Barren Earth

By

Captain & Tennille

EXT. TOWN, MAIN STREET - DAY

What appears to have once been the center of prominence, is now a bleak, dormant existence.

Shop windows are either broken or boarded up, painted signs are faded to the point of being unrecognizable. Everything in the area is coated with dust.

A crowd of PEOPLE are gathered in the center of the street, staring at a large, steel silo that stands twelve feet high.

Everyone holds a cup, bowl, or bucket in their hand.

At the silo's base, a concrete basin four feet in diameter.

A few yards from the silo, a broken broomstick handle sticks in the ground. The overhead sun casts a shadow that is nearly dead center on an X in the ground.

The people's glance shifts between the silo and the shadow.

With just the slightest movement, the shadow falls, dead center on the X, and the silo begins to click.

The clicks are slow at first, but eventually pick up speed as square panels on the silo open to reveal small pipes.

Water trickles from the pipes, runs down the silo, and drops into the basin.

After only a few seconds, the water stops, and the panels close as the last bit of water trickles into the basin.

The water in the basin is low, measuring a quarter inch.

Without hesitation, the serene crowd turns savage.

They charge the silo, dipping their hands and various objects into the basin for just the slightest bit of water to bring to their lips.

Women push their children to the front of the crowd, but the men push the women out of the way. The children bite and claw at the men, but lose the battle, as the men shove past them to the water.

ABEL, mid thirties, dressed in tattered clothes, and REBECCA, late twenties, wearing a flowered dress that has seen better days, watch the scene from a short distance away with a mixture of horror and disgust. On the other side of the silo stands BASTION, late forties and dressed in a black suit with a black shirt. He watches as well, but attempts to calm the crowd.

BASTION

People, please. We mustn't fight with each other. We need to remain calm so we may harvest all we can.

The crowd pays no attention and keeps fighting toward the center.

Suddenly, a drain at the back of the basin opens and quickly swallows all the remaining water.

The crowd freezes, stunned over the loss.

Bastion steps forward to address the crowd, but waits. A pained expression on his face.

Members of the crowd steadily turn their attention to him.

BASTION My dear people, we cannot continue on in this fashion. It's getting us nowhere. Each and every day it's getting worse. The silo gives us less and less water, and we have less and less time to get it.

ISAAC, late thirties, steps forward from the crowd.

ISAAC That's why we have to hustle. If we don't, we won't get anything!

BASTION How do you know, Isaac?

ISAAC

It's like you said, Bastion. Every day we get less and less, so we have to rush to get what we can.

BASTION

Not if you...all of you...would listen to what I've told you countless times before.

Isaac becomes frustrated.

ISAAC Listen, Bastion, we've been going round and round with you on this, and the whole lot of us just ain't buying it. This ain't a message from God...

Bastion bites his tongue, frustration is written in the heavy lines on his face.

ISAAC ...this ain't a test from God, it's got nothing to do with God. This is just the end of civilization as we know it. It's about survival!

Bastion loses his control.

BASTION

Fool! Can't you see? That's why IT IS a sign from God! It's a test! Just as Noah was instructed to build the ark, we too have a purpose here!

ISAAC Oh yeah? Then what is it?

BASTION That has not yet been made clear, but soon, we will know.

The crowd stirs a bit. Isaac can only smirk.

ISAAC Yeah, we've heard that before.

BASTION Fine, you refuse to listen to reason? Why not ask Abel and Rebecca what they think?

The crowd turns their attention to Abel and Rebecca, still standing where they watched the riot.

ISAAC

Abel?

Abel looks to Rebecca, who gives him a look of encouragement.

We don't know what's going on, but we agree with Bastion. We need to stop this fighting and work together. If we don't, you'll be right and we'll all be dead.

A brief silence before Rebecca chimes in.

REBECCA

Tell them your idea.

ABEL

We need to designate a team to gather the water. About four people, each with a bucket, who can gather the water each day. If we do that, we can avoid all the confusion, and end up with more water to share.

ISAAC

How are four people going to gather as much water as all of us?

ABEL

Because what we're doing anymore isn't gathering. It's all out fighting. We spill more water than we collect. Look at your jugs. How much water did you get?

The crowd looks in their various objects. Nobody seems pleased with their haul. They look back to Abel.

ABEL

We also need someone to monitor the drain to hold the water in the basin until we can get it all out. We can gather the remaining water with towels, wring it into a bucket, and use that to water a small garden.

ISAAC

(crazy laugh) Crop? Are you serious? We don't have enough to drink and you want to waste it by watering plants?

BASTION

If we show God that we can work together, perhaps he'll show mercy on us.

ABEL

I'm afraid we don't have a choice. As bad as the water shortage is, we're almost out of food as well. Ever since you people decided to grab whatever you could get your hands on in the stores, we've been on the down slope.

BASTION

I'd also like to mention the baptismal pool. As blasphemous as it would have been, it could have proven a wonderful supplement to our daily supply. That is, until you all stole it.

JESSE, a late fifties man in the crowd, walks to the broken broomstick and pulls it from the ground.

JESSE I'm not standing for this anymore.

Jesse moves to the silo and jumps up onto the basin. He holds the broomstick like a baseball bat.

BASTION Jesse, please get down from there.

JESSE

No can do, preacher. We need to eat, and this horrible thing is the key to that.

Jesse whacks the silo with the broomstick. A loud ping echoes through the dust filled air.

BASTION Jesse, please get down!

Bastion tries to pry Jesse from the silo, unsuccessfully. With a few more swings, one of the silo's panels pops open.

He lowers the broomstick and peers at the small pipe inside.

He looks to the crowd.

JESSE Somebody get me a wrench. He looks back at the pipe, just as it juts out from the hole. It pierces his eyeball, and shoots a clean hole right through the back of his head.

The pipe pulls back, and as quickly as it arrived, it is gone. The panel closes as Jesse's body falls backward.

The crowd gasps in shock as they stare at Jesse's dead body. Blood flows from the exposed eye hole.

Bastion scans the shocked faces.

BASTION Do you all agree we have our answer? We have to work together.

Bastion turns to Isaac and Abel.

BASTION Gentleman, we'll need to transport Jesse's body to the burial ground. Please prepare to help me in doing so.

The two men nod as Bastion picks up the stick, puts it back into the ground, and walks away, leaving the shocked onlookers with Jesse's body.

INT. ABEL AND REBECCA'S HOUSE - DAY

A small house, the main room is both the kitchen and living room, with a wooden dining table at its center and a fireplace built into the wall. A small bedroom is at the back with a bed and dresser in the corner.

Abel and Rebecca enter through the front door. Rebecca immediately goes to the dresser, she begins to pack Abel's things.

Abel watches her through the doorway.

ABEL In a hurry to get rid of me?

Abel smiles, but Rebecca is quick with her response.

REBECCA I am, as a matter of fact.

ABEL

Really?

REBECCA Yes, because the sooner you leave, the sooner you'll be back. I hate it when you go. ABEL I know, it's just...everybody looks up to me...to us, you know? Rebecca finishes packing the bag and hands it to Abel. REBECCA Yes, I do. Just be back soon, please? ABEL You know I will. REBECCA If I lost you, I don't know what I'd do. ABEL I know, honey. I'll be back as fast as I can, alright? Rebecca nods, and Abel gives her a soft kiss. ABEL See you soon. Abel leaves and Rebecca rests her hands on the dining table, heartbreak in her eyes. EXT. THE FLATLANDS - NIGHT Night has fallen, but instead of the usual black, star-filled sky that most people are accustomed to, the air is filled with a thick green glow. Isaac and Abel pull a cart that carries Jesse's body, while

Bastion walks ahead of them.

Isaac looks at the sky with fear, Bastion reads from a Bible, easily illuminated by the green sky, and Abel has his head down, focusing on pulling the cart.

ISAAC I don't know how you guys just ignore that sky. Gives me the creeps. ABEL What do you expect when half the Earth gets wiped out by nuclear war? We're lucky that's all that changed.

BASTION The sky hasn't caused us any harm. Why are you alarmed, Isaac?

ISAAC Didn't we cart a guy out here about a month ago that got caught in some acid rain?

Bastion thinks, then remembers.

BASTION Oh, right. The drifter. Such a shame. He was very good with his hands.

ISAAC Yeah, well so was Jesse.

Abel raises his head, then stops suddenly, mouth agape.

Isaac doesn't notice at first, but does when the load becomes too much to pull.

ISAAC Hey, what's the big idea?

Isaac looks up, spotting whatever it is that Abel's viewing.

ISAAC

Sweet Jesus.

Bastion turns back, looking up from his bible.

BASTION Isaac, please, the blasphemy.

Abel and Isaac begin to cough and cover their faces.

Bastion turns to see what they're looking at. A half dozen bodies, dug up from their graves and torn to pieces.

Bastion removes a handkerchief from his jacket and places it over his mouth. The smell is unbearable.

BASTION Coyotes, most likely.

ISAAC Coyotes? What are coyotes doing out here?

BASTION This is where the lord has brought them.

ISAAC Oh yeah? Well, if I see one of those things around here, I guarantee you, we'll be having meat to eat.

Isaac reaches into his belt and pulls out a sharpened piece of steel. A primitive, makeshift knife, with a big, dagger like handle.

ABEL Look, let's just bury Jesse and get back home, okay? I'm not hunting for any coyotes, food or no food. It's too dangerous.

BASTION Yes, Abel, good idea. Let's just bury the body. It's going to have to be deeper this time, so the animals won't get to it.

Abel heads to the cart and reaches in, pulling out a shovel without a handle. He marvels at it.

ABEL Nice shovel. What happened to our handle?

ISAAC We had to use it for firewood. Don't worry, I brought buckets. We'll be done in no time.

Isaac reaches into the cart, pulling out two buckets and tosses one to Abel.

Bastion looks for a good spot and stops.

BASTION This will be good. Dig here. Abel and Isaac join Bastion, drop to their knees, and scoop at the dirt with their buckets.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. THE FLATLANDS - DAY

The sun has been up for a few hours and blazes in the distance.

Abel and Isaac have made great progress on the hole, now standing ten feet below the Earth.

Bastion sits on the edge, watching their progress.

Abel looks up, wipes the heavy sweat and dirt from his face.

ABEL I think this is good enough, Bastion. A normal grave is only six feet deep.

BASTION I know. I just don't want the same thing to happen to Jesse as the others.

Abel and Isaac exchange a glance. Both are exhausted and aggravated, but go back to digging the hole.

After a few scoops, they notice something. The ground is now harder, more compact. They freeze.

> ABEL No. It can't be.

ISAAC I think it is.

Bastion looks deep in the hole from the rim.

BASTION What? What is it?

Abel and Isaac don't answer, they start digging, faster and more furious than before until...

Water seeps into the hole from the ground underneath. Slowly at first, then faster and faster until finally, it bursts into the sky, getting them all wet. ISAAC We found water! ABEL

We're saved!

Abel and Isaac join arms, dancing round and round in celebration. Bastion joins in, as all three men dance in the spray.

ISAAC No more rationing, no more hoping for rain that's not filled with acid, no more...

Suddenly, a coyote joins the dance, latches itself onto Isaac, and sends them both to the ground.

Abel reacts fast, hitting the coyote with a bucket, but it won't budge. Isaac fights it off with an arm, and puts up a good fight.

The coyote snaps at Isaac's face, coming close, but not quite getting him.

Then, a loud yelp echoes through the air. In an instant, the coyote is dead, Isaac's makeshift knife buried deep in its throat.

Isaac pushes the coyote off, and claps his hands together.

ISAAC Now, let's fill up our buckets and get this coyote up on the cart. Tonight, we'll eat good.

EXT. TOWN, MAIN STREET - DAY

Abel, Isaac, and Bastion walk along. Isaac and Bastion chat gleefully, still overjoyed by their find.

Abel is in deep thought.

BASTION I told you. If we just stayed the course of the righteous and kept the faith, God would show us the way.

Bastion looks to Abel.

BASTION

What's the matter, brother? Are you not pleased with our find?

ABEL

No, no, I'm pleased. I've just been trying to think of a way for us to get the water here, without having to go all the way out to the flatlands.

BASTION

Any thoughts?

ABEL

Well, we could build a pipeline of some sort, but I don't think we've got the materials for it. Our best bet is to dig in the area, see if the water's underneath us here too.

BASTION

An excellent idea. I do hope you'll head up the team.

ABEL

Sorry, Bastion, but I think this is a job for the whole town. Besides, any fool can dig a hole.

Bastion smiles and pats Abel on the back.

BASTION

This is very true, Abel. We'll need everyone to chip in. After we find the water, it's going to take a lot of work to plant crops and get a food supply harvested, but what a difference a day makes.

Isaac looks ahead in wonder.

ISAAC What's going on up there?

Bastion and Abel look to see the townspeople, gathered around the silo. Bastion looks at the sun.

BASTION Probably waiting for today's water supply. ABEL But who's that man?

Bastion spots ADAM, a late forties man dressed in a black, dust soiled suit and red shirt. He stands on the basin of the silo, perfectly still with his arms folded.

> ISAAC Looks like somebody's trying to muscle in on Bastion's territory.

BASTION Not in that shirt.

Bastion beelines to the basin.

BASTION Excuse me. What do you think you're doing?

ADAM Are you in charge here?

BASTION Well, we work as a team in this community--

ADAM Are you Bastion?

BASTION

Yes.

ADAM These people said you're in charge.

Adam steps down from the basin.

BASTION Okay, but what do you want?

ADAM

To apologize.

Bastion is confused. Abel and Isaac walk up.

ABEL What's going on, Bastion?

BASTION I...I don't know.

Adam motions for the three men to step away from the crowd.

All eyes are on Bastion for an answer.

BASTION Keep your eye on the sun. I'll find out what's going on.

ADAM

It's a long story, and I'll fill you in on the details, but in short, your community was chosen for a specific experiment on basic human survival in the twenty second century. We cut off all your ties to the outside world, limited your water supply, and essentially caused you to revert back to the late nineteenth century.

Isaac grits his teeth.

ISAAC Why you sonofabitch, you did this to us? I oughta kill you.

Isaac raises a fist, but Abel puts a solid hand on Isaac's

isaac raises a fist, but Abel puts a solid hand on Isaac's fist and calms him down.

ABEL So, we really weren't out of water? You just cut it off?

ADAM Correct. All part of the test.

BASTION Test, eh? Well, how did we do?

ADAM

Quite well, actually. There were five other towns besides yours, and they died off or resorted to cannibalism within a few months. You've survived all this time, unfortunately unbeknownst to us.

BASTION How could that happen?

ADAM

Just a glitch in our system, but it was rectified yesterday when somebody activated the security mechanism on the silo. ABEL I'll be damned. Jesse did something noble with his dying act.

ADAM We're truly sorry for all this, and we're going to do our best to make it right. To make sure that you and your people will never have to toil in filth like this ever again. We'll--

BASTION I'm sorry, but who is this "we" you keep referring to?

ADAM My apologies.

Adam produces a card and hands it to Bastion.

Bastion laughs heartily, handing the card to Abel.

BASTION Didn't I tell you that God would provide?

Abel scans the card.

ABEL Yes you did, but I never imagined it would be quite like this.

Isaac glances at the card over Abel's shoulder. It reads:

"Adam - Governmental Operations Department - G.O.D"

ISAAC I'll be damned.

The three men share a laugh.

FADE OUT.

THE END