

## **Last Act**

by Richard Rose

~ Excerpted from TAT Journal [\*Issue 2\*](#)

TAT Foundation founder, Richard Rose, spent a lifetime in spiritual and philosophical research. Rose's short story, "Last Act," is a dream-like evocation of a man's thoughts before the curtain falls.

---

This was the last act of the play. Old James Inman was a little embarrassed and yet nervous. Why, thought he, should a playwright be nervous about someone else's play? This was, after all, a rare privilege... acting about the directions of acting.

This was a room. It was large... large, but the corners and far sides were dimly seen. The far side of the room could have contained many people. If there were many people there the observer would never know, because things were hazy.

There were a dozen people there, grown people, and two or three children. There was an evident age gap. The children were four or five at the most, several little blond-haired boys and girls. The men were no less than forty, and most of them were fifty or more. John Perry and Irving G. Grubb sat across the table from Inman and seemed obscured by cigar smoke. These were old acquaintances, but all the rest had been recent encounters for Inman.

John Perry was Russian and he never fully explained how he came upon the name of Perry. He was tall and heavy. A combination of an eager man, and an irritated man. He was always impatient to get to the Truth. He never did anything about it really, but he was always quick to criticize any signs of frivolous thinking in others.

Irving was also tall, and also had a fair amount of dark hair. But Irving was better built, not quite so heavy. Irving was dour and suspicious. When he talked to you, he turned his head away to a degree, and he always listened with a frown of disbelief. And when he began to talk or reply the listener always found a mind of conjecture rather than argument, and a general mood of compromise together with a patient reaching-out with questions that might bring the two points of view together rather than trying to force his own views.

Grandchildren are a spark of life for old people, but when the grandchildren reach the adult stage, there is no real urge to look after, or worry about great-grandchildren. The old men gravitate to the park, to the courthouse, or to some bench along a stream and indulge one another in meaningless comments which are always backed by meanings that all of them understand and never bother to try to translate.

This particular meeting of Inman, Perry and Grubb, and the rest, differed in that there was no small talk. There were no audible words. All of them had learned to converse adroitly by

direct mind. A gestalt, a mood, or an entire philosophy was communicable in a couple of seconds. There would be a short lag... and each man's response could be picked up.

Inman was looking back ten years, and they all knew it. There was a group of young men and women. It took years of his teaching to convince them that they did not exist. They were gone, and now in a way he wished that they still existed. Yes, they still exist in Timelatch where he met them... exist to lesser or greater degrees, that is. They were upset when he decided to take a vacation from Timelatch for a few days. His first thought was to take a couple with him, but he could not decide which, if any, could stand to be away from people of their own age.

Those were good people. Most of them real warriors. And those who were not warriors were lovers. There are only two real ways to make the trip of life, Inman always insisted. A person must fight desperately for his goals, or he must love the goal without quibble or reason.

The ones who turned out to be warriors were Frantice, Martin, Masara, Messano, Duke, Curstburger, Gugenheim, and many others, forty or more. They had gone out to teach, to live at the most effective angle for betweenness, so that their magic might multiply. Some had established their own experimental centers, and were making mistakes and learning how to make more mistakes and more voltage in the ensuing determination. Each of them had their own disciples who were not always taught the exact teachings Inman had advised. Each diverged a little, each to his peculiar personality.

This may have annoyed Inman five years ago; little divergences had no effect upon his mind now.

Irving smiled. His unabashed message was, "You old bastard, what is so important about your session with those shadows you projected but could not hold on to. We do not see you as such an important cog. And you are a warm person, that is about all. Oh, yes, I'll agree, a man who has read a lot and learned a lot... and I might even add, you have a soft heart in you... a bit mushy... did you no good at all."

Inman smiled too. What is wrong with the Truth? Inman, the end-result, is little more than, a shadow. But then man is also something else besides that which winds up at the finish. He is also the history of his action. He is a process... even if one end is grey and smells like a damp cellar.

Inman looked at Grubb and Perry, and thought, "It is good to be with you. No changing you two. No hopes unhatched here. No disciples unfinished. Just old friends who have no idea that I am. They see mostly a body. If I am warm in my attitude, they warm themselves at the glow of friendship. And if I am distant or cool to them, there is no anger, but a sort of detachment as if they were not picking up my thoughts at all."

Perry looked at Inman. "Disciples hell. Is that all? What became of your family? Doesn't it bother you to sit here in this haze, knowing that your family will never know or believe that you are anything but a capital nut? Ideas be damned. I can live without ideas, philosophies or earth-shaking revelations about the final Nature of Things... if I could be with my children and my grandchildren. What is there in any form of life where there is no longer any love?"

Irving looked at the floor. He was disappointed in Perry. Inman stepped inside Perry for a moment and felt the heart-rending loneliness that Perry had. But all of them knew that Perry's boys had grown up and away. Poe was dead, and left no children. And Russ, who looked so much like John, threw his father out of his house, alienating their grandchildren from John. The mother had lost her mind.

And John silently hears these things which he already knew, and nods his head. There was no hope. And there was no place to go to find the meaningful hope of youth again. And that was what it would take. None of them had the energy to become ambitious again, nor the passion to prime themselves for new folly. So this grey room would have to suffice for the time being.

Somebody projected the need for a drink for all of them. Inman knew his lines. The script called for him to have a heart attack and he was supposed to slump forward upon the arm of his chair, at the mention of drinking.

So he slumped forward. Perry and Grubb responded properly as the script directed them to. They simply stared.

Inman projected the word, "Death."

Everyone in the room looked at him and did not move. They stared. They echoed the word "death" in the same tone that a child would echo the word, "school". The acting was good. Some looked sincerely blank.

The three little children came over to Inman's figure, and seemed amused that his arm protruded from the arm of the chair as if it were pointing straight ahead.

Inman thought, "This is not in the script, but it looks rather macabre to have children in a play, playing with a dead man's fingers." So he projected to Perry and Grubb, "One of you fellows lead the children away."

No projection came in return. Something had happened to the telepathic rapport. Everyone stared at him. He got a slight glimpse of their thoughts, but they directed no message to him. Or if they did, he was not picking up any intentional projection. He knew what they were thinking as they stared.

"About the only thing Inman plays good is a dead man."

Then Inman knew that something was happening. He had lost the power to project because his entire chain of quantum energy was failing. This could only mean one thing. Genuine death. They would never know the difference, and so could not revive him. He would be dead for ages before they knew he was really dead.

The voltage had spun down. The body had lost energy before, but had always recuperated soon enough to feed the neural coils with quantum energy.

Now he only remembered the words to project, and was not sure if they would ever be received. "I am really dying. What a way to go, acting in a damned play... the part of a dead man."

