

# CACTUS, TEXAS

By

Dane Futrell

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## CACTUS, TEXAS

**CACTUS, TEXAS** was originally produced at the Infrared Theatre Collective Showcase held by Prism Theatre Company in Phoenix, Arizona. It premiered on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, on behalf of both Infrared and Prism. It was directed by Anji Inukai. The cast was as follows:

LUCIE.....Allison Watson  
KENNY.....Tanner Conley  
ELI.....Tim Nipper  
STRANGER.....Ollie Slade  
CHAD.....Dylan Clark

## CACTUS, TEXAS

CAST: 2F, 3M

LUCIE (F) 23. Totally okay with the situation.  
KENNY (M) 23. Totally not okay with the situation.  
ELI (M) 60s. The situation.  
CHAD (M) 30s. California surfer.  
STRANGER (F) 23. Dressed identical to LUCIE.

TIME: Never.

PLACE: Cactus, Texas. Unexpectedly windy and cold.

SET NOTE: There are many “dead rats” used throughout the play. If possible, they should be plush toy rats with a squeaker inside so that when they are touched, they squeak.

CASTING NOTE: Cultural diversification and gender bending are encouraged.

TEXT NOTE: The verbiage is vulgar as is. In production, however, feel free to cut as much of the profanity as deemed necessary to make it approachable for your audiences.

CACTUS, TEXAS

# CACTUS, TEXAS

*Before rise, Hank Williams-esque music is heard, accompanied by the sound of wind and tumbleweed. The rising lights reveal a plethora of dead rats scattered about. LUCIE and KENNY, two best friends, sit on a log stage left, lost. Lucie has her favorite blanket wrapped around her and is not impacted by the cold at all. Kenny, blanket-less, is shivering intensely and failing to light a cigarette.*

**KENNY.** Why does every ghost town out here look the exact damn same? Overpriced gas stations. Frozen horses out by the interstate. Hotels *nobody* works at. And acres of abandoned warehouses... What the hell. (*He flicks the lighter.*)

Apocalyptic hicks. (*He flicks the lighter again. It's not working.*) Come on!

**LUCIE.** Have you tried pressing the thing? I heard that works.

**KENNY.** All I've been doing is pressing the thing! It's the damn cold that makes this impossible. The wind.

**LUCIE.** The wind.

**KENNY.** Yes. (*He keeps flicking the lighter to no avail.*) Or maybe it's just out of gas.

**LUCIE.** We can relate to that, huh.

**KENNY.** Too soon, Lucie. Too soon.

**LUCIE.** Just forget about the lighter. Just take in the view out here. It's so spacious.

**KENNY.** There is no view out here. It's blackness. This lighter is my only hope.

**LUCIE.** For what? Starting a fire? Making a smoke signal?

**KENNY.** Momentary salvation. It's my only hope for lighting this cigarette, *inhaling*, and making life tolerable for three or four seconds.

**LUCIE.** You don't need that.

**KENNY.** I don't need a lot of things.

**LUCIE.** Like cigarettes.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**KENNY.** Like you.

**LUCIE.** Hey. There's a dead rat over there. Look.

**KENNY.** What.

**LUCIE.** You see that?

**KENNY.** Oh my god-- That's disgusting!

**LUCIE.** There's another one! One, two, three, four--

**KENNY.** Oh my.

**LUCIE.** Five, six, seven, eight, holy--

**KENNY.** Every time you look there's more.

**LUCIE.** Why are there so many? Seems like they all just up and died on a whim, together. Did we just witness a mass extinction? Or a group sacrifice by all the rebellious rats who failed to overthrow their oppressors? *(Lucie kneels down and presses one of the rats. It squeaks. She looks up to Kenny as she makes it squeak three more times.)*

**KENNY.** We need a plan. We need a plan to get *away* from these rats. Okay?

**LUCIE.** There's gotta be at least fifty.

**KENNY.** And a fifty-fifty shot we survive the night. Great. So, step one--

**LUCIE.** We're surrounded by death, Kenny. I wanna talk to them. Understand their thoughts, their upbringing, their culture.

**KENNY.** They are dead rats! They don't have culture!

**LUCIE.** Maybe not anymore.

**KENNY.** Ugh. *(Kenny flicks the lighter repeatedly, with increasing frustration.)*

**LUCIE.** But they did at some point.

**KENNY.** Lucie! As much as I love talking about rotting rodents, we *really* need to make a plan. Here's the plan, okay? Step one.

**LUCIE.** Step one.

**KENNY.** Step one is I hate this fucking lighter and I just want you to know that.

**LUCIE.** Okay. What's step two?

**KENNY.** Step two is I figure it out eventually and I get it working and I light it and I get rid of this last cigarette. Finally.

**LUCIE.** That's a whole lot of steps in one.

**KENNY.** Yeah.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**LUCIE.** What about the rest?

**KENNY.** I figured that's where you would come in, Lucie. You have any ideas?

**LUCIE.** We can become one with the rats. Maybe they can save us, huh?

*(A moment.)*

**KENNY.** Existence is torture. It really is torture. Those asshole German philosophers were right. Life fucking kicks rocks sometimes. Big rocks.

**LUCIE.** But in hindsight, we're gonna giggle about this around the campfire and tell our little versions of the story to all our friends.

Remember the time we got lost in Northern Texas on the way to Colorado?

**KENNY.** Remember that time we fucking died? We're about to be identical to those rats. Those dead as hell rats. *(Kenny taps one of the rats with his foot. He jumps at the squeaking sound.)*

**LUCIE.** At least you'd have nothing to worry about if you're dead.

**KENNY.** You know what I think? I think worrying is the only thing keeping us alive right now. All of mankind. When you're a kid, you're not even really alive yet. Nowhere near it. You're not thinking. You're not worrying. Then you grow up and you start thinking about everything and *worrying* about every damn thing and you think to yourself: "This is what it's like to be alive! This is life! I love my life!!!"

**LUCIE.** You're only alive if you're worried to death?

**KENNY.** I guess so, Lucie.

**LUCIE.** You feel alive right now?

**KENNY.** Momentarily. Not sure how much longer it'll last 'til I'm six feet down in the dirt.

**LUCIE.** Can I try that?

**KENNY.** Dying?

**LUCIE.** The lighter.

**KENNY.** Oh.

**LUCIE.** Can I try it? I think I can get it to work.

**KENNY.** Sure. Be my guest.

**LUCIE.** Okay. I'm your guest. *(Lucie takes the lighter and cigarette and throws them offstage.)*

**KENNY.** Fucking--

**LUCIE.** Into the void you go.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**KENNY.** (*Melting.*) But why? *Why?*

**LUCIE.** Step one done.

**KENNY.** Why, Lucie, why?! Why'd you throw my lighter and my cigarette?

**LUCIE.** You said you wanted to get rid of it. You were failing to do so. I don't like watching you fail. So, I helped you succeed. Now you can find other avenues to success that don't involve nasty habits and fake satisfaction. Real happiness! There's another dead rat over there, too.

**KENNY.** That was my last one!

**LUCIE.** Maybe ever. You think they all have names? The rats. Or *had* names.

**KENNY.** You're so observant, you know that?

**LUCIE.** Thanks.

**KENNY.** Yeah. Observant enough to notice dead rats when it's pitch-black outside but not observant enough to know when we're running out of gas in the car!

**LUCIE.** You were driving the car, Kenny.

**KENNY.** I know!

**LUCIE.** We've been over this. I was asleep. I went night-night.

**KENNY.** I know I was driving, Lucie, but I was asleep for *hours* before you woke me up and told me it was my turn to drive! I figured that's all I would have to do. Drive.

**LUCIE.** That is all you did.

**KENNY.** For all of ten minutes! Before we suddenly found ourselves on the side of road, with both our tank and chance to survive entirely empty. You woke me up at a gas station, Lucie. I assumed that somebody would have filled up the tank with gas.

**LUCIE.** Who?

**KENNY.** You.

**LUCIE.** Ohhh.

**KENNY.** I assumed *you* would have filled up the tank with *gas* at a gas *station* instead of getting back on the highway with no miles 'til empty!

**LUCIE.** It was your turn to fill it up, though.

**KENNY.** Why didn't you TELL ME THAT?



## CACTUS, TEXAS

**LUCIE.** I don't like telling people how to spend their money, Kenny. And I thought maybe you knew where another gas station was around here.

**KENNY.** Around here?

**LUCIE.** Yeah.

**KENNY.** AROUND HERE?!?

**LUCIE.** Yeah.

**KENNY.** Lucie, I have never been anywhere around here!

**LUCIE.** (*Genuine.*) Hey, me neither.

**KENNY.** No shit!

**LUCIE.** We have so much in common. No wonder we get along so well.

**KENNY.** How could I possibly know where another gas station would be? No GPS, my phone is dead--

**LUCIE.** We can go back to that gas station, can't we?

**KENNY.** What do you think we're doing?

**LUCIE.** Going the other way.

**KENNY.** What-- Other way?

**LUCIE.** Far out. Toward the void. Or whatever else is out there.

**KENNY.** No. No-- We're on our way back to the gas station so we can get some gas and promptly un-fuck ourselves after getting royally fucked.

**LUCIE.** The gas station is the other way, though.

**KENNY.** Huh?

**LUCIE.** Remember when you pulled over, when you ran out of gas—

**KENNY.** Me?

**LUCIE.** You turned the car around so we could face the direction we came.

**KENNY.** No I didn't.

**LUCIE.** Then we walked the other way for some reason.

**KENNY.** No, we... oh my god.

**LUCIE.** Yeah.

**KENNY.** Oh my *god*.

**LUCIE.** Yeah.

**KENNY.** I have no idea where we are.

**LUCIE.** We're definitely somewhere.

**KENNY.** Yeah! Yeah... somewhere. We're fucked. So much for going to Red Rocks tomorrow.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**LUCIE.** Ah, Red Rocks... the Rocks that are Red.

**KENNY.** Gone. Nope. Done. Never gonna see 'em.

**LUCIE.** Not with that attitude, you're not. We'll make it eventually if we just keep walking.

**KENNY.** I'm not walking anymore. Any way we choose to walk is gonna be the wrong way. Either we walk towards certain death or uncertain life. Neither of which interest me in the slightest right now. Maybe we should just set up camp out here and hope for the best, huh? People might pass through here and help us out. What do you think?

**LUCIE.** I have my camping stuff in the car if we want go get it.

**KENNY.** It's so cold. It's *so* cold. We're in Texas, where it's supposed to be hot enough to bake cookies on the hood of your car, and it's so cold.

**LUCIE.** We should try that sometime with our car.

**KENNY.** The sun doesn't even shine here. Do we even know what time it is? It doesn't *feel* like night-time, but it's--

**LUCIE.** I don't really do the whole "clock" thing.

**KENNY.** What.

**LUCIE.** I just live in the moment. Time is reductive. Pointless. I do collect sun dials, though. The brass ones I really like.

**KENNY.** Well, that's real useful in the pitch-black dark.

**LUCIE.** I don't have them on me anyway. I left them—

**KENNY.** In the car. Yeah. Wow. There's no way this is Texas. The Texas I know is full of sand and racist cowboys.

**LUCIE.** There's always sand if you look east. And I'm no cowboy, but I can start being racist if you want me to. (*A moment.*)

**KENNY.** Aren't you cold?

**LUCIE.** Not really. I'm so chill already, so.

**KENNY.** That's wonderful for you.

**LUCIE.** And you being so hot-headed all the time makes it balance out. Hot and cold. Homeostasis and shit. We can huddle together like penguins to warm you up if you want.

**KENNY.** No.

**LUCIE.** I can rub my blanket against your sweater.

**KENNY.** No.

**LUCIE.** Friction.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**KENNY.** Oh, a cigarette would be *so* nice right now!

**LUCIE.** But the struggle to light it would not be.

**KENNY.** I should've known that "Wake up, Kenny. I can't drive anymore." sounded *way* too confident when I heard it. But I didn't even question it. *Why* didn't I question it?

**LUCIE.** Well, I was right. I couldn't drive any more. We would've ran out of gas.

**KENNY.** You're incomprehensible. It's like you think backwards. Do you think at all, actually? Do you have a brain? Do you ask questions?

**LUCIE.** If I think backwards, does that mean I already have all the answers?

**KENNY.** Let's just keep moving. No use staying here and fading into nothingness. Looks like there's a sign over here or something.

**LUCIE.** Yeah. Next to another dead rat.

**KENNY.** Phenomenal. Maybe we can find out where we're at, besides *hell*.

**LUCIE.** Isn't hell supposed to be hot?

**KENNY.** Shut up. *(There is an old wooden sign center stage that reads "Micronesia: The Next Wave" in indecipherably scratched-out lettering. Lucie and Kenny squint at the sign and try to read it.)*

Micro... What does that say?

**LUCIE.** It starts with "micro".

**KENNY.** Yeah.

**LUCIE.** Ends with "wave".

**KENNY.** Yeah.

**LUCIE.** Microwave.

**KENNY.** No. There are words in between micro and wave... "micro... *next* wave"? I can't see what it says through all the scratches.

**LUCIE.** Like a big ol' angry cat went to town on this thing.

**KENNY.** Why would a cat be angry at a sign?

**LUCIE.** Same reason you are, maybe.

**KENNY.** I'm not angry at the sign. *(Lucie laughs.)* What?

**LUCIE.** "Went to town" on the sign ... I said "went to town", but we didn't actually go to any towns... because we ran out of gas and we got

## CACTUS, TEXAS

lost... “went to town”. (*Light giggles are heard in the darkness of stage right.*)

**KENNY.** The hell is that? (*There is a dilapidated picnic table stage right with two shovels leaned against it. ELI, an old man fresh out of a dumpster, sits there sipping out of an empty red solo cup, giggling. He wears overalls that are too small and nothing else besides a half-destroyed hat. He speaks with a heavy southern drawl.*)

**ELI.** Oh lordy lord... I guess you boys *are* pretty funny after all.

**LUCIE.** Thanks.

**KENNY.** After all?

**ELI.** Talkin’ bout bein’ angry at the sign. Only sign I’m mad at is the sign of the times. Other than that, I ain’t angry. Not anymore... (*Eli contemplatively sips from his cup.*)

**LUCIE.** Hello there mister.

**ELI.** Hi.

**KENNY.** Who are you?

**ELI.** Hey now. You can’t ask me a bunch of questions about who I am without gettin’ to know me a little bit first. Let me ask you something since we’re all so keen on askin’ questions. You boys ever been to... Micronesia?

**KENNY.** No.

**ELI.** Alright, then. (*He sips from his cup.*)

**LUCIE.** Is it nice there?

**ELI.** I dunnuh. Haven’t been just yet.

**LUCIE.** Oh.

**ELI.** Was hopin’ you boys would enlighten me as to how it is.

**KENNY.** Sir, we really need some directions.

**ELI.** My work friend is a California-type. White boy. Dreamboat. Long, wavy hair. Real relaxed. Smells like salt and dirt. Stands high like a Florida palm and talks how a turtle would talk if they could. ‘Course, he would say that they already can talk. Turtles.

**LUCIE.** I used to have a tortoise.

**ELI.** No! (*Eli crushes his cup in his hand.*) I said turtle!

**LUCIE.** Sorry.

**ELI.** One sinks, one floats. That’s a big damn difference!

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**KENNY.** Sir, do you know where the nearest gas station is? We were at one earlier but we--

**ELI.** He was in the military, The Turtle Man, and after he got his pension he went to Micronesia and surfed for a whole year. Believe that? A *whole year* in the ocean, catchin' those waves, skin absorbin' all that salt. I love salt. Good for the sinuses. I had a salt rock once but I licked it dry so quick I had to be hospitalized. Anyways, y'all boys need a map or somethin'?

**KENNY.** Yes! That'd be so helpful right now.

**ELI.** Well, well, do I have a surprise for you.

**KENNY.** You have one?

**ELI.** I have this here cup.

**KENNY.** What.

**ELI.** Had it for lifetimes. Eternities. Just about all I got.

**LUCIE.** Where do you go to fill it up?

**ELI.** It fills up on its own. That's that Cactus Magic, you know?

**LUCIE.** I dig magic.

**ELI.** I have these shovels here, too. But they come and go with time. You'll find that out soon enough.

**KENNY.** Why'd you bring up having a map if you don't have one anyway?

**ELI.** Maps are overrated. I prefer globes. Spin 'em 'round real fast and see all them destinations kinda merge into one big haze. Makes you think that you never know where you are... (*Eli sips and sits down at his picnic table. He grows sad and reflective.*) I never could surf as good as the Turtle Man... If I got real good with the surf, I wouldn't have to worry about catchin' planes anymore. Or boats... I could just catch a wave and take it all the way 'round the world. All the way to Micronesia... The Turtle Man, now. All he did was surf!

**KENNY.** You mentioned that.

**ELI.** So much it killed him!

**LUCIE.** Oh no.

**ELI.** Yup. Killed his ass dead.

**LUCIE.** Did he drown?

**ELI.** No. He got murdered by a shark.

**KENNY.** You mean eaten?

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**ELI.** I said murdered!

**LUCIE.** Can animals be murderers?

**ELI.** You don't know what I've seen, boy.

**KENNY.** She's not a dude. *(ELI sips from his cup, then descends into a catastrophic coughing frenzy. He falls to the floor, seemingly dying a horrendous death. Then he gets back up and fixes his hat.)* Oh, man.

**LUCIE.** Are you okay?

**ELI.** Ahem!

**KENNY.** Sir, do you know where we are?

**ELI.** Cactus.

**KENNY.** Cactus?

**ELI.** Cactus, Texas, baby! Nothin' like it, nothin' like it! *(STRANGER enters from stage right. She wears the same exact clothes as Lucie. Everything down to the blanket. They hold a cigarette and a lighter as they walk across the stage.)*

**STRANGER.** Hey there.

**ELI.** Hi, Stranger.

**LUCIE.** That's a pretty cool blanket.

**STRANGER.** Thanks. You too.

**LUCIE.** You thrift that?

**STRANGER.** Yeah. You?

**LUCIE.** Yeah.

**STRANGER.** Nice.

**KENNY.** Who are you?

**STRANGER.** Shut up. Nerd.

**KENNY.** Is that my lighter? Do you have my lighter and my cig?

**STRANGER.** I found them over there. I don't know who they belong to.

**KENNY.** You found my things! Thank you! I owe you.

**STRANGER.** They're not yours.

**KENNY.** But they are. They--

**ELI.** Not anymore.

**KENNY.** But—Hold on. You don't understand what happened. I was trying to smoke one and then--

**STRANGER.** You threw them into the void?

**KENNY.** No.

## CACTUS, TEXAS

**STRANGER.** Carelessly? Out of frustration? Careless ass. You don't care about anything that doesn't involve a fleeting, momentary notion of satisfaction. And for what?

**KENNY.** I don't know what you're talking about. I just need my cig so bad.

**STRANGER.** Do you deserve it? Do you deserve to be satisfied?

**KENNY.** I'm so stressed! I've been so stressed out today from getting lost and getting cold and the rats are dead and everywhere and the sun doesn't shine and-- (*Stranger lights the cig and takes a long drag. This just about kills Kenny.*)

**STRANGER.** Delicious. Is this a cowboy killer?

**KENNY.** No.

**ELI.** I was. Once upon a time.

**KENNY.** How'd you get it to work? I spent years trying to get it to work.

**STRANGER.** I pressed the thing. And I didn't lose my fucking cool when things got hard. (*To Lucie.*) Hey. You should really take into consideration who your *real* friends are in this world.

**LUCIE.** Okay.

**KENNY.** What's that supposed to mean?

**STRANGER.** A wise man once told me this.

**ELI.** Me.

**STRANGER.** Who's really gonna help you be the absolute best version of yourself out here? Really stop and think about it. I think... I think some people deserve to be left behind. Buried deep beneath us... You should consider sticking around here. Meeting everybody. We're really accepting, and supportive. I think you'd fit right in.

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