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LOST BOY FOUND IN WHOLE FOODS



Drama
by
Tammy Ryan

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Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods - Drama.

By Tammy Ryan. Cast: 3m., 3w. In the early '90s in Sudan after civil war destroyed their villages, an exodus of boys trekked 800 miles across Africa until making it to refugee camps in Kenya, where they lived on a bowl of grain a day for 10 years. In 2001, the U.S. resettled 3,600 of these “lost boys” in cities across America. *Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods* tells the story of Christine, a recently divorced “East Ender” from Pittsburgh, who meets Gabriel, a former “lost boy” working in the produce section of Whole Foods. Soon Gabriel’s world becomes enmeshed with hers and daughter Alex—leading to a remarkable journey of awareness, struggle and hopefulness. The play asks the question: what happens when we open up our lives to help another human being—leaving us to wonder about the effect of one soul upon another. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Code: LK4.*

Cover: Premiere Stages and Playwrights Theater of New Jersey co-production, featuring Warner Miller. Photo: Mike Peters. Cover design: Susan Carle.

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By
TAMMY RYAN



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For the three angels, Roni, Peter and Khadra,
who knocked on my door.
And for Mama Kate,
who opened hers.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play must give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author must also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and must appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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“Originally produced by Premiere Stages at Kean University
and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey”

Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods was originally produced by Premiere Stages, John Wooten, Producing Artistic Director; and Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, John Pietrowski, Artistic Director, in the Zella Fry Theatre at Kean University on September 5, 2010. The cast and creative contributors were:

Gabriel Warner Miller
Christine Kim Zimmer
Alex Alexandra Rivera
Panther Jamil A.C. Mangan
Michael Dolan David Farrington
Segel Mohammed Trish McCall

Director John Pietrowski
Dramaturg Erica Nagel
Scenic Designer Joseph Gourley
Lighting Designer Nadine Charlsen
Sound Designer Jeff Knapp
Costume Designer Sarah Cabbage
Stage Manager Danielle Constance
Casting Director Carol Hanzel

The Pittsburgh premiere opened in the Studio Theater at the Pittsburgh Playhouse by The REP, the professional theater company of Point Park University, Ronald Allan-Lindblom, Artistic Producing Director, on September 30, 2011. The cast and creative contributors were:

Gabriel David Anthony Berry
Christine Laurie Klatscher
Alex Connie Castanzo
Panther Jamil A.C. Mangan
Michael Dolan Ben Blazer
Segel Mohammed Shammen McCune

Director Sheila McKenna
Scenic Designer Stephanie Mayer-Staley
Lighting Designer Andrew David Ostrowski
Sound Designer Steve Shapiro
Costume Designer Cathleen Crocker-Perry
Fight Director Randy Kovitz
Production Manager Kim Martin
Production Stage Manager James Ogden II

NOTE ON PRONUNCIATIONS:

Kakuma, the refugee camp in Kenya is properly pronounced as KAK-oo-ma, although at the beginning of the play, Christine can mispronounce it as Ka-KOOM-a. Same with Darfur, with correct emphasis on the first syllable: DAR-for. Kakuma is the Swahili word for “No place.”

Segel is pronounced SAH-gl dropping the “e” when you say it. Christine mispronounces it as “Say-GEHL” and later “Seh-GEHL. Correct emphasis is on both first and second syllable and you swallow the “e” in the second syllable.

In general, when pronouncing the Dinka words all vowels have Latin (new pronunciation) values.

The letter “c” is pronounced as “ch” as in “change”

The letters “ny” are pronounced as the Italian “gn” as in “gnocchi”

“oo” is pronounced as “oa” in goal

“ee” is pronounced as “a” in “scale”

“aa” is pronounced as in “car”

“uu” is pronounced as in “pool”

“g” is pronounced as in “gain”

“a” is pronounced as in “car”

“e” is pronounced as in “every”

“i” is pronounced as in “kill

“o” is pronounced as in “poll”

“u” is pronounced as in “bull”

TRANSLATION OF DINKA WORDS and PHRASES:

nyang - crocodile

Kene ee Deng. - This is Deng.

Yedi? - How much?

Ee ca lueel ye bi ya— - You said it would cost—

Yen ce keul. - I have been robbed.

E kenne ye di? - How much is this?

aguen - a term of affection for a child

Yen ci maar. - I am lost.

Bunia - cattle or cows

Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

GABRIEL: Early to mid-20s, Sudanese refugee, member of the Dinka of Southern Sudan, one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan,” he attends community college part-time and works full-time at Whole Foods.

CHRISTINE: Mid- to late 40s, recently divorced, at a turning point.

ALEX: 16, Christine’s daughter, a sophomore at Pittsburgh Catholic School for Girls.

PANTHER: 30, Gabriel’s roommate, also a Sudanese refugee. Works various minimum-wage jobs, although he seems to carry around a lot of cash, and a cell phone that rings continuously.

MICHAEL DOLAN: mid- to late 30s. Stay-at-home dad, Catholic activist. Works for different local causes. He used to work for Catholic Charities, now looking for a new job.

SEGEL MOHAMMED: Late 30s.

Director and founder of the Pittsburgh Center for Refugee Relief, Somali born, Arab raised, single mother.

TIME AND PLACE

September 2004 to October 2005. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

SETTING

Scenes take place in the produce section of Whole Foods, in the home of Christine and Alex, on a bench in a playground where children are playing, in the downtown office of Segel Mohammed, in Gabriel's imagination and in Christine's memory. The set should be fluid enough to move from scene to scene seamlessly. Feel free to think theatrically, incorporating light, sound, image and music to push the action forward. As much as possible, avoid black-outs, to allow the play to move quickly from scene to scene.

* * * *

For note on pronunciations and translation of Dinka words and phrases, see end of script.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

AT RISE: *A young Sudanese man is stacking papayas.*

GABRIEL. “To understand metaphor,” my teacher says, “you must imagine.” (*He smiles broadly.*) I am Dinka. I want to say. I know what metaphor is. The Monyjang think in metaphor. You say in your country, “sunrise.” We say, “the cutting of the earth.” Does the sun really slice open the earth like a papaya, spilling its red juice across the sky?” (*Shrugs.*) You must imagine. (*Clicks his tongue against his teeth.*) Imagine. You are running in the bush alone at night in your bare feet. You are a six-year old boy, when fire burns the sky. When everyone in your family—sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandfather, grandmother—run like zebra, who suddenly see a lion among them, and your mother— (*He stops a brief moment, then continues.*) Your mother shouts in your ear, “Go! Run! Find Your Own Way!” Now you are cutting the soles of your feet on the tall grass and a lion is behind you. You are the breakfast of that lion because she has not eaten all night and she is coming for you! (*Shaking his head, laughing to himself.*) If I could use these metaphors in English composition, believe me, I would have no problem!

(He holds up a papaya, pulls out a large shiny knife from a sheath hanging from his belt and slices it in two. LIGHTS SHIFT.)

SCENE ONE

(LIGHTS RISE on CHRISTINE sitting alone at her kitchen island. She'd been crying, now she's done. She wipes her eyes, blowing her nose. She pours herself a cup of coffee. ALEX walks in half dressed in her Catholic school girl's uniform. CHRISTINE doesn't look up. ALEX stares at her for a moment.)

ALEX. Do you know where my sweater vest is?

CHRISTINE. Good morning, Alex.

ALEX *(a slight sigh)*. Good morning. *(Half a beat.)* My vest?

CHRISTINE. It's where you left it.

ALEX. And where is that?

(CHRISTINE picks it up off the counter, holds it out to her. ALEX takes it and puts it on, along with her socks and shoes through the following.)

ALEX *(cont'd)*. Thank you.

CHRISTINE. You're welcome. It's been sitting there all weekend.

ALEX. Well, I wasn't here all weekend.

CHRISTINE *(beat)*. And take an umbrella; it's raining.

ALEX. I'm fine.

CHRISTINE. You'll be soaking wet waiting for the bus.

Take an umbrella.

ALEX. I couldn't find one.

CHRISTINE. Look in the hall closet.

ALEX. I did.

CHRISTINE. There are no umbrellas in the house?

ALEX. Okay, I may have left a few at school. Is this really important to fight about this morning?

CHRISTINE. Are we fighting? All right. Let's start over.

How about breakfast. I'll make you—

ALEX (*interrupting*). I don't have time.

CHRISTINE. Have a piece of fruit.

ALEX. I'm not hungry.

CHRISTINE. And then you'll buy some sugary candy bar from that vending machine.

ALEX. I'll have a granola bar.

CHRISTINE. Alex, why do you have to make everything so difficult? Eat some breakfast.

ALEX. Why do you have to control every little thing I do? Dad doesn't.

CHRISTINE. No, he doesn't.

ALEX. I'm late. I missed the bus already. (*Beat, then an entirely different tone.*) Can you drive me to school?

CHRISTINE. Oh, Alex. I have things to do this morning. I have phone calls to make for that school fundraiser I volunteered for—which is another thing your father doesn't do.

ALEX. Oh no! I forgot.

CHRISTINE. What now?

ALEX. I volunteered you to make brownies for the open house this afternoon.

CHRISTINE. What open house?

ALEX. There's an open house for something, I don't know, I'm supposed to bring them with me this morning.

CHRISTINE. When you volunteer me for something, Alex, you have to tell me!

ALEX. I forgot, Mom, I have a lot on my mind! I was at Dad's all weekend, and then when I finally got back here, I still had homework to do—

CHRISTINE. Well, why didn't you do your homework at your father's?

ALEX. I left my books here and he didn't want to come back for them. They give too much homework at this stupid school.

CHRISTINE. It's a good school.

ALEX. I hate it. It's too hard, and the other girls are horrible.

CHRISTINE. Those girls you eat lunch with sound nice.

ALEX. Girls are herd animals. And to have a herd you need someone pushed outside of the herd. And I am officially outside the herd. But obviously that doesn't matter to you.

CHRISTINE. Of course, it matters, Alex. Do you think I want to see you so unhappy?

ALEX. No one likes me at that school. I have ZERO friends. And still you sit there and say it's a good school, why don't you love it?

CHRISTINE. It is a good school.

ALEX. Then you go there.

CHRISTINE. We're not supposed to live like this.

ALEX. Like what?

CHRISTINE. In parallel lines—

ALEX. Oh no, don't take me on that boredom train again, not at 7:30 in the morning.

CHRISTINE. We're supposed to live in circles, concentric circles, circles within circles.

ALEX. Really?

CHRISTINE. People used to live in big extended families, all in the same place. Like a tribe. Don't roll your eyes at me—

ALEX. I'm not rolling—

CHRISTINE. Where everybody participates. It takes a village, Hillary said that. One person can't do it alone.

ALEX. Maybe you shouldn't have gotten a divorce.

CHRISTINE. That wasn't entirely up to me, Alex. *(Pause.)* Your father needs to participate a little more. I can't be the only one responsible for making sure you get your homework done on the one weekend that you're there.

ALEX. Okay, I'll tell him. *(Beat.)* Will you make the brownies?

CHRISTINE. Fine. I need to go shopping anyway. Come on. Let me get dressed. You're coming with me.

ALEX. What?

CHRISTINE. We'll go to Whole Foods; it's on the way to school.

ALEX. No, not Whole Foods. We need *brownie* mix.

CHRISTINE. They have it; it's just healthy brownie mix. We could use some healthy food in this house. Maybe we can get an umbrella there too.

ALEX. I'm not going to Whole Foods before school. I'll miss first period!

CHRISTINE. Well then, I'm not making your damn brownies.

ALEX. Then don't make them! Okay, don't do anything for me, I don't care! In two more years I'll be out of this house and you won't have to do anything for me ever again. And then we can all be like Dad—and pretend we don't have a family. I'll walk to school. *In the rain.*

(ALEX exits, door slams. CHRISTINE sits frozen, not moving. Then she puts her coffee cup down, too hard—and bursts into tears. Briefly. She wipes her eyes and starts to write a list.)

CHRISTINE. Eggs, milk, bread...brownie mix.

(LIGHTS SHIFT.)

SCENE TWO

(SOUND of automatic doors whooshing open. LIGHTS BUMP UP in the produce section of Whole Foods. CHRISTINE watches as GABRIEL slices a papaya in half.)

GABRIEL. Can I help you?

CHRISTINE. Excuse me?

GABRIEL. Do you need help finding everything you are looking for today?

CHRISTINE. What am I looking for? That's a good question. How about that?

GABRIEL. Papaya. Want to taste?

CHRISTINE. Okay. *(He holds the knife with a piece of fruit up to her mouth. She reaches up and takes it, eats it, still looking at him.)*

GABRIEL. In Africa, this was my favorite. What do you think?

CHRISTINE. Delicious.

GABRIEL. The meat—the flesh—is very good, very juicy. But don't forget the seeds.

CHRISTINE. Really?

GABRIEL. You must eat the seeds. Americans always throw away the seeds. It is the best part. Lots of protein. These grow wild in the jungle in my country. When I find them they keep me alive.

CHRISTINE. In Africa?

GABRIEL. Eat the seeds.

CHRISTINE *(takes a seed, puts it in her mouth, chewing)*. Interesting...peppery. Reminds me of tree bark.

GABRIEL. Better than tree bark. I know, because I have eaten tree bark. *(He returns to stacking fruit. CHRISTINE watches him.)*

CHRISTINE. Where in Africa are you from?

GABRIEL. Southern Sudan.

CHRISTINE. Is that in Darfur?

GABRIEL. Darfur is more north and to the west. We are south. What is happening now in Darfur, happened first in our villages. It is very very bad. *(Beat.)* Thank you for stopping by today.

CHRISTINE. You're welcome. *(Reading his name tag.)* Gabriel. *(Gestures with papaya.)* And thank you for the taste. Hard to believe, but I've never had papaya.

GABRIEL. Promise me you will eat the seeds. Feed them to your children. Very nutritious.

CHRISTINE. Believe me, Gabriel. My daughter will not eat these seeds. They look too much like bugs.

GABRIEL. Lots of protein in bugs.

CHRISTINE. That would not convince her.

GABRIEL. Maybe she likes mango, my other favorite.

CHRISTINE. She likes brownies.

GABRIEL. Ah. Yes. Chocolate. And sugar.

CHRISTINE. I don't mean to keep you. I don't want to get you in trouble.

GABRIEL. Oh, no, it is no trouble. They like us to talk to the customers. But— (*winks*) they want us to keep working too.

CHRISTINE. It was very nice to meet you. I'm Christine.

GABRIEL (*sticks out his hand, one hand still packing papaya*). Nice to meet you, Christine. You are wearing a cross. Are you Christian?

CHRISTINE. Oh, yes. Catholic.

GABRIEL. Catholic Charities helped me when I first arrived here.

CHRISTINE. How long have you been here?

GABRIEL. We arrived before September 11th. It is three years this week.

CHRISTINE. Oh...well...happy anniversary. Take—take care, now. (*She starts to walk away, hesitates.*)

GABRIEL. If your daughter does not want the seeds, feed them to your sons. They'll grow strong and tall. I know.

CHRISTINE. I don't have sons. Just my daughter.

GABRIEL. Only one child. That's a shame. You must have sons next.

CHRISTINE. Believe me that would be a medical miracle, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. You should believe in miracles, Miss Christine.

CHRISTINE. Gabriel. Like the angel.

GABRIEL. It is a very common name among the boys I grew up with. Gabriels, Daniels, James and Peters, all from the Bible, you know.

CHRISTINE. Are you—one of the “Lost Boys”? I saw this program on TV about boys in Africa—

GABRIEL. Yes, I am one of the former Lost Boys. But I am no longer a boy and I am not lost, right? I am here stacking papaya in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I am talking to Christine, a very nice customer, with one daughter, no sons.

CHRISTINE. Well, I, I hope to see you again. Next time I’m here, I’ll look for you.

GABRIEL. May I ask you a question?

CHRISTINE. Oh sure, sure.

GABRIEL. Are you a teacher? (*He pulls a folded up piece of paper from his pocket.*)

CHRISTINE. No. Just a mom, sorry.

GABRIEL. A mom is very important.

CHRISTINE. Are you looking for a teacher? I mean, your English is excellent.

GABRIEL. Thank you. We learned English at Kakuma. But now, I am going to community college (*taps the paper*) and I am having trouble. If you were a teacher—you could give me some advice.

CHRISTINE. What are you studying?

GABRIEL. Business management, someday I want to be the black Donald Trump. That is if I can pass English composition. I have to write this essay. (*Holding up his essay.*) Ooo, boy. That is tough for me.

CHRISTINE. I'm afraid I'm not a good teacher. Or so my daughter tells me. She doesn't let me help her much. She gets frustrated; then I get frustrated.

GABRIEL. She is lucky to have her mom.

CHRISTINE. I will tell her that. *(Beat.)* Do you have any family in Africa...that you are in touch with?

GABRIEL *(as he carefully refolds the paper and puts it back in his pocket)*. Some guys have found their families. When I was at Kakuma, a man there say he see my mother alive. But I have not seen her since I was a small boy.

CHRISTINE. Oh. That's—I'm so sorry.

GABRIEL. I have hope someday. Tch. Someday.

CHRISTINE *(after a pause)*. Good luck, Gabriel.

GABRIEL. Please stop by again. *(He returns to work, CHRISTINE watches him a few moments, then impulsively:)*

CHRISTINE. You know what. Maybe my daughter can help you with your essay. What are you doing tonight? Why don't you come over to the house when you get off work? She can help you with your essay, then you can stay for dinner?

GABRIEL. I don't want to impose on your kindness.

CHRISTINE. No, no, you're not at all. Don't worry, I'm not crazy, I promise. I don't make a home-cooked meal that often and I'd like to share it with you.

GABRIEL. You are very generous to invite me.

CHRISTINE. I live around the corner. You could walk there. It's a short walk. When do you finish working tonight?

GABRIEL. Seven o'clock.

CHRISTINE. Then come at seven. *(She writes down her address on her grocery list.)* It's just a few blocks east. Do you know how to get there? There's my phone number, if you change your mind. Or...get lost.

GABRIEL. I will find it.

(GABRIEL pushes his cart offstage. CHRISTINE watches a moment, then she exits with her basket in the other direction. LIGHTS SHIFT.)