

HOUSE OF VICTORY



This is a legend of living in the AMERICAN PLACE.
It is like the bone structure of a people's living.

Some things happen to us, some things happen to our mothers, but it all happens to us.

This has to do with the kind of living that makes the village and the small town. The different parts will span a long time length and will have no regard for historical sequence. It only is intended to convey a sense of certain permanent qualities in the American body frame. There are certain things that last like bones.

The scene is the inside and outside of a house.
There is:

- a doorway
- a front porch
- a rocking chair
- a rope swing.

There will be no heavy construction; only the frame of a doorway, a platform of the porch, a Shaker rocking chair with a bone-like simplicity of line, and an old fashioned rope swing.

This so placed as to divide the stage into two areas of action. There will be nothing casual in their design. It will have great beauty of line and proportion.

At times the action will shift from one area to the other, and some times both areas will be used simultaneously.

The action centers around days in the lives of the people.

- EDEN VALLEY
- WEDDING DAY
- INTERLUDE
- EPISODE
- FEAR IN THE NIGHT
- DAY OF WAR
- TIME OF RETURN.

There will be moments of great dramatic urgency, of conflict and anguish, side by side with moments of lyric awareness of the most simple things of living - a sense of country side, fields and the usual in a people's life.

I have used quotations from the Bible, not in a religious sense so much as in a poetic sense. There are certain groups of people who think in Bible terms and incidents, whereby it becomes abstract, almost,

like any poetry. Side by side with it I have tried to use the colloquial expression to make it less a Biblical quotation and more a simple part of daily conversation and speech.

I have no suggestions as to how to handle these lines, whether with music under them or without it. I think it is for you to decide how it can be woven as a web without making it choppy and unsatisfactory for you.

"HOUSE OF VICTORY"

Characters

THE MOTHER:

She is really the matriarch, the constant figure that exists regardless of time and period. She sits in a Shaker rocking chair on the porch thruout the piece. She is like an early American portrait in costume and looks. She is small, exactly drawn, with a certain elegance and formality. Altho she is a type she is also specific and definite in the way such paintings are that hang in so many American homes. She is theatric in the way American Primitives are.

In quality she is fanatical, formal, gentle, delicate, and hard, in a certain rocklike way.

It is she who speaks the lines.

THE DAUGHTER:

She is the Daughter of the American Woman. She is slender, young, valiant. She is what one thinks of as the Pioneer Woman. She is strong but she is also feminine and attractive. There is a feeling of great eagerness and great capacity for feeling. She gives the impression of seeking her destiny with eagerness and a kind of love.

THE CITIZEN:

I use the word CITIZEN because I do not want to call him just A MAN. Perhaps we can find a better one later. He is shy, fanatical, with the overtones of the Puritan ancestor about him. He is in no way a country bumpkin. He has a certain awkward grace of action; he is a creature of American bone. It is the kind of man that became the abolitionist, the John Brown. He is the type of simple man who would fight to the death for civil rights for mankind. He is tragic in his dedication as well as heroic.

He becomes the husband of the DAUGHTER.

THE FUGITIVE:

This is the man who is hunted, persecuted who almost becomes a clown in his unconscious agony for freedom. He is

really the slave figure of the CIVIL WAR but should have a broader meaning as well. He will be seen in the half-light and shadows. There will be a real sense of dance about him. Whether you want to use a negro melody, a sense of frantic simple prayer or not, is up to you.

YOUNGER SISTER:

She is a minor character used as relief and turn of scene. She has about her the headlong qualities of adolescence. As the DAUGHTER suggests the Pioneer period and the MOTHER the American Primitive, so she suggests today.

TWO CHILDREN:

These exist as belonging to any period.

NEIGHBORS:

These are the figures of the town, and exist outside of definite period. When costumes, however, they will be definite in quality. The men will be a little like the Mark Twain figures. They will be YANKEES.

ACTION

OVERTURE:

This is entirely up to you, to have it or not as you think best. If you think it best to have one, I feel it should not be long. Perhaps there could be a sense of simple celebration such as in the hearts of people at the beginning of a town. This might even be a fanfare but not militant in feeling.

The curtain lifts in darkness.

The outlines of a house are visible: a front porch
 a doorway
 a rocking chair
 a swing.

All that can be seen are the outlines, the bones of the house. The structure could be painted with luminous paint so that it shines and is visible in the darkness.

When the light comes up the scene should suggest the inside and outside of a house.

The light first lights the face of the MOTHER as she is sitting in the rocking chair on the porch.

The MOTHER is an American Primitive, small and perfectly drawn in costume and position.

She seems to be looking out over the land she has helped to stake and claim and win. This need in no sense be western in feeling. My own great Grandmother went into Pennsylvania when it seemed a frontier.

EDEN VALLEY:

The path of light extends across the stage reaching thru the doorway into the house.

The DAUGHTER runs across the floor onto the porch and stands in the doorway.

She comes with a young vigor, an eagerness, a welcome.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

"AND THE LORD GOD PLANTED A GARDEN EASTWARD IN EDEN."

The DAUGHTER moves down and sits on the steps.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

Intro

2 min

*Scene 1
Foot with
Mother
Returns*

"PRETTY, ISN'T IT, DAUGHTER?
ALWAYS WAS PRETTY."

The DAUGHTER goes down the steps into the outside space. There is a solo dance that is joyous and by turns deeply serious. There is a sense of "Clearing", a moment of suspension in the worries of existence. At times it could have the quality of a psalm, not religious in a dark sense but a psalm in the sense that it is lyric, poetry, of the kind a woman like that would only be familiar with because she knows no other. It is simply that it is rich in feeling and possessed of an energy in texture. There is also an electric eagerness for destiny that is the unconscious partner of youth and healthy living. The dance finishes with her at the swing, or in it. The swing is the old fashioned kind of two ~~propes~~ with a board across.

The CITIZEN enters.

He is shy, fanatical, with the overtones of a Puritan ancestor about him. He is not a bumpkin, but is a creature of American bone, possessed of a certain awkward grace of action. He moves to the swing where the DAUGHTER is seated.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

"AND THE LORD GOD TOOK A MAN AND PUT HIM INTO THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO DRESS AND KEEP IT."

There is a duet of courtship.

While there is a certain familiarity in this whole situation there need be no use of folk material except as you see fit. It has moods within its framework as a duet and several ways of treating it are possible.

I keep hearing certain things from your music.

There is the utterly unforgettable quiet part of the LINCOLN work. That is so utterly beautiful in having been woven on this country's loom without seeming to use any folk material really. Then there are part from the "QUIET CITY".

I hear this without hearing the melody. It is a quality that I hear, or I feel something that makes me think I hear it. Do you know what I mean?

The duet is finished before the steps.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

"HE'LL DO, DAUGHTER."

2 1/2

3 min.

Scene 2

Courtship

Under sentiment

WEDDING DAY:

Benetti

4 min Adolescent party

Wedding Day celebration

5 for Citizen

silence

This mood is broken by the Young SISTER running across the stage in an excited adolescent way. There is an interlude for her and her companions.

It really serves to introduce the following action and is a part of the WEDDING DAY.

This in the beginning has all the qualities that exist in a small town, an early town, a little sense of a County Fair, a little of a revival meeting, a party, a picnic. It really is a celebration, an excuse for a good time. It is for company.

There is a solo for the CITIZEN. It is like an exhibition of strength, having engaging qualities such as Davy Crockett had in legend. As a finish he sweeps the DAUGHTER across the doorway into the house.

There is an instant of stillness and silence.

LINES: TheMOTHER speaks:

"AND ADAM SAID, 'THIS IS BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH, AND SHE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN."

Immediately there are two scenes being played simultaneously: The love scene inside the house; and the old time party outside the house.

The love scene is awkward, quiet, secretive, reticent and sparing in movement. There is a great tension under the movement.

The party outside develops into an old fashioned chivari(charivari). It is the celebration that takes place at a wedding, or did do so in the out districts of this country. It is often a terror to the peoplecouple, especially to the woman and harks back to the old restraint in a puritan, protestant community. It is a kind of intensified Saturday night. In more sophisticated areas it still exists in the dinner for the bridegroom.

These two scenes are played simultaneously in two opposite shafts of light indicating the inner and outer areas of the house. The MOTHER sits between.

Finally all activity fades and the stage is dim and empty again.

INTERLUDE:

Transition

There could be a short passage of six or eight bars transition while the lights are dim except for a single lighting of the face of the MOTHER. On the last bar the lights have come up again.

4 min

Love Scene + party

The action resumes with a scene of children playing as they do in the early morning. The light streams across the stage thru the house as it did in the beginning, revealing the MOTHER IN FULL figure as before.

The DAUGHTER and the CITIZEN walk to the door as the DAUGHTER did in the beginning of the piece.

LINES: The MOTHER SPEAKS:
"AND THE EVENING AND THE MORNING WERE THE FIRST DAY."

The two move down the steps much as the DAUGHTER DID IN THE first scene.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:
"SPRING COMES EARLY THIS YEAR, DAUGHTER.
ABOUT TIME FOR SPRING PLANTING, SON."

There follows a lyric interlude for the company. It should have the feeling of a telescoped day with such simple things as take place in times of peace, children playing, women talking, men in some feats of strength, a party at night, dinner, perhaps, and a pattern of work.

This has no dramatic significance. It is rather the essence of living together without war and in a common bond, of time and place and relationships. It could have rather a song-like quality. I also feel it might take the form of a theme and variations in rondo form. That is of course for you to decide. If it did take that form then the DAUGHTER would take the A.

This interlude fades into the night. The entire company is seated about. The family is on the steps of the porch. There is a feeling of time suspending, of a world listening. The outlines of the structure are visible still and the MOTHER'S face is in the light.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:
" IN THAT DAY SHALL THIS SONG BE SUNG,
WE HAVE A STRONG CITY;
SALVATION WILL GOD APPOINT FOR WALLS AND BULWARKS.
OPEN YE THE GATES,
THAT THE RIGHTEOUS NATION WHICH KEEPETH THE TRUTH MAY ENTER." IN

EPISODE:

In the midst of this tranquillity there appears on the opposite side of the stage a small stage set framed in a kind of luminous frame. By its size, its appointments, its decoration, it gives the feeling of an old fashioned theatre set, a show boat stage. The company seated about gives the effect of audience.

A play takes place within the frame. It is essentially condensed and highly dramatic but is in no sense satire or burlesque. There is no

3 min
Daily Life
(Shaker Song?)

comedy but a sense of the tragic. The action centers about the crucial scenes in "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Rather than playing it exactly as written it should have the effect of the pictures that take place in one's mind upon hearing that name. It will be played simply but with a theatricality, a certain poignant artificiality. These were the crucial scenes that turned the attention of the world to slavery and precipitated the crisis. It is like putting a grave truth in the mouth of a child. It has the innocence and the power.

The music could be treated in several ways. It might show music of the time or reminiscent of war songs and marches or it might be of the quality of spirituals. But you will know what is best, as always in these matters. I hope you do not mind if I sometimes talk aloud.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin"

At times there could be lines in this scene from the book spoken by the MOTHER or by those playing the scene. But the lines should be used only two or three times because the whole thing is not long. And it all has the effect theatrically of being seen thru an opera glass; there is a feeling of distance, of another dimension.

The scene fades.

LINES : The MOTHER speaks:
" THE NEW WINE MOURNETH
 THE VINE LANGUISHETH
 ALL THE MERRY HEARTED DO SIGH

 ALL JOY IS DARKENED
 THE MIRTH OF THE LAND IS GONE."

FEAR IN THE NIGHT:

The company moves swiftly out as though in a hurry to move secretly out of sight. Only the family is left.

The FUGITIVE ENTERS.

There is a dance of a hunted creature, followed or imagining he is being followed. He falls, rushes, hides, tumbles, lies still. People enter, cross the stage as though in pursuit. His whole activity is one of dumb, clownish agony and fear. He is awkward with the tragic awkwardness of the hopeless. He hides by the skirts of the MOTHER.

Pursuit of Fugitive

The CITIZEN now enters from the house and goes down from the porch.

There follows a solo, angry, violent, possessed. It is fanatical at times mad. It is reminiscent of HARPER'S FERRY, AND JOHN BROWN.

Angry "Dance" Citizen

The dance is broken at times by lines from the MOTHER.

These are the lines;

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

" FOR THUS SAID THE LORD GOD OF ISREAL UNTO ME: ' TAKE THE WINE CUP OF THIS FURY AT MY HAND, AND CAUSE ALL NATIONS TO WHOM I SEND IT TO DRINK IT. AND THEY SHALL DRINK , AND BE MOVED AND BE MAD, BECAUSE OF THE SWORD THAT I WILL SEND AMONG THEM.' "

After the dance the Citizen exits as though driven by some great voice.

(These lines are not exactly right - I will try to find simpler ones.)

THE DAY OF WAR:

I have laid this day of war in the CIVIL WAR period, but is is the state of war at any time, with its timeless tragedies of separations, bewilderment, loneliness, loss and the quiet, simple agony of uneventful lives torn asunder.

Again it is laid against the childish background. The YOUNGER SISTER runs across the stage in a frenzy of adolescent excitement.

The children enter playing at a charade of war.

The CITIZEN reenters quickly and he and the DAUGHTER ENTER the house. There is again a double scene.

Within the house there is a scene of goodbye while outside the children play at war.

The CITIZEN exits after the children. It is as tho they both used the same tragical music.

The DAUGHTER throws herself at the feet of the MOTHER.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

" GET TO YOUR FEET.
YOU ARE MY DAUGHTER."

There follows a dance for the DAUGHTER. It is like psalm only in the sense that it is strong and ecstatic lyrical movement. It is in no sense religious. In fact none of this whole piece is religious. The lines are used because they have a militancy and poetry and were part of the life of that period.

LINES: The MOTHER speaks:

"NOW GATHER THYSELF IN TROOPS, O DAUGHTER OF TROOPS:
HE HATH LAID SEIGE AGAINST US."

There follows a dance for women. It should be beautiful and terrible. There is in it bitterness as well as grief and gentleness. But it is strong with a new strength. It is almost like an incantation for return of right living. I should like to get into it a feeling of union and sharing and strength.

This dance continues long enough so as to establish the fact that it helps to bring about the return and the end of war. There could even be a time of darkness on the stage with this music and sense of the dance continuing.

War activity

Daughters Dance

There should be lines at a few places throughout this section - not to explain action but to heighten the dramatic feeling - Women's Dance

RETURN:

Again it seems to return to the beginning.
The MOTHER sits alone.
The light extends into the house.

The MAN enters and stands by the swing.
The DAUGHTER enters on a run as in the beginning.
There is a meeting and they go into the house together.
There is again a double scene.
Inside the house is the meeting of the MAN and the DAUGHTER.
Outside is the excitement of return.

End

This is hard to see as yet and I will have to think of it a little longer. I wish I could give the feeling that the return is in the period now(today). At least that it has the timelessness that makes it seem possible.

Quiet End

At the end, instead of its ending a a great moment of excitement, I wish it could quiet down to a point where the audience is included in it in some way. There will be lines from the MOTHER near the end but I must find them.

