



EXIT FROM THE UNDERWORLD

by Neil Rathmell

A SMITH SCRIPT

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a short play by Neil Rathmell

CHARACTERS

Aeneas

Anchises

Playwright

*(Enter **AENEAS**.)*

AENEAS

She said I would find him here, on the Elysian fields. How quiet it is! Just a distant murmur, like bees on a summer day, the sigh of souls freed from their troubles, freed by kindly death.

(Looks about, calls.)

Father! Anchises! Father!

(Waits expectantly.)

I'm so excited! What will he look like? Will he be the old man he became during the long siege or will death have made him young again?

(Looks about and calls again.)

Anchises! Father!

(Looks about again.)

Where is he? She said he'd be here.

*(Enter **ANCHISES**.)*

ANCHISES

Did someone call?

AENEAS

(Turns and sees him.)

Father!

(Goes up to him and kneels, his head bowed.)

ANCHISES

*(Looking down at **AENEAS**, puzzled.)*

Did you drop something? What was it? Where did it go?

AENEAS

(Taking his hand and placing it on his head.)

Bless me, father!

ANCHISES

What? Do I know you?

AENEAS

(Standing.)

I am Aeneas, your son. Have I changed so much?

ANCHISES

What did you say your name was?

AENEAS

Aeneas.

ANCHISES

(Thinks.)

Say it again.

AENEAS

Aeneas.

ANCHISES

(Shakes his head.)

No, it's not ringing any bells.

AENEAS

Your son, Aeneas. I am your son.

ANCHISES

No, I don't think so. Who was your mother?

AENEAS

Venus.

ANCHISES

Venus?

AENEAS

She pretended to be a Phrygian princess. It was only later she told you who she really was. I was brought up by nymphs until I was five. Then she brought me to you and told you to call me Aeneas.

ANCHISES

Well, you'd think I'd remember that, wouldn't you?

(Pause.)

What about my wife? Did I have a wife? I don't remember one. Mind you, I'm getting very forgetful these days.

AENEAS You don't remember the siege?
(ANCHISES thinks, shakes his head.)
 Ten years from start to finish? You must remember, surely. When it was over, we managed to escape, you, me, my wife, Creusa, our son, Ascanius. Don't you remember? I carried you on my back.

ANCHISES I must be getting old. They say your short-term memory goes when you get old. I'm sorry... er...

AENEAS Aeneas.
ANCHISES Aeneas.
(Pause.)
 You're not making this up, are you? I sometimes think people make things up to make me look stupid because I can't remember them.

AENEAS I wouldn't do that.
ANCHISES Some people do. They do it all the time.
AENEAS I carried you on my back. Troy was in flames. I wanted to stay.
ANCHISES It was in flames and you wanted to stay?
AENEAS It was a matter of honour. You didn't want to go either.
ANCHISES Didn't I?
AENEAS You thought we should stay and fight to the death.
ANCHISES Did I?
AENEAS It was Creusa.
ANCHISES Creusa?
AENEAS My wife, She wanted us to escape for the sake of Ascanius.
ANCHISES Who was he?
AENEAS Our son. I told you before. We saw a flame burning on Ascanius's head.
ANCHISES A flame?
AENEAS Yes.
ANCHISES On his head?
AENEAS Then we saw a falling star and you said it was a sign from the gods that we should leave.

ANCHISES I said that?
AENEAS So we left. But you were too old to make it on your own, so I carried you.

ANCHISES Did you?
AENEAS On my back. I told you.
ANCHISES Told me what?
(Pause. AENEAS turns aside and speaks to himself, as before. ANCHISES remains where he is, humming from time to time rather tunelessly.)

AENEAS I did what the Sybil said. I went to the forest in search of the golden bough. My mother sent doves to guide me to it. I pulled the branch from the tree and took it back. She led me to the gates of hell, where Charon waits to ferry the spirits of the dead across the river. I climbed onto the boat and he rowed me across. And now...
(Turns to look at ANCHISES.)
 Is this what the gods give us? Peace in oblivion, happiness in forgetting? My father is as ignorant as I am, but his ignorance is bliss and mine is only despair!
(Heaves a sigh, hangs his head, suddenly looks up.)
 Hang on! He might have forgotten the past, but that's not to say that he can't look into the future. I'll give it one more go.