

When Mother Calls

By David Radcliff

This environmental play emphasizing the call to respect and nurture the earth is easily adapted for performance in congregations, youth camps, retreats, or other church or youth events.

To put on this play successfully, you will need eight actors. The cast includes Amy, a teenager; Ralph, Amy's father; Mother Nature, an adult woman, either in person or as an off-stage voice; a prosecuting attorney; a judge; Euphydryas Editha Bayensis, a butterfly; Frank/Frances Flora, a plant; and Carson, a boy.

Props include an electric leaf-blower; optional goggles and air-filter mask; a pile of dry leaves; a bench; furniture to indicate a court-room: raised judge's table and chair, judge's gavel, chair for witnesses; large paper bag; glass of lemonade. Special effects may include a colored spotlight or smoke from a dry ice machine.

The scene opens with father (Ralph) in the yard herding the leaves with an electric leaf-blower. He does so with a certain earnestness, perhaps dressed in goggles and air filter mask.

Teenaged daughter Amy arrives on the scene. She calls to get his attention.

Amy: "Dad. Dad!"

Ralph: "Oh, hi, Amy. How was school today?"

Amy: "Fine."

Ralph: "You're home a little late, aren't you?"

Amy: "Had to stay after for a GreenTeen meeting. You know, the environmental club."

Ralph: "Why couldn't we just have a normal kid. The French Club, the Drama Club, or even that afterschool Bible group, for goodness sake. No, my daughter gets hooked up with some extremist group!" (feigning tears)

Amy: "Oh Dad, cut it out. It's just something that interests me. So what have you been doing all day?"

Ralph: "I had the day off, and I just had to get these pesky leaves taken care of. But I gotta tell you, these contraptions are really nice. I just blow my leaves over to the property line and a little wind comes up—and shazam! a few minutes later and they're the Wilkins' problem! And what don't blow away, I can just stuff into the trash can and they're taken right to the dump. Just doing my part to clean up the environment."

Amy: "In GreenTeens today we had a fact sheet about environmentally sensitive yardwork."

Ralph: "I don't like the sound of this already."

Amy: "Do you know how much carbon dioxide is emitted by Americans using leaf blowers every year?"

Ralph: "Amy, this is starting to get personal."

Amy: "2.6 million tons."

Ralph: "But...but...I rode my bike to the mailbox today. Doesn't that make up for it?"

Amy: "That's two blocks, dad. But nice try. And the leaves—landfills are getting filled up with our yard waste, food waste and the other ton of stuff each of us throws away every year. [Agitated, Ralph begins walking back

and forth with the leaf blower on, Amy following him and talking to him as he moves about] And that bike ride was a good start, but you'd get a lot more exercise raking leaves. Upper body movement, eye-hand coordination, great practice for the Olympic curling team...."

Ralph: "Wait a second—how did we get from leaf-blowing to the Olympics? Listen to yourself, Amy. (with an air of nostalgia) I can still remember the day when you could use a paper plate without flinching, and our family could go for a drive without having to file a trip plan. But now, our recycle container is filled with foreign cans—cans you've taken in from every curbside and alleyway on your way home from school. And your mother and I last winter, huddled together in our sweaters, reading by the light of that compact fluorescent bulb. What a pitiful sight!

Amy: "That was the closest you two have been in years."

Ralph: "Well, yeah... But look what's become of us, Amy! All in the name of Mother Nature."

Amy: "Dad, it's not Mother Nature that's the problem. It's us. We treat the earth like it's ours to trash. It's not even ours anyway. Last Sunday we learned in Sunday School that the earth is the Lord's."

Ralph: "Well then let the Lord come up with a tree that keeps its leaves to itself! Honey, I'm not some eco-monster who just puts his own needs before those of the planet. I'm just one man doing his part to make the world safe for... croquet."

Amy: "How about some lemonade, Dad. (slight sarcasm) It's got to be tiring with so much resting on your shoulders."

Ralph: "(not noticing the sarcasm) Sure, that sounds great."

Amy: "(starts toward house, but turns back) Dad, remember when we'd all get out here on a Saturday morning and rake the leaves together? You were even jumping in the piles!"

Ralph: "It was a lot of fun, wasn't it...except for that time I lost my car keys in the leaf pile—seemed like it took an hour to find them!"

Amy: "Yep...that was tragic—but somehow we survived..."

Ralph: "But those days are long gone, honey. Why work like that when we've got a machine like this (pointing to leaf-blower)."

Amy: "I don't think you get my point, dad. Lemonade—coming up!"

[Dad goes back to work. He sits down on a bench for a few minutes to relax. Shortly he says...]

Ralph: "I'll just lay back and relax for a few minutes before she brings the lemonade. [mumbling to himself as he drifts off to sleep] If Mother Nature had any real concern for us hard-working humans she'd invent a tree with retractable leaves or something... spare us a lot of unnecessary trouble..."

*****Dreamtime begins*****

[Mother Nature character can be a voice from off-stage, or can be visible on-stage (except that Ralph cannot see her). Special effects such as a colored spotlight or smoke from a dry ice machine may indicate the dream state that Ralph is now in.]

Mother Nature: "Ralph, Ralph."

[Ralph stirs and then slowly rises as he responds; speaks in a bit of a stupor, leaf-blower still in hand]

Ralph: "Yes, ...who is it?"

Mother Nature: "It's mother."

Ralph: "Mom! We weren't expecting you til next weekend!"

Mother Nature: "No, not that mother. This is Mother Nature speaking."

Ralph: "Huh?... Oh!... Listen, about those things I was saying... I really didn't mean..."

Mother: "That's not why I'm here, Ralph."

Ralph: "That's a relief!"

Mother: "It's much more serious than that."

Ralph: "O-boy."

Mother: "I know how you think, Ralph."

Ralph: "Double-O-boy. We've got big problems."

Mother: "Yes, we do. It's the way you humans treat the earth. Cutting down the forests, squeezing out those poor, little defenseless species. Using those, those, machines of yours to create havoc all over the planet! (Ralph quickly drops leaf-blower). Treating the earth like it was yours to do with as you please. Shame on you, Ralph!"

Ralph: "You don't have to take it so personally."

Mother: "(nearly roars) How else am I supposed to take it!! (Ralph cowers) [slight pause] "Excuse me, I get a little upset. We have to take a trip, Ralph. To a courtroom. There's a trial in session. And you might have some personal interest in the case."

Ralph: "I'll just jump in the car. [beat] Bad idea."

Mother: "Ralph, come with me." [lights out; move to new set nearby where there is a trial in process. The courtroom scene includes a judge, prosecuting attorney, witnesses waiting to be called.]

Ralph: "Just what is this?"

Mother: "You'll see, Ralph."

Prosecuting attorney: "Your honor, I would like to call my next witness."

Judge: "Proceed."

P.A.: "I call Euphydryas editha bayensis." [a butterfly with a kind of sophisticated-lady personality takes the stand]

P.A.: "Please state for the court your name and place of habitation."

Butterfly: "Well, dear, most of my friends know me by my nickname, Bay Checkerspot butterfly. I live in the fashionable San Francisco Bay area."

P.A.: "Could you tell us a little about yourself?"

Butterfly: "Certainly. My family—the butterflies—are one of the most studied insects in the world. And it's not just because we're so good-looking. We have short life cycles and large populations, and are easily identified "on-the-wing," so to speak. [to prosecutor] You could pick me out of a crowd, couldn't you, honey?"

P.A.: "Er, yeah, uh... anything else you want to say about yourself, uh... Madame Butterfly."

Butterfly: "Well, dear, there are fewer and fewer places that are fashionable enough for beauties like us—you know, prairies, forests, stands of milkweeds. And we can hardly stand the heat anymore—in fact, many of most of us are moving a little closer toward the poles every year—you know, we don't look good in sweat, dah-ling. Of course, we aren't the only ones; they say that as we butterflies go, so go the other species. I think they call us an 'indicator species', trend-setters, you know."

P.A.: [close to madame Butterfly] "And just what are you `indicating' these days?"

Butterfly: "We are indicating... oh, I just hate this word. It sounds so, so final. We are indicating 'extinction'."

P.A.: "And what evidence do you have of this?"

Butterfly: [beginning to break down] "I've lost so many of my dear friends since they came to town. Sthenele Brown butterfly disappeared years ago. The small blue Xerces butterfly—such a cute little thing—was last seen in the 40's. Lately the Baron's Checkerspot butterfly has practically been run out of town. And now... and now... (almost overwhelmed with emotion)"

P.A.: "Go on, Ms. Checkerspot."

Butterfly: "Now, they're after me!"

P.A.: "And just who is this "they"?"

Butterfly: "Those humans!!"

P.A.: "No, more questions, your honor."

Judge: "Thank you, Ms. Checkerspot. You may... er... flutter down. Next witness."

Ralph: [to Mother Nature] "Heart-rending testimony. But, if you'll excuse me, so what? We're out a few butterflies. Life goes on."

Mother Nature: "Does it, Ralph? Keep listening."

P.A.: "Your honor, the next witness is already enrolled in our Witness Protection Plan. To protect his anonymity, he (or she) goes by the name "Frank (or Frances) Flora." Mr. Flora, will you take the stand?" [a plant with a bag over its head takes the stand]

P.A.: "Tell us a little about yourself, Mr. Flora."

Flora: "I am a plant from an equatorial rainforest. I am related to other, well-known plants that are used in a wide range of pharmaceuticals. I am almost certain that I, too, have properties that will be of benefit to human beings some day."

P.A.: "Mr. Flora, would you tell the court about your concern for remaining anonymous? Isn't it a little strange that a plant that could possibly be rich and famous would want to remain out-of-sight?"

Flora: "It's a dilemma, your honor. If they find out about my medicinal properties, they may go out of their way to protect me. Or they may cut down all my friends t make room for more of me—like all those palm oil plantations—I lost so many dear friends when cut everything down to put all those in. And sometimes when they find something that they really want or need, they grab for it so furiously that they end up... killing it off. Besides, the more we plants do to improve their health, the more there are of them to run over us!"

P.A.: "I can understand why you wouldn't want to go out on a limb. Is there anything else you want to say?"

Flora: "Yes. R-E-S-P-E-C-T. It disgusts me when they protect us and value us just for what we can do for them. I want to be loved and appreciated for who I am, not because of what they can get out of me!"

P.A.: "And Mr. Flora, just who is the 'they' to whom you refer?"

Flora: "Human beings, of course!"

P.A.: "No more questions, your honor."

Judge: "Thank you, Mr. Flora, you may step down. You may call your next witness."

Mother Nature: "Well, Ralph, does that testimony make you want to turn over a new leaf?"

Ralph: "It was very persuasive. Guess I'd never really looked at it from the plant's point-of-view. But it would take so much effort to make any real changes. I'm still not sure it's worth it in the long run."

Mother Nature: "Then you'll be quite interested in the next witness."

P.A.: "Your honor, I would next like to call to the stand...a human being. Mr. Carson Andrews, please take the stand." [this should be a boy about 10-12 years old, or someone dressed to look this age]

Ralph: [to Mother Nature] "You know, he kinda looks like my brother's boy!"

P.A.: "Carson, please state your reason for wanting to testify."

Carson: "We of future generations are very concerned about what kind of planet we will inherit from our parents and grandparents. We're worried that things like the air and water and soil won't be able to keep us healthy--=and that many of the beautiful things in our world like the birds and flowers and forests will disappear."

Ralph: [to Mother Nature] "Articulate little fellow, isn't he? What he's saying makes sense, too!"

P.A.: "Carson, could you tell us a little of your personal story."

Carson: "My mom taught me to take care of the earth. She told me that ever since she was a little girl she's been concerned about the environment—even though her dad gave her a hard time about it. She told me she was doing it because God expects us to, and because she cares about me and my future!"

Ralph: [to Mother Nature] "Hear that? Sharp kid, dedicated mom. And a grandfather like that! Now there's an eco-monster for you!"

Carson: "Mom says her dad used to get on her when she'd bring home cans she found along the road."

Ralph: "Cans along the road...?"

Carson: "And he called her an 'environmental extremist' once."

Ralph: [with dawning recognition] "It couldn't be..."

P.A.: "Sounds like your mother has had a big impact on you. What did you say her name was?"

Carson: "Her name's Amy."

Ralph: [exclaims] "My baby's had a baby! And he's testifying against his own grandpa!" [Ralph falls to his knees or with his face to the ground]

Mother Nature: "Relax, Ralph, it's only a dream!"

Ralph: [head in hands, beginning to cry, very dramatic] "No, it's not a dream! It's all true! That's me he's talking about! Poor little fella. [lights go down and then out as Ralph is talking and sobbing, then come back on as he finishes, with set back in its original form] He and his mom out there trying to make this world a better place... and a bunch of old windy leaf-blowers like me refusing to do our part. Oh, Mother Nature, give me another chance! I'll do better this time!"

[lights go up on original scene, Amy walks on as her dad is sitting sobbing on his bench]

Amy: "What's the matter, dad, got a leaf allergy or something?"

Ralph: "Oh, Amy, it's you, and you're not... [placing his hand on her abdomen, obviously relieved] Amy, you'll never believe where I've been. [somewhat rapidly] There was a courtroom, and a trial, and Madame Butterfly, and Frank Flora—except that wasn't his real name because he's in the witness protection plan—and Mother Nature, and... [slight pause] and... a little boy who said so many good things."

Amy: "Chill, dad! You really have been working too hard out here. Have a glass of lemonade."

Ralph: [takes glass, but doesn't drink] "But now I see that you're right about some things. We really do have to change the way we're treating our world... I mean, God's world. Big things like the destruction of habitat; small things like the way we take care of our yards."

Amy: "Dad, what's come over you? It's like you've seen an apparition or something!"

Ralph: [Calming down a little] "Not an apparition, honey. A vision. A vision of a different way of treating our earth. You know how Frank put it? R-E-S-P-E-C-T. And little Carson talking about sustainability. What a kid! Maybe you'll meet him someday, Amy." [puts his arm around Amy as they start to walk off stage]

Amy: "Yeah, sure dad. For now, let's talk about an old-fashioned leaf-raking party!"

Ralph: "Great idea, Amy. We'll dust off those old rakes, show off our Olympic raking form, make some gargantuan leaf piles, get a running start..."

Amy: "...after we've made sure your car keys are on the key rack where they belong!" [they walk off stage arm in arm and laughing]

"When Mother Calls"
by David Radcliff
New Community Project