

A Savanna Story

written by

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Rehearsal Draft

## Characters

<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Description</u>
Pete	M	71	An Expatriated American. Loose fitting clothing. Hair and beard are getting a little shaggy. He's been here for a while, but you can still see the American within.
Abdelkerim	M	14	A child soldier of a local guerrilla militia. Uniform, satchel, rifle. Still has a bit of child about him, despite what he has witnessed.

## Setting

A camp located on the savanna of Chad.

## Time

Present day.

Lights up on the exterior of a simple canvas tent located on savanna in the Sahel region of Chad.

There is a fire in the fire pit, as well as a well worn lawn chair. A kettle hangs over the fire. A loaf of bread has been freshly pulled from the coals.

A solar panel and a plastic rain barrel are the tell-tale indicators of a first world person trying to be comfortable in a third world location.

Abdelkerim wears a military uniform, dirty, with a large blood stain on the side. He has a satchel, and a rifle with a sling. He points the rifle at Pete.

Pete wears all the indicators of an expatriated American: Ball cap, blue jeans, loose shirt. His hair and beard are shaggy, but you can still see the clean-cut underneath. He points a shotgun at Abdelkerim.

The BBC is playing over shortwave radio.

Silence.

A moment.

Pete lowers and puts down his shotgun.

PETE

This is ridiculous. Would you like some tea?

Pete turns off the radio.

ABDELKERIM

(in French)

Pourquoi est vous ici? (*Why are you here?*)

PETE

I'm sorry, were you listening to that? The radio? I'm sorry, I don't speak much French. Never got around to fluency. I suppose I never will now.

ABDELKERIM  
 (in French, firmer)  
 Pourquoi est vous ici?

PETE  
 Is yelling at me in French supposed to scare me?

ABDELKERIM  
 (firmer)  
 Pourquoi est vous ici? Pourquoi est vous ici??

Pete walks to the fire and takes the kettle. He pours the water into the cup.

PETE  
 It'll be a moment, it's too hot to drink. I'm not much of a tea drinker myself, but I haven't been able to find a coffee that I like since I moved to Chad.

ABDELKERIM  
 J'étais abattu, j'ai besoin d'aide. (*I've been shot, I need help.*)

PETE  
 If you'd like, I'll grab you some sugar. You can doctor it up as you see fit.

ABDELKERIM  
 Non, ne m'emmène pas chez le médecin! (*No, don't take me to the doctor!*)

PETE  
 (with a spark of recognition)  
 Well now, that sounds familiar! Medicine? Do you need medicine?

ABDELKERIM  
 Nous vous avons observé. Le Général m'a dit de venir vous prendre les fournitures dont nous avons besoin. J'ai dit que vous n'étiez qu'un vieil homme, mais il m'a dit de vous prendre ce dont nous avons besoin. Il m'a tiré dans le flanc, disant que si je refusais un ordre, il tuerait ma sœur. (*We've been watching you. The General told me to come and take the supplies we needed from you. I said that you were just an old man, but he told me to take what we needed from you. He shot me in the side, saying that if I refused an order, he would kill my sister.*)

A beat.

PETE

My friend, you have two problems. Three, if I count the blood stain. One, I don't speak much French. But they speak enough English in the city, I can buy my supplies. And, two, no matter the language, I'm not going to respond well to a child pointing a rifle at me.

ABDELKERIM

Je ne suis pas un enfant! (*I'm not a child!*)

PETE

(in French)

Tu parles anglais! (*You speak English!*)

ABDELKERIM

You speak French!

PETE

Not fluently!

ABDELKERIM

I was told to kill you!

PETE

Then, stop trying to scare me by speaking French, and do it already! You've had more than enough chances! Make your General happy!

ABDELKERIM

I will! Don't push me!

Abdelkerim stares down the barrel of the rifle, frozen.

PETE

(with a sigh, slightly disappointed)

Your tea should be cooled off. Have some.

Pete holds the tea up. Abdelkerim hesitates for a bit, before lowering the gun and taking the tea. He drinks the tea quickly, finishing it off.

PETE

(continued)

I have some bread, if you'd like. I'm running low on meat. Just not sure that I'm ready for buffalo.

Abdelkerim grabs the bread by the fire, and tears chunks off, eating as if this is his first meal in years.

PETE

My God, when was the last time they fed you?

ABDELKERIM

Your god has abandoned you here.

PETE

My god abandoned me years ago, I brought myself here.

Pete sits in one of the chairs, staring at Abdelkerim.

PETE

How old are you?

ABDELKERIM

Sixteen.

PETE

(disbelieving)

Sixteen?

ABDELKERIM

(sheepishly)

Fourteen.

PETE

Seems right. I'm Pete.

ABDELKERIM

Abdelkerim.

PETE

What's your first name?

ABDELKERIM

That is my name.

PETE

No, no. I know people named Abdelkerim. It's a surname, a last name. What is your first name?

ABDELKERIM

That is the name that the General calls me. That is the name that I answer to.

PETE

Your "General" seems like quite the peach.

ABDELKERIM

(by rote, programmed, but not  
robotic)

The General is a wonderful man! He loves and protects us all. He is going to stop the government from exploiting the workers. He is going to protect our mothers and our sisters. He will ensure that we all have good productive jobs. He will put food on our tables.

PETE

Sounds like a million strong men before him.

Abdelkerim raises his rifle.

ABDELKERIM

I need your supplies now, Mister Pete.

PETE

You need to stop pointing your rifle at me. I'm not threatened, and it's not helping you get what you want.

ABDELKERIM

I will kill you if you try and stop me.

PETE

I came here to die.

Abdelkerim looks surprised at the thought.

ABDELKERIM

What?

Pause.

PETE

I'll make you a deal. I'll give you the supplies you need to take to your "beloved General." But, let me take a look at your wound first.

ABDELKERIM

No doctors!

PETE

I wouldn't dream of it. I have a first aid kit, I want to look at your wound.

Abdelkerim ponders this for a moment, then nods.

PETE

Wait here.

ABDELKERIM

Where am I to go?

Pete enters the tent, the sounds of him rummaging around are heard.

After a moment, Abdelkerim grows impatient.

ABDELKERIM

What is taking so long, Mister Pete?

Abdelkerim raises his rifle, and looks in the tent.

ABDELKERIM

(continued)

Who is this? Bring that out. Let me see.

Pete exits the tent, a first aid kit in one hand, a framed photograph in the other.

ABDELKERIM

(continued, taking photograph)

Let me see.

Pete reluctantly hands the photograph over.

PETE

(quietly)

Lift your shirt, let me see.

Abdelkerim lifts his shirt and studies the photograph.

ABDELKERIM

Who is this?

PETE

Your wound's not bad at all, just a scratch.

ABDELKERIM

Is this your wife?

PETE

I can clean it out, stitch it up. You'll be back at it in no time.

ABDELKERIM

Est-ce votre femme?



PETE

(sharply)

Yes! It is my wife. If you don't mind, I'll stitch you up so you can go back to killing people.

Pete kneels beside Abdelkerim, he cleans the wound with peroxide and antibiotics.

ABDELKERIM

(wincing)

Where is your wife? What is her name?

PETE

She's not here. She's gone.

ABDELKERIM

Gone where?

PETE

(stitching)

She got sick. She got sick and died. And I miss her. I miss her a lot. She always wanted to come here. She'd get tired of the sunsets in our neighborhood. Always saying how much better they were in Africa. Every time we started talking about taking a vacation, she always brought up Africa. So now I am here, watching sunsets that she never got to see. Maybe she can see them through my eyes, I don't know. Just waiting until I get to see her.

Pete finishes the stitches and applies a bandage, stands.

ABDELKERIM

That is why you aren't afraid to die. The General is doing a favor by having me kill you. See your wife sooner.

Pete stops for a moment, before drawing some water from the rain barrel. He rinses his hands, and pours a glass.

PETE

(reflectively)

I'm not afraid to die. I'm not in any rush, but I'm not afraid. We're all going to die, eventually. All that matters is the path we take to get there.

ABDELKERIM

Yes! Yes! Exactly as the General says!

PETE

Maybe. But I don't want to ruin other lives to get there.

ABDELKERIM

I am helping the General save lives! Your death, even, it will save lives!

PETE

(with a soft chuckle)

Doubtful.

An animal sound, off.

PETE

(continued)

Oh, look! The buffalo are here. There is a spring just there. They come through here to drink their water. It's far too muddy for me, I'm fine waiting for the rain.

They watch the buffalo stroll on their way. It is a moment of peace in the middle of their respective wars.

After a moment.

PETE

Do you believe in heaven, Abdelkerim?

ABDELKERIM

If this is hell, then there must be a heaven.

PETE

You are a wise young man, Abdelkerim.

Abdelkerim hands the photograph back.

Pause.

PETE

(continued, still watching the buffalo)

You can take whatever you need. Food, medicine, just take it.

Abdelkerim exits into the tent. Pete's quiet pain plays across his face.

A moment later, Abdelkerim exits the tent, closing his now full satchel.

PETE  
Do you have everything you need?

ABDELKERIM  
Yes. I do.

PETE  
Good.

Abdelkerim raises his rifle, pointing it at the back of Pete's head.

ABDELKERIM  
I hope you see your wife soon, Mister Pete.

PETE  
Sara. Her name was Sara.

Abdelkerim pulls cocks his riffle. Pete, hearing the click, closes eyes and steels himself to the inevitable.

PETE  
Make your General proud...Get it over with...

Abdelkerim looks down the barrel of his rifle, hesitating.

PETE  
(a firm *sotto voce*)  
Do it!

Abdelkerim fires his rifle, the sound of a buffalo collapsing.

Silence.

PETE  
You missed.

ABDELKERIM  
I hope you see your wife soon, Mister Pete.  
But not today.

Pete turns around, angrily disappointed.

PETE

You failed your General, Abdelkerim. Your sister is in trouble.

ABDELKERIM

Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe she is already dead, I don't know. Maybe I don't have a sister at all. But I know that you don't deserve to die. Not like this. You are a kind old man, you should be shown kindness.

PETE

Get out of here.

ABDELKERIM

I will tell the General that you are dead. I will give him the things I have stolen, and lead him away from you. You will be safe.

PETE

I spit on your General.

ABDELKERIM

(gathering his belongings)

I have shot you a buffalo. You now have plenty of meat. Buffalo meat is good, you will like it.

Abdelkerim begins to walk away.

ABDELKERIM

(continued)

I guess we both want peace, Mister Pete. We just have see who gets there first.

Abdelkerim leaves.

Pete, still stunned, watches him.

Lights down.

END.