

RUMORS OF POLAR BEARS

A one-act play
by Jonathan Dorf

Cast of Characters

DEME, 18, female, survivalist meets teen next door
ROMULUS, 15 or 16, male, Deme's brother
ADAM, male, around Deme's age
EVE, same age, Adam's girlfriend and not the sharpest tack
SCRUBS, 13, hyperactive girl, something of a mascot like Anybodys
from *West Side Story*--could possibly be male as well
IKE, 18, male
TINA, 18, female, Ike's girlfriend

Inhabitants of New San Francisco

ANDI, 18, female, their leader
CASSIE, 15, female, her younger sister
DOC, 18, female, a self-styled "doctor"
ENSEMBLE (aka TEEN GIRLS), the inhabitants of New San Francisco,
flexible in number but preferably 3-4 minimum, with no maximum

The actor playing Tina could also play an inhabitant of New San Francisco.

As noted above, it is possible for Scrubs to be played as a male instead, simply making the necessary pronoun changes in the script.

Setting Notes

Settings are largely meant to be suggested, though the kiddie pool is necessary, and there should likely be at least a few selected set pieces that hint at the recycled nature of New San Francisco. The rest is up to your production's ambition. A good designer should feel free to go to town, as long as the set doesn't prevent the play from moving quickly.

Production Notes

In Scene 1, "freeway" may be replaced with "highway," depending on what suits your production.

In Scene 6, productions may substitute equivalent local examples for the Colorado River, California and Nevada.

It is important to avoid blackouts as much as possible between scenes.

SCENE 1

The near future. Somewhere in the western United States. DEME (18), female, appears in a spotlight. Her clothes are survivalist meets teen next door, but it's better if the light can hit just her face. Her head is well-covered to shield it from the sun.

DEME

I always wanted a baby polar bear. Its fur would be so white, I could hold it in my arms and rock it to sleep at night, and it would be so soft and pure next to me. And each day we'd play games, the kind of games that parents and their baby polar bears play, and as it gets older it would know how to be.

(beat)

That's how it is with a lot of things. If we only got them when they were babies, maybe a lot of these things wouldn't have happened. And now the polar bears have gone far, far away. Or maybe they're just gone.

Lights up to reveal Deme in a blighted landscape. Nearby, a squatter tent dwelling that has the feel of having been patched and mended repeatedly. ROMULUS, 15 or 16, enters. His clothing has the same survivalist streak, with a hint of punk in his boy next door wear. He has a bag slung over his shoulder.

ROMULUS

Sun's down.

DEME

And?

ROMULUS

Friday night.

(beat)

Friday night!

DEME

Don't know how you even keep track.

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ROMULUS
 (singing it like a jingle)
 Friday night is party night.
 (points at his watch)
 It's magic. The magic watch that never stops.

DEME
 It will.

ROMULUS
 Sourpuss.
 (singing again)
 Friday night is party night. Make your work week come out
 right.

DEME
 Speaking of work...

ROMULUS
 Let's not speak of it.
 (once more singing)
 Friday night--

DEME
 If you sing that one more time...

ROMULUS
 You'll what.

DEME
 Don't push me.

Romulus pushes her super gently,
 just to be annoyingly literal.

DEME (CONT'D)
 You know that's not what I meant.

ROMULUS
 (singing)
 Friday night--

DEME
 Don't--

ROMULUS
 (continuing)
 Is--

DEME
Romulus, I mean it.

ROMULUS
(beat)
Here.

He pulls a bunch of cans out of his bag.

ROMULUS (CONT'D)
Tuna. Garbanzo beans. Creamed spinach. Creamed corn. Cream of wheat. Score or what?

DEME
You always do this.

ROMULUS
Do what?

DEME
You always hold a few back until I'm mad, and then they pop out, peace offering.

ROMULUS
I come in peace.
(beat)
Is it working?

She hauls off as if to hit him. He flinches, but she runs her hand through his hair gently. Then she grabs his hair hard.

ROMULUS (CONT'D)
Ow!

She kisses his hair and lets go.

DEME
How many cans are left down there?

ROMULUS
Dunno. It's dark.

DEME
More or less.

ROMULUS

Probably less. Come on--it's Friday night. Can't we wait and be end of the world again on Monday?

(beat)

What?

DEME

That's such a Mom thing.

ROMULUS

Yeah?

(beat)

I think I remember less each day.

DEME

Don't be all end of the world, Deme.

ROMULUS

I write in my book, but it just feels less and less real.

DEME

Dad had no sense of humor.

ROMULUS

I don't remember him at all.

DEME

You were three.

ROMULUS

Three should be good for something.

DEME

That was a crowded year.

ROMULUS

I hope he doesn't hate me for not remembering.

DEME

(beat)

Why are we talking like this? It's Friday night.

(singing)

Friday night is party night.

ROMULUS

Make your work week come out right.

DEME

Make your work week come out right.

ROMULUS

I'm goin' in head first this time.

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Ha. DEME

One of these days I will. Dive bomber! ROMULUS

You ready? DEME

You got the stuff? ROMULUS

Deme pulls a shoulder bag of her own from inside the squat.

Do you have to ask? DEME

Romulus howls, as if sending a signal to distant friends. He's answered by cawing and barking and howling from elsewhere in the area.

To the party pool! ROMULUS

Lights dim, except for the spotlight on Deme.

DEME
The year Romulus turned three, I remember a man in a designer pin-striped suit and perfectly polished shoes swinging a sledgehammer at every inch of his Hummer, screaming that he would no longer be part of the problem. And when he's done, he sits on the curb and points at me to come closer and he says he wants to set it on fire, but he can't, because he just can't hurt the planet any more. He grabs my hand and starts to cry, and he says he's sorry he's crying, but he can't help it and isn't there some way he could give back the Hummer and the half hour showers for just one more minute with his wife? And then he stands up, wipes his face, tells me the Oil and Water Wars are all his fault, and throws himself onto the freeway below.

(beat)

I made that up. Not the Hummer or the hammer or the crying or him taking my hand or the freeway. But the Oil and Water Wars didn't start for another week, and that's just what we call them now because there's nobody to tell us different.

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The lights may go to black if necessary, but it would be better for them to crossfade and come up on the new location.

SCENE 2

Not far away, and not long afterward. A kiddie pool, empty of water, sits in an otherwise barren patch of ground. A nearby sign used to read "Danger: Keep Out," but danger has been crossed out, and the words "private club" written in graffiti over top. Enter Deme and Romulus.

ROMULUS

We're never first.

ADAM, Deme's age and dressed in a sort of punk meets beach meets Mad Max chic, steps out of the shadows.

ADAM

And you never are.

EVE, same age, his girlfriend and probably not the sharpest tack in the box, jumps out right after.

EVE

Ambush!

DEME

You're just a regular Bonnie and Clyde.

ADAM

Adam and Eve, thank you very much, and we coulda' water whacked you no thing.

ROMULUS

But you gave the signal.

EVE

(mimicking him)

But you gave the signal.

ADAM

Maybe we been waiting, watching for weeks, studying your ways.

ROMULUS

Yeah, and maybe our parents are waiting for us at the spa.

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EVE
 What's a spa?

ADAM
 Baby, it's not important.

EVE
 I hate it when he uses words I don't know.

DEME
 (to Adam)
 You're right.

EVE
 I'm a poet.

DEME
 We shoulda been more careful.

ROMULUS
 But--

DEME
 Shut it.

EVE
 (continuing her thought)
 Show some respect.

ADAM
 Hey, we're here. It's all good.

DEME
 Yeah, Eve. Give us one.

EVE
 (beat)
 OK.

(her poem)
 Day hot sun dry hot
 My favorite time is night
 Pool of water wet!

DEME, ADAM AND ROMULUS
 Amen.

EVE
 Let's get this party started!

DEME

Where's Dare? And Tina and Ike?

SCRUBS, the youngest at 13 or 14, bounds out of the bushes. She's the Anybodys of their world.

SCRUBS

What about where's me? I call first into the party pool!

Scrubs races out of her punk-Mad Max-tomgirl wear and into a bathing suit lickety split, jumping into the empty pool.

ROMULUS

Hey--it's my turn.

SCRUBS

Party water!

Romulus races to strip to a bathing suit or shorts or whatever is most suitable.

SCRUBS (CONT'D)

(chanting)

Pour! Pour!

ROMULUS

Wait!

SCRUBS

Pour! Pour!

Deme pulls a gallon jug out of her bag and pours its contents into the kiddie pool.

SCRUBS (CONT'D)

Woohoo!

Enter TINA and IKE, about the same age as Deme, Adam and Eve. They dress about the same, but with maybe just a bit more of a designer edge. They look gaunt.

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ROMULUS
That's enough, Scrubs. My turn now.

DEME
Where's Dare?

SCRUBS
I just started partyin.
(her party call)
Rock on! Rock on hard!

Scrubs jumps around and frolics
as if this is the best thing
ever.

IKE
He's tired.

DEME
(to Romulus)
You gonna dive in?

ROMULUS
Maybe I will.

DEME
Romey says he's going to dive in.

Adam tries to push his way past
Romulus, but Romulus blocks him.

ROMULUS
It's my turn.

ADAM
Not if I get there first.

DEME
Tina, you OK?

EVE
Ad, let him go.

Adam and Romulus struggle
playfully. Of course, just as
Adam starts to get past Romulus,
he has to stop to strip down to
his swim gear, which gives
Romulus time to block him again.

ROMULUS
Not this week.

ADAM
I am the king of the party pool!

SCRUBS
Party, party!

EVE
Adam!

ADAM
I'm just havin' fun with him.
(beat)
Fine.

Adam lets go of Romulus, then feints at him. Romulus flinches, but stands his ground.

ROMULUS
Blow, Scrubs.

Beat. Scrubs gets out. Romulus jumps in.

ROMULUS (CONT'D)
Party, party!

ADAM, EVE, SCRUBS, ROMULUS
Party, party! etc.

Adam, Eve and Scrubs dance around the party pool, while Romulus frolics in it. Deme studies Ike and Tina, who looks longingly at the pool. Beat. Tina can't take it anymore and runs for the party pool, pushing the others out of the way and drinking from the pool.

ROMULUS
Don't drink the party water.

ADAM
Yeah--if you drink it, what are we gonna party in?

Tina stops drinking.

TINA
Sorry. I was just really...thirsty.

DEME
Where's Dare?

EVE
Yeah. How we gonna party in the pool if you drink the water?
Then we'd have to be sad all the time.

IKE
Dare's tired. He's lying down.

DEME
(beat)
Is he lying down, Tina?

IKE
I just told you--

DEME
Tina?

Beat. Tina shakes her head.

DEME (CONT'D)
Romey, get out of the water.

ROMULUS
But we're partyin--

DEME
Get out of the water now!

This time Romulus doesn't
hesitate. He gets out and grabs
for his clothes. During this
exchange, the others retreat ever
so slightly from Ike and Tina.

DEME (CONT'D)
(to Tina)
Where's Dare?

TINA
We thought he just got too much sun, and then he got a fever
and the sweats and we kept givin' him water but it didn't
help and then he...

We have to leave. DEME
 Leave? Why? ROMULUS
 Adam, what's going on? EVE
 Leave for good. DEME
 There's nothing wrong with us. IKE
 And Dare's just tired. Right, Ikey? DEME
Tina can't help herself. She
drinks voraciously from the
kiddie pool.
 Tina, you're drinking the party water. SCRUBS
 We gave our part to Dare, that's all. IKE
(beat)
 Tina, stop it!
Tina stops drinking again.
 We've gotta go. DEME
 Where? ROMULUS
 I don't know yet. North. DEME
 Why do we have to go anywhere? ROMULUS
 Yeah. We live here. EVE
 Nobody says you have to go anywhere. DEME
(to Eve)

ROMULUS
So why do I?

ADAM
You can stay with us.

DEME
How long do you think you got?

EVE
Yeah. Stay with us.

DEME
How long til you get whatever they got?

ADAM
We go out there, we get water whacked for sure.

SCRUBS
I ain't gettin' water whacked.

DEME
For what? For our nothing?

ADAM
They don't know that.

DEME
There's no they. When's the last time we even heard a voice?

ROMULUS
(beat--indicating Ike and
Tina)
We can't just leave 'em here.

Deme starts to pack. Beat.
Romulus seethes, but he joins
Deme in packing, getting road
clothes, etc. Adam, Eve and
Scrubs follow suit.

DEME
And we didn't.
(beat)
I had a string from the place where the cans had almost run
out.

She lets the string go, and Ike
grabs it.

Deme begins to walk, and it unravels until it extends across the stage. Adam, Eve, Romulus and Scrubs walk near Deme, while Ike and Tina walk at the end of the string, with Ike holding it.

DEME (CONT'D)

That was how far they had to be. Romey wouldn't look at me for three days. But none of us caught what they had. And on the fourth day--

Ike lets go of the string, and the lights fade on him and Tina.

DEME (CONT'D)

It could have been any of us. It could have been all of us.
(to Romulus)
It could have been you.

ROMULUS

Don't expect me to say thanks.
(beat)

And now what?

DEME

We keep going.

ROMULUS

What's wrong with here?

DEME

Too hot.

ADAM

It's perfect.

EVE

Yeah. I love it.

DEME

It'll get worse.

ADAM

We're almost out of cans. We gotta restock.

DEME

From where? Got a better chance up north.

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ADAM
Of runnin' out.

DEME
I heard buzzing last night.

EVE
Every time you hear a bug now we move? I don't think so.

ADAM
(running at Eve)
Buggggzzz... Bzzz...

EVE
(playing)
Don't let it get me!

Adam chases Eve around. Scrubs joins in. Even Romulus gets into it, as they run all over the stage, with Romulus ultimately pantomiming a horrible death just as he looks up to realize that he's surrounded by TEENAGE GIRLS armed with makeshift weapons. Your production can use as many women as it likes, but there should be enough that the five characters already on stage appear to be in jeopardy.

Want to read the rest of the play? Just click on the Place an Order button to receive a free perusal copy!