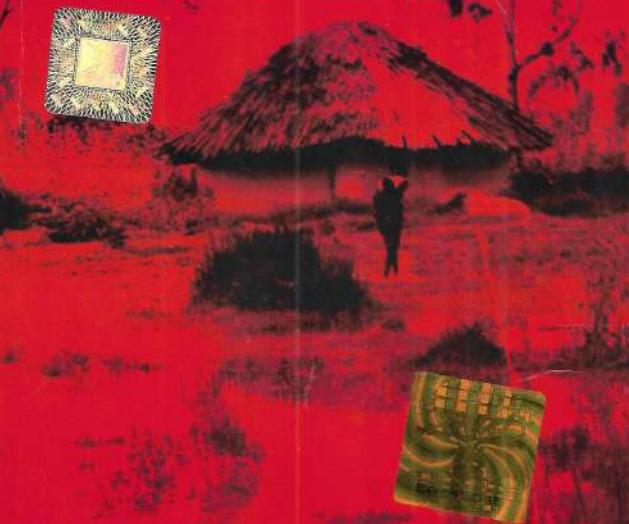


the floods



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John Ruganda

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The Floods was first performed at the French Cultural Centre, Nairobi on 1 March 1979 by the University of Nairobi Players. It was later transferred to Education Theatre Two, University of Nairobi. It was directed by John Ruganda and the decor was by Murray Ngoima. The cast was as follows:

HEADMAN	Joshua Okare Emesu
KYEYUNE	Henry Kuria
FISHERMAN	Martin Okelo
BWOGO	Oluoch Obura
NANKYA	Stella Muka
JOURNALIST WITH NOTEBOOK	Dave Murathe
JOURNALIST WITH MICROPHONE	Martin Okelo
JOURNALIST WITH CAMERA	Njagi Gakunju
LADY JOURNALIST	Louise Kaigwa
THE FLOODS	Martin Okelo
	LOUISE Kaigwa
	NJAGI Gakunju
	RUTH Ombis
	WAKANYOTE Njuguna
	STEVE Gakuo
	STEPHEN B. Gitakaya
	ADHIAMBO Debe
	M. Katui Katua
1ST SOLDIER	Joshua Okare Emesu
2ND SOLDIER	Martin Okelo

The Floods was also performed at the Festival of Small and Experimental Scenes, Yugoslavia, in the Cities of Mostar, Zenica, Banjaluka and Sarajevo from 28 March to 18 April 1979.

Characters in the play

HEADMAN	a military dropout
TWO BOYS	non-speaking
KYEYUNE	a quaint traditionist
FISHERMAN	in his early twenties
BWOGO	an executive
NANKYA	a pseudo-intellectual
JOURNALISTS	improvised
SOLDIERS	

The E.A.E.P. Drama Library

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8. *Man of Kafira* – Francis Imbuga
9. *Echoes of Silence* – John Ruganda
10. *The Floods* – John Ruganda
11. *The Bride* – Austin Bukenya
12. *Muntu* – Joe de Graft
13. *I Will Marry When I Want* – Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Ngugi wa Mirii
14. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* – Ngugi wa Thiong'o & Micere Mugo
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21. *Othello* – William Shakespeare
22. *Death of a Salesman* – Arthur Miller
23. *The Black Hermit* – Ngugi wa Thiong'o
24. *Mugasha: Epic of the Bahaya* – Nyambura Mpeshu
25. *Black Mamba* – John Ruganda
26. *Voice of the People* – Okiya Omtatah Okoiti
27. *Aminata* – Francis Imbuga

the first wave

An island in Lake Victoria. Intermittent growls of thunder and flashes of lightning. The sky is dark with clouds of rain. Offstage: shouts, cries and all manner of noise from stampeding men, women and children – the last batch that is fleeing the island. The action starts with more growls of thunder. A man, the Headman of the island, comes on the stage carrying a big bundle of his belongings. He stops and looks back, calling his mates to hurry to the boat. He is using an improvised loud speaker.

HEADMAN: The boat is leaving ... the boat's leaving any moment now! The boat is leaving any moment now! Ten minutes to go and the boat will be off! Just ten minutes and goodbye to the floods! You heard what the radio said ... in three hours' time the floods will ravage this island. Don't ask me how and why, because that's what the radio said. Hurry along mates; the captain is waiting and the floods are coming. The floods are coming! Hurry up everybody! Hurry up! Hurry!!!! (Pauses and listens and looks back. No one.) Are you deaf? It's now or never! Now or never!! Hurry up everyone!!! (The boat is heard honking insistently by the shore.)

HEADMAN: The captain is getting impatient and the floods are coming! Hurry up! Hurry up everybody! Ten minutes and the boat will set sail! Whether anyone likes it or not! Dogs are prohibited,

goats not permitted! No cocks and no cows! Just you and your blankets. Pigs will be prosecuted and cats will be quartered. Just you and your blankets. (Angrily) HURRY UP!!! (Enter two excited boys carrying their light luggage.)

HEADMAN: That's what I call good boys. Obedient servants of society. No dilly-dallying. (The boys start chasing each other around the stage. Pitching and gliding their wooden toy boats this way and that way, gradually getting on the Headman's nerves. One boy drops his boat, the other crushes it with his foot accidentally. They fight each other with their luggage.)

HEADMAN: Stop it ... stop it you miserable mackerels! Stop it, I said!! (He separates them.) Now dash off to the boat at once ... come on, what are you waiting for? (He chases them away, shouting after them.) And tell the captain to be a little bit more patient. (to himself) This is not the navy where you get instant obedience. (announcing again) Nine minutes to go; don't say I didn't warn you. Nine minutes. Nine minutes; don't say I sent you to your graves. Dogs are prohibited, goats unpermitted. No cows, no cocks. Eight minutes ... the floods are coming. Eight minutes, eight, eight ... (He notices an old man, Kyeyune, offstage, shambling towards the stage.)

HEADMAN: That's a good old man. That's it grandpa. A little trot does it. A little shamble. We are leaving

no food for the floods. No food for the floods. And the rain will soon be on our backs. Steady, steady, steady old ... (As the old man enters, there is one blinding flash of lightning and a loud peal of thunder which send him sprawling to the ground. They have unsettled the Headman as well. Screams in the background ... then silence.)

KYEYUNE: (recovering, but still on the ground; supplicatingly his hands raised to the sky) Kagoro, Lord of the sky, send your glazing shafts to other islands. We are in flight; do not darken our paths. Uproot all the stumps lining our journey into the unknown.

HEADMAN: (trying to help the old man to stand up) Trot along, old one. A little shuffle does it. Trot along to the boat. Time is money, the saying goes. Time is life: that's what I say. Pick up your bag and be gone.

KYEYUNE: (still on his knees) We have too much to carry, Lord of the sky. Too much to carry and yet our backs are broken. We have a long way to go, yet the waves bar our paths. If there is one amongst us, one who has gone astray, one of us who has tickled your wrath, let not your bright shafts land on all of us. Have mercy! (He notices the red cloth in which his gear is wrapped.)

KYEYUNE: (with exaggerated fright) Oi! Oi! Oi! What madness is this? What injustice?

HEADMAN: What is it, old one?

KYEYUNE: Why do you people want to kill me? Send me home before my time? What have I done to you?

HEADMAN: What have we done ...?

KYEYUNE: Can't an old man live a little longer? Can't he live to see his neighbours' grandchildren bear other children? Am I taking too much of your room? Consuming all your air?

HEADMAN: (getting impatient) We are running short of time, old one.

KYEYUNE: Or is it because I have no children of my own that you should sacrifice me to the Lord of mighty flashes? Haven't I seen you through from childhood to manhood ... the whole lot of you? Have I not, with my own feeble hands? Don't I deserve a bit of gratitude from you? A bit of attention? A bit of regard?

HEADMAN: What have we done, old one? What's all the fuss about?

KYEYUNE: Look at that! (He throws his bundle to the Headman.) Who did it?

HEADMAN: I don't understand, old one.

KYEYUNE: Your head is no better than a fish net, young man. No better than a fish net. ... Must we flaunt our red banners when Kagoro has mounted his throne? Must we raise dust in his face? No wonder his swords are poised against us!

This is clearly a bad omen. (The Headman is still uncomprehending.)

KYEYUNE: Bring that bundle here. (The Headman obeys. Kyeyune unwraps the bundle.) Look at this red banner! He could have struck me dead, were I not Kyeyune the fire-eater, the midwife of the flame tree. (He tucks away the red cloth between his blanket.)

HEADMAN: But you did your own packing.

KYEYUNE: I know, I know. You should have warned me all the same. These incidentals have a way of slipping through the memory.

HEADMAN: (announcing) Seven minutes to go, ladies and gentlemen! Seven minutes!

KYEYUNE: Seven minutes, seven minutes! What is the hurry for? Can you time your destiny?

HEADMAN: The captain is impatient and the floods are coming.

KYEYUNE: (insistently) Can you time your destiny? Tell me. When Kagoro has mounted his throne, who are we to point a finger at him? (mimicking him) Seven minutes, seven minutes. What is all this baying for?

HEADMAN: You fuss around too much, Kyeyune.

KYEYUNE: We are not strong enough to battle with the floods, let alone the flashes, son. This is clearly a bad omen: the rains on our backs, the flashes on our foreheads and now the floods ...

HEADMAN: (*business-like*) You are now to proceed to the boat, at once. Our safety depends on the cooperation of everyone ...

KYEYUNE: You should tell that to the lady. Huddled on the couch and peering through papers endlessly.

HEADMAN: That includes you, Kyeyune. Now up and be gone.

KYEYUNE: "The floods are coming," I tell her. ... "That's what the radio says; who can time the floods?" says the lady. I left her piecing words together in search of relevances behind radio pronouncements. What learning has brought to our women is something I can't understand.

HEADMAN: Forget all about her and proceed ...

KYEYUNE: Forget her? You don't know what you're saying! Do you know who she is? A big fish in the biggest pond of learning. That's what she is.

HEADMAN: Stop fussing, for Chrissake, and be gone - at once.

KYEYUNE: (*mildly insulted*) Eh! Eh! Eh! Young man, who do you think you are talking to? A cockrel? You of all people! You who, only yesterday, were licking your own mucus and kneading soil with your own urine? And you talk to me like that? Has your brief stay from the island taught you to frown at our wrinkles?

HEADMAN: I'm in charge of this operation and I won't tolerate this, this ...

KYEYUNE: STUPIDITY. Is that it? Isn't that what you wanted to say? Well, then, say it. Go on and say it. (*pause; no answer*) You're overrunning your zeal, young man. No wonder they threw you out of the military! Good for nothing, that's what you are. Now if you are using the floods as an excuse to spit on our grey hairs, then there is as much wisdom in you as there is in a weevil. (*imitating him*) Hurry up everybody! Hurry up mates, the floods are coming! What do you know about floods? (*A fisherman enters carrying among other things a bundle of fish nets and a basket of smoked fish.*)

HEADMAN: (*relieved by his entrance*) Where do you think you're taking all those?

FISHERMAN: But, but ...

HEADMAN: No 'buts.' You heard the order: only you and your blankets.

FISHERMAN: My livelihood depends on these fish nets.

KYEYUNE: (*sarcastically*) You heard what the big man said: no buts.

HEADMAN: Leave the fish nets here and proceed to the boat. Do you think every port is a fishing ground? I can't understand you people. The old one fussing about some dirty piece of red cloth and now you and your fish nets.

FISHERMAN: But what shall I do without them?

KYEYUNE: Hang yourself—that's what the big man means.
Or jump into the lake.

HEADMAN: The basket too. Put it down. Always eager to exploit the misfortunes of others, floods or no floods. What would you do if they were to poison the entire lake? Remove yourself – and at once.

FISHERMAN: (*desperately*) Master, have mercy!

KYEYUNE: (*laughs sarcastically*) Is there any mercy between the jaws of a crocodile?

FISHERMAN: I have tiny twins to feed and a sickly wife. My mother is blind. My father—he went away. No one knows where. Three dark figures came to the homestead one evening and took him away.

HEADMAN: (*callously*) Your uncle drowned in the lake, your aunt committed suicide and your sister died of scabies. What next?

FISHERMAN: I was playing with the twins when they came. They said to father: "You're needed." He hugged the twins, squeezed my palm and walked between the two, one guarding the rear. That was many months ago, master, many months before you came back. Have mercy! Think of the twins!

KYEYUNE: (*visibly unnerved by the memory*) You may be the rock of ages, but let the young man take his nets. He has borne too much burden.

HEADMAN: (*gently*) Come on, run along. (*rethinks*) No.

FISHERMAN: (*Misunderstanding the Headman's intentions, he kneels and thanks him.*) Master, master, my benefactor! May you live long, master!

HEADMAN: Go back and tell everyone to hurry up. Unnecessary luggage is prohibited, do you hear? Prohibited, (*The fisherman walks away wounded. The Headman eyes the basket hungrily, empties the contents into his bigger basket and pulls out a smoked fish.*)

HEADMAN: (*appeasingly*) Now, old man, have a bite and trot to the boat.

KYEYUNE: (*admonishingly*) I don't touch what doesn't belong to me, son. That's the custom here, if you have forgotten already.

HEADMAN: Suit yourself. A full belly may be handy later. You never know.

KYEYUNE: I don't touch what isn't mine. Moreover, I don't eat fish anymore.

HEADMAN: (*eating and calling*) Six minutes to go and we are off to the mainland. Six minutes. No more, no less. (*to Kyeyune*) Beautiful job, this. He clearly knows his job well, the young man does. Delicious fish. (*ironically*) But what I hate is exploiting other people's misfortunes. An emergency situation and you have some people planning what to make out of it.

KYEYUNE: Is it any different from what you are doing right now?

HEADMAN: Is that meant to be a reprimand, by any chance?

KYEYUNE: Just a plain question. Is it any different?

HEADMAN: You are free to have a piece.

KYEYUNE: I said I don't eat fish anymore.

HEADMAN: Is that why you are sore about me? (*pause; no answer*) Dogs are prohibited, goats unpermitted. No fish, no fuss. Six minutes, six minutes and we are off to the mainland ... You are sure you don't want a grub?

KYEYUNE: You can have my share. It's all yours. (*The boat is heard honking again. Kyeyune is lost in deep thought, now fondling the nets tenderly, now casting them almost imperceptibly.*)

HEADMAN: (*singsong*) Captain's impatient and the rains are coming

Men are packing and the women wailing
The children are playing and goats're grazing
The sky is rumbling and the floods are coming
Last call for one and all! Last call!
Hurry up everybody! Hurry up!

KYEYUNE: (*self-pityingly*) Once upon a time, I too, could eat fish with relish. Once upon a time.

HEADMAN: (*surprised*) What's up, old man?

KYEYUNE: Yes - mixed with groundnuts, you wouldn't find a more wholesome meal anywhere.

HEADMAN: You can still have a bite if you like.

KYEYUNE: Once upon a time, I was also the best fisherman here. Not so long ago. The best fisherman. Do you know that, son? The best on this island. You were away then, young man, but that's the truth. One sail and a netful of tilapia, another sail, a netful of mackerel. (*He fondles the nets some more. Headman helps himself to another fish.*)

KYEYUNE: They even composed a song about me. Do you know the song, son?

HEADMAN: You're talking too much. Move to the boat.

KYEYUNE: He doesn't understand. (*Silence except for the Headman's eating: then suddenly Kyeyune breaks into his song.*)

KYEYUNE: They thought I had a secret talisman blessed by Nalubale's priestess. Laziness always breeds envy and empty excuses. It was skill, son, SKILL. When you have lived on the lake as long as I have; when you are generous to Nalubale as often as I was, you get to know every ripple and what it harbours beneath; every wave, the good and the ill it brings. At least that's what I thought. And that's not an impotent boast as your face suggests.

HEADMAN: I haven't doubted you, old one. But for Christ's sake ...

KYEYUNE: Yes, I was the best. Ask anybody on this island or any other you care to choose.

HEADMAN: Yes, yes, you were the best, but now we must leave. (*calling out*) Five minutes to go ...

KYEYUNE: They will tell you: "When it comes to fish, Kyeyune has the last word. Big and small, he knows them all." And now the floods: do you think I have lived this long not to know the wind that carries the floods? Sixty years on this island and you think the radio that was only brought yesterday knows any better? The radio—what mockery!

HEADMAN: Do you want us to leave you here?

KYEYUNE: Leave me here? You're not leaving me son, since I wasn't coming with you in the first place. The radio said this, and the radio said that! What don't we know? What did the radio say about Mukanga? That he was run over by a tractor. And didn't all of us see them dragging him from his hut—or have you forgotten? The radio said this, the radio said that ... You go on. You're eager to face your destiny. As for me, I'm here to stay, floods or no floods. I'm not ready to cross paths with any destiny yet.

HEADMAN: (*threateningly*) You will force me to drag you to the boat.

KYEYUNE: You try it, young man. Just you try it.

HEADMAN: You are a bloody nuisance.

KYEYUNE: You dare do it.

HEADMAN: (*moving towards Kyeyune*) I said MOVE TO THE BOAT! (*Kyeyune throws the net over the Headman's head and pulls. Headman is entangled, collapses down in a heap.*)

KYEYUNE: I may be old, young fellow, but I still know a trick or two. (*The Headman is trying to disentangle himself but Kyeyune keeps pulling his victim around the stage. After some time, he releases the Headman.*)

KYEYUNE: I told you to leave me alone. I make no demands on anyone. I expect neither commands nor demands from you. I carry my own destiny in my own palms.

HEADMAN: (*who is now free*) You'll pay for this, you barbarian!

KYEYUNE: Once upon a time, young fellow, I used to catch *empuuta* twice your size and half as easily as I have just demonstrated. So let me be. Yes, I was the best fisherman in these parts until one day something strange happened to me.

HEADMAN: Are you or are you not moving to the boat?

KYEYUNE: (*He ignores the question.*) It was a normal day, by all signs. It was early evening when I set sail. I paddled my canoe forward, as the breeze beat against my brow. The waters let me sail on and on towards where the *empuuta* abound ... Do you know Ssese, son? (*no response*) No matter. I cast my nets as usual and paddled

along. The sun was slowly setting and luck was not on my side that day. So I paddled on and on to the centre of the lake. Then all of a sudden the net on my right became heavy. It weighed down the right side of my boat. I knew it was a big catch. Do you know what it was, son? A man. A military man. Dead. Three long nails in his head, his genitals sticking out in his mouth. A big stone round his neck. His belly ripped open and the intestines oozing out. I looked at that body, son, and froze with fright. Here was a man, a military man, who probably had a wife and children ... possibly a mother, too. Who knows? Here he was, dead, in the middle of the lake. What had he done to come to such an unmourned-for end? Had he, perhaps, in a moment of enthusiasm, uttered an unwelcome word to his masters? Had he, perhaps, through his own sweat and scrupulous saving, accumulated a bit of wealth which his extravagant mates had set their eyes on? Or did he have to die because he knew the secret ambitions of his masters? I don't know, son. But if there are men who can rip our bellies open, drill nails in our skulls and stuff our mouths with our own genitals, why have I lived long enough to see my head grey? Since then, son, I have never left this island. I gave up fishing once and for all. I paddled my canoe to the hearth. If I'm to catch a human being each

time I cast my net, then I might as well starve to death. Then another day, months later, as I sat down licking my lips cutting through a tasty fish, what do you think happened?

HEADMAN: I'm tired of your fireside prattles.

KYEYUNE: Fireside prattles he calls them. Am I a prattler now because I found a human finger in the bowels of a fish? A human finger! I went out and threw up. Came back and said to myself: Why me of all people? Why should these strange things happen to me? That, too, is why I don't eat fish. Do you think I'm mad, son? Do you think I dared the lake too much?

HEADMAN: No, you are not mad, but it's time you went.

KYEYUNE: That man, son, that military man still haunts me. I should have brought him to the island but I was afraid. Supposing his enemies got wind of it, it would be the end of me, I thought. I just removed the three nails from his skull, the genitals from his mouth, and pushed him right back to the crocodiles. I can't face the lake once more son, I can't.

HEADMAN: (announcing) Three minutes to go and we set sail. Just three minutes.

KYEYUNE: His ghost will pull me down the lake.

HEADMAN: It hasn't drawn you to it so far.

KYEYUNE: Because I haven't crossed its path. (*The islanders troop to the boat followed by the Headman as*

Bwogo enters. He is dressed in a three-piece suit, a winter coat on top, a bowler hat and an umbrella.)

BWOGO: Anyone seen Nankya? (*no response from the islanders as they exit*) Old one, have you seen a young lady ...?

KYEYUNE: (*hostile*) Are you one of them?

BWOGO: One of them?

KYEYUNE: Disciple of the ogre.

BWOGO: What are you talking about?

KYEYUNE: Have you come for the saplings even?

BWOGO: I'm looking for ...

KYEYUNE: Yes, you must be. Underneath that jacket sleeps the terrible hand of death. I can see the bulge.

BWOGO: Have you by any chance seen...?

KYEYUNE: There are no men on this island, if that is what is itching you. You finished them. You or your betters.

BWOGO: I don't understand.

KYEYUNE: You have come to mock us. To find out whether we still have bulls worth your bother. What has this island done to you? There are no men on this island I'm telling you. Ask the man you sent here: the very man who spits at our wrinkles and whips the orphans.

BWOGO: Who do you mean?

KYEYUNE: The headman who is having more than his share of the widows.

BWOGO: I'm looking for a certain young lady.

KYEYUNE: A young lady?

BWOGO: Yes, a young lady and her mother. Have they gone to the boat yet?

KYEYUNE: You're now turning your wrath on women?

BWOGO: Have they gone to the boat yet? That's what I want to know.

KYEYUNE: Leave us alone. We have lived on this island tolerably well before the ogre came on the scene, heralded by fronds and frenzied shouts.

BWOGO: What ogre are you talking about?

KYEYUNE: The one that everybody calls Boss.

BWOGO: That's a dangerous thing to say.

KYEYUNE: I know as you do not know that when the beckon calls, he will gallop into the net. Big or small no one can resist the call of the beckon. It's a matter of time.

BWOGO: That's treason, old man. Age has no prerogatives with Boss. Treason is treason.

KYEYUNE: There are worthier men who have gone before me. Many more will go after me. But that will not stop his sun from setting when the time comes.

BWOGO: You haven't answered my question yet.

KYEYUNE: We had our complaints here and there, of course. There were times when the rains failed us or the floods ate up our belongings, but all in all we went on fishing and tilling the soil for sustenance, confident of tomorrow and the day after. But now we are no better than a drunkard's cockerel - unsure of ourselves anyone moment. Each dawn is as surprising as it is painful. We welcome dusks with partial sighs of relief and the nights with vigils wrought with wails and squeals of terror. The ogre has turned against its kindred.

BWOGO:

KYEYUNE:

Have they gone to the boat yet?

But the man with three nails in his head never discriminates between the indispensables and the disposables. He comes in many guises. Sometimes as a fisher of men, lonely and subdued. He casts his net beyond the shoreline and engulfs lovers cuddling each other in the sand. At other times, he uses the irresistible beckon: the casual whistling, the itch in the feet and the eventual gallop towards the trap. That's when they take it upon themselves to remove specks of dust, not from their own eyes, but their neighbours'. As I said before, it's only a matter of time.

BWOGO:

KYEYUNE:

Aren't you aware the floods are coming? The floods? "That's what the radio said," she told me.

BWOGO: Who told you?

KYEYUNE: The lady. She is in there. On the couch, coiled like a cobra.

BWOGO: And her mother?

KYEYUNE: "Who can tame the floods?" she asked me.

BWOGO: You should be on that boat, like all the rest.

KYEYUNE: Cows.

BWOGO: What?

KYEYUNE: Cows heading for the slaughter-house. That's what they look like to me.

BWOGO: Take my advice and head for the boat before it's too late.

KYEYUNE: If she is here and you're here, it can't be all that bad. There is something I don't understand though: why my blood is against that boat. I don't know why.

BWOGO: It is safe and sound. There is no danger. Intended to help you, that's all.

KYEYUNE: Safe and sound, did you say?

BWOGO: That's right.

KYEYUNE: Maybe I should go and check.

BWOGO: You better, before it is too late.

KYEYUNE: Maybe I should actually go and check. Maybe I should ... (*Bwogo goes to the house, Kyeyune towards the boat. The Headman is heard sounding his last call.*)

HEADMAN: (off) Last call for one and all. Last call. The boat is leaving in a minute's time. The boat is leaving in a minute. Dogs are prohibited, goats unpermitted. No fish, no fuss. Just you and your blankets. No fish, no fuss. (*The boat gives a last honk and drives off.*)

CURTAIN

the second wave

The scene has shifted to an abandoned bungalow, in a slightly tolerable condition. Inside it are two or so battered easy chairs, an ancient divan, a table and Nankya, who has marooned herself in here, on the island. There is a sink just below one of the front windows and a telephone in one corner. Waves can be heard lapping and slapping the shores of the island. A storm seems imminent. Thunder growl, then sharp flashes of lightning. The window shutters creak moanfully as if about to be unhinged by the wind. Nankya enters from one of the side rooms, a wireless in her hand. She is visibly anxious about the state of the weather. She fiddles with the controls of the wireless ... jarring sound ... then voice. Nankya properly adjusts the station and sits on the divan listening to the radio. There are several newspapers and magazines around.

Wireless ... blican voice of the people. In the name of the Benevolent Father of the Republic, we greet you. Here's an urgent announcement once more. I repeat ... stand by for an important announcement from the Ministry for Rehabilitation. (*prolonged jarring sound - then voice*) We apologise brothers ... there was a slight technical hitch in our studios. But here is the announcement: (*clears voice*)

"A reliable spokesman of the Ministry of Rehabilitation confirmed the rumours that the level of Lake Victoria is going to rise two feet above normal in the next three hours.

Inhabitants of the Lake Victoria islands and surrounding areas are urged to evacuate immediately. I repeat this ... must evacuate immediately due to expected floods in three hours' time from now. The Republican Navy will come to rescue stranded inhabitants after it has escorted the Benevolent Father of the Republic who is leading a big Peace Keeping Delegation to ..." (Nankya turns off the knob disgustedly... but is shaken by the news. Thunder ... lightning ... creaking shutters; she goes to close shutters. Stares out for some moments. She sees a man running towards the bungalow. Bwogo. She puts on an annoyed expression ... but behind it can be detected a sense of relief. She bolts shutters and goes back to the divan. Pantings become louder and louder as Bwogo approaches the door. She remains motionless. Knock at the door. She doesn't respond. More knocking; she moves ghost-like to open. Opens and hides behind it. Bwogo enters. Closes door, notices Nankya planted by the wall. He places his umbrella on the table.)

BWOGO: Thank God, you are here, Nankya. I wasn't wrong after all. Bwogo is never wrong. (She is impassive.) What do you think you're doing here? On this island of perpetual floods? They have all taken to their heels - the islanders: men, women and their children packed together in a tattered boat like sardines in fish tins.

Scared stiff of the floods. Women thumbing their rosary beads; men gazing at the waves impotently and the children crying because of the rain and the thunder claps. I met them. Pathetic figures. (*quick look at her; no response*) Did you hear the lunch-time news? (*no response*; *Bwogo like God but half mockingly*) "I do bring a flood of waters to destroy all flesh, for flesh has corrupted man's way upon the earth." Should have thought the Old Man was joking. But no! He did actually bring the flood upon the earth. (*his mood slightly more serious now*) Did you listen to the weather report, Nankya? (*Silence. Bwogo removes his coat and places it on the table.*) I met them: men, women and their children. Herded together like beasts in Noah's ark. I shouted at them: "Anybody seen Nankya?" Silence, like the silence in here. Uncalled for, don't you think? (*no response*) The weather is awful, of course, and the floods are coming. 'But so what? We have a nice little boat to sail us ashore. Bwogo always knows his responsibility. Nankya is in danger. So what does Bwogo do? Comes to rescue his chum. How about that? (*going towards her with affected endearment*) Come on darling, say something. (*Nankya ducks away from his intended embraces.*) (*NANKYA determinedly mute. Convulsing with fury. Bwogo, aware of his intrusion, feels about his way cautiously like a guilty husband. He*

(speaks pompously, with affected confidence.)
It's odd. It is injuriously odd. (*stuffing his pipe, which he lights much later*) Three months back, we came here. Together. Hand in hand, cheek to cheek, one might almost say – for a week's holiday. The sun, as though pinned to the apex of this roof, beamed at our every deed, our every thought, our every dream. It smiled when we smiled, drowsed when we did and slept when we wanted it to. The flowers, too, felt our endearing presence and ... do you remember? The flowers? (*no response*). Do you remember the flowers? Well ... they bloomed as soon as we had arrived! Just bloomed. And the birds burst into song in the trees. The sand beneath our feet was warm and sensuously inviting. (*soliciting a reaction*) No? Well ... it was for me, at any rate. You said, I remember: "I wish it were possible to leave our footprints on the sands of time!" Remember? And the moon ... now that's really a lovely thought. (*pauses*) But Nankya, can't you even open the window shutters? Can't we? The air here is absolutely unbreathable. It's stale and stinks of rotten fish and human corpses, and the mucky litter. (*persuasively*) Come on, Nankya, open the windows, darling. Noo? Not even for a while? Waiting for Bwogo to do it, I suppose? (*pauses and looks at her; nothing*) Well, I'll open the shutters all the same. It's in your own best interests you know. (*He goes*

(and opens, then violent creaking of the shutters)
Waah! Just as well you didn't open them before I came. (*He reopens half the window and peeps out*) Do you remember the moon at night? We stood here, my chin upon your shoulder, my arms around your waist, and saw the moon thrust its beams into the belly of the lake. "Let's go and pull at the diamond strands of the moon." That's what you said. Very imaginative. Then all of a sudden the waves rolled the strands towards us, remember? It was a wonderful time ... we scanned dawns and dusks in mutual embraces. Time was at our command. And I thought, "My God, how exquisite for two beings to have *inner harmony*." Sour grapes now, if you ask me. (*removes his jacket and places it behind chair*) But look at us now. You don't want to talk to me. And you are planted against that wall as if determined to grow. Nankya, do you really think you can grow? ON this cement floor? (*pause; moves away from window, moves towards her*) Tell me, though ... why did you run away without telling me? Thought I wouldn't trace you, eh? Nankya, you really ought to be ashamed of your quick temper. Look at everything around us. Life has faded out of the look of them. The room is indifferent, like an open coffin. The walls ... (*stops and stares at them*) the lustre has gone out of them. Do you know what? The finger-marks are actually still

there. Can you imagine? Three months back and the blood dots of the bedbugs we killed are still here! You said, "Don't thumb them ... the blood will stink!" And I replied, "There's water, Nankya. Sometimes water washes blood away." So I squashed the bugs with the thumb, and washed it afterwards. Do you remember you shivered when I tried to touch your cheek? "Murderer!" you snarled at me, and dashed to the beach. And as usual I had to follow you like a faithful dog. (*knowingly*) Just as well I did. Remember? By the way, did you listen to the weather report? You've got a radio set here. Did you set it? (*no answer*) I ask in good faith. For your own best interests. (*pause*) Nankya, you've got to say something. I can't talk to myself all the time while you stand there like a lamp post - indifferent. I mean, hell, if you don't want me here, say it. (*He changes tactics. Goes and sits on the divan. Fiddling with radio set. Nankya, whose anger has been gathering momentum, goes and grabs it from him. For the first time she is showing signs of life.*)

(blowing up) L-e-a-v-e my set alone.

(surprised at the venom; releases set) Well, that's something. A beginning. Miracle number one. "The dumb speaketh!" And soon the cripple shall throwaway her crutches and bolt to the rich land of Bacchus unaided. (*drops the playful mood*) Did you listen to the weather report?

NANKYA:

BWOGO:

(*no reply*) The floods are coming in less than three hours.

NANKYA: Why can't you mind your own business, lecher?

BWOGO: Now that's unkind, baby. Almost vulgar. Isn't it strange that we should now talk and act as if we are strangers? (*Nankya not concerned*) Look here, Nankya; time is running out, the floods are coming and you are playing high and mighty ... (*luringly*) Come on, Nankya; what have I done to you? (*He moves closer and testingly pulls her into his embrace.*)

(pushing him away) Bwogo, leave me alone.

(continues as if nothing had happened; moves to the window) And my boat ... my boat pitching and gliding to and fro, to and fro between the wind and the waves. (*faces her*) Doesn't the flood frighten you, Nankya? Doesn't it? I saw those dotards and the women ... their faces wrought with fright. They know what havoc the floods have caused on this island. And the lake too ... this lake harbours its own unfathomable secrets. As the mainlanders say: "He who eats well is always insatiable." This lake can't complain, though. It has been the tomb of many men. And you, too, know it. Lorryfuls of wailing civilians, driven to their deaths, over the cliff, at the point of bayonets. The crocodiles have never been more thankful. That's what the foreign papers say ... Lorryfuls ...

- NANKYA:** (*disdainful*) Is that meant to frighten me?
- BWOGO:** What would happen to us, I wonder, if the waves battered my boat? What would become of us?
- NANKYA:** It's children that fear the blaze of a cockscomb, Bwogo.
- BWOGO:** I suppose we would have to wait for the rescue team.
- NANKYA:** Rescue team indeed! Wasting the tax-payers money on useless expeditions. A slight sign of unrest, and he trots to the neighbouring countries ... And what are you doing here?
- BWOGO:** "There'll be an emergency rescue operation." Boss promised. I guess we can wait a while. No need to panic.
- NANKYA:** Why do you have to follow me like my shadow? Can't you mind your own business?
- BWOGO:** A faithful dog never barks.
- NANKYA:** Didn't you receive my letter? I wrote to you ...
- BWOGO:** Just wags its tail, but never barks.
- NANKYA:** I wrote to say it's quits. Maybe you didn't believe it, but it's true. I am not a well for every pot and pan. Do you understand that?
- BWOGO:** (*Sensing what she is driving at, he deliberately diverts her from her train of thought. Moves away from window to the table. Recites his poem "Being Fulfilled" playfully but with a tinge of accusation.*)
- Behind hidden courtyard corners,
On the green wet grass,
After formal partings and the party,
Girls gaze at the moon
Moanfully, as they are filled.
And then they walk away
To their fathers' apartments
Fulfilled.*
- Don't you think that is rather lovely poetry?
- NANKYA**
- BWOGO:** It's bull-shit, to say the least.
- (chuckling)** And then they walk away
To their fathers' apartments
- FULFILLED**
- NANKYA:** Bunk.
- BWOGO:** (*inciting her for the heck of it*)
*Girls gaze at the moon
Moanfully, as they are filled?*
- Tersely put, don't you think? Brilliant observation. "*Gazing at the moon moanfully.*" Wah!
- NANKYA:** Muckheap. A clear sign of a demented mind.
- BWOGO:** (*with fake exuberance to drift her further from her 'pot and pan' theme*) You have an incisive mind, Nankya, and a flair for artistic finesse. Tell you what, why don't you try your luck with the

TLS. Do you know what would happen to you after a year or two? You'd become a celebrity my dear. A household ware in literary circles. But before then we would have a real big do, in one of these plush hotels. (*Deliberately clowning as Chief Judge announcing the results. Climbs on one of the chairs ... Gets out imaginary glasses from his shirt pocket, wipes them and proceeds.*)

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. Ours has not been an easy task at all, as you can well imagine. But after very heated and sharply divided deliberations, the panel has decided, by a vote of seven to four, to award this year's J.F. Kennedy Literary Prize to Miss ... Elisabeth Nankya. (*clapping and calling her over to the rostrum*) Miss Nankya. (*no response*)

(*Steps down from the 'rostrum' to go and congratulate her and introduce her to the august audience. He bows before her and offers her his hand*) "Congratulations Miss Nankya."

SHIT. (*As she slaps him hard on the face. There is a brief uneasy silence. Then suddenly, Bwogo collects himself and covers up the incident with an apology.*)

Excuse me ladies and gentlemen. I must apologise to Elisabeth Nankya. She prefers to be referred to as Ms Nankya, NOT Miss Nankya. She is the Chairperson of the Women's Lib in her

BWOGO:

NANKYA:

BWOGO:

homeland. And cut out Elisabeth in future. Not authentic enough. Smells of wine and ecumenical habits. She is Nankya Rutagambanabato.

(*Cheers, boos, heckling, etc. Then with sudden inspiration, and undaunted, Bwogo snatches a diary (notebook) from his jacket and, with an equal amount of dexterity, pulls out a pencil from the spine of the diary and proceeds to interview Ms Nankya. From now on the impression we should get is that there are so many hawks trying to get at the chick: journalist with notebook; journalist with microphone; journalist with camera, etc. The chick is caged in by the hawks. Now Bwogo transforms himself into the journalist with a notebook (JWN). Nankya is browbeaten by his courage. If the producer so wishes he can bring in the other journalists after Bwogo's announcement of the winner, or he can make Bwogo play the parts of all the journalists.*)

JWN:

You are the very first female literary personality in your homeland to receive this coveted prize, Ms Nankya. What do you feel about your achievement? (*eagerly waiting for her answer; writes down an imagined reply*) ... Like any other literary critic would feel in the circumstances. (*JWN not satisfied*)

JWN:

(*insistent*) You may be right there, Ms Nankya, but surely we can't ignore the fact that you are the very first female from Africa ever to receive

this honour, albeit deservedly. First female. Obscure country in Africa. No impressive body of literature of its own, let alone a critical tradition. These are important factors, Ms Nankya. Or don't you think so? (pause, looks at Nankya for an answer; she has none; enters in his note-book):... NO COMMENT.

(Journalist with microphone and portable tape recorder is battling his way through other journalists to reach Nankya. Wipes his sweat off his brow, fixes his gadgetry and proceeds. He has the air of a seasoned journalist ... one of the very few who do their homework.)

JWM: Ms Nankya, in your treatise you cited Mr Bwogo's poem 'Being Fulfilled' as a clear example of a work of a bourgeois poet, beefed up with *stranganoff* or *chicken la king*, perched on the pedestal of exploitation, excessively dressed, expensively housed and, to cap it all, perpetually exuding his fumes of cognac and champagne on to the under-privileged – the millions of mice in society that make do with the crumbs. Interestingly enough, Ms Nankya, you used women in your community as the symbol of the tireless workers who are never recompensed for their sweat. If I may be allowed to contradict you a little, I think the poet here was merely drawing our attention to the pervasive societies, I repeat *societies*, with all their bloodless passions where men

and women have opted for a cheap life-style: sex without love. They have renounced their right to appreciate life with all its beauty and ugliness, its vices and virtues, its conformity and contradictions. The economic and political structures of your society are absolutely irrelevant in this instance. (The other journalists are getting impatient but JWM presses on.)

JWM: The most impressive thing about Bwogo's work is that he looks at the external environment with directness; at women with fascination; at men with curiosity and at the social circumstances with sympathy – although, in the final analysis, he is a cynic. Now to come to my question. (The other journalists are almost riotous. They, too, want a chance.)

JWM: Doesn't it strike you as a little odd that you, Ms Nankya, who have rather admirably put on a Marxist stance in your literary criticism; you whose fellow workers are underfed, undernourished, unclothed, uneducated, abused, whipped, raped and incarcerated for failing to provide enough raw materials to the capitalist world, should have accepted the 10,000 dollars J.F. Kennedy award for literary criticism – an award that is as exorbitant as it is capitalistic in conception? (With amusement, he announces her answer to fellow journalists:)

JWM: Ms Nankya says, ladies and gentlemen, that she has not come here to bandy words with agents of imperialism and exploitation. CIA assassins. Thank you Ms Nankya. (*general laughter, amidst which journalist with camera comes on the scene*)

JWC: Just look at my finger Ms Nankya. Just look at my finger. Nothing to do with CIA assassination devices, I assure you. Just to get your black-is-beautiful face in position. Tilt your chin up a bit, please. Thaat's it, baby. Thaat's it. Now hold it there, baby. I won't be long. (*while he fixes his camera*) This will be the best photograph of the decade. Hit the headlines from China to Chicago. From Siberia to Pretoria. Here we go 'Nanky! Just a ten thousand dollar Jacqueline Kennedy smile, and I'm your man for ever. (*takes snap; then with gusto, and beside himself with his achievement*) Brilliant! A masterpiece that will turn the Pope Apopsy-wopsi. Thank you, 'Nanky.' (*blows her a kiss; animated laughter*)

(Lady Journalist (LJ) grabs her chance and interviews Nankya. There is some kind of rapport between the two women. For the first time Nankya answers questions – a development that occasions a flurry of numb questions from the men journalists.)

LJ: Miss Nankya, ten thousand dollars is a pretty handsome sum of money. What do you intend to do with it?

NANKYA: What would you do with that kind of money?
LJ: Go around the world seeing places and people, maybe. Or perhaps build myself a villa in Venice. Or just simply laze around: plenty of food and wine and pleasant company ... you know.

NANKYA: Even if your own people were starving, deprived, degraded, denied their rightful place in the sun?

LJ: Well, mine aren't exactly starving. But still, what do you plan to do with your ten thousand dollars?

NANKYA: Arm my people. My comrades in arms.

LJ: I beg your pardon?

NANKYA: Yes, arm the Patriotic Front down south. They need every penny of the prize.

JWM: You mean the terrorists, the murderers in Rhodesia?

NANKYA: In Zimbabwe, my dear sir.

JWM: This is preposterous. How could you do that Nankiey, or whatever the name is? How could you even think of it? Here you are, an apparently well educated girl, civil – one might almost say – and cultured; and the only thing that you can think of is genocide! Aren't you ashamed to utter such atrocious nonsense before your hosts? Do you realise that these terrorists have massacred innocent civilians in cold blood?

NANKYA: Their oppressors, yes. They have killed the oppressors and their lackeys. And for your information, good sir, that's not even a beginning yet. There's more to come.

JWN: I knew it. We have a diehard communist on our plate. Behind that austere smile lies the heart of a bloody communist. A barbarian.

JWM: Do you know the number of nuns they have raped?

NANKYA: A handful of collaborators, that's all. But as I say ...

JWN: And the innocent children they have impaled?

NANKYA: Prisoners of war.

JWC: And the buildings – the beautiful buildings – they have burnt down in the name of liberation? What of the bridges they have blown up?

JWN: The railway lines?

JWM: The mines?

JWN: The ranches?

JWM: The lot.

NANKYA: Their property. Whatever they choose to do with their property is their own business.

JWM: Their property? This is the limit. The height of insolence. Once a barbarian, always a barbarian. (*JWM folds up his gear and prepares to leave as the other journalists begin to incite the audience as they leave. "BURN HER. BLOW HER UP. BLOODY*

NIGGER. ZINJAMP. BABOON COMMUNIST. AWAY WITH THE COMMUNIST", etc. They exit, except for one 'journalist', Bwogo, who will gradually fall back into his character. For the moment he is ready with his notebook and pencil.)

BWOGO: Ms Nankya, you belong to the women's lib; what have you got to say about marriage?

NANKYA: I beg your pardon?

BWOGO: Marriage. What have you got to say about it? Bind you till death doth you part.

NANKYA: (suddenly realising she is left alone with Bwogo) what are you talking about?

BWOGO: 'What God has put together let no man put asunder.'

NANKYA: Bwogo, you dare ask me that?

BWOGO: What?

NANKYA: Marriage.

BWOGO: Wedding gown and wedding bells.

NANKYA: Do you really want to know or ...

BWOGO: Brides-maids and the flowers.

NANKYA: ... Or are you just shooting crap?

BWOGO: Till death do us part.

NANKYA: One second?

BWOGO: What?

NANKYA: The moment of conception.

BWOGO: I see. Go on.

NANKYA: And then ...

BWOGO: Nine months.

NANKYA: The length of a pregnancy.

BWOGO: You've got it. Go on.

NANKYA: The conjugal bulge on the belly.

BWOGO: Maternity dress and iron tablets.

NANKYA: Labour pains. Terrible time. Before the final push.

BWOGO: Boy or girl?

NANKYA: Doesn't matter.

BWOGO: That's it. A child is a child. Go on.

NANKYA: Clump the cord. Normal delivery.

BWOGO: Not 'untimely torn from mother's womb'?

NANKYA: Normal.

BWOGO: Breastfeed or ...?

NANKYA: Glucose feed.

BWOGO: Right track.

NANKYA: Nestle milk and cerelac.

BWOGO: Wet nappies.

NANKYA: What?

BWOGO: Wet nappies in the crib. Hell of a job.

NANKYA: Soap suds and serrated palms.

BWOGO: Beads with different colours ... for toys.

NANKYA: Indifferent maid. Muck in her fingernails.

BWOGO: Money.

NANKYA: Kindergarten. Learn and leisure.

BWOGO: You need bags of money.

NANKYA: "Ba ba black sheep."

BWOGO: All the way. At every turn. Bags and bags of money. From the crib to the coffin.

NANKYA: Then the Sunday school.

BWOGO: (*has realised where the conversation is leading to*) What Sunday school? Sabbath – day of rest.

NANKYA: At the mission.

BWOGO: CUT.

NANKYA: What now?

BWOGO: Not cut out for me.

NANKYA: What isn't?

BWOGO: The whole business. Not for me.

NANKYA: You started it.

BWOGO: The mission. Something I can't understand.

NANKYA: Nuns and priests. Starched-white habits and "Our Lord who art in heaven ..."

BWOGO: Boss's mission, I mean. Very bizarre.

NANKYA: (*disappointed*). Oh. I see. Boss's mission, of course.

BWOGO: Neighbours fighting over some barren stretch of land simply because some White prospector said there might be oil. Said *might be* oil, mind you. That's enough to make our neighbours jump at each other's throats. Height of stupidity.

NANKYA: Do you still want to know what I think about marriage?

BWOGO: Wet nappies. I have seen them ... on Sundays.

NANKYA: The nappies?

BWOGO: Married couples. Cuddling each other in cars, licking ice creams. Enough to make a cat vomit.

NANKYA: Depends.

BWOGO: Depends on what?

NANKYA: The couples.

BWOGO: Same thing. Routine work. The women especially. Mornings: pawing expensive sofas. Afternoons: fumbling around the house to fill up space, or yodelling out Christian hymns which they half understand. Evenings: their eyes glued on T.V. sets watching irrelevant films and poorly produced local programmes. At night: sex without passion, without love. What the hell?

NANKYA: There are career women.

BWOGO: Worst of the lot. Bothering their bosses. No, sir, marriage isn't for me. I'm not one for the cage or the chains. A man belongs to the open air.

Move around. Make a million or make friends. As simple as that.

NANKYA: Go ye and reproduce.

BWOGO: That's another thing. The brats. Soiling the sinks and wetting the carpets. Jik and Robbialac should be grateful. (*moves towards the sink*) Incidentally, are you going to clean up the sink? I'm thirsty.

NANKYA: I'm not thirsty.

BWOGO: So?

NANKYA: You wash the glasses.

BWOGO: (*at the sink washing the glasses*) False move.

NANKYA: Who by?

BWOGO: The Boss. I can't get over it. Extremely unwise in the circumstances. Peasants are feeling the pinch-after the budget. The army especially. The army is very restive. Anything could happen. Peace mission abroad and pieces back home. It's as if the man was being propelled by some premonition. Refused to listen to his military advisers. "We can't always have foreigners as our intermediaries," says he. "It is high time we learnt to wash our own dirty linen in private." Amazing. (*now wiping the glasses*) Give them more guns, that's what I say. That's what they need. Not a round table conference. Guns.

NANKYA: Genocide. That's what it's called.

BWOGO: That's right. The survival of the fittest. Boss sometimes lacks business acumen. He doesn't realise that so long as our neighbours are mortally interlocked in combat, we can do a bit of business. Do you remember seven years ago? We made quite a bit of money when our neighbours to the south had an open confrontation. One must always keep a keen eye and ear for business. Here was an entire population plagued by jiggers. And what did I say? Safety pins. The armies can't fight properly if they are plagued by jiggers. So we gave them millions of safety pins in exchange for their coffee. And it worked.

NANKYA: You've forgotten the floods.

BWOGO: Still have two hours or so.

NANKYA: Maybe you are afraid.

BWOGO: Afraid? Afraid of what?

NANKYA: The peasants are feeling the pinch. The army especially. Restive. That's what you said. And besides you're Boss's first cousin. Chairman of the Building Board. Most of all, head of the State Research Bureau. That's pretty close, brother. Enough to unsettle a saint. Given a chance, some people could hit back at the head of the Research Bureau. And you know it.

BWOGO: Do I now?

NANKYA: Yes, you are afraid. Anything could happen.

BWOGO: Anything like what?

NANKYA: A coup, maybe. The land is caved in with corruption. The atmosphere hangs heavy with various grievances. Men deprived of the land they fought for. By Boss. Mercenaries terrorising the populace.

BWOGO: You don't fancy Boss, do you?

NANKYA: Graduates grovelling in dustbins in search of sustenance; the Civil Service sore about MPs' salary hikes; temples tainted with martyred blood and, above all, uncertainty and death. Death stalking the streets like thousands of soldiers on the beat. The situation is real bad. It will either be assassination or a bloody coup.

BWOGO: No. Boss will be the last one to be toppled by a coup.

NANKYA: That's what he says.

BWOGO: I know. But still, he shouldn't.

NANKYA: What about you and I?

BWOGO: What about us?

NANKYA: And the coming baby?

BWOGO: What of it?

NANKYA: You said anybody could have done it.

BWOGO: Did I now? (*offers her a drink; she takes it*)

NANKYA: Had anybody known me before you, Bwogo?
Had anybody ... before you seduced me?

BWOGO: (*absent-mindedly, toying with his glass*)
"In big executive offices
On the Afghanistan carpets
Secretaries gape at the ceiling"

NANKYA: That trick won't work again.

BWOGO: Afraid to stake their shillings?

NANKYA: Try something else.

BWOGO: "As they are hurriedly filled."

NANKYA: Stop it, Bwogo.

BWOGO: "And then they pick up their garments
Hurry to their rented rooms
Doubting
Their fulfilment."

NANKYA: It won't work.

BWOGO: That's what you think.

NANKYA: I'm telling you.

BWOGO: In big executive offices.

NANKYA: In your office, to be exact.

BWOGO: (*trapped*) What the hell?

NANKYA: Did you find a rapture? Afterwards you told me:
"Nankya, you may not believe me, but it is a miracle to find a virgin nowadays."

BWOGO: So I did, did I?

NANKYA: Can you deny that, too? Six months of calculated abstinence during which time you had your sex orgies on the sly. "Platonic," you said. "Our relationship is to be purely platonic." And for a while I got caught in the web of lies. You are crafty.

BWOGO: It doesn't pay to be pure, you see. To be pure is to be a failure. And the world is sick and tired of failures. Yes, the world has no room for those who are pure. Those who aren't successful. To wring success from the rocks of life, you have to be hard yourself. Hard and remorseless and unfeeling. That is the gospel according to Saint Success.

NANKYA: Like you callously disposed of Rutaro. Tall and handsome. Eyes big and bright like diamonds.

BWOGO: That is provocation.

NANKYA: First Class Honours, Animal Husbandry. Dying to take on the world and change it. And he disappeared into thin air like a flea's fart. That was hard and remorseless, all right.

BWOGO: You shouldn't have told me.

NANKYA: It was the truth. We went out for dinner one night, with a friend of his. Danced and drunk quite a bit. I found myself in the same bed with him afterwards. Not as much as a kiss or a caress. He slept in his trousers on top of the blankets. A man of principles. Took no advantage. Like some people would.

- BWOGO:** Tell me another.
- NANKYA:** This is not to say he didn't try. But nothing happened, I swear.
- BWOGO:** Which is why I did it. Said to myself: "If Beth is this sort, goes to dine and dance each time I turn my back, I might as well do it, damn it;" And I did. On the Afghanistan carpet while the blood was still boiling in my veins.
- NANKYA:** In your big executive office ...
- BWOGO:** Can you swim, Nankya? Can you?
- NANKYA:** An innocent man. Killed for no reason. At *The International*. His cries for help unheeded by one and all.
- BWOGO:** No, that wouldn't work.
- NANKYA:** He was drunk.
- BWOGO:** Too long a distance.
- NANKYA:** Drunk and trying to be friendly.
- BWOGO:** And familiar. Very familiar.
- NANKYA:** Just asked for a simple dance. "Do you mind if I dance with your lady?" he asked you. 'Go right ahead, young man,' you told him. He danced extremely well, as if he knew that *that* would be his last dance.
- BWOGO:** He had no business being familiar with you.
- NANKYA:** I saw no harm in a simple dance. And, besides, you were busy negotiating business deals.
- BWOGO:** Familiarity breeds ...
- NANKYA:** Death.
- BWOGO:** Contempt.
- NANKYA:** Death. At least for him.
- BWOGO:** You're deliberately provoking me, Nankya.
- NANKYA:** In a way I feel guilty because of him. I don't know about you.
- BWOGO:** Let's get out of here.
- NANKYA:** You killed him.
- BWOGO:** The floods are coming ...
- NANKYA:** Pushed him down the staircase all the way from the fifteenth floor of *The International Hotel*. That was hard all right. Hard and remorseless.
- BWOGO:** Time is running out on us, Nankya.
- NANKYA:** Kicked him and shovelled him down the staircase with their military boots. Your boys did. For a mere two thousand shillings. What callosity!
- BWOGO:** Drop that jazz, Nankya. I'm not impressed in the least.
- NANKYA:** Two thousand shillings and a man goes tumbling down the stairs to his death. His brains splotched all over the staircase. "Most wanted criminal killed as he was trying to escape." That's what the papers said.
- BWOGO:** (*involuntarily wanting to beat her up, but checks himself*) Stop it, I said.

- NANKYA:** Most wanted criminal! My God!!
- BWOGO:** (*slaps her hard*) STOP IT! (*Quick drink ... silence*)
- NANKYA:** You slapped me.
- BWOGO:** I know.
- NANKYA:** You slapped me very hard.
- BWOGO:** Was meant to.
- NANKYA:** You slapped me because I told you the truth.
- BWOGO:** Shouldn't have.
- NANKYA:** You are cheap.
- BWOGO:** We all are.
- NANKYA:** Cheap like debris. Leftovers.
- BWOGO:** That's right. Leftovers. Debris. Floods of sediments from the cradle to the coffin. Now, let's get out of here.
- NANKYA:** I'm going nowhere with you ... you...
- BWOGO:** Go on. Say it. Go right ahead and say it. You're not going away with a murderer.
- NANKYA:** I wasn't going to say that.
- BWOGO:** I read it in your eyes. The fright. The accusation. Something unspoken, but loud as a bell in the dark.
- NANKYA:** Imagination ... Maybe even guilt. Guilt goads, However hardened one is.
- BWOGO:** I'm leaving. (*puts on his jacket*)
- NANKYA:** Suit yourself.
- BWOGO:** I'm leaving without you.
- NANKYA:** The door is not bolted and the storm outside has stopped.
- BWOGO:** But the floods, Nankya, the floods. Every minute that passes draws us nearer to danger.
- NANKYA:** I'll look after that myself; and, besides, I didn't come with you. Leave me alone ... Leave me before you regret it.
- BWOGO:** How can I leave you here? The floods are coming, time is running out and ...
- NANKYA:** "You are playing high and mighty." I have heard that before.
- BWOGO:** You have no boat, and besides ...
- NANKYA:** My own business.
- BWOGO:** Things being equal we need twenty minutes to get ashore.
- NANKYA:** (*unimpressed*) Time and tide wait for no man. Is that it? Coxcomb politics.
- BWOGO:** Look, I'm sorry I slapped you. I hate being needled, being prodded and probed.
- NANKYA:** Same here ... Goes against the grain.
- BWOGO:** You were needling me too much. Deliberate provocation.
- NANKYA:** You didn't bleed. No wounds, no scars.

- BWOGO:** Things of the past are best unraked. What would happen if we relived all our past? We would have no time for the present. We must forget things of the past.
- NANKYA:** Some things?
- BWOGO:** All things. Each moment should be a new slate to write on ... Now let's be off. In less than two hours the floods ravage this island.
- NANKYA:** Mere fabrication from the weather man: "Scattered showers and thunderstorms," that's what they always say. Never heard an accurate weather report all my life.
- BWOGO:** You don't have to offer yourself to the spirit of the lake. Brimful as it is ... brimful with rotten corpses. No wonder the damned place stinks: flood victims, mutilated bodies of army deserters, unidentified corpses of the enemies of the system, suicide cases ... God! The list is endless.
- NANKYA:** You're coming round, aren't you? Facts glaring at you right in your face. You can't close your eyes to wipe them off, can you? They tickle the conscience, once in a while.
- BWOGO:** Look, let's get away from this ...
- NANKYA:** Dumping ground.
- BWOGO:** What?
- NANKYA:** Dumping ground for the State Research Bureau. Credit is all yours.
- BWOGO:** Don't say that Nankya. You are starting again ... the prodding.
- NANKYA:** "Prisoners spending too much time digging graves. Besides, we need the land for mechanised agriculture and industrial development. Let's just dump the bloody bodies in the lake. Minimal pollution." You probably proclaimed that at one of your SRB meetings. And everybody applauded and agreed you deserved the annual anti-pollution award. That's distinguished service for you.
- BWOGO:** Stop being frivolous.
- NANKYA:** Credit goes where it is due. "For nonpareil service to the State, we have unanimously ..." *(cutting her short)* Do you know that ghosts of the departed prowl this island at nightfall?
- NANKYA:** "... we have unanimously awarded the medal to Bwogo. Bwogo is the man for nonpareil service to the State."
- BWOGO:** Ask any fisherman here.
- NANKYA:** "Bwogo, the poet laureate, has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt ..."
- BWOGO:** One caught a corpse of an army brigadier in his fishnet. I met him. Scatter-brained. Poor fellow. Has never recovered from the experience. Goes about talking to himself all the time. Sometimes talks to trees and buildings. Any object.

NANKYA: The papers never reported it. Too sensitive. The brigadier had quite a following in the army. Part of the reason it is restive.

BWOGO: You're needling me again.

NANKYA: (*imitating him*) Am I, now?

BWOGO: You are definitely heading for trouble.

NANKYA: For the lake, you mean? Stone around my neck and then ... plop into the lake.

BWOGO: They call it masochism. Cut it out.

NANKYA: "Body nowhere to be found. Case closed."

BWOGO: I'm warning you. Cut it out.

NANKYA: Or just simply: "Most wanted criminal commits suicide." Is that how the papers will put it? Suicide or disappearance?

BWOGO: STOP IT DAMN YOU! (*He pounces on her. There is a struggle during which Kyeyune enters excitedly. Bwogo, who is startled by this unexpected intrusion, draws a pistol from his jacket and fires. He misses. Kyeyune has collapsed to the ground, his gear scattering all over. Nankya lets out a scream.*)

NANKYA: BWOGO! You have killed him. (*tries to move towards Kyeyune; Bwogo pulls her back*)

BWOGO: Don't. (*his pistol at the ready*)

NANKYA: You've killed an innocent man – again.

BWOGO: Trespassing on private conscience strictly forbidden ... Who is he?

NANKYA: An innocent old man.

BWOGO: Should have knocked. Else what are doors there for?

NANKYA: (*freeing herself and going over to Kyeyune*) Oh, Kyeyune. I knew it. I knew it would come to this.

BWOGO: Dogs and doors for security reasons. Even cretins know that.

NANKYA: The moment you slipped out of this door, I knew you would face your fate.

BWOGO: Do you know him?

NANKYA: God, I'm tired of meeting blood everywhere I go.

BWOGO: Who is he?

NANKYA: The mainland is choking with it, the lake bubbling with it like a cauldron and the island is barricaded with blood.

BWOGO: (*furious and violent, bangs the table hard*) Stop jabbering, woman. (*The bang is thunderous enough to wake up Kyeyune from his shock. His immediate reaction is to pray. Jerks himself up into a supplicating posture. Bwogo is suspicious – restrained by Nankya from shooting.*)

KYEYUNE: Kagoro, lord of the skies, send your violent shafts to other heads. If there is one amongst us who has gone astray, one of us pointing an accusing finger at you, let not your heavy hand land on all of us.

NANKYA: (anxiously) Are you all right?

KYEYUNE: (still looks distraught: unsure of his fate and where-abouts) Where am I? Please, don't kill me. Don't kill me. I pray you. I'm only a simple person. Spare me masters.

NANKYA: (shakes him vigorously to bring him back to reality) Kyeyune, Kyeyune, look at me. You're safe. No one is going to hurt you.

KYEYUNE: They will. They will. The ambassadors of darkness. I saw them. Faces masked with vengeance. Tell them to leave me alone.

NANKYA: I will. Now calm down.

KYEYUNE: (still on his knees) How can I? How can I calm down? Can't you see? The times are turbulent and man swift of foot and finger. Kagoro, our lord and master, let not the grass suffer when the mighty ones size each other's biceps. I have already seen enough to tear my tendons apart.

NANKYA: (lifts him up and examines him) Did he hurt you? (after a while) Can't see any blood.

KYEYUNE: Floods of it in the lake. Oozing and spurting out of the boat and the waves ferrying it across to the island. Then I said to myself, 'If they have to come for me, too, they will not find me by the shore. I know I'll die but if I must die now, I'll not die like a dog. My eyes squinting at the sky. My mouth gaping at the sportive flies. Someone must close my mouth and close

my eyes! And I came back here ... Here where I thought there was still a bit of sanity.

NANKYA: Let's look at your hands. (examines the hands and legs, etc.) No harm done. The chest, too, is okay. Calm down, Kyeyune.

BWOGO: (taking command of the situation) Who is this fellow?

KYEYUNE: He has called them home. (He looks around for reassurance. His fright is abating.)

BWOGO: Who is he, Nankya?

KYEYUNE: The man with the irresistible beckon. Three nails stuck in his skull. He has called them home.

BWOGO: What is all this nonsense?

KYEYUNE: "Fireside prattles," that's what he called my stories. But the master of the waves knew better. There I was lingering along the shore waving farewell to them. I never knew it would be the last farewell. There I was tickling the sand with my toes, feeling bored and lonely and thinking of the mysteries of the lake and the man with the three nails stuck in his skull ... the chief patrol of the waters. The lake too needs patrolling. Poachers are through with elephant tusks. They have turned to the lake. I was thinking of this when, behind the floating island, boats emerged. Boats like a herd of hippos sailing leisurely.

BWOGO: Can you follow what he is talking about?

KYEYUNE: They spotted the lonely boat with the men, women and children singing, "Onward Christian soldiers, marching on to war, with the banner of Jesus." Singing and clapping loudly ... oblivious of the world around them. (*He reenacts the aiming, shooting and bodies toppling over.*) Then suddenly, spouts of gunfire and fierce arrows of brilliance penetrating the body of the lonely boat. Thunder claps bouncing off the body of the boat and sending reverberations of death across the island and beyond. Men, women and children toppling over from the boat into the lake. Almost immediately, the man with the three nails in his skull shot up like an agitated dolphin and started singing, "I am the fisher of men." He let out one menacing laughter as he gathered the bodies into his net, and then disappeared back into the lake.

BWOGO: Who is this madman?

NANKYA: (*who has been following Kyeyune's story attentively*) He is Kyeyune. Looks after this place.

BWOGO: Since when?

KYEYUNE: I have seen you before, sir. I can't remember where. Bwogo Yes, I remember; we have met. Since when ...?

NANKYA: Three months now. Took over from Kyambadde, after they had come for him.

KYEYUNE: You should have been there. The chaos and the panic. Adults trampling down the young. And Mr 'No-fish-no-fuss'-pathetic figure. I almost laughed. But then I said, 'Who am I to laugh at Fortune's backside?'

BWOGO: Who did? Who came for Kyambadde?

NANKYA: Who else? The State Research Bureau. Said he was dangerous. An agitator paid by the guerrillas to incite the masses. An agent of Zionism and neo-colonialism.

BWOGO: It can't be true. I should have known.

NANKYA: You can't know everything. If you don't believe me, ask anybody on the island.

KYEYUNE: Which anybody? They are gone. Can't you understand that? Gone. Kaput. Kalasi. He called them to his domicile. (*imitating the sound of shooting and acting out the part of a frantic soldier at the game*) Tu-tu-tu-tu-(*His shooting suggests the enemies are all over the place. He is shooting and ducking and retreating and advancing until the last enemy drops dead.*)

NANKYA: You mean ... Oh, no. It can't be true.

BWOGO: Is he all right? Or is he gone mad?

KYEYUNE: That's right. ... MAD. Mad like a monkey. That's what he called me, Mr 'Dogs-are-prohibited, goats unpermitted, no-fish-no-fuss.' And then

tu-tu-tu-tu-tu. Spit fire and reverberations. You should have seen him. Stunned by the fierce arrows of brilliance. Immobilised by the terror of unexpected blackout. He was the first one to fall.

BWOGO: Who are you talking about?

KYEYUNE: Mr 'No-fish-no-fuss.' The terror of the island. And then there was more shooting and screaming. Mothers clinging on to their babies, and fathers shielding off volleys of bullets from their children ... with their frail hands. It was a terrible sight. The boat whirled round and round and round in circles before it finally sunk into the belly of the lake.

BWOGO: (*Gradually the truth dawns on him; slight panic.*) Who did all that?

KYEYUNE: How do I know? Maybe the fisher of men .. maybe the man with the three nails stuck in his skull. It can be lonely sometimes, at the bottom of the lake. He needs company once in a while.

NANKYA: Is this true, Kyeyune? Has it actually happened?

KYEYUNE: What do you mean is this true? The flame tree knows only one truth. How to accommodate flashes of lightning. And what of man? What does man know, apart from petty squabbling and aimless murder?

NANKYA: Good God! Shall we ever rid ourselves of this incessant bloodshed?

(*Bwogo has been trying to work out the whole episode, comes out with an 'answer.' Nankya is also lost in her own thoughts. They talk at cross-purposes.*)

(pained) An entire island wiped off for no apparent reason!

The accursed work of the guerrillas. That's right. Guerrillas.

Poor Nnalongo and her twins.

Guerrillas parading their ill-gotten guns. An assortment of guns from Peking, or are they from Russia without love?

They too have gone down the lake.

Dragging Muslims from their mosques, ripping their bellies open ...

Faithful Christian. Like my mother.

Burning their shops and shambas ...

Never missed her Mass ever since she was baptised.

Yes, I can see it all happening. Bloody bastards. Raping, looting, disemboweling and ...

And the twin toddlers-poor pups.

Boss is a way and now the mice master the homestead in broad daylight.

- NANKYA:** "Kato will grow to become a bishop," she used to say, 'a bishop, and his sister, Nyakato, will become a doctor.'
- BWOGO:** Yes, they wouldn't have dared if Boss were around. But now, all is lost
- NANKYA:** "Kato will heal men's souls and Nyakato their bodies." Everything seemed clearly laid out in her mind. Like the alphabet.
- BWOGO:** We told him. We asked him not to go. Told him the time was inappropriate. But he was adamant and stubborn like a stinging bee. Now all is lost.
- KYEYUNE:** (*gathering up his gear*) Most extraordinary fellow, the man with the three nails. Once he beckons, you get the itch in your feet. Nothing will hold you back. Amazing.
- BWOGO:** All lost and gone down the drain. I'll never forgive Boss ... leaving us in such a lurch. Seven years of sweat and saving slipping through our fingers like melting ghee. And the witch hunting that will follow. Witch-hunting and reprisals. The slightest noise sending a chill in the spine. A telephone call, a knock at the door a muted laughter - they all sound like dynamite. Men avoiding the beaten tracks and the part costumes because there are road-blocks every other mile, and behind them stem faces an stiff hands carrying automatic weapons. Loaded and ready. Excruciating identification parades The Bible against the Koran. Robes against turbans. Yes, I can see it happening already. (*approaches Nankya, diary as 'notebook' in his hand; pulls out a chair and plants it between them: road-block. Plays the part of the officer-in-charge.*) What's your name?
- NANKYA:** Kato and Nyakato - healers of men. That was her idea. Her grand plan. The family's tribute to Ssalongo.
- BWOGO:** (*insistent*) Your name, please?
- NANKYA:** There are all fishers and healers of men. Did you know that? Fishers and healers. Her children were to be healers. And what about you, sir?
- BWOGO:** (*losing his cool*) What is your bloody name?
- NANKYA:** (*with impunity*) Kill-me-quick.
- BWOGO:** (*flabbergasted; his eager attempt to fulfill his duties frustrated*) Whaat?
- NANKYA:** KILL-ME-QUICK.
- BWOGO:** Sooner than you think. My good fellow ... Tribe?
- NANKYA:** African. Black like soot. Body and soul.
- BWOGO:** I'm hereby warning you that unless you cooperate fully with the law-enforcing officers you will face ...
- NANKYA:** The firing-squad. Is that it? 'The priest has given his absolution may your soul rest in pieces.' Squad.

BWOGO: Occupation?

NANKYA: Census Board. Counting corpses, whenever possible.

BWOGO: You are overstretching my patience. I'll repeat the question. What's your occupation?

NANKYA: Census officer. Counting corpses.

BWOGO: I can see you are bent on obstructing the course of justice ... Place of birth?

NANKYA: General Ward ... National Hospital. Floor mucked with faeces and vomit. The walls with blood stains. Every patient choking with the stench.

BWOGO: Age?

NANKYA: Younger than death ... older than birth.

BWOGO: You seem to be taking this lightly. Should anything unpleasant happen, you've got yourself to blame. Religion?

NANKYA: Traditional. Cowrie-shell and dog's horn, if you have ever seen one.

BWOGO: (*His patience has run out. He grabs her and twists her hand behind her back.*) Bloody bastard. What do you think you are? We have tried to be civil with you. We expect you to do the same. Answer the questions properly like everybody else. Cut out your cynicism. Right? ... Right. (*forces her into a squatting position*) Sit and be still and behave yourself. If you are civil, we will be civil. If not ... (*gets out his pistol and points it at her temple*) Understood? Right all.

Here we go again. (*ready with his notebook and pencil*) What's your name?

(meekly) Adriko.

BWOGO: Adriko. (*writing down*) Adriko who?

NANKYA: Abdallah Adriko. Double A, for short.

BWOGO: Abdallah Adriko ... Occupation?

NANKYA: Businessman.

BWOGO: Occupation: businessman ... what business?

NANKYA: Fish and chips.

BWOGO: Fish and chips ... Place of birth?

NANKYA: North, North-West. Two miles from town.

BWOGO: Religion?

NANKYA: Islam. I thought it was obvious.

BWOGO: Religion: Islam. Thank you sir. To the landrover, please. (*lifts her up and pushes her off the stage but she lands in Kyeyune's hands who has been eating an orange all this while*) Captain James! There is your man. Adriko, circumcised, non-pork-eater and a businessman. Ready to face his Allah. (*back to his role*) That's what they are doing now ... screening. Christians to the right and to freedom. Moslems to the left and into the landrovers towards the maximum security prison. Bread and water, before they are forced to hammer each other to death. (*Nankya frees herself*) Maximum security. That's another story. One-way traffic. Free ticket to hell.

NANKYA: That's it. Maximum security. That's what happened to Ssalongo. What a terrible way to die.

BWOGO: (*partly to himself and partly to the audience*) Maximum security? Hell of a place. I'm telling you-and I know. Pailfuls of shit and floods of piss and vomit. Blotches of clotted blood on the floor, graffiti written out in blood on the walls and the Koran. But this time, the Bible instead. Useful commodity this: either read it and get converted, smoke it to reduce the tension or simply use it as T.P. for quick relief.

NANKYA: He went through all that, Ssalongo did. Fifty-five years old, a wife with twins, an ailing mother and a simple groceries shop at the border. Fifty thousand shillings paid for his ransom did not help.

BWOGO: The end of the road-that's what the maximum security is. A slow tortuous process. Every deed meant to break one down. Endless chores. Mornings: digging mass graves and burials; afternoons: carnage - the thudding of hammers against the skulls; evenings: enforced cannibal feasts on fellow inmates, and at night: hallucinations. It's already happening. I know that. Crusaders, they call themselves. (*He spits.*) Bloody agents of biblical cruelty.

NANKYA: Good for you. At least you know the menu very well, it appears. But Ssalongo, frail of body, as harmless as a saint ...

BWOGO: Guerrillas. Crusaders of Christ spreading the gospel of death. What the hell! Bloody mice nibbling away at the greased garb of state in the name of Christendom while Boss is away on a busy peace-keeping mission. Crusaders creating chaos and blaming ...

NANKYA: SRB.

BWOGO: Guerrillas.

NANKYA: SRB. Remorseless and unfeeling.

BWOGO: Guerrillas. Disembowling their victims in public.

NANKYA: They grabbed Ssalongo from his modest shop at the border, stuffed him into the boot of their 504 and whisked him off to maximum security. Said he was carrying on dubious trade with dangerous refugees. Then two months later, two agonising months of waiting and praying, Nnalongo learnt over the radio that her husband had been shot dead while trying to escape. (*disgusted*) Deadwood! Can't even coin up new excuses.

BWOGO: It's all lies, lies, lies. Lies intended to tarnish the good name ...

NANKYA: The twins got to know their father was dead. 'Was he a robber, Mummie, a cut-throat, as they say?' asked young Nyakato. 'Was he a dangerous man, a traitor, as the radio says?' quipped in Kato. Nnalongo simply said,

'He was a good man and a Christian. That's why they killed him.' Now the three are also dead. Dead and gone. Joined their Old Man (*Intermittent bursts of machine gun-fire at a distance. Pregnant silence in the room. Kyeyune has managed to take cover behind Nankya. Bwogo, rooted to his spot, is visibly shaken. More bursts of gun-fire.*)

BWOGO: *(to still himself more than anything else)* That's them - the avengers of the Bible. *(He forces himself towards the window to check but immediately retreats back at the sound of more guns.)*

BWOGO: Bloody bastards. *(notices Nankya staring at him with calculated amusement)* What the hell! Say something. Don't stare at me like a bloody owl. *(silence)* Is anything funny?

NANKYA: Cracks in the stony wall.

BWOGO: *(quick glance at the walls)* What?

NANKYA: You are cracking.

BWOGO: It isn't funny.

NANKYA: Cracking and trembling all over.

BWOGO: *(steadyng himself)* Your fault. We should have gone much earlier.

NANKYA: *(naughty chuckle)* The boss of the State Research Bureau is trembling like a leaf. *(pulling Kyeyune to the front)* Kyeyune, come and see your

master's pneumonic tremors. *(Kyeyune ducks back into his former position.)* This is hilarious. A little retort from the rifle and the invincible boss of SRB goes all jelly. The official mask is falling to pieces. And behind it? A desperate desire to cling on to life ... like anyone else. *(directed at Bwogo)* It is easier to prescribe a cure for any political malady, isn't it? Not as easy to take the prescription. *(Bwogo quickly grabs his pistol and sidles towards the door.)*

NANKYA: The flood is descending upon you, Bwogo. In its determined pursuit, it has swallowed up all your henchmen, one by one. You are all alone now. The floods, Bwogo, beware of the floods. *(Bwogo dodges an imaginary wave and retreats. From now on. Bwogo is so thoroughly engrossed in the web of Nankya's nightmare that his utmost concern is how to save himself.)*

NANKYA: The dead are no longer dead, Bwogo. They are up in arms to right their wrongs. They have risen from their deep slumber at the bottom of the lake and are carrying shrouds of vengeance towards you. *(Bwogo feeling caged. looks in all directions for an exit; none.)* For seven years you have resisted their persistent beckoning, for seven years added hundreds to their number. They are tired of waiting, waiting without having you in their midst. There will be a knock on that door any time now. Will you open it?

'He was a good man and a Christian. That's why they killed him.' Now the three are also dead. Dead and gone. Joined their Old Man (*Intermittent bursts of machine gun-fire at a distance. Pregnant silence in the room. Kyeyune has managed to take cover behind Nankya. Bwogo, rooted to his spot, is visibly shaken. More bursts of gun-fire.*)

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(She knocks on the table three times.) Will you open for your visitors, Bwogo? Will you open the door? Or would you rather they broke in? I can see you are not anxious to face them. Very well. They will have to break the door. (The door is forced open. Enter the Floods: masked characters in costumes that will bring out the floods effect. They slowly surround the room. Bwogo hides under the table.)

NANKYA

They know where you're hiding, Bwogo. They know you are under the table. They are now coming for you under the table - slowly but surely. (As the Floods ebb and flow towards the table. Bwogo hops onto the chair.)

NANKYA:

No false hopes, Bwogo. They will get you yet. Be it in the darkest nook in the underworld, or the hottest spot in hell, they will get you. They will get the mastermind of the SRB, the chief perpetrator of all evil in this land. I can see them putting their heads together discussing the punishment that should be meted out to you. The lake is turbulent, all right. Violent waves clashing against each other, all because of you. Waves of dissent against waves of assent, floods of retribution against floods of attrition. There is mature silence now. Silence, consultations and the final agreement. The odour of massacred blood must be expurgated. The noses are planted in all directions to catch

the slightest whiff of the odour. That's it. They have found you yet again. Tirelessly, noiselessly, they are on the track again. (Bwogo crawls onto the table; squats as he observes the approaching Floods)

NANKYA:

You once thought yourself unreachable, untouchable, like you have always thought yourself indispensable and indisposible. But here they come again. Men with a mission. Here they come. As patient as death. As sure as silence, the final silence.

(The Floods rise up higher and higher to engulf Bwogo. In the meantime, like a man about to drown, he clutches at anything in sight. He tries kneeling and crawls on all fours around the table in vain. He stands up and tries either to dive or fly but realises there is no chance. As they engulf him, he ducks and 'swims' towards the corner where the telephone is. The Floods float around the table agitatedly. Bwogo tries to dial a number an action that is immediately answered by machine guns from without. Bwogo replaces the receiver as the Floods exit. Silence, during which Bwogo recovers from the nightmare. He tries to ring out again and again and again, each time more desperately; no luck.)

BWOGO:

NANKYA:

Bloody hell! Is everybody on holiday?

The storm ... maybe the storm snapped the telegraphic ...

BWOGO: Have they gone?

NANKYA: Who?

BWOGO: They were here, armed to the teeth.

NANKYA Who do you mean?

BWOGO: The shroud carriers riding on the crest of the floods. Looking for me everywhere ... everywhere. (*machine guns outside*) That's them. The shroud carriers. I'll face them man to man. Prove to them men still exist in this state. One to a thousand, I'll face them.

KYEYUNE: (*stepping forward*) When death has spotted a quarry, master; it never exudes its odours.

BWOGO: One blow for the Boss, come what may.

NANKYA: (*tantalisingly*) You want to leave us here, is that it? Take to your boat and flee to freedom?

KYEYUNE: Listen to her, master. Death keeps its odours unto itself.

BWOGO: (*dressing up*) What do they think they are? Just because Boss is away...

NANKYA: You're not leaving us here. This mess is all yours and Boss's. You better clear up the mess first.

BWOGO: I'm going, that's all. I'll be back soon.

NANKYA: You're not leaving us here.

BWOGO: Cut out the fuss. Moments ago, you were determined to stay. Said you'd not go with a lecher and a murderer. So what the hell? (*more machine guns*)

KYEYUNE: (*going over to Bwogo: and pleading with him*) Master, master, did you hear that? They have started again. I pray you don't go to them.

BWOGO: What do they think we are? A pile of faggots?

KYEYUNE: They will kill you, master. They are drunk with blood.

NANKYA: (*to Kyeyune*) Leave him alone. Bragging is not bravery.

BWOGO: Just because Boss is away; does that give them the licence to terrorise the citizenry?

KYEYUNE: Please tell him, madam. It's not worth it. I saw them. They are mad. Shooting and killing anything on sight.

NANKYA: If he wants to go, let him go.

KYEYUNE: What about us? Bayonets in our bellies. I don't like that.

NANKYA: You can go with him.

KYEYUNE: To face the fire with my bare hands? No, madam.

NANKYA: (*sternly but not unkind*) What exactly do you want to do? (*Kyeyune is blank.*)

BWOGO: Go down with one, bloody idiots. Crusaders? (*spits in disgust*) A bunch of baboons.

NANKYA: (*tempting him once more*) The floods ... the floods are coming.

BWOGO: I won't be long.

NANKYA: In less than two hours, the floods ravage this island.

BWOGO: There's still time, woman. First things first.

KYEYUNE: Please, master, listen to me. (*He goes down on his knees.*) Those are not men. They are mad. Don't go to them. (*Bwogo is not impressed. Kyeyune clutches at Bwogo's trousers.*) Please don't go, master. We need you ... We need you here.

NANKYA: Let him go if he likes. Bloody murderer. (*She storms into the backroom.*)

KYEYUNE: (*after making sure Nankya is out of hearing*) Can I come along with you, master? They wouldn't touch her I'm sure, or would they? Let me come with you. They wouldn't harm an old man like me.

BWOGO: Stay where you are. I won't be long. (*He pushes him aside and exits. Kyeyune, who is still on his knees, breaks out into prayer.*)

KYEYUNE: Kagoro, lord of life, send your violent shafts to other heads. If there is one among us, one who has gone astray, one whose chest bars your path, let your hand not land on all of us. Protect us that we may sing praises to you. (*He stands up and goes to the door and looks at Bwogo who has resolutely continued with his search. Gently closes the door and, shaking his head in amazement.*)

KYEYUNE: THE CALL OF THE BECKON! NO ONE CAN RESIST IT.

(*SLOW curtain or gradual dimming of the lights as the case may be. This is a convenient place to have an interval. On the other hand if the producer and his actors so wish, they could continue without a break.*)



the third wave

The setting is the same as in the Second Wave, if only tidier this time. Kyeyune is muttering to himself as he finishes off wiping the kitchenware in the sink. Waves can be heard lapping against the shore and the wind whistling in the trees. Kyeyune, somewhat agitated by these noises from without, moves to the window and peeps out. He is not at all too happy about what he sees or what he thinks he sees.

KYEYUNE: (*addressing some object outside*) If I must die, Irresistible One, spare me the lure of your beckon: my feet trudging towards the shore and my eyes glued to the one with the three nails stuck in his skull. My head is singed to the bone by the straight ones' irreconcilable folly and my hands limp with supplication. I have croaked my voice hoarse in prayer, Irresistible One, but no one hears! No one bothers. Too engrossed in grabbing and hoarding. My knee-caps have turned into slabs of stone with my perpetual pleas but everyone kicks me in the teeth. The world around me is falling to pieces, corpses upon corpses along the streets, in the jungle and in the lake, but no one takes heed of the squeals of terror in homesteads being deserted. I have given up, Irresistible One, given up and now I submit myself to the judgement of your heavy hand. (*moving away*

from the window to the table) And Nalubale, in her seventh year of labour, can no longer bear the monumental weight of the straight ones. She was abused, she tells her kind, abused and assaulted by the straight ones' unquenchable lust. She will not be appeased this time. No amount of supplication will change her mind. In the first instance, when she was trapped in Nyamgondho's net, she relented. It was her fault to venture beyond her father's realm into the environs of the straight ones. She relented and, in fact, transformed his dire poverty into excessive wealth; his foibles into a pillar of strength and his nonentity into renown. Wasn't he a celebrity then, a celebrity steadily heading for the highest stool of the straight ones? Wasn't he? If only he hadn't been incensed with unexpected success and turned his chest against her beaded waist? You are barren ... barren like a rock: he kept on taunting her, "a castaway good-for-nothing, debris of the floods." And he went ahead and sought out embraces from his own kind. Forgetting the wonders of her miraculous hand of plenty. What could she do? A woman, in foreign territory, uncared for, her generosity abused: what could she do? She increased his greed until such a time his own kind had to get rid of him ... three nails stuck in his head, his genitals in his mouth. Maybe an excessive punishment.

But what could she do ... ? After sometime, she reconsidered her decision. That is when she made him the patrol of the lake ... with specific duties to net the evil ones of his kind. But now her anger is unabatable. She will not relent. (*He demonstrates.*)

One noontide, when the waters were cold in her dime, she had decided to go out and spread her aquatic limbs on her father's rock, for a celestial bask. But Nyamgondho, who had been spying on her behind the floating islands, took this as an act of enticement, an unsolicited act of provocation. He cast away his garb of death, adorned himself in the garments of the straight ones.

Stealthily he slithered towards the rock, and before Nalubale had time to gather her garments, he was on top of her, hotly passionate, writhing with lust. She fought in vain to resist this defilement. She twirled her tail around his back to throw him off without success. He had his fill, all right. He had his fill unmindful of the consequences on those of his kind. For every thrust he made, we witnessed waves of destruction on the island; for every ejaculation, floods ravaged the entire island to avenge her lost chastity. Since then we have witnessed several floods, some mild, some mighty. On the

whole, we have gone on fishing and tilling the land for sustenance. But now we can no longer resist the call of the beckon. (*moves back to the window and addresses 'her'*) Daughter of the lake, it is not for me to stay away your mighty hand of injured pride. My slabby knee-cups bear me testimony to my pleas unto you. It is for you to determine our fate. Those of us who can still catch the rays of the sun behind closed doors, through chinks in the walls. (*He urgently moves to the centre of the stage.*) Now I have done it. I have done it without knowing. I have aroused her wrath upon us. She has woken up to the memory of the misdeeds of those gone before us. She is flexing her limbs to send the floods upon us once more. She has woken up, woken up the entire council of elders of her kind. The lords of the lake are perturbed all right. They are up in arms. They have suddenly noticed Nalubale is heavy with the child of the straight ones. A disgrace to her and a betrayal of her kind. For seven years she hid in her hut as she heaved and groaned with the weight of the straight ones. The sky is cast and the lake swollen like a pond bursting with a herd of hippos. Spare us, daughter of the lake. Spare us that we may recant and learn your mysteries. Spare us that we may bring forth strong saplings to revere you. ... Oh! What is the use? (*in despair*) She has spurned my prayers and turned a deaf ear

to our on-coming woes. The ninth year, the ninth year is knocking on our doors. Spare us, daughter of the lake. Shall we stand Nalubale's labour pains? Or shall we sink after her final push – the gush and the dreaded delivery that will bring the turbulent floods in its wake? For sure we need a deliverer. A martyr to atone our sins and appease the daughter of the lake. Will it be Master, our Master, unknowingly drawn to the scene of action? Will he sacrifice himself to save the few that remain? Or will he be the hand through which chastisement will come upon us? (*imitating Bwogo*) "Stay where you are," he said, "I won't be long." That door opened, the storm had stopped, the sky and the lake, clear and calm. There was a casual whistle, to attract attention. I heard it but closed my lips. And then the beckon, the itch in the feet and he galloped right into the net. "The call of the beckon. no one can resist it." I remember muttering to myself.

The terrible thing is that it can happen to you any time. You're having a good laugh, or a quiet moment of self-examination or just simply having great fun: a drink in one hand, and your other hand ruffling your lady's petticoat. And then the casual whistle, the beckon and the itch in the feet. Do you know you could forget all about your heavily laden handbag, young lady? And you, sir, your lady and follow

the call? I have lived long enough to see fish pouring down from the sky. So I should know.

NANKYA: (*calling from the back room*) Has he come back?

KYEYUNE: (*to himself*) That is the question. (*to the audience*) Has he come back yet? Or to be less optimistic: will he ever come back? In one piece?

NANKYA: (*enters ... surprised*) Where is he?

KYEYUNE: Wrong question. Calls for no answer.

NANKYA: But I thought you were talking to ...

KYEYUNE: The Patron of the lake, yes. Amazing personality. Remote control.

NANKYA : It's ages since he left.

KYEYUNE: First: his casual whistle ... to attract attention and then the suspension of time. That's how he goes about it. Casually but effectively.

NANKYA: He said he'd be back soon.

KYEYUNE: Then the irresistible beckon. Most crucial stage this. Beyond it, no turning back. The irreversible step ... Tell me, though, have you ever come face to face with ...? No. I shouldn't ask you that. You wouldn't be here otherwise, or would you?

NANKYA: I don't like it here. The whisperings of the waves on the shore, the rustling of the wind in the trees and dogs, dogs barking and retreating from their own shadows.

KYEYUNE: *(to himself)* The plague is catching on. *(to the audience)* That's how it starts. One gets squeamish and impatient. Then comes the itch and finally the gallop into the net.

NANKYA: *(fretting)* I wish I were at home ... with my mother. Tending flowers at the mission, sweeping and cleaning the church and dusting the pews. Rearranging the Bibles and hymn books for the evening services. There is peace there, or there was once upon a time. Peace and quiet. Oh, mother, why have I neglected ...?

KYEYUNE: The everlasting claim of the umbilical cord. That's it. Mother Earth. She takes whatever she gives. It is easier for some of us. We make no claims and none is made on us. No mother, no father. No wife, no children. I carry my destiny in my own palms. Ready to dispose of it at a throwaway price and at my own bidding.

NANKYA: She gave all she could, at her own bidding. Always slogging. Yes, I remember. Took me through an acute attack of measles at four and the earthquake of the forties. That's when she built a hut on her own. With Nankya tied on her back. Yes, she built it: dug the holes, put in the poles, kneaded the earth and plastered it on the wall frames. She would have thatched the roof had the catechist not offered to help. Talk of women being inferior. It's time she got a rest.

KYEYUNE: Six feet under. Complete rest. Full board and no tariffs.

NANKYA: Then came the locust invasion and the famine. She could have thrown me away to the hyenas or into the pit latrine – only there wasn't any. And besides she is not one for shortcuts. Joined the working corps, as an ayah. Had to give up at Independence. As a matter of principle. The African memsahib throwing her underwears and menstrual gear all over the house. That's when she quit. "Our African masters have no manners. No time for decorum or decency. Thrown them to the four winds of *uhuru*," she told her mates and quit. Tough decision for a mother with a school-going daughter. "What do they think they are? Will my daughter not grow up to be one of them?" And here I am, playing the Queen of Sheba! *(suddenly)* Let's get out of here, Kyeyune.

KYEYUNE: *(taken by surprise)* Go? Go where? Are you all right, madam?

NANKYA: Anywhere, away from here.

KYEYUNE: I knew it. I knew the moment would come. The mighty never go down alone. This is madness. *Suicide*. Can't you see we can't go anywhere. Trapped by the floods and ambushed by the one with three nails.

NANKYA: I'm scared stiff and, besides, my mother ... I want to see ...

KYEYUNE: (*Some kind of whistling can faintly be heard. He stops her short.*) Wait a moment. (*listens*) Did you hear that? (*slight build-up of tension*)

NANKYA: (*casually*) What is it?

KYEYUNE: You didn't hear anything?

NANKYA: Anything like what?

KYEYUNE: Nothing at all? Not even ...?

NANKYA: The usual; the waves, the wind ...

KYEYUNE: Not those.

NANKYA: What then?

KYEYUNE: (*in whispers*) Shhhh! Not so loud.

NANKYA: What is it?

KYEYUNE: I must be going mad, as he said. Mad like a monkey.

NANKYA: What is troubling you?

KYEYUNE: The whistling. You didn't hear any whistling?

NANKYA: (*She is somewhat relieved. Kyeyune more desperate.*) Oh, that. Just the wind in the trees.

KYEYUNE: Just the wind in the trees. No, madam. That's the Patron himself. Danger signal. The inevitable whistling.

NANKYA: Your imagination, Kyeyune. You're overtaxing your imagination. (*She involuntarily scratches her toes.*)

KYEYUNE: You're twisting your toes madam. Scratching and twisting your toes.

NANKYA: What of it?

KYEYUNE: It doesn't augur well for us.

NANKYA: What are you talking about?

KYEYUNE: The itch. Do your feet have an itch? (*She doesn't understand.*) Then we are doomed. On our way out into the lake. Certain as death: the whistle, the beckon ... No ... there is no beckon, but the itch is there and the eventual gallop into the net. The fisher of men is on the track again. (*another whiff of whistling*) There it goes again ... summoning us to the lake. (*He goes panicky. Stumbling over things, looking for an exit before he collects himself and decides on what to do. Nankya is passive lost in thought. It is absolutely necessary for Kyeyune to avoid playing this episode comic; if anything the impression that should be created is of an innocent man's moments before he faces a firing squad.*)

KYEYUNE: Quick, madam, do something. Madam, please, don't stand there petrified ... as if you'd seen a ghost. (*in hysterics*) MADAM, DO SOMETHING. Can't you see we are in trouble? Shall we follow the call like sheep? God helps ... Look, let's switch off the lights. (*Nankya follows the 'instructions' in a somnambular fashion. Kyeyune is in terror.*)

KYEYUNE: Help me with the table ... Faster, madam, faster. No time for crawling. FASTER. (*They place it against door.*) Bring the chairs ... MADAM PLEASE. (*They place them against the table.*) Now the windows. (*He almost bumps into her.*) Bar all the windows. (*panting*) Slightly better. Safer. Whatever happens, we tried. Tried our best. We are safe from ...

NANKYA: (*different train of thought*) Bwogo.

KYEYUNE: From the Patron of the floods. Let's pray madam. The end is near. (*Kyeyune kneels behind the table as if it were an altar and mumbles out prayers. Nankya, facing the audience, simply closes her eyes and narrates what is in her mind.*)

NANKYA: Moses Bwogo by baptism. Bashir Bwogo by political expediency. Boarding schools all the way to Form Six. A brief spurt in the military academy at Sandhurst. Quit because the exercises were too rigorous. Several trials in schools of technology in Britain and eventually ends up in India. Commerce degree in Delhi. Five years of flopping and a sixth to fluke the B.Com. Under-Secretary in the ministry of commerce and accelerated promotions because he is Boss's cousin. That's him, all right. Out there. (*She opens her eyes.*) Mr Bashir Bwogo. Kicking the sand and swinging his umbrella. Happy with himself. A smile plastered on his lips from ear to ear. Whistling away like a lark in love.

KYEYUNE: Invincible One, protect us from the self-proclaimed designers of our destinies.

NANKYA: He is now pricking orange peels and rotten pears with the tip of the umbrella and slashing the flowers with it, like a drunken executioner. Just to appease his wanton pride. His job has been accomplished. By the SRB boys. "Jolly good fellows," he tells himself, whistling and capering around capriciously. "Hardened mongrels. Consciences as blank as they are black with evil. Always following orders to the letter. Spot your quarry and they will ferret him out of the most obscure barrow." (*Kyeyune, in the background, is thoroughly engrossed in prayer. sometimes lifting up his hands in supplication, and at other times genuflecting, etc. This should be done without distracting the audience's attention away from Nankya.*)

NANKYA: Yes, I remember them once, at the Imperial. Posh place that. VIPs and invited guests and the SRB boys unnoticeably around. Unobtrusive but observing the slightest wink or a twitch of the moustache. My first date with Bwogo. There we were four of us around one table. Bwogo, myself and friends of his. An illiterate T.P. tycoon who kept silent most of the time. And a headmaster of some school. We talked and joked and danced. It was a marvellous time. But our T.P. tycoon friend was feeling left out and gradually withdrew into himself.

For some strange reason he didn't quite click with the headmaster. He was carefully and secretly observing the way he talked, the way he drank and smoked his cigarettes. He didn't fancy the slightest thing the headmaster did. Nor did the headmaster know what was happening, though I suspect he sensed the animosity behind the silent man. Then out of the blue, while Bwogo was dancing, the tycoon blew up. "What you thinks your doesing? What you spoking Toilet Paper? You laughtering me? This toilet paper man go fixing you if you don't quiet. Do you heard? No laughtering and drunkening and talking like Queen Zabeth? Do you thought becaunze of your dengris you can embrought your England here? You goes toilet now if you don't quiet. And I goes made you eat it proper proper. So you quiet. You hearded me? Stop biting your England here, I am talking you. I can emboughted you twice complete and also. And no mosquito can zwing about yours dengris." The headmaster was stunned and simply said, "What have I done now? What have I said that has annoyed Mr ... Mr ... Mr ... what has annoyed you, sir? She just told me you manufacture toilet paper and I said *GREAT*. Was that an insult?" That did it. The tycoon clicked his fingers once and, in a second, the SRB boys were on the spot. They bundled him out of *The Imperial* and that was the end of him.

His corpse was found floating in the lake a week later. (*At the word corpse Kyeyune bolts up and joins Nankya.*)

KYEYUNE: What corpse? The master's?

NANKYA: No. Not Bwogo's. (*She can't explain. They are not at par in their experiences.*) Forget it.

KYEYUNE: But you talked of corpses.

NANKYA: (*talking his language*) Yes, in the lake ... SRB work ... Okay? (*slight pause; she continues unravelling what is in her mind*) Bwogo has stopped now and turned back to gloat at the corpses in the lake. His mission accomplished.

KYEYUNE: (*understanding*) Corpses tumbling down from the lake. Yes, I saw them. Men, women and children.

NANKYA: Murder in the lake. SRB work. (*imitating Kyeyune*) Tu- tu - tu - tu- tu ...

KYEYUNE: (*reminiscent*) Men, women and children singing *Onward Christian Soldiers* and the boat whirling around in terror. Like a dog chasing its own tail. I saw it all with my own eyes. (*Kyeyune seems to have forgotten all about the whistling without, which has temporarily stopped. Nankya unconsciously breaks out into song. 'HE IS A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW', halfway through she substitutes the verse with: 'THEY ARE JOLLY GOOD FELLOWS,' runs through it, and then suddenly stops after realising the irony of it. Her singing has been*

accompañado por el baile mientras Kyeyune seguía la ritmada con la cabeza)

NANKYA: (with bitterness) Jolly good fellows indeed. Like their master, who is stabbing his umbrella in the cranium of the anthill thoughtlessly. No mercy, no remorse but stab, stab, like a sadist. Three times. With fierce delight.

KYEYUNE: Three stabs. Three nails. The man with three nails, his limp body in my net. And I said to myself, "If each time I cast my net only to catch men with nails drilled in their craniums, I might as well hang my nets. And I did." That was quite sometime back.

NANKYA: It is stuck. Trapped by the cranium. The soldiers in the anthill are putting on a full-blooded battle. They die by the dozen but they will not surrender. They fight with sticks and spears and pangas to defend their national boundaries. Some maniac has claimed half their territory but they will not let him have even an inch. *Fight on gallant ones, fight on. Defend your rights ...* The enemy is still stuck ...

KYEYUNE: Three nails stuck in his head. Genitals in his mouth. Result of vindictive envy.

NANKYA: He is struggling to pull it out now. Struggling to pull out the umbrella. His jacket flapping in the wind. Sweat running from his brow like a broken tap. One-two-three, pull, one-two-three, pull. Last chance now, gentlemen, last

chance. Put in all your power. Ready? (*now counts in ascending order*) ONE ... TWO ... THREE and PUUUUL. (*Nothing happens. 'They' are exhausted. 'They' take in some break.*)

KYEYUNE: No amount of pulling can dislodge the nails. The curse of Nalubale. Her chastity was not lost for nothing. The defiler must be demolished.

NANKYA: One mighty heave, and another with both hands and yet another and out it comes red to the hilt. There is a groan from the bowels of the anthill. A groan ... and mourning and wailing. Life nipped in its prime. The death of the Queen Mother. This is a national catastrophe. The orphans and widowers grieve with the common man. For the first time. She was loved by one and all. She was one respected as the Founder Mother of the nation. (*The whistling is heard again this time approaching the house.*)

KYEYUNE: (*all jittery now*) There it goes again, madam - the whistling. A reminder to the flicker in a gale. What shall we do? What will save us from the call of destiny?

NANKYA: Condolences to the bereaved family. We are one with you in this hour of national catastrophe. Death hath untimely ripped the Beloved One from our midst. The Founder Mother of our nation. A benevolent and magnanimous Daughter of the Soil. There will be state mourning for four weeks, a military burial for the occasion and

a statue erected in the City Square. But now, ladies and gentlemen, you must dry your tears and brace yourselves for the business at hand. As you know, many state guests are expected. They must not catch us unawares. I can see them already assembling before trooping to the specially erected mausoleum topped with eternal flames for the highest among mortals. An ironic contrast if you ask me. But here they come, ladies and gentlemen, here they come.

KYEYUNE: Who, madam, who?

NANKYA: (*like a radio announcer reporting and commenting on a live incident*) The dignitaries and our VIPs are filing in, ladies and gentlemen. But behind their floods of tributes and condolences, one can detect an eerie apprehension, not about what has passed, but what is yet to come. Grey heads are drawn together in speculation, behind closed doors. Beneficiaries of the deceased booking emergency flights abroad. To get out while the going is good. Manual workers excited about the unexpected holiday. The businessmen secretly grumbling about the ensuing losses. Newspaper editors giving top priority to full page advertisements of condolences. The time calls for new realignments and diplomatic patching. New pacts to be signed and others to be abrogated. Hurried pledges of loyalty and desperate attempts to create scapegoats.

It's a bizarre flurry of activity inspired by contradictory motives. It is a great circus. The death of the Queen Mother has unleashed a motley of banal absurdities. This very moment our VIPs are almost within the precincts of the burial grounds. And at the appointed time a twenty one gun salute will rock the skies. The citizenry is requested not to panic.

Protect us from them, protect us, oh, Lord.

Here they come, these dignified men of medals and black three piece suits and bowler hats. Here they come marching like gallants of old. Mopping their brows and fondling their swagger sticks. Adjusting their tops and brass batons. A nod of the head here, a wave of the hand there. Acknowledging cheers and courageously ignoring the thunderous boos.

KYEYUNE: Strike them dead, strike them cold.

NANKYA: Proclaiming their avowed brotherhood and castigating the prophets of doom.

KYEYUNE: Protect us from the designers of doom, oh Lord; the instruments of pain and misery.

NANKYA: Counterfeiting Judas, disclaiming their atrocities of yester-years.

KYEYUNE: Send us a thunderbolt to smite them, oh Lord; give us the strength to castigate them.

NANKYA: Incriminating imaginary adversaries and meting out paltry penalties.

KYEYUNE: Spare us the squeals of terror, oh Lord, and the torrents of tears.

NANKYA: They have arrived, ladies and gentlemen, they have arrived. The gunmen are ready and the firing will soon begin.

KYEYUNE: The lake is broody because of them, oh Lord, the lake is broody with drenched frowns.

NANKYA: Cross your fingers, ladies and gentlemen, and cock your ears. The abomination of desolation is at the door.

KYEYUNE: And the floods of sorrow. Protect us from the floods of sorrow, oh Lord.

NANKYA: Now is the time for the salute. After which, the flypast. Stand at attention ladies and gentlemen. (*They both steel themselves against the expected boom of the guns by cocking their ears. Silence. Nothing happens. They look at each other in surprise, at which moment two raps are heard on the door. Kyeyune is startled and clutches Nankya's arm helplessly.*)

NANKYA: Two. (*three raps*) Five. (*four raps*) Nine. (*silence; whispers*) Nine-gun salute. A dozen missing. Conclusion: no disciples for the deceased. Her tumultuous reign is buried with her. We are back to square one. (*silence*)

BWOGO: (*from without*) Open the door. (*silence: they stare at each other*) Are you deaf? Open the door.

KYEYUNE: Who is it?

NANKYA: A resurrection.

KYEYUNE: Is it master?

NANKYA: After the third day, he rose up from the dead.

KYEYUNE: (*wonderingly*) Is it master?

BWOGO: (*from without, forcefully*) OPEN THE DOOR!

KYEYUNE: (*excited*) It's master. It's master.

NANKYA: I told you.

KYEYUNE: (*precautionary measure*) But wait a minute. Who is it? (*tantalising silence: slight panic*) We are innocent. We have done no harm.

BWOGO: (*from without*) What the hell! Open the damned door before I break it!

KYEYUNE: (*relaxing and removing the barricades*) It's master, it's master. I knew it. Are you alright, master?

BWOGO: (*impatiently*) What do you think you are doing in here?

KYEYUNE: Hold on a moment. (*opens the door and Bwogo enters; Kyeyune is beside himself with excitement, familiarly welcomes his master.*)

BWOGO: (*noticing the cluttered items of furniture*) What the hell is going on?

NANKYA: Security measures – Kyeyune's idea. 'Man is fast of foot and finger.'

BWOGO: (*inflammable*) Bloody gimmick. Enough to make a dog laugh.

KYEYUNE: Welcome home, master, welcome. In one piece. I said to myself, "He will come back. He must. Beckon or no beckon. He will come back." And here you are in one piece. As vigorous as a bull.

BWOGO: (*unimpressed*) Is anyone going to switch on the lights? Or is this meant to be a dungeon?

KYEYUNE: Presently, presently. The man with the three nails can't always have his way, I said. Not with master ...

BWOGO: PUT ON THE LIGHTS! This isn't a cave. Or have you been up to something behind my back?

NANKYA: Is that meant to be vulgar? You're revolting. (*She puts on the lights.*)

KYEYUNE: We got worried, though. When that door opened and you stepped out ...

BWOGO: (*deprecatingly*) Open the windows and cut out the babbling. (*Kyeyune's enthusiasm is dampened but he proceeds to open the windows grudgingly.*)

NANKYA: What is eating you? Shouting and cursing and ordering everyone around. Where are your manners?

BWOGO: (*deliberate insult*) Ask your mother. She'll tell you.

NANKYA: (*extremely hurt*) BWOGO!

BWOGO: Look at this mess. Even a pigsty is better. Chairs all over the place. Table upside down. (*These are lies.*) Orange peels on the floor and the divan cluttered with crockery. What the hell?

KYEYUNE: (*rearranging the furniture, while he talks to himself; Bwogo is surveying the room*) Dead, that's what I feared. Dead and netted. But now, I wish it. Deep down in my heart, I wish it had happened. (*There is silence in the room. Nankya is peering at Bwogo. He catches her at it.*)

BWOGO: What the hell are you staring at me for! Can't think. Can't concentrate with your eyes boring into me ... I said STOP STARING AT ME.

(*SILENCE except for Kyeyune dragging the chairs and putting them into place; Bwogo is unreasonably irritated by the noise; Nankya is preparing her assault.*)

BWOGO: (*misdirected anger*) Stop that noise, will you! It's driving me crazy. (*Kyeyune stops, but doesn't know what else to do; he decides to mop the furniture ... All in all, he is looking redundant. The silence is gradually getting on Bwogo's nerves.*)

NANKYA: (*starting the attack*) WELL!

BWOGO: (*still irritable but happy at the interrupted silence*) Well what?

NANKYA: (*Nankya will systematically get her own back.*) You know what I'm talking about. Stop ducking.

BWOGO: (*curtly*) LIKE HELL. Like hell, I know what you're jabbering about.

NANKYA: Are you satisfied at your findings?

BWOGO: (*diverting*) Give me a drink. A dimple scotch.

NANKYA: (*insistent*) Are you satisfied?

BWOGO: (*blowing up to cover up*) I SAID GIVE ME A DRINK. DAMN YOU!

NANKYA: Hold your guns, man. No need for fretting. You can blow up the roof or bomb the walls if you like, but I'll still be with you. All I'm asking ...

BWOGO: Are you going to get me *that* drink?

NANKYA: I'm not your wife, do you know that?

BWOGO: (*pulls a chair and sits down*) Kyeyune, get me a drink. (*Kyeyune pretends not to have heard.*)

NANKYA: (*putting out feelers*) So it wasn't the crusaders, after all.

BWOGO: Kyeyune, did you hear me?

NANKYA: Crusaders of Christ spreading the gospel of death.

BWOGO: KYEYUNE?

KYEYUNE: Yes, master.

NANKYA: Bloody agents of biblical cruelty. That's what you said.

BWOGO: Get me a drink. (*Kyeyune totters around deliberately.*)

NANKYA: Dragging Moslems from their shops and ripping their bellies open.

BWOGO: What's going on here? One is deaf, the other nagging.

NANKYA: Tarnishing the good name of the Second Republic.

BWOGO: You'd better stop your claptrap, before I do it for you. I'm tired of your nagging.

NANKYA: Aren't you satisfied now?

BWOGO: SHOCKED. Is that what you want to hear. Shocked beyond regret. Happy?

NANKYA: It was the SRB. Isn't that correct?

BWOGO: I know that.

NANKYA: That's what I said. Didn't I? But you insisted it was the guerrillas, the crusaders of Christ.

BWOGO: You don't have to yap about it all day long. Save your breath for something better. (*Kyeyune 'innocently' brings in a full bottle of orange squash and places it before Bwogo.*)

BWOGO: (*excuse to blow up once more*) I said a scotch, damn you. A DIMPLE SCOTCH. Oh, these infernal morons. Can't hear. Can't see. Can't read. (*storms toward his drink*) What are you good for? Wouldn't even be worth the worms (*Kyeyune chuckles with glee. Bwogo is back with his drink*)

(and two glasses.) They would reject you, do you know that? They wouldn't touch as much as a peel off you. Even if you were salted and spiced. They wouldn't touch you. They would turn their mandibles in disgust and declare you not fit for consumption. (He serves himself.) Now, trot along to the beach and get me cold clean water from the boat. Ask the captain. He'll show you.

KYEYUNE: *(his gleeful mood vanishing) Bu-bu-but, master!*

BWOGO: *Bu-but master what?*

KYEYUNE: *The man with the three nails. The patron of the floods. I daren't cross the path of the patron ...*

BWOGO: *(unkindly) To hell with your patron. You heard what I said. (sternly) Now run along to the beach. No slithering. Do you get me? (Kyeyune hesitates at first, but on second thoughts exits. Bwogo downs his drink, refills and this time remembers to serve Nankya as well.) Mind a swig?*

NANKYA: *Never neat, thank you. (pause) You shouldn't bully him around like that. He is old enough to be your father.*

BWOGO: *Dead. But he was never an idler, even at sixty-six. Work, work, work. That was his motto. Died on the job. The very last tick. That's why I loathe Kyeyune's doddering and his twiddle-twaddles. He is a pain ...*

NANKYA: *(involuntarily takes the glass and sips) So it was the SRB, after all.*

BWOGO: *(downs his drink) You have said that before.*

NANKYA: *(sarcastic) Jolly good fellows, the SRB boys.*

BWOGO: *Cut out the sarcasm. Not particularly impressive.*

NANKYA: *Carry out the orders to the letter. No mind of their own where money is concerned.*

BWOGO: *You're saying nothing new. Besides, I'm not interested.*

NANKYA: *And what's more, you gave the orders. *FOR SECURITY REASONS*. You gave the orders hoping I would be one of the victims. Isn't that right? It is lent time, you said to yourself; Nankya will accompany her mother to the island. A thousand pounds tip for the director of the meteorological department, five hundred for the broadcasting boss, and the radio and television would warn the inhabitants about the imaginary floods. They would assure the populace not to panic as a rescue team was on its way after escorting the Benevolent Father of the Republic. Isn't that it? Isn't that what happened an hour or so back? The radio announced the impending floods. The boat arrived and the headman whipped everyone on to the boat. Nankya and mother were to be on that boat. Herded together like sardines. But what was of cardinal importance to you*

particularly, the motive behind this master plan was that Nankya and her mother had to be on that boat. Then the pre-planned accident. The massacre in the boat. The authorities would then conveniently blame it on the guerrillas. Grab a number of innocent fellows, charge them with treason but promise them the presidential pardon if they would appear on television and confess ... confess crimes that they hadn't committed, let alone ever dreamt about. Wasn't that the master plan? (*Bwogo is busy soaking himself with drink, guilt written on his face.*) No one would raise an eyebrow about it. No one peep through the loopholes. What the radio says is gospel truth. What the viewers see on television is indelible proof. Your hands and conscience would appear clean. No remorse. No self-recrimination because bodies of mother and her daughter are untraceable. Then your expensive wreaths at government expense and a symbolic burial in the city cemetery for a would-have been fiancee and her mother. An ingenius plan, if you ask me. Extravagantly sponsored, almost confidentially planned and professionally executed. But it misfired. For all the careful arrangements, the exorbitant sums spent and the expertise employed, it misfired because, after all, you didn't get your target. Do you see the absurdity of it all?

(*Bwogo, either partly because of booze, remorse or a sheer urge to hit back, comes out with what he considers a tremendous showdown. He has so far realised that a physical confrontation will not silence Nankya. But silenced she must be at all costs. He tries out shock tactics first. He will later improvise as occasion demands. For the moment, he leaps up from his chair most unexpectedly dashes to the window and halloes out Mama Nankya like a maniac.*)

BWOGO:

(frantically) Mama Nankya, Mama Nankya, MAMA NANKYA. Can you hear me? (*Nankya is taken by surprise.*) I am talking to you, Mama Nankya. Can you hear me? She is at it again, Mama. This time it is serious. The situation is out of control. Do you hear me? Out of control. (*He is actually shouting at the top of his voice.*) Beyond repair. We will need a miracle to get out of it. She can't listen to reason any longer. She is barking and bellowing like a baboon in labour. All the rats have scuttled away into their tunnels. A dozen have already miscarried. Five have fainted. The entire place is in turmoil rattling with her venom. Her tongue is spitting out fire. We are burning. The whole place is burning down. Call the fire brigade, Mama. The fire brigade. She is tearing everything apart now. Hurry home, Mommie. HURRY HOME before the whole place is ablaze with her vengeance. Hurry home, Mommie, please. There is civil war in here. Man

against woman. Wife against husband. (*final scream*) HURRY HOME.

NANKYA: (*moving over towards him*) What is all this buffoonery in aid of? Why are you anxious to be offensive? To act insane and stupid?

BWOGO: (*not satisfied with the outcome yet; tries other ways*) Did you hear that, Mommie? She says the whole world is stupid and full of insane people. That includes you, Mommie. Stupid and insane, she says. That's why she wants to destroy it. Burn it to ashes and breed a horde of honkies because blackies are evil and vicious. Black like soot. Body and soul. (*She is near him now. He shrinks away from her with horror to the sink, grabs a plate for a shield and a ladle for a sword and performs a mock fight eventually attacking her viciously.*) Leave me alone, maniac. Leave me alone. Don't touch me, I tell you. Don't dare touch me. She is attacking me like a ferocious rhinoceros, Mama. Wielding her sharp sword. (*That's what he is doing.*) Two enemies have fallen victim already. (*He has thrown down two chairs by using the ladle.*) Two others are on the ground now. (*He has kicked two chairs down and thrust his 'sword' in to their 'breast'.*) They are pleading for mercy, Mommie. It's only your sonny remaining. She is advancing towards me. (*He advances towards her viciously and chases her*

around the room until he corners her by the divan and throws her on it violently. His 'sword' is on her breast.) Surrender you black bastard. Hands up before I run this sword into you. HANDS UP! Who do you think you are? (*He dispenses with his gear and goes for her throat. They struggle until they roll off the divan to the ground. He growls and barks at her like a dog, tearing into her viciously with his teeth and fingers. She squeals with fright and desperately tries to escape. She grabs a chair and fences herself against him. He barks across the chair like a dog that has spotted a tough burglar. His barking eventually breaks out into some daemonic laughter and subsides. Silence.*)

BWOGO: Scared, are you? Scared into silence. The submission of an arch enemy. (*pleased with the outcome*) That is something. I'd pay a million to see that face again. The shattering of the mask. Exposing the frightened face of the champion of equality. And now, if you dare open that filthy mouth of yours again, there will be worse trouble.

(BOTH are on fours like cats and dogs. Nankya staring at him in disbelief. He suddenly realises he has taken the game a bit too far; tries to make amends; slowly lifts her up from the floor, looks intimately into her eyes and embraces her passionately. She lets him do it. Pause.)

BWOGO: (*genuinely sorry*) I'm sorry, darling. Exceedingly sorry. Needling me like that. Needling and prodding like a porcupine. (*she gently disengages herself*) ... I'm doing my duty, Nankya, like you're doing yours. What the hell? Nagging, nagging all the time. And moralising. That was not fair. I mean I'm not perfect. But then, who is – in the circumstances? We all have our little shortcomings, our little idiosyncrasies here and there. Bread to earn. Our lives to keep. Future to think about. Nasty memories to forget. If I have signed death warrants once in a while, is it any worse than you failing your students? Is it? Murdering and burying their future by the stroke of your pen? Is it? (*no response*) Because, Nankya, duty is duty. And each man for himself. (*Nankya lights a cigarette.*) Take my case, for example. Walking along the streets. Eyes accusing me. Fingers subtly pointing. The minds cursing and wishing me the most horrible death. Yes, you were right. Sometimes I get scared. Some of those bastards could hit back hard, given a chance. (*not flattering*) You are a beautiful person really ... well meaning, sometimes. I mean it. But at other times, I don't understand you. I don't understand what happens to you. The moment you open that mouth of yours, it's brimstone and fire. An open volcano threatening to destroy the world entirely. What has the world done to you? Why

are you so bitter? (*pause; change of topic*) Can I fill you up? (*She ignores the question.*)

NANKYA: Have you ever lived in a squalid little place? Hot as hell? Twelve square feet. Ten people?

BWOGO: Not one that-*(hesitates)*-that I can think of. But I have seen some, if that means anything.

NANKYA: Then it's useless to explain. You wouldn't understand. Dingy little room. Sharing it with rats and lizards. Cockroaches in the corners. Flies and mosquitoes. Everything wrapped in smoke and soot. The crucifix. Picture of Jesus on the cross with two thieves on either side. Mother's old Bible stacked with birth certificates, job cards and my termly school reports. The people as well. Everything in that tiny room bearing the indelible mark of smoke and soot. It was a hell of a place. Hot as a furnace. Ten people. Twelve feet. People piled on top of each other.

BWOGO: (*finding it hard to believe*) Are you imagining all this?

NANKYA: The stench of toilers' sweat, charcoal and paraffin. And the perpetual smoke smarting the eyes. Men and women stealing snatches of sex pretending the children are asleep. And the little ones covering their faces with tattered blankets and putting on their rehearsed snoring to reassure their parents. And one meal a day – if you can find it. Would you understand all

this? I bet you wouldn't. You are a poached egg, bread and butter product. You wouldn't.

BWOGO: Not exactly. But I have read something like it in the papers.

NANKYA: Yes, of course. In the papers. Well, I have lived it almost half my entire life. Am I supposed to forget about it? Create a rosy picture of my past? Parties, picnics and pamperings? That I never had. Isn't it only natural to look back in bitterness? Ten people. Twelve square feet. The servants' quarters. Overlooking the Master's mansion and separated by a concrete wall with square holes in it. As if deliberately designed to remind us of our poverty. Our unalterable station in life with no firm footing on the ground. ... The wall with the square holes. What is behind that wall? Rubbish heaps and dustbins? Beggars and cripples on Fridays? No, sir. A twelve-acre garden with lovely white and red roses. A lovely swimming pool. And the grass so carefully trimmed and clean that we wouldn't dream of drying our tatters on it. Twelve acres, twelve acres for his alsatians and his little son of seven. All that space for his dogs and a single child. I remember the confinement between the servants' quarters and that wall. Sternly warned not to venture beyond it. By mother. The loneliness, the immobility and envy. That's when I began to appreciate the design of the

wall, especially the square holes, because I could peep through those holes hours on end to get contact with the world beyond: you playing around with the dogs and chasing rabbits. Or simply floating in the pool. And each time you caught me peeping through those holes, you'd call the dogs and charge at me with your toy gun. "Hands up you good for nothing bastard. Hands up before I shoot," you'd say. But I always held my ground. In actual fact, rather enjoyed it because I knew that neither you nor the dogs would go through those holes, except those moments when you'd fire at me with your toy gun. That was another matter. Frightened me with the bang. Then I would crawl to our room and lock the door. You'd laugh your lungs out and follow me to my home ground to lay siege. Climb on top of the wall, toy gun pointed at our door and the dogs waiting down below. When I thought you had gone, I would cautiously open the door, peep out, upon which you would shout out *BANG!* And the dogs would start barking. Do you remember? During the holidays.

I must have been young then. Very young.

Seven or eight. In a boarding school, initially for Whites only. Chicken broth. Braised steak on onions and Yorkshire pudding. You had the right to come to our quarters, and I had no right to venture beyond the wall into the twelve

acre garden, sniff at the roses or see my face in the pool. Private property. No trespassing. And you dare ask me why I'm so bitter? Has it changed now, except for the very, very few who are willing to lick the armpits of the Yorkshire pudding products?

BWOGO:
I'm sorry.

NANKYA:
Pity is the last thing I expect from you or anybody else. And, besides, it's a question of choice. If I wanted ...

BWOGO:
I'm sure father wouldn't have minded you playing in ...

NANKYA:
Maybe, maybe not. But mother advised against it. And that was enough. "Keep your distance, my child. We shouldn't annoy Master. Never get between the hammer and the anvil." She always respected your father. You should have seen the amount of trouble she went through to please him. Absolutely nauseating. Up at six o'clock on the dot. Into the shower room while the cook and the shamba boy were still snoring off their previous day's exhaustion. Pink frock, chequered apron, pink head-gear and white canvas shoes. The amount of care she took to appear clean, despite the smoke and soot, was excruciatingly annoying. She would say, "Master hates slobbery servants, Master does." And for all that fuss and fanfare, she got seventy shillings a month, two pounds of meat at Christmas, and seven of sugar

at Easter. Master hates this, Master hates that and seventy shillings a month That word *Master* always hurt me. Especially when I grew up and got to know what it really meant. People in their respective pigeon holes. Defined and demarcated. ... Am I boring you?

On the contrary. Go on. We have never talked like this before.

MASTER! Your father. Money-minded and mean. A man we had always seen in our village. No particular merit or integrity. And all of a sudden, *MASTER*. Just because of some historical accident. Right place at the right moment and proper connections. I found it difficult to reconcile myself to it.

BWOGO:
He was a hardworking fellow, God bless him. Stomping around and doing his work efficiently. Not well educated, of course. But he had the determination to succeed in the world. A man with excessive ambition. Almost like you.

NANKYA:
One day I told mother. Fifteen I was, I remember "Relax mother. He probably doesn't even notice you." "It's okay by me, Nankya. It is no trouble to me, either way. No trouble. But we must learn to do things we are told to do. One day you'll know it helps," she said. That same evening grandmother died. She had been unwell for quite sometime. Tuberculosis. The doctors had given her up and discharged her from hospital to create room for more promising patients.

Maybe also to give her a chance to die among her people in the tiny squalid room behind your father's mansion. It had rained heavily earlier on in the evening. Hailstorm. And the dusk was fast descending upon the room like a confident battalion. I remember the lamp winking lamely because we hadn't found time to buy paraffin, what with the rain and hailstones. People were talking in muted whispers, huddled like orphans around the only bed in the room where grandmother lay dying. She was sound asleep but all of a sudden she started coughing and vomiting blood. When the coughing stopped she painfully opened her lips wanting to say something. A last farewell? A blessing or an apology that she hadn't done much for us? I don't know. No sound came out of her mouth. She surveyed the little room in which we were, looked at each one of us in turn and tears started trickling down her shrivelled cheeks. After a time she turned her face from us and lay still on the bed. Mother wiped her eyes, closed them and straightened out her arms and covered up the still body. It is then I knew grandmother was dead and gone. Gone beyond the reaches of poverty and suffering. Beyond us. Never to be seen again. I went outside, squatted in one corner of the wall, my eyes full of tears. I pulled out my dress to mop them and suddenly

realised I was putting on the dress she had last bought me. It was then that I broke down and wailed loudly. Mother rushed out and slapped me hard into silence because Master does not like noise. (*Bwogo is gripped by the story; he doesn't know what to say.*) There was no wailing or crying out aloud. Only the constant sniffling and the streaming of tears down distraught faces. Because the premises were not ours and Master hates noise. (*Goaded by the memory, she is trembling all over. She is breaking down and tears rolling down her cheeks, as she repeats the following chant with increasing intensity. Bwogo does not know what to do*) No wailing, no crying because master hates noise. No wailing, no crying because master hates noise. NO WAILING, NO CRYING BECAUSE MASTER HATES NOISE, etc. (*Bwogo uncertainly moves to her cautiously and sits her down on the divan. He wipes off her tears. She is calming down. He offers her a drink and lights her a cigarette. They drink and smoke in silence.*)

BWOGO:

(trying to break the silence; soothingly but cautious) You have never told me this before.

NANKYA:

Give me your handkerchief. (He does. She blows her nose.)

BWOGO:

It must have been a traumatic experience. Why didn't you tell me ...?

NANKYA: (*matter of fact*) There is always time for everything.

BWOGO: I am sorry.

NANKYA: No apologies. It wasn't your fault.

BWOGO: But still ... going through all that.

NANKYA: Look, forget it.

BWOGO: As you say, but all the same I'm sorry.

NANKYA: That's all right.

(*Bwogo is somewhat reassured. The worst has passed. But Nankya, without showing it, is still thinking about her experience. Her answers are mechanical.*)

BWOGO: And your mother - tell me more about your mother.

NANKYA: Whatever for?

BWOGO: You never talk about her. You never talk about yourself. Politics, always politics. It's not everything in life. Tell me more about her.

NANKYA: Ordinary. Palms serrated. Eyesight bad. Trachoma. Back slightly bent, but still goes to church, rain or shine. Bow-legged. Black veins on the arms and legs.

BWOGO: You are running her down.

NANKYA: (*building her offensives*) You wanted to run her in.

BWOGO: What do you mean?

NANKYA: The floods, the boat, the SRB. Nankya and her mother.

BWOGO: Ceasefire. remember? Or was it merely a tactical retreat?

NANKYA: On whose terms?

BWOGO: (*anxious to avoid another confrontation*) Yours, of course, if you like.

NANKYA: (*hitting on the word she has been looking for*) AGORAMANIA!

BWOGO: What's that?

NANKYA: AGORAMANIA.

BWOGO: I don't like the smell of that word. It's like dead roses. The odour travels ahead of you. Making you giddy.

NANKYA: Stinks like poverty. Agoromania: craze about open space, masses of room to move about and breathe in fresh air. Free to dance, laugh and cry at will. Some place to bury your dead as well. Place to call your own. That's my disease. Agoromania. Certainly yours as well, but in a different form. The Bwogo Estate everywhere in the country. The Mitchell Mansions. The Aphrodite Service Apartments. The Bay of Bachelors. The Camasutra Hostels and the Rainbow Tourist Hotels: you name it. You are not the chairman of the Building Board for nothing. Always on the look out for open space. To leave your imprint on it.

BWOGO: You're starting again. Please drop it. I have no energy to fight back. (*He is genuine in this. Dopes himself with drink for unexpected eventualities.*)

NANKYA: (*warming up and riding the tidal wave*) What about your bank account number in Switzerland? That's a knocker. (*laughs at him*) Your gold ingots in Bengal? That's a buster. Need I say more? All for one man, a bachelor at that. If I were in your shoes – thank God I'm not – I wouldn't be that greedy. I'd give some to the poor. They too need space to breathe in fresh air and bury their dead.

BWOGO: (*getting irritated and worried at the same time*) I'll not subscribe to this exercise. It's dangerous.

NANKYA: (*in top form*) What about Boss? What don't I know about him? Boss indeed. (*She laughs derisively.*) His concubines, his brain tumour that causes him bouts of insanity, the various methods of liquidating his supposed enemies. His businesses north of the equator? What don't I know about him? You are right. I'm a security risk. I could do much if not handled with care. You can tell Boss that.

BWOGO: You are treading on dangerous ground, Nankya. Dangerous and slippery.

NANKYA: A tely to the Amnesty International or the Interpol or, better still, the CIA and you'd be

snuffed out like a wick. Squashed to smithereens. And your Boss tumble down to obscurity like a ton of toads. It would be worse for you, though. An only child, a senior bachelor who would inherit all that wealth that you have amassed at the expense of the nation? Father and mother dead. You don't bother about your step-brothers and sisters. Where would your wealth go? To the grave with you? You are not a Pharaoh. To your tarts? You are not a philanthropist. No, my good man. It would go back to the state. You're sitting on state property, that's all. All the seven years of sweating and saving and stealing will come to nought. And just because of one person, one person who has given you no cause for alarm yet, you wipe out an entire community? In cold blood. Men, women and their children? Fifty families exterminated in a whiff of a moment. Because Nankya knows too much. Because Nankya might talk. Now what will you do about it? Your supposed enemy, my good sir, is still at large, as you can see. At large, alive and kicking. Hardly a yard from you. Aren't you going to use your pistol? No? The pistol won't help this time? That's true. It won't frighten me like it did when I was a child. What are you going to do?

BWOGO: (*unruffled and catching up*) What do you want me to do? (*sarcastically*) Crawl on my knees and apologise? Ask for forgiveness? From you – of all

people? A freak with calculated interests. Always looking for chances. Weighing and counter-weighing the weakness of your opposite number. Always waiting for the right moment to pounce? Is that what you are looking for? Bwogo on his knees praying for mercy? (*goes on his knees to demonstrate*) I am sorry, Beth, I was misguided. I mean ... oh, well to be frank with you, B ... one can't take risks (*quickly corrects himself*) What I mean, Beth, is ... you see ... I thought you might squeal. (*laughs stupidly*) Isn't it funny how a human mind works? A simple joke like that and the other fellow takes it seriously. It was a joke, I assure you. I'm serious, Beth. Just a joke. What I mean is forgive me. I'm sorry. Please, Beth, understand me, please, please. Look ... (*gets out his cheque book*) ... I mean I'm not being presumptuous, am I? (*signs the cheque*) Let's make it up. Like friends. Hell, a friend is always a friend ... A friend in need, Beth ... Let's make a deal. (*Hands over the cheque*) Sign in any amount you need, Beth, and let bygones be bygones.

NANKYA: You are behaving lugubriously. (*She tears up the cheque and throws the bits in his face.*)

BWOGO: Is that what you want me to do? To cringe? NEVER! Do you understand? NEVER! So, if you think this silly rigmarole of yours will lead you anywhere, go bloody right ahead. Blackmail will

never work with me. Do you understand? At least not from a freak like you.

NANKYA: How awful of you! How can you be so mean? (*surprised at his rejoinder and lost for words*) So, so, so ...

BWOGO: What is so mean about it? But I am not through with you yet; if that's what you think. You started it. So let's drive it to the end, however bitter. That's what you like: wallowing in ugliness. (*pause; waits for her response: none; he attacks*) But I know exactly what is bugging you. I know what is making you spend sleepless nights and what is brewing up in your pants. Do you know what is bothering you? Really bothering you? I'll tell you. It is the baby. (*Nankya starts.*) That's right. The coming baby. That is what is troubling you. That is what is at the back of your mind.

NANKYA: Don't be ridiculous.

BWOGO: You can say that again. But it is true. Yes, the baby. That's what is at the bottom of all this denigromania. "What does Bwogo think about the coming baby?" Isn't that the question uppermost in your mind? Isn't it? Can you deny it? Can you deny it? Bwogo's answer. "He is always dodging the question. Postponing the issue. Joking about it. Shelving it, sidetracking it. But has never confronted it squarely. Come to grips with it. Give a clear

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BWOGO: What is so mean about it? But I am not through with you yet; if that's what you think. You started it. So let's drive it to the end, however bitter. That's what you like: wallowing in ugliness. (*pause; waits for her response: none; he attacks*) But I know exactly what is bugging you. I know what is making you spend sleepless nights and what is brewing up in your pants. Do you know what is bothering you? Really bothering you? I'll tell you. It is the baby. (*Nankya starts.*) That's right. The coming baby. That is what is troubling you. That is what is at the back of your mind.

NANKYA: Don't be ridiculous.

BWOGO: You can say that again. But it is true. Yes, the baby. That's what is at the bottom of all this denigromania. "What does Bwogo think about the coming baby?" Isn't that the question uppermost in your mind? Isn't it? Can you deny it? Can you deny it? Bwogo's answer. "He is always dodging the question. Postponing the issue. Joking about it. Shelving it, sidetracking it. But has never confronted it squarely. Come to grips with it. Give a clear

cut answer." That's what you keep thinking all the time. It is written all over you. You go on turning and twisting it in your little head until you have almost gone berserk with it.

NANKYA: That's a stupid lie.

BWOGO: I can read your mind like a book, Nankya. Don't you forget that. There you are now, sitting down calmly, sometimes erupting like a volcano, but all the time you are busy thinking about that child. What it will mean to you and your future, above all. A woman with a child and no husband. Not the other way round. A child without a father. But with a mother. You must have a fiendish sense of concentration. Simultaneously listening to me and your inner voice and yet betraying no emotions whatsoever. I'll give you credit for that.

NANKYA: Are you feeling guilty by any chance?

BWOGO: Guilty? You must be joking. I know who I am dealing with – a virago. Do you know that's what Boss called you after one of your television interviews? A virago. That aptly summarises you. You know what Boss asked me once? "That virago of yours, is she voluble where it matters? As equally volatile?" I laughed.

NANKYA: A vampire, that's what he is. You can tell him that. A relic of the twelfth century before Christ. A vampire sucking the blood of his kindred. Tell him that too. But it won't be for long.

BWOGO:

You are skirting again, aren't you? Like you have done the whole of this afternoon. Skirting the entire spectrum of ideas and secret thoughts but all the time patiently waiting for the right moment to pose the crucial question. *Will Bwogo accept responsibility?* Go right ahead. I'm waiting. (*Bwogo serves himself a large measure of drink and downs it. His denigration has worn off. He serves Nankya, who accepts, in spite of everything.*)

NANKYA:

There are ways, if that's what you want to know. Not altogether legal, but there are many ways. Both modern and traditional.

BWOGO:

A million and one, that's true. A million and one. Antibiotics; ergometrine drugs, instrumental inducement, the lot. But you are a coward when all is said and done. Afraid to take the plunge into the unknown, the uncertain. Always shoving decisions on to other people's shoulders because you are scared of scandals and frightened of death. "What if I should die," you keep telling yourself ... "What if I should die in the process?" You are frightened of death, baby and your mother. Abortion is prohibited by the Catholic Church, isn't it? And your mother is an ardent Catholic. Goes to church on Sundays, rain or shine. You just don't know how she will take it if she gets to know. *That, too, frightens you. So all this jazz about 'There are ways' is*

a bait. A desperate attempt to make Bwogo accept responsibility. But will he? That's the question in your little mind.

NANKYA: Don't talk to me about accepting responsibility. All I know is that there are ways. Safe and sound. Death-proof, if you like.

BWOGO: Death-proof, is that it? And you say it's safe? You must be out of your mind. I don't care what you do. But I'm just warning you. There is no guarantee in these things. I can assure you of that.

NANKYA: Keeping a clean conscience, isn't that it? 'I warned her' kind of stuff. Don't bother. It's my own business now. You have nothing to do with it. That's what you implied.

BWOGO: When I said, "Anybody could have done it." Remember? You wilted. Gazed at me like a frightened goat, shocked to the spine. You'd taken me for granted, you see. In confidence. Maybe you even skipped the pills on purpose. To trap me. Bwogo is a gentleman. Most understanding. He will rise up to the occasion. Won't let me down. He is rich, unmarried, fairly well known and all the usual eligible girls' arguments. What the hell!

NANKYA: (*casual reminder, but intended to corner Bwogo*) We went together, didn't we?

BWOGO: (*unsuspecting*) Went together where?

NANKYA: To the doctor ... at your insistence.

BWOGO: (*has sensed the trap; will do his best go get out of it*) Like hell we did. A male doctor. Yes, I remember. A male doctor, you suggested slyly.

NANKYA: A friend of yours. Norman, is the name. Collegemate in Delhi.

BWOGO: Yes, a male doctor. By God, I can see it all. You are crafty.

NANKYA: What are you getting at? What's the big idea?

BWOGO: "Female doctors talk," you said. "I hate them. They distort things on purpose. Out of envy. Especially the spinsters." At the time, it sounded logical.

NANKYA: (*She has realised what he is driving at, slight panic.*) Absolutely logical. And besides, they are not half as thorough. Always in a hurry to go somewhere. Boyfriends most likely. They are never thorough.

BWOGO: 'THOROUGH-GOING' is the word. They don't have the facilities, if you see what I mean.

NANKYA: You are being obscene. Running down the profession.

BWOGO: Obscene, my foot. What do you think? Examination couch patiently waiting. Nurse sent to the bank. Messenger to deliver a bunch of bills. The dress and pants are peeled off. And then the examination. The palm gently squeezed the breast, trailed down the groin for palpation

test and then the climax - two fingers in the womb. Per vaginal examination.

(*NANKYA is reliving the experience in her mind, trembling a bit, but Bwogo is too absorbed to notice.*)

NANKYA: All in the line of duty!

BWOGO: That's what you say ... But there is a peculiar process here. What amounts to cause and effect. What's the word? There is a special word for it. A scientific word.

NANKYA: (*anxious to restrict the argument to science*) Gravidex.

BWOGO: (*testing the word*) Gravidex, gravidex. No. That's not it. Gravity more likely. The force of attraction between two objects. But that's not it either. That's not the word I'm looking for ... (*He has got it.*) I have got it. FRICTION. Friction is the word. Friction generating stimulus. What do you think he felt? During the P.V. examination?

NANKYA: (*feebley*) He is a friend of yours. Ask him.

BWOGO: Like hell. Yes, this friend of mine. What did he feel? The vaginal warmth on his finger tips. And you lying down on the couch half naked, staring in his eyes. Was he nauseated, do you think? Aroused?

NANKYA: How do I know?

BWOGO: He wasn't touching blood and shit, remember. And he was not born in the arctic zone. Not frigid

or cold-blooded either. What about you? What did you feel? Handsome fellow, respectable job, a rising star in his profession and good breeding. What did you feel? Repulsed? Attracted or stimulated?

NANKYA: What are you driving at?

BWOGO: He is a thorough-goer. Forty-five minutes. Quite long about it. This male doctor friend of mine. He's quite long about it.

NANKYA: (*Deliberate misinterpretation to close the topic*) He will come by and by. Maybe he hasn't found the water container. At his age you'd probably take a century to the boat and back. In any case you prefer your drink neat. (*She fills his glass. Bwogo downs it absent-mindedly. Her plan has failed.*)

BWOGO: I had left you with him and gone to the adjoining restaurant for a little swig, but had asked you to find me there. After forty-five minutes, I got concerned and came over to his clinic. You were through by then, weren't you? You mumbled something. I didn't bother. But then, I noticed he was fumbling around his desk doing nothing in particular. His eyes avoiding mine. Occasionally stealing glances at me from the corner of his eyes and talking shop. But above all smelling of *Channel No. 5*. How about that? (*no response*) You do use *Channel No. 5*, don't you?

NANKYA: (*a shade of embarrassment*) You're just making it up, that's all. Just making it up to suit your incurable jealousy.

BWOGO: *Channel No. 5* which I had specially bought for you, among other things, as your thirty-seventh birthday present.

NANKYA: So?

BWOGO: What was a man supposed to conclude?

NANKYA: (*thinks the best thing to do is to arouse his jealousy to its maximum*) That Norman sent the nurse and the messenger out on purpose. Behind your back. The examination couch properly made and ready for the onslaught. And Norman, handsome and a rising star in his profession, did not disappoint the occasion. Measured up to the challenge nice and proper. Forty-five minutes. Nonstop, while you were away swilling your dimple scotch. Satisfied?

BWOGO: Precisely. Q.E.D – quite easily done. Your relish for the flesh and pious lechery are fairly well known. After all, what is the difference between my Afghanistan carpet and his examination couch?

NANKYA: More comfortable, if that's what you want to hear. More comfortable.

BWOGO: Serves the same purpose. The less comfortable the better – for those who know.

NANKYA: (*offhand*) That's your own headache. As I said, there are ways.

BWOGO: And I haven't forgotten Rutaro either. Tall and handsome. First Class Honours Animal Husbandry. Eyes big and bright like diamonds.

NANKYA: Dying to take on the world and change it. You didn't let him.

BWOGO: Precisely. (*sarcastic*) A man of principles. Never took advantage ...

NANKYA: You can say what you like *MR. BWOGO*. I'll look after myself.

BWOGO: (*final punch*) What about your ... promotion? Are you forgetting about that? What about your promotion? Don't tremble. Answer me.

NANKYA: (*now really concerned; she least expected this: lamely*) What about it?

BWOGO: (*enjoying every moment of this*) Thirty-seven. Lecturer in Literature. A handful of shoddy little publications that are not even worth reading in a public lavatory. Unmarried. And tipped for the professorship in preference to your internationally recognised colleagues. Solid men and women of integrity. Brilliant researches and publications. Minds as sharp as a razor. Bypassed and shelved in the cold filing cabinets of the university bureaucracy under the convenient pretext of nationalisation. What hypocrisy! What blatant parochialism! Nepotism at work.

Nibbling away at the very embryo of academic integrity. What merit do you think you have, that others don't, to justify your promotion? Apart from your pretty face, your sly harping on nepotism and, above all, your zealous knack to rip off your pants in order to achieve your goal? You are ambitious all right; no one can deny you that. Overambitious, to be exact. But even ambition must be backed up by integrity and, in your line, respectable research. Isn't that so? But to you all this is too much unnecessary trouble. It doesn't matter as long as you attain your final goal, even if you have to fleece your colleagues in the process. Systematically run them down on flimsy excuses. Isn't that so? (no reply) Thirty-seven. Unmarried and tipped for the Chair. It's hot news for the mass media! 'YOUNGEST PROFESSOR IN THE UNIVERSITY', 'FIRST AFRICAN FEMALE PROFESSOR SOUTH OF THE SAHARA.' Front page. Bold type-face and a seductive photograph. It would boost your ego, wouldn't it? (*He is getting annoyed because of her non-response.*) And once you are up there, on the pedestal of your fake academic achievement, you'd try your level best to keep your colleagues at the bottom of the ladder. Frustrating them, maligning them, cooking up the most ridiculous excuses to block their promotion. Maybe now you see how the child comes in, don't you? You know as well as I do how that child comes in.

... If you get it in the family way, you will miss the Chair. And you don't want to miss the Chair. If you abort, word will soon go round and the everlasting pious members of the Senate, some of whom you know rather intimately, will squirm and turn down your application. It's then they will realise your shortcomings. And you're frightened of scandals. Either way, my dear girl, you are in a pit of red ants. A deep pit of red ants. They are all over you, Nankya. Biting where it hurts. You can't get out of that pit. And that's where Bwogo comes in in your calculated scheme of things. To save the situation. To pull you out of the deep pit. And because you reckon he is a gentleman, you are dead convinced there will be a wedding gown and wedding bells. (*imitating bells*) Ding dong, ding dong, ding dong.

NANKYA: I'm not dying to get married, if that's what you mean.

BWOGO: Bridesmaids and flowers. (*breaks into song: WEDDING BELLS ARE RINGING IN THE CHAPEL*)

NANKYA: I said I'm not interested.

BWOGO: Reception at State House. Senate members among the VIPs. You are ingenious. Well-wishers blabbering about your fortune. "She's lucky, isn't she? Husband stinks with ... "

NANKYA: (*bitingly*) MURDER

BWOGO: (ignores this) WEALTH.

NANKYA: MURDER. Her husband is a murderer. That's what they would say. And I'm not going through life carrying that kind of ignoble tag, if you must know. Wife of a murderer. Wife of a swindler. Wife of an extortionist.

BWOGO: (temporarily checked and surprised) You dare say that, Nankya? At this very moment?

NANKYA: It's the truth. It hurts. But it's the truth all the same. Don't tell me I'm burning my boats, because it no longer matters.

BWOGO: (savouring the words while thinking of the next move) A murderer, they would say?

NANKYA: That's right. A murderer and a swindler. Won't be the first time either.

BWOGO: An extortionist too? ... What would they say about you, I wonder? What do they say about you in academic circles? Do you know?

NANKYA: (nervous) A virago. You've just said.

BWOGO: Something worse.

NANKYA: A lecher?

BWOGO: All women are, in varying degrees. The very worst. What do they say?

NANKYA: You tell me.

BWOGO: FRAUD. An academic fraud. That it's not your brain that got you the doctorate, if you see what they mean. Yes, a fraud, that's what you are.

A smiler with a dagger. Hiding behind the mask of self-righteousness and pseudo militancy. That's what they say. And who am I not to believe what they say? Your puritanical stance is absolutely disgusting, your Marxist neurosis nauseating and your literary hodge-podge thinly sprinkled with quotations from Mao and Fanon embarrassing, to say the least. Any third-rate dilettante from the back streets of this city can spew out doctrines and dogma twice as well as you can though you have a doctorate in the Arts. No, Nankya, you are a fraud of the highest order. Even in your department, your colleagues have looked through you. You have nothing to offer except ideological cliches and half-chewed critical jargon. You are thirty-seven, what have you got to show for it? That you are a traditionist, because you dropped your Christian name? That you are leftist in ideology, fighting for peasants' rights on a full belly and a beauty parlour in the bargain? Why are you fighting tooth and nail and pants for this professorship? To enhance the lot of the poor? Or is it for recognition? And yet who knows you beyond this island? You're as bad as those you are quick to condemn, if not worse. At least we don't go yapping about the conditions of the poor while filling our pockets. We do our best to help them.

NANKYA: You are a nasty pot-bellied bastard.

BWOGO: That's right. And I'm not ashamed of it.

NANKYA: I hate you.

BWOGO: It won't reduce my weight. Not a gram.

(FINALLY assured of his victory, he offers her a drink. To appease her? To deride her? She gulps down. He serves her another. For the moment he seems spent. There is a brief silence, during which he recharges himself with drink. Nankya on the other hand, sips her drink, now thoughtfully. It is slightly beginning to tell on her. At first when she talks, it is to break the silence. But with more drink she discovers what path to take in the way of revenge.)

NANKYA: (just toying with the idea) I might as well send that tely, after all.

BWOGO: (absent-mindedly) I beg your pardon?

NANKYA: I said I might as well send that tely.

BWOGO: What tely are you talking about?

NANKYA: To the Amnesty International.

BWOGO: (joking) Big deal that. Champion of human rights.

NANKYA: Better still hold a press conference. Both for local and international consumption.

BWOGO: Whatever for? All this because you haven't got the right answer yet. I like you. You're a born fighter.

NANKYA: (warming up) 'Fifty Families Exterminated. SRB Boss Responsible. Motives Still Unestablished.'

That would be a scoop for the press, wouldn't it?

BWOGO: Like hell. Will expand your C.V.

NANKYA: (picking up one of the papers; reads the heading) 'The Island's Sole Survivor on the Carpet.'

BWOGO: Your publicity mania again. I wouldn't be shocked.

NANKYA: (drops paper and picks up another) 'Several Scandals to be Exposed.'

BWOGO: (patronisingly) For a woman, you're interestingly witty and ...

NANKYA: (another paper) 'SRB Boss under Fire.'

BWOGO: ... devastatingly aggressive.

NANKYA: 'Read this exclusive interview with the sole survivor in our next Sunday Mirror.' (drops the paper on the table) Brilliant publicity synopsis in the midweek dailies. How about that?

BWOGO: What would you achieve by that?

NANKYA: Nothing maybe. Absolutely nothing.

BWOGO: So why all the bother and the dither?

NANKYA: Just to humour you. Be perfectly in line with your analysis of my character. A publicity maniac. And if I were one of the editors, I would really blow it up big. Make it sensational. Add a pinch of spice in the advert: 'Director of Meteorological Department Suspended.'

BWOGO: Original.

NANKYA: 'Broadcasting Boss in Custody.'

BWOGO: Authentic.

NANKYA: Head of State Research Bureau under House Arrest.'

BWOGO: Explosive. Will take the nation by storm.

NANKYA: That would boost their sales all right.

BWOGO: And earn you a million dollars, if not the Chair.

NANKYA: But as it is, they are all under your armpits. They will just scratch the issues, if not distort them altogether. In which case, I'll have to bank on the foreign press.

BWOGO: I wouldn't be so sure, if I were you.

NANKYA: They can be extremely devastating when they choose to. Expose all the sordid details. No holding back.

BWOGO: The papers wouldn't go beyond the airport. They would either be impounded or bought out by the relevant department.

NANKYA: How about the subscribers? Are you forgetting about those? They would xerox copies of the articles and distribute them around. Free of charge. That aside, there is the BBC, the Voice of America, the Voice of Germany, Radio Moscow, Radio Peking and the rest of them. People rely on them more than your local station when it comes to sensitive news of this nature. Boy, it would be something. The whole world will know the Hitler of Africa – the man behind the

violation of human rights in this country. The disappearances, the massacres, the executions and the random killings. And then the International Commission of Jurists will pick it up. The tourists will be scared to come to the blind spot of the dark continent. Loans and investments will be frozen. That will do it.

BWOGO: (*half appealing, moves over to her*) Nankya, let's cut out this cat and rat game.

NANKYA: (*taken by surprise*) What did you say?

BWOGO: The cat and rat game we are indulging in. Let's cut it out. It's becoming dangerous.

NANKYA: You started it. We are not half-way through yet. Let's drive it to the very end, however bitter, you said.

BWOGO: (*accusing voice but delicately*) Did I, now?

NANKYA: (*aggressive*) Didn't you?

BWOGO: (*half apologetic*) In the heat of the moment, maybe. Effective prodding and needling did it. You made your point.

NANKYA: So did you. Loud and clear. Wasting no punches. Hitting where it hurts most.

BWOGO: (*hesitating at first, but throws down the bait all the same; seductively holds her hand*) Look, let's be friends, Nankya.

NANKYA: (*the bait is working.*) You are drunk.

BWOGO: (*encouraged*) Let's be genuine friends. Like we used to.

NANKYA: Bloody stinking drunk. You don't know what you're saying.

BWOGO: There's no need to fight each other. To find out the winner. You made your point. Let's just be friends again. (*realising he is bringing her round to his point of view*) Remember when we had just met? At the zebra crossing. Opposite the Post Office. Along Republican Road?

NANKYA: Your Mercedes-Benz screeching in my ears.

BWOGO: Picnics every weekend. Movies on Mondays. Dining and dancing on Wednesdays. Parties on Fridays. They called us the 'inseparable ones'. Do you remember?

NANKYA: (*breaking away from him; sits down*) It was good when it lasted.

BWOGO: (*excited by his success*) Look, Nankya, let's recreate that moment. Our first encounter at the zebra crossing.

NANKYA: You are becoming nostalgic. I'm not interested.

BWOGO: Come on, Nankya, let's do it.

NANKYA: (*stubbornly*) Things of the past are best unraked. Those were your own words.

BWOGO: Not all things.

NANKYA: What would happen if we relived all our past? Remember?

BWOGO: This is a special request. Nankya, please! Let's do it.

NANKYA: We would have no time for the present.

BWOGO: (*losing patience slightly*) I know. I know. I said all that. But this is special. And, besides, you didn't get the Best Actress of the Year Award for nothing. Lead role in *Medea*. Remember? Type-casting, but still ...

BWOGO: (*suddenly plunges into the role of Medea before she kills her children*)
*'Friends, now my course is clear: as quickly as possible
To kill the children and then fly from Corinth:
not
Delay and so consign them to another hand
To murder with a better will. For they must die.
In any case; and since they must then I who
gave
Them birth will kill them. Arm yourself, my heart:
the thing
That you must do is fearful. Yet inevitable.
Why wait, then? My accursed hand, come, take
the sword:
(He grabs a knife.)
Take it, and forward to your frontier of despair.
(Moving steadily towards Nankya)*

*No cowardice. no tender memories; forget
That you once loved them, that of your body
they were born.*

*For one short day forget your children: afterwards
weep:*

*Though you kill them, they were your beloved
sons.*

Life has been cruel to me.'

(He 'stabs' Nankya two times; slight pause.)

My God. That was something. Absolutely electrifying. Brought out the best in you. The anger, the vengeance and the remorselessness. The adjudicator couldn't help giving you the award. The killing came out so easily, so naturally, that I forgot you were the Nankya I knew. But this (meaning their first encounter) is a different cup of tea. A bit of coyness here, a bit of coquetry there and downright wooing. Come on, let's do it. (leading her into her role) At the zebra crossing, along Republican Road. Do you remember?

NANKYA: I said I wasn't interested.

BWOGO: Come on, be a sport. For old times' sake. (*She shakes her head negatively.*) What are you afraid of anyway?

NANKYA: Afraid?

BWOGO: Yes, afraid. You haven't been on stage for

sometime, have you?

NANKYA: (*takes up the challenge*) All right. If that's what you think. Let's do it. (*She moves over to the divan; sits.*) Bwogo Beautiful! That's the best actress of the year talking.

NANKYA: Your chauffeur almost ran me over. The tyres screeched and I had to run for my life. If I hadn't, I would now be a cripple or six feet under.

BWOGO: Yes, I remember. The zebra crossing. In front of it, the yellow traffic lights. Behind it, in the Mercedes-Benz, a diligent chauffeur hurrying his master to an emergency Board meeting. The tyres screeched on the tarmac. The chauffeur cursed and the pedestrians booed and raised their fists at him.

NANKYA: My heart was pounding at break-neck speed. "I could have been run over," I kept telling myself. "I could have been run over."

BWOGO: I'm sorry. It wasn't intentional.

NANKYA: Do you really want us to do it?

BWOGO: I'm dying to. Itching to start. Let's do it.

NANKYA: All right. I'm ready.

BWOGO: But you can't do it properly while sitting?

NANKYA: (*jokingly*) You want me to sleep or something? Hey! That's an idea. Sleep. How about a nap before Kyeyune returns? (*pulls him down on*

*No cowardice, no tender memories; forget
That you once loved them, that of your body
they were born.*

*For one short day forget your children: afterwards-
weep:*

*Though you kill them, they were your beloved
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NANKYA: (*jokingly*) You want me to sleep or something? Hey! That's an idea. Sleep. How about a nap before Kyejune returns? (*pulls him down on*

the divan, cups his head in her arms and sings 'Golden Slumbers')

BWOGO: (annoyed, disengages and moves away from her) Let's call it quits. You are not serious.

NANKYA: Hold your guns, man. I'm ready.

BWOGO: (appeased) It's you to give me the cue, remember? (She stands up. He sits on a chair comfortably.) I'm being driven along Republican Road. My chauffeur suddenly stops. Zebra crossing. And there you are, among the pedestrians. Mopping your face. Standing out. Elegant like the Queen of Sheba. "Now, now! What a beauty!"

NANKYA: Cut out the exaggerations.

BWOGO: Thoughts. Those are my thoughts. You're not supposed to hear this.

NANKYA: Okay. Proceed.

BWOGO: "I must catch that bird for sure. My! My! What a chick! Where have I seen her before, I wonder?" Now there is your cue. The zebra crossing. (Nankya lazily walks across the room in front of the seated Bwogo. The car jerks into a stop. Bwogo looks up.)

BWOGO: (impatiently moves over to her to demonstrate: first the way she has done it and then the way she should do it) All right, all right. You are not doing it properly. Like you did it. Even a fly wouldn't be impressed – the way you've done it. Use those hips, baby. Use them. The gyrations

of the hips that tantalise men and send their hands diving into the deeps of their trousers. Remember? The gyrations. And don't carry that bag of yours as if you were going to the ladies' or something. Every step must be calculated. Every gesture must carry a message. (He sits down.)

(She does the bit again, this time properly – like a coquette.)

BWOGO: That's good. That's very good ... 'Stop, stop, stop. Quickly!' (She stops and glares at him.)

NANKYA: What is it now?

BWOGO: Don't interrupt. I'm telling my chauffeur to stop so that I can get out of the car. You just walk on. Throw me an affected look or smile if you like, but proceed. (She walks around the room. Bwogo to himself) Where do such chicks hide?

(He gets out of the car, puts on sun glasses, lights a cigarette. He catches up with her.)

BWOGO: Excuse me, madam. (Nankya stops.) It was not intentional.

NANKYA: (surprised) What wasn't?

BWOGO: He is very reckless, sometimes.

NANKYA: What are you talking about?

BWOGO: My driver. I have always told him to be careful but ...

NANKYA: Oooh! It's all right. Cars have the right of way.
(looks at her watch intending to move on)

BWOGO: I am extremely sorry, madam. It wasn't fair to make ... to make a lady of your ...

NANKYA: I said it was okay. Now I must ... *(taking a step)*

BWOGO: Can I give you a lift, if you don't mind?

NANKYA: I have already arrived. Thanks all the same.
(She decides to go.)

BWOGO: *(following her)* Excuse me. *(She stops.)* Don't consider me rude. But ... but weren't you looking ... ?

NANKYA: Looking?

BWOGO: *(importantly)* At the supermarket, where I had parked. Weren't you *staring*?

NANKYA: *(embarrassed somewhat, but hides it)* What do you mean *staring*?

BWOGO: You were staring at me, weren't you? As if trying to recollect where you'd seen me or something. Weren't you? *(brief silence)* Don't say you weren't, because you couldn't have been staring at my driver.

NANKYA: You caught me staring?

BWOGO: And then you turned away ... embarrassed, sort of.

NANKYA: You couldn't have noticed I was staring unless you were doing the same thing. Stealing glances

at me. Now, I really must be off.
(But she doesn't.)

BWOGO: I must confess I was staring.

NANKYA: *(coquettishly)* You were staring at my hips to be exact.

BWOGO: *(beginning to have ideas; steals a glance at them)* Now, that's what I call hitting the iron while it's hot.

NANKYA: Nothing else to do, but taking mental snapshots at ladies' navels.

BWOGO: *(really getting in the mood)* You are too fast for me, baby. Too fast. *(pleased with his progress)* What is a man supposed to say to that?

NANKYA: I don't know.

BWOGO: Woh! Woh! Your face is familiar though. I ...

NANKYA: Have seen you before. Maybe you've forgotten. Very long time back.

BWOGO: Time slips through our fingers and memory is unreliable ... sometimes. *(hazarding a guess)* Might it have been at *The International* or was it *The Imperial*?

NANKYA: Are those the only places you go to'?

BWOGO: *(modestly)* Oh, well, not always. Could have been at a party then. Most likely.

NANKYA: At your father's.

BWOGO: (*misunderstanding her*) Of course, yes. One of the parties. Those were the days. The old man used to be quite hospitable those days. Trust my memory to fail me at such a moment. But he was shrewd ... Never gave me a chance to freely ... Tell you what, why don't we go for a quickie? For old times' sake.

NANKYA: I'm afraid I must take my leave – now.

BWOGO: A little drink, just across the road.

NANKYA: No, thanks. Perhaps another time.

BWOGO: Hop, step and we are there.

NANKYA: There is always another time. I have got a job appointment in fifteen minutes' time.

BWOGO: It will be a quickie.

NANKYA: Please don't insist.

BWOGO: For old times' sake.

NANKYA: It's important.

BWOGO: What is?

NANKYA: My appointment.

BWOGO: You still have fifteen minutes.

NANKYA: (*giving in; they walk towards an imaginary bar*) Okay. But let it be a quick one.
(*THEY move about a bit and sit down by the table.*)

BWOGO: We didn't even introduce ourselves.

NANKYA: Elizabeth is my name.

BWOGO: BETH for Beauty. Lovely. Bashir. Bashir Bwogo.

NANKYA: (*almost betraying herself*) Not Moses by any chance? (*Bwogo surprised; she corrects herself quickly*) Used to read about a Moses Bwogo. A relation of yours maybe?

BWOGO: Never heard of him. Must be billions of Bwogos. Your first name?

NANKYA: Elizabeth is enough – for the time being.

BWOGO: (*luringly*) Come on ...

NANKYA: Elizabeth.

BWOGO: (*gives up and calls an imaginary waiter by clicking his fingers*) Steward! (*turns to her*) What are you having?

NANKYA: A coke.

BWOGO: (*feigned surprise*) A coke? At this time ...

NANKYA: Ice cold.

BWOGO: Hope you don't mind if I shoot down Martell Brandy, hot water and a slice of lemon.

NANKYA: As you like.

BWOGO: I've got a cold ... (*calls waiter again*) Steward! (*turns to her*) Are you staying with your parents?

NANKYA: I am staying with my mother.

BWOGO: Your father up-country, then? Putting one and one together? Most unusual, wouldn't you say? It's normally the wives that do the digging and

the caring for the business chores. (*calls the waiter, this time banging the table to attract attention*) STEWARD!!! What the hell?

NANKYA:
Dead.

BWOGO:
(*absent-mindedly*) I beg your pardon ...? I must see the Manager at once. I mean, we can't be kept waiting for an hour ... (*trying to stand up*)

NANKYA:
Dead. (*Bwogo looks at her, not understanding.*) My father. Dead.

BWOGO:
(*sitting down*) I am sorry.

NANKYA:
I stay with Mother and Matiya. (*He looks at her questioningly.*) ... Matiya. He has always lived with Mother for as long as I remember. But he is not my father. But I do call him Father, because I have always called him Father. He married Mother out of sympathy and had the purity of heart not to take advantage of it ... I don't know why I should be telling you all this.

BWOGO:
You are in good hands, Beth. (*quickly*) Hope you don't mind if I call you Beth, do you? Beth you're in good hands. Noo? Don't you trust me? (*cursing under his breath*) Oh, these infernal waiters!

NANKYA:
Mother doesn't know who my real father is.
(*completely mistaking her*) Oh!

BWOGO:
NANKYA:
Not like that. She's not a prostitute, if that's what you mean by 'Oh!' One night, guns are

heard booming and rattling a mile from home. Their chatter becomes louder and louder as they approach home. At first it doesn't scare her, because such is the time when everyone has gotten used to guns chattering in the air. There is bloodshed everywhere. The strong answer it with silent stares. The weak with intermittent wails. More shots are heard advancing. Mother begins to panic. Her father is not back from hospital yet. Perhaps grandie's condition is not improving at all. And Mother is all alone in the house. The tarmac road is trembling with military boots. And the sky scanned with helpless cries and squeals of terror. The military boots are steadily approaching. There is going to be trouble in this area. There is going to be trouble. There will be trouble. There is ... BANG! Mother's door is burst open. Smashed to pulp. Four figures turn the house up-side-down. God knows what they are looking for ... and father is not back from hospital yet. Perhaps caught between their crossfires ... And my mother is only sixteen. They look at her and burst out with laughter. Mother freezes with fright. Taut like a bow-string. One of them rips her bra open. Horrible laughter. He commands her to lower down her school skirt. Her trembling hands just manage to do so. Horrifying bursts of laughter. Soon the four men are on top of mother, one after

the other, before she passes out ... I still don't understand why I'm telling you all this. But that's how I was born, Mr Bwogo.

BWOGO: (*Gripped by her story*) Good God!

NANKYA: My father might be one of them. Perhaps the four – who knows?

BWOGO: And they got away with it scot-free?

NANKYA: They faced the firing squad afterwards, of course, but that didn't stop Nankya being born.

BWOGO: (*getting her second name; reflectively*) Nankya
(*as if trying to recollect*) Elizabeth Nankya ...
That was a terrible ...

NANKYA: (*deliberately changes the topic*) How about that drink you offered?

BWOGO: (*waking up from a reverie*) Drink? (*suddenly remembers*) The drink, of course ... WAITER!! That's the trouble with these third-rate hotels. Sloppy servants and miserable management. (*booming out*) WAAITTEER?

NANKYA: (*looking at her watch*) Let's forget it. I am getting late. Will have it another time.

BWOGO: At *The International*. Later this evening ...?
Fiveish?

NANKYA: That's okay by me. (*He pulls back her chair and they move away from the hotel.*)

BWOGO: (*reminiscent*) Beautiful. It was absolutely beautiful. Six months. Picnics every weekend.

Movies on Mondays. Dining and dancing on Wednesdays and parties on Fridays. Six months of inseparable coexistence. Before Rutaro came in.

NANKYA: I wouldn't say that. Rather it was the Afghanistan carpet and then ... "Anybody could have done it." Did you find me with anybody? You pestered me for weeks on end and each time I talked of possibilities of pregnancy you said that that was not a problem. Do you remember?

BWOGO: Yes, but ... but ...

NANKYA: But, but what? You spent a complete week without coming to see me, didn't you, when I told you I had missed my period? A whole week. You even went as far as instructing your secretary not to connect me whenever I phoned. How low can you sink, Mr Bwogo? How low?

BWOGO: Who told you? My secretary ...

NANKYA: Yes, you can now go and fire her. Give her the sack. She told me and ...

BWOGO: Lies, that's what she told you. Naked lies! Do you think I'm all that stupid?

NANKYA: What reason did she have to tell me lies ...? Unless, of course, you make love to her on your thick Afghanistan carpet, when the rest of the staff have gone? (*pauses and looks at him*) Is that what you're trying to tell me, Mr Bwogo?

You make love to Helen when the others have gone home'?

BWOGO: Nankya, you are now going too far.

NANKYA: Confess, Bwogo! You make love to your secretary. That's why she didn't want to connect me. Her lover boy must not be bothered by other women. And she had the temerity to tell me!

BWOGO: My relationship with Helen is purely official. Dictation, filing ...

NANKYA: And "Nankya is on the phone again; would you like to talk to her?" "Tell her I'm busy!" you would say, wouldn't you? "But she says it's urgent" "Like hell it is." And then you would slam back the phone cursing.

BWOGO: This is becoming ridiculous.

NANKYA: That's what all the bosses say. But you and I know better. When everybody is anxious to leave office at five, Bwogo and his secretary are busy looking for extra work. Isn't that the reason you stay in the office these days after five?

BWOGO: Whatever you say, Nankya, don't bring in Helen. You are not being fair.

NANKYA: Am I not now ...? (*looks at him; he turns away*) And Bwogo, supposing I have actually gone and done it?

BWOGO: Done what?

The antibiotics, the egemetrine drugs ...

BWOGO: You must be joking!

NANKYA: There are other ways, too. Traditional, but safe and sound ... *Ekibombo* leaf, for example. Irritates the uterus and very little bleeding. At least that's what she said.

BWOGO: Who are you talking about?

NANKYA: "You're not the first one to do it," she said. "If your man is irresponsible, what else can you do? He has nothing to lose, but *you*, you will go through life carrying an unwanted child."

BWOGO: (*alarmed, grabs her handbag and rummages through it*) You mean you've actually ...?

NANKYA: 'In an hour or two, it would be over.' And she takes the whole business so casually, so reassuringly, that one feels it the most natural thing to do. In the circumstances.

BWOGO: (*getting out cosmetic items and certain drugs*) I can't believe it. I can't. (*He stares at her.*)

NANKYA: Why are you staring at me? Is it pity? Four men on top of mother?

BWOGO: Nothing.

NANKYA: Is it disgust then or is it sympathy you are feeling for me? Me a product of contagious lawlessness? Don't waste your sympathy Mr ...

BWOGO: It's not that.

NANKYA: What then?

BWOGO: (*putting back the drugs, etc.*) We should leave this island, Nankya.

NANKYA: Frightened of the floods, are you? The head of the State Research Bureau is scared of the waves!

BWOGO: It's not that either. It is *you*.

NANKYA: Good heavens! This is hilarious. *You* scared of me?

BWOGO: Supposing you develop a complication?

NANKYA: What complication?

BWOGO: Haemorrhage. Have you thought about that? It has happened to many girls, you know. Bleeding to death. A few hours, and the blood is cold, the body stiff.

NANKYA: You have seen others bleed to death, have you?

BWOGO: It's no joking matter, you know.

NANKYA: At least I have someone with experience at hand.

BWOGO: Blood oozing out till one drops dead.

NANKYA: It is reassuring. Someone with experience ...

BWOGO: Why did you have to do it, Nankya, why? I can't understand you. An unsolicited present from the Old Boy above, and you treat it as if it were scum. You're a despicable little murderer. And yet moments back you were going on about murder. What hypocrisy! I wonder who you take after? Your mother or your soldiering fathers?

NANKYA: Don't insult my mother, Bwogo. I'm warning you.

BWOGO: Definitely not your mother.

NANKYA: You are overstretching the joke. I don't like it anymore.

BWOGO: Probably your lead-hearted military fathers. The ease with which you have destroyed life, that hardened fighting spirit of yours and your itchy urge to trample down everything that stands in your way are compatible with the military genre.

NANKYA: I said stop despising my mother. Whether she did it with the military or the monkeys, it's none of your business. She didn't have any choice, I have told you. Don't make it sound as if she went scrounging for it in the barracks. She was caught up in a situation she didn't understand and yet, at sixteen, she got through it with scars only, do you hear? Scars. No bullets in the navel. So shut up about my mother. And, again, I said *supposing*. Just *supposing* I had done it?

BWOGO: But what are you shouting for?

NANKYA: I said just supposing I had done it for Christ's sake. And you go on as if I had already done it.

BWOGO: (*relieved*) You mean you actually haven't done it yet?

NANKYA: I said just supposing. Can't you understand? Just supposing I had done it?

BWOGO: (somewhat relieved) I was beginning to wonder ... to doubt your sanity.

NANKYA: That doesn't mean I *can't* nor *won't* do it.

BWOGO: You don't really hate me as you said, do you?

NANKYA: (non-committal) I don't know.

BWOGO: Hate me enough to do it? Erase all the signs of our intimacy?

NANKYA: It was good when it lasted. Enjoyed every moment with you.

BWOGO: Same here. Still do. Every moment ... almost.

NANKYA: All that is now gone with the wind, I'm afraid.

BWOGO: No, Nankya. It is still there. Intact.

NANKYA: That evening on your carpet. I knew that *that* was the beginning of the end. Folded it into our arms and wrapped it in the carpet into the dustbin.

BWOGO: (desperately) It's still on, Nankya. Can't you see? It is still on. Intact.

NANKYA: I had meant our relationship to be platonic, like you said. Deep and beautiful. Beyond the dictates of the flesh and blood.

BWOGO: We all have our needs and weaknesses ... but it was beautiful. I have no regrets.

NANKYA: That's what you say.

BWOGO: It's true. The only trouble is you want me to do things your way.

NANKYA: And you want me to do them your way.

BWOGO: That's the trouble ... Can't we just be? Cut out the cat and rat game?

NANKYA: The wall is still there. And so are the masks.

BWOGO: Which wall now? Which masks?

NANKYA: Between your father's mansion and the servants' quarters.

BWOGO: You are imagining it.

NANKYA: It's impregnable. Re-enforced with iron-bars and granite. Even the square holes are blocked. No chinks for peeping through either. Just one solid impregnable wall between us. In a way, it's a pity. Because you're not really that bad.

BWOGO: (elated and excited) Please say that again, Beth ... Please say it again. For my sake. Almost the only good thing you've said about me in weeks.

NANKYA: (smelling) You are not all that bad, in some things.

BWOGO: Oh. Nankya, darling. You are a marvel. We shall get bulldozers to demolish the wall. Pull it down completely so that we can then start from scratch.

NANKYA: (conspiratorially) Or the floods might be better and faster.

BWOGO: No. The floods won't do. There is you and I to think about. And the baby boy. Rwenkuba, the thunderbolt that will blast the wall and redeem us.

NANKYA: On the contrary. The wall is tall and terrifying. We are glued on either side of it. It is fiercely smooth and slippery, radiating balls of red heat. Lizards are tumbling down from it and moths burning their wings. I can hear general commotion on your side. The Bwogos are restive, their guns at the ready. They mustn't let the Nankyas drag their poverty beyond the wall. And Mother ... my mother ... is scared stiff. She is pulling my skirt, forbidding me to climb over. "We must keep our proper places, Nankya, our proper distance." But I'm scaling the wall, despite her advice and the balls of red heat. I'm scaling the wall just to have a peep at the world beyond the wall. (*She has managed to climb on to the table.*) I must see what lies beyond this dinginess and darkness. (*peeps over the imaginary wall*) My God! What beauty! What brightness! Everything so bright and beautiful. Cars sliding by in somnambular silence. Doves dipping themselves in the swimming pool. This is paradise. (*panicky and shaking*) What is happening now? What are you doing to me? You don't want me to bask in the brightness? You don't want me to feast on that beauty? The wall is shaking. The wall is shaking. I'm falling. Help, help, help! (*she jumps into his arms.*)

BWOGO: Welcome, Beth.

NANKYA: I didn't do it.

BWOGO: The bulldozer did it.

NANKYA: It wasn't my fault. Now you'll say I planned it. Demolished the wall on purpose.

BWOGO: It was the bulldozer.

NANKYA: Are you sure, Bwogo? Are you sure?

BWOGO: As sure as the wedding gown and the wedding bells.

NANKYA: And the bridesmaids.

BWOGO: And confettis and streamers over us.

NANKYA: I can't hear the wedding bells.

BWOGO: Big reception at State House.

NANKYA: Senate members among the distinguished guests.

BWOGO: Yes, of course, the Senate members.

NANKYA: Oh, Bwogo, you're just wonderful!

BWOGO: You're fabulous!

(As they embrace. Kyeyune enters. Embarrassed at the sight, he coughs. They disengage.)

BWOGO: (covering up) Where the hell is the goddamn water?

KYEYUNE: I couldn't find it. (*urgently*) Master, Master ...!

BWOGO: What do you mean you couldn't find it? (*He moves over to serve some drinks.*)

NANKYA: Didn't you find the captain?

KYEYUNE: Three holes in the head. A flood of blood on the floor.

BWOGO: (giving Nankya one glass; they toast) Here is to the 'inseparable ones'. May they live longest and happiest. (They drink up.)

KYEYUNE: They are coming, Master. They are coming. (The door bursts open. Enter two soldiers.)

1ST SOLDIER: Hands up!

BWOGO: What's all this?

1ST SOLDIER: Hands up! I said. (The second soldier is covering both Bwogo and Nankya. They obey.)

BWOGO: I think you're mistaken, gentlemen.

1ST SOLDIER: What's your name?

BWOGO: Bwogo. Ba ...

NANKYA: Moses Bwogo. (First Soldier writes it down.)

1ST SOLDIER: Moses Bwogo. Occupation?

NANKYA: Chairman of the Building Board.

1ST SOLDIER: I didn't ask you, young lady.

BWOGO: Chairman of the Building Board.

1ST SOLDIER: Mr Bwogo, maybe you think we don't have your particulars. You are the boss of the SRB, are you not? Are you not? Answer me!

BWOGO: I am.

1ST SOLDIER: Very well, follow us.

KYEYUNE: (to himself) The call of the beckon, no one can resist it.

1ST SOLDIER: Out everybody. (They lead them out.)

CURTAIN DOWN

A fine playwright, actor and director, John Ruganda has played a leading role in the development of theatre in East Africa. He was closely associated with the Makerere Travelling Theatre and was a founder member of the short-lived Makonde Group in Kampala, and of the University of Nairobi's Travelling Theatre and the Nairobi University Players. He was Senior Fellow in Creative Writing at Makerere before joining the Department of Literature of the University of Nairobi.

The Floods is the study of the abuse of power by military dictatorships in contemporary Africa, and of the dehumanising effect that this has on both the power-drunk agents of the state and those of the oppressed who escape total liquidation at the hands of the former. The play also examines the inhibitory effects of class and privilege on personal relationships. And, most appositely, the setting for this contemporary classic is an imaginary island in Lake Victoria, Uganda.

"There can be no question at all about the dramatic richness of *The Floods*"—
The Standard

"... a concerted exposure of all agents of death and destruction. The horror of our historical moments, which has witnessed the birth of such megalomaniacs as Idi Amin, is re-enacted raw and crude as a lesson to the future as the playwright gropes for new beginnings"—*Africa*

"John Ruganda... has written yet another masterpiece — a play so terrible and so good"—Theo Luzuka, in the programme magazine for the first ever performance.

"John Ruganda... constructs his plays with extraordinary originality and his English is superbly forceful, pure and poetic"—Translated from *Le Monde*.



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