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TWO SCENES FROM A PLAY

BY ROBERT WHITLATCH

The following are from a play which, to quote the author, has this idea as its premise: "The justification for existence is a faith in the inherent ability of man to achieve greatness."—(Editors)

SCENE ONE

(The scene—a mound surrounded by mist. On the right is a dark, barren tree. It is night. A man and a woman appear.)

MAN: We've walked a thousand miles today. Around the earth it feels like. It's lonely here. The void transcends the being. Let's stop.

WOMAN: You'll never stop stopping. How shall we cease our wandering if you insist on stopping?

MAN: That's your trouble. If we cease our wandering we'll have nothing to struggle for. I wish we'd brought some matches. But then I guess it doesn't matter. We haven't any wood.

WOMAN: You could go out and find some. I don't like the cold myself. You don't look after me like you should. Is it my fault we came this way?

MAN: Then you think it's mine? What other way was there to come? The road only runs one way and we don't want to go back.

WOMAN: If we go forward much more we shall be back. That suits your mood I believe.

MAN: I beg your pardon.

WOMAN: Around the earth. Didn't you say you felt like we'd been around the earth?

MAN: It doesn't matter. What other way would it take us but around? We can't go up you know. Do I look like a bird to you?

WOMAN: If you were, you could sleep in the trees. Then I wouldn't have to make the ground comfortable for you.

MAN: When have you ever done that? You wouldn't even make my burial ground properly. Most would treat a bird with more respect than that.

WOMAN: I'd make your grave the most cherished place on earth. But you haven't got the decency to die.

MAN: I dare say you wouldn't like it much if I died. Then who would take care of you? You've got to care for me because there isn't anyone else to do the job. I care for you and many thanks I get.

WOMAN: Care means the same as love and I couldn't do that. It wouldn't be right if someone caught us.

MAN: Who would care?

WOMAN: It would ruin my reputation.

MAN: How will you know you have one until you lose it? Come put your head in my lap and I'll do the same for you. It's the only thing left with any warmth.

WOMAN: No!

MAN: I certainly won't force myself upon you. One of us must sleep under the tree. I would if it weren't for the birds. You can if you wish. It may be warmer here.

WOMAN: I should rest easier if you will promise to leave me alone.

MAN: You may rest as easy as you like. I have more demands than a common animal. The release isn't enough. That is accomplished singly. My very make-up demands more than this.

WOMAN: Good night.

CHORUS: An endless progression of social transgression,
A mass of obsession called oral confession,
A physical digression caused by depression—
This is a race confused.
(The lights fade as the Chorus speaks.)

SCENE TWO

(The scene—a desert. The color and feeling are that of reflected light on sand.)

WOMAN: What are you thinking? You haven't said a word for hours.

MAN: You'll get no money for my thoughts. I haven't thought in months. My eyes are always forward in the daytime. At night I look to where we've been, now I look straight ahead, but I mustn't think.

WOMAN: You have the gaze of a leader. I have followed many leaders in my time and they all look as you do now. I wonder if they never thought for months at a time. Now that you mention it I have a feeling they didn't.

MAN: Please don't refer to me as a leader. I cannot even lead myself out of this desert; the desert of my mind that heats to insufferable desire in the daytime only to be dulled by the cold of the night. Always wanting to be fertile, but lacking the substance to give life to the humblest of ideas and returning to a dormant state that it could never release itself from in the first place. No, a leader is someone who won't admit even to himself that he has no direction. How can I be your leader when I admit even to you that I lack the final goal of our journey?

WOMAN: I followed Caesar's men. I was one of many that left every thing for adventure. They loved me and took me to them at night and by day they spat on me and called me whore. I was more fortunate than the others. I was Caesar's. I came, I saw . . .

MAN: You were ravished! Last night you refused me. And yet you thought of me as leader. How can you feel you have any reputation left? Or has time cleansed the cleve in your well-used maidenhead?

WOMAN: Those that knew me can know me no longer as they have long since ceased to be. When we come to our destination I will be as virginal as any to all that come to me and only you can take this from me. I am coming to my glory and must reach for the clouds. Your hands and mine must not be allowed to reach down to the coffers of obscenity.

MAN: I wish I'd known you before; I might understand you now.

WOMAN: If you'd known me before you now would be as the rest. I care for you enough not to wish that on you. They found all they desired. We desire what we have not yet found. If you should find only me you might cease to desire what we journey for. No! You shall have none of me without the rest.

MAN: I shall have none of you at all it would appear. I cannot lead and you insist on following me. My being staggers with the weight of your dependence and yet you are my only support. Why won't you take me by the hand and show me the way to lead?

WOMAN: It is you who must do the taking. But all that in time. Let us never lose sight of our own being. Union only after the mem-

bers are strong. We are together again after a long time. After we were evicted you no longer would have much to do with me. Now you want me because there is nothing else. You must find yourself before you can find me; before you can find anything else. Aren't you afraid I'll betray you again? You never tempted me but others always have.

MAN: I fear every traveler because of that. I hate you and love you and worship and detest you but without you I should never be able to live, for loving and hating are essential to my nature. The love was there at the beginning and out of it you filled my life with purpose and dreams. I came to you often as a child and you nursed my hungry spirit. You shone the light of my purpose and acted as seer of my dreams. Then as a boy throws a rock at a streetlight you shattered and your white hot filament streamed to the ground, grew more brilliant and then, out of its vacuum, lay before me, a charred twisted formless mass of dirt. Whatever became of the boy with the rock?

WOMAN: He is still around, but does it still matter where? He can be with us but do us no harm as long as we don't yield to his rock. Round and firm as it is, it can never shatter what is strong. Time should have tempered our plates. They should not now shatter as easily.

MAN: Our ivy-covered cloister of introduction was as warm and as sweet as anything I have ever known. Why couldn't you have enjoyed it as I did and not have given the pitcher a chance to strike us out? There is no harm in refusing to play. It's your temptation that has thrown us into this millenium in the arena. How long will I survive before I can no longer hold my own? Why did you force us to enter this combat? Does peace mean nothing to you?

WOMAN: Did peace mean anything to you then? How could you know what peace was until you had experienced conflict? Peace was then only tranquillity that leads to apathy. Your purpose fell into this pit and was lost because you didn't know it to begin with. Peace can only come by struggling for it. You cannot have your honey until the bees have been conquered. Your cloister of introduction had to fall. Your only hope, my only hope, the only hope left is to continue on our journey and to find the golden city where you can build not a new cloister of introduction and deviation, but a house of dedication. No matter how large or how small you must build before you may find that for which we search. I will help. I have always wanted to help. I helped by releasing us in the beginning. Don't you owe

me thanks for the opportunity I have given us?

MAN: I try to follow your plan. But I am weak. I want it as it was before. I can't stand this constant struggle. The sweat-stained armpits of my shirts turn yellow and at the same time I too turn. Age follows me and I have tired of conflict. No! I do not thank you. I damn you for what you have done to us. I hate you for the bitch that you are but I am afraid of the loneliness without you and must love you and follow you and lead you so as not to be left with myself.

WOMAN: Think of me as you will, but come with me. You will thank me, our children will thank me when we have built our house, and have found our way through its rooms and passages. But we must reach the city soon. Do not delay. Remember the cold of the desert. We must be through it by nightfall. I feel expanded to the fullest but may break if contracted again. Walk before me,

CHORUS: Always degrading what it should be persuading,
Always blockading follows masquerading,
After evading there follows the fading—
This is a race confused.