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SCENES FROM A PLAY*

Dennis Kennedy

Note: The play is *Remembering*, the first of two short plays designed to be performed together and called *Remembering and Forgetting*. They are dedicated to the memory of my father and are about the persistence of memory and the problem of forgetting to stay human. The first is evocative and echoing, the second specific and brutal: two sides of the same ringing coin as it drops down a stone stairway. What follows are the opening scenes.

DK

Two armchairs near the center. A kitchen table and four chairs are needed later. A window of some type downstage; when looking out through it the actors face the audience. Except where indicated, the fades should be rapid and the blackouts as short as possible.

The MAN and the WOMAN are old, in their sixties at least, but should not be decrepit. Despite their age, they have a certain sinewy vigor. The WOMAN, especially, moves with an ancient gait. MIKE and JAMES (the GUESTS) are young, about 25 to 30. It is important that no one appear to be middle-aged.

Lights up. The MAN and the WOMAN are sitting in armchairs.

WOMAN: You said you'd love me. Always, you said. The sun was bright, like my eyes, you said. I looked at it. It was bright.

MAN: It was cloudy that day, and you said why not get married. I thought, well, as good this as. . . . The clouds broke a moment, the moon came through, and there was a star right below the left crescent. Red, flashing.

WOMAN: There was a breeze. I said, feel the breeze in your eyes. Like the sun. The hedge sang with the birds. You said, I'll always love you, like the wind on these leaves. Red, they were. It was autumn.

MAN: The tricks it plays. In the spring that year, I went to see you. You had changed while I was away. A baby, that's what it was. A baby was crying somewhere. Did you have a baby? I asked. I couldn't know — I'd been away. No, you said. Why do you ask? It cried on a while longer. Who do you live with, I asked. No one, you said. I've come back, I said.

*extracted from *Remembering and Forgetting*, Copyright 1976 Dennis Kennedy.

WOMAN: You went away in the spring, just when the buds had split open. There'd been a storm and they were on the ground. You looked lovely in your bright uniform. Off to the wars! Ta-ra, Ta-ra! with a shiny cap with gold braid. I'll come back you said. When you left, all I thought of was blood rushing out of arteries and nostrils. Pyrocantha blooming in the garden, the sun bright as your buttons, a breeze on your hair, though most of it was covered by the cap. I thought you'd never come back.

MAN: What did you come back for, people ask me. You had a career, fast promotions, rising to the top, always need men like me, with my training, ready and able — that's what's important, able — to do anything any time any where, no questions, no hesitations, no thought for self, always make out. I don't know, I say.

WOMAN: I remember now: there was a bridge over a small stream, a Japanese arch bridge of wood, in the back of the house and I'd wait there at sunset for you to come back. Come home, I'd say, at the top of the bridge in the red sky, wearing my summer dress without sleeves for the cool and no shoes at all and no brassiere, waiting . . . I threw pebbles into the water. They made rings of ripples, and the minnows came to feed on them . . .

MAN: Why didn't you write you said.

WOMAN: . . . and the ripples floated out to the struts of the bridge and the minnows followed them, every evening. I'd look at my hands and see the veins carrying blood back to my heart and how the skin was wrinkled. A light green moss from the stones over the skin over the blood. I posed there for a photo in my beige blouse unbuttoned half-way down and no sleeves or shoes, waiting.

MAN: We got a house, you wanted a house, and we moved in and there was a baby crying and I went to work and came back. I never saw the photo. You never showed me the photo.

WOMAN: I did, but it's lost now.

MAN: Never.

(Pause)

WOMAN: I was waiting there when mother told me you'd never come back. She never liked you, my mother, and said you'd never come back. I wanted to jump off the bridge, but it was stony on the bottom. Never come back, she said. I waited a while longer, then came in.

MAN: Why didn't you write, you said.

Blackout.

Lights up. They are at the window.

MAN: The yellow jackets pollute the blossoms, the honeysuckle strangles the air.

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WOMAN: In the evening we sat by the fire, driftwood and eucalyptus and pine branches for smell, and planned what we couldn't see. The past was over now, you said, and I hoped to forget what you had done. The night air was cold, though it was only September. A window was open a bit, but you wouldn't let me close it. Need it for the fire to draw, you said. You smoked a pipe and I sat and watched the seed pods from the eucalyptus pop in the flames. My back was cold from the window, but my front was warm. We have to look ahead now, you said.

MAN: That summer, a few months later, I was walking the beach with the dog, the little one – well, really not *that* little, but the smaller one, the one that barked at everything –

WOMAN: – the one that was killed –

MAN: – who used to puke on the carpet and then creep up the stairs, and the oil was coming in from the leak offshore, only you couldn't really see it, just a little dark in the water maybe. But it was there, under the sand and under the water. You'd be greasy if you went swimming. And walking on the beach your shoes had tar and mess stuck to them. Grease. That summer, a man came up to us, the dog and me, and said you can't walk dogs on the beach. I've always walked my dog on the beach, I said. You can't do it anymore, he said. Why not, I said. Because they passed a law, he said, because dogs crap in the sand and no one cleans it up and people lie in it and step in it. *My* dog doesn't crap on the beach, I said, he has a little potty he goes in at home. He showed me a badge and then stood there with a pad on his thigh and wrote me a ticket for walking the dog in a forbidden place.

The dog barked at him. On the way home, he crapped in the sand. It was warm.

WOMAN: It was the only dog we ever had.

MAN: See that hummingbird by the pansies. Wants to suck out the honey from the flowers.

WOMAN: They're fushias. Flowers don't have honey.

MAN: What do bees eat then? We had three dogs, and the others were all bigger than this one. Mark, Rhonda, and Timmy Sue.

WOMAN: Timmy Sue was a cat. We never had anything named Mark or Rhonda. We only had one dog.

MAN: What was its name then?

WOMAN: Look at the starlings on the telephone wire.

MAN: What the hell was its damn name? *(Pause)* I never smoked a pipe. A cigar, yes, now and then, in the evening maybe or after breakfast. A cigarette now and then, out with friends, though I never bought them for myself. Always kept them in the house though for guests. Right there in that dish. Look in it now, you'll see it's still filled, ready for the next smoker who visits. People don't do that these days. I like the old ways. But never a pipe, no. Too messy. Pipe cleaners, tobacco pouch, knife and tamper, matches. Pipe.

WOMAN: And the fire popped the seed pods and I hoped for the children you'd never let me have. I wanted a house full, boys and girls, and lots of dogs for them and chickens and a pony. No, you said, we must concentrate on ourselves now, and the fire burned down till it was red like blood and I lost my eyes in it.

MAN: That's it — Rhonda was the name of our little girl!

Blackout.

Lights up. The WOMAN is sitting alone, looking at photographs in an album, turning the pages slowly and pausing to study carefully an occasional picture. She is humming a soft tune from the 1960's, perhaps "The

Girl from Iphenima. "The tune is punctuated with sounds and comments related to the pictures: a quick silly laugh, a "Humph!", a smile, a too-rapid turning of the page to avoid an unpleasant memory. She hears a noise, and goes to the window to look. She smiles and stares, and says "Cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep. . ." She returns to the chair, picks up the album, resumes turning the pages and looking. Hums as before. At last she finds a photo of some particular importance, stares long at it, stops humming. Looks up, hums a few bars, stops humming. A long, audible sigh. Stares into nothing.

Slow backout.

Music up. Lights up. They enter dancing together in a gentle waltz.

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5

MAN: Ah, yes, we danced together! One two three one two three, Strauss, Delibes, Stravinsky. Those were the pleasant days, before these. Music, champagne from crystal glasses, friends coming over for visits, dinners out. Of course, we had to make arrangements for the children.

WOMAN: Twirl, and spin, and glide. Dip. Joe Murray, Sarah Solomon, Billy the Kid Hofstader, and all the crowd would be there – somewhere anyway, and we'd be there, dancing, dancing. Who dances any more? Does anyone dance any more? Dip, glide. And Lawrence Welk and the polkas and the new dances we did – we'd keep up with them all, the fast ones and the slow ones in the dark.

MAN: Mexican food with Carta Blanco beer, tortilies and arrosch and chilly relenloes, and pizza late at night, after a bash (*they are out of breath*), makes me full to think of it.

WOMAN: I liked the egg rolls and rice at Jimmy's Oriental Gardens behind the post office. Gone now. (*They stop and lean on each other.*)

MAN: Dangerous there now, you know. It was George Hofstader.

WOMAN: No, it was Billy. How could they call him George the Kid?

MAN: They didn't call him that, and you didn't call him that. Nobody called him that. It was George. (*Pause*) George the German.

WOMAN: It's tiring now, but then I'd go on for hours and hours, never want to stop.

MAN: You never wanted to stop anything. But you did.

WOMAN: What children?

MAN: Hum?

WOMAN: What children did we have to make arrangements for?

MAN: Perhaps it was Henry. *(They begin to dance off)*

WOMAN: What children?

MAN: Henry the Hun.

Blackout. Music out.

Lights up. The MAN is sitting at the table alone. A bottle of red wine and two glasses. The bottle should be clear glass so that the wine can easily be seen. He rises, takes the bottle, and carefully fills each glass to the brim. He sits. Looks about, hums and whistles. Picks up his glass and looks at it. Sips. Looks about cautiously, takes a large drink. Sets down glass, gargles. Drains glass quickly and quickly fills it up again. Hums innocently, expecting her entrance. Slight pause. Looks about, takes a big drink. He hears her coming, tries to drain glass quickly, and set it down before she enters. Hums with mouth full, etc.

WOMAN: *(entering)* It'll be just a moment, shall we have some wine now?

MAN: *(mouth not quite empty yet)* Um-hum.

WOMAN: Have you been drinking without me?

MAN: No, I was waiting for you. Do you want some now? Sit down and have some now. We'll have some together.

WOMAN: Why is your glass empty then? Why is your glass empty then?

MAN: I haven't filled it yet. Just getting around to it now *(picks up bottle)*. Sit down and have some.

WOMAN: Look at that! Look at that glass! I washed that glass. I know

that glass was clean. Look at it!

MAN: What's the matter with it? It's clean. What's the matter with it?

WOMAN: Look at it! Wine drops at the bottom. (*Takes the glass*) At the bottom. Red drops. I can see them. Open your mouth. Go on, open up. Open wide.

MAN: Why should I? It's my mouth.

WOMAN: Open up! (*He opens, she holds his lips back with a finger and peers in*) Look at that! Look at that! Red stain on the teeth. And the gums. Why do you lie? Why do you always lie to me? I don't mind your having a little red wine, I like a little red wine now and then, good for the arteries and the nose; I don't mind at all, but why do you lie to me? Why can't you ever wait for me? You never could wait for me. I'm cooking the dinner, a simple dinner, yes, but a hot dinner, I'm out in the kitchen cooking the dinner, for how long now – forty years? fifty? – no it can't be fifty, can it? 7

MAN: What?

WOMAN: I said, it can't be fifty can it?

MAN: Fifty what?

WOMAN: Fifty what?

MAN: Yes, fifty what?

WOMAN: Fifty what. Have you been listening to me?

MAN: Of course I've been listening to you. You're going on about my teeth.

WOMAN: Every night I'm out in the kitchen cooking the dinner – *your* dinner – while you're in here. The least you could do is wait.

MAN: I am waiting. What do you think I'm doing?

WOMAN: You're not waiting, you're drinking the wine!

MAN: Well what am I supposed to *do* while you're out there? You won't

let me in the kitchen, you kick me out of the kitchen.

WOMAN: How do you expect me to cook with you wandering around in my way? How am I supposed to cook your hot dinner with you wandering around in my way?

MAN: So what am I supposed to do?

WOMAN: Supposed to do? Supposed to do? What are you supposed to do? Don't you know? *(Pause)* When?

MAN: What?

WOMAN: What are you supposed to do *when*?

MAN: When what?

Pause as they stare at each other. She exits. He fills his glass and drinks as she re-enters with two plates of food: his glass should be empty and his mouth full. She stares at him so that he can't swallow without giving himself away. She sits and drinks. He hums as he pokes at his food.

WOMAN: Why don't you eat? Go on, eat.

MAN: *(he tries to say "It's too hot"; the wine trickles out of his mouth).*

WOMAN: It's not too hot, it's just right. It's very good. Go on, try some, aren't you hungry?

They stare at each other. A loud knock on the door. He rushes from the table to answer, swallowing and gasping for air.

WOMAN: Who is it? Is it Rhonda? Is it? Who is it?

MAN: *(off)* . . . no, I don't think we know where it is . . . *(Enters, followed by two young men, the GUESTS. MIKE carries a knapsack. They are a bit like Laurel and Hardy, or Jules and Jim)* . . . do we know where that is?

WOMAN: Who is it? What do they want?

MAN: It's Barry the Bosch and his friend. What do you want, did you say?

WOMAN: We don't have much. Barry the Who?

MAN: What? *(to her)*

MIKE: Excuse us, madam, it's just that we've lost our way in the dark, looking for this address *(shows a piece of paper)*, and came upon your cheerful and pleasant cottage for respite from the storm.

WOMAN: Is it dark out? I haven't been out today.

MAN: What address is it? Let me get my glasses. Cottage?

MIKE: What a cheerful and bright room you have here. Warm, and dry, and inviting to the weary lost traveller. I see you're at dinner — you must excuse our intrusion. Wine . . .

MAN: Let me see that *(takes the paper)* . . . 14301 Barnstable Drive?
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There's nothing like that around here. What are you trying to pull?

9

WOMAN: *(coquette)* I'm not a madam.

MIKE: It's only our misguided directions that have chanced us to intrude upon you, at so obviously inconvenient a time, and for this, our sincere and profound apologies. But even this brief moment — all too brief, it appears — within your warming walls will brighten our prospect and add spark to the, uh, fires of discovery as we rush on, driving through the darkness like a sword, like a discovering sword to our predestined end, our fateful rendezvous with the final object of the quest —

JAMES: *(mutter)*

MIKE: What's that? *(They confer privately)* Yes, all right, yes. Hum. As my companion has well and timely reminded me, we but waste your time as ours, both precious indeed, ours by reason of the urgency of our journey, yours by reason of the, uh, advanced state of your years, leaving little remaining, so accept our humble apologies and allow us to depart as quickly and suddenly as we came, exiting from your lives as we entered, unasked, unexpected, unremembered, and unneeded, a small, two small seed puffs blown from the dandelions of the autumn grass, passing all but unnoticed in the wind.

WOMAN: Is it dark out?

Pause.

MAN: Would you like a glass of wine?

JAMES: I thought you'd never fucking-well ask.

Blackout.