

SEEKING ASYLUM

By Jerry Rabushka

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CHARACTERS

MALE ROLES

MARK: A rather crazy character living in an altered reality; not sure if he wants to be cured or not.

THOR: Thinks he's an orderly, he's a bit crazy and a bit lonely, but lots of fun on a good day.

DRAKE: Thor's best friend, perhaps an inmate of the asylum, perhaps not.

DAD: Everybody's father (long story) with a really annoying sense of humor.

FEMALE ROLES

RENEE: Mark's wife, the only sane one of the bunch, and it annoys her to no end.

SHAMIKYA: (Shamikya Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de los Flores) A hip-hop girl who is a side effect of Mark's drugs.

PHYLLIS: A hip-hop girl, along with Shamikya, who is a side effect of Mark's drugs.

MOM: Everybody's mother (**long story again**) who just can't stand to see her children happy.

SHEREE: A distant cousin from Brooklyn who thinks she's sane.

DELORES: A more distant cousin, from the Bronx.

DOCTOR: Can be played by either male or female, it's a leading role, but open to many interpretations. DOCTOR takes care of the patients, often to his/her own advantage.

PROP LIST

Several bottles of pills for the DOCTOR and other patients
Duck whistle for THOR
Earplugs for THOR
Various papers for MOM and DAD
Latex gloves for MOM
Optional setup of cameras and other equipment for the TV studio

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The perfect show for a forward-looking group of actors who just like to “go crazy!”

This play is designed to be done with minimal set, if desired, or it would work just as well with a more elaborate backdrop. *Seeking Asylum* has three basic settings. However since the TV Studio and the Asylum are pretty much happening at the same time, they can be combined into one. It can be done realistically, with cameras and microphones and a few chairs to imitate the workings of a small TV studio and provide the feel of a cable TV infomercial. Or in fact, the TV shows can be done right out of the asylum. The family reunion scene at MARK's house in **Act 2** can be simply set up by adding or rearranging some of the furniture. It would be a good rule of thumb to concentrate less on where it's happening, and more on what's happening and how.

The challenge of this play, for both director and actor, is to take some of the seemingly incoherent ramblings of the characters and turn it into a cohesive whole. The DOCTOR, while a leading role, is open to a lot of interpretation. It can be played by either gender at whatever age seems appropriate. It's the DOCTOR who more or less maintains control over the situation, and who presents the scenario to the audience.

This is a play that would thrive on some fast blocking and physical humor. MARK can adopt a different personality when HE goes on his nonsensical ramblings, almost repeating it as a student by rote. RENEE should balance her role between the villain that calculates to take over her husband's malady and a woman who is legitimately starved for his attention. THOR, the most affected by the play's rapid mood swings, offers a challenging and intriguing role for both humor and sympathy.

Costumes can be pretty straightforward; folks in the asylum can wear the typical garb for their position; RENEE's quest for attention could be demonstrated by some flashy outfits, and SHAMIKYA and PHYLLIS can

go as “hip-hop” as they please, and conform to the current musical trends of the time. MOM and DAD can be a contrast, with MOM tight-lipped and conservative, and DAD a slob, a man who thinks his jokes are a lot funnier than they are, with a costume that doesn’t fit quite right.

Since the play is set in East Texas, a southern attitude and a drawl can add flash to some of the character’s personalities.

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ACT 1 SCENE 1

Most of the play takes place in an asylum somewhere in Texas, as well as in a TV studio set up for infomercials. The line between the two is very thin and crosses without much notice. The audience can figure out in their own mind which is which. The set can be very Spartan; just a few chairs, beanbags, or other places to sit are sufficient. A “concept” set, which emphasizes the mental more than the physical surroundings, would be effective here as well. Work with lighting for various effects, to show a commercial in progress, or to isolate characters at various dramatic moments. As the show opens, MARK is on stage, talking mainly to the audience. DOCTOR is listening off to one side until HE becomes more involved in the action.

MARK: (*showing some bottles of medicine*) I take these for my delusions, these for my nightmares, and these... (*grins, almost childish*) because I like the color. (*explains*) It all started about a year ago. Well maybe six months. Or was it last week? I can't remember, but I think it was that Wednesday after the family reunion. I'm not really sure. I tend to lose track after a family reunion.

DOCTOR: Nobody cares when it all started. Just get on with it.

MARK: I can't get on with it until I remember when it started. There's no point in going back a year if we've only got to deal with six months.

DOCTOR: I'd rather go back a year. I can charge you twice as much.

MARK: I used to remember exactly when it started. The nightmares, the delusions, the loneliness. Then they put me on these pills. Now, I feel crazy, but I don't know why.

DOCTOR: (*strolling more into the limelight, speaking authoritatively*) Mark has side effects. Lots of them. Nausea, headaches, cramps. Sometimes he thinks he's a fish.

MARK: My grandmother had plastic surgery and now she looks like LL Cool J. Grandpa doesn't mind. He just doesn't like rap.

DOCTOR: That's another side effect. He tends to ramble.

MARK: So did Grandma. That's why she had the surgery.

DOCTOR: But there's two side effects that he can't seem to get rid of.

MARK: Yeah. Nausea you can puke up. Headaches? Pop another pill.
Grandma, I can tune out.

(Enter SHAMIKYA and PHYLLIS. They're both trendy, colorful, and enjoy their own humor.)

SHAMIKYA: **(introducing herself, with a flourish)** I'm Shamikya
Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de Los Flores!

PHYLLIS: **(not impressed, but we can tell they hang together a lot)**
Whatever. I'm Phyllis.

DOCTOR: Phyllis what?

PHYLLIS: Just Phyllis. Shamikya took all the names.

MARK: I can't get rid of them.

DOCTOR: **(to the audience, regarding the girls)** We've never seen
them.

MARK: **(can't believe that)** They're standing right in front of you.

DOCTOR: Well, move them. I don't want them blocking anyone's view
of me.

MARK: Shake it out, Shamikya.

(SHAMIKYA moves over, but with attitude.)

PHYLLIS: **(stands right in front of DOCTOR)** What about me? You
always think of her first.

MARK: **(moves her out of the way)** That's because she always does
everything first. She enters first, she talks first, she thinks first.

PHYLLIS: That's not true. See? I disagree – first.

MARK: Which one of these pills created them, Doc? Can't we - **(sees
GIRLS are miffed)** oh, not that I would!

DOCTOR: Do you want to keep having those nightmares?

MARK: Now it's the same two nightmares over and over. Shamikya
etcetera de Los Flores, and Phyllis. At the grocery store, they fight
over prices. At dinner they fight over Grandma, particularly now that
she looks like LL Cool J. At the mall they fight over lingerie.

SHAMIKYA: **(teasing, spinning around in front of MARK)** What are
you doing in the lingerie department, Mark?

MARK: **(shouting, and stopping her spinning)** I'm trying to keep you
two quiet!

PHYLLIS: You can't. We're side effects. We're like a curse in Greek
mythology. **(explaining to MARK and the audience)** In the old
days, bad things happened through intervention and retaliation from
Mount Olympus. Now, they happen through drug cocktails. Three

thousand years ago, they would blame Aphrodite! (**a bit hip-hop**)
Now we ascribe it to how we prescribe it.

SHAMIKYA: It's revenge for what you did to your wife.

MARK: (**defensive**) I didn't do anything to my wife!

PHYLLIS: (**aghast**) You ignored her?! The Goddess must strike back!
(**SHE and SHAMIKYA “cast a spell” on MARK, who falls over in shock**)

DOCTOR: (**not impressed, but picking MARK up and “presenting” him to the audience**) Mark was an experiment, of sorts. We tried hypnotherapy. We tried psychotherapy. We tried shock therapy.

MARK: That wasn't shock therapy. You made me listen to the soundtrack from *Grease* for 48 hours without a break.

SHAMIKYA: We like these pills. (**affectionately, hovering around MARK**) And we don't want you to ever stop taking them.

PHYLLIS: If he does, we disappear. Then he has to go back to his wife!

SHAMIKYA: Renee – the evil one.

PHYLLIS: She's not evil. She just can't help it.

SHAMIKYA: She won't support him. (**stands by MARK**) She won't stand by him. (**pulls PHYLLIS over to her**) That's why we're here. We're not as bad as he likes to pretend.

MARK: You're here because I'm loony! And you're making it worse. (**to audience, about SHAMIKYA**) In the morning, she's green, until the first set of pills wears off.

DOCTOR: Mark used to dream about being lost in outer space. About being caught on the wrong end of an interplanetary struggle. About having to press the button and blow up Earth. Then one day...

MARK: One day I had this dream that I was the only Republican at the Democratic National Convention. And they nominated me.

DOCTOR: What did you do?

MARK: I called the party headquarters. Now I'm on the ballot in 48 states.

DOCTOR: He's not really.

MARK: (**argumentative**) I am, really. Every state except Hawaii and Vermont.

DOCTOR: (**pushing him back**) He's not. Really, he's not.

MARK: (**threatening**) Did you have me removed? I'm on the Florida ballot in three different places. Just in case they miss. And our home state of Texas!

DOCTOR: Don't mention Texas.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texassssssssss.

MARK: Stop that!

PHYLLIS: Me? I didn't say anything.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texassssssssss.

MARK: I told you not to mention it! (**to DOCTOR**) Make them stop!

DOCTOR: I can't make them stop. I can't see or hear them. Only through your narrative. Then they're plain as day.

SHAMIKYA: Plain! I am not plain!

PHYLLIS: **(to DOCTOR, up in his face)** How would you know? You can't even see us!

MARK: **(wandering off)** I want a cure. I want to see Grandma the way she was.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texasssssssssss.

MARK: **(turns around to them)** Stop that!

DOCTOR: She never really had the surgery.

MARK: You mean...

DOCTOR: She aged like that naturally. She just didn't want to admit it.

MARK: If I knew when all this started, we could make some sense out of it. When did I first see you?

DOCTOR: You've been seeing me for a year. But you weren't this deluded in the beginning. You just thought you were.

MARK: What's the difference?

DOCTOR: **(indicates GIRLS)** This is the difference. Side effects.

SHAMIKYA: We're really incarnations from Ancient Greece. We just follow people around, and annoy them. In those days we were called "the furies". These days, people call us "issues."

PHYLLIS: We've been assigned to Mark to help him snap out of his illness.

SHAMIKYA: It's too bad, because, frankly, he's tiresome.

PHYLLIS: Same old nightmares.

SHAMIKYA: Same old visions. He needs the side effects.

PHYLLIS and SHAMIKYA: Texasssssssssss.

MARK: Stop that!

PHYLLIS: **(tickles him under the chin)** Only if you vote Democratic.

MARK: **(astounded)** In Texas? Isn't that a capital offense?

SHAMIKYA: Not if you're mentally ill.

(Enter THOR and DRAKE, dressed as orderlies. They're very energetic and upbeat for the moment, and they are a bit out of breath from a struggle.)

THOR: Doctor!

DOCTOR: **(a bit condescending)** Yes, Thor?

DRAKE: Doctor!

DOCTOR: Yes, Drake?

DRAKE: She's out of control.

THOR: You have to do something.

DOCTOR: Who's out of control?

PHYLLIS: Who isn't? It's an asylum!

MARK: It is *not* an asylum.

SHAMIKYA: Grandma looks like LL Cool J and you think it's not an asylum. It's either an asylum or it's Jerry Springer.

THOR and DRAKE: (**chanting**) Jer-RY! Jer-RY! Jer-RY!

MARK: Make it stop. I can't take these voices.

DOCTOR: Those are for real.

MARK: Wait a minute! They can't be! (**indicates THOR and DRAKE**)

They can't hear Shamikya unless they're figments of my imagination.

THOR: Oh, we can. You're "doing" it.

MARK: I'm "doing" it?

DRAKE: (**mimicking MARK**) I'm Shamikya Eritrea Britanya Arriaga de los Flores.

DOCTOR: To the rest of us, you're doing it. Their voices are coming out through your mouth.

MARK: Oh my God! Then...

SHAMIKYA: That episode in the lingerie department? And no, they didn't fit you!

MARK: (**up to THOR, looking at him intently**) Yah know...!

THOR: (**tries to move away**) Get him away from me!

MARK: (**turns THOR back around**) Oh, like I'm the first crazy person you've ever met. (**looks him over closely**) You look just like... my... ex-girlfriend.

THOR: (**frightened, looking around embarrassed**) Dude! (**tries to run off, but MARK holds him at bay**)

MARK: (**big smile**) You do! That's why I dumped her! (**laughs hysterically**)

DRAKE: (**pushes MARK's hands down to his sides**) I think this fella needs a straight-jacket.

MARK: I need new medication.

RENEE: (**his wife, enters hysterically**) Mark! (**tries to get to MARK, but THOR and DRAKE hold her back**)

MARK: Who's that?

THOR: It's your wife! (**to the crowd, as SHE still struggles**) And someone better do something about her.

DRAKE: She's a drama queen. A diva! A prima donna! (**gasps with horror**) An... actress!

THOR: She thinks she's on stage.

RENEE: (**looking around the stage**) I *am* on stage. Do you think this is the lobby of the Ritz Carlton? (**breaks loose; THOR and DRAKE try to catch her, but can't**)

DRAKE: And she's out of control!

MARK: Especially when she sees me with-

RENEE: I have never seen you with Shamikya and Phyllis. Shamikya and Phyllis don't exist. I've *heard* you with them, but seen them?

No... no... no...! (*approaches DOCTOR*) Doctor, I'm tired of this whole setup.

DOCTOR: We're doing everything we can.

RENEE: Not for me. I want attention. I want medication. (*bigger, taking over*) I want to be the one with the problem.

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