

The Last Day

a short play by Bernard Goldberg

Performed at Mutiny in Heaven,  
the Mountain, October 19, 2006

Sam ... Gregory Littman  
Joe ... Tom Waldman  
Jenny ... Coleman Hough  
Beth ... Tanya Kahana

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INT. SAM'S OFFICE

Joe appears at the doorway and knocks.

Sam rises up from behind the desk and stands.

SAM  
Thank you for coming.

JOE  
Of course.

SAM  
I've never done this before.

JOE  
Really? Well, there's nothing to be afraid of.

SAM  
No, I suppose not.

JOE  
Everyone does it.

SAM  
I suppose so.

JOE  
At one time or another.

SAM  
It's just that it brings up so much. So many issues.

JOE  
Yeah?

SAM  
Dust.

JOE  
Dust?

SAM  
Dirt.

Sam looks down to examine the carpet.

JOE  
I brought the form we'll need. We can simply fill it in as we go.

SAM

Okay.

JOE

I'll bring it back to my office,  
where my secretary will type it up.  
Then I'll fax it to you for  
corrections, changes, additions.  
Then we'll type it up again, have  
you sign it, and you're in  
business.

SAM

Great.

JOE

May I sit?

SAM

Oh, I'm sorry. Wow! Here. Sit  
here.

JOE

Thank you.

SAM

Water?

JOE

I'm fine. Thanks.

SAM

No water. Okay. How do we begin?

Sam sits on the carpet.

JOE

Let's figure out your assets first.  
Then we can divide them.

SAM

Okay.

JOE

I don't need specific amounts.

SAM

Okay.

JOE

General products will do.

SAM  
Products.

JOE  
Generally.

SAM  
Okay.

JOE  
Let's begin with stocks.

SAM  
Nope.

JOE  
Nope?

SAM  
Don't have any.

JOE  
Bonds?

SAM  
Can't say that I have bonds.

JOE  
Gold?

SAM  
Sorry.

JOE  
It's okay.

SAM  
You're not upset with me, are you?

JOE  
Not at all.  
(beat)  
Do you have any property?

SAM  
I have a lean-to along the Russian  
River.

JOE  
A lean-to?

SAM  
It's a kind of shack. For camping.  
There's a lot of fishing along the  
Russian River.

JOE  
So it's a vacation cottage.

SAM  
It's more of a shack.

JOE  
(writes)  
Lean-to.

SAM  
I haven't been there in decades.

JOE  
I've heard it said that a house is  
a living, organic being. It needs  
constant care.

SAM  
Yeah. . . It's probably gone by  
now.  
(beat)  
This place, for example. I could  
use a new carpet.

JOE  
When I got my first office -- I was  
at a firm then -- I asked if I  
could put in wood floors. They  
said it would be too expensive to  
replace when the time came.  
(beat)  
They were already planning to  
replace me. You can just tear up a  
cheap carpet and put in another.  
(beat)  
Other property?

SAM  
None to speak of.

JOE  
Bank accounts?

SAM  
Sure. Yeah.

JOE  
Okay! Anything else?

SAM  
My car.

JOE  
Good. Now, the beneficiaries.  
Whom would you like to name?

Sam thinks.

JOE  
What is it you do here?

SAM  
We diversify.

Joe laughs.

JOE  
You know, I'm chuckling. On my way  
into the building, I saw a young  
man with one of those colorful ties  
-- pearl pink, pewter blue, one of  
those fancy names. He held a small  
imitation leather briefcase, and he  
was looking at the directory.

SAM  
Job interview, probably.

JOE  
Right. But the thing of it is, his  
tie. It was down to here (pointing  
below his waist).

SAM  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

MARTIN  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

JOE  
He looked lost.

SAM  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

MARTIN  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

JOE  
And confused.

SAM  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

MARTIN  
Ha! Ha! Ha!

JOE

And you know he won't get the job!

SAM

JOE

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Both laugh loudly and long, aware of each other's laughter and unwilling to stop before the other. When it becomes clear that they have laughed beyond the normal time and that the other may stop at any moment, they both stop laughing.

We hear but do not see Jenny and Beth, who are in the office next door.

JENNY (O.S.)

When the nerves are as tight as a the strings of a harp, and the heart is feverish from the day's assaults, Shavasana, the corpse pose, can restore a bit of grace.

Joe and Sam look at each other. Joe isn't sure whether he should say anything, since Sam may not want to talk about it. Sam is hoping Joe didn't hear and then realizes he must have.

SAM

They do this yoga thing for lunch.

Pause.

SAM

I was married for a year. She'd make herself up for me at office parties and dinners. Shaded her eyes until the irises appeared black. I know it's impossible, but it appeared so. She painted her lips to look like Scarlett Johansson's. Scarlett didn't exist then, but I can see the resemblance now.

JOE

I've been divorced twelve years. My wife thought attorneys were glamorous. Maybe they are. All I do is record things. I write things down.

(beat)

Sometimes I feel dead. Maybe my wife sensed that.

(beat)

(MORE)

JOE(cont'd)

When I started working, I saw the older partners. They looked tired. They must have envied me, I was sure.

SAM

You seem alive to me.

JOE

Yeah? You too.

As they remember who they are, they both become depressed.

JOE

Little bumper cars in an amusement park.

(beat)

That's our legacy. We leave the world with more than it had. And we take that with us.

(beat)

I had a neighbor, an older man who kept to himself. He'd wave to me when I waved, nod to me when I nodded. That was the extent of it. After years of this, I asked him if he'd like some gum. I never chewed gum, but on this one day, I had some. (yells) "Hey, Mr. Marconi!" He was hard of hearing. "Would you like some Wrigley gum?" (angry voice) "I don't chew gum!" he said. And that was it. "I don't chew gum!"

(beat)

What can you do?

JENNY (O.S.)

Breathe and go into yourself. Picture large, puffy clouds surrounding your head.

SAM

You have a dog?

JOE

No.

SAM

Me neither. There was this German Shepherd once. I didn't know what to do with it. It dropped a rubber ball at my feet and looked up at me. I threw the ball.

(MORE)

SAM(cont'd)

The dog ran after it, picked it up in its teeth, and brought it back to me. Then he dropped it at my feet. I picked the ball up and threw it. The dog ran after it, picked it up in its teeth, ran it back to me, and dropped it at my feet. I threw it again. The dog ran, picked it up, brought it back to me. I threw it again. Again, and again, and again, until the dog was breathing so heavily I thought its head would explode. I tried to stop, but it shoved the ball toward me with its snout, becoming more and more insistent, manic even, with a focused, canine intensity. I didn't know what to do, so I just kept throwing the ball.

(beat)

She told me he'd become overheated. Something like that. The dog belonged to her, Melissa, or maybe to her family.

(beat)

Melissa had brought me to her home in San Francisco. In the hills of San Francisco. We lay by the fireplace, the dog nearby. I was afraid to make a move. Not just because of the dog but because I was afraid.

Sam looks toward the doorway. His face lights up. He waves eagerly.

Joe looks toward the doorway. He sees no one. He turns back to Sam, who looks depressed.

JOE

You know, one of my hobbies is self-help books. If you don't mind, I'd like to offer an interpretation. That dog you've described may be a part of yourself.

SAM

The dog?

JOE

You may be afraid of your own aggression.

SAM

See, now, that's the trouble with psychology. It's like watching football on television. You watch from the safety of your sofa, making judgements about the players without knowing anything about what it's like down there, on the field, in the middle of a huddle, having been hit over and over again.

JOE

It's just a hobby. It helps with clients.

BETH (O.S.)

*He feels me. He feels me not, he feels me. He feels me not, he feels me.*

JENNY (O.S.)

He feels you not.

BETH (O.S.)

Shut up, bitch!

SAM

I carpeted this office myself. Pulled up the old carpet and laid the new one. It wasn't just that I was tired of it. It had the color of dead flesh.

Sam gets down on all fours. He examines the carpet with his hand and then his nose.

SAM

It may be time to lay carpet again. Maybe a brown hue with a green tint.

JOE

I've recently discovered beige. It's what they call a neutral.

(beat)

Decorators say it goes with everything.

BETH (O.S.)

You know who's cool? Jim is cool. He's really nice. You know who's supercool? Jason. My sister's going out with him.

(MORE)

BETH(cont'd)

He's an investor. He buys homes and then fixes them up and then sells them for a lot more. He's only twenty-three, but he's really, really nice.

JENNY (O.S.)

They shouldn't be called homes when you buy them just to sell them.

Sam climbs onto the desk.

BETH (O.S.)

He owns three homes now. By next year he'll own five.

JENNY (O.S.)

What does he do with his money?

BETH (O.S.)

I told you. He invests it. You know who's cool? Peggy's cool. She's really nice. You know who's cool? Terry's cool.

Sam lies on his back and folds his arms over his chest.

SAM

On the last day, they will look at me and say, "What can we think?"

JENNY (O.S.)

Become as nothing.

BETH (O.S.)

I am nothing.

JENNY (O.S.)

We are nothing.

SAM

On the last day, they will say, "What have you done?"

(beat)

My answer will be, "It is as nothing."

BETH (O.S.)

I believe I'm falling asleep.

JENNY (O.S.)

Breathe deeply.

SAM

He was a good man. Was he a good man? He made mistakes. Why? And of what magnitude?

BETH (O.S.)

(chanting softly)

You know who's cool? Linda's cool.  
You know who's cool? Cindy's cool.  
You know who's cool? Rhonda's cool.  
You know who's cool? Donna's cool.

JENNY

Allow your body to be heavy and your forehead to be light. Allow your eyelids to be heavy, and your inner eye to be light.

SAM

Will I miss the place? No. Will I regret my time here? Maybe.

JENNY (O.S.)

And now, our time is up.

BETH (O.S.)

I was just enjoying myself.

JENNY (O.S.)

That's always a bad sign.

JOE

Before we're born, we know about goodness. We have all the knowledge we need for a a happy, decent life. But in the moment before birth, an angel taps us above the lips, and we forget it all. It's gone. Everything. Leaving paradise, we're born, screaming, into the world, where we spend an entire life trying to remember what we forgot.

Joe walks to Sam and stands near him and above him.

SAM

I leave all my earthly possessions to Scarlett Johansson. Without conditions and without stipulations.

(beat)

(MORE)

SAM(cont'd)

Though I hope she'll donate some of it to charity in my name. But that's a recommendation and not a requirement.

JOE

When I go, I hope it will be softly, like a baby's kiss. Like the moon as it rises. Like the sound of the stars.

SAM

When I go, I'll recover what I lost.

JOE

When I go, I'll remember what I knew.