

The Couple – Now and Then

A Three Act Play

A story of love, life as poetry, forgiveness and redemption

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PLAYBILL

Act I – Edie and Dave – Now and Then

Act II – Excerpts from William Wordsworth (1802-1804)

Act III – Fannie and David in the 19th century

Scene I – David’s introduction

Scene II – The trip

Scene III – My war

Scene IV – Women of the West

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Act I

(The Director tells the audience the play is about to begin)

(Edie and Dave come onto stage and sit in chairs next to each other – her on his left)

Hi everybody. **(He gestures toward her)** That there's Edie and I'm Dave.

Some of you know us from other visits and other times.

We have been married over 45 years now. It was on a Friday night just seven days before Christmas, just next door to Buckley Landing, before there was a Buckley Landing, right in that church, on December 18th, 1971. I stood to her right that night as we are seated now. I tried to be her right-hand man through those years all I could when I wasn't away workin'. We did some livin' together.

Before I met her, she been Valedictorian of her High School Class, attended Harpur College at Binghamton and graduated from Oswego State as an Elementary School Teacher. She taught children to read before and after we married. As a single woman, she had traveled widely and had an appreciation for the classics – art, literature and music. As an engineer, I am still trying to catch up to her on that. At the end of her career she taught troubled incarcerated youth at a detention facility.

I'd like to say some words to her and have you all witness it now all these years later.

(He looks at her)

Edie, let me tell about the night we got married. It was a long time ago. Forty-five years. We have been married and together most of our lives. It was close to Christmas and a candlelight service on a Friday night. There were poinsettias all around the church. The lights were dim and the candlelight was warm. It was beautiful. When I saw you coming down the aisle in your beautiful Spanish lace wedding gown, I couldn't believe how lucky I was to have you for my wife. You were so beautiful, I had all I could do to keep from crying right then.

I loved you so much then and, after all our life together, I love you more now today.

(Play Memory of Askokan Farewell recitation)

When we first met there was a familiarity, an inexplicable knowing of my past. What was it? Was it something from the past forgotten until the first moment of awakening?

Unless, **(pause)** I had known her before and memory knows before knowing remembers and believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes an ocean's lighthouse, a protective beacon, a haven protective from the waves crashing onto the ancient rocks of shore as it has forevermore done before our remembering, or as a vista of a sunlit brown hay field endlessly vanishing to the horizon with waving lambent blades like one remembers a dusty road with a desert mesa off at the distant extreme of our human vision, awestruck with streaked loving tears.

All all of that means is we forget, or we remember wrongly, or we remember fondly sometimes from an idealized dream of something that never happened or someone that never existed in the way we thought of them, sometimes with no good reason and unconsciously and sentimentally like a feeling.

It is not like a glory that has passed from this earth so much as one that has passed through our personal unconscious soul, ours alone, authentic and real only to ourselves, a glory gone from the present but forever imagined in our capacity to wonder.

It is like when we were children, when perhaps memory knowing, knowing beginning to remember, perhaps even desire, we in our youth were still too young to have learned enough despair to hope.

It is like a pre-remembrance, a remembrance before we were born or even existed. It is like something that came to us in this life from the eternal wheel that turns throughout all of the universe and unconsciously inside ourselves.

Act II

I found an old poetry book from Edie's days at Harpur College.

(He holds up the book)

It was selections from the American and English poets of much earlier times. This one captured my imagination since I had heard bits of it poignantly used in a drama on film. It taught me much about life as I have lived it and see it now.

I have heard that happy people like music and sad people like poetry. Here are just a few words from William Wordsworth epic poem with dramatic music. These would turn out to be important to my story.

ODE - Excerpts from *Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood*, William Wordsworth (1802-1804)

(Play John Clare's Wordsworth recitation)

*There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day.
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*

.....

*But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone;
The Pansy at my feet*

*Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?*

(Play My recitation of Wordsworth)

*The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,
The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.*

.....
*Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,*

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

.....

*Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*

(Bow head down and pause)

Act III

Scene I

(Actors step away briefly for a costume change)

(They sit back down and David checks his pocket watch)

Howdy.

(He touches the brim of his hat as a gesture of hello.)

(He gestures toward her)

This here's Fannie McAuley. I tell you more about her later.

When I was a young boy, born and raised in Baltimore, my life was comfortable. My widowed father Morgan had raised me in a fine house not far from the harbor. I was his only child. He was a successful banker, while he filled my mind with the things about history and politics he believed I needed to know. I neglected to mention my name is David Wexley.

I joined up with the Union army out of Baltimore with two of my best friends. We fought for General Ambrose Burnside right there in Maryland in '62 at a place we called Antietam and the rebels called Sharpsburg. My friend Jeff was shot and killed crossin' Antietam creek on a bridge they later called the Burnside Bridge.

Later in '64 we fought in Virginia at a battle they called the Battle of the Wilderness. It was a swampy place with no room to maneuver as we tried to get west and take the capital of Jeff Davis' country, Richmond. We fought to a stalemate as Bobby Lee held us off and General Grant called it off. But I was shot in the leg and captured. They took me to Richmond and later by train to a prison in Georgia they called Andersonville.

I spent most of the last year of the war there and held my other friend Pat in my arms while he died. His suffering was over and he went to heaven.

They released me at the end of it and I wandered west to the Mississippi at Natchez. I met a man named Joe who was just freed from a plantation

nearby. We became lifelong friends and wandered the South together looking for his stolen wife and finally went up into Ohio. We settled there and Joe made a great life for himself as the owner of a successful furniture factory and his role as a legislator in Columbus. His new wife Mary Custis, a 3rd generation freewoman, and him had twins – a son and a daughter.

I helped him every way I could. I fell in love with Estelle Culpepper, but her father Jim wouldn't let me marry her. She was a colored woman you see. I went back to drinkin' and Joe tried to console me with his God. But it was no good, so I packed up and headed west on the train in 1887, twenty-two years after the war, at age fifty-five.

(Actor pauses to reflect)

Scene II

I took the train out to Chicago and on to Denver City with an idea to go on to Aspen and be an engineer for the silver mines.

In Denver I got acclimated and sat in a saloon thinking about finding a good horse. There in that saloon I met a fine young woman, too young for me, name of Darcy Farrow. She was friendly and we got to talking. After some moments, we moved from the bar to a table off to the side and shared some whisky and talk. After some whiskey, we got mellow and the talk turned sentimental.

Darcy was a wonder to see. Her voice was the sweetest ever to land on my ear. Her eyes shone like bright lights. She had this way of touching my arm when we talked close. Her touch was as soft as a feather. I could tell right from the first, when I brought it up, she was a horsewoman.

She was a Scot like me. It surprised me how many came out West as pioneers. Mostly I thought they had settled down the spine of the Appalachians and into the South, with a few up into the remote areas of Maine. But we have an adventuresome spirit, so it makes sense how many had come out here.

She came from the Carson Valley Plain, from Yerington near Carson City, Nevada. The Walker River runs by there. It's fed from Sierra Nevada snowmelt and empties to the south in Walker Lake.

She told me all her stories about that territory. It had become a new state in 1868. There its people were mining for gold and silver before this new rush to Colorado for silver. Just after the war a lot happened out there that had begun well before it. Silver mined from Virginia City helped finance and may have saved the Union. It was known all over the country in the 19th century for its mining boom.

Carson City, Nevada, named after Kit Carson, was over on the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada. The Virginia and Truckee Railroad ran from there in 1864. The railroad was named after Virginia City and the Truckee River. Nearby Yerington, Nevada was named after Henry M. Yerington,

Superintendent of the Truckee Railroad since 1868. The Truckee carried a lot of bullion from the rural highlands of Virginia City to Carson City.

We used it for money in the West.

(He takes the 1886 Morgan silver dollar from his vest pocket, looks at it and puts it back.)

Mark Twain reported news about it later in 1868 as reminiscence of his journalism career there in Nevada.

Darcy knew horses and she loved to talk about them. She was looking for something better just like I was. Like I told you, saloons are the places where folks come together to meet, talk, drink, gamble, dance and maybe fall in love. Sometimes they are the places where people argue and get into a fight, but not usually. Usually it is a place of relaxation and community.

She had moved to Denver City just four years ago after her betrothed jilted her. I cannot imagine how that could have happened.

When we got ready to leave and walked out, I saw she had a limp in her leg like me. She said her pony stumbled and fell on her a few years back and she felt lucky to have survived it. I told her I did too with my war wounds and time in the prison camp in Georgia.

Out on the boardwalk in front of the saloon, we paused a few moments to say goodbye. She knew I had been looking for a good horse to travel west, so she suggested I go see the McAuley ranch just outside town toward the west. She pointed me in that direction even though we were both lookin' that way at the sunset.

We gave each other a long embrace. That was the last time I ever saw Darcy Farrow for a dozen years. She was always on my mind for all that time.

To be honest about our self-view of resolute strength, there is an opposite side too. Probably from the Irish, it is a sad melancholy fatalism. In moments of weakness, when our guard is down, we don't always believe everything will work out for the best.

But we draw from this sadness, this fatalistic romanticism, also as a source of our strength. It flows out of us in our poetry, often released with our whiskey.

Scene III

War is cruelty. There is no use trying to reform it. The crueller it is, the sooner it will be over. That's what General William T. Sherman said. And Uncle Billy meant it.

War is hell. War is never glorious. It don't matter what the cause, the purpose, the intent, or the outcome of it is. Human beings are killed. I know that because when I was a young man I seen it and participated in it. I killed human beings.

For good or bad, I was forged in Hell's fire and it formed the man I became, the man that I am. All I got to keep from it was my scars and my honor.

(Actor looks at the floor with sadness)

Scene IV

Following Darcy's advice, I hitched over there to the McAuley ranch and met Fannie McAuley. She was alone with no sign of a man there at the ranch house. She greeted me friendly and we talked for hours. She did most of the talking and finally she showed me her horses.

She had come from Scotland, near the Borders in the lowlands, to Kentucky just at the end of the war. Her husband Angus and her settled in there to raise horses. Funny thing though, they had been Reivers and horse thieves back in the homeland, yet they came to raise horses in America legitimately.

So they learned how to raise Kentucky thoroughbreds on their land, in their new country. But the troubles and the turmoils there in Kentucky from the war were too much. They picked up and moved to Colorado. Here they learned to crossbreed thoroughbreds with western mustangs.

Fannie looked at me sincerely and told me none of that war meant anything to Angus and me. We didn't grow tobacco, or rice, or cotton, or sugar cane in Kentucky; we raised fine horses. We owned no slaves. We didn't appreciate Grant's or Sherman's Army of the Tennessee, or Morgan's Raiders from the Confederacy either.

Like all Scots, we just wanted to be left alone on our land and not see it destroyed by outsiders. We had no great army to protect ourselves, so we moved west. Even fighting Scots can recognize when a fight is not worth it. You may know our history and that we are the most feared in battle but this was not our fight.

If we had not moved quick, soldiers would have stolen our thoroughbreds and used them to haul caissons for cannon or supply wagons, starved them or blown them up in battles. That we could not abide. They would have to get their horses and mules elsewhere.

When they came there, just like back in Kentucky, Fannie and Angus McAuley together were a formidable force to be reckoned with. On her own now, Fannie was still a fierce, strong personality to deal with as well.

It ended up I stayed with Fannie. Angus had died a couple years ago when his heart gave out. We kept company and I helped her arrange her bed. Like every Scot, this Lassie, actually an older strong Scotswoman, couldn't pass up something for free, especially if a good bargain was struck for the benefit of the giver and the receiver. She was hard-bitten, hard-scrabble, but with mirth and satirical.

We spent our time together living in the moment. We didn't care what tomorrow might bring. It is poetic but true to a man's heart in love that while today the blossoms still clung to the vine, I tasted her strawberries. I drank her sweet wine. A million tomorrows may pass away, but I'll not forget the joy that was mine those days. She knew I was a rover, discontented with yesterday's glory and who I am from the song that I sang. Today was our moment. Come to bed she had said. We laughed and we cried and we sang. We had a powerful and poignant two seasons together.

I hadn't planned to, but I decided to stay a while with Fannie. Delaying my idea to get to Aspen, I thought this might be home. After all, this might have been what I have been seeking all the years since the war.

Fannie was younger than me and had no children. I had grown up without a mother but had always been fond of women. There was something going on here beneath the surface and beyond our recognition. She was always teaching me things – things about me my father never did. She intuited things about me. It was like nurturing in a way but not exactly like that. I found it sensually attractive. She was a plain woman compared to some, but pretty enough. I was drawn in in a way I had never felt before.



Although I was older than she, it was sort of a mothering she gave me. She was a comfort I had never known. Come lay beside me and just rest your weary bones she would say on more than one occasion. Fold me in your arms and rest your troubled old head on my bosom lad and let the troubles of the world melt away.

As I lay enfolded in Fannie's arms, I cried for all the years of war I had seen and for the guilt and pain and loss I had carried for such a long time. It was a forgiveness for what I had done and a release from the tortured

memories. I forgave myself for having survived it when so many thousands had not, so many lives cut short in their youth, lying dead still, torn apart on the fields the last I saw them and have been dreaming about them just as they were only a moment ago.

She got up and picked up a small book from her shelf above her davenport desk in the parlor. She walked back over toward me extending it forward in two hands, as though making an offering, her azure eyes smiling sadly, glistening with emotional sympathy. She sat back down on the sofa next to me, so close I felt her warmth.

This old book has poems in it I have enjoyed and that helped me get through the loss of Angus, she said. I want to read you selected parts of one by Wordsworth that deeply affected me and I have read it many, many times. It is about immortality and recollections of early childhood. I want you to know it.

Enfolded in Fannie's arms, she read me the parts that were important:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,

The earth, and every common sight,

To me did seem

Apparelled in celestial light,

The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore

Turn wheresoe'er I may,

By night or day.

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.



This is the same old English poem I read you.

We are not alone, no matter whatever our trials, disappointments or horrors. We are born with an unburdened soul – pure and immortal – able to see God's glory all around us in everything in nature and the world we behold. As we live life our soul becomes burdened and we cannot see His

glory as we once could. It is difficult to put down our burden and be as authentic as we were born.

Enfolded in Fannie's arms, I told her I see the graves and worse still the dead unburied. The souls gone and untarnished have left behind the earthly pain. All the sorrows have been shed. Only those who still live shall carry it until it is our time.

Enfolded in Fannie's arms, she told me that all had found peace after they gave their last full measure of devotion and I must also.

After all these years, let us say the words that we were taught David. It is for them David, for their immortal souls and for ours. Say them with me:

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.

Amen

Enfolded in Fannie's arms, she told me it is goodness, light illuminating the darkness. It is the way out of our troubles. We are not alone.

This hard woman, so strong resilient and wise, she was the one who gave me the gift of peace of mind. It was a great dark thing had gone. We lay quietly together and looked into each other's eyes. It was peaceful. I slept better than I had in many years.

This here woman sitting beside me was my Fannie as forever remembered from that David's past. But she was before my remembering. My Edie has been with me for as long as I can remember.

Thank you kindly.

The End

(Actors stand and bow to the audience)