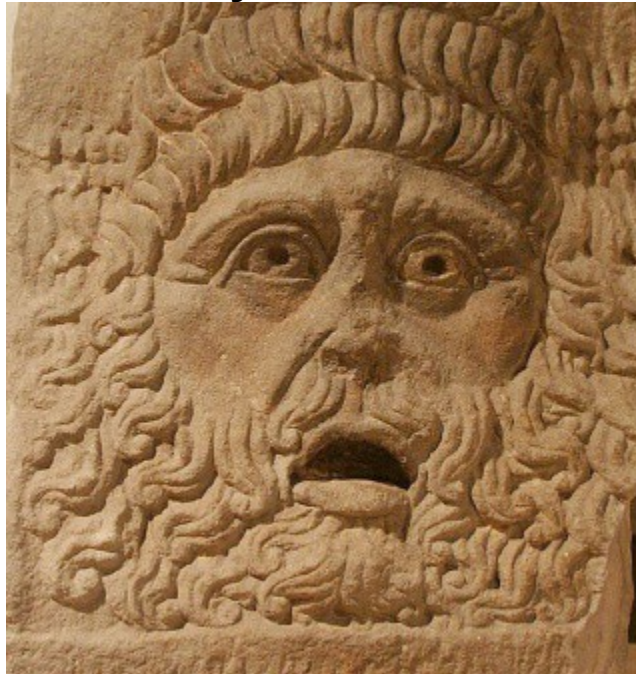


**Royalty Free Short Monologues
& One-Act Plays:
For High Schools and Older Teens
by Rick Doble**



Relief of a Tragedy Mask, Barcelona, circa 1st century, from the Roman Walls.
Archaeology Museum of Catalonia (Barcelona) (commons.wikimedia.org)

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Students, schools and non-profit organizations may perform these dramatic works at no cost but they need to credit the author, Rick Doble, and send him an email stating when and where there will be a performance of the work and the manner in which he was credited, e.g., in the printed program, on a poster or an online announcement.

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List Of Performances Of These Works

Monologues

- 2 monologues included in: *Millennium Monologs, 95 contemporary characterizations for young actors*, Edited by Gerald Lee Ratliff, Meriwether Publishing Limited, 2002.
- since 1997, 60,000+ individuals came to Rick Doble's drama website section and read an average 2 1/2 works each resulting in monologues read 150,000 times
- seven drama sites worldwide linked to this web site
- Doble received over 225 email requests to perform monologues
- performances were held at the *Texas State Thespian Festival* (2004)
- Doble gave permission to make monologues available throughout South Africa and neighboring African countries via the National Drama Library in Bloemfontein, South Africa in 2004
- a performance at the *Actor's Studio* in New York City, USA

Ghost Play, a one-act play performed around world

- at the Bruce House Learning Centre, Covent Garden, London, UK (2013)
- at the East Providence Community Theater, Providence, Rhode Island, USA (2004) -- a full scale production with music created just for the play plus an encore presentation
- at Arizona State University, Phoenix, AZ, USA -- as an audio drama (2004)
- at St. Scholastica's Academy of Marikina, The Philippines (2001)
- at a class studying Greek drama in Savannah, Georgia, USA (2000) (the play is based on Greek drama)
- at a school in Ontario, Canada
- at a school in South Africa

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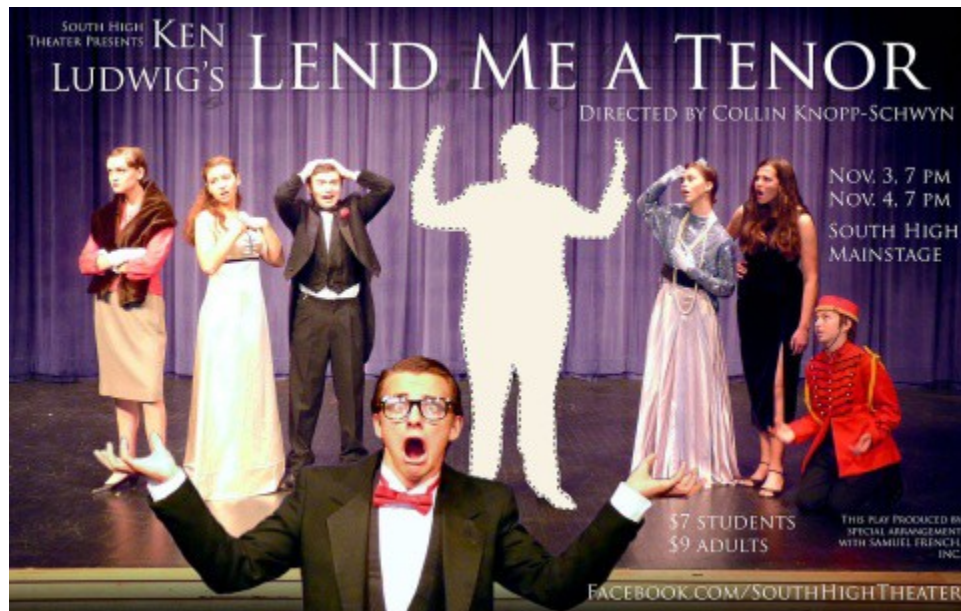
DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

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One reviewer wrote about these works: "Dramatic monologues that have contemporary spunk."

Half of these monologues are spoken by women and half by men. These are stories of the experience of love at different ages. These monologues have been performed all over the world by amateur and professional actors alike, including actors at the Actors Studio in New York City. Two of these monologues have been included in the collection *Millenium Monologs* (available on Amazon) with other authors such as Mark Twain and Arthur Miller.

Millennium Monologs, 95 contemporary characterizations for young actors,
Edited by Gerald Lee Ratliff, 262 pages, \$15.95, Colorado Springs: Meriwether Publishing Limited, 2002.



Poster for a high school drama production. (commons.wikimedia.org)

1. *Beach Music*

(Word count = 693)

Usually, I can sleep like a stone.

Lightning seeking the ground next to my bedroom, or birds calling loudly in the morning, have never bothered me. So why am I listening to the slight whine of box springs in the room I rented?

My boarders are softly rocking. Through the plaster walls I hear their breathing, his sudden puff of air. Then the springs ebb to silence, and what's left is the rhythm of their snores. But still I cannot sleep.

I came to St. Augustine to find a husband. And after two years, all I've got is three jobs and a hundred dancing shoes.

Twice a week I instruct retired men in the art of shagging. It's the one job that I really enjoy. And they flirt with me, always ask me to marry them, maybe a little seriously at times. We laugh and even pretend that I will, until it's ten o'clock. Then we close for the night.

They're nice, these older men. They think I'm beautiful and treat me with respect. Although, I admit, on bad days I giggle only to keep them coming back. On those nights, I feel heavy, clumsy; their touch and smell make my skin crawl. But I smile and snuggle into their shoulders anyway. Next time, when I'm in a better mood, I may want them, so I chose not to spoil things.

My day job at the University is full of paper and procedure, and I often long for another's touch. So on good evenings I kick off my shoes and dance barefoot with all the men who have come just for me. And later when I lie here, I can feel each of their wrinkled hands on my waist, my shoulder, the weight and pull of their flesh. It's like having ridden a car for hours, responding to its motion even after it's come to rest.

And then I think of my high school boyfriend, gentle, quiet, angry, who took me swimming in the cool rivers of the Georgia foot hills. My first lover, a married man, who held me so carefully I felt like a bowl he was afraid to spill. And my fiance whose touch felt like flower petals, until he scrapped my skin like rose stems, and our wedding plans ended.

But of course who I really want is my husband. I've always believed that one day I'd find "him," and he would fully hold me, envelop me like no one ever has, make

me whole.

Still, where he is, is a mystery.

I am the oldest of a family of five children and none of us has married or stayed married. My parent's relationship was strained at best. As kids we ran between the vacant rooms of their boarding house, while my mother changed the sheets, swept the remains of the night before into a waste paper basket. Guests liked us, because she would never tell what she heard or saw.

The house became a game of hide and seek between the wishes of Mom and Dad, each of us learning how to play their contradictions to our advantage. I guess I sided with Father, Mother seemed so cold. Dad was ineffectual and moralistic, but always had time for me, made me feel I was his "girl."

*

I reach for a glass of water on my window sill when a flash of lightning illuminates my room. The walls, my oak bureau, the pictures of my family are now bathed in a steel blue light. I sit up and look down on the outside just as another vein cuts across the sky. It glows on the tree tops, the shiny lawns below. Dark rain like a curtain follows, tapping on my glass.

And then the voice begins to fade, the one that's been keeping me awake. I slide back beneath my soft covers, feel as though I'm floating.

And now at last I can feel sleep near me; it's coming closer, over taking. It wraps itself around me. I fall into its stream.

2. Heading South

(Word count = 1060)

My father has decided I'm a failure, but won't say so to my face.

At this moment I'm staring down into the Baltimore tunnel, while our Thanksgiving visit replays in my brain. It's like a bad pop song I can't shake.

I'm dazed by hours of driving, the ribbon of highway rolling, rolling under my wagon. I've decided to head south for parts unknown: New England in the side-view mirror, magnolias up ahead. The radio blares away, and it feels like we're falling down the east coast.

In the back seat, is my new young wife with our two children, a baby and a toddler. Genny, is the one all the fuss is about. When memories of those caring, stern looks of Father and Mother overwhelm me, I look in the rear-view, and it's like coming up for air.

I can't say my life makes sense right now.

I think I'm going to settle in Georgia or Alabama. Revive my contracting business, go where people don't look at me and ask why I didn't finish college. Or why I left my family on Long Island for our baby sitter.

Over the holiday my father spoke to me amiably enough, about his law practice, about the private school where he serves on the board. About the time he carried the ball for Harvard in the fourth quarter and succeeded in getting it to the second yard line before they were overwhelmed by Princeton and lost.

"It was the proudest moment of my life and still is," he announces. This story is like a mirror he has held up to himself and others over the years.

"I'm sure your days of being a champion have the same meaning for you," he says as he studies my face, trying to determine how I got off the track.

Father calls anyone who competes a "champion," the way he calls all students at the private school "doctor." I won a couple of local ski jumping contests and came in third once in a regional.

But I didn't do it for the glory.

I did it, instead, for the incredible serenity that I've only known twice in my life. First, when I was flying then floating, just me and the wind, over the silent fans who for a few long moments were so irrelevant.

The other, when Genny and I make love.

"I remember when you twisted your leg after a bad landing and had a cast on for months. But you went right back to competing, to being a champion."

His face has settled into a landscape of handsome wrinkles, like the Massachusetts mountains where they live. One brow is permanently higher than the other. Very distinguished.

*

The day after Thanksgiving, Mother and I go for a drive alone. Following long disguised inquiries about my state of mind, she at last confides in me.

"Your father asked for a divorce this fall."

I'm dutifully silent as she weaves the Mercedes through a light snow dusting the roads.

"To his secretary," she laughed. "I mean couldn't he be more original? And I told him flatly no, never! I care about him too much, and I think he does about me, to get carried away by a passing infatuation."

My mother has one of her perpetual colds and sniffles the whole time. She dabs her nose with a tissue, for emphasis, I think.

"And you know, Gerald, I really do believe he was relieved. He cleared his throat more times than I can remember, and shuffled his papers on his desk, but in the end, he was glad I put my foot down . . . Now we're happier than we've been in a while."

Then, like a concerned grandmother, she changes the subject to the babies. She delicately inquires about Genevieve and our plans for the future, while letting me know I can't discuss her marriage. That I should be grateful she still talks to me.

The snow becomes heavy, so we head back to their house overlooking the lakes and the valley. As we climb the steep drive she suddenly blurts, "Why do we save our best face for others and show our worst face to those we love?" And cries for one of the few times I can remember. I hand her a Kleenex.

Before dinner I go back upstairs to the east wing and walk down the long hall of the "children's side" of their home. I open the door, peer into my old room. It's almost the way I left it, chock full of hockey sticks, pennants, footballs, skis, and trophies.

After dinner everyone ends up in the den. It is dark, cozy with leather couches you

can really settle into. My wife and I grab one and pass the babies back and forth. My aunt crochets, my mother wraps herself in a handmade shawl. My father comments. We watch TV to avoid talking about my brother and sister. They're gone on a deluxe ski trip to Switzerland with their families.

Thanksgiving behind us, Genny and I leave early in the morning. Everyone comes out to wave as we drop down the hill in my aging station wagon. For the first time I realize my mother's smile is as hard and delicate as the Massachusetts snows.

*

Now we've been driving all day. I can see the sun setting in the side-view like a fire I'm fleeing.

Also I've been watching Genny in the mirror: the baby reaching up to her, suckling her, sleeping in her arms; the toddler putting his fingers in her mouth, wiping her with saliva, milk, and graham crackers.

From the back I hear her quiet voice, "Gerry, we need to find a motel soon, I don't think I can last much longer."

I know that tone, soft and firm. I exit at the first food-fuel-lodging sign on the interstate, and we race down a strip of plastic restaurants to a Comfort Inn.

I look in the rear-view to check on Genny. She's asleep with the toddler curled up on her lap and the baby nursing from her open blouse. A soft neon glow mixes with the leftover sunset as I signal my turn.

But in the middle of the parking lot, I step on the brakes, bringing our wagon to a halt. My eyes glazed, blurred and filling with tears, I'm having trouble seeing.

3. *The Limelight*

(Word count = 749)

You don't know my name, but you'd know my face.

I've been in dozens of movies and TV dramas, in supporting roles. I play bad guys: the dirty cop who's trafficking in drugs, the company hatchet man who hires goons to beat up the workers, the good friend who's screwing his best friend's girl.

The director who taught me how to act says she turns the TV off when a knee goes into my groin for the third time. None of us likes the cardboard villain I've become. But I make a living. Have succeeded where most of my friends have failed, although my passion used to be O'Neil and Tennessee Williams.

It wasn't always like this. At first I had leading roles, even got reviews describing me as thoughtful and sensitive. But it's been so long, I couldn't get it up for that type of work anymore.

Only kidding. I have a beautiful wife and a marriage, the envy of the industry. It's just these alimony payments I resent, that have always forced me to take any part that's offered. And if you know the movie biz, it means that once they've got you pegged, you're stuck. You have to take it when and where they give it to you, or your name's no longer up in lights.

You see, my first wife, elegant, slim, devastatingly alluring, my high school sweetheart, is bleeding me dry as she has for years. She owns a percent of me, I guess you'd say.

When I played Hamlet in college, she waited for me in the wings. After my eleven curtain calls, we drove out in her mother's station wagon and spent the night in a pasture making full use of the fold down back seat. I remember moaning like a bull, like Hamlet would have if he'd ever had Ophelia. And I knew then that our life was going to be perfect, me in profound starring roles, Pamela at my side, waiting in my dressing room along with a penthouse in New York and L.A.

Then I started to get the work I wanted. Major films, beautiful talented leading ladies. But that was the problem. Because Pamela became quiet, moody, paced on the edge of the set, suspicious of every woman I caressed under the lights.

It got so directors wouldn't let her on location. And I got so I couldn't act if she was there watching me. But then I became distracted, thinking about her brooding at our apartment in New York, when I would have to call her at the end of the day and

hear a flood of anger, the latest rumors she had read in the tabloids about my heroine.

So our marriage ended.

And I remarried a woman like myself, who plays secondary characters, who has given me three beautiful children, who loves me and understands the business, who is there when I need her.

What more could a man ask?

I guess we always think of what could have been, what I was so close to being, like the tragic heroes I used to play. Who aspired to greatness and inevitably failed, whose restless, unsatisfied lives drove them to desperation, so that at the end of the movie they drove their car off a bridge, crashing through an ornate iron railing, to fall slowly, romantically into a cold churning river.

But I know very little about life. All I've been around since college is the inside of a studio or a frantic schedule on location. The rest of the world beyond the sets is unclear. When I finish a job, I mope around our apartment. I feel empty, out of touch, like a cop without a criminal to chase. I have no desire to go out; my friends are usually filming.

You see I'm addicted to my work. Even these villains who don't require me to stretch, whose sneers I can give you on demand. I've grown fond of them in a way. They're so slippery, they have no honor. Unless they're caught with the goods, smoking gun in hand, they'll deny everything, convince you their accuser is lying.

"So what'll it be, Jecko? You wanta come in with me on this deal? It's easy. A piece of cake. The cops are so stupid they'll never get it figured and no one gets hurt. No one! You see the insurance'll cover the loss. It's the perfect scam. Come on, do it. You can trust me."

4. Invasion

(Word count = 808)

Last night I woke, sweat soaking my pillow.

It's been so many years. I thought that it was behind me. The faces of men I barely knew, Katrinski, Pajoli, Myerschmidt, their hard smiles playing under my eyelids like the flash of artillery fire. Years ago my wife thought that I was suffering from battle memories, from what they call now "post traumatic stress disorder," when I was a graduate student. Which in a way is true. During the war I bought myself precious time. With my desk job in the army, with the skills I learned in college, I managed to delete my name from the roster of soldiers to be shipped off to battle in Okinawa. None ever returned.

I was the first in my family to go to a university, and I knew then that I would move on, get my Ph.D., make my mark.

So I never regretted what I did. I accepted the burden that is given to all men of greatness when they must go against the grain. And usually I forget the men I saw shipping out on LST's, knapsacks bulging, smiling from behind their dread. They wished me luck, told me they'd be back soon, said that in no time we would be sitting down, laughing over a beer.

Today I am famous; I discovered a blood cell that's been named after me. It has brought me prize after prize, saved countless people.

It's just at these conferences when I stay at modern hotels, which have always reminded me of army housing, in their sameness no matter where I am, Barcelona, Tokyo, Miami, Rio, that I can see them more clearly. Barely literate men, men who would have gone back to being plumbers and carpenters and taxi drivers.

I knew that I was not one of them.

Of course, we went to the bars, because we were there, thrown in together. Some almost became friends, a few I shared my vision with: of returning to school, looking deep into ourselves and making an important discovery.

Which is all the justification I need for what I did, because my work, has saved a hundred Katrinskis and Pajolis.

It's only occasionally when I'm looking out at a foreign ocean with the sound of waves breaking, like the post where I was stationed, that I think about it.

Most of the time I don't remember.

*

My husband is gone to a conference. And I worry about him when he's away. I miss him, sure. But he doesn't realize how often he still dreams his regular nightmare. About three I often wake to see him clawing at the sky.

He thinks I don't know. Which in a way is true. I don't understand what war means to men, what promises they've made to each other, which they're allowed to break. He will never tell me.

But over the nights, when he talked in his sleep during the early years we were married, I put together a quilt of what had happened. At first it was a crazy pattern. But then I stood back, and I saw it, saw what he had done. I felt shivers falling through me, and I held him tight until he stopped kicking, and we fell back to dozing.

The next morning I felt a kind of tired I'd never known before, as though my feet were made of stone. And he barked at me the way he usually does after one of his dreams. I said I hadn't slept well, the full moon kept coming through the window, and he made one of those swallowed laughs men make when they think women are crazy. In the afternoon when a storm approached, I trembled, like I'd seem him do, at the thunder far off in the distance. Then I took a nap, but it was as though bullets and bombs were raining down on me.

However, that was years ago.

Sometime today he'll call me from wherever he is in the world, and he'll think he's just checking on the small farm we keep, the sheep, the goats, the chores he left for me to do, and I'll tell him everything is fine, except that the hoof we've been having trouble with still isn't right. And he'll take a deep breath and say it's good to hear your voice, and I'll agree, and then he'll blow me a kiss through the phone, and we'll hang up.

But I can tell by the pitch in his throat, how bad it was last night. And just talking to me usually does the trick, even when he's in a bad mood, dishing out his gloom, cutting me to pieces, because he knows I love him. And whatever happened, he did for us, even though I didn't know him when he was a soldier. He did what he believed in.

5. Duplicity

(Word count = 645)

I told my wife about my lover. I felt I ought to as the end is coming nigh. I wanted to tie up loose ends.

I didn't try to sugar coat it; I miss Jennifer now she's left town. The way I've started to miss my wife, knowing we won't be together that much longer.

My wife is small, independent, part Eskimo, met her in Alaska when I was doing field work. She'll do okay without me, you can't keep her down, but I know it's hard.

I'm an anthropologist who writes poetry. And it looks like I won't get far enough in either discipline to make a difference. Not even a footnote in some damn dissertation.

Cancer is eating me away. I've started to have that thin, gaunt look. I find I spend most of the day reclining in my chair. I tire easily and day dream of Jennifer who tasted like the bread my father used to bake. He'd never let me cut it with a knife. Said it had a better flavor when you tore the crust in your hands. When you spread butter onto it, hot and jagged.

He had come so far in life, a master baker, son of wheat farmers in the Midwest. As a boy I remember him making loaves on weekends, just for himself. Kneading the dough, letting it rise, filling the house with his scent.

I went even farther, first son to go to college, then graduate school. "Why did I need so much schooling?" my parents asked me for the entire five years I was getting my doctoral degree. I never could explain it to them. It gave me such freedom to understand traditions from within, to pick and chose my gods.

There's an old story about Alaska. An anthropologist offended his host when he wouldn't sleep with the Eskimo's wife, as was the custom. It took him days to explain that it wasn't because she was ugly, or that he didn't like her tribe. Finally they compromised. She chewed the leather on his parka to soften it, instead.

I've no regrets about Jennifer and the hours I spent savoring her roundness, her hands that made my skin feel as though warm water were gently pouring over it. We recited poetry we'd memorized like foreplay. And after we made love, we'd lie there in the quiet we had created, before I fell asleep. But then I always woke quickly thinking I smelled my father's oven.

Yet today when I look at my wife, who rarely cries, and see her eyes heavy with tears, see her trying to forgive and understand me, before letting herself feel the anger she should feel, I know I can't live with myself.

I turn my face and remember us courting in Alaska. It was early spring, only 20 degrees below. We went for walks in the bright full moon, almost like day light reflecting off the blue snow, looking for fox and rabbit tracks. She found a cavern, hollowed out by the wind. She pulled me inside and we kissed with our parka tops flung back, in this place where our lips wouldn't freeze. Then we hiked back to my cabin in our snowshoes and went to bed for days.

Loving two women is merely a fact of my life.

My wife so practical, in charge, a small whirlwind. My lover well read, insecure, playful, big boned as my Dad used to say.

Even before she knew, my wife never liked Jennifer. Nor Jennifer my wife. How odd it is that I can contain them both.

And now, especially now, I'm glad. I think of them like Indian spirits, the big and little sisters, who come to you and guide you. They are what I'm holding on to, looking for, to take me from this world into the next.

6. If a Plane Crashed Exactly on the US-Canadian Border, Where Would They Bury the Survivors?

(Word count = 868)

It is the morning after Christmas and I cannot sleep. I hear my second husband, on the far side of our king-size bed, snoring like an innocent babe, while tears fill my eyes and wet my silk night gown.

I wish that I were somewhere else, anywhere but here.

And who knows, I may be soon. And then I'll be free of this childhood friend I married late in life, who never has an illness and can't understand others who do, who lives for nothing more than tuning up his MG sports car, his vast matchbook collection from restaurants and clubs, his library of jokes from the New Yorker.

"Many are cold, but few are frozen," he tells my visiting nephew when he arrives in a snow storm. He doesn't get it, so Albert explains, "Many are called, but few are chosen." And the boy giggles; he's just the right age to find that funny. To me it's like the annoying clank of weights Albert lifts in the afternoon. It sends shudders through me when the barbells drop onto their cradle, and he groans for more.

"Albert Pace ran a race

Up and down the fireplace

He stubbed his toes and broke his nose

And that's the way the story goes"

My sisters and I used to skip rope to that jingle about him when we were kids. I can't remember who made it up. I laughed at him when we were young and later when he was in college, some small college here in the Midwest because he could never get into a good one in the East like my brothers. And he wanted to marry me then, and I said never, never. Never!

But after my first marriage ended, there he was again. And he wanted me so badly, and I wanted to be wanted so badly that I took him, took him for my husband.

It's four going on five. I can tell by the glowing trick clock he bought for our bedroom, where the hands are mounted on clear plastic and are moved by nothing visible.

That's how I feel. I am being moved by nothing I can see because the marrow in my bones, the substance I never thought about, is no longer making white cells,

something else I never ever thought about. And I am looking paler, and losing weight, and next Christmas I will not be here.

So I wake up after a couple of hours sleep, and my body is aching for my first husband, who I wasn't able to really love. Who gave me two beautiful children, who bought me this expensive house, who didn't go to college but made more money than any of my brothers, who my parents didn't like. Whose love making I once made fun of at a family dinner.

Maybe I am getting what I deserve. How could I have been so cruel to him?

Why didn't I know I loved him until he had handed me a bundle of stocks, and had gone to his new wife in Chicago, leaving me back here in the suburbs? For years I could only see him dazzled by some young frilly thing, while he deserted me faithful and true.

But I know that isn't so.

Randall, I do love you. Did love you. And I don't understand why it took until now for me to say it, even to myself. And what I would give to feel you heavy on top of me.

Albert rolls over, and for a minute I think he is going to wake. He reaches toward me, but it is a reflex of the comatose; soon he is back in dream land.

He's so happy here with me. I never dared tell him other-wise. What was the point? We had made our late life decisions, and that was that. I could not stand the scrutiny of my family over another marriage gone bad.

So from now on it's me and Albert, Albert and me.

I'm beginning now to see light in the windows, and it's only about this time that I'm able to doze off. In the early morning my thoughts grow softer.

I think of the summer when I'm in the kitchen helping the maid. I look out the window at Albert in his bathing suit, a high ball in his hand, dark glasses pushed up on top of his head. The radio baseball game is wafting loud and soft in the wind. He is slowly working his way around the pool with a long vacuum pole, sucking leaves and other debris off the bottom. He does look handsome, I have to admit. In a few minutes the neighborhood kids will arrive for a swim while he supervises them. And then he'll be laughing and telling them more of his jokes. Especially the long one they all know about the magazine photographer in Korea, but they like to hear again because he improvises a little each time, leading up to the punch line.

"Oh, sweet Mr. Rhee of Life, at last I have found you."

And when I think of this, even I have to smile. And I imagine that I'm happy.

7. *All My Tomorrows*

(Word count = 607)

Chester Maddox, you devil!

I rode for two hours in the snow to see you. An old friend from Carson Mills gave me a ride. You know, I wrote weeks ago I'd be there this weekend. But you didn't show.

I've really had it with you, I have.

For twenty years I've spent each afternoon, following your devious ways. Like the time you tricked Cynthia into marriage, then abandoned her after she lost her memory in some town out west. Now, I'm not forgetting you tried to redeem yourself. You did rescue the young girl from that mob of terrorists, but only because Jessie asked. We all knew, of course, that Jessica was your one true love.

Oh yes, I can see through you: handsome and dashing, able to charm them all, even those who don't want to trust you.

But this time I'm finished.

I've written you for years, let you know every detail of my life. And even though you never answered, I felt a bond had grown between us. So when I read you'd be this close, that the entire cast of *All My Tomorrows* would be in Providence, I made sure I'd meet you. I waited an hour in the freezing cold.

Chester Maddox what am I going to do about you?

I'm here at my window watching my ducks across the water near the point. Tears of anger are filling my eyes at what you've done to me. But I'm not the first. And I suppose I won't be the last. I'm lying on the couch in my "jelly" house -- it used to sit on the highway where they sold jams and such to the tourists before it was moved. In spite of today I feel so lucky. I have this cozy little place I can afford, because, you know, there are all those expensive mansions across the way. And I've got my cats and my beloved ducks on my pond.

I retired here -- I'm sure I wrote you about it -- from the mill where I'd worked my way over the years to floor manager, 2nd shift. My friends were certain I'd be lonely, away from the clacking looms.

But you know, Chester, I really don't miss it.

I feed the wild mallards and know each of their ducklings by sight. My cats with

bells around their throats run free in the grave yard. I watch the seasons change through my picture window, from white to brown to green and back; the sun glances through the plate glass differently each month. In winter the TV's good, in summer it's all reruns.

Except yours, Chester.

Each afternoon I see your life progressing with mine, as we grow old together. You've lasted so long you're almost treated with respect, achieved a certain status by surviving.

Odd for such a scoundrel as you.

Oh dear, it's getting dark. Where are my cats? I guess I'm going to have to call them, stand on the porch, bang my spoon and sauce pan. They're such devils staying out so late.

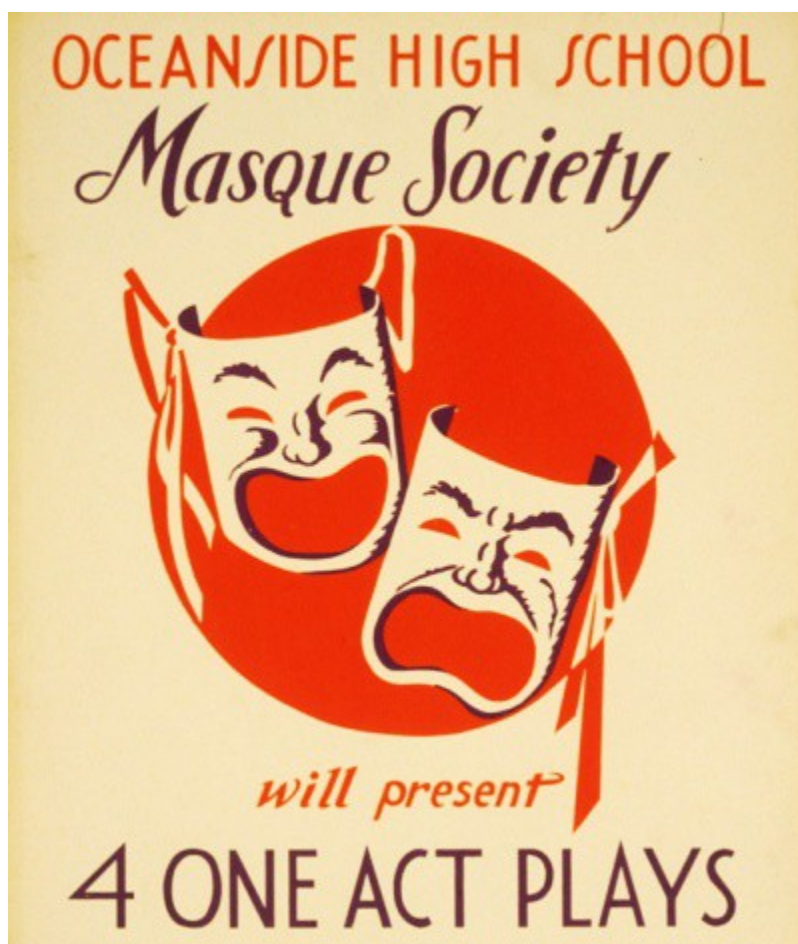
And after I finally coax them home, I'll feed them and brush their fur. Then I'll open a can of soup, and settle back onto this couch to watch those sitcoms I don't like nearly as much as my soaps. But that's life and I have to accept it -- in the evening that's about all there is.

And on Monday we'll see about you, Mr. Maddox.

When two o'clock, rolls around, I might not watch *All My Tomorrows*, just to get even. Except knowing you, I won't be able to resist.

So I probably will.

ONE-ACT PLAYS



Poster from the Oceanside High School Masque Society in their presentation of four one-act plays. (commons.wikimedia.org)

GHOST PLAY

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NOTE: Ghost Play has been performed in the Philippines, the U.K., India and is in the library system in South Africa. It was also part of a deluxe production, called *Eerie Evenings*, and performed with original music at the East Providence Community Theater in Providence, Rhode Island, which included an encore showing.

A play with music in one act, seven scenes.

A modern-ancient drama which tells a story of dreams, memories and ambition.

This play is based loosely on elements of Greek tragedy.

It came about as a result of a series of dreams by the author.

Characters

Seth: the hero, an executive in a multi-national, multi-billion dollar company.

Seth's Wife, Laura: a loyal corporate wife and mother.

The Ghost: dressed in a white robe with leaves covering its head, it is neither man or woman. Under its robe is a skeleton suit. It resembles the Irish description of a Banshee.

Seth's Secretary, Molly; Chairman Of The Board; Psychiatrist; Police

Sergeant; Policewoman: All of the above could be played by the same person, or one woman could play a couple of parts and one man could play the rest.

The Chorus: Office Workers; Board Members; People At Police Station;

Criminals In Jail: All of these are played by the same actors - I would suggest a minimum of four - two women and two men. The above act like a Greek chorus.

They can speak the lines in unison or individuals can speak the lines in sequence. When the props are being changed, the chorus members might change the sets.

Setting: The present day. A modern suburban setting.

Scenes:

As in traditional Greek drama the action takes place over a twenty-four hour period.

- 1: Seth's office - 9 AM.
- 2: Meeting room at Seth's company - 3 PM.
- 3: Seth's home - 6 PM.
- 4: Psychiatrist's office - 9 PM.
- 5: Police station - midnight.
- 6: Jail cell - 3 AM.
- 7: On a country road - dawn, 6 AM.

Lighting: Strong spot lighting at times. Some scenes with deep shadows.

Props and scenery: I would suggest the use of a rear screen onto which a slide is projected. There could be one slide for the office, one for the board meeting, one for the home etc. Minimal props would include: a desk, a coffee table, a couch, six chairs, and four cots (or bed rolls). Most scenes only need a few props, the rest could be mimed, i.e. doors, walls. See remarks before each scene.

Costumes: Ordinary everyday business clothes are appropriate. Seth starts out in a suit, vest and tie which he wears the entire time, but it becomes more disheveled as the play goes on. Secretary and wife are well dressed, board members also. Prostitutes and thieves are well dressed but flashy; prisoners in jail are in old ragged work clothes.

Note about production: The author encourages theater groups to produce this play in any manner that they feel is appropriate. The above suggestions would allow this play to be preformed with minimal actors and props, thus making it easier for schools and production companies. This play could be produced with or without music. The notes below describe some ideas for the music if it is part of the production.

Music: The music should be simple and sound a bit like spoken words. At times the music will rise to dominate the action. At other times the music should fade into silence. Silence is often used for emphasis. Unless stated otherwise, music with the appropriate theme (appropriate for the character currently speaking or the emotions currently being played out) is always in the background. Characters may freeze sometimes while music continues. The play can be a bit stylized. It could feel slightly like a silent movie with music as background if a director wants to stage it that way. I encourage the use of original music, but there should be a number of themes that continue throughout and that interweave.

Music Themes:

Seth's theme: his theme has a narrow range of only an octave, two at most when he is agitated.

Seth's wife's theme: more octaves than Seth, but not very flashy. A matter-of-fact theme with an element of pleading and comforting.

Anxiety theme: Seth, the workers at the company, Seth's wife all use this theme; minor key. Seth uses it especially when he worries about the ghost.

Resolution theme: the counterpart to the anxiety theme is a resolution theme. It occurs when Seth thinks about being able to sleep or being free of his dreams and later when he comes to terms with the ghost. It is also used at the end when Seth makes a decision; major key.

Chorus theme: this theme is used by the workers, board members, people in police booking room, and prisoners. The theme has a whining character, a moaning and groaning feel to it. It is often nervous.

Ghost's theme: a menacing, foreboding theme. The theme should be also full of sorrow and sympathy for the ghost, because it was the ghost who was killed.

Chairman of board, psychiatrist, sergeant, policewoman theme: this theme is no

nonsense, assertive, take charge. We'll call it the "taking-care-of-business" theme. Production of the music can be very simple. It could be taped beforehand or played with a single electronic synthesizer or with a small group of instruments.

Dialogue: The actor's speech should be, at times, like singing (just as the music should be a little like talking). Some actors and directors may feel the need to repeat a line here and there that is not in the script. Please do so if it will enhance the rhythm of the play. Asides are especially important. Often the actor comes to the front of the stage where he or she is spotlighted while the rest of the action freezes in the shadows in the background. After the aside the actor or actress should return to the interaction with the others and the lights should come up.

Act I, Scene 1

Before the action starts there is an musical introduction or overture in which the audience hears most of the musical themes they will hear throughout the play. This introduction should take a couple of minutes and the stage should be darkened. The lights come up.

SCENE: Seth's office at work.

TIME: 9 AM.

PROPS: desk and chair onstage left.

There is a wall down the middle of the stage (which could be a curtain or just mimed). On the other side of the wall is the secretary's desk and chair which could also be mimed. Seth is seated, slumped over his desk. The secretary is working on the computer at her desk. Behind her office workers are conferring. They each carry a clipboard. There is a loud buzzing sound. The secretary stops typing and opens the door to Seth's office.

MUSIC: somewhat light, nervous, conversational; Seth's theme and the taking-care-of-business theme, with the chorus theme coming in later.

SECRETARY

Sir, you buzzed.

SETH

Yes, Molly, cancel my appointments,
the next hour or two.

I couldn't sleep last night.

SECRETARY

Not again sir, I'm sorry.

SETH

I've an important meeting at three,
got to be my best for that.

SECRETARY

I'll make sure that you're not disturbed.

SETH

Tell no one Molly.

You've worked for me all these years.

Tell no one.

SECRETARY

Yes, sir, I've been with you

a long time,

followed you

through your climb to VP

in charge of sales.

No one.

No one.

(Exits through the office door to the other side of the stage where office workers are waiting anxiously. The light dims on Seth's side and brightens on the worker's side.)

WORKERS

Again?

SECRETARY

He wants to be alone

for a while that's all.

WORKERS

That's twice this week.

What can it be?

Disease, cancer, stress?

Our careers linked to his.

If he weakens, falters,

how will we feed the kids,

make payments on the house?

(The light dims on the worker's side and brightens on Seth's side of the stage.)

Seth is reclined in a chair. Seth's speech is coherent but shows signs of becoming disjointed. Later in the play his speech will be quite incoherent, but with an added poetic lilt to it.)

SETH

Alone, I'm alone.
This darkened room...
But I'm afraid.
I need to sleep
but I'm afraid of sleep.
It's my dreams
they won't leave me alone,
they won't let me rest --
something in the darkness
again and again
under leaves,
bright spot lights
sudden sounds
Oh, I wish I could sleep
I'll try-
pull these shades,
lie here

(Seth pulls the shades and the room darkens. He puts his feet up on his desk and leans back in his chair. The workers peek though the door.)

WORKERS

Maybe now he can rest.
Revive,
renew,
be ready for the managerial meeting
this afternoon
when our department is at stake.
--Please, let's hope.

(The workers close the door and walk to the back of their side of the stage where they confer.)

SETH

(Jumping up from his chair, pacing.)

Oh,no!

It comes again:

this shadow,

these heavy shadows

banging up against me

like a sack of sand.

What are they?

Why won't they let me be?

Two weeks and only cat naps.

I've got to sleep...

(His voice trails off. He falls to the floor, the rug, exhausted, and curls up in a ball like a dog trying to sleep in the cold).

SECRETARY

(Looking in, surprised to see him on the floor.)

Well, at least he's sleeping;

that's good.

WORKERS

(Behind her, peering in, surprised but relieved.)

Now, we'll be okay.

He'll get the rest he needs.

No one's sharper in the board room

when he's up to it.

He'll do his best.

Act I, Scene 2

SCENE: a corporate meeting room.

TIME: 3 PM.

PROPS: six chairs, a chart, and a pointer.

The board members (or chorus) is seated in the chairs facing the chart. The chairman speaks first.

MUSIC: Silence until noted.

CHAIRMAN

Seth, we anxiously await your report.

SETH

Yes, I've prepared the figures
you require
to make the necessary
decisions about
who to keep on
and who to fire.

CHAIRMAN

Good, let's get on with it.
Lights, please.

SETH

(Charts, spot light.)
Here you see the sales
figures for the last five years;
notice the the clear trending down
from year to year.

GHOST

(The sound of Seth's presentation fades.

MUSIC: ghost's theme begins quietly but becomes much louder.

A ghost figure, head covered in leaves and blood -- but unrecognizable, neither man nor woman -- walks into the room and sits down at Seth's empty chair.

The music recedes for the moment.)

SETH

Now the sales per person
in each division...

(He looks at his chair and drops his pointer. He walks away from the group who freeze while lights dim on their area. Seth is spotlighted.

MUSIC: anxiety theme.)

(Aside.)

My dream,
that was in my dream --
this walking mangled head --
neither man or woman --
only leaves and hair and blood.
Please not now;
leave me alone.

GHOST

(The figure gets up and slowly walks out. Seth returns to his position in front of the chart.

MUSIC: fades, then a silent pause before the chairman speaks.)

CHAIRMAN

Seth, what is it.
We're waiting.

SETH

(Aside.)

I don't know what it is --
such a cruel joke --

I wish I knew.

(Then addressing the board)

Oh, yes, sorry I was trying
to remember a point or two.

CHAIRMAN

Well, let's get on with it.

(Seth points and talks in the background while the chorus of board members get out of their chairs, go to the front of the stage and deliver the following speech. The chairman, however, stays in his seat listening to Seth's presentation.

MUSIC: chorus theme.)

MEMBERS

He doesn't seem right.

No one's sharper than he is
in the board room.

It must be these awful decisions;
we all feel the strain

but it shows more on his face today
like a wrestler

trying to pin his opponent;
let's hope he'll be okay.

He's slated to be executive VP next.

We're counting on him
to pull us through.

Act I, Scene 3

SCENE: Seth's home.

TIME: 6 PM.

PROPS: couch, chair and coffee table.

As the scene opens, Seth's wife is sitting on the couch drinking a cocktail. Seth walks in -- he is moving slowly, dragging. He puts a load of papers and then his attache case on the table.

MUSIC: silence until noted.

WIFE

(Looking up.)

Did it go okay at work today?

SETH

(He speaks in a monotone; he is in his work mode.)

Yes, not bad.

I convinced the board
to do a study
before they trimmed
my department back.

WIFE

That's what you wanted.

SETH

Yes, the best I could hope for.

(Walks to the front of the stage while his wife freezes her pose on the couch.)

(Aside.)

But these dreams
that invade my body,
that cling to me
night after night

like shadows of something
I don't remember
--like a life I once had
and forgot...

(He returns to where he had been standing.)

WIFE

Did you say something?

SETH

No, no - nothing...
it's nothing.

WIFE

(She get up, runs her hands through his hair and straightens his clothes. She looks at him with concern.)

You don't look right these days.
It must be the awful
responsibility you carry.
The work you have to do --
make decisions about who to keep
and who to let off --
bloody work,
almost like deciding who will live
and who will die.

(She freezes, hands still caressing him. He walks two paces toward the front of the stage.)

SETH

(Aside.)

Bloody, bloody --
in my dreams blood everywhere
but not mine,
some one else's veins had opened
and spilled out into the leaves.

(He returns to stand directly in front of her as he had before.)

WIFE
What did you say?

SETH
Nothing,
just talking to myself.

WIFE
It not like you.
You look tired,
why don't you get some rest.

SETH
REST!
(Part agreement, part anguish.)

WIFE
Yes, rest;
lie down on the couch.

SETH
The couch...
And sleep...

WIFE
And sleep.

(He lies down while she gets a blanket. She tucks him in, covers him with the blanket, and pulls the shade; then she exits.)

MUSIC: resolution theme plays softly like a lullaby.

He sleeps for a moment, then tosses and turns on the couch. All at once offstage there is a blood curdling scream. Seth sits bolt upright.

MUSIC: rises and is a strong undercurrent to the duet that follows.

His wife comes rushing in. Their speeches overlap; they are talking past each

other, neither is really listening. Seth's speech is disjointed.)

SETH

Now I remember,
I remember now.

WIFE

It was just a dream.

SETH

That's good I guess
at least it's out.

WIFE

Only a dream.

SETH

(Disjointed, breathing hard.)
I'd forgotten
years ago
an accident
alone
no one there
except the body I hit

WIFE

You know it was a dream.

SETH

and dragged
under the car
across the road
couldn't tell
old or young
man or woman

a figure of arms and legs

WIFE

You had a bad dream.

SETH

I buried in a ditch
and went my way
forgot till now
--but never any news
of wrong doing on that road
like it never happened
until lately
when I couldn't remember
or forget--

WIFE

(Their speeches no longer overlap, but they still are not listening to each other.)

You were dreaming.
It must not have happened
if it was never on the news.

SETH

(Like in a trance, not hearing her.)

They couldn't have been important,
probably a vagrant, a bum,
someone no one cared about
or missed.
Is that why I never heard?
Why I could forget so easily?

WIFE

There was no news.

SETH

That's why I should forget-
because at least now I can remember.
Maybe I can sleep.
I'm sure there's nothing more to it.
I've got to go on,
lead my life;
too many people
count on me.

WIFE

(She is soothing, nodding, agreeing, comforting. The following lines are like a lullaby.)

Yes, just a dream
there was no news,
something you should forget
now you can sleep.

SETH

Yes, now I can sleep.

(She tucks him in the couch again, gives him a hug, he lies there with the spotlight on his face. His face goes through many expression such as anger and frustration. MUSIC: reflects Seth's changes in emotion.

Then all at once he is smiling, relieved, and laughing. He covers himself up with the blanket and lies on his side, facing the audience. He looks at peace; he shuts his eyes.

MUSIC: resolution theme starts but shifts to the ghost's theme.

Then the bloodied figure walks into the room, stands in front on him on the couch, and stares. He opens his eyes, sees it, and muffles his scream.)

SETH

(Sitting up, tense, in charge, commanding, like ordering on of his subordinates.)

Go away!

Leave!

I've remembered you now -

That's enough.

GHOST

(The figure walks away; Seth's body relaxes. But it does not leave, instead it circles the couch and comes back to stare at Seth.)

SETH

(Softer tone, like asking a friend for a favor.)

Please...

I've remembered you now

Nothing I can do today

will change anything

that happened then.

GHOST

(The figure walks away and circles as before.)

SETH

Is there more I have to do?

Still more?

My life will be destroyed

if I confess.

You see that don't you?

All these people who depend on me...

(This time the figure walks toward the exit and does leave. Seth tries to sleep.

MUSIC: anxiety theme.

A spotlight is on his face. He is wide awake. He gets up paces up and down the room with the blanket wrapped around him. His walking becomes more agitated. Finally he bangs his fists on the wall.)

SETH

(Screaming.)

Okay!

Okay!

Act I, Scene 4

SCENE: psychiatrist's office.

TIME: 9 PM.

PROPS: two chairs and a coffee table.

Both Seth and the psychiatrist are seated as the lights come up.

MUSIC: quiet and low music haunts the scene.

SETH

Thank you for seeing me so late.

DOCTOR

Seth, I know it's important
so tell me what it is.

(Seth paces the room attempting to speak several times. The psychiatrist expects him to speak but he doesn't and continues to pace the room. Finally he collapses on the couch and stares at the ceiling.)

MUSIC: the anxiety theme begins soft and low and then rises in pitch and volume to end in the resolution theme at the end of his speech.

In this speech he tells for the first time exactly what happened, up to now it's been only hints and fragments.)

SETH

(Soliloquy. Very disjointed at first but it is also a clear memory for the first time. He paces, sending emotions with his body, emotions of regret, of not being responsible, of anger, or sorrow.)

I cannot sleep
these shadows
in my dreams
keep waking me
hit and run
on a country road
late at night
a shadow

that was a body
nobody really
a vagrant, a passerby
walked into my headlight
like a deer, stunned-
the sudden body
banging against my car
my first new car
I stopped
he or she, I couldn't tell
it was dead,
dragged under the car,
mangled, unrecognizable -
my car dented, bloodied

(Now more coherent.)

I had had a bit to drink;
didn't want to answer questions.
It was an accident;
that's all - an accident.
Telling the police
would not undo what had been done.
I dragged the corpse
to a ditch
covered it with leaves.
No one saw me.
I drove to an all night car wash
and cleansed the blood
on my chrome grill.
Then I slept for hours, days
because it was the weekend.

And after reading the papers each day
with no news of me, my accident -
no one missing, lost or found,
I forgot and resumed my life
my career, my first job,
my fiance, my engagement.

(After he is done, he sits back in his chair. He slumps, but it is a look of relief, almost relaxation more than exhaustion.

MUSIC: fades to silence, then there is a pause at which point the psychiatrist speaks.)

DOCTOR

(Looking up from his notes.)

Clearly ...

SETH

Yes, please tell me.

What I think and feel
is so murky, so muddy.

DOCTOR

You've been working too hard.
Your wife told me.
What you remember is nothing,
just a dream.
You said yourself
you couldn't identify the body,
this is typical of a dream --
disturbing and real to you
but in the final analysis nothing.
I think you need some rest,
that's the best medicine for you.

SETH

(Loud, almost to himself or to the audience; he gets up abruptly from his chair
and paces impatiently.)

REST!

Of course I need rest,
I haven't been able to sleep
for weeks.

(He sits back down.)

DOCTOR

(Calmly reassuring.)

I'm prescribing some sleeping pills.
You won't dream very much with these
and when you've been able to rest
things will look different,
you'll see.

(Seth slumps back into his chair. He cannot believe what he is hearing.)

SETH

Pills?!

DOCTOR

Yes, they'll do the trick.

SETH

(Still stunned by the doctor's lack of comprehension.)

You don't understand
do you?

DOCTOR

(Still reassuring, but also annoyed and commanding.)

I understand completely
which is why I am prescribing these
and why you came to me for advice.

SETH

(Holding his head in his hands.)

PILLS!

DOCTOR

(The doctor writes the prescription and holds it out to him.)

(MUSIC: taking-care-of-business theme to the end of doctor's speech.)

Seth, here, believe me.

Take this,

get it filled,
lie down,
take a couple.
They'll knock you out till morning;
make you forget everything,
so you get the rest you need,
but it's late and I've got to go.
I left guests at my house.
I need to return to my life.

(Seth gets up.

MUSIC: ghost's theme.

Seth is hunched over, bent. He takes the piece of paper with glazed eyes. He looks at it like it is a strange object, then suddenly rage comes over his face; he crumples the piece of paper and throws it at the doctor.)

SETH
PILLS!

(Before the surprised doctor can respond, Seth runs out the door and stage lights fade to black.)

Act I, Scene 5

SCENE: police station.

TIME: midnight.

PROPS: desk and chair for sergeant.

Thieves and prostitutes are waiting to be booked. There is a general noise as they talk among themselves.

This scene (and the next scene to a lesser extent) is clownish, comic relief, humorous to everyone except Seth and later his wife. Seth is the straight man for the jokes.

As the lights come up, Seth runs in and rushes to the sergeant's desk, breathing loudly. His clothes are half unbuttoned and askew; his hair is flying off to one side. Everyone in the room stops talking and listens to what he says to the sergeant.

MUSIC: silence for the entire scene.

SETH

I've come to confess.

SERGEANT

Confess, good!

We always like confessions;

clean and neat --

no skullduggery --

no poking around.

You can come clean.

SETH

Clean, yes, clean.

I knew this was the right thing to do.

So okay, here goes.

(Takes a deep breath - Sargent is poised to write it down.)

CHORUS

(Mumbling to themselves.)

Here goes.

(They point at Seth and joke as if to say sarcastically, "Man, I bet this is really going to be good.")

SETH

I killed "it" years ago.

SERGEANT

It?

CHORUS

It!?

(Some of them laugh softly.)

SETH

Yes, I don't know whether it was
a man or woman,
young or old.
I couldn't tell --
it was a hit and run
on Turner's road.

SERGEANT

Hit and run - okay.
Now we're getting somewhere.
And when, when was this?

SETH

Fifteen, twenty years ago.

(From this point on the thieves and prostitutes make faces and jokingly mime what Seth is saying. One thief makes the universal sign of "he's crazy" by taking his index finger and making it go round in circles as his finger points at his head. A prostitute acts like she has a noose around her neck and is about to be hung.)

SERGEANT

(Looking up.)

Can you be more precise?

SETH

No, I'm not sure;

I've only just remembered
because it kept coming back to me
in my dreams.

Like I said, it was on Turner's Road
where the road curves,
past the grove of trees
right on the pond,
after you've left the town limits.
Some people call it Turner's Point.

SERGEANT

(Not writing, humoring him.)

20 years ago,
and you've only just remembered
because of a dream?

SETH

Yes, that's right,
a nightmare again and again.

SERGEANT

(Winking at his comrade.)

I see.

SETH

You've got to believe me
It was I.

SERGEANT

(Making fun of him.)
You were it?

SETH
No, I did it.
I killed someone
and now I can't sleep
but if I can confess then
maybe I'll get some rest.

SERGEANT
(His comrade brings a large book to the sergeant's desk.)
There is no record of such a thing,
nothing like that,
out there in the last twenty years.

SETH
But it was me
I tell you.

SERGEANT
You did nothing
except had a bad dream
and now can't tell what is real.
But I know it was nothing.

SETH
Please, you've got to believe me
I can't sleep otherwise.

SERGEANT
(Now tired of this.)
We'll look into it,
go out to where you said
and poke around.

In a week or so
we'll call you.

SETH

(Holding up his hands to be handcuffed.)
Now, now, please, now.

SERGEANT

Not now,
But soon,
so go home now
get some rest.

SETH

(Getting angry.)
Rest, home!
I cannot rest
and home feels like a prison.

SERGEANT

Well, anyway, move on.
I've other business to attend to.

SETH

(Flailing his arms, at the policeman near by.)
No, now, now, it must be now.

SERGEANT

(Angered.)
If you insist, we'll book you
for disorderly.

SETH

Yes, thank you
Anything, please

(The police take him offstage while the chorus delivers the closing speech,
spoken by individuals in sequence.)

CHORUS

It's getting hard
to get arrested these days.
what with prison overcrowding,
government cutbacks --
even a good confession
won't guarantee
a warm bed in a cell anymore

Act I, Scene 6

SCENE: jail cell.

PROPS: four cots.

TIME: 3 AM.

Four cell mates are already in the jail. They are sitting on their cots staring at the ceiling as the lights come up. Seth is led into the cell by a policewoman.

This scene continues with the comic flavor of the last scene but it takes a while to build. Throughout the scene the cell bars are mimed. The actors are looking out through the bars at the audience.

MUSIC: until noted the anxiety theme plays softly in the background.

POLICEWOMAN

(As though she were taking a child to school.)

Here's what you wanted.

I hope your happy.

SETH

Yes, thank you.

(Enters the jail and a couple of cell mates look up from their cots.)

POLICEWOMAN

(To herself.)

They get weirder every day.

MATE #1

Why are you in?

SETH

Hit and run.

MATE #2

Bad break,

someone saw you, I guess,
couldn't get away with it.

SETH

No, no one saw.
I only just remembered --
fifteen years ago maybe --
but the sergeant didn't believe me.

MATE #3

So why are you here?

SETH

I want to be here;
this is where I belong.

MATE #4

You want in
and all of us wants out.
That's kinda strange.

SETH

It's all strange to me now.
Nothing makes sense anymore.

MATE #1

Mr. Upright Citizen here
doing his civic duty,
confessing to something long gone
under the rug, forgotten.

SETH

I couldn't help myself;
my dreams wouldn't let me sleep.

MATE #2

A dreamer, eh?

Jail is no place for dreamers.

SETH

(Almost begging for understanding.

MUSIC: gets a bit louder.)

I had no choice but to admit.

My dreams would not let me rest;

they grabbed hold of me,

clung to me,

shook me until I could see

that I had killed some one,

someone I had forgotten,

but the police they won't believe me.

MATE #3

(Angry, no sympathy.)

God save us from do-gooders

like you;

if everyone confessed,

the jails would be full.

SETH

(Seth walks forward to cell bars and says more to himself than to others.)

I had no choice.

I had no choice.

PRISONERS

(As a chorus.

MUSIC: fades into the background again.)

He chooses us

instead of his plush home,

his Mercedes,

his vacation condo at the beach.

He prefers this cell

and our company.
With lunatics like this
jail just isn't safe anymore
for regular criminals like us.

(They taunt him, push him, muss up his hair, then push him back and forth between them during the chorus. He does nothing. All resistance is gone. He is like a sack of potatoes being thrown around.)

POLICEWOMAN

(Off stage.)

Quiet in there,
it's time to sleep.

SETH

(In a daze.)

Yes, sleep.

(The prisoners rush to take the beds; Seth is left with the floor. He curls up like a dog. Soon we can hear him snoring. Lights fade to a half light.

MUSIC: ghost's theme begins and gets louder and slowly changes to resolution theme.

The ghost appears outside the cell. It then walks through the bars, as though the bars did not exist, to where Seth is lying. It takes a blanket it is carrying and spreads it gently, lovingly over the sleeping Seth.

MUSIC: the resolution theme rises.

Lights fade to black to indicate passage of time; all we can hear is the loud sound of Seth snoring.

Lights come up. Laura, his wife appears at the jail cell door. Seth is deep asleep, snoring loudly.)

WIFE

(Pointing to Seth.)

I've come to bail him out.

MATE #1

You can have him,
good riddance.

WIFE

Can you wake him for me;
he seems fast asleep.

MATE #2

(Poking at Seth who does not wake but continues to snore.)
Come on you, Mr. Fancy Pants.
Your wife is here to take you home
to your house in the hills.
(He finally gets down and shakes Seth; Seth slowly awakens.)

SETH

(MUSIC: resolution theme plays in the background.
Seth does not recognize or care where he is. He is still absorbed by the dream
he just had. He speaks slowly, groggy with sleep, but exhilarated.)
I finally slept
and dreamed
that I was flying,
light as air,
gliding over a forest
like a hawk
catching the wind

WIFE

(Annoyed, exasperated, tired, angry.)
I've come to bail you out.

SETH

No, no,
please it's okay
I want to be in here.

POLICEWOMAN

(Off stage.)

Out with you do you hear
this isn't a hotel.

SETH

(Still half asleep.)

I want to stay...
only just relaxed...
light as air...
flying...
free...

WIFE

(As though speaking to a child.

MUSIC: changes to anxiety theme.)

This has gone far enough
-- lets go.
We'll talk about it
in the car on the way home.

POLICEWOMAN

(Off stage.)

Come on, hurry up.

PRISONERS

(As a chorus.)

Out with you!

Be gone!

You snore too loud!

(They all pull the covers over themselves, roll over and go back to sleep.

Reluctantly Seth gets up and walks out of the jail to his wife who leads him
offstage.)

Act I, Scene 7

SCENE: on a country road, near a deep ditch.

PROPS: a small tree, its roots wrapped in burlap.

TIME: dawn, 6AM.

The light is at a very low angle casting long deep golden shadows. The chorus (now in the form of office workers with clipboards) are almost completely hidden in deep black shadows, almost offstage. They remain there until the last part of the scene.

Seth and his wife come onstage lugging a tree whose roots are wrapped in burlap. They are struggling under the load. Seth speaks with more assurance than he has before. MUSIC: ghost's theme lush, full and almost optimistic but in the background.

SETH

Over to the ditch
just a bit more.

WIFE

It's so heavy,
I need to take a breather.

(They put the tree down. They are breathing hard.)

WIFE

I'll help you
with this tree
but you need to know
I don't understand.

SETH

Thank you, Laura.
I know it's odd
but if I plant this tree

here in the ditch
where I dragged the body,
I think I'll find some peace,
and I might be able to start again.

(Wife puts her face in her hands and weeps. Seth tries to hug her.)

SETH

It's almost over
this part at least.
Lets plant the tree
as the sun is coming up:
somehow this feels right to me.

(She gets up and they move the tree a few more feet, then he digs a hole and they lower the tree into the hole, then fill the hole with dirt and leaves.

MUSIC: appropriate theme for the character.)

SETH

Laura, you need to know
I'm not going back.
I can't go back.
This tree and what it means...
I can't go back.
You see that don't you?

WIFE

The job, our life -
is that what you mean?
We can't go back to these?

SETH

Yes, I'm not myself anymore.

WIFE

(Assertive, but understanding.)

Seth I've come with you this far
to a place you're not sure you remember

to a ditch where nothing happened,
and I've helped you plant a tree.
Now you'll have to go back to
your workers and their families,
they're all depending on you.
And Frederick not even
through high school
and Mary-Lou still in college.
Seth, how could you, how could you?
How could you even suggest
such a thing?

SETH

Laura, what can I say?
I know they all count on me
but I've decided to take a job
at the nursery.
You know how I like to garden.
I'll manage the greenhouse
and we'll get by somehow.

WIFE

(Angry and hurt.)
No, Seth, we won't.
You can't desert us all.
Your workers who are your best friends
will lose their jobs without you.
There's no turning back.
I understand you feel pain
but we'll cope somehow.
There may be new drugs that can help,
but don't give up.
We've both worked so hard.

(She takes a deep breath and pauses. She is debating whether she should say
what she is about to say. She turns and looks at him directly.)
I have something to say
which I promised not to tell.

You will be named
Executive Vice President soon.
This is what you've wanted,
what we've both built
our lives around.
So now do you see?

SETH

(Soliloquy. His wife freezes in position. He walks to the front of the stage and speaks to the audience. He takes the audience into his confidence.)

(Aside.)

Now that I've achieved
what I've chased all these years
it's worthless and worse;
it's like a weight
that will keep me from running free.
But I will have to work
under this shadow.
How can I desert
all those who depend on me?
I will be Executive Vice President
with all the trappings
of my status...
A month ago I'd have been delighted;
now I feel I'm being buried.
Perhaps this is my punishment.

(He lets out a wail or a moan and gestures to the sky. He walks back to where his wife is standing and looks at her directly.)

MUSIC: Seth's and wife's theme go back and forth.)

I understand now.
I've been selfish.
I thought I could bring you along
but you don't see what I dreamed.
Maybe I can go on.

WIFE

Yes, we can.

We'll take a vacation.
You need the rest.
We'll change our life
but not throw it away.
You see that don't you?

SETH

I see what you see.
My lot is cast.
I'll do my best.
I'll make you proud of me.

WIFE

I knew you'd come around.
That's why I married you.
You're sensible
when it comes down to it.
We'll get by, you'll see.

SETH

Yes, I'll try.
I'm sure everything
will be all right.

(They walk to the edge of stage right and look at the sun rise. Seth puts his arm around Laura.

MUSIC: the resolution theme rises.

The ghost walks onto the stage on the opposite side from Seth and his wife. They cannot see the ghost because their backs are turned. The ghost walks up to the tree they planted and slowly removes the white robe to reveal a skeleton suite. It then carefully spreads the white robe down around the base of the tree and curls up under the tree branches.

MUSIC: the music fades a bit as the office workers come out of the shadows and walk to the front of the stage. They address the audience and also reassure each other.)

CHORUS

Seth is his old self again.
He's a man you can depend on.
We were counting on him
to pull us through.
He's just that kind of guy.

(All characters freeze on the stage.
MUSIC: resolution theme becomes louder.)

THE END

PROMETHEUS IN CHAINS

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NOTE: Prometheus in Chains has not been released to the public until now.

A one-act play in three scenes.

A play based in part on Greek Mythology and Greek Drama.

Characters

Prometheus, an immortal God who created humans from clay and stole fire from the Gods so he could give it to human beings. Since the Titan Prometheus was immortal and could not be killed, Zeus chained him for eternity to a rock where now a vulture comes each day to peck at his liver.

Zeus, king and most powerful of the Greek Gods. Zeus is angry at Prometheus for tricking him by stealing fire and giving it to humans. But he is equally angry that Prometheus both created and protected humans -- as they are beings Zeus does not care for.

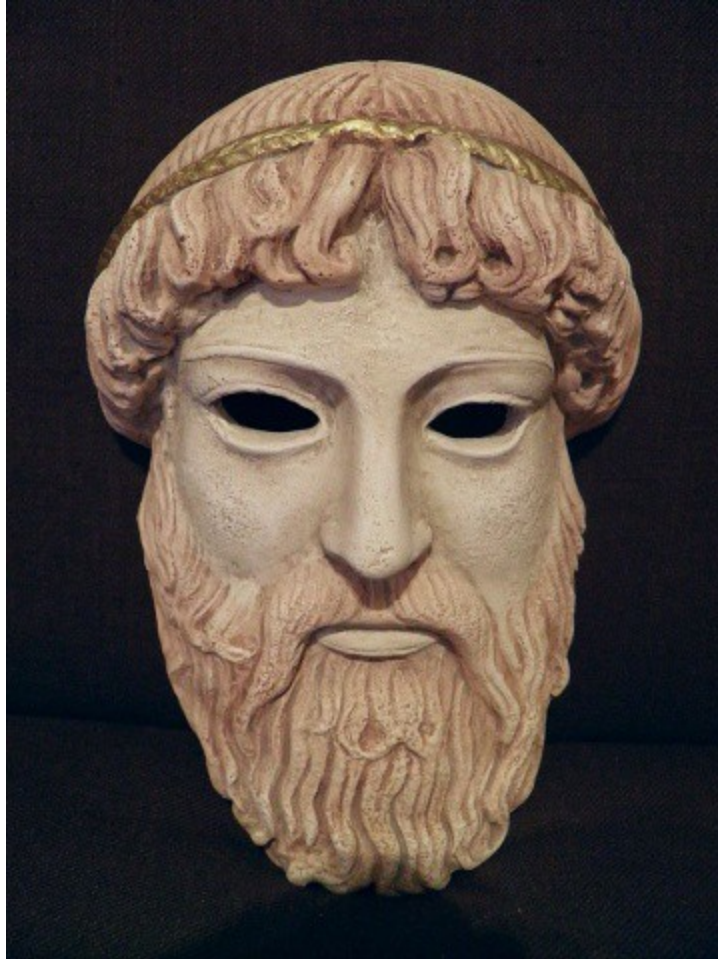
Two Lost Tourists.

Hercules, the strongest man in Greek Mythology.

Two Guards.

The Vulture, who pecks at Prometheus and who is dressed in a kind of chicken suit.

Chorus Of Humans: the chorus is a traditional element of Greek drama and usually comments on the action.



Mask of Zeus. Replica of ancient Greek theatrical mask.
(commons.wikimedia.org)

ACT I, SCENE 1

Prometheus is lead onto the stage in heavy chains. Two burly guards hold him. His feet are chained together, there is a choke clamp around his neck, chains drip from his hands and feet.

Zeus follows dressed magnificently. Covered in gold with a brilliant headdress, he carries a thunderbolt which on occasion he gestures with; lightning and thunder crash loudly as a result.

ZEUS

Now Prometheus you see where your arrogance has ended.
You will be chained to this rock for all time
worse than death you will live
each day to be penetrated by the pecking of the vulture on your liver
which will only cause eternal pain
on each endless day.

PROMETHEUS

I accept my fate, oh lord Zeus,
and do not regret what you call arrogance
because my humans will live.

ZEUS

They do not care about you,
those humans you coddle
like so many young puppies looking for a teat to suck.
After all you gave them,
after all you risked,
they have built no temples just to you,
few sacrifices rise up with you in mind.
Do they even care what has happened to you?

PROMETHEUS

That is of no concern to me.
I gave them life
by molding them from clay.
And at creation
after my foolish brother had doled out
fur, fangs, and wings
to all the other creatures
there was nothing was left
for naked human kind.
But even then I found a way
I gave them fire, thought and hope
Because with these tools they could survive.

ZEUS

Yes, you tricked me
into accepting only the bones and fat
of sacrifices instead of meat.
And then you stole fire from Olympus
after I forbade it
and gave it to them for all time.
Worse you taught them how to use that fire
to make metal and pottery
and light their towns at night.

PROMETHEUS

But then you destroyed
all of mankind in the great flood.

ZEUS

Almost destroyed
as you know.
You convinced me to save only two
who built an ark
and after the flood

the human race came back
just as you hoped it would.

PROMETHEUS

Yes, eventually they may
challenge even you, mighty Zeus.

ZEUS

I thought so.
You think they will free you.
Stupid Titan, they have forgotten you.
Now that they have power
they think it is their birth right
not the result of your sacrifice.
You will never be free from this rock
if that is what you are thinking.
Not in a day, a month, a year or a thousand years.

PROMETHEUS

You have not understood
and I did not expect you to.
You who measure worth by obedience,
by worship, by animals and children slaughtered
and sent to you as sacrifices,
how could you understand?

ZEUS

In your arrogance
you think that you are smarter than me
but what you have given your humans
is that same arrogance
which will in time be their undoing.
And no one, not even you can stop this now

because their fate is set
and their reach will exceed their grasp
and one day there will be too many to feed
one day they will pollute the oceans and the air
one day they will poison themselves
and blame the gods for their fate.

PROMETHEUS

(Noticeably disturbed by this prediction.)

Zeus why do you say this?
Is this one of your tricks?
Has this been prophesized?

ZEUS

(Smiling coyly.)

Let me show you something
I will show you the future of your beloved humans
and then you tell me what you think.

(A rear screen slide shows a large city like New York at night with lights
burning.)

ZEUS

See this is what happened to your fire.
It is now twisted and turned into tiny threads that light at night.
Man no longer must live by the sun
but instead creates his own day
disjointed and disconnected
from the days that I rule.
They even send their fire up
to artificial man made moons
and send it down again across the world.
And they fly
across the oceans in comfort
across lands far from Olympus
and sail with boats that have their own power.

PROMETHEUS

(Impressed, surprised.)
My god how they have grown
Just as I hoped
but...

ZEUS

Yes, but...
There are 6 billion of them on the Earth now.
In just one more life time it will be 10 billion
You forgot...

PROMETHEUS

(Angry.)
Forgot what?
Without arrogance, as you call it,
they never would have challenged the night
and lit the world
they would never have crossed the seas
or flown like birds
to far flung lands
It was never certain that humans would survive
It was only certain that if I did not give them
the sciences, the arts, the warmth and light of fire
that they would not survive
with no claws or swiftness like other animals
they would have been doomed.

ZEUS

Yes, but you made them upright like the gods
looking to heaven,
so they forgot that they would never be like the gods...
(Pauses.)

Be that as it may
their fate is sealed.
They will procreate beyond their means;
they will foul their own nest
and that poison will spread
to all parts of the world
and your precious beings
will drown in a deluge
of their own making.

(Prometheus realizes the Zeus may be telling the truth and his head slumps.)

ZEUS

And it gets worse.

PROMETHEUS

How much worse could it get?

ZEUS

These wonderful humans of yours have invented
the most power weapons of destruction ever conceived.
They have instruments of war that
explode with the force of a volcano
or ten thousand of my lightning bolts at one time.
And they have cart loads of these weapons.

PROMETHEUS

(Now starting to believe.)

Take me to the rock, to the vulture
to what will become my familiar torments.
I cannot look at the end of mankind
that you take such glee in showing me.

(The rear screen fades out and the two servants lead Prometheus to the rock where they hammer his chains into place. Zeus and the servants leave in darkness. A glow of dawn starts to fill the stage. Then a loud cry fills the

stage. The vulture lands and pecks at the liver of Prometheus and blood flows onto the floor. Prometheus cries out in agony, a blood curdling scream, again and again.)

ACT I, SCENE 2

THREE THOUSAND YEARS LATER

It is late afternoon. Prometheus is chained to the rock and slumped over exhausted after another day of being pecked by the vulture. Two tourists are about to appear stage left. They are tired from climbing. Before they arrive on stage the audience can hear their conversation.

WIFE TOURIST

(From offstage.)

Are you sure this is the right way?

HUSBAND TOURIST

Yes I'm sure. There is an ancient monument here, just a few more feet.

WIFE TOURIST

The tour bus is miles from us. If we are late, we'll have to get a taxi back to town.

HUSBAND TOURIST

We'll get back in time.

(They appear onto the stage.)

HUSBAND TOURIST

My god what is this? Could this be the temple?

PROMETHEUS

(Lifting his head in exhaustion.)

Are you lost?

WIFE TOURIST

Yes, we are lost. Dear, why don't you use the global positioning gadget you brought so we can see just how lost we are?

HUSBAND TOURIST

Okay I will, just to show you.

(He pulls out a device and punches some buttons.)

Oh, my god!

WIFE TOURIST

What?

HUSBAND TOURIST

We are lost. The GPS is telling me we are not on the Earth but outside it.

WIFE TOURIST

I told you we were lost.

PROMETHEUS

What in the world is that thing?

HUSBAND TOURIST

It's a GPS. You know, even this little handheld gizmo can radio up to the satellites overhead and tell me exactly where I am on this globe. I mean that's what it normally does.

PROMETHEUS

Quite remarkable. So you could go anywhere on the Earth and it would tell you where you are?

HUSBAND TOURIST

Where have you been for the last twenty years, living in a cave? Yes, everyone knows about GPS.

PROMETHEUS

Well, you see I have been a little preoccupied.

WIFE TOURIST

Yeah, just what are you doing here? Is this some kind of a joke?

PROMETHEUS

You might say that. We Greeks have a strange sense of humor. You would really have to be Greek to understand. Lets just say its a kind of initiation rite.

(Pause.)

But tell me more about this world you came from. I 've lived in this remote area for the last three thousand years

(Corrects himself quickly.)

ahh, 30 years and must admit I am really out of touch. Not that this area has ever been at the center of modern technology anyway. Is it true that you can talk to just about anyone in the world with an instrument you hold in your hand?

HUSBAND TOURIST

You mean a cell phone. Yes, I have one here although we might be out of range. Here give me a number and I will make a call for you.

PROMETHEUS

There is only one number I would like to call, but he's pretty busy.

HUSBAND TOURIST

What's his name? I'll look up his number.

PROMETHEUS

Zeus.

WIFE TOURIST

Like the god?

PROMETHEUS

Yes, it's even spelled the same.

HUSBAND TOURIST

No, we seem to be out of range. I mean this is a very strange place. No GPS, no cell phone, I can imagine that even the television and radio reception is bad.

PROMETHEUS

Probably -- look tell me something. In this modern world of yours if you had a message you wanted to get across to a lot of people, how would you do it if you had the right connections and could work with the powers that be.

WIFE TOURIST

Well you could go on the television talk shows. That would get you noticed.

PROMETHEUS

No, I mean to get really big, so that people would throng to hear what you had to say. They might even dance and yell.

HUSBAND TOURIST

Oh, you mean become a rock star.

PROMETHEUS

A rock star -- like a star in the heavens who sits on a rock?

HUSBAND TOURIST

You really are not in touch with the modern world. No, a musician who plays rock and roll music, a kind of music that is full of energy -- where people dance and yell.

WIFE TOURIST

It's starting to get late, we need to go back and find our tour bus or a taxi.

HUSBAND TOURIST

(To Prometheus.)

I hope your friends will be here soon, so you won't have to spend the night like that.

PROMETHEUS

Oh, don't worry about me. I'm kind of used to this by now.

WIFE TOURIST

(Tourists leave. Off stage.)

I told you we were lost.

PROMETHEUS

(Thinking to himself.)

A rock star. Why not? I could do that.

HERCULES

(Off stage.)

It's this way. Just up to the top of the rock here.

(Hercules enters.)

I have come to set you free.

PROMETHEUS

Does Zeus know about this?

HERCULES

Yes, he made the condition
that you could be released from your curse
if anyone could free you from the rock
and I have the strength to do that.

PROMETHEUS

Well maybe the future isn't set in stone after all.
Maybe destiny isn't quite what it's made out to be.

(Hercules struggles with each of the places where the chain is hammered into the rock, He loosens each one slowly with a lot of groans, and pulling and panting.)

PROMETHEUS

Well, then lets get on with it. I've got plans, big plans.

HERCULES

(Taking a break and looking a Prometheus.)
You're not going back to Olympus, you won't be allowed back there.

(Hercules frees the last chain and Prometheus moves to center stage with the ends of the chains hanging from his hands and feet.)

PROMETHEUS

No, the plans I am making have to do with human kind.
I'm going to give them a rock concert they will never forget.

ACT I, SCENE 3



Prometheus creating man from clay. (commons.wikimedia.org)

The curtain remains down. Suddenly there is a brilliant light and a loud sound of thunder. It should be very loud so that it almost shakes the building. It rumbles for a long time after the initial crash.

ZEUS

(Zeus dressed in all his magnificence with a bolt of lightening in his hand slowly walks onto the stage in front of the curtain.

He looks at the audience. He smiles. He shakes his bolt at the audience and then smiles again.)

Just kidding.

(He scans the audience and begins his monologue.)

Prometheus is about to come on stage.

I've decided to let him have his moment.

There is very little he can do for those puny creatures called human beings; they have already determined their own destiny but I'll humor him for a while.

(He winks at the audience to take them into his confidence, like friends to whom he is confiding. He almost whispers.)

He thinks that he can still make a difference -- prevent humans from this deluge of their own making.

(Then more loudly.)

Well, lets not spoil his fun.

So ladies and gentlemen

I offer you today

the rock star for the ages,

Prometheus Unchained.

(Zeus gestures with his lightning bolt. There is another huge crash, brilliant light and then the auditorium and the stage go into total darkness. The curtain rises. A loud scream is heard in the darkness. Then lights fade up as dim spot lights focus on Prometheus who is chained to his rock, hands and feet, in the center of the stage. The vulture is pecking at his liver. At either side of him are two guitarists, one keyboard player, and a drummer. Lights grow a bit brighter as so that the musicians can be made out on the stage as well. They are all dressed like heavy metal stars.)

PROMETHEUS

(A slow, mournful, lyrical ballad begins.)

(Singing.)

My name is Prometheus

And I've a lot to say

To you two legged creatures

That rule the planet today

I was there at the beginning
I made you from clay

(During this song lights grow brighter. Hercules walks on stage from the side opposite from Zeus. He goes to the rock, pulling and loosening the chains. Then the vulture goes to the other side and tries to pull the chain off the other side. Hercules is the only one who has the strength to do this, so he goes to the other side and yanks out the other chains. Prometheus then lifts himself from the rock and walks to center stage where he stands with the chains still hanging from his arms and feet. The vulture is now at his side like a side kick, dancing.)

The following music is loud and clashing heavy metal music, but not so loud that the words cannot be clearly understood.

Prometheus dances, prances, gestures, as he sings. The chains swing about wildly from his body as he moves. He smiles, is full of energy; all the somber mood of the beginning is gone.)

PROMETHEUS

(He looks at the crowd slowly.)

My name is Prometheus

(Slight response from the crowd.)

(Audio plays the noise of a rock concert crowd responding or people planted in the audience scream and yell in response.)

How are you doing?

(Louder response from the crowd.)

Are you doing okay?

(Louder response from the crowd.)

I've a lot to say

To you two legged creatures

That rule the planet today

(Very loud response from the crowd.)

I was there at the beginning

I made you from clay

(Loudest response from the crowd. Crowd goes wild.)

My children how you've grown
with your rockets and your cars

I know you have dreams
I've seen them in your eyes
to populate the planets
to reach for the stars

But can't you see
can't you see
that you can't keep on a going
this a way

The Earth has limits
there's only so much to go around
You need to start thinking
about boundaries and borders
about water, Earth and sky

Science has changed your life
but not your nature
Now you rule the planet
you must rule yourselves as well
The Earth is yours,
manage it with tenderness

And once you do
the planets and the stars
will belong to you...

ZEUS

(Zeus suddenly raises his thunderbolt and a huge crash of thunder and brilliant flashing light interrupts. Prometheus stops singing and all fall silent for a few seconds.)
Enough of this nonsense.

PROMETHEUS

(Singing softly but clearly.)
My name is Prometheus

And I've a lot to say...

ZEUS

Be quiet.
Or I will chain you to that rock
and this time I won't release you
even after a thousand thousand years.
I said you could do a little rah-rah-rah,
but telling them that not only the Earth
but the planets and the stars belong to them.
That is too much.
They do not.
They belong to me
and frankly their presence on this Earth
has been long enough.

PROMETHEUS

(Singing softly but clearly.)
To you two legged creatures
That rule the planet today
I was there at the beginning
I made you from clay

ZEUS

I warned you.
Hercules, place him back on the rock.
Use all your strength
so that no one else can free him.

(They lead Prometheus back to the rock and pound in the nails. The vulture torments him by threatening to peck at him.)

ZEUS

(He looks out at the audience, he eyes individuals and scowls.)
You will not survive.

You are doomed.
In a thousand years you will be extinct.
And the Earth will be better for it.

(The stage goes to darkness but not so dim that the audience cannot see the curtain falling. Slowly from the darkness comes the slow mournful ballad that began the act.)

PROMETHEUS

(Sings.)

My name is Prometheus
And I've a lot to say
To you two legged creatures
That rule the planet today
I was there at the beginning
I made you from clay
(Lights fade to total darkness.)

THE END