

# THE JOSEPH'S BOAT

An adaptation of Elizabeth Reynard's  
"The Boat that Fain would live on Land"  
within a play by Laura Opie & Jacek Zuzanski

Story adapted for theatre through the courtesy of the Chatham Historical Society.

*Excerpt of the play*

## Characters:

### Actors

Ghost of Rev. Joseph  
Mom  
Chris – a teenager  
Jaime – age 6 or 7

### Puppets

Rev. Joseph  
Caleb Gifford  
Goody Hatch  
Goody Parker  
Goody Jenkins  
Elder 1  
Elder 2  
Elder 3

## **PROLOGUE: In Trouble**

*(Set: Chris & Jamie's backyard. A dinghy full of flowers. Mom is putting flowers from the boat into pots on the ground.)*

MOM: I need a trowel... *(Mom exits. Joseph Metcalfe's ghost enters, replants the flowers in the dinghy, and exits. Mom re-enters and realizes the flowers have been put back in.)*

MOM: Oh, no! Who...?! Why...?! *(Looks around, very upset.)* Chris! Jaime! Come here please! *(She starts putting flowers back in the pots.)* Chris! Jaime! I can't believe this. *(Exits calling for them.)* Chris. Jaime. Where are you. I need to talk to you now.

CHRIS: Mom? Did you call? Mom? *(Surveys the situation, tosses the ball and glove on the ground and starts taking flowers out of the boat. Jaime comes onstage, sneaks around the boat "spying" on Chris, swoops in, steals the hat, and runs to the other side of the boat.)*

CHRIS: Hey, Imp. Give that back!

JAIME: Betcha can't catch me! *(Laughing, they dodge around the boat and run off stage.)*

*(Ghost enters and puts the flowers back in the boat. Jaime enters, freezes, hides on other*

*side of the boat, peeks out. Ghost catches a glimpse of Jaime. They start a slow “chase & hide” around the boat. Ghost starts crawling too, and they meet each other as he rounds the front. They are both startled, Jaime screams, the ghost groans a scream, and disappears scattering the flower pots. Jaime gets up and calls after the ghost. )*

JAIME: Who are you? Why did you put the flowers back?

*(Ghost reappears. He has The Narrow Land open in his hand, pointing and trying to give it to Jaime, who backs away but doesn't run. Ghost gives up and puts a bookmark in it, lays it on the ground, and disappears. Jaime stares after Ghost, then runs to pick up the book, pages through it, and runs off calling for Chris.)*

JAIME: Chris! Chris! You won't believe it. Chris!? *(Exit. Mom enters holding two trowels and sees that flowers are back in boat.)*

MOM: Hey! Who put those flowers back again! *(Picks up Chris' ball and glove, then throws it down and counts to regain composure.)* One, two, three, four, five, six, seven eight, nine, ten. *(Still angry, starts removing flowers and continues counting until Jaime enters running.)* Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen....

JAIME: Mom. I saw a ghost. A real ghost!

MOM: Jaime, I don't have time for games.

JAIME: But, Mom...

MOM: Enough! Where is Chris? CHRIS!

CHRIS: *(Entering.)* Yeah, Mom? You called?

MOM: Chris. This has gone far enough. This is the third time I've taken all the plants out of the Joseph's Boat to have it hauled away and you put them back. I know you want to keep that old broken down dory, but I've had enough.

CHRIS: But, Mom. I didn't do it!

MOM: Chris...!? Lying just makes things worse. And what about my conference!

JAIME: But, Mom. It was a ghost. I saw him. I think he's a friendly ghost. But he didn't look very happy about the flowers.

MOM: Jaime, not another word. Go inside, please, while I talk to Chris. *(Jaime starts to exit but comes back to watch the scene.)*

CHRIS: Mom. I didn't do it. I swear. I don't want the boat to go, but I didn't do it.

MOM: That's enough. I'm too busy for this. My conference starts tomorrow, and I don't even have time to breath. The flowers come out. Period. As soon as my conference is over, the boat goes. I don't want to hear another word about it. *(Exit.)*

JAIME: *(Holding out book.)* Can you read this to me, please?

CHRIS: Not right now, Jaime. *(Thinking aloud.)* Maybe I should take the flowers back out of the boat...

JAIME: I don't think the ghost would like that.

CHRIS: *(Thinking aloud again.)* No. I won't do it.

JAIME: Hmm. I guess Mom won't like that. Are you more afraid of the ghost than Mom?

CHRIS: It's not that I'm afraid of Mom...too much... I just don't think what she's doing is right. I grew up with this boat. Dad's grandmother planted flowers in it. For all I know our great, great, great, great grandmother planted flowers in this boat. Besides, Mom called me a liar, and I didn't take them out!

JAIME: I know. The ghost took them out.

CHRIS: *(Snorts and shakes head in disbelief, then reconsiders.)* Hey. Did you see someone in our yard? Maybe a neighbor, or a tramp, or something?

JAIME: It was a ghost, and he gave me this. *(Holds out book.)*

*(As Chris looks through the book and speaks, Ghost enters. Jaime sees him and tugs frantically on Chris's sleeve. Ghost puts flowers back in the boat. Antics show that Chris can't see Ghost: ie tickling Chris, pulling at strands of hair. Chris brushes his arm as if to brush off a bug, and looks confusedly for flying insects, but stares through Ghost.)*

CHRIS: Lemme see that. *(Reads.)* "The Narrow Land: Folk Chronicles of Old Cape Cod." Hey. This is from the Library. How did you... ? *(he opens it up to book mark)* This is a story about Joseph's Boats! *(To Jaime, tugging on Chris's sleeve.)* What? WHAT! Stop it, Jaime. *(Jaime keeps tugging and pointing at Ghost.)* Lemme read this, will you? Wow. Gosh! It says here that the ghost of the guy who started it all comes around and checks out all the Joseph's Boats on Cape Cod. I don't know about ghosts, Jaime, but I get a funny feeling about this. I think I'll put those flowers back in the boat...

JAIME: The ghost already put them back. *(Ghost hovers nearby, but Chris can't see him.)*

CHRIS: You SAW that?

JAIME: UH-huh. (*Ghost whispers to Jaime.*) Maybe you should tell Mom not to let them take the boat away.

CHRIS: (*A little creeped out.*) Maybe you're right. (*Chris nervously picks up ball, tosses it while pacing and thinking.*) If I could just get her attention for long enough to understand...

JAIME: (*Ghost whispers to Jaime.*) She always sees your puppet shows at the Library.

CHRIS: So...

JAIME: (*Ghost whispers to Jaime.*) You could make the show about keeping the boat.

CHRIS: Hm...Gee. The timing is good with her conference, but I don't have a play.

JAIME: (*Ghost whispers to Jaime.*) You can make a play out of the story. In the book.

CHRISS: (*Looks at book. Considers.*) I could... I could do it! ...If the other kids want to...

JAIME: Can I help make the puppets?

CHRIS: It could work! Jaime, you're a genius!

JAIME: Not really, the Ghost told me.

CHRIS: Better get busy. We have to be ready to perform in three weeks. (*They exit.*)

## **THE PUPPET SHOW**

### **Introduction**

(*Ghost crosses with sign: THREE WEEKS LATER. Mom is in audience.*)

CHRIS: (*Enters with book.*) Hi everybody. Thanks for coming to see our show.

JAIME: (*Enters w/chair.*) Hey, Chris. Would you read me the story about Joseph's Boats?

CHRIS: Sure. Here it is. Hold on. I'll get a chair. (*Hands Jaime the book. Exits.*)

JAIME: (*Sits and reads.*) "The Boat that Fain would live on Land," by Elizabeth Reynard. (*Chris reenters with the chair and sits next to Jaime.*) What does "fain" mean?

CHRIS: It's an old fashioned word. This story took place in Falmouth almost 300 years

ago, in 1723, so the author uses words common from that time. “Fain” means “by preference” or “gladly.”

JAIME: Oh, so it’s about a boat that was glad to live on land? That’s sort of like a fish out of water...

CHRIS: Sort of. Here. Let me start... *(takes the book and reads)* “The Reverend Joseph Metcalfe from Falmouth visited Caleb Gifford to announce a welcome legacy and discuss the purchase of a boat.”

JAIME: Wait, wait, what’s a legacy...

CHRIS: Money you get as an inheritance, when someone in your family dies.

JAIME: Ah.

CHRIS: You know what, let’s see it as a puppet show. I think the actors are ready.

JAIME: Ladies and Gentleman, boys and girls: Scene I: Reverend Metcalfe’s Business with Caleb Gifford.

## **SCENE 1: Reverend Metcalfe’s business with Caleb Gifford**

REV. JOSEPH: Caleb Gifford! Caleb Gifford. Wait a moment, will ye. I’ve got business to discuss with ye!

CALEB GIFFORD: Business, Parson Metcalfe? Oh, dear. If it’s those fish I sold last Saturday, I can assure you that all were sold well before eventide and I was on my knees at sundown for my prayers.

REV. JOSEPH: Nay, nay, Master Gifford. I want you to sell me a boat.

CALEB GIFFORD: A boat! Are you to give up your office and become a fisherman?

REV. JOSEPH: It has always been my dream to purchase a boat.

CALEB GIFFORD: But for what do you need a boat dear Parson?!

REV. JOSEPH: I dream of having a boat in which to take mine ease on the deep.

CALEB GIFFORD: Ease? On the deep? Good Dominie, I can tell you - boats are nothing but worrying critters necessary to some pursuits, but never allied to pleasure!

REV. JOSEPH: Why, look now across the minnow ripples into the red horizon of the setting sun. On such a calm night, in even a small boat, a man might voyage far.

CALEB GIFFORD: Well, setting sun or not, Reverend, how will you purchase a boat with one son and ten daughters to feed, and the town in arrears on your salary?

REV. JOSEPH: Ah! See here, Master Gifford. I can forgive the town's debt! I have the figgers wrote down on a paper.

CALEB GIFFORD: Well, we all know how meager your stipend is.

REV. JOSEPH: Here, here! This is my legacy, Mr. Gifford!

CALEB GIFFORD: I, myself, am ashamed of how little our young town of Falmouth can afford to pay for your good service!

REV. JOSEPH: No, no! Look at my inheritance! Here, look.

CALEB GIFFORD: Hmmm... Did you say inheritance?

REV. JOSEPH: I am preparing now to journey to Dedham to retrieve it.

CALEB GIFFORD: HMMMM. Inheritance!

REV. JOSEPH: And, on my return, I would take the greatest pleasure in using a portion of it to purchase a boat. Can you ready one for me?

CALEB GIFFORD: Those are fine figgers you have wrote down, Reverend. I am sure that I have a boat that will suit your needs.

REV. JOSEPH: God be with you Master Gifford. I shall be back on Saturday, well before the Sabbath prayers begin. *(Exit)*

CALEB GIFFORD: Why, he's as seafaring as a buttercup, that one. But if I don't sell him a boat, he'll buy one from someone else. Afterall, if Parson Metcalfe is ready to pay good shillings and pence, I have the boat for him. It's known far better days, but there's no sense in wasting seaworthy timber on the Parson's folly. *(Exit.)*

## **SCENE 2: The Reverend Metcalfe buys his Boat**

CHRIS: *(reading)* "The minister returned from Dedham and the collecting of his legacy one Saturday afternoon. While passing through the town of Boston he had purchased a new wig, and "covered" with this, he made his appearance at Caleb Gifford's door. Caleb led

him down to the shore where an apple-cheeked dory bobbed at it's mooring..."

REV. JOSEPH: Oh, Master. Gifford. You have indeed made me a happy man! The boat is perfect. Absolutely perfect. Do you know, I have almost the same feeling about this boat as when I saw my new wig in Boston. It was just the one for me: Not expressed in fancy, neat, not gaudy. Fitting a Parson, don't you think?

CALEB GIFFORD: The wig, or the boat, Reverend.

REV. JOSEPH: Both. But the wig. Did you notice? Does it suit me?

CALEB GIFFORD: It would be hard not to notice... And did your wife see this head decoration of yours?

REV JOSEPH: She hasn't yet.

CALEB GIFFORD: Ahm...

REV. JOSEPH: I do hope my flock approves...

CALEB GIFFORD: They may be...impressed.

REV. JOSEPH: I must hurry back to the parsonage, now. My dear little boat will have to wait until after the Sabbath for me. Good day, Master Gifford.

CALEB GIFFORD: Good day, Reverend.