

A scene from

THE PROFESSION

by WALTER WYKES

CHARACTERS

EUGENE

VAGRANT

SETTING

A park

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A scene from
THE PROFESSION

[Early evening. A public park. The sounds of strange animals howling in the distance, clumping about in the brush. EUGENE sits quivering on a park bench. In his hands, he grips an orange tightly.]

EUGENE

It's all right. They're ... they're probably much smaller than they sound. Tiny little things. Birds. Or ... or insects.

[Howling.]

Insects ... insects often *sound* much ... ahh ... much larger than they really are. It's a ... a kind of ... you know ... defense ... to ... to scare away the ... ahh ... the bigger animals.

[Pause.]

That's it. Insects. I've solved one riddle at least.

[Pause.]

They're ... they're probably terrified, poor things. Huddled in the dark ... all alone ... making as much noise as possible, but ... terrified some bigger insect might come along and call their bluff. It's ... it's certainly good to be a human being capable of defending oneself!

[Howling.]

If ... if not insects, then birds. Birds at the most.

[An enormous roar. The sounds of a kill—a small animal gasping, clawing for its last breath of air.]

Squirrels maybe. Or ... or chipmunks. Perhaps a kitten chasing its first moth. How ... how cute.

[Enter the VAGRANT. He is covered with a thin layer of filth. His clothes are tattered and torn. He has no shoes. He hobbles toward EUGENE, breathlessly, the grinning idiot. He pauses behind the bench for a moment, then reaches for the orange. EUGENE screams.]

Ahh!

VAGRANT

[Jumping back.]

Ahh!

EUGENE

Stay back! Stay back or I'll ... I'll defend myself if I have to! I can be terribly vicious!

[The VAGRANT crouches low to the ground.]

Who are you?! What do you want?!

[Still crouching low, The VAGRANT spins around as if looking for an attacker.]

What are you ... what are you doing? I'm talking to *you*!

VAGRANT

This one?

[The VAGRANT points to himself.]

EUGENE

Yes! You!

[EUGENE glances around nervously.]

Who ... who do you *think* I'm talking to?

VAGRANT

Moon-pie!

EUGENE

What?

VAGRANT

Moon-pie!

EUGENE

Moon-pie?

[The VAGRANT nods emphatically.]

That ... that's ... what? Your name?

[The VAGRANT nods—watches EUGENE expectantly.]

It's a code-name, isn't it! You're an agent of The Profession! They've sent you to hunt me down! To drag me back! Well, I ... I won't go!

[The VAGRANT does a mad dance, laughing wildly.]

VAGRANT

Moon-pie!

EUGENE

I won't go back! Do you hear?! My mind's made up! Are you listening?! I've had it with The Profession! I'm finished! You ... you might as well just move on to your next ... your next ... ahh—

VAGRANT

[Clapping wildly.]

Moon-pie! Moonpie!

EUGENE

—victim.

[A beat.]

Oh, you're not one of them. You're just a lunatic. A halfwit. No offense.

VAGRANT

Fruit-fly!

[EUGENE freezes.]

EUGENE

What was that?

[The VAGRANT waits expectantly.]

What did you say?

VAGRANT

Fruit-fly!

EUGENE

I thought so! Where did you hear that word?!

VAGRANT

This one!

[He points to himself.]

EUGENE

You?

VAGRANT

This one!

EUGENE

You're ... *you're Fruit-fly?*

[The VAGRANT watches EUGENE expectantly.]

Then you're the one! You're the one behind it all!

[The VAGRANT does a mad dance, clapping wildly.]

But ... you can't be. You're an idiot.

VAGRANT

Moon-pie! Moon-pie!

EUGENE

Oh, you don't even know your own name!

[EUGENE returns to the bench. The VAGRANT follows, sits next to him.]

Are you sure you're not one of them?

[The VAGRANT grins.]

No ... I guess not. If you were, they'd be here by now. Unless they sent you to ...

[EUGENE swallows hard.]

I can't think about that! I won't! It's pointless! Besides, they'll ... they'll never find me here! I'm perfectly safe!

[The VAGRANT hovers over EUGENE.]

Still, you ... you *do* look familiar.

VAGRANT

The eyes!

EUGENE

[Studying the VAGRANT's eyes.]

Yes ... it is something about the eyes. Or do you mean my eyes are playing tricks on me?

VAGRANT

The eyes! Darkness! Dream hole!

EUGENE

Oh, well ... that clears it up. Thank you.

[The VAGRANT makes a dive for EUGENE'S orange.]

Hey! Don't touch that! That's my orange! MINE!!!

[EUGENE wrenches the orange away from the VAGRANT.]

Sorry. I'm sorry. I ... I don't mean to be stingy. I'm sure you're very hungry, but I can't allow you to eat this orange. It's just that ... well, it's ... it's the key to

everything! I know it doesn't make much sense. I don't understand it quite yet myself. But one has to have faith, you know, that ... well, that everything will come clear in the end.

[Pause.]

It ... it must be nice to be a halfwit. A vagrant, I mean. A wanderer. You don't have to contemplate. If you're hungry, you eat. Everything's basic. Primitive. Nothing to confuse the issue. No one to push you around ... tell you what to do. Maybe ... maybe I should join you!

[EUGENE chuckles. No response from the VAGRANT.]

Hey ... maybe I *should*! They'd never find me then! And if they did ... well, they wouldn't recognize me! I'll bet people don't even give you a second thought, do they?! They probably cross the street when they see you coming! That's it! That's the answer! I'll be an outcast! What do you think?

VAGRANT

Hah!

EUGENE

[Defensive.]

What?

[The VAGRANT snorts.]

What's so funny? I ... I could be an outcast!

VAGRANT

Moon-pie! Dreamer's gold!

EUGENE

Why not? I ... I admit I don't have much experience, but I've always thought of myself as living on the fringes. I'm an outlaw at heart! Once, when I was five or six ... don't tell anyone, but ... I once stole a whole handful of comic books from a retarded boy who lived down the street! Lifted them right under his nose!

[A beat.]

All right, I ... I took them back the next day, but it's the thought that counts!

[A beat.]

You're not impressed.

[A beat.]

I guess maybe a ... a true outcast only takes what he needs to survive. Is that it? You probably have your own code of conduct. Like the samurai. But I ... I could learn! You could teach me!

[The VAGRANT snorts.]

I think I'd make a respectable outcast!

[Pause.]

All right, what's ... what's wrong with me? Is it the shoes? You're right—shoes might draw attention! Shoes are much too mainstream for me anyway! I've never really liked them! They chafe your feet! Give you blisters!

[EUGENE removes his shoes.]

There!

[The VAGRANT stares at EUGENE's feet.]

I ... I suppose I should get rid of the socks too?

[He does.]

There! You see—I'm willing to make sacrifices. I don't ask for special treatment. I just want to be a regular outcast like everyone else.

[The VAGRANT stares hard at EUGENE.]

What?

[EUGENE begins to fidget.]

What is it? The pants? Just tell me what to do. I'm willing to do whatever it takes. Only I ... I don't have anything else to wear. This is all I've got. I admit, it's a bit dressy for your average outcast, but ... I ... I could dirty it up a bit. A few properly placed smudges, a rip here and there, and you won't recognize it!

[EUGENE attempts to rip his coat.]

This ... ahh ... this is ... good ... good fabric. Maybe if I try the seams.

[He tries the seams—no luck.]

Oh! Wait! I've got it! We could trade! You want to trade?! You know, they say well dressed panhandlers are much more successful! People are more likely to give you a few dollars if you're wearing a coat and tie because they know you must really be in a bind! I ... I know it doesn't make much sense, but it's a proven fact!

[EUGENE begins to take off his clothes.]

Just ... just take off your clothes. I'll even throw in the shoes. And the socks, if you'd like. They're a little smelly, but ...

[The VAGRANT takes EUGENE's shoes. Sniffs them.]

Believe me, you won't be sorry. Those are very expensive shoes! Some kind of fancy leather. My ... my wife, Ibid, bought them for me ...

[EUGENE pauses.]

Ibid ...

[He stares at the pants in his hands for a long moment.]

She ... she has very good taste in ... in clothes.

[Silence. Overcome with sadness, EUGENE sits on the bench.]

Finally, after a long moment, he offers the VAGRANT his pants.]

Here. Take them.

[He does.]

You want the coat too? Take it! And the tie! Take it all! I don't need it anymore!
There! I feel much better now! Free! So this is what it's like to be an outcast!

[The VAGRANT snorts.]

What? I ... I still don't qualify? But I've met all the requirements.

VAGRANT

Hah! Skin-deep!

EUGENE

Well ... I ... I'm sure there are certain spiritual aspects that I'll ... I'll have to grow into. I mean, I'm sure there are several levels of vagrancy, and I can't expect to attain the highest levels right away. These things take time. I'm sure you've been at it for years, and you want to protect your status by making newcomers serve a ... a sort of apprenticeship so to speak. And I'm willing to do that! I'm committed for the long term! But surely I qualify as at least a Level One outcast! I mean, one has to have some kind assurance that one is moving in the right direction! After all, I've given up everything! I've sworn off all material possessions!

VAGRANT

Not all.

EUGENE

Not all? What ... what do you mean?

[EUGENE clutches the orange tightly.]

You don't mean *this*? It's not for material reasons that I'm attached to it! It's what the orange represents! Why can't I be an outcast with an orange? Where is it written that an outcast can't own a little piece of fruit?!

[The VAGRANT holds up his hand—points to it.]

What?

[The VAGRANT points to his hand.]

Your hand.

[The VAGRANT nods—pantomimes opening a book.]

Reading. Hand-reading? Braille? Blind?

[The VAGRANT shakes his head no.]

Book.

[The VAGRANT nods.]

Hand. Book.

[Pause. Horrified.]

The *handbook*!

[The VAGRANT nods emphatically.]

No! Oh, no!

[The VAGRANT does a mad dance, clapping wildly.]

You're lying! There is no handbook! I refuse to believe it! It's a lie! A fabrication! You just want me to feel I've been left in the dark! Well, I ... I won't have it! Do you hear?! I won't have it! I refuse to cooperate! How do you like that?!

VAGRANT

[Clapping wildly.]

Refuse!

EUGENE

That's right! Refuse!

VAGRANT

Refuse! Refuse!

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