

Friendly's Fire (or, Guy Friendly Meets the Saint of Thieves)

Synopsis

In a cabin in the Last Frontier, Guy Friendly, a Gulf War veteran and bee-herder, has just had a tooth stolen during casual sex. His best friend Todd, a pawn-shop owner dressed as an astronaut, finds Friendly in a fevered state. Trapped by the snow, Todd has little choice but enter Friendly's fevered dream, to unravel the events of the night before – and the events of the Gulf War that led Friendly to become a shut-in. An homage to Western movies, He-Man action figures, and my belief as a child that the Sesame Street Muppet Guy Smiley was in fact God, *Friendly's Fire* shows us what lengths a man will go to preserve his friend's sanity, and what lengths another will go to allow himself to remember his brother, who died in service.

Production/Developmental History:

Friendly's Fire had its first preview performance on October 5, 2017, and its world Premiere at Barter Theatre (Barter II) on October 14, 2017 (directed by Richard Rose, Producing Artistic Director at Barter Theatre). It ran in rep. for 21 performances. Previously, it had a workshop production at the Classic City Fringe Festival in Athens, GA (directed by Dina Canup).

Friendly's Fire won the 2015 Appalachian Festival of Plays and Playwrights (2015), and was a Semi-Finalist for the Princess Grace Playwriting Award Fellowship (2017), nuVoices at The Actors Theatre of Charlotte (2015), and Boulder Ensemble Theatre of Colorado's Generations (2015). It was also a Finalist for Kernodle Playwriting Award (2016). One of Todd's monologues will be published in *The Best Stage Men's Stage Monologues 2017* (Smith and Kraus).

Characters:

Guy Friendly, a Bee Herder, former Army pilot, and the embodiment of the frontier spirit.

Todd, a relocated Texan, part-time deputy, and pawnbroker. For the majority of the play he wears a spacesuit: NOTE: it should be a cheesy send-up of a 1950's b-movie spacesuit, not something one needs to purchase from NASA.

Jessica, a punky girl who collects teeth.

Queen Bee, a bee who, at times, stands in for Friendly's wife, Natalie.

Actor 1:

Moss Pete, a man made entirely out of peat moss

Santa Claus, The Saint of Thieves and Pawnbrokers

Bee 1, a bee

Reynolds, a local deputy (Base character)

Actor 2:

Young Man (aka Jason Friendly), Friendly's brother; a deceased UH-60 Gunner (Base Character)

Poacher, a very dangerous man

Voice of Dennis, off-stage character

Bee 2, a bee

4M 2W with doubling. Note: the doubling is not "suggested." Rather, each Actor has a "base" character which manifests in different ways during the course of the play.

Setting:

Inside Friendly's Cabin in Alaska. It will change a bit as we enter Friendly's head and take a journey to the North Pole, late 1990's.

Where we are in the story:

Todd has come over to visit Guy Friendly in his cabin in a remote part of Alaska. Guy has become a shut-in following the circumstances of the Gulf War (Kuwait). Earlier that night, Guy was assaulted by a one-night stand and is now living in a fantasy world comprising action figures brought to life mixed with his memories of the war and his estranged wife. Todd just finished helping Guy tear up pieces of the cabin for a fire they're building in a floor. Friendly's believes that they are in the mountains somewhere, not in his room. The fire is finished, they sit close...

(A moment. The men seem to be enjoying the fire. SOUND OF A BEAR GROWLING.)

FRIENDLY

Tell me that's your stomach, Todd.

TODD

...not really hungry.

FRIENDLY

Get into the cave...slowly.

(He picks up the jar with QUEEN BEE and slowly moves behind the sheets. He produces his pistol.)

TODD

What is -?

FRIENDLY

Belonged to my Dad. [Note: Insert type of gun here; actor's and director's discretion.] It's a collector's item, if you know your guns. Has a nice kick, my father used to say. Give it a nice squeeze. The first time I held it, I was scared of it. I remember the sweat on my brow, the wiggle in my legs. Don't know what possessed me to take it with me.

TODD

You're...not going to use it...

FRIENDLY

We're gonna wait here. Just wait here. Bear will probably be gone by morning.

TODD

A bear?

FRIENDLY

Yes, sir. This is Bear Country.

(FRIENDLY'S POLAR BEARSKIN RUG rises, and walks around the room. He disappears behind the sheet somewhere.)

TODD

You think we should put out the fire?

FRIENDLY

Nah.

(Pause. FRIENDLY stretches out.)

He wandered off. We're safe for now.

TODD

Okay. Good. Safe is good.

(FRIENDLY produces a ukulele from under his coat. TODD chuckles. FRIENDLY strums a bit.)

TODD

You gonna play me something?

FRIENDLY

Yeah?

TODD

Sure. (Chuckles.) Play me something, Friendly. Anything to drown out the howling of the wind.

(He starts playing.)

FRIENDLY

(sings)

TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
YOU WRECK EVERYTHING
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
I WISH IT WAS SPRING
I KNOW GLOBAL WARMING IS A MYTH
WHEN I SEE YOUR CONTINENTAL DRIFT

(During this sequence, POLAR BEAR returns. He interacts with TODD a bit.

QUEEN BEE also enters. Finally, JASON enters wearing camouflage.)

FRIENDLY (Contd.)

TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
I WISH I COULD FREEZE YOUR HEART
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
YOU TEAR MY WORLD APART
YOU ARE AN ISLAND MADE OF TEETH
THERE'S ONLY MORE OF YOU BENEATH

TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
WE WILL ALL FREEZE TO DEATH
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
IT IS ANYONE'S GUESS

HOW LONG YOU'LL KEEP US FEELING BLUE
I'VE NEVER MET SOMEONE LIKE YOU

ALL

TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
DON'T YOU DARE SAY GOODBYE
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
EVEN YOUR PARTING IS A LIE
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
YOU ARE A WISH MADE FROM A BONE
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
YOU REMIND US WE'RE ALONE

TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER
(In harmony)
TUMBLEWEED GLACIER

(JASON exits. QUEEN BEE returns to her "jar.")

POLAR BEAR and FRIENDLY

Now that was nice.

TODD

Thank you, friend. We needed that bit of harmony.

POLAR BEAR (Note: has a slight Russian accent)
Can't tell you how long it's been since folks invited me to sing along. Heh heh. Where

POLAR BEAR (Contd.)

are you all heading?

TODD

North pole.

POLAR BEAR

Quite a ways to go.

FRIENDLY

Travel much?

POLAR BEAR

I used to all the time. I'm Bera, last of the Golden Paw. My traveling days have ended since....The Egg Man started picking us off.

FRIENDLY

Egg Man?

POLAR BEAR

Poacher. Been hunting the Golden Paw for many years. Tracked us through Iceland. Russia. Here. He's a man like I've never seen before. He's made entirely...of teeth.

FRIENDLY

Teeth?

POLAR BEAR

Mmm-hmmm.

FRIENDLY

Have you seen a girl with a tooth necklace?

POLAR BEAR

Is she with the Egg Man? (FRIENDLY shrugs.) Well, I try to stay off his grid. So, if she travels with the Egg Man I'm happy to say I have never met her. But a necklace of teeth. Sounds like Egg Man all right.

FRIENDLY

I imagine you get many hunters up here.

POLAR BEAR

That's true. But most of them are respectful. They free our spirit, use our fur, eat our meat. Not exactly the way I want to go, but to be a trophy. As a mere trophy your soul is caught between worlds. But, if respectful, there is a release of spirit...it's what makes the aurora borealis. It's the song of the Golden Paw. You can only hear the music when you enter the spirit world, but it causes all this light.

TODD

I always thought that was some kinda reflection.

POLAR BEAR

Well, it is. Just because you can use science to explain spiritual phenomenon, it doesn't mean spiritual phenomenon can be explained *away* by science.

TODD

That's some philosophy you got there. Friendly doesn't believe.

FRIENDLY

Hush now.

TODD

Calls the man upstairs "the Sky Wizard."

POLAR BEAR

Man upstairs?

TODD

Yeah, you know. The Man Upstairs.

POLAR BEAR

Ah. I don't really have much use for stairs, so I'm not sure I follow your meaning. I tend to live in caves. Hiding in shadows of ice from the Egg Man and his ilk. (Beat.) Say...hungry? I know a good patch in the ice where the salmon try to hide. What say you?

TODD

I'm starving. All we've been living off is honey.

POLAR BEAR

HONEY!

FRIENDLY

Well...

(He takes out a jar of honey.)

POLAR BEAR

I suggest a trade. My fish for your honey.

TODD

Partner – you have a deal!

QUEEN BEE

Aren't you even going to ask me?

(LIGHTS UP on QUEEN BEE. Both FRIENDLY and POLAR BEAR regard her.)

FRIENDLY

Queen – are you all right?

QUEEN BEE

Oh, I'm great. Take without asking, be demanding. You're all bears to me.

(A long pause. FRIENDLY approaches her in her space.)

FRIENDLY

I never realized...I never knew it was like that.

QUEEN BEE

I would do anything for you. Obviously. It's just nice to be asked. (Beat.) The honey is supposed to be for the eggs.

FRIENDLY

Eggs?

QUEEN BEE

The children.

(LIGHTS CHANGE. QUEEN BEE suddenly moves differently. She is less ethereal, more "real." She is now FRIENDLY'S wife, Natalie.)

FRIENDLY

The children (beat.) Are you...painting in here?

QUEEN BEE

The whole point of this room was...I can't look at it anymore.

FRIENDLY

I didn't say "never."

QUEEN BEE

Right.

FRIENDLY

I just said not now. So much has happened.

QUEEN BEE

You've been saying "not now" for quite some time. I finally got your meaning.

FRIENDLY

No, wait, my meaning is not....I don't mean I...I wish you wouldn't paint over it, though. The nursery rhymes. The cartoon bees. I think....I think it's a great room for a baby.

QUEEN BEE

We don't have a baby.

FRIENDLY

Well, not yet.

QUEEN BEE

Then, when?

FRIENDLY

Just not....

BOTH

Not now.

QUEEN BEE

Will you help me paint?

FRIENDLY

We'll just have to paint it all again when –

QUEEN BEE

Don't. (Beat.) I think...I think I need this to be a choice. This room is always going to be here reminding me that time is passing, that everything is...passing. I don't want to live in a house where there's one room that we never talk about, never go into, because we're waiting for someone who is never going to come. Guy...it's fine.

(Beat. It's obviously not.)

It's fine. Some people. They don't have children. So...can we paint it?

(FRIENDLY nods. This breaks her a bit, but she holds it in.)

Okay. Then, let's paint it. That hive of yours is like having children anyway, isn't it? Lots of honey for the taking...

(LIGHTS CHANGE. QUEEN BEE becomes QUEEN BEE again. POLAR BEAR looks at FRIENDLY. A moment.)

FRIENDLY

Queen Bee. May I...may we...partake of this honey?

QUEEN BEE

See that? Didn't need to growl, and you didn't drop dead. Yes. Yes, you may.

FRIENDLY

Thank you.

(QUEEN BEE nods. She regards POLAR BEAR and turns away. POLAR BEAR notices. He gets down on a knee.)

POLAR BEAR

On behalf of all bears, I apologize, milady.

QUEEN BEE

Thanks. (Beat.) Thank you.

(POLAR BEAR smiles. LIGHTS FADE on QUEEN BEE.)

(LIGHTS CHANGE. POLAR BEAR and TODD sit near the fire. TODD produces a frying pan. POLAR BEAR has a half dozen fresh-caught salmon.)

FRIENDLY

And so we made a slightly bigger fire. Bera showed us how to eat salmon raw. Todd showed Berathe joys of cooking.

TODD

...you're narrating now?

FRIENDLY

And we danced by the fire.

TODD

Danced?

FRIENDLY

Danced! And it's a great dance, Todd! Come on!

(LIGHTS CHANGE. POLAR BEAR puts his arms around TODD. They dance. It's a little awkward. FRIENDLY smiles. A moment. FRIENDLY takes the jar with the queen bee out of his jacket. QUEEN BEE enters.)

I haven't danced in so long. Not since...

(He puts the jar away. LIGHTS CHANGE. She approaches FRIENDLY, as if a blushing bride. Her manner is different – playful. A song you might hear at a wedding plays. They begin to slow dance.)

QUEEN BEE

You hate this.

FRIENDLY

I don't like so many people looking at me.

QUEEN BEE

They're looking at me.

FRIENDLY

Yeah, well...who wouldn't?

QUEEN BEE

My mom is pissed.

FRIENDLY

Why?

QUEEN BEE

Not wearing white.

FRIENDLY

So?

QUEEN BEE

You know. Traditional.

FRIENDLY

That all started with Queen Victoria. She said a lady getting married should only wear white.

QUEEN BEE

I didn't know that.

FRIENDLY

And didn't we go to war with the British? Aren't we speaking American English instead of, you know...

QUEEN BEE
(Bad accent)

Grammatically proper English.

FRIENDLY
(Playing along)

So, so proper. Women used to wear all kinds of colors. Mostly red. Not so much yellow and black, but...it's more traditional to not wear white.

(They lean in to kiss, and stop.)

QUEEN BEE

Your brother's speech.

FRIENDLY

He's been at the open bar.

QUEEN BEE

No, it was great. Really said a lot about you two.

FRIENDLY

Yeah.

QUEEN BEE

(Beat.) I can't believe you have to go back –

FRIENDLY

Not now.

QUEEN BEE

-so soon. I just. No, I know. And really, I'm fine with it. I really am...it's just...I wish you didn't have to.

FRIENDLY

We'll be careful.

We?
QUEEN BEE

Yeah – him and me.
FRIENDLY

Right.
QUEEN BEE

He's the best gunner there is. You know, last time, we...

Yes?
QUEEN BEE

Nothing...not the time.
FRIENDLY

Right. Not the time.
QUEEN BEE

(A tense moment. They hold each other close. QUEEN BEE regards friendly.)

Well, she's still mad at me.

Your mom? (Beat.) The hell with her. (He looks around.) Shit. You think she heard me?
FRIENDLY

Yes.
QUEEN BEE
(Smiling)

Man. Great way to begin.
FRIENDLY

It's okay. We're not going to last.
QUEEN BEE

...what?
FRIENDLY

(QUEEN BEE becomes stiff. LIGHTS CHANGE.)

Nothing lasts. QUEEN BEE

That's not true. FRIENDLY

This is just temporary. QUEEN BEE

No. FRIENDLY

You are just a station on the way. QUEEN

That's...that's not how it works. FRIENDLY

Don't miss your helicopter. QUEEN BEE

Helicopter? FRIENDLY

(SOUND of a helicopter.)

Your brother is waiting. QUEEN BEE

No...he can't be. FRIENDLY

He is waiting for you to board. QUEEN BEE

Permission to...not. FRIENDLY

(SOUND of a helicopter getting closer.)

You have to go. QUEEN BEE

I want us to be safe. FRIENDLY

I know.
QUEEN BEE

But, it's a battle for...
FRIENDLY

It's the currency of the world.
QUEEN BEE

What is?
FRIENDLY

(A SHOT! POLAR BEAR stands roaring. LIGHTS CHANGE. QUEEN BEE exits. TODD leaps up! POLAR BEAR turns. He stands in front of TODD, shielding him, sticking his neck out, as another shot rings out. It hits POLAR BEAR. He stumbles and falls, almost in the fire.)

(FRIENDLY draws his firearm. He looks around. POACHER enters. POLAR BEAR lies, breathing heavy.)

You men all right?
POACHER

(FRIENDLY regards POACHER – he is entirely wrapped up. His face covered by a scarf. Aviator goggles over the scarf. He wears a heavy white coat. FRIENDLY stands in front POLAR BEAR holding his piece.)

I saw the Bear.
POACHER (Contd.)

Stand down, Poacher. The bear's with us.
FRIENDLY

The bear...is with you...friend, now I've heard it all. Lower your piece, friend.
POACHER

I'm not feeling very friendly what with your taking a shot at someone at my table.
FRIENDLY

POACHER

It's down now, might as well let me have it.

TODD

We're losing him, Friendly.

POACHER

It's a bear! Look at me – I'm on your side.

FRIENDLY

On my side? Taking a shot at me and mine, and you're on my side? (Beat. To TODD.)
We'll give him a proper burial.

POACHER

(Laughs)

In the ice? You're a special kind of stupid, ain't you?

FRIENDLY

That's right. I'm stupid. And I'm aiming a gun. At your head. And I'm fixing to put a hole through it if you don't turn around and crawl back on whatever floating 'berg brought you here.

POACHER

Crazy liberals, right? Save the seals, save the bears, save the whales, save the glaciers.
And you call yourself a man.

(FRIENDLY cocks his gun and takes very careful aim.)

POACHER (Contd.)

Well, I can see when I'm not wanted.

(He turns and leaves.)

TODD

Are you the Egg Man?

(Pause.)

POACHER

That's just a myth, son. There are no people made of teeth.

(POACHER exits.)

POLAR BEAR

Ah, man. He'll be back for me. To finish the job...can't be like this. Friends, I need you

POLAR BEAR (Contd.)

to free my spirit.

TODD

You don't know what you're saying, Bera.

POLAR BEAR

I do. I can see my relations. My family. I need to...join that great song in the sky. You'll see me in the lights. With the spirits of all bears. Watching you. (Beat.) Free me.

(TODD turns away.)

FRIENDLY

You don't see what I see, do you?

(TODD doesn't respond.)

I'm holding him. His innards are...out. His leg...the bone is...I can't even hear the blade turning anymore...

(FRIENDLY starts to cry. SHADOW of a helicopter blade. Sounds of battle.)

I can't carry him, Todd.

TODD

I know.

FRIENDLY

I can't...I can't carry him. Oh, God. He's looking at me... another UH-60 goes down in the distance. Wait...we were on a mission. Combat Search and Rescue of other shot down aircrafts. Out of the corner of my eye I could see where the fire was coming from...it was...it was...

(FRIENDLY looks down. SHADOW of the helicopter dissolves. SOUNDS of battle die down. LIGHTS return. TODD approaches FRIENDLY.)

TODD

Why don't you let me...

FRIENDLY

...let you?

TODD

I can...I can put the bear down, okay? You don't have to do this alone.

FRIENDLY

Right. Right. So, long Bera. It was a hell of a run.

TODD

Bera.

FRIENDLY

Best gunner in...

(LIGHTS CHANGE. FRIENDLY drops the gun and moves to the tub. Crawls in. TODD looks at him, and back at POLAR BEAR.)

TODD

Oh, great Bera. Last of the Golden Paw. Great fisherman. Great comrade. Great friend. We release you from the pains of this earth to join your relations. To join those who served...who caught fish before you. You are out of danger, now. My friend. You are out of danger.

(He raises the gun. He doesn't fire. Instead, he says....)

Bang!