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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.
STONE SKIPPERS

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, 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?

Just pretend I’m not here.

WOMAN
No problem.

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

WOMAN
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!

What?

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

Here? I’m in the way here?

Yes.

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

You’re a distraction.

WOMAN:
You’re kind of cute yourself.

JOE
I mean I can see you.

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

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.)

. . . way out of your way.

WOMAN

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. 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.)
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 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.

JOE

Well, it’s dumb

JOE

You stop that, lady.

WOMAN

It’s stupid!

WOMAN

No it isn’t.

JOE

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

WOMAN

It’s what?

JOE

Empty!

WOMAN

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

JOE

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

WOMAN

What the hell does that mean?

JOE

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

WOMAN

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

JOE

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

WOMAN

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

JOE

That’s like “pretend”, isn’t it?

WOMAN

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

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! . . . ummmmm.

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