

**SIDEWALK
SATORI:
INTERVIEW
FOR HELL**

**A Play by
A. Daniel Thompson**

CAST OF CHARACTERS

J.R.

Old alcoholic, alias the Dean, hairy

ED

Clean-cut white man, in midlife crisis

MARY

Mentally-ill large Hispanic woman

RICHIE

Runaway teen prostitute, pretty boy

NAT

Black social worker, alias the Referee

NOTE:

as audience enters the theater,
Nat will be at entrance begging,
laid out in horrible stench

Scene One

A park with trees, three benches, J.R. on center bench amid empty bottles, Mary wrapped in dirty clothes and papers on bench stage left, from right...

enter Richie, leading Ed by the arm

Richie:

Here you are. This is J.R. He sometimes helped me out when I was first on the street. J.R., this guy says he needs help cause he's homeless. Doesn't look like it to me, but I brought him anyway. Thought maybe he's just shy, pickin' me up, ya know? Come on...
(strokes Ed's arm and chest)

Ed:

No, really, not that. I do need help. I., I left my family and I don't know what to do, how you go about this... whole thing. I just, well, I'm staying out here anyway and I'm not going back. I was just hoping someone could sort of show me the ropes.

J.R.:

So, you say you left your family. You left? *(no answer)* And you want to be out here, with us? You think you have what it takes?! To join us, the few, the proud *(posing, upright, sways)* Well, we'll ask you a few questions and find out. Your name? Name? Know how to talk??

Ed:

Yes, of course, I'm a college graduate. I...

Richie:

I don't care. I've got work to do. So, anyway, I brought you.

Ed:

Yes, thank you.

Richie:

Thank you? Fuck you!

J.R.:

He wants something, Mister...

Ed:

Ed. Um, I don't have any money. I left it all.

Richie:

Worthless asshole! What a waste. Let him rot, J.R. I hope he is homeless. He deserves it. Nobody jerks me around! *(to Ed)* Give me your watch.

J.R.:

Relax, Richie. Let's find out what he's about. We'll grant him an interview.

Ed:

Thank you. That is, I'm sorry, an interview?

J.R.:

That's right. Do you want the position? First off, that's Richie. Heroin, that's why he's so skinny, not hungry for food anyways. But he'd do anything for a fix, including sell his soul.

Richie:

My soul? Shit, I wish somebody'd buy that worthless hunk of shit. Like the devil!
(sticks tongue out, growls demonesque)

J.R.:

So give him your watch for starters, then.

Ed:

No way!

J.R.:

Good! Very good, for your first test... Now, down to business. I'm J.R. They call me the Professor. *(takes swig from cheap wine bottle periodically)*

Richie:

Whatever old man! You're fucked in the head. I'd rather be fucked in the ass. At least I get paid that way.

J.R.:

You may call me Dean, since I will be deciding your fate.

Ed:

Look, I'm not sure this is, um...

Richie:

Oh, this is rich!! Which one is loonier?

J.R.:

Quiet you, urchin. Have you no respect for your elders?

Richie:

Oh, sure, look what they've done for me! (*poses*)

J.R.:

The poor boy, destitute, turned to prostitution. He's not bad really, an orphan.

Richie:

(*in British accent*) "Please, sir, may I have some more" (*holds ass apart at them*)
Bad to the bone, baby, you'd better believe it!

Ed:

Look, I'm sorry to have troubled you. I'll go.

J.R.:

Don't go yet! We were just getting to the interesting part- you.

Ed:

I don't know.

J.R.:

Courage, friend. We just want to see if you can make it before we take a chance on you. You know, it's not for everyone. The pay's not much, and the hours...

Ed:

But the benefits, the freedom, no one to tell you what to do, counting the clock, covering...

J.R.:

That's right, one long vacation in the sun!

Richie:

You guys are wacked out! What vacation? You fuckin' never get vacation. Everyone be tryin' to tell you what to do, the case workers, that Referee, the shelter guys, fuckin' breatherizing you for a fuckin' bed. You are always on, on the street!!

J.R.:

Don't mind him. He's in a bad mood, jonesin'. You'll see... lots to learn.

Ed:

I'm a quick learner.

J.R.:

Good, neophyte. Now we're talking!

Ed:

Just call me Ed. I have no last name anymore.

J.R.:

How romantic! Children?

Ed:

I'm through with that, all the blame. I tried to stay home for 'em, then when that didn't work I stayed away, always at work, alone anyway. Fuck it!

J.R.:

Temper? Never mind- that's an asset out here- in the great beyond...

Richie:

(sitting stage right, singing, shooting up) Break on through to the other side...

Ed:

And who's she? *(pointing to Mary)*

J.R.:

(in loud mock German accent) I'll ask the questions! No, just kidding. She's Mary.

Richie:

(singing) Cross-eyed Mary.

J.R.:

An angle, poor gentle creature, mad Mary la Guadalupe, the virgin...

Richie:

No virgin!

J.R.:

Mary has a handicap and nobody to care for her.

Richie:

Yeah, right. She ain't got no handicap, 'cept perhaps a little crotch rot. She's just lazy as all hell. And dumb- not deaf though. You can hear, can't ya?! Boo!!! But she don't ever talk, ever. Never makes a noise, even when these old fucks have their way with her, she don't scream, don't say nothing, not a word. Just looks, like now, like she's asleep, but with her eyes open. Referee, the social worker, is always trying to do something for her. But she won't budge; couldn't drag her into a shelter- strong as all hell! *(at J.R.)* And the shelters always kicking this other one out! Don't make any sense.

J.R.:

Don't be bitter, boy. The world is your oyster.

Richie:

Yeah, slimy and smelly! Like that cum dumpster! (*points to Mary*)

J.R.:

Back to brass tacks. (*to Ed*) What makes you qualified for this... life style?

Ed:

Well, I'm... flexible, dependable.

Richie:

Sure you are!

Ed:

And are you really a... (*to Richie*)

Richie:

Hoar, honey, yeah! And a magnificent one, don't deny it!

Ed:

But why?? Must you...?

Richie:

Hell, if I was good enough for my old man, and he didn't even provide. Who the hell are you?!

J.R.:

Back to the interview. What do you think you'd like most and least here?

Ed:

I don't know. The food least, I guess.

Richie:

What about getting beat up? The food's fine- if you can keep your teeth. And the drink.

Ed:

And most, most of all I'd like having no one depend on me, no deadlines, no stress, the open air, adventure.

J.R.:

What would you do if you won a million dollars?

Ed:

What?!

J.R.:

That was the best question any interviewer ever asked me.

Ed:

You?

J.R.:

Yes, good sir, and?

Ed:

Well, give it away, I guess.

Richie:

I'm gonna kick this guy's mother-fuckin' ass!

J.R.:

What would you teach people from this position?

Ed:

What would I teach?

J.R.:

That is my question. We have a responsibility, you know!

Ed:

I have no idea! Why did I even...? Oh, who knows!?

J.R.:

God knows. Look, here's what you'd be doing: I'll give you a little orientation, assume you as my apprentice, an abercaderian. Follow me and watch.

Scene Two

J.R. move upstages, followed by Ed, into spotlight; background blacked out

J.R. addresses the crowd, Ed watching behind, periodically checking his watch

J.R.

Spare any change. Got a quarter, lady? I will tell you: I have just had an epiphany, a genuine epiphany! Long had I thought, and not just I, that this life is so empty, a void. We try to fill it up with things: gods, systems, material things, or others we can never grasp. Nothing fills this hole in our being. How long, oh Lord, how long? Then, I thought, this is absurd! Who can fill this abyss if not I myself? So I threw myself, my Self, into the great void- either to fill it completely or to lose myself completely forever. The ultimate leap of faith! Praise be! Joy of joys! *(aside to Ed, behind his hand)* I once made the jump- in front of a train! *(back to crowd, moving closer and closer, more and more in their face, stinking)* At one glorious time, all souls soared free in the heavens. Then there was a revolution in the stars, a fall. That fallen angel- it is You!- was condemned to live here below in the sin and samsara and mara seeking satori and such and... *(breathless)* wallowing, blissfully, in the exalted dirt and grime sublime of existence. But we wanted it! We chose the Fall, the playful split- to taste, to taste- the forbidden fruit, sexual, nay sensual, fruit of the tree of knowledge and sorrow, to season delight, tree of evil, to spice up the good... Is not Satan, the fallen one, is us? Fallen angels all living out lives of lies, bittersweet rotting meat and sour grapes, soulfood, a taste for Life...

(enter Nat, looks at Ed, waves, then stands listening)

But we can soar free again anytime we like! We chose this mortal coil and sting and we can shuck it off. Revel in your Choice- to come down and feel, be, become, love, lose, laugh, cry! We have all come down to die on our crosses for the sins and glory of all. The world is allone. *(to audience still)* YOU!! You make the world whole, complete! You are the Center, your Nature true. We will all be joined in the universal union. What is yours and what mine really, ultimately? It seems to me illusion, or reality, or Memorex!

Nat:

How do? *(to Ed)* He's on a long one. *(point at J.R.)*

J.R.:

Nirvana is in Samsara. Death is a breath of air, the reincarnate digesting its best merit to give it again character and form, plunge back down into the depths to struggle and to strive. Why? To uplift the rest until all is enlightened, Amen! Karma points galore, shoot- score! Liberated. So, have you never wondered why? Why are we so deluded, attached, endlessly desirous, struggling, suffering? And why have we forgotten? If we have lived, and lived- countless lives upon lives- why have we no memory- Praise be!- of all this knowledge? Would that you knew! This is the greatest gift of all, to ourselves: It is not a test, but a chance, a fresh start, a clean slate, tabula rasa, all our sins and dispositions wiped away, all our accumulated attachments dissipated like husks after the harvest by the cosmic winds of oblivion. We come into the world free and clean with every chance to realize - that is to recognize, not to create- perfection, enlightenment, even paradise for ourselves and for all sentient beings yearning to be free. Oh, Glory! They say the meek shall inherit the earth. It is commonly interpreted, I think, as meaning that those who seem weak for refusing to indulge in physical violence, or perforce verbal, will one day move in to inhabit the gilded palaces of earthly delight. Could it not also be understood though, I ask you, as implying that those who, for whatever reasons, have not the force to battle and vanquish the ultimate foe, their selves, will indeed be burdened with this terrestrial testing grounds until such time as they can at last move beyond? Well, what say you?!... Gimme a quarter.

Ed:

You're raving!

J.R.:

The tourists like it. I can't play harmonica. It's important that the truth lie outside them.

Ed:

What's for real here?

J.R.:

You are- maybe. Are you late, mad hatter?

Ed:

Perhaps, though I've nowhere to go.

J.R.:

Then back to the interview.

Scene Three

Lights come back on backstage as Mary mumbles on one bench, Nat surveys Richie passed out on another, then puts his arm around J.R. with a glance at Ed.

Nat:

How ya been, J.R.? Who's this?

J.R.

That is the question I am attempting to answer. *(to Ed)* Have you heard of koans, little zen riddles sort of like the sound of the clapper less bell and all that? No, well, here's an existentialist nursery rhyme for you then, to put you back at ease...

Ed:

Please, look, I don't understand all this. Do I get it- or not? Am I accepted? I really want this. I need this. I'll do anything, almost...

J.R.:

(loudly) Fuzzy-wuzzy was a bear. Fuzzy-wuzzy, was he there? Fuzzy-wuzzy, was he? *(pause)* Have a drink. *(Ed takes the proffered bottle.)* So, tell me what you think of this one, a parable:

(red lights)

This man trades his soul to the devil- and for what? To what end? Power? Riches? Fame? Love perhaps? Revenge even? No, only a trick, that the Devil let loose all the other souls that he has thus stolen, won, or otherwise acquired and come upon by sin and all. Isn't that right, Mister social worker?

Nat:

Yessir, I suppose, depending.

J.R.

Nat, this here is hapless Ed, on a Quest. I must quell his world-thirst quickly. I continue:

This Man, having renounced all worldly pursuit, greed, and such, a slave to religious sacrifice, instead of just reward, a world utopia, the redeemed, come down to smite his foes et al.- he decided to renounce all this and make the supreme sacrifice- his soul. And let us not believe he sinned in doing so. He made the deal direct- with the devil herself!! And there was a great light and lifting of wings of grace, the chosen, (*spread arms*) and the Gates of Heaven were thrown wide open, never to shut again and the man was granted death and peace and his soul again, eternal life, freed from the Devil. And the Devil himself was freed from his heavy burden, his unceasing task- with no more unholy host (unemployed he was) the Devil himself was uplifted on dusty, cobwebbed wings of scale and feather fine- lifted out, transcended his eternal servitude and God was glorious in grace, and Man a hero and angel redeemed and redeemer- at good long last. Hallelujah! What do you make of that?

Ed:

Listen, Mister J.R., whoever you are, can't you just accept me? I don't understand any of this. I need to...

J.R.:

Belong. Fit in. I thought you didn't want to answer to anyone anymore. I'll give you one more chance. Try this one...

Scene Four

Nat moves upstage, aside, starts writing on a clipboard

J.R.:

In the beginning was not chaos.

Nat:

Casenotes: Monday evening.

J.R.

In the beginning all was One, the Initial One Great Union: the word, deed, whatever. Then came the division into opposites, day and night, dark and light, yin/yang, good/evil, and especially- female and male. It divided in order to have a play partner!

Nat:

Park on forth street. Subjects present: Richie (doped), Mary (delusional), J.R.(drunk), and a new case, Ed (desperate).

J.R.:

I mean, can you conceive of a world without woman and man, the desire, primal urge, instinct to union- it's what we live for! So, the world was divided- into harmonic tension in flux.

Nat:

Observation: J.R., fair health, good humor.

J.R.:

And so time began- and then was chaos- Now! Sacred chaos from which we create order, strive to consensus, comprehension- but we are deluded, suffering too, but we willed it, see, we chose this- freedom. And we have tasted of the tree of life and knowledge and sex and who would give it up and starve- who?! None, well, welcome then. Bissimila! To Reality, good god glorious reality. But who can see it clearly?

Nat:

Auditory and visual hallucinations, schizoid manifestations, no sign of suicidal ideation anymore.

J.R.:

Man was longtime in darkness, then there was light. Mir licht were Goethe's last words, he who said nothing human was foreign to him! But first, darkness. Man turned around and around searching. He groped for something and found... an elephant! And elephants all the way down. Man felt the tusk and said it was a cup. He felt the tail and said that it was a rope, felt the trunk and said it was a snake, felt the four legs and called them columns, felt the ears and said that they were screens, felt the body and called it a mountain. He knew not that it was an elephant, kept imagining it was a butterfly. So it is with us, the world, existence. We live in illusion, alone in darkness, desperately seeking.

Nat:

Subject presents mania, seems to be trying to initiate new person, this "Ed", whoever he is. Is this a set-up, a prelude, a con?

J.R.

Then there was a light again. He followed it looking for its source. It stayed with him ever,

constantly close, but its source eluded him. He searched for it in forests and desert, deep valleys and atop clouded mountain peaks. Finally, he looked in the water and he saw his reflection, the light emanating from its source, an illuminated diamond point on his own forehead above the eyes, from a glowing thousand pointed lotus blossom of luminescence. And he grasped at it still blindly, rippling the water and damping out his light- for he held, could hold- nothing and lost the light. Man was longtime in darkness... Get it?

Ed:

(drinking lots now) Huh? *(the light in the park is getting darker and darker)*

Nat:

J.R., you seem good, lots of energy. Did you go to the hospital again? *(long pause)* No, huh? How about you tell me about your new friend here then? That's exciting.

Ed:

No time for that. Ed, come here, this is urgent!

Scene Five

This time as they move upstage, the background remains dimly lit to show Nat writing casenotes over Mary and Richie, occasionally touching them, kneeling, even going through Mary's rags. The spotlight meanwhile flickers rhythmically as a train noise plays softly.

J.R.:

Remember the time in the train, old boy? *(distant gaze)* Nobody saw my halo in the tunnel, my hollow aura. The guardian angels threw me off- into the labyrinth. Modern man thinks he is flying, but he doesn't realize that he is really falling, the eagle weighed down by the serpent, forever falling. That is existence! Hence our uneasy feeling, man's lament, cause there is a solid earth mother down there and one day perhaps, if we realize or forget- Splat! *(hits hand)* But wouldn't that be a relief: a foundation that gives the ultimate grant? Get a piece of the rock. We'd love to climb back into that womb, our original sin, division. But don't blame Oedipus. His father started it! Life: this carrot dangling ever before us, never attained. Life is an evidence, not an essence, not a Being but a Becoming. You say you want eternal life, heaven or hell- it's all the same. Sweat it out on your treadmill, your hamster wheel. There's your ceaseless life, love. We've got it already, good riddance. No escape, huis clos, on a wheel, rack of fate, mandala, samsara. So called civilization is just stagnation, dont'ya know? Here's the deal:

Ed:

No more deals!

J.R.

(wipes forehead) No return to the El Dorado, Lost Paradiso golden age, noble savage. The Garden is closed, for repairs. So it is and so be it. So have I heard. Forget Jungsters and patchwork new-agers. Does not our vehicle seem to follow the Way effortlessly, and we in it? Bless the big basket! *(pause)* There, look, see! For why not we? Weeeeeee! *(laughs)* What would good old practical Confucius say and Isis of old, let's not forget? By no means. Mythology: that's what we call religions of old. Heresy! That people believed mere stories: Loki, Hermes and all that, the crazy fox, the blood clot, coyote. Made up! Make-believe! Airy Fairytales! Catch a leprechaun by its tail. While meanwhile we continue believing fervently, fanatically, ferociously our own mythology of modernism, millennial malaise, money most of all. Money, a religion without faith. Empirical evidence of evolution and all that. So today we worship the dollar, symbol of our freedom, tool of our slavery?! Meanwhile assuming all the time that redemption, salvation and all that bebop jazz bebop will still weave the familiar charm of good ole Paul (a Helen in disguise), forgetting Jesus, that old Jew, his eschatology- which means, my friend and brethren, supreme world-negation- the Kingdom of God cast before swine...

Ed:

No, please no!

J.R.

Judgment day, forelocks, sign on the nose, woe to the wicked, would that you knew! That's what He, son of a gun God, predicted: the imminent end of the Earth, and it has Not come to pass! So, what now? Praise be God, we're living in bonus time, our world preserved, smitten, not smote. Be gone, smoke and mirrors! Realize this: our world is transformed then, now, and forever, the kingdom of God upon us, at hand, in heart. Remember your faceless face! We dwell already in the City, though we ignore it. Our day is come and coming. That day is today and tomorrow. Give me back that bottle!

(Ed gives back the bottle)

Scene Six

J.R. starts helping Ed up a "hill" on top of which is a cross. Wind blows. They pass the wine back and forth carefully.

Ed:

I imagined something once about the Christ Child.

J.R.:

Tell me.

Ed:

Well, we know a lot about the birth of the little baby Jesus, his humble beginnings and then again about the messiah's martyrdom and events leading up to his early demise and encore appearance. But what about the time in between? Almost nothing is known or said about the important formative years of one of the most important figures in Western Culture next to Elvis. I just thought with a dad like his, he must have been a brat.

J.R.:

Do tell.

Ed:

Imagine: "You're not my real father!" young Jesus would yell when asked to help out in his step-dad Joseph's carpenter workshop and he'd run off to play with his friends, showing off by skipping across streams, leaving them behind. "Jeez!" they'd yell. God on high would punish such pride perhaps by plunging the Boy in the brink, swallowing him in a fish or some such for a few days. Junior would come out in a temper, throw a thundering tantrum causing celestial tempest. "It's the Nazareth boy again," the neighbors would say. The Christ Child must have been more respectful to his virgin mother, but would no doubt constantly pull the proverbial wool over her overindulgent eyes. "Jesus Christ Nazareth!" she'd scold, "Did you raise the dog from the dead again? I told you: no more miracles in my household! Wait until you're old enough to know better." "Sorry, ma," he'd say, "I forgot."

J.R.

"Sorry! I forgot!" (*laughs, swigs*)

Ed:

"Son," a Voice in the desert from a constant cloud or some such sign would bellow, "Thou shalt not lie." And God'd smite Him 'til it smarted, "You did not, cannot ever forget." It's hard to get away with much with an all-seeing, omniscient Father. "Obey your mother and your Father and say ten million Hail Mary's." I see this cantankerous Christ Child especially fond of reeking havoc with the poor Pharisees- if one preaches on poverty, vanity, humility, and charity, Jesus would immediately have his rich robe switched with the tattered rags of one of the beggars in the mob listening. IF a fiery false prophet waved his staff predicting fiery hell for heretics, untruth-speakers and nay-sayers (which would include of course every other seer and soothsayer of any other cult, or of ungenerous means, in short, a whole Templeful), Jesus would turn his staff into a snake in his hands. This mischievous messiah would work the same such transformations upon

the tyrannical polearms of the Roman soldiers, the fanning palm leaves of lazy, self-satisfied monks, the scepters of their well-fed, decadent governors, prelates, and all such rabble. God his Father would preach long in vain to Him of tolerance and humility and all that, but you can't preach to the preacher as they say, and in the end, as always, if Jesus obeyed it was only out of fear of the mighty wrath of the Lord, his Father.

J.R.:

A child once wrote a letter to God, saying: Why are you a jealous God? I thought you had everything.

Ed:

Exactly. And I see young Jesus as vengeful. Perhaps it was Lazarus teasing him about his mother and her "immaculate conception"... "Holy shit!" little Lazarus would curse, struck down by Jesus' lightning fit. And Jesus' Father would teach Him the healing touch. When Jesus tried to scuffle again, God would teach him to turn the other cheek literally, getting the spanking of eternity, done unto as he would do unto others! Jesus would get in even more trouble as he got a bit older, entering adolescence. He's start lifting girls' robes now, instead of old priests. Perhaps Father would teach him chastity by means of a burning fig leaf. Then one day maybe Mary forbade him to go to some big stoning in the village. Jesus tried to sneak over but hears the rumbling on high in the heavens in the sky. "Ah, Dad," he'd whine. And so, sulking, get together with his gang called the Disciples. They'd go to their hide-out to pout and Jesus would strike a rock and water would spring and pour forth which Mr. Messiah miraculously turns into wine and they'd all get royally rocked. And so would be seen the worst hangover in history with the whole world spinning and head-spinning vomiting to make the exorcist queasy! Oy vey!

(J.R. swigs, pretends to vomit, swigs more, passes the plastic bottle)

Even head-strong young Jesus would be praying God for mercy, promising redemption, messianic morality, and worshiping at the alter. So it would be a long and twisty road, but by wisdom, patience, justifiable wrath, discipline, tough love, tolerance, God would teach and inculcate at long last in his head-strong Son the word and more importantly the experience of the preachings to come, related then by the apostles, at long last to learn, to live, to love, to practice and preach humility and tolerance and all the other divine doctrines that led to his demise and our immortal salvation!

(Ed laughing lightly hysterical, manic to slight sobbing)

My boy was a handful, my wife too easy on him, a beautiful boy, but delicate. I didn't think he'd make it. I loved him. I told him once too in the hospital. Sometimes I was too strict sure, but I couldn't be blamed, busy as I was and anyway, I could tell, though they complained I was never around, they didn't want me around. And good riddance! Now they'll see what it's like. Let another provide... You got kids?

J.R.:

No. Never. Don't believe in 'em. Shot the stork. The Buddha called his little baby "nuisance" and left to found a new world based on suffering. Around age thirty, like JC!

Ed:

Good ol' Al Schweitzer swore himself to service and self-sacrifice at age thirty, left a brilliant academic and music career. I'm long past due.

J.R.:

What you gonna serve? Where's the beef?

Ed:

So, do I get it? Am I accepted?

J.R.:

Come here. *(takes his arm)*

Scene Seven

Ed heads down to the main bench area of the park again. J.R. follows, waves Nat away with his hand. Nat leaves them. The men sit on the center bench.

J.R.:

What's your real story?

Ed:

Is that part of the interview?

J.R.:

An aside. Of interest of course.

Ed:

What's yours? You're obviously educated...

J.R.:

Indoctrinated, my boy. By curiosity.

Ed:

How did you end up out here, or rather- why?

J.R.:

Why not? When I got back from Africa, nothing made sense anymore, everything I'd learned. I'd lost my mother to death, my wife to another man, a job. Freedom- ha! People think freedom is being able to do what you want. At best it consists, as Rousseau said, in not having to do what you don't want to do. There are many things I don't want to do like fight, out or in. There's no family here on the street either (*indicating boy on bench, Richie*) But I try not to judge those in their glass towers or in their snug, spacious houses with guest rooms never occupied. Listen, there are lots of stories about us, the mendicants. Most of 'em are a load of dung. Don't you know any?

Ed:

My favorite is the fable of the two friends well-wished.

J.R.:

Tell it. I need a good story. A lot depends upon it.

Ed:

Two beggar boys were wandering down a dusty road.

J.R.:

Garibous.

Ed:

These two boys had nothing in the whole wide world except some tattered clothes on their backs, their walking stick and begging bowl and each other. Which is all they needed. They strolled into this village all skin and bones and smiles and shuffles, softshoeing for success! And they happened upon a Thanksgiving harvest feast, a splendid scene, a sight for sore-eyes. Laid out on the enormous tables was a shiny turkey with all the trimmings, a veritable cornucopia. Drinks flowed freely in a heady clinking of toasts and arguments about seating, spacing, and all that stuff. (*they both reach for the bottle at the same time, pulling, Ed releases*) There were vats of hot

spiced wine, frothy eggnog, sweet apple cider. Fat red faces laughed loudly and fed heartily. The turkey was monumental, dripping juices as it was carved, spilling over an avalanche of steamy stuffing, all smothered in rich gravy. Then there were of course all the dressings and gourmet garnishings: mounds of creamy mashed potatoes piled high, sweet corn on the cob smothered in butter, succulent cranberry sauce, salads and casseroles galore, all the piping hot breads and rolls in baskets, lines of pies, crispy and hot- sweet potato, pumpkin, peach all with fresh, cool whipped topping, home-made, a resplendent, a regal repast!

J.R.

Mmmm.

Ed:

The friends feasted their eyes, eyed one another, then began performing for all they were worth: singing and dancing, acrobatic tumbling tricks, juggling and clowning around. The revelers continued to gobble up and guzzle down gluttonously, but one of the party carelessly threw them a few bones. The friends were not falsely proud and quite hungry. They humbly thanked the bountiful stranger, picked the bones out of the dirt, glad to have 'em, and carried on their merry way. They came to a little stream and lay down on the gently sloped bank under a big clear blue sky. They felt joyful and giddy, laughed and laughed for no reason. The world was theirs for the taking! They had all the water they could drink, as far as the eye could see to wander, discover, and explore, the limitless heavens to dream in, full of bright stars, and best of all: each others' company. "Our cup runeth over!" they joked, scooping water from the stream in their hands and splashing one another playfully.

J.R.:

And surely goodness and mercy shall follow them all the days of their lives!

Ed:

Oh yes, and they even had some turkey- bones! They lay quiet a moment on their backs on the green, green grass, grateful for everything, catching their breath after racing up and staring at the sky so immense. They sat down to eat, gave grace, drank deeply from the stream, and picked those bones clean and... Lo and behold! What should they find?! No, nothing hidden. No stolen diamond lodged in the gullet, no. Even better- the wishbone! "How lucky we are," they exclaimed and laughed and looked at each other and all around, and laughed again. "The world is full of hidden treasures!" So each one grabbed one side of the wishbone and pulled and pulled with all his might. Then- crack!! "Congratulations!" said he with the smaller piece, "I hope you get your wish. You deserve it. I'm so happy for you. Whatever in the whole wide world did you wish for? *(Ed acts out these wishes as they appear in his mind, miming them excitedly)* A castle with high towers and dark dungeons full of secret passages behind mysterious wall hangings, treasure chests and charmed dragons to fly around on? No? How about an elephant and camel

caravan? a huge pirate ship with seven sails to sail the seven seas? your own island with buried treasure, haunted by a friendly ghost? or magical powers...” The other seemed shy to say. “None of that,” he admitted, “I simply wished that you should get your wish.”

J.R.:

No!

Ed:

“My foolish friend,” laughed the other, “I wished the same for you!” And they hugged. Both had won. So when you sit down to count your blessings on next Thanksgiving day, I hope and pray that you too will find that you have as much as they.

J.R.:

Hmph. Me, I ain’t got a story, kid. Okay, here’s the scoop though, seriously: the tripple super-doooper fuckin’ pooper-scooper! My story- forget it. People in America take care of their crappy dogs (to the tune of trillions of dollars per annum) but they bitch about us, call us lazy, useless. What’s the group that really lays around dirty, smelly, free-loading? Pets! Richie used to have one but he sold it eventually, not before he sold his own body though.

Ed:

No, I don’t believe you, he’s a kid. He’s not, is he, really?...

J.R.:

Him? Oh, he’s from one of those snug families. A dad a lot like you, no doubt. Don’t let him fool you- he’s just spoiled. We’re all romantics here, I guess, believing the best in everything. The clever ones you call comen just sell it too. Like the president! I’m president tonight!

Ed:

What’s her story? (*Mary*)

J.R.:

No one knows.

Ed:

Nothing, nobody here has any coherent character.

J.R.:

What were you expecting?! Perhaps you miss your nice safe alarm clock already. Here's the best way for you to start off your day: *(makes loud buzzer noise)* Good morning! I say: punch your time clock good, once and for all, not that I advocate violence. Here you wake up to the sweet, beautiful buzzing of bugs. I always think one of them is God declaiming the mysteries, the Truth. *(makes buzzing noise)*

Ed:

Look at him sleeping. *(at Richie)*

J.R.:

The angel.

Richie:

(groggily) Suck my ass, you faggots! *(buries head deeper in arms and coat)*

J.R.

Peace, mon ange. Here's a lullaby: I've gone to think where thinkers go, beyond the rain, beyond the snow, not to the mountain, not to the plain, to the inner reaches of my brain. I've gone to dream where dreamers stray. It isn't near or far away or at the end or at the start... at the secret place within my heart. I've gone to live where dead men dwell, no, not in heaven, no, not in hell. Search not your body. Search not your mind. Look in your self your soul to find. *(long pause, deep silence)* I wrote that poem. What do you think?

Ed:

(hesitates) It's very good.

J.R.:

It's crap! Pretty words, artfully arranged, signifying nothing, no real life image, just nonsense, a game like this with you. We're just wiping at spots in the picture but the spots are in our eyes, our minds, our lives. We can never see through the glass clearly, darkly, dearie. The enemy inside is me.

Ed:

I like pretty poetry. Well ordered.

J.R.:

Order in! With a side of pickles! That's poetry: mouth watering! The texts and books that cause people the most dreams nowadays are menus and catalogues!

Ed:

Look, I'm tired. What do I need to tell you that you'll accept me for your "position"?

J.R.:

Tell me the truth. Why did you leave and where are you going? (*lights get darker*)

Ed:

God it's dark now.

J.R.:

Don't be afraid.

Ed:

I'm not afraid for myself so much as I am afraid of myself.

J.R.:

You love your family.

Ed:

Yes, that's why I had to leave.

J.R.:

An affaire?

Ed:

Affaires, long ago, she had.

J.R.:

Fights?

Ed:

I don't want to talk about it. Give me the bottle.

J.R.:

(gives bottle) I see. I can make my decision now. There's no feeling left.

Ed: What's it gonna be?! Am I in? Rather, am I out?

(total darkness)

Scene Eight

Lights somber, Richie holding broken, bloody bottle over Ed who lies on his face on the ground.

Richie:

(going through Ed's pockets) Shit, he ain't got no money. He wasn't lying, the fucking loser!

J.R.:

How you gonna give me my share of the watch?

(total darkness)

Scene Nine

Bright backlight on Mary. She rises, goes up behind Ed who is on his knees facing us upstage.

Mary:

(putting her hands on Ed's head) Go back to your wife and kids, Ed.

(total darkness)

Ed:

(slowly, deliberately, detached) Time illuminates many mysteries, though the historians claim it buries and obscures because they seek only one Truth. We're all dust in the end, though this is not the final analysis and ultimate consideration; it settle a lot nonetheless. Nothing lasts. All fades away. Into new molds and these too are temporary, transforming, transcendent, transient. In reality, we are all transients. This too shall pass.

Scene Ten

A romantically lit bar, Richie the bartender cleaned up, J.R. sitting there drinking in a smart suit, Ed walks in looking destitute and disheveled.

Richie:

(snotty) May I help you?

Ed:

Huh?

Richie:

What do you want? *(silence)* You have to order something to drink.

Ed:

I'm meeting a friend.

Richie:

And will he be paying?

(enter Mary in a red power suit, entering suddenly, emphatically)

Mary:

She'll have a bottle of your best champagne! *(hugging and kissing Ed unabashedly)* We're celebrating our fiftieth wedding anniversary today, so only the finest for us.

(enter Nat upstage, reading from clipboard, addressing audience)

Nat:

You are ill, mentally. You imagine all this. You belong in here with us, not out, on the street!

J.R.

(moving upstage beside Nat) In reality, we are all transients. Thank God!

THE END

