

Act 1. Autumn.

Afternoon, Joseph and Maria's dwelling, he is making a chair – he is consumed

MARIA: (far offstage, just as he is about to hammer a nail) Joseph?

JOSEPH: Hmm? (listens, then takes aim again)

MARIA: (off-stage, nearer) Joseph?

JOSEPH: (trying not to be annoyed) I'm here. (pause) I'm here, my song-bird! (takes aim again)

Enter Maria.

MARIA: Joseph!

JOSEPH: (startled) Maria!

MARIA: You are still working on that chair?

JOSEPH: (wary) I cannot quite get it finished the way I want.

MARIA: You have spent too long indoors today. Again.

JOSEPH: I thought you were out.

MARIA: (cuddling up to him) Look, there was something happening in the village today. I know not

what, but everyone is heading toward the temple this evening. Some with strange laughter, others with a grim aspect. It was a strange sight. I do not have the words for it. Joseph, have you heard what is happening?

JOSEPH: (returns to the chair) What would I know stuck in here? I could hear them on the road, but I know nothing. You went to market nevertheless?

MARIA: Me and Beth. Looking at cloth, Joseph. Looking at lots of wonderful white cloth.

JOSEPH: Maria, it is autumn! We are not married until next summer!

MARIA: These things must be arranged well in advance – and you never know when you will see such lovely white cloth again.

JOSEPH: Lots of white Roman cloth, no doubt.

MARIA: They make the best.

JOSEPH: Perhaps they also make good bandages (indicates thumb).

MARIA: (taking his hand) Aw, are you hurt?

JOSEPH: (proudly) No, no. My hammer would not dare.

MARIA: You have been working hard, Joseph. You will finish it soon?

JOSEPH: That is my hope. It's already taken me an age. I have not left our house in days, Maria, not even to attend to affairs at the temple. I hope your father likes it. That he thinks it a fair exchange for such a beauty.