

THE END OF THE LINE

A One Act Play

by Theodore J. Nottingham

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CAST

ACTOR (a vain and theatrical man or woman)

MAN (a happy-go-lucky, compassionate stage hand)

OLD MAN (a wise old tramp)

SET

The stage of a large theater

Lights FADE UP on a barren stage. Only an impressionistic backdrop and a few flats give the feeling of a partially completed set for a play which is not going to take place. A Greek-like statue is upstage right. Multiple colored lights stream onto stage, creating the effect of a stained-glass window in a desolate sanctuary.

Classical MUSIC fades up as if it were the overture for a performance. The SOUND of excited talking is heard coming from backstage. The confusion grows louder as footsteps run to and fro. The MUSIC is abruptly cut off. The ACTOR in Shakespearian costume hurries onto stage from the wings. He wears kleenex as though he was still in the process of having his make-up put on. He comes to center stage, terribly shaken. He cups his hand over his eyes and stares out at audience.

ACTOR (stuttering nervously): Ladies and gentlemen...We've just been informed...The stage manager has just heard the news... (He calls backstage) Craig! You want me to tell them?

(The SOUND of an indistinct voice is heard from backstage.)

ACTOR (to someone offstage): What? Craig's gone home? What about Bobby? Bobby, are you in the light booth? (There is no answer. Actor is stunned) They've all left me! (He looks out at audience) No, wait! Don't you folks leave also...Let me at least make the announcement. (He clears his throat and gathers his courage) A few moments ago, a news bulletin flashed across the world...This is it! The end is here, ladies and gentlemen. Some

strange cosmic occurrence has set off a chain reaction of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and other disasters all over the planet... They say England has already gone under. There...There is no more England, ladies and gentlemen...God didn't save the Queen!

(He breaks down and hurries offstage. After a moment, a MAN enters upstage right. He carries a broom and begins to sweep. He stops and looks at the statue representing humanity. He shrugs and goes back to his sweeping. The Actor returns onstage carrying a suitcase and dragging a trunk filled with costumes. He has changed into an expensive sportsuit. He sits on trunk, depressed. He notices Man sweeping and watches him for a moment.)

ACTOR: Hey you! What are you going to do now that it's all over?

(Man looks over at him. He continues to sweep, mumbling something.)

ACTOR: Project, man! I cannot hear you.

(Man slowly sweeps his way closer to Actor)

ACTOR: What are you planning to do with these last moments of your life?

MAN: I don't know...

(Actor shakes his head, disgusted.)

ACTOR: Don't you have any place to go? Any family?

MAN: Nope.

ACTOR: I don't either. Say...Why don't you stay here and keep me company?

(Man stops sweeping and looks over at him. Actor opens trunk and takes out six pack of soda, offering one to him. Man approaches and guzzles it down.)

ACTOR: I don't recall your name.

MAN: You never really asked.

ACTOR: How long have you been working at this theater?

MAN: Five years.

ACTOR: I knew I'd seen you before.

MAN: I'm the guy who had your props ready for you every night.

ACTOR (embarrassed): Oh...Thank you.

MAN: Don't mention it.

(Actor rises and wanders around stage)

ACTOR: I'm gonna miss all this. The lights, the applause...

MAN: So am I. Even the unpaid overtime and overpaid prima donnas. It was better than digging ditches, I guess. (He goes back to sweeping)

ACTOR: You really don't need to do that.

MAN: You're right. This place will be a swamp before you know it.

(Actor begins to whimper.)

MAN: Hey...It had to happen someday. They've been warning us for centuries.

ACTOR: But why now? Just when fame was within my reach! (He sobs)

MAN: Come on now, it ain't that bad. You're more famous than I'll ever be. Look at it this way. You've got at least one fan.

ACTOR: Who?

ACTOR: Me! I've watched you perform a hundred times. I remember your death scene. It was really pretty good. All those gestures and everything. Can't say too much about the sword fights, though. But how real can you get, right?

(Actor angrily moves away from him.)

ACTOR: Who are you to criticize my work? You know nothing of art!

MAN: Maybe not...

ACTOR: Oh my God! Why have you done this to me? You take away everything I've worked so hard for and leave me with a...moron...I used to go to church all the time when I was a kid. I was even baptized! Doesn't that mean anything? Was it all for nothing? (He wanders about stage) I've always been a good human being. I never stepped on anybody who didn't deserve it. Why did you have to do it to us now? Everything was just fine...There weren't too many wars, no big ones anyway. We were more civilized than we'd ever been before...We coulda traveled to the stars if you'd just held off! But no, no it had to be now when no one was expecting it anymore. Zap! Behind our backs! If you'd just warned us, just given us a little hint, we would have all gone back to church, I promise you.

(The SOUND of a nearby earthquake is heard.)

ACTOR (frightened): What was that?

MAN: I think the northside just fell apart.

ACTOR: That's where I live! (He groans)

MAN (sincerely): Are you ill?

ACTOR: All those three hundred thousand dollar houses! What a waste...

MAN: I know it. They shoulda put the money into parks, with statues and birds and little kids with balloons.

ACTOR: What??

MAN: I said they shoulda...

ACTOR: Never mind! (with dramatic pity) Your poor soul. Your poor, poor soul. You'll be extinguished without ever having understood what life was all about. Had you but one ounce of ambition, you could have achieved almost anything. Every person on this earth has, or had rather, the potential to achieve something.

MAN: You mean, I, little uneducated, undisciplined I, could have been like...you?

ACTOR: Close to it, if you'd only tried.

MAN: Where did I go wrong? Maybe I was potty trained too early.

ACTOR (irritated): Go ahead, be humorous. See where that will get you.

MAN: I wasn't being tumorous. (He leans on his broom thoughtfully) I was postulating on the possible events which affected my being at an innocent age...Boy, that sounded good.

ACTOR: You could have been an engineer, a chemist, an aviator, a sales representative, who knows what.

MAN: The only thing I ever wanted to be was an Indian chief. No kidding. I could always relate to Crazy Horse or Sitting Bull. Now there were some together dudes!

(Lights suddenly FADE OUT.)

ACTOR: Oh my God! It's the end! It's all over! Forgive me Lord, I know I was a selfish creep, but I really meant well. I...

(Lights FADE UP.)

MAN: False alarm.

(Actor straightens clothes, trying to regain his dignity.)

MAN: Isn't it funny how people confess only when they know there's no chance they can get away with anything anymore?

ACTOR: Since when did you start making observations on humanity?

MAN: Actually, I never paid much attention. That's my biggest mistake.

ACTOR (walking away from him): How to go with honor and dignity, that is the question.

(Man opens trunk and searches through costumes.)

MAN: Boy, you got yourself a portable wine cellar in here. (He takes out bottle and examines it)

ACTOR: This has got to be the end of the world for me to be on the same stage with this...individual.

(Man opens bottle and tastes wine.)

MAN: Hey, this ain't bad. A bit dry, but who doesn't with age.

(Actor sits on partly torn down platform. He stares into space, melancholic. Man approaches him.)

MAN: Say, since we have a little time on our hands, why don't you do some acting for me.

ACTOR: Are you crazy?

(Man sits on trunk as though relaxing to watch a performance.)

MAN: No, really. I'll be as enthusiastic an audience as you've ever had.

(Actor looks at him, considering.)

ACTOR: The roof might cave in any minute.

MAN: That would be the ultimate curtain. I ask you, how many actors can go out with such a thunderous finale?

ACTOR: True...You're more creative than I thought. What did you say your name was?

MAN: My friends call me Joe.

ACTOR: Joe? Well, why not? Okay, Joe, what would you like to hear?

MAN: Do you know the one about the farmer's daughter-in-law?

ACTOR (irritated): No, I don't! We didn't study that under Strasberg.

MAN: Too bad.

ACTOR: But I can give you something for your cultural enlightenment.

MAN: Great.

ACTOR (excited): I'll even get in costume for this.

(He crosses to trunk and looks through costumes.)

MAN (looking at bottle): This is really a treat.

ACTOR (putting on oversize wig): I know. This is a unique privilege which few are granted.

(He puts on princely costume and crosses to center stage.)

ACTOR: In this crucial moment of our history, I shall attempt to expound upon humanity, its achievements, its weaknesses, its joys and sorrows through the art that has been handed down to me from the ancient Greeks and the Babylonian dramatis personi before them, bringing forth the essence of what our purpose on this ill-fated planet was meant to be.

MAN: Say what?

ACTOR: That's my intro.

MAN: Oh, your intro? Bravo!

(Man applauds. Actor bows gracefully. The SOUND of another earthquake is heard.)

MAN: You better make it quick.

ACTOR: There is so much to say. Where to begin?

MAN: I've got a wonderful idea! How 'bout if I help you out? That way we'll get done in half the time.

ACTOR (reflecting): That seems to make sense. But can you act? Have you any thespian

blood in you?

MAN: Not as far as I know. But I was always healthy as a child.

ACTOR: Well, this should be a challenge.

(Man excitedly hurries to trunk. He finds a large black cape and ties in around shoulders. He models it for Actor.)

MAN: Is it me?

ACTOR: The cape of doom! Yes, quite appropriate.

(Man crosses stage, swinging flaps of his cape. He comes to statue and studies it.)

MAN: What if this represented humanity? It's a close enough representation.

ACTOR: And who are we?

MAN: Who have you always wanted to be?

ACTOR: Richard Burton?

MAN: Almost. Think...You look the part with the hair and all.

ACTOR: Uuuh...

MAN: Do you have a big white beard? That would do it.

(Actor looks into trunk and finds large white beard. He puts it on.)

ACTOR: Santa Claus?

MAN: Not quite. Distant relative.

ACTOR: Oh, I know! God Himself!

MAN: Right! Jehovah, Allah, Yahweh!

ACTOR: But I've heard that God is not a He anymore...or a She...Maybe I could dress up as a bush! No, that'd be scratchier than this beard. (He poses majestically) And who will you be?

MAN: Your sidekick. Beelzebub.

ACTOR: That's a heavy role. Can you handle it?

MAN: Are you kidding? He and I go back a long way.

(Lights suddenly FADE OUT.)

ACTOR: Darn! I was just about to make my entrance.

MAN: Hold on. They've got all kinds of candles around here.

(Man hurries offstage. Actor remains in darkness.)

ACTOR (low, booming voice): I AM THE LORD!

(He walks across stage dramatically and comes to statue.)

ACTOR: The Day of Judgement has arrived!

(The SOUND of thunder and earthquakes rumble in the distance.)

ACTOR (normal voice): Right on cue! (He places hand on statue) The infinite universe has witnessed your acts. The verdict is GUILTY!

MAN (offstage): Objection!

(Man enters with two bright candleabras. He places them on either side of statue.)

ACTOR: Overruled!

MAN: My clients pleads not guilty for reason of insanity.

ACTOR: Who has named you their defender?

MAN: I've been their counselor for centuries.

ACTOR: May I remind you that there are no loop holes on the Judgement Day.

MAN: If You will allow me to state my case, O Creator of All that Is, You may come to a different verdict. After all, if You don't give them a break, who will?

ACTOR: I have been giving them a break ever since Cain beat in his brother's head.

MAN: I'll grant You, Omnipresent Endlessness, they have certainly tried Your eternal patience more than any other being in Your universe, but the cards were stacked against them from the start.

(Actor sits on platform, maintaining a regal air about him.)

ACTOR: Alright, I will give them this one last chance for salvation if you can make their case stand up. But no monkey business. Don't put the blame on their animal inheritance.

MAN: Consider what it is like to grow up on this planet. The pressures, the temptations, the stimulus, the noise, the pollution, the one-eyed monster...

ACTOR: The what?

MAN: The tube, the idiot box, the TV. By the time they make it through childhood, they get to see fifteen thousand murders, they learn that might makes right, that greed is good, that they gotta look out for number one...

ACTOR: Isn't there an off button?

MAN: Sure, that's easy for you to say. You try telling a kid he or she can't watch their Saturday morning cartoons! Or Sunday afternoon football, or the evening news. It's not dinner anymore if you can't share it with an anchorperson.

ACTOR: So you blame it all on electronic progress?

MAN: How 'bout the work place? Some folks don't even have windows to look out of. They go a whole day without seeing a tree! Or how 'bout group pressure? If you don't look like something off a magazine rack or weigh in at the acceptable amount or think about the same things, you're outta the game. They strike you out! Now, wouldn't that drive you crazy?

ACTOR: Your line of defense is irrelevant. You know as well as I do that they all think their planetary covering is the most splendid item in their galaxy. I Myself could not count the number of reproductions they have made of themselves since one of them started scratching on cave walls.

MAN: True...True...

ACTOR: Looks like I pulled the rug right out from under you, eh you old devil?

MAN: Just a minute, Omnipotent One. I still hold up my plea of insanity. For instance: why is it that these humanoids are the only beings in the entire cosmos who have this urge to destroy each other? Is this not a true symptom of utter insanity?

ACTOR: It may seem that way to you, but that is only because of your limitations as a fallen angel. I would say that it is not insanity which causes such abominable behavior, but simply the results of their petty concepts of themselves. Pride, ambition, hate, etcetera, etcetera...None of this was in the original blueprint. This is truly a product of their own.

MAN: Yes, but...they are your children. A bit naughty perhaps, but still your kids.

ACTOR: I know, and sometimes I think I am too lenient. But what can I say. I am Love. I can't help it.

MAN: I remember times when you weren't so forgiving.

ACTOR: When?

MAN: What ever happened to the Roman empire? Or to the golden age of Greece? Or Babylon? and how 'bout Egypt? And just look at what's happening today!

ACTOR: Well...That's the way it goes. I cannot let them get carried away with themselves.

MAN: You like to put them back in their place, so to speak?

ACTOR: They don't need me for that to happen. It is always their own folly that does them in. But that is the only way they will ever learn.

MAN: But they never do! It's the same thing over and over again! Why don't you give them a crash course on how to exist as decent members of the univers?

ACTOR: I do at times. Although my graduating class seems to get smaller and smaller each decade.

(The SOUND of thunder echoes backstage. Man jumps, startled.)

MAN: I won't deny that.

ACTOR: Good.

MAN: But...I just hate to see them all hurled into oblivion.

ACTOR: They had their chance. I should have done it two milleniums ago when they...when they...

MAN: Crucified Him?

(Actor crosses to candelabra and stares into flames. The SOUND of thunder crashes in the distance. It seems to cry out the grief of God. Actor slowly takes off wig and beard, dropping them to the floor.)

MAN: Is the game over?

ACTOR: We are guilty, Joe, you know that? We're self-centered, immoral, cruel...My

God... When I think of the life I've led. (shouting in despair) I'm such a pathetic little nobody who never lifted a finger for his fellow human beings! I don't want to die like this!

(He slumps down to his knees, weeping. Man watches him in amazement.)

MAN: That's the best performance you've ever given.

(The Actor's whimpering turns into sobs which grow louder and louder. Man is made uneasy and hurries to his side. He puts his arm around him.)

MAN (gently): Stop, Lawrence. Don't judge yourself like that. You're not an evil man.

(Actor stops crying and catches his breath.)

ACTOR: No...I'm not evil...I'm just a little boy starving for recognition, for affection...I always looked the other way when it came to other people's needs.

MAN: We've all done that, Lawrence...

ACTOR: I wanted the world to know that I had existed, that I had lived here for a short while. What a waste...It takes Armageddon to see myself face to face. (He turns to Man) Forgive me, Joe, for not noticing you these last five years.

MAN: I never held it against you.

ACTOR: I want to die. I want to die right now. Make it fast, Lord, can you do that much for me?

(Man rises and goes to trunk. He takes out another bottle.)

MAN: This is what you need. (He opens it and hands it to Actor.)

ACTOR: Do you think it will work if I hold my breath?

MAN: I don't know. It'll most likely make you feel very uncomfortable.

ACTOR: Well, I don't need that on top of everything else.

(He drinks a great gulp.)

MAN: Uuuh...Can you save me a taste?

ACTOR (handing him bottle): Here. Take all you want.

(Man drinks. Actor stares blindly ahead.)

ACTOR: Hey! Maybe we're already dead and don't realize it.

(Man pinches Actor's arm.)

ACTOR: Ow! What's the matter with you?

MAN: I'm afraid we're still alive.

ACTOR (sighing): I wonder what it will be like.

MAN: What's that?

ACTOR: Being dead.

MAN: I don't know. I've never been dead before.

ACTOR: After the initial pain, it can't hurt, right?

MAN: I guess not.

ACTOR: Your body rots and you...just float around in space, or something. (suddenly terrified) What if there really is a hell?

MAN: Can't be worse than a nasty hangover.

ACTOR: But what about the fiery pits and all that?

MAN: That depends on whether God has a sense of the dramatic. (He walks across stage, skipping) I think we'll all congregate somewhere out there. On Pluto or Venus maybe...Or we may have to go through one of those black holes.

ACTOR: Oh no! That'd scare me to death!

MAN: I wonder how we'll recognize each other. We'll have no face, no voice, no smell...I know! Telepathy. It'll be one gigantic psychic seance!

ACTOR: You're outta your mind!

MAN: But that's the point. We will be out of our minds, out of our bodies, out of our personalities. Maybe we'll even love one another.

ACTOR: I doubt it. There's always some jerk around that I can't stand.

MAN: No, we'll all be One. (He closes his eyes and sighs with happiness) We'll all be One with our Maker. No more barriers between us. Think of it! All the prejudice, sexism, social

structure -- down the tubes! No more! Imagine all those big businessmen when they get up there and find out that there's no currency exchange.

ACTOR: They'll probably go into real estate. There's a lot of property out there.

(Man laughs. Actor laughs also in spite of himself)

ACTOR: Well, what are you waiting for? Open up another bottle. We're celebrating!

(The SOUND of thunder and earthquakes bursts out, closer than ever.)

ACTOR: Go ahead! Knock the walls down! Swallow up the whole building! See if we care. We're celebrating, right?

(Man finds bottle in trunk. He returns with two of them.)

MAN: Right! (He hands a bottle to Actor) These are the last ones.

ACTOR: So what? That's about all we have time for.

(They raise their bottles, toasting.)

ACTOR: To death!

MAN: And to life, which got us ready for it!

(They toast merrily, and put the bottles to their lips. An OLD MAN stumbles in from backstage. His clothes are ragged even though they had once been of fine material. The two are quite surprised by his appearance.)

OLD MAN: Howdy! Looks like I found the right place.

ACTOR: I beg your pardon?

OLD MAN: I have been looking for people who might be hospitable...

ACTOR: I'm sure there are plenty out there. This is not a rescue center.

OLD MAN (approaching, indignant): Have you been in the streets? They're empty. Everybody's hiding in their basements. And besides, this is a theater, isn't it? Well, if theaters aren't rescue centers, then I don't know what is.

MAN: Haven't you got a home? Or a family?

OLD MAN: I had a home...But the bridge was torn off by a tidal wave. Drowned all my little

friends. They were my family.

ACTOR: We have a genuine lost soul on our hands.

OLD MAN: I had this big one-eyed cat. Could knock a rat silly with one stroke of his paw. We really understood each other...Oh, I haven't introduced myself. (takes off hat) The honorable Everett J. Macintosh the first, one time professor, author, and vagabond. Degrees in philosophy, literature, and socio-economics. Currently unemployed and out of order. Please to meet you, I'm sure.

(Man and Actor look at each other.)

ACTOR: You were a writer?

OLD MAN: Occasionally. When the spirits moved me.

ACTOR: Macintosh...That sounds familiar for some reason...Wait a minute! I know you! Didn't you write a play entitled...

OLD MAN: "Wind Along the Waste." A classic. From Omar Khayyam's verse: "Into this Universe, and why not knowing Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing; And out of it, as Wind along the Waste, I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing."

(Man applauds. Old Man bows.)

ACTOR (dramatically): "...That nothing from Above has given hand a glove with the intention of damning what it touches!!"

OLD MAN (astonished): Hallelujah! You're the first person I've ever met who read it!

ACTOR: I didn't merely read it, old man, I starred in it when it opened at the "Red Barn" in Duffy, Mississippi.

OLD MAN (outraged): You're him? I don't believe it! I've been looking for you going on fifteen years now! You're the reason my masterpiece closed after opening night! You turned it into a farce with all that strutting around like some high and mighty movie star! You had no more idea of what my play was about than the producer did! If the French had seen it, I would have won a Pulitzer Prize! But you blew it for me. (He sits on platform, calming down.) That's alright, though. I knew this lifetime was not meant to be a glorious one for me.

MAN (handing him bottle): Here, have a sip, old man. Make yourself at home.

ACTOR: A stage is not a public square!

MAN: Ah, blow it out your ear, Larry! (to Old Man) Come on, this is good burgundy. It'll help you imagine you won the Pulitzer.

OLD MAN (taking bottle): I thank you, my good man. It is a rarity to meet a decent fellow man. (He drinks) Aaah! Vive la France!

ACTOR (humbled): Was I really that bad, Mister Macintosh?

OLD MAN: Worse. But, like I said, it's all water under the bridge now. I had my day.

MAN: When did you have your day?

OLD MAN: In the last century.

MAN: I don't understand.

OLD MAN: I was Henrik Ibsen.

MAN (humoring him): No kidding?

OLD MAN: If you study the Master Plan objectively, there's no other possible alternative. Ibsen could only return as a dignified drunkard. But I still recall the old days when I was "freaking people out" as they say with my avant-garde dramas.

MAN: But why would you come back in this...condition?

OLD MAN: Everyone can use a bit of humbleness. I was in danger of being poisoned by self-importance. Besides, I probably learned more about life this time around than in the old days in spite of the success. I am more of a participant in the human condition now, rather than simply an observer.

MAN (sincerely): Do you think I could have been Crazy Horse?

OLD MAN: Why would you want to have been a crazy horse?

ACTOR (dramatically): I was the great Edwin Booth.

OLD MAN: You? You were undoubtedly a Tory merchant who wanted Washington hung for treason.

ACTOR (insulted): I'm as patriotic as apple pie!

OLD MAN: Don't kid yourself. I know the type.

ACTOR: What makes you so sure you're an authority on anything other than cheap wines?

OLD MAN: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath."

ACTOR: What?

OLD MAN: Are you familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah?

ACTOR: No.

OLD MAN: "By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive."

ACTOR: I've always been amazed at how average people can memorize a whole book like that. Most actors couldn't even do it.

OLD MAN: Most actors never tried.

ACTOR: Anyway, don't bore me with Biblical quotes, old man.

The SOUND of thunder explodes nearby. Actor runs for cover. Old man laughs.

OLD MAN: No use hiding, friend. Your time is up. "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken."

ACTOR: Cut it out! It's bad enough as it is!

OLD MAN: You ain't seen nothin' yet.

MAN: Do you know what's going to happen?

OLD MAN: How could I?

MAN: I thought you might have some inside information.

OLD MAN: No...I am like the character in my play that this gentleman attempted to portray. "I've traveled the world, seen the cities, witnessed the animals that roam with such freedom, and have heard the words of those who have them. What, I ask you, am I to think? And indeed, am I capable of such an act?" (to Man) Well, I have yet to find an answer to that question.

ACTOR: No wonder it bombed.

OLD MAN: Say, isn't it foolish to hold each other in contempt at a time like this? (puts out his hand) Let's forget the past. How about it?

(Actor looks at him suspiciously.)

ACTOR: Can you forget my performance?

OLD MAN: Sure!

ACTOR: Then I'll forget your play.

(They shake hands.)

OLD MAN: Although it's the best thing you've ever had the privilege to be part of.

ACTOR: No, it wasn't! I played Hamlet in junior college!

MAN: Come on, guys. This is getting us nowhere.

ACTOR: You going someplace?

MAN: Pretty soon, yeah.

(Actor is silenced. Old Man looks at bottle.)

OLD MAN: Any more of this?

MAN: You're too late.

OLD MAN: Story of my life. This one, anyways.

MAN: You don't really believe you were Ibsen, do you?

OLD MAN: You don't really believe you are what you think you are, do you? We're all blinded by illusions. Illusions of delusions. I happen to believe, objectively speaking, that I'm a lot more than a failed writer born in a Pennsylvania coal mining town, who never accomplished anything by surviving an acute case of cirrhosis. I'm not a by-product of bored, overworked immigrants. I'm an integral part of all this. I've known the riddle of the Sphinx, I've crossed the Rubicon, I've been father, mother, child, adulterer, oriental, gypsy, knight in shining armor...

ACTOR: You must have spent time in California!

MAN: How do you know if the life you're living now is a winner?

OLD MAN: It doesn't really make a whole lot of difference, does it? There are no winners or losers. We're just a bunch of bewildered spirits trying to figure out what we're supposed to be doing down here.

ACTOR: I know what I'm suppose to be doing!

OLD MAN: Oh yeah? What?

ACTOR: Achieving my childhood dreams and ambitions. And I'll tell you something, I would have achieved them eventually.

OLD MAN: So what?

ACTOR: Well...I'd have a mansion in Beverly Hills, credit cards, a Mercedes...and the whole world would love me.

OLD MAN: That's one childish dream, alright. (turning to Man) What about you, sir, what did you wish for in this lifetime.

MAN: What did I wish for? I don't really know...

OLD MAN: Do you think you got anything out of being here for a few decades?

MAN: A few laughs...A very few...

OLD MAN: Did you ever fall in love?

MAN: About twenty-eight times?

OLD MAN: I mean really fall in love.

MAN (sadly): Horace...

OLD MAN: Who?

MAN: A scruffy little mut. Best friend I ever had.

OLD MAN: Well, don't fee bad. If someone had only told me that loving was the one worthwhile thing to do down here, I'd be a rich man indeed. But I never met anyone who knew the meaning of the word.

ACTOR: Can't meet too many people sleeping under a bridge.

OLD MAN: Quite true. Although I did get to know and grow fond of someone I would have otherwise stayed away from.

ACTOR: Who's that?

OLD MAN: Myself.

MAN: I guess there's not too many of us who know who we really are...

OLD MAN: It's all there for the finding though.

ACTOR: You can't spend your whole life asking questions. You won't get anything done!

OLD MAN: You got more important things to do than finding yourself?

ACTOR: I didn't know I was lost.

OLD MAN: That's most people's excuses. But you can't plead ignorance. If you just look around, there are innumerable hints and clues.

ACTOR: Listen to him! What are you? Some kind of know-it-all hermit? Doesn't look like you managed to lead a pure life either, Mac.

OLD MAN: No, I certainly didn't. But I'm not fool enough to overlook that fact.

ACTOR: As far as I'm concerned, I did the best I could. What more can you ask for?

OLD MAN: You'll find out real soon.

(The SOUND of great thunder clap explodes nearby. Lights abruptly FADE OUT. Only the candles illuminate the scene.)

MAN: Looks like it's all over.

(Man goes to curtain line and looks out, amazed.)

MAN: Wait a minute...I see...I see a rainbow!

ACTOR: You're seeing things!

MAN: That's right! And the thing I'm seeing is a rainbow! The most incredible rainbow I've ever laid eyes on!

(Actor rushes to curtain line and looks out over audience.)

ACTOR: What could this mean?

OLD MAN: It means we haven't been abandoned. In spite of ourselves. (He joins them on curtain line.)

MAN: We've been given another chance!

ACTOR: What does our Creator want? An encore of the mess we've made these last eight thousand years?

OLD MAN: Our Creator is giving us a new start, a new opportunity, a new life.

ACTOR: Why should I get another chance? (Old Man puts his arms around them. A beam of light FADES UP, representing a golden sunray falling onto the stage.)

OLD MAN: God's got lots of work for us to do. Lots of lonely people to visit, lots of hungry mouths to feed, lots of lost and...

MAN: Tell me something. Do you think God would accept me as a worker in the Big Plan?

OLD MAN: Everyone is accepted, everyone is called to help out.

ACTOR: Even at this late date?

OLD MAN: Especially now.

ACTOR: Well, what are we waiting for? Let's go out there and get busy!

(They smile and exit. The light beam remains on the empty stage for a moment and then FADES OUT.)