

SAVING NINEVEH

Act I

Scene 3

Setting: The Belly of the Great Fish

At Rise: The stage is empty and dimly lit. There are faint sounds of water; maybe a humpback whale song.

JONAH

(Tumbling and sprawling onto stage)

Lo-o-o-o-ord!

(A bucket of water is thrown in after him, perhaps a fish or two.)

Lord, have mercy on me!

(JONAH cowers, waiting the next blow, but nothing happens. HE cautiously uncurls.)

I'm alive. I'm still alive! O God. O Lord. Safe. Safe. Praise be. Thank You. Thank You.
But where . . . ?

(Tests the surface of the stage with his hand.)

What is this? It's like . . . like . . . What the . . . ?

(Smells his hand.)

Eeesh!

(JONAH starts to wipe his hand on his shirt, then stops. HE holds his hand in the air indecisively a moment, then wipes it on his pants, as far down as possible.)

Where the . . . ?

(HE struggles to his feet on the uncertain footing.)

Oh, it can't . . . I mean, I saw it but I thought it went . . . Oh He wouldn't . . . But but . . .

(Pause)

This is disgusting! Weren't You listening! I said drown me, kill me, be done with me! I could live with that. But but this! This! Elijah, sure! For him You send a flaming chariot. For Jonah, though, what? A fish? Jonah the Prophet, carried away in his chariot of slime? Is this Your idea of a joke?

(RAPHAEL enters holding a lighted lamp. JONAH doesn't see him.)

It's dark. It's wet. It stinks. It's hard to stand up. And all the running water is on the outside! "Go to Nineveh! Their offense is rank in My nostrils!" Well, maybe being omnipotent, You could afford to be a little less sensitive. And anyway I got my own life to live!

(Pause)

Do you know, when I was young, I used to dream of being a prophet. I really did. When other kids were out playing in the streets on those long, warm, fragrant summer evenings in Galilee, I used to sit in my room and read about the prophets. And then I would lift my eyes from the scroll and stare off over the hills—and there they would be, rising up before me in all their vigor, all their rage, all the fury of their love for You. The Prophets! Moses staggering down the Mountain under the crushing weight of the tablets, and then hurling them in rage at Aaron's Golden Calf! His face so flaming bright, it would sear your eyes to look at him. Oh, and Elijah! How I used to read his stories over and over. There danced the four hundred prophets of Baal around their cold smokeless altars while Elijah mocked! "Where is this Baal, eh? Why doesn't he hear you? Could it be he's asleep? Or maybe the old boy's in the outhouse reading the paper!" And when it was over, the hillsides of Carmel ran red with the blood of idolatry! When I was young, I prayed that You would call me and use me. If You had only called me then, O Lord, how readily, how eagerly I would have answered: *Here am I! Send me!* But that was then. And I'm tired now. And I no longer have it in me.

RAPHAEL

Well, you're going to have to get it back.

JONAH

You! So you've been dogging my steps the whole way.

RAPHAEL

I was assigned to you. We're in this together. And have we got work to catch up on!

JONAH

Listen, I really don't want this job, I have never wanted this job, and it's not growing on me. This is, without any possibility of doubt, the worst trip I have ever been on.

RAPHAEL

You're the one He chose. I'm stuck with you.

JONAH

You're stuck with me!

RAPHAEL

And what a screw-up you've been, too.

JONAH

Screw-up? Is that all you can . . .

(Pause)

That's it, isn't it? I mean, that's exactly what I've been.

RAPHAEL

A complete, five-star, gilt-edged, certified Grade A screw-up.

JONAH

Well, that's comprehensive.

RAPHAEL

Have you felt The Change yet?

JONAH

The change?

RAPHAEL

A sort of thin, pale, bleached quality to everything?

JONAH

No. I'm aware of a dark, stinky, cold quality to everything, but that's about it.

RAPHAEL

You know, the further you stray, the thinner everything gets. But, if you haven't felt it, I suppose there's no use my trying to explain it to you. We'll give it a while.

JONAH

You're not going to leave me in here?

RAPHAEL

You would perhaps prefer to be out there?

JONAH

But it's dark, and I'm scared, and these juices are making my skin itch.

RAPHAEL

You will see the sun again, never fear. And in the meantime, here, you may keep this.

(Hands JONAH the lamp.)

It will burn as long as you need it. But I'm going. You need a little time to think and I have other screw-ups—I mean, humans—to attend to.

JONAH

Wait! We've got to talk!

RAPHAEL

God is listening. You can take all these matters up with Him.

JONAH

God.

RAPHAEL

Jonah, He saved your life. This is a blessing.

(BLACK OUT)

End of Act I, Scene 3