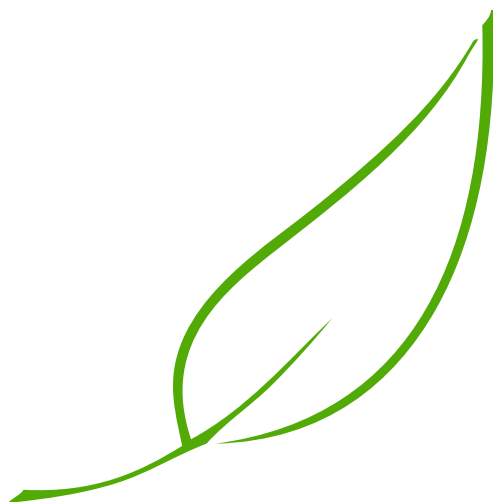


CATCH A FALLING STAR

by Ken Bradbury



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NURSE: *(talking on the phone)* No, it's been quiet tonight. And thank goodness. When this hospital's busy, it's a madhouse. You should see some of the cases we get in here. It's good to have one peaceful evening.

HUMPTY-DUMPTY: *(from offstage)* Get away from me!

NURSE: So much for that.

HD: *(still offstage)* Varlet! Release me from your clutches!

NURSE: Look, I'll call you back. Sounds like we've got a mental case coming in.

HD: *(entering, an extremely irate Humpty-Dumpty, limping)* I heard that!

NURSE: *(quickly grabbing him and helping him to a chair)* Let me help you, sir.

HD: Unhand me! Unhand me!

NURSE: I have to touch you, sir. I'm a nurse and this is a hospital.

HD: That's no excuse. Just give me a Band-Aid and let me out of this madhouse!

NURSE: This is a hospital and you'll have to lower your voice.

HD: Do you know who I am?!

NURSE: I know you're injured. I'm sure they got the rest of the information in the ER.

HD: Do you mean you don't recognize me?

NURSE: *(sighs)* OK. *(looks at him)* No. Never seen you in my life.

HD: Good grief! Don't you read? Don't you watch television? Films! The Theatre!!! Have you spent your life in this sterile cocoon, Miss Bedpan?

NURSE: My name is Nurse Applebee.

HD: And I ... *(rising painfully out of his chair)* am the great ... Humpty-Dumpty! *(as he stomps his foot to strike a noble pose, a spasm of pain shoots up his leg and he collapses onto the chair)* Ahhhhhh!

NURSE: *(matter of fact)* I told you to sit down!

HD: *(still writhing)* You! You will tell me nothing, Nurse Applesauce!

NURSE: Applebee. Now take your clothes off.

HD: I beg your pardon!

NURSE: You've been injured. We have to see how bad.

HD: You will see nothing!

NURSE: Could be, but you've got to take them off anyway.

HD: Thousands have paid to see the great Humpty-Dumpty walk across the stage in all his splendor! Millions have screamed "More!" as the great Humpty-Dumpty took his bows! Miss Applejack, you are talking to the greatest actor alive today! I never work without costume!

NURSE: Applebee. And I'm very impressed, now hold still. *(she rips an imaginary shirt off his back, he howls in displeasure)*

HD: I am aghast!

NURSE: You might be, but you've also got some nasty bruises there, buddy. What'd you do?

HD: The great Humpty-Dumpty took a great fall!

NURSE: Great. So where does it hurt?

HD: Ah! The question is, Who does it hurt? Thousands screaming out for my return! Millions mourning the loss of their conquering hero! I can see the headlines: The Stage Goes Dark as Dumpty Declines!

NURSE: Got a temperature?

HD: Passion is my temperature! Tragedy is my pulse!

NURSE: Look, are these questions too hard for you?

HD: Nothing! Nothing is too hard for the Great Dumpty! No challenge too tepid! No adventure too dangerous! I laugh at pain! (*laughs*) I scorn adversity! (*he scorns*) I ... (*she puts a stethoscope to his bare back*) Ahhhhhhhh! You've stabbed me! I am murdered! I die!

NURSE: It's just a stethoscope.

HD: Oh, cruel fate! To be left alone at the hands of Attila-the-Nurse!

NURSE: Applebee. So how'd you say you fell? Tripped on something?

HD: The Great Humpty-Dumpty does not trip! I was ambushed!

NURSE: Ambushed? You in a western?

HD: Western? Western! You've cut me to the quick! Thinkest thou that the Great Dumpty would appear on something so base as a horse?

NURSE: (*shrugs*) I don't know. Clint Eastwood always looked good on one.

HD: (*screaming out*) Torture! Help! She's torturing me with amateurism! Help! Help!

NURSE: (*clamping her hand over his mouth*) If you don't quiet down, I've got a padded cell.

HD: (*breaking free*) Yes! That's it! MacBeth! Drive me to madness with your threats, M'Lady! I shall not break!

NURSE: I'm glad I've got tomorrow off. You say you were ambushed?

HD: Hoodwinked! Plotted against! Some evil knave moved the stage just as I was about to deliver Hamlet's soliloquy, and I tumbled into oblivion!

NURSE: What?

HD: Every night I gave myself the choice ... "To Be, or Not To Be?"... and tonight, the answer was "No!"

NURSE: Then you tripped?

HD: I plummeted headlong into the depths of eternal degradation!

NURSE: Huh?

HD: I fell into the orchestra pit.

NURSE: (*tries to stifle a laugh, but fails*)



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