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Dramatic Publishing

TO DESTROY YOU IS NO LOSS

The Play

**Based upon the book
by
JOAN CRIDDLE**

**Adapted
by
DOROTHEA HUBBLE BONNEAU**



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JOAN CRIDDLE
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(TO DESTROY YOU IS NO LOSS)

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This play is dedicated to Cambodia:
A beautiful country
which lives in the hearts of its people.
And especially to Teeda Butt Mam,
whose name means attendant of the Goddess,
and to her family.

TO DESTROY YOU IS NO LOSS

A Play in One Act
For 12 Women, 6 Men and 5 Men or Women*

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

TEEDA BUTT MAM a vivacious fifteen-year-old
SOORSDEY Teeda's eighteen-year-old sister
COMRADE PO a male krom leader
COMRADE KI a female krom leader
YOUNG WOMAN .. a teen-age worker in Teeda's group
LON and PEAP fifteen-year-old friends of Teeda
TEVI Teeda's eight-year-old niece
SOLDIERS 3, 4, 5 male Khmer Rouge soldiers
SOLDERS 1, 2 female Khmer Rouge soldiers
CAMBODIA a goddess-like young woman
who represents the grace and aspirations
of the emerging nation: Cambodia
SOPHY Tevi's eight-year-old friend
EAST .. a prototype which represents influence from the East
TEACHER 1 Tevi's compassionate teacher
CHILD 1 and 2 members of Tevi's work group
KEANG Tevi's father, Teeda's brother-in-law
MUM Teeda's mother
SI TON Teeda's fiance
TEACHER 2 a cold, Khmer Rouge teacher

*CHILD ONE and TWO, TEACHER ONE and TWO,
and EAST may be played by either men or women.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE ONE:

June 1975. Teeda's secret place: A bamboo grove. Teeda recalls the relocation of her family from Phnom Pehn to the Khmer Rouge camp.

SCENE TWO:

The rice fields one night later. Tevi and Sophy stand guard at night in the rice field.

SCENE THREE:

Bamboo grove. June 1976. Teeda reflects on her year in the camp.

SCENE FOUR:

A clearing near the bamboo grove. Teacher One says good-bye to his/her students.

SCENE FIVE:

A clearing near the bamboo grove. Si Ton asks for Teeda's hand in marriage.

SCENE SIX:

A clearing near the bamboo grove. The soldiers repeat their daily ritual.

SCENE SEVEN:

The forest, indicated by a single tree. Teeda is visited by Cambodia. Si Ton's death is foreshadowed. Teeda learns of Peap's torture and death.

SCENE EIGHT:

The bamboo grove. Teeda contemplates suicide.

SCENE NINE:

Teeda recognizes her individual power and determines to hold on to life.

TO DESTROY YOU IS NO LOSS

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *The village of Khum Speu, ancestral home of the Butt Choun family. Two cubes stand CR and CL. A third cube stands DL in front of the stage. Palm fronds may be placed behind the third cube, to indicate TEEDA's secret place. A krama flies from a tall bamboo pole UR.*

AT RISE: *TEEDA is seated cross-legged on the cube DL. She is gazing ahead, occasionally she looks down, absorbed in thought. CAMBODIA enters from the center aisle of the audience and crosses until she stands just to the right of TEEDA. Tiny bells chime as she walks.*

TEEDA *(looks about, listens, then carefully removes a small notebook and pen which she has hidden in the hem of her sleeve. She reads as she writes).*

JOURNAL: June 17, 1975. I have found a secret place where I can write. Only my family know of this place. If the Khmer Rouge discover I am educated, I will be killed, but I am willing to risk my life to record what is happening here because it is important for people to know.

Two months ago millions of people were forced from their homes in the city and sent to live in communist-

run ancestral villages. All of my family including my four sisters and two brothers-in-law, my cousin Samol, and my little nieces and nephew were uprooted from a lovely two-story home in Phnom Pehn, the capital of Cambodia, and sent to live here, in Khum Speu. We were allowed two weeks to build shelters. For this task we were given no tools and no instruction. I am proud to say, that when it rains, there is only one leak in our roof.

This ancestral village was once a garden of color and laughter. I regarded it as a place of carefree childhood vacations. Now it is like a black pit which sucks at my emotions, stealing all of my happy thoughts and leaving only emptiness.

The emptiness is the absence of Papa. The others had to drag me away from Prek Po when Papa was taken from us by soldiers. They told us he would be re-educated, that he would return. But friendly villagers in that region warned that the whole family was in danger, and so we fled in the night. I still watch down the road. Every now and then, my hope rises and I think I see my papa coming, but it always turns out to be someone else.

Beside my father's disappearance, there are three facts that lurk like predators on the rim of my mind, watching to rob me of my sanity. The first is constant hunger. At most we are allowed only one cup of rice per day. The second is the great sadness I feel because my family has been separated. Mum and I have lived alone in the little hut we built because my sister Soorsdey has

married and moved to her own shelter. At least she is still living in our krom. She and my cousin married very suddenly because she was afraid of being chosen to be the bride of a soldier and he was afraid of being drafted by the army. Fortunately, one aunt and uncle and my little cousins Tevi and baby Moni live nearby. The others have been scattered like grains of dried rice in an angry wind. The third haunting fact is the memory of my two little dogs who I left tied in our backyard with three bowls of water and three bowls of a food and a promise to return in three days. I have betrayed them.

At night I often have wonderful dreams that help to ease the ugliness of the day. Last night, I dreamt a voiceless force was pushing me down a dark, narrow alley while rows of eyes stared at me from disembodied faces. Cries flashed like lightning, flashed red the blackness. I opened my mouth to scream, my scream was silent. Then I heard the sweet chime of bells, and I saw a beautiful woman walking toward me. She held a small, blue bell in her hand. The terrifying images melted in the rose-colored aura of light which surrounded her. And her voice rang like the clear spill of a mountain stream. She told me that I was to become the bell. Then she disappeared, leaving me...

(SOORSDEY enters from UR and runs to TEEDA.)

SOORSDEY. What! You still have that notebook? Is writing your thoughts worth risking your life?

TEEDA. This place is safe. No one knows about it but you and Mum and Tevi.

SOORSDEY. You must hide the notebook and come quickly. The meal is nearly over and the kosang is about to begin. (*TEEDA and SOORSDEY move quickly DC. They sit with their backs to audience, facing the cubes. CAMBODIA crosses UR and stands watching.*)

(MUM, TEVI, LON, PEAP, KEANG, YOUNG WOMAN, TEACHER 1, and CHILD 1 and 2 enter from UR and join TEEDA and SOORSDEY. No one speaks, ALL look down. ALL sit with the right knee over the left, with their backs to the audience, facing the two cubes. SOLDIERS 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 enter from UL. They stand in a straight line, stretched from UR to UL facing the audience. COMRADE KI enters UL and mounts the cube CL. At the same time COMRADE PO enters UR and mounts the cube CR. The COMRADES address their AUDIENCE with dedicated zeal.)

COMRADE PO. This village has been divided into kroms. Ten families represent one krom. There is a krom leader for each krom. You will do everything the krom leader tells you. Angka has given you twenty square feet on which to build your home. Angka has allowed you to use bamboo from the forest. Angka has been generous. Now you must work for Angka. You must work quickly. You must be ready to sacrifice. The Angka will bless you with food and clothing. Turn to Angka for your every need. Be resourceful.

COMRADE KI. This is Year Zero! Nothing from the past exists: No books, no money, no certificates. There is only this moment and the future. The past is dead. You will forget it. You are lucky to be building a new na-

tion, an independent nation, with no need of its neighbors. Give yourselves to the Angka.

COMRADE PO. You must refrain from all activity which steals your energy. There will be no more soccer games after the evening meal. Such activity robs the Angka of the water of your skin. Since you have so much vitality, you will work in the field at night when the moon gives enough light.

COMRADE KI. From this time you will eat only in the dining pavilion. You will be taken to see Angka if you eat at any other time or any other place. Angka alone will provide your food.

COMRADE PO. You may now make your confessions to Angka. (*YOUNG WOMAN stands, steps forward, and turns to address the AUDIENCE. She looks down as she speaks.*)

YOUNG WOMAN. I have trespassed against Angka, and I ask for forgiveness. Yesterday I did not work as fast as my comrades. I will work harder tomorrow to make up for the difference. (*AUDIENCE claps. YOUNG WOMAN resumes her place.*)

COMRADE PO. Are there further confessions? If not, then do not forget, memory sickness is a crime that cannot be tolerated. Any talk of the past is strictly forbidden. Chhaoue Satttek, memory sickness, is like the rotten part of a fruit. It festers and grows if it is not cut out. Symptoms of memory sickness include laziness and pretending to be sick to avoid work. The children will report memory sickness to the krom leader. The Angka directs you give your greatest respect to the children. They are untainted by ideas from the old regime. The children will report any behavior which is displeasing to the Angka. You are to honor what the children say.

COMRADE KI. The Angka directs that all children age eight and older move into the children's house by midnight tomorrow. The Angka is Mother, Father, Brother, Sister. The Angka is your family. I am Comrade Ki, I am the women's group leader. This is Comrade Po, he is the men's group leader. Do not be late when you report for work in the morning. You are dismissed. *(COMRADE PO and COMRADE KI exit UL followed by the SOLDIERS. LON, PEAP, and TEEDA cross DC. TEVI crosses DL and looks about. MUM, SOORSDEY, CHILD 1 and CHILD 2 exit UR.)*

LON *(whispers)*. Cousin Teeda. Don't turn around, just listen as we pass. *(LON and PEAP walk single file past TEEDA.)* When we go to plant rice, copy the others. There are leeches in the irrigation ditches. If one gets on you, don't react, just pull it off and throw it away. Otherwise you will be punished. This is Peap. She is my friend. She can be trusted. Trust no one else. Show the leaders that you are a willing worker. Also, if you have hidden any of your good clothing, you should burn it. If they find out that you were rich, you will disappear. *(PEAP and LON pass TEEDA without looking at her. They exit single file UR. TEVI approaches TEEDA.)*

TEVI. Teeda, it's safe to talk for a minute. I watched all the leaders. They've gone. Aunt Teeda, I'll be taken to live in the children's house tomorrow.

TEEDA. I know, Tevi, there's nothing I can do.

TEVI. Aunt Teeda, I'm frightened. The youngest children are sent out to guard the fields at night. I am so afraid of snakes, and they come out in the dark.

TEEDA. You must be very brave, Tevi. At least now you will be going to school.

TEVI. It's not a real school. They teach the children to spy on their parents! But, I'll never do that.

TEEDA. You must never say that to anyone again. Tevi, you must understand. It is very serious. If you refuse what they tell you, they will kill you. That's what they mean when they say you will find yourself in a plastic bag!

TEVI. I know. I have never been so afraid. Teeda, I'll miss Mother and Father and baby Moni.

TEEDA. I know.

TEVI. I buried the picture of our old house to the right of the bamboo stand in the back of our house.

TEEDA. Tevi, don't tell anyone that you lived in Phnom Pehn.

TEVI. I won't. That's why I buried the picture.

TEEDA. I've heard that your teacher is kind, he used to be a student of your father's.

(SOLDIER 3 enters from UL.)

SOLDIER 3. You, there! What are you doing?

TEEDA. I am just telling my niece how fortunate she is. She has just turned eight years old and she will move to the children's house tomorrow.

SOLDIER 3. She has no need of your advice. The Angka is her family now.

TEEDA. Forgive me. Of course, you are right. *(TEEDA exits UR, TEVI follows. SOLDIER 3 exits through the center aisle of the audience. CAMBODIA crosses DC, pranams, addresses the AUDIENCE.)*

CAMBODIA. I am Cambodia. Many believe I have died. But, as you can see, I live in the hearts of my true

people. They cannot see me, but when their souls cry out, I appear to them in night visions.

(EAST enters UL.)

CAMBODIA. The big powers, the East and the West, seek to own me, or to destroy me. They do not realize I cannot be owned, or destroyed. One of them is coming now. I must go with him for awhile, for he holds my people hostage. But when he is not looking, I will slip away.

EAST. You, there! You are not permitted to move about freely. Humble yourself in the presence of the Angka. You may no longer call yourself Cambodia. Cambodia is buried with the past. You are now Kampuchea.

CAMBODIA. You have changed my name?

EAST. Be silent. Come with me. Do not speak or you will be put to death with the untrainable ones. Your body too will float down the river wrapped in a black plastic bag. *(EAST leads CAMBODIA down the center aisle of the audience.)*

SCENE TWO

SCENE: *The rice fields are represented by a bare stage. MUM enters UL, followed by KEANG. She kneels to pray before her Buddha, KEANG serves as look-out. The two cubes remain CR and CL.*

KEANG. Quickly, Mother, finish your prayers, they're coming!

MUM (*praying*). This is the place where the children must stand guard. Tevi is a dear child, she is kind to everyone. Protect Tevi and the little ones, and fill the hearts of the children with courage.

KEANG. Mother. Hurry. (*KEANG and MUM exit DR.*)

(TEACHER 1, SOPHY, and TEVI enter DL. TEACHER 1 places TEVI on the cube CR and SOPHY on the cube CL facing the audience.)

TEACHER 1 (*positioning each CHILD*). If you hear footsteps, then call. Otherwise, remain still and listen carefully. You are the ears of the Angka. You are the eyes of Angka. You are helping to build a great nation. Remember, no talking. Listen very carefully or the soldiers will send you to see Angka. (*TEACHER 1 exits L. The stage is dimly lit.*)

TEVI. Sophy, are you there? I can't see you.

SOPHY. Shhhh! Tevi. We're not allowed to talk.

TEVI. But, did you hear that rustling sound?

SOPHY. Ignore it. It's probably a mouse.

TEVI. But, what if it's a snake?

SOPHY. Stand still, and it won't attack you. Tevi, if a soldier hears us talking, we will have to go a whole day with no rice. Shhhh! Someone's coming.

(TEACHER 1 re-enters L.)

TEACHER 1. We will be moving.

TEVI. But, we just got here.

SOPHY (*intervenes*). We are happy to move. (*TEACHER 1 leads TEVI and SOPHY off DL.*)

(COMRADE KI leads LON, PEAP, TEEDA, SOORS-DEY, and the YOUNG WOMAN in from DR. They are dressed in black. Moving backwards in diagonal rows, they pantomime taking rice plantings from their hip bags and pushing the plantings down into the ground. SOLDIER 5 enters behind them, beating out a rhythm which says stoop, plant, stand, move backward one step, move UL and exit.)

SOLDIER 5. You are like grains of rice in a large wok. If one is taken out of the wok, another will replace it. To destroy you is no loss!

COMRADE KI. Democratic Kampuchea is flourishing. It is the purest example of communism the world has ever known! The Wheel of History is turning. It will crush all who stand in its path! *(All of the YOUNG WORKERS have exited UR by the conclusion of this speech.)*