

ART IN HEAVEN

A Stage Play

by

Gary Kott

CHARACTER:

ARTHUR, the grand observer, ancient looking, rigorously non-judgmental, except for today.

SETTING:

A cloud; way, way up there.

ACT ONE:

Morning.

ACT TWO:

Afternoon, same day.

ACT THREE:

One month later.

ACT ONE

The arriving audience sees thirty bright yellow ledgers illuminated by individual lamps and displayed on black racks. The yellow ledgers are lined in blue with hand-lettered entries and pencil sketches of faces in the upper left corner. In front of the racks of ledgers is a hodgepodge of odds-and-ends; a puff basketball hoop, a video game console, an easel, found-object airplanes, power tools. When the audience is seated a stage light goes up. Arthur, dressed in a work coverall, appears and heads hopefully to a chute with a sign that says, "Repair Shop" and a disappointing, aging attachment, "Out of Service." He mutters to himself.

ARTHUR

God, fuck it. Fucking Repair Shop. Still on the fritz. It's been so freaking long. What the hell are you doing down there? You're a goddamned Repair Shop, you should be able to repair yourself. Meanwhile, the earth is going crazy. People are in such pain. We're supposed to be helping them. But I can't -- I don't know how to fix anyone. That's your job. Fucking Repair Shop. There I go again. I'm using language I never used in my life. F-bombs. It's not like me. I get phone calls from the Repair Shop. They know I'm upset about the situation. They say, "Well, there's nothing we can do about it, we know you're frustrated, but find some distractions, take your mind off things." Distractions? They mean band-aids. Short-term relief. I find a distraction, it takes my mind off of things for a bit. Then I look at my ledgers and I think about the people we're supposed to be helping, and I start to get so fucking angry.

To the Repair Shop.

Hey, down there, get it together. I have a ton of new ledgers here. What the hell am I supposed to tell them?

Arthur paces uncomfortably as he addresses the new ledgers.

As you might have sensed, goofing off does not come naturally to me. Before the Repair Shop broke down I was what you would call a black-belt workaholic. Running here. Running there. Day night. Night day. Nonstop. My motto was, "If you don't show up Saturday, don't bother to show up Sunday." No coffee breaks. No days off. Certainly, no vacations. Then the Repair Shop goes kaput. Look at me. After all these years, Arthur, Observation Specialist, now Executive Goof Off.

He takes an awkward shot of puff basketball.

The Repair Shop recommended this distraction for me. Tossing spongy balls into this basketball contraption. The jump shot. The dunk shot. The hook shot. Doesn't do anything for me.

He sits at his desk, and zeros in on the audience.

Let's say you need a distraction, but you don't have a spongy ball. The Repair Shop says not to worry.

He pulls a wastebasket from under his desk.

This is a tried and true distraction, popular in offices. You're at your desk troubled about something. A deadline. The boss. Something at home, kids, mortgage, whatever. Just slide out your wastebasket, crumple up a ball of paper, toss it in.

He demonstrates successfully, then adds a side note.

This is a true story. There was a scientific study done on tossing crumpled paper balls into wastebaskets. It was financed by -- you can look this up -- a grant from the United States National Science Foundation. Researchers discovered that there are therapeutic advantages in writing down your worries on a sheet of paper, crumpling the paper into a ball, and tossing your worries into a wastebasket. Example.

He writes on a sheet of paper.

You're worried about your stock portfolio. The Fed rate's all over the place. This is a disaster. Your net worth isn't anywhere near where it should be.

He crumples the paper into a ball and tosses it into the wastebasket.

According to scientists you're not worried any more even though you're going broke. Whew.

Arthur considers.

Hmm, maybe I should try that.

He writes.

The Repair Shop is a fucking asshole. It breaks down and can't fix itself. Meanwhile, people with serious problems are waiting for help. But they won't get help because the Repair Shop is broken. Fucking assholes.

He crumples the paper into a ball and tosses it into the wastebasket. He waits for relief that doesn't come.

Nothing. Three cheers for the National Science Foundation. Taxpayer money well spent.

A phone rings, the black one next to a Gold Phone.

It's the Repair Shop. I better cool my temper. A good piece of wisdom, "You never have to apologize for what you say, only for the way you say it."

Arthur answers it in feigned good cheer.

Art in heaven. Hey, what's up? Another volcano in Hawaii. Ooo, that sounds bad. The Nature Specialists must be going nuts. Nothing they can do until you guys are back in business. Any progress? I have all these ledgers up here. Broken people that need to be fixed. Yes, I'm finding distractions. Today? Tossing balls of paper into a wastebasket. Trying not to think of -- okay, I won't mention them again. As long as I know

you're working hard to -- okay, I won't mention that either. Sure. Talk to you later.

Exasperated, Arthur hangs up. He collects himself then points to the telephones.

The black telephone connects me with the other Specialists. Nature Specialist. Health Specialist. Repair Specialist. The Gold Phone? That's the big one. Guess who.

He removes a flow chart from under his desk.

Visual aid.

He shows the flow chart and points to various boxes.

Box number one at the top of the flow chart. Let's just call that one Gold Phone. Avoid reference to He, She, or It. Any religion, cult, or spiritual self-help group. Follow the arrow down to box number two, Observation Specialist. That's me, Arthur. Pretty high up the food chain but not alone. Follow the arrows across you'll see many boxes on my equal level. Nature Specialist. Life Planning Specialist. Governments Specialist. Governments. Plural. Every country included. Underneath all of us is a huge box. Repair Shop. That's where we send people, places, and things to be fixed. I deal only with people.

Arthur points to the ledgers, sweeps across them and the audience.

Every human being that ever walked on earth. I observed them all.

He explains as he moves to the Repair Shop sign.

I was amazingly good at my job. I observed people, uncovered their fears and their flaws, recorded them on yellow ledgers, reviewed them carefully then brought them over to this chute. Whoosh. Off they'd go to the Repair Shop three clouds down. Here's what my job was not. Not to judge. Not to analyze. Not to repair.

He sits at his desk.

The question comes up. "While you're observing flawed people why don't you fix them?" Brutal truth. I wouldn't know where to begin. I'm very good at spotting problems with people, I haven't a clue how to solve them. I'm like the guy in the service department of a car dealership. I can hear the knocking engine, I can write it down, but fix it? Nope. I would send that car straight to a master mechanic. Our Repair Shop is filled with master mechanics. Unfortunately, they're --

The black telephone rings, Arthur answers.

Art in Heaven. Good news? Great news! Yes, I'm holding onto my seat. A new cell-phone app. With a new distraction. Way better than tossing crumpled paper into a wastebasket. PaperBall Toss. Worries vanish with every throw. This is the great news you called me about? No, I don't think it will take my mind off of anything. Especially how slow you're moving in fixing the Repair Shop. I'm sorry you're getting sick of hearing this. I don't appreciate you calling me ten times a day with new distractions. I'm sorry you think I'm an ingrate. Fix the Repair Shop and I'll be gushingly grateful. No, I'm not going to try PaperBall Toss. Goodbye to you, too.

He hangs up irritated and collects himself as he moves toward center stage.

Art in heaven. Where'd that handle come from? Some of you already guessed.

Arthur pulls a chair over to extreme center downstage.

Fear. The number one annihilator of the human soul. Financial ruin. Cancer. Dentists. Fear of failure. Fear of rejection. Fear of abandonment. I've observed Presidents panicked about not getting re-elected. Dictators terrified of assassination. Fear of hospitals. Fear of germs. Fear of death.

He moves closer.

People try anything and everything to conquer their fears. Therapy. Meditation. Medication. Some turn to prayer. "Now I

lay me down to sleep. I pray the lord my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake. I pray the lord my soul to take." "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. Courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference." Then one day up pops this one. The Lord's Prayer. "Our father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be they name."

He repeats.

Who art in heaven. Art in heaven. I wasn't the one who put it together. Before that prayer I was simply Arthur, Observation Specialist. Then one day at our annual meeting I began to hear it. "Hey, look, it's Art in Heaven." "Yo, Art in Heaven." "Art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." One day my Gold Phone rings. I answer. It's you know who, "Hello, Art in Heaven."

He remembers.

Gold Phone was just checking in. Wanted to know how things were going with the ledgers. I lied and said everything was hunky dory. I didn't get into how badly these people were suffering. There's enough on Gold Phone's plate I figured. What I should have done was yell at the top of my lungs.

Arthur beseeches the gold telephone.

There wasn't supposed to be any human suffering! Everything was supposed to be perfect!

He collects himself.

Maybe I could use a band-aid.

He heads for a display of home-made, found-object airplanes.

Here's one that I chose for myself. Airplanes. Working up here in the clouds I see them zipping by. Jumbo jets zipping to Paris. FedEx planes zipping to deliver packages. I decided to start making them. I didn't have any real airplane parts, so I used junk from a pile of junk. Screwed together with my trusty power tools.

He takes a power screwdriver and revs it.

This airplane has a fuselage made from plumber's pipe. Its nose cone is a water faucet. The propellers are actually fan blades.

Arthur moves toward an easel.

Over there is a distraction I wish worked for me but doesn't. Painting. For whatever reason every time I stand at the easel, I freeze up and can't paint a drop. I've always had a special place in my heart for artists. Over the eons I've observed all the great masters. Caravaggio. Da Vinci. Renoir. Unbelievably talented, but screwy? You wouldn't believe the bizarre things that rolled around in their noggins. The museums? They might have their artwork. But I have their ledgers.

Arthur goes to his desk.

Here's what it's like being me. Century in century out I'm privy to people's innermost thoughts. Many are interchangeable from one person to another. "Am I earning enough money?" "Are my children happy?" For other people, their innermost thoughts create disturbances. Panic attacks. Obsessions. Phobias. It's been like that since the beginning of time, civilization after civilization. There's a perception that people who live in simple fishing villages are better balanced emotionally. Not true. Fishermen worry, "Does she still love me?" "Have I caught enough fish?"

He moves forward.

I got a kick out of observing a renowned authority on the human psyche speaking at a professional seminar. He said, "Forty years of research on the human mind is now over." His learned colleagues leaned forward with bated breath, expecting strict academic terminology. He surprised them, "My conclusion about people? They're nuts all over the world."

He goes back to his desk.

For me, it's a matter of degree. At what point do I create a ledger for a person and send it to the Repair Shop? Easy formula. I create a ledger when I observe an internal defect that chronically interferes with his or her reasonable happiness.

Arthur gestures to the audience.

Obviously, there are no ledgers for normal, well-adjusted, happy people who have no need for a Repair Shop. In a nutshell, I create ledgers for people that can't overcome their turmoil no matter how hard they try.

Arthur beseeches the Gold Phone.

There wasn't supposed to be any turmoil! Everything was supposed to be perfect!

The black phone rings. Arthur answers it.

Art in Heaven. Any luck? Sheeze. You guys are -- no, I'm not looking for a fight. Video tennis? I didn't try that yet today. Okay, I'll give it a go. Sound advice as always from the Repair Shop.

Exasperated, Arthur hangs up.

I'm tired of wasting my breath on them.

Arthur goes to his video game console.

The Repair Shop absolutely adores this distraction. Video gaming. Twenty-four-seven band-aids. Super Mario Brothers. Guitar Hero. Donkey Kong. Then there are the sports games. Baseball. Bowling. Boxing. And those are just the B's.

Arthur grabs a hand-held device.

My latest band-aid is video tennis. It's me against an animated opponent.

He narrates as he plays.

Power serve. Lob shot. Backhand slice. Ooo, I didn't think she'd get that. This player's good. Maybe I can tire her out. I'll hit ground strokes from the back court until she muffs one out of bounds.

Arthur makes tennis ball sounds as he rallies with the computer player. He grows bored then stops playing the game.

I need a distraction from my distractions.

Arthur sits at his desk.

Some people claim that they need no distractions. That they like to face life head on. Bring it, sucker. I can take whatever you dish out. These people are not aware that I'm silently observing them. Sunday Night Football. Monday Night Football. Thursday Night Football. Slam Dunk Contest. Home Run Derby. For most people, ten minutes watching the evening news is enough to send them racing to their nearest distraction. Don't get me started on the evening news.

He removes a notebook.

Here's a list of distractions for the evening news, all highly recommended by the Repair Shop, mavens of the band-aid.

He reads.

Shopping, in store or on TV. Reading. Dancing. Pets. Gardening. Music. Cooking. Surfing the internet. Poker, canasta, Monopoly. Quilting.

The black telephone rings, Arthur answers.

Art in Heaven. Were your ears burning? I was just reminiscing about some of your best band-aids. I'm sorry. I forgot you hate the term band-aids. I'm not minimizing their psychological complexity. I'm not belittling their effectiveness. You are hyper touchy. Maybe you should send yourself to the Repair Shop. If you could ever get the damn thing fixed. Maybe I am saying you're not trying hard enough. I've got a backlog of ledgers here. People that really, really, really need help. Not to mention the chaos down on earth. The world is going insane. Do you read the news? Megalomaniacs in control of nuclear weapons. Talented celebrities hanging themselves from doorknobs. Children in school massacred by other children. Yes, I do believe you're partly to blame. You've wasted --

Arthur realizes there's nobody on the other end.

They hung up.

He replaces the receiver and can't control his anger.

Bastards. They've completely thrown in the towel. Distractions. Bullshit. Band-aids. Bullshit. A woman is standing on the ledge of a roof. She's in despair and ready to jump off. Here, miss. Play with this spongy ball.

Arthur hurries to the black phone and dials.

Now it's my turn to call them.

He talks into the phone.

Art in Heaven. I have one question and I need an honest answer. How close are you to fixing the Repair Shop? The longer you keep me in limbo, the angrier I become. You're still in the talking phase. You don't even have an idea, let alone a plan. Yet you make it sound like you're working night and day.

He's appalled by what they say next.

You have no intentions of looking at any ledgers again. You have no intentions of helping any of these people. Well, I asked you to be honest and honest you were. For that I am grateful. We have nothing more to say to each other.

He begins to hang up.

Oh. Except for this. Go fuck yourself you fucking piece of worthless fuck.

Arthur slams down the phone. He paces.

No more Repair Shop. Hell. There's always been a Repair Shop.

He stops in front of the ledgers, filled with determination.

Then I guess it's up to me. I, Arthur, will find a way to help you. Even though I never fixed anything in my life. I'm not sure how I'll do it, but I will do it. This is my pledge to you. Your misery is over. You've spent your last sleepless night, you've shed your last tear. You're about to witness the

ultimate miracle. Finally. At long last. *The fix for all human suffering!* Art in Heaven. Ready?

He declares.

Let the healing begin.

Inspired, Arthur exits. The stage lights go down, leaving only the ledgers lit.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The stage lights go up. Arthur enters, still dressed in his work clothes but looking not quite as inspired.

What did I get myself into? Repairing damaged people. By myself. I have to admit I'm a bit nervous. I never thought I'd be in this position.

He pumps himself up.

But I'm ready to have at it.

He addresses the ledgers.

Who wants to go first?

Arthur peruses the racks and selects one.

I should start with an easy one. Build up my confidence.

He takes a ledger off the rack and reads.

Logan plays the bigshot. He takes even the smallest achievement and blows it way out of proportion. In high school he scores a soccer goal and crows about it for a week, even though his team lost in a rout. His teammates and coach grow so disgusted with him he's thrown off the team. Logan's ego continues to hurt him. In his career he's demoted from Vice President to Consultant. His wife divorces him after Logan brags at dinner

parties that the only reason their son was elected class president was because of Dad's brilliant campaign strategy.

Arthur struggles to formulate his first repair, then proclaims.

Egomaniacs, blowhards, irritating to other people, harmful to themselves. But I have something that could help Logan. I observed a man once whose ego had grown so inflated, nobody wanted to be near him. The man's obnoxiousness grew in stages. First elected City Treasurer, then elected City Manager, finally elected Mayor. The man awoke one morning with an insight, "I should enjoy my success. I should breathe it in. Breathe it in deep. But I must always remember to exhale." Years later, when he was elected a very humble Governor, the man passed along that insight to up-and-coming hotshots.

He places the ledger on his desk.

Logan, I'm planting this seed in you. Breathe it in, but don't forget to exhale.

Arthur, pleased with himself, basks in his accomplishment then peruses the ledgers and selects another one.

Let's raise the bar a little. I've been observing this person since the day he was born.

He reads.

Mason is a confused boy. Mason sits at the dinner table and his father smacks him to the floor. The cause for confusion is that Mason's parents create a funny word. Whenever Mason's father hits him, they call it a "Clobber." A year after his father's death, Mason, grown now, visits his mother. She begins recalling her husband's brutal temper, "I know your Dad was mean to you. I know that he yelled at you. But thank god he never hit you." Mason responds, "Mom, you were at the dinner table. You saw him smack me to the floor." Mason's mother reflects. "Oh, that," she says dismissively, "That was just a Clobber."

Again, Arthur struggles for a repair until he's satisfied that he has a good one.

Solution. I observed a man once. A well-respected philosopher. He wrote nineteen books on the human condition, one a Pulitzer Prize winner. In it he included a significant phrase. "Look back but don't stare." It applied to any person that had something extremely unpleasant in their past. A bad marriage. A career embarrassment. A troubled childhood. The philosopher suggested for people not to slam the door on their past but to limit their time rehashing bad memories. "Look back but don't stare." Done correctly, a person can overcome the most unpleasant memory. Even you, Mason.

Arthur, satisfied with his repair, places Mason's ledger victoriously on the desk. However, as he peruses for another ledger his confidence begins to wane. He's now having second thoughts.

Breathe it in but don't forget to exhale. Look back but don't stare. Those aren't solutions they're bumper stickers. Clever sayings that might bring temporary peace that will fade the moment a person's ego or childhood nightmare rears its ugly head again. I can see these bumper stickers on the back of cars, complete with happy smiley faces.

Arthur barks.

I have to come up with solutions that are far more substantial.

He peruses the ledgers.

Now I'm nervous again. Where to start?

He points to a section of ledgers.

This bunch here is drowning in regrets. "I shouldn't have sold that house, it would have been worth a fortune today." "I married the wrong person." "I joined the wrong law firm."

He points to the left.

These are people whose sex lives are out of whack. Gay sex. Straight sex. Trans sex. Too much sex. Too little sex. More sex. *More sex.* No more sex.

He points to the right.

Over there is a cornucopia of people that need help. Compulsive gamblers. Liars. PTSD. Crazy-makers.

He points to the back row of ledgers.

That entire rack is filled with people suffering from a horrendous flaw. The cruel interject. Follow. You're driving down the road enjoying the scenery, beautiful sky, gorgeous field of flowers, when out of the blue you remember yelling unfairly at your children. That's an interject. Out of nowhere an unpleasant thought. Now then, same scenario. You're driving down the road enjoying the scenery when out of the blue you remember yelling unfairly at your children. What follows is a vicious barrage of self-loathing. "I'm a repulsive person. I hate myself. I should drive this car straight into a tree." That, my friends, is a cruel interject. It's a psychological phenomenon unknown to most people, a torture chamber to others.

Arthur realizes.

This new job is going to be a lot harder than my old one. Now I know why they invented coffee breaks.

He looks for something.

I don't drink coffee but there's plenty else to do around here to try to relax. Let's see. Airplanes, video tennis, paint a picture.

He revs the electric screwdriver.

I'd like to build a new airplane, but it will take too long. Paint a picture? I already know where that would lead. Me standing frozen at the easel unable to paint a drop. That leaves video tennis. Yay. As the saying goes, "Tennis is downright smashing."

Arthur grabs the hand-held device and starts to play.

Lob. Charge the net. Backhand slice. Gotcha. Love fifteen. Ooo, nice serve. An ace. Fifteen all. Another ace. Thirty fifteen. Another ace? Forty fifteen. Yikes, I didn't even see that one. Game, computer.

He looks to the ledgers and realizes that they're in need of help.

Maybe it's time to get back to work.

Arthur selects a ledger.

Here's someone I think I can handle.

He reads.

Antoine feels invisible. Nobody ever notices him, at parties, in school, at home. To explain his situation, Antoine concocts a story. His father, a scientist, creates a complex chemical compound with hybrid structures that alter the speed of light and make objects in their path disappear. When his father converts the compound into a gaseous state his pregnant wife inadvertently inhales it. Soon, a baby is born that people can hear, that people can feel, but can't see. Antoine tells himself this story so convincingly he begins to believe he's actually invisible.

Arthur mutters.

A solution with substance.

He takes his time before deciding.

My opinion? Antoine needs a shrink. Serious couch time. The dilemma. Which therapy? There are so many to choose from. Psychoanalysis. Gestalt Therapy. Psychodrama. The list is endless. However, the root of Antoine's problem lies in the crazy story he tells himself. Therefore, I'm recommending cognitive psychotherapy, a talking therapy that corrects faulty thinking.

He places the ledger on his desk.

Antoine, you're not invisible. I see you, and I'm sure that one day you'll see yourself.

Arthur exalts.

I did it. A solution with substance. Who's next? I'm red hot.

Arthur picks a ledger.

Aloma. This is a sad one for me.

He narrates.

I observed Aloma as a magna cum laude student, a rising star in the corporate world then, snap, a pitiful fall from grace. Aloma is due to speak at a conference in San Francisco, fails to show then phones drunkenly from a hotel in Mexico slurring that she has the flu. At Thanksgiving Aloma staggers from the dinner table, five minutes later her mother finds her passed out on the bathroom floor. A couple in an upscale cocktail lounge notice a photograph in the Wall Street Journal then notice it's the same woman across from them as Aloma tumbles off her barstool.

Arthur considers.

Alcoholism. There's an entire treatment industry out there. On one end of the spectrum there are expensive luxury facilities, on the other no-frills recovery houses. There's also a spiritual program that collects a dollar a meeting, nothing if you can't afford it. Unfortunately for alcoholics seeking treatment, there are only two possible results. One, they stop drinking. Two, they don't.

He places the ledger on his desk.

Aloma, I'm planting a seed. You need to reach out for help. It's there, but only if you want it.

Once again, Arthur's initial confidence begins to wane.

On the other hand, maybe what all these people need are medications. There's a wide world out there of psychopharmacology. Anti-depressants. Antipsychotics. I've observed many people who take them. I've also observed a serious problem. In theory medications balance out unbalanced brain chemistry, but in too many cases they lead to devastating addictions.

His confidence wanes more.

Psychotherapy. Clearly, it's a vast improvement over what went before, lunatic asylums and lobotomies. But what can I say? With all the research done by psychology professionals, what

have they proved when it comes to mental health? Simple answer. The earth is flat.

Arthur concedes.

I'm back to square one. Solution? Coffee break.

He addresses the ledgers.

I know I'm off to a bad start, but I promise that by the end of the day you'll all make breakthroughs.

Determined, Arthur heads for the easel.

Why can't I? Caravaggio, Da Vinci, Renoir, step aside. Hanging next to you in the Louvre is the sensational new master, Art in Heaven.

Arthur takes a paintbrush and stands boldly at the canvas then, suddenly, freezes up.

But not today. No breakthrough yet for me, either.

He moves from the easel.

Artists. Art. Art in heaven. I don't want to be a name-dropper, but I observed Vincent Van Gogh many, many times. A truly wonderful human being. Unfortunately, Van Gogh had the tragic flaw of self-destructive depression. I don't know how many times I sent him to the Repair Shop. They tried everything but couldn't fix it. Beyond repair. Van Gogh was not alone. I've observed many people with irreparable destructive flaws, thieves, murderers, rapists, suicides. Hard-wired. Cross-wired. Fundamentally damaged at birth.

Arthur contemplates.

Fundamentally damaged.

He moves toward his desk and sits.

At birth.

He remembers.

It reminds me of a poem someone recited to me. I can't remember who recited it. I was having a rough time. Overwhelmed by all the suffering I was observing. It happens more than I'd like. Their pain becomes my pain. The poem was written by -- wait a minute -- I remember who recited it -- it was Gold Phone. Gold Phone just happened to call me at my low point. The poem was written by the English poet William Blake. "Every night and every morn. Some to misery are born."

Arthur has an epiphany.

Some to misery are born. My god. Here it is. The answer. Laid at my feet by Gold Phone. I just didn't bend over to pick it up. But now I see it clearly. The fix for all human suffering. I can't wait to share my plan with Gold Phone. Unfortunately, our line of communication is one way only. I'll have to wait for Gold Phone to call me. There's no telling how long that will be. Time for Gold Phone is measured in --

A telephone rings. It's the Gold Phone. Arthur, amazed, stares at it for a moment then answers.

I can't believe you called. I was just thinking of --

He realizes that he's being called on the carpet.

The Repair Shop? Well, yes, I guess I did kind of flip my lid. F-bombs? I'm ashamed to say I dropped quite a few. I agree, it's not like me. Until today, I didn't know I had those words in my vocabulary. Of course, I remember your piece of wisdom, "You never have to apologize for what you say, only for the way you say it." It's just that, well, I hate to throw the Repair Shop under the bus, but they just don't give a fuck any more. I am so sorry. You can clearly see how frustrated I am. Yes, I understand, the F-word isn't about frustration, it's about anger. So, I guess that's me. Angry. Furious. There's so much pain down on earth. The people, broken, the ledgers. Look, you gave me this job and the amazing ability to carry it out. I've observed everyone, man, woman, child. I've explored every nook, every cranny. I've uncovered every fear, every flaw, wrote them down on ledgers -- yes, I know the ledgers were my idea, not yours. But I did it with a purpose. I find that the written word is far more accurate than simply talking about a person's problems. When I sent a ledger to the Repair Shop there was no chance of something important being lost in

translation. I even included a pencil sketch of the person's face to jog my memory in case something needed to be filled in later. Thank you. I appreciate the compliment. It's a system that I take very, very seriously. Too seriously according to the Repair Shop. They have me playing video games to take my mind off of things. The Repair Shop has no intention whatsoever in solving anyone's problems, not even their own. That's why I flipped my lid. That's why I dropped the F-bombs. I want to help people. I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out how. I tried this, I tried that, until suddenly I came up with an amazing plan. But I'll need your help in carrying it out. If you could give me a few minutes, I really think I have a breakthrough for humanity. You will? Thank you. I am honored.

Arthur takes a moment to compose himself.

I'm not going to waste your time with nonsense. Distractions. Band-aids. Bumper Stickers. Bogus relief at best. I'm also bypassing traditional mental health remedies. Psychotherapy. Medications. Elusive. Hit or miss. What's needed is a fix that flawless, absolute, permanent.

Arthur rises with great enthusiasm.

"Every night and every morn. Some to misery are born." I remembered the poem you recited to me. Instant clarity. An epiphany. Replace fundamental damage at birth with fundamental emotional purity. You, Gold Phone, can install into newborns a universal mental well-being. No fears. No flaws. Peace of mind will come as naturally as breathing.

Arthur delivers his magnificent coda.

I've saved the best for last. You, more than anyone, will treasure this. There wasn't supposed to be any human suffering. Everything was supposed to be perfect. Now it will be. Perfect.

Arthur is walloped.

It wasn't? Everything wasn't supposed to be perfect?

He listens more.

I am?

He can't hear anything.

Hello. Hello.

Arthur hangs up the phone and wobbles. Eventually, he's steady enough to reveal.

I've just been fired.

Arthur staggers off stage. The lights go down, leaving only the ledgers lit.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

It's a month later. Arthur enters wearing a ceremonial robe, chanting. He's in fine spirits, as he regales the ledgers while loading them into a cardboard moving box.

ARTHUR

ART IN HEAVEN! ART IN HEAVEN! ART IN HEAVEN! ART IN HEAVEN!
What a fabulous retirement party. Actually, it was more like a retirement roast. From start to finish, I was the brunt of good-natured ribbing. The emcee of the event, or, more accurately, the Roastmaster, was none other than Phil from the Repair Shop. Phil skewered me from the get-go, leading the crowd with sarcastic chants of, "Arthur's ledgers! Arthur's ledgers! Arthur's ledgers!" The cloud was packed. All the other Specialists were there, active and Emeritus, of which I am now one of. The head of the Emeritus Society bestowed upon me my new title, Arthur, OSE, Observation Specialist Emeritus. Then came the presentation of my Emeritus Robe, a true honor, and I will wear it with great pride. After that, it was an evening of pure fun, imitations of me, gag gifts, and a surprise musical ending.

He tries.

I can't remember who went first. It's all a mishmash. Oh. It was Rita, Employment Specialist. Rita pretended to be interviewing me for my next career. She said, "Arthur, it says here that you were an Observation Specialist. An utterly useless job description. But let's have a look at your application. You wrote that you've been doing this job since the dawn of man. Arthur, please, this is no time to be a wise ass. Your entire future is at stake. And look at the ridiculous answer to this question, 'How long were you in your previous place of employment?' You wrote, 'Two point eight million years.' Again, wise-ass. Arthur, you're going to end up on the bread line."

Arthur loads more ledgers into the box.

Next, came Phil. He presented me with a special retirement gift on behalf of the entire Repair Shop. "Arthur, because of your profound love for distractions we're giving you the greatest invention in the history of distractions. The television remote control. A disturbing image pops up on the screen? Click, the Tonight Show. Another Presidential scandal? Click, The Simpsons. Another terrorist bombing? Click, reruns of Seinfeld. Arthur, use your new remote control wisely. After all, you've paid dearly for denying the irrefutable truth. There's only one fix for every problem on earth. Repeat after me." At that, the entire audience joined in. "Distractions!"

Arthur winces.

Everyone got a kick out that one. I faked it and laughed along, even though I still don't believe it.

He packs more ledgers.

Up next came Elinor, Mathematics Specialist. Elinor told the crowd, "I understand numbers and I understand equations, but I understand nothing else. Especially anything to do with people. Naturally, when I met Arthur, I couldn't comprehend a word he was talking about. Despair. Primal fear. Human suffering. I stared at Arthur blankly. He stared back in horror then shouted, 'Don't you understand? There wasn't supposed to be any human suffering.'" At that, once again, the entire audience heckled me, "EVERYTHING WAS SUPPOSED TO BE PERFECT!"

Arthur grimaces.

Ouch. That one hit below the belt. However, it didn't sting for long. In the middle of the dais sat a gold telephone that rang. The room grew silent. Phil lifted the receiver, and out echoed Gold Phone's voice.

Arthur as Gold Phone.

"Arthur's plan isn't outlandish. I just might do it one day. I might also put an end to earthquakes, illness, wars. As far as Arthur's ledgers go, I am making an announcement today. I'll be creating a grand cloud museum, The Museum of Ledgers. It will serve as a research facility for Specialists studying the intricacies of the human mind. In the future I'll plant some of Arthur's ledgers in a cave on earth, wrapped in oil cloth marked with a pictograph translating to, "The We. Ledgers of us." After archaeologists discover the ledgers, they will go on public display. I did this before with the Dead Sea Scrolls and it continues to be a once-in-a-lifetime exhibition. Arthur, congratulations, and good luck in your retirement."

Arthur as himself.

The room remained silent, until everyone chanted. "ART IN HEAVEN!" "ART IN HEAVEN!" "ART IN HEAVEN!" Then Phil grabbed the microphone and introduced his grand finale. A musical extravaganza. Out from nowhere popped a woman dressed like Mick Jagger, strutting and singing to me.

Arthur sings.

"I said, 'Hey, you, get off of my cloud. Hey, you, get off of my cloud. Hey, you, get off of my cloud. Don't hang around, 'cause it's my cloud now, Arthur.'"

He reveals.

Her name is Luz. She's my replacement. The new Observation Specialist. A young woman, eighty thousand years younger than me. But what Luz lacks in experience she makes up for with intelligence and kindness. Luz and I talked for a long time after the retirement party. She told me she felt terrible about replacing me. I assured her that once it was explained to me why I was completely fine with the decision. Luz has the ability to not only observe people but to repair them on the spot. She tried to explain her method, but to me it was new-age mumbo jumbo. Her method has something to do with integrated something plus something else cubed, or prime, but don't quote

me on that. Before we said goodbye, I told Luz that I'd stop by tomorrow morning to clear out my stuff. Luz wouldn't hear of it. She insisted that I take at least a month to adjust to my new retirement life. Then she made a request. She asked if I could leave behind my easel, the spongy basketball contraption, and especially my found-object airplanes. I agreed then foolishly asked, "How about the ledgers?" With a diplomatic smile she said, "I'm going to need those shelves for my research books."

Arthur continues to box up his ledgers, muttering to himself.

So, that's what I'm doing. Farewell ledgers. Farewell me. I shouldn't complain. I've observed people go through this a billion times. One day top of the heap, next day out to pasture. Obsolete. Useless.

He changes his tune.

Surprisingly, I don't think I'll miss this place. During my month-long introduction to the retired life I had a blast. There was so much to do, beginning with the Emeritus Hobby Club. Name a hobby they have it. I started with the number one retirement cliché, golf. I popped a golf ball onto a tee and ripped it. Up the ball sailed away from the cloud. Oops. I forgot. There's zero gravity up there. Nothing to slow down the ball's ascent. The ball kept rising and rising until thwack. The golf ball smacked right into the side of a NASA satellite. Knocked out its entire communications system. Sorry, NASA. I should have yelled "fore."

Arthur goes to his easel.

I also joined the Emeritus Art Club. Everybody was standing at their easel freely painting, having a ball, except for one person. Me. I just stood there frozen. A woman next to me noticed and asked, "Troubles?" I answered, "I can't even get started." She stated confidently, "Because you don't know the secret." I motioned for her to go on. She continued, "You have to be willing to paint a bad painting." "A bad painting?" She explained, "For me it was Michelangelo and Picasso. The fear of not painting a masterpiece stopped me cold. Who is it for you?"

Arthur looks to the ledgers.

That's easy. Caravaggio, Da Vinci, Renoir it was all your fault. You were so talented I was too intimidated to paint. Now?

Arthur freely splashes paint on his canvas.

Finito. One more bad painting by Art in Heaven.

He displays a wild mish-mash.

A masterpiece of badness.

He sits at his desk.

Here's a club I joined and totally enjoy. The Emeritus Comedy Club. It's made up of would-be stand-up comedians, none whom have any sense of humor. But they work constantly on their material, most of it stolen from old comics. Because of my experience observing stand-up comedians, they've chosen me to be the official bouncer-offer. Every day I get phone calls, "No, Sid, you screwed it up again. It's not, 'Please take my wife.' It's 'Take my wife, please.'" Chet calls, "No, Don Rickles didn't call people a hockey stick, he called them a hockey puck." Esther has an idea for a joke, but it needs work, "I'm building a retirement village on the sun. I'm calling it Sun City."

Arthur announces.

Me? I'm taking a shot at observational comedy. I was an Observation Specialist, why not? Observational comedy. You start out by saying, "Did you ever notice?" Then you pick something from your everyday life and take it from there.

Arthur assumes the stance of a stand-up comedian.

Did you ever notice that people today are saving everything to something called "the cloud?" "I just saved all my financial records in the cloud." "I sent ten thousand office memos to the cloud." "If I want a new pot roast recipe I just pop into the cloud." I don't get it. I live up here in the clouds. I've never seen one office memo or pot roast recipe. I call my buddy over in Health, "Have you seen any financial records in your cloud?" He has no idea what the hell I'm talking about. I started searching from one cloud to the next. Nothing. Bummer.

I could use a new pot roast recipe. One day I'm searching a cloud when I see the face of a ten-year-old boy. I said, "What the heck are you doing here?" The boy whined, "My mother, my teachers, everyone accuses me of daydreaming. 'Get your head out of the clouds,' they say. Please, mister, don't kick me out of here." I mussed the boy's hair and said, "Five more minutes then go do your homework." On my days off I take field trips. I go back and watch important events in the history of earth. Noah's Ark? I saw two animals arrive late and miss the boat entirely. Poor Grables. Never even made it to the endangered list. Then there's Moses. Yes, Moses had a beard, but it was so long he had an assistant carry it across the desert. I observed the assistant and noted in his ledger, "Moses delivered us from the bondage of slavery, but look at me now. Hair schlepper."

Arthur bows and waves.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. You've been a wonderful audience. I hope to see you again at my eleven o'clock show.

Arthur takes one more bow then heads back to the remaining ledgers, chanting.

Art in Heaven! Art in Heaven! Art in Heaven!

He realizes the truth about his situation.

ART IN HELL.

He flops into his chair.

Who am I kidding? I shouldn't be retired.

He lifts a few ledgers.

Logan. Mason. Aloma. You don't belong in a ledger museum or in a cave. You belong exactly where you are on earth, only calm, peaceful, happy. I'm sorry I wasn't able to help you. It seems that I became a cog in a wheel that's nonfunctional and totally uncaring. Now with my new Emeritus status I'm not even a cog. I have absolutely no chance of helping you anymore.

Defeated, Arthur finishes packing the boxes. Then an idea comes.

Unless.

The Gold Phone rings. Arthur looks at it curiously then answers.

Hello. You heard? I haven't said anything yet. You sensed it. You think I'm making a big mistake. You think I don't have the skills for it. Here's why you think that way. You convinced me that my job was only to observe. You convinced me that I wasn't able to repair. Yes, I am questioning your judgement. No offence, but you're the one that picked those flunkees in the Repair Shop. Fucking losers. That's right, an F-bomb, and perfectly placed. Okay, bottom line. I'm leaving. Going rogue, as they say. I'll no longer be called Art in Heaven. From now on I'm Art on Earth. Trying my hardest to help anyone that needs it. What makes me so sure I can help? Simple. See these power tools I use to build my airplanes? There's a saying, "That wacko has a few screws loose."

Arthur takes the power screwdriver and revs it into the telephone.

Presto. Ready to run IBM.

Arthur puts down the phone.

Hold a sec.

He removes his robe and tosses it onto his desk. He's now dressed only in his work coveralls. Arthur picks up the phone and states.

I'd like to thank you for making me a member of the Emeritus Society, but I hereby resign.

He finalizes.

Enough goofing off. Goodbye, good luck, and, as we said in the middle ages, god speed.

Arthur hangs up and looks at his cloud for the last time. Then he grabs his moving box and heads

away. The Gold Phone rings but
Arthur ignores it.

Art on Earth. Rogue Repairman.

Comfortingly, he addresses the
audience.

You will all sleep very well tonight.

Arthur exits. The stage goes
dark.

END OF THE PLAY