

DUST AND ASH

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A short play by

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## CAST

TEENA      early 30s, female, pristine and measured in every way

DUST        early 20s, male, he looks like a man, but he has the  
mind of a child

ASH         16, female, looks like a child, but there is much going  
on behind her innocent eyes

## SETTING

The early 22nd Century. The east coast of what was once the United State of America and is now a broken nation, devastated by war and disease. The play takes place in TEENA's underground bunker in New Jersey, a days walk from the shore.

In blackout, an electrical kind of hum permeates the dark. It grows in intensity and suddenly cuts off as an electric lantern flicks on. TEENA's face swims in the light from the lantern. The sounds of bombs outside. TEENA slowly rises and moves around the room, turning lights on.

We see a small, underground shelter not unlike a rabbit's den. The walls are lined with shelves neatly bearing home canned and jarred food, bottles of water, all the makings of a well-stocked bomb shelter. A small garden sits under several heat lamps. It is a garden for one. There is one of each vegetable growing and a small patch of wheatgrass. An umbrella hangs over the head of the bed, placed just so.

TEENA moves to the middle of the room and begins a bizarre kind of yoga. She looks to be in her early 30s and is extremely fit. Her skin is so smooth and pristine it seems to glow. In the background the sound of a bomb rumbles. The shelter shivers. TEENA pauses. She inhales and continues. After some time, there is a pounding at the door.

TEENA stops, alarmed. More banging.

DUST

Help!

TEENA turns towards the door in shock.

TEENA

Go... go away!

DUST

Please help us! Please, my sister is hurt!

TEENA stares at the door.

TEENA

I don't... let people in.

DUST

(crying)

Please, please, she's bleeding. I don't have anything to stop her from bleeding.

TEENA

Then she'll die I suppose.

DUST

She's my sister. She's the only person I have.

TEENA

Sister?

DUST

Please!

ASH

It's okay. It's okay. We'll find someplace else.

DUST

There's no place.

DUST bangs on the door.

DUST

Help!

TEENA

Stop banging.

DUST

Let us in! You can't not let hurt people in!

DUST bangs more on the door.  
TEENA can take no more interruptions. She holds her hands to her ears and screams:

TEENA

Stop banging!

ASH begins to sing softly. The song is old and familiar while alien at the same time. It's like something a mother would have sung to her child, but it has been warped by time and war.

TEENA listens. After a time:

TEENA

What... is that tune?

ASH

I don't know. Maybe a lullaby?

TEENA

You don't know?

ASH

I can't remember.

DUST is whimpering.

ASH

Shh. It's okay.

ASH continues to sing. TEENA approaches the door and puts her hand to it. She closes her eyes and listens.

TEENA

If... if I allow you into my home... Well, you would have to put down any weapons first.

DUST

We don't have them!

TEENA

And you would have to be...

TEENA gestures, grasping for the word.

TEENA

Sanitized.

DUST

What for?

TEENA  
So I don't get sick from you. Obviously.

DUST  
Yes, yes!

ASH  
We'll wear hazmat suits if you want. Won't we?

DUST  
Yes!

TEENA  
Just let me put down some plastic.

DUST  
Why?

TEENA  
You said the girl was bleeding. It will just take a moment.

TEENA puts down plastic. Checks her work. Straightens the plastic.

DUST  
Could you hurry, please?

TEENA  
A hurried job is a sloppy one.

Finally satisfied, TEENA unlocks the many, many locks on the door. She takes a deep breath, then opens it. In the door frame stand DUST and ASH. They are both far too thin and damaged for their age. They begin to step in, but TEENA holds up her hands. She is holding her breath, and gasps:

TEENA  
Stop!

TEENA sprays them down with something in a spray bottle.

DUST  
It stings!

TEENA

I know that.

TEENA spritzes DUST and ASH once more and they look at her. She nods and they stumble across the threshold.

TEENA

Put the girl here on the plastic.

DUST

Do you have anything to help her?

TEENA

Let me see it.

ASH raises her shirt to show a gash on her side. DUST whimpers.

ASH

It's not that bad, Dust.

TEENA

Everything is bad. A paper cut means infection and infection means death. This is more than a paper cut. Here.

TEENA thrusts iodine, gauze, and tape into DUST's hands.

TEENA

Wash your hands and then clean her up.

(to ASH)

Do you want stitches?

ASH

No, thank you. It's barely anything.

DUST begins to wash his hands with TEENA keeping an eye on him.

TEENA

Hm.

ASH

I'm Ash. This is my brother Dust.

TEENA

Ash? And Dust?

ASH

Well, Ashley and Dustin. Ash and Dust are our -

TEENA

New names.

ASH

Nicknames.

TEENA

Nicknames, yes, I understand.

ASH

What's your name?

TEENA

Teena. T-E-E-N-A. Not T-I-N-A.

ASH

That's an interesting spelling.

TEENA

Yes... How did you find me?

ASH

We were walking through the woods -

DUST

East!

ASH

Yeah, we were walking east through the woods and they dropped a bomb right near us.

DUST

South of us.

ASH

That's right, Dust. He's great at directions. I fell on some rocks and got this and then we saw your door -



TEENA

How did you see my door??

ASH

I... I just saw it -

TEENA

It's con... it's con-, uh... it's covered. No one's ever seen it. There's a tree that covers it.

ASH

The bomb must have knocked it over.

TEENA paces away nervously. She plays with an ornate pin in her hair. ASH notices.

ASH

That's a lovely pin in your hair.

TEENA

It's from China.

DUST

What's China?

TEENA

A country.

DUST

Never heard of it.

ASH

It's printed on a lot of the old stuff.

She pulls a beat up Tupperware container from her bag and turns it over.

ASH

Like this. See? "Made in China."

(to TEENA)

Do you know where China was?

TEENA  
On another continent.

DUST  
What's continent?

TEENA  
Hurry up and help the girl. You should be on your way.

DUST  
Could we stay here a little? It's warm.

TEENA  
No. It's not big enough. There isn't enough food.

DUST  
(looking at the cans)  
Looks like a lot. More than anyone could eat.

TEENA  
It's mine. Stop eyeing my things.

DUST  
(pointing to the garden)  
Ash, what's this?

TEENA  
Don't touch them!

Her yell frightens Dust.

ASH  
We have food with us!

ASH overturns her backpack and a  
pile of junk food in bright  
wrappers pours out.

ASH  
There were machines in an old building -

TEENA  
That's not food.

DUST  
Sure is. Everyone's been eating it for a hundred years.

TEENA  
And how would you know what people were eating a hundred  
years ago?

DUST

How would you?

ASH

Dust, stop. I just meant that you don't have to worry about feeding us.

TEENA

It doesn't matter. You've brought germs in already. I'll have to disinfect the entire house when you leave. Your clothes are filthy.

DUST

We can't help that. You should be nicer. You might not see another person for weeks if we leave.

TEENA

When you leave. And that's nothing, I haven't seen another human in years.

ASH

Really?

TEENA

Hm.

ASH

How long have you been down here?

TEENA

Forty-two years, three months, five days.

DUST

Bullshit.

TEENA

It is not.

DUST

You aren't even that old. There's no way -

TEENA

Who are you to presume my age?

DUST

You're not old enough -

TEENA

Jumps to conclusions often end in... bad falls.

DUST  
You're a liar!

ASH  
Dust, stop. What is your age, Teena?

TEENA eyes DUST, then looks at  
ASH. She sees a kind spirit  
there.

TEENA  
I'm one hundred and three.

DUST  
Bull-crapping-shit.

TEENA  
You are in my home -

DUST  
And you are insane!

DUST laughs at his joke.

TEENA  
Out! Get out! I never should have let you in here!

ASH  
No, please! Dust, stop! Leave her alone!

DUST  
You believe her?

ASH  
And why shouldn't I?

DUST  
Bull-crapping-shit.

ASH  
Dust, calm down. Watch your mouth. Teena, when were you born?

TEENA  
The turn of the century. Not this past one, the one before.  
The twenty-first.

A plane is heard overhead.

TEENA  
Back when wars were fought away from us.

ASH  
You look amazing.

TEENA  
Thank you.

ASH  
How do you do it?

TEENA  
Do what?

ASH  
Keep yourself looking so young.

DUST  
(under his breath)  
She's a liar.

TEENA  
Well, I've always taken expert care of myself. Since I was a child. I always ate my vegetables. I never had ice cream or candy. I stayed out of the rain. I stayed out of the sun.

ASH  
You've never played in the sun?

TEENA  
No, no. My parents were a great help. Always holding an umbrella over me at the beach, or having someone do it. And when they passed, Graysun... Graysun would follow me about with the umbrella.

ASH  
Was Greyson your husband?

DUST takes his coat off. TEENA notices.

TEENA  
(a sound meaning neither yes nor no)  
Hm.

ASH  
Was he -

TEENA  
Your brother should take off that shirt. It needs washing.

No. DUST

Dust. ASH

No... thank you. DUST

TEENA  
Come on, don't be ridiculous.

She puts on a pair of plastic  
gloves and pulls at his shirt.

No, thank you. DUST

TEENA  
Just for a minute. Just take it off for a minute.

DUST  
NO! THANK YOU!

TEENA  
Do not... [searching for word] yell at me!

ASH  
Teena.

TEENA and DUST look at ASH.

ASH  
If you want to look at Dust without his shirt you might want  
to ask him nicely.

TEENA  
I don't know what you're talking about. His shirt was... it's  
filthy. His shirt -

ASH  
Does he remind you of Graysun?

TEENA  
No. [beat] And it's spelled G-R-A-Y-S-U-N, NOT G-R-E-Y-S-O-N.

TEENA paces away, absentmindedly  
touching the umbrella over her  
bed.

ASH

I love your umbrella.

TEENA steps between ASH and the umbrella.

ASH

I didn't mean -

TEENA

I think it's time you left.

ASH

No, please. I really do want to hear more.

DUST

She just needs to rest a little.

ASH

I'm fine. I'd just like to know more about how you've maintained yourself. Please, go on. Dust, put your shirt in the sink to soak a little.

He does so. TEENA stares at his naked torso.

ASH

Go on, Teena.

TEENA

Well... so, yes, people usually take care of one part of their bodies very well and they think they are very healthy for it, but they are ignoring something else that always ends up being their undoing. So I didn't ignore anything. I have never slept less than 8 hours or more than ten. I do not ingest anything manufactured. And here is the result. Look at my skin. Look at my body. I have never had a broken bone, a cut, or a bruise. My skin is completely unmarred. I have outlived my own parents and my younger siblings, and since the war broke out I believe I have outlived their children and grandchildren as well.

ASH

You don't know?

TEENA

No.

DUST

You just holed up in here and left them when the war started?

TEENA

You don't... listen. I've been here forty-two years, three months, five days. When did the war start?

DUST

I don't know. I was a kid.

TEENA

Then it couldn't have been forty-two years, three months, five days ago, could it?

DUST

(a bit red in the face)

No.

TEENA

No. I came down during an outbreak of some flu, and once I was here it just seemed safer. So, here I've been.

ASH

You haven't seen another person in forty-two years, three months and..

TEENA

Five days. No.

ASH

You don't know if your family even knows you exist anymore?

TEENA

No, I don't.

ASH

That's so sad. To have all of this, your health, and no one to share it with.

TEENA

People carry disease. And they can hurt you. Even if they don't mean to, they can hurt you.

ASH

Is that what happened with Graysun?

TEENA

Why would you say that?

ASH

I just wondered -



TEENA

I think it's time you were going.

DUST

Can't she take a nap? If we go out there now, we'll be so slow -

TEENA

You have to leave. I have to disinfect.

ASH

I'm fine. We can go, Dust. We'll find some place to sleep for the night and start towards the shore in the morning.

(to TEENA)

We're hoping boats still come for survivors.

TEENA

Well, good luck to you.

ASH

Thank you. Maybe you have a shirt for him? Since his is soaking.

TEENA hands DUST a kind of state-issued looking garment.

TEENA

This is... a spare.

ASH

Say "thank you," Dust.

DUST

Thanks.

DUST walks to the door and opens it. He looks outside and grumbles.

DUST

It's raining.

ASH shovels the snacks into her backpack, cringing a little with the movement, and rises. She smiles at TEENA.

ASH

Good luck to you, too, Teena. You really have such a lovely, lovely home. I hope Dust and I can find something like it one day.

ASH smiles sadly at TEENA. TEENA turns and takes the umbrella from above her bed.

TEENA

Here, take the umbrella. It doesn't provide protection from much, but it will keep the sun and the rain off of your head.

ASH

Thank you.

ASH nods to DUST and he exits.  
ASH lingers.

ASH

Teena... Are you sure there isn't any family that might miss you? Someone we could get in touch with? Let them know you're alright?

TEENA

I've said if they are alive, they don't know me. I've been down here too long for anyone to remember.

ASH

That's very sad, Teena.

TEENA turns away.

TEENA

Yes, I know.

ASH

To have no one in the world to share your lovely home with.  
To watch your back. To know you exist.

ASH has begun to creep up behind TEENA. She holds the umbrella in both hands.

TEENA

Very sad, yes.

ASH

It seems like such a waste.

Ash?

DUST (O.S.)

TEENA turns towards DUST's voice and ASH slings the umbrella around TEENA's throat, strangling her. TEENA deftly pulls the hairpin from her bun, and in a movement she had performed in her strange yoga, reaches behind, sticks it in ASH's throat and twists. The girl drops to the ground, dead. DUST starts back to the door brandishing a shiv.

Ash!

DUST

TEENA slams the door shut in his face and throws the bolts.

ASH!!!!

DUST

DUST pounds the door and continues to scream for his sister. TEENA begins to wrap ASH in the plastic. She removes the umbrella from the girl's hands and looks at it.

Very, very sad, yes.

TEENA

As TEENA goes to replace the umbrella under the bed, she catches sight of herself in a mirror. Her hand goes to her throat as she stares in horror.

A bruise.

TEENA

Planes are heard, bombs explode in the distance, and DUST sobs his sister's name.

Blackout.