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SF PERUSALS

# A Cool Dip in the Barren Saharan Crick

by Kia Corthron

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH

FOUNDED 1830

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***A COOL DIP IN THE BARREN SAHARAN CRICK* was commissioned by Playwrights Horizons with funds provided by Time Warner Inc.**

**Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the World Premiere of *A COOL DIP IN THE BARREN SAHARAN CRICK* Off-Broadway in 2010**

***A COOL DIP IN THE BARREN SAHARAN CRICK*** was first produced by Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, artistic director) in New York City on March 28, 2010. The performance was directed by Chay Yew, with sets by Kris Stone, costumes by Anita Yavich, lighting by Ben Stanton, sound by Darron L. West, and the production stage manager was Kasey Ostopchuck. The cast was as follows:

**ABEBE** . . . . . William Jackson Harper
**PICKLE** . . . . . Myra Lucretia Taylor
**H.J.** . . . . . Kianné Muschett
**TAY** . . . . . Joshua King
**TICH, SEYOUM** . . . . . Keith Eric Chappelle

## CHARACTERS

**ABEBE –** an Ethiopian man, 20, 27, 28
**PICKLE –** a black American woman, 42, 50
**H.J. –** Pickle's daughter, 17, 25
**TAY –** a white American boy, 9
**SEYOUM –** an Ethiopian man, 34
**TICH –** a black American man, late 20s to 30
**THREE HEADS**

## SETTING

The U.S. and Ethiopia.

## TIME

2006, then seven years later, then a year after that.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

Abebe is ever-positive, cheerful, always working to maintain this exterior.

Suggested music: John Lee Hooker, Beethoven's Ninth. Regarding the latter, the playwright is partial to the recording of Eugene Normandy conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.*

*Please see Music Use Note on Page 3

# ACT ONE

## Scene I

*(Bathroom.* **ABEBE** *stands, staring at the toilet from the other side of the room for several moments. Then he quietly walks toward the john, kneels before it, and flushes it, staring into the bowl: fascination. The flush over, he sits back on his heels, gratified.)*

*(But the temptation strikes again. He glances around [as if to ensure he is not being watched], then slowly [as if such delicacy would somehow diminish the volume of the flush] pulls the handle. It is this second flush that provokes an offstage reaction. Slash marks indicate the interruption points:)*

**H.J.** *(off, yelling)* Abebe! Did you flush a/gain?

**PICKLE.** *(off, yelling)* Abebe! There's a drought on, don't for/get!

**H.J.** *(off, yelling)* Abebe! If it's yellow let it mellow if it's clear don't touch it, fool!

**PICKLE.** *(off, yelling)* Abebe! Remember we must conserve!

*(***ABEBE***, still staring into the toilet, flushes a third time. As their steps are heard getting nearer:)*

**H.J.** *(off, yelling)* ABEBE, GET THE HECK AWAY FROM THAT TOI/LET!

**PICKLE.** *(off, yelling)* ABEBE, THE COMMODE IS NOT A TOY!

*(Now a jiggling at the locked doorknob, followed by banging on the door, the yelling uninterrupted:)*

**H.J.**

Abebe, you know there's a water shortage! You come from Africa, I'm sure you understand the preciousness of H20! Don't think just because you're in America waste is a privilege, we have bills! And limitations, the dang reservoir's dry, boy!

**PICKLE.**

Abebe, I know you're new here but the drought has left us in a crisis! It may be hard to comprehend when water is in the pipes every time you turn them, but this may not go on indefinitely! Water is a finite commodity, we have to be aware!

*(***ABEBE***, seemingly oblivious to the women, stares with wonder into the running water of the toilet.)*

## Scene II

*(Half kitchen, half dining room. Sliding glass door to the outside. In the dining area an old console stereo with turntable.* **ABEBE** *stands holding a Bible, giving a sermon.* **PICKLE** *sits in a chair pulled from the table and facing* **ABEBE**, *holding a Bible.* **H.J.** *sits, chomping on a fat sandwich.)*

**ABEBE.** God assures us in Leviticus: "I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit."

**PICKLE.** *(long A)* A-men!

**ABEBE.** How many days?

**PICKLE.** Fifty-seven!

**ABEBE.** Fifty-seven without rain. And now having to buy water from Seton, our reservoir dry.

**PICKLE.** Cuz the *crick*'s nearly dry!

**ABEBE.** Why?

**PICKLE.** Sin!

**H.J.** Are you studying to be an ecologist or a preacher?

**PICKLE.** Abebe's a freshman, H.J., he doe'n't have to declare his major yet.

**ABEBE.** I like to think of myself as an e-God-ogist. *(laughs heartily)*

**H.J.** *(to* **PICKLE***)* But isn't that how you got the college to sponsor him? Water major?

**PICKLE.** Just a suggestion because of his interest in water. Let's see. There was classes on wetlands and wells and waterway well-being –

**H.J.** *(to* **ABEBE***)* And what are you taking?

**ABEBE.** Early Christian Monasticism, English 101, Intro to the Gospel of John, Intro to Calculus, Seminar: Jesus on the Silver Screen.

**H.J.** Sounds like there's a drought in your studies.

**ABEBE.** I write an ecology column for the school paper, next semester I shall take Wetland Management.

**PICKLE.** I *like* playin' Congregation. Someday Abebe be a real preacher, I say "I knew him when." Preach!

**ABEBE.** *(back to preacher)* What sin has caused our water shortage?

**PICKLE.** Waste!

**H.J.** You oughta know. STOP FLUSHING THE DANG TOILET!

**ABEBE.** *(laughs heartily)* I shall cease immediately!

**H.J.** You said that when you got here a month ago.

**PICKLE.** Well he *did* stop!

**H.J.** And just started again. I know indoor plumbing's a fascination for you but we *are* in a crisis.

**PICKLE.** I think this is exciting. Drought: little hardship, turn off our water three hours a day, *nothin'*. In Orme, *(pronounced "Orm")* Tennessee, population one hundred forty-five water turned *on* just three hours a day! Six to nine, people rushed home from work to take a shower, do the dishes the laundry. And CNN dot com too discreet to mention that other: flush the commode.

*(The doorbell rings.)*

That's it! *(rushes off)*

**ABEBE.** Indoor plumbing may still be a novelty as I am a village boy, but I did *not* have to come to America to witness it. Plenty for the city people, Addis Ababa. When your mother invited me to lunch at her hotel, I saw the fountains outside and wanted to dive in: a shower! *(hearty laughter)*

*(***PICKLE** *returns with the mail: letters and a flat package, about a foot square.)*

**PICKLE.** Knew it come today, just had a feelin'!

*(***PICKLE** *pulls out of the package an old record album, the cover a bit yellowed with age but in good shape.)*

John Lee Hooker!

**ABEBE.** I must hear it!

**H.J.** *(finished sandwich)* I gotta brush my teeth. *(exits)*

*(***PICKLE** *putting the record on the turntable. It is in very good condition.)*

**PICKLE.** See that? Way he hammers it on, pulls it off. *(briefly air-guitars)* And the tempo he change on a dime. No way they could add backin' tracks, instead ask him while he's singin' to stomp on wood, there's the percussion.

**ABEBE.** Pickle, how do you know so much about music?

**PICKLE.** My daddy taught me, blues music he loved. That record he used to play for my sister and me when we was tykes. John Lee was my daddy's favorite. John Lee from Mississipp', like us!

**ABEBE.** *(a question)* But H.J. was born here. Maryland.

**PICKLE.** *(nods)* Married Hal, followed him here, his hometown. Both my babies born and raised here. Marylanders. *(***PICKLE** *enjoying the music again.)*

**ABEBE.** *(holds out Bible to indicate)* Church?

**PICKLE.** *(reminded)* Church! Hey! You preach the sermon, then I pick the hymn.

**ABEBE.** Okay!

**PICKLE.** Don't never lift the needle off middle of a song, ruins the vinyl.

*(***PICKLE** *turns the record player volume down, muting the sound.)*

**PICKLE.** Ready!

**ABEBE.** *(preparing to preach)* God –

**PICKLE.** My daddy loved the blues, he used to get in big hollerin' matches with my husband who on the other hand lean more toward jazz, classical. Like one's better 'n the other. I remember singin' hymns in the shower, one day I'm beltin' out Joyful, Joyful –
*(sings)* MELT THE CLOUDS OF SIN AND SADNESS
DRIVE THE DARK OF DOUBT AWAY.
GIVER OF

**PICKLE.** *(cont.)* Hal come flyin' into the bathroom! "Hit it right, Pick!" My husband say, "Beethoven wrote it with syncopation!" then he take it away!
*(sings)* MELT THE CLOUDS OF SIN AND SADNESS
DRIVE THE DARK OF DOUBT AWAY – GIV/
ER"
hear that? "*Giv/er*" Beethoven threw in a little zinger, not everything so symmetrical, blow out your expectations! Just like in the original: three instrumental movements, then don't he pitch the world a curve ball, bring in a chorus the final round! *(laughs)* I used to love singin' that song to H.J. and Carve.

*(***ABEBE** *smiles.)*

**ABEBE.** Church?

**PICKLE.** *(reminded)* Church!

**ABEBE.** *(preparing to preach)* God –

**PICKLE.** You gonna make a wonderful preacher, Abebe. Poise, you never talk down to people. And knowledge, for a tour assistant, you educated my church group 'bout the holy lands ten times better 'n the man runnin' the show.

**ABEBE.** Thank you, Pickle.

**PICKLE.** You know about my grief. H.J.'s and my grief, year ago. Then I saw this ad for an Ethiopian Christian tour….What I needed.

**ABEBE.** I am sorry for your loss, Pickle.

**PICKLE.** *Or* ecologist! You choose that over preacher, you make a good one.

**ABEBE.** I owe you so much, Pickle. Thank you, Pickle. Is "Pickle" a common American name?

**PICKLE.** My daddy called me that, baby up. You think I'm a dill or a sweet?

**ABEBE.** Sweet!

**PICKLE.** You too! Let's sing!
*(singing)* SHALL WE GATHER AT THE RIVER
WHERE BRIGHT ANGEL FEET HAVE TROD

WITH ITS CRYSTAL TIDE FOREVER
FLOWING BY THE THRONE OF GOD?
here comes the chorus!

*(As* **PICKLE** *continues,* **ABEBE** *cheerily fakes singing this hymn he doesn't know.* **H.J.** *returns while they are singing.)*

**PICKLE.**
YES, WE'LL GATHER AT THE RIVER,

**ABEBE.**
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH

**PICKLE.**
THE BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL RIVER,

**ABEBE.**
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH

**PICKLE.**
GATHER WITH THE SAINTS AT THE RIVER –

**ABEBE.**
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAH

*(***PICKLE** *suddenly breaks into uncontrollable laughter.)*

**PICKLE.** *(to* **ABEBE***)* I can't believe you still do that! Remember when you were little, I'd turn on the car radio, if you didn't know the words –

*(***H.J.** *sharply turns to* **PICKLE**. **ABEBE** *is confused.* **PICKLE***, startled by* **H.J.***'s look, is silenced.)*

Sorry, Abebe, mixin' you up with somebody else. *(beat)* Nothin', common mistake. I see a movie with two blond women, I spend resta the film confusin' 'em. *(chuckles nervously)*

**ABEBE.** Did I tell you about my interesting opportunity to witness last evening?

*(***PICKLE***, still unsettled, shakes her head no.)*

The shop was slow, so I began rearranging the front table display when Mary Jean behind the register speaks: "That's him!" I look out into the mall corridor,

and Mary Jean admonishes me for looking where she implied to look. I see a little white boy. A sad little white boy, I think he is alone, that the man seated next to him is a stranger, but every so often the man says something to the boy and the boy responds by nodding. Mary Jean says, "That's the people took him in, fosters. That boy don't speak."

**PICKLE.** Wait, I know what you gonna say. That's the boy his daddy taken that shotgun, killed his mama, his brothers and sister and lastly himself.

**ABEBE.** Correct! But this boy on that fateful night his father could not locate, so small he balled himself in a corner under the bed and was unseen. Now a woman carrying shopping bags joins the boy and man, and they stand and walk toward our shop. "He'd like a pair of tennas," the foster father says to me, so I walk the boy to the children's shelf, indicating the styles to see if any are to his fancy. The Adidas? He nods. The New Balance? He nods. These exceptionally hideous Nikes? He nods. The boy carries an old shoebox tied with a string. I ask him to sit. He does, and sets the shoebox on the chair next to him. I take my shoehorn out of my hip pocket and slip the shoes onto his feet. Do they feel good? He nods. Can you walk around in them? He does. How do they feel? A trick to make him speak! He stares. Mary Jean offers to ring them up, an opportunity for her to interrogate the woman, who has pulled her credit card from her wallet. I put my shoehorn back in my hip pocket, and alone with the boy, I kneel beside his chair and tell him that God is always with us, that God will never desert us. He nods. I tell him the people we love will never desert us either, even those in heaven watching us, still loving us, always loving us. He stares at me. I tell him that people make mistakes but that does not mean they do not go to heaven. I lean in close, and I say quietly, "Everyone has a bad day. What we need to remember are all the days of love." *(smiles)*

**PICKLE.** Then?

**ABEBE.** Then he stands. Walks around me, behind me, he takes the shoehorn from my hip pocket, he puts it into *his* hip pocket. I do not know if this is anger, a robbery and a dare that I not challenge it, or if this is something he is giving me. A closeness. His foster parents did not see, Mary Jean did not see. Then his foster parents lead him out of the shop, and I wonder whether I have sinned in allowing the theft to occur, not to have reported it. But I weigh my offense, taking all the factors into consideration, and in this reflection I remember: The shop has many shoehorns.

*(***ABEBE** *turns to* **PICKLE***, smiling.)*

Now I would like to hear the entire album. John Lee Hooker has a new fan!

**PICKLE.** Knew it! *(turns up the record volume)* Pretty good condition, huh? "Almost mint," what the seller said. But what we hear today: never again. Next time a bit different – little pop on track two, bump the middle a five. "Dialectics," some ol' Greek called it, change: You can't cross the same river twice. What makes what we have now so precious: Fleeting.

## Scene III

*(Playground.* **TAY** *sits alone at a picnic table, his lunch box on the table, eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without enthusiasm. He wears a big plastic backpack, brightly decorated with a cartoon. On the table next to his lunch is a worn shoebox, tied shut.* **ABEBE** *enters with his own packed lunch, sits beside* **TAY**.*)*

**ABEBE.** Hello Tay. Do you remember me from the shoe shop? *(***TAY** *nods.)* They told you I was coming? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Do you know my name? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Can you say it? *(***TAY** *stares.)* Abebe. *(***TAY** *stares.)* All alone. You don't like to sit with the other children? *(***TAY** *nods.* **ABEBE** *smiles.)* I'm your lunch buddy. Every Thursday we shall eat lunch together. Okay? *(***TAY** *nods.)* It seems your foster mother noticed that we were having a nice chat, because she came back to the shoe shop the day after you and I met. I was off that day so she came again the next day and I was working, and she told me she thought I might be a friend to you. Then your vice-principal called me. (beat) As lunch buddies, we will talk. Okay? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Would you like to tell me something about yourself? *(***TAY** *stares.)* Would you like me to tell you something about myself? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Okay. I am from Ethiopia. Do you know where that is? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Africa? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Correct! There is much much much much water in Africa. Unfortunately sometimes it is not in the right places. Or the dry season becomes drier. Or the water is unclean. This can mean sickness, diarrhea and measles and meningitis, and these can mean death. They meant my mother's death, and my father's death, and my brother's death, and my older sisters' deaths, and my twin infant sisters' deaths. For some reason I was the only one Death overlooked, so I am an orphan: no more family. *(meaningfully)* Do you understand? *(***TAY** *stares.) A*nother family took me in but I was aware of the burden. Rain came and we rejoiced. I had been going to school but stopped to

help out the women with the farming at home. Women may go to school but few do because the task of fetching water requires several hours in a day. I was able to continue my education through occasional odd jobs in the tourist trade and this would allow me access to the internet. I learned of Rajendra Singh, a man who developed a primitive dam system to capitalize on rainwater, thousands of these small dams he brought to his poor, rural countrymen in India, and I felt this could be done in my village. So with the help of my fellow villagers, for most wondrous about this project is that it requires the community to work together, we were also successful with this dam. It provided a bulwark against drought, it allowed a few of our girls to go to school. On one of the Christian tours a kind American woman, interested in my background and asking many questions, was very impressed with my dam project. "How old are you?" she asked. "Nineteen," I replied. Now I am twenty. She brought me to the States to further my education so that I might take my knowledge home to serve my people, to save my people, and I will. *(beat)* But first I have another task to accomplish. I will share a secret with you, Tay. My work is the Lord's. When I was offered a trip to America, I saw an opportunity to spread God's word. I am a missionary here, America is not saving *me, I* am here to save *America! (A school bell rings.)*

**ABEBE.** *(cont.)* Yours is the second bell. Correct?

*(***TAY** *nods.* **ABEBE** *takes a cupcake out of his lunch, offers.)*

You like chocolate?

*(***TAY** *takes the cupcake, puts it into his lunchbox. Then unties the shoebox string, opens the shoebox. Pushes it toward* **ABEBE**. **ABEBE** *is surprised.* **ABEBE** *looks into the box. Pulls out a photograph.)*

Your family? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Everyone? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Very beautiful. Except your brother's eyes closed. *(smiles)*

*(***TAY** *indicates the box again.* **ABEBE** *pulls out a naked Barbie doll.)*

**ABEBE.** *(cont.)* What is your doll's name? *(***TAY** *points to the picture.)* Your sister's doll?

*(***TAY** *nods. A reality dawns upon* **ABEBE***)*

These are all your family's things? What is left to you?

*(***TAY** *takes a roller skate out of the box, the kind that can be attached to the bottom of a sneaker.)*

Where is your other skate? *(***TAY** *stares.)* You could find only one?

*(***TAY** *nods.* **ABEBE** *reaches in without looking, pulls out the shoehorn.* **TAY**, *instantly mortified, snatches it, hides it in his arms.)*

*No,* yours! Okay okay? You keep! I don't need the shoehorn back.

*(***TAY** *stares at him several moments. Then pulls out of the shoebox a flag. The flagpole is about eight inches long, such as those given out at parades. It is wrapped around its pole and rubber-banded so that it can't be identified, though red, white and blue may be evident.* **TAY** *points to the photo.)*

Your father's? *(***TAY** *nods. Offers the flag to* **ABEBE**.*)* Me? *(***TAY** *continues offering.)* No! you don't have to give me because I gave you.

*(***TAY** *reaches into the box, pulls out an identical rubber-banded flag. Again indicates for* **ABEBE** *to take the first flag.)*

I see! We can wave the flags together! *(***TAY** *nods.) That* I would like. Together!

*(***ABEBE** *takes both flags, removes the bands, hands one back to* **TAY**. *They unfurl them. They are Confederate flags.* **ABEBE** *and* **TAY** *begin to wave them together.* **TAY** *nearly smiles.)*

Together! *(waving)* Together! *(waving)* Together!

*(The second bell rings. They are still smiling and waving.)*

## Scene IV

*(Bathroom.* **ABEBE** *stands, holding his Bible, mouthing a silent prayer.* **H.J.** *enters wearing a shower cap and her bathing suit. Over the suit is a long overshirt, perhaps a nightshirt, hanging to her knees or lower.)*

**H.J.** *(fingering the quote marks)* I've seen those Baptism "robes," thin as rice paper, not me. Baptism's nothin' but a wet T-shirt contest.

**ABEBE.** Seven hundred gallons of water to grow enough cotton for one T-shirt!

**H.J.** Someday when you get your church, guess every sermon be your Eleventh Commandment: "Thou shalt not waste."

**ABEBE.** There is sin in godlessness and sin in waste. Waste *is* godlessness. I do not separate.

*(***H.J.** *steps into the tub, filled with water.)*

**H.J.** I still don't see how this helps you. Baptizing a heathen, cuz I know that's what you think of me.

**ABEBE.** Someday I will witness to someone who will accept the Lord and want immediate baptism in the faith! It might happen next year, it might happen tomorrow! I must practice, I must be ready!

**H.J.** Ready.

*(***ABEBE** *speaks, the Bible verses he has memorized.)*

**ABEBE.** Luke writes that the soldiers asked John the Baptist: "what shall we do? And he said…Do violence to no man…[A]nd all men mused…whether he were the Christ… John answered… I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh…he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

*(***ABEBE** *has marked the Bible to the correct page, and holds it out to* **H.J.***)*

**ABEBE.** Now you read Matthew please.

**H.J.** *(reads)* "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized – "

*(In one fell swoop* **ABEBE** *snatches the Bible back and splashes* **H.J.** *She sputters.)*

**ABEBE.** Dunk! *(laughing heartily and in good nature)*

**H.J.** I quit! *(getting out of the tub)*

**ABEBE.** Please! I must practice!

**H.J.** Yeah I'm doing you a favor, look what *I* got!

**ABEBE.** Very sorry! I shall make reparations! Tonight your dishwashing turn becomes mine!

*(***H.J.** *considers.)*

**H.J.** It wouldn't affect the rest of the schedule. Tomorrow's still your turn.

**ABEBE.** Of course!

*(***H.J.** *considers, then steps back into the tub.)*

**H.J.** Do it again it's all over. "There are wrongs which even the grave does not bury."

**ABEBE.** I have made a deal, a Christian never welches! *(beat)* "There are wrongs … ?"

**H.J.** Harriet Jacobs. Who I'm named after, didn't you ever wonder what H.J. stood for? Penned a page-turner about her escape, so well written the whites didn't believe a black authored it, and I'm talking about her *friends*, abolitionists. My parents' thing, namesaking us after black heroes. My little brother was George Washington Carver, that's why we called him "Carve." So his whole name was George Washington Carver Carter.

**ABEBE.** I too am a namesake! Abebe Bikila was told to keep an eye out for the Moroccan frontrunner, number twenty-six and Here are your Adidas who have sponsored these 1960 Olympics. But the Moroccan's number was switched to one eighty-five and the Adidas did not fit. So shoeless Abebe runs, neck and neck with one eighty-five while searching frantically for

nonexistent twenty-six. Abebe wins, the first African to take Olympic gold, Olympic gold for a marathon he ran barefoot! Went to Tokyo in '64 to provide moral support, in the end he competes, this time in Asics sneakers. He wins! four minutes ahead of second place. He wins! the first Olympic athlete to take the marathon twice. I too have a quote! When asked in 1960 about the barefoot race, Abebe replies: "I wanted the world to know that my country, Ethiopia, has always won with determination and heroism."

**H.J.** Wow. 'S he still alive?

**ABEBE.** Twice Olympic gold, twice he comes home to a hero's welcome! The second time the emperor presents him with the gift of a Volkswagen. In a country of few cars, it is a Rolls Royce. In 1969 he is in a car accident. It leaves him a quadriplegic. Surgeons work tirelessly and miraculously, and he recovers! Now only a *para*plegic! He begins to compete in paraplegic archery and jokes that he would win his next Olympic gold from his wheelchair! *(laughs heartily)*

**H.J.** Wow. 'S he still alive?

**ABEBE.** In 1973 at age forty-one he is dead, having succumbed to a cerebral hemorrhage related to the car accident of four years before.

**H.J.** Wow.

*(silence)*

**ABEBE.** Someday *I* will drive a Volkswagen! I have God's work to do, God will provide!

**H.J.** How *are* the driving lessons going?

**ABEBE.** Much improvement! The car slipped onto the sidewalk only twice yesterday! *(Baptism:)* In the nineteenth chapter of Acts, Paul comes upon disciples in Ephesus –

*(Suddenly the muffled sound of the John Lee Hooker album playing downstairs.)*

**H.J.** Guess she's home. MOM! STOP PLAYING THAT, WE'RE HAVING OUR SACRED MOMENT!

*(The music stops. Sound of footsteps.* **ABEBE***'s left hand on* **H.J.***'s back, right hand holding up the Bible.)*

**ABEBE.** In the nineteenth chapter of Acts, Paul comes upon disciples in Ephesus –

*(A knock at the bathroom door.)*

**PICKLE.** *(off)* This the baptism? Can I watch? *(***H.J.** *sighs.)*

**ABEBE.** Please join us, Pickle!

*(***PICKLE** *enters in a nurse's uniform and carrying a letter.)*

**PICKLE.** House all quiet, thought yaw finished already, went out.

**ABEBE.** You were only hearing the tranquility of holiness!

**PICKLE.** Seein' that girl get a little a the devil knocked outa her's worth it, even if she just actin' the part. Letter for you! From Ethiopia!

**ABEBE.** Thank you!

**PICKLE.** I'll set it here 'til you're dry.

*(***PICKLE** *sets the letter on the back of the toilet, then sits on the closed seat.* **ABEBE***'s left hand on* **H.J.***'s back, right hand holding up the Bible.)*

**ABEBE.** In the nineteenth chapter of Acts, Paul comes upon disciples in Ephesus –

*(a hip hop ring tone offstage)*

**H.J.** That's me!

*(***H.J.** *gets out of the tub, snatching her towel to cover herself.)*

**PICKLE.** Don't be on that cell phone all day! *(***H.J.** *exits. Waving the letter, to* **ABEBE***:)* Stamp's pretty! *(***ABEBE** *takes the letter, opens it.)* How'd you get her in the baptismal tub? *Her* Bibles geometry and physics.

**ABEBE.** An even trade. It was her turn to do the vacuuming this afternoon but I assumed the task.

**PICKLE.** Sound like she made out on that deal. Wonder what's goin' on in East Africa?

*(***ABEBE** *looking at the letter. His face is serious.)*

**PICKLE.** Bad news?

**ABEBE.** Good news! We must always see the good!

**PICKLE.** That sounds bad.

**ABEBE.** No! My brother Seyoum has reported –

**PICKLE.** "Brother"?

**ABEBE.** My adopted brother Seyoum has reported that there is talk of a World Bank funded megadam coming to our village.

**PICKLE.** Oh! That sounds good.

**ABEBE.** No! However! It takes just such a crisis to galvanize a community, my friends will stand strong and prevent this catastrophe, they will prevail, *God* will prevail and our community will be made even stronger!

**PICKLE.** That *is* good news! *I* have good news!

**ABEBE.** What!

**PICKLE.** Look like the water bottling plant's finally gonna go through! Jobs!

**ABEBE.** *Terrible* news!

**PICKLE.** That's right, you got a thing against bottled water. What's your thing against bottled water?

**ABEBE.** Tons of plastic waste! Tons of fuel to deliver! Minimal health testing!

**PICKLE.** Oh. Guess you gonna write about it in your school paper.

**ABEBE.** Indubitably!

**PICKLE.** How's school goin'? Classes?

**ABEBE.** I am excelling in every subject! Including driver's education!

**PICKLE.** Knew you could do it! Studyin' the book?

**ABEBE.** I have memorized the Safe Drivers Manual! Stop for the school bus! Sixty-five on the freeway!

**PICKLE.** *(horror)* You goin' on the *freeway?!*

**ABEBE.** Hypothetically!

**PICKLE.** Oh. *(to* **H.J.***)* H.J., YOU KNOW YOUR CELL MINUTES'RE NUMBERED!

**ABEBE.** I also have had a plethora of phone calls today! Two! First, Tay's schoolteacher called to ask if I would be interested in supplementing my Lunch Buddy status by becoming a Big Brother to Tay outside of school. Yes! I replied. Next, Mrs. Cindy Lambert, Tay's temporary guardian called to second the notion, and said she would like to drop Tay off here before her morning Wal-Mart shift Saturday, her husband Pete will pick him up. Okay?

**PICKLE.** Okay! How's he doin'? Better?

**ABEBE.** Better! He has family things he holds tight to, and I think this is very good. Mrs. Lambert is concerned about only one of these family things. This would be Tay's pajamas. When the murdering was finished, he came to his mother, held his blood-soaked mother. The police wanted the pajamas for evidence but Tay refused. The police shrugged: The case was shut-and-open after all. It took three days to get Tay to take off the pajamas, covered in dried blood. Mrs. Lambert would like to burn them but Tay has expressed his discomfort with this notion in no uncertain terms. However, aside from this attachment to the butchery and his commitment to being a mute, Tay is doing quite well!

*(***PICKLE** *turns her head as if she has heard something. She listens a few moments: the sound makes her happy.)*

**PICKLE.** Hear that?

**ABEBE.** No.

*(beat)*

**PICKLE.** You ever hear the dead?

**ABEBE.** Always! Although I am usually asleep. Do you?

**PICKLE.** No!

*(pause)*

**PICKLE.** She tests me.

*(***ABEBE** *confused.)*

**ABEBE.** H.J.?

**PICKLE.** Put me on a trial. You think 'at's right? Somebody do that to their own mother?

**ABEBE.** No! Accuse you?

**PICKLE.** Yes!

**ABEBE.** Of what?

**PICKLE.** Everyone got their own way a grievin'! right? Can't nobody tell nobody else how they s'posed to mourn. Right?

**ABEBE.** *Very* right! It is written in Ecclesiastes, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every – "

**PICKLE.** Hey! Lemme tell ya a funny story 'bout the dead! Hal's story. Miss Ivy taught eleventh grade English he tole me, *(indicates)* lived crost the crick. When my husband was little his mother cleaned for her awhile. One day, no one to babysit, Hal's stuck there with his mama. Miss Ivy the kind got all sorta magnets on her fridge, more 'n *me*. "Bahamas" with a palm tree and "Alaska" with a polar bear and "I'm not cheap but I'm on special this week" and amid the hordes near the back wall little Hal spies a plastic cartoon magnet a this little black boy, wide surprised Sambo eyes, his bare behind just off the toilet with this caption above:

Nigger nigger
All refine-y
Still your ass is
Black and shiny

*So!* A warm evenin' later in the week, Hal decides to hide in the bushes under Miss Ivy's kitchen window. He try to make up his own poym but, like I say, he's little so all he come up with:

**PICKLE.** *(cont.)* Whitey whitey
Shiny shiny
Whitey whitey
Shiny shiny

But apparently his voice don't come through the window like a little boy: squeaky eerie Miss Ivy don't know what! Washin' the dishes think she hear some mouse speakin' English. Or ghost! Somebody dead come back to greet her, Miss Ivy searchin' everywhere, don't know where the words emanatin' from, spooked!

**ABEBE.** Very amusing! You tell very funny stories about the dead, Pickle!

**PICKLE.** Hal tol' me that story after we's first married, moved here. That thing tickle us so bad, ever after we be sittin' up in bed, all one a us gotta say is "Shiny shiny" and we both crackin' up! And next thing we know slippin' under the blankets. Together.

*(***PICKLE** *and* **ABEBE** *smile.* **H.J.** *enters.)*

**PICKLE.** H.J.! I was just tellin' Abebe 'bout Miss Ivy, remember your daddy's eleventh grade – ?

**H.J.** Whitey whitey shiny shiny. That was Alene Douglas. *(Ay-leen.)* She said you were bothering her little brother. *Marky* Douglas.

**PICKLE.** *(beat: stares at* **H.J.***)* I don't know what you talkin' about.

**H.J.** She said you guilted him into coming into the office. He told the principal you saw him in the market perusing the toys while his mother in frozen foods, you come to him and talked and you and he agreed Carve oughta get the fourth grade math prize from last year, he earned it. So Marky offered to give it back. To which the Principal said No.

**PICKLE.** Carve *would*a earned it!

**H.J.** Carve didn't make it to fourth grade! And they *gave* him an award –

**PICKLE.** Bullcrap award! *(to* **ABEBE***)* Spaghetti for dinner?

*(**ABEBE**, confused, nods.)*

**PICKLE.** You'll like mine. Gobs a garlic!

*(**PICKLE** exits.)*

**H.J.** He wouldn't have earned the fourth grade math prize anyway. In third grade he was number three in math.

**ABEBE.** What did he earn?

**H.J.** The Posthumous Math Prize. Certificate just said something about "commemoration for excellence" but no live kids ever got it. *(steps into tub)* Whoo! better get goin', water already plunged well below lukewarm.

*(**ABEBE** holds the Bible out to **H.J.**)*

**ABEBE.** Read please?

**H.J.** *(reads)* "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him...and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove…saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

*(**ABEBE** very gently takes **H.J.** backwards under the water, **H.J.** pinching her nose closed with her fingers. When she emerges, she seems changed.)*

**ABEBE.** You felt something?

**H.J.** Yeah. I mean…Yeah.

**ABEBE.** What?

*(pause)*

**H.J.** They drowned.

*(pause)*

**ABEBE.** Your father, brother. Your grandfather.

**H.J.** Katrina.

*(**ABEBE** nods.)*

**H.J.** Two-thirds of our bodies water, two-thirds' the earth water. We start in water, fetus in the sac. So why in the end put down in the dirt? Water is home, sailors got it right. Burial at sea.

## Scene V

*(***ABEBE** *and* **TAY** *in the kitchen. Against the wall are professionally printed signs as would be carried by protestors in a demonstration:*

"Stop the Glendale Springs Plant: Tap Water Is Safe Water"

"Keep Glendale Springs Flowing"

"30 Million Plastic Bottles = 1 Day's Litter"

*(On the fridge are plastic letters, numbers and shapes that have been arranged in an equation:)*

2 THANKS = 1 ♥

*(On the kitchen counter are many paper cups.* **ABEBE** *pours water into each, filling them halfway.* **TAY**, *sitting on a stool, looks on. He wears the cartoon backpack from Scene III. A paper cup set apart from the others holds the two Confederate flags. Also on the counter are* **TAY***'s shoebox, a magnifying glass and a copy of Masaru Emoto's* The Hidden Messages in Water.*)*

**ABEBE.** "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth…. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Do you know these Bible verses, Tay? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Sunday School? *(***TAY** *nods.)* Very good! The other verse that begins "In the beginning" begins "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God." So we have learned God's creation began with water, and with the word.

*(***ABEBE** *has finished filling the cups and now leans over one of them, speaks into it.)*

The Word.

*(He takes the cup and puts it into the freezer. Now he leans over another.)*

Heaven.

*(As* **ABEBE** *puts it into the freezer, the distant rumble of thunder.)*

**ABEBE.** *(cont.)* God willing, it may finally rain today. Cindy told me she asked you to pack your raincoat into your backpack. Did you do this? *(***TAY** *nods.* **ABEBE** *smiles.)* We await the miracle of rain, but hurricanes are the *catastrophe* of rain, the climate-changing wages of the sins of the wealthy of America downpoured upon the destitute. But today! Today we shall rejoice! As we do in my village after a drought. We would collect the rainwater via the little dams, I showed my people how to build the little dams and we were saved! A little dam is a blessing, a gift from God. A *mega*dam is a curse, a gift from the World Bank, but I have written to my brother Seyoum, we will prevent this, I will stand strong with my village! *(beat)* From here.

**H.J.** *(enters, wiping her sweaty brow)* Humid!

**ABEBE.** God willing, it may finally rain today!

**H.J.** *(to* **TAY***)* Hello.

**ABEBE.** H.J., this is Tay. Tay, this is H.J.

**H.J.** Hey Tay.

*(***TAY** *stares at her. They stare at* **TAY**. *Then* **ABEBE** *turns back to* **H.J.***)*

**ABEBE.** That means "Hello, H.J.!"

*(***H.J.** *takes a can of soda out of the fridge, snaps it open and drinks.)*

**H.J.** Used to get like this in Mississippi. We went every summer to my grandfather's, two weeks. 'Til last summer. *They* went. I stayed with Mom, her gall bladder operation. *(now seeming to notice chaos in the room for the first time)* What's going on?

*(***ABEBE** *hands* **H.J.** *the book. She leafs through it as* **ABEBE** *speaks.)*

**ABEBE.** Perhaps you are not familiar with the work of Masaru Emoto. Dr. Emoto has studied ice that has crystallized. Ice that in its liquid state had been exposed to positive language produced intricate, exquisite designs. Ice that in its liquid state had been exposed to negative language formed hideous, incoherent muddles.

**H.J.** You don't think Dr. Emoto's a heathen?

**ABEBE.** *(pleased that she has recognized this)* Indubitably! However, he insists upon the existence of God, and this alleviates some of his paganism. There are many heathens who, despite their deception regarding the Truth, do appreciate the holiness of water. The Koran states, "We have created every living thing from water." Hindu temples are always located near water. The Shinto of Dr. Emoto's Japan believe waterfalls to be sacred, and in the Tao Te Ching it is written: "Water gives life to the ten thousand things and does not strive." Unfortunately these people are all in for a surprise because I hear there is not much water in hell! *(Laughs heartily. Then a new thought:)* Ah!

*(speaks into a cup)*

Hell.

*(puts it into the freezer)*

**H.J.** *(book:)* Abebe. This looks like the containers have to be kept at the perfect temperature of minus four Fahrenheit, which I'm pretty sure our freezer isn't. And they have to be in the freezer exactly three hours, are you timing them? And Emoto used Petri dishes, not paper cups. And they still have to be minus four while you look at them under a *high-powered microscope.*

**ABEBE.** Check!

*(***ABEBE** *picks up the magnifying glass.)*

**H.J.** I don't think that's gonna work.

**ABEBE.** Well, *(winking at* **TAY***)* it is our experiment, we shall see! We set the bad cups on the bottom, the good tops on the top.

*(***ABEBE** *thinks, then speaks into a cup.)*

Love.

*(***TAY** *suddenly runs out of the room.* **H.J.** *looks after him, then at* **ABEBE**.*)*

**ABEBE.** *(cont.)* Tay is a frequent urinator! *(confidentially)* Cindy tells me he always naps from three o' clock until four, and he knows for this he must wear his rubber underpants. *(puts cup into the freezer)*

**H.J.** You sure play some funny games with Tay. Next guess you be taking him to the demonstration. *(glancing at the signs)*

**ABEBE.** You know about my protest! I just initiated it and it is already causing a groundswell!

**H.J.** I know about it now. Don't be surprised to see protestors protesting the protest. *Their* signs'll read "The Glendale Springs Plant Will Provide Jobs."

**ABEBE.** There are better jobs! The government can create jobs meant to *preserve* the environment.

**H.J.** So what about your major? Theology or ecology?

**ABEBE.** My plan is twofold: Save the planet! Save its souls!

**H.J.** Good, you shouldn't drop the other. You could make a good preacher, Mom thinks you could make a good preacher. *(beat)* I think you could help her.

*(Pause:* **TAY** *returns, takes his seat, holds a cup out to* **ABEBE**.*)*

**ABEBE.** Thank you! *(***ABEBE** *thinks, then speaks into the cup.)* Gratitude. Dr. Emoto tells us that love and gratitude have the most striking and far-reaching effects inside and outside of us. We must engage in both sentiments, though gratitude is the more potent, and more rare. The formula Dr. Emoto suggests is two parts gratitude to one part love. *(Puts cup into the freezer.)*

**H.J.** Even if it could crystallize, how could it distinguish when you say every word exactly the same?

**ABEBE.** Tone is irrelevant. Most pertinent is the word itself. Dr. Emoto typically used written words, no tone.

**H.J.** Tone is everything. We don't even need words.

*(Leans over a cup. As if something [or someone] is delicious)*

**H.J.** Mmmmmmmmm.

*(puts it in the freezer)*

*(another)* AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!

*(Her sudden scream startles* **ABEBE** *and* **TAY**. *This was* **H.J.***'s intention, and she is laughing as she looks up at them. At this point she notices for the first time the Confederate flags.)*

*AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!*

*(***TAY** *quickly runs off.)*

What's *that?*

*(***ABEBE** *at first confused.)*

**ABEBE.** This is the flag of Tay's father. And forefathers. In a note Tay wrote the word: "Heritage."

**H.J.** His father was a cracker! *(***ABEBE** *confused.)* Racist! These are Confederate flags. Rebel banners. Slaveholders!

**ABEBE.** In America there are *still* slaveholders?

**H.J.** *No!* Hope not. But that's where those things originated, pennant of the defeated. You know what it's like growing up here, hicksville, ninety-five percent the students white? Act like you're an outsider in your own hometown! And when white people say the flag's not about racism, it's about Southern heritage, well what the hell else *was* Southern heritage?

*(***TAY** *returns. There seems to be no outward indication that he has heard the conversation until he sits down and takes the flags, possessively clutching them to his chest and staring at* **H.J.***)*

**H.J.** Guess blood's thicker 'n water.

**ABEBE.** Correct! *(reconsiders)* But there is water *in* our blood.

**H.J.** An expression. I mean like father, like son.

*(***ABEBE** *ponders.)*

**ABEBE.** Your Saltine crackers are white! This is what you and Pickle mean by "cracker"!

**H.J.** I think it came from someone cracking the whip.

**ABEBE.** This discussion is quite enlightening! When Tay and I were at the jungle gym, I pointed to the swing. Tay did not respond. I pointed to the monkey bars. Tay did not respond. I pointed to the slide. Tay did not respond. I pulled out my flag, which Tay gave me. Tay responded. Tay pulled out his flag. Tay and I made a parade, marching around the blacktop. Now everyone else responded. The parents and the children instantly ceased their activities to stare at us, but said nothing. I did not understand, I thought there must be a rule against playground parades! *(laughs heartily)*

**H.J.** That's so funny. Believe me when those white people got home to anecdote the afternoon to their spouses, didn't you give *them* a hoot: the crazy African come to town.

**ABEBE.** *(embarrassed, trying to laugh)* Well, I doubt –

**H.J.** What do *you* care? Entertain the fools and leave, you can go back overseas anytime you want. But by school tomorrow your parade be the joke of the town, white boys asking me, "How's your houseguest? George of the Jungle."

**ABEBE.** I don't think –

**H.J.** You *ought*a come to my school, guest speaker. Betcha those white boys get a big kick outa you: the grinning African. *(***TAY** *runs off with the flags.)*

**ABEBE.** *No!* It is not –

**H.J.** And STOP WASTING OUR WATER! Experiment, you sure find some funny uses for water in a drought! Talk about two parts gratitude, you come from Africa, think you'd *show* a little gratitude for us, gratitude for the ever-convenient American guarantee of H20!

**ABEBE.** AFRICA HAS WATER! The Blue Nile Ethiopia, the *Nile!* You think *I* don't appreciate water? I *respect* water, I do not take water for granted, how many gallons does one person in Ethiopia use per day? Three! One person in the United Kingdom? Thirty-one! One

person in the United States? One hundred fifty-one! *(***TAY** *appears in the doorway but, aware of the tension, stays there, unnoticed.)* Americans talk about conservation but you do not *really* think it will run out, only *one percent* of all the world's water is usable, when it is gone, *gone, look at this drought! And last year Katrina, too little water or too much –*

*(***H.J.** *has reacted to the reference to Katrina, and* **ABEBE** *sees that he has upset her, though she tries to cover. He is ashamed and embarrassed by his outburst and tries to regain his cheer, to calm things.)*

**ABEBE.** *(cont.)* So much water God has provided in Africa. Did you know Ethiopia's River Gihon is one of four that nourished the Garden of Eden – ?

**H.J.** *(glaring and guttural)* Don't you goddamn try to save *me,* preacher.

*(***PICKLE** *enters from the outside with grocery bags.)*

**PICKLE.** *(wiping her sweaty brow)* Humid!

**ABEBE.** I believe God may bring rain today. Seventy-one without rain!

*(From her angle* **PICKLE** *sees* **TAY***, though he tries to conceal himself.)*

**PICKLE.** *(smiles)* Hello.

**ABEBE.** *(startled to realize* **TAY** *has been standing there)* This is Tay. This is Mrs. Carter.

**H.J.** You just went to the market yesterday.

**PICKLE.** *(plops her bags on the counter)* Well guess I forgot a few things. *(looking from the paper cups to the signs)* Someone's been busy in here!

*(***H.J.** *unpacking bags.)*

**ABEBE.** *(embarrassed)* I shall clean up my mess!

**PICKLE.** Wa'n't a accusation.

**H.J.** Oreos!

**PICKLE.** Got everyone's favorite! *(to* **ABEBE***)* Red hots, right?

*(***ABEBE** *smiles.* **PICKLE** *takes out colored liquid in plastic strips.)*

You like ice pops, Tay?

*(***TAY** *stares. Then comes to her, points to a pop.)*

Chocolate? Lemme freeze it for ya.

*(***PICKLE** *smiles, opens the freezer door to put the ice pops in. Stares.)*

**PICKLE.** Yaw already makin' snow cones?

**ABEBE.** Are you familiar with the work of Dr. Masaru Emoto, Pickle? Speak a good word into a cup and it will freeze into a spectacular, glorious –

*(But* **PICKLE** *isn't listening to* **ABEBE**. *She has thrown the ice pops into the freezer and continues to unpack groceries, speaking to* **TAY**. **H.J.** *will stop unpacking to listen to* **PICKLE**.*)*

**PICKLE.** I knew a little boy once, 'bout your age. See that tree out back? He climb it, almost to the top, don't *you* try it! Useta scare me to death! "You come down from there!" I'd call, and always he did, but next day soon's my back turned he fly back up it. Set him in the time-out, deny him the peach cobbler, smack his behind: nothin' stop it. So I just keep offerin' up the punishments and pray he grow out of it, pray he don't hurt hisself be*fore* he grow out of it, then one day wipin' the kitchen table I spy him. Slam open that slidin' door, "WHY YOU GOTTA *BE* UP THERE, CARVE?" He say, "Come up, Mommy! You come up, you'll see why!" I say "Then *both* us break our neck!" He say, "Close your eyes! Close your eyes you'll see it!" We argue awhile, then finally he win. *(Stops unpacking and closes her eyes. Gradually smiles.)* I *do* see it. Snuggled in the branches, nobody on the ground notice me. Quiet. Only the blue jays here, I get it! I get it! *(beat)* But when I open 'em *(does)* I'm all shaky. Cuz what I seen eyes-closed is why my boy liketa fly away, soar away from down here. Never come back. *(goes back to unpacking groceries)*

**ABEBE.** Pickle. You know that God is always with us in our adversity –

**PICKLE.** Yep. Cabbage was on sale.

*(***PICKLE** *continues taking out groceries.* **TAY** *takes a toothbrush from his backpack and shows* **ABEBE**.*)*

**ABEBE.** *(glancing at his watch)* Very good! Tay has remembered he must brush his teeth before his nap. *(***TAY** *exits.)*

**PICKLE.** Ain't he big for a nap?

**ABEBE.** Cindy says it is his idea and he wakes on his own.

*(***PICKLE** *pulls out a package of red shoestring licorice.)*

**H.J.** *(alarmed)* Mom …

**PICKLE.** *(chuckles)* Punchin' in the candy and the cake and the ice treats, girl at the register goes "Yaw havin' a party?"

**H.J.** *Who's left in this house likes shoestring licorice?*

*(***PICKLE** *stares at her.)*

**PICKLE.** NO TRIAL!

*(***PICKLE**, *very upset, rushes out of the room.* **H.J.** *starts to follow.* **ABEBE** *blocks her.)*

**ABEBE.** I think she would rather be alone.

**H.J.** MOVE!

**ABEBE.** She has told me she does not like your tests.

**H.J.** *(trying to get past him)* That's too bad, they're for her own good –

**ABEBE.** *She weeps.*

*(***H.J.** *stops, sighs. Then starts slamming the groceries away as she speaks.)*

**H.J.** It's not a trial. *(yelling offstage to* **PICKLE***)* EXAGGERATOR!

*(***ABEBE** *stares at* **H.J.** *During her monologue,* **TAY** *will return and sit, moving two cups close to himself.)*

**H.J.** *(cont.)* You think I like it? Sadist? She's my mother! Everything seemed okay, considering, all these months

she's relatively normal, now the first anniversary come around and suddenly she…Little memory proof, big deal. What scares her is not ace-ing the test well what scares *me* is her showing up for my baby brother's soccer game, then go into a panic, wonder why he's not in the lineup. What scares me is her out driving alone, then turn around to chat with two or three backseat passengers who aren't there, slam into a guardrail, or tractor-trailer. Do I take the car keys from her? *no. Should,* her safety, but her dignity I protect instead, you think I want to humiliate her? Just trying to keep her in one piece before it's too late! Then I come up with an idea. Maybe an occasional reality check might prevent "too late." *(pause) You* supposed to be the man of God! She's my mother, *I* want to help her!

*(pause)*

**ABEBE.** *I* want to help her.

*(A sudden redundant humming, akin to the purring of a cat. It is* **TAY**. **H.J.** *and* **ABEBE** *turn to him.* **TAY** *makes this sound of contentment over one of the two cups he has pulled to himself. Moving to the other cup he makes the cry/caw of a lonely bird. Now back to the first cup, he creates the prior humming. Now back to the second cup, the crying again, but it continues, sounding increasingly more terrified and desperate, and seeming without end.)*

## Scene VI

*(Half-hour later. Kitchen/dining area with the sliding glass door to the outside. Three chairs have been pulled from the table and set in the middle of the floor.* **H.J.** *sits next to an empty chair, both these chairs face* **ABEBE** *in his chair.* **ABEBE** *holds his Bible.)*

**ABEBE.** Perhaps we should let *Pickle* lead the service! Pickle!

*(***PICKLE** *appears in the doorway, reluctant.)*

**PICKLE.** What.

**ABEBE.** I know these tests have frightened you in the past, but I promise I am a kinder and gentler H.J.! *(laughs heartily)*

**PICKLE.** Thought it *wa*'n't a test, thought it was church.

**ABEBE.** It *is!* Please join us, sister!

**PICKLE.** How we have time for church? You said Tay's naps only an hour.

**ABEBE.** Then we must begin immediately! Do you have a favorite verse you have memorized?

*(***PICKLE***, stubborn, hesitates.)*

**PICKLE.** I like the verse where Jesus calmed the sea.

**ABEBE.** Then come! Recite!

*(***PICKLE** *saunters over to the empty chair, sits. Then:)*

**PICKLE.** I like the verse where Jesus calmed the sea.

*(***ABEBE** *and* **H.J.** *wait for more. None comes.)*

**ABEBE.** *(finally)* Very good!

**H.J.** That's not memorization!

**ABEBE.** Well she at least has remembered the content, if not the exact words!

**H.J.** That's like saying "I remember the ingredients, just can't recall if it was a *pinch* of salt or a pint."

**ABEBE.** *(flipping through his Bible)* I am betting Pickle's memory only needs a prompt. I know the verses she speaks of, Matthew 8. *(to* **PICKLE***)* Please, jump in! *(reads)* "And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep."

**PICKLE.** *(remembering)* Yeah!

**ABEBE.** "And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish."

**PICKLE.** Yeah!

**ABEBE.** "And [Jesus] saith unto them, Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?"

**PICKLE.** That part's red.

**ABEBE.** "Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm."

**PICKLE.** Yeah!

**ABEBE.** Excellent!

**H.J.** Excellent *what?* She didn't recite anything! Anyway, I want some real answers.

**PICKLE.** No trial!

**H.J.** When were you born?

**PICKLE.** Year before my first birthday.

**ABEBE.** Pickle! Can you name the Ten Commandments?

**H.J.** We finished the Bible. *Now* –

**PICKLE.** You promised church! I thought this was church!

**H.J.** Yeah, we're moving on to a subcategory: "Our Family and Church."

**PICKLE.** Who are *you*, Alex Trebek?

**H.J.** Faster we get through this, faster it's over with.

**PICKLE.** *(turns to imaginary person next to her)* What you thinka that, Alex? *(becoming Alex Trebek)* "Pickle, I think H.J.'s appointed herself dictator of the room which definitely puts you in Double Jeopardy" how's that? 'M I crazy enough for you now?

**H.J.** Too bad sarcasm isn't a symptom of lucidity.

**ABEBE.** Perhaps Pickle would like to select her *own* memory to share!

**H.J.** That won't –

**PICKLE.** *Yeah!*

*(***H.J.** *sullen.* **PICKLE** *thinks. Now the sound of a middle-aged man's chuckling. Then: a* **HEAD** *appears. The face needn't be distinctive, nor colorful – perhaps, on the contrary, white like a ghost or a tombstone bust. Its voice should* not *sound like a call from The Beyond, but rather as if it is here, now, alive.* **PICKLE, H.J.** *and* **ABEBE** *do not seem to notice the* **HEAD** *[which was the chuckler.])*

**HEAD 1 (HAL).** Alex Trebek! You better watch it, Pick, she *really* gonna think you lost it!

**PICKLE.** I loved Miss Ruby. Taught all the Sunday School grades, black Baptists. For awhile went with those kids to the white church but that didn't stick.

**H.J.** Why'd you switch?

**PICKLE.** Huh?

**H.J.** Why'd you start going to the white Baptists?

**PICKLE.** *I* don't know –

**H.J.** You told us a million times.

*(***PICKLE** *confused.)*

**HEAD 1 (HAL).** 'Leven o' clock. Noon. One.

**PICKLE.** White Baptists got outa church on time!

**H.J.** Right! But you had to go back. Black church.

**PICKLE.** 'Course!

**H.J.** Why?

*(***PICKLE** *puzzled.)*

**HEAD 1 (HAL).** Come on, Pick. Easy.

**PICKLE.** *(remembers)* The music. Never liked the music.

**H.J.** Yes!

**PICKLE.** Never sang "This Little Light of Mine." Did sing "Amazing Grace" but never sounded right.

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