

SIOUX CENTER SUDAN

---

a one-act drama

by

Jeff Barker

321 Albany Avenue NE  
Orange City, IA 51041  
712-707-7093  
712-441-3231  
[barker@nwciova.edu](mailto:barker@nwciova.edu)

*...and there shall be no herd in the stalls:  
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD...*

*Habakkuk*

## Preface

This play is not the play I set out to write. The project started when Lin Sexton leaned over to me at the Christians in Theatre Arts conference in Virginia in the summer of 2003. She said, “I need you to feel called to write a play about women in the church—it’s the civil rights issue of our time.” Lin’s comment made a good deal of sense to me. My wife, Karen Barker, and my colleague, Joonna Trapp, had already been teaching me about the importance of such a project. So, I looked for source material. I thought I’d found it in Dennis Covington’s wonderful book “Salvation on Sand Mountain.” But a film company purchased the rights, and film trumps theatre in such cases.

I was determined to tell a true story, not invent a woman. I’m not sure why; maybe I felt it would help the conversation if this were a discovered woman with all her complexities intact. A few months ago, I heard about Arlene. One of my students, Matt Hulstein, said, “You should talk to Arlene. She’ll change you.” He was right, and I’m grateful for his insistence. Arlene is an unassuming and gracious person. She is a disciplined Christian. And she has lived and continues to live a life of service, prayer, and loving God. I was drawn to tell her story because it is also God’s story. Arlene knew of my previous work, so she soon became willing to let me try. She opened her heart and also file after file of her personal letters and memorabilia. And she introduced me to her friend, Eleanor Vandevort (Vandy) and Vandy’s amazing book, “A Leopard Tamed.” What a privilege it has been for me to get to know these two women.

My touring company at Northwestern College during 2005/6 walked with me through a very compressed development process. I blame them, especially Micah Trapp who said, “I want us to try and tell Arlene’s story” even though she knew time was short. I took the bait and plunged ahead with that mixture of faith, hope and foolhardiness that fuels some writers. Arlene was both patient and diligent, reading and responding to drafts within a day.

Like many Americans, I have been fairly oblivious to the truth that Sudan is at my front door. I had heard of “the lost boys” but until a month ago, I did not realize that two Sudanese refugees were attending my own college. What an overlooked resource for their fellow students and me. Hopefully, Arlene’s story will help many to ask these young men to tell their stories. And the telling of their stories will draw forth other stories. That’s the way all good stories work, and that is one of the great reasons for telling them. Usually we weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice only after we have heard their stories.

But this is not a play about the civil rights issue of our time. Lin will probably read this play and then repeat her request. “Sioux Center Sudan” is just a play about two women who have been faithful to God. That’s it. Take it for what you will.

Cast of Characters  
*in order of appearance*

(19 men, 18 women; the original production was played by 3 men and 5 women)\*

<u>Arlene:</u>	retired missionary, in her eighties, but active and energetic
<u>Students #1, #3, #4:</u>	#1 and #3 are male; #4 is female. Eighth graders.
<u>Eleanor Kuyper:</u>	eighth grade friend of Arlene; also when older
<u>Pa:</u>	Arlene's father, John Schuiteman
<u>Teacher:</u>	high school teacher
<u>Singers:</u>	first a quartet, then a larger group, then a trio
<u>Mama:</u>	Arlene's mother
<u>Dr. Paul Harrison:</u>	speaker at mission's conference
<u>P.A. DeJong:</u>	Arlene's pastor in Sioux Center
<u>Ruth:</u>	Woman at mission board
<u>Miss Arnold:</u>	Supervisor of Nurses Training, Sioux City, Iowa
<u>Milly:</u>	Arlene's sister
<u>People from church:</u>	speakers of scripture; these are probably among the singers

<u>Marian:</u>	missionary teacher at Nasir; 7 years older than Arlene
<u>Vandy:</u>	Eleanor Vandevort; mostly in her twenties and thirties
<u>Man:</u>	Nuer man
<u>Another Man:</u>	Nuer man's friend; could be a woman
<u>Mother with twins:</u>	Nuer woman
<u>Cieng Piny:</u>	Arlene's Nuer language tutor, about 25 years old
<u>Yuol:</u>	Cieng Piny's uncle
<u>Messenger:</u>	Nuer man who brings word of Yuol
<u>Boy:</u>	Nuer boy from Yuol's village
<u>Arab one:</u>	at a merchant shop
<u>Arab two:</u>	at a merchant shop
<u>Woman with pipe:</u>	Nuer woman at Yuol's deathwatch
<u>Grada:</u>	Arlene's sister
<u>Minister of Interior:</u>	Arab politician in Khartoum
<u>Kuac:</u>	Moses Kuac, the Nuer pastor of the church at Nasir
<u>Cleopas:</u>	Nuer man from Nasir
<u>Attorney:</u>	lawyer of Nuer man in Sioux Falls jail

Woman preacher: Nuer person at Zion Lutheran gathering in  
Sioux Falls

Khor: Cieng Piny's son

Rosanna: Khor's wife

Man Juba: Cieng Piny's wife

*\*Doubling suggestions are at the back of the script*

*\*\*Pronunciations of Dutch and Nuer lines are at the back of the  
script.*

Time

Throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the  
twenty-first.

Place

Arlene's home in Sioux Center, Iowa, United States; various  
places in Nasir, Upper Nile Province, The Sudan, Africa.

*for Arlene and Vandy*

Sioux Center Sudan

SETTING: May be played with minimal props and a few stools. A painted drop would be nice, with a vista of southeastern Sudan. The story is designed to be told without deference to the age or race of the actors.

AT RISE: The company of actors moves onto the stage. Any of the actors can start the play by saying, "Sioux Center Sudan. A true story of Iowa and Africa."

(Four students gather around Arlene.)

STUDENT #1

How about you, Arlene, do you promise? Do you swear?

ARLENE

It's against the Bible to swear a promise.

ELEANOR KUYPER

I knew she wouldn't do it.

STUDENT #3

Her sister Harriet's in high school.

ELEANOR KUYPER

You don't want to do everything just because your sister does it, do you?

STUDENT #1

How is it against the Bible to swear?

ARLENE

The Bible says not to swear but to let your answer be yea or nay.

ELEANOR KUYPER

Come on, Arlene, we have to stick together.

STUDENT #1

Well then, just say yea or nay.

STUDENT #4

We're Welcome Township kids, not goin' onto Sioux Center high school. Quittin' now, stayin' put.

(STUDENTS all freeze while ARLENE talks with us.)

ARLENE

Our farm is north of Sioux Center, in Welcome Township. Our school is Welcome Township school #4. Welcome #4, we call it. One room, eight grades. My friends and I have been together at Welcome #4 since kindergarten.

(STUDENTS break.)

STUDENT #4

You have to quit, too. Everybody? Yes?

ELEANOR KUYPER

Yes.

STUDENT #3

Yes.

STUDENT #1

Yea.

ELEANOR KUYPER

Arlene. Pleeeeeeease.

ARLENE

Alright. I promise. I won't go to high school.

(Chorus of delight.)

ELEANOR KUYPER

(exiting)

Welcome 4 forever.

STUDENT #1

Not ever?

ARLENE

Not ever.

STUDENT #1

Do you swear?

(ARLENE gives him a glare. He throws up his hands and backs off. They all exit.)

ARLENE

I can't go yet anyway. My sister Harriet still has two more years; Mama needs me home to take care of Milly.

(realizing we don't know)

She's the baby.

PA

Arlene?

ARLENE

Yeah, Pa.

PA

I got one for you.

ARLENE

And Pa needs me to be his nurse.

(Mimes getting needle and taking out sliver.)

He always saves his slivers for me. Everybody thinks I'll grow up to be a nurse. So did I. But the world's changing. Electricity is coming out to the farms. And now minimum wage is for women, too. I think it'd be great to move to a city and be an office worker.

After high school, of course, if I go, which I promised I won't. It's not everybody that goes to high school.

(By now ARLENE has forgotten the sliver and is lost in her own thoughts.)

My parents only went to eighth grade. If you go to high school, they expect you to do something, to become something. That's why my friends, they think eight grades is enough. But my parents won't.

(Back to her work.)

And I couldn't do anything to hurt my parents. I wouldn't.

(PA screams in anguish, which brings ARLENE out of talking to us and into PA's world. She is seriously concerned until he laughs, and she realizes he's teasing.)

ARLENE (continued)

Oh! Pa!

PA

(pulling out the sliver)

There it is. Arlene, what are you thinking about.

ARLENE

Freshman year.

PA

Stop worrying. That's two years away.

ARLENE

Are you sure I'm high school material, Pa?

PA

(exiting)

Well, like your Ma says, "Arlene puts her mind to something, might as well get out of the way."

(TEACHER enters.)



TEACHER

All right class, let's continue the readings from your essays.

ARLENE

High School. The assignment is, "What does the word 'faithfulness' mean?"

TEACHER

(giving ARLENE her paper)

Arlene Schuiteman, you're next.

ARLENE

(reading)

When I think of the word "faithfulness" I think of my great grandfather and his dog. My great grandfather was sixty five years old. He became sick. His dog sneaked inside the house and waited under the bed. But my great grandfather died. The dog followed my great grandpa's casket as it was put on a wagon and taken to church. During the funeral, the dog laid in front of the church door. That dog followed the coffin until it was put into the ground. My great grandpa's dog survived for ten days without food or water, and then died of a broken heart. Faithfulness."

QUARTET

(in tight harmony)

Living for Jesus a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

(Singers hum the chorus as ARLENE continues.)

ARLENE

That's one of our favorite songs at Christian Endeavor youth group at First Reformed Church in Sioux Center. I'm the president. It's mostly just doing the chores that nobody else wants to do, but I like it.

(almost a spoken prayer)

O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee; For Thou, in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me.

QUARTET

I own no other Master, My heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

MAMA

(entering)

Arlene, have you been thinking at all about what you'll do after high school.

ARLENE

(hiding her concern)

No, Mama.

MAMA

Well, it's nothing to worry about.

ARLENE

(suddenly, near tears)

I know, Mama. But it's hard to make the right decision.

MAMA

Have you thought about taking the Normal course?

ARLENE

That's what Harriet did.

MAMA

It's for anyone who wants to be a teacher.

ARLENE

Just because my sister does something doesn't mean I have to do it.

MAMA

Just because your sister does something doesn't mean you can't do it.

ARLENE

Maybe I don't want to be teacher.

MAMA

Well, you'd be a good one. Maybe you could take Welcome #4 someday. You could stay living here.

ARLENE

Would you and Pa like that?

MAMA

We'd be thrilled to have you stay. So would your sisters.

ARLENE

Well, Mama, I'll think about it.

MAMA

Well. Don't think too hard. You'll know what to do.

(MAMA kisses her on the forehead and exits.)

ARLENE (continued)

(a bit discouraged)

But...Harriet's a teacher.

(a positive thought)

But Jesus was a teacher.

ELEANOR KUYPER

Arlene, I hear you're going to stay home and be a teacher.

ARLENE

I'm not hired yet.

ELEANOR KUYPER

Remember when we promised we weren't going to high school?

ARLENE

Yeah, I guess I'm not so faithful as I think.

ELEANOR KUYPER

Your parents made you go.

ARLENE

I decided to go.

ELEANOR KUYPER

It was your parents.

ARLENE

I said it was my decision.

ELEANOR KUYPER

You can't please 'em your whole life, you know.

(exiting)

Welcome 4 forever.

(ELEANOR KUYPER exits.)

ARLENE

I decide to become a teacher. First at Plato Township, then, sure enough, Welcome #4. Teaching my own sisters, Milly and Joyce. And my cousins and the neighbor kids. It's my tribe. I love it. I could stay here the rest of my life.

(PA and MAMA enter.)

MAMA

(entering)

How were the students today?

ARLENE

I'm proud of how well they help each other.

MAMA

Reflection of you.

ARLENE

I think it's just the beauty of the one room school.

PA

Are you ever sorry you became a teacher?

ARLENE

No. I'm not.

PA

I always thought you'd become a nurse.

ARLENE

Things change, Pa.

(Beat.)

Do you think we'll ever get a refrigerator?

PA

What put that question in your head?

ARLENE

Modern times.

PA

Maybe once the war's over. 'Til then, no need to make any sudden changes. Aren't always going to have the one room schools, you know. Some places they already bus them to town. But they're building a new hospital in Sioux Center.

MAMA

What are you—Pa!—she'll think you're trying to push her out of the nest.

PA

No such. I'm just trying to help her make a nest she can stay in when the world changes. You're always putting the wrong foot in the stirrup.

MAMA

And what in the world does that mean?!

ARLENE

Maybe I don't want to live in a nest.

MAMA

(in Dutch, to PA)

Kijk nu wat je doet! (*Now see there what you've done!*)

(in English)

Arlene, you coming along with me and your sisters to the Missions Conference tonight. Over in Orange City?

ARLENE

I have some planning's not done.

PA

(waves his hand)

Oh. Well, then....

ARLENE

What?

PA

Nothing. I was just going to see if you wanted to help me with the milking.

ARLENE

I'll just get changed.

PA

No. I'm not going to be the one that made you skip the Missions Conference.

ARLENE

(through her teeth)

I will help you with the milking, Pa, and I will go to the Missions Conference and I will do my planning.....sometime!

PA

She sure gets her mind set, doesn't she. Where's that from?

MAMA

(sarcastically, in Dutch)

En dat vraag je aan mij. (*And you're asking me?*)

PA

Don't you be speaking Dutch to me, woman.

MAMA

Oh, shush, John.

ARLENE

So, not to disappoint either one of them, I go to the annual missions conference.

(ARLENE sits and other women sit with her in a row.)

DR. PAUL HARRISON

The most crucial need now in Arabia is nurses. We need nurses. We are praying that the Lord will provide us nurses. That is our prayer in this most desperate hour.

ARLENE

He is speaking to me.

DR. PAUL HARRISON

Did you ever want to be a nurse?

ARLENE

I say, as long as I can remember.

DR. PAUL HARRISON

Do you have the work ethic for the training?

ARLENE

I tell him, I'm John Schuiteman's daughter.

DR. PAUL HARRISON

Is God calling you? Will you say yes?

ARLENE

God is calling me...to be a teacher. I already said yes.  
(stands)

And that is what I do for the next six years.

QUARTET

Living for Jesus through earth's little while,  
My dearest treasure, the light of His smile;  
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem,  
Bringing the weary to find rest in Him.

(They do not sing the chorus.)

ARLENE

The Sunday afternoon service. That's the way of the churches of Northwest Iowa in 1949. Sunday morning service in Dutch. Parents go. My sisters and I stay home to fix dinner. After dinner, all eight of us pile into the Ford, girls in the back trying to be careful with our dresses, for afternoon service in English. Then the old folks go off to Grandma's for coffee, and the rest of us have Sunday School. We head for home in time for milking. Today is the Sunday afternoon service that will stand out from every other Sunday afternoon service in my young life.

It's a normal 1:00 service. We're into the sermon. The text is Isaiah 6:8: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I, send me.'"

(Beat.)

I don't know how to show you. Maybe just use your imagination. In a moment, you might see it.

FEMALE #4

Imagine inside an old church building,

FEMALE #5

Old pews.

MALE #3  
Big organ pipes.

MALE #1  
And a high gallery that wraps around.

FEMALE #2  
And there's a young woman sitting there on a pew in the gallery.

ARLENE  
She's me.

FEMALE #3  
She's listening to the sermon.

FEMALE #4  
She's hearing her pastor, Pastor De Jong, saying...

P.A. DEJONG  
Who will go? Who will go for us?

FEMALE #5  
And as you watch...

MALE #3  
She starts to glow.

MALE #1  
From her head down to her feet.

FEMALE #2  
And she realizes it herself...

FEMALE #3  
That she's glowing.

FEMALE #4  
Then she looks around.

FEMALE #5  
because she thinks other people must be glowing, too.

MALE #3  
Now she's embarrassed,

MALE #1  
Because she's the only one glowing.

FEMALE #2  
And she's afraid she's about to attract a lot of attention to herself.

FEMALE #3  
She wants to slide down under the pew.

FEMALE #4  
She glances around.

FEMALE #5  
And no one has noticed.

MALE #3  
One boy is sleeping.

MALE #1  
She sits up again.

FEMALE #2  
No one has noticed except her.

FEMALE #3  
This is just for her.

EVERYONE (except Arlene)  
Just her.

ARLENE  
And I say, "Alright. Here am I, Lord. Send me."

(P.A. DEJONG is sitting in his study. ARLENE sits down across from him.)

ARLENE

That week, I go to visit the pastor.

P.A. DEJONG

Glowing?

ARLENE

Yes.

P.A. DEJONG

Glowing.

ARLENE

Yes, Reverend DeJong.

P.A. DEJONG

Glowing like, like really glowing?

ARLENE

Yes. You think I'm crazy?

P.A. DEJONG

Absolutely not. What do you think it means?

ARLENE

That your sermon was meant for me.

P.A. DEJONG

Alright. Do you know what you should do?

ARLENE

What should I do?

P.A. DEJONG

Arlene. God's will is not that difficult to figure out. The difficult thing is to do it.

ARLENE

I think God wants to send me. How should I do that?

P.A. DEJONG

How about writing a letter to someone?

ARLENE

Like to whom?

P.A. DEJONG

Here's an address. Write to that woman. See what she has to say.

ARLENE

Alright. Thank you. Thank you, Pastor DeJong. Thank you for not thinking I'm crazy. Thank you for not trying to explain it away.

P.A. DEJONG

That's okay. I sorta wish it was me.

ARLENE

I do, too.

(P.A. DEJONG exits.)

ARLENE (continued)

I write the letter and wait. I get a reply. It's not much.

RUTH

Dear Miss Schuiteman: Thank you for your inquiry as to the possibility of becoming a missionary nurse. I find it impossible to respond to your call from God, as you put it, until you've completed your certified training. Sincerely, Ruth Ransom, Board of World Missions, New York, New York.

ARLENE

I'm not very encouraged. So I figure, I'll apply to two nurses training programs. If I don't get in, then I'll know.

(MAMA and PA enter.)

MAMA

You what?

ARLENE

I got accepted to nurses training school.

PA

Nurses training school?

ARLENE

Actually, two of them.

MAMA

(a bit perturbed)

So you're going to quit teaching?

PA

No, she's going to become a nurse.

MAMA

Isn't that what I just said?

PA

Yah. But it's the way you said it.

MAMA

(exiting, speaking fiercely in Dutch)

Hier word ik niet goed van! (*This situation is making me not well.*)

(MAMA exits.)

PA (continued)

Your mother says she's very proud of you. And so am I.

(PA exits.)

ARLENE

I approach each step of the way objectively. If I don't pass the boards, well then I'll know. If I don't graduate, well then I'll know.

MISS ARNOLD

(entering)

Arlene. Two things. First congratulations on your excellent completion of our program.

ARLENE

Thank you, Miss.

MISS ARNOLD

And secondly, I wonder if you've ever considered becoming a teacher of nurses. My point is, I think we could help you go on to the University of Iowa if you would come back and work here.

ARLENE

Thank you.

(Beat.)

Thank you so much.

MISS ARNOLD

Good.

ARLENE

No. It's just that – I have something else I have to do first.

MISS ARNOLD

Oh. Are you sure?

ARLENE

Yes. I'm sure.

MISS ARNOLD

You know this opportunity won't always be here.

ARLENE

Yes. I know.

MISS ARNOLD

Alright, well.... You still have my congratulations.

(MISS ARNOLD exits.)

ARLENE

I haven't yet told anyone except my pastor, but I write another letter and I get another answer.

RUTH

Dear Miss Schuiteman: Yes, I remember your inquiry. I hope that I wasn't too abrupt in my reply. I fear I may have been abrupt. But in God's gracious timing, you have persevered, and it is with great hope that I invite you to complete the enclosed application.

ARLENE

"In God's gracious timing...." "It is with great hope...."

(PA enters. Also MAMA and MILLY.)

ARLENE (continued)

The whole family is over – my two married sisters, Harriet and Bernice, and their three little kids. Joyce and her boyfriend Wilmer. Everybody. It's time. I have to tell them. But Joyce steals the moment by announcing her engagement. So I wait until the end of the night.

(to the room)

Everybody, before we...before you go, I was, I wanted to, I, to tell you something.

MILLY

Oh, yeah, I heard this really great joke today.

MAMA

Hush, Milly, Arlene was talking.

MILLY

I'm sorry, Arlene. What?

ARLENE

You can tell your joke.

MILLY

It's very funny.

MAMA

A joke can wait. What is it, Arlene?

(Silence.)

MILLY

Come on, Arlene.

PA

(to MILLY)

Milly.

(to ARLENE)

Arlene, if it's something you...sometimes it's easier if you just rip a bandaid off quick.

ARLENE

Okay, what I need to tell you is that...I'm going to be a missionary.

(Long pause.)

PA

You're what?

ARLENE

I'm going to be a missionary. In a foreign country.

(Silence.)

MILLY

Have you heard the one about the penguin and the –



MAMA

We'd better get these little ones bundled up.

MILLY

What? I didn't tell my joke.

PA

Save it for when people feel like laughing, Mill.

MAMA

(babytalk)

Come on, baby.

ARLENE

And that was it. The party broke up and we went to bed. The next morning, Pa's up early.

PA

How'd you sleep?

ARLENE

Fine. Pretty good.

PA

I didn't.

ARLENE

Didn't sleep good?

PA

Didn't sleep at all.

ARLENE

Over what I said?

PA

What was the nursing all about?

ARLENE

Remember the missionary conference in Orange City? There was a call for nurses.

PA

I didn't go. I stayed home.

ARLENE

You always said I'd make a good nurse. Sometimes I'm slow. But God didn't forget about me.

PA

A missionary nurse?

ARLENE

Yeah, Pa.

PA

You been thinking about this awhile, haven't you.

ARLENE

A long time.

PA

How's that gonna go? Ach, that could mean you'll be gone for years. We got a new hospital right here, they're looking for nurses like mad.

(Lets out an expression of painful words, but in Dutch, something like, "Mijn lieve meisje," meaning "My darling little girl." Then speaks in English.)

God can use nurses right here in Sioux Center.

ARLENE

I know. That's not my assignment.

PA

How can you be so sure?

ARLENE

How can you be so sure?

PA

Well.

(Beat.)

You got my heart hitched to two buggies, girl.

ARLENE

I'm just asking for your blessing, Pa.

PA

Oh. Well, that's easy. You have my blessing. I was just thinking that maybe you wanted me to like it.

(He starts out, stops and turns.)

You're not going to Africa or something now are you?

(Since he is answered with silence, he blurts out the same thing in Dutch he said earlier as he exits.)

ARLENE

There is an immediate need for a nurse in a village called Nasir in a country called the Sudan, on the African continent just south of Egypt, with the Nile running through it. I don't know a thing about it.

My precious glowing church votes to pay my entire annual support. The Mission Board in New York sends somebody out to ask them to please change the vote so that some other churches can join in the adventure. It's Christmastime in 1954 that my home church gives me a commissioning service.

WOMEN'S TRIO

(they sing second verse of "Jesus Paid it All")

Lord, now indeed I find Thy pow'r and Thine alone,  
Can change the leper's spots and melt the heart of stone.

MARIAN

Dear Arlene. I'm so eager to meet you in person. There are lots of rocky times ahead for you, but it's really fun to abandon yourself into the Lord's hands like Noah: no tiller, no sail, no compass. "Be

careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving..."

P.A. DEJONG

And Arlene, as your pastor, I send you forth with these words taken from Jesus' prayer for his disciples: "As thou has sent me into the world, even so I also send you, Arlene, into the world."

MARIAN

I could tell you what we do with our leisure time. We don't have any. I'm the teacher. Vandy's our Bible translator, a real language expert, and a bit on the incorrigible side. Nuer is our language and our people.

Our house is not as private as it might be, but you can always cry in the shower!

Bring your bathing suit. And your rifle. I hope I haven't scared you off. Love. Marian.

(As MARIAN exits, ARLENE perhaps re-enters in a nurse's uniform.)

WOMEN'S TRIO

(heard singing offstage, the refrain of "Jesus Paid it All")

Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe.

Sin had left a crimson stain—He washed it white as snow.

ARLENE

Snow? Do they have snow in the Sudan? I don't know anything. So I read like crazy, but not about the language. It is unwritten. I take the train to New York, climb the gangway of the Scythia, and sail off alone into an unknown world.

As you have guessed, they have no snow in Nuerland. It's April when I finally climb out of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship plane onto the grassy airstrip at the edge of the outpost. It is very, very hot. Soon the river will overflow, and then the airstrip will be useless until the rainy season is over. That'll be wintertime back home. I'm already missing the cold.

The Nuer people are not white. They are black. Blacker than black. A magnificent blue black. They wear beads and bracelets,

earrings and, in 1955, little else. The British Government is in power, and they have made a rule that when you are at the outpost, clothing is not optional. So a Nuer person on his way to town just throws a strip of cloth over his shoulder.

Into this world I have arrived with my nurse's uniform, and 5 pairs of white canvas shoes.

(MARIAN enters.)

MARIAN

This will be your bed. And in here's the kitchen.

ARLENE

Marian!

MARIAN

What?!

ARLENE

We have a refrigerator.

MARIAN

Where did you say you were from?

ARLENE

A primitive culture.

MARIAN

The fridge is diesel, but it doesn't freeze anything. But look at this. An indoor toilet.

ARLENE

(teasing)

I've seen those.

MARIAN

You know everything. We have electric lights in the evening. But you'll need to learn how to use a lantern.

ARLENE

That I can do.

(Referring to herself.)

Farm girl.

MARIAN

Yep. You're gonna be good.

ARLENE

And that's the Nuer name they give me: Nya Bigoaa. "Nya" meaning unmarried, without children, sorta like, "Miss". "Bi" meaning "you will be." "Goaa" meaning "good." Nya Bigoaa. "Miss, you will be good." And my Nuer last name is "Jon." That means I am the daughter of John Schuiteman. Nya Bigoaa Jon. "Miss, you will be good, daughter of John." Nya Bigoaa Jon. Try it. [ ] Good! Before long, like everyone else, you'll forget my Sioux Center name. It'll just disappear into Nuerland. Just like me.

(Wound alarm clock ringing.)

MARIAN

Nya Bigoaa. Are you awake?

ARLENE

What time is it?

MARIAN

Six oclock. Can you grab my alarm for me?

VANDY

(entering)

Somebody awake in here?

MARIAN

I'm not.

ARLENE

Hi, Vandy.

MARIAN

(to VANDY)

Why are you up?

VANDY

Well, for one thing, your alarm went off. And for another I thought maybe if somebody was up they'd want to help me kill a snake.

MARIAN

I'm not up.

ARLENE

I'm up. This is chore time back home.

VANDY

Oh, yeah. Farm girl.

ARLENE

Give me five minutes.

(to us)

Killing snakes is a daily routine. And because the poisonous snake is a Nuer god, they won't kill it. They'll tell Vandy, "Tall girl, bring your fire."

MAN

(in Nuer)

Nya mi bar. Noonni mac.

ARLENE

And Vandy grabs her .22.

VANDY

What kind is it?

MAN

Deng.

ARLENE

I will soon learn that it is okay for a snake to be killed, as long as they don't do it.

ANOTHER MAN

(in Nuer)

Guiche. Jen e piny. (*Look. It's down there.*)

(The men back away.)

Jenen! Jenen! Jenen! (*There. There. There.*)

MAN

(in Nuer)

Nuk eh. Nuk eh. Nuk eh. (*Kill it. Kill it. Kill it.*)

ARLENE

What? What are they saying?

VANDY

(satirically)

Let me see if I can translate. Um, "Kill it, kill it, kill it."

ARLENE

Are you going to kill it?

VANDY

Awhn.

ARLENE

What's "Awhn"?

VANDY

Yes. Awhn means yes.

ARLENE

Awhn?

VANDY

Yes.

ARLENE  
(to the men in Nuer)  
Nuk eh?

MAN and ANOTHER MAN  
Awhn! Awhn!

ARLENE  
So Vandy “nuk eh”s it. For someone as fearless as Vandy, this takes no skill. You put the rifle to the snake’s head and pull the trigger.

(VANDY mimes this and there is the sound of a gunshot.)

ARLENE (continued)  
When I first went off to kindergarten at Welcome #4, the teacher spoke English. But my parents had only spoken Dutch at home. That’s what I feel like now: a kindergartener who has only spoken Dutch.

VANDY  
(explaining to ARLENE)  
After I killed the snake, I said to them, “You say this snake is God?”

MAN  
*Awwhn*, it is God.

VANDY  
Then I have killed your God?

(The men freeze. VANDY speaks to ARLENE.)

VANDY (continued)  
Their answer should have been, “Awhn.” To which I would have replied,  
(in Nuer)  
Ku baa teedi? (*How can this be?*)  
(in English)

“Can a person who is less than God kill God?” To which they should have replied.

(The men break their freeze.)

MAN and ANOTHER MAN  
(in English)  
Of course not. This is ridiculous. What fools we are. Why haven’t we seen this before?

(The men freeze again.)

VANDY  
But what they said was.

MAN and ANOTHER MAN  
(sorta together)  
We don’t know.

VANDY  
You don’t know?

MAN and ANOTHER MAN  
(shaking their heads, they say “no” in Nuer)  
Ec.

ARLENE  
What does, “Ec” mean? No?

VANDY  
(to ARLENE)  
Awhn. I said to them,  
(to the men)  
Why are you afraid of this creature?

MAN  
It is the way of the People.

ANOTHER MAN  
(poking the MAN, in Nuer)  
Ce lieu? (*It is truly dead?*)

MAN  
*Awhn.* It is truly dead. My sisters, who will remove the snake?

VANDY  
You will.

(MAN looks at ANOTHER MAN.)

ANOTHER MAN  
I am not going to touch it.

MAN  
We are not going to touch it.

(They look at VANDY.)

VANDY  
Why not?

MAN  
Because we will die.

(All freeze except ARLENE.)

ARLENE  
How can I be a nurse in this place? I don't know the language or the culture. But I cannot learn one without knowing the other. I am thrown into this deep river in all my clothes.

(ARLENE covers her face with her hands.)

VANDY  
Bigoaa.

ARLENE  
*Awhn.*

VANDY  
You need to remember something. This is not on our shoulders. If God does not work, neither can we.  
(To the men.)  
I will remove the snake.

MAN  
*E jen.*

ANOTHER MAN  
*E jen.*

(The men leave. VANDY goes.)

ARLENE  
“If God does not work, neither can we.” If God does not work, neither can I.

(Several patients amble onto the stage, waiting.)  
A great Hegleg tree stands in front of our clinic, and it is there, in the cooling shade of “the clinic tree” that the patients gather at earliest light. They have malaria, meningitis, trachoma, pneumonia, TB, worms, measles, chicken pox, whooping cough, yaws, dysentery. Bites—from scorpions, hyenas, snakes and crocodiles. But I am not allowed to help.

MOTHER WITH TWINS  
(Carrying baby in basket; clapping her hands, she speaks in Nuer.)  
Luak a. (*I need help.*)

ARLENE  
(pointing)  
Over there. To the clinic tree.

MOTHER WITH TWINS  
Luak a. (*I need help.*)

ARLENE

(using sign language)

The doctor does not allow me to work yet. I can't understand you.

MOTHER WITH TWINS

Luak a. (*I need help.*)

ARLENE

I don't know the language. Ech.

MOTHER WITH TWINS

Luak a!!! (*I need help!!!*)

ARLENE

Was this baby just born?

(to us)

She grabs my hands and forces them onto her stomach. I feel a kick.

(mostly to herself)

How far did you walk to get here?

MOTHER WITH TWINS

Luak a. (*I need help.*)

ARLENE

Marian, quickly.... This woman walked in here with one baby born and at least one more on the way.

MARIAN

(to the woman)

E ngu. Nyimar? (*What is it my sister? Is it peace?*)

MOTHER WITH TWINS

Gatda lieu e. (*My baby is dying.*)

MARIAN

Awhn. Come, honey, come.

MOTHER WITH TWINS

Awhn. I tried to tell that woman I need help, but she wouldn't listen.

MARIAN

She's learning your talk, my sister. Come.

ARLENE

I lie at night on my bed, looking at the screens covered with insects, watching the bats swooping to catch them, listening to the hippopotami snorting in the distance. I think, "If only it were Pentecost and I had the tongues of fire..." I remind myself, "If God does not work, neither can I." I fall asleep dreaming of the farm and Welcome #4.

Then my first rainy season arrives in full force. The people migrate back to their villages, where they will plant crops beyond the spreading swampland. There are not so many patients now, and I don't feel so guilty for not helping. The river rises and overflows. And up the swollen river comes the steamer, carrying a dying Nuer boy. He knows English!

(ARLENE enters, with VANDY and MARIAN close behind.)

MARIAN

Oh honey, how is he?

ARLENE

I don't know. It's possible, but it doesn't look good.

VANDY

It's Nuerland's great enemy, TB—

MARIAN

He won't die.

VANDY

But I'm no doctor.

ARLENE  
Dr. Gordon has some of the new meds: streptomycin, isoniazid.

MARIAN  
He's a young man. And he's one of the few converts.

VANDY  
How fair is that?

ARLENE  
If God doesn't work, neither can we.

VANDY  
I wish I could figure God out. You believe, you work, but you have no idea. You can't make God fit a graph. Mission work is not a business.

ARLENE  
(exiting)  
Excuse me.

MARIAN  
What's wrong with her?

VANDY  
I don't know. I'm just guessing. But first year away from home, doesn't know the language, doesn't know the culture, isn't sure if she's doing any good. Could be ready for a melt down.

MARIAN  
Just because you're a pessimist doesn't mean everybody is, Vandy!

(MARIAN exits.)

VANDY  
(to no one)  
Well, like I said, I'm just guessing.

(VANDY exits. ARLENE comes to CIENG PINY's mat on the floor.)

ARLENE (continued)  
How are you feeling, Cieng Piny?

CIENG PINY  
Alright.  
(He coughs.)

ARLENE  
Would you like me to read you something?

CIENG PINY  
Alright.  
(He coughs harder.)  
Am I going to die?

ARLENE  
What would you like me to read?

CIENG PINY  
In English? I need to keep up with my English.

ARLENE  
Well, that's good, because I can't read Nuer.

CIENG PINY  
(Coughs.)  
I'll be your language tutor.

ARLENE  
Well, then you'd better live.

(CIENG PINY laughs which makes him cough.)

ARLENE (continued)  
Oh, Cieng Piny, I'm so sorry. I should know better than making a joke. I'm so—



CIENG PINY  
No. It's alright. Laughter is medicine too, you know.

ARLENE  
It says that in the Bible.

CIENG PINY  
Yes, Nya Bigoaa Jon. That's where I read it.

ARLENE  
Shall I read the Bible to you?

CIENG PINY  
Some day you won't.

ARLENE  
What?

CIENG PINY  
Some day you won't. Muslim law is coming.

ARLENE  
I don't think so. What makes you say that?

(CIENG PINY coughs.)

ARLENE (continued)  
Listen.  
(She opens the Bible and reads.)

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Cieng Piny, are you asleep?

(CIENG PINY is asleep.)

ARLENE (continued)

Cieng Piny has no money; not even a goat or a chicken. So he can't pay for his medicine. Of course we treat him, and when he is well enough, he gives me language lessons. And by the time the grasslands begin to burn and the People encamp their cattle along the lowering river, my tutor has become my friend, a dear Christian brother. And he pushes me.

CIENG PINY  
But how are you going to get courage?

ARLENE  
Let me practice on one person.

CIENG PINY  
You are ready, Bigoaa. Practice on the children under the clinic tree. Tell them the stories you told me as I lay dying.

ARLENE  
(in Nuer)  
Naaman e kuar jeečni! (*Naaman was chief of the army.*)

CIENG PINY  
(in Nuer, with vigor, as coaching her)  
Naaman e kuar jeečni!

ARLENE  
E wut mi boom boom, ka ta ke (*He was a brave man but he had*)  
(in English)  
leprosy.

CIENG PINY  
E ruac mi goa, Nya Bigoaa. (*It is good talk, Nya Bigoaa.*)

ARLENE  
Thank you, my teacher.

CIENG PINY  
Nya Bigoaa.

ARLENE

Awhn, Cieng Piny.

CIENG PINY

It is still the season for travel. Am I well enough to go home?

ARLENE

Is my talk good enough?

CIENG PINY

It is very good.

ARLENE

Will you take your medicine?

CIENG PINY

I wish to see my people. I wish to talk to them.

ARLENE

Then go in peace, my brother.

CIENG PINY

(exiting)

Stay in peace, my sister.

ARLENE

And so he goes. And at the turning of the year, his prophecy sharpens its knife. The British Empire pulls out, handing the government to the Sudanese of the North. Different geography, different race, different religion. But at the American mission outpost by the Sobat River, that is a world apart.

One day, I go into my bedroom to escape the oppressive mid-day heat. Vandy is there.

(VANDY enters.)

ARLENE (continued)

Hi, Nyarial.

VANDY

Bigoaa.

ARLENE

Can I see that Time magazine when you're done?

(No answer.)

What?

(No answer.)

What? What is it Vandy?

(VANDY hands over the magazine, pointing to one page.)

ARLENE (continued)

Eulogies?

(Reading and sorting out confirmation for this tragedy.)

Auca. Five? Five?

VANDY

Jim Elliot was my classmate at Wheaton. He and Elisabeth were in Bible study with me. We were going to be missionaries and go wherever God—do whatever God—

(ARLENE comes to her and VANDY melts into ARLENE. Other cast members sing in Nuer, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.")

VANDY (continued)

Where's the good, Arlene? Where is it?

(VANDY exits.)

ARLENE

"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth forever." When the rainy season is over Cieng Piny returns. And he is not alone.

(YUOL sits on a stool near ARLENE. He coughs. CIENG PINY is there, too.)

ARLENE (continued)

You know what is wrong with your uncle, don't you, my brother?

CIENG PINY

I thought so.

ARLENE

You remember that I thought it might kill you?

CIENG PINY

Yes, that is why I told Yuol that he should go with me to the clinic tree on the Sobat River at Nasir. He is come.

(CIENG PINY has now given YUOL into ARLENE's care.  
He exits.)

ARLENE

Old father. Is it peace?

YUOL

It is peace, my daughter.  
(He coughs.)

ARLENE

And so, I begin to nurse this old man. All during his treatment he listens whenever someone talks the talk of God. At the clinic prayer time he listens. At Vandy's weekly Bible study, he listens.

YUOL

This talk is very sweet.

ARLENE

Each Sunday he sits on a log bench in the grass roofed church and listens to Pastor Kuac.

YUOL

My daughter, how many cows have I killed for the gods? One, two, three, four, five.

(Shows with his hand. Coughs.)

And did I get life? No. No life. They are gods of uselessness.

ARLENE

At the beginning of the dry season, Yuol begins to strengthen.

YUOL

Nya Bigoaa! Do you know what God wants of us? He wants us to be praisers.

ARLENE

E jen.

YUOL

E jen! E jen!

ARLENE

It is good talk, old grandfather.

YOUL

I called to that man, Ruon, one day. I said, come let us talk. He came. I said you are an old man, let us talk about the God, Jeebeth.

ARLENE

(to us)

There is no "s" sound in Nuer. So Yuol says, "Jee-beth," for Jesus.

YUOL

He says, I don't want to talk about the God, Jeebeth. I said, then go away I don't have any other talk.

ARLENE

So this old man who has become a praiser asks Pastor Kuac to be washed. How does he know? He has not seen a baptism. He knows because has heard the story in the gospel.

(YUOL kneels and KUAC baptizes him. There is perhaps a Nuer chorus. Or maybe the refrain of "Sweet By and By" sung in Nuer.)

ARLENE

He is so happy, Vandy.

VANDY

I worry. In the far east, converts from Buddhism, when they come to die, they return to Buddhism. They may live a Christian, but they die a Buddhist.

ARLENE

What are you saying, Vandy?

VANDY

I have great hope, Bigoaa, just as much as you. But we have to face the fact that there are many dangers in the Christian way.

ARLENE

I'm a Calvinist. I believe that if a person is a Christian, he will remain a Christian.

VANDY

If.

(After the song and baptism, YUOL comes to ARLENE.)

YUOL

Nya Bigoaa.

ARLENE

Yes, old grandfather.

YUOL

It is still the season for travel. Am I well enough to go home?

ARLENE

No. You still need to take the medicine everyday.

YUOL

You can give me the medicine to take to my home.

ARLENE

You are safer here, old grandfather.

YUOL

I will be with my family there. I wish to see my people. I wish to talk to them.

VANDY

(with great passion)

You are safer here. There is danger if you go, old grandfather. Much danger. You should stay here with us.

YUOL

(YUOL points to his heart.)

There are many hearts in my village. God is churning for the hearts of my village. I wish to speak to them of Jeebeth.

VANDY

It is good talk. Go in peace, old grandfather.

YUOL

Stay in peace, my daughters.

(YUOL takes their hands.)

God of the sky, Father of Jeebeth, protect me from the father of evil when I get home. You know the temptations and power of the way of the People. O, protect me. Inono.

(YUOL starts to go.)

ARLENE

The last words we hear, watching him drift away in the loaded dugout canoe....

YUOL

(calling)

He is my husband. God is my husband.

VANDY

He has no question of the love of God for him.

ARLENE

His village is seven days walking. We know that he does not have enough medicine to last the rainy season. He must return. But he does not return. And the rains begin to fall. Cieng Piny writes us a letter of concern from his school.

CIENG PINY

My sisters, I have heard the bad news that my uncle has sacrificed a cow to the gods. He is an old man, but a babe in Christ. We must not forget to pray for him.

ARLENE

The rainy season ends. But Yuol does not come back.

VANDY

(entering)

You won't believe this one. Pastor Kuac thinks he should beat his wife.

ARLENE

Beat her?!

VANDY

He bought her an aluminum tray, and he wants her to use the table he made. She's a village girl, she's never lived like that. She's threatening to leave him.

ARLENE

He's not being serious.

VANDY

Yes, he is. He says the other women will talk if he doesn't, and if a wife is not beaten from time to time, she thinks her husband doesn't want her around.

(VANDY cries out in frustration.)

ARLENE

Sit down. I'll go and speak with him.

(ARLENE starts to exit.)

MARIAN

(dashing in)

Nyarial! There's a runner here. He has a message about Yuol.

(VANDY enters, too.)

VANDY

Bigoaa, it's about Yuol.

MESSENGER

He won't live long. He can never reach Nasir by foot again. The disease of before has come. Now his son has died. The family said, this is your fault, Yuol. Make a sacrifice to the god deng. Live or at least let us live. So he killed an ox. But Yuol is dying.

VANDY

(who is now getting mad)

The Devil is not going to beguile him without some opposition. We can catch the MAF plane as far as Akobo.

ARLENE

His people may be moving to cattle camp. How could we find him?

VANDY

It's a journey of faith.

MARIAN

Please. Go.

ARLENE

(to us)

The Missionary Aviation Fellowship plane takes Vandy and me part way. The next morning, we set out in the Jeep, loaded with food and water, bedrolls, and extra gasoline. From there we set out down the one lane, dirt road. After three hours in the Jeep, we arrive at Yuol's village.

VANDY

He's not here, Bigoaa. They've moved to cattle camp. This boy says he can take us.

BOY

You cannot get there by car.

VANDY

We can't take the jeep.

ARLENE

If we don't take the jeep, we can't get him out. He'll die.

VANDY

Lets go.

BOY

You cannot take the jeep.

VANDY

Would you like to ride or walk beside us?

BOY

I will take a ride.

ARLENE

So we start out in the desperate heat of midday, across the trackless plain, through the tall grass, creeping over the hummocks of caked earth left on the floor of the dried swamps. A family of giraffes lopes gracefully along beside us. And then the hood of the jeep bounces off.

VANDY

We can tie it back on with a rope.

ARLENE

Every twenty minutes, we have to stop and refill the radiator.

VANDY

Arlene. Look. Water lilies.

ARLENE

We're missing a battery cap.

VANDY

I'll whittle a cap from a root.

ARLENE

There are no villages to mark the way, but the boy sees something.

BOY

Go there. Go to that tree.

ARLENE

I see it in the distance, like a black mast on a calm sea of golden grass. We get to the tree and there is nothing there.

BOY

Go. Go there.

VANDY

There's nothing there. Nothing at all.

ARLENE

We drive. Finally the boy says.

BOY

He is there.

ARLENE

We see nothing, but another tree, short, thin and lifeless against the gray sky. We creep closer and see that at the tree is a small waterhole filled with young men and cattle. And then we see him. He is coming to meet us, leaning on a staff, draped with the white cloth we had given him. We run to him.

VANDY

Sit, old grandfather. Come and sit down.

YUOL

My children. I am dying. I am dying.

ARLENE

We sit down at the tree, with Yuol in its narrow shadow.

YUOL

My son died. I am dying. There has been much trouble. I did something. I killed an ox. The father of evil came. My head was confused. The people were angry. They said God was angry and it was my fault—that was why we were dying. Jeebeth loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.

(He coughs.)

VANDY

Little ones to him belong.

(in Nuer)

Ken kocke, ka Jen bume. (*They are weak but he is strong.*)

(He coughs. VANDY looks at ARLENE.)

ARLENE

We have come to take you back with us, old father.

YUOL

Ah, the journey would kill me.

VANDY

But there is a sky canoe which is coming to take us all tomorrow.

(YUOL holds his head in his hands.)

YUOL

A sky canoe? We will go.

VANDY

(to just ARLENE)

Just for the record, I'll be surprised if the trip in this jeep doesn't kill him.

ARLENE

Me, too.

(to us)

We have no time to lose if we're going to reach the road before dark in this animal infested countryside. We do reach the road and stop at a little merchant shop. We overhear two Arab men talking about us.

ARAB ONE

Who are those two white women?

ARAB TWO

They came to get the old man, in the jeep.

ARAB ONE

Who is he?

ARAB TWO

He's that old man from Pi Jiaak. Yuol. The man who has Jesus for his God.

ARLENE

Vandy says to me.

VANDY

What a reputation. Even the Muslims know who he is and what he thinks. If they know, everyone must know.

ARLENE

The next day, we fly in the MAF plane back to Nasir. It is the only plane ride of his life. I remember Yuol's words as he looked out at his Africa.

YUOL

What has God done? What has God done?

ARLENE

January 5, 1958. Dear Folks. Well, Friday was my 34<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Vandy gave me a big blue, man's handkerchief and a note that said, "For the nose that blows from dear nose woes." This morning, though weak and tired, Yuol came walking into church. I still can't get over the thrill it has been to know that man. I love all of you so much, especially today.

YUOL

Do not bury me in the way of the people. Cover me only with the white cloth. Nothing else.

VANDY

Yes, old father, you will be buried in the white cloth as you said.

ARLENE

Vandy tells me later that an old woman who knows Yuol is sitting near them at the end. She's smoking a pipe with a long stem.

WOMAN WITH PIPE

He will die today?

VANDY

I don't know. Maybe. His body has nothing more. Did Yuol talk to you of the God, Jeebeth?

WOMAN WITH PIPE

Awhn.

VANDY

Did he tell you about the place he is going?

WOMAN WITH PIPE

Awhn. He said he was going to the place where God is.

VANDY

Which God?

WOMAN WITH PIPE

The God, Jeebeth.

VANDY

The God, Jeebeth?

WOMAN WITH PIPE

The God, Jeebeth.

VANDY

Do you believe this is true?

WOMAN WITH PIPE

I don't know.

(Looks at Yuol.)

He died?

VANDY

No. He is breathing still. The place of God is a good place, old mother. Maybe there is cattle there.

WOMAN WITH PIPE

It is like that?

VANDY

It may be. God said he was getting it ready for us.

ARLENE

Little does Vandy know if there are cattle in heaven, but whatever there will be will be good and to the Nuer people nothing is as good as cattle.

WOMAN WITH PIPE

He dies.

(She spits and turns her back.)



VANDY

(singing)

Awhn, Jeebeth nhok a. (*Yes, Jesus loves me.*)

Awhn, Jeebeth nhok a. (*Yes, Jesus loves me.*)

Awhn, Jeebeth nhok a... (*Yes, Jesus loves me...*)

ARLENE

And the woman turns her back, because that is what the Nuer do when death comes. Probably the greatest joy for me this first term in Africa will be to have known Yuol.

And now I must tell you of another death. One that catches me by surprise, and makes me an African. I am home on furlough. I am in Kentucky, and I get a phone call from my sister.

GRADA

Arlene?

ARLENE

Grada. Hi.

GRADA

Arlene, it's Pa.

ARLENE

Alright. What?

GRADA

He and Mama are not coming to see you in Kentucky after all. They got as far as Sioux City. And he started feeling so bad that they had to turn around. It was a heart attack. They got to the hospital. That's where I am now.

ARLENE

Can I speak with him?

GRADA

Not just yet. But soon.

(GRADA exits.)

ARLENE

But soon never came. He was gone that night.

Five years ago, I could have stayed home to please my Pa. I would have loved to do that. But then he's the one that would leave, and who would I please then? As much as it hurt him, I know that he meant for me to go. And I know that he was proud of me. But it was Dutch pride, which means it is never to be spoken of.

I think now that it is the one two punch of Yuol's death, followed by my father's that has turned me into an African. My home is now the Sudan. Just in time for the northern Sudanese to say no. The government starts expelling westerners. Vandy goes first and then me. At the beginning of the dry season of 1963, I come home for dinner, and there is a cablegram from the Ministry of the Interior. Within a week, I must say goodbye, and head north to the capital city.

There is a balm waiting for me in Khartoum. It is Cieng Piny.

CIENG PINY

Is it peace, my sister?

ARLENE

It is peace, my brother.

CIENG PINY

What's this about?

ARLENE

They haven't told me.

CIENG PINY

You can appeal to the Minister of Interior.

ARLENE

I've asked for an interview. Here's my letter.

CIENG PINY

(reading)

“His Excellency, the Minister of Interior. The Republic of the Sudan. Khartoum. Your Excellency. Because I have due respect for the authorities who have the responsibility of maintaining law and order, and because it is my desire to serve the welfare of the Sudan and her people, I hereby appeal to your Excellency....”

Vandy would be scoffing at all those “excellencies.”

ARLENE

If they work, I’ll be the one laughing.

CIENG PINY

“If God does not work, neither can we.”

ARLENE

You have been a good brother to me, Cieng Piny.

CIENG PINY

My sister. No matter what, you will be back.

ARLENE

Or I will see you somewhere else.

CIENG PINY

E jen.

ARLENE

E jen pany.

(CIENG PINY exits.)

ARLENE (continued)

I am granted an interview at the Ministry of the Interior. The whole thing lasts less than five minutes.

(MINISTER OF INTERIOR enters.)

MINISTER OF INTERIOR

What do you hope for?

ARLENE

I wish to review whatever charge may be against me.

MINISTER OF INTERIOR

Yes. Well that is easy. I have reviewed your file and there is no case that is made against you that can be defended in court, so no charge will be brought.

ARLENE

No charge?

MINISTER OF INTERIOR

You have understood it completely.

ARLENE

So I will not be expelled from the country?

MINISTER OF INTERIOR

Please, I thought you had understood. I promise that your expulsion order is final. It cannot be changed.

ARLENE

And what is His Excellency’s reason for my expulsion?

MINISTER OF INTERIOR

That is easy. The reason for your expulsion will be left to your own discretion to supply. Now, if you will kindly excuse me....

(MINISTER OF INTERIOR exits.)

ARLENE

I left Sioux Center to follow God. Where he is taking me now, I do not know. I fly from Khartoum to Bethlehem. While I am in Bethlehem, I hear that President Kennedy has been shot. I return to the United States, a foreigner. I do learn a little about my expulsion.

MARIAN

The story goes that a police sergeant wanted one of the local women for a night and she refused. She told him that the nurse at the clinic said it was wrong and might lead to disease. He got hot under the collar and told authorities that your teachings were putting a barrier between the north and the south. He being from the North and she being from the South.

ARLENE

But the barrier was already there.

KUAC

A Letter from Kuac. Murdering began in Nasir in June, 1965. We pray and ask God to help us, but there is no answer.

(Song "There is a Balm in Gilead" is sung in English by trio of women during the following.)

TRIO

(sung)

There is a balm

CLEOPAS

A letter from Cleopas.

TRIO

(sung)

in Gilead

CLEOPAS

Bigoaa, the July 8 massacre of Juba was inhuman.

TRIO

(sung)

To make the wounded whole.

CLEOPAS

Women and children were burnt inside their huts.

TRIO

(sung)

There is a balm

CLEOPAS

They are not rebels, but innocent villagers.

TRIO

(sung)

in Gilead

CLEOPAS

In the future, you will return to us.

TRIO

(sung)

To heal the sin sick soul.

VANDY

A letter from Vandy. August 24, 1965. Dear Arlene. You must have received the communiqué about the Sudan. Why does God allow those whom missionaries have taken years to train to be slaughtered? What do you speak about now in churches? I wish I knew what God thinks of missions.

ARLENE

(Drums begin.)

Cleopas and Cieng Piny were both wrong. I never returned to the Sudan. Vandy wrote a book about Nasir. In her book, she wrote...

VANDY

What did God want of me? This is what he wanted of me. This is what was needful. Not the salvation of the Nuer people. Not the translation.

VANDY and ARLENE

No, it was something even greater than these. It was the severest test of faithfulness I knew: to believe Him, not for what He would do, but for who He is.

ARLENE

Sometimes I get news from the Sudan. I learn that my beautiful young language tutor, Cieng Piny, has died. His TB returned. And his prophecy comes true: nationwide Islamic law. In the early 90's, Osama Bin Laden makes his base in northern Sudan. The country is torn apart.

Famine. Genocide. And thousands upon thousands of south Sudanese refugees fleeing to the United States.

ATTORNEY

Hello. Is Mrs. Schuiteman there?

ARLENE

Miss.

ATTORNEY

Pardon?

ARLENE

Miss. I'm not married.

ATTORNEY

Oh. Yeah. Well, I'm an attorney here of a Sudanese man. You know about the Sudanese community here in Sioux Falls?

ARLENE

A little. I don't travel so much anymore.

ATTORNEY

I was hoping you could come up here and help us sort something out.

ARLENE

What is that?

ATTORNEY

We have a Sudanese man in jail for beating his wife. He says it's expected in his culture. Can that be true?

ARLENE

I will come and talk with him.

ATTORNEY

Thank you, I promise I'll call you back as we see what develops here.

(ATTORNEY exits.)

ARLENE (continued)

I guess that case was settled, because I was not called back. But the word gets around that I am someone who knows the Nuer. I'm invited to a worship service at Zion Lutheran, a monthly gathering of Nuer Christians in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I go. There is much singing. A woman from the tribe preaches.

WOMAN PREACHER

Before we go today, I wish to recognize that we have a guest here.

ARLENE

They're looking at me.

WOMAN PREACHER

Would you come and introduce yourself to us?

ARLENE

Mal mi gua. E an Nya Bigoaa Jon ka Nasir. (*Hello. My name is Nya Bigoaa Jon from Nasir.*)

KHOR

Nya Bigoaa?

ARLENE

Yes.

KHOR

Nya Bigoaa Jon?

ARLENE  
Yes.

KHOR  
My father used to talk about you.

ARLENE  
Who is your father?

KHOR  
I am Khor. My father was your friend, Nya Bigoaa. I am the son of Cieng Piny.

(Beat.)

ARLENE  
Khor, son of Cieng Piny? Do you have other family here?

KHOR  
My wife Rosanna is here. Our children are named Virginia, where Rosanna and I got married, and little Cieng Piny. I don't know if you knew my great uncle Yuol.

ARLENE  
Yuol, Yes.

KHOR  
Well, many of his family became Christians. Some of them are here in the United States. His son, Choel, is a pastor in Minneapolis.

ARLENE  
Is your mother living?

KHOR  
Yes, in the Sudan. We are hoping to bring her soon.

ARLENE  
You will, Khor.

KHOR  
God will. If God does not work, we can do nothing.

ARLENE  
Yes.

KHOR  
Yes.

ARLENE  
And so it is that on Easter Sunday in my eightieth year of life, Sudan gathers into my living room in Sioux Center, Iowa. There is Khor and Rosanna, and their children. I meet for the first time their new little girl.

(ROSANNA enters with baby in her arms.)

ROSANNA  
Her name is Nya Bigoaa.

ARLENE  
Khor's mother, Cieng Piny's wife, has now arrived. Her name is Man Juba. Is this what was meant to happen all along? Only he knew what he meant when he said, "Go, and make disciples."

MAN JUBA  
(entering, taking ARLENE's hands)  
Mal mi gua, Nya Bigoaa Jon?

ARLENE  
Awhn. Mal e Man Juba.

MAN JUBA  
Old father, we call you now, we the people of sin. You, chief, help us. You are the one with power. Let your heart be soft. Let your heart be soft. We are praising you now. We are your praisers. What has God done! What has God done! We are calling you with the name of your son, Jeebeth. Inono.

(Someone begins to sing, in English, as ARLENE continues speaking.)

There's a land that is fairer than day.  
And by faith we can see it afar.  
For the Father waits over the way  
To prepare us a dwelling place there.

(Humming continues.)

ARLENE

In the fall of 2005, the U.S. Government hired Khor as a translator. He works in Iraq today. His family lives among the Sudanese in Nebraska, and he calls them every morning. I am 82. I live in my parents' old house in Sioux Center, Iowa. I talk often to Vandy in Dillsburg, Pennsylvania. Neither of us ever married. But God is our husband, and Jeebeth is making us a home.

(The refrain is sung one time in English, and then half the singers sing in English and half sing in Nuer.)

In the sweet by and by  
Lime, lime, lime gwa Kuoth thin (*It is sweet, place God there.*)  
We shall meet on that beautiful shore....  
Bah ne rom nee ciang kehl, nee ciang kehl (*we will meet, one day, one day*)

[or kut kuoth, nee kuoth piny  
(*near God, near God surely*)]

END OF PLAY

### Doubling suggestions

The first production (as reader's theatre) was with a cast of 5 women and 3 men. We cast the play as follows:

Female #1: Arlene

Female #2: Mama, Woman With Pipe, Man Juba

Female #3: Student #4, Miss Arnold, Marian, Woman Preacher

Female #4: Eleanor Kuiper, Ruth, Vandy

Female #5: Teacher, Milly, Mother with Twins, Grada, Boy, Attorney, Rosanna

Male #1: Pa, Kuac, Messenger, Arab 1, Minister of Interior

Male #2: Student #1, P.A. DeJong, Yuol, Another Man, Khor,

Male #3: Student #3, Cieng Piny, Man, Arab 2, Cleopas

Some of Arlene's longer narrations may be separated among the actor/readers.

The singing can be handled by a separate choir or the above actors can take songs depending on their musical ability. Obviously there are overlapping issues at some points, but these can be sorted out by having one or two voices begin in unison, and then have a singer join in as they are freed from their character responsibilities.

Finally, you may wish to have some sounds created live (like the gun shot).

Pronunciations of Dutch

- p. 21 – Kijk nu wat je doet!  
(*Now see there what you've done!*)  
pronounce: kike now vat ya dut
- p. 22 – En dat vraag je aan mij?  
(*And you're asking me?*)  
pronounce: ann dhat vroag ya oan my
- p. 27 – Hier word ik niet goed van!  
(*This situation is making me not well.*)  
pronounce: hear vhort ik neat (short t) goot vhon
- p. 32 – Mijn lieve meisje.  
(*My darling little girl.*)  
pronounce: mine leevuh mayshuh (as in duh)

Pronunciations of Nuer

General Notes:

- Try not to slide vowels. Nuer has mostly quick word.
- “r” is never a hard r sound. Add a little tongue and roll it slightly.
- There is no “c” sound. Each word printed with a c should be pronounced “ch.”

- p. 35 – Nya Bigoaa  
pronounce: niya (run together, one syllable, quick)  
bĩ gwä
- p. 37 – Nya mi bar. Nooni mac.  
pronounce: niya (run together, one syllable, quick)  
mĩ  
bär  
nō knee (stretch out o sound)  
mych (quick word)
- p. 37 – Guiche. Jen e piny. Jenen!  
pronounce: guē cha (quick)  
eh  
pēn (soften n with toungue)  
jen´ en
- p. 37 – Nuk eh!  
pronounce: nuk (u as in “cut”)
- p. 38 – Awhn  
pronounce: like yawn without the “y”
- p. 39 – Ku baa teedi?  
Pronounce: kuoo baa (like pa) tay dee
- p. 40 – Ec  
pronounce: e (like pay) ch

- p. 40 – Ce lieu?  
pronounce: che (as in pay) lee oo
- p. 42 – Luak a!  
pronounce: loo uk (as in cut) ah (short & choppy)
- p. 43 – E ngu. Nyimar.  
pronounce: E (as in Ed), nasally “new”
- p. 43 – Gatda lieu e.  
pronounce: combine t and d with tongue in gatda  
lee oo eh (as in ed)
- p. 45 – Cieng Piny  
pronounce: chung peen (soften n with tongue)
- p. 48 – Naaman e kuar jeečni!  
pronounce: e (like in ed)  
ku ar (like in tar)  
jay ch knee
- p. 48 – E wut mi boom boom, ka ta ke  
pronounce: e (as in ed)  
woot me boom boom  
kah tay ke (as in ed)
- p. 48 – E ruac mi goa,  
pronounce: e (as in ed)  
ryech (roll r a little)  
me gwaa
- p. 49 – Nyarial.  
pronounce: nya´rial (roll r a little)
- p. 51 – Kuac  
pronounce: ku why ch (one syllable, quick)
- p. 52 – Ruon  
pronounce: row an

- p. 59 – Ken kocke, ka Jen bume  
pronounce: ken koychke (e as in ed)  
koo jen boom e (as in ed)
- p. 60 – Pi Jiaak  
pronounce: pee gee uk (as in cut)
- p. 62 – nhok e  
pronounce: nhok (as in pot) ah
- p. 67 – Cleopas  
pronounce: klee aw puss
- p. 70 – Mal mi gua. E an Nya Bigoaa Jon ka Nasir.  
pronounce: mal mǐ gwaa  
e (as in ed) awn Nya Bigoaa Jon  
kä Nasir.
- p. 71 – Choel  
pronounce: rhymes with joel
- p. 72 – Li me, li me, li me gwa Kuoth thin  
Bah ne rom nee ciang kehl,  
pronounce: lee may gwa kuoth thin  
bah neh rom knee chung kel



# Living For Jesus

Text: Thomas O. Chisholm

Liv - ing for Je - sus a life that is true, Striv - ing to please Him in  
Liv - ing for Je - sus thro' earth's lit - tle while, My dear - est trea - sure, the

all that I do, Yield - ing al - le - giance, glad - heart - ed and free, This is the  
light of His smile, Seek - ing the lost ones He died to re - deem, Bring - ing the

path - way of bless - ing for me. O Je - sus, Lord and Sav - ior, I give my - self to Thee; For  
wea - ry to find rest in Him

Thou, in Thy a - tone - ment, Didst give Thy - self for me. I own no oth - er mas - ter; My heart shall be Thy

throne. My life I give, hence - forth to live, O Christ, for Thee a - lone.

# An Chu Dje Koo Lar

(I Have Decided to Follow Jesus)

Folk Melody from India  
Arr. Lois Estell

An chu dje koo lar Ba Je - beth gor, An chu dje koo lar Ba Je - beth gor,

An chu dje koo lar Ba Je - beth gor, Thu lu loin jock, Thu lu loin jock.

# Li Me Gwa Kuoth Thin

Lois Estell

Li me, li me, li me gwa kuoth thin. Bah ne rom nee cian keh,

nee ciang keh li me, li me.

## There Is A Balm In Gilead

Spiritual  
Arr. Lois Estell

There is a balm in Gil-e-ad to make the wound-ed who - le,  
there is a balm in Gil-e-ad to heal the sin - sick soul.

## Sweet By and By

Text: Sanford F. Bennett  
Music: Joseph P. Webster  
Arrangement: Lois Estell

There's a land that is fair - er than day, And by faith we can see it a - far; For the  
Fa - ther waits o - ver the way To pre - pare us a dwell - ing place there. In the  
sweet, in the sweet, by and by, by and by. We shall meet on that beau - ti - ful shore. - In the  
- sweet, in the sweet, by and by, We shall meet on that beau - ti - ful shore.

## Jesus Paid It All

Text: Elvina M. Hall  
Music: John T. Grape  
Arrangement: Lois Estell

Lord now in - deed I find Thy pow'r and Thine a - lone, Can  
change the lep - er's spots and melt the heart of stone.  
Oo - - - - -  
Je - sus paid it all, all to Him I owe.  
Je - sus paid it all, all to Him I  
owe. Sin had left a  
crim - son stain He washed it white as snow.