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Everyman in the Circus of Life

A Modern Retelling of the Medieval Morality Play

By

TRAVIS TYRE

and

Everyman The Original Text

Adapted by

TRAVIS TYRE

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By TRAVIS TYRE

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Everyman: Yesterday and Today

“Let anyone take the trouble to produce [a morality play], and he will see how deep a sense of worship can combine in the richly boisterous world of the theatre. It is as if laughter intensified the power to pray, as if Christianity were a thing so strong that it could include all the explosions of laughter a dramatist can devise.”

N Coghill

Some plays will live forever. *Oedipus the King* from ancient Greece and *Romeo and Juliet* from Elizabethan England will always be around in some form, or another. These plays last not because they were written well, which of course they were, but because they continue to impact each new generation with truths and insights about the way humans think, feel and behave.

Everyman, the most popular of all medieval morality plays, endures for the same reasons. Written 500 years ago, the play is not considered to be on the same par as the works of Sophocles or Shakespeare, but it was nonetheless unique for its time and it continues to resonate with modern audiences. The plot is simple: a regular guy is called by God to show how good he has been to others and to prove why he should be given a place in heaven. Its timeless theme is that no amount of riches will go with us when we die. According to the play, the way for sinful man to overcome his wretched state and enjoy eternal life is to store up “spiritual” riches, not the kind he can take with him, but the sort he can leave behind. Without a storehouse of such wealth, man is doomed to suffer everlasting separation from everything he holds dear.

Being a “moral play,” it poses a moral predicament (Everyman’s failure in life is caused by his own selfishness) and provides a moral solution (doing good deeds) to solve the prob-

lem. The play's central question is a powerful one that could be asked of any generation in any time, "What deeds of meaningful and lasting value will we do in life?" The play makes this question a life-or-death issue. Everyman's eternal reward hinges on his answer, and as the play shows, his deeds, frail as they are, are the only things that stay with him in the end.

Elements of Medieval Drama

Everyman was written and performed near the close of one of the most fascinating theatrical periods the world has ever known. The **medieval** period, lasting roughly from A.D. 900 to A.D. 1400 was well-known for its art and drama. Early on, a theatrical phenomenon called **liturgical** (or church) **drama** emerged. Religion and art were tossed together in a pot and stirred vigorously for more than five hundred years. Inside the church, the stage and the sanctuary meshed as one. Preachers were actors and actors were preachers. The Bible came alive for millions who previously knew nothing about it. They couldn't read the Bible but they could watch it unfold before them. Later in the era, a new kind of drama began to go where none had ever gone before.

Involvement of the Church (10th to 12th Centuries)

Early on, traveling minstrel shows, with their nomadic players and singers, were popular on the streets but not in the church. The performers were considered rootless vagabonds and their work sinful. Christianity had become a world religion, and the chasm between art and worship had grown deep and wide. In the second century A.D., one Church's official stance was clear: "No Christian shall participate in or attend any form of drama under penalty of public punishment and/or excommunication from the Holy Church." For the next several centuries, into the 900s, this attitude was still evident,

but things were slowly changing. Priests had begun to see the possibilities of drama as a way to teach. Their parishioners were unable to read the Bible, and even if Bibles were readily available (which they were not), people still could not understand Latin—the traditional language in which the sermons were spoken.

Imagine the situation: your church is packed every Sunday, but from the first lyric of the opening hymn to the last amen of the priest in the pulpit, not a single word is understood. This weekly disconnect endured for eons. For most people it was a world of few books, few riches, and little if any color, spectacle and pageantry.

Until drama.

By the mid-900s, drama in the worship service had gotten fully underway. **Tropes**, as the early examples were called, were simple, brief re-enactments of biblical moments. The most notable, and possibly the first of its kind, was a staged vignette of the three Marys at the tomb of Christ's resurrection during the Easter celebration. Its title, *Quem Queritis*—literally “Whom seek ye”—was taken from the first words of its chanted line: “Whom seek ye in the sepulcher, O Christian women?” The short interlude was a chanted celebration of the women's visit to the site of Christ's burial tomb and the appearance of the angel who tells them that Christ has risen. The dialogue comes straight from the Latin text of the New Testament:

Angel: Quem queritas in sepulchre, O Christicole? (*Whom seek ye in the sepulcher, O Christian women?*)

Marys: Jesum Nazerernum crucifixum, O caeliccolae. (*Jesus of Nazareth the crucified, O heavenly one.*)

Angel: Non est hic, surrexit sicut praedixerat. Ite, nuntiate

quia surrexit de sepulchro. (*He is not here; He is risen, as He foretold. Go, announce that he has risen from the sepulcher!*)

The performance lasted only a few moments, but practically before the actors had exited the stage, drama in the church became a wildly popular success. Tropes were immediately prepared for Christmas, and new ones immediately developed to dramatize other moments in the Holy Scriptures. In what must have seemed like lightning speed, creativity and innovation rushed in to meet the growing need, and a lively, inspiring worship experience began that brought millions of new churchgoers to Sunday mass.

Early tropes had three elements: simple action, costume, and music. Also, only one was performed in the service. But before long, groupings of two, three, and four began to be seen. Then, in the span of a few decades, the entirety of Scripture, from Creation to the Day of Judgment, had been staged. As their popularity grew, the dramas began to be performed in the **vernacular**, or the common language of the people. Finally, congregations could see and hear the point of the sermons. Once the Bible became accessible in this way, there was no going back. Knowledge of biblical characters and events grew to heights never before seen in the history of the Christian church.

Moving Outside the Confines of the Church

But by the late 1200s, drama had become a thorny problem for the Church. It was attracting huge crowds, but the mobs often turned unruly. Productions had become bloated. Increasingly intricate costumes and elaborate music required bigger and bigger budgets. More than occasionally, sets were built so large that seating had to be pushed to the back wall. Special

effects brought grand spectacle into the worship environment, but smoking, billowing Hell-mouths that opened and closed right at one's feet caused more than a few distractions. Complex arrangements of pulleys, ropes, and levers (used for lowering the Messiah to the earth and taking Him back up again on cue) snaked dangerously over pews and took away even more space.

When the Church had finally had enough, it moved everything outside, first against the building itself and then into the courtyard. This solved some of the problems, but it created entirely new ones. With drama no longer directly under the church roof, priests began losing their artistic control, and variations in the dramas occurred. The **miracles**, later called **miracle plays** by historians, had been strict re-enactments of the Bible, but now they had added embellishments. New thoughts, emotions and dialogue were creeping into the characterizations. Major biblical characters began saying words not specifically set down in Holy Writ. Additional changes were seen in minor Bible characters. Noah's wife and others, who had never spoken a word before, now had lines, funny ones at that, and were starring in whole scenes of their own. If hearing Moses speaking new lines caused the priests heartburn, this new step was a full-bore sprint down the slippery slope. Hints of such changes had been seen earlier inside the church, but now the gate was wide open. The life of Christ and the miracles of the saints quickly morphed into the rough equivalent of today's worst sitcoms. It was only a matter of time before the Church washed its hands of drama altogether and booted the whole mess out into the streets.

Evolution of the Cycles (13th to 16th Centuries)

Wasting no time to take over where the Church left off, local groups of artisans and craftsmen called **guilds** began developing their own productions. With the Church mostly out of

the picture, the plays leaned even more toward pure entertainment. But, interestingly, the subject matter remained intensely, profoundly religious. In fact, throughout the rest of the medieval period, dramas stayed focused on religious events, characters, and doctrines.

Medieval thespians, inside and outside of the Church, honored a single god—Jehovah of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New, with the Holy Ghost bringing all three together in the Holy Trinity. As water could exist in three distinct forms—steam, liquid and ice—and yet remain one entity, so too could the Holy One of the Christian Church. In the medieval mind and heart, this and other doctrines, including the Seven Deadly Sins, the Sacraments, etc., were the way things were and the way they would always be. During celebrations on annual holy days, miracle plays and mystery plays (also called **passion** plays), were common fare. Mystery plays focused mainly on the life and suffering of Jesus Christ.

With more and more towns and guilds getting involved, more scripts were being written. Artistic license increased, and entire collections of plays, called **cycles**, began to be produced. The identities and professions of almost every medieval playwright are unknown today, although they were most likely local scholars, priests, and artists in towns throughout Europe. The author of *Everyman*, for instance, is anonymous, but historians believe he was a priest or monk—and one who knew a great deal about liturgy and drama, because the original contains many symbols and sacraments of Catholic worship.

Traditions among the guilds created a hierarchy that made involvement in certain cycles and scenes more prestigious than others. Guilds competed with one another to win the responsibility of participation. But winning came at a price. Not only did the construction of the scenes fall to the guilds

(guildsmen had to sign contracts promising to construct “with all due haste and quality”), they were also required to foot the entire bill for all the parts and personnel they needed. Despite this drain on their time and revenue, guildsmen treated their roles as a solemn duty.

In the months leading up to each holy day, mainly Christmas and Easter, the guilds would create their assigned elements. When *Noah* required an Ark, the shipbuilder guild constructed it. For the *Creation*, the weavers designed and sewed the costumes. For the Crucifixion, carpenters built the cross and butchers acted the roles of those who had killed Christ.

The annual productions had been easier to deal with when they were inside a church, but the winter cold and mid-Spring rains made working outside a miserable experience and viewing an uncomfortable one. Soon, the productions were consolidated into one. The *Corpus Christi* celebration took place in more favorable months (May or June). One performance, as opposed to several, saved the guilds money and kept the men participating.

Without a performance space like a sanctuary or courtyard, the cycles become “rolling” shows. **Pageant wagons**, from the Latin *pagina* meaning “wagon,” ensured that all townspeople could see every scene. These two-story carts were built by the blacksmith guilds and had a top floor (the stage) on which actors performed and a bottom floor on which they dressed behind curtains and awaited their entrance cues. Some wagons had elaborate set pieces, such as a fire-spewing dragon head for dramatic effect. Every wagon in the procession was assigned a scene. Once the festivities began, a cart rolled into the first **play station** and performed its scene. Then it packed up and moved on to the next station a few blocks away, just as the next wagon began performing in the

earlier space. This process continued until all the scenes had made their way through town.

Historians believe that the *Corpus Christi* consisted of two main parts: the Coming of Christ and the Life of Christ. The first part included the Creation and Fall, Cain and Abel, Noah's Flood, and Abraham and Isaac. An intermission took place, then scenes of the Nativity, the Shepherds, and the Magi bearing gifts were acted out.

The second part included the Temptation, the Woman Taken in Adultery, the Raising of Lazarus, introduction of Judas, the Last Supper and Betrayal, and the Trial. Another intermission would be had, and the Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Last Judgment would follow.

Cycles could be anywhere from 18 to 42 plays in length and could be exhausting for everybody involved, including the performers. One monk, named Simon of St. Riquier, composed an actor's worst nightmare. His *Acts of the Apostles* was 62,000 verses long and took 40 days to perform. The actor playing Jesus had to speak four thousand lines and the Crucifixion scene lasted as long as it did in real life. In a cycle performed in 1437, the actor playing Christ actually died on the cross after hanging there for hours, and in another, a priest named Jehan de Missey (playing the role of Judas) was killed when he was forced to hang from a tree while the other actors struggled to deliver their enormous share of lines.

The **mystery plays** of the 1400s were the longest and most ambitious, and their cycles could have as many as five hundred actors involved. **Miracle plays** were considerably shorter, but they never enjoyed the same level of popularity. Both were spectacles-feasts for the eyes—but neither were soul-searching explorations of the human psyche. A few succeeded in portraying characters and a realistic emotion or

two, particularly when it came to the Blessed Virgin, but not until the advent of the **morality play** did medieval drama attain the theatrical heights of the Greek plays before them or the Shakespearean ones afterward.

Morality Plays

The first of the morality plays appeared in the 1400s. They were similar to the mysteries and miracles in religious content, but not in structure, setting, or character. In these, they were complete departures. Moralities were not true liturgical dramas, which took place inside the church building, nor were they faithful reenactments of Bible events and characters. The characters were not well-known figures, and the dialogue was not Holy Writ. Instead of portraying biblical characters, they used symbolic character “types” to set up a moral dilemma and propose a moral solution. Of greatest interest to the morality writers were the **principles** of the Bible, not its people. The morality plays were never sponsored by the Church. They were the drama of the streets, performed by traveling minstrels and vagabonds, and they played well **to** the people because they were **of** the people and **for** the people.

Everyman remains the best-known of this type of medieval drama. Its author (and all information about his life) is completely unknown, but his never-ending questions and simplicity of character are enduring and endearing elements. The main character is no saint or messiah. He’s a regular guy, warts and all, who is just trying to figure out who he is and what he ought to be doing while on the earth. In a world where most people were illiterate and had stopped going to church, *Everyman* linked them to the “moral” value of being good and living a good life.

Everyman Yesterday

The carefree protagonist, *Everyman*, is approached by Death and told that he must present an account of his deeds to the Almighty God in heaven. He is given one hour to put his affairs in order and to prepare the record. When *Everyman* starts looking for help, advice, and friendship, he gets deserted by everyone he considered to be friends. Increasingly desperate, *Everyman* finds a very weak but alive acquaintance named Good Deeds. And as his Strength, Beauty, Intelligence, and Knowledge all depart from him, Good Deeds is all that remains. As *Everyman* goes to his grave, his Good Deeds alone are his only hope for eternal reward.

Everyman Today

Because its theme is so universal, *Everyman* has been rediscovered by every generation of theatre goers, encouraging creativity from directors, actors, costumers, and set designers. Its action can be and has been placed in many time periods and settings. The famous Salzburg Festival production beginning in the 1950s placed the action in a banquet hall during a family feast (shades of *Macbeth*). An American production in the 1990s set the play inside a 1940s radio show studio. The disc jockey (*Everyman*) is yanked off his radio show because he is so overbearing and selfish to his co-workers. When his boss tells him to find just one person to show why he shouldn't be fired, *Everyman's* search turns up no one. In the end, a lowly intern speaks up about an incident in which the DJ helped him out. The DJ is credited for it after finally admitting to fighting deep personality insecurities that had always kept him from being a good person to others. The play has been performed with masks, by puppets, and even as a one-person drama. In whatever approach, *Everyman* offers an exciting opportunity to explore meaningful and lasting themes.

Everyman in the Circus of Life

This collection includes a new contemporary adaptation, *Everyman in the Circus of Life* as well as an edited version of the original. Both scripts are meant to help young actors explore the history and nuances of the medieval period as well as discover how the past can be retold for the present. At the end of the script a list of suggested activities contains rehearsal games and exercises to help actors find their own personal connection to the play.

Since morality plays are **allegories**, stories using symbols to explain a truth, the circus becomes an apt metaphor for the chaos and awe of life. In *Everyman in the Circus of Life*, the story line and the original characters remain, but everything is now vested with the aura of the circus. God is the circus boss, Death is the ringmaster, Worldly Possessions is a juggler, Strength is a weight lifter, and so on. With equal access to both versions, amateurs and professionals alike can engage in a unique opportunity to learn about the medieval world—by studying the original—and to see how the past can be enlivened for today’s stage—by performing the new version.

In searching for the pulse of the drama, modern actors should ask themselves the play’s central question, “What deeds of meaningful and lasting value will they do in life?” It may be helpful to begin with another question, “What deeds have others ever done for them that have had a meaningful and lasting effect?” Such notions of selflessness and sacrifice for others were very much a part of the medieval heart. Community meant everything, as the eager participation and financial sacrifice of the guildsmen attests to. To this day *Everyman*—the play and the character—links us to these lasting ideas.

Everyman in the Circus of Life

CHARACTERS

(All characters can be played by men or women.)

First Barker
Second Barker
Circus Boss
Everyman
Ringmaster
Ballerina
Juggler
Prudence
Balloon Seller
Fortune Teller
Strongman
Holy Man
Clown
Freak

Suggested doubling for a cast of 2m., 2w.

Man 1: Circus Boss, Everyman

Man 2: Juggler, First Barker, Holy Man, Freak

Woman 1: Second Barker, Balloon Seller, Fortune Teller,
Strongman

Woman 2: Ringmaster, Prudence, Ballerina, Clown

To my wife Elizabeth
who pours meaning into every moment
of our lives together

Everyman in the Circus of Life

(Circus music begins. BALLOON SELLER, BALLERINA, STRONGMAN, and JUGGLER perform their respective feats with great energy. Two colorful boxes are positioned center stage with a red curtain hanging between them that opens at the middle. A sign reading: "The Circus of Life" hangs above the curtain. On the opposite sides (R and L) are two colorful ladders. CIRCUS BOSS (in white overalls and bright yellow cap) sits atop one, overseeing all. EVERYMAN and PRUDENCE enter. EVERYMAN wears a black shirt with a bright red heart on his chest. PRUDENCE wears a pretty dress. They munch on a massive ball of cotton candy as they go to each performer, watching excitedly and applauding as each act finishes. Music rises. Throughout the play, the actors freeze in their places until needed, or they may stay behind the curtain and enter when needed or a combination of both.)

FIRST BARKER. Welcome! Welcome, ladies and gents!
Step right up to the carnival tents!

(BARKERS usher EVERYMAN and PRUDENCE through the curtain.)

SECOND BARKER. Ladies and gentlemen, one and all,

Infants and children, short and tall,

FIRST BARKER. We're all a part of the circus of life.

So, climb these steps for the time of your life.

SECOND BARKER. Hurry, hurry, hurry! Right this way.

A great adventure awaits you ...

BARKERS. Today!

(Explosion of smoke in front of the curtain.)

FIRST BARKER. We bring to you a play ... the drama of Man ...

The drama of Everyman!

SECOND BARKER. On this stage, in the Circus of Life, Everyman journeys.

Walking and talking upon this stage.

CIRCUS BOSS *(voice booms)*. Yet he murders time with idle speech

And spends his life half asleep.

FIRST BARKER. And now ... he is dying.

SECOND BARKER. Everyman is dying!

BARKERS. ... Dying!

ALL. ... DYING!

SECOND BARKER. Strength, beauty and even his senses
Will soon fade like flowers under a withering sun.

FIRST BARKER. The same bright sun that used to brighten
his days

Will soon cast a shadow across his face.

SECOND BARKER. And in the end,

CIRCUS BOSS. His reckoning awaits. It must be written. A
record of his deeds.

SECOND BARKER. All the good and bad, the meaningful
things ... written down.

FIRST BARKER. The good deeds crowned with an eternal
smile.

CIRCUS BOSS. The bad ones enthroned in a forever frown.

SECOND BARKER. Once his deeds are collected and weighed

FIRST BARKER. Carefully balanced, measured, displayed

SECOND BARKER. Pinched, poked, prodded and nudged.

STRONGMAN. And then ...

JUGGLER. And then ...

BALLERINA. And then ...

FIRST BARKER. Everyman's life

SECOND BARKER. His meaning ...

FIRST BARKER. His time ...

CIRCUS BOSS. Will be ... judged!

(BARKERS come C. Music begins again.)

FIRST BARKER. We hope that you in the audience

Will follow us into the crowded tents

SECOND BARKER. Take a deep breath.

Leave your worries behind;

Enter with us into Everyman's mind!

(The circus goes into full swing again. BARKERS move open the curtain. CIRCUS BOSS comes off ladder in a rage and speaks to BALLERINA.)

CIRCUS BOSS. Where is Everyman? I want to see him, now!

Find him and bring him here. It's time we had a talk.

I've warned him and warned him about this day.

I will listen no more to all of his squawk!

Every day he comes and goes, refusing to follow my rules.

He waltzes around, and he never talks to me.

He pays no attention to anything!

He's turned away from his duties for too long.

He's never cared for anyone but himself.

That's it! I've had it. His time is up.

He's turned his back no more!

I demand he put pen to page

And write down all he's ever done!
From his youth to the end of his days
The good and the bad. Oh, there's meaningless tons!
I want his record ... I demand a reckoning
An account of his deeds
That's what I want from Everyman!

BALLERINA. He's in the circus. I don't know where,
But I'll find him. I'm sure he's there.

CIRCUS BOSS. You stay here. I have something else in mind.
Something of a much more interesting kind.
Everyman's life is about to end.
Send in the Ringmaster, Death, my old friend.

BALLERINA. But Death? So quick, it gives him no time
It seems so entirely unfair.

Would you consider giving Everyman
Just a little more time? A little more air?

CIRCUS BOSS. Time will do him no good, that's for sure.
If I give him a little, he'll only want more.

BALLERINA. Maybe he'll repent and change his ways.
It's a thought at least. A hope anyway.

CIRCUS BOSS. No. He won't change his mind, you'll see.
Only justice, final justice, will open his eyes, trust me.
Mercy has had no effect on him. No matter what he does ...
He continually forgets where his life comes from.
Now, bring in the Ringmaster, I'm curious to know
How Everyman will fare. Go! Let's open the show!

*(BALLERINA poses at curtain, as BARKERS throw it open
to reveal the RINGMASTER entering through smoke, very
dramatically.)*

CIRCUS BOSS. Come! I have a task—

RINGMASTER (*cracking a whip*). You've taken me away from rushing to and fro in the circus. Why am I here?

CIRCUS BOSS. Death, I have work for you.

RINGMASTER. I have my own work to do.

CIRCUS BOSS. That will have to wait. You will now go to Everyman

And tell him of the reckoning I demand. He is to write an account of his life in the circus and tell me any meaningful thing he has done. I want to see it in one hour. Not a minute more.

RINGMASTER. I will seek him in my own way, if you don't mind.

He thinks only of pleasure. He'll be easy to find.

(BARKERS open curtain as RINGMASTER goes to ladder. CIRCUS BOSS sits on other ladder, watching.)

FIRST BARKER. Everyman, death comes at any time.

Without any warning, no reason, no rhyme.

SECOND BARKER. You still have a chance to escape your fate.

While you're alive, it's never too late.

(EVERYMAN enters, munching an oversized ball of bright cotton candy. BALLOON SELLER carries a single balloon and joins EVERYMAN.)

BALLOON SELLER. Hey, Everyman! Over here!

I've got something for you. (*Displaying the balloon.*)

EVERYMAN. For me? Thanks, Friendship, you mean everything to me.

You always have so much to give.

BALLOON SELLER. I always give you all I have. Here. This one's special. I chose it just for you.

(EVERYMAN takes the balloon.)

BALLOON SELLER *(cont'd)*. Where are all the other ones I gave you before?

EVERYMAN. Oh, they're gone. Did they mean something to you?

BALLOON SELLER *(hiding the disappointment)*. No, of course not! They were ... yours.

EVERYMAN. I'm sorry. I let you down—

BALLOON SELLER. Hey, what's mine is yours, right. A friend till the end, that's me.

EVERYMAN. Thanks! *(Seeing a coin.)* Hey, is that a quarter? *(Reaches down.)* Shiny! *(Distracted, he lets go of the balloon, which floats away.)*

You're a good companion, Friendship. The best. *(Bites coin.)*
I don't know what I'd ever do without you.

BALLOON SELLER. Anything you ever need, you can count on me—

A friend till the end, that's me.

(RINGMASTER appears at curtain, cracking a whip. BALLOON SELLER screams.)

RINGMASTER. Come here, you two. Now!

BALLOON SELLER. It's him you want, not me.

(BALLOON SELLER pushes EVERYMAN toward RINGMASTER and runs behind the curtain, shivering.)

EVERYMAN. Name's Everyman. How do you do?

And that's Friendship, my constant companion, through thick and thin.

RINGMASTER. You have escaped death many times, Everyman.
But I finally caught up with you.

EVERYMAN (*recognizing*). Hey, you're the Ringmaster! I've seen your work in the circus.

Very impressive. Caged in with those lions. And you never get hurt!

RINGMASTER. I defy death.

EVERYMAN. You make an impression, that's for sure.

RINGMASTER. I defy death because I am death!

EVERYMAN. Death? (*Pause.*) You're what?

RINGMASTER (*throttling EVERYMAN*). I have been commanded to take you into the Realm of the Spirit, where you will give an account of your deeds. I must have it in writing.

Now please. (*Letting go of EVERYMAN's throat.*)

EVERYMAN. Whoa, you're intense. Realm of the Spirit? What's that?

RINGMASTER. I talk. You listen! Have you prepared your account?

EVERYMAN. My what?

RINGMASTER. I have come to take you to your Maker.

He wants to hear what you've been up to lately. Now, let's go!

EVERYMAN. Wait, wait, wait. Who sent you?

RINGMASTER. The Circus Boss. The one who runs this place.

EVERYMAN. Wow. The Boss? You know him?

RINGMASTER. We've had our moments.

EVERYMAN. He's the guy who makes all the rules, isn't he?

He's loud and, if you ask me, he's not very nice.

RINGMASTER. Your journey's over, Everyman—The circus is closing for you.

(*RINGMASTER gestures. Lights go out.*)

EVERYMAN (*in darkness*). Whoa, Death. You make the lights go out quick.

RINGMASTER. Your time is up. Your mortal life has ended.

EVERYMAN. You can't do that. It's *my* life!

RINGMASTER. Really? What have you ever done with it?

(A bright spotlight hits EVERYMAN.)

RINGMASTER *(cont'd)*. Your mortal life is MINE!

(RINGMASTER grabs EVERYMAN's heart. EVERYMAN breathes heavily in pain. BALLOON SELLER shrieks. A menacing key note plays as EVERYMAN pleads.)

EVERYMAN. Hey, that hurts!

RINGMASTER. Where is your reckoning?

EVERYMAN. Friendship, help me—

RINGMASTER. Where is it?

EVERYMAN. I don't have it ... I need more time.

RINGMASTER. There is no more time!

EVERYMAN. Give me an hour. Can I have one hour?

RINGMASTER. Hmmm. If ... *(Pulling EVERYMAN up.)* ...

I give you this hour,

Will you have it ready?

EVERYMAN. I'll have it. I promise!

(RINGMASTER lets go of his chest. Lights come up. EVERYMAN gasps for air. BALLOON SELLER rushes to help him.)

RINGMASTER. One hour. When I return to this spot, present your reckoning ...

or you will burn! *(Cracks whip.)*

EVERYMAN. Yes. I'll gather all my friends and they'll help me write it ...

You'll have everything you need.

RINGMASTER. In an hour?

EVERYMAN. I promise. They'll prove I'm a good guy.

RINGMASTER. You have that many friends?

EVERYMAN. Sure I do.

RINGMASTER (*in his face*). No fraud. No fibs. No excuses.

All in writing. A full account of every meaningful deed you've done in the circus.

EVERYMAN. No problem. And I'll get all my friends to come with me

And vouch for my character personally.

RINGMASTER. Right ... When I return, you, your reckoning, and your friends, will accompany me. I warn you ... be here ...

EVERYMAN. And when I pass the test, we'll all come back here—

RINGMASTER. No, Everyman. You only get one chance in the circus.

Once you leave, there's no coming back.

EVERYMAN. But I'll do everything you said—

RINGMASTER. One chance! One reckoning. Put your affairs in order. (*Whip crack.*)

One hour! Not a minute more.

(*BARKERS open curtain as RINGMASTER exits to ladder.*)

BALLOON SELLER. Is he gone? Whew!

EVERYMAN. He'll be back. Did you hear what he said?

BALLOON SELLER. About not coming back? About that ... I gotta go.

EVERYMAN. Wait! A friend till the end. You said that!

BALLOON SELLER. When he comes back, you're done.

Can I give you some advice, as a friend? Run! (*Disappears behind curtain.*)

EVERYMAN. I can't. He found me once, he'll do it again.

BALLOON SELLER. You're in a fix. That's for sure.

EVERYMAN. But, that's what you're here for. To help me in my hour of need.

(EVERYMAN reaches in and pulls BALLOON SELLER from the curtain.)

EVERYMAN (*cont'd*). Have I ever asked you for anything?

BALLOON SELLER. Every day! (*Shuts curtain.*)

EVERYMAN. You can vouch for my character. It's easy. Besides, you're my friend till the end. Right?

BALLOON SELLER. Yes, I said that, didn't I.

All right. You can count on me to say what a great person you are.

EVERYMAN. Great. When he gets here, we go.

BALLOON SELLER. Go where?

EVERYMAN. To the Realm of the Spirit.

BALLOON SELLER. The what? To *where*? Do you know what that is?

The Realm is where dead people go.

I'm not going to be dead, no how, no way.

That's how it is, no matter what you say!

EVERYMAN. But—

BALLOON SELLER. Friends don't let friends get dead.

EVERYMAN. You promised. A friend till the end, you said.

Listen, I'm in big trouble. I need something I don't have ...

And I have very little time to get it. Help me, please.

BALLOON SELLER (*comforting*). Yes, yes, of course. We're friends, aren't we?

Tell me all about it.

EVERYMAN. I was just strolling through the circus, just minding my own business ...

BALLOON SELLER. That's all you ever do.

EVERYMAN. Right! And out of nowhere the Circus Boss tells me I have to write a book ... a big book.

BALLOON SELLER. It won't be that big.

EVERYMAN. About all the stuff I've done.

BALLOON SELLER. That's not much actually.

EVERYMAN. And he wants you to help me!

BALLOON SELLER. He does?

EVERYMAN. Of course! A little jog to the Realm of the Spirit. Vouch for my character. No big deal.

BALLOON SELLER. Is this going to interrupt my day?

EVERYMAN. From what I'm told ... forever, I'd say.

BALLOON SELLER. Bye. (*Closes curtain.*)

EVERYMAN. Wait! I need your help.

(EVERYMAN reaches into the curtain again and pulls up the BALLOON SELLER.)

BALLOON SELLER. Let's just go. We'll run away.

EVERYMAN. It's no use. All we can do is wait.

BALLOON SELLER. I can't go with you.

I can't do what you want me to do.

I can't promise what a great person you are.

I can't say how much of a friend you've been ...

EVERYMAN. Why not?

BALLOON SELLER. Because ... you're as good at being a friend as a tree is at flying.

And going to the Realm of the Spirit? It's too much to ask of a friend.

We're tight, but friends don't let friends die for them.

EVERYMAN. Not *for* me. Just *with* me.

BALLOON SELLER. Either way that's crazy. Sorry. I've got other things to do.

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