The Heart Soothers is a dynamic play that critically reflects on contemporary social values in Africa. It is a story of two young university graduates who opt to live together "for better, for worse." It is a story of bitter betrayal and revenge; of deep internal conflict and fear of the unknown. It's a vivid play in text and on stage. The theme in ***The Heart Soothers*** is relevant to all generations.

Sylvester Onzivua is a medical doctor by profession. His area of specialization is forensic and anatomical pathology. He is a contributing author of the book *Forensic Medicine, Medical Law and Ethics in East Africa* published in 2005. He was also among the first regular contributors to the humor column The Rib Breakers in the The Monitor newspaper in Uganda.

The Heart Soothers *is a moving narrative on a clash of civilizations. It reminds the reader about how difficult it can be for people to run away from the consequences of their actions and deeds.*

Samuel Andema
Chairman, International Reading Association
Washington DC, USA.

This is a very didactic play that handles the conflicting ideas of tradition and modernity. It is a unique work of art that has got great moral lessons for our society.

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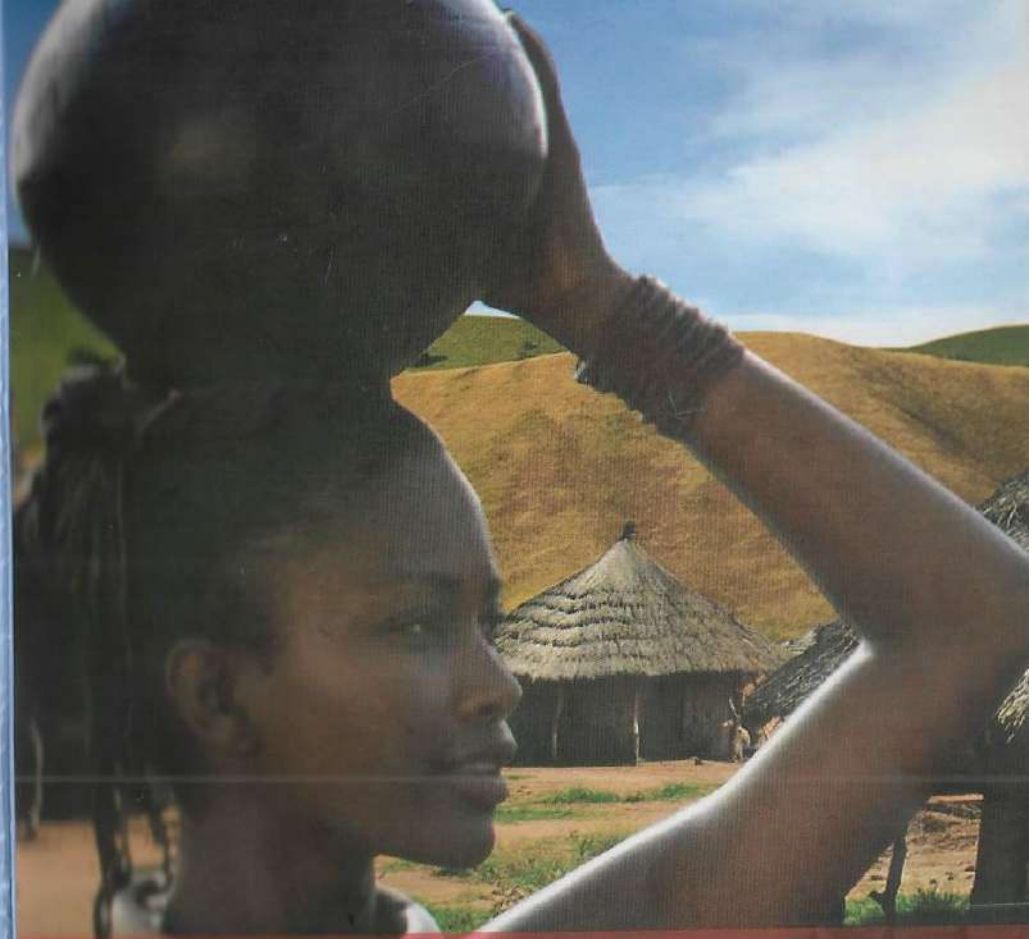

The Heart Soothers

A play by

SYLVESTER ONZIVUA

featuring

Africa's dilemma

CAST

Jimmy	A company executive
Recho	Jimmy's sister
Iyaa	Their mother
Mini	A school teacher
Florence	Acquaintances of Jimmy and Mini
Patrick	Acquaintances of Jimmy and Mini
Jez	A young woman
Jogo	A taxi driver
Jaja	A native doctor

Time setting: The present day

Act One

In the village. A lone girl is seated in an unkempt compound engrossed in the traditional game of ayiya. Enter Iyaa from the garden with green vegetables in her hands.

Iyaa: *(Eyes the unsuspecting girl, then in exasperation,)* Recho, Recho, how many times must I have to remind you that you are now a grown up girl, not fit to play such a game? *(Recho hurriedly abandons the game and retreats from Iyaa.)* Do you think you have many more years to stay in this home? Consider also the bad example this so called sister-in-law of yours is exposing you to. You have even acquired her laziness. Just look at this compound, why wasn't it swept?

Recho: But it was swept.

Iyaa: By who?

Recho: By my sister-in-law.

Iyaa: No wonder! Would anybody expect anything better out of her? And where has she disappeared to?

Recho: She went to collect firewood.

Iyaa: And Jimmy?

Recho: They went together.

Iyaa: What kind of nonsense is this? When did men start collecting firewood? Anyway, what does one expect of the likes of her but to make a man follow her like ants follow each other. *(To Recho)* And what are you doing staring at me like that? Bring me a mat immediately. *(To self)* I thought I was hearing stories when I heard that these so -called educated girls have no shame what-so-ever. Just imagine roaming all over the village with a man. And as for my son Jimmy, I cannot even tell what kind of dirty things this woman of his has not made him eat yet. What else could have driven a whole university graduate to go looking for firewood with a woman brought home as a wife? *(Meanwhile Recho has returned with the mat).* For God's sake what are you doing standing with that mat in your hands? Spread it out.

(Iyaa takes a seat and starts to prepare the vegetables.) And you, I want you to pick up every leaf that was left unswept in this compound. Is that clear? *(Then she detects a queer smell from the kitchen).* Recho, did you leave anything unattended to on the fire?

Recho: Why do you ask?

Iyaa: Why do I ask? In my own house, why do I ask? What kind of rudeness is this? There is obviously something getting burnt on the fire.

Recho: It must be the beans, but I poured enough water in them.

Iyaa: Wait here until I find out. *(Heads for the kitchen as Recho flees).*

Recho: Shall we ever eat meat in this home? Anyway, if the beans chose to get burnt, it is not my fault. Day in and day out it is beans, beans, beans. Are we bean weevils to feed on beans endlessly?

Iyaa: *(Appears with a pot of burnt beans.)* If I strangle you, will any one blame me? I deliberately left you home today to prepare these beans knowing very well I would come back with these greens that my son has missed for such a long time in the city. Now look at the mess you have made. Go pour them away and then go and cultivate that meat your mouth is itching to eat. The God who created you and this sister-in-law of yours has really let loose two live devils on me. Go get some of the dried fish and put it on fire, and get some sim-sim to prepare it with. Do you hear?

Recho: *(Pleased)* The dried fish did you say? Are we going to add these vegetables to it too?

Iyaa: Let me frankly remind you that you are beyond salvage. With the appetite you have for meat and the likes, I wish God had created you a hyena.

(Enter Jimmy and Mini, the former carrying the firewood.)

Recho: *(To Jimmy)* Can I give you a hand?

Jimmy: Thank you, but we are already home *(drops the firewood).*

Iyaa: My son, what caused you to go killing yourself in the wilderness?

Jimmy: Mother, it was not killing ourselves; it was a good adventure.

Mini: *(Kneels to greet Iyaa)* You are most welcome from the garden.

Iyaa: *(Aloof)* Thank you.

Jimmy: *(To Recho)* This compound was very clean by the time we left. What happened'?

Recho: These children from Zechariah's home were here and they were the ones who littered all these leaves.

Jimmy: When will you ever start telling the truth and stop putting the blame on somebody else? And why didn't you sweep it then?

Recho: I failed to find the broom.

Jimmy: Are you sure you looked for it in the kitchen and did not find it? Is that not where you left it Mini? *(Mini nods).* Bring me drinking water.

Recho: Water in the house is actually finished.

Jimmy: Even from mother's pot?

Recho: That was the first to dry up.

Jimmy: What were you doing at home all morning that made you fail to collect water?

Mini: It was my fault, I must say. I should have gone for water before going for firewood but I thought there was still enough left in mother's pot. Maybe I can go and fetch some now. *(Heads for the hut).*

Jimmy: Is that so? Then I understand. *(To Recho.)* I do not see what you are doing here. Go get mother's pot and both of you go for the water.

Iyaa: And who is to do the cooking here if everybody at home runs away?

Jimmy: Mother, the well is close by. They should be back soon. *(Exit Recho and Mini.)*

Iyaa: Be careful with these pots. *(Then in a lower tone)* I always give my pots to strangers with a lot of reservation. One never really knows with these town women. *(Then to Jimmy.)* Where were you the whole morning?

Jimmy: *(Laughing)* As you can obviously tell, we went collecting firewood.

Iyaa: This is no laughing matter my son. When did men start collecting firewood? Couldn't your so-called wife do it? What do you think the village will say?

Jimmy: Let them say whatever pleases them. She still does not know her way around.

Iyaa: Have you ever heard of a man going around showing the village to a woman brought home as a wife? There is surely enough time for her to get acquainted with the village without making a show of herself parading all over with a man. The whole village will say you brought home a woman who expects to be conducted on a tour of the village as if she were the village chief.

Jimmy: But mother, I must say there is an element of misunderstanding. In the first place, Mini never asked me to go with her collecting firewood. On the contrary, she objected to my going. It's only because I insisted that I went.

Iyaa: That is what you must say. But for all I know she was all along looking for a way to dodge entering the kitchen. When you mentioned the idea of firewood, you provided her with the perfect excuse she was looking for.

Jimmy: But we left Recho cooking.

Iyaa: Indeed, and when she will get married, who is going to do the cooking in the home?

Jimmy: But Recho is not getting married at this moment.

Iyaa: So that is why this woman of yours does not cook?

Jimmy: But you must understand she is a visitor.

Iyaa: Visitor indeed! Where were you born? When did women start being called visitors?

Jimmy: Mother, I sincerely think you are being a bit too harsh on Mini. You must admit you have hardly known her for a week.

Iyaa: That is the point. Who is she?

Jimmy: *(Light heartedly)* She is Mini.

Iyaa: Is that all?

Jimmy: Is that not all?

Iyaa: You act wisely when you bring your friends for us to see. But we should know them more than by sight. For instance, we should know who their parents are, what sort of background they come from and such things.

Jimmy: I have never really met her father or any of her people. We met at the university and we finished the same year, and we are working in the same town. *(Silence).*

Iyaa: Have her people been to see you yet?

Jimmy: Not yet.

Iyaa: Have they sent you any message?

Jimmy: Not any that I have received.

Iyaa: My son, it is clear that she doesn't care about her people, nor do her people care about her; that is if she has any people at all.

Jimmy: Mother, she has her people alright; and I have seen all of them in her album, and they all resemble; but why are you going into all these?

Iyaa: Ever since your father died, you have been my only hope. You must remember I am still in this homestead because of you. I have allowed myself to be tormented by poverty, having sold off all that was left of the animals to make you comfortable at school. You must also remember that you are now the head of this family and whatever you do will either uphold the good name of this family

or dishonour it. I can understand how lonely you must be in the big city. Sometimes you are tempted to stay with a friend, but you must learn to treat friends for what they are. Some are no more than fleeting dreams to pass time with. But there is now a need for you to settle down. There is a need for you to build a home. Have you been to see the catechist yet?

Jimmy: I have been rather busy these last few days; I have not found the time yet.

Iyaa: Should we say you have not found the will yet?

Jimmy: But why the urgency?

Iyaa: My son, I am not growing younger. More often than not, I am down with one sickness or another. These sicknesses give me no peace. My fields are unattended. All my age-mates have grandchildren. I look forward to seeing my grandchildren and playing with them. Before you return to the city, you must leave somebody here to assist me. In this way, we shall be assured that home is being well catered for.

Jimmy: Mother, life is not as simple as that these days. To begin with, money is no longer easy to come by. Today life is extremely expensive. I still need time to settle at my job and I have not found adequate accommodation yet.

Iyaa: Accommodation should not be the problem right

now. Even that hut you are living in right now is good enough. Now about other things, everybody here in the village is willing to give you a hand. With a goat here and a cock there and other things, everything will go on well. Moreover, the catechist is a very understanding man. He can afford to be patient. The whole issue will be dealt with as an internal affair.

Jimmy: Mother, what is so special about the catechist's daughter?

Iyaa: Eeh! Don't you know this girl my son? I now begin to understand why the hesitation; to begin with, her mother gave birth to eleven children. Of course you know childbearing is passed on from mother to daughter. Some of the virtues of childbearing in the mother must have been passed down to the daughter. Taking her education, she is the only girl who has successfully completed her secondary education in the whole of this village and even beyond. Look at the respect she gives everybody, look at the way she keeps the catechist's home, ever so clean. At no moment will you find her idle. She spends the whole day in the garden. She ploughs like a tractor. She is a very hard working girl. You will never find another woman like her. She is the girl who understands that a woman is brought home to fetch water, cook and produce fat and healthy children, not two or three but ten and beyond. She is such a religious girl who does

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not possess the seductive type of eyes that this woman of yours has.

Jimmy: *(Assertively)* When we are discussing the catechist's daughter, let us not involve Mini in it. Otherwise we will be back-biting and even at worse gossiping. I will not allow it. Now about this catechist's daughter, you said that she ploughs like a tractor? I do not intend to open a farm in any foreseeable future. And that she is capable of breeding like a rabbit, I do not intend to father a whole tribe. And that she is a senior four drop out, considering my aspirations of a marriage of interaction, dialogue and communication ... *(Enter Recho and Mini, the former balancing the smaller of the pots of water on her head and the latter following dejectedly, only holding the headrest in her hands. All eyes focus on her.)*

Jimmy: What happened?

Mini: *(Shaky)* I do not know how to explain this but when we were at the well, I gave Recho the smaller pot I had gone with, to carry home. And on our way, some of these boys looking after cattle must have tied grass knots along the path. I got trapped and the pot lost balance...

Jimmy: I am sorry. Did you get hurt? Did water pour on you?

Iyaa: *(Shock gradually sinking in.)* But how can this be possible? Of all things, why did this have to happen to my pot that has served me for all these years?

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Jimmy: Now Mother, you are frightening her all the more. This was an accident. We can buy another pot; after all the pot was already old. Sooner than later it would have began to leak.

Iyaa: *(Shock giving way to pent up feelings: she moves in front, her eyes at the horizon but also heavenwards.)*

My son, do grow up.

My son, for how long must you remain a fool?

Oh! My son thinks that money can buy everything.

Oh! My son thinks that money can buy experience.

Leak did I hear my son say would my pot!

Old did I hear my son say was my pot!

The pot, is it a saucepan to leak?

The pot, has it ever leaked?

Does my son know how I acquired that pot?

Or does my son imagine I bought the pot?

My son does not know the pot was older than him.

My son does not know the pot was passed over to me by my mother.

The pot that my mother received from the hands of her mother.

Who also received it from her grandmother.

The pot I would have gladly died in its place but passed on.

For in the death of this pot, I see my own death.

In the death of this pot, I see the death of my son.

The pot is no more!

It can no longer be passed on from generation to generation.

Nor can the saucepan that has replaced the pot be strong enough to defeat the encroachment of the years.

Only the pot can outmanoeuvre the years.

The pot that mothered many generations.

The pot that fed the great men of this village.

The pot that reconciled families.

The pot that cooled the thirst.

The pot that brewed the strongest of beers.

The pot that soothed my heart.

The pot that fed my children.

The pot is no more.

This pot that its children respected.

This pot that its children dared not to break.

Who is it that has laid waste the work of so many generations?

Surely not the gods that have kept the pot alive.

I do not want to believe the gods have a hand in this.

This is no small matter.

This is no ordinary matter.

Curtains fall.

Act Two

Scene one

A single room apartment neatly arranged with a feminine air about it. The furniture is modest. It reflects a not-too-well-off working class occupant. Enter Jimmy and Mini carrying between them a shopping bag.

Jimmy: *(Very tired)* Will I ever escort you to the market again?

Mini: *(Exasperation)* What again?

Jimmy: We left this place at 2.00 p.m. and now it's almost seven o'clock. I can't even remember how many times you made us walk the whole town to buy one small item we could have bought anywhere in the town.

Mini: I was just teaching you how to be economical with money. You men do not know how to bargain. The very first price you are told is the price you pay. Anyway, if you don't appreciate...

Jimmy: *(Conciliatory)* I guess you are right. One can never get settled in life without a woman. That is perhaps

why I am still very disorganised. *(Then changes tone.)* Do you still have some drinking water?

Mini: Some of the fruit juice I made in the morning is still available.

Jimmy: Good girl. That is why I like it with you around. *(Exclaims)* Ehee! What has surprised me is the price of even the cheapest essentials. Meat is now almost double the price it was a few months ago. At this rate I will turn into a vegetarian.

Mini: *(With bitterness)* Now, with this rising cost of living assuming you were married, how many children would you have loved to father? *(Gives him the juice)*

Jimmy: Rephrase that question.

Mini: Assuming you were married ...

Jimmy: Assuming we were married... *(silence)*. Continue.

Mini: How many children would you...

Jimmy: How many children would we...

Mini: ... plan to have?

Jimmy: *(Takes a long sip before answering.)* I am attempting to imagine how my grandfather would have reacted to such a question. He would have laughed off his head before going for his whip in case one of his wives dared to confront him with such an issue. Anyway, I think having children is one problem, and the economic situation is another altogether. *(Deliberately changing the subject; reaching for the shopping bag.)*. Let's have a look at the dress we bought *(holds it*

against her body.) Hold it please. *(Mini reluctantly obeys; in admiration)* In this dress you can even tempt a bishop. You can be sure that in it I'll never let you out all by yourself.

Mini: *(Refuses to be flattered.)* Yet you always accuse us, women, of jealousy.

Jimmy: Oh, if only you knew, men are more jealous than women. Men keep their feelings under tight control, unlike women on whose faces a spark of jealousy can be read from a long distance.

Mini: Then you do not yet know women.

Jimmy: If it were possible, a man would label his wife "private property; absolutely out of bounds; strictly forbidden", and many others, and make her move with the labels wherever she went.

Mini: *(Sarcastically)* And how would a woman label her husband?

Jimmy: Of course it would be the same if she had powers. But left to himself, a man would simply label himself "A custodian". *(Mini, having dumped the new dress on a chair, sullenly resumes her seat on a stool and begins to prepare some vegetables which occupy her throughout the scene.)*

Jimmy: Mini! *(She looks up)* Mini!

Mini: I am not deaf.

Jimmy: What is actually the problem with you today? *(Silence)* What is wrong? *(Silence)* Is it the experience we had in the village? (Silence) I have said this to you over and over, I do not give a damn about the opinion of those people in the village. I am not interested in that village girl. Do I make myself clear? *(Silence)* Is it the pill? That's it, isn't it?

Mini: What about the pill?

Jimmy: Do you still want to get on the pill? *(Silence)* Have you forgotten that our first and real quarrel which threatened to end my relationship with you was about the same?

Mini: Now who is talking about a quarrel?

Jimmy: *(In a calculated, firm, yet gentle voice.)* To those who discover that you are on the pill, you create a bad image of yourself particularly when you are a young girl. Today girls simply get on the pill as a fashion, a half-baked imitation of a foreign civilisation. It is a shame, it stinks. *(Slyly)* Have you proved beyond doubt that you really need these things? Let's forget about the pill for the moment, shall we? *(Silence)* That is what has been on your mind the whole of today, isn't it?

Mini: I will be going back tomorrow.

Jimmy: What?

Mini: I will be going back tomorrow.

Jimmy: What is itching you here? Tomorrow is Sunday.

Mini: I have got lessons to prepare.

Jimmy: You can prepare them from here.

Mini: I promised to give my class a test on Monday.

Jimmy: At first it was a lesson and now it's a test. Which is which?

Mini: Either way, I will leave tomorrow.

Jimmy: You are not leaving here until Monday.

Mini: To be frank, I am not getting on quite well with my aunt. She resents my coming here for weekends and I have a feeling she expects me to move out now that I have found employment. She takes the slightest opportunity to emphasise to me the need for privacy.

Jimmy: Is she all alone? Doesn't she go out at times?

Mini: At thirty eight?

Jimmy: I wonder why she let herself reach thirty eight.

Mini: Some people think they are very good until it's too late. That is when they realise they are not that good after all.

Jimmy: *(Sitting upright slowly and carefully choosing his words)* For the last few weeks, I have sincerely been thinking a lot. I believe you and me are now mature enough to make important decisions for ourselves.

With life being what it is today, would it be asking for too much if I requested you to move in here permanently? *(Silence)*

Mini: Let's first go home.

Jimmy: *(Passionately)* It's too expensive my dear; not right now. I have to be very frank with you. I have just started working, going home would mean going through all the preliminaries, which will involve at least one bull. That alone costs a lot of money. Going home may even involve the full bride price. No Mini, you are the first and perhaps the only person I expect to understand and sympathise with me.

Mini: But it is against our traditions. And these things have terrible repercussions, which I very much dread.

Jimmy: You still believe in those traditions? How many weekends have you spent here? And what has happened? Absolutely nothing. Those traditions have lost their meaning and power in our age. And what I am asking us to do is nothing new. It's the order of the day. Almost everybody who has done it has got away with it. I am sure we'll get away with it too.

Mini: All the same it disturbs my conscience.

Jimmy: Come on, be of your age. We cannot afford to be bulldozed by tradition. With time our people will understand we need something new. You can't put new wine into old wine skins, mind you. *(Smiles)*

Mini: *(Desperately)* Jimmy, we profess to be Christians. We can't start living together just like that. It's wrong before God.

Jimmy: Mini, what the church brought to us is coloured white. The church, and not God imported the white man's culture to us wholesale. In the white man's culture, a woman goes to her new home through the church. But for us, she goes to the church through her new home. We are not the white. We are not offending God. Perhaps we are offending fellow men; the only difference being that their skin is white.

Mini: *(Resigned)* Give me time to think and make up my mind.

Jimmy: There is no time Mini. Let today be the day, and this hour, the hour of your decision.

Mini: Please do not press me that far. I do not want to take a decision I'll live to regret. Please be realistic. Give me time to make up my mind.

(Mini stares vacantly ahead as curtains fall)

Scene Two

In a luxurious sitting room of a typical upcoming Company Executive; Mini preparing to go to town, is interrupted by a knock.

Mini: Come in. *(Enter Florence, a lady of the modern times who carries herself with a lot of confidence.)*

Mini: *(Welcomes Florence with eager enthusiasm)* Flora, what a surprise. I am extremely delighted to see you. How are you? *(Shows her to a seat.)*

Florence: Just about fine. And how are you?

Mini: I must say about the same.

Florence: *(With a knowing look all around.)* For how long have you been here?

Mini: A good number of months.

Florence: You mean you have decided to settle down with him?

Mini: *(With a guilty smile.)* Such things do happen my dear Flora.

Florence: But frankly Mini, you are no longer the jolly and care-free girl of our school days.

Mini: What do you expect with all these fears and worries?

Florence: I sincerely feel sorry for you ever since you told me of the problems you are facing. I hope Jimmy does not take his mother seriously.

Mini: *(Bitterly)* I had never met that woman before. In the week we spent at Jimmy's village, the woman showed such a hostile attitude towards me.

Florence: As I told you before, it's always best to ignore such people.

Mini: And apart from that, if it were only Jimmy's silence or late comings, I might just have accommodated them.

Florence: Now, what else has cropped up?

Mini: Jimmy is a total stranger to me these days, with a short temper and intolerance at the slightest excuse. It is as if no feeling of love has ever existed between us.

Florence: Anyway, as I have always told you, love, so called is unknown to our men. The only love there is, is the one from herbs and potions.

Mini: *(Alarmed)* I have never used such things, moreover our love was so spontaneous to us.

Florence: Talk of spontaneous love to me is Greek. You should see that fool Geoffrey craving for me now.

Mini: *(Eyes popping.)* Craving for you?

Florence: *(With a carefree attitude)* Sure. Why not? I only had to go to my native doctor to have him ready to kiss my feet.

Mini: *(Shocked)* You mean you went to a witch-doctor?

Florence: They are not witches. They are native doctors. It is only the ignorant who term them so.

Mini: With all your education and Christian as you are, you stooped that low?

Florence: It is not stooping low. It is conquering the forces of nature. I put Geoffrey precisely where I wanted him to be. Unfortunately for him, he is now a closed chapter.

Mini: *(Puzzled)* What do you mean?

Florence: My boyfriend is renting for me a flat in town.

Mini: *(Shocked)* Are such things possible? How can you do such a thing to your husband even if he has hurt you?

Florence: Why not? Why should I tempt my fortunes?

Mini: *(Absorbing the shock.)* Then why did you go to the witch-doctor or native doctor, whatever you call him?

Florence: Just to make sure Geoffrey does not go back to his girl friends.

Mini: I do not believe in inflicting pain on someone as an end in itself even if he hurts me so much.

Florence: So what do you want to do about Jimmy, sit here and die of sorrow?

Mini: I am hoping somehow that things will work out for the better. But he is so changed.

Florence: *(With interest)* So changed? What do you precisely mean?

Mini: Jimmy goes on safaris and appointments so often. And the money for the house is also reduced.

Florence: Is that all?

Mini: As I said, one by one, I might have found them bearable but to combine late coming, silence, a short temper and total indifference kills me, Florence.

Florence: Do you have any suspicions?

Mini: I do know somewhere something is crystallising, but I can't put my finger on it.

Florence: If you believed in our native doctors, I could have taken you to my doctor and you would have found out already.

Mini: Maybe in the long run I might, but I am scared of these people.

Florence: Can you imagine what my doctor has made me do to my boyfriend?

Mini: *(With interest)* What?

Florence: First of all, he has dropped all the girls he had. He even beat up one in my presence...

Mini: *(Interrupting)* You are the limit.

Florence: Not only that, he buys whatever I demand. He keeps most of his money in a suitcase of which I have the keys and whenever I ask him for money, he tells me to get any amount from the suitcase.

Mini: People are made differently. For me I must be the unfortunate type. Some of us are made to suffer at the hands of men, by the looks of it.

Florence: Nonsense. The only problem is you expect to get good things for nothing. God helps those who help themselves. You know how much money I have to spend on these doctors?

Mini: Anyway, I do not have the courage or the money.

Florence: My dear Mini, I just dropped in to see your new place. I have a few things to do in town so I beg to leave. *(Stands to leave.)*

Mini: I too was on my way to town to take Jimmy's jacket for dry cleaning. If you can just give me a few minutes, we can go together.

Florence: That will be all the more fun. *(Mini routinely checks the pockets of the jacket. She comes across a letter, which she silently reads. Shock and disbelief register on her face as she does so).*

Florence: What is it Mini?

Mini: No, this can't be true.

Florence: *(Joins her)* What is it?

Mini: I think I must be running mad.

Florence: *(She gets the letter from Mini and silently, she quickly reads through).* Listen to this. *(She reads aloud.)*

Jimmy dearest,

I find it hard if not impossible to rub the sweet memories of the wonderful safari we had. Ever since we came back, I have never stopped day dreaming. I had never before had a plane ride nor travelled so far north. Hotbed Lodge and Stranger's Inn were wonders, weren't they? What's more, sitting close to you all along the safari made all the difference.

Jimmy, my love, I am just crazy about you. Although I know you have a wife, I can't just help it, what with all the love and understanding you showed me. I can't forget the way you kept me laughing all along the safari. No man has ever made me feel so queenly.

The touch of your hands.

The twinkle in your eyes,

Am I ever to forget?

Once again, a million thanks for the safari.

Forever hungry for you, I remain J.

Mini: This can't be true.

Florence: Mini do grow up. A letter is right here before you. What more proof do you need?

Mini: Oh God what should I do now?

Florence: Take my advice. Get yourself a domestic pain killer.

Mini: *(Absent minded)* What is that?

Florence: Get yourself a panadol.

Mini: A panadol? What for?

Florence: My dear, at this stage you need a panadol.

Mini: You mean these tablets for killing pain?

Florence: *(With glee)* I can't believe you are so green.

Mini: Green about what?

Florence: Panadols! *(Silence)* Listen! When your husband or any man begins to give you heartaches, especially by cheating on you, you simply get another man to soothe your heart. This new man you will call your heart soother, your pain-killer or simply your panadol.

Mini: *(Lost in her own thoughts.)* I do not know what I am going to do when Jimmy comes home.

Florence: Just show him the letter and let him know you also know. But first dig up more information about this girl.

Mini: How?

Florence: There must be another letter or Jimmy may have scribbled an address somewhere. Check around.

Mini: You could be right. Come and give me a hand. *(Heads for bedroom. Florence stands up to follow suit. Enter Jimmy. Mini ignores him.)*

Florence: Oh Jimmy, welcome home. You actually found me on the verge of leaving. I have a commitment I cannot afford to be late for.

Jimmy notices letter, down plays it.

Jimmy: I hope you had a nice time.

Florence: Indeed I had. Good day.

Jimmy: Good day to you too.

Mini emerges from the bedroom with her belongings. She angrily picks up the chair backs.

Jimmy: Mini, what is the problem'? What is it? *(Silence)* Is it this letter'? That is it, isn't it? Now listen to me! Just give me a minute to explain. Please! *(Mini maintains her silence and glares at him. Extremely persuasive, at his best as he continues)* I deliberately brought this letter home to show to you. I brought it to you to ensure that the relationship between you and me is completely transparent. Now about the author of this letter, she is one of our secretaries with whom I had the misfortune of travelling up-country on a fact-finding mission. I kept her

company throughout the journey purely out of courtesy. But she mistook it for advances. And moreover she has always looked at me lustfully. I have never ceased to remind her that I have a wife. No wonder she even quoted this in her letter. I brought home this letter so that you may write to her on the back of it and ask her to stop disturbing your dear husband. I give you the liberty to use as many nouns and adjectives in your reply as you can. Then, first thing tomorrow morning, I will deliver it to her. Maybe she will understand that you and me are a very serious couple.

Mini: Oh Jimmy, I was so worried. *(Sits down.)* What should I write?

Jimmy: Here write *(gives her a pen)* "We have had enough of you, husband poacher." Tell her she is an off- layer; very cachexic … that she is below the Michael West standard… a BMW… and many other things you can think of.

Mini: Should we say she is a bush rat, full of garbage, a buffoon, a baboon.

Jimmy: *(Interposing)* Yes …yes… go ahead …and sign here … sign as Mrs. …yes here. First thing in the morning it will be on her desk.

Mini: *(Delighted)* I would love to see her face as she reads it *(Hands the letter to Jimmy.)*

Jimmy: Do not worry about that.

Mini sets about re-arranging the room.

Jimmy: *(Remembers)* The silly letter almost made me forget

to inform you that a business friend is coming to visit us this evening. I hope you will serve us with the wine I brought yesterday and perhaps dinner later.

Mini returns her property and disappears into the kitchen. Jimmy impatiently glances at his watch now and then, paces up and down, rather restless: then a knock.

Jimmy: That must be him. *(Goes to the door.)* You are most welcome, Patrick. Feel at home *(Showing him a chair).*

Patrick: Thanks. You disappeared without a trace from Kiira Club yesterday. What time did you leave the party?

Jimmy: *(Involuntarily looks at the kitchen door and then lowering his voice.)* I left quite early at about eleven o'clock, I think.

(Then raising his voice) Mini ...Madam.

Mini enters with two glasses of wine on a tray.

Jimmy: You have not met before, have you?

Patrick: Not as far as I can remember... But let me make a guess. She must be your Minister of Internal Affairs *(they laugh).*

Jimmy: She is Mini ...and Mini ...meet Patrick. A business associate.

Mini: You are most welcome *(she retreats).*

Patrick: *(Takes a sip)* This is really going to be the cure of my hangover. I wonder why you are not nursing a hangover yourself, Jimmy.

Jimmy: *(Tries desperately to silence Patrick as he looks helplessly at Mini's retreating figure.)* If that one gets wind of what you are saying, she will raise hell here.

Patrick: Do you allow her to bulldoze you around? I have already put mine in her rightful place. I am entitled to my freedom of movement and I allow no one to question it.

Jimmy: *(Hurriedly changing the subject.)* I hope you have succeeded in locating a good market for the items I called you about yesterday.

Patrick: I have got somebody willing to take them at twelve hundred and thirty. He needs them now!

Jimmy: *(Amazed)* How did you succeed in getting such a good market within so short a time?

Patrick: These people who are now running businesses all over town are willing to buy anything.

Jimmy: That gives a total of...

Patrick: One point three.

Jimmy: That is excellent. Do we get a cheque or hard cash?

Patrick: Of course hard cash. So let us get going. And besides, I have an intriguing invitation at The Joint at eight tonight. I am looking forward to your company.

Jimmy: Not after yesterday. I am still not feeling well enough.

Patrick: What are you going to do at home the whole evening, supervise the kitchen? *(Laughs rather loudly).*

Jimmy: *(Hurt but making light of the issue.)* Of course not.

Patrick: Then let's get going.

Jimmy: In that case let me inform "The Minister of Internal Affairs." *(Exits)*

Mini: *(Enters with Jimmy)* I was looking forward to you joining us for dinner. And moreover evening tea is nearly ready.

Patrick: I would have loved to, but we have a line to chase. Is that not so, Jimmy?

Jimmy: I am afraid the principles of survival leave us with no choice.

Patrick: Madam accept my sincere gratitude for everything.

Mini: You are welcome.

Exit Jimmy and Patrick.

Mini: God what have I done to deserve this? Is this the man I married? And then that Patrick friend of his, what was he talking about? Wait a minute ... Jimmy told me he spent last night in Kayala attending a meeting. A meeting with parties and hangovers... Jimmy will have to explain. I wonder why some men like Jimmy are so blind to be led by the likes of Patrick. God may forgive Patrick but I will never forget what he is doing to break our relationship.

The next morning. The setting is the same as previous. Jimmy emerges fully dressed for duty, holding a briefcase.

Mini: *(Hotly pursuing him.)* Aren't you having breakfast?

Jimmy: It's already too late.

Mini: What do you mean'? It's only seven o'clock.

Jimmy: I have some urgent work to do before I attend a board meeting scheduled to start at 10.00 am in Kayala.

Mini: Can you please do me a favour and sit down for a minute? There is something I want to discuss with you.

Jimmy: *(Standing)* What is it that you want to talk about that I can't listen to while standing?

Mini: Is it my cooking that you resent these days'?

Jimmy: What makes you think so?

Mini: Yesterday, you asked me to prepare tea for you and your friend. No sooner had I finished preparing the tea than you left. These days you look for the least excuse to run away from here. I want to know what is happening.

Jimmy: What can't you understand? I am very busy these days.

Mini: Even up to midnight and beyond?

Jimmy: I have to chase lines.

Mini: The other day you told me you spent the night

in Kayala. What was it that that Patrick friend of yours was talking about yesterday?

Jimmy: You are wasting my time. Why didn't you raise the issue last night?

Mini: Last night? You came back at 3.00 am. Did you sincerely expect me to be wide-awake at that time?

Jimmy: Anyway, I am going to office. We shall discuss what ever you desire in the evening. *(Starts to leave).*

Mini: *(Blocking the way)* Who do you think you are fooling? Before you go, tell me where you were the other night.

Jimmy: I was in Kayala. Patrick also happened to be in Kayala.

Mini: So Kiira Club in Kayala?

Jimmy: *(Sweetly)* Kiira Club is not in Kayala but Kiira Night Club is and it is on Kiira Road. Surely you remember Kiira Road in Kamoya. It's the road on which David and Josephine live. We have been to their place on more than one occasion. Don't you remember'?

Mini: *(Finding it hard to believe)* Which party did you attend?

Jimmy: *(Even more sweetly.)* I didn't attend any party. Patrick did. I only checked on him.

Mini: *(For lack of anything better to say.)* Now you have ignored the so-called family account, haven't you?

Jimmy: My salary still goes there, doesn't it?

Mini: Apart from the salary, what else? Yet you have opened a new bank account.

Jimmy: I have many business interests these days. I need a current bank account. Don't you see a savings bank account is a hindrance to business? Moreover, the maximum amount of money that can be withdrawn is limited.

Mini: Then why don't you deposit some of the profits you make on the family bank account?

Jimmy: I have to reinvest the capital and even the profits. It's yet too early.

Mini: *(Aggressively)* And why don't you want me to know your new account number and how much money you have on it?

Jimmy: I am already late for office.

Mini: *(hotly)* Give me an answer.

Jimmy: *(Picking up his briefcase)* Am I on trial? I see I have never given you a beating and you have decided to grow horns. It's a very good way through which you are inviting one. *(Starts to leave, hesitates and then faces Mini).* My money is my own affair. If you have as much as a single coin on those accounts, you can then righfully demand for an accountability from me. You are not going to dictate to me what I am to do and what I am not to do with my own money. Get that very clear in your head. *(Exits arrogantly. Mini who has been watching Jimmy wide-eyed breaks down and sobs.)*

The following day.
The setting is as before, and Mini is deep in thought, desperation and futility on her face. The silence is broken by a knock.

Mini: *(Startled, tiding up)* Come in. *(Enter Florence).*

Florence: Thank you. But believe it or not you look absolutely worn-out. Have you been sick?

Mini: Not really.

Florence: It's Jimmy again, isn't it?

Mini: Leave me alone as far as Jimmy is concerned.

Florence: What mischief is he up to now?

Mini: I can't explain it myself. Jimmy has simply abandoned home, the very few times he comes home, the earliest time of his arrival is 3.00 am. *(Lost in thought.)* I should have believed you.

Florence: I told you. You even saw the letter for yourself. What did Jimmy say about the letter?

Mini: Jimmy swore upon his father's grave that he had nothing whatsoever to do with that woman. He told me it was one of their secretaries with whom he had the misfortune of travelling up-country on official duty.

Florence: Then what happened up-country?

Mini: That he kept her company throughout the safari

purely out of politeness and a sense of official duty. But the girl mistook it for advances. He claims the girl fell madly in love with him.

Florence: Did he also claim he remained toothless?

Mini: He did not want to antagonise her. But he swore that he has never replied any of her letters and that he brought home that letter to make me aware of the whole situation.

He even made me scribble on the back of that letter so that he could return it to her.

Florence: *(Amazed)* And you gave it to him to return?

Mini: He forced me into believing that he would never be unfaithful to me. I should have known better.

Florence: But how could you have been fooled to that extent? You should have made him write a letter of regrets, which you should have taken yourself. But tell me, why is Jimmy abandoning you for other women? Is there something missing in you that he finds in other women?

Mini: Children, of course. Jimmy has hinted it though in a drunken manner, that I am here for breeding purposes. Yet I am as barren as a brick.

Florence: You are here for breeding purposes? He must be joking. How does a person hope to look after a multitude of children, some of them bastards?

Mini: Jimmy maintains that the presence of children gives the incentive to work harder. I have not

given him a child for all these years. There must be something wrong with me.

Florence: Our African men are nothing but grown up babies in the way they think. And about your not being able to get a baby, it may not be your fault. It may be Jimmy who is actually the problem.

Mini: No, there is nothing wrong with him. The very few nights he does not turn his back on me, he performs very well as a husband.

Florence: That is where you go wrong. The fact that a man can plough a field does not automatically mean that his seeds will germinate. A man who can aim a gun does not always shoot accurately. Have you ever been for a medical check up?

Mini: That was the first thing we did. We were pronounced fit.

Florence: Have you ever been on contraceptives?

Mini: What has that got to do with it?

Florence: When one has been on contraceptives and stops using them, complications may arise, making conception difficult.

Mini: You imagine Jimmy can as much as allow me touch a contraceptive pill when he is so desperate for a child?

Florence: Then why worry? You have just been together for two years.

Mini: But I am convinced its Jimmy's failure to see my

people. Whenever I suggest to Jimmy we go home to settle the bride price and other traditional matters, he always claims he is too poor despite the millions of shillings he is making these days.

Florence: You, a university graduate, talk of bride price? You amaze me.

Mini: I really believe we have not yet reached the age where we can afford to ignore the barest essentials of our traditions; more so, where vital and delicate issues such as marriages are concerned. Much as we are living in a so-called modern society, I think Jimmy has made a mistake by not going to see my parents. A parent's blessing is blessed by God. And so long as God exists, the blessing of our parents hold and continue to play an important role in our lives.

Florence: That may explain what Jimmy was doing in Karika.

Mini: Jimmy in Karika. When?

Florence: Today, I saw Jimmy in Karika this morning when I went there to buy a few items. He may have been there buying some of the traditional items required for bride price.

Mini: But Jimmy told me this morning that he was going for a board meeting in Kayala. Let me find out from his office *(dials)*. He must have gone to chase one of his numerous women.

Florence: You sincerely think a man of Jimmy's standard

and status will have anything to do with women from slums such as Karika?

Mini: From what I know of men, they will follow anything in a skirt with two legs … Good afternoon … can I talk to Jimmy Ezonia? …Since this morning … Isn't he out on official duty …his wife … Okay, thanks. He hasn't been to office today. This has marked the end of my patience. Today Jimmy will have to do a lot of explaining.

Florence: I have nothing more to offer you. I offered you my native doctor, you refused. I offered you a panadol, you refused. What more am I to do for you?

Mini: Florence, on the other hand I think that it is taking things too far. My mother often told me that to us women, marriage is merely a matter of tolerance. The higher your degree of tolerance, the more successful your marriage will be; at least externally.

Florence: What is it that you really call marriage? Has Jimmy ever done anything traditional to acknowledge you as his wife? Have you ever gone to any church or officially registered even an imitation of marriage?

Mini: But everybody around us recognises us as husband and wife. That should be the most important thing for the beginning.

Florence: But why are you desperately trying to defend

Jimmy? The most important thing for the beginning must be for the parties themselves to recognise and acknowledge each other as husband and wife. But Jimmy is behaving in a manner that does not reflect that he acknowledges you as his wife but rather as nothing but a part time friend. Why should you remain faithful to him?

Mini: Florence, I have listened to you. But I am sorry I find your solutions incompatible with my beliefs.

Florence: Don't ever say I did not try to help you. Good day, and I wish you every luck *(exits)*.

Mini: *(Desperately)* Life, why have you so cheated me? What have I done to deserve this? Witchcraft? Not that one. What security can witchcraft offer in marriage? I see many people who start big businesses first consult witch doctors. I see many people who fall sick, rush to witch doctors. Can witchcraft offer any security in life? Now these things called panadols! Such things have never existed in our culture. If I were ever forced to choose between these two evils, which of them is the lesser evil; witchcraft or panadols?

(A knock, Mini goes to the door …collects a letter) … Who is this who could have addressed a letter, Mr. & Mrs. Ezonia? *(Opens it)* An invitation? …an engagement party at Kiira Club? But this was two days ago… *(Then the truth dawns on her)*. My God!, My God!, Is this supposed to be the Kayala party? *(Decisively)* This is the end. I cannot tolerate more

than this ... History has proved that surprise is the best weapon. Let me pretend I know nothing. When Jimmy comes back; whether at midnight or tomorrow, he is in for a surprise.

Later in the day, Jimmy walks in.

Mini: *(Casually lifting up her eyes)* How was office today?

Jimmy: It was fine. Why?

Mini: Is it a crime to know how your office was? And how was Kayala?

Jimmy: *(Looks hard at her)* Just as usual.

Mini: Has your company decided to open a branch in Karika?

Jimmy: *(Very suspiciously)* Now what has that got to do with you?

Mini: Nothing but maybe everything.

Jimmy: What do you mean?

Mini: Where were you this morning?

Jimmy: And what has that got to do with you?

Mini: I want to know what you were doing in Karika this morning.

Jimmy: *(Hostile)* And what were you doing there yourself?

Mini: *(In tears)* Jimmy, is this what you call building a

family? Where do you think such life will lead you? You can fool one person at a time but you cannot fool everybody at all times.

Jimmy: *(Feigning annoyance)* I do not see why you want to drag me into your unending quarrels. You make this place so miserable for me. Will I ever have peace in this home'?

Mini: *(Unmoved)* The day before yesterday, you claimed you were in Kayala, allegedly in Kiira Night Club. I used not to think you could reduce yourself to such a cheap liar.

Jimmy: Cheap liar? Did I hear you call me a cheap liar? I told you I was in Kayala and if that does not satisfy you, too bad. You can go hang. *(Gets up to go.)*

Mini: And where do you think you are going'?

Jimmy: When did you become the man and me the woman in this house to question my movements?

Mini: Wherever you are going, we shall go together.

Jimmy looks menacingly at her and then comes to sit down.

Jimmy : Then go where you want to go.

(Mini sits). I say go; go!

A stony silence follows. Jimmy looks at his watch now and again. Obviously he is getting very impatient and irritated. When he finally reaches his boiling point, he gets up, and makes determinedly for the door. Mini follows him.

Jimmy: *(With anger)* Get back right now or you will not like it when I get through with you.

Mini: *(Defiantly)* No.

Jimmy shoves her violently back and a fight erupts between the two.

Mini: Kill me today! Make a gift of my dead body to my parents today! On account of your women, kill me off today! *(In between sobs)* But to the grave you will also follow me.

The fight continues to the bedroom. It's only evidence is Mini's wailing. Then a knock, followed by a louder knock. Jimmy emerges from the bedroom as Patrick enters.

Jimmy: You just caught me on the verge of leaving. Perhaps it's my chance to ask you to give me company today.

Patrick: How is your Minister of Internal Affairs?

Jimmy: Sh-h-h. Later.

The two exit.

A few minutes later, a tearful Mini emerges.

Mini: *(To herself)* Jimmy has made me realise that faithfulness is stupidity. Whoever eats honey should not be surprised at the sting of the bee. Jimmy is going to be paid in his own currency. Perhaps he will realise how I feel. Only and only after that shall we settle down.

Curtains fall.

Act Three

Scene one

The curtain opens to show a one-roomed apartment furnished with some old fashioned sofa sets. A few stools and a bed are in the background.

Jez is lying on the bed, resting. There is a knock on the door.

Jez: Open! *(Another knock.)* Come in! *(Another knock.) She reluctantly gets up to open the door. (Enter Jimmy carrying an apparently heavy paper bag in one hand and two packets of milk in the other).*

Jez: *(Forcing a smile,)* May I give you a hand? *(she notices a plaster on one of Jimmy's cheeks which had previously been carefully obscured by the bag).* What happened to you?

Jimmy: *(In a manner of waving her off.)* It's nothing to worry about.

Jez: *(Sarcastically)* I see.

Jimmy: It's true it's nothing to worry about. And stop looking at me that way. It was only a small accident.

Jez: What happened?

Jimmy: When I got home from the office, I found my neighbour beating up his wife. I went to the woman's rescue and when I held her husband, she charged blindly at both of us and here on my face lies the marks of her attack. *(Shaking his head.)* Husbands and wives, will they ever live in Eden again?

Jez: Isn't it barbaric to fight one's wife at this time of the day?

Jimmy: You women are sometimes difficult to understand. You are a very suspicious lot. No woman will believe that her husband is faithful.

Jez: They are right. *(Silence)* Can I prepare you something to drink?

Jimmy: I will be most grateful. But you are still not looking very well. Did you go to the clinic?

Jez: Yes I did. I have actually been anxiously looking forward to seeing you.

Jimmy: *(Alarmed)* Something serious?

Jez: *(In an attempt to relax Jimmy's mind)* Not really; you must first have your drink.

Jimmy: I hate to be kept in suspense.

(Jez serves the drink)

Jimmy: *(Taking a sip and a bite)* I always enjoy whatever you prepare. You never cease to remind me of my

own mother. *(Then noticing Jez has not served herself.)* Anything wrong?

Jez: You will excuse me. I have lost appetite for almost everything.

Jimmy: What is actually the problem with you? *(For an answer, Jez gives him her medical forms.)*

Jimmy: *(Studying them.)* Are these your medical forms?

(Jez nods.) I can't make head or tail of this medical short hand.

Jez: *(Turning away from Jimmy.)* Apart from the ordinary treatment, I decided to go for a pregnancy test *(silence)*.

Jimmy: And what did you find out?

Jez: I was told that I am pregnant.

Jimmy: *(Finding it hard to conceal a smile.)* Correct.

Jez: *(Turns sharply to face him; angrily and defiantly.)* What do you mean?

Jimmy: *(With a shrug.)* I am only congratulating myself for a job well done.

Jez: *(With a plea.)* Jimmy can't you be serious for a moment?

Jimmy: Serious about what?

Jez: I do not want a child.

Jimmy: What! Did I get you right or was that a slip of the tongue?

Jez: I want to have an abortion and I am serious.

Jimmy: Well you can't and that is final.

Jez: *(On the verge of tears.)* I often told you that I wanted to be on contraceptives. You insisted that contraceptives were not Christian. Now see what has happened.

Jimmy: Don't be silly. What is wrong with what has happened?

Jez: *(Hardening)* I haven't completed my course. If that does not mean anything to you, it does mean everything to me.

Jimmy: *(With hurt pride.)* What do you mean, that your course means nothing to me? Wasn't it me who advised you to pursue that course?

Jez: Does that give you a right to treat me as you choose?

Jimmy: I do not see any reason as to why you are getting worked up. Will the pregnancy stop you from completing your course?

Jez: Attending a computer course with a pregnancy? You must be out of your mind.

Jimmy: If you find it hard, I can always get you a private tutor to give you lessons here at home.

Jez: Private tutor or no private tutor, I do not want a child. Do you know what having a child involves? Who is going to have the time to look after the child?

Jimmy: We can always employ a house helper.

Jez: And deprive my own child of parental care?

Jimmy: What is going to happen to you and me?

Jez: *(With bitterness.)* You and me?

Jimmy: What has gone into your head today? Don't you believe that I sincerely love you?

Jez: What love are you talking about? To love me even after a child?

Jimmy: *(Attempting to relax.)* Is that what has been worrying you? The problem with you is you let the fear of the future rule the present. Jesus said, "Don't worry about the troubles of tomorrow. Tomorrow will take care of itself. Today has enough worries of its own."

Jez: You will never convince me. You men are so short sighted. All you think about is your present pleasure. Let us be frank and face the situation. You and me cannot get married, *(bitterly)* not with that wife of yours. What guarantee is there that we shall continue to live together?

Jimmy: In your heart of hearts, you believe I am going to abandon you'? Don't you realise that this baby is going to be the surest and strongest bond between the two of us?

Jez: Stop believing in theories. Real life has shown your assumption to be completely wrong. Thousands of women have been abandoned with their children. What man will choose to bear

extra responsibility when he has got his legitimate family to look after?

Jimmy: Financially, I have no problems. I have opened a bank account for you already. What more assurance do you want? My problem is not this *(gestures to indicate money)*. The problem is who will inherit it.

Jez: My dear, if you think money is everything to a human being, then you have got it wrong. Do you know the shame and humiliation of calling my child a bastard? Why should I allow my own child to grow up with such guilt? Do you know that the child's resentment will be against me and not you? I sincerely regret having got involved with you. Now think about my future. You are going to be comfortable in your home. What about me? Who will want anything to do with me? If you are not going to provide me with the money, I will go ahead and look for it.

Jimmy: *(Passionately)* Jez, can't you be more reasonable than that? Have you got any human conscience in you? Don't you realise abortion is a sin.

Jez: You still believe in such rubbish? How many times has God helped me? If God existed, would I be in such a situation?

Jimmy: Please come back to your senses. Abortion is a sin, whether you dispute it or not.

Jez: For your information, I do not share the same faith with you.

Jimmy: That does not alter anything. You must also realise that abortion is a crime against this nation. Don't you know that abortion tantamounts to murder? Don't you know that abortion is the cold-blooded murder of an innocent little baby; an innocent soul you are meant to cherish, to love and to protect? Why do you want to deny an innocent baby its right to exist? How would you have felt if your mother had aborted you?

Jez: Obviously I would have felt nothing. Still I would have been grateful to her for having kept me out of this sickening world. And you seem to forget that we are all criminals in one way or another.

Jimmy: Why do you want to ruin your life at such a tender age? Don't you realise that you may never conceive again?

Jez: Who is desperate for a kid? Not me.

Jimmy: Abortion is dangerous. It may cost you your life. Many women have died during these abortions.

Jez: If you had not realised before, you are sending me to a more certain death.

Jimmy: What do you mean?

Jez: *(In tears)* Please for my life's sake, consent to this abortion. Our traditions are bad. Many girls from my clan have died in labour. Most of them died away from home. And Jimmy, I have never told you about my family. My father wields so much power in the traditional cycles. He will not stand

an illegitimate child; please for my life's sake do something.

Jimmy: I have all along sought to see your father, but you have always hindered me. This will now give us a firm ground upon which to face him.

Jez: It will be a disgrace to him. I cannot face him in the state I am in. You are being very unfair to me *(hardening)*. Anyway I am not asking for your consent any longer. Nothing you can do will stop me from having an abortion. Now that you have refused to provide me with the money for the abortion, I will go ahead and look for it. On that, I am decided.

Jimmy: *(Also hardening up)* You are forcing me to take a very unpleasant measure. In my hands right now is your medical report. This report I will keep until you have safely delivered. If you dare risk an abortion, I will hand it over to police. I am not going to be party to the murder of my own child.

Jez: *(In tears)* Are you threatening me?

Jimmy: *(Unmoved)* Nothing could be further than that. In reality you are attempting to dig your own grave. *(Jez buries her head in her hands and sobs quietly. Jimmy who is not used to tears watches with growing discomfort. When he has had enough of it he goes to sit by Jez and soothes her).* Jez, I do not see why we had to go through all that. If complications arise in future, then we will consider an abortion. Please do not misunderstand me. All I am saying is that its too early to take such a decision. Jez, look at me.

(Silence) Please look at me. *(She looks up.)* Do you see deceit in my eyes? Have I made any promise to you that I have failed to honour? Why don't you trust me this time? Let us forget about this business for the present let's think about the evening. My sole purpose of coming to see you today is to take you out for the evening. For God's sake, don't spoil the evening for us. You will do us a lot of good by going to have a nice bath right now. You will also save us a lot of time. Look, I am ready. *(An uncomfortable silence follows. Then reluctantly Jez gets up and prepares for a shower and then exits; Jimmy paces up and down.)* I go to what I could call home and Mini denies me the peace and happiness every man is looking for. Then I come to Jez. She welcomes me. She knows my tastes. She receives me with warmth and I get from her the real peace of mind and the joy of living. Jez brings all the sweet memories of life rushing back to me, save for today. Even then, which girl in that position would have reacted differently? Yet it is my own happiness at stake. How far must a man allow public opinion to choke his own personal happiness?

Curtains fall.

Scene two

In Jimmy's house, enter Mini and Jogo.

Mini: You are welcome dear *(gives him a seat).*

Jogo: Thank you.

Mini: You will excuse me for a minute.

Jogo: It's alright. *(Mini exits, Jogo gets up and with an air of confidence walks about the room. Enter Mini with a bottle of beer and glass. She serves Jogo.)*

Jogo: I thought you said we were coming for a drink.

Mini: I asked you to come up for a drink. As a matter of fact, I rarely drink. Last evening was a special occasion. Even now, I am still suffering from a hangover. I will end up throwing up if I take a glass of beer.

Jogo: You must be lonely here. Do you stay here all alone?

Mini: I live here with my brother. But he went on safari yesterday. It's only during holidays like this that I am lonely. During the school days, I am occupied the whole day.

Jogo: Can I come and see you often?

Mini: I'd love that but factors beyond my control will not favour that.

Jogo: What factors?

Mini: *(Shyly)* I would not like my brother to confront you here.

Jogo: Is he that strict about you?

Mini: Not really. But I respect his views. He is deeply religious and he has his reservations about certain aspects of life.

Jogo: Who does he fancy you are? A small girl of fourteen ?

Mini: He is a loving brother. I do not want to disappoint him.

Jogo: *(Finishing his drink)* He will be even more disappointed when he discovers you have not been sincere with him. In that case, when do I see you again?

Mini: I will inform you. Do you mind another drink?

Jogo: No, thank you. I only came because you insisted. Our regulations do not allow us to drink.

Mini: Which regulations?

Jogo: Driver's regulations. When you drink, don't drive and when you drive, don't drink.

Mini: How can I easily contact you?

Jogo: Come to the taxi park. You will never fail to get me. When can I expect you?

Mini: Don't worry, soon.

Jogo: I hope you will excuse me. I am already late for duty. *(Rises to go).*

Mini: *(Rising and holding his hands.)* Let me see you off.

Jogo: *(As they approach the door)* Give me a good bye please. *(Mini looks tenderly at him, they embrace.)*

Mini: See you soon love.

Jogo: You are such a sweet little devil. *(Exits.)*

Mini: Please take care of yourself *(She looks for a long time at Jogo, then talking to herself).* It wasn't all that bad. After all, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is not such a bad principle. Rather than giving you a feeling of guilt, it instead gives you a feeling of satisfaction *(looks around).* It is evident Jimmy did not come home last night. He will come back sometime anyway, and we will all keep quiet and pretend nothing has happened or is happening and go on living normally. Perhaps life has a purpose after all.

Curtains fall.

Act Four

Eight months later. In Jimmy's house. Jimmy is seated in one of the chairs taking coffee and reading a newspaper. Mini too, taking coffee, is knitting.

Jimmy: *(As though still reading the newspaper.)* Mini, don't you think it's high time I got introduced to your dad?

Mini: What?

Jimmy: I am serious. I would like to get the green light from your dad so that I may alert my people to start talks with your people.

Mini: *(Still finding it hard to believe.)* When?

Jimmy: As soon as possible. You realise we are growing older every day and therefore certain things have got to be done.

Mini: *(With one of her rare smiles.)* Father won't forgive me. My living with you was very much against his will.

Jimmy: He will understand. I very much respect our

traditions but we must also learn to catch up with the realities of today. As I have always said, it is our responsibility to convince our elders to see our point of view and yield to us.

Mini: Mother, I am not worried about her. She will be most delighted. But father I am still scared of. Another of my fears is that he is too religious.

Jimmy: You mean he will insist on a church marriage there and then?

Mini: More than likely, he will.

Jimmy: I have always felt the doctrine of church marriage has been wrongly inculcated in our people.

Mini: Why?

Jimmy: A church marriage today is associated with a flamboyant wedding. As a result most couples enter marriage with huge debts.

Mini: Father is not the type to mind about such a wedding.

Jimmy: He may not but other people will. We shall be a laughing stock if we do not meet their expectations.

Mini: Jimmy, you have always told me you don't care about public opinion.

Jimmy: I used not to, those youthful days. Now I do. And flamboyant marriages are not my only objections. Even worse, we shall cease to be regarded as

Christians if we postpone church marriage.

Mini: By whom?

Jimmy: By the church.

Mini: How?

Jimmy: By refusing us the Holy Communion. The church believes that before church marriage, a couple is living in perpetual sin.

Mini: You are getting it all wrong. What the church is doing is to protect itself. Not every Tom, Dick and Harry living with a woman is serious about her. The serious minded one is he who takes her to church.

Jimmy: Then why does the church hold traditional marriage in low regard?

Mini: The church doesn't. That is why you are allowed a church wedding only after the traditional marriage.

Jimmy: Why then doesn't the church allow a couple Holy Communion after a traditional marriage?

Mini: Traditionally a couple makes a commitment before the tribe. In church you make a commitment before God. "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

Jimmy: *(With mockery in his voice.)* Is this church marriage you are defending biblical in nature?

Mini: *(Enjoying the situation.)* Why not?

Jimmy: Where in the bible is a recording of such a

marriage? Take for instance Mary and Joseph, did they undergo the church marriage you are defending?

Mini: The traditions of the church dear. Christ gave the church authority to decide these things. "Whatever you bind on earth, the same will be bound in heaven". What we have in the bible is Jewish culture. Now that Christianity has spread to the lands of different cultures...

Jimmy: Exactly *(He is interrupted by a knock on the door which he goes to open. He returns reading a telegram with an alarming expression on his face.)*

Mini: What is it Jimmy?

Jimmy: My mother is seriously sick and has been admitted in a private hospital. My younger sister sent this telegram this morning. Mother demands to see me immediately.

Mini: Poor Mother. What are we going to do?

Jimmy: I must leave immediately. I hope to catch the seven o'clock bus. It's only five thirty. There is yet time. Let me inform my boss *(Jimmy goes to the telephone and dials.)* Would you like to come along?

Mini: *(Shows some hesitation.)* Who would then look after the house in our absence?

Jimmy: *(On the phone)* Hullo, can I speak to Mr. Okello ... Good evening sir... not very well I am afraid... I just received a telegram from home ... my mother is seriously ill and has been admitted in a private hospital ... my presence is demanded at home ...

immediately ...it really sounds bad ... four days at least ...thank you very much sir... Thank you *(Hangs up; to Mini)* What did you say?

Mini: I was wondering who would keep the house in our absence.

Jimmy: Anyway, I don't think it is necessary for both of us to go; not at the moment. Get my safari bag as I call for a taxi. *(Exits Mini.)*

(Jimmy dials) Hullo, ...can I speak to Ali? ... Can you please do me a favour ...Reserve me a seat on the evening bus. I just received a message from home ...Thank you very much.

(Hangs up; enter Mini with a safari bag.) I will probably be away for four days I hope the money in the house will suffice. The bus will leave in thirty minutes time ...we had better hurry.

Exit Jimmy and Mini

Later that evening.

Mini returns, heads straight for the telephone.

Mini: *(Dials)* Hullo... Can I speak to Jogo? ... Hello Jogo ... I am very well but feeling a bit lonely. Can I see you tonight ...Here at home ...There is no one else here ...coward... then prove you are not one ... see you then my love ... bye ... anything...

Her spirits suddenly high, Mini sets about tidying up the room while humming a tune to herself. Lights dim to a soft gentle evening. A knock and Jogo comes in.

Mini: *(Embracing him)* You are most welcome Jogo.

Jogo: Thank you. How are you?

Mini: I am very well thank you. And how are you?

Jogo: Couldn't be any better I guess. *(Gently.)* How is your brother?

Mini: Who? *(Recalls and then laughs)* You mean Jimmy?

Jogo: Why did you have to introduce him to me as your brother?

Mini: I didn't want to lose you that early. You did not seem to have the courage to continue if you had known the truth.

Jogo: It did not take me long to find out the truth. Where is he today?

Mini: He has gone to the village.

Jogo: What took him so urgently up country?

Mini: That old woman of his is dying.

Jogo: You mean he has another wife back home?

Mini: Not another wife. I mean his mother.

Jogo: How can you talk like that about your mother in-law?

Mini: If only you knew what type of woman she is, then you would understand. She has been the major cause of my troubles in this home.

Jogo: What do you mean'?

Mini: That woman has always urged her son to marry. But when he decided to live with me as husband and wife, his mother did not approve of me.

Jogo: She did not approve of you? On what grounds?

Mini: His mother expected him to pick on a goddess for a wife, and I am very far from her idea of a goddess. She has even accused me of having hooked her son to milk him dry of his wealth.

Jogo: But why did Jimmy allow himself to be so influenced by his mother?

Mini: Jimmy is weak in character. Until recently the man in him had not yet fully developed.

Jogo: Has it now?

Mini: I must confess it has. Today Jimmy proposed going to see my people.

Jogo: He did what?

Mini: I hope you will understand. He wishes his people to start talks with my people.

Jogo: You mean you are getting married in every sense of the word?

Mini: We will only be going through mere formalities; in my present state I need something to hold on to; I need something for protection.

Jogo: *(Romantic)* When you get married, will you have any room for me in your heart?

Mini: Jogo, you mean everything to me. In you I have discovered a panadol, a pain killer and above all a heart soother.

Jogo: That is the nicest thing you have said to me this evening. Do not say anything more. That is the last thing I want to remember to my dying days.

Mini: *(Even more softly.)* Jogo if I abandon you, who will father my child?

Jogo: *(Attentively)* What did you say?

Mini: *(Calmly)* I am pregnant with your child.

Jogo: Stop joking at this time of the night.

Mini: I am serious. I confirmed it in hospital two days ago.

Jogo: Are you sure I am responsible?

Mini: Why should I lie to you on such a matter as this?

Jogo: *(Panicky)* Now what do you want? An abortion?

Mini: No.

Jogo: Why not?

Mini: I will never be able to get it out of my mind; The guilt will choke me to my dying days. I have had a strong Christian upbringing. I have always maintained that evil should not be fought with evil.

Jogo: I still find it hard to believe.

Mini: Do you remember the two weeks Jimmy was away attending a refresher course? The date of the pregnancy coincides with that. Perhaps you should look at the doctors report to believe.

Jogo: Where is the report?

Mini: In the bedroom.

Jogo: *(Getting up)* Let me have a look at it. *(Exit Jogo and Mini)*

Later; in the dead of the night.

Suddenly there is a loud knock at the door.

Then another and another.

Mini tiptoes into the sitting room closely followed by a bare chested Jogo.

Mini, attempting to peep outside, is interrupted by a fourth knock.

Mini: *(Shaken)* Who is that?

Patrick: It's me, Patrick.

Mini: Who?

Patrick: Patrick.

Mini: *(Rudely)* What do you want?

Jimmy: Mini, its me he has escorted home.

Mini: *(Panicky)* Just a minute.

(To Jogo.) My husband is here. Get out for God's sake.

Jogo: How do I get out?

Mini: I don't know ...Just disappear.

Jogo: But how?

Mini: Get out through the windows.

Jogo: But all your windows have burglar proofing.

Mini: Do not just stand there. Do something.

Jogo: Come here. I have an idea. *(They disappear in the bedroom. A few minutes later, Mini re-emerges.)*

She is more stable and with some confidence opens the door.

Mini: *(Very alarmed.)* What happened?

(Enter Patrick and Jimmy, the former heavily supporting the latter.)

Patrick: I am at a loss as to how I should explain the situation. At about eleven p.m., I received a call from one of the nurses in the hospital that Jimmy had been involved in an accident and was unconscious; I rushed to the hospital but found he had regained consciousness. The hospital was so crowded that the doctor allowed me to bring Jimmy home after preliminary examination found that he did not sustain any serious injuries.

Mini: What kind of accident was it?

Patrick: From the report I got from the policemen, the evening bus Jimmy was travelling in to the village had faulty brakes. The brakes failed at the

Katinga slope which is approximately one hundred kilometres from here. The driver panicked and jumped off; the bus swayed off-road and overturned.

Mini: I hope it was not fatal.

Patrick: I am afraid it was; four people died on the spot and many more are in critical conditions. It was nothing short of a miracle that saved Jimmy. *(Silence)* As it is rather late, I wish to say good night. The doctor advised him to have absolute bed rest and go for a more thorough checkup in the morning. I will come and pick him up in the morning. Goodnight.

Mini: It was so kind of you. Goodnight. *(Exit Patrick)*

Mini: *(Returns quickly as Jimmy attempts to get up)* Can I prepare you something light to eat?

Jimmy: I am in no mood to eat. It's only rest that I desire. *(Attempts to get up.)*

Mini: *(Quickly)* When you left, I feared to sleep alone; so I asked one of the new female teachers at our school to come and give me company. I had prepared her a place with me in the room. But now that you have come, I will prepare for her a place here in the sitting room instead.

Jimmy: *(Resuming his seat)* That is alright with me.

Enter Jogo in a very convincing feminine attire.

Mini: *(Introduces Jogo)* He is RoseMary; I mean she is Rosemary; one of the new teachers at the school.

Jimmy: *(Puts on a smile to make the visitor feel at ease).* It's a pleasure to meet you although it would have been a greater pleasure in happier circumstances.

Jogo: *(In keeping with the attire)* I have just heard about the accident; I hope you are not seriously hurt.

Jimmy: *(In cheerful mood)* The doctor told me I only sustained minor injuries that should not cause any worries.

Jogo: Mini told me your mother is also seriously sick in the village.

Jimmy: That is the trend of life; troubles in this world, whenever they come, they do so in numbers one after another. They are beyond our control. We only pray for the best.

Jogo: I really wish her a quick recovery.

Jimmy: I sincerely apologise for I must have disrupted your sleep. If you don't mind, I wish to let you rest. Good night.

Jogo: Good night.

Jimmy limps into the bedroom.

As soon as Jimmy disappears, Jogo and Mini exchange glances.

Mini: I will not tempt my fortunes any further, enough is enough. *(She starts to tiptoe away.)*

Jogo: Madam, thanks for everything. *(He rapidly tiptoes away.)*

Jimmy: *(Holding Jogo's shirt and a pair of trousers, emerges just in time to chatch a glimpse of Jogo tiptoeing away. Throws the clothes at him)* May you die a miserable death.

Jogo: *(Making a face at Jimmy)* You miserable loser may you also suffer an untimely death.

Jimmy attempts to pursue Jogo and Mimi but his condition severely limits him.

Jimmy: *(Lamenting)* Let us be fair. How can a woman I feed, dress and look after bring another man into my own house and straight into my bed? Are these the equal rights that women are fighting for? Just because I have a girl friend in town who is moreover pregnant with my child, does this entitle Mini to behave in whichever way she chooses?

(*Decisively*) Let me, from this minute invite Jez to come and live permanently here. Since I was contemplating going for introductions and now I have prepared for them, what will stop me from going for introductions with Jez… I am sure she will be delighted… *(calls)* Hello! Oh Jez… how sweet your voice sounds at this time of the night… it really soothes the heart. I must apologise for

having made such a late phone call ...I am not exactly fine physically ...I was on my way to the village this evening ...Yes by bus ...Oh you have heard the news? The bus that got the accident. No, I am not very seriously hurt ... but bad enough. I really need somebody to nurse me, somebody like you to take care of me ...I told you a thousand times I will only get married to you. But to cut a long story short, at last I am one hundred percent free.... free ...It's too good to be true.... I want you to move in here permanently ...I even wish you could move in this very minute ...Okay but you move in first thing in the morning. Yes, although the doctor asked me to go through a thorough medical check up in the morning. Just hire any vehicle ...I will pay from here. Good night my love.... I miss you too ... sweet dreams. *(Hangs up.)*

Yes, that does it; never keep your eggs in one basket. If I had Mini alone, on whose shoulders would I lean during this time of crisis?.... Ah! I am suddenly glad I have always kept Jez even though as a substitute. Now I can even afford a good sleep...but not in that defiled room ...not in that contaminated bed. *(Laughs sheepishly to self.)* These chairs are at least clean *(Doses off).*

Next morning.

A knock.... no reply ...Jimmy is still asleep... another knock, no response.

Patrick enters.

Patrick: Hullo Jimmy, *(Jimmy wakes up with a start.)* I am sorry Jimmy, that I am a bit late. I hope you had a nice night.

Jimmy: *(Cynical ...winces with pain.)* Nice night? Yes it was a good night... Almost too good to be true ...

Patrick: Is there something wrong? *(Only gets an irate look from Jimmy; then suspiciously.)* What happened after I left last night?

Jimmy: What else could have happened? I actually caught Mini exercising her rights in my own bed... a bed ...I bought with my own money.

Patrick: Rights? What sort of rights? And where is Mini?

Jimmy: Mini actually desired to see me dead. I kept wondering what sort of "*kisirani*" made me get that accident yesterday. *(Silence)* I believe as soon as I left yesterday, Mini "imported" a lover in my own house.

Patrick: Say that again.

Jimmy: That "*malaya*" Mini had the audacity to bring another man into my bed.

Patrick: Are you really serious?

Jimmy: Do you think I am joking? Look ...see where I slept... Here are his clothes ...He escaped disguised as a woman. With my condition being what it is, there was little I could do...But I swear

by my father's grave that Mini will never step in here again ...She came with nothing and she leaves with nothing.

Patrick: I would never have believed women could take their fight for equal rights up to the bed ...Only recently I found a woman fighting for equal rights with men ...guess what! She attempted to urinate while standing up. *(Laughs alone.)*

Jimmy: But let's be fair. How could Mini do this to me?Mini with whom I have stayed for two years and whom I have found to be totally barren? Where will this fight for equal rights lead her to? I have already made express arrangements for this other lady Jez to move in here today... in fact this morning. I will take her for introductions right away and I will even have more time to look after our baby.

Patrick: My brother, I give you full credit for that. Accept my sincere congratulations.

Jimmy: Thank you.

Patrick: How is Jez coming? Can I offer you my truck to collect her property?

A sound of a car approaching.

Jimmy: I told her to hire ...listen; that must be her.

Patrick: *(Peeps)* Yes, that is her ...but I do not see any luggage ...stay cool; she is coming up... *(With unwarranted enthusiasm.)* Come in, come in. You are most welcome.

Jez: Oh Jimmy!

Patrick: It could have been worse.

Jez: I am really sorry. What happened'?

Patrick: It was the fault of the driver, driving at such high speed with faulty brakes. That man wanted to kill all his passengers. God was with Jimmy.

Jimmy: I thought you were coming with all the household property from your place.

Jez: I have come to clean the house. I will move in thereafter.

Jimmy: That is kind of you. I had overlooked the fact that this house needs thorough scrubbing. But you cannot clean the entire house in your present condition *(touching her abdomen).*

Jez: I asked Florence to come and give me a hand. I am surprised she has not come yet.

Patrick: Florence, the one you used to stay with before you moved to Karika?

Jez: Yes. You know her?

Patrick: Of course. Who does not know Florence? Jimmy, what are we going to do now that Jez has come?

Jimmy: Jez will keep the house. I need to keep the appointment with the doctor. *(They prepare to leave; a knock and Florence bursts in, panting.)*

Florence: Oh Jimmy, I did not know the accident was that serious.

Jimmy: Nothing much to worry about ...I just escaped

with some minor injuries ...Thank you for coming to offer Jez a hand. I really appreciate your kindness... I have to go for a thorough medical check up... x-rays and such things.

Florence: Will you be back soon?

Jimmy: These medical investigations take time. We may probably come back in the afternoon at the earliest.

Florence: I really wish you a quick recovery.

Jimmy: Thank you. We will see you later in the day.

Exit Jimmy and Patrick. Florence tiptoes to see if they are really off.

Jez: Is Jaja coming?

Florence: Of course, he never lets down his clients.

Jez: But is it safe? What if Jimmy finds him here?

Florence: Don't worry. Jaja takes care of every small detail.

Jez: Is he a true witch doctor'? I mean, is he really powerful?

Florence: He is not a witch. He is a native doctor ... my private and ... personal doctor. I only go in for the best.

Jez: What do you think he will do?

Florence: Nothing really much. All he will do is to cleanse this house, to make sure no other woman ever settles in this house other than you ... moreover you never know what charms that woman may

have left behind. You need someone to neutralise such forces.

Jez: What are we supposed to do?

Florence: Let's sit on the mat... here. Jaja always insists we sit with our backs to the door... he will do most of the talking ...let's just sit and wait. He should be due any time now. I told him everything.

Jez: What really happened between Jimmy and Mini?

Florence: Rumour has it that Jimmy caught Mini red handed with a man in his bed; the only thing Mini made away in was the night dress. I am told early this morning Mini went to the police and tried to file a case but there was nothing whatsoever to support the validity of their marriage. The civil court could not help her either.

Jez: That is precisely why I swore never to get married. *(Bitterly)* If it was not for this... *(Touches abdomen).*

Florence: A woman needs security. Your child needs even more security; and there is need to protect your name. Do you know that some people are already blaming you for breaking up Jimmy's family?

Jez: *(Hostile)* That is very stupid of them. Did I invite Jimmy to come to me? He came on his own accord. *(Thunder rumbles nearby...)* What is that ...I thought the sky was clear.

Florence: That must be Jaja. *(Darkness rapidly descends.)* Yes it's him. He prefers to work in darkness.

Jez: I am scared, Florence ... *(silence)* Florence!

Florence: Sh ...h. ..h *(A cock crows close by followed by sudden thunder. Flames suddenly leap from the sides to engulf the stage. Enter Jaja holding two lit candles: hands the two candles to his clients as he continues to chant incoherently and sprinkle the room with some liquid from a gourd: comes to sit opposite his clients.)*

Jaja: My daughter, what favours may the gods grant you today?

Jez: To cleanse this house and to make me secure in it.

Jaja: *(Diviniates, looks up.)* Are you sure of the man responsible for this pregnancy? *(Silence)* Does this pregnancy belong to this house? *(Silence then assertively.)* Answer me.

Jez: *(Frightened)* I am not sure, Jaja.

Jaja: *(Laughs cynically.)* That is what the gods have made plain here. That you are confused about the father of your child. But they will deal with that. There was another woman dwelling in here. Is that not so?

Jez: Yes. Yes.

Jaja: *(Hysterically)* Show me the favourite seat of the man in this house. *(Jez points; the native doctor sprinkles the place with a potent potion as he performs mystical rites. Returns to his clients; beckons them to stand . Removes a parcel wrapped in leaves, hands it over to Jez).*

Jaja: Here, feed him on this.

Jez: *(Alarmed)* What is this?

Jaja: Sh...h....h. Behold the uterus of a crocodile with the entire birth canal. Listen carefully daughter, listen. You must cook the colourful dish in as special way. Each piece must visit a special place before it tastes the fire. Serve the colourful dish with sweet potatoes. And here, drink this. *(Jez hesitates, the medium takes a swig at the drink; hands it over to her.)*

Florence: *(With encouragement.)* Drink it; I have drunk it before. *(Jez drinks it and hands over the calabash.)*

Jaja: No other woman shall settle in this house other than you. All the money, all the wealth and the man in this house, you will have control over.

Jez: Thank you, Jaja, thank you.

Jaja: The fee will be two bulls. *(Jez and Florence gasp and look at each other.)*

Florence: Between the two of us we only have money for one bull ... the balance we shall bring two days from now.

Jaja: *(Looks sternly at both of them.)* So it shall be for now ... do not forget least you face the wrath of the gods.The gods shall be with you, now and forever, *(collects the candles and exits - silence.)*

Lights come on.

Jez: I do not think I can do it.

Jez: I am scared, Florence ...*(silence)* Florence!

Florence: Sh ...h. ..h *(A cock crows close by followed by sudden thunder. Flames suddenly leap from the sides to engulf the stage. Enter Jaja holding two lit candles: hands the two candles to his clients as he continues to chant incoherently and sprinkle the room with some liquid from a gourd: comes to sit opposite his clients.)*

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Lights come on.

Jez: I do not think I can do it.

Florence: Do what?

Jez: What Jaja has said is too degrading.

Florence: What is degrading about it?

Jez: What do you think Jimmy will say when he finds me cooking that way?

Florence: Do not worry, Jaja will take care of everything. Just make sure you lock the doors when you are doing it.

Jez: Have you ever done it?

Florence: Some of us have performed tougher assignments; and besides, how do you think my men put on weight?

Jez: Are there no alternatives?

Florence: Yours is a simple assignment. Tell me *(looking suspiciously at Jez)* what was that about you being unsure of the father of your child?

Jez: *(Hesitatingly)* I do not know how to say this but its true. I do not know who is really responsible for this pregnancy.

Florence: You mean this is not Jimmy's child?

Jez: I am not sure.

Florence: You, a woman, not sure? What kind of woman are you?

Jez: Jogo still used to come and visit me.

Florence: Jogo, my brother?

Jez: Yes.

Florence: You want to drag my brother into this mess?

Jez: But you were the one who started it all.

Florence: I honestly thought your relationship with Jogo had ended.

Jez: *(Sharply)* Help me, Florence.

Florence: Help you about what'?

Jez: What do you think Jaja gave me to drink?

Florence: Why?

Jez: I am beginning to have some abdominal pains.

Florence: *(Alarmed)* What kind of pains'?

Jez: Lower abdominal pains… the pains come and stop …they keep on getting stronger each time and the pains are now more …frequent.

Florence: You feel some back pain too?

Jez: Yes, the pain goes right to the back. It makes me feel like rubbing the back.

Florence: You must be going into labour.

Jez: But the baby is not due yet. My expected date of delivery is three weeks from today.

Florence: Then you must be going into premature labour.... Oh! God what are we going to do? Did you carry any extra money?

Jez: No … why?

Florence: We have to hire a taxi and get you to hospital.

Jez: I don't even know where Jimmy keeps his money.

Florence: There is only one alternative. Let me inform Jogo, after all Jimmy is not in. *(dials)* Can I speak to Jogo? Thank God. Jogo. We need you here… Jimmy's residence …Yes Mini's home …What? You can't come …You can't explain? For God's sake you must come …Jez has gone into premature labour …Jimmy is not …around… He has gone for a medical check up …following an accident yesterday …he is not due till… much later okay; we expect you in five minutes *(Hangs up, turns to Jez:)* He is coming. *(Jez having intense pains, walks about aimlessly rubbing her back.)*

Florence: *(Attemps to help)* Just sit still … take deep breaths … like this …do not worry the taxi is coming soon.

Jez: Oh Florence …the pains …are unbearable…Oh Florence help me, Florence…

Florence: I am trying… are there no mattresses around … here lie on the mat… lie on your side …no … not on the back …take deep breaths …Yes like that.

Jogo bursts in; furtively looks around.

Jogo: What is it?

Florence: Jez has gone into labour …The baby could come anytime.

Jogo: But the baby is not due yet. Is that not what you told me Jez?

Jez: Yes. But it must have been Ja… *(Checks herself)*

Jogo: It must have been what?

Florence: *(Quickly)* It must be premature labour… Get up.

Jez: Jogo, give me a hand.*(Jimmy enters; Jogo recoils.)*

Jimmy: What is happening? *(Then notices Jogo.)* You again? *(Advances menacingly towards him.)*

Florence: *(Quickly)* Jez has gone into premature labour… but Jimmy we were not expecting you.

Jimmy: So that is why she went into labour? *(Silence)* And who is he?

Florence: He is Jogo … my brother, same father, same mother. I am telling you the truth.

Jimmy: *(Connecting it up.)* So it was you who introduced your brother to Mini?.

Florence: *(Fear shows on her face.)* No, I mean yes …I mean no.

Jimmy: *(Facing Jogo)* And what does he want here?

Florence: He, he, is a taxi driver and he came to give us a lift to hospital …we thought we would get you at the hospital.

Jimmy: So this time you have invited him to Jez, haven't you?

Florence: No, Jimmy, No. No. It was Jez who invited him here.

Jez: No … why?

Florence: We have to hire a taxi and get you to hospital.

Jez: I don't even know where Jimmy keeps his money.

Florence: There is only one alternative. Let me inform Jogo, after all Jimmy is not in. *(dials)* Can I speak to Jogo? Thank God. Jogo. We need you here… Jimmy's residence …Yes Mini's home …What? You can't come …You can't explain? For God's sake you must come …Jez has gone into premature labour …Jimmy is not …around… He has gone for a medical check up …following an accident yesterday …he is not due till… much later okay; we expect you in five minutes *(Hangs up, turns to Jez:)* He is coming. *(Jez having intense pains, walks about aimlessly rubbing her back.)*

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Florence: He, he, is a taxi driver and he came to give us a lift to hospital …we thought we would get you at the hospital.

Jimmy: So this time you have invited him to Jez, haven't you?

Florence: No, Jimmy, No. No. It was Jez who invited him here.

Jimmy: *(Turns to Jez)* Jez you invited him here? For God's sake why? Tell me why.

Florence: Jez says she is not sure who the father of her baby is. She says it could be his.

Jimmy: *(Holding Jez by the neck)* Jez, is that true? *(Silence)* Is that true *(Vigorously shakes her.)* Is that true?

Jogo: *(Losing his cool.)* What if it's true?

Jimmy: Shut up you idiot. I am not here to argue with you otherwise people will not notice the difference *(To Jez.)* Is that true?

Jogo: Leave her alone. How can you hold a woman in labour like that?

Jimmy: I say shut up… is it true you are not sure who is responsible for your pregnancy? *(Silence, Jimmy smacks her in the face.)*

Jogo: Be a man, face your equal.

Jimmy abandons Jez and turns to face Jogo. The two fiercely clash, each attempting to wrestle the other. Jimmy finally succeeds to hold Jogo by the tie which he uses to slowly strangle him. Jogo goes limp and falls to the ground foaming at the mouth. Jimmy demonically continues to strangle him.

Florence: Jimmy, you have killed my brother …Jimmy you have killed my brother … *(Raises alarm as Recho bursts in wailing).*

Recho: Jimmy, where are you? Jimmy, where are you? Jimmy, Mother is dead. Jimmy, Mother has left us orphans *(Continues wailing.)*

Flashback

Enter Iyaa; slowly moves to face Jimmy.

Iyaa: Jimmy, remember you are the head of this family and whatever you do will either uphold the good name of this family or dishonour it.

For in the death of this pot.

I see my own death.

In the death of this pot.

I see the death of my son.

In the death of this pot.

I see death everywhere.

Curtains fall.

THE END