

Six Beds

By R. James Scott

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Peter Miller from Chicago, a recent college graduate, is determined to write an account of the pain and suffering caused by the new AIDS epidemic, so he persuades the directors of a clinic to allow him to masquerade as a patient. All goes well until the other patients on the floor discover his pretense. In an intensely emotional scene they hold him down and inject him with what he believes is the virus. In the end, Zeb, the last of the five patients to survive, has the honor of telling Peter of the subterfuge, that he was not injected the “bug” at all. Peter finally is able to finish his account of his experiences on the ward. This is a powerful piece that brings to light the many questions we all deal with when faced with our own mortality. About 50 minutes.

Six Beds

- 3 -

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 m, 2 w, 1 flexible, extras)

PETER MILLER...Journalist.

ZEBULON HERSCHEL DUNBAR...Last one of the AIDS patients in the ward to survive.

LAZENBY...AIDS patient, cries in his sleep.

SCONS...AIDS patient, a skinny 20-year-old.

RALPH GLADDEN...AIDS patient, forces Peter to confess.

WILLY FREDRICKSON...AIDS patient, young, disowned by his family.

CONNIE...Willy's caring sister.

BETH...A kind nurse.

DR. SCOWER

NURSES

Six Beds

(AT RISE: A single SPOT comes on DC focused on PETER. He is in his mid twenties standing alone with a small suitcase on the floor to his right. The rest of the stage is dark, but spill from the spot may partially illuminate one or more of the six hospital beds positioned in a row behind him. He has a black notebook clutched in his left hand which he may use in his gestures.)

PETER: I was twenty-six years old in 1983, and a recent graduate of UCLA department of journalistic studies. A writer, or at least I referred to myself as such, but in fact I had yet to publish my first book, or land a real job. I was at the end of my meager finances, and at the end of my patience. In a last-ditch effort to break into the world of serious journalism I contacted an old friend of my father who was heading up an experimental facility to house and treat the victims of the new AIDS epidemic.

I told him that I wanted to bring a new light to this mushrooming plague of the twentieth century by writing an account of the sufferings from the inside. He was reluctant to give up one of the few beds in his charge, but I convinced him that if projections were even close to correct, we would be needing several thousand of these now experimental facilities, and that would require education, and public support.

On November 23, 1983, under mild protest by three of the staff members, I was processed into the center as a patient and took one of the beds on the third floor.

It was still warm.

(The SPOT fades as LIGHTS come up behind. PETER picks up his suitcase, and is escorted by nurse BETH to the only vacant bed, second from SR. He places his suitcase on the bed, stands right of the bed, snaps the latches and opens it.)

Six Beds

- 5 -

(Behind him, a MAN lies in the bed, face turned away from center. On the opposite end of the room, a MAN sits up in bed talking low with a YOUNG WOMAN who sits in a chair left of the bed. THREE OTHER MEN are at the back of the room. One sits on a chair looking out a window, while the other two converse in low tones. They notice Peter and his suitcase, and one of them, ZEBULON, turns away and approaches Peter standing at the head of the bed.)

ZEB: What be your name?

PETER: What? ...Are you talking to me?

ZEB: Who you think I be talking to, fool? What be your name?

PETER: Peter. Peter Miller. I just got here. Nice to meet you.

ZEB: Where you from?

PETER: Chicago.

ZEB: What you be doin' here?

PETER: Same as you I guess.

ZEB: You gots the bug?

PETER: The what?

ZEB: We all got the bug. If you be here, you got the bug.

PETER: I see. What is your name?

ZEB: Zebulon Herschel Dunbar...the third.

PETER: That's quite a name.

ZEB: Damn right it is.

PETER: I'm just Peter...no middle name.

ZEB: Just Peter from Chicago.

PETER: That's right.

ZEB: Well, just Peter from Chicago, welcome to our little family. *(ZEB sits on the SR side of the third bed and faces PETER.)*

PETER: Thanks. Is this all there are...six of us?

ZEB: No, hell no. The whole building be full.

PETER: Oh. Oh, I just didn't see...

ZEB: They just keeps us separated out so nothing spreads.

PETER: Isolation

ZEB: Iso-what?

PETER: Isolation, to protect in case someone gets sick.

ZEB: We all be sick, we all gots the bug.

Six Beds

- 6 -

PETER: So you said. I didn't see any women. Are there any women?

ZEB: What, you think only the man gets the bug?

PETER: No, I just didn't see any.

ZEB: They all be on the other side.

PETER: They all...died?

ZEB: No, they ain't dead. What be wif you, my man? They be on the other side...the other building.

PETER: Oh, sorry. I just didn't understand.

ZEB: They don't speak no English in Chicago?

PETER: Of course they do, it's just...different.

(SCONS, the man who was standing with ZEB, has turned and comes up behind bed number three. He is a skinny twenty-year-old.)

SCONS: He was cryin' again last night.

ZEB: He's just a boob. Don't mean nothing. Hey Scons, meet Mr. Peter from Chicago.

SCONS: What you be doin' here?

PETER: Movin' in.

SCONS: They don't waste much time.

PETER: How do you mean?

SCONS: Two hours ago, another man be in that bed.

(LAZENBY, the gentleman who was looking out the window, comes over.)

LAZ: You got Kruder's bed.

PETER: What's a Kruder?

LAZ: The man what used to be in that bed.

PETER: Where did he go?

LAZ: The morgue.

ZEB: You been cryin' again, Lazenby?

LAZ: Who told you that?

ZEB: A little bird. Who'se that with Willy this morning?

LAZ: I think it's his sister or something.

SCONS: You two should get together. *(SHE is crying.)*

LAZ: I knew it was about over when they put up the screens.

End of Freeview

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