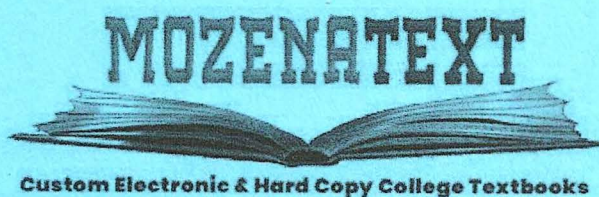


ENGLISH TWO

**SUMMER 2024
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Summer 2024

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Divider
(Intentionally Left Blank)

which the supernatural and the secular, the market and the shrine, the technological and the traditional are equally valid and equally bizarre.

Okri and Laing represent a significant new kind of writing from Africa, but theirs is not the only kind. Many of the stories we received were thinly veiled political allegories or documentaries, such as Saïda Herzi's 'factions' about Somalia. The stories of rural villagers, especially of the poorest and the women attempting to live with dignity in a disintegrating economy, are being written into literature. There is a greater diversity of writers, and with them a greater recognition of the variety of cultures within the African continent, including the communities of Indian and Arabic descent in Eastern and Southern Africa, the conflicts between Igbo, Yoruba and northern Islamic societies in Nigeria, the differences between the poor and the middle classes, and the politicians who are a class unto themselves. Especially we noticed this time the increasing number of women writers and also of men who were taking notice of and seeking to express a female perspective on such issues as marriage, childbearing and circumcision.

This anthology reveals the lively diversity of subjects, forms and styles which can be found in contemporary African short-story writing. The editors believe that it will give enjoyment to the general reader as well as students and teachers of African writing, and hope that it will encourage them to explore a literature which continues to develop and flourish.

C. L. Innes 1992

NJABULO S. NDEBELE

The prophetess

The boy knocked timidly on the door, while a big fluffy dog sniffed at his ankles. That dog made him uneasy; he was afraid of strange dogs and this fear made him anxious to go into the house as soon as possible. But there was no answer to his knock. Should he simply turn the doorknob and get in? What would the prophetess say? Would she curse him? He was not sure now which he feared more: the prophetess or the dog. If he stood longer there at the door, the dog might soon decide that he was up to some mischief after all. If he left, the dog might decide he was running away. And the prophetess! What would she say when she eventually opened the door to find no one there? She might decide someone had been fooling, and would surely send lightning after the boy. But then, leaving would also bring the boy another problem: he would have to leave without the holy water for which his sick mother had sent him to the prophetess.

There was something strangely intriguing about the prophetess and holy water. All that one was to do, the boy had so many times heard in the streets of the township, was fill a bottle with water and take it to the prophetess. She would then lay her hands on the bottle and pray. And the water would be holy. And the water would have curing powers. That's what his mother had said too.

The boy knocked again, this time with more urgency. But he had to be careful not to annoy the prophetess. It was getting darker and the dog continued to sniff at his ankles. The boy tightened his grip round the neck of the bottle he had just filled with water from the street tap on the other side of the street, just opposite the prophetess's house. He would hit the dog with this bottle. What's more, if the bottle broke he would stab the dog with the sharp glass. But what would the prophetess

say? She would probably curse him. The boy knocked again, but this time he heard the faint voice of a woman.

'Kena!' the voice said.

The boy quickly turned the knob and pushed. The door did not yield. And the dog growled. The boy turned the knob again and pushed. This time the dog gave a sharp bark, and the boy knocked frantically. Then he heard the bolt shoot back, and saw the door open to reveal darkness. Half the door seemed to have disappeared into the dark. The boy felt fur brush past his leg as the dog scurried into the house.

'Voetssek!' the woman cursed suddenly.

The boy wondered whether the woman was the prophettess. But as he was wondering, the dog brushed past him again, slowly this time. In spite of himself, the boy felt a pleasant, tickling sensation and a slight warmth where the fur of the dog had touched him. The warmth did not last, but the tickling sensation lingered, going up to the back of his neck and seeming to caress it. Then he shivered and the sensation disappeared, shaken off in the brief involuntary tremor.

'Dogs stay out!' shouted the woman, adding, 'This is not at the white man's.'

The boy heard a slow shuffle of soft leather shoes receding into the dark room. The woman must be moving away from the door, the boy thought. He followed into the house.

'Close the door,' ordered the woman who was still moving somewhere in the dark. But the boy had already done so.

Although it was getting dark outside, the room was much darker and the fading day threw some of its waning light into the room through the windows. The curtains had not yet been drawn. 'Was it an effort to save candles?' the boy wondered. His mother had scolded him many times for lighting up before it was completely dark.

The boy looked instinctively towards the dull light coming in through the window. He was anxious, though, about where the woman was now, in the dark. Would she think he was afraid when she caught him looking out to the light? But the thick, dark green leaves of vine outside, lapping lazily against the window, attracted and held him like a spell. There was no comfort in that light; it merely reminded the boy of his fear, only a few minutes ago, when he walked under that dark tunnel

of vine which arched over the path from the gate to the door. He had dared not touch that vine and its countless velvety, black, and juicy grapes that hung temptingly within reach, or rested lusciously on forked branches. Silhouetted against the darkening summer sky, the bunches of grapes had each looked like a cluster of small cones narrowing down to a point.

'Don't touch that vine!' was the warning almost everyone in Charterston township knew. It was said that the vine was all coated with thick, invisible glue. And that was how the prophettess caught all those who stole out in the night to steal her grapes. They would be glued there to the vine, and would be moaning for forgiveness throughout the cold night, until the morning, when the prophettess would come out of the house with the first rays of the sun, raise her arms into the sky, and say: 'Away, away, sinful man; go and sin no more!' Suddenly, the thief would be free, and would walk away feeling a great release that turned him into a new man. That vine; it was on the lips of everyone in the township every summer.



One day when the boy had played truant with three of his friends, and they were coming back from town by bus, some grown-ups in the bus were arguing about the prophettess's vine. The bus was so full that it was hard for anyone to move. The three truant friends having given their seats to grown-ups, pressed against each other in a line in the middle of the bus and could see most of the passengers.

'Not even a cow can tear away from that glue,' said a tall, dark man who had high cheek-bones. His balaclava was a careless heap on his head. His moustache, which had been finely rolled into two semi-circular horns, made him look fierce. And when he gesticulated with his tin lunch box, he looked fiercer still.

'My question is only one,' said a big woman whose big arms rested thickly on a bundle of washing on her lap. 'Have you ever seen a person caught there? Just answer that question.' She spoke with finality, and threw her defiant scepticism outside at the receding scene of men cycling home from work in single file. The bus moved so close to them that the boy had feared the men might get hit.

'I have heard of one silly chap that got caught!' declared a young man. He was sitting with others on the long seat at the rear of the bus. They had all along been laughing and exchanging ribald jokes. The young man had thick lips and red eyes. As he spoke he applied the final touches of saliva with his tongue to brown paper rolled up with tobacco.

'When?' asked the big woman. 'Exactly when, I say? Who was that person?'

'These things really happen!' said a general chorus of women.

'That's what I know,' endorsed the man with the balaclava, and then added, 'You see, the problem with some women is that they will not listen; they have to oppose a man. They just have to.'

'What is that man saying now?' asked another woman. 'This matter started off very well, but this road you are now taking will get us lost.'

'That's what I'm saying too,' said the big woman, adjusting her bundle of washing somewhat unnecessarily. She continued: 'A person shouldn't look this way or that, or take a corner here or there. Just face me straight: I asked a question.'

'These things really happen,' said the chorus again.

'That's it, good ladies, make your point; push very strongly,' shouted the young man at the back. 'Love is having women like you,' he added, much to the enjoyment of his friends. He was now smoking, and his rolled up cigarette looked small between his thick fingers.

'Although you have no respect,' said the big woman, 'I will let you know that this matter is no joke.'

'Of course this is not a joke!' shouted a new contributor. He spoke firmly and in English. His eyes seemed to burn with anger. He was young and immaculately dressed, his white shirt collar resting neatly on the collar of his jacket. A young nurse in a white uniform sat next to him. 'The mother there,' he continued, 'asks you very clearly whether you have ever seen a person caught by the supposed prophetess's supposed trap. Have you?'

'She didn't say that, man,' said the young man at the back, passing the roll to one of his friends. 'She only asked when this person was caught and who it was.' The boys at the back laughed. There was a lot of smoke now at the back of the bus.

'My question was,' said the big woman turning her head to glare at

the young man, 'have you ever seen a person caught there? That's all.' Then she looked outside. She seemed angry now.

'Don't be angry, mother,' said the young man at the back. There was more laughter. 'I was only trying to understand,' he added.

'And that's our problem,' said the immaculately dressed man, addressing the bus. His voice was sure and strong. 'We laugh at everything; just stopping short of seriousness. Is it any wonder that the white man is still sitting on us? The mother there asked a very straightforward question, but she is answered vaguely about things happening. Then there is disrespectful laughter at the back there. The truth is you have no proof. None of you. Have you ever seen anybody caught by this prophetess? Never. It's all superstition. And so much about this prophetess also. Some of us are tired of her stories.'

There was a stunned silence in the bus. Only the heavy drone of an engine struggling with an overloaded bus could be heard. It was the man with the balaclava who broke the silence.

'Young man,' he said, 'by the look of things you must be a clever, educated person, but you just note one thing. The prophetess might just be hearing all this, so don't be surprised when a bolt of lightning strikes you on a hot sunny day. And we shall be there at your funeral, young man, to say how you brought misfortune upon your head.'

Thus had the discussion ended. But the boy had remembered how, every summer, bottles of all sizes filled with liquids of all kinds of colours would dangle from vines and peach and apricot trees in many yards in the township. No one dared steal fruit from those trees. Who wanted to be glued in shame to a fruit tree? Strangely, though, only the prophetess's trees had no bottles hanging from their branches.

The boy turned his eyes away from the window and focused into the dark room. His eyes had adjusted slowly to the darkness, and he saw the dark form of the woman shuffling away from him. She probably wore those slippers that had a fluff on top. Old women seem to love them. Then a white receding object came into focus. The woman wore a white *doek* on her head. The boy's eyes followed the *doek*. It took a right-angled turn – probably round the table. And then the dark form

of the table came into focus. The *doek* stopped, and the boy heard the screech of a chair being pulled; and the *doek* descended somewhat and was still. There was silence in the room. The boy wondered what to do. Should he grope for a chair? Or should he squat on the floor respectfully? Should he greet or wait to be greeted? One never knew with the prophetess. Why did his mother have to send him to this place? The fascinating stories about the prophetess, to which the boy would add graphic details as if he had also met her, were one thing; but being in her actual presence was another. The boy then became conscious of the smell of camphor. His mother always used camphor whenever she complained of pains in her joints. Was the prophetess ill then? Did she pray for her own water? Suddenly, the boy felt at ease, as if the discovery that a prophetess could also feel pain somehow made her explainable.

'Lumela 'me,' he greeted. Then he cleared his throat.

'Eea ngoanaka,' she responded. After a little while she asked: 'Is there something you want, little man?' It was a very thin voice. It would have been completely detached had it not been for a hint of tiredness in it. She breathed somewhat heavily. Then she coughed, cleared her throat, and coughed again. A mixture of rough discordant sounds filled the dark room as if everything was coming out of her insides, for she seemed to breathe out her cough from deep within her. And the boy wondered: if she coughed too long, what would happen? Would something come out? A lung? The boy saw the form of the woman clearly now: she had bent forward somewhat. Did anything come out of her on to the floor? The cough subsided. The woman sat up and her hands fumbled with something around her breasts. A white cloth emerged. She leaned forward again, cupped her hands and spat into the cloth. Then she stood up and shuffled away into further darkness away from the boy. A door creaked, and the white *doek* disappeared. The boy wondered what to do because the prophetess had disappeared before he could say what he had come for. He waited.

More objects came into focus. Three white spots on the table emerged. They were placed diagonally across the table. Table mats. There was a small round black patch on the middle one. Because the prophetess was not in the room, the boy was bold enough to move near the table and touch the mats. They were crocheted mats. The boy

remembered the huge lacing that his mother had crocheted for the church altar. ALL SAINTS CHURCH was crocheted all over the lacing. There were a number of designs of chalices that carried the Blood of Our Lord.

Then the boy heard the sound of a match being struck. There were many attempts before the match finally caught fire. Soon, the dull, orange light of a candle came into the living room where the boy was, through a half closed door. More light flushed the living room as the woman came in carrying a candle. She looked round as if she was wondering where to put the candle. Then she saw the ashtray on the middle mat, pulled it towards her, sat down and turned the candle over into the ashtray. Hot wax dropped on to the ashtray. Then the prophetess turned the candle upright and pressed its bottom on to the wax. The candle held.

The prophetess now peered through the light of the candle at the boy. Her thick lips protruded, pulling the wrinkled skin and caving in the cheeks to form a kind of lip circle. She seemed always ready to kiss. There was a line tattooed from the forehead to the ridge of a nose that separated small eyes that were half closed by large, drooping eyelids. The white *doek* on her head was so huge that it made her face look small. She wore a green dress and a starched green cape that had many white crosses embroidered on it. Behind her, leaning against the wall, was a long bamboo cross.

The prophetess stood up again, and shuffled towards the window which was behind the boy. She closed the curtains and walked back to her chair. The boy saw another big cross embroidered on the back of her cape. Before she sat down she picked up the bamboo cross and held it in front of her.

'What did you say you wanted, little man?' she asked slowly.

'My mother sent me to ask for water,' said the boy putting the bottle of water on the table.

'To ask for water?' she asked with mild exclamation, looking up at the bamboo cross. 'That is very strange. You came all the way from home to ask for water?'

'I mean,' said the boy, 'holy water.'

'Ahh!' exclaimed the prophetess. 'You did not say what you meant, little man.' She coughed, just once. 'Sit down, little man,' she said, and

continued. 'You see, you should learn to say what you mean. Words, little man, are a gift from the Almighty, the Eternal Wisdom. He gave us all a little pinch of his mind and called on us to think. That is why it is folly to misuse words or not to know how to use them well. Now, who is your mother?'

'My mother?' asked the boy, confused by the sudden transition. 'My mother is staff nurse Masemola.'

'Ao!' exclaimed the prophetess. 'You are the son of the nurse? Does she have such a big man now?' She smiled a little and the lip circle opened. She smiled like a pretty woman who did not want to expose her cavities.

The boy relaxed somewhat, vaguely feeling safe because the prophetess knew his mother. This made him look away from the prophetess for a while, and he saw that there was a huge mask on the wall just opposite her. It was shining and black. It grinned all the time showing two canine teeth pointing upwards. About ten feet away at the other side of the wall was a picture of Jesus in which His chest was open, revealing His heart which had many shafts of light radiating from it.

'Your mother has a heart of gold, my son,' continued the prophetess. 'You are very fortunate, indeed, to have such a parent. Remember, when she says, "My boy, take this message to that house," go. When she says, "My boy, let me send you to the shop," go. And when she says, "My boy, pick up a book and read," pick up a book and read. In all this she is actually saying to you, learn and serve. Those two things, little man, are the greatest inheritance.'

Then the prophetess looked up at the bamboo cross as if she saw something in it that the boy could not see. She seemed to lose her breath for a while. She coughed deeply again, after which she went silent, her cheeks moving as if she was chewing.

'Bring the bottle nearer,' she said finally. She put one hand on the bottle while with the other she held the bamboo cross. Her eyes closed, she turned her face towards the ceiling. The boy saw that her face seemed to have contracted into an intense concentration in such a way that the wrinkles seemed to have become deep gorges. Then she began to speak.

'You will not know this hymn, boy, so listen. Always listen to new

things. Then try to create too. Just as I have learnt never to page through the dead leaves of hymn books.' And she began to sing.

If the fish in a river
boiled by the midday sun
can wait for the coming of evening,
we too can wait
in this wind-frosted land,
the spring will come,
the spring will come.
If the reeds in winter
can dry up and seem dead
and then rise
in the spring,
we too will survive the fire that is
coming
the fire that is coming,
we too will survive the fire that is
coming.

It was a long, slow song. Slowly, the prophetess began to pray.

'God, the All Powerful! When called upon, You always listen. We direct our hearts and thoughts to You. How else could it be? There is so much evil in the world; so much emptiness in our hearts; so much debasement of the mind. But You, God of all power, are the wind that sweeps away evil and fills our hearts and minds with renewed strength and hope. Remember Samson? Of course You do, O Lord. You created him, You, maker of all things. You brought him out of a barren woman's womb, and since then, we have known that out of the desert things will grow, and that what grows out of the barren wastes has a strength that can never be destroyed.'

Suddenly, the candle flame went down. The light seemed to have gone into retreat as the darkness loomed out, seemingly out of the very light itself, and bore down upon it, until there was a tiny blue flame on the table looking so vulnerable and so strong at the same time. The boy shuddered and felt the coldness of the floor going up his bare feet.

Then out of the dark, came the prophetess's laugh. It began as a giggle, the kind the girls would make when the boy and his friends

chased them down the street for a little kiss. The giggle broke into the kind of laughter that produced tears when one was very happy. There was a kind of strange pleasurable rhythm to it that gave the boy a momentary enjoyment of the dark, but the laugh gave way to a long shriek. The boy wanted to rush out of the house. But something strong, yet intangible, held him fast to where he was. It was probably the shriek itself that had filled the dark room and now seemed to come out of the mask on the wall. The boy felt like throwing himself on the floor to wriggle and roll like a snake until he became tired and fell into a long sleep at the end of which would be the kind of bliss the boy would feel when he was happy and his mother was happy and she embraced him, so closely.

But the giggle, the laugh, the shriek, all ended as abruptly as they had started as the darkness swiftly receded from the candle like the way ripples run away from where a stone has been thrown in the water. And there was light. On the wall, the mask smiled silently, and the heart of Jesus sent out yellow light.

‘Lord, Lord, Lord,’ said the prophetess slowly in a quiet, surprisingly full voice which carried the same kind of contentment that had been in the voice of the boy’s mother when one day he had come home from playing in the street, and she was seated on the chair close to the kitchen door, just opposite the warm stove. And as soon as she saw him come in, she embraced him all the while saying: ‘I’ve been so ill; for so long, but I’ve got you. You’re my son. You’re my son. You’re my son.’

And the boy had smelled the faint smell of camphor on her, and he too embraced her, holding her firmly although his arms could not go beyond his mother’s armpits. He remembered how warm his hands had become in her armpits.

‘Lord, Lord, Lord,’ continued the prophetess, ‘have mercy on the desert in our hearts and in our thoughts. Have mercy. Bless this water; fill it with your power; and may it bring rebirth. Let her and all others who will drink of it feel the flower of newness spring alive in them; let those who drink it, break the chains of despair, and may they realise that the desert wastes are really not barren, but that the vast sands that stretch into the horizon are the measure of the seed in us.’

As the prophetess stopped speaking, she slowly lowered the bamboo

cross until it rested on the floor. The boy wondered if it was all over now. Should he stand up and get the blessed water and leave? But the prophetess soon gave him direction.

‘Come here, my son,’ she said, ‘and kneel before me here.’ The boy stood up and walked slowly towards the prophetess. He knelt on the floor, his hands hanging at his sides. The prophetess placed her hands on his head. They were warm, and the warmth seemed to go through his hair, penetrating deep through his scalp into the very centre of his head. Perhaps, he thought, that was the soul of the prophetess going into him. Wasn’t it said that when the prophetess placed her hands on a person’s head, she was seeing with her soul deep into that person; that, as a result, the prophetess could never be deceived? And the boy wondered how his lungs looked to her. Did she see the water that he had drunk from the tap just across the street? Where was the water now? In the stomach? In the kidneys?

Then the hands of the prophetess moved all over the boy’s head, seeming to feel for something. They went down the neck. They seemed cooler now, and the coolness seemed to tickle the boy for his neck was colder than those hands. Now they covered his face, and he saw, just before he closed his eyes, the skin folds on the hands so close to his eyes that they looked like many mountains. Those hands smelled of blue soap and candle wax. But there was no smell of snuff. The boy wondered. Perhaps the prophetess did not use snuff after all. But the boy’s grandmother did, and her hands always smelled of snuff. Then the prophetess spoke.

‘My son,’ she said, ‘we are made of all that is in the world. Go. Go and heal your mother.’ When she removed her hands from the boy’s face, he felt his face grow cold, and there was a slight sensation of his skin shrinking. He rose from the floor, lifted the bottle with its snout, and backed away from the prophetess. He then turned and walked towards the door. As he closed it, he saw the prophetess shuffling away to the bedroom carrying the candle with her. He wondered when she would return the ashtray to the table. When he finally closed the door, the living room was dark, and there was light in the bedroom.

It was night outside. The boy stood on the veranda for a while, wanting his eyes to adjust to the darkness. He wondered also about the dog. But it did not seem to be around. And there was that vine archway

with its forbidden fruit and the multicoloured worms that always crawled all over the vine. As the boy walked under the tunnel of vine, he tensed his neck, lowering his head as people do when walking in the rain. He was anticipating the reflex action of shaking off a falling worm. Those worms were disgustingly huge, he thought. And there was also something terrifying about their bright colours.

In the middle of the tunnel, the boy broke into a run and was out of the gate: free. He thought of his mother waiting for the holy water; and he broke into a sprint, running west up Thipe Street towards home. As he got to the end of the street, he heard the hum of the noise that came from the ever-crowded barber shops and the huge beer hall just behind those shops. After the brief retreat in the house of the prophetess, the noise, the people, the shops, the street lights, the buses and the taxis all seemed new. Yet, somehow, he wanted to avoid any contact with all this activity. If he turned left at the corner, he would have to go past the shops into the lit Moshoeshoe Street and its Friday night crowds. If he went right, he would have to go past the now dark, ghostly Bantu-Batho post office, and then down through the huge gum trees behind the Charterston Clinic, and then past the quiet golf course. The latter way would be faster, but too dark and dangerous for a mere boy, even with the spirit of the prophetess in him. And were not dead bodies found there sometimes? The boy turned left.

At the shops, the boy slowed down to manoeuvre through the crowds. He lifted the bottle to his chest and supported it from below with the other hand. He must hold on to that bottle. He was going to heal his mother. He tightened the bottle cap. Not a drop was to be lost. The boy passed the shops.

Under a street lamp just a few feet from the gate into the beer hall was a gang of boys standing in a tight circle. The boy slowed down to an anxious stroll. Who were they? he wondered. He would have to run past them quickly. No, there would be no need. He recognised Timi and Bubu. They were with the rest of the gang from the boy's neighbourhood. Those were the bigger boys who were either in Standard Six or were already in secondary school or were now working in town.

Timi recognised the boy.

'Ja, sonny boy,' greeted Timi. 'What's a picaninny like you doing alone in the streets at night?'

'*Hail*, bra Timi,' said the boy, returning the greeting. 'Just from the shops, bra Timi,' he lied, not wanting to reveal his real mission. Somehow that would not have been appropriate.

'Come on, you!' yelled another member of the gang, glaring at Timi. It was Biza. Most of the times when the boy had seen Biza, the latter was stopping a girl and talking to her. Sometimes the girl would laugh. Sometimes Biza would twist her arm until she 'agreed'. In broad daylight!

'You don't believe me,' continued Biza to Timi, 'and when I try to show you some proof you turn away to greet an ant.'

'Okay then,' said another, 'what proof do you have? Everybody knows that Sonto is a hard girl to get.'

'Come closer then,' said Biza, 'and I'll show you.' The boy was closed out of the circle as the gang closed in towards Biza, who was at the centre. The boy became curious and got closer. The wall was impenetrable. But he could clearly hear Biza.

'You see? You can all see. I've just come from that girl. Look! See? The liquid? See? When I touch it with my finger and then leave it, it follows like a spider's web.'

'Well, my man,' said someone, 'you can't deceive anybody with that. It's the usual trick. A fellow just blows his nose and then applies the mucus there, and then emerges out of the dark saying he has just had a girl.'

'Let's look again closely,' said another, 'before we decide one way or the other.' And the gang pressed close again.

'You see? You see?' Biza kept saying.

'I think Biza has had that girl,' said someone.

'It's mucus, man, and nothing else,' said another.

'But you know Biza's record in these matters, gents.'

'Another thing, how do we know it's Sonto and not some other girl? Where is it written on Biza's cigar that he has just had Sonto? Show me where it's written "Sonto" there.'

'You're jealous, you guys, that's your problem,' said Biza. The circle went loose and there was just enough time for the boy to see Biza's penis disappear into his trousers. A thick little thing, thought the boy.

It looked sad. It had first been squeezed in retreat against the fly like a concertina, before it finally disappeared. Then Biza, with a twitch of alarm across his face, saw the boy.

'What did you see, you?' screamed Biza. 'Fuck off!'

The boy took to his heels wondering what Biza could have been doing with his penis under the street lamp. It was funny, whatever it was. It was silly too. Sinful. The boy was glad that he had got the holy water away from those boys and that none of them had touched the bottle.

And the teachers were right, thought the boy. Silliness was all those boys knew. And then they would go to school and fail test after test. Silliness and school did not go together.

The boy felt strangely superior. He had the power of the prophetess in him. And he was going to pass that power to his mother, and heal her. Those boys were not healing their mothers. They just left their mothers alone at home. The boy increased his speed. He had to get home quickly. He turned right at the charge office and sped towards the clinic. He crossed the road that went to town and entered Mayaba Street. Mayaba Street was dark and the boy could not see. But he did not lower his speed. Home was near now, instinct would take him there. His eyes would adjust to the darkness as he raced along. He lowered the bottle from his chest and let it hang at his side, like a pendulum that was not moving. He looked up at the sky as if light would come from the stars high up to lead him home. But when he lowered his face, he saw something suddenly loom before him, and, almost simultaneously, felt a dull yet painful impact against his thigh. Then there was a grating of metal seeming to scoop up sand from the street. The boy did not remember how he fell but, on the ground, he lay clutching at his painful thigh. A few feet away, a man groaned and cursed.

'Blasted child!' he shouted. 'Shouldn't I kick you? Just running in the street as if you owned it. Shit of a child, you don't even pay tax. Fuck off home before I do more damage to you!' The man lifted his bicycle, and the boy saw him straightening the handles. And the man rode away.

The boy raised himself from the ground and began to limp home, conscious of nothing but the pain in his thigh. But it was not long

before he felt a jab of pain at the centre of his chest and his heart beating faster. He was thinking of the broken bottle and the spilt holy water and his mother waiting for him and the water that would help to cure her. What would his mother say? If only he had not stopped to see those silly boys he might not have been run over by a bicycle. Should he go back to the prophetess? No. There was the dog, there was the vine, there were the worms. There was the prophetess herself. She would not let anyone who wasted her prayers get away without punishment. Would it be lightning? Would it be the fire of hell? What would it be? The boy limped home to face his mother. He would walk in to his doom. He would walk into his mother's bedroom, carrying no cure, and face the pain in her sad eyes.

But as the boy entered the yard of his home, he heard the sound of bottles coming from where his dog had its kennel. Rex had jumped over the bottles, knocking some stones against them in his rush to meet the boy. And the boy remembered the pile of bottles next to the kennel. He felt grateful as he embraced the dog. He selected a bottle from the heap. Calmly, as if he had known all the time what he would do in such a situation, the boy walked out of the yard again, towards the street tap on Mayaba Street. And there, almost mechanically, he cleaned the bottle, shaking it many times with clean water. Finally, he filled it with water and wiped its outside clean against his trousers. He tightened the cap and limped home.

As soon as he opened the door, he heard his mother's voice in the bedroom. It seemed some visitors had come while he was away.

'I'm telling you, *Sisi*,' his mother was saying, 'and take it from me, a trained nurse. Pills, medicines, and all those injections, are not enough. I take herbs too, and then think of the wonders of the universe as our people have always done. Son, is that you?'

'Yes, Ma,' said the boy who had just closed the door with a deliberate bang.

'And did you bring the water?'

'Yes, Ma.'

'Good. I knew you would. Bring the water and three cups. MaShange and MaMokoena are here.'

The boy's eyes misted with tears. His mother's trust in him: would he repay it with such dishonesty? He would have to be calm. He wiped

his eyes with the back of his hand, and then put the bottle and three cups on a tray. He would have to walk straight. He would have to hide the pain in his thigh. He would have to smile at his mother. He would have to smile at the visitors. He picked up the tray; but just before he entered the passage leading to the bedroom, he stopped, trying to muster courage. The voices of the women in the bedroom reached him clearly.

'I hear you very well, Nurse,' said one of the women. 'It is that kind of sense I was trying to spread before the minds of these people. You see, the two children are first cousins. The same blood runs through them.'

'That close!' exclaimed the boy's mother.

'Yes, that close. MaMokoena here can bear me out; I told them in her presence. Tell the nurse, you were there.'

'I have never seen such people in all my life,' affirmed MaMokoena.

'So I say to them, my voice reaching up to the ceiling, "Hey, you people, I have seen many years. If these two children really want to marry each other, then a beast *has* to be slaughtered to cancel the ties of blood . . ."'

'And do you want to hear what they said?' interrupted MaMokoena.

'I'm listening with both ears,' said the boy's mother.

'Tell her, child of Shange,' said MaMokoena.

'They said that was old, crusted foolishness. So I said to myself, "Daughter of Shange, shut your mouth, sit back, open your eyes, and watch." And that's what I did.'

'Two weeks before the marriage, the ancestors struck. Just as I had thought. The girl had to be rushed to hospital, her legs swollen like trousers full of air on the washing line. Then I got my chance, and opened my mouth, pointing my finger at them, and said, "Did you ask the ancestors' permission for this unacceptable marriage?" You should have seen their necks becoming as flexible as a goose's. They looked this way, and looked that way, but never at me. But my words had sunk. And before the sun went down, we were eating the insides of a goat. A week later, the children walked up to the altar. And the priest said to them, "You are such beautiful children!"'

'Isn't it terrible that some people just let misfortune fall upon them?' remarked the boy's mother.

'Only those who ignore the words of the world speaking to them,' said MaShange.

'Where is this boy now?' said the boy's mother. 'Son! Is the water coming?'

Instinctively the boy looked down at his legs. Would the pain in his thigh lead to the swelling of his legs? Or would it be because of his deception? A tremor of fear went through him; but he had to control it, and be steady, or the bottle of water would topple over. He stepped forward into the passage. There was his mother! Her bed faced the passage, and he had seen her as soon as he turned into the passage. She had propped herself up with many pillows. Their eyes met, and she smiled, showing the gap in her upper front teeth that she liked to poke her tongue into. She wore a fawn chiffon *doek* which had slanted into a careless heap on one side of her head. This exposed her undone hair on the other side of her head.

As the boy entered the bedroom, he smelled camphor. He greeted the two visitors and noticed that, although it was warm in the bedroom, MaShange, whom he knew, wore her huge, heavy, black, and shining overcoat. MaMokoena had a blanket over her shoulders. Their *doeks* were more orderly than the boy's mother's. The boy placed the tray on the dressing chest close to his mother's bed. He stepped back and watched his mother, not sure whether he should go back to the kitchen, or wait to meet his doom.

'I don't know what I would do without this boy,' said the mother as she leaned on an elbow, lifted the bottle with the other hand, and turned the cap rather laboriously with the hand on whose elbow she was resting. The boy wanted to help, but he felt he couldn't move. The mother poured water into one cup, drank from it briefly, turned her face towards the ceiling, and closed her eyes. 'Such cool water!' she sighed deeply, and added, 'Now I can pour for you,' as she poured water into the other two cups.

There was such a glow of warmth in the boy as he watched his mother, so much gladness in him that he forgave himself. What had the prophetess seen in him? Did she still feel him in her hands? Did she know what he had just done? Did holy water taste any differently from ordinary water? His mother didn't seem to find any difference. Would she be healed?

'As we drink the prophetess's water,' said MaShange, 'we want to say how grateful we are that we came to see for ourselves how you are.'

'I think I feel better already. This water, and you . . . I can feel a soothing coolness deep down.'

As the boy slowly went out of the bedroom, he felt the pain in his leg, and felt grateful. He had healed his mother. He would heal her tomorrow, and always with all the water in the world. He had healed her.

NADINE GORDIMER

Amnesty

When we heard he was released I ran all over the farm and through the fence to our people on the next farm to tell everybody. I only saw afterwards I'd torn my dress on the barbed wire, and there was a scratch, with blood, on my shoulder.

He went away from this place eight years ago, signed up to work in town with what they call a construction company – building glass walls up to the sky. For the first two years he came home for the weekend once a month and two weeks at Christmas; that was when he asked my father for me. And he began to pay. He and I thought that in three years he would have paid enough for us to get married. But then he started wearing that T-shirt, he told us he'd joined the union, he told us about the strike, how he was one of the men who went to talk to the bosses because some others had been laid off after the strike. He's always been good at talking, even in English – he was the best at the farm school, he used to read the newspapers the Indian wraps soap and sugar in when you buy at the store.

There was trouble at the hostel where he had a bed, and riots over paying rent in the townships and he told me – just me, not the old ones – that wherever people were fighting against the way we are treated they were doing it for all of us, on the farms as well as the towns, and the unions were with them, he was with them, making speeches, marching. The third year, we heard he was in prison. Instead of getting married. We didn't know where to find him, until he went on trial. The case was heard in a town far away. I couldn't go often to the court because by that time I had passed my Standard 8 and I was working in the farm school. Also my parents were short of money. Two of my brothers who had gone away to work in town didn't send home; I suppose they lived with girlfriends and had to buy things for them. My

father and other brother work here for the Boer and the pay is very small, we have two goats, a few cows we're allowed to graze, and a patch of land where my mother can grow vegetables. No cash from that.

When I saw him in the court he looked beautiful in a blue suit with a striped shirt and brown tie. All the accused – his comrades, he said – were well dressed. The union bought the clothes so that the judge and the prosecutor would know they weren't dealing with stupid yes-baas black men who didn't know their rights. These things and everything else about the court and trial he explained to me when I was allowed to visit him in jail. Our little girl was born while the trial went on and when I brought the baby to court the first time to show him, his comrades hugged him and then hugged me across the barrier of the prisoners' dock and they had clubbed together to give me some money as a present for the baby. He chose the name for her, Inkuleko.

Then the trial was over and he got six years. He was sent to the Island. We all knew about the Island. Our leaders had been there so long. But I have never seen the sea except to colour it in blue at school, and I couldn't imagine a piece of earth surrounded by it. I could only think of a cake of dung, dropped by the cattle, floating in a pool of rainwater they'd crossed, the water showing the sky like a looking-glass, blue. I was ashamed only to think that. He had told me how the glass walls showed the pavement trees and the other buildings in the street and the colours of the cars and the clouds as the crane lifted him on a platform higher and higher through the sky to work at the top of a building.

He was allowed one letter a month. It was my letter because his parents didn't know how to write. I used to go to them where they worked on another farm to ask what message they wanted to send. The mother always cried and put her hands on her head and said nothing, and the old man, who preached to us in the veld every Sunday, said tell my son we are praying, God will make everything all right for him. Once he wrote back, That's the trouble – our people on the farms, they're told God will decide what's good for them so that they won't find the force to do anything to change their lives.

After two years had passed, we – his parents and I – had saved up enough money to go to Cape Town to visit him. We went by train and

slept on the floor at the station and asked the way, next day, to the ferry. People were kind; they all knew that if you wanted the ferry it was because you had somebody of yours on the Island.

And there it was – there was the sea. It was green and blue, climbing and falling, bursting white, all the way to the sky. A terrible wind was slapping it this way and that; it hid the Island, but people like us, also waiting for the ferry, pointed where the Island must be, far out in the sea that I never thought would be like it really was.

There were other boats, and ships as big as buildings that go to other places, all over the world, but the ferry is only for the Island, it doesn't go anywhere else in the world, only to the Island. So everybody waiting there was waiting for the Island, there could be no mistake we were not in the right place. We had sweets and biscuits, trousers and a warm coat for him (a woman standing with us said we wouldn't be allowed to give him the clothes) and I wasn't wearing, any more, the old beret pulled down over my head that farm girls wear, I had bought relaxer cream from the man who comes round the farms selling things out of a box on his bicycle, and my hair was combed up thick under a flowered scarf that didn't cover the gold-coloured rings in my ears. His mother had her blanket tied round her waist over her dress, a farm woman, but I looked just as good as any of the other girls there. When the ferry was ready to take us, we stood all pressed together and quiet like the cattle waiting to be let through a gate. One man kept looking round with his chin moving up and down, he was counting, he must have been afraid there were too many to get on and he didn't want to be left behind. We all moved up to the policeman in charge and everyone ahead of us went on to the boat. But when our turn came and he put out his hand for something, I didn't know what.

We didn't have a permit. We didn't know that before you come to Cape Town, before you come to the ferry for the Island, you have to have a police permit to visit a prisoner on the Island. I tried to ask him nicely. The wind blew the voice out of my mouth.

We were turned away. We saw the ferry rock, bumping the landing where we stood, moving, lifted and dropped by all that water, getting smaller and smaller until we didn't know if we were really seeing it or one of the birds that looked black, dipping up and down, out there.

The only good thing was one of the other people took the sweets and

biscuits for him. He wrote and said he got them. But it wasn't a good letter. Of course not. He was cross with me; I should have found out, I should have known about the permit. He was right – I bought the train tickets, I asked where to go for the ferry, I should have known about the permit. I have passed Standard 8. There was an advice office to go to in town, the churches ran it, he wrote. But the farm is so far from town, we on the farms don't know about these things. It was as he said; our ignorance is the way we are kept down, this ignorance must go.

We took the train back and we never went to the Island – never saw him in the three more years he was there. Not once. We couldn't find the money for the train. His father died and I had to help his mother from my pay. For our people the worry is always money, I wrote. When will we ever have money? Then he sent such a good letter. That's what I'm on the Island for, far away from you, I'm here so that one day our people will have the things they need, land, food, the end of ignorance. There was something else – I could just read the word 'power' the prison had blacked out. All his letters were not just for me; the prison officer read them before I could.

•

He was coming home after only five years!

That's what it seemed to me, when I heard – the five years was suddenly disappeared – nothing! – there was no whole year still to wait. I showed my – our – little girl his photo again. That's your daddy, he's coming, you're going to see him. She told the other children at school, I've got a daddy, just as she showed off about the kid goat she had at home.

We wanted him to come at once, and at the same time we wanted time to prepare. His mother lived with one of his uncles; now that his father was dead there was no house of his father for him to take me to as soon as we married. If there had been time, my father would have cut poles, my mother and I would have baked bricks, cut thatch, and built a house for him and me and the child.

We were not sure what day he would arrive. We only heard on my radio his name and the names of some others who were released. Then at the Indian's store I noticed the newspaper, *The Nation*, written by

black people, and on the front a picture of a lot of people dancing and waving – I saw at once it was at that ferry. Some men were being carried on other men's shoulders. I couldn't see which one was him. We were waiting. The ferry had brought him from the Island but we remembered Cape Town is a long way from us. Then he did come. On a Saturday, no school, so I was working with my mother, hoeing and weeding round the pumpkins and mealies, my hair, that I meant to keep nice, tied in an old *doek*. A combi came over the veld and his comrades had brought him. I wanted to run away and wash but he stood there stretching his legs, calling, hey! hey! with his comrades making a noise around him, and my mother started shrieking in the old style aie! aie! and my father was clapping and stamping towards him. He held his arms open to us, this big man in town clothes, polished shoes, and all the time while he hugged me I was holding my dirty hands, full of mud, away from him behind his back. His teeth hit me hard through his lips, he grabbed at my mother and she struggled to hold the child up to him. I thought we would all fall down! Then everyone was quiet. The child hid behind my mother. He picked her up but she turned her head away to her shoulder. He spoke to her gently but she wouldn't speak to him. She's nearly six years old! I told her not to be a baby. She said, That's not him.

The comrades all laughed, we laughed, she ran off and he said, She has to have time to get used to me.

He has put on weight, yes; a lot. You couldn't believe it. He used to be so thin his feet looked too big for him. I used to feel his bones but now – that night – when he lay on me he was so heavy, I didn't remember it was like that. Such a long time. It's strange to get stronger in prison; I thought he wouldn't have enough to eat and would come out weak. Everyone said, Look at him! – he's a man, now. He laughed and banged his fist on his chest, told them how the comrades exercised in their cells, he would run three miles a day, stepping up and down on one place on the floor of that small cell where he was kept. After we were together at night we used to whisper a long time but now I can feel he's thinking of some things I don't know and I can't worry him with talk. Also I don't know what to say. To ask him what it was like, five years shut away there; or to tell him something about school or about the child. What else has happened, here? Nothing. Just waiting.

Sometimes in the daytime I do try to tell him what it was like for me, here at home on the farm, five years. He listens, he's interested, just like he's interested when people from the other farms come to visit and talk to him about little things that happened to them while he was away all that time on the Island. He smiles and nods, asks a couple of questions and then stands up and stretches. I see it's to show them it's enough, his mind is going back to something he was busy with before they came. And we farm people are very slow; we tell things slowly, he used to, too.

He hasn't signed on for another job. But he can't stay at home with us; we thought, after five years over there in the middle of that green and blue sea, so far, he would rest with us a little while. The combi or some car comes to fetch him and he says don't worry, I don't know what day I'll be back. At first I asked, what week, next week? He tried to explain to me: in the Movement it's not like it was in the union, where you do your work every day and after that you are busy with meetings; in the Movement you never know where you will have to go and what is going to come up next. And the same with money. In the Movement, it's not like a job, with regular pay – I know that, he doesn't have to tell me – it's like it was going to the Island, you do it for all our people who suffer because we haven't got money, we haven't got land – look, he said, speaking of my parents', my home, the home that has been waiting for him, with his child: look at this place where the white man owns the ground and lets you squat in mud and tin huts here only as long as you work for him – *Baba* and your brother planting his crops and looking after his cattle, Mama cleaning his house and you in the school without even having the chance to train properly as a teacher. The farmer owns us, he says. I've been thinking we haven't got a home because there wasn't time to build a house before he came from the Island; but we haven't got a home at all. Now I've understood that.

I'm not stupid. When the comrades come to this place in the combi to talk to him here I don't go away with my mother after we've brought them tea or (if she's made it for the weekend) beer. They like her beer, they talk about our culture and there's one of them who makes a point of putting his arm around my mother, calling her the *mama* of all of them, the *mama* of Africa. Sometimes they please her very much by

telling her how they used to sing on the Island and getting her to sing an old song we all know from our grandmothers. Then they join in with their strong voices. My father doesn't like this noise travelling across the veld; he's afraid that if the Boer finds out my man is a political, from the Island, and he's holding meetings on the Boer's land, he'll tell my father to go, and take his family with him. But my brother says if the Boer asks anything just tell him it's a prayer meeting. Then the singing is over; my mother knows she must go away into the house.

I stay, and listen. He forgets I'm there when he's talking and arguing about something I can see is important, more important than anything we could ever have to say to each other when we're alone. But now and then, when one of the other comrades is speaking I see him look at me for a moment the way I will look up at one of my favourite children in school to encourage the child to understand. The men don't speak to me and I don't speak. One of the things they talk about is organising the people on the farms – the workers, like my father and brother, and like his parents used to be. I learn what all these things are: minimum wage, limitation of working hours, the right to strike, annual leave, accident compensation, pensions, sick and even maternity leave. I am pregnant, at last I have another child inside me, but that's women's business. When they talk about the Big Man, the Old Men, I know who these are: our leaders are also back from prison. I told him about the child coming; he said, And this one belongs to a new country, he'll build the freedom we've fought for! I know he wants to get married but there's no time for that at present. There was hardly time for him to make the child. He comes to me just like he comes here to eat a meal or put on clean clothes. He picks up the little girl and swings her round and there! – it's done, he's getting into the combi, he's already turning to his comrade that face of his that knows only what's inside his head, those eyes that move quickly as if he's chasing something you can't see. The little girl hasn't had time to get used to this man. But I know she'll be proud of him, one day!

How can you tell that to a child six years old? But I tell her about the Big Man and the Old Men, our leaders, so she'll know that her father was with them on the Island, this man is a great man, too.

On Saturday, no school and I plant and weed with my mother, she

sings but I don't; I think. On Sunday there's no work, only prayer meetings out of the farmer's way under the trees, and beer drinks at the mud and tin huts where the farmers allow us to squat on their land. I go off on my own as I used to do when I was a child, making up games and talking to myself where no one would hear me or look for me. I sit on a warm stone in the late afternoon, high up, and the whole valley is a path between the hills, leading away from my feet. It's the Boer's farm but that's not true, it belongs to nobody. The cattle don't know that anyone says he owns it, the sheep – they are grey stones, and then they become a thick grey snake moving – don't know. Our huts and the old mulberry tree and the little brown mat of earth that my mother dug over yesterday, way down there, and way over there the clump of trees round the chimneys and the shiny thing that is the TV mast of the farmhouse – they are nothing, on the back of this earth. It could twitch them away like a dog does a fly.

I am up with the clouds. The sun behind me is changing the colours of the sky and the clouds are changing themselves, slowly, slowly. Some are white, blowing themselves up like bubbles. Underneath is a bar of grey, not enough to make rain. It gets longer and darker while the other clouds are all pink, it grows a thin snout and long body and then the end of it is a tail. There's a huge grey rat moving across the sky, eating the sky.

The child remembered the photo; she said, That's not him. I'm sitting here where I came often when he was on the Island. I came to get away from the others, to wait by myself.

I'm watching the rat, it's losing itself, it's shape, eating the sky, and I'm waiting. Waiting for him to come back.

Waiting. I'm waiting to come back home.

LINDIWE MABUZA

Wake . . .

FOR THEM: NAME THIS DAY GRAVE IN JUNE 1976:

FOR HER

NOW AND AFTER

BECAME FOREVER

- i became aware: wake up to
- ii became conscious: i.e. after sleep
- iii became militant: wake up and fight
- iv vigil for the dead
- v furrow of water following ship

This was funeral day in Soweto. One day was an eternity to forget all other days leading to it. People had emerged to pay their last pretext to it. Respect was no longer spoken of. On such a day everyone has written permission to pretend the dead have always been alive. Yet even the womb of the earth knew by the smells and languages of Johannesburg that every African hand represented charged wires of dead labour.

Thina Silangazela
Ikhaya Laphezulu

(We crave
that home above)

The drums and chorus of the Zion Christian sects competed with pennywhistle cries of reed and rib ingenuity. There was smoke and dust too, even in these early hours, vainly rising and slithering to choke the various hints of township jazz. Thokozile had been first at fat-cake auntie's house. Now, the greased newspaper rested peacefully under the eight-year-old armpit. One would have thought tears had drowned

her sight. No! For her greeting this morning was not a child's. 'We see you! Though what's there to see ourselves over.'

For children grow like mushrooms on funeral day. Bullets had spoken on Wednesday. It was Ndwazi's turn to skip rope. 'If only she had not been so fast.'

Thoko kept blaming Lwazi. She should have landed and remained on the ground and then she would not have been caught, in their birdfly style of skipping. Mid-air, head and bullets met. One whizzed, the other dazed, and both landed spent. Thoko had put her thumb in the wound. But Lwazi was dead.

How could she be sure whether it was the blood or the brain she wanted to push back first into her playmate's head? Her hand was overpowered and since no one else noticed the bloody piece of steel drop on her lap, she quickly shoved it back into the entrance, or was it exit? Then she had asked her feet to carry her into the outhouse, fast, to rest from all the openings on Lwazi's head. And the police! Too scared to enter her own house.

•

'Why didn't she answer me?' Thoko had begged herself. 'Why did she look at me like that?' and then

'Lwazi opened her mouth wide but did not say anything. Aah! Sha-a-ame!'

The smell in the toilet was as routine as respect in Johannesburg. Good thing those fat green flies did not mind sharing their home with a runaway child. How brilliantly green the flies! Some buzzed lazily, almost nonchalant since they lacked nothing now. And then she remembered, perhaps vaguely, her mother telling Lwazi and herself how the sheer gloss and sheen green greed blocked blood from moving around the body and then sores spread and began to eat away the health of the whole.

'Awu, this flea Biting right over the swelling left by its last cousin,' but Thoko was already administering the flea's last bites. She had mastered the art of flea-catching and killing. The best method, one especially recommended for night prowlers, she had learned from

Lwazi. 'First wet your forefinger with saliva. Then roll the finger over the parasite. Then squeeze the parasite. Then place it between your nails and then squirt your blood out of it. Squeeze it all out, dead.' For Thoko and Lwazi the method was guaranteed. Any and all blood-suckers. Their last blood bite.

Sometimes they would give dry runs of the encounter. The imaginary triumphant capture would be punctuated by war dance and stomping manoeuvres and congratulatory embraces. On the podium of friends, levity and games, self-praise was final recommendation. 'Lwazi! She just went down like a bag of corn, *dutshi!* thud! Maybe the screams and booms I hear will scare the fly that buzzed over Lwazi's head.'

The flea-catching method did not work with flies though. Lwazi and Thoko had long agreed that they did not especially relish the thought of dissecting the fly's belly, although this would have assured them of necessary extermination of these creatures. Somehow, it never mattered what sex they were. Male or female, flies carried a bag of eggs. No! Squeezing was out of the question. So suffocating them with one of those modern inventions you bought at Moloi's all-purpose store was the most acceptable method of annihilation. With such thoughts rotating faster than the spread-speed of fear, with questions, fleas and flies alternating to colonise her seclusion, Thoko remained on that concrete seat. Or, at the very least, it would be said that with her body slenderised by daily rations of porridge or *mizile* rice, she thinly contained the smell of the place till her mother's voice screamed her out. The mother had thought she would have some rest this night. Factory machines drain. Home is where one gets charged. But now ... funeral day ahead!

No! respect, not that. There was even winding drummed obstinacy about the word. Every day, but funeral day, black people's respect poured out into white receptacles that greedily soaked up all virtue and tradition except that which rooted whiteness deep into karroos, pla-teaus and the sprawl of the Southern African veld. So why on earth would the word 'respect' even suggest itself when silent graves openly sang praises to the sky that never seems to alter its pattern in spite of its constantly changing colour?

'Oh you of our own,' the sustained sob echoed.

'What have we done on earth?' resounded agonisedly comforting like

a funeral orchestra with its invisible strings stretched like a coffin across yawning graves. The chorus is also echoed in the language of clicks and deep hymns where people smile and even chuckle at the awesomeness of dare and death. Condolences.

Live on.

'How many deaths for us, you of our own?' A shrill voice wonders at death's cynicism. Weak from tears and the weight of unanswered questions, many voices danced the staggering steps of a drunkard, shuffling the weary steps of the vigil. They had sat up all night. Thousands of people in different homes. Waiting together for death to teach then as it does everyday in the newspapers. The death toll had reached five hundred. Then no more news! Soon, it would be expensive news. The regime would sell the dead children back to parents. Otherwise? Otherwise!

(<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	(What happened?
<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	what happened?)
(<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	(what happened
<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	what happened)
(<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	(what happened
<i>Kutheni na?</i>)	what happened)
(<i>Loluhambo?</i>)	(this journey?
<i>Lunengozi . . .</i>)	has danger . . .)

They sang, recounting the tedium of turmoil. They counted on forgetfulness, vainly. They hoped it would deliver them out of the land of pain and dreams. No such relief. At best, not yet! Anger and tiredness had lost appetite. So, the newspaper-wrapped fat-cakes which Thoko had bought just stared, drying themselves out much like the land blighted by droughts.

There was no drama to the eight hundred deaths. No mystery either! Only the quantity and nature of violence. The fascist government wanted Africans to think, breathe, evaluate and conceptualise in Afrikaans. 'Only dogs and slaves are defined by their masters,' said Frederick Douglass. The students said no! to indoctrination and demonstrated. The police shot them. The fascists of South Africa said shoot 'at any cost'. Absolutely no drama to hot pursuit and murder, in cold blood!

Now at Thoko's home, every room was filled to bursting capacity. Even then, in the living room which has now acquired the sadness of a mosque or cathedral were two strips or 'nests' of unoccupied space representing the missing ones.

Please do not feed too long on this emptiness, for your heart could overflow, the silence said. In the valley of life we fear no death. In the valley of death we fear all evil. But where is the cup to receive our precious blood? And in Soweto, people devise ways of drinking sorrow.

The corpses of Thoko's brother and sister wait at a local mortuary. Distance the pain! God! *Molimo!* Things of this earth! When one corpse is one too many it is enough then that nests should tell, as with their books and school uniforms, that the occupants have whirled away. That's just how one felt when they skipped rope, especially in the major league of the sport. They created their unique styles but the envy of all was the birdfly. Thoko and Lwazi were the regional champions by peer acclamation

Loluhambo lunengozi:
(This journey has danger)
Loluhambo lunosizi:
(This journey had grief)
Kutheni na: Kutheni na?
(What happened: what happened?)
Kutheni na: Kutheni na?
(What happened: what happened?)

'Oh! Our sister, do not trouble yourself. Kumalo will get the slip.'

'Our brother, they burned down the office. We need permission to bury the . . . dead.'

'Yes, yes, our sister. How can I forget? But I also know my brother-by-custom. We wouldn't have married you to a tree. I know him. I swear by those under, he will get that slip.'

'Yes, our brother, hope does not kill.'

'Don't chuck hope away. My brother is a man. He will knock and knock until he sees a crack at Johannesburg City Hall. You'll see. He'll come back. We'll bury them today.'

More tears streamed as Thoko's mother's strength defied the sombre dignity of factory hands and machinist control.

'You know too, our brother. To ... sit ... in ... your ... nest ... with pain ... All right I'll try ... and ... hold myself. But ... there's the thought that 'ears me that ... the ... pain ... will be d ... ragged. Ay! No! *Mos!* ... death is better. They have killed *mos*, what else do they want?'

'Sh ... no, our sister, do not speak like that. Thoko should not hear you ... you will stumble our last seed.'

'It is well, our brother.'

She took the wide end of her mourner's tunic to empty some of the salt that had tasted her face from their mutual foundation. Fluids and salts that were ministers. Offices and orifices of sweat-pores, nostrils and eyes. She turned back to see him; speaks.

'I will be careful. I will ... try ... caution!' 'No, our sister. Not just you. All of us have to be careful of the growing ones.'

And then her body convulsed with the fever of other memories. And more tears scream in her quietly speaking, or trying to.

'*Mos*, you too know how Boers are, our brother. They kill ... and murder ... and throw ... on rubbish ... dumps ... with flies like ... the child ... of ... Modise ... If Naledi's fa ... no ... if Kumalo doesn't get the slip perhaps ... I was thinking ... that with some zinc together ... there is ... no money to take the children to ... the ... cold storage ... I was thinking ... that with some of the collection ... we should get nails and some zinc and rope ... make ... two cases ... now I don't know this hiccup ... I was thinking ... we could then ... place ... the children ... no ... the gone ones ...' She now no longer sees him, she goes on speaking. 'Ha! Naledi! Naledi! Where is Themba? You should look well after your brother. Don't let the other children chop his tail. As long as they don't cause him pain.'

'Oh! Children can be clever. Because the older high school children know that Themba sings well they said: "No, you, Themba, won't be initiated by singing at *msila's* concert. We graduate you instantly, automatically. Instead of singing, you see, we are very very thirsty. You will have no tail to cut if you quench this thirst. Now, take this fork," they would say, "and bring us some water till this tiny cup is filled." Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh! Children! But you know Themba tried to get a forkful of water. Then he asked for a spoon.'

'A spoon? A tail asking for a spoon? *Msila?* Ha! Ha! Ha! Look here,

take this other fork, no maybe three. We only do this to you because you are special, we don't usually give more than two forks but you, Themba, you are special! Ha! Ha! Ha! Heh! Heh! She sees the children, her children, her brothers, the five of them – the first, then fifth. She laughs. She sees her brother, but only for a second. Which brother! She speaks, wondering.

'Why do you shake me so, my brother? Oh! The gone ones ... careful now ... place them ... in ... zinc ... case ... wood swallows water ... then lower ... lower ... them into ... the cold ... wa ... te ... r ... s ... of ... the ... ri ... v ... er ... near the ... tr ... ees.'

And then she wandered, swimming alone, groping, feeling the tip of a wandering finger belonging to one of the unknowns like the Lwazis and the Naledis and the Thembas, and hundreds more. By then, the shrouded woman was out. Almost as cold as the shallow waters of the white tributary that meanders through Soweto. She drifted. For a while her brother was there to receive the tired thoughts into his steel-milled hands. And then to her all was now and forever irrelevant. What have we done? *Kuheni na?* Nearer my God! The fight will continue. All these converged on those in the living room and adjacent rooms; but only as lives from epic, liberatory songs of a nation. They seemed almost like lonely dissimilar vowels (vowels all the same) for concordial agreement.

The lives converged on all those at Thoko's house, many other homes too. They converged on those around the nest, that swollen mound covered with a black sheet, the centre piece of long toil and misery. And now, the mound was ready to dress with its soil all the bleeding wounds. In death, discordance seemed swallowed by grief then pressed into tears. Already, it would appear as though the tears were endless streams although all who really know feared the worse to come and a worst.

There were hundreds of dear ones now only called the 'gone ones'.

The regime thought and thought till it decided 'no mass funeral for victims of Soweto riots'.

'You, too, Kumalo, (Sir) you bury your children one by one. *Sis?*'

Kumalo had walked out of the office, a temporary arrangement at City Hall, Johannesburg, South Africa. Market Street, crossed Von Brandis, Eloff, then towards the Smal Street entrance to Park Station. Hardly more than three decades ago, he remembered rickshaw 'boys' in regal peacock splendour; animal power for beaded chariots that can fly pleasure into the leisure of white world tourists. At night these 'boys' dozed while robbers came or did not come! Hardly more than a decade ago he remembered ... Yes, Park.

This is where workers from Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and the various insults called bantustans make their debut to the super-exploitation on the African continent for the benefit of other continents.

For a while Kumalo transgressed into this 'foreign' world and the warmth that rose and choked that region of the body only endowed the female of the species, the womb, did not strike him as odd. Not at all! He was a man. But he was not afraid of birth of feeling. Especially not on funeral day! And not for a messenger boy! He was not a man ...?

Funeral day? This was to be extra added attraction to an otherwise dreary existence filled with some monotonous sounds of law pre-occupied Johannesburg. Johannesburg is the mother-child of Soweto. Stranger, don't be alarmed at such an umbilical existence. The reverse of the question would be more appropriate to answer but since a child of 'Soweto' significantly differs from a Johannesburg darling we shall only ask the question direct: Where is Johannesburg without 'Soweto'? If the cemetery suggests itself, blame it on gold deposited below the earth we trample.

How such thoughts pounded the sore head of Kumalo! And more came as the train flashed! Braamfontein flashed! Peace and privacy reigns! Langlaage flashed! Candy, lumber, clothing and of course gold flashed! Croesus flashed! none bow before the cemetery except the dead and dying and all flashed before the city of jams, jellies, preserves and all the jolly canned stuff! There's no end to the rise of mine dumps. Lonely cablecars ride their riddle here and there and back and forth, and there are many lores and many a legend hidden at the base of those white hills. New Canada shimmers in the lake as the train swallows more! But a storm rose inside Kumalo as he watched the burning soil of 'White City' and the tears knocked in his throat wanting an exit, but not this time, while the children burn barefoot on the earth ... Earth, you fatten not!

We fatten and fatten you with youth and brain. But still you're not satisfied! We're never guests when you set your tables. Always you dine and wine, picking our choice cuts, our promises, our children, our leaders. But still, your bossy fingers itch for more and more. Why do it to us? If this be the prize for gold and other things, why not take your anger to those who anchor me to sweat and die for your keeping? For their crowns and jewels my people wear not. Tell me, Earth, why, why me? I do not grow fat and rich! my people do not wreck you, our earth of our forefathers. We only do our Lord's bidding yet you whip with two swords. No! I would still have died with one! Why did you choose my children if you were hungry? Johannesburg gravy has more fat! Oh Earth you fatten not and then they tell me to bury the late ones on Monday. 'No slip,' the note said. They died on Wednesday and the city could not keep them after Friday. Do I have heart and liver to watch my own rot because the government is afraid of many funerals in one day? I would not like to burn bodies like the Indians but maybe ashes could enliven you as well as anything can.

Oh Earth not one but two of them! Now what of our plans to make Naledi, our first child a beacon to new life and light? Earth, the heavens never ask streams or sand or mountains or any of their vast landscapes to speak the language of the scorching sun. To learn in the language of clashing clouds or even to speak in winter with the peaceful lips of the spring moon.

Let me tell you about this Naledi, Earth. Well, my daughter, well

she was a woman but she was a man too. Naledi, we called her that because in Sotho it means star. We have the name in Zulu – Nkanyezi – but it sounded nicer in Sotho because her mother was a Sotho girl when I married her. But Naledi, she had her feet firmly rooted in Soweto. Why on earth should she not say no, Johannesburg! No, Pretoria! No, Witbank! Why shouldn't she, Earth? What else does this Afrikaans language hide that my star saw? That's why they killed my children, killed all children! They saw what they were not supposed to see. Slavery. Trickery. Chaining the mind! No! No! No! No! That's not right, man. At fourteen they kill her! Yesterday the wife had these sleeping spells. Naledi's mother is a good woman. If she was there on the street she would have run between the bullets and the children. She always said she would die for the children to live longer and better. No! She'll be all right with my brother-by-custom on her side. She'll rest from any worry. I know my brother.

Then he raised his head; he was stunned. He had missed Phefeni station and was at Dube. That disturbed him. A man ought to measure correctly even when there is death in the family. No! That's being a willow. Weak. No! That's not Naledi's father. He wished himself convinced that it wasn't thinking too long that made him miss his destination. Just to be sure he was correct he was going to think about his Naledi just so that bad luck would know him. But the present was there in the vibrating rhythm of the station. Dube's sulk painted a painful monotony of acute sombreness and loaded sobriety. Quite unusual for Saturday morning when reprieve, though short-lived, tenaciously holds workers, and workers engage in varieties of thanksgivings to themselves and the day. Quite phenomenal for a day, the only one in the week, when most of Soweto workers consciously or unconsciously forget Friday and Monday or whatever broods between. Where are the attires bought, made, borrowed or ritualistically taken from city stores?

This day, domestic workers even managed to borrow without discussion from their employers' wardrobes, the same bosses that reluctantly let them come to 'that Soweto'. 'I'm not against nice things,' Naledi would say. Yes, let me think about her! Hawu! That child! I can almost hear her voice every evening as I returned from

City Deep Gold Mines. She would leave whatever else she was doing and come to me.

Naledi: *Sawubona Baba*
(we see you father)
Kumalo: *Awu Mntungwa, Mbulazi,*
wena owadl'umuntu,
umyenga ngendaba
(Oh you of the Mntungwas
defensively pretentious
You who finished a person
beguiling him with story)
We see you Princess of Ours

Naledi: The water for your feet is ready but I must make you a cup of tea first to wash away the thirst of the day and sweat.

•

Naledi would then proceed to the kitchen. Make the tea, place milk and sugar on a tray, bring it over to the living room where I would have taken off my shoes . . .

Naledi: No, father. (So she would always warn in her warm tone, and bright her eyes.) You just rest. I'll do that.

•

After serving the tea she would then go and get the warm water, add salt, place the towel, soap and scrubbing stone next to the bowl, then stick her own foot in just to test it.

Naledi: All right *Baba*, careful now when you place the children in.

Kumalo: No, child of the cities, only women's feet are children in Zulu – *abantwana*.

Naledi: If it were not for the stings inside your feet from walking and

standing, shifting paper, I would insist my father has children for feet too... my brother also...

Kumalo: *Qha*. It has no matter: But I know you say it because you like us.

Naledi: Like you, *Baba*? I die of you! Are the thorns coming out?

Kumalo: Awu! It scratches the heart! Are you still learning nicely from Mahau?

Naledi: Badly nice, *Baba*. It is so nice it can't be explained.

Kumalo: School fees almost finished your mother and me this year with two of you in high school now. You must help your brother to be strong and carry himself right so he can do the work.

Naledi: Ha, *Baba*. You do not know Themba. He has already slaughtered his first arithmetic half-year examination. You know what else? He says he will be a chemist, you know.

Kumalo: That too scratches the heart. But where... not in this country!

Naledi: Well, teacher Mahau says it is a matter of time before Angola comes to South Africa. I think he means before we do what they did to the elephant tearing up their land. He says we should not stop reaching and climbing and flying high in our thinking. Hayi, it is those below the earth who brought us Mahau. He really treads where they laboured.

Kumalo: No! I like that. I like what he says.

Naledi: (Wiping Kumalo's feet) Now thank me, *Baba*. (She would wait proudly, attentively.)

Kumalo: Abundance is rejected only by a wizard.

Naledi: No, *Baba*, not that one. One that soothes the heart.

Kumalo: Don't tire even tomorrow?

Naledi: No, *Baba*! You know which one I mean.

Kumalo: *Mtungwa mbu*... You of the Ntungwas.

Naledi: Not that either. Thank me. Remind me of the hero you see everyday, moving in and out of Johannesburg!

Kumalo: (Feigning sudden illumination: teasingly) Oh... that one!

Both: The Rand Gold Storage is the Rand Cold Storage.

This is how the ceremony would always end. Kumalo was at the backdoor of his rented house... Orlando West.

With most of the grown-ups languishing in the depth of the general and specific character of mass agony, Thoko chose a spot near the kitchen window where she became lost in the enveloping mood. She had brought the fat-cakes as asked. But as with the adults her own appetite for food had deserted, and in its stead was a more rapacious gnawing presence. It was an eight-year-old desire to know the nature and character of death. When she was five, Thoko had been very sick at her grandmother's in Natal. Her grandmother had said the doctor had said the cause was corn-meal sickness. Thoko must have been very sick because one day her grandmother even decided to miss work. But on that same day a man in a postal-house uniform had brought a yellowish-orange envelope. After reading it, Thoko's grandmother had cried and cried so hard Thoko started crying too. Then she heard her grandmother tell the passersby, those who had been attracted to the house by the sounds, that her grandmother's parents had both died the same day in another part of the country. And then the grandmother would call them: '*Mama We! Awu Baba*'. They were not in the house when she called. They had not walked in as called people usually do. So where did they go? Thoko asked herself. Thoko's corn-meal pains were back as if to claim their portion from her reservoir of weakness and tears. She was still crying that evening when her grandmother, all in black, went to the train station, leaving Thoko with auntie Rose, a niece of Thoko's grandmother. Death, she thought, must be big like the bishop or someone very high up for her grandmother to have to leave her sick like that. Her gogo had left so... so...

On funeral day, as she sat by the window, her head supported by the cupped hand, she wondered about death. Where did he live and what mansions did he possess to want to claim so many people, also so many people whom she knew, all at once? She suspected how serious death was this day because even though all those adults saw her sitting there 'like an orphan' - as they referred to that posture - no one actually reprimanded her for 'wishing marvel' or motioning to death, sitting in a posture that was a premonition of his coming.

Tears are not always letters, clearly spelling mysteries, yet even to Thoko, death tears did suggest that it was also much better to know

the exact and real source and character of death. This day Thoko's mother had discreetly taken her hand, then she tried again to explain the death phenomenon. As on other occasions since that indelible Wednesday, Thoko's mother had not gone beyond 'It is like ha . . . v . . . ing . . . a . . . long . . . s . . . l . . . e . . . e . . . p' and then tears poured down her black dress.

Back by the window Thoko had even wished a long deep sleep. You can see lots of things other people don't know about when you are in a long sleep. It happened with Thoko in the lavatory when she hid herself after she saw the openings on Lwazi's head. Since then, sleep, like appetite, seemed to prefer other people. Perhaps in other regions too. Everyone around now seemed to have found it hard to fall asleep, but then it could be because they were busy singing and praying and explaining over and over again how it all happened. Each time a mourner or sets of mourners came, the story of the late ones' death would be told. But before this abandonment by sleep, Thoko had fallen asleep in the lavatory after contemplating those green flies and fleas. Somewhere, between the worrying and the scratching, her thoughts flew and the long sleep came! And now, she remembered one late summer afternoon. Naledi was cooking supper. Thoko and Lwazi were sitting near that same window through which Thoko was now reading her thoughts. The two girls had been hurried back by an imminent storm. From the whirling up of any lightfooted object by the boisterous wind! From a fairly balanced exchange: the sudden sharp blindness of the splitting lights, thrilling, shivery and shrill, and the raucous roaring voice of shouting thunder! Thoko and Lwazi agreed, as they had no other serious questions, that this time without any doubt God in heaven must be beating up his wife navy-blue. Maybe other women up there have jumped on him and anyone watching the fight must see what colour 'bloomers' they are wearing and maybe someone does not have any on and everyone hides their one eye!

'Haw! Haw! Haw! Haw! Haw!' Seeing. Laughing. Not seeing. And perhaps in self-defence God's wife must have responded by sending flying and flaming any tangible missile in sight such as saucers and cups, a process guaranteed to produce lightning results. Then the first large tears spat on the window panes; they were accompanied by hail.

As great friends and speculators as the two girls were, they had not

yet arrived at any adequate explanation of what caused those rocks. As in any other field of endeavour, our experts tried to give us some light in this domain. Suffice it to say that perhaps the conclusion tolerated by both Lwazi and Thoko derived from subjective reasoning based on observing objective natural reality. When nature is not as happy with the world, winter comes to spread frost on grass and sometimes to bite little fingers and toes. It would seem quite reasonable, then, that the anger of heaven's occupants would produce something more formidable than frost, something that can knock down a head, certainly a superior part of the human anatomy. Allowing for a reasonable suspension of disbelief, should it not follow then that our budding scientists concluded:

If the godheads had proclaimed their anger in a riotous manner, there was plenty of cold debris from that general commotion. Even some of the belchings of the thunder said that. There was cleaning up being done up in heaven. And now what else was earth if not the dumping ground for the most high refuse. They had even heard something akin to this idea in Sunday School. The young lady guest teacher, or was it the young guest lady teacher, from the United States of America, North America, Universe, had taught that after Angel Lucifer fell, God cleaned heaven by sending him and his kith and kin down to earth where he prowls in daily darkness seeking whom he may devour. In their own language, Thoko and Lwazi read it all to mean that what is broken up in God's household can only come down to the ground. It was always cold when their parents quarrelled over money or food.

As they now sat by the window, they spoke of how they could use God's debris by stringing those glassy rocks together and making themselves two diamond necklaces. Yes, Lwazi's father's second brother (Lwazi had never met him) worked in a place where they dig diamonds. Her mother had even shown Lwazi what a watch looks like when its face was the only part that was not diamond. Even the band? And her mother had also shown her rings with lots and lots of these things she called stones. Sometimes on her day-offs Lwazi's mother would just quietly borrow some of Mrs Epstein's jewellery. So Lwazi and Thoko would wear their diamonds in miner uncle Jones's honour and for all the domestic workers like Lwazi's mother. In anticipation,

they would even try to walk like any Mrs: bodies thrown forward by high heels, a dog on a leash. 'C'mon, Sport' and 'Sweet boy, c'mon,' their thick lips tightly bundled in the manner of sophisticated Europe speaking and their little torsos perched, they would transform themselves into live white ladies. Happier moments they couldn't imagine.

Lwazi: Mrs Pom-Pom my dear shwe shwe shwe shwe! Shwee shwee.

Thoko: My dear Mrs Boom-Boom twee twee twee and then twee twee twee really?

Afterwards this hilarity filled the kitchen, with Naledi joining in the young ladies' free happiness. On the diamond necklace Naledi intervened though, warning them against the short lifespan of hail, especially against skin warmed by the sun of Africa. They listened and understood. They could always be what they wish.

They listened. They understood.

They could still be Mrs Pom-Pom and Mrs Boom-Boom if they wished. It's just that they really preferred being Thoko's mother, always working with machines, or even making these machines. For her part Naledi told them she was perfectly happy being her father's daughter. Looking straight at the younger girls she firmed her narrowing eyes, imitating the manner of her father! 'It is not wrong to fight for justice,' and then she would go back to her cooking and leave the little ones alone to ponder that for a while.

Lwazi: Thoko, would you fight?

Thoko: Depends.

Lwazi: Depends on what?

Thoko: On why I was fighting.

Lwazi: Say, somebody always 'starts' you so that you get angry.

Thoko: Well sometimes my cousin who is a year older than myself 'starts' me by calling me 'baby lion' and then when I get hot I want to fight him. But my mother says that that's not starting me. It is 'teasing

for love'. That's what she calls it. Hm . . . I suppose it depends too on who I'm fighting.

Lwazi: But that is good . . . baby lion. Well, now . . . you know, you haven't answered me. Now let's say . . . maybe . . . let's say you were fighting the FL.

Both: EAS. Fleas: Haa. Haa. Haa. Haa. Haa. Haa.

Thoko: Look, Lwazi. Even the rain is fighting.

Lwazi: No, I don't think it's fighting. Maybe it's crying. Haven't you seen your mother scrubbing floors? Well, it is not exactly the same but something close to it. When Ma scrubs the floors she cries tears to help her wash everything clean. Heaven must be throwing away the tears they thought they would use but . . .

Thoko: But I don't understand that at all.

Lwazi: You should remember, Thoko, that heaven is not dirty at all. So, if there was a fight up there followed by the cleaning up and Naledi said our necklaces would melt because the skin is warm, maybe God and his wife are warm and too hot and are laughing tears.

Strangely, it begins to dawn.

Thoko: Ahaa! And perhaps the broken things that didn't get thrown down as hail just began to melt?

Lwazi: I think so. Now you see. The hail just melts in all that warmth above and it comes straight to us.

Now a sense of challenge.

Thoko: Ha! How do you know all this?

Lwazi: Because they named me Nolwazi. That's how I know. Do you know what Nolwazi means?

Thoko: (Feeling a little shamed) Huh? Well . . . No!

Lwazi: Many people do not know. It means I'm mother of Ukwazi (knowledge) nokuhlakanipha (wisdom).

Thoko: Hey! You are happy.

Lwazi: Why do you say that?

Thoko: Because mine does not say that.

Lwazi: Ya! What does it say? Thoko. What does it mean? Something good, I'm sure.

Thoko: Thoko is really not my whole name. My name is Thokozile.

Lwazi: Mmmmm, Thokozile.

Thoko: Yes! Sithokozile! We are happy. My parents were happy when I arrived.

Lwazi: Does it mean they did not mind? They mind and then they don't. Am I saying it Thokozile?

A little song.

Thoko: Thoko. Thoko. Thokozile. Sithokozile (We are rejoicing. Our joy is a little lady).

Lomtwana wethu intombi. Hawu Sithokozile.

The song is repeated. Lwazi joins in. Once. Twice. Then again. And again. Now, again, eager to return to her point, not disappointed, pointing:

Thoko: Yes, they didn't mind. But look at those drops in that little pool there. You still don't think they are fighting?

Lwazi: Wooooo! They all want space, fast. (Excitedly, pointedly: the activity in the forming puddle.)

Look, Look!

Thoko: Yes, look how they fight for space. (Satisfied and content to digress). But you don't know why Naledi is Naledi and Themba is Themba.

Lwazi: No, I don't.

Thoko: (Authoritatively, tantalising) Well, do you want to know?

Lwazi: (Sensed dependence) I wouldn't mind. Naledi says information.

Both: Frees:

(Beside herself with wonder and laughter.)

Naledi: Wo! You two are something else. You know . . .

Thoko: Well, Naledi is Naledi, star; and star is right here with us. Now have you ever seen stars cooking? Like this one right now?

(All three laugh).

Lwazi: Not really. No (Indicating with finger on the pane). But I have seen stars die or fall after cooking in the sky. Dwi . . . i . . . i . . . i.

Thoko: Yes! I know that others take their place in the sky. So you know this, Naledi.

Lwazi: Yes! But what about Themba?

Thoko: Themba! Well! Themba is really not his full name. His real name is Themba lethu. It means our hope or the hope of all of us, of the people.

Lwazi: (Now pensive, wondering now) Strange how we get names . . . heh . . . but Thokozile is my best one. It would be nice if we were both Thokozile. We are happy. Or maybe mine should have been Thoko, short for Sothokoza (we will be happy) for the full name.

(Springing back from momentary reverie) Hey! I just remembered. My mother's sister is going to have a baby. She also works in the kitchens. She asked me to give a name for her baby. And whatever name I give, that's what the baby will be called.

Thoko: So what are you thinking?

Lwazi: I'm thinking of naming her baby Sothokoza (we shall rejoice) if it's a boy, or Duma, short for . . .

Thoko: Awu Suka! Why Duma? It could be Dumazile! (we are disappointed)

Lwazi: Because when people use the short form only, Duma, those listening will think it might be the short form of Dumile (famous) or

Dumazulu (Heaven's thunder). I will be happy if it's a baby girl.
Nodumo! Mother of renown.

Thoko: Oh! Let's talk about the rain.

Lwazi: All right.

For a good while the two stayed together watching the rain activity through the window pane. As if the icy stones had not been enough confusion, rain drops were now streaming continuously. Before their eyes, the strokes seemed to take positions, each vying for the most advantageous space. For an advent. Venturing. As if those drops that chose to land on clefts or gutters or streams had more results to show for their cumulative collective activity. It was not just Naledi saying it, but they were actually seeing this thing happen. Not too far from the puddle, there was an anthill. Again, Naledi made them watch the difference. It seemed as if those drops that chose to land on that hill could be traced only for a moment furrowing their scattered ways down. But after a while, there would only be furrows left behind and no puddle, Naledi pointed out between cooking and tasting her own creations spiced generously with her mother's artistry born of want. In their own language derived from seeing nature, Thoko and Lwazi articulated the dangers of following the line of least resistance in life.

Thoko: Sometimes I don't understand what Sis' Naledi means.

Lwazi: She means that at least we should not be like that all of the time.

Thoko: Like what?

Lwazi: Like soft-soft! weak-weak! Wanting to keep going downhill.

Naledi: Why not? It's easy! And sometimes fun!

Lwazi: Yes, it's easy, but all of the time?

Naledi: Why not? You haven't answered that one yet!

Thoko: Well, because if you keep going downhill all or most of the time, there is no going up.

Naledi: But why? I insist! Why?

(After some silence, and Thoko and Lwazi revealed uneasy smiles.)
Because after a while all the paths and space will be . . . ?

Both: They will be for going down!

Naledi: Yes! Thank you!

And as time moved faster than life-in-a-dream capsule, Thoko whispered to herself about the two 'goodest' women she knew besides her mother! Lwazi and Naledi. But she was afraid to whisper any further lest her voice should echo too loud like the slightly muffled resonance of flights above the clouds on a rainy day. And she searched for another thought to break the pattering chatter of the roof. (Naledi and Lwazi had disappeared.) The dream remained.

She heard the wagon train but could not see it.

She moved from the seat chilled by her own fears. She moved closer to the window so that Lwazi and Naledi might remember where they left her and would come back for her too. Honest, she would be a good sport! With her face pressed against the window round and flat, flatly round she heard something bounce behind her. She turned around in life pressed round into a dream. She saw the bouncing ball and was afraid. Could it be the void she did not understand, she never thought, never knew! Could it be her mind, the enchanted fairytales or life embodied in a ball? How could one ball keep badgering her, bouncing and laughing? Sometimes it tapped Thoko's shoulder slightly from behind, injecting thoughts that exploded the tongue in the mouth, giving grief the taste of bitterness. She wanted to puncture the poignant bounce out of that hollow tormentor! Oh! But if only she could catch the ball! If only her hand could squeeze it once, much as she has pressed her face against the window pane! Squash it. Squeezing . . . She could do that! Would her hand be too little? And she alone. Alone, she could. But then she remembered, as she followed the bouncing ball, she remembered Naledi telling her and Lwazi that victory could not be as thrilling to a triumphant but closeted wrestler as it would be to a team. No! She did not understand Naledi's sayings sometimes, but that hardly mattered now because the louder and longer she tried to straighten a point the more hysterical the laughter from the ball. She could not absorb and saturate herself with that ridicule, standing and seeming 'lost in the forest of despair. Never! And still consider herself

Lwazi's friend and Naledi's sister! Never! Her father's protégée too! Never! No more of that. You could see her little strength ascend with each strengthening breath. She was now ready and determined to slice and punch the life out of the demented thrills of the laughing ball that usurped her mind and kitchen space forcing her to follow it right into the open . . . and . . . and then . . . no . . . she could not believe what happened . . . except . . . well! It happened. At precisely her moment of strength the ball bumped the highest it had ever reached. The exalted one! And as it spun down its arrogance exhausted and as always, vulnerable, it dived straight into a puddle where the many drops arrested and swallowed its impetuous elasticity. She moved forward feeling close to the puddle, in her own way. She now wanted nothing more than to rescue this semblance of a ball. But the ball which now seemed like any other tormentor exploded its air, and where it sank, countless happy bubbles emerged with sparkling sounds alternating with the music of raindrops. Thoko wanted to touch these. Slowly, she had to tie it with her will, slowly her hand moved as though it were directed to the gathering forms before her eyes. The rain stopped, completely. And the form grew out of the drying puddle with the intensity and fire of marchers' steps singing from the direction of the river. There was a rainbow of banners and slogans that proudly arched and encored against the spread of the western sunset. She could have sworn that the marchers wore school uniforms. Yet each uniform transformed chameleon-like into a soldier. Thoko's eyes on the marchers, her hand touched the silky silted surface that was the puddle where hundreds of miniature coffins arose all drenched in the colour of earth and blood, earth, blood!

Right there on the land of martyrs Lwazi rose from her narrow imprisonment, offering Thoko both her hands. They both looked at the lavatory. Both smiled and then joined their hands, making a bridge and before they could even finish squeezing the pests between their thumb nails, the hundreds of coffins lightly rested on the joined hands. The marchers' song rose like bells at morning break and the bridge and reason for all moved to meet the marchers. Rising to crown the

human rainbow was Naledi's banner, no longer an aloe in the desert! 'It is not wrong to fight for justice.'

On funeral day the banner climbed and climbed with the ascending volume till it was finally pitched on the highest mine dump in the Rand, guarded by three gifts from friends: a tank, a rocket and a gun.

When recognition finally came with the eye of the sun, when reckoning itemised the score, as it always must, 'Soweto' was sowing the fallen seeds in NANCEFIELD or NICEFIELD depending on who might be inclined to pronounce a fertile cemetery created by the marriage of law and order to dead labour. Also, NICEFEEL underlines the peculiarities of the tongue contorted into foreignness as respect hovered over the only space left in Johannesburg where police did not demand a pass. Isn't it the only land Africans possess citizenship after death?

But seeds are bound to germinate. For funeral day, the seeds were now bound to the mother of us all and underground they had privileged rights to spread wide, widely extending themselves and prospering in the eternity of creation. Broadcast. And if one reaps what one sows, in a land, where the latter is black and the former white, they all worked for fields and feels of sumptuous bullets, banquets of blasting rights of privilege. At the moment of benediction, from grave to grave of soil-streaming mounds with her, mount Freedom banner.

As each shovel blanketed our reservoirs of tears and grief, the little girl followed the ministerial 'dust unto dust' with verses from class recitation:

it is ours
this land
the air
the water and sun
it is ours

when someone says nay nay nay
say I beg your pardon, nay.

also ours the mountains
the fruits in valleys
from end to endless end
ours all

the breath in live blades
the pulse of our wind
altogether ours

when some say mine mine mine
say I beg, beg your pardon,
nay ours ours
remember our sweat
too is ours
dead people's sweat
we will not forget
when we still bleed
our pain also pours
ours the scattered grains
to cement
to build
and to build over.

Amen. Five times – differing melodies,
the last deep in the throat and the chest – husky,
positive.

Amen? Johannesburg is the child of 'Soweto'. Aah! Amen Stranger!
Don't be alarmed at such an umbilical existence. The reverse of the
question would be more appropriate to answer but since a child of
'Soweto' significantly differs from a Johannesburg darling we shall
again ask the question direct: Where is Johannesburg without 'Soweto'?
If the cemetery suggests itself, blame it on the gold deposited below the
earth we trample.

Without Johannesburg, Soweto lives and dies. Dies as South Western
Township, dies as dependence and gold. Lives as full humanity,
peoplehood! Ours.

Amen. So be it.
This will be.

DANIEL MANDISHONA

A wasted land

Uncle Nicholas came back from England after the war in January 1981. He spent the entire fourteen hours that the journey lasted trussed up in a straitjacket between two burly cabin crew. On arrival at the airport he was met by a four-car police escort and taken straight to the psychiatric unit at Harare Hospital. For his waiting relatives, most of whom had not seen him for twenty-five years, it was a traumatic homecoming.

I had been born in his absence and only knew him from a sepia-edged black and white photograph which he had sent to my father on his arrival. It was of him and a friend standing ankle-deep in fresh snow with pigeons perched on their heads and arms. Throughout most of my childhood my memory of him consisted of that hazy, unsatisfactory likeness that was twenty years out of date. Yet it told me nothing about his behavioural quirks: how he talked, how he walked, how he laughed; whether he drank or smoked. In short, I could not visualise the whole without knowing its parts.

When he killed himself in March 1982 by cutting his wrists, all I was left with were confused memories of weekly visits to the hospital bed of a druggy and pathetic old man, who soiled himself and had to be chained to the bed posts to curtail the intermittent orgies of self-inflicted violence provoked by deep bouts of melancholy. It was an inescapable yet poignant irony that he had gone overseas to better himself, not to come back in disgrace to swell the ranks of burned-out, unhinged 'been-tos' with minds contaminated by too much learning.

For the last eight years of his exile he had stopped writing altogether. My father wrote to him regularly but in the end stopped because all his letters were returned saying there was no such person known at that address. Nobody knew what Uncle Nicholas was doing or where

A wasted land

ther fair or necessary for my mother's heartbreak to be compounded / the revelation that our comfortable lifestyle had been fraudulently nanced.

he judge declared him a bankrupt in his absence and ordered equestration of all movable assets. All the court cases against him were dropped because there was nobody to prosecute. Bailiffs arrived over the next few days to apportion the remaining things in the shops and the house to pay off his creditors. They literally left us in the clothes we were standing in. Mother had to borrow money from relatives to pay for the funeral. Michelle came to tell us that she had booked into a cheaper motel and would be staying for the second funeral. Mother was so touched by this gesture that she dropped her pretended hostility and even invited Michelle and her boyfriend to a meal. But they never came. When I went to their motel I was told they had left urgently. I wrote her a letter, speculatively using one of Uncle Nicholas's old addresses, but it came back saying there was no such person known at that address.

We moved house after that but we could not erase the memory of Father's death. One cannot rid a room of its bad associations by rearranging the furniture. Father died in April 1981, exactly a year after Independence. Those debts accumulated during the war proved too much even for a man of his resilience. Like Uncle Nicholas and so many others, he survived the war only to die of its effects when the peace arrived.

MIA COUTO

The birds of God

Begging your pardon, I don't know anything more like a pilgrim than the river. The waves pass by on a journey which has no end. For how long has it been water's job to do that? Alone in his old dugout, Ernesto Timba measured his life. At the age of twelve he had entered the school of pulling fish from the water. Ever in the waft of the current, his shadow had reflected the laws of the river dweller for the last thirty years. And what was it all for? Drought had exhausted the earth, the seeds were not fulfilling their promise. When he returned from fishing, he had nothing to defend himself from his wife and children, who impaled him with their eyes. Eyes like those of a dog, he was loath to admit, but the truth is that hunger makes men like animals.

While he contemplated his suffering, Timba made his craft glide slowly along. Under the *mafurreira* tree, there on the bank where the river narrows, he brought the boat to rest so that he might drive away his sad thoughts. He allowed his paddle to nibble the water and the dugout clung to the stillness. But he could not stop his thoughts:

'What life have I lived? Water, water, just nothing else.'

As it rocked to and fro, the dugout caused his anguish to multiply.

'One day they'll fish me out of the water, swallowed up by the river.'

He foresaw his wife and children watching him being pulled from the mud, and it was as if the roots of the water were being torn up.

Overhead, the *mafurreira* retained the sun's fierce dispatch. But Timba wasn't listening to the tree, his eyes were peeping into his soul. And it was as if they were blind, for pain is a dust which drains light away. Still higher above, morning called and he caught the smell of the intense blue.

'If only I belonged to the sky,' he sighed.

And he felt the burden of thirty years of tiredness upon his life. He remembered the words of his father, uttered to teach him courage:

'See the hunter there, what he does? He prepares his spear the moment he sees the gazelle. But the fisherman can't see the fish inside the river. The fisherman believes in something he can't see.'

That was the lesson of the bound-to-be of life and he now recalled those wise words. It was getting late and hunger told him it was time to go home. He began to move his arm while casting a last glance upwards, beyond the clouds. It was then that a huge bird passed over the sky. It was like a king, pleased with its own majesty. The creature, high on the wing, held his eyes and an uncanny anxiety took root within him. He thought:

'If that bird were to fall on my canoe now!'

He uttered these words aloud. Hardly had he finished speaking than the bird shook its huge wings and quickly flew in a downward spiral towards the boat. It fell as if expelled from life. Timba picked up the damaged bird and holding it in his hands, saw that the blood had not yet unbuttoned its body. In the boat, the animal gradually recovered, until it stood up and climbed onto the prow to take stock of its survival. Timba grabbed it, and weighed its flesh in order to work out how many meals it would provide. He put the idea out of his mind, and with a shove, helped the bird to take off.

'Be off with you, bird, go back from where you came!'

But the bird turned round and headed back to the boat. The fisherman once again drove it away. Yet again it returned. Ernesto Timba began to despair.

'Get back to your life, you bloody bird.'

Nothing. The bird didn't move. It was then that the fisherman began to wonder: that thing wasn't a bird, it was a sign from God. The warning from heaven would destroy his peace of mind for ever.

Accompanied by the animal, he returned to the village. His wife celebrated his homecoming:

'Let's have the bird for lunch!'

Delighted, she called the children:

'Little ones, come and see the dicky-bird.'

Without answering, Timba placed the bird on the mat and went to the back of the house to fetch some wooden boards, wire and reeds.

Then he set to work to build a cage so large that even a man could fit inside standing up straight. He put the animal inside and fed it the fish he had caught.

His wife was flabbergasted: the man was mad. Time passed and Timba only cared about the bird.

His wife would ask, pointing at the bird:

'Seeing as how hunger is pinching us, don't you want to kill it?'

Timba would raise his arm, emphatically. *'Never! Whoever touched the bird would be punished by God, would be marked down for life.'*

And so the days passed by, while the fisherman awaited fresh signs of divine intentions. Countless times he lingered in the moist afternoon heat while the river sat there in front of him. When the sun went down, he would go and check the cage where the animal was growing ever fatter. Little by little, he began to notice a shadow of sadness fall over the sacred bird. He realised the creature was suffering because it was lonely. One night he asked God to send the solitary fowl a companion. The following day, the cage had a new inmate, a female. Timba silently thanked the heavens for this new gift. At the same time, anxiety took root in him: why had God entrusted him to keep these animals? What might be the message they brought?

He thought and thought. That sign, that lightning flash of white plumage, could only mean that heaven's humour was about to change. If men would agree to dispense their kindness to those messengers from heaven, then the drought would end and the season of rains would begin. It had befallen him, a poor fisherman of the river, to play host to God's envoys. It was his task to show that men could still be good. Yes, that true goodness cannot be measured in times of abundance but when hunger dances in the bodies of men.

His wife, who had returned from the *machamba*, interrupted his thoughts:

'So there are two of them now, are there?'

She came over, sat down on the same mat and looking long and hard into her companion's eyes, said:

'Husband, the pot's on the fire. I'm asking you for the neck of one of them, just one.'

It was a waste of time. Timba promised severe punishment to whoever mistreated the divine birds.

In time, the couple had chicks. There were three of them, clumsy and ugly, their gullets ever open: enough appetite to empty the river. Timba toiled on behalf of their parents. The household provisions, already so scarce, were diverted to feed the coop.

In the village, the rumour went around: Ernesto Timba was stark raving mad. His own wife, after many a threat, left home taking with her all the children. Timba didn't even seem to notice his family's absence. He was more concerned with ensuring his poultry's protection. He detected a spirit of envy around him, vengeance hatching itself. Was it his fault that he had been chosen? They said he had gone crazy. But he who is chosen by God always wanders off his path.

Then, one afternoon when he had finished his work on the river, a feeling of uncertainty set his mind aflame: the birds! He set off home at a rush. When he got near, he saw a pall of smoke rising through the trees around his house. He paddled his dugout towards the river bank, jumped out without even tying it up, and began to run towards the scene of the tragedy. When he arrived, all he saw was wreckage and ashes. The wood and wire had been chewed up by the flames. From between the boards a wing, untouched by the fire, sought to save itself. The bird must have hurled itself against the wall of flames and the wing had got away, an arrow ominously pointing towards disaster. It was not swaying to and fro, as is the obsession of dead things. It was rigid, full of certainty.

Timba stepped back, appalled. He shouted for his wife, for his children, and then, on discovering that there was nobody else to shout for, he wept such copious tears of rage that his eyes hurt.

Why? Why had they harmed those birds, pretty as they were? And there and then, amidst all the ash and the smoke, he addressed himself to God:

'You're going to be angry, I know. You're going to punish your children. But look: I'm asking you to forgive them. Let me be the one to die, me. Leave the others to suffer what they are already suffering. You can forget the rain even, you can leave the dust lying on the ground, but please don't punish the men of this land.'

The following day, they found Ernesto hugging the current of the river, chilled by the early morning mist. When they tried to raise him, they found him heavy and impossible to separate from the water. The strongest men were brought to the task, but their efforts were in vain.

The body was stuck to the surface of the river. A strange feeling of dread spread among those present. To hide their fear, someone said:

'Go and tell his wife. Tell the others that the village madman has died.'

And they withdrew. As they were climbing the bank, the clouds clashed, the sky seemed to cough sullenly as if it were sick. In different circumstances, they would have celebrated the coming of the rain. Not now. For the first time, their faiths joined together pleading that it might not rain.

Impassive, the river flowed on into the distance, laughing at the ignorance of men. Ernesto Timba, gently lulled by the current, was carried downstream, and shown the by-ways he had only glimpsed in dreams.

Divider
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AESCHYLUS

The Suppliants

TRANSLATED BY

PETER BURIAN



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AESCHYLUS
The Suppliants

TRANSLATED BY
PETER BURIAN

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

CHARACTERS

CHORUS of the daughters of Danaos

DANAOS

PELASGOS, King of Argos

HERALD of the sons of Aigyptos

HANDMAIDENS of the daughters of Danaos

Armed attendants

SCENE

A sacred grove outside the city of Argos
with an altar and images of several gods

PARODOS

The CHORUS enters from the left, led by DANAOS and carrying branches wreathed in wool as tokens of supplication. They are followed by HANDMAIDENS, who seat themselves at one side of the orchestra, where they will remain in silence until the Exodos.

CHORUS

Zeus,

suppliant lord,

turn your eyes

kindly toward us, travelers who raised sail
where the Nile slides through rippling sands
to the sea. We fled your land, the sun-stunned
pastures that stretch to Syria, not
because our townsmen banished us
for the stain of bloodshed; no, we flee
by choice, escaping men and chains we detest:
unholy marriage to Aigyptos' sons,
our kinsmen.

10

Danaos, our father and the leader
of our rebellion, chose to play this pawn
as best among sorrows: so we skimmed
the salt rolling sea and reached harbor
here in Argos. We are Argive. We boast
birth from the fly-maddened heifer whose womb
the touch and breath of Zeus filled—Io.
What land would receive us more gently, armed

[5]

Gods of my race, you birthgods, hear me!
 Look where justice lies: do not waste
 my youth on what
 must never be;
 hate rude force and you are just to marriage.
 One altar shelters
 even the warworn, one refuge for exiles:
 awe of the gods.

Antistrophe 3

80

Zeus's will be done—
 though his desire is hard to track
 and the paths of his mind stretch shadowed,
 tangled in thickets
 where I cannot trace or guess.

Strophe 4

What Zeus has decreed
 by his nod stands fast, unshaken.
 It blazes out everywhere, flares
 even in darkness
 the black flame of doom for men.

Antistrophe 4

90

From their heaven-storming towers of hope
 Zeus hurls men to ruin,
 yet his strength wears no armor,
 his force is all ease.
 In the pure stillness where he thrones
 he wills thought to deed
 and the deed is done.

Strophe 5

Let Zeus see men's insolence swell,
 the stalk unfurling wild
 fresh tendrils to entwine us,
 flowering with wanton
 wicked thoughts, frenzied with desire.
 Lust goads them to ruin:
 folly traps the fool.

Antistrophe 5

100

[8]

Such suffering my keening tells, my shrieks
 shrill with pity,
 heavy with tears.
 Ai Ai Ai
 Still living I sing
 my own dirge, my only prize.

Strophe 6

110

Hilly grazingland of healing Apis
 hear me!
 Earth, you know my savage tongue.
 See, I tear my softspun Sidon veil
 to tatters.

But if death stands aside and all is well,
 these rites of death
 run stained toward god.
 Ah Ah Ah
 Wave on wave of grief,
 where are you carrying me?

Antistrophe 6

120

Hilly grazingland of healing Apis
 hear me!
 Earth, you know my savage tongue.
 See, I tear my softspun Sidon veil
 to tatters.

Oars and a rope-rigged shelter
 against the sea
 sped us stormless,
 for the winds were kind. So far
 I find no fault,
 and still I pray:
 all-seeing Father, grant us
 gracious issue.

Strophe 7

130

[9]

Help us, the brood of a mother you hallowed,
escape the beds of men,
Oh Oh Oh
flee untamed, unwed!

Pure maiden daughter of Zeus, *Antistrophe 7*
will as I will. 140
Guard of the gate
to the hallowed shrine, guard me
with all your strength.
Unbroken maid,
keep me unbroken, ward off
my pursuer.

Help us, the brood of a mother you hallowed,
escape the beds of men,
Oh Oh Oh
flee untamed, unwed! 150

If not, if sky gods spurn our sun-black tribe, *Strophe 8*
we must turn to the god
who dwells in earth and welcomes wanderers,
Zeus of the dead,
we must turn these sacred fillets
to nooses.

Ah Zeus, for envy of Io
oh, how gods' vengeance
still stalks us.
I know the heaven-toppling anger 160
of your queen:
rough winds draw storms behind them.

Then my just reproaches will catch Zeus out, *Antistrophe 8*
for he disowns the child

he himself once begot of the heifer,
turning his glance
away from our prayers. No, hear us
from on high!

Ah Zeus, for envy of Io
oh, how gods' vengeance 170
still stalks us.
I know the heaven-toppling anger
of your queen:
rough winds draw storms behind them.

when spoken to, but then don't be slow in reply.
 People here will be ready to take offence.
 You are refugees and in need: remember
 to be submissive. Proud speech is not for the weak. 200

EPISODE I

CHORUS LEADER

Father, your prudent advice strengthens our prudence;
 we have sealed it safe in memory. Now,
 forefather Zeus, look down.

DANAOS

May his eye
 caress you with kindness. Come, no more delay.
 Turn plan into deed.

The CHORUS moves toward the altar.

CHORUS LEADER

I will take my place at your side.
 O Zeus! Have pity, do not let us die.

DANAOS

With his favor, everything ends well.
 Now call upon this bird, sacred to Zeus.

CHORUS LEADER

We pray that the Sun's rays show us safety.

DANAOS

And holy Apollo, a god once exiled from heaven. 210

CHORUS LEADER

He knows our sorrow: may he show mercy to us mortals.

DANAOS

May he show ready mercy and defend us.

[13]

The CHORUS resumes its formation at one side of the orchestra. DANAOS stands near the altar.

DANAOS

Be prudent, children! A prudent captain steered you
 here, your trusty old father, and my advice
 will serve on land, too. Write it in your hearts.

I see dust rising, voiceless herald of a marching
 army; the whine of the axle trees spinning
 in their sockets breaks the silence. Now

I can make out troops with bright shields
 and bristling spears, horses and curved chariots.

Likely the country's leaders, learning from scouts
 that we are here, have come to see for themselves.

But will they approach in peace or whetted
 to savage anger? Better in any case, daughters,
 to sit near the gods assembled on this hill.

An altar is stronger than any tower, a shield
 no man can penetrate. Come quickly, holding
 the white-crowned branches, emblems of Zeus who
 shows pity, 180

reverently in your left hands. You must answer the strangers
 as strangers should, in piteous voices filled
 with sorrow and need. Say plainly that this exile
 is not stained by blood, but strike all boldness
 from your words, and all immodesty
 from your eyes; look downcast and gentle. Speak only 190

[12]

[15]

You have heard my land and lineage; now tell me yours.
Be brief. We are not fond of idle talk.

CHORUS LEADER

Briefly, then, and clearly: we are Argive.
We claim to descend from the Cow blessed with child—
a proud claim, and our story will prove it true.

PELASGOS

Strangers, your tale beggars belief. How can
you be Argive? To me, you look like Libyan
women, not our native stock, or maybe
spawn of the fertile Nile. Cypriot craftsmen
stamp their coins with images like yours.
You might be nomads such as I have heard
saddle the ungainly camel and cavalcade
across some African landscape. If you had bows,
I'd take you for that tribe of husbandless hunters,
the flesh-eating Amazons. But tell me your story; I want
to learn how you claim the descent from an Argive line.

CHORUS LEADER

You know that here in Argos long ago
Io kept the keys of Hera's house?

280

PELASGOS

Indeed she did; everyone knows the story.

CHORUS LEADER

Do they also tell that Zeus made love to her?

PELASGOS

Yes; but could not hide his embraces from Hera.

CHORUS LEADER

So there was strife in heaven. How did it end?

[16]

PELASGOS

Our goddess transformed woman into cow.

CHORUS LEADER

And Zeus still pursued this horned creature?

PELASGOS

They say he took the form of a bull in rut.

CHORUS LEADER

How did his strong-willed queen answer that?

PELASGOS

She set a watchman, all eyes, upon the cow.

CHORUS LEADER

Who was this all-seeing herder of one heifer?

290

PELASGOS

Argos, son of Earth. Hermes killed him.

CHORUS LEADER

How else did Hera harass the poor cow?

PELASGOS

She sent a tormenting, cow-driving gadfly.

CHORUS LEADER

The Goad—that is the name Nile's people give him.

PELASGOS

And he drove Io from home on a zigzag trek

CHORUS LEADER

Everything you say confirms my story.

[17]

PELASGOS

to Kanopos and as far as Memphis . . .

CHORUS LEADER

where the touch of Zeus's hand planted the seed.

PELASGOS

Who then claims to be the calf of Zeus's cow?

CHORUS LEADER

Epaphos, named for the prize Zeus seized.

PELASGOS

(And Epaphos' child?)

CHORUS LEADER

Is called Libye, because
she harvested the bounty of Earth's greatest river.

PELASGOS

What offshoot of hers do you still have to name?

CHORUS LEADER

Belos. He had two sons. One is my father here.

PELASGOS

This honored gentleman? Tell me his name.

CHORUS LEADER

Danaos. He has a brother with fifty sons.

PELASGOS

The brother's name? Surely you won't withhold that.

CHORUS LEADER

Aigyptos. Now you know your suppliant's lineage
from ancient times. We are Argives. You owe us protection.

[18]

PELASGOS

It seems you do have an ancient claim on Argos. 310
But what drove you to flee the house of your fathers?
What storms of fortune carried you away?

CHORUS LEADER

Lord of the Pelasgoi, trouble changes its colors
ceaselessly; misfortunes are not of a feather.
Who could have guessed that exile would cast us ashore
at Argos, fleeing the advances of our cousins
out of hatred for the marriage bed?

PELASGOS

What grace do your suppliant branches, fresh-cut
and wreathed in white, claim from this assembly of gods?

CHORUS LEADER

Not to be slaves to the sons of Aigyptos. 320

PELASGOS

Because you hate them? Or because it would be unlawful?

CHORUS LEADER

Would a woman scorn a master she loved?

PELASGOS

Yet it is through marriage that our strength increases.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes—and those in misery are left to their suffering.

PELASGOS

Then what am I, as a righteous man, to do?

CHORUS LEADER

The sons of Aigyptos will claim us. Don't hand us over!

[19]

PELASGOS

A heavy burden—it will mean a dangerous war.

CHORUS LEADER

Justice shields the man who fights for her.

PELASGOS

If she shared the struggle from the start.

CHORUS LEADER

Honor the helm of state wreathed by my branches. 330

PELASGOS

I shudder to see their shadow in this sacred place.

CHORUS LEADER

The wrath of Zeus Suppliant is a heavy burden.

*In the following exchange, the CHORUS dances and sings;
PELASGOS remains stationary.*

CHORUS

Son of Palaichthon, hear me *Strophe 1*
with a kind heart. Lord of the Pelasgoi,
look on your suppliant, this exile,
a heifer trapped by wolves on a steep crag
trusting still in her herdsman's strength,
bleating for his help.

PELASGOS

I see them nodding, this company of gods assembled
in the shade of your fresh-cut branches. But may 340
the cause of these strangers, our kin, not bring us disaster,
not bring war without warning to a city caught
unprepared. Of such things we have no need.

CHORUS

Themis, suppliant goddess, *Antistrophe 1*
daughter of Zeus Allotter of Shares,
see that our flight is free of disaster.
My lord, though old in wisdom, learn from youth:
Revere your suppliant's righteous claim
and win the gods' grace.

PELASGOS

This is not my hearth where you sit. If the whole 350
community risks infection, the people must find
a cure together. I can promise nothing
until I share the counsel of all my citizens.

CHORUS

You are the citizens, you are the state! *Strophe 2*
A king fears no judgment:
your nod is vote enough to rule
this altar, this common hearth;
your throne and your sceptre
alone command in every need.
Beware defilement! 360

PELASGOS

Defilement be with my enemies! But how
can I help you without terrible harm?
And if I should refuse to honor your prayers?
No one would call that gracious, or wise either.
I am at wit's end, fearing to act,
or not to act and take what chance may send.

CHORUS

Look up to him who watches from the heights, *Antistrophe 2*
patron of all who crouch
at neighbors' hearths, waiting in vain
for justice. The wrath of Zeus 370

Lord of Suppliants will not
be moved by the tears and groans of
those it ravages.

PELASGOS

But if the sons of Aigyplos claim to rule
you as next of kin, in accord with the law
of your land, how can I oppose them?
You must show that those same laws
give them no power at all over your lives.

CHORUS

May I never,
never fall into men's hands,
under men's power. My defense from this
marriage I loathe is escape; I will find
my own cure
under the stars. Make Justice your ally, my lord.
Choose to honor the gods!

Strophe 3
380

PELASGOS

This is no easy judgment. Do not ask
me to judge. I have said it before:
although the power is mine, I will not act
without the people. I will not have them say,
"You honored strangers and destroyed your land."

CHORUS

Zeus, our blood-kin,
your blood-kin, surveys all this,
a balance poised in his impartial hand.
The injustice of the wicked he heaps
on one scale;
on the other, the holy deeds of the righteous.
How can justice bring pain?

Antistrophe 3

[22]

PELASGOS

We must search deep for a thought that can save us,
for an eye, clear-sighted and unblurred,
to descend, like a diver combing the sea floor,
and surface again unharmed with an outcome
free of disaster for the state, and also
for myself. We don't want War to plunder here;
we don't want to invite Vengeance, destroyer
god who never sets his victims free
even in Hades, to settle on our house
for having surrendered you to foes as you sat
in the seats of the gods. We must search for a thought that
can save us.

CHORUS

Think:
think of justice, think of reverence.
Be our patron,
our protector.
Do not betray us, exiles
driven far from home, pursued by violence
that the gods despise.

Strophe 4
410

You

hold all power here; will you watch me
seized as booty
from this altar,
this seat of so many gods?
Know men's violence and its outrage; beware
the anger to come!

Antistrophe 4

420

Can you bear to watch
suppliants dragged
from the gods' images by our headbands,
like horses,
rough hands grasping at our finespun robes?

Strophe 5

[23]

Know that your children
and your whole house,
whatever choice you make, will reap rewards 430
or pay back
in kind. Think! The rule of Zeus is just.

PELASGOS

I have thought and thought, and am run aground
on necessity's steep shoals. Like a ship
with bolts fastened tight, gripped by ropes
and winches, I am being dragged to war
with these or those. Nowhere is there a harbor
free of pain. If a house is plundered, Zeus
the Enricher may send new wealth for old,
a shipload, more by far than what was lost. 440
If the tongue shoots its arrows amiss, its barbs
of bitter anger, speech may still heal speech.
But to keep from shedding kindred blood
we have mighty need of sacrifices.
Many victims must fall to many gods
to ward off ruin. Yes, I shrink from this struggle:
better to be ignorant of evil than an expert.
Yet may all be well, despite my judgment.

CHORUS LEADER

Hear the last of many righteous pleas.

PELASGOS

Speak! You may be certain I shall hear. 450

CHORUS LEADER

I have belts and sashes to tie my robes.

PELASGOS

Such things are suited to women. What of it?

Antistrophe 5

CHORUS LEADER

Well, you see, they give me a fine device.

PELASGOS

What kind of talk is this? Come, speak plainly!

CHORUS LEADER

If you fail to make us a firm promise .

PELASGOS

How will your device of sashes serve?

CHORUS LEADER

To adorn these images with strange new offerings.

PELASGOS

This is a riddle. Tell me what you mean.

CHORUS LEADER

We mean to hang ourselves from these gods—right now!

PELASGOS

The words I hear are whipstrokes to my heart. 460

CHORUS LEADER

Then you understand. I have opened your eyes and you see.

PELASGOS

Yes—see troubles to wrestle wherever I turn,
a flood of evils churning like a river
that sweeps me toward a bottomless sea of destruction,
treacherous to cross, and with no haven from harm.
If I do not settle your claim in full, you threaten
defilement that cannot be overtopped; but if
I take my stand before the walls and fight
Aigyptos' sons, the issue will be bought

at bitter cost indeed: men's blood staining
the plain for women's sake. Yet the wrath of Zeus
Lord of Suppliants commands our awe and reverence.
His fear is highest.

(to DANAOS)

You, the girls' old father,
take these boughs and go to other altars
of our gods. Let all the citizens see a sign
that you come as suppliants, and not take me
to task, quick as they are to blame their leaders.
The sight may even stir pity and dispose
some to despise the violence of the men.
The people will favor you in this extremity,
for everyone grants good will to the weak.

DANAOS

It is no small thing to gain a righteous patron,
and one so kind. But send an escort to guide me
safely to the altars that stand before your temples,
homes of the gods who guard this state. I look strange;
the race Nile breeds is unlike Inachos' tribe.
Alone, my boldness might give birth to fear,
and men have killed friends through ignorance before.

PELASGOS

(to a group of his attendants)

March with him, men; the stranger, our guest, is right.
Lead him to the city's altars and the seats of the gods.
And don't prattle with passers-by. You are simply
escorting this sailor as a suppliant to the gods' hearths.

470

480

490

*Exit DANAOS right, attended and carrying a bundle of
branches.*

CHORUS LEADER

He has your orders and is on his way.
But what of me? How can I hope to be bold?

PELASGOS

Leave your branches here as a sign of your troubles.

CHORUS LEADER

I leave them. I am obedient to your word.

PELASGOS

Now move along toward this open precinct.

CHORUS LEADER

How can a space that is open to all protect me?

PELASGOS

We'll not give you up for winged monsters to seize.

CHORUS LEADER

What of those more hateful, more vicious than vipers? 500

PELASGOS

My words have been fair. Let yours not be ill-omened.

CHORUS LEADER

Do you wonder that fear drives out reason?

PELASGOS

But a woman's fears are always excessive.

CHORUS LEADER

Then cheer my spirit with your words and deeds.

PELAGOS

Your father will not abandon you for long,
but first I am going to call the Argives to assembly
to win their good will for you, and I must teach
your father how to address them. You wait
here and pray to Argos' gods to grant
what you desire. I go to arrange the rest:
May Persuasion attend me, and Luck be our ally!

510

PELAGOS and his retinue exit right.

STASIMON I

The CHORUS dances.

CHORUS

Lord of lords, blest
beyond all blessing, blissful Zeus,
yours is the power
in perfect fulfillment.

Hear me! If you hate
the violence of men,
keep your kin safe from outrage,
break calamity's black oar
in the dark sea-swell.

520

Look with kindness
on women of a glorious line,
renew the gentle
tale of love for Io,

whom your touch once made
mother of us all.

Remember your long wooing!
We claim you as our father
and this land as home.

Antistrophe 1

My mother's ancient track
I retraced to this field
where under watchful eyes
she nibbled flowers, then fled,

Strophe 2

531

[28]

[29]

stung to madness by her fly,
trading one tribe for the next
on her mindless trek, until
she swam the wind-tossed strait
and her fate gave the cleft between continents
its name: Cow-ford.

She lunged across Asia,
through sheep-grazing Phrygia,
past the towns of Mysia,
up the Lydian valleys
to Pamphilia's mountaintops,
and onward to Cilicia.
Over rivers whose waters
always flow she fled,
through Aphrodite's deep dark soil that yields rich
scythings of grain.

The winged cowherd goaded her on.
Frantic with pain
she reached Zeus's fruitful meadows
snow-fed by sacred Nile
no illness touches, but whirlwinds lash.
Io was crazed with shame, inflamed,
possessed by Hera's goad.

Natives trembled with pale terror
at what they saw,
uncanny hybrid woman-cow,
a marvel, a monster!
Who was it then healed Io, released
the carewary wanderer from
the torture of the goad?

Zeus Who Rules All Time
caressed her with might,

[30]

with tender breath
freed Io from pain.
She poured out her sorrow
in tears of shame.

Truly the cargo she now took on
was Zeus's, his the perfect
child she bore,

whose time was happy
and long. So the Earth
cries aloud, 'This,
this is Zeus's child,
son of him who gives life!

Who else could heal
the plagues Hera's cunning hate contrived?'
Zeus's this work: and our race
his child's line.

What god have I clearer
claim in justice
to summon for his deeds
than the Father

who planted my seed with his own hand,
great architect of our race,
allhealer, old in wisdom,
Zeus of fair breezes?

He sits below the throne
of no other,

to no power pays homage,
does no one's work
but his own. His deeds are accomplished
with the whisper of a word
that brings to birth whatever
his fertile mind wills.

Strophe 4

[31]

570

Antistrophe 4

580

Strophe 5

Antistrophe 5

591

EPISODE 2

Enter DANAOS from the right.

DANAOS

Children, take heart! The people have voted
to support us with the full force of law.

CHORUS LEADER

Dear old man, best herald of my hopes!
Tell us: What was the final decision, how
did the majority rule in the show of hands?

600

DANAOS

It was a sight to make my old heart young
again—the air bristling with hands raised
unstintingly, without a moment's doubt,
as the Argives decreed that *we may settle
here in freedom, safe from seizure and assured
of protection. No one, native or foreign,
shall drag us off, but if enemies try force,
the price to any citizen who refuses aid
is loss of rights and exile.* King Pelasgos
won our case with a warning not to fatten
the wrath of Zeus Lord of Suppliants.
Twofold defilement, he said, arising alike
from claims of natives and strangers, would wander the
state,
grazing unchecked, insatiable for suffering.

610

The people of Argos heard and stretched their hands
high even before the vote was called.
Skillful turns of speech persuaded them,
but Zeus put his seal on the outcome, too.

620

*DANAOS moves to the altar and stands looking to the left
during the following song.*

CHORUS

Come, let us pray for Argos,
returning good for good.
May Zeus Lord of Guests and Strangers
guide blessings from the mouths of guests
faultless to their goal.

[33]

[32]

Let prayers eager to bring honor
fly up from my veil-shadowed lips:
that no plague empty
the town of men, no strife
drench this soil with its children's blood;

that the flower of youth
 grow ungathered,
 that Ares Manslayer,
 who beds Aphrodite,
 not mow down their blooms.

660

Strophe 1

Zeus-born gods,
 hear us now as we pour
libations of blessing on Argive kin:
Let lewd Ares, who harvests men
 where others sowed the seed,
 never raise his cry,
 desolate music
 fit for no dance,
above the fire-toppled towers of Pelasgos' town.

630

And let the altars where elders
assemble blaze at their tending.

Antistrophe 2

The state is governed
well when Zeus gets his due,
the strong guest god whose law guides straight.

For they pitied us,
cast a vote in all kindness,
honored Zeus's suppliants,
this unenvied herd.

May this land bear leaders
 always, we pray,
 and may the Farshooter
 Artemis watch over
 each mother's birthpangs.

670

Antistrophe 1
640

They did not
spurn a woman's battle
to vote with men. They watched the avenging
eye of Zeus, exactor of debts,
the gaze that can not be
outfought. What house
would ask for Vengeance
to perch heavy,
defiling the rafters like some bird of ill omen?

Let no killing quarrel rip
the state to tatters,
rousing Ares to arms,
father of tears, who hates the dance,
who shuns the lute,
arming brother against brother.

Strophe 3

May the hateful swarms of sickness
settle far away.

May Apollo Wolfgod

be kind to the young.

680

Zeus grant earth to swell with fruits

in perfect ripeness

season upon season.

Let the cattle that graze this plain

bear countless calves.

Let all blessings flow from the gods.

Antistrophe 3

EPISODE 3

DANAOS

For these prudent prayers, my children, I have
nothing but praise. And now you must listen bravely
to your father's unwelcome, unexpected news.

From this refuge for suppliants, my lookout, I spot
their ship. There is no mistaking those sails, the sides
shielded with hides, the eyes of its prow scanning
a course through the waves, eager, all too eager
to do the tiller's bidding, but no friend to us.

Now I see sailors, black limbs glistening against
white tunics; now other vessels—a whole fleet
carrying troops to do their masters' bidding.
The lead ship has furled sail close to shore
and is rowing in at full stroke.

Calm

And let them grant fair terms to strangers,
not arm Ares for battle:
do justice, not harm!

Gods dwell here and keep this land:
worship them in the ancestral way,
cutting the laurel and
slaughtering cattle
as your fathers ordained. For Justice
has made honoring parents
her third commandment.

Antistrophe 4

700

and prudence are needed now, and you must never
neglect the gods that shelter here. I shall go
rouse advocates to defend you, for a herald
or a whole delegation may try to seize you,
drag you away as booty. No! They shall never
touch you. No need to tremble on that account.
But if our help is slow, you can do no better
than remember this refuge, all your strength.
Courage! In time, on the destined day, every
man who scorns the gods will surely pay.

720

*In the following exchange, the CHORUS dances and sings,
DANAOS and the CHORUS LEADER remain stationary.*

CHORUS LEADER

Father, I am frightened. Their ships have wings.
Only moments divide us now.

730

CHORUS

I tremble with terror!
Has all my running really come to this?
I die from fear, father.

Strophe 1

DANAOS

Courage, children! The Argives' vote was final
and they will fight for you, I know.

CHORUS LEADER

Aigyptos' tribe is accursed, wild with lust,
battle starved. You know that, too.

CHORUS

In dark-cheeked, strong-hulled
ships
they sailed against us, a great black army.
Their anger hits its mark!

Antistrophe 1

740

DANAOS

Yes, but row on row of men, limbs toughened
under the sun, will meet their charge.

CHORUS LEADER

Do not desert me, I beg you! A woman alone
is nothing. There is no strength in her.

CHORUS

But the men are
full of blood lust, treacherous,
impure of heart,
ravens eager to defile an altar.

Strophe 2

DANAOS

We are the winners, children, if they add
the gods' hatred to our own.

750

CHORUS LEADER

No awe of tridents or the gods' other emblems
will keep their hands from me, father.

CHORUS

So arrogant,
swollen with unholy rage,
the shameless dogs
will hardly hear the gods commanding "No"!

Antistrophe 2

DANAOS

Wolves are stronger than dogs, the proverb says.
Papyrus is no match for wheat.

CHORUS LEADER

This is a raging, lustful beast, an unholy
terror. We must protect ourselves!

760

DANAOS

A fleet needs time to get under way and time
to put in at port. Even when a ship
rides at anchor and the hawsers are secured on shore,
the wise steersman is still wary, moored
off a harborless coast, with the sun sinking
into the sea. Night brings pangs like childbirth
to the sailor shepherding his flock of ships. And no troops
will disembark until their vessel is secure
in her moorings. You are frightened, I know; but keep
your wits about you and don't neglect the gods.

770

(I go to make all ready for you, once)

I have persuaded our allies to help. Old
as I am, they will find my wits and words still young.

Exit DANAOS right.

STASIMON 3

The CHORUS dances.

O hills and pastureland
worthy of so much awe,
what must we suffer?
Is there in all Apis' country
no dark hollow to hide me?
O to fly up, away, black smoke
among Zeus's clouds,
or wingless dust
vanishing into sheer nothing!

Strophe 1
780

No escape from this fate!
My heart shudders darkly.
I am trapped, trembling
in the net father's watching set.
Better death in a noose's
embrace than let the man I loathe
graze my skin with his
greedy fingers.
Sooner Lord Hades possess me!

Antistrophe 1
790

Can I find some high throne
where dripping clouds congeal to snow?
Or must a sheer brooding crag,
goat-shunning,
vulture-haunted,
aloof,

Strophe 2

watch me fall before brute force makes a marriage
to break my heart?

Then let dogs feast, let birds
tear my flesh, no matter. To die
is to stand clear of evils
that fatten
on groans and tears.
I choose
death, not marriage. How can I cut a path to
deliverance?

Antistrophe 2
801

Burst heavenward, my cry:
let my lament find fulfillment
from the gods,
find some release!
Father, look with eyes of justice
flashing out hatred of force: honor
your suppliants, almighty
Landruler Zeus!

Strophe 3
810

The spawn of Aigyptos
pursue me with ruthless male pride,
swaggering,
howling their lust,
storming this refuge to take me
by force. But your hand holds the balance;
men achieve nothing except
you will it so.

Antistrophe 3
820

EPISODE 4

The HERALD of the sons of Aigyptos enters left with armed followers.

CHORUS

Aaah!

He has crawled ashore, this sailor,
and comes to seize me!
before you take me, you die!

HERALD

Move down to the ships, now,
move along!

CHORUS

I'll scream!

830

I see the suffering
start, the violence against us.

Aiai!

Run! Make for safety,
for our refuge!
They're savage-minded,
their lust unbearable
on land, on sea.
Lord of the land,
defend us now!

840

HERALD

Get going!
Move along,

[42]

along to the ships.
What? You won't?
You won't? I'll tear
out your hair, pluck
you clean, brand you.
I'll chop heads from
blood-gushing stumps!
Get going, damn you.
To the ships!
Move!

850

CHORUS

The salt waves
should have swirled over you,
the current engulfed your rugged ships—
and your masters' brutal pride.

Strophe 1

HERALD

I'll drag you
bleeding, throw you
into the boat.
Stop screaming.
Are you mad
to die? Hey!
Away from the altar!
To the ships!
You have no rights,
no honor.
You think I'll
feel reverence?

860

CHORUS

I pray you
will never see again
the flood that brings forth cattle, that warms
and ripens blood to bear life.

Antistrophe 1

870

[43]

HERALD

.....
To the ship now,
to the ship quick!
Like it or not,
I'll drag you off
by force, right now,
by force.
.....

CHORUS

Ai! Ai! Ai!
 May you die helpless
 in the sea's cold embrace,
 stiff gales drive you headlong
 across her salt plain,
smash you against the sandbar they call
 Sarpedon's barrow.

Strophe 2
880

HERALD

I order you on board, quick! Our prows
point seaward. No more delay: I'll not be
ashamed to drag you off by the hair.

CHORUS

Ah! Ah! Ah!
 Outrage! Mad dogs howl
 lecherous at my heels.
 May great Nile see you rut
 and turn you away
with your ignorant pride and stupid
 arrogant power.

Antistrophe 2
890

HERALD

Howl, shriek, cry to your gods: still
you'll not jump ship on Aigyptos' sons!
Fiercer screams! New wails to match new woes.

[44]

CHORUS

Father, your help fails me,
the altar tricks me.
Like a spider he traps me,
 drags me seaward
step by step. A dream?
 A black nightmare!

Strophe 3
900

Oh! Oh! Oh!
 Mother Earth,
Mother, save me!
 Turn away
his frightful shout!
 Father Zeus,
o son of Earth!

910

HERALD

I am not afraid of the local gods.
They did not rear me, they will not feed my old age.

CHORUS

A huge two-legged snake
darts close, eagerly
lunges at his helpless prey—
 hideous viper,
he grasps my foot in
 horrible jaws!

Antistrophe 3

Oh! Oh! Oh!
 Mother Earth,
Mother, save me!
 Turn away
his frightful shout!
 Father Zeus,
o son of Earth!

920

[45]

HERALD

If you don't give in and move along to the ship,
I'll have no pity, I'll tear your clothes to shreds!

CHORUS LEADER

Rulers of this land, they are breaking me!

HERALD

Since you won't listen to me, it seems
I shall have to drag you off by the hair.

930

CHORUS LEADER

Lord Pelasgos! We are done for! The pain!

HERALD

If it's a lord you want, you'll soon see lords
enough—sons of Aigyptos! You won't lack masters.

*As the HERALD and his men continue to pull the
CHORUS from around the altar, PELASGOS enters
left with a band of soldiers. At his first words,
the struggle ceases.*

PELASGOS

You there! What are you doing? How dare you treat
The land of the Pelasgoi with such contempt?
Or did you imagine only women live here?
Barbarians who play these insolent games
with Greeks soon find they have badly missed the mark.

HERALD

Are my actions unjust? What gives offense?

940

PELASGOS

First, you don't know how strangers should act.

HERALD

How so? I am just recovering lost property.

PELASGOS

What patron's support have you called on here in Argos?

HERALD

The greatest there is: Hermes, patron of searchers.

PELASGOS

You claim a god's support for sacrilege?

HERALD

The gods I honor live beside the Nile.

PELASGOS

And the gods of Argos are nothing. Is that what you mean?

HERALD

I mean to take these girls, unless you steal them.

PELASGOS

Lay one hand on them and you'll howl with pain!

HERALD

This is how you befriend a foreign guest?

950

PELASGOS

Steal from the gods and you're neither friend nor guest.

HERALD

Very well. I'll report this to Aigyptos' sons.

PELASGOS

What do I care? You don't graze my meadows.

HERALD

Before I go—a herald's first duty
is precision. What shall I tell my lords?
Who robs them of their cousins? Ares will
not call witnesses in this dispute,
nor settle it by levying a fine. No, first
many will fall, many cast off their lives.

PELASGOS

Why tell my name? You and your whole crew 960
will learn it soon enough. But you shall have
the women only if they wish it so,
only if honest persuasion wins their consent.
Our people will never give them up to force;
Argos voted as one man, and bolted it
clear through, like a hull, to hold it fast.
This is not something scratched on tablets or sealed
in scrolls; it is the plain speech of a free tongue.
Now get out of my sight and be quick about it.

HERALD

So, we stand on the brink of a dangerous war, 970
it seems. Victory and power to the men!

PELASGOS

You'll find men here, too—who drink a stronger
brew than barley-beer.

*The HERALD and his followers exit left. PELASGOS turns
to the CHORUS.*

Take heart,

all of you! Go with your own attendants
to the safety of our city, impregnable
behind strong walls and towers designed
with deep cunning. You will find there

[48]

many houses belonging to the people,
and my house, too, laid out with a generous hand.
You are welcome to share lodgings with others, 980
or to live apart in separate dwellings,
if that should please you more. The choice is yours.
I am your patron and sponsor, along with all
the citizens whose vote brought this about. What
higher authority can you be expecting?

CHORUS LEADER

May the good you have done,
most godlike of the Pelasgoi,
blossom with good in return.
But we ask one more favor:
send us boldhearted Danaos, 990
our father, to guide our thoughts.
He will know where we should dwell.
Although you now welcome us kindly,
people are quick to fault foreigners.
May it all end for the best.
May our reputation stay fair
and without reproach in Argos.

*PELASGOS and his followers exit right. The CHORUS
LEADER now addresses the HANDMAIDENS, who have
been seated at one side of the orchestra since the beginning
of the play.*

Handmaidens, each of you stand
beside the mistress whose dowry
Danaos made you, to serve her. 1000

*As the HANDMAIDENS move to the side of their mis-
tresses, DANAOS enters right, accompanied by an armed
escort.*

[49]

DANAOS

Children, we owe prayers to the people of Argos,
 burnt offerings and outpourings of wine, as if
 to the gods of Olympos, for they are truly saviors.
 What happened here they heard with loving care
 for you, their kin, but hatred for your cousins.
 And to me they have assigned this company
 of spearmen, to do me honor and protect me
 against plots to strike me down, making
 my death an everliving burden on the land.
 In return for such favors, let thanks fill
 the sails of your hearts, and add one prudent thought
 to the many your father has written in your minds:
 Time will be our judge, for we are strangers
 here. Slander stands on every tongue,
 ready to defile us with a hasty word. Do not
 bring me shame! You are at the age that
 turns men's eyes. Ripe fruit is hardest to guard,
 for men will covet and plunder, even birds
 and beasts will ravage it. And why not?
 Aphrodite herself hawks this fruit
 of her fairest season bursting with sweet nectar,
 and passers-by, struck by desire for lush
 maiden beauty, shoot volleys of enchanting
 glances. Do not fall to what we have struggled
 to flee, plowing the furrowed seas. No shame
 for us, no pleasure for our enemies!
 Live where you like: both Pelasgos and the city
 offer quarters free of cost. That much
 is easy. Only hold firm to your father's command:
 Honor modesty more than life itself!

CHORUS LEADER

The gods grant all else, but as for my ripe
 fruit, father, take heart. Unless the gods
 lay strange new plans, I'll not stray from my track.

1010

1020

1030

EXODOS

*The CHORUS sings and dances the first strophic pair, the
 HANDMAIDENS perform the second.*

CHORUS

Glory and honor to the gods,
 blessed lords of Argos
 who hold the town in their hands, and who dwell
 along Erasinios
 ageless, everflowing. Attendants,
 mark my song: I shower praise
 on Pelasgos' state
 and my hymns no longer honor
 Nile spilling seaward,

Strophe 1

1040

but sing the rivers that rise here,
 gentle, shining waters
 that pour through the land to sweeten the soil
 and make it rich with young.
 Pure maiden Artemis, turn your eyes
 toward our troop in pity,
 spare us marriage rites
 compelled by force. I'd seek that prize
 on the shores of Styx.

Antistrophe 1

1050

HANDMAIDENS

We are your friends, but our flock
 will not scorn Aphrodite

Strophe 2

the Wily, honored for her awesome power,
who stands with Hera nearest Zeus's throne.

Her darling daughters are at her side,

Desire and Persuasion,
who cast inescapable spells.

Harmony, too, has her part
in lovers' whispers 1060
down well-worn paths of loving.

I fear for the fugitives: *Antistrophe 2*
stormwinds are rising, cruel griefs
and blood-smeared war threaten. Why else the smooth
crossing, swift pursuit? If fate has ordained
a thing, it will be. The mind of Zeus
is trackless, unbounded.

Marriage has come to so many
women now and in time past;
I too add a prayer 1070
for willing consummation.

*The third strophic pair is divided between the two groups
facing each other on opposite sides of the orchestra.*

CHORUS
Great Zeus, guard us from *Strophe 3*
marriage with Aigyptos' sons!

HANDMAIDENS
And yet that would be best.

CHORUS
Your charms will not charm me.

HANDMAIDENS
You know nothing of the future.

CHORUS

No. Can my eyes pierce *Antistrophe 3*
to the depths of Zeus's mind?

HANDMAIDENS
Then moderate your prayer.

CHORUS
What must the limit be? 1080

HANDMAIDENS
Don't ask the gods for too much grace.

CHORUS
Lord Zeus, spare us *Strophe 4*
bitter marriage to mates we despise.
You who delivered
Io from pain with hands of healing,
making gentle your might,
give women power and victory!

I am content *Antistrophe 4*
if my portion of evil is mixed
with a share of good, 1090
if Justice renders judgment for me.
Lord, grant me some cunning
device to win my deliverance!

*DANAOS and his attendants exit right in solemn proces-
sion, followed by the CHORUS and HANDMAIDENS.*

NOTES

1 **suppliant lord:** Zeus, the most powerful of the Olympian gods, was regarded by the Greeks from Homer onwards as the protector of wanderers and all who seek refuge.

23 **Zeus Savior, third and last:** an allusion to the custom of pouring three libations after a meal, of which the last was offered to Zeus as protector of home and family.

45f. **Child of His Touch:** Aeschylus plays on the name Epaphos and the common noun *ephapsis*, "touch."

58 **Tereus' wife:** usually called Prokne, she punished her husband for his rape of her sister Philomela by murdering their own son Itys. Tereus' wife was transformed into a nightingale, Tereus into a hawk (elsewhere, a hoopoe).

111 **hilly grazingland of healing Apis:** the Greek words *Apian bounin* refer to the land of Argos, for which Apia was an alternate name (cf. the reference at 255 to Apis, the heroic healer), but also glance at the maidens' claim to be Argive by oblique allusion to Io (in the phonic similarity of *bounis* and *bous*, "cow") and to Apis, an Egyptian calf-god identified with the Greek Epaphos.

139 **Pure maiden daughter of Zeus:** Artemis, virgin goddess of the hunt, a resolute protector of virginity.

154 **Zeus of the dead:** Hades, lord of the underworld; cf. 224ff.

160f. **the heaven-toppling anger of your queen:** the jealous wrath of Hera; see 279ff.

208 **this bird, sacred to Zeus:** must be the eagle, a regular companion of Zeus, but in the following line the Chorus identifies it with the sun, apparently alluding to the Egyptian solar hawk of Amun-Re.

210 **once exiled from heaven:** Apollo killed the Cyclopes because they made the thunderbolt with which Zeus killed his son, Asklepios. For this, Zeus banished him from Olympus for a year, during which he served the Thessalian king Admetos as a shepherd.

214 **a trident:** symbol of Poseidon.

216 **Hermes, as the Greeks portray him:** apparently another instance of "translating" between a Greek representation and the corresponding Egyptian one. This Hermes presumably appears as an heroic human figure; the Egyptian messenger-god Thoth was represented as ibis- or ape-headed. Alternatively, Danaos may make euphemistic reference to a phallic image of the god such as could be seen everywhere in the Athens of Aeschylus' day.

234 **patrons to prepare your way:** *proxenoi* were individuals who announced the arrival and represented the interests of foreigners; the Danaids will appeal to Pelasgos himself to become their patron (411), and Danaos will call him patron when he has accepted their suit (482).

243 **Palaichthon:** the name means simply Ancient Land; through him, Pelasgos claims what the Greeks referred to as autochthony, the racial purity of a line sprung directly from Earth, and thus not subject to the uncertainties of migrations, invasion, or even sexual generation.

246 **All the lands:** the kingdom grandly claimed by Pelasgos encompasses essentially all of mainland Greece, from Thrace in the northeast to Epirus in the west.

291 **Argos:** by most accounts had a hundred eyes and enormous strength; to kill him, Hermes had first to lull him to sleep eye by eye with his music.

300 **named for the prize Zeus seized:** a second etymology of the name Epaphos (the first is alluded to again in 298, **the touch of Zeus's hand.**) The play on words here is more complex; Epaphos is said to be named after *rhusia*, meaning something taken or seized as compensation; the missing verbal connection is the verb of seizing, *ephapto*; the conceptual connection is that Epaphos' name, by alluding to the divine seizing of Io, declares him to be its true compensation.

301 A line has dropped out; the bracketed words supply the needed question. **Libye** is evidently associated here with the fertile region of the Nile, not the area encompassed by modern Libya. (The Greeks commonly used the name to refer to Africa as a whole.)

344 **Themis:** as a common noun, "custom" or "law"; Hesiod makes the deity Zeus's bride, by whom she bears Justice and Good Government, among other offspring; here, she is his daughter or simply his agent, but in any case personifies the force that binds societies together and regulates conduct.

350 **my hearth:** the hearth and its fire were the sacred center of domestic life, and every settlement also had a public hearth that in some way both symbolized and guaranteed communal life. The hearth of a home would be the appropriate place to supplicate a powerful individual. (We know that a contemporary of Aeschylus, the great statesman and general Themistocles, became a suppliant at the hearth of Admetos, king of the Molossians, when he was ostracized from Athens.) Pelasgos distinguishes such private supplication from the demand that the Danaids are making of the whole Argive people. The Danaids reply by assimilating the altar to the public hearth and the King's will to that of the whole state (354-60).

375 **as next of kin:** Pelasgos appears to know of an Egyptian law that gives the Danaids' cousins some claim to take them in marriage. There is no evidence that such a law existed, but the Athenian audience might well be aware that intermarriage was customary within the pharaoh's family, and they would think also of the Athenian law conferring the right to marry an heiress upon her father's next of kin, though this applied only after the father's death. The Chorus evade the legal question, but the Herald of the Aigyptioi raises it again at 942, and it may have played a role in the following play, *Aigyptioi*.

486 **Inachos' tribe:** the people of Argos, after one of the two chief rivers that water the Argive plain.

527 **Remember your long wooing:** translates the Greek phrase *genou polumnestor*, which simply means "be much-re-membering"; but the adjective also suggests *mnestor*, "suitor," especially in a line addressed to *ephaptor Ious*, "the toucher of Io."

539 **Cow-ford:** a literal translation of *Bosphorus*, as the strait that divides Europe from Asia Minor is still known. The word does not occur in Aeschylus' text; I have taken the liberty of making his allusion explicit.

548 **Aphrodite's deep dark soil:** i.e., Phoenicia, famous for the cult of Astarte, whom the Greeks assimilated to Aphrodite.

629 **lewd Ares:** he is the type of the adulterer from the *Odyssey* onward (cf. 660), but the epithet here primarily refers to his "promiscuous" conduct in war; as in matters sexual, so in battle he is always taking what does not belong to him.

669f. **Farshooter Artemis:** like her brother Apollo, Artemis is an archer. The Greeks associated her equally with the protection of virginity (see on 139) and the easing of childbirth.

[58]

680 **Apollo Wolfgod:** perhaps an allusion to the Argive sanctuary of Apollo Lykeios, the chief glory of Argos, according to the geographer Pausanias, and supposedly founded by Danaos. As Wolfgod, Apollo is chiefly a figure of destruction, but he may here be invoked as undoer of harm, or simply propitiated so he will not cause harm.

705 **third commandment:** the first two are contained in 696-703, fair treatment for strangers and honor for the gods. The gods might be expected to come first in such a triad, but the Chorus has every reason to emphasize hospitality to foreigners.

723 **drag you away as booty:** the Greek phrase, *rhusion ephaptores*, carries an ironic overtone of Epaphos, the product of Zeus's seizing of Io; see on 300.

761ff. Danaos' description of the difficulties of landing an army, a somewhat awkward way of calming his daughters' fears, takes on a (no doubt unconscious) double meaning when we realize that images of anchoring and harboring can be Greek metaphors for sexual union. Danaos' words seem to suggest a slow, careful preparation for a nocturnal climax—that ironically will bring the pangs of childbirth upon the males.

771 Once again I have supplied in brackets a line that has dropped out of our manuscript tradition.

774 **O hills and pastureland:** the Greek says *io ga bouni*, which is close in sound to "Io, Earth, Cow" (cf. on 111).

871 **the flood that brings forth cattle:** i.e., the Nile.

873 The beginning and end of this speech are mutilated beyond plausible restoration.

885 **Sarpedon's barrow:** a headland on the Cilician coast opposite Cyprus; Sarpedon is the Lycian king known from

[59]

the *Iliad*. The Chorus at this point imagines a disastrous return voyage of its enemy to Egypt.

942 **recovering lost property:** see on 375.

943 **What patron's support:** see on 234.

1037 **Erasinos:** one of the two principal rivers that flow near Argos (the other, the Inachos, is mentioned at 486). It is contrasted at the end of the strophe by the Nile, and at the end of the antistrophe by the Styx, chief river of Hades.

1052 The final chorus must be divided between two parties, but there is no clear indication in the text as to how, and three possible solutions have vigorous scholarly adherents: (1) the Danaids divide themselves into two half-choruses, (2) the Danaids are answered by the Argive bodyguard that has returned with Danaos, (3) the Danaids are answered by their Handmaidens. I have chosen the last alternative as most consistent with the indications of the text and most dramatically appropriate, but the matter is impossible to resolve with certainty.

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DEDICATION

To all those who have been at the forefront in the development of literature in Gikūyū language through songs and books: Mūthirigū and Mau Mau composers; contemporary composers like Kamaarū, D. K. Kiraatū, Wahoome, Rūguīti, Gathaithi Choir, Mwikū Orchestra; and to all the other Kenyans who have been developing literature in all the other Kenya national languages through songs and books.

In particular, we can never forget the contribution of Gakwa Wanjau who long before the Mau Mau armed anti-imperial struggle used to write books in Gikūyū language. And even after Gakaara was detained by the British for his patriotic anti-imperial literature, he never gave up his struggle to create a patriotic literature in Gikūyū language. On being released from political detention, he continued to write and publish books and magazines in Gikūyū.

All patriotic Kenyan writers, accept this, our offering!

Will Marry When I Want

Characters

KIGUUNDA, *Farm labourer*

ANGECE, *Kiguunda's wife*

GATHONI, *Their daughter*

GICAAMBA, *Kiguunda's neighbour, a factory worker*

GOOKI, *Gicaamba's wife*

AHAB KIOI WA KANORU, *Wealthy farmer and businessman*

JEZEBEL, *Kioi's wife*

MUEL NDUGIRE, *Nouveau riche farmer and shopkeeper*

ELEN, *Ndugire's wife*

LUUA WANDITIKA, *Kioi's business partner*

RUNK

MAITER

SECURICOR WATCHMAN

ANGERS. DANCERS. MUSICIANS. CHILDREN. WORKERS. MAU MAU

JERRILLAS. BRITISH SOLDIERS. AFRIK'ANI HOME GUARDS

ACT ONE

Kigũũnda's home. A square, mud-walled, white-ochred, one-roomed house. The white ochre is fading. In one corner can be seen Kigũũnda and Wangeci's bed. In another can be seen a pile of rags on the floor. The floor is Gathoni's bed and the rags, her bedding. Although poorly dressed, GATHONI is very beautiful. In the same room can be seen a pot on three stones. On one of the walls there hangs a framed title-deed for one and a half acres of land. Near the head of the bed, on the wall, there hangs a sheathed sword. On one side of the wall there hangs Kigũũnda's coat, and on the opposite side, on the same wall, Wangeci's coat. The coats are torn and patched. A pair of tyre sandals and a basin can be seen on the floor.

As the play opens, WANGECI is just about to finish peeling potatoes. She then starts to sort out the rice on a tray and engages in many other actions to do with cooking.

KIGŪŪNDA is mending the broken leg of a folding chair. GATHONI is busy doing her hair. The atmosphere shows that they are waiting for some guests. As KIGŪŪNDA mends the chair, he accidentally causes the title-deed to fall on the floor. He picks it up and gazes at it as if he is spelling out the letters.

WANGECI:

What do you want to do with the title-deed?
Why do you always gaze at it
As if it was a title for a thousand acres?

KIGŪŪNDA:

These one and a half acres?
These are worth more to me
Than all the thousands that belong to Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru.

These are mine own,
Not borrowed robes
Said to tire the wearer.
A man brags about his own penis,
However tiny.

WANGECI:

And will you be able to mend the chair in time
Or are our guests to squat on the floor?

KIGÜUNDA: [*Laughing a little*]

Ahab Kioi son of Kanoru!
And his wife Jezebel!
To squat on the floor!

WANGECI:

Go on then and
Waste all the time in the world
Gazing at the title-deed!

WANGECI continues with her cooking chores. KIGÜUNDA puts the title-deed back on the wall, and resumes mending the chair. Suddenly a drunk passes through the yard singing.

DRUNK: [*Singing*]

I shall marry when I want,
Since all padres are still alive.
I shall get married when I want,
Since all nuns are still alive.

[Near the door he stops and calls out]

Kigüunda wa Gathon!
Son of Mürima!
Why didn't you come out for a drink?
Or are you tied to your wife's petticoats?
Do you suckle her?
Come, let's go!

WANGECI: [*Runs to the door and shouts angrily*]

Go away and drink that poisonous stuff at the bar!
You wretch!
Has alcohol become milk?
Auuu-u!
Have you no shame urinating there?

[She looks for a stone or any other missile. But when she again looks out, she finds the drunk disappearing in the distance. She goes back to her seat by the fireplace]

He has gone away, legs astride the road,
Doing I don't know what with his arms.
Has drinking become work?
Or have beer-halls become churches?

KIGÜUNDA:

Was that not Kamande wa Mūnyui?
Leave him alone,
And don't look down upon him.
He was a good man;
He became the way he now is only after he lost his job.
He worked with the Securicor company.
He was Kioi's nightwatchman.
But one day Kioi finds him dead asleep in the middle of the night.
From that moment Kamande lost his job.
Before the Securicor company he was an administrative policeman.
That's why when he takes one too many,
He swings his arms about as if he is carrying a gun.

WANGECI:

Alcohol will now employ him!

KIGÜUNDA:

Poverty has no heroes,
He who judges knows not how he will be judged!
Suddenly a hymn breaks out in the yard. KIGÜUNDA stops work and listens. WANGECI listens for a little while, then she continues with her activities. GATHONI goes out into the yard where the singers are.

SOLOIST:

The Satan of poverty
Must be crushed!

CHORUS:

Hallelujah he must be crushed,
For the second coming is near.

SOLOIST:

He destroys our homes,
Let's crush him.

ORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush him and grind him
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*The Satan of theft
Must be crushed!*

ORUS:
*Hallelujah he must be crushed,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*Crush and cement him to the ground,
Crush him!*

ORUS:
*Hallelujah crush and cement him to the ground,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*He oppresses the whole nation,
Let's crush him!*

ORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush and grind him,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*The Satan of robbery
Must be crushed!*

ORUS:
*Hallelujah he must be crushed,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
Bury him and plant thorn trees on the grave.

ORUS:
*Bury him and plant thorn trees on the grave,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*He brings famine to our children,
Let's crush him!*

ORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush and grind him,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*The Satan of oppression
Must be crushed!*

CHORUS:
*Hallelujah he must be crushed,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*Crush and cement him to the ground,
Crush him!*

CHORUS:
*Hallelujah crush and cement him to the ground,
Crush him!*

SOLOIST:
*He holds back our rising awareness
Let's crush him.*

CHORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush and grind him,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*Our people let's sing in unity,
And crush him!*

CHORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush and grind him,
For the second coming is near.*

SOLOIST:
*I can't hear your voices
Let's crush him!*

CHORUS:
*Hallelujah let's crush and grind him,
For the second coming is near . . .*

*the group LEADER now enters KIGÜÜNDA's house and stands by the
door holding a container for subscriptions. GATHONI also enters and
stands where she had previously sat.*

LEADER:
Praise the Lord!

KIGÜÜNDA }
WANGECI } [*Looking at one another as if unable to know what to say*]
We are well,

And you too we hope.

LEADER:

We belong to the sect of the poor.
Those without land,
Those without plots,
Those without clothes.
We want to put up our own church.
We have a haraambe.*
Give generously to the God of the poor
Whatever you have put aside
To ward off the fate of Anania and his wife.

KIGÜUNDA: [Making a threatening step or two towards the LEADER]

We can hardly afford to feed our bellies.
You think we can afford any for haraambe?

The LEADER goes out quickly. The group resumes their song.

SOLOIST:

The devil of stinginess
Must be crushed!

CHORUS:

Hallelujah let's crush him
And press him to the ground,
For the second coming is near.

SOLOIST:

He is making it difficult for us to build churches,
Let's crush him!

CHORUS:

Hallelujah let's crush him and press him down,
For the second coming is near.

SOLOIST:

The devil of darkness
Must be crushed . . .

KIGÜUNDA: [Rushing to the door]

Take away your hymn from my premises
Take it away to the bush!

*Haraambe: Public fund-raising

They go away, their voices fading in the distance. GATHONI sits down and resumes doing her hair.

KIGÜUNDA:

That we build a church in honour of poverty!
Poverty!
Even if poverty was to sell at five cents,
I would never buy it!
Religions in this village will drive us all crazy!
Night and day!
You are invited to a haraambe fund-raising for the church.
Which church?
Of the White Padre and Virgin Mary.
You are invited to a haraambe for the church.
Which church?
Of the P.C.E.A* The Scottish one.
Haraambe for the church.
Which church?
Of the Anglicans.
Of the Greek Orthodox.
Of Kikuyu Independent.
Of Salvation Army.
Of the Sect of Deep Waters.
Are we the rubbish heap of religions?
So that wherever the religions are collected,
They are thrown in our courtyard?
And now the sect of the poor?
Religion, religion, religion!
Haraambe, haraambe, haraambe!
And those church buildings are only used once a week!
Or is this another profitable business?

ANGECI:

You know they were here the other day
Trying to convert me!

*P.C.E.A.: Presbyterian Church of East Africa

KIGÜUNDA:

Who? The same lot?

WANGECI:

What do they call themselves?
 The ones that came from America very recently,
 Those ones: their haraambe is not local
 They say you take them a tenth
 Of all you earn or harvest.
 Even if it's a tenth of the maize or beans
 You have grown in your small shamba* . . .

KIGÜUNDA:

All that haraambe,
 To America.

WANGECI:

What are they called now?

KIGÜUNDA: [*Pretending anger at her*
 And why don't you follow them
 To Rome, Greece or that America
 Singing [*Sings in mimicry*]
The devil must be crushed,
Crush him!
For darkness is falling . . .

70 [WANGECI and GATHONI laugh]

WANGECI:

That voice of yours attempting foreign songs
 Could frighten a baby into tears:

KIGÜUNDA: [*Suddenly seized by a lighthearted mood*]

This voice that belongs to Kigüunda wa Gathoni?
 Don't you remember before the Emergency†
 How I used to sing and dance the Mücüng'wa dance?
 Was it not then that you fell in love with these shapely legs?

*Shamba: farm

†Emergency: Kenya was under a British imposed State of Emergency from 1952 to 1962

WANGECI:

You, able to dance to Mücüng'wa?

KIGÜUNDA:

Gathoni,
 Bring me that sword on the wall.
 [GATHONI goes for the sword]
 I want to show this woman
 How I then used to do it!

[GATHONI hands the sword to KIGÜUNDA. KIGÜUNDA ties the sword round his waist. He starts the Mücüng'wa. In his head he begins to see the vision of how they used to dance the Mücüng'wa. Actual DANCERS now appear on the stage led by KIGÜUNDA and his wife.]

KIGÜUNDA: [*Soloist*]

I am he on whom it rained
As I went up and down
The Mütiriri mountain.

DANCERS:

I am he on whom it rained
As I went up and down
The Mütiriri mountain.

KIGÜUNDA:

I was late and far away from home
I spent the night in a maiden's bed
My mother said they should go back for me
My father said they should not go back for me.

DANCERS:

I was late and far away from home
I spent the night in a maiden's bed
My mother said they should go back for me
My father said they should not go back for me.

KIGÜUNDA:

Maiden lend me your precious treasures
And I will lend you my precious treasures
Maiden, the treasures I'll lend you

*Will make you lose your head
And when you lose your head you'll never find it again.*

DANCERS:

*Maiden lend me your precious treasures
And I will lend you my precious treasures
Maiden, the treasures I'll lend you
Will make you lose your head
And when you lose your head you'll never find it again.*

KIGÜUNDA:

*Whose homestead is this
Where my voice is now raised in song,
Where once my mother refused a marriage offer
And I wetted the bed?*

DANCERS:

*Whose homestead is this
Where my voice is now raised in song,
Where once my mother refused a marriage offer
And I wetted the bed?*

KIGÜUNDA:

*My mother's bridewealth was a calf taken in battle,
The calf was tended by young warriors.
Many hands make work light.*

DANCERS:

*My mother's bridewealth was a calf taken in battle,
The calf was tended by young warriors.
Many hands make work light.*

KIGÜUNDA:

*Mother ululate for me,
For if I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.
Oh, yes, come what come may
If I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.*

DANCERS:

*Mother ululate for me,
For if I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.
Oh, yes, come what come may
If I don't die young I'll one day sing songs of victory.*

KIGÜUNDA:

The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors

*And be handed back to patriots
Like Kimaathi's* patriotic heroes.*

DANCERS:

*The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors
And be handed back to patriots
Like Kimaathi's patriotic heroes.*

Until the DANCERS leave the arena. KIGÜUNDA goes on alone and repeats the last verse.

KIGÜUNDA:

*The crown of victory should be taken away from traitors
And be handed back to patriots
Like Kigüunda wa Gathoni . . .*

ANGEKI: [Cutting him short]

Sit down!

An aging hero has no admirers!

[Kigüunda unties the sword and hangs it back on the wall]

Who prevented you from selling out?

Today we would be seeing you
In different models of Mercedes Benzes,
With stolen herds of cows and sheep,
With huge plantations,
With servants to look after your massive properties.

Yes, like all the other men around!

They are now the ones employing you,

Jobs without wages!

Hurry up and mend that chair,

Kioi and his family are about to arrive.

Hasn't that chair been in that condition all this time,

Without you doing anything about it?

If they arrive this very minute,

Where will they sit?

KIGÜUNDA: [Hurrying up with the work. When he finishes repairing it, he sits on it, trying to see if it's firm]

What can they do to me even if they enter this minute?

**Nedan Kimaathi: Mau Mau guerrilla leader*

Let them come with their own chairs
Those spring and sponge ones that seem to fart
As you sink into them.

[He sings as if he is asking WANGECI a question]

Whose homestead is this?
Whose homestead is this?
Whose homestead is this?
So that I can roll on the dust
Like the calf of a buffalo!

KIGUUNDA waits for an answer. WANGECI merely glances at him for about a second and then continues with her work. KIGUUNDA now sings as if he is answering himself. Still singing, he stands up and walks to the title-deed, pulls it off the wall and looks at it.

This is mine own homestead
This is mine own homestead
This is mine own homestead
If I want to roll on the dust
I am free to do so.

WANGECI:

I wonder what Mr Kioi
And Jezebel, his madam,
Want in a poor man's home?
Why did they take all that trouble to let us know beforehand
That they would be coming here today?

KIGUUNDA:

You, you woman,
Even if you see me in these tatters
I am not poor.

[He shows her the title-deed by pointing at it. Then he hangs it back on the wall]

You should know
That a man without debts is not poor at all.
Aren't we the ones who make them rich?
Were it not for my blood and sweat
And the blood and sweat of all the other workers,
Where would the likes of Kioi and his wife now be?
Tell me!
Where would they be today?

WANGECI:

Leave me alone,
You'll keep on singing the same song
Till the day you people wake up.
A fool's walking stick supports the clever.
But why do you sit idle
While this bedframe
Also needs a nail or two?

KIGUUNDA takes the hammer and goes to repair the bed. WANGECI turns her face and sees GATHONI's bedding on the floor.

Gathoni, Gathoni!

GATHONI:

Yes!

WANGECI:

Gathoni!

GATHONI:

Yees!

WANGECI:

Can't you help me
In peeling potatoes,
In sorting out the rice,
Or in looking after the fire?
Instead of sitting there,
Legs stretched,
Plaiting your hair?

GATHONI:

Mother you love complaining
Haven't I just swept the floor?

WANGECI:

And what is that bedding doing over there?
Can't you put it somewhere in a corner,
Or else take it outside to the sun
So the fleas can fly away?

GATHONI:

These tatters!
Are these what you call bedding?
And this floor,
Is this what you call a bed?

WANGECI:

Why don't you get yourself a husband
Who'll buy you spring beds?

GATHONI:

Mother, why are you insulting me?
Is that why you refused to send me to school,
So that I may remain your slave,
And for ever toil for you?
Picking tea and coffee only for you to pocket the wages?
And all that so that you can get money
To pay fees for your son!
Do you want me to remain buried under these ashes?
And on top of all that injury
You have to abuse me night and day?
Do you think I cannot get a husband?
I'll be happy the day I leave this home!

WANGECI: *[With sarcasm]*

Take to the road!
There's no girl worth the name
Who is contented with being an old maid
In her mother's homestead.

GATHONI:

Sorry!
I shall marry when I want.
Nobody will force me into it!

WANGECI:

What? What did you say?

GATHONI:

I shall marry when I want.

WANGECI:

You dare talk back to me like that?
Oh, my clansmen, come!
You have started to insult me at your age?
Why don't you wait until you have grown some teeth!

[With sarcasm]

You! Let me warn you.
If I was not expecting some guests
I would teach you never to abuse your mother.

Take these potato peelings and throw them out in the yard.

[GATHONI takes the peelings. As she is about to go out, her father shouts her]

KIGÜUNDA:

Gathoni!

[GATHONI looks at her father fearfully]

Come here.

[GATHONI makes only one step forward still in fear]

If ever I see or hear that again . . .!

Utaona cha mtema kuni.

Do you think that we mine gold,

To enable us to educate boys and girls?

Go away!

Na uchunge mdomo wako.

[GATHONI takes the peelings out]

WANGECI:

What's wrong with the child?

She used not to be like this!

KIGÜUNDA:

It's all the modern children.

They have no manners at all.

In my time

We could not even sneeze in front of our parents.

What they need is a whip

To make them straighten up!

WANGECI:

No!

When children get to that age.

We can only watch them and hope for the best.

When axes are kept in one basket they must necessarily knock
against each other.

She'll soon marry and be out of sight.

There's no maiden who makes a home in her father's backyard.

And there's no maiden worth the name who wants to get grey
hairs at her parents' home.

KIGÜUNDA:

Do modern girls marry,

Or do they only go to the bars

Accompanied by men old enough to be their fathers,
And the girls cooing up to them, sugardaddy, sugardaddy!
Even for those who have gone to school up to secondary
Or up to the Makerere grade of Cambridge
The song is still the same!
Sugardaddy, sugardaddy!

GATHONI enters and goes back to where she was before and continues
with doing her hair as if she is getting ready to go out

WANGECI:

Have you gone back to your hair?
What's wrong with this child!
Bring me the salt.

[GATHONI brings soda ash instead]

Oh, clansmen, did I ask you for soda ash?

GATHONI:

I did not find any salt.

WANGECI:

So you suggest we put soda ash in the stew?
Look for the salt.

GATHONI:

There is no salt.
Wasn't it finished last night?

WANGECI:

Where shall I now turn?
Give me some money so Gathoni can run for salt!

KIGUUNDA: [Searches his pockets]

I have no money. I gave it all to you.
Didn't you buy cooking oil, rice and salt?

WANGECI:

Thirty cents' worth of cooking oil
And half a kilo of sugar!
Was that all that exhausted your pockets?

KIGUUNDA:

The given does not know when the granary is empty.
Do you think that taking out is the same thing as banking?

WANGECI:

He who puts on dancing finery knows how he is going to dance in
the arena!

You were the one who said that we should cook food for the
visitors, not so?

GUUNDA: [Not happy with the subject, trying to change it]

Do you know that in the past,
The amount of money I gave you
Would have bought more than three kilos of sugar?
Today, am I expected to cut myself to pieces
Or to increase my salary by force
To enable me to keep abreast with the daily increase in prices?
Didn't they increase the price of flour only yesterday?

WANGECI: [Sarcastically]

The difference between then and now is this!
We now have our independence!

GUUNDA:

I ran away from coldland only to find myself in frostland!

WANGECI:

But even if prices rise
Without the wages rising,
Or even if there are no jobs,
Are we expected to eat saltless food?
Or do they want us to use ashes?
Gathoni!

GATHONI:

Yees.

WANGECI:

Can you run over to Gicaamba's place
And ask them for some salt!
Those are never without anything
Because of their fortnightly pay.

GATHONI begins to move]

And Gathoni!

GATHONI:

Yees.

WANGECI:

And . . . eem . . . and . . . eem,
Don't tell them that we have guests.
This food cannot feed guests
And feed the whole village.

[GATHONI goes out]

KIGÜÜNDA: *[As if his thoughts are still on wages and price increases]*

You talk about prices,
But tell me a single item whose price has not gone up?
In the past a mere thirty shillings,
Could buy me clothes and shoes,
And enough flour for my belly.
Today I get two hundred shillings a month,
And it can't even buy insecticide enough to kill a single bedbug.
African employers are no different
From Indian employers
Or from the Boer white landlords.
They don't know the saying
That the hand of a worker should not be weakened.
They don't know the phrase, 'increased wages'!

WANGECI:

Are we the pot that cooks without eating?

GATHONI enters panting. *It looks as if she has something on her mind.*

GATHONI:

We have been given a lot of salt!

Before GATHONI sits down a car hoots from the road. GATHONI does not know if she should sit down or run out, she shuffles about doubtfully.

WANGECI:

What kind of a person is this?

He never enters the house to greet people!

[The car hoots again, now with more force and impatience]

WANGECI:

Go, you are the one being called out by John Mũhũni.

Why don't you get out before he makes us deaf with the hooting?

[GATHONI goes out]

Do you know that Gathoni began to be difficult

Only after this son of Kioi started this business of hooting for her?

[KIGÜÜNDA goes on with his work as if he has not heard anything]

The son of Kioi!

What does he want with Gathoni?

Gathoni being a child,

Does she realize that men have prickly needles!

KIGÜÜNDA:

You should have said that it is the modern men

Who have got prickly needles.

Give me water to wash my feet.

WANGECI brings him water in a basin. KIGÜÜNDA goes and gets his tyre sandals from the floor. He now imitates the gait of young men as he walks towards the basin talking all the time.

Modern young men?

You can never tell!

Ask them to put on bell bottoms

And to put on platform shoes,

And then to whistle whistles of hypocrisy,

That's all they are able to do.

But it has well been said that

The father and mother of the beautiful one have no ears.

[WANGECI: *[Starts as if an idea has suddenly occurred to her]*

Could it be the reason why . . . ?

KIGÜÜNDA:

Why what?

WANGECI:

Mũhũni's father and mother, Kioi and Jezebel, are visiting us?

They have never before wanted to visit us!

KIGÜÜNDA:

To visit, yes – to say what?

WANGECI:

It could be that . . .

KIGÜÜNDA:

You women!

You are always thinking of weddings!

WANGECI:

Why not?

These are different times from ours.

These days they sing that love knows no fear.

In any case, can't you see

Your daughter is very beautiful?

She looks exactly the way I used to look – a perfect beauty!

KIGÜÜNDA: [*Stopping dusting up the tyre sandals*]

You? A perfect beauty?

WANGECI:

Yes. Me.

KIGÜÜNDA:

Don't you know that it was only that
I felt pity for you?

WANGECI:

You, who used to waylay me everywhere all the time?
In the morning,
In the evening,
As I came home from the river,
As I came home from the market,
Or as I came back home from work in the settlers' farms?
Can't you remember how you used to plead with me,
Saying you had never in your life seen a beauty like me?

KIGÜÜNDA: [*Going back in time*]

That was long before the state of Emergency.
Your heels used to shine bright,
Your face shone like the clear moon at night,
Your eyes like the stars in heaven.
Your teeth, it seemed, were always washed with milk.
Your voice sounded like a precious instrument.
Your breasts were full and pointed like the tip of the sharpest
thorn.
As you walked it seemed as if they were whistling beautiful
tunes.

WANGECI: [*Also mesmerized by memories of their past youth*]

In those days
We used to dance in Kīneenī forest.

KIGÜÜNDA:

A dance would cost only twenty-five cents.

WANGECI:

In those days there was not a single girl from Ndeiya up to
Githūga
Who did not die to dance with you.

KIGÜÜNDA:

You too would swing your skirt
Till the guitar player was moved to breaking the strings.
And the guitars used to sound tunes
That silenced the entire forest,
Making even the trees listen . . .

The sound of guitars and other instruments as if KIGÜÜNDA and

WANGECI can hear them in the memory. KIGÜÜNDA and WANGECI start
dancing. Then they are joined by the guitar players and players of other
instruments and DANCERS. They dance, KIGÜÜNDA and WANGECI among
them.

Nyaangwīcū let's shake the skirt
Nyaangwīcū let's shake the skirt
Sister shake it and make it yield its precious yields.
Sister shake it and make it yield its precious yields.

Nyaangwīcū is danced on one leg
Nyaangwīcū is danced on one leg
The other is merely for pleasing the body.
The other is merely for pleasing the body.

Wangeci the beautiful one
Wangeci the beautiful one
With a body slim and straight like the eucalyptus.
With a body slim and straight like the eucalyptus.

Wangeci the little maiden
Wangeci the little maiden
When I see her I am unable to walk.
When I see her I am unable to walk.

Wangeci let's cultivate the fruit garden
Wangeci let's cultivate the fruit garden
This garden that belongs to Kigüūnda wa Gathoni.
This garden that belongs to Kigüūnda wa Gathoni.

*Wangeçi, our mother, we now refuse
Wangeçi, our mother, we now refuse
To be slaves in our home,
To be slaves in our home.*

When this is over, WANGECI says. 'Oh my favourite was Mwomboko.' And KIGÜÜNDA replies: 'Oh in those days we used to tear the right or left side of trouser legs from the knee downwards. Those were our bell bottoms with which we danced Mwomboko.' Now the guitar players and the accordion players start. The Mwomboko DANCERS enter. KIGÜÜNDA and WANGECI lead them in the Mwomboko dance. Guitars, iron rings and the accordions are played with vigour and the dancers' feet add embellishments.

*The Mwomboko dance is not difficult,
It's just two steps and a turn.
I'll swing you so beautifully that,
Your mother being in the fields,
Your father in a beer feast,
You'll tell me where your father's purse is hidden.*

*Take care of me
I take care of you
Problems can be settled in jokes.*

*Limuru is my home
Here I have come to loaf about
Wangeçi, my young lady
Be the way you are
And don't add frills
To your present gait.*

*Take care of me
I take care of you
Problems can be settled in jokes.*

*This is your place
Famed for ripe bananas
I'll sing to you till you cry
Or failing to cry
You'll be so overcome with feelings*

*That you'll take your life.
Take care of me
I take care of you
Problems can be settled in jokes.
I brewed liquor for you
And now you've turned against me!
A cripple often turns against his benefactors
Our son of Gathoni
Good fortune, unexpected, found Wacũ in the Field
And she sat down to feast on it.
Take care of me
I take care of you
Problems can be settled in jokes.
Have you taken one too many
Or are you simply drunk
I'll not say anything,
Oh, Wangeçi my little fruit,
Until seven years are over . . .*

The voices of men and the sound of guitars, accordions and other instruments end abruptly. The DANCERS leave the stage. KIGÜÜNDA and WANGECI remain frozen in the act of dancing. KIGÜÜNDA shakes his head as if he is still engrossed in memories of the past. They disengage slowly!

KIGÜÜNDA:

*Oh, the seven years were not even over
When we began
To sing new songs with new voices,
Songs and voices demanding
Freedom for Kenya, our motherland.*

procession enters the stage singing freedom songs.

*Freedom
Freedom
Freedom for Kenya our motherland*

*A land of limitless joy
A land rich in green fields and forests
Kenya is an African people's country.*

*We do not mind being jailed
We do not mind being exiled
For we shall never never stop
Agitating for and demanding back our lands
For Kenya is an African people's country . . .*

As the SINGERS leave the stage WANGECI takes over the remembrance of things past.

WANGECI:

*I myself have always remembered
The Olengurueni women,
The ones driven from their lands around Nakuru
To be exiled to Yatta, the land of black rocks.
They passed through Limuru
Caged with barbed wire in the backs of several lorries.
But still they sang songs
With words that pierced one's heart like a spear.
The songs were sad, true,
But the women were completely fearless
For they had faith and were sure that,
One day, this soil will be returned to us.*

A procession of women SINGERS enter the stage singing.

*Pray in Truth
Beseech Him with Truth
For he is the same Ngai* within us.
One woman died
After being tortured
Because she refused to sell out.*

*Ngai: God

*Pray in Truth
Beseech Him with Truth
For he is the same Ngai within us.
Great love I found there
Among women and children
A bean fell to the ground
And it was shared among them.
Pray in Truth
Beseech Him with Truth
For he is the same Ngai within us.*

The SINGERS leave the stage.

KIGUUNDA:

*It was then
That the state of Emergency was declared over Kenya.
Our patriots,
Men and women of
Limuru and the whole country,
Were arrested!
The Emergency laws became very oppressive.
Our homes were burnt down.
We were jailed,
We were taken to detention camps,
Some of us were crippled through beatings.
Others were castrated.
Our women were raped with bottles.
Our wives and daughters raped before our eyes!
[Moved by the bitter memories, KIGUUNDA pauses for few seconds]
But through Mau Mau
Led by Kimaathi and Matheenge,
And through the organized unity of the masses
We beat the whites
And freedom came . . .
We raised high our national flag.*

*A jubilant procession of men, women and children enters the stage
singing songs and dances in praise of freedom.*

*It is a flag of three colours
 Raise the flag high
 Green is for our earth
 Raise the flag high
 Red is for our blood
 Raise the flag high
 Black is for Africa
 Raise the flag high.*

[They change to a new song and dance]

SOLOIST:

*Great our patriots for me . . .
 Where did the whites come from?*

CHORUS:

*Where did the whites come from?
 Where did the whites come from?
 They came through Mūrang'a,
 And they spent a night at Waiyaki's home,
 If you want to know that these foreigners were no good,
 Ask yourself:
 Where is Waiyaki's grave today?
 We must protect our patriots
 So they don't meet Waiyaki's fate.*

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SOLOIST:

*Kīmaathi's patriots are brave
 Where did the whites come from?*

[They continue singing as they walk off the stage.]

KIGŪŪNDA:

*How the times run!
 How many years have gone
 Since we got independence?
 Ten and over,
 Quite a good number of years!
 And now look at me!*

[KIGŪŪNDA looks at himself, points to the title-deed and goes near it]

*One and a half acres of land in dry plains.
 Our family land was given to homeguards.
 Today I am just a labourer*

*On farms owned by Ahab Kīoi wa Kanoru.
 My trousers are pure tatters.
 Look at you.
 See what the years of freedom in poverty
 Have done to you!
 Poverty has hauled down your former splendour.
 Poverty has dug trenches on your face,
 Your heels are now so many cracks,
 Your breasts have fallen,
 They have nowhere to hold.
 Now you look like an old basket
 That has lost all shape.*

WANGECI:

*Away with you,
 Haven't you heard it said that
 A flower is robbed of the colours by the fruit it bears!*

Changing the tone of voice]

*Stop this habit of thinking too much about the past
 Often losing your sleep over things that had better be forgotten.
 Think about today and tomorrow.
 Think about our home.
 Poverty has no permanent roots!
 Poverty is a sword for sharpening the digging sticks . . .*

Pauses, as if caught by a new thought]

Tell me:

*What does Kīoi and his family
 Want with us today?*

KIGŪŪNDA:

*Well, they want to see how their slave lives!
 To see his bed for instance!*

WANGECI:

*Of all the years you have worked there,
 Is it only now that they have realized you have a home?*

KIGŪŪNDA: *[Lightheartedly]*

*They want . . . to come . . . to tell you . . . that . . .
 You must tell . . . your daughter . . . to stop . . .
 Going places with their son!*

WANGECI:

Yes, for I myself did not feel birth pangs for Gathoni?
Should they dare to say such a thing,
I'll make them tell me whether it's Gathoni
Who goes to hoot a car outside their home day and night.

KIGÜUNDA: *[Suddenly remembering something]*

Wait a minute!

WANGECI:

What is it?

KIGÜUNDA *puts his hands in his pockets, obviously searching for something. He takes out a letter. He reads it silently. Then he goes to where the title-deed is and pulls it off.*

WANGECI: *[Repeating the question]* What is it?

KIGÜUNDA:

You know the rich fellow
They call Ikuua wa Nditika?

WANGECI:

The great friend of Kioi?

KIGÜUNDA:

Yes. That's the one.
It's really true that a rich man
Can even dig up forbidden sacred shrines!
He wrote me this letter
And told me that there is a company
Belonging to some foreigners from America, Germany
And from that other country, yes, Japan,
Which wants to build a factory
For manufacturing insecticide
For killing bedbugs!
They want to buy my one and half acres
For they say the plot is well situated in a dry flat plain
And yet very near a railway line!
Ikuua wa Nditika and Kioi wa Kanoru
Are the local directors of the company.
It's therefore possible that Kioi is coming
To talk over the matter with me.

WANGECI:

Stop. Stop it there.
Aren't they the real bedbugs,
Local watchmen for foreign robbers?
When they see a poor man's property their mouthwater,
When they get their own, their mouths dry up!
Don't they have any lands
They can share with these foreigners
Whom they have invited back into the country
To desecrate the land?

A knock at the door. KIGÜUNDA quickly hangs back the title-deed and puts the letter back into his pocket. WANGECI runs about putting things right here and there for she thinks that KIOI and his family have arrived. She exclaims: 'They have come and the food is not yet ready!' Another knock. GICAAMBA and NJOOKI enter. They are a worker and his peasant wife and they look mature in mind and body. GICAAMBA is dressed in overalls. KIGÜUNDA and WANGECI are obviously disappointed.

GÜUNDA	}	: So it's you?
WANGECI		
GICAAMBA	}	: Yes . . . How are you?
OOKI		
WANGECI		
KIGÜUNDA	}	: We are well.
OOKI:		

Give us what you have cooked.

WANGECI:

The food is still cooking.

GÜUNDA:

Karibu*, karibu.

WANGECI:

Aren't you sitting down?

*Karibu: welcome

GICAAMBA takes a chair. KIGÜÜNDA also takes a chair near GICAAMBA.
They sit in such a way that the men are able to talk to one another, and
the two women the same.

NJOOKI: [To WANGECI]

Gathoni told us that you had visitors.
And so I asked myself,
Who are these secret guests?
Could they be whites from abroad?
And you know very well a white has no favourite?

WANGECI:

Gathoni is too quick with her tongue.
It's Kioi and his family
Who said they would like to pass by
On their way from the church.

NJOOKI:

Just passing by? I wonder.
Since when have rich men been known to visit their servants?

WANGECI:

We don't know what they really want.
In fact you found us asking ourselves the same question.
They sent a word the day before yesterday.
Even their son, John Mühüüni,
Has just come for Gathoni this very minute.
He is a real particle of Godhead.
But he hardly ever talks with people.
He, for instance, never enters the house.
He just hoots and whistles from the road.

NJOOKI:

Let me caution you for even a wise man can be taught wisdom.
Ask Gathoni to cut off that relationship.
Rich families marry from rich families,
The poor from the poor!
Can't you see that the children of the big men,
And of these others who brag that they are mature men
All go to big houses!
Or have you become Jesus-is-my-saviour converts
And I have never heard you shouting 'Praise the Lord!'
And giving testimony . . .

KIGÜÜNDA:

. . . but you are slightly better off,
For you are paid every fortnight.

GICAAMBA:

Even though we are paid fortnightly
Wages can never equal the work done.
Wages can never really compensate for your labour.
Giküyü* said:

If you want to rob a monkey of a baby it is holding
You must first throw it a handful of peanuts.
We the workers are like that monkey
When they want to steal our labour
They bribe us with a handful of peanuts.
We are the people who cultivate and plant
But we are not the people who harvest!
The owners of these companies are real scorpions.
They know three things only:
To oppress workers,
To take away their rights,
And to suck their blood.

*he two women stop their own chatter to listen to GICAAMBA. GICAAMBA
speaks with a conviction that shows that he has thought deeply about
these matters. He uses a lot of movement, gestures, mimicry, miming,
imitation, impersonation, any and every dramatic device to convey his
message.*

GICAAMBA:

Look at me.
It's Sunday.
I'm on my way to the factory.
This company has become my God.
That's how we live.
You wake up before dawn.
You rub your face with a bit of water
Just to remove dirt from the eyes!

*Giküyü: name of the founder of the Giküyü nationality but in this
context means personification of the whole community.

Before you have drunk a cup of milkless tea,
 The Sirena cries out.
 You dash out.
 Another siren.
 You jump to the machine.
 You sweat and sweat and sweat.
 Another siren.
 It's lunch break.
 You find a corner with your plain grains of maize.
 But before you have had two mouthfuls,
 Another siren,
 The lunch break is over.
 Go back to the machine.
 You sweat and sweat and sweat.
 Siren.
 It's six o'clock, time to go home.
 Day in, day out,
 Week after week!
 A fortnight is over.
 During that period
 You have made shoes worth millions.
 You are given a mere two hundred shillings,
 The rest is sent to Europe.
 Another fortnight.
 You are on night shift.
 You leave your wife's sweat.
 Now you are back at the machine.
 You sweat and sweat and sweat,
 You sweat the whole night.
 In the morning you go home.
 You are drunk with sleep.
 Your wife has already gone to the fields.
 You look for the food.
 Before you have swallowed two mouthfuls,
 You are dead as sleep.
 You snore and snore.
 Evening is here!

You meet your wife returning from the fields.
 Bye, bye,
 You tell her as you run to the machine.
 Sweat.
 Another fortnight.
 Here, take this
 Two hundred shillings.
 The rest to Europe.
 By that time you have sold away
 Your body,
 Your blood,
 Your wife,
 Even your children!
 Why, because you hardly ever see them!
 There are some who sell away their blood,
 And they end up dying in there.
 But many more end up as cripples.
 Remember the son of . . . eeh . . . you know who I mean . . .
 The chemical dust
 Accumulated in his body
 Until the head cracked!
 Did they take him to hospital?
 Oh, no.
 Was he given any compensation?
 He was summarily dismissed, instead.
 What about the son of . . . eeh . . .
 You know the K. C. A. * elder? The one
 Who, with others, started the freedom struggle? . . .
 His son used to work in the cementing section
 Where they keep retex and other dangerous chemicals.
 The chemicals and the dust accumulated in his body.
 He was forced to go to the Aga Khan Hospital for an operation.
 What did they find inside him? A stone.
 But was it a stone or a mountain!

*K. C. A.: Kikuyu Central Association, a militant political movement.

It was a mountain made of those chemicals!
 He was summarily retired with twenty-five cents as
 compensation.
 What has life now got to offer him?
 Is he not already in his grave though still breathing?
 Since I was employed in that factory,
 Twenty-one people in that section have died.
 Yes, twenty-one people!

KIGUUNDA:

Oooh, this is a very serious matter!
 If I were to be told to work in that retex section
 I, son of Gathoni,
 Would then and there part ways with that company.

GICAAMBA:

I wouldn't mind, son of Gathoni,
 If after selling away our labour,
 Our village had benefited.
 But look now at this village!
 When was this company established?
 Before the Second World War.
 What did it bring into the country?
 A few machines,
 And money for erecting buildings to house the machines.
 Where did they get the land on which to build?
 Here!
 Where did they get the charcoal for use by the machine?
 Here!
 Was it not this factory together with the railways
 Which swallowed up all the forests around?
 Is that not why today we cannot get firewood
 And we can't get rain?
 Where do they get the animal skins?
 Here!
 Where do they get the workers to work those machines?
 Here!
 Where do they get the buyers for those shoes
 Here!

The little amount of money they give us,
 We give back to them;
 The profit on our work,
 On our blood,
 They take to Europe,
 To develop their own countries.
 The money they have already sent to Europe
 Paid for those machines and buildings a long time ago.
 Son of Gathoni, what did I tell you?
 A handful of peanuts is thrown to a monkey
 When the baby it is holding is about to be stolen!
 If all the wealth we create with our hands
 Remained in the country,
 What would we not have in our village?
 Good public schools,
 Good houses for the workers,
 Good houses for the peasants,
 And several other industries
 In which the unemployed could be absorbed.
 Do you, son of Gathoni, call this a house?
 Would you mind living in a more spacious house?
 And remember the majority are those
 Who are like me and you!
 We are without clothes.
 We are without shelter.
 The power of our hands goes to feed three people:
 Imperialists from Europe,
 Imperialists from America,
 Imperialists from Japan,
 And of course their local watchmen.
 But son of Gathoni think hard
 So that you may see the truth of the saying
 That a fool's walking stick supports the clever:
 Without workers,
 There is no property, there is no wealth.
 The labour of our hands is the real wealth of the country.
 The blood of the worker

Led by his skill and experience and knowledge
Is the true creator of the wealth of nations.

What does that power, that blood, that skill
Get fortnight after fortnight?

Something for the belly!

Wa Gathoni, just for the belly!

But it's not even enough for the belly!

It's just to bribe the belly into temporary silence!

What about the three whom I mentioned?

Today all the good schools belong

To the children of the rich.

All the big jobs are reserved

For the children of the rich.

Big shops,

Big farms,

Coffee plantations,

Tea plantations,

Wheat fields and ranches,

All belong to the rich.

All the good tarmac roads lead to the homes of the rich.

Good hospitals belong to them,

So that when they get heart attacks and belly ulcers

Their wives can rush them to the hospitals

In Mercedes-Benzes.

The rich! The rich!

And we the poor

Have only dispensaries at Tigonini or Kiambu.

Sometimes, these dispensaries have no drugs,

Sometimes people die on the way,

Or in the queues that last from dawn to dusk . . .

WANGECI:

Oh, well, independence did come!

NJOOKI: [Sings *Gitiro**]

Let me tell you

* *Gitiro*: name of a dance song, a form of opera

For nobody is born wise

So although it has been said that

The antelope hates less he who sees it

Than he who shouts its presence,

I'll sing this once,

For even a loved one can be discussed.

I'll sing this once:

When we fought for freedom

I'd thought that we the poor would milk grade cows.

In the past I used to eat wild spinach.

Today I am eating the same.

GICAAMBA: [Continuing as if he does not want his thoughts to wander
way from the subject of foreign-owned companies and industries]

Yes,

What did this factory bring to our village?

Twenty-five cents a fortnight.

And the profits, to Europe!

What else?

An open drainage that pollutes the air in the whole country!

An open drainage that brings diseases unknown before!

We end up with the foul smell and the diseases

While the foreigners and the local bosses of the company

Live in palaces on green hills, with wide tree-lined avenues,

Where they'll never get a whiff of the smell

Or contract any of the diseases!

KIGÜNDA: [Sighs and shakes his head in disbelief]

Oooh!

I have never worked in a factory.

I didn't know that conditions in industries are that bad.

GICAAMBA:

To have factories and even big industries

Is good, very good!

It's a means of developing the country.

The question is this: Who owns the industries?

Who benefits from the industries?

Whose children gain from the industries?

Remember also that it's not only the industrial tycoons

Who are like that!

Have you ever seen any tycoon sweating?

Except because of overweight?

All the rich wherever they are . . .

Tajiri wote duniani . . .

Are the same,

One clan!

Their mission in life is exploitation!

Look at yourself.

Look at the women farm labourers,

Or those that pick tea-leaves in the plantations:

How much do they get?

Five or seven shillings a day.

What is the price of a kilo of sugar?

Five shillings!

So with their five shillings:

Are they to buy sugar,

Or vegetables,

Or what?

Or have these women got no mouths and bellies?

Take again the five shillings:

Are they for school fees,

Or what?

Or don't those women have children

Who would like to go to school?

Well, independence did indeed come!

NJOOKI:

You'll have to shut those mouths of yours!

It hates less he who sights it

Than he who shouts its presence.

Was it not only the other day

That the police beat you

When you went on strike

Demanding an increase in wages?

Did you get anything

Apart from broken limbs?

Your rumour-mongering

Will cost you lives.

WANGECI:

Was it not the same language

You people used to talk during the rule of the wealthy whites?

When will you ever be satisfied? You people!

Dwellers in the land of silence were saved by silence!

IGUUNDA:

Discussions breed ideas.

And ideas cannot be hauled about like missiles.

Discussions breed love, Gikūyū has stated.

GICAAMBA *lifts up* KIGUUNDA's arm. *They sing. GICAAMBA sings solo and then they both join in the chorus. They dance around the stage, the women looking on.*

GICAAMBA:

Here at wa Gathoni's place

I will spend night and day

Till I am sent for by post.

CHORUS:

Here at wa Gathoni's place

I will spend night and day

Till I am sent for by post.

GICAAMBA:

I'll talk about workers

And also about peasants

For in unity lies our strength.

CHORUS:

I'll talk about workers

And also about peasants

For in unity lies our strength.

GICAAMBA:

Foreigners in Kenya

Pack your bags and go

The owners of the homestead have come.

CHORUS:

Foreigners in Kenya

Pack your bags and go

The owners of the homestead have come.

ALL:

*I'll defend my fatherland
With the sword of revolution
As we go to the war of liberation.*

ALL:

*I'll defend my fatherland
With the sword of revolution
As we go to the war of liberation.*

GICAAMBA:

*Poverty! Poverty!
Nobody can govern over poverty
For poverty is like poison in a body.
Exploitation and oppression
Have poisoned our land.*

A knock at the door: all turn their eyes to the door. AHAB KIOIWA KANORU, JEZEBEL, SAMUEL NDUGIRE and HELEN enter and stand near the door, so that for a time there are two opposing groups in the house. AHAB KIOI and JEZEBEL are dressed in a way that indicates wealth and wellbeing. But the NDUGIRE family is dressed in a manner which shows that they have only recently begun to acquire property. KIOI for instance is dressed in a very expensive suit with a hat and a folded umbrella for a walking stick. JEZEBEL too has a very expensive suit with expensive jewellery. But NDUGIRE and HELEN have clean, tidy but simpler clothes. They all take out handkerchiefs with which they keep wiping their eyes and faces because of the smoke in the house. They also cough and sneeze rather ostentatiously. KIGUUNDA and WANGECI are worried because there are not enough seats in the house. GICAAMBA and NJOOKI look at the visitors with completely fearless eyes. As KIOI and his group enter moving close to one wall of the house to avoid contact with the GICAAMBA, one of them causes the title-deed to fall to the ground. They don't pick it up. And because of their worry about seats and the excitement at the arrival of the KIOIS, KIGUUNDA and his wife do not seem to have their minds on the fallen title-deed. GICAAMBA walks to the title-deed and picks it up. All eyes are now on GICAAMBA and they give way to him. GICAAMBA looks at the title-deed, then at the KIOI group then at the KIGUUNDA family. He hangs the title-deed back on the wall. GICAAMBA and NJOOKI go out.

KIGUUNDA: [Relieved]

*Come in, come in
Why are you standing?*

As he says that, he is giving them seats. KIOI sits on the chair which KIGUUNDA had been repairing. NDUGIRE and his wife sit on the bed, and his wife sits on an empty water tin or small water drum. They sit in such a way that the KIOI group is on one side and the KIGUUNDA family on the other side, at least they should be seen to be apart, or to be in two bosing camps. WANGECI now cleans her hand with a rug or with her pergarment or with her dress, and shakes hands all round. She then removes the pot from the fire and busies herself with plates and engages in other chores connected with the reception of the visitors.

DI:

*We are not staying . . .
You were at our place this morning,
I take it?*

KIGUUNDA:

*Yes, I am the one who milked the cows
And I even helped the tractor driver to load it.
But it was very early,
You had not yet woken up.
The only other person whom I saw was the Securicor guard
As the company car came to fetch him away.*

NDUGIRE:

Who is the tractor driver?

DI:

*He is an old hand at the farm.
Even when the farm belonged to the white man
We had nicknamed him Kanoru . . .
We gave him the same name as my father . . .
The tractor driver worked there.*

KIGUUNDA:

Kanoru's?

*I too used to work there
Before I was sent to detention at Manyani.*

JEZEBEL: [To NDUGIRE but loud enough for everybody to hear]

That tractor driver is very mature.

He does not argue back.
 He does not demand higher wages.
 He just believes in hard work,
 Praising our Lord all the time.
 He is a true brother-in-Christ.

NDUGIRE:

You have spoken nothing but the truth.
 If all people were to be saved,
 And accepted Jesus as their personal saviour,
 The conflicts you find in the land would all end.
 For everybody,
 Whether he does or does not have property,
 Whether an employee or an employer,
 Would be contented
 To remain in his place.

WANGECI *scoops out rice on plates and hands a plateful to everyone.*

JEZEBEL: [*Looks at the food as if she is finding fault with the cooking*]

You know, with me, when lunch time is over,
 However hungry I might have been,
 I am not able to swallow anything!

KIOI:

I am also the same,
 But I could do with a cup of tea.

WANGECI:

I'll make tea for you.
 But you can't come into my house
 And fail to bite something.

KIGÜUNDA *starts to eat heartily. WANGECI is busy putting water for tea the firestones.*

KIOI:

Let's say grace.
 Sister-in-Christ!
 Say grace before we eat.

HELEN: [*Eyeing the KIGÜUNDAS with ferocious disapproval*]:

Let's all pray . . .
 God, Creator of Heaven and Earth,
 You the owner of all things on earth and in heaven,

We pray you bring to an end
 The current wickedness in the land:
 Breaking into banks and other people's shops,
 Stealing other people's coffee,
 Placing obstructions on highways,
 All this being Satan's work to bring ruin to your true servants.
 Oh, God our Father
 Tame the souls of the wicked
 With thy sword of peace,
 For we your servants are unable to sleep
 Because of the terror inflicted on us by the wicked.
 You to whom all the things on earth do belong
 Show the wicked that everybody's share comes from Heaven,
 Be it poverty or riches.
 Let us all be contented with our lot.
 We ask you to bless this food,
 And add unto us that of the Holy Spirit;
 We ask you in the name of your only Son,
 Jesus Christ, our Lord.

L:

Amen.

After the grace, KIOI and JEZEBEL take a spoonful each and then they are satisfied. But NDUGIRE and HELEN eat without any inhibitions.

DI:

You might perhaps be wondering
 Why we have come here today.
 Do you know him?
 He is our brother-in-Christ.

NDUGIRE: [*Standing up to give testimony*]

My name is Samuel Ndugire
 I am a man who has received the tender mercy of the Lord,
 Since the year 1963.
 Before then I used to be a very bad homeguard.
 I used to kill people,
 And to do many other terrible deeds
 As was the habit among the homeguards of those days.
 In our village they had baptized me Kimeendeeri

Because of the way I used to crush people's heads.
 But the Lord called unto me in 1963,
 It was the midnight of December twelve,
 And he told me:
 Ndugire . . . the only good freedom is that of the soul.
 Leave your fishing net behind
 Follow me now,
 And I shall make you a fisher of men.

The kioi group sings

I shall make you fishers of men
 Fishers of men, fishers of men,
 I shall make you fishers of men,
 If you follow me

If you follow me

If you follow me

I shall make you fishers of men
 If you follow me.

Since then my affairs started improving.

I and my sister-in-Christ

Were given a few shops by God.

It's from those shops,

That we now and then get a shilling or two

For clothes for our children,

For school fees,

And for petrol.

And quite recently,

God showed us a tiny garden in the settled area.

It is a tiny garden of about a hundred acres.

But it has a good crop of tea.

The same Lord then took us by the hand,

To inside a bank

Where he enabled us to get a loan with which to buy it.

Now you see I did not take out

Even a cent from my pocket.

And yet I am milking cows,

And I am harvesting tea.

That's why I always praise the Lord

Without any fear.

KIOI, JEZEBEL, HELEN and NDUGIRE sing while KIGÜUNDA and WANGECI
 [are completely amazed.

We praise you

Jesus lamb of God

Jesus your blood cleanses me

I praise you Lord.

As they come to the end of the verse they are seized by the spirit.

NDUGIRE starts another hymn. He claps and the other three join in,
 [dancing about with joy.

I step gently on the road

On my way to heaven.

I am sure that I'll get there

To rest for ever with the other saints.

Thank you Lord my guide

With Jesus Christ as my bread of life

And the Holy Spirit as my water of life

I'll never go hungry or thirsty.

Wild animals and diseases

And even poverty can't get at me

For they are frightened by the bright flames around me

For I am completely dressed up in the splendour of God.

GÜUNDA: [Shouting at them]

What do you want?

ZEBEL is startled by the sudden unexpected shout and she falls down.

NDUGIRE and HELEN rush to where she has fallen on the floor. They fuss
 around her, lift her to her feet and dust off her clothes, all the time
 casting murderous glances at KIGÜUNDA. WANGECI is worried and she
 tries to make the tea. She looks about for the tea-leaves. Then she
 shouts:

WANGECI:

Oh, dear, we have no tea-leaves.

They were finished last night

And I forgot to buy more.

[Showing them the sugar]

I only remembered to buy sugar.

KIOI:

It does not matter . . .
 Even without having given witness,
 I would like to say this:
 The other day the Lord our Master
 Came to me and to my sister-in-Christ
 And he told us:
 How can you light a lamp,
 And then cover it with a tin?
 After praying hard and humbling ourselves before him,
 The Lord our Master told us
 That we should show people the way
 To enter the church of God
 So that we can all praise the Lord together!

KIGÜUNDA: [*Slowly, without shouting*]

What do you want?

KIOI:

We want you to enter the Church!

JEZEBEL:

You and your wi-wi-wi-
 And Wangeci.

HELEN:

Come out of the muddy trough of sins!

NDUGIRE:

Praise the Lord.

KIOI:

To enter the Church is easy.
 But you must first stop living in sin.

JEZEBEL:

You must be baptized.

NDUGIRE:

You do a church wedding.

HELEN: [*Showing her wedding ring*]

Give Wangeci a wedding ring.

KIGÜUNDA:

Sin, did you say?

JEZEBEL:

Yes, you and Wangeci have been living in sin.

WANGECI:

But God has blessed us and given us children.

HELEN:

Children of sin.

KIGÜUNDA:

Sins . . . Sins!

I:

We have brought you the tidings
 So that when our Lord comes back
 To separate goats from cows
 You'll not claim
 That you had not been warned.
 Repent. Come out of the darkness.

JEZEBEL

HELEN

NDUGIRE

: [*Singing*]

*When Jesus comes back
 To take home his amazing ones,
 The amazing ones being the people
 Saved by the Lord.
 They will shine bright as the star
 The great northern star
 And the beauty of his amazing ones
 Will shine like the stars
 And you children, and you children . . .*

*KIGÜUNDA shouts at them, moving threateningly towards them,
 nicking them at the same time. In fright, JEZEBEL drops her bag on
 the floor. She does not pick it up as she and HELEN flee to near the door.
 Near the door, JEZEBEL remembers her handbag on the floor and she
 gestures to HELEN to go back for the handbag. But HELEN refuses.
 JEZEBEL moves stealthily towards the bag, picks it up and runs back to
 where HELEN is standing. All this time KIGÜUNDA is giving KIOI and*

NDUGIRE a piece of his mind. As he moves towards them, they move backwards (eyes to the door) at the same time gesturing to KIGÜUNDA be cool and patient.

KIGÜUNDA:

And you the
The amazing

This is mine own
Gathoni's
I have properly married
Having paid all the b
According to our national
And you dare call her a
That we should now be blessed by a human like
Has he shaken hands with
Let me tell you one thing Mr
Every home has its own
And no outsider should interfere in other people's homes!
Go away, you devils!

As he says the last words, he rushes for the sword. Seeing him take sword, the KIOIS and the NDUGIRES flee followed by KIGÜUNDA holding the sword. KIGÜUNDA comes back, laughing and swinging the sword, a kind of victory dance, mimicking them.

KIGÜUNDA:

Jesus should hurry up
And come back for his amazing ones...

WANGECI: [Upset]

See what you have now done,
Chasing away our guests.
You did not let them say what had really brought them here.
Tomorrow you'll be without a job!

Before KIGÜUNDA answers, a car hoots. After a second GATHONI comes running. She is dressed in new clothes, new platform shoes and has a new handbag. She has also got new earrings. She now stands as if she in a fashion parade.

WANGECI:

Gathoni, from where did you get these clothes?

GATHONI removes her handbag from one shoulder to the other, then she lks across the stage haughtily, and she cannot take her eyes from her v self. She walks about as if she is still in a beauty contest or fashion parade.

THONI:

Oh, this dress?
John Mühüüni bought it for me.

NGECI:

What about these shoes?

GATHONI:

Platform shoes! He bought them too.

ÜUNDA:

Mühüüni, son of Kioi?
Son of Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru?

THONI:

Yes!

Another hooting. GATHONI takes out a lipstick and begins to paint her red.

KIGÜUNDA:

Listen.
When did Kioi's son marry you?
I want you to take back this dress to him!
And all these other fineries of a whore.

WANGECI:

Even these shoes worn by rebels!

THONI:

And I go back to my rags?

ÜUNDA:

A man brags about his penis however small.
A poor house, but mine!
Don't overstep the boundaries, else you get lost.

THONI: [For a second stopping applying lipstick]

Who is the girl who does not like being well dressed?
Who does not like to feel that she is human at times?
So that when now and then she steps on the road
People's eyes turn to her,

And gasp, there goes Miss Gathoni.
It's poverty and not riches
That forces a woman to go without perfume.

WANGECI:

Do you see how you answer your father?
Don't you know a maiden once drowned in a sea of sweetness!
And where are you going?

GATHONI:

John Mũhũni wants me to accompany him to the coast.
Mombasa, for a week.

WANGECI:

Mombasa! Swahililand?
Do you think to be smiled at is to be loved?
You'll now get lost.

KIGŪNDA:

If you go to Mombasa,
Then find another home!

Now the hooting continues. GATHONI puts things back in her handbag. For a time it looks as if she is torn between her loyalty to her parents and her loyalty to John Mũhũni. When she hears another hooting sound she walks to the door, turns once to her parents and says 'Goodbye'. She goes out. KIGŪNDA sits down on a chair and supports his head in his cupped hands, dejected. WANGECI slowly walks to the door and peers outside. Then she comes back and she too slumps into a seat. There is silence between them, there is complete silence in the house. After some time, WANGECI begins to nod her head as if a new idea has occurred to her. She stands up and walks slowly to her husband's side and puts a hand on his shoulder.

WANGECI:

Don't be so dejected.
A parent is never nauseated.
By the mucus from his child's nose.
A she-goat suckles its young
However deformed.
I have just thought of something,

[Smiling]

Couldn't that be the reason?

IGŪNDA:

The reason what?

WANGECI:

Why the Kiois want you and me
To first have a church wedding?

KIGŪNDA:

Why?

WANGECI:

You have eyes and can't see?
Or has the language of the eyes
Become as hard as the language of the ear?

[WANGECI walks to the title-deed and takes it off the wall]

You yourself had earlier thought
That they were visiting us
To talk to you about this, your one acre,
Because of the insecticide factory
They and their foreign friends want to build:
Didn't you even show me the letter from Ikuua wa Nditika?
Kioi did not say a thing about it.
And if they had come here
On account of your piece of land,
Kioi would have brought Ikuua along.
Our title-deed is now out of danger!

[WANGECI returns the title-deed to its original place on the wall]

So what else would make them want
To see us two in a church wedding?
Think!

IGŪNDA:

So what?

WANGECI:

Gathoni! Gathoni and John Mũhũni!
Didn't you also think that they were coming
To tell us that
Our daughter should not keep the company of their son?
Did they mention anything of the sort?

Did they say they don't want Gathoni and John Mũhũni
together?

KIGŪŪNDA *raises his head. He and WANGECI look at each other. Then
KIGŪŪNDA nods his head several times as if he too has suddenly seen the
light.*

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene One

*Inside Kigũũnda's house. Another day. KIGŪŪNDA, WANGECI,
GICAAMBA and NJOOKI are all seated as if in an intense discussion. They
are eating porridge. WANGECI and NJOOKI are also shelling maize grains
from maize cobs. They are all wearing working clothes. It's evening.
The sun is setting. In the course of this scene, it progressively gets dark
and WANGECI has to light a hurricane lamp.*

GICAAMBA:

... Leave these people alone.
They are just playing about with you,
In the same way a cat plays about with a mouse,
Knowing that the mouse will end up in the cat's belly!

KIGŪŪNDA:

We are looking at it this way!
It's obvious that Kĩoi does not want his son
To marry from mere pagans!

GICAAMBA: [*Doubtingly*]

Ahab Kĩoi wa Kanoru.
Is that what he told you?

KIGŪŪNDA:

Eh... Eh... What?

GICAAMBA:

That he wants his son
To marry Gathoni, your daughter?

WANGECI:

Not in so many words
They only hinted at it...

GICAAMBA:

Promises do not mean delivery.
Clouds may be in the sky
But it does not mean it'll rain!

NJOOKI:

You people! You people!
A tooth smiles at a spear.
The rich never marry from the poor.
The rich only want to find ways
Of continuing to drink people's blood.

GICAAMBA:

And how does religion come into it?
Religion is not the same thing as God.
All the religions that now sit on us
Were brought here by the whites.
Even today the Catholic religion
Is still called the Roman Catholic Church.
P.C.E.A. belongs to Scottish protestants.
The Anglican church belongs to the English.
The Orthodox belongs to the Greeks.
The Baptist belongs to the Americans.
There are many more religions
Which have been brought here by imperialists from America,
And which tell us we should give them a tenth of all that we
produce.
Where does the ten per cent go?
To America.
Then they send back to us ten shillings
Taken from the tenth portion we sent them,
And they tell us:
This is American aid to your local churches.
And we give them a standing ovation.
When the British imperialists came here in 1895,
All the missionaries of all the churches
Held the Bible in the left hand,
And the gun in the right hand.
The white man wanted us

To be drunk with religion
While he,
In the meantime,
Was mapping and grabbing our land,
And starting factories and businesses
On our sweat.
He drove us from our best lands,
Forcing us to eke a living from plots on roadsides
Like beggars in our own land,
Some of us dying in his tea and coffee plantations
Others dying in his factories.
Had we not woken up
And sworn a readiness to die
Fighting against the British imperialists,
Where would Kenya be today?
The white man had arranged it all
To completely soften our hearts
To completely cripple our minds with religion!
And they had the audacity to tell us
That earthly things were useless!

inging]

*Goats and cows and money
Are not important.
What is important
Is the splendid face of Jesus.*

*I glance here
I glance there
And I see a huge bonfire
In Devil's Hell
And I ask myself:
What can I do
To avoid the Hell's fire?*

But they, on this earth, this very earth,
They are busy carousing on earthly things, our wealth,
And you the poor are told:

Hold fast unto the rosary,

Enter the church,

Lift up your eyes unto the heavens.

NJOOKI } : [Singing]
GiCAAMBA }

Believe in God

And He'll take care of all your problems,

He will show you all the good things

And remove all the evils from you

Through Jesus you'll get your share in heaven.

Believe in God

Believe in God

Believe in God

And trust in Him.

GiCAAMBA:

Can't you remember

The days of our freedom struggle?

Was it not the religious leaders

Who used to be sent to us in detention camps

At Manyani

Mageta

Hola

Mackinon Road

Wamũmũ

To tell us:

Surrender, surrender, confess the oath,

That's what Jesus tells you today!

[Sadly]

I remember one man,

Whom we had nicknamed Patriot Son of Njeeri,

Because of his patriotic courage.

He was a brave fighter,

So feared by the enemy

That the enemy soldiers would not go near any place

Rumoured to be wa Njeeri's area of operations.

When he was finally caught,

His gun having jammed,

Wa Njeeri was sentenced to hang.

I remember one priest,

Even today he is still around preaching,

Who used to trail wa Njeeri in the cell:

Repent, repent.

Confess the oath,

Reveal where the others are hiding.

All this as if we were not fighting

For the liberation of our country,

The liberation of our lands and our wealth!

Patriot Son of Njeeri

Just shot saliva into the fellow's priestly mouth

And told him that

He, a patriot, would never betray the other patriots to foreigners

Because of his belly!

He told him with great courage:

I Patriot Son of Njeeri

Will never sell the masses

Or sell my country for money!

I would rather die.

NJOOKI starts a song and they all join in:

I'll never betray this land,

I'll never allow the greed for money to

guide me

Like Warũũũ and Luka wa Kahangara.

GiCAAMBA:

The same colonial church

Survives even today.

Did the leopard ever change its spots?

A kid steals like its mother.

The chameleon family

Has never changed its backridge.

Wa Gathonĩ, the war was hard fought!

NANGECI:

The church has changed a lot.

They now beat drums and play guitars in church!

They sometimes use traditional tunes
To fit in religious words!

NJOOKI:

Yes!
But the song is the same song . . .
The word the same word . . .
The aim the same!
And the intentions are still the same!
You!
You don't need to have words rammed down your throat!
You!
The earthly water is bitter!

GICAAMBA:

[Singing]

*And even today the earthly water is still bitter
From homesteads to workplaces,
From the children to grown-ups
The earthly water is bitter, what shall we drink?*

ALL: [Joining in]

*If you go to any office to seek help,
You find the occupant is glum,
If you try to enter inside,
He growls at you, 'I'm busy'
All because the earthly water is bitter.*

NJOOKI: [Continues singing alone to prove that the aim of all these
religious hymns is to point the way to heaven]

*Even now, the earthly water is bitter
From homesteads to workplaces,
Drink Jesus and he'll quench your thirst
For the earthly water is bitter.*

[Stops singing but changes to preaching]

Rest not your souls on this earth.

[Goes to the wall, takes the title-deed and raises it high]

Lay not your treasures on this earth.

ALL: [Singing]

*This world is not my home
I am just a passer-by.*

*All my joys await me in heaven
Where all the saved have gone.
I'll never worry over earthly homes.*

... AMBA:

What about their homes of twenty storeys and more?
Have they burnt them down?
It's simply that they don't want us
To think too much about our shanties,
And ask ourselves, why!

NJOOKI: [To KIGÜUNDA, as if preaching to him but still holding high the
title-deed]

Blessed are they that go thirsty and hungry
And endure tribulations in their hearts
For they shall inherit the Kingdom of God!

GICAAMBA: [Now really worked up]

The Kiois of this earth
Where do they rest their souls?

NJOOKI points at the title-deed as if she is answering GICAAMBA's
question. She then hangs back the title-deed on the wall, walking as if
she has a rich man's big belly. She then walks back to her seat still
imitating the walk of a rich man with a big protruding belly.

GICAAMBA:

Why didn't Kioi come
To tell you that he has increased your wages?
Or to give you a piece of his own lands?
Yes, for the earthly treasures are not that important!
Or is it a sin to increase a worker's wages?
Religion . . . religion . . .!
Religion is the alcohol of the soul!
Religion is the poison of the mind!
It's not God who has brought about our poverty!
All of us were born equally naked.
Wa Gathoni,
It's not that we don't work hard:
I drive a machine all the day,
You pick tea-leaves all the day,
Our wives cultivate the fields all the day,

And someone says you don't work hard?
The fact is
That the wealth of our land
Has been grabbed by a tiny group
Of the Kiois and the Ndugires
In partnership with foreigners!
Accompany them to church, if you like!
No one regrets the going as the returning.
Take care you don't lose four
While running after eight.

KIGUUNDA:

Listen.
I am not much after the church.
I don't even go to these haraambes
For stone church buildings
Daily being erected
As if in competition.
But,
And there you have not answered me,
Shall I punish my own daughter and ruin her future
By refusing to have our marriage blessed?

GICAAMBA:

There is no marriage which is not blessed.
How else would God have given you Gathoni?
Didn't you pay the bridewealth,
Seeking our people's communal blessings?
Isn't the Ngurario ceremony the true blessings
Of all your family and the nation?
The voice of the people is the voice of God.

NJOOKI:

Marriage is between a man and a woman.
Marriage is a covenant between two people,
Their flesh and soul becoming one
Without money coming into it,
Love pulled by love:
Love the price of love.
Today it's not one human that marries another
But property marrying property,

Money marrying money,
This House marrying that House,
Hearts being taken to the market
And the customers asked:
How many kilos of love do you want?
That's why you find that
Even if modern couples go to church
Or to the District Commissioner,
With the rings and flowers,
They don't spend more than two nights together!
Darling, I'm sorry, but it was not you I loved.
Sugarmummies and sugardaddies
Are now all over the land:
Boys with their mothers,
Girls with their fathers!
What happens to the herd
When the leader has broken legs?

GICAAMBA:

They go to church as a fashion.
Some go back to the church only on the day
They are being buried.

WANGECI:

You!
They can't say prayers over your body
Unless you have been baptized
And you have been a churchgoer.

ICAAMBA:

Yes, if you are poor.
But if you are a man of property
Or if you have been a leader of this or that
They will pray for you
And sing aloud
How hardworking you used to be.
Haven't you heard it said that
A rich man's fart does not stink?
How many bishops came to the funeral
Of the rich old man who died recently,

And you know very well that
 He never even knew the door to any church?
 Do you want to say that
 If Ikuua wa Nditika died today
 His body would not be taken to the altar
 By his friends the Kiois?
 Don't tell me this and that.
 A blessed marriage is when
 A human quality is attracted by another human quality.
 A blessed marriage is when
 Two people accept to be two patriots
 Defending their home and nation.

WANGECI:

What's wrong in having a marriage blessed?

NJOOKI:

Were you not told just now?
 There's no marriage which is not blessed
 Except the one founded on measured love
 Or on bank savings!
 My wedding for instance was very blessed
 Though I didn't take it to their churches.
 The Ngurario* ceremony was attended by the whole land.

GICAAMBA:

Men, women and children,
 The whole community rejoiced together.

KIGUUNDA:

I too was there
 And I saw it all!
 The women's ululations
 Were like trumpets of purest joy . . .

*The national Ngurario wedding ceremony of GICAAMBA and NJOOKI. |
 Women from the side of the bridegroom enter from one side carrying*

*Ngurario: the final ceremony in a marriage. Once a couple go through this ritual, they are supposed to be legally married.

*liquor and other gifts trilling the five ululations for a boy. Women from
 bride's side enter from the other side answering back with the four
 ululations for a girl. They meet in the middle and form a circle and the
 two sides exchange compliments and gifts through the Gitiuro opera
 dance and song.*

BACIKU [The bride's clan]

*Let me give away the hand of Njooki,
 I swore I would never exchange her
 For anybody's property.
 But I'll exchange her for a gourd of honey.
 Give me now the honey
 For which I once took an oath.
 I'll now keep the honey beside the bed
 So every time I wake up I taste a little.
 I, woman of the Njikū clan,
 Have cultivated hills and slopes
 Making sure that Njooki has enough to eat.
 That's why I swore I would never exchange her for property
 That I would only exchange her for honey.
 HUUU! I said I would take her to the home of Gicaamba Son of
 Kihooto
 Where rich honey is kept in skin drums.
 Yes, this is Njooki whom I now take
 Where honey is kept in skin drums,
 Delicacy of many seasons
 A feast in valleys far away.*

IBU1 [Women from the bridegroom's clan]
*Woman with a beautiful gap in the teeth
 I'm still on my way to the Njikū clan
 Looking for Njooki, my bride.
 For I keep on asking myself
 Where will I get the woman
 Who will fill my granary with millet grains?
 I'll come to you, stealthily walking against the walls,
 The same walls against which
 The black goats of the Mbūi clan*

Warm themselves and scratch their skins.
 Woman of the Njikū clan
 I have everything you may now demand of me,
 Except that which was stolen from me by the whites.
 I have got your honey.
 But I'm also hungry though I'll not beg.
 Hand me now my Njooki
 Through the main entrance into my homestead
 And even then, woman of the Njikū clan,
 You'll give me my yam with which
 To fill the broken gap in my mouth,
 For I long ago tightened a belt around my waist
 And I swore I would only untie the belt
 At Njooki's mother's homestead.

AAGACIKŪ:

Here is the millet gruel, woman of the Mbūi clan,
 You who know how to welcome guests!
 Now hand me my honey
 And my earrings and tobacco
 For the beautiful one from the Njikū clan.
 As for you the beautiful one from the Mbūi clan,
 I have got your yam,
 And a crop of ripened bananas.

The AAGACIKŪ clan trill the four ululations for a girl. The AAMBŪI trill
 the five ululations for a boy.

AAGACIKŪ:

Now you have seen
 We have given away the hand of Njooki
 To the Mbūi clan
 So famous in war and peace.
 Let's now go back to cultivate our fields
 While seeking ways of getting back
 Lands stolen from us by the whites.

AAMBŪI:

Yes, we join our two hands
 To see if we can defeat the enemy
 Of this, our land,
 Our beautiful land of Mount Kenya.

When they finish the Gitiro opera sequence they sing and dance yet
 other sequence, expressing joy and triumph.

Give way

Give way

Else you'll be trodden

By the herds belonging to the Mbūi clan

Herds with bells around their necks.

As soon as they finish and exit, children rush onto the stage pulling the
 de, encircling her, singing and dancing.

Hail our herds

Hail our bride

She'll fetch water for us from the valley

And should she refuse

We back-a-bite her

And as soon as the children exit, men now enter the stage singing and
 dancing. They form a big circle.

In whose homestead do you raise the dust of vigour?

In whose homestead do you raise the dust of happiness?

I holding a gun in the mountains

For I see the soot here hangs long and loose from the roof

I holding a gun in the mountains.

Whose homestead is this?

Whose homestead is this?

I holding a gun in the mountains

So I can roll down like the young of a rhino

I holding a gun in the mountains.

Mother ululate for me

Mother ululate for me

I holding a gun in the mountains

For a white woman once raised hue and cry against me

I holding a gun in the mountains.

Women ululate. The dancers get off the stage still singing and dancing.

GICAAMBA takes over.

GICAAMBA:

It was soon after this

That the colonial government

Forbade people to sing or dance,

It forbade a gathering of more than five.

But we went on meeting clandestinely.
 We the workers in factories and plantations said in one voice:
 We reject slave wages!
 Do you remember the 1948 general strike?

*A procession of workers with placards bearing political slogans ente
 They shout different slogans: 'We want higher wages; Down with
 prices; Up with Uhuru, Down with Imperialism; Down with traitors,
 Up with patriots; the factories and the country belong to us.' They th
 form a line sitting in twos, ready to take the oath of unity in struggle.
 The leader utters a particular resolution and the mass repeats after him.
 After each resolution, two people go through the arch of banana leaves
 to the other side, where two patriots, a woman and a man, are standi
 giving out guns. As soon as they get the guns, they stand in a line
 marking time ready for the war of liberation.*

LEADER:

I speak the truth and swear before God
 And before the people present
 And before the ancestors
 I swear by the oath of the masses
 And by the blood of the Kenyan people.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

I'll never let this soil go with foreigners
 Leaving the people of Kenya wretched!
 If I ever let it go,
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the masses turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

I'll never aid the missionaries in their preaching
 Or follow them
 Betraying our culture and national traditions.
 If I do so,
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the masses turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

If I am asked to hide weapons
 I shall obey without questions.
 If I am called upon to serve this organization
 By day or night,
 I'll do so!
 If I fail to do so
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the poor turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

I'll never make a girl pregnant
 And then leave her without a husband
 If I do so,
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the masses turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

I'll never never divorce
 If I do so,
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the masses turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

I'll always help this organization,
 With all my strength and property,
 I'll help members of this organization,
 So that if a bean falls to the ground
 We split it amongst ourselves.

ALL: [Repeat]

LEADER:

Therefore I'll never eat alone
 Forgetting fellow comrades and patriots,
 If I do so,
 May this, the people's oath, destroy me
 And the blood of the masses turn against me.

ALL: [Repeat]

When all are in line with weapons, the LEADER makes them go through military drills, he then inspects a guard of honour (or the other way round), and then they march out singing joyfully and defiantly.

*We were happy as we went to battle
We were happy as we returned victorious
Our spirits were high
As we went and returned.*

*When we got to Rũirũ River
We found it in floods
Warũingĩ ordered us to make a bridge
Death in struggle is welcome.*

*A little further on
We came across a traitor,
Who threatened to shout our presence,
Warũingĩ said, let him shout
And a bullet will shout him down.*

GIKAAMBA:

*It was soon after this that
I too fled into the mountains
To join the people's guerrilla army
Here in Limuru
We were led by Warũingĩ and other patriots.*

A battle between Mau Mau guerrillas and British soldiers with their African homeguards breaks out. The Mau Mau guerrillas are victorious, killing a few enemy soldiers, capturing some of their weapons and clothes, capturing one or two enemy soldiers, and making the others run away. The Mau Mau patriots now march on the stage singing victory songs.

*When our Kĩmaathi ascended the mountains
He asked for strength and courage
To defeat the imperialist enemy.*

After marching, they go out, still singing.

GIKAAMBA:

*We were not given freedom
We bought it with our blood,
We the peasants, workers and children.
Wa Gathoni,
Do you want to say that
That blood was not blessed?
If we had agreed with those
Who used to tell us,
Get saved, surrender,
Think of your life only and
You'll go to heaven,
Kenya would still be under colonial rule.
Blessings! Blessings!
Blessings are born of patriotic unity!
Blessings come to a people,
When they love their country
And they unite to produce wealth,
Uniting in toil
And in sharing out without greed,
And without discrimination between sexes!
Blessings come to a people
When they reach a stage where
If a bean falls to the ground
They split it among themselves.
Blessings will come to us
When we struggle and fight for our rights
And defend Kenya against internal and foreign exploitation.*

WANGECI [Standing up and speaking bitterly]

*I don't much care
If Gathoni marries into the Kĩoi family or not.
All I care is for Gathoni to marry a man
Who will look after her.
Whether she marries into a rich man's home
Like that of Kĩoi's business partner,
Ikuua wa Nditika,
Even though he never goes to church,*

Or she marries one of your sons, Gĩcaamba,
All I want is for her
To live well.

WANGECI *starts collecting things together and lighting up the lamp in a way that shows that the GICAAMBAS are no longer welcome*

NJOOKI *[Getting the hint and turning to GICAAMBA]*

You have talked too much
A priest without a collar!

GICAAMBA:

I am a priest of peace
And patriotic unity.

NJOOKI:

Why then don't you go to a seminary!
Let's go home now
For tomorrow is back to work.

GICAAMBA:

Give us leave to go.
But think about what I've said.
For although Gĩkũyũ once said
That nobody ever repents another man's sins
Yet a leader who never listens
Is not a leader at all.

NJOOKI *and GICAAMBA leave. KIGUUNDA remains seated but deep in thought. But WANGECI goes on with her activities still angry.*

KIGUUNDA:

The spear of Gĩcaamba's words
Has truly pierced my heart.

WANGECI *[Angrily]*

Go ahead and let your daughters suffer
All because of the words of a political agitator.
Since when did a person
Try to build his hut
Exactly like that of his neighbour?

KIGUUNDA:

Gĩcaamba is an honest man.
He has never turned his back against the people.
He has never betrayed the Mau Mau oaths.

WANGECI:

It's all alright.

You join Gĩcaamba in his drunkenness.

You listen to him and get lost.

You!

The burdens of the masses

Are tied with a cord easy to cut

Or carried in a basket full of holes.

Remember when we received Uhuru!

Some people roamed the whole land

Telling us that we should not buy land

For which we had all shed blood!

Wasn't Ikuua wa Nditika one of those agitators

And he had been in detention at Mageta?

Those who had the money

And those who joined hands with homeguards

Or those that got loans

And did not listen to foolish words,

Weren't they the ones

Who bought all the best lands?

We who listened to foolish words,

Where are we now?

Just this verandah for a house.

[She goes to the wall and pulls off the title-deed]

And this piece of waste land,

One and a half acres only.

And even then Ikuua wa Nditika

Is still after it!

Let me tell you.

The coward went home safely to tell the tale

And left the brave lying for ever safe on the battlefield!

Gathoni's father,

Let us go to Kĩoi's place early tomorrow morning.

Let's go and tell him that we agree with his plans.

His words are good.

His ways are straight.

His style of life is proper.

His church is holy.
 His church shows us the only way to life and happiness.
 Gicaamba's words arise out of envy.
 Do you hear,
 Or am I talking to the deaf?

KIGÜUNDA [*He is still deep in thought. He stands and in confusion and agitation walks about the stage. Then he goes and stands near WANGECI*]

We shall not wait for tomorrow morning.
 Let's go there this very minute.
 Hand me my sword
 For a man does not go in the dark with empty hands.

WANGECI *puts the title-deed on the seat. She goes to get the sword.*
 KIGÜUNDA *puts on his coat. Then he takes the sword from WANGECI and hides it under the coat. WANGECI also puts on her coat. Then KIGÜUNDA sees the title-deed on the seat. He picks it up. He looks at it. Then he slowly walks to the wall and hangs it back, WANGECI looking on.*

KIGÜUNDA *then turns to WANGECI:*

KIGÜUNDA:

Let's not go there now, in the dark, for it is very late.
 Let's go there tomorrow early in the evening!
 Come to think of it,
 We do not even have the money
 For the wedding ceremony.

END OF SCENE ONE

Scene Two

Kioi's home, in the evening. A big well-furnished house. Sofa seats, TV, radiogram, plastic flowers on the table, and so on. Electric lights. On the walls are several photographs. On one wall can be seen a board with the words: 'CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE, THE UNSEEN GUEST AT EVERY MEAL, THE SILENT LISTENER TO EVERY CONVERSATION'. There is also a picture of a hairy Nebuchadnezzar turned into an animal. JEZEBEL, NDUGIRE and HELEN are at table. The table has all sorts of dishes. There is also water on the table in a huge glass container. A

Act Two, Scene Two

WAITER *stands by. IKUUA WANDITIKA, a man with a belly as huge as that of a woman about to deliver, is seated away from the dining table and is busy collecting his things, bits of paper and so on into a small suitcase. KIOI is standing near him waiting for IKUUA to go so he can join the others at table. As soon as IKUUA finishes collecting his things, he stands up and makes as if to move.*

JEZEBEL:

Are you sure you won't take a bite?
 A cup of tea even,
 And it is easy to get it ready.

IKUUA:

I prefer a beer
 Or a glass of wine,
 But I know that you are all saved, Jesus-is-my-Saviour.
 [*They all laugh*]

Anyway you know very well that
 When I am not in a hurry
 I do take your meals.
 I left my Range Rover way down at the gate
 And the driver might fall asleep.
 Besides, his home is very far from my place
 And on driving me home he has to walk back all that way.
 Let me go.

[*He makes as if to move and then he turns to KIOI. They walk a step or two and talk as if in a private conference but loud enough for the others to hear*]

Listen Mr Kioi.
 Don't forget that business about the insecticide factory.
 Our foreign friends want to start as soon as possible.
 As you know,
 The main problem with such a factory
 Is that it's bound to produce a lot of smelly gases
 And therefore it cannot be built in an area
 Where important people live.
 What we need is a place like Kigüunda's
 Or any other place similarly situated.

The poor are many in Kenya.

[They laugh]

Their laziness is what is driving them

To sell their strips of land.

But if you don't want your name as one of the local directors to appear,

We can use your wife's name

Or that of John Mũhũni, your son.

That's what most people are doing these days,

Because of income tax,

And also to cover up a little,

For poverty has no governor.

It's better to sometimes cover up our eating habits

Rather than show the poor our mastications!

Being a local director of foreign firms

Is not a very taxing job;

What they want is just an African's name.

All we are required to do

Is to be their watchmen.

Yes, we could be called their watchdogs!

[They laugh]

Yes, watchdogs for foreign interests!

JEZEBEL:

Your words Mr Ikuua are very unbecoming,

They might send you into the everlasting fire.

You have even refused to renew your marriage in church!

All you would have been required to do

Is to throw away one wife.

It does not matter if the knife falls on the eldest

And you are left with the youngest

Provided you go through a proper church ceremony!

IKUUA [Laughing]

I am contemplating marrying a third!

Mr Kioi think about the matter,

But anyway I am coming back soon

So we can go over the accounts again.

[Goes out. Kioi joins the others at table]

HELEN:

That man has become really wealthy.

ZEBEL:

Oh, he is wealth itself!

NDUGIRE [Trying to change the subject]

So your son John Mũhũni

Has not yet returned?

KIOI:

From Mombasa? No.

I had also sent him to Malindi,

To check on a plot I bought near Watamu Bay!

HELEN:

What for, so far away?

KIOI:

I just want to erect a small hotel!

About three storeys or so.

That's why in fact I'm dragging my feet

Over this business of an insecticide factory.

At Mombasa and Malindi

Hotels are very profitable.

Profits from hotels are more than

You can get from factories

Or even from smuggling in coffee or gold or ivory,

All because of our visitors from abroad!

What do you call them? Watalii.

Yes, tourists from America, England, France and Germany.

HELEN:

Are those the ones I normally see in buses

Passing by Kĩneeni on the way to the Rift Valley,

Sometimes stopping by the roadside

To buy fruit and sheepskins?

NDUGIRE:

Tourists?

I have heard on the radio,

That there is not a single government ministry

Which brings as much money into the country

As the Ministry of Tourism.

I have heard it said

That a man blessed by the Lord

With the ability to provide tourists with all sorts of earthly pleasures

Can get lots of money.

Although I believe in self-reliance,

I am also convinced that

Partnership with foreigners can bring quick wealth.

KIOI:

True,

But these workers cannot let you accumulate!

Every day: I want an increment.

Workers are like the ogres said to have two insatiable mouths.

When they are not demanding a rise in wages

They are asking you for an advance.

My mother is in hospital!

My child has been expelled from school,

Because I have not yet paid his school fees!

My wife has just delivered!

JEZEBEL:

And you know

They won't hear of going to family planning clinics!

KIOI:

And when a worker decides to go

He does not even give you any notice!

NDUGIRE:

Do you know what I do with them?

I give them this month's salary

In the middle of the next month.

If you do that,

A worker will never leave you

Unless you sack him.

Of course there are one or two who complain!

JEZEBEL:

This business of not being satisfied,

And of not being contented with one's station in life

As clearly ordained by God,

Comes from not being a good Christian.

JELEN:

These are earthly trials.

We should pray for these people,

Knowing at the same time that

There are many sects

Now misleading the masses.

NDUGIRE:

Like the sect that calls itself

The church of the poor?

They make us all lose sleep

By their endless night drumming

Shouting: 'Crush Satan!'

Don't they know that Satan is not visible?

JEZEBEL:

I don't blame them.

Many of them cannot read or write,

They don't know A or B or C.

KIOI:

And even some of these Kikuyu independent churches

which are being revived

Are rather dangerous.

[*Whispering*]

Don't you remember that

Mau Mau oaths used to be taken

Under the cover of those churches?

NDUGIRE [*Fearfully*]

Is Kigunda one of those people?

Is he a Mau Mau type?

I have never liked that man's eyes.

Do you recall the night he took out his sword against us?

OI:

No, no, Kigunda is not that type at all.

The other workers fear and respect him.

That's why I think that should he be saved

He would lead the other workers into the church.

Some of those workers who waste their energy in beer-halls

Would give up the habit altogether.
 Besides, Kĩgũũnda is a hard worker
 And that's why although he raised a sword against us
 I did not dismiss him.

JEZEBEL:

You?
 Don't you remember those Mau Mau days?
 Wasn't it the servant, supposed to be faithful,
 Who used to spy on and betray his European employer?

Dogs bark fiercely. There is a knock at the door. They all look to the door with terrified faces. No one wants to open the door. Kĩoi turns to the WAITER.

Kĩoi:

Go . . . and . . . and . . . open the door.

The SERVANT/WAITER is also a little scared. He gingerly walks to the door and opens it. A SECURICOR WATCHMAN enters and speaks in Kiswahili.

WATCHMAN:

Sir!

Madam!

There is a man and woman here
 And they say they want to see you.
 Shall I let them enter?

Kĩoi:

Tell them to enter.

Enter Kĩgũũnda and WANGECI. Kĩoi and his friends are relieved. They literally sigh with relief.

ALL:

So it was you?

Kĩgũũnda } : Good evening?
 WANGECI }

The WATCHMAN goes out.

THE OTHERS:

Good evening.

Kĩoi:

We are at table.
 Take seats over there.

Kĩgũũnda:

We have come because . . .

Kĩoi:

Let's first eat,

We are going to talk after.

The WAITER brings tea and passes near where Kĩgũũnda and WANGECI are sitting. As the WAITER passes by, WANGECI, thinking that the tea is meant for them, stretches her hand out to pick up one cup. The WAITER quickly moves the tray away leaving WANGECI's hand hanging in the air empty. WANGECI is very humiliated.

JEZEBEL:

Please excuse us!

I am afraid we had cooked just enough

For invited guests.

WANGECI [*Trying to cover up her humiliation*]

It does not matter.

We have just eaten,

A supper of a mixture of beans and maize.

HELEN turns up her nose as if she can smell the foul smell of bean and maize

Kĩgũũnda:

Our only problem is water.

The water around has dried up.

Now our women have to walk for miles.

Wangeci has today been roaming all over

Looking for water,

And even then she could not get any.

Give me a little water

To push down the meal of maize and beans.

JEZEBEL [*To the WAITER*]

Go and fetch water from the drum outside,

You know the one near the pig-sty.

WAITER hurries out

NDUGIRE:

Oh, without water life is such misery!

[He deliberately takes a glass and fills it with water from the huge jar on the table and empties the glass]

Before I eat an egg in the morning
I have first to drink a full glass of water.
Some people don't realize that
Water is very vital to the body.
Water is better than tea or even milk.

HELEN:

A well-cared-for body is only possible with water.

The WAITER brings water, in a cup, and gives it to KIGÜÜNDAS who drinks it.

JEZEBEL:

Yes, because without water,
You cannot clean the body.

KIOI:

That's why Jesus told the woman from Syria,
I am the water of . . .

NDUGIRE:

Life!

The others sing: the KIGÜÜNDAS watch

*Thirst and hunger for earthly things
Is the sleep and death of life.*

*Cry unto God your Lord
And he will save you.*

*Life, life,
The everlasting life
And you'll never get thirsty.*

JEZEBEL:

Let's now say a prayer
To thank God for the food
We have just eaten.

[She looks at the KIGÜÜNDAS]

We thank you Lord our God
For the food you have given us.
Now we humbly lower our eyes
Before your holy presence, Oh Jehovah,
You who are the head of this house
You the unseen guest at every meal
You the silent listener

To every conversation.
We do not want to be like Nebuchadnezzar
Who was turned into a beast
For forgetting to thank you.
That's why we now humbly beg you
To give us spiritual food
And to give us the water of life
So that we shall never get thirsty.

M.L.:

Amen.

The KIOIS and the NDUGIRES now leave the table and take more comfortable seats facing the KIGÜÜNDAS. The SERVANT/WAITER begins clear the table.

KIOI:

What do you want?

KIGÜÜNDAS [Clearing his throat]

We have come because of that matter.

WANGECI:

We have thought a great deal about the matter,
And we came to the conclusion that
We should not put obstacles
To your larger purposes.

KIOI:

If you have agreed to our plans
We shall now become true friends,
Your house and mine becoming one
In the name of the Lord.

[L: [They sing clapping joyfully. KIGÜÜNDAS and WANGECI join in the singing but they obviously don't know the tune and they often clap out of step]

*Goodnews
About our Saviour
Has come to us
This is good news.*

*Yes good news has come
Telling us all*

*How He forgives
And how he loves us.*

*Great love is this
Of Christ the helper;
He came down from heaven
Because he felt pity over us.*

*His name will be sung
From place to place
And all the nations
Will give up their wickedness.*

KIGUUNDA:

But there's a small problem!
A modern church wedding
Requires a lot of things.
We cannot enter the holy church
The way we are
With muddy feet
And these rags ever on our shoulders.

JEZEBEL:

You don't need a great deal.
You only need the following:
First is the fee for the officiating priest.
And then robes for the bride.

NDUGIRE:

And a suit for the bridegroom.

HELEN:

And clothes for bridesmaids and best man.

JEZEBEL:

And for the children,
Who will hold the train!
Then you'll have to set aside a little sum of money
For bread, milk, butter, jam,
And of course for the wedding cake.

HELEN:

Oh, yes, the cake!
The cake is central to a Christian wedding!

NDUGIRE:

The Christian Ngurario.
[Laughs at the comparison]

JEZEBEL:

You!

Ikuua seems to have taught you unbecoming language!

HELEN:

What about rings and flowers?

JEZEBEL:

Oh, yes, I was forgetting those.

KIOI:

And you can buy all those
From my supermarket at Wabera Street.

ANGEKI:

Where shall we get the money for all that?

KIOI:

Kiguunda earns a lot of money.
Don't you deposit some of it
In a Post Office savings account?

NDUGIRE:

You know that we black people
Have never really mastered the word, savings.
Yes, setting aside something
For a rainy day.

GUUNDA:

What do I get a month?
Two hundred shillings,
And you call that a lot of money?
Two hundred shillings a month
With which to buy clothes, food, water,
And you know very well
That prices are daily climbing up!
A person earning two hundred shillings,
Can he really cope with the rising prices?

NDUGIRE: [Cutting him short]

But do you think it possible to have two price categories,
For those with property
And those without?

Does God's rain fall on a rich man's fields
Bypassing a poor man's field?

KIOI:

Not only that my brother-in-Christ.
I give all the workers a hundred or a hundred and fifty!
You, Kigũunda and the tractor driver
Are the only workers who get two hundred shillings.

JEZEBEL: *[As if cracking a joke]*

The tractor driver is very well behaved
And not like you, father of Gathoni.
He never complains about anything.
He never complains about his wages!

KIGŪUNDA:

I didn't come here to ask for an increment
Although I won't mind a rise in wages
It's only that the wedding ceremony will cost a lot of money.

KIOI:

Kigũunda, you are a very wealthy man,
Only that you don't care to know:
You have a lot of land, one and a half acres.
You have a full-time job.
How many thousands who in Kenya today
Cannot boast about a space large enough for a grave even?

NDUGIRE:

A grave is not even the best comparison
Since there are many state-owned graveyards.
But how many hundreds of Kenyans
Are now roaming all over the country
Looking for any type of job whatever the pay
And they can't get any?

KIGŪUNDA:

I wanted to find out
If you could lend us money
To meet the cost of the wedding ceremony.

NDUGIRE, KIOI, HELEN and JEZEBEL stare at one another in obvious dismay. KIOI is rapt in thought.

KIOI:

That's an easy matter.

I like you.

The other day I even visited you in your home.
But remember what God told Adam and Eve:
There are no free things!
Hakuna cha bure!
No more manna from heaven.

Turning to NDUGIRE]

If anyone wants free things
He should go to Tanzania
Or to China.

NDUGIRE:

I have heard it said that
In China there's no private property,
That everything, including women, is shared out.

JEZEBEL

HELEN

NDUGIRE:

What! Women shared out!

Yes, they say that in China there's no rich or poor.
But how can a country progress
Unless led by the rich?

KIOI:

In China, they don't even believe in God.

JEZEBEL:

Didn't the missionaries get there?
Does it mean that all the Chinese,
The whole country, will burn in hell?

KIOI:

Yes, eight hundred million souls.
To burn for ever!

NDUGIRE:

Nebuchadnezzar's clansmen.
Let them burn.

HELEN:

Flames jumping in the sky.

NDUGIRE:

Like flames from a pile of dry firewood.

JEZEBEL:

Their bones breaking: crack! crack!

KIOI:

And all because of
Getting rid of the rich.

KIGÜÜNDA:

Does it mean that in China
People do not now have food, clothes and shelter?

NDUGIRE:

Who knows!

KIOI:

Just imagine!
All the people . . .
If all the people are to become equal like these teeth
Who would do the work?
Anyway we in Kenya are very lucky,
Because we are a Christian nation.
We worship at the feet of the Lord,
The same Lord who commanded us all
To forever sweat over whatever we eat or drink.
Mr Kigüünda your words are good
And I am willing to help you.

KIGÜÜNDA:

Thank you! Thank you!

KIOI:

There are two alternatives.
You have got one and a half acres of land.
There is an American-, German- and Japanese-owned company
Which wants to build an insecticide factory.
I think Mr Ikuua has already written to you about it!
If you sell that piece of land,
You'll get a lot of money.
With some of that money,
You can buy land in the Rift Valley
Or in Maasailand
And the rest you can bank.

KIGÜÜNDA:

I will never sell the piece of land.
I just wanted . . .

KIOI:

I have not finished. I told you there were two alternatives.

You have rejected the first.

The other alternative is to borrow money from a bank
With your one and half acres as security.

KIGÜÜNDA } : What! Our title-deed to go to a bank!
WANGECI }

OI:

Yes, because no bank will lend you money
Without some security.

In fact borrowing from a bank is better
Than borrowing from an individual like me,
Because the bank only requires you
To pay back a little each month.

Now this is how I'm going to help you:

First I'll myself take you to the bank

Of which I am a director

And I will vouch for your integrity.

I'll pledge to withhold from your wages

Whatever the monthly amount

You and the bank will agree.

ELEN:

You, our brother-in-Christ, are very kind-hearted.

Praise the Lord.

[Turning to KIGÜÜNDA]

Do you know that not many people today

Would agree to become a surety

In order that a mere worker might get a bank loan?

PUGIRE:

Yes, because a propertied man like Kioi

Naturally fears that such a worker

Might fall ill or even die suddenly.

WANGECI:

Anybody can die.

Even millionaires do die.

NDUGIRE:

Yes, but you will agree that the

Death rate is worse among the poor!

KIOI:

Mr Kigüünda, what do you have to say?

KIGÜÜNDA:

Whether I borrow from you or from a bank
 It is all the same to us.
 I didn't come here to beg.
 But you people are the bankers
 Of what we the poor produce!
 Tomorrow I shall bring the title-deed;
 You and I will take it to the bank.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

Scene One

Kigüünda's home. The interior is very different from what it was in previous scenes. A new dining table with chairs. On the table is a big suitcase, also new. New plates, cups, basins and so on. A suit hangs on the wall where Kigüünda's old coat used to hang. On one wall hangs the picture of Nebuchadnezzar exactly like the one in Kioi's home. On another wall, exactly on the spot where the title-deed used to be, now hangs a board with the inscription: 'Christ is the head . . . etc', again like the one in Kioi's house. The title-deed is not now anywhere in the house.

The scene opens with KIGÜÜNDA and WANGECI busy bringing in new things into the house, such as sofa seats, a big standing mirror, a radio and so on. WANGECI and KIGÜÜNDA are full of joy at the sight of each item. They are very happy, particularly because their house now looks like the Kiois'. KIGÜÜNDA goes to the board with the inscription 'Christ is the head', takes it off and studies it before putting it back on the wall. WANGECI in turn goes to it, dusts it, and then looks at it as if she is studying each letter. KIGÜÜNDA goes to the radio and turns the knobs until he gets a song. He tries to dance to the tune. He then goes to the mirror where he tries on his wedding suit, in the process discarding his old rags and tyre sandals. WANGECI goes to the radio, tries the knobs this way and that way, occasionally standing back to admire it or talking about with it or swinging it. She turns to KIGÜÜNDA.

WANGECI:

Why did you buy this?

KIGÜUNDA: *[Turning round]*

Didn't I tell you to try on your clothes?

WANGECI:

I was admiring you.

WANGECI goes to the suitcase. She opens it. She starts undressing, getting rid of her old rags. She seems fascinated with the different items of clothing, lifting each in turn, as if she cannot make up her mind where to start. She takes out a huge brassière.

WANGECI:

How does one put on this?

KIGÜUNDA:

Why don't you simply wear it as pants?

WANGECI:

I'll try it on, on the wedding day.

[WANGECI puts on her wedding robes]

KIGÜUNDA: *[Dusting himself up and admiring himself in his new suit]*

On that day

I'll wake very early,

And put on this suit!

[Turning round, he is completely mesmerized by WANGECI in her white wedding dress]

You have turned into a teenager!

Do you know what this white wedding dress means?

Its whiteness means that

You have never known any man.

[Laughs]

On that day

I shall ask Jishinde Ushinde Studio

To take a colour picture of you.

We shall send one picture to the papers

Taifa Leo. The wedding column.

I hear that the paper belongs to the Aga Khan

And they send him a copy of the paper in Europe!

Imagine!

Your picture and mine going to the Aga Khan in Europe!

On that day you and I will walk down the holy aisle

Holding hands.

Act Three, Scene One

[He tries to hold WANGECI's hand]

WANGECI:

No, it's the bridegroom who enters first.

The bride follows, led by her father.

KIGÜUNDA:

O.K. O.K.!

[He goes to the radio and stops the music]

I'll then walk ahead with the best man.

[He walks ahead and then turns his head to see if WANGECI is following]

Aren't you following behind me?

WANGECI:

I'm coming.

[They start walking as if they are really in a church on the wedding day.

A church choir accompanies their mimed enactment of the wedding ceremony.

The good news of life

Is all about Christ the Lord.

He is our strength.

He will guide us.

And should any evil

Come near us

Christ is able

To defend us from evil.

And when our days on earth are over

We shall dwell with Jesus

For ever and ever.

Now WANGECI and KIGÜUNDA are standing before an invisible priest.

They then kneel down before 'him'. The voice of the invisible priest is heard raised in prayer:

VOICE:

Oh, God, our Lord

We lower our eyes before you today

Asking you to bless this bride

And this bridegroom.

For you were the one who wrote in the holy book.

Thus shall a man leave his father and mother

And be joined to his wife

And the two shall become one.
 That's why, oh Jehovah, we humbly ask you
 To bless this ceremony.
 For you also said:
 Two people are better than one
 For they can see the fruits
 Of their labour.
 And should one person fall
 The other can raise him.
 But cursed is the man who falls
 And he has no one to raise him.
 And if two people should sleep together,
 They can warm one another,
 But if one sleeps alone,
 How can he warm himself?
 That's why you Christ the Lord
 Went to the holy wedding at Galilee
 And you turned water into wine,
 The wine which was your blood.
 Bless this house of
 Winston Smith Kigunda and Rosemary Magdalene Wangeci.
 Double the fruits of the labour of their hands.
 We ask you all this
 In the name of Jesus Christ
 Our Lord, Amen.
The prayer is followed by a hymn sung by an invisible church choir:
God blessed
The very first wedding
Of Adam and Eve.
Even today he still blesses
Holy matrimony
When Christians
Are marrying.
And afterwards
When Jesus comes back,
They'll ascend with him to heaven
The bride and bridegroom of the Lord.

As the hymn is being sung KIGUNDA takes out an invisible ring and puts it on WANGECI's finger. WANGECI does the same. KIGUNDA now is the veil from WANGECI's face and kisses her. They kneel down, holding hands. The invisible choir now takes up another hymn.
Jesus I have now put on my cross
To marry my Lord
Even though
Others may leave him.
And you my friend hurry up
And put on robes of faith
So that you'll ascend to heaven
To dwell in God's eternal happiness.
While the hymn is going on KIGUNDA and WANGECI rise and slowly talk to the reception. They sit, waiting for speeches and gifts.
 KIGUNDA:
 Speeches bore me.
 WANGECI:
 Me, too.
 The man who is now talking
 Never misses a single wedding.
 KIGUNDA:
 And he makes the same speech
 In all the wedding receptions.
 WANGECI:
 Look at that one
 Who has just stood to speak.
 He advises couples to do
 What he himself never practises.
 KIGUNDA:
 Yes, he is always beating his wife.
 WANGECI:
 Oh, dear,
 That one again!
 She never says anything
 Apart from how beautiful her own wedding was.
 And she ends up crying.
 See.

There she goes.
She has started.
She is weeping . . .

KIGÜUNDA:

When will they start bringing us gifts?
Today I want to know
Who our true friends are!
I wonder what the Kiois and the Ndugires
Will bring us?
Some people can play nasty tricks;
They'll hand you a closed envelope,
But on opening it
You will find they have enclosed only five shillings!
Wait a minute.
That one has stood up.
He will now read the whole Bible
From cover to cover,
And then he will preach
Until tomorrow . . .

WANGECI:

Oh, dear, before we have cut the cake?
Cutting a wedding cake
Which is as white as snow
Or as white as this wedding dress
Is a most wonderful thing.
A wedding without a cake
Is not a Christian wedding at all!

KIGÜUNDA:

The speeches are now over.
Let's stand up to cut the cake.
It's a cake, five storeys high!

They stand up holding an invisible knife. They start cutting the cake. The choir sings another hymn. They give each other a piece of cake. They continue cutting it. Suddenly the hymn stops. A car hoots rudely. But KIGÜUNDA and WANGECI do not hear it. They are totally absorbed in the ceremony of cutting the cake. Another rude hooting and a car moves away. GATHONI comes in. She is at first taken aback by the

Act Three, Scene One

changes in the house and by the strange behaviour of her parents. She then slumps into a seat and starts weeping. Without realizing that they are still holding each other's hands, her parents stare at GATHONI.

KIGÜUNDA } : What's the matter?

WANGECI } : Where's John Mühūni?

GATHONI goes on weeping. WANGECI lets go KIGÜUNDA's hand and goes to where GATHONI is sitting.

WANGECI:

What's the matter, my daughter?

GATHONI:

He . . . he . . . he has jilted me.

WANGECI:

Who?

GATHONI:

Jo . . . John . . . Mühūni . . .

KIGÜUNDA:

To be jilted is nothing.

There are many more eligible men in the world.

WANGECI:

Stop weeping.

GATHONI:

It . . . is . . . not . . . just . . . that . . .

WANGECI:

What else?

Speak. Quickly.

GATHONI:

We went to Mombasa.

When we came back to Nairobi

I told him that

I was pregnant.

KIGÜUNDA

WANGECI

GATHONI:

} : Pregnant?

He used to tell me that

He wanted us to have a baby

That he would never marry a girl

Who had not conceived

In case he married someone barren.
At Nairobi, he did not say anything.
But when we reached the village
He suddenly shouted at me
And ordered me to get out of his car,
That he was not responsible for the pregnancy
And that he would never marry a prostitute.

KIGŪNDA:

Do you now see the fruits of your obstinacy?
Did I not forbid you
To go to Mombasa?

WANGECI:

Leave her alone.
Let's go to Kioi's place now.
He is a good old man,
A Christian,
A man of the church,
A man of integrity,
A man who likes to help others.
He is not the sort who would endure
To see a child like this suffer.
Didn't he tell you that
He wanted your house and his to become one?
Let's go there now,
Even though it is dark,
And tell him.
Let the children marry first.

KIGŪNDA collects his old rags, about to change. Then he takes the sword. He shouts at Wangeci, 'Change into your old clothes!'

END OF SCENE ONE

Scene Two

Kioi's home. Kioi and IKUUA are alone in the sitting room. They are busy counting money and cheques. Their words can be heard. 'This

million and a half comes from the sale of tusks and of lion and leopard skins to Japan. And these two million come from the maize and salt we sent to Uganda... And these eight millions come from Chepkumbe coffee...' etc. IKUUA is doing most of the talking, while Kioi is merely granting assent, and receiving some of the heaps of notes and cheques, and writing down the figures. As soon as they have finished counting, IKUUA tells Kioi: 'It's now your turn to take all this to the bank tomorrow. And beware of robbers.' IKUUA stands up:

IKUUA:

Let me leave now
For I have to rush to the airport.
Our friends from America and Germany,
You know, the ones involved in this factory,
Arrive at midnight.
By the way don't worry about the site,
The peasant whose land adjoins Kigūnda's
Has agreed to sell us three acres,
So that he can buy some shares
In a land-buying scheme in the Rift Valley
Of which I am the leader.
But should Kigūnda agree to sell his,
It's alright,
For the factory will need space for expansion.
And what did you decide
About you becoming one of the local directors?
It's not much work.
It's just a matter of one or two board meetings.
You become overseer
Just as you now oversee their banks.
You and I will be like watchdogs!
Holding fleshy bones!

[He laughs]

Kioi:

It's alright.
But I think we'd better forward the name of John Mūhūni.
Let him become a director,

So that our sons can begin to exercise responsibility!

Charity begins at home.

IKUUA:

So he has come back from Mombasa?

KIOI:

Yes, and he reported that

All my properties on the coast

Are in good condition.

IKUUA:

Bye, bye.

IKUUA goes out. KIOI goes on calculating a bit and jotting a few things down. Suddenly there is an urgent knocking at the door. He hides the money. Before he has hidden everything away, KIGÜNDA and WANGECI, in their old working clothes, enter.

KIGÜNDA:

We have come

Because something unexpected has happened.

Instead of Wangeci and I marrying in church

The children had better marry first.

KIOI:

Children?

Which children?

WANGECI:

Mühüüni and Gathoni.

KIOI:

John Mühüüni!

Which Mühüüni are you talking about?

KIGÜNDA:

Has he not told you?

KIOI:

What?

Tell me.

KIGÜNDA } : That he has made Gathoni pregnant.
WANGECI }

KIOI: [Very angry]

My son can't do a thing like that.

We have brought him up in Christian ways...

Go away from here.

I don't want to hear any nonsense from you.

Why are you unable to look after your children?

WANGECI:

Aaa—uuu—u!

We shall go to court.

We are all equal before the law.

KIOI: [Smiling]

Did you say 'court'? Law?

Run. Hurry up.

We shall see on whose side the law is!

Your side or our side!

There are no laws to protect parents

Who are unable to discipline their children,

Who let their children become prostitutes.

I am a mature person,

I've been made mature by Christ.

And I can let my son marry

Only from the home of a mature person.

KIGÜNDA: [Pulling out the sword]

So I'm not a human being?

So I have no feelings?

Is that why you dare call my daughter a whore

In my very presence?

Don't you know how it pains

When I truly know that

It's your son who lured her away from home?

Now I'll prove to you that

I am a human being!

This sword is my law and my court.

Poor people's lawcourt.

KIOI is trembling with hands raised]

You'll die now.

Kneel down.

Kneel!

KIOI kneels down]

Look at yourself, you Nebuchadnezzar.

You are the one turned into a beast.
Walk on all fours.

Walk on your feet and hands.

[KIOI walks on all fours]

Eat grass,
Christ, the Head, is watching you,
Walk!

[WANGECI is beseeching KIGUUNDA not to kill him]

WANGECI:

Don't kill him.

Let him sign an agreement.

KIGUUNDA:

This one?

To sign an agreement?

KIOI:

Yes, I'll sign.

I'll sign anything you want me to sign.

Even if you want them to go to church tonight

They'll go!

KIGUUNDA: [With pride]

Church, your churches?

Let me tell you a thing or two Mr Ahab Kioi.

Even if you were now to give me all the wealth

Which you and your clansmen have stolen from the poor,

Yes, the wealth which you and your Asian and European
clansmen

And all the rich from Kenya share among yourselves,

I would not take it.

Just now,

No amount of gold or ivory or gemstones

Would make me let Gathoni marry your son.

But as for signing something,

You will!

Earthly debts must be paid here on earth.

It is said the fart of the rich never smells

But yours Kioi stinks all over the earth.

JEZEBEL peeps in and quickly rushes back to the inner rooms. The

Act Three, Scene Three

SECURICOR WATCHMAN and NDUGIRE and HELEN enter. KIGUUNDA is not afraid. But NDUGIRE and HELEN are trembling with fear, and they don't know what to do. The WATCHMAN takes out his whistle and starts blowing it and threatening KIGUUNDA from a safe distance. But whenever KIGUUNDA moves a step towards them they all run to an even further distance.

KIGUUNDA:

Wangeci bring a piece of paper from that table.

I want all these to witness

Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru's signature.

The WATCHMAN goes on blowing his whistle and threatening KIGUUNDA, but with his eyes very much on the door. Before KIGUUNDA gets the piece of paper, JEZEBEL enters with a gun, a pistol. The WATCHMAN and the NDUGIRES give way and follow behind her, now all acting brave. With her eyes on KIGUUNDA's sword and pointing the gun at him she walks to where her husband is and helps him to his feet with a hand. WANGECI goes to where KIGUUNDA is and tries to get the sword from him. But KIGUUNDA pushes her away. Now it is the confrontation between the gun and the sword.

JEZEBEL:

Put that sword down.

KIGUUNDA at first refuses, then he reluctantly lets the sword fall to the ground. JEZEBEL bends down and pushes away the sword, while still pointing the gun at KIGUUNDA.

JEZEBEL:

Get out. Get out of here.

KIGUUNDA and WANGECI start to leave. But at the door, KIGUUNDA quickly turns round as if finally determined to regain his sword and hit it out. JEZEBEL fires the gun. KIGUUNDA falls.

END OF SCENE TWO

Scene Three

Kigūunda's home. About two weeks after. Kigūunda is not in. Most of the new things are no longer there. The house is very much like the way

it was at the beginning of the play, except for the picture of Nebuchadnezzar and the board with the inscription 'Christ is the Head' which still hang from the walls as if in mockery. Note that the board with the inscription, 'Christ is the Head' hangs on the spot where the title-deed used to hang. WANGECI is sitting on a chair, dejected. NJOOKI is standing near her, trying to comfort her. GICAAMBA is standing near the board with the inscription, as if he is reading the letters, shaking his head from side to side in disbelief.

WANGECI:

What shall I now do?
Where shall I now turn?
Oh, oh, my child!

GICAAMBA:

Where is Gathoni?

WANGECI:

My friends: don't ask me.

NJOOKI:

But why? Where is Gathoni?

WANGECI:

Her father threw her out of the house.
I stayed for a week without knowing
Where she had gone.
Now I hear that she is a barmaid.
My daughter!
A barmaid!
Gathoni my child!
To become a whore?

GICAAMBA: *[Moving away from the board]*

Let's not call our children prostitutes.
A hyena is very greedy
But she does not eat her young.
Our children are not to blame.
Gathoni is not to blame.
When a bird in flight gets very tired
It lands on the nearest tree.
We the parents have not put much effort

In the education of our girls.
Even before colonialism,
We oppressed women
Giving ourselves numerous justifications:

[Sings]

*Women and property are not friends,
Two women are two pots of poison,
Women and the heavens are unpredictable,
Women cannot keep secrets,
A woman's word is believed only after the event.*

And through many other similar sayings,
Forgetting that a home belongs to man and woman,
That the country belongs to boys and girls.
Do you think it was only the men
Who fought for Kenya's independence?
How many women died in the forests?
Today when we face problems
We take it out on our wives,
Instead of holding a dialogue
To find ways and means of removing darkness from the land.

[Sings]

*Come my friend
Come my friend
Let's reason together.
Our hearts are heavy
Over the future of our children.
Let's find ways of driving darkness
From the land.*

NJOOKI:

Gathoni now has no job.
She has no other means of earning a living
And she would like to dress up
Like all her age-mates.

WANGECI:

Would she were a housemaid!

NJOOKI:

A housemaid?
To be collecting all the shit in somebody else's house?
And when the memsahib is out of sight,
The husband wants the maid to act the wife!
Thus the maid doing all the work for memsahib!

GiCAAMBA } : *[Sing as if continuing the song]*
NJOOKI } : *Gicaamba has just sung]*

*Yes we find out why
It's the children of the poor
Who look after rich people's homes,
Who serve them beer in beer-halls,
Who sell them their flesh.
Come my friend
Come my friend
We reason together.
Our hearts are heavy
Over the future of our children.
Let's find ways of driving away darkness
From the land.*

WANGECI:

Oh, my child!

NJOOKI:

She will come back!
Our children will one day come back!

GiCAAMBA:

And where now is Kigũũnda?

WANGECI:

I don't know!
He might be in a beer-hall.
Ever since he lost his job,
He had become married to Chibuku liquor!
And now he has lost his piece of land.

GiCAAMBA } : What?
NJOOKI }

WANGECI:

Didn't you hear about it over the radio?
You too have forgotten us.

NJOOKI:

No!

We have not forgotten you,
Gicaamba has been on night shifts.
And again we noticed
That since you started friendship with the Kiois,
You did not really want our company.

WANGECI:

Nobody repents the sins of another.
Nobody regrets the going as the returning.

GiCAAMBA:

What about the piece of land?

WANGECI:

We went to Kioi's place
To tell him about Gathoni and Mũhũũni.
Kioi and Kigũũnda exchanged heated words.
Kigũũnda took out his sword.
Kioi's wife took out a gun.

GiCAAMBA }

NJOOKI }

: What? A gun?

WANGECI:

What can I say?
We are now breathing
Only because the bullets missed us
Death was not ready to receive us.
Kioi said he would not pursue the matter further,
But he dismissed Kigũũnda from his job.

If only I could catch that Kioi.
With these hands that know toil
I would teach him a thing or two!

WANGECI:

After a week
Kigũũnda got a letter from the bank's lawyers.
The letter said: pay back the loan
Or we shall sell your piece of land.
Kigũũnda has no job.
He has tried to sell the goods

We foolishly bought with the loan money
And they are not fetching much.
So the radio announced that
The piece of land would be auctioned.

NJOOKI:

We never heard the announcement.
When will it be auctioned?

WANGECI:

Today.
It was being auctioned today.

NJOOKI:

Today?

WANGECI:

Today! This day!
Today was the day
The Kiois buried us alive.

KIGUUNDA's drunken voice can be heard. He is singing.

*I shall marry when I want
While all padres are still alive
And I shall get married when I want
While all nuns are still alive.*

KIGUUNDA enters, very drunk.

KIGUUNDA:

How are you?
Son of Kihooto,
Why didn't you join me for a drink?
Chibuku for power.
Kill me quick: Chibuku.
You Gicaamba have become tied
To your wife's apron strings.
Do you suckle her?
Women are useless.
A woman is a pot full of poison.

WANGECI:

And so Chibuku has married you?
Every day. In the morning. In the evening.
Whenever you sell anything

To get money to pay back the loan,
You go to a beer-hall where Chibuku is sold.
Chibuku!
Chang'aa liquor!
Poison poured into our country!

GICAAMBA:

Yes, yes, by the whites
And their local followers.
Servants to foreigners!

KIGUUNDA: [Sings and dances]

*Greet Chibuku for me
Chibuku chased away my bitterness
Chibuku chased away pain, sorrow and thoughts.*

WANGECI:

Go away,
Go back to the beer-halls
Where your daughter is selling beer
And dance and sing in there.

KIGUUNDA:

Shut up, woman!
Gicaamba, never trust a woman.

WANGECI:

Was I the one who told you
To go for loans from other people's banks?

KIGUUNDA:

Who wanted a church wedding?
You an old woman
Wanting to go through a humiliating ceremony!
And all because of looking down upon our culture!
You saw fools going for foreign customs
And you followed in their footsteps.
Do you think that it's only foreign things
Which are blessed?

WANGECI:

You are not the one talking.
It's liquor speaking through you.

KIGUUNDA: [Worked up]

You now insult me!
 You dare insult me!
 Have church weddings entered your brains?

He takes the picture of Nebuchadnezzar and breaks it to pieces. He does the same for the board with the inscription, 'Christ is the Head'.

WANGECI:

Do you think that breaking those
 Will bring back the piece of land?

WANGECI and KIGÜUNDA fight. GICAAMBA and NJOOKI separate them.

WANGECI is crying and shouting all sorts of insults.

WANGECI:

Kill me!
 Let him murder me!
 Murder me before the whole population!
 Kioi has proved too much for you.
 Chibuku has proved too much for you.
 Your daughter has proved too much for you.
 O.K., kill me! Kill me now!
 Leave him alone, the poor wretch.
 Let him now kill me
 So he can have meat for supper.

KIGÜUNDA suddenly changes as if a mortal blow had been struck at his own identity. He slumps into a seat, completely dejected, but rapt in thought. WANGECI is also dejected as she too takes a seat.

GICAAMBA:

Whatever the weight of our problems,
 Let's not fight amongst ourselves.
 Let's not turn violence within us against us,
 Destroying our homes
 While our enemies snore in peace.

KIGÜUNDA:

You have spoken the truth.
 For from today Kioi has become my enemy.
 Either I die, or he dies.
 Why, they have buried me alive!

NJOOKI:

The piece of land . . . was it sold?

KIGÜUNDA: [Pause]

Yes. [Shows them his hand]
 Now we have only our hands.

GICAAMBA:

Who . . . Who bought it?

KIGÜUNDA: [Pause]

Ahab Kioi wa Kanoru.

NJOOKI:

A-uuu-u!

That man should now be baptized
 The Oppressor, Son of Grab-and-Take.

ALL:

The Oppressor, Son of Grab-and-Take.

KIGÜUNDA:

When I left the auction place
 I thought I should revisit the piece of land
 For a last glance,
 A kind of goodbye.
 Who did I find there?
 Kioi wa Kanoru, Ikuua wa Nditika
 Plus a group of whites.
 I fled.

But their open laughter followed me . . .

GICAAMBA:

The laughter from the clansmen of . . .

KIGÜUNDA

NJOOKI

WANGECI

} : The Oppressor, Son of Grab-and-Take.

The same group of people who had sung in Act One now come back and break into the same song:

The devil of robbery
 Must be crushed
 Hallelujah let's crush him
 For the second coming is near.
 He has brought famine to this land
 Let's crush him.
 Hallelujah let's crush him
 For the second coming is near.

The devil of oppression

Must be crushed.

The LEADER of the group enters with a container.

LEADER:

It's a haraambe to build a church

For those troubled at heart

For those carrying pain in their hearts!

WANGECI unties a handkerchief and takes out a shilling which she puts into the container. She stands at the door and watches the group as they now sing a hymn of harvest:

We bring you this offering, oh Lord,

It is the fruit of our toil on the land.

Take it Lord and bless it.

Take it Lord and bless it.

If you give in a tiny calabash,

In heaven you'll be paid in a similar container.

If you give in a big wide basin,

In heaven you'll be paid in a similar container.

And if you don't give anything,

You too will never receive blessings.

Lord take it and bless it.

We bring you this offering, Oh Lord,

It's the fruit of our toil on the land.

Take it Lord and bless it.

Take it Lord and bless it.

The SINGERS go away singing. WANGECI returns to her seat.

GI'CAAMBA is shaking his head from side to side.

GI'CAAMBA:

This has become too much for us.

The Kiois and the Ikuuas,

For how long will they continue oppressing us?

The European Kioi, the Asian Kioi,

The African Kioi,

What's the difference?

They are clansmen.

They know only how to take from the poor.

When we took the Mau Mau oath,

We used to make this vow:

I'll always help this organization

With all my strength and property

I'll always aid members of this organization.

If a bean falls to the ground

We shall split it equally among us.

If I fail to do so,

May this, the people's oath, destroy me

And the blood of the masses turn against me.

L: [*They repeat as if renewing a political vow*]

GI'CAAMBA:

Our nation took the wrong turn

When some of us forgot these vows.

They forgot all about the people's movement

And they took over the programme of the homeguards,

They said that a vulture eats alone

That no bird of prey preys for another.

They turned into sucking, grabbing and taking away.

That group is now ready to sell the whole country to foreigners.

Go to any business premise;

Goto any industry;

Go to any company;

Even if you find an African behind the counter,

Smoking a pipe over a protruding belly,

Know that he is only an overseer, a well-fed watchdog,

Ensuring the smooth passage of people's wealth

To Europe and other foreign countries.

Grabbers

Exploiters

Oppressors

Eaters of that which has been produced by others:

Their religion,

Their hymn,

Their prayer

Are all one:

Oh, God in heaven,

Shut the eyes of the poor,

The workers and the peasants

The masses as a whole

Ensure that they never wake up and open their eyes

To see what we are really doing to them!

Wa Gathon!

We too should think hard,

Let's wake up and reason together, now.

ALL: [*They sing. WANGECHI stands up and sings facing and looking at*

KIGÜNDA. KIGÜNDA also stands up and walks towards her. They march and hold hands as they continue singing]

Come my friend

Come my friend

Let's reason together.

Our hearts are heavy with worry

Because of the future of our children.

Let's drive away the darkness

From all our land.

GICAAKABA:

The question is this:

Who are our friends? And where are they?

Who are our enemies? And where are they?

Let us unite against our enemies.

I don't need to elaborate!

He who has ears, let him hear,

He who has eyes, let him see.

I know only this:

We cannot end poverty by erecting a hundred churches in the village:

We cannot end poverty by erecting a hundred beer-halls in the village;

Ending up with two alcoholics.

The alcoholic of hard liquor.

The alcoholic of the rosary.

Let's rather unite in patriotic love:

Gikūyū once said:

[Sings]

Two hands can carry a beehive,

One man's ability is not enough,

One finger cannot kill a louse,

Many hands make work light.

Why did Gikūyū say those things?

Development will come from our unity.

Unity is our strength and wealth.

A day will surely come when

If a bean falls to the ground

It'll be split equally among us,

For —

[*They sing*]

SOLOIST:

The trumpet —

L:

Of the workers has been blown

To wake all the slaves

To wake all the peasants

To wake all the poor.

To wake the masses

SOLOIST:

The trumpet —

ALL:

Of the poor has been blown.

SOLOIST:

The trumpet!

L:

The trumpet of the masses has been blown.

Let's preach to all our friends.

The trumpet of the masses has been blown.

We change to new songs

For the revolution is near.

SOLOIST:

The trumpet!

L:

The trumpet of the masses has been blown.

SOLOIST:

The trumpet!

ALL:

*The trumpet of the masses has been blown.
We are tired of being robbed
We are tired of exploitation
We are tired of land grabbing
We are tired of slavery
We are tired of charity and abuses.*

SOLOIST:

The trumpet!

ALL:

*The trumpet of the poor has been blown.
Let's unite and organize
Organization is our club
Organization is our sword
Organization is our gun
Organization is our shield
Organization is the way
Organization is our strength
Organization is our light
Organization is our wealth.*

SOLOIST:

The trumpet!

ALL:

The trumpet of the masses has been blown.

SOLOIST:

The trumpet —

ALL:

*Of the workers has been blown
There are two sides in the struggle,
The side of the exploiters and that of the exploited.
On which side will you be when*

SOLOIST:

The trumpet —

ALL:

Of the workers is finally blown?

CURTAIN

APPENDIX: SONGS IN THE ORIGINAL GIKÜYÜ

Wavre: Ngashikwa ndevu
Mibho ni atire,
Na ngashikwa ndevu
Wa wari ni atire!

Ngashikwa ndevu
Mibho ni atire,
Na ngashikwa ndevu
Wa wari ni atire!

p. 3-7

Calamni wa mshimo
Ni arangwa
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Washikwa miki itia
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Calamni wa mshimo
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Arangwa na skorogwa,
Arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Ni mshimo ikinda.

Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.

Calamni wa mshimo
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Ni mshimo ikinda
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.

Calamni wa mshimo
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Ni mshimo ikinda
Ni arangwa!

Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Washikwa miki itia,
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.

Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Washikwa miki itia,
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Washikwa miki itia,
Ni arangwa!

p. 8

Calamni wa mshimo,
Ni arangwa!
Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Ni mshimo ikinda
Ni arangwa!

Harirya ni arangwa,
Na akinyirio ikinda ri hakuh.
Calamni wa mshimo-ini
Ni arangwa...

pp. 11-13

(E te miki)
Ni ni ndakirwa ni mbara
Kirima kile mshimo,
(Cilgamba)
Kirima kile mshimo
Ngambata na ngikirika!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
Ni ni ndakirwa ni mbara
Kirima kile mshimo,
Kirima kile mshimo
Ngambata na ngikirika!
Ndakirika Gikuyu
Hali, kiriri kile mshimo,
(Cilgamba, ikinda, mshimo)
Maiti shiga ni njooerwa,
Baba shiga ndakirika.
I hali humae...
... har halya!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
Ndakirika Gikuyu

Hali, kiriri kile mshimo,
Maiti shiga ni njooerwa,
Baba shiga ndakirika.
Maiti shiga mshimo
Ndakirika ngikirika!
(Cilgamba, ikinda, mshimo)
Na gikigira ngikigira
Hali, bari mshimo-ini,
(Cilgamba)
Wona wote mshimo-ini,
Hali ndakirika kuwona!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
Maiti shiga mshimo
Ndakirika ngikigira
Na gikigira ngikigira.
Hali, bari mshimo-ini,
Wona wote mshimo-ini,
Hali ndakirika kuwona!
Gikigira ni kile ngikigira
Kikinda maiti ndakirika,
(Cilgamba...)
Kikinda maiti ndakirika,
Ndakirika ngikigira bari!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
I hali humae...
... har halya!
Gikigira ni kile ngikigira
Kikinda maiti ndakirika,
Kikinda maiti ndakirika
Ndakirika ngikigira bari!

MOZENATEXT



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