

Playwright's note: This is a developing play in its beginning stages. Character names, among other things, are not final. The basic premise (this plot is incomplete): A family in Botswana, who has lost Papa to AIDS, struggles to survive. Mama has also been infected with AIDS, and so has her baby daughter. The household is headed by Tamisha, age 15. As the family's circumstances become increasingly desperate, Jerome, the younger brother, joins the local militia to provide funds to sustain his family. Dvonte, the academic, must drop out of school because he, like many others, has become sick. Tamisha has lost much of her family; as an adult, she hopes to affect change in her country and help others by becoming a doctor.

Act I, Scene 1

TAMISHA

Mama, I put the firewood by the stove.

MAMA

Thanks, baby.

TAMISHA

Do you want me to help start dinner?

MAMA

Where are the boys?

TAMISHA

Outside.

MAMA

I need Dvonte to go to town tonight.

TAMISHA

Mama, you know he can't.

MAMA

I don't have a choice, Tamisha

TAMISHA

What's wrong, Mama?

MAMA

Nothing. I need him to pick up the last order of Papa's medicine.

TAMISHA

Mama, we don't need that.

MAMA

It's still ours. We were promised eight orders, and we are entitled to that last supply. Tell Dvonte to come see me, and start dinner.

TAMISHA
Yes, Mama.

Act I, Scene 2

TAMISHA
Mama's sick.

DVONTE
I know.

TAMISHA
You have to go to town to pick up Papa's pills.

DVONTE
She needs them?

TAMISHA
I think so.

DVONTE
Will they give her her own?

TAMISHA
Maybe. The clinic doesn't have much left, though. I hear they don't give the medicine to most people now.

TAMISHA
Jerome!

JEROME
I'm playing!

TAMISHA
Come here. [he comes] Give Dvonte the watch.

JEROME
It's mine now! Papa...

TAMISHA
Give it to Dvonte. [Jerome removes the watch, hands it to Dvonte. Pause.]

JEROME
What are we eating?

TAMISHA
Boiled cabbage.

JEROME
Every night! I hate it!

TAMISHA
You'll eat it. We're lucky. [to Dvonte] Mama wants to see you before you leave. You should go now – only three hours until dark. [he leaves]

JEROME
Tamisha?

TAMISHA
Yeah?

JEROME
Why don't you come to school anymore?

TAMISHA
Mama needs help with the house.

JEROME
Can't Dvonte help?

TAMISHA
He's the smart one. He's going to be a doctor, and doctors have to go to school and study hard.

JEROME
Can I help with the house too?

TAMISHA
No. You have to study hard, too.

JEROME
Why?

TAMISHA
So you can be smart like Dvonte, and when you grow up, you can have money and eat anything you want for dinner, every night.

JEROME
Tajik is leaving school and he is getting lots of money.

TAMISHA

You aren't joining the militia, Jerome.

JEROME

Why? Maybe Mama wouldn't be sick if she had meat for dinner. Maybe Papa wouldn't have died if he didn't have to eat boiled cabbage every night for dinner. I could get us money, Tamisha. I could get someone to help Mama and you could go to school. Tajik said they would give me \$30 in advance, and every month.

TAMISHA

No.

JEROME

But-

TAMISHA

No! Get the girls and come inside. I need you to help me with dinner.
[Dvonte returns, ready to leave for town]

JEROME

Are you going to town now?

DVONTE

Yes. I'll see you tomorrow.

JEROME

You can't go! Tajik said the trails are getting worse!
[Dvonte kisses Tamisha goodbye]

TAMISHA

Be careful.

Act I, Scene 3

The girls and Jerome are at the table, finishing dinner. Tamisha enters from the bedroom.

JEROME

I'm hungry, Tamisha.

TAMISHA

Eat your cabbage.

JEROME

I did.

FNOT

Should I take Mama her food now?

TAMISHA

I just did. That's – that's extra. You and Jerome can share it.

FNOT

Tamisha?

TAMISHA

Yeah?

FNOT

Are you as old as Raoul?

TAMISHA

No. Raoul is 16.

FNOT

Oh. Tamisha?

TAMISHA,

What, Fnot?

FNOT

Raoul came to get his brother from school today. He said to tell you to keep us home with you so we don't get them sick.

TAMISHA

You aren't sick, Fnot.

FNOT

Is Mama sick?

TAMISHA

Mama's going to be fine, Fnot. We're all going to be fine.

Act I, Scene 4

Tamisha is asleep at the table. Dvonte enters quietly.

DVONTE

Tamisha.

TAMISHA

You're back! Did you get them?

DVONTE

Two supplies, plus Papa's which makes three.

TAMISHA
How did you get all those?

DVONTE
I said I'd bring Mama in and prove to them that she needs the medicine. The nurse said that wasn't necessary, there isn't room, just to take the medicine and go.

TAMISHA
You'll have to take the ring next time.
[her stomach growls. Dvonte giggles]
Stop! I can hear yours, too!

DVONTE
That's because I missed dinner.

TAMISHA
Goodnight, Dvonte.

DVONTE
Night.

Act II, Scene 1

DVONTE
Tamisha! Tamisha! [running in]

TAMISHA
Hi...

DVONTE
Come inside. Sit down.

TAMISHA
What's going on? Where are Jerome and Fnot? What happened?

DVONTE
They're coming. Nothing bad. Guess what?

TAMISHA
WHAT?

DVONTE
Today after school, my teacher asked me to see her, and she told me I'm her best student, and she's real proud of my work, and if I keep it up, she can help me get into a study program in Germany next year, for two months, for future doctors, for kids who are good at science, and-

TAMISHA
Does it cost money?

DVONTE
No! They pay for everything!

TAMISHA
You're going to be a doctor, just like Papa wanted!

DVONTE
You think so?

TAMISHA
Yeah. Papa would be so proud. [hugs her brother]

DVONTE
Thanks. You're skinny, Tamisha.

TAMISHA
I'm fine. You have to go to town. Mama is out of medicine.

DVONTE
I need-
[Tamisha hands him a ring]

TAMISHA
Be careful. I'll save you some cabbage.

DVONTE
I don't want any. You can have mine.

Act II, Scene 2

JEROME
Why did Dvonte have to go to town?

TAMISHA
For medicine.

JEROME
For Mama?

TAMISHA
Yeah.

JEROME
But the clinic isn't in town.

TAMISHA

Of course it is. Dvonte was there a few months ago.

JEROME

Tajik said the fighting in town last month was too bad and the clinic left. They sent everyone home. Tajik's sister has been home for a month.

TAMISHA

The clinic is there. Tajik is telling stories. Eat.

JEROME

I did. My stomach is empty, still.

TAMISHA

There's extra tonight. Bring me your bowl.

JEROME

Whoa! That's a lot this time!

TAMISHA

Share with Fnot.

JEROME

Tajik eats meat twice a week. They give him more money now. I could –

TAMISHA

Eat and be quiet.