

Everychild

BY FREDERICK PETERSON
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A PLAY OR PAGEANT

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Scene I. The Garden of Joy

Cho-Cho The Clown Everychild Mother, Father, and dancing children

Scene II. Sweat-shop

Father, Mother, three children, Everychild

Scene III. The Farmstead

Jim the Father, Mary the Mother, Billie, Tom, and Rosie, their children. Cho-Cho and Everychild

Scene IV. The Coal-mine

Joe, Jack, Bert--three old miners and two boys

Final Scene. Same as first scene

Cho-Cho, Everychild, Mother, Father. Old group of children and new group with Everychild

PROLOGUE

BY CHO-CHO

Good people! This is the Play of Everychild With Cho-Cho As Author and Manager. The play has defects-- It has good points-- And bad points-- Like the world itself-- Like life! Perhaps the author of the world Is something like me, A little grotesque, A little whimsical, Serious often, Sometimes all the more serious Seen through a Fool's words With cap and jingle of bells. In this droll world There are lots of children Who are the children of fools-- Like me. Good people! I bespeak your patience With Everychild Daughter of a Clown.

SCENE I: *Stage dark as curtain rises. Moderate starlight and quiet music of cradle-song type. Little fairies come out dancing in the darkness with firefly lamps and sing the following cradle song:*

Some one is sleeping Out in the dark Where fireflies glimmer Spark upon spark.

Some little stranger Come from afar Under the glory Of moon and of star.

Deep in the blossoms That drift as they fall Some one is sleeping And stirs not at all.

Sleep, little stranger! The night is near gone; Sleep, little stranger, But dream of the dawn!

The dim light reveals a dark figure lying on the mosses at the foot of an old tree. As the light grows gradually stronger the dark object begins to move, to slowly take off one after another of black coverings, revealing a little girl of nine or ten years, dressed in white. She rubs her eyes, looks about wonderingly, and slowly rises to a standing position. Meanwhile the earth grows more luminous and roseate. The birds have begun to twitter now and then before the dawn, and their notes increase in number and variety with the approach of morning. The growing light reveals an orchard of old apple-trees near at hand in full bloom, with petals falling, and hills and mountains lifting and towering upward higher and higher into the blue distance. A path leads from the orchard up the near hills and toward the heights. The music has grown louder, and is sweet and tender, interspersed with bird notes. A number of children, girls and

boys, come out and sing and dance under the blossoms of the apple-trees. They sing the children's song:

We are of the sunrise Flower-breath and dew, Travelling wider circles
Of blue beyond the blue,

Seeking strength of spirit, Happiness and joy-- Heritage decreed for
Every girl and boy.

Music of the moonbeams And the orchard rain, Music of the meadows
Waving with the grain,

Mountains in the sunlight, Colors of the flowers, Trailing cloud and
shadow-- All of these are ours.

We are of the sunrise Flower-breath and dew, Travelling wider circles
Of blue beyond the blue.

The little girl in the foreground looks with wonder and delight at the entrancing spectacle. She has her side to the audience. She raises her arms, listens, rubs her eyes, smiles with joy. She touches the grass, the flowers, the trees, picks up and smells the falling apple-blossoms. She begins to dance like the other children. One of them sees her and runs toward her with arms outstretched. The newcomer touches her hair and her hands. They smile at each other. The little girl leads the stranger toward the others and has her join in the dance. The dancing is in the Greek manner. They play with a light, large, bubble-like balloon.

Little Girl

What is your name?

Stranger

I do not understand.

Little Girl

Oh, of course, I forgot. I will lead you to some one who will give you a name.

(A man and woman have come slowly through the orchard and seated themselves on a bench under an apple-tree. Two or three of the children lead the stranger up to them.)

Stranger (feeling of the hair and gown of the woman)

Who are you?

Woman (smiling)

I am your mother.

Stranger (feeling of the hair and face and garments of the man)

Who are you?

Man

I am your father.

Stranger

What place is this? They told me somewhere--but I have forgotten--that I should die *there* which is being born *here* and come to the earth.

Mother

Yes, this is our world, and I shall give you a name. I shall name you Everychild.

Everychild

Is it always and everywhere so beautiful?

Mother

No, but it should be so, and some day it will be so.

Father

It is a dream we have.

Mother

It will be even more beautiful than this, for we shall go higher, and climb those Morning Mountains. The flowers of the Spirit grow there.

Everychild

And we shall gather them?

Father

Yes, Everychild. Come now, and bring all the others with you. We will take that path yonder to the hills.

Mother

No, wait! They are not all here. There are some missing. They must all come.

Father

It will be so long to wait. Let us go with these.

Mother (laying her hand on EVERYCHILD'S head)

Have we not named her Everychild?

Father

Yes. She must go down and find all who have lost their way. Perhaps some have awakened in the wrong place and are wandering about in the dark jungle of the world. We will wait here till they come.

Mother

Go, Everychild. Find them and bring them all back with you. Take this lamp. (*Hands her a rose-colored lamp, etc.*)

Father

Our lamp?

Mother

Our love!

Father

Take it, Everychild. With this lamp you can find the lost children and bring them all back with you.

Mother

We will wait for them no matter how long.

(EVERYCHILD starts down along a path leading off the stage to the right--the music and singing continue through the whole scene. CHO-CHO appears, right, for a moment and points her path to her saying: "This way, Everychild.")

(CURTAIN FALLS)

CURTAIN rises revealing

SCENE II: A squalid room in a city tenement, a miserable stove, a bedraggled bed. Right, a table at which a poorly dressed man and woman are working fast and feverishly. Three children of about four, eight, and ten years sit on a bench, left, sewing as fast as they can, looking tired, depressed, weary. It is evening, the room poorly lit. Noises from the street, street calls, rumbling of vehicles, honk of autos, etc., etc.

The Younger Child

Ma, can I go to bed? I am so tired and hungry.

Mother

It ain't ten yet. It will be only a few minutes more. The boss is coming early in the morning and we must have the work ready. Now you be still and keep working. You don't know what a good home you got. Ain't she got a good home, John?

Father

You bet she got a good home, and if you all work now we get the good coffee and bread in the morning and perhaps in a couple a weeks we all go to the movies.

Oldest Child

Gee, I like to see that fairy play what we see once.

(Bell strikes ten.)

Mother

Now, go right to bed, children. It is ten o'clock.

(Takes light and goes with husband into room right. Children undress and scramble into one bed.)

(Street noises all discontinue, back of room opens out on to the orchard and the music of first scene is heard with dancing children. EVERYCHILD comes into the room with her rosy lamp. The three children sit up in bed and rub their eyes. EVERYCHILD glides all about the room and looks at the squalid place in dismay, then goes up and smiles at the children.)

Everychild

You are some of the lost children. How did you get in here? Come with me. I will give you some better clothes and you can dance and sing with all of them.

(They get out of bed and she leads them in wonder and joy out into the orchard.)

(CURTAIN FALLS)

SCENE III: *Plain interior of a farmer's kitchen with farmer's wife busy over stove, and kitchen table set for lunch for two. Adjacent room, left, small bedroom in which lies a pallid thin child in bed with dishes and bottles on little bedside table. Very little light. Curtains to a single window down. Farmer in overalls comes in, looking hot and tired. He throws hat on chair, says "Hullo, Mary, dinner ready?" and proceeds to wash hands and face in a basin on a stool. Then sits down at the table.*

Mary (bringing food from stove and sitting down opposite)

Here we are, Jim. Guess you're ready for something. It takes a man to sprout a patch o' locusts, and you had breakfast by lamplight.

Jim

Some o' them roots seemed as long as from here to the barn.

Mary

But you'll have the best pasture in the county next year.

Jim

What's the good? We rationed our beef steers the way that government chap taught us, and our pigs, and our sheep, and who got the profit?

Mary

A lot more documents came from the government to-day--all about *pigs*. And we haven't got a decent house to live in! If we could only build on that pretty bit of high ground I've had picked out for three years, Rosie would quit havin' these sick spells.

Jim

How is she, mother?

Mary

I b'lieve she's a little better. Jim, have you got any money left from sellin' the car?

Jim

You know we had to pay the interest at the bank first of all, and the rest went for fertilizer.

Mary

I miss the car more on Rosie's account than mine. She's been cryin' for a ride this morning. I didn't know what to say. And I had to promise her she could go to the picnic if she got well. That'll mean a pretty dress, and hat and shoes.

Jim

I don't know where you'll get 'em then.

Mary

Looks like we ought to be able to give our children a little pleasure. There's poor Billie and Tom don't more'n get home from school an' lay their books down till they have to go to hoein' and pullin' weeds. I don't blame Billie a bit for runnin' away and goin' fishin' last Saturday.

Jim

I don't either, though I had to whip him for it. I can't do without his work and get through.

Mary

Get through? When did we ever get through anyhow? Look at this, Jim. (*Picks up paper and points to paragraph.*) Beef steers sold to-day in Chicago at nine cents a pound. It cost us fourteen cents to raise ours, and we're countin' on makin' things easier by raisin' more next year. And see here, it says *beef* went *up* in the Eastern market four cents.

Jim

Steers down, beef up! Robbin' both ways.

(*Enter BILLIE and TOM with schoolbooks, which they throw down, shouting: "We got a half-holiday!"*)

Billie

The big boys are goin' to play ball. Dad, can't we go watch 'em? (*MARY and JIM look at each other.*)

We ain't seen a ball game this year, and we want to learn to play. They're makin' a little boys' team at school.

Mary

Daddy's workin' awfully hard to-day. He needs you bad to pile brush for him.

Jim

You can't go to-day, boys. Next time----

Billie (hopeless)

Oh, next time! It's always next time.

Mary

Wash up now, and you can have a hot dinner.

(*They wash listlessly.*)

Jim

Mary, I think you'd better telephone for the doctor to come and have a look at Rosie.

Mary (hesitating)

I did--this morning. He said he didn't have time to come out to-day.

Jim

Dr. Lowden?

Mary

Guess he's tired o' comin' for nothing. You can't blame him.

(JIM hangs his head. A knock at the door. JIM rises and opens it. CHO-CHO enters giggling and grimacing while the farmer and his wife are speechless with amazement.)

Cho-Cho

You sent for a doctor?

Jim

Yes--but--you--ain't--no doctor.

Cho-Cho

No, I--ain't--no--doctor (*mimicking*), but my daughter is a doctor and here she is now.

(Enter EVERYCHILD disguised as a doctor, with a long black cape hiding her white dress, a pair of goggles over her eyes, a long white beard, a white wig, a man's hat on, a little black bag in her hands.)

Jim (tearing his hair distractedly)

You say that little old man is your daughter and a doctor?

Cho-Cho

That's right--but a new kind of doctor. This is a Health doctor, not a Disease doctor. Present treatment for Health--absent treatment for absence of Health. (*Ha--ha--hee--hee!*) I'll leave the doctor here. (*Goes out.*)

Everychild

Well, well, where is the patient? (*Putting hat on chair.*)

Jim

I must be crazy, but I never seen a doctor like you. You ain't no doctor.

Everychild

Oh, yes I am. I'm a children's specialist. Is she in that room? (*Goes to door and opens it--draws back a little.*) Whew! No air. Lift up that curtain and open the window! (*JIM does it, rather aghast.*) You must show me where you keep your pigs. Don't they get light and air on a day like this? (*Goes toward bed as ROSIE rises up in bed and stares with a smile at the little doctor.*) So this is the little patient. Well! Well! (*Lifts up and looks at the bottles.*) Take these and throw them out. (*Hands them to MARY, who takes them out and returns.*) My! My! Pork and potatoes and candy! Of all things! I'll have to make out a diet list later. (*Feels pulse--listens to her chest.*) I think the trouble with you is bad food, bad air, and no light. The trouble is not enough agricultural pamphlets on human live stock, not enough government millions spent on the real thing. Now get up, Rose! Let me see you stand. There, that's good. Now a comb and brush--we'll help this hair a little.

Mary (handing EVERYCHILD a comb and brush)

My hands are so full of work----

Everychild (arranging ROSIE'S hair)

Yes, that's better. Now, father, a glass of milk! (JIM goes into kitchen.) And mother, open that bag, please.

(While MARY opens bag. JIM returns with glass of milk, which ROSIE drinks.)

Mary

Oh, my!

(Takes out pretty dress, stockings and slippers, which she lifts up, looks at delightedly, and carries to the doctor.)

Rosie

Oh, mother! You did get them!

(EVERYCHILD works fast, slips the gown on the patient with the stockings and slippers, while ROSIE smiles happily, though dazed by the splendor of it.)

Rosie

Are you going to take me to the picnic?

Everychild

Indeed I am! A picnic that will never be over!

Rosie

Are we going to ride? Have we got our car back?

Everychild

Better than that.

Rosie

What is it?

Everychild

You'll see. Maybe you'll dance out of the window.

Mary

Are you going to take her away?

Everychild

Yes, I shall keep her with me until she is well. Then she will return to you.

(Takes out of the bag the rosy lamp and waves it. Throws aside her cap and pulls off goggles, wig, and beard. The back wall moves away, revealing the first scene with the same strains of music and the dancing children in the orchard. EVERYCHILD leads ROSIE out to join them. BILLIE and TOM move after them calling: "Let us go with you! Take us with you!")

Rosie

Oh, please take Billie and Tom!

Everychild

Yes, I want them, too. Come along, boys!

(They shout and run after ROSIE and EVERYCHILD.)

Mary

Oh, Jim, is this a dream? Or am I awake at last?

Jim (putting his hand to his head, dazedly)

Perhaps this is what it ought to be for all the children of the world.

(CURTAIN FALLS)

SCENE IV: *Interior of a coal-mine, lit only by lamps on the heads of three men and two boys, about twelve and fourteen years, the men busy at work getting the coal down with picks, the boys shovelling coal into a car. They work a few minutes. Distant muffled sound of a steam-whistle. They immediately drop tools and go to corner and pick up each a can, paper bag, or small basket, and sit down to eat.*

One Man

Lunch-time. It feels good to rest half an hour in this bloomin' hole. (*Takes a drink from a bottle he brings from his pocket and hands to another.*) Have a swig, Jack?

Jack

Don't care if I do. (*Takes a swallow.*) I'll bring some next time, Joe.

Joe (passing bottle to the other)

Here, Bert, it helps. Take some and give a swallow to the boys.

Bert

I'll take some and thank you, but I guess the boys are better off without it.

Jack

How long you worked here, Bert?

Bert

Nigh on fifteen years, and a devil's job it is. I wanted to be a sailor, but I got into this, and it paid pretty good, and then I got tangled up with a family and just stayed on the job. But it's no place to spend a life. (*Coughs.*)

Joe

I been here 'bout as long as you, Bert. I ran away from the big woods where my father was a lumberman. Thought I'd see the world, and just got stuck here and never could make up my mind to get away. See the world, eh! All I ever seed was de inside of it. If I had my way to do over again, I think I'd take to the tall timber up dere on top.

(Meantime the two boys, while eating with one hand out of their cans, have been whispering and playing knuckle-bones with pieces of coal, a little way from and behind the men. Suddenly they stop, look around at each other and listen, for they hear the fairy dance music of the first scene, which is not heard by these older men, who go on talking.)

First Boy

Dey's havin' parade up dere.

Second Boy

Dat ain't band music, you mutt.

(FIRST BOY begins to sway as if in time with the music.)

Second Boy

Wot's the matter?

First Boy (sheepish)

Nuthin'. *(Tries to keep still. They both listen.)* Did yer ever dance, Buck?

Second Boy

Naw. *(Listens.)* But I bet I could!

First Boy

I had a dream onct. I dremp I's in an orchard, an' they's blooms floatin' round. I could smell 'em!

Second Boy

You's nutty. You can't smell in a dream.

(They listen, and finally yield to the music, swaying their bodies, moving their arms, and beginning to dance as the music goes on.)

Jack

I've been here fourteen years, since I was a boy. It ain't a place for a man. It's too black. You get black outside and inside. Why, they say your lungs get black from breathing this dust. And your soul gets black. The place for an honest man to work is out in the white light, on your ocean or in your woods, or on the roads and railways, and in the big buildings. This kind of work is work with punishment added to it. A little of it would be all right for men who go wrong, or for some as needs discipline. Then some day they'll get machines to do the rest. Ah--there's the whistle. Come on, boys, to work again!

(A whistle sounds and all start to work as before.)

(CURTAIN FALLS)

FINAL SCENE: *Curtain rises on final scene. Same as first, with music as before, and with the mother and father and children among the apple-trees. CHO-CHO appears, right, and says: "Here they come!" EVERYCHILD enters, right, bringing with her a number of children, who follow her and then scatter under the trees.*

Everychild

Oh, mother, I went everywhere, and we've brought all who could come! But there were some in holes in the ground that I couldn't reach, though we danced and danced, and called and called. They were too far down. And there were some ill and crippled, in hospitals, that couldn't walk, and some hidden away in great buildings called factories--and some in tenements, where there was no sun, and no

green grass to walk on. Mother, what shall we do? It was so hard to leave them. Won't you go back with me, and help me?

Mother

Yes, Everychild. We must all go. Not one must be left down there.

Father

Yes, we cannot go on up the Morning Mountains until they come.

Mother

We will start at once, all of us, down through the highways and valleys and cities of the world, and bring them here. Come, children, let us go.

(They gather about her and start down, right, singing as they go. CHO-CHO lingers behind for a few moments and pronounces an epilogue.)

EPILOGUE

Not all here yet-- But they must come To this sunshine-- To these mountains-- To these birds and trees-- To the music-- To the Land of Health, The Land of Happiness-- They may be gay *there*-- Sometimes-- Sometimes-- But that is a fool's Paradise-- My old Kingdom-- And I must lead them up To this new land Of hope and joy.

(CURTAIN FALLS)

