

THE THREE WISE WIVES

A short drama
by Christine Woolgar

faith.workthegreymatter.com

hope4greypplaces@gmail.com

ADVISORY WARNING: Some references to patriarchy, sexism and the risks of childbirth.

PREMISE: The wives of the magi discuss the men's departure and whether their journey is wise.

WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT: The commercialisation of Christmas, the injustice of patriarchy, and how Jesus' kingship truly is different.

LENGTH: ~1,200 words

GENRE: Drama.

CHARACTERS:

CASSANDANE: Wife of Casper. Older and somewhat cynical.

MEHRSA: Wife of Melchior. Believing. Grown up and thinks for herself.

BITA: Wife of Balthazar. A young dreamer.

This sketch was first written in November 2022 as part of a series on Matthew's gospel and money.

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THE THREE WISE WIVES

THE THREE WOMEN ARE SITTING TOGETHER.
MEHRSA IS HEAVILY PREGNANT.

CASSANDANE: Well ladies, I dare say we'll have a few months of peace and quiet while the men are gone.

BITA: It must be so exciting for them! A whole caravan travelling westward across strange terrain, all to find a baby king. Such an adventure!

MEHRSA: Ooof! Count me out. I'm exhausted just going to the market.

CASSANDANE: How long is it now, Mehrsa?

MEHRSA: Only two months more and then this little one will arrive.

CASSANDANE: I still think you're brave to let Melchior abandon you in your hour of need.

MEHRSA: Oh, Cassandane, it's not like that.

CASSANDANE: They could be gone for years.

MEHRSA: And they could be back in just a few months.

BITA: Oh I hope not!

CASSANDANE: Bita! Whose side are you on?

BITA: I just mean... it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience. They'll be travelling at night, navigating by the stars.

CASSANDANE: Going miles out of their way as they search for their next source of water.

BITA: They'll see distant lands they've never seen before.

CASSANDANE: And may wish never to see again.

MEHRSA: Oh Cassandane, don't be so cynical.

CASSANDANE: Bita, if the thought of this delegation is so captivating for you, why don't you join them?

BITA: Oh, I thought it about it, I just... I'd be so nervous that something would go wrong. And besides, they've already left now.

CASSANDANE: Bita dear, you are the well-connected wife of a magus and they've barely been gone two days. I'm sure you could hop on a camel and catch them up.

BITA: (HESITATES) I couldn't leave Mehrsa while she's pregnant.

CASSANDANE: Melchior left her!

MEHRSA: Hey, I said it wasn't like that.

CASSANDANE: What was it like then?

MEHRSA: Melchior believes this journey is important and I think he's right.

CASSANDANE: It's just the birth of a prince. Happens all the time.

MEHRSA: It's the birth of the one who will be king of the Jews.

CASSANDANE: And why is that so remarkable?

BITA: (PASSIONATELY) Because for generations now they've lived without a king! In exile, in diaspora, waiting for the return of their anointed one!

MEHRSA: (TRYING TO SOUND MORE CREDIBLE) Because this must be the work of God.

CASSANDANE: You seriously believe that?

BITA: We saw his star rise in the West! The heavens don't align for no reason!

CASSANDANE: Oh, I'm sure there's a reason, I just don't think it's likely to be the birth of a divinely-appointed baby king.

BITA: Bu—

MEHRSA: Yes, I believe God is at work in this.

CASSANDANE BREATHES LOUDLY.

You don't?

CASSANDANE: I stopped believing in signs and wonders a long time ago.

BITA: (DISTRAUGHT, LIKE SHE'S JUST HEARD THAT SOMEONE MURDERED SANTA) You don't believe in magic?

MEHRSA: (QUIZZICAL) You don't believe in God?

CASSANDANE: (SIGHS) I think that the *idea* of magic and the *idea* of God has been a remarkably convenient way for royal families to accumulate vast sums of wealth and hold onto them. Even now, our three husbands are taking gifts to a child who won't have any political power for the next twenty or thirty years.

MEHRSA: They're not going to buy political favours.

CASSANDANE: But if they were that would at least make some practical sense!

BITA: Cassandane, the gifts are a gesture of goodwill and peace and new life!

CASSANDANE: Oh, so *that's* why you let Balthazar take myrrh with him? Because nothing says 'new life' like, "Here's an embalming oil for when you bury your father." I'm sure his dad will be delighted.

BITA: Bu—

MEHRSA: If you're so cynical, then why did you let Casper take ten minas of gold?

CASSANDANE: (SIGHS, WITH GENUINE WEARINESS) Because it wasn't worth arguing over. (PAUSE) Yes, I think this whole tradition is a waste of time and money, but people think it gives them hope and that it makes them happy, and I'm not going to change that any time soon.

MEHRSA: You think Casper, Melchior and Balthazar have all gone on a fool's errand?

CASSANDANE: I think it quite likely, yes.

MEHRSA: And the stars and the prophecies and the visions all mean nothing?

CASSANDANE: Supposing this baby boy has been born, what are they going to find? Some doting father who says, "Look at my handsome first-born son? Doesn't he take after me? Doesn't he take after my father? Doesn't he take after my father's father, and my father's father's father?" Meanwhile, the boy's nameless mother will be in isolation, reeling from the most exhausting event her body has ever been through, assuming she even survives.

MEHRSA: (GENTLY, BUT SHE'S CLEARLY HURT) Cassandane, I'm pregnant too, remember?

CASSANDANE: (HESITATES) Yes. And that's why I'm angry, Mehrsa. Your husband has left you to enter motherhood on your own, all for the sake of someone else's baby boy. At least with Casper, the gold didn't have sentimental value. As for Balthazar... Bita wouldn't let him have a moment's peace if was here. But Melchior should have known better.

BITA: Cassandane, every new life is special and important. But sometimes fate calls you to do something and you have to put it above family.

CASSANDANE: And how many men have used that as an excuse to abandon their wives and children? Bita, I know you believe this baby is important, but even if he is, what can the magi realistically expect? They'll be specks in a crowd; they'll wait for hours, days, jostling with other dignitaries until they get their minute to glimpse this tiny little baby, who — precious though he is — will look like any other baby.

BITA: What if it's not like that? What if... what if no one else has read the stars or even knows that he's a king? What if they're the only ones there?

CASSANDANE: Then they'll all look like a bunch of idiots.

MEHRSA: (VERY DELIBERATELY) Either that, or everyone else will.

LONG PAUSE.

I hear you Cassandane. Honestly, I do. But something tells me this child is different. God is at work in this; I feel it whenever I pray. That's why I told Melchior to go and to take frankincense with him.

And now I'm wondering whether any of us can understand what's happening unless we see this child in person.

BITA: I thought you said you didn't want to travel while you were pregnant and breastfeeding.

MEHRSA: I can't say the thought thrills me, but... I can make it work. Will you come with me?

BITA: (HESITATES) But... what if something terrible happens?

MEHRSA: Whether we stay or go, we can't control that. At least this way, we'll all be in it together.

BITA: (THINKS FOR A MOMENT) (DETERMINED) Very well. I'll come with you.

MEHRSA: Cassandane?

CASSANDANE: Someone needs to stay behind and take care of this place.

MEHRSA: So be it.

MEHRSA GETS UP TO GO AND BITA
SCRAMBLES TO HER FEET.

CASSANDANE LOOKS UP.

CASSANDANE: But Mehrsa? (MEHRSA LOOKS AT HER) If I'm wrong, you'll be sure to tell me when you get back?

MEHRSA: For sure. I wouldn't have it any other way.

CASSANDANE: That I believe.