

ROBERT R
By Gavin Goldsmith

CHARACTERS

ROBERT RAYFORD: A thin and sickly African American youth with a mysterious illness. Polite yet quiet.

NURSE LISA: A black nurse working at City Hospital. Kind and patient.

DOCTOR DRAKE: A white doctor working at City Hospital. He's proud and self assured.

DOCTOR MARLYS WITTE: A white lymphologist working with Barnes Hospital. Young and cocky.

DOCTOR MEMORY ELVIN-LEWIS: A white chlamydia expert working with Barnes Hospital. Serious and professional.

CONSTANCE RAYFORD: Robert's mother. Out there, confused, and looking for her son.

RADIO ANNOUNCER: A white man's voice.

SETTING

City Hospital and Barnes County Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri, 1968-1969.

SET

In the center should be Robert's hospital bed. Scenes in different parts of the hospital will happen in different areas in the stage. When the lights go blue, the character is not in the world of the hospital anymore.

ACT I
SCENE 1

*(City Hospital, St. Louis,
Missouri. 1968.)*

*(The Emergency Room. The
atmosphere is sterile and
quiet.)*

*(NURSE LISA sits behind a
reception desk. On the desk is
an old 1960s rotary phone, a
clipboard, and a pen. She reads
a newspaper.)*

*(The phone rings, and she
answers.)*

NURSE LISA

City Hospital, who's speaking? Mhm. We'll have a wheelchair available. Thank you.

*(She lights a cigarette and
puffs out smoke. She calls out.)*

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

We need a roller near the emergency room, someone's coming in with a broken leg!

(A pause.)

(The phone rings.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

City Hospital, who's speaking? Mhm. Sir, have you called an ambulance? How long ago? Mhm. Mhm. They should be there shortly. Just apply pressure to the wound until they get there, okay? Would you like me to stay on the phone? Mhm. How are you feeling? Okay. Mhm. Mhm. Just apply pressure and they'll be with you shortly. Is anyone in the house with you? Mhm. Tell them to keep a watch outside. Is the door open-- ah. Mhm.

(A pause.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Oh, they've arrived? Yes, we'll see you soon. Thank you.

(She sighs and takes another drag of her cigarette.)

(The phone rings.)

(She sighs, pinching the bridge of her nose. She forces herself to be pleasant.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

City Hospital, who's speaking?

(A beat. She twirls the ring on her finger.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

I told you to stop calling me at work... What if something serious happens? I mean it! Oh, you're too much. Stop! No, I mean it.

(She giggles.)

(While she's speaking, ROBERT, age 15, enters. He's uncomfortable. He wears simple clothing. He nervously tugs at his shirt. NURSE LISA watches him.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Stop it, I'm at work!

(ROBERT takes a step back.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Hold on, someone needs something.

(Robert walks up to Nurse Lisa's desk. He picks up her newspaper, glancing at the crossword she's working on.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

I'll call you back.

(She hangs up the phone.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Can I help you?

(ROBERT doesn't answer. He stares at his feet.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Can you give the paper back, please?

(ROBERT puts the paper back on her desk.)

(A beat.)

ROBERT

Four across is Ruby.

NURSE LISA

What? Oh.

(She looks at the crossword puzzle and then at ROBERT, then puts it down. He was right.)

ROBERT

I need help.

NURSE LISA

Young man?

ROBERT

My name's Robert.

(She begins to write this down.)

NURSE LISA

What do you need help with? Where are your /parents?

ROBERT

/It's just me. I need help.

NURSE LISA

Robert, can you tell me what's wrong?

(A beat.)

ROBERT

No.

(The phone rings.)

NURSE LISA

Hold on one second.

(She picks up the phone.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

City Hospital, who's speaking? Have you called an ambulance? Sir, if she's going into labor, you need to call an ambulance. Mhm. Mhm. Sir-- yes. I understand, but-- Yes. Okay. Yes. We'll see you soon. Thank you.

(She hangs up the phone. ROBERT takes a step back, tugging his shirt down.)

NURSE LISA

Young man... Robert. Why don't you sit down?

ROBERT

I can't.

NURSE LISA

Can't... sit?

(ROBERT doesn't answer.)

NURSE LISA

Are you in pain?

ROBERT

No. I mean... yes. But... it's hard to explain.

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Then wait here.

(She hands him the paper.)

ROBERT

Can I have a pen?

(NURSE LISA smiles and gives him a pen. He begins to quickly fill-in answers to the crossword puzzle.)

(She picks up the phone and spins the numbers on it, and then puts it up to her ear.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Doctor Drake? Yes. I have someone at the ER desk who I think you should see. Yes. Thank you.

(She hangs up the phone.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

He'll be down in a moment.

ROBERT

Thank you.

(Silence.)

(ROBERT stands awkwardly with the crossword puzzle. DOCTOR DRAKE, wearing a lab coat and a stethoscope, enters.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

So this is our mystery visitor?

NURSE LISA

His name /is Robert.

ROBERT

/I'm Robert.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE extends a hand.
After a moment, ROBERT shakes
it.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert. Nice to meet you. I'm Doctor William Drake. Will you come with me?

*(ROBERT reluctantly follows
DOCTOR DRAKE.)*

(NURSE LISA follows.)

SCENE 2

(A single bed, an IV stand, and a desk filled with medical equipment)

(DOCTOR DRAKE leads ROBERT into the room. NURSE LISA follows.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE tries to help ROBERT onto the bed, but he refuses to sit.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Alright. Robert, before we can do anything, how old are you?

ROBERT

15.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He's 15, Lisa?

NURSE LISA

He needed help.

(DOCTOR DRAKE pinches the bridge of his nose.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, we can't help you without knowing where your parents are. Can I call them?

ROBERT

No.

DOCTOR DRAKE

And why not?

ROBERT

I don't... I don't have any.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm... sorry. Who's your caretaker, Robert?

(ROBERT looks down.)

NURSE LISA

How long have you been on your own?

(ROBERT stays silent.)

(A beat.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Take his blood pressure, Lisa.

NURSE LISA

Yes, doctor.

*(NURSE LISA straps ROBERT's arm
in a blood pressure monitor.)*

*(The room is quiet except for
the sound of the pumping of the
blood pressure cuff.)*

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

136 over 84.

ROBERT

Is that bad?

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's normal. Can you tell us what's the problem, Robert?

(ROBERT looks down.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

You're safe here.

ROBERT

I don't want to say it in front of a girl.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE and NURSE LISA
look at each other.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Would you mind stepping out for a moment?

NURSE LISA

Doctor.

(She exits.)

ROBERT

My... um. My... my privates are covered in warts. And my legs are all... swollen. And everything hurts. I walked here and I think my feet may explode. But sitting hurts. Everything hurts.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I see.

(A beat.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Can you take your pants off for me, Robert?

ROBERT

N-no...

(A beat. Robert swallows hard and then exhales.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Yes.

(ROBERT slowly pulls his pants down. He winces in pain.)

(His legs are swollen.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE puts on gloves and gently touches ROBERT's legs. He nods to himself.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Does that hurt?

(ROBERT nods, wiping his face.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Look up, please?

*(ROBERT does as he's told.
DOCTOR DRAKE does a lymph node
test on him, feeling under his
neck.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Does that hurt?

ROBERT

Yes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You can put your pants back on.

*(From the desk, DOCTOR DRAKE
takes a mercury thermometer
out.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm going to take your temperature now, alright?

ROBERT

Okay.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE puts the
thermometer under his tongue.
ROBERT stands in silence, but
begins to tap his foot. After a
moment, DOCTOR DRAKE takes the
thermometer out of ROBERT's
mouth and examines it. He's
surprised by it's results. He
writes it down.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

You have a fever. Do you feel feverish?

ROBERT

How do you mean?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Do you feel hot? Sweaty? Or cold? Do you have the chills?

ROBERT

No. Yes? Sometimes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I see. You're currently at 101 degrees. Not terrible, we can work on bringing that down. Can you sit down? Or try?

(ROBERT tries to sit. He ends up leaning against the bed.)

ROBERT

(Frustrated:) I can't.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Can I invite the nurse back in?

(A pause. ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

(Calling out:) Please come back in, Lisa.

(NURSE LISA enters once more. She holds a hospital gown, which she puts on the bed.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Can you change into this, please?

(ROBERT exits.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE begins to write on his clipboard.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

He's an odd one.

NURSE LISA

He's just a kid. He wouldn't tell me what's wrong, though.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I don't think he knows.

(ROBERT enters in a hospital gown.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Can you lay down, Robert? It's easier than sitting.

ROBERT

I... I can try.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Lisa, help me.

(ROBERT goes over to the bed. He lifts his legs in pain as he tries to prop himself up. NURSE LISA holds up his torso while DOCTOR DRAKE pushes his legs up. ROBERT cries out in pain. NURSE LISA and DOCTOR DRAKE set him down on the bed. ROBERT breathes heavily.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE goes to one of the drawers in the room and takes out a needle, a tube, and a vial.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

I'm going to take some blood now, okay?

ROBERT

... Yes sir.

(DOCTOR DRAKE wipes the inside of ROBERT's arm to sterilize it before going in to take blood.)

(ROBERT looks away.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE hands NURSE LISA the vial of blood.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE puts a cotton ball on ROBERT's inner arm and wraps bandages ROBERT's arm.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

All done.

ROBERT

Th-thank you.

DOCTOR DRAKE

(To NURSE LISA:) Hook him up to the IV, please. I have some questions for our friend.

NURSE LISA

Robert, are you sure--

ROBERT

I don't have a family.

(He extends his arm pleadingly.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Hook me up to the IV. Please.

(NURSE LISA Rolls over an IV pole. She gets a saline solution and hangs it from the stand. She puts the needle in his arm and lets the drip work. She exits with the blood work.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

How long have you been experiencing these symptoms?

ROBERT

Two years.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Two years?

ROBERT

At least.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Can you describe how you feel right now?

ROBERT

My legs feel like they're on fire-- and I can't catch my breath no matter how hard I try. And-- and it just hurts.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What hurts, Robert?

ROBERT

Everything.

(NURSE LISA reenters.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, do you know what a lymph node is?

(ROBERT thinks.)

ROBERT

No, sir.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Lymph nodes are tiny little glands that filter lymph, which is a fluid containing white blood cells. You know white blood cells?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

The pressure you feel on your neck and your legs are because they're swollen. It means your body is fighting an infection. We'll put you on an antibiotic regimen and hopefully that will get some swelling down. Does that sound good?

ROBERT

Yes sir.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Good.

(He writes a prescription down on his clipboard and tears it off, handing it to NURSE LISA.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Nurse, can you go down to the pharmacy and get me tetracycline, please?

NURSE LISA

Yes, doctor.

(She exits.)

ROBERT

What's that?

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's an antibiotic. Don't worry, Robert, we'll get you back on your feet.

ROBERT

Thank you, sir.

(DOCTOR DRAKE pats him on the shoulder. He exits. ROBERT is left alone. He takes off the bandages on one arm and raises it, examining his arm.)

(ROBERT hums to himself. Then tries to get comfortable. He can't. He rolls over, away from the audience.)

SCENE 3

(ROBERT sits in his bed, alone.)

(There's a radio on the desk, just out of reach. He reaches for it, but he's out of breath from stretching.)

(He adjusts himself and reaches out again, touching the top of it, but not being able to turn the knob. He sighs, then crosses his arms, defeated.)

(He sits upright, looking at the radio. He looks around, then shoves one of his legs off the bed. He winces in pain. He does the same to the other leg. He stands, shaky on his legs.)

(He limps around the room, holding himself up on the bed. Then turns the radio on. It plays I Say a Little Prayer by Dionne Warwick.)

(ROBERT closes his eyes and smiles, remembering hearing this song with his family.)

(He begins to hum along. When it gets to the chorus, he sings.)

ROBERT

*Forever, forever, you'll stay in my heart, and I will love you,
forever, forever, we never will part.*

(He begins to dance. As he dances, his legs buckle from under him, and he collapses.)

(He starts to cry, wiping his face on his sleeve. He turns around and tries to climb back on his bed, but falls.)

(He lays for a moment, out of breath.)

ROBERT

(Singing along again:) I... say a little prayer.

(NURSE LISA enters holding a tray of breakfast.)

NURSE LISA

Robert, it's-- oh my god!

(She runs to him, trying to sit him upright.)

NURSE LISA

Robert, what happened?!

(ROBERT is still catching his breath.)

ROBERT

I... the radio. I just... I just wanted to hear music.

NURSE LISA

Oh, Robert...

(She goes to the radio and turns it off.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

If you need something, just ask. That's what we're here for.

ROBERT

I want to be independent.

NURSE LISA

You're in a hospital, Robert. There are limitations.

(ROBERT pouts.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Come on, let's get you up.

*(She lifts him up and guides him
back into the bed.)*

NURSE LISA

Can I get you anything?

(ROBERT thinks.)

ROBERT

What's the news say?

NURSE LISA

Nothing interesting.

*(She puts the tray of food on
his lap. He pokes at it.)*

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

You can't be picky, Robert.

ROBERT

... Bobby. You can call me Bobby.

NURSE LISA

Okay, Bobby.

ROBERT

But Doctor Drake can't.

NURSE LISA

Why not?

ROBERT

He just can't.

NURSE LISA

Okay. Just between you and me.

(She offers a smile. Robert takes a bite of his food, and frowns.)

ROBERT

Not like what momma makes... or made.

(A moment of silence.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Can you turn the radio back on?

(NURSE LISA turns on the radio. The news plays.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

With the death of Martin Luther King Jr. still heavy on our minds, St. Louis takes action. Many, "die-ins" have been staged across the city. The ever changing political climate of St. Louis grows dire with the black community on the verge of--

(NURSE LISA turns it off.)

ROBERT

Verge of what?

NURSE LISA

You... you don't want to hear that.

ROBERT

Why not?

NURSE LISA

Doctor Drake... doesn't like politics at work. Let's just play music.

(She changes the station. It plays Harper Valley PTA.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

There.

ROBERT

What's a die-in?

(She puts a hand on Robert's shoulder.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Eat your food. I'll be back to collect the tray. And remember, don't hesitate to ask if you need anything.

ROBERT

I did ask.

NURSE LISA

... Robert, there are... were, people fighting for people like you and I. And now they're dead.

ROBERT

Now what?

NURSE LISA

I don't know.

(A beat.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Eat your food. I'll be back tonight to check on you.

(ROBERT nods.)

(NURSE LISA exits.)

(ROBERT takes another bite of his food. He grimaces at the lack of flavor. Then he puts the tray on the table next to him with the radio.)

ROBERT

Not like momma makes...

SCENE 4

(ROBERT is asleep in his bed. The IV is gone. His legs are now raised. Next to him is a small table with pill bottles, a pitcher, and a small bowl. The radio is gone. A chair sits in the corner.)

(The lights go blue, indicating a moment outside of time and place.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE enters, reading off his clipboard.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert Rayford, 15 years old. No formal identification, so all of this is on faith. A shy but polite young boy, Robert R isn't very forthcoming with information. It is unknown where his parents are, if he even has parents. What we do know is that the patient claims to have experienced symptoms of genital warts and swelling of the lower body for approximately two years, starting in 1966. We've placed him on a regimen of tetracycline and penicillin for Lymphedema. We've reduced his fluid and salt intake. Due to the compromised immune system he has been placed in the Isolation Ward. Two weeks have passed... and no changes.

(He sighs, writing notes on his clipboard.)

(The blue light fades and we return to the present.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Robert? Are you awake?

(ROBERT shifts in his bed.)

ROBERT

Robert's not here right now.

(ROBERT puts his pillow over his head.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE taps him on the shoulder.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I brought you a newspaper. Crossword isn't done yet.

(ROBERT turns.)

ROBERT

I'm awake.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, you need to take your medicine. But first...

ROBERT

Temperature.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes.

(DOCTOR DRAKE hands him a thermometer, which he holds under his tongue. While ROBERT sits still, DOCTOR DRAKE pours him a cup of water.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE takes the thermometer and examines it.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Still 101.

ROBERT

I'm sorry.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Don't be sorry. You can't control this. Now, take your medicine.

(ROBERT sits up. DOCTOR DRAKE hands him the cup of water. He swallows two pills.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Now give me your arm, we have to do some blood work.

ROBERT

Why?

*(ROBERT holds out his arm.
DOCTOR DRAKE starts to take
blood.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

We have to know your white blood cell count. See if the medicine is working.

ROBERT

Do you think it's not?

DOCTOR DRAKE

That's for time to say, not me.

ROBERT

Do you and time talk at all?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Sometimes. Here.

*(He holds a cotton ball to
ROBERT's inner arm. ROBERT holds
it there. DOCTOR DRAKE places
bandages over it.)*

ROBERT

Thank you, Doctor.

(DOCTOR DRAKE nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Now, look up for me?

*(ROBERT does as he's told.
DOCTOR DRAKE feels under his
neck.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Do you still feel pressure here?

ROBERT

Yes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Interesting. Rest up, Robert, we're going to get you better.

ROBERT

How?

(A beat.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I don't know yet. Just have faith in the medicine.

ROBERT

Yes, Doctor.

(DOCTOR DRAKE exits with the blood.)

(ROBERT sinks into his bed. He then sits up, crossing his legs. He touches his calf, and winces in pain. Then he starts to rub them. He sits back and sighs wiping his forehead.)

(A beat.)

(ROBERT punches the bed in frustration, banging his fists onto the side of it. Then he begins to hit his legs, and then yelps in pain.

(He cries, holding his head in his hands.)

(NURSE LISA comes running in.)

NURSE LISA

Bobby?! Bobby, what's wrong!

ROBERT

My legs!

(She goes over to him. He tries to fight her off. She grabs his fists.)

NURSE LISA

Bobby-- Robert! Calm down!

ROBERT

I don't wanna! I want to go home! I don't want to be here anymore!

NURSE LISA

Robert, you'll hurt yourself!

ROBERT

I don't care!

(ROBERT collapses onto her, crying. She holds him.)

NURSE LISA

You're gonna get better. And then you'll get out of here.

(ROBERT remains silent. He lays back down in his bed.)

(A beat.)

ROBERT

Promise?

NURSE LISA

I promise.

(ROBERT smiles weakly.)

ROBERT

Sorry.

NURSE LISA

No need to be sorry, Robert.

(ROBERT turns away from her.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

It's a beautiful day out.

ROBERT

Are the birds singing?

NURSE LISA

Yeah, they're singing.

ROBERT

Good.

*(ROBERT's arm extends as if to
let a bird land on his finger.)*

NURSE LISA

If I leave, will you hit yourself?

(ROBERT doesn't respond.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Bobby? Will you hit yourself?

(ROBERT doesn't respond.)

(A beat.)

(She pats his shoulder.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Get some rest.

*(She leaves. ROBERT keeps his
arm out for a moment, before
turning over.)*

*(He stares blankly for a moment,
then curls into a fetal
position.)*

*(DOCTOR DRAKE enters, holding a
clipboard. He looks at ROBERT.
He sits in the chair, pinching
the bridge of his nose.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

(quietly to himself:) Patient... unstable. Prep for surgery... immediately.

SCENE 5

(ROBERT sits on his bed, holding his knees to his chest. On his bed is a pile of newspapers, all turned to the crossword section, all completed.)

(He sits silently and still. Then, after a moment of silence, he picks up a blank crossword and begins filling in the puzzle.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE and NURSE LISA enter.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, how are you feeling today?

(ROBERT sits still. He shrugs, still filling in the crossword.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Better? Or worse?

(ROBERT looks up.)

ROBERT

About the same.

(DOCTOR DRAKE nods. He picks up one of his newspapers and looks through them.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Do you read these, Robert?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Nothing but depressing news lately. Although they're building the arch, that's exciting. Maybe when you're out you can visit it.

ROBERT

Maybe. That... that would be nice.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You like crossword puzzles, huh?

(ROBERT nods.)

ROBERT

I like puzzles.

(DOCTOR DRAKE puts the paper back on his bed.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

What if I told you we can get you up and walking again?

ROBERT

How?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Remember the lymph nodes I was talking about?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

We can remove and drain them. That will get the swelling down. And while you recover, you can do all the puzzles you want. Then some physical therapy, you can walk, and then we can get you out of here as good as new.

(ROBERT perks up. He looks at NURSE LISA.)

NURSE LISA

This will be good, Robert.

ROBERT

... Yes. I... I'd like that.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Then the procedure begins tomorrow.

ROBERT

Tomorrow?

NURSE LISA

You'll be okay Robert.

ROBERT

(To NURSE LISA:) W-will you be with me?

(NURSE LISA looks at DOCTOR DRAKE.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

She'll be close. Robert, come on, this is a good thing!

ROBERT

For who?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Excuse me?

(ROBERT puts a hand over his mouth.)

(He slowly takes it off.)

ROBERT

Sorry. That was mean.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I... I guess we're all a little on edge.

(NURSE LISA steps between ROBERT and DOCTOR DRAKE.)

NURSE LISA

He's right. This is a good thing.

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Rest up, Robert, we'll need your strength and positive attitude tomorrow!

ROBERT

I don't think I have either of those.

DOCTOR DRAKE

And humor! Lisa. Talk to him.

(DOCTOR DRAKE pats her on the shoulder and exits.)

NURSE LISA

This is just a procedure. You'll be asleep the whole time.

(ROBERT shifts in his bed uncomfortably.)

ROBERT

Can I listen to some music?

(NURSE LISA begins to collect the completed newspapers.)

NURSE LISA

I'll get the radio for you.

ROBERT

Promise?

(He holds out a pinky. NURSE LISA takes it in her own. They interlock pinkies.)

(She exits.)

SCENE 6

(NURSE LISA and DOCTOR DRAKE enter, prepped for surgery.)

(A bright operating light shines down on ROBERT, almost angelic, but sterile and cold.)

(NURSE LISA sets a radio on the table next to his bed, next to a lot of medical equipment.)

(ROBERT squirms.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE puts a hand on his shoulder.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's okay, Robert.

(ROBERT looks at NURSE LISA.)

NURSE LISA

We're right here.

(ROBERT snuffles, and then nods, looking up directly at the light.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE preps an anaesthesia mask, which he puts over ROBERT's face. ROBERT muffles a yell and grabs at DOCTOR DRAKE's arm.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's okay. This will just put you to sleep.

ROBERT

Promise?

NURSE LISA

We promise.

(Silence. ROBERT inhales deeply. Then again. DOCTOR DRAKE watches him breathe. Then, he's asleep.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Scalpel.

(NURSE LISA hands him the scalpel.)

(The lights go out, except for the spotlight on ROBERT.)

(NURSE LISA turns on the radio. It plays Mony Mony by Tommy James.)

(In the darkness, NURSE LISA attaches ROBERT to an IV. Then A Pacemaker-Alarm-Monitor heart monitor that tracks his heart beat.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Sponge.

(NURSE LISA hands DOCTOR DRAKE the sponge.)

(The song ends.)

(The lights go on, abruptly. The spotlight on ROBERT fades.)

(NURSE LISA removes the mask from ROBERT's face.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

And we're done here.

(DOCTOR DRAKE turns, taking off his bloody gloves. NURSE LISA holds out a biohazard box. He throws them in, then exits. NURSE LISA stands and looks at ROBERT. He sleeps soundly.)

(She exits.)

(After a moment of silence, ROBERT stirs. Then wakes up, groggily. He sits upright, propping himself up on his elbows.)

ROBERT

... Lisa? Doctor Drake?

(No one answers.)

(ROBERT lays back down.)

SCENE 7

(ROBERT's still hooked to the IV, but no longer the heart monitor.)

(The radio is still next to him.)

(He sleeps soundly, his legs raised.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE enters.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, it's time to wake up.

(ROBERT stirs. Then opens his eyes. Seeing it's DOCTOR DRAKE, he sits up.)

ROBERT

Good morning.

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's the afternoon, but, yes. Good morning.

(ROBERT shrinks slightly.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Have you tried walking?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

And the swelling has gone down, right?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Then why isn't your fever going down.

(ROBERT looks around.)

ROBERT

I-- I don't know, sir.

(DOCTOR DRAKE puts a hand on his forehead.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

You're still warm.

ROBERT

Sorry.

(DOCTOR DRAKE stands back.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

You've been taking the antibiotics every day.

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

And everything every doctor tells you to do. Including me. Especially me. You've been listening to and doing?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Do you feel better?

(A beat.)

ROBERT

... No.

(DOCTOR DRAKE consults his clipboard.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

The draining and removal of your lymph nodes should have solved this problem. But you still have some kind of infection. And you're not getting better.

(ROBERT remains silent.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Is there anything you're not telling me, Robert? Us?

(A beat.)

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

You promise?

ROBERT

... Yes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Then... that's enough for now.

(DOCTOR DRAKE begins to exit.)

ROBERT

... Can I have a newspaper?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Not now.

(He exits.)

(ROBERT sits alone.)

(After a moment, he gets up. He can walk a little better. He extends his arms and tries to walk in a straight line, but loses his balance and nearly falls. He holds his legs in pain.)

(He slowly makes his way back to the bed. He pulls the blanket

around him and hugs his knees to his chest. He puts his head on his knees and cries.)

SCENE 8

(Another wing of the hospital. DOCTOR DRAKE sits at a desk with a rotary phone, his head in his hands. NURSE LISA enters.)

NURSE LISA

I think that--

DOCTOR DRAKE

Went well?

(NURSE LISA shrinks.)

NURSE LISA

... Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I don't know what I'm doing, Lisa. I'm at my wits end. That surgery should have been an end to our problems but who knows! Who the hell knows anymore.

(He slams his hands down.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

We've done what we can. Now we wait for the next disaster.

NURSE LISA

Doctor--

DOCTOR DRAKE

He's a goddamn Zebra, Lisa.

NURSE LISA

With all due respect, name calling is uncalled for.

DOCTOR DRAKE

No, he's not one thing or the other. It's not black or white, it's a fucking zebra. I thought he had lymphedema, and I've been treating him-- I was treating him for seven goddamn weeks as if I knew what I was doing, but nothing works! I performed surgery on him and he has a persistent fever. We drain his lymph nodes, take his blood, and he just sits there. He just sits there! What do I have to do to get through to him? Tell him 'Hey, buddy, you're in danger!'

NURSE LISA

He's just a kid. A scared kid.

DOCTOR DRAKE

But adult enough to check himself into a hospital? With no family? And we don't know if that's true!

(NURSE LISA looks down.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE sighs.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Let me be. Go check with the other nurses to see what's happening. I can't be with him right now.

NURSE LISA

... Yes, Doctor Drake.

(She exits.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE rummages in his pockets for cigarettes, and lights one. He takes up his clipboard.)

(NURSE LISA re enters.)

NURSE LISA

Doctor Drake, there's a phone call for you.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Can this wait, Lisa?

NURSE LISA

I think you'll want to hear this, Doctor.

(DOCTOR DRAKE picks up the phone.)

(On the other line, and the opposite side of the stage on another phone, is DOCTOR MARLYS HEART WITTE.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Hello?

DOCTOR WITTE

Hello, is this Doctor William Drake?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes, this is he.

DOCTOR WITTE

Hello, my name is Marlys Witte.

DOCTOR DRAKE

A pleasure.

DOCTOR WITTE

You're treating a boy named Robert? Robert Rayford?

DOCTOR DRAKE

... Yes. How do you know?

DOCTOR WITTE

He's made ripples in certain circles. I'm with the Washington University School of Medicine. We know you haven't explicitly asked for help, but we've heard a lot about his case.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What are you saying, Doctor Witte?

DOCTOR WITTE

I'm a lymphologist who just might be the answer to your prayers, Doctor Drake.

DOCTOR DRAKE

The power of prayer won't help my patient, Doctor.

DOCTOR WITTE

Interview me then.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Excuse me?

DOCTOR WITTE

See if I'm right for this job.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'll schedule you in for later this week.

DOCTOR WITTE

No, now. Because later this week I'll be helping treat your patient.

(DOCTOR DRAKE chuckles.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Alright, Miss Witte, the floor is yours.

DOCTOR WITTE

Doctor Witte. Mister Drake. I graduated summa cum laude from Columbia University's Barnard College and NYU School of Medicine, residencies at North Carolina Memorial Hospital, Bellevue Medical Center, and Barnes Hospital. Prayers are the lowest form of support I can offer.

(A beat. DOCTOR DRAKE thinks.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

I'd just like to observe him.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'll call you when he's ready for visitors.

DOCTOR WITTE

Thank you, Doctor.

(He hangs up.)

(NURSE LISA enters once more.)

NURSE LISA

What did she want?

DOCTOR DRAKE

A visit.

(He exits.)

*(The phone rings. NURSE LISA
rushes to answer it.)*

SCENE 9

*(ROBERT sits on his bed. His
legs are still elevated. He
periodically scratches at them.)*

*(NURSE LISA enters holding a
box.)*

NURSE LISA

I got you something.

*(She hands him the box. It's a
100 piece puzzle.)*

ROBERT

This is for me?

NURSE LISA

Yep.

ROBERT

And I don't have to share it?

NURSE LISA

No.

ROBERT

My brother and I used to do these...

NURSE LISA

You have a brother?

(ROBERT nods.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Where is he?

(ROBERT shrugs. He traces his fingers over the picture on the box.)

ROBERT

Thank you.

NURSE LISA

You're welcome, Bobby.

(DOCTOR DRAKE enters abruptly.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Good morning, Robert.

ROBERT

Good morning.

DOCTOR DRAKE

We have a visitor for you today.

(ROBERT tenses.)

ROBERT

Who?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Another doctor. She'll be examining you today.

ROBERT

I don't want a girl looking at my privates.

(DOCTOR WITTE enters.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Okay, I've heard enough. Robert, I've seen many privates in my medical career. Don't worry. My name is Doctor Marlys Witte, it's a pleasure to finally meet you.

ROBERT

Hello ma'am.

(DOCTOR DRAKE sighs.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert, this is a good thing.

(ROBERT pulls his blanket further up his chest.)

ROBERT

Hi, Doctor.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Doctor Witte wanted to see you now that you're better.

ROBERT

Okay.

DOCTOR WITTE

Doctor Drake says he's removed some infected lymph nodes and drained some, is that correct?

ROBERT

Yes, ma'am.

(DOCTOR DRAKE hands her his clipboard.)

DOCTOR WITTE

You're 15 years old?

ROBERT

Yes.

DOCTOR WITTE

Where are your parents, Robert?

(ROBERT doesn't answer. He looks down, tugging his blanket up to his neck.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE pulls DOCTOR WITTE aside.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

He doesn't have a family.

DOCTOR WITTE

Oh. I'm sorry, Robert.

(ROBERT remains silent.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

You said you've experienced symptoms of swelling of the legs, genitals, and lower body. Is that correct?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

As well as a compromised immune system, low T-Cell count, loss of weight--

DOCTOR DRAKE

Those are actually my notes, Doctor.

ROBERT

What are your notes?

DOCTOR DRAKE

We've discussed this, Robert. Your blood tests have shown--

ROBERT

Decrease in white blood cells. Right.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes.

DOCTOR WITTE

And you say these symptoms have gone on for two years?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Robert, can you stand?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Can you stand up for me?

(ROBERT nods. He slowly stands up, grimacing in pain as he does.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Are you alright?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR WITTE

What's wrong, Robert?

(ROBERT's breathing turns heavy.)

ROBERT

My. My legs hurt. So badly.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Still?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Then sit down.

ROBERT

Thank you.

(DOCTOR DRAKE helps him sit.)

DOCTOR WITTE

(holding up her hand:) Robert, can I take a look at your genitals?
Your privates?

ROBERT

No.

DOCTOR WITTE

I won't hurt you. I just want to see what's wrong.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You can trust her, Robert. Lisa, can we have the room?

NURSE LISA

Um. Yes, doctor.

(She exits.)

(ROBERT breathes in deeply. After a moment, he hikes up his hospital gown. His genitals are swollen and covered in lesions, as well as most of his upper thighs.)

(DOCTOR WITTE is stunned for a moment.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Thank you, Robert. That'll be all for now.

(ROBERT lays back down on his bed, pulling his blanket up to his neck.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert, have you ever had any sexual contact with anyone?

(ROBERT shifts uncomfortably.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Robert, I asked you a question.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Answer the question, it's alright.

(A beat.)

(ROBERT nods.)

ROBERT

I... I had a girlfriend.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You had a girlfriend? What was her name?

ROBERT

De-Debbie.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Debbie...?

ROBERT

Deborah. That's... that's all I know.

DOCTOR WITTE

You didn't know her last name?

(ROBERT puts his hands over his ears and shakes his head.)

DOCTOR WITTE

It's alright, Robert. It's alright.

DOCTOR WITTE

Did she have any of your symptoms?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Do you know anyone else who had these symptoms, Robert? Think hard.

(A beat. Robert pulls his blanket closer to him.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

(Sternly:) Robert.

ROBERT

My... my Gramps. He-- he died. And my Grams. After him. But-- but I don't know about their privates. I didn't look. No, I didn't look.

(ROBERT begins to shake his head more and more and pull his legs closer to him.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

I didn't look.

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's alright, Robert.

(ROBERT hugs his knees to his chest.)

ROBERT

They died. And we didn't have money for a funeral. They're just buried there, Doctor. They're just buried. Both of them.

DOCTOR WITE

I'm... I'm sorry, Robert.

ROBERT

That's gonna happen to me.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Don't say that, Robert.

(DOCTOR DRAKE goes to put a hand on ROBERT's shoulder, but he shakes it off.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE goes over to the phone on the table and dials a few numbers.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Lisa? Can you come to Robert's room? Thanks.

(He puts his hands in his pockets and begins to leave.)

(DOCTOR WITTE, shocked, follows him.)

SCENE 10

(ROBERT sits up with a thermometer in his mouth. DOCTOR WITTE stands next to him with a full vial of blood. She puts it in a test tube holder and sets it on the table. DOCTOR DRAKE stands over ROBERT, looking at his watch. After a moment, he takes the thermometer.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE examines the thermometer and then writes down the results.)

(NURSE LISA enters and takes the vial of blood and exits.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE hands ROBERT a towel. ROBERT wipes the sweat off his forehead.)

(DOCTOR WITTE writes down her own examinations on her own clipboard.)

(ROBERT lays back down.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Doctor Drake, can I speak with you outside?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes.

(DOCTOR DRAKE and DOCTOR WITTE stand outside of ROBERT's room. DOCTOR WITTE lights a cigarette)

*and takes a puff, pacing
around.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

What's wrong, Marlys?

DOCTOR WITTE

That's Doctor Witte to you.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Alright, alright.

DOCTOR WITTE

How much longer are we keeping this up?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Excuse me?

DOCTOR WITTE

Your notes, Doctor. You surgically removed and drained his lymph nodes in his legs.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes, I'm treating him for /lymphedema.

DOCTOR WITTE

/Lymphedema, I know. But did it occur to you to pay attention to the lesions on his genitals?

DOCTOR DRAKE

I had him on a strict regime of medications for over seven weeks, Doctor. This was a last resort. And I don't appreciate your tone.

DOCTOR WITTE

That boy clearly has an infection that has nothing to do with lymphedema. If I had to guess, which I do, I would say this is a type of STI. I'll, of course, have to run more tests to be sure.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Oh, *you'll* have to run more tests?

DOCTOR WITTE

Doctor Drake, it's been over seven weeks, like you said.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes, he's been in my care and confidence for the duration.

DOCTOR WITTE

Your patient has shown no changes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

With all due respect, you weren't there in the beginning. He could barely walk. I got him back on his feet. And the antibiotics are working.

DOCTOR WITTE

Then why does he still have a temperature?

DOCTOR DRAKE

A persistent infection. I'll probably have to drain more lymph fluid.

DOCTOR WITTE

And how long will that take?

DOCTOR DRAKE

As long as it needs to.

DOCTOR WITTE

You're willing to keep him here on the same unchanging cycle? How long are you willing to keep him in that bed with no changes, William? I've been here watching you fumble with thermometers, taking notes, and doing nothing while he gets weaker and weaker every day. What's it going to take for you to do something? Seek out an expert.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He's my patient.

DOCTOR WITTE

So you've said.

DOCTOR DRAKE

A boy with no family. With no one to care for him. With nothing. Nothing!

DOCTOR WITTE

I know--

DOCTOR DRAKE

You know? I don't think you understand, then. I've done more for this boy than anyone in his life, probably. Don't come after me with this bullshit, Marlys.

DOCTOR WITTE

You're so deluded! He's--

(NURSE LISA walks by with a stack of folded towels.)

NURSE LISA

Um. Hello, doctors.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Hi, Lisa.

DOCTOR WITTE

Nurse.

(She continues to walk. She exits.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

What do you recommend, in your 'expert' opinion, Doctor Witte?

DOCTOR WITTE

We transfer him to Barnes Hospital. A colleague and a friend who specializes in microbiology works there.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What's his name?

DOCTOR WITTE

Her name is Doctor Memory Lewis.

(He thinks on this for a moment. Then:)

DOCTOR DRAKE

No. I'll have her examine him here, but I won't transfer him. He's my patient.

DOCTOR WITTE

Well he's not just a patient, he's a medical mystery. And one we'd like to solve before it gets worse.

DOCTOR DRAKE

One visit. And if I don't like what she has to say, you're both out.

DOCTOR WITTE

No three strikes rule?

(DOCTOR WITTE smiles to herself.)

SCENE 11

(ROBERT sits on his bed. Nurse Lisa has set up a bed table for his puzzle, and he has nearly completed it.)

(The radio plays static. He hits it, then it plays the news.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Many black workers have gone on strike in recent weeks. We haven't heard comments from these malcontents, although we haven't asked. If they're so angry, then they can spell out their grievances themselves, right?

(ROBERT hits it again. It plays Beautiful Morning by the Rascals.)

(He holds two fingers under his neck, checking his lymph nodes.)

(A knock at the door. DOCTOR DRAKE and DOCTOR WITTE enter.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Good morning, Robert.

ROBERT

Where's Lisa?

DOCTOR DRAKE

She's sick.

DOCTOR WITTE

Drake.

(A beat.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE sighs.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

She went on strike.

(ROBERT begins to dismantle his puzzle.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Robert, where did you get that?

ROBERT

From Lisa.

(A beat.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

And if she doesn't want to see me, I don't want to see this.

DOCTOR WITTE

She wants to see you, I'm sure. But she just... She has her own things to work out.

DOCTOR DRAKE

And she got you that puzzle.

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert, come on. We have a lot to discuss.

(ROBERT looks at them. He extends an arm.)

DOCTOR WITTE

No, we don't need any blood right now. We have someone for you to meet. Memory!

(DOCTOR LEWIS enters wearing glasses, pants, and a lab coat. She exudes professionalism.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Good to meet you, Robert.

(ROBERT smiles weakly.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

I'm Doctor Memory Lewis. I was hoping we could have a discussion.

(She steps towards Robert, and he shrinks.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

I've heard you're being treated for lymphedema, and that isn't working, is it?

(ROBERT looks at DOCTOR DRAKE.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Answer the question, Robert.

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

ROBERT

My body is constantly on fire.

(DOCTOR LEWIS nods.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Do you... need to look at my privates? My- my genitals?

DOCTOR LEWIS

I might have to. But tell me, when did these symptoms begin.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Two years ago.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I asked him.

ROBERT

... Two years ago.

(DOCTOR LEWIS thinks.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'll go over the notes with the other Doctors. But now I do have to examine your genitals and pelvic area.

(ROBERT swallows hard.)

(He stands up shakily. DOCTOR DRAKE holds him upright.)

(ROBERT opens his hospital gown.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS examines him, feeling his scrotum, then applying pressure to his pelvic area. ROBERT winces in pain.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE helps ROBERT back into bed. ROBERT breathes heavily.)

DOCTOR WITTE

So?

DOCTOR LEWIS

If I had to guess, I would say it's a case of chlamydia. Luckily there are treatments and medications.

ROBERT

Chlamydia?

DOCTOR DRAKE

What kind of treatments?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Well, I would need permission of a parent, but I could benefit from a rectal examination.

ROBERT

My butt?

DOCTOR DRAKE

He doesn't... have family.

DOCTOR LEWIS

A medical proxy?

DOCTOR WITTE

No.

DOCTOR LEWIS

And we're still treating him?

*(She pinches the bridge of her
nose.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Robert, I would need your consent to perform a rectal examination.

DOCTOR WITTE

Just a swab, it will be easy.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Or a blood test will suffice.

DOCTOR LEWIS

No, you've taken enough blood.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I've taken the proper amount of blood and lymph fluid, if you consult my notes--

DOCTOR WITTE

We've seen the notes.

DOCTOR LEWIS

And I think our best course of action is a rectal exam. Robert--

ROBERT

No.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'm sorry?

ROBERT

NO! I don't want that!

*(He puts his head in his hands
and pulls his knees to his
chest.)*

ROBERT (cont'd)

You can't go down there! Just leave me alone!

(Silence.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'm-- I'm sorry, Robert.

*(ROBERT puts his head in his
knees and cries.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert--

ROBERT

Leave me alone.

ROBERT

I want to be alone.

DOCTOR WITTE

Memory. Why don't we... why don't we--

DOCTOR LEWIS

Be somewhere else. Yes.

DOCTOR WITTE

Subtle. Let's go.

*(DOCTOR LEWIS and DOCTOR WITTE
exit.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm not going anywhere. Not until I know you're stable.

ROBERT

Am I ever?

(A beat.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

I'm just a medical mystery.

(ROBERT lays down and turns away.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE begins to walk away. He looks at ROBERT, then sighs. He goes over to the radio and turns it on.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Another beautiful day in Sunny St. Louis. While we sit and enjoy the new baseball season, our city is peppered with protests and police officers just trying to do their best in a city. And now, The Box Tops with *Cry Like a Baby*.

(Cry Like a Baby by the Box Tops plays.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE looks at ROBERT.)

(ROBERT looks at him, then turns away.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE sits on the floor. He puts his head in his hands.)

SCENE 12

(Washington University, St. Louis, MO.)

(A single desk with two microscopes sits center stage. DOCTOR LEWIS sits in front of a microscope.)

(She looks in, examining the slide, and then writes down on a notebook what she sees.)

(She pushes herself away from the desk and sighs.)

(DOCTOR WITTE enters, holding two cups of coffee. DOCTOR DRAKE follows her, silently.)

DOCTOR WITTE

You look like you can use a break.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I could use ten. But I can't now, can I?

DOCTOR WITTE

Coffee!

(DOCTOR LEWIS smiles weakly at her. She takes the coffee and takes a single sip, before making a sour face.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Never make me coffee again, Marlys.

DOCTOR WITTE

Oh-kay then.

(A beat. DOCTOR LEWIS studies her notebook intently, then back at the microscope. DOCTOR WITTE pulls up a seat.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

You look troubled, Doctor Lewis.

DOCTOR LEWIS

When you asked for my expertise I didn't know you were so desperate for help. This is... this is unheard of. Unprecedented.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What?

(DOCTOR WITTE takes a look in the microscope.)

DOCTOR WITTE

What am I looking at?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Chlamydia.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What? No. What? That can't be right, Memory.

(DOCTOR LEWIS gets up and paces.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Because it's in his bloodstream? I thought so, too. So I ran more tests. Chlamydia generally stays localized to the infected area. And now it's swimming in his bloodstream and lymph nodes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I don't understand, I drained his lymph nodes, they shouldn't be this infected.

DOCTOR LEWIS

What's draining them going to do? It's a system. It's not like they can take a strainer and strain out the bacteria and put the lymph back in.

(A beat. DOCTOR WITTE puts her head in her hands.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

How do you think he came into contact with this disease?

DOCTOR LEWIS

A rectal exam would clear up a lot of these questions but...

DOCTOR WITTE

That's off the table it seems.

DOCTOR LEWIS

It doesn't 'seem.' It is.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You don't suspect the boy...

(He makes a vague gesture.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

What about the boy, William?

DOCTOR DRAKE

That he could be... homosexual?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Would that change your treatment of him?

DOCTOR DRAKE

I--

DOCTOR LEWIS

Did we not swear the same Hippocratic Oath?

DOCTOR DRAKE

We did--

DOCTOR LEWIS

Would you stop treating him as a patient if he's homosexual?

DOCTOR DRAKE

No. No I wouldn't.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Good. Is that all?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Say he's not. What if he was some kind of child prostitute?

DOCTOR WITTE

Where is this coming from?

DOCTOR DRAKE

I was fine with it being lymphedema. But chlamydia? That raises more questions, as if we don't have enough.

DOCTOR WITTE

Sexual contact. It comes from sex.

DOCTOR DRAKE

With who?!

DOCTOR LEWIS

That's not what's important. What is important is the future.

DOCTOR DRAKE

The future?

DOCTOR LEWIS

The future. And what we intend to do with him.

DOCTOR DRAKE

And what do you intend to do with him?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Have him transferred to Barnes. It'll be easier for us to treat him there.

DOCTOR WITTE

Someone here doesn't like that idea.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I frankly don't give a damn whether or not he likes it.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm not an unreasonable man, Marlys, you can stop acting like I'm not here.

(DOCTOR WITTE holds her hands up.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Whatever you say. I just know you're not budging on this.

DOCTOR LEWIS

This isn't a win or lose situation, William, it's someone's life on the line. Does that make things more clear?

DOCTOR WITTE

You're preaching to the choir. Or, at least, I understand. Some of us need convincing that over seven weeks of treatment and no results means keep doing the same thing.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Stop talking down to me!

DOCTOR WITTE

So be a bigger man so I don't have to talk down to you!

DOCTOR DRAKE

So help me--

DOCTOR WITTE

So, help you! That's why we're here!

DOCTOR DRAKE

Oh, this is a we now?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Excuse me! This is my lab and I would appreciate it if we keep things professional. Leave your egos at the door or leave.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE and DOCTOR WITTE
look at her.)*

*(DOCTOR LEWIS slumps back into
her chair. She looks through her
notes.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert R, 15 years old. African-American. Average height. Underweight. A colleague and friend Doctor Marlys Witte contacted me through Washington University for my expertise in microbiology and chlamydial infections. For two weeks we have isolated bacterial

cultures from blood and other bodily fluids by isolating the bacteria in fertilized eggs. Chlamydial infection has spread outside the infected zone and spread into the bloodstream.

(She slams down her notes and stands up.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Does this sound familiar, Doctor Drake?

DOCTOR DRAKE

You've been trying for two weeks and all you can tell me is that there's bacteria in his blood. That doesn't warrant me handing over my patient!

DOCTOR WITTE

Are you insane? Certifiably, are you insane? Seven weeks. Seven weeks of treatment, surgery, and nothing from you. And then you call us, and you get a diagnosis as soon as the woman looks at him. And you still think you're the best caregiver in this?

DOCTOR DRAKE

I've heard enough! He's my patient. I've treated him the longest, and I know him the best.

DOCTOR WITTE

With no results.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Marlys.

DOCTOR DRAKE

And you've gotten results?

DOCTOR LEWIS

I have. The chlamydia bacteria in the bloodstream, something I've never seen before, is a bigger result than sitting around arguing about what to do next.

DOCTOR DRAKE

If this is something you've never seen before, how would you treat it better than I can?

DOCTOR WITTE

Because she's the goddamn expert!

DOCTOR LEWIS

Because I believe in science. And in medicine. And my own abilities. And with Marlys and I watching over him I believe he can make a

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

stronger recovery with some University doctors here than he could over there. With all due respect, Doctor Drake, this isn't about any of us. There's a young medical mystery we need to solve to save a life. And none of us are making progress alone.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE crosses his arms.
DOCTOR LEWIS hands him her
notebook.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Here are my notes. Read them over as soon as you can, then authorize the transfer.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You still think I'm authorizing this?

DOCTOR LEWIS

My notes have all the answers you need. And you have a number you can reach me, I assume?

DOCTOR DRAKE

I do.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Good.

*(DOCTOR LEWIS sits down at the
desk once more, examining the
microscope.)*

*(DOCTOR DRAKE and DOCTOR WITTE
look around.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Doctor Lewis?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Hm?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Is this your way of asking us to leave?

DOCTOR LEWIS

If you think you should leave, then do so. I have my own work to do. You have yours.

DOCTOR WITTE

I could walk you out, Doctor.

DOCTOR DRAKE

No that's... that's alright.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE exits, confused.
DOCTOR WITTE laughs loudly, and
sits next to DOCTOR LEWIS.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

That was great!

DOCTOR LEWIS

What?

DOCTOR WITTE

You handed his ass right to him!

DOCTOR LEWIS

I meant what I said. I don't like the way he sounded.

DOCTOR WITTE

Why?

DOCTOR LEWIS

A fifteen year old has a severe bacterial infection causing him distress for over two months, and he wants to know if the boy's homosexual? We need to get him out of there.

DOCTOR WITTE

What if he is?

DOCTOR LEWIS

What if he is, Marlys?

(DOCTOR WITTE shrinks.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Now, can you get me some coffee from the break room? They have what I like.

(DOCTOR WITTE sighs.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Yeah, Memory. I can get you coffee.

(She exits. DOCTOR LEWIS is left on stage, examining the contents of her microscope, alone.)

(On the other side of the stage, ROBERT sneaks out of bed.)

(He nearly collapses from the pain of his legs. He slowly sits on the floor. He punches his legs.)

(He pulls himself up. He grabs onto whatever he can while he walks. Then, he leaves the room.)

(Outside his room he finds a phone. He picks it up and looks around to see if anyone is there.)

(He dials it, and waits for an answer. On the other end is CONSTANCE REYFORD, his mother.)

CONSTANCE

Hello?

(ROBERT doesn't answer. He puts his hand over his mouth.)

CONSTANCE (CONT'D)

... Hello? Who is this?

(ROBERT begins to cry.)

CONSTANCE (CONT'D)

Bobby? Bobby, is that you?

(ROBERT sobs.)

CONSTANCE (CONT'D)

Bobby? Please... come home. I-- I can make some grits-- you love grits!
Please, Robert... I won't be mad. Just-- just... come home.

*(ROBERT takes his hand off his
mouth. He exhales a shaky
breath.)*

ROBERT

... Don't look for me.

CONSTANCE

Bobby?

(He slams the phone down.)

(Then, he collapses and cries.)

SCENE 13

(City Hospital.)

(Nurse Lisa enters the hallway outside Robert's room, where Doctor Drake stands reviewing his clipboard.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Here to beg for your job back?

NURSE LISA

I don't beg. And I never quit.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You're bold, I'll give you that.

NURSE LISA

They killed Doctor King. I felt like I was doing something but it's been months now and... I don't know. I really don't. So I'm back, I guess.

(DOCTOR DRAKE looks at her.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

I'd like to see Bobby again.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Who's Bobby?

NURSE LISA

... Robert.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Well...

(He thinks.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

He doesn't speak much to me or the other two. I think you'd be a welcome sight. And who knows, you might get something out of him.

NURSE LISA

The other two?

DOCTOR DRAKE

A lot happened. I'll fill you in.

(Lights transition to Robert's room. He's sitting in his bed, folding a napkin into a flower. He holds it up, proud of his work.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE and NURSE LISA enter.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Good morning, Robert.

ROBERT

Lisa?

NURSE LISA

Hi, Robert.

(ROBERT grins.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

What have you got there?

(ROBERT hands it to NURSE LISA.)

ROBERT

I made a flower.

(DOCTOR DRAKE smiles slightly.)

NURSE LISA

Thank you, Robert.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Very nice.

(ROBERT shifts uncomfortably.)

ROBERT

Do those women need more blood?

DOCTOR DRAKE

No, no. We're, um... we're here to talk to you about something, actually. Robert... these past few months. How have you been feeling?

ROBERT

Good.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You can be honest with me.

(ROBERT goes silent.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Robert. I'm talking to you.

(ROBERT puts his hand over his mouth, shaking. Then, he begins to cry.)

ROBERT

I just want this to be over.

(NURSE LISA goes to comfort him, but DOCTOR DRAKE puts a hand on her shoulder. DOCTOR DRAKE kneels next to ROBERT.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm going to talk to Lisa alone. I'll be right back.

(ROBERT nods. DOCTOR DRAKE exits. NURSE LISA gives ROBERT back his flower.)

NURSE LISA

Make more. I'll be back.

(She exits.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE and NURSE LISA meet outside ROBERT's room. DOCTOR DRAKE throws his stethoscope onto the ground, and bites his hand in frustration. He paces around.)

(NURSE LISA, shocked, takes steps back.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Those women are right. Witte and What's-Her-Name. I can't have this kid having breakdowns with nothing to help him with.

NURSE LISA

Doctor, we left him crying in there.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Do you think you can break through to him?

NURSE LISA

Doctor Drake?

DOCTOR DRAKE

He doesn't let me in. He says he's fine, but he's not. He says nothing, and when he does say something, it's one word. I don't think he trusts me. He might trust you more. You're more... motherly.

NURSE LISA

Motherly.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Yes.

NURSE LISA

I... I'll do what I can.

(DOCTOR DRAKE exits. NURSE LISA enters ROBERT's room.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

How are you doing, Robert? Honestly.

(ROBERT stays silent.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Robert... Do you remember what you told Doctor Witte? About your grandpa?

(ROBERT nods.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Did he... did you ever talk about that with her? Or Doctor Drake?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Can you... do you want to?

*(ROBERT shakes his head, fast.
He puts his head in his hands.)*

ROBERT

I didn't see their privates. I didn't see it, it's not real. I didn't see.

NURSE LISA

Robert, it's okay. Whatever happened... whatever you saw... it's not your fault.

ROBERT

I didn't see anything.

(A beat.)

NURSE LISA

Do you feel safe here?

(ROBERT remains silent.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

With Doctor Drake? Do you feel safe?

(ROBERT pulls his blanket close to him.)

ROBERT

I... I want to be better.

(NURSE LISA sits at the foot of his bed.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE listens at the door to their conversation.)

NURSE LISA

Do you feel better? Do you feel like you're getting better here?
(A pause. Robert shakes his head.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Are those women... Are Doctor Witte and Doctor Lewis helping?

(ROBERT nods.)

ROBERT

They take a lot of blood.

NURSE LISA

Would you feel better with them?

(ROBERT looks around, and then pulls his knees close to his chest.)

ROBERT

I don't want Doctor Drake to be mad.

NURSE LISA

He won't be mad.

(ROBERT wipes tears from his eyes.)

ROBERT

They just take and take and take and I sit here... I just sit here, I lay here... I don't know what to do.

(A beat.)

NURSE LISA

Would you feel safer with Doctor Witte and Doctor Lewis?

(A pause.)

(A beat.)

(ROBERT cries. NURSE LISA hands him a tissue.)

(ROBERT nods at her question. Then speaks quietly.)

ROBERT

Yes.

(DOCTOR DRAKE storms away.)

NURSE LISA

If I leave, will you be okay?

(ROBERT nods.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

Promise?

ROBERT

... Promise.

(He holds out a pinky once more. NURSE LISA takes it in hers again.)

(NURSE LISA stands.)

NURSE LISA

I'll be back.

ROBERT

Promise?

NURSE LISA

Promise.

(She exits. ROBERT is left alone. He wipes his face and goes on to make his roses again.)

(NURSE LISA finds DOCTOR DRAKE.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I've had enough of this, Lisa.

NURSE LISA

I just broke through to him.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I need to talk to him.

NURSE LISA

Give him time. He's sensitive.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Time? Time?! I've given him months of my life! And now two women are saying they can magically fix him? No, he's my patient, and I get through to him. Now.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE rushes into
ROBERT'S room.)*

NURSE LISA

Doctor Drake! Stop!

(ROBERT drops his flower.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert. I need to know. Where are your parents?

(ROBERT doesn't answer.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm talking to you.

NURSE LISA

Doctor Drake, please!

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert. Are you 15?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Have you gotten better from this treatment?

(ROBERT remains still.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Robert. Talk to me.

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

And what about your grandparents?

(ROBERT tenses.)

ROBERT

I didn't look.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I need more than that!

ROBERT

I didn't look! They died, and I didn't look, and they're buried! They died alone, but with us! I didn't look!

NURSE LISA

Please! You're upsetting him!

DOCTOR DRAKE

We need the whole story, Robert!

ROBERT

I can't!

DOCTOR DRAKE

Why not?!

ROBERT

BECAUSE YOU'RE SCARING ME!

(Silence.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE looks down at himself. He takes a step back.)

(NURSE LISA pushes past him to comfort ROBERT. She holds his head close to her.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE looks at the scene he's created.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I have to do it, Lisa.

NURSE LISA

Doctor?

(ROBERT has turned into a fetal position, shaking. He's covered in sweat and tears.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

I have to authorize the transfer. I can't believe I let Marlys Witte win.

ROBERT

Win... what?

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

I'm... I'm sorry, Robert.

(ROBERT sits up, and wipes his eyes. He stares directly at DOCTOR DRAKE.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Starting as soon as possible, you're going to be transferred to Barnes County Hospital for treatment.

(ROBERT lets that sink in. He leans back in his bed.)

ROBERT

Do I get to choose where I go?

DOCTOR DRAKE

... No.

(ROBERT throws himself at NURSE LISA, clutching onto her abdomen. She rubs his back.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Another beautiful day in St. Louis, but bundle up, it's getting cold out there. Remember this holiday season, say hello to those special people in your life. Moms, dads, brothers, grandparents. And now, *MacArthur Park*.

(MacArthur Park plays.)

END ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

*(Barnes West County Hospital.
Christmas 1968.)*

*(Santa Claus go Straight to the
Ghetto by James Brown plays
faintly on the radio.)*

*(A small tree sits in the
corner, barely decorated.)*

*(A different hospital bed. The
air is slightly more sterile,
and the lights are slightly more
intense.)*

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Merry Christmas, St. Louis, from me to you. You're listening to *Santa Claus go Straight to the Ghetto*. And who knows? He just might.

*(After a moment of stillness,
DOCTOR LEWIS enters, wheeling
ROBERT in.)*

*(ROBERT looks around, taking in
his new surroundings.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS

And this is your room.

ROBERT

It's... clean.

DOCTOR LEWIS

We're in a hospital, of course it's clean.

*(She walks over to the radio and
turns it off.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Do you need help getting into bed?

(ROBERT looks at the tree.)

ROBERT

It's like the Charlie Brown tree.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'm not familiar.

ROBERT

It's a sad little tree.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I... I see. I'm sorry, maybe we can--

ROBERT

Where's Nurse Lisa?

DOCTOR LEWIS

She doesn't work here, Robert. Perhaps she'll visit.

ROBERT

Really?

DOCTOR LEWIS

I can certainly call her.

ROBERT

What about Doctor Drake?

DOCTOR WITTE

Perhaps he'll stop by for some observations.

(A beat. ROBERT thinks.)

ROBERT

You say perhaps a lot.

(DOCTOR LEWIS helps ROBERT stand, and then guides him onto the bed.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Perhaps I do. Are you comfortable? Can I get you anything?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Okay. Get comfortable, get some sleep. Tomorrow Doctor Witte will be here. Understand?

(ROBERT nods.)

(DOCTOR WITTE exits. ROBERT is left alone.)

(After a few moments, he sits upright.)

ROBERT

Hello?

(There's no answer.)

(ROBERT pulls his blanket to cover him.)

(The lights go blue, indicating a moment outside of time and place.)

(ROBERT lays back down, and curls into a fetal position. He sings to himself.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Frosty the snowman... Was a jolly happy soul... With a corncob pipe and a button nose... And two eyes made out of coal.

(CONSTANCE walks on stage.)

CONSTANCE

Robert! Bobby! Come home! It's cold out here-- I-- I brought you your coat! Your blanket! Your puzzle cubes-- look! I have them all here! Robert! Please!

(ROBERT sits up.)

ROBERT

Mom?

(ROBERT extends a hand.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

Mom... I can't... I can't reach you...

*(CONSTANCE extends an arm.
They're looking at each other,
but can't see each other.)*

CONSTANCE

I'll find you, Robert. If it's the last thing I do.

(Their hands almost touch.)

*(CONSTANCE puts her hand down.
She begins to walk away.)*

(ROBERT lays back down.)

ROBERT

Merry Christmas, mom.

CONSTANCE

Merry Christmas, Bobby.

*(The blue light fades and we
return to the present.)*

*(DOCTOR WITTE enters and puts a
hand on ROBERT's forehead.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

You're warm.

SCENE 2

(Barnes Hospital, January, 1969.)

(The tree is gone. No music plays.)

(ROBERT hits the radio. It makes no noise.)

(After a moment, DOCTOR WITTE enters, followed quickly by DOCTOR LEWIS.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS holds a clipboard and is already wearing rubber gloves.)

(ROBERT, startled by the doctors, pulls his blanket over his head.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Good morning.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Good morning, Robert.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'll be working with you formally now. Robert, I'm a microbiologist researcher. I've been doing a lot of work behind the scenes with you, so now I look forward to--

ROBERT

Do you need more blood?

(A beat.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

... Yes, actually.

(ROBERT holds out his arm with a blank expression. DOCTOR WITTE preps his arm for taking blood.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

I have some questions to ask you.

(DOCTOR WITTE finishes taking blood, and begins to exit.)

DOCTOR WITTE

He doesn't like talking about his family.

(She exits.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Is this true?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Alright, then. Robert, you understand you have a chlamydia infection, yes?

(ROBERT nods.)

(DOCTOR WITTE re-enters.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Chlamydia is only transferred through sexual contact. Have you had steady sexual contact with one or more partners?

DOCTOR WITTE

He said he had a girlfriend.

DOCTOR LEWIS

He can speak for himself, Marlys.

DOCTOR WITTE

Alright.

ROBERT

She's telling the truth.

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert, have you been eating?

(ROBERT goes silent. He pulls his knees into his chest.)

ROBERT

Can I have a newspaper?

DOCTOR WITTE

You need to give us something to work with. Anything.

DOCTOR LEWIS

No, I... I think that's enough questions for now. Rest up, Robert. We'll check on you tomorrow.

DOCTOR WITTE

(away from ROBERT:) Memory, are you sure?

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'll handle it from here.

DOCTOR WITTE

You haven't worked with him like I have.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'll handle it. From here.

(Defeated, DOCTOR WITTE walks to the door.)

DOCTOR WITTE

You two deserve each other.

(DOCTOR WITTE exits. Silence lingers for a moment.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

You're going to get better, Robert. I promise.

(A beat. Robert remembers something.)

ROBERT

Nurse Lisa promised she'd come back.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Did she?

(ROBERT extends a pinky.)

ROBERT

I'll be better?

(DOCTOR LEWIS steps forward, slowly. She takes his pinky.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

We'll do everything we can for you.

(ROBERT squeezes her pinky.)

ROBERT

I'll be better?

(DOCTOR LEWIS nods.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

You're going to get better.

(They release pinkies. ROBERT lays down.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS smiles softly and rubs his shoulder.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Get some rest. A nurse will be with you to give you your antibiotics.

ROBERT

Lisa?

DOCTOR LEWIS

She... she doesn't work here, Robert.

(DOCTOR LEWIS smiles. She begins to leave. When she's out the door, she turns around.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Happy new year, Robert.

ROBERT

Happy new year, Doctor.

(She exits.)

SCENE 3

(The lights go blue.)

(CONSTANCE enters wearing a long coat and a scarf and gloves. She's on the street in her neighborhood looking for her son.)

CONSTANCE

(speaking to passerbys we can't see:) Excuse me-- have you seen-- Excuse me, have you seen-- my son! His name is Robert, he answers to Bobby. He's about this all... A little skinny... Please-- it's getting cold. I need to find him.

(She gets frustrated.)

CONSTANCE (cont'd)

Doesn't anyone care?! A little boy-- my little boy-- I haven't seen him since last year! I know he's alive! Someone help me find him!

(DOCTOR WITTE enters with a newspaper and hands it to ROBERT.)

(ROBERT looks at it.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Think you can help me with the crossword?

(ROBERT squints.)

ROBERT

Can I have a pen?

(CONSTANCE pulls out a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket, trying to show it to any passerbys.)

CONSTANCE

Please, he looks like this. Take it! Show your friends!

*(ROBERT thinks hard. He coughs
as he looks at the paper.)*

ROBERT

I...

DOCTOR WITTE

Yeah?

(ROBERT writes one thing down.)

ROBERT

That's what I got.

*(DOCTOR WITTE frowns, but takes
the paper.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

Thanks, Robert.

*(CONSTANCE pulls her coat
tighter.)*

CONSTANCE

I'll find him.

(CONSTANCE exits.)

*(The blue lights fade, returning
us to the present.)*

(DOCTOR LEWIS enters.)

(ROBERT extends an arm.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

No, no, I don't need blood today, Robert. Any discomfort?

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT' d)

Do you think the new medication has been working?

ROBERT

Yes.

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Good. Your temperature is stable, your vitals are... fine. How do the swollen areas feel?

ROBERT

Sore.

DOCTOR WITTE

Does it still hurt to pee?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Alright...

(DOCTOR LEWIS writes that down.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

A nurse will be back to collect a urine sample tonight after dinner.

ROBERT

Lisa?

(DOCTOR LEWIS sighs.)

DOCTOR WITTE

We told you, she doesn't work here, Robert.

(ROBERT's shoulders slump.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS sets down her notes.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Before this... were you in school, right, Robert?

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

What was your favorite subject?

(ROBERT thinks.)

ROBERT

Math. Algebra.

DOCTOR WITTE

I've never met a teenager that liked math.

ROBERT

It's like a puzzle. Solving equations.

DOCTOR LEWIS

You liked solving for X?

(ROBERT crosses his two index fingers into an X and nods, smiling.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Did you meet Debbie at school?

ROBERT

Who?

(ROBERT quickly puts his hand over his mouth.)

(DOCTOR WITTE looks at DOCTOR LEWIS.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I won't be mad if you lied about Debbie.

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

ROBERT

I didn't lie to you.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert.

ROBERT

I don't lie.

DOCTOR LEWIS

it's okay if you lied. But we need to know. Debbie might be sick, too.

ROBERT

I don't lie.

(ROBERT hits the side of his head.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert, stop.

ROBERT

I don't lie!

(He goes to hit his head again, but DOCTOR LEWIS grabs his arm. He tries to wrestle free from her grip, but can't.)

(He hits himself with his other hand, and chants:)

ROBERT

I don't lie! I don't lie! I don't lie!

(DOCTOR LEWIS grabs his hands and struggles to put them back in his lap.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Marlys, don't just stand there!

(DOCTOR WITTE slowly backs up, then runs.)

(ROBERT breathes heavily, looking at DOCTOR LEWIS.)

ROBERT

I lied.

(He begins to cry.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

It's okay, Robert. It's normal. You're scared.

ROBERT

Not about Debbie.

(DOCTOR LEWIS puts her hand on his shoulder.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

You can tell me.

ROBERT

My head... I can't think right any more. I want... I want to do puzzles again. But... I can't think. Everything hurts. I want my momma.

(He puts his head in his hands.)

ROBERT

I want my mom!

(DOCTOR LEWIS rubs his back.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Give me a name, Robert. She'll visit you.

ROBERT

She can't...

DOCTOR LEWIS

Why not?

ROBERT

She'll remember grandpa. She'll know I'm gonna die. But I don't wanna die. She remembers a boy. A normal boy..

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert. Your illness doesn't define you.

(ROBERT wipes his eyes.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT'D)

Tell me or Doctor Witte her name.

(ROBERT shakes his head.)

ROBERT

I'm not her Robert anymore.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert...

(ROBERT turns away and lays down.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT'D)

Tomorrow I'll bring you another newspaper. How does that sound?

(ROBERT doesn't answer. He goes into a fetal position.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT'D)

... Get some rest, Robert.

(She exits. ROBERT is left alone.)

SCENE 5

(DOCTOR LEWIS sits at her desk, writing in her journal. After a moment, DOCTOR WITTE enters holding a cup of coffee.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Hey there.

(DOCTOR LEWIS doesn't answer. She furiously writes.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Hi, Memory.

(DOCTOR WITTE stands behind her, looking at what she's writing.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

What is this list of names?

DOCTOR LEWIS

It's all the 'Deborahs' in the area.

DOCTOR WITTE

Trying to track Robert's girlfriend down again?

DOCTOR LEWIS

There's a real chance that there's a young girl out there with the same chlamydial infection Robert has.

DOCTOR WITTE

If he's telling the truth.

(DOCTOR LEWIS gives her a look.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Do you think he trusts us?

DOCTOR LEWIS

No, next question?

DOCTOR WITTE

Why do you say that?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Because we're white, Marllys.

DOCTOR WITTE

So?

DOCTOR LEWIS

So? We're white health care professionals in a better financial situation than him, taking blood from him almost every day, and keep him in a bed away from his family for a year.

DOCTOR WITTE

We had to crawl our way through muck and shit to get where we are.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Yes.

DOCTOR WITTE

And that doesn't warrant some respect?

DOCTOR LEWIS

I think he understands us.

DOCTOR WITTE

I don't get it.

*(DOCTOR LEWIS lights a
cigarette.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS

You don't need to. Just understand he won't completely trust us. Ever. And forcing it will make it worse.

*(She offers her cigarette to
DOCTOR WITTE, who accepts it and
takes a puff, and then hands it
back to DOCTOR LEWIS.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

Did you find anything conclusive on our 'Debbie Doe?'

DOCTOR LEWIS

In St. Louis alone there's 31, but none are really in his age group. And most are... Well, white. And in this city if a boy that sick was with a white girl... I don't think he'd be here to tell the tale.

DOCTOR WITTE

I think there's another... worse option we don't want to discuss, Memory.

(Silence. A beat.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

The truth of the situation is that we don't know. And we may never know.

DOCTOR WITTE

Well we better find out.

DOCTOR LEWIS

We don't need to know everything that happened to the boy, we just need to know what's going on with him now.

DOCTOR WITTE

You're not in the least bit curious about what happened to him?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Of course I am. But will knowing affect my treatment of him?

DOCTOR WITTE

I need a smoke.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Take mine, I'm done.

(DOCTOR WITTE plucks the cigarette from DOCTOR LEWIS's fingers, then ponders it.)

DOCTOR WITTE

He's a kid from the other side of the tracks. He probably got into all sorts of mischief.

DOCTOR LEWIS

He's a math geek who likes crosswords in the Sunday paper and puzzles. I don't know what mischief he can get into. Let's come up with questions we can ask him.

DOCTOR WITTE

Here's a better one. That girl, the nurse. What was her name?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Lisa.

DOCTOR WITTE

Lisa. We get her to ask some questions.

(DOCTOR LEWIS shakes her head.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'm not manipulating a young woman into manipulating an even younger man.

DOCTOR WITTE

That's what you say now. But, don't worry. We're gonna crack this case wide open, don't worry.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Is that what we're doing?

DOCTOR WITTE

If we find the girl and it's just an STD? Cool. If we find there's no girl and this is the start of an epidemic and we found patient zero? We could nip it in the bud.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Are you going to be the next Anne Sullivan? Finding the miracle cure for a mysterious illness? Because I don't need a glory hog here, I need a doctor. Can I get that?

DOCTOR WITTE

Excuse me?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Marlys, we have a boy in there who's wasting away before our eyes. And-- and every day I come in he knows... he KNOWS I'm going to ask him for blood. Or lymph fluid. And he knows it. And we don't talk. He barely talks. And you know what I do? I take the blood. I take the lymph fluid. And I go, and I sit in front of a microscope staring at

no T-cells, at chlamydia, at a kid's blood right in front of my eyes. And then I go to him with no answer and go, try this! And maybe something helps. But it never does. So between Drake taking out lymph nodes and you playing hero, I really just need a doctor. Is that too much to ask for?

DOCTOR WITTE

Memory--

DOCTOR LEWIS

Don't 'Memory' me.

(A beat.)

DOCTOR WITTE

He'll be a husk.

(DOCTOR LEWIS puts her head in her hands.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

He already is. We all know it. I... I need a drink. And a smoke. I need a drink and a smoke.

DOCTOR WITTE

Gonna drink on the job?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Don't try and be cute, I still have words for you.

DOCTOR WITTE

You can't kill yourself over him. You do what you can and that's all anyone can ask for.

DOCTOR LEWIS

That may have worked for other chlamydia patients, but doing all I can isn't enough. And all you can do isn't enough.

DOCTOR WITTE

So we just have problems. No solutions.

(DOCTOR LEWIS stands up. She walks away from DOCTOR WITTE and looks away.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I've lost patients before. That's what we train for. In my residencies I saw a man with a case of gangrene. We had to remove his leg below the knee. He recovered physically. He can walk. But never mentally. He was broken. Something about losing a part of you that's so tied to

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

being human, like a limb, suddenly being missing? He didn't come back from it.

(DOCTOR WITTE stays silent.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

I have to do better for Robert. We have to do better for Robert.

DOCTOR WITTE

And if we can't?

(DOCTOR LEWIS sits down and continues to work.)

(A beat.)

(DOCTOR WITTE goes to help DOCTOR LEWIS.)

SCENE 6

(ROBERT hobbles out of bed. He can barely walk, and coughs every so often. He wipes his nose on his arm.)

(He hits the top of the radio.)

(The lights go blue.)

(Instead of the RADIO ANNOUNCER, it's CONSTANCE's voice.)

CONSTANCE

Robert, what have you gotten yourself into this time?

ROBERT

Momma?

CONSTANCE

A fine looking mess you're in. Can barely walk, don't talk to those doctors, and for what? You're too shy, you've got to get out of your head!

ROBERT

I-- I know.

CONSTANCE

Chin up, Bobby. Don't look so sad.

ROBERT

I can't think right anymore. Words aren't coming to me anymore... Am I dying?

CONSTANCE

I don't know, Bobby.

(ROBERT drops to his knees.)

ROBERT

I don't wanna die.

CONSTANCE

No one does.

ROBERT

I don't wanna die alone.

CONSTANCE

Just talk to the doctors. Tell them how you feel.

ROBERT

They don't understand. They're-- they're vampires. They just want blood.

CONSTANCE

They're doctors, Bobby, you know they need it.

ROBERT

They say I have a... disease. A bad one.

CONSTANCE

What disease, Robert?

ROBERT

I can't tell you.

CONSTANCE

You can tell me anything. I'm your mother.

(ROBERT begins to cry.)

ROBERT

I can't tell you!

CONSTANCE

Bobby, I'm your mother. And I love you--

(ROBERT picks up the radio, unplugging it, and slams it down.)

(After realizing what he's done, the energy leaves his body and he collapses.)

(The blue lights fade.)

(DOCTOR WITTE runs in.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert? Robert, what's wrong?

(ROBERT turns to her.)

ROBERT

I don't know.

(She pulls on rubber gloves and pulls his sheets off his bed.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

I'll get a nurse to wash these. I'll grab you some clean ones. Don't... don't move.

(ROBERT stays still, coughing into his hand.)

(DOCTOR WITTE exits and then re-enters with new sheets. She quickly begins to put them on.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

If you're not feeling well, tell us. You like math? Well believe in science. We're here to make you better.

(She finishes.)

(ROBERT lays back down in his bed.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Robert, can you sit up for me?

(As ROBERT sits up, he coughs.)

(DOCTOR WITTE takes a stethoscope and puts it on his back. He shivers.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Breathe in?

(ROBERT breathes in.)

DOCTOR WITTE (cont'd)

Breath out. Another time, breathe in... And out. One more time, breathe in? And out.

(DOCTOR WITTE stands up and takes off her stethoscope.)

ROBERT

What's wrong?

DOCTOR WITTE

It... it sounds like your lungs are filled with fluid. We need to do an x-ray to be sure.

(DOCTOR WITTE helps him stand.)

(FLASH. A light hits ROBERT from one angle.)

(FLASH. Another angle.)

(FLASH. From the front. ROBERT holds his hands in front of his face to protect him.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Stay still please.

(FLASH. The whole stage is illuminated, just for a moment. ROBERT then collapses.)

(DOCTOR WITTE rushes to him.)

SCENE 7

(ROBERT sleeps.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS enters in gloves and a mask and wakes him. She holds a small cup with pills and another cup of water.)

(ROBERT sits up, rubbing his eyes.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS hands him the pills. He takes them in his mouth. Then she hands him the water. He drinks it. He coughs, then lays back down.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

How are you feeling, Robert?

ROBERT

Bad.

DOCTOR LEWIS

You have pneumonia. It's a virus. Your lungs are filling up with fluid.

ROBERT

Like my lymph nodes.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I suppose, yes.

ROBERT

You're saying 'suppose' again.

(DOCTOR LEWIS smiles.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I suppose I am.

*(Suddenly, in another room,
DOCTOR WITTE barges in with
DOCTOR DRAKE following her.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

You have a lot of nerve showing up here unannounced.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I know you don't like me, you've made that abundantly clear. But I was his first doctor. You took the case out from under me.

DOCTOR WITTE

We didn't sabotage you, Drake, we were more qualified.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I was his doctor.

DOCTOR WITTE

For what good that did.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He came to my hospital first.

DOCTOR WITTE

He was a child, and he was scared. No care, no money, no family.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What is your problem?! Yes, I made mistakes, but I need to see him.

DOCTOR WITTE

And why's that?

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's his birthday.

(DOCTOR WITTE looks confused.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Lisa told me.

(DOCTOR LEWIS enters their room.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

She makes it clear she wants things to change, but I can't change them.

DOCTOR LEWIS

You could.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Hi, Memory.

DOCTOR WITTE

I'd like to hear what he has to say. Come to apologize to me? Or Robert? Or try and undermine all the work we've done?

DOCTOR LEWIS

You two can fist fight in the parking lot, but this is a hospital. We heal people here.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Do we?

(DOCTOR LEWIS looks down.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Tear each other apart, I don't care.

(She turns to leave.)

DOCTOR WITTE

First time I called Drake? He treats me like a little girl, then I meet him and he treats me like a nurse.

DOCTOR DRAKE

This isn't about me! This is about Robert!

DOCTOR WITTE

What about Robert, William?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Marlys. Enough.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I was his first doctor.

DOCTOR WITTE

You didn't visit him until months later. Did you even know he was still alive? Why now? Hm? Why now, Drake?

DOCTOR DRAKE

(exploding:) Because I made a mistake!

(Silence.)

(DOCTOR WITTE backs up from him.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (CONT'D)

The... the last night before he was transferred to you two. I scared him. I yelled. It was so easy to forget he was a person... a kid. I buried myself in my notes. I'm sorry. I can... I can at least try and make things right.

(DOCTOR DRAKE wipes his eyes. He turns away from the women.)

DOCTOR WITTE

You get five minutes.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Leave the door open. Also, be careful. Wear a mask and gloves, he's contracted pneumonia.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He has pneumonia and you didn't--

(DOCTOR DRAKE is about to get mad, but then releases his anger in a long sigh.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

I... yeah. I understand.

(DOCTOR DRAKE goes to ROBERT's side. He pulls on a medical mask and gloves. From his pocket he

*produces a jigsaw puzzle in a
box.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Um. Hi, Robert.

ROBERT

Hello.

DOCTOR DRAKE

How are you feeling?

ROBERT

Bad.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I see.

ROBERT

Did you bring Lisa?

DOCTOR DRAKE

No, I... I didn't. But she's working again.

*(DOCTOR DRAKE hands him the
box.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Sorry I didn't wrap it. I... I'm not good at such things. But I heard
it's your birthday.

(ROBERT nods.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (cont'd)

Sweet sixteen!

(ROBERT looks at him.)

*(He opens the puzzle and
examines the pieces.)*

ROBERT

Thank you.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I... I wanted to apologize. For yelling. I shouldn't have been like that. That night.

(ROBERT pulls his legs to his chest.)

ROBERT (cont'd)

I'm a medical mystery. And I now have ammonia.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Pneumonia.

(DOCTOR DRAKE takes a step forward.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert... have you noticed a decline in your vocabulary?

ROBERT

Maybe.

DOCTOR DRAKE

It was good seeing you, Robert. I have to talk to your doctors now.

(ROBERT nods.)

ROBERT

Bye.

(DOCTOR WITTE and DOCTOR LEWIS enter the other room once more. DOCTOR WITTE lights a cigarette and offers it to DOCTOR LEWIS. DOCTOR LEWIS declines.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE enters their room.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

He's worse than I thought.

DOCTOR WITTE

Maybe he just doesn't like you, Drake.

DOCTOR DRAKE

What do we do?

DOCTOR WITTE

Oh no. Not we. You're a visitor. And visiting hours are almost over.

DOCTOR DRAKE

You can't shut me out.

DOCTOR WITTE

We can. And we are.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Both of you... just stop it. Drake. We're treating him for pneumonia. And let's all remember he's just a kid. We're just treating someone who has pneumonia.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He's 16.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Excuse me?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Today's his birthday.

DOCTOR WITTE

He didn't tell us, Memory.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I... I see. William, go home. If anything actually important happens, we'll let you know. For now... just go home. Marlys and I can take it from here.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Are you kicking me out?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Not in such harsh words, but, yes.

(A beat.)

*(DOCTOR DRAKE begins to exit,
but then turns.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

I don't get you two.

(He exits.)

DOCTOR WITTE

I hate him.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I know.

SCENE 8

(ROBERT lays in bed, facing the ceiling.)

(The radio hisses, then starts to play the RADIO ANNOUNCER's voice.)

(The lights go blue.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Robert. Are you awake?

(ROBERT groans.)

ROBERT

No.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Robert, it's time to wake up.

(ROBERT stirs.)

ROBERT

I'm up.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

You're very sick, you know.

ROBERT

I've got pneumonia.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

And chlamydia. Why are you still hanging on?

ROBERT

... What do you mean?

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Why bother going through treatment after treatment, doctor after doctor. You saw your grandpa. You saw him buried. It's just going to happen to you. Will they mark your grave?

ROBERT

Don't... don't say that. I'm going to get better. Then I'm gonna see momma.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Don't let the doctors fool you. You're never getting out of this hospital.

ROBERT

No! I am!

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Says who? Your mommy? Oh, that's right, you haven't seen her.

ROBERT

She-- she can't see me like this.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

How will she feel when she knows her little boy has what her father had? And that's it's sexually transmitted.

(ROBERT picks up his pillow and begins to hit the radio.)

ROBERT

Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!

(ROBERT begins to have a coughing fit. He leans over the side of his bed and throws up.)

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Disgusting.

ROBERT

I... I need to see momma again...

(The blue lights fade.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS rushes in.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert? What's wrong?

ROBERT

The-- the radio man... He's... He's...

(DOCTOR LEWIS walks over to the radio.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert, the radio isn't on.

(ROBERT sits up.)

ROBERT

He-- I... I...

(DOCTOR LEWIS puts her hand on his head.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

You're burning up.

(ROBERT blinks. He rubs his eyes.)

ROBERT

Mom?

DOCTOR LEWIS

No, I'm--

(ROBERT pulls her into a hug and starts crying.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS is frozen.)

ROBERT

I don't want to die.

DOCTOR LEWIS

You-- you're not going to die.

ROBERT

I can't die yet... I'm the stud of the century.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert?

(ROBERT collapses.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Robert!

(She shakes him. She puts an ear to his chest. His heart is beating.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

MARLYS! I NEED YOU!

(DOCTOR LEWIS positions ROBERT on his side.)

(DOCTOR WITTE enters.)

DOCTOR WITTE

What do we do?

DOCTOR LEWIS

We let him rest. Clean up his vomit. Tomorrow we need a serious medication change. Then...

DOCTOR WITTE

Then it's a waiting game.

DOCTOR LEWIS

It has been.

DOCTOR WITTE

Feel like you're losing a limb yet?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Yeah. Yeah, I do.

SCENE 9

(ROBERT breathes heavily.)

(DOCTOR WITTE enters with a tray of food. It has peas on it.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Eat up, Robert.

ROBERT

Not... hungry.

DOCTOR WITTE

Food will make you stronger, Robert. Come on. I'll be back.

(She exits.)

(Every breath is a labor. He grabs at his food lazily. He grabs a handful of peas and squeezes them, staining his hand, then letting his hand rest on his chest, staining his gown.)

(He closes his eyes and breathes in sharply.)

ROBERT

Mom... I have to finish my homework...

(He takes a few deep breaths.)

ROBERT (cont' d)

Mom... I can't breathe...

(He coughs.)

(He keeps on coughing.)

(He leans over the edge of his bed and coughs. Then he lays down and wretches, curling into a fetal position.)

(He remains still for a moment. Eerily still. His breathing seems to have stopped. Then, he turns over onto his back and gasps for air. He claws at his neck.)

ROBERT (cont' d)

Air-- Can't breath-- mom! Mommy! Mommy, I'm scared!

(He begins to sob, loudly, and yells, and moans.)

(His vitals go up. His heart rate is up dangerously.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS and DOCTOR WITTE rush in after a moment of him writhing on stage.)

(DOCTOR LEWIS puts a hand on his forehead.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

He's burning up.

(DOCTOR WITTE gets a damp towel and places it on his forehead. ROBERT lays still. Too still.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert? Robert, can you hear me? Robert!

(ROBERT slowly opens his eyes.)

ROBERT

Grandpa?

(DOCTOR LEWIS holds ROBERT's hand.)

ROBERT (CONT'D)

I don't want to play.

DOCTOR LEWIS

We're here, Robert.

DOCTOR WITTE

We're right here.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Call Drake. And Lisa. They have to know.

DOCTOR WITTE

Know what? This is just an episode.

(ROBERT breathes in loudly and coughs. He coughs more, and then dry heaves, writhing in pain.)

ROBERT

Can't... I don't want to... I don't want to...

DOCTOR LEWIS

What, Robert?

ROBERT

Die... I don't want to die...

(The DOCTORS look at each other. DOCTOR WITTE leaves the room.)

(DOCTOR WITTE enters another room and dials DOCTOR DRAKE on the phone.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE answers.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Doctor William Drake, who's speaking?

DOCTOR WITTE

It's Marlys. Come to the hospital. Robert's...

(While back in Robert's room...)

DOCTOR LEWIS

A six letter word for cats.

ROBERT

F-Feline...

DOCTOR DRAKE

Robert's what? Have you found your miracle cure, Doctor Witte?

DOCTOR WITTE

Not the time. He's... I think this could be it.

(DOCTOR DRAKE falls silent.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

... I'm leaving now.

(DOCTOR DRAKE hangs up. He pulls on his coat and exits.)

(DOCTOR WITTE exits.)

(In ROBERT's room, DOCTOR LEWIS has started to look through ROBERT's newspapers. He has completed every crossword puzzle.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

A leader of a wolf pack, five letters.

(DOCTOR WITTE dials NURSE LISA.)

NURSE LISA

Hello?

DOCTOR WITTE

Lisa? This is Doctor Witte. Come to the hospital. Robert's...

ROBERT

... I don't know.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Yes you do.

(ROBERT begins to cry.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT'D)

It starts with an A.

NURSE LISA

He's what?

DOCTOR WITTE

He's-- *(A beat.)* He's not feeling well. I-- I think he wants to see you.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Alpha. Come on, Robert, you can do this.

ROBERT

No more...

NURSE LISA

Okay! I'll be there soon.

(She hangs up.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

I'll be right back. I'm going to find Doctor Witte.

*(DOCTOR LEWIS follows where
DOCTOR WITTE has gone.)*

ROBERT

Mom... Lisa... I'm so cold...

DOCTOR LEWIS

What's taking so long?

DOCTOR WITTE

I called them both! They have lives, they have to come on their own time.

ROBERT

I don't... I can't see...

(He coughs more. Then he writhes in pain more. He claws at his throat.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

They have to come soon.

ROBERT

Mom... Grandpa... Grandma... I'm...

DOCTOR WITTE

I don't control them, Memory! I'm not their keeper!

ROBERT

I'm... sorry.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Don't raise your voice at me.

DOCTOR WITTE

Don't tell me what to do, how about that, Memory? You're such a control freak!

(ROBERT goes limp.)

ROBERT

... Freak.

(He flatlines.)

(ROBERT has died.)

(The DOCTORS notice the noise of a flatline. They turn in shock. They run into the room.)

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Robert?! Robert, please, answer me!

DOCTOR WITTE

Robert!

(They go silent.)

(DOCTOR WITTE wipes her eyes.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (CONT'D)

Robert... I'm so sorry.

(DOCTOR WITTE holds ROBERT's hand.)

DOCTOR WITTE

I... I... Call the time.

(DOCTOR LEWIS checks the time.)

(Then, she writes it down.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

11:20 pm.

(NURSE LISA enters with a puzzle box.)

NURSE LISA

Robert? Oh... I'm sorry. Is he... Is he asleep?

(DOCTOR WITTE and DOCTOR LEWIS don't say anything.)

(NURSE LISA drops the box and goes over to ROBERT. She holds his hand.)

NURSE LISA

I-- I should have been here. I'm-- I'm so sorry.

DOCTOR WITTE

It's not on you. It's... he was sick.

(NURSE LISA closes ROBERT'S eyes.)

NURSE LISA

Robert... I'm sorry... I'm so so sorry...

(NURSE LISA goes back to her box. She holds it to her chest.)

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

I was going to help him with a puzzle... it's a Beatles Jigsaw... I don't know if he likes The Beatles. But then I thought, what kid doesn't? I mean, they... they're The Beatles. And he loves puzzles. I... Even if he

NURSE LISA (cont'd)

didn't like the music he could do the puzzle... and we could listen to a record... maybe I could sing for him... it would have been... nice.

(She begins to cry.)

NURSE LISA (CONT'D)

And I wasn't there for him.

(DOCTOR WITTE hugs NURSE LISA as she cries. DOCTOR LEWIS looks down, with a hand on ROBERT'S shoulder.)

(Silence falls over the group.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE bursts in wearing surgical gloves, prepared to help)

DOCTOR DRAKE

If we don't act fast we can lose him. Witte, give me his temperature.

(He goes over to Robert and tries to take his pulse.)

DOCTOR DRAKE (CONT'D)

He's... What are we all waiting for? Let's go people, we can't--

(NURSE LISA shoots up.)

NURSE LISA

(screaming:) SHUT UP!

(Silence again.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE looks at ROBERT.)

DOCTOR DRAKE

Oh no.

DOCTOR WITTE

Drake...

DOCTOR DRAKE

Did you... Did you call it?

DOCTOR LEWIS

Yes.

DOCTOR DRAKE

When?

DOCTOR LEWIS

11:20.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm... I was late.

DOCTOR WITTE

We all were.

*(Silence falls over them again.
DOCTOR DRAKE puts his hand on
ROBERT's other shoulder and
closes his eyes.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

I'm sorry, Robert.

(DOCTOR DRAKE kneels.)

NURSE LISA

We... We have to find his family. Tell them.

DOCTOR DRAKE

He didn't have any.

DOCTOR WITTE

He didn't want them to see him like... like how he was.

DOCTOR LEWIS

In a twisted way, we were all he had. And we weren't there.

NURSE LISA

But they-- they have to know!

DOCTOR WITTE

And we'll let them know. But for now... we can't leave him in here.

*(NURSE LISA walks over to him.
She holds his hand. Then
interlocks pinkies with him.)*

NURSE LISA

I'm sorry.

*(DOCTOR WITTE pulls the sheet
over his face.)*

*(DOCTOR WITTE and DOCTOR LEWIS
wheel ROBERT and his bed off
stage, slowly.)*

(NURSE LISA falls to her knees.)

*(DOCTOR DRAKE puts a hand on her
shoulder.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Let's get you home, Lisa.

*(LISA holds the puzzle box close
to her chest.)*

NURSE LISA

What was his middle name?

DOCTOR DRAKE

Hm?

NURSE LISA

His middle name. What was it?

(DOCTOR DRAKE goes silent.)

NURSA LISA (cont'd)

I don't know, either.

(She walks off in the opposite direction.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE is left on stage, alone.)

(After a moment, he takes a flask out of his coat, and takes a drink. Then, he exits.)

(The stage is empty.)

SCENE 10

(The blue light.)

(ROBERT, now dressed in a button down and slacks, the picture of a polite 1960s boy, enters the empty stage with a table and a more modern radio. He hits play on the radio.)

RADIO HOST

It started in 1982. AIDS, previously called GRID, has swept the nation like wildfire. What started as a small cluster of gay men dying of pneumonia in '81 has developed into a nationwide pandemic. The CDC coined AIDS, the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, the product of the HIV Virus, in 1982.

(DOCTOR LEWIS enters. She is no longer wearing her lab coat. She puts her head in her hands.)

(ROBERT stands downstage.)

RADIO HOST (cont'd)

Now, five years later, we may have the face to blame for this pandemic. Deceased Canadian flight attendant Gaetan Dugas may be responsible for bringing this disease into the United States. Here to talk about him and his book, *And The Band Played On*, is author Randy Schilts...

*(DOCTOR LEWIS quickly turns
the radio off.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS

I can't listen to another word of this. First GRID, now AIDS. No one actually cares. Reagan is letting people drop left and right, my staff is overbooked, and we're not even a hotspot down here. I... I'm just tired.

(The phone rings.)

(The blue light fades.)

*(DOCTOR LEWIS sighs, then
answers it.)*

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Doctor Memory Elvin-Lewis, who's speaking?

*(DOCTOR DRAKE is on the other
line.)*

DOCTOR DRAKE

Memory? It's... it's William. William Drake?

(DOCTOR LEWIS tenses.)

DOCTOR LEWIS

William. To what do I owe the pleasure?

DOCTOR DRAKE

It's... it's about Robert.

DOCTOR LEWIS

He's dead 15 years now, William. There isn't much to say.

DOCTOR DRAKE

I kept tissue samples.

DOCTOR LEWIS

You what?

DOCTOR DRAKE

They tested positive for the HIV antibodies. Memory, he had AIDS. We could have had the first AIDS case in the United States right under our nose!

DOCTOR LEWIS

We don't know that.

DOCTOR DRAKE

It could explain everything.

DOCTOR LEWIS

I don't need explanations. I need to tend to living patients who I can still help.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Your hospital is filled with them too, isn't it.

DOCTOR LEWIS

If by "them" you mean AIDS patients, yes, it is. Goodbye, William.

DOCTOR DRAKE

Wait. I told Marlys. She went to the press.

DOCTOR LEWIS

Of course she did.

(A beat.)

DOCTOR LEWIS (cont'd)

Drake... William. Have a good evening.

(She exits.)

(DOCTOR DRAKE exits.)

*(DOCTOR WITTE enters with
CONSTANCE.)*

DOCTOR WITTE

Mrs. Rayford... Constance. We thought you were dead. Or... he didn't... Either way. Seeing you again... getting out. You kept him going.

CONSTANCE

Thank you, Doctor Witte.

DOCTOR WITTE

Call me Marlys.

CONSTANCE

Thank you... Marlys. But I don't need to know what a disease did to him. I don't need to know that he loved me. I know he did. And I know he knows I loved him. What you saw? The boy you knew? There was no one else but Bobby. He was just a boy. A young boy who loved puzzles, and grits, and his family.

(DOCTOR WITTE smiles, pats her on the shoulder and exits.)

(The lights go blue.)

(CONSTANCE stands center stage.)

CONSTANCE (cont'd)

What you have to understand... under the medical mystery... he was just a boy. He was just a boy.

(She hugs herself, then exits.)

(ROBERT stands alone on stage.)

(The blue lights fade.)

(He turns on the radio.)

END OF PLAY

