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# Once On The Dark Continent

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ONCE ON THE DARK CONTINENT

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Honors College Graduate Distinction

By

Katrina Alexandria Bidwell

\*\*\*\*\*

Western Kentucky University  
2011

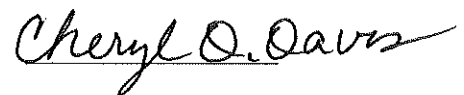
CE/T Committee:

Professor Cheryl Davis, Advisor

Professor Bruce Schulte

Professor John Baker

Approved by



Advisor

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## ABSTRACT

Set in the fictional village of Buguta in post-genocide Rwanda, *Once on the Dark Continent* follows the experiences of a young doctor working for the Doctors Without Borders Program. Dr. Erica Davis unwittingly finds herself in a country where the past has continued to repeat itself a decade after a devastating civil war, unbeknownst to most of the outside world. Their history isn't the only thing plaguing the villagers like a parasite: Erica's careful attention to the patients at the Buguta clinic leads her to diagnose them with toxoplasmosis, a revelation that has the potential to begin solving the myriad problems in the village.

Keywords: Honor's College, CE/T, Play, Rwanda, Thesis

Dedicated to my friends, family, and everyone who has touched my college experience

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Erica would have never been able to brave the Dark Continent without the support, encouragement, and expertise of many people. I owe a great amount of thanks to my CE/T advisor, Dr. Cheryl Davis, for encouraging me to pursue a rather unconventional thesis. I am also grateful to my other committee members, Dr. Bruce Schulte and professor John Baker, for their encouragement and enthusiasm. I am greatly indebted to Professors Scott Stroot and Tom Coash in the Department of Theatre and Dance for dedicating countless hours of their time to this project in addition to their invaluable expertise in the fields of theatre and playwriting. I would also like to thank the Honors College for providing me with an intellectually challenging environment for the entirety of my college career. Many thanks and all my love to my family and friends who have shared many late nights and much encouragement with me both while I worked on this project and throughout my time at Western. Many thanks to my friend James Wayuni Githinji for providing his help with the use of Kiswahili in the play.

Finally, I owe a great debt of thanks to everyone who believed that a biology student could become a playwright.



## VITA

March 18, 1989.....Born—Bowling Green, Kentucky  
2007.....Glasgow High School, Glasgow, Kentucky  
2009.....Study abroad in Kenya  
2010.....Study abroad in Ecuador

## FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Fields: Biology, Spanish

Minor Field: Theatre

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## PREFACE

What follows is a work of fiction, the product of my efforts to bring together my interests and passions to create my CE/T. I have always been fascinated by works that bring together science and a dramatic plot, making both accessible to a wider audience than they otherwise would have been. When the time came to begin work on my CE/T, I, with the encouragement of many people, realized that I had the opportunity to create such a work of my own.

It was important to me that the events of my play, while not entirely likely, were based on scientific fact when possible and at least theoretically possible otherwise. The cornerstone of the scientific foundation of *Once on the Dark Continent* is the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. Various scientific studies have linked the incidence of infection with *T. gondii* with the incidence of psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia and other schizoaffective disorders (Flegr, 125). The most recent studies support the hypothesis that the interaction of the host's immune system with *T. gondii* and the parasite's action on neurotransmitter systems (most notably, those for dopamine and serotonin) are culpable for the behavioral changes observed in infected patients who also suffer from schizophrenia and other psychiatric disorders (Hinze-Selch, 134). Approximately 70-80% of patients suffering from schizophrenia experience delusions and hallucinations; other common symptoms include disorganized behavior and social withdrawal in addition speech difficulties and abnormalities (Turner, 21). The delusions and hallucinations

experienced by schizophrenics can induce violent behavior (such as that experienced by the character James).

Erica's system for diagnosing her patients with Toxoplasmosis is based on a protocol for laboratory diagnosis of the disease set forth by the CDC (Toxoplasmosis). Even with the very limited resources available, Erica would have been able to follow the protocol involving a mouse model almost exactly. One major departure is that Erica used wild mice found around the clinic; in a real-life setting carefully raised laboratory mice would have been used.

Another important aspect of the play was an accurate representation of at least some of the historical events that affect the plot of the play. The Rwandan Civil war took place between 1990 and 1993, with the events now recognized as the Rwandan Genocide taking place in 1994 (Peress, 2-14). The conflict was between the government of then president Juvénal Habyarimana and the Rwandan Patriotic Front; it was the assassination of Habyarimana in 1994 that proved to be the catalyst for the Rwandan genocide. At the core were ethnic tensions between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority; most of the violence was directed toward the Tutsis who previously had a large amount of power and influence over the Hutus. During the genocide, over 1 million persons were killed, about one seventh of the country's population at that time (Taylor, 1). That I chose to set the play in the year 2007 was also significant. At the end of 2007, Doctors Without Borders ended its presence in Rwanda after having provided aid there since 1991 (MSF).

Finally, in the play several characters use words from the language Kiswahili. Though it is not the official language of Rwanda, it is commonly spoken throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In order to ensure accuracy, I consulted a friend of mine, James Githinji,

who is a native speaker of Kiswahili. A glossary of the terms used appears at the end of the play.

# **Once on the Dark Continent**

**By**

**Katrina Bidwell**

CAST:

Erica Davis – late 20s/early 30s, young physician who just finished her residency.

Reuben – mid/late 30s, native Rwandan male nurse working at Burguta.

Bradley Williams – late 20s/early 30s, physician with the Doctors Without Borders program in Rwanda.

David – Reuben’s nephew, 6 years old.

Chelsea – the same age as Erica, Erica’s best friend since childhood.

Jake – late 20s/early 30s, a recruiter for the Doctors Without Borders program, very slick and persuasive.

James – mid 50s, the former *Burgomaster* of Buguta.

Various Villagers – varying ages. The husband and wife in scene 7 should be of child-bearing age. The villagers in scene 17 and the patients in the clinic can be double cast.

A Rwandan bartender.

A young Rwandan boy – approximately David’s age.

SETTING: The US—Doctor's Without Borders Office and Erica's apartment. Rwanda—the clinic in Buguta, the jail, a bar, in the village.

TIME: 2007

NOTE: Kiswahili is used at various points in the play. A guide to the meaning of the words used is included at the end.



**Scene 1**

*Lights up. ERICA and a charismatic, attractive young man behind the desk at the Doctors Without Borders Office. Sparsely furnished with a desk and spare chair.*

ERICA

... So that's how I knew it was for me, and as you'll find from my application, I have also had extensive experience with—

JAKE

So, Dr. Davis, as a recent graduate from one of the best residency programs in the country, I'm curious as to *exactly* why you're willing to defer your career to join the Doctors Without Borders Program? Is it safe to say that you're a passionate and motivated person?

ERICA

I really think I can help the p—

JAKE

Very good. Well, Dr. Davis, you're in luck. We have an opening in the village of Buguta. Normally you would be placed in a pool of qualified physicians that we bring out to the field when they're needed, but we have such a shortage of physicians currently willing to be assigned to Rwanda that you could leave almost immediately. The area of interest is mostly populated by the Tutsi, which shouldn't be relevant anymore; unfortunately, this area of the country isn't quite healed from the violence in the mid-nineties. Is it safe to say, Dr. Davis, that you're well-prepared for a challenge?

ERICA

Rwanda. Great. Um... I thought that the country was over the genocide.

JAKE

Well... there's still a lot of bad blood between the Hutu and Tutsi. In a lot of ways, it's not so much the same people's war it was, but the next generation who inherited some unfortunate circumstances. Certainly any *tribal* warfare isn't as widespread as it once was. And, Dr. Davis, you seem like the kind of lady that would really get a lot out of an opportunity such as this.

ERICA

Actually, I was interested in your programs in Latin America—

JAKE

Judging from your record, Dr. Davis, you're very well equipped to handle an assignment in Rwanda. Actually I've been authorized to accept you into the program straight away. I know it's sudden, but surely you're up to the challenge.

ERICA

Well... um... I mean, I am, but—

JAKE

No buts! (*Laughs*) Highly educated individuals of your caliber are always such self-doubters! It's a phenomenon I can't wrap my head around! You understand, of course, Dr. Davis, that this program has a great number of medical personnel waiting to be assigned to a mission, and that your next opportunity to be deployed might be months or even years from now?

ERICA

Oh. Well, I was really interested in the Latin American programs since I already understand the culture and I speak the language. Actually I've never been to Africa before.

...but, well...when you put it that way...

JAKE

I knew you'd be up for it.

Oh, that reminds me, Dr. Davis.

*(Goes under his desk again, taking longer this time. He flops a heavy black vest on the desk.)*

Here's your Kevlar vest. It has the Doctors Without Borders insignia embroidered on it.

Just a little precaution. Top of the line. We're quite proud of them.

ERICA

Um... Thank you? Can I... come back and pick this up before I leave the country? This'll look kind of weird, carrying a bullet-proof vest out to my car and all—

JAKE

Actually, Dr. Davis, I was hoping you would be willing to leave in about a week.

ERICA

Wow, uh... that's a little soon, huh?

JAKE

Actually, the soonest flight is tomorrow morning.

ERICA

Right, so I'll be taking this with me then. I don't suppose you're looking for an apartment to sublet?

*(JAKE looks at her, puzzled)*

Yeah, bad joke. I need to go deal with that then.

JAKE

*(Retrieves more paperwork)*

Now, here's the list of relevant vaccinations as well as a recommended packing list.

Good luck, Dr. Davis.

*(Blackout)*

## **Scene 2**

*Setting: ERICA's room. This need not be a fully staged, representational "room," merely enough things to suggest a bedroom, at least a dresser with photos, a fish tank, some boxes.*

*Lights up. ERICA is packing a suitcase and taking photos off a dresser, one by one, wrapping them in newspaper, and putting them in a box.*

*(doorbell rings)*

ERICA

Coming, coming!

*(Enter CHELSEA)*

ERICA

Oh thank God! Thank you so much for helping me get this together.

CHELSEA

Hey, no problem. It's not every day your best friend moves to a war zone in Kenya. Are you really sure you want to go?

ERICA

It's Rwanda. In Africa too, you're not far off. Don't freak out. The war is over. Technically speaking.

*(They begin shuffling around, moving things.)*

CHELSEA

I thought you said something about going to South America again?

ERICA

Yeah, I did...

And you know what, I don't remember expressly saying yes to the guy in the office when he offered me this position. He was like a used car salesman. He did this weird thing where he said my name a lot and he was... and he just wouldn't stop talking and he said my name a lot...I got confused.

CHELSEA

You always did suck at saying no.

ERICA

I know... Not the first time it's gotten me into trouble, won't be the last.

CHELSEA

*(picks a picture frame up)*

Whoa- you still have this? Didn't you guys break up 6 months ago?

ERICA

What? Oh. It's—

BOTH

Douchebag McGee

CHELSEA

I remember the night you found out he cheated on you—

ERICA

...from Facebook. Yeah. You know I had almost repressed that memory.

*(Chelsea finds a box full of flash cards)*

CHELSEA

Wow... pay dirt.

*(Holds up several)*

I will seriously never forget the day we got married and a bunch of these fell out of your dress during the service—

*(hastily puts them back down)*

...and then the best man helped you pick them up again...

ERICA

I knew at that moment I didn't have a chance with him.

CHELSEA

I really thought you were going to beat me down the aisle.

ERICA

Please, by our hometown's standards, I was an old maid at 18 when we graduated high school. You got married straight out of college and everyone was shocked you waited so long. And I know I've said this before, but I formally apologize for when my marriage conflicts with your first child's high school graduation.

Okay, you know what, next subject. I didn't mean for this to be a recap of all of my hall of shame moments with men.

*(Beat)*

CHELSEA

So I can't believe you're leaving in a week and you're going to be gone for—a year?

ERICA

Ish? They're supposed to be leaving the country by the end of this year... so about 10 months or so. I don't have a lot of serious commitments here; it won't be a big issue.

CHELSEA

*(hesitating)*

By the way... about that... Remember how you always told me you couldn't wait to be an aunt? Well... um... surprise!

ERICA

Wha-what?

CHELSEA

Well, I was going to wait a little longer just to be safe, you know? But since you're leaving, I figured you'd want to know.

ERICA

Oh my gosh. I—I don't even know what to say! Congratulations!

CHELSEA

I hate that you won't be here...I really wanted you to be the godmother.

ERICA

Wow. I... Gosh. Thanks. And I'm sorry. I really thought I'd be there when you had your first kid.



CHELSEA

Me too. Heck, I've thought about letting you deliver it too.

ERICA

I'm torn between finding that awkward and touching.

CHELSEA

Eh. (*shrugs*) It's not like we haven't been through everything else together.

ERICA

I know... I really hate that I'm missing this. If I had known I wouldn't have agreed to go until after.

CHELSEA

I wish you could have been here too. You're the one person I really wanted to have there with me...besides Will. Obviously.

ERICA

I'm really sorry.

CHELSEA

I mean... you didn't know. It's partly my fault for not telling you sooner.

ERICA

Well hey, let me take the pregnant lady out for ice cream, huh? We can do this later. I've already got the stuff that's going with me together.

CHELSEA

This stuff?

*(Gestures to a clustered stack of boxes)*

ERICA

Actually...

*(Goes behind the boxes and produces a small suitcase)*

I'm taking this.

CHELSEA

I'm calling bull on that one. That might hold your accessories. For one day.

ERICA

That one... tiny... suitcase. For almost a year. They made it clear I need to be able to easily carry and run with whatever I bring. I think the running thing was just, like, a metaphor or something.

Anyway, how about that ice cream?

CHELSEA

Yes! Oh my God, I don't know if this is normal or not, but I've totally started craving stuff. *And*, I'm coming up with a list of names! What do you think about...

*(Black out)*

**Scene 3**

*(Setting: camp in Rwanda. Before the lights come up, the sound of a helicopter is heard, along with shouting and gunshots. Lights up on Clinic exterior.*

*Enter REUBEN and ERICA, running, dodging bullets, etc. They come to a stop on the front steps of the clinic and REUBEN sets her suitcase down. ERICA sinks down on the steps)*

REUBEN

Welcome to Buguta, Dr—

ERICA

Davis.

REUBEN

Dr. Davis. I'm Reuben, the nurse here.

*(ERICA nods, obviously still in shock)*

ERICA

Yeah, there wasn't a lot of time for introductions the way they chucked me out of the helicopter.

REUBEN

*(lightly)*

That was easy. You should have seen what happened when we tried to get supplies last week.

*(makes explosion noises)*

ERICA

Lucky me.

Apparently they were serious about being able to run with your suitcase.

*(REUBEN nods)*

*ERICA*

Well... I'll just... say, where will I be staying?

REUBEN

Wherever you like. We usually sleep in the clinic, but you can move the cots around if you prefer. I suppose you could sleep outside...?

ERICA

No thanks.

REUBEN

Let me get you a mosquito net. You don't want to get malaria.

ERICA

‘Preciate it.

REUBEN

Not at all. *(Thoughtfully)* Malaria to us is quite like the common cold; as I understand, people get quite alarmed in the United States from malaria.

*(lifting suitcase)*

Now if you'll follow me, I'll t—

*(The sounds of gunshots and shouts erupt. A group of VILLAGERS carrying a young boy come rushing onstage. They speak hurriedly to REUBEN.)*

REUBEN

Daktare, this boy has been shot in the leg. Something must be done immediately.

ERICA

OK—let's go!

*(All rush into the clinic interior. Brief blackout, followed by REUBEN and ERICA wheeling a gurney downstage center. A harsh spotlight on the gurney. ERICA and REUBEN perform a surgery. They finish and wheel the gurney offstage. Blackout)*

#### **Scene 4**

*(Lights up. ERICA enters in bloodied scrubs and collapses on the front steps. Her suitcase is still sitting outside. She moves to pick it up and changes her mind. REUBEN enters from the clinic doors, wiping his hands on a bloodied rag.)*

REUBEN

Excellent work. He's going to make it, daktare. You are, how do they say in American?

A natural.

ERICA

*(Sheepishly)* Well, actually that's just the second time I've ever had a shooting victim. I did my residency in a little town where that sort of thing only accidentally happened—and it only happened once in the whole four years I was there. You really knew what you were doing more than I did—

REUBEN

If not for you, daktare, he would not be with us right now.

ERICA

Well... thank you, Reuben. Asante sana... I actually learned that off a sign in the airport.

REUBEN

Excellent. What else do you know?

ERICA

*(Embarrassed)* Just that. I got a book before I left, but I ended up sleeping most of the way. Time difference and all.

REUBEN

You will learn. *(chuckle)* Luckily most VILLAGERS here speak English.

ERICA

Good, I was worried that I'd be totally useless... as opposed to just probably useless.

*(Laughs)* That was an eventful first couple of hours here.

*(From the interior of the clinic, a young boy walks out)*

Hey, buddy. What's your name?

REUBEN

That's my nephew, David. I take care of him now.

ERICA

Oh—are his parents...

REUBEN

*(uncomfortable)*

His father was a Hutu, and was killed during the fighting. His mother, my sister, died of AIDS shortly after he was born.

ERICA

Oh--I'm... sorry.

REUBEN

It's fine. Luckily he's HIV negative. Honestly there hasn't been a better time to be alive in Rwanda for decades.

*(David runs to ERICA and starts pulling on her hair, laughing. ERICA pulls him onto her lap)*

ERICA

He's a cute kid. How old is he?

REUBEN

Six next month.

ERICA

I hope you don't think I'm asking too many questions, but I thought you said his father died during the war? I thought most of it was over in 1996.

REUBEN

In 1994 people died by the thousands every day. Once that stopped happening, though, it wasn't as interesting to the rest of the world.

*(Beat)*

But to answer your question: for some, the feelings of resentment and hatred are still as strong today as they were during the war.

*(From offstage, BRADLEY enters carrying a medic bag and wearing dusty, stained scrubs)*

REUBEN

Daktare Williams. Welcome back. This is Daktare Davis, who just arrived a few hours ago.

*(BRADLEY solemnly shakes hands with ERICA and eyes her up and down)*

BRADLEY

Dr. Bradley Williams. Pleased to meet you.

REUBEN

Daktare Williams has been in out in the neighboring villages for several weeks.

BRADLEY

There's still a lot to be done I'm afraid. If you'll excuse me.

*(BRADLEY exits into the clinic)*

ERICA

I guess I should get unpacked.

REUBEN

Go ahead, while you have a moment, Daktare Davis.



ERICA

Please, just Erica.

REUBEN

While you have a moment, Erica.

ERICA

You're right. (*Getting up*)

*(Suddenly, another round of gunshots erupts. REUBEN and ERICA look out, ERICA is startled and REUBEN looks nonplussed. Blackout.)*

## Scene 5

*Clinic Exterior, Night. BRADLEY is sitting eating a sandwich and ERICA walks out with her dinner and joins him.*

ERICA

It's amazing here. When it's quiet, I mean. Well, even when it isn't, I guess--

BRADLEY

I guess so. It all blurs together for me anymore.

ERICA

I don't think I'll ever get *that* used to it.

*(Awkward silence)*

So... what brought you out here? How'd you get into... this?

BRADLEY

"This" meaning...?

ERICA

Um... in general?

BRADLEY

*(Laughs)* Well, that's a long story. I guess I've always known I was going to be a doctor. My dad was one. There was a point in time I thought I'd like to be a film director, but...you have to make a living, you know? I don't really think there was anything else I could really do besides this.

ERICA

I understand.

BRADLEY

Yeah... somehow through a combination of familial pressure and my own unrelenting desire to succeed I found myself in med school. My dad offered me a position at his clinic at the same time a position here opened up. But that'll be waiting for me when I get back. Why the hell not, you know? I've been out here the better part of three years.

ERICA

Oh. Your dad has his own clinic?

BRADLEY

Well, kind of—a clinic and a lab. And he does some writing on the side.

ERICA

Wait a second... was your dad—

BRADLEY

Oh God—

ERICA

The guy who wrote the anatomy book? The one I used for like four years straight in med school?

BRADLEY

Yeah. That'd be him.

ERICA

Wow. You're dad's a pretty big deal in medical academics.

BRADLEY

*(Starts to go back inside)*

Paging Dr. Obvious...

*(Enter REUBEN)*

BRADLEY

Reuben, here are the keys.

ERICA

Do we need to lock our supplies up at night?

REUBEN

Supplies... no. We don't have much to attract thieves. This is for the patients.

ERICA

Patients...? I'll admit, I haven't had a chance to look around, but... I haven't seen—or heard—any patients.

REUBEN

They're quiet, for the most part, when they're kept alone. That building behind the clinic, there? It used to be the *jela*... how do you say it in American?

*(REUBEN makes a joking gesture as if holding onto bars)*

ERICA

*(Laughs nervously)*

You're keeping them in the *jail*? Um... that *is* a joke, right?

REUBEN

Ah. Yes. Jail. They started behaving strangely. Many of the people here are superstitious and would not care for them. Most of them lived through the worst parts of the war and haven't been the same since.

ERICA

Wow. Do you mind if I go with you over there?

REUBEN

As you wish, Daktare. I have to make sure that the doors are locked. *(REUBEN lights his lantern.)* If you'll follow me?

*(Blackout)*

## **Scene 6**

*Interior of the building. This need not be staged elaborately. Merely spotlights on areas of the stage floor with VILLAGERS seated in the middle. Some twitch nervously and reach for things that aren't there, some pace and talk to themselves, some seem catatonic. In one cell sit a few children. None pay attention to REUBEN and ERICA, holding David's hand, walking onstage.*

ERICA

What happened to these people?

REUBEN

A few of the people began acting hostile. Irritable. Some of them simply began talking to themselves, hearing and seeing things that weren't there. Their families wouldn't keep them, they were convinced that they were possessed with demons. It's not safe for them to wander alone. So, they've been brought here, and the only place we have for them to stay safely is... *(makes a general gesture)*

*(REUBEN goes to each "door" and makes sure that it's locked. ERICA wanders from cell to cell.)*

ERICA

What's wrong with these children?

REUBEN

They were born blind. It's considered unlucky. Unfortunately, we can't always watch them, and so...

*(Shrugs)*

This is reality. It would be even more cruel to let them wander alone.

ERICA

People can be so resilient. I've seen people that should be dead walk away.

I've seen people that I thought were in the clear flat line.

But... I don't know that I wouldn't be in their position myself.

*(Silence as ERICA wanders again from cell to cell. At the last one, she peers in closely at the patient, who jumps towards her. ERICA screams, snatches David up, and runs offstage. REUBEN chuckles and blows his lantern out. Blackout.)*

### **Scene 7**

*Clinic exterior, day. A few VILLAGERS make a line that ends offstage. BRADLEY, ERICA, and REUBEN are all tending to patients ERICA is taking one person's blood pressure. She stares with disbelief at the sphygmomanometer. David sits at Erica's feet and periodically distracts her.*

ERICA

Let me try that again. Sorry.

BRADLEY

That's the third time you've taken that BP.

ERICA

*(Moves over to BRADLEY, quietly)* It's 240 over 190. I think it may be broken.

BRADLEY

No, that's probably right. Half the people here have hypertension.

ERICA

This is ridiculous. How is her blood pressure not turning her inside out? If she were back in the states, she'd be on her way to the emergency room right now.

BRADLEY

Yeah, funny thing... she's in the middle of nowhere in Rwanda so we do what we can.

ERICA

*(Goes back to the patient.)* It's just a cold, I think. REUBEN, do we have a thermometer?

REUBEN

*(Removes a thermometer from another patient's mouth and dips it into a jar of what is perhaps alcohol)*

Here.

ERICA

Is this the only one we have?

REUBEN

Yes.

ERICA

You know what, never mind. I'll just... *(She feels the patient's forehead with her hand.*

*To patient:)* Wait a moment, won't you?

*(ERICA goes inside to look for medicine and quickly returns with a small plastic bag with a few pills)*

I'm afraid we don't have anything to give you but Tylenol. Take one or two of these every few hours, as you need it for pain or fever.

PATIENT

Asante sana.

*(ERICA watches as the patient steps off the porch and go offstage)*

ERICA

She just went to the back of the line again...that's why the line's never gotten shorter.

REUBEN

*(Attempting to be cheerful)*

You know, before you and Daktare Williams came, I only saw perhaps one or two patients a day. What is it you say? When it pours it rains?

BRADLEY

I don't know why you bothered prescribing anything. I've never had a patient take all of their pills. They remember for maybe a day.

ERICA

*(Ignores him and motions to the next person in line, a female VILLAGER)*

What can I do for you today?

VILLAGER

My identification—

*(The VILLAGER riffles through a plastic bag that she's carrying and produces a small plastic card)*

ERICA

Oh, no, no, no—it doesn't matter to me what tribe you are.

VILLAGER

*(Proudly, but quietly)*

I am a Tutsi.

ERICA

Um, well that's nice... As I was saying, how can I help you?

VILLAGER

Two months ago I have a bad back—



ERICA

How about you start with what's bothering you today?

VILLAGER

I have fever. I feel hot, like I can't breathe.

ERICA

Do you feel tired?

VILLAGER

*(thinks for a moment)*

Yes.

ERICA

Have you had malaria before?

VILLAGER

*(Shrugs)*

And I think I'm pregnant.

ERICA

Well, congratulations! Is this your first?

VILLAGER

I have five at home.

ERICA

Wow, that's—impressive.

REUBEN

Here, children are a blessing. It's strange, I'm sure, considering families are so small in America.

ERICA

I understand. Well, that's wonderful. First, I'd like to make sure you don't have malaria. Bradley, do we have any malaria tests in the back?

BRADLEY

What do you think?

ERICA

*Reuben*, do we have malaria tests?

REUBEN

We've been out of them for a while. We are several weeks overdue for a shipment of supplies, we may get one soon, any day now—

*(In the distance, gunfire. ERICA no longer winces at the sound.)*

But maybe not.

ERICA

Pregnancy tests?

*(BRADLEY scoffs)*

REUBEN

I'm sorry, no.

ERICA

*(To the patient, cheerfully)*

Well, I could start you on antibiotics—but I'd really like to know if you're pregnant or not. You might check back in a few days, if we get a shipment of supplies. Definitely come back if your symptoms get worse, or if there's something new. Now, is there anything else I can do for you today?

VILLAGER

I want my temperature taken.

ERICA

If you insist—Reuben, that thermometer, please. *Asante*.

*(Leaves the thermometer in for a conspicuously short amount of time)*

No fever. Is there anything else I can do?

VILLAGER

I want a blood test.

ERICA

*(Slightly impatient)*

We're out of pregnancy tests and malaria tests. I know we don't have any tuberculosis tests. The only things I know we're not out of are HIV tests.

VILLAGER

Yes, give me.

ERICA

Okay. Be right back. (*ERICA goes into the clinic and returns with a testing kit.*)

Just a little stick. (*ERICA pricks her finger and the VILLAGER winces dramatically.*)

Now we wait. (*ERICA waits several seconds and glances carelessly at the test*)

All right, it's neg— (*ERICA looks at the test again. She pulls REUBEN aside*)

Hey Reuben, how reliable are these tests?

REUBEN

The protocol is to do three tests, if at least two out of three are positive, we consider them to be HIV positive.

ERICA

(*Hurries back into the clinic and comes back with more tests*)

We have to do a couple more.

(*ERICA performs two more tests, and waits for the results away from the patient.*

*REUBEN peeks over her shoulder; ERICA starts when he speaks.*)

REUBEN

We do HIV counseling for every patient that we find to be positive. I can do it—

ERICA

No. No, thank you, Reuben. I knew I'd have to do something like this eventually.

REUBEN

You've never had to do this before? Perhaps I should—

ERICA

She's my patient. I can handle this.

*(Crosses over to the patient and puts her arm around her. The VILLAGER starts at the unexpected gesture.)*

Will you come over this way with me? We need to talk.

*(ERICA leads the VILLAGER out of everyone's earshot)*

Ma'am, you tested positive for HIV. Do you understand what that means?

VILLAGER

*(Obviously shocked and confused)*

ERICA

You seem quite healthy right now, so if we start you on medication, I'm confident you can go on living several more years with no problems.

*(VILLAGER visibly starts to panic)*

We will have to start you on medications right away since we don't know for sure if you're pregnant or not. I know this is all happening very quickly. I understand this is a lot to take in right now. Are there any questions I could answer for you?

VILLAGER

...

ERICA

One thing I would like to do is have your husband and other children come in to be tested as soon as possible. They may need to go on medication as well.

VILLAGER

...

ERICA

You wouldn't happen to have any members of your family here would you?

VILLAGER

My husband.

*(Gestures vaguely back to the clinic, where a man is suspiciously watching their conversation. ERICA motions for him to join them.)*

ERICA

Do you want to tell him or would you like me to do it?

VILLAGER

...

ERICA

Alright.

Sir, I just administered an HIV test to your wife, and it came back positive. This doesn't necessarily mean that you will be positive as well, but certainly it's necessary to test you right away to make sure. In the event that you are positive, you'll want to start medication right away. In addition, I'd like to see your children—

WALTER

This isn't my fault! Is that what she told you?

*(Glowers at his wife, who cringes)*

ERICA

I didn't say it was anyone's fault. It's fortunate we know this now. The sooner you start taking the medication the better your chances are of living a normal life for as long as possible.

WALTER

No! I did NOT do this!

*(Grabs his wife and begins to forcefully pull her offstage)*

ERICA

Sir, I insist that—

*(WALTER raises his hand threateningly. REUBEN notices this commotion.)*

REUBEN

Walter, she's trying to help you and your family.

WALTER

*(More angry now that REUBEN is involved)*

Are you *trying* to shame me in front of all these people? And why would I trust you? You're no different than them and everyone thinks so! Why would I listen to a *mzungu* and her little *mzungu* pet? *(He spits at REUBEN's feet and pulls his wife offstage. The other VILLAGERS, by this point, have been intently watching the commotion and exit severally, following the couple. BRADLEY sarcastically cheers and goes back inside.)*

ERICA

*(annoyed, looking at the patients leaving)* I could have handled that.

*(Notices the look on REUBEN's face)*

I'm sorry, Reuben. *(Hands him a tissue for his shoes)*

REUBEN

I'm used to it... unfortunately.

*(DAVID wanders to where they stand and ERICA picks him up.)*

There's a lot of mistrust for western medicine, western people. Some of the tribal leaders have managed to convince their villagers that the western world is to blame for the war, and all of the problems we've had ever since.

You have to understand something, too. Often, the men of the village must leave to find jobs in the city, especially since the war. And they... well, they contract HIV from women there, come back home, and give it to their wives. I know that family... the husband is a truck driver. He often travels across the country and is gone for weeks at a time. In their eyes, you were drawing attention to his misconduct. I know.... It happened to my sister.

ERICA

It must be hard for you, being the go-between for us.

REUBEN

In a lot of ways, they see me more as one of you than a citizen of this village anymore.

ERICA

And now they don't trust you either, since the doctors came.

REUBEN

Most of the people would go their entire life without seeing a doctor were it not for you and your organization. You're doing a great service to these people, Erica. Don't think we're not grateful.



ERICA

No—I mean, thank you, but that’s not my point. What I mean is, I’m sorry you’re having problems because of us. We came to help and it seems like we’re causing at least as many problems as we’re solving... If we’re really fixing anything, anyway. I’m sorry you have to deal with this.

REUBEN

No. Please don’t think of it that way.

*(Quickly changes the subject)*

It looks like we have a free afternoon—shall we have lunch?

ERICA

Um... sure. That’d be great.

*(Blackout)*

### **Scene 8**

*Lights up. ERICA is sitting on the front steps of the clinic, watching the activity in the courtyard. BRADLEY is busying himself with a box of supplies. The patients being kept at the clinic are milling about the yard.*

ERICA

I’m glad we let them outside. Things are starting to die down around here. *(Looks at BRADLEY)* Maybe just a little?

BRADLEY

These people are as much of a danger to themselves as anyone else. They all suffer from post-traumatic stress. And God knows what else.

ERICA

It'll do them a lot of good to get them outside.

*(Beat)*

You're sure it's post-traumatic stress?

BRADLEY

Of course I'm sure.

ERICA

Oh.

*(From the courtyard, one of the men behaves even more strangely, attracting ERICA's attention. She moves to make sure he's alright.)*

BRADLEY

Don't bother. That's James. He was the *Burgomaster* of this village and now he's barely functioning. Sad.

ERICA

*(Ignoring his advice. To JAMES)*

Can I get you something? Maybe some water? *Mafi?*

JAMES

*(mumbles unintelligibly and flails his arms violently)*

ERICA

Okay, okay!

BRADLEY

I told you.

*(From offstage, REUBEN and WALTER enter carrying two badly bloodied children; one of them is DAVID. ERICA and BRADLEY run into the clinic behind REUBEN. Repeat of earlier operation scene except with two stretchers; ERICA at one and REUBEN and BRADLEY at the other)*

ERICA

Jesus, what happened to these kids?

REUBEN

David and the other boy were playing by the road and detonated an old landmine—

BRADLEY

Forceps, Reuben.

ERICA

*(Quietly)*

I—I don't even know where to start...

BRADLEY

Were you asleep during your surgical rotations?

ERICA

Nobody I operated on came in contact with an IED. Not even close. *(Starts working)*

BRADLEY

You're going to have to get as much of that shrapnel out as possible. Cut it out if you have to.

*(Stops what he's doing)*

Look at me. You can do this.

ERICA

*(Nods and starts working)*

He won't stop bleeding. Oh my God, he won't stop bleeding!

BRADLEY

*(Runs to the table)*

That's because you severed an artery. Get out of the way!

*(BRADLEY works for a few frenzied moments)*

ERICA

Come on, David.

BRADLEY

Shit. He's gone.

*(Blackout)*

## **Scene 9**

*(Clinic exterior, later that evening. REUBEN sits alone on the front steps. ERICA enters from the clinic.)*

ERICA

Reuben... I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for this to happen.

REUBEN

...

ERICA

This is my fault, I—

REUBEN

I know.

ERICA

Is there anything I can do for you? Anything at all. Is there anyone in your family I should—

REUBEN

I don't have any family left.

ERICA

...

REUBEN

David's in a better place. No child should have to grow up here.

ERICA

I'm so sorry. I don't what to say.

REUBEN

I don't know what there is to say.

*(Long pause)*

I need some time alone. Please.

ERICA

I'll...leave you alone.

*(Erica exits. Blackout.)*

**Scene 10**

*Lights up. The next morning. ERICA is sitting on the front porch with one of the female patients, who is showing her how to weave a basket.*

ERICA

You're a lot better at this than I am.

*(Stops what she's doing)*

See, you're doing so much better. All of you are. You just needed some fresh air and something to do, didn't you?

*(ERICA glances at her watch.)*

Alright, everyone, It's time to go in for lunch. JAMES, Esther, Lydia, Thomas...

JAMES? JAMES? JAMES!

*(ERICA begins to frantically search the area around the clinic.)*

REUBEN!

*Lights down.*

*Lights come back up on the clinic exterior, evening. ERICA, REUBEN and BRADLEY sitting outside, visibly exhausted.*

BRADLEY

How did you manage to LOSE one of the patients?!

ERICA

*(distressed)*

I don't know... I don't know.

BRADLEY

Of all the incompetent—this probably happened while you were busy screwing up yesterday. As soon as you stop your little crusade to make the world a better place, maybe we can do our jobs.

ERICA

Listen to yourself. Why the heck are you here?

BRADLEY

Since when is this about me?

ERICA

If you don't want to be here, why don't you go down to the village bar and get a drink. Or better yet, go home! Stop being a martyr. You're not fooling anyone.

BRADLEY

Oh, you're one to talk, you don't even want to be here!

ERICA

And you don't even really want to be a doctor at all, do you?!

BRADLEY

*(Storms off)*

*(ERICA looks hopelessly between where BRADLEY left and where REUBEN stands.*

*REUBEN shrugs and trudges offstage. ERICA sinks down on the steps and starts to cry.*

*Blackout.)*

## Scene 11

*(Lights up, a roadside bar the next morning. ERICA sits alone at a table, and a waiter brings her yet another mystery bottle. ERICA miserably begins to drain the bottle and REUBEN staggers onstage, and sits at a different table. ERICA notices REUBEN and staggers over.)*

ERICA

Do you mind if I join you? *(REUBEN makes a noncommittal gesture and grunts. ERICA pulls up a chair timidly.)*

REUBEN

Well... I have to say, out of all the bars in the village, you managed to find the dirtiest. I'm glad to know I'm not the only one who deals with their problems like this.

ERICA

Not exactly my proudest moment, OK?

REUBEN

We should perhaps think of going back some time soon.

ERICA

I don't think I can right now.

REUBEN

Yes, we probably should sit here for a while. I'll get some water. *(REUBEN attempts to rise and nearly falls over. He sits back down.)* Maybe we should just sit.

ERICA

That's not what I meant. I can't go back. For lack of better words, I suck at being a doctor. I freaked out. I have messed up everything I've touched lately.



REUBEN

I suppose we all make mistakes.

ERICA

Reuben, I've never felt worse about anything in my life. David was your world. This is all my fault. *(starts tearing up)*

REUBEN

I wish it was me instead.

ERICA

*(Now really crying)*

Me too!

*(Long awkward pause)*

You wanna know the truth? If I had my way I would have been vaccinating kids in the Amazon. Probably years down the road. And somewhere between a guy that I suspect was a used car salesman at one point and a 24-hour plane ride I convinced myself that this was where I needed to be. And I was meant to be doing this.

REUBEN

Everything happens for a reason.

## ERICA

When I was a kid, like, four or five, my grandpa started making me read the newspaper to him. The weird thing was that I actually enjoyed it. The paper in the town I grew up in was kind of a joke—I basically lived in Mayberry. The front-page article was about how nice the weather was, complete with a picture of my younger brother and I at the playground by our house. That habit stuck with me though, and eventually I got my hands on big stuff—the New York Times, stuff like that. And the older I got, the more I noticed how many problems there were in the world. It made me want to do something. There was a time in my life where I seriously thought studying my ass off would make the world a better place, somehow. OK, I realize that I sound trite as hell right now. What kind of question is that anyway, “Why did you want to do this?” And you get asked it all the fucking time. You become kind of a societal martyr for deciding to become a doctor and at the same time people get suspicious: I had to have been coerced by my parents who want their kid to be something they can brag about; I want to make a ton of money and drive a fucking Mercedes. I wanted all the smokin’ hot nurses.

*(Beat. Notices REUBEN’s expression)*

Well, not in my case, but you get the point. Whatever. I mean... my point is, I really thought I had a couple of moments where it was so clear that this is what I was supposed to be doing. But I don’t know anymore! I kind of wonder if everyone who said they did is telling the truth or not. I stayed in and studied while my friends partied though college because that’s what I was supposed to do. I was single all through college and convinced myself I was happy that way because I was supposed to put my career first. In med

school, I got this occupational high every time I snatched someone from the motherfucking jaws of death.

REUBEN

Motherfucking jaws of death?

ERICA

Uh... nevermind. I felt good about myself when I saved people. And... damnit, I don't even know what I was ranting about anymore. I don't know why I'm doing what I'm doing right now anymore. I think I did once. I suck at what I thought I was decent at. Stuff I should be able to do and now what the hell am I going to do? I'm an inadequate doctor stuck in a Third World country that seems insistent on not functioning. And I would kill for a bacon cheeseburger right now.

REUBEN

Pole sana.

ERICA

Yeah. Me too.

REUBEN

*(Obviously unsure of himself)*

Perhaps you should go back to the clinic now?

ERICA

Did you get any of what I just said at all?

REUBEN

...

ERICA

I feel extremely trapped right now.

REUBEN

You know pearls?

ERICA

Beg pardon?

REUBEN

Pearls. You know, that women wear—

ERICA

Oh yeah. Those.

REUBEN

Well, you know how they are made? A little piece of sand that irritates the oyster and makes it miserable, until finally—something beautiful. Sometimes, we have to be patient. Sometimes, trials lead you to something beautiful. And you have already accomplished so much. You have to stop, how you say, beating yourself for not being able to be everything to everyone. You're still a good person. That's the point, you're a person. And you have a duty to take care of yourself. I don't recommend you taking care of yourself like this again, but your choices don't make you good or bad. They just make you, you. You have nothing to feel badly about, only to learn.

ERICA

*(Moved)* Thanks. You know what, I feel like... you know what I shouldn't feel so much better after that, but I do. I think I really needed that. Is that weird? Maybe my parents didn't praise me enough as a kid...

*(Beat)*

I should be the one taking care of you in a bar.

*(suddenly hysterical)*

Oh God... I'm the reason you don't have any family here anymore.

REUBEN

Erica...

*(Beat)*

I shouldn't tell you this. But I was in this exact same bar, doing what you're doing now, at that table there, the day I decided I was going to leave the village to go to nursing school. My parents hated the idea. They threatened to disown me. No one here thinks much of education, or the big city. Much better to go to work, be useful right away. And then my sister found me here, and she told me, I owed it to myself, that I had worked too hard for this opportunity not to make the most of it. She was telling me what I already knew, but needed someone to say. I went to school, and I never heard from my parents again. I finished right as the war started, and so I came back here, but by that time, my parents and my sister were gone. The only family I had left was her son—

ERICA

David.

REUBEN

Yes, David. And they are my inspiration. And I have to hold onto that when things get bad. All of them are still with me. Things get bad; it's life. You have to keep those moments, or those people that cause life to make sense with you. And eventually it will all make sense again.

*(long pause)*

ERICA

Reuben?

REUBEN

Yes?

ERICA

I think I can go back now.

REUBEN

Go ahead.

ERICA

But... you're coming too, right?

REUBEN

I need some time alone. To take care of myself. I must do this.

ERICA

Alright, Reuben. I'm sorry, again.

*(Erica gets up and staggers offstage. Blackout.)*

**Scene 12**

*Lights up. Setting: a hut in the village, but could be a dark corner of the stage. Night, blue lights, animal sounds, a storm begins in the distance and crescendos throughout the scene. JAMES sits alone, rocking.*

VOICE

James?

JAMES

Yes...

VOICE

I'm back.

JAMES

Yes.

VOICE

It's as I've told you before...

JAMES

The doctors...

VOICE

...Are your enemies.

JAMES

Yes... yes.

VOICE

You know what you must do.

*(JAMES runs offstage. The sound of a thunderstorm begins in earnest, lightning flashes. Blackout.)*

### **Scene 13**

*(Clinic exterior, evening. Sounds of rain and thunder. ERICA, and BRADLEY sit on the porch. ERICA is surrounded by books and patient charts, reading them by lanternlight.)*

BRADLEY

*(Clears throat importantly)* Listen... I want to apologize about the other day.

ERICA

...

BRADLEY

Look, we all make mistakes. I was frustrated. I said a lot of things I shouldn't have.

ERICA

No joke.

BRADLEY

I got mad because, well... you're right.

ERICA

What?

BRADLEY

What you said. To be honest... I don't know if this is what I want to do.

ERICA

Uh...



BRADLEY

The whole reason I came here was because I was sick of being a doctor just because that was what I was supposed to do. That's the truth. I became a doctor because I had to have the right career, I had to make money, and as far as anyone in my family was concerned it was the only job.

ERICA

I'm...sorry? I—

BRADLEY

It was cake convincing people that this was what I want to do. My dad's a famous doctor, why would I want to be anything else, you know? And when I finally got through the 12 years of hell that was undergrad, med school, and residency, my dad offered me a job at his clinic. I'd be filling in for him while he was busy touring the country, giving talks and being important. And at that point, spending three years in a war zone with no electricity or running water seemed like a better option.

ERICA

You've saved so many people here.

BRADLEY

So, I'm good at this. Lucky me. I should probably just thank my genes.

ERICA

I wish I were.

BRADLEY

I wish I had your conviction. You probably wouldn't be here if you didn't really want to be. Doing the right thing for the wrong reasons is still the wrong thing.

*(BRADLEY pats her on the shoulder and exits as REUBEN enters)*

REUBEN

What was that?

ERICA

I think maybe we understand each other.

REUBEN

I'm confused.

ERICA

I'm still mentally digesting it myself.

*(REUBEN shuffles offstage. Blackout.)*

#### **Scene 14**

*Clinic exterior, cloudy day. A small cross sits in a corner in the front yard. REUBEN stands beside it, disconsolate. ERICA enters, carrying a small handful of flowers. She notices REUBEN*

ERICA

Oh. Um... I'm sorry. I'll just, uh... leave these and go.

REUBEN

Stay if you want.

*(ERICA sets the flowers by the cross.)*

*Asante.*

ERICA

No problem.

REUBEN

Here it is a problem. You would have to walk for hours to find just that many flowers.

And it is not safe to be wandering alone.

ERICA

Well, maybe, but... I needed a break anyway. (*Gestures to the books still on the porch*)

REUBEN

What have you been doing?

ERICA

(*Unsure*) Nothing important.

REUBEN

Come on...

ERICA

Well... I've been thinking—I don't think the patients have post-traumatic stress syndrome.

REUBEN

Okay...

ERICA

I think most of them might have schizophrenia—or a personality disorder.

*(sheepishly)*

Some of the symptoms do overlap with post-traumatic stress, of course. But I've been looking through their charts. Almost all of them have been treated multiple times for cold-like symptoms that come and go, even before the war started. Most of them actually had psychiatric problems before the war—well, the ones we have records for. And you want to know my theory?

REUBEN

Sure.

ERICA

I think they might have toxoplasmosis.

REUBEN

Well, I appreciate that you've been keeping busy since there haven't been any patients here, but...

ERICA

It makes sense—you know, toxoplasmosis is something patients are beginning to be screened for when they're admitted to psych departments to support a schizophrenia diagnosis. I'm willing to bet that they've had some kind of exposure to undercooked meat, possibly cats—

Reuben, I need your help.

REUBEN

At your service.

ERICA

Don't—say things like that. Anyway, I'm going to need some mice. Like... 5 or 6 mice. However many you can track down.

REUBEN

You need a pet?

ERICA

No. I have an idea. I think I can diagnose these patients. The only thing I don't have are mice. Everything else we have here.

REUBEN

Explain this to me?

ERICA

Sure. All I need to do is inject the mice with blood samples from the patients. In a week we should be able to find the parasite in the peritoneal fluid with a microscope.

REUBEN

Interesting, but... Obviously, they're not dying. You can't really treat it anyway. Their symptoms go away after a few weeks.

ERICA

We're not exactly doing anything else. We haven't had anyone come to the clinic in days. (*more quietly*) If they're symptomatic then they should be treated. Some of them are HIV positive and most of them are undernourished to boot. And we happen to have Pyrimethamine. We can treat them with that. Basically, I need a win right now.

REUBEN

So—explain this again.

ERICA

It's not sophisticated, but we should be able to culture the parasite from the patients if they're carrying it. *T. gondii*. Really, I guess we could do it in any animal, but mice are easy to keep up with and we can keep a bunch of them in a small place. It'd be a lot more reliable if we had clean lab mice, but I think it'll still work. After a week we remove the fluid from their peritoneal cavity and we should be able to see the parasite with a microscope.

REUBEN

Ndyo. I'll help you.

ERICA

Thank you, Reuben. I knew I could count on you. I guess we need to go set some traps, huh?

REUBEN

Huh?

ERICA

We should probably go set traps for the mice. Unless you have another way of catching them?

REUBEN

No, I understood that. What is, "huh?"

ERICA

Um. “Huh,” means... huh. It means, “what” if you’re confused or, “right” if you... Um.

English sucks.

REUBEN

Like air?

ERICA

No, uh—like... Um. I mean to say—

REUBEN

*Sawa sawa.*

ERICA

Sorry?

REUBEN

Here, when we ‘re confused and don’t know what to say or just want to continue on, we say, “*Sawa sawa.*” It’s OK. I’m OK. *We’re* OK.

ERICA

*Sawa sawa.* Thank you. *Asante sana.*

REUBEN

Yes. Now, those mice?

*(Both exit offstage. Blackout)*

**Scene 15**

*Village. Rain over the village shown on the screen. It is storming and the VILLAGERS are surrounding JAMES, almost excited to a riot.*

JAMES

You know this is true! The foreigners are our enemies! They kept me locked away—they are the enemies just as much as the Hutu! Death to the white devils!

VILLAGERS

Yes!

Get them!

Drive them out!

This is our village!

*(Some VILLAGERS fire their guns)*

JAMES

They are holding our friends and family captive!

*(Shouts of agreement)*

It is time we take back what is ours! We never asked for their help!

*(More shouts, etc)*

They are the enemy, they are the ones that brought those animals, the Hutu, to power!

It is our duty to rid our land of these demons! Are you with me?

VILLAGERS

Yes!

Death to the white man!

Etc.



*(VILLAGERS exit shouting and brandishing weapons. The storm continues. With a particularly loud crash of thunder, blackout.)*

## **Scene 16**

*Clinic exterior, day. ERICA walks around the clinic exterior as if she's looking for something. BRADLEY enters.*

ERICA

Bradley, you wouldn't have seen a cage full of mice, would you?

BRADLEY

Oh, yeah, don't worry about it. I took care of it last night before I went to bed.

ERICA

What do you mean by, "took care of it?"

BRADLEY

Oh, I just , you know, left the top of the cage open and shooed some cats over here.

ERICA

*(starting to panic)* You *fed* them to the *cats*?!

BRADLEY

I mean, I wasn't going to kill them myself. Don't tell me you were attached to them or something.

ERICA

I injected them with the blood serum of the patients that I think are infected with *t. gondii*! If they were infected, the mice are infected, and now the cats are running around the savannah spreading the disease!

BRADLEY

What?

ERICA

*T. gondii*? You know what I'm talking about?

BRADLEY

You're talking about toxoplasmosis?

ERICA

And you're not freaked out by the fact that there are a bunch of cats running around?

BRADLEY

Chill out. How many diseases get passed from one animal to another?

ERICA

You really have to be joking. Did you not take parasitology in med school?

BRADLEY

Uh, no. I'm a doctor, not a vet.

ERICA

Oh my God. Reuben!

*(Enter Reuben)*

Our mice just got fed to a bunch of cats.

REUBEN

*(Shocked)* What?!

BRADLEY

I feel like I'm on the outside of something looking in.

*(ERICA sinks down onto the steps and groans into her hands. Blackout.)*

**Scene 17**

*Clinic, exterior. The storm is raging loudly. The sounds of a mob of VILLAGERS slowly crescendos through the beginning of the scene. ERICA reads a book and sits protectively by the box containing mice. BRADLEY sits and watches the storm.*

ERICA

There hasn't been anyone here for days.

BRADLEY

They're probably scared of the rain. The thick layer of dirt they're always wearing is probably the only thing holding them together.

ERICA

You're disgusting.

*(BRADLEY goes back inside.)*

ERICA

*(Hears the mob drawing close with a start.)*

REUBEN? BRADLEY? Oh my God—what's going on? BRADLEY?! REUBEN?!

*(Enter REUBEN. BRADLEY runs into the clinic and returns with a rifle)*

REUBEN

You're not going to need that.

BRADLEY

Like hell I won't!

*(Scuffle between REUBEN and BRADLEY. BRADLEY fires a shot into the mob. One of the VILLAGERS goes down. One returns fire, hitting BRADLEY. REUBEN throws the gun to the ground in front of the patients)*

What are you thinking? Look at yourselves. You don't want to do this.

*(REUBEN steps off the porch and walks right up to JAMES, who defiantly holds his gun up to REUBEN's head and cocks it. REUBEN doesn't flinch.)*

Think about it.

*(ERICA edges into the clinic and comes back running with a box of supplies. She begins to work on BRADLEY with one eye on the crowd. Eventually Jimmy begins to falter. REUBEN pulls the gun out of his hands with little effort and throws it to the ground and the two share an embrace.)*

It's alright now. It's going to be alright.

*(The others eventually lower their weapons. A couple of VILLAGERS carry the wounded VILLAGER to the porch, where REUBEN begins to work on him.)*

ERICA

Really, Bradley?! You're supposed to be here helping these people and you *shoot* one of them instead?

BRADLEY

They had guns! I just got shot in the leg!

ERICA

If you hadn't shot at them first this wouldn't have happened!

BRADLEY

Whose side are you on?

ERICA

Side? Side?! We're doctors, dumbass, there are no bad guys.

BRADLEY

Fix me already!

ERICA

*(Digs into his leg roughly, BRADLEY yells in pain. Erica rants and works furiously.)*

*Maybe* you should fix yourself! You make me sick. "Boo hoo, my dad's a famous doctor and I've had everything handed to me." I may be on a delusional mission to save the world but at least I'm not on a delusional mission to make everyone in the world miserable! Well congratulations, buddy, you're doing an awesome job! When people back at home think about doctors, they think of bitter, self-important jackasses like you!

*(ERICA gets up and walks inside)*

BRADLEY

What the hell are you doing? I have a bullet in my leg?

ERICA

It's out and you've been closed up. I've had practice.

*(Blackout)*

### **Scene 18**

*(Clinic exterior, day. REUBEN and ERICA exit the clinic carrying suitcases. BRADLEY hobbles out on crutches. ERICA sits off by herself, lost in thought.)*

BRADLEY

I'm really surprised they were able to get us out of here so soon.

REUBEN

Your organization planned on completely pulling out of the country by the end of this year anyway.

BRADLEY

Somewhere in the US there's a Big Mac calling my name.

*(REUBEN goes back into the clinic)*

Look... I never got the chance to thank you yet. I couldn't have done a better job myself

*(gestures to his leg)*

ERICA

No problem. It'll be nice to be home again.

BRADLEY

Damn straight it will be.

*(Beat)*

I've got some things to re-think. Thanks...again.

ERICA

Is it really that hard for you to say "I'm sorry" and "Thank you?" Every time you've said it to me you look like it's killing you.

*(Helicopter noise in the distance)*

BRADLEY

All right! Reuben, it's here!

*(REUBEN comes outside, he and ERICA grab for the same suitcase and have an awkward moment. BRADLEY starts to hobble offstage, REUBEN follows behind. ERICA gets to the steps of the porch and hesitates.)*

BRADLEY

Come on! We don't have all day.

ERICA

Yeah—I'm coming. Reuben, you can finish the experiment, right? The incubation period ends tomorrow.

BRADLEY

Not your science experiment again.

ERICA

You remember what I told you, right?

REUBEN

No, I'm... I'm... not a doctor.

ERICA

*(Looks hurriedly from the clinic to the helicopter offstage. Then, with resolve)* Alright.

Then I'll stay here and finish it.

BRADLEY

Oh come on. You've done everything you can here.

ERICA

I need to make sure this gets finished. It's important.

BRADLEY

I don't understand you. But it wouldn't be the first time you were right.

ERICA

Or the last, I hope. Have a good flight back.

BRADLEY

I'll let the main office know where you are.

*(BRADLEY and REUBEN exit. The sounds of the helicopter fade out, REUBEN enters)*

REUBEN

Please don't feel obligated to stay here. You don't owe us anything.

ERICA

Six months ago I probably would have gotten on that helicopter. Heck, last week I would have given anything to get out of here.

REUBEN

I believe you.

ERICA

I know you do. But—anyway, I only have a month and a half left in my whole assignment anyway, and I really want to see this through.

REUBEN

Well... I must say I'm proud of you.

ERICA

Hey, I have a lot of inspiration. *(Smiles towards David's grave)* I want to do something, even if it barely make a difference.

REUBEN

He would have been proud of you too.

Well... it's time for lunch?



*(ERICA and REUBEN smile and go inside. Blackout.)*

**Scene 19**

*(Clinic exterior. ERICA has an old microscope and several slides. She looks at several slides and REUBEN enters from offstage.)*

REUBEN

You certainly work quickly.

ERICA

*(Startled)*

Reuben!

REUBEN

*Pole sana.*

ERICA

*(Excited)*

Take a look at this! Here. The first slide here is from a normal mouse. See?

REUBEN

I see...nothing really.

ERICA

Exactly! Ok... here's one from Thomas.

REUBEN

It's...teeming. With...with what?

ERICA

Yes. Ok. What you're looking at right now are tachyzoites. It's one of the life stages of the parasite. This means that these patients are infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* (*indicating a small stack of charts*). And some of them will require treatment.

REUBEN

Certainly. We can start that now. Congratulations, doctor.

ERICA

(*Grins*) It's... not that big of a victory. Unless they're HIV positive or severely malnourished they're not at a huge risk. Still, we can treat them all if they have symptoms. It just so happens that the malaria medication we have can be used for that.

REUBEN

The only way to solve all the problems out here is to do it one thing at a time. Problem number one solved.

ERICA

Thanks.

(*Blackout*)

## GUIDE TO KISWAHILI WORDS

Asante (sana)—(a-SAAN-tay)—Thank you (very much)

Mzungu—ma-ZOON-goo—literally means, “one who travels” but has come to mean “foreigner” in the vernacular, especially used for whites.

Burgomaster—a local government official, the equivalent to the American mayor.

Ndiyo—n-DEE-yo—yes

Pole (sana)—POH-lay—I’m (very) sorry.

Sawa sawa—SAH-wa SAH-wa—Okay/It’s okay

Mafi—MAH-jee—water

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