

SINCE AFRICA by Mia McCullough ©2009 dialogue sample

Scene 7

LIGHTS UP on ATER's apartment. DIANE pulls a tray of oatmeal cookies out of the oven and puts a new tray in. She is fidgety, nervous. She looks at her watch, chews her lip.

There is A KNOCK AT THE DOOR.

DIANE

Ater?

REGGIE opens the door. He holds a book wrapped in cloth. DIANE's discomfort level increases. She's a bit manic.

REGGIE

Hello?

DIANE

Oh. Deacon Hudson. Hello.

REGGIE

Mrs. MacIntyre.

DIANE

I thought you might be Ater.

REGGIE

He's not here?

DIANE

No. We had a date, you know, we were supposed to meet today. He's been late before, but never this late. I'm a bit concerned to tell you the truth.

REGGIE

Are the other boys home?

DIANE

No. They're at work.

REGGIE

You have a key?

DIANE

No. No. He, none of them, ever lock the door. I keep telling them it's not safe, they don't seem to— Even the door downstairs is always propped open. I want to close it, but then I'm afraid they don't have their keys. Joseph told me he's been locked out twelve times.

REGGIE

Yes. I noticed the door. That's how I got in.

DIANE

Yes.

DIANE looks at her watch.

REGGIE

How long have you been waiting?

DIANE

Almost two hours.

REGGIE

That is late.

DIANE

Did you have an appointment with him as well? He didn't tell me, but he wouldn't necessarily.

REGGIE

Yes. No. I don't have an appointment. I was just dropping off a new Bible for him. The one he brought from Kenya is a little worse for wear.

DIANE

I see.

The OVEN TIMER DINGS.

REGGIE

What's that?

DIANE

It's the cookies, they're probably not done yet, this batch, I don't trust the oven so I've been setting the timer conservatively, no, they're not done,
(beat)
but these have been cooling for a while. If you'd like one.

REGGIE

You're making cookies?

DIANE

Well, that was part of our plan for the day. But I got nervous. Waiting. If I don't occupy myself with something, I start thinking of scenarios.

REGGIE

Scenarios?

DIANE

You know, maybe he got hit by a bus, or stabbed by thugs, or attacked by dogs. Or maybe he's just lost, but that one doesn't stick with me for more than a moment or two, because, you know, it's far too logical and not nearly morbid enough.

REGGIE

I see.

DIANE

It's a mother thing.

(beat)

Please have a cookie. They're oatmeal raisin. No nuts, if you're allergic.

REGGIE

Thank you. Still warm.

DIANE

Yes.

REGGIE

Very good.

Awkward pause.

DIANE

(cautiously, but condescending)

You should have had some tea.

REGGIE

Pardon me?

DIANE

Last time you were here, Ater gave you some tea, but you didn't drink any. He told me.

REGGIE

I don't particularly like tea.

DIANE

I tried to explain that you didn't mean any offense. It's considered rude in Dinka culture to refuse an offering of food.

REGGIE

Oh. Well, I didn't realize that.

DIANE

I told him that sometimes people say "no thank you," and it's perfectly acceptable. I think the concept of refusing food is a little hard to get your mind around if you're from a country where no one has enough to eat. Anyhow, it's not so much to ask that we meet him halfway on some of these things, especially at first. We don't want to be arrogant, and pretend that our way is the only way, after all.

REGGIE

(as polite as he can manage)

No, of course. Thank you for telling me.

Awkward pause.

DIANE

You could *leave* the Bible for him. If you don't want to wait.

REGGIE

Well, I have to admit, I'm a little concerned myself, now.

DIANE

The other volunteers, they did tell me about the tardiness issue, but still, this seems extreme.

REGGIE

Yes.

DIANE

Do you think we should call the police?

REGGIE

Why don't we give it another half hour.

The OVEN TIMER DINGS again. DIANE checks the cookies and takes the second tray out.

REGGIE

I wonder, Mrs. MacIntyre, if baking cookies is the best use of your time.

DIANE

What does that mean?

REGGIE

It's just not a usual volunteer-refugee activity. Helping him set up a bank account, showing him the library—

DIANE

We've done those things. I thought teaching him how to make inexpensive, healthy food was useful.

REGGIE

No, it is.

(beat)

How often do you see Ater?

DIANE

About once a week.

REGGIE

I heard you bought him some clothes.

DIANE

The donated clothes don't fit him.

REGGIE

It's not really appropriate—

DIANE

To let him walk around in pants that are two inches too short? You're right. It's not appropriate. He didn't even have a decent pair of gloves. This is Chicago, these boys think fifty degrees is cold.

I bought them *all* gloves, if you want to know.

Beat.

REGGIE

That was very generous of you.

DIANE

It's not a matter of generosity, it's a matter of practicality.

REGGIE

Perhaps, next time, it would be better to donate the clothes to the church and we can distribute them.

DIANE

I see.

REGGIE

We just wouldn't want you to get into a position where the boys started asking you for things. Putting you on the spot.

DIANE

Oh.
So, you're protecting me.

REGGIE

Yes.

She nods. A pause. DEACON HUDSON sits on the sofa and unwraps the Bible.

DIANE

(quietly)
What is that you have it wrapped in?

REGGIE

An African cloth.

DIANE

Is it Kenyan?

REGGIE

... I'm not sure. My wife gave it to me.

DIANE

It looks similar to the cloth they wrap their dead in.

REGGIE

Are you a scholar of textiles? or of African culture.

DIANE

Neither. Just a little detail I picked up there on my last trip.

REGGIE

I see. My wife and I would love to go someday. We couldn't afford it as a vacation, but perhaps as missionaries.

DIANE

It's really not that expensive, once you get there. It's the tickets.

REGGIE

Yes. I'm sure.