

## **Three Plays without Words**

No.1: "The Street"

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# **Three Plays without Words**

## **No.1: "The Street"**

By Sandeep Bhatnagar

*There are no words or props in this play. The actions of the performer are slightly slower and more exaggerated than in real life and become even slower as the play progresses. The scenes are enacted to the accompaniment of the suggested pieces of music, preferably performed live. The play and the music continue to work at their own levels, each attempting to create and convey a special mood.*

### **Dramatis Personae:**

*Scene 1: A young man of around 21 years.*

*Scene 2: The same man at the age of 30.*

*Scene 3: The man is now past middle-age.*

### **Scene 1**

**Music: Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 29 in B-flat major (Opus 106)**  
**("Hammerklavier")**

An earnest looking man walks jauntily on stage from across the wings. From his posture, it appears as if he is carrying a satchel. He stops and pretends to adjust the controls of his I-Pod. There is a soft smile on his face. He waves out to someone and breaks into a grin as he apparently receives a greeting in response. His stride picks up and he walks with even more self-confidence than before; there is a noticeable spring in his stride. He nods and waves to acquaintances and even appears to pat one on the back. All is going well for him.

He gestures questioningly with his left hand to someone in the distance. It seems that this person has asked him to wait for a moment. His friend reaches him and they do a hi-five. The man smiles and becomes attentive in the manner of one listening to a good joke. He nods as the narrative progresses. All of a sudden, he breaks into laughter. He expresses his amusement most heartily by clapping his hands and wiping away tears of merriment from his eyes. At last, he takes control of himself and gets ready to reciprocate with his own joke. Now it is his turn to tell a "good one". He does so with gusto. He begins with a patient rendering of the facts, punctuating his anecdote with flamboyant gestures. Then he pauses for a moment and breaks into convulsive laughter. He repeats the punch line as tears roll down his cheeks. At last, he sobers down for a moment and glances at his watch. How time flies. He is late. Must hurry. So he hastily bids farewell to his friend and picks up his satchel. He stops in midstride for a moment, apparently lost in thought, then recovers and smiles self-indulgently, shaking his head in mild self-

reproach. Really! The things he sometimes got himself into! He glances at his watch, and begins to walk faster. He swings an imaginary umbrella with panache as if to say, "I'm off for my tryst with destiny with a smile on my lips."

He has just begun to walk when he appears to bump into someone. He immediately apologizes and moves on, all the while glancing over his shoulder and continuing with the apology. This causes him to collide with another passerby. He tries to apologise to him but to no avail and an argument breaks out. The man protests in the manner of a refined gentleman, courteous but firm. But things don't seem to be going his way and he soon finds himself being pushed back. He protests passionately but continues to yield ground. We soon see him reluctantly making his exit, all the while making gestures which range from placatory to mildly defiant.

**Note:** The performer may wish to add his or her experiences to the play. After all, it is the performer who gives life to the text, especially in the case of a mimetic piece like this one. The basic mood of this scene is one of ebullience, mixed with a sense of over confidence. The protagonist has completed college, has plenty of friends and acquaintances. He is prepared to "rough it out" because he feels that is the way success is achieved. He is not looking for shortcuts. Hence, he finds himself walking along the street with others of his kind. The first instance he has of discord in real life is when he collides with someone; in the sense, he inadvertently steps on someone's toes or rubs a person the wrong way and is bullied for this *faux pas*. The jarring notes in the song of life have begun. The melody, however, plays on, regardless of whether our protagonist is in synch with the music or not.

*(fade out)*

## Scene 2

**Music:** *Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 15 in D major (Opus 28) ("Pastoral")*

The man returns, somewhat disheveled. This time he walks purposefully to a point on stage and seems to lean his back against a pole, as if waiting for a bus. He shields his eyes from the glare of the sun with the help of his right hand as he tries to read the numbers on buses passing by. It is hot and humid and his bus seems to be taking its time to arrive. His shoulders droop and he constantly wipes the sweat from his brows with a handkerchief in a most dejected, almost forlorn, manner. He sees someone in the distance and walks towards him. He takes out his wallet and pays for something which he takes gingerly from the vendor. He gives the object in his hand a lick and a look of relief appears on his face. He then continues to eat his ice cream as he waits for his bus. He still wears an anxious look but the ice cream seems to have cooled him down a bit.

Nothing happens and the man gets restless. He waves out to someone as if asking him to stop. He buys something which we realize is a newspaper when he opens it and begins to read. His face registers all the entire gamut of emotions he experiences as he goes through the paper. He shows annoyance only to break out into a smile as he reads about something amusing. He shakes his head and shrugs in quick succession. Meanwhile, he keeps glancing in the direction of the street from which his bus is supposed to arrive. Nothing happens, so the man continues to read his newspaper. He sees someone and waves out but receives no response. He is abashed and lowers his hand with a sheepish expression on his face. He sees someone else and again tries to attract his attention. Once again, he gets no reply. He stares around as if to make sure that no one has seen him and then returns to his anxious vigil.

He soon gets tired of reading and throws down his newspaper in disgust. He begins to pace back and forth, waiting for his bus.

After a while, he straightens up and a smile of relief brightens up his face. He has spotted his bus. He picks up his bag and excitedly moves forward to board it, only to jump back in alarm as the bus simply whizzes by without making its scheduled halt. The man is outraged and shakes his fist in the direction of the passing vehicle. He runs after the bus, gesticulating wildly. As he nears the wings, he tries to leap into the bus, misses his step and falls flat on his face.

**Note:** In this scene, the protagonist struggles to embark on a career or board a bus, so to speak. Much of his earlier confidence has left him as have most of his companions. No one likes to befriend a loser. He keeps seeking options, keeps trying to board the proverbial bus. But the bus takes a long time to arrive and when it does, it doesn't halt at the stop he is waiting at. Things don't seem to "happen" for the protagonist. The song of life, however, continues to play on. The protagonist tries to listen to its tune but the notes are elusive. Besides, he is preoccupied with the arduous task of waiting.

*(fade out)*

### Scene 3

**Music:** *Beethoven's Piano Sonata No.17 in D minor (Opus 31)*

*("Tempest")*

The man faces the audience wearing a worried and pre-occupied expression on his face. He looks over his shoulder anxiously. He then looks to the left and then to the right and left again. He appears to be trying to cross the road. Each time he tries to cross, he steps back as if he has narrowly missed being run over. He apprehensively looks at his watch and gazes upwards as if trying to compare it with some large clock in the distance. Once again, he tries to cross the road. He takes a few steps forward and then jumps

back in alarm. He decides to wait a while, gazing intently from side to side in the manner of one searching for an opening in the passing traffic. He takes a furtive look at his watch. Then he taps it with his forefinger and puts it to his ear as if to make sure that it is working. It is getting late and he needs to cross over to the other side. He paces back and forth, takes a tentative step forwards and then hurriedly jumps back. There seems to be no let up in the traffic. What should he do now? He scratches his head and then decides to fold his arms for a while in the manner of one willing to be patient.

He waits and waits and soon begins to impatiently tap his foot on the pavement. Once more, he ventures forward with anxious steps. This time, he barely escapes with his life. He whirls around in alarm, his arms flaying wildly in the manner of one who has narrowly missed being run over by a hairsbreadth. He is visibly shaken and decides to rest. He takes out a handkerchief, dusts the pavement with it and sits down. He cups his chin in his palms and returns to the task of watching the traffic pass by.

Tired of waiting, the man decides it is time to act. He gets up and with new found resolution and steps forward into the middle of the road, his hand held up in the manner of a traffic policeman. Much to his surprise, the traffic stops momentarily. He takes a step forward and tries to walk across. But as soon as he puts down his hand, the traffic restarts and he finds himself in the middle of the road dodging passing vehicles. His face is contorted and he bends this way and that. The expression on his face is that of a hunted animal. He is really frightened. What should he do? At this rate he will be run over. His eyes show his panic and he runs madly from one side to the other. Suddenly, he is hit and thrown back onto the pavement.

He remains in a prone position for a while and then gets up slowly. He staggers to his feet but collapses almost immediately. He is on his knees, his head bent down, his shoulders drooping and his head bent in abject dejection. At long last, he has been completely defeated. The music continues to play gently as the light dims on stage.

**NOTE:** The protagonist is now trying to cross over to the other side. He has reached middle-age and finds himself as puzzled as he was when he first set out on the journey of life. The crossing over metaphor is ambiguous. It is possible that the protagonist is seeking a career change, greener pastures, so to speak. It may also be that he is tired of living and wishes to either end it all or at least retire in peace. He cannot "cross over" because he is held back by worldly concerns: family, emotional relationships, unfulfilled desires and ambitions. The most difficult person to admit defeat to is oneself. Needless to say, the Song of Life goes on.

*(Fade out)*