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Beach Play
Two One-Act Plays

by

Robert R. Lehan

Including
ASHES
and
STONESKIPPERS

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Beach Play
Two One-Act Plays by Robert R. Lehan

ASHES

SETTING: A quiet section of beach at twilight

CHARACTERS: 1 man/1 woman;

TOM: Early seventies, recently widowed.

BARBARA: His dead wife, barely seen in dim light

STONESKIPPERS

SETTING: A stretch of beach early morning

CHARACTERS: 1 man/1 woman;

JOE: An athletic middle-aged white male

WOMAN: A loud, nearly elderly homeless woman

WARNING: There will be gunshots

ETC:

Both ASHES and STONSKIPPERS share a simple set indicating the ocean and a ground row of rolling sand dunes above a section of beach. SOUNDS OF SURF AND SEA GULLS compliment the set to provide the desired atmosphere while LIGHTING is used to effect the time of day for each play.
ASHER
By Robert R. Lehan

(AT RISE: We hear the SOUND of SURF and GULLS. In a few moments lights fade up silhouetting a ground row of rolling sand dunes above a section of beach at twilight. The lights reflect the glow of the setting sun which darkens as time passes. At CENTER, a circle of stones surround a small, glowing fire pit. To the LEFT of the fire pit is a music stand from which hangs a wind chime. Above the stand is a straight-backed wooden chair with a small outdated tape player on the seat. As the light of the sky fades, the light of the fire increases, casting a dark shadow across the stage. In the darkness, BARBARA quietly appears in dark colored clothing carrying a script. SHE places the script on the music stand then picks up the tape player. BARBARA sits on the chair and raises the volume on the tape player. The SURF SOUND becomes louder. BARBARA holds the tape player as she would a baby.

The SOUND CONTINUES as TOM, an older gentleman wearing khaki summer slacks, an unlettered sweatshirt and sneakers, enters crossing to the darkened right apron. HE carries in his hand a white, quart-sized Chinese food carton. TOM stops and looks out over the “ocean” and sighs sadly. BARBARA deliberately and carefully raises and lowers the volume of the tape player to echo TOM’s sigh. TOM crosses toward the glowing fire and stands with arms folded, the carton dangling by its handle from one of his fingers. HE sighs again and once more the SURF SOUND echoes his sigh. TOM crosses down center to the water’s edge. After a moment, HE opens the carton and attempts to pour the contents into the water but can’t bring himself to do it.)

TOM
(Whispering) No!

(TOM reseals the carton and returns to the fire. HE stands, torn, unable to decide.)

I can’t!

(The SURF SOUND fades up, then lowers to underscore the voices. At the music stand, BARBARA, in the dark with the tape player, reads her lines as if they were the SURF itself.)

BARBARA
Youuuuu . . . .

TOM
Huh?

BARBARA
Promisssssssed . . . . . . .

TOM
What?

BARBARA
Yooooou . . . . . . . PROM-isssssssed!
TOM
What? I don’t . . . . I don’t believe . . . . .

(TOM is intensely alert. He holds his breath, lifts his head, listens to the left, to center, to right. His lips form the unheard word “Barbara”.)

TOM
Barbara. (SURF SOUND up, then down) Barbara? (Louder) Barbara?

(SURF SOUND rises and lowers once again. Agitated, TOM paces.)

TOM
(Mumbling) Stop this, Tom. Stop it. This is crazy. This is CRAZY! (Stops pacing. Listens. Waits.) Barbara? (SURF SOUND up then down.) Is that you? (SURF SOUND up. Pause. Down.) You’re here, aren’t you?

(SURF SOUND flares up in response. It then fades down and out. For the first time now there is total silence. TOM reflects on the silence. A long pause.)

(Whispering) Talk to me. Please.

(We hear the faint sound of BARBARA’S WIND CHIME. The fire light flares up, dies down.)

BARBARA
(From the darkness, remaining unlit, speaking in a slow, windy whisper that mimics the sound of the surf.) Tommyyy . . . . . Tommyyy . . . . . .

TOM
Yes . . . Yes. I’m here.

BARBARA
Don’t - be - afraaaaid. . . .

TOM
I’m not. I’m not afraid. . . . (WIND CHIME and the SURF SOUND return underscoring the scene. There is a long pause.)

TOM
Where are you? (WIND CHIME.)

BARBARA
Near. Near you.

TOM
I can’t see you. I want to see you.

(WIND CHIME. BARBARA remains in dim light, never leaving her chair. The light from the fire brightens when she speaks.)
BARBARA
You’re close. I think you’re very close. The space between us is not as great as I used to think.

TOM
Can I touch you?

(HER voice is losing the “surf” quality, becoming normal.)

BARBARA
I don’t know, Tommy. I don’t think so.

TOM
(Sadly) Oh.

BARBARA
But, I think . . . maybe you can . . . I’m sure you can . . .(HE reaches out a searching hand.)
. . . If you do what I ask you.

TOM
Anything.

BARBARA
Throw them in the ocean.

TOM
(Groans, arms falling) Ohhhh.

BARBARA
In the ocean, Tommy. As you promised.

TOM
Oh, Barbara . . .

BARBARA
(More insistent) As you promised me, Tommy.

TOM
Oh, don’t. Please don’t ask me to do that.

BARBARA
It’s what I want. That’s why I’m here.

TOM
Oh, Barb, I had to promise. I didn’t want to.

BARBARA
Had to? What do you mean, “Had to”? You didn’t have to.
TOM
Honey, you were in pain. Such awful pain. I would have promised anything.

BARBARA
(As if it were a brand new word) Pain? Oh, yes . . .

TOM
So I did. I just said it. I didn’t mean it.

BARBARA
You didn’t . . .

TOM
You knew how I felt about a family plot.

BARBARA
(Her laugh rattles the wind chimes) Oh, yes! You actually wanted one.

TOM
Yes. Yes, I did. I still do.

BARBARA
I forgot all about the pain.

TOM
That was no time to argue, so I just promised . . . I’m sorry, what was that?

BARBARA
I forgot about the pain.

TOM
You did?

BARBARA
I’m not quite sure what it is.

TOM
Wow, that’s . . . That’s wonderful! That’s the best thing you could have said. That’s Oh! Hey, do you know that today’s your birthday?

BARBARA
It is?

TOM
Yes! June thirtieth (Or substitute today’s date). You forget that, too?

BARBARA
You forget a lot. You’ll see. But I didn’t forget your promise. I remember that very clearly.
TOM
Yeah. Well, I’m really sorry about . . .

BARBARA
Tom!

TOM
Yeah?

BARBARA
Enough. I want you to do it.

TOM
I know. I know. I tried, honey, I really tried.

BARBARA
Try again.

TOM
That’s why I’m here, you know. Because it’s your birthday and I knew that was what you wanted. I just . . .

BARBARA
So will you do it? Please?

TOM
I came down here. . . I tried . . . and I. . . (shrugs) I just can’t.

BARBARA
Of course you can.

TOM
Well. . . . I won’t. (SURF SOUND)

BARBARA
Won’t?

TOM
No, I won’t. I can’t just throw you away!

BARBARA
Tom . . .

TOM
I know. I know what you’re going to say.

BARBARA
Oh, yeah? “It’s only ashes? A little carbonized calcium and such? It isn’t me?” Is that what I’d say?
(Shouts) Yes!

BARBARA
Well you’re right. So answer me; just why are you saving this box of old clinkers?

TOM
Because they’re YOUR clinkers!

BARBARA
Well that’s right. That’s exactly right. They are mine and I want them thrown in the ocean.

TOM
No! (Near tears) No. (A long pause while the SURF SOUND fades up, then down.)

(Carefully quiet) Please?

TOM
(Shakes head) I can’t.

BARBARA
It’s just a simple little thing . . .

TOM
Not to me.

BARBARA
Oh, Tommy. Come on now.

TOM
It’s all I’ve got!

BARBARA
If you loved me, Tom, you’d do what I ask.

TOM
And if you loved me you couldn’t ask it.

BARBARA
You don’t get it, Tommy. You just don’t understand.

TOM
I guess I don’t. Look, I went along with your quick-cremation thing, didn’t I?

BARBARA
Yes.

TOM
Didn’t I?
BARBARA

Yes, you did.

TOM

I let them burn you to cinders. I let them turn you into this. I didn’t want that.

BARBARA

I know.

TOM

And I still don’t want that.

BARBARA

I appreciate that, Tommy.

TOM

Well, it sure doesn’t feel like it.

BARBARA

Oh, I do! Of course I do. That was very hard for you.

TOM

Yes, it was.

BARBARA

And of course I appreciate it.

TOM

I wanted a wake and a regular funeral.

BARBARA

Yuck! I know.

TOM

(Shouting again) Well, I didn’t get it, did I? So let me have this, all right? A little hole for the ashes. A little marker for the plot. I won’t throw you in the ocean. (Pause; OCEAN SOUND.)

BARBARA

You know, Tom, you’re some kind of weird old ash collector. Those ashes are so unimportant, believe me.

TOM

It’s not the ashes that are important. You’ve never understood this . . .

BARBARA

So what’s important then?

TOM

The place. The PLACE is important.
BARBARA
(An abrupt laugh) Hah! There you are! “Location, location”, that real estate thing.

TOM
Stop it! (Beat) Look; on my way here, I passed the cemetery . . .

BARBARA
You mean the compost pile? (Laughs at her own joke, causing the CHIMES to SOUND.)

TOM
Stop it, I said. Just stop that!

BARBARA
Sorry. Sorry. It is pretty funny . . .

TOM
God! Look at me! I’m standing here on a cold beach in the dark, arguing with a dead person who doesn’t know what’s good for her.

BARBARA
I do so.

TOM
You don’t. You really don’t.

BARBARA
Do so. (Pause.)

TOM
Look; I’m doing this for you!

BARBARA
Hah!

TOM
Listen. At the cemetery there was a family . . .

Fascinating.

TOM
(Ignoring her) . . . five or six people. Young and old. Surrounded by gravestones and markers. And in spite of what you think, they weren’t discussing ashes or any other bodily residue.

BARBARA
No? So what were they doing?

TOM
Laughing.
BARBARA

Laughing?

TOM

That’s right.

BARBARA

I think you stumbled onto an odd little family, Tom.

TOM

Not at all. They were wonderful.

BARBARA

A little gallows humor, was it?

TOM

No. Someone had told a funny story about some old uncle. (*SURF SOUND. Pause.*)

BARBARA

All right. How does it go?

TOM

I don’t know. How would I know?

BARBARA

You don’t know?

TOM

No. I didn’t hear the story.

BARBARA

Tom, if you didn’t hear it how are you going to tell it to me?

TOM

I’m not going to tell you the story.

BARBARA

Uh huh.

TOM

The story doesn’t matter.

BARBARA

Well, you did bring it up, dear.

TOM

They were all telling stories. The specific one doesn’t matter. I don’t remember, ok?

BARBARA

I see.
TOM
No you don’t.

BARBARA
No?

TOM
No. *(SURF SOUND)*

BARBARA
You’re right. I’m missing something.

TOM
You’re missing the point.

BARBARA
Which is. . . ?

TOM
Those people were warming themselves with family memories. The older ones were passing them to the younger ones. Those stories tie that family together through all the generations. It’s ancient, for God’s sake and it’s wonderful.

BARBARA
And you say they were laughing?

TOM
Sure.

BARBARA
Well, I guess I get it, Tom, but I have to tell you; they don’t have to do that in a grave yard.

TOM
No, of course they don’t *have* to, but the grave site is a good place for it. It’s a place where the living can gather, surrounded by their history; where they can retell the old family stories. It doesn’t matter if their bones are there, or ashes or whatever. It only matters that it’s their place. It’s the family’s holy place.

BARBARA
Ah! There it is! There you go with that.

TOM
What? There I go with what?

BARBARA
The “place”, the “place”. It’s your place thing, your territory thing!

TOM
Oh, come on!
BARBARA
It’s a place, Tommy. Like your own little country.

TOM
It is not. (Pause) Well, so what if it is?

BARBARA
It is! It’s a tiny grassy country with markers and fences. Fences! Only the living do that. You draw lines around a place. There’s my side, there’s your side. You can come in, you stay out. We dead don’t make those distinctions. No, we’re everywhere and we love being everywhere, but you people; you can’t seem to live without your circle-the-wagons attitude. Tommy, listen; borders keep more people out than in.

TOM
Oh, come on, will you, it’s just a . . .

BARBARA
Place! It’s a place with a fence around it.

TOM
It’s a– a SPOT! A nice little spot where once or twice a year the living and the dead can kind of . . . interface.

BARBARA
What? What’s “interface”?

TOM
Connect.

BARBARA
Oh.

TOM
Yeah. All those old gravestones connect the living people to their ancestors and vice-versa. I want that, too. That connection. What’s wrong with that?

BARBARA
There’s nothing wrong with it, Tommy, but there is something missing.

TOM
Yeah? What would that be?

BARBARA
The rest of the world.

TOM
Oh, come on.

BARBARA
The whole rest of the world, Tommy. You don’t see the big picture.
TOM
Oh, I don’t, huh?

BARBARA
Being committed to one place separates us from all the other places. You’ll see that when you get where I am.

TOM
Like when I grow up, huh?

BARBARA
You just don’t understand.

TOM
I guess not. I guess I don’t. A place makes me feel closer. Look, I’ll see beyond those ashes and the marker.

BARBARA
And then you’ll remember me?

TOM
I’ll remember us. Us! That’s what it’s all about, isn’t it?

BARBARA
Yes. Like this? (WIND CHIME)

TOM
Wait. I know what that is. It’s the . . . uhh . . . The damn whatayacallit from outside our window. It’s like your laugh.

BARBARA
It is?

TOM
Sort of. Yeah.

BARBARA
Oh, thank you. It’s the wind chime.

TOM
Right! The wind chime. We used to hear it from our bed.

BARBARA
Yes. And do you remember this, Tommy? (WIND CHIME)

TOM
I still hear them every day. (Sniffs) . . . Oh.

BARBARA
Yes?
TOM
That smell . . . *(Bursts into tears)* Ah!

BARBARA
Yes.

TOM
It’s soap . . . It’s your bath soap. *(Getting control)* Oh, that took me by surprise. That was a little cruel, Barbara.

BARBARA
Sorry. But you remembered, didn’t you.

TOM
Sure. Why did you do that?

BARBARA
Here we are on the beach, yes?

TOM
Yeah.

BARBARA
No fence, no grass, no grave stones, no borders of any kind?

TOM
*(Nodding)* I see.

BARBARA
And did we “interface”?

TOM
Indeed we did.

BARBARA
So you take my point.

TOM
Yeah *(Pause)* Yeah. *(SURF SOUND. Pause.)*

BARBARA
So you’ll do it?

TOM
Yeah. I’ll do it. When you’re right, you’re right. *(SURF SOUND)*

BARBARA
Thanks, Tommy. Now I’m going to do something for you.
TOM

Ok.

BARBARA
First; I’m going to get a much bigger monument than the one you were going to buy for me.

TOM
Are you saying I’m a cheapskate?

BARBARA
Second; you’re going to understand something really important. No you were never a cheapskate. And three; I think we can touch, just a little, from now on.

TOM
All right. It’s a deal.

BARBARA
It’s a deal.

TOM
OK . . . Here we go.

(SURF SOUND grows as TOM takes carton and walks down to the center apron where he stands unmoving. SOUND continues. Long Pause. Then finally…)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

Please continue to the next page for the second play in this collection
STONESKIPPERS
by Robert R. Lehan

(At Rise: SOUND OF SURF AND GULLS. Lights rise on a quiet section of beach. It is morning; a blue sky silhouetting a row of rolling sand dunes. The Downstage edge acts as the edge of the surf. The stage is bare except for a shapeless pile of blankets and stuffed green plastic bags situated Up Right. JOE enters wearing a suit and humming. He crosses briskly from Stage Right carrying an attaché’ case. He steps over the bags and blankets, making only the slightest hesitation in his walk or tune. SOMEONE in the pile audibly grunts and rolls over. JOE strides Down Center. He inhales deeply. The SOUND OF SURF AND GULLS rises as he stands looking out at the surf. HE exhales as the SOUND fades. HE is now prepared to meticulously begin. First, HE sets his case down, takes off his suit coat, and places it neatly on the sand. Then HE removes one shoe and sock, rolling the sock and stuffing it into the shoe. HE removes the other shoe and sock and repeats the ritual. JOE looks at the surf once again, thinking. HE rolls up his trouser cuffs, tucks his tie between two shirt buttons and makes “throwing” motions at the ocean. HE counts softly to himself. Methodically, JOE carefully opens the attaché’ case, takes out a mini tape player and places it Downstage. HE looks at the surf, thinking, then moves the tape player Upstage away from the surf. Once again JOE makes serious throwing motions at the ocean.)

JOE

(Counting) One . . . Two . . .

(Satisfied now, JOE prepares to play the tape. HE presses play button, steps quickly forward so that his feet are in the cold surf. HE concentrates. THE TAPE PLAYS QUIET MUSIC WITH A CELESTRIAL QUALITY to it, then a slow mellifluous, hypnotic “RADIO VOICE” is heard.)

VOICE ON TAPE
You are listening to tape number one of the series entitled, “The Image of Accomplishment”. Tape number one is an introduction to the method of imaging. Listen. (A bar of MUSIC) Relax. Relax. You don’t have anywhere to go. You don’t have anything to do. Let’s think about the future. Relax. (Another bar of MUSIC) What is it that you are anxious to be? What is it that you are ambitious to accomplish? Think of it now. Think of it calmly. Give it a name.

JOE

(With great fervor) Stoneskipping Champion of the World!

VOICE ON TAPE
Now picture the exact moment when you achieve your goal; the critical moment upon which your future depends; your “Winning Moment”. See yourself attaining your goal in that one moment. (A bar of MUSIC) Close your eyes. Close them. (JOE closes his eyes.) Stand with your feet a shoulder’s width apart. Arms hanging comfortably. (HE does it.) Turn your palms forward. (HE turns his knuckles forward.) Palms forward! (Joe quickly turns his palms forward.)

JOE

Whoops! (A bar of MUSIC.)
VOICE ON TAPE

Good. Now gently raise your hands until your fingertips touch your eyes. (HE does it.)

Good. Now, very slowly. Very very slowly . . . begin to perform the perfect movement in your mind. Remember; see it and be it.

“See it and be it”. . . Right.

(Taped MUSIC plays as JOE concentrates. HE speaks with exaggerated slowness, mimes the throwing movement in slow motion.)

JOE


VOICE ON TAPE

Yes, that’s it! Now listen to this! (Tape: SOUND OF CROWD APPLAUDING. JOE grins widely, pumps fist.) Now take your hands from your eyes. Stand relaxed . . . (JOE flaps his hands, rolls neck, shrugs shoulders.) You know that you can perform that moment perfectly. Try it. Try it really. Try it now. . . This ends Tape One–

JOE

Whoops!

VOICE ON TAPE

An Introduction to The Method of Imaging. Please rewind the tape to the beginning.

( JOE presses the rewind button then, in mime, with extreme care, HE selects a stone from the sand at his feet. JOE takes a deep breath, fixes his concentration, winds up and throws the stone with great force toward us. It strikes the water.)

JOE

Bam! (Stone sinks quickly.) Damn! (Very disappointed) Aw, damn!

(JOE stands dejectedly for a moment then looks for a new skipping stone as, Up Right, AN OLD WOMAN sits up in her bags and blankets. She wears an old watch cap and several layers of stained and mismatched clothing. THE WOMAN yawns, scratches, then finds, in one of her bags, a last bit of chocolate. SHE unwraps the bit of chocolate, eats it hungrily, licks the wrapper, folds and saves it, all the while watching JOE who is now prepared to try again. HE winds up, is about to release, when THE WOMAN addresses him.)

WOMAN

So what’ cha doin’?

JOE

(Startled, jumbles the stone) Damn! What?

WOMAN

What’ cha doin’?
Practicing.

(WOMAN) Practicing, huh?

JOE

Yeah. That’s right. And I’d better get back to it.

(JOE winds up, but aware that THE WOMAN is staring at him, cannot concentrate.)

(WOMAN) (As JOE is about to release the stone) Interesting.

(JOE screams) Ahh! (Drops stone)

(WOMAN) Say, you don’t have any spare change, do you?  (JOE makes a point of ignoring THE WOMAN.) I guess not, huh?

(JOE throws again. The stone hits and sinks.)

(Bam! Damn!  (To WOMAN) Would you mind not staring?)

(WOMAN) Sorry. (After a moment) So just what is it you’re practicing?

JOE

Stoneskipping.

(WOMAN) Yeah, huh? (Long pause) So how’s it workin’ out?

JOE

Not too good. Look, I have to do this, all right?

Just pretend I’m not here.

(WOMAN) No problem.

(WOMAN) What say? (Pause) Hey, you don’t have any spare change, do you?

You ignore me too. Ok?
WOMAN
Yeah, Ok. I’ll just move to a sunny spot.

JOE
Fine. *(HE circles impatiently as SHE crosses right to left dragging her bags, finding a spot at far left.)* Not there! Hey!

WOMAN
What?

JOE
Please. Not there. You’re right in the way.

WOMAN
Here? I’m in the way here?

JOE
Yes.

WOMAN *(Looks both ways)* I’m not in your way. You have plenty of room.

JOE
You’re a distraction.

WOMAN:  
You’re kind of cute yourself.

JOE
I mean I can see you.

WOMAN *(Understanding)* Oh. I see. Yeah. Well, we’re “always with you”, right?

JOE
What?

WOMAN
Oh, never mind.

JOE
Look, this is important to me and I’m trying to concentrate. So would you move? Please?

*(SHE drags her bags toward left. HE prepares to throw.)*

WOMAN *(Pointing elaborately)* Over there okay?

JOE
That’s fine. Thank you.
WOMAN
Good. I’ll just set up here out of the wind . . .

JOE
Good.

WOMAN
. . . hoping some generous person will come by.

JOE
I’ll get back to work now.

WOMAN
And I’ll be right over here . . .

JOE
Fine. Fine.

(Tries to concentrate as THE WOMAN opens a small folding camp stool and sits.)

WOMAN
. . . way out of your way.

JOE
Okay! (WOMAN watches as JOE takes a deep breath, fixes his concentration, winds up and throws. The stone strikes the water.) Bam! Doop! . . . Doop! C’mon . . . . (It has sunk) Ahhhhh! Damn. Damnit! (Finds another stone, takes a deep breath, fixes concentration, winds up, throws stone. It strikes the water.) Bam! (Stone sinks. Distraught.) Ahhh! What’s the MATTER! What the hell is WRONG with me?

WOMAN
Hey. Hey, mister.

JOE
What?

WOMAN
No joke, I’m really hungry. Are you sure you don’t have a little loose change? (JOE does not respond.) Mister, please. Do you have . . .?

JOE
(Explodes) No! No I don’t! And will you get the hell away from me! (HE grabs up a stone, throws wildly. It sinks.) Ahhh!

WOMAN
(Shouts back at him) Happy to! Just happy to do it!

JOE
Good.
WOMAN: If I wasn’t starving, I’d never have anything at all to do with some rock-throwing . . . misanthropic . . . cheapskate . . . asshole!

JOE

What? What is that?

WOMAN: “Asshole”?

JOE

No. That other thing.

WOMAN “Misanthropic”?

JOE

Right. What’s that about?

WOMAN Pretty much the same as “asshole”.

JOE Oh, is that a fact?

WOMAN It is gospel.

JOE It is, huh?

WOMAN Yeah.

JOE You know, lady, you have got some goddamn nerve.

WOMAN I do. Yes, I guess I do. I have to.

JOE Yeah, well just don’t talk to me. Ok?

WOMAN Suits me.

(THE WOMAN sits near her bags, watching JOE. SHE unfolds and licks her candy wrapper.)
JOE

Good. Now stay that way.

(JOE selects another stone, winds up, and as HE is about to release it, THE WOMAN interrupts again.)

WOMAN

All right. (HE stops) Just why are you doin’ that?

JOE

Lady, I’m warning you.

WOMAN

(Shrugs) Just curious. (Pause) You make all that seem so serious.

JOE

Ok. Two minutes! That’s all you get, ok?

WOMAN

Yeah. Fine.

JOE

It's my job

WOMAN

Yeah? Like for money?

JOE

Damn right for money.

WOMAN

Mmm. Seems a tad . . . uhhh . . . you know . . . frivolous, doesn’t it? I mean for a grownup.

JOE

Frivolous? What do you mean, frivolous?

WOMAN

Unimportant. Dumb maybe.

JOE

What!

WOMAN

I could be wrong.

JOE

It’s a recognized competitive sport. Stoneskipping.

WOMAN

Really?
JOE
Yes, really!

WOMAN
If you say so. Now listen, I just need a little . . . .

JOE
You never even HEARD of it?

WOMAN
Can’t say that I have. *(Continuing)* A bit of small change. Maybe enough for a . . .

JOE:
Well, you've heard of it now.

WOMAN
I have. You are dead right. Another piece in life's big picture puzzle.

JOE
Can I get back to work now?

WOMAN
Yeah. *(SHE remains quiet for a moment. HE waits.)* So you’re an uhh, an athlete, huh?

JOE
That’s right. *(Pause)* Ok now? *(SHE nods. HE winds up.)*

WOMAN
A professional . . . uhh . . . rock thrower. *(Laughs)* How about that?

JOE
Stoneskipper.

WOMAN
Whatever. For money?

JOE
Yes.

WOMAN
Huh. Swear to God?

JOE
Lots of money.

WOMAN
Ya live, ya learn. Right? That’s a new one on me. Say, uh, with all that money, you don’t suppose you could spare a couple of . . .
JOE
It’s what I do, that’s all. I usually do it better.

WOMAN
You’re in a little slump, huh?

JOE
You got it.

WOMAN
Yeah. Me, too.

JOE
(Laughs) Ha! Come on! A stoneskipper? You’re not telling me that you’re a stone . . .

WOMAN
Me? Naaa! Not likely. What I am is I’m a very hungry person. I skip meals… lots of them. I’m a champion mealskipper but I’m in kind of in a LIFE slump. . . Haven’t you heard anything I said?

JOE
Actually, no. Not very much. (Gestures) I’ve been really busy.

WOMAN
Just throwin’ them rocks, huh? Now whattaya see in that?

JOE
It’s a living, that’s all. Sometimes it’s a good one.

WOMAN
Uh huh.

JOE
Sometimes. And it gives me a lot of pleasure usually, but I’m off today, so it’s not so much fun, but when I’m sharp, when I’m really hot, it’s terrific. You just can’t beat it.

WOMAN
You probably have to eat real well.

JOE
Well, yeah. You have to. You have to eat.

WOMAN
Mmm.

JOE
Everything. I love everything about it.
WOMAN
What d'ya mean?

JOE
It has just the right mix of everything; the physical, the mental, the aesthetic . . . *(catches himself)* Why am I talking to you?

WOMAN
Oh, yeah, “the aesthetic” . . . Tell me about it.

JOE
Naaa. It gets really technical. You don’t want to hear all this.

WOMAN
Sure I do! *(Not really)* C’mon, tell me. Talk to me.

JOE
Well. . . . ok. But just the part about picking the right stone could take a few chapters.

WOMAN
Some are better than others, huh?

JOE
Oh, yeah. Of course. It’s like a wing. Do you know anything about wings?

WOMAN
*(Shrugs largely)* Naaah.

JOE
Well, take my word for it, the stone becomes a wing.

WOMAN
*(Disbelieving)* C’mon.

JOE
Yeah. That’s right. An airfoil. Not a good one, but it is an airfoil.

WOMAN
You’re right. I don’t think I need this.

JOE
I knew you wouldn’t understand. Look . . . look, I’ll show you. Here’s a pretty good one. No, this one. See how it’s flat on this side and rounded on this?

WOMAN
Mmmm. You know, I think I’d rather have a sandwich.
JOE
It’s like a wing. Flat on the bottom, curved on top. Ok, watch now; first the concentration…
(HE takes a deep, loud, breath. Winds up. Throws. The stone strikes the water.)…and....
Bam! Two, three, doop, doop, six, seee-ven. . . doop! Eight! That’s terrific! Eight! Did you see that? Eight! Wow. You must be bringing me luck.

WOMAN
That ought to be worth something, huh?

JOE
Like what?

WOMAN
A sandwich maybe? A cup of coffee?

JOE
Is that all you think about?

WOMAN
Lately, yeah.

JOE
“Tell me”, you said. “Talk to me”, you said. Am I wrong?

WOMAN
No, you’re right. I said a lotta’ things and I guess that was one of them.

JOE
Yeah. So that’s what I’m doing. I’m telling you; I’m talking to you. So listen. The stone is a wing.

WOMAN
The stone is a wing.

JOE
Right. And when you throw the right stone in the right way under the right conditions, you get thrust. You get drag. You get a little lift. In other words, you get flight!

WOMAN
Hey, that’s . . . ahhh . . . that’s terrific.

JOE
It is! So you throw it. And it flies a little and you get that “bam” when it hits and then, if you’re a little luckier than I’ve been today, you get “doops”. That’s how you make—

WOMAN
Doops?
JOE
Right.

WOMAN
You make DOOPS?

JOE
You try to. That’s how you—

WOMAN
(With growing anger) I don’t believe I’m listening to this.

JOE
Bounces. Off the water. We call ‘em “doops”. You could say “points”, I guess.

WOMAN
I’m STARVING here and you’re worried about “doops”?

JOE
(Shrug) Yeah. The world record is thirteen.

WOMAN
Listen, please. Can we forget the world’s goddamn doop record for a minute?

JOE
Ok. What is it?

WOMAN
I need some HELP here. I can’t use any doops. What I need is some food, understand? A little food. Or some money and I’ll buy it myself. Hey, do you have maybe a sandwich in that bag?

JOE
No. Don’t touch that. Leave that alone.

WOMAN
A candy bar, maybe? A Twinkie?

JOE
(Moves the bag) Listen. This is important. Ok? Now, the first bounce is called a “hit” or a “bam”. And each stoneskip after that is a “doop”.

WOMAN
This is important, huh? This “doop” business?

JOE
Yes. I guess it sounds dumb to you, huh?

WOMAN
From your mouth to God’s ear.
(Sulking)  It’s what I do, that’s all.

Well, it’s dumb

You stop that, lady.

It’s stupid!

No it isn’t.

‘Course it is!  It’s useless.  It’s . . . it’s VAPID, that’s what.

It’s what?

Empty!

Oh, yeah!  What’s a homeless old bag like you doing with ten dollar words?

What’s a rock thrower like you doing with such presumption?

What the hell does that mean?

I’m just hungry, mister, I’m not stupid.

Yeah?  You’re so smart, do you know what the world’s record is?

Let me guess.  Ummmm… (She makes a swami-like gesture)  Thirteen.

That’s it!  That’s right!... How did you…?  Well, I’ve been able to image fourteen.

That’s like “pretend”, isn’t it?

Well, yeah.  A very, very strong pretense.
WOMAN
So are you pretending to be in a competition?

JOE
No!

WOMAN
It’s a real competition?

JOE
Damn right, it’s a real competition!

WOMAN
But you’re telling me that you have the world’s record in the bag…

JOE
I never said THAT . . .

WOMAN
. . . because you can IMAGINE it! Now that’s stupid!

JOE
It’s a technique, that’s all.

WOMAN
Big damn deal! I can imagine a whole damn turkey dinner, do you know that? Huh? I can “image” it clearer than any Thanksgiving dinner you ever ate. But I’m not going to eat that dinner…

JOE
You don’t understand.

WOMAN
Not unless a few realities happen first. And I know about reality. I know a lot about it. Reality isn’t the meal I imagine. Reality is the meal I GET!

JOE
Well, I know how to make reality happen. I know I can break that record. Just, “see it and be it”.

WOMAN
You know what? You’re pathetic.

JOE
Stop that!

WOMAN
What you’re saying here, is that if your particular dream comes true, you’ll be a goddamn doopmaster.
I will be the Stoneskipping Champion of the World!

Whatever. You’ll have loads of money and you won’t help anybody with it.

There’s a lot more to it than that.

Yeah?

Yeah. The beauty part. The aesthetic part . . .

Oh, give me a friggin’ break. (SHE sits, Left, crying, exhausted. HE moves to the right.)

The aesthetic part is . . . like in the early morning . . .

Oh man, oh man, oh man . . .

Right here on the beach.

Yeah. On the freezing goddamn beach.

With the sun coming up!

And my teeth are chattering out of control. And I’m scared. I’m always, always scared.

And the surf is roaring!

And my back aches. And everything hurts. You’re just never ever out of pain out there. Ever.

The color is amazing. Oh, you just can’t imagine the color! It’s just . . . just glorious! The morning color. Oh!

And the smells! Those morning smells. . . Oh! I used to cry out loud when I smelled breakfast from down the beach . . .
JOE

WOMAN
. . . Breakfast from the houses way down the beach (points). My stomach aches; it’s knotted up. It needs to **eat**.

JOE
And I wind up . . . and I throw . . . *(laughs)* . . . Haa! . . . and bam!

WOMAN
Smell the coffee. Smell the pancakes. *(Cries)* Ahhh! . . . ummmm.

JOE
And it hits! And it sails and sails . . .

WOMAN
And bacon! Oh, dear Jesus, smell the bacon. *(Sobbing)* I could kill for bacon.

JOE
Then…doop! It happens. It bounces along, hits the face of the wave and . . . doop! Another. Then it’s skimming the water. Perfectly flat. I don’t know how it got that way. It doesn’t always do it. But it’s skimming along in ground-effect, with the air compressed between the stone and the water surface. It’s skating on air! Then another wave-face and doop! That’s… how many? Four, I think. And on it goes. Another wave doops it up in the air. Doop! Another. That’s six and it’s going strong . . . Another wave! It’s beautiful! Just beautiful!

WOMAN
I almost always use a bucket for a toilet . . .

JOE
Seagulls are everywhere! Screaming! Hunting for their breakfast.

WOMAN
. . . or I dig a hole in the sand. Way back. There . . .

JOE
Big lucky wave slaps it. Knocks it cockeyed. Speed increases. . .

WOMAN
. . . away back from where I sleep, ya know, in a bag . . . An old sleeping bag.

JOE
Again. Again! The waves play kickball with the stone. Doop! Doop! And that’s ELEVEN!

WOMAN
That’s what I use. The bucket. Used to bother me somethin' awful, but the hunger kills any feelings I used to have. Any modesty. Any, you know; shame.
JOE
And then it’s all over. And I… I’m left standing there like… like a man in a postcard. It’s wonderful. Me and the surf and the gulls.

WOMAN
And I hide my stuff. My bag. And I walk along the beach to town. Look for work. Begging.

JOE
Ohh, wow. It’s all so terrific! I just love it.

WOMAN
Everyday I meet people like yourself and I ask them to help me. Just a little.

JOE
Yeah. Well, I guess we all do what we have to do. (HE prepares to leave.) And I’m outta here.

WOMAN
(Pleading, crying) Don’t go. Help me! Help me now!

(HE stops and considers)

JOE
Naa! Gotta go. (Continues packing.) I’ll be out of your way in a minute.

WOMAN
(Out of control now) Outta’ the way? You’re right there, mister. You’re dead right. (SHE takes an old pistol from a bag, cocks it, and moves toward him.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes