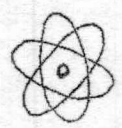


3



DOORS RICHARD'S ALMANAC 1955



Whenever the mood strikes -- and that, usually, Too Damned Often -- A2C Richard W. Brown (36th TransRon, APO 132, New York, New York) puts out an issue of POOR RICHARD'S ALMANAC. The mood is upon him again, this is it that you are holding in your hands, this is the 15th glorious issue, and it goes through the 103rd mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. In a way, Bruce Pelz shares part of the blame; he's connected with getting it from stencil to mimeo bond. May God have mercy upon him; it's certain, nobody else will. If there is a cover, it's by Bjo, unless it's by someone else, in which case your guess is as good as mine.

)*()

C O N T E N T S

Paul Stanbery: Genius On The Fringes...

...rich brown...

...pp 1...

The Last Night Of Doubt...

...Paul Stanbery...

...pp 20...

The Last Night Of Doubt is copyright © 1962 by Paul Stanbery. All Rights are reserved by the author.

(*)()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()*()

Paul Stanbery:
Genius On The Fringes
by
rich brown

Only a few moments ago -- just before I sat myself down to this typer to begin this little article/essay, -- I really had everything carefully worked out in my mind. After two months of much mental cogitation and occasion-

al note-scribblings dealing with all the connected experiences I intended to write about, I was positive, when I sat down, that it was only waiting for my clever mind and deft fingers to bring it all before you in living black & white. I was the picture of confidence, even though I felt that this article would have to be a work of art, a thing of beauty, a kalleidoscope of words. Something -- excuse the cliché -- Larger Than Life. Something, in other words, to match the person I intend to write about: Paul Stanbery.

But as I got myself ready to throw myself into that Great Something and pull out of it the Deepest of True Meaning and Significance (for a change in my general run of fanwriting), the whole project seemed to fizzle in front of me. Christopher Moreley's comment on Don Marquis in Letters Of Askance seemed almost applicable to myself, then: "There is always one more bit of hackwork to be ground out before we can get at the masterpiece. More ironical still, when we deliberately sit down to tackle the announced masterpiece, how often it goes wooden in our hands."

This article, when I first tried to write it, went wooden in my hands, not because I had some other bit of hackwork to do, but because I wanted to distil Paul Stanbery's personality on paper. I wanted you to know why I like Paul Stanbery, as a person, as a friend, as a writer, as a composer -- as, in fact, everything he has ever tried to be (read: been). And, therefore, I would have had to do the impossible. The masterpiece turned to lead when I realized that even if I succeeded in doing this, I would in-

introduce you only to the Paul Stanbery I knew two years ago, the Paul Stanbery about whom one might say,

"He had a motto once, you know --
'To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power which seems omnipotent . . .
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,
This . . . is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.'"

-- which is, if I am any judge, still true. But the Stanbery that I knew, the Stanbery of a few years ago, about him one might also say,

"Ham, you know, he's a poet
But he don't know it,
'Cause his works don't show it.
He hasn't decently finished anything he ever started --
'What a waste, what a waste . . .
What a waste of money and time . . .'"

-- and that, I sincerely believe, is no longer true. If The Last Night Of Doubt (from which I have been quasi-quoting, and which appears in this issue) is not enough proof of this, 641 pages of his recently completed novel should be. I hope it finds a publisher. Knowing Paul, I think it will.

My mistake, when I started this article, was that I would be telling you about Paul Stanbery 1959 and earlier -- and I doubt that there is much resemblance between him and Paul Stanbery 1963. What faults he may have had, he has overcome the greatest number of them.

But, as you can plainly see, I am going on with it. There are three reasons for this, and only one (the first) is perhaps a wee bit too Gerberizing. These reasons are: 1) I have seen Stanbery's name used by some of fandom's third-raters with all the scorn and derision one might expect (but which I did not), and I want to investigate the why of this -- and, perhaps, remedy some of it through this. 2) I want to offer, at the least, a partial proof of what I intend to say by printing The Last Night Of Doubt. 3) I want to do you a favor -- I want to introduce you to a friend of mine, the Paul Stanbery I knew, that you might better know the Stanbery who is now, and be able to know the Stanbery who will be.

**

You will excuse me, perhaps when I tell you that it is related, if I mention Earl Kemp's second Safari Annual. It was, I am sure you will all remember without difficulty, a survey that attempted to answer the question "Why Is A Fan?"

Earl himself said, in his introduction, that he felt that the survey was a failure. It may have been -- but if it was, then it was the same kind of failure that the first Safari Annual was with the "Who Killed Science-Fiction?" question, because neither succeeded in finding a Definite Answer to the questions posed. At least, there didn't seem to be much agreement in either case.

The question, "Why Is A Fan?" has always seemed to be one of those questions that defies a One True Answer -- though God knows enough have tried, with everything from the crackpot "Fans are slans" to the pseudo-intellectual "fans are in-group word-orientated types who strive towards pleasureable Communications." Both answers are, in my estimation, quite excellent examples of how fans are more than willing to use senseless hook-um just to delude themselves into thinking that they are something they are not.

I think an answer that is a little closer to the Real Truth has been stumbled upon by Ted White. The stumbling may have been inadvertant, with the intent of humor, but I, having thought on it for some time, think it is more Significant than many other things that have been offered for serious consideration. "I am going to change my Image," Ted wrote, "No longer will I be Mean & Ditching Old Ted White; I will become a Sweetness & Light Young Ted White." Or something like that.

My contention is that a fan is a fan because fandom offers the opportunity to build an unjustified self-Image. A fan is a fan because of Image.

Let me explain.

Every person, mundane or otherwise, has an Image of his (or her) Self. Or so psychologists tell us. But in most cases, I think you must agree, they/we do not live up to them. Yet in the microcosm we know as fandom, you can be seen only as you wish to be seen. In fandom, you can be recognized as anything you want to be, regardless of what you are: a pimp could become a BNF and a nice respectable old lady could become a ferocious fugg-head; all depending solely on the Image they put forth in the hurdy-wordy world you are a part of right now.

All right then. If we are to at least temporarily grant the assumption that this is the conscious (and/or unconscious) motivation of fans, how does fandom then see itself? The answer I have found for this lies in the Image it portrays in faaan-fiction, that would-be 'school of in-group Lit-erature' which provides and presents the fannish fantasy.

The formula for this sort of story, a semi-serious tale which embellishes and glorifies what it pretends is the highest and lowest points of fannish existance, probably does not bear repeating; for, if you've been in fandom for more than six months (and I think most of FAPA falls into that category, the state of the waiting-list being what it is) you have probably read it at least twenty times.

But I will repeat it, anyway.

The story involves itself with telling you what a Swell Fellow the protagonist is; how he wrote such beautiful faaan-fiction Right From The Very Beginning. It tells about the Focal Point Fanzine he published as a neofan, about all the brilliant one-shots he put out; about how his FAPA-zine was in the Top Ten, and Number One for twenty years running; about the club-meetings and conventions he attended and all the beautiful bon mot's he displayed there. And, if this is to be one of those tales that are supposed to be Actually True To Fannish Life, or one of those stories that is trying to put the old gentle quash on your heart-strings, then there's something in there about how the prota_gonist is disillusioned in some way,

cut to the Very Quick as it were, and Forced Away from that thing which he holds most dear in life...fandom, what else?

Well, that's the formula. Larry Stark started it, Terry Carr has used it successfully, and several others (myself included) have used it. Larry Stark, however, unfortunately called it a formula for 'realism' in fannish writings.

Now, I ask you . . .

. . . Realism?

Or wish-fulfillment?

If it is realism, really realism, surely you could name me three real fans, out of fandom's hundreds, who fit this description. So name me two. Name me one . . .

For further proof that this plot outline Lacks Something in the way of realism, let us take the average person who comes into fandom and see what happens to him. His first effort will probably be illegible or unintelligible or both; chances are that he has never really tried to express himself in black and white before. He may phrase like an illiterate, spell like a six-year-old; without a doubt, two or three places in his first issue or early correspondence he will entrench his foot firmly between his upper and lower dentures. Still, he will make a few friends; and he probably will not be of enough concern to enough fans (unless his name is George Willicks) to warrant making enemies. His first (and possibly second, third and fourth) convention he will be a nonentity. In this fannish day and age he will probably never put out a one-shot; if he does, it won't be very good. And lastly, when he drops out of fandom, if he drops out, it will no doubt be either because he lacks interest, his interests have been channelled elsewhere, or he suddenly discovers the obvious; that fandom is foolish and rather bumblingly like mundane, and what the heck is the fuss all about anyway?

That is realism, actually; but, unfortunately, it would make a poor Hero Epic. It would also play hob with the Image most fans try to live up to, hold of themselves, and thus would like to hold up to others for their admiration. It's 10¢ fakery and two-for-a-nickle phoniness, but fans seem to want it that way. Rots of Ruck, people.

All of this, if you will, is important in computing the factors in the reason why Paul Stanbery is only a 'genius on the fringes' and not a really Big Name in fandom; and why he never got the respect he deserved.

The most important thing to realize is that he has never given any real concern to his fannish Image -- And, probably, caring less, never will. Paul could no more fit into this phony image than could any other fan currently in fandom; the only difference being that Paul realized this and didn't even try. Paul Stanbery always, and invariably, sometimes painfully and sometimes joyously, is Paul Stanbery. And that, if I may say so, is a Very Wonderful Thing, no matter what fandom may say or think.

The beautiful (but disillusioning, quixotically) thing about fandom is that it is only half composed of reality; the other part lies in the beautiful but disenchanting forests of non-existence. People in fandom live more on fakery and phoniness and self-deceit than do their outside mundane counter-parts -- and then proceed to delude themselves into believing that

Paul Stanbery: Genius On The Fringes -- v

because of this (and not in spite of it) they are Superior. (You would be surprised -- or perhaps you wouldn't, I don't know -- at how easily the "fans are slans" statement is laughed at, yet how equally easily the concept is cheered and accepted.)

Differently than I, Paul may have seen this from the beginning; at least, the echoes of his laughter at the 'fannish attitude' still rings true to anyone willing to strain the slightest bit to read the pages of Equation #2 -- or the part of it that got out.

Once it seemed a great pity to me that the whole issue did not get done. If Stanbery had wanted the esteem of fandom, the complete publication and mailing of that issue would have given it to him. (Or so I would have liked to think -- for surely, I told myself, fandom would not (could not?) remain unheeding of his talents forever.)

But Dave McDaniel (who was then Ted Johnstone) and I are the only ones who realized that Paul could have redeemed himself fannishly if he had gone ahead with it. This was the neozine of the Fannish Epic: his editorial was filled with the bite of satire and his introductions to various articles (continued in the manner of Equation #1) -- fictional interludes in which various thinly-disguised fannish characters were sitting around talking to each other at The Inn Of The Francing Pony -- I can only describe as being truly, fabulously funny. Even some of it was a lampoon sort of satire -- one masked fellow (whom I was supposed to identify, since I was a Soames Operative) ran around wielding a sword-sized stylus, writing 'Qwertyuiop' on everything from desk-tops to people's foreheads, shouting, "From out of the night, when the full moon is bright, comes a voice that says 'I'm Sorry!'" Despite the fact that I eventually figured out (through a process of elimination) that it was Walt Willis, he was always referred to as Mr. Sorry.

To continue in that vein may have made Stanbery a Burbee or Grennell or Willis type.

On the other hand, it might not have.

Stanbery is always Stanbery.

It really doesn't matter -- it no longer seems a pity to me that the issue was not published. For, through the process of extrapolation (which most fans, I believe, are familiar with) I could see that if Paul had stayed to receive the respect due him, he might have remained in fandom. It would have been a great gain for fandom; but a total loss for Paul Stanbery -- and, may I ever be so bold, for the world.

**

You know, the most astounding thing about all of this conjecture is that Paul has only written for the fannish press five or six times. Yet, for the scarcity of his material, he is, it seems, a legend in reverse. He is pictured, mostly because of his connection with Coventry, as some sort of a wide-eyed fanatic who wanders around the streets of Pasadena (and/or Seattle), in full Coventranian regalia, ordering the common citizens beheaded. Those who do not consider (or know of) the Coventranian side -- in whatever part of Borneo they might reside -- remember him only as the

editor of 1½ crudzines -- crudzines, not necessarily because they were all crud (some of it was, but none of it was by Stanbery) but because they were poorly reproduced.

With this in mind, I somehow have the feeling that some of you people out there are going to doubt my statement that Stanbery, given the appreciation, might have been "a Burbee or Grennell or Willis-type." For proof of this statement, then, let me offer you the following rather lengthy quotations from Equation #2, written by Stanbery. In these pages, Paul, then aged 16, debunked, poked fun at, and satirized: fandom, fans, me, the mundane world, his own projects, and himself -- and usually in reverse order. There was no comparable writer, fanwise, at near the same age. Tho the reproduction was far from perfect, it was readable; comparable, I would say, with the reproduction Max Keasler used to feature in Fan Variety and Opus. Here, let me quote you a few pages at random:

"What's on the other side of the record?" Richard asked.

"Oh, you wouldn't like it," I said, putting the disk (which reminds me that Decca has started using a lousy wood base filler for theirs which is lousy) back into the plastic jacket and then skipping it with one hand (of course, I never touch the grooves while handling it) into the album.

"What is it?" he asked again, his non-conformist-type curiosity aroused by my denial of his request and my assumption that he wouldn't like it.

"Thomson's ACADIAN SONGS AND DANCES from 'The Louisian Story.' It's just folk music -- that kind of thing. Like I said, you wouldn't like it."

Richard was looking at me slyly. "What makes you think I wouldn't like it? All fans are supposed to love folk music."

This I knew. I had even got him to listen to Vaughn Williams' SINFONIA ANTARTICA after I told him old V. W. had written folk songs. He liked SINFONIA ANTARTICA -- but then, I had told him he would. Ken Waddell even admitted it was 'pretty tough.'

"Okay, Richard," I said weakly. "If you want to hear it I'll put it on. The first piece is kind of sad -- in fact, it's called 'Sadness.' Like all the others, it was taken from Louisiana folk songs. I'm thinking of using it in my score for OUR TOWN." I put the record down on the irregularly revolving turntable on my custom-built low-fi rig. I told Richard he wouldn't like it, even though it was folk-music, but I'd always had hopes that he might like it. Richard was always much more interested in music I told him he wouldn't like. But this time it turned out, as usual, that I was right.

Or, for another, better example:

A lot of reactions to the first Equation which you won't read about in the lettercol came from my non-fan friends (The worst type of

friend you can have is a fan, you know. They have shifty eyes.) or maybe victim/friends. I started distributing the zine the second day of school, long before I sent it out to any fans. Some of them were fool enough to buy copies. As I had half expected, their reactions weren't too enthusiastic. A friend of mine last year who lives over in La Canada said S. E. Moray's story was too fantastic and that he didn't understand all these fannish things (I'd like to see him try to decipher Hyphen). Another ~~spoke~~ friend who bought it from me because he liked the copy of Richard's Califan #1 I had shown him (?) thought he was gyped because he couldn't read it*. A girl from Pasadena was disappointed because her story wasn't in it (after all I had told her about me being a big publisher and all). Bill Williams, the infamous artist, was one of the most violent in his reaction to it. He was furious that I had thought to print the illustrations he had done about a year before for me. He did give me a few of his modern works which are considerably better. I have been printing them, and a few of the old ones that are left, and will continue to do so, over his violent objections and those of most of you readers, until I run out. He thinks the illos of his that I used are "unrepresentative of his present artistic ideals." Richard and Ken Waddell agree with him.

James Ganwer, another 'artist,' hasn't spoken to me since. I succeeded in tracking down Ian Whiteside, an old 8th Grade friend who had been with me when I was caught leaving the school grounds without a lunch pass (my only crime except for the time I robbed a copy of The Puppet Masters from the library -- my mother caught me and made me return "that nasty book"). I gave Ian his copy but unfortunately he didn't remember drawing for me. There were others who got the zine but their comments were much the same. Jim Ellingwood, who originally was going to publish Equation on his ancient A. B. Dick mimeograph, which wasn't in a state of repair, and was my production manager, thought it was hideous but offered to ditto it for me if I bought a ditto. My English class is taking up a collection to send me to Mars. The movement is very popular.

About every year or so I get a crush on a girl I know. Usually they're the curt, intellectual type who would as soon spit in your face as smile, the other half are the nice, hide-the-brains type who are big in society (sometimes in other ways) -- they'd spit if it wasn't impolite, so they just smile and tell you to go fly a kite. Anyway, I never get anywhere with either type, because they always think I'm a slob. The latest one was no exception. After she'd read the first issue for about a week (I'd given it to her to impress her with my great ability as a publisher (I was losing more money than anyone had ever done before and I was still going to put out a second issue and lose more money)) she told me that she and everybody in her family thought it was a riot. I smiled modestly but broadly and got all tin-

*Califan #1 was my first fanzine -- 2pp, mimeographed illegibly on slick ditto paper. --rwb

gly inside and then ran like heck. I found out later that she still thought I was a slob.

About the only good thing that came of the whole mess was the money I made from the sale of a few (it turned out I was losing 10¢ on every one I sold) and my meeting with Lee Collins through Bill Williams "that scribbler." Lee saw Bill's copy of Equation and he was interested in meeting the publisher. Bill gave him one of my business cards (that I printed up in the 9th grade class I had Bill in with me and where I printed Equation's first cover back in the Spring of 1957) and Lee got in touch with me. He suggested that I get my art work and such organized, and in this way he got to be my new production manager. (Shows what you get for making suggestions to me...) Now I've got somebody to do my dirty work again. (I never liked Jim Ellingwood. He always wanted to be PAID.)

Even as little as Stanbery has turned out, even though his productions were sometimes hard to read, I could not help but wonder why fandom, the microcosm where Talent was King and Talent Observation was Prince Consort, refused to see Stanbery for what he really was. Were the trees, by any chance, obscured by the forestry? What was the reason, if not?

Perhaps I will never know.

Perhaps I wouldn't care too much for fandom if I did.

**

I was little more than five years old when I first met Paul Edward Stanbery.

We were in kindergarten together. I seldom paid him any particular heed; he was as small, tight-lipped and inconspicuous physically then, proportionately, as he is (in some few cases) today. Understand, please, that by 'tight-lipped' I mean to convey a physical description of him only, and to no way imply that he was the Silent Type, for Silent is something that Stanbery certainly is not. Nor was he then.

In fact, he shocked his way into my frame of reference when he started talking to Linda Rumble. ((It's funny how names will come back to you, just like that, when you haven't thought of them or used them for years.)) Linda Rumble was (as everyone who could toss a taunt knew) my 'girl friend.'

Actually, Linda and I found that we were Intellectually Compatible, was all. We both shared the same tastes in Literature -- including, among sundry other things, the daring radio adventures of one Sgt Preston and his "wonder-dog," Yukon King. So we often played together during recess. She played Sgt Preston and I played Yukon King. (This Early Training had an interesting outcome -- she became a Lesbian and I became a sonofabitch -- but that is neither here nor there.)

Paul was trying to tell her that our episodes/adventures needed at least one more character, and he would be happy to fill that position himself. Since it was a sort of unwritten rule that I could never talk during these episodes -- I was a dog, you see, and dogs (at least, Yukon King-type dogs) just didn't talk in those days -- I could not voice any objections I might feel. But I felt them, the flavor of jealousy and dog-biscuit strong in my mouth; with snarls and growls at him, furious no-type headshakings, and snapping at his legs, I tried to get the idea across to Linda that I didn't think Paul quite acceptable. Paul, after calmly disengaging his trouser-leg from my vehement teeth, would turn back to turning his logic on Linda. Finally I was (I felt) compelled to do a very undog-like thing: Paul had all but convinced her that we needed another 'talking' character. They were ignoring me completely. So I picked up a handy sandpail (which were always there in profuse profusion) and creamed him one up side the head.

It was no wonder, then, that it took another five or six years for us to become good friends.

But good friends we became.

It was either 1952 or 1953, I don't remember which, now. I remember looking back to see him at the top of Washington Junior High hill, at a place where the parking lot was being built (it looked somewhat like a battlement), making promises, I have no doubt, to the world. And I, on my way home from school, continued on. But something must have delayed me, or Paul must have been awfully fast, because just another block or so down I looked across the street to see him walking along with the humptibump stride that characterizes so many brief-case carrying people (he carried a breifcase even then), humming to himself and conducting an imaginary orchestra with his free hand. I thought for a few seconds before crossing the street. Then, after looking both ways, and with my eyes wide open, I walked across.

We became good friends. I can't remember, just now, how; it might have had something to do with science fiction, though as I remember it it was some time later that I discovered that Stanbery was also interested in same. At any rate, day after day would see me walking up to his house to talk with him before we both made our way to school. Day after day would see me walking home with him, talking when I had the chance (usually, he was walking circles around me -- quite literally -- gesticulating wildly and talking in such long and involved wild streams of conversation (sometimes held by logic as strong as iron cord, sometimes on what seemed to be flimsy spidery webs but turned out to be refined as steel, equally strong) that his lips would chap and sometimes bleed). When I didn't, I listened -- which was, as I say, most of the time. Yet, for all the kiddin I've done about his talking (everyone kids him about it; it's The Thing To Do), I've never regreted, I can truthfully say, a second I've listened; and I doubt that I will, ever.

Before we were both barely in Junior High, we were trying to sell pro-

Paul Stanbery: Genius On The Fringes -- x

professionally. We "collaborated" on many things -- and I put that in quotes for good reason. I would give Paul a two-page (i.e., page and a quarter) 'story' which was little more than a skeleton plot outline, and he would transform it into a 16 or 20 page piece of fiction. They were not masterpieces; but they were better than a number of things that had appeared in PLANET STORIES; and Paul didn't have much to work with, from my side of the "collaboration."

Also, when we were in Junior High, we started the Washington Junior High Science Fiction League. It died shortly after he left. But that was where we first expressed our interests in communicating our avidness in sf, where we tested its strength and found it Good and Pure. It was there that we started the Lapex Stan-Brown Science Fiction Productions. Lapex was Stanbery's name for a Disney-like corporation that he intended to get started. His ideas for the thing included such things as making good sf films (at first on an amateur basis -- he actually made two) and starting a Disneyland-like park where he would reap in the money to finance these films. The first idea was ridiculed at Stanbery's only (to my knowledge) attendance at the LASFS (Unicorn Productions, anyone?), and he gave up the second when Disney cashed in on his dreams. Two films and about sixteen radio-production-type tapes; that's all he produced. It was I who added the '@' to the name in place of the 'a' because I thought it looked a heck of a lot fancier that way, not realizing that it would change the pronunciation to Latpex. I also acted in a few of the tapes. For that I got my full last name into the titles. Stanbery not only acted, he directed, produced, filmed, did the screen/radio adaptations from the original stories and/or wrote them himself, worked as sound engineer and scored the music -- for which he got the first syllable of his last name in the titles. Sometimes I wonder if there's any real Justice left in the world.

When we were in Junior High, we made plans for our first fanzine, Equation. I went ahead and published four or five crudzines while Paul worked, as the mood hit him, on Equation. But Paul tells it better (albeit more lengthily, perhaps) than I could, so I'll stop resisting the temptation and give in to it; I'll go ahead and quote from what he had to say about it from the vantage point of it's second issue:

There were a good deal of things wrong with the first issue; not the least being my excessive blatherings (which I show no signs of shortening), the omission of page 13, the addition of a second page 51, and two things which it seemed nobody missed: the lacking FOR THE SAKE OF HACKTION lettercol which Richard published in FRAMISHED #2(#4) and the lack of the Sullivan reviews, which have been replaced by our friends out there in fanland, but which it seemed nobody really liked when they appeared in ETERNITY #1, but I liked -- and which are now unobtainable because Rich lost Mr. Sullivan's address.

The big reaction in fandom, though, didn't seem to mention that. Everybody was astounded at the length and nobody could read it. Many people think this was because of the poor quality of ZOTZ:press repro-

duction. This is not true -- the facts are that when I finished typing all the EQUATION, Vol. II, No. 1* stencils in June 1958, Richard was in a terrible fit of fannish depression. At the time I believe he was about to ask that horrible, horrible question: "What The Hell Do I Spend All Of This Money On Fandom For When I Could Be In The Magnetic Golf Ball Manufacturing Business?" I could tell he was getting the fugg bug. He wasn't that bad all the time. But when he wasn't writing letters he was just sitting around. He knew that if he wanted to run any of his stuff he'd have to run mine off too, so he didn't run off anything, except POOR RICHARD'S ALMANACK #2, a bit of FRAM #2, and 10 pages of EQUATION.

When I turned the stencils over to Richard, I'd expected him to run them off within a few weeks. I found that this certainly was not the case. For two months, ZOTZ!press was not doing anything. And Rich had gotten me so I was running around in circles. After all, as I said lastish, we started planning EQUATION in late 1956 -- but we had no money, no duplicator, and very little material -- most of it by ourselves, which would have been exhausted after the first issue. All that came of our grand neofannish plans was ETERNITY #1, Rich's first fanzine of any note. Like I said, nothing came of it and in late 1957 we started all over again. The main reasons for the re-birth were that I'd received material in the EQUATION fiction contest I feel I am obligated to print, ETERNITY, the substitute for EQUATION was being discontinued, and I just plain wanted to publish a fanzine. The reason it didn't come out in the Spring of '58 is because I didn't want to enough. I got bogged down in school work and special reports and Music To Live Every Note Of and girls and the like and traded all my \$1.75 quires of stencils to Rich for those famous 1000 magazines, which I still have (I never sell anything -- it's too final). But as well as never selling anything, I never throw things away, give up a girl for keeps, or give up an idea, positively. So, when Summer began I was back at my hot, tired little typer, buying stencils again, and putting out EQUATION.

You could see why I was running around in circles -- after all, we'd already had six months of delays. Finally he'd gotten me so desperate to get EQUATION out that I was literally foaming at the mouth with rage at his inactivity. But he just sat there, with the blithe, stubborn, tough-luck-but-I-don't-want-to-fool-with-that-cruddy-mimeograph smile on his obstinant JD-type face and that to-hell-with-mundane-life glazed look in his eyes. I gave him up. With typical neofannish zeal, I yelled "Roscoe take you!" at the top of my voice (which didn't disturb him one bit) and had an idea -- I decided to get back the mimeograph I'd sold my brother. I asked him where it was and Jim (that's my brother) told me I could buy it back for \$16 -- \$2.00 a month in that cold, calculating Stanbery-type tone. He's younger, richer, taller, fatter, and uglier than I am -- and gets better

*The first 'volume' of EQUATION was ETERNITY -- all two issues of it. It was given this designation since it had printed some material intended for use in EQUATION. --rwb

grades. I hate his guts. That's why we're the best of pals. He pointed out our large broken picture window in the living room and told me it was across the street in an old Victorian-type house where the owners (or rather, the occupants -- you see, the bank is unlucky enough to own the house) were using it to print up literature to convince people to sign the petitions they were circulating to throw out four members of the Pasadena Board of Directors. This had something to do with the famous Pasadena "14 Feet" Campaign which I won't go into at this point -- ask me about it and I'll tell you. (Like they say, "There's something about Pasadena...")

----- Hey, Richard? ARE YOU SURE WILLIS STARTED THIS WAY? -----

The people didn't have any more use for the mimeograph; they'd gotten a multigraph (curses!) so I took my little machine home, and began to set up CROWN PRESS in the back yard. I finally decided to lick that mimeograph once and for all. I took a look at a very neo-fannish EQUATION ad Richard and I had run off when I first got the mimeo . . . it wasn't quite as bad as I thought -- I hadn't typed the stencil right, I'd put it on backwards, and there wasn't quite enough ink, sure, but it certainly looked as good as some stuff Richard has put out and actually dared to mail -- like ETERNITY #1, for instance. (I could only read that because most of the stuff in it was to have been in EQUATION and I'd memorized it.) I decided to be very patient and not use any nasty words or wrecking tools and not care one little bit if all of EQUATION were destroyed in the process (it wouldn't have mattered much to the readers, anyway) -- I ended up wrecking page 62 (which I replaced -- it was just my ramblings, anyway, so it didn't really matter -- there were far too many of those for my taste) but, amazingly enough, the other page I tried came out perfectly (unfortunately, those copies of that page were not the ones I used in the final assembly). I ran down and showed it to Richard, who was coming up from Ken Waddell's house to his pad, and he liked it. So CROWN PRESS and EQUATION were reborn.

Those were not the last of the Perils of Paul Edward, however. I had the zine run off within a week (or two at the outside) and then found it was too thick to staple. I tried a few times to put it together like Harlan Ellison with lots of staples* or Lee Hoffman with tape, but it looked cruddy. So I bought some brass fasteners over at the 5 & dime. They looked fairly good. I fastened all my stuff to find that I had nothing to send them out in -- I was afraid they'd fall apart. S. E. Moray was threatening to mail "The Gorgeous Molecules" somewhere else if we didn't send him a copy, so, about the middle of October -- (we'd finished running the thing off the middle of September) -- we sent him one -- in an envelope I'd just run off the week before. I mailed copies out in piddling amounts (about 5 every two weeks) ever since then. Most of them were out by the mid-

*He refers to Science-Fantasy Bulletin; my copies had been re-re-re-stapled by me; Paul obviously thought they came that way. --rwb

dle of January. I'd had a two years delay in publication.

For those of you who could not read the last issue: I don't think it was the fault of my mimeograph (which ran off most of it).. Look on pages 29, 30, 56 & 57. Notice that they look almost readable. Now look on page 62. It looks absolutely unreadable, but study it closely -- it IS readable . . . almost. Now compare the type styles on those pages -- carefully. I asked Rich to do that, being as he is a Soames Operative and all, and he said: "Why, it's elementary, PEST, old man . . . They're . . . They're . . . They're . . ." That's what he said. Well, as you can see.

So obviously the real trouble lay in the terrible typing. My old machine, an L.C. SMITH which was about 20 years old, was falling to pieces. The 'N' broke and the typing was going all over the place so I got a new typer.

First I tried out my brother's on page 62 and some of the King reviews this, but it didn't work very well. I gave up my brother's typer and bought one of my own, a new HERMES 2000 portable (made by Palliard, makers of the Bolex cameras), which was a touch like an office machine -- that's good for me, because I pound heck out of a typer. This has not eliminated the XX's, but the purchase of a bottle of correction fluid helped that trouble.

Further proof that the unreadability and eyestrain was not completely due to my mimeo (which is a MEYER 8½ x 11 inch job which works fast, but more messily than Richard's (about twice as fast)) was the job I did on FRAMISHED #2 (#4) and THE DISENCHANTED DUPLICATOR. These were both typed (like pages 29, 30, 56 & 57 lastish) on Richard's typer and mimeod on better paper. Well, anyway, we hope this is more readable. You can't say we didn't try (even if we didn't try anything but your patience).

That is the Equation story, or most of it. I qualify that statement because it didn't tell about all of our wonderful plans (before either of us had ever even seen a fanzine) -- of a circulation of a couple of thousand, and stories (buying 10th American Serial Rights -- there are no such things) by people like Heinlein, van Vogt, and others. We eventually came down out of the clouds, yes; but the air was, to use an old EsAdamsword, trufine, while it lasted.

**

I took Stanbery as a friend, but I did it in bits and snatches. It was a gradual thing. Through some miracle that is beyond my feeble powers to explain, I got the Stanbery personality in just the right doses, and never ran into any great, flooring surprises. There were surprises, of course, but always (as it just turned out) never quite enough to cause too

much crogglement. I mean, so Paul didn't think anything of making a snack of mustard and crackers -- so? And so Paul lived in the attic and Lived Every Note of classical music that he was forever playing (and wanted you to live it too) and was always moving, moving; so he sometimes pulled up the movable stairway so that he could be alone, and sometimes talked so long that his lips would chap and/or bleed, and talked about/had his mad, grandiose, noble dreams and plans -- was anything surprising about that?

Well, frankly, yes.

But coming in bits and snatches, as it did, nothing Stanbery ever did floored me. Staggered me, shook me, surprised me, yes -- but floored me, no, never, not quite.

Dave McDaniel was the first fan who ever got all of it in one quick blast. Because of his, and other, reactions, it became a Thing among local fans to say things like, "After you've met Burbee you've got to see Stanbery." Or: "Old Pasadena Joke -- we almost introduce you to Stanbery." Now, Dave is as fine a fannish character as there is, in my estimation -- a more-than-interesting conversationalist with catholic interests; but I think he will admit, as would anyone else in fandom, that to have a conversation with Stanbery is an Experience That Must Be Had If You Want To Tell Your Grandchildren That You Have Really Lived. No one that I have met in fandom is a match for Stanbery, conversationally.

I remember very well that I had told Paul about him and told him about Paul, and that a meeting had been arranged. But, as Fate obviously meant to have it, the day that the event was scheduled to come off I had just got and read Cry Of The Nameless -- and in those days Cry was always read and commented upon in one day, the day it was received. So I gave Dave directions and told him I would be up "just as soon as I finish this letter."

The letter went to gigantic proportions -- nearly eight pages.

Six hours later I arrived. Dave, though with disheveled hair and wavering between crogglement and wonder, had stood the experience well considering that I had not given him any real idea of what to expect ("You'll like Stanbery -- he's weird.") and that he had gotten all of it at once -- the music, the attic, the Stanbery monolog, and the constant motions, the original wind-up toy: you wind it up, set it down, and it doesn't stop until a spring breaks or it loses its tenseness.

Later, when we were going back to my house, Dave made an attempt to describe the experience: "He's like an atomic bomb explosion -- all of the energy, but so much of it wasted."

At the time, it was the most adept description I had ever heard of Stanbery. But now that it's no longer being wasted, a search for something new seems in order.

**

Paul Stanbery, in everything he does, may be Talent Personified, but he stands out in my mind not as a Writer, Poet, Musician, Composer, Conductor (several times, to my recollection, he conducted the high-school orchestra in his own compositions), though I certainly believe he should

get all the recognition in these fields he deserves, which is more than he has ever received.

But Paul Stanbery stands out in my mind as an orator. Paul can talk. He is one of the few people in the world who really can; conversationally he is excellent, and with his monolog -- something that is often belittled and made fun of (and I've done it, myself, out of envy) -- he is perfection.

I remember the 7th grade and Washington Junior High Hill (which always meant a lot more to Paul than even I, who know him best, in fandom, can claim to understand -- though I might offer the conjecture that it was a symbol of achievement; you had to be in Junior High to go on the Hill; so the Hill was 'at the top' in more ways than one -- but enough of this digressing) and how Stanbery used to give impromptu, off-the-cuff speeches for the kids who were waiting there for school to open. There, on the trapezoid of thought, he bounced from the witty to the profound, de profundis ad adstra, from the stars to the staid microcosm of the school. Too, I remember Stanbery, as a member of the Student Body and as an elected official in the school government, orating and being 102% the parliamentarian. He revamped the school constitution -- and, a few years later when he was going to John Muir High, he returned, oratory and all, to defend it from the newer parliamentarians who were getting ready to louse it all back up again.

Another thing -- important thing -- that I remember was that, once, the school newspaper dole-out comic-strip characters to fit the personalities of well-known Washington students. For instance, one pair (two guys that were the best of friends, regular clowns, one tall and one short) were called Mutt & Jeff; one reasonably good-looking girl who was exceedingly stylish was called Katy Keen; and much cetera. The most appropriate title or character given, though, was the one they gave Paul. They dubbed him "The Little King." That was Stanbery all over; and proof, if anyone wants such, that not all of his titles Coventrianian are self-proclaimed.

**

Somewhere in here (and it might as well be now) we're going to have to go into the formation of Coventry, what it is generally all about, since it has been mentioned here and in other places so many times in connection with Stanbery.

Bob Lichtman made an attempt (in Bedtime Story, a piece of fiction he wrote that went through SAPS some time ago), based partially on what he had heard, to picture the very beginning of Coventry. It was a good (read: entertaining) try, but it covered the ground much too fast. I think, in all fairness, that I should say that I'm pretty sure Bob realized that when he wrote it.

Coventry, though not Coventry as we know it, dates back to the fourth and fifth grades, Stanbery and I in each grade respectively. At the time, I was leading a small group of budding young juvenile delinquents on daring

escapades into The Junior High Hills (we were all elementary school children). The Elementary school stood at the crest, or flattened place, just before the hill continued up to its acme; at the top of the hill proper stood the Junior High.

Alphonso Sims, Danny Bromage (who later became the City Manager of Crimzoidia) and myself constituted the regular portion of this "group," with occasional others to augment our strength. We would get passes to go to the bathroom (one had to have a pass to leave the playground), and let ourselves out the back window of same, to shimmy down a drain-pipe and make a mad dash across twenty feet of open space before we were covered by the brush and other foliage offered by the hill.

Once there, we had our own adventures. And, once there, we could view the entire elementary school playground below us without much chance of being seen. We could always see the games the other children were playing.

One game was an especial and steady favorite in particular. Absolute swarms of kids could be seen, running in that particular galloping stride that children have to let you know that they're on horseback. Cavalry, they were. Or, actually, they were two cavalries; they would meet on the field (read: playground) to do battle. And as dangerous as this may have seemed, or may sound now, I can remember only once that anyone ever got hurt, and even that was not from the mock-battles; over-enthusiastic, perhaps, about the game, one kid forgot to duck as he ran/rode under a low chinning bar.

And always, always, at the head of one of these groups, 'rode' The Little King. They were his battles, carried out by his strategies; it was his game. And it is not hard to be King when it is in You and In The Situation; indeed, the reverse is true.

That, whether Paul will admit it or not, was the actual beginning of Coventry. So far as I know, none asked him what he would call the game; or, if they did, I feel certain that he would not have (as Bob Lichtman's story suggests) called it Coventry. If anything, he would have probably called in Cavalry.

From those beginnings (say I) came the Mariposan Empire. Paul, his brother Jim, Mike Tarpin and his brother Jerry, and a few others started this little on-paper Empire with Pasadena/Altadena borders. They had their little on-paper battles (though at the time some of them still weren't only on-paper), constitutions, declarations; they had their war-councils, pacts, treaties -- occasionally, straight out of the mundane, they had their lies and deceptions and treacheries -- they had their ranks and titles and their glories of Rome (and some of its fall). Quite some time later, Bruce somebody (founder of New Scotland), I, Ken Waddell (I gave Ken Mongloidia, my 'home' country, and he split it into Mongloidia-Kentonia) and a few more came into it.

But it was still the Mariposan Empire.

It remained the Mariposan Empire for a hell of a long time. Gradually, later, Stanbery and I began to work in our science-fictional ideas as well, much to the ranklement of other members, who balked completely at the

concept of super-weapons -- which, actually, in retrospect, was a Good Thing, otherwise Coventry would not be nearly as adventurous as it is and can be. The spindizzy was the first idea that was actually incorporated without objection; it was not inconceivable that the same type of action that had already taken place within the Mariposan Empire could just as well take place on a spindizzy -- and this is how the City Fathers were founded. It was also how the Mariposan Empire took on the form of different land masses, instead of being a bunch of inter-connecting states that bordered each other.

Then Stanbery read Heinlein's Coventry. From then on, first his own country, then the entire spindizzy, followed the Covenant (over the violent objections of Jouar Lynn); eventually the spindizzy took on the name of Coventry. From that point on, Coventry went forward to become what it is today -- whatever the hell that is.

Coventry, as such, has no language; and Stanbery and I developed two pieces of esoterica that might not be understood by outside fans. One was, "Boyd Raeburn, Ted White, QWERTYUIOPress." Stanbery's passion was classical music, and mine was fandom. To the extent that I got Paul interested in fandom, he got me interested in classical music. But it was a battle there for a while, and there was always a bit of misunderstanding when he started saying something like, "I want you to listen to the counter-point in the base-tenor cleft of the oboe--" assuming, as he did so, that I knew what the hell he was talking about, whereas I actually did not. So, whenever he got too far into classical music for me to follow him (even at a great distance) I would say, "Boyd Raeburn, Ted White, QWERTYUIOPress," to let him know he was getting too esoteric for me. Perhaps it was not kind of me, but Paul always laughed. And though, many times, when I got carried away talking about something famish, he could have said, "Shostakovitch Bach, Base-Tenor cleft," he never did. The other bit, which is used in Coventranian material, is "Cleah Uvani." It was derived from Heinlein's use of "Clear Skies!" as a spaceman's good-bye. 'Cleah' being the Southern pronunciation of 'clear' and 'Uvani' implying the universe, the skies. It may also be a greeting, or used kindly to express well-wishes.

**

I do not deny, and I'm sure that Paul would not, that Coventry, our Coventry, is based on things out of Childhood, and therefore very likely to be Childish. The adjective, somehow, doesn't seem to bother Coventranians; and I think I know the reason why. It is childish, I am childish, they are childish, you are childish. Oh, Yes; that's the reason. I firmly believe that there is a child . . . within any greybeard that you may ever meet; a child hidden in the most mature of individuals. The thing is not to repress it, but to admit it; and, occasionally, to let the child come out to play. And dream. For dreams are much of what we have...

Childish it is, and was, and childish it may ever be. It was, in any event, shaped and molded by a fine mind -- Paul Stanbery's. He drew the

maps, drafted the documents and histories, gave it form. It was an act of creation; though he drew on the established imaginations of others -- from Heinlein, Blish, van Vogt, and later from Tolkien and Lieber (and a few of us are trying to work in Three Hearts And Three Lions, somewhere) -- he created something out of it all that had the essential mark of Paul Stanbery, something that made it more his than theirs.

Still, it was only one creation. And, though no less important because of when and where and under what circumstances it was formed, it may well be that it is one of his lesser works.

Coventry (to get back to the point) is a conglomeration, a mixture, and a blending of science fictional and fantasy backgrounds. The idea of the Coventranian stories is to fit in with these backgrounds; that, perhaps, with the concept of background not being a worry, a bit more time can be put into making the other parts of the stories better. I do not take it on myself to say whether the Coventranians have succeeded or failed (if asked I would say that, generally, they had succeeded -- but that's just my personal opinion, and since I'm a Coventranian myself I just might be a little prejudiced), but I would like to take to task the fans who cry "Thief! Steal!" at these 'cribbed' backgrounds. Let me put it to you this way: the best authors crib. Oh, I can see people rising up to object, but let me explain first. Or, better yet, let me give you an example. The Lord Of The Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien is probably the finest piece of fantasy of this century -- and maybe, just maybe, the finest so far, or possibly the finest ever. Whether it is or isn't is no concern of mine here; only that, generally speaking, it is recognized as a truly fine piece, though of course there are criticisms that can (and probably will) be made. My point in this instance is that it doesn't take a very astute reader of fantasy to know that Tolkien cribbed. I Pilantier is actually Excalibur (or any number of other magical/mythical swords); the Rings come from Wagner; Gandalf is a one-up Merlin; and I leave it to others to trace the Dark Riders, Aragorn's trip through the marshes, etc. The important part is what he did with it, not where he cribbed from. There's only one difference with Coventry -- and that is that it's more honest with you. It doesn't bother to make up new titles for its cribbings -- it doesn't call a Spindizzy a Transmorfifier or a Multiple Phenode. But if you'll check back to the Blish stories you'll find that the Coventranian Spindizzy bears little resemblance to Blish's concept. The same with most of the other cribbings. Yet the criticisms against Coventranian fiction are almost wholly based on the fact that we're not afraid to give credit where credit is due; not on what the writer has done with the material at hand. This seems grossly unfair, that fans should demand 100% originality (or at least a little deceit) from those who write about Coventry where they do not expect as much from the best authors in the science fiction and fantasy field. Actually, if it weren't so pitiful, that fans (of all people!) should demand this, it would be humorous.

It is, indeed, hard to be King, if it's in you but not in the situation.

Well, Stanbery's tough. He used to tell me that insults bounced off him like water off a duck's back, but I didn't believe him. I wouldn't believe him now -- he's capable of stoicism in such moments, I know, but I don't think he's incapable of feelings. The last time I saw him he was still a little guy (though he's grown a bit lately); perhaps he's still not very strong. But he is tough. (Resilient might be an even better word.) "To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;/To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;/To defy Power which seems omnipotent.../Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,/This...is to be/Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;/This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory." Those are Paul's words on the subject. Now you mark mine: Stanbery's going to Make It and Make It Big. And he'll do it out there, in the real world, where it really counts.

It's not hard to be good in fandom, they say; a third-rater among fourth-raters will naturally win esteem. But, again, I must ask: What about the first-rater among the fourth-raters? Those who can see among the blind? Who would be King in that situation?

I wonder...

**

I guess that's about it. But just one more thing.

Stanbery, except for his increasingly disassociated interest in Coventry, is no longer even slightly active in fanzine fandom as such. But as The Last Night Of Doubt will show, he has gone on to other and, I think, far better things. With this in mind, then, there's only one thing I can say to end this article, and that one thing is: "Cleah Uvani."

So, Cleah Uvani Paulus Edwardus Rex II of the line Quantas-Stanbourie, Master of Buckland, Bishop in Eastfarthing, Patron Cleric of the Realms of Light and Darkness, Number One of the Upper Twelve and President of the CIAWOT.

Too, Cleah Uvani Paul Stanbery: Writer, Poet, Musician, Composer, Conductor, Orator, Truth-Seeker.

Cleah Uvani, you clown -- live every note of it.

Cleah Uvani, Little King.

O, Cleah Uvani, old friend!

THE LAST NIGHT OF DOUBT

A PLAY OF SELF-ACTUALIZED TRIUMPH IN THREE ACTS

by

Paul Stanbery

Act I, THE PARTY.....a chandelier and the look of a prison (p. 22)
Act II, THE WAR.....a tree instead of a chandelier (p. 33)
Act III, THE WAKE.....a coffin instead of a tree (p. 49)

THE CAST

(in order of their appearances)
("....in the beginning was the Word....")

THE ABSOLUTISTS

The Man, a hero and an artist
Elizabeth Murray, the hostess
Gregory Murray, the host and husband
Mark Halsey, a composer

THE RELATIVISTS

Ralph 24C41+, the life of the party, the leader and the high priest
Helena Crowne, Mr. Halsey's incipient wife
Sylvia, a woman
Samson, a trumpet player of a different color

The Play takes place tonight in the capitol of the world, which is, of course, located in the city of men. It concerns internal affairs in the territory of the almost-living.

© 1962 by Paul Stanbery. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved, permission for which must be secured from the author. All inquiries should be addressed to Paul Stanbery, 1317 N. Raymond, Pasadena 3, California.

May 30, 1961, at the home of
Robert Cummings and set to
his music, through nights of
doubt

a motto on

INTEGRITY

Cold night winds sway
Through the trees.
No light shines out
To guide my way.
Where is hope?
Where is what could be?
The past has lied to me.

I have life (lied),
I have strength (lied),
But where am I?
Must I live to share my dreams
With swaying trees?

My dreams lead me
Far away from home.
But my dreams will
Light my path -- and my soul
Will find me,
Find hope,
Guide me on my way.

Cold winds blow about me
No light lights my darkness,
Save the one that's mine.
Save the one that's mine.

--Paul Edward Stanbery

ACT I -- THE PARTY
a chandelier and the look of a prison

((THE MAN, bearded and red-eyed, sits with hands chained together in a corner. He weeps. (To the left)))

THE MAN: This'll end, too. I can stop. I won't be lost, no matter what comes. They always used to tell me to be wary; I should never come to a place for what I need. I should never beg. But you get so hungry. There's no way out if you can't eat -- and I can't live in a world of damn mirages. God, give me some reality! Make something clear! Let me see what is, not just a blur . . .

"God of my fathers, bow thine ear to me, turn not away the light of thy countenance...O, hear the voice of my complaining!" A man doesn't say things like that to something he doesn't know. I wish I could say it but I can't be sure. Who to? I don't know! Nothing is real -- not even bread and water lasts.

((The lights go up behind him and we see the chandelier. A party is in progress. ELIZABETH, a beautiful socialite, and GREGORY, her masked husband, dance.))

ELIZABETH: Greg, can't you get him to come out of it? He's being so anti-social, brooding over there. He's ruining the whole party. And why doesn't he shave?

GREG: He doesn't like us, that's why. I don't think he knows we exist.

THE MAN: My God, Sylvia, where are you?

GREG: He's calling a name.

ELIZABETH: She's in the bedroom.

((RALPH, a party-goer dressed in a loud suit with ridiculous tie, enters with a challengingly impish look. (To the right)))

RALPH: Sylvia is in the bedroom with the trumpet player?

ELIZABETH: What does it look like?

GREG: I've always wondered what it looked like; a glistening white body grasping a sweaty black one to it.

RALPH: It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen; it makes me want to laugh.

ELIZABETH: You're always so witty, Ralph.

THE MAN: Sylvia, my God, don't let her do it!

RALPH: The artist is meditating on inspiration.

ELIZABETH: My God, you're the funniest thing!

((MARK and HELENA dance slowly on stage. (To the right) They stop to the left of ELIZABETH, GREGORY and RALPH. (Others may be present -- RALPH may even have a date.)))

HELENA: What are they talking about?

MARK: They're talking about love.

HELENA: We're in love.

((The lights go up behind a scrim and the members of the party step back as HELENA and MARK walk back to different sides, then enter to meet behind on a highly spotlighted bed. They embrace.))

MARK: The world revolves.

HELENA: What's that?

MARK: I love you. It makes me quiver, how I love you!

HELENA: Come to me? You've got a weekend for it.

MARK: I've got my life. I don't teach music to those damn dumb kids this summer. I've got three months to compose. And to make love...

HELENA: Three months go fast...

MARK: Every minute is a lifetime...

HELENA: Your music is so wearying...

MARK: Your laughter fills the universe...

HELENA: There are so many distractions...

MARK: There is no one but you...

((They kiss. The scene returns to the party.))

ELIZABETH: And he was the most exasperating man I ever met. But money is money. Didn't Voltaire say that?

RALPH: Einstein.

ELIZABETH: You're so smart.

RALPH: It's not my fault.

THE MAN: God of my fathers! Leave me not lonely in my misery, O hear the voice of my complaining! The past promised so much, can't you see? I had a destiny -- I know it! The child with quick undoubting mind becomes only a shadow of a man. How could I know everything then and know nothing now? Why am I left blind in this infernal pit?

Please! Light my darkness as it was lit when I was young. Show me the face of the universe. Lead me back again upon a world young and bright. I could count the leaves on the trees. I had a life. I could

THE MAN (Cont.):

feel and see and smell. But then it was gone, whirled away, dead!

((Party lights go down.))

Deceit and treachery! They stole it from me, don't you see? I wanted their love but they refused it. God, take these chains from my arms!

((Lights go down around THE MAN and rise behind the skrim.))

MARK: When did you first know you loved me?

HELENA: I don't know.

MARK: But did you know it?

HELENA: I love you.

MARK: You knew it, didn't you? Tell me you knew it.

HELENA: Mark, you're hurting me.

MARK: You won't tell me, Helena; they named you rightly. Helen of Troy, the most famous of your breed, had a body but no brains. She loved no man, but all men. She loved her body more than all of them. Nobody could hold a thing against her. Menelaus, her deserted husband, took her back and made love to her every night as she grew old.

Menelaus of Greece launched a thousand ships

To find out whose bed she lay in --

They cut off his part and took her back

Leaving their dead behind them.

HELENA: You hate me, don't you, Mark?

MARK: I hate you, Helena. Bitch.

HELENA: That makes all the difference. Make love to me. I know I love you.

MARK: I hate you, Helena. I'll burn you with my hatred.

HELENA: I'd like that. Burn me. Consume me. I want to be warm.

MARK: Darned Helena!

((Lights go down behind skrim, fade up again at the party.))

RALPH: This whole party is beginning to look like a comedy.

ELIZABETH: I always have such fine parties, don't I, darling?

GREG: You have the finest parties. You always did well at that, Liz.

ELIZABETH: Thank you. Ralph, be funny.

RALPH: Here you see the outlay of the universe. The story of mankind. Welcome to the great confusion, party-goers. You're all trapped, any way. And I love captive audiences.

You see, everybody's chained here. They wanted to come. They must

RALPH (Cont.):

have wanted to, or they wouldn't fight so hard to stay. That's what it's all about, you see. Life wants to keep going. But it dies -- that's the catch, the trick ending. The denouement. You see, we die, so we think it's a great tragedy. Of course. We can't see the whole picture. It's no tragedy because we made mistakes along the way. (Or maybe we planned them.) And a few of them grow up to become men and women who'll grow up to see our tragedies and make their own mistakes, and life will keep on living. And live; life wine.

Maybe it's all planned this way. Maybe we're supposed to be miserable and not exactly what Our Maker intended so we'll...

((Lights go up behind the skrim))

MARK: We need each other, Helena. We were incomplete; we were empty lies before. But we have each other now, so we're real, Helena. There's no joke to it any more.

HELENA: Life seems something. We can have children.

MARK: Children?

HELENA: We will have children -- I sensed it in church.

MARK: What are you saying?

HELENA: In the church I sensed that we'd have children and they'd smile and we'd be very happy.

MARK: Helena, you know I can't afford children on my salary. There's my work.

HELENA: There's always your work, work, work. Doesn't my happiness, our happiness, mean anything to you?

MARK: But it's just that...I can't do what I want and give a family enough to eat.

HELENA: What you want? It's more important than me?

MARK: Can't you see? It's more important than me.

HELENA: Even you, huh?

MARK: Music is life and love to me. It's all I know and all I don't know.

HELENA: I'm jealous.

MARK: What?

HELENA: Shut up and kiss me.

((Lights go down, up at party.))

RALPH: ...and so we see that it's really not bad, after all. There's consolation for the whole race as a group, if not for the individual who gives up his dream.

ELIZABETH: That was the funniest thing I've heard you say, Ralph.

THE MAN: God of my fathers! Please don't leave me alone in the vacuum of myself. I'm not big enough, can't you see, Big Man? You up there — give me a sign. I need it. Where are you?

Are you talking to your Archangel up there? Or are you off in the golden brothel in the sky? Maybe you're on a journey. Or perhaps you're sleeping...only sleeping.

You must be there. There is more than myself. I can see it in the stars, cry for it in my dreams... Do you know my dreams? I dream of travelling, always travelling. Searching and talking, but never finding. What is my part in your plan? Or is there really a plan at all? Where am I? Where is Sylvia tonight? In what part of hell is Sylvia?

((Lights up on skrim.))

MARK: I love you.

HELENA: I know that.

MARK: Is there a new way of showing it?

HELENA: Find one.

((Lights down, party lights go up.))

ELIZABETH: I want to hear some music.

GREG: Well, you hired the trumpet player. Find him.

RALPH: He's in bed with that bohemian girl that guy with the beard brought.

THE MAN: Sylvia!

RALPH: You know, I know why he grows that beard. It's to protect himself from the world. He wants to build a barrier between what he is and what he thinks he should be in other people's eyes. He's a prisoner of his moods.

ELIZABETH: I'll ring for the trumpet player.

((A gong sounds.))

RALPH: I thought that was rather ostentatious, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Sin should always be displayed proudly.

GREG: The fruit of our deceit is sweet...

ELIZABETH: ...For betraying truth is the nearest we can come to it.

((SYLVIA and the negro trumpet player, SAMSON, enter. He leads her, his head bowed, from the room, from the right.))

SYLVIA: They didn't say it would be like that.

SAMSON: They never tell you anything.

SYLVIA: I'm glad they didn't tell me.

ELIZABETH: Are you through now?

GREG: Do you want to play for us?

SAMSON: Of course. I always want to play.

((SYLVIA bows her head and waits for him to take her hand. He will not, but walks to the platform before the skrim to play his trumpet. He begins to blow, and a trumpet joins the jazz combo in the pit. It does not matter if he plays, only that the music sounds. SYLVIA walks to THE MAN and stands over him. He cannot force himself to look at her. SAMSON snaps his fingers and takes down his horn, standing in a trance at the center of the stage.))

SAMSON: I play out of need, man. Not out of want. There is no true want-playing that can last. If you only want something, it's to get something else that you need. You must need, man. Need. That's all there is. The world turns to the pulse and the beat of naked need. It calls with the throbbing sound of the heart. Lub-duh, man. That's the course of all true swinging. I need, man. Whenever I'm not playing, I think about when I will be playing. Everything throbs, and that's our music, man; naked need.

Now I wail, man. Because I desire. I desire and then I need. They are tied. A man's dream is his need. Throb all through me, devour myself. Save me from myself.

THE MAN: How could you, Sylvia?

SYLVIA: We wanted each other. We needed each other.

THE MAN: You didn't ask, Sylvia. You didn't do it through me. You didn't even give me that.

SYLVIA: I love you.

THE MAN: You can say that, after giving yourself to the world.

SYLVIA: I must give myself to everyone but you, because it's only you who returns my love. And that makes my love for you real. But I am imperfect; only when I touch you can I tell the truth. But if I tell the truth, I lose myself.

THE MAN: You love me or don't you?

RALPH: You know, this is all rather ridiculous. All this fuss about love.

ELIZABETH: But you said it was everything in a nutshell.

GREG: You said it was the keystone of life. That's life's trick, isn't it? If we get to the bottom of this, we find out what life's really like, don't we?

RALPH: Don't you understand? We can't really understand everything. You can only say "Yes." To what is.

ELIZABETH: Ralph, you're an utter idiot.

THE MAN: Sylvia, why are you so damnably afraid of being faithful to me?

SYLVIA: You think you're so damned pure, don't you? You sit here with your beard and your bloodshot eyes and tell me to go to hell. What are you afraid of? Don't you want me? Use me! I'll let you. I don't want to hurt you. Why didn't you hold me when I went to him? Why didn't you tell me to stop?

THE MAN: It was your choide, can't you see that? I can't make your choices for you. I can't tell you where to make love. I love you. Can't you see that if your will doesn't love me, you can't possibly? It must be you that I love, not a certain part that loves to do what I tell it.

SYLVIA: But I love you, too. I do.

THE MAN: How considerate. Do you really love me, or do you terribly need what love I can give you?

SYLVIA: Do you love me?

SAMSON (suddenly spotted): Swing! Oh, God, everybody swing! Don't stop to think. Don't let your lies catch up with you! Don't let the sun leave the sky. Don't stop swinging. Don't tense. Fear the infinite, man. Just say "yes" to that need. Say "yes" and drown yourself.

MARK (singing): I love you, Helena!

HELENA: Do it again; you're hurting me!

SAMSON: Forget! Forget everything! Forget your troubles, forget your soul -- leave it all behind with the garbage. Take what is yours and swing with it, man. Relax. Take it all and use it. Need, man. Want and need. No, just need. Need is all there is. Don't stop saying "Yes."

MARK: Yes!

HELENA: Yes...

SAMSON: You see, it's easy. I'm black and I hate it, but when I swing I can't think to hate. I can't begin to fear. Man, when I swing I am not. Man, let me laugh at myself. Oh, to be in a place where I am master of myself, where I cannot find a crutch to hate. Swing on! Say always "yes." To what you hate say "yes" or you will destroy yourself.

((Spct.out.))

RALPH: Ever read Moby Dick?

ELIZABETH: Don't be silly.

RALPH: I know Greg can't read, but I was just thinking...

ELIZABETH: You are just the funniest person I know.

THE MAN: No, I tell you. Get away from me. I can't lean on you and be myself. I love you but I find do many things about you I can't help but hate. I hate my need for you so much. My need will betray me.

SYLVIA: It has already betrayed me.

THE MAN: I betrayed you?

SYLVIA: God of my fathers! You know your God better than you know me. You love him for the same neglecting that sends you running from me with curses. You must trust him? Why can't you trust me?

THE MAN: Because you slept with a trumpet player...while I stood and watched you.

((Lights up behind skrin.))

MARK: ...made me want you so bad I couldn't sleep for thinking of you.

HELENA: Mark...

MARK: I'd toss and turn. Where is Helena? I knew you'd be here, so I came to take you.

HELENA: You came, Mark...I'm here in your arms.

MARK: Yes... Why do you do this for me? This is what every man dreams of; a woman just for himself alone. You know that, don't you? And you gave yourself to me. You desire, too...

HELENA: Oh, Mark, you're so cute.

MARK: I love you. (HELENA laughs.) Now what was that for?

((Lights dim, up at party.))

SYLVIA: But darling, did I really sleep with him at all? Do you know? Have you any proof? I'm here with you. You don't see me with him. How do you know? Could it be a lie, a dream?

THE MAN: It was all a lie; it had to be. It won't happen again.

SYLVIA: It never happened at all. We're just as we were. We've forgotten.

RALPH: But there's some kind of falacy here. I'm sure of it. There must be. You can't unmake anything.

THE MAN: Why is that? How is that? What are you saying? She loves me -- I have her now. We're complete. How can there be any other completeness than ours?

SAMSON: I love my horn, and my horn loves me.
I love my horn, and my horn loves me;
When we're apart, we're as alone as can be.

RALPH: You're saying everything is relative?

ELIZABETH: Oh, Ralph, you must mean that everything is related.

RALPH: Elizabeth, you're stupid.

ELIZABETH: Isn't he funny?

THE MAN: I still stand with my love. We are here and now united.

GREG: They are here and now uniting.

ELIZABETH: Oh, Greg, you're funny too.

THE MAN: Will you all be quiet? Will you all shut up? This is my love, don't you see? This is what I've fought for and I won't have any of you filthy blind monsters chain it to convention. Let no man defile my love!

SAMSON: Except yourself, man. Play it cool.

THE MAN: The stage is mine, for tonight. The spotlight is mine. I can drive any of you out of it. There is no reality unless I say it is. I make the world in my mind. I see what it is, but my eyes makes what it sees. My ears make what can be heard. What I forget never existed. I love. I see her love me, she must love me. I don't know of unfaithfulness, there was none.

ELIZABETH: I don't quite understand him.

GREG: I don't quite understand this whole conversation. How can he yell and mumble at the same time?

RALPH: Oh, Elizabeth, do you really ever understand anything?

MARK: I love you. We shall always love.

HELENA: Love makes the world go 'round.

SAMSON: We swing!

THE MAN: I cannot totally understand everything. How can I explain it?

SYLVIA: We say "yes" to what is.

RALPH: If you don't understand, how can you comprehend?

THE MAN: I cannot.

RALPH: If you cannot comprehend it, it must not exist. That's logic. Nothing exists without you.

THE MAN: Yes. I am the hero.

RALPH: Find. Then I do not exist, I must be imaginary. Make me vanish.

THE MAN: Very well. ((He turns around.))

RALPH: Aha! You no longer see me, but you still hear my voice, don't you? I should not exist. ((THE MAN covers his ears.)) But I still exist. I simply yell and that yell will not let you forget your illusion. (yells)
The Hero is living on a misconception!

THE MAN (turning): Someday I will unmake everything. I'll be the master of it all. I'll understand and my mind will know no bonds of reality.

RALPH: Someday reality will free itself of you. Someday it will unmake you. You know that.

THE MAN: I do no fear death.

RALPH: It is well. You do not understand it. You were not meant to. You are meant to live. Life is your medium. You are of the living. That is all you are. Death is not a part of you.

THE MAN: What do you prove by all these riddles?

RALPH: I prove that what is, is. I prove that reality is your master and you can't ever hope to understand it, much less control it. You live as part of the universe of real things. You depend on it for food, for help to let you sleep, for the beginning of your life and your resting-place when you stop. You depend on it for her (points to SYLVIA). Even though you can control every action you make, you cannot change it. You are its slave. You cannot unmake what is. You cannot change reality.

SYLVIA (touching THE MAN's arm): I love you.

THE MAN (relaxing/wishing to relax): I am complete.

RALPH: Are you really? We must put that to a test. We must see what makes her all that it takes to complete you.

THE MAN: We are complete, and the night blooms. An embrace, and a thousand exploding fires as stars are in my grasp. With each searching kiss I find a new truth. Everything is in her. I understand everything: I know myself when she is in my arms.

RALPH: Heaven, isn't it?

ELIZABETH: Isn't that what it's like, Greg?

GREG: Of course, dear.

MARK: I'm nothing.

HELENA: You are everything.

RALPH: But what about him? (points to SAMSON) He's as alive as he was before. He still needs. She can still look upon him and embrace him as she does you. There's no magic barrier. She is still herself. Convenience will make it easy to find her a way into his arms.

THE MAN: I will chain her to me. (takes the manicle from his left arm and tries to fasten it to SYLVIA's right.)

SYLVIA (drawing back): No!

THE MAN: You do not love me.

SYLVIA: We were to love without bonds.

RALPH: You're trying to chain her with the chains that bind you to yourself. You'll only be weighing yourself down more. You poor fool.

THE MAN: There must be a way.

God of my fathers! Bow thine ear to me. Turn not away the light of they countenance.

((The lights fade before the chain and rise behind the skrim.))

Thy rod and thy staff; they comfort me
Thou hast made me to lie down in green
pastures.

Thou leadest me beside the still waters,
Thou restoreth my soul.

Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow
me all the days of my life

And I will dwell in the house of the
Lord, forever.

MARK: I love you.

HELENA: I love you.

MARK: We need each other.

HELENA: We love. We need.
What will come of it?

MARK: Yes, how will it end?

HELENA: With an embrace and
an awful lot of nothing-
ness.

ACT II --- THE WAR
a tree instead of a chandelier

((THE MAN, bare-headed and in uniform, stands left to the center of the stage. His hand is gripped near his left shoulder and blood comes from his chest. His gun lies thrown away from him. He tries to remain standing, his teeth gritted in pain. He stumbles forward a bit, but his knees buckle and he falls to the ground. He braces his arm against the earth for support and cries out.))

THE MAN: I die. I've been shot! Good Lord, there's a bullet in me. Can't somebody help me? Water. My God, give me water.

((GREG enters in uniform. He wears a gas mask and helmet and rushes cautiously but compassionately to the side of THE MAN. He cradles THE MAN in his arm.))

GREG: I heard your voice, sir. You're wounded.

THE MAN: Yes, damn it, can't you see? I'm bleeding. Take me to a doctor. It doesn't hurt as much as I thought it would; only more so.

GREG: What did you say, sir?

THE MAN: I'm delirious. There's no pain. Only throbbing.

GREG: Of course, sir.

((The lights go up behind the skrim as GREG helps THE MAN off left. They enter left behind the skrim, which still bears the bed. ELIZABETH, in nurses garb, stands over it.

GREG: Nurse, this man's wounded. Needs help badly.

ELIZABETH: Of course. Get him into bed. There.

((They help him under the covers. No one binds his wound.))

THE MAN: How good it feels...

ELIZABETH: Sleep. Everything will be all right in the morning.

THE MAN: But tomorrow...

ELIZABETH: Tomorrow there'll be a day after.

THE MAN: Oh, then it's all right.

ELIZABETH: Of course it is.

GREG: Just rest, sir; you'll be all right. Tomorrow will come regardless.

ELIZABETH: Even if you're not ready.

THE MAN: I must rest; that's right. I mustn't...

ELIZABETH: Think.

THE MAN: Yes, that's it. I mustn't think at all.

ELIZABETH: The night nurse will be with you soon.

((SYLVIA slowly enters right. GREG and ELIZABETH watch her and go off left. She watches and moves to sit down by THE MAN as the lights slowly come up before the skrim and go down behind. HELENA and MARK enter right, in front of skrim, hand in hand and as tourists.))

HELENA: What is this country?

MARK: They call it the Valley of Death on the road map.

HELENA: Is there a beach anywhere? I'd give anything for a good swim.

MARK: No beach for miles. There's a war on and no time for it.

HELENA: Oh.

MARK: I should enlist.

HELENA: Why? It's none of your affair. You don't want to kill. You want to walk with me.

MARK: Yes, but suppose they came to take you from me? They'll rape you and burn my music.

HELENA: Who told you?

MARK: The posters. All the newspapers. My friends talk about it all the time.

HELENA: Friends? I thought you had no friends in this land but me?

MARK: Oh, Helena. We can think we live independantly, but we can't walk alone. Everybody has friends. I can't be totally yours. We live in the world.

HELENA (going into his arms): But you don't love the world. You love me.

MARK: Of course. I don't want anything but you. You're all I need.

HELENA: Your music?

MARK: Your breathing has always been my music.

HELENA: I love you.

((They kiss. HELENA breaks away.))

MARK: You're shaking, Helena. Why?

HELENA: Do you hear it?

MARK: Hear what?

HELENA: The shooting, Mark. I can't hear anything but the shooting.

MARK: I can't hear anything.

HELENA: How many miles away are they, Mark?

MARK: I don't know. I can only see smoke, and further away from that...
fire.

HELENA: Will they get closer? Are they coming closer?

MARK: I don't see anyone. Yet.

HELENA: Feel my belly, Mark. Let me put your hand against it. Do you
feel that, Mark?

MARK: Yes. A kicking.

HELENA: It's ours, Mark. It came out of our completeness. If they come,
Mark, they'll kill you.

MARK: Nonsense. I've done nothing against them.

HELENA: They'll want to kill it. The sign of our love. They'll rape me
and put a bayonet through its unborn body. They'll beat you and take
your sex away and never let you touch your music...Our children will not
live.

MARK: You want me to kill?

HELENA: You love me?

MARK: Of course.

HELENA: I want us to live. God wants us to live.

MARK: They'll take my consolation and the dream I never had, then.

HELENA: They want to enslave us and take our souls away.

MARK: Who told you this?

HELENA: Read that sign. Up ahead.

((She points to stage left and he looks after her.))

MARK: Oh, my God. Come on, Helena, let's get out of here.

((They hurry back to stage right. Behind the skrim, ELIZABETH and GREG enter. SYLVIA now sits in a chair to the right of THE MAN's bed. As HELENA and MARK go, THE MAN awakens suddenly.))

THE MAN: But I'm not ready! You can't make me go! I haven't done it; I
didn't have the time, don't you see? I had a family to support -- all the
rest of it.

SYLVIA: Don't shake so.

THE MAN: Who are you?

SYLVIA: The night nurse.

THE MAN: I can't quite see you, but your voice is beautiful.

SYLVIA: Of course. Lay back. Close your eyes. Sleep. You're so strong. You'll hurt yourself.

THE MAN: But I can't let them find me here sleeping. I must be ready.

SYLVIA: I'll make you feel good. Do you want that?

THE MAN: Can you really do that for me? Take the weight away? Make me not afraid?

SYLVIA: Desire it.

THE MAN: Make me forget; don't make me have to do it. Don't say you'll help me do it. I can't do it, don't you see?

SYLVIA: You don't need to.

THE MAN: That's right; when you're with me I don't need to. Of course. Help me to forget my task.

SYLVIA: As you will. Because you will. (they kiss)

((The lights blare up, as they drop behind the skrim. A searchlight occasionally scans the stage. MARK enters from the right in uniform, holding a gun and moving catlike.))

MARK: Come out! All right, come out, damn you! Nobody's going to take my dream from me. ((SOUND OF LOUD AND DISTANT LAUGHTER)) They're laughing? How can they do it, damn them? They're laughing about the destruction of our world. Stop that noise! Be still. Stop laughing! Stop laughing... They've stopped. The ungodly noise; it's gone. It's quiet again. Hah! Too quiet. Almost as though the sky had stopped thundering and is now turning its eye on me.

It's a nightmare. A lousy nightmare. The whole war's like that. It's what you feel when it's early morning and everything's quiet. You're dreaming of love and then suddenly you are hearing a noise that is just a few feet away from you. It's as if a great gaunt soulless could were passing over you. You think of looking up to see, but then you're afraid that unless you lie still without breathing it'll reach out and pull the life from you. You lie still, trying to stop the shaking that takes hold and somehow your reasonable mind knows there's nothing there, but the ape in you won't let you even move a muscle.

You know then that you wouldn't mind if it was only your life's work they'd hack into little pieces with their smiling pudgy faces, but it's you they want to shoot down with their rifles and raucous laughter. You know there's no reason. No reason,

That's why there are wars. Somebody just wants to kill somebody else. That's all. The leaders just give you excuses. Because somewhere there are monsters that make wars, forging them in some hellish furnaces. Where are they? Damned idiots! Come out of your sewers and deep wells!

MARK (Cont.):

I must find them, if only to ask why. Don't you see? Because they're the destroyers. I've got to save at least my corner of the world from them. Keep them out with justice and law.

I hear thier voices all the time. From deep inside. Take, take, take they whisper insideously. ((THE LAUGHTER IS HEARD AGAIN)) I can't stand it! We can't take much more. Why do they insist on using us? We already live. Why isn't it enough? Why, why? Why can't there be a peaceful moment in our lives for once? It's always one damned scrape after another. The last one, they don't let us out on.

They're on all sides. They make us come out on the battlefield, us decent folk, and then they pink us off, one by one. At all the windows in the dark. Nobody's safe, no matter how righteous they are. There's always somebody, don't you see, who want to take. Big men in funny little hats who run up on the front lawn and peek in, out of the night, before they break in to plunder.

SAMSON (in the audience): Hey, chicken, over here!

MARK: I'll get you. Where are you? Come out and fight like a man!

SAMSON: Look at our sign.

MARK: Hiding behind that? It can't keep me from you. I'm coming for you. Forward, yeo!

((He charges off to the left. SAMSON runs from his position toward a left exit. He leans out and shoots with a rifle at nothing. There is a long scream. The lights go up again behind the skrim and THE MAN awakens, gasping.))

THE MAN (as if he himself is wounded): Sylvia! I heard a shot.

SYLVIA: Please. Don't frighten yourself.

THE MAN: Where are you?

SYLVIA: I'm right beside you.

THE MAN: I can't see you. Why aren't you where I can see you?

SYLVIA: I'm the closest I can get.

THE MAN: I can feel you against my back. It should be enough for me. It isn't, but I know it should be.

SYLVIA: I love you.

THE MAN: I heard a shot. That means they're coming for me. I expect they'll be here soon. I must compose myself. There's no reason for them coming now, just the throbbing in my shoulder, but they'll take me just the same. Even though I'm not ready. If only there were some way out of

THE MAN (Cont.): this mess.

SYLVIA: What does it all mean? Why can't we just belong to each other and be happy?

THE MAN: You think I know the answer to that? I'm lost here, just like you. This war wasn't any of my idea. Nothing ever is, not in this world. We're trapped. All of us, like rats. Sinking rats.

SYLVIA: I don't like rats. I never thought of myself like that.

THE MAN: We'd raise little rats. Would you like that?

SYLVIA: I like you.

THE MAN: Thank you. That was altogether the nicest thing you've said to me all evening.

SYLVIA: I know. I like to be nice.

THE MAN: You do, don't you? Yes, you like to be nice even more than you like me. But no, don't answer. I'll tell you about rats.

Rats are humanity's constant and unseen companion. Somehow, though despising humans, this parasite on the work of honest men, this destroyer the rat, will make his home, his nest, in any corner of a place where men live. He needs us, and wherever we travel he always finds a place to stow away. A man can't escape his rat companion. There's as many of them on the face of the earth as there are of us. Between men and rats there exists a kind of malevolent companionship.

Rats live in our homes, yet they look at us with gleaming eyes of fear because they know we seek to destroy them. And why not? You know, the average rat destroys \$1000 worth of grain a year -- I read that somewhere. They carry plagues unknowing because they live in filth.

And they despise us just as much, I suspect, for the fact that, no matter how much we fear them, no matter how much we have made for ourselves with intelligence and skill, no matter how often we proclaim mankind as master of the Earth, we still cannot defeat the wise will to survive of the common rat.

The rat sneers at man's minion, the cat, who can swallow mice whole but cannot gulp down the fantastic bulk of a full-grown Rattus Nervegi-ous. The rat is waiting for the day when he will have the strength to meet man on his own grounds, without such intermediary nonsense as erect walking, traps, and pools of poison. Who would live to be master on that day?

And so, little titterings can be heard echoing through the empty houses of men's souls in the dark of night, pouring out of the lairs of the fiends before they scamper off to gnaw at the fruits of civilization.

((The lights go up out front. ELIZABETH is seated right on an orange crate. GREG paces back and forth to the left.))

ELIZABETH: How far away are they now?

GREG: Just across the river. In the night like this, the flashes of their guns make angry sonnets in the dark. They'll be over here soon.

ELIZABETH: Can't we stop them?

GREG: What do you mean, stop them? We can't, any more than we can curse that filthy sign of theirs. It almost seems as though we want to lose. Nobody wants to fight anymore. They want to walk home to lie with their wives in the town until the enemy comes and shoots them in their beds. It seems we can't go out and get men to kill for things they wouldn't die for, at least not when they've already got enough to eat.

ELIZABETH: You're defeated?

GREG: You've heard the hero in there, mumbling to himself, and screaming when he thinks about the pain. And he's the greatest warrior on our side -- at least, I like to think he is. We must have somebody better than me. Because I'm no warrior. At least, I don't think so.

ELIZABETH: Maybe you are.

GREG: Thank you, Liz. Very nice of you and all that, but I don't believe it. Not really. You know that man in there? Even he hasn't done all he should have done. Did you know he told me all about his plan a couple of nights ago?

ELIZABETH: Plan?

GREG: Yeah. He was going to cross over the river and camp us in the shade of those trees. And to do it he was going to build three massive bridges -- imagine that! -- over the river. And send thirty crack divisions, ones he'd trained himself, over to encircle the enemy. He showed me the battle plan himself. He meant it.

ELIZABETH: Who could he get to serve in this little army of the just?

GREG: But then he got himself wounded and he can't do it now. They won't let him. But he's here, you know, and I bet he could have done it alone. Even alone. I don't know if he thought he could, but he acted like it. Think of it: three massive bridges!

ELIZABETH (bursting into tears): Oh, Greg, why do we have to go through all this? Victories, defeats, and for what? Some lousy playwright wants to make his reputation off our pains. I didn't come here to be dragged through a knot-hole. I came here to be entertained. I'm getting a sermon. And if I wanted one of those I'd go to church. I'd get a better one there, anyway. I'd get one I couldn't quite understand and could apply to daily life. Greg, let's walk out. I mean it. Greg, are you listening to me?

GREG: That's always your answer, isn't it? Walk off when things get

GREG (Cont.):

tough. Don't fight when you see something unpleasant. If you can't answer the questions just give up and turn on the TV set and don't look it up, ever. And then you sleep at night and you can't because you worry about the kids or the car or the house payments or what you should have been but aren't. Have you ever once wanted, Liz, to have a last night of doubt?

ELIZABETH: What do you mean?

GREG: Haven't you wanted to find out the answer to why you're here and why you should do things so you can go out and do what you should without questions and doubts and all the rest? You know damn well what I mean.

ELIZABETH: I can't stand it. It hurts my ears to hear all this screaming.

GREG: Well, I won't desert, Liz. I'll stand by that hero to the end. I've got a place in life, for once, and you can't make me leave it. Three massive bridges!

ELIZABETH: Oh, Greg, why can't you take off that mask for once?

((There is a black-out and a jazz interlude is played, depicting The Armageddon, the fight for honor against oneself. At the close of the interlude a spotlight appears on the left, as THE MAN stumbles in from that direction.))

THE MAN: Where do I wander now? In what wilderness of my soul is this stinking country? Where's the enemy?

"God of my fathers, hear me, hear me. God of my fathers, let my voice be heard." In the city of men I've seen people die in torment, with terrors and doubts in their souls; they die with the ultimate regret. I see them dancing on the commons; sentenced to dance, forever led by foolishness, for the fact that they cannot see that there is any truth to set them in a new step.

The crowd stands in the square --
They dance and love and work furiously,
Achieving little and wasting more.
The Man appears and with the voice of hope
Shouts angrily to move them from their apathy;
His voice is buried in their gleeful shouting.
He has a pole, but cannot raise it
For they always knock it down.

That is the ideal statement of the great plight in the city of men.

Even the man who speaks of hope cannot raise his pole -- and the leader who can rally the world to his side cannot control it for his very life when he betrays its will.

That is life, and the spirit of life lies in contradictions and half-truths, if any truth there be.

THE MAN (Cont.):

So I stand here now, truth or none, on a high and windy hill
 overlooking the shapes of buildings in the city of men.
 God, this is my home!
 The land I have not seen for lo! these many years.
 Why is it quiet? Why is all this here to be seen?

What is meant by this sudden meeting with my past?

THE VOICE (Ralph/Off): Where is Sylvia?

THE MAN: I wander here alone, lost in a maze of yesterpaths;
 I stand now on the hill of promises.
 I was a youth -- in childhood, straight and tall;
 when the God's did fashion me they loaned to be a body perfected
 in their sight.
 From the choosing-house of love they procured for me a heady
 beauty.
 From the always-burning fires of the traditions of men they
 brought me courage.
 With all the skills of the world, they gave me wisdom
 and enhanced my beauty so that the mirrors of society told me
 it surpassed all others.
 Two thirds I was made God and one third animal: I stood a man.
 This hill stands near my home. My feet have trod this soil
 I know not how often. From the days of my birth
 I have come to this hill for strength. I have learned to climb
 this hill and I have learned of beauty from the view.
 This hill held what fame I strived to earn,
 what things I built -- I sacrificed it to the public
 here. Sometimes they laughed and sometimes
 they sent cheers for me to echo in the stars --
 but it was all here.
 Years I've spent away,
 but I came back to rub my wounds and bruises
 in the hot coarse soil and to proclaim
 my victories on the lawns of shining grass; I did return.
 This ways my place of triumph. Falcon on its perch,
 sun riding in the sky, stars strewn coldly
 through the heavens; I saw my triumphs here.

What is a man
 if he seeks truth outside himself? I do not know.
 I only seek, seek that which makes me have a right to be,
 in lands I know are real. I grew here. And what I learned,
 I learned in these surroundings. And everything I know to be
 True and Beautiful rests upon that part of me which knows

THE MAN (Cont.):

this place, my place of birth, upon this hill, and that real
to be...

For if this place should perish, if my childhood should not
have been

then all I know to be real and binding should only fade
to be some misty concept foreign to my heart; but here
is truth I know. Here no ideas reign.

This is the truth. I kneel and grasp it in my hands, I stretch
and pluck it from a tree. This is my reality. Truth as real
as I can ever be.

For this, this land of my ideas and motivating force, is what
made me.

I came from this soil, I wallowed in it, I hate its plants and
creatures and I grew to know the people who lived from it too.
It is my land.

As long as it remains, as long as I remain a part of it, my truth
remains as fact witnessed by the existence of me and it that
made me.

If this place and I ceased to exist, then the facts that built
my life

would shrink only to be memories and not flesh, and what I
truly love,

my source, my being, and my truth,

would have to be only another pair of unclean footprints
upon a cosmic God-made ball of mud.

I stand on this hill, beside these darkened buildings of my life and
the trees and look out onto the city beneath me and the people. And I
think.

I think about the world I see around me and the others sprinkled in
the blue-black sky above my head. Sometimes I think of music and love
and always I am sad. Sometimes, though, I make vows and announce vic-
tories to the towering edifices of the land of the living (that is, me)
and to the arms and green trees and factories and stars above and to the
supreme being (what I do not know) which put them there.

I make vows about what I intend to do, what I, the supreme being, and
the lands and peoples around me expect of me. And then I try (God knows
I try) to do it.

And here are my accomplishments.

Listen, ye people,

open ears, great institutions of men,

I speak to you of triumph, of achievement.

Here is the story of my life:

The story of what came of divine law as it is written in the
spirit of my mind when it came into touch with this, my
treasonable world.

THE MAN (Cont.):

I was a bright boy and mother loved me for it.
 Child prodigy; loved to talk, bored with work.
 Wrote plays at seven, drafted stories,
 later began a score of novels; painted, composed music, danced.
 Yet all this I did for recognition. It was that
 I wanted to create, not that I needed creation.
 Here was my logic; fancy this;
 No man, howe'er victorious, is truly great unless
 the men around him see his victory. I asked
 that those around me see what I have built.

I plead with them
 to let me carry on. To make me, if you will, for virtue
 of their love. I saw it true
 that no man can be great unless the populace will choose to let
 him serve.

I did not see that no man can be great unto the populace
 until he cheers himself. And no man can praise that in him
 which is not there with honor. Honor is
 the true measure of greatness. And I thought fame to be the
 true measure
 of honor. Hah. I came to the land to work
 and found that I cannot.
 Where do I stand now? I cannot make myself.

Do you know what they called me? Pretty terrific. Born success
 story. I thought they loved me. "The City's master creator," they said.

I was going to build a work that could stand as a great cathedral on
 this hill; its spires stabbing skyward as a monument to my value, my
 greatness; and my eternal soul finally realized by others as I could not
 truthfully say that it was true and valid.

A cathedral to a lie...

You see, I knew I hadn't done all I should have done.
 But Sylvia came, and I no longer had to prove anything.
 Love struck me as a woman
 slid bawdily into my world of torment.
 I saw her as a golden sunrise banishing for me the empty nights
 of loneliness without reprieve.
 But if she wilts
 coyly with flirtacious skill from my life's destined path
 what then ensues?
 You see, I have something to prove.

I wanted to place my name beside those of famous men; I wanted to make
 a monument of my soul; sculpting new facets of truth in ways no man had
 ever sculpted them before. I wanted to build a beacon fire of magnifi-
 cance, of greatness, of artistic genius, of fidelity to truth. And I

THE MAN (Cont.):

wanted to possess the love of men in their respect and my own respect I wished to know what I deserved.

But alas, it was an impossible task I set for myself. I can't really satisfy myself with my work; it all seems one game, a strange play of hostility, almost a way of revenge against the world for some injustice done me in the distant past.

Oh, God, if I wasn't meant to work to my fullest capacity, why ever did you begin in me the ceaseless obsession to do it? I've come to the end of my rope. There've been no rewards for my efforts, none that I can feel. How can I succeed if I'm given no sign of victory? If I die of this hopelessness, what gain will it be to you? But if I am able to enjoy the fruits of my achievements my works will multiply and luster them selves into a great pyre to match your stars, a magnificent glorification of your truth and right.

But now the winter has come
cold wind and slashing rain
and things that I had thought
so sacred and profane
have vanished now as Honor
has whirled away in wake of frigid winds.

I stand now on a hill above the town
for here I forged a name, a monument to match
the sprawling cold white splendor of the stars,
a crown of hope and honor ringed above with love,
the jewel which represents the recognition
of the finest part in one
and revels in its tender viewing by another.
We thought that love could rise above our dormant souls
forever.

(The hollow wind floats back my empty words.)

Forever.

But now I trudge down silent war-torn paths
and journey down the chilly war-torn streets
to pass between the light-warm and still happy homes of men
who well could trade their honor for a love
that would to them so much more faithful be
than that invaluable love they wish they'd had for self.

I lean against a dark and naked tree
perhaps to wonder,
perhaps laugh
at what we thought must last so long
but now remains
as bits of shattered crystal in the snow.

THE MAN (Cont.):

I had a motto once, you know:
"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
to forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
to defy power which seems omnipotent...
neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,
this...is to be
good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
this is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory."
Hmm, you know, I'm a poet
but I don't know it,
'cause my works don't show it.
I haven't decently finished anything I ever started --
"What a waste, what a waste...
what a waste of money and time..."

((ELIZABETH suddenly appears, right.))

ELIZABETH: That isn't original, is it, Gil?

THE MAN: Shelley...a popular song..I don't know. What are you doing here, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: Hello, dear. Glad you noticed me. I'm just fixing things for a party tonight.

((GREG enters right, in a rush.))

GREG: Hello, Gil. Liz. (kisses ELIZABETH) You're beautiful. What's that stuff you're wearing?

ELIZABETH: \$25 a bottle.

GREG: Love it. How's the play, Gil?

THE MAN: Let's not be depressing.

GREG: Depressing doesn't have a thing to do with it; just money. How's the play?

THE MAN: Haven't done a damn thing on it since last week.

GREG: I thought you said you had the idea all boiled out?

THE MAN: Oh, I did. It's all supposed to take place at this cocktail party in one night --

GREG: You told me that last week. For an hour.

ELIZABETH: Gil, that idea sounds awfully familiar. I mean, doesn't every play take place in one night at a cocktail party?

THE MAN: I think they call it teacup drama, Liz.

GREG: What happened to the great creative brain, Gil?

THE MAN: My typewriter broke down.'

ELIZABETH: You ought to get a secretary.

THE MAN: I ought to learn to type. Can't dictate at all.

GREG: It's no wonder those typewriters break down, the way you hammer away.

ELIZABETH: You punch holes through the paper every time you hit an "o."

THE MAN: Don't look so grim, all of you. You know how lousy I am. Besides, I'm in love.

ELIZABETH: Not again.

GREG: Don't tell me about it.

THE MAN: I've found a soul-mate. Just can't tell you how it makes me feel. She's coming tonight. Wonderful girl and brains. I told her it would be hell here --

ELIZABETH: Thanks.

THE MAN: --but she's coming anyway.

ELIZABETH: You never think of telling me these things before, do you? It seems with you there's always got to be room (GREG joins in:) for one more.

THE MAN: I wouldn't come here if there wasn't.

((SAMSON and RALPH, both clad in leather jackets and blue jeans, enter left as musicians.))

SAMSON: This is the scene?

THE MAN (to himself): My God, no, I'm remembering again.

ELIZABETH: They're going to play for our party tonight.

GREG: One of the hottest combos on the coast. Three stooges minus one. Right, boys?

RALPH: That's right, Mr. Murray.

THE MAN: But you weren't his manager, you were a---a---

RALPH: A social catalist. The life of every party.
I am the voice of your complaining.
I am a prodder now to act upon this scene as on the last,
and, while seeking only to advance myself
will cause the surrounding characters to fight within
while handing out free advice and society's judgments,
with the author's leave.

SAMSON: Out the static, man.

RALPH: Just being friendly.

SAMSON: I can't focus, man.

GREG: I'm sorry if I've--

RALPH: Samson here is kindof nervous. He hasn't appeared between pillars, you know, for some time.

ELIZABETH: Doesn't he talk to anyone?

SAMSON: I can talk, white lady. I just don't dig this chit-chat bit before I go on. I'm not trying to be impolite, Mrs. Murray, but a man must think of what needs be played before he blows. You know?

GREG: I've been in show business long enough to understand.

SAMSON: Then that settles it. Now, where's the girl?

THE MAN: Girl? I think I--

GREG: We promised Samson a date for tonight.

RALPH: It's in the contract.

GREG: Between numbers. Liz?

ELIZABETH: She's ready.

((ELIZABETH gestures and a gong sounds. SYLVIA enters slowly right, looking demurely at SAMSON.))

THE MAN: Sylvia. Good to see you here. I want you -- Liz, Greg.

ELIZABETH: We already know her kind.

THE MAN: I love you, Sylvia.

SYLVIA: Please, Gil, don't hurt yourself. Stop saying things like that. You're embarassing me in front of him.

SAMSON: Passion fades, man. And what you thought was eternity for you was only a sigh of the wind. There is nothing she can feel of you she cannot feel of me. And I make love more gently. She wants me now. You dig? It's nothing. You're throwing the whole gig over for one little bit and it's the most unimportant part, man. You're a fool.

THE MAN: You mean I'm supposed to sit here and admire you while you --

SYLVIA: Copulate. You can go home, Gil. After all, we had what was ours. Our relationship became what it became. We can still be friends. We were such lovely friends. I want you for my friend and him for my lover, that's all.

THE MAN: Even after you betray everything my love stood for.

SYLVIA: That was your conception. Why can't you grow into long pants, Gil? Sex doesn't mean anything. I love you now as much as I ever did.

THE MAN: What? You mean all along I... (gives a long, loud and anguished moan)

SYLVIA: I love you, Samson. I want you and you need me.

((SYLVIA slides seductively into SAMSON's arms.))

THE MAN: The pain...God, no, it's coming back again. I'm still a lie. I'm guilty of treason. My bridges aren't built. Still. Where's the doctor? I'm wounded. God, where's the doctor?

THE VOICE (calmly): You have broken your promise...And now do you see what are the wages of sin? Forgetfulness.

((The party falls back and exits.))

THE MAN: Lie! I hear a lie. Someone out there is lying to me. Come out, wherever you are. Reveal yourself! You can't lie to me and get away with it. Where are you, damned idiot?

MARK (from right section of the audience): Here! On your side.

HELENA (from left section of the audience): The world judges...

MARK: And it marks your gravestone as success or failure.

HELENA: No, behind the sign, Mark.

THE MAN: What say you, angels of death?

MARK: You're a bum and a failure.

THE MAN: I'm the last mortal man, I tell you!

MARK: A bum, a failure. You call yourself an artist yet you've never done a damn thing in your life. Lazy; never anything comes out that's worth a damn. You don't know how to apply yourself. A hero?

HELENA: Yes, if you're such a hero, why don't you spend every hour working instead of crying your heart out for some two-bit whore? You're no hero, just a ham actor.

THE MAN: I'm a truth-seeker.

MARK: Truth? It's a tom-foolery.

HELENA: Everything leads to contradictions.

MARK: Look at the sign! Look!

THE MAN (turns head towards left): The sign?

HELENA: Read it!

((THE MAN shakes his head no.))

MARK: Read it! ((THE MAN closes his eyes in torment.)) Read it for all the world to hear!

HELENA: Go ahead, sucker.

THE MAN (slowly): There is no truth. The sign. Yes. I can read it.
There is no truth.

THE VOICE: There is no truth.

((THE LAUGHTER SOUNDS AGAIN.))

THE MAN: But that can't be. We must be here for some reason, to take some action.

HELENA: You're free...

THE MAN: We can't be unmade by contradiction. How dare you write such a thing? Make it your motto? If somebody doesn't take life seriously, what's ever going to be done? I'm what the world needs, can't you see? I'll give you all truth through my fighting. Can't you see?

THE VOICE: Can't you see?

THE MAN: Who asked that? (silence) Damn it all, who asked that question? Where is he? The destroyers can hear my voice, I know that now. Their message: There is no truth. Ha! Come out; let's have our battle. This is war! Where is your champion? Send him out and we'll have done with it.

((THE LEADER (RALPH, clad as before in this act, but with a black gauze mask) walks in left.))

THE LEADER: Well, here I am. If you want it, we'll have our battle now. You must remember, of course, I have my no-truth all about me. I am a-bounded in lies and retained by relativism. Now, where is this truth of yours?

THE MAN: My truth?

THE LEADER: At least your honesty.

THE MAN: I don't have it. I lost it?

THE LEADER: You lost it?

THE MAN: I can't find it. Somewhere along the way I must have lost it. ((THE LEADER laughs.)) So. You're laughing, too. All through my life, that laughter's the same laughter I've heard all along. And you're the enemy. You're the laughing destroyer I've been trying so hard to free the world of. You laugh at truth wherever you find it. You neglect a man while he lives, laugh at him, and try to destroy his work because you couldn't match it yourself. And it's your minions who do the dirty work of destroying and rule the city of men. The almost-living. You're the rats I've been trying to stamp out. I get it now. But good.

THE LEADER: Destroyers? We only offer freedom from truth. Of course,

THE LEADER (Cont.):

you're forgetting something, aren't you? Don't be so high and mighty. There's a destroyer in you. Haven't you seen him at work, gnawing away at your version of truth? You. You sabotaged the truth you claimed you were trying to defend. You're the traitor. You're your own worst enemy, fella. Now, you know you haven't done all you could do. Who can blame the world for laughing, for wanting to kick your teeth in? You should want to do it yourself.

You don't really want to do a damn thing with yourself. Admit it, you idiot. The rat is inside you.

THE MAN: No...

THE LEADER: You sold your own soul and didn't even get a good price for it. You didn't do what you thought you could; you couldn't do it for yourself and so you offered to do it for Sylvia. You gave her your soul and your life work. You could tell yourself you were an all-right guy. But when the time came for your wages, she was in bed with somebody else. You had no reward of your own and it proved what you knew all along. You didn't deserve one.

Hah! Now you don't even have as much integrity as Mark and Helena out there. You don't even possess as much as they do, children of men. You didn't have the honor, and now you don't even have the love.

THE MAN: No! I won't have you saying such things without proof. I can't let statements as damning as those stand unquestioned. We'll have to put this to some kind of a test. A trial by law, that's what we'll have. Mark, you can act as recorder.

MARK: Right.

((MARK runs up to stage and draws up a chair. He begins to take down what is said in an examination blue book. HELENA slowly comes up on stage to observe at his side.))

THE MAN: And you, Ralph, as society incarnate, can act as judge.

THE LEADER: Well, I must admit this is a novel way to handle our little mix. A combat by trial.

Hear ye, hear ye! The superior court of the city of men, in and for the land of the almost-living, is now in session, the State Leader presiding. The case before us is that of The Rat (points to THE MAN) versus The Spirit Of Man (knocks his own chest).

Will the accused stand? (he does) Rat, you are accused of high treason against the conduct of human progress. The punishment in this district for clogs in the wheels of civilized contribution is summary execution. How do you plead?

THE MAN: I don't know. I'll have to think it over.

THE LEADER: You may sit down. (he does) We will now hear the case for the prosecution.

THE MAN (putting head in hands): Oh, Sylvia. Sylvia...

SYLVIA: What do I need to say? The case has already been summerized. This play has presented all the evidence for those perceptive enough to pick it out. This man is a failure, damned by his own set of values. The play states the facts simply and directly. Our party has become the judgement-place and our war representative of the battle of mankind against his baser nature.

Here is a man who has lost a war. Unable to do what he had been made to want himself to do, but misleading himself, through love, to think that he has done it. He has condemned himself to loneliness.

THE MAN: Loneliness for me is death.

SYLVIA: From his own mouth comes the conviction. Be your own justice. The prosecution rests.

THE LEADER: We will now hear the case for the defense.

THE MAN (goes to knees): God of my Fathers! Bow thine ear to me...

THE LEADER: Bow your own ear. In this court you must bear the responsibility for your own guilt. I am asking you to be your own jury and let your conscience act as judge.

THE MAN: You ask me to do that? You know I must admit my guilt if I do that. I've got to pay the piper.

Oh, where is absolution? God of my Fathers! Even you hear me not in this forest of lies and doubting. Forgive me, can't you do that? Let me start over. To do the same thing. Oh, I haven't done enough. I haven't done enough... How do you learn to walk?

HELENA: You travel step by step.

THE MAN: But I've such a burden. Help, I'm wounded!

HELENA: Put up or shut up.

THE LEADER: You forget our mercy. You forget the great mercy of the world. We offered you absolution, "There is no truth." You would not accept that.

HELENA: Say Yes.

THE MAN: Don't you see, it wouldn't have mattered to me as a little man in my living whether what I'd done was really true or false on a universal scale? I'm not supposed to know truth. All that mattered was whether I'd lived close to what I'd thought life to be with all my might.

THE LEADER: Then admit your condition.

THE MAN: I've failed. May God have mercy on my miserable soul.

THE LEADER: Then the verdict of the court is your own. You have no reason to appeal, yet. You have not been cheated or restrained in any way save

THE LEADER (Cont.):

by the forms of social courtesy. You can justly chain no handicap to your innocence but yourself. And the handicap is your crime.

SYLVIA: Your honor, I recommend the death penalty, as this man has already declared himself dead to society as a productive member in its organism.

THE LEADER: What do you say to that?

THE MAN: Guilty.

SYLVIA: He is the destroyer.

THE MAN: No. No, you are. I could have been greatness itself if only you had used me and helped me.

SYLVIA: Objection!

THE LEADER: Objection sustained. The purpose of this trial is to determine the defendant's value or lack of it. It has nothing to do with the recognition of value.

THE MAN: Then I am the prosecutor.

THE LEADER: You might say that, yes.

MARK: I've run out of paper.

THE LEADER: Your time is up, Mr.—Mr., er...

THE MAN: Gilgamesh.

THE LEADER: Your time is up and the verdict will be delivered.

THE MAN: Guilty.

THE LEADER: The defendant is guilty as charged. The accused will stand. (he does) The punishment for the crime of non-contribution is abolition. Sentence will be executed on the palace archery field at midnight. Both you and your guilt will be reconciled there.

The condemned may now partake of his last meal.

((THE MAN and SYLVIA stand. She comes to him and they kiss.))

THE LEADER: Colonel Samson! Colonel Samson, come here. I want you.

((SAMSON runs in left, carrying a rifle.))

SAMSON: You wanted me, sir. I could hear you.

THE LEADER: Take care of him. He's a blot on the face of humanity.

SAMSON: Right, sir. Prisoner, attention!

((THE MAN puts SYLVIA aside and comes to attention.))

THE LEADER: Do you have any last words to say for yourself?

THE MAN: I meant well. I guess that's all...

Wait a minute I see something. A blasted vision.

SYLVIA: The terror-dramatics of a dream.

THE MAN: I see a white cat on a leash, walking across the sky, jumping from grey cloud to grey cloud toward the anaemic moon. Nobody's holding the leash. I have the strangest feeling I've seen it --

MARK: We haven't got all night.

THE MAN: I know where I've seen it.

SAMSON: Okay, then, are you ready now?

THE MAN: I want to say something. I have some confessions to make. The confessions prove my guilt.

THE LEADER: This might clarify the issue. Let him talk.

THE MAN: I'm never ready, don't you see? That's just the trouble, is all.

Oh, I hate everything in the world. That's because it all hates me. All except that cat up there. He was the only friend I had, so long ago, and I betrayed him. I'm a bum and a fool. That's a nice way to put it. There are other words, I suppose, but I won't use them. Damn.

You see, I'm a genius -- or I say I am, it's all the same, you know. Well, really, I'm not a genius and I know it. I can't even kid myself about it. It's nice to say you think you're a genius and all that rot, but you really can't believe you are -- at least, I can't.

Come here, cat. Oh, no. You won't, will you? You've got too good sense. I always turn everything I love against me, sooner or later. It never lasts. It always turns away from me eventually.

Ha! You know, I've even tried playing at creating from time to time, but it never turned out very well. I never really believed -- I never really wanted or needed to. I say I'm God and the Last Mortal Man, all at the same time, but it's a lie. I'm really a fraud, and I know it. I just hope I'm interesting. I try to be.

Nobody respects me, everyone feels sorry, including me. We all gather round and mope about what a wonderful failure I am. And we all agree that it would be nice if somebody were willing to help, but no one can, including me again. No one really gives a damn.

I'm little and I'm ugly and everybody sneers at me behind my back. I know it. I do too. What the hell. Everyone knows I'm magnificent and then I have to pull a silly trick and they all hate me for disillusioning them. And I hate them for being disillusioned.

I guess you came to see the play about me, to see what a fool I am. Well, the theatre doesn't look very packed to me, in fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you're the only one listening. It doesn't matter. It just proves my point. You may be the only person left whose rat hasn't taken them over.

THE MAN (Cont):

Hey, this is a heck of a way to do a play. Some decent dialogue, please. Director, get some kind of a plot going. Put a character on the stage, not a man. No, dammit, I forgot the cue. I don't know the line.

THE LEADER: Well, we've had enough of your apologies, anyway. Let's get on with it.

THE MAN (letting out a wail of agony): There's nothing left of me!

((THE MAN sinks to his knees, sobbing.))

THE LEADER: Oh, keep still, you mama's boy. Don't you ever think of appearances? You're the hero.

THE MAN (lost in sobbing): There are no appearances. Only failure.

SYLVIA: You don't think of anyone but yourself.

THE MAN: Yes, yes.

THE LEADER: Yes. Genius? That you could sink to this! Worthless. Scum. Rub him out, Colonel. The sight of him makes me ill.

SAMSON: He's an enemy of the people?

THE LEADER: Yes.

THE MAN: Nobody loves me, everybody hates me,
Think I'll go eat some --

THE LEADER (turning away): -- humble pie.

((SAMSON shoots THE MAN coldly. THE MAN falls forward, face on the ground, his hands before it, legs apart.))

SAMSON: You're nothing to anybody. (spits on the body)

THE LEADER: Good job.

SAMSON: Thank you, sir.

THE LEADER: I'll give you a week's leave. Go into town and dance. Lay that comely wench you've got eyes for.

SAMSON: Thank YOU, sir.

((SYLVIA takes hold of SAMSON's arm.))

THE LEADER: Oh, before you go I'd like you to tell me something. Tell me, Colonel, what hath God wrought?

SAMSON: He built us a victory. Like, before we were unclean with our dreams, but now, man, we bask in glory.

THE LEADER: My side did win. We did conquer after all. And the rats shall inherit the earth. You came to me as little children and I gave you love to love yourselves. What did I give you, Samson?

SAMSON: The double deal.

THE LEADER: Right. Ah-hah! On one hand I grant you equal opportunity to suffer in my name. Power as a result. And equal opportunity for guilt. All the responsibilities belong to all the people.

At the same time you gave me your hands and I cleaned them. I gave you love to love yourself. You need a figurehead to blame when you fail that responsibility of yours. And a symbol of what you've won when you battle. You cannot take the weight of defeats upon yourself or you'd admit that you yourself should be destroyed. And so you lift me to power and I inherit the tower of doubt that lays within yourself.

Laugh, if you will, because the people cannot see my face. I mask it so that it can be their faces, too.

The armies I possessed have gained their power.

And so, I lead; I rule.

The people grant me power and I reflect their will.

I possess them; they possess me.

And for this purpose did I change my face, so I could that much more be part of them.

I trade my face and will for power,

the fairest fruit of luck.

The people are mine. They are complete in me.

There is no more responsibility.

There is only me. My will is their will.

You want the answer? Your heart thirsts after truth? I'll give it to you. Samson, what is our battle cry?

SAMSON: There is no truth.

((SAMSON smiles at SYLVIA, and they walk off, arms around each other.))

THE LEADER: And now the hero goes to take his pleasure with a whore, as if he'd felt he'd dreamed of it himself and earned it by his deed. The integrity of pleasure. As if any dream still exists. It's all philosophy . . .

Ah, it's all philosophy. And yet we still can't understand a thing. We try to learn all about music by listening to a piano fall downstairs in the dark. There is no truth.

Don't you think I've searched for it? I've a position and a responsibility to the city of men, now that I've freed them from truth, and I must deal with things to the best interests of all involved. I must be objective to be sure that everything I do is right. You can't go running around making mistakes. You must sit back and study the Real Problem. Of course, it's quite difficult to be objective when you are an object yourself, you know. You so often get prejudiced by selfish considerations. But I've found the only way to know truth is not to get involved.

THE LEADER (Cont.):

It's really for the best in cases like that, you know, to stop living altogether. Then you can really be objective.

Look at that body. Ech! He was not objective. Look at him. He made mistakes and wouldn't let himself live with them. He wanted comfort, as my people find in me, without the benefit of lack of laws. To err is human, to forgive inhuman, you know. It's all so simple. Courtier!

((GREG enters in a black gauze mask, from the left.))

GREG: Sire?

MARK: When you get tweaked, you get all furry.
For protection, vote for Murray.

HELENA: For emperor.

THE LEADER: Have this body prepared for internment. I realize it's horribly selfish of me, but the stench is beginning to tell...and, well, public health, you know. I do wish he'd bathed more often; then, perhaps... ooh. Well, there was something else. I had to say something else.

GREG: There is no truth?

THE LEADER: That's it. One little detail. There is no truth...

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: You know, to be totally honest with you, that isn't exactly correct. You see, really, objectively speaking, if two stories contradict each other it may be that each is only a part of the real truth. You're like the blind hindu's and the elephant. You have only to get far enough back and you'll see how all the contradictions fit together into the cosmic oneness of it all. Listen to this, it's a word of hope for those who need it.

For example, it's a common misconception that if two facts contradict each other, then neither can exist as true. But that's misleading. The mere fact that a law isn't obeyed, for instance, may mean it isn't valid, but it doesn't mean it isn't legal. Laws don't exist to order what is — they exist to explain what we see of the order that exists.

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: You just can't say a thing like that and get away with it. If there is no truth then it can't be true that there is no truth. How's that for a paradox? Hah.

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: I've found, however, that there are a great many practical reasons to make that assumption, anyway, even if it isn't logically sane. No matter what truth I try to follow, something seems to trip me up. I'm

THE LEADER (Cont.):

always making mistakes. The trouble with people is they're too human, that's the fact of the matter. And that character over there wouldn't have killed himself if he hadn't expected himself to be perfect, totally true to truth every thinking moment.

If he'd just stepped back he would have seen that nothing he could have done would last forever, so to be totally objective he would have had to admit that any victories couldn't be won on proven ground. He probably wouldn't have won any victories anyway, matter of fact, so why try? Hmm?

Of course, we must consider the possibility that maybe people weren't put here to win when they fight, just to fight. But that's ugly. You can never really win anything, objectively speaking. Things just change hands, I mean. So let's not frustrate ourselves by idle contemplation. We won't get anything out of it.

Now, look here. Nobody can know anything. I mean, really know it. You can only define it, not explain it. Oh, you can pick up little pieces of truth along the way. But you probably couldn't understand it all if somebody told you. You keep asking the ever-present Why and all you get out of it is a big, fat Because. Some people think that because they don't know what Truth is, it isn't there --

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: And they use that as an excuse to keep from fighting. The fifth freedom: Freedom from truth, boon of affluency. The only reason people are enslaved is because they're lazy. If you start in, what reason is there for them to want to get to the top, if nothing meant them to get to the top, I mean? They could get to the top, I mean, if they really wanted to -- maybe not by their own merits, but somebody could put them there. Hell, I did.

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: Maybe all of life is luck. Nobody bothers to take that into their theories. You can say Yes to destiny like I did. He didn't. Of course. He wanted to take full responsibility for every action. Well, look what happened to him. Never volunteer, I say.

Truth is, people are just plain irresponsible. That's the original sin. And sometimes they're selfish to the point of short-sightedness. They keep so busy with their little concerns that they deafen themselves to the rhythm of the cosmic oneness.

Well, I've got things to worry about now, like all of you, and so I'll have to end this act. You see, ruling the world is not easy. Responsibility is the prerequisite to power. I've got it just like he did, now. Of course, it isn't objective; what I do won't last, but I have to do something or they'll throw me out. My people want me to serve them. And though I'm not sure of truth, I don't want them to be rid of me. I have to live within my own set of rules, an order for what I do (even if it's

THE LEADER (Cont.):

not Universal), or nothing gets done. And I have to do something. I don't know why I have to stay in power, except that the graft makes for relatively high life.

I have a new world to build.

GREG: There is no truth.

THE LEADER: Now I have to be as hard on myself as he did. There's a tomorrow to plan for. And we cannot fail tomorrow. I'm not ready, I know. Oh, God, I'm as bad off as he was. I'm in the same boat. And no bed-warmer for consolation. Oh, that tomorrow would not have to dawn...

GREG: Sir, don't worry. It's perfectly all right. Or at least fairly perfect. I'll stand by you to the end. We have a new world to build. Of course, it can wait. Tomorrow there'll be a day after.

THE LEADER (bitterly): And there is no truth.

GREG: That's it, sir. Onward and upward.

((MARK and HELENA applaud. There is a slow fade of lights until nothing. The curtain is closed.))

ACT III — THE WAKE
a coffin instead of a tree

((A coffin, lit with candles, stands at the center of the stage. THE MAN should be in the coffin, but he is not. We cannot tell this from the audience. RALPH, this time clad in the garb of a minister, stands at the head of the coffin. head bowed in meditation. ELIZABETH and GREG (who is now wearing his unsmiling mask) enter from right and pass by the coffin. They look in for a while. GREG turns away and after a moment ELIZABETH joins him, pulling out her handkerchief and rubbing away a tear.))

ELIZABETH: He was such an unhappy man.

GREG: Nobody misses him and you know it.

ELIZABETH: But he suffered so much. And then he died so tragically. The hunting accident.

GREG: I don't think anybody misses him.

ELIZABETH: He left that girl...Sylvia. The one he loved so much.

GREG: That baggage? She's probably still loving it up with that trumpet player. She doesn't give a damn about anybody except herself, the tramp. If she came, you know, it would be the most filthy thing that could happen to his body. At least this should be a time without lies.

ELIZABETH: Greg, at times like this you can— Honestly, you should be acting bereaved, you know that. He deserved it, after all his suffering.

GREG: I expect he's glad he's out of it. So there. The prophet in his own country. All that rot.

ELIZABETH: That's a cold-blooded thing to say. How thoughtless. You know, sometimes I think I don't know you at all.

GREG: How could you, Liz, with this mask I'm wearing?

ELIZABETH: Don't you have any feelings? Don't you really care about anything? Why don't you show what you feel?

GREG: I'd shot it, if I was sure it was really mine. But this blasted mask keeps getting in my way. I've worn it for so long, you know, that it's beginning to get so I can't...

ELIZABETH: Well, then, why don't you take it off? Sometimes I don't think it becomes you, anyway.

GREG: You wouldn't want to see my face. Don't kid yourself. It's like I asked you to take off your make-up. Look here, I'll take off my mask if you take off your make-up.

ELIZABETH: Oh, grow up, Greg. Sometimes you are really ridiculous.

GREG: You don't want to take off that make-up, do you?

ELIZABETH: Greg, now, let's not be-- I mean, how would I look without my make-up?

GREG: I don't know. That's just it. I don't think you do, either.

ELIZABETH: But, Greg, I can't take off-- I mean, really--

GREG: I just wanted to make a point, Liz. That's all. We mustn't have a scene, of course. Certainly not here, anyway.

ELIZABETH: Yes. Yes. I was forgetting appearances. I'm sorry.

GREG: Naturally.

ELIZABETH: Greg, let's go outside for a little while. It's almost dawn, you know, and the sunrise... I always feel so much closer to God and all that.

GREG: Yes, let's go.

((They do not exit. They walk to the right and stand rigidly looking off. MARK and HELENA sneak in left and sit on the coffin, holding hands.))

MARK: Act Three should take place in the audience, don't you think? That is where we should be.

HELENA: I don't know. I like it here.

MARK: It doesn't hurt anybody up here. Nobody would think of looking here.

HELENA: I love it here, don't you?

MARK: Let's go to bed.

HELENA: Here? Right here? In front of them?

MARK: Why not? They came to see a show, didn't they?

HELENA: Aren't we giving them enough by kissing?

MARK: They don't understand what we mean by doing it. They don't see we're trying to get at the nature of truth; that you can't get at it except by saying and doing all kinds of ridiculous things. Because truth and meaning is all that way. It doesn't make sense. It's all in riddles because what is is all pretty ridiculous.

HELENA: You mean life?

MARK: That's right. You don't really see anything, except life. And it all begins for no reason. It all stops with a click or something. It's so damned funny. There's no way to tell about it or find out how to live unless you tell funny stories in a crazy way; know what I mean?

HELENA: Or just say yes to it.

MARK: Of course. I didn't think of that.

((SAMSON appears up left, a little drunk.))

SAMSON: It swings. Everybody swings.

HELENA: Where did he come from?

MARK: From the earth, I guess. He looks so black.

HELENA: Maybe he's a clotted blob of night. It's black, too.

((SAMSON walks up to the coffin and examines it.))

SAMSON: Funny kind of bar you all've got here. Ha.

THE HIGH PRIEST (RALPH): You can't get drinks here. This is the house of the dead.

SAMSON: Who said that? Sounded like a grey's voice. Who said that? Society? Hah! I can get drinks anyplace I like, see there. I've got the constitution behind me, see. I'm cool stuff on the coast, man. I'm rich. You know, Rockefeller-stuff.

THE HIGH PRIEST: This is the house of the dead.

SAMSON: Like hell. I'll wake them up.

((HELENA and MARK leave the casket as he gets out his horn and begins to play. The jazz combo in the pit wails.))

SAMSON: Get the beat, man. Life beats to that pulse. Lub-dub, man. Get the beat, damn you. To what you hate say Yes. When you swing you are not, so swing boy.

Oh I love my horn
And my horn loves me;
I love my horn
And my horn loves me;
When we're not apart
We're as close as can be!...

MARK: He's beautiful, isn't he?

HELENA: With his trumpet and song.

Swing! The source of all true abolition. Swing! Man! Hey, swing...
HEY! ((The music stops as SAMSON breaks down in tears, falling to his knees.))

I can't. I can't. It doesn't fog it enough. There's nothing that fogs it away. Look at that hand. Black. Black as a tar baby. Damn. God damn.

You know, I hate myself. The greys have been saying for years that I should and I do. I really do. It works. I look. I really look at my hands when they play and they're different. Oh, God, why must I be different?

HELENA: Why doesn't he just say Yes?

MARK: And accept it? Why must he accept it? Why can't he try bleach?

SAMSON (still on his knees, face in hands): You think it's funny. If only it would work.

HELENA: We are, Samson. We can question it, but it won't change things.

((A spot suddenly goes on behind the skrim and SYLVIA is seen awakening from the bed. She smooths her hair and begins humming SAMSON's tune. She walks around the skrim to enter left. She passes RALPH and looks in the coffin.))

SYLVIA: Who is this?

THE HIGH PRIEST: That is a man who loved you. He is dead, now.

SYLVIA: Are you sure? I'd like to talk to him.

THE HIGH PRIEST: Quite sure. He died for need of you.

SYLVIA: He needed me?

THE HIGH PRIEST: Incredibly. You were all he lived for.

SYLVIA: I don't like people who need me. The time comes when they don't need me any more.

((She walks away from the coffin, taking a flower out of her hair and putting it on the casket. She comes up behind SAMSON, putting her hand on his shoulder.))

SYLVIA: Are you sad?

SAMSON: I was supposed to exit. I haven't yet. They don't want me here.

SYLVIA: I want you. (helps him to rise) You'll love me, won't you?

SAMSON: You have a beautiful body. (puts his arms around her)

SYLVIA: I know. I'll love you.

SAMSON: Oh, I've seen you. You love everybody.

SYLVIA: I'll love you if you want it.

HELENA: Say you despise her.

MARK: Yes...

SAMSON: I despise you. You want me, yet you spit in my face when I want you to hear my playing. You don't know what it is to be like me and I hate you for being glad you aren't me.

SYLVIA: I love you even more. You make me need to prove myself. I must now conquer you. I love men, you see, even if they hate me. Because they hate me.

SAMSON: And you hate them even if they love you. Shut up.

SYLVIA: I'll push my body against you when I kiss you; will you like that?

((SAMSON kisses her with a light-hearted smile, muttering between the passionate moments. He almost laughs and SYLVIA gets even more sexily desperate.))

SAMSON: I didn't believe you would. I didn't believe you really would.

((RALPH now steps forward and the tableau begins to freeze. MARK and HEL-ENA standing hand-in-hand at the left, SAMSON and SYLVIA embracing somewhat right of center, ELIZABETH and GREG frozen side-by-side to the far right. RALPH walks behind the coffin and leans over it.))

THE HIGH PRIEST: Silence, please. The time is now come for all of you to take a quiet pose.

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together in the sight of God to summarize, for each others benefit, the meaning of a man. (vaults over the coffin and continues, commanding the center of the stage)

This is not a subject to be glossed over,
or to be taken as a joke,
for life is much of what we have.

Here was a man.
Here was the noblest Roman of them all.
He lived and died, but what was the purpose of this living and
dying?

Just exactly what did he prove
in his moment in the sun?
What was important to him?
Was he true to it? Did it betray him?
What is the value of the man?
I shall tell you.

Here was a man who lived in his love.
He was willing, willing to the point of eagerness,
to give every moment of his life
to the goal of achieving her,
of storming her soul
and placing his flag atop it.
Perhaps this was because he realized
his own soul was worthless to him
in his loneliness.
This love, which he placed above all things,
even his own life,
even this very love, betrayed him.
Even against the advice of the greatest sages of the world
he persued this hopeless love

THE HIGH PRIEST (Cent.):

because he knew in perfect love
even only for a moment,
for that moment at least,
love could erase all his faults, give him value,
grant him oblivion.
Absolve him from his hopeless search for perfection.

We see before us a man who died
because he needed more than he desired,
and knew he desired more than he deserved.
So he took something that he needed
because it would have him
and he thought that
that which he wanted to him could never possibly belong.
So chained to need and feeling he'd denied
his own desire, when his need rejected him,
as needs so often do,
he realized he was proven right,
his worthlessness was true,
and so, in truly noble fashion, he
allowed himself to be destroyed, knowing well
that others realized his worthlessness
and so he did a selfish thing for benefit of all mankind
not to say the least for his poor ruined heart.

Ah, do not judge this man a fool; I think that most of you,
given the chance, would have tried to hold to you
that thing which chance had thrown into his arms.
It is so easy for us, locked in an embrace,
to see the world as holding hope and truth.
Our search for values comes to a quick end,
we see ourselves; they see each other and they think
we think we've solved the challenge of our selves.
We do not see; we blind our minds
to that which lies so deep within.
For each man, victim to reality that he is,
is still a macrocosm
within himself.

We see each man a city in himself.
Here is the wall, the outer reach, the masquerade;
some do not have much city closed within,
others wall it off or plan
their alleys to lead quickly out again.

THE HIGH PRIEST (Cont.):

Within that wall lies the chasm of the body and sensation.
 In those warmed darkened depths man feels himself
 a cunning and sufficient animal,
 a beast that loves the taste of passion --
 any passion, all that can be had --
 the love of it, the acceptance, the ever-present Yes.
 And within that ring of flesh there lies
 the region of the charted soul;
 the part we're taught to know and to demand as ruler of our will,
 but still within, shielded behind those
 circles three of mask, desire, and law
 does sleeping lie the castle
 dangerous of something us.
 This land is at the core. Oh, to possess it
 and to know what makes us do the things we do
 in moments dim. But we can no more know
 this night-bound realm than our angry struggling playwright
 can reveal
 the core of his small
 incoherent play. This fortress towers
 above our lives, dwarfing our success
 and plaguing those moments few of peace we come to feel
 with myriads of doubts and treacheries and fears.
 A robber baron, that foul castle in ourselves.
 Oh, to break down that fortress and set free
 our captive realms without, is goal enough
 to make the proud'st psychi'trist grieve for a rich
 future in his chosen occupation. This fortress
 is the unwilling ruling center of our lives.
 Destroy the fortress and be free of need for self-acceptance,
 destroy the fortress and be free of weighty guilt,
 destroy the fortress and be free of fears of self.
 Destroy the fortress and be free to do your will,
 unweighted by the binding ties
 of your oblivion-seeking flesh.

But the tragedy, the real tragedy of life lies --
 the tragedy is that we cannot destroy the citidel of sin --
 we can only surrender it.
 Search for love, search for truth; talk it out.
 Search for identity, search for sensation; sleep it off.
 Ask for the Almighty, beg the Cosmic Dad, to enter us
 and cleanse our hearts within;
 or ask for love, that foul, deceitful thing
 to suck us vortex-like into the womb

THE HIGH PRIEST (Cont.):

of fair forgetfulness.
Be ye washed in the blood of the Lamb!
Chase your lady
'round the mulberry bush . . .

As you have no doubt guessed, this play's a joke,
a pretense thought up in the shadowy realm of doubt;
Three acts:
A party,
battle
and a wake.
A hope of truth and yet no more
of truth than you can glean from life itself.
We have no answers; we only share ways of talking
about darkness.

At a party he found loneliness,
and in war he saw how loneliness is gained.
And now he sees there is no other thing.
The universe is built
on lonesome things that stand alone.
Sometimes they stand alone together.

Remember what we have been saying through this play.
You're all you truly possess;
there's nothing else
in this wide realm of vast and sprawling galactic dust.
It is a vast and cosmic sack of nothingness,
and we, the people, dropped from nowhere into it,
seeking everything and finding nothing,
we wonder about on our forgotten stage and wait
until our time for leaving it has come. What hopes,
what living, or what love can mean
in this great pit, no man can tell.
There is nothing, save existence, can be proved,
and even that comes with a parlor trick.
He even failed to fight for lack of cause.
There is no meaning in our living;
the meaning and the universe are God's.
Glory be to the Father, and to His Love,
and to the Spirit of Life. As it was in the beginning
it is now, and ever shall be. World without end.
Amen.

THE PEOPLE: Amen.

((The lights go up behind the skrim and we see THE MAN standing mawkishly before the bed.))

THE MAN: Do they serve drinks here? Or do you have to have a Diner's Club card or something?

SYLVIA: Where did he come from?

THE HIGH PRIEST: What is it you want of us?

THE MAN: What the hell -- I want service! Just so long as it's wet. I've got things to do--

THE HIGH PRIEST: You can sit down, please.

THE MAN: I don't want to sit down. I've been sitting down long enough. I just want to stop along the way to get a drink, a bit in the way of entertainment and fun; then I'll be on my way. I've got a travelling show to do. None of you run out on me, now; I'll be right in.

THE HIGH PRIEST: We were not planning on leaving.

THE MAN: Damn nice of you. It's cramped in this climate. A man can't breath with all this perfume on the wind.

((He goes around the skrim to enter right.))

HELENA: I thought he was dead.

MARK: You got me killed in the last act, remember? Or maybe it wasn't me. Maybe it was just somebody who made you feel like I make you feel.

HELENA: It's a very silly thing to get people killed all the time in those crazy wars. You could have stayed, really. I mean, you'd have had me anyway, even if they did win. And that would have made up for losing your music anyway, wouldn't it?

MARK: I think so. (looks at her) Yes, I know so. I can be more sure of you than of my dream. You're really here, aren't you?

HELENA: Our pleasure is real.

MARK: Our love is all we've got. I hope it lasts 'till the show is over.

THE MAN (entering): What is this? Some kind of a circus?

THE HIGH PRIEST: This is the land of the almost-living, if that's what you mean.

ELIZABETH: We are in bereavement. Maybe you don't understand that.

THE MAN: I came in here to get a drink; I get some kind of pageant. (he turns to SYLVIA) Hey, kid, you want to drink with me?

SYLVIA (moving toward him): I guess so.

THE MAN: What'll it be?

GREG: I've got some drinks in the cabinet.

((GREG moves toward underside of the coffin, where his liquor is stored. From under it he brings a bar stool (or an orange crate) and a green bottle, pours drinks, puts them on a tray, lays them on the coffin.))

ELIZABETH: Don't be a bartender, Greg!

GREG: Why not? I'm everything else.

THE MAN (going to sit down with SYLVIA): Hurry it up.

GREG: Will sea water do, sir?

THE MAN: Just so long as it's wet. I don't mind salt. Do you like salt, honey?

SYLVIA: I don't mind it.

THE MAN: Then we'll have some. I've been through all hell out there. But I'm still alive. Come here, you little tramp; I'll tell you the story of my life.

((SYLVIA completes her separation and stands over THE MAN.))

THE MAN: Sit on my knee. I want some loving. (She does and they kiss as GREG pours more drinks)

THE HIGH PRIEST: Oh, please. Please. Can't you stop thinking of yourself for just a moment? There is a time for embracing and a time to refrain from embracing.

THE MAN: You really like to hear yourself talk, don't you? This is my business and I'll thank you to keep your nose out of it. I don't care how objective you are, I'm subjective and I don't give a damn what time it is. Now what are all you people doing standing around here still? Go get lost. If you aren't already. Just what is it all you people are doing here, anyway?

HELENA: Isn't it you who should be answering the questions?

THE MAN: What do you mean? Why should I understand anything any more than you do? What are you trying to prove, standing around my bar? What are the tears for? Trying to please somebody?

GREG: We're trying to give you a decent burial.

ELIZABETH: And we would, if you'd just keep quiet.

THE MAN: So that's it. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, "that's all there is..." Well, what do you want, a soliloquy?

THE HIGH PRIEST: Can't you show a little reverence for the dead? Where's your fear of God, man?

THE MAN: Where's your love for life, sir? I see it all now. You just

THE MAN (Cont.):

want to get me out of your lives, don't you? Say good-bye and shovel me in and get me to play the nice quiet corpse bit. You didn't even think about me being dead. You just think how quiet it'll be when I don't scream out my soul at parties.

ELIZABETH: That's not true.

THE MAN: And you, Sylvia — you'll miss me when Samson leaves you and you need a little comforting.

GREG: We're just sorry we lost you, that's all.

THE MAN: Sorry you lost me? How nice of you. How damned nice of you. How do you think I felt with a bullet in me?

THE HIGH PRIEST: If you'll just keep quiet, we'll go on with the ceremony.

THE MAN: I heard your speech out there, Ralph. Was that in blank verse?

THE HIGH PRIEST: Free verse. I tried to make it sound iambic, you noticed, so that the savage rhythm which appeals to the soul of primitive natural man could over-come the message of the lines, which might have been slightly prejudiced.

THE MAN: It's that kind of think that makes me sick to death. You and your stuff about real worlds and that rot. "The cosmic pit of nothingness." We can't unmake anything, can we? Sure. Nobody can unmake nothing. Somebody unmade me in the last act. But I'm back again; I'm not sure I know why.

MARK: Medicine is making phenomenal advances these days.

THE MAN: Tell that to Hippocrates. I'm sorry if that's an esoteric joke, but I'm not feeling very delightful tonight. I'm going to tell you all off. I'm including the audience in this, too. I might as well.

I don't know what the playwright is trying to do. He's trying to prove something, I guess, like everybody else. So he can go home and tell his wife or whatever else he's got that he's great. And somehow or other he's gonna try and believe it. He thinks maybe the Answer To It All's in his play and somehow or other, if he makes it obscure enough, some poor fellow is gonna think he understands it. Well, he can't get away with it.

Audience, if you were coming for a Message, go home! There isn't any message. There never is. The only message is beating right inside your body. That's the only answer I know.

I don't think you came for a message, I think you came to be entertained. In which case I think we're probably doing a mighty poor job of it. I'm sorry, but that's the way it goes.

Well, you look very religious tonight, Ralph. Damn good of you.

THE HIGH PRIEST: Thank you.

THE MAN: I don't need thanks from you or anybody else tonight, you know that? Funny thing. I don't believe in courtesy any more. I never did. But I always thought that somehow it would do me some good. There would be some way to get in good with people. And if I got in good with them, don't you see, they'd love me. That's all I wanted. Love. Ah, we're all such babies.

We all delude ourselves.

THE HIGH PRIEST: Get control of yourself.

ELIZABETH: You're making a scene.

THE MAN: Everybody should be entitled to make a scene once in their life. You'd think if I'd died somebody would listen to me. I suppose that's asking too much.

Oh, for God's sake listen to me, lovers of truth! I've had a voyage in the land of darkness (you know, the one from whose bburne no traveler returns) and I've come back!

All right, Elizabeth, fix your lipstick. Don't just fidget. And for once, Sylvia, could you stop staring at Samson in the middle of my monologue? If you want to go to bed with him, there's one right behind the skrim like there's been all through the play.

SYLVIA: I'll be still.

THE MAN: Thank you, Sylvia. Now, is everybody listening? Ha! Everybody's listening. You know, I feel so damn guilty when everybody's listening to me. That's the trouble. I always feel so damn guilty. Well, I'm sick of feeling guilty. I did in the last act, and that didn't do anything. I don't feel any better. Things are a little more boring, that's all.

You know, there are two things I believe in.

I believe in God and I believe in Me.

You're all about to start to laugh. Go ahead. That's just what you always do. When you say to yourself I'm an all-right guy you just kind of laugh it off because you don't really believe it. You can't, you lazy bastards. You can't.

THE HIGH PRIEST: Mankind is basically sinful.

THE MAN: Mankind is basically stupid, that's all. You're all children, all of you. What does mommy think of me? Do the boys at the office love me? Do I make my husband happy in bed? Ahhh, kid stuff! Are you what you think you should be? Or do you just care what others think?

Oh, you're a success, uh-huh? You in the back row there. You're glaring at me like I'm saying you're an egotistical failure. Oh, I'm not saying that. You're not an egotistical anything. You're just a blob.

THE MAN (Cont.):

Putty in the hands of anybody who tells you to do something to be somebody.

Don't you see? If you're a success, you have to be a success in the eyes of somebody. And they're the ones who make you a success. You had not a damn thing to do with it.

I don't care who you are, you can't make a success in this world. Not even I can succeed. Oh, luck can make a success of you, contacts can make you. But you're not responsible. You're just the victim. What's success? What does it mean? Not even happiness means anything.

I believe in Man and I believe in God.

I believe God made man in his own image, more or less. And I believe man tries to force God into his own puny form half the time.

Ralph, a few minutes ago you were talking about the inner fortress of each man. Their little knot of terror that sometimes makes them into monsters. You said that if it was destroyed, man would be free.

THE HIGH PRIEST: That is correct.

THE MAN: I'm afraid I can't agree with you. I'm telling you that if that Gordian knot is untied, men are nothing. Tell me how I can be anything in my own eyes if I'm denied control over them? They're mine. And I'm me.

I've got a heart that throbs, and I've got muscles and sex organs and hair and teeth and a brain. They're mine. God gave them to me. I'm here, and that's proof of God.

Maybe God's an insane monster, sure. But he's still God. And I'm still alive and I love life and I was meant to love life.

I've got a mind and identity and I love it and I'm sick of tying it to other people. Which of you here loves your mind?

You don't, Elizabeth, that's evident. I can't see your face for all that make-up. You put it on and you liked the reflection so you could fool yourself into thinking you like you.

Same with you, Greg boy. Mask. You even know it's there but you're afraid to take it off.

And you, Samson; you, the strong man always making excuses for yourself because of your skin. It's a good excuse to explain your lousy situation. It won't get you out of it.

And you, Sylvia, who are always so afraid of losing yourself. You surrender yourself to any man who'll look at you twice. You deny your brain every time you throw yourself at a man. The only reason you don't want to be possessed is so the man who owned you wouldn't throw you away.

I don't understand you, Ralph. You lie too much. You lie so completely that you believe it. Be objective, you scream. Be insane. Explain every unfulfilled desire away. You can't.

All of you, monsters!

THE MAN (Cont.):

I'm going out to be slaughtered. I can't succeed. Even if I did I wouldn't be able to satisfy my thirst for justification. But I'll be me. I won't lie. I'll know what I want and when I get a part of it I'll enjoy it and when I don't my stomach will growl like the devil and I'll scream. But I'll live.

I believe in God and I believe in me.

You can chain yourself and you can free yourself. There's God in you if you just listen to him. God didn't make you because he wanted you destroyed; he wanted you to try to live. And you yourself want to live. Well, go out there and enjoy. You can, you know.

Remember, nothing can hurt you beyond destroying you and you'll never die over a woman or a job. Can't you see that? They can't unmake you. You're still you. And God made you. Tear down the fortress, but don't let anybody in; just let your soul out. Do what you want. Only want. And never fear anyone.

Never do anything for anybody's sake but your own. I stopped existing in the last act because I sold out my dream and traded my will for love. I lived in my love. Sylvia loved me and she made me complete; I thought that since she saw me whole I was whole. I thought that only if I existed in her sight would I really exist. Then she stopped thinking of me after a while and went to bed with Samson there. She cried his name in her sleep.

I was living for the sake of love alone, you see. The dream that made the purpose for my soul...well, I gave it up to make itself, if anything, merely a product of our love. My dream became a love-inspired servant of our relationship. And valuable as our love-mate, soul-mate, help-mate relationship was, it would not rise to make itself master of a dream. But, in spite of facts in life, I existed for her.

SYLVIA: And if he was in my thoughts no longer...And had no dream to call his soul...

THE MAN: Quite right. I was unmade, you see...and had to die like the soul I gave her to crumple.

MARK: But you could come back?

THE MAN: As soon as I realized what I'd done. As soon as I discovered I could really exist only in my thoughts anyway. As soon as I came to know that I was just as incomplete with her as without. As soon as I realized whether I liked myself or not I was still existing.

Sylvia, put down that handkerchief. You know, crying makes you look absolutely insipid.

SYLVIA: I got carried away.

THE MAN: The hell you did. It just made you feel good. Go to bed with Samson or something. That'll make you feel better. Go on, now. I ex-

THE MAN (Cont.):

pect he needs you.

SYLVIA: Don't say that.

THE MAN: After all, we've done all we can for each other, really. Our relationship was what it was and we enjoyed it. I loved you more, I guess, than I could hate what you did.

SYLVIA: All right. I really want to go. I should shut the door, even though I-- Remember, I loved you too. As much as I can let myself love anyone.

THE MAN: Sure, I'll remember. Now go along.

((She goes; he gives her rear a pat to send her on.))

THE MAN: Go ahead, embrace him. You want it. That's right.

It's funny, but love isn't everything, you know. And it can only hurt just so much, this being without love. It really can't kill you, you know, unless you're a great fool.

THE HIGH PRIEST: You sit there and tell us you don't care if anyone loves you, accepts you, values your greatness. Yet, if no one sees your work, recognizes your genius, craves your company, or can value it, how can you possibly find motivation to do anything? You have just unmade your audience. And possibly your livelihood. You must have a reason, a motivation.

THE MAN: I didn't say I didn't care if I or my work was accepted. I just said that if it was not it could only hurt me just so much.

GREG: But what reason do you live for, if not for the recognition of and the contribution to the progress of the race of man?

THE MAN: Honor.

ELIZABETH: That's a very childish word, you know. And very outdated. What do you mean?

THE MAN: Self-actualization, I suppose. If I can really know what that means. Self-motivation, independance of environment.

THE HIGH PRIEST: All of that sounds very inviting, I admit. But why do you bother to tell us, if you're so independant? Why do we matter, if you no longer need an audience?

THE MAN: Because you're all here together, apparently to learn something. One big shared moment of truth, if you care to use that term. Because I want to help you find it, for the shere egotistical pleasure that I get from hearing myself talk, from being helped at times, from justifying myself and the universe through my art.

ELIZABETH: You're the most egotistical man I've ever met. You need to grow up. You just can't see the whole picture. (She looks in her compact)

THE MAN: Why should I? I'm in it.

HELENA: What do you want us to do? Please let him talk. Tell us, sir, what's your advice? That's important.

THE MAN: I guess you'll think it's childish, Elizabeth. I want you all to stop lying.

ELIZABETH: Lying?

THE MAN: Listen. Listen to me very carefully.

There's a music of honesty in this universe and I've never heard it before. All my life I've been seeking it and now, angrily living moment after more frustrating moment a tragic night of doubt, I hear it. There IS truth, People of Rome!

A music of truth sounding through life from the same Ultimate Cause that sends it pulsating through the vastness of the universe. Pretty literary, huh? I'M getting carried away? Indeed. I wish I could be carried out of this swamp of exhausted desire and misplaced passion. Oh, I know. "We all come into the light sometime." The glare blinds us. And you know the feeling as well as I do. We want to save ourselves; we feel we can pull ourselves out of our slough by our bootstraps. And then, we can explain it all away psychologically or in some other manner. And the glory all runs down into despair. We can explain all of it away except the fact that we did see something there, and we did come out hoping.

Well, I'm sick of these 'mornings after.' I'm not going to wake up. Nobody could make me want to.

You hate me for this -- this damned conceit of mine. I'm saying, "I've got truth and you don't." Who cares? Who really gives a damn? I have got truth, and it won't help you by itself. But just for fun, I'll prove it to you logically.

Ralph, you can back me up with objectivity.

THE HIGH PRIEST: The High Priest to you now.

THE MAN: Oh, you're prejudiced. Losing objectivity there just because I don't buy your brand. Careful, you just might become human. Hmm.

Well, I don't really need him. He'd have made things easier for my truth, but still he can't unmake me with even his twisted mind. Okay.

First of all, if everything is not relative, then there must be absolute truth. And if there is absolute truth, then we have to agree with it, or we're obsolved. But the assumption of absolute truth is too easy and pleasant. You aren't complete children, after all; you've been knocked around too much to believe anything's as simple as that. Obey your father and mother; thou shalt not commit adultery. Rules don't make

THE MAN (Cont.):

themselves that easily in all cases; black and white are hard to find.

Okay. Here. Everything's relative, see? The world is formed only in your minds. Everything is what you think it is. You believe something is valuable and True, then it is True.

I'm saying a man is valuable only in the sense that he serves that which he believes has value. A man sets up laws and dreams to guide his life and to make his way of living successful. Life is successful according to the yardstick that makes it a result in living. (On an eternal scale you can count your progeny as part of your life.)

Now, if you don't obey your rules of procedure for conducting your life, can you count your life's conduct as successful? It's pretty hard, unless you carry relativity to insanity. Even if there isn't any real absolute law, you're still gonna be out on a limb if you haven't been honest and fit in with what you think the universe is. In other words, by your own definition you aren't any more. You shouldn't exist. You have sinned, if you'll pardon the expression. You've missed the mark. You have unmade yourself. Your life is one big lie.

And so I find dishonesty at the basis of what makes people unhappy. I think basic honesty is, in fact, the prerequisite to existence.

MARK: Were you honest? You were dead, and now you live.

THE MAN: Good question. But I was dead in honesty even before they shot my corpse. Even before Sylvia betrayed me and destroyed all that was in the life I was seeking in her. I'd unmade myself by my own rules. The universe is ruled by an insane monster, I screamed. Life is a big joke. I am a joke. Nothing is worth anything. Nothing is anything. Nothing is. I am not.

He screamed, "There is no truth." I screamed, "There are only contradictions. There are no absolutes. There is only being." But I knew, deep inside, even though I couldn't prove it to anybody, much less myself, that there was more.

I did dream, you see. Oh, I was unfaithful to my dreams. I betrayed the whole universe, just as Sylvia betrayed me. But I did dream.

Don't you see, a man is made in dreams. Oh, he lives, he walks, he thinks, he loves. But if he does not dream, if he does not beg the infinite that dwells in him to surge outward in a burst of flame to match the universal fires of all his macrocosm, if he does not see the thing most desirable before him always, he is lost.

A man can become lost and carnal. Without the love of beauty most high, without the taste of victory in his mouth, he is nothing. He wanders in nothing and wallows in deceit and treachery. He is without hope.

At night you can see what makes a man hope and hear it on the still night wind. You look up at the sky and see the blazing pinpoints of white fire that are the stars, you feel the cold night wind and hear the rustling of the trees, you stand above the noises of the city and the

THE MAN (Cont):

foolish oblivion-seekers who huddle together in the night, and you can see what is. You can sense beauty; you can feel the outlines of a dream.

That is why our play began at night. Night is the time for dreaming and the time for making love. Dreaming and making love are not all of life and there are those who like to think that they are not important parts at all. Perhaps not. But it is a peculiar thing: those who dream and make love would have nothing about them but those things of love and dreams, and those who scoff and turn away only do so because they can never possess.

Possession and lack will be as they will be; they come and go, with luck. But we ourselves remain. The heroes in our little play.

Our drama began at night, at a party, and I suppose you can say it ends with one. I've always thought that funerals were very like parties, like going-away parties. We all wave good-bye to the coffin of the man with tears in our eyes, and then we go off somewhere to have a drink after the farewell. Well, I have a little farewell speech to make before I go off to move the heavens and the earth.

I am a dreamer, and I want to realize my dreams. And I haven't done it yet. I've been hoping, I've been expecting to someday find the strength to see it through (for I've begun the dream) and still, I haven't done it, yet.

But it's a funny thing. I know now the strength was in me, in me from the Truth out there, all the time. All I had to do was to admit to myself the state of grace I was living in.

All the gifts that I'd been given. God willed me me. I am myself. Nobody in all this wide world can unmake me. I don't have to please a damned soul.

You just have to wake up and realize where you stand and do something to make your dreaming come to live in your life.

Behold! I dream.

I lied, we all do, and now I know what the lie was. I can't keep on lying, not if I want to exist by definition. I know that; so I'm going to stop. Simple as that. I'm going to war with my past, do you hear? I'm going to forget those chains I wore. (rubs wrist sores) I'm going to forget it. All my life I've chained myself to things that didn't really mean anything, old ways of life that never did me a damned bit of good anyway, thinking somehow that those old ways of life were more me than I was. And when I ran out of old ways I chained myself to the chains themselves, just to hold on out of fear. Out of the fear that I knew deep inside; the fear that I'd unmade myself. Well, I didn't succeed. I couldn't chain myself forever. I've learned and the learning made me free.

It may hurt a little, it may hurt me more than anything I've ever done before, but once you learn a thing has to be done the best thing you can

THE MAN (Cont.):

do is forget about your self-denying doubts and do it. It's as simple as that. Move on it. Just move.

What a pep-talk! (sighs) Ha! But it's true. You see, you can change your world in a moment of forgetting . . .

Wherever you go and whatever you do, don't forget you'll still be you. There won't be any firey writing in the sky and no big signs. I know that I'll have to do it all myself. Or let the best part of me do it. I know what needs to be done and it will be done. I will let myself do it.

Don't be a fool and wait 'till morning to do it. Let the best out of your little prison now.

The dawn begins tonight. Hm.

I'm the Last Mortal Man and I've got the fields to plow before the morning...before I stop...before I die.

So long, suckers!

((THE MAN walks off, down into the audience, and out of the theatre, as if on parade.))

ELIZABETH: What are we supposed to say after an exit line like that?

GREG (calling after him): You forgot to pay for the drinks!

MARK: We're not supposed to say anything.

HELENA: We're . . . supposed to change our lives.

THE HIGH PRIEST: Maybe we laugh, maybe we sigh. But we go on living just the same, even if the playwright does want to make a 'self-actualized triumph' play out of the whole thing.

ELIZABETH: You're so wise, Ralph.

HELENA: What do we do now?

THE HIGH PRIEST: Forget. Everyone has moments of clarity and self-assurance. It's a well-known psychological phenomenon. It passes just like everything else. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. C'est la Vie, Que sera, sera, Illigitium non Carborundom. Damn.

It'll all pass. Already you're beginning to wonder what it was he said that made you feel so wonderfully free. But you're not free.

Things are as they always were. The dawn begins tonight? Hah! Put the dawn in its place, in the morning. Perhaps we could change it, but the chances are tomorrow will be just another day like yesterday and today. Always tomorrow. Tomorrow never is. You are the moment in which you live just as if you were a fish swimming only in time. Time is the measurement. If you are then, you are today. Tomorrow you will still be, and no differently. Accept; you really can't change. Accept.

HELENA: He sounded so convinced. Isn't there anything we can do? He thought he was doing something.

THE HIGH PRIEST: There is nothing that has not already been done. That is the riddle; but there are nothing but riddles.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

SAMSON: Because it's a sure thing nobody else will.

SYLVIA: What did you say?

SAMSON: You can't trust anybody. They'll never let you keep anything.

THE HIGH PRIEST: May the grace that comes through selflessness, the love of God the Creator, and communion in the Spirit of Man be and abide with you this day and forever. Even to the end of the world.

SYLVIA: I love you.

SAMSON: You love me now.

SYLVIA: Hold me close to you. Keep me warm.

((They do not kiss. A pause. SAMSON laughs.))

SYLVIA: What are you thinking of?

SAMSON: What he said before he left. The dawn begins tonight. Hum. My skin is black, like the night. Dawn comes, but the blackness won't go away.

SYLVIA: I love your blackness.

SAMSON: No, you love me in spite of my blackness. It is just part of me, that's all. When day dawns and the music-playing stops I'll see my hands again and live to hate myself. Sometimes it pleasures me to pollute those who hate me, making them butn as you do with the thought of me. But the pleasure does not last. I still hate myself. I cannot hate anyone enough to stop the hating of myself. Your friend there, the one who walked off; he had justification. But I'm down the tubes from the word go. My own skin imperfects me. I'm a big, black lie.

SYLVIA: Don't say things like that. They aren't your standards. They're just ours.

SAMSON: Hum. So you've brainwashed me. Do you think even without my color I'd be free? I'd still fall short, like your friend with the dream. I guess I'd rather play my horn than blow down the walls of the universe. I can't prove nothing.

You know, they set me free. I wanted to tell you that. The emancipation proclamation guarentees freedom, did you know that? Why don't they write one for the whites, too? Because you know what? Freedom, hah! I'm just as enslaved as all the rest of you. (he kisses a peck on SYLVIA's nose) Good-bye, honey. Take care.

((He exits right into the audience and leaves the hall, snapping fingers.))

SYLVIA: Adieu. I will. Forever. I love you. I think. As you grow farther away, I know it.

MARK: Why must there always be mornings?

HELENA: So there'll be other nights...with you.

MARK: It's been some cliff-hanger of a play, hasn't it?

HELENA: Mark, let's go where we can be alone.

MARK: Now?

HELENA: Let's go away. Nobody'll miss us.

MARK: But the play's not over yet.

HELENA: It's never over. Mark?

MARK: All right. I buy -- I buy! As they say in the land of the almost-living. wow... Let's go.

HELENA: I'm with you.

MARK: Off into the sunset...

((They exit to the left backstage.))

RALPH: And now there's nothing left but me and a coffin, and the last of the guests. The party's over. And you'll all be going home soon. Home to forget and get back to your lies and doubts. I suppose I should say something especially significant right now. But I can't tell you anything for certain. I wish I could, but I can't.

And now I must thank the host before I leave. That's convention.

((ELIZABETH and GREG stand and RALPH goes to them and shakes hands in farewell.))

RALPH: Elizabeth, Gregory, it's been a wonderful time. I hope we get the chance to get together some time again in the near future. It's shocking we don't get together more often.

GREG: It's been great having you.

ELIZABETH: We really would have it any other way.

RALPH: No, I'm quite sure it wouldn't have happened any other way, whether you had anything to do with it or not. That's fate.

ELIZABETH: Oh, Ralph, you're just the funniest thing.

RALPH: It's not my fault. (turns to SYLVIA) You're still here, aren't you? Want a ride home? Your date kind of walked out on you.

SYLVIA: I'll love you.

RALPH: Of course you will. I mean, fidelity isn't in your nature. Poor thing. No matter how often they infect you, you still need them much more than you'll let yourself love any one of them.

ELIZABETH: What do you want for an exit, Ralph?

GREG: How about a fireworks display?

RALPH: I don't know. Somehow that doesn't seem dramatic enough.

SYLVIA: I don't like to leave parties. I always feel I might be missing something.

GREG: How about a tragic ending?

ELIZABETH: Yes, that way they wouldn't say we were a farce.

RALPH: Yes, you could die and end it off with a poignant bang. Death is always so final. And it's really in keeping with realism, because people do at the end, you know. We do want to satisfy our audience that the play is realistic.

ELIZABETH: How about— Oh, I can just see the way it'll look. We'll go back there to that bed and fall down, as if struck by lightning, in each others arms.

GREG: That way we wouldn't have any distractions.

ELIZABETH: Amours venis vincent, or however you say that in Latin.

GREG: Liz is really creative, isn't she? Genius.

RALPH: Sounds good, I'll admit, and very final. But are you sure it'll be realistic? I mean, I never thought you two were quite the Romeo and Juliet types. I mean, you were never ones to let love get in the way of realistic considerations.

GREG: Oh, that's nothing. I mean, we wear masks anyway. All we have to do is change them, and then everything'll be just as realistic as it was before. We'd be just as honest as we always are. Really, I mean. And it would be so much more fun. After all, what we've shown of ourselves in this play already has been just a pack of lies, the pack of lies that makes us complete and one with society. We can complete ourselves another way if we really want to. Just change masks. There are so many different ones to be worn, you can never get to know where the flaws lie. We've been carrying the banner of social stability --

ELIZABETH: And now we can carry the banner of love.

GREG: You see, we need our masks. Society can make us whole, by seeing us as if we were whole. I mean, relatively speaking. For instance, her mask makes her beautiful --

ELIZABETH: And yours hides you from the goals you never reached.

GREG: Of course. She loves her.

ELIZABETH: And he needs his.

GREG: Of course.

RALPH: But you people are living a lie. We can't leave the audience with that to sleep on.

GREG: Oh, they have their own lies. If anything, they should worry about that. That isn't any of our doing, not directly. And so far as we're concerned, we don't want to change things.

ELIZABETH: It would only change things for the worst. We're happy as we are. Our masks love each other.

GREG: We couldn't face truth without some kind of a mask, could we?

ELIZABETH: Who wants honesty, anyway, if it's so ugly?

GREG: You see, it's all we can do to mold ourselves to the way of life we picked out. We think it should be right, even if it isn't. Maybe we were just born into it, but I like to think we chose it.

ELIZABETH: Yes, Ralph. After all, that makes them our masks. (takes GREG's arm)

RALPH: All right, then. Go backstage and good luck with it.

BOTH: Thank you.

((They go backstage by different sides.))

RALPH: Let's wait until they're finished. Everybody should have his moment of -- truth, you know.

GREG (Off): Hey, Ralph, are we going to have a happy ending after this?

ELIZABETH (Off): Yes. I always like a happy ending.

SYLVIA: I could kiss you.

RALPH: Ah, yes, you could. That would do it. (to the others:) Yes, everything's going to turn out right after all.

GREG (Off): Ah, that makes me feel better.

ELIZABETH (Off): Me too.

RALPH: Well, that's an improvement. That's almost perfect. All set back there?

GREG: Okay. New masks and everything.

ELIZABETH: Yes, we are.

RALPH: All right. Lights, please.

((Lights coming up reveal ELIZABETH and GREG facing each other, both mask-

ed, across the bed. GREG wears most of his uniform from ACT II, or at least the trim.))

GREG: I have done the state some service and they know't —
 No more of that. I pray you, in your letters
 Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
 Nor aught set down in malices then must you speak
 Of one that loved not wisely but too many.
 Though Birnham wood be come to Dunsfanne,
 And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,
 Yet I will try the last. Before my body
 I throw my warlike shield. Be cozy now to men of grosser blood
 And teach them now to war!
 Had I but time — as this fell sergeant, death,
 Is strict in his arrest — Oh, I could tell you —
 But let it be. —Horatio, I am dead (dying of bitches);
 Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright
 To be unsatisfied.

((He dies, falling on his back across the bed.))

ELIZABETH: Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
 And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!
 What's here? A cup, clos'd in my true love's hand?
 Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:—
 O churl! drink all, and leave no friendly drop
 To help me after? — I will kiss thy lips;
 Haply some poison doth yet hang on them,
 To make me die with a restorative. (kisses him)
 Thy lips are warm!

SYLVIA: Oh, kiss me, Ralph. Please.

ELIZABETH: Yea, noise? — then I'll be brief — O, happy dagger! (she snatches a rubber knife from GREG's belt, of ACT II) This is thy sheath (stabs herself); there rest and let me die.

((She falls on GREG's body and dies. The lights dim behind as GREG and ELIZABETH arrange themselves to die in each others arms. SYLVIA and RALPH are left in a pool of light.))

RALPH: It's over. It's all over.

SYLVIA: It's just beginning. The sun's coming up.

RALPH: Wasn't it perfect oblivion for them? They're complete now, in an embrace. They need nothing save themselves. Hum. What is your name?

SYLVIA: Sylvia.

RALPH: Sylvia. It appeals to me. You are different from me. Your body is different. Kiss me; isn't that the appropriate thing we should do to begin things?

SYLVIA: Oh yes. We should kiss. Then, later on...

RALPH: Life will find a way, won't it?

SYLVIA: We can't fight it. It's bigger than both of us.

RALPH: But my dreams.

SYLVIA: Dream of me. It's easier.

RALPH: I should say yes, I suppose...

SYLVIA: It's the thing to do.

RALPH: It's funny. We search for the Answer, the ever-present Why.

SYLVIA: Yes, is the answer.

RALPH: I know. It is the only answer.

(they kiss, finishing an embrace)

((Blackout. The curtain falls.))

finis