

SANITY

© Cary E. Cook 2000

CAST: BOB: man age 20 - 40
DOCTOR: age 40 - 60, always calm & composed until page 24

SET: A Psychiatrist's office.
Desk, comfortable chair, table with coffee maker

AT [DOCTOR is sitting at his/her desk, doing paper work.]

RISE: [BOB, the patient, enters, stops and looks at the audience, slightly surprised.]

DOCTOR

Hi Bob. Be with you in a minute. Have a cup of coffee.

[BOB is totally aware of all audience reaction. Somewhat worried, BOB walks to the coffee stand and picks up the transparent pot from the coffee maker.]

DOCTOR

Gotta get this AMA report in the mail today.

[BOB and the audience can see that the coffee pot is empty.
He lowers it to his side while looking at the audience.]

DOCTOR

Bob! You're spilling it! The coffee; you're spilling it.

BOB

Oh! Sorry.

[BOB picks up a styrofoam cup and pours some non-existent coffee into it, then puts the pot back down on the coffee maker. He sniffs the cup, walks to the patient chair, and sits as DOCTOR finishes his lines

DOCTOR

Anyway, I would have had it ready a week ago, but they changed some of the procedures, and didn't make it clear. They're about as efficient as the IRS. So how's the week been?

BOB

'Bout the same.

DOCTOR

Any more episodes?

BOB

Aren't you gonna turn the recorder on first?

DOCTOR

Oh. Okay. [Turns on a tape recorder] You in a hurry?

BOB

No, but uh... I can tell right now it's gonna get relevant quick.

DOCTOR

Bob Johnson, session, uh... seven. So... tell me about your week.

BOB

[Deep breath] I had one episode on Saturday and two on Wednesday. The rest has been pretty straight... till now.

DOCTOR

Now? You mean today?

BOB

I mean *right* now.

DOCTOR

You're having one *right now*?

BOB

Yeah.

DOCTOR

Bad one?

BOB

Really vivid.

DOCTOR

What can you tell me about it?

BOB

It's like I'm on this stage,
and the whole office is like a theater.

DOCTOR

Movie theater?

BOB

No. More like a play.

DOCTOR

Describe it.

[Bob is about to describe the theater. His lines must be modified so as to accurately represent the theater at the time of the play.]

BOB

Bright lights all over the place. Furniture looks cheesy. I can't even smell the coffee. The walls are totally gone. People looking right thru 'em.

DOCTOR

You have the feeling people are watching you?

BOB

Yeah.

DOCTOR

A lot of people?

BOB

About _____.

DOCTOR

So you can see them?

BOB

Yeah.

DOCTOR

Do you recognize any of them?

BOB

No.

DOCTOR

Take a close look. Are your parents there?

BOB

No.

DOCTOR

How about policemen, judges?

BOB

No.

DOCTOR

Authority figures of any kind?

BOB

No, just a bunch of ordinary looking people.

DOCTOR

Are any of them trying to communicate with you?

BOB

No, just watching.

DOCTOR

Why do you think they're watching you?

BOB

I don't know. They seem to be waiting for something.

DOCTOR

What?

BOB

How should I know?

DOCTOR

Concentrate. What are the people waiting for?

BOB

I think they want some kind of ... punch line.

[If audience laughs] Yeah, that was it. They were definitely waiting for a punch line.

DOCTOR

Why do you think they want[ed] a punch line?

BOB

They seem to want it to be a comedy.

DOCTOR

What?

BOB

The play.

DOCTOR

Oh... so you feel like you're in a play. Am I in it?

BOB

Yeah.

DOCTOR

What's my role?

BOB

You play a damn psychiatrist!
What the hell do you think your role is?

DOCTOR

Oh, of course. Sorry. Now, you said something I find very interesting. You said "they want it to be a comedy". Why do they want it to be a comedy?

BOB

That's a good question. That's a damn good question.
I don't know.

DOCTOR

Do you feel that they wouldn't accept you as a serious uh ... character?

BOB

They might have a bit of a problem with it.

DOCTOR

Why?

BOB

I don't know.

DOCTOR

Do you feel like people don't take you seriously?

BOB

I don't think that's it.

Actually I don't think it has much to do with me.

DOCTOR

What does it have to do with?

BOB

Situation I guess. I think they figure something like this is supposed to be funny.

DOCTOR

Are you fully clothed?

BOB

Yes I'm fully clothed!

DOCTOR

But you feel like you're an object for other people's entertainment.

BOB

Yeah, I guess that's what it's trying to tell me.

DOCTOR

"Trying to tell you"? So you think your hallucination is trying to tell you something?

BOB

Well isn't that how you're supposed to interpret these things?

DOCTOR

That's a bit Jungian, ... but maybe. Let's pursue it. What do you think they want?

BOB

They seem to want to be entertained.

DOCTOR

Do you think it's telling you that in order to have value as a person, you have to entertain other people.

BOB

Could be.

DOCTOR

If that's what it's saying, do you agree with it?

BOB

[pause] No. I don't have to take that.

DOCTOR

Very good. Now. Tell that to your illusion.

BOB

You mean...

DOCTOR

Tell your illusion that your self esteem is not in any way dependent on its approval.

BOB

You hear that? I do not need your approval.

[*****Next line depends on audience reaction.*****]

What do you do when your illusion just stares at you?
What do you do when your illusion laughs at you?

DOCTOR

I think in this case the best strategy would be to ignore it.

BOB

Right. [Focuses attention on Doctor]

DOCTOR

These illusions of yours are not threatening;
they're just distracting. Right?

BOB

Right.

DOCTOR

If you don't allow them to distract you,
that's half the battle.

BOB

Right.

DOCTOR

All that remains is to determine what causes them,
and eliminate the cause.

BOB

Right.

DOCTOR

Now it seems to me that these illusions don't represent any
particular persons or parts of your psyche, but the public in
general. Is that reasonable?

BOB

Right.

DOCTOR

So the question is, why would your mind create the illusion of the public peeking into your private life and laughing at you?

BOB

Right, right, right, right.

DOCTOR

When the episodes began, were there any changes in your life which might be considered embarrassing?

BOB

Uh... you know actually they hardly ever laugh. They just kinda hang around. This is the first time with any serious laughing.

DOCTOR

Did you not say that you stopped dating shortly before the episodes began?

BOB

That depends on how you define date

DOCTOR

I'd like to focus specifically on sexual activity.

[BOB responds to audience reaction or lack of it.]

DOCTOR

Bob?

BOB

What?

DOCTOR

Does that subject make you ...

BOB

No! Why should it? [to audience] I'm a normal guy.

DOCTOR

Bob. ... I'm over here.
Is it fair to say that your sexual activity suffered a sharp decline right about the time the episodes began?

BOB

Well wouldn't yours if you had spectators popping out of the wall paper?

DOCTOR

I'm wondering if you might be mixing up cause and effect. It's not uncommon for male potency to decline even as early as one's twenties.

BOB

Hey, I can tell you flat out, you are on the wrong track. I have no problems in that area. Besides, who made you the judge of sexual normalcy? A lot of people think it's immoral to be sticking it all over the place.

DOCTOR

Morality and normalcy are two separate issues, Bob. Let's try not to confuse categories. Psychotherapy is only qualified to speak on normalcy.

BOB

Yeah well, I'm not so sure normalcy is always the best way to go.

DOCTOR

Quite correct. Many people find it terribly restrictive.

BOB

Goddamnit! How come you guys always think restrictive is bad? Maybe some restrictions are good for society.

DOCTOR

What's good for society is once again a moral issue, Bob. Psychotherapy deals with individuals.

BOB

Well, maybe individuals would be better off with more restrictions.

DOCTOR

Some are. Some people can only be comfortable in a restrictive environment ... especially people of a religious temperament.

BOB

No, I can see where this is going.
This has nothing to do with my conversion.

DOCTOR

So you've stated. But you also said that the episodes began shortly after you converted to Christianity.

[pause. BOB scans the audience.]

DOCTOR

What's going on?

BOB

Probably nothing. It just seemed like the audience tensed up when you said Christianity.

DOCTOR

Interesting. And why would they do that?

BOB

Let's not play the 'why' game, okay.
I don't know why other people do things.

DOCTOR

That's not the question, Bob. The question is why your mind would create the illusion of people doing certain things. If the mention of Christianity causes tension in your illusion, one might ask if it also causes tension in you.

BOB

Yes, it does. I've already told you that.

DOCTOR

So let's put things in perspective. You turn Christian; you stop dating; you start having hallucinations of people watching you.

BOB

That's a bit oversimplified.

DOCTOR

But essentially correct, right? [pause] Tell me, Bob, do you think sex outside of marriage is immoral?

BOB

Well, the Bible says...

DOCTOR

Bob, that's not the question. I asked you what you think.

BOB

I don't see anything particularly wrong with it, as long as you use protection ... and it's not violating some contractual agreement.

DOCTOR

Then we've apparently identified the source of the tension.

BOB

'The' source? Goddamn, you shrinks oversimplify things. Soon as you trace it to sex, you think that's the core issue. Okay, I disagree with the Bible on sexual restrictions, but it's not the main issue. I have a lot of problems with Christianity.

DOCTOR

For instance?

BOB

I don't really feel comfortable talking about that.

DOCTOR

Maybe you would feel more comfortable with a Christian psychotherapist.

BOB

Yes frankly, I would,
but unfortunately they referred me to you.

DOCTOR

How 'bout that. And why did they refer you to me?

BOB

Damned if I know.

DOCTOR

Quite simply because I'm the best.

BOB

Best in the area for my particular problem is what they said.

DOCTOR

Because they couldn't deal with your particular problem,
because their religious bias hampered their objectivity.

BOB

And I suppose your anti-religious bias is more objective.

DOCTOR

I'm not anti-religious at all. I highly approve of religion.
It works very well for a lot of people.

BOB

"Works". You mean it helps them walk around looking normal.

DOCTOR

In most cases.

BOB

Any religion, long as it works?

DOCTOR

Different strokes...

BOB

For different morons.

DOCTOR

I'm not the one making value judgments here, Bob.

BOB

Do you make any judgments at all?
Like what's true and what's false?

DOCTOR

What works is true; what doesn't work is false. That is all we know in psychotherapy, and all we need to know.

BOB

So truth is whatever bullshit gets the desired results.

DOCTOR

[sighs] Religions provide structures whereby experience can be filtered and interpreted to fit into a time honored system. Usually I encourage patients to stay in whatever religion they walk in with. In your case, however, religion - at least the one you've chosen - doesn't seem to be working for you. And we're going to have to address that.

BOB

Yeah, I know, but not today.

DOCTOR

We can take ten more sessions, or do it now. It's your dime.

BOB

Not right now, okay.

DOCTOR

As you wish, but I assure you, I'm quite competent to deal with religious problems. [pause] Oh! I get it. It's not me at all is it? It's your audience. So you feel that they would disapprove. Does their approval actually matter that much? ... What are they? ... Angels?

BOB

I don't know what they are, Goddamn it! That's the problem! Angels, ghosts, Martians? I'm not sure *they* even know what they are.

DOCTOR

Demons?

BOB

No, they're not demons.

DOCTOR

How do you know?

BOB

I commanded 'em to depart in the name of Jesus Christ,
and it didn't work.

DOCTOR

Oh ... of course.

BOB

Well, let me clarify that. I commanded 'em to depart *if* they
were demons, or harmful spirits, or whatever.

DOCTOR

Oh. So then if they don't depart,
you figure they're okay with Jesus.

BOB

Yeah.

DOCTOR

But you don't feel comfortable talking about Christianity
in front of them?

BOB

Well look; try to understand this, Doc. I'm not your normal
Christian, okay. I mean, I read the Bible - study the hell
out of it, but I don't go to church. I can't stand church
people.

DOCTOR

Not hard to understand.

BOB

Yeah but, it's not the hypocrisy. Everybody automatically thinks that, but it's not. I can cross off the hypocrites. It's the *real* ones that jack my jaws. It's all these really nice friendly people that are just totally full of shit up to their eyes. You ever watch Christian television? That's not just lunatic fringe. They're all off in that direction, with the gay bashing and the no abortion or evolution or saying fuck. [looks at audience] Do you feel that? Do you feel the vibes they're giving me?

[DOCTOR shrugs 'No']

I'm not even totally sure I'm a Christian at all. There's a lot of it I don't agree with. Know what I mean? And I've found that when I start talking real in front of these ... spectators, they get uptight about it. Like sometimes they laugh. But even though they laugh, I can tell they're still nervous about what I'm saying. It's like they can only handle stuff they're used to, and if you cross the line, they don't know what to do with you. Like right now I can tell I'm making them nervous. They thought they knew what was going on, but now they're not sure.

DOCTOR

What happens if they get nervous?

BOB

I don't know. I've been afraid to find out. Maybe there's angel critics out there, and they tell God, and I get a bad review.

DOCTOR

So you're afraid God won't like you if you say what you really think?

BOB

Yes! Isn't everybody? I can barely get away with it in private. But in front of an audience?

DOCTOR

You actually think God sent them here to intimidate you?

BOB

Maybe.

DOCTOR

So the same God who created you doesn't want you saying what you really think?

BOB

Not when it's complaintive. There's lots of stuff in the Bible about how God gets pissed if people complain. And it says you're supposed to praise him all the time, and all that horse shit, whether you mean it or not. You've read that stuff, haven't you?

DOCTOR

I'm familiar with it.

BOB

And it makes me wonder what kind of people he's got working for him, you know? Like in the book of Revelation there's these weird looking guys that stand around his throne going 'holy holy holy' all the time day and night round the clock. And I'm wondering, is that all these guys do, or they shift workers, or what? And why are they doing it? Do they *like* doing that? Are they getting paid? Or are they afraid *not* to do it? And what kind of a God would even *want* people doing that kind of shit? I mean if you were the Supreme Being, would you want people doing stuff like that? This guy sounds more like a petty tyrant on an ego trip.

DOCTOR

Allright! Now, do you feel better?

BOB

I'm not done yet. The part I hate the most is the eternal damnation shit. Not that I'm opposed to punishment for doing bad stuff. I'd really like to see every son of a bitch get exactly what they deserve, but it's the eternal part that jacks me. Crimes are finite, Goddamnit. They deserve finite punishment. I believe in justice. How can I possibly believe that shit is just? If God wanted me to think like that, why did he create me with a concept of justice that can't possibly accept it?

[looks at Doctor. beat. DOCTOR shrugs.]

And even on the other end, heaven's just as crazy. Jesus wipes out the law. *Oh God no!* You can't say that! He *fulfills* the law; that's totally different. I get this vision of the marriage supper of the Lamb - biggest social event of human history, Jesus at the head table of head tables, Moses on his right, Jeff Dahmer on his left, and everybody's singing Jolly Good Fellow, and I'm choking on some piece of food 'cause I didn't wait to say grace, and nobody'll give me a Heimlich, 'cause nothing bad happens in glorified bodies. Eat all you want, never shit, nobody dies. Everybody's either a king or a priest. Well let me ask you something. If everybody's a ruler, who washes the dishes? Huh? Paper plates? Disposable gold plates? Then somebody has to take out the trash. Who takes out the trash? Huh? *Who takes out the trash?*

DOCTOR

Bob!

BOB

[pause] Yes. [Not said as a response to the previous line]

DOCTOR

Yes what?

BOB

I *do* feel better.

DOCTOR

[pause] I'd say we've made some progress, wouldn't you?

BOB

Yeah. Something just got unblocked.

DOCTOR

Psychological constipation. You just took a dump.

BOB

I needed it. Hey, this is good. What's next?

DOCTOR

Here's how I see it. You're attracted to Christianity ... for whatever reason, that's not important. The important part is, you think you're going to be judged by God. But you're not sure about this God. He doesn't appear to be just. This can put tremendous stress on the mind. So you created another judge in your mind - more like a jury - a jury of ordinary people - a jury of your peers. Does that make sense?

BOB

Yeah. Yeah, you got it, Doc!
You nailed it right on the head!

DOCTOR

But it didn't work.

BOB

It didn't?

DOCTOR

No. This imaginary jury doesn't seem to be vindicating you either. They just stare at you waiting for something.

BOB

What?

DOCTOR

You tell me.

BOB

More evidence?

DOCTOR

What evidence?

BOB

I don't know. Goddamn. I been doing everything right.
[pause] No, that can't be it.

DOCTOR

What can't be it?

BOB

The profanity. That's nothing.

DOCTOR

You sure?

BOB

Yes I'm sure. First thing I did when I turned Christian was quit cussing. It lasted a few months. I damn near exploded. If God doesn't want me saying Goddamn, he can damn well give me a nervous system that doesn't need to be saying Goddamn all the time, Goddamnit!

DOCTOR

Well then back to the question.
What evidence are they waiting for?

BOB

I'm out of ideas.

DOCTOR

Then perhaps it's time to re-examine our premises. These episodes appear to be getting worse. Now they even laugh at you. Yet you continue to believe there's some kind of message in this. Why must there be a message?

BOB

It's the only thing that would make sense.
I've got to make sense of this!

DOCTOR

Bob, what if the message is that you shouldn't care so much what other people think? Would that make sense?

BOB

Hmm... Maybe. But wait. What does that leave me with?
If not the jury, then I'm back to God.

DOCTOR

Bob, I've told you that I hardly ever challenge a person's religion. But it should be obvious that you don't handle Christianity well at all. You're not the Christian type. You can see that, can't you?

BOB

Yeah, I know.

DOCTOR

Have you considered Judaism?

BOB

Of course I've considered it. Why do you think most Jews are atheists? They can't handle it either. The ones that try end up bobbing up and down in front of a wall.

DOCTOR

Are you sure you really need a father figure?

BOB

No, I don't need a Goddamn father figure! I don't have some deep psychological need to see my dear departed whatever. I need sense is what I need, damnit!

DOCTOR

Well, Buddhism has a lot to offer.

BOB

Yeah, right. Everything is nothing, but it still looks like something cause you're too stupid to see it, so you meditate for decades, so you can see how nothing it is, and that's nirvana, which is better quality nothing, which is totally irrational, but that's nothing too. So why don't they just call it nihilism?

DOCTOR

Then it looks like you're S O L with religion, Bob. Religious people think what they're told. You think what appears rational. You also insist on a common sense view of justice, and you won't be bullied out of it. Gods don't like that. It looks like you're going to have to confront reality head on.

BOB

What's that mean?

DOCTOR

No crutches. No illusions. No faith colored glasses. You're going to have to confront the possibility that the core of your problem may not be an imaginary audience at all, but an imaginary God.

BOB

Well how do you do it without God?
What do you think the meaning of life is?

DOCTOR

Why must it even have one?

BOB

Do you think human life evolved by chance?

DOCTOR

Maybe. Who knows?

BOB

But how do you work it out so it's rationally consistent?

DOCTOR

Consistency is not as they say, "the hobgoblin of small minds". On the contrary, it is the bane of bloated minds, too full of information to process it, and very much in need of shrinking.

BOB

That doesn't answer the question.

DOCTOR

Why should you care?

BOB

Don't you?

DOCTOR

Why should I? If the question can't be answered, why care?

BOB

Do you care about *anything*?

DOCTOR

Of course. I like pleasure; I dislike displeasure.

BOB

Is that all?

DOCTOR

What else do I need?

BOB

Then what do you...? I mean what...? How do you...?

DOCTOR

Bob, look what you're doing. You're searching all over the place for a question. That's backwards. One searches for answers, not questions. And if answers are not available, there is no reason for questions. Make sense?

BOB

[pause. BOB gapes.] But...

DOCTOR

[hypnotic] But if you must have a question, try this one. Why question?

[BOB spaces out.]

It is truly amazing how little the human mind actually needs once you stop thinking about it.

BOB

[pause. BOB recovers just enough to ask.] So ... what's ... the answer?

DOCTOR

There is no answer.

BOB

Nothing?

DOCTOR

[spacey] Call it whatever you like. It doesn't matter.

BOB

[pause] No! It matters! The audience is still there, just as clear as ever. It matters *why*.

[DOCTOR gets up and pours a cup of imaginary coffee.]

DOCTOR

I'm going to be straight with you, Bob. You're in a very dangerous state of mind. On one hand you're committed to what you call reality, but you're looking for it in illusion. Those who succeed in finding reality in illusion are what we in the profession call ... fruitcakes. Most of them are locked away.

BOB

What do *you* care?

[DOCTOR leans back on front of desk]

DOCTOR

Quite simply because you're a patient. If you flip out, I can't use you as a reference. That would displease me. So pay attention. You are sitting in a psychiatrist's office in the real world. Your goal is to get your head on straight. Anything that doesn't jibe with this obvious reality is illusion. If you can't see that, there's not a shrink in the world who can keep you out of the booby hatch.

[Points to cup.] What's this?

BOB

Coffee cup.

DOCTOR

Good. What's this?

BOB

A desk.

DOCTOR

And that?

BOB

A chair.

DOCTOR

What's that on the wall? [pause]

Bob, tell me what you see on the wall. [pause]

[lifts Bob by the arm and faces him at audience.]

What do you see, Bob?

BOB

Bunch of people looking at me.

DOCTOR

On the wall!

BOB

There is no wall.

DOCTOR

Fine. Walk thru it! *Walk thru it, Bob!* Either walk thru the wall, or sit down in the real world, and smell the coffee.

[BOB at edge of stage stares into faces of closest audience members, then walks back to the chair and plops down.]

DOCTOR

Welcome to reality. [sits.]

BOB

[pause] You know why I didn't do it? I looked into their eyes. They don't know what's going on any more than I do. Their world is no better than this one.

DOCTOR

Congratulations. It truly does not matter.

[Fade to near black as BOB stares at the audience.]

BOB

No! Wait! [jumps out of chair.]

[Lights up quickly.]

Goddamnit! I will not end it like this! I will not live in this Goddamn crock of nothing! That's why I turned Christian in the first place - tried to anyway. But I won't live in bullshit either! What do we have to do? Pretend to believe some shit headed religion just to keep the nothing from swallowing our ass?

You hear [imperative] me, Creator. I know you're out there. I choose to bet my soul that you are righteous. Fuck the odds! If you are, give me what I deserve. If you're not, *terminate my ass!*

[The tone of Bob's next line depends on audience reaction or lack of it.]

I'm done with it.

[BOB storms out.]

[DOCTOR chuckles, picks up the recorder.]

DOCTOR

Bob Johnson, therapy concluded, seven sessions.

[Clicks off recorder & puts it down. Picks up his coffee cup.]

Case closed. Mission accomplished.

[Stands, walks to front of the desk & leans back on it.]

Okay, so I enjoy a good mind fuck.

[Puts the cup down on the desk upside down. Looks at audience]

That doesn't mean I can't be righteous if you give me enough time.

[Looks at control booth.]

Blackout.

[Abrupt blackout.]