

MARY & MARTHA

a play

BY

VERALYN R. WARKENTIN

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

(c) Veralyn R. Warkentin 1994



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

THE AUTHOR HAS GRANTED AN
IRREVOCABLE NON-EXCLUSIVE
LICENCE ALLOWING THE NATIONAL
LIBRARY OF CANADA TO
REPRODUCE, LOAN, DISTRIBUTE OR
SELL COPIES OF HIS/HER THESIS BY
ANY MEANS AND IN ANY FORM OR
FORMAT, MAKING THIS THESIS
AVAILABLE TO INTERESTED
PERSONS.

L'AUTEUR A ACCORDE UNE LICENCE
IRREVOCABLE ET NON EXCLUSIVE
PERMETTANT A LA BIBLIOTHEQUE
NATIONALE DU CANADA DE
REPRODUIRE, PRETER, DISTRIBUER
OU VENDRE DES COPIES DE SA
THESE DE QUELQUE MANIERE ET
SOUS QUELQUE FORME QUE CE SOIT
POUR METTRE DES EXEMPLAIRES DE
CETTE THESE A LA DISPOSITION DES
PERSONNE INTERESSEES.

THE AUTHOR RETAINS OWNERSHIP
OF THE COPYRIGHT IN HIS/HER
THESIS. NEITHER THE THESIS NOR
SUBSTANTIAL EXTRACTS FROM IT
MAY BE PRINTED OR OTHERWISE
REPRODUCED WITHOUT HIS/HER
PERMISSION.

L'AUTEUR CONSERVE LA PROPRIETE
DU DROIT D'AUTEUR QUI PROTEGE
SA THESE. NI LA THESE NI DES
EXTRAITS SUBSTANTIELS DE CELLE-
CI NE DOIVENT ETRE IMPRIMES OU
AUTREMENT REPRODUITS SANS SON
AUTORISATION.

ISBN 0-315-99074-0

Name Veralyn R. Warkentin

Dissertation Abstracts International is arranged by broad, general subject categories. Please select the one subject which most nearly describes the content of your dissertation. Enter the corresponding four-digit code in the spaces provided.

Canadian (English) Literature
Communications SUBJECT TERM & the Arts - Theater

0332

U-M-I

SUBJECT CODE

0465

Subject Categories

THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

Architecture 0729
Art History 0377
Cinema 0900
Dance 0378
Fine Arts 0357
Information Science 0723
Journalism 0391
Library Science 0399
Mass Communications 0708
Music 0413
Speech Communication 0459
Theater 0465

EDUCATION

General 0515
Administration 0514
Adult and Continuing 0516
Agricultural 0517
Art 0273
Bilingual and Multicultural 0282
Business 0688
Community College 0275
Curriculum and Instruction 0727
Early Childhood 0518
Elementary 0524
Finance 0277
Guidance and Counseling 0519
Health 0680
Higher 0745
History of 0520
Home Economics 0278
Industrial 0521
Language and Literature 0279
Mathematics 0280
Music 0522
Philosophy of 0998
Physical 0523

Psychology 0525
Reading 0535
Religious 0527
Sciences 0714
Secondary 0533
Social Sciences 0534
Sociology of 0340
Special 0529
Teacher Training 0530
Technology 0710
Tests and Measurements 0288
Vocational 0747

LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS

Language
General 0679
Ancient 0289
Linguistics 0290
Modern 0291
Literature
General 0401
Classical 0294
Comparative 0295
Medieval 0297
Modern 0298
African 0316
American 0591
Asian 0305
Canadian (English) 0352
Canadian (French) 0355
English 0593
Germanic 0311
Latin American 0312
Middle Eastern 0315
Romance 0313
Slavic and East European 0314

PHILOSOPHY, RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

Philosophy 0422
Religion
General 0318
Biblical Studies 0321
Clergy 0319
History of 0320
Philosophy of 0322
Theology 0469

SOCIAL SCIENCES

American Studies 0323
Anthropology
Archaeology 0324
Cultural 0326
Physical 0327
Business Administration
General 0310
Accounting 0272
Banking 0770
Management 0454
Marketing 0338
Canadian Studies 0385
Economics
General 0501
Agricultural 0503
Commerce-Business 0505
Finance 0508
History 0509
Labor 0510
Theory 0511
Folklore 0358
Geography 0366
Gerontology 0351
History
General 0578

Ancient 0579
Medieval 0581
Modern 0582
Black 0328
African 0331
Asia, Australia and Oceania 0332
Canadian 0334
European 0335
Latin American 0336
Middle Eastern 0333
United States 0337
History of Science 0585
Law 0398
Political Science
General 0615
International Law and
Relations 0616
Public Administration 0617
Recreation 0814
Social Work 0452
Sociology
General 0626
Criminology and Penology 0627
Demography 0938
Ethnic and Racial Studies 0631
Individual and Family
Studies 0628
Industrial and Labor
Relations 0629
Public and Social Welfare 0630
Social Structure and
Development 0700
Theory and Methods 0344
Transportation 0709
Urban and Regional Planning 0999
Women's Studies 0453

THE SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING

BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

Agriculture
General 0473
Agronomy 0285
Animal Culture and
Nutrition 0475
Animal Pathology 0476
Food Science and
Technology 0359
Forestry and Wildlife 0478
Plant Culture 0479
Plant Pathology 0480
Plant Physiology 0817
Range Management 0777
Wood Technology 0746
Biology
General 0306
Anatomy 0287
Biostatistics 0308
Botany 0309
Cell 0379
Ecology 0329
Entomology 0353
Genetics 0369
Limnology 0793
Microbiology 0410
Molecular 0307
Neuroscience 0317
Oceanography 0416
Physiology 0433
Radiation 0821
Veterinary Science 0778
Zoology 0472
Biophysics
General 0786
Medical 0760

EARTH SCIENCES

Biogeochemistry 0425
Geochemistry 0996

Geodesy 0370
Geology 0372
Geophysics 0373
Hydrology 0388
Mineralogy 0411
Paleobotany 0345
Paleoecology 0426
Paleontology 0418
Paleozoology 0985
Palynology 0427
Physical Geography 0368
Physical Oceanography 0415

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Environmental Sciences 0768
Health Sciences
General 0566
Audiology 0300
Chemotherapy 0992
Dentistry 0567
Education 0350
Hospital Management 0769
Human Development 0758
Immunology 0982
Medicine and Surgery 0564
Mental Health 0347
Nursing 0569
Nutrition 0570
Obstetrics and Gynecology 0380
Occupational Health and
Therapy 0354
Ophthalmology 0381
Pathology 0571
Pharmacology 0419
Pharmacy 0572
Physical Therapy 0382
Public Health 0573
Radiology 0574
Recreation 0575

Speech Pathology 0460
Toxicology 0383
Home Economics 0386

PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Pure Sciences

Chemistry
General 0485
Agricultural 0749
Analytical 0486
Biochemistry 0487
Inorganic 0488
Nuclear 0738
Organic 0490
Pharmaceutical 0491
Physical 0494
Polymer 0495
Radiation 0754
Mathematics 0405
Physics
General 0605
Acoustics 0986
Astronomy and
Astrophysics 0606
Atmospheric Science 0608
Atomic 0748
Electronics and Electricity 0607
Elementary Particles and
High Energy 0798
Fluid and Plasma 0759
Molecular 0609
Nuclear 0610
Optics 0752
Radiation 0756
Solid State 0611
Statistics 0463

Applied Sciences

Applied Mechanics 0346
Computer Science 0984

Engineering

General 0537
Aerospace 0538
Agricultural 0539
Automotive 0540
Biomedical 0541
Chemical 0542
Civil 0543
Electronics and Electrical 0544
Heat and Thermodynamics 0348
Hydraulic 0545
Industrial 0546
Marine 0547
Materials Science 0794
Mechanical 0548
Metallurgy 0743
Mining 0551
Nuclear 0552
Packaging 0549
Petroleum 0765
Sanitary and Municipal 0554
System Science 0790
Geotechnology 0428
Operations Research 0796
Plastics Technology 0795
Textile Technology 0994

PSYCHOLOGY

General 0621
Behavioral 0384
Clinical 0622
Developmental 0620
Experimental 0623
Industrial 0624
Personality 0625
Physiological 0989
Psychobiology 0349
Psychometrics 0632
Social 0451



Nom _____

Dissertation Abstracts International est organisé en catégories de sujets. Veuillez s.v.p. choisir le sujet qui décrit le mieux votre thèse et inscrivez le code numérique approprié dans l'espace réservé ci-dessous.



U·M·I

SUJET

CODE DE SUJET

Catégories par sujets

HUMANITÉS ET SCIENCES SOCIALES

COMMUNICATIONS ET LES ARTS

Architecture	0729
Beaux-arts	0357
Bibliothéconomie	0399
Cinéma	0900
Communication verbale	0459
Communications	0708
Danse	0378
Histoire de l'art	0377
Journalisme	0391
Musique	0413
Sciences de l'information	0723
Théâtre	0465

ÉDUCATION

Généralités	515
Administration	0514
Art	0273
Collèges communautaires	0275
Commerce	0688
Économie domestique	0278
Éducation permanente	0516
Éducation préscolaire	0518
Éducation sanitaire	0680
Enseignement agricole	0517
Enseignement bilingue et multiculturel	0282
Enseignement industriel	0521
Enseignement primaire	0524
Enseignement professionnel	0747
Enseignement religieux	0527
Enseignement secondaire	0533
Enseignement spécial	0529
Enseignement supérieur	0745
Évaluation	0288
Finances	0277
Formation des enseignants	0530
Histoire de l'éducation	0520
Langues et littérature	0279

Lecture	0535
Mathématiques	0280
Musique	0522
Orientation et consultation	0519
Philosophie de l'éducation	0998
Physique	0523
Programmes d'études et enseignement	0727
Psychologie	0525
Sciences	0714
Sciences sociales	0534
Sociologie de l'éducation	0340
Technologie	0710

LANGUE, LITTÉRATURE ET LINGUISTIQUE

Langues	
Généralités	0679
Anciennes	0289
Linguistique	0290
Modernes	0291
Littérature	
Généralités	0401
Anciennes	0294
Comparée	0295
Médiévale	0297
Moderne	0298
Africaine	0316
Américaine	0591
Anglaise	0593
Asiatique	0305
Canadienne (Anglaise)	0352
Canadienne (Française)	0355
Germanique	0311
Latino-américaine	0312
Moyen-orientale	0315
Romane	0313
Slave et est-européenne	0314

PHILOSOPHIE, RELIGION ET THÉOLOGIE

Philosophie	0422
Religion	
Généralités	0318
Clergé	0319
Études bibliques	0321
Histoire des religions	0320
Philosophie de la religion	0322
Théologie	0469

SCIENCES SOCIALES

Anthropologie	
Archéologie	0324
Culturelle	0326
Physique	0327
Droit	0398
Économie	
Généralités	0501
Commerce-Affaires	0505
Économie agricole	0503
Économie du travail	0510
Finances	0508
Histoire	0509
Théorie	0511
Études américaines	0323
Études canadiennes	0385
Études féministes	0453
Folklore	0358
Géographie	0366
Gérontologie	0351
Gestion des affaires	
Généralités	0310
Administration	0454
Banques	0770
Comptabilité	0272
Marketing	0338
Histoire	
Histoire générale	0578

Ancienne	0579
Médiévale	0581
Moderne	0582
Histoire des noirs	0328
Africaine	0331
Canadienne	0334
États-Unis	0337
Européenne	0335
Moyen-orientale	0333
Latino-américaine	0336
Asie, Australie et Océanie	0332
Histoire des sciences	0585
Loisirs	0814
Planification urbaine et régionale	0999
Science politique	
Généralités	0615
Administration publique	0617
Droit et relations internationales	0616
Sociologie	
Généralités	0626
Aide et bien-être social	0630
Criminologie et établissements pénitentiaires	0627
Démographie	0938
Études de l'individu et de la famille	0628
Études des relations interethniques et des relations raciales	0631
Structure et développement social	0700
Théorie et méthodes	0344
Travail et relations industrielles	0629
Transports	0709
Travail social	0452

SCIENCES ET INGÉNIERIE

SCIENCES BIOLOGIQUES

Agriculture	
Généralités	0473
Agronomie	0285
Alimentation et technologie alimentaire	0359
Culture	0479
Élevage et alimentation	0475
Exploitation des pâturages	0777
Pathologie animale	0476
Pathologie végétale	0480
Physiologie végétale	0817
Sylviculture et taune	0478
Technologie du bois	0746
Biologie	
Généralités	0306
Anatomie	0287
Biologie (Statistiques)	0308
Biologie moléculaire	0307
Botanique	0309
Cellule	0379
Écologie	0329
Entomologie	0353
Génétique	0369
Limnologie	0793
Microbiologie	0410
Neurologie	0317
Océanographie	0416
Physiologie	0433
Radiation	0821
Science vétérinaire	0778
Zoologie	0472
Biophysique	
Généralités	0786
Médicale	0760

SCIENCES DE LA TERRE

Biogéochimie	0425
Géochimie	0996
Géodésie	0370
Géographie physique	0368

Géologie	0372
Géophysique	0373
Hydrologie	0388
Minéralogie	0411
Océanographie physique	0415
Paléobotanique	0345
Paléocéologie	0426
Paléontologie	0418
Paléozoologie	0985
Palynologie	0427

SCIENCES DE LA SANTÉ ET DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT

Économie domestique	0386
Sciences de l'environnement	0768
Sciences de la santé	
Généralités	0566
Administration des hôpitaux	0769
Alimentation et nutrition	0570
Audiologie	0300
Chimiothérapie	0992
Dentisterie	0567
Développement humain	0758
Enseignement	0350
Immunologie	0982
Loisirs	0575
Médecine du travail et thérapie	0354
Médecine et chirurgie	0564
Obstétrique et gynécologie	0380
Ophtalmologie	0381
Orthophonie	0460
Pathologie	0571
Pharmacie	0572
Pharmacologie	0419
Physiothérapie	0382
Radiologie	0574
Santé mentale	0347
Santé publique	0573
Soins infirmiers	0569
Toxicologie	0383

SCIENCES PHYSIQUES

Sciences Pures

Chimie	
Généralités	0485
Biochimie	0487
Chimie agricole	0749
Chimie analytique	0486
Chimie minérale	0488
Chimie nucléaire	0738
Chimie organique	0490
Chimie pharmaceutique	0491
Physique	0494
Polymères	0495
Radiation	0754
Mathématiques	0405
Physique	
Généralités	0605
Acoustique	0986
Astronomie et astrophysique	0606
Électronique et électricité	0607
Fluides et plasma	0759
Météorologie	0608
Optique	0752
Particules (Physique nucléaire)	0798
Physique atomique	0748
Physique de l'état solide	0611
Physique moléculaire	0609
Physique nucléaire	0610
Radiation	0756
Statistiques	0463

Sciences Appliquées Et Technologie

Informatique	0984
Ingénierie	
Généralités	0537
Agricole	0539
Automobile	0540

Biomédicale	0541
Chaleur et thermodynamique	0348
Conditionnement (Emballage)	0549
Génie aérospatial	0538
Génie chimique	0542
Génie civil	0543
Génie électronique et électrique	0544
Génie industriel	0546
Génie mécanique	0548
Génie nucléaire	0552
Ingénierie des systèmes	0790
Mécanique navale	0547
Métallurgie	0743
Science des matériaux	0794
Technique du pétrole	0765
Technique minière	0551
Techniques sanitaires et municipales	0554
Technologie hydraulique	0545
Mécanique appliquée	0346
Géotechnologie	0428
Matériaux plastiques (Technologie)	0795
Recherche opérationnelle	0796
Textiles et tissus (Technologie)	0794

PSYCHOLOGIE

Généralités	0621
Personnalité	0625
Psychobiologie	0349
Psychologie clinique	0622
Psychologie du comportement	0384
Psychologie du développement	0620
Psychologie expérimentale	0623
Psychologie industrielle	0624
Psychologie physiologique	0989
Psychologie sociale	0451
Psychométrie	0632



MARY & MARTHA

A PLAY

BY

VERALYN R. WARKENTIN

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

© 1994

Permission has been granted to the LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA to lend or sell copies of this thesis, to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS to publish an abstract of this thesis.

The author reserves other publications rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

ABSTRACT

"Mary & Martha," a creative writing Master's thesis, takes the form of a play. Loosely based on historical fact, it is set in a Mennonite *Maedchenheim*, or girls' home, like those established in Winnipeg during the 1920s by the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Mennonite Churches. The play is a fictional account of the closing of the "Mary-Martha Home" in 1959. It deals with the relationship between two sisters, Martha and Emma, who have run the Home since its inception. The play presents the interaction of these sisters with each other, and with three younger women, employed as domestic servants, who also live in the Mary-Martha Home. The church board's decision to close the *Maedchenheim* is a catalyst for confronting issues of personal identity, freedom, fear of change and fear of "the other." The play explores how two generations of Mennonite women are forced to examine their place in a changing world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my parents, thanks for love, support and room & board.

To the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Margaret Groome and Dr. Alvin Esau, heartfelt thanks for your ideas and insight.

And to my advisor, Dr. George Toles, a man of profound insight, integrity and sincerity, special thanks for your invaluable support, encouragement and friendship. Thank you for believing in me.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my

"Opa" Abram P. Albrecht,
a gentle teller of tales
who taught us to remember.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
HISTORICAL BACKDROP	ii
WORKS CITED	x
ABOUT THE PLAY	xii
CHARACTERS	xv
SETTING	xvi
SCENE I	1
SCENE II	18
SCENE III	28
SCENE IV	47
SCENE V	61
SCENE VI	68
SCENE VII	77
SCENE VIII	86
SCENE IX	95
GLOSSARY OF GERMAN TERMS	105
FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	106

Historical Backdrop

Because the [Mennonite's] literal biblicism expressed itself in believers' baptism, a life of discipleship, separation of church and state, non-participation in war or government, the 'Brethren,' as they preferred to call themselves, were savagely martyred by Catholic and Protestant alike. Restrained from open proselytizing, they could do no more than teach their faith to their children; what in 1523 began as a religious movement became in time a swarming of a particular people from various nationalities bound together by a faith: like ancient Israel, they were a religious nation without a country.

(Rudy Henry Weibe, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, ix)

The Mennonite Exodus from Russia

Followers of the teachings of Menno Simons, the Mennonite Anabaptists (referring to those who chose adult baptism), had always known persecution for their faith. Mennonites preferred to exist as 'strangers in a strange land' so as to ensure their exemption from military service and their assimilation into cultures which they feared would preclude the continuation of their faith and German language heritage. Around the year 1800, Mennonites emigrated to Russia at the invitation of Catherine the Great who promised religious freedom, and the freedom to educate their children in accordance with Mennonite traditions. Under self-rule and a diligent work ethic, Mennonite settlements flourished with the population reaching approximately 104,000 by the year 1914. But the security and prosperity of the settlements collapsed when the Bolsheviks seized power in

1917. Over 700 Mennonites were executed by terrorists in South Russia from February 1918 to December 1919 (Mennonite Exodus 28-38). The bloody terrorism and aftermath of famine, drought and disease prompted the mass exodus of some 20,000 Mennonites to Canada (Rempel 2).

With the influx of Mennonite refugees from Russia during the 1920's and 1930's, young Mennonite girls often became the chief means of financial support vital for paying off the "*Reiseschuld*" (travel debt) to the Canadian Pacific Railway. The CPR owned the ships on which the families came from Russia. The *Reiseschuld* was a heavy burden which had to be overcome by each family before economic security could be realized (Rempel 4-5). The severe shortage of domestic servants in Canadian cities was a disguised blessing for many Mennonite families. While labour for men and boys who did not speak English was almost non-existent, young Mennonite girls were ideally suited for domestic labour (Rempel 4). Frequently, the family relied upon the income of daughters, employed as domestics, as the sole means to alleviate the *Reiseschuld* burden.

While dependent on the income, Mennonite parents were wary to send their daughters into Winnipeg to work. City life was traditionally seen as a den for all forms of moral vices - but more so to Mennonites with their deeply ingrained doctrines of non-conformity (Valverde 129-154; Epp 101). Anxiety over the faith and virtue of sheltered, young

Mennonite women left alone in Canadian cities was pronounced.

The Founding of the Mennonite *Maedchenheim* (Girls' Home)

In order to protect these girls (some were as young as thirteen), in 1926 the Mennonite Brethren and General Conference churches independently established two "*Maedchenheime*" (girls' homes) in Winnipeg (Epp 100). These homes were "safe havens" where the girls would stay temporarily, until they were found appropriate domestic placement. The homes were intended to keep the girls safe from the influences of the 'heathenish city' with its many snares: theatres, dance halls, and 'English' men, referring to any man who wasn't Mennonite (Epp 111). These were seen as ubiquitous urban crises which fostered the closely-knit community of the *Maedchenheim*. It was a meeting place and a social, spiritual and psychological support structure where the girls could spend their day off, speak their own language, practice their faith, and share their common experiences. The *Maedchenheim* alleviated the isolation and loneliness of the young women who often suffered emotional scars from the traumatic events in post-Revolutionary Russia.

The name of the Mennonite Brethren *Maedchenheim*, which was located at 437 Mountain Avenue, derives from the New Testament accounts of Mary of Bethany and her sister,

Martha. Martha has become synonymous with pragmatism and service, while Mary is associated with spontaneous, emotional devotion (Luke 10:38-42). Their different approaches to faith are also illustrated in the Gospel of John. While Martha is serving the Passover meal, Mary anoints Christ's feet with costly oil; for this act she is chastised by Judas, but defended by Jesus (John 12:1-8). By referring to both Mary and Martha, the *Maedchenheim* lauds the need for balance: to live a life of both faith and service (Esau Klippenstein 154).

Christened "Eben-Ezer" in 1936, the General Conference Church's home refers to a place (Ebenezer) founded by the Children of Israel meaning: "Until here God has provided" (1 Samuel 7:12). This verse would have particular meaning for the Mennonites, so recently persecuted in the Old Country, who found refuge in Canada. The *Maedchenheim* was also considered a provision, a safe haven from any potential threats in a 'worldly' city. In 1926 a house was rented at 458 McDermot Avenue, then a larger house at 412 Bannatyne until finally in 1943, the General Conference purchased 605 Bannatyne (Rempel 6-7).

The actual operation of the homes varied with the matrons who ran them although certain events were common to both. Time off for Winnipeg domestics was Thursday afternoons and every second Sunday. On their weekday off, Mennonite girls would ritually meet "under the clock" in the

downtown T. Eaton Store and then bring a bag lunch and meet at Mary-Martha or Eben-Ezer. About 100 girls would arrive for day long socializing, fellowship and singing. Sometimes, there would be as many as two to three hundred young women crowded on the stairways, or on the porch. A Bible Study was often held that evening led by a local Mennonite minister, followed by singing around the piano and games. The weekly event was both a social and spiritual outlet which would last until about 11 o'clock at night (Epp 105; Esau Klippenstein 152).

Every year a photograph of the young women, taken in front of the *Maedchenheim*, would be published in a local Mennonite paper such as *Der Bote* or *Mennonitische Rundschau* (Esau Klippenstein 155). It was always of great interest to the younger men in the congregations who scrutinized the photographs carefully. No men, other than the church board and ministers, were allowed at the Mary-Martha Home, which was run by Anna Thiessen who was a strict disciplinarian (Epp 105). Young men were strongly discouraged from coming to the house to court the girls. Even girls engaged to be married could not entertain their fiances without prior permission. At the Eben-Ezer Home, under the more relaxed direction of Helen Epp, young men - under proper supervision - could visit the girls and attend Bible Studies (Epp 106).

Anna Thiessen was motivated by what she decided was in the best interest of her girls. Thiessen was well-known for

lobbying and convincing the city government to implement a half day off per week for live-in domestics. Due to her efforts, Thursday afternoons became known as "maid's day off" in Winnipeg (Epp 108).

Running the *Maedchenheim* with efficiency became an outlet for women like Thiessen and Helen Epp whose leadership skills traditionally were given no place in the church. As historian Marlene Epp notes:

The relationship between the girls' home and the sponsoring church institutions seemed to be respectful but at times uneasy. The male conference leaders may have felt ill-prepared to deal with some of the problems which arose at the homes, but at the same time somewhat ill at ease when seeing a capable woman like Helen Epp or Anna Thiessen develop a profile in the church and take responsibility which was not customary for a woman.

(105)

Matron Helen Epp was known to have resented and challenged the Mennonite conference leaders who wanted to "run the Ebenezer home and tell [her] how the money should be spent" (Marlene Epp 105). Similarly, Anna Thiessen became the first woman prior to 1945 to speak publicly at a Mennonite Brethren church conference. She lectured parents against sending their daughters into the worldly city "before they were prepared to withstand the temptations of city life" (Epp 103).

But the impact of the *Maedchenheime* directly on the lives of the over 2000 women associated with them, is best illustrated in taped interviews conducted in 1987 in

Winnipeg with 34 women (Esau Klippenstein 144-166). In this oral history project, the *Maedchenheim* is described as an "oasis" and "refuge," looked back upon with gratitude (153). One woman noted that she had come to the city "inexperienced, naive, trusting everyone" and reflected: "...Looking back on it all I thank my God often yet for those people who looked out for us" (161).

The Closing of the Girls' Homes

Mennonites have traditionally seen themselves as "set apart" from society which is often considered "worldly" and a threat to Mennonite faith and morality. To the Mennonite Colonies in Russia, religious persecution, famine, and war created even stronger unifying bonds of community. Community is often fostered by crises.

At the outset of his paper on the Eben-Ezer girls' home, Eric Rempel contends: "The necessity of the *Maedchenheim* was dictated by a period of economic crisis. As the Mennonites established themselves, economically, the crisis faded, and with it the era of the *Maedchenheim*" (1). By the 1950s young Mennonite women were much less vulnerable to the dangers of the city. Many were using domestic jobs as stepping stones to clerical, teaching or medical positions (Esau Klippenstein 159). Cross-cultural, Inter-faith marriages were becoming more commonplace and less frowned

upon. To the generation of women who founded the homes, the girls of the 1950s were modern, with much more liberal ideas and lifestyles. One of the reasons suggested for the decline of the Mary-Martha Home was the "gulf" between the young girls and the elderly matron who ran it. It was felt she "had no real understanding for young people" (Epp 112).

The young women of the 1950s had adapted and assimilated. The Mennonites were no longer a community in crisis. The two Winnipeg girls' homes were closed in 1959.

Works Cited

- Epp, Frank H. Mennonite Exodus. Altona: D.W. Friesen, 1962.
- Epp, Marlene "The Mennonite Girls' Homes of Winnipeg: A Home Away from Home." *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. 6 (1988); 100-114.
- Klassen, Katherine Schellenberg. "The Winnipeg Maedchen Heim - Ebenezer." *Mennonite Historian*. Vol. X No. 1 (March 1984); 1-2.
- Klippenstein, Frieda Esau. "'Doing What We Could': Mennonite Domestic Servants in Winnipeg, 1920s to 1950s." *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. 7 (1989); 145-167.
- . Oral History Project, Mennonite Girls' Homes, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada, 1987.
- Mirror of the Martyrs: Manitoba Exhibit*. Concord College, Winnipeg. April 10 - May 15, 1994. Exhibit prepared by The Martyr's Mirror Trust, North Newton, Kansas, and Mennonite Historical Library, Goshen, Indiana.
- Rempel, Eric. "Eben-Ezer Girls' Home, Winnipeg (1926-1959)." Winnipeg: unpublished paper. Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1977.
- Thiessen, Anna. Die Stadtmission in Winnipeg. Winnipeg: Self-published. 1955.
- Urry, James. "Motherland, Fatherland and Mennonite Identity." *Mennonite Mirror*. Vol. 19. No. 2 (October

1989); 5-6.

Valverde, Mariana. The Age of Light, Soap and Water.

Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991.

Van Braght, Thieleman J. The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs

Mirror of the Defenceless Christians Who Baptised only
Upon Confession of Faith, And Who Suffered and Died for
the Testimony of Jesus, Their Saviour, From the Time of
Christ to the Year A.D. 1660. Trans. from the original
Dutch from the 1660 Edition by Joseph F. Sohm.

Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1964.

Wiebe, Rudy Henry. Peace Shall Destroy Many. Toronto:

McClelland & Stewart, 1972.

About the Play

The following play is based on these events. Although it takes place in what is called the "Mary-Martha Home," the setting is a fictional recreation and combination of the two homes. I have taken liberties with dates and details. However, the attitudes and ideas of the characters reflect those expressed in the above quoted articles and interviews. In the play, the character of Marta Epp is an amalgam of many of these. The characterization is loosely based on both Anna Thiessen, who founded the Mary-Martha Home in 1926, when she was twenty-three years old; as well as Helen Epp, who ran the Eben-Ezer Home. However, Marta, and all the characters in the play, are fictional constructs and should be read that way. All of the characters exist in my imagination alone, although occasional snatches of dialogue echo words that have been spoken by the women of the *Maedchenheim*.

The *Martyrs Mirror*

Sixteenth-century Anabaptist women martyrs were imprisoned for their faith. Published in Holland in 1660, Thieleman J. Van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror* records that to prevent their own "good witness," screws were clamped into women's tongues. This also prevented the women from singing hymns on the way to execution, be it by drowning, beheading

or burning at the stake. In 1571, one Dutch woman named Anneken Hindriks was considered particularly seditious for the crime of marrying a "Menninist" man in the "Menninist fashion." Although drowning was the customary execution, Anneken was tied to a ladder, her mouth filled with gunpowder and she was cast onto a bed of burning coals (*Martyrs Mirror* Manitoba Exhibit April 1994).

The complete title of Van Braght *Martyrs Mirror* was:

*The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror of the
Nonresistant Christians Who Baptised Only
Upon Confession of Faith and Who Suffered and
Died for the Testimony of Jesus, Their
Saviour, From the Time of Christ to the Year
A.D. 1660*

A martyr is "one who sacrifices his life or something of great value for the sake of principle." To Van Braght, mirror meant "an exemplary model, a reflection of the mystery of the meaning of ultimate reality" (*Martyrs Mirror* Manitoba Exhibit). The seventeenth-century *Martyrs Mirror*, probes the mystery of the meaning of ultimate truth, a reality some felt worth the price of their lives.

The theatre to follow is not 'bloody,' but it is a play about sacrifice - a metaphorical martyrs' mirror up to nature. Be it gunpowder or screws in the tongue, Anabaptist women were silenced. With this play, I try to speak for the modern, unheralded Anabaptist women who chose to enter by the narrow gate; who chose a sort of martyrdom for the *Maedchenheim*.

Special Note:

The poems appearing between scenes are taken from *Standing All the Night Through*, a collection of poetry by Audrey Poetker-Thiessen. The poems or Scriptural passages (Revised Standard Version) which appear between the nine scenes are intended to function as music would between scenes in a play production.

Characters

Marta Epp - (known as Miss Epp or *Schwester* Marta) Matriarch and founder of the Mary-Martha Home. Mid-50s with a strong, erect stature. Severe hairstyle, conservative print dresses, sensible shoes. Speaks with thick German accent.

Emma Epp - Marta's only surviving sister. About 45 years old. "Emma" is similar to the German word *immer* meaning "always." Conservative but current in dress and hairstyle. She is droll and lively. Also has a strong accent.

Erika - About 19 years old. 'Day' domestic, working at an employer's home daily, but living at Mary-Martha, where she has been for two months. She is impetuous, feisty, progressive and independent.

Dorothy - About 21 years old. Also a 'day' domestic, she has lived at the Home for two years. She plays the piano. A very pretty girl, she is timid, conciliatory and deferential.

Mary - About 18 years old. Newly arrived domestic from southern Manitoba farm. She is quietly observant and speaks with directness.

Prediger Fast - Minister & liaison between *Maedchenheim* and Mennonite Church Board. He is also in his mid-50s. He vacillates between condescension and nerves when confronted with opposition. Speaks with German accent.

Setting

Mary-Martha Home in Winnipeg's North End, 1959.

Stage consists of living/dining room. The front entrance is stage right. The Dining Room with a large, round table is upstage near the swinging door to the kitchen. Downstage left is the staircase leading up to the bedrooms.

The Home is simply decorated with solid, sensible furniture. Any feeling of warmth seems forced and exists pragmatically. There are no extra frills. The only luxury seems to lie in the piano, upstage right. Piled high with hymnals, it too serves a purpose in the *Maedchenheim*. The only frivolous accent are yellowed, lace doilies bracketing the arms of the old burgundy sofa, centre stage. A doily also caresses the high back of the "Marta's chair" which sits just to stage left of the sofa.

Along one wall are the annual *Maedchenheim* photographs. On the walls are various Scripture verses in German gothic script. This plaque is visible above the piano:

True evangelical faith
cannot lie dormant.
It clothes the naked,
It feeds the hungry,
It comforts the sorrowful,
It shelters the destitute,
It serves those that harm it,
It binds up that which is wounded,
It becomes all things to all men.

Menno Simons
1539

Housewifery is Martha's part,
and Mary's part is quietness and rest
from all the world's din,
that nothing may hinder her
from hearing the voice of God.

From the medieval anchoresses' *Ancren Rewle*

nostos: (Greek "a return home") Homesickness. The feeling
of never being at home even when you are at home...

Ronald Rolheiser, *Spirituality for a Restless Culture*

Then the Lord said: "I have seen the affliction of my people
who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their
taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down
to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to
bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a
land flowing with milk and honey...."

Exodus 3:7-8

"*nun, ade, du, mein lieb' Heimatland*"
("now, farewell, my beloved homeland")

Mennonite Hymn sung when the trains pulled
out of the Ukraine.

The way through the world
Is more difficult to find than the way beyond it.

Wallace Stevens

where do you come from
he asked & i said
do you mean
where do i live
& yes he said what
else could i mean
& i said where i live
is not home
to a mennonite
where do you come from
means this side or that
& then it means
from russia or switzerland
after which it means
the netherlands belgium
& prussia & switzerland
again i explained
to him when he asked
before that i said
we lived in darkness

Mary & Martha

Scene I

A THURSDAY EVENING IN JANUARY, 1959. EVERYTHING IS CRISP WITH SOUNDS MAGNIFIED BY THE TAUT AIR ON ONE OF THE COLDEST NIGHTS OF THE YEAR. ABOUT 6:30. CURTAIN RISES ON DOROTHY AND ERIKA SETTING OUT CUPS AND SAUCERS IN BUFFET STYLE ON LARGE DINING ROOM TABLE, UPSTAGE LEFT.

Dorothy:

You know the rule, Erika.

Erika:

Victorian idiocy!

Dorothy:

You've been warned once.

Erika:

And threatened a hundred times. She doesn't approve of anything I do. Which reminds me....

ERIKA CLIMBS ONTO THE DINING ROOM TABLE, PRECARIOUSLY STANDING ON SOME BOOKS AND STARTS TO CHANGE THE CHANDELIER LIGHT BULBS. DOROTHY LOOKS ON WORRIEDLY, HOLDING A CUP IN ONE HAND AND A SAUCER IN THE OTHER.

Dorothy:
(SOTTO VOCE)

What are you doing? She doesn't like anything in this house to change without her permission. Not even a light bulb.

Erika:

[UNSCREWING AND REPLACING LIGHT BULB]
She won't even notice. She'll just be thankful she can read her Scriptures easier during Bible Study.

Dorothy:

The girls should start arriving any minute -- and you're standing on the hymnals!

Erika:

Will you keep your voice down?

Dorothy:

If you fall and break your neck, Miss Epp will kill you.

Erika:

That'd be one less thorn in Marta Epp's side. This should spruce things up. [FINAL TURN OF THE NEW LIGHT BULB] 'Let there be light!'

Emma:
(VOICE OFF STAGE)

... 'And there was light'

THE GIRLS FREEZE IN FEAR. EMMA ENTERS.

... I don't think the Electric Company should be compared to the book of Genesis. The bills we get are already a sacrilege.

THE GIRLS SIGH IN RELIEF. ERIKA DESCENDS. DOROTHY DUSTS OFF THE HYMN BOOKS.

Dorothy:

It's you, *Schwester* Emma. We thought....

Emma:

Ja. Und if my Schwester heard you, she'd call it blasphemy and you'd be shovelling the walk for a week.

EMMA GOES OVER TO TELEPHONE TABLE BEGINS TO SORT THROUGH MAIL AND PHONE MESSAGES.

Erika:

That's how I maintain my girlish figure. She found the ticket stub from the Metropolitan in my waste basket. I tried to explain that it was "The Ten Commandments" - a Biblical movie bringing faith to the masses. I thought that'd appease her. But she just said: "No good will ever come from being in a theatre," and handed me the shovel.

Dorothy:

I told you she would find out. You can't hide anything. But you were lucky. Miss Epp once heard me singing "*Du Liegst Mir im Herzen*" over the Hoover. I had to scour the pots for a whole month.

Erika:

So much for making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Maybe she's softening up.

FROM KITCHEN OFF STAGE WE HEAR LOUD BANGING OF POTS AND SLAMMING CUPBOARD DOORS.

Maybe not.

MORE CUPBOARDS SLAM.

Emma:

What's going on in there?

Dorothy & Erika:

It's Thursday.

Emma:

Yes, I know, 'pots on Thursday,' but at this hour? The other girls will be here any time.

Dorothy:

She's been like that all morning. She even asked me to bring up some jars from the cellar.

Emma:

What have you done this time, Erika? [ERIKA FEIGNS BEING DEEPLY OFFENDED] Something has happened. Whenever there is a crisis, Marta goes to the cellar to check for provisions. Because of the famine years in the Old Country. Some things you never forget. So, while Marta counts the preserves, she forgets to pick up our new girl from the station.

Dorothy:

No, *Prediger* Fast called. He said he could pick her up before Bible Study. It's on his way and he said he wants to talk to you and *Schwester* Marta about something.

Emma:

I see.

[MORE CLATTERING AND BANGING SOUNDS FROM KITCHEN]

That explains the pots.

EMMA NOTICES ENVELOPE. SHE OPENS IT, SCANS LETTER. THEN SHE SLIDES IT INTO HER APRON POCKET. DURING THE COURSE OF THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION, EMMA MOVES TO BOOKSHELF, TAKES OUT LARGE BLACK LEGER, RUNS HER FINGER DOWN A FEW PAGES, THEN RETURNS THE BOOK TO ITS PLACE.

Erika:

So how old is this Mary?

Emma:

About your age.

Erika:

Why is she coming here? Why wouldn't she stay on the farm with her mother?

Emma:

Mary's brothers will work the farm. Her mother needs Mary's income to help pay off debts. Funerals are expensive.

Erika:

Working to pay for your father's grave. [SHUDDERS]

Dorothy:

Imagine how she feels, poor thing. It must be hard enough to leave home, but especially at such a time.

Erika:

Especially if this is your destination.

Emma:

"How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire. And the tongue is a fire."

Erika:

Now you sound like *Prediger* Fast.

Dorothy:

Miss Epp doesn't really care all that much for *Prediger* Fast does she? I mean, except in Christian love.

Emma:

They have known each other over thirty years. Even before he was married.

Erika:

Do I detect a romance or something?

Emma:

My *Schwester* is right. You watch too many movies.

Dorothy:

Can you imagine Miss Epp having a romance, Erika?

Erika:
(GIGGLING)

Well, no. I can't even imagine Miss Epp being anything other than--well--Miss Epp. Was *Schwester* Marta ever young, Emma?

Emma:

Leben ist schwer. Life is hard. Sometimes you don't get to be young.

Erika:

Sometimes you're not allowed to grow up. I'd like to have the chance to be responsible for myself. One day, I want to own one of those houses I've scrubbed and scoured. Someone else can eat in the kitchen and look after my hungry, whining brats. While I have high tea in the peace and quiet of my dining room with my Royal Albert, entertaining my guests.

Dorothy:

'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay.'

Erika:

Oh, really? What about that time the lady you worked for made you scrub a perfectly clean stove twice? I remember how upset you were. You said that all you wanted to do was go for a ten minute walk in the park because you had finished all your chores. She made your hands raw. It was just spiteful. Her keeping you in your place.

Dorothy:

Yes, but I didn't get even. We are supposed to set an example. You know what Miss Epp says: "You are an open book read by many. That's how you have to live."

Erika:

Well, your employer was illiterate. I can't believe she was so nasty to a saint like you.

Emma:

That was about two years ago, *ja*? You didn't stay in that place very long.

[DOROTHY TURNS AWAY & SETS CHAIRS UP AROUND THE TABLE]

You know, Erika, I didn't so much mind sitting in the kitchen with the children. When I first started as a live-in maid I was just twelve, maybe thirteen. I looked after the most beautiful three year old boy. Billy. He had big blue eyes. It was from Billy that I learned English. I would read to him "*Aschenbroedel*" - you know -- "*Cinderella*." I knew the *Gesichte* from the Old Country. He would correct me when I said the words wrong. He would never scold me. A very sweet little boy. He would cry when I gave him back to his mother. *Ja*. From Billy I learned English. Of course, now my words aren't always so good. But Billy was always very interesting in me.

Dorothy:

Why didn't Miss Epp teach you? I thought she used to be a teacher or something.

Erika:

She just likes to lecture.

Emma:

Marta always wanted to be a missionary. Then the church offered her a job here. She was nineteen, she has me to look after, so she decides Winnipeg had just as many heathens as a foreign country. And here we still are yet.

DOORBELL RINGS.

That must be our new girl.

Erika:

I won't know what to say.

Emma:

That has never stopped you.

Erika:

Really. I've never had somebody close to me die.

Emma:

[STOPPING] I've never known anyone who could say that.

EMMA OPENS THE FRONT DOOR. THE OTHER GIRLS RISE TO GREET THE NEW ARRIVAL. MARY ENTERS WEARING A DOWDY BROWN COAT, BLACK HAT, BLACK ANKLE LENGTH BOOTS, CARRYING ONE, SHABBY LEATHER SUITCASE. SHE HAS A SMALL, SLIGHT BUILD AND WEARS WIRE-FRAME GLASSES.

Emma:

Welcome to the Mary-Martha Home! We already have a Marta - that's my *Schwester*, Miss Epp, but we still needed a Mary. This is Erika and Dorothy. They are *dienst-maedchens*--domestics--as you soon learn to be, *ja*?

BOTH GIRLS GREET MARY.

Und I'm *Schwester* Emma. [GOOD-NATUREDLY] I unofficially help my sister run things around here. She will be here in a moment. She has to just finish the kitchen.

OFFSTAGE ORCHESTRA CLATTER OF BANGING OF POTS, CUPBOARD DOORS SLAMMED SHUT. THEN SILENCE.

It's...finished.

MARTA EPP APPEARS IN THE KITCHEN DOORWAY. SHE IS AN IMPOSING FIGURE. THE THREE GIRLS AUTOMATICALLY STIFFEN TO ATTENTION. EVEN EMMA GIVES WAY SLIGHTLY TO MARTA'S AUTHORITY. MARTA WEARS AN APRON OVER A SIMPLE, FLORAL PRINT DRESS. SHE STANDS WITH A SOLDIER'S POSTURE AND SURVEYS THE SCENE FOR A MOMENT. HER HAIR IS THICK AND A DULL GREY - A BUN OF BARBED WIRE. HER EYES ARE BLUE AND CLEAR LIKE STAINED GLASS; BUT GLASS IN A WINTER LIGHT. AFTER A MOMENT, SHE SMILES AT MARY. HER SMILE TRANSFORMS HER USUALLY TAUT FACE. JUST AS SUDDENLY, THE SMILE VANISHES.

Marta:

Guten abend, Mary. Gott segne dir. Du kannst Deutsch sprechen, ja?

Mary:

Ein bisschen. I prefer expressing myself in English.

Marta:

Most of the young people do. Welcome to the Mary-Martha *Maedchenheim*.

Mary:

Danke.

Marta:

Our deepest sympathies about your father, Mary. May God comfort you.

Emma:

If there is anything that we can do, we're here. Even just to listen.

Marta:

I hope you will find a home with us, Mary. We want to help you as best we can. We also want to prepare you to be a Christian example in the homes of others when you serve as *dienst-maedchen*. And to prepare you for the temptations of city life. If you are a good girl, you will be a welcome part of our *Maedchenheim*.

Mary:

I'll do my best.

Marta:

All we are called to do, is to do what we can.

Emma:

You are just in time for Bible Study tonight. It will be a good chance for you to meet some of the other girls. Where is *Prediger* Fast? He drove you here, *ja*?

Mary:

Yes. He said he needed to pick up some papers at the church but would come right back.

Marta:

(EDGY) We will meet with him after, Emma. We will not keep the others waiting. Dorothy, take Mary's things and show her to her room. Give her Erika's extra pillow and mirror. One hand mirror is enough for a girl. Erika, I noticed icy patches on the walk. It must be clean before our guests arrive, *ja*?

Erika:

Of course, *Schwester* Marta. The last thing we need is a fallen woman.

Marta:

[DISTRACTED, SHE DOESN'T REACT TO ERIKA'S COMMENT]

Come to the kitchen, Emma. We have things to...clean up.

Emma:

Make yourself at home, Mary.

EXIT MARTA & EMMA TO KITCHEN. SLIGHT PAUSE. THEN DOROTHY RUSHES OVER TO TAKE MARY'S BAG.

Dorothy:

It'll be so nice to have someone new, here. I've lived here for two years myself, so it's great to have a change. Erika has only been here two months.

Erika:

It just feels like two years. Relax, Dorothy. Give Mary a minute to catch her breath. She'll need a little fortification in this place.

Dorothy:
(EXPLAINING TO MARY)

Some people don't get along too well with Miss Epp.

Mary:

Miss Epp? It's Miss Epp? I never quite caught her name. I thought *Prediger* Fast said "Mishap."

Erika:

Mary, you're going to fit right in!

Dorothy:

If there's anything you don't understand don't be afraid to ask us.

Erika:

And while you're here, maybe we can teach you a few things. Remember Mary: "You are an open book to be read by many."

Mary:

Very poetic. I like reading.

ERIKA SMIRKS AT DOROTHY AS SHE TAKES THE SUITCASE.

Erika:

What do you read? Traditional, Victorian novels...?

Mary:

No. More modern writing, actually.

Erika:

That's good to hear. I'm a big romance aficionado. Are you into romance, Mary...?

Mary:

No, I don't have a boyfriend. That is what you're asking, isn't it?

HER CLEVERNESS FOILED, ERIKA REMAINS SILENT.

Dorothy:

[IMPRESSED WITH THE NEW CHALLENGER] You're right on time, too, Mary. We're having a Birthday party next month. What kinds of presents do you like?

Mary:

My Birthday was in December.

Dorothy:

Really? A Christmas Birthday? That's nice. I was born in September. The Birthday Party is a Mary-Martha tradition. We get our picture taken and everything. [INDICATES SERIES OF PHOTOS ALONG THE WALL] The annual *Maedchenheim* photos. There used to be around 30 or 40 girls staying here at one time or another, so they had one big Birthday party a year for everyone. It's a tradition.

Erika:

Aren't some of those hairstyles ghastly? And those uniforms. [POINTING TO A GIRL IN PHOTO] She looks like an albino rabbit in springtime. Must be right off the boat.

Mary:

This one looks younger than I am.

Dorothy:

She hardly looks over twelve, poor thing. Most of the domestics in the city will come to the party. It's quite an event, although there aren't as many of us now. There are only the three of us living here--including you, Mary.

Erika:

I'm a Pisces, myself. Dorothy is a Virgo. You, know, the Virgin. So what else is new.

Dorothy:

Erika!!

Erika:

[TO MARY] I can't believe I've found someone who can still be shocked. I was just telling Dorothy that because my actual Birthday falls on the day of the Home's party I think I deserve a little extra-special treatment. I've decided to ask *Schwester* Marta - you know, "Mishap" - if I can invite David.

Mary:

Ah. The boyfriend.

Dorothy:

You're crazy. [TO MARY] You know *Schwester* Marta threw out her nail polish last week. Erika just keeps pushing her limits.

Erika:

I hate it when she goes into my room. But "Misty Moonlight Mauve" I can live without. She can't make me throw my feelings in the trash.

Mary:

What's wrong with your boyfriend?

Erika:

There's nothing wrong with my boyfriend. Old school, Miss Epp and her Victorian mode of being is the problem. You're in for a return to Puritanism in this place, Mary. No men - or boys - allowed in Mary-Martha without special permission. Except of course the minister and he's never invited except for the occasional Bible Study.

Dorothy:

Prediger Fast. He's the one that drove you, Mary.

Erika:

He drives us all. I was talking to some of the girls at Ebenezer - the other Girls' home - last week. They're allowed to have boys at their Bible Study. They have been for years. I think it's time for a change around here.

Mary:

Do you think minor acts of rebellion - like painting your nails - will strengthen your case?

Erika:

No... I'm just...I'm just not going to let her run my life. I will not succumb to her threats.

Mary:

So you've been warned.

Erika:

Just wait and see how you feel after a few days under her scrutiny.

Dorothy:

I keep telling Erika if she doesn't walk on eggshells,
Schwester Marta will send her home.

Erika:

I'm not going home.

DOORBELL RINGS.

Dorothy:

Thank goodness. The girls are here for Bible Study.

Mary:

I haven't even unpacked yet.

Dorothy:

[MOVING TO THE FRONT DOOR] You can share my Bible.

ERIKA AND MARY MOUNT THE STAIRCASE.

Erika:

Lucky you. Dorothy has a red letter edition - with pictures.
Say listen, Mary, I really like that hat. It's very
stylish. Is it new?

Mary:

I bought it for my father's....

Erika:

Oh.

Dorothy:

[AWKWARDLY] Mary, we're very sorry about your father. Should
I mention anything tonight. In the prayer requests, I mean?

Mary:

No...don't bother. It never did any good before.

[MARY CONTINUES UP THE STAIRS. TO ERIKA:] I'm really tired.
I hope I can stay awake.

Erika:

I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Mary. *Prediger* Fast -
isn't.

ERIKA'S LINE IN TIME WITH DOROTHY OPENING THE FRONT DOOR
WITH A SMILE AND GREETING. QUICK FADE TO BLACK.

...also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness.

1 Timothy 2:9-15

Scene II

ABOUT 11 O'CLOCK THAT NIGHT. THE BIBLE STUDY HAS ENDED. ALL THE VISITORS EXCEPT *PREDIGER* FAST HAVE LEFT. EMMA IS AT THE TABLE, STACKING THE CUPS AND SAUCERS. FAST SITS AT ONE END OF THE SOFA, A CUP & SAUCER ON HIS LAP. HE IS DRESSED IN A DARK SUIT, HIS GREY HAIR IS COMBED BACK, WEARS GLASSES. ERIKA STEPS INTO THE DOORWAY FROM THE KITCHEN:

Erika:

There's still some coffee, *Prediger* Fast.

Fast:

Thank you, no. I'll be awake all night as it is.

ERIKA MOVES TO DINING ROOM TABLE TO HELP EMMA. DOROTHY ENTERS FROM THE STAIRCASE ON TIPTOE:

Dorothy:

She's out like a light, poor thing. She must have been exhausted. [JOINS THE OTHERS AT THE TABLE]

Fast:

Yes. It's certainly a shame about her father. Prime of life. It's not always easy to understand the ways of the Lord, but He is faithful. At first I thought Mary was becoming a *dienst-maedchen* because her family needed the income. But it's not just that. It seems Mary had been planning to move to the city for some time. She wants to pay her own way in order to study in the evening. She wants to go to United College, I understand. Arts or some such thing. Wants to be a teacher, I would imagine. So many of our young people are nowadays. Quite admirable for the young lady, although on the ride over I suggested that the Mennonite Brethren Bible College or even the Canadian Mennonite Bible College would be more appropriate for her. Mary had pleaded with her parents. It had already been decided before her father's passing.

MARTA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN.

The mother had reservations, but I assured her that little Mary could not be in more capable hands than in Miss Epp's *Maedchenheim*. It has been known as a 'safe haven' to many. Your reputation precedes you, Marta.

Marta:

[UNAFFECTED BY THE FLATTERY] We do what we can. [SHE TAKES HER CHAIR]

Fast:

Yes. I know Miss Epp has always done and will always do what is in the best interest of the girls.

PAUSE. MARTA LOOKS STEADILY AT FAST WAITING FOR HIM TO GET DOWN TO BUSINESS, MAKING IT AS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR HIM AS POSSIBLE. HE TAKES THE HINT. HE SETS DOWN HIS COFFEE, TURNS TO HIS BRIEFCASE, AND CLEARS HIS THROAT:

Well, Marta. Emma. I wish this was simply a social call following a very stimulating Bible Study.

[ERIKA AND DOROTHY EXCHANGE A LOOK]

But I'm here in an official capacity.

MARTA MEETS HIS EYES STEADILY BEFORE SHE TURNS TO THE GIRLS.

Marta:

It is late. You girls should go to bed. Tomorrow there is work.

Erika:

[MAKING HERSELF COMFORTABLE AT DINING ROOM TABLE] I'm not tired. Besides, I don't have to be at the Taylor place till seven o'clock.

WHEN ERIKA WON'T MOVE, DOROTHY PULLS ON HER ARM.

Dorothy:

Yes. Bible Study was exhausting--I mean, I'm exhausted. Goodnight all.

Emma:

You heard my *Schwester*, Erika. Time to sleep. Now.

ERIKA RELUCTANTLY JOINS DOROTHY. AS BOTH GIRLS EXIT UPSTAIRS ERIKA STARTS A ROUSING RENDITION OF "DU LIEGST MIR IM HERZEN" WHILE DOROTHY ATTEMPTS TO SHUSH HER.

TURNING TO FAST, MARTA PICKS UP HER BIBLE FROM THE COFFEE TABLE. SHE HOLDS IT ON HER LAP, LIKE A GOLD EMBOSSED SHIELD.

Marta:

So...?

Fast:

[PULLING PAPERS FROM HIS BRIEFCASE]

Marta, I take it you've received a letter from the Board dated November 13th of last year. To date, we have received no reply. Given your efficiency and reliability the Board is frankly surprised to have to send me to...follow up. We...the Board...realize that you have many responsibilities running the Home, looking after the girls and all. But it has been almost two months and, frankly, [LOOKING AT MARTA DIRECTLY FOR THE FIRST TIME] you have fewer duties at the *Heim* than ever before.

Don't think the *Maedchenheim* is being singled out. The Church is re-examining all of the organizations which receive its support. The membership is concerned that their tithes are used where they will do the most good. Funds are especially required in the mission field.

If you've had some trouble gathering the pertinent documents, or difficulty with the financial statements, perhaps I could be of assistance...?

Marta:

I do not need your assistance, *Prediger*.

FAST STRAIGHTENS HIS PAPERS AND CLOSSES HIS BRIEFCASE.

Fast:

You have performed an invaluable service, but the Board is not certain that these services are still necessary.

Marta:

Now Christian charity is not necessary?

Fast:

Times have changed and young people have changed. The truth is that your girls are not as...as delicate and in need of protection as they were twenty years ago. Just look at Erika, there. She can take care of herself.

Marta:

Ja, ja, our Erika. So now they are more worldly, we throw them to the world, to the wolves?

Fast:

The *Reisechuld* has been payed. The only debts these girls have is to help pay for their brothers' university educations - sometimes even their own! They're using domestic work as a stepping stone to nursing, teaching, or before they raise families of their own. Young girls nowadays aren't willing to dedicate their lives, as you have, to being a...servant.

Marta:

Since when are we not all called to be servants, *Prediger*?

Fast:

[LIGHTLY] You know your theology, Marta.

Marta:

And I know my duty. My girls live their faith. There is no distinction. How we live is the only Bible some people may ever read.

[RISING AND INDICATING PHOTOGRAPHS ALONG THE WALL]

You see all these faces that have passed through my door? Every girl that has found safety and rest in these rooms, a listening ear, a common language. You want me to give that a price. How much will you charge for a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ?

Fast:

[PAUSE] How long have you been here? Since the 1930s, Marta?

Marta:

Since nineteen twenty-six.

Fast:

Nineteen twenty-six. The year I first met you. Don't think the Board is not grateful for your unwavering dedication. You have run this *Heim* for as long as I have known you. But it's 1959 now, Marta! You could retire!

Marta:

The Board has always tried to tell me how to run my *Maedchenheim*. They do not live here. They have not dried the tears of our young girls, in the beginning, some still children, 12 or 13 years old. Torn from their families, sent into houses where they could not speak the language, hardly fed, unloved, and alone.

Fast:

I know how strongly you feel about this, Marta--

Marta:

You talk about my reputation when you walk in the door and now you say no more safe haven.

Fast:

[AT A LOSS] The Board just needs something concrete...some numbers for their decision making. Surely you understand my predicament, Marta?

Marta:

I have a document to show you, *Prediger*. [MARTA RETRIEVES THE LARGE, BLACK LEGER FROM THE BOOKSHELF. THE SAME ONE EMMA LOOKED AT EARLIER] Emma calls this my 'second Bible.'

Emma:

[QUICKLY TO FAST WITH A FORCED LAUGH] No offence...

Marta:

It is the '*Maedchenheim's Bible*.' A record of every girl who has come and gone, her parents and siblings. Her favourite food. Her Birthday. The last address we have after she left us. Every satisfied employer. And every employer who mistreated one of our girls. You see the black mark beside their name? They were never dealt with again. This is my only record. This is my voice. I have nothing more to say to your Board. Or to you.

MARTA SITS IN HER CHAIR AND OPENS HER BIBLE.
PAUSE.

Fast:

Well, Emma, you were always the reasonable one. What do you have to say?

Emma:

[RISING] I say...goodnight. Marta and I will be in touch with you and the Board.

Fast:

Of course. Emma's unshakeable loyalty to her sister.

Emma:

Goodnight, *Prediger*. Your wife will be wondering where you are.

FAST COLLECTS HIS GOODS AND MOVES TO THE DOOR. EMMA HELPS HIM WITH HIS OVERCOAT.

Fast:

You will be in touch, then?

Emma:

We will be in touch.

Fast:

Peace be with you.

Emma & Marta:

And with you.

Fast:

[TURNING BACK AT THE DOOR] I don't know if you're aware of this, but nowadays, many people think the *Maedchenheim* is just a place where girls get cheap room and board.

HE EXITS.

Marta:

That man has always been impossible.

Emma:

So now we shoot the messenger?

Marta:

I should have told you, Emma. They - the Board - had this idea before. In 1945. Think of it! With all the war immigrants - they thought the *Maedchenheim* had no place! And so I went to them and I told them how it is here. One woman against twelve men. There are times when we cannot keep silent - even to the church. For my girls I'm not afraid. You know I'm not.

Emma:

I was there. When you lobbied and won Thursday afternoons off for the domestics of Winnipeg.

Marta:

My girls deserved at least that much.

Emma:

It seems to me, City Hall never expected a Mennonite spinster to put up such a fight.

Marta:

We do what we can. [PAUSE] I don't understand, Emma. It is God's work we do and now the Board says 'no more safe haven.'

EMMA GOES OVER TO *MAEDCHENHEIM* BIBLE. SHE FLIPS THROUGH, SCANS A COUPLE OF PAGES, AS MARTA READS HER BIBLE. THEIR MOVEMENTS PARALLEL. AFTER A MOMENT:

Emma:

[CONSULTING THE LEGER]

It is true that the number of girls who have found employment through us has dropped like a stone in the well. It is true that our expenses are going up like *Prediger* Fast's blood pressure....

Marta:

[NOT LOOKING AT EMMA, READS ALOUD] "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink...Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

Emma:

That also is true.

EMMA HESITATES AND THEN PULLS LETTER OUT OF APRON POCKET AND HANDS IT TO MARTA.

Emma (Cont'd):

This came today. From the Board. But addressed to me.
[MARTA LOOKS AT HER] They are a little afraid of you. And they are very serious this time. Not like in '45.

MARTA READS THE LETTER AND THEN CAREFULLY PLACES IT INSIDE HER BIBLE.

Marta:

So, now they go behind my back.

Emma:

Not very Christian.

EMMA REACHES OVER AND TAKES THE OPEN BIBLE FROM MARTA AND READS:

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious enough for itself. Let the day's own troubles be sufficient for the day." It is late.

Marta:

Ja. You go to sleep. I will sit here for a little while. I need to think. And pray.

EMMA RISES AND STARTS TO GO.

Bitte, Emma? Turn out the light. I don't know why, but tonight it gives me a headache.

EMMA TURNS OFF LIGHT, EXITS UPSTAIRS. MARTA SITS IN HALF LIGHT, HANDS FOLDED.

QUICK FADE TO BLACK.

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

Scene III

SUNDAY LUNCH A WEEK LATER. THE DINING ROOM IS BRIGHTLY LIT. MARY POURS WATER FROM PITCHERS INTO GLASSES. ERIKA LAZILY ARRANGES ZWIEBACH INTO BASKET AND THEN POLISHES THE CUTLERY AT HER PLACE SETTING.

MARTA AND EMMA ENTER, RETURNING FROM CHURCH. THEY ARE IN THE MIDST OF A HEATED "DISCUSSION," OBLIVIOUS TO THE PRESENCE OF THE OTHERS AS THEY TAKE OFF THEIR SUNDAY COATS.

Emma:

As a prayer request yet!

Marta:

The Church is one body. If one member suffers, all suffer.

Emma:

Ja. But who will they think is the pain? Marta, you poke a stick into a hornet's nest.

Marta:

Or maybe it is a brood of vipers. I asked for prayer support. I said how things are from where I stand. Let the congregation decide who it is who stings.

THEY LOOK UP TO SEE THE TWO GIRLS STARING AT THEM QUESTIONINGLY. EMMA AND MARTA ARE EMBARRASSED. DOROTHY, WEARING OVEN MITTS, BREAKS THE MOMENT AS SHE BRINGS IN THE LAST HOT DISH FROM THE KITCHEN.

Dorothy:

That's everything.

EVERYONE TAKES THEIR PLACE AT THE TABLE.

Marta:

Let us pray.

[ALL BOW THEIR HEADS. MARTA SAYS GRACE:]

Marta (Cont'd):

*Komm Herr Jesus, sei unser Gast, und segne was du uns
bescheret hast.*

ALL IN UNISON: Amen.

Mary:

At home, we always held hands for Grace.

Marta:

Here, we do not.

BRIEF PAUSE. MARY BEGINS TO REACH FOR FOOD.

I will read a passage of Scripture before we eat. It is what we do at this Home.

"But Jesus turning to them said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills 'Cover us.' For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" The Gospel of Luke.

MARTA CLOSES HER BIBLE AND PLACES IT ON BUFFET NEARBY. SHE BEGINS TO FILL HER PLATE. EVERYONE ELSE SEEMS TO HAVE LOST THEIR APPETITE. AFTER A MOMENT, EMMA TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND THEN BEGINS PASSING FOOD AROUND. ALL RELUCTANTLY START EATING.

Emma:

Bitte, pass me some of your delicious gurken, Dorothy.

Dorothy:

They're my favourite. With my first attempt I was in quite a "pickle," shall we say. [ERIKA ROLLS HER EYES] But Schwester Marta helped me. She's shown me how to preserve many things from our garden. Have you seen the cellar, Mary? Jars and jars of preserves. Chokecherry jelly, candied crabapples, canned beets - everything you might ever crave in the dead of winter!

Erika:

Have you ever noticed that people always talk about food while they're eating?

Dorothy:

[IGNORING ERIKA] We store and can just about anything. We really...can! Preserves for our winter preservation. Our little cellar is quite a horn of plenty.

A SILENCE.

Mary:

A cornucopia.

Dorothy:

Yes!

A SILENCE.

Marta:

What did you think of the sermon this morning, Mary?

Mary:

It was...fine. Very nice.

Marta:

You found it instructive...?

Mary:

Yes...I guess so.

Marta:

I remember especially the passage: "Guard your heart with all vigilance. From it flow the springs of life." It is very important to watch over the thoughts and feelings in your heart. Some thoughts are not suitable for young, Christian girls.

Erika:

I don't know. Pastor Friesen always leaves me cold. Must be his name.

DOROTHY AND ERIKA GIGGLE. MARTA IS ANNOYED.

Emma:

[SUPPRESSING A SMILE] Could you pass the peas, please, Marta?

Marta:

[PASSES DISH TO EMMA] You spend a lot of time in your room alone, Mary. You are troubled, maybe?

Mary:

No. I'm fine.

Marta:

You can talk to us, Emma or me, if you feel a burden.

Mary:

I'm fine, really. I like my time alone.

Marta:

You are studying. Or praying, maybe?

Mary:

[HESITATES] I...I write.

Marta:

Letters to your mother?

Mary:

Sometimes...not very often, I'm afraid.

Marta:

Then what?

Mary:

I just write. My thoughts, my feelings.

Dorothy:

You write poetry? How nice! I really like Emily Dickinson:
"If I can stop one heart from breaking I shall not have
lived in vain." Isn't that beautiful?

Marta:

Your poems are those things I found in the trash the other
day?

Mary:

You--you read them? I threw them out because I didn't want
anyone to read them.

Marta:

Because they said things you did not want to say?

Mary:

[QUIETLY] Because they did not say them strongly enough.

Marta:

They seemed strong enough to me. I think the trash is the best place for them.

THE FORK MARY HOLDS FALLS LIMPLY TO HER PLATE. SHE RISES TO LEAVE.

You are not finished and you have not been excused.

Mary:

No. I've been accused. And I've had enough.

MARY EXITS BLINDLY & SWIFTLY UPSTAIRS. SOUND OF HER BEDROOM DOOR QUIETLY CLOSING. STRAINED PAUSE.

Emma:

[GENTLY] Marta, Mary has had enough. So many changes. And her father. Sometimes it is important for people to say what they feel. Maybe silence does more harm than speaking.

Marta:

We must accept what cannot be changed. Good will not come of wasting time on words - blasphemous words. Writing things down and questioning does not change what is. And it does not serve the Lord.

TENSION HOVERS AROUND THE TABLE. AFTER A MOMENT ERIKA PLACES HER CUTLERY ON HER PLATE LIKE HANDS OF A CLOCK. SHE THEN PLACES BOTH HANDS IN FRONT OF HER ON THE TABLE AS IF BRACING FOR A HURRICANE.

Erika:

[ATTEMPTING NONCHALANCE] I was talking to Katie and Esther after the service this morning. You know, the girls from Ebenezer? They were telling me that men - not only ministers - can attend their Bible Studies. Did you know that, Dorothy? Did you know that young boys are welcomed at Ebenezer?

Dorothy:

I...heard.

Erika:

Did you know that, *Schwester* Emma?

Emma:

I heard, too.

Erika:

Apparently, young men have been included in their Bible Studies for ages. I think it was the open, welcoming arms of Christ on the cross that sparked such a novel idea.

You know our Annual Birthday party next week - the *Maedchenheim* tradition? It just so happens that it falls on my real Birthday.

Emma:

Don't worry, Erika, Marta and I - we don't forget these things. It will be special for you.

Erika:

You see, that's what I'm hoping. Because of the coincidence, I think it's - as you say - quite special. So...I....

Dorothy:

[INTERRUPTING] My grandmother used to send me a dollar in the mail whenever my Birthday fell on a Sunday. I always found that strange because I had nothing to do with it. But I spent the money.

Erika:

[WITH DETERMINATION] ...So I think, because my Birthday is on that day, I think I should be allowed one privilege. Nothing elaborate - I'd just like to bring a friend.

EVERYONE AT THE TABLE TENSES, KNOWING WHAT WILL FOLLOW.

I'd like to bring someone special. I want to bring David.

Marta:

[SLOWLY PUTTING DOWN HER KNIFE & FORK BEFORE SPEAKING] So.
It is that "English" boy again.

Erika:

By "English" you mean not "a nice Mennonite boy." That's
right. He's "English."

Dorothy:

He seems nice to me, though...of course, I wouldn't know....

Emma:

Your David from the movies, *ja*? As if I need to ask.

Erika:

Ja.

Emma:

So, he is a student, *ja*?

Marta:

Emma! I have said we will not discuss this English boy.
Not on Sunday, not on any day. I have said it before: no
good thing will come of those movie houses.

Erika:

It already has.

Marta:

You do not know about men. Especially the kind of
'Englishmen' that go there.

Erika:

What would you know about men?

Marta:

Ahhh...men....

Emma:

AMEN! That was a fine meal. Will you help me clear up, Dorothy...?

DOROTHY STARTS TO RISE BUT IS HALTED BY THE CONTINUED CONVERSATION.

Erika:

Exactly why am I not allowed to talk about David? Just tell me why.

Marta:

No more talk.

Erika:

Why won't you let us discuss men in this house? Because you'll be left out of the conversation?

Emma:

[SHARPLY TO ERIKA] That's enough.

A LONG PAUSE.

Erika:
(attempting respect)

May I be excused, please? I have to help a friend with homework.

Marta:

It is Sunday. We do no house work and we do no homework.

Erika:

I promised.

Marta:

You should not speak so carelessly.

Erika:

Take the log out of your own eye before you criticize the speck in mine. [SHE SPEAKS QUICKLY, USING THE INERTIA OF HER OWN WORDS] Did you want to come with me, Dorothy? You're good at math and it's David's worst subject.

A GUILLOTINE PAUSE.

Marta:

Constantly you defy me. You go to the movies. You see this English boy behind my back. "What ye sow, so shall ye reap," "Do not be deceived. Bad company ruins good morals." Words of truth that you have been taught. But you are the kind that only learns by pain. The pain of your own foolishness. Mark my words. This English boy means only trouble.

Erika:

"God looks not on the outward appearance. God looks upon the heart." A Psalm of David. [TAKING A DEEP BREATH] I want my David at the party.

Marta:

The *Maedchenheim* will not spread palm branches on the road to suit your mood, Erika. Take him to Ebenezer. But he will not set foot in this house. I forbid it.

Erika:

Who would want to? I must be out of my mind wanting to expose David to this claustrophobic cloister!

Marta:

If you like to leave, you can leave.

Erika:

Maybe I'll just do that.

Marta:

I can have your parents fetch you anytime.

Erika:

I can take care of myself.

Marta:

If you go anywhere it is back to your parents who trusted me to look after you. You do not know about life. You act like you are grown-up - big words, big talk, short skirts. You are just a child.

Erika:

You don't know anything about my life. You hold on to ancient rules and meaningless tradition.

Marta:

[RISING] For how ever long you live in this *Maedchenheim*, you will follow the rules of this *Maedchenheim*. You will be able to make your own mistakes in your own home soon enough. You are all excused.

MARTA EXITS TO KITCHEN REMOVING HER PLATE & CUP. DOROTHY STARTS CLEARING THE DISHES. ERIKA FUMES. EMMA IS AT A LOSS.

Emma:

What is happening to this *Heim*? [ERIKA IS SILENT] We have so much to be thankful for and you must bring defiance under our roof.

Erika:

I'm sorry, Emma.

Emma:

Apologize to Marta, not to me.

Erika:

I won't. I refuse to be afraid of her anymore.

Emma:

[SADLY] What is happening to this *Heim*?

Erika:

I spoke the truth! You know I did.

Emma:

"God looks not upon the outward appearance, God looks upon the heart." Will you judge what is Marta's truth?

Erika:

We all walk on eggshells - or on beds of nails for her! Sacrificing anything to stay within her boundaries - even you!

Emma:

What you do not see is that, to Marta, bending the rule is like wielding an axe. Change the rules and pretty soon everything, all the respect, all the reputation she has built is smashed until the *Maedchenheim* is splinters, ready for the furnace.

Erika:

This is about a party - not anarchy! [PLEADING] Emma. All I want is to have my friend, who happens to be a boy, come to the party. Is that so much to ask? [EMMA IS SILENT] Of course you don't understand how I feel. You're just an old....

Emma:

...Old maid? What do you think domestics are?

Erika:

I didn't mean it like that.

Emma:

[SIGHING] So, what if Marta let your David come to the party? Then you'd want him at the Bible Studies like at Ebenezer. Then you'd come home from a walk and want to ask him inside for tea. He will have a cup and then you'd wish he could stay and play Dominos. You know it's true. Marta does what she does because she understands how you feel so well.

Erika:

She's as compassionate as a vegetarian in a butcher shop. Look what she did to Mary!

Dorothy:

Poor, Mary. I felt so terrible. You know, yesterday, Mary said that my voice was like lamb's wool. Poetry...can be very good.

Erika:

How could *Schwester* Marta crush Mary's spirit like that? And telling everyone else what to do and how to live and where to go and what to wear...

SHE STACKS THE DISHES ANGRILY.

Emma:

[TAKING THE PLATES AWAY FROM ERIKA] Why don't you go over there and read the Good Book. The salvation of you and the china. I need something for my stomach. It's not the food - it's the Sunday dinners. [EMMA TURNS BEFORE OPENING THE KITCHEN DOOR] How many times must I forgive my neighbour - seven times?

Dorothy:

[QUIETLY] Seventy times seven.

EMMA EXITS WITH DISHES TO THE KITCHEN.

Erika:

Just whose side are you on?

Dorothy:

It's not a war - except to you.

Erika:

It's been bottled up inside me. Marta just shakes me like a soda can.

Dorothy:

I can't believe you dared to mention David. And right after she filleted poor Mary. What were you thinking?

Erika:

All I can think of in this place is that I'm not allowed to think. I can't have my own thoughts and opinions and desires. I might as well be living at home.

Dorothy:

If you're not careful, you will be.

ERIKA STARTS TO PACE ACROSS THE LIVING ROOM. DOROTHY WATCHES HER FOR A FEW MOMENTS THEN SHE FINISHES CLEARING THE TABLE WHILE LOUDLY HUMMING THE HYMN "FAITH OF OUR FATHERS."

Erika:

I wouldn't sing if I was you. Especially not while you're at the table. Marta will say that the Epstein family you worked for was a bad influence.

Dorothy:

You're pacing like the leopard in the zoo.

Erika:

I'm being symbolic!

Dorothy:

You're making me nervous.

Erika:

You're making me nervous! Just be quiet.

Dorothy:

I always sing when I'm upset. Singing makes me feel better.

Erika:

I suppose in the two years you've been here, you've written an opera.

Dorothy:

I wish you wouldn't always be like that.

Erika:

You're as bad as Marta! You can't even face the truth of this place! You won't admit that it's an empty shell where the wind blows holes in our conversations. I bet the only warmth you feel is under your down-filled quilt in the middle of the night. Not even then! I've heard you crying when you think everyone else is asleep.

[DOROTHY QUICKLY TURNS AWAY, HIDING HER FACE]

This is nothing like a "Home."

Dorothy:

[PASSIONATELY] It is! It is a home!

Erika:

[RETREATING A BIT] Well, I wouldn't know much about it.

Dorothy:

It is a home. And it's safe. It's much better than how it was before.

Erika:

Before what?

Dorothy:

Before - when I lived in the house where I worked.

Erika:

Why? Did they make you serve wine at parties or something? Marta would never let one of her domestics do that! Well?

Dorothy:

Don't yell at me!

DOROTHY HURRIEDLY TAKES REMAINING DISHES TO KITCHEN. ERIKA LOOKS AROUND THE ABANDONED ROOM. THEN SHE DEFIANTLY SLUMPS INTO 'MARTA'S CHAIR.' INSTEAD OF THE BIBLE, SHE LEAFS THROUGH THE 'HEIM'S BIBLE.' SHE STARTS READING ALOUD, AT FIRST WITH SARCASM:

Erika:

"The Mary-Martha Home opened October 30, 1926. It is to be a safe haven for young Mennonite girls, refugees, whose young lives have already been 'sorely tested.'" You can say that again.

DOROTHY RE-ENTERS AND SHEEPISHLY WANDERS OVER TO ERIKA.

Dorothy:

[AWKWARDLY] Emma won't let me help.

Erika:

Listen to this. Our history. [READING, FALSELY GRANDIOSE]
"With the shortage of domestic servants, employers often go directly to the train station to find cheap labour among the newly-arrived immigrants. Because the parents are so desperate to pay the... *Reiseschuld*..."?

Dorothy:

That's "travel debt."

Erika:

[CONTINUES READING] "...to the Canadian Pacific Railway, who sponsored their trip from Russia to Canada, they send their young girls into strange homes where they cannot speak the language. Because of the need for servants, there is much more opportunity for girls to work, than for boys."

Dorothy:

Imagine that! We were more in demand than the boys.

Erika:

Now we've been replaced by the washing machine.

TURNS SEVERAL PAGES, & CONTINUES READING:

"We have taken in little Annelise. She is only nine years old. I think she is too young to serve in a home, but she has no other means of support. I will try to keep her here for a few months until she can learn a little English; until she feels safe. She is the only survivor of a family of fourteen children. She watched her mother and sisters die from Typhus. She has terrible nightmares and I can only hold her in the night when she screams...."

Dorothy:

That's *Schwester* Marta's handwriting.

DOROTHY AND ERIKA LOOK AT EACH OTHER. EMMA HAS ENTERED FROM THE KITCHEN AND HEARD THE LAST EXCHANGE.

Emma:

Dorothy with your lamb's wool voice, will you see to our Mary?

DOROTHY EXITS UPSTAIRS. EMMA WALKS OVER TO ERIKA.

I don't know if it is right to tell you, but I think you should know. The Board is talking of closing the *Maedchenheim*. That's what *Prediger* Fast was here about. You talk from spirits being crushed. Mary's is not the only one.

ERIKA STARES AT EMMA AS THE LIGHTS FADE.

mennonite hymns
were made for dancing
pale on darkness
on terraces of brick
on hot summer nights
they were made for dancing slow
cheek to cheek dancing
for the bearded
& the beardless men
to glide graceful as doves
with their wives
mennonite hymns were made
for women touching men
in the heart on beds
scattered with lilacs
mennonite hymns were made
to be danced to
beside the red river
down in the valley
valley so low
mennonite hymns were made
with the full moon
in the eastern trees
pale on darkness
they were created
apart from the world
on the eighth day

Scene IV

LATE THURSDAY AFTERNOON, THE DAY OF THE HOME'S ANNUAL BIRTHDAY PARTY.

IN THE DARKNESS, WE HEAR A FEW BARS OF A HYMN PLAYED ON THE PIANO. SUDDENLY A MINOR CHORD SPLINTERS THE DARK.

LIGHTS UP ON DOROTHY SEATED AT THE PIANO. MARY AND ERIKA FASHION FRAGILE DECORATIONS FROM TISSUE PAPER. BUFFET STYLE SETTING ON TABLE. FOLDING CHAIRS LEAN AGAINST THE WALL IN ANTICIPATION.

Dorothy:

Schwester Marta won't allow it.

Erika:

I think this is finally one thing that *Schwester* Marta has no control over. It's the Board's decision and Miss Marta Epp answers to them.

Dorothy:

[WHISPERS] Closing? Both Mary-Martha and Ebenezer?

Mary:

I don't think *Prediger* Fast mentioned Ebenezer. Maybe.

Dorothy:

But where am I to go?

Erika:

Listen to you! Don't be so dramatic - that's my department.

Dorothy:

[FIERCELY] You don't understand! I have nowhere to go!

DOROTHY LOOKS AT BOTH THE GIRLS. SHE TURNS BACK TO THE PIANO AND SLOWLY CLOSES THE KEYBOARD LID. THEN SHE RISES AND EXITS

TO THE KITCHEN.

MARY LOOKS AT ERIKA ACCUSINGLY.

Erika:

Fast is the Grand Inquisitor not me. I think it's the best thing for her. It lessens her chance of serving - a life sentence as spinster inmate. They say that about us, you know. That everyone in Mary-Martha is over 30 and a spinster for life in prison garb of navy dress and white apron for day, black and white for evening.
[SHE GIVES A MOCK CURTSY]

Mary:

For you it's an escape. But Dorothy has no...ruby slippers.

EMMA ENTERS FROM THE KITCHEN, WITH TWO HEAPING PLATES OF DESSERTS.

Emma:

Everything looks festive except Dorothy. I would like you to take a holiday from teasing the poor girl, Erika.

Erika:

I am as innocent as the driven snow, which my shovel and I know intimately. [PRIMPS IN HALL MIRROR] I'm glad I got that hair cut. I looked just ghastly last year.

Mary:

[EXAMINING PHOTOGRAPH ON THE WALL] You did not. You're very photogenic.

Erika:

You think?

Emma:

Dorothy tells me she will not be in the our photograph this year.

Mary:

I don't know why. She's got great bone structure.

Erika:

I hadn't noticed.

TELEPHONE RINGS. EMMA NATURALLY MOVES TO PHONE, BUT ERIKA INTERCEPTS AND ANSWERS. DOROTHY ENTERS FROM KITCHEN AND MOVES TO DINING ROOM TABLE TO HELP MARY. EMMA JOINS THEM.

Erika:

Hello, Mary-Martha. It's me. [CARRIES ON LOW-VOICED CONVERSATION]

Emma:

[TO MARY AND DOROTHY]

I remember a time when no one wanted to answer the phone. "Mary-Martha Home, Good Morning. No. This is not Mary. This is not Martha, either. Yes, you have the right number." We drove people crazy. I think most people thought my *Schwester* named the *Heim* after herself.

Erika:

[ON TELEPHONE] Okay. Yes. Great. 'Bye. [HANGS UP]

Mary:

Will you help us hang the streamers from the chandelier, Dorothy?

Dorothy:

[INDICATING ERIKA] That's her department.

Erika:

Sorry, not this time. I'm going out. [SHE STARTS FOR THE STAIRS]

Dorothy/Mary:

But you'll miss the party!// What about the picture?

Erika:

She's the one with the bone structure. You'll just have to stand in for me, Dorothy. David wants to see me tonight. For my Birthday, I guess. He's taking me out somewhere nice.

Dorothy:

You have to be in the picture. It might be the last.

Erika:

[BEAT] I'll miss my bus. [DASHES UPSTAIRS]

UNCOMFORTABLE PAUSE AS THE GIRLS LOOK AT EMMA. ERIKA COMES DOWNSTAIRS WITH HER COAT ON, CARRYING HER PURSE. PUTS ON BLACK ANKLE LENGTH BOOTS AT THE DOOR.

Emma:

Marta is not a willow. She is an oak. While you are out with this 'English boy' remember that what you sow, you will reap.

ERIKA EXITS. PAUSE.

Emma:

So, she told you. But you must say nothing - especially to the Ebenezer girls. Nothing is certain. The Board must decide.

Dorothy:

Please don't let them close our Home, *Schwester* Emma.

Emma:

Everything will work out as it is meant to, Dorothy. So I guess you will be in the photograph now.

Dorothy:

I really don't want to.

Emma:

But the other pictures you have been in, *ja*?

Dorothy:

I heard about those photographs. When they're published in *Der Bote*, boys from all the churches snatch them up. They rate us and pick out all the prettiest girls.

Mary:

You have no worries, Dorothy. You're beautiful.

Dorothy:

No! No! Don't say that. My father says: "As a gold ring in a swine's snout so is a beautiful woman without discretion." And he says to thank God for a pretty face because it can be a blessing or a curse - a curse!

EMMA AND DOROTHY JUST STARE AT HER IN SURPRISE.

[MEEKLY] The masking tape is in the kitchen.

QUICKLY EXITS TO KITCHEN. MARY AND EMMA EXCHANGE A LOOK.

Mary:

[TO HERSELF] What isn't masked?

Emma:

I noticed you were burning your lamp oil quite late last night....

Mary:

I couldn't sleep.

Emma:

Writing letters, maybe?

Mary:

Maybe.

Emma:

King David was a poet. I send some excellent epistles myself - in German, of course.

Mary:

You write...?

Emma:

No, no. I have no gift that way. But I have been known to take a turn on the stage - in my younger years.

Mary:

The forbidden theatre? I don't believe it!

Emma:

Ja! I once played the Queen of Sheba in a *Jugendverein* play. In my costume I even turned a few heads, if I may humbly say so.

Mary:

You're always surprising me, Emma. It's like your mission is to make a rainbow bleed on our sidewalk. While the rest of us see a gasoline slick in a mud puddle, you remind us that we're tiptoeing through magic.

Emma:

It is all how we see. "For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." Always, *Immer* - my name - Emma.

Mary:

It might have better suited your sister. Marta needs everything to stay exactly the same. Preserved and unchanging - like the jars in her cellar. She refuses to admit that life flickers by so quickly. Every second is a new image, a new flash of reality - like one of Erika's movies. Maybe you could wave your magic wand in front of Marta's eyes.

CLOCK CHIMES THE HALF HOUR.

Emma:

Ach, *nein*! I need some magic. Look at me! Still not dressed and flour on my hands.

SHE QUICKLY GOES UPSTAIRS TO CHANGE.
DOROTHY RETURNS FROM KITCHEN.

Dorothy:

I'm worried about what *Schwester* Marta will do when she finds out about Erika. I'm afraid she's gone too far.

Mary:

You know what I think? I think Erika is the only one of us with any sense. Maybe she acts rashly, maybe she's stubborn and impulsive - but she risks doing something.

Dorothy:

A rebellious spirit is sinful.

Mary:

Weren't you listening last Sunday? "Sin" isn't the terrible things you've done it's "missing the mark." Sin is what you fail to do. I envy Erika.

Dorothy:

What if Marta throws her out?

Mary:

What if she does? Erika is doing what the rest of us crave so desperately.

Dorothy:

Going to the movies...?

Mary:

You don't fool me, Dorothy. You make yourself as innocent as a lamb. You talk in cliches so you'll never have to think for yourself or allow yourself to feel.

Dorothy:

What do you mean?

Mary:

I've heard you play. Maybe you won't say anything, but you're passionate through ivory keys.

Dorothy:

I play hymns...!

Mary:

So your passion is God directed! The divine spark of Creation through your music. To reveal your innermost depths, your deepest fears and desires. You're afraid to, as I am. Maybe Erika doesn't write or paint or play the piano, but she is passionate about life. I look at her and I'm ashamed. I once read somewhere that if you wanted to know someone, you shouldn't ask for their life philosophy - just ask them about their average day.

Dorothy:

I guess that makes our motto: "Cleanliness is next to --"

Mary:

It isn't a joke! Look at me! The only time I feel safe enough to write is in the darkness when everyone else is asleep. I'm free from censure and disapproving looks, or worst of all: the condemnation of silence.

Dorothy:

Maybe you're meant to write. You could be the next Emily Dickinson.

Mary:

"The soul selects her own society" - but I've segregated myself. I notice things, details. Light glinting on the snow like a million flash bulbs. A hundred perfumes mingling when I meet the other girls under the Eaton's clock. We go for hot coffee. I hold a white cup with an endless navy border. I watch as elegant, ascending wisps mingle in the air with our words. All the Thursday afternoons imprinted in my mind like the wax seal on my letters. But I don't really live for the sensations - they're just mental crib notes for my writing.

I want to feel and taste and touch just so that I can write it down. I write because I'm afraid to live.

My father once read one of my poems. I had left it out on my nightstand by accident. I was usually careful to squirrel everything between the onion pages of my Bible, where no one would look. I walked in on him reading it. He set the paper down and left. All day long he looked at me with a mixture of suspicion, confusion and disapproval.

Dorothy:

He didn't like it?

Mary:

I was too afraid to ask if it moved him, if it said something to him, anything. I never asked. And then - I never had the chance. You're lucky to have music, Dorothy.

Mary (cont'd):

Piano and voice seem the only Arts praised by our people. In a Mennonite church you can play and sing publicly, but you cannot write in private.

DOORBELL.

Dorothy:

They can't be here yet! We're not ready. Oh, this is terrible.

DOROTHY OPENS THE DOOR TO MARTA.

Marta:

I forgot my key.

Dorothy:

It was open.

Marta:

Oh. [TAKES OFF HER COAT, HANDS IT TO DOROTHY].

It's snowing again. Tell Erika she needs to shovel before the guests come.

BEAT

Dorothy:

I can't.

Marta:

Can't what?

Dorothy:

Can't tell her.

Marta:

[GROWING IMPATIENT] Why not?

Dorothy:

Because...because...

EMMA COMES DOWN THE STAIRS. SHE HAS CHANGED INTO A SUNDAY DRESS.

Emma:

Because our Erika has gone out for the evening.

MARTA RETRIEVES HER COAT FROM DOROTHY.

Marta:

[ICY VOICE] Then I will do the walk.

Emma:

Marta, what did they say? Any decisions?

Marta:

I must do the walk. [MARTA EXITS]

Emma:

She's angry. She shovels. She has a bad back. Just like mother.

Mary:

You and *Schwester* Marta don't talk about your parents, Emma.

Emma:

Marta will get *Hexenschuss*, mark my words.

Mary:

What's that?

Dorothy:

She means "Lumbago." *Hexenschuss* means "Witch's gunshot."

Emma:

[TO HERSELF]

Ja. But who pulls the trigger?

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons
of God.

Matthew 5:9

i have crossed this wilderness before
i have seen it empty
& have dreamt it filled
when asleep
& when awake

colour me with the red wrath of the winepress
the blood of women
with black *heimatlieder*
armbands kerchiefs
call me a child birthed
by a wild mare
woodscolt

i begin confession
after the need has passed
i am a stranger wandering
with no burying place
no resting place for my head

colour me menno

night blue in menno's eyes
now & the end of time
is only a moment
of erring astray
in menno's eyes
his protesting eyes

Scene V

LATER THAT EVENING. ROOM INDICATES REMNANTS OF PARTY. FAINT SOUNDS OF GIRLS LAUGHING/PLAYING OUTSIDE. CHAIRS RANDOMLY SET AROUND PIANO. MARTA AND FAST ARE STACKING CHAIRS. MARTA IS MOVING SLOWLY AND DELIBERATELY.

Fast:

Another year gone by, eh, Marta?

Marta:

Perhaps the last, *Prediger*?

Fast:

[CLEARING HIS THROAT] Another success. You've outdone yourself, as usual. The *kuchen*, the *Zwiebach*, the decorations.

Marta:

The baking is Emma's and the decorations are the girls'. You need not shower me with compliments. Idle flattery never suited you.

Fast:

And you were never one to be gracious. I'll be frank, then.

Marta:

I want nothing else.

Fast:

I couldn't help but notice the pronounced absence of your Erika this evening. When she didn't even arrive for the photograph I thought "it must be serious." Is she in bed with a fever?

MARTA IS SILENT.

Fast (cont'd):

I don't like how it looks, Marta. I have heard the talk. We know where Erika spends her free evenings. What's next - the dance hall? Don't think I don't know about those 'English' men. I was young once.

Marta:

[COLDLY] I know.

Fast:

[PAUSE] Speaking from purely personal opinion, I think the Board has a point about the *Maedchenheim*. As I said, times have changed - whether or not you have, Marta. You don't know how to deal with young girls nowadays. Afterall, you have no children of your own. [WITH MEANING] You might have. Things may have been different.

Marta:

Things were different. [GESTURES TO PHOTOGRAPHS ON WALL] These are all my daughters. It is only boys I can't deal with.

Fast:

I can see what will happen. Such a shame to see the *Heim's* unsullied reputation ruined at the...at this time.

Marta:

The Board has reached a decision...?

Fast:

No, no. Nothing yet.

Marta:

Then I will not hear your prophecies.

Fast:

[HE SHUFFLES NERVOUSLY] I must apologize for inconveniencing you earlier. That little mix up this afternoon. The new girl was confused.

Marta:

Yes. We Epp sisters are so...interchangeable.

Fast:

Not at all Marta. You're one of a kind. Too bad there's no one to carry on your good name.

HE ABRUPTLY TURNS, PUTS ON HIS COAT AND EXITS. MARTA'S FACE BEGINS TO CONTORT WITH PAIN. SHE SLOWLY MOVES TOWARDS DINING ROOM AS EMMA ENTERS FROM KITCHEN, HOT WATER BOTTLE IN HAND.

Emma:

I knew it! Just look at you! Now just leave everything and sit down. You'll be in bed for a week if you don't watch yourself.

Marta:

[WITH GREAT CONTROL] Somebody has to do it. They all want the party, but nobody stays to clean up afterwards.

Emma:

[WATCHING THE GIRLS FROM THE WINDOW] Oh, let them have their fun. It's that wet heavy snow that's perfect for snowmen. And better men of snow than...

Marta:

[MARTA GLANCES AT HER ASKANCE. MUTTERING FROM HER CHAIR] Next time, I'll let them have their fun with the shovel.

Emma:

...Johann is leaving early. I should have stayed in this room with you.

Marta:

[BITTERLY] As chaperon?

Emma:

As the U.N. [TURNING BACK TO THE WINDOW] A snowball fight! Ach, nein! Menno Simons would not approve! Johann Fast had better duck! Oh! Right in back of the head! [MARTA SMILES] Mary has a good throwing arm! Oh..not.... Poor Dorothy! That girl should learn to defend herself.

Marta:

She's a good girl. The others should learn from her example.
[GROANS]

Emma:

[EMMA PLACES HOT WATER BOTTLE BEHIND MARTA'S BACK]. There now. That's better.

[SHE SITS ON SOFA]

So. Do I need a troika to drag it out of you or will you tell me what happened with the Board?

Marta:

There is nothing to tell. Their new secretary, young Miss Retzlaff politely told me that the Board was unable to see me.

Emma:

But *Prediger* Fast asked to see you.

Marta:

It seemed Miss Retzlaff addressed the invitation to the wrong Miss Epp. *Prediger* Fast asked to see you. The Board must be tired of hearing my tired, old voice. The "reasonable one." I think that was what he said.

Emma:

They're just afraid because you stand your ground. You've even fought City Hall and won. Thursday afternoon's off for our girls - by law. They're afraid you'll win again.

Marta:

I thought perhaps Johann Fast still thought we were interchangeable.

Emma:

Will you never bury the hatchet?

Marta:

I carry no hatchet. And I carry no torch. How can you defend him? He tried to use you to hurt me. Men cannot stand rejection.

Emma:

Some of us reject ourselves before anyone else has the chance.

Marta:

Save your wisdom for the girls.

Emma:

[PAUSE. THEN QUIETLY:] Don't you ever wonder how it might have been?

Marta:

Never. But stop to think how it might have been if the *Maedchenheim* had never been. No matter what the Board may decide now, I did what was right.

BOTH SIT IN SILENCE. MARTA GROANS AS SHE ADJUSTS IN HER SEAT.

Emma:

Here let me do that...

BUSIES HERSELF WITH ARRANGING THE HOT WATER BOTTLE AND
PILLOW BEHIND MARTA'S BACK.

You know you've got to watch yourself. Last time your
Hexenschuss lasted two weeks. You push yourself too hard
sometimes, Marta. We're - none of us - as young as we used
to be. You can't do everything you know. Next time leave the
walk to the girls or I will help you.

MARTA ADJUSTS DOILIES. WANTS EMMA TO STOP TALKING.
EMMA RISES.

Why don't I make us some tea?

Marta:

[EXPLODES] I don't need a mother!

Emma:

[STOPS. THEN CROSSES TO STAIRS] I always did.

EXITS UPSTAIRS. MARTA TURNS TO SPEAK BUT CHECKS HERSELF.

QUICK FADE TO BLACK.

not with prayers to the dead
 or fasts or vigils
 we do not make our way
 down passover's stony steps
 there is no hair shirt
 that adds to our righteousness
 or flagellation of the flesh
 that saves ourselves from self

the just live by faith

with that word
 i kindle a fire
 i defy the pope
 i vex the devil
 i please god

the just live by faith

simon peter crucified upside down
 james slain by herod
 john exiled to patmos
 andrew scourged & hung on a tree
 philip stoned
 bartholomew flayed alive
 thomas the doubter burned
 through by a lance &
 simon the canaanite crucified
 thaddeaus beaten to death
 matthais stoned or crucified
 in ethiopia or colchis

not the first or the last
 to die before the world
 is redeemed
 those who live here
 walk in light
 & cast long shadows
 we have no prophets
 or princes
 no incense or oblation
 only a small moment

that moved on

Scene VI

LATER THAT NIGHT. HALL CLOCK CHIMES MIDNIGHT. EMMA SITS IN "MARTA'S CHAIR" IN THE DARK, A BIBLE ON HER LAP. THE FRONT DOOR OPENS A SLIVER. ERIKA TIPTOES IN. SHE JUST REACHES THE STAIRS WHEN:

Emma:

[STAGE WHISPER] In "Aschenbroedel" you would be a pumpkin.

Erika:

I thought everyone was asleep.

Emma:

Everyone should be.

Erika:

Goodnight.

Emma:

So soon? Don't think the only dates I had were in Matrimonial cake. Nothing to tell me? Or maybe an Old...Domestic like me wouldn't understand....

Erika:

[HESITATES, THEN DARTS OVER TO SITTING ON THE SOFA NEAR EMMA]

Oh, Emma. It was...wonderful. David took me to this restaurant that was like Hawaii. You wouldn't believe it - there was even a waterfall inside! There were tiny lights in the ceiling - like pinholes to let the moon through. It was so romantic. Emma, David is...he's...wonderful. I just adore him.

SUDDENLY LIGHTS ON. MARTA STANDS IN THE KITCHEN DOORWAY IN HER HOUSECOAT, HER HAIR DOWN IN A LONG BRAID.

Emma:

[TO HERSELF] In the cellar. I should have known.

Marta:

The only one you should adore is God.

ERIKA RISES.

What's that on your eye? Somebody has hit you?

EMMA PULLS A TISSUE FROM THE SLEEVE OF HER HOUSECOAT & HANDS IT TO ERIKA. SHE WIPES MAKE-UP OFF ANGRILY.

Erika:

It's not going to work. You're not going to spoil my perfect evening.

Marta:

Perfect? Shameful! That English boy keeps you out till this time of the night. Doing goodness knows what.

Erika:

We did nothing wrong. And he is not just "that English boy." His name is David.

Marta:

And does this David have a family? What is his family name?

Erika:

Rosdeba. David Rosdeba.

EMMA AND MARTA FREEZE. THERE IS DEAD SILENCE FOR A MOMENT.

Marta:

A Russian name.

Erika:

He was born in Canada, like me. So he's Ukrainian, big deal!

Emma:

[QUIETLY] *Ukrainski.*

Marta:

You will go to bed now. Tomorrow you will pack your things and get out.

MARTA STARTS TO EXIT, STOPS DURING ERIKA'S OUTBURST.

Erika:

You can't throw me out!

Marta:

You have decided.

Erika:

You're not banishing me because I went out with David, but because I told you his last name. Your condemning him for his heritage! What's the matter with you? Emma. Say something. Are you going to let her throw me out? Emma?

EMMA IS SILENT. ERIKA TURNS ANGRILY TO MARTA:

You talk about non-conformity. It's all just a smokescreen for elitism and fear. You act as though anyone who isn't Mennonite is a threat! You think there's something wrong with anyone whose last name isn't Friesen or Penner or Klassen! Well the war is over. It not 1939--it's 1959. You label the "other" as 'English' just so you have someone to fight against. Or to protect yourself from. If there's no persecutor - you'll invent one!

ERIKA WALKS OVER TO MARTA, PLANNING TO GO UPSTAIRS.

You think yourselves so righteous, so superior. If that's how you treated the Ukrainians in Russia, no wonder you were persecuted.

MARTA SLAPS HER IN THE FACE. EMMA LEAPS TO HER FEET. THE BIBLE TUMBLES TO THE FLOOR.

Emma:

You are a pacifist!

MARTA SINKS ONTO THE STAIRS IN DISBELIEF AT WHAT JUST SHE'S DONE.

Marta:

I...am...a...pacifist. We fled Prussia because we would not take up arms. We came to a land where we could practice our faith in peace. The land we worked for over 200 years. I remember the orchards. Our land, our prosperity. The land of milk and honey Catherine the Great gave to us. That the Lord gave to us.

Emma:

[QUIETLY] "And the meek shall inherit the earth...."

Marta:

We were pacifists when the Bolsheviks rode into Molotschna. They shot every boy in the village over the age of sixteen, or who looked sixteen. Victor. My brother, Victor, was fourteen, but he was a tall boy. And my uncles. We had no guns left. They had already been stolen by bandits weeks before. Before the massacre.

Emma:

[QUIETLY] "Blessed are the peacemakers...."

Marta:

There were fires in the distance. We heard rumours about the other villages, but we didn't believe. God would protect us. It was cold. I remember. I wore gloves in the house. October. We were all gathered in the second floor of the house to sing and to pray. It was so cold, I wore the brown gloves I had made in the house. I knit them. They had no fingers. Papa held my two hands out. He smiled: "Marta, you should finish what you start...."

Emma:

Papa...

Marta:

I wore my gloves in the house. We were singing and praying...until Bolshevik shouts drowned us out. They used sabres to hack down the door. It wasn't even locked. There was no *selbstschutz*. No self-defence. They dragged all the men out and lined them up on the side of my father's barn. Mamma was on her knees to their leader...

Emma:

Mamma...

Marta:

He hated us more than all the others. He used to work on the Hildebrand farm. He had stolen some tools and the Hildebrand boys beat him. He wanted what we had. What our people had built over 200 years in the Steppes. He swore revenge.

Emma:

Vengeance is mine...

Marta:

He would repay. I will never forget those eyes. Like ice, like picks to hew the ice. Nestor Machnov.

Emma:

Machnov...

Marta:

Mamma was on her knees to Machnov. He told the bandits to take aim. Mother crawled to the front. She stood before Papa. She was begging to spare his life. She stands in front of Papa: "Let me die instead. I will die for him." Machnov smiled. I smile. I think he is going to let them go. He smiles at them. A single bullet. It passes through them both. One bullet. The ice picks dance as they fall and he says...

Emma:

"...I learned how to save from you."

Marta:

How to save....

Emma:

Salvation...

Marta:

Five missionaries in Molotschna that week.

Emma:

The women in the long robes. And there was a *Prediger* who led the singing and tent meetings. The green tents. I had forgotten....

Marta:

...so holy in those robes. Chosen of God. Wanting to bring the Word of the Lord to the Ukrainian villagers, to the poor, the ignorant, the starving. There was so much suffering after the Revolution. So much bloodshed. The missionaries were bringing peace instead of the sword....

Emma:

I had forgotten...

Marta:

There was no more bread in the house. I was afraid they would come back and take the food. So I go to Uncle Johann's granary to make sure we can still make bread. I go at daybreak. I'm afraid they will see me cross the field. I will be shot down like a rabbit. But there was no one when I reach the granary door. My fingers sticking out of the gloves get stained with rust. I push hard on the door. There's something in the way. I use my shoulder. And then the smell. It strikes me in the face. I think it is something the bandits have done to poison the grain. To

Marta (cont'd):

starve us. But then I see. Black robes. And the red. It isn't rust on my hands. All five. Each was cut down in the middle by a sabre as they stepped through the door. That's why we'd heard nothing in the village. The sabres. You couldn't recognize their faces. Then I go home. I get matches. Everyone would think Bandits did it.

Emma:

The fire...I remember...and *Tante Gredel* cried....

Marta:

...Uncle Johann hung himself with a leather whip in the stable. With the leather whip he had braided himself from the horse hides. He did not want to starve like the peasants. But we could not make bread from those bloodstains. [PAUSE] I vowed to myself I would finish what the missionaries started. They would not have died for nothing at the hands of the Bandits. The Bolsheviks....

Erika:

The Ukrainians. I didn't know.

Emma:

I didn't know.

Marta:

[AS IF STILL IN A TRANCE] Forgive me. Both of you. Forgive me.

STARTS SLOWLY UP THE STAIRS

Emma:

Why did you never speak of this - Uncle Johann and the missionaries?

Marta:

[STOPPING ON THE STAIRS] Children must be protected from such things.

SHE EXITS.

LONG SILENCE.

Erika:

Emma, how old were you?

Emma:

I was six. Marta was twelve.

QUICK FADE TO BLACK.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.

1 Corinthians 13:11-13

Scene VII

STILL LATER THAT NIGHT. THE LIVING ROOM IS DARK. A SHAFT OF LIGHT SLICES THE STAIRWAY AND WE HEAR MUFFLED WHISPERS. ERIKA IS DRESSED AND COMES DOWN THE STAIRS CARRYING SUITCASES. SHE IS PURSUED BY MARY IN HER NIGHTGOWN. THEIR CONVERSATION IN STRAINED WHISPERS.

Mary:

Don't be rash. You always argue.

Erika:

Not like this. You don't understand. *Schwester* Marta told me to leave.

Mary:

No more threats this time.

Erika:

I'm calling Dorothy's aunt. I liked her and she said I could visit anytime.

THE HALL CLOCK CHIMES 3 A.M.

Mary:

"Anytime"?

DOROTHY, ALSO IN NIGHTGOWN, ENTERS FROM UPSTAIRS WITH A SMALL PIECE OF PAPER CLUTCHED IN HER HAND WHICH SHE GIVES TO ERIKA.

Dorothy:

Here's the number. Just don't wake *Schwester* Marta.

THE THREE STAND AWKWARDLY, UNSURE OF WHAT COMES NEXT.

Mary:

Be sensible Erika. You can't call anyone at this hour.

Mary (cont'd):

There aren't even any buses. Or have you smashed your glass teddy bear for taxi-cab fare?

ERIKA SITS DOWN ON THE SOFA LOOKING HAGGARD AND LOST.

Dorothy:

Schwester Marta will give you another chance. She probably just wants to scare you. She'll turn the other cheek, you'll see.

Erika:

I was never good at turning the other cheek. Not figuratively, and especially not literally.

Mary:

Are you saying...*Schwester* Marta...she hit you...?

Dorothy:

You're lying.

Erika:

Pacifist in theory, but not in practice. I seem to have that effect on some people.

Mary:

You walk around with a mouth full of gunpowder. This time - did you light a cigarette?

Erika:

[WEAK SMILE] Smoking can be hazardous to your health. Marta was more shocked than me. It wasn't her fault. I was really angry, but there were things I didn't know about Emma and Marta. About when they were in Russia. You hear about the terrible things that happened during the war. The pogroms against the Jews and the massacres at the Death Camps. They say the same things happened to the Mennonites.

Mary:

We hear murmurs sometimes in the church pews. Veiled discussions with grey heads bowed talking about "The will of God," whispering platitudes about faith.

Dorothy:

Really terrible things you block out. You try to pretend they never happened.

Erika:

The Bolsheviks came to Marta and Emma's village. They killed all the men over sixteen. Even the ministers. Marta and Emma...saw their parents murdered by bandits. Shot to death in front of their eyes. One bullet through both of them, like...like in a movie. But it's not supposed to be that way. Villains in black hats are shot - not your mother. It's not supposed to be that way.

Mary:

But it is. It always is: 1917, 1919, 1939. Movies are insidious because they make us believe otherwise.

Dorothy:

Marta and Emma must have been just...

Erika:

Just children.

MOMENT OF SILENCE.

Dorothy:

[SPEAKING VERY QUICKLY] If your mother is gone, there's no one to protect you. The world is full of evil. Unsafe. When you're young you don't think so. You trust everyone. You think that they love you and that adults are strong. That they'll be kind and take care of you. But they don't. They can lie, they can hurt you. You have to have a safe place where nobody can get you. Even if it means hiding in a closet. You have to hide from people who just want to hurt you.

ERIKA AND MARY STARE AT DOROTHY.

Mary:

Dorothy, what happened?

DOROTHY LOOKS UP AT THEM SHARPLY. THEN SHE TUCKS HER KNEES INTO HER CHEST, HUGGING HER NIGHTGOWN CLOSE.

Dorothy:

I'm so ashamed. A man. From the last house I lived in.

Erika:

[IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTANDS] Where you only stayed two months.

Dorothy:

At first I thought he was really nice. He said I could read any of the books in his study. I could go in anytime, even without asking. Then he would corner me in the kitchen. He would say things and I didn't understand what he was talking about. Then he kept trying to...touch me. I went out every chance I could. To the store, to the park. I tried to fix it so I was never around but he would come home from work unexpectedly and find me.

Erika:

What exactly did this man, do? Did he ever...you know...

Dorothy:

No!! No, I would have died! I'm so ashamed.

Mary:

Why didn't you say anything?

Dorothy:

I told the wife I was leaving. I guess he was afraid, so he hid some of her pearls in my room. He threatened to go to

Dorothy (cont'd):

Schwester Marta and say I stole them. It proved the...the...kind of girl I was. He said he was going to ruin the *Maedchenheim's* reputation. He said I'd be disgraced and shunned. And they'd throw me out. I was sure he's do it. I'm always afraid he'll find some way to have Marta send me away.

Erika:

Listen to me, Dorothy. He's the one to blame. Sometimes it doesn't pay to have good bone structure.

Dorothy:

It's a curse! It's a curse like my father said. He wouldn't believe me. He'd say I was a Jezebel. That I did it on purpose. He'd...he'd...blame me. I couldn't go home, I had to stay here with *Schwester* Marta, where I'd be safe.

Erika:

I've often made your safe haven hell. We're more alike than I realized.

Mary:

You know that woman's pearls, Dorothy? You're worth more. You have no price.

Dorothy:

[SMILES FAINTLY] More poetry. [SHE SLOWLY UNCURLS AND STANDS] I need to get some water.

Mary:

I'll get it.

Dorothy:

No, no. I'll get it. [FAINTLY AS SHE EXITS THROUGH KITCHEN] I need to...look after myself.

Mary:

Well, Erika? The silent, suffering pearl has been found and you're free from the shackles of Mary-Martha. Your one night on the town seems to have been worth it.

ERIKA REMAINS SILENT.

You withstood the wrath of Marta and all of our disapproval. Don't take this the wrong way, but you have the tenacity of a prairie winter.

Erika:

My perfect evening. [PAUSE] He left me, Mary. Afraid I was too serious. Didn't want to give me the wrong idea. He's going to finish school before he even considers settling down. When he asked me to dinner, I convinced myself that he'd present me with a small, blue velvet box. But he didn't even remember it was my Birthday. I left. I walked home. That's why I'm so late. For once I didn't intend to annoy Marta - and for this - I'm thrown out. I'm sure that appeals to your poetic sense of justice. [BEAT] Mary. It's not supposed to be this way.

Mary:

The Hollywood romance melts on the screen right in front of your eyes.

Erika:

I wanted to believe it so badly.

Mary:

We see what we believe.

Erika:

I wanted David to hide me in a wedding dress. Someone to take care of me. My mother was too tired when she came home from the factory to do anything, except yell at me if the dishes weren't done or Ellen was crying. I'm twenty - and I've single handedly raised four children! When I was old enough to realize I deserved more, my unbridled tongue lashed me to my father's leather belt. So I escaped to this prison and sent money home. From that version of home to this one. Gives a new meaning to *Heimweh*.

Mary:

Explain to Schwester Marta, she'll understand. She'll let you stay.

Erika:

I knocked my suitcase against your bedroom door on purpose. I wanted you to stop me. I wanted you to help me find a way to stay - at least until Mary-Martha is closed for good. Now I know how Dorothy feels. There's nowhere else to go.

SUDDENLY THE LIGHTS ARE TURNED ON IN THE LIVING ROOM AND MARTA AND EMMA COME DOWN THE STAIRS IN THEIR ROBES. MARTA SEES ERIKA'S BAGS.

Marta:

Go back to bed, both of you. It's late and tomorrow you work. Leave if you must, Erika, but...if you like, you can stay. But, I still say that good things don't happen after midnight.

Mary:

[RISING] Sometimes they can.

Erika:

We'll do what we can to help you keep the *Maedchenheim* open.

MARTA LOOKS AT EMMA.

Emma:

They had a right to know. They are not children.

Marta:

Go to bed now. You'll be late for work and the Mary-Martha girls are never late.

Erika:

I won't be late again, *Schwester* Marta.

THE GIRLS START MOVING TOWARDS THE STAIRS. DOROTHY ENTERS THROUGH THE KITCHEN DOOR. SHE STOPS EVERYONE WITH:

Dorothy:

We won't let the Board close down the *Maedchenheim*, *Schwester* Marta. You and Emma lost your first home, you're not going to lose this one.

Marta:

[MOVED] We do what we can.

Dorothy:

We'll do what me must.

Emma:

[STEPPING UP TO MARTA]. *Selbstschutz*.

THE THREE GIRLS GATHER ON THE SOFA, MARTA TAKES HER CHAIR, EMMA GETS THE "*MAEDCHENHEIM'S* BIBLE" AND MARY TAKES PEN AND PAPER. THEY START TO PLAN THEIR STRATEGIC DEFENCE IN FLANNEL NIGHTGOWN FATIGUES AS THE LIGHTS FADE.

wait for me menno
where the waters run

into the sea my brother
i am coming

to you carried along
on the strength

of your song i have
missed
you

i have missed
you often

menno brother *bruder*
i have missed
your bright ocean
sky/steppe

your bright eye
deflected off evil

your red neck
damp with sweat
&

hay seeping
from your pores menno
my fair one
on the body
which is broken for me
now i dance
now i lay me down
to milk from your hairy breast
the knowledge of life
& climb to god
from here

i would

fuck you dry
of your pilgrim song
& pour it out
on troubled waters
to smooth the way
for your children
to come home

i would come home too

Scene VIII

FOUR MONTHS LATER. A BRIGHT JUNE MORNING. A BEAUTIFUL RAINBOW BOUQUET OF FRESH FLOWERS SITS IN THE CENTRE OF THE DINING ROOM TABLE. MARY STANDS IN THE OPEN FRONT DOOR. THE SUITCASES MARY CARRIED IN THE FIRST SCENE STAND EXPECTANTLY NEAR THE DOOR. MARY WAVES. SOUND OF CAR HORN; THEN CAR DRIVING AWAY.

MARY STANDS LOOKING OUTSIDE FOR A MOMENT. THEN SHE ENTERS, CLOSES THE DOOR. SHE LOOKS AROUND THE ROOM FOR A MOMENT AND THEN SITS ON THE PIANO BENCH, THINKING AND PLAYING A FEW NOTES. MARTA ENTERS FROM KITCHEN CARRYING A JAR OF PRESERVES.

Marta:

[OFF] Dorothy! Emma is waiting for you...[ENTERS]
Oh, it's you. Have they gone?

Mary:

I was surprised you weren't here to see them off.

Marta:

I said my goodbyes this morning. But to housework - you can't say goodbye.

Mary:

Dorothy was asking for you. She wanted to know if you liked the flowers.

Marta:

Beautiful of course, but too extravagant for Emma and me.

Mary:

I thought you'd come to wave with me as the car drove into the sunset. Especially for Dorothy since she's lived here for two years--

Marta:

I told you, we said our goodbyes. One goodbye is enough.

Mary:

What were you doing downstairs?

Marta:

We must still get things done that need to get done. The cellar has to be cleaned out. All these jars! Who is going to be eating? Emma is always in the kitchen. We have enough to last another 25 years. We didn't know from the Board we'd get... [HER VOICE TRAILS OFF]

Mary:

An expiry date.

Marta:

Except for my preserves. They last forever. That's what Emma says: "Marta's jars are sealed for life." You know, she would sometimes put jars aside for the furnaceman to open when he came by. The lids were so tightly shut we didn't have the strength. Then I learned this trick with a rubber band around the lid - for grip. No more need for men.

PAUSE

So. You will go back to your mother?

Mary:

Just until I'm able to find a suitable place in the city. I'll try to find a basement suite near the university. There are some families I've met through Dorothy's aunt who wanted to have help with their children. I could get room and board while I study...and write.

Marta:

Still that writing.

Mary:

Like the Anabaptist women in prison - I have to smuggle out my message. Take away all the paper and ink - I'll still etch my will on a tin spoon with a pin.

Marta:

You are not in prison and you do not proclaim faith. You will spend your life's blood alone in a room and in the end you will hide your words in the trash.

Mary:

No. Not forever. When I trust my own voice, I'll put faith in my words and slip them past the jailer. You helped me decide to keep writing. [MARTA'S EYES WIDEN] You have always said our lives are an open book read by many.

Marta:

Ja. That is true.

Mary:

Actions and words are a language to be interpreted. Between what I do and say, everyone already knows what I think. My face is already a page of text etched with my average day - I don't need a spoon. When I get my thoughts on paper, at least I have a chance to edit, to say as precisely as I can what people already suspect I'm feeling, if they've taken the time to notice.

Marta:

Most people never notice. Do not be disappointed when no one bothers to read you.

[SILENCE]

And Dorothy and Erika. Do they still plan to live together?

Mary:

They'll stay with Dorothy's aunt for a time and then find a room of their own.

Marta:

Dorothy is a good girl. Maybe she will be a good influence on Erika.

Mary:

They'll take care of each other. Before she left, Erika said she'd never felt so close, so much of the feeling that this really was a home as when we were banding together to defend it. The crisis made us like family.

Marta:

When you girls are settled you must let us know how you're keeping. You know that Emma and I will be here. At least for a while...until a buyer is found. But enough. You are getting a ride?

Mary:

I'm splurging. My first taxi-cab to the train station.

Marta:

Watch that you do not make it a habit. We can get used to luxuries that we cannot afford.

Mary:

We can also make idolatry of self-sacrifice. [ADDING QUICKLY] You've taught me to value my wages.

Marta:

I can only hope that we have taught our girls some things in the time they spent here. That is my hope and my prayer. I will have faith that the Lord's will has been done.

Mary:

You imagine it has.

Marta:

You say it has not..?

Mary:

[REASSURINGLY] No, no. It's just that to have faith you have to imagine. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen." You see what you believe.

Marta:

Next you will say I need glasses.

Mary:

Reading glasses...? [MARY SHRUGS] The taxi is on its way.

Marta:

So. Then, all the best to you. *Gott segne dir.*

MARTA PUTS DOWN THE JAR SHE IS HOLDING AND HOLDS OUT HER HAND. AFTER A MOMENT, MARY TAKES HER HAND. MARTA RELEASES HER HAND AND PICKS UP HER JAR AND TURNS TO GO TO THE KITCHEN. MARY TURNS AND PUTS ON HER COAT. SHE PICKS UP HER BAG WHICH SHE THEN DROPS WITH FURY.

Mary:

Is this how it's going to be, then? At the end? All masks and politeness? We tried, Marta. We defended the *Heim*. Even Dorothy. You saw what it did to her to bare her soul like that in a room full of men who coughed and shuffled their feet. She said how much she needed you and the Mary-Martha.

Marta:

She is a good girl.

Mary:

Even Erika. I wanted to pull *Prediger Fast's* vocal chords out of his throat for a necktie when he started maligning her as the prime example of the failure of the *Maedchenheim* nowadays. But she never flinched. He turned the colour of your canned beets when she asked their forgiveness. Explained how lost and alone she felt when there was no Home to go to. Her humility left them all speechless. Even Fast.

Marta:

She surprised even me.

Mary:

All of us standing up with testimonials - baptized into the Mary-Martha Home. It was just as she said - we'd never felt so close as during the crisis. We dovetailed in our efforts to face the Board. United by faith because - pacifists or not - Mary-Martha was worth a fight.

Marta:

It made no difference. They had already decided.

Mary:

But don't you feel different, Marta? Maybe we didn't win but at least we stepped out of silence and submission. For once, we defended ourselves. We said something.

Marta:

Selbstschutz. [TURNS AWAY]

Mary:

The way the world is now, we need a safe haven more than ever. You never had somewhere safe, so you built one. But now, the wine is vinegar. Even if it wasn't everyone demands new wine skins.

Marta:

[TURNS BACK]

Except you. You said nothing. You - who wants to be the big writer - silent.

Mary:

All I could do was sit there, in front of them and swallow...blood from the paper cuts on my tongue. Sliced by the pages and pages unspoken inside me. I couldn't be a witness for everything that is right about this Home because

Mary (cont'd):

there is the other side of light, soap and purity. I couldn't say or even write - how I feel about all of us in this *Heim*. Some things would hurt too much to say.

Marta:

You are a critic, not a witness. But I did what I could - while they let me.

Mary:

Did you? I don't. I hardly ever do what I can. I don't live. I don't speak. I have all this life trapped inside me - preserved in silence. Rotting and fermenting. Because I'm too afraid to act. Sin isn't movies or dance halls or nail polish, Marta. It's failing to do what we might have done. We're all - all of us in this house - so afraid. Everytime I walk in the door I feel a moth in my throat. It's lifeless and empty.

This house - this glass house - has been shattered by the sledgehammer of the Board. That's what it feels like. But maybe that's what had to be. Now we're forced to act - or else walk all over the shards, ignoring the blood.

STARTS TO GO AND STOPS.

It didn't work, Marta. You tried to preserve your world, to keep it secure from the murky, raging world out there. But you've packed yourself away. You've packed your heart and soul in brine sealed it air tight from the world, just waiting for a crisis. But the crisis is - there is no crisis. You've preserved yourself. You've preserved yourself in silence and sacrifice all these years. Like all the jars in the cellar, you've gone to waste.

MARY PICKS UP HER SUITCASE AND EXITS.

MARTA STANDS FOR A MOMENT. SHE WALKS TOWARDS THE KITCHEN. THEN SHE STOPS AND FACES DOWNSTAGE. SHE HOLDS THE JAR UP WITH TWO HANDS, LIKE AN OFFERING. THEN SHE OPENS HER HANDS AND LETS IT SHATTER.

BLACKOUT.

in the legends of my people
the rivers run red
with blood i wept
& dreaming i dreamt
i anointed new flowers
with clay from the grave
& with spittle
& her face was as strange
as the flowers
& i said by the by
i am searching
& she told me again
of the saviour
as she did in
the summers before
& i wept in the dark
as she held me
& dreaming i dreamt
i was found.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I
have kept the faith.

1 Timothy 4:7

Scene IX

LATE EVENING AT THE END OF AUGUST. EMMA ENTERS FROM KITCHEN JUST AS MARTA ENTERS THROUGH FRONT DOOR, A DARK SWEATER DRAPED OVER HER SHOULDERS. SHE CARRIES A HANDFUL OF LETTERS.

Emma:

Marta! Where is your sweater? Summer is over.

Marta:

I'm glad I checked. I missed these.

HOLDS UP STACK OF LETTERS. MARTA SITS IN HER CHAIR. SHE SORTS SOME OF THE LETTERS AND HANDS SEVERAL TO EMMA.

Emma:

That makes about 400.

AFTER A MOMENT EMMA STARTS TO CHUCKLE.

Marta:

Tell me.

Emma:

All those letters. I just thought about what we can do with them when we go. Remember when *Prediger* Fast asked: "Have you any concrete evidence of the impact of the *Maedchenheim*?" I think we'll drop some evidence on his doorstep: three garbage bags full!

Marta:

It makes no difference now.

Emma:

I know. I just want to heap burning coals upon his head. Think of it Marta - the look on his face would be worth the *Hexenschuss*!

BEAT. BOTH SISTERS SUDDENLY BURST INTO LAUGHTER - IT IS THE FIRST TIME MARTA LAUGHS IN THE PLAY.

Marta:

Letters from all over the country. Even from Paraguay! After 30 years. I never thought to ask, how did all our girls hear about it?

Emma:

Word of the closure got around. Especially with the article Mary wrote: "There's No Place Like Home." Must have been Erika's idea.

Marta:

Three garbage bags full. We did teach them a few things.

HOLDS A LETTER AT ARMS LENGTH.

From Mary.

EMMA HANDS HER OWN BIFOCALS. MARTA SCOFFS. AND LEANS BACK WITH HER ARM STRETCHED FORWARD. SURPRISED:

It's Scripture.

MARTA HESITATES, THEN ACCEPTS THE BIFOCALS. SHE PUTS THEM ON AND IS CLEARLY SURPRISED AT THE CLARITY OF VISION. SHE READS:

"'Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the Mother of James and the other women with them who told of [the resurrection] to the apostles, but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.' (Luke 24:10-11)

"The apostles of the church didn't believe those women either. But it was to the women that Christ appeared first after the Resurrection. Mary, the listener and dreamer, Martha the doer. They were both at the tomb. They knew the truth and nothing could take that away. Always, Mary." We did what we could.

Emma:

Four hundred letters. Four hundred.

Marta:

[SHE FOLDS UP THE LETTER, TAKING OFF GLASSES]

It is not so bad for women to write. Here. This is from Dorothy. You read it.

Emma:

[TEARING OPEN LETTER] It's almost a reunion!

EMMA HOLDS OUT HER HAND FOR THE BIFOCALS. MARTA PASSES THEM INTO HER HAND LIKE A SURGICAL INSTRUMENT. READS SILENTLY FOR A MOMENT:

She says her training is going fine [READING SILENTLY] Impossible! Ice packs, Marta! I don't know what they are teaching in hospitals nowadays. [READS ALOUD] "Erika is also well. You'll be pleased to know we are getting along famously."

Marta:

She even sounds like Erika, already.

Emma:

[CONTINUES READING] "She is very pleased with her new secretarial work. She dresses up and is attracting the attention of some gentlemen in the office. Erika is so pleased with her new life, that she hasn't even had much to say about Mary and David. Yes, Emma! Our Mary is spending time with Erika's former 'English boy.'" Oh dear. She says they met in one of Mary's English classes. It seems that David is also a writer. They have formed a little group where writers share what they have written. A "safe haven for writers" she calls it.

Marta:

We have taught them a few things. Erika's English boy. Do all men think the *Maedchenheim* girls are interchangeable?

Emma:

[EXASPERATED] Will this never end, Marta? Don't you understand? You're the one Johann wanted. [PAUSE] How do you think it feels going through life being the second choice?

Emma (cont'd):

[MARTA IS SILENT] Marta, do you really never wonder how it might have been...?

Marta:

No. I have had over 2000 daughters.

Emma:

I have had 2000 young girls come and go in my life. I tried to bless them in the time they were here, to give them moments of happiness, but they were never mine. Now I think I just wanted to be *Aschenbroedel* so that someone might wave a happy ending over me. I wonder, Marta. I wonder! You never ask me, but I wonder how it might have been.

Marta:

So, you want to blame me? I never asked you to choose between Johann and the *Maedchenheim*. All of our girls loved you. Johann you never could have been sure of.

Emma:

He would have been good to me. We would have learned to love--

Marta:

How can you talk of love? He made you second choice - you've said so!

Emma:

I do not think I ever felt like anyone's first choice, so I could have accepted that.

Marta:

Foolishness! You were always first to me.

THE TELEPHONE RINGS. EMMA ANSWERS.

Emma:

Hello. Mary-Mar....Emma is here speaking.

SHE CARRIES ON A BRIEF CONVERSATION IN GERMAN AND THEN HANGS UP.

That was Mrs. Thiessen. Ebenezer was sold on Wednesday. They have given them one month to find somewhere else to live. After 33 years - a month's notice.

Marta:

What did she say?

Emma:

She said: "Until here, the Lord has provided...."

MARTA IS SILENT, GRATEFUL FOR THE DISTRACTION OF SORTING MAIL. SHE HOLDS UP A LETTER.

Marta:

From the Board. Maybe someone is interested in this house. [MARTA SCANS LETTER FROM ARMS LENGTH DISTANCE] I cannot believe this!

Emma:

Must we join Mrs. Thiessen on the street?

Marta:

Johann Fast writes to say that considering my years of dedicated service to the church and considering my present situation the Board has taken it upon themselves to offer me a...[STUMBLES OVER THE WORD] stipend...for life. Do they think I need charity? That I am helpless? It is an insult.

Emma:

I asked them.

MARTA'S MOUTH DROPS OPEN

Marta:

You asked them? You went behind my back for charity? Do you want to shame me?

Emma:

There is no shame, Marta. You were nineteen when you started this *Heim*. They have taken it back with no consideration for how you will live. Thirty-three years. You put everything into the *Maedchenheim*. You gave it your life, and what do they give you? Oh, yes, a nice plaque for your wall. They made no provision for you at all.

Marta:

Until here the Lord has provided.... [EMMA GIVES HER A LOOK. MARTA IS FLUSTERED AND ANGRY] How will I face the Board in Church. They will think I am a pauper. Worse yet - greedy!

Emma:

You do not pay the bills, Marta. What is worse, that we get a monthly allowance - that you have earned - or that the creditors come and take away furniture that belongs to the church?

Marta:

Why did you never say anything to me?

Emma:

Because I knew I could take care of things. You have already done enough. They are giving you fifty dollars a month - the salary of a missionary. I go make some tea. It's chilly in here.

EMMA EXITS TO KITCHEN. MARTA RE-READS THE LETTER. AFTER A TIME, EMMA RETURNS WITH TWO CHINA TEA CUPS ON A TRAY.

Emma:

I added some honey from the Wiens' farm.

Marta:

I will refuse their offer. I will live as I have always lived. I have always done what I could. I am strong. I am not the frail, old woman you seem to think I am.

EMMA ANGRILY PLACES THE TRAY ON THE TABLE. A CHINA TEA CUP CRACKS IN HALF, BROWN TEA FILLS THE SAUCER. MARTA AUTOMATICALLY REACHES TO START PICKING UP THE PIECES.

Emma:

Stop it! Stop! Leave it alone! Why must you fix everything! Don't you understand? Why must you always be unbreakable? You are not, you don't always have to be...to be the mother!

Marta:

Emma!

Emma:

It is *Selbstschutz*, *Selbstschutz*, Marta! Will you never understand that? You have become all things to all people, but you have never taken time to see what you need to be for yourself. You will speak for the girls, you will speak for the *Maedchenheim*, but you will never open your mouth to protect yourself - like a screw is clamped on your tongue. If you will not fight for yourself, you must accept that someone will. When was there ever anyone to take care of you?

Marta:

I don't need anyone. I was responsible for you. Taking care of you. There was no one else.

Emma:

There was the Hildebrands. Their sons were murdered. They wanted to take us in.

Marta:

And you say the Board is ungrateful. I always did my best for you. There is nothing I would not do for you. I may not have always done the right thing, but I did what I could. Always. So there would be bread on our table. So that we would not be separated. When they wanted us to go to separate families because of the sickness, I refused. Look at our cousins! They were separated and they died in Siberia. I kept us together. Tante Gredel died of Typhus you were all I had left and I wasn't going to lose you, too.

Emma:

I know what you did. But you were hardly old enough to take care of yourself. You did what you could. You did your best. But you could not take Mamma and Papa's place, no matter what.

Marta:

I could never replace them. I did what they would have wanted. I finished what they started. I kept us together. I kept us alive.

Emma:

That's all we were - alive. But what good is that when there is no joy, when there is no sharing. I never had a sister. We hardly spoke you were so busy working -

Marta:

I made sure you had decent clothes and a place to live. How can you say these things to me? I would have died for you.

Emma:

You already did! You died for me when you were twelve, because you never lived for yourself!

[MARTA SITS IN STUNNED SILENCE]

Marta, there have been martyrs enough. Enough sacrifice.

PAUSE

Emma (cont'd):

The war is over. The *Heim* is closed. The world is still turning. Erika, Mary - even Dorothy - are doing well. There is no more crisis.

Marta:

What do you want me to say?

Emma:

What will you do?

Marta:

I could ask you the same thing!

Emma:

I will thank God for the years I could serve our girls in His name. And I'll will try to forgive myself.

Marta:

What is your great sin?

Emma:

I will try to forgive myself for everything I have not done.
[PAUSE] What will you do?

Marta:

Why do you say these things to me? You want me to say that I have done nothing with my life? That I am no longer necessary? You want me to admit that I have been discarded, like a dishrag?

Emma:

Marta. My hair is as white as yours. I'm all grown up. I don't need you.

Marta:

[FEELING THE BLOW OF THE WORDS] So you have said.

Emma:

But there is someone who does.

[BEAT. EMMA RISES AND PLACES HER HAND ON MARTA'S SHOULDER.]

Marta:

All I ever wanted was for you to be safe and happy.
All I ever wanted was to make a safe haven for the girls.

Emma:

You did your job too well.

Marta:

I gave them my life and they call it cheap room and board.

Emma:

What will you do, Marta? What will you do now?

Marta:

I will do what I can. I will learn to be your *Schwester*. And
I will miss Mamma, too.

FADE TO BLACK.

The End.

GLOSSARY OF GERMAN TERMS

Aschenbroedel - The fairy tale "Cinderella."

Bibel Stunde - Bible Study. Literally "Bible hour."

dienst-maedchen - maid, or domestic. Literally "servant girl"

Gesichte - story

gurken - pickles

Maedchenheim - girls' home

Heim - home

Heimweh - homesickness. In the 1920's and 1930's many of the newly arrived immigrants left their families to work alone in the cities. Their loneliness and depression was alleviated somewhat by the fellowship in the girls' home.

Prediger - pastor, minister

Reisechuld - travel debt; owed by many Mennonite families to the Canadian Pacific Railway for passage from Russia to Canada.

Schwester - sister

Selbstschutz - "self-defence." In 1918 a self-defence committee was organized to protect some of the Mennonite villages in Russia from plundering bandits. This was controversial because of the traditional pacifist stance of the Mennonites. By the time the committee was formed, most fire arms had been stolen by the bandits. The *Selbstschutz* was largely ineffectual.

Zwiebach - Home made buns with two layers.

FURTHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Images, memories, snatches of dialogue, stored away in the folds of imagination resurfaced in this creative writing thesis - often in surprising ways. While these sources are impossible to pinpoint, the sources of encouragement and inspiration have been clear and vital for the completion of this project.

My life is blest with the presence of the most extraordinary, talented, wonderful people. They don't even mind my fondness for superlatives.

I mention them here, in brief, in no particular order, but with love and gratitude to:

Dr. Robert Kroetsch - my last hope.

Dr. Dennis Cooley - for a listening ear and warm hug when I needed it most.

Carol Shields - an ever gracious hostess for toasty tea and warm chats on the 6th floor.

Nicole Markotic & Charlene Diehl-Jones - inspirations of wit & power; beautiful, remarkable women who also write that way.

My fabulous Fletcher Argue office mates - Phyllis Johnson, Rose Weaver & Margaret Shaw-McKinnon (roommates once more!).

Joan Lawrence & Maureen Robinson - for sage advice & cat tales & accents.

Dad & Robb - for early morning Pembina Highway jaunts, making short stories long.

Dad & Roger - for reminding me that she who endures to the end shall be saved (a.k.a. those annoying words "wrap-it-up!").

Mom - for late night proof-reading & translations & snacks.

The fabulous friends for telephone & in person pep-talks - Diane & Connie & Jennifer & Jayne (in Winnipeg); Esther & Airdre (in Vancouver); Ashley & Aimie (in house).

Richard - for the power of letters, especially "M".

Gordon - for the affirmation and rush of "in-print".

Agnes ("Oma") Albrecht, Agathe Teske & Dorothy Wiebe - truly remarkable women of strength & spirit, these *Maedchenheim* alumni brought history home.

& to Frieda Esau Klippenstein - who told me about the *Maedchenheim* in the first place.