

HIKERS...

A one-act play

by

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Cast of Characters

KURT: early 50's, a high-school teacher.

COLLEGE KID: early 20's, a college student.

Place

The Organ Mountains, New Mexico

Time

Late Summer

Synopsis

During his annual escape from the concrete jungle, Kurt Fowler encounters a college student on a desert mountainside. The college kid is a cheery distraction from his hike, until he becomes eerily familiar.

SETTING: A mountain trail. Space.

AT RISE:

COLLEGE KID (OFFSTAGE)
Pablo? Pablo!

COLLEGE KID enters from stage right
and dumps his backpack on the
ground. He slurps from a canteen
and then sits to peel off a boot.
Pebbles spill out. He rubs his ankle.

KURT (OFFSTAGE)
Hey! Hey, how's it goin'?

COLLEGE KID (turning)
Hey, man. What's happenin'?

(From stage left
enters KURT, middle-
aged but fit, also
sporting a backpack.)

KURT
I didn't think I'd run into anyone up here. Somehow I
remembered it being less hot at this elevation. No
such luck. You all right?

COLLEGE KID
(strapping on boot)
Oh, yeah. Just some rocks. Been up here before?

KURT
Quite a long time ago. I love these mountains. A
buddy of mine and I idiotically tried backpacking right
up the west side of the Organs this same time in
August.

COLLEGE KID
You mean like moi?

KURT
That what you're doing? Start at Dripping Springs Trail?

COLLEGE KID

Nah, we didn't know about any trails. We're clueless.

KURT

Yeah, there are four lower elevation trails now.

COLLEGE KID

Had no idea that many people hiked up here.

KURT

Oh, sure. I walked by a family about mile back, just before I left the trail.

COLLEGE KID

Well, my amigo and I wanted to see how high we could go on foot. So like a couple of dummies from a turnip farm we set out this morning. Like, could we approach the top of the Needle.

KURT

Not unless you're an experienced climber, with the right gear. It's close to nine thousand feet and steep.

COLLEGE KID

Think that's what we, with hiking IQs of zero, figured out. We're both fried and runnin' low on H2O. Speakin' gibberish to each other. Rust is comin' outta our mouths instead of any cogent language.

(He shakes his empty
canteen.)

KURT

Oh, here.

(He drops his
backpack and pulls
out a bottle of
water, handing it to
the COLLEGE KID, who
looks it over.)

COLLEGE KID

All right. Totally convenient. Thanks.

KURT

Don't climb a mountain without it. I'm Kurt.

(The COLLEGE KID
gets up and shakes
KURT's hand.)

COLLEGE KID
That makes two of us.

KURT
No kidding. Curtis?

COLLEGE KID
No, Kurt.

KURT
It's a great name, isn't it?

COLLEGE KID
I've always been stoked by it.

KURT
So, where's your friend?

COLLEGE KID
Well, that's just it. Pablo and I got slit up not
fifteen minutes ago. We got this survey map of the
Organs and it shows a spring a couple of miles north of
here. 'Course, don't ask me how old the map is.

(He spreads the map
on the ground. KURT
looks it over.)

KURT
Wow, I had a map like this when I was in college here.

COLLEGE KID
You went to State?

KURT
Yeah, thirty years ago. What're you studying?

COLLEGE KID
I'm a lit major. Goin' into my senior year.

KURT
So was I. Can't tell you I did anything with it.

COLLEGE KID
So I'm screwed? Anyway, Pablo says I'm laggin' behind,

and he's gonna scout ahead and find this spring. So he drops his backpack and disappears behind some rocks. I tried followin' and ended up stumblin' through a ravine. Then, it's just like, he's gone, man. I shouted after him. It's a time warp. He's gone. Finally, I looked toward the sun and saw the world spinnin'. I was toast.

KURT

Can happen to anyone, you don't carry enough water. Get disoriented. So, this was just now you guys split up?

COLLEGE KID

Yessir. Our adventure into the unknown, man.

(checks his watch)

Think my watch broke when I tripped. Time is it?

KURT

Almost one o'clock.

COLLEGE KID

My watch stopped at noon. Weird, man. Restracto.

KURT

Well, you got cell phones? Have you tried calling him?

COLLEGE KID

Cell phones?

KURT

Oh, you guys are trying to tough it out. Okay.

(KURT takes out his
cell phone.)

My risk-taking days are behind me.

COLLEGE KID

What's that?

KURT

Samsung. Just upgraded. Got someone to call?

(He hands him the
cell phone.)

COLLEGE KID

You serious? How does it work?

KURT

(laughing)

What else you guys been doing up here?

COLLEGE KID

(looking it over)

Far out. So this can make a phone call?

KURT

(taking it back)

You got a helluva sense of humor. All right, look. It can make a phone call if I can get a signal. Sometimes out here you can't.

(He tries.)

Nah, nothing. But I'll tell you. That's an old map. That spring probably dried up years ago. And there's been no rain. You're not going to find any water. My advice to you boys is head back down to the trails. It's only getting hotter.

COLLEGE KID

Yeah. Soon as I cool down, I'll find that rock-jumpin' dickhead buddy of mine. Pardon my French. This trek into the desert unknown was his whole idea. "Divest ourselves," he said. Of whatever we have.

(He takes off his cap. Shaggy hair flops out.)

If you need to keep truckin' don't let me stop you. I appreciate the H2O.

KURT

(staring at him)

I could use the rest myself. Kind of music you like?

COLLEGE KID

Gettin' kinda personal, Kurt. Just yankin' your chain. Let's see. Pablo and I caught Boston in concert a couple of weeks ago.

KURT

Boston? Good god, are they touring again after all this time?

COLLEGE KID

What do you mean?

KURT

Hang on a minute.

(He pulls his cell
phone back out.)

Don't have any Boston, but I do admit to seeing them in
concert my senior year. Okay, here's somethin'.

COLLEGE KID

What is it, like a radio?

KURT

No, it's my phone again. Please tell me you got at
least an I-Pod or somethin'.

(The COLLEGE KID
stares at him.)

Steven Jobs is turning over in his grave right now.
Okay, know who this is?

(The 1970's song,
Life's Been Good by
Joe Walsh, plays.)

COLLEGE KID

Joe Walsh. "Life's Been Good."

KURT

What do you know? Had no idea college kids listened to
Classic Rock. Restores my faith in youth.

COLLEGE KID

Pass your cool test? I dig Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin,
Steely Dan, Tom Petty, Fleetwood Mac, Jethro Tull ...

KURT

Classic Rock. Huh.

COLLEGE KID

That phone is killer diller.

(The COLLEGE KIDS points
to a piece of electronics
dangling from KURT'S belt.)

KURT

Res Q Link 4-0-6 GPS Personal Locator Beacon.

COLLEGE KID

You're like a fuckin' James Bond. Okay, time to split.

KURT

Yeah, let me give you a bottle of water for ol' Pablo.

(He gets him one.)

COLLEGE KID

Thanks. So, you still live around here, Kurt?

KURT

Just visiting. I live in Colorado.

COLLEGE KID

Where 'bouts?

KURT

Denver. Teach high school.

COLLEGE KID

I may end up there. I'm applying to DU's grad program.

KURT

That's where I went. M.A. in Humanities.

COLLEGE KID

This is wild, man. Staggerin' around mountain scrub in the desert one minute and then I run into you the next. Somehow this will make sense. This will jive with Pablo. He's a philosophizin' fool.

KURT

I knew a Pablo. Lost touch with him. Well, give me your e-mail address. Maybe we can stay in touch.