

Let's Spend Some Time Together

Steve Abhaya

(Two old men, Antoine Beck and James Call, are seated, side by side, in overstuffed arm-chairs. There is a dim light from the lamp between them. There are newspapers scattered about. Near the end, a third man enters.)

Scene One

Beck: Descartes is a philosopher.

Call: Astronomy is a science.

Beck: Hamlet is a tragedy.

Call: Shakespeare is the author of Hamlet.

Beck: English Literature is important.

Call: Harvard University is important.

Beck: Latin is an ancient language.

Call: Television is a recent invention.

Beck: I have an interesting book to read.

Call: I have just read an interesting book.

Beck: (aside) This man has an extraordinary gift.

Call: (aside) This man is remarkable.

Beck: (resumes) The Mississippi is a river.

Call: The Missouri is a river.

Beck: Jefferson City is the capitol of Missouri.

Call: (too quickly) Caracas Caracas is the capitol
of Venezuela.

(They both laugh in mild congratulations.)

Scene Two

Beck: (proudly) I work very hard.

Call: (defiantly) I have finished my work.

Beck: (resolutely) I go to work every day.

Call: (scoffing) The child has eaten his soup.

Beck: (aside) I dine with my friend every day.

Call: (aside) We discuss the international news.

(The next two lines are spoken at the same time.)

Beck: Children love chocolate.

Call: I am going to buy a book.

(The two look at each other, smile and nod.)

Beck: The orchestra is going to play *Suwanee River*.

Call: I am going to listen until I am tired.

Beck: (reading a newspaper) The President has examined
the situation with care.

Call: The orchestra has just begun the overture to the opera *Carmen*.

(The next two lines are spoken at the same time.)

Beck: Yesterday, I saw an Italian film.

Call: The army has beaten the rebels.

(Beck looks at Call with consternation.

Call looks at Beck with dismay.)

Beck: The director was Fred Rico Fellini.

Call: Fred Fed Fedrico? (He gets no response) Um. The singer is going to sing a long aria.

Beck: (moving on) I have purchased photographs of the entire production.

Call: I am going to read a book about Italian films.

Beck: (condescending) Children seldom love the opera.

Call: (quietly triumphant) Children seldom love the opera *Carmen*.

Scene Three

Beck: (speaking with pleasure in the words) The Empire State Building is the tallest building in New York City.

Call: (wistfully) This would be a good room to dance in .

Beck: (looking around) This resembles the home of my cousin and his wife.

Call: (gaining strength) This would be a good room to play a musical instrument in.

Beck: (reasserting himself) The Empire State Building is very tall.

Call: I have taken many photographs of cathedrals and monuments.

Beck: I have been to visit a great many large buildings.

Call: The Smithsonian Institution has one of the largest stuffed

animal collections in the world.

(They both turn reflective.)

Beck: This would be a good room to play the trumpet in.

Call: Some musicians can perform long compositions entirely from memory.

Beck: (performing) The King died of old age. Long live the King.
(adding) He was gravely ill.

Call: (reciting) Very few books are as celebrated as *The Essays* by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Beck: (softly) Some people have worked very hard to understand many difficult things. (in a normal voice) I am going to speak to Mary.

Call: I am going to telephone her at the earliest hour.

Beck: Some children are insolent, and their parents forgive them.

Call: I am going to ask her some difficult questions.

Beck: I am going to ask Mary to go to New York, tomorrow.

Call: There are many large buildings in New York.

Beck: There are large buildings all over the world.

Call: (aside) I have no doubts he has been to New York many times.

Beck: (aside) I understand this man. I met him in New York.

Call: This room could be almost anywhere. It could almost be a restaurant.

Beck: (aside) He has an excellent memory. When he reads something, he remembers even the smallest details, and he remembers them for a long time.

(aloud) In my family, everyone gets together for Christmas.

(pause) I am going to listen to the music.

Call: (picking up a newspaper) The situation is critical.

The President has ordered the cabinet to stand by.

Beck: A family is happiest when all its members get along.

Call: Children should go to bed at nine o'clock on the dot.

Beck: The paper says that children have been involved in the fighting.

Call: When they are left alone, children are often bored.

(Beck begins humming Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*.)

Call: (loudly) Stravinsky! Stravinsky is the composer of all the finest music we hear today.

Beck: He is a good composer.

Call: He is a better composer than most composers.

Beck: He is one of the finest composers in the world.

Call: (smiling warmly) He has composed many fine compositions.

Beck: (cooly) One should buy the music that one desires.

Call: (affectionately) He is a respected composer.

(sadly) And now he is dead.

Beck: (matter-of-factly) He was very old when he died.

Scene Four

Beck: No one can adequately understand the depths of my problems.

Call: It is joyous when someone discovers the grottos beneath the ruins of past miseries.

Beck: I have come to an end, and there is no sign of relief.

Call: (aside) He made his fortune, and now he collects his memories like medals.

Beck: I used to wander over my domain and discuss the natural flow of events as if they were dwellings, constructed one after another.

Call: The greatest constructions of the last century have been neglected and most are now seafood restaurants.

Beck: When Shakespeare describes an event, it's as if a monument to time has been erected in the endless void of space.

Call: When Columbus discovered America, the fabric of the old empires was threadbare.

Beck: A great structure begins beneath the vision and continues beyond the memory. (begins coughing)

Call: In the earthquakes of the last century, many supposedly secure structures were shaken to their foundations and most did not withstand the godlike turmoil.

(Beck's coughing subsides)

Call: Children were found wandering in the rubble. They would like to claim some ground for posterity.

Beck: They have claims of their own.

Call: Buildings are dedicated to men.

Beck: Men give their lives in order that other men may see their handiwork and praise it.

Call: Visitors stop every daylight hour to witness the continuity

evident in the stone.

Beck: The guide led us into the interior of the pyramid.

(pause, then more heavily) Somehow, the march continues beyond the spirit.

Call: (aside) When we see the essentials of a man's life torn from him, we pity him. I was just reading in the newspapers of his many adventures.

Beck: (ruefully) Some of our decisions will live on in infamy.

Call: (aside) I have read that he always smokes a cigarette before making grave decisions.

Beck: (fumbling for a cigarette) Top advisors go to the conference room to confer.

Call: Someone is brought in to entertain them.

Beck: They can hear the music filtering through the corridors.

Call: There is always an orchestra waiting in an anteroom, day and night.

Beck: (looking around) It is getting darker. It must be nightfall.

Call: The first notes of the composer were met with scorn by the general public.

Beck: Now, visitors pause at his grave and mark the occasion with a silent prayer.

Scene Five

Beck: (with fresh readiness) You don't have to wait until the last minute to do what you want to do.

Call: (pleased) In the Seventeenth Century, women and children

were taught to act on instinct.

Beck: (shortly) In the Seventeenth Century, everything was done by hand.

Call: When you are asleep, you don't know how old you are or what age you live in.

Beck: I woke at the same time the train arrived at the station.

Call: (wisely) The treasures of our subconscious, that we don't comprehend, are symbolized by the precious objects that we possess in our conscious lives.

Beck: (coldly) The reception of interior thoughts is directly proportional to the amount of air we are able to inhale through our skin.

Call: When one has penetrated the subconscious for the first time, it's as if one has broken into a Gothic cathedral and surprised God on his knees praying to Mankind.

Beck: I'd like to get it all into a computer, and then see what.

Call: One must demolish that old chateau, the conscious mind.

Beck: Give it all to the secret police, the dictator unconscious.

Call: No one knows everything.

Beck: Except some Unknown Know-It-All.

(They both become reflective.)

Call: The Cathedral of Notre Dame was built in Paris about 700 years ago.

Beck: We've been waiting that long for the talking picture to come along.

Call: During the war, the whole world went to the movies, just like always.

Beck: A historial would be able to make some sense out of that.

Call: (warmly) If you want to enrich your life, you should read interesting books.

Beck: I repeat the old maxims. They always make sense, in the end.

Scene Six

Beck: (heavily) I'm finished. I've just about had it.

Call: (helplessly) What man can say when his time is complete?

Beck: Who can measure the effect of our words on the wind?

Call: (aside) When he speaks of these things, I wonder what I am to think. Even when I know what I'm thinking, I wonder about the efficacy of what I'm likely to say.

Beck: What is the proof?

Call: There is a tradition in our phrases.

Beck: What are the answers?

Call: There are many answers.

Beck: Where there any calls?

Call: I've been waiting a long time for a message.

Beck: How many messages are there in the city of New York?

Call: New York is America's greatest city.

Beck: New York is the oldest memory that fantasy can recall?

Call: How do we know when Columbus set sail for the New World.

Beck: How do birds know which direction to fly?

Call: What walls have windows without doors?

Beck: Windows are like walls.

Call: Windows are like doors.

(They both drift off, sleepily. All is silent. The light fades.)

Scene Seven

(The light brightens. A third man is standing behind them.

Beck and Call both turn to him.)

Beck: Are you in charge here?

Call: Are you the one in charge?

Man: Men come here to make music and dance.

Beck: Is this the right place for that?

Man: I'm not a philosopher.

Call: (looking at Beck) Decartes is a philosopher.

(Beck and Call smile at each other. Music filters into the room.

The Third Man begins to dance.)

The End