

A Really Meaningless Play

A comic romp through the book of Ecclesiastes... no really!

By John Cospers

ROYALTY INFORMATION

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

CHORUS- Introduces the play

THE SCHOLAR- A Biblical authority

VANITY- The barker in Vanity Fair

ETHEL- A five foot tall woman eating chicken

SARA & CARA DEMPSEY- The rarely separated "twins"

PAYTON- The Chicago Bears freak

SISTER WISDOM- The sweet voice of wisdom

SISTER FOLLY- A loud-mouthed, obnoxious opposite to Sister Wisdom

ANDY THE DARNED- A man trapped in Sister Folly's house

RALPH- A guy seeking wisdom

ULA JEAN- An uppity old lady with a marshmallow fetish

ELAINE- A wise-cracking New Yorker

WOODY- A director

BRIDGET- A power-hungry girl seeking meaning

ERNIE- A guy of a thousand ailments who just wants a beer

JANE- A woman who only speaks through her puppet Urno (who also has a puppet named Manuel) – should be the same actress as the Chorus

THE GURU- Follower of a legalistic and absurd religion

FAITH- A woman with the answer

This play can be performed with as few as four actors – two men, and two women – with one man playing the Scholar, one man playing all the other male roles, and the two females splitting the other roles.

PROLOGUE

(The Chorus walks out to a piano, plays the piano dramatically as she speaks [or, if you feel like putting it to music, sings] the Invocation to the muse.)

CHORUS- So the simple can be made wise
And the wise may comprehend
That the seeing may perceive
And the hearer understand
Come sing, my muse to inspire
The seekers on the stage
As once again we wish to tell
A tale that has no age
A tale of hearts pure and true

(The Scholar enters, irritated.)

Who face trials and strife
To have that treasure all men crave
To know the meaning of--

SCHOLAR- Hey! What do you think you're doing?

CHORUS- I'm invoking the muse of theatre.

SCHOLAR- You what??

CHORUS- Invoking the muse of theatre, a traditional beginning for a play dating back to the time of the Greeks, intended to—

SCHOLAR- Yes, I know what it means. But you can't do that here.

CHORUS- Why not?

SCHOLAR- This is a church! You can't invoke a pagan muse here.

CHORUS- But we're trying to do a play!

SCHOLAR- A play, huh? What's it about?

CHORUS- I've got a script right here.

SCHOLAR- *A Really Meaningless Play*, a comic romp through the book of Ecclesiastes.

CHORUS- Sounds exciting, huh?

SCHOLAR- Oh this will never work.

CHORUS- Why not?

SCHOLAR- Well for one thing, Ecclesiastes is hardly material for a comic romp. It's a dismal, dark, depressing book to the untrained eye.

CHORUS: It is?

SCHOLAR- For another, most people have never read Ecclesiastes! To your average Christian, Ecclesiastes is the last book you pass on the way to read the naughty bits in Song of Solomon.

CHORUS- There's naughty bits in Song of Solomon?

The Chorus grabs a Bible off the piano and opens it.

SCHOLAR- They know absolutely nothing about the book, its intended purpose and the message found within. And without that foundation, they won't understand the play.

CHORUS- Wow! I never realized!

SCHOLAR- Yes, Ecclesiastes is a deep, but mysterious book.

CHORUS- Not that. Song of Solomon. Did you see what's in here?

SCHOLAR- Oh brother.

CHORUS- Look, we just thought a play might be a good way to share with people the message of Ecclesiastes.

SCHOLAR- And your desire is worthy of admiration, but it's impossible. The book is too complex and challenging to boil down to a comic romp.

CHORUS- Then maybe you can help us.

SCHOLAR- Me?

CHORUS- Yeah, you know, you can narrate. Help us along our journey in search of the meaning of life. I mean with our comic skills and your expert knowledge of scriptures, surely we can help people understand Ecclesiastes.

SCHOLAR- Oh, I don't know.

CHORUS- Please? Pretty, pretty please?

SCHOLAR- You really think these people are gonna get it?

CHORUS- We have to try. For their sake.

SCHOLAR- I dunno. *(points at someone in the audience)* I doubt there's anything we can do for that guy. *(points to a girl)* And that one... heh, no way.

CHORUS- Well, *(points at a cute guy in the audience)* What about her?

SCHOLAR- Oh, she's cute. She's VERY cute. Hi there.

CHORUS- You want her to get the point, don't you?

SCHOLAR- Are you cold, baby? Ecclesiastes 4:11.

CHORUS- Hey! You want her to get the point, right?

MUSE- Okay, I'll do it. But I'm only doing it for her sake.

CHORUS- Oh thank you

SCHOLAR- Yeah, yeah, run along back stage. I'll get these people started right.

(The Chorus exits.)

SCHOLAR- For those who do not know, Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. His wisdom brought him all the riches and fame the world had to offer. Yet Solomon still sensed something was missing in life, leading him to ask the question: what is the meaning of life? So it was Solomon began his search for meaning in a place called Vanity Fair...

(The Scholar exits.)

SCENE ONE

(Vanity enters.)

VANITY- Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls of all ages, step right up and welcome to

VANITY FAIR! The place where all your wildest dreams and fancies come true is right here, right this way, and your vain experience begins right here on the Midway where you will see sights and wonders not to be believed at the Vanity Fair freak show. Now, introducing the first freak of the day! From the hills of Kentucky, a freak of nature that is truly foul! It's the five foot tall woman-eating chicken!!!

(Ethel, a man, enters with a bucket of KFC. He opens the bucket and pulls out a piece of chicken, and starts to eat.)

VANITY- Look at that! Isn't it horrifying??? What, you people don't find this horrifying? I mean look at the carnage, the terror, the look of utter revulsion on her face, yes this is a terrible, awful... this is a bad attraction, huh? Get outta here Ethel.
ETHEL- *(like a chicken)* B-GOCK!!

(Ethel exits.)

VANITY- I can see you all are a truly sophisticated crowd. Yes, no simple carny tricks for you. We're going to have to pull the really big tricks! And to honor your sophistication, I will bring forward a freak even stranger than the one that has come before. Born separated at birth, they were joined together shortly after, and rarely, if ever, are they separated! Introducing the freaks from San Francisco, the Dempsey Twins!!

(Cara and Sara Dempsey enter, holding hands.)

CARA- Hi there.

SARA- Welcome to Vanity Fair.

CARA- My name is Cara.

SARA_ And I am Sara.

CARA- We were born separate.

SARA- On different days.

CARA- To different mothers.

SARA- But then, we were joined at the hands.

CARA- And we rarely separate.

SARA- Except for showers.

CARA- And putting on deodorant!

SARA- And the occasional trip to the loo.

VANITY- Look at them! They're joined at the hands! Isn't that freaky? *(reacts, frustrated)* Gee, tough crowd. Girls, get lost.

CARA- Thank goodness. I need to go to the loo.

SARA- I'll go with you.

(The twins exit.)

VANITY- All right, all right, I see you all are still not impressed! Well wait til you see

this NEXT freak! Yes, this freak is so horrifying, so unbelievable, you'll look at it and go, that's unbelievable!

OFF STAGE VOICE- That's unbelievable!

VANITY- Just like that! Introducing the deluded, the insane, the die-hard never say lose Chicago Bears fan!

(Payton enters.)

PAYTON- I'm ready to go in, Coach! Just give me a chance. I know there's a lot riding on it, but it's all psychological. Just gotta stay in a positive frame of mind. I'm gonna execute a button hook pattern in super slow-mo.

(Payton executes the pattern as Vanity goes on.)

VANITY- Yes, this sad, delusional individual still believes it's 1985. She believes Payton is still the all-time rushing leader, the Fridge was a good draft pick, and McMahon is a good quarterback.

PAYTON- Let's see that, in an instant replay.

(Payton reverses the action.)

VANITY- All right, all right, so this is not to your taste either.

(Payton exits.)

VANITY- But stick with me, and you will see something amazing. Power beyond your wildest dreams. Pleasures your imagination can't begin to conceive. Ah, but you're not interested in such things. You want to begin your journey with the thirst for wisdom. But, beware! For Wisdom has a sister whose ways seem equally valid, but lead to a much different fate.

SCENE TWO

(Wisdom enters, with a basket of food. She sets it down and sits, like a mystical fairy.)

WISDOM- Let the simple minds come to me, and may all who seek understanding find it. For within the walls of my home I have prepared meat and drink for the hungry. Listen, for my lips speak in truth.

(Wisdom freezes. The Scholar enters.)

SCHOLAR- This is Sister Wisdom. In a moment, you will meet her sister, known as Sister Folly. Now these fine ladies actually appear in Solomon's Book of Proverbs, but we brought them here tonight because Solomon began his search for meaning in Wisdom. You will soon learn what Solomon learned when he sought her counsel.

(The Scholar exits.)

WISDOM- Give ear to my teachings, for they are more precious than rubies. I detest all things that are crooked; they will have no share in my bounty.

(Folly enters, drinking a beer.)

WISDOM- But for the man who would rule justly, the one who would govern wisely, nothing can compare to the--

FOLLY- *(interrupts her sister with a belch)* Blah blah blah. Every day the same tired speech. Let the simple minds come to me. What do you want with Simple Minds anyway? They haven't had a hit since the theme from *The Breakfast Club*.

WISDOM- I don't mean the band, I mean--

FOLLY- I know what you mean. "Bring me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

WISDOM- That's the Statue of Liberty. My calling is much higher, more noble.

FOLLY- Yes, and men are just banging your door down, aren't they?

WISDOM- At least I'm not a liar.

FOLLY- It's not lying. It's called marketing. I'm much prettier than you, and my sales pitch is better. No one reads the fine print, and that's why I win every time.

(Andy enters from Folly's home.)

ANDY- Turn away! This is a crooked path, leading to death and destruction!

FOLLY- *(zaps Andy with a cattle prod)* Get back! Get back in there! There's no one to hear you.

ANDY- What a fool I was!

FOLLY- Yes, we all know you're an idiot. Now go back to scrubbing my snow globe collection, Andy.

(Andy exits.)

WISDOM- Poor soul.

FOLLY- Oh don't pity him. He chose his path. Besides, you may be the guardian of the path of enlightenment, but there's one fate even you can't save men from.

WISDOM- Someone's coming!

FOLLY- He's mine!

WISDOM- No, this one looks wiser than most.

FOLLY- How can you tell, the drool on his chin? I'll close this deal in five minutes tops.

(Folly exits. Ralph enters.)

WISDOM- Let all who are simple come to me. Come, eat the food and drink the wine I have prepared. *(shows the wares in her basket)*

RALPH- Hmm. Are those Chiquita bananas?

(Folly makes an entrance, fixed up to look like Wisdom.)

FOLLY- Let the simple come to me!! *(she swipes the basket from Wisdom)* For stolen nanners are sweet, and good to eat!

RALPH- Must've taken the wrong turn. I was looking for Wisdom, not the salad bar.

WISDOM- Come with me, simple one. For the path I will show you will extend the days and years of your life.

FOLLY- Come with me, and your days will be one long party.

RALPH- Who are you people anyway?

WISDOM- I am Wisdom, she is Folly.

FOLLY- No, I am Wisdom, she is Folly.

RALPH- I'm Ralph... and I'm a little confused, so let me get this straight. One of you is Wisdom.

WISDOM/FOLLY- I AM!

RALPH- And one is Folly.

WISDOM/FOLLY- SHE IS!

RALPH- *(shakes free)* The only way I see to solve this is with a test.

FOLLY- A test?

WISDOM- You're not afraid to be tested, are you, sister?

FOLLY- *(nervous)* No! Of course not! Bring it on!

RALPH- Okay. Two women gave birth to babies, but one of their children died. They come before you, with one woman accusing the other of switching the children and stealing her living baby. You offer a solution: you'll cut the child in half. One woman says do it. The other begs you to give the other woman the child. Who is the real mother?

FOLLY- The one who said give the child to the other woman!

RALPH- That is correct!

WISDOM- You cheater! You stole that answer from me!

FOLLY- I know the answer because I am wisdom!

WISDOM- You know the answer because you eavesdropped on me with King Solomon! You have to believe me, she's lying to you!

RALPH- She got the question right.

FOLLY- That's right. I got the question right. I'm Wisdom, and you're Folly.

WISDOM- I'm Wisdom and you're Folly!

FOLLY- I'm Wisdom and you're Folly!

WISDOM- I'm Wisdom and you're Folly!

FOLLY- I'm Wisdom and you're Folly!

WISDOM- I'm Folly and you're Wisdom!

FOLLY- I'm Folly and you're Wisdom!

RALPH- *(to Wisdom)* Okay, I believe you. You're Wisdom, she's Folly.

FOLLY- No she's not I-- Oh!! You did it to me again!!

WISDOM- Ha ha!

FOLLY- You're gonna pay for this one!

WISDOM- Ralph, it would be wise for you to get clear. There's going to be a fight.

(Dim to blacklights. The Sisters fight, flying around stage, kicking and sissy slapping each other. In the end, Wisdom beats Folly. Lights back up.)

WISDOM- The Wise will always triumph over Fools. Now, get lost.

FOLLY- Have fun with your girl, Ralph. She's a real barrel of laughs.

(Folly exits.)

RALPH- Wow. That was impressive.

WISDOM- Thank you. Now, Ralph, what can I do for you?

RALPH- I have come seeking the meaning of life. Can you help me?

WISDOM- The meaning of life. Yes, Ralph, I can help you.

RALPH- Oh wonderful!

WISDOM- But, uh, I'm not sure you're going to like it.

RALPH- Why not? The meaning of life was my whole reason for coming out here.

WISDOM- Yes, but it's one of those things where you've built it up in your mind so much, that the actual discovery will be a let down.

RALPH- I'm willing to take the chance.

WISDOM- Okay, here it comes.

RALPH- At last.

WISDOM- You wouldn't rather here my dissertation on how to neutralize the West Coast offense?

RALPH- The meaning of life, please.

WISDOM- There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.

RALPH- *(searching for pen and paper)* Wait, let me take some notes.

WISDOM- A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance....

RALPH- *(finally with pen and paper)* Sorry, I was looking for a pen. Can you repeat all that?

WISDOM- I'll just give you the Cliff's notes.

RALPH- Excellent.

WISDOM- In my years of studying wisdom, I have sampled everything under the sun.

But when I surveyed all that I had done, I realized it was all meaningless. Utterly meaningless.

RALPH- Meaningless?!?

WISDOM- A chase after the wind.

RALPH- That's the meaning of life?

WISDOM- More or less.

RALPH- There's nothing new, nothing truly worthwhile. It's all meaningless.

WISDOM- A chase after the wind.

RALPH- Well thank you for making me feel like an idiot.

WISDOM- I'm so sorry.

RALPH- You're sorry? I would have been better off with your sister.

WISDOM- No you wouldn't. At least this way, you know the truth going in.

RALPH- Yeah, but you know what they say. Ignorance is bliss.
WISDOM- Say, that's good. Can I use that?
RALPH- Sure. Why should I take credit for anything when everything is meaningless?
WISDOM- A chase after the wind.
RALPH- Why do you keep saying that?
WISDOM- It sounds nicer than "meaningless."
RALPH- They're both meaningless.
WISDOM- A chase--
WISDOM/ RALPH- --after the wind.
RALPH- I know.
WISDOM- You wanna hear about the West Coast offense now?
RALPH- No, I don't. I just wanna be alone.
WISDOM- You sure you won't eat anything?
RALPH- I'm sure. Please, just leave me alone.
WISDOM- I understand.

(Wisdom exits. Ralph exits the other way.)

SCENE TWO

(The Scholar enters.)

SCHOLAR- Meaningless. Meaningless. A chase after the wind. Solomon sought the meaning of life in wisdom, the loftiest of all pursuits, only to find it was an empty pursuit. So Solomon turned to the place where so many people today look for meaning: He turned to pleasure.
ULA JEAN- *(blows a whistle, runs on)* Stop it, stop it, hold it right there, young man.
SCHOLAR- Who are you?
ULA JEAN- My name is Ula Jean. And you can't talk about... you know... in church.
SCHOLAR- What are you talking about?
ULA JEAN- You know... that "P" word.
SCHOLAR- Pleasure?
ULA JEAN- *(blows her whistle)* DON'T! Say that!
SCHOLAR- But, its in the Bible. I mean when Solomon is searching for meaning, he tries Wisdom, and he tries Pleasure--
ULA JEAN- *(blows her whistle)* Stop saying that!
SCHOLAR-- What? There's nothing wrong with it. I mean all good things come from God. Including--
ULA JEAN- Don't say it!
SCHOLAR- Well how am I supposed to address pl-- "IT" if we can't say it?

(Elaine enters, with a grocery sack holding a bag of marshmallows.)

ELAINE- Excuse me, but I think I can help.
SCHOLAR- I hope someone can. I can't take much more of that whistle.

(The Scholar sits down to watch.)

ULA JEAN- Who are you?

ELAINE- I'm Elaine. And you are?

ULA JEAN- Ula Jean. And I warn you, young lady, you better keep it rated G.

ELAINE- Oh, I will. Because I'm going to talk about something we can all agree brings joy and happiness. *(pulls out the marshmallows)* Marshmallows!

ULA JEAN- Oh goodness, I love marshmallows.

ELAINE- Do you want a marshmallow?

ULA JEAN- Oh yes please.

ELAINE- Here you go.

ULA JEAN- *(eats)* Mmmm, that's so good.

ELAINE- You like it? Have another one.

ULA JEAN- Oh, thank you. You're such a sweet girl.

ELAINE- I know. Here, try another.

ULA JEAN- Mmm, yummy.

ELAINE- Yes, everyone loves marshmallows. Who else wants some?

(Elaine goes in the audience, gives away some marshmallows.)

ULA JEAN- Hey, girl, give to the elderly!

ELAINE- Oh, I'm sorry. Here, have some more.

ULA JEAN- That's so good.

ELAINE- And some more. And some more.

ULA JEAN- Mmm, my mouth thanks you. But it's getting crowded.

ELAINE- Yeah, you know, the first couple taste really, really good. But what if we put in some more.

ULA JEAN- Hey!

ELAINE- And a few more!

ULA JEAN- Hey!

ELAINE- And a whole bunch more!

ULA JEAN- Ooooh, I don't feel so good.

ELAINE- This is what is known in economics as the law of diminishing returns. Or as we say in the Big Apple--

(Elaine shoves one more huge handful into Ula Jean's mouth. Ula Jean gags, grabs the grocery bag and starts spitting them back out.)

ELAINE- Too much of a good thing makes you puke.

ULA JEAN- I don't remember eating that. Hope I don't need it later.

ELAINE- So there ya have it, folks. If you're trying to find meaning in marshmallows, or French fries, Playstation, or anything else that brings pleasure, you're just not going to find it.

(The Scholar stands.)

ULA JEAN- You think you're such big stuff, don't you. Picking on the old lady, shoving marshmallows in my mouth. Well you listen to me, when I rule the world, I will put young whippersnappers like you in your place. I will lay the Smackdown on you.

SCHOLAR- Oh please, you think power is going to make you happy?

ULA JEAN- If it means putting you in your place, it will.

SCHOLAR- Well let me tell you about a guy who thought he would be happy if he was made powerful. He was an ambitious young man, named Justice Leak.

SCENE THREE

(Ula Jean exits. Scholar picks Justice out of the audience.)

SCHOLAR- Justice was a clever young fella from the streets Bronx, and he wanted nothing more than to be ruler of Vanity Fair.

(Woody enters with props for Justice.)

WOODY- Okay, okay, young man now look, you're going to be the leader of Vanity Fair, you need to look like a leader, okay. Because ostensibly you're playing an ambitious young man, but really, your character represents the ascent of the Vandals in central Europe. Okay?

SCHOLAR- Justice was a bright young man, with strong ideals, and a plan for the future.

WOODY- Okay, okay, here's your speech, now let your voice ring out, okay, because you're not only speaking for the people of Vanity Fair, but for every person who's had to lose valuable years of their life waiting in the lobby at the DMV.

JUSTICE- Fight and you may die, run, and you'll live...at least a while. And dying in your beds, many years from now, would you be willin' to trade all of that from this day to that, for one chance, just one chance, to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take away our lives, but they'll never take our freeeedooooomm!

SCHOLAR- Yes, he was a passionate speaker. And the people loved him.

(Woody and Scholar pick the "People" out of the crowd.)

WOODY- Okay, okay, on the surface here, you all are of course playing the good citizens of Vanity Fair, but on the inside you're more like that annoying trio of Munchkins from the Lollipop Guild. So on the count of three, let's hear a big cheer for Justice's speech, okay?

(The People cheer.)

SCHOLAR- The people loved Justice, and they elected him their leader. Immediately, he made some changes to the way things were run. Taxes were lowered, Interest rates dropped, and the national anthem was changed to something reminiscent of Justice's childhood.

(Play national anthem, "Ghatsbusters." All of the characters stand, hands over their hearts as the song plays for about a minute. After the song, Bridget enters and joins the crowd.)

SCHOLAR- It was all sunshine and roses at first. People loved Justice.

(Woody cues the people to say, "YAY!")

SCHOLAR- But then trouble rocked Justice's administration, when it was discovered he used tax payer dollars to pay for the soft and fluffy kind of toilet paper instead of the generic!

(Woody cues the people to "BOO!")

SCHOLAR- The People revolted, and overthrew Justice Leak, while a new leader took center stage!

(Get the People to overthrow Justice; Bridget takes center stage. Woody gives them their cues.)

BRIDGET- I am Bridget. I am your new leader!

PEOPLE- Yay!!!

BRIDGET- Starting today, there's gonna be some changes around here!

PEOPLE- Yay!!!

BRIDGET- From this day forward, all country music albums will be burned!

PEOPLE- Yay!!!

BRIDGET- From this day forward, the green traffic lights will be changed to yellow.

PEOPLE- Yay!!!

BRIDGET- Also, all the red traffic lights will be changed to yellow!

PEOPLE- Yay!!!

BRIDGET- From this day forward, the official language of Vanity Fair will be--
Swedish!

PEOPLE- Yay!!

WOODY- No, no, say, "Ya!"

PEOPLE- Ya!

BRIDGET- And from now on, no one can walk anywhere. We must all hop like kangaroos!

(Get the people to hop like kangaroos.)

SCHOLAR- All traffic lights yellow? Hop like kangaroos? What was she thinking? And what were the people thinking following her? There was no doubt, her power had driven her mad. So it just goes to show you, that power, like everything else we've talked about is completely meaningless.

WOODY- Right now, it would be customary to applaud these nice people for helping us

tell the story of poor Justice Leak. But that too, would be meaningless. A chase after the wind. But it would be rude to deny them the joy of hearing applause so everyone, put your hands together over and over really fast.

(Send the People to their seats. The Scholar exits.)

SCENE FOUR

BRIDGET- So all the hard work I did to take power? It was all for nothing?

WOODY- Sorry, kiddo. That's the breaks.

BRIDGET- Why you dirty, no good narrator! I can't believe you suckered me in! I'm going to sue you! Yeah, I'll sue you for everything you've got.

WOODY- Sue me? But why? I was only doing my job? *(starting to cry)* You don't know how difficult my job is. Especially with my condition.

BRIDGET- Please... I didn't mean to make you cry.

WOODY- I never wanted to hurt you.

BRIDGET- I know.

WOODY- I want you to be happy.

BRIDGET- You do.

WOODY- I want everyone to be happy.

BRIDGET- Everyone?

WOODY- You're not the only person in Vanity Fair seeking purpose and meaning. Billions of people pass through here, and expect me to help them find meaning, to make them happy with themselves. And those people out there. They thought coming to this play would make them happy.

BRIDGET- Poor souls.

WOODY- My life is so hard.

BRIDGET- I'm sure it is. But, uh, maybe, maybe before you can help others you need to help yourself first.

WOODY- What do you mean?

BRIDGET- Well... and I'm no expert, but I see how miserable your job makes you. Maybe if you learned to be happy with yourself, you would be better able to help other people.

WOODY- *(snaps out of her fake tears)* Why Bridget... that's so wise.

BRIDGET- Nah.

WOODY - No, really, it is. I never thought of it that way.

BRIDGET- Well, I'm glad I could help.

WOODY - Help-- Bridget, that's it!

BRIDGET- What's it?

WOODY - The meaning of life! Most people come through just looking for pleasures and parties or power, but they've got it all wrong. We have it all wrong. We weren't meant to serve ourselves. We were meant to help people.

BRIDGET- You think so?

WOODY - You've helped me. Why shouldn't you be able to help others. And I know just the place for you to do it. I know this support group that's in need of a leader.

BRIDGET- Oh, I don't know.

WOODY - Bridget, these are some hurting people. They need a wise person like you to tell it like it is, lift their spirits.

BRIDGET- I wouldn't know how to begin.

WOODY - Do exactly what you did with me. Just listen, and then give them the same, common sense advice you gave me.

BRIDGET- Nah.

WOODY - Come on, it's easy. I mean if Dr. Phil can make a career out of it, surely a dumb mug like you can.

BRIDGET- Okay, I'll give it a shot.

WOODY - Oh thank you. (*hugs Bridget*) You wait here. Get a couple chairs set out. I'll send in the group.

(Woody leaves. The Scholar enters and sets up three chairs.)

BRIDGET- Me. A support group leader. Well, I do enjoy helping others. I guess I can give this a shot, right?

SCHOLAR- Why not?

BRIDGET- Will it work?

SCHOLAR- Of course not. But hey, don't let that stop you from trying.

(The Scholar exits.)

BRIDGET- Oh what does he know? I should be okay. So long as these aren't real crazies.

(Ernie enters, shy, and takes a seat.)

BRIDGET- So far so good. Hi there.

(Pause.)

BRIDGET- I'm Bridget.

ERNIE- Ernie.

BRIDGET- And how are you, Ernie?

ERNIE- (*rapid*) Well to tell the truth, I've been better. I mean I know so much of it is my fault because what can I say I'm curious and I tried some stupid things and I'm paying for it now. Like three times a day I have to take this blue pill which regulates my respiratory system and with it take two hits of a puffer. But I also have this red pill that I have to take at the same intervals, except I can't take them together because one I take with food and the other I don't. And then the doctor gave me these green pills which keep my sinuses that I can take with the reds, but not the blues. And I chase that with a liquid medicine of which I take three teaspoons full four times a day. Then I have this orange pill which has no other purpose than to remind me to take a yellow tablet which gets crushed up and eaten with peanut butter to make it go down easier, but that's so I don't freak out in public situations because I do have a fear of public speaking. And I know this all sounds terribly over-whelming, but it's really not bad considering the

alternative, which means continual post nasal drip, asthma, irregular breathing, and bowel movements not to be believed.

BRIDGET- You don't say.

ERNIE- But so long as I stay on this medical regiment, I'm perfectly fine, except when ever I do this--

(Ernie lifts his arm over his head and blacks out. Jane and Urno enter.)

BRIDGET- Oh my gosh, is he okay?

URNO- He's fine. He does this all the time.

BRIDGET- It can't be healthy for him.

URNO- Of course not, but did he tell you the alternative?

BRIDGET- Yes, he explained that.

ERNIE- *(waking up)* Oh, did I black out? *(sits)*

BRIDGET- I'm Bridget, and who are you?

URNO- I'm Urno, this is my friend Jane.

BRIDGET- Nice to meet you, Jane. Nice puppet.

URNO- Ahem. Thank you for the compliment, and I'll thank you for addressing me and not Jane.

BRIDGET- Why?

ERNIE- She has a serious fear of the outside world. Everytime she ever opened up to anyone, she was hurt. So I acts as her go-between, her spokesman if you will, so that she doesn't have to open herself up to hurt ever again.

BRIDGET- Can Jane answer for herself?

(Pause.)

BRIDGET- Okay, how about Urno?

URNO- Jane has a serious fear of the outside world. Everytime she ever opened up to anyone, she was hurt. So I acts as her go-between...

BRIDGET- I see.

URNO- Her spokesman if you will--

BRIDGET- Okay, already. Sit down.

(Jane sits.)

BRIDGET- All right. Let's begin with me asking you all a question. Why are you here? What would you like to get out of this session?

ERNIE- I want a beer.

BRIDGET- Huh?

ERNIE- I want a beer.

BRIDGET- No, I mean in this session, what do you want?

ERNIE- I want a beer. Right now.

BRIDGET- This is going pretty much like I expected. Urno, same question.

URNO- I suppose we came here for one of two things. Either a reason to open up again, or a way out.

BRIDGET- A way out of what?

URNO- A way out of this dangerous world we live in, so that we never have to be hurt again.

ERNIE- I know a way out. Beer!

URNO- Oh here we go again.

ERNIE- It's the perfect escape.

URNO- Oh sure, beer lets you escape for a little while. But then it wears off, and then what?

ERNIE- Get more beer!

BRIDGET- Ernie, let's expand on this. What's your fascination with beer?

ERNIE- Well... It's fun. And it makes me feel grown up. 'Cause you see, my parents would never let me drink beer. But when I drink beer, I'm controlling my life, not them. You know?

URNO- But the irony is that in escaping through beer, you surrender control to inebriation. You don't control your actions when you're drunk, do you?

BRIDGET- Hey, hey, let's not get into personal attacks. What if we found another source of escape? Something that makes you feel good, and maybe can help others?

URNO- Like what?

BRIDGET- Like... serving others.

ERNIE- Huh!

URNO- Not a chance.

ERNIE- Other people made us who we are. You help someone else--

URNO- They'll use you!

ERNIE- And toss you to the side of the road!

URNO- Because they only care about themselves.

ERNIE- Sorry, try again. There's no way I'm helping others.

URNO- Ditto.

ERNIE- Unless they buy me beer.

URNO- Oh here we go again.

ERNIE- There are worse things than getting drunk to escape reality!

URNO- Name one!

ERNIE- Hiding behind a puppet!

URNO- Hey! There's nothing wrong with that. People like puppets. Everyone loves puppets. You even love me, don't you?

ERNIE- I HATE PUPPETS!!!!

(Urno gets silent and introverted, and Urno (with Jane's help) pulls out a new smaller puppet named Manuel.)

MANUEL- Hello. My name is Manuel. And I will be acting as Urno's spokesperson, his go-between.

ERNIE- Oh, I've had enough of this.

(Ernie stands, grabs the puppets, wrestles with Jane for them.)

MANUEL- No-- Let go of us!

(Ernie rips the puppets off Jane, who curls into a fetal position and rocks nervously. Ernie holds the puppets over his head.)

ERNIE- Ha ha! *(realizes his arms are in the air)* Oh no.

(Ernie faints.)

BRIDGET- I think that will end our session. Thank you both for coming. *(hands Jane her puppets)* Thank you for coming. *(helps Ernie to his feet)* I think we made great progress.

MANUEL- Will you be back next week?

BRIDGET- Not a chance.

MANUEL- Why not? You've helped me so much to learn to express my puppet self!

BRIDGET- Sorry, Manuel, I got into this for myself, because I thought it would give my life meaning. But it turns out that work and serving others is just a chase after the wind.

MANUEL- Que? Sorry, senorita, we puppets don't speak in metaphors.

BRIDGET- What I mean is that work, like power and pleasure and wisdom, is meaningless.

MANUEL- Meaningless?

BRIDGET- Meaningless! *(starts to exit)*

MANUEL- Wow, that's a big word for a people. Hey where you going?

BRIDGET- I need a beer!

(Bridget and Ernie exit. Jane sets the puppets aside.)

SCENE FIVE

JANE- I don't want to hide behind puppets. Or anything. I'd really love to be myself, and enjoy life. But... but it's so hard when there are so many people telling me who to be and what to do. If only there were someone out there that could help me put it all together, make sense out of life. You know? Someone who could give me some belief, some way of life to have faith in!

(The Guru enters.)

GURU- Come to me, all you who are simple minded. Come to me, and you will find what you truly seek: meaning!

(The Scholar enters.)

SCHOLAR- Don't do it, Jane.

JANE- Why not?

SCHOLAR- It's not going to give you what you want.

JANE- A girl has to believe in something.

SCHOLAR- Something, but not just anything.

JANE- *(to the Guru)* Excuse me! Hi. Can you help me?

GURU- Do you seek a place to put your faith?

JANE- *(not interested)* Sure.

GURU- Do you yearn for truth?

JANE- I guess.

GURU- Do you desire meaning?

JANE- Yeah, why not.

GURU- Then let us supply all the answers you require.

JANE- Sorry, I'm through putting my faith in people.

GURU- No, my child, you're not putting faith in me. Put your faith in the Church of Meaning.

JANE- The Church of Meaning, eh?

GURU- We're living in a spiritual time my child. People are searching for something solid, something that hasn't changed in thousands of years. That's why the Church of Meaning has experienced unprecedented growth as of late.

JANE- And what makes your church so appealing?

GURU- Tradition, my child, traditions that date back before you were born.

JANE- Such as?

GURU- Well for starters, the way we dress. We wear these blessed garments every where we go.

JANE- How come?

GURU- So we can stand out in the crowd.

JANE- Wouldn't your actions as believers set you apart?

GURU- Don't ask questions, child, this church has been around a long time. Our traditions are tried and true.

JANE- Your outfits are ridiculous too.

GURU- Not to us. Because we recognize the significance of the articles we wear. For example, this hat on my head.

JANE- Uh huh. And what does that represent?

GURU- We wear the hat in remembrance of Edward Depp the Hatter.

JANE- And what did he do?

GURU- He wore a hat like this.

JANE- Why?

GURU- It's called faith, my child.

JANE- Oh is it?

GURU- Yes. For similar reasons, we don't eat starches on Tuesdays.

JANE- Is that so?

GURU- We refrain from starches in honor of Elvin the Perplexed.

JANE- Elvin the Perplexed. What did he do?

GURU- It's what he didn't do that's important.

JANE- What didn't he do?

GURU- He didn't eat starches on Tuesdays.

JANE- I see. So do you have any traditions not related to people from your church?

GURU- Like?

JANE- Oh, like anything relating to God?

GURU- God? Never heard of him.

JANE- A church that doesn't believe in God?

GURU- Why should we believe in him? He has no faith in us.

JANE- So you acknowledge there's a God.

GURU- We have no stand on his existence or non-existence, except to say if he does exist, he did a terrible job down here.

JANE- Why do you say that?

GURU- Well for one, what was he thinking when he created rutabaga? Nastiest vegetable in existence. And someone please tell me what the deal is with the platypus?

JANE- All right, but besides that, what else do you have against him?

GURU- Well, he didn't exactly give us anything to live for.

JANE- What are you saying?

GURU- There's nothing of value in this world. It's all meaningless. It's--

JANE- A chase after the wind?

GURU- I was gonna say running after the breeze, but you get the idea.

JANE- All this I know. But what's the benefit I get from religion? I mean all I see here is traditions done for tradition's sake, with no long term redeeming value whatsoever.

GURU- Gives you something to do Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

JANE- Something just as meaningless as everything else under the sun.

GURU- How dare you persecute me and mock my religion!

JANE- What good is religion if it doesn't give you something to live for?

GURU- I have something to live for.

JANE- Like what?

GURU- The festival of Schmelz the Terrible.

JANE- Schmelz the Terrible? What did he do?

GURU- She.

JANE- Okay, what did she do?

GURU- She put cheese in the mouse traps of every Church of Meaning in Bangladesh.

JANE- The churches in Bangladesh?

GURU- Yeah, both of them.

JANE- And she's called Schmelz the Terrible, why?

GURU- Well, it was pretty terrible for the mice.

JANE- I don't think the Church of Meaning is for me.

GURU- Aww come on. You'll love it. We have contemporary music.

JANE- No thank you.

GURU- We have celebrities.

JANE- No thank you.

GURU- There's a Playstation in the foyer.

JANE- Beat it.

(The Guru exits.)

JANE- Now where do I go?

SCHOLAR- There's no where left, I'm afraid.

JANE- You mean it's over?

SCHOLAR- It's over.

JANE- But there has to be something.

SCHOLAR- I'm afraid not.

JANE- Well isn't this a happy ending?

SCHOLAR- Now you know how Solomon felt. After seeking out wisdom, pleasure, power, and work he sat down and saw that it was all--

JANE- Meaningless. Meaningless. *(sits in disgust, tosses the picture)* Everything is meaningless. *(to the audience)* Sorry folks. I wanted a happy ending as much as you all. But uh... it seems we've come to the end. I know, it must be rather disappointing. We all kind of wasted an hour here. I mean that's an hour that I could have spent with my little sister. Or talking to my granny. Hey, we could have done something more exciting, like seek out the Holy Grail. Or travel through space! Of course even those adventures would have been meaningless. But we wouldn't have known it if we'd only stayed away from this place. We'd have gone on in blissful ignorance, not realizing that nothing we can do here matters. It's all - say it with me, a chase--

JANE & AUDIENCE- After the wind.

(Faith enters at the rear of the auditorium.)

JANE- I guess I should say good night. So on behalf of myself, and all the weirdos trapped in the eternal cycle of meaninglessness in Vanity Fair--

FAITH- Place me like a seal over your heart

Like a seal on your arm

For love is as strong as death

Its jealousy unyielding as the grave

It burns like blazing fire

Like a mighty flame

Many waters cannot quench love

Rivers cannot wash it away

If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love

It would be utterly scorned

JANE- Who is that?

SCHOLAR- Who do you think?

JANE- I thought you said I couldn't believe in anything.

SCHOLAR- She's not just anything.

JANE- *(to Faith)* Who are you?

FAITH- My name is Faith.

JANE- You're not from around here, are you?

FAITH- Not at all. My home is far from here. Far from this world.

JANE- Then why would you ever come around this dump?

FAITH- To point the way.

JANE- To what?

FAITH- Something meaningful.

JANE- Heh, that would be a first, someone in this place with meaning.

FAITH- You've been searching a long time, haven't you?

JANE- More places than you can know. Wisdom, pleasure, power, work...

FAITH- Can I make an observation?

JANE- I'm not going to stop you.

FAITH- You failed to find meaning because you're looking in the wrong place.

JANE- How so?

FAITH- There's nothing new under the sun. Everything here is meaningless. But there is one thing, something that did not originate under the sun, that can give your life meaning.

JANE- Oh yeah?

FAITH- Love.

JANE- Love?

FAITH- Love that would shed its blood and give its life for you.

JANE- (*skeptical*) Sure.

SCHOLAR- It's true, Jane. A long time ago, a man from my home passed through Vanity Fair. He knew that the road of Vanity Fair led to death, and he offered the people a way of life that would be meaningful. But Vanity Fair rejected him. They condemned him for saying their ways were meaningless, and nailed him to a cross.

FAITH- But my master rose from the dead, and in doing so, opened the door so that you and I could have meaning in life.

JANE- What is that meaning?

FAITH- Fear God, and obey his Word. This is the meaning of life. The world where we live will be destroyed. Vanity Fair will come to an end, and all of her residents will be judged. But God's kingdom will never pass away. And neither will anyone who becomes a citizen of His kingdom.

JANE- Tell me how to become a citizen of the Lord's kingdom.

FAITH- Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will be saved.

(*Blackout.*)

OTHER PLAYS AVAILABLE BY JOHN COSPER

MONSTERS

A horror/comedy for youth and adult audiences that explores the wages of sin, and the glory of redemption. The play begins in the home of a mummy and vampire, immortals who are having some domestic issues. They are visited by goth kids who think their brand of immortality is the way to go, but the creatures of the night teach them about the loneliness and guilt. An invisible girl shares her feelings on invisibility and loneliness. Then, a werewolf, grilled by police interrogators, discovers he cannot blame anyone but himself for his crimes. Next comes a scene out of a slasher movie, when a psycho killer shows up just a little too early to catch the misbehaving teenagers and dole out their punishment; his early appearance inspires new-found obedience in the teens. The play then takes you to a haunted house, where a man suffers constant haunting by the ghosts of his past - and guilt. Then a zombie discovers that she no longer has to be the living dead. She has found a way to life, and wants to share it with her zombie pals. Finally, Dr. Frankenstein catches up to his monster, who has torn the town apart. But rather than letting his creature be punished, the good doctor becomes a symbol of grace, and the pathway to new life on Earth. Audience: Youth, Adults. Cast: 18 or more. (Double casting possible.) Run time: 70 minutes.

Price: \$20

THE BIG, BAD MOVIE

When a Hollywood studio decides to release their latest anti-God film in a small town, a church full of activists takes to the streets in protest. But are the well-meaning members of First Church being used to sell movie tickets? **The Big Bad Movie** is a dark comedy about Hollywood and the church that will make you stop and think before you leap the next time someone forwards you a warning about some evil Hollywood blockbuster. Free to download; a \$20 royalty is due if performed

HELD BACK

A dark comedy about Christians who proclaim Jesus with their words and deny him with their lives. The play follows the daily life of a minister bored with his congregation; a "church lady" set in her ways and her morals; the church lady's daughter, who is growing up to be just as uncaring toward others; and a business man afraid to share his faith. The minister blows off church members. The church lady lie to avoid a speeding ticket. The daughter passes on a chance to speak to a classmate in need. The business man is perpetually accompanied by Jesus, and every time a co-worker appears, Jesus gets shoved under the desk. Meanwhile, a hurting woman in desperate need of the love of Christ encounters each of these so-called believers in her day. Every time, she sends out signals that she needs help. Every time she is denied. The play ends with Jesus walking into her apartment, finding her body, and reading her suicide note. This won't be anyone's favorite play, but it will leave an unmistakable impression on people about the need to share Christ with others. Audience: Youth or Adult. Cast: 8 males, 8 females (some doubling up of parts is possible to accommodate a smaller cast). Run time: 1 hour.

Price: \$20