

Father Time Meets His Match

by

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FATHER TIME MEETS HIS MATCH

Synopsis

Enticed to take human form under the guise of a masquerade, Father Time is captivated by a beautiful young woman who leads him into a trap set by the world's foremost time researcher. Intent on making him pay for the grief he causes, the researcher unveils her revolutionary method for neutralizing him -- a method with consequences as yet unfathomed. For his sake, and perhaps that of all humanity, Father Time struggles to escape.

Set & Structure: One act; two distinct simple settings

Characters

Dr. Alexandra Battle - eminent middle-aged scientist deeply scarred by the realization that time plays no favorites and that all suffer its ravages; distressed by the life choices she has made, she is resentful and vindictive but not evil.

Princess - young and innocent, she has come under the aura of Dr. Battle; compassionate, perhaps to a fault.

Father Time - Clockmaster of the Universe who has taken human form briefly on somewhat of a lark, just for the experience of living; strong-willed and ultimately defiant but not immune from feelings. A worthy combatant for Battle.

Place -- A ballroom and an adjoining room

Time -- The present

Production Note: In that brilliance and insanity are often indistinguishable, Dr. Battle must be portrayed as exemplifying aspects of both.

FATHER TIME MEETS HIS MATCH

Downstage right is decorated as part of a grand ballroom. There is light classical music playing and there are many background conversations. A large image of a broken clock with the words "The End of Time as We Know It" sits on a tripod. Consistent with the theme of a masquerade, a male dressed as Father Time enters, a young woman dressed as a princess on his arm. They stop and engage in playful banter; she hides much of her face behind a fan. A somewhat older woman wearing a long dress and a mask that covers her eyes swoops on stage then interposes herself between them in a protective manner.

ALEXANDRA

Well, well, what have we here? A young lovely about to fall victim to the wiles of Father Time? My dear, didn't your mother ever warn you about such things? He is, no doubt, intriguing but, take it from me, it's senseless to be captivated by his charms for he is an unforgiving master.

PRINCESS

Oh, but madam, you judge me wrongly and with prejudice. We are but friends, newly minted.

ALEXANDRA

That is oh so apparent, but once put in circulation the coin that is newly minted can quickly become despoiled. I bid you employ the utmost care in your dealings with this rogue; he is most heartless.

FATHER TIME

Madam, you do slight me severely. I deserve not this reproach.

ALEXANDRA

Thou liest, dear sir, and I have countless witnesses to verify it is so.

She begins to move away then stops and returns.

But who am I to doubt the word of an allegedly honorable man or, worse yet, stand in the way of divine romance?

(in an obvious poetic rhythm)

The time of mirth may not long endure, so cast thy net quickly and be sure; what's caught today let none forget, yet honor that catch without regret. If thou desirest to make feelings clear, do so in earnest where others won't hear.

She nods toward a door downstage left.

You may have confidence the door leads to a place of security, perhaps even against the ravages of Father Time. Ta-ta, my dear.

She spirits away.

Our hostess? FATHER TIME

She nods.

Do you know her?

Don't you? PRINCESS

I'm afraid not. I...I'm new here. FATHER TIME

There's nothing to be afraid of in not knowing her; it's when you become acquainted that you need to worry. PRINCESS

About her or you? FATHER TIME

What do you think? PRINCESS

I think I'd enjoy being alone with you. FATHER TIME

Oh dear sir, you makest me blush. Do I have thy oath of felicity? PRINCESS

You may have whatever you want from me. FATHER TIME

PRINCESS

I doubt that you would ever dare to be so generous; being so young and innocent I am easy prey for cunning words and manipulations. But I am also not nearly so helpless as you might imagine.

She takes him by the hand and leads him to the door. They stop momentarily and scan the room. He looks pensive.

PRINCESS

Cold feet, for Father Time no less?

FATHER TIME

No...I....I just want to remember this, this experience. It's so

PRINCESS

Timeless?

He turns to stare at her.

FATHER TIME

Yes...yes, it's timeless.

He kisses her lightly on the cheek; she pulls away, and reaches for the door handle. He moves quickly to cut her off.

Age before beauty.

He smiles playfully, turns the doorknob, and enters. She follows. The door closes. There is a loud thump and the stage goes dark.

The lights come up to reveal the room they entered. It is sparsely furnished. In the center Father Time sits on an ordinary chair, hands tied behind his back. He is beginning to regain consciousness. The Princess is at his side, watching. The other woman stands before him. Downstage right is a table with a sheet draped over some box-like object with a protruding cylinder. There is an antique table with a washbowl and pitcher atop in the background. A second chair sits beside the table. There is a French door in the background.

ALEXANDRA
(much more brusquely)

Don't worry, he's not hurt.

She pulls off her mask and tosses it aside, almost contemptuously. She unceremoniously lets her hair down then begins unbuttoning her dress. Beneath is a plain shirt and calf-length skirt. She hurls the dress aside scornfully.

She glances at the Princess.

Well?

PRINCESS

Well what?

ALEXANDRA

Are you going to do your job or just stand there mooning over him?

PRINCESS

Why did you have to hit him so hard? He may have a concussion.

Alexandra moves to Father Time's side, rips off his beard and tosses it on the floor. She does the same with the white wig. He stirs slightly. She cups his chin in her hand and looks at him closely.

ALEXANDRA

Not bad, not bad at all, even for an immortal.

PRINCESS

What did you expect?

ALEXANDRA
(thoughtfully)

To tell the truth, I didn't know what to expect. The archetypal images are obviously just wishful palliatives, reassurances for the masses. But

She walks around him, analyzing.

.... he is surprisingly ...

PRINCESS

Handsome?

ALEXANDRA

If you say so; you're a much better judge of that than I.

PRINCESS

You're sure it's him. I mean, there's no chance we

ALEXANDRA

Got the wrong man? Hardly.

PRINCESS

But how can you be certain?

ALEXANDRA

I can't -- until he wakes up and we confront him.

PRINCESS

But if we're wrong...We, we could go to jail.

ALEXANDRA

Yes, we could. But if we're right, if we're right ...

The Princess walks away then turns to face her.

PRINCESS

Alexandra, are you sure this is the only way? I mean, couldn't we just

ALEXANDRA

Just what? Talk to him, try to reason with him? Plead our case and rely on his compassion? He has none; can't you see that. Look in the eyes of a crippled old woman or a lonely elderly man who's going blind. Does that strike you as the work of a compassionate entity.

PRINCESS

But what makes you think he'll change, or even want to?

ALEXANDRA

He won't ... but I've invested my whole life in finding a way to defeat him.

Father Time raises his head slightly.
It falls back to his chest. The Princess
moves to the pitcher on the table and
pours some water on a cloth. She
returns to his side and places the cloth
on his forehead. He begins to revive.

FATHER TIME

What...what happened?

ALEXANDRA

That's a bit vague, don't you think? Since the demise of the dinosaurs or the birth of Christ? Before the Battle of Waterloo or Sherman's march to the sea? After Archimedes said "Eureka" or Oppenheimer quoted from the Bhagavad-Gita?

She kneels and looks into his eyes.

The key word is not "what" but "when."

FATHER TIME

Where, where am I?

ALEXANDRA

Here, not there. Not where you were a few minutes ago. Not where you normally are.

FATHER TIME

What do you want from me? I, I don't have any money. I, I travel light.

ALEXANDRA

Oh yes, I suspect you do, flitting from here to there and back again in anonymity just to watch us, observe us as we suffer.

FATHER TIME

What are you talking about?

ALEXANDRA

I'm talking about your place in the universe, as guardian of chronology, the keeper of all time.

FATHER TIME

What? You're mad.

ALEXANDRA

Perhaps, but perhaps not. And you're going to help prove that one way or the other.

He tries to move and discovers his arms
are tied. He tries to wiggle free.

Ah, ah, naughty, naughty. We want you to stay with us for a while -- just a short time.

She turns and crosses the room to a coat rack
where she grabs a lab coat; she starts to put it
on as she returns.

You see, oh dear eternal one, you've been careless. Like all the ancient gods, you weren't content to stay in your own domain, above the toil and trouble of everyday human existence. No, you had to come down and mingle with us, show off perhaps. Or was it more malicious, to taunt us, belittle us because we have so little of what you have? You were foolish, a thoroughly human trait I must say, and now we mere mortals have the upper hand. To quote Bob Dylan, "How does it feel?"

PRINCESS

Oh please, Alexandra, let him go. This...this can't work...And even if it did, what right --

ALEXANDRA

Do we have to interfere? What right, indeed. But then again, what right does he have to mock us? He came into our midst, not vice versa.

FATHER TIME

What do you want?

ALEXANDRA

What **do** I want? That's an excellent question.

She turns her back on him.

I guess I want ... justice.

FATHER TIME

(he stiffens; then defiantly)

You'll have your justice -- you'll get exactly what you deserve....Maybe sooner than you think.

She spins quickly.

ALEXANDRA

Ah, now there's the Father Time that we all know and loathe. Quite arrogant, especially for someone in your predicament.

FATHER TIME

It's not as much a predicament as you think. You can't keep me here forever; in fact, you can't keep me here for long at all.

ALEXANDRA

Maybe not, but perhaps I won't have to.

The Princess moves to her side.

PRINCESS

Alexandra please, let him go. It won't work...and even if it did we don't know ...

ALEXANDRA

What would happen? You're right, we don't. But could it be any worse?

FATHER TIME

(struggling to get loose)

You're crazy, you know that. This is insane.

ALEXANDRA

Sanity, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder, don't you think?

She rushes across the room to the table
and wheels it back to directly in front
of him. She crosses back and forth in
front of him repeatedly.

You've made a mistake in coming here. You could have stayed safe in your ethereal home but you took human form to attend my party. The End of Time as We Know It -- a delightfully enticing theme, wasn't it? And you, in your arrogance, just couldn't resist making an appearance to mock me. Yet you don't even know who I am, do you?

She stoops and shouts directly in his face.

Do you?

She stands and composes herself.

My dear Father Time, I am Alexandra Battle, Doctor Alexandra Battle. Does that name ring a bell now? No? What if I said the world's foremost researcher in the field of the nature of time. Nobel Prize winner, lauded author, celebrated speaker, dedicated educator.

She turns away then turns back to face him.

Oh, and inventor. No one knows about the inventor part ... well no one except the lovely princess.

Princess moves to her side.

PRINCESS

You don't have to do this. We can let him go.

ALEXANDRA

Tut, tut, my dear. I'm sure he wouldn't want to leave even if he could. No, I think he's so intrigued that he'd want to stay just to see what I've invented -- the thing beneath the sheet. A boogie man for Father Time, shall we say.

FATHER TIME

You can't hurt me, you know.

ALEXANDRA

Can't I? Well, we'll see about that. Then again, maybe I won't have to.

She reaches beneath the sheet and pulls out a cord then pulls it across the room to an outlet and plugs it in. She returns to confront him.

Come here, my darling.

Princess hesitates.

(with an edge)

I said come here.

Princess complies.

Look at him, take a good hard look at the face of evil, the greatest evil ever conceived. Doesn't appear threatening, does it? Not maniacal like Hitler or rabid like Genghis Khan. Not the face of a cruel dictator or a mass murderer, you say? No, no, an evil far more insidious. You see my dear, he is nothing more than a common thief. Or perhaps an uncommon thief. Yes uncommon. A typical thief takes something from you quickly, spirits it away in the blink of an eye and usually sells it to get something -- money, drugs, guns. But our dear Father Time isn't in such a hurry, so he can do his work gradually, ever so slowly. In fact, most of us don't even realize what he's doing. By the time we do, it's too late to do anything; our time is almost all gone. Isn't that right?

FATHER TIME

(ceasing to struggle; with conviction)

You can't hurt me.

ALEXANDRA

You keep saying that. What makes you think I want to? Maybe I have no intention of hurting you --

She kneels directly before him and leans close.

Maybe I intend to kill you.

She rises and turns her back on him.

It's been thought of before, you know. People talk about it almost impulsively. "Just killing time" they say without realizing that it's you doing the killing, you sucking precious minutes, hours or days out of their life. And no one has ever tried to do anything about it -- until now.

She rips away the sheet to reveal a box-like device with electrical components on top and a tube projecting from the front. She turns the table slightly so that the tube is aimed at Father Time.

Princess steps forward.

PRINCESS

Alexandra, there has to be another way.

ALEXANDRA

Another way? Really? You think someone, anyone, else has the ability to entice him to take human form? Could someone else devise such a trap? And if they could, what then? Who else has the ability -- no, the brilliance -- to invent this?

She gestures toward the object then moves to its side and touches it lovingly.

I call it the Alexandra 200k, the crowning achievement of my career. The 200k represents my investment -- the more than 200,000 hours over the last three decades -- that I've spent perfecting it. And it is perfect; I've made sure of that because I knew I'd have only one chance to get you -- only one chance to use it. But it only needs to be used once.

FATHER TIME

You're insane.

ALEXANDRA

Am I? But I'm free and you're my prisoner, so perhaps -- at least for now -- insanity rules.

FATHER TIME

You can't kill me.

ALEXANDRA

Oh yes, yes, I know. Some tripe about how vital you are to the fate of the universe. It may be true, it may not; who cares? Quite frankly, I'm not at all interested in your death.

FATHER TIME

Then what do you want?

ALEXANDRA

What do I want ? For lack of a better word, revenge. I want to see you suffer.

FATHER TIME

Why?

ALEXANDRA

Why? Why? Oh how deliciously wonderful. You don't even realize the cause of your punishment. That makes it even better. Anyone can endure torture if they understand the reason for it -- military information, state secret, personal reputation -- the idea of suffering for a just cause makes for happy martyrs. Torture just for torture's sake, well that's no fun. It's just mean. And how can that be fulfilling? But knowing that there's a reason for your pain -- a good, solid, justifiable reason -- yet not realizing what it is, ah that's the ultimate punishment.

Princess rushes to her side.

PRINCESS

You didn't say anything about torturing him.

ALEXANDRA

I didn't? Oh, well a major oversight on my part, I must say. I'll have to send myself to my room without supper.

She tinkers with the instrument. Princess turns and moves slowly to Father Time's side; she gently touches him on the upper arm.

PRINCESS

(touching him gently on the shoulder)

I...I...I didn't know it would be like this. Please believe me.

She turns and starts to move away then looks back over her shoulder and stops. Alexandra continues tinkering. Princess moves slowly to behind Father Time's chair then hesitates briefly. She starts to untie him.

ALEXANDRA

(without turning; in a sing-song fashion)

Princess, I wouldn't try to untie him if I were you.

She turns.

You see, that would force me to turn on the Alexandra 200k prematurely and if I do that, well I can't be held accountable for the results. Just back away, please.

Princess pauses then slowly complies. Alexandra turns briefly back to the machine for an additional adjustment, then turns to face them. Princess remains downcast and keeps her back turned.

Princess....

She doesn't respond. Alexandra sighs then exhales with finality.

Oh, all right, no torture. You are such a party pooper. But I have to admit without your "assistance" none of this would have been possible.

(to Father Time)

She's obviously quite a convincing actress, wouldn't you say? And perfect for the role of the young ingénue. I knew that from the moment I met her. A little impressionable, perhaps, but --

FATHER TIME

Leave her alone.

ALEXANDRA

My, my, how chivalrous of you. One would think you'd be rather resentful of her duplicity.

FATHER TIME

I'm not the resentful type.

ALEXANDRA

Obviously not, but then what's there for you to resent -- present situation excluded of course. No, resentment is a uniquely human burden I think, and unfortunately it's like a bottomless cup of coffee at the breakfast buffet. You think you've drained it but there's always more.

FATHER TIME

Maybe for some people -- the weak ones.

ALEXANDRA

And I'm one of them, is that what you're thinking?

FATHER TIME

You tell me. After all, I have all the time in the world.

ALEXANDRA

Don't be so sure.

She walks back and forth in front of him.

All right, I'll confess: I am resentful, perhaps overly so. But when I see what you've done and continue to do I can't help it. If you were on trial I'd be required to present evidence, so to be certain that everything is perfectly justifiable I think I will. In fact, I'll even call a witness.

She crosses the stage and quickly drags the other chair into view, sitting it facing the audience within a few feet of his.

Now let me see, whom shall it be? The lovely Princess? No, somewhat naive and a bit too inexperienced. Maybe even biased in favor of the accused. Ah, I have it, the ideal representative of the human race... I call the noted time researcher Dr. Alexandra Battle.

She turns around and nods to where she was previously standing then sits in the chair. She raises her right hand.

ALEXANDRA (as witness)

I do solemnly swear that --

FATHER TIME

Get on with it.

Alexandra stands.

ALEXANDRA

My, my, not very patient, are we? Very well. Dr. Battle, as the world's foremost authority on time, specifically the space-time continuum, is it accurate to say you have a deep appreciation of the nature of time.

She sits. ((This alternating continues throughout the remainder of the testimony sequence.))

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

Quite accurate.

And its effects?
ALEXANDRA

Yes, and its effects.
ALEXANDRA (sitting)

ALEXANDRA
(wandering back and forth in
front of him and the empty chair)
Then perhaps doctor, you could summarize them for us.

ALEXANDRA (sitting)
Most certainly. Time, as promulgated by the accused,

FATHER TIME
I object.

ALEXANDRA
Overruled....That wasn't me, that was the judge speaking.

FATHER TIME
Oh, I'm glad there's an impartial arbiter here to protect me.

ALEXANDRA (sitting)
As I was saying, the primary function and, consequently, effect of time is to induce entropy -- the transition from a state of higher energy to lower energy, to break things down as it were.

ALEXANDRA
And this entropy, it applies to everything?

Everything.
ALEXANDRA (sitting)

ALEXANDRA
And everyone?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)
Yes.

ALEXANDRA
Doctor, so that we better understand the concept can you give us some concrete examples?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

Certainly. In the physical world rocks break down into smaller rocks then even smaller rocks then dirt and eventually mere dust. The same process applies to living organisms, ironically producing exactly the same end product -- dust. Or ashes if we humans decide to move the process along a bit more quickly.

ALEXANDRA

And the primary cause of this breakdown is time?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

Yes.

ALEXANDRA

And this is done without regard to emotions, connections, commitments?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

Most assuredly. The accused --

FATHER TIME

I object!

ALEXANDRA
(springing up; intensely)

Overruled! Continue doctor.

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

As I was saying, the accused acts without any consideration of humanity, at least as far as I can discern.

ALEXANDRA

A little more detail, doctor; what actually happens?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

We're born, we age, and we die.

ALEXANDRA

We're born, we age and we die.

(counting on her fingers)

Seven simple words. It all seems so neat and tidy. But it isn't neat and tidy, is it doctor?

FATHER TIME

I object. Leading the witness.

ALEXANDRA

Overruled!

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

No, no it's not. It's, it's gut wrenching.

ALEXANDRA

Gut wrenching. What a vivid term. So this neat and tidy process of the passage of time makes one feel as if her insides are being twisted and violated. Give us an example, doctor.... from your own life perhaps.

ALEXANDRA (sitting)

Well, obviously we start out as innocent children, impressionable and trusting. As time passes we become less so. We give up the notion of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny as sources of awe and wonder and replace them with more "adult" sensibilities.

ALEXANDRA

Such as sex...the desire to reproduce?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)
(after a distinct pause)

Yes.

ALEXANDRA

Then what?

ALEXANDRA (sitting)
(deliberately and with difficulty)

Then after 20 to 30 years or so we women ...

ALEXANDRA

Yes, doctor, we women what -- lose something? Our estrogen, our eggs, our ability to be what we always thought we needed to be to become whole? And if we waited patiently for the right time or the right one to go through life with but haven't found him, then what? We're just out of luck? Oh, and doctor, those are just the internal changes. Don't forget about the visible ones -- the changing shape of our bodies, the wrinkles, the graying of our hair and yellowing of our once pearly white teeth. And if we live long enough we can look forward to the growing brittleness of our bones, declining function of our ears and eyes, hardening of our brains. And no one ever apologizes for this, does he doctor? There's not one expression of sympathy, one word of sorrow. It all just happens -- and nothing we say or do, think or pray for, can change it. We're condemned without a trial, sentenced without an opportunity to appeal, and punished without regret, isn't that true doctor?

She bends before the empty chair.

(screaming)

Well, isn't it true, doctor! Isn't that what happens? Isn't it!

Princess rushes to her side and grabs her.

PRINCESS

(shaking her)

Stop it Alexandra, stop. Quit torturing yourself.

Alexandra sobs loudly as Princess holds her tightly. There is a distinct pause then Father Time speaks.

FATHER TIME

I know my rights.

Alexandra's crying subsides; Princess turns to look at him.

PRINCESS

What?

FATHER TIME

I have a right to cross examine the witness.

Alexandra composes herself, wiping away tears and sniffing.

FATHER TIME

I do have that right, don't I?

Alexandra steels herself, standing taller to display her resolve.

ALEXANDRA

Yes, you have that right.

She moves slowly to the chair and sits.

FATHER TIME

Just one question, Dr. Battle... Didn't you ever realize that to receive love you have to be willing to give it?

PRINCESS

Objection! Objection! Objection!

Alexandra glares at him then suddenly stands and lifts the chair overhead and prepares to hit him. Princess thwarts her.

No, Alexandra, no.

Alexandra shakes with rage then relents and puts the chair down.

ALEXANDRA

No, no, you're right. That would be too quick and not nearly painful enough.

She rushes to the machine and wheels it to directly in front of him.

You...you deserve to suffer. But, you're right, I can't really do anything to hurt you physically. I agonized over that for years, years, until I finally realized that there's only one way, one way, to win. Only one way. And the secret is, not trying to win.

She touches the machine, almost lovingly.

ALEXANDRA

Oh, no, we don't have to win. I realized that one night while playing chess against myself. All we have to do is not lose -- keep you in check. Have you ever seen Edgerton's wonderful high speed photographs -- you know, the ones where the bullet is stopped an inch after piercing the apple or the fragments of a droplet of milk are poised in midair before falling back into the saucer? He was able to do that by using very high speed film.

FATHER TIME

So, you're simply going to take a picture of me? Really, doctor, I expected more of you.

ALEXANDRA

I'm flattered. I'll try to live up to your expectations. What, pray tell, is the key to a quality photograph? Light, of course. And even though light seems to travel in straight lines, it doesn't always, does it? Oh no; as Einstein so perceptively pointed out, light can be bent by gravity. Intriguing, isn't it? And as something approaches the speed of light what happens to time? It slows down.

Father Time begins to look more concerned.

Do you understand where I'm headed? Do you grasp the implications? Given enough gravitation a beam of light could, theoretically, be bent into a circle. Not at all practical

on a grand scale, I admit, but actually possible on a tiny one -- say a cylindrical field two feet in diameter and six feet high. And if you found a way, after two decades of research, to maintain that cylindrical field for a very long, long -- pardon the expression - - "time" -- what would happen to someone inside it? Even more importantly, if, just by chance, the keeper of time was trapped within this field, what do you suppose might happen to those who weren't? Would the way they experience time change, perhaps dramatically? Would they age far more slowly and gracefully?

FATHER TIME

You don't know what you're doing. You....you can't do this to me. It's, it's not

ALEXANDRA

Fair? Who's to say what's fair and what's not. That seems rather subjective, don't you think?

FATHER TIME

I...I can help you.

ALEXANDRA

Oh really, how? By giving me more time? Sorry, if this works I'll have more than I ever imagined.

FATHER TIME

But you'll never be young again. You need me; you can't reverse time.

ALEXANDRA

Not yet....but with an eternity to work on it almost anything is possible, don't you think?

She touches the machine again lovingly
then flicks a switch and a loud hum begins.
She withdraws a pair of dark glasses from
her lab coat pocket then turns to Princess.

Princess, put on your goggles.

Princess pats the sides of her dress anxiously.
She quickly scans the room.

PRINCESS

I ... I can't ... I must have lost them.

ALEXANDRA

Lost them?

She pauses momentarily then takes hers off,
hurries across the room, and gives them

to Princess.

Here. I have another pair in the lab. Watch him and don't touch anything.

She turns and hurries from the room. The hum grows louder.

FATHER TIME

Help me, help me, please.

Princess turns away.

Please. You have to help me.

Princess turns to face him.

She's insane, can't you see that?

Princess approaches.

She's wasted her life and now she wants to ruin everyone else's.

PRINCESS

You're, you're trying to trick me.

FATHER TIME

No I'm not! Look, you need me -- time has to go on. You can't change that.

PRINCESS

She thinks she can.

FATHER TIME

She's wrong. There's no telling what will happen if you go through with this. You know I'm right.

Princess turns away.

Hurry; we're almost out of time....Please.

Princess relents, turns, hurries to behind his chair and begins untying him. He pulls free and stands quickly. He reaches for her hand.

Come on.

She pulls away.

PRINCESS

No, I ...

FATHER TIME

You have to come with me.

PRINCESS

She needs me.

FATHER TIME

She's mad, I tell you.

PRINCESS

Then she needs me even more.

He reaches for her hand.

FATHER TIME

I need you too... I, I think I'm falling in love with you.

Princess shakes her head slightly.

PRINCESS

I don't know what to say.

FATHER TIME

Say you'll come with me.

Princess pauses, looks down then looks up and nods. She offers her hand and he grabs it. They cross to the door; he presses his ear to it then turns to her.

She's coming.

PRINCESS

This way.

They turn and she leads him across the stage and through the French door. Seconds after they exit Alexandra comes through the door, with her hands empty.

ALEXANDRA

Princess, I

She stops and scans the room.

Princess?

She stares at the empty chair then slowly crosses to the machine, turns it off, and sinks to the chair. She lowers her head and covers her face momentarily. She looks up and a smile appears followed by a loud cackle. She jumps up and races to the French door.

Goodbye, my dearest. You've served me well. He has taken the bait and must now live with the consequences. He will no doubt fall madly in love with you, honor you, cherish you, and one day, one day years from now lose you. Then and only then will he know how it feels -- the ravages of time will scar him too.

She crosses and rests her hand lightly on the machine and smiles.

(BLACK OUT)

(END OF PLAY)