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Product Code A0800.2

Stoneskippers

by

Robert R. Lehan

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Stoneskippers

by Robert R. Lehan

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:

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.

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.*

JOE

“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

(Visualizing) Baaaaaaa mmmmm. (Pause) Doooo oooop. (Pause) Doooo oooop. (Pause) Dooop-dooop-dooooop. (Pause) Dooop. Doop-doop-doop-dup-dupdup aaand onne mooore. . . Doop! That’s it! Fourteen!

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, fumbles the stone) Damn! What?

WOMAN

What’ cha doin’?

JOE

Practicing.

WOMAN

(Nods, thinks) 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.)

JOE

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?

WOMAN

Just pretend I'm not here.

JOE

No problem.

WOMAN

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

JOE

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)* Ahhhh!. Damn. Damn! *(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 uhhh, 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) Haa! Come on! A stonesskipper? 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.

JOE
(Sulking) It's what I do, that's all.

WOMAN
 Well, it's dumb

JOE
 You stop that, lady.

WOMAN
 It's stupid!

JOE
 No it isn't.

WOMAN
 'Course it is! It's useless. It's . . . it's VAPID, that's what.

JOE
 It's what?

WOMAN
 Empty!

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

WOMAN
 What's a rock thrower like **you** doing with such presumption?

JOE
 What the hell does that mean?

WOMAN
 I'm just hungry, mister, I'm not stupid.

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

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

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

WOMAN
 That's like "pretend", isn't it?

JOE
 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.

JOE

I will be the Stoneskipping Champion of the World!

WOMAN

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

JOE

There's a lot more to it than that.

WOMAN

Yeah?

JOE

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

WOMAN

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

JOE

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

WOMAN

Oh man, oh man, oh man . . .

JOE

Right here on the beach.

WOMAN

Yeah. On the freezing goddamn beach.

JOE

With the sun coming up!

WOMAN

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

JOE

And the surf is roaring!

WOMAN

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

JOE

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

WOMAN

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

JOE

And I choose my skipping stone. Very carefully. Very picky. Find just that perfect stone.

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