

The Evening at Emmaus

A Play for the Friday after Ascension

Written in London, February 10, 1952

with the dedication: *For my Wife on March 9, 1952*

Cast

CLEOPAS	bright red garment
OTHER DISCIPLE	dark red garment
MARY, wife of Cleopas	violet garment
THE FIGURE	in blue, covered in white veils

A small room in the village of Emmaus. In the middle, a table with three chairs. Cleopas is sitting on the right chair, on the left the Other Disciple. The central chair is empty. On the table is a lit oil-lamp, shedding a soft light through the room. In front of the lamp, a bowl with bread. It is evening.



CLEOPAS: What was that? First it was still light,
And then the light went out

And left us here in darkness.
Oh, how the ice in my heart melted,
As though for me a dormant sense were awakened
Which until now never found its fullness
And was now fulfilled.

OTHER DISCIPLE: A countenance, two eyes full of soul
And full of love, gazing on our humanity;
Two hands, accompanying His speech
With gestures,
And then breaking the bread upon this table;
A body, radiant in its sheath of warmth,
And now an end to all that,
A sudden disappearance and loss.

CLEOPAS: Like poor naked sinners,
Who for one moment
Were allowed to behold the heart's paradise,
And now, forsaken in the waste of this world,
Having to find their way
In the senses' labyrinth,
Here we are.
What is to be done?

OTHER DISCIPLE: What is to be done?
Shall we follow Him, who has now left us?
Shall we seek Him, who here vanished from us?
Shall we become silent,
As we have just been speaking?
*[The door opens and MARY enters, carrying a bowl
of soup. She remains standing at
the door, waiting.]*

MARY: Where is the Stranger
Who was just with you?
Has He again left the house
Empty and without farewell
Which greeted Him as a guest?
You are disturbed, dispirited,

You seem to be lifted out of yourselves!
 May I learn what happened here?

CLEOPAS: What happened here?

Nothing and yet everything,
 Everything and yet nothing.
 A man appeared, and was a divine being.
 A god appeared and was a human being.
 And our eyes were allowed to behold Him
 And our hearts were able to deny Him.
 What more do you want?

MARY: He came and went,
 And left you two alone?

OTHER DISCIPLE: Did He leave us alone?
 Are we forsaken, really forsaken,
 And undone forever?
 What is forsakenness?
 Are we not wholly filled by
 His presence, although He went?
 And wholly imbued by the
 Clarity of His light,
 Although He departed from us?

MARY: You speak as if the Lord were
 Still here and not crucified.
 But it was I myself
 Who stood with His mother beneath the Cross
 When He passed away.
 Oh, that I might tear
 That hour
 Out of my heart forever!
 Oh, that I might always
 Bear that sight within me!
 Say, is it that, this fathomlessness
 Which you encountered?

CLEOPAS: When you, Mary, went out in the evening
 With the other women

To enliven the poor body
 With spices
 And lay it in the rock-tomb,
 You returned no more
 To Jerusalem.
 We all thought, like you as well,
 That an end had now come
 To what had just begun,
 That the repose of death
 Set the keystone
 Upon the power of life.

MARY: I let the other women
 Make their way back to the city.
 I myself returned through the night
 Here to Emmaus.
 The Moon shone upon all the ways.
 It was still and a light breeze
 Brushed silver through the full fields,
 Making the corn tremble
 And in the fig-trees
 Singing a lament.
 My thinking was gone,
 My grief was overwhelming,
 My life was at an end.
 When I stepped into the house, I fell wearily
 Onto my couch
 And slept the Sabbath through.
 When I rose up this morning,
 I felt as though my heart had died.
 Like a mask I went about my work
 And hoped that you would come.
 And when evening fell,
 You stepped in,
 Brought two friends with you,
 Sat down at this table.

I came in to feed you
 And when I saw you together
 A scarcely known love glowed
 In my heart.
 I did not know what had become of me.
 So I quickly went out, to the kitchen,
 In order to fetch you further food.
 I have brought it here for you.
 And yet the Stranger has disappeared.

OTHER DISCIPLE: Mary, we do not need food.
 We have been nourished.
 He broke the bread with us.

CLEOPAS: Mary, on the same chair
 Which is bearing you, He sat
 And looked at us
 With His star-like eyes.

MARY: Was it the Lord?
 OTHER DISCIPLE: It was the Lord!
 MARY: He whose death I witnessed?
 CLEOPAS: He whose death you witnessed!
 MARY: Yet He is dead!
 Irretrievably dead, killed
 By the power of state law.
 How can He have escaped
 That death,
 Which my own eyes,
 Tearless with grief,
 Perceived?

OTHER DISCIPLE: So it is.
 MARY: What is so?
 Was it the Lord?
 Was it death?
 Oh, help to decipher
 This unutterable riddle!

CLEOPAS: It was the Lord
 Who went through death
 And who,
 As He proclaimed to us,
 Rose on the third day.

MARY [*pointing to the door on the right*]:
 Yet what is that?
 [*Everyone looks. A FIGURE, completely veiled in blue
 and white garments, has entered, as though the light
 of the Moon had come into the room.*]

CLEOPAS [*leaping up*]: Who are you?
 Are you a spectre wanting to fool us
 And turn the calm of our hearts
 Into distress and torment?

MARY: I feel so strange.
 Is it not I myself
 Who has appeared there?

OTHER DISCIPLE [*softly*]:
 Be quiet, the figure wants to speak.

THE FIGURE [*with a voice which seems not to come from itself*]:
 From the primal grounds of the depths,
 From the earthly spheres of the past,
 From the life-cycles of all creation
 Have I risen up to the light
 I never previously saw.
 Erda is my name,
 Artemis was I called.
 Earthly gorges, rocky chasms, fiery depths
 Have opened up
 And raised me into day.
 Terrible confusion holds sway in the depths,
 Uproar, madness;
 And the bonds of laws have burst.
 Do you know who I am?

CLEOPAS: You are in the house of human beings.
 You see the table
 At which men take their food.
 You are in the realm of human sight.

THE FIGURE: Oh, the confusion!
 Will I escape from it
 And ever find my way back
 To the spheres of the world where I am at home?

OTHER DISCIPLE: Back? For you there is no turning back.
 For you there is only redemption.

THE FIGURE: Redemption?
 That word sounds to me
 Like death.

CLEOPAS [*still standing*]:
 Mary, take the bowl with the bread
 Into your hands,
 Raise it three times
 Up to the height of your eyes.
 [*MARY rises and does so.*]

CLEOPAS: Now step towards Erda,
 Sink to your knees before her
 And ask her to break the bread.

MARY [*kneels before The Figure*]:
 Once, when Mother Leto bore you
 And you were entrusted to your brother
 The god Apollo,
 When you had the Earth as your field of play
 And animals were living through you
 And plants growing through you,
 When men worshipped you
 Yet were never allowed to draw near you,
 When you turned bold Actaeon
 Into a stag
 And his dreadful hounds tore him to pieces
 And every part of him

Brought man disease,
 You, who once admonished Odin in warning,
 Who bent his bow for Apollo
 And who sent Niobe's children into ruin,
 Do you know what being human means?
 [*THE FIGURE, throwing back her veil, reveals her mask. CLEOPAS and the OTHER DISCIPLE hide their faces in their cloaks.*]

THE FIGURE: Never has a mortal been allowed
 To behold my face!
 Bared before you now lies my being,
 You earthly woman!
 Look at my eyes,
 They have never seen sunlight,
 The shining Moon had fashioned them.
 My head is Luna's eternal wandering
 In cycles round the Earth
 And my features bear the marks of all creation.

MARY: Then let your countenance, O Artemis,
 Find its reflection in my earthly face.
 I gaze at you and you at me.
 Who now reflects the image in the mirror?

THE FIGURE:
 Who gave you this wisdom, earthly woman,
 That you in human speech
 Can show a goddess the way?

MARY: Look into my face
 And know.

THE FIGURE:
 What? Your wrinkles, your earthly misfortune,
 The creases of your labour?

MARY: All those and yet more.
 [*CLEOPAS and the OTHER DISCIPLE have uncovered their faces and come nearer to Mary and the Figure.*]

MARY: Can you follow the ridge of my nose
 Into the furrows of my brow?
 THE FIGURE: I can.
 MARY: Can you follow the axis of my eyes
 Which stands horizontal upon it?
 THE FIGURE: I can do so.
 MARY: Do you know that this cross
 Is engraved into the face of every human being?
 The long beam, to divide the face
 Lengthwise,
 The crossbeam, completing it
 And bearing the eyes?
 Do you know that every tear
 We humans weep
 Is part of the blood which dripped to Earth
 From the hands of the Redeemer?
 Do you know that every word
 Human beings speak out of good will
 Is part of the blood
 Which fell down
 From the feet of the Redeemer?
 Since last Friday
 The event of Golgotha is imprinted
 Into the human countenance.
 Man weeps and speaks
 Wholly out of the wound-marks of our Lord.
 Since then the divine face can
 Be reflected
 In the human countenance.
 THE FIGURE: I can begin to grasp
 That streams of time must find new ways
 In order to flow.
 MARY: Do you know that death is redemption?
 THE FIGURE: I know it now.
 Let me take a morsel

From the bread of life.
 It is the bread of death
 Which I once rejected.

[THE FIGURE takes a piece of bread, breaks it in her hands and eats from it. Then she covers her face again and within her veil seems to crumble into nothingness. The veils remain lying on the earth.]

VOICE OF THE FIGURE:

I commanded the cycle of the world,
 Command me, Son of Man.
 I am now in the kingdom of the dead,
 And Life is my reward.
 Spheres I did not know before
 Have received my being.
 I shall achieve redemption,
 I know the human land of men.

[The moonlight vanishes and the room lies there just dimly lit by the oil-lamp. MARY kneels at her previous place.]

CLEOPAS: So it is not just that we humans,
 In the earthly circle far surrounding our eyes,
 Were allowed to receive light
 From the heavenly realm.

OTHER DISCIPLE: No, even those who once were gods
 Are now removed from the thrones
 Which once seemed to be their seats.

MARY *[rising]*: Come, let us bear news to Jerusalem
 Of the event
 Which we witnessed here.

CLEOPAS: Will the Lord now in all future time
 Here on Earth
 Appear to men
 That they are filled
 With His being?

OTHER DISCIPLE: Was it the Lord?

Was it not our anxiety
Playing a prank on our own soul?

MARY: Come, let us turn

Towards Jerusalem.
Perhaps the other disciples
Know how to help us
In our distress,
In our doubt
And in our suffering.

CLEOPAS: O Lord, if you have vanished,

Then we want to seek you.
If you have passed away,
Then we want to wander unceasingly
In order to find you.
Come, friend, and you, Mary.
The way to Him
Stands open for us.

*[They turn to the door at the left back,
take their staffs and exit.]*