

# The Plague Seeker (where is it?)

By

*Christine Emmert*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...* The Plague Seeker, by Christine Emmert comes through the lens of biblical lore with an archetypal elderly man dragging a bell around announcing impending calamity and doom. A rag-clad woman confronts the man because she's seen it all and isn't interested in his prophecies. The play summons a feeling of another time and place, but the warnings of suffering and plague seem all too familiar. What if the old man is right? Does it mean the bell should keep ringing? Is there time for peace and quiet when the end of the world is nigh upon us? There's something Brechtian about the writing in Christine Emmert's play, not as alienation, but in the direct style of language and driving themes. At the precipice of disease, displacement, and disaster, this unusual little play is a timely meditation about manifestation and, ultimately (one hopes) transformation.

MAN (sings)

Mercy is the bridge across the river  
Mercy is the hand that leads me home.  
The darkest night makes no shiver  
Where the beloved of Adonai do roam.

*(Spacing is playwright's own. Please scroll down.)*

## THE PLAGUE SEEKER

THE PLAGUE SEEKER/a

Time: twilight

Place: Not determined

Characters:

Man

Woman

Synopsis: A man with a bell comes warning of disasters. He stops briefly to talk with a woman who has lived through them. Then he continues on.

THE PLAGUE SEEKER/1

(an empty stage. An elderly man enters in rags. He is ringing a bell)

MAN

Flee! Flee! Sickness! Death! Your tongue will dry in your mouth! Your body will weep tears from your pores! You will be on fire on the coldest day!

A WOMAN (she enters, dressed in rags as well)

What are you talking about? Go away. You'll scare the children.

MAN (ringing his bell louder)

Flee! Flee!

WOMAN:

I don't want to flee. We just got here. You can't imagine the journey. And who are you? I've never seen you. Are you a leper? You don't look as though you are missing any body parts. (he rings bell furiously) Stop it or I'll have to take the bell away from you.

MAN (stops ringing the bell)

You're no fun. Aren't you even scared of me? A little?

WOMAN:

No. If I'm scared of you, I have to be scared of everything. We just got here. From a place where they used more than bells to frighten us. We just finished the house. (she gestures to the right) My children just settled down for the night. And then you come, ringing that great big bell.

MAN

Not such a big bell. (whispers) I stole it.

WOMAN

Why would you want to do that? Go put it back. And move on with your threats of death and disease. I've been hearing those for the last hundred years now. Maybe more.

MAN

You're still around and kicking. Why complain?

WOMAN

Do you know how many villages I've been thrown out? do you understand that the promised land was never in sight? I've survived it all – the death and rape and pillage. But others haven't. Others whom I loved. Now I am tired. I am here. I have children. I don't need some strange man with a big bell to come and tell me it's all going to happen again. I was the outsider and I moved on. Now you are the outsider. YOU move on.

THE PLAGUE SEEKER/2

MAN

Where should I go? I don't have a home. I follow the others who are looking for one. Then my job is to frighten them away.

WOMAN

Some job! Who gave you a job like this?

MAN

I don't remember. It was a long time ago. I was told I was part of the story.

WOMAN

From whom did you steal that ridiculous bell.

MAN

The same being who told me to follow after. He said someone eventually would want to give me a home. I would stop wandering. He turned away for a moment. I grabbed the bell and ran.

WOMAN

Well, you can stop right now and sleep over there (points) by the wall. If you promise to be quiet.

MAN

O, thank you so much.

WOMAN

Just give me the bell.

MAN

No. I can't do that. How would you know I was here except for my bell? It tells you to pay attention to me. Take notice. Sometimes we blend into the scenery. No one even sees us. The outsider. You know that.

WOMAN

I've never had a bell. I had a community that walked with me.

MAN

Then you were never alone. (rings bell loudly and dances around) Ha! Ha! Ha! (she just stares at him) We are always alone. Looking for a promised land that doesn't exist.

WOMAN

It is promised. Only Moses isn't allowed. Moses was the first outsider. He spoke of plagues too....but not for us....He said we should not look for the plagues. (sharply) And neither should you. If you put away the bell, you could join us.

### THE PLAGUE SEEKER/3

MAN

I never met Moses. He was always gone by the time I got there. I was held back at the Red Sea. Good thing too. I have a fear of water.

WOMAN

They talk about you in the temple. Not you, exactly, but someone like you who is an Outsider to us. A wanderer. And the world thinks We are outsiders. Wanderers.

MAN

But you have a house and sleeping children....

WOMAN

I didn't always. I too followed the plagues and the wars and the destruction of the Temple. And then I came to this peace....this Zion.

MAN (sings)

Man like the flower is born  
To have his roots shorn  
Like a shadow he cannot last  
where the Great light is cast. (rings the bell)

WOMAN

That's sad. But not as sad as what you cried when you first came.

MAN

I am the plague-seeker. You must leave me outside of your community. If you let me in, I will destroy you. There are things a community cannot contain.

WOMAN

You said someone will give you a home.

MAN

Jeremiah was my name, and Isiah and Ezekiel.

WOMAN

Let me go in to my children. You are wearying me.

MAN (sings)

Mercy is the bridge across the river  
Mercy is the hand that leads me home.  
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#### THE PLAGUE-SEEKER/4

WOMAN

Foolish old man, what will happen when you find your plague? When your skin splits?  
When your tongue dries out? When Mercy forgets you?

MAN

I will sing unto the Great a new song. (with a laugh) And I will ring my bell again and again to warn the others.

WOMAN

Goodnight, foolish old man.

MAN

Good night, woman with a community of people. I'm going now.

WOMAN

I certainly hope so.

MAN

And by the time I return....

WOMAN

Oh, then! We'll have moved on.

(she goes off)

MAN (stands for a moment collecting his energies and then continues on his path ringing his bell)

I am not fearing the sores and pains of life. I am not fearing death at the hands of enemies. I fear only a darkness where I cannot see Adonai's face. (he is off)

--the end--

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *In a world of constant migration two themes struck me – those that try to find roots and those that try to live without need of them. Diasporas are as old as civilization. Legend of the Wandering Jew (who will not rest in his travels until Time itself ends) butt up against community need to keep cultures alive in spite of the alienation. Such concepts are best expressed in theater by the use of comedy such as that used by Bertolt Brecht in his writing. I follow Brecht – or maybe you could say I am a Brecht Seeker.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Christine is a writer, actress, director and educator. Her work has been read/performed in the USA, Canada and the UK. Presently she is awaiting publication of her novella, Dreaming of Storms.

You can find her novel, The Nun's Dragon, and her shorter piece, Lillith, on Amazon. She often creates pop-up theatre with her husband, Richard.