

An Advent Play

For the Camphill Community Youth Group
Written in Autumn, 1950

*Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens
who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.*

Matthew 25:1

Cast

FATHER	A woodcutter
MOTHER	A haberdasher
WILLIAM	first son, a smith (aged 28)
RUDOLF	second son, a carpenter (aged 17)
AURELIA	first daughter (aged 27)
NATALIE	second daughter (aged 26)
VICTORIA	third daughter (aged 25)
PAULINE	fourth daughter (aged 22)
LUCY	fifth daughter (aged 21)
FRANCESCA	sixth daughter (aged 20)
HERMIONE	seventh daughter (aged 19)
ANNA	eighth daughter (aged 16)
JOHANNA	ninth daughter (aged 15)
AGATHA	tenth daughter (aged 14)



A dark room. An old, tattered red curtain covers the whole back of the stage. On either side are seven chairs; the middle one is a kind of armchair. Centre stage is a long table, on which is a stable lantern, providing the only light.

Above the chairs on the right is a wooden shelf, on which are two baskets, one filled with apples and the other containing a loaf of bread. The walls on each side have a door leading outside. Everything appears dingy, old and worn.

It is the Saturday evening before the first Advent Sunday. VICTORIA, LUCY and HERMIONE are in the room. LUCY is scrubbing the table, VICTORIA sweeping, and HERMIONE dusting the chairs.

VICTORIA, LUCY, HERMIONE [*singing*]:

Darkness on earthly time does fall,
Human hearts are growing older,
Growing cold and ever colder,
No longer open to a call.

Birds on branches have no breath,
Their singing is both hard and poor,
Frosty are all paths and bare,
Leading to everlasting death.



Dun - kel ist die Er - den zeit Menschen -
 Vö - gel flat - tern auf den Zweigen, Arm und

her - zen wer - den äl - ter, Wer - den
 hart sind ih - re Schlä - ge, Fro - stig

kalt und im - mer käl - ter. Sind nicht mehr zum
 kahl sind al - le We - ge Füh - ren in des

Ru - f be - reit.
 To - des E - wigkeit.

Original music by Karl König.

HERMIONE: Over and over again we have to sing this song!

LUCY: Have to?

VICTORIA: Oh, if only Advent were here at last!

LUCY: Here?

HERMIONE: It will never reach us anymore.

[*humming*] Darkness on earthly time does fall,
 Human hearts are growing older.

[*The door on the right opens; outside is even darker than inside. FATHER enters, tired, frozen and covered in snow, with his axe over his shoulder. He is wearing boots, has a short grey beard and his face is covered with stubble.*]

FATHER: Hello, girls,

Is Mother not yet back?

The table not laid

Nor chairs put in place?

No meal served for your poor father?

HERMIONE: It's still early in the evening, Father.

You're coming at such an unexpected time.

Are you ill?

FATHER: Ill?

I'm just tired, unspeakably tired.

The tree trunks are frozen hard.

Not even my axe

Cuts through the hard wood.

[*He places his axe on the floor with a loud thud and sits down in the chair near the door. The curtain opens in the centre, and NATALIE, ANNA and AGATHA come in and stand in front of their father. The first three daughters carry on with their work.*]

AGATHA: Father is back.

ANNA: Have you seen Mother?

NATALIE: She went hours ago into the village

To offer

The peasants

Coloured ribbons for the wreaths

On Advent Sunday!

FATHER: Coloured ribbons?

For the wreaths?

Stupidities, girl,

Foolishness, play and false trickeries!

No-one believes

In these pathetic charades any more.

Oh, I'm tired!

I'm so tired!

NATALIE: Where d'you think Mother is, Father?

I feel so scared,

This Saturday is so cold and long.

She wanted to be with us

Before the evening began.

ANNA: She also told me:

'Just finish the wreath

And put in the candles.
 Before Father comes home
 I'll be back and will then help you
 Lay the table for supper.'

AGATHA: Yes, that's what Mother said.

Didn't she meet you, Father,
 When you came from the forest
 Through the village
 Here into our hut?

FATHER: O girls,

My eyes were tired,
 I could only see the steps
 My feet were taking on the hard-frozen path.
 It was so dark and I was just making my way
 Home, to be with you.
 Be quiet ... Listen –
 Aren't those footsteps?

AGATHA: I hear it too, Mother's coming now.

ANNA [*listening*]: The steps are coming nearer;
 Yes, it's Mother.

*[The door on the left is pushed open and WILLIAM,
 the brother, enters. He wears a leather apron and
 carries a heavy sledgehammer on his shoulder.
 He falls onto the chair and lays down
 the sledgehammer noisily.]*

WILLIAM: Here I am again.

It's all no use,
 No use!
 The fire's gone out in the forge,
 The cold didn't let it burn any more.
 The smithy is forsaken
 And snow is falling
 Through chinks in the shingle roof.

LUCY: Couldn't you stoke up the fire,
 Brother?

HERMIONE: Oh, nothing wants to burn any more
 Or wants to warm up in this winter's cold
 And death of the world.

VICTORIA: Why didn't the strength of your arm
 Keep the fire alive in the forge,
 Brother?

WILLIAM: What's the use of an arm,
 When there's no more fuel to burn?
 When wood and kindling are wet
 And completely frozen?
 And when my heart can't kindle the spark?
 Oh, it's all no use!
 [*to Father*] Tell me, Father,
 Is there no more wood and no coal?

FATHER: The axe is blunt,
 The trees are dead,
 And I'm tired,
 I'm so tired
 That I don't know
 What I can still do.

*[PAULINE and FRANCESCA enter through
 the curtain and remain standing in front
 of WILLIAM.]*

FRANCESCA: Tell us, William,
 Did you see Rudolf?
 He still wanted to take a cradle
 To Farmer Grumbach
 Whose wife is expecting her first child any day.
 Rudolf was still busy early in the morning
 Putting on the side-pieces,
 And then he set out on the path.

PAULINE: He was so pleased with his cradle!
 He planed the sides smooth
 And carved two angel-heads
 Into the headboard.

WILLIAM: I haven't seen him!
 But he's strong and old enough
 To find the way to Farmer Grumbach
 And back here again too!
 What's worrying you?
 My fire has frozen in the smithy;
 What shall I do?

*[While William was speaking,
 AGATHA and ANNA helped Father
 out of his boots. VICTORIA, LUCY
 and HERMIONE continued their work,
 and NATALIE went repeatedly
 to the door and listened outside.]*

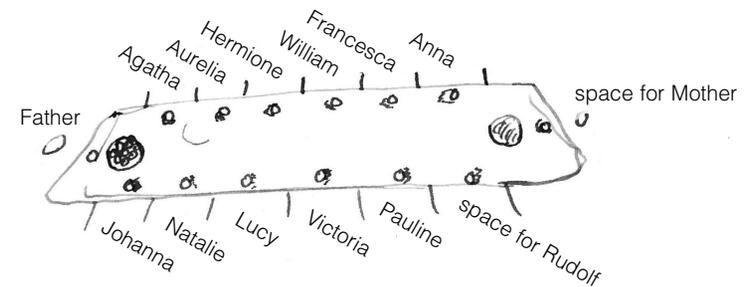
NATALIE: But where is Mother?
 I'm getting so scared this gloomy evening!
 Shouldn't some of us
 Run down to the village to see
 If Mother is coming?

FATHER: Mother will surely come.
 Don't worry yourselves, girls!
 Maybe she has persuaded the stupid peasants
 To buy from her the coloured ribbons
 And other knick-knacks
 Which looks pretty and gaudy.
 Where are Aurelia and Johanna?

NATALIE: They're still in the kitchen
 And trying
 To make whatever we still have
 Into a proper supper.

FATHER: Then call them in. We want to sit down
 And not wait any longer for Mother.
 She'll be coming
 And Rudolf has surely
 Fixed himself up for the night
 At Farmer Grumbach's.

HERMIONE *[calling through the curtain]*:
 Aurelia, Johanna, are you ready?
 William is here and Father, too.
 We want to start having supper.
 I'm laying the table.
 Have you got the food ready?
*[LUCY and VICTORIA carry the big table into
 the foreground. The others help to place the chairs. At
 either end of the table, two armchairs are placed for
 Father and Mother, and six chairs along each side.
 PAULINE puts the basket of apples on the left side of
 the table where Father is sitting, FRANCESCA puts the
 basket of bread on the right side of the table in front of
 Mother's chair. AURELIA and JOHANNA enter with a big
 bowl of soup and fourteen bowls. When all have taken
 their places around the table, there is at last peace in the
 room.]*



AGATHA: May we now say grace, Father?
[FATHER nods.]

Earth who gave to us this food,
 Sun who made it ripe and good,
 Dear Earth, dear Sun, by you we live,
 Our loving thanks to you we give.

*[They all sit down. HERMIONE and AURELIA
 start serving the soup.]*

FATHER: The grace is wrong!

It's not the Earth
But the work of our hands
Which has brought us
What we need to live.

WILLIAM: Also it's not the Sun,

But the sweat, toil and trouble
Of us men which have ripened this world's produce
On the earthly tree.

AURELIA: I've always thought,

That it's man
And not the other powers
Who is Lord of existence.

LUCY: D'you really believe that?

Oh, how proud of it we are!
It's nice to think so.

HERMIONE: Not only nice, but strong as well.

I feel my blood quite warming up
At this proud belief.

VICTORIA: Isn't it the soup warming your blood?

Yet it's right to know
That William and Father
Through their labour
Are giving you food.

JOHANNA: Man with his labour –

He defies the Earth and the Sun.
He wrests from the ground its treasures,
He builds his own houses,
His ships, his carriages.
He fashions his cradle and his coffin,
He plants trees, clears forests,
He rules as master of all creatures.

AGATHA: Where now is Mother, Father?

I'm getting more and more frightened.

FATHER: Don't worry, child.

She'll still come.

ANNA: But don't you think

We should go into the village
And look for her?

WILLIAM: Oh, be still with your lamenting!

I want to have my soup in quiet.
I've deserved the right to indulge here In a bit of food
In peace.

FRANCESCA: And if our Mother freezes on the way?

PAULINE [*taking up these words*]: Or our brother
Is taken from us by falling rocks?

NATALIE: I'm so scared!

The food
Sticks in my mouth!
Oh, don't you hear it?

[*A wind has risen outside; it beats against the walls
making them tremble. All listen; in the rushing
of the wind, there is suddenly a distinct knocking
on the door.*]

ANNA: D'you hear it, Father, there's knocking!

Maybe our brother is in trouble!

FRANCESCA: Maybe it's Mother

Calling for help?

[*The knocking becomes louder, silencing
everyone at the table in fear.*]

FATHER: Won't you go to open the door, William?

WILLIAM: Me, why just me?

Leave me in peace,
I'm tired of this trouble.

[*FATHER looks around. The wind grows stronger,
the knocking louder.*]

FATHER: Doesn't anyone want to open the door?

Aurelia, you're the oldest.

Go and see what the wind there
Wants to tell us.

AURELIA: Oh, Father,

No, I cannot, will not, may not!

AGATHA: I'm the youngest;

I'll see who's at the door.

[She goes to the door on the left and opens it. A gust of wind sweeps into the room and the lamp flickers. There is stillness. She goes out through the door.]

AGATHA: Hello, hello, is anyone there?

[She comes into the room.]

It's quite still there outside.

Stars are shining and the sickle moon

Stands clear in the sky.

There's no-one at the door!

[AGATHA sits down again.]

VICTORIA: Perhaps it was an illusion.

The anxiety we have

For our mother and our brother

Has twisted our mind.

[The wind rises again. Loud knocking and a crackling of twigs can be heard from outside.]

FATHER: This is really evil and strange.

First this hard day

And now it's as if all the elements were loose.

William, get up and see what's happening.

WILLIAM:

Not me, the girls are old and strong enough.

Let them go to the door.

FATHER: Then Victoria, go and look

Whether it's our senses

Or the elements

Deluding us.

VICTORIA: O Father, no, I don't want to.

My knees are trembling with fear.

[ANNA goes to the door on the right foreground and opens it. A gust of wind blows in again. She steps outside, but does not call. She comes back.]

ANNA: It's just as Agatha said:

Stars are shining and the sickle moon

Stands gleaming silver in the heavenly come.

The night is still, and the field peaceful.

Trees are just softly stirring

And trembling in the penetrating frost.

[While Anna is speaking, AURELIA and VICTORIA have fallen asleep with their heads resting upon their arms on the table.]

LUCY: It's only a spook

Wanting to make fools of us.

Are we so tired and so old

That we can no longer

Withstand evil?

FATHER: There's no other spook

Save the one

We can conjure up into our own mind

With cowardly thinking.

[Outside, a storm breaks loose and the howling and whining of many voices are in the storm. All look up in fear. FATHER's hands are shaking and WILLIAM grimaces in fear.]

FATHER:

William, don't be afraid of this howling,

It's a storm coming and going.

Won't you look outside the door?

WILLIAM: No, Father, I can't,

Leave me be and ask me no more

Than what I can manage.

I'm a human being.

Don't you know what that means?

Lord of the Earth!

FATHER: Alright, alright,
 Be quiet then!
 Lucy will now see if everything's in order.
[As he turns to her, he sees that she has fallen fast asleep on her chair. FRANCESCA rises and goes to the door. When she opens it, the howling ceases and the brightness of a clear night falls into the room.]

FRANCESCA *[speaking with wide open arms]*:
 Radiance from the silent winter night
 Is shining through the darkness of our hearts.
 Stillness resounds and I can
 Hear the creation sighing in my breath.
[AGATHA and Anna get up and stand beside her.]
 Awakening light is living in this brightness.
 My pulse is beating with expectation, pounding
 And waiting for salvation.

WILLIAM: I haven't experienced anything like this before.
 What is it, Father? Can't you help me?
 Can't you guess, or advise me what it is?
 Oh, my conscience is tearing at its bonds,
 Rousing me, pulling me, shaking me.
 Where's my hammer?
 Shouldn't I go and search for my brother?
[He rises heavily, leans with his hands on the table and looks at Father. HERMIONE rises and looks at her brother in astonishment.]

HERMIONE: You want to go out
 And search for our brother Rudolf?
 O William, then you'll never
 Return to us and your work.
 This is the night
 Of testing and of trials.
 You won't be able to come through it.

WILLIAM: Why don't you give me an answer, Father?
 Can't you tell me what I should do?

[At this moment, both doors open and shut a few times with the greatest force, shaking the room and the people in it. AURELIA, LUCY and VICTORIA sleep through it.]

FATHER: I should give advice
 To one who himself always knew
 With iron certainty
 What he had to achieve?
[The howling begins again, buffeting the walls.]

WILLIAM: I know now.
 My brother is calling.
 I'm going. I must,
 I want to find him!
 Rudolf, your brother is coming!
[He shoulders his hammer and leaves the room by the door on the left. It is now quiet in the room. HERMIONE gazes after him anxiously.]

HERMIONE *[to Father]*: You're driving him to his death.
 You're letting him go
 Without a kindly word.
 With fear in his heart
 He's going into the night,
 He who called himself
 A Lord of the Earth.

FATHER: Be quiet, child.
 Words are transforming,
 Their meaning is changing;
 The core of the world is dissolving.
[Behind the background curtain a gentle light slowly becomes visible, gradually spreading. Out of the light Rudolf's voice sounds.]

RUDOLF: I called out to William,
 I crossed through the forest,
 I sprang over rocks,
 I waded through the river,
 Sisters, are you prepared?

[FATHER and all who are still sitting at the table, jump up.]

FATHER: My son is speaking.

HERMIONE and JOHANNA: Our brother is speaking.

PAULINE and NATALIE: Are we prepared?

FATHER: My son is calling,

I must go and search for Mother!

I'm so tired, so very tired.

Where shall I find her footprints?

O night of testing, receive me,

Show me the way,

Fulfil the law.

[He goes wearily out by the door on the right and bangs it shut. HERMIONE and JOHANNA fall to their knees by the table and cover their faces with their hands. PAULINE and NATALIE go to AGATHA, FRANCESCA and ANNA in the foreground and gaze at the growing light behind the curtain. This becomes ever brighter revealing the figure of Rudolf behind it as if in a white garment.]

RUDOLF: I carried the cradle up the mountain,

The stars were shining on my way.

The river with its rushing currents,

The cliffs with their resounding echoes,

The birds with their singing

Were leading me upwards.

NATALIE, PAULINE, FRANCESCA, ANNA, AGATHA [*in chorus*]:

We want to follow you, O brother.

We have courage and hope for the way.

We have strength to find you there

Where your love will come to meet us.

[Behind the curtain the MOTHER appears, clad in a bluish mantle, at Rudolf's side.]

MOTHER: I came down into the earthly land,

For the comfort of Father,

And the care of my sons.

My daughters had joined me.

I endeavoured

So to guide them in the earthly land

That compassion would blossom in their hearts.

But earthly crookedness

Sucked up their spirit-germ.

They became daughters of men,

And five of them were overcome

By the sleep of the world.

Fear, pride and vanity,

Anxiety and apathy destroyed them.

You others who stayed awake waiting for me,

Whom uneasiness and hope,

And also concern for me

And my son did not let fall asleep –

What do you now want to do?

NATALIE, PAULINE, FRANCESCA, ANNA, AGATHA:

We want once more to find our way to you,

O Mother.

You returned to us from the village,

You gave yourself for us in sacrificial courage.

Oh, let us now do the same for you.

MOTHER [*spreading out her arms*]:

Then take from the basket

The apples of this earthly misery,

And feel the roundness

In the cup of your hands.

[The five daughters follow the Mother's instructions.]

Now each of you take a portion from the loaf,

Hold it before you

In a loving and receiving gesture.

[They do so.]

And now try

To step across the threshold

Leading from darkness into light.

The power of earthly apples

And transforming strength of bread
 Will now accompany you hither.
 Starlight is gleaming,
 Will for sacrifice is shining,
 Love is glowing
 Within you for the Spirit.

*[NATALIE, PAULINE, FRANCESCA, ANNA and
 AGATHA pass through the curtain and then the light
 goes out. The room is again lit only by the dim light
 of the stable lamp. AURELIA, VICTORIA, LUCY,
 HERMIONE and JOHANNA are still asleep. The door
 on the left opens and WILLIAM comes back.*

HERMIONE and JOHANNA wake up.]

HERMIONE: Have you now found our brother, William?

JOHANNA: Was it a dream? He came to us in here.

WILLIAM: Our brother lies dead at the foot of the cliff.

He fell over it and can never rise again.

*[FATHER enters through the door on the right;
 AURELIA, VICTORIA and LUCY wake up.]*

VICTORIA: Have you brought Mother to us?

AURELIA: Were you in the village?

LUCY: O Father, speak, where is Mother?

FATHER: She lies frozen on the way to the village.

The cold snatched her away from us.

She has gone stiff,

And will never grow warm again.

WILLIAM: O Father, without our brother,

Without our mother

How shall we complete our earthly tasks?

FATHER: Let us only hope

And bear our distress and trouble.

AURELIA, VICTORIA, LUCY, HERMIONE and JOHANNA:

We want to maintain courage

And kindle our hope

In the earthly darkness

And the earthly night.

We too live in expectation

That we shall not be lost.