

Two Men Dying in Desert after the Nuclear Apocalypse

A barren, dry, expansive desert with some rolling hills in the background. The Earth is parched and dying. Multiple cracks in the ground suggestive of a salt flat or some similarly dry type of desert. There is a lone flower downstage right, pink and wonderful, alone in the hot breeze of the apocalypse. It sits in a spotlight, the audience's entire gaze should be brought to it.

Connor trudges onstage. His clothes are raggedy and worn. He carries a backpack overstuffed with a multiple sweatshirts, a tent, small canisters of propane, and a grill. He tramples the flower.

ARTHUR (OFFSTAGE)

You bloated buffoon!

Arthur stumbles onstage. In another time and place, he would have been a college professor. A wool sweater with elbow-pads is wrapped around his waist. He wears wire-rim glasses that he must constantly shove up his nose for the sweat pouring from his face.

Can you not simply throw your weight around every place you walk?

CONNOR

I've had it about to here with you, man.

ARTHUR

And I with you, brother!

CONNOR

I really don't give a shit about the flower.

ARTHUR

Clearly!

CONNOR

What have flowers ever done for us anyway?

ARTHUR

Well, I suppose we can agree upon that. Highly un-utilitarian, flowers.

CONNOR

Always made me sneeze.

ARTHUR

You know what makes me sneeze, friend?

CONNOR

What's that?

ARTHUR

Nuclear fumes.

He sits on the edge of the stage, grunting as he lowers his body and backpack.

Come, join me.

CONNOR

Let's find something that was like a tree or a boulder.

ARTHUR

We're in the middle of Salt Lake City. Do you see anything for miles in sight?

Connor begrudgingly sit beside Arthur. He opens his flask of water and drinks from it. Confusion in his eyes, he tips it upside down. Nothing. He throws it at the trampled flower in disgust.

The flower didn't do anything.

Connor sighs.

CONNOR

Guess we're dying out here, huh?

ARTHUR

Indubitably.

CONNOR

Too bad, I always wanted to see the Carlsbad caverns.

ARTHUR

Why is that?

CONNOR

My aunt and I were staying in San Diego before the bombs went off. Super fancy hotel, marble floors, chandelier, the concierges with the fake smiles that you told yourself were real. Whole sha-bang. She said that while she was there she wanted to see the caverns. Totally knew that there had to be caves somewhere around San Diego. Turns out the closest ones were in Carlsbad.

ARTHUR
So how stunning were they?

CONNOR
What?

ARTHUR
The caverns.

CONNOR
We didn't go!

ARTHUR
Why not?

CONNOR
How we gonna get to Carlsbad, New Mexico?

ARTHUR
Fly, my friend!

CONNOR
We'd already flown to San Diego! Why do you think we're out here?

ARTHUR
To enjoy the sunshine of course.

CONNOR
Arthur, when was the last cloudy day?

Arthur pauses, thinks.

ARTHUR
Riiiiigghhhtttt. I'd forgotten.

CONNOR
Anyway, I wanted to see them before I died.

ARTHUR
Do you have any reason to believe there'd be buzzards out here?

CONNOR
Why?

ARTHUR
I'd rather my body didn't go to waste.

CONNOR

Is that gonna be your last thought?

ARTHUR

My what?

CONNOR

You know, the thing to close it out. The slam for your slam-shut. "I hope a buzzard eats my body"?

ARTHUR

Well, it's too hot for many strains of bacteria.

Connor leans back. His breaths are slow and ragged. His ribs are bared. He looks as though he may die any moment but that he simply doesn't care.

CONNOR

What'll happen to us if there aren't any buzzards?

ARTHUR

Something will come along, I'm sure.

CONNOR

"Something" is awful ambiguous, Sir Arthur Malafort of Oxford.

ARTHUR

Well, when you're sitting under in 45 degree sunlight in the middle of a salt plain, you may find it difficult to think up any specific animal that might just so happen to be out here.

Arthur looks over at Connor.

But not all bacteria. Extremophiles. There are bound to be some out here. They were helping that flower grow. They shall come along and slowly break down the flesh off of our bones and chew us apart and turn our bodies into fumes through their biological processes. Before long, we'll be nothing but bones baking in the sun.

CONNOR

And then?

ARTHUR

Well, this isn't the prime environment for fossil formation. We'll probably slowly be ground to dust by the wind, the heat slowly making our bones as brittle as glass. Then we shall be blown away, never to be remembered or thought of again. Nothing left of our legacy.

Arthur takes a swig from his flask of water.
Connor hears the sloshing and sit bolt
upright in a daze.

I suppose the buzzards might've been all wiped out by the bombs.

CONNOR

What's that?

Arthur speaks up.

ARTHUR

THE BUZZARDS MIGHT'VE BEEN WIPED OUT!

CONNOR

No, the thing in your hand.

Arthur looks from Connor to his water and
back to Connor.
They freeze.
Connor lashes out for the water. Arthur
dodges upwards, trampling the flower in the
process.

CONNOR

God damn it!

ARTHUR

You drank all yours!

CONNOR

You selfish asshole!

ARTHUR

I was going to tell you—

CONNOR

When? Before bacteria had turned me to dust or after?

Pause.

ARTHUR

During?

CONNOR

I'm gonna rip your head—

ARTHUR

Wait, wait, my friend! Leave me the water, you can have the rest of the marijuana!

CONNOR

You'd give me weed for water?

ARTHUR

Think of it this way, you shall die leaping from cloud to cloud on the heights of drug-induced ecstasy. I, meanwhile, shall die fighting for every last breath, trying to stay alive. Who wants that? It's far too exhausting. Better to die without a fight.

CONNOR

O.K., sure.

They sit back down at the edge of the stage. Arthur reaches into his backpack and extracts a bong, grinder full of weed, and lighter. Connor takes them and lights up while Arthur drinks his water.
Pause.

So what are you going to think about? Before lights out?

ARTHUR

Probably Susan.

CONNOR

She your wife?

ARTHUR

No, my friend. Only met her once. Kissed her while intoxicated and we ended up having intercourse that night. Never saw her again.

CONNOR

Fair enough.

ARTHUR

We were sitting on this large brown couch, leather, the party happening all about us. Of course, it was a British party, not quite so loud or destructive as these American disasters that you call parties. She sat down next to me. She told me that she wanted things to be the way they were again.

CONNOR

Wasn't this the only time you'd seen her?

ARTHUR

Oh, most definitely. She'd mistaken me for someone else.

CONNOR

You're shitting me.

ARTHUR

No, my friend. She thought with absolute certainty that I was Bobby McOwen, captain of the rowing team. All muscular and the like.

CONNOR

How did she mistake you for a star rower?

ARTHUR

Well, it was dark.

CONNOR

And when you went back to her place?

ARTHUR

I really don't think she cared by that point.

Connor laughs a raspy laugh that turns into coughing. He lies back on the dry, cracked ground.

Regardless, she sat down and told me that she wanted things to be the way they were. She kissed me, and I was simply present. Now, know that I have learned many words throughout my time. From Aardvark to Zaftig I know them all. Yet there were not quite words for this feeling of simply being alive as we kissed each other. She pulled me closer to her. And I her. And I knew that she meant more to me than anyone who came before or would come after. She took me back to her dormitory. Standing outside the elevator, I looked into her eyes. I told her she was beautiful. And she asked me "why?" I did not have an answer.

CONNOR

Damn...

ARTHUR

Regardless, she took me to her room. To her bedside. I sat down beside her.

CONNOR

That's beautiful...

ARTHUR

And then I woke up.

CONNOR

What?

ARTHUR

I woke up.

CONNOR

You mean...

ARTHUR

Oh no, it wasn't real in the slightest. I'm fairly certain Susan was simply an amalgamation of a few attractive women I'd seen that day that my brain had pushed together. I would never have intercourse for real, my friend, you know me. I mustn't waste time on such activities.

CONNOR

You dreamt about it, man.

ARTHUR

Some dreams aren't worth pursuing.

CONNOR

Alright, you got me.

Connor no longer has the strength to pull himself upright. He lays back, staring at the sky for the rest of the play.

You know what I'm gonna think about? The big, fat sloppy joe served at Steven's Diner back home. I can already see it waiting for me wherever I'm going.

ARTHUR

Likely nothingness.

CONNOR

I really don't give a shit as long as that sloppy joe is waiting for me.

ARTHUR

Did you ever have someone, my friend? Someone who you thought you loved so deeply that you would not surrender your time with them for anything less than the moon and the sky? Someone who stuck on your life like a tag, who you couldn't forget if you tried? The kind of person that Shakespeare wrote about and for, the kind of person that Edgar Allen Poe bemoaned and Homer memorialized. The person who arcs through time, living simultaneously so rooted in the past that it seems they'll never change and yet so far in the future that they seem ages beyond us all. Someone who makes you feel like you could live then as well, like you could be the one living now and then and past all at once. Have you ever known someone like this, my friend?

CONNOR

No.

ARTHUR

Neither have I.

CONNOR

Why?

ARTHUR

Well, I supposed I've always wanted to know how that feels.

CONNOR

Never got the chance, man, my age.

ARTHUR

Yes, I'm aware.

CONNOR

The bombs dropped...lost everything...

ARTHUR

Yes, I know.

CONNOR

Everyone always told me to be patient growing up. I didn't have to write that book now. I didn't have to ask out that girl now. I didn't have to leave now, I'd get out of this old town eventually, kick it off my shoes like I always wanted to do. "You're only eighteen," they'd say. Then, "you're only twenty." Wait, be patient, trust the process, the system, follow your dreams. Where's their god damn system now?

ARTHUR

I'm not certain, my friend.

CONNOR

I'll tell you where it is. It's died. It blew up with everything else when those bombs dropped. You want to know everybody's problem, Arthur? You want to know why I think we never got anywhere, why this happened in the first place? No one expected nuclear war. No one ever thought the bombs would fall. No point in patience when you're waiting for a buzzard that might not even fucking come.

ARTHUR

The bacteria will take care of you.

CONNOR

I don't give a flying fuck. I don't want to go out getting picked apart by a bunch of little microbes that I can't even see. I want to go out like the system. I think I've earned that, don't you? Twenty-five god damn years of giving my life to that system and it all goes up in a big ball of fire. That's what I want. I want to feel the tendons snapping from my body, I want to look the thing eating me in the eye and know that I was there to be eaten,

I want to go out in a great big fucking struggle of feathers and sweat and blood and tears. I deserve a fireball. Everyone deserves a fireball, Arthur.

ARTHUR

That simply isn't life, my friend.

CONNOR

You hear me say that life is fair?

ARTHUR

Not specifically, no.

CONNOR

Good. Cause I'm not controlling what I'm saying anymore but I want whatever I say to fill up that ball of fire with the blood and the great big shining light that I could never be. And I don't want to go on some big rant about the injustices of life and how I deserve fairness and all that shit. All I want is a ball of fire. A big fucking ball of fire with my name on it. That too much, Arthur?

ARTHUR

In this life? Yes.

CONNOR

Fuck you, Arthur.

ARTHUR

I bite my thumb at you sir.

Connor laughs.

CONNOR

Look at us. Last two guys on the planet telling each other to go fuck themselves.

ARTHUR

You have no way of knowing that.

CONNOR

Knowing what?

ARTHUR

That we are the last two people on Earth.

CONNOR

You think there's anyone beautiful left?

ARTHUR

I don't think, I know.

CONNOR

Well, know if there's someone beautiful left. Just for me.

Arthur sighs.

ARTHUR

Yes, I suppose there are two beautiful people left. A tall, muscular man with a strong jaw, dripping with sweat, with long black hair that he can flip over his shoulders, with large, tight buttocks and a sway of his hips coming this way to get us. And a woman of equal attractiveness.

CONNOR

Tell me about her, Arthur.

ARTHUR

With the life you had, my friend, I'm sure you heard more than enough about how a woman should look. And a man for that matter. I should never have entreated your query.

CONNOR

You remember how we met, Arthur?

ARTHUR

You know, I don't think I do actually.

Long pause. Arthur keeps waiting for Connor to say something. He doesn't. Connor's chest is still.

My friend?

Arthur turns. He scoots over to Connor and feels his pulse. Surprise, but not shock, registers in his eyebrows.

A caw cuts through the theatre.

A black shadow appears on Connor's body.

Oh look, a buzzard.

END OF PLAY