

# "ASCORBIC ACID FREAK"

A One Act Play  
by Grant Sutor Vuille

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A One Act Play  
by Grant Sutor Vuille

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**"ASCORBIC ACID FREAK"**  
A Play in One Act

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**CHARACTERS :**

**MARK.** HE IS IN HIS MID THIRTIES, HAS HAD A TWENTY YEAR CAREER AS AN ACTOR IN SEMI-PROFESSIONAL SHOW-BIZ, AND IS SUPPOSED TO BE DYING OF THE RARE INCURABLE ILLNESS, AIDS. HIV HAD JUST BEEN DISCOVERED THE YEAR BEFORE.

**STEPHAN.** HE IS IN HIS TWENTIES AND IS MARK'S LIVE-IN COMPANION AND FRIEND.

**JULIE MOFIT.** SHE IS A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG ACTRESS IN HER TWENTIES WHO ADORES MARK AND WISHES HIM TO RETURN TO THE STAGE WITH HER.

**WANDA.** SHE IS THE MANISH SIDE-KICK/STAGE MANAGER TO HER ACTRESS FRIEND, JULIE. SHE IS IN HER TWENTIES OR EARLY THIRTIES AND IS GRUFF AND EXTREMELY OVERPROTECTIVE.

**ZEBULON.** ZEB, FOR SHORT, IS A HANDSOME MAN IN HIS LATE TWENTIES, EARLY THIRTIES, WHO IS A CLOSE FRIEND TO BOTH MARK AND STEPHAN.

**DR. PURGESS M.D.** HE IS MARK'S PERSONAL PHYSICIAN AND FRIEND. HE IS DETERMINED TO CURE HIM WITH EXPERIMENTAL DRUGS AND STANDARD THERAPIES BUT IS QUACKISH AND SUFFERING CONFLICTING IDEAS ON HOW TO TREAT HIV/AIDS.

**SCENE 1** (IT IS EARLY SUNDAY MORNING, 1988. THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN MARK'S HOME LOCATED IN FICTIONAL SMALLVILLE, USA. STEPHAN, A YOUNG MAN IN HIS TWENTIES, IS UP AND AROUND IN HIS PAJAMAS, HE THEN BEGINS PREPARING THE MORNING HEALTH DRINK BREAKFAST SUBSTITUTE. HE PREPARES IT IN A BLENDER IN THE KITCHEN USING ICECREAM, RAW EGGS,

MILK, AND VITAMIN-C TABLETS. AFTER HE POURS THE DRINK IN MARK'S GLASS HE FILLS HIS OWN ONLY HALFWAY, TOPPING IT OFF WITH SEVERAL SHOTS OF VODKA FROM A BOTTLE. MARK IS HEARD TO SHOUT COMMANDS FROM THE BEDROOM)

MARK. Be sure to put in at least ten thousand milligrams of Vitamin--C, Stephan. I'm not feeling quite myself today.

STEPHAN. (SARCASTIC) Does that mean we need a little extra hand action in there?

MARK. Ha, ha! You attempting comedy? Nice try--don't use it in the act. I'm just a little congested is all--don't forget I want three raw eggs!

STEPHAN. I know the routine, Melanie, save the eulogy for Scarlett. She can use it in the sequel.

MARK. Two months going on two years. Dr. Purgess wants to do a special case study on me at the University Hospital.

STEPHAN. Well, hooray for Dr. Purgess M.D.! I think we can all breathe a little easier.

MARK. Hell, just load me up with "C" and I'll be fine. Hospitals freak me out.

STEPHAN. So does dear Dr. Purgess M.D. Personally, I think it's the raw eggs that sticks you together.

MARK. "Binds!" With you it's probably vodka.

STEPHAN. Keeps me going--don't knock it 'till you try it.

MARK. Save the medicine show elixir for yourself. I don't need any mood enhancing.

STEPHAN. Could've fooled me.

MARK. Hurry up in there, I'm hungry.

STEPHAN. I'm not your nurse, Mark, come and get it yourself, it's already made. Hey, aren't you the guy I saw on "Name-That-Cure"?

MARK. Spareme, you skeptic pessimist. Dr. Purgess M.D. says he'll cure me if it kills him...that is, if I don't die first.

( AS MARK PASSES THROUGH, STEPHAN SETTLES ON THE SOFA WITH A COPY OF THE MORNING PAPER)

STEPHAN. I don't believe you're sick at all. It's all in your head.

(MARK ENTERS THE BATHROOM AND SHUTS THE DOOR. THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES)

MARK . ( ENTERING BATHROOM) Haven't You heard about the new HIV blood tests?

STEPHAN . ( LOUDLY) The whole thing's a plot...a scheme!

MARK . I can't hear you, the water 's running!

STEPHAN. The public is hysterical with fear and the country is in a state of moral anarchy as the afflicted are ostracized by the non-afflicted. We're lucky we live in Smallville U.S.A., where the veil of worldly ignorance protects the accused.

MARK. Can't you wait 'till I'm through in here, please, Stephan?

STEPHAN .I'm just bull-shitting, don't pay any attention. (MARK COMES OUT)

MARK. What was that you said?

STEPHAN. Oh, nothing, same old bullshit...never mind....

MARK . That 's what I thought. (HE SIPS HIS DRINK) Sure there's enough "C" in this?

STEPHAN. (ABSORBED IN THE NEWSPAPER) Of course there's enough.

MARK. There'd better be, or your ass is all mine tonight.

STEPHAN. If freedom isn't free,  
then what is it?

MARK. An Olympic competition?  
(HE PLOPS ONTO THE SOFA) Give me some of that paper  
you airhead.

STEPHAN. Then it must be a myth.

MARK. (SCRUFFLING THROUGH NEWSPAPER)  
What is?

STEPHAN. Freedom.

MARK. There's a price to be paid  
for everything, Stephan.

STEPHAN. Then what about human  
rights? Where's our freedom of choice if there's a  
price to be paid for living in a so called free society?

MARK. You have to follow the rules of  
society, any society, if you want to survive--Shut up  
and read your funny papers, I'm trying to concentrate on  
important political matters.

STEPHAN. Like which terrorist country  
to make secret deals with?

MARK. No, like what form of discipline  
I'm planning for you at bedtime.

STEPHAN. All God's creatures great  
and small deserve a piece of the pie, don't they?

MARK. And they'll fight for it until  
the day they die. Only the strong survive, you ought to  
know that by now. I'll survive like everyone else on  
God's green Earth as long as I've got the fight in me.

STEPHAN. How can the will to live  
possibly overcome incurable illness?

MARK. If my will to live is stronger  
than a virus's will to devour me then I shall be victorious.

STEPHAN. You certainly are sure of  
yourself. You don't need Dr. Purgess M.D. hovering  
over you like the Virgin Mary.

MARK. No. But he's our friend and  
I like to humor him. As long as I hang on he thinks he's  
the greatest doctor alive.

(THE PHONE RINGS ON THE ENDTABLE NEXT TO THE SOFA AND STEPHAN ANSWERS IT)

STEPHAN. Hello?

MARK. (QUIETLY) I'm still asleep.

STEPHAN. Hey Julie, what's happen-  
ing? Uh, no, he's still in bed asleep... should I wake  
him up? Ooooh, Miss Mofit, on second thought, why don't  
you tell me all about it and I'll give him the message.  
Uh huh...yeah...well...I don't know, sounds very  
interesting, but...well, you know how he is...you want to  
come over? Oh, I don't know...sure...one o'clock's okay,  
(SARCASTIC) he ought to be up by then...well, you know  
how it is, when you're sick'n all, you gotta get your  
rest...yeah...oh, no, he's well enough to have visitors  
...of course it's alright...see you about one then...bye.

( HE HANGS UP THE PHONE )

MARK. So, my favorite leading lady  
is paying us a call. I'm honored. What's she up to?  
...That is, what's the occasion?

STEPHAN. The Smallville Playhouse  
wants to give you a life time membership.

MARK. Oh, yeah? I haven't performed  
on their stage in three years. What's it going to cost  
me?

STEPHAN. I think they want you to  
jump through the hoop and perform some of your old musi-  
cal numbers with Miss Mofit. It's their twenty fifth  
anniversary celebration.

MARK. Sounds like their usual scheme  
to drain the fat wallets of city slickers. Has-been  
variety entertainment gets them every time.

STEPHAN. The theatre needs your help.  
They're running in the red, they need you. You did some  
of your greatest work there. You owe them. You met  
Julie there...and me...remember? We were in a show  
together...Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's  
Dream".

MARK. ( THOUGHTFUL ) How could I forget?  
...As for the anniversary thing, I doubt it.

STEPHAN. Come on, Mark, I know you  
still care. You should be glad they want you at all.

MARK. This lifetime membership bonus is bogus tokenism. I'd rather receive a gift certificate to Hamburger Heaven. If and when you get your degree in theatre you best send your ass to New York, get out'a Smallville before the community theatre entraps you.

STEPHAN. You have a bad attitude, "buck-O", go stand in the corner.

(THEY LAUGH, MARK SOCKS HIM LIGHTLY ON THE SHOULDER)

MARK. (APOLOGETIC) Sorry, Sir Lawrence "O", I lament not having tackled the "big-time" before twenty years of amateur theatrics resulted in a bad case of burnout. I'd really hate that to happen to you.

STEPHAN. I can take care of myself.

MARK. The bright lights of Broadway are a long way from Smallville.

STEPHAN. Things aren't so bad here. You made money doing commercials and regional dinner theatre. You can't complain about that.

MARK. Selling ammonia cleansers on local TV and singing to audiences who belch instead of applaud has its drawbacks. So

STEPHAN. (QUICKLY) Some great artists aren't recognized until after they're dead--oops--sorry, Mark. I didn't mean it, I swear.

MARK. That's okay, I'm not planning to go anywhere--just yet--but I hardly believe my six volumes of scrapbooks are going to impress anyone.

STEPHAN. So sell the publishing rights. Auction them off at the anniversary bash.

MARK. Yeah, we could use the cash. I've got some swell shots of Julie--bet I could squeeze a few sympathy bucks out'a her. God knows, my medical insurance isn't cutting it.

STEPHAN. So let's get 'em down and sort through 'em. Julie can help us when she gets here.

MARK. Forget it, man, no way. Too much nostalgia is lethal. That would have to be the cruelest form of revenge imaginable, showing a has-been his press clippings.

STEPHAN. You depress me, Mark. Let's get out of the house and go for a ride. It's a beautiful day out.

MARK. Good idea. The past is a refuge for losers.

STEPHAN. Your collection of memorabilia is an entertaining reminder of a life well lived. We'll donate it to the Smallville Historical Society and forget all about those sixty plays you were forced to do over the years.

(STEPHAN TAKES THEIR GLASSES AND GOES TO THE KITCHEN AREA. HE MAKES HIMSELF A STIFF DRINK)

MARK. On second thought, maybe we shouldn't run off with Julie dropping by in a little while. I'm half expecting Dr. Purgess, too.

STEPHAN. What are you talking about? You're running a little fever so you need Dr. Purgess to stick a thermometer up your butt? Get real, Mark, and get dressed, we're going for a drive.

MARK. This is your second drink this morning, you can't drive like that.

STEPHAN. (TOSSING HIM THE KEYS) Who said anything about me driving? You're not helpless, you take the wheel.

MARK. (FEELING HIS THROAT) My glands are swollen.

STEPHAN. So what else is new? Come on, hurry it up, let's go, I'm suffocating in here!

MARK. I think I need to go lie down.

STEPHAN. Come on, Mark, this isn't like you, you need the fresh air.

(MARK EXITS INTO THE BEDROOM)

MARK. Wake me up when Julie arrives.

STEPHAN. (GOING AFTER HIM) I don't understand you man, one minute you're ready to conquer the world, and the next minute you give up without a fight. (MARK TOSSES THE KEYS TO HIM THROUGH THE BEDROOM DOOR) Thanks a lot, you're a real pal. (THE DOORBELL RINGS FOLLOWED BY A KNOCK ON THE FRONT DOOR) See if I take you anywhere with me again, Mark. I'm serious, man, I'm tired of this shit--someone's at the door.

MARK. Whoever it is, I'm—

STEPHAN. (GOING TO THE DOOR) --I know, I know, you're sound asleep, you're taking a nap.

(HE OPENS THE DOOR AND THERE STANDS ZEBULON, A VERY ATTRACTIVE MAN IN HIS LATE TWENTIES, EARLY THIRTIES)

ZEBULON. Hey, Stephan, what're you dudes up to?

STEPHAN. (LETTING HIM IN) Hey, Zeb, come on in, what brings you by so early Sunday morning? I thought you were usually in church?

ZEBULON. Oh, yeah, I don't know, I kind of wanted to see Mark. Is he home?

STEPHAN. The master's asleep.

ZEBULON. Oh. (NOTICING THE CAR KEYS IN STEPHAN'S HAND) You going somewhere? I didn't come at a bad time did I?

STEPHAN. Uh, no, I thought we were going out for a ride, but Mark changed his mind.

ZEBULON. He feeling okay?

STEPHAN. The same, I guess. So what's the occasion? Can I help you with anything?

ZEBULON. (HESITANT) No, I guess not, I just had Mark on my mind. I've been concerned about him and just had a feeling I ought to come by.

STEPHAN. Well thanks for checking up on us. You want a drink?

ZEBULON. (LAUGHING) Oh, no, not on Sunday, the Lord would strike me with a bolt of lightning!

STEPHAN. (GOES TO MAKE HIM ONE)  
Come on, Zebulon, show us what you're made of. It's nearly noon. God won't mind. Besides, He would have zapped all of us long ago for livin' such a promiscuous life-style, eh?

ZEBULON. The Lord can be very forgiving.

STEPHAN. And very mysterious, or so I've heard. Scotch and Soda okay?

ZEBULON. Sure, why not?

STEPHAN. That's my boy. (HE MIXES THE DRINK) You know, I'm sure glad you decided to drop by. We never have company anymore, except maybe the good doctor. Say, don't you feel a little guilty skipping church? You're a biblical scholar aren't you? Name's from the Bible isn't it? (HE TAKES HIM HIS DRINK) Your name, Zebulon, that's quite a label, it curls around the tongue, eh?

ZEBULON. Just call me Zeb. It's easier.

STEPHAN. But I like things to be tough. (GOING TO THE SOFA) Come on, have a seat. If we make enough noise we'll awaken Sleeping Beauty.

ZEBULON. I don't want to bother him if he's sleeping.

STEPHAN. (SITTING DOWN, HE PATS THE SOFA FOR ZEBULON TO JOIN HIM) Sit down, Zeb, darlin', we'll be quiet as church mice... (LOUDLY FOR MARK'S BENEFIT) Quiet enough to wake the dead!

ZEBULON. (SITTING ON THE SOFA) Stephan, please, I really don't want to disturb him.

STEPHAN. I know, I know, but the guy needs a little stimulation to keep his blood boiling. We were supposed to go out. It'd be good for him I swear it. Even his stupid doctor says so!

ZEBULON. Yeah. It must be rough taking care of him.

STEPHAN. Yes, sometimes it is.... (CHANGING THE SUBJECT) It's good to see you. Are you really wrapped up in this religious stuff?

ZEBULON. When my parents were alive and I was a kid we traveled the mid-west holding revival meetings in a tent. They were faith healers and I was the poor orphan cripple who accompanied them, miraculously set free of my crutches at each revivalist meeting.

STEPHAN. That's cool. In the three years we've known you, how come you never mentioned it before?

ZEBULON. I've only just lately even been able to talk about it.

STEPHAN. You ashamed of it?

ZEBULON. Not anymore, not since I asked the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive me.

STEPHAN. But you were a kid, you couldn't help it. You did what your parents told you.

ZEBULON. Yeah, but I wasn't even ten years old when I realized how wrong it was. I did it for years until I was fifteen and ran off when we played Denver, Colorado.

STEPHAN. When you played Denver?

ZEBULON. We were fakes, weren't we? --Like touring thespians doing Shakespeare.

STEPHAN. ... Shakespeare?

ZEBULON. Like you guys, actors, we could have used you on the road back then. We could have raked in a lot of extra dough.

STEPHAN. (THOUGHTFULLY) So how does Jesus feel about your being Gay?

ZEBULON. (CAREFULLY) I'm still wrestling the Devil on that question. The Bible can be pretty damning on that subject.

STEPHAN. What about your Christian friends at your Church? --Which you skipped out on today.

ZEBULON. I don't think they know. Least wise, if they do, they don't let on. I like to keep my private life to myself and to the Lord Jesus.

STEPHAN. I know it's none of my business, but you ought to consider changing Churches. There are some decent Gay religious groups I hear.

ZEBULON. Not in this town.

STEPHAN. (GETTING UP) Well, Hell fire, we'll start our own damn Church! The Gay Spirits of Smallville! Come on, Zeb, let's blow this joint and go cruising for some recruits.

ZEBULON. (STANDING) What about, Mark? Can he come, too? We shouldn't ought to leave him alone should we?

STEPHAN. He can take care of himself when he makes up his mind to.

ZEBULON. Is he really dying?

STEPHAN. (THINKING A MOMENT, THEN WHIMSICALLY) Naw, the whole fuckin' thing's a hoax to win sympathy votes in the next presidential election. His doctor's pissed because he won't let him pump him full of the latest sample of anti-biotics. If I was in his shoes I wouldn't fancy being a guinea pig for overzealous quacks.

ZEBULON. (AMUSED) Mark always was kind of stubborn.

STEPHAN. I've always had the gnawing suspicion that this disease was created in some secret undercover laboratory by a thankless administration.

ZEBULON. Aren't you scared of being exposed to it?

STEPHAN. I've been tested in the last year and it's negative. Besides, we've been careful and always take precautions. Let's hit the road, man, finish your drink and come on. I wanna drive down by the river.

ZEBULON. (FINISHING HIS DRINK) Let's check on Mark first. He's probably awake by now. We were pretty loud.

STEPHAN. Believe me, when he's out, he's out cold. (HE STARTS FOR THE DOOR, HANDING ZEBULON THE KEYS) You drive, you've only had one drink. Did anyone ever tell you what beautiful eyes you have?