



A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK

BY **KEN URBAN**



DRAMATISTS
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INC.



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*Dedicated to Owiso Odera.
You are missed.*

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK was originally produced by the Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director, Michael Maso, Managing Director), Boston, MA, on October 18, 2017. It was directed by Colman Domingo; the scenic designer was William Boles; the costume designer was Kara Harmon; the lighting designer was Russell H. Champa; the sound designer was Lindsay Jones; the dramaturg was Jeremy Stoller; the production stage manager was Adele Nadine Traub. The cast was as follows:

JEREMY/ED Samuel H. Levine
TEDDY/NICHOLAS McKinley Belcher III

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK received its European premiere on October 16, 2018, at Trafalgar Studios in the West End, produced by Eilene Davidson for Stage Traffic Productions. It was directed by Jonathan O’Boyle; the scenic and costume designer was Jason Denvir; the lighting designer was Nic Farman; the sound designer was Max Perryment; the stage manager was Sarah Greenwood; and the production manager was Sarah Reed. The cast was as follows:

JEREMY/ED Douglas Booth
TEDDY/NICHOLAS Clifford Samuel

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK was developed by the Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis and commissioned by Epic Theatre Ensemble.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Directors Colman Domingo, Jonathan O'Boyle, Jeremy Cohen, Bevin O'Gara, and Will Pomerantz;

Actors McKinley Belcher III, Samuel H. Levine, Douglas Booth, Clifford Samuel, Owiso Odera, Nate Cheeseman, Joe Wilson, Jr., and Eddie Shields;

Dramaturg Jeremy Stoller;

All of the Doctors Without Borders volunteers who agreed to speak with me about their service;

My students at “that school in Boston”;

And to the Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director), Eilene Davidson and Stage Traffic Productions, The Playwrights' Center (Jeremy Cohen, Artistic Director), and Epic Theatre Ensemble (Ron Russell, Artistic Director)

For their belief and support in this play.

CHARACTERS

JEREMY, early 20s. Glasses.

TEDDY, 30s. No glasses.

ED, early 20s. Played by the same actor as Jeremy.

NICHOLAS, 30s. Played by the same actor as Teddy.

CASTING

2 actors (2 men):

1. White, early 20s, who plays Jeremy and Ed.

2. African-American, early 30s, who plays Teddy and Nicholas.
Nicholas speaks with a Ugandan accent.

There should be about a ten-year age difference between the two actors.

SETTING

Teddy's hotel room.

Evening and the following morning.

January 2011.

SCRIPT NOTES

See additional Production Notes at the back of this volume.

All punctuation and spacing is intentional, giving a sense of the line's delivery.

Shift A change in location and/or time. No scene changes. These are actor-driven events supported by a shift in light or sound. But the focus is the transformation of the actors.

Bleed A moment when the present and the past coexist.

Return A return to the present moment.

/ The following lines begin to overlap at that point.

// The lines after the following lines begin to overlap at that point.

To have a friend is to know that one of the two of you will inevitably see the other die. [This is] the mourning that we expect from the very beginning.

—Jacques Derrida

The hardest thing about coming home [from the field] was feeling like I wasn't important anymore because I wasn't helping people. It made me hate friends. I hated hearing them complain. How could I go back to living this life after seeing what I'd seen over there? It took time before I could be a friend again.

—Personal Interview,
Doctors Without Borders (MSF) Volunteer

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK

Scene 1

The sound of heavy rain.

An empty hotel room. Cramped and shabby. A single bed, a dresser, a nightstand with a clock, a few mismatched lamps. A single moldy bedside lamp is on its dimmest setting.

The room has two doors. One leads to the hallway, while the other leads to a small bathroom. Both doors are closed. (When either the bathroom or main doors are opened, only a small part of the bathroom or hallway is visible to the audience.) There is a large window on one wall with thick curtains drawn to prevent any light.

A conversation is heard out in the hallway:

JEREMY. *(Offstage.)* You want me to grab some of those?

TEDDY. *(Offstage.)* Nah, nah, I got it, I got it...

Click of a keycard-activated door.

Teddy and Jeremy enter from the hallway. Teddy carries a handful of assorted Dutch beers, while holding the keycard. Jeremy wears a light jacket and a backpack, both still damp from the rain. Teddy places his stash of beers down and turns on the other lights. At some point, he takes out his cell phone and places it on the dresser. There is a nervous energy in the room. Teddy has been drinking. Jeremy hasn't.

JEREMY. Funny, no matter the hotel, every room always looks / the same.

TEDDY. The same shade of ugly. This one, though, is a particular shade of ugly.

(Taking in the sound of the rain.) Listen to that. It's really coming down out there.

JEREMY. Yeah.

TEDDY. Hey, don't imagine your room's got a fridge, huh?

JEREMY. I don't have a room. Didn't check in. Went straight to the bar.

TEDDY. You're traveling light.

JEREMY. Suitcases are still at the airport. Hey. Do you have any food? I'm starving. I was hoping the bar would have something.

TEDDY. Got a Kind Bar, I think.

Teddy grabs a bar out of one of the drawers and gives it to Jeremy.

Here you go.

JEREMY. Thanks.

TEDDY. I, ah, don't want you passing out or anything.

JEREMY. Love these things.

TEDDY. Yeah?

Pause.

The men share a look. Teddy's look lingers a little too long.

JEREMY. Everything OK?

TEDDY. Should probably figure out a way to keep these beers cold.

Teddy sets about his task (checks the bathroom, drawers, etc., looking for an ice bucket). Jeremy eventually sits on the bed and finishes the Kind Bar.

Shouldn't complain I guess. At least the bartender down there let us buy all of these. That makes up for the fact the damn hotel bar closes at eleven. There's gotta at least be an ice bucket. Or something. Somewhere. Right?

Teddy turns and sees Jeremy sitting on the comforter.

Hey, you sure you wanna sit on that?

JEREMY. What? Sorry, I didn't mean to sit / on your bed—

TEDDY. No, no, I don't mind you sitting on the bed. I was just thinking, that comforter. Who knows what's living on that thing?

JEREMY. Really?

TEDDY. Bugs and shit. Freak me out. I'm not a girl about most things. But that stuff, I'm a girl. Maybe it's those bedbug ads I see on the subway. I always get an itchy sensation in a hotel. Sorry. Kind of a gross thing to talk about.

JEREMY. Did you pick up some uninvited guests when visiting the Red Light district?

TEDDY. I wish.

JEREMY. I mean, I'm not judging or anything if you did.

TEDDY. We've all paid for it one time or another, bro. Visit one of those places, you'll wanna down some antibiotics afterwards though.

JEREMY. They make you wear a condom, right?

TEDDY. Yeah. Well. Course. You fucking around with a hooker, you're wearing a rubber. Hell, my motto: You banging any stranger, you best be sporting a raincoat.

JEREMY. Could still get herpes. Or crabs. But you can get crabs from just sitting on this comforter.

TEDDY. Gross.

JEREMY. Y'know they never wash these things.

TEDDY. Ugh. Don't remind me.

JEREMY. There's bugs all over us, all kinds of microscopic creatures live on our skin.

TEDDY. OK, that's really disgusting.

JEREMY. It's true. Did you know there are as many creatures living on your body right now as there are people on earth?

TEDDY. Enough, enough. You're just trying to gross me out.

JEREMY. (*Laughs.*) Maybe.

TEDDY. (*Laughs.*) Bitch.

Oh man, it's good to talk to an American. The only company I ever get downstairs in that hotel bar are German tourists. They all

want to try out their English on me. Can't understand a goddamn thing they say.

Where you from by the way?

JEREMY. Boston.*

TEDDY. You're kidding me?

JEREMY. Well. Outside of.

TEDDY. Where?

JEREMY. Newton. My parents live there.

TEDDY. Born and raised in Roxbury.

JEREMY. Close.

TEDDY. Roxbury's a little rougher than Newton.

JEREMY. Guess.

TEDDY. Damn, a fellow Masshole. You travel halfway across the globe and—

JEREMY. I know, right?

TEDDY. You go to Newton High?

JEREMY. I had friends who did.

TEDDY. Boarding school, huh?

JEREMY. My parents made me.

Teddy realizes it's a losing proposition in terms of keeping the beers cold.

TEDDY. Shit. I give up. Guess we better drink fast.

Teddy grabs two beer cans. Like an expert, he holds each beer horizontally and uses his Swiss Army Knife to puncture a small hole in each can.

Jeremy watches.

JEREMY. What are you doing?

TEDDY. We're gonna shotgun these, buddy.

JEREMY. What the hell is that?

TEDDY. You've never shotgunned a beer before?

JEREMY. No.

* See Production Notes and Alternative Dialogue at the end of the play text.

TEDDY. Where the hell did you go to college?

JEREMY. (*Slight hesitation.*) I went to school in Boston.

TEDDY. I'm guessing not UMass.

JEREMY. What does it matter?

TEDDY. Oh, I get it, you're one of those people who say "I went to college in Boston." And if they keep askin, you eventually cave in and say, "I went to school in Cambridge." Am I right?

JEREMY. Yeah, I'm one of those assholes.

TEDDY. Yeah, yeah, there's plenty of you Harvard boys working at Shittybank with me.

JEREMY. This isn't a frat party, I'm not / a frat brother—

TEDDY. Hey, Mister Harvard, I am a frat brother and you're gonna shotgun this here beer.

He hands Jeremy one of the beers.

JEREMY. Christ, really?

TEDDY. Put your lips there.

JEREMY. This is gonna kill me.

TEDDY. Hardly.

Jeremy puts his lips on the knife hole. Teddy turns the can upright.

Ready?

Jeremy nods.

Teddy pulls the can's tab open.

Suck it down, buddy.

Teddy does the same to his beer.

For a first-timer, Jeremy is surprisingly good. Only a little beer gets on his shirt.

Teddy, on the other hand, is a pro. No beer is lost.

JEREMY. I did it!

TEDDY. You sure you've never done that before?

JEREMY. Never.

TEDDY. Quick study.

Ready for another?

A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK

by Ken Urban

2 men (doubling)

On his way home after a year in East Africa, a young aid worker goes back to a shabby Amsterdam hotel room with a fellow American. Over beers, the two strangers confess their shared fear that they betrayed the friends who needed them most.

"...a probing, multilayered study of guilt as both a terrible individual burden and as an unlikely source of connection. ...[A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK] steadily gains power and ultimately more than rewards your attention..."

—The Boston Globe

"...[a] theatrical tour de force..."

—TheaterMania.com

"A work this intense, this radiant and searing, could leave you with spiritual sunburn. ...The show...sizzles with restlessness and erotic energy... Urban's script burns with outrage for the way real-life American religious meddling incited homophobic violence and legislative oppression in African nations like Uganda."

—WBUR, Boston Public Radio

"...The script's emotional depth is continually rich and surprising, its characterizations free of stereotypes. Urban uncovers fascinating new layers in characters we thought we understood. ...the result is both captivating and profoundly moving. ...A GUIDE FOR THE HOMESICK is a gripping drama packed with genuine emotional power."

—ArtsFuse.org

Also by Ken Urban

THE AWAKE
THE HAPPY SAD
NIBBLER
and others

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