

THE HOUND OF HEAVENN

By Jerold London

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With enormous admiration for Dr. Louise Jilek-Aall, her work, her writing, and particularly her *Working with Dr. Schweitzer*, without whom we would not approach the final door to the real meaning of the great doctor of Lambaréné.

And for the insight of Edouard Nies-Berger and his *Albert Schweitzer As I Knew Him* – together with all the others, of course, whose lives and writings were touched by Schweitzergeist.

THE HOUND OF HEAVENN

TIME AND PLACE

1961. A thick, tropical forest along the River Ogooué stands guard over Dr. Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon, West Africa. His bungalow (**center stage**), like the nearby wooden barracks, is old, with chicken-wire windows. Untidy. Dusty. Cozy. Safe and relaxing. All about are the sounds of animals – chickens, goats, dogs, cats, chimpanzees, and a peacock. The inside quarters, where SCHWEITZER works and sleeps, are remarkably small and overcrowded. A desk, crammed with books, papers and a lamp, takes up nearly the entire area by the window (along with its chair). There is barely room enough on it for him to write. Batches of letters, more books, and manuscripts are heaped in bundles on the floor beside the table. Personal belongings are tucked in where they can fit. Clothes hang from a line across the room. A few faded photographs and African straw mats fill what space there is over his bed and his organ-like piano. A single chair for a guest rests in the only unoccupied space near the desk. Between scenes, selections from Bach's organ music may be heard.

CHARACTERS

ALBERT SCHWEITZER. Age 86. A once powerful figure, tall and full, with a bush of disordered hair, a signature moustache, and a handshake of swallowing dimensions. Now slightly stooped, wearing in daytime a wrinkled short-sleeved white shirt, black bowtie, faded khaki trousers, and a white pith helmet. But what impresses most is his great personal warmth, shining out from under an almost shy modesty.

LOUISE. Narrator and visiting doctor. Age 30. Norwegian.

RICHARD FRIEDMAN, permanent staff doctor. Middle aged. Jewish.

MARIANNE, 40's, charming, a well-dressed, glamorous, wealthy, high society visitor to Lambaréné, with curly blonde hair and noticeably red-painted lips. Her makeup is done with artistic skill, highlighting her rosy, youthful skin and attitude.

GUSTAVE, late 50s or early 60s, an orderly. Multi-lingual.

HÉLÈNE BRESSLAU, Schweitzer's wife. Said to have had small, piercing eyes. A charming woman with classic features, and small of frame. Daughter of Jewish parents, but baptized Christian at age seven.

A native dancer, non-speaking part.

Various other non-speaking parts (predominately black) whom the Director may cast into the production, as and where deemed appropriate.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

... // in the dialogue indicates interrupting (but **not** overlapping) text.

Over the stage hangs a large SCREEN with pictures projected upon it. The initial picture (if permission is granted) is of Bartholdi's Black African statue in Colmar.

Schweitzer, Albert (1875-1965) | Harvard Square Library,
<https://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/albert-schweitzer/>

“The Black African statue by Bartholdi at Colmar. It was Schweitzer's strong and sustained emotional reaction to this statue as a boy and a young man that helped motivate him in making the commitment of his life to Africa.”

See, also, the Journal of Unification Studies, Vol. 9, 2008 (pp. 119-142): Blessed are the Peacemakers: Albert Schweitzer as Exemplar. Bartholdi is best known as sculptor of the Statue of Liberty, representing the abolition of slavery in America.

Is black so base a hue?

Sweet blowse, you are a beauteous blossom, sure.

– William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* act IV, scene ii.

SCENE 1 – GUTEN MORGEN

A pale silver full moon shines over Dr. Schweitzer's small bungalow in Lambaréné, Gabon, West Africa. He is lying, fast asleep, in a dream. Dull, rhythmic, native drumbeats are heard in the distance.

LOUISE

Enters to stand stage right, and points at the bungalow.

He's asleep now.... You might be wondering what all this means to me. Well, Dr. Schweitzer changed my life. It's that simple. And that's why I'm so passionate talking about him. Often, thinking back, I remember the opening lines of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven. It's a rare poem that so perfectly fits the soul of a great man:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days.
I fled Him, down the arches of the years.
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind.
And in the mist of tears I hid from Him.
From those strong feet that followed, followed after.
With unhurrying chase, and unperturbèd pace.
With all deliberate speed and instancy they beat.

The Hound of Heaven that chased the Great Doctor was Jesus. *His view* of Jesus. Because *his Jesus* was not the Jesus *I* was taught. Of him Dr. Schweitzer wrote:

Quote: The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward as the Messiah, who preached the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth and died to give his work its final consecration, never existed. He is a figure clothed by modern theology in historical garb.

Doctor Schweitzer believed in one underlying ethic, which I believe in, too: Reverence for life. Reverence for *all life*. From that conviction sprang the laws of his philosophy. The quest of his life was Africa; and his partner in that quest was his wife, Hélène. She left here before I came.

A sudden noise, or shadow, disturbs SCHWEITZER; and still lying in bed his double gets up and sleepwalks from the bungalow to LOUISE. His hands and walk give evidence to the sleepwalking.

LOUISE

[*pointing*] We're in his dreams, I think. I am, at least.
He's probably remembering when first we met.

**SCHWEITZER comes up to LOUISE, still
asleep.**

SCHWEITZER

What is your name, young lady?

LOUISE

Louise.

SCHWEITZER

Louise?... And what do you want to learn from me, Louise?

LOUISE

I would very much like to learn how to extract teeth ... in the bush.
[*aside*] I didn't tell him what I want the most is to be found.

**SCHWEITZER turns, to walk back to his
bungalow. On the way he begins to roar
with laughter.**

SCHWEITZER

[*laughing*] What a girl! What a girl! A true bush doctor, this one.
She knows the agony of pulling teeth in the bush. By God! That's grit.
I haven't laughed like this since Since I can't remember when.

SCHWEITZER returns to bed.

LOUISE

My story's not particularly original. I'm from Oslo, Norway.
On the way to becoming a bush doctor, I earned my M.D. in Zurich.
Studied tropical medicine in Basel.
Worked a year in Tanzania, and another in the Congo.
And then I came here. To West Africa. To see Dr. Schweitzer's hospital.
When I was at university in Oslo, Dr. Schweitzer came to us.
A hero. A winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.
An international role model for selflessness and sacrifice.
It meant something to us.
In fact, to me, it was one of the most memorable moments of my life.
We Norwegians idolized him.
Our enthusiasm went up to the sky.

LOUISE

Collections for his hospital were made around the country.
The night, after he accepted the Nobel Prize, we organized a torchlight parade.
From university to City Hall.
When he and Mrs. Schweitzer stepped out onto the balcony,
twenty thousand cheered from the square below.
We sang to them: A Norwegian hymn which gives thanks for the Earth.
A spirit was emerging. We could feel it. A new sense of worth, after the War.
That was eight years ago.
And it's been that spirit I've longed to find, and be a part of, again.
Working with Dr. Schweitzer I've seen streams of people coming here.
Worldwide. To his hospital. Many, sick at heart.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, aren't I?
Morning's coming. Of the day I'm saying Goodbye to Dr. Schweitzer.
With a word or two of caution:
Dr. Schweitzer is extraordinarily confident. Domineering even.
Firm-willed, in a velvet-hearted sort of way. Even at *his* age.
He views it his job to turn children, with slack habits, into self-respecting adults.
I've had *my lessons* to learn from him.
Enduring the pain of life is to feel the Lord's hand in your hand, he says.
Another thing. The Great Doctor is something of a hero-worshipper.
His aunt Mathilde was one of his heroes, when she was alive and he was young.
[pointing to the SCREEN] Bartholdi was another,
and his statue of the black man, in Colmar.
The majesty. The great black man striving for the nobility of his soul.
Yearning for the heroic in life.
It filled the thoughts and imagination of a young Schweitzer.
Well, you'll see. What a story there is to tell you!

LOUISE exits. Night becomes mid-morning. SCHWEITZER is writing at his desk. LOUISE enters, again stage right, and walks to, then into Schweitzer's room.

SCHWEITZER

Guten Morgen, Fräulein Luise.

LOUISE

Guten Morgen, Doktor....
You wanted a word with me?

**SCHWEITZER signals for LOUISE to sit,
in the only available chair in the room.
However, she continues standing.**

SCHWEITZER

Sit down, Mademoiselle. Please.... Please.

LOUISE sits, with some reluctance.

SCHWEITZER

You're the first from Norway to visit me in Lambaréné.
I have very happy memories of your country.

LOUISE

Her face lights up.

[*with excitement*] I was there!

In university, when you came to Oslo for your Peace Prize.

SCHWEITZER

His face lights up.

You were?

LOUISE

Oh, yes. Our whole country felt like we were with you.

You were a hero to us. Both of you.

You might not know it, what the war did to the Norwegian sense of honor.

SCHWEITZER

There was a torchlight procession ... //

LOUISE

From university, to City Hall. I was in it!

Everyone was so full of joy. Everything seemed so full of light.

SCHWEITZER

Well, now you can see for yourself how I've used your generous gifts.

It's an irony, though, that the first time I welcome a Norwegian to Lambaréné,
I must appeal to Norwegian generosity yet again.

LOUISE

But ... //

SCHWEITZER

But I hear you have experience in tropical medicine.

LOUISE

I do. And I am prepared to return to my work in Tanzania.

SCHWEITZER

You have seen how we are experiencing an epidemic of measles right now.

LOUISE

The heat everywhere around here, it's so oppressive. It drains my strength away.

SCHWEITZER

If you would be willing to stay, for a while. Help with the children.
Till another physician arrives, I would feel very obliged indeed.

LOUISE looks down at the ground.

SCHWEITZER

You have already witnessed mothers sobbing.
And have taught many of them how to cool their babies' feverish bodies.

LOUISE

Still looking down.

But ... Doctor Schweitzer ... please ... //

SCHWEITZER

You are young. Some of my staff have considerable experience in the tropics.
There are many things you can learn from us.

LOUISE

I I I don't know.

SCHWEITZER

I daresay there is a good spirit of cooperation at my hospital. And safety.

LOUISE

Looking up and staring into Schweitzer's eyes.

How can I say no? How could I be free to refuse you?

LOUISE stands, and takes Schweitzer's hand. A look of relief falls across his face. SCHWEITZER stands.

SCHWEITZER

Now tell me. How is it that you, of all people, a specialist in tropical medicine,
should step ashore from a canoe right in front of my hospital,
just at the moment we so desperately needed you?

LOUISE sits and finally begins to cry.

SCHWEITZER

Sits.

What is it, my dear?

LOUISE

How can you understand?... But maybe you can.
How afraid I've been. So many terrifying diseases.
Every day in Tanzania by myself. And the Congo.
I was so full of hope when I came to Africa.
This continent. It's so disillusioning. Beyond belief.
It's so lonely being a bush doctor.
I came here because of you.... *You*.
With all the expectations.
And now with all the disappointments I couldn't have imagined.
The feeling of helplessness.
So many people dying.
O God! It's so awfully exhausting.

SCHWEITZER

Africa.

Oh, I do. I do know what it's like to be a young doctor here.
We learn. We have to learn, who dare this strange land.
Every loss is a rupture.
But Listen....
For every rupture there's that much more responsibility to the living.
And we learn. Every time we lose, we learn just how much Africa gives.
Nowhere in the world have I seen the theatre of life and death play out with such
drama, such intensity, *and* such beauty, as here in Africa.

**They sit in silence. Then SCHWEITZER
stands, walks over to LOUISE, gently
touches her cheek, and exits.**

SCENE 2 – IF YOU WANT TO BE ME, BE ME

The stage is ablaze with the noonday sun.

LOUISE

Enters to stand, stage right, a white pith helmet on her head.

When the sun's ablaze at the Earth's equator we take shelter, not to collapse.
That's why we use as much of the morning as we can for surgery.
At noon we seek refuge in the consultation building.
There's nothing like the stifling heat I've ever encountered, anywhere.
Sweat running down the length of my body.
The consultation building's the only safe place from dizziness and nausea.
We each have our own assigned table.
The largest, in the middle, is Doctor Schweitzer's,
where he can keep an eye on everything while he writes.
He's always writing. It's his passion.
Lines of patients wait, for hours, stretching out the door.
They're from around here; and they can endure the heat.

A picture of patients, queuing up for consultation, appears on the SCREEN, accompanied by sounds of coughing, crying, moaning, laughter, and chatter.

I share my work with three other physicians, in addition to Dr. Schweitzer.
They are Dr. Takahashi, who manages the leper village. About 200 patients.
It's the disease Africans fear the most. But it's curable now. With D.A.D.P.S.
Second, there's Dr. Friedman, who's in charge of caring for the mentally ill.
He lives the most withdrawn, private life. I honestly hardly know the man.
Finally, there's Dr. Müller, our surgeon, whom I assist. One surgery, in particular,
I dread: Removal of overgrown tissue from a patient with elephantiasis.

A picture of a boy with elephantiasis appears on the SCREEN.

It's caused by a thin worm, contracted upon a fly's bite, which makes the tissue under the skin grow until the whole leg becomes grotesquely enlarged and heavy.
In order to remove overgrown tissue, a surgeon lifts up the skin, cuts out the surplus, ligates the blood vessels, and rejoins the skin over the wound.
It can take hours, in the heat. My job is to hold up the heavy leg. Steadily.
It's a dreadful ordeal. I have to grind my teeth just to hold on.
The duty nurse is constantly wiping my face or bringing me a cold drink.

LOUISE

[beat] Actually, we don't talk about the heat amongst ourselves. No matter how bad, we never complain. When guests remark about it, they're met by cold indifference from Dr. Schweitzer. You might think it heartless. But it's not. When there's nothing to be done, and so much else to do, what's the use wasting precious energy fussing over it?

Pause. Day turns to evening.

The two parts of life here I like the least are the heat, of course, and the aimless tourists with their cameras and foolish questions. It never ceases to amaze me how patient with them the Doctor is. He welcomes all, without discrimination. The curious American. The perpetual student. The lonely and longing, in search of meaning in life. Even some anxious to find fault with the Hospital and our Nobel Prize winner. But, of course, there are physicians and nurses eager to learn. And grateful colleagues and friends, paying their respects.

This week we have with us a planeload of delightful Finnish ladies, who've won our hearts with their enthusiasm. They belong to an Albert Schweitzer fan club. Nurses, secretaries, and housewives who have saved their money for years, to be able to make the trip to visit their idol.

SCHWEITZER enters and stands, stage left, listening.

LOUISE

They were invited to stay for dinner this evening; and many did. But at dinner, they turned timid, shy, and quiet. Finally, one got up the courage to ask: "What's going to happen here?... I mean, when you're gone?" Silence fell upon the room. The poor lady started turning red. [to SCHWEITZER] But you just smiled at her, didn't you?

SCHWEITZER

Coming over to LOUISE.

"Since I'm living to a hundred, we've got plenty of time to work it out," I gently told her.

LOUISE

Everyone laughed. Then one of them asked, "What can we do for you?"
The laughter brought me out of a trance I was in, and I seized the moment.
Naughty me! "Do you know 'Wonderful is the Earth'?" I asked them. They did.
And we all sang it. It was the song we sang for you that wonderful night in Oslo.

Sings:

Deilig er jorden
Prektig er Guds himmel
Skjønn er sjelenes pilgrimsstall
Gjennom de fagre
Rytter på jorde
Går vi til paradys med sang.

Pause. SCHWEITZER takes hold of Louise's hand.

SCHWEITZER

Thank you. You have made me very happy.
I am glad you are still here.

They stand for a while together. Then SCHWEITZER walks into his bungalow, sits, lights a lamp, and begins reading.

LOUISE

There was a reason I wasn't myself at dinner tonight. Let me explain.
It had to do with Dr. Friedman. The lonely one.
We physicians have nearly no time to get to know each other personally.
When the workday's over, we're usually so bone tired we just sit, half asleep.
Sometimes listening to music on an old record player.
Earlier today something happened I haven't told anyone about.
Dr. Friedman, as I've said, keeps nearly entirely to himself.
Or spends hours by lamplight, sitting and talking with Dr. Schweitzer at night.
None of us has had any success making friends with him.
In the consultation room his table is close to mine.
And for a while I was intimidated by his solemn face and gruffness.
That is, until I saw how he always knew when I needed help the most.
With kindness he'd talk to me, till he knew I'd gotten my confidence back.
This afternoon he seemed in a particularly bad mood, and I tried to help.
I said to him, "You're not very happy, are you?"

LOUISE

He turned to me and asked, almost in a whisper, “Do you see this?”
Rolling up the sleeve of his shirt, over his forearm, he revealed the bluish numbers,
tattooed on his arm.... I froze.
I didn’t know a thing to say, and didn’t dare look him in the eye.
“All my family were killed in gas chambers, except for me. I lost everything.
My family. Everybody I knew. My God. My faith. My joy. Everything.
I wandered about, hardly knowing when or where I would kill myself.
Until I happened to come here.
And Dr. Schweitzer and his wife took me in, as if I were their own son.
They showed me how much they cared.”
Finally I lifted up my eyes into those sad lonely eyes of his.
“Dr. Schweitzer and his wife listened, patiently, through my outbursts.
They showed me there was still human dignity and goodness left in the world.”
At this point the evening bell rang, and I left without saying a word.
Maybe, I hope, my face showed what I was feeling. Maybe not.
And I pondered at dinner what to do, while we were with the Finnish ladies.

LOUISE sings to herself, from Cat Stevens, “If You Want to Sing Out, Sing Out.”

LOUISE

If you want to sing out, sing out
And if you want to be free, be free
‘Cause there’s a million things to be
You know that there are

And if you want to be me, be me
And if you want to be you, be you
‘Cause there’s a million things to do
You know that there are.

[slowly] You know that there are.

Dear God, sometimes, so bad, I just want to cry.

During the time when LOUISE is singing to herself, FRIEDMAN enters from stage left, crosses, and goes into Dr. Schweitzer’s bungalow. The two sit, together, in the lamplight. LOUISE takes notice.

SCENE 3 – BEAUTEOUS BLOSSOM

Twilight.

LOUISE

Enters to stand, stage right.

Visitors. What can I say? Some are good, like you. Some, I'd say, not so good. We had a good one stay for months, if you can believe it. Her name was Mary Lou. I guess she and her rich American husband couldn't have children of their own; and she desperately loved the ones in our Children's Clinic. If one of her favorites should happen to die, she would go into hysterics. Otherwise she was a great help, and we gladly made allowances. Mary Lou's very favorite was a three-year-old, whom she literally nursed back to life with her love. When he was recovering soundly, Mary Lou got it into her head to adopt him. His parents, having given the boy up for dead, seemed to think she had the right. And when they learned how wealthy she was, how could they refuse? for his sake? Mary Lou would take him into her arms, and hug and kiss him. She truly loved him, while his mother struggled to hide her tears. A few days before the adoption Dr. Schweitzer, who had been carefully watching, gently approached Mary Lou. She was holding the boy when he asked her, "Have you written your husband? To have a room ready for your new son?" "Oh," she frowned. "He won't live with us. In the South! Oh, we couldn't have a black baby in our house. I'll find a children's home where he can grow up, and visit him whenever I want." There was an icy silence. Then, without another word, Dr. Schweitzer took the boy from her, walked him by the hand to his parents, put the boy's hand into his mother's, and told them, "Go home. To your village. Take your son; and don't come back for a long time."

Pause.

Mary Lou left Lambaréné a few days later.

SCENE 4 – 30

Evening.

LOUISE

Enters to stand, stage right, holding some presents.

I don't know about you, but to me birthdays are meant to be special days.
My 30th was the first time in three years I'd had anything like a proper one.
The two before, I didn't even hear my own name.
"Mama Doctor." That was it. In Swahili.
And I'd missed the fuss and festivities.
Strange, how birthdays remind me of fire.
When I'd come back, in the twilight, to the village where I lived, in Tanzania,
I'd walk past African families, sitting together outside their huts.
It made me feel homesick, seeing them around the fire,
eating, talking, having family time together, the light flickering across their faces.
Family time is family time everywhere in the world.
And Lambaréné's not all that different.
What I see mostly here, on people's faces, is comfort and friendship.
And love. Love especially for their beloved doctor.
He's already outlived fathers and grandfathers of theirs;
and could go on forever, as far as they're concerned.

First thing the morning of my 30th birthday they came outside my room,
singing a German hymn which Dr. Schweitzer had put together,
for commencement of my birthday celebration.

**Sharp, metallic beats of a gong, and a
hymn sung from offstage:**

Harre, meine Seele,
harre des Herrn!
Alles ihm befehle,
hilft er doch so gern.
Sei unverzagt!
Bald der Morgen tagt,
und ein neuer Frühling
folgt dem Winter nach.
In allen Stürmen,
in aller Not
wird er dich beschirmen,
der treue Gott.

LOUISE

I quickly jumped out of bed, and got myself dressed and ready.
First kisses and handshakes. Hearty hugs, and love, and well wishes.
Then off to the dining room in a parade.
And, my God! all the gifts that were piled around my plate. What excitement!
They royally embarrassed me.
A book from Dr. Schweitzer.
A chessboard, from Eric the carpenter.
A new stethoscope. An African woodcarving.
And, then, at the hospital, smiles all around from the mothers with their children.
A bowl of rice. An egg. Cooked bananas.
And from my friend, Gustave, a small object to make me blush.
[showing] A good luck charm. Delicately carved.
An image of a pregnant woman. For the future.
The thing was.... The problem was....
They'd forgotten to sing a *personal* birthday song for me.
Which is something that's always done for permanent staff on their birthdays.
Silly, but it made me sad....
But no birthday story's complete without a happy ending.

SCHWEITZER enters and stands, stage right, next to LOUISE.

At midday I asked Annette, the children's clinic nurse, why.
"I guess because you're not considered permanent staff," Annette replied.
"It's nurse Ali and Mademoiselle Mathilde who make all the social decisions.
So there won't be any hurt feelings or jealousies,
if one gets treated better than another."
It's true:
Nurse Ali and Mademoiselle Mathilde *are the ones* who make the social rules.
Correct, Dr. Schweitzer? That even you must follow?

SCHWEITZER

There are some things even I can't fight.
Women's rules are such a mystery to me.

LOUISE

I wore disappointment across my face all afternoon.
Hadn't I worked just as hard, and sweated just as much as the others?
At dinner, everyone but me enjoyed the decorated table and the food ...
suddenly a song came drifting in.
We all stopped to listen.

LOUISE

It was a chorus of native women and their children. Outside.
Singing my personal birthday song the best they could.
The message came in. Loud and clear.
I lifted my head up with a sudden pride.
[to SCHWEITZER] You looked at me, and nodded. Didn't you?

SCHWEITZER

[*smiling*] It was the best compliment of the day? N'est-ce pas?

LOUISE

[to SCHWEITZER] The smile on your face, and the singing,
they were music in my ears. They told me everything I needed to know.
And then you called for cookies and chocolate, and invited me outside with you.
Just you and I. To pass sweets out, to the hands of the eager children.
Cheers greeted us. I loved it. And the laughter of the excited children.
While everyone else stayed seated, inside.

SCHWEITZER

Africans have an uncanny ability to put feelings right.
It pleases me, Louise, that your birthday had a happy ending.

LOUISE

[to SCHWEITZER] You knew all along, didn't you?

**SCHWEITZER gently touches her face,
smiles, and exits.**

LOUISE

It's important how Dr. Schweitzer feels about me.
It means more, maybe than I'd like to admit.
Lambaréné is only a small corner of the world.
And only a corner of my life.
But I'm thankful to be noticed.
Noticed, wanted, and feel worthwhile....

SCENE 5 – A SLAP AND A C-SECTION

Evening. SCHWEITZER and MARIANNE enter, to stand stage left.

SCHWEITZER

Why all the intrigue, Marianne? dragging me out here.
What's it about?
Did something go wrong on your visit to the village?
I noticed how Louise wouldn't look at us at dinner.

MARIANNE

You were certain to hear, eventually.
And *I* wanted to be the first to tell you.
But we couldn't talk about it in there, with everyone else listening.

SCHWEITZER

Well, we're alone now.

MARIANNE

Your young Louise slapped me.

SCHWEITZER

[*shocked*] I What?
She did?..
Why in the world would Louise do such a thing to you?

MARIANNE

She was playing heroine.

SCHWEITZER

Help me understand.

MARIANNE

Darling, when I come to visit you each year for our two weeks together,
I behave like a missionary of elegance. That's the French woman I am.
We have our happy times. But, seriously, you don't know me....
No, you don't. You might think you do, but you don't.
And you don't see how everyone, the women especially,
cast their jealous stares at us.

SCHWEITZER

Perhaps I don't. I hardly consider female jealousy worth my time.
I don't deny it. Never have.
Or deny that having you here brightens life up immeasurably. It comforts me.

MARIANNE

And you show it. To tell the truth: *you vaunt it*.
Which hardly helps things any.
But I like it. I look forward to it. You make me feel special.
You make me feel I'm a part of the sacrifice you're all making.
And normally I'm as calm as an English ladybird. You know that.
Like, for example, with the lepers in your leper colony we walk to.
With lepers I'm not the least bit afraid. To be around them. Or to touch them.
I'm not fearful at all. Like the Africans are.
There's something in my heart for those people.
And that's the Marianne you see. But there's a Marianne I never let you see.
Which, by the way, isn't all that difficult to do.

SCHWEITZER

A compliment? Or a reproach?

MARIANNE

I lost control of myself today.

SCHWEITZER

Oh?

MARIANNE

We went to the village in the flat-bottomed canoe you loaned us. Your best.
The way you always treat me. And I had a very pleasant visit.
My friend's husband, the French doctor you know,
took Louise to show her around his hospital.
But when I got back, to the landing where the boat was,
there she was.
Sitting in the boat, stark naked.
And I hadn't been told a thing.

SCHWEITZER

What? What do you mean?
Who was naked?

MARIANNE

Some pregnant native girl.
Who needed a C-section, your Dr. Louise told me. *Here*. Not in the village.
So they decided to take her. In *my* canoe. With *me*.

SCHWEITZER

Oh.

MARIANNE

She was in horrible pain. Sweating so bad she had to take off her clothes.
She was sitting on them, in the boat.

SCHWEITZER

Yes?

MARIANNE

They carried her there. Your Louise and a nurse. To my boat.
And made a seat for her.
When I saw her, sitting there like that, I froze in my tracks. Almost fainted.
I sat at the back, and nearly vomited. I could barely glance at the girl.
Thinking it would help me, Louise put a blanket over her shoulders.
But that didn't help at all. Suddenly the girl began to cry out loud.
She closed her eyes, rocked back and forth, and twisted her arms into a knot.
I knew she was about to die. Right there in front of me.
So I did what I had to. I jumped to my feet and yelled at her.
Something like, "C'est bien. C'est bien."
I don't remember exactly what. Something like that.
And touched her, to help quiet her down, on the hair.
But she just crouched down, groaning worse than ever, and trembling.
"Do something, for God's sake." I screamed. "I can't stand it any longer."
I lost control. I started acting crazy. Stamping my foot. It was a madhouse.
The boat began swaying. Some of the men left their oars to get to me.
I guess they thought I was going to capsize the boat.
With crocodiles waiting. But I fought them off.
And that's when your Louise slapped me, behind the ear.

SCHWEITZER

Oh. I see now.

MARIANNE

I'm sure she knew you'd disapprove. Probably get her dismissed. On the spot.
But she had the courage to bring me to my senses.
I get like that sometimes. When things get out of control.
Maybe all women do. I don't know.
But Louise stayed calm and cool; and things quieted down.
I sat down beside the girl; and Louise put her arms around the both of us.
Both of us sobbing.
When we got here they carried the girl into the hospital, and did what they had to.
And she's all right now. I heard her cry out....
When they put a newborn baby in her arms.

SCHWEITZER

Hum.

MARIANNE

You aren't going to dismiss her. Are you? Oh, blessed me! I hope not.

SCHWEITZER

I think I'll think about it.

MARIANNE

She was a hero. Not a villain.

SCHWEITZER

Smiles.

Well, if you say so.

MARIANNE

You fox! You had no intention of doing any such thing, did you?

They exit, laughing.

SCENE 6 – A NEW BABY LOUISE

Right before dinner. The evening bell rings. A picture appears on the SCREEN of Dr. Schweitzer’s hospital – a cluster of approximately seventy small buildings and primitive huts accommodating over a thousand people in a natural, harmonious, native-life setting along the River Ogooué.

LOUISE

Enters to stand, stage right, just as the bell rings.

It’s dinner time. You know the bell. You know the routine.
Which brings to mind how well we’re treated in Lambaréné.
The table must seat up to fifty, across the room. Don’t you think?
Mademoiselle Mathilde making sure it’s always warmly lit, every evening,
by kerosene lamps she has down the middle.
Always tastefully decorated. She’s good at that. And plenty of food.
With Dr. Schweitzer sitting, as he does, at the center of one side.
Nurses, to his left. Doctors to his right. And you guests on the other side.
It’s a wonderful environment. It’s a wholesome environment. It’s inviting.
Everyone eating together. All of us served by friendly African helpers.
It’s African hospitality.

Before I got here I’d read criticisms of the Doctor, and his hospital procedures.
You may have, too.
Journalists accusing him of running an old fashioned, unhygienic hospital.
And I’ll tell you, when I first arrived, I had some doubts of my own.
I didn’t find the expected solid, whitewashed brick walls.
No hard cement floors. No wards with beds in rows in them.
Because that’s the very atmosphere that frightens rural Africans the most.
Bed to bed, African patients feel constantly anxious and defenseless.
Not knowing what the stranger lying next to them might do to them in the night.
Or what sickness might jump across onto them. Do you understand?
It’s the exact opposite of the small huts Dr. Schweitzer has built for them,
to stay in, with their families, while they’re here.
It’s what Dr. Schweitzer knows about Africans.
That lying alone in a room, constantly in fear, impedes the healing process.
It’s to make a sick person feel at ease that Dr. Schweitzer invites the entire family.
They live in the small huts he has built for them.
Good huts. Good homes away from home.
So that in Africa patients can be housed as Africans want to be, and should be.
His Golden Rule.

LOUISE

Walks the length of the stage and returns. Twilight.

Wives. Children. Grandparents. Goats. Dogs. Chickens. Everything.
You can see them sitting by their fires at night, fixing their food ... healing.
In exchange, fit family members give service to the hospital.
Helping with upkeep of the buildings, or in the garden, or the laundry.
It's native to them.

The operating and recovery rooms, on the other hand,
are equipped and run right up to modern standards.
Which leads a doctor like me to wonder:
What are Dr. Schweitzer's astonishing recovery rates due to?
At least, in part, they must be due to the avoidance of stress and anxiety,
which are so present in more "modern" hospitals.
Don't you think so? I do.

Families arrive in canoes loaded with provisions.
In addition, we have our own garden.
Nevertheless, there's always a need for more food.
Which is why Dr. Schweitzer sends Siegfried out each week in the hospital truck,
to buy supplies of bananas, rice, and other crops from nearby villages.
It's considered something of a holiday,
when a staff member is invited along on.
Which I was once. I wish you could have seen it.
We started out early in the morning.
There'd been a downpour the night before;
and driving along the road, Siegfried had to carefully avoid the bigger potholes.
Through the open window I took in the freshness of the wet leaves,
and the smells of the grasses, and underbrush, and flowers. It was delightful.
People were already waiting for us along the road,
with bundles of cooking bananas and sacks of rice they were selling.
There probably was not a single family we met who hadn't had at least one
member treated at the Hospital, at one time or another.
A number of women and children ran up, to the truck, to shake my hand,
and give me presents of fruit or eggs.

It was past noon, and we were on our way back to the Hospital,
when Siegfried was forced to stop the truck.
An old man was standing in the middle of the road. Desperate.
He came up, and asked if there was a doctor. His wife was very ill, he said.
Siegfried said it was okay; and I got out of the truck to follow the man to his hut.

LOUISE

Again walks the length of the stage and returns. Dusk.

The old man's wife was lying on a mat beside a smoldering fire;
but she sat up and smiled when I knelt down beside her.
In addition to a swollen abdomen, she was dangerously emaciated.
Likely in her late fifties. Wrinkled face and dried-up breasts.
Her husband explained, in broken French,
that her stomach had been growing like that for months,
and was giving her terrible pain.
I examined her. And there was no doubt. There *was* a child.
I could feel its head and hear its rapid heartbeats through my stethoscope.
I told them she was expecting, and the child was nearly at term.
The old man became angry, saying it was nothing to make jokes about.
I told him again, and that I was serious.
He said something to his wife; and she covered her face with her hands.
"Can't you see?" he asked me. Then started yelling. "My wife's an old woman.
She's already given birth eleven times. She would know."
Some of the neighbors peeped in, to see what the commotion was.
The two of them were visibly upset.
She might not have been as old as she looked,
but I knew she was headed for a terribly difficult time, in her weakened state.
So I told them she needed to be seen as soon as possible by Dr. Schweitzer.
He would tell them what to do.
And they agreed that her husband would bring her in a few days.
So, I left their hut, found Siegfried; and we came back.
It was a mystery to me, until Dr. Schweitzer explained:
"To Africans, this would be a bad-omen child. A child of witchcraft.
The couple will likely let it die. Maybe we can persuade them to leave it with us."
That made sense to me, seeing as how there's always some abandoned or
orphaned child in the nursery, being looked after by kindhearted African women.

The couple arrived in Lambaréné three days later in their canoe.
Dr. Schweitzer examined her, and told the husband in French,
"Monsieur, there is no doubt. Your wife is going to have a baby.
I know it sounds impossible.
And you may not be prepared for another child at your age.
But to us, this one's special. Consider leaving it here, s'il vous plaît.
We would like to make it a child of the hospital, and keep it safe.
If it's a boy, it shall be named "Albert."
If a girl, "Louise."
You needn't tell anyone. And you can come back any time to adopt it."

LOUISE

A third time walks the length of the stage. Night has fallen.

The old man was speechless. He grasped the Doctor's hand.

A month or so after a successful delivery the couple left in their canoe.

By themselves.

She never produced a drop of milk.

They both would have perished in their village.

Baby Louise has been so much a loved child here.

I try not to favor her, but she's become a favorite of mine.

SCENE 7 – AMAZING GRACE

Night. Dr. Friedman and Dr. Schweitzer are sitting by lamplight in Dr. Schweitzer's bungalow, quietly conversing. LOUISE enters to stand outside the door of the bungalow.

SCHWEITZER

Louise? Is that you out there? Come in.

Dr. Friedman stands as LOUISE enters.

SCHWEITZER

There. Have a seat.
You can sit on my bed, Richard.

They sit, respectively.

SCHWEITZER

[after a brief pause] So, tell me. Louise. What brings you here so late at night?

LOUISE

[hesitantly at first] I don't know where to begin, Doctor Schweitzer, except I should have come to you sooner. I know. Nurse Annette and I tried, all we could, but we've lost... It's that friend of yours, you know. The professor, visiting you.

SCHWEITZER

Yes. We know.

LOUISE

He took on, assisting in the Children's Clinic. You probably know that, too.

SCHWEITZER nods.

LOUISE

At first, he just watched Annette and me.
And then offered his help, which we were glad to accept.
But all he wound up doing was lecturing and criticizing us.... I'm sorry.

SCHWEITZER

You needn't be. There are all kinds, in the practice of medicine. You'll learn.

LOUISE

We're always so busy in there.
And we don't have time to answer questions like that.
Like, how our clinic lacks hygiene, and how we make decisions so quickly.

FRIEDMAN

He's from spacious, bright wards of European hospitals,
where patients are few and overfed.
And physicians have endless hours to mull over their diagnoses.
And use all sorts of stylish equipment to confirm.
Not much help in the tropics. Overcrowded. In tin-roofed barracks.
Children starving. Fighting for their lives.

LOUISE

Oh my God! Dr. Friedman. You *do* understand, don't you?
And you are *so* right.
He seems to have no idea what it's like to have worm-infested children. Anemic.
Sick with malaria.... Why does he come here in the first place?

SCHWEITZER

We all need to learn. And I try to accept everyone, when it's possible.

LOUISE

I admit we do do things. Like injecting fluids right into a child's abdomen,
when there's no time to lose.
Or when I transfused my own blood directly into the veins of a distressed child,
when we couldn't wait for matching blood from a relative. My blood's universal.

FRIEDMAN

[*shocked*] **What?**

SCHWEITZER

Good God, Louise! You must never ... *never* do that again. Do you hear me?
Promise me. *Never*.

LOUISE

I was desperate. And I won't do it again. I promise.
He was anemic. Gasping from the lack of oxygen in his blood.

FRIEDMAN

And?

LOUISE

He lived. And fell right off to sleep, the moment he got fresh blood in him.
Peacefully.

SCHWEITZER

You promise, Louise.
Never again. I absolutely forbid it. Do you understand me?

LOUISE

I know. I promised. And I won't.

FRIEDMAN

Is that why you came tonight?

LOUISE

Two weeks ago Annette came to me, and whispered in my ear, "I need your help." I knew right away what the problem was. Or guessed I knew.

SCHWEITZER

Yes?

LOUISE

The professor was talking with you, and not paying any attention to us. So Annette was able, secretly, to take me into the pharmacy, where there was this beautiful little girl, about four, with intelligent dark eyes and the sweetest smile, sitting on her father's lap. The professor had given her aspirin, only aspirin, for her burning fever. When I put my stethoscope over her lungs, I almost screamed. It was easy to hear the crepitation. She was dying of pneumonia. We immediately gave her penicillin. And I explained to her parents how important it was to keep her cool.

FRIEDMAN

I gather it didn't work.

LOUISE

That's not true. Everything was going fine until the third day, when the professor saw Annette and me giving her a penicillin injection. He was furious, and ordered the treatment stopped. He called us infants. Ignorant. Inexperienced. Over-anxious females. Me, not a true doctor. Not knowing that using antibiotics today can dilute their effectiveness in the future.

SCHWEITZER

What happened?

LOUISE

We let ourselves be bullied by him, and didn't come to you. I suppose we assumed he'd told you; and she *did appear* to be out of danger.

FRIEDMAN

I'm guessing she wasn't. Which is why you're here. Am I correct?

LOUISE

The professor took over her treatment, and wouldn't let us see her.
A few nights later her parents brought her to Annette's door.
They were worried sick.
Annette got me; and we examined her. She was burning hot.
We immediately put her back on antibiotics.
For hours we tried all we could think of, but nothing helped much.
In the morning Annette placed her in an aerosol tent which gave some relief.
But then she started choking. She was choking to death.
Her temperature was so high worms even started creeping out of her.
I rushed to Dr. Müller, and asked him to do a tracheotomy. He was reluctant.
"You don't know what that will do to her parents," he told me. I begged him.
The little girl, I told him, was thrashing her arms about, trying to get air.
And when I went back, her face was seized by a death grimace.
I grabbed her from her mother's arms and rushed her into the operating room.

FRIEDMAN

Where was the professor in all this?

LOUISE

He had no idea what it was he saw happening, and went on his way.
I don't think he ever asked about her again. And now he's back home.

SCHWEITZER

Dr. Müller never told me about any of this.

LOUISE

He had no choice.
By that time her muscles were sucked in by her tremendous efforts to breathe.

SCHWEITZER

[*beat*] Was the operation a success?

LOUISE

The blood flowed when Dr. Müller cut into her throat and opened her windpipe.
When he cut through the rings of the trachea, she took her first few, deep breaths.
And relief immediately showed on her face.
A metal tube was inserted. Her neck bandaged up. She survived.
Annette and I couldn't help it. We cried like babies. We'd fallen in love with her.
We rushed to get her parents. When she saw her mother, her arms stretched out,
and her lips said, "Mama." But there were no sound. No words.
Her father became furious. The metal sticking out of her throat horrified them.
Their revulsion made us feel as though we had violated their daughter.

SCHWEITZER

What Dr. Müller had feared.

LOUISE

We hadn't the words to explain; and the tension kept getting worse and worse. But not with her. She seemed to harbor no ill feelings whatsoever. She seemed to understand what her parents couldn't, and accepted it all. Annette and I arranged a room for her and her parents close to our quarters, where we could watch her better at night. In the day, she'd sit up in bed and play with toys we gave her. She had such a passionate will to live.

SCHWEITZER

I see.

I know.

It's sadly in vain we try to train ourselves not to fall in love with patients like that.

LOUISE

Her parents never left her alone. Her father collected wood every day, and bought food. Her mother made a small fire to cook outside her door. When one was sleeping, the other would stay awake by her side. But they never got used to the artificial windpipe. Can you understand?

SCHWEITZER

You wouldn't be here with that face, if things went differently, would you?

LOUISE

"It's not our girl's head anymore. Take that thing out," her father demanded. Their constant blaming glares at us became nearly unbearable, especially when we knew she wasn't going to make it.

A sob from LOUISE. And silence.

FRIEDMAN

You must be exhausted.

LOUISE

We are. Annette and I both are. For days now we've hardly been able to eat or work as we should. We keep asking ourselves, what should we have done? Should we have spared the girls' parents the ordeal of the tracheotomy?... Do you understand, Dr. Schweitzer? What I mean?

SCHWEITZER

[*slight pause*] Louise, listen to me. You did what you had to do.
It's our sacred responsibility, as physicians,
to do everything we can to relieve suffering and pain, and give life a chance.
When we've done everything we can, it is out of our hands. Believe me.

LOUISE

[*beat*] There's something I have to tell you.
While she was in that bed I saw a profound change take place.
It had been her parents who gave comfort and reassurance before.
But as the end approached, *they* became like children,
while she seemed to reach a spiritual level beyond anything I've ever seen.
Her eyes, wide open, were filled with love and acceptance.
She is the one who gave strength and courage to us all....
Dr. Schweitzer, is that what God is?

SCHWEITZER

Stands for a moment, then sits back down.

God watches. Yes. Sometimes looking through children's eyes.
Sometimes even through an animal's eyes. I have seen.

LOUISE

[*beat*] For a long time after she left us, we just sat there. Frozen.
Suddenly her father threw himself upon her body, sobbing.
He ripped out the hated tube from his daughter's throat,
wrapped her dead body in a blanket and left. They both left.
Back to their remote village, I would think.
Hating us. Forever.

**They sit there, quietly. Finally, LOUISE
stands, and leaves. She walks
downstage, softly singing to herself, and
then comes to a halt, stage right.**

LOUISE

Sings softly to herself.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see.

Stands, stage right.

LOUISE

If I ever was in His presence, I felt it that night....
That was a while back, now. It's hard to get it out of your mind.
I've been telling you a lot. But nothing more important to me than that.

A few months later Dr. Schweitzer called Annette and me over to his table,
in the consultation room, to look at a young boy in serious respiratory distress.
His parents were merchants who peddled their goods up and down the river.
Their son was running a fever. Gasping for air.
I was alarmed. Annette and I both were.
We knew the story. We knew the scenario.
In the end it was Dr. Schweitzer himself who ordered a tracheotomy....
But this time the patient recovered.
When the tube was removed, and he realized he could speak,
the boy jumped up on his bed, threw out his arms, and said,
"Mama! Mama! I'm better. I'm free, again. Mama."

We all were.
And Dr. Schweitzer knew we were.

SCENE 8 – BY DRUMS AND FIRELIGHT

Night. LOUISE enters, stage right, stops to look around, walks stage left, where again she stops to look around, and exits. She reenters stage left, in a village in the African rainforest (just appearing, illuminated by the light of numerous bonfires), some distance from Lambaréné, up the Ogooué River and one of its tributaries. Dull, rhythmic, native drumbeats are heard.

Unexpectedly a clattering noise (of sticks being beaten together) replaces the sound of the drums; and there appears a tall man clad in straw wearing a hideous straw mask covering his head and face. He holds a wand of feathers and bones, which he swishes around his head. The strange figure dances before LOUISE, and finally comes to a stop less than two feet away from her face. The man slowly extends a hand, with something of a snakelike movement. LOUISE reaches her hand out; and the instant their fingers touch, there is an electric discharge like a miniature bolt of lightning. The dancer lets out a piercing cry, as his arm recoils with a violent jerk. LOUISE begins retreating backward. GUSTAVE stands watching at a distance as the stage goes dark.

Light returns (still nighttime), LOUISE reenters, stage left, and stands, staring back in the direction of the native village. Native drumbeats can be heard again. SCHWEITZER approaches her out of the shadows, startling her.

SCHWEITZER

Have you had an interesting evening, Louise?

LOUISE

Oh my God! You startled me. Where did you come from?

SCHWEITZER

Up, in my house. Reading.

LOUISE

Do you know what time it is?

SCHWEITZER

My Dear, do *you* know what time it is?

LOUISE

Late. I know.

SCHWEITZER

Maybe a little too late?

LOUISE

I went on a

SCHWEITZER

A little adventure, I'd guess.

LOUISE

Don't you ever sleep?

You can't burn a candle at both ends, you know.

SCHWEITZER

You can if it's long enough.

But it's not me I'm worried about. It's *you*.

LOUISE

An interesting evening, yes; but not enjoyable.

SCHWEITZER

Oh?

LOUISE

Gustave was the one who told me, I suppose you know.

That a famous medicine man was coming to an upriver village.

And he drew me a map.

Everyone's been talking about it for days.

The Africans, I mean. How there was going to be this great feast.

And ... well, we had to go.

SCHWEITZER

We have rules here, you know?

Against foolish ventures like that.

Particularly at night.

You could have been killed.

LOUISE

He said it would be okay, there, in the village.

Safe enough. People singing, and dancing, and eating.

With their children there with them.

SCHWEITZER

Going and coming are less than safe. But I suspect you've learned that.

LOUISE

I went with Eric. By boat.
Eric.
The carpenter.
He made his own canoe.
I guess you know.

SCHWEITZER

A tiny one, I'd say.

LOUISE

We had paddles, for balance.

SCHWEITZER

In the river? At night?

LOUISE

The going was all right.
We had the drumbeats to guide us.
It was coming back that was tricky.

SCHWEITZER

I imagine.

LOUISE

On the river ... I know I shouldn't be telling you this.

SCHWEITZER

It's over now.
And I'm not going to punish you....
This time.

LOUISE

There was a herd of hippos. In the river. Grunting, snorting and splashing.
Our canoe was drifting at them, and nothing we could do about it.
We just continued down the river, passing right through them,
hardly daring to use our paddles.
One bump. One bite. And we'd be dead.
I was so afraid, Dr. Schweitzer, I almost dropped my paddle in the river.
My hands were shaking like leaves in a storm.

SCHWEITZER

Are you ever going to do anything like that again?

LOUISE

Never. I promise.

SCHWEITZER

Good....

Anything unusual happen to you in the village?

LOUISE

No, not really.

I saw the famous medicine man.

And wild dancing.

And lots of children, running around.

SCHWEITZER

It's best for us to leave children be, out there like that.

Lest a child should fall, or feel a sudden fright, and cry out.

Because you'd be suspected immediately of witchcraft.

And might not be able to extricate yourself, alive.

Good night.

**SCHWEITZER walks back to his house,
while LOUISE just stands and watches
him.**

SCENE 9 – TIME, COMPASSION, AND THE POOREST OF THE POOR

Late afternoon. Consultation room. A simple wooden table (six to eight feet long) and two wooden chairs in the space, stage left, between Dr. Schweitzer’s bungalow and where the native village of Scene 8 was. Initially one of the chairs is placed at the table, facing the audience, while the other is placed upstage from it.

LOUISE enters and sits at the table. GUSTAVE enters, and stands at her side.

LOUISE

Turns to GUSTAVE.

It was a frightening experience, Gustave, in your village, in the feast.

GUSTAVE

I should never have told you how to get there.

LOUISE

I looked at you, dancing. I thought for certain it was you.
But you never came over, or said a thing to Eric or me.

GUSTAVE

I did. I whispered to you to leave. Remember? It was time for you to leave.

LOUISE

So that *was* you. I couldn’t tell, in the darkness.

GUSTAVE

Yes. It was.

LOUISE

You men were so agitated. Dancing. I never dreamed you could be like that.
Your head lifted up so high. Your face grimaced. Eyes staring into space.
Half naked. A wild man compared to the quiet orderly we see today.
Was it really you?... That strange, almost fearsome thing?

GUSTAVE

[*laughs*] Yes. It was.

LOUISE

How little we really know of your world. Of this world at all.
You adapt to our ways in the hospital. Polite. And we’d never guess.
Not a trace of the emotion. We’d never guess a thing.

GUSTAVE

Just a moment.

GUSTAVE walks upstage and returns, smiling.

LOUISE

You love the Doctor, don't you?

GUSTAVE

He needed a drink, was all.

LOUISE

And you need a seat, standing the way you do all the time.

LOUISE stands, fetches the chair upstage, and brings it back next to hers at the table.

LOUISE

Here. Sit. You look like a little worn out. It's been a hectic afternoon.

GUSTAVE shows surprise, considers the offer for a few moments, but given that he is indeed tired, he drops into the chair with a sigh. LOUISE smiles.

LOUISE

There.

They sit for a few moments. Then, from offstage:

VOICE of MADEMOISELLE MATHILDE (offstage)

Why is Gustave sitting? He can stand, I would think.

GUSTAVE stands. LOUISE stands.

LOUISE

And so can I, Mademoiselle Mathilde!

[*beat; and then to GUSTAVE*] Just sit, Gustave. You deserve it.

Slight pause. Then GUSTAVE slowly sits back down, after which so does LOUISE.

LOUISE

There.

GUSTAVE

Thank you.

LOUISE

[*beat*] How is it, Gustave, you have worked at this hospital so many years, and have not been promoted?

GUSTAVE

Are you not satisfied with my work?

LOUISE

Oh! To the contrary. I couldn't possibly do what I do without your help. Interpreting for me. You know all the local tongues. Or most of them. And the diseases. And the tribal beliefs, and customs, and superstitions. You know what I need to find out. And so quickly. And so easily. You help the anxious mothers and fathers understand what I need to do. You, and your never-ending patience. You make my job so much easier. Not feeling like an outsider. I could never ask for more.... I was just curious.

GUSTAVE

I never had time to finish school. And, besides, Dr. Schweitzer needs me in here.

LOUISE

Oh.

GUSTAVE

I'm not saying what I meant, properly. It doesn't matter what position I have, so long as I can work with him. I am happy with the work I do.

LOUISE

Oh.

GUSTAVE

When we were young boys, we used to get together around the fire,
and tell each other all the new things we'd learned that day.
One of the most important things Dr. Schweitzer taught me was time.
In our daily life the only thing close we have to time is getting up in the morning,
and going to sleep with the darkness.
And when we get married, how many moons to count till a baby is born.
We know how far we can paddle in a day.
And how long a hippo stays on the bottom of a river before coming up for air.
But to us, days come in an endless line; and before we know it, life is over.
Dr. Schweitzer gave me the treasure of how to keep track of time.
And where work fits in. Every day is divided into twenty-four hours.
And finishing something inside a set time limit is accomplishing something.
As long as I live I shall be thankful to Dr. Schweitzer for time.

LOUISE

[*pensively*] So many things to be thankful for with him.

GUSTAVE

I used to not like the time Dr. Schweitzer spent, looking out, over the river.
I used to fear that the spirits of the water would steal him away to another place.
I'd hide behind a bush and watch him.
And then I'd make up a story, and run to him, out of breath,
to get him back up at the hospital.
[*pause*] Compassion is another thing the Doctor taught me.

LOUISE

Yes. Perhaps compassion is the special key to Dr. Schweitzer's healing powers.

GUSTAVE

To African men, "compassion" is a word of weakness. A woman's word.
We warned him: No African respects a doctor who has a weakness like that.

LOUISE

I disagree.

GUSTAVE

You see, in our way of life you help kinspeople, and your tribe.
If you help anyone else, you might be helping an enemy.
Dr. Schweitzer could care for all of us because he didn't belong to a tribe.
We had many a dispute with him over that,
and finally learned how to work out among ourselves, who would help whom.
So as not to violate tribal law.

LOUISE

Ah! Africa!

GUSTAVE

We'd ask ourselves, why?
Why did he want to help *all* sick people?
Did he enjoy the thrill of overpowering evil spirits of sickness and death?
But no.
When we saw him worry when a patient was slow to recover,
and his sadness when one died,
we knew he didn't consider himself all that powerful.
It had to be something else.
But try as I might, I could never get him to explain the "compassion" he had.
And the name of Jesus was no help to me, either.
Then, one evening, it came to me. You might say, like in a dream.

LOUISE

What happened?

GUSTAVE

Closes his eyes.

One evening I was walking past the hospital, on my way home, and saw a lamp.
I went in, to see if anything was wrong,
but stopped quickly when I saw it was the Doctor.
Through the open door I saw him bending over a man,
helping him drink water.
The man had the sleeping sickness, and was in the last stages.
He was hopeless. Too weak to even lift his head.
I'd warned Dr. Schweitzer to leave the man alone.
A medicine man who continues to treat a dying person loses his powers.
We all know that.
I started to turn away just as Dr. Schweitzer lifted his head,
looking up, into the darkness.
And then I saw it: There he was. The light of the lamp shone upon his face.
And there was something that suddenly hit my heart.
Something in his sorrowful look.
And the word "compassion" spoke in my mind.
And, at last, I knew.
I knew I would never be the same again.

**GUSTAVE covers his face with his hands
for a moment.**

GUSTAVE

After that I longed to be with Dr. Schweitzer, to learn about compassion.
And about God.
And about Jesus, who seemed to be the Doctor's personal friend.
The importance of Jesus, the Doctor taught us, is not in rituals,
but in the way Jesus lived. In his love and compassion for us. For the poor.

LOUISE

[*pensively*] For the poor.

GUSTAVE

But look at me talk. I'm not poor.
I may not have enough for fancy clothes and jewelry,
but I'm well fed. And safe.
And I have all the medical care I could ever ask for.

LOUISE

True.

GUSTAVE

Far from being one of the poorest of the poor.

LOUISE

Who are they?

GUSTAVE

Let me tell you a story. About Leo, whom you know.
The tall man with the stern face, who organizes the servers in the dining room.
Some time ago he got into a terrible argument, involving his wife and her family,
about how much he'd have to pay them, if the child she was carrying was a girl.

LOUISE

I know who you mean. But isn't that set by tribal custom?

GUSTAVE

Her brother was demanding far too much, and it enraged Leo.
He drove the brother out of their hut, and then beat his wife.
He beat her so bad she lost the baby. And her brother cursed him.
It haunted him. He was convinced he would be poisoned by his wife's family,
or killed by ancestral spirits as punishment for his crime.
He would kneel on the floor, at night, praying for forgiveness and for protection.
He couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat.
He heard voices.

GUSTAVE

When we told Dr. Schweitzer about it, he spoke to Leo.
But Leo continued failing. He spent hours arguing with invisible spirits.
And losing weight. And screaming at night.
Finally, frothing at the mouth, he started ranting and raving.

Mimics an insane person's ranting.

Leo didn't recognize anyone, not even his wife.
And everyone was convinced that Leo had been driven insane.
He had become what Dr. Schweitzer calls the "poorest of the poor."
When Dr. Schweitzer was told that Leo was probably not going to make it,
he went to see Leo again himself.
This time he said to him in a stern voice,
"Leo, it's enough. You have shown your sorrow.
You have gone to the limits of what a man can endure.
Your wife, and your family, and your friends here are suffering with you.
There's nobody who wishes you any further harm.
Come back, or you will die. And if you die, more suffering will follow you.
To atone for your mistake, I tell you: You have to live.
Show everyone your manliness and your courage.
Live."
There was deep silence. Leo's eyes blinked. The spell was broken.
Leo recovered. Not right away.
First he had to get some good sleep.
Then some good food.
Then he started speaking again.
And finally he took care of his wife who'd faithfully stayed near him through it all.
It was a great day when Leo appeared again at his job in the dining room.

LOUISE

It must have been.

SCENE 10 – LOVE LETTERS AND MEMORIES

Late into the night. SCHWEITZER is sitting at his desk in the lamplight, bent over his books, reading and writing. He sits up, and looks toward HÉLÈNE. On an elevated platform upstage, stage right, HÉLÈNE BRESSLAU (middle 40's – in Schweitzer's memory) sits at a table with a lit lamp of her own, and a stack of letters she is looking through (occasionally holding one or another up, to make a point).

Their communication is by way of Schweitzer's mind and memory.

BRESSLAU

Do you want to talk, Bery? How are you feeling tonight?

SCHWEITZER

Wistful, I guess....

I ask myself, Lene, if I could have gotten here without you.

I think so. But not the same man.

BRESSLAU

You forget much, my friend. Me, too.

The feelings, less so. It's the details that fade, over time.

Fortunately, I have our letters.

SCHWEITZER

Letters? Letters from when?

BRESSLAU

From March the second, 1901, right up to before our marriage, in 1912.

I had sent you a book; and you thanked me for it.

SCHWEITZER

I don't remember that. But I'm sure I asked you to destroy them.

Personal letters are far too unpolished, to be left floating around.

BRESSLAU

They're part of our legacy that I've guarded.

SCHWEITZER

Ugh!

BRESSLAU

Our Cycling Club was a legacy, too. Do you remember it?

SCHWEITZER

Of course I do. The freedom it gave us, to talk, and ride, and explore together?

BRESSLAU

And that day along the Rhine?

SCHWEITZER

The day we walked our bicycles from the dam, you and I?
And I told you of my infirmity? And we made our pact of friendship?...
How could I forget? It was a day that changed my life.

BRESSLAU

Mine, too. Saturday, March 22, 1902.

SCHWEITZER

It was a day I celebrated for years to come....
You know? There's a bond that confession creates.
You became my guardian angel. I knew I could trust you with anything.
And I told you what I wanted to do with my life. The simplicity of it.

BRESSLAU

I believed in you, too. And what you wanted. And I welcomed it.
It was the same thing I wanted for my life: To serve humanity.
To be a nurse to the soul, even more than to the body.
You just put it into words better.
And ... something else: I longed to lose myself in your genius.
Is that so un-feminine? To love a man, like that?
Sharing your awful secret brought me closer to you.
But it burned my heart as well. Thinking we could never be lovers.
I imagined how Mary Magdalene must have felt, asking Jesus:
Would God put this boundless desire in my heart, simply to deny its fulfillment?

SCHWEITZER

I'm certain I told you to find another man, and have a family life with him.

BRESSLAU

But I didn't love another man, did I? I loved you....
When you love someone like that, it's the same as knowing you're a chosen one.
There's nothing really you can do. The heart demands what the heart demands.

SCHWEITZER

One day I knew I'd have to hear this: The path you were led down. Your sacrifice.
Not reproachfully, I hoped. But gently like this. Without bitterness.

BRESSLAU

But I *never* ... did I?
We followed our dream, together. The continent. The people.
The spirit in me stayed strong. The body, weakened.
The bitterness was not in coming here. It's what happened after.

SCHWEITZER

It's me. I know it. I lose myself in my thoughts, and I can't help it.
Before you, the only person I could talk to and trust was my aunt Mathilde.
I was so happy when I was with her.
We could sit and talk together for hours, our chairs pulled up to the fire.
When she died, it was my greatest loss on earth.
And then you. You became the one.
I could talk to you, at any hour, in my mind. Write you my innermost thoughts.
I'm strong, but only with strength behind me. You, and God were my strength.

BRESSLAU

But why me? If you had a phobia of physical intimacy, why seek me out to tell?

SCHWEITZER

Because I trusted you.

BRESSLAU

But why *me*?

SCHWEITZER

I I knew how much you loved me.

BRESSLAU

Oh.... And you did the same thing with me.
You sat, in your mind, imagining I was with you. Like now. Talking for hours.
You'd rather be with me in your mind, than face-to-face.

SCHWEITZER

[*staring at her*] Did I said that?

BRESSLAU

Finding a letter:

You were reminiscing about a late December evening, in Paris, in 1898,
when your aunt Mathilde showed up at your door.
She sat in your armchair, in front of the fireplace, and she comforted you.
"Be strong and noble," she said. And you discovered new meaning in your life.
And you wrote me: It's strange I have so little desire to speak with you in person.

SCHWEITZER

Then, talk to me, Lene. Be part of me tonight. In my imagination.
Tell me: Where did things go wrong? When we did so much that was right.
Why did you fall in love with me in the first place? Let's start there.

BRESSLAU

I fell in love with your manner. Your idealism. Your height.
Your unmanageable hair. Your uncommon sensitivity. Your whole face, smiling.
I fell in love with the strength and conviction you radiate.
Bery, you are one of the greatest men in the world.
And I cannot believe how flawed you are.
Men and women fall in love differently. A man has it so much easier.
He chooses a profession; and his profession gives his life definition and direction.
A woman has to account for the meaning of her life differently.

SCHWEITZER

That's why women are the more noble souls. Their self-sacrifice.
Their love for a man is what draws him to her. It ennobles him.

BRESSLAU

And in return, a woman needs to feel loved. And valued. Over everything else.

SCHWEITZER

I guess I never told you just how much your love gave me strength and freedom.

BRESSLAU

I don't think you have any concept how that sounds, to a wife.

SCHWEITZER

What more does a wife want, than to ennoble her husband?

BRESSLAU

I wanted something more of togetherness. I wanted more to *feel* your love for me.
You wrote me how much you needed my love. I wanted you to show me yours.

SCHWEITZER

It was there.

BRESSLAU

Then what happened to it? What changed it? Getting married?

SCHWEITZER

I admit: I *was* terrified. Nauseous even. Thinking of our bodies close together.

BRESSLAU

That was you, not me. I told you, your sex was safe with me.
I wasn't going to jump you, even if I wanted to.

SCHWEITZER

But it didn't stop you, did it?
That hard cold night that was the starkest chill of my life.

BRESSLAU

What are you talking about? Saint-Rémy? That was five years later. In the winter.
The world was turning upside down. Don't blame that on me.

SCHWEITZER

Oh God yes. No blame. The sadness being French prisoners of war.
The despair being out of Africa. The cold.
Everything we'd sacrificed everything for, stolen from us. Our home. Our health.
I had no work. No writing. No patients. No energy. Nowhere to go.
Nothing to live for. *I* was the one who broke. Not you. I was the crazed one.
No, it wasn't your fault at all what happened. It was *me*. *My mind* spinning.
You were so emaciated and exhausted, I thought you were dying. Because of me.
And I'd denied it. And denied it. And still denied it. Denying you. Because of me.
And a beast in me conquered me. Guilt and desire. I threw myself on the cross.
Ears ringing. Relentlessly. Head splitting. Choking. Barely breathing.
I felt my father on my back. Beating me. Naked. For what I'd seen and done.
Beating me with a cross. Trying to get away from him.
That any Christian man can deceive himself, believing he'll be spared the thorns.

**BRESSLAU stands, to start undressing.
SCHWEITZER, at first, fails to notice.**

SCHWEITZER

I owed you everything. I owed you anything I had left.

**SCHWEITZER notices his wife
undressing, and covers his face.**

SCHWEITZER

Good God! Lene. Get yourself dressed.
Please. For God's sake. I can't bear it.

BRESSLAU

Redressing and sitting back down.
It's okay, Bery. Everything's okay. You can look now.

SCHWEITZER

It was my fault. *I* was the guilty one.
Can you understand, and forgive me?

BRESSLAU

Oh, I forgive you, if that's what you need. But I never saw it that way.
I never imagined making love could kill something so good inside a person.

SCHWEITZER

It brought my father back. To haunt me. Beating me for what I'd done.

BRESSLAU

But you got over it, and back to Africa, after the War.
Our debts got paid. Your fear and depression left you.
And you came back here. Leaving me in Europe.

SCHWEITZER

Nearly forty years the guilt and shame of that has been stuck inside me.
Even though you did get back ... some.

BRESSLAU

My God! What a pity! You, the greatest man in the world. And so terribly flawed.
I wish I could have understood the real you better. When it mattered.
I wish I could have understood better the meaning behind your call to Africa.

SCHWEITZER

Africa is my land of safety. My land of freedom. I've been safest, mostly alone.

BRESSLAU

Your calling was a need to be mostly by yourself?

SCHWEITZER

Essentially.... I could never have accomplished what I did in Europe.
Africa was my duty. Africa was my solitude, knowing I had lived up to my duty.
Africa is the land where a man like me can be free to discover himself.
To let his life be his argument. It was my path.

BRESSLAU

Your path was my path. To serve mankind, far from European wealth.
For you, the partnership gave way to the cause. For me, it never did.
Not to my last day here. Like my love for you. It never died.

Pause. BRESSLAU picks up a letter.

BRESSLAU

I might have tried saying farewell. But you wouldn't remember it.
In December, 1903, just before I entered nurses' training at Stettin.
You were ever the arrogant and humble one, Dr. Schweitzer, weren't you?
I was, too, I guess. I wanted to be a nurse *to the soul*. I wanted wings.
And I wanted your music, close to me. Even then....
Play something for me, Bery. Please? You have no idea how I long for it.

SCHWEITZER goes to his organ-like piano, sits, and plays a Bach prelude. Then he returns to sit at his desk.

SCHWEITZER

Bach.... There's true immortality. I get as close to God as I can, when I play Bach.
Oh! If I could dare dream something of mine might become something like that.

BRESSLAU

I'm a little disappointed. You make it sound like we came here for immortality.

SCHWEITZER

[*beat*] When I think back, I think about Paris, with Aunt Mathilde,
sitting by the fireplace at Christmas time, throwing pine branches in.
Talking about the true meaning of life.

BRESSLAU

You never think of me that way?

SCHWEITZER

I thank God for you, when I think of you.

BRESSLAU

The point is, that you never think of me by a fire, loving and comforting you.

SCHWEITZER

My feelings for you surpass love and comfort.

BRESSLAU

How strange you are. How strange *I am*, not seeing it.
[*beat*] What was it, anyway, about Africa that possessed you?

SCHWEITZER

How whites had plundered the blacks of this land.
How I believed no responsible Christian could remain a calm observer.

BRESSLAU

I know you must have thought about it, didn't you? It could have meant your life.

SCHWEITZER

We had a duty. *I did*, at least. To the Africans. And to Jesus, himself.
I wanted to be a part of his fellowship who bear the mark of pain for goodness.

BRESSLAU

Jesus was a Jew, like I was once. Why not stay and help the Jews in Germany?

SCHWEITZER

I was never a politician. Nor a statesman. Nor a good policeman.
It was not the Jews my heart called me to serve.

BRESSLAU

No. Of course not.
What you wanted was a place that would venerate your superior intelligence.

SCHWEITZER

Once I believed in the innate goodness of my fellow man. But not anymore.
Once I had unbounded zeal for life, and discovering life's meaning.
Now I sadly find myself in decline.

BRESSLAU

Once I was young, and healthy, and full of energy, too. And I believed it,
when you said one day our paths would be one. I believed in that.

SCHWEITZER

Lene, I'm tired, now. Let's not talk about this anymore tonight.

BRESSLAU

You become weary when you have to face uncomfortable truths.

SCHWEITZER

The truth is that your health became problematic. Your back. The pain.
The tuberculosis. The need for rest. Losing tolerance for the heat here as you did.
It wasn't right how much of yourself you were losing to this place and the people.

BRESSLAU

It was *my choice*. *My life*. *My home*. *My dream*. *My purpose* in life.
I may have been frail at times; but you at my side, my will stayed strong.
I helped start this hospital; and I wanted to end my days here, with you.
And I certainly didn't want your pity doing it.

SCHWEITZER

I never pitied you. Not once. Don't accuse me of *that*.

BRESSLAU

What we did was one of the most humanitarian sacrifices ever made.
Thousands of lives saved. Tens of thousands more, made better.
But the way you talk, it sounds like you did it for your immortality.
And a debt you felt you owed Jesus.

SCHWEITZER

I did what I did because of necessity. Nothing more to say. I did what I could.

BRESSLAU

Why did I have to love you so much, Bery, if only to suffer and sorrow from it?
You tried my patience. I nearly died from homesickness away from you.
But your words gave me hope and courage.
Before we came, I can remember how much I longed to begin our work in Africa.
We embarked upon a quest, Sir. And it's all right to be a woman on a quest.
Even in partnership with a self-driven man like you, if he's a good man, like you.
I used to hurt just seeing how tired you were, driving yourself the way you did.
Sometimes I found myself wanting to scream at you.

SCHWEITZER

There was a time you used to fret about getting old. Remember?

BRESSLAU

And now look at you! In your eighties!

SCHWEITZER

I told you: We would run, and never tire.

BRESSLAU

What would I do without you? my Great One?
I can't think of myself without thinking of you.
But that's not the case with you, is it, my friend?

SCHWEITZER

Why do you say?

BRESSLAU

How could you have written the thousands and thousands of pages you did, and barely mention my name? Hélène Bresslau. Maybe three or four times in all?

SCHWEITZER

You're right. I neglected thinking of giving you the credit you deserved. I admit it.

BRESSLAU

Your mind never let it go, did it? What the fear of marrying me did? Such a pity.

SCHWEITZER

What a pity, indeed.

BRESSLAU leafs through more of the letters.

BRESSLAU

You once wrote:

“My beloved, my great friend, thank you for everything you are for me.
You are the most precious thing I have in the world.
You rose in my life like the moon. A peace that only you can give me.
A peace, that when we part, there is no longing or sadness in me,
because in spirit I am always with you....”
Bery? Did you *ever* miss me?

Pause.

I guess not....

Looking back, I guess in your mind we were just a pair of noble friends.

Pause.

What do you believe in?

Not that commanding will of yours.

Not that dominating mind.

But in your heart. What do you, deep down, believe in?

SCHWEITZER

That I am good.

That I am a glass empty, calling to be filled.

That I am a man dedicated to Jesus's unfinished work.

BRESSLAU

Why would you dedicate your life to a man you say never existed?

SCHWEITZER

Jesus existed. I never said he didn't.

Just not the fabled man so badly misrepresented in Bible.

BRESSLAU

It's what the people wanted, isn't it?

SCHWEITZER

What people?

BRESSLAU

Not everybody's clever as you. Not everybody sees things like a Schweitzer can. People wanted a God they could touch. Blood they could see. That kind of Jesus.

SCHWEITZER

That's nonsense. A person has to be himself, no matter what other people want.

BRESSLAU

There's not a metaphor of us in all you say. Be yourself, you said, and follow me. And you? You were more interested treating injured natives than an injured wife. It wasn't you I married, was it? I married words and a dream.

SCHWEITZER

We made a promise, you and I, ten years before we got married. It's that promise you married.

BRESSLAU

A promise to seek a life of reverence for life, and giving back. Together. Together. Reverence for all life. Except mine. **Except mine. Do you hear that? Where's your wife in your reverence for life? Where is the love?**

SCHWEITZER

Not so loud. Hush, Woman.

BRESSLAU

That's what you always do. You cut me off. But not this time. I'm your wife. God created us to be together. You've lost sight of that. That we don't serve Jesus alone. We do it together. We share the pain. We share the glory.

SCHWEITZER

Enough. Please.

BRESSLAU

No man is complete on his own. Because God made man and woman to be one.

SCHWEITZER

Woman! Please stop.

BRESSLAU

**With you, how can a person get anywhere?
You turn your back, and a dozen others coil about you. Like snakes.
I'm your wife. And you belonged more to everyone else than to me.**

SCHWEITZER

God bless you, Wife. Need I go on, listening?
I am truly, truly sorry for what I did.

BRESSLAU

Bery. Bery. I love you. Do you not understand that?
It's my love you're taking into immortality.

SCHWEITZER

[*beat*] Come. Sit down here, with me.
I care so much for you. I always have....
Here. Pretend there's a fire.
Give me your hand.
I'm thinking of the wooden bridge, and the swirls of the river below, rushing by,
when I first dared tell you my secret, and the dream of the life I was planning.
I'm thinking of, treasuring those first sacred moments of our friendship.
And I'm thinking of our coming here, to Africa together.
What we saw and learned together.
We did love it, didn't we? Almost at first sight.
I thank you with all my heart for all you gave me.

BRESSLAU

Forgive me, Bery.
Forgive your friend who hasn't a single thought left in her head.

SCENE 11 – AUF WIEDERSEHEN

In the morning. SCHWEITZER is sitting at his table, reading.

LOUISE

Enters to stand, stage right.

Lambaréné: My home for a year. But I'm needed elsewhere now....
I'm no Nobel Prize winner. Never will be.
I merely carry part of one with me. Next to my heart. My inspiration.
With all deliberate speed, Dr. Schweitzer has changed my life.

Lambaréné is Dr. Schweitzer's home, nearly forty years now.
And who knows how many more?
His wife, Hélène, was able to share little more than ten years with him here.
It was her one great disappointment in life,
that health lapses prevented her from devoting more time alongside her husband.
Bouts with tuberculosis.
Lingering back problems.
Growing intolerance for tropical heat.
Chronic fatigue.
Depression.

After Dr. Schweitzer's return to Lambaréné in the 1920's, Hélène fluctuated
between illness and health, stillness and movement, sadness and purpose.
Her one lengthy stay, after the beginning, was during World War Two.
It provided a last opportunity for her to work actively in the Hospital.
Her final visit began in January, 1956.
By May of 1957, short of breath, blue-lipped, and almost too weak to walk,
Hélène flew to Paris, accompanied by a devoted Dutch nurse.
It was the last she would see Lambaréné, or her husband.
What homesickness!
So close to the end of her days.
She was beyond recovery.
She died little more than a week later, in a hospital in Zurich.
Dr. Schweitzer wrote to one of his closest friends:
"My wife passed away, peacefully, in Zurich.
For the past three months her strength was waning visibly.
And in Zurich her heart, which was already not functioning correctly, failed.
She told me she could no longer stand the heat."

**LOUISE sits down on the stage, and
takes a handful of dirt.**

LOUISE

What is life about, if not love?
Sometimes I think I know. Sometimes I don't.
Is it immortality? What we give a man like Albert Schweitzer?
Or what goodness he leaves of himself with us?
When the two of them arrived in the spring of 1913,
no one could have imagined what would come of it.
They did it out of faith, and love, and a sense of atonement.
They did it to pay a duty they felt owing,
for the blessings life had granted them.

The man was the world's leading expert on Johann Sebastian Bach and his music.
Renowned as a concert organist.

An authority on the construction of church organs.
He was front and center in the search for the historical truths behind the Bible.
A theologian, a lecturer, a pastor, and published philosopher.
Known everywhere in the academic world for his writings,
especially for the Quest of the Historical Jesus.

A man who trained six years just to become a jungle doctor to go to the bush.
To serve people whose language and ways he knew nothing about.
To face malaria, sleeping sickness, leprosy, and scores of other diseases.
Not to mention the enervating Equatorial sun.
How little we know what's behind the faces of the people we meet.
Behind the masks.

Like, how little I knew about Gustave and *his* private life.
Dr. Schweitzer told us once at dinner that big cities make poor people invisible.
That he could never have accomplished what he did had he not left Europe.
I've seen that personally.

I have a friend who insists that Jesus had to suffer the cross,
because he had led too untroubled a life before his crucifixion.
That he had to join the Fellowship of those who bear the Mark of Pain.
The way he did.

Like Dr. Schweitzer did. Like Hélène did.
Like everyone who feels the strong feet following us, with all deliberate speed.

Hélène was her husband's nurse, his jungle anesthesiologist, his linguist.
She was the one primarily responsible for feeding the seriously ill.
She was her husband's guardian angel.
I was told she used to say toward the end:
"It makes me feel so foolish, this being so helpless.
I ought to be working with the Doctor."

LOUISE

When Dr. Schweitzer returned after World War One,
he found everything they'd built in ruins. Destroyed by termites and looters.
He started again, at a fresh place, with grander designs and a dock on the river.
He was architect and builder, with the sole help of 19-year-old Noel Gillespie,
a student from Oxford who joined the Doctor for the first few months.
Gillespie wrote that the great man was very silent,
and commanded not to be spoken to unless necessary,
as he is too tired even to think when it's not necessary.
The Doctor's not that bad anymore.

Stands and lets the dirt drop to the stage.

And so, here we are. I'm about to leave. Again.
He knows it. My replacement has arrived.

For years, they tell me, the Doctor was plagued by too much mail.
This last year he decided to distribute part of the burden onto our shoulders.
A challenge I thoroughly welcomed.
Sending off stories of our life here, to admirers far away. It's great fun.
And, it's given me more frequent opportunities to talk to the Doctor in person.

**SCHWEITZER leaves his room to walk
down to LOUISE, carrying a small
bundle wrapped in old cloth.**

SCHWEITZER

Have you thought much about the tropical forest along the Ogooué?

LOUISE

[*surprised*] I beg your pardon.

SCHWEITZER

In our younger days Hélène and I ... I've been thinking so much about her lately.
Anyway, in our younger days, when my wife and I traveled up and down the river,
I would sit for hours, looking at the tropical forest on either side.
The lush vegetation, battling, one against the other, for its share of life.
And it would oppress me, to see how plants and trees choke one another,
to reach the sun. Why should I care? I'd ask myself.
Some trees will survive; some will rot as underbrush.
That's nature's way. Some might say it's a cruel way.
But to me nature is merely indifferent. Which is what *I* refuse to be.
I refuse to be indifferent. Do you understand what I mean?

LOUISE

But it *is* the way nature is. Isn't it?

SCHWEITZER

All living things want to survive. Does that give us the right to be indifferent?

LOUISE

We're not meant to do anything about that, are we?

SCHWEITZER

Even animals will sometimes give up their lives to protect the lives of their young.

LOUISE

Oh. You mean, "Reverence for Life."

SCHWEITZER

Reverence for life. Reverence for the will to live.
Because the will to live is an integral part of the force that preserves life on Earth.

LOUISE

Some life is meant to live. And some, to die. Is how *I* look at it. If I could, I would rid the world of leprosy, and sleeping sickness, and so many other diseases. And mosquitoes. And ticks. And termites, as well. Without compunction.

SCHWEITZER

Who's to choose?

LOUISE

God, I suppose you're thinking. But God gave *us* brains.

SCHWEITZER

Ah, yes. A distinctly human way of thinking.

LOUISE

And we are meant to do *some* of the looking after the Earth He created.

SCHWEITZER

As I look at it, to become truly, ethical beings, on a higher plane of existence, we owe nature, *and ourselves*, a protest against arbitrariness. It only needs to start with a profound conviction to keep life alive, spiders, snakes, worms, dogs, songbirds, and hospital patients. Add gratitude for all life gives. From that personal ethics will grow, automatically. Even if modifications have to be made, for compassionate justice. *Provided* we remain guided by an imperative to preserve life whenever possible.

LOUISE

It must be easy for you to see how you're talking to this young bush doctor, who's way out of her depth, philosophically.

SCHWEITZER

You don't agree?

LOUISE

You said:

The will to live is an integral part of the force that preserves life on Earth. I couldn't agree more.

SCHWEITZER

Then?

LOUISE

Life on Earth is approaching a disastrous turn in the road. People are seeing science get far too complicated, and out of control for them. More powerful and impersonal every year. So much so we're becoming a danger to ourselves, and to the environment, and to all the rest of life. Don't you agree?

SCHWEITZER

I do. I must. The mind of civilized man seems to be in spiritual decay.

LOUISE

And it's only going to get worse, until we do a few, thoughtful things.

SCHWEITZER

Such as?

LOUISE

Intelligently, justly, and compassionately limit population growth, or the planet's going to die, hungry, of human appetite without mercy.... Scale down to a simpler life, or we'll see the planet burn up.... And balance rights of man and nature toward the greater good. Harmoniously. Because it's survival of life on Earth, not indiscriminate reverence for life, that's the prize.... I'm sorry, Doctor, but that's the way I feel. I wholly believe there should be no wanton killing; but respect for life without reflecting on the quality of life.... It becomes no reverence for life at all.

SCHWEITZER

[*thoughtful pause*] Don't you have a letter today you want to discuss with me?

LOUISE

Actually, I do. It's from a woman in Sweden, who's asking:
Do you have any secret how to deal with pain that won't go away?

SCHWEITZER

Actually, I do. It takes the courage of two people.
The courage of the sufferer and the courage of the one supporting her.
The courage to share the pain, the patient with her body. And us, in our hearts.
If we can stand the pain, the patient can too....
It is written, Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

LOUISE

Dr. Schweitzer ... do you know what you are, to me?

SCHWEITZER

What? my little warrior.

LOUISE

You are the river. The angel and water who baptized me into compassion.

**SCHWEITZER steps away from LOUISE
and takes a handful of dirt in his hand.**

SCHWEITZER

[*aside*] She came into my jungle, out of nowhere, with a lamp and a window.
Which she opened. To let my thoughts, like smoke of a fire, rise up away from me.
I'm only human; and I realize:
That we each are immortal, in our own eternal way.

**SCHWEITZER lets the dirt drop to the
stage and returns to LOUISE.**

SCHWEITZER

I'm only human. That's all I ever claimed to be: a simple human being....
Here. Here's a parting gift for you. For the bush.
The dental instruments, in this old cloth,
which I used during my early years in Lambaréné.

**SCHWEITZER gives LOUISE the dental
tools, takes both her hands into both of
his, and then steps back. Tears, rolled
down her cheeks, she brushes away.**

SCHWEITZER

If you continue to work diligently you will become a successful healer of men.
I promise you that. Each of us has our own way to go.
And in our own way each of us is strong enough. The task may be daunting.
But always remember: The person you heal is yourself. Your pains and fears.
Looking at you, you are seeing through their eyes into your own.
Our brother's not so heavy. He's our brother.

They embrace, then walk separately: He stage right and she stage left, both stopping short of exiting, and standing.

With the sound of rhythmic jungle drum beats in the distance, GUSTAVE enters, upstage, to downstage center.

GUSTAVE

[*motioning*] Hélène's ashes sleep in the shade of the cemetery over there,
by the bank of the river she loved so much. She's at home. She's at peace.
Native drums beat the sound of the strong feet that followed her to the end.
With all deliberate speed. Her sacrifice was maybe the more poignant of the two.
God asks more of a woman. From her heart.
And more of a man. From his back. And both are flawed.

A picture of the Schweitzer Hospital today appears on the SCREEN.

Next to her lies Dr. Schweitzer.
He lived to age 90; and died peacefully in his sleep.
Our people say, "Thank God who sent Dr. Schweitzer to us.
Our good shepherd, who gave his life for us,
now buried in our soil, under our palm trees."

When they carefully lifted the Good Doctor's body into the ground,
here at Lambaréné,
it became apparent to all that Africa had not changed the man.
The man had changed Africa.
He brought us life. He brought us respite from pain.
He brought us compassion, reverence, and Jesus.
Just as Jesus had brought us God, goodness, and love.
Where would we be without them?
Who could have imagined this place now, from what they saw in the beginning?

GUSTAVE

May he rest here in peace for evermore.

And may we call Reverence for Life the God within us. Call compassion, God.
A God to face the other gods, of nature, river, jungle, avarice, prejudice, and
injustice.

**GUSTAVE momentarily bows his head,
and then exits through the audience, as
SCHWEITZER and LOUISE exit, stage
right and stage left, respectively. Drum
beats cease.**

END