

MADMAN AT THE WISHING WELL

A ONE ACT PLAY

by

Theodore J. Nottingham

(Note: This play is copyrighted with the Library of Congress and the Writers Guild of America. Use of this play, for readings or production, is permitted upon approval from the author. Contact Tnottingham@usa.net)

CAST

MADMAN (also known as Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third)

ANGEL (a spunky young creature)

SPIRIT 1

SPIRIT 2 (divine entertainers, versed in the arts of dance and pantomime)

SPIRIT 3

MR. GRIM (a sly, hideous creature--the personification of Death)

SETS

The attic of a madman, collector of theatrical paraphernalia.

Upstage left is a large round table covered by a red cloth. Several old chests are scattered about the stage. Various worthless antiques are piled across the upper stage. There is a dusty dresser upstage right. A large handmirror lies on top of it.

Stage is dark. The sound of bizarre laughter explodes offstage right. A silhouette rushes out from stage right as laughter echoes away and dim orange/green lights FADE UP. The eerie lighting reveals a strange figure bending under the folds of a large black cape.

The MADMAN scurries about the stage in a sort of sinister dance step, delighting

himself with the objects he comes across. He peeks out from under his cloak. His hair is long, stringy, unclean; his nose is grotesquely long and twisted; his eyes piercing and darting like a cornered rat. He straightens up and looks out at audience, bewildered. He shields his eyes from the lights, astounded at what appears to him in the shadows.

MADMAN: What are you people doing in my attic? (He approaches curtain line) You're not from the Saint Guinevere sanatorium, are you? 'Cause if you are, forget it, I'm not coming! I've got enough trouble with the loonies out here, let alone the ones you've managed to cage up!

(His mood suddenly changes) However, if you're tourists from another world, welcome! Welcome to this little solar system's own cosmic freak show, starring...

(He pulls off plastic nose) Yours truly! Classical, all around madman! (He bows to audience, then proceeds to take off cape, wig, and make-up as he talks) I was once quite acceptable to the general definition of what is currently agreed upon as befitting the terminology of the word "normal." Oh, I'll admit, I sometimes found myself on the outer boundaries of that definition, wandering along the untrodded frontiers of psychological wilderness as it were...But, all in all, most of my early years were lived like a good...cow, ruminating all day long and following the herd out to pasture.

(He proceeds to paint on another face and puts on a beard) You like? Call me Ivan. Ivan Ze Terrible!!

(He suddenly changes mood as he removes beard) I always liked those guys, you know. The ones who could make you shiver before they ever stepped in the room. To think they also wore diapers at one time...Wow...(suddenly melancholic) So much for the good old days of childhood.

(He removes his pants. Beneath them he is wearing child's shorts. He skips across the stage) Remember? When butterflies and sunny days and morning dew were so full of wonder...

(stops center stage) Sometimes I think we grow up backwards. We know everything at first and then proceed to unknow all that our hearts naturally understood.

(He becomes intensely contemplative) Growing up is like a miscarriage. I forget who said that...maybe nobody. Little humans are so full of joy and awe and...harmony. Nothing is clouded by the fumes of haughty opinions and imbecile vanity. Inside, they must be like a spring day. And then...

(He begins to whimper. As he is about to break out into sobs, he abruptly returns to dresser without a trace of his previous emotion. He looks at himself in mirror and combs his hair in a different style)

Oh...I just can't decide who to be today. (He puts down mirror, excited) I know who

I'll be!

(He pulls out an explorer's hat from trunk. With English accent --) Livingstone, I presume? (Playing both people) You WHAT? (Meekly) I...presume... (Outraged) You came all this way to do THAT? What sort of adventurer are you, Henry?

(walks about, making his way through jungle) I say! That is like the man who, upon discovering that he is alive, that there is something more inside of him than gooey tubes, asks for an after dinner drink and goes to bed!! (Jumps up and down) Yes! Yes! Yes! That is what I am!

(Takes off hat and solemnly faces audience) I, Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third am a seeker of Truth!

(Runs to curtain line) Ah Ha! Getting heavy, eh? Someone should have warned you on the way in! But who could have known that you were going to tune in on my attic? I wonder if you even knew where you were going to land... Come on, tell me the truth! Tell crazy Hubert de truth! This is all an accident! A big mistake!

(Heartbroken) I knew it! I knew it! Nobody ever wants to listen to Hubert! You were hoping to land two blocks away from here, where that...that pervert, the politician lives. Sure, that would have been much more colorful. All those important people, all those big decisions about whether to blow up this or that piece of dirt, all those orgies...Sure, that would have been worth the price of admission!

(Suddenly changes mood) Let's pretend we're in the middle of the ruins of Babylon!

(Dramatically) A desolate city of ancient stones, where shivers a harsh desert wind carrying haunting memories of long forgotten mystic lore... (Imitates wind) Ooouuu....Ooouuu...Winding streets leading to nowhere, covered with timeless sand. (To audience, surprised) What's the matter? Don't you want to play? Ooouuu...

(Tries to get audience to howl) Don't you realize we're here to find TRUTH?! Why? Well...(looks at imaginary watch) Some of us are going to die anytime now. In fact, thousands and thousands of dead bodies are being planted all over the globe this very second. And personally, I'd like to know what all this insanity was for anyhow! What were we suppose to do here other than feed ourselves, sleep, and keep our teeth well brushed???

(Suddenly startled) LOOK! An ancient manuscript buried in a rusty chest lies under yon fallen column! Perhaps it holds unimaginable secrets concerning man's short journey upon this speck of living dirt. Shall I excavate it? Or will it reveal too many uncompromising facts about our terminal condition?

(Approaches audience, reflecting) You know, that's a major pain in the derriere...When you discover something of importance, you're suddenly stuck with the responsibility of knowing about it! What would an ant do if it really knew that it

was an ant?

(Moves about in a frenzy) If it could see from our vantage point, which would be like hiking up Mount Olympus for it, and witness all that endless scurrying about which only ceases when some omnipotent foot massacres a whole work camp. Boy! Forget it! It would check out fast and apply for a lifetime as a hippopotamus.

(Turns back to imaginary spot) To dig or not to dig? Of course, all I need to do is change hats and eliminate this touchy situation. I'm not sure I wanted to be an explorer anyhow...What if that manuscript tells me to throw away my comfort and my self-indulgence...and worst of all, my self-pity if I want to find the path toward Truth... (He ponders that thought for a moment) I can't! I can't do it! I don't really want Truth that bad. (Takes off hat) It was just a phase. I'd much rather live in chaos.

(A person in audience suddenly jumps out of her seat.)

ANGEL (shouting): You've got to do it, Hubert!

(Madman looks out at audience, utterly stunned.)

MADMAN: Hey, stay out of this! This is a one man show!

(Angel hurries down aisle to stage.)

ANGEL: Don't be such a fool! This may be the most important crossroad of your life!

MADMAN: What's it to you? A man can't even find peace in his own attic anymore!

(ANGEL comes on stage. She is dressed in the beige clothing of an explorer.)

ANGEL: Dig it up! If you don't, I will!

MADMAN: Hold it! I'm the one who found it!

ANGEL: Do you have a permit from the government to dig up their motherland?

MADMAN: I...I didn't think to ask...

ANGEL: Well I do!

(She pulls out an envelop and hands it to him. He looks at it, astonished.)

MADMAN: Who are you anyway?

ANGEL: You know who I am. Give me a shovel!

(Madman looks around for a shovel. She pantomimes finding one and begins to dig. He watches her for a moment, still in shock.)

MADMAN: Have...have we met?

(She interrupts her determined digging, and quickly shakes his hand.)

ANGEL: Nice to meet you. (She goes back to work.)

MADMAN (trying to regain a dignified composure): I generally don't come upon other people on my lunatic ravings. They are strictly private affairs. (To himself) I could have sworn I locked the door.

ANGEL: You did. I'm one of those who "tuned in" on your attic. I'm not from around here.

MADMAN: You're kidding!

ANGEL: Would I be digging a ditch in the middle of an arid desert in the noonday sun if I were kidding?

MADMAN: No, I guess not...I'm...I'm really confused.

ANGEL: I've hit something!

MADMAN (hurrying over, astonished): You have?

ANGEL: There it is! There it is!

MADMAN: Here, let me help.

(He digs furiously. They pantomime lifting out a heavy chest. They sit back, breathless, and look at each other in amazement.)

ANGEL: Go ahead. Open it. The lock is broken.

MADMAN: I really don't think I should.

ANGEL: Why not?

MADMAN: I...forgot my glasses. I can't read without my glasses.

ANGEL: Come on, Hubert, have some courage!

MADMAN: It might be just a bunch of outdated newspapers.

(She pushes him out of the way and struggles with the heavy cover. He looks out at audience.)

MADMAN: What kind of manners do you teach your creatures out there? Ever heard of grace and charm and...

(She has managed to open the chest and suddenly turns around and embraces him. Her weight causes him to topple over and she falls over him, laughing.)

ANGEL: Oh, Hubert, I'm so happy for you.

(She smothers him with kisses, then sits up and looks back into the chest. He remains on the floor.)

ANGEL: It's a map to the soul, designed by sages from a secret brotherhood who received the knowledge from higher beings. Hubert! Wake up!!

MADMAN (rising slowly): Huh? I'm awake...I think. (He looks at map, dazed) It's in aramaic. How can you read it?

ANGEL: Last time I was down here, I was an Armanian.

(Madman jumps up, frustrated.)

MADMAN: I can't take anymore of this! You come into my attic, uninvited, you dig up things that don't belong to you, and now you toss out stories about other lives in Transylvania!

ANGEL: I never said I lived in Transylvania.

MADMAN: Well, it's all the same once you get east of the known world.

(She stands, saddened.)

ANGEL: Are you angry with me?

(He turns away, folding his arms.)

ANGEL: I want to be your friend...I only came here to play with you.

MADMAN: I have more important things to do.

ANGEL: I guess I made a mistake. I thought you were genuinely crazy. I thought you had possibilities. (She walks off toward audience) Well, au revoir Hubert. Don't stay up here too long or you'll catch cold.

MADMAN: Wait a minute! Hey! I don't even know your name! Hey! (To person in audience) Would you tell her to come back. I'm really not angry at her. Really, I swear. (Shouting to back of audience) Don't leave me all alone!!

(He moves backward toward center stage, melancholic. He trips over imaginary chest and falls. He kicks it out of the way.)

MADMAN (angered at audience): See what happens? When you open the window and let us know that the Spirit world is right next door, all it does is cause us poor fools grief and despair. How can we ever again feel at home on this mud ball when we find out about an ethereal cosmos full of higher beings? You guys don't have to worry about the price of meat, or mending your socks, or getting up in the morning! Why don't you just let us rot here in our miserable delusions of grandeur and tell us

all the secrets after we've left the theater! I mean...what am I suppose to do now? Go back to imagining I'm all the things I could never be? (He jumps up) You see! You've spoiled it all! You've ruined my show! (He jumps up and down in a child's temper tantrum. He suddenly stops and becomes quite collected) Well, I accept my torment. 'Tis the will of Fate. The show must go on as they say.

(He rummages through one of the visible chests and finds a crutch and a tattered cape. He moves upstage left to dresser, finds a wig in one of the drawers, and puts it on while looking into mirror.)

MADMAN: I'll be Long John Silver...(In pirate's voice) Searchin' for hidden treasure! Yohoho and a bottle of rum!

(He leans on crutch, lifts his leg up behind him and wanders about the stage.)

MADMAN: Come, me boy. Can't be too far now where ol' Ben Gun buried the loot. (He spots imaginary map) Bless me bones! A treasure map!

(He bends down to pick it up but cannot reach it from the top of the crutch. He makes a comic attempt to reach the floor and finally gets hold of the imaginary map.)

MADMAN: Why...It leads to a well. Eh! Eh! Ol' Ben's a sly one, he is! This time 'tis a well, not a cave. Let me see...East thirty degrees...(Walks about, following directions) Then north to the very edge of the isle.

(He comes to table covered by cloth upstage left. He takes off cloth, revealing a stone well. He rubs his hands with glee.)

MADMAN: Eh! Eh! Eh! Well, Johnny me boy, you didn't lose your leg for nothin'!

(He looks inside. For a moment, he remains in that position, then slowly moves back, completely overwhelmed. ANGEL slowly rises from well, dressed in flowing multi-colored garments. Note: the back of the well, invisible to audience, is open and against wings so that Angel may crawl into it during Madman's soliloquy. Madman drops his crutch and remains standing on one leg, unaware that the other is still bent upward. She gracefully steps out of well, smiling at him. She is more feminine this time.)

ANGEL: Oh, Hubert, you look so silly on one leg.

(He looks down and notices his stance. He pushes leg back into position as though in a catatonic state. She laughs merrily at his surprise and approaches him. She kisses him on the nose and pulls his wig over his eyes. He stands motionless as she moves downstage.)

ANGEL: Did you not wish me to return?

(He moves stiffly downstage, blinded by wig. He passes her and nearly falls into

audience. He is redirected and heads upstage like a zombie. He stumbles against well and falls partly into it. His feet kick meekly to keep him from tumbling all the way in. Angel hurries over to help him out.)

ANGEL: Hubert!

(She pulls him out and takes his wig off.) **ANGEL: You do not want to fall in there. There is no bottom to it.**

MADMAN (as if in drunken stupor): Then why is there a top, eh?

ANGEL: Hubert, look at me. I came back. (She turns his face toward hers) Remember me?

MADMAN: Where's ol' Ben Gun? He's got the treasure.

ANGEL: No, you have the treasure, Hubert.

MADMAN: Who's Bert? Never heard of him...

ANGEL (mildly frustrated): Make a wish.

(She pulls him toward well.)

MADMAN: Uuuh...I wish...I wish I had a candy cane!

(She suddenly produces a candy cane from the well. He stares at it stupidly.)

ANGEL: Do you get it?

(He shakes his head positively and smiles, taking the candy cane. He unwraps it and eats it while she talks.)

ANGEL: This is a magical well, Hubert. It is a meeting point between the cosmos of matter and the cosmos of spirit. It is a prism through which glow other dimensions. It is a connection with higher spheres of Reality.

MADMAN: What is it doing in my attic?

ANGEL: Don't ask silly questions. You have been searching for Truth and have journeyed to a mysterious place out of Time where you might find some answers.

MADMAN: What are the questions?

ANGEL (moving away from him): I came back because I thought your cry for understanding was sincere. Maybe I was wasting my energies on you. If I leave, you'll never see me again.

(Madman suddenly snaps out of his state. He looks at candy cane with disgust and tosses it into well.)

MADMAN: Forgive me, whoever you are. I was somewhat unhinged by your surprise re-appearance. I may be wacko, but I still am vulnerable to unexpected occurrences. I won't even think of asking you how you pulled this one off. Although it seems you could make a lot of money with that trick.

ANGEL: Is that what you want to do with your life? Make money?

MADMAN: Would I be spending my time in an empty attic if that were my ambition? Of course not. No, I am a dreamer, a visionary, a philosopher, an artist even...

ANGEL: An artist? What do you create?

MADMAN: Deception. Particularly self-deception. Like right now, I'm acting as if I had some idea of who I am, of what I am doing. Actually, I have no idea what I'm doing on this planet, why I'm stuck with this...(points to body) rather unpleasant "compagnon de voyage," and what the point of all this nonsense is!

ANGEL: That is why I am here, Hubert.

MADMAN: What do you mean?

ANGEL: If you wish hard enough, sincerely enough, you may be able to find the direction you need to take in order to begin to understand.

MADMAN: Where do I begin?

ANGEL: Right here.

MADMAN: Here?

(She walks over to well)

ANGEL: This is a wishing well, Hubert.

MADMAN: A what well?

ANGEL: A wishing will. It is a place where all is possible. An eternally simmering brew of creation from which one can sip a glimpse of the Creator's Presence.

MADMAN (looking in well): Is that a fact? And what where you doing in there?

ANGEL: I am a watch.

MADMAN: A watch?

ANGEL: I watch over the well and guide those who are willing to taste of its spicy ingredients.

MADMAN: Is...Is it free?

ANGEL: Nothing is free, Hubert. If you want a taste, you must pay for it.

MADMAN: How...how much is it?

ANGEL: How much do you want?

(He considers for a moment.)

MADMAN: Do I have to pay in advance?

ANGEL: I am afraid so.

MADMAN: How do I know this is worth anything?

ANGEL: You don't. But nothing can be worse than what you are now, right.

MADMAN: Well...I don't know about that!

(Angel moves off toward well.)

ANGEL: Then goodbye, Hubert. If you want to remain what you are, you certainly don't need me around.

MADMAN: Wait! Okay, okay, I'll try it.

(She turns merrily around, smiling at him. She claps her hands. Three Peter Pan type SPIRITS jump gracefully out of the well. They are dressed in colorful tights and move continually, like inexhaustible ballet dancers. Hubert looks at them in great consternation.)

ANGEL: Do not pay attention to them. They are just part of the cast.

MADMAN: Cast? What cast?

ANGEL: Why, of whatever play you wish to be in, Hubert.

MADMAN: I...(He walks around stage, greatly excited. Suddenly, he takes on a noble stance) I would like to be King Arthur at his mighty court where all were pure and noble.

(Angel and the three Spirits hurry to chests and quickly slip on costumes. The Spirits pantomime sitting around the Round Table.)

MADMAN: Wow!

ANGEL: Sire, your knights await your entrance.

(He puts on a cape and majestically moves to imaginary table.)

MADMAN: Hi guys...(To audience) I guess I better do it right. (In a "Richard Burton" voice) Mylords, welcome to Camelot! Be it known throughout the realm

that this sacred table is to be a place of communion for men of highest principles and noblest intent. We are gathered here to bring purity and light in these dark times. Mylords, it is we who will help Humankind rise out of barbarism and look homeward toward our spiritual origin.

(He notices that one of the Spirits has slipped away and joined Angel upstage right. They kiss passionately.)

MADMAN: Uuuh...Where's Lancelot?

(He turns around and sees them. The two other Spirits laugh coarsely and encourage Lancelot with whistles and applause.)

MADMAN: Hold it! Cut! Curtain!

(They all look at him.)

MADMAN: That was not the idea!!

ANGEL: What do you mean? This is the way it was, Arthur.

(Madman crosses downstage, tearing off cape.)

MADMAN: Well, I don't want to play anymore. I want to be somebody who really made it!

SPIRIT 1: How about Napoleon?

MADMAN (interested): Napoleon?

SPIRIT 2: He became a mighty emperor.

MADMAN: I know my history!

(He walks around like Napoleon. Then he suddenly remembers.)

MADMAN: Wait a second! He ended up all alone on some dingy island in the middle of nowhere!

SPIRIT 3: So? He had some great memories to take with him.

MADMAN: Big deal! He still died by himself in an empty room.

ANGEL: But Hubert...We all do. That is, you all do.

MADMAN: We all do what?

ANGEL: We all die alone...

MADMAN: Not me, babe! When I go, I wanna go in a blaze of glory, surrounded by friends and lovers and admirers!

SPIRIT 1: How about Julius Caesar? He was surrounded by friends when he died.

MADMAN: Funny, real funny. What are you, the comic relief?

SPIRIT 1: No, I have been hired to help you see the Truth, Mister Rutherford. That is all. Nothing personal.

SPIRIT 2: Truth is objective, Mister Rutherford. You must let go of your bloated ideas of yourself and your rosy dreams of what life is if you want to discover it.

SPIRIT 3: Why don't you wish to be yourself, Mister Rutherford?

MADMAN: Because I don't know who that is, that's why!!

ANGEL: Then perhaps it is time to find out.

MADMAN: How?

ANGEL: Do you really wish to know?

MADMAN: Of course!

ANGEL: Then observe closely!

(Lights FADE OUT. A golden light FADES UP over the three Spirits who pantomime and dance. Spirit 1 is a blind man frantically seeking his way out of an invisible box surrounding him. Spirit 2 is a wild animal on all fours stalking his prey. Spirit 3 is serene, all accepting, and slowly turning in circles on the same spot. A rhythmic MELODY plays in the background.)

ANGEL: Will the real Hubert Emery Rutherford please sit down.

(MUSIC stops abruptly. The three Spirits sit.)

ANGEL: You cannot all three be the same person.

SPIRIT 1: Sure!

SPIRIT 2: Of course!

SPIRIT 3: Why not?

ANGEL: How can three be one?

SPIRIT 1: Because there is no one Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third.

MADMAN: What do you mean? I'm standing right here!

SPIRIT 2: Yes indeed, that is correct. And yet...How many are standing inside while you are standing right there?

MADMAN: What is this weirdo talking about?

ANGEL: Observe!

(The three spirits stand up and perform a pantomime dance portraying various aspects of human emotion and personality.)

SPIRIT 1: I...

SPIRIT 2: Am...

SPIRIT 3: Hubert...

SPIRIT 1: I love people...

SPIRIT 2: I hate people

SPIRIT 3: And I don't really care...

SPIRIT 1/2/3: But we are all Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third!

ANGEL (to Madman): How can that be you ask?

(She pantomimes waving a wand.)

SPIRIT 1: I am completely insane.

(He runs around stage like a crazy man. Angel claps hands and he freezes in strange position. She waves wand.)

SPIRIT 2: I am very serious and intellectual.

(He moves solemnly across stage. She claps her hands and he freezes in thinker's position. She waves wand toward Spirit 3.)

SPIRIT 3: I...I just want something to eat!

(He rushes toward Angel. She snaps her fingers and he freezes just as he is about to rush over her. Angel motions for Madman to take a look. He walks around the "statues," astonished.)

ANGEL: Do you recognize them?

MADMAN: How can they all be me at the same time?

ANGEL: Why Hubert, you could multiply these statues a thousand times and still find them to represent you. Your name is but a label for a kaladeiscope of uncontrolled energy.

MADMAN: You mean...I'm not only a madman...I'm a madmen! Oh my God!

ANGEL: You are legion...

MADMAN (desperate): Tell me...Are there any good guys in me or am I just a horde of barbarians?

ANGEL: That which seeks to understand within you is of a higher order. You are a miniature cosmos, Hubert. Though you tend to manifest through the asteroid part of your universe, there are also suns in there somewhere.

MADMAN: How do I travel to them?

ANGEL: Now that is a valid wish, Hubert. (She goes to well and leans in) Heeelooo dooown theeere! (She turns to Madman) He is coming.

MADMAN: Who is?

ANGEL: Death.

MADMAN: Death?!! What does he have to with this?

ANGEL: Why, he is just one of the necessary ingredients to discovering yourself. His presence will help reveal your invisible nature.

MADMAN: My invisible nature?

ANGEL: Yes! This odd costume is the habitation of spirit. Within spirit you will find unity, peace, and fulfillment.

MADMAN: Really?

ANGEL: Yes, Hubert. A visit with Death will offer you a new perspective on this temporary fragmentation you call yourself. The knowing of Death will shed new meaning on what you call life.

SPIRIT 1: You must consult your mortality!

SPIRIT 2: Only then can you distinguish between the illusory and the real!

SPIRIT 3: Only then can you find the path to your true Self!

MADMAN: Let me get this straight...Death is coming to my attic?

ANGEL: Actually, he has always been here, ever since that doctor tapped you on the bottom. That was his entrance cue.

MADMAN: Do I really have to talk to him before I figure out who I am?

(The Spirits suddenly revive.)

SPIRIT 1: Is the sky blue?

SPIRIT 2: Does the earth spin?

SPIRIT 3: Do the birds fly?

SPIRIT 1/2/3: Of course you have to speak with Death. How else are you going to get out of this mess?

ANGEL: This is only part of the story down here. It becomes much more involved after the intermission.

MADMAN: But this is a one act play!

ANGEL: I know. The other acts are staged in another realm of creation. You did not really think that it was going to end up here in this attic, did you?

MADMAN: Well, I...

(Lights FLASH ON AND OFF.)

ANGEL: Here he comes!

MADMAN (terrified): Who?

ANGEL: Death.

(Lights FADE OUT. Stage is in darkness and silence. A reddish light slowly FADES UP. Madman is alone on stage. The dim light reveals a silhouette, MR. GRIM, standing stage left. The hooded figure slowly moves center stage toward Madman. Lights become brighter as Madman sees him and runs in terror behind dresser. The silhouette removes hood, revealing a freakish, full-headed mask of a grinning skull enlivened by long strands of carefully groomed white hair.)

MR. GRIM: I don't believe we have met. My followers call me Mister Grim. (He approaches terrified Madman) It is not my habit to converse with prospective clients. I am a very busy reaper because every season is harvest season. And I have never had a bad year. However, I am making an exception for you, Hubert.

MADMAN: What did I do to deserve such a...priviledge?

MR. GRIM: I'm returning a favor to someone. Let's just leave it at that. I understand that you have some questions.

MADMAN: Well, they can wait...

MR. GRIM: You'd like to know if, when the lights go out, you're going to exist in the higher spheres of the cosmos, basking in the light of the Uncreated. (He laughs)

MADMAN: Since you mentioned it, is there such a place, Mr. Grim?

MR. GRIM: Why do you want to know?

MADMAN: Well...

MR. GRIM: If there is, you certainly don't qualify for an application.

MADMAN: What would I have to do to...

MR. GRIM: What am I, your counselor? You've got no business asking me for advice. Not until you turn in your belly button.

MADMAN: I intend to...eventually.

MR. GRIM: Don't give me any promises. Every creature in the Universe knows that the human biped is the biggest liar this side of the Milky Way.

MADMAN: But, since we happen to have met prematurely, can't you make a little exception?

MR. GRIM: You're so boringly typical. Always trying to get something for nothing. What's in it for me?

MADMAN: My soul..

MR. GRIM: You mean to tell me that you solemnly swear to hand it over to me, no strings attached, if I grant you an interview?

MADMAN: Yes, what have I got to lose?

MR. GRIM: Everything, my son, everything.

MADMAN: But I'll never get any answers hanging around here..

MR. GRIM: Not with your tiny burp of will, that's for sure. Listen, I'm not going to waste anymore time bargaining with you. It's not like I'm bankrupt, you know. I don't need to beg for your miserable, soiled souls. They're a dime a million. Besides, it won't be long before you're mine free of charge.

MADMAN: Doesn't my kind make for prime firewood?

MR. GRIM: You really think you're an exception, don't you? You know, that's the funniest thing about you creatures. You all think you're exceptional whether you're a king, a peasant, a thief, or a wild and crazy prima donna. Well, here's one answer in your search for Truth which you don't want to find: you are nothing, nothing at all. Every century, it's the same type-cast parts with different costumes. There's nothing original about you at all. A baby is being born this instant who will play the same kind of role you are playing, and think that he is heading down his own unique path in the chaos of human experience. (He turns away from him) From a little higher up, you're all the same. Buffoons, vainglorious puppets whose primary aim while dangling about is not to see your strings.

MADMAN: There must be something unique...No one else is living this scene right

now. This is my experience.

MR. GRIM: And who are you?

MADMAN: Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third!

MR. GRIM: Do those syllables constitute your identity? What's a Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third? The only potential identity you might have had is that firewood you're about to hand over so generously. Don't look for it in the plane of matter. You can dig into your marrow down to the tiniest molecule and you won't find anybody there.

MADMAN: Mister Grim, I've got to know who I am before I leave!

MR. GRIM: What for?

MADMAN: There must have been meaning to all this...

MR. GRIM: A short journey, nothing more. If you didn't learn anything on the way, that's your problem. The caravan isn't going to wait.

MADMAN: But how? How do I learn?

MR. GRIM: You never opened your eyes. You're all lost nomads, blind and confused. It makes my job so easy!

MADMAN: My eyes have been open! I have observed, I have tried to understand! That's what drove me crazy!

MR. GRIM: Hubert, my wretched client, you were never around to look through your eyes! And that is why you don't want to play anymore. Something in you realized that you have been missing all these years. And like a typical humanoid, you thought you would find yourself if others gave you attention. For some reason, that provides the illusion that you are real.

MADMAN: Where did I lose myself?

MR. GRIM: You were never there to begin with.

MADMAN (desperately): Will you show me what I should have done?

MR. GRIM: This is really not the way I want to spend my day off.

MADMAN: Please, Mister. Grim. Just imagine the tormented soul I will make, finding enlightenment at the price of renouncing life.

MR. GRIM: Sounds pretty melodramatic.

MADMAN: I'll do it, Mister Grim. I always wanted to play a great tragic role. I've been rehearsing for something like this since I was old enough to be morbid.

MR. GRIM: I don't know that I'd call it a great role. But your sense of drama amuses me. I'll never figure out why you humans take this cosmic farce so seriously. Of course, is it wasn't for your ludicrous perceptions of your condition, you would be terribly boring to the rest of us. I have seldom had such a good time on any other planet. You get top prize for the best circus this side of the galaxy.

MADMAN: Will you do it, Mister Grim? Will you show me the meaning of existence?

MR. GRIM: I'm not really the best authority on the subject. However, a tortured soul is always welcome.

(He walks around stage like a director.)

MR. GRIM: Okay...The meaning of existence, eh? Let me see...

(Madman paces back and forth, nervous with anticipation.)

MR. GRIM: Sit down, Hubert. You're just like Galbraith.

MADMAN (sitting): Who's Galbraith?

MR. GRIM: The pet vulture I had living with me last time I visited. He was always pacing back and forth. Drove me crazy.

MADMAN: When was that?

MR. GRIM: Three months ago, according to my sense of time. The year of your Lord 1106. Right before the...what did you call it? You know, when business was so good. They had such a delightful name for me then. The Black Death! (He laughs a sinister laugh)

MADMAN (horrified): I...I didn't realize...

MR. GRIM: That's right, I am quite a celebrity. That's what I've been trying to tell you. This is an extraordinary privilege for you.

MADMAN: I'm quite honored, really. I never thought I'd meet...

MR. GRIM: Don't get too excited, son. Remember our bargain. At the end of this scene, you're jumping out the window.

MADMAN (jumping to his feet): WHAT?

MR. GRIM: That's as effective a way to go as any.

MADMAN (panicking): But...but...

MR. GRIM: It's not like you have a choice, Hubert. You're mine now.

(Madman goes to imaginary window stage right and looks out.)

MADMAN: My God...Oh my God...

MR. GRIM: Leave him out of this!

MADMAN (in a frenzy): I can't...I just can't! I've been afraid of heights since the first day I looked out of my crib!

MR. GRIM: You have forgotten why you agreed to the bargain.

(He snaps his fingers. The dark backdrop suddenly LIGHTS UP with a magnificent image of a sweeping mountain chain (rear-screen projection). Madman freezes in stupor as he stares at the massive vision. Heavy organ MUSIC rises as Mr. Grim snaps his fingers again and again. A series of breathtaking views of majestic nature appear and disappear from the shadows. Mr. Grim stops the display on an image of the sun over a sea of clouds. MUSIC fades out.)

MR. GRIM: Remember? I said I would show you what you've missed. I will show you what you could have been during your stay on this cluster of interstellar dust.

(Madman sits down, resigned to his hopeless situation.)

MR. GRIM: What is a Hubert Emery Rutherford the Third? (He laughs) There is no such thing!

(He snaps his fingers. As he speaks, images of galaxies, nebulae, and other colorful outer space phenomena appear on backdrop.)

MR. GRIM: There are only energies descending through the cosmos from the Primal Source. Through worlds unimaginable to your little mind, through dimensions incalculable, beyond your constipated logic, the Divine life-force floods infinity. Highly diluted, it bursts through your sun and animates this cold, forsaken corner of the Universe. (With a wave of his hand, the images disappear) How's that for a geography lesson?

MADMAN: Uuh, that's...real interesting...

MR. GRIM: Now jump!

MADMAN (terrified): Hold it! This can't be the end of the act already!

MR. GRIM: What else is there to say?

MADMAN: You didn't explain anything! How do I fit into the picture?

MR. GRIM: Oh...Well, you're like...like vegetation. You absorb the various gases and energies and transform them into other gases and energies, sending them on their way to further transmutations. It's all one big factory actually. And I'm the sanitation engineer. (He laughs)

MADMAN: There must be more to...me!

MR. GRIM (looking out window): I suggest you jump off to the left so you don't splatter all over the stairs. Somebody might slip on the way out and injure themselves. (He laughs coarsely)

MADMAN: There has got to be more to this...

MR. GRIM: Jump already! I'm on a tight schedule.

MADMAN: I don't think you've told me everything, Mister Grim. Unless...unless you don't know either!

MR. GRIM (suddenly enraged): I beg your pardon?!

MADMAN: Maybe you're just a garbage man...

MR. GRIM: Sanitation engineer!

MADMAN:...and garbage men, even cosmic ones, don't necessarily know what the mayor has planned for the garbage!

MR. GRIM: If you don't jump right now, I'm going to turn you into raspberry pudding!

MADMAN (with new confidence): I overestimated you, Grim.

MR. GRIM: JUMP!!

MADMAN: Go back to where you came from! I'm not leaving until I get some straight answers.

(Mr. Grim points a finger at him and growls.)

MADMAN: Cut the freaky stuff! You didn't carry out your end of the deal. You don't know a whole lot more than a lunatic in his attic!

MR. GRIM: I'm gonna roast you alive!

MADMAN: I'm a child of the Universe, garbage man, whether I serve as vegetation or transmitter. I have a right to share in the divine mysteries of existence. And it seems to me that you're just not the creature to talk about our inheritance. Go back to your crypt. I'll see you there when I'm good and ready!

(Madman crosses to door.) **MR. GRIM:** You're not going anywhere!

(Mr. Grim grabs him and drags him back to the window. Madman cannot overcome his strength. ANGEL enters stage left. Mr. Grim immediately stops and becomes sheepish.)

ANGEL: What do you think you're doing?

MR. GRIM: Aaah...We were just having a conversation, isn't that right, Hubert,

old buddy? (He pats Madman on back) Well, gotta go now. Thanks for the chat. I'll drop by again sometime. (He heads for backstage) We have an agreement to honor, remember?

MADMAN (finding his courage): Get out of my life, Grim! You don't impress me anymore.

(Mr. Grim grimaces at him and exits quickly. Madman collapses in chair.)

MADMAN: You've got good timing...

ANGEL: Call it Providence.

MADMAN: Providence, eh? How does that fit into the scheme of things?

ANGEL: Why, Hubert, Providence IS the scheme of things.

MADMAN: And you think he sent you back so that I could continue to roam the attic a while longer?

ANGEL: Yes, I do.

MADMAN: You really think He knows I'm here at all?

ANGEL: Of course!

MADMAN: That's crazy. People in my neighborhood don't even know me. How could the Creator, who watches over billions of worlds...

ANGEL (softly): Hubert, the Creator IS your neighborhood. All the rest is illusion. That street corner you live on, or the nation, or the continent, or the galaxy...all that means nothing. What makes your heart beat and makes you wonder, that is where you live. And that is where you will find a particle of the Creator.

MADMAN: You mean, I'm like a little apartment where the Inconceivable drops in?

ANGEL: You can be much more than that, Hubert. You can be simply a vacant warehouse, or a country home...

MADMAN: A hunting lodge...

ANGEL: A hunting lodge? Yes, I like that. Right in the heart of the wilderness.

MADMAN: And what is He hunting for?

ANGEL (smiling): Himself!

MADMAN (in awe): You mean...

ANGEL: That's right. If you would begin to question all your conglomeration of

thoughts and feelings, you might find that the master of the hunting lodge is the master of All that Is.

MADMAN: So I don't have to worry about who I am...because as long as I make room for the Creator within me, He will occupy what is otherwise an empty space.

ANGEL: In a manner of speaking. When you think of yourself as an empty space, you can then be filled.

MADMAN: Filled with the Presence of God!

ANGEL: I'd say that beats all the imaginary characters you've been trying to fit into all these years.

(Madman doesn't hear her. He is lost in thought. A new serenity comes over his face.)

ANGEL: Hubert? Are you still with us? You don't have to take the idea of empty space that literally, you know. (He doesn't respond) Hubert!

MADMAN: I am cured...You have cured my agony, my madness. How can I ever thank you?

ANGEL: Don't thank me. Thank the One who made it all happen.

MADMAN: Why should He go to such trouble over me?

ANGEL: Because you are His child and He loves you.

MADMAN: But..Now that I'm not a basket case anymore...What will the neighbors say? They won't understand it.

ANGEL (smiling): Don't worry, they'll think you're really crazy now.

MADMAN: Good, I wouldn't want to ruin my reputation.

(Madman takes her hand and leads her offstage.)

MADMAN: Let's take a walk. I want to introduce you to everybody.

ANGEL: No one can see me, except for you.

MADMAN: So much the better.

(They exit. Lights FADE OUT.)

THE END