

Christmas night

A Play for Children

© 2008 Monica Dart

Characters in order of appearance:

CAT	HORSE
DOG	OWL
DEER	FOX
HARE	BEETLE
MOLE	BEE
1st RABBIT	FROG
2nd RABBIT	BADGER
SQUIRREL	HEDGEHOG
WATER RAT	BOY and GIRL
COCKEREL	MARY, JOSEPH and JESUS
HEN	SHEPHERDS
MOUSE	THREE KINGS

Recorders ... country music.

As the lights dim, we hear an owl calling.

Prologue ... In front of the curtains. Light.

- CAT Did you hear the owl?
- DOG From where I was in the farmhouse,
I heard the sound, strange and soft on
the still air.
- CAT I was in the barn. The cry was a message.
- DOG (immediately interested) **News! Tell me.**
- CAT That we must meet.
- DOG Owl and you ... (eagerly) and me?
- CAT Many more.
- DOG Hen? (Cat nods) Horse ... Cockerel ...
Sheep? (Cat nods again) ... (wonderingly)
All of us at the farm?
- CAT More.
- DOG (racing impatiently round the cat) **Don't
tease! I want to know.**
- CAT (in a hissing voice) **I can't tell you because
I don't know ... everything.**
- DOG (incredulously) **We're going to a meeting and
you can't tell me what it's about?**
- CAT Don't rush at things, you know it gets you
into trouble.
- DOG (resigned) All right.
- CAT (kindly) Listen. Something ... something
wonderful will happen this night. Owl says
three kings are travelling this way. They
have come from eastern lands, guided by
a star.
- DOG Why?
- CAT That is what Owl wants us all to find out.
He thinks it will be important.
- DOG I don't understand. Kings have their lives and
we have ours.
- CAT Oh don't you see? If it will make such a
difference to kings ... to people ... it will
matter to us. Life could be ... different.

DOG (in a rush) More walks and runs ... bigger helpings at dinner ...

CAT (puts out a paw at him) No! (quietly) Have you noticed how it has been these last hours?

DOG (thoughtfully) I have felt truth. Like it is when everything between master and me is right ... only it means much more than that.

CAT There you are! (Cat and Dog sit together and look up towards the sky) Now, you must collect the farm animals, while I hurry to the fields and the wood. (just as they are going their separate ways) Oh! And go in the barn and wake hedgehog.

DOG (protesting) That's impossible!

CAT In the autumn, when the night was colder than usual, hedgehog once said to me, 'Sometimes it worries me that I may miss something important. You wouldn't let that happen, would you?' I said, 'Of course not!' So you must wake Hedgehog.

DOG (doubtfully) I'll do my best.

CAT When our work is finished, we'll meet and go together to the clearing. And see ...

DOG And hear.

CAT & DOG What will come to pass this night
Is not yet clear:
Trust will lead us to the light.
Never fear.
And trust and truth.
And truth and joy
Will meet, and all their power employ.

(exit Cat and Dog – L and R)

CURTAINS BACK

Scene – A clearing in the wood

DEER I see Hare is one of the early ones.

HARE You stood on the far hill, silhouetted against the sky. I ran a shorter way, yet you arrived first.

DEER It is a gift given to me, to run quick as the changing wind.

HARE You move faster than a ripple caused by a stone in water.

DEER And you have power to match your needs ... What was that? Why? Mole!

MOLE Excuse me. Have I come to the right place?

HARE Certainly. Well! Well! We don't often see you.

MOLE I am rather busy underground, but I understand this is an important occasion. Perhaps you can tell me a little more about it.

DEER The fact is, we don't know any more than you ...

1st RABBIT Go on!

2nd RABBIT Don't push!

1st RABBIT I didn't!

2nd RABBIT Yes you did. You first!

1st RABBIT No, you! You're the eldest!

2nd RABBIT If you're not careful. I'll ...

SQUIRREL (suddenly appearing) Now you two, behave yourselves!

1st RABBIT What are you doing here?

2nd RABBIT Yes, why are you up and about? I thought you would be snoring in your drey. (the rabbits giggle)

SQUIRREL (indignantly) I don't doze all the winter, you know. Any nice day in winter I'm up and about, looking for anything that's going ... anything tasty. I'm not lazy, you know. But why are you all waiting here?

DEER We have come for a meeting.

SQUIRREL So that is why cat was rushing about!

HARE (to Deer) Can you see anyone else coming?

DEER Yes. Fox.

RABBITS Oh, no! (rush to other side cowering)

HARE (nervously) 'Fox', did you say?

2nd RABBIT Two of us. Just waiting here, to be ...
to be ... Oh dear!

HARE (thoughtfully) Fox! Hmm ...

WATER RAT (appearing unexpectedly) Have you heard the
saying?

RABBITS (jump) Oh! How you frightened us!

HARE What saying?

WATER RAT That the wolf shall dwell with the lamb.
It is like that tonight.

SQUIRREL I have noticed. Do you really think I'm looking
for food? Water Rat, you have explained it
beautifully.

(Cockerel and Hen enter)

COCKEREL Now don't be nervous.

HEN I've never been here before.

COCKEREL We must be brave.

HEN When I think of our cosy house, the clean
straw, the friendliness of our neighbours ...

COCKEREL We must be sensible.

HEN (whispers) They're all staring. (flutters) Look
at them!

SQUIRREL (comes forward) You know me. I've been in
your pen many times.

COCKEREL There you are! (to Hen) Squirrel's no
stranger.

2nd RABBIT We've been on the lettuce patch
(nudges 1st Rabbit) haven't we?

1st RABBIT Ooo yes!

COCKEREL I remember seeing you.

WATER RAT I came to the farm once. In the drought
I had a splash in the trough which saved
my life.

COCKEREL (to Hen) You see!

HEN (more cheerful) They do seem quite friendly.

MOUSE (when we see part of the Horse appearing)
Thank you for the lift. (we hear her jump
down and she cartwheels into sight)

HORSE My pleasure. (laughs/neighs)

MOUSE (looks around) I don't think I know these
parts.

HORSE There used to be a bridle path around here
somewhere! Many a time I cantered past the
beeches. (laughs)

MOUSE Someone I know over there. (goes to Hen)
I wondered where you could be. All that
grain lying around and no sign of you.

HEN You stay with us.

COCKEREL That's right, stay with us. (Mouse stays close
to Hen and Cockerel)

(Fox enters, leaps over Water Rat, looks nervously around
... is agitated and uncertain ... causes general panic. Rabbits
race behind Deer. Hare peeps behind a bush. Hen and
Cockerel are very fluttery. Noise and pandemonium.)

OWL (enters) Now! Now! You can't behave like
this! (they are all still)

DEER Are there many more to come?

OWL A few ... including the two farm children.

MOLE (doubtfully) Oh, the children!

FOX They've been kind to me. (this causes
amazement)

HARE Kind to you?

ALL Kind to you?

OWL Let him speak.

FOX When I meet them unexpectedly, they stand
still and just look, as though I'm something
special ... as though they would love to
meet me. Love ... do you understand?
(silence while they consider this)

OWL We shall understand tonight.

FOX What is it about, this meeting?

OWL I'm beginning to know. You have made me
realise, Fox, why we had to come. Not one
of us is afraid now. See how quietly and
eagerly we wait – all together.

(enter Beetle and Bee; Bee whispers to Fox)

FOX (light-heartedly) **You mustn't sting me tonight.** (Beetle and Bee move, almost in a dance, from one animal to the other)

(enter Frog)

FROG Gracious me! Never seen so many ... hope I'm not last. I can't wait to find out what's happening. Nobody ever tells you anything. The way Cat was rushing about! I said, 'Just a minute', but Cat didn't wait a second. Looks as though I'm here on time. (to Beetle and Bee) **Don't you two ever stop still?** (they wait by Frog)

HARE Hip! Hip! Hip!

EVERYONE (looking right) **Hurray!** (Badger enters)

BADGER Hello! (looks round) **Do go on! Don't stop for me. I mean** (warm and friendly) I shouldn't like to spoil things.

FOX You're not spoiling anything. We're glad to see you.

BADGER Well, come on, tell us what it's about.

OWL We must have patience.

BADGER Oh, I see.

SQUIRREL Have you noticed?

WATER RAT It's a special night.

BADGER As I left home, I did notice something ... something in the air ... then, there was a message about this meeting.

DEER Here's a brave one.

BADGER Hedgehog!

RABBITS Hedgehog!

MOLE You must be cold.

HEDGEHOG I'm too excited to be cold. (running round in a circle)

HORSE Hungry?

HEDGEHOG No. I had some milk which was left out for the Cat.

FROG You make me giddy. (Cat and Dog arrive with the two children who are dressed in warm clothes)

OWL Cat and Dog,
Your work is done;
Night is here,
But soon the sun
Will shine and show
With warmth and light,
How love may grow.

ALL With warmth and light,
How love may grow.

Cat and Dog take up their original positions L and R downstage; the boy and girl draw back the curtains to reveal Mary, Joseph and Jesus, raised.

To country music, the shepherds walk through the central aisle of the hall, climb the steps to centre stage and kneel before the family. To the tune 'We Three Kings' the kings also appear at the back of the hall, walk to the centre steps and kneel before the family. The audience stands and everyone sings 'O Come, All Ye Faithful'.

Cat and Dog pull curtains.

Learning Together:
Exploring the relationship between distinctive Christian education and building a cohesive society

The Stapleford Centre
Annual Education Conference 2009
2-4 January 2009
The Hayes Christian Conference Centre,
Swanwick, Derbyshire

Speakers:
Paul Woolley: Director of Theos
Revd Professor Jeff Astley
Elizabeth Green Alan Flintham

To find out more:
web: www.stapleford-centre.org/conferences
e: conferences@stapleford-centre.org
t: 0115 939 6270