

ETCHINGS
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CAST

M Man in 50s or 60s, homeless, weathered
W Young college-aged woman

SCENE/SET

Stage dimly lit, empty except for a small “park” located slightly SL of center. A large stone to sit on or a bench, leaves scattered on ground around it. A tree slightly USL of the stone or bench. A soft spotlight surrounds the “park” scene.

All of the above is optional. The idea is to create, in some manner, with lighting and/or prop and/or with sound, the atmosphere of being outside, intimate space, a feeling normally associated with goodness and, perhaps, reflection and change.

A young woman, college student perhaps, is sitting on stone or bench reading.

Homeless man enters SR pushing grocery cart with his “life” in it. It is overflowing with “stuff”. He walks slowly, stooped as he pushes as though the cart was a great weight, in a meandering path, loops, pauses, but slowly, indirectly makes his way toward the stone or bench.

His clothes are shabby, a filthy mess. His face, hair, beard (if he has one), level of cleanliness all are befitting a man who lives on the streets.

The only oddity of his attire are his shoes which appear to be brand new, clean, pristine, high-top sneakers, untied but otherwise right off the store shelf. They are a loud, intense color – shocking pink or green - unlike the dirt-gray appearance of all the rest of his attire.

M

[Chuckles in a low voice. Takes couple of steps toward W, not seeing her, rather distracted by everything around, so much so, he turns away, noticing a squirrel. He pushes cart in direction of squirrel, then stops.]

Hungry? Huh ... *[less an expression than an audible, guttural sound – pause]*
All god's children gotta live. Yeah.

[W hears him, looks up – is a bit taken aback with his appearance and behavior. She continues reading but is obviously watching him out of the corner of her eye.]

Grace. Yeah. *[beat]* Oh, yeah. Full of grace ... Mary, mary ... quite contrary ... hungry, little fella? Come on ... come to daddy *[guttural laugh]* ... stew, yeah ...

[He stops, listening perhaps? To what? Smells the air, then pushes cart again, turning back toward stone or bench.]

Righteous. All God's creatures. Yeah. Bless the day. Amen ... Yeah ... Amen ... and fuck you, too.

[The closer M gets to W the more she inches away uncomfortably, not sure if he is talking to her, to himself, if he's hallucinating or trying to frighten her. She doesn't look directly at him but watches him without looking. M doesn't seem to notice W.]

Pacem in terris. *[pause – then in a sudden yell]* HAH! ... *[pause then sings]* Bennie's got a snotty nose ...

[Stops singing to wipe nose and face on sleeve. Hacks up something in throat and spits wad of yuck on ground toward stone or bench.]

Yeah, hmm ... *[sings again]* ... old rotten doughnuts ...

[W inches farther away as he nears, draws up tensely, clearly on edge. M remembers squirrel, stops, turns and yells.]

.... God's creatures ... yeah ... *[listening again?]* Hmm, true that ... don't I know ... hah *[guttural laugh-like sounds]*

[M continues to bench or stone, sits on edge farthest from W still showing no signs of seeing her. Long painful pause.]

M (contd)

Scare ya?

W

[Shocked, frightened by direct address even though M never looks at her.] No ... ah, well, yeah ... a little.

M

Hah. Honest! Like that. Yeah. Not many like that ... *[long beat]* Gotta be honest. Tell it like it is. Yeah. Rolling stone gathers no moss ... Kate Moss *[pause]* - hmm. Hot - yeah. *[long beat]* Stink too ...?

W

[Not knowing if it was a question or even if it was directed to her, W, obviously very uncomfortable, begins to answer, then stops, then begins again.]

What ...? I – ah – no ... are you talking to me?

M

[gruffly – but never looking at W, never obviously addressing her.] Don't lie. No lies. *[beat – scolding squirrel]* Start honest, end honest. Can't change. No changing.

W

[Very ill at ease. Starts to gather her things.]

I have to go ... I have to ...

M

[gruffly] No! *[now apologetically]* I mean ... no. You stay. Your bench/stone ... primogeniture – yeah ... first come, first serve ... *[M stands ... to leave]* No shoes, no shirt Hah ... no shit. *[To himself – lower tone]*. I'll go ...right ... yeah.

M (contd)

[long beat. Man doesn't move, but starts to hum or sing Pie Jesú, Andrew Lloyd Webber's version, quietly but clearly enough for her to hear. Woman doesn't move. She listens, still frightened but strangely curious, then speaks.]

W

It's just ...

M

[Cuts her off ... yells, gruffly]

[sadly, somewhat gruffly] Be the change ... HAH, yeah ... right on ...

[She looks at her book, did he see what she was reading? A biography of Gandhi? Does he know about Gandhi? She's no less frightened but even more curious.]

[guttural sounds, almost to himself] Spare change ... Huh ... bus, yeah ... coffee ... no, food ... yeah ... *[excitedly, loudly]* steak! ... yeah, right on ...

W

[She cuts him off – he's rambling and she wants to say what she started to say a moment ago.]

[she almost yells to interrupt his internal dialogue] It's just that you scared me ... the way you talk, your tone – and ... and ...

M

[He stops, reflects, looks at her.]

Hmm ... *[seems addressed to W – but only a guttural sound – pause, then looks away, then quietly to self, angry, but almost inaudible.]*

Quit bothering people ... told you ... useless ... no, you just go on now ... right on, get out of here ... gotta go ... my ass ... yeah ... ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies ...

W

[Trying to interrupt this downward verbal spiral, W yells]

Hey – Stop it. *[M freezes mid-sentence, doesn't look at her but listens.]*
 You just scared me a little – that's all. You kind-of yelled at me - for no reason. But all that, that “stuff” you're saying ... I mean, what ...

M

[to himself] Ironic ... *[changes subject, says aloud for her to hear]* Good spot.

W

Yeah, it's really nice here. I love the smell of the leaves in fall. And when it snows ... so peaceful and quiet. And the Christmas lights along the path ... *[long beat, then trying to establish a human bridge – but keep distance]*

Do you live here? In the park?

M

Don't live anywhere. *[pause]* Good spot. Can't stay - cops won't let me. Say I scare people. Got no right to do that. Can't have a spot like this. Not mine. Dirty. Smelly.

*[Looks away, quietly speaks to himself again
 but W can't make out words.]*

W

There you go again – running on ... running yourself down. You act like you've done something horrible. What did you do that was so bad?

M

So bad ... Sinbad ... the sailor ... popeye, hah ... *[sudden yell]* Killed people. Yeah!
[now said slowly, regretfully] Yeah, right ... yeah.

W

[worried, frightened again] Killed ... people? But ... I mean ... How did you kill people? What do you mean you killed people?

M

Just that *[angrily again]* – Killed! Dead. Fucking dead. Killed. Wasted. Offed ‘em. Shot ‘em. Stone cold fucking bloody-all-over smoked ... popped ...

W

... You’re scaring me again.

M

Honest. Start honest, end honest. *[long beat, then quietly, soothingly.]* Don’t be scared. Was long ago ... not a killer. Don’t kill people. *[to himself again]* Long ago. Yeah. Long ago ... Ironic.

W

What’s ironic? You said that twice now.

M

You talking to me? Why you talking to me? People like you don’t talk to people like me.

W

[W now is a bit irritated] People like me? Who are people like me? *[no answer]* Come on ... who are people like me? Or you, for that matter? Who are people like you?

M

I just said that.

W

Yeah, I know – I just heard that. Except I don't buy "people like you" or "people like me" or "people like anybody". People are just people.

M

Mother Theresa ... you some kind of nun or something? Don't look like a nun ... cut the crap. Start honest, stay honest. People are shit – the way it is. Always was, always will be. [long beat]

W

Let's talk about something else.

M

You talk - you pick.

W

How long have you lived ... on the streets? Been homeless?

M

Depends - a matter of perspective. [pause] Yeah. Home's no good ... [beat, then points to his head] ... dangerous neighborhood ... Never felt right ... ever ... had roofs, yeah, but they're just ... just places to go ... with numbers ... [agitatedly] I got no numbers [pulls up sleeves to show forearms] ... no numbers ... see ... hah ... [long beat]

... everything ... every little bit ... etched ... etched ... right here [point to head again] right here in my ... in my ... [long beat, seems to have mentally gotten lost, blank stare]

W

Are you OK?

M

You a shrink? Gonna fix me? *[beat – then angrily]* I'm not broke.

W

I didn't say you were. *[pause]* Why do you get so angry? It scares me. *[pause]* You just stop sometimes – in mid-thought - go off somewhere – I don't understand.

M

I imitate life. I'm art ... yeah. I'm a piece of art, imitating life. Right on!

W

Do you have a family? A place to go?

M

Roots? Roots? *[pause]* Roots, my ass. You got roots? You think you do! *[beat]* What do you believe in makes you so ... so ... perky? HAH! Perky ... yeah ... like that word.

W

[weighing whether to answer or not, eyeing him, then ...] I believe we're all created equal ...

M

[Makes a game show buzzer sound] Wrong ... regular June Cleaver ... you'll outgrow it.

W

[raised voice in argument] I don't want to outgrow it ... *[said like fuck you]* thank you ...*[pause]* ... on top of that, I believe if given a chance, with a little help, everyone can make something of themselves. ... There, now, say something ignorant about that ...

M

[jumps up, puts hand over heart] I pledge allegiance to the flag ...

W

God, you're such a cynic! *[beat]* So tell me – what do you believe in?

M

Nothing. Not a damned thing. Nada. Amen! Pax Domino. Pure Cane Sugar. Eat at Joe's. *[long pause – looking away]* Yeah - life. I imitate life. You June, me Picasso. Right ... yeah. Guernica ... living color ... no black and white ... no ...

W

Picasso – right. *[pause]* I don't believe you. *[as in I don't believe your attitude]*

M

[Makes another game show buzzer sound] Wrong again. Ain't your choice to believe or not. You ask, I tell. Start honest, end honest. That's the way it is. Always was, always will be.

W

Well, try that on yourself, then. You're not honest. You're obviously educated. Probably had a good job ... made good money. Which means you do – or did - believe in something - even if it's only that the rest of us are fools for going about our business, trying to make a difference ... while you shuffle around, pushing that cart full of god-knows-what, not doing a useful thing for anyone, including yourself!

M

Make a difference *[pause]* ... hah. *[derisively]* You gotta be ... What? You, me, everybody on this planet – CO2 pumps, is all. Only difference any of us makes is some stink worse than others. I stink. You don't. There's a difference. Amen. Yeah ... right on!

W

A cop out. No ... I'm not buying it. *[in a debate-team tone]* I just applied to the Peace Corps. If I get in, I'm going to go some place where they need teachers and ...

M

... fuck with little kids' minds. I know what you're gonna do. Fuck the natives – Mother Theresa – a missionary for capitalism ... pith their little brains so they'll be none the wiser when some fat-cat power-tripper comes steals everything they got - leave 'em high and dry with a pile of bullshit books you taught 'em how to read ... Three Musketeers ... Mother Goose ... Mary HAD a little lamb ... now Oscar Mayer's got a flock of sheep ...

W

God ... you are so damned cynical ...

M

You better believe it! That's the way it is - always was, always will be. Yeah ... join the Peace Corps ... my ass ... save the world ... *[yelling]*... my ass!

W

What do you know? All you've got to show for yourself is that cart full of ... full of, garbage ... and cynicism. A garbage pail overflowing with cynicism. Guernica ... you talk about bullshit ... *[yelling, angry]* that's bullshit.

M

I ain't no cynic!

W

[Mimicking him, mocking him] Yeah ... right ... hah!

M

Yeah, right ... *[beat, fuming]*

I was in the Peace Corps – four years. Yeah ... How about that? Drafted too, Viet Nam. Hoo-rah! Meanwhile, back at the ranch, El Rancho Malario, land of the free, home of the brave, Leave It to Beaver-ville, little girls get blown up in churches ... people's skulls bashed just 'cause they're black ... *[pause]*

Yeah, right ... created equal ... my ass. *[pause]*

Know what happened to the folks I “helped” in the Peace Corps? Wanna know? Half of 'em killed ... raped ... crippled ... whatever. They had something the money boys didn't ... simple ... rotting corpses – yeah, right – that's making something all right ... climb a pile of skulls ... get to the top ... yeah, right on!

W

[sadly, sympathetically for him] I'm really sorry.

M

For what? You weren't there. You didn't do nothing. Me neither. Just the way it is. Always was, always will be. Start honest, stay honest. Your mama wears boondockers. Sex, drugs, rock 'n roll ...

W

I'm sorry all that happened to you – and to them. The war, and ... *[long pause]* ... I just believe ... you just gotta try to make a difference ... that's all ... It's important ... *[said in a lower tone, mostly to herself]* ... to me, at least.

M

Ironic.

W

You said that before. What's ironic?

M

Senior year of high school, 4th period Latin ... made this announcement ... Sent us all home ... God, I remember it all ... the weather ... the ... the smell ... the bus ride ... the cold on my skin ... rain ... long scary walk ... *[long pause]* ... JFK

W

You're not a cynic at all, are you? Peace Corps ... drafted ... Is that what the killing was about? Viet Nam?

M

[Makes sound of game show buzzer] You win! Bingo! And the grand prize ... Irony of ironies.

W

[yelling, angry, really pissed off] What?

M

Everything. You ... me ... this rock (or bench). *[beat]* Saving the world ... hah. Right. English Leather – shit ... Me ... medic - killing people ... Peace Corps. Piss corps. Apple core. *[long pause]* All bullshit. I hate it. All of it. You. Me. This. Them. ... Who, what, when, where, why, how ... How now brown cow ... yeah ...

W

[long beat] Then why did you join the Peace Corps?

M

To save the world. *[laughs ironically]*

W

And how'd that turn out for you? *[He startles, then glares at her.]* Sorry ... just wanted to inject some humor ... things seem to be a bit heavy, don't you think?

M

Heavy. Hah. *[said like a hippie – like oh, wow, man]* Heavy! Irony is, you sitting here ... saying all this shit ... we did the same back then. Yeah, right ... but in the middle of that heap of a shit life, there was the Peace Corps ... Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights, Special Olympics, the moon ... the fucking moon ... do you believe it? ... Scott Glen ... Buzz Carpenter ... yeah, The Carpenters on the moon ... Muskrat Love ...

[somewhere in the above he begins to sob up, then pauses – lost in thought]

We knew ... yeah, we **KNEW** ... life ... right there in front of us ... And I ... I ... *[he cries – she doesn't know how to handle it. After a while, he says almost inaudibly.]* Yeah ... right. Leave it to Beaver ... Ozzie 'n Harriet ... Ask not ...

W

What happened?

M

Gotta go ... *[he gets up, gets his cart.]* ... they'll be coming ...

W

Where are you going?

M

In nomine patris ... Now and forever ... yeah. *[he laughs, turns, still laughing and begins to leave]*

W

Hey, don't go ... don't give up ... You can still change. You can try ... that's all we got.

M

Yeah, right. *[turns toward her again]* No good ... greed's the game ... bird's the word - always was, always will be. Machiavelli ... hah! ... Assholes ... Love 'em or leave 'em. Yeah, love 'em or get ... fucked ... *[long beat – turns away – stops – turns back suddenly]* I hate 'em! Everything about 'em ...

W

Where can I find you?

M

[It starts to snow. M looks up, watches flakes fall, long pause ...]

Everywhere ... I imitate life ... regular Picasso ... yeah ... art, that's me. *[He turns away again, begins pushing cart off stage.]*

W

Wait. Don't quit ... You ... you made a difference *[she hesitates]* – just now ... it matters ...

M

[Turns to her, they look at each other, he speaks.]

Get ... go ... do what you're gonna do ... I'm done ... nothing left here *[pointing to heart]* ... But you, yeah, right there, the future ... right there. Feel it! Don't you feel it? Smell it! Taste it! Suck it up ... yeah! Wrap your arms around that sucker ... and ...

[Turns and starts to push cart off SR, speaking to self but aloud so she can hear, mimicking JFK's tone, mumbling, running on and on.]

Ask not ... yeah, right on. Ask not! Yeah ...! *[continues mumbling ...]*

[As M mumbles on, W rises, watches him, turns DSC and begins to hum, very low, Silent Night. M stops, frozen in place]

M (cont'd)

[M listen, begins, just tears down his cheeks, only low sounds, then speaks, looking over left shoulder, with breaking voice ...]

Is it wrong ... justice ...? Kids ... no hunger? I mean, kids for Christ's sake ... look at 'em ... shit ...

[M grows agitated but tearful]

War ... hate ... *[almost choking in his tears]*... give 'em a roof ... that simple ... a home ... let 'em be ... *[sobbing]* ... something wrong with that? Can't I want that? Can't I believe in that ...?

Fucking world ... fucking people ... fucking

[totally broken down, unable to speak or complete his thoughts - long pause]

[W raises voice, singing or humming more loudly.

M begins to hum with her – a harmony.

Their voices true up, making a beautifully harmonious chant, round or anthem.

Their voices grow louder, stronger.]

[M and W continue singing/humming as lights slowly fade to black. The hum continues in black for a few seconds then stops instantly at peak crescendo – leaving an almost-echo in the house.]

EOP