

HINDS' FEET ON HIGH PLACES

List of characters:

Narrator

Much-Afraid

Shepherd

Sorrow

Suffering

Craven Fear

Pride

Aunt Dismal Forebodings

Lord Fearing

Resentment

Bitterness

Self-Pity

Mrs. Valiant

Scene 1

NARRATOR

Narrator: This is the story of how Much-Afraid escaped her Fearing relatives and went with the Shepherd to the High Places where "perfect love casts out fear."

Having been in the service of the Chief Shepherd for several years, Much-Afraid desired intensely to please him and was happy in most ways. She was, however, shamefully conscious of two things: the unsightly blemish of a crooked mouth and feet so twisted that they often caused her to limp and stumble as she went about her work. As plaguing as these were, there was an even greater trouble in her life. She was a member of the Fearing Family.

Like most other families in the Valley of Humiliation, the Fearings hated the Chief Shepherd, and it was a great offense that one of their own family should have

entered his service. Consequently they did all they could both by threats and persuasions to get her out of his employment. Finally, they laid before her the family dictum that she must immediately marry her cousin, Craven Fear, and settle down respectfully among her own people. If she refused, they threatened to use force and compel her!

As was her habit every morning and evening, she hurried to the watering place on the outskirts of the village to meet with the Shepherd. She felt sure he would help her and not permit her relatives to kidnap her and force her to leave his service for the dreadful slavery of marriage with Craven Fear.

(setting: at the trysting place -watering place- after receiving the news from the Fearings)

(Shepherd on stage, staff in hand; Much-Afraid at his feet; water sounds low)

SHEPHERD/MUCH-AFRAID

Much-Afraid: Oh Shepherd! What shall I do? How can I escape? It is dreadful enough to be Much-Afraid, but to think of having to be Mrs. Craven Fear for the rest of my life is more than I can bear! (sob)

Shepherd: Don't be afraid. (he lifts her up) You are in my service, and if you will trust me, they will not be able to force you, against your will, into any family alliance.

M-A: They are determined to get me into their power. I shall never dare venture outside my cottage alone for fear of being kidnapped. (she looks up with longing to the mountains) Oh, if only I could escape from this Valley of Humiliation altogether and go to the High Places.

Shepherd: I have waited a long time to hear you make that suggestion, Much-Afraid. That would indeed be best for you.

M-A: (stares in astonishment) Me? Go to the High Places?

Shepherd: In my Father's Kingdom, the Realm of Love, no Fears of any kind are permitted. I will very willingly take you there.

M-A: Oh, if only I could! But it isn't possible. Those mountains are so steep and dangerous. I could never get there. I am too lame. (she looks down at her feet, is filled with self-pity and despair and begins to cry)

Shepherd: It is quite true that the way up to the High Places is both difficult and dangerous. It has to be so that nothing which is an enemy of Love can make the ascent and invade the Kingdom.

M-A: I have been told that only the hinds and the deer can move on them safely.

Shepherd: Nothing blemished or in any way imperfect is allowed there, and the inhabitants of the High Places do need "hinds' feet." (smiles) I have them myself. But Much-Afraid, I could make yours like hinds' feet also.

M-A: Make *my*... (laughs, looks down at her feet) How is it possible? And what would the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Love say to the presence of a wretched little cripple if blemished may dwell there?

Shepherd: You would have to be changed, but if you are willing to go with me, I promise to help you develop hinds' feet.

M-A: (nods) I am willing!

Shepherd: Not only must you have hinds' feet, you must also receive another name for it would be as impossible for Much-Afraid to enter the Kingdom as for any other member of the Fearing family. Are you willing to be made like the new name which you will receive?

M-A: (nodding) Yes, I am.

Shepherd: (smiles, then gravely) There is one thing more, the most important of all. No one is allowed to dwell in my Father's Kingdom unless they have the flower of Love already blooming in their hearts. Has love been planted in your heart, Much-Afraid? (He stares at her intently as if looking into her heart)

(she knows he sees deep down in her heart; she flinchingly returns his long gaze and so sees her reflection)

M-A: (putting her hand on heart) I think...what I see reflected in your eyes growing there is a great longing to experience the joy of natural, human love and to learn to love one person who will love me in return. (embarrassed pause) But, perhaps that is not the Love of which you are speaking? (ashamed) At least it's nothing like the love I see in you.

Shepherd: Then will you let me plant the seed of love there now?

M-A: (shrinking back) I am afraid. I could never dare to love unless I were sure of being loved in return. If I let you plant it, will you promise me that I will be loved in return? I couldn't bear it otherwise.

Shepherd: (smiling) Yes, I promise that when the plant of Love is ready to bloom in your heart and you are ready to change your name, then you will be loved in return.

M-A: (with a thrill of joy) Please plant it in my heart now!

Shepherd: (draws something from his cloak and holds it in his hand) Here is the seed of love.

M-A: (bends forward to look and with a startled cry draws back) The seed looks very sharp! Won't it hurt if you put it into my heart?

Shepherd: It slips in very quickly, but love and pain go together. If you would know love, you must know pain. And you are very much afraid of pain, are you not?

M-A: (nodding ashamed) Yes, very much afraid.

Shepherd: (quietly) But it is so happy to love.

M-A: (she looks into his eyes, then away and repeats his promise) When the seed of love is ready to bloom, you will be loved in return! (steps forward, bearing her heart) You may plant the seed in my heart.

Shepherd: (smiling, then presses the seed into her heart) Now you will be able to go with me to the High Places.

M-A: (She winces, then relaxes and is filled with joy) Oh thank you, thank you! There is no one in the whole world as good and patient as you are.

Shepherd: I am even more glad than you. (smiling with pity on her) Now you may go home and make preparations. I cannot give you an exact time when we will start for the mountains, but you must be ready to follow me whenever I come to the cottage, singing one of my special songs. When you hear it, come at once to this place. Do not tell anyone, for a journey to the High Places needs to be a secret matter.



Self-Pity: Let's get some refreshment. I need to be *revived* after a scare like that!

(The rest agree and are distracted with food, etc.)

(suddenly M-A awakens, realizes what has happened, springs toward the window)

M-A: Mrs. Valiant! Valiant! Come and help me. Come quickly!! Help!

(They all freeze in their tracks)

Mrs. Valiant: (thrusting her head in through the window) Out of this house this minute, you pack of idle Fears! OUT! Every one of you! This cottage belongs to the Shepherd and won't you catch it if he finds you here!

(They run helter, skelter out the door)

Mrs. Valiant: (coming in sternly) Oh you poor, silly girl. (feeling mercy now) Oh come now. (hugs her) There, there, it's all right.

M-A: (whimpering)

MRS. VALIANT

Mrs. Valiant: You sit here. While you're getting over your fright, I'll just pop into the kitchen and make a good cup of tea. My, if they haven't put the kettle on for us!

(aside to herself) What a pack of harpies! She ought to have stood up to the whole lot of them before they had her in their clutches. (glances at M-A) Ah, but what's the use of saying that? She can't act upon it, poor thing. She's one of them herself - Fearing's in her blood. (sigh) and when the enemy is within you, it's a poor prospect. I think no one but the Shepherd himself can really help her.

(to M-A) Now drink your tea, dear, and you'll feel better. If you like, I'll sleep here

in the cottage tonight.

M-A: Oh no, I couldn't keep you here when your family is waiting for you. Thank you... I'll be sure to bolt the door behind you.

Mrs. Valiant: Very well, but if you need me, you have only to ring this bell and the whole Valiant family will be here instantly to assist you. (she leaves)

M-A: Oh whatever will I do? It's too late to meet the Shepherd. He came singing the secret song....(sob) He'll think I don't want to go with him to the High Places. Supposing he's gone and left me behind! (sob) Oh, this throbbing! Why ever did I let him plant the seed of love in my heart? (sees the Song Book and pick it up)

(Reads) "By night I sought him, He whom my soul loves so. I sought, but I could not find him, and now I will rise and go. Out in the streets of the city, and out on the broad highway; For he whom my soul loves has left me and gone away."

Surely, he who knows all about me, would not leave me until he was quite sure I meant to refuse him. I will go to the watering place and see if he is waiting for me there. Though there be a hundred Craven Fears lurking in the streets, for the pain in my heart, I must know. (puts on her cloak and exits)

(lights dim; "cottage" is cleared and "watering place" set up)

Narrator: Though it was now in the early morning hours and yet still dark, Much-Afraid limped along hoping to find her beloved Shepherd.

Scene 3

M-A: (limps along looking for him; then seeing him, stumbles toward him) O my Lord, take me with you as you said. Don't leave me behind!

Shepherd: (smiling, takes her hand)

(Lights fade low as they exit as if climbing down and out, down-right)

(Fearings enter up-right to center; lights full up)

Scene 5

FEARINGS

(Lights come up; Pride wears a bandage around his head and arm in sling)

T Aunt Dismal: That was a nasty fall, Pride. Losing your balance on a rocky cliff could have turned out much worse than this.

Craven: (snickering) Losing his balance? Pffaaa! Is *that* what he told you?

Bitterness: You didn't really think he would *admit* defeat, did you?

Pride: I'm fine. Just a temporary set back. That all. I actually was considering withdrawing to regroup and strategize anyway.

Lord Fearing: (thundering) Weeks have been wasted! We should have had a wedding by now! I don't understand the failure and mishandling of a simple errand! Surely there was something you could have done while she wandered around in the desert.

Resentment: (aside) I resent that! (fake smile) Lord Fearing, while Much-Afraid was in the desert, the *Shepherd* never left her side? I mean, really, you could hardly

expect us to move in with *him* around!

Bitterness: Well, maybe the desert was impossible, but if you ask me - and no one ever does - we should have had her on the Shores of Loneliness when she was feeling very much alone.

Resentment: We were so close there! My accusations against her "hero" were really sinking in, and she was beginning to agree with me. Pride was moving in.

Craven: We almost had her!

Pride: We? You mean I! Had her by the hand, *I did*. (takes Craven by the hand and they act out) Told her that if she had any self-respect...(looks at Craven as if he's M-A) you would demand to be taken directly to the High Places and stop all this wasteful wandering in the wilderness. What was the point of it anyway?

Bitterness: (moving in) Torment! That's what. He's just dangling the proverbial carrot out there. Never really intends to make good on any promise!

Pride: It's true, I'm afraid. *We've* seen this before. He seems to enjoy making fools of those who follow him. And, I hate to say, it's working. I mean *everyone* in the Valley has heard of this little journey of yours, Much-Afraid. The family has tried to cover for you, but well, frankly, it's shocking that a member of such a respectable family would be so gullible.

Craven: That was a good one! (they stop the acting abruptly)

Pride: Naturally! And I had her in my power...until Self-Pity started babbling!



Self-Pity: Hey... it's not my fault. I had her feeling so sorry for herself. I mean who wouldn't - being left alone to wander aimlessly and being misunderstood and scorned by everyone... I really had her attention on that one.

Craven: Yeah, but you just couldn't stop at that, could you?

Self-Pity: All I said was that he seems to delight in thinking up new ways to *bruise* her.

Resentment: Well, apparently that was the *wrong* thing to say! It was like she suddenly *remembered* something...and screaming for the Shepherd was NOT what we were hoping she would do!

Craven: Ha! Did you see the look on Pride's face when the Shepherd appeared from nowhere, lifted him high above his head and hurled him over the cliff? (acts this out)

Self-Pity: Poor, poor Pride. (then, realizing they all feel sorry for Pride) And what about me? If I hadn't ducked and bolted like a hare, she would have laid me out with that sharp piece of rock she hurled my way!

Aunt Dismal: *That* doesn't sound at all like the same milquetoast mouse that stole away in the middle of the night.

Craven: You've got that right! Something terrible is happening and it's terribly dreadful...in the *worst* sort of way!

Lord Fearing: The fact is, our spys tell us that she is on the lower slopes now and heading *up*. I'm afraid she'll reach the Higher Places and will be completely out of

reach if we don't do something fast!

Aunt Dismal: She won't make it. She'll stumble and fall from a rocky cliff ...

Self-Pity: (whining) True enough, Aunt Dismal, if it weren't for those two very strong guides who aid her at every steep impass. Why, it took everything I had just to keep up. My poor, poor feet!

Pride: Since she has put herself under the protection of the Shepherd, force is unlikely to succeed. It's obvious - to ME anyway - that some means will have to be found to beguile her into leaving him of her own free will. *I* have many powers of fascination yet to be employed in order to coax her away from the Shepherd. Much-Afraid will be brought back here if it is the last thing I do!

(they all nod in agreement)

(Lights out)

Scene 6

(lights up on Narrator)

Narrator: It hardly mattered to Much-Afraid that Sorrow and Suffering were still with her because of the hope leaping up in her heart that soon they would cease to be her companions altogether. The Shepherd had, at last, been leading them in the direction of the High Places, and once they arrived, she would need them no longer.

One day they suddenly reached the top of the highest hills and could see at no great distance, mountains! Never had she seen anything so beautiful, and before they believed it was possible, they found themselves among the slopes and boulders at their very base. In the late afternoon, the path they were following led them right up to the foot of an impassable precipice and there stopped dead.

(they've entered and now stand staring up)

(lights up)

M-A: There is no sign of a track in any other direction. (puts her head back and looks straight up, then starts to tremble) There is no way to *ascend* such a terrifying wall of cliff! We will simply have to turn back.

S&S: Point to hart and hind ascending the precipice

Sorrow: Do not be afraid, it is not a dead end after all. There is a way up the face of the precipice. The hart and the hind have shown it to us quite plainly.

Suffering: We shall be able to follow it, too, and make the ascent.

M-A: Oh no! No! That path is utterly impossible. The deer may be able to manage it, but no human could. I could never be able to get up there. I cannot get to the High places that way and so can never get there at all! (bursts into a sob)

Sorrow: Much-Afraid...

(M-A puts her hands over her ears and cries hysterically) I can't do it. I can't.

CRAVEN

Craven: Ha, ha! My dear little cousin, we meet again at last! Did you really believe you could escape from me altogether? No, Much-Afraid, you are one of the Fearings, and a Fearing you'll always be. What's more, you trembling little idiot, you belong to me!

M-A: I won't go with you! I refuse to go with you!

Craven: Well, have it your way then. Take a look at the precipice before you. Won't you feel lovely up there! Just look where that dizzy little ledge breaks right off and you have to *jump* across the chasm onto that bit of rock.

Resentment: Just picture yourself, Much-Afraid, hanging over space, clutching a bit of slippery rock which you can't hold onto another minute. Imagine those ugly knife-like rocks at the foot of the precipice, waiting to mangle you to pieces as your strength gives out and you *plunge* down on them!

Craven: (moving closer) That's only one of *many* such broken places on the track, and the higher you go, the farther you will have to fall. So, make your choice. Either you must go up there - where you know you can't - or you must come back and be my little slave ever after.

Suffering: Much-Afraid, you know where your help lies. Call for help.

M-A: I am afraid to call. I'm so afraid that if I call him, he will tell me that I must go that way, that dreadful, dreadful way and I can't. I'm ashamed to face him. He will tell me to build an altar, and this time I can't.

Bitterness: It's true, Much-Afraid. The more you yield to him, the more he will demand from you. He is cruel to you and takes advantage of your devotion. All he has demanded from you so far is nothing to what he will demand if you persist in following him. He lets his followers, even women and children, go through tortures and hideous deaths of all sorts. Could *you* bear that, you little whiner?

M-A: (shaking her head)

Read all

Shepherd: (cheery) Why, Much-Afraid, what is the matter? Don't be afraid, it is I.

M-A: (shamefully) Oh, my Lord! (looking up) You are tender and compassionate to them that are afraid.

SHEPHERD / MUCH -
AFRAID

Shepherd: Tell me why you were so fearful.

M-A: It is the *way* you have chosen for me to go. It looks so dreadful, Shepherd, so impossible. I turn faint whenever I look at it. The roes and hinds can go there but they are not limping, crippled, or cowardly like me.

Shepherd: (smiling) But what did I promise you in the Valley of Humiliation?

M-A: You said....O Shepherd, you said you would make my feet like hinds' feet and set me upon my High Places.

Shepherd: Well, the only way to develop hinds' feet is to go by the paths which the hinds use - like this one.

M-A: (looks down, slowly speaks) I don't think I *want* hinds' feet.

Shepherd: Oh yes you do! I know you better than you know yourself, Much-Afraid. You want it very much indeed, and I promise you these hinds' feet. What did I say to you the last time that we met?

M-A: You said, "Now you shall see what I will do." But I never dreamed you would do anything like *this!* Lead me to an impassable precipice up which nothing can go but deer and goats. I'm no more a deer or a goat than is a jellyfish! It's

too...it's too....(begins to laugh) Why it's too preposterously absurd!

Shepherd: (laughing) I love doing preposterous things! I don't know anything more exhilarating than turning weakness into strength, and fear into faith. If there is one thing more than another which I should enjoy doing at this moment, it is turning a jellyfish into a mountain goat!

(They laugh together)

Shepherd: Come now, little jellyfish, do you believe that I can change you into a mountain goat and get you to the top of the precipice?

M-A: Yes.

Shepherd: Will you let me do it?

M-A: Yes, if you want to do such a preposterous thing, you certainly may.

Shepherd: Do you believe that I will let you be put to shame on the way up?

M-A: (gazes steadily at him for a moment, kneels) I don't think I mind so very much if you do; only have your way in me.

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO INDICATE RAINBOW)

(Shepherd hands her a memorial stone)

(S&S come near)

Shepherd: (as he ropes them together) This precipice is at the foot of Mount Injury,