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Kaleidoscope

By

Ray Bradbury

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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ISBN: 978-0-87129-571-2

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KALEIDOSCOPE

**A One-Act Play for
Seven Men or Seven Woman, Extras**

C H A R A C T E R S

Captain HOLLIS

Crew Members: STONE

STIMSON

APPLEGATE

LESPERE

WOODE

BARKLEY

Various Voices

**TIME: Today, Tomorrow,
and Beyond Tomorrow**

PLACE: Space

KALINDO
A One-Act Play
Seven Men, One Woman, Five

CHARACTERS

LEON WOLFE
Tom Mervin
STANLEY
ALICE
LESTER
WOOD
BARR
NORMAN

THEY
and their
LAWYER

Kaleidoscope

At curtain rise: darkness.

Static, electronic sounds, radio impulses.

Then, a radio impulse, twice, three times.

HOUSTON RADIO VOICE

**Signal RD Houston calling. Space Flight Apollo Ninety-Nine
Respond.**

HOLLIS (on radio)

Apollo Ninety-Nine. Hollis here.

HOUSTON RADIO

**Loud and clear. Medical checkout. Soma tapes running.
By the numbers.**

**(HOLLIS appears in silhouette, his face dimly illuminated.
We can see that he stands amidst his CREW, all of them
closely packed in a small crowd. Ideally, these men should
be located in the orchestra pit with their heads and shoulders
above the sight lines, and the entire stage area free for
later use. As each man speaks, his own individual illumination**

comes on until the entire crew is seen compacted into what must be the interior of a space ship. As the men respond, they pantomime with their hands as if moving the controls or the radio equipment of such a ship.)

HOLLIS (his spot comes on)

Hollis. Physical report to Houston medico/soma tapes. A-one.

STONE (appears)

Stone here. A-one.

STIMSON (appears)

Stimson. A-one.

APPLEGATE (appears)

Good old Applegate here. In fine fettle.

HOLLIS (curtly)

Applegate!

APPLEGATE (ducks his head)

Hell. A-one.

LESPERE (appears)

Lespere. Okay.

BARKLEY (appears)

Barkley. Super A-one.

WOODE (appears)

Woode reporting. Fine, thanks.

APPLEGATE

All present and accounted f- (He stops, for HOLLIS has given him a look.)

HOLLIS

All present and well. Nine days and three million, four hundred thousand miles out from Earth.

HOUSTON RADIO

Check. Psycho-balance tapes operative. Scramble thoughts. Word associate.

APPLEGATE

Stupid.

HOUSTON RADIO

Repeat, please.

APPLEGATE

Not only *how* we feel but *what* we feel, to a computerized psychoanalyst three million miles away! Stupid!

HOLLIS (cutting in)

Applegate!

APPLEGATE

Now hear this: A for Applegate. H for Horse. S for Snowstorm. R.P. for Rabbit Pellets. Enough word association?

HOUSTON VOICE

Terminate, Applegate.

APPLEGATE

Terminate Applegate? (He snorts.) That's *poetry*!

HOLLIS (cool and quiet)

Terminate. (A beat.) Hollis here.

HOUSTON RADIO

Scramble-associate, Hollis.

HOLLIS (a beat, he swallows, then:)

Sometimes I wonder why I am captain of a rocket bound into deep space. (The MEN look at him, waiting.) And then I remember that not all of my crew members are named Applegate.

APPLEGATE (mock miffed)

Hey! (The CREW laughs.)

HOUSTON RADIO

End of Hollis scramble?

HOLLIS

End.

STIMSON

Stimson here.

HOUSTON RADIO

Scramble-associate, Stimson.

STIMSON

It took me two days to get to the top of Saint Peter's in Rome. Three days to nerve myself to make it to the top of the Eiffel Tower. Sometimes I wonder what I'm doing, three million miles high in space. (The MEN murmur. STIMSON shuts his eyes.) End scramble.

WOODE

Woode here. I . . . I *never* made it to the top of the Eiffel Tower. I was . . . afraid.

HOUSTON VOICE (mocking)

Now you tell us, Woode. (The MEN laugh, gently, understandingly.)

WOODE (nodding, shrugging)

Now I tell you.

LESPERE

Lespere scrambling. Hot dogs. Apple pie. Mom.

APPLEGATE

Hey, what kind of word association is that?

LESPERE

Midnight. Open the icebox door. Reach in. Three-layer banana cake. Glass of milk. Yes, *sir!*

APPLEGATE

He's kidding.

LESPERE

Sand-lot baseball.

APPLEGATE

He's nuts!

LESPERE

Good cigars. Grandpa and Dad talking late at night on the front porch rocking chairs.

APPLEGATE

I may throw up!

LESPERE

Over and out scramble.

STONE

Stone in. I - (Bells, sirens, static, radio impulses.)

HOLLIS

Stone, Woode, Lespere?

STONE

Meteor dead on! Impact! Impact! Prepare for collision!
(The MEN hold to each other, in one fierce wild crowd for an instant, then reach out their hands as if to hold off collision, and work, in pantomime, their various machines and computers. Bells ring. Rapid impulses run wild!)

HOLLIS

Crew to stations. Oxygen helmets! Helmets on! Helmets on! (We see them, in pantomime, clap on their helmets and oxygen equipment. Sirens blare.) On stations, all?

LESPERE

On! We . . . Oh, my God! Impact! Im - (Instant darkness. The MEN vanish. A fearful explosion. Static and radioactive sounds. Voices cry and shout. ALL fade in and out.)

VOICES (on radio, rising, fading)

Oh, God, falling, falling . . . Ship . . . Where's the rocket?

Explosion! Gone! Where, where? . . . Captain? . . . Stone?
The men, the men, where're the men? . . . Captain? . . . Gone,
gone . . . Oh, falling, falling!

(One face, that of CAPTAIN HOLLIS, appears, pinspotted,
higher now, up at L in a kaleidoscope of shifting lights,
shadows, stars. He looks all about, terrified, then gradually
regains his wits and his speech. Slowly, he pieces it together.)

HOLLIS

Oh, the concussion! Like a giant knife had cut it, the rocket
just . . . split wide! The men, oh . . . thrown out in space.
Like, like a dozen wriggling silverfish. Scattered in a dark
sea. And the rocket, in a million pieces, there it goes, a
meteor-swarm seeking a lost sun . . . gone . . . oh, gone.

VOICES (over the radio)

Barkley, Barkley, where are you? . . . Woode, Woode?
Captain?

HOLLIS

Voices . . . calling like lost children in a long night . . .

VOICES

Captain . . . Barkley . . . Where, where? Woode?

STONE'S VOICE

Captain Hollis, Captain . . . This is Stone!

HOLLIS (quickenng)

Stone, Hollis here. Where are you? (He stops.) Stupid, stupid question! Where?

STONE (his face appearing, floating in

the dark off to one side)

God knows, / don't! Which way is up? I only know I'm falling, falling . . .

HOLLIS

Yes, we fall. Like pebbles down a well. We're not men anymore, not captain, crew . . . only voices . . . voices without bodies . . .

STONE

We're going away from each other!

HOLLIS

Oh, yes, that's for sure. At one hundred thousand miles an hour! Here's your hat, what's your hurry? We *do* move.

STONE

What happened?

HOLLIS

A meteor strike. The rocket blew up. Rockets *do* blow up.

STONE (numbly) (at)

They do, oh, they do. Is . . . is there any way for us to get back to one another, get together?

HOLLIS (at a distance)

Not unless you strapped on your force-fly unit just before the blowup?

STONE

No. You?

HOLLIS

There wasn't time. So here we are, seven men dropped in space, with no way to maneuver, turn, fly. All we can do is . . .

STONE

. . . fall . . .

STIMSON'S VOICE (on the radio)

. . . fall . . . fall . . . Oh, it's a long way . . . long way . . . a long, long, long way down . . .

STONE

Who's that?

HOLLIS

Stimson, I think. (He calls.) Stimson!

(Stimson's pinpoint light fades up. We see him floating above and beyond the other two.)

STIMSON

. . . long way down . . . long way . . . I'm going to die. I can't *believe* that. I -

HOLLIS

HOLLIS
Stimson! Let's get organized here!

(Applegate's face light flashes on as he hoots with laughter. He floats, moves, now up, now down, only his face visible.)

APPLEGATE

Organized? Organized! Listen to the man! Organized!

HOLLIS

Applegate, is that you?

APPLEGATE

Applegate, scared gutless but reporting. Boy, you're funny, Captain.

HOLLIS

What do you *want* me to do, let us all go to hell?

APPLEGATE

You're not in *charge* anymore, Captain. We go where we go.