

THE ORANGE GROVE

By Tom Jacobson

Playwrights Ink  
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## CAST OF CHARACTERS

PETER TURNER, 30s-40s, an organist

LARRY YOSHITOSHI, 30s, a software expert (sings bass)

LOTTIE BERMAN, 30s-40s, the church office manager (sings soprano)

YOLANDA OLAFSON, 20s, an aspiring opera singer (sings soprano)

VERONICA RICHARDS, 40s-60s, a nurse (sings alto)

GUSTAFINA LIEDTKE, 90s, a widow (sings alto)

PASTOR, 40s-60s, a genial tenor

SIMON CARPENTER, 20s-40s, a homeless tenor

NORBERT BRANMOE, 50s-60s, the congregational president (sings bass)

The action takes place in the choir room or sanctuary of Orange Grove Lutheran Church in Los Angeles. The time is the present.

SETTING: If the set is a choir room, it may be very stark, with only chairs and a piano. If the set is a church sanctuary, then it should include pews, a piano (and/or organ), and stairs leading to a chancel with an altar. The most optimal staging is to perform the play environmentally in the sanctuary of an actual church.

With the houselights still on in a church sanctuary or choir rehearsal room, PETER TURNER, 30s-40s, comes in carrying a sheaf of music and wearing a light jacket. He sits at the piano, sorts the music meticulously, and selects a few pieces. He plays a medley of *For All the Saints*, *Three Kings* from Mendelsohn's *Elijah*, *What Child is This?*, and *Thine is the Glory*. As he concentrates on his music, a number of other people quietly enter the room. VERONICA RICHARDS, 40s-60s, wearing a nurse uniform, comes in carrying a Tupperware container of homemade treats and a bottle of communion wine. Just passing through, she disappears, jingling a set of keys. Overlapping her entrance, SIMON, 20s-40s, comes in from another direction. He is rather scruffy and wears several layers of clothing—none of them particularly clean—and starts shedding them while standing rather close to the piano and staring intently at PETER, who studiously ignores him as he plays. LOTTIE BERMAN, 30s-40s, comes in carrying a recorder case and a few pieces of paper. She looks around, then almost bumps into NORBERT BRANMOE, 50s-60s, as he enters and she tries to leave.

NORBERT

Excuse me—

LOTTIE

(With a nod toward PETER.)

Shhh!

NORBERT

Oh, right, sorry—

LOTTIE

Shhhh!!

LOTTIE leaves. NORBERT goes to the lighting controls (or switch) and starts dimming the house lights as well as turning

on additional lights and adjusting them.  
LARRY YOSHITOSHI, 30s, comes in with  
music. When PETER sees him, he stops  
playing.

LARRY

(On cell phone.)  
You shoulda got a Mac. Gotta go. I'm late.

PETER

(Slight Oklahoma accent.)  
Late!

LARRY

Traffic—Santa Monica Boulevard—

SIMON

Mr. Turner—

PETER

Three minutes before the full rehearsal—

LARRY

I practiced on Sunday, but it's been a few days—

SIMON

Mr. Turner—

PETER

Simon, we need to rehearse Larry's solo, and he's late—

LARRY

(Overlapping.)  
—Late, I'm late. But I'm ready—

SIMON

Just wanted you to know your car is fine.

PETER

Oh...good.

LARRY

Hey, nice haircut.

SIMON

I been watching it and it's fine.

PETER

Thanks. Yours is too short—*again*.

PETER

'Preciate it. Why don't you sit and listen to Larry? He's been *practicing*.

LARRY

Yeah, well, we'll see. Need to do this quick so Yolanda will be surprised—

PETER starts to play and LARRY gets ready to sing. SIMON stands there, staring for a moment longer. LARRY sings *O God Our Help in Ages Past* in a strained, nervous tenor voice that is somehow charming in its naiveté. SIMON gets bored, sits down and organizes the clothes he shed. While LARRY sings, NORBERT continues to play with the lights. LOTTIE comes back in and assembles her recorder. VERONICA passes through jingling her keys but without the treats or the wine. LOTTIE hands VERONICA her papers as she passes by.

VERONICA

Oh, Lottie, the bulletin—thank you—

LOTTIE

Shhh!

VERONICA takes the papers and starts to leave, almost running into PASTOR, 40s-60s, and GUSTAFINA, 90s, as they come in. PASTOR wears clerical garb.

VERONICA

Pastor! Welcome back!

PETER

Just in time for rehearsal!

SIMON

Oh, Father, could you—

PASTOR

Hello, everybody!

VERONICA leaves. PASTOR waves at LOTTIE, who waves back with her recorder. SIMON immediately goes to PASTOR and whispers in his ear. PASTOR digs in his pocket and gives SIMON a little money. GUSTAFINA takes her seat. SIMON leaves. LARRY returns to singing.

LOTTIE

(A warning.)  
Yolanda!

LARRY immediately stops singing, and PETER stops playing. YOLANDA, an attractive soprano in her 20s, comes in wearing a backpack.

YOLANDA

Pastor, comment allez-vous?

PASTOR

Tres bien, et tu?

LARRY hides his music and goes to YOLANDA. LOTTIE practices on her recorder.

YOLANDA

Ca va. That's all my French. How was Provence?

PASTOR

Tres jolie! And at Taizé we learned a brand new liturgy. But it's terrific to be home. Bon soir, Larry!

LARRY

(Helping YOLANDA with her backpack.)  
Bone sewer, Pastor.

NORBERT

(Approaching PASTOR.)  
Are you jet-lagged? I always get so worn out coming back from Minnesota—

PASTOR

That sounded wonderful!

YOLANDA

What did?  
(Struggling out of the backpack.)  
Larry—ow!

PASTOR

Not at all! Just walking in, seeing this, all of you—  
(Tears in his eyes.)  
C'est magnifique. Tres bien, oui, tres bien. Pardonez-moi—  
(He leaves, almost bumping into SIMON as SIMON enters.)

LARRY

My French.

YOLANDA

Your French is unpardonable.

NORBERT

He really shouldn't—

SIMON

Thanks, Father!  
(To the others.)  
Father gave me—look, he gave me—  
(Dashes out.)

YOLANDA

Gustafina, how are you?

Sehr gut. GUSTAFINA NORBERT  
He's a pastor, not a father!

YOLANDA  
Oh, don't make me do French *and* German tonight!  
(Dashes out.)

LARRY  
(Following YOLANDA.)  
Yolanda--!

NORBERT  
(Leaving with LARRY.)  
He doesn't have that kind of money—neither does the church—

Everyone has left except LOTTIE,  
GUSTAFINA and PETER.

PETER  
Guten abend, Frau Liedtke.

GUSTAFINA  
(German accent.)  
How are you, Peter?

PETER  
I could have sworn there was a choir here a minute ago. No one takes All Saints Sunday seriously but me.

GUSTAFINA  
I am on time.

PETER  
Ja, sehr Deutsch!

GUSTAFINA  
Ach, your German is terrible!

VERONICA  
(Bustling back in with papers and her keys.)  
So, Peter, did you hear about the school?

PETER  
What'd they break now?

VERONICA  
Their lease. They're leaving.

PETER  
Leaving!?

VERONICA  
After Christmas.

PETER  
In the middle of the school year?

VERONICA  
They found a facility with handicap access. Methodist.

PETER  
But...doesn't their rent pay for about a third of our budget?

GUSTAFINA  
Half!

Concerned, LOTTIE stops practicing her recorder.

VERONICA  
A little more than that.  
(Handing LOTTIE the papers.)  
I edited the psalm. It was way too long.

PETER  
Somebody shoulda managed that relationship better.

PETER  
How can we get another school mid-year?

LOTTIE  
You edited God?

VERONICA  
We can't. And we'd have to meet ADA requirements anyway, at least forty thousand dollars.

PETER  
Does Pastor even know?

YOLANDA comes in,  
followed by SIMON.

GUSTAFINA  
Ja. Talked about it in the car all the way here.

YOLANDA  
Simon, I can't give you any money.

PETER  
I thought he seemed more choked up than normal.

SIMON  
I don't want money.

VERONICA  
I'll start the coffee.  
(Leaves.)

YOLANDA  
Ask Pastor for money.

LARRY  
(Sticking his head in the door.)  
Oo-ee-oo!  
(Disappears.)

SIMON  
(Grabbing an offering envelope and pencil.)  
Your—your—autograph.

GUSTAFINA  
(Startled.)  
Mein Gott!

YOLANDA  
My autograph!?

SIMON  
What was that?

LOTTIE  
(At the same time.)  
Her autograph?!

LARRY  
(Sticks his head in again.)  
Oo-ee-oo!

SIMON  
Before you go off to the opera and get famous—

YOLANDA  
(Signing the envelope with the pencil.)  
I could write you a whole novel before that happens. Peter, can we practice my solo after?

PETER  
Won't be an after till we get started.

YOLANDA  
Oh, Larry, stop.

LARRY  
(Coming in.)  
I'm a llama. When I was in Big Sur last year I heard llamas greeting each other, and that's what it sounded like.  
(Makes llama ears with his fingers.)  
Oo-ee-oo! How was the workshop?

YOLANDA  
Just exercises all day, no real singing.  
I'm so past that.

LARRY  
You have to work if you want—

SIMON  
(Trying to get her attention.)  
I sweat too much. Once I had to leave a party cause I dripped in the punch. I don't go to parties now.

YOLANDA  
Like I need a lecture after eight hours of "ma me mi mo moo, ma me mi mo moo."

LARRY

The Master Chorale called again. Why haven't you—?

YOLANDA

Larry, I'm a soloist! Not—

LARRY

(Making llama ears.)

Oo-ee-oo!

(SIMON also makes llama ears.)

SIMON AND LARRY

Oo-ee-oo!

SIMON, LOTTIE AND LARRY

Oo-ee-oo!

YOLANDA

Honestly!

PETER

Will the llamas please take their seats? I'd like to get us out of here by nine.

NORBERT

(Coming back in with PASTOR and taking a seat.)

LARRY

Yeah, we need to get started.

--So I'm planning on running a speaker wire out to the narthex so mothers with crying babies can listen to the sermon—

PASTOR

Wonderful, Norbert.

LOTTIE

If there were any babies...

YOLANDA

We only have one soprano.

LOTTIE

More than enough.

SIMON

Yolanda, Larry's got a surprise for you.

YOLANDA

A surprise? Really?

LARRY

It's nothing. *Simon!*

YOLANDA

Larry, that's so sweet.

PETER

People, people, please.

(Holding up an anthem. Everyone digs through their folders for the anthem.)  
I know you think you know the anthem cause it's a familiar hymn, but I want it in parts  
and it's not as easy as it seems. Especially for the men.

PASTOR

Except for the tenors, of course.

SIMON

We got it perfect.

LOTTIE

Tenors!

PETER

Faith like a mustardseed. Starting with verse two, men only, please.  
(Plays brief introduction.)

MEN

(Singing, not very well.)  
Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine  
Yet all are one within your grand design  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

LOTTIE and YOLANDA  
whisper to each other and  
giggle.

PETER

Gentlemen, you've done a marvelous job of suiting sound to sense—

LARRY

We're in glory shining?

PETER

No, feebly struggling. Let's hear the tenors on that line.

PASTOR AND SIMON

(Singing as PETER plays.)  
We feebly struggle—

PETER

Without me this time.

PASTOR AND SIMON

(Singing without PETER playing.)  
We feebly struggle—

PETER

You're a little under pitch on the C sharp. Try raising your eyebrows.

PASTOR AND SIMON

(Singing with exaggeratedly raised eyebrows.)  
We feebly struggle—

PETER

Better. Basses, same line.

PASTOR

Only better? Not perfect? We *are* tenors.

PETER

Yes, but don't give up hope. Basses.

LARRY AND NORBERT

(Singing, LARRY enthusiastically, NORBERT quietly.)  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine—

PETER

Larry, a little more feeble, Norbert a little less. Can you open your mouth a bit more?

NORBERT

(With a very small mouth.)  
No.

PETER

No?

NORBERT

I have a Norwegian jaw. My dentist told me it's the smallest bite he's ever seen. Very limited range of movement.

YOLANDA

I'm Norwegian and I have a big bite.  
(Demonstrates.)

NORBERT

Oh, no. Mine's unusually small.  
(Demonstrates.)

LOTTIE

That's for sure.

PASTOR

It's a very polite bite, Norbert.

NORBERT

I don't have what you'd call a leadership mouth. I'm more suited to be vice president than president of the congregation—heh, heh—

PETER

All of the men, please, same place.

MEN

(Singing. PASTOR hits a very sour note.)  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine—

LARRY breaks up with laughter.

SIMON  
Feeble!

YOLANDA  
That was scary.

LOTTIE  
What was that?

NORBERT

Heh, heh—that was definitely a struggle.

PASTOR

I thought I was much better that time.

PETER

It was a bold mistake, a proud Lutheran sour note—

PASTOR

Oh, that's a *treble* clef!

LARRY

Sorry, speaking of struggle, I just had an idea about the school.

NORBERT  
I've been thinking about that, too.

PETER  
Wouldn't the council meeting be a better—?

LARRY

Rather than chase after the money to bring us up to handicap standards, why don't we sell the property and merge with another congregation, say whatchacallit in Santa Monica—?

GUSTAFINA

Merge?

NORBERT  
You mean Mount Olive?

PETER  
People, people—

PASTOR  
The folks at Mount Olive'd never come here—their building's much newer than ours.

LARRY  
No, if *we* sell—the land alone—we're sitting on at least a million dollars—we could create an endowment for a larger, stronger congregation—

GUSTAFINA  
Sell the church?

SIMON  
What's an endowment?

PETER starts noodling on the piano.

LARRY  
I keep telling you we're really naïve about money, not asking for pledges for the coming year—

LOTTIE  
That's what we do at my temple—pledges—

YOLANDA  
Aren't we here to *sing*?

NORBERT  
It's called a faith budget.

PASTOR  
The Lord will provide.

LARRY  
It's bad—stewardship—that's the word you use, right, Pastor? We could do some good with that money. Isn't that what churches are supposed to do—good?

YOLANDA  
Larry, please!

PASTOR  
Let's not forget we're at choir rehearsal—

PETER  
Yes, oo-ee-oo, choir!

PASTOR  
Larry, you know how many Lutherans it takes to change a light bulb?

LARRY  
How many?

EVERYONE BUT LARRY  
(In mock horror and astonishment—it's an old joke of PASTOR'S.)  
Change??!!

LARRY

Just a suggestion.

PETER

I suggest we hear the women on verse two.

YOLANDA

Please!

LOTTIE

Who?

PETER

Oh, blest communion.

GUSTAFINA

Where?

PETER

Verse *two*. Shall we? Do let's.

WOMEN AND PASTOR

(Singing as PETER plays.)

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine—

LARRY snorts. Everyone looks at him.

PETER

The women are sounding frighteningly postmenopausal.

PASTOR

Oh, did you say just the women? Pardonez moi.

LARRY cracks up.

PETER

This time with estrogen.

WOMEN

(Singing, with LOTTIE flat and GUSTAFINA starting each line early.)

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine

We feebly struggle, they in glory shine

(YOLANDA glares at GUSTAFINA. LARRY giggles more.)

Yet all are one within your grand design

Alleluia! Alleluia!

LARRY is laughing silently but very hard.  
He's almost drooling. PASTOR starts to  
giggle as well.

YOLANDA  
Larry, honestly!

LARRY  
(Trying to stifle his laughter.)  
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

PETER  
Lottie, I think you're a wee bit flat.

PASTOR  
I can't help it, either!

SIMON  
I don't know why but she sounds terrible.

NORBERT  
Hoo-boy!

LARRY makes a strange stifled-laughter noise, almost a choking sound. PASTOR cracks up.

YOLANDA  
Try coming down on top of the note rather than scooping up to it. And *smile*.

(Chilly.)  
Oh. Thank you.  
LOTTIE

YOLANDA  
Larry, it's *not funny*.

(Barely able to speak.)  
Sorry.  
LARRY

PETER  
And Gustafina—  
(No response. He speaks louder.)  
Frau Liedtke!

GUSTAFINA  
Yes?

YOLANDA leaves.

PETER  
I appreciate your leadership in coming in even a little earlier than everyone else—

GUSTAFINA  
Thank you. My daughter gave it to me for Christmas last year.

PETER

(Louder.)  
Promptness is certainly a virtue, but watch me so we all start together, all right?

GUSTAFINA

All night?

PETER

(Very loud.)  
Just watch me, please. Let's try it with everybody—

GUSTAFINA takes out her hearing aid and bangs it against the seat, then puts it back in. At the same time, SIMON waves his hand as if to clear the air.

PETER

Yes, Simon?

SIMON

One of the tenors made boom gas.

PASTOR looks embarrassed, as he's the only other tenor.

PETER

Think of it as the peace that passeth understanding. Everyone. Where'd Yolanda go?

YOLANDA

(Coming back with a glass of water.)  
My chords were dry. Better to have water than—

GUSTAFINA

(A small gasp.)  
Gretchen!

YOLANDA

Gretchen who?

PASTOR

No, Gustafina, it's only Yolanda.

YOLANDA

(As LOTTIE giggles.)  
*Only* Yolanda?

LARRY and PASTOR confer in whispers.

GUSTAFINA

Oh, my dear! I'm so sorry. Just now you looked like my grand-daughter Gretchen. Gave me the shivers—she died in a car accident six years ago. Where are my pills?

PETER

(Going to GUSTAFINA.)  
They do look alike, don't they?

NORBERT

She and her parents didn't come to church.

GUSTAFINA

She was very pretty, like you.

YOLANDA

Oh, I remember her. She sang, right?

SIMON

Nobody's pretty as Yolanda.

PETER

She played piano.

NORBERT

A very pretty girl.

GUSTAFINA

And Peter was her music teacher. Back when he was in graduate school.

LOTTIE

Oh, you finished? Congratulations.

PETER

No, I'm still at USC.

YOLANDA

They let you stay that long?

SIMON

He's never gonna graduate.

GUSTAFINA

(To PETER.)  
Sometimes it's so painful even to see  
you at choir.

PASTOR

(To LARRY.)  
I don't care about property values!

(To YOLANDA.)

And tonight you were almost like her ghost. A doppelganger—you know the German word?

YOLANDA

No.

LARRY

Shall we try verse one, all of us? I know the tune.

PETER

Ah, maybe that's what we need—the unison part! It's getting late and we're not even through our first anthem.

EVERYONE

(Singing. Very boldly unison. It sounds pretty good.)

For all the saints, who from their labors rest  
All who by faith before the world confessed

As they sing, VERONICA comes in with her keys, sits down, pulls out her music and prepares to sing.

EVERYONE

Your name, O Jesus, be forever blest  
Alleluia! Alleluia!

VERONICA

(Opens her mouth to sing, just as they've finished.)

Oh! I'm sorry. Coffee's ready.

PETER

We haven't quite earned our break yet.

NORBERT

I could use some coffee, 'cause my throat gets quite dry.

(Puts a cough drop in his mouth.)

As you get older, you don't produce as much phlegm.

VERONICA

And there are some lemon ginger coconut bars—

PASTOR

While we're on break—

LOTTIE

I don't have phlegm. It's not ladylike.

PETER

We're not on break—!

PASTOR

I'd like everyone to think about an idea I had. With the school gone, we'll need to save some money, and I was thinking—

NORBERT AND PETER

No!

PASTOR

Now, wait a minute. You don't know what I was going to propose.

(They stare at him for a moment.)

I was thinking that perhaps we could budget for a little less salary for me next year—

NORBERT AND PETER

No!

VERONICA

Pastor, you do this every year.

NORBERT

Heh, heh. And every year the Council says no.

VERONICA

And if Fred Briscoe were here, he'd give you a raise for having the nerve to propose such a thing!

LARRY

He *is* here.

SIMON

When I was a baby I used to pretend to be dead to freak my parents out. A tiny baby!

NORBERT

That's right!

PETER

Under the altar—

YOLANDA

What?

LARRY

I found a bunch of little white boxes under there when I was helping Norbert install the sound system. I opened one up before I saw the label—cremated human remains!

LOTTIE

Ew! Is that what those are?

PASTOR

Doris didn't want to keep dusting him at home.

YOLANDA

Larry, ishda!

NORBERT

So, Pastor, if you don't stop talking like that, we'll have to bring Fred out to testify.

YOLANDA

If you want to save money, don't hire that liturgical dance troupe for Pentecost.

VERONICA  
 Oh, we have to!  
 (Making liturgical dance movements.)  
 I thought it was beautiful.

SIMON  
 That was stupid!

LOTTIE  
 That was Pastor's idea.

LARRY  
 It's not just saving a penny here or there or finding forty thousand for an ADA renovation. Any time I make practical suggestions for stabilizing finances or increasing attendance, everybody tells me why we can't—

PETER  
 People...

NORBERT  
 We'll find the money. We always do. We bought the new organ seventeen years ago and raised the hundred and sixty thousand dollars in just eighteen months!

PETER  
 People...

PASTOR  
 That's a big reason we can't merge with another church.

LOTTIE  
 A big waste, if you ask me, with a congregation this small.

VERONICA  
 The organ's built to last 50 years.

NORBERT  
 It's not a waste!

PETER wanders out.

NORBERT  
 It has fifteen ranks of pipes, which is a lot for a sanctuary this size. Our organ donors wanted a real pipe organ, not one of those electric digital ones.

YOLANDA  
 Excuse me, but Peter's *leaving*.

LARRY  
 Like I said—just a suggestion.

SIMON  
 Hey, where'd Mr. Turner go?

VERONICA  
 I don't think we're going anywhere. When did your husband found Orange Grove Lutheran, Gustafina?

GUSTAFINA

Nineteen and forty-four, right after his ordination. His first church—his only church! This was just an orange grove then. The oranges were so sweet. We still had ten trees. After the education building, there were three, but there came some fungus.

LOTTIE

Now there's only one old tree left.

LARRY

Forget I ever mentioned merging—!

PASTOR

We don't need to think about that. Not yet, anyway.

PETER wanders back in, eating an orange.

LARRY

It just seems like a realistic approach—  
given the upkeep required here.

PETER

Yecch! Sour!

NORBERT

I take care of maintenance. A merger's giving up, like huddling together against the cold, unchristian world. A last desperate—

VERONICA

Peter, don't we need to practice? Isn't this  
the anthem for Sunday?

YOLANDA

Okay, everybody, Peter's  
back.

PETER

Oh. You think?

PASTOR

I think it's coming along very nicely. At least—

LARRY AND PASTOR

—In the tenor section.  
(LARRY cracks up.)

PETER

Let's try the third verse. Different words, but the same harmony as verse two.  
(Gives pitches.)

ALL

(In harmony and *a capella*. It sounds pretty good.)  
 The golden evening brightens in the west  
 Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest  
 Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest  
 (SIMON starts waving his hand to indicate personal gas.)  
 Alleluia! Alleluia!

YOLANDA  
 (To LOTTIE.)

Smile!

GUSTAFINA takes her pills out of  
 her purse and gets ready to take one.

VERONICA

Simon, stop that!

SIMON

It's bad!

PETER

You sounded very good that time, now—

SIMON

I'm gonna have to go outside—

PETER

No!

GUSTAFINA signals for a sip of  
 YOLANDA'S water to take her pill.  
 YOLANDA gives her the water.

VERONICA

Simon, behave—

SIMON

It's not me—it's Father!

VERONICA

Simon, that's enough!

PASTOR

Veronica, it's all right. Simon, sit down—

SIMON

Does anybody have any—just a little—today's not been a good day—

NORBERT  
Pastor already gave you too much—

VERONICA  
You're just trying to get attention.

SIMON  
(Grabs GUSTAFINA'S pills.)  
I am not.  
(Puts all the pills in his mouth at once.)

GUSTAFINA  
My pills!

LARRY  
Hey, you might wanna spit those out.

SIMON grabs the water from YOLANDA  
and swallows some with the pills.

NORBERT  
What are they?

VERONICA  
Blood pressure, who knows what could—

GUSTAFINA  
Veronica, I need those!

SIMON  
They don't do anything. See?

VERONICA  
Gustafina, I'll refill your prescription  
first thing tomorrow.

PETER  
People...people!

PASTOR  
Perhaps now we've earned our break.

NORBERT  
A little—

VERONICA  
Coffee! There's coffee in the coffee room.

GUSTAFINA  
Treats?

LARRY  
And cookies?

LOTTIE  
What kind of treats?

VERONICA  
Bars—lemon ginger coconut.

GUSTAFINA  
(Leaving.)  
Ginger—good for the digestion.

YOLANDA  
Homemade?

VERONICA  
(Leaving.)  
Oh, I forgot the cream. Does anyone  
want lemonade instead of coffee?

LARRY  
(Leaving.)  
I didn't have dessert.

SIMON  
(Starting to leave.)  
I want lemonade.

NORBERT  
(Starting to leave.)  
I could use a little—

PETER  
Maybe we should take—

YOLANDA  
(Leaving.)  
Larry, not too many—

PETER  
—A break.

PASTOR  
Wait, Simon, maybe Peter will go over the trio with us. Norbert—

LOTTIE  
Pastor, I'm almost done with the bulletin. I just need you to fill in the Prayer of the  
Church.

PASTOR  
After choir, Lottie.

LOTTIE  
And can we cut out the Children's Sermon since we haven't had children for the last four  
months?

PASTOR  
If we stop having it, they most certainly won't come.

LOTTIE  
Never mind, then.

LOTTIE goes out.

NORBERT  
Do you want to do the trio? Nothing wrong with starting early.

PETER  
It's only October. Christmas isn't for two months yet.

SIMON

The one with all the oohs?

PETER

And you've done it for the last four years.

PASTOR

Maybe this year we'll get it right.

SIMON

Let's do it. I remember it. But can I get lemonade first?

NORBERT

I don't think I have my music.

PASTOR

I'll share. Simon, why don't you have lemonade after?

Defeated, PETER gets out the music *I Wonder as I Wander*.

NORBERT

Oh, Pastor, I had another idea. What about the Lutheran high school? Aren't you on that committee for the synod? They could use our education building or even tear it down—and we could finally get some good parking built—

NORBERT notices that PETER is seated at the piano staring at them expectantly. NORBERT shuts up and gets in position. PETER plays.

SIMON

(Singing beautifully.)

I wonder as I wander out under the sky  
How Jesus our savior did come down to die  
For poor lowly people like you and like I  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

While SIMON sings verses two through four while PASTOR and NORBERT accompany him with oohs, LOTTIE appears in warmer (California winter) clothes and changes the lights. VERONICA and LARRY appear, also in warmer clothes. They each add a Christmas decoration to the set. After they've added their decorations, they perform a mock liturgical dance behind the

MEN as they sing. During the dance, YOLANDA (also in warmer clothes) adds a few decorations (with help from LOTTIE) then takes her seat. GUSTAFINA comes in wearing winter clothes and takes her seat as well. By the end of the song and the dance, LOTTIE, GUSTAFINA and even PETER are enjoying a good laugh.

SIMON

I wonder as I wander out under the sky  
How Jesus our savior did come down to die  
For poor lowly people like you and like I  
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

PETER

Good, good—it's only mid-December—we've still got ten days till Christmas, so there's time to polish.

YOLANDA

Larry, for heaven's sake!

PETER AND LARRY

What?

SIMON

Do you ever worry that you're going to suddenly lose your mind and eat something gross off the sidewalk?

YOLANDA

Oh, nothing, he was just—

VERONICA

(Starting to leave.)

It was liturgical dance! I hope you appreciated it. We've been practicing for weeks!

PETER

Thank you everyone for a wonderful rehearsal.

(SIMON starts to run out.)

Wait, Simon. Pastor?

PASTOR

(As everyone bows their heads.)

Gracious God, thank you for this evening when we can join together to praise your name and enjoy each other's company. Bless our preparations for the celebration of the birth of your Son. Please guide us safely home and watch over those who have no place to go this night. In Jesus' name we pray—

EVERYONE

Amen.

Everyone prepares to leave, gathering coats,  
etc.

YOLANDA

Larry, I'll see you in the car.  
(She leaves.)

SIMON

Anybody seen my toothbrush?  
(Disappears.)

NORBERT

Veronica, before you run off—

PASTOR

Happy Hanukkah, Lottie.

VERONICA

I can't talk long, Norbert—I'm  
taking some blankets to the  
community center.

LOTTIE

Merry Christmas, everyone.

NORBERT

I'll make it quick—you know I'm  
the chair of the nominating  
committee for council—

PETER

Happy Hanukkah.

LARRY

(Grinning.)

Gonna invite your grandmother to the Christmas  
Eve service?

VERONICA

Is my term up? Of course I'll go  
on council again—

LOTTIE

She still doesn't know I work here.

NORBERT

No, it's not up till next year, but I  
don't know if you know I've  
decided being president of the  
congregation is just a little too  
much for me, overwhelming, you  
know—

PASTOR

Best office manager we've ever had.

VERONICA

Gustafina, do you have a ride?

LOTTIE

She'd die if she knew. Once I was with her at  
Century City and Mrs. Liedtke came up and  
started talking to me about church. Afterwards  
my grandmother said, "that woman must be  
crazy."

GUSTAFINA

Ja, Pastor's taking me.

LARRY

Do you need any more help with the  
office software?

NORBERT

So I was wondering—I know you  
might not have a lot of energy for  
it now—

LOTTIE  
Fine for now.

LARRY  
You're not still retyping the council minutes after I email them to you?

LOTTIE  
Oh, no.

LARRY  
Good, cause next I wanna teach you how to update the webpage.

LOTTIE  
Isn't that awfully...technical?

LARRY  
A little. But I'll show you. Not to brag, but I got the website date to change at sundown every night, to make it more biblical.

LOTTIE  
And Jewish.

LARRY  
So the Genesis verse changes for each day of the week—on Sunday it's "And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."

LOTTIE  
That's where it stops being Jewish.

LARRY  
Pastor, why is that? Why is our Sabbath different from the Jews'?

PASTOR  
Sunday is the day of resurrection, a new world, starting over—Easter changed everything—

VERONICA  
Oh, I'm fine—

NORBERT  
You do half of this stuff anyway, so I was wondering if you'd be interested in being president of the congregation come January.

VERONICA  
Oh, no.

NORBERT  
I understand, with the chemotherapy and all—

VERONICA  
It's not that. It just wouldn't be right for me to be out front like that.

NORBERT  
But I'm thinking it's time we had a woman as president—

VERONICA  
Gustafina, what would you think of that—a woman as president of the congregation?

GUSTAFINA  
Ach, my husband would rise up from his grave! Never while he was pastor!

VERONICA  
See, Norbert?

NORBERT  
Well, you can't fault me for trying.

VERONICA  
You should stay president, Norbert. You're doing a great job!

LARRY

I see. Well, anyway, I emailed a friend who gave me this fancy algorithm to change the date automatically, but it used up too much memory, so I found a different way. I also figured out, and this is pretty cool, how to change the background color of the website to match the—whatchacallit—liturgical color of the church year. So if you look at it now it's blue for Advent, but it will change to white for Christmas in a week—all automatically, I only had to set it up this year and it will do it by itself in the future.

LOTTIE

Neat. Excuse me, I've got to go light some candles. Pastor, any luck finding the missing offering?

PASTOR

Not yet, I'm afraid. That's wonderful, Larry. I know you're busy with your business—

LARRY

(Shrugging modestly.)

Hey.

LOTTIE starts searching for the lost offering.

PASTOR

--So it's great that you can take the time for the website. It looks better than any other Lutheran website I've seen—

PETER

That one with the revolving crosses! Can't you make ours do that, Larry?

PASTOR

I'm so glad you joined the church. I remember when your dad was gardener here and he used to bring you with him. I always felt bad—

NORBERT

Oh, no. What with the school and all, I don't know if I'm up to the challenge of the next year.

VERONICA

I'll stay on the evangelism committee and the education committee though. I've got some ideas for visitor follow up.

NORBERT

That's very important, very important.

VERONICA

We can't just send a note once and expect them to come back. We've got to be more aggressive, especially with the neighborhood changing—

GUSTAFINA

No families any more.

VERONICA

So transitory. I'm going to make it a goal to have fifty people as our average attendance next year.

NORBERT

That's ambitious. Very good.

LARRY

It was all very mysterious to me, since Dad didn't want us raised in any religion. But now I think of him every time I come here

(Overhearing VERONICA.)

Fifty doesn't seem ambitious to me. Why do we have so few?

YOLANDA

(Coming back in.)

Larry, I have an audition in the morning.

NORBERT

There are too many Lutheran churches in LA. Used to need more because eighty years ago they conducted services in different languages—

GUSTAFINA

One church in German—

NORBERT

All those Scandahoovians—

VERONICA

Norwegian, Swedish—

PASTOR

—Kind of a Babel. But when the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was formed—

PASTOR

—By the merger in 1988—

NORBERT

With everybody speaking English—

LARRY

I get it. Too many churches and not enough people in 'em. And it goes without saying, not enough offering come Sunday. Hey, a developer I know told me this property is worth at least a million and a half. He's even interested—

LOTTIE

Well, here it is!

(Produces an offering plate—full of money—from under PASTOR'S seat.)

Has this been here since Sunday?

PASTOR

(Taking it from LOTTIE.)

I guess so. Good work, Lottie.

(Accidentally drops the offering plate, scattering money.)

Oop.

VERONICA

Norbert, what about Larry?

PETER

Oh, for heaven's sake!

NORBERT

Larry? He doesn't have time—

VERONICA

Let me talk to Pastor.

LOTTIE

Oh, Pastor!

PETER

Now we know what happened to the music fund.

EVERYONE helps pick up the money and  
put it back in the offering plate.

LOTTIE

This is serious! Now our deposit won't  
balance—worse than the counters usually  
do, and they're bad enough. We've had  
checks bouncing all over the place lately,  
almost completely gone through the savings.  
And this has been just sitting out since  
Sunday—all kinds of people wander in here  
all the time off the street, some of them  
kinda weird. I'm only a green belt, so I get  
nervous. I'm trying to do my job properly,  
but—

YOLANDA

Checks bouncing, really?

NORBERT

Oh, yeah, it's getting bad.

PASTOR

Managing money doesn't seem to be one of my gifts.  
(Laughs.)

LOTTIE

(Almost muttering.)  
Not funny. It's not.

LARRY

Well, if anybody would listen to me  
about that—

VERONICA

It doesn't matter. I go over the books—

PASTOR

But I think I've talked the Schermers into a forty thousand dollar gift to cover the ADA  
renovations—

NORBERT

Really? That's a great step.

VERONICA

They never come.

PETER

Well, they can't sing.

GUSTAFINA

Forty thousand!

PASTOR

But they bought us the van a couple of years  
ago—

YOLANDA

He can, a little. But she sounds like  
cats mating. And she lost so much  
weight she looks like a sharpei.

NORBERT

Then we'd just need to find another school tenant. But the renovation could take a while—

GUSTAFINA

(Overlapping.)

It wasn't always this scramble for money. Back in nineteen and fifty seven, we had three hundred children in Sunday School—

(To LARRY.)

—Back when your father was the gardener. The choir was forty people, and I sang solos all the time. Back then I had a real voice, not an old lady voice. I know I shouldn't be trying to sing in choir any more, but I just can't give it up! It's habit.

PETER

You're voice is still lovely, Frau Liedtke.

GUSTAFINA

Ach, I crack and croak—

LARRY

No, you don't.

GUSTAFINA

Pastor Liedtke was so proud of Sunday School—all those kids—

PASTOR

You and your husband did a wonderful job of building this church.

GUSTAFINA

It was such a beautiful place.  
(Starts reading a book.)

LOTTIE

You're not gonna get your friend the contractor again? He always goes over budget.

NORBERT

We always start off too cheap is the problem.

VERONICA

That's cause you underestimate to get the project past Council.

NORBERT

Not true. Not true.

YOLANDA

That cement picnic table he made looks like Stonehenge.

SIMON comes back in with his toothbrush.

SIMON

Anybody seen my pillow?

SIMON

(Producing a pillow and blanket.)  
Here it is. And my blanket.

SIMON makes himself an improvised bed, not quite, but almost out of sight. He lies down. The others ignore him and avoid the area.

NORBERT

It still is. I try to keep it up. If only I'd get a bigger maintenance budget—

LOTTIE

You always go over.

LARRY

Sorry, Yolanda. I just love hearing about how the church used to be—as a kid I was always on the periphery—

PETER

Yolanda, didn't you want to go over your solo?

YOLANDA

If you're going to push me about my singing, you can at least get me home at a decent hour—

LARRY

I'm pushing you?

YOLANDA

The workshop—you know—

LARRY

I'm paying for it is all—

YOLANDA

Don't talk about money. You're embarrassing me. Oh, Peter, can we practice real quick?

LARRY

I don't mean to—I'm sorry—how—?

YOLANDA

That liturgical dance, for one thing—

PETER

I'm thinking we should incorporate it into our Easter celebration. Larry, you don't mind wearing a black leotard, do you?

LARRY

I will if you will, Petey.

YOLANDA

Larry, my *audition*—!

VERONICA

I'll be cleaning up the kitchen—  
(Leaves.)

NORBERT

And you wonder why I don't want to be President!

PASTOR

Veronica shouldn't clean up alone—  
(Leaves.)

NORBERT starts puttering with the seating.

NORBERT

I don't go over budget.

LOTTIE

Every time.

NORBERT

I donate all my labor. If more people would help me. Larry does at least. But I'm practically a one-man operation on the Property Management Committee.

LOTTIE

If you'd make them do a written estimate it'd be easier to hold down costs.

NORBERT

This darn thing!  
(Banging the seating.)  
Ow! Oops, it broke.

LOTTIE giggles. NORBERT putters more.

YOLANDA

Peter, you're not helping! Encouraging goofiness! That's what's wrong with this church—it's too goofy!

PETER

We have fun, but it's very serious at the same time—

YOLANDA

Have you ever noticed that almost everyone here is single? There's a reason for that!

PETER

Single people have more time to get involved—

YOLANDA

It's inept, even tacky—that horrible bread cake they always serve at special lunches—

LARRY

Bread cake?

LOTTIE groans at the memory.

PETER

It *is* terrible. Isn't it, Frau Liedtke?

GUSTAFINA

What?

YOLANDA

First you lay out slices of white bread—Wonder Bread, preferably—on a platter. Then spread—I dunno—salmon spread on them. On top of that another layer of bread. Next, a layer of cream cheese. More bread, and this time—my favorite part—a layer of peanut butter.

LARRY

No way!

YOLANDA

Another layer of bread and another layer of spread. Maybe deviled ham this time. One more layer of bread, then cover the whole thing with cream cheese and slice vertically, so it looks like layer cake. Except when you take a bite—

LARRY

—You have peanut butter and salmon in your mouth—

LARRY, LOTTIE AND YOLANDA

—At the same time!

YOLANDA

Whose recipe is that?

LOTTIE

It's Veronica's.

PETER

And don't say anything to her. She's very proud of it.

LARRY

But if it's that gross—

LOTTIE

I don't touch it.

PETER

Well, don't say anything to her till after she's done with her chemo at least.

LARRY

Veronica's having chemotherapy?

YOLANDA

Chemo? Ishda.

PETER

Yes, so please don't disparage—

VERONICA

(Coming in.)

Oh, good. Everybody's still here.

(Passing out lots of lemon ginger coconut bars. LOTTIE takes some and disappears.)

Take these home. I won't eat them. I'm so stupid—still baking like we had more people! Don't let me interrupt—what were you talking about?

LARRY

Um.

YOLANDA

Nothing.

PETER

The...uh...Reconciling in Christ program.

NORBERT groans.

VERONICA

Oh, that's so important. I'm glad we're doing it.

PETER

I think it's the next big schism in the Christian church.

GUSTAFINA

Is it almost time to go, Veronica?

LARRY

Then maybe we oughta *not*.

VERONICA

Isn't Pastor taking you home, Gustafina?

PETER

Every five hundred years or so there's a issue that divides the church and almost destroys it, but ultimately makes it stronger. The fall of Rome, the break with Eastern Orthodoxy, the Reformation. Now, with women ministers and issues related to gay and lesbian people—like the Reconciling in Christ program—we're in the midst of another revolution. Every mainline protestant denomination is struggling with it.

NORBERT

I don't think we're quite ready for this one.

PETER

Not an impulsive people, us Lutherans. We've been *studying* homosexuality for the last twenty years. Much more attuned to evolution than revolution.

NORBERT

Now, I don't go for that evolution stuff.

SIMON gets up, apparently irritated that their noise is disturbing his sleep. But he won't admit that.

YOLANDA

But Norbert, weren't you some kind of scientist—an engineer—before you got—before—

VERONICA

(Interrupting quickly.)  
Before you retired.

SIMON

Veronica, do you have any—?

YOLANDA

I mean—fossils and things—

VERONICA

No.

LARRY

Carbon dating—

NORBERT

They haven't proved that carbon dating really works. And those fossils could have been formed very recently, even faked.

PETER

But *in general* Lutherans accept evolution—sorry I brought it up. And I'm sorry to get on my soapbox about Reconciling in Christ, but the mainline protestants need to do

SIMON

Norbert, I wonder if you could—

NORBERT

Sorry, nothing on me. I can

PETER (Cont.)  
 something to distinguish themselves from  
 the pentecostals and fundamentalist  
 Christians if they're going to survive the century.

NORBERT (Cont.)  
 give you a ride anytime, Simon.  
 Happy to do that. But no money.

YOLANDA  
 And is that so important?

LARRY  
 Yolanda!

NORBERT  
 This country was founded by Protestants!  
 (Sputtering a little.)  
 Not Catholics, not Jews, not Buddhists or Muslims or—all our *laws* were written by  
 mainline Protestants—our Constitution—

YOLANDA  
 But not Lutherans, I bet—

NORBERT  
 The Bill of Rights, the Declaration of  
 Independence—

LARRY  
 What about televangelism?

The others laugh.

SIMON  
 Yolanda, I want to get a little  
 something to eat before bed, I mean,  
 after choir—

VERONICA  
 Have you ever seen a Lutheran on TV?

YOLANDA  
 I already told you, Simon. I'm not  
 in a position to give away money.

PETER  
 Not exactly telegenic. Other than Davy and  
 Goliath.

LARRY  
 Oh, come on. Get Petey on TV, playing his organ—

PETER  
 Don't call me Petey!

NORBERT  
 Hey, hey, keep it clean—!

LARRY  
 I mean—

PETER  
 I know what you meant, Larry.

LARRY  
Sorry...Pete.

PETER  
Peter!

Suddenly there is a strange, mournful sound  
in the distance, like giant musical sigh or  
someone sitting on an accordion.

GUSTAFINA  
Gott in Himmel! What was that?

SIMON  
Aagh! Is the church haunted?

NORBERT  
Could it be the organ?

LARRY  
Like that time Petey fell asleep on the  
keys during the sermon.

VERONICA  
Oh, I hope not!

PETER  
Maybe some air got trapped in a pipe and just now released. If it happens again, I'll call  
the organ repair guy. And I did not fall asleep!

LARRY  
Every Sunday!

YOLANDA  
Way creepy.

VERONICA  
Peter doesn't fall asleep.

PETER  
Not once!

NORBERT  
I'd hate to think something's wrong with the  
organ—it's practically new.

LARRY  
What was the sermon last Sunday? I bet you can't even tell me Pastor's joke at the  
beginning.

PETER  
He always tells the same ones. About  
the little boy—

SIMON  
I know! I know!

LARRY  
I knew it. No idea.

VERONICA  
Sssh, Simon. He's asking Peter.

PETER  
It was about preparation, advent, prepare ye the way—

LARRY

That was two weeks ago. This week was Jonah, reluctant prophets—

SIMON

Peter, I wonder, could you lend me—?

PETER

Simon, you know it's not a loan, and with what I make I really can't—

LARRY

Asleep! I knew it! Petey!

VERONICA

Simon, Pastor already gave you some money this evening—

PETER

Larry, quit!

SIMON

No, he didn't.

GUSTAFINA

He did, too. I saw.

PASTOR

(Coming in.)

Does everyone have a ride home?

NORBERT

Pastor, did you give Simon money again?

GUSTAFINA

You are taking me, Pastor?

VERONICA

If you're hungry, I can thaw out some lasagna from our last Youth Club—it's only six months old.

PASTOR

Yes, of course, unless Veronica is.

YOLANDA

Peter, can we—?

PASTOR

Oh, I don't remember—  
(Digs in his pocket.)

PETER

Yes, please!

NORBERT

Pastor, don't—

They rehearse *What Child Is This?*

SIMON

I have a job, you know. It's just not a regular job.

YOLANDA sounds beautiful. LOTTIE comes in and quietly hands VERONICA some papers.

PASTOR

You take care of things here at church.

SIMON

(Over YOLANDA'S singing.)

Norbert drives me, Veronica feeds us,  
Yolanda sings, Peter plays, Father holds us  
all together. God gives everybody a job, and  
I make sure things are okay. I watch. I watch  
the building. I watch the cars. All night. I'm  
a 24-hour security system. It's what I'm  
meant to do. And I have to be paid for that! It's only fair. And I don't need  
much. And I give a lot back. Remember that time I scared away the burglar—just by  
turning on a light? Last week I saw a fire in the education building, cause I was here.  
Nobody else was here at four in the morning—that's what *I* do. So I'm the one who got  
the fire extinguisher—

NORBERT

I fix things.

LOTTIE

And what do I do, nothing?

VERONICA

Except there was no fire.

SIMON

And I'm sorry about that.

VERONICA

You spray the fire extinguisher all over  
everything—

NORBERT

Hoo-boy! What a mess!

SIMON

But I cleaned it up! I do that, too! I have to have something to do or I go, well, you  
know how I go—

PASTOR

You have a lot of energy—

SIMON

I get depressed, and when I do, you know, I, sometimes, in the past—

PASTOR

But not recently—

SIMON

Not just pills, but sharp things—

NORBERT

We're glad you're here to help, Simon.

SIMON

You tried to get me in that program, Father, but I just couldn't—I'm not homeless, this is  
my home! This is what I need, the church is what I need! But I have to get paid!

PASTOR

(Giving him money.)  
Here.

VERONICA AND NORBERT  
(Disappointed.)

Pastor.

GUSTAFINA

Pastor, we are going soon, ja?

SIMON

Otherwise, you'll be having my funeral here.  
Father, I can have my funeral here, can't I?

PASTOR

In just a few minutes, Gustafina.

PASTOR

That's a long ways off, Simon.

LOTTIE

And I can sing at it.

(They all look at her.)

I've decided to become a funeral singer. Full time. So I might be retiring as office manager soon. I know a lot of sad songs, in a variety of faith traditions. Let everybody know.

SIMON

Thanks, Father.

PASTOR

Simon, I'm not a priest—I'm a minister. A pastor, not a father.

SIMON

You're a father to me.

(Looking at money.)

Anyone wanna go to Jack-in-the-Box? My treat?

LARRY

No thanks.

NORBERT

If you can wait, Simon, I'll give you a ride.

SIMON

I'm okay. It's not far. Good night.

(Runs out.)

NORBERT

Pastor, we don't have that kind of money—

VERONICA

You're just encouraging him—

PASTOR

Think of it as an informal homeless ministry—we can't afford a real program—  
whatsoever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me—

NORBERT

We're in a financial crisis. If I don't  
find another renter to replace the school—

PASTOR

The church is sposed to be a refuge  
from the world—

PASTOR

It's *my* money, Norbert. Not the church's.

NORBERT

But still—

GUSTAFINA

What time is it?

LARRY

If we had an endowment, we could have a *formal* homeless ministry.

PASTOR

Time for me to take you home. Norbert, don't panic—pray. A bientôt, everyone.

EVERYONE (Variously.)

Good night, au revoir, Pastor. Good night, guten nacht, Gustafina.

GUSTAFINA

Good night.

PASTOR and GUSTAFINA leave.

VERONICA

Oh, Lottie, I found a typo—

LOTTIE

I thought you proofed it already.

NORBERT

Larry, I don't know if you know I've  
decided being president of the  
congregation is just a little too much  
for me, overwhelming, you know—

VERONICA

Sorry. I'll fix it. Don't worry about it—

LARRY

You're really good at it, Norbert. I can  
see that from just my one year on Council—

LOTTIE

No, it's my job.

(Takes papers and leaves.)

NORBERT

Well, heh, heh, thanks very much, Larry. But I was thinking it's time for me to take a break—I've been president for the last eight years—

VERONICA

And you did such a good job leading the organ campaign before that—  
(Disappears.)

NORBERT

But I was talking to Veronica—

LARRY

Wait, no, I think I know where this is going—

NORBERT

I'm getting older, not moving as fast, and I get this nervous rash—I'm just not very confrontational, and I'm getting a little tired—

LARRY

Are you saying I'm confrontational—?

NORBERT

No, but you have a lot of ideas—

LARRY

And the tradition around here seems to be if you have an idea—

NORBERT

Then you get asked to carry it out, that's right—I know how you feel. Sometimes life just seems like a series of getting through things—if I can only get through *this week*, if I can only finish *that*. And it's a little hard to see what's on the other side—what's there after all the hard work? What's the reward? Are you just trying to *get through* your whole life—?

LARRY

You're sure an upbeat mix of the eighties, nineties, and today—

NORBERT

A kind of mild agony all the time—

LARRY

Are you asking me—what are you asking me?

NORBERT

Just to think about—I know you've only been on Council a year, but the website project turned out great—

LARRY

You want me to be president?

NORBERT

Well, I suppose...would you think about it?

LARRY

But I'm just barely a Lutheran. I only started coming to church when you decided to pay Yolanda for choir, what, a year and a half ago?

NORBERT

But then you joined choir, joined Council, got baptized—

VERONICA comes out, starts tidying up the choir area.

LARRY

Six months ago! I don't know anything about it. I only started taking communion last month.

NORBERT

See? How fast you move? That's what we need. Lutherans tend to be too cautious—it's our nature, heh, heh.

LARRY

Look, I love this place. Everybody talks too much, but in my family *nobody* talked, so all this chatter's kinda fun—

VERONICA

I think you'd be a great president. Attendance would soar!

LARRY

Veronica, I'm not ready for that—I've got too many jobs—overbooked as it is—

VERONICA

Oh, I completely understand—

NORBERT

*It is a big commitment—*

VERONICA

Everybody here is doing so much—

NORBERT

The nature of a small church—you're doing *way* too much, Veronica—

VERONICA

(Lifting a stack of music folders.)  
Oh, no, I do as much as I want to—

LARRY

Always here. Quietly taking care  
of things.

LARRY

(Helping her.)  
Why don't you be president?

VERONICA

It's really not my place—  
(Dropping the folders.)  
Oops—sorry—I didn't drop any on you, did I?  
(Going to her knees to pick them up.)

LARRY

(Kneeling to help.)  
No, I'm fine—here—

NORBERT

(Also kneeling and gathering folders.)  
I'll get some—you shouldn't be lifting that much anyways.

VERONICA

(Standing, with some folders in her arms.)  
Oh, no, I'm fine.

As she stands, VERONICA accidentally  
catches her wig on a chair or pew, and it  
comes off. She is completely bald.

LARRY

Veronica—

NORBERT

Your wig—

VERONICA

Oh, dear.  
(Putting the wig back on.)  
I'm just not used to this thing. It keeps slipping off.

LARRY

What—are you—?

VERONICA

Chemotherapy. You knew that, didn't you?

LARRY

Well, no, Peter mentioned—I'm sorry.  
What kind—?

NORBERT

That's why we've been praying for  
her every week—

VERONICA

I had a mastectomy two months ago.

LARRY

But...when? You didn't miss church.

NORBERT

She came to choir four days after the operation. Hoo-boy.

VERONICA

I couldn't just sit home. But don't worry. I'm fine. I take the wig off at the community center when I want to scare the kids.

LARRY

Don't you think you're doing too much—if you're not up to snuff?

VERONICA

I feel fine. I vomit a lot the day after my treatment, then I'm okay. Or pretty much.

NORBERT

But this is why she shouldn't be president.

LARRY

I didn't know. I thought some kind  
of stomach thing—

VERONICA

It's no big deal. But you'd make a  
wonderful president, Larry.

NORBERT

Wonderful.

VERONICA

If you do it, I'd be willing to be vice president and do all the annoying stuff.

LARRY

But—

VERONICA

Oh, I understand if you don't have the time—

LARRY

It's not that—

VERONICA  
We're all so busy.

NORBERT  
But we need some fresh thinking—

VERONICA  
Business savvy—

NORBERT  
We're in a little bit of a crisis with the  
school leaving at the end of the month—

VERONICA  
The savings are pretty depleted.

LARRY  
But you gotta know that if I'm president I'm gonna want to deal with that my way. No  
more council meetings where everybody talks and nothing happens.

PASTOR comes in with a toilet plunger.

NORBERT  
That's why we want you. A bold approach.  
Lots of energy!

VERONICA  
Of course. That's what we're hoping  
for. An answer to a prayer.

LARRY  
That's the problem! We can't pray ourselves out of this mess!

PASTOR  
God has an answer for every prayer. But not always the one you expect. What mess?

PASTOR gives each of them an odd look in  
turn, then disappears into the sacristy.

LARRY  
Okay, okay, I'll think about it.

NORBERT  
You will?

VERONICA  
Oh, Larry, that's wonderful.  
(Hugs him.)  
I'm so happy.

YOLANDA  
(Having finished her song.)  
What's wonderful?

LARRY

I...uh...I'll tell you in the car.

YOLANDA

Wonderful would be if people would actually listen while someone's trying to practice, rather than jabber on about nothing, dumping folders—

LARRY

Home again, home again, jiggy jig.

VERONICA

I'm sorry, Yolanda.

YOLANDA

Finally and at last! Thank you, Peter.

PETER

You're welcome. It sounded great.

VERONICA

Beautiful, Yolanda.

YOLANDA

Thanks, Veronica.

LARRY

(As he and YOLANDA leave.)

I want you to know I'm really flattered—but—

NORBERT

Just think about it.

LARRY

And Veronica, I'm sorry about—

VERONICA

It's nothing. I'm fine. Good night.

YOLANDA

Why are you flattered?

LARRY

Get a good night's sleep, Peter.

LARRY

In the car.

PETER

I'll count sermons.

YOLANDA

I have a right to know—

LARRY

Can you for once not think about something so trivial—!

YOLANDA

Trivial!

YOLANDA and LARRY leave.

NORBERT

I'll take care of the lights.

NORBERT starts turning out the lights.

PETER

They sure bicker a lot.

VERONICA

Oh, she's just jealous.

PETER

Jealous!?

VERONICA

She's irritated he flirts with you.

PETER

He does not! He teases—

VERONICA

He teases everybody—so funny. But he flirts with you, *Petey*.

PETER

Veronica, that's embarrassing. And not true.

VERONICA

Well, I'm sure you read that kind of thing better than I do. But you're talented and interesting—

PETER

I am *not* interesting!

VERONICA

Everybody is, if you look close enough.

PETER

But there's never any time for that. I'm not going to read anything more into Larry. Besides it's irrelevant. He's got a girlfriend and I—

VERONICA

You have your music.

PETER

Mean!

VERONICA

You're above love.

PETER

Make fun.

VERONICA

You said it before: "I'm above love."

PETER

No, I said I'm over it. Love is hormonal. We've romanticized it, but now that I'm older I realize it's just biology. It used to feel so *insistent*, but now I could give a—I could care less. Besides, my mother's coming to live with me. And you're right. I have a lot of things to do. There's the hospital, there's church, and I have a feeling I'm going to compose something really amazing someday. Music that makes a difference, brings people back to church. That organ cantata—I'm not too old for that, although they say composition is for young people, too.

VERONICA

Mozart was composing at four and burnt out by—

PETER

He was dead before he was my age. But people live longer now.

VERONICA

Some people.

PETER

Stop that! Veronica!

(She laughs.)

That's not funny. You're so bratty. You paid for the altar flowers again this month, didn't you?

VERONICA

The ladies pay for the flowers—in memory of their husbands—

PETER

What do you care about all those old f—  
 (Catches himself.)  
 —Fellows under the altar?

VERONICA

They do! The widows. They pay!

PETER

Whatever you say. But you do too much! You're always here, and you never get anything back!

VERONICA

Oh, I get plenty back, all the time.  
 Just to be around Pastor. I admire  
 him so much. He's so quietly spiritual,  
 which stands out in our loud world.

PETER

And that shameless manipulation to get  
 Larry to be president—

VERONICA

Norbert asked Larry to be president.

PETER

But—your wig—how could he say no?

VERONICA

That was a complete accident. I should probably glue it to my head.

NORBERT

(Calling out.)  
 Everybody out. I'm turning out the lights.

PETER

I saw. It was not an accident.

VERONICA

Yes, it was!

PETER

I can just imagine you cooking that up with  
 Pastor over the dishes. Hey, did you smell  
 wine on his breath tonight, by the way?  
 What was that—late afternoon communion?

VERONICA

If I were that cagey, the church  
 wouldn't be having financial  
 problems—don't be so hard on him.  
 He's got a lot on his mind.

PETER

And are you so sure Larry would make a good president? Some of his ideas are a little aggressive, hard-edged, *practical*.

PETER

I'm not sure I trust him. Scares me a bit.

VERONICA

He's so good with money.

VERONICA

Don't *trust* him?

PETER

Orange Grove is at a delicate point, and Larry—well, he's not the delicate type—

VERONICA

You're just saying that because he flirts with you.

(Sees PASTOR coming in with the plunger. His shirt is wet.)

Pastor!

PETER

Weren't you taking Gustafina home?

NORBERT

Lights out!

PASTOR

Did the wig trick work?

Blackout as NORBERT shuts off all the lights.

END OF ACT ONE

## ACT TWO

VERONICA comes in and turns off the house lights and adjusts the others. PASTOR comes in, followed by PETER. When she finishes with the lights, VERONICA putters about, tidying up the choir area.

PETER

It just hardly seems worth it this year, and maybe too painful for everybody.

PASTOR

We always start Lent with the distribution of ashes—nothing's changed—

PETER

Not yet. But I don't want to go out into the night with our future smudged on my forehead. If Larry has his way—you're not happy about—tonight—I mean, it's *practical*, but—

PASTOR

We'll see how things work out.

PETER

But it's not like you don't have a say! You're letting this place slip through your fingers—in the last year attendance fell from fifty to thirty-some at a service—

PASTOR

Peter, I know you're anxious, but a church is based on faith—

PETER

I'm not anxious—sad is all.

PASTOR

We're not the only church in this position. Mount Olive's the same. All across the country Lutheran churches—plenty of mainline Protestant churches—have attendance of thirty, twenty, even less than ten at a service, and they keep going—

PETER

Wherever two or three are gathered—

PASTOR

The numbers don't matter so much.

PETER

They're dying!

PASTOR

Miracles are small things, happening one at a time, to a few people here and there.

PETER

But in life aren't we supposed to be headed toward something, pushing toward a goal, moving—

PASTOR

Well, certainly. There's one thing we're all moving toward all the time. No matter how much we accomplish—

VERONICA

Death.

PETER

Veronica!

(Laughs.)

Scared me! Popped up like a ghost.

VERONICA wails like a ghost.

PASTOR

I was thinking *after* death. But we do have to get through the death part first.

PETER

Is that what's happening here? I don't see how I'm gonna get through tonight.

VERONICA

Concentrate on Yolanda breaking up with Larry.

PETER

Veronica!

VERONICA

Oh, that's right. Pastor, Peter's above love.

PETER

They're not breaking up. They just think it's healthier not to live together right now.

VERONICA

You'd think they'd come to *Pastor* for counseling.

PASTOR

Are they *both* telling you what's wrong with the other?

PETER

No! A little. Larry more than Yolanda.

PASTOR

They should at least get advice from someone *slightly* neutral!

VERONICA

You're not above love at all.

PETER

Both of you! Stop it! You're being catty cause you're afraid—this isn't pretty, it isn't! When really it's as much your fault as anybody's—you're supposed to be in charge of the budget—

VERONICA

Perhaps we shouldn't have let you hire all those musicians for Good Friday and Easter, when there's no way we can afford them—

PASTOR

Oh, we have to have the tympani—

PETER

Fine!

PASTOR

And the brass—

VERONICA

You threatened to quit if we didn't—

PASTOR

And the oboe!

PETER

Make fun! At least I act like it's serious! We can say "oh, this isn't important, this too shall pass,"—something's got to be important *sometime*!

VERONICA

Peter, you're overreacting!

PASTOR

Of course, it's serious.

PETER

I am *not* overreacting!

PETER runs out and there's the sound of him tripping over something and falling down, perhaps triggering a car alarm.

VERONICA

(As she and PASTOR rush to the door and look out.)  
Peter!

PASTOR

(Trying not to giggle.)  
Are you okay?

PETER

(Off.)  
Peachy! I just—go abuse Simon!

PASTOR

He's limping.

VERONICA

He just tripped over the curb.

PASTOR

Should we be worried about him?

LOTTIE

(Coming in, assisting GUSTAFINA.)  
Almost knocked Mrs. Liedtke down.

GUSTAFINA

I hope Peter's all right.  
(Giggles.)  
But he did look funny.

PASTOR

His ego's bruised more than anything.

VERONICA

Gustafina, are you feeling all right?

GUSTAFINA

Just a little dizzy in the parking lot. I'll be fine.

LOTTIE

(Holding up some small metal rings.)  
Mrs. Liedtke, can you pull these apart?

GUSTAFINA

Oh, don't ask me!

LOTTIE

Pastor?

PASTOR

(Trying.)  
No, they're linked together. They were forged that way.

LOTTIE

(Pulling the rings apart.)  
Voila!

VERONICA

Oh my!

PASTOR

Lottie, most excellent!

VERONICA

You take our minds off—keep us  
distracted—

LOTTIE

I gotta have some kinda alternative  
career.

PASTOR

(Overlapping.)  
If Peter'd come back maybe we could rehearse.

YOLANDA

(Coming in.)  
Where's Peter going? I thought I was  
gonna be late.

VERONICA

Oh, good, Yolanda. Are you going  
to be here Shrove Sunday? I need  
some help making my famous layer  
loaf.

YOLANDA

(Rolling her eyes.)  
Sorry. I'm rehearsing for my master class. Pastor, when you go to Paris next time, can I  
come with you?

PASTOR

Won't you and Larry want to be in Paris  
alone? I'd most certainly be in your way.

GUSTAFINA

Why Paris? Why not Weimar?  
It is the soul of Germany.  
Goethehaus, Schillerhaus, Liszthaus,  
all the literature and music. Such  
music they play there. A beautiful  
place—schön!

YOLANDA

No, I'll want your advice—where to eat,  
what to see—not just touristy stuff—

LOTTIE

Right next to Buchenwald, isn't it?

PASTOR

(Showing her a letter.)  
Speaking of Paris, I just got this letter from Taizé, sent to Mount Olive by mistake—isn't  
that funny? They're inviting me to stay again next time I'm in France. Longer even—

GUSTAFINA

Longer than vacation?

PASTOR

Oranges and olives don't taste very good together, you know.

## GUSTAFINA AND YOLANDA

What?

PASTOR

I made an olive-orange relish the other day to go with my Cornish game hen, but it was terrible. Maybe it was the pomegranate juice.

YOLANDA

Ew! You didn't!

VERONICA

Never mind. Pastor, please! Yolanda, I didn't know you and Larry were planning to go to Paris.

YOLANDA

We're not.

(Announcing to everyone.)

Oh, Larry's probably going to be very late. He's off at Mount Olive—

VERONICA

With Norbert. We know.

YOLANDA

Just passing it on. He asked me to.

PASTOR

Norbert's got that commitment from the Schermers—

VERONICA

The alternate plan—

GUSTAFINA

How much is the amount, Pastor?

PASTOR

Five thousand dollars. In writing.

GUSTAFINA  
Oh.

LOTTIE  
Not enough....

YOLANDA  
That won't do it.

VERONICA

It's a start. Sort of a challenge grant for the other thirty-five—

PETER

(Coming in, very business-like.)  
Lottie, we need to start even though not everyone's here. Can you and Steve get us into Gethsemane?

LOTTIE  
(Putting her recorder together.)  
Sure.

YOLANDA  
Steve?

PETER  
Pastor, the tenor part is really important in this,  
and Simon's not here yet—

PASTOR  
Her recorder.

YOLANDA  
Oh, right, Steve.

PASTOR  
So you want me to sing a solo?

PETER  
Until Simon arrives it'll be a solo.

PASTOR  
I shall be pleased to uphold tenor honor.

PETER  
Veronica, we'll need you back in the soprano section as well. May I count on you?

VERONICA  
Most assuredly.  
(Giggles.)

PETER  
Norbert and Larry will be here late or maybe even not at all. Larry's taking his proposal,  
the one approved by church council—

VERONICA  
Tentatively—

PETER  
What?

VERONICA  
Tentatively approved. Conditional  
upon acceptance by Mount Olive.

YOLANDA  
Larry's saying it's a done deal.

PASTOR  
Peter, shouldn't we begin?

PETER

Of course, I just thought everyone should know—

VERONICA

Everyone knows.

PETER

Oh. Okay. Lottie? Steve?

LOTTIE plays a verse of *Go To Dark Gethsemane* on her recorder. She's not particularly good. Everyone else scrambles for their music and gets ready to sing. GUSTAFINA holds her head for a moment. VERONICA notices and puts her hand on GUSTAFINA'S shoulder, but GUSTAFINA shakes it off impatiently. They begin to sing. Missing SIMON, LARRY and NORBERT, they don't sound very good, either.

EVERYONE

(In parts.)

Go to dark Gethsemane  
All who feel the tempter's pow'r.  
Your Redeemer's conflict see.  
Watch with him one bitter hour  
Turn not from his griefs away;  
Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

SIMON

(Bursting in.)

The church is sold!

GUSTAFINA

What? No!

(Starts to cry.)

PASTOR

Simon!

VERONICA

Simon, stop that! It's not true. Larry and Norbert just went to Mount Olive's council—

LOTTIE

It couldn't be sold that fast!

SIMON

It's sold!

PASTOR  
Simon, what makes you say that?  
How do you know?

YOLANDA  
Did Larry tell you?

No.  
SIMON

PETER  
Simon, sit down please.

LOTTIE  
Sit down!

Norbert?  
VERONICA

No.  
SIMON

PETER  
Your presence is formally requested in the tenor section.

Then who, Simon?  
VERONICA

LOTTIE  
You're just making it up. You're like a dog that pees on the carpet just to get attention. I used to believe you, feel sorry for you, but you *always* exaggerate—you *always* need money for something—

Lottie—  
PASTOR

LOTTIE  
I know. Out of bounds! I'm too forthright,  
too honest, never sparing anyone's feelings—

YOLANDA  
Now who's trying to get attention?

No one says that about you, Lottie.  
PASTOR

LOTTIE  
But what about my feelings? You can all just go to Mount Olive—but this is my job!

A goofy one.  
YOLANDA

PASTOR  
Yolanda!

YOLANDA  
So easy!

LOTTIE

It just looks easy because I've got the office organized.

LOTTIE

It's part time and it doesn't pay much,  
but it's perfect—perfect for me, anyway.  
I've worked at a lot of places—but nowhere  
was everybody—most everybody—so nice!

VERONICA

Well, sort of.

YOLANDA

I bet she has.

VERONICA

It's not confirmed, Lottie.

SIMON

It is!

PASTOR

Who told you, Simon?

LOTTIE

I'm consulting an attorney.

SIMON

I just *know*. Sometimes I know things. Is it okay if I know something?  
(Bumping into VERONICA'S coffee cup, spilling it.)  
Oh, sorry.

VERONICA

My coffee! Simon!

SIMON

You believe me, don't you,  
Yolanda?

PETER

Simon, sit down and take your Ritalin!

LOTTIE

Please just be quiet!

PASTOR

It's a *feeling*—is that right?

YOLANDA

I won't believe it till I hear it  
from Larry.

SIMON

What's Ritalin? I  
don't take Ritalin!

SIMON

Yeah. I'll clean it up.

VERONICA

(Relaxing as she cleans.)  
No, no, I shouldn't have coffee in here.

LOTTIE

No, you shouldn't.

VERONICA

Just a feeling.

GUSTAFINA

Sehr gut. I have been here since I was twenty-two!

SIMON

But it's strong!

PASTOR

Simon, we're not thinking about that now. We're singing. And I, for one, feel the need of another tenor.

VERONICA

(Tasting the coffee remnant.)  
It's *weak*, if anything.

SIMON

Okay. Sure. What song?  
(PASTOR shows him.)

GUSTAFINA

(Holding her head again.)  
I don't know if I'm up to all this.

YOLANDA

(To LOTTIE.)  
Maybe it's retirement time.

SIMON

Don't be scared, Pastor.

LOTTIE

Shhh!

PASTOR

I'm not scared.

PETER

(After they all stare at him expectantly.)  
Oh. Is it time to rehearse? Could there possibly be a *church service* on Sunday?

SIMON

Your music's shaking. Don't panic—pray.

PASTOR

As far as we know.

PETER

Maybe even with *music*?

VERONICA

I'm sorry, Peter. I'll behave, won't I, Gustafina?

GUSTAFINA

Ja, sure.

PETER

Okay, if we're actually *ready*—we need to break this down a bit. And since we're short of men—

SIMON

Hey!

PASTOR

We have the requisite number of tenors, thank you.

PETER

(Exasperated.)  
Yes, Father.

SIMON

(Correcting.)  
Pastor!

PETER

(Glaring at SIMON.)  
—Let's have just the women on verse two.

WOMEN

(Singing in parts, as PETER plays.)  
Follow to the judgment hall  
View the Lord of Life arraigned—

YOLANDA

(Interrupting.)  
Before we do that, I think I have to tell everyone that Larry and I are no longer—we're not—

LOTTIE

Together?

VERONICA

(With a glance at PETER.)  
An item?

YOLANDA

We're not—I don't want to talk about it,  
but, well, we're *not*. I just thought you  
should know so there won't be any question.

SIMON

You broke up?

PASTOR

Shhh, Simon, please.

PETER

(After a moment of silence.)  
I'm sorry, Yolanda. Thank you. We're all appreciative of your thoughtfulness about our  
feelings.

YOLANDA

I just don't want there to be any question.

PETER

No. Of course not. Not one. We're very sorry to hear it.

Ad lib agreement: “Yes. Of course, very sorry. That’s terrible.”

SIMON

(Not meaning a word of it.)  
That’s awful. Just awful!

GUSTAFINA

May I just say one thing?  
(Everyone tenses.)

PETER

Yes, Gustafina?

GUSTAFINA

I have been hearing from the ladies that they’re a little—nothing against anyone here, but, well, they miss the Tre Ore service.

LOTTIE

Not again.

PETER

We had a vote on that in Council, I thought—

SIMON gets up and moves next to YOLANDA, which makes her uncomfortable.

PASTOR

We did. Gustafina, perhaps—

GUSTAFINA

(Overlapping.)  
I’m only saying that I’ve heard—it’s hard for them to come to Tenebrae at night on Good Friday, and they miss the afternoon service, that’s all—

PETER

Which ladies, Gustafina?

GUSTAFINA

Oh, they wouldn’t want me to say.

LOTTIE

I know who it is.

PETER

I wish they’d said something when we were deciding. It’s a little late now.

GUSTAFINA

Oh, they would never say. But I thought I should pass on—

PASTOR

Thank you, Gustafina.

PETER

That’s very helpful. Simon,

back to the tenor section!

VERONICA

For next year.

SIMON returns to his place with some reluctance.

LOTTIE

If there is a next year.

PETER

Verse two? Without Steve this time. Ladies only?

YOLANDA

(Mimicking PETER.)  
Ladies only?

SIMON

Father, I mean, Pastor, you think I'm wrong about the church being sold, but I can hear it in my head.

PETER

Please?  
(Plays.)

PASTOR

I'm sure that's true, Simon.

WOMEN

(Singing in parts.)  
Follow to the judgment hall,  
View the Lord of Life arraigned;  
Oh, the wormwood and the gall!  
Oh, the pangs his soul sustained!  
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;  
Learn from him to bear the cross.

SIMON

You're just saying that. You don't believe me. No one ever believes me.

(Louder.)

It's my great misfortune never to be believed. Nobody takes me seriously because of my face. I don't have a serious face. It's a kind of comical face.

PETER

Simon, let's be polite and listen when the others are singing.

SIMON

See, no one takes me seriously! I'm a serious guy. The church is sold and I don't have anywhere else to go and I'm serious!

PETER

Simon, please! Were you raised by—manatees?!

YOLANDA

(Mimicking PETER.)  
Simon, please!

LOTTIE  
Yolanda, what is your deal?

SIMON  
I can't be polite if no one takes me seriously!

PETER  
Simon, we take you seriously enough to let you live on church property for free which is probably completely illegal, and it's only happening because Pastor's too soft-hearted to kick you out and made up a whole "watchman" job for you so you can feel you're contributing when in actuality you're just a kind of parasite who's found a good host—!

PASTOR  
Peter—

VERONICA  
Simon, you're getting all sweaty.

PETER  
I'm just sick of you interrupting and taking all of this generosity—killing the fatted calf—for granted—

SIMON  
You're not paying me! If that's how you feel, I might as well quit.

VERONICA  
(Giving SIMON a cloth.)  
Here, wipe your face.  
(He does.)

YOLANDA  
Simon, please. We're all very glad you're here and your voice is beautiful.

SIMON  
It is?

YOLANDA  
When you listen to Peter and sing like he says.

PETER  
But how often does *that* happen?!

SIMON  
Okay, Yolanda, I won't quit.

PASTOR  
Peter—

VERONICA  
This is a rough night for all of us—

PETER  
I'm sorry, Pastor, but I'm sick, sick, sick of all—this—verse three, please—everybody!  
(Plays.)

EVERYONE

(In harmony, sounding somewhat better, but lacking basses.)  
 Calv'ry's mournful mountain climb;  
 There, adoring at his feet,

NORBERT arrives, looking very distracted.  
 Everyone glances at him, but the singing  
 continues uninterrupted.

EVERYONE

Mark that miracle of time,  
 God's own sacrifice complete.

SIMON starts fanning for personal gas  
 again. PETER notices and picks up a  
 hymnal.

EVERYONE

"It is finished!" hear him cry;  
 Learn from Jesus Christ to die.

At the conclusion of the song, PETER  
 throws the hymnal at SIMON.

PETER

Simon, stop it!

But the hymnal hits LARRY, who has just  
 come in the room.

LARRY

Hey! Ow!

PETER

Sorry, Larry, that was meant for Simon. Simon! No more! I won't have it!

LARRY

Won't have what?

VERONICA

Simon, would you like some lemonade?  
 Let's go get some—

SIMON

Yolanda, you can smell it, can't you?

PETER

Veronica, no! We need to be responsible—

VERONICA

Our responsibility is to help each other without asking questions. That's what we do. When you needed a full-time job, Pastor got you in at the hospital—

PETER

Simon needs to know when he's out of—

PASTOR

You did that, Veronica—

VERONICA

Well, whatever, it was *done*. Nothing else matters very much, does it? We try to be nice, try to be polite—it doesn't always work, but we try. And that's what counts, right, Peter?

PETER

I guess.

(They all look at him.)

I'm sorry, Simon.

SIMON

Me, too.

PETER

(After a moment.)

Norbert?

NORBERT

Oh. Hello. Sorry we're late.

LARRY

(Bursting with news.)

Yeah, we didn't mean to interrupt—

NORBERT

I drove kinda slowly cause my blood pressure's been bothering me—I've got the blood pressure of a small rodent, must be part gopher, heh-heh, my heartbeat's abnormally fast, too—and I've been feeling kinda funny, plus traffic was terrible, keeps getting worse and worse on Santa Monica Boulevard—

PASTOR

The whole West Side—

NORBERT

Hoo—yeah! Just terrible, worse every year—and the airplanes from Santa Monica airport fly over my house—

LARRY

(Bursting out impatiently.)

They accepted our proposal!

(Everyone just stares at him.)

Mount Olive was very enthusiastic about merging congregations. Their attendance is almost as bad as ours, so this is an opportunity to double—they've got plenty of room in the pews! And it's a very nice facility—not as much character as Orange Grove Lutheran, but much more modern, better parking, no building maintenance problems. And with a real endowment they—*we*—can make substantial improvements and develop new programs—they're even open to the idea of moving our organ into their sanctuary—

PETER

You can't—move—an organ—

LOTTIE

Do they need an office manager?

NORBERT

I told him that.

LARRY

What?

SIMON

I was right. Believe me now?

VERONICA

The pipes—

PETER

The console, the whole design—it's for this sanctuary—almost impossible to adapt. It'll never sound the same—

YOLANDA

The acoustics—

PETER

It was built to my specifications—*our* specifications—just for us!

GUSTAFINA

So the church—?

PETER

Look—the pipes—how beautiful! It just fits! Maybe it's idolatrous, but I *love* this organ!

SIMON

Is sold!

VERONICA

The church isn't sold. They've accepted our proposal, that's all. We have the option—

LARRY

They accepted our proposal and don't forget I've been talking to a developer and today he made an offer of one point seven million—one point seven million!—imagine what good we can do with that—

PETER

—At Mount Olive—

GUSTAFINA

So the church—?

LARRY

(Enthusiastically.)  
It's as good as sold!

VERONICA throws down her keys and storms out. PETER disappears.

LARRY

Of course it's a sad day, but it's a happy one as well—a new beginning. You made me president cause you thought I had ideas, could get things done—and the Council agreed to my proposal. We don't have much choice—but this is a good thing! We've saved the church—not its sanctuary, but its soul! You'll see. Right, Pastor?

PASTOR does not answer. PETER reappears with a number of small, white boxes. He stacks them up in a prominent place as LARRY is talking, then disappears again.

LARRY

And here's the really cool part! I had no idea why my father was so attached to this place, why he wanted to garden here when there were lots better jobs all around town. In investigating the title I found out who owned this property before it belonged to the church. It's amazing! Can you guess?

No one guesses. PETER returns with more small white boxes and continues stacking them. When he finishes, he disappears.

LARRY

My grandfather! My grandfather owned this land before the war. It was his orange grove—those were his trees! He lost it during the internment, apparently he had to sell the land cheap—

(To GUSTAFINA.)

So I guess you got a good deal! Isn't that astonishing? I'm flabbergasted myself. My father never told me, just worked and worked what was left of the land after he got out of the camp. Till there were no more trees—except the one. He loved to bring me here, let me fertilize—

LARRY

Did you know about that? Did you know you got my grandfather's land?

GUSTAFINA

You were always so dirty!

It seems GUSTAFINA can't answer. PETER returns with more white boxes, stacking them.



YOLANDA

Peter, don't be disgusting! Gustafina, he's sorry—

NORBERT

George was pretty handy, too.

PETER

Not at all! They're bearing witness.

VERONICA

They remind us of the past, and we're showing them the future—

PETER

—Or lack thereof!

VERONICA

Where will we put them? Does Mount Olive have a columbarium?

PETER

There won't be an altar for them to hide under any more. Their wives won't take them back—

PASTOR

Peter, Peter, please.  
(Trying not to cry.)  
Do not—do not make light—

SIMON

He's freaking me out, Pastor. I might go over the edge. Dead! Whole people! In little boxes!

PETER

I'm not—just pointing out the—I dunno—irony—that's probably not the right word—

PASTOR

I think what we have to think of here, if I'm not mistaken, is to remember the Bible. There is no shame in this.

LARRY

Shame?

PASTOR

No shame. There is glory. You don't always have to win. We don't always have to have the most members, or the most people in church on a Sunday—the numbers don't mean much. Sometimes you win by losing.

VERONICA

You must lose your life to save it.

LARRY

Mrs. Liedtke, did you know? Did your husband tell you how the church bought the land? Who sold it?

GUSTAFINA appears to be trying to talk, but can't seem to get the words out.

PETER  
Larry, you're embarrassing her.

YOLANDA  
Stop bugging her. She's old!

LARRY  
It's just a simple—

GUSTAFINA  
I—I—I—  
(Gestures helplessly, looks imploringly at VERONICA.)

YOLANDA  
Really old.

LARRY  
I'm sorry, Mrs. Liedtke—I didn't mean—

PASTOR  
(Going to her.)  
Gustafina, are you all right?

GUSTAFINA  
(Looking frightened and helpless, a hand to her head.)  
I—I—I—

LOTTIE  
Is she—?

PASTOR  
Veronica, what do you think?

NORBERT  
Oh, my, I think she's having a stroke—

VERONICA  
Gustafina, can you raise your arms?

YOLANDA  
(To LARRY.)  
Look what you did!

SIMON  
I can help! What can I do?

VERONICA  
Can you say anything?

LARRY  
I didn't—

YOLANDA  
Klutz!

LARRY  
It's just the truth, that's all.

GUSTAFINA  
I—I—

VERONICA  
Anything else?

LARRY  
It was Petey with the ashes—

GUSTAFINA  
I—

PETER  
Don't call me Petey!

YOLANDA  
Put a pencil between her  
teeth!

VERONICA  
I think it is a stroke. Lottie, call an ambulance.  
(LOTTIE jumps up and runs out.)

PETER  
I'm parked right outside.

VERONICA  
Go start your car.

PASTOR  
No, that's for a seizure

YOLANDA  
She could choke on her  
tongue!

SIMON  
What can I do? Let me help!

PETER runs out.

NORBERT  
Those look like the symptoms. I read about  
this because I have high blood pressure, too.

PASTOR  
Gustafina, give me your hand.

VERONICA  
Larry, help us help her out. Gustafina, can  
you walk? Let's walk.

YOLANDA  
Larry, help, for heaven's sake!

They help her walk toward the door.  
It's a struggle. NORBERT fades the lights  
while YOLANDA stands by in judgment  
and SIMON hovers uselessly.

VERONICA  
Careful, careful, you're doing  
great—

PASTOR  
One step at a time.

SIMON  
Let me! Let me!

YOLANDA  
They didn't mean it, Gustafina—

NORBERT  
This is why they have ADA  
requirements.

VERONICA  
Almost there—

PASTOR  
Most excellent—

SIMON  
I'm watching!

LARRY  
I didn't think—

NORBERT  
We'll all be old, soon.

YOLANDA  
Klutz!

VERONICA  
Peter's bringing his car.

PASTOR  
Just relax.

SIMON  
Do you just want me to watch?

LARRY

I'm so sorry, Mrs. Liedtke, I didn't know—  
I just got so excited—this is a wonderful day  
for me! For all of us! A wonderful day!

YOLANDA

Larry's sorry, Gustafina. Peter's  
sorry, too, I'm sure—

Lights go out completely. Instrumental  
version of *Go to Dark Gethsemane* in the  
darkness. Quietly the choir members come  
in and strip the sanctuary of all linens and  
décor, including candles. After they have  
finished, VERONICA, wearing a white  
nurse's outfit comes in and kneels to pray.  
PASTOR comes in, pursued by NORBERT,  
who wears a dark suit.

NORBERT

(Putting something he's carrying out of sight, then turning on the lights.)  
Pastor, you don't have that kind of money! She'll probably buy grain alcohol or crack!

PASTOR

I'm not here to judge her. If she needs it she needs it. I don't know what she needs. I  
don't know who she is.

NORBERT

(Adjusting the lights.)  
Funny, I always thought Pastors knew what  
everybody needed deep down. Think of all  
the time and effort I put into these lights and  
now....

PASTOR

God knows her. God knows what  
she needs.

VERONICA disappears.

YOLANDA

(Overlapping NORBERT. Coming in with LOTTIE. Both wear dark clothes.)  
No, I'm not upset. I just always thought she liked my voice better. No offense.

LOTTIE

She wanted to give me a good start on my new career. Since I won't be needed at Mount  
Olive.

PASTOR

I bet the office manager at Mount Olive can't help out with Hebrew translations.

LARRY comes in, also in a dark suit.  
YOLANDA, studiously ignoring him, turns

back to LOTTIE. VERONICA reappears  
with a Tupperware container of treats.

YOLANDA  
What are you singing?

LOTTIE  
*Be Still.*

YOLANDA  
I *said* no offense.

PASTOR  
The song.

VERONICA leaves with the Tupperware.

LOTTIE  
(Overlapping PASTOR.)  
The song *Be Still*. That's what I'm singing.

YOLANDA  
Oh. That old thing.

LOTTIE  
She liked it. Especially when I sang it.

YOLANDA  
You have the breath control for the pianissimo?

PASTOR  
We're all getting a chance to sing for her, Yolanda.

YOLANDA  
As a *group*.

PASTOR  
Well, you know, I've long felt that we never sounded all that good as individuals—

VERONICA reappears without the  
Tupperware. She starts sorting through  
sheet music.

YOLANDA  
I'm professionally trained! I've spent a lot of money—

LARRY

That's for sure.

PASTOR

Of course, there are voices of distinction. But mostly we're just volunteers who like to sing—no one's ever going to pay us. Yet when we all sing together, when we really listen to each other, when we blend, and watch Peter, we sound surprisingly wonderful.

NORBERT

That happens every Sunday in every church around the world.

PASTOR

I don't think so, not like this.

(Gets teary.)

Not even in France. Not even Taize.

LARRY

Now, don't everybody be sad. This is a milestone!

YOLANDA

It's a *funeral*.

LARRY

Right. Of course. But—I mean—today—it's the beginning of a bigger, better, stronger congregation—

YOLANDA

Sounds like an ad for 24-Hour Fitness.

LARRY

The endowment will provide almost a third of the operating budget for Mount Olive. And when we all start going there on a regular basis, the attendance will double—so will the offering. Think of all the social outreach—we could expand Hospice in Home—that's a terrific program—!

NORBERT

Um...I think—

PASTOR

Larry—

LOTTIE

It's a funeral!

LARRY

You're right. I'm sorry. I'm sad, too. But she wouldn't want us to be. We're celebrating a life.

YOLANDA

*That* sounds like an ad for Forest Lawn.

NORBERT

I'm glad she wanted the service here, rather than at Mount Olive.

PASTOR

The last service held at Orange Grove.

PETER

(Coming in, dressed in a dark suit.)  
Good afternoon, everyone.

EVERYONE

(Variously.)  
Hello, Peter. Good afternoon.

PETER

Before everyone else gets here, Lottie, do you want to go over your solo?

LOTTIE

Nope. I've got it! I'm a professional.

PASTOR

As of today.

PETER

(To LARRY.)  
And how are we today, O Destroyer of Churches?

PASTOR

Peter—

PETER

O Pillager of Historical Landmarks—

PASTOR leaves.

LARRY

It's not historical—

PETER

O Layer to Waste of the Spiritual Realm!

LARRY

I'm sorry they won't take you on at Mount Olive.

PETER

O Vanquisher of Music!

LARRY

I didn't think they'd only want the one organist.

PETER

There's only one organ, Larry. An *electric* organ! And one organist. And one service on Sundays. So that one organist will get a raise—thanks to your endowment. Go on—wreak your havoc!

LARRY

Maybe this means you can finish at USC.

YOLANDA

He's too old, Larry. He's never going to finish.

LARRY

Not here, Yolanda.

PETER

I'm *not* gonna finish. Can't afford it. I'll just...stay on at the hospital and volunteer to accompany musicals in community theatre. I'll be that guy who gets drunk at parties and plays *Send in the Clowns*.

LARRY

But you're a great organist!

PETER

Maybe, but I'm tired. This will be a good break.

LARRY

You're tired cause of your job. That hospital sucks it out of you. I need an office manager—

YOLANDA

You don't have an office.

LARRY

A business manager, an administrator—that's what you do at the hospital, isn't it? Administrate?

PETER

Yes, but—

LARRY

I could pay you better than a non-profit and it wouldn't be hard at all. Part time—

PETER

No—

LARRY

Give you a chance to compose—

PETER

No, Larry. I can't.

LARRY

Why not?

PETER

It's just too...I don't need to make a lot of money. I'm Lutheran. I'd feel guilty.

PASTOR returns from the sacristy wearing his ceremonial vestments.

LARRY

That's what's wrong with Lutherans! Always trying to stay pure by rejecting the world—that's why Lutheran churches are in decline, always struggling—

LOTTIE

Hello, I'm not Lutheran. And I'm out of a job.

VERONICA finishes with the music and disappears.

PASTOR

(Handing the U-curve to NORBERT.)

There's nothing wrong with struggling.

NORBERT

It's all we know. I probably won't even join Mount Olive. Their building's so new nothing needs fixing.

(Leaves.)

LARRY

But if you're not struggling, if you're comfortable, you can help other people—like a church is supposed to!

PASTOR

But that's when churches get in trouble, when they're comfortable. The Roman church—that's when Luther left. A church is a sanctuary to the homeless and the broken, so it's okay if it's a little broken, too. Not a triumphant altar to glory, but to frailty.

LARRY

But we're worshipping God....

PASTOR

In the guise of humanity.

LOTTIE

Speaking of frailty, who took Simon to the hospital?

PASTOR

Oh, I think Norbert did.

PETER

Pastor, where is he going to go? They're not going to let him live in Mount Olive.

NORBERT returns with some music.

LARRY

He'll go into a shelter, where he can get some real rehabilitation.

PASTOR

He wouldn't go before. Now there's no choice.

NORBERT

We weren't doing him any good here. Just giving him handouts. No motivation.

YOLANDA

Aren't *we* warm and loving!

LOTTIE

Who said that? Miss Congeniality?

NORBERT abruptly leaves.

PETER

We failed him. One quiet cataclysm after another.

LARRY

I wouldn't talk about warm and loving if I were you—

PASTOR

I hope you all will come visit me at Taize.

YOLANDA

Do they let women visit?

PASTOR

It's a religious community, but not a monastery.

LARRY

I don't understand why you have to go. We're going to need your help settling everyone in over at Mount Olive.

PETER

It's a synod rule.

PASTOR

Actually, it's a churchwide rule. At least in the U.S.

LARRY

Pastors have to leave the country when—when they—?

PASTOR

Retiring pastors—and that's what I'm doing, I suppose—retiring pastors are strongly urged not to stay involved at their former churches.

LARRY

That's not right.

PASTOR

No, it's a good idea. Retired pastors sometimes meddle—

LARRY

You wouldn't.

PASTOR

I'd try not to. But parishioners have a tendency to "consult" with the former pastor if he's around. Very difficult for the new minister. It's a smart idea for me to say au revoir.

YOLANDA

And you love France.

PASTOR  
Mais oui!

YOLANDA  
Moi aussi. So can I come visit?

PASTOR  
I'll be at Taize most of the time, but  
I'll make plenty of excursions, so don't  
just drop in unannounced.

NORBERT  
(Coming back in.)  
I don't suppose they'll need another  
baptismal font at Mount Olive. Ours  
is much nicer. Maybe we could sell  
it on ebay.

YOLANDA  
Of course not.

PASTOR  
But you're welcome any time I'm there.

YOLANDA  
Where will you go first?

VERONICA reappears, and sits quietly,  
listening.

PETER  
Back to Chartres?

PASTOR  
Well, now there's an idea. I have a little mission to accomplish there.

NORBERT  
Oh, that's right.

LARRY  
What's that?

PETER  
Pastor always told me to go to the cathedral at Chartres, so when I finally saved enough money to go to Paris, I took the train out to the country. It was dark and quiet inside the church, very medieval. I walked down the center aisle, over the inlaid stone maze and around the ambulatory until I was directly behind the altar. Then I reached into a secret niche and pulled out a note—addressed to me. It said, "Dear Peter: Welcome to wonderful Chartres. Light a candle for someone you love."

LARRY  
It was from Pastor?

PASTOR

I always visit Chartres.

PETER

So I wrote a note and stuffed it back in the secret niche. "Dear Pastor: You said light a candle for someone you love, so I lit one for you."

PASTOR

Thank you.

Sound of a chainsaw outside.

YOLANDA

What's that?

LOTTIE

It's the Orange Grove Chainsaw Massacre!

LARRY

They're not supposed to come till tomorrow—

PASTOR

Who?

NORBERT

Who's they?

LARRY

Some of the demolition people—

YOLANDA

We're still using the church!

NORBERT

I'm still chair of Property Management!

LARRY

Not for the church—

PETER

The orange tree!  
(Runs out.)

NORBERT

A little disrespectful, don't you think?

LOTTIE

(Over her shoulder to LARRY as she dashes out after PETER.)  
Why didn't you let me schedule this?

YOLANDA

Good going, champ.

LARRY

This was scheduled before the funeral—I forgot—

YOLANDA

Then go out and tell them to stop—for  
Pastor's sake!

NORBERT

Fine, do what you want.  
(Leaves.)

PASTOR

Really for Gustafina's.

LARRY

Oh, man, I'm sorry—how dumb can I get?  
(Dashes out. Yelling at the workmen.)  
Hey! Hold off a minute—!

YOLANDA

Are you all right?

PASTOR

It's just a tree. The fruit's been sour for years.

YOLANDA

But if we dug around the roots, put on some manure—

The sound of the chainsaw ceases.

PASTOR

(Smiles.)  
Too late, don't you think?

YOLANDA

Not even one more year to see if the fruit sweetens?

PASTOR

Even Jesus would chop it down now.

YOLANDA

I grew up in this church. And sometimes I hated it. Especially during—

PASTOR

Confirmation class?

YOLANDA

Was I that bad?

PASTOR

You used to put on eyeshadow during Luther's Small Catechism.

YOLANDA

Mount Olive has terrible acoustics. I went over there on Saturday and tried *Ave Maria*, the Schubert—

PASTOR

Careful, they don't like Latin over there. Pastor Thronson does an annual Kick the Pope sermon.

YOLANDA

I got accepted for Master Chorale.

PASTOR

LA Master Chorale? At the Music Center?

(She nods, not exactly humbly.)

Congratulations.

YOLANDA

So I think that's where I'll be singing from now on.

PASTOR

I understand.

YOLANDA

And things with Larry would be...still kind of—

PASTOR

Uncomfortable. Of course.

YOLANDA

I'm happy, in a weird way—

PASTOR

About Mastor Chorale? It's wonderful!

YOLANDA

No, more like a weight's been lifted—

YOLANDA AND PASTOR

—Relief!

(They both laugh.)

(Looking outside.)  
Oh, look.

PASTOR

Gustafina.

YOLANDA

Looks pretty good, doesn't she?

PASTOR

Well, considering—

YOLANDA

(Coming in supporting a very unsteady GUSTAFINA on his arm.)  
Look who I found!

NORBERT

VERONICA stands up, expectant.

(Going to her.)  
Gustafina! You look terrific!

PASTOR

In fact, GUSTAFINA looks pretty frail.  
She's limping and apparently doesn't have  
the use of one hand.

How are you feeling?

YOLANDA

Much—much—um—um—

GUSTAFINA

Better?

YOLANDA

(Nodding.)  
Ja.

GUSTAFINA

It's wonderful you could make it today.

PASTOR

I—must—important!

GUSTAFINA

YOLANDA

Veronica would be glad you're here.

PASTOR

She is.

VERONICA smiles.

NORBERT

(Trying to lead GUSTAFINA to a seat.)  
Come sit, so you can listen—

GUSTAFINA

(Resisting.)  
No—

NORBERT

Just a few steps—

GUSTAFINA

No—I can—can—want to—sing!

The others look at each other doubtfully.

PASTOR

In that case we won't process. Why don't you sit in your usual place?

GUSTAFINA

Ja.

With NORBERT'S help GUSTAFINA takes her usual place next to VERONICA.

LARRY

(Rushing in.)  
I stopped them for now. They won't cut down the—

YOLANDA

Larry, quiet! Look who's here.

LARRY

Gustafina! You look great! Considering...

GUSTAFINA

Danke schön.

PETER

(Coming in with LOTTIE.)  
Larry, send them home.

LOTTIE

They won't go.

LARRY

They can wait a little bit, but it's been  
scheduled—it'll cost too much to postpone—

PETER

We're having a funeral here!

NORBERT

Somebody gets a little  
authority...! Not his place  
at all! *I'm* Property  
Management—I don't care if  
he *is* President!

YOLANDA

They can't knock down the church with us in it!

PASTOR

Now, everyone, it's not like we don't have another church.

PETER

What? Move the whole funeral over to—?

NORBERT

I'm just a little bit furious.

PASTOR

—To Mount Olive.

YOLANDA

Honestly!

LOTTIE

I've got people coming to hear me sing.

PASTOR

A lot of people are coming. Not to worry. We can leave someone here to direct them to  
Mount Olive. Lottie, please call the funeral home so they can redirect the hearse.

(LOTTIE whips out a cell phone and disappears.)

PETER

Can we at least practice here? Will they give us that much time?

LARRY

I guess so, they're taking a break. I'm so, so sorry about this.

PASTOR

That's all right, Larry. Don't worry about it.

NORBERT

I think he *should* worry about it! Decisions have been made—important decisions—without proper consideration! We used to make decisions together, with *some* input from the Property Management Committee. That’s how we decided on the organ, the altar—do you understand? Does everybody understand how this building works, how every part means something?

PETER

Norbert—

LOTTIE

(Coming back in.)  
They’re diverting to Mount Olive.

NORBERT

(Going to the altar.)  
The nave is like an upside-down ship. The altar—do you remember when we changed it?

PASTOR

Oh, yes, Norbert, you did a wonderful job!

LOTTIE

*That* decision was a long time coming! And construction took *forever*.

NORBERT

(Demonstrating.)  
It used to be a tomb altar, flat against the wall, so for communion Pastor had to face away from the congregation. But I cut it in half—very delicate, and yes, it did take me a while—then I moved the front half forward so now it’s a table altar and Pastor faces us when he blesses the sacraments. It made a big difference and nobody even remembers, I bet!

PASTOR

Of course, we do, Norbert.

NORBERT

And now it’s just going to be dismantled!

PETER

The organ, too, Norbert, but we need to practice.

NORBERT

I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I’m kinda aggravated.

PETER

We’re all tense, but we’re running out of time.

(Settling in at the piano as NORBERT returns to his place.)

Okay, everyone. Let’s be perfect the first time so we can get on over to Mount Olive before the roof caves in here.

NORBERT  
Which is it, please?

PETER  
(Holds up music.)  
Veronica's favorite.

GUSTAFINA  
Ja.

NORBERT  
Oh, mine too. At least something's going my way.

PETER gives pitches and they sing *a capella*. They are, in fact, perfect.

EVERYONE BUT VERONICA  
(Singing in harmony.)  
Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won

GUSTAFINA is singing just fine, and the others look at her in amazement, gradually dropping out one by one to listen.

EVERYONE BUT VERONICA  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away

Finally everyone is listening except GUSTAFINA, who sings with great ardor (she can't hear that the others have stopped).

GUSTAFINA  
Kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay

EVERYONE BUT VERONICA  
(Happily joining GUSTAFINA for the last lines)  
Thine is the glory, risen conquering Son  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.

PETER  
Wonderful, everyone. You sound—we sound—  
(Almost surprised.)  
—Really, really good.

Wow. You never compliment us.  
LOTTIE

I do, too, all the time!  
PETER

But this time he means it.  
NORBERT

I always mean it!  
PETER  
You *did* sound a little shocked.  
PASTOR

Never mind!  
PETER  
Well, now you've ruined it.  
LARRY

(In German.)  
Was? Was? [What? What?]  
GUSTAFINA

Gustafina, you did a marvelous job of holding up the alto line by yourself.  
PETER

(Almost under her breath, but not quite.)  
Because she was singing the melody....  
YOLANDA

Danke schön. I—for—for—Velomint—  
GUSTAFINA

Veronica.  
YOLANDA AND NORBERT

Ja.  
GUSTAFINA

We do throw a good funeral.  
PASTOR

We ought to—we spend our whole lives preparing for it.  
NORBERT

All religions are death cults.  
(Everyone stares at him.)  
Sorry.  
PETER

NORBERT

We did sound good. Even with people missing.

YOLANDA

Maybe that's why we sound good.

(Everyone stares at her.)

Sorry.

(To LOTTIE.)

We blended well, I thought.

PETER

We should head on out.

LOTTIE

(Astonished.)

Thank you.

PASTOR

Who can stay to direct people to Mount Olive?

NORBERT

I will.

PETER

No, no, we need you all there. We can't afford any more missing voices.

NORBERT

I can make a sign.

PASTOR

That will have to do.

NORBERT

(Going to the door.)

I'll just post it on the front door like the 95 Theses. Oh, wait, can't forget this.

(Produces a white mound on a large platter.)

YOLANDA

Bread cake!

NORBERT

Veronica's layer loaf for the reception. The recipe will live on.

LOTTIE

I can't have any—it's not kosher.

(PASTOR glares.)

But maybe I can make an exception—*today*.

(VERONICA looks pleased.)

YOLANDA

I'm lactose intolerant.

But I have some pills.

PETER

I'm dieting this week.

But I suppose a taste won't hurt....

NORBERT

(As the doorknob comes off in his hand.)

Oh, dear. I knew that was going to happen eventually.

(Trying to shove the doorknob back in.)

Came right off in my hand. Give me a minute. I think I can—

PETER

We don't have a minute. I'm going to get the last of my music and I want the rest of you there before I arrive!

GUSTAFINA, LOTTIE, YOLANDA, and  
LARRY start toward the door. PETER goes  
out through a different door to get music.

PASTOR

It's all right, Norbert. We won't be using it.

NORBERT

(Dropping the doorknob on the floor.)

You're right. Why worry about it? We're free, in a sense. This building's a money pit.

(He struggles to get the door open.)

As soon as I—

LARRY

Here, Norbert.

NORBERT

No, I don't need any—!

(As LARRY helps him get the door open.)

There.

(NORBERT goes out.)

LOTTIE

(With a handful of bulletins.)

Guess we don't need these any more either.

(Carelessly drops them. They scatter. She leaves.)

YOLANDA

(Helping GUSTAFINA to the door.)

I can drive you, Gustafina, unless you want to go with Norbert.

GUSTAFINA

(Tries to say something, can't find the word.)

Ja.

YOLANDA

Ja what? You want to go with me or Norbert?

GUSTAFINA

Ja.

GUSTAFINA goes out with YOLANDA.

LARRY

Pastor, you need a ride?

PASTOR

Oh, no. I've got vestments and things in my car. Mount Olive might as well have them.

LARRY

That'll be good. Some continuity.

(Sees PETER coming back in with music.)

See you there.

(Disappears.)

PETER

Boy, he took off.

PASTOR

You told him to get out of here.

PETER

As always, not quite enough time to do it right. And where's Simon?

PASTOR

I'm not tenor enough for you?

PETER

Oh, yeah, Norbert took him to the hospital—

PASTOR

—The loony bin.

PETER

Really, the loony bin?

PASTOR

The hospital, but the mental ward. I made arrangements, Lottie helped. He finally agreed to go, but only if Norbert drove him.

PETER  
Did he just—tump over the edge?

PASTOR  
He'd balanced there for a long time.

PETER  
Did he hurt himself?

PASTOR  
Change is not...he doesn't—

PETER  
None of us do.  
(Busily organizing music.)  
France. That'll be nice. Taize's pretty?

PASTOR  
Very nice.  
(After a moment.)  
Peter.

PETER  
Pastor?

PASTOR  
Say something to Larry.

PETER  
Say...what kind of something?

PASTOR  
He's not with Yolanda any more.

PETER  
(Sits at the organ, plays quietly.)  
Pastor, don't be ridiculous. Nobody's more—  
(Struggles for the word, won't say it.)  
—Than Larry, and nobody's less—  
(A different struggle.)  
—Than he is either. He offered me a job. It would be horrible.

PASTOR  
Really? A job? Hmmm.

PETER

Stop.

PASTOR

He didn't offer Lottie a job. Take it.

PETER

If he asks again—

PASTOR

We're too cautious, don't you think? I've been driving my whole life with hands at 10 and 2. Careful, prudent, not necessarily with money, but with people's feelings at least.

PETER

That's your job.

PASTOR

But is it yours?

PETER

Isn't it everybody's?

PASTOR

Well—

PASTOR AND PETER

—Lutherans, anyway.  
(They laugh.)

PASTOR

What would Veronica say?

PETER

She'd push me. She'd make fun of me. Please don't do that.

PASTOR

And you're above love.

PETER

Don't!

PASTOR

What else do you have going on? Really?  
(PETER says nothing.)

There. I wasn't careful with your feelings. Maybe we *are* free now.

PETER

That sounds so awful. I can't believe you let it—we let it—seems like we just bought the organ—what a waste. It all happened fast, didn't it?

PASTOR

Like a thief in the night.

PETER

(Shutting off the organ.)  
Wish I could take this home.

PASTOR

You'll find a church.

PETER

So will you.

PASTOR

Maybe. But I don't know if I'd fit in anywhere else. Orange Grove Lutheran is pretty unique.

PETER

You're way too young to retire. You can't just give up. We all depend on you. You were *called*.

PASTOR

I think now I'm *called away*.

PETER

Veronica depended on you. She admired you very much, you know.

PASTOR

(Surprised and delighted.)  
Admired me? Really?

PETER

Very much.

VERONICA turns away, embarrassed.

PASTOR

Oh, my!

LARRY

(Coming back in.)  
Pastor, Gustafina wants you.

PASTOR

Of course.

(Starts to leave, LARRY starts to go with him.)

Can you help Peter?

(PASTOR disappears.)

LARRY

What do you need?

PETER

Nothing. I don't know why he said that.

(Indicating the music in his hands.)

It's just music.

(They stand there awkwardly for a moment.)

When the churches merge, will you be president?

LARRY

They want me to. But I don't know.

PETER

(Shrugs.)

I'm sure you could. There's that endowment to manage.

LARRY

I won't know anybody there.

VERONICA stands, as if hopeful.

PETER

Oh, sure. *Some* people from here will go there.

(Pause.)

I wouldn't know anyone either.

(Pause.)

And their choirmaster *prefers* his electronic organ.

LARRY

Gloomy day. For a funeral.

PETER

Marine layer.

LARRY

When I was a kid they used to call it June Swoon or June Gloom. But—global warming—now it starts in April and goes all the way to August. Maybe someday LA will be a rainforest instead of a desert.

PETER

I'd like to believe in that—warming theory—but—

LARRY

No?

PETER

The universe is getting colder, not hotter.

LARRY

Now how do you figure *that*?

PETER

Expanding, spreading out, farther apart—makes sense to me—as much as anything does.  
(Shrugs.)

LARRY

(Nodding.)  
Colder.

Sound of the chainsaw again.

LARRY

What are they—? They're supposed to—  
(Dashes out.)

PETER stares after LARRY for a moment, then quickly engrosses himself in sorting his music. VERONICA relaxes—sadly—and watches him. He looks at his watch, goes to the door, starts to leave, then steps back inside. The chainsaw sound ceases.

GUSTAFINA comes in on PASTOR'S arm, still limping.

PASTOR

Gustafina wanted one last look.

GUSTAFINA

Mein kinder—wasser—watered, no—wet—

PETER

Baptized? They were all baptized here?

Ja. GUSTAFINA

Peter—? PASTOR

Guten Erinerrungen, Frau Liedtke? PETER

(Indicating LARRY.)  
Did—? PASTOR

Please! PETER

Mein Ehemann—die Bestattung— GUSTAFINA

Pastor Liedtke had his funeral here. PETER

I officiated. PASTOR

Oh! Hold on a minute!  
(Disappears.) PETER

Schön. Schön!  
(Starts to cry.) GUSTAFINA

Gustafina, you know I don't know any German. Parle-tu francais? PASTOR

Die Bestattung— GUSTAFINA

Does that mean "funeral?" PASTOR

(Returning with a small white box.)  
"Bestattung" is funeral, yes. PETER

Schön. GUSTAFINA

(Handing her the box.)  
Did you want—Pastor Liedtke...?  
PETER

Oh, Peter, no—  
PASTOR

(Accepting the box.)  
Bitte. Danke. GUSTAFINA

Schön. PETER

PASTOR  
Oh, dear. What will we do with the others? We can't leave them here. It's probably even illegal.

Schön. GUSTAFINA

(Taking her out.)  
A beautiful service. I'm sure it was. PETER

(As they leave.)  
Schön... GUSTAFINA

PASTOR is left alone with VERONICA. She watches him, but he can't see her. He looks around the room, perhaps for the last time. He picks up the bulletins that LOTTIE scattered earlier. He leaves and closes the door behind him. Just as the door is closing, SIMON gropes his way in from another door. SIMON is grubbier than before, his hair has gotten long, and his beard has come in quite a bit.

## SIMON

(Feebly.)

Good morning, everyone! I've had all my pills now. Every single one. Every single one...is gone. Pastor? Yolanda?

(Tries the door. Finds there is no knob.)

Hey! I'm coming, too!

(The sound of the chainsaw begins again outside.)

Open up! You're gonna need me there! They don't have nobody like me!

(Bangs on the door.)

Who's gonna watch out for things? Someone's gotta watch—

(Staggers, dizzy.)

Whoa!

(Sits down abruptly.)

Someone's gotta...give me a ride. I can stay for a little bit, and watch for a while, but I can't forever.

(VERONICA goes to him and lays her hands gently on him. He does not notice.)

They're gonna tear this place down in three days. But there's still a lotta...stuff here...and somebody's gotta watch it. All kindsa people come here, and they're not all...good people. All kinds of temptation. I'm ready! Won't anyone...watch with me? Can no one—

(Curling up.)

—Stay...?

The strange musical sigh is heard once again. SIMON falls asleep with VERONICA watching over him. The sound of the chainsaw gets louder.

THE END