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Anti-Venom

by Craig Kenworthy

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JUANITA; *a teen-age tour guide in a Central American country*

DAWN; *a woman bout 28-35, married to Scott, who recently had an affair*

SCOTT; *Dawn's husband, slightly younger in age*

SETTING

In the Rainforest

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(AT RISE: The stage remains dark. SOUND: BIRDS.)

Juanita

And this plant is used for...

Dawn

What's that on the ground over there? It's moving.

Juanita

What? Wait, I see it. Don't move, miss.

Dawn

(Screams) Oh, God, it bit me.

Juanita

You moved.

Dawn

Scott. Scott. Damn it, where are you?

(LIGHTS UP. At center stage is a rock about two feet high with a jungle plant hanging over the top of it. DAWN is sitting Stage Right, holding her ankle. SOUND, OFF: Thunk.)

Juanita, Off

Miss, I got it.

(SCOTT enters Stage Left, running to and crouching at Dawn's left. JUANITA enters Stage Right with a burlap bag in her left hand and a large knife in her right hand and stands behind DAWN.)

Scott

Dawn, what happened?

Dawn

A snake bit me. Juanita caught it. God, *(Rubs left leg)* that hurts.

Juanita

Please, I will go down the river. The village nurse will know what to do. I will bring the nurse. *(Looks in bag; meets SCOTT's eyes)* I should not delay. *(Exits)*

Scott

(Kneels beside DAWN, looks at her leg) Did you see what it looked like?

Dawn

I'm a dietician. Not a lot of snake recipes. Brown and green, maybe.

Scott

How big?

Dawn

I don't know. What was that snake she talked about on the boat?

Scott

The Fer-de-lance?

Dawn

Yes, but it had another name.

Scott

The seven step snake. If it bites you, you make it about seven steps before you die.

Dawn

I only took two steps or three steps, tops. And they were baby steps.

Scott

You'll be fine. It's probably not even poisonous. And we're not far from help. Plus, you're young and healthy. Most fatalities are older people or small children who...

Dawn

Please, please stop trying to make me feel better.

Scott

Sorry.

Dawn

What were you doing anyway?

Scott

Just scouting ahead.

Dawn

For what? More rocks and trees?

Scott

Actually, I found a view of the canyon.

Dawn

That's just great. Listen, since you're sure I'll be OK and we're stuck here for awhile, there's something we need to discuss. We need to make a decision. She's not getting any younger. She needs more and more help.

Scott

It's not that bad. She can still feed herself.

(SCOTT stands and crosses Stage Left.)

Dawn

That's not a really great measure. You can feed yourself.

Scott

I just don't think it's time yet.

Dawn

You agreed we could finish the basement bedroom this year. It's a good time to decide.

Scott

You want to decide this based on redecorating. God, that's cold.

Dawn

Why? That's a good time to decide what to do with her.

Scott

I am not going to decide this based on something you just saw in Architectural Digest.

Dawn

Come on. It's more simple than that.

Scott

Simple? You think after all these years, this is simple?

Dawn

Sure. I'm sure my Mom can do part of it.

Scott

Your mom? Now, there's someone who can barely feed herself. She probably poops in the corner as much as...

Dawn

What? Don't say that. We're talking about...

(DAWN and SCOTT talk over each other.)

Dawn
My mother.

Scott
My dog.

Dawn

I thought we were talking about my mother moving in with us.

Scott

I thought we were talking the dog's health. Now, if you want to put your mother down, I'm ready to talk about that.

Dawn

That's just hilarious. Are you saying you won't even consider it?

Scott

Are you asking because I can't exactly say no right now?

Dawn

No, if I was doing that, I'd ask you to...

Scott

Say 'I forgive you?' You put someone between us.

(Beat.)

Dawn

Since I told you about what happened, you've never said...

Scott

Fine, in case you are dying and you are NOT dying, I forgive you. It's not exactly like forgetting to pay the Visa bill, you know.

Dawn

Since I told you, you've never said you still...

Scott

I stayed.

Dawn

Yes, you stayed. *(Wipes brow; holds leg)* My leg really hurts.

Scott

Let me look at the book. I'm sure it talks about snakebite.
(SCOTT pulls out a "Boy Scout Manual and begins to thumb through it.)

Dawn

Yes, I'm sure the American Boy Scout manual addresses snakebites in Costa Rica. Why did you bring that thing?

Scott

It's a very valuable resource. *(Reading from book)* For example, it says here that sucking out snake venom is not effective and it is dangerous.

Dawn

Is that for the sucker or the suckee? God, why did I let you bring me here for our trip?

Scott

I never said I should get to pick.

Dawn

No, you never said that. You've never asked for anything. Or about anything.

Scott

What does that mean? Is this about me not wanting to hear the blow by blow?

Dawn

There wasn't any blow, Scott.

Scott

(Covers ears) See, that's what I mean. Why does everybody think I need to know where you dropped your robe or if the room service guy noticed that only one of you had a ring?

Dawn

What did you say?

Scott

Nothing. Just things I thought...

Dawn

No, not that part. What was that about "everybody?"

Scott

Nothing.

Dawn

Who did you tell?

Scott

Nobody. It's not exactly something guys want to share. "Yeah, I thought the Cubs could finally win this year too. Hey, did I tell you my wife cheated on me?"

Dawn

You told your sister, didn't you?

Scott

I had to explain why we weren't coming to the beach house. Christina made a deposit.

Dawn

I'm sure the owner loved hearing that excuse. *(Fans self; hyperventilates)* Does the book say if drinking iodine flavored water is OK?

(SCOTT pulls his pack open, takes out two books, baggie with toilet paper and a water bottle. HE hands the bottle to DAWN. She drinks, shakes a bit and dribbles some water down her front.)

Scott

I'm sorry. Here. Let me look at your leg again.

(SCOTT Reaches around her leg with his right hand and runs his hand up it to her knee.)

Scott, Continued

How does it feel?

Dawn

(Takes another drink) That feels good.

Scott

You know, our guide, Juanita, is quite a soccer player. She thinks she could get a college scholarship, if she could play a year at a high school in the U.S.

Dawn

Are you trying to be nonchalant? OUR guide has a long life ahead of her except for the poor choice of living near so many things that can kill you. Give me your other hand.

(SCOTT hesitates. DAWN takes his left hand and starts to pull herself up.)

Scott

What are you doing? It's better if you rest, so the venom doesn't spread.

Dawn

I want to see this 'Sacred Canyon' you kept talking about. And I thought you said it's probably not poisonous.

(DAWN steps forward, leaning on SCOTT. HE helps her cross to Down Stage Right.)

Scott

Careful. That's the start of the edge of the canyon. Come on, sit back down.

Dawn

You never asked me why.

Scott

Why why?

Dawn

Why is what most people want to know.

Scott

You want to know why no why?

Dawn

(Shakes off his arm; crosses back to rock; sits) Now you're just turning this into an Abbot and Costello routine. You're such an ass sometimes.

Scott

I'm not the one who put whoever on first. Look, maybe it's because I could handle it if there was a why. I'm not sure I could if it was 'Why Not.'

Dawn

It was never 'Why Not,' Scott.

Scott

Do you know what I did that night after you told me about it? I drove to the river and threw in rocks for an hour. Then a cop pulls up and asks me what I'm doing. He made me do the DUI tests. I started crying at the number 89...88... 87 and I was bawling when he made me touch my nose. He told me not to take it so hard. Said that I could go into a first time offender program. Then he took me to the station. But I passed the breathalyzer. So I reminded him that my plates were expired and didn't have proof of insurance and I was pretty sure I was wanted in Iowa for several serious parking violations. They still said I needed to go. Told me to go home. *(Looks at his watch)* Where is Juanita? It shouldn't take this long. Maybe I should take the trail to the river and see if I can flag down someone.

Dawn

I just think it might help if you understood what happened...

Scott

I should have told her that I'm type O, so you can have my blood if they need to... Look, the sooner we get you help, the better.

(SCOTT crosses to his get his backpack. HE opens it and removes a camera and notebook.)

Dawn

Scott, don't...

Scott

You know, we haven't taken a single photo all day. And I spent all that time emptying the memory card.

Dawn

Scott, don't leave me...

Scott

I'll leave you the pack. *(Bends down and takes her leg)* I think you should elevate this.

(SCOTT lifts leg up over the pack and exits Stage Left.)

Dawn

...don't leave me. I won't. I still love you. Shit. *(Picks up Scout book, sets it aside and pulls another book out of pack)* So, what did you leave me to read besides 'Knot tying for the Sexually Frustrated.' Great, Joseph Conrad. *(Reads from book)* "The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness, bearing us down toward the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress: and Kurtz's life was running swiftly too, ebbing, ebbing out of his heart

Dawn, Continued

into the sea of inexorable time. (*Sets book down, touches leg then picks up notebook and begins writing*) Scott, in case I don't... I want you to understand what happened. It was a guy I knew from school. We went out once in college. I always liked him but not as much as he liked me. Twice. Not as in liked me twice as much, but it was two times. Why? Was it our sex life? (*Beat*) Not really but the truth is that lately, when we made love, it was like we were playing Scrabble and all you could do was make words like "the" and "it". (*Tears off bottom of page, balls it up, throws it into 'canyon' and starts writing again*) I guess I always liked the chase too much. You used to chase me, like a cheetah, like you'd run after me until your heart burst.

(*SOUND, OFF: Thrashing; SCOTT cursing. HE enters Stage Right with cuts on his arm and one pant leg missing. There is foliage stuck to his clothes and in his hair. DAWN see him and stops writing.*)

Scott

Ah, shit. I cut off the main trail, took some game trail. I figured all the animals used it as a shortcut. It just comes back here.

Dawn

Was that idea in the Boy Scout manual? Animals have road engineers?

Scott

I'll just go down the main trail, maybe cut toward the sound of the river.

(*SCOTT crosses past DAWN with noticeable limp.*)

Dawn

Maybe you should just stay here. Are you limping? What happened?

Scott

I was running down the trail and there was a tapir.

Dawn

One of those things that looks like a cross between an anteater and a large pig?

Scott

Yeah. Weighed about three hundred pounds. It was blocking the trail. (*Rubs his leg*) I yelled and screamed at it. I guess it didn't like that. I fell off a ledge when it started chasing me.

Dawn

You could just wait here with me.

Scott

We need to get you help as soon as we can.

Dawn

I'd rather you stay here. Besides you said, "It's probably not poisonous..." Wait, do you think it's poisonous?

Scott

I'm not saying that. It's just that I found a piece of the snake's tail that Juanita must have dropped. Listen, many of these snakes look alike. Let's not overreact.

(SCOTT reaches towards DAWN and touches her cheek.)

Dawn

(On verge of tears, takes his hand) Please, just stay here. Don't go. Just stay. Tell me... Stay here, Scott.

Scott

You're going to be all right. I'll hurry. I promise.

(SCOTT kisses DAWN lightly on her forehead as SHE turns her face away. SHE lets go of his hand and SCOTT limps off. DAWN opens the notebook, picks up the pen and begins to write once again.)

Dawn

So, this guy from school chased me and I slowed a little and then a little bit more. Then, I let him catch me. *(Shakes her head)* Do you want to know why I slowed up that last little step? Remember your last family reunion? I got to observe the whole clan. I realized right then that I might be in for forty, maybe fifty years of watching you become your father. That the best parts of you could wear away. That maybe I didn't mean enough to you to keep that from happening. For you to step up and tell your older brothers to not blame their wives for the kids falling down or get angry because there's no mustard. That's the kind of man I hoped you were. And I was afraid I was wrong about who you were. So, I let him catch me.

(SCOTT enters. HE is soaking wet.)

Scott

I heard a boat. I thought it was them, but it was going downriver. I yelled but they didn't hear me, so I tried to swim after it.

Dawn

You tried to swim after a motorboat?

Scott

Yeah, pretty dumb, huh?

Dawn

(Big smile) Yeah. In a river full of crocodiles. There are crocodiles, right? And piranha?

Scott

I was getting pushed by the current. I was afraid I'd end up on the wrong side and not get back in time.

Dawn

In time for what?

Scott

In time... in time for help to come.

Dawn

What if it doesn't come in time? Scott, can't you...

Scott

(SCOTT turns away) When the cop was driving me back to my car that night you told me about your affair? He drove by the drive-in where you worked in college. There was a girl in one of those yellow polo shirts and green shorts they wear. She was closing up. Remember how I'd get there 15, 20 minutes early, just on the chance you'd be the one cleaning up outside, so I could talk to you?

Dawn

You usually did half my work for me. And I always traded with someone in case you did stop by.

(DAWN's eyes begin to droop and her head drops.)

Scott

I saw that girl and I remembered how I'd pull in, see you and I'd... I'd just tingle. You know, I've always been sorry that you were the first one to say 'I love you.' Because you said it after I knew I loved you. I was just afraid. If I said it and you didn't say it back... I came back to say that if you need to tell me, if you want to tell me what happened, why it happened, then you can tell me, but you need to know that no matter what...

Dawn

(Talks over him) ... You know when your cousin Mike died and you left for the funeral? That was about three weeks after I... after it happened and just before I told you about it. I stayed home from the funeral because I had that job interview. When I got up the morning you left for it, I found seven post-it notes around the house telling me how great I'd do in my interview. By the way, the one on the iron wasn't such a good idea. On a morning when you got up at 3 A.M. to go be with the aunt who half raised you and to help her bury her only son, you stopped and left me those notes. I realized then who I'd caught. That's all I wanted to tell you, Scott.

(DAWN looks at what she wrote in the notebook and tosses the notebook into the canyon. Beat. DAWN smiles then passes out. SCOTT starts to turn back towards DAWN.)

Scott

I was going to say I still love you, Dawn. Dawn? *(No response)* Oh, God.

(SCOTT runs to DAWN, grabs her leg, and attempts to suck out the venom.)

Scott, Continued

Can you hear me? Did you hear me, Dawn?

(SCOTT cradles DAWN's head as JUANITA enters carrying a medical bag.)

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes