

## Painted Desert

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A full-length play

By Christopher G. Smith  
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“This taut and mystical morality tale kept me engaged to the final moments.” Brigid Amos NPX

2017 Palm Beach Dramaworkshop finalist. Company table reading at Read-a-Thon

Excerpt Presented Little Lifeboats TEASE at Phoenix Theater 2016

Finalist 2015 Wordsmyth Theater Company

Finalist 2015 id Theater Seven Devils Playwrights Conference.

**Painted Desert Log Line:** On the American Painted Desert a charming convict battles with a lost and wandering preacher over the fate of a young runaway.

### **Cast of Characters**

**Robby:** A young man in his late teens, early twenties.

**Devlin:** A man on the run. He controls situations but rarely has to lose his temper to do so. He can be very charming and very deadly.

**Preacher:** He is either a desert mystic or a crazy man. He quotes the bible as if it is his native speech. We are never sure if he said or if it comes from "the book". He is kind and compassionate.

**Sheriff:** She is a modern day update on the poker faced law man. She sees more than he is willing to share.

**Setting :** Southwest Desert

**Time:** The not so distant past

### **ACT I**

**Scene 1**.....The Southwest Desert. Sunset.

### **ACT II**

**Scene 1**.....The Southwest Desert. Later that night.

ACT 1

SETTING:

The Southwest Desert. Sunset. A red-orange sky drop surrounds the stage. As the evening progresses, the sky will fade to deep blue and moonlight will appear. Upstage we see the remains of an old wooden building. The walls are collapsing. A door is still attached to the frame. Part of a porch remains. Upstage sits a simple shaker chair. Down stage sits an old bench car seat. It is covered in a black leather like material. Cracked and worn. Various pieces of junk are scattered about.

LIGHTS UP: We see the shack against the sky backdrop. Perhaps a bit of red light bounces off a tin patch on the roof.

The sound of cars on a highway in the distance is heard. We see ROBBY standing down stage. He is a young man in his late teens. He carries a full backpack and looks in the direction of the road. Slowly his hand drops to his side.

There is a momentary pause. We hear crickets and the sound of the car tires fading in the distance. A voice is heard in the darkness.

DEVLIN

Nobody is stopping here tonight.

ROBBY

Can't stay here.

DEVLIN

Why not? It's a free country, isn't it?

Robby takes off pack

ROBBY

That's something!

DEVLIN

What?

ROBBY

Saying something like that.

DEVLIN

Like what?

ROBBY

Saying something like "It's a free country."

DEVLIN

Well it is!

ROBBY

It is and isn't.

LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE UP: To fill in the rest of the stage. We see DEVLIN center stage right. He is rugged looking and unlike ROBBY, DEVLIN looks comfortable in the environment. He wears jeans and cowboy boots. He lights a lantern and then leans his head back on the bottom of the old car seat.

DEVLIN

Now what's that supposed to mean?

ROBBY

It's a free country, but this spot isn't free.

DEVLIN

I don't see any owners.

ROBBY

What do you call that?

ROBBY points to the old building

DEVLIN

A shack.

ROBBY

No. That's not what I mean.

DEVLIN

What? A shanty? A lean to?...

ROBBY

Stop it. It means somebody owns this land.

DEVLIN

Or somebody owned it. By the looks of that place he hasn't made a payment for years.

ROBBY

You don't know that. You don't know anything about this place.

DEVLIN

I know what I see. And I don't see any owner.

ROBBY

Is that how it worked with the car?

(Pause)

I see a building. That means an owner.

DEVLIN

Relax. He won't be coming here tonight.

ROBBY

You don't know that for sure.

DEVLIN

Look, nobody owns this place Alright.

ROBBY

Somebody owns it. Maybe it's a part of a national park or something.

DEVLIN

Do you see any signs?

ROBBY

No.

DEVLIN

Alright then, parks always have signs. That's a rule. You can't have a park without labeling everything. "Old Tree" "Old Rock"... So it's not a park.

ROBBY

Maybe it's a reservation. Or the Government owns it. I mean, there's been military stuff all over here.

DEVLIN

Sure, maybe, and maybe a UFO is going to land here tonight. But I'm not going to worry about it. You're stuck here so relax.

DEVLIN points to a beer sitting near ROBBY

DEVLIN

Are you going to drink that beer or not?

ROBBY

I don't know. Is it cold?

DEVLIN shrugs his shoulders. ROBBY picks it up, opens it and drinks

ROBBY

It is!

DEVLIN

What did you expect?

ROBBY

We've been walking all day. I expected it to be hot!

DEVLIN

No. You just shove them deep in your pack. Down in the socks and shirts where it's real protected. You need to learn this stuff.

ROBBY

What for? I am never going to use that again.

DEVLIN

You don't know. We could be on the run for a while.

ROBBY

I don't think so.

DEVLIN looks at him with an "I don't know"

DEVLIN

Or maybe a rattler will get me. This is rattler country you know? Big rattlers the size of a man. They rattle you to the ground and fang you just like Dracula.

ROBBY

Is that right?

DEVLIN

Sure, rattlers and scorpions. They hide deep in your sleeping bag. All kinds of scary crawling deadly things out here.

DEVLIN shivers and scratches his back

DEVLIN

Gives you the willies just thinking about it doesn't it? You better learn this stuff. You may be the only survivor. Have to crawl all the way back to town for help. Sure would be nice knowing you had a cold beer in your pack as you slither along the sand, now wouldn't it?

ROBBY

That's not likely.

DEVLIN

But it could happen. The odds are as good as the owner of this place showing up.

ROBBY

You said there wasn't any owner.

DEVLIN

Well there isn't. But you don't think that way do you?

ROBBY

What do you mean?

DEVLIN

I mean you think in terms of straight lines. Things are or they aren't. I don't believe you have a maybe in your body.

ROBBY

Maybe. Maybe not.

DEVLIN

Very clever. See, that's thinking. That's what I like in a partner.

ROBBY

We aren't partners.

DEVLIN

Sure we are. You drank my beer. You rode in my car...

ROBBY

Your stolen car.

DEVLIN

Oh boy. Now you spoiled it. No getting around it now. No standing before the judge and saying you didn't know. If you weren't my partner this would be a serious situation indeed.

ROBBY

How's that?

DEVLIN

Well, partners protect each other, see. They stick together. It's a kind of code that goes way back. Biblical stuff.

As partners we can take the West like Butch and Sundance. Maybe become folk heroes.

ROBBY

You're so full of crap. We ain't partners and we sure ain't friends.

DEVLIN

(With real anger slipping out)

Now don't be saying that!

(Calming and with charm)

You know it's not true, friend. Either we're partners or you're just some dumb kid that stumbled into trouble while hitchhiking. And you know what that would make me?

ROBBY

What?

DEVLIN

Why that would make me a criminal! Are you saying I'm a criminal?

ROBBY

I don't know what you are, I don't really care. I'm just trying to get down the road. For the moment we're traveling together. That's all. Don't worry. I'm not saying nothing.

DEVLIN

Well, good. Because otherwise you could be in serious trouble here.

ROBBY

Is that right?

DEVLIN

You've heard stories about kids hitchhiking who just disappear.

ROBBY

Stupid kids. Kids who don't know how to defend themselves. If that were the case I'd mess you up.

DEVLIN

Is that right?

ROBBY

Definitely. Besides, I never heard of someone getting killed over a ride in a stolen car.



DEVLIN

It depends on who you're dealing with. People have been killed over a lot less. Some people kill just for fun. Kind of like a hobby gone South, you know?

ROBBY

No. I don't know.

DEVLIN

You're not really thinking about backing out of this partnership, now are you, friend? After I saved your life?

ROBBY

I don't owe you anything.

DEVLIN

Is that how you see it. A debt must be paid friend.

ROBBY

Whatever. I just don't want anymore trouble.

DEVLIN

We're not going to get in any trouble. As long as we stick together. Put her there partner.

DEVLIN holds out his hand. ROBBY doesn't respond.

DEVLIN

Do you need some sort of blood ritual to seal this deal, because I'm game...

DEVLIN pulls out a knife from his boot

ROBBY

No. Put that away.

DEVLIN

Good.

DEVLIN puts the knife back.

DEVLIN

Handshake works for me too.

ROBBY puts out his hand reluctantly.

ROBBY

We shouldn't stay here. Let's just keep moving. If we stay we're going to get caught.

DEVLIN

No we aren't. You watch too much TV. Have you ever gotten caught for anything?

ROBBY

No. But I was smart enough not to just sit and wait for the cops to show up either.

DEVLIN

See. I knew you had experience. That's why I chose you.

ROBBY

This is different. I don't have a record.

DEVLIN

Good. No way to trace you. I just borrowed a car, that's all. We took a little joy ride.

ROBBY

No. A joy ride is across town. I've done that. It's fun. Hop in a nice car, race it around, drive it all night and dump it. This is different. You drove it across state lines. Different charges. You screwed up.

DEVLIN

You worry too much. Nobody is going to tie us to that abandoned car.

ROBBY

You don't know that. We didn't get far enough away to be stopping here.

DEVLIN

I know more than you think. People steal cars all the time. It's big business. It might become a good career for you if you could learn to relax.

ROBBY

I don't need any trouble with cops.

DEVLIN

Fine. We're backpacking remember? Nothing ties us to that car but your memory.

ROBBY

You've got it all figured out huh? Everything just falls right into place. Alright, so tell me, what's the plan?

DEVLIN

There's no plan. We deal with it as it comes. It's called maximizing opportunities.

ROBBY

Great! So how long do we stay here in this dump with our maximized opportunities?

DEVLIN

Just the night. Then in the morning, we take off for Mexico.

ROBBY

What's in Mexico?

DEVLIN

Wonders! What's your heart's desire? Treasure? Fame? Senoritas? Your future waits for you in Mexico, my friend.

ROBBY

I don't think so. Not going to Mexico! You can do that one on your own.

DEVLIN

No future for you here. There are no cops looking for you in Mexico. You could be a free man.

ROBBY

I never said the cops were looking for me.

DEVLIN

You never said they weren't. Sometimes people tell you more by what they don't say. You'll be safe from them in Mexico.

ROBBY

Is that right? And just how do we get there? The car is broke down back there.

DEVLIN

We take the next car we can get our hands on.

ROBBY

It's that easy.

DEVLIN

It is if you know what you're doing. I've been at this a while.

ROBBY

I'll bet you have. So that's what you're good at? Just traveling and stealing...

DEVLIN

Taking. Not stealing.

Oh sorry!

ROBBY

There's a big difference.

DEVLIN

What's the difference?

ROBBY

DEVLIN  
Stealing is sneaky, underhanded kind of things. Low life stuff. Taking is up front, eye to eye. Taking is being strong enough to grab what should have been yours all along.

ROBBY

Is that how you got the car?

DEVLIN

You really want to know?

ROBBY

Why not. I got nothing else going on here.

DEVLIN

I didn't steal it. I didn't have to. I just took it. I walked right up and said, "Give me the keys." And he did.

ROBBY

Just like that?

DEVLIN

Without thinking.

ROBBY

Bull shit.

DEVLIN

Are you calling me a liar?

ROBBY

No way somebody would just give you their car without being threatened.

DEVLIN

He was being threatened. He knew. People are like animals that way. They can smell danger. You ever see two dogs meet up? Both ready to fight? The weaker one just drops down low, so it can survive. It was like that, he knew he was the bottom dog.

ROBBY

Come on! Nobody would just hand you the keys.

DEVLIN

Well now, you weren't there were you? What do you think I did?