

The Psychologist A Monologue by Alan Lamberg, performed at the Towson Studio Theatre, December 1999.

Lights up on an office. The office is neatly ordered, complete with the usual desk facing downstage and rolling chair, preferably a fancy one with buttoned leather cushioning. There is a tall file cabinet and a large, filled bookcase against the left wall. The closed and locked door is on the right. There is a window with curtains downstage, just a toss away from the desk.

The office should be cozy and small, intimate for a studio audience. The edge of the stage should be no more than a chair's length from the first row. There should be no more than ten rows.

The desk is tidy with various functional decoratives; a notebook computer, a small desk lamp with pens, pencils, post-it-notes, stapler, staples, paper clips, &c. There is also a printer stand adjacent to the desk with an HP Laserjet and various supplies on the lower shelves.

There is a lone, tall lamp by the door, it is on, lighting the room in addition to the little sunlight peering in from the curtains.

There is also a 16"x20" blank canvas that is held up by a easel.

The Psychologist; Magnus Portentas, is standing in front of his desk, facing the audience. He begins by assuming a professional, yet cynical attitude which is his guard. Slowly and surely this objective guard will be let down into a subjective, raw epiphany. Beginning with a blank stare, he notices something and looks carefully while adjusting his tie. Then he pauses to look again. This time, he pulls a comb out of his pocket and adjusts his hair. He feels the stubble on his face. Then he stands straight again.

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I'm pleased to... *(He trails off. Then he stands straight again.)* Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am pleased to announce *(He interrupts himself.)* –Wait a minute, will they introduce me? *(Pause. He turns around and goes to his desk, opens a drawer, pulls out a bottle of prescription pills, and pops one into his mouth. He immediately goes back to start.)* Good eve– *(He chokes on the pill and coughs. He immediately reaches inside his sports jacket and pulls out a small metal flask and takes a swig. Upon settling, he starts again.)* Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. I'm... Magnus Portentas... and I am pleased to introduce the announcement of this year's recipient of the American Society's Psychology Committee Administration's Lifetime Achievement Award. *(Hold for applause.)* This award was founded a decade ago by the A.S.P.C.A. in hopes of encouraging a "tradition of excellence" in the field of psychiatry, as said by the president of our association, Norma Grant. *(Hold for applause.)* The recipient will be recognized and honored among colleagues, like myself, *(I doubt there will be applause here,)* and lastly, our honored associate will receive a financial endowment from the State Government. My fellow colleagues, I present to you, Dr. Norma Grant. *(Hold for applause.)*

Excuse me, Doctor? You want the envelope? I don't have it. I thought you had it? Am I supposed to have it? Why should I have it? I'm not the one reading the announcement, you are. I'm not one receiving the award—not after all these years of dedicated, hard work!

(He starts again; this time, venting, not practicing formality.) Good evening you poor saps, because just like me, you've been gypped out of years of hard work. Or maybe some of you are total jerk-offs and are just here to schmooz, since you have nothing to show. Or maybe some of you can relate to me and how we've been screwed out of what we deserve.

Good evening Ladies and Gents, and let's not forget your children, it must be difficult to be a psychologist and have children. Oh, I know your secrets, some of you have confided to me in drunken confession at those A.S.P.C.A. cocktail parties that you can't bring yourself to look upon your child without constant psychoanalysis!

(He sits on his desk, trying to relax.) Good evening Ladies and Gents, my name is of no importance, since I won't be snatching up any glory today other than having the privilege of being Norma Grant's honorary ass-kisser, since the original honorary ass-kisser couldn't make this gig. It looks like ugly fate struck again and took the other guy out with a case of appendicitis. So here I am, pleased to introduce the announcement of this year's recipient of the A.S.P.C.A.'s Lifetime Achievement Award, founded by our beloved mistress moneybags, Norma Grant, who chose the acronym of our humble bullshit association which will forever confuse people into believing that our clients are your cutesy little snobby cats and smelly large dirty dogs. A.S.P.C.A. my ass. (Hold for applause!) "Tradition of Excellence" my ass! (Hold for applause.) Honored among colleagues like myself (Hold for "Who are you?")

(He stands up.) Well fuck you too my fellow colleagues because of course you don't know who I am, since you can't see in front of you. Financial endowment my ass. My fellow colleagues, I present to you, Dr. Norma Grant. *(He claps contemptuously.)*

Excuse me Madam? You want the envelope? I thought you had it? Oh, my mistake, I do have it. Here it is... *(Picks up picture frame from desk and hurls it smashing into the door.)*

(Pause. He reflects on what he just did. He goes to pick up the pieces. Puts them into the trash. He notices his hands trembling. He tries to calm down. It isn't working. Meanwhile, he has taken out his liquor-flask and swigs again. While doing the above action, he remembers something aloud.) Haven't you ever experienced a moment of violence? A surrender to the rage.

This flask was given to me five years ago as a secret santa gift by one of my colleagues. I forgot who gave it to me. Maybe I never found out. Maybe I never bothered.

The liquor in this flask was purchased last week. I talked with the liquor store owner about rocket science and how humans will only survive by leaving this planet... He was a nice man. I smiled and nodded as I walked out the door.

I smile and nod. That's what I do. They'll put that on my tombstone; "He smiled and nodded."

I'll be doing that at today's ceremony, and I did that when I first met Norma Grant. I smiled and nodded when I accepted membership into the A.S.P.C.A., this petty bureaucracy that only hindered my work. I smiled and nodded when I received my Ph.D. in Psychology and then went off on my merry empty way to help others while I help myself to this putting together this nice office of mine, with my mahogany desk, upgraded computing technology, and plush comfortable chair that I could fall asleep in. *(He sits and relaxes.)* Sometimes I do.

And let's not forget that nice couch over there, *(Indicating the seats in the audience,)* and how much I paid for that beauty to keep you, my clients, cozy. And so I smile and nod when you speak your troubles to me, I smile and nod and sometimes take notes while you go off in your rant. I write skilled interpretations of your psychobabble in my notepad, and when your hour is up, and you leave me in my isolated privacy, I reach to my bookcase for the DSM-IV or maybe the Iliad.

(Pause. He reaches for a writing tablet and a pen. He takes a few notes.) Soon enough, using the six years of schooling I received, I identify your pathology, or what ails you, with something a manual describes. I cross reference my knowledge with the knowledge of my predecessors from the last century, the founders and commanders of modern psychology. I smile and nod with the diagnosis, and I fill your prescription, whether it be in the form of words or medicine.

And in the hopes that you smile and nod, I move on to the next patient. And soon enough, we all smile and nod our way through life. *(He notices ink on his fingers.)* And then,

when no one's looking, I notice ink blots on my hands and fingers.

(Pause. He goes to the bookcase via rolling chair and pulls out a dictionary. Opens to a specific page and reads.) Asylum. Noun; from the Greek, *asylon*. (1) an inviolable place of refuge and protection... sanctuary. (2) a place of retreat and security: shelter ... refuge. (3) an institution for the relief or care of the destitute or afflicted and especially the insane!

Unfortunately, there are some of you that end up falling through the loopholes and onto the streets, passing by in a creepy schizophrenia, no thanks to the insurance companies. No one will help you then, since you're not smiling and you're throwing your head from side to side.

(Pause. He rolls toward the canvas.) I can't help all of you. *(Indicating the blank canvas.)* One of you gave me this blank canvas as a consolation prize for trying to help you, even though you're still getting mail from your parents in your cell downstairs. The tabula rasa.

(Pause. He takes out his liquor-flask again. This time, staring at it.) Hmm. I should really avoid the alcohol this time. I have to wake up early tomorrow. And I haven't been able to sleep lately. When was the last time I had insomnia? Or better yet, are there any that I don't remember? And if so, how can I recall them?

Hmm. *(He gets out of his chair and goes to the file cabinet.)* Five years... *(He pulls files.)* And what month is it? October.

Again. There's no escaping the Fall.

(Looking at a particular file.) Last year, last Fall, it was me trying to convince an adolescent male that suicidal thoughts can be redirected to thoughts that can make change. But I forgot how much adolescents are so desperately afraid of change.

(He keeps the one file and brings it to his desk.) A year before that, it was the mother of five children. She couldn't handle the stress of being a single mother. I tried to relate to her that she's not alone, that there are countless families that can survive single parenting. But then she had to go and confess that she was in love with me. I tried to help her, but... When I explained to her that she was only being fixated, she felt rejected. So she found vindication in suing me for sexual harassment. It was her word against mine. The courts are still out on that one.

And this year it's something that I just can't... I'm experiencing the same kind of melancholy that many of my patients have, yet the difference is that I understand what's causing their ailments. So what's wrong with me?

Think, damn you, think! What happened five years ago?

I was put before the state review board. *(He goes to his chair, stands behind it.)* It was the most stressful experience of my life. I was supposed to prepare a synopsis of my qualifications and my accomplishments over the years. And when I had to stand in front of these people who had the power to strip me of my license to practice, I felt powerless. And when it came time for me to speak for myself, I completely forgot what I had to say. *(He sits in his chair.)* I remember wishing that my old psychology professor, Dr. John Chapkind, was there, but he passed away shortly before I got my license.

I really missed him. He was like a grandfather to me. I remember the funeral; his face was suddenly so lifeless. *(Pause.)*

(In the rolling chair, he makes his way downstage, closer to the audience, intimately.) After the inquiry was over, I went to home and couldn't sleep, worried about losing my practice, and that all my work, all the money I put into my education, would go down the drain. I had a dream that night, which I never shared with anyone. I found myself back at the inquiry. Only this time, Dr. Chapkind was sitting there, watching me while the others were imposing their terrible questions on me. Then he said to me, in his wise old voice,

"You're unprepared. Okay, so you've been analyzing, but you need to rework this. Don't worry, it happens to all of us. It's called 'The Psychologist's Nightmare.' Did you know this was going to happen?"

I responded angrily to him, "Not at all!" --even though I would never do such a thing.

And although my anger seemed to not touch him, he began to cry for some other reason entirely, and he quietly said, "I don't believe you."

(He suddenly gets up from the chair and makes way back to his desk.) When I woke up and recalled the dream, I was at a loss to interpret it. It had no obvious symbols, and my resources gave contradictory information. All I knew for sure was the feeling that I felt that day, when I was up in front of the inquiry; it was a living nightmare:

In addition, it felt similar to being estranged from an ex-lover; my heart clenches, my eyes begin to melt. I want to cry. I feel it welling up; despair.

This feeling floated through me, and I could do nothing to stop it. I wanted to cry, because I felt nothing.

I have everything; my practice, my books of knowledge; philosophies and psychologies, both modern and classic; the black arts and the naive arts, respectively. All of this knowledge is embedded into my thoughts until the day I die.

Nihil sub sole novum; every action, within time, sinks into nothingness. On that day, five years ago, I felt absolutely nothing. Nothing; the opposite of life. I misplaced my smile, and I took a moment to stop nodding. On that day, I began to weep inside. And since then, I don't think the weeping has stopped.

(Pause. He reaches into his briefcase for a bottle of water.) God, It's been five years since my last... It's been a while since I looked back.

FIVE YEARS! *(He throws the bottle to the floor, then stands poised to crash the chair on its side. Instead, he stands. He pulls a black billed hat out of a drawer and holds it.)*

I remember a time when every week used to be a nexus, my life was about decisions. And new and incredible things would happen. An event, a person, or a challenge, or a kiss, a look, a laugh, an opportunity...

A dead-end. *(In one, sudden, violent sweep, he clears a lot of the papers and some items off his desk.)* I know when it fucking started! I remember! It was half-a-lifetime ago; just before I turned twenty-one. It began in that summer, when my best friends returned from their faraway colleges only to soon part ways as each of them were on his or her own "search" for something. Some would go to Europe to visit a significant other for a few weeks. Others would stay indoors and be lonely and anti-social. And many were trying to raise money by working full-time. But I was expectant that everyone, now out of school, would have free time.

I was immediately disappointed. They weren't so level-headed after all with their time. It seemed that my collective friends, with the exception of a few individuals, became one, inconsiderate asshole.

But, giving my friends the benefit of the doubt, and being as understanding and equally gullible, *(Dons the hat, spins around as he takes off his sports jacket, now in a mode of satirizing his former smiling, youthful self.)* I'd call in hopes of planning a better tomorrow. *(Picks up the phone and speaks into it.)* "Hello? Hi, are you busy? Oh, I guess I talk to you later." *(Hangs up. He gets serious for a moment.)*

Eventually, the many misses give way to a hit or two, *(Loosens his tie. Satirically, he picks up phone.)* "Hi! Do you have a moment? Great. I want to see when we can do something sometime. You don't know? How about Tuesday? No? Wednesday? --Pick a day out of this week... oh... next week? You can? Okay, how ab-uh huh... Can you call me back then? Or better yet, page me. Yeah, you've got my number-oh... ~sigh~ again, it's 416-0538. Yeah, 0538. Okay. I'll hear from you later, g'bye." *(Hangs up. Now serious, he begins taking off his tie.)*

Eventually, I become offended because so many friends don't have enough mind to call me back, or to remember. *(Goes to computer, unbuttons top button of shirt. He is less serious but not as satirical.)* Of course, they always check their email twice a day... *He types the following.)* "Hi. Look, e-mailing `cos haven't heard from you. What's up? Happening a lot lately, with people. Really sorry situation. Maybe you me Monday? Call me." *(Sends message.)*

Eventually, all of this frustration— (*His pager beeps aloud. He checks it. He looks out to the audience.*) Excuse me. (*Picks up phone. Dials according to the number on the pager.*)—All of this frustration makes myself inconsistent. “Hey, hi! Oh? Tonight? ...Uh... Well, my other friend was going to come over and we were going to finish watching this movie... yeah, um... it's just that he'll be going back to school this fall, and... yeah, he ditched me last week. You and I shouda jus' done something. Sorry. I'm sorry! What—? Yeah, bye.” (*Hangs up. He is serious again.*)

Eventually, all of this frustration leaves me feeling detached. (*Looks at computer, notices something on the screen.*) Oh, he's online. (*Types.*) Chat request. “Hey. So, we doing something today?” ...Oh... “Why not?” ... “Well, what are you doing now?” ...Your girlfriend is there? ~sigh~ You'll call me? “Okay.” Yeah, right. “Good-bye.” (*Stands away from the computer. He is seriously detached.*)

It was dreadful... nauseating... (*The phone rings. He picks it up.*) “Hello. What's up? Me? Well, I can't wait to go back to school. I've got some classes that I am much looking forward to. I just wish that the summer would be over with already. This whole season has been nothing but a sullen mess. I've also written three stories in two weeks. It's pretty amazing, pretty soon I'll have nothing else to write about because my jerk-friends don't know what the hell they're doing.

“Do you know how many times I've sat on my ass waiting for people's phone calls? I've just about had it, I'm ready to rip the Goddamn thing outta the socket... (*Takes off hat.*) I guess this is why parents and other grown adults don't have many friends...”

(*Slams phone down. Picks it up and slams it down again. And again. Angrily rips phone off the desk and smashes it into the wall.*)

That was the past. Smashed to pieces. I had so much to talk about, so much to wonder, so many questions to ask. Now I stand here with the answers to the questions that I once asked. But are they the right answers? Did I even ask the right questions?

Do I pine anymore? Do I long for mutual love anymore? No, because I gave up looking for it.

Am I insecure with my sexuality? No, because I've minimized it, shed it.

I don't wonder if I'm going to make it as a psychologist, because here I am.

But will I be here for the rest of my life?

Do I pine for the answers to God? No, because everyone else seems to know it. Because my science rules God out of the equation. The simplest explanation is probably the truth. (*Goes to drawer and pulls out a small bubble bottle.*) Quantum mechanics. (*Opens bottle and fumbles for wand.*) Probability. (*Indicates the surrounding space.*) The great nothingness; the void, the vacuum. (*Holds the wand up to his face.*) Existence precedes essence. This is where my magic lies. We are but a bubble of existence; something out of nothing. (*Blows one, single bubble.*) It's all very logical. Logic killed God. (*The bubble pops.*)

There might have been countless bubbles; big bangs and big crunches; to me, the universe is nothing but a lotus flower that no one notices while it opens and closes.

What happened to my humanity? I was once naive. I used to look up at the night sky and see the different, colored stars. Life had beauty, inspiration and wonder. I used to find it in the classic authors; Homer, Virgil, and Dante, and on the other side of the world was Lao-Tzu, Chang-Tzu, and the brothers of Chan Mountain. I used to feel at ease with nature, now I'm aware of my separation from it. Alienation. War. Instant gratification. I'm no longer a child; I'm a modern. I'm nothing but a vessel of ideas; unfulfilled dreams.

Is there a way out? Is there any judgment?

(*He goes downstage, closer to the audience, intimately.*) And the worse part is that—in this universe of finite laws for finite people—I'm afraid that I'm not alone.

Humanity will not meet an end in a grand Judgment Day, nor will we be extinguished by

another Ice Age, nor will we be shattered by an asteroid, nor will we be blasted by nuclear fire; no apocalypse, no sudden death. We will live to see each of our dying days, we will die knowing that none of our dreams were ever fully realized. Compromises on our lives will be made, and the reality of the prevailing attitudes will hold us back from truly making ourselves. We will end not with the child-like image of our dreams, instead we will disintegrate from the imposed image as others have perceived us.

(In an extremely sustained retreat, he moves downstage.) Eventually, all action, within given time, will sink into nothingness; *nihil sub sole novum*, and all individuals will eventually alienate from each other, for they will become jaded by disappointment, and the lack of harmony, the lack of effort, the lack of vitality will further drain each others' harmony, effort, and vitality, and—like a perpetually falling teardrop—we will evaporate before we hit any surface. The lack of passion and substance in our empty lives will perpetuate alienation from each other, and the human species will simply cease to exist because love is made cliché and devoid of all meaning; everyone will eventually cease all forms of love, and no one will be born ever again.

(Pause. He cries while standing, pressing against the desk. In his weeping, he presses against the desk, which moves it toward the wall, eventually blocking the door. He sits back into his chair.)

(Something occurs to him. He starts laughing quietly, eventually the crying turns into grand laughter. He gets up and retrieves the dictionary from his bookcase, looks up a word. Reads.) Elysium! Noun; from the Greek, *Elyision*. (1) the abode of the good after death in classical mythology.

(2) paradise!

(He tosses the dictionary away.) This is an asylum!? This is where Elysium went when modern life moved in and labeled the soul sick! Psychology is supposed to be the study of the soul!? Psychiatry is a medicine!? Since when does the material affect the immaterial? It's a faulty art!

Modern Psychology has made me into a madman, truly. It's because I go to my patients and tell them "Wake up you fucking animals! Tear your heart out and look! Is it alive!? Tell me how you feel about it!?" *(Long Pause.)*

Silence? That's all you have to say?

There is a lot of silence these days. Seneca once said that silence is learned by many misfortunes. No wonder we're so fucked up in our heads. There's no change!

There's a voice that cries out for change, and we haven't been listening to it!

At least, I haven't been listening to it. And now I'm stuck!

I'm stuck! *(He topples the chair.)*

Have you been listening? It's your turn to listen now! You've been talking endlessly, that's all we do is talk. We're talking heads. There's nothing gratifying about watching people talk themselves to death, is there? And I'm not talking about listening to me. You don't have to listen to me, I'm the fucking psychologist! I'm the one who's been listening to you! And now you have a chance! No it's your turn to listen before it's too late! Listen to yourselves! Listen to the voice inside of you. Not out of you. Inside you! Not out of you!

Learn from my mistake. I thought I was a lighthouse to you; I'm sorry, I'm not a bright source of inspiration, full of wondrous knowledge to inspire you along with your life. I'm sorry, I am a martyr! I suffer and I die. That is who I am. Now you know why. Now you know why my life is stuck.

Now I know why my life is stuck. I had a choice years ago, and I didn't even choose. I just passively took whatever was given to me.

You see, when I graduated high school, I, like so many of my fellow graduates, suffered from some form of despair, whether it was because I just got out of an abusive relationship or I was an abusive person. And psychology was my remedy. I used psychology to heal myself at

that time. But instead of moving on, instead of dreaming aloud, I stayed in one place; I ended up sticking with it. But I didn't need to be stuck! I had a feeling a long time ago, and I ignored it. Now I feel it again! We feel it right here! (*Indicating the heart.*) And the more we feel this clenching, then we are one step closer into a grave—

—Not a physical grave, oh no, heart attacks, common as they are, are not to be feared. What you should fear is being stuck in a grave of an unfulfilled life!

Indecisiveness! Restlessness! Depression! Melancholy! Missing something so desperately and you don't know what it is! These are all classic signs of a soul crying out for change!!!

The soul does not eat or sleep—as the body does—so the soul can never be completely gratified! Only the body is gratified!

Your soul is distinguishable from all other souls because you can be forever changing, ever dynamic! Ever pursuing a dream, fondly growing from memory, active and excited in each moment! Each moment!!! And once you lose the moment!

As I had... for five years...

(*Goes to the blank canvas.*) This is the *tabula rasa*; the blank slate. We start off this way, and we may end this way; *nihil sub sole novum*. (*He moves downstage to the audience.*) But does nothing stop you from painting it? *ein Herz und eine Seele sein*; (*He uprights his chair.*) be of one heart and mind. And when your soul cries out, you can paint another layer. And again and again. (*He brings his chair next to the canvas.*) The canvas will always be there, since nothing is eternal.

You might say that making something out of nothing is tricky. (*He goes to his briefcase and pulls out an unseen razor blade and tosses the rest of the plastic over the desk onto the floor.*) But maybe it'll get easy once you get into the habit.

(*He goes back to the canvas.*) Perhaps as you acquire the paints and pigments of your liking, you may trade with your companions and discover new colors. Perhaps you may paint dreams unique only to you, and inspiring to everyone else. (*He cuts his left wrist.*) And the cry of the soul is the motion of the paintbrush.

(*He paints his blood onto the canvas.*) The cry of the soul. (*He is physically ebbing. The lights are slowly dimming.*)

The cry ... of the soul ... (*He goes to his chair, sits, and turns around to face the canvas; the audience can no longer see him. The only light is a soft spot on the freshly painted canvas. The light stays on. There is no curtain call.*)