

# THE MAGIC OF MADNESS

By Jules Tasca

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## **CHARACTERS**

DR. ERIC GUTIG, a middle-aged psychiatrist  
TONY HELMSEY, a man in his late thirties  
NATALIE HELMSEY, Tony's wife, a patient of Dr. Gutig  
OPAL, a young patient in her late twenties  
RAY, a patient in her forties  
ANNE, a patient in her fifties

## **PRODUCTION NOTES**

This play is simply staged with four small stools or chairs. Most of the time the WOMEN sit but they can rise and move when they have a speech that warrants such action.

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**SETTING:** The office of DR. GUTIG at the Morrisville State Psychiatric Hospital. A desk and chairs suggest the setting.

*(DR. GUTIG sits at his desk making notes. A knock is heard off.)*

GUTIG: Yes. Come in, please. *(TONY HELMSEY enters)*  
Tony, good morning.

TONY: Good morning, Doctor.

GUTIG: Sit, Tony.

TONY: Thank you. *(TONY sits.)* Well, how is Natalie?

GUTIG: Your wife is coming along.

TONY: You mean there's some progress this time?

GUTIG: Some.

TONY: She'll talk to me? She won't just sit there and shrug?  
She'll talk to me today?

GUTIG: I think so.

TONY: Really, Dr. Gutig?

GUTIG: I think she'll respond this time but...

TONY: But what? What is it, Doctor?

GUTIG: How shall I put this? She'll speak to you but....but she won't speak to you if she's by herself.

TONY: Huh? I don't get you, Doctor.

GUTIG: *(rising)* How does one explain something like this? We try....we try to put people together in therapy sessions – groups – to help them articulate their problems. The members of the group, it is hoped, will bond and share insights into the stresses that have fractured their well-being. Your wife's group now consists of four women who were quite withdrawn and didn't respond in the original regular group sessions. So I thought of putting these four withdrawn women together as a special group. At the first couple of sessions, it was quiet. But about ten days ago, this group began to open up.

TONY: Natalie did?

GUTIG: They all did. What broke the ice, I think, was they all blurted out an answer to my question at once or almost at once, as if...as if they all had the same feeling.

TONY: What question was it, Doctor?

GUTIG: You understand we must poke at some of these people lost within themselves with pointed questions.

TONY: I hear you.

GUTIG: I asked them if they could kill one human being, whom would they kill. And they...they all said, my husband.

TONY: Natalie said?.....me?

GUTIG: This is what they said.

TONY: And Natalie blurted out that she would...

GUTIG: I only report what they said, Tony. They're angry women.

TONY: Anger?

GUTIG: Real or imagined, it's there.

TONY: More imagined I'd say.

GUTIG: Be that as it may, after that incident, an odd bonding developed amongst the four. They opened up. They looked upon one another as sisters. And, although none of them is a chatterbox, they're more voluble than before. Sometimes now, they answer in unison. Other times one of them or three of them will pick up on and finish the sentence of another.

TONY: What?

GUTIG: That's why I say if you see her alone, I think she'll just sit there and stare as she usually does.

TONY: (*rising*) Doctor Gutig, this is bizarre.

GUTIG: It seemed strange to me when it started, but this bonding experience helped a hard, frightened, passive group of women to start talking. There's a certain magic to it. That they can open up together, I mean.

TONY: Magic? It sounds to be like she's getting worse, Doctor. Worse. You want me to speak to my wife with three other women? I don't see any magic in it. It's madness. She's here to be cured.

GUTIG: Tony, I asked Natalie. I said your husband's coming today. Would you like to speak to him?

TONY: And?

GUTIG: They answered, "not by myself."

TONY: They answered? *They* answered?

GUTIG: They looked at each other and sort of nodded and that's...that's how they answered.

TONY: Doctor, I want to see my Natalie alone. I want to see what in hell's become of the woman. Where is she?

GUTIG: (***crosses almost off and calls***) Mrs. Helmsey...Natalie.

***(NATALIE enters with DR. GUTIG. SHE is about TONY's age.)***

TONY: Natalie...Natalie, how are you?...Don't you wanna come home now?...How are you feeling?...Here, sit down here. (***TONY seats NATALIE then HE sits across from her***) The kids...the kids are fine. Your mother's making them fat always eating out. But...but they're okay...how're you?...Nat...Natalie ...Natalie, do you....do you want to say anything to me? (***NATALIE shrugs.***) Come off it, Natalie. (***angrily***) Speak to me!

GUTIG: Tony, it's no good to work yourself up. I explained to you how...

TONY: Natalie...Doctor Gutig's saying you'll talk to me if this group's here. Is that so? Natalie, what's going on? Do you really want those other women in here while we talk? Do you? Natalie? (***NATALIE slowly nods her head yes.***)

Natalie, you do? You actually...all right...for crying out loud....all right, Doctor, I want to talk to her any way I can...I need her to snap out of this. (***DR. GUTIG crosses off stage.***) Natalie, what're they doing to you in this hospital? Huh? Are they treating you...

GUTIG: (***HE re-enters with the three other women***) This is Opal. Rachael – we call her Ray. And Anne. Ladies, meet Mr. Helmsey.

TONY: Hello....Hello, everybody.

***(OPAL smiles. RAY gives a little wave.)***

ANNE: Hi.

GUTIG: Please, make yourselves comfortable.

***(The women sit.)***

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TONY: So...I don't know anything about this. I mean to say, how do we do this?

GUTIG: I think we should just all have a talk.

TONY: This is all so...

GUTIG: (**seating TONY**) Tony, what would you like to talk about?

TONY: What would I...my wife's progress...Natalie, what is this?

Are you all right? (**pause**) Natalie?

NATALIE: I'm getting...

OPAL: Better, I'd say.

ANNE: Better.

NATALIE: Yes, I'd say that.

ALL FOUR: A little better...

***(ALL FOUR do not always speak in unison. Sometimes their speeches overlap. Sometimes two voices are in unison and others overlap.)***

***(TONY looks at GUTIG.)***

GUTIG: It does take some getting used to. It took me a while to grasp how deep and secure their bond is now. Just go on, Tony. It's all right. Go on.

TONY: Natalie....Natalie, the children miss you.

NATALIE: The children.

ALL FOUR: The children.

OPAL: How beautiful...

RAY: When they're born...

OPAL: When they're little...

NATALIE: Yes.

RAY: But now...

ANNE: I know...They never call...I'm not needed.

ALL FOUR: Not needed anymore.

TONY: Of course, they need you. Two teenaged kids.

NATALIE: They turned away.

RAY: Maryann...

TONY: Who's Maryann?

ANNE: Quick easy sex.

ALL FOUR: They turn away.

GUTIG: Maryann's Rachael's daughter.

TONY: But I was talking to my...

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GUTIG: I know. Just go on.

**(Pause.)**

TONY: Nat, I know...I know it's been rough on you, but both Tommy and June have promised me that when you come home, you'll find that they've...they've changed. **(ANNE laughs. TONY looks at DR. GUTIG.)** Nat? Natalie?...

NATALIE: It was too...

OPAL: Too much...

RAY: They were too much.

ANNE: Yes, just for me. Where...where...

NATALIE: Where were you?

ALL FOUR: Where were you?

NATALIE: Where?...

RAY: Were you?...

ANNE: Where, George?

TONY: I'm Tony. George is probably your husband. I'm speaking to my wife if you don't mind... Natalie, I know...I know I sort of dumped the kids on you. I know that, Natalie. I always thought you were strong enough to handle them, I guess...I know when they got into their teens...I know they became...I don't know...problems.

NATALIE: Abused me.

TONY: What?

ALL FOUR: Abused me with words.

RAY: You heard.

ANNE: When you're not around.

NATALIE: He said horrible things.

ANNE: Screw you.

NATALIE: Whenever I ask...

RAY: I know. Whenever you'd ask him to do something.

ALL FOUR: Anything.

NATALIE: He said cruel things to me.

ALL FOUR: Screw you, Lady.

NATALIE: He said that...

ALL FOUR: Screw you, woman.

TONY: I'll...I'll have to call him.

**(RAY laughs.)**

RAY: You can't talk to Ralph now.

OPAL: I'll talk to him. They always say that, don't they?

NATALIE: Yes, I'll talk to him.

ALL FOUR: And what good will it do now?

NATALIE: And June with that boy.

ALL FOUR: That older boy. Too old.

ANNE: They never realize...

OPAL: No. Like me. She thinks his tough stuff is heaven come to earth.

ANNE: But it's really hell with a little aftershave.

**(Some laughter.)**

TONY: June...June doesn't see him as much anymore. Listen...Listen, would you women mind if I spoke to Natalie alone now?

NATALIE: No. I don't want them to go. No.

TONY: Natalie...Natalie, you've got to get better on your own. You can't come home with these women. We have to talk alone.

ANNE: You're not happy?...

RAY: With speaking to us, she means.

OPAL: You're getting answers.

NATALIE: What is it you want?

ANNE: Yes, what?

TONY: Dr. Gutig here says...he says...he says you have anger toward me. **(ANNE shakes her head yes.)** Why're you nodding? You don't even know me? What's she been telling you Opal?

GUTIG: That's Anne.

TONY: Anne, Opal, what does it matter? None of them knows me. Why is she nodding like I did something to her?

ANNE: I know you.

TONY: I'm not your...

RAY: We all know you.

ANNE: You stream through us.

RAY: Yes.

OPAL: All of us.

ALL FOUR: We know you.

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