Memories of Eden

Christopher Snethen*
Christopher Snethen

Memories of Eden

Setting: The entire play takes place in Stanley’s apartment. It is a humble apartment with a small table at center stage, a sink and a stove on the upstage wall, a sofa at stage left. Sitting next to the sofa on the downstage side is a coffee table on which are Menorah candles. All of the candles are burnt down except for one. There are no bright colors in the entire scene.

Characters:

Stanley - A young man, mid-twenties.
Nick - An old man, thin, with a long white beard. He is dirty and wears torn clothes. He is Santa Claus.

The play

(Stanley and Nick enter from a door at stage right. Stanley holds Nick’s arm around his neck and is leading him in. Nick is obviously drunk.)

Nick: (mumbling angrily) What’re ya doin’? Leave me alone.
Stanley: (leading him to the couch) Take it easy, old fella, I gotcha. (sits NICK on the couch)
Nick: You ain’t got me, I got myself. (pause) Ya see, I can stand up by myself. (He leans back and speaks to himself.) You ain’t got me, I got myself. Goddamn people just leave me alone. You ain’t got me. Ain’t nobody got nobody. Ain’t nobody got shit. Ain’t nobody worth a shit no more. (sighs) If you want to get me, get me a gun. (STANLEY is setting the table for one and preparing food on the stove. NICK continues to speak.) If I had a gun, I’d shoot somebody. If you wanted somebody shot, all you’d have to do is say, ‘Nick, shoot him.’ and I’d shoot him. I’d shoot anybody, just get me a gun. Whole damn world needs shot. Whole world’s already shot. (laughs drunkenly at his own joke) Didja hear that? Whole world’s already shot.
Stanley: Yah, that’s a good one. Whole world’s shot. (NICK leans back and sighs. He has settled down when STANLEY has finished setting the table. STANLEY walks to where NICK is and tries to help him up.) Get up, I made you some eggs.
Nick: (pulling his arms from STANLEY’S hands) I can get up myself! I’m not crippled. (NICK gets to his feet and makes his way, still drunken, but not as bad, to the chair where the food is laid out. STANLEY follows and sits across from him.)
Nick takes a bite of food.) Who are you?

Stanley: My name is Stanley. I found you sleeping on the street outside.

Nick: Why didn’t you leave me be?

Stanley: It’s too cold to be sleeping out there on the ground. Especially for a guy your age.

Nick: Guy my age, huh? Think I’m about to kick the bucket or somethin’? I ain’t too old to kick your ass! (He bangs his fist on the table, and then does it three times rapidly. He takes another bite of food.)

Stanley: Listen, you don’t have to stay. I just thought I’d give you a break. You can leave right now if you want.

Nick: You ain’t givin’ me no break. There ain’t no breaks. (takes another bite of food) So, you’re just a good Christian, huh?

Stanley: Actually, I’m Jewish. But if you mean my bringing you in here, I couldn’t leave you out in the cold.

Nick: So, you’re Jewish, huh? That’s funny, that’s really funny.

Stanley: What’s funny?

Nick: (pushes back the plate, reaches in his pocket and gets a cigarette, which he lights with a match) Nothin’. Nevermind. (STANLEY gets up and gets an ashtray from next to the stove and puts it on the table next to NICK. NICK takes a drag on his cigarette) So, you bein’ Jewish, does that mean you believe in forever?

Stanley: Sure. Don’t you?

Nick: I don’t believe in forever, Stan. There ain’t no such thing. Forever’s bull shit. It’s all bullshit.

Stanley: Listen, I don’t know what you’re getting at, but you can drop the sad bum bit.

Nick: (takes another drag on his cigarette and stands up and walks around the apartment while he speaks) It’s like a big machine, runs good for a long time, but it’s got to wear out. And it clunks along right before it’s done, puffing like an old man, doin’ its damndest to keep up. But it does wear out. Didja ever hear of a guy named Malthus?

Stanley: (thinks for a moment) No.

Nick: (laughs) No big deal, didn’t expect you to. Doesn’t matter anyway.

Stanley: (obviously bothered) Who are you? How do you know all this? Why are you telling me? A guy I found laying in the street is telling me about forever.

Nick: (putting out his cigarette) My name is Nick. Used to be a big man, head of an international operation. Used to live up North and run this thing out of my house.

Stanley: (doubtful) Where up North? Albany?

Nick: (laughs) No, it was up further than Albany. One day I just got tired of it
Memories of Eden

all. My market disappeared. So I decided to go to Florida like all the other geezers that get sick of their lives. My wife didn’t want to go, so I left her behind. (reflecting) Operation ran a lot of years. Market just ran out. (pause) And the machine wore down.

Stanley: So why aren’t you in Florida?

Nick: Never got that far. When I got to the city, I fell in love with a whore. She rolled me and took my money. So I started drinkin’. And here I am.

Stanley: So why don’t you go to Florida now?

Nick: Ah, shit, Stan. If the machine ain’t workin’ her, it ain’t gonna work in Florida.

Stanley: Listen, why don’t you just cut it out with all this broken machine crap!? You quit your life, end of story. It doesn’t have anything to do with any machine running down.

Nick: Scary thought, ain’t it? And it’s a shame more than words can say. I wish I could say something that would make us feel better, but that’s sort of got us where we are now, ain’t it? And I’d like to say that maybe if we all worked real hard, things could be all right again. (gets a cigarette from his pocket, lights it, and sits down at the table) And it would be great if somebody could say, ‘Buddy, could you spare a dime for a cup of coffee?’ and he wouldn’t get shot. (takes a drag on his cigarette) But I’m not so sure things could ever be like that again. Hell, I don’t think people really want to be like that again. And even if they did, I don’t think it could be.

Stanley: But I took you in when it was cold. And I gave you food. Doesn’t that mean anything?

Nick: Sure it means something. It’s what makes it so hard to swallow. Beautiful traces of something gone. Memories of Eden, I guess you could say. But putting oil on the gears of a wore out machine ain’t gonna make it work. (pause) I guess when I look out the window at the shapes moving in front of my eyes and the grass on the ground that wouldn’t have been there if someone didn’t plant it, and the sidewalks so Goddamned hard and straight and cold, I can’t help thinkin’ we’re comin’ up on the end. Talk about ways to stop it if you want, it ain’t gonna help much. Everything’s got to come to an end. Was there ever a minute that you didn’t think it was gonna end? I used to, but it seems to me like we’ve reached an end. That’s all there is folks, there ain’t no more. (takes a drag on his cigarette, stands up and begins to pace) It might’ve been a a different story if all we ever wanted to do was survive. But we want to get ahead, that’s human nature. And what goes up, must come down. You can blame the industries if you, or you can blame McDonalds. It doesn’t really matter. They got the same drive the cave man did, they just had the caveman’s tools when they started. In a way, it’s all been leading up to this. I guess you just got to swallow hard and accept the fact that it’s over.
And if you don't then your kids are going to, or their kids. Sometimes, when I'm really drunk, the thought seems kinda beautiful to me. I imagine I was a little boy, standin' on a hill side watchin' fireworks explode in the sky, only it was in really slow motion, fireworks seemed to last a million years. But somewhere along the line they got to burn out. Somewhere along the line it's got to stop. The only way we know how to stop a stop is to make a go, and that's how we got here.

Stanley: (gets up and begins to clear the table but stops suddenly) Listen, why don't you take your Goddamn machine and get the hell out!!

Nick: You're probably right. I should just leave. (exits)

(STANLEY runs his hand through his hair and looks around the apartment. The Menorah candles on the coffee table catch his eye, and he walks over to them. Using a book of matches that is lying on the table, he lights the last candle. The lights fade and the candle is there in the darkness. STANLEY blows out the candle and exits.)