

Wildfire
A Full-Length Play

Written by
Dakota Silvey

Copyright (c) 2023

Dakotasilvey@gmail.com
Dakotasilvey.com
(208) 403-5936

"You're not sorry to go, of course. With people like us our home is where we are not..."

-F. Scott Fitzgerald

CAST of CHARACTERS

AMERI/HOTSHOT, female, 24. An engine crew member and med school dropout.

MONAHAN, 30. Lead sawyer who prefers the old-school ways.

WALLACE, 20. Rookie and college dropout.

DEBRASKA, 35. Hotshot squad leader and a veteran from Louisiana.

BROWN, 27. Cali-Bro and ski-bum.

MARSHALL/BIG ERNIE, 40. Hotshot crew superintendent with 20+ years of experience.

SETTING

Present day. An Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) *spike* campsite located on the remote flank of a record-breaking California wildfire. Sleeping bags, basic camping supplies, various wildfire suppression tools such as Pulaskis, Chingadera, Super-Ps, McCleods, shovels and chainsaws. After each wake-up, the camp is packed up and "relocated."

ACT 1

SCENE 1

AT RISE: A projection casts a blaze of fire amongst silhouetted trees. A soundscape of a roaring forest fire, similar to that of an approaching freight train, is heard. Chainsaws are revving in the distance. Men appear as silhouettes against the fire. They are bent forward, hacking at the ground with various fire suppression tools. The image is similar to that of a chain-gang working in twilight. Men grunting, shouting, cursing. Smoke envelops the cast and audience.

MARSHALL

Keep it up, boys! Just two more chains!

(ALL groan. MARSHALL laughs and then starts singing. The tools smack and scrape in unison.)

Hey, Ernie!

ALL

*That's Big Ernie!
Born in fire, his heart's cold as steel.
He drinks rum all day and digs all night.*

He's always ready to start a fight!

MARSHALL

Hey, Ernie!

ALL

*That's Big Ernie!
His pa is a fire devil.
His ma the Santa Anna wind.*

He decides who lives and who dies!

MARSHALL

Hey, Ernie!

ALL

That's Big Ernie!

*He twists your ankle on a P.T. run!
He starts wildfires just for fun!*

Then he pisses all over to put it down.

MARSHALL

Hey, Ernie!

ALL

That's Big Ernie!

MARSHALL

Pick it up, rookie! Put your back into it! I don't want to see you scratching the dirt. Choke down and dig deep! Chop those roots hotshots! Only two more chains!

(ALL but WALLACE laugh.)

VOICES

Come on, we're just getting started!

Get it!

Quit slacking, rookie!

Take more!

Whoa! Watch your swing!

You call that digging?

Heads up for Widowmakers!

Big Ernie wants your sweat and blood!

Better not piss off Big Ern!

Time to get full satch'!

Yeah! Let's get saturated!

Like he said, only two more chains, rook! (Laughter)

(The burning trees flicker like fading candles as the hotshots exit. As the lights fade, the roar of the fire grows louder until blackout.)

END SCENE

ACT 1

SCENE 2: SAFE SPACE

Red emergency lights turn slowly like a lighthouse lamp. The sound of a speeding freight train coming closer from miles away. Center stands HOTSHOT. She has on "Nomex" flame-resistant clothing and a helmet.

HOTSHOT

Don't be afraid. You're in a safe space. No, not that kind of safe space. You won't hear comforting tones or feel comforting hugs or the cool of an air-conditioner. This is a Safety Zone. You're going to hear horrific language, anxious voices, sometimes prayers, sometimes crying, sometimes both. The most important thing to listen for? The train. Do you see any tracks? (Beat) Exactly, no roads, no tracks, no cell towers, just rich folk cabins, meth labs and moonshine distilleries. But you're safe. *You are safe.* And you trust me, right? The most important thing? Listen for that train. When you feel that rumble, the walls of this safe space are going to heat up, and you're going to feel *unsafe*. That's okay though. You won't run. You won't panic. Because you trust me, right? Forget what you know. Ignore your gut. Because that train is coming for you, it's the ghost train, it's the angel of death. But I won't let her find you. You will want to scream. To leave this space. Your skin will burn and your lungs will fill with smoke and you'll feel just like death. But remember, *this is a safe space*. I know, it doesn't sound much like a safe space, does it? I need you to ignore your feelings, those sounds and listen to me, okay? When you hear the screams and feel the flames licking at your boots, you won't scream, will you? I want you to take out your safety blanket and dig into the dirt.

(HOTSHOT rips out a silver shimmering fire shelter resembling a space blanket.)

When your body feels that radiant heat it tells you to run? You're going to ignore the instinct. *Breath and dig.* You will feel like you're digging your own grave- but *you're in a safe space*. Nuzzle that cold soil. Throw away your safety helmet because it's going to melt. Lie down in your safety hole and put on your safety blanket and hug the Earth, put your face in her and feel her breathing life into your lungs. That freight train you hear? That's a fire inferno. That dirt you're breathing? That's Earth's bosom. You're going to hear the train getting louder and louder until it's

(MORE)

HOTSHOT (cont'd)

right over top of you but be still and keep your face down. The devil's going to tug at you, he wants to tear off that safety blanket but you won't let that happen, right? You're *in a safe space*. It will hurt to breathe, your lungs are going to burn and your ears will feel like they're bursting and your skin will feel like it's tearing but remember *you're in a safe space*. Let the train pass over you, breathe in mother nature and after this, you will never think the same way about safe spaces again.

(The train gets louder and louder until it is heard passing over the audience and lights fade.)

END SCENE

ACT 1

SCENE 3

It's night, with each scene, the hotshots become dirtier, their faces streaked and their clothes gradually become covered in more and more soot. They carry heavy fire-fighting backpacks. Each one has a wildfire suppression tool such as the standard "Pulaski" or "Chingadera." They begin setting up a "coyote" camp consisting of only bedrolls and sleeping bags. Each firefighter is distinguished by ageing of the helmet, each dent and scrape is a badge of honor. The rookie's should be fresh out of the box, initially.

BROWN, WALLACE, MONAHAN and DEBRASKA enter. They are exhausted and dripping in sweat. MONAHAN lowers a chainsaw from his shoulder and sits next to it. He takes a bandana from his pocket and begins disassembling it to wipe the dirt and sawdust off.

BROWN

Damn, bro, Big Ern' really screwed us on this one.

(BROWN takes off his helmet, and removes a head bandana, he wrings it out watching the water drip. WALLACE stands awkwardly, unsure if he's allowed to take his fire pack off.)

WALLACE

Who?

MONAHAN

Shut up, rook. Who said you could speak?

DEBRASKA

Tell me about it, first assignment of the season and we're stuck in Happy Camp? (To MONAHAN) Chew?

(MONAHAN nods. DEBRASKA tosses him a can of Copenhagen chewing tobacco. MONAHAN packs his lip with chew.)

BROWN

I hate Cali fires.

MONAHAN

(To BROWN) Wanna dip?

(BROWN shakes his head in disgust. WALLACE sits on the ground to study his pocket guide.)

Oh, right. Forgot you don't have any vices, granola boy.

BROWN

We all have our vices.

MONAHAN

Breaking "veg" to eat tuna ain't a vice, Brown.

BROWN

I wish those fire camps would try to respect dietary restrictions. Remember the Camino Fire in the Carolinas? They gave me peanut butter and pita bread for breakfast, lunch and dinner!

MONAHAN

Maybe if you quit being a little bitch and ate meat like a man. Then you wouldn't go T.U. every time you humped the chainsaw up a hill.

BROWN

I was dehydrated!

MONAHAN

So take some salt pills, pussy!

DEBRASKA

You still wanna be a lead on the saw, Brown?

BROWN

I'd like to be.

MONAHAN

You don't sound sure. Do you want it or not?

BROWN

Yes- Yes I want to be a lead.

DEBRASKA

Then you gotta quit falling out on crew hikes.

MONAHAN

And quit taking so long sizing up trees. I could cut 5 in the time it takes you to drop one pig.

BROWN

I don't wanna get smoked by a rotting tree, man.

MONAHAN

Shit, you're not taking lead saw talking like that. You gotta man-up if you wanna be a saw dog, hippie. I've been rocking Bravo-2 for 3 years.

DEBRASKA

Yeah, rockin' ya chain on boulders, Monahan. Yeah, That's right I saw you throwing sparks off that rock, "saw dawg." You put a lick on that dull-ass chain yet?

MONAHAN

Not yet, boss.

DEBRASKA

I need that saw cleaned and sharp, Monahan. We got a full day of line prep tomorrow and we can't let the other squads take any more leaps on us. Unless, you want Wallace to take the saw from ya?

MONAHAN

Nah, boss. I was just saving some chain for the probie. Little extra training.

DEBRASKA

Uh, huh.

MONAHAN

(To WALLACE) Hey, probie, you know how to sharpen chain?

(MONAHAN takes a metal sharpening rod from inside his boot and throws it at WALLACE's helmet.)

Hey! Probie! You got your ear pro in?

WALLACE

Huh, me?

MONAHAN

Yeah, you *pro-ba-tion-ary*. Take your helmet off, numb-nuts you're off the clock. You know how to sharpen a chainsaw?

WALLACE

Uh-

DEBRASKA

Brown, why don't you show him in the morning.

BROWN

You got it, D.B.

MONAHAN

Don't fuck it up. I want her cutting diamonds tomorrow. *Diamonds*. Hey, you ever try dip, probie?

BROWN

Don't do it.

WALLACE

Dip?

MONAHAN

Copenhagen mint.

WALLACE

What's that?

MONAHAN

Jesus! Where'd they find you? Take a pinch and put it under your bottom lip.

(MONAHAN chucks the container at WALLACE.)

DEBRASKA

Ain't we usually down in A.Z. or New Mexico 'round this time o' season?

MONAHAN

Yeah, but I hear monsoons hit early this season.

BROWN

Then how come Cali's dry as a bone this year?

DEBRASKA

Cause monsoons typically hop the coast and dump mainland.

(WALLACE pinches some tobacco and looks at it.)

MONAHAN

(To WALLACE) More!

BROWN

Monahan...

MONAHAN

What? (To WALLACE) You wanna be a hotshot, right?

(WALLACE takes a huge pinch.)

MONAHAN

There ya go. Don't waste it, I only brought 2 cans of that shit and Cali taxes are out the ass.

(WALLACE packs it under his lip and wipes his mouth.)

BROWN

What's the minimum wage here?

DEBRASKA

Fi'deen.

MONAHAN

Great, some kid wearing a paper hat at In-N-Out makes more than me.

DEBRASKA

Didn't think you was in this for the money, Monahan.

MONAHAN

I'm not- But- It would be nice to afford a doctor appointment after smoking my lungs out for six months.

(DEBRASKA stretches.)

DEBRASKA

Or even a chiropractor.

(WALLACE is visibly ill.)

(To WALLACE) Lookin' like you could use a doc right about now.

(WALLACE dashes offstage and vomits.
MONAHAN and DEBRASKA laugh. BROWN
shakes his head.)

MONAHAN

Lightweight.

DEBRASKA

Damn, Monahan! You did 'im dirty!

MONAHAN

What? He wants to be a big hotshot! Not my fault he can't hang.

BROWN

Seven.

MONAHAN

What?

BROWN

We're on for seven months this year.

DEBRASKA

Every year it gets longer and longer.

BROWN

Who knew global warming would be so good for business?

(WALLACE enters, wiping his mouth with his sleeve. BROWN removes his bandana and hands it to WALLACE.)

WALLACE

Thanks, Brown.

(BROWN nods. WALLACE wipes his mouth.)

MONAHAN

That's bull, Brown. We've been having fires like these since the seventies.

BROWN

No, we weren't. Look at the data. '06 was our worst year and we are consistently coming close to that each season.

MONAHAN

It's just the media blaring biased politics. I don't buy it.

BROWN

Sure, just keep living in your ignorance, man.

(MONAHAN feigns a punch to WALLACE's stomach.)

MONAHAN

2 for flinching! Quit leaving your Pulaski unattended, if you do I'm stealing it. Got that? That tool is you life-line, rookie.

(MORE)