

Masquerade

by J. Mykell Collinz

"A harvest festival?"

"Yes, with music and dance, theatrical performance of tragedies and comedies. Having a primeval orientation, celebrating the cultivation of herbs and vines. With ritualistic use of intoxicants, to remove inhibitions, to liberate participants."

"Sounds like a pagan religion, Johnny."

"The ancient Greek festivals, Rosemary, were therapeutic for their participants. Our festival will prove therapeutic as well. I find it therapeutic just to contemplate it."

"You can't expect to recapture that same spirit today, people have changed."

"They haven't changed fundamentally. A good tragedy, or comedy, which honestly mimics human nature, can still be medicinal to the human spirit. Especially if the audience participation aspect can be recaptured. Today's audiences are too sober. They're rational, passive, observers instead of being participants. They've lost their insight into the mythical, into the emotional value of human suffering."

"The emotional value of human suffering?"

"I'm stressing the insight factor here, derived from the total audience experience. Every individual attending the festival will participate in a workshop preparing them for the music, dance, and theatrical events to follow. Everyone can have a role to play in the final drama, where, traditionally, everyone suffers in the end, in one way or another."

"Tell me more about the ritualistic utilization of intoxicants to remove inhibitions. How will that work?"

"That's really up to the individual, everybody's different. During the workshops we'll screen for problems. Potentially abusive individuals will be given special treatment. If necessary, we'll use armed security to contain violence."

"That sounds too dangerous to me, Johnny. Where would they allow you to hold such a festival around here?"

"I have an isolated, mountain valley resort in mind. I'll keep it relatively small at first, by invitation only, making it exclusive and therefore desirable. Outwardly, we'll be celebrating the grape plant, its harvest, and its consumption as wine. Yet other natural intoxicants may be included in the rituals, marijuana in particular. Of course, let's be clear about this, people should already understand how these intoxicants can be used effectively, along with music and dance, to remove inhibitions, to liberate themselves to a more natural, primal state for the theatrical performance. We don't want them falling down drunk or stoned out of their minds. Not too many of them, anyway."

"How will you choose who to invite?"

"I'll experiment at first by inviting scholars, playwrights, poets, actors, students of drama in general, hoping for a representative cross section of humanity, or something like that."

"This is a big change from our previous characterization of you, Johnny. While on tour, your presentation spoke to the average person's social, economic, and political needs. Now, a festival, with a primeval orientation, celebrating the cultivation of herbs and vines? How should the world interpret this?"

"I don't see anything inconsistent, Rosemary, about going back to our origins for inspiration. Along with social, economic, and political needs, the so called average person has an even more primal need for a direct experience of a higher purpose in life."

"Higher purpose? Higher than what? This is beginning to sound too much like a primitive religion. You're moving into dangerous territory, Johnny. I think we should stay focused on basic needs, on a human scale."

"I think you're missing the point here, Rosemary. This is human scale stuff. Let me tell you about the first production. We'll begin with Euripides, *The Bacchae*. It's about the god-intoxicated female celebrants in the ecstatic retinue of Dionysus. They carry long wooden sticks wrapped in grape vines and leaves. They strike rocks

with their stick, water gushes forth. They scratch the earth, wine bubbles up. They draw milk from the stream, honey trickles from their stick."

"You call that human scale?"

"Let me finish. They wear snakes girded to their hips. They suckle deer fawns and wolf cubs like infants, at their breasts simultaneously. Weapons of iron cannot wound them. Fire does not burn them. The snakes harmlessly lick the sweat from their heated bodies. Now, imagine yourself playing such a character in this theatrical production."

"You want me to imagine myself playing a Nymph?"

"The women associated with Dionysus were called Maenads. But, yes, they were a lot like Nymphs, I believe. Do you find that offensive?"

"A group of young Nymphs for yourself? Is that what you're looking for? When do I start rehearsing the part, now?"

"I must admit I have thought about that. But, no, don't do it for my sake. Do it for yourself, or not at all. Anyway, there are plenty of other characters to play. Write your own character. Be a goddess. However, personal insight, derived from participation in the drama, should be our ultimate goal for everyone attending the festival."

"You seem bound and determined to go through with this, Johnny, so I'll stop badgering you, for now. Tell me what you need to get it going and I'll help you with the money end."

