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Cast of Characters

ABE

BOB

BOB-2

ROBIN

VOICE

WORLD WITHOUT MEMORY

by Seth Kramer

Scene 1

(Lights up. ROBIN and ABE sit across from each other at a table, a few empty plates between them. There is a pause in conversation. ROBIN is a handsome woman in her 30s, wearing a business suit. ABE is in his 70s, fairly fit for his age. ROBIN finishes a bit of food and looks at ABE expectantly. A few pregnant beats.)

ABE. *(Blinking:)* I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I missed that.

ROBIN. You did?

ABE. Yes, I missed that. My attention must have wandered for a moment.

ROBIN. Oh.

ABE. I don't know what happened.

ROBIN. It's ok.

ABE. Please, would you...um...

ROBIN. Sure, alright. Where do you want me to start from?

ABE. *(Beat:)* I don't know. Just go back, go back to the part about...

(Pause, reaching.)

ROBIN. The last little bit?

ABE. Sure.

ROBIN. Ok. It's not all that important though.

ABE. Nonsense. Please.

ROBIN. I was just saying that Robby and I are having a hard time deciding what we are going to do next month.

ABE. You're fighting?

ROBIN. You know how he gets.

ABE. I also know how YOU get.

ROBIN. Dad!

ABE. You're stubborn. You're pig-headed half the time.

ROBIN. Oh, you think anyone who disagrees with you is pig-headed.

ABE. You're just like your mother.

ROBIN. Do you want to hear this or not?

ABE. Alright, go on. Tell me.

ROBIN. Well, he comes home yesterday and tells me we are going to spend our vacation time visiting his brother up in Vermont.

ABE. So?

ROBIN. He TELLS me. Forget the fact I think his brother is an asshole, ok? Forget that. Also forget the fact we had already discussed this and decided that this year we were going to do something else. Something exciting. Go to Europe or Tahiti or something. Everything we had talked about meant nothing. It's the fact that he had the nerve to TELL ME.

ABE. Fishing.

ROBIN. Dad...

ABE. No, no, no. Fishing. If I've told you one time I've told you two thousand. There is nothing in this life like waking up before the world with someone you love, packing up a boat, and going out onto a glass still lake to fish the day away.

ROBIN. I know, Dad.

ABE. What could be better than just the two of you alone at the quietest place in the world?

ROBIN. Room service? A manicure? I could give you a list.

ABE. Nonsense. The zing when you cast out. The soft plunk into the water and the ripple it sends out. Then it's—wunk, wunk, wunk—as you reel back in. It's like meditation. Waiting for that first slight tug, that unmistakable kick of life when you finally get one on the line.

(Beat.)

But it's the waiting, see? The waiting is what it's all about. Checking your line. Reeling back in. Casting again. The anticipation.

ROBIN. The bugs, the squishy worms, the odor of dying fish.

ABE. I used to take your mother fishing, you know? She never complained like you do. She was twice as good company as any man I've ever fished with because she wasn't a man. She was your mother.

ROBIN. I know Dad.

ABE. Lake Oka-Bodgi.

ROBIN. Lake Oka-Bodgi.

ABE. That's right. We'd fish, drink beer and talk about anything the world cared to offer up—and the sun would creep up so slowly, and if we were lucky, we'd already have half a cooler full of fish. Then at night your mother would clean those fish, I'd build us a fire and cook 'em up something special.

(Smiles.)

There is nothing, never has been and never will be, that can taste like those days on Lake Oka-Bodgi with your mother. Nothing.

ROBIN. I know Dad.

ABE. You were conceived at Lake Oka-Bodgi, you know. That's all you two need. Fishing. You and Bobby ought to go fishing.

ROBIN. Dad, I still HATE fishing.

ABE. Hate fishing?

ROBIN. I've always hated fishing. You and mom kept dragging me out to that boring lake until when I was 12 and got covered with leeches. Remember?

ABE. I...

ROBIN. No fishing. And don't you dare mention it to Robert. I mean it. God, what a nightmare that would be, stuck on a boat for two weeks with that man's brother.

ABE. I don't...I don't remember it like that. I don't...

ROBIN. Dad?

ABE. Your mother loved fishing.

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights up. ABE, dressed in a robe, sits on a couch watching TV, clicking a remote. A pause. BOB walks in adjusting his tie. BOB is a chunky man in his 40s, who is starting to go bald. He wears a sharp three piece suit. He sees ABE and stops.)

BOB. What is this?

ABE. What is what?

BOB. What are you doing here?

ABE. Watching TV. What does it look like?

BOB. I can see that. Why?

ABE. I don't know, the TV was here, I was here. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

BOB. Jesus, Abe, why do you do this to us?

ABE. Do what? If you have something you'd rather watch I'll change the channel.

BOB. Robin! Robin, come in here for a second.

ABE. Tattle tale.

(ROBIN enters, putting on earrings.)

ROBIN. What? I'm late already, I don't have time...

BOB. Look what I found.

ABE. Hi.

ROBIN. What are you doing here?

BOB. Watching TV, of course.

ROBIN. You're not funny.

ABE. You want to watch something?

BOB. I'm not trying to be.

ABE. Are you two feeling alright?

BOB. (*Under breath:*) He forgot.

ROBIN. Dad, what day is it?

ABE. Day?

BOB. Yes, the day, Abe. Tell us the day.

ABE. What the hell type of question is that? You don't think I know what day it is? It's Tuesday.

BOB. Thursday.

ABE. Tuesday—Thursday, when you're retired those two become interchangeable.

ROBIN. Do you know where you're supposed to be right now?

ABE. Watching TV?

ROBIN. Damn it, Dad!

BOB. (*Under breath, sing-songy:*) I'm telling you—he forgot.

ABE. I did not forget!

ROBIN. So you did this on purpose?

ABE. No, of course not! But I didn't forget either. (*Pause, begrudgingly:*) Forget what?

BOB. I knew it.

ROBIN. You have an important appointment today.

BOB. Correction, he HAD an important appointment today.

ABE. I did?

ROBIN. The doctor, Dad. You need to go see the doctor so he can run a few tests.

ABE. (*Sour:*) Oh, that.

BOB. This is the second time he's pulled this, you know.

ROBIN. He didn't PULL anything, Robert.

BOB. The clinic is going to be none too happy.

ABE. I don't like doctors.

ROBIN. He's not doing this on purpose.

ABE. They poke you with needles.

BOB. I wouldn't be too sure.

ABE. Stick things in the "No Entry" porthole.

BOB. His "problem" seems pretty selective, if you ask me.

ABE. Stop doing that! Stop talking about me like I just left the room.

ROBIN. Get dressed, Dad. Robby, go call the clinic, see if they'll let us reschedule for later today.

BOB. They won't.

ROBIN. Just do it.

(BOB exits.)

ABE. I'm not going.

ROBIN. Oh, yes you are.

ABE. Oh, no I'm not.

ROBIN. Dad, please, stop being difficult. As it is, I'm going to have to take another day off work, which I can't afford, just to chaperone you down to the clinic.

ABE. I don't need a chaperone.

ROBIN. I wish that were true. If I don't take you myself now...

ABE. I'll go if I say I'm going.

ROBIN. You'll end up at the Yankee game and come home all sun-burned.

ABE. The Yankees are playing today?

ROBIN. Go get dressed.

ABE. But my programs...

ROBIN. Go!

ABE. (*Gets up, sullen:*) I should have punished you more when you were a child. (*Defiant:*) I'm not wearing a tie.

ROBIN. Fine.

ABE. I don't like ties and I don't like hospitals and I'm sure as hell not going to be forced to put on a tie just to go to the hospital!

ROBIN. I said fine.

ABE. God damn doctors, God damn old age, God damn prostates! I better not miss Jeopardy! If that perverted ghoul tries to bend me over and so much as touch me with a rubber glove, they're going to have to do exploratory surgery on him just to find the damn thing. You get me? (*Defiant:*) I still got my dignity.

ROBIN. That isn't what you're seeing the doctor about, Dad.

ABE. It isn't?

ROBIN. No. We talked about this already, when I first made the appointment for you.

ABE. You promise?

ROBIN. On Mother's grave. Now, for the last time, go change clothes.

(ABE begins to exit, stops, turns.)

ABE. (*Hesitant, nervous:*) Robin, why do I have to go see the doctor?

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up to a dim glow. ABE is lying on an angled table, his eyes wide open and a frightened look on his face. A blanket covers his body. A thin beam of light rolls up and back along his head, face, and neck. A dispassionate VOICE, speaks over an intercom system. Its tone is one of forced patience.)

VOICE. Please, Mr. Rothstein. We need you to hold still during this, alright? Can you do that for me? It'll all be over before you know it. Try and relax. A lot of people fall asleep during this. It's really a very simple...

ABE. The light.

VOICE. Yes, why don't you shut your eyes, Mr. Rothstein. Lie back, relax. Pretend that you're taking a nap at home.

ABE. The light.

VOICE. Mr. Rothstein, if you keep moving around none of the information we gather is going to be any good. We need you to HOLD STILL or we're going to have to redo the entire procedure.

(ABE brings his hands up to his face.)

Please, keep your hands at your sides. Mr. Rothstein? We NEED you to keep your hands at your...

(Beat.)

Mr. Rothstein?

(Pause.)

Can we get someone in there and strap him in. I don't have all day for this. It's going to be alright. Mr. Rothstein? Mr. Rothstein?

ABE. Why am I here?

(Blackout.)

Scene 4

(Lights up, ROBIN and BOB sit on a couch working. There are a stack of video tapes on a table. BOB is smoking his pipe. ABE enters and looks around confused.)

ABE. *(Pause:)* Robin?

ROBIN. *(Not looking up:)* Yeah, Dad?

ABE. What are you doing?

ROBIN. Working.

ABE. On what?

ROBIN. It's just a couple documents. I have to read up on this company's history, go over some financial reports, mark them up. That sort of thing.

ABE. Oh.

ROBIN. *(Looking up:)* Is something wrong?

ABE. I... No. No.

ROBIN. Do you need something?

ABE. I've lost...

(Beat.)

I'm looking for something.

ROBIN. What is it?

ABE. I can't remember.

BOB. *(Exchanging look with ROBIN:)* Is it your medication?

ABE. *(Annoyed:)* No.

ROBIN. Movies?

ABE. Yes. Yes, that's it.

ROBIN. Do you want to return them now?

ABE. I want my movie card.

ROBIN. Your card?

ABE. I want to rent some movies. I thought we could watch something together.

BOB. We're working.

ABE. When you're finished then. Have you seen my card?

ROBIN. Dad, we've already rented a bunch of movies.

ABE. You did?

BOB. *(Under breath:)* Only took about two hours.

ROBIN. They're on the table.

ABE. Oh good, then I'll just watch these. That'll save me a walk. Can I pop one in?

ROBIN. No, Dad...we already...

BOB. Why don't you watch them upstairs, huh, Abe? Like I've already said, we're working.

ABE. Do you want me to wait?

BOB. *(Another significant look:)* No. No, that's alright.

ABE. It's no fun watching them alone.

ROBIN. We...um...we've already seen these.

ABE. You have?

BOB. Yes, we watched them earlier, remember?

(ABE picks up the tapes and stalks off. After he leaves, BOB, removes his glasses and rubs his eyes. ROBIN starts to cry. BOB puts his arms around her. Blackout.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. ABE sits alone in a spot light. He holds a photograph.)

ABE. I have this picture.

I know it's mine because I keep it in my wallet. It's an old black and white of me holding a fish. The fish is a pike that runs the length of

my entire arm—beautiful and sleek and long. In the picture I'm a lot younger, a chubby face that is beaming from ear to ear. The lake in the background is good old Lake Oka-Bodgi.

Next to me stands a man in knee-high boots wearing a pair of old-fashioned suspender pants. He has a hat tipped back on his head, his hand resting on my shoulder and his face is split by this crooked grin of pride.

I've looked and looked and looked... *(Reaching inside:)* Studied every inch of that picture, I keep expecting to see something in those black and white eyes—something I'll know. The way his hand felt, the slant of his smile...but nothing ever comes.

(Pause.)

I keep a black and white stranger with me at all times in my wallet.

I don't think I'll ever never know his name again.

(Blackout.)

Scene 6

(Lights up, BOB and ROBIN stand around a table arguing with each other in hushed tones. ABE stands in the doorway, out of sight, listening.)

BOB. Look. Look...

ROBIN. It's not your place to say.

BOB. Look...

ROBIN. I don't want to discuss this.

BOB. You're being stubborn, Robin.

ROBIN. And you're being cruel.

BOB. Hey, I'm not the bad guy here. I'm not trying to manipulate anyone's opinion and I don't want you to say I made you do this...

ROBIN. Fine, then don't.

BOB. Robin...

ROBIN. What?

BOB. Let's be rational.

ROBIN. Don't throw that word at me. Don't think you can hide your simple justifications for...for...what would you have me do?

(Beat.)

What would YOU do in MY situation?

BOB. What would I...

ROBIN. Yes.

BOB. I AM in your situation. I AM.

ROBIN. He's my father, Bobby.

BOB. Mine too.

ROBIN. Oh, please.

BOB. Your dad has always been there for us. He helped build this house. Made me feel like his SON. You think this is easy for me?

ROBIN. He has good days.

BOB. The doctor said...

ROBIN. I know what the doctor said.

BOB. Then you should know it's best for all of us.

ROBIN. NO! What I know is that it will be EASIEST for us, but not for him. For him it would be a nightmare. I can't believe you're telling me to...

BOB. I'm not TELLING you to do anything.

ROBIN. I CAN'T.

BOB. What are we supposed to do then, huh? Do you want to quit your job so you can stay home with him? Take care of him? Give up your career? Because that's what it's going to take.

(Pause, no answer.)

Everyday he gets worse. You've seen him, he watches the same movies over and over. He asks the same questions. He goes to the store to buy something but doesn't bring any money. Yesterday he started running a bath and then wandered off without a word. Nearly flooded the whole fucking house.

ROBIN. He just makes a few mistakes.

BOB. He needs to be WATCHED, Robin. We can't keep taking care of him.

ROBIN. *(Pause:)* He's my father.

BOB. I know. That's why we have to do something.

(ABE turns and exits. Blackout.)

Scene 7

(Lights up, ABE stands in a harshly lit section of stage, cowering next to a payphone. He looks confused and frightened. Crowd noise can be heard. The sounds of heavy traffic come in. Horns honking. At least one siren should approach and then fade away.)

ABE. *(Muttering to himself:)* 976...976...976-5...something...976-5...636.

(Picks up phone, dials.)

976-5636...976-5636...976... Hello, Robin? Robin? Can I speak to Robin? Please, my name is Abraham Rothstein...I need... No. I made a mistake then. I misdialed. I'm sorry.

(Hangs up.)

976...976-5363-563...976...

(Pause. ABE dials the operator.)

Hello, operator? I am having a problem, I need help. I went for a walk and got lost. Now I...I can't remember my phone number anymore. I can't remember my phone number.

(Beat.)

The last name is Rothstein... Yes, that's right R-O-T-H-S-T-E-I-N. Try Robin, that's my daughter's name, she'll be able to come and get me...she'll know what to do.

(Beat.)

I don't know. It's a...a tree name, I think. Something...something tree street. 976. I remember those numbers. 976. And then 5 maybe. *(Becoming frantic:)* My name is Abraham Rothstein. I have a daughter, her name is Robin. 976...and I have to speak to her so she can come get me. I need help. I need help!

I don't know where I am.

(Blackout.)

Scene 8

(Lights up. ABE sits on a park bench, holding breadcrumbs. He is smiling blissfully, enjoying a beautiful day. One of his shoes is missing. A pause. BOB-2 enters. BOB-2 should be a different actor wearing the same clothes as BOB. His manners are exactly the same. He is the same person only, since ABE has forgotten him, he is a stranger now. He looks at ABE.)

BOB-2. Hello.

ABE. Good morning.

BOB-2. Do you mind if I sit down?

ABE. What, here?

BOB-2. Yes.

ABE. Alright.

BOB-2. Thank you.

ABE. It's a free country.

BOB-2. Yes, I suppose it is.

ABE. You have to sit fairly still or the pigeons won't come near you.

BOB-2. *(Long pause:)* Nice day.

ABE. Mmmmm.

BOB-2. Plenty of sun.

ABE. Mmm.

BOB-2. How long have you been out here?

ABE. How long?

BOB-2. Yes.

ABE. I...I don't know.

BOB-2. I see.

ABE. A while. I don't know. It was nice out. I was walking, the sun, the quiet. I just sat down and started feeding the birds. My mind must have wandered.

BOB-2. Alright.

ABE. I'm not wearing my watch. I must have left my watch somewhere. I don't know what time it is.

BOB-2. It's Ok.

(Beat.)

Do you know that you're missing one of your shoes?

(ABE laughs, delighted by this. He wiggles his toes and looks at BOB-2, who looks concerned. ABE laughs again at his toes.)

ABE. *(Sighing, content:)* Funny, huh?

BOB-2. Do you know what happened to it?

ABE. *(Furrows brow:)* Nope. I have one, I don't have the other.

(He chuckles again.)

Shoes.

BOB-2. *(Pause:)* Do you want to go now?

ABE. Go?

BOB-2. Yes.

ABE. Go where?

BOB-2. Abe, are you feeling alright?

ABE. Of course I feel alright, I've... *(Suddenly wary:)*
...never...felt...better.

BOB-2. What? What is it?

ABE. How did you know my name?

BOB-2. Know your name?

ABE. Yes, how did you know my name?

BOB-2. Abe, this isn't funny.

ABE. Funny? I had better go.

BOB-2. Wait, wait...

ABE. Don't try and follow me.

BOB-2. Follow you?

ABE. I'll call the police.

BOB-2. Abe, what the hell is going on? It's been hours...

ABE. Hours?

BOB-2. Yeah, almost 12 hours.

ABE. I don't know what you're talking about...

BOB-2. Robin's been worried sick. You disappear without a word. God only knows what could have happened to you. I had to take the afternoon off work to come look for you. I've had enough.

(Stands.)

The car is only a few blocks away. Let's go.

ABE. Don't touch me.

BOB-2. Abe, I'm going to take you home.

ABE. I said don't touch me.

BOB-2. You're not drunk are you?

ABE. I don't know who you...who you are...

BOB-2. Robin is going to have a fit if you've been drinking.

ABE. I don't know what you're... I don't...

BOB-2. Abe...come on.

(BOB-2 takes ABE's arm.)

ABE. Help me! Someone HELP ME!!! I'M BEING ATTACKED!!!
SOMEONE HELP ME!!!

(Blackout.)

Scene 9

(Lights up. ABE, alone in a spot. He is perfectly lucid and peaceful.)

ABE. A world without memory is a world of the present.

The past exists only in books, in documents. In order to know himself, each person carries his own Book of Life, which is filled with the history of his life. With time, each person's Book of Life thickens until it can not be read in one sitting. And then comes a choice—accept the burden of time or abandon the past.

Without his Book of Life, a person is a snapshot, a two-dimensional image, a ghost. It doesn't matter if yesterday they were rich or poor, educated or ignorant, proud or humble, in love or empty-hearted—no more than it matters how a soft wind gets into their hair. Such people look you directly in the eye and grip your hand firmly. Such people walk with the limber strides of their youth.

For it is only habit and memory that dull our passions. Without memory each night is the first night. Each morning, the first morning, and each kiss stolen for the first time.

In a world without memory.

(Blackout.)

Scene 10

(Lights up. ABE sits on a bed in a robe. ROBIN sits across from him.)

ABE. Something is wrong. Something is wrong.

ROBIN. What is it?

ABE. I can't... I don't...

ROBIN. Dad...

ABE. Where are my cigarettes?

ROBIN. You shouldn't smoke, Dad.

ABE. Where are my God damn cigarettes?

ROBIN. You quit.

ABE. Now listen here...

ROBIN. You quit smoking almost six years ago.

ABE. That's impossible.

ROBIN. Do you remember what your doctor told you? What he said about your lungs?

ABE. I hate doctors.

ROBIN. He said that if you keep smoking the walls of your lungs would become so brittle...

ABE. This is ridiculous.

ROBIN. ...so brittle that you may tear one. That your breathing would become impaired...

ABE. *(Truly confused:)* Why are you doing this?

ROBIN. *(Long pause:)* What?

ABE. Why have you brought me here? Why won't these people let me leave?

ROBIN. Dad...

ABE. Have I done something wrong? Are you punishing me?

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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