



BAER

Okiva Omatah Okell

## CHARACTERS

(Presented in the order they appear in the play.)

1. BOSS The strongman, Head of State.
2. SIBUOR Right-hand man to Boss.
3. NASIRUMBI A schoolteacher and social activist.
4. INDONDO Editor of a local daily newspaper, *The Voice of the People*.

## FIRST SEQUENCE

(BOSS, in his early sixties, casually dressed in immaculate white complete with a matching broad-rimmed Stetson hat and looking athletic, sits alone reading newspapers under a large umbrella in a garden at his official residence. He exudes confidence. An aura of "cowboy toughness" hangs about him like a discernible scent. In fact, he is a cowboy. Next to him are empty chairs and a small table on which are a teapot, cups, etc. His mobile phone rings.)

**BOSS:** (On phone) Hello! Oh, Mr. Fix It! How's London? I'm the very image of health! Thank you. Sunny as usual. A bit humid today though. What's the good news? (Upbeat. Listens. He is now on his feet, pacing about, totally immersed in the conversation, takes mental notes) The villa is a large cluster of luxury homes dominating a small hill leading down to the sea. The main home occupies 82,186 square metres, has 12 bedrooms, and a 14,000-bottle wine cellar, with

many bottles containing 65-year-old vintage port. (Laughs) That's good. I don't drink wine that's younger than me. (Laughs) Oh no. Not the women. I don't touch women older than half my age. (Laughs) What's the asking price? Ten million US dollars? It's reasonable. The First Lady will love it when I present it to her on her birthday. (He speaks with some alarm after a longish pause) No! Not those Swiss accounts! They are my lifeline. Nobody touches them. I will pay for the villa from this year's tea export earnings. (Enter SIBUOR in an expensive faultless business suit, brown leather briefcase in hand and stops at a distance. BOSS sees him and moves further away, still on phone) Fax me details of the company in whose name I will buy the villa: All I have are a 16th-century castle in Valencia, Spain... a townhouse in Paris, an Oceanside villa in Nice, France... and a 32-room chateau in Lausanne, Switzerland. Get more European properties. Office blocks, chateaux and mansions in exclusive districts... especially those associated with historical figures like Napoleon. Okay. Bye. Take care. (Puts off the phone and takes his time to turn and face SIBUOR) What do you want?

Your Excellency!

(Some anger) Don't Your Excellency me! Can't I have some time to myself?

I am sorry, Your Excellency!

SIBUOR:  
BOSS:

SIBUOR:

- BOSS:** What's it?  
**SIBUOR:** The woman is here.  
**BOSS:** Which woman?  
**SIBUOR:** Nasirumbi.  
**BOSS:** Who is she?  
**SIBUOR:** I'd like you to meet her.  
**BOSS:** Boss does not like to be ambushed!  
**SIBUOR:** Son of the War God, it's not to ambush you  
that I brought her. It's to defuse a bomb.  
**BOSS:** (Grasping the gravity of the matter) Huh!  
What's wrong?  
**SIBUOR:** (Gets up) She's causing trouble. Things are  
getting out of hand.  
**BOSS:** What are you talking about?  
**SIBUOR:** There was a small story on it in yesterday's  
paper.  
**BOSS:** It's your business to read local papers and  
then brief me accordingly.  
**SIBUOR:** A group of women are ganging up to oppose  
our Resort Paradiso Africana Project.  
**BOSS:** Mere women? What can they do? *stereotype*  
**SIBUOR:** They are threatening to strip and stage a  
nude parade through the streets in protest  
- hundreds of them. They call themselves The  
Mothers' Front. Nasirumbi is their leader.  
**BOSS:** (Impatient) Don't tell me you're not on top of  
things.  
**SIBUOR:** I am. That's why all is calm. When I sniffed  
out their scheme I reached out to contain  
their leader. I asked her to write Boss a letter

- stating their grievances... and requesting to meet you.
- BOSS:** I won't see her today!
- SIBUOR:** (*Pulls the letter out of his pocket and hands it over to BOSS who declines to take it*) Your Excellency, I assured her you could see her as soon as you read her letter.
- BOSS:** I never rush things!
- SIBUOR:** Within 24 hours!
- BOSS:** What madness is upon you?
- SIBUOR:** I told her this matter is very close to your heart. I wanted to impress her. Boss, the people know you as a man of action. You are known for your unrivalled efficiency. I assured her Simbi is close to your heart and you would leave everything you were doing to attend to her. It has to be today, Your Excellency.
- BOSS:** When did you get the letter?
- SIBUOR:** Yesterday.
- BOSS:** Why bring it this late?
- SIBUOR:** I was very busy Your Excellency... doing a thorough background check on her, looking for the button to turn her off.
- BOSS:** You should have called.
- SIBUOR:** (*Subdued*) Your Excellency, I forgot.
- BOSS:** Goodness me! How could you?
- SIBUOR:** I'm sorry.
- BOSS:** Don't 'am sorry me'! You should have forewarned me.

SIBUOR: Son of the Plague, she's riffraff - no match for /  
Boss. Crush her. Grind her to pulp with a wave  
of your hand!

BOSS: You can't just ambush me like this and expect  
me to do your dirty work for you. No. I won't  
see her today.

(Kneels on one knee) Boss, you are Boss!  
BOSS: Will I still be Boss if I make a fool of myself  
before her?

SIBUOR: That's why I have left her outside. I have all  
the information you need at my fingertips.  
Read her letter.

BOSS: (As SIBUOR makes to open the letter) It's too  
late to read that letter. Get up and give me  
your fingertips facts about her. You know the  
kind of weapons I need to annihilate her. (Pen  
and notebook in hand, he sits at the table and  
takes notes as he interviews SIBUOR) Spouse?  
SIBUOR: Single parent. No husband. I think she sleeps  
around with men.

BOSS: Children?

SIBUOR: Three children from three different men

BOSS: Excellent! (SIBUOR sits down) Her age?

SIBUOR: About 40.

BOSS: Profession?

SIBUOR: Secondary school teacher.

BOSS: Where?

SIBUOR: St. Bakhita's Academy.

BOSS: Public or private?

SIBUOR: Public.

- BOSS:** Performance record?
- SIBUOR:** Excellent. Top school!
- BOSS:** Subjects?
- SIBUOR:** Teaches Kiswahili and Maths.
- BOSS:** Anything outstanding about her as a teacher?
- SIBUOR:** Has won top awards in both subjects several times.
- BOSS:** Is she rich?
- SIBUOR:** No. Survives on her small salary.
- BOSS:** Where does she live?
- SIBUOR:** Buru Buru.
- BOSS:** A slum dweller? (*Chuckles*) Isn't that near Korogocho slums?
- SIBUOR:** No match for Boss.
- BOSS:** Any criminal record?
- SIBUOR:** I don't know.
- BOSS:** (*Bangs the table and SIBUOR rises instinctively*) Don't know?
- SIBUOR:** The CID are investigating.
- BOSS:** Then say CID!
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Does she pay her taxes?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Does she hang around with criminals and other 'do-no-gooders'?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Are any of the men who fathered her bastards in police records for anything?
- OR:** CID!

- OSS:** (Pause. Casts a stern glance at SIBUOR who cowers) What did you say the women she leads are called?
- SIBUOR:** The Mothers' Front.
- OSS:** Membership?
- SIBUOR:** Rabble. The type you can buy off with a penny!
- OSS:** How many?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Any with police records?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Any supporters with means?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** (Firm) Do a thorough job! Have the women received any money from dubious sources? Criminals like patronising such groups. How many bank accounts do they have?
- SIBUOR:** CID!
- BOSS:** Any positive achievements?
- SIBUOR:** They volunteer to clean streets. They have a lunch programme for street families where they serve a mug of porridge. Through their reforestation project they organise rural women to plant trees in the countryside. That has made them very popular in their neighbourhoods.
- BOSS:** You said they have featured in the papers.
- SIBUOR:** Only one paper has been carrying their articles.
- BOSS:** Which one?
- SIBUOR:** The notorious one... *The Voice of the People.*

**BOSS:**

Those busybodies latch onto anything.  
Boss, we underrate a muckraking journalist  
at our own peril. His pen is lethal. Don't you  
remember the scandal involving the illegal  
importation of luxury cars, and the ease with  
which he "finished" Hon. Owiti?

**BOSS:**

That's enough for now. Get the CID to check  
out that newspaper.

(*BOSS stands up and begins adjusting his  
clothes. SIBUOR helps tidy up the place.*)

**BOSS:**

How do I look?

**SIBUOR:**

Like a burning spear aimed at the enemy!

**BOSS:**

That's me.

**SIBUOR:**

Son of Thunder!

**BOSS:**

Bring her on!

(*Exit SIBUOR. BOSS remains standing, full  
of himself. Moments later, SIBUOR ushers  
NASIRUMBI to where BOSS is. She is formally  
dressed in elegant Kitenge or similar African  
attire. She is about 40, confident and "full of  
life".*)

**SIBUOR:**

Your Excellency, it's my pleasure and honour to  
introduce Lady Nasirumbi.

**BOSS:**

(Without moving) Welcome, Nasirumbi.

**NASIRUMBI:**

(Diplomatic but suspicious) Thank you, Your  
Excellency.

**SIBUOR:**

Your Excellency, Lady Nasirumbi is the  
embodiment of your dictum that great people  
stand out for doing two things: first, they  
realise that something needs to be done;

second, they do it. She is a dedicated grassroots leader. She leads a large group of dedicated women. The Mothers' Front is a study in the importance of strong grassroots leadership in our communities. I ran into her yesterday morning and she gave me the letter I showed you.

**BOSS:** (To NASIRUMBI) I got your interesting letter yesterday afternoon. You addressed matters very close to my heart. Sorry for the rushed meeting.

**NASIRUMBI:** I am most grateful for this opportunity, Your Excellency. I want to talk to you so much like my life depends on it.

**SIBUOR:** Your Excellency, with your permission, I'll leave you to attend to her.

**BOSS:** Okay. But stay within earshot just in case I need you. (Exit SIBUOR) Welcome. (Helps her sit down and serves her tea) How much sugar?

**NASIRUMBI:** No sugar, please.

(BOSS serves the tea and they drink in silence)

**BOSS:** Your letter touched my heart.

**NASIRUMBI:** I didn't expect your response within 24 hours!

**BOSS:** On the contrary, it is one of those natural leadership things. When it is Boss' duty, it is my duty, my priority! You gave me this job. Boss must serve you.

**SIRUMBI:** I am grateful to meet you against all expectations!

**BOSS:** How do you find my garden?

(Pause)

**NASIRUMBI:** Lovely.

**BOSS:** I am a tree-hugger at heart.

**NASIRUMBI:** It shows.

**BOSS:** By the way, you look familiar. You teach Kiswahili and Mathematics at St. Bakhita's and you have won the top awards in both.

**NASIRUMBI:** I am honoured you can remember.

**BOSS:** (Rises, walks about) How can I forget great achievers like you? I am very proud of St. Bakhita's. It's one of our top schools. It's the shining evidence that our public schools can hold their own against the best private ones. Are any teachers from the school on the Education Board?

**NASIRUMBI:** No.

**BOSS:** That's not good. The key to our future lies in good education – quality education! After we introduced Universal Free Primary Education, my challenge now is to keep the class size at the minimum and put a well-trained teacher in charge. I'll instruct the Education Minister to appoint you to the board right away.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Politely) Your Excellency, though I would love to, my hands are full right now. When not teaching I am busy with the Mothers' Front!

**BOSS:** Oh, the Mothers' Front! I've heard a lot about the Mothers' Front... how you keep the streets clean...

**NASIRUMBI:** Why does everybody associate us with garbage?

**BOSS:** (Sits) You're doing a commendable job. There is no greater thing in life than to serve a cause greater than oneself; to be dedicated to something greater than us, to live for a cause one is prepared to die for. As Frantz Fanon would say, "we are nothing on earth if we are not in the first place slaves of a cause..."

**NASIRUMBI:** Is it true your Government plans to cut down Simbi Forest?

**BOSS:** Why do you say that?

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Pulls out a dossier*) We have this report that says some World Bank funded foreigners want to invest here.

**BOSS:** Well, Nasirumbi, this is a very big mountain to climb. The Cabinet is still studying the proposal. No firm decision has been made.

**NASIRUMBI:** The Mothers' Front would like to know where you stand.

**BOSS:** It is a good exercise in discipline that we don't get ahead of the facts. Experts are still poring over the documents, meticulously agonising over tiny details, debating the matter and, as your presence here attests, even ordinary people are getting involved and having their full say. The debate is open. Boss must proceed on a platform of principle not details. I don't want to interfere.

**NASIRUMBI:** You are the boss!

**BOSS:** This is not the time to pamper egos...this is time for hard questions. How do we manage consensus?

**NASIRUMBI:** I doubt if that will work.

**BOSS:** Don't misunderstand me. On such sensitive matters, Boss must not inflame passions but appeal to the firm and dependable good of intellect. Reason and scientific facts must prevail. The strategy is to encourage dialogue and imaginative thinking, and to shun sermons and dogmatic solutions to complex problems. (*Rises, takes a few paces, then stops to address the empty space before him, talking more to himself than to her*) The fundamental reason for politics is public service. Boss must consult widely... He must hear from everybody on matters of policy and law. Boss cannot go beyond the accepted limits of civilised government. (*He changes to a delightful tone and talks directly to her*) Boss will form a Commission of Inquiry to look into the matter.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Rises*) Your Excellency, Simbi is our only water source.

**BOSS:** Let the people decide.

**NASIRUMBI:** We cannot do without Simbi. That forest is sacred.

**BOSS:** You are raising legitimate concerns. As a private citizen and a tree hugger I am in full agreement with you. But Boss is also Boss... A good number of my subjects think otherwise.

They see the project as a stimulus package to kick-start and grow our economy. Such investments offer every citizen the dignity of a job. Their support for the project is not baseless. They are addressing themselves to the mundane issues of life - bread and butter issues are their top priority, and they have as much say over Simbi as do you and me.

**NASIRUMBI:** Does development have to dismember us?

**BOSS:** Unemployment is a big problem here. We need jobs.

**NASIRUMBI:** Destroying the environment to cater for our needs today is like eating our offspring. Where do we get the justification to saddle posterity with our needs?

**BOSS:** There are no simple answers. We must debate openly. On the one hand, we need the forest; on the other, we desperately need the jobs. And nature gracefully provides death to nourish life.

**NASIRUMBI:** Jungle morality, huh!?

**BOSS:** All I'm saying is that people guided by principle look at the complete picture.

**NASIRUMBI:** We want your written assurance that the Government will not touch Simbi. Not today, not tomorrow, not at any other time. You've no choice but to publicly declare that stand.

**BOSS:** It'll be a negation of my nature to act on impulse.

**NASIRUMBI:** Don't act on impulse. Do what's right. Follow your conscience. /

**BOSS:** This is not a personal matter where conscience is supreme. In public life what is right must be balanced against what is prudent.

**NASIRUMBI:** Destroying Simbi is neither right nor prudent.

**BOSS:** Of course, it's not!

**NASIRUMBI:** And it is unpopular.

**BOSS:** Boss shuns popularity. I must do what is right.

**NASIRUMBI:** Where I stand there's no second opinion to this madness.

**BOSS:** As a private citizen you are free to say that. As a Boss I cannot.

**NASIRUMBI:** Put your foot down and simply say no.

**BOSS:** I have neither the legal nor the constitutional authority to throw my weight about.

**NASIRUMBI:** (With force, closes in on him) You have the final word!

**BOSS:** (Firm as he paces past her) Madam, we agree on doctrine; we only differ on method. Any day, anywhere, you win the argument. But you must be careful not to lose the war. The people want to be listened to - they must be heard. It'll be futile to try and intimidate people into doing the master's will. In a democracy, there are no masters. We must have consultations and work hard at consensus building with serious attempts at compromise.

**NASIRUMBI:** Compromise over Simbi?

**BOSS:** We need time to digest what we have and to build consensus. (Pause) The million-

dollar question is: will the project bring visible improvement in the people's material circumstance? If the answer is yes ...

**NASIRUMBI:** No!

**BOSS:** Yes!

**NASIRUMBI:** Never!

**BOSS:** If the answer is yes then, we must be ready to negotiate and compromise in the spirit of give and take.

**NASIRUMBI:** No!

**BOSS:** Whatever happens to Simbi is a prerogative of the people.

**NASIRUMBI:** No. It will be your doing!

**BOSS:** Simbi's survival cannot be granted or denied by the Government. Simbi doesn't belong to the Government; Simbi belongs to the people. The people must decide its fate. Power resides in the people. The mandate is the people's to not only choose who but most importantly how it is exercised. The will of the people will be cheated if we don't hold a referendum on the issue.

**NASIRUMBI:** A referendum?

**BOSS:** Put Simbi to a vote.

**NASIRUMBI:** What?!

**BOSS:** Let the people decide!

**NASIRUMBI:** Where's the commitment to protect the environment which you always preach?

**BOSS:** Boss will protect Simbi.

**NASIRUMBI:** If your aim is to save the forest, why disguise it?

- BOSS:** My hand must stay hidden.
- NASIRUMBI:** Why?
- BOSS:** Devotion to duty.
- NASIRUMBI:** How?
- BOSS:** As an intellectual and a democrat, I am honour bound by a hierarchy of moral values. You stand for good; I stand for better. (*She does not respond. Longish pause as she continues staring at him.*) Simbi raises understandable concern and emotion. But Boss cannot deal with it in an emotional manner. His response must reflect reason, not emotion.
- NASIRUMBI:** Then you are not on our side.
- BOSS:** No. No. No... Don't get me wrong. My heart is in full agreement with you; only I cannot be open about it. Matters of the heart are personal. Boss is a public servant. He cannot champion personal views. Neither can the Cabinet impose its will on the public. A democracy is not a simple form of government; it's a delicate balancing of competing interests. Democracy is something you have to work at. The rule of law is the basis of democracy. The credibility of any democracy is served by being meticulous.
- NASIRUMBI:** (*Frustration beginning to show*) I didn't come for a lecture on democracy! /
- BOSS:** (*Firm, authoritative*) I want you to appreciate that a democratic process is the best mechanism for determining the will of the people. Debate is always healthy.

**NASIRUMBI:** In this particular case you will provide the roadmap.

**BOSS:** Not a highway to damnation! Not a path to perdition! Boss will not provide a roadmap to somewhere people don't want to go. It is his business to lead only along those roadmaps the people provide. As Simbi is vital to our livelihoods, he'll give his life to defend it; but if saving Simbi involves subverting the will of the people, he'll be the first to destroy it... It's not that he doesn't care about our physical environment, but that he loves and totally submits himself to the people's right to self-determination.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Voice rising*) Your reluctance is an abdication of responsibility! (*At the top of her voice*) Where's the courage of your convictions?

**BOSS:** Do I notice a ring of anger in your voice?

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Angry*) Simbi is a vital part of our common heritage. It's the only migration corridor left that links the northern and southern game reserves - ensuring the survival of our wild animals. The tourist resort will cut across and ruin everything. It'll separate the two game reserves into unviable islands. Soon the animals will inbreed and die out, and your much touted tourism will suffocate. Simbi is not just a forest; it is the very recipe for our life.

**BOSS:** And democratic processes guarantee the enjoyment of quality life.

- NASIRUMBI:** Democracy is just a social option!
- BOSS:** You don't mean democratic governance is not a civilising necessity in society.
- NASIRUMBI:** If it is a convenient way to avoid looking at our soul, I have no time for it.
- BOSS:** Be careful not to give yourself away.
- NASIRUMBI:** I'm not on parade!
- BOSS:** All the same don't become a stain on our democratic way of life. We must be beyond reproach as we put together a strategy necessary to get the results we desire. To succeed, we need humility, canvassing and networking.
- NASIRUMBI:** Boss, Simbi cries out for justice.
- BOSS:** Unfortunately, justice is a balancing act. The scales of justice are not absolute; they are relative. Humanity itself survives today because of our ability to queue, negotiate, engage in diplomatic mediation, reconciliation and peacemaking even in the face of extreme hopelessness and the threat of death. We must move slowly, careful not to trap ourselves into a tight corner.
- NASIRUMBI:** (*Impatient*) Do we or do we not have your backing?
- BOSS:** Are you ready to dialogue?
- NASIRUMBI:** For heaven's sake don't answer me with a question! This matter is too grave to be left pending.

**BOSS:**

Boss won't rush to take hard-line positions acceptable only to a section of society. I can't live with such an indelible act of cowardice!

**NASIRUMBI:**

The earlier you put your foot down the better. I won't abdicate! I have an obligation to defend our democratic values... the law not war.

**NASIRUMBI:**

As our leader you must stand up for Simbi.

**BOSS:**

Where would that leave those who support the project?

**NASIRUMBI:**

They have no business supporting an abomination!

**BOSS:**

Boss cannot wish them away and neither can you. If Boss puts his foot down and says no, will that frustrate a sizeable section of the population? Yes! Those who genuinely believe the resort will create jobs are not negligible. Should we risk their frustration and anger? No! We must give them a fair chance to be heard. No one wants to feel left out. (*After a long pause, he helps her back into her seat, then speaks to her in a low patronising tone.*) My dear, though we are on the same side I must play the devil's advocate to advance our cause. We are up against a formidable foe... Wars are not won by definitive actions only; wars are won by all efforts thrown at the enemy. And the hallmark of great leadership today is to make the all-important leap of faith in the ballot.

**NASIRUMBI:**

I am not about to make a leap into the unknown.

**BOSS:**

Don't worry. By synthetically enhancing the democratic process, Boss will get the results he wants in any vote. The people will vote to pass a law that will protect Simbi for posterity. A secure and prosperous Simbi will be my legacy. (*Pauses, then continues talking more to himself than to her*) Boss has a vision for this place, a vision for his people. When Boss picks up pen to write his memoirs, his finest thoughts will be reserved for the principled way he handled the difficult challenges of the day. Boss wants to tell a story that is a satisfactory record of political ethics and integrity. That's why in all he does, he celebrates the good and combats the bad. (*Pause*) Believe you me, the war to save Simbi will only be won by secretly taking the battle to the enemy.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*With the least interest*) I will present your stand to the Mothers' Front.

**BOSS:** I give you my word. And my word is always cast in stone. We can only win this through the backdoor. The front door is wrought with insurmountable dangers. Tell your friends to be careful.

**NASIRUMBI:** We will be very careful.

**BOSS:** First and foremost, we must locate the perfect middle ground between purpose and method. Our campaign should not cause despondency. It should not militate against our people's organic unity to cause disruption. You will also avoid predatory movements that rubbish the motherland to win favours abroad. That can

Cause disaffection with the patriotic masses  
and we will be the losers. Be careful. Don't tell  
the world Boss never warned you.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Rises, ready to leave, smiling at great effort) I  
am most honoured by your welcome.

(Calls out to SIBUOR) Sibuor!

(Offstage) Your Excellency...

Bring the envelope.

(Offstage) Blue, green, yellow or red?

Brown. (Directly to her) Anybody who takes a  
stand when it is easy and rewarding to simply  
cruise the middle deserves my total respect.

(SIBUOR enters and hands the envelope over to  
BOSS who reaches inside it to bring out a wad  
of notes. Surprised by the unexpected donation,  
she hesitates, and he literally has to put the  
money into her hand.)

**NASIRUMBI:** No, thank you,/

**BOSS:** It's only a small token... one hundred  
thousand... my small donation to the Mothers'  
Front. I'll organise something more substantial  
soon.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Genuinely grateful) Oh, thank you very  
much!

(Exit SIBUOR)

**BOSS:** It's nothing really. We are kindred spirits.  
Judge me on results.

**NASIRUMBI:** One hundred thousand will keep our lunch  
programme for street children going for some  
time.

**BOSS:** Boss will support you. Keep in touch.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Puts the money into her handbag) Our treasurer will send you a receipt for this donation.

**BOSS:** I don't need a receipt. When Boss gives charity with his heart, it ends there.

**NASIRUMBI:** You will get an official acknowledgement from the Mothers' Front.

**BOSS:** Generosity is its own reward.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Smiling) Nevertheless, you have given the money to the Mothers' Front. It's public money and our treasurer must acknowledge receipt. We like to be accountable.

**BOSS:** You are a tough one, aren't you?

**NASIRUMBI:** The Mothers' Front is held together by trust. In the long run, it always pays to do things the correct way.

**BOSS:** We shouldn't let perfect be the enemy of good.

**NASIRUMBI:** At the very least we have to be the best we can be.

**BOSS:** Your judgment is right, but I find the reasoning a bit askew.

**NASIRUMBI:** That's how I do my things.

**BOSS:** As you wish, Iron Lady.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Leaving) Thank you for the compliment and thank you for everything.

**BOSS:** (As NASIRUMBI begins walking off) Just a minute! (Gets out a visiting card, scribbles his numbers on it and gives it to her) Those are my direct numbers. You can reach me at will. I'd like to know more about the Mothers' Front: your membership, your goals and objectives, your strengths and weaknesses - things that will

enable Boss to support your projects fully. During Christmas this year, Boss will host a garden party for the Mothers' Front and the street families under your care. What do you think?

**NASIRUMBI:** Not a bad idea.

**BOSS:** We can do a lot together. Just keep me informed about your progress on this case. Should you need any help or favours my door is wide open. Call me at any time, day or night. If Boss is not around, the Hon. Sibuor will attend to you. You can get him on any of these numbers. (*He scribbles on the card*) Sibuor is my man – trust him fully.

**NASIRUMBI:** Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

**BOSS:** Before you go, I'll take you on a brief tour of my botanical gardens at the back of that house and down the garden path to the main gate. I have beautiful trees and flowers from around the world. You won't believe the diversity. (*As they leave*) You will keep the limo and driver for the day. (*She does not respond*) Please, ensure we choose the road of dialogue. A society that's happy and healthy listens to itself. Keep me informed about your plans. Don't do anything; don't even issue a statement to the media, before you first clear with me.

(*They walk off and the lights fade out slowly.*)

(*B L A C K O U T*)

## SECOND SEQUENCE

*(Action takes place at the office of the Editor of "The Voice of the People". INDONDO has come in early and settled down to his work. Moments later, enter SIBUOR. He is clad in an expensive business suit and, breathing fire, bursts in through the door brandishing a copy of the day's issue.)*

**SIBUOR:**

Why have you published this? (INDONDO does not move) How dare you highlight degenerate activities in *The Voice of the People*? What good has that silly woman done to merit splash headline prominence in today's issue? You're treading on dangerous ground. Boss is beside himself with rage that you did not ask for his response before printing the allegations. Doesn't good journalistic practice require that? Why intimidate the public with inflammatory headlines that turn out to be wrong?

**INDONDO:**

By standing up for the environment, those women are speaking for all.

**SIBUOR:**

Monstrous nonsense! Don't you know that any 'do-no-gooder' out to make money masquerading as a 'do-gooder' needs enemies to justify their madness?

**INDONDO:**

I don't.

**SIBUOR:**

The outrage industry exists for selfish purposes. And when it stumbles upon a case that serves its cause, it latches onto it like a dog to a bone, and you can't separate the two.

- INDONDO:** That doesn't apply across the board.
- SIBUOR:** Exude some maturity and depth. Scoundrels thrive behind such phoney environmentalists. Learn from me.
- INDONDO:** Then I have a long way to go.
- SIBUOR:** This opportunistic rebellion is at best spurious and pharisaic. It does not stem from any inner moral effort or ideo-intellectual conviction. It's disgusting that these women want to politicise a purely developmental issue. Nasirumbi and her group are not environmentalists! They're opportunists without core values.
- INDONDO:** You of all people can't say that.
- SIBUOR:** They are the very picture of political opportunism. In the good old days it used to be that where there is smoke there is fire. But today, where there is smoke, it's most likely that there is no fire but a smoke machine in the service of one or the other NGO or civil society agenda. Those women are shamelessly compromised!
- INDONDO:** In your spirited attempt to rubbish them, be careful not to discredit yourself.
- SIBUOR:** Those scheming women are perverting a noble cause in the service of their private demons. And you either stop promoting their wicked crusade, or else...*(menacing, threatening...)*
- INDONDO:** You are courting disaster.
- INDONDO:** *(Looks at his watch, remaining calm at great effort) Mheshimiwa, it's 6.15 am. I came in this early to clear some urgent work. If we must talk, please see me later in the day.*

**SIBUOR:**

(After a longish pause) You have no idea how much you've hurt us. (He points at the paper) Why can't you subject yourself to journalistic scrutiny and maintain an editorial stance that is dispassionate and independent?

**INDONDO:**

(After a long pause) To know the merits or demerits of the project both sides must be free to air their views.

**SIBUOR:**

(Sort of pleading) Those malcontents are up to no good. A man of your social standing should know better. How could you let her write this?

(He runs his eyes over the page looking for the relevant sentence and reads it out aloud)

"The idea of a private enterprise taking over a public facility is a social disgrace that must be resisted by all citizens of sound morality."

**INDONDO:**

Don't you agree?

**SIBUOR:**

What matters is that I don't like it at all.

**INDONDO:**

On the contrary, I agree with her stand.

**SIBUOR:**

The campaign mocks our values, and you should know better than to help her call the people to arms! Development is the only way forward for us.

**INDONDO:**

Development should not be an alibi for theft.

**SIBUOR:**

You are mixing and fudging issues.

**INDONDO:**

My paper will remain impartial.

**SIBUOR:**

The hallmark of good journalism is that you have a good solid story; and you give your readers facts not conjecture, innuendo and rumours. You must think carefully about the

value of what you publish. Man, what do you want our people to feel when they pick up your paper in the morning? (*INDONDO doesn't answer*) Mr. Indondo, that project is vital. Tourism will boom. Jobs! Hundreds of jobs will be created. The target is poverty alleviation.

Poverty?

Poverty alleviation!

Who creates and sustains poverty?

What?

Why is poverty a well-funded project in the modern world?

I don't get you.

Can you define poverty?

Well, the World Bank defines poverty as a pronounced deprivation in well-being.

Then how do you eradicate poverty simply by increasing economic growth, trade, consumption and the exploitation of resources? Can you win against poverty?

**SIBUOR:** Don't be silly! Real money will pour into this country. The construction phase alone will employ hundreds.

**INDONDO:** Poverty is more than just material deprivation. Poverty is also about being excluded from the decision-making process. (*He pauses, then firmly as he moves closer to him*) *The Voice of the People* is the people's voice, and it must be heard./

**SIBUOR:** Why – just because you have a voice?

**INDONDO:**  
**SIBUOR:**

Simbi is very important yet you threaten it. From the comfort of your plum job you can indulge in such fancy talk. The majority in this country cannot. Think of the homeless multitudes; the unemployed. Then think of the money that will flow in... the jobs. The people will benefit directly.

**INDONDO:**

The only people to benefit are you and your ilk.

**SIBUOR:**

The poor will benefit. Development is knocking at our door.

**INDONDO:**

Then do the right thing. Look for land elsewhere.

**SIBUOR:**

Our people won't wallow in poverty just to satisfy your misplaced sentimental feelings for a piece of idle land.

**INDONDO:**

Idle?

**SIBUOR:**

No land should lie idle. It's in the Bible. Forest land is not idle land. And senseless development founded on greed cannot sustain a society.

**SIBUOR:**

Gibberish!

The environment is sacred.

**INDONDO:**

Stop spouting topics you know nothing about. You sound like a poor undergraduate term paper.

**INDONDO:**

The ownership and use of limited resources is a sensitive matter. Left unchecked, crooks like you will conjure up all manner of projects to steal them.

**SIBUOR:**

Those women have no case.

- INDONDO:** Then get an impartial arbiter to dismiss them.
- SIBUOR:** We won't risk or squander the opportunity the project presents.
- INDONDO:** Get a competent independent party to conduct an environmental and socio-economic impact assessment of your project.
- SIBUOR:** We have neither the money nor the time to waste on assessments when matters are so clear.
- INDONDO:** Can we cope with the many tourists the resort is supposed to attract? How many cents in the tourist dollar will remain in the local economy given that the hotel will be foreign owned? Will the resort import foodstuffs, even water, as per the industry practice? /
- SIBUOR:** Those details will be worked out in due course. All that matters right now is the jobs to be created.
- INDONDO:** Will the locals get those jobs that matter or will they be reduced to slave labour on their own land? (*Pause*) There are many questions crying out for answers. Thank God those women are addressing one of them, insisting that the sanctity of public property must not be violated/
- SIBUOR:** We have carried out extensive studies. The community will gain immensely. All is well that ends well.
- INDONDO:** It's universally accepted that the means must justify the end.

**SIBUOR:**

Politically and economically, everything possible is a means to an end. The end must justify the means.

**INDONDO:**

Sibuor, we cannot do that and hope to prosper. Sooner or later we will implode. You sound like those hopeless, useless miserable women. /

**INDONDO:**

Those women may not be the richest or the finest among us... those ordinary folks you look down upon are talking about things that are important to all of us. They are talking about values... /

**SIBUOR:**

All supreme values are responsive to the market. And to be a man is to be an accomplice of the market.

**INDONDO:**

You animals of the market aspire to be on top of the food chain, but human beings must reach much higher and do things differently. Theology! Idlers, failures and conmen always hide in theology and God. Can you say what you're saying another way - in the language of the jobless, hungry and bitter man on the street? The crux of the matter is that we can only guarantee our future by guaranteeing our food chain.

**SIBUOR:**

In that project, this country's proactive leadership has the fundamental interests of the people at heart.

**INDONDO:**

No immoral activity is done in the social interest.

**SIBUOR:**

Wealth guarantees security and outweighs empty idealism.

INDONDO:

On Simbi's edge is Victory Park. That park serves many people, especially the poor who cannot afford membership of private clubs. Why lock them out? (Pause)

SIBUOR:

The war against poverty calls for radical actions. Everything that can be sold must go. Your stand is the surest way to subsidise the poverty project. But thank goodness, those who own Simbi are opposed to your plans. That forest belongs to the Government.

INDONDO:

Only as the trustee. The Cabinet is not supposed to be a den of opportunists out to line their pockets at the public expense.

SIBUOR:

The Government is empowered to deploy public facilities as it deems fit.

INDONDO:

The underlying assumption in that argument is that the authorities will not abuse that power to benefit a few people upstream as they simultaneously cause ruin and misery to the majority downstream.

SIBUOR:

Have you forgotten that this suburb, everything in it including this expansive office block owned by The Voice of the People, are on what used to be the greater Simbi Forest?

INDONDO:

It's not just this suburb, but the entire town. The town expanded as the forest receded. Don't hide in that whole town thing. Be specific and sincere. The acre of land upon which this private office block stands was acquired by The Voice of the People and not a cent was paid to the Government.

- INDONDO:** Don't ask me where all those who are opposing you today were then. What we lost cannot be recovered; but what we have left is ours, it must be enhanced and we will protect it.
- SIBUOR:** That forest has been left standing there simply because no project was forthcoming. Now that the resort has come up, the authorities must and will give it priority.
- INDONDO:** If you must build the resort, purchase land from private landowners. Nobody is going to fight you if you leave our forest intact.
- SIBUOR:** Haven't you seen the blueprint we circulated?
- INDONDO:** That doctored dossier, making the case for development, is a sham.
- SIBUOR:** We have good intentions.
- INDONDO:** The English say the road to hell is paved with good intentions.
- SIBUOR:** That's up to the English and fools like you who worship them. It has nothing to do with sovereigns like me.
- INDONDO:** Even if your resort will merge into and virtually leave the forest intact, how do you respond to the opposition voiced by the War Veterans Foundation about the two buildings of historic importance you plan to knock down?
- SIBUOR:** Buildings of historic importance?
- INDONDO:** Where the freedom fighters were tortured to death.
- SIBUOR:** People obsessed with past glories, totally unconcerned by current challenges annoy

**INDONDO:**  
**SIBUOR:**

me. The sooner those infamous buildings are demolished the better for us.

How?

Don't you read Ngugi wa Thiong'o? We must decolonise the mind and move the centre! The freedom fighters and those fellows at the museums, who want the buildings preserved, are agents of neo-colonialism! We have no place for agents of subjugation and decay.

You don't have to be that insensitive!

We fought for freedom! The blood of our heroes was not shed in vain. We must defend our interests.

**INDONDO:**

By coming up with phoney projects to steal from us!

**SIBUOR:**

How many times do I have to tell you we are NOT going to destroy Simbi?

**INDONDO:**

Once you get a foothold in that forest, Simbi won't survive your monstrous assault. I have the grim facts with me.

**SIBUOR:**

That's nowhere near the truth!

**INDONDO:**

You can dress it in decorative garb, you can sing praises about it; you can dance around it; you can put perfume on it; you can even kill, but you cannot run away from it, and you won't stop me from going after the hard facts. I have maps, architectural drawings, bills of quantities; I know everything! You plan to steal all that land, plus the trees and everything on it. Everything!

**SIBUOR:**

Where's the evidence?

**INDONDO:** Evidence? (*He pulls out a dossier from his desk and shoves it at SIBUOR*) Isn't that a true copy of your highly confidential blueprint?

**SIBUOR:** (*Shocked*) Huh! (*SIBUOR snatches and examines the dossier. It is authentic*) How did you get this? (*Long pause as a fuming SIBUOR gives him a hard, threatening stare*)

**INDONDO:** It's shameful! An abomination! You're up to no good. You've been in public service long enough. You are already rich - richer than this country. What else do you want?

**SIBUOR:** I pity you. (*Points a threatening finger*) Now, either you join us or we crush you.

**INDONDO:** Over my dead body!

**SIBUOR:** (*Indonesian*)  
**INDONDO:** That's no challenge to me. (*He pulls out a gun and begins toying with it*) I have done terrible things to get where I am. I have dined with demons - feasting on human flesh and blood. When the power god demands an offering from me, I willingly offer the ultimate sacrifice. Today, the power god demands Simbi... we are going to cut it down along with anybody who stands in our way.

**INDONDO:** (*Dismisses him*) Empty threats!

**SIBUOR:** (*Puts the gun on the table*) That's not a threat. That's not a warning. It just is a plain fact you have to live with. Nothing will come between me and the riches of Simbi.

**INDONDO:** There will be no triumph of big business over public opinion.

**SIBUOR:** Do you think you can fight us?

**INDONDO:**

This encroachment on Simbi is a direct attack on our livelihoods. It draws the line. It is the point at which we say enough is enough and move to reclaim whatever we have lost over the years. We can only move in one direction. No you won't!

**SIBUOR:**

**INDONDO:**

We will. We won't lose valuable biodiversity, water resources and other blessings of Simbi so that some faceless destitutes can get imaginary jobs. And even if the jobs are real, what sense does it make to kill our future? What is left of Simbi is our communal heritage.

**SIBUOR:**

(*Looks at his watch*) Whether the people like it or not, we are going to build a modern tourist resort where Simbi stands. We have the power and we have decided. You parrots have no chance pitted against businessmen like me.

**INDONDO:**

You – a businessman? You are a mere speculator, dependent on patronage and graft!

**SIBUOR:**

(*Wearing a dismissive smile*) When the history of this country is written, my courage and pragmatism will be reserved for the proudest pages.

**INDONDO:**

With your likes on the loose writing our eulogy, this place will have no history to write about.

**SIBUOR:**

Your attempts to distort the truth won't succeed.

**INDONDO:**

Going by the many letters I receive daily from a cross-section of the population, there is widespread discontent in all segments of society.

- SIBUOR:** Let's have another one of those silly articles appearing in *The Voice of the People*, and we know who is who in this part of the world. I did not invent this crisis. *The Voice of the People* will report it in black and white.
- INDONDO:** *The Voice of the People* is not *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*. This is a band publication that specialises in digging up the dirt on others. You've fired the first shot, I have taken up the challenge. I am going to play dirty - real dirty. We'll see who stinks most.
- INDONDO:** The cutting edge of Truth and Justice will get sharper with every issue.
- SIBUOR:** Are you daring me?
- INDONDO:** This is my story and I am sticking to it.
- SIBUOR:** Do you think you can do as you like in this place? You should know better than that. We do what we please, as we please, where we please. Get used to it. From here I am going straight to Boss.
- INDONDO:** Stop name-dropping! Be your own man!
- SIBUOR:** Another silly article and you won't be able to look your wife in the face again.
- INDONDO:** (Shooting up) Don't drag my family into this. Get out!
- SIBUOR:** Huh! You? You can't throw me out.
- INDONDO:** Get out!
- SIBUOR:** Don't play with dynamite!
- INDONDO:** Bandit!

SIBUOR:  
INDONDO:

My small finger is more than you can handle.  
Every dog thinks himself a lion in his heyday!  
*(In the heat of the moment, SIBUOR fishes for  
an envelope from under his jacket and produces  
pictures which he throws at INDONDO.)*

SIBUOR:

*(Whispers to self)*  
Before you call me a dog, take a good look  
at those pictures of your amorous self, Mr.  
Clean! *(INDONDO hesitates)* Go on! Look at  
that photographic evidence of your adulterous  
relationship with your secretary - lying on a  
hotel bed in the nude like Lucifer has routed  
God in the universe! *(Shaken, INDONDO  
remains speechless.)* Another senseless word  
from you and your world will crumble. *(A  
dumbstruck INDONDO slumps over his desk  
crestfallen. After a long pause, SIBUOR speaks  
to him patronisingly in a softer conspiratorial  
tone.)* Let's work together. Pledge your loyalty  
to a new family and you will cross the street.  
*(SIBUOR reaches for INDONDO's hand over the  
desk)* Do we have a deal?

*(Lights fade out on them.)*

**(BLACKOUT)**

### THIRD SEQUENCE

(A restless SIBUOR paces about alone in BOSS's living room the same morning. Moments later enter an immaculately dressed BOSS from adjoining rooms.)

- BOSS:** What's gone wrong?  
**SIBUOR:** Things are out of hand.  
**BOSS:** (Alarmed) Huh! What's it?  
**SIBUOR:** That satanic woman!  
**BOSS:** Nasirumbi?  
**SIBUOR:** She's out to get us.  
**BOSS:** How?  
**SIBUOR:** She refuses to go quietly. She's beating her drums all over the place.  
**BOSS:** (Slightly relieved) If it's another campaign of protest letters let them waste their time. They seem to have a lot of it.  
**SIBUOR:** Things are really hot. The editorial in today's issue of *The Voice of the People* is dangerous and insulting. Look at the sensational headline! (He reads out aloud) "Ogres Invade Simbi Forest!"  
**BOSS:** Huh! (He snatches the paper and runs his eyes over the page, then thunders) Unpatriotic slime will NOT blossom here! Those who say no to Boss live to regret!  
**SIBUOR:** (He snatches the paper back and displays it) Imagine the banner story is an article about those women's opposition to the project!  
**BOSS:** Has that paper's editor gone bonkers!?

**SIBUOR:**

He is dangerous. He openly insults you on the editorial page.

(*A worked up BOSS opens the editorial page and runs his eyes over it, reading out aloud those parts that alarm him.*)

**BOSS:**

(*Reading angrily*) "... there can be no better demonstration of official irresponsibility and insensitivity, than the decision by the authorities to let whatever is left of Simbi Forest be stolen by private enterprise...whatever progress the project is meant to bequeath to this country is negated by the destruction it is going to unleash on our environmental, cultural and historic heritage...since ordinary people have the final word..." (*Looks up at SIBUOR*) Huh! Ordinary people don't have the final word!

**SIBUOR:**

Boss has the final word!

**BOSS:**

I don't believe this!

**SIBUOR:**

That editor is mad. He is dangerous. (*Snatches the paper from BOSS, looks for a place and reads aloud*) "...since ordinary people have the right to determine their destiny, I call upon all citizens to come out en masse and show their opposition to the project. . . official corruption is an abomination that must be destroyed, root and branch!"

**BOSS:**

(*More surprised than enraged*) Why? This is the high priest of anarchy enchanting his gods!

**SIBUOR:**

(*Looks for another section and reads it out to a pensive BOSS*) "Silence may be golden, but

when that silence implies social withdrawal and political quietism; when that silence does nothing to stop the elimination of decency as a political, social and cultural force; when that silence promotes injustice and the erosion of a democratic culture; when that silence degenerates into an instrument that legitimises and abets evil, then that silence is an evil - a vice that must be condemned emphatically by all . . ."

**BOSS:**

(Enraged) That's pure sedition! Idiotic myopia! Moral dysfunction! Anarchy incarnate!

**SIBUOR:**

Anarchists cannot represent the masses!

**BOSS:**

Not in my backyard!

**SIBUOR:**

Silence the drums! Break the drums before resentment breeds revolt!

**BOSS:**

(After a long pensive pause) Worry not. Boss is digging a deep grave for his enemies.

**SIBUOR:**

I can still hear the drums.

**BOSS:**

(Moments of indecision, then he violently grabs SIBUOR's head and, in a low but firm voice, speaks into his ear.) Whatever you are hearing

is just a distant echo of his dying screams from the Valley of the Dead. (Explodes, grabs and gives SIBUOR a violent push that knocks him down.) Boss prohibits that paper's publication!

(SIBUOR gets up. BOSS beckons him to move closer.) On second thought, the drums will not be silenced - they'll play on...but my firm grip will direct the drummers' hands.

**SIBUOR:**

We must silence him immediately! He knows too much! (*Pause, then in a near whisper*) He has a copy of our confidential blueprint.

**BOSS:**

(*With more fear than force, but enraged*) How did he get it?!

**SIBUOR:**

I don't know.  
(*With menacing authority*) Sibuor!

**BOSS:**

Your Excellency!

**SIBUOR:**

That document was to stay hidden until we had a firm foothold in Simbi. How did he get it?

**SIBUOR:**

One of our people must have leaked it to him. Have we degenerated to a point where we cannot keep a secret? (*No answer*) I hate myself for having to work with men who cannot deliver! How could such an abomination happen?

**SIBUOR:**

I don't know.

**BOSS:**

(*Explosive*) Is that an answer? Heads must roll!

**SIBUOR:**

(*Begging, desperately pleading on his knees, holding onto BOSS' feet.*) Boss, I was created to serve you. I exist because you wish it. You're the rock upon which I am founded. I am nothing without you. You are the breath in my nostrils! (*Long pause as SIBUOR prostrates himself before BOSS.*)

**BOSS:**

(*Picking him up*) Get up and put your act together.

**SIBUOR:**

Thank you, My Lord!

**BOSS:**

(*Pause, then with a sense of finality*) Plug the hole. Silence the offender.

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

You have spoken, BOSS.

Get him!

Do I have my orders?

(Desperate) Don't wait to find out. Get him by the balls! Get him by the throat! Crush him!

We can't afford to take chances.

(Reassuringly) We have the upper hand this time round. Whatever evidence he has against us, he'll be foolish to throw the first stone. We have a tight noose around his neck.

How?

(Gets out an envelope from under his jacket) He knows that I have THESE against him! (BOSS takes the envelope) I told him to think twice before focusing his pen on us, if ever again. (He elatedly goes through the pictures, then with a thumbs up sign) Yeah! These are gems! Each one of them! (Pause, then to SIBUOR with overflowing admiration) These are lethal! (On second thought, with suppressed apprehension) You scare me.

Papa, my loyalty to you is absolute. I've nothing against you. It was absolutely necessary to have a lever under this nut. Our survival demanded it.

(Longish thoughtful pause) So far so good! But such things may not mean much to that amoral character. To be on the safe side, Dalang'i has to silence the busybody. As the paper's owner he either does my bidding or Boss finishes

**SIBUOR:**

It's not for Boss to merely preside over events,  
but to rule.

**BOSS:**

And to rule effectively Boss will!

**SIBUOR:**

Son of the War God!

**BOSS:**

Why does a leopard kill?

**SIBUOR:**

Reasons are not an issue when killing advances  
one's interests. (*Inciting him*) Shoot from the  
hip. Shoot straight. Shoot to kill.

**BOSS:**

On the contrary, I must hold my fire.

**SIBUOR:**

Boa constrictor!

**BOSS:**

Politics is about timing. Now is the time to  
embrace and flirt.

**SIBUOR:**

A tiger pounces not to embrace and flirt.

**BOSS:**

The enemy is still out of range. I want them  
so close they will feel the full impact when I  
strike. The point of attack will present itself.

**SIBUOR:**

Take the handcuffs off me!

**BOSS:**

Of what use will that be?

**SIBUOR:**

The people have to know where you stand on  
crucial issues.

**BOSS:**

Boss must proceed with a brain surgeon's  
caution and precision - gloves, anaesthetists  
and all in place.

**SIBUOR:**

Give me my orders, I beg you!

**BOSS:**

Don't panic. Boss must play both sides of the  
street. In public I must be the people's friend.  
It is very important that I don't stand up at  
this stage.

**SIBUOR:**

Boss, this is politics. Any show of weakness on  
our part is suicidal.

**BOSS:**

Playing weak when you are at your strongest is the best way to lay an ambush and rout the enemy. Besides, procedures are procedures. And since the matter is before a court of law, Boss should not be seen to influence the due process.

**SIBUOR:**

Son of Fire, since when did we wait to serve legal papers on our enemies?

**BOSS:**

Do you realise we are dealing with a very radical group which believes it can govern from the streets?

**SIBUOR:**

That's why we must destroy them! We must fight these women with intelligence. Force is necessary, yes, but not sufficient... not at this time. Boss will proceed with utmost caution.

**SIBUOR:**

Left alone, the women will dig up overwhelming evidence against us.

**BOSS:**

Public opinion is shaped by perceptions, not evidence.

**SIBUOR:**

Son of the Plague, sow terror! Sow fear! (BOSS doesn't answer) The people want to hear your thunder... reassure them... thunder your stand throughout the land!

**BOSS:**

Many are the times Boss accomplishes more by what he doesn't say or do.

**SIBUOR:**

Time is running out.

**BOSS:**

Boss is busy elsewhere, dealing with more important issues, handling the big story.

**SIBUOR:**

This thing has become big.

BOSS:

Deflate it. It must stay small, undeserving his attention.

SIBUOR:

It's getting out of hand.

BOSS:

Boss is not sleeping on the job. At the very least the people must see it for what it is: too small to warrant the attention of the highest office in the land.

SIBUOR:

We must frighten them... Inaction is the most dangerous course of all. (Pause, almost pleading) Boss, social order is a product of strength, and order naturally serves the strong.

BOSS:

(After a thoughtful pause) You surprise me.

SIBUOR:

How, Boss?

BOSS:

All these years as my man and you still don't understand politics. The people must not have a warts-and-all portrait of Boss. We need to constantly show his benevolent side. Besides it's not advisable to have fixed ground. To expose my hand is to give the protesters a new lease of life. The strategy is to stay formless, to keep them guessing. They must have nothing solid to attack!

SIBUOR:

Son of the War God! (He does not respond)  
Cripple them. Outright strangulation, Boss!

BOSS:

My arm has not lost its muscles. After the suit has been dismissed Boss will enforce the court's ruling and uphold the law like hell's errand boy. I'll slam them with the full force of the law.

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

SIBUOR:

BOSS:

Indomitable lion! Pounce!

In life you will be surprised how often a ~~far~~  
is worth a thousand lions. Deceit rules the  
world.

Son of Thunder, a mere woman cannot prevent  
total men, with money and power, from crowing  
in their backyard!

A slippery tree is climbed with caution,

*(Lights fade out slowly.)*

*(BLACKOUT)*

## FOURTH SEQUENCE

(Action takes place at the Editor's office.  
INDONDO is going through his work. Enter  
NASIRUMBI bursting with energy.)

**INDONDO:**

Did the High Court grant your application for a permanent injunction?

**NASIRUMBI:**

The judge noted that though the Mothers' Front had a moral obligation to protest, he distinguished between moral obligations and legal ones. Justice Opoti argued that not being mandated to represent the people; and two, the forest not being our private property there is no legal basis in our laws for us to apply for the injunction. He dismissed the case with costs.

**INDONDO:**

I saw it coming.

**NASIRUMBI:**

How can we not have jurisdiction over Simbi? It is public property!

**INDONDO:**

Such judicial lynching has far-reaching political and social implications.

**NASIRUMBI:**

That ruling was totally without merit. A travesty of justice that prevents a fair hearing of the issues we raised in our plaint... it is an abuse of court procedure and the due process. I didn't expect such an outrageous outcome.

**INDONDO:**

On the contrary, that verdict was written long before you presented your case.

**NASIRUMBI:**

What do you mean?

**INDONDO:**

The judge, like anybody with the hunter's meat in his mouth, will not say or do anything against the hunter.

**NASIRUMBI:** That's not the end of the road for us. We believe in justice. I give you a grasshopper's chance in a gathering of fowls.

**INDONDO:** Those who hold hands to support each other don't fear a slippery path.

**NASIRUMBI:** Boss is the law. The courts are his puppets. What then should we do?

**INDONDO:** Nothing.

**NASIRUMBI:** You don't mean we throw in the towel!

**INDONDO:** We need some time off to see the options open to us.

**NASIRUMBI:** We either intensify the fight right away or very soon we will become irrelevant.

**INDONDO:** The more reason why we must give thought to what lies beyond the next step.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Fishes papers from her handbag*) I'd like you to publish this article to launch a signature campaign in our support.

**INDONDO:** Of what use will that be?

**NASIRUMBI:** Our lawyers see a provision in the law. A substantial number of signatures will prove that we represent a vast group opposed to the project. Then and only then can we appeal the Court's ruling. The judge gave us 14 days in which to appeal. The masses don't have that much time to give us their signatures. Somehow we must and we will have our day in court!

**INDONDO:** What if the same court turns around and accuses you of forging some of the signatures,

and charges you with perjury? You'll be jailed for a long time for forging signatures on your petition.

**NASIRUMBI:** Whatever it takes we won't embrace impunity and accept that officialdom, especially Boss, is above the law.

**INDONDO:** He holds all the cards.

**NASIRUMBI:** What do you suggest?

**INDONDO:** Don't waste time in his courts. Our compromised Judiciary allows the impunity of the powerful.

**NASIRUMBI:** I don't allow it!

**INDONDO:** But what can you do?

**NASIRUMBI:** The good fight has to be fought.

**INDONDO:** We are outgunned, outnumbered... they have resources we don't have... and worst of all, like hyenas, they are inspired by greed.

**NASIRUMBI:** The people are with us. I see light at the end of the tunnel.

**INDONDO:** No, you don't.

**NASIRUMBI:** I do! We are winning. Why are they hitting below the belt?

**INDONDO:** That's their nature. We have to rethink our strategy and change tactics. To succeed it is essential we don't waste all our energy just throwing ourselves at the machine, bogged down in arenas of struggle that cannot deliver the systemic shifts we need. We should not be blind to the fact that most of the conventional venues for political engagement - legislation, elections, courts, single issue campaigns and

labour fights - are so co-opted by the predatory elitist system that it is difficult to imagine how to use them to realize self-determination. Our challenge is to think outside the box, to explore new arenas of struggle that embody alternatives that will give us the opportunity to create new political realities. (Pause) To be more direct with you, I don't think *The Voice of the People* will be on our side if we maintain a blunt confrontational stance.

**NASIRUMBI:** You can't say that at this crucial stage of the struggle. *The Voice of the People* is central to the struggle. You are our strongest weapon.

**INDONDO:** All the same, I would like us to be prepared for the day when *The Voice of the People* will not only black us out but publish articles against the protest.

**NASIRUMBI:** What?!

**INDONDO:** (Resigned) Have you seen any articles on Simbi since my editorial of last Wednesday? Even in the letters to the editor?

**NASIRUMBI:** (Becomes visibly conscious for the first time that all is not well) Did I notice a change in you when I walked in? (Pause) Is that why you didn't come to the law courts?

**INDONDO:** I hope you have discovered something.

**NASIRUMBI:** What?

**INDONDO:** That it is an imperfect world.

**NASIRUMBI:** What's happening?

**INDONDO:**

(After a thoughtful pause) My hands are tied. The voice of the people will not be silenced! Public scrutiny is our only saving grace... you

are the only check we have on the wanton abuse of power.

**INDONDO:** Yes, but I must know how to exist - and that matters the most.

**NASIRUMBI:** What?

**INDONDO:** I must find an accommodation with the powers that be.

**NASIRUMBI:** You won't serve wicked self-seekers who lack the respect for and do not attend to our most elementary needs!

**INDONDO:** (After a long pause) I am sorry that's how things stand right now.

**NASIRUMBI:** Man, so you agree with them... have you all along offered lip service to the cause?

**INDONDO:** We must change our tactics.

**NASIRUMBI:** You make no point sitting on the fence. In this conflict there is no neutral ground. Stand up and translate your convictions into concrete action.

**INDONDO:** To not understand our enemy is to prepare for defeat. The enemy is multifarious and ruthless. To have a chance against them, our battle plans must radically change. And besides, I am obeying orders.

**NASIRUMBI:** Whose orders?

**INDONDO:** Those of my publisher. Mr. Dalang'i hardly comes here. He summons me to his office whenever he wants to talk to me. This time, however, on Wednesday, like a prey in flight, he burst in here...

(FLASHBACK: During the above speech, *INDONDO* gestures and accidentally knocks over a document tray from his table scattering papers onto the floor. Lights change, triggering off the flashback. *NASIRUMBI* picks up the papers. She gives him one of the sheets of paper, impersonating Mr. *DALANG'I*, the publisher. The changeover should be as seamless as possible.)

**NASIRUMBI:** Take a good look at this letter I have written you.

(*INDONDO* goes through the letter.)

**INDONDO:** Mr. Dalang'i, why write such a strong letter when you could simply call me over to your place.

**NASIRUMBI:** (In panic) Boss has been to my place.

**INDONDO:** (Aware of the gravity of the situation) We are an independent paper. The authorities have no business trying to direct our editorial policy.

**NASIRUMBI:** See to it that you do EXACTLY as Boss demands in that letter.

**INDONDO:** Mr. Dalang'i, what Boss is asking is totally against our editorial policy. We will not shirk our duty of protecting the public from his breach of trust...

**NASIRUMBI:** I've walked a long treacherous road to get where I am. I won't risk everything by fighting the system. Right there in your hands are orders from Boss. No. They are my orders. They draw a clear line on the ground. Don't cross it.

INDONDO:

NASIRUMBI: But we're only reporting the truth.

What's the value of truth when history is written by one side - the victors! Just do what Boss demands.

INDONDO:

Mr. Dalang'i, I cannot use *The Voice of the People* so recklessly. I cannot accept the demands of Boss because they exist in the logic of dictatorship - the warped logic of gross abuse of office.

NASIRUMBI: *The Voice of the People* is an investment. It must justify its existence. It's not a platform for peddling lofty ideas.

INDONDO: We must show some concern.

NASIRUMBI: The number one concern for any businessman worth the name is good returns.

INDONDO: We also have a duty to our readership - to the society that over the years has trusted and invested in us... given us business, helped us grow from a backstreet publication to what we are today.

NASIRUMBI: We pay taxes. We have created and continue to create jobs. We contribute to charity... What else do you want?

INDONDO: I am not talking about pittance. Let's give back something that will touch everybody personally and radically change the way things are done in this country for the better.

NASIRUMBI: I am nobody's hero. There's no point in being a hero. When Boss speaks, we obey. Disobeying means death.

**INDONDO:** *(Waves the letter and drops it into the tray)*  
will not accept this.

**NASIRUMBI:** I won't take that as your final word; think about it for the next few hours. *(Pause)* The idea is to be around tomorrow.

**INDONDO:** *(Almost to himself)* Greed governs us. It must be opposed and defeated.

**NASIRUMBI:** As long as you work for *The Voice of the People*, you have to weigh your options carefully! When the authorities issue sanctions you obey them or get the sack. *(Pause)* I didn't go into business to make friends. That is life. And as it is said, life is an art of shifting alliances to serve one's interests in the pursuit of the possible.

**INDONDO:** *(After some silence)* Mr. Dalang'i, we should not let these people kick us about. This is a good story. It is hot. It's selling very well. It's a godsend - an opportunity to grow our paper as we do the right thing.

**NASIRUMBI:** I will lose the paper. Boss will ban it. You have to begin supporting them immediately. You will substantially edit anything newsworthy about that story, and delete whatever the authorities might not like.

**INDONDO:** In my long career as a journalist, I have always addressed myself to issues and events objectively and truthfully. I cannot be guided by fear, by profit, or by partisan interests. I must and I work for the common good.

**NASIRUMBI:** All these years, I have given you a free hand and you have done a commendable job. This time, however, you'll have to do as they wish.

Big money is involved. The World Bank is involved. Do you know what that means? Our lives count for nothing. Boss came in person to my place breathing fire and delivered threats. He insinuated that I am using the forest saga to cause public disaffection so I can run against him in the next elections. I don't want to turn up dead, shot through the head, my tortured, mutilated and burnt body dumped on a remote village hillside.

**INDONDO:** (Almost to himself) These people are mistaken to think they can hurt others with impunity! (Turns and speaks directly to her) I will hit them so hard they won't know what their world is coming to.

**NASIRUMBI:** You won't do so through *The Voice of the People*.

**INDONDO:** I will do it my own way. If the truth is so hated it needs a guard of lies to go around so be it. This is a new war, a personal war... a war that threatens my very existence in a way you cannot comprehend. I will take it to them ... I will fight them on their turf, smoke them out of their holes and crush them.,

**NASIRUMBI:** Why do you feel so strongly about things that don't affect you directly as an individual? If I have learnt anything in this world it is that on this side of the grave it pays to put profit before principles, money before patriotism!

**INDONDO:** What matters to me is that history is a long chain. One generation leads to another. We are

the most important link in that chain at moment. We don't want to be the weak link. We must play our part.

**NASIRUMBI:** I don't care an iota whatever is done to the forest. Why can't you also be impartial?

**INDONDO:** Impartial between life and death? You don't have to be a rocket scientist to choose life. The future of each depends on the good of all.

**NASIRUMBI:** All the same I am neutral.

**INDONDO:** As Dante wrote, neutrality in a time of severe moral strife is wrong.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Stung*) Dante puts no money in my pocket. You've been around long enough to know that.

**INDONDO:** Silence in the face of injustice amounts to complicity.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*With force*) I expect you to have the wisdom that experience bequeaths one. Never let the heart rule the head. Read the signs. You must realise at this point that we are playing politics... and there's no morality in this game. You should know what is worth dying for and when to bow out gracefully. It's an imperfect world. I have made my choice.

**INDONDO:** You make no choice but pure calculation when you acquiesce. There is no meeting of minds when you acquiesce. There's no point in handshakes when you acquiesce.

**NASIRUMBI:** We have to make deliberate sacrifices at a certain point in order to gain greater advantages at another.

- INDONDO:** My call to journalism was born of a burning desire for justice and self-determination. A persistent will to succeed against monumental odds has made me what I am. Simbi will not be raped as we stand on the sidewalks of life.
- NASIRUMBI:** I don't give a damn as long as I can go about my business as usual.
- INDONDO:** Right now you're here because you cannot conduct your businesses freely.
- NASIRUMBI:** These people don't care. There's no point holding them to standards they don't believe in.
- INDONDO:** People are held to standards whether they agree with them or not.
- (Long pause)
- NASIRUMBI:** Well, I am not a politician. My position is very clear. To continue working for me, please those in power. (*She gets more papers from the envelope and hands them along with the envelope to him.*) For the next few days you will publish these articles praising the ingenious project.
- (Long pause as they stare at each other in silence)
- INDONDO:** I will sleep over it and get back to you.
- (INDONDO puts the envelope and the papers back into the tray. This action coincides with the change of lights back to normal, ending the flashback. The transition should be as seamless as possible so that the scene ends with the lights clearing as INDONDO drops the last papers back into the tray.)*

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Resigned*) We have a big problem. What's the way forward?

**INDONDO:** If you can't beat them, join them and...

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Dismissing him*) Savage morality!

**INDONDO:** (*Insisting*)...join them and beat them at their own game.

(*Pause*)

**NASIRUMBI:** Let's talk to Mr. Dalang'i, plead our case together. He might listen. (*Pause*) You are important to his business. He cannot do without you.

**INDONDO:** My profession is difficult. I own nothing - not even the pen and the paper... And media owners don't like investigative journalists. Besides the fact that they do not want to lock horns with the powers that be, most are beneficiaries of corruption. Instead of positively shaping public consciousness, media outlets promote conflict and peddle warped images of those in power.

(*Silence as they stare at each other*)

**NASIRUMBI:** The struggle cannot afford to lose you to them at this crucial stage.

**INDONDO:** I have to tread carefully. The stakes are very high right now. There are details you don't know. The thugs we are fighting are vicious.

**NASIRUMBI:** Vicious but not invincible. Their supposed strength lies in the mere fact that by abusing office, they have countless ways of either helping or harming one, depending on how one chooses to relate to them.

**INDONDO:**

If we don't plan a clever comeback we will just be the orchestra and Boss the conductor. At the moment the best strategy is to keep our heads down but be prepared to move very fast at short notice.

**NASIRUMBI:**

It pains me to see them so reckless yet as public trustees it's their mandate to serve the common good.

**INDONDO:**

People who stray into politics with crash programmes to feather their nests are not respecters of altruistic values. They employ any means to have their way. They're ready to kill. It won't be easy to stop them.

**NASIRUMBI:** Then for the sake of your conscience, resign from that job and...

**INDONDO:** (Cuts in)... and walk naked down the street?

**NASIRUMBI:** Resign and demonstrate your resolve to win the day for justice and liberty.

**INDONDO:** Of what use will that be?

**NASIRUMBI:** A leopard is known by its spots.

**INDONDO:** Heroes don't look like me. I am just an ordinary guy trying to get some job done. If I succeed, well and good. But I am not ready to do so at all costs... Not at the cost of my limb, life or livelihood.

**NASIRUMBI:** What do you mean?

**INDONDO:** I don't think we are looking at the problem through the same eyes.

**NASIRUMBI:** If you don't resign on principle, you will be a sell-out.

**INDONDO:** I am not a sell-out; I am a survivor.

**NASIRUMBI:** Sell-out, survivor – call it what you may – in any language, a sell-out is a sell-out.

**INDONDO:** I believe in surviving.

**NASIRUMBI:** That's a convenient way out.

**INDONDO:** You don't get me.

**NASIRUMBI:** I have seen your type.

**INDONDO:** I don't have to win always.

**NASIRUMBI:** If you don't stand by what you believe in you are a sell-out - a turncoat who makes a deal with the devil.

**INDONDO:** Allow me to explain...

**NASIRUMBI:** A kite rises against the wind not with it. What you're about to do amounts to collaborating with evil. I feel betrayed. (*A dejected NASIRUMBI sits*)

**INDONDO:** If you close your eyes because you don't wish to see your enemies you will not be able to see your friends. (*Pause*) We must not play into their hands by being too militant. The road of protest has signposts made of human skulls. The world has too many dead heroes. I don't want to be one of them. I am too busy to die. I need this job. I don't wish to become irrelevant. I'll keep my drums and determine the tempo of the dance. My control over *The Voice of the People* is very important.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*After a thoughtful pause*) You've made your point. It's only difficult for me to accept that things have suddenly turned for the worse. (*Pause. INDONDO extends his hand and helps her onto her feet.*) Where do we go from here?

(*Lights fade out.*)

(*B L A C K O U T*)

## FIFTH SEQUENCE

(BOSS, SIBUOR and INDONDO are holed up in a private room at a hotel. BOSS and SIBUOR cut comical figures "overdressed" in women's clothes, complete with handbags, high heeled shoes, wigs, lipstick and such like makeup, to conceal their identity. The two look a bit nervous, but a glance at them reveals the expression of seasoned schemers.)

BOSS:

(Looking at his watch and stretching nervously)  
We've been here for hours waiting. Where's that white woman?

INDONDO:

She will come. She is keen to meet Boss. She assured me herself. We must go along with her. It should not matter whether or not she drags us through mud.

SIBUOR:

What matters is that we get a favourable Environmental Impact Assessment Report on the project from her.

INDONDO:

I have explained everything to her.

BOSS:

(Almost to himself) My stomach has been rumbling ever since I learnt of her presence in town. Why should the World Bank spring a spy on us at this critical time?

SIBUOR:

(Nervously) It's not that we're scared or anything.

BOSS:

This is a nightmare! A shipwreck! I don't know what to do. After we have done so much, parted with loads of money, I cannot imagine that without her approval, the World Bank's funding will be withdrawn./

SIBUOR:

It does not have to come to that. If she doesn't issue a favourable report, we can ask our foreign partners to intervene directly with the World Bank.

BOSS:

I can't bring myself to face them. I had assured them everything was safely wrapped up. (Pause. Looks at his watch and stretches nervously.) She's taking rather long. I have a bad heart.

SIBUOR:

The fact that she insisted we dress like women so nobody can notice her in our company makes a lot of sense. She is a wise woman. I know her type. By delaying, she's testing our nerves, hoping to scare and intimidate us into a deal tilted in her favour.

INDONDO:

(To SIBUOR) You are right.

BOSS:

(To SIBUOR) I pray it comes to that. (A knowing look at INDONDO) We can comfortably accommodate her. My only fear is that money might mean absolutely nothing to her. She looks the proverbial activist fool – the type that's sold out to ideological mirages. I hate everything that's happening!

SIBUOR:

Boss, all we want is her endorsement.

BOSS:

(Looks at his watch) Why is she taking so long?

INDONDO:

(Rises) I'll go upstairs and see what is holding her up.

(BOSS and SIBUOR jump onto their feet.)

BOSS & SIBUOR: (Horrified) No! No! No!

- BOSS:** Don't!
- SIBUOR:** Don't do that. It'll... eeh...
- BOSS:** It'll earn us her rage.
- SIBUOR:** We will be doomed.
- BOSS:** (To SIBUOR) Are you impatient?
- SIBUOR:** Me? Oh no. No way! Not me.
- BOSS:** (Sits, pretends to be equally relaxed) We will wait - patiently.
- SIBUOR:** (As if prompted by BOSS, he also drops into his seat, crosses his legs and pretends to be relaxed.) Bad things happen to those who have no patience.
- BOSS:** Let her take her sweet time.
- SIBUOR:** (To INDONDO, who ignoring BOSS, is moving towards the door.) If something is holding her up, tell her to take her time. It goes with high office to keep the powerless waiting.
- INDONDO:** (BOSS gives off a muted grunt, betraying a wounded ego.)
- INDONDO:** (To BOSS) I'll be very subtle. I'll give her the least reason to suspect we are impatient. I will weigh her mood and suggest things. Throw baits here and there and watch. Reassure her... tell her she has everything to gain keeping your good company. You are a very popular leader. The people will love it.
- SIBUOR:** I was just about to suggest that. Flattery is the key word here. Poetry pleases gods and fixes power.
- BOSS:** (Following him to the door) Tell her, I am ready to help her with the investigations. In fact,

I would like her to address the Cabinet at a special session to be convened in her honour.

When?

INDONDO: Tell her anything.

BOSS: Even this afternoon?

SIBUOR: Now! Anything! I'll implement whatever you agree with her.

INDONDO: (Going) I'll hurry.  
(Instinctively, they jump up and follow him to the door.)

BOSS: No! Don't hurry!

SIBUOR: Take your sweet time.

BOSS: Bear in mind that we need her; she doesn't need us,

SIBUOR: Drop hints that we are willing to do business with her. Guide her to the edge and make sure she looks down the shaft into the gold mine we are putting at her disposal.

INDONDO: (At the door) Leave it to me. I know what to do. (Goes closing the door behind him, then just as they take their seats, he re-enters the room and they jump onto their feet, in panic) Gentlemen, whatever happens, don't expose me. I know you have given me a lot of money but this is different.

BOSS: (Tense, to SIBUOR) Were you born yesterday?

SIBUOR: Me? Oh - No! No! No! Never!

BOSS: (To INDONDO) We are old hands. You have nothing to worry about. (Exit as before. Moments later SIBUOR sits down. Resigned to

- his fate a pensive BOSS stays standing.) I hate everything that's happening! We can't leave our fate to him!*
- SIBUOR:** I have full confidence in him.
- BOSS:** You?
- SIBUOR:** I trust him.
- BOSS:** How do you know he is sincere?
- SIBUOR:** Don't worry about such things.
- BOSS:** Huh!?
- SIBUOR:** He doesn't have to be sincere. He is trapped.  
*(Boss gives off a half-hearted grunt, he is not convinced.)* Boss, a dog with a bone in its mouth cannot bark. That's what matters. Doesn't the fact that he voluntarily exposed this spy to us in the nick of time clear him?
- BOSS:** I know you have a point but things just don't seem to add up for me.
- SIBUOR:** He would have used her against us.
- BOSS:** I know!
- SIBUOR:** You saw the photocopies. He allowed me to secretly make them from the official World Bank documents she had left in his office.
- BOSS:** I still don't trust him.
- SIBUOR:** *(Rises)* His opposition to the project was his way of buying a ticket onto the gravy train. The Mothers' Front, all those protesters, want a chance at the table. Indondo won't squander his chance. Time will tell.
- BOSS:** What? Leave my life to fate? No! What have you done to verify what you trust?

**SIBUOR:** Papa, when he volunteered the information to me, I was sceptical at first. I thought he was laying a trap. But when I cross-checked and confirmed there was a strange white woman staying here, incognito, in a rundown hotel, carrying World Bank stationery, paying for everything in American dollars, interviewing ordinary people about the project and other affairs of the country, I thanked my God for the blessing Indondo is to us.

**BOSS:** You can't be sure she has been in town for only two days.

**SIBUOR:** Exactly two days! I have a copy of her air ticket. Secondly, she passed by Indondo's office upon her arrival two days ago, and sought an interview with him. He convinced her not to seek audience with Nasirumbi, but to talk to us.

**BOSS:** There is a strong possibility she has been operating secretly, incognito, for quite some time. She has only surfaced to put finishing touches to a job already done, throw us off guard, and to cover her tracks.

**SIBUOR:** No! Indondo gave us full details of her movements since she arrived. I have checked them out.

**BOSS:** Secret agents are smarter than you think. They sneak into a place; accomplish their mission before announcing their presence.

**SIBUOR:** You scare me Boss.

**BOSS:**  
**SIBUOR:**

We will have to spend heavily to save our skins./

We have the money to handle her. (*Pause. With a cold firmness. Leans over to whisper into Boss ear*) If need be, there'll be a fire in this hotel. Her room will be raided during the evacuation. For all that I care she could end up dead in a car crash. I will use whatever means necessary to stop her.

**BOSS:** (*BOSS beckons SIBUOR to move closer*) If it comes to that, like the others, it will be strictly between us. Whatever we do must be done well and quietly. Indondo must never be let in on such things.

**SIBUOR:** What matters is that he is doing a splendid job for us right now. (*He indicates by moving his index finger across his neck*) We can silence him later.

**BOSS:** It's not that I am scared; I am bitter. I am very bitter that a small woman like Nasirumbi should cause me so much trouble. A mere woman! One who should be on her knees, queuing at the end of a long line, begging me for favours! She'll know who I am in this part of the world!

**SIBUOR:** That's the spirit, Boss. She'll have nowhere to hide. (*To the audience*) She will serve as an example to others who might be tempted to challenge us. (*The door opens. They jump onto their feet, frightened. Enter INDONDO, alone*)

- INDONDO:** Sorry to keep you waiting.
- BOSS:** (*Struggling to find his voice*) No! Good gracious, you're alone!
- SIBUOR:** Where is she?
- INDONDO:** (*Taking a seat*) Still upstairs. She is unable to come down. She has just received a call. Her superiors have instructed her to have the report ready immediately. A decision has to be made before the weekend.
- BOSS:** (*Dropping into his seat, devastated*) God have mercy! We are vanquished!
- SIBUOR:** (*To INDONDO, almost pleading*) Is there any way we can lay our hands on that report before she dispatches it? (*Pause*) Can we buy it?
- BOSS:** (*Desperate*) We have the money. We're ready to spend.
- SIBUOR:** Did you tell her we are ready for a hearty handshake...?
- BOSS:** An embrace, if need be!
- INDONDO:** She is willing.
- BOSS/SIBUOR:** Huh?!
- INDONDO:** She has a price.
- BOSS:** (*With a sigh of relief*) Hallelujah! Wise woman! She'll make it big in this world.
- SIBUOR:** How much?
- INDONDO:** She'll state her figure. If you can pay her price, she will play ball. Not only will she write a favourable report about the project, but she will also present a Golden Shield of Honour to Boss for his exemplary leadership.
- BOSS:** (*Curious*) A Golden Shield of Honour?

She's just told me that when members of her organisation are sent on missions such as this one, they carry special shields made of pure gold, which they present to deserving cases in their efforts to promote environmental awareness. The shield is the ultimate seal of approval.

BOSS: As the old saying goes: it's better to be lucky than to be gifted.

SIBUOR: And the harder we work, the luckier we get.  
INDONDO: The prospects look good.

BOSS: (Back in command and visibly excited) The long awaited moment of boomerang presents itself.

SIBUOR: The finger on the trigger just got tighter!  
BOSS: When can she present the international award?

INDONDO: She proposed to do so tomorrow night. But first you must pay up whatever she will demand.  
SIBUOR: Sibuor will see to that right away.

BOSS: Before the sun sets on this great day, she will be a rich woman.

INDONDO: (To BOSS) Can she present it at your office tomorrow night when she brings her draft report for your perusal and amendment?

BOSS: Must it be at night?

INDONDO: Yes. Like at the independence celebrations, the lights have to be switched off then on as part of the crowning ritual. It is a vital part of the ceremony.

SIBUOR: Boss, it is the New Dawn thing!

**BOSS:**

I want it done in public, before a sizeable crowd of residents, with live media coverage. Since Boss is being crowned with gold in his official capacity as Boss, it is only proper that she honours him in the public domain.

**SIBUOR:**

The night complicates things.

**BOSS:**  
**INDONDO:**

On the contrary, it does not. The people will work during the day. In the evening they troop to the National Stadium to honour their beloved leader.

**SIBUOR:**

The people will work for half a day then go home to prepare for the glory. In the evening the whole country will be ordered to share in the glory of their great leader. Those who can will come to the stadium. Others will follow the proceedings on national radio and TV.

**BOSS:**

(Barking.) All protocols observed!

**SIBUOR:**

(To BOSS.) We are on the threshold of a very bright future.

**BOSS:**

(To INDONDO.) Give it headline prominence in your paper! This is a people's triumph, a triumph of reason, a triumph of sovereignty!

**INDONDO:**

Do I let you in on a small secret?

**SIBUOR:**

Why not?

**INDONDO:**

(To BOSS.) Boss, would you like to hear it?

**BOSS:**

I'll hear anything that will reassure me. I need success stories.

**INDONDO:**

(With a knowing wink to SIBUOR.) I plan to have full control over her. I have asked her out tonight. I'll make sure she knows how much I weigh.

- SIBUOR:** (With respectful admiration) You can't be serious!
- INDONDO:** Dead serious. Tonight! After a few drinks, I'll pounce.
- BOSS:** (With a veneer of embarrassment, to SIBUOR) Can you figure Indondo, riding the lioness?
- (SIBUOR nodes gleefully)**
- INDONDO:** (Taunting him) Sibuor knows what I am capable of!
- SIBUOR:** Not any more. (To BOSS) Boss, don't you think any general worth his name would be proud of such foot soldiers.
- BOSS:** (To INDONDO) Once you put a woman down, you have her under total control. Keep her pinned down until we extract the last secrets out of her.
- SIBUOR:** (To INDONDO) I feel challenged. I'll prove my mettle by going for Nasirumbi herself. I'll put her in her place and shut her up once and for all.
- BOSS:** (To SIBUOR) You are not serious.
- SIBUOR:** They don't call me "The Whirlwind" for no reason.
- INDONDO:** The Whirlwind - that's a curious one. I've never heard that before.
- BOSS:** His friends call him The Whirlwind because of the way he ruffles women's skirts like a hurricane.
- INDONDO:** (Giving him a hearty handshake) Mr. Hurricane, I didn't know we're birds of a feather.

- SIBUOR:** It takes a thief to catch a thief!
- BOSS:** (*Almost to himself*) I am still not convinced she is alone. Be on the lookout. Both of you! Keep your ears on the ground. Things have reached a delicate, dangerous stage.
- SIBUOR:** Boss, it's time we employed our bare knuckles against the women. (*BOSS doesn't answer*) Son of the War God!
- BOSS:** This stain on our otherwise impeccable record must be removed. It's obscene – a stain on our national honour. It goes against everything we hold sacred.
- SIBUOR:** Do I have my orders?
- BOSS:** Must you ask if a thunderbolt carries fire in his roar?
- SIBUOR:** (*Autoritatively, full of himself*) Failures who cannot resist a dig at the authorities are past tense!
- BOSS:** Zero tolerance!
- SIBUOR:** Action Plan: one, tomorrow's planned demonstrations by those women are either called off or we unleash our forces to counter with a riot of our making; two, we go for Nasirumbi's head.
- INDONDO:** (*To Boss*) There's no point flogging a dead horse. We have already defeated Nasirumbi. She's a gone case. Finished!
- SIBUOR:** On the contrary, she is dangerous. To be safe we must obliterate her.
- INDONDO:** (*To Boss*) Your Excellency, why use bitter

- SIBUOR: poison when a sweet one works just as well, if not better?
- Those women have an assignment from hell.  
We cannot afford to lose this war to them.
- INDONDO: (Directly to BOSS, almost pleading) Your Excellency, we have to be careful. Any silly move on our part might resurrect her cause by winning her undeserved sympathy with the masses. Why don't we buy her off? She too has a price.
- BOSS: (To SIBUOR) He has a point. An enemy is untapped strength! The ultimate victory is not to destroy Nasirumbi but to win her over.  
(On his feet, ready to charge) Picture the decapitating shock and awe of Boss charging with the Golden Shield and Nasirumbi and her troops following close behind!
- SIBUOR: (To BOSS) Son of the War God! (An excited BOSS bellows out a loud roar like a lion marking out its territory in the savannah.) Captain who's Captain, are you there?
- BOSS: He tangos with the sea-devil and lives.
- SIBUOR: Are you still in charge, Captain?
- BOSS: A true captain never abandons ship in the high seas!
- SIBUOR: Even if water is pouring in and the vessel is tilting ominously?
- BOSS: He'd rather sink with it!
- SIBUOR: Your enemies have ganged up, ready to attack!

**BOSS:** My spittle cripples the enemy.  
**SIBUOR:** Head-hunter!  
**BOSS:** Every war presents a unique opportunity.  
**INDONDO:** Commander of the Golden Shield of Honour!  
**BOSS:** When Boss walks with a limp, doomed are you  
to think he is lame - he is only performing a  
dance.  
**SIBUOR:** (Energised) The Champion Bull...  
**BOSS:** ... that throws up a sandstorm as he goes from  
one conquest to another, unscathed.  
*(The two burst into song and perform a hilarious  
victory dance. INDONDO urges them on, clapping  
and calling them nasty pet names that would be  
outright insults under different circumstances.  
They literally dance to his insults.)*  
(Lights fade out.)  
(BLACKOUT)

## SIXTH SEQUENCE

(It is late afternoon the same day, outside NASIRUMBI's house. Action takes place against the backdrop of long shadows cast by the setting sun. SIBUOR, now clad in an expensive business suit and looking suspicious, large briefcase in hand, is outside NASIRUMBI's house pacing about. He has been waiting for quite some time and his impatience shows. Moments later, NASIRUMBI, clad in faded jeans trousers and a T-shirt, appears at a distance, sees him, considers him for some time and, without uttering a word, walks on past him.)

**SIBUOR:**

(Embarrassed, calls after her) Good afternoon, Madam.

(NASIRUMBI stops and takes her time to turn and face him. She remains silent. SIBUOR moves towards her with an outstretched hand ready for a handshake and repeats his salutation. NASIRUMBI remains silent and does not return the handshake. She walks on and enters her house. SIBUOR hesitates for a few moments then follows her into the house.)

**SIBUOR:**

(Sounding normal at great effort) Boss sends me with a special message for you.

**NASIRUMBI:** What does the holier-than-thou want of a fallen woman?

**SIBUOR:** Nobody said you're a woman of loose morals.

**NASIRUMBI:** You said it at the resort's groundbreaking ceremony. You put my propriety and patriotism to question.

**SIBUOR:** That's not true.

**NASIRUMBI:** You insulted me in public.

**SIBUOR:** No, I did not.

**NASIRUMBI:** It was in the press, on radio and on TV. The whole world heard you.

**SIBUOR:** Madam, don't believe anything reported in the media.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*She pulls out a newspaper from her handbag, opens it, looks for the section and reads aloud, mimicking an agitated politician addressing a large crowd. She simultaneously taunts him.*) I salute you, dear patriots. It's your attendance in such large numbers and your strong solidarity behind our leaders that keep the wheel of progress moving uphill.

**SIBUOR:** Don't trust a word published in *The Voice of the People*. I personally know that paper's editor. He is a hopeless, amoral character – a turncoat ready to sell his soul to the highest bidder. (*As she casts a strong stare on him*) I have the evidence.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*After a longish pause, she continues reading*) "Whores and whoremongers won't win against progress, order and the rule of the law! Our patriotic society has no place for those ill-informed and immoral women who justify their existence by masquerading as environmentalists and champions of social justice."

**SIBUOR:** (Visibly cornered) I didn't say that. I swear by the heavens!

**NASIRUMBI:** (Continuing to read) "If a woman wishes to lead us, first, she must be married. She has to be brought here by her husband. That's tradition. Nasirumbi's unbecoming conduct is inconsistent with the nobility of African womanhood. Due to her lack of respect for men, they will always use her as a hospital bed and move on."

**SIBUOR:** I swear by God, I can't say such unprintables! Not even in private!

**NASIRUMBI:** (Continuing to read) "Nasirumbi should not be allowed to corrupt our youth. I have a dossier on her loose sexual life. Were I to release it, she would never raise her head in public again."

**SIBUOR:** I don't believe this! I didn't mention you at all in my speech!

**NASIRUMBI:** (Reading on) Death to Nasirumbi - the epitome of evil! (Folds the paper, then confronts SIBUOR) Now Your Holiness, what bringeth thee to the epitome of evil?

**SIBUOR:** (Nervous but fighting to sound confident and in control) I'll sue that paper for publishing falsehoods! They will see fire. (Reaching out) Let me have that copy as evidence. (NASIRUMBI declines and steps back) You know how cheap these journalists come. Never believe whatever is reported in the media. Journalists are the least ethical people in the whole universe.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Firm) Why did you insult me? (Pause) Instead of addressing the issues I raised over Simbi, you called me names.

**SIBUOR:** Name-calling never got anybody anything.

**NASIRUMBI:** If the way I have chosen to live is causing you sleepless nights, I am ready at any time, but at the right place, to debate my lifestyle in public.

**SIBUOR:** I swear by the Most High. I did not say a word about you.

**NASIRUMBI:** I know that when you are a woman people who want to cut you down fault you by a moral criterion they don't uphold themselves. If that's your style you'll never get past me!

(*SIBUOR remains silent. Looking down at the ground he nervously throws glances at her, while she casts her intimidating stare directly at him.*)

**SIBUOR:** Boss wishes you well... He wants us to come to an accommodation of sorts ... He requests you to use your esteemed followers to promote our good name abroad... No foreigners should come here and dictate to us... We are a sovereign people.

**NASIRUMBI:** Sovereignty is no licence for base conduct.

**SIBUOR:** Our sovereignty cannot be compromised. Our forefathers died for it.

**NASIRUMBI:** (Firm) I am not interested in that. For us to talk, tell me that you will not destroy Simbi. Tell me the forest will be left intact.

- SIBUOR: In a way that's why I am here.
- NASIRUMBI: Don't take me for a fool!
- SIBUOR: I haven't the slightest intention to insult the lady you are.
- NASIRUMBI: Shame on you!
- (Nervous pause)
- SIBUOR: I am the bearer of good news. We have decided to open a new leaf in our relationship with the Mothers' Front. We can help each other. In the spirit of give and take, we are ready to sign a Memorandum of Understanding.
- NASIRUMBI: (After a thoughtful pause) I'll think about it.
- SIBUOR: No, you don't have to think about it. The offer is as rock solid as they come. When something is rock solid, you don't think about it; you just see it.
- NASIRUMBI: What's your offer?
- SIBUOR: Four hundred thousand, local currency, hard cash.
- NASIRUMBI: Peanuts!
- SIBUOR: Eight hundred thousand?
- NASIRUMBI: I always demand my pound of flesh.
- SIBUOR: One million?
- NASIRUMBI: I'll accept nothing less than ten million.
- SIBUOR: (Surprised) Ten million!
- NASIRUMBI: Cash!
- SIBUOR: Huh!?
- NASIRUMBI: Simple, clear, not negotiable. (Long pause as SIBUOR considers the amount) Pay or get going.

**SIBUOR:** Okay. I will go see Boss. We will write you a cheque.

**NASIRUMBI:** No cheques. Hard cash! I know the sorry bunch I am dealing with.

**SIBUOR:** When matters get to this level, we always keep our part of the bargain. You are a very important stakeholder. I'll make a deposit right away. (*Raises the briefcase*) I have two million here.

**NASIRUMBI:** (*Doubtful*) Two million? Are you sure?

**SIBUOR:** (*Opens his briefcase, pulls out a stuffed paper bag and dangles a few bundles*) Here. See for yourself. We mean business. Deal?

**NASIRUMBI:** (*After a short pause.*) Deal!

(*They exchange the money, then a handshake and a hug*)

**SIBUOR:** (*Straightens up, victorious, confident*) We'll give you all the moral and material support you need, provided your group supports and works hand in hand with us. To begin with, assure me you'll call off tomorrow's public demonstrations.

**NASIRUMBI:** Do you doubt me?

**SIBUOR:** Not really. It's just that something very important to this country's future is going to happen the day after. We don't want to take any chances.

**NASIRUMBI:** From now henceforth, I will take orders only from Boss and you.

**SIBUOR:** Good. I even have a solid plan to make you the anti-corruption Tsar.

**NASIRUMBI:** Wow!  
**SIBUOR:** In fact, the lucrative posting will make you the second most powerful person in the land after Boss.

**NASIRUMBI:** Boss is boss.  
**SIBUOR:** Now that we are friends, would you mind joining me for dinner some time?

**NASIRUMBI:** (Pauses, looks at him, smiles affectionately, a sexy flash) What do you think?  
**SIBUOR:** (Bursting with anticipation) Tonight!?

**NASIRUMBI:** Whenever you are ready.  
**SIBUOR:** (Excited) Tonight! (He looks at his watch) My driver will pick you up at seven. Now, to keep our first evening together stress-free, I have some pressing matters I must attend to right away. Kindly allow me to take leave.

**NASIRUMBI:** Just a minute. To show that I have crossed over, I'll teach you a small trick as a mark of true friendship to honour this great day.

**SIBUOR:** (Eager) A trick? I love tricks.

**NASIRUMBI:** It is a simple trick. Master it and it'll make you a better man.

**SIBUOR:** A better man, are you sure?

**NASIRUMBI:** (Leaving the room) Hold on a minute.  
(NASIRUMBI leaves the money behind and enters the inner rooms. An excited SIBUOR performs a hilarious victory dance.)

**SIBUOR:** Make me a better man? I'll test that trick on her tonight and prove my mettle to Boss.  
(He composes himself as NASIRUMBI returns)

*carrying a metal pail, a matchbox, a bottle labelled "Petrol" and old newspaper pages.)*

**NASIRUMBI:** Here we go.

**SIBUOR:** Who taught you the great trick?

**NASIRUMBI:** Life.

**SIBUOR:** That's remarkable!

**NASIRUMBI:** Move closer and pay maximum attention to the ritual. It won't take long.

**SIBUOR:** What is it you intend to do?

**NASIRUMBI:** (As she takes out a matchstick) Set fire to corruption!

*(He dives and snatches the money)*

**SIBUOR:** How dare you!

**NASIRUMBI:** Some of us aspire for greater things in life!

**SIBUOR:** You'll pay dearly for this!

**NASIRUMBI:** I have already paid... I pay dearly every day! Look at the mess you have put this country in... the potholed roads, the dilapidated infrastructure, soaring crime, people dying daily in their thousands at our rundown hospitals for lack of medicine... clean water is a pipe dream for the masses, workers earn ridiculously low wages while you award yourselves skyscraper salaries and allowances... Look at what you have done to education!

**SIBUOR:** You can't rubbish our highly acclaimed education system.

**NASIRUMBI:** You send your children to study abroad. One must be rich to get a good education... The other day your government issued an

international appeal for food aid to feed the starving masses in the countryside, starving because you have destroyed the environment and stolen from them! As if that is not bad enough, you dare come here to compromise me with 10 million, stolen from our taxes!

SIBUOR:

(Shaking his head, bewildered) How people change! Your foreign masters must be paying you well!

NASIRUMBI:

Go to hell!

SIBUOR:

I see. You're no longer the poor fellow who came crawling before Boss, begging for whatever fell off his table.

NASIRUMBI:

I never did that!

SIBUOR:

You can't deny it! It's on camera. You took a cool one hundred thousand from us.

NASIRUMBI:

That money was fully accounted for. Boss donated it to the Mothers' Front not to me.

SIBUOR:

You'll face the music when the Anti-Corruption Unit moves in to audit the accounts of the Mothers' Front.

NASIRUMBI:

Enough of your trash!

SIBUOR:

We'll deal with you accordingly.

NASIRUMBI:

(Pointing with unwavering firmness) Please get out!

SIBUOR:

(Fidgeting) You can't throw me out.

NASIRUMBI:

(As he goes) Tell the miserable Boss that public office is no platform for recklessness!

(The lights fade.)

(BLACKOUT)

## SEVENTH SEQUENCE

(NASIRUMBI's house has been vandalised and ransacked. Stones, paper and twigs litter the floor. The furniture is upturned. She is picking up the pieces, packing her belongings into boxes. She looks tired and ruffled but still cuts a beautiful figure dressed in tights. Enter INDONDO carrying a notebook, a small video recorder and a still camera.)

INDONDO: (In a sombre mood) Sorry, I am late. I passed by my office to attend to urgent matters that cropped up.

NASIRUMBI: How are the children doing?

INDONDO: They miss you but they're getting on well.

NASIRUMBI: Pity them for having me for a mother.

INDONDO: Don't say that.

NASIRUMBI: The little ones are suffering a lot on my account. Why do I have to expose them to such dangers?

(Silence)

INDONDO: I will take pictures of you picking up the pieces.

NASIRUMBI: Go ahead. (INDONDO begins making notes and taking pictures of the room) By the way, Samson was here.

INDONDO: Samson?

NASIRUMBI: The industrialist.

INDONDO: You're kidding.

NASIRUMBI: Following this attack he wanted to know how much I need so he can help me get back on

my feet. He identifies fully with our cause. He also would like to make a substantial donation to the Mothers' Front.

**INDONDO:** What's the catch?

**NASIRUMBI:** Must there be a catch?

**INDONDO:** Goodwill is long dead and buried.

**NASIRUMBI:** I don't know that one.

**INDONDO:** Why go on parade if he is genuine?

**NASIRUMBI:** He had lots of good things to talk about.

**INDONDO:** The vulture has seen the hunt heating up and

now wants to perch strategically. We won't do the killing for him.

**NASIRUMBI:** He offered to identify and sponsor a candidate for the next elections. The way he talked somehow impressed me. He cited cases I didn't know about - where the authorities have used the treasury as their personal cashbox. He has the facts at his fingertips. He means business.

**INDONDO:** Big business and politics are joined at the hip. Samson's fingerprints and handwriting are all over this place. The return address on the failed package we are lands squarely on his doorstep. I can bet he is the main player in the scheme to grab Simbi. A pointer to his evil genius is that he owns and operates Boss.

**NASIRUMBI:** Then why would he sponsor a candidate against Boss?

**INDONDO:** It's because of you. By standing up you are draining the swamp of fear in which his mosquitoes hatch. Samson wants to hijack your initiative. He is not making much of a

- switch. He is just making a different estimate of where power lies.
- NASIRUMBI:** He appreciates that this country can be better managed.
- INDONDO:** He does not! All he wants is to corrupt you into silence.
- NASIRUMBI:** Let's wait and see his candidate before we condemn him outright.
- INDONDO:** No we won't.
- NASIRUMBI:** If he is a credible individual why not support him?
- INDONDO:** We'll only put an end to this circus the day we stand up as a people, with benchmarks and with our own candidates.
- NASIRUMBI:** We have to be accommodating.
- INDONDO:** The battle to establish a government that is accountable will be long and painful. It will not come through a mere replacement of Boss with another crook.
- NASIRUMBI:** Who will we vote for then?
- INDONDO:** (*Confidently*) I will vote for you.
- NASIRUMBI:** (*Surprised*) What? Vote for me?
- INDONDO:** Yes - you!
- NASIRUMBI:** I am not a politician.
- INDONDO:** We want leaders not politicians. Upright, honest and honourable!
- NASIRUMBI:** I don't wish to lose my focus.
- INDONDO:** This is your chance. Enhance that focus. Take this struggle to its logical conclusion.
- NASIRUMBI:** Better to miss an opportunity than to invite disaster.

- INDONDO:** Drop the nonsense! You know what we must do to defeat these people...
- NASIRUMBI:** When a river is contaminated at the source the poison will extend its full length.
- INDONDO:** See! You understand us so well! With you in power we...
- NASIRUMBI:** I have a life to lead.
- INDONDO:** Your life changed the day you stood up for Simbi. Power is your next challenge.
- NASIRUMBI:** That'll be a dramatic departure from the real struggle; it'll be an indication that we are in this for personal reward.
- INDONDO:** I am surprised a person as knowledgeable as you can shun power. Anybody with a social mission must know that political power is the only instrument by which we can realise our social ideals. Power is everything.
- NASIRUMBI:** It is predatory to seek leadership so as to gain power. Before long the urge to transform that power into wealth will be irresistible. If you fight for power, you don't fight for change.
- INDONDO:** (Pleading.) You are somebody who will roll up your sleeves and do what it takes to restore our institutions.
- NASIRUMBI:** Our salvation does not lie in messiahs. It is the ordinary folk who will save this country. People should not forget their residual role to keep rulers on their toes. Haven't you heard it said that societies always get the leaders they deserve?

**INDONDO:** Still, when such an opportunity presents itself, folks need a great leader like you to guide them. Great nations are founded on the visions of great leaders.

**NASIRUMBI:** We don't have to be in power to participate in the due process of government. Leadership does not have to reside in political office, it doesn't have to wield power; true leadership can reside anywhere provided it controls how power is wielded. As long as any one of us is willing to stand up and pay the price, there is hope... and hope is our best ally!

(A car pulls up outside and hoots. INDONDO moves over to the window and looks out.)

**INDONDO:** (Visibly shaken) My goodness, we're done! It's the crocodile!

**NASIRUMBI:** (Equally shaken) Boss!?

(The hooting gets aggressive)

**INDONDO:** (Nervous) He shouldn't find me here.

**NASIRUMBI:** Hide in the bedroom!

(More hooting. INDONDO enters the bedroom. NASIRUMBI returns to the boxes and resumes her work. Moments later BOSS enters. He is casually but expensively dressed in shiny black complete with a matching broad-rimmed Stetson hat and dark sunglasses. He is in a buoyant mood and walks with a visible swagger.)

**BOSS:** (Entering) Is anybody home? (NASIRUMBI remains quiet and does not even look up. BOSS sees her and speaks with gradually increasing force.) I have been hooting all this time, why

didn't you care to answer? Even in your present condition, you still must respect Boss.

MASIRUMBI: You have to earn that respect.

(Rises to her full height, arms akimbo)

(Evidently hurt but restraining himself) I heard misfortune befall you last night. I have come alone to empathise like a friend. The differences we have notwithstanding, you are my subject. It's my duty to protect the lives and property of all. I want to personally assess the extent of the damage with a view to taking drastic action against the perpetrators.

MASIRUMBI: The job was well done. Congratulate them!

BOSS: Congratulate vandals?

MASIRUMBI: Haven't you got your money's worth?

BOSS: What's upon you?

MASIRUMBI: I know your handiwork.

BOSS: You don't have the licence to insult me!

MASIRUMBI: Your hatchet man promised me this much and I got it.

BOSS: What are you talking about?

MASIRUMBI: Didn't you send Sibuor to me last evening?

BOSS: Sibuor and Boss are two different people.

MASIRUMBI: He told me what you have in store for me if I don't toe the line.

BOSS: You had better watch your mouth, lady. I will not take this. If you had a shred of intelligence you could have realised by now who you are dealing with and the direction to go for your benefit.

MASIRUMBI: I feel like spitting in your face.

**BOSS:** *(With injured authority)* Spit in my face? You!?  
How? No! Never! How dare you even think of it?

**NASIRUMBI:** You deserve worse from me and you will get it.

**BOSS:** Those who spit in the face of a storm live to regret.

*(A defiant NASIRUMBI turns and goes back to her work. A quiet but tense BOSS eyes her for some time then walks towards the bedroom, peeps in, turns around to explore the living room.)*

**BOSS:** How did you escape?

**NASIRUMBI:** The devil wishes we were forced into a corner so his imps could run us down.

**BOSS:** What're you talking about?

**NASIRUMBI:** I hold you responsible for this mess.

**BOSS:** Me?

**NASIRUMBI:** Yes – you!

**BOSS:** Woman, are you totally incapable of learning? Had you listened to Boss, the Simbi crisis would have been resolved in your favour through a referendum. But you ran to the courts and Justice Opoti's judicial conclusion on the matter left no room for doubt or interpretation. When the Judiciary rules, the Executive is duty bound to uphold the ruling. *(Pauses, weighs the impact of his words. NASIRUMBI does not respond. She just lets him talk to himself.)* Boss will get to the root of

this matter. (Pretending to be surprised at that discovery) Come to think of it. You could have done this to yourself to save face, hoping to win public sympathy. A judicial commission of inquiry will unearth the truth.

**NASIRUMBI:** Please yourself!

**BOSS:** You have earned yourself many enemies. Boss cannot guarantee your safety any more.

**NASIRUMBI:** The people are on my side.

**BOSS:** You may speak for *hoi polloi*, the useless masses, but you don't speak for the people. The people are those in power and property! The people know what is good for them. Boss speaks for the people.

**NASIRUMBI:** Don't underestimate the masses.

**BOSS:** (Touting, rubbing in the salt) Woman, the temptation to lead a crusade against the authorities is always politically appealing, but it is foolish. You must be able to gauge popular reaction to what you are championing before you forge ahead. You should have listened to me.

**NASIRUMBI:** Vintage Boss! Grandstanding, posturing, serving dead words, clouding reality in phraseology, resorting to rhetoric to avoid addressing our problems, talking big, walking big, concealing your rot in finery, deaf to every voice except your own... biggest say-one-thing-do-another ... talk-virtue-do-vice ... I regret having been so naïve to ask for that meeting. I lost valuable time listening to you.

**BOSS:** You made a cool one hundred thousand, cash!

**NASIRUMBI:** It's that money again!

**BOSS:** You will regret you crossed my path.

**NASIRUMBI:** Drop the mask and be a man for once!

**BOSS:** (Turns to her suddenly) Do you doubt me? Do you wish to taste my manhood? (He disdainfully pounces and grabs her) I am the cock. You are nothing but a mere woman. I'll put you in your place.)

(They struggle. He makes frantic but unsuccessful efforts to kiss or knock her over. Though weaker she holds out and fights back with all her strength.)

**NASIRUMBI:** Stop it! You animal! You're hurting me!

**BOSS:** I love tough women. They bring the best out of me.

(They struggle on. She bites him and he cries out in pain but he does not let go. The struggle intensifies. She frees a hand and pokes him in the eyes, blinding him. As he recoils covering his eyes in pain, she unleashes a kick that gets him square in the crotch, stopping him in his tracks. He bellows out, stiffens and collapses in a heap. A few moments later, he recovers but stays down nursing himself in great pain.)

**BOSS:** You've killed me!

**NASIRUMBI:** That'll teach you a lesson.

**BOSS:** I meant no harm.

**NASIRUMBI:** Meant no harm? Heh! What do you think I am? A whore? Get out! (Seeing that he is not

BOSS:

moving she picks up the broomstick and smacks him once and points to the door.) Out of here! (Gets up and stumbles to a safe distance, retreating, nursing his crotch) You'll pay dearly for this. You'll regret this for the rest of your life.

(He exits. Moments later a car door bangs offstage and he drives off.)

INDONDO:

(Enters the room) He is so shameless! He stinks! You have given him the treatment he deserves. (Raises his video camera) I recorded the whole drama.

(INDONDO leaves reluctantly as the lights fade out.)

(BLACKOUT)

## EIGHTH SEQUENCE

(The National Stadium. The stage is decorated and set for the great occasion. A military brass band plays in the background. The usual public address systems and media paraphernalia are in place. SIBUOR and INDONDO are already on stage. SIBUOR is dressed in flamboyant traditional attire. He begins working the crowds with jokes and niceties of what they should do to welcome BOSS. When done he invites INDONDO to address the gathering then he exits. Where possible, background actors should be involved and utilised to play the invisible crowd.)

**INDONDO:**

The World Bank's Special Envoy, Hon. Ministers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, all citizens gathered here tonight at the National Stadium and all citizens around the country following the live broadcasts on national radio and TV; I cordially welcome you all to this memorable occasion. According to tradition, all will arise and applaud His Excellency the Prince of Peace and his entourage when they arrive. The Honourable Sibuor will then invite His Excellency to give us his words of wisdom. Immediately after the wise speech, the lights will momentarily be switched off, the World Bank's special envoy will crown His Excellency with the Golden Shield of Honour, and then the lights will be turned on again, to reveal the new dawn.

(Interrupting the last line, a loud trumpet blast offstage announces the entry of BOSS. INDONDO gestures to the audience and it rises. The background, military music comes to the fore and becomes the entry song.)

**INDONDO:**

Ladies and gentlemen, His Excellency the Prince of Peace... the Great Leader...

(Enter BOSS formally dressed for the occasion. SIBUOR follows closely. BOSS waves royally to the audience and goes straight to his throne as SIBUOR moves to the microphones.)

**SIBUOR:**

(With authority) Your Excellency, the World Bank's Special Envoy, Hon. Ministers, diplomats, distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am very happy that through God's grace, I have lived to see this historic day, a day when one courageous and caring man becomes a channel for the destiny of his people, an indelible reference point in our proud history. (He bows to BOSS) A leader who personifies cosmic and social order, symmetry, harmony and beauty... A pillar of justice... of love, peace and unity. (Pause) But on the other hand Great Leader, I am also a very sad man. Some of your citizens, one or two ungratefuls, synonymous with short-sighted venality, don't know how to reciprocate the favours God has bestowed upon us through Your Excellency. I condemn the Mothers' Front for insulting you. Your Excellency, they owe you and your patriotic

people an apology. Sooner rather than later they must publicly repent, and pledge their total loyalty to His Excellency. A few rogue individuals in the service of foreigners will not hold us hostage. Duty to the country will come before duty to the self; conscience before self-interest. If that is the Riot Act, so be it! I am honoured to read it to Nasirumbi and her pack. (Pause) As we prepare for today's challenges we all know that we cannot cheat the future. The Holy Book says: "Do not be deceived: God will not be mocked: whatsoever a man sows, shall he also reap." There is no turning back. (Pause) Your Excellency, declare this the Day of Liberation and we shall observe it as a national public holiday. It'll be a day of revelation when the World Bank presents the Golden Shield of Honour to Your Excellency. The World Bank's endorsement should show the malcontents in our midst that the civilised world is satisfied with the exemplary leadership displayed by Your Excellency. (Pause) I will stop there. I now have the greatest of honours to introduce a man of integrity and character, one who will lead us for a long, long time to come. Your Excellency!

(BOSS moves to the microphones amid applause as an excited SIBUOR steps aside. BOSS' speech will be punctuated where appropriate by applause.)

**BOSS:**

On my own behalf and on behalf of my people, I extend my special gratitude to the World Bank. That esteemed organisation has done us proud by choosing to honour our humble efforts in a very special way. To have sent a special delegate to come here and award us the Golden Shield of Honour is something we must be grateful to God for. (*Pause*) Not only does this award draw the attention of the entire world to my achievements, it puts you firmly on the world map. I have made my arrival on the world scene with a bang. Make no mistake! Dear peace-loving citizens, I promise to do all that is necessary to stay there. When the world's great lay their interests on the big table to allocate resources, rest assured that you'll be represented well. (*Pause*) The golden shield I am just about to receive will be an integral part of my armour. I call upon all those going astray to get over their fits of insanity, come to their senses and join the fold. I have a big heart. I am always ready to forgive. Everybody, the Mothers' Front included, has a role to play as we open a new leaf. Let's all join hands in development. Those who love their country don't bring it to a halt. (*Pause*) With those few remarks, my dear people, I express my gratitude to you for your unfailing support. Thank you. Thank you. (*Acknowledges cheers from the crowd*) Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much everybody.

**INDONDO:** (After whispering into BOSS' ear he takes the microphone) The moment of revelation is upon us. The World Bank's special envoy will now come forward and present the Golden Shield of Honour to His Excellency. Remember the lights will momentarily be turned off to usher in the new era. Nobody should panic...

**SIBUOR:** (Interjecting) At that crucial moment of consummation, when the lights are switched on to announce the new dawn... all of us must show our total appreciation in our own unique way.

**INDONDO:** Your Excellency, kindly get down on your knees... Stretch out your hands and await the crowning moment.

(BOSS obeys with religious ceremony. INDONDO reaches for his video camera and begins recording. Blackout. Lights flicker for a few moments and gradually brighten to full to reveal a kneeling BOSS holding a child's corpse. NASIRUMBI stands next to him. SIBUOR is dumbfounded. Lighting and sound effects should be deployed to capture and highlight the climactic moment.)

**NASIRUMBI:** I have kept my promise!

**BOSS:** (Crestfallen) Oh my God!

**NASIRUMBI:** You killed that child and many others. She died at the National Referral Hospital for lack of medicine. Hundreds are dying daily around the country for lack of basics as you and your

cronies loot the country to stash money abroad,  
to buy yourselves luxuries you don't need. For  
how long will this genocide continue? (*SIBUOR*  
*recovers and tries to sneak away but INDONDO*  
*dives after him and forces him to kneel next to*  
*BOSS. NASIRUMBI points at the two and turns*  
*to throw the challenge directly to the audience.*)  
Why? Why? Why? Why have you... all of you...  
each one of you... why have you let this rot  
preside over us?

(*Everything freezes as the lights fade out.*)  
(*SLOW CURTAINS*)

# VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

OKIYA OMTATAH OKOITI is a well-known playwright. His first published work, *Ziwanda Magere* (EAEP 1991), received enthusiastic response in Kenya and beyond. Owing to its rich literary lustre it was made a set book for secondary schools in Kenya. Besides writing plays, Okoiti is also a short story writer and media commentator on social, cultural, political and religious matters.

In *Voice of the people*, Nasirumbi incurs the wrath and hostility of the powers that be for engaging in a crusade to save Simbi Forest. Led by Boss, the political leadership would stop at nothing to achieve its heinous goals. But it has to contend with the integrity and moral forthrightness of Nasirumbi, whose unshakeable resolve ends up being a nightmare to Boss and his sycophants.

*Voice of the People* was declared the Best Original Play in the 1991 Nairobi Theatre Academy Awards.

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