

Stars Old Man

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A version of the play was first produced by Limelight Theatre.

ONE
You know what's easy?

TWO
What?

ONE
Just saying a couple of words at a time.

TWO
Yep.

ONE
I mean. . .

TWO
I know.

ONE
You do?

TWO
Yeah.

Pause.

ONE
The other way is harder.

TWO
Yeah.

ONE
Saying more words at a time.

Agreed. Two

Yeah. ONE

Try it. Two

Me? ONE

Yeah. You. Try saying more words. Two

I'm uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable. ONE

Try. Two

You try. ONE

I asked you first. Two

Fine. ONE

Okay. Two

Pause.

Begin.

ONE

It was the second of the month of June. It might have been warm, I can't remember. There was a child sitting near the base of a large leafy tree. I approached the child and said You are going to grow old. The child sat up a little and smiled at me but didn't say a thing. I retorted You will grow old. You will. It is a fact. It is a fact. Youth cannot be denied to me and given to you, it will be taken away. You will fear it and it will plague you. Your shoulders will grow larger and burden your back. Your hair will gray, your face will fold, your legs will break... you will collapse under the weight of existence! The child just smiled... just smiled at me. And then the leaves fell from the tree. They were wonderful colors and there was a breeze that kept them aloft. They just hung there, floating against the gray sky, and then white. It was me... just me. The child was gone, the tree was dying, I was alone. I looked at my hands... they were shaking. I sat at the base of the tree and laughed. That's all I remember.

TWO

That was quite long.

ONE

Thank you.

TWO

You're quite welcome. Your hands are shaking.

ONE

Are they? I hadn't noticed.

TWO

Just look at them. They're shaking terribly. It's not cold here. The fire is more than warm enough for the room and the two of us.

ONE

Oh no.

TWO

What?

ONE

They don't shake because it's cold. I'm not cold. They shake because they're dying.

TWO

Because they're dying?

ONE

Which means that I'm dying. There isn't a great deal of time left you see. What happened at the tree was the first time they were shaken. Now they shake more often. I don't notice anymore. Thank you for telling me. It's terribly embarrassing.

TWO

Well, here's a blanket to cover them up.

ONE

Thank you.

TWO

Do you have any other stories, old man?

ONE

I don't like to talk too much, you know.

TWO

You did very well last time.

ONE

Thank you for saying so. Another story.

TWO

It doesn't have to be long, I suppose. You could tell a short one.

ONE

A story means something has happened. How can I tell you less? They have to be longer. Maybe. I don't really know. I've never told my stories before.

TWO

I'd love to listen to them.

ONE

I'll have to think of them. The brain doesn't work as well when you're dead or dying. I suppose I'm a little of both.

TWO

No, no. You're just fine. Here, let me help you with your blanket... it's slipping off of you a little.

ONE

The hands are still going are they?

TWO

Yes. There you go.

ONE

Thank you.

TWO

Have you remembered a story yet?

ONE

No. I was wondering about my hands.

TWO

Don't worry about them at all. I'll tend to the blanket. You think of stories to tell.

ONE

Would you like a story from the infancy, toddler, child, adolescent, young adult, adult, middle-aged, elderly, dying, or dead stage of my life?

TWO

You can't tell me about your dead stage yet, can you?

ONE

I'm a little dead already. I know some stories.

Two

Alright. Tell me one.

ONE

There is a part of me, a percentage, a piece of my pie that is already dead. I was walking down a road in the night. There were no trees anywhere. The land around the road was perfectly flat. You could see stars on what would have been the horizon as bright as if they were above you. It was like living in a snow globe. The dome of the earth was perfect and the base was level. The stars may well have been the falling bits of snow because they were moving, close to the horizon, as if they were those bits of snow floating in that viscous liquid. I couldn't make out a single constellation from a book, but I saw constellations no one has ever known. The stars were telling me a story. I wiped my eyes thinking I was seeing things but they continued to move. To float. To change direction and placement. There was a musical note, a sixteenth note, floating about for a while through the sky, and an oval came from a square and shattered it into a million stars. I didn't know it but there was music until the note shattered. Everything was silent. I watched as the oval traveled across the baseline of the earth. There was a flower that sprung up in its path and was destroyed. A spinning top, a beating heart, creativity... all destroyed. And after the oval had flown around the world it expanded to envelop the whole sky and there was darkness. And the stars were gone. And I kept looking for something, anything, a lump, a bump amidst the flat earth and could find nothing different. But then, I touched water... but the ripples provoked by my fingers invaded my face! Oh!

Two

I see them, there, on your face.

ONE

It was very disgusting.

Two

It is very disgusting. Here's a blanket to cover up.

Places blanket over One's face.

ONE

Oh, that's just fine. That's just fine.

Two

No, thank you for letting me help. Oh, your hands are shaking again.

ONE

Are they?

TWO

Yes. There you are. All better.

ONE

That fire must be raging. It's getting so warm in here.

TWO

I'll put it out. Wouldn't want to overheat us.

ONE

Are you sure? I could just take these blankets off.

TWO

No, no, I wouldn't even hear it.

ONE

But you'll be cold.

TWO

I'll be perfect. It was quite hot in here from the beginning.

ONE

Thank you for your kindness.

TWO

It's no trouble. Did you have any other stories to tell me?

ONE

Well...

TWO

I'd love to hear them.

ONE

Yes, but it's slightly difficult with this blanket over my face.

TWO

No! I don't want you to get cold. It's become terribly cold.

ONE

Has it?

TWO

Yes. There are icicles growing. I'm not sure how they got here this quickly.

ONE

Surely you'll need one of the blankets to keep warm.

TWO

I couldn't, you're almost dead.

ONE

But...

TWO

Oh, I've found one for myself. All is well.

ONE

Good. I'd better stay under here. Icicles! How incredible.

TWO

Yes, quite.

ONE

This is a story you'll tell one day.

TWO

But I want to hear your stories.

ONE

Icicles! Wondrous! My stories are just that: stories. You're living a story right now. I wish I could see them. In my adult years, long ago, I was waiting in a line... a very slowly moving line. It seems, in fact, that I waited in this line for three years. I had to wait, they told me, because I was turning thirty-five, and I wasn't quite sure of the reasoning behind it but at that time you didn't have to have reasoning for things. People did what they were told because they had to, because if they didn't they wouldn't be anymore. So we stood in line, all of us. I asked one person behind me what they were waiting for when those in charge weren't looking, the line was long you know, and she said she was waiting because she was seventy-five, but that she was seventy-seven now! Can you imagine? And I said I was waiting because I was thirty-five, not thirty-seven... and that was two years of waiting right there. We tried to think of why thirty-five and seventy-five were the same, why both of us might be there, but we didn't know. The only thing that was the same was the fives... and that didn't make any sense to us at all... but for the last year we were talking when we could and the line moved much faster.

TWO

What happened when you got to the end of the line?

ONE

They had forgotten or something and we weren't sure. When the guards went away and didn't come back we just left the line. We quit waiting.

TWO

So you never found out?

ONE

No. We never did figure out what we were waiting for.

TWO

Doesn't that bother you?

ONE

What?

TWO

Not knowing why you stood in line for three years.

ONE

No. I'd rather not know... bad things might have happened... I'm sure it wasn't good things at the end of the line. My hair was grey by the end of it.

TWO

Grey?

ONE

From stress... or silence. The two years of waiting without friendship, conversation, guards and guns together... stressful, confusing.

TWO

Well, it's getting late.

ONE

I hadn't noticed, what time is it?

TWO

Late, it's late. Are you ready for bed?

ONE

I suppose I could be... are you yourself tired?

TWO

It is late.

ONE

I suppose you're right. Another story tomorrow?

TWO

Yes... tomorrow.

ONE

Alright then. I'll sleep then.

TWO

You sleep then.

ONE

I will.

The next day.

ONE

Another story?

TWO

You're still alive.

ONE

I'm part dead.

END OF PLAY