

Transcendence

written by

Mohammad Khan

Address
Phone
E-mail

FADE IN:

EXT. A CHLLING AUTMUN AFTERNOON IN SEPTEMBER IN THE STREETS
OF BEAUMONT, TEXAS

The year is 1945. A black Homeless man, PACO, (48) steadily walks forward carrying a walking stick and a broken guitar hanging on his back. Paco walks with his eyes shut. Wears a thick jacket, and hat to brace the wind. An object bulges in his pocket. He slowly walks his cart up the stepping hill.

A medium built black man, THOMAS (30s), sits on the sidewalk in work overalls stained with coal dust watches and walks towards him. He smokes a cigarette in the cold wind. The only thing that keeps him warm.

THOMAS

Sir. Let me help you with that

He smothers the cigarette on the ground and tries to guide him, but Paco waves him off.

PACO

No need to son. I know where I am
headin. I can carry my own.

THOMAS

And where is that?

PACO

House is a few blocks down

Thomas sees houses line the streets blocks down

THOMAS

Oh you live there?

Thomas puts his hand on the homeless man's left shoulder.
Paco swipes it away quickly.

PACO

Almost hit Doris.

THOMAS

Doris?

Paco places his hand on his left shoulder. And holds his hand face down towards the Thomas's direction.

PACO

This is Doris.

Thomas (and us) squint trying to see what's on the hand.

Slow focus of an ant.

Paco places Doris back on his shoulder who quickly scurries for warmth in the crevices of Paco's jacket.

THOMAS

Well, never met a man who named an ant. What's your name? I'm Thomas.

Thomas holds out his hand to the homeless man. Paco stays looking forward.

PACO

They call me Paco.

THOMAS

Do you want help reaching the house?

PACO

No, but I don't mind the company.

PACO holds out arm for Thomas to hold, his walking stick bounces off the concrete in front of them.

PACO (CONT'D)

You work Thomas?

THOMAS

Many jobs. I worked as carpenter under Mr. Arnold down on Phelan boulevard.

Thomas sees the broken guitar

THOMAS (CONT'D)

You a musician?

PACO

Gospel and Blues.

With perfect pitch, Paco begins humming *Dark was the Night. Cold was the ground.*

Plays hid broken guitar, no sound comes from it. Thomas joins humming.

THOMAS

You wrote that?

PACO

And many more.

Paco covers up from the harsh wind.

Thomas offers his coat, but Paco refuses.

PACO (CONT'D)
I don't need one where I'm headed.

A beat.

PACO (CONT'D)
Where you headed Thomas? Before you
joined me

THOMAS
I..was headin to the train station

Paco laughs.

PACO
Boy I'd never heard of a train that
ever came through Beaumont. Where
you really headed?

THOMAS
I don't know. I was just...sitting
till you came along. Thought you
was a-an angel or some answer to a
prayer.

A beat.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Things haven't been good since the
crash, see. And-and I just lost my
job.

PACO
family?

THOMAS
No family. No home. No job. I got
nothin to give no more. They've
taken everything.

PACO
Sorry Thomas. I ain't no angel. I
can't fix your problems neither.
But I am a preacher and you have my
blessing.

THOMAS
You a preacher and a musician?

PACO
Blind musician since seven years of
age.

THOMAS
Born blind?

PACO
My stepmother threw lye into my
face. Music kept my company. Some
listened.

THOMAS
(surprised)
Jesus

PACO
Can't do nothin about it.

A beat.

THOMAS
Father, do you believe things
happen for a reason?

PACO
I do.

THOMAS
Then why the torture and loss? Why
me?

PACO
We can't choose what our path is,
but know it is the best path for
us.

THOMAS
So I was born to remain poor and
homeless?

PACO
I don't know.

THOMAS
See, my daddy served in the war
first world war and my brother was
drafted in the second. What do I
have to show for it? While they out
savin the world, I am out here with
nothin but a few painted buildings
and cleaned up homes.

PACO
And those places will be cleaner
and brighter because you were
there. There to brighten everyone's
day.

A beat.

PACO (CONT'D)

We all plant seeds to reap them later. Maybe we won't ever know our purpose. Maybe our purpose was to be an example for others to follow, to learn from. We may be here to help our fellow neighbors or help people see beyond the heavens. And be an example for people to follow.

THOMAS

What about you? Will your music reach beyond the heavens?

PACO

Hell, I don't know. It might not even reach beyond Beaumont.

Paco stops walking.

PACO (CONT'D)

Smell it? I'm home.

Burned remains of the house stands smelling of charred wood and furniture.

A packet of newspapers sit in the burned remains.

THOMAS

What happened?

PACO

It burned down.

THOMAS

Don't you got the money to repair it? What about your music?

PACO

Not much. Since everything burned I get by playin on the streets.

Paco hacks coughing up a lung.

THOMAS

Is there a doctor around?

PACO

Hospitals here don't accept blind patients. Or Negro ones.

Dark clouds roll in.

Paco carries Doris to the ground.

THOMAS

Why do you carry Doris around?

PACO

She's like me, alone and forgotten
by her colony.

A half-incinerated red mahogany door lies near Paco.

He leans over taking out a doorknob and placing it in the door.

PACO (CONT'D)

Carl also goes here.

THOMAS

(laughing)

Carl? You named a door knob too?
And how'd this come to be?

PACO

Carl, my father, was a handyman. He
and my stepmother, Doris, never got
along. And she'd fight with me too,
but it never got serious until one
night. One night, my father left
his tools out fixing a door, and
this door knob was lying on the
floor. My stepmother and I got into
an argument. She threw lye in my
eyes and as the lye seared my eyes
shut, I tripped on this knob. I
keep it to remember where I come
from. Scars and all.

A beat

PACO (CONT'D)

It's nobody's fault but mine.

THOMAS

But you were just a kid. You
couldn't 've-

PACO

I learned how to read from that
woman. I learned how to keep myself
company in the cold dark...from
Doris.

Thunder rumbles above.

PACO (CONT'D)
It's gettin late Thomas. You should
head home now.

THOMAS
You're sleepin here?

Paco pulls sheets of newspapers and other scrap as a cover.

PACO
I get by living here. I'm among
friends.

THOMAS
What's your real name? I ain't
never met a brother named Paco.

Paco laughs.

PACO
It's a name I give myself traveling
from town to town. Many people
don't like my music, so I start
new.

THOMAS
So what's your real name?

PACO
Willie. Willie Johnson. Though
people mockingly call me Blind
Willie.

Thomas stands as a few sprinkles of rain begin.

THOMAS
Take care Willie.

Paco holds out his hand and Thomas shakes.

PACO
Things will get better, Thomas. I
promise. You may not live to see
the fruits of your labor, but they
will grow. Who knows how far you'll
go and who you'll reach?

Thomas shakes one last time before walking away.

Thunder rolls in and it rains steadily.

Thomas runs across the street for cover.

Blind Willie Johnson curls up in newspapers as the rain pours

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. Thomas's Home - EVENING

September 5, 1977. A small house moderately decorated. A small tv sits in the corner by a small table.

A woman, Joanne, (60s) carries a steaming casserole dish to a table.

JOANNE

Thomas. Let's eat. It's about to begin.

CUT TO:

Thomas sitting fumbling in a room. A newspaper clipping on the wall. *Homeless musician dies of pneumonia in burned remains of home.*

JOANNE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Thomas! Hurry!

Thomas stands. He looks at the newspaper clipping and smiles.

THOMAS

Coming.

We follow Thomas walking into the dining room. A small tv sits a few feet away from the table. Joanne wipes her, pulls up a seat. The plates are filled with the steamy casserole.

Thomas kisses her cheek before sitting.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Smells great.

JOANNE

It better. It's my grandmother's recipe. And you better finish quickly before I do.

Thomas laughs. She runs to turn the volume dial up.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

Shush. It's almost here.

A NEWSROOM BROADCAST. An anchorman dressed in a suit and tie. He excitedly straightens his tie and reads from a paper.

ANCHORMAN

Good evening. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has opened yet another chapter in human history. In a few minutes, VOYAGER I will join its sister craft, VOYAGER II, and travel into deep space to analyze Jupiter and Saturn. Once these satellites have completed their task, a new one awaits: journey into deep space. VOYAGER I carries a 12 inch gold disk encoded with photos of earth, greetings in 50 different languages, and music from whale songs to Chuck Berry. Including a piece of music by a blind musician, William Johnson. His piece, *Cold was the Night. Dark was the ground.*, will soon reach the far expanses of our solar system and the galaxy beyond. VOYAGER I & II will be Earth's representatives to any life outside of our solar system. Let's go to Harold Jones waiting at Cape Canaveral Air Station. Jones?

CUT TO: Cape Canaveral launch of Voyager I.

The NASA operators in charge of the flight are doing their standard maintenance check before they launch in T minus 10....9....8...7.....6....5....4...3....2....1....We have liftoff

FADE TO BLACK.