

THIS WORLD AND THAT ONE

By Philip Vassallo

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SYNOPSIS: Two couples, one in their sixties and one in their twenties, camp at a site distracted by each other's presence. As the older couple face their past and the younger their future, they find a moment of mutual peace in their present.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 females, 2 males)

CHARLES (m)..... Age 62. *(25 lines)*

KATHERINE (f)..... Age 62. *(28 lines)*

CHARLIE (m) Age 22. *(23 lines)*

KATHY (f)..... Age 22. *(25 lines)*

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Campsite.

PROPS

- ☐ 4 sleeping bags

DEDICATION

For Edison Philip DeLuca, whose determination, diligence, and radiance make me feel younger than I am and do better than I thought I could.

AT START: *A campsite. Lights above, suggesting a bright, star-and moon-illuminated night. Lying on the ground at right are CHARLES and KATHERINE in the light, and at left are CHARLIE and KATHY in the dark. CHARLES and KATHERINE lie still and silent in their own sleeping bags, and CHARLIE and KATHY cuddle and coo in one sleeping bag as their other adjacent sleeping bag remains vacant.*

CHARLES: Of all the...

KATHERINE: It's all right.

CHARLES: Why don't they...

KATHERINE: They're fine.

CHARLES: *(Sits up.)* Can't they find another place to smooch?

KATHERINE: They can hear you.

CHARLES: *(Louder.)* In a campsite half the size of Alaska! It's bad enough we've got to deal with the howling owls, shuffling raccoons, and nosediving bats, let alone the ever-looming specter of hungry bears. Give us a break!

KATHERINE: Charles, please!

CHARLIE and KATHY stop their activity, lie still.

CHARLES: It's about time, thank you very much. I was getting old here wondering how much she could take of you.

KATHERINE: Shhh!

CHARLES plops down. Lights down on CHARLES and KATHERINE and lights up on CHARLIE and KATHY. CHARLIE leaps up. KATHY peeks from sleeping bag.

CHARLIE: Did I tell you I love you in the past five minutes?

KATHY: I don't have my watch.

CHARLIE: Well I do.

KATHY: I know you love me, Charlie.

CHARLIE: This spot is perfect.

KATHY: I knew you'd like it.

CHARLIE: I want to stay here forever. *(Points at CHARLES and KATHERINE.)* Minus them.

KATHY: They're okay.

CHARLIE: Promise me something.

KATHY: What?

CHARLIE: That we won't become like them.

KATHY: Well, you're one half of that promise.

CHARLIE: With me it's a given. I'm not going to ever be an old grouch complaining about the natural world and human nature.

KATHY: Isn't complaining about human nature human nature?

CHARLIE: Only for grouches complaining about the very things they should be grateful for. Of all the places they could go to complain, they pick our campsite. (*Mocking CHARLES.*) "I'm getting old here." You are old!

KATHY: I'm not so sure you've got them pegged. They're out here under the open night sky just like us.

CHARLIE: With insomnia.

KATHY: And they're looking up at the stars just like us.

CHARLIE: In separate sleeping bags.

KATHY: And they chose to hitch up at the most scenic view in the park just like us.

CHARLIE: They're a strong argument for why people shouldn't live their whole adult lives together.

KATHY: Are we a strong argument for why they should?

CHARLIE: Come on. Don't get paranoid. I'm just saying.

KATHY: And I just want to make sure that when you're talking about them, you're really not talking about us.

CHARLIE: What did I say that would make you think such a thing?

KATHY: That couple has been together maybe forty years. They probably have children old enough to be our parents. Give them some credit for knowing how to get along in the world.

CHARLIE: Wow! That's one giant leap of logic! How would you know whether they just met on MatchMeUpDotCom? Or have holed up here after robbing a bank? Or he isn't on some sex offender's list, and she's on furlough from the state penitentiary while serving a term for child abuse? You're idealizing. You can see the old man's a pain in the butt, and the old lady's afraid we're going to bash their skulls in and rob them of the five bucks at best stashed in their sleeping bags.

KATHY: And I'm idealizing! Why are you being so ornery?

CHARLIE: Why? Because those crabs are ruining the most perfect night of my life. Because I can't think of a better person to be with than you, but I have to share the moment with them.

KATHY: I don't know what you mean by perfect. Please, no perfect! I can't live up to that standard.

CHARLIE: What the... did I say you have to?

KATHY: I'm just who I am, pimples and all.

CHARLIE: What are you saying? I love you, pimples and all. That's what I mean by perfect. I wouldn't have you change in any way. But you've gone light years off the point.

KATHY: Sorry if you think so, but there's something more going on here than you're letting on. I was in that sleeping bag with you just moments ago and never in my life have felt so warm, so safe, so loved. I thought you felt that way too. And now you're making me promise you something I can't possibly honor.

CHARLIE: What in the name of God do you mean?

Lights down on CHARLIE and KATHY, CHARLIE remains standing and KATHY sits up in her sleeping bag. Lights up on CHARLES and KATHERINE, KATHERINE bolts up, startling CHARLES from his sleep. CHARLES remains under the sleeping bag as KATHERINE eventually walks down center.

KATHERINE: (*Whispers.*) Did you hear that?

CHARLES: Huh?

KATHERINE: I heard voices.

CHARLES: You're nuts.

KATHERINE: People's voices.

CHARLES: The wind.

KATHERINE: And footsteps.

CHARLES: Squirrels.

KATHERINE: No. I heard them. And saw their faces. They were a young couple.

CHARLES: They at it again?

KATHERINE: They must be forty years younger than us. They're in love for the first time and having their first argument. About things you can argue about all night long without ever getting the other person to agree on the slightest point.

CHARLES: Okay already.

KATHERINE: They're not even married. They don't have any children. Barely out of college. No solid jobs yet. No rent or mortgage. They haven't seen much of the world, haven't been hurt by too many people, haven't hurt too many people themselves. But they say they love each other.

CHARLES: All of a sudden you know their life story.

KATHERINE: This is one of the most important nights of their young lives, and they think they know it. But they really don't. How could they? By tomorrow, they'll get tired of the things that fascinate them today. They haven't been passed over for promotions, or been laid off, or been betrayed by friends or family. She believes in God and he doesn't, but her faith hasn't been challenged and his lack of faith hasn't been either. They're young enough to hold on to that arrogant certainty. You know, that the darkness of this night will be washed away by the sunshine of tomorrow. Oh, I'm so worried for them.

CHARLES: Stop worrying about things you can't control, Katherine.

KATHERINE: I can't help it.

CHARLES: Worry about us. If I don't catch a death of a cold out here and you don't wake up with a sore back, it'll be a minor miracle.

KATHERINE: They're so young. Listen to them.

CHARLES: Their time has passed.

KATHERINE: How could you possibly say that? Their time has barely begun.

CHARLES: *(Rises, moves toward KATHERINE.)* Besides, that's not what they're talking about. It's not about unanswerable questions that have screwed over philosophers since the beginning of time. They're not talking about relativity or the mind-body problem. They're just trying to fill in their own black holes, they're getting stuck.

KATHERINE: Then you heard them too.

CHARLES: How could I not? I listen too, you know. They're too young to worry themselves about owls spooking them, raccoons grabbing their food, bats nosediving for their hair, or a black bear prancing through. They might think they're solving the world's problems. But they're too needy to figure out a single one.

KATHERINE: And what's so bad about that?

CHARLES: Self-centeredness? Egomania? Narcissism? Nothing, I suppose, in a perfect world. But when there's so many people on this crazy planet who don't have a hundredth of what they have, I imagine they could have better things to do. With the world rumbling, burning, drowning, and blowing away, I guess they could look around and see who can use their bright, shiny eyes, able bodies, and creative minds. But who am I to say? I squandered my youth away worrying over those same needy things.

KATHERINE: Stop trying so hard.

CHARLES: What's that supposed to mean?

KATHERINE: You're giving them—and us—far too much credit for being able to change the world. We've hardly evolved further than those owls, raccoons, bats, and bears you're obsessing about.

CHARLES: I'm not obsessed. I just want to go to sleep.

KATHERINE: And I just want to see and listen. To spooky owls, food-grubbing raccoons, nosediving bats, and prancing bears. To that beautiful, young couple.

KATHERINE remains down center, and CHARLES retreats to his sleeping bag, lights down on them. Lights up on CHARLIE and KATHY.

KATHY: No promises. I don't know what perfect is, but I do know that it doesn't get better than this. This is how we were meant to be. (*Points to CHARLES and KATHERINE.*) All of us. There's not enough time to let people's idiosyncrasies freak you out. All we need is a nine-point-five earthquake to get people together, a hundred-fifty-mile-an-hour hurricane or tornado to get neighbors helping neighbors. Everybody wants perfect, but nobody does anything about it. They all just sit there waiting, criticizing, attacking, and getting nowhere.

CHARLIE: (*Slowly moves into the vacant sleeping bag next to KATHY'S.*) I just want you to know I'm glad you brought us here. Now that I'm here with you, now that we've made love under this big sky, I can't imagine what I've done in my life to deserve you.

KATHY: Things happen because they happen. That's all.

CHARLIE: No. There's a reason for everything, Kathy.

KATHY: Well, if you're going to sleep in there, at least move closer. I'm cold.

CHARLIE moves in his sleeping bag next to KATHY until they are one. Lights remain up on them as lights come up on CHARLES and KATHERINE.

KATHERINE: Come here. I'm cold.

CHARLES moves into KATHERINE'S sleeping bag with her, as CHARLIE and KATHY look at the older couple for a long moment. Silence.

CHARLES: Is this okay?

KATHERINE and KATHY: I don't remember ever feeling so sad.

CHARLES: Oh, babe.

CHARLIE: I'm sorry.

CHARLES: I'm so sorry.

CHARLES and CHARLIE: So sorry.

KATHERINE and KATHY: *(Both bury their head in their man's chest.)*

So am I.

KATHERINE: So.

KATHY: Am.

KATHERINE: I.

CHARLIE: Maybe when you wake up, that sadness will wash away.

CHARLES: Tomorrow.

KATHERINE: Maybe.

KATHY: Maybe.

KATHERINE and KATHY: Yes.

Curtain.

THE END