

JOSEPH THE DREAMER

Gen 37, 40, 41

When you've got a gift like that,
You've no choice.
You're not in charge.
The dreams come:
You don't choose them.
You don't choose the meanings.
You tell your family because your family are there,
They're your world,
There's no-one else to tell;
And it got me booted out of my world
Into slavery,
And for years I was just another useful body,
Working hard,
Useful to my master,
But no special gift.

When I was in prison,
In shame and disgrace I didn't deserve,
My gift came back to me:
This gift, that was free,
Mine, but not under my control,
I hadn't earned it, or learnt it,
A possession, that couldn't be traded:

That's what earned me my freedom,
Position, power, responsibility:
Scope for all my human talents,
That are under our control;

And finally, my family's respect.

JOSEPH – SPOILT DARLING

I was very spoilt,
But I was never loved for my own sake:
It was my mother who was the favourite,
My father's favourite wife.
I think she'd been her own father's favourite, too:

Favourite little girl!
That's why he'd been so difficult about letting her go.

Aunt Leah was the senior wife,
And I'm sure she deserved the greatest love and respect.
She'd had all those wonderful sons for Dad.
But Dad always cherished my mum.
He treated all my half-brothers the same,
Aunt Leah's children and the two slave-women's children,
Which wasn't really fair on any of them;
But he treated me like a prince.
When I think what a show-off I was,
I just cringe;
But it wasn't my fault:
Just a lonely little boy
Trying to play the role he'd been given!

SON OF RACHEL

Gen 37

What else could I do but dream?
Pampered son of the favourite wife;
No chance to prove myself, like the others;
Never allowed near the sheep,
Never mind a wolf!

It was a breakthrough, being sent to join my brothers.
Perhaps Dad realised I needed a more normal existence,
And he was trying to break me in gently.

I was thrilled to reach them:
After all the wandering about,
This might be it:
They might accept me into their way of life;
But it was doomed from the start:
Me in my wonderful outfit,
Them in their shepherds' clothes,
We were from different worlds!

WHAT A WIMP!**Gen 37***Judah looks back:*

I felt so sorry for him.
 What a wimp!
 He'd had such a struggle to find us.
 He looked so pleased with himself.

There was no stopping the others:
 Those clothes!
 They were like a red rag to a bull.
 Ten of us, and not one of us had ever had an outfit like that!
 They just ripped it off him.
 I managed to find some excuse and stop them killing him outright,
 Hoping to rescue him secretly,
 But Fate took a hand in things:
 Soon the problem was off our hands
 And we'd got more money than we knew what to do with.
 Dad swallowed the story about a wild animal,
 But it hit him very hard.
 He grieved for a long time.
 It hit me too.
 Sometimes I still wake in the night, thinking:
 Joseph! Little brother, what happened to you?

HAUNTED BY GUILT*Judah:*

It haunted me over the years:
 Poor kid! The look in his eyes!
 What had happened to him?
 How far had they taken him?
 I found out I wasn't the only one who'd wanted to save him:
 Reuben's family will always remember
 Reuben wanted to set him free;
 My descendants will remember
 I persuaded the others not to kill him;
 But how many of the others felt the same way?
 Did we all secretly shun the deed,
 But afraid to protect him openly?

The outsider!
 Afraid to protect the outsider
 From the gang's hatred?

The money never did us any good.
 None of it went on anything special.
 Some of it's still lying around somewhere.
 None of us likes to touch it.

**MYRRH AND GUM AND TRAGACANTH
 JOSEPH'S JOURNEY GENESIS 37**

*'Myrrh and gum and tragacanth,
 Balsam and resin. . .'*

The long stride of the camels and the wafts of fragrance:
 Scent seeped through the packaging,
 And we travelled in a perfumed haze
 Like an offering to the gods.

Gutted, that's how I felt
 After my brothers' treatment:
 Disembowelled and empty,
 Keeping pace with all those embalmers' spices.

Gradually, plodding across the desert,
 Oasis to oasis,
 Keeping out of the sun,
 Listening to the merchants
 And wondering how trade was going,
 It dawned on me slowly,
 Whether I wanted it or not,
 There'd be an afterlife!

JOSEPH'S POWER**Gen 41***Joseph:*

The corn I sell, that people thank me for,
It isn't mine.

All the wealth of Egypt at my fingertips!
Scribes hover behind me, to take dictation:
My word can open or close storehouses,
And plant or clear great sweeps of countryside.

I love my work;

I love this country that I plan;

Yet not a grain of it is mine.

Stewards, every one of us!

Stewards of Pharaoh, stewards of the Nile.

Helpless, we wait for the water

To brim the fields with life.

We have done, will do, our part,

But without the Nile we are powerless.

When it comes, we will use it,

With canals and gates and buckets and screws,

But these are mere toys to its peaceful invasion,

Slaking the dry dust,

Filling the cracks, cooling the heat,

Quenching the thirst, quenching the thirst.

The Nile! Water! At last!

To make the land fruitful!

JOSEPH, GRAND VIZIER**GENESIS 41**

Grand ceremonies set me drifting:

State banquets or temple rituals.

Luxury perfumes in the fragrant air

Hit my sense, and banish me

Back to the desert trails,

Limping through the heat,

With the camels swaying under their loads of spices,

The hot air, subtly aromatic, and I, tethered,

Securely guarded like all the other merchandise.

When you've been bought and sold:
 Just a commodity!
 When people have looked you over,
 Inspected your teeth, tested your muscles,
 Haggled over your price;
 You keep success at a distance:
 You know it's never really yours.

They say: once a slave, always a slave:
 Not me!
 But it never leaves you.
 It was my brothers who sold me.
 I'm on my own –

And just to be,
 Is grace enough.

JOSEPH: HIS BROTHERS COME TO BUY CORN

Gen 42

Joseph:

It was worse than strangers:
 With strangers, all you're dealing with is the present moment.
 You're all Here-and-Now!
 Looking at them,
 Unknown still,
 I was faced with a world I'd left behind,
 Myself, the cocky young misfit,
 The hundreds of miles of desert we'd crossed,
 The years we'd lived, so differently.
 Where were the squabbling teenagers?
 All married now,
 Staid fathers, grandfathers even!
 Would I still be a misfit?
 This wasn't their territory;
 They were coming as customers, driven by hunger;
 But you could see their maturity, teamwork;
 And their concern for family,
 For our old father,
 For the missing brother: my brother!
 It was heart-breaking!

Had they still a place for me?
Or must I be the Egyptian, the potentate, the unknown?

A PLACE IN HISTORY

Gen 45

Joseph's brothers talking, in Egypt.

When you look at what he's achieved here
And what he's done for Pharaoh,
No wonder he didn't fit in at home!

I know what we did was wrong:
Planning to kill him, then selling him instead;
But what if we hadn't done it?
Would there have been anyone to foresee this famine?
Egypt might have starved,
Along with the rest of the world.
What would have happened, then?

F.Mary Callan, York '01