

Three Wise Fools

A fantasy on the Nativity

by

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Three Wise Fools

List of Characters

Melchior

He is elderly, philosophical, a little melancholy, but with a dry sense of humour that comes with age and experience.

Balthasar

Is lean, intellectual and a worrier.

Caspar

Is younger, sturdy, bustling and managing.

The Recording Angel Can be male or female.

First, Second and Third Shepherds Can be male or female.

Other Shepherds

At least two, but could be any number, male or female.

The play which is set in a waiting room is a fantasy, and the humour should be allowed to surface. In the original production the characters were dressed traditionally, but they could just as well be in modern dress.

Running time: approximately 45 minutes

THREE WISE FOOLS

A boring, dreary waiting room. A line of 6-8 hard, identical chairs are placed from left to right at the back of the stage. By the far right chair there is a small, low table covered with magazines and newspapers. On the back wall are posters in varying degrees of wear and tear.

On the farthest chair right sits Melchior, patiently leafing through the magazines. He is elderly, philosophical, a little melancholy, but with a dry sense of humour that comes with age and experience. On the two chairs furthest left sit Balthasar and Caspar with their arms folded, tense and fidgety. Caspar is younger, sturdy, bustling and managing. Balthasar is lean, intellectual and a worrier.

The situation is not under their control. The action begins with a longish silence while Balthasar and Caspar fidget, yawn, gaze impatiently around the room, drum their fingers etc.

BALTHASAR Are you sure this is the place?

CASPAR *(A gusty sigh of exasperation)* Fourteen!

BALTHASAR I beg your pardon

CASPAR Fourteen! That is the fourteenth time you have asked me. And this is the fourteenth and last time I shall say YES! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Of course this is the place. The omens, the signs, our calculations, the palace astrologers, the time – yes. Especially the time. This is the place. We all agreed.

BALTHASAR Perhaps we made a mistake.

CASPAR Mistake? I made no mistake.

BALTHASAR It wouldn't be the first time.

CASPAR What do you mean?

BALTHASAR We went wrong before.

CASPAR We went wrong? *(Remembering hastily)* No we didn't. That was – that was a detour. Just a detour. Besides we couldn't go past without calling to pay our respects. It wouldn't have been polite. They are family after all.

BALTHASAR Family! It's always family. Is there any royal family between here and Babylon you are not related to?

CASPAR No. No, I don't think so.

BALTHASAR That's one of the reasons it has taken us so long. I never dreamed it would take us so long. Paying our respects to your family has added months, years to our trek. *(Sadly)* I have been away so long. I don't feel I am simply on a journey. I feel I have gone into exile.

CASPAR What about me? How do you think I feel? Wondering what sort of mess and muddle they'll all be getting without me. None of them, none of them can read the simplest of instructions, and heaven knows I left enough of them, without getting it wrong and getting into a muddle *(Sighs)* It'll all be waiting for me when I get back. One big muddle *(Pause)* Still, I'm not complaining about the journey. After all, it's cheaper staying with relatives.

BALTHASAR I'm not complaining about the journey – except, except that it took so long.

MELCHIOR *(Looking up from his magazine)* Longer than could have been expected. Not a good time to start out. *(Goes back to his reading)*

BALTHASAR Well! That was hardly our fault.

MELCHIOR *(Shaking his head and murmuring as he turns a page)* . . . In the bleak midwinter.

CASPAR He didn't have to come.

BALTHASAR *(Gloomily)* None of us did.

CASPAR *(After a pause)* Yes . . . yes, we did. We had to come.

BALTHASAR You know I've never enjoyed administration. I always yearned after the contemplative life. All I ever wanted was to be left alone with my scrolls, the ancient wisdom and the stars. But that was my undoing. If I had busied myself more with the affairs of state I should never have stumbled across the sign. It was, it was like hearing a trumpet call. A summons. A call to arms. I was gripped with an urgency I had never experienced.

CASPAR I know, I know. I felt an enthusiasm I had only ever felt before for my full granaries and balanced accounts. But it was more than that. There was something else, a feeling that the old satisfactions were not enough, the old ways were beginning to fall apart.

MELCHIOR *(puts down magazine)* The old dispensation was no longer enough.

CASPAR Something stirring – something I was told I shouldn't miss.

BALTHASAR Like seeing the light of the sun over the horizon -before the dawn.

CASPAR That's it! That's it! The light. We were drawn irresistibly towards this vision of the light.

BALTHASAR (*Sighing*) But visions fade in the bitter cold, the rude wind's loud lament. Those filthy lodgings and their exorbitant prices.

CASPAR And the camel drivers were always thieving and abusive. Not much contemplation there.

MELCHIOR It was better travelling at night.

BALTHASAR At least then we could still see the stars.

CASPAR Sleeping in snatches; waking in the dark; fumbling about.

MELCHIOR Like lame men who stumble (*Sighs and goes back to reading his magazine*)

BALTHASAR Visions fade.

(A sad pause but then CASPAR brightens up)

CASPAR But we didn't stop. We didn't stop. Not once did we even mention going back. No, we kept on going. And we've arrived. We have achieved our journey's end. That's something.