

A DANCE TO THE GIVER OF LIFE

Revd Christopher Garland

Scene 1

Husband and wife emerge from their hut. The husband is carrying a scrappy dancing mask, with some feathers missing.

HUSBAND: Tomorrow is the Forest Spirit's dance
In which we must their power enhance.
And as, by dancing, we show for them our care
We pray them, with us, their power to share.
But, in a mask like this, I can't appear.
You have forgotten about it all the year.

WIFE: You wear it: you prepare it.
Just some feathers are all you need
Which a proper man would find with speed.

HUSBAND: You come with me on a hunting trip
And I'll soon find feathers I can strip.

They set on a hunting trip, and there is slapstick, as the wife points to birds, which the husband tries to go after, and misses. The wife becomes tired, and the husband tells her off in dumb show, and drags her along. Then, as she is being dragged, she points to another bird, he drops to go after the bird, she runs away, and hides, he comes back, searches for, and finds, her, and then drags her along again. In the end, they both settle exhausted against an egg-shaped object.

Scene 2

In this scene, there are a group of chanters and kundu at the side of the drama-area, as well as the dancers waiting inside the "egg". The husband and wife are still sleeping against the egg, as both kundu drums begin to beat, both inside and outside the egg, and the husband and wife wake up and sit up.

HUSBAND: I feel the air alive with sound
I feel that spirits are all around.

WIFE: See, the egg, where you rest your back
Quick, turn, and see it crack.
We made it by our bodies warm.
Now life from it will outward swarm.

HUSBAND: The egg is home of wondrous power.
Come wife, behind that bush, let us cower.

The egg opens, and the dancers slowly emerge, and begin to dance, with movements that accompany the words of the chanters.

CHANTERS: Beating, beating to the rhythm of life
Beating slowly, with no need of strife.
Slowly, we gather to a dancing pace
Emerging out, with natural grace.
Twisting and weaving, along the line,
Advancing and glancing, we intertwine
Now, freely and gaily, we stamp our feet,
Giving ourselves, fully, to the rhythm's
beat,
Nodding and swaying, in our dancing
dress.
Our every move to life says yes
The music and dance makes us into one
The rhythm of life has its work well done

Now, our steps link us up, in a line of
peace
In turn, we settle in waking ease
In quiet, we quake with waiting vigour
Till the dance grows again, bigger and
bigger.

Four other dancers enter.

With other spirits, we leap turn
To win the release, for which all life must
yearn
(*This may be repeated*)
Then, back to the egg, we make our way
To wait to be born, at the break of the day.

*The kundu drums die down, the dancers crawl back into their
egg.*

HUSBAND: We have the paradise birds' spirits seen.
But I do not know whether we wake or
dream.

WIFE: If we could, of those birds, some feathers
glean,
We would, of the dance, be King and
Queen.

HUSBAND: Now, of the birds, I feel such awe,
I could not kill them any more.

WIFE: You speak as a fool, and as a coward
Kill them, and, by them, be empowered.

HUSBAND: Speak not like, in this fearsome place,
Come, back to the village, at our quickest
pace.

(They go back to the hut.)

Scene 3

On the way to the hut, they meet the white man, who is carrying the gun.

WHITE MAN: Where are you going, at such fretful speed.
What's your problem, what's your need?

HUSBAND: Oh air, we have forest spirits seen
And, I would, we could, of our fears, be clean

WIFE: Do not hear his talk of fright.
He is captive of the dreams of night.
What we have seen, could all be ours
If he didn't fear its wondrous powers.
If in the forest, you dare to roam,
You'll find the paradise birds' secret home.

HUSBAND: Of forest spirits, I have no care,
So to find the birds, is an easy dare.
I'll follow your tracks back, right away.
While the trail is fresh, I need not stray.

WIFE: You'll know you have the answer found
If you see the large egg upon the ground.

WHITE MAN: If those birds, I can shoot and kill,
Of their feathers, I will take my fill.
The egg you saw, must be from a nest,
So, with my gun, I will go in quest.

HUSBAND: Those whom the spirits do not scare
May find they miss what is special there.
Before you go, please, your heart prepare,

For you are going to the spirits' lair.

WHITE MAN: Delay me no more with your worries poor.
I've left much worries behind; I've a
modern mind.
Into the forest I'll press ahead. . . .

*(He blunders roughly in the direction from which the husband
and wife have come. The husband and wife return to their hut.
The white man wanders round and round, until he comes near
the egg.)*

Now does that, or that, mark their trend?
Confound those people, I've lost my way
And now it is no longer day.
My mind, with anger, is disturbed
And empty fears, I must keep curbed
The air heavy, I want to sleep,
I can just up to this white stone creep.

*(He crawls up to the egg, rests against it, and sleeps almost till
dawn the next day.)*

Scene 4

*The kundu drums begin to beat out odd taps, with no real rhythm.
The white man wakes up.*

WHITE MAN: Desire for riches disturbs my rest
But I will not, by forest fears, be
oppressed.
This stone is the egg, of which they spoke,
My body's warmth has the egg shell broke
An egg so big is a foolish dream,
But I'll take my distance, so I can scheme.

CHANTERS: Doubt and anger disrupt our dance
One by one, we must take our chance.

The egg splits open, and spirit dancers came out one by one. As they do so, the white man shoots at them. One or two he hits, others struggle off into the forest to hide. The white man takes some feathers from the birds that have been shot.

CHANTERS: One by one, one by one
Our line has gone,
Our dance is done
We are scattered, by the gun.

WHITE MAN: With the feathers I've caught
I'll see what wealth can be bought.

(He starts back to the direction of the hut.)

Scene 5

The white man goes the hut, where the husband and wife are waiting.

WHITE MAN: Come out, come out,
And obey my shout.
No thanks to you,
I've feathers few.
Now, I'll make my way.
To see for what they'll pay.

(The white man goes off.)

HUSBAND: Wife, it's with you I'm annoyed
That he's the spirits destroyed.
By your sharp tongue and scorn
You have the weaving torn
That wrapped our world with the spirit
powers
And linked the rhythm of their life with
ours.

WIFE: That link do we, with music, make

Our dance can the rhythm, from the spirits,
take.

HUSBAND: But now, the spirits are death and done,
Doomed by the white man's doubt, and his
gun.
The world they lived in is split apart
And can't be renewed by the dancers' art.
The white man's feathers were the marks
of death,
For they were all of the spirits that he'd
left.

WIFE: Death shall have the final word,
Our life is not tied to the spirit of a bird.
Now I will, the Christian preacher, hear
Who has told me, of death, to have no fear.
For Christ has risen from the dead
And with new life has His people fed.
It is to Him, we should reverence give,
And, in His name, respect all things that
live.
Come, your dancing mask, now let us take
And back to the egg, our way now make!
The egg that breaks, new life to free,
In that a sign of life we see.
Though forest spirits have no power to
scare,
For the life of the forest, let us show our
care.
The good news of Christ, let us celebrate
By giving new life to our former state.

Scene 6

The husband and wife return to the forest, and the broken egg.

HUSBAND: By calling spirits, by magic, we tried,

To gain their power upon our side.
Now, grace, we know, by God is given,
And by no earthly power may life be
driven.
So, for God's sake, His gift we praise,
And our thanks to Him, for them we raise
Our dance, we see, from spirits draws no
power
But prays God, on life, His blessings to
shower.

*The man begins to dance, with his mask on, the kundu drums
begin to play. One by one, the fallen spirits wake, and join in the
line of the dance, and perform a dance similar to that performed
in Scene 2. The chanters chant.*

CHANTERS: Bless the Lord, all created things
Sing his praise, and exalt him forever
Bless the Lord, you heavens
Sing His praise, and exalt Him forever
O let the earth bless the Lord
Bless the Lord, you mountains and hills
Bless the Lord, all that grows in the
ground
Sing His praise, and exalt Him forever.
Bless the Lord, all the birds of the air,
Bless the Lord, you beasts and cattle.
Bless the Lord, all men on the earth,
Sing His praise, and exalt Him forever
O people of God, bless the Lord
Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord
Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord
Sing His praise, and exalt Him forever.
Bless the Lord, all men of upright spirit
Bless the Lord, you that are holy, and
humble in heart.

Bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit
Sing His praise, and exalt Him forever.

The dancers end the play by dancing out of the drama area. The wife has been watching the dancers, and she may make an act of worship, such as kneeling before the cross, which may be brought on, and then she may leave by following the dancers.