

REFLECTIONS ON THE NON-REALISTIC DRAMA SINCE STRINDBERG

with two original plays: WHERE THE HELL IS SHE?

and THE FABULOUS FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

by

Michael McGuire

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date March 19, 1964

## ABSTRACT

Following are two one-act plays in the non-realistic tradition of modern theatre with a critical introduction about this tradition since Strindberg. It is first seen that non-realism is extremely difficult to define--theatrical performance always involves some non-realistic elements. It is found that generally those plays which emphasize some element of drama other than character (e.g. song or dance) may be termed non-realistic.

The tradition is then traced through Strindberg, Yeats, Eliot, Ionesco, Sartre, Genet, and Beckett. The dissolution of character before other elements of the drama is observed in Strindberg's Miss Julie. The poetic drama of Eliot, and more especially of Yeats, is shown to emphasize language (Aristotle's category of diction), at the expense of normal character development and interaction. Huis Clos, Sartre's tour de force, illustrates the impossibility of a rigid classification of plays into the categories of realistic and non-realistic, for, though Sartre has created a purely hypothetical world, or hell, his characters behave and act upon one another in a thoroughly believable and consistently motivated manner.

Ionesco's characters are shown to cancel their own existence by their absurd behavior in an insolite world where anything can happen. Again language, or the attack upon language (and through language-thought) is shown to be the primary element in this non-realistic theatre. Genet's characters are merely reflections

of social roles. They behave, not as individuals, but as socio-economic types in a world of abstractions. Le Balcon, especially the first four scenes, is seen to rely more on stage activity (gesture and visual factors) than on character to convey dramatic action. The characters of Samuel Beckett are not whole characters; they are merely parts of characters. In both Waiting for Godot and Endgame one character is primarily emotional; the other intellectual. Only together can they form a whole character. Beckett's plays are concerned with revealing a state of being, not with portraying an event. In order to do this, they rely primarily on thought (conveyed through rhythmical diction) rather than character--the most necessary element in a strong plot. Happy Days follows the same lines as the two earlier plays, but here language itself has become the object of examination, as in the Ionesco plays.

Finally, our conception of non-realistic drama having been clarified, and our acquaintance with its tradition renewed, we can see how the author's two plays, Where the Hell is She? and The Fabulous Fountain of Youth, function and how they fit into the non-realistic tradition of modern theatre.

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## REFLECTIONS ON THE NON-REALISTIC TRADITION SINCE STRINDBERG

The non-realistic tradition, in which I write, is not clear cut. Realistic plays like Death of a Salesman and The Caucasian Chalk Circle include non-realistic elements (ghost, chorus), and non-realistic plays like No Exit and Endgame come close to creating realistic characters. Today, one of the best Absurd playwrights, Harold Pinter, is tending toward realism as one of the best realistic playwrights of our time, Bertolt Brecht, tended toward non-realism. In subject matter most significant plays are, in some sense, realistic, while in technique all drama requires some non-realism. Perhaps we might term these plays which emphasize some element of the drama other than character "non-realistic."

We can observe this phenomenon in Strindberg in whom, according to Bentley<sup>1</sup>, can be found the modern origins of both realism (as leading to Brecht) and non-realism (as leading to Sartre).

In Miss Julie character has fallen to bits. The broken pieces are in our hands. Instead of a kind of Middle-class tragedy we have a bitter jest against all tragedy. Instead of adopting the Ibsenite architectonic Strindberg prides himself on the reintroduction of the monologue, the pantomime, and the dance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bentley, Eric, The Playwright as Thinker, (New York, 1946).

<sup>2</sup>Bentley, p. 183.

In A. Dream Play and The Ghost Sonata we find the new subject matter that becomes available to the dramatist who would free himself of a literal conception of character. Dialogue occasionally comes free from plot enabling it to follow a line of thought further than would otherwise be possible. Superficial "unity" is sacrificed in order that the archetypical human experience might be suggested. Possibility and probability here become entirely subject to the dramatist's control because anything can happen. This is the self-created basis for dramatic freedom.

The basis of non-realism in Yeats and Eliot follows from their emphasis on language, and their desire to give free rein to the mind as realized in language that is not entirely subject to the possibilities of character. Generally speaking, realistic drama was not made for eloquent characters. It prefers the unattractive, unintelligent victim of circumstance. The playwrights who can fully realize the possibilities of both character (as subject to plot) and language are few and far-between. Should poets be denied the stage? Or should they be forced to write a drama wherein their own speciality is subordinated to another aspect of the drama? It was inevitable that poets should reconceive the drama.

They wanted something that was more than a poetry reading, yet less than pure theater. Yeats and Eliot managed to do this in achieving a poetry of the stage, a poetry which is visual as well as audial. In Yeats especially, we find the poetic image that can be SEEN. Naturally, in such drama, tableaux, dance,

song, and monologue realize their full possibilities. This is not the only kind of theater that should be allowed in our century--or any other--but it is a kind of theater that must never be lost unless we are willing to experience the subsequent impoverishment of the more popular forms.

Yeats has attempted to create the illusion that a character IS more than he does. This is, of course, an impossibility in a "realistic" play where ALL that we know of a character comes from what he does, what other characters say about him--how they react to him, and what he says of himself. But in Purgatory, the unnamed characters represent, not particular individuals, but archetypical human experience. These characters find their motivation in the human condition more than they find it within the told or present action of the play. In revealing the essence of one character, the Old Man, Yeats has implied the existence of the past that polluted him, and the future that is stopped in him.

Yeats does not waste energy attempting to maintain a suspension of disbelief in the audience. Nor does he encourage disbelief as Brecht does. He creates his freedom to be poetic and uses it. It is not the action itself, but the meaning of the action that interests Yeats, as it did Strindberg. As the Daughter said in A Dream Play: "What you say is correct. But you have not understood it."<sup>3</sup> So with Yeats; it is the under-

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<sup>3</sup>Strindberg, August, "A Dream Play", reprinted in Six Plays of Strindberg, (New York, 1955), p. 254.



standing that counts. In the poetic play Plot loses its all-important role. The Old Man tells us repeatedly to understand: "Study that house;" "And that's symbolical; study that tree, What is it like?"<sup>4</sup> Such statements also illustrate the self-consciousness that is possible in modern non-realistic plays from Yeats to Beckett and Ionesco.

Murder in the Cathedral, with its introduction of a chorus, frees itself even further from the subjection of Diction to Plot. Within the chorus all personality is eliminated, and language and meaning exist in their own right. Although not many playwrights will successfully imitate Yeats or Eliot, their type of theater is contributive to the mainstream of drama in that it informs the contemporary theater with a certain vitality of language. Imitators like Wilder and MacLeish fail to write great drama because they are not great poets. I am convinced only great poets can write poetic drama because in the theater the poetic line is tested in the dramatic line. A further qualification: they must be capable of dramatic poetry like "Sweeny Agonistes", or "A Dialogue of Self and Soul."

But does non-realism always spring from a poetic impulse? The answer is no, but the non-realist theater is often a theater of language. One of the central concerns of the modern "subjective" playwrights (as opposed to the "objective" playwrights like Adamov or Brecht) is the question of identity. The human image had to be revised in Europe after the Goyaesque experience of

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<sup>4</sup>Yeats, W. B., "Purgatory", reprinted in The Modern Theatre, ed. Eric Bentley, (New York, 1955).

the war. (In America optimism and humanism remained untarnished for some time. In Commonwealth countries the pre-evolutionary image continues as a quaint cultural lag.) The question for the artist who does not seek the answer in social re-organization is "Who am I?" This question is posed by both Beckett and Ionesco and in basically similar ways, the common denominator being the realization that the most basic characteristic of man is the way he talks about himself and the world. Anti-realism in the theater of the Absurd becomes anti-drama because language no longer exists as a medium of communication, but has become itself the subject matter of dramatic action. The question "Who am I?" is reflected in the self-conscious concern of modern drama: "What is a play?" Here it is not the attempt to be realistic that threatens the theater as such, but self-conscious and overt (like functional architecture with wires, pipes, and air ducts on display) examination of that which makes theater possible: language. As Vannier says of the Theater of the Absurd:

Their originality this time no longer lies in their choice of a new language, but in their setting up a dramaturgy of human relations at the level of language itself. Their originality appears quite clearly if we compare this dramaturgy with that of the traditional theatre. In the latter, human relations are never verbal relations, but "psychological" relationships which language only translates . . . . When language becomes the object of a theatrical problem, nothing is any longer a matter of course: the doors are open to a criticism of its value, and that is why the destruction of language is one of the major directions of this avant-garde current. The drama of words will therefore be only a drama of absurdity, and the theatre of language, by destroying its object, will become

an anti-theatre: a dialectic whose consequences we can observe in the theatre of Ionesco.<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely this concern with language, combined with the resultant formal experimentalism, that carries the absurdists beyond Sartre and Camus. For in Huis Clos and Caligula we find the traditional view of rational man threatened by new forces, but we do not find the attack on language that itself threatens man's view of himself.

In other words, in absurd drama there are two concerns that reflect the problem of identity: the attack on conventional language (cliches, etc.), and the creation of a theatrical world where anything can happen.

Why attack language? How does this attack reflect the modern concern with identity? "Language most shows a man; speak that I may see you."--Ben Jonson. The words we use and our manner of arranging them are involved with our own sense of identity. If we speak largely in cliches we think in cliches and our sense of identity probably comes from an easy identification with our social role as an entity we verbalize to ourselves: "I AM a lawyer." Or, if we lack a sense of identity, our search for it may be easily channeled by admen's verbal concepts. Therefore, to show the absurdity of our language is to show the absurdity of our existence, existence without being. In short, if our language is innocuous and vacuous, what right have we to a sense of self?

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<sup>5</sup>Vannier, Jean, "A Theatre of Language", printed in Tulane Drama Review, ed. Richard Schechner, (New Orleans, Spring, 1963), p. 182.

How is the attack on language one of the basic ironies of Ionesco's theater? To begin with, his theater rests, as Schechner says,<sup>6</sup> on the contrast, or dramatic tension, between the inner and outer worlds. The outer world is the setting and the inner world is the action. These are never in harmony, and the greater the contrast between them the greater the comic effect. This disharmony also functions between language and situation. For example, in The Bald Soprano we have a nonsense distortion of a French proverb. The distortion: "J'aime mieux pondre un œuf que voler un boeuf." Schechner observes: "It looks and sounds like a sentence; its rhyme scheme disguises it as a proverb; it has all the grammatical necessities of a sentence. But it lacks the intention of a sentence." Now the point I want to make is that language that contains no possibility of communication undercuts not only the validity of language, but the value of the effort itself and, by extension, the existence of the speaker or listener. Take, for example, one of the Professor's speeches in La Leçon:

That which distinguishes the neo-Spanish languages and their idioms from other linguistic groups, such as the group of languages called Austrian and neo-Austrian or Hapsburgian, as well as the Esperanto, Helvetian, Monacan, Swiss, Andorran, Basque, and jai alai groups, and also the groups of diplomatic and technical languages--that which distinguishes them, I repeat, is their striking resemblance which makes it so hard to distinguish them from each other. I'm speaking of the neo-Spanish languages which one is able to distinguish from each other, however, only thanks to their distinctive characteristics,

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<sup>6</sup>Schechner, Richard, "The Inner and the Outer Reality", printed in Tulane Drama Review.

absolutely indisputable proofs of their extraordinary resemblance, which renders indisputable their common origin, and which, at the same time, differentiates them profoundly--through the continuation of the distinctive traits which I've just cited.<sup>7</sup>

This is so close to reason that we are led to take him seriously, and then the joke is on us. Our language and our existence are really threatened. We have in the Professor's speech an absurd balance between his scholarly tone and the nearly complete absence of subject matter. But this is only one of the many dialectical contrasts of the play. In the beginning we have his extreme patience which is absurd in light of the inanity of his pupil's responses. And this patience is all the more effective because of our rising sense of dread. But the real comedy springs from the inappropriateness of his patience to her stupid responses. And later in the play when our sympathy has shifted to her when his rapidly growing sexually violent reaction to her toothache has alienated us, the dramatic action hinges on the inappropriateness of her increasing provocativeness (in the production I saw at the Theatre de la Huchette the pupil opened her legs further with each of his verbal onslaughts) to her increasing danger.

In the world of Ionesco's drama everything cancels something else out. Language, setting, and action are at war with themselves and with each other. The ordinary appearance of the characters contradicts their extraordinary actions.

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<sup>7</sup>Schechner, p. 189.

Schechner feels that it is this dialectical tension between the co-existent crimes and outer realities that replaces plot in an Ionesco play and results in a theater of the monstrous lacking ordinary motivation and therefore abstract by reason of its very absurdity. To create characters capable of gratuitous acts (i.e. acts without motivation) is to undercut all basis for "realism." The Ionesco character has no real existence: Ionesco has destroyed it by exposing the inherent self-cancelling contradictions of the character's life, especially in the attack upon his language. Lacking identity his characters "substitute speed for substance, activity for act."<sup>8</sup> They try to find themselves and fail at an increasing pace. They fail to resolve this dialectic between the reality they lack and the proliferation of THINGS in space (e.g. a stage full of furniture).

The gap between the inner and outer reality--that gap which informs Ionesco's entire technique--lays bare the alienation of his heroes from themselves and from the world. The Ionesco hero can neither reach and understand himself nor grasp the things of the world. Yet these things--his apartment, his wife, his coffee cups, his table and chairs--are his; they are his only connection to the flow of life, to the abundance of life, and as the hero becomes conscious of his separation from these things he tries ever more desperately to unite himself to what is his.<sup>9</sup>

Because these characters do not exist there is always the danger that the full world of the stage does not exist either.

Doubrovsky: "The comedy of proliferation on the level of things, is complementary to the

<sup>8</sup>Schechner, p. 192.

<sup>9</sup>Schechner, p. 192.

comedy of circularity on the human level. The chairs in The Chairs, the cups in Victims of Duty, the pieces of furniture in The New Tenant, or the eggs in The Future 'is in Eggs are multiplied until they crowd and choke the stage, the corpse and mushrooms in Amedee keep growing until there is no more room for the characters . . . The eternal return is not an eternal assertion of the self, as it was for Nietzsche, but its perpetual negation. Moreover, to man's absence corresponds the all-pervading presence of things. In the same way as Sartre's Rouquentin experienced nausea in front of a pebble or a root, the spectator experiences the essential emptiness of man before the monstrous kingdom of objects."<sup>10</sup>

And if there is no theatric identity how can there be technical realism? Realistic techniques must have some substance to represent. If a playwright is cognizant of the real doubts concerning man's identity in the twentieth century, it is only natural that this cognizance should be reflected in non-realistic techniques. And if he feels, as Ionesco and Genet do, that people lack identity without realizing it, he may well choose non-realistic techniques as the basis of his attack upon their (non-substantial) density.

This leads us to the second technique of absurd drama that reflects the problem of identity (or ontological insecurity). The creation of a theatrical world where anything can happen is quite the opposite of a world where actions are the natural expressions of concrete personalities. Ionesco refers to his world as insolite.

Insolite is one of Ionesco's favorite words; it is difficult to translate. An insolite world is

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<sup>10</sup>Schechner, p. 198.

one in which anything may happen, without cause, at any time; it is a world of simultaneously hilarious and horrendous caprice. The insolite lurks in the most everyday experiences; it surprises us, sometimes comically, sometimes tragically, sometimes in both ways at once. The Professor's rape-murder of the Pupil is insolite, as is Mrs. Martin's description of a man tying his shoelace. But the insolite is not limited to phenomena--it pervades the entire structure of the plays. The sudden changes in character, the electric introduction of startling images, and the violent wrenches in the course of the action--these are all insolite. In short, the insolite is an attitude, a way of looking at the world.<sup>11</sup>

As speed is a substitute for being, so noise is a substitute for language with ideational content.

. . . this tension between evanescence and presence--between the over-full and the utterly empty--forms the core of his early work. In this respect we must remember that Ionesco sees language--words--as fully analogous to things. A stage full of empty yet "heavy" (tangible) noise is certainly full, in the literal sense of the word.<sup>12</sup>

Ionesco's characters destroy themselves through inanity or they are cancelled out in interaction with the setting. But these characters live on after death, or do not leave the stage when dead. The characters in The Bald Soprano are dead before the curtain rises. The evidence of this is their dead language. Others, like the Professor in La Leçon, seek their own existence in the repetitive patterns of language which appear to have substance. The search is itself evidence of non-being, or ontological insecurity. And, as the character becomes conscious of the fact that he does not know who he is, the whole world becomes insolite, in his perception. This is when he begins to pile up possessions as a substitute for a sense of identity.

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<sup>11</sup>Schechner, p. 195.

<sup>12</sup>Schechner, pp. 196-197.



Beyond Ionesco in technical innovation and progression of thought is Samuel Beckett. Now Genet claims that society is deceived by its own images (Le Balcon), and Ionesco has shown how society is caught up in its own language; but it could be argued that it is Genet that has been deceived by his own image and that it is Ionesco himself who is caught up in language. But Beckett, who has developed both of these themes, is not subject to either criticism. He has written his major plays in French rather than his native English to avoid the kind of self-indulgent writer's writing that would be available to him in his own language. And he has more distance from and control over his profound stage images than any other living playwright.

Genet's theater is one of reflections where the only identity behind the reflections is his own. This is the philosophical basis for his own realism. Nevertheless his stage images are second only to Beckett's in depth of complication. In the first four scenes of Le Balcon he sees the stage as a space to be filled and he fills it. Gesture and visual factors increase in importance as dramatic action is conveyed (not replaced) by stage activity. It is in the more verbal sections of Le Balcon that Genet tends to be over-explicit, thus reducing dramatic effect, e.g. the sixth scene which can easily be cut--the action could be advanced similarly by a better handling of Roger at Madame Irma's--and the ninth scene which is too long and bends over backward to explain the preceding action. Irma and Carmen's dialogue in scene five points out the basic conceit of Le Balcon much too obviously:

IRMA: . . . Mais dis-toi que Général, Evêque et Juge  
sont dans la vie . . .

CARMEN: Desquels parlez-vous?

IRMA: Des vrais.

CARMEN: Lesquels sont vrais? Ceux de chez nous?

IRMA: Les autres. Ils sont dans la vie supports  
d'une parade qu'ils doivent traîner dans la  
boue du réel et du quotidien. Ici la Comédie,  
l'Apparence se gardent pures, la Fête intacte.

Genet is attacking his audience by suggesting in Le Balcon that, by dealing in illusion consciously, the play is closer to the real than they are. As the Chief of Police says in scene five: "Je fais comme eux, je pénètre d'emblée dans la réalité que le jeu nous propose, et comme j'ai le beau rôle, je les mâte." Or, as the Envoy says of the "queen": "C'est une image vraie, née d'un spectacle faux."

The apparently quite rational moral of Le Balcon is that identification equals death, not identity. Observe Irma as queen in the last scene.

LA REINE: Je ne serai donc jamais qui je suis?

L'ENVOYÉ: Jamais plus.

LA REINE: (comme effrayée): Jamais plus? Jamais plus  
rapportera à ma seule personne? Jamais plus  
rien qui me concerne ne pourra arriver aux  
autres?

L'ENVOYÉ: (sec): Oui.

LA REINE: Chaque événement de ma vie: mon sang qui  
perle si je m'égratine . . .

L'ENVOYÉ: Oui, madame; chaque événement s'écrit avec  
une majuscule. Et maintenant . . .

LA REINE: Mais c'est la Mort?

L'ENVOYÉ: C'est Elle.

To return to Beckett: If we were to compare Endgame with Waiting for Godot we would observe that, whereas the latter is set in an open waste land, the former is set in a world so closed that it suggests the interior of a madman's skull. However, the fact of the kitchen effectively destroys the notion that Endgame is intended to be a monodrama. We would note that each play has two major and two minor characters, and that the two major characters in each are innately opposed to one another. In Endgame Hamm is the master; he is untidy, sensuous, and self-pitying. Clov, on the other hand, is the servant; he is neat, sexless, and intellectual. In Godot one thinks, one feels. In both the characters suggest aspects of human beings rather than complete characters. There is a general increase of disability from Godot to Endgame. In the former, Lucky is nearly dumb; Pozzo is blind. In the latter, Hamm cannot stand or see, Clov cannot sit, and Hamm's accursed progenitors have lost their shanks.

We might go on to note that whereas Godot is quickly paced, Endgame moves with an excruciating slowness. In Godot little is remembered; in Endgame nothing is forgotten: it is even re-lived. The theme of Godot appears to be an examination of the nature of

time, more specifically, of waiting. The theme of Endgame is that time must have a stop. We see the last human beings. Their supplies are running out. The tide has stopped. "Something is taking its course." Clov's movements and posture are an indication that things are slowly grinding to a halt. As far as plot goes (both plays deal with situations rather than events), the question in Godot is--will Godot come?; in Endgame--will Clov leave? The latter is a little like Mann's Hans Castorp in the sanatorium of contemporary existence. Having unconsciously arrived, agreed to stay simply by the fact of inertia, Clov finally becomes conscious that there is no place else for him to go. (In this he is not unlike the modern graduate student in the sanatorium of the university.) Clov's problem is to re-discover mobility.

But it is this question of the plotless play along with the nature of Beckett's concept of dramatic action that I wish to develop specifically in reference to Endgame.

The rhythm of the play is to be found in the retardation of motion. This is obvious from Clov's opening movements. His activity comes close to being self-defeating--as does the later dialogue. The constant pauses give the audience time to think. The plot exists only in an ironic sense. Endgame plays with the audience expectation of something to be done, of a move to be made. (The play is extremely conscious of the audience and of itself as play. Note Hamm: "An aside, ape! Did you never hear an aside before?"; Clov: "This is what we call making an exit.")

And Hamm's statement "We're getting on. The thing is impossible. Don't we laugh?").

The first lines play with the possibility of plot. "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished." Suspense is created. What is finished? Is the "must" in the above line a statement of fact or a fervent wish? Perhaps Clov is talking about the game they are playing. Perhaps he is talking about the dog he is making that still lacks a leg. In either case the lines create an incantatory rhythm around a conception of visceral impulse that is not unlike the technique of Henry James.

Hamm functions as a director. His first line "Me--(he yawns)--to play," suggests a passion play where action is suffering; suffering action. As Clov says of Nagg: "He's crying." And as Hamm answers: "Then he's living." (See also Clov's long paragraph, p. 80.) But this idea too is misleading, or ironic, because the play comes close to establishing the image, as Nell puts it: "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness."

"Can there be misery--(he yawns)--loftier than mine?" Hamm raises the question of his own heroism or tragedy. But it is another false lead for the anxious audience. "No doubt," undercuts it. "Formerly," qualifies the undercutting. "But now?" raises the question again. It is a delay intended to pay on audience expectations.

The dramatic action of Endgame seems to be based on the asking and answering of questions in such a way that each line

cancels the preceding line. And often, as in Brecht, banal stage activity undercuts the verbal action--i.e. when it is not undercutting itself. An example: "No, all is a--(he yawns)--bsolute" cracks the absolute.

Hamm continues to mislead us: "And yet I hesitate to . . . to end." Is he talking about the game itself, or the story he is writing? Clov's "I have things to do." functions similarly. Does he have to work on the dog or tend his garden? (Note how Clov's dog and garden, Hamm's verbal composition, and Nagg's story about the tailor are creation images that function in opposition to the general impression that time is coming to a stop.)

Hamm, the director, gets things going again with "Did you ever see my eyes?" Clov knows what Hamm is up to, but he must answer because his identity depends on the continuation of the game. Clov: "What is there to keep me here?" Hamm: "The dialogue." They are going through an old burlesque routine, and their character comes from the rhythms. Nagg and Nell represent a further development of the theme of immobility. Hamm is also preoccupied with this theme. That is why he is so fascinated by the Cartesian bicycle wheels. As Hamm's "We're getting on", this preoccupation with motion functions ironically in a play that isn't going anywhere--as dramatic action is usually understood.

The question of the pain killer creates a false suspense that is demolished with the discovery that there is no more. But it also fits in with the real action of the play in reinforcing the theme that there is no cure for being on earth. Let us see

how the play consciously retards its own motion, nevertheless continues, and progresses by a series of cancellations.

HAMM: . . . (Pause.) Don't we laugh?

CLOV (after reflection): -----retards  
I don't feel like it.

HAMM (after reflection): -----retards  
Nor I.  
(Pause.) -----retards  
Clov!

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: Nature has forgotten us. -----Hamm continues  
by setting up a  
new central con-  
ception. He  
knows what move  
Clov will make.

CLOV: There's no more nature. -----cancels preceding  
line.

HAMM: No more nature! You exaggerate. --qualifies  
initial assertion.

CLOV: In the vicinity. -----cancels qualified  
assertion.

HAMM: But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair,  
our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!

CLOV: Then she hasn't forgotten us. --indifferently  
undercuts value  
of whole argu-  
ment.

HAMM: But you say there is none. ----establishes  
impasse.

CLOV: No one that ever lived ever thought so crooked  
as we.

This little interchange is particularly interesting because it suggests in the last line a possible explanation of the action. Perhaps by indirection they will find direction out. Or, perhaps their nihilism has turned the picture of the world to the wall. Then it wouldn't be the world that was dying, but only a certain sensibility. As Hamm says:

I once knew a madman who thought the end of the world had come. He was a painter--and engraver. I had a great fondness for him. I used to go and see him, in the asylum. I'd take him by the hand and drag him to the window. Look! There! All that rising corn! And there! Look! The sails of the herring fleet! All that loveliness!

(Pause.)

He'd snatch away his hand and go back into his corner. Appalled. All he had seen was ashes.

(Pause.)

He alone had been spared.

(Pause.)

Forgotten.

(Pause.)

It appears the case is . . . was not so . . . so unusual.<sup>13</sup>

But it is only a possibility. More likely the sensibility that can see the possible limitations of its perspective and nevertheless makes a nihilistic statement has more effectively damned the world than could a lesser mind. The play ends with the question of motion and what the world is REALLY like unresolved.

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<sup>13</sup> Beckett, Samuel, Endgame, (New York, 1958), p. 44.



Happy Days can perhaps best be viewed as an expansion of the Nagg-Nell relationship of Endgame. Again the names Winnie and Willie suggest horses--creatures once used for transportation. And one of the basic elements of the situation is lack of locomotion or, more specifically, loss of the use of one's legs--the upright position being that which distinguishes man from other animals. Again they are confined to a small sand-covered area, and this time one is buried in sand.

The situations differ in the removal of an objective will (Hamm's) that controlled theirs. Winnie and Willie have legs and freedom from coercion, but choose not to move. "What a curse, mobility!" The stage activity of the final scene comes as a shock after the preceding, seemingly theatrically impossible, immobility. When there is nothing moving on stage but Winnie's head, we must consider the human face more closely than in any other play (see Blake). They are also more highly developed than Nagg or Nell in that their senses are fully functioning. They can listen to and watch each other--when they choose to: note the end. One might almost say that they have developed out of Nagg and Nell in the same way that Hamm and Clov developed out of Estragon and Vladimir. In each case, the more developed characters listen intently and never forget where Didi and Gogo could not remember each other's names and Nagg thought only of his sugar plum while Hamm composed his inimitable tale.

The central concern of Happy Days as I see it is the possibility, or impossibility, of communication. This is one of Beckett's basic themes. Language itself is attacked.

Nicklaus Gessner has tabulated ten different modes of disintegration of language observable in Waiting for Godot. They range from simple misunderstandings and double-entendres to monologues (as signs of inability to communicate), cliches, repetitions of synonyms, inability to find the right words, and "telegraphic style" (loss of grammatical structure, communication by shouted commands) to Lucky's farrago of chaotic nonsense and the dropping of punctuation marks, such as question marks, as an indication that language has lost its function as a means for communication, that questions have turned into statements not really requiring an answer.

(Esslin, p. 45.)

This is, of course, Ionesco's major interest. Statements and questions cancel preceding statements and questions in the works of both playwrights, but with Beckett alone do we feel that more than our logic has been attacked. Our metaphysics are undercut by his verbal games and we feel with Clov: "Better than nothing! Is it possible?"

To speak in the "old style" is to speak as if words had not lost their meaning. The sweet old style is made up of old things, old eyes, and old jokes ("How can one better magnify the Almighty than by sniggering with him at his little jokes, particularly the poorer ones?"), and, last but not least, Winnie's old song. In fact, Happy Days sets up an opposition between silence and song with words and sounds in between. Hamm, we remember, loved the old questions: "Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there's nothing like them!" But Clov did not feel quite the same way: "You've asked me these questions millions of times." But if Clov did not appreciate the pitter patter of little lines, what did he want? "I want to sing," he

says, and the opposition between speech and song is established. Winnie's bag, being the alternative to a sustained effort at communication with Willie, and yet falling short of individual expression, represents speech tending towards silence rather than song. Winnie first finds the old style on a medicine bottle in her bag for "Loss of spirits . . . lack of keenness . . . want of appetite . . ." --words which assume that there is a cure for being on earth. Whenever she becomes conscious of the futility of her efforts at communication, she plays with the contents of her bag.

Words fail, there are times when even they fail. (Turning a little towards WILLIE.) Is that not so, Willie? (Pause. Turning a little further.) Is that not so, Willie, that even words fail, at times? (Pause. Back front.) What is one to do then, until they come again? Brush and comb the hair, if it has not been done, or if there is some doubt, trim the nails if they are in need of trimming, these things tide one over. (Pause.) That is what I mean. (Pause.) That is all I mean. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful, that not a day goes by--(smile)--to speak in the old style--(smile off) without some blessing--(WILLIE collapses behind slope, his head disappears, WINNIE turns toward event)--in disguise.

It should be obvious here that the bag represents in a fine stage image that which is suggested by the pattering everyday speech of Ionesco's characters--the substitution of routine for human contact. It is at that moment between the failing of words and the initiation of distraction that contact is possible. At that moment, I imagine, Willie strains toward her, before she returns to the old style, and he collapses.

We are in a kind of wasteland where the nearly human ("last human kind--to stray this way") visit of Mr. and Mrs. Shower, or Cooker, is nearly forgotten. Aside from the possibility of relation between Winnie and Willie, there is only the chance of contact with man-made products; newspaper, comb, mirror, lipstick, gun, etc.: the fully guaranteed genuine pure manufactures of sexless pigs who have reproduced things instead of people. Were it not for the bag, total isolation would come with the silence that follows the failing of words.

Oh no doubt the time will come when before I can utter a word I must make sure you heard the one that went before and then no doubt another come another time when I must learn to talk to myself a thing I could never bear to do such wilderness. (Pause.) Or gaze before me with compressed lips. (She does so.) All day long. (Gaze and lips again.) No. (Smile.) No, no. (Smile off.) There is of course the bag. (Turns towards it.) There will always be the bag. (Back front.) Yes, I suppose so. (Pause.) Even when you are gone, Willie.

And later:

The day is now well advanced. (Smile.) To speak in the old style. (Smile off.) And yet it is perhaps a little soon for my song. (Pause.) To sing too soon is a great mistake, I find. (Turning towards bag.) There is of course the bag. (Looking at bag.) The bag. (Back front.) Could I enumerate its contents? (Pause.) No. (Pause.) Could I, if some kind person were to come along and ask, What all have you got in that big black bag, Winnie? give an exhaustive answer? (Pause.) No. (Pause.) The depths in particular, who knows what treasures. (Pause.) What comforts. (Turns to look at bag.) Yes, there is the bag. (Back front.) But something tells me, Do not overdo the bag, Winnie, make use of it of course, let it help you . . . along, when stuck, by all means, but cast your mind forward, Winnie, to the time when words must fail--(she closes eyes, pause, opens eyes)--and do not overdo the bag.

Winnie, like Clov, who continually announces his return ("I'm back again."), suffers from an ontological insecurity. Her search for identity leads to compulsive talking in the hope she will be heard--or seen. To be seen, the almost inevitable contact, the proof of existence--it is to avoid this that so many Beckett characters are blind. To be seen is one of Winnie's passions--that is why she makes herself up so often. However, her make-up will be long gone when she finally is seen. For Winnie, to be seen is to BE, with all its quasi-religious implications.

Oh I know it does not follow when two are gathered together--(faltering)--in this way--(normal)--that because one sees the other the other sees the one, life has taught me that . . . too. (Pause.) Yes, life I suppose, there is no other word. (She turns a little towards him.) Could you see me, Willie, do you think, from where you are, if you were to raise your eyes in my direction? (Turns a little further.) Lift up your eyes to me, Willie, and tell me can you see me, do that for me, I'll lean back as far as I can.

Her request is tragic because it is a request for everything, for life, and yet it is like asking for the moon in a world where communication does not seem worth the effort, though "it would seem hardly possible--(voice breaks, falls to a murmur)--to ask less--of a fellow-creature--to put it mildly . . . ." At the beginning of Act II she again expresses the importance of being seen: "Someone is looking at me still. (Pause.) Caring for me still. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.) Eyes on my eyes."

In the final scene Winnie knows she IS because Willie sees her. It is a happy day for her--given the circumstances. It really is. And, where Willie's earlier song was incomprehensible (like Lucky's)--though a significant effort, Winnie's song finds words for the impulse towards communication: "Every touch of fingers tells me what I know." And though we may realize that she has not been touched, we are reminded of Clov's "We should lick each other." The final tableau is the sadness after song. "It does not last of course."

I write because I must attempt to understand the human world and the analysis and creation of bright--or dark--little centers of motivation and their interactions is the best way I know to do this. I write drama--at once the most objective and subjective of literary forms--because I must make a many-sided approach to a world that is coming at me from all sides. Drama is objective because it involves the conflicts of the several points of view of several characters and because it often deals with the real problems of the real world. It is subjective in that the dramatic world, for all its complexity, is still an internal one--the playwright himself contains all the possibilities of his characters--and in its ability to capture from the inside more perfectly than the novel or even poetry the ungodly feeling of a world that has no ethical framework for action or any context whatsoever.

Where the Hell is She examines the role of institutions (marriage, war, etc.) in the lives of men who have lost sight

of whatever divinity there may be. Their struggles are related to the significant idea by extension: masochism and sadism are institutional emotions--they can only fill a world wherein institutions and the parts they assign have become ends in themselves.

The Fabulous Fountain of Youth asserts that there is no escape from the organized, power-centered modern world, that the only solution is to involve ourselves in it as we find it--with a difference. Where Louis withdrew, from the play and from the theater, Ponce returns, to both. It is not a play of social reconciliation; it establishes the grounds for a direct attack. If the horror of modern society is not realized in the swamp it is because the latter is too natural. I find it hard to hate animals. In spite of insecticides, private power, and the Weyerhaeuser interests, their world is relatively free from pollution.

I write in the anti-realistic tradition of Absurd theater. I cannot overemphasize the fact that a non-realistic theater is not necessarily socially unconscious. I hope to achieve a union of realistic and non-realistic techniques, as did Brecht, only from the other side.

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WHERE THE HELL IS SHE?

(A dull roar begins before the curtain rises and increases in volume to a weird scream of unknown machinery. It stops. A crowd is heard running across the stage. After a short silence, a woman is heard running in high heels. The curtain is yanked open violently. The stage is empty except for a bench in the center.)

WILLIAM MADISON, a well-dressed man of sixty with a rapid, inconclusive manner of speaking.

(He whistles as one calling a dog. There is no response to his whistle; he calls.)

Mary. Here, Mary. Come along, Mary. Be a good girl now. You know an Irish Setter isn't an ordinary dog. Maryyyy! It's a special dog. Ohh, Ohh, Mary. Come here this minute! Those big brown eyes full of tears. Mary! How I love those long red hairs.

(He sits on edge of stage and removes his shoes.)

I hope you're coming today, Mary. There's going to be a surprise.

(He looks around suspiciously.)

It's better than chasing sticks, you know.

(He giggles.)

Mary, I won't look if you're not ready. Really!

(He covers his eyes with his hands.)

JOHNNY MURPHY, seventy years old, dressed in a gray shiny suit and a purple shirt. He speaks with authority. He looks out from behind the bench and grins monstrously. A few strains of "A Tisket, a Tasket, a Green and Yellow Basket" are heard. He

starts to laugh, but covers his mouth with his hand, and darts back behind the bench.

MADISON (Covering his ears.) Who's that I hear laughing?

(Speaks rapidly.) It isn't every girl that'll wash your feet just so they feel . . . feel good . . . good all over. My feet have always felt good. It's because she washed them. In between the toes . . . with soap and water. They're clean, clean.

(He sticks one in the faces of the front row.)

She hasn't washed them for three years.

(He slowly and meticulously removes his socks.)

Where IS she? After all. Three years. She was lovely. She had long red hairs . . . that followed her everywhere . . .

(He trails his red socks in the air.)

. . . she went.

(He drops his socks in front of the stage.)

(Screams.) SHE LOVED ME! And you would too if you knew me, really knew me, knew me well, that is. I CAN'T STAND COLD FEET. You know what it is to be warm, really warm, warm all over?

(Rubs his feet. Next lines addressed directly to member of the audience chosen by actor.)

You there! You know. I know you know. We all know you know. You know what a warm little office is like, what a big warm house is like. Oh yes, it's obvious. You've made it. You're where I want to be. Tell me, what's it like? All that warmth. All that love and respect. Come on. Wasn't it worth while cutting a few corners here and there? You understand. You're my friend.

You're going to listen very closely. I know you will. Say, bye the bye, I'm, well, looking for somebody. If you've seen her . . . Oh, I hope it's not too late.

MURPHY (Leaping out from behind bench. Poor old MADISON falls startled into front row.) It's never too late. Live now, die later. Buy while you can. Eat if you want, ashtrays, toothpaste, ladies' luncheons, prophylactics, cherry sundaes, diamond rings, dollar dinners, automatic toasters, and acres of shitty candy. Sneak right up, sonny, and take a peek at the sights. You've come at a good time. Midnight on the great white way. Now's when the girls get goin' down by the Hershey's factory where the niggers are thick as flies, and now's when, if you go walkin' out past the elevated tracks, if you take a turn down Maxwell street, if you make a hollow sound on a black sidewalk, why you can have the flesh of your choice, all painted up against the cold, on a smelly little mattress full of life. Just piss out the window, sonny, and look for blotches with a match.

(Pulling MADISON on stage and speaking confidentially.)

Sneak right up, son. I know a pretty little thing just up the tracks a piece that makes love hand over fist at the drop of a pair of pants. She's not an ordinary girl. Oh, no! She's a special girl. She calls me her big Johnny.

MADISON (Carrying his shoes and socks.) How do you do? I'm William Madison. I've lived a long time. I like dogs and apples and . . . and football. Right now, well, I'm just kind of looking for someone.

MURPHY I'm Johnny Murphy, by God, and it's quite a life I've led. Right now I'm spinning the world and making sure nobody falls off at the same time. It's a big job.

MADISON Yes, I should think it would be. Yes.

MURPHY When I have a little time left over, I breathe life into the half-dead and help the homeless find their Marys.

MADISON Do you? You do. Find their . . . say . . . perhaps you can help me?

MURPHY No doubt about it. Now you just lie down here. (He directs MADISON'S actions.)

MADISON Lie down?

MURPHY (Softly.) Yes, just lie down. Just let go, son. Just relax. Relax. (Rubs his arms a bit, pushing him toward bench.)

MADISON Well . . .

MURPHY That's it, That's it. We'll just sit down as a first step. And then we'll turn and put our feet up. (MURPHY lifts them.) And now we'll just straighten out. And before we know it we're lying down.

MADISON (Flat on his back.) Well, all right.

(MURPHY takes a newspaper out of his hip pocket, shakes it like a magician's handkerchief, and spreads it over MADISON.)

(LOUIS walks across the stage pushing a broom. MURPHY turns to watch him. MADISON pops up.)

MADISON Let me see. I want to watch.

MURPHY (Pushing him down.) Don't get anxious. I'll tell you everything I see.

MADISON What did you see?

MURPHY Nothing.

MADISON My feet are cold.

MURPHY Wiggle your toes a bit.

MADISON (Wiggling his toes.) Ahh, that's better.

MURPHY I knew it would be. Are you falling asleep?

MADISON I think so. Will there be gifts for me when I wake up?

MURPHY But yes!

A picture of mother covered with dust,  
But yellow and cracked it stands,  
By a photo of father grinning with lust,  
With his wallet in his hands.

MADISON Is that all?

MURPHY But no! There's a little white church with the cross  
broken off. And there's a peppermint stick for Mary's candy  
bag. And there're three old men on camels who lost their way.  
And there're some sticky popcorn balls all stuck together.

MADISON I'm sleeping.

MURPHY Liar!

MADISON I am not lying. I'm asleep!

(LOUIS, fifty years old, matter-of-fact voice, enters in the  
other direction pushing a broom.)

LOUIS Be quiet and listen to the birds.

MURPHY (Wheeling around.) The what?

LOUIS The robins and the sparrows. (Stops.)

MADISON (Sitting up.) What nonsense. There aren't birds any  
more; there haven't been any birds for three years. I can't  
even remember what they look like, you know.

MURPHY Perhaps he meant bats.

MADISON No. He said birds, and I won't have it. Birds. There are NO birds!

LOUIS Birds have beaks, don't they?

MURPHY Of course.

LOUIS And they fly?

MURPHY Yes. Yes.

LOUIS Fly to trees?

MADISON Yes. Yes. Yes.

LOUIS And when they're not flying they sit in the trees and sing.

MURPHY So what?

LOUIS So be quiet and listen to them.

MURPHY I don't hear anything.

MADISON Johnny?

MURPHY What?

LOUIS He's got cold feet.

MADISON You shut up, you.

MURPHY Silence, both of you. Let's try and make a little sense out of this.

MADISON Johnny?

MURPHY What?

MADISON Come sit on my bed.

MURPHY Why?

MADISON I want you to tell me a story.

MURPHY What do I get if I do?

MADISON I'll tell you a story too.

MURPHY That should be fun. Your stories are so adult.

(To LOUIS.) Coming?

LOUIS (Leaning his head against his broom.) I'll just stand here and listen to the birds if you don't mind.

MURPHY (Sitting on a corner of MADISON's newspaper.) There now.

MADISON I'm glad you didn't bring him with you, Johnny.

MURPHY Why?

MADISON I don't like him.

MURPHY Don't oversimplify.

MADISON Well, I mean, he's always going off by himself. He doesn't want to learn, I don't think. He doesn't do what he's told. He doesn't tell anybody what to do. Perhaps he doesn't like me. What a funny face he has.

MURPHY You don't like him, do you, Billy?

MADISON Yes, that must be it; one day I followed him to the woods. It was the middle of the winter, but he didn't come out for an hour. And when he did he looked as happy as a lark.

MURPHY Is that the story you wanted to tell me?

MADISON No. You have to tell me one first. You have to.

MURPHY All right, Billy. Now lay back like a good boy. Go on. There. That's the way. Now, once there was a little boy.

MADISON Once upon a time there was a little boy.

MURPHY Quite right, Billy. Once upon a time there was a little boy. He played football. By God, that boy could run. There he goes full speed around left end. It was the homecoming game. His mother was in the crowd dropping back to pass the buck. And

his father was running interference along the sidelines like a blind rhino. There goes our little boy. Back, back goes the quarterback. Our little boy is running away from everybody. And there's the pass. Our little streak of yellow is in the end zone. His arms are open. Look! He's smiling. It's a safe thing. There's the ball. Right in the goddam face, wasn't it, Billy?

MADISON I'd forgotten about that. I never remembered that before. We had a free afternoon. The authorities were smiling and drinking coffee with mom and dad. But where were you? Where were you? Just watching?

LOUIS He threw the ball.

MADISON Did your dead birds tell you that? (Sitting up.)  
(To MURPHY.) That wasn't nice of you to tell me that story, Johnny. Tell me another. Tell me a good one.

MURPHY No. It's your turn to tell me one.

(MADISON gets up. MURPHY takes his place on the bench and MADISON tucks him in.)

MADISON (Softly.) Just lie down.

MURPHY Damn it! I know how to lie down.

MADISON Yes. Yes. Of course you do.

MURPHY You were saying . . . ?

MADISON (Putting on his shoes.) Oh, I know a story or two, or three. Well, once there was a group . . .

MURPHY Once upon a time there was a group.

MADISON Yes. Yes. Thank you, Johnny. Once upon a time there



was a group of boys. They were fine boys, you know; the kind you see on posters. They stole the pants off other boys. The boy who stole the most pants, and saved them, everybody said, would lead the others all through life. Well, one day they stole my pants. There they were flying from the flagpole.  
(Everybody looks up.)

But along came the good Mr. Smith.

(Everybody looks left.)

MURPHY My hero!

LOUIS (Soft, matter-of-fact tone.) The good Mr. Smith. Thirty. Unmarried. A bit pudgy, especially under the eyes. He's the tailor around these parts; participates in all the school activities, likes his tea at three with the widows.

MADISON And the whole group was caught, caught in the act; all except the leader who ran away. But he was caught too, in the act of boring a hole in his closet wall to watch Mrs. Smith undress.

LOUIS (Soft, matter-of-fact tone.) That's Mr. Smith's mother.

MURPHY Liar! (Leaping up.)

LOUIS No. There was never any doubt about Mr. Smith's parentage.

MURPHY There's NEVER been a divorce in my family!

LOUIS Wrong line.

MADISON (To himself.) Boy, I can sure tell 'em, can't I?

MURPHY I never used the wrong line in my life.

(Getting back under the newspaper by MADISON.)

Nobody can sidetrack me.

(Laying down his head then raising it suddenly to LOUIS.)

Don't you know any stories?

LOUIS Not when I'm left out in the cold.

MADISON I saw her yesterday. She was swinging in her swing and smiling at me with her bright eyes and her long hair was flying in the wind.

(He takes one of the newspapers off MURPHY and waves it around him. MURPHY snatches it back and covers himself with it.)

LOUIS I saw a cardinal this morning. A male.

MADISON How do you know?

LOUIS The males are brighter than the females. Tell us about female cardinals, Murphy.

MURPHY (Waking himself with an effort.) So you want to hear a story, do you?

LOUIS Yes.

MURPHY O.K. Once upon a time there were two cardinals that lived in a tree. One was a male and one was a female, by God. One day somebody ugly climbed the tree. (To LOUIS.) He looked like you. The female fought to save her home. Somebody ugly hit her with a stick. The male flew away to look for another female.

LOUIS (To MURPHY.) You were caught up the tree! YOU! (Pointing.)

MURPHY Oh, I was?

LOUIS Yes, you were.

MADISON Oh, he was?

LOUIS Yes, he was. With a knife . . .

MURPHY With a knife?

LOUIS Yes. You tried to kill her! You tried to kill her!

MADISON With a knife?

LOUIS Cut the strings of her swing half through. But she didn't swing that day. Oh, no. It was little Billy almost broke his neck wasn't it?

MADISON Oh, it was.

LOUIS (To MURPHY.) Tried to kill her. (Pointing at MURPHY.)

MURPHY Tried?

LOUIS Tried and failed.

MURPHY Maybe it was your strings I wanted to cut.

LOUIS (Taking a step toward MURPHY.) That's why you hate Mary, isn't it? Because she means the world to you; because she can dance; because every muscle in her body moves. You're all tangled up in your own strings trying to pull them yourself.

MURPHY (Leaping up, running behind bench. MADISON knocked on floor, begins to whimper.) Get up! Time to get up. Time to make our beds.

LOUIS When you try to dance you only twitch. But you're going to change all that, aren't you? You're going to make her love being led by a man who can only twitch. You'll lead her marching right over my dead body when I try to cut her loose.

(He advances toward MURPHY, who struts around defiantly keeping the bench between him and LOUIS.)

One, two, three, four. Who are we for? Murphy! Murphy! The wonderful world of ME!

MADISON (Getting up and beginning to fold newspapers on bench.)

I think it's time we made our beds, boys. It's time.

MURPHY Never mind! I'll make it later.

MADISON Oh, I'll do it.

(Picks up sheet of newspaper, begins to fold it like sheet, discovers something underneath.)

Oh, Johnny Murphy. Johnny Murphy. (Mocking voice, pointing at bench.) You've been a BAD boy. (Shaking finger.) BAD boy. BAD boy.

(LOUIS begins to laugh harder and harder. MADISON dances around pointing at MURPHY.)

MURPHY I'll break you. I'll break you both. If it's the last thing I do, I'll break you.

(Recovering himself he stands on bench, in middle, arms crossed, legs braced wide apart. MADISON continues to dance and point.)

MADISON (Chanting.) Johnny Murphy. Johnny Murphy.

(LOUIS continues to laugh heartily.)

MURPHY (This time when he speaks, order is re-established.)

That's enough. Stop right there. Back to bed, my babies.

(He steps off bench, walks to edge of stage, turns his back to audience, arms crossed, legs braced wide. MADISON hobbles obediently to the bench, wipes the middle seat with a part of the newspaper, which he then throws daintily in the audience, and lies down, covering himself with a part of the newspaper.)

MURPHY Good boy. Good.

(LOUIS sulks toward bench, then turns suddenly toward MURPHY.)

MURPHY Back. Back.

(LOUIS turns back toward bench, crawls unwillingly under it.)

MURPHY Fine. Fine. Wait just a minute.

(MURPHY seats himself crosslegged, erect, arms still crossed, back still to audience.)

MURPHY Ready!

(He waits a minute, then adds in a loud whimper.)

I'm ready!

LOUIS (From under bench.) Mr. Murphy?

(MURPHY, in somewhat better spirits, does not deign to reply.)

Mr. Murphy?

MURPHY Yes. What is it?

LOUIS It's about a job, sir.

MURPHY Speak up. What about a job?

LOUIS I'm looking for a job, sir. I have a family . . .

MURPHY Yes. Yes. What can you do?

LOUIS (Crawling out from under bench, remaining on hands and knees.) Anything you say, sir. I'd like to work for you, sir. I could believe in you.

MURPHY (Satisfied whisper.) That's the line.

LOUIS (On knees, hands loosely at sides.) I'd do things well for you, sir. I like your green trucks. I think they're pretty. And the shopping bags with your initials. I like to see them full. There's a little bit of me in every one.

MURPHY Can you sweep?

LOUIS Can I sweep?

MURPHY Yes.

LOUIS I've been sweeping all my life. First I put the sawdust on the floor. Then I take my big broom, and with long gentle pushes I walk around the store in the night. Never too fast. Never too slow. And then I climb the stairs and do the second floor, and the third. And just when I get to the fourth, and I'm thinking, now we're ready for another day, the sun comes up over the lake, red like our awnings, and bright like our windows, and I'm glad to be a part of it all.

MURPHY Take the broom and put the place in order.

(LOUIS rises, not too quickly, not too slowly, takes the broom and, sowing sawdust from his pocket as he goes, goes around the stage in long gentle pushes. MADISON peeks out from under his newspaper.)

MADISON Mr. Murphy, sir?

MURPHY I suppose you want a job too?

MADISON (Leaping up and running eagerly before MURPHY where he jumps up and down a bit.) Oh, yes, yes, sir. It's a job I want. Yes.

MURPHY Your qualifications?

MADISON I've been to school, sir. Yes. I played football. And I'm pretty good with dogs.

MURPHY I've already given that man there a job. Why should I give you one?

MADISON Well, I hate to say anything, sir. BUT, that man just hasn't got his heart in it, you know. He talks, yes. Yes, but look how he walks.

MURPHY How would you walk?

MADISON (Doing a quick dainty step.) Like an employee of "Jonathan Murphy's."

MURPHY Good boy! Take his broom away.

(MADISON tries to do so.)

LOUIS Hey. I'm doing my job.

MADISON You don't belong here, mister. Now-give-me-that-broom. (He tugs with increasing violence on the broom that LOUIS refuses to surrender until MURPHY leaps up to restore order.)

MURPHY Billy, leave that dog alone!

LOUIS (Releasing his end of broom just when MADISON gives a mighty tug and falls on the floor.) Wrong line.

MURPHY Oh, yes. Damn!

MADISON (On floor, holding broom upright.) That's a short one.

LOUIS Are you sure we did the whole thing?

MURPHY He's got the broom, hasn't he?

MADISON What will we do now? What will we ever do?

MURPHY (Seating himself in the middle of the bench, spreading newspaper across his lap.) Come unto me, Billy Madison, and bring your friend there. What have you got for me to listen to? (To LOUIS, MADISON and LOUIS kneel on either side of MURPHY.) You there. Tell me a good one.

LOUIS When I was a child I went out in the woods. It was winter. The black oaks were covered with ice. The branches

clicked and clacked when the wind blew, and it was always blowing. I saw some tracks in the snow. I followed them to a hollow that was sheltered from the wind. There was a girl sitting before a fire. Everything was black and white. There was a girl sitting before a fire. Everything was black and white. I was afraid. There was a dog by the fire.

MADISON (Eagerly.) What happened? Tell us quick.

MURPHY You stay out of this.

LOUIS She smiled and I went down by the fire. I told her my name. She told me hers. It was Mary.

MURPHY I forbid you to mention her.

MADISON What did you do? Did you touch her? Did you . . . ?

MURPHY Not another word.

MADISON Quick, tell us about something else then.

MURPHY Dammit, you stay out of this.

LOUIS I grew up. I had a family when everyone was hungry. Once I had a job, but I lost it.

MURPHY. Forgiven. Say a hundred "Hail . . . ." Forget it.

MADISON I can't.

MURPHY Damn! What have YOU done?

LOUIS He played football.

MURPHY I've heard that one.

MADISON Oh, listen. Listen.

MURPHY I'm listening. Go to it.

MADISON I've got something to tell.

LOUIS Tell it. It's stuffy here.



MADISON Can't you look at me when I'm talking?

MURPHY I'm all eyes.

MADISON Hhmp. Baseball was my game. I played right field. Yes. I led the batting order if you want to know. Are you listening?

MURPHY I'm all ears.

MADISON I held my bat like Goliath. I swung at the first pitch. I missed, but you could hear the wind whistling around the bases and echoing off the buildings. The second pitch wasn't my meat. I let it pass. It was a strike. The third pitch hit me right in the face and shattered my glasses all over the place. That echoed off the buildings too.

LOUIS (Laughing.) Jesus, that's good.

MURPHY Some other time, if you don't mind. Continue, Mr. Madison.

MADISON I grew up and went to work. I had a job I was proud of when most people were too lazy to work. I held it until the war.

MURPHY Did you say war?

MADISON (Shouting.) Listen to me. I have a way with animals. I was only bitten once. (He stands on one leg to show them the calf of the other.) That was a dog! He belonged to this girl; yes, and you see . . .

MURPHY Skip it!

MADISON But I married her and lived happily ever after.

LOUIS That's good.

MURPHY There's NEVER been a divorce in my family.

LOUIS Or any marriages either.

MADISON Oh. Well done.

LOUIS I've been saving it.

MURPHY That's important. I've always saved. I had a collection of pants when I was a child. (Proud pause.) Are you listening?

LOUIS AND MADISON Yes, father.

MURPHY There was this girl with long red hairs . . .

MADISON (Yanking newspaper off MURPHY'S lap and trailing it in air.) . . . that followed her everywhere . . . (He replaces newspaper in his lap.) . . . she went.

MURPHY She wore pants.

LOUIS Don't tell us your problems.

MURPHY That girl could dance.

MADISON She sure could. She could.

MURPHY I thought she loved me.

LOUIS Of course she did.

MURPHY But that damn dog wouldn't let me near her.

MADISON I could have told you that, you know.

MURPHY . . . until one day.

LOUIS (Shouting, pointing.) Murderer!

MURPHY (Leaping up on bench and shaking his fist.) By God, that was a wedding!

MADISON (Dancing and singing to the tune of A TISKET, A TASKET, A GREEN AND YELLOW BASKET.) My wedding. My wedding. We're going to do my wedding.

MURPHY All right. All right. Where the hell is the altar?

LOUIS (Turning bench on end.) Here.

MURPHY You two were over there.

(They stand stiffly together on one side, he walks solemnly behind the bench where he cannot be seen.)

Ready!

LOUIS Set the scene first.

MURPHY (Flowing out from behind bench in skirt of newspapers with arms spread wide.)

After puberty, my children, one begins to think . . .

MADISON (Stamping his legs rapidly.) Oh, Johnny, not like THAT!

MURPHY (Stopping, turning toward MADISON.) Something more informal?

MADISON You know. Like we do it when we're alone, huh?

(He looks proudly at LOUIS.)

MURPHY Quite right, son. (He continues his advance until he settles himself on the edge of the stage.)

MURPHY Well, it all happened the other day on the way to the altar. I was wearing my new herringbone suit. I seated myself just behind a nearly naked statue of Our Lord where the heat from the candles made me sweat like a pig. So I moved nearer the aisle. But it was so cold there that I had to find another seat just behind the organ. By this time nearly everyone had realized that I was the best dressed man in the church. (Gets up.)

MADISON It was MY wedding, Johnny. I stuck my chest out and

met everyone in town. (He stumbles around, smiling nervously, shaking hands with MURPHY, then LOUIS.)

LOUIS (Looking at his hand.) It was like having a dead bird fall into your hand.

MADISON Hurry. Hurry. I can't wait, you know.

MURPHY Let's get the ball rolling. Bride and groom to the altar.

MADISON (Running to MURPHY.) Here I am. Let's go.

MURPHY Well. Where is she?

MADISON (Shamefacedly.) She's not coming today, I don't think.

MURPHY I'm afraid I can't marry you then.

MADISON Perhaps another church . . .

MURPHY No. No church on this earth. You can't have a wedding without a bride. They're not like grooms.

MADISON (Running to LOUIS and leading him to the altar.)

Oh, Louis, won't YOU play her part?

LOUIS I'd love to. Is it anything like Musical Chairs?  
(Satirical tone.)

MADISON (Taking LOUIS' arm in his.) READY!

MURPHY (Who has been arranging his skirts, absentmindedly.)

I had been admiring my rich red robes. I looked up just in time to see that the bride had not shaved her legs.

MADISON (Impatiently.) We're ready!

MURPHY Behold! You are on the threshold of the city of God. Hear the heavenly choir. See the thousand candles. Fly in our doors with a million happy souls. Eat if you want, ashtrays,

toothpaste, ladies' luncheons. Ride the silver stairs upward through the red and green chambers to the golden throne room.  
(Sits down.)

LOUIS We're ready!

MURPHY What's his name?

LOUIS Billy Madison.

MURPHY Come here, Billy Madison.

(MADISON sits on MURPHY'S knee.)

MADISON Hi!

MURPHY Hi! Now what do you want, young fellow?

MADISON Well . . .

MURPHY Is it generation, so to speak?

MADISON Well, I want a picture of mother and father, and a little white church, and a peppermint stick, and three old men on camels who lost their way, and a SWING! Yes, that's what I want most of all, a swing! And I want to swing in my swing. But I don't want to be alone in my swing.

MURPHY Whom do you want to swing with?

MADISON MARY!

MURPHY And where is Mary?

MADISON (Pointing.) That's Mary over there!

MURPHY Are you Mary?

LOUIS More or less.

MURPHY All right, Mary. Come here.

(LOUIS sits on MURPHY'S other knee facing MADISON.)

LOUIS Hi!

MURPHY Hi! And what do you want, honey?

LOUIS I want Billy.

MURPHY That's the spirit. There doesn't seem to be any problem here. Just let me get in voice. Yea! Humph. Verily! Humph. Verily I say unto you: You have been alone and outcast, you have sought but you have not found, you have opened your eyes but you have not seen, you have listened but you have not heard, you have followed but you have not followed far enough. You have said "yes", but in a whisper. Now, children, the time has come to say "yes" for all the world to hear. And now, Billy, do you take Mary to be your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, etcetera?

MADISON Yes, sir. (Aside.) Oh, it will soon be mine.

MURPHY Humph. And do you, Mary, take Billy to be your lawful wedded husband, to love and obey, for richer or poorer, etcetera?

LOUIS Yes, sir. (To MADISON.) It's all yours now.

MURPHY Okay, kiddies, I pronounce you man and wife.

(He leaps up, spilling MADISON and LOUIS.)

Music! Violent music! Smiles and tears. Shake the colored glass between us and the March sky. Tear the loin cloth from Our Lord. Shut the window. Pull the shade. Strip! Pull the covers over your heads and become as little children. Touch and whisper and try to smile. It's a safe thing now. Scream you bitch, if you think nobody can hear. And get the hell out of here! I've got an organization of my own.

(MADISON and LOUIS walk beaming, arm in arm, to the back of the theater, while MURPHY sings the wedding march.)

Some day you'll come to me, sister, and we'll see what happens. But take not thought for the morrow, Johnny boy. Now I stand in the life between lives looking up and down the track, but nothing comes. Five years I wait for something to happen. Five years repeating till my pockets are full to bursting and my stomach slides over my belt. Then, thank God, it was all over. (Lights begin to flicker, a dull roar is heard.)

Who's that I hear laughing? (Calling to back of theater.)

Get in line there, men. Quick march.

(MADISON marches down center aisle with evident pride in his uniform, not in the least regretting the shortness of his honeymoon. LOUIS straggles behind, speaking condescendingly to members of audience.)

LOUIS There now. Don't be afraid. Don't get up. Just watch. You're not in condition anyway. Say, aren't you a relation of . . . (He points at MADISON.) Sorry, I thought I knew you. (MADISON and LOUIS march to MURPHY'S orders.)

MURPHY (Removing his newspapers and rolling them into a rifle, shaking hands.) It's good to be together again, boys. Just like old times. Got your cap pistols?

MADISON and LOUIS Yeahhh.

MURPHY And plenty of caps?

MADISON and LOUIS Yeahhh.

MURPHY Remember, draw fast, shoot for the balls, blow the smoke out of the barrels, and walk away slowly.

MADISON and LOUIS Yeahhh.

MURPHY Got the flags?

MADISON and LOUIS Yeahhh.

MURPHY With plenty of stars and stripes?

MADISON and LOUIS Yeahhh.

MADISON Johnny, sir?

MURPHY Yeahhh?

MADISON Who we fightin' this time, sir?

MURPHY The enemy, soldier. Get in line there.

(MURPHY marches in place with rifle over shoulder, knee-high like children play march. MADISON and LOUIS march up and down stage with increasing violence.)

MURPHY Remember the girl in Stalingrad,  
Her hungry lad, her aging dad.  
There wasn't a man that heard them yell  
When we blew them all to hell.

MADISON and LOUIS  
Yes, we blew them all to hell.  
We blew them all to hell.  
And no one heard them yell!

MURPHY Remember the girl in old New York  
Who couldn't eat and wouldn't work.  
She lost her skin. She lost her hair.  
And so we lost our maiden fair.

MADISON Fingers and eyes and children's toes  
A one-eyed soldier without any nose  
Pregnant corpses and bits of brick  
All mixed up to make you sick.

LOUIS Nothing to eat. Nothing to drink.  
Mother's body is starting to stink.  
Sister was laid and nobody paid.  
Daddy's marching in a big parade.

ALL THREE

Yes, we blew them all to hell.  
We blew them all to hell.  
And no one heard them yell!



(Lights flicker in time with music. Roar becomes deafening.)

MURPHY Eat if you want, ashtrays, toothpaste, ladies' luncheons, prophylactics, cherry sundaes, diamond rings, dollar dinners.

Somebody's hair and somebody's nose,  
A dead girl blooming like a beauty rose,  
Broken glass and rotten books,  
And people crapping when nobody looks,  
Pregnant corpses and bits of brick,  
All mixed up to make you sick.

MADISON (Stumbling, falling.) Mommy, Mother of God. Touch me. Talk to me.

LOUIS (Falsetto scream.) Play, Billy. Play, play, play. Billy won't play, can't play, would play if he could, but he can't, can't play, can't play the game. (Sits down on edge of stage with head in hands.)

MURPHY Christ, that was fun. We'll have another war soon. But right now I believe I'll take a little nap.

MADISON Me too. I'm tired.

(They lie down in middle of stage and draw newspapers over them.)

MURPHY Good night.

MADISON Good night.

LOUIS (Walking around.) Here I am. Home again. This is my family. I'd like you to meet somebody disgusting. (He gestures at the sleeping pair.) Where are you, baby? Are you walking through the woods in the winter? Are you laughing at me with your bright brown eyes? No. That was your dog. KISS HER OR KICK HER TEETH IN, BUT DON'T STAND AT ARMS' LENGTH WISHING HER WELL!

MURPHY (Raising himself on one elbow.) Billy?

MADISON (Opening his eyes.) What?

MURPHY I was just thinking. Some people like to give orders. That's me. And some people like to take them. That's you.

MADISON Maybe you're right.

MURPHY Of course I'm right. (Lowering head.) Goodnight, Billy.

MADISON Goodnight, Johnny. (Closes eyes.)

LOUIS (Seating himself on edge of stage.) Ahh, there's something married about that boy. He's one of those fellows who'd be married whether or not there were any women available. Mary wanted a man who was like Johnny on the outside, like Billy on the inside, and like me in the woods . . . The bitch.

MURPHY Billy?

MADISON What?

MURPHY Come here.

MADISON Why?

MURPHY We might play a bit.

MADISON What would we play?

MURPHY A game. You can think of a name for it.

MADISON Oh, Goody. I like games. But you make the rules. Promise?

MURPHY I promise.

LOUIS Johnny?

MURPHY What?

LOUIS Come here.

MURPHY Why?

LOUIS I want to play with you.

MURPHY This is rather a change. I don't want . . . You do?

LOUIS Yes.

MURPHY Oh, all right. (Goes toward LOUIS.) Shall we play house? I'll make the beds.

LOUIS And I'll feed the birds.

MADISON Oh, Johnny! Don't trust him. He's ugly!

MURPHY Not altogether.

LOUIS Not in my soul, you bastard!

(He grabs MURPHY, tosses him over his knee and begins to spank hell out of him. Newspapers fall all over audience.)

MURPHY Stop! You can't do this. Go get your broom!

LOUIS (Spanking him harder and harder.) Do you really want me to? You BAD boy. Now you're not going to peek at Mrs. Smith any longer, are you?

MURPHY (Desperate.) No! No!

LOUIS And you're going to let the little boys keep their pants on?

MURPHY Yes. Yes.

LOUIS And you won't pick on Billy any longer?

MURPHY No! No!

LOUIS And you'll never see Mary again?

MURPHY Never!

LOUIS (Violently.) And soon you will take one of those little ropes you're hanging from and wrap it around your neck, won't you?

MURPHY Yes.

MADISON Make him cry! Make him cry!

LOUIS Cry, Johnny! Cry! Cry!

MURPHY (Choking.) I can't.

MADISON Make him scream then!

LOUIS Scream, Johnny! Scream!

MURPHY (Screaming.) Mary!

(LOUIS stops, looks around, MURPHY scrambles away.)

LOUIS (To himself.) Mary.

MADISON (Loud whisper.) Pssst. (During MADISON'S talk MURPHY lies down on bench and covers himself up. LOUIS turns.) If anything happens to Johnny, I want you to be my friend. (MADISON closes his eyes with knowing smile.)

LOUIS Chickenshit. I saw your lips twitch when you gave the address to the taxi driver. I heard her say "good morning" so she didn't have to say "It's you again. Why have you come back?" I saw the hand with the cigarette shake and heard the coffee cup rattle in the saucer. (Wheeling toward MADISON, loud voice.) Your friend, Billy? I'd rather have a pet poodle with diarrhea. I could marry it off to a motherly bitch with a rag.

(MADISON sits down, stunned.)

MURPHY (Leaping up.) Mary! Mary! Is that you?

LOUIS (Turning toward MURPHY, imitating Mary's voice. Note: he is 50.) "Yes. Yes, it's me. But John, is that you? You're pale. Haven't you seen the sun for years and years? Why are you looking in my eyes like that? Do you see a little puppet strangling in his strings? Go sit down, John." (He sits.)

MURPHY (Dazed, but gradually recovering himself.) My little girl didn't talk like that. I can hear her now. (He imitates her.) "Johnny. Where HAVE you been? Come over here this minute and let me look at you. Such drab colors, Johnny. Whatever happened to that rich red tie you wore at our wedding? It made you look like a banker. I was so proud of having you for a friend. Everyone asked me afterward who that handsome man was, walking around the church. And I said, 'That's my friend Johnny Murphy, Johnny Murphy himself'."

LOUIS (Continuing imitation.) "Is that my Billy? Billy boy, I love you. Come tell me you love me."

MADISON (Getting up and going to LOUIS with a hangdog expression, rubbing eyes.) Oh. It's Mary. Oh Mary, I love you.

LOUIS "Thank you, Bill. You're looking good. I'm so glad you haven't got those ugly dog hairs all over your pants. And I see you finally cleaned the glass out of your eyes."

MADISON Yes.

LOUIS "Have you been kind to Johnny, Billy? You know, he only runs the world so it won't hurt him. He's really a very little man, no bigger than the image in my eye."

MADISON Oh Mary, don't say such things about Johnny. Mary. Why, Mary. (Snapping out of illusion that it is Mary talking to him.) What big eyes you have! (Beginning to imitate Mary.) "Oooh. There's my best man. Hi birdbrain!"

LOUIS Who's calling me birdbrain?

MADISON "It's me. Mary. Can't you say "Hi", stupid?"

LOUIS I . . . uh . . . (Succumbing to illusion.) Hi!

MADISON "I saw a red-headed wren on a wire fence that looked just like you. It made me think of that wintertime in the woods when we sat by the fire and looked at each other. You know, you could do with your eyes what no man ever did to me with words; make me feel like carrion! You're cold, man, cold, cold, cold. And how you loved to fly by night."

MURPHY (Sitting dazed, making paper airplanes out of newspaper, throwing one at audience.) I hear you, Mary. I hear you.

MADISON "My husband was busy sweeping, sweeping, sweeping up on the old fourth floor. But you'd lost your job, lazy. And you came and sat on the fence outside my kitchen window and sang the prettiest songs until the war came and you had to take orders like everybody else. Do you still crow at dawn, baby?"

LOUIS Crow at dawn? (Realizing delusion.) I haven't seen the dawn for years. Say, Mary, what a weak sister you've become.

MURPHY Don't stop, Mary. Don't stop. Tell us more about the wren. What color was it? Did it fly well, really well? And the dawn, was it red? Was it red like our awnings and bright like our windows? And was there a face in the dawn? A face with a gentle smile and soft words like the morning wind. All will be well, said the smile. And life is good, said the voice. I will build me a monument to your smile, and to your voice, and to your child.

LOUIS It was my kid, Johnny, and hers. More than Mary, it was the real thing. It was living, John, and playing with a leaf when we left it in the woods. And at the end of the summer I went back and there it was, kind of crumpled into itself. Ass end up. It looked like green jello full of cottage cheese. And in the winter there was nothing. Everything was black and white and I was afraid. But you had the world in your wallet, John, and Billy was a soldier, and I was walking all night with my broom. There's no hope here. (He leaves stage and walks up center aisle.)

MURPHY Louis!

LOUIS (Turning, stopping.) What?

MURPHY Let's have a bit of a goodbye.

LOUIS Goodbye, John. (He turns.)

MURPHY Goodbye.

MADISON Louis.

LOUIS Yes. (Turns.)

MADISON We didn't find her, did we?

LOUIS No. (He leaves.)

MADISON (Whistles as for a dog, waits, and then calls, snapping his fingers.) Mary. Here, Mary. Come along, Mary. Be a good girl now. (He wanders off stage right, still searching and calling.)

MURPHY (Waits a minute, grins monstrously, and dances behind his bench. A minute later the curtain falls to the tune of "A Tisket, a Tasket, a Green and Yellow Basket.")

## THE FABULOUS FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

A dark rain forest with clinging vines, swamp noises, etc. The QUEEN, young and beautiful, clad in swamp attire and carrying a great stick, walks out of the swamp (backstage) in an easy, certain manner.

QUEEN This (sweeping gesture) is the swamp, my swamp. I'm the Queen. That (the theater) is the Great River of Fear which no one has ever thought of crossing. This is my hate stick. When anyone in the swamp misbehaves--pow! Over there (behind audience) is the bottomless quicksand where the world ends. There the great hate bird wheels laughing through the fog, and sorrow beats the water with her broken wings. But we folks in the swamp don't mind. Curiosity is frowned upon here. Just leave reality alone and it won't bother you. We're quite comfortable. It gets a little hot and muggy sometimes, and the insects do have a way of getting in where you don't want them. But, all in all, things are good enough in the swamp that we don't want to go off on any wild goose chases. Besides, the exact borders aren't known, and many of us suspect that there is no end to the swamp. A little knowledge is a bad thing--as we say here in the swamp--and a lot of knowledge is worse. So we've settled right down here, paired off, built tree huts--the works. And being comfortable takes so much time that we really haven't got any left for crackpot schemes. But every once in a while a stranger stumbles into our midst--from another



part of the swamp, we assume. And, often as not, the fellow is an explorer, and you know what they're like--always thinking things are different somewhere else. Well, these cranks--we call them fuzzy-minded idealists here--are real troublemakers. The last one led several hundred otherwise sane and respectable swamp dwellers off into the quicksand and they were never heard from again. You can see why we try to stop these fellows before they get started. The reason I say all this is because one has been sighted bumbling along in the distance of the swamp and, likely as not, he'll stumble this way--and I wouldn't want anyone to judge the rest of the swamp by his behavior. I think I can already hear him crashing through the undergrowth. (She glides back into the swamp.)

(PONCE, a relatively young man in colorful coat and pants, swash-buckler's boots, a red hat with a huge green feather, carrying a rapier. He stumbles across stage untangling himself from vines.)

PONCE Damn swamp! (Untangled, he struts.) There! I'm getting adjusted. (QUEEN makes a swamp noise; he jumps.) Wupwupwupwup! (He turns, draws, thrusts.) There! Take that! And that! (Pause.) That silenced them. (Movement in bush. His knees shake, his rapier wavers.) Draw, you beast! Out and fight like a man. (His hand shakes badly.) If you don't out, I'll in, and hell to pay! (A small rabbit hops out of the bush. They stare at, walk, hop around each other.) Looks like a rabbit. Hello there, little rabbit. Lost? (Aside.) Probably knows his way around this swamp a hell of a lot better than I do. (To RABBIT.)

I don't suppose you could give me some directions. (RABBIT thinks "Rabbits can't talk, stupid.") Well, I really must be on my way. Say hello to your (vague gesture) and good day to you, little rabbit. (He takes a step, hears a hop, takes a step, hears a hop, stops.) Well, rabbit, on the same road, are you? That's life. Trails come together for a while, then part, and that's the way of it. So let us . . . (Aside) I think I'm getting a little vague for him. Stick to the concrete. That's the way to talk to animals. (RABBIT wiggles ears furiously.) What's that? (RABBIT crosses ears.) You have something to say to me? (RABBIT nods.) Well? (RABBIT waves him over. PONCE kneels beside him. RABBIT looks around cautiously, removes large folded yellow paper from pocket and hands it to PONCE.) What's this? No! An old Spanish map? (RABBIT nods.) Why, it covers the whole swamp and beyond. I just cross the Great River and follow the dotted line to the big X. (RABBIT nods.) What could be simpler? (RABBIT agrees.) (Reading.) And there, across the River of . . . Fear, in the middle of a bright land full of red and yellow birds and golden cattle is La fabulosa fuente de la juventud . . . The Fabulous Fountain of Youth!! (Leaps up.) Eternal youth! A land ruled by life instead of death! Why then everything would be possible: happiness, kindness . . . if only I can find the dotted line. The swamp may have reclaimed it. But first I must cross the River of . . . Fear. Thanks a million, rabbit. Goodbye. (Exit, nearly skipping. RABBIT waves, then sees QUEEN coming and hurries

off.)

QUEEN What did I tell you--a perfect nut. And judging from that insane gleam in his eye--a tough one to crack. But the swamp always wins. (Smiles.) His days are numbered. (Looking offstage.) What's this? Oh no! Two more! Things just aren't what they used to be. Damn foreigners getting in everywhere! (Glides back into swamp.)

(DIRECTOR OF PRISONS and POSTMASTER GENERAL stagger on, middle-aged, out of breath, and clothed in the ruins of office.)

POSTMASTER (Running up behind.) Did you hear that? Some horrible beast is tracking us.

DIRECTOR (Brushing him off.) Only you, my dear Postmaster-General, plague this expedition.

POSTMASTER Why, Director of Prisons, I didn't know you felt like that. Are forty years in the Civil Service as nothing to you?

DIRECTOR Rather four days and nights in this foul swamp are as everything to me. (Sits.)

POSTMASTER (Sitting.) Ah, but remember the wonderful teas we've had . . . the Governor-General's wonderful teas.

DIRECTOR Those teas were pure hell! If only I had been Governor-General.

POSTMASTER If only . . .

DIRECTOR If it hadn't been for his wife I never could have stuck this native-infested wilderness for forty years.

POSTMASTER She was a real doll all right . . . at least for the first twenty.

DIRECTOR Oh, don't remind me. (Pause.) Remember the day the Governor-General died?

POSTMASTER That WAS a corker! Right at the most important tea of the year!

DIRECTOR (Pumping legs rapidly.) That damn little cup was dancing on my knees. I nearly squeezed my cupcake into gruel! Still, a dying epileptic at the Colonial Day Tea--no laughing matter.

POSTMASTER Especially if it happens to be the Governor-General. (They roar.)

DIRECTOR (Reflectively.) That takes the cake all right.

POSTMASTER (Enthusiastically.) And when he pulled the tablecloth after him.

DIRECTOR The ladies didn't notice a thing until the punch bowl started sliding away.

POSTMASTER "Well!" she said.

DIRECTOR "This is a bit unusual."

POSTMASTER "I say, Susan, the punch bowl; it seems to be . . ."

DIRECTOR "Why, Lilly, it certainly does."

POSTMASTER "Susan, will you look at the Governor-General!"

DIRECTOR "Certainly is kicking up a fuss, isn't he?"

POSTMASTER "Spoiling our tea."

DIRECTOR "Oh, Lilly, the punch bowl, it's going to . . ."

(Laughs madly.)

POSTMASTER (Roaring.) "Oh, Susan . . . Spfsss . . . it fell on his . . . ." (Slaps knee.)

DIRECTOR (Cracking up.) " . . . on his head, Lilly, on his head . . ."

POSTMASTER (Losing all control.) "heehaaheehaaheehaa . . ."

DIRECTOR (Eloquently serious.) Oh, Melinda, couldn't we make a go of it? I said.

POSTMASTER Sorry, dear; you're just too old, she said. (They embrace, sobbing.)

QUEEN (Behind them.) Telling stories?

DIRECTOR (Holding POSTMASTER tightly.) Stories, stories; are they only stories?

QUEEN (Coming downstage.) I fear you gentlemen have been too long in the swamp.

POSTMASTER Look, Director of Prisons, a native!

DIRECTOR (Focusing.) Why yes, so it is. (Standing.) I . . . white man . . . come in friendship . . . (Elbows POSTMASTER.) Get the beads, stupid! (POSTMASTER searches frantically. To QUEEN.) Greetings from big fort . . . garrison . . . Tallahassee . . . (QUEEN merely smiles.) (To POSTMASTER.) Don't know the names of their own settlements. . . (To QUEEN.) . . . Peace . . .

QUEEN (Bad taste.) Ugh!

POSTMASTER I can't find them!

DIRECTOR Never mind, she looks stupid. (Best manner.) Hello there, little native girl. I'm the (cough) Director of Prisons at the Tallahassee Garrison. I'm visiting your fair swamp because I've lost my (choke) . . . excuse me, I get all choked up . . . my youth, and maybe you can help me find it again.

For example (Adds sign language), you wouldn't have a nice tree hut we could leap in and catch a little, would you? My intentions are really up and up. (He staggers forward, leering.) Of course I will speak to your father . . .

POSTMASTER (Still sitting.) Say hello for me.

DIRECTOR Certainly. (To QUEEN.) I only desire a little rest before I come to the end of the trail. (Advancing eloquently.) Just a mat on the native floor . . .

POSTMASTER Have fun, Director of Prisons.

DIRECTOR I will, thank you, Postmaster General. (To QUEEN.) Just a moment of respite, a neat feat to beat the heat . . .

POSTMASTER Nice line.

DIRECTOR (Affected by heat.) That's quite enough from you! (To QUEEN.) Ahh, my love . . . uf, young lady, to lie pleasantly ensconced on the cool leaves . . .

POSTMASTER Give her a turn of the key for me.

DIRECTOR You dead letter! (To QUEEN.) Now, lovebutts . . . uh, little native girl, naked in the shade of the cocoanut palms . . .

POSTMASTER (Singing.) Lock her up  
And knock her up . . .

DIRECTOR You obscene . . .

QUEEN (Singing.) Lock her up  
And knock her up . . .

QUEEN and POSTMASTER My fair prisoner!

DIRECTOR (Turning, turning.) My keys, I've lost my keys!

QUEEN (Kicking him.) There they are! (She laughs. He falls.)

POSTMASTER (Catching him.) You shouldn't have done that!  
He's an old man.

QUEEN I wouldn't have done it otherwise.

POSTMASTER Now we've got to find the fountain!

QUEEN What fountain?

POSTMASTER Why, the Fabulous Fountain of Youth!

QUEEN (Aside.) It must be hotter than usual. (To POSTMASTER.)  
And what makes you think this fountain is in my swamp?

POSTMASTER We met this rabbit with a map . . .

QUEEN (Aside.) Rabbits just don't fit, do they?

POSTMASTER . . . and we're looking for a place to cross the  
Great River.

QUEEN But you . . .

DIRECTOR (Mumbling.) . . . so sad . . . all those years . . .  
all those people I'll never see again. They seem so real. Are  
their lives too . . . slipping away?

QUEEN Better give him some cocoanut milk.

POSTMASTER Yes.

QUEEN And then, get out of my swamp!

DIRECTOR (Looking up.) Oh! Couldn't we stay?

POSTMASTER We've got no place to go.

DIRECTOR We've burned our canoes.

POSTMASTER And here we are!

QUEEN I'll bet you could do wonders for my administration!

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER We certainly could!

QUEEN Then just hop on that crocodile over there. He'll take  
you to the Royal Clearing.

POSTMASTER (Scurrying.) The Royal Clearing! (Exit.)

DIRECTOR (Hurrying.) This IS an honor! (Stopping.) Are you sure he's safe?

QUEEN A real vegetable. (DIRECTOR half-smiles.) The mind of a frog and the soul of a log. (DIRECTOR exits trying to convince himself.)

QUEEN Is everybody happy?

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER (Offstage.) Yes!

QUEEN Let me hear it!!!

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER Yes!!!

QUEEN Then happy traveling! (She waves.)

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER (Singing offstage while QUEEN dances):

#### THE CROCODILE SONG

A-roving we will go  
 Through the ice and snow.  
 We'll fear nor wind, nor sleet, nor hail,  
 Nor the belly of the whale,  
 Nor the hate bird flying high--  
 Who wants us to want to die--  
 Nor the ice bear in his cave,  
 Nor the death shark on the wave;  
 For we're traveling in fine style  
 On the back of a crocodile!

QUEEN (Stopping) Whew! What a strain keeping the old swamp spirit up. But it makes for good citizenship. Now I must rush to the other side of the swamp on my wonderful hate bird--who is always waiting just out of sight--and quell a picnic some happy-go-lucky sparrows have begun. (Exit into swamp.)

PONCE (Enters scratching, sits down to rest.) Damn mosquitoes, fleas, lice . . . what next? Things will be different at the Fabulous Fountain. There the temperature is always right, and



none of the creatures bite each other. This swamp just doesn't like me. (He senses movement behind him, turns, nearly draws, but doesn't.) Will you look at that! What a beautiful, beautiful butterfly. I've never seen such a beautiful butterfly! (BUTTER flutters her wings, moves closer to PONCE, almost bowing.) I wonder if butterflies talk. Rabbits don't. I know that for a fact. You're so lovely! (BUTTER melts.) Pretty little butter butterfly . . . hello.

BUTTER Hello.

PONCE (Leaping up, running around.) She spoke! She spoke! A butterfly spoke to me! (Aside.) Boy, am I in tune with nature. (To BUTTER.) But I don't suppose all butterflies speak. Other butterflies aren't like you, are they? (She shakes her head.) They're smaller. (She hangs her head.) Oh, I'm sorry. I like big butterflies. Do you like people? (She shrugs.) I'm Ponce, the famous explorer. (No reaction.) You can call me Ponce . . . What shall I call you?

BUTTER Butter.

PONCE Butter! That's a wonderful name! (Bending.) It's as pretty as you are. Butter, may I ask you a question? (She nods.) What do you do here in the swamp?

BUTTER I fly around.

PONCE And land on flowers? (She nods.) And . . . you like to dart about in the sun? (She nods enthusiastically.) Tell me something, when you're just sitting, why do you open and close your wings?

BUTTER It feels good.

PONCE I knew it! I knew it! But oh, Butter, you're not going to . . . this isn't your only day, is it? (She nods slowly.) Oh, it isn't fair. I wish you could stay here and live with me.

BUTTER I do too.

PONCE But, you know, there's a fabulous fountain, and maybe you could fly there, and become young again, and . . .

BUTTER You wouldn't like me.

PONCE Why not?

BUTTER I was different.

PONCE Oh. (Pause.) Butter . . . will you share your day with me?

(She nods. They just kiss. Her wings quiver. His arms move a little like wings. They look at each other. She flies away.)

PONCE (Trying to fly and not doing too well.) Butter, wait for me! Wait!

QUEEN (Emerging from swamp where BUTTER left.) Feeling the heat?

PONCE (Dumbfounded.) Who are you?

QUEEN I'm the Queen of the swamp.

PONCE I didn't know swamps had queens.

QUEEN This one does, and I'm no mere figurehead either.

PONCE More power to you.

QUEEN (Stamping stick.) The more the merrier.

PONCE (Sitting.) When you get all you want, would you mind cooling the swamp off a bit, and getting rid of the fleas?

QUEEN Stand up!

PONCE (Standing.) And then bring Butter back to me.

QUEEN She's already dead.

PONCE What?

QUEEN Time flies. (Sits.) You may sit.

PONCE (Sitting.) I hope she thought of me when . . .

QUEEN Butterflies have short memories.

PONCE She didn't have much pain . . .

QUEEN A lizard got her. A big swamp lizard. Life is bad in the swamp.

PONCE Poor Butter.

QUEEN No use crying over spilt lives.

PONCE If only we could have had the one day.

QUEEN What difference would that make? It's all cancelled in the end.

PONCE (Thoughtfully.) Yes, that's true here. I'm looking for a place where it isn't.

QUEEN You're wasting your time. The swamp is everywhere.

PONCE But you haven't seen the map with the dotted line.

QUEEN And the big X the Spaniard scratched in the mud two hundred years ago?

PONCE That's the one.

QUEEN Don't be ridiculous! Grown men don't believe in old Spanish maps and fabulous fountains.

PONCE They don't?

QUEEN No. They find nice native girls, build tree huts, and

work their way up in the administration.

PONCE Then they couldn't believe in the fountain.

QUEEN Of course not. They're sure there isn't one. So they settle down to a life free from false hopes.

PONCE I don't think I'd like that.

QUEEN Why not?

PONCE These people you tell me about are convinced life is bad.

QUEEN They do their best to forget it.

PONCE I won't believe it's bad until I see as much of it as possible.

QUEEN Your life will be worse than theirs. They don't concern themselves with the truth. But you will have to face again and again the fact that life is bad.

PONCE Unless, of course, Your Majesty, it isn't.

QUEEN You don't really believe that!

PONCE Why not?

QUEEN You're not serious! No one believes that!

PONCE Life isn't necessarily bad.

QUEEN You're kidding! You can't fool me, you know. I've been around this swamp.

PONCE I'm not trying to fool you. The rabbit gave me a wonderful map.

QUEEN Damn rodent. Never content with his lot.

PONCE Just think, if I do find the fountain, our lives will be changed . . .

QUEEN They can't be changed.

PONCE Everyone will have time to find out just what they do best and their lives won't be wasted. Everything they do will be significant.

QUEEN (Aside.) It must be getting hotter.

PONCE Just think what you could do, Your Majesty. You could make the swamp a nice place in which to live. You could help old explorers, and be kind to little animals, and . . .

QUEEN But as it is I can send old explorers to the land of no-return, and eat little animals, and . . .

PONCE Well, perhaps your philosophy is all right for you, but the people . . .

QUEEN The people! They don't count.

PONCE But if they did . . .

QUEEN You certainly take the long-range view.

PONCE That's my secret. What's yours?

QUEEN I just see my point of view.

PONCE But there's so much else to see.

QUEEN Well, if you just want to look at things--but I want them for my own, and mine is the way to get them. If there were a fountain--big enough for everybody--I might think differently. But there isn't. Believe me, I'm not so young and beautiful because of any secret fountain--it's natural.

PONCE I never doubted it for a moment.

QUEEN And don't think the fountain could do anything for that gangly body of yours.

PONCE I've quite accepted my condition.

QUEEN But not the swamp's? You know you wouldn't be bad-looking if it weren't for that insane gleam in your eye. Why are you such a crank?

PONCE I don't know.

QUEEN Did anyone ever tell you that your lower lip quivers when you get earnest?

PONCE No.

QUEEN Anyone would think you were dirty-minded. I'll bet you're really looking for a land full of naked virgins.

PONCE I hadn't thought of that.

QUEEN You hadn't? Had you thought of the fact that when you find your fountain--I suspect you're looking for something else altogether--there'll be nothing left for you to do but choose your woman and settle down? Just like here--only it will be forever. And, likely as not, the females you'll find in the distance of the swamp--far from the banana trees--will be inferior specimens. You can't imagine the difference. Why, look here at the Royal Body. Such lines are unknown elsewhere in the swamp. Such spirit can't be found. Why I've killed more men than those little swamp whores have had! See that vein--that's blue blood. I'm every inch a queen. But the men around here belong off in the sticks. There's not one of them fit to rule beside me. They're nothing but savages. Not a drop of gentlemanly blood in their veins. (Pause.) Well?

PONCE Well what?

QUEEN Well it's a good thing I have my hate stick to keep them in their place. Without it I'd be just another swamp beast at the mercy of the larger animals. What are you looking at me with that insane gleam for? I've got a good mind to give you a wop with my hate stick. (RABBIT steals it unseen.) Would you like a good crack, stranger? (Not finding.) Oh! My stick. My hate stick. My power; it's gone!

PONCE (Concerned.) There, there; we'll find it. It couldn't have gone far. It was here just a moment ago.

QUEEN Somebody took it. Some power-hungry savage. You see what life is like! (Close to tears.) I want my power!

PONCE Now, now. I'll find your power for you.

QUEEN (Looking up.) You will?

PONCE Yes. I'll look for it while I'm trying to find a place to cross the river. You see the dotted line . . .

QUEEN Forget the dotted line. Whoever took my power would go to the interior where he could use it.

PONCE (Standing.) Your Majesty, I'll do my best to find it, but I must look where I'm going.

QUEEN (Angrily.) Then be careful you don't drown in the River of Far. You'll learn the hard way the swamp is no goddamn picnic.

PONCE The hard way is often the best way.

QUEEN (Summarily.) Goodbye.

PONCE Goodbye. (Exit in questing posture.)

QUEEN (Bitterly.) Oh, little rabbit. (RABBIT appears.) My hate stick please. (He hesitates.) That's a Royal Order, Bugs;

hop to it! (He does so.) Now come here. (She takes stick.) Don't be afraid. (He sits.) You certainly are a friendly little fellow. Don't you ever get afraid alone in the swamp at night? (RABBIT shudders.) Haven't you ever sat under a little bush when the swamp owls were hooting and the snakes were dropping from the trees? (RABBIT begins to shake.) Oh, don't get afraid. If you get afraid you might run into the quicksand and sink twitching while something watches from the bank . . . or run smash into some brambly things and get all tangled up. Then you might hear something sneaking toward you and break your little legs trying to get free. (RABBIT is shaking violently.) Listen, rabbit, I'm the Queen around here, and I'm in a position to tell you that the swamp is a very bad place. If you're not careful it will break your little bones, or hold you under in the quicksand, or digest you in the belly of a snake. Now you're not going to tell any more swamp secrets to anybody, are you? (RABBIT hesitates, then shakes head slowly.) That's a good little rabbit. Go find yourself a wild carrot. (RABBIT exits.) (To audience.) See? The tables turn here when I want them to. And life continues in the swamp just the way I like it.

(Stage darkens.)



## SCENE II

The setting is the same but the characters have aged somewhat. PONCE enters, his feather broken, his boots fallen around his ankles, his rapier rusted.

PONCE This swamp must go on forever. (Hears something.) What's that? Something is tracking me. I know it. (He tries to draw.) Rusted. But I'm not beaten yet. (He almost growls.) Swamp-beasts don't scare me. (Getting down on all fours.) Come on, beast; fight me if you dare . . . (RABBIT enters, missing an ear.) Rabbit! Is it you? (RABBIT nods.) But what happened to your . . . (RABBIT thinks "that's life.") (Standing.) We seem to be getting bogged down, little fellow. We had such wonderful plans. We were going to do so much more. Our lives were going to be so different. (Sitting.) What's happened to us? I was looking for . . .

(DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER enter casually, arrayed in all the finery of office.)

DIRECTOR (To POSTMASTER.) . . . and so I said we really must have the cells drained.

POSTMASTER Quite, quite. Oh look, Director of Prisons, a loiterer.

DIRECTOR (To PONCE.) I say, old fellow, have you got a swamp permit?

POSTMASTER We don't allow loitering in the swamp.

PONCE (Snapping awake.) I've got it! The Queen's power!

DIRECTOR You do?

POSTMASTER Good for you.

PONCE You gentlemen haven't seen the Queen's power?

DIRECTOR Haven't we?

POSTMASTER What haven't we seen?

DIRECTOR We haven't seen her pants.

POSTMASTER Her fabled pants, red as ripe tomatoes . . .

DIRECTOR Says who?

POSTMASTER The Minister of Transportation and he should know.

DIRECTOR Indeed he should.

PONCE (Patiently.) Well, have you seen her power?

DIRECTOR We've seen it kill sparrows . . .

POSTMASTER . . . and torture rabbits.

DIRECTOR It all began when our crocodile disappeared into the first cool bog . . .

POSTMASTER . . . saying "Man, this is the life."

DIRECTOR Since then we have risen to prominence in the swamp.

POSTMASTER Ascendence.

PONCE But where is the Queen's power?

DIRECTOR In my pocket.

POSTMASTER And mine.

DIRECTOR But mostly mine. I'm the Director of Prisons and this is the Postmaster General. (They bow.)

PONCE An honor. And the Queen?

DIRECTOR She has her hate stick.

POSTMASTER That's all she wants.

PONCE (Politely.) Have you had fun with the Queen's power?

POSTMASTER Not like we would have had with her pants.

DIRECTOR No, we haven't had much fun at all.

POSTMASTER (Sniffling.) It's been terrible.

DIRECTOR Petitions, petitions . . .

POSTMASTER . . . and more petitions.

DIRECTOR Rebellion in the North.

POSTMASTER Famine in the South.

DIRECTOR Flood in the East.

POSTMASTER Fire in the West.

PONCE So life is bad here too.

DIRECTOR What's that?

POSTMASTER He said life is bad here too.

DIRECTOR Nonsense, my boy, life is good . . .

POSTMASTER . . . good, good!

PONCE (Standing.) Tell the Queen you saw me and that I'm off to cross the river.

DIRECTOR The river!

POSTMASTER The Great River of Fear!

DIRECTOR You can't do that!

PONCE Why not?

DIRECTOR I'm sure it's illegal.

POSTMASTER If not immoral.

DIRECTOR (Turning.) We must check.

POSTMASTER (Following.) Immediately. (They exit.)

PONCE (Recalling.) Across the River of Fear in the middle of a bright land full of red and yellow birds and, and . . . is

. . . (RABBIT hops up and down.) . . . the Fabulous Fountain of Youth! (RABBIT claps.) There, I remembered. It's amazing how you can get out of touch, (Sitting.) even forget what you started out to do. I think I was beginning to replace my values with swamp values. That would never do. I'd be just another swampbeast at the mercy of the larger animals. Where have I heard that before? So quickly the old time becomes a swirling mess . . . just years down the drain . . . people waving as they go. If only I could remember things exactly as they happened. There'd be some kind of redemption in that. Why, I seem to remember a beautiful swamp queen standing in a clearing just like this--it was one of those rare cool days in the swamp--telling me I was the handsomest man she'd ever laid eyes on. I can still hear her voice . . .

QUEEN (Standing behind him.) Wrong, all wrong. Your memory is warped, Ponce.

PONCE My name!

QUEEN Nothing remains true to form. You're the tall thin man in the circus mirror. While you were looking for life it walked right by you. And now you have only the mirror. (Whispered.) Take it down from the wall, Ponce. Press your body up against it and see how well you fit. (Normally.) Is it possible you've even lost your self? Look! Imagine the rapier slicing the air. (He tries to draw.) Imagine a butter butterfly kissing that! Her wings would fall off. She would dry up and blow away--as we say here in the swamp. (She disappears.)

PONCE Am I growing old already? Why then I'll run downhill!  
And when I'm dead I'll dance on my grave . . . if possible.  
Have I lost my self? Next I'll be hearing that those two fools  
have found theirs. (Stands and manages to draw his rapier.)  
There, old blade, ready for a slice of life? Rabbit! Shall  
we continue our quest? (RABBIT presents him with a new feather  
for his cap.) Why thanks, old rodent! Have our trails come to-  
gether again? (RABBIT nods.) Then we're off! (They begin gay  
exit.)

POSTMASTER (On the run.) The Director of Prisons . . . (Loud  
splash) . . . he just fell in the bog!

PONCE (Stopping.) How did he do that?

POSTMASTER Well, he was leaning over it backwards . . . Oh  
never mind, aren't you going to save him?

PONCE How long do you think he can float?

POSTMASTER Not very long. His keys . . .

PONCE I see. You'd better declare an emergency.

POSTMASTER Only the Queen can do that. Or maybe the Director  
of Prisons . . .

PONCE Since you know where to find him . . .

POSTMASTER Oh, save him!

PONCE I can't save him.

VOICE OF CROCODILE I'll save him!

POSTMASTER Oh no, the crocodile! Do something!

PONCE Just a minute, friend. How come we heard the old fellow's  
splash after you announced his fall? (Advancing with rapier.)  
There's foul play here.

POSTMASTER (Retreating.) No, no. We were friends. He kept the prisoners, I kept the mail.

PONCE Why did he fall?

POSTMASTER I don't know. I don't know. He was ill-balanced. A regular lard-ass. A man like that wanting the Queen for his own! Kept calling her Melinda. He had no right. No right!

PONCE Go on.

POSTMASTER The Queen loved me. She did her best to conceal it. I did it for her. I had to.

PONCE What did you do?

POSTMASTER (On his knees.) I knew the Director of Prisons' favorite spot--a high bank with good footing--and I went there in the night, and I found his little pile of leaves, and I weighted them, and when he swung them out behind him he upset that delicate balance, and . . .

PONCE So why come for help?

POSTMASTER (Sniffling.) I was sorry.

PONCE Before it happened?

POSTMASTER (Collapsing into tears.) I love the Queen!

PONCE (About to run him through.) Perhaps life would be better around here without people like you.

QUEEN (Enter waving hate stick.) En garde, you assassin! (They duel.) You troublemaker! You dreamer! Take that! (He foils her.) And that! (Foiled again.)

PONCE (Retreating.) Hey Queen! There Queen! Now Queen!  
Your dignity. Your image.

POSTMASTER (Jumping around as is RABBIT.) Oh, my Queen, my Queen. She's come to save me. Oh joy! Oh bliss divine! Your Majesty, if you win I'll marry you.

QUEEN (Ceasing attack.) He's yours.

POSTMASTER No, no, no! (He runs smack into the DIRECTOR. Both fall.)

DIRECTOR (Pointing.) He tried to . . . drown me! Rocks on my leaves. Lost balance. Splash. Sabotage. Murder. I'm going to lock him up. He can't dirty my sash! (Gives pursuit.)

POSTMASTER Help, a madman! (Hides behind QUEEN.) The mails, what will happen to the mails?

QUEEN (As DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER circle.) People don't seem to write anymore.

PONCE Isn't that the truth?

QUEEN Just advertisements.

PONCE That's how it is.

QUEEN Keeps the postmen busy.

PONCE That's about it.

POSTMASTER Help, help, help . . . (Exit.)

DIRECTOR You postage-due son of a bitch . . . (Exit in hot pursuit.)

QUEEN Rabbit, you'd better keep an eye on them. (RABBIT exits.) Well, Ponce, the years have been good to you.

PONCE You're looking pretty good yourself. (They sit.) So good, in fact, that it makes me a little suspicious.

QUEEN Oh really, of what?

PONCE Of you, Your Majesty.

QUEEN Me? Oh Ponce, why?

PONCE What's it like across the river?

QUEEN Oh, don't you know?

PONCE No.

QUEEN I thought everybody knew. Nothing but quicksand . . .  
the high laugh of the hate bird wheeling through the fog . . .  
the last flutter of sorrow beating her broken wings.

PONCE That's so sad. How do you know?

QUEEN (Laughing.) A little bird told me.

PONCE And afterwards it laughed.

QUEEN No. She tried to fly, but her wings were broken.

PONCE You've been there!

QUEEN Yes, I've been there. Why do you think I stay here?

PONCE Is it so bad there?

QUEEN The swamp is everywhere.

PONCE Are you sure?

QUEEN You think I don't know my own swamp?

PONCE But we're forgetting something--you're so young and  
beautiful, and we've been here so long. What's the secret?

QUEEN Why Ponce, all the girls ask me that.

PONCE They do?

QUEEN Yes, and I tell them it's my positive outlook keeps me  
young.

PONCE No.

QUEEN What has your outlook done for you?



PONCE It's kept me alive.

QUEEN But what a life--on the fringes of the swamp looking for the impossible. You could have paired-off with a nice native girl . . .

PONCE I've met some pretty wonderful animsl.

QUEEN But think of all you've missed. I've hit nearly everyone in the swamp with my hate stick. Pow!

PONCE Almost hit me once.

QUEEN I've had some great times. Once I slaughtered an entire village--they had refused to sacrifice to the great hate bird--laying about me left and right until not a person was left alive; except a little one-eyed child I left to tell the story.

PONCE To whom?

QUEEN To strangers who don't know that hate rules the swamp.

PONCE I know it. That's why I'm going to cross the river.

QUEEN Then you prefer death.

PONCE Staying here is only waiting to die.

QUEEN Look around you. This is the swamp as it has always been. And it continues. It works. It will always be like this. Do you think it would be any better crawling with red and yellow birds, with golden cattle getting stuck in the bogs, with happy people bumping into each other and falling into the river? You must hate life to want to change it. Remember, the swamp doesn't like people who want to change it. It will change you first. Not much time has passed from the swamp's point of view, but you have withered like a sunflower in the dark.

PONCE I know the swamp is real but I'm here too. And I work. And this is the way I am. My dreams are as real as the mosquitoes. Maybe even the swamp has a dream. Sometimes I feel it--like it knows where it's going. Something is happening here like water seeking its level--patiently, inexorably . . .

QUEEN That's death, Ponce. Don't you feel it in your bones, rising around them, sucking you down, down; and in the distance a high laugh? Once I felt his icy fingers crawling up under my leopard skin. I gave him a good crack with my hate stick and I haven't had any trouble with him since.

PONCE The dream is larger than death. And when I feel it I know that the fountain is somewhere near. And so I look, and looking too feels right. You can't beat that feeling, Queen, any more than you can hit every green shoot in the swamp with your hate stick.

QUEEN Who wants to? I have only to stand by and watch. The dream shrivels in the head and the water goes out of the green shoots; they twist and curl and snap and return to the muck.

PONCE But . . .

QUEEN Don't move, Ponce, I can hear your bones creaking.

PONCE And I can hear your heart beating. Can you?

QUEEN I have no heart.

PONCE Why then we'll give you one! Listen! That's our breathing. Look at us. Aren't we beautiful?

QUEEN I may be. You certainly aren't.

PONCE But isn't it good to talk? Imagine . . . right in the middle of the swamp!

QUEEN There's nowhere else, Ponce. (Pause.) If I take you across the river and show you, will you drop all this nonsense?

PONCE If it is nonsense.

QUEEN (Standing.) Then if you'll escort me.

PONCE (Standing, offering arm.) It will be a pleasure.

QUEEN How I hate to travel alone.

PONCE It can get tiring.

QUEEN (Lifting a leg.) If you'll just help me on my hate stick.

PONCE Why certainly. (Lifts her on.) How's that?

QUEEN Just fine. Now if you'd like to board.

PONCE An honor and a privilege. (Steps gingerly on. RABBIT enters eagerly.) Your Majesty, I have a friend.

QUEEN (Starting her hate stick.) Brrffgghh. (Over shoulder.) What's that?

PONCE (Shouting.) I have a friend!

QUEEN Good for you. Brrffgghh.

PONCE But, Your Majesty!

QUEEN Brrffgghh. What's that?

PONCE He wants to come!

QUEEN Bring him along then. (RABBIT hops on, QUEEN warms up, all shake furiously.)

PONCE (Waving hat.) We're off! We're off across the river!

DIRECTOR (Enter running.) Hey! What's this I hear about a Fountain of Youth?

PONCE and QUEEN Oh no! (QUEEN adjusts idle.)

DIRECTOR Oh yes. You're not getting off without me! I've guarded your prisons. I've carried the burden of office. I came here in the first place looking for youth and I'm going to find it.

QUEEN (Preparing for flight.) Let's go, hate stick.

DIRECTOR (Grabbing end of stick.) I'm not going to let you. I want to go. I need it more than you. I have seniority! Besides, there's Melinda. (Grabbing PONCE.) I told her about the fountain and she said she'd wait . . .

PONCE But not to come back until you'd found it?

DIRECTOR Why, yes.

QUEEN Fool! Get on. (He does so. She pulls throttle. Overloaded, on a short strip, they attempt a wobbly take-off.)

ALL (Except RABBIT.)

#### THE HATE STICK SONG

Hate stick, hate stick; in the air!  
 Make the heads roll everywhere.  
 Hate stick, hate stick; take a crack!  
 Carry us up on your back.  
 Hate stick, hate stick, rough and tough;  
 In the air--and do your stuff!!!

Brrffgghhhh!!!

POSTMASTER (Enter running.) Hey! Wait for me! (He grabs DIRECTOR, who grabs RABBIT, etc. All fall loudly.)

QUEEN Wait, hate stick! (It waits. She cuts ignition.)

DIRECTOR (To POSTMASTER.) Now you've done it! I hope you're happy! We'll never find the Fabulous Fountain. You stamp-lick! How did you get out?

POSTMASTER I picked the lock. I'm not stupid.

PONCE Apparently not.

POSTMASTER And I let all the other prisoners out too! So there!

DIRECTOR You did what?

QUEEN He did?

PONCE Looks that way.

DIRECTOR (Up.) Our lives aren't worth a bog nickel!

QUEEN (Up.) The swamp is no longer safe!

POSTMASTER (Staying put.) It is for me. They like me.

PONCE (Up.) I suggest we cross the river.

QUEEN A fine idea.

POSTMASTER (Up.) Oh, could we?

DIRECTOR Some of us could, Postmaster General, if it weren't for . . . (RABBIT signals furiously with remaining ear.)

PONCE What's on your mind, Rabbit?

(RABBIT hops, points.)

QUEEN He must know a place where we can jump over.

PONCE Yes!

DIRECTOR Oh, wonderful!

POSTMASTER Goody!

(All line up behind RABBIT.)

PONCE Is everybody happy?

ALL Yes!

QUEEN Let me hear it!

ALL (Hopping gaily after RABBIT.) Yes!!

DIRECTOR Don't pull!

POSTMASTER I'm not pulling!

ALL (Except RABBIT.)

THE HOPPING SONG

We're off and it's the truth  
For the Fabulous Fountain of Youth.  
All over the place we will hop  
Till we come to a place where we stop.  
And there, we hear, we will all drink beer  
And gaily jump over the River of Fear  
Into the Fabulous Fountain of Youth.  
We're off and it's the truth!!

(All exit hopping. Stage darkens.)

## SCENE III

Still the swamp. The characters are noticeably older. PONCE enters slowly dragging a cart with DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER in it. The QUEEN plods several paces behind. They may drag themselves once or twice across the stage.

DIRECTOR (To POSTMASTER,) Well, we didn't land smack-dab in it, did we?

POSTMASTER Not smack-dab. No siree.

DIRECTOR (Behind hand.) Could say we missed altogether.

POSTMASTER (Cackling.) Could.

DIRECTOR Let me say, Postmaster General, that if this expedition is not a success, it's been good to have a man like you along.

POSTMASTER (Wringing hands.) Oh, it's so nice of you to say so. (Pause.)

DIRECTOR It's been an honor to serve under me, hasn't it?

POSTMASTER Oh, yes. It's been an honor to serve under you, sir.

DIRECTOR (Arm around him.) We've had some experiences!

POSTMASTER Real humdingers!

DIRECTOR Remember the day we crossed the River of Fear?

POSTMASTER . . . the river of fear, the river of fear . . .

DIRECTOR Yes, the mighty River of Fear.

POSTMASTER Oh, the River of Fear.

DIRECTOR Yes, that's it.

POSTMASTER Remember the time we crossed it?

DIRECTOR Yes, yes. I was just . . .

POSTMASTER That was an experience!

DIRECTOR A real jim-dandy!

POSTMASTER It was boiling with the spring hate.

DIRECTOR Raging!

POSTMASTER We had just finished the last jar of peanut butter.

DIRECTOR The escaped prisoners were closing in behind us.

POSTMASTER Swampbeasts to the left,

DIRECTOR Quicksand to the right.

POSTMASTER The deadly piranha fish just ahead.

PONCE (Stopping.) Well, what happened?

POSTMASTER What are you--stupid?

DIRECTOR Escape a situation like that?

POSTMASTER You try it some time!

(The QUEEN has caught up with PONCE, who sets down cart.

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER disembark and settle down to an intent game of pick-up-sticks.)

QUEEN I see they're keeping their spirits up.

PONCE That's life.

QUEEN (Sitting.) How long has it been?

PONCE (Sitting.) Not so long . . .

QUEEN . . . from the swamp's point of view.

PONCE Your Majesty, any day now . . .

QUEEN . . . I'm going to hit myself with my hate stick.

PONCE Don't do that!



QUEEN Why not?

PONCE Because there's a . . . fabulous fountain . . . birds  
. . . cattle . . .

QUEEN You're a slow learner.

PONCE I haven't seen the quicksand.

QUEEN And when you do see it?

PONCE (Thoughtfully.) Maybe I'll back the cart into it.

QUEEN Spoken like a king! I didn't know you had it in you.

PONCE But I don't believe in the quicksand.

QUEEN (Disgusted.) You have a fine philosophy for plodders.  
Stick with you and I'll pace the swamp from one end to the  
other. Where's your spirit?

PONCE I'm just being sad for a moment.

QUEEN (Concerned.) Why?

PONCE I miss Rabbit.

QUEEN What nonsense!

PONCE Do rabbits go to . . . ?

QUEEN Don't be ridiculous! Cheer up. It was my fault. He  
really couldn't balance with only one ear.

PONCE I suppose not. Well, (Standing) we're off.

QUEEN I can't take another step.

PONCE Try!

QUEEN I won't!

PONCE But you've got to!

QUEEN Why?

PONCE To stop now would make the whole thing meaningless.

QUEEN It always was. Besides, my feet hurt. And my sore feet are more real than your stupid fountain!

PONCE Then I go alone.

QUEEN (Standing.) Dance with me first.

PONCE (Hesitating.) What do you want to dance?

QUEEN Just a little bog trot.

PONCE Well, all right.

(They dance one of the subtler mating dances of the swamp.)

PONCE (Tearing himself away.) I must go now. (QUEEN sits dejected.) Gentlemen, the carriage is waiting.

POSTMASTER Did you hear that, Director of Prisons? The carriage is waiting.

DIRECTOR (Intent.) Yes, I heard it. Tell him to hold his horses. I just want to get this little black bastard.

POSTMASTER Hold your horses. He wants to get that little black bastard.

DIRECTOR Shit!

POSTMASTER Gee whiz, you've messed it up again!

DIRECTOR Mind your own business, Postmaster General.

POSTMASTER It is my business. Who do you think you're playing? (PONCE sighs. QUEEN looks at him.)

DIRECTOR In this game one plays against oneself.

POSTMASTER So who wins when you lose?

PONCE Gentlemen, your carriage.

DIRECTOR Why, there's our carriage now. Shall we?

POSTMASTER After you, Director of Prisons.

DIRECTOR No, no. After you, Postmaster General.

POSTMASTER (Embarking.) You're too kind.

DIRECTOR (Following.) Not at all.

PONCE All aboard for youth and happiness.

QUEEN I lost my ticket.

PONCE That doesn't matter.

QUEEN Oh, but it does!

PONCE Goodbye, Queen.

QUEEN Ponce! (Offering hate stick.) Take this.

PONCE I won't need it.

QUEEN Then goodbye.

(PONCE pulls cart slowly offstage.)

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER (Chanting arm in arm.)

We are marching, marching, marching;  
We are marching, marching, marching.

QUEEN (Softly.)

#### THE SONG OF HATE

Wherever you go in the swamp, my lad,  
Carry a stick you must,  
For the swampbeasts they are big and bad;  
The natives you cannot trust.

The ants upon your eyes may sup,  
The beast upon your bone,  
But the quicksand swallowed your mother up  
And left you all alone.

So learn to sleep, my little lad,  
With one eye open wide.  
It matters not the swamp is bad  
With the hate stick at your side.

There he goes. The only idealist I ever met in the swamp. A rare bird. It's a real shame there isn't any fountain. (Pause.)

It's so quiet I can hear my heart beating. I've been hiking so long I'm losing my good sense. You know I kept running into myself coming out of the swamp in the other direction. And I wouldn't get out of my way. I just kept coming right at me until I had to stop and stare myself in the face. Then I pressed myself against me to see if I fit, but I passed right through me, and again I was trekking into the swamp. If it had happened just once I could have forgotten about it, but it happened dozens of times, perhaps hundreds. I hope it doesn't happen on the way back. That could be confusing. (Standing.) So long, Ponce. Don't look forever. (Exit.)

(Stage progressively darkens to end of scene. DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER scramble weakly across stage after QUEEN.)

POSTMASTER (Frantic whisper.) Isn't this desertion?

DIRECTOR This is called being practical.

POSTMASTER Oh, good. I wouldn't want to be a deserter. (Exit.)

(PONCE backs through the murky swamp, rapier drawn. He is alone.)

PONCE Oh, I know you're there. I knew it all along. I saw you stalking, waiting . . . I heard the swamp suck up your footprints as you passed tracking, hunting . . . But you won't get me. No, I'm too smart for you. You'll see. You can't trap me. I'm on both sides of you. You can't touch me. You don't know where I am. Does that come as a surprise to you? I was circling you when you thought you circled me. You see, I believe in the fountain and the happy people. And I have them right here (hits chest) where you can't get your paws on them. Oh

yes, they're real. As real as you are. See? I believe in you too. That's why I'll get you--I am going to get you--because you have only yourself. You can only be in one place at once. Right there! And I'm circling right now. (Backing.) You can't get behind me, beast. Would it matter to you that people die, that life slips through their fingers and they can't even feel it going? Would you care to convince the Queen that she's still somebody without her power, those fools that they exist without their offices? No. You wouldn't and you couldn't. So you stay right there, beast. I'm out to win, beast. And I mean to take my victory from you, beast. Stay! You can't circle me. I'm circling you. I know who you are. Every time eyes don't meet, I see you. Every time ears don't listen, I hear you. You think I stand for nothing? Only a corpse has one reality, and that's you. I smell you now. I could touch you. Damn you, disappear! Haven't I got you yet? I will, you know. I've got possibilities. The first proof is I see you. You can't sneak up behind me. You can't knock my life out from under me. I'm the one person you can't do that to. Yes, I've got possibilities. And I'm going to get you. Tell me about yourself, beast--is it cold in the swamp at night? When you crawl out of your hole in the morning and see the bubbling quicksand and the empty sky, what do you think of? Another beast reality beside you in the dark? Is that it? You see, I'm listening. And that's the second proof I'm going to get you. Beast, you are foul! Never have I seen such ugliness as yours. Even you could not bear to see such

filth. But I can. I can even touch you. And that's the third and final proof I'm going to get you. See how fearless I am? Oh, he's going to say something. What an intelligent beast! What's that? You want to ask a question? Go ahead. Ask away. What? What do you mean "care?" Of course I care. That's my trademark. Look around you! How could anyone not care? What? Why you're just a beast. But my own kind. That's different. Naturally. Who? Why every last one of them, every one. Yes, of course. The garrison at Tallahassee. The natives. Of course. Go on. The escaped prisoners. Surely. There is room in my heart. The Director of Prisons . . . He was all right. There is room in my heart. The Postmaster General . . . not really my type. But . . . there is room in my heart! Yes, yes. Of course, of course--the Queen! . . . so full of hate . . . so . . . yet . . . even so . . . there is room . . . lots of room . . . What are you laughing at? I'm no laughing matter. I care! I really care! Don't forget Butter! And Rabbit! What about Rabbit! And the Fountain! You can't forget that! Wait! Don't go away! The Queen just slipped through my fingers. The others ran away. I couldn't bring the Fountain to them! Wait! Stay and fight! Wait! Listen to me! Listen!

(He stands mid-stage as it blacks out.)

## SCENE IV

Same swamp. Same characters, older than ever. POSTMASTER and DIRECTOR dance on.

POSTMASTER (Pirouetting.) Oh, it's good to be young again.

DIRECTOR (Walking on hands.) Yes, yes, yes. (Righting himself.) I was just giving my new prisoners a peptalk. Men,, I said, you're only young once.

POSTMASTER Heehee.

DIRECTOR And, seeing as, I said, you young men have decided to pass your youths here at my prison . . . we're going to provide you all with games and hobbies.

POSTMASTER Very good of you, Director of Prisons, very good . . .

DIRECTOR Whereupon one of them had the nerve to ask that I let his wife visit him.

POSTMASTER No!

DIRECTOR Yes! And in the night.

POSTMASTER No! The animal.

DIRECTOR Yes! That's what I said. Young man, do you think you're a swampbeast? Abstain, I said; you're only young once.

POSTMASTER That's putting your finger on it.

DIRECTOR I played alone when I was young and they will too!

POSTMASTER But perpetual youth is different.

DIRECTOR It certainly is. (Slyly.) Have you seen the Queen's new pants?

POSTMASTER (High whisper.) New pants?

DIRECTOR Yes.

POSTMASTER How do you know?

DIRECTOR The other day . . . in the council chamber . . . she slipped on a banana peel.

POSTMASTER In the council chamber!

DIRECTOR I was standing right in front of her holding forth on the rights of prisoners . . .

POSTMASTER (Nearly choking.) Did you notice the color?

DIRECTOR They were a subtle beige.

POSTMASTER No! She must be getting old.

DIRECTOR They had frills.

POSTMASTER They did! (Gulp.) You're sure they weren't just the old ones--faded?

DIRECTOR (Thunderstruck.) I hadn't thought of that!

POSTMASTER We'd better look for the old ones.

DIRECTOR Yes, but where?

POSTMASTER (He has it.) The Royal Garbage!

DIRECTOR (That's it.) The Royal Garbage!

TOGETHER (Skipping arm in arm.)

#### THE ROYAL GARBAGE SONG

We're sure to do our best;  
 We're off on a wonderful quest!  
 We'll look under every leaf and peel;  
 A glance in the Royal Bog we'll steal--  
 Until it's altogether true  
 That the Queen's new pants are new! (Exit.)

(Swamp birds begin to call and sing.)

QUEEN (Entering merrily. To Audience.) Listen everybody! An explorer has been sighted bumbling along in the distance. Can



you guess who it is? Well, it's Ponce, and he's back, and we're going to give him a Royal Welcome! You owe him a lot. He did what you never had the spirit to do. He went looking for the Fabulous Fountain of Youth! Imagine that--and in the swamp! We thought the swamp would always be the same. How wrong we were! We're not going to be stuck in the mud all our lives. In just a minute we're going to get up and live for ourselves. We're going to listen to our hearts beat. We're going to breathe, and walk around, and run and . . . oh, it's all going to be so much fun! And we're going to look at things, but most of all at people. And we're going to listen to them. And . . . we're going to touch them! Oh, here he comes! Hi, Ponce! (Jumping up and down.) Ponce, it's me. The Queen! (Clapping.) Come on everybody! Make him feel at home! (Swamp applause.)

(PONCE comes walking down aisle of theater.)

PONCE! That's the Great River of Fear! You can't just walk across it! My, my; where did you learn that?

PONCE (Stopping.) A little bird taught me.

QUEEN Don't push a good thing; get off the water.

(PONCE leaps on stage, stands in front of QUEEN. Pause. The swamp is silent.)

QUEEN Well, what did you see?

PONCE (Simply.) I saw the great hate bird wheeling through the fog.

(Pause.)

QUEEN (Quietly.) You've given up your quest?

PONCE No.

QUEEN Then what are you doing here?

PONCE This is where it led me.

QUEEN Right here?

PONCE Right here.

QUEEN This very spot?

PONCE This very spot.

QUEEN Then you're going to live in the swamp?

PONCE Yes. I guess I'll have to learn how to use that hate stick.

QUEEN Maybe. Maybe not. Oh, I almost forgot. There's someone here to greet you.

(Swamp birds begin again. DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER skip sideways across stage.)

DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER (Singing.)

We're sure to do our best;  
We're off on a wonderful quest!

PONCE Not them!

QUEEN No.

PONCE Then who?

(QUEEN makes grand gesture of presentation. RABBIT hops on, stops, opens arms wide.)

PONCE (Opening arms.) Rabbit!

(They embrace. DIRECTOR and POSTMASTER skip back. All dance hand in hand in circle.)

## THE SWAMP SONG

We're here and it's the truth:  
This is the Fountain of Youth!  
So here we'll run and romp and stomp  
In our fabulous, fabulous swamp!!

CURTAIN