

**THE CLINIC**  
**By Daniel Beecher**

Commissioned by Plan-B Theatre Company and Utah AIDS Foundation. Read as part of Plan-B's Script-In-Hand Series on April 6, 2011 with the following cast:

Jeremy	David Fetzer
Brett	Andy Rindlisbach
Robin	Yolanda Wood

Directed by Jason Bowcutt.

Stage Directions read by Heidi Hackney. Stage Managed by Marcine Lake.

*A small waiting room. Chairs line the walls with occasional side-tables filled with brochures, pamphlets, and old magazines. The walls are adorned with posters, some are informative, bearing facts about various sexually transmitted diseases, some are glossy photos with some one-liner about herpes-- clearly from anti-STD ad campaigns. BRETT is standing alone, reading a wall poster about genital warts. Waiting. He pauses, looks around, sits, and picks up a magazine. Eventually, the door opens and ROBIN, a technician at the clinic enters, leading JEREMY. They are mid-conversation.*

ROBIN

It'll take about five or ten minutes, and then I'll call you back to talk about your results, ok?

JEREMY

Oh, that's it?

ROBIN

Yep.

JEREMY

Oh. Well that's not bad...

ROBIN

(Turning to leave) Nope.

JEREMY

So... what do I look for?

ROBIN

I'm sorry?

JEREMY

Smile or frown? Which is good news, which is bad?

ROBIN

I...

JEREMY

I'm just saying - when you call me back- You know, you assume that if it's good news, the person would be smiling, or frowning if it's bad news... but you're a pro. You give bad news for a living, so now I'm thinking you might smile if it's bad news, to put the person at ease, or make a serious face if it's good news to make the person nervous, so they feel good when they hear that everything's ok, but in the mean time, you put the fear of God into 'em so they wear a condom next time, or whatever. (Robin smiles) So which is it with you?

ROBIN

I guess you're just going to have to wait to find out. (Robin exits. Jeremy wanders over and sits next to Brett.)

BRETT

Did you know one in five sexually active adults has genital warts?

JEREMY

(stares at him for a moment) Really.

BRETT

It's on a poster, Jerm. It must be so.

JEREMY

I guess I can't argue with that. And P.S. - maybe we should lay off that particular nickname while we're in a disease-riddled public health clinic, don't you think?

BRETT

What, "Jerm"? Oh. Eww. Yeah, that's not good.... So, *Jeremy*, how'd it go?

JEREMY

Oh. Great. Couldn't be happier. Robin there is delightful.

BRETT

What? Was she a bitch or something?

JEREMY

No, she's fine. She just gave me the standard lecture about safe behavior and all that. I think she could tell that I'm not, like, totally irresponsible, or whatever, but it's her job, so...

BRETT

You were in there for a while - I was starting to worry.

JEREMY

Nah. Nothing to worry about. Well, not yet... We were just chatting.

BRETT

Chatting? About what?

JEREMY

You know me - when I get nervous I get friendly.

BRETT

Yes. You do. I wish I was like that.

JEREMY

No you don't. You hate it when I start chatting up strangers.

BRETT

I don't hate it, I just get a little embarrassed. But not because you're doing anything wrong... I'm

just more reserved. You know that. That doesn't mean I don't wish I could be more outgoing like you.

JEREMY

Really? Huh. I did not know that.

BRETT

So what did you chat about?

JEREMY

Mostly we talked about what a fucked-up job she has.

BRETT

Oh, nice!

JEREMY

What?

BRETT

You told her she has a fucked-up job? Why would you say that?

JEREMY

Oh come on! I'm not a total social retard. I just realized that it must be really hard to spend every day telling people they have some horrific disease, you know?

BRETT

Yeah.

JEREMY

So I asked her about it.

BRETT

Ok. So what'd she say?

JEREMY

She said it's weird, but she's used to it. Apparently most people are pretty calm, and she just tells them about their options and what to expect or whatever, and they thank her and go on their way. Apparently, freakouts are pretty rare. I still think it would be super weird.

BRETT

I couldn't do it.

JEREMY

Yes you could. You'd be awesome at that sort of thing.

BRETT

Really? Why do you say that?

JEREMY

Dude, you're perfect. You're sensitive, but you don't get all over-dramatic. You're calm, you're kind...that's why I wanted you to be here.

BRETT

Well... thanks, I guess. That's nice.

JEREMY

I hope... I hope it's ok. Holy shit- I didn't even think... This isn't freaking you out, is it?

BRETT

It's fine.

JEREMY

Oh my god! I'm such an asshole! It never even occurred to me that this might be... I just thought that, you know, you've been through all this, so you could help me out or whatever. I didn't even think about the whole... This isn't, like, THE clinic, is it? Where you came?

BRETT

Well... yeah...

JEREMY

Oh my god! Brett, I'm so sorry! What was I thinking?

BRETT

I said it's fine. Don't worry about it. We're here for you.

JEREMY

You sure? You don't have to stay...

BRETT

It's fine (Pause.)

JEREMY

Uuuuuugh! I gotta say- this is not the most comfortable I've ever been...

BRETT

Well, no... It wouldn't be, would it?

JEREMY

This is about as awkward as five to ten minutes has ever felt for me. I'm actually kinda surprised by how shitty this feels...

BRETT

Really? You do know what you came here to do, right?

JEREMY

Well, yes... But I had worked it all out in my head. I thought I was totally ready.

BRETT

What do you mean- "worked it out in your head?"

JEREMY

Last few nights I've really put a lot of thought into this.

BRETT

Into what? Getting tested?

JEREMY

No, into the whole HIV/AIDS thing... Into what my life would be like, you know?

BRETT

Why would you do that? You don't even know if you have it yet.

JEREMY

Yeah I know that... and the truth is that I'm reasonably confident that I don't have it. But it's not about that for me.

BRETT

Ok, what's it about?

JEREMY

You know me, I hate fear. I hate being afraid of things. So when I run up against something that scares me, I try to really think through it. Defeat it intellectually...

BRETT

God, they really shouldn't let some people major in philosophy.

JEREMY

Whatever. At least I'm not afraid of life.

BRETT

Maybe if you were a little more afraid you wouldn't be here now... ever thought of that?

JEREMY

You don't have to be afraid to act wisely and responsibly. You do, however, probably have to be a lot more sober than I was at Sarah's party back in June.

BRETT

I don't know- I wish I had been more fearful in younger years...

JEREMY

Naw. I find fear a completely unreliable motivator.

BRETT

How do you figure?

JEREMY

It stops working after a while. When fear is the only thing keeping someone acting a certain way, there's always a blip in the back of their mind that they're being controlled, and humans HATE being controlled. It backfires. Eventually, most people want to do the thing they're afraid of, just so they can feel like they're in control.

BRETT

I don't get it.

JEREMY

Oh, what's an example...? Oh, ok, so: back in college, I smoked tons of pot, right? But I decided I would never do any "hard" drugs like coke or meth because my dad had told me all these horror stories, and I was scared that I'd wind up on the streets picking my skin off or something. But a bunch of my friends did coke all the time, and they loved it, and they would offer it to me- not pushy or anything, just being polite, right? And eventually curiosity and my need to stay up and study got the better of my fear. And thus began my three year coke bender.

BRETT

Bug chasers.

JEREMY

Sorry?

BRETT

Bug chasers. Some guys get so sick of worrying that they'll get AIDS, that they try to get it on purpose, just so they don't have to worry anymore.

JEREMY

What? Really?

BRETT

Yeah.

JEREMY

God. That's sick.

BRETT

Yeah, I know.

JEREMY

But it makes my point, right?

BRETT

I guess so.

JEREMY

This is what I'm saying- You can't base your life on rules from an external source, because there will always be that need to rebel. The only way to be sure that you'll keep yourself safe and not get caught in some weird mindfuck is if you sit down and consciously decide on your own rules, and continually reaffirm those rules to yourself.

BRETT

Well... that's a very nice theory.

JEREMY

It's the truth.

BRETT

Maybe it is, but most of us don't want to spend all of our free time in intellectual-slash-philosophical contemplation... so we have to rely on less perfect motivations to keep ourselves safe.

JEREMY

That's probably true. I just think it's sad.

BRETT

Sad?

JEREMY

I think a lot of people would be a lot happier if they really examined their fear- usually they'd find that the thing they're afraid of really isn't that bad.

BRETT

Well... I don't know that HIV falls into that category...

JEREMY

Well- I'm not sure I agree with you... I mean, yes, it is still a potentially deadly disease, but... this is what I was talking about. I've been giving this a lot of thought, and, looking at it logically: When you get past the initial fears that were pounded into us in the 80s and 90s and just look at the facts... With all the meds they have, and the treatments... I guess I just don't feel that worried. I mean, it's not like HIV is the end of the world anymore...

BRETT  
I'm sorry?

JEREMY  
Don't get me wrong- it sucks, I don't deny that... but look at you. You're the prime example. You're the fucking picture of health. You're in better shape than I am!

BRETT  
That's really not difficult, but ok...

JEREMY  
You said it yourself- your virus count or whatever is almost zero.

BRETT  
I didn't say that, I said it's almost undetec...

JEREMY  
Undetectable... right! You live a normal, productive life, am I wrong?

BRETT  
No, but...

JEREMY  
So what's so scary, then? When you think about it?

BRETT  
Dude, really? What's so scary? Really?

JEREMY  
What made it scary back in the day was the fact that we didn't know what it was. It was killing people left and right and nobody knew how it spread, or what made it so deadly. Now we know all those things. And, as your shining example so clearly illustrates, we know how to keep it under control.

BRETT  
Yeah, I don't think you...

JEREMY  
I'm just saying... isn't it possible that the fears we have associated with HIV are kind of relics of an era that's passed?

BRETT  
No.

JEREMY  
No?

BRETT

No.

JEREMY

That's it, huh? Just no?

BRETT

Look - I get what you're saying. And you're right that I am in great health and that HIV doesn't dominate my life. But this idea that it's not scary anymore...Well... I hope that she comes back with good news. That's a theory I would never want you to have to test.

JEREMY

Hey, it's not like I want the thing. I'm just saying looking at it from a logical perspective... maybe not that bad.

BRETT

Ok. I hear what you're saying. Thanks for your input. Let's change the subject, shall we? Do you have any good travel plans coming up?

JEREMY

Wait... what? Why are we changing the subject?

BRETT

I'm sorry- I thought you had it out of your system and we could move on. Did you have something you wanted to add?

JEREMY

Woah. Um... I guess I thought we were having a conversation... Didn't realize I was just "getting something out of my system."

BRETT

We were having a conversation. I'm just ready to have a different one now.

JEREMY

Ok... I'm confused- Obviously you think I'm being an idiot, here... which is fine... But dude- since when do you back down from a fight when you hear something you disagree with?

BRETT

I just don't want to talk about this... especially not here... ok?

JEREMY

Um... I think I'm missing something here...

BRETT

I JUST DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, OK? Let's just get past this test and we'll go from there.

JEREMY

Holy shit, dude! What the fuck? I was just trying to be positive. Trying to be logical about the whole thing. That's how I deal with fear, all right? You don't have to freak out on me...

BRETT

Why can't you just let things drop?! I told you I wanted to change the subject- (silence)

JEREMY

Ok. I now see that I just told a man who is HIV positive that HIV is not a big deal. Clearly, that is a stupid thing to say. I'm sorry.

BRETT

It's fine.

JEREMY

But... I mean... am I wrong? You're healthy. You're active. Maybe you have to take a few pills every day, but you're doing really well. Right?

BRETT

I'm doing well.

JEREMY

Then I don't get it. What am I missing?

BRETT (quietly) It's still there.

JEREMY

What?

BRETT

It's still there. It's always still there. Maybe the tests can't find it right now- which is great... But it's there. It's somewhere in my body. Lurking. That fucking virus is as much a part of me as my skin now. And no matter how healthy I am, the truth is that it could still hit me at any moment.

There are people who are healthy for ten, fifteen years and then suddenly BAM. Dead in 18 months. To tell you the truth, it's almost worse that I'm healthy.

JEREMY

What?

BRETT

When you're healthy, it's always a potential. It's hanging over my head. This constant dull, nagging tension. It never goes away completely. Half the time I'm jealous of the sick ones... At least they know their fate. When you're healthy, you can never quite feel at ease. You can be happy with 90% of your life, but there will always be that dark shadow in the corner of your mind... just waiting... and wondering. Like a fucking... what do you call... black, fucking... raven hanging out over my... stupid... doorjamb or something. (Long pause. They both try to maintain

the seriousness of the moment, but Brett's final metaphor proves too ridiculous... eventually someone lets out a tiny snicker.) ...A raven? (They both burst out laughing)

JEREMY

I wasn't going to say anything, man...

BRETT

Wow... note to self: avoid poetics.

JEREMY

No, but I get what you're saying. Makes sense.

BRETT

I'm just saying -

JEREMY

No, you're right. And you know what? You've convinced me. I now officially really don't want to be HIV positive.

BRETT

Ok. Good. My work here is done.

JEREMY

Yes.

BRETT

Indeed.

JEREMY

Now all we need is for Robin to come back and give me my fucking results...

BRETT

I know! Where the hell is that bit... (The door suddenly open and Robin looks in. The boys both burst into more laughter. Robin remains completely stone-faced, not smiling, not frowning. )

ROBIN

Jeremy, you can come back.

JEREMY

(To Brett, as he stands and walks to the door.) Is that a smile or a frown? Shoot! I can't tell!  
(to Robin) Damn, you're good!

*Robin and Jeremy exit. End of play.*