

ASCENSION DAY
by Timothy Mason
Faith (18) - Charity (16)

The Play: Life often takes a turn when we are young that affects us forever. This theme is explored with an edge in Timothy Mason's short play set in a Lutheran Bible camp in Wisconsin, late in May, 1947. The story centers around nine teenagers spending a week at camp, strengthening their faith through testimonials, enriching the quality of their lives by study (everything from "nature tips" to lifesaving), and having time to spend with each other, sharing life experiences. If all of this seems expected church camp business, what is underneath this engrossing drama certainly isn't. In this seemingly tranquil environment, on the shores of a beautiful lake, loon song abounding, a series of moments compose a score that will not only change many lives, but will allow us the opportunity to reflect on the path our lives have taken. Written with economy, the issues are significant, the characters crystalline. The week is seen through the eyes of the young people. In fact, the adults at camp never appear—but are always a threatening presence. Specifically we follow the story of two sisters, Faith and Charity. Faith, the older of the two, is returning to camp—this year as a junior counselor. Last year at camp, her life began to change. Having been brought up in a strict home, overseen by a demanding, single-minded father, Faith found her experiences at camp exciting but disturbing. She met a boy, a boy who has returned this year. Faith struggles to handle the feelings in her heart, while at the same time, striving for perfection in the eyes of her parents, her sister, and herself. Her rigid instincts for right and wrong (influenced by her father) have driven away the boys and, during the course of the play, will sever the close bond that for years has held her and Charity together. Charity wants the freedom to explore a new-found excitement away from the watchful eye of her parents and resists Faith's firm governance. Perhaps seeing her own choices in Charity's actions, Faith drifts further away until the desperation demands action. A rekindled spark with Wesley, last year's boyfriend, ends in disaster. Those around her seem shallow, mindlessly content for the same kind of life that their parents live. Faith somehow demands more from life.

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As the loons cry on the lake, Faith shatters inside, unable to maintain her fragile facade. Her final fateful move brings the play to its startling climax, and forever changes the course of her life.

The Scene: This is the first evening of camp. There has been a general assembly earlier in the evening where Pastor Tollefson called on the young people to give testimonials. Faith and Charity are assigned to the same cabin—with Faith the counselor in charge. For Charity this entire camp experience is new. For Faith, returning to camp brings a mixture of feelings.

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(Charity and Faith are sitting on Faith's bed. Faith is brushing Charity's hair.)

CHARITY: I don't think I could ever do that, how am I ever going to do that?

FAITH: Charity, nobody gets out of here without giving a testimony.

CHARITY: Imagine talking in front of everybody about your complexion problems.

FAITH: Judging from his skin, we're still waiting for the miracle.

CHARITY: Oh, did you think? I thought he was adorable.

FAITH: With you, Charity, this is a broad category.

CHARITY: Strange, but cute as a bug. What was his name? Randy?

FAITH: Oh! Listen. Those loons again...

(They listen to the wailing of loons across the lake.)

CHARITY: I'm glad you're our junior counselor.

FAITH: So am I.

CHARITY: It's just... Well, I'm sorry, Faith, but just please try to remember that in some ways it's not easy, having the person in charge of your whole cabin be your sister.

FAITH: You're afraid I'll embarrass you.

CHARITY: Well you know what I mean.

FAITH: Oh, I do. I'll cut back on the chewing tobacco and I'll only spit on the floor after the lights are out.

CHARITY: You get it from Mother, you're so sarcastic, both of you.

(Beat.) If you could just, you know, be a little more... I don't know... Easy-going.

FAITH: What does that mean?

CHARITY: Like, if a boy smiles at you, you don't have to turn to stone or anything.

FAITH: What on earth...?

CHARITY: You just don't act like the other girls and that makes them, I don't know...

FAITH: *(Overlapping.)* I certainly hope I'm not like the other girls...

CHARITY: ...uncomfortable.

FAITH: ...for one thing, I'm older than the other girls...

CHARITY: Only a year and a half...

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FAITH: ...I'm not a giggling sixteen-year-old.

CHARITY: There, that's just the sort of thing I mean. We're not supposed to giggle or laugh, we're not supposed to goof around or have a good time or...

FAITH: Charity, of course I want you to have a good time, I don't know what you're talking about. *(Beat.)* I want you to have a good time. This is a very special place, this camp meant so much to me last year, I want it to be the same for you, I really do. *(Beat.)* Listen, it's simple. I'll just ask Pastor Tollefson to assign me to another cabin, it doesn't matter to me.

CHARITY: No, Faith, I'm sorry...

FAITH: Really it doesn't.

CHARITY: No, really.

FAITH: June can take the Naomi cabin, I'll take the Ruth cabin, it's no trouble at all.

CHARITY: No, please...

FAITH: I think I'd be better with the younger girls anyway.

CHARITY: I wish I hadn't said a thing, I really do.

FAITH: I'm not just saying this...

CHARITY: Faith, no! Please. I think I'm just nervous, is all, it's the first day, I just want...you know, people to like me. *(Beat.)* You met somebody here last year, didn't you, that's why it was so special.

FAITH: I met lots of people.

CHARITY: A boy, I mean.

FAITH: And I accepted our Lord as my personal Savior.

CHARITY: Is he here again this year? Wesley? *(Faith stops brushing Charity's hair.)* You wrote his name on the inside back cover of one of your notebooks. About a dozen times. *(The cries of the loons rise again, demented, maniacal.)*

FAITH: There they go again.

CHARITY: They're going crazy out there.

FAITH: It's so mournful, it's so lonely and despairing.

(They listen.)

CHARITY: *(Finally.)* Can you imagine being that horny?

FAITH: Honest to goodness, Charity, why do you insist on reducing

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everything to...

CHARITY: To what?

FAITH: To the lowest common denominator, that's what.

CHARITY: You can't even say it, you can't even say the word.

FAITH: Anyway, you don't know a thing about loons.

CHARITY: And nothing's beautiful to you unless it's *mournful and awful and sad and...touching.*

FAITH: They have half a dozen different cries and each one has a different purpose.

CHARITY: I'm just so frightened you'll turn into a spinster.

FAITH: There's one for alarm, there's a feeding call, and yes, of course, there's mating, obviously.

CHARITY: My sister, the spinster Sunday School teacher.

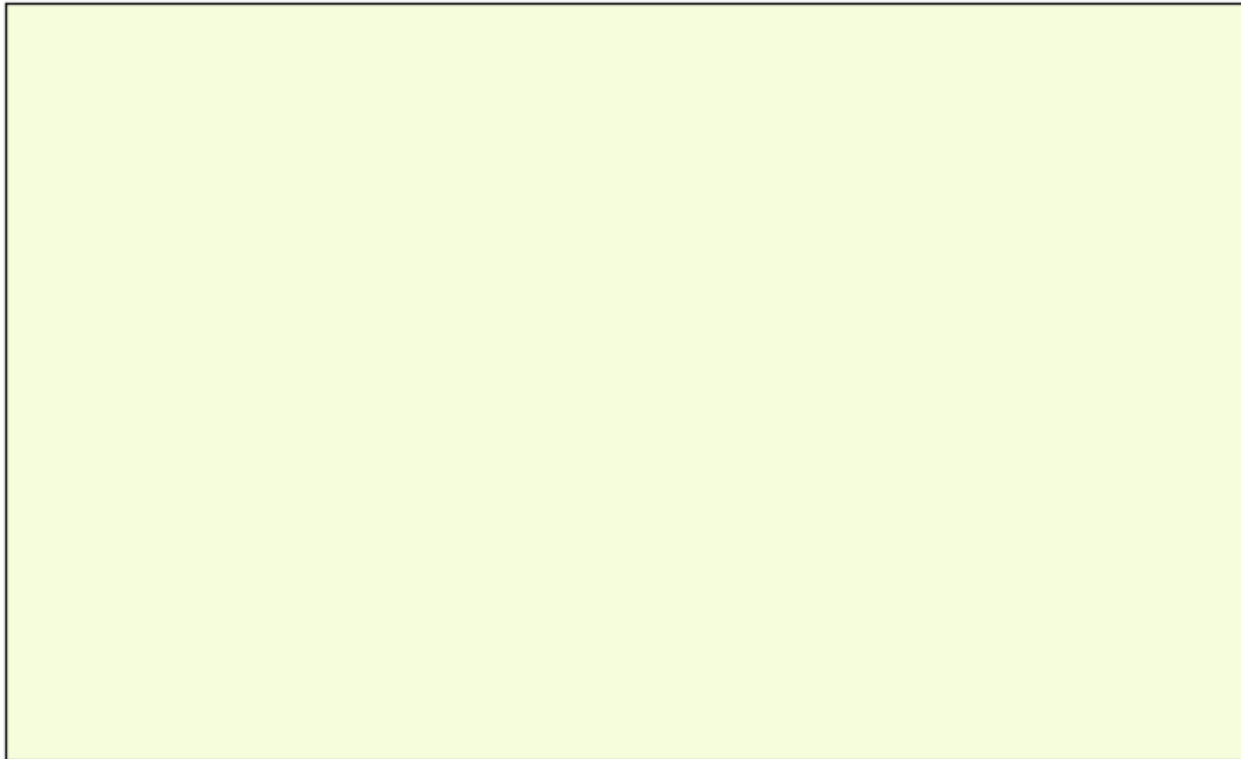
FAITH: There's one particular cry for when they're lost, for when they've become separated and can't find each other. It's a terrible cry, I've heard it, it's so terribly desperate.

CHARITY: Just please...I need you. I'd be twice as scared if you weren't here.

Set / Furniture Plan

Draw, below, the "set" you plan to use for your scene.

SR



SL

Downstage