

TWO PLAYS

**Refugees Of The Great Lakes
& Stolen Seeds**

Doyin Aguoru

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DRAMA

TWO PLAYS

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Kraftgriots

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Refugees of the Great Lakes

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RWANDA: More than just the name of a country
but an embodiment of the challenge to secure human
future.

—Dr Wally N' Dow.

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From the Playwright

Refugees of the Great Lakes is a play passionately conceived upon the realities of the experience of the refugees of the Great Lakes of Central Africa after the mass genocide of the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994. The work centres on the nightmarish post war experience of the victims of war. It portrays the harsh realities of being refugees on the women and children, particularly the child-soldiers who were declared wanted in Kigali because of their involvement in the carnage.

Refugees of the Great Lakes is set in Kibumba and some of the Central Africa refugee camps such as Katale, Tshondo and Mugunga. It is heart rending that some of the refugees remained in these camps for years and in spite of their initial experience and circumstance continue to suffer contentions, disunity and conflicts that typically generate war. The recurring imagery of wasted years, the hopelessness of war, the psychological and catastrophic consequences of war, the state of inertia, the senseless tragedies – particularly the reality and the shock of the deaths of the refugees in the camps from the ravages of epidemics – paint a clear picture of the compelling horrors of war and its aftermath.

The premiere of the play on the 23rd of April, 2014 in Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Nigeria, coincided with the activities that began on the 6th of April, 2014 held to commemorate 20 years of the Rwandan genocide in Rwanda. The nation commenced a week of official mourning to mark the country's painful history; a period of reminiscing and remembrance of the heroes, the villains and the innocent.

What is perhaps most instructive is that several nations have come to the brink of war or have gone to war despite

the fact that instances of the irreparable consequences of war abound.

This play queries all the great wars ever fought in Africa and in the entire world. The characters portrayed here are in honour of all the victims; the great men, women and children who braced the wars and the invincible peace pacts signed by the women of war.

Doyin Aguru

April 2014

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Characters

Aju	Leader of opposition, representative of the refugee at Kibumba (wanted for genocide by the government in Kigali)
Jose	Male refugee (wanted for genocide by the government in Kigali)
Boma	Male refugee (wanted for genocide by the government in Kigali)
Valeria	Boma's wife (seamstress in Kigali)
Ingiria	Valeria's friend
Robina	Psychopathic victim of war plagued with nightmares
Rioja	Male refugee, Robina's father (wanted for genocide by the government in Kigali)
Angie	Robina's mother
Ruyigi	Female spiritualist at Kabira Camp
Nyatu	Female refugee and court clerk in Kigali
Florentyna	Female refugee, teacher in Kigali
May	Female refugee, teacher in Kigali
Tay	Female refugee, teacher in Kigali
Betty	Female refugee, nutritionist and chief caterer in Klon Hotels
Sambi	Female refugee

Musoga	Male refugee
Kaman	Male refugee
Muyinga	Elderly male refugee who takes over the coordination of Kibumba Camp from Aju
Kirundo	Male refugee
Justin	Male refugee
Cyprien	Male refugee
Kita	Young man, father of the baby born in Kibumba Camp
Captain Jack	Soldier
Baby	
Sick woman	
1st Man	
2nd Man	
Refugees	(With the exception of the dominant characters, most of the roles can be taken by any of the refugees. Names given to refugees on the list is to make room for an extensive cast where it is possible to realize a full refugee camp)

Members of cast of the premiere

AJU	Bankole Adeolu
NYATU	Aziba Augustina
JOSE	Adebambo Taiwo
BOMA	Abayomi Olamide, Bello Azeez
FLORENTINA	Balogun Tomisin, Afolayan Tosin
SAMBI	Akinrotahun Taiwo, Enilolobo Oluwanishola, Olaseni Tanwa, Amusan Damilola
ANGIE	Adegunwa Mariam O, Ogunsanya Erianu
RUYIGI	Ogidi Kehinde, Mutiu Rofiat
RIOJA	Jimoh Nurudeen, Tiamiyu Johnson
ROBINA	Adigun Modupelola, Solanke Taiwo
MAY	Tijani Temitayo
TAY	Toriola Christiana, Aborishade Mosunmola
BETTY	Adesanya Funmilola, Onukagha Sally
VALERIA	Ibikunle Aminat, Kolawole Titilayo, Aminulai Olabisi
KAMAN	Unoroh Victor
MUSOGA	Amos Damilare
KIRUNDO	Adesanya Afeez

MUYINGA	Ojelade Damilare
CAPTAIN JACK	Rufai Abdullahi
1 ST MAN	Olowode Afolabi
2 ND MAN	Adelesi Damilola
JUSTIN	Bello Azeez
CYPRIEN	Tiamiyu Johnson
CORPSES	Adelesi Damilola, Lamidi Omobolanle, Omukagha Sally, Adelesi Damilola
SICK WOMAN	Olayiwola Ikeoluwa
BABY	Anjola Akinrotohun
REFUGEES	Funmi Abimbola, Hussain Aishat, Solanke Taiwo, Mutiu Rofiat Ibikunkle, Emmanuel Omoizeh Glory, Aziba Augustina, Enilolobo Oluwanishola, Toriola Christina, Balogun Oluwatomisin, Amos Damilare, Adegunwa Mariam, Adigun Modupelola, Olaseni Tanwa, Mbadike Helen, Adebambo Taiwo, Unoroh Victor, Ogunsanya Erianu, Olowode Afolabi, Diya Oluwayemisi, Akinrotohun Taiwo, Aborishade Mosunmola, Lamidi Omobolanle, Omikagha Sally, Edogbo Abigael, Tiamiyu Johnson, Afolayan Tosin, Emmanuel Omomizeh, Glory, Aminat Olayiwola Ikeoluwa, Aminulai Olabisi, Kolawole Titiayo, Ojelade Damilare
DIRECTOR	Obadaye Wale

Act I

Scene I

Whence shall our sun rise again?

Will Ra, who saw us begin now still witness our end?

Will Ra and Mithra not be appeased and ascend upon us again?

Dusk in Kibumba Camp. Dim and greyish lights slowly come up revealing makeshift structures in the camp of recently settled Hutu refugees from Rwanda. A melancholic rendition of a dirge slowly rises and falls, rises and falls again as the lights reveal other items: boxes, jute bags tied up in various shapes and sizes scattered in heaps all over the grassland and a few livestock. Lights become deliberately dim while the song continues indicating that there is rest in spite of the prevailing mood in the camp.

A long eerie screech startles the entire camp. Men, women, and children leap out of their tents and scramble to the centre of the camp in great alarm. A few women clutch their babies. Some militiamen and youths in a guarded stance are armed with sticks, rifles and clubs. They look around suspiciously poised for reprisal.

AJU: Was there an attack? Whose tent?

NYAMA: I am not certain there has been an attack.

JOSE: But there was a blood chilling shriek and it came from this camp.

AJU: (*Thunderously.*) Whose tent did the screaming come from?

BOMA: It was from Rioja's tent, his daughter Robina had a nightmare. They are still calming her down.

AJU: The entire camp was roused at this odd hour because of a dream? (*He is evidently displeased.*) Boma, disperse the people and let us get some sleep before the day breaks.

BLACKOUT

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Act II

Scene I

KIBUMBA CAMP

A few women and children are busy preparing meals. There are makeshift stone tripod fire places. They sing in unison, low but definitely sonorous voices. Children pick up the hum, as they shell the palm kernel that will be used for oil.

Whence shall our sun rise again?

Will Ra, who saw us begin now still witness our end?

Will Ra and Mithra not be appeased and ascend upon us again?

Treasures of hope

Hope for despair,

Hope for life,

Hope alone, for peace to abide,

Then home beckons.

Hope for peace in spite of chaos.

Then home beckons.

Hope to make it home,

Thoughts of home,

How sweet...

Whence shall our sun rise again?

Will Ra, who saw us begin now still witness our end?

Will Ra and Mithra not be appeased and ascend upon us again?

(AJU strides out of his tent, apparently enraged by the content of the song that is adapted to an ancient Hutu melody.)

AJU: How many times must you be told not to chant foolishly in the midst of all this trouble? The height of insensitivity! All you can chant is "home beckons"! Very well then, go home! Go home and let those bastards chop some of you up and fling others into the prisons so reserved for you. You, Angie, have not been able to resolve the problem of your daughter who is gradually running mad and disturbing the peace of the camp with her midnight screaming, yet you do not lack the inspiration to sing. The next person that dares to raise another nostalgia-inducing-melody will be sent away from this camp. *(He buttons up his shirt and walks away in a huff.)*

NYATU: I didn't know he was back!

FLORENTYNA: I have always told you that the song is provocative.

SAMBI: Is there any wrong in telling the truth? Is what we had not better than this? *(She points at the supplies, food and water in a pitiable pile.)* Most of us here are innocent people. We have no political ideologies or ambition. We have no reason to be enemies to anyone or any group of people. I overheard the men yesterday saying there has been a successful coup in Zaire. Do you know what that means?

FLORENTYNA: What does it mean? Would you rather return to Kigali and be maimed and consistently raped? Would you rather be accused of genocide that you know nothing about because some Tutsi did not like your face? Or would you rather be condemned to death for your supposed role in the genocide? Which of the options suits you? We are not even really safe here.

SAMBI: Are you implying they may invade the camps and carry out their threats? Can that be? We are only hiding in the bush...

FLORENTYNA: The U.N mission, I hear, broadcasts the aid we receive. I have gathered that the threat of our recovery is worrying to our adversaries. So if the power shifts, we may be attacked or driven away for political reasons. (NYATU looks around furtively as if someone may be eavesdropping and signals to the others to move aside.)

NYATU: We will not heighten the tension by painting the worst scenario. We can't go back now. That is certain. If we give ourselves up for the so-called persecution on the basis of ethnic guilt, what happens to our children? Several people here, adults and children, are already declared wanted for the killings. We will have to make the most of our stay here.

ANGIE: Our men usually meet and deliberate over these issues. I wonder why they haven't been meeting over these new developments.

NYATU: You are right Angie, but we dare not teach them what to do, lest they see us as being confrontational. Our sole responsibility is to focus on surviving in this camp.

FLORENTYNA: Nyatu, you seem to see things from impassive perspectives. You have really changed. We all have...

SAMBI: Not without cause. (SAMBI chuckles.)

NYATU: We should go and fetch pure drinking water in Lake Kivu in two days time. Tell our sisters so that we will be many and we will set out early. We have so much to talk about and so many actions to take.

FLORENTYNA: I agree, but Angie needs help with Robina. Urgent help. We need to know what tortures her so much that she refuses to speak. She has been through a lot, we know, but Aju just casually said she is running mad. That is not good for her at all.

SAMBI: Angie, I hear there is a good spiritualist and healer around Lac Vert and Mugunga camps. You may be able to find solution to Robina's problem with her, but carefully enquire before you set out. I hear Boma has people in Tshondo and Lac Vert. Ask your husband to seek his counsel, he may know about the woman.

ANGIE: Thank you. It has been my heartache especially because of the way her husband and children were massacred. (*She shakes her head in sorrow with her hands folded in front of her.*) I will ask my husband to talk to Boma.

The children pick up a new song as the women resume cooking.

*Kabuye Kanjye
Kabuye Kanjyenikezape
Kabuye Kanjyenikezape
Endanaweukarore
Naweukarore
Ni kezape*

*My little Rock
Lullaby and counting out rhyme
My little rock
My little rock is very pretty
My little rock is very pretty
Take it, look at it,
It is very pretty*

BLACKOUT

Scene II

RUYIGI'S PLACE AT KABIRA CAMP

RUYIGI, a voluptuous, queer-looking woman sits on a slightly elevated platform where she is consulted by people. The walls are marked with strange mystical signs. She is apparelled in dark colours, a long dress with turban of the same shade.

RUYIGI: You are welcome, what brings you? You are certainly not of this camp or nearby camps. (RIOJA, ANGIE, his wife, his daughter ROBINA and BOMA his friend remain standing as they tell her of their mission.)

BOMA: We greet you our mother, Ruyigi. We are refugees from Kibumba camp. We moved in from Ruhengeri ten weeks ago. It is because of Robina, my brother's daughter that we are here to consult you.

RUYIGI: You are welcome.

RIOJA: Thank you. Our mother, my daughter, Robina has been plagued with horrific dreams. She wakes up screaming at night, rousing the camp to the extent that the leaders and general populace imply that she is suffering a mental disorder. I thought it was the psychological effect of the war in Kigali. Her husband and two children were killed in her presence and she was gang raped. She insists that, that is not really the problem, but that she sees more terrible things in her dream. I cannot imagine what can be more terrible. We have pacified her by telling her that the worst is

over, that nothing may be more deadly than what she has suffered and what we have suffered... strangely, she refuses to speak about her dreams or tell anyone what is terrifying her. Telling the dream, I suppose, may deliver her from the affliction. It is on her account that we are here.

(ROBINA, a thin dark-complexioned young lady with long hair, fondles a button on her dress; her gaze is fixed on the marks and signs on the wall. She appears unperturbed all through her father's explanation as though reference was not being made to her. RUYIGI stares at her a while before speaking.)

RUYIGI: Can she speak? Does she speak? (RIOJA, BOMA and ANGIE, ROBINA's mother, nod silently in consent, while ROBINA looks on.)

RUYIGI: Her name?

RIOJA: Robina.

RUYIGI: Robina! *(She calls sharply to draw her attention.)* Come over here. *(She draws a low stool close by. ROBINA rises and walks briskly to RUYIGI's side.)*

RUYIGI: My daughter, I can see that the nightmare spirit visits you. You are troubled and grieved ... tell me what you see in your dreams. *(Silence.)* You are a quiet child. *(All nod.)* What is it that you see in your dream? Tell me. *(ROBINA hesitates. Coaxingly, RUYIGI talks.)*

RUYIGI: Tell me, there will be a way out. Tell me.

(ROBINA stares at her a while, suddenly springs up on her feet with her eyes sparkling, she begins to talk.)

ROBINA: It's in two parts! At first, it's the shooting, the maiming, the slaughtering of men, women and children like animals, the splitting of pregnant women's bellies

to forcefully jerk out the unborn ...

(After rendering these lines, the characters in the scene freeze. ROBINa remains standing while the lights dim to reveal war going on on the other side of the stage. Armed men in uniform and in plain clothes display gleaming machetes, and different arms and ammunition. Guns with rolls of bullets hang across their chests. A group of people, apparently rounded up from their homes, are led towards a road block manned by the armed men. Some cower, and a few scream before their grim faced captors.)

FIRST MAN: *(Smiles in a sinister way and he scratches his head as though a brilliant idea has just occurred to him.)* Identity! Bring out your identity cards. Show us your identity cards. *(Some of the terrified captives begin to fumble through their pockets while others raise their hands helplessly.)*

SECOND MAN: *(Speaks to two of the armed men.)* Separate them! Hutus to the left, Tutsis to the right. *(They briskly examine the identity cards produced by some of the captives.)*

THIRD MAN: They are all bloody Hutus!

FIRST MAN: Very good. We will kill them methodically! Rain the bullets and let the heads roll! Open fire!

(Mime – The captors open fire on the group and pursue those fleeing with machetes. The lights dim as the machetes and the clubs go up and down, dealing deadly blows on the victims. Blackout on the stage. Lights come up slowly to reveal ROBINa walking up and down on the other side of the stage in a measured pace, others look on with great concern.)

ROBINA: The people flee. Each one runs the race ... we move in throngs. Hundreds, thousands of people with bags, parcels, children on shoulders, some with livestock. *(Once again, dimming greyish lights fall on ROBINA and RUYIGI's parlour as they all freeze. Bright lights up on the other side of the stage to reveal the exodus of the refugees in a mime. Light fades out gradually on the multitude as they exit the stage and is spontaneously replaced by the brightly lit session with ROBINA and RUYIGI.)*

ROBINA: I still see heads of people ... it is like the exodus of the Israelites I saw in films as a child. *(She sits.)*

(RUYIGI, BOMA, RIOJA and ANGIE look at one another. RUYIGI signals that they should be still and quiet, suspecting that the last part would be of great import.)

ROBINA: Then the second part, *(She springs up on her feet glaring at each of them, her gaze finally settling on RUYIGI.)* We are refugees in the camp. A strange place, thick forest, living as we are; without necessities, no beds, cookers or anything, no tap water. People are quarrelling, then I see a whirlwind rapidly sweeping through Kibumba camp. People begin to vomit. Some terrible stench fills the entire camp, people are suddenly gaunt, sunken-eyed ... I see people choke. Then I see bodies of dead people in heaps – not like those killed in war but tons of people lying askew; I see heaps of corpses with arms and legs jutting out. Flies swarming in and over the tarpaulin and wrappers used to cover them – men, women, children! A frustrated child sucking the breast of a woman sprawled out in death ... Then I see members of my family in a heap. It is suffocating; something clutches my chest and throat ... so, I scream.

(The eyes of RUYIGI, BOMA, RIOJA and ANGIE grow

wider as she speaks, they look at one another in utter confusion. She turns, fixes her gaze on each of them again as if just regaining consciousness and becoming aware of their presence and returns to her stool.)

RUYIGI: Nightmarish!

A soul-gripping nightmare!

Heart rending as it is, it is our collective nightmare.

(Standing up, her blank stare is unfathomable, beyond grief.)

That endless journey is our reality.

More deaths, destruction and devastation loom...

Poor child, Nightmare takes advantage of you in those appearances and with those apparitions, but *(she raises her finger)* she may be revealing something...

How often do you have these dreams?

ROBINA: Every three days since we arrived in Kibumba Camp.

(RUYIGI returns to her seat, brings out a totem from a mysterious pouch, lying by her side and rubs it in her palm. She rises up again and rubs ROBINA's face with her palms.)

RUYIGI: Hmmm, Nightmare visits you often, too often, or so I think. No doubt, several people are continually plagued night and day with the horrors of the war. But, she may be showing some dreadful thing that may happen in Kibumba camp. You may all need to leave the camp or take Robina out of the camp. For now, Robina will stay here with me. I will treat her so that she will no longer be tortured by Nightmare and her apparitions. Once I confirm she no longer has the dream, you can come for her.

ANGIE: *(Speaks for the first time.)* She will need some things – a change of clothes, toiletry and ...

RUYIGI: (*Smiles.*) I know. I will take care of that and will take care of her. Leave her. You may come and see her if you wish, anytime. Tomorrow or next.

BLACKOUT

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Scene III

WATER FETCHING AT LAKE KIVU

Early hours of the morning. Women begin to arrive in trickles at the main tributary of Lake Kivu. The scenery of the lakeside must necessarily change to make the setting and plot plausible. They arrive with bowls and plastic pots. As they arrive, they place their water pots aside and exchange pleasantries particularly on how they are able to leave the camp without the men suspecting. The women split into companies, groups of twos and threes and continue chatting after the initial greeting.

SAMBI: So Florentyna was able to get you twins to come, I thought it would have been hard to get a newlywed out of the camp.

MAY: Tay and I got the message yesterday evening. I only emphasized the need for water and that the older women were going with us and he agreed.

FLORENTYNA: I sent my son to them late evening with some food.

NYATU: That is something! Our men would not have suspected that we need time away from it all, from them, the children, and awesome responsibilities of being wives and mothers on the run.

(ANGIE and a few other women arrive, drop their pots and join in the exchange of pleasantries. The women are a mixed combination of the educated and non-educated. Strikingly here, the common status of being

refugees brings them together; teachers, traders, nurses, caterers, seamstresses and full house wives among others. They seem lively and excited in comparison to the gloomy face worn in the camp.)

VALERIA: (*Conspiratorially raises her eye brow.*) Friend, you made it?

INGIRIA: Yes, dear friend, I did.

(They both move out of the circles of the women and speak in lowered voices. Stage business goes on among the other women while VALERIA and INGIRIA continue with their discussion.)

VALERIA: Even though I have an age long score to settle with one of the women that summoned this meeting. I didn't want to die of curiosity while the women were meeting and feed on hearsay when the women return.

INGIRIA: Yes, (*She giggles.*) it is better to hear from the horse's and not the donkey's mouth. I hear that women in some camps are already engaging in petty trading in some of the neighbouring refugee camps. I am on my way to see my sister who sent the word to me last night so that I can begin to trade with the balance of the money I am left with. So, I thought I really had nothing to lose by being present here. I will pass through the bank of the other tributary of Lake Kivu to her place after the meeting. (*The meeting is called to order.*)

NYATU: Sisters, it is so good we were able to make it here today. Let us leave all other issues for now and focus on the burning issues of our subsistence in Kibumba camp. This is the purpose for this gathering. Making it out of Rwanda and still being alive in spite of the really harsh conditions we are faced with has not been easy but as women we have been strong and even most of

us are surprised at how we have adapted to the changes. *From the tales of war and experiences of survivors of war around the world and the recent developments in Central African countries, we know that people live as refugees for years, even decades. We hope our experience will not be that long or that bad but I think from all the radio reports and the posture of our men, we may be here for a long time ... (She pauses, looks into the eyes of the women who have taken sitting positions by the clearing by the lake side.), longer than we think. (There is a long silence and a few depressive sighs.)*

MAY: My mothers, we hear a lot of troubling things, the most worrying of what is said on radio is that the Hutu opposition is using our camp as a base for regrouping and midnight training and that some of our leaders are wanted in Kigali. This implies that we are not safe because Tutsi militia may strike Kibumba Camp as a pre-emptive measure, which also implies that we are living in real danger. *(Several of the women, particularly those who are not enlightened, open their eyes in shock, some whisper; one to one another.)*

NYATU: A number of us have discussed, and the facts are staggering; the truth is we have reasons to be alarmed. Aju, one of the heads of the opposition to the Tutsi regime in power, is in Kibumba camp with us, not in hiding but as a notable Hutu representative before the U.N. He is not only prominent but visible internationally. Kibumba Camp is therefore without doubt, a potential keg of gun powder. We may not be able to do anything about that but surviving this season as refugees in Kibumba Camp with our children is the most important issue before us today. We must be mindful of the obvious that we are no longer in the comfort of our homes nor

do we have the amenities the city offers. Survival and surviving must be uppermost on our minds.

SAMBI: Yes. Sisters, issues of nutrition and hygiene are vital. You must have observed that we have lost some children and even young mothers to illnesses and over exposure since we settled here; we need to be more conscious of the nutritional value of the food we eat to stay healthy and nourished.

TAY: (*Nods and adds.*) And also the best way to dispose of refuse and human waste.

SAMBI: Yes. That is also vital. We are fortunate to have Betty here with us. We all know she was the most senior caterer and nutritionist in Klon Hotels in Kigali. Betty, we count on you to advise us concerning feeding so as to reduce the rate of malnutrition: protruding bellies, long necks and dehydrated skin that has become evident on our children and entire clan since we fled.

BETTY: Err, err ... the supplies sent by the U.N basically include err ... egg yolk, powdered milk and stockfish. Err, err ... The water we receive is not enough for our daily need and that explains the dryness of skin as well as the evident loss of fluids and loss of weight in most people. Err, err... we have less access to proteins but there is a species of spinach that is edible and nutritious that I discovered towards the north of Kibumba Camp. Err, err ... there is also a variety of tuberous plants that grow like the sweet potatoes that mature rapidly within weeks. Both will be easy to prepare in variety of meals. Err, err ... we need to cultivate the two so as to boost the nutritional quality of our diet.

NYATU: Thank you Betty. Those of us that are farmers or those who kept small gardens back in Kigali as I did can help in mapping out specific places to be cleared

for the planting as from tomorrow.

FLORENTYNA: We are in the rainy season, we need to keep warm so that there will be fewer infections that could lead to severe cold and pneumonia.

NYATU: You are quite right there, Flo. We have to think of the education of our children. We cannot overlook this important aspect of their well-being. While we trudge the long path to freedom, our children's contemporaries are in school and are making progress. We have to painstakingly work out a plan to see to it that they continue their education in the camp. We must remain purposeful. We must give hope to these innocent children. If we do not, this experience will create a wide gap between the Tutsi and the Hutu children. We have to continue to train them so that they will not waste away.

FLORENTYNA: Thankfully, we have qualified teachers here, including my humble self. *(She says with a laugh.)* Let us organize the children into manageable groups so that we can ensure that they are not completely dislodged. We all know they will run around like rabbits and climb trees like monkeys all day long if we allow them. Even though there are no counting materials: biro, books, and all that, they can still learn by rote.

NYATU: Something to say about our health, as women. We are the most vulnerable. We must continue to comfort our husbands in the night season but we cannot afford to have too many women put to bed in these conditions. Sambu, one of our nurses, tells us there are many pregnant women in camp already. *(The women laugh but nonetheless note NYATU's observations with seriousness. VALERIA and INGIRIA exchange knowing looks but laugh along with the other women.)*

SAMBI: Permit me to touch on a very sensitive issue. Many of us were abused sexually by supposed friends and foes who took advantage of the state of war. (*A number of the women bow their heads and others glare emptily at SAMBI.*) It is really unfortunate that most of the women and young ladies raped could not receive treatment before we fled for our lives. A few have been reported pregnant and are suffering from various disorders. Most of us are grieving, sorrowing over our lost husbands, children and relatives. We must create time to counsel ourselves and bathe the unseen wounds and scars with a sense of togetherness and love.

FLORENTYNA: The women who are already pregnant need attention particularly the newlyweds who are inexperienced. We, older women, must provide the support they need. There are indications that the young people among us will necessarily marry within and outside the camps. There must be order even in this state of chaos. Those of us that have teenage daughters must be watchful, counsel them not to give themselves away freely. *Gutahira*¹ may no longer be a cultural practice but the older women can see to the adjustment of the newlyweds and ensure that the men are responsible and committed to their women.

NYATU: For the oldies (*She smiles.*), Angie, here is the person to see on matters of prevention of conception

¹ The Rwandan practice of observing a bridegroom's capacity to love and care for a bride. Traditionally, the bridegroom resided with the family of the bride in the first few days of their union and is involved in male chores and other forms of work. He is also assessed on his display of self discipline. In pre-colonial times, the wife of a man who falls below societal expectations could be withdrawn and the man sent away in shame. Though no longer a prevailing practice, such accounts serve as deterrent for men who would have been indiscreet.

or abstinence as a control measure. Her experience in nursing and midwifery counts. She may even help us identify herbs that reduce libido. (*The women find this amusing and laugh again.*)

ANGIE: Not to worry. (*She winks conspiratorially.*) We will find the ways and the means without being found out.

NYATU: One or two more issues before we 'fetch water' and head back for Kibumba. My years of associating with lawmakers, lawyers and the court give me insight into some of the issues at stake, particularly the reports that we hear over the radio. I have identified seventeen of our children in Kibumba Camp who have been declared wanted in Kigali for their participation in the genocide. I also identify about eight of the men in our camp who are desperately sought after for the genocide in Kigali. We won't, and we can't turn over our children, neither can we give up our radical and militiamen. But there is something we can do as women. We are and can be peacemakers. We are here because of battles created and fought by men. Let us discourage our men from advancing the war ... there are better alternatives. We still have the power of *Umweko*².

All: Yes! (*The women leap up and begin the Umweko dance.*)

Yes, we have the power!

Surely power resides with us!

As mothers we are powerful!

As sisters we are powerful!

As lovers we are powerful!

² Mystical way of restraining men from going to war in Rwanda. Strings from clothing, belts that tie clothes around the waists or such material are used symbolically.

As wives most powerful!

We do have *Umweko!*

Pull the strings and restrain your brother from war!

Pull the strings and restrain your lovers from war!

Pull the strings and restrain your sons from war!

Pull the strings and restrain your husbands from war!

Umweko! Umweko! Umweko!

(The women mime a war situation. Owing to a ridiculous allegation, their men are provoked and are getting set for war. In each case the woman dissuades a husband, lover, friend, brother or son who remains adamant. Upon the insistence to go to war, the woman, in each case, pulls out a string of a fabric or strand of a material and places it in front of the man. The man knows the implication. In each case, the man steps back and lay the weapons down and the woman spins in a dance because she has dissuaded the man from participating in the war. She rejoices because she wins the war before it begins.)

NYATU: I tell you my dear friends that we have the power; we have to use it. The *Mzungus*³ have let our men down. The international community they depended on to stop the carnage had no strategic interest in this zone, so they watched us kill ourselves. The foreigners that were here then were sent for by big vehicles and taken back home while we continually killed ourselves. Sisters, let's henceforth intervene and not leave our husbands to their decisions, which are sometimes rash, because the women and the children will continue to suffer the consequences.

³ White men

(The women hum the song.)

Whence shall our sun rise again?

Will Ra, who saw us begin now still witness our end?

Will Ra and Mithra not be appeased and ascend upon us again?

NYATU: Yes, we will sing again. Here, there is no man to shut us up. Our hope is nigh, we will not give up. We must discard the cultural taboos associated with womanhood. We have new roles and new responsibilities as women; wives, widowed or whose husbands are incarcerated. We must support our husbands, fend for our children, climb trees, build houses, think for ourselves. We must team up, our individual differences should no longer count. We are refugees, we need to rebuild the non-existent communities. Let us support the women who have no men and build stronger tents for them until we return to Kigali.

(The women sing.)

The sun shall return above us,

It will be revealed to us once again,

The sun shall return above us,

It will be revealed to us once again

Ra and Mithra will be appeased.

NYATU: There are traitors everywhere. *(She lowers her voice.)* Everywhere. Traitors ... even among us women. We must not harbour those who want to use the camp as cover and hide out to launch an attack in Rwanda. If we do, we will have bigger troubles than we can cope with. Let's join our hands together and sing. *(The women join hands as they sing.)* Our voice of reason will bring harmony, perhaps encourage the men and children sought after to surrender and negotiate with the new government in Kigali and the sun would have risen

above us again.

The sun shall return above us,
It will be revealed to us once again,
The sun shall return above us,
It will be revealed to us once again.
Ra and Mithra will be appeased.

*(The women reduce the tempo of the song as the lights
fade out at Lake Kivu.)*

BLACKOUT

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Scene IV

MIDNIGHT IN KIBUMBA CAMP

A couple lie together on a makeshift bed in a dimly lit tent. BOMA's wife, VALERIA, one of the women who were at Lake Kivu, sits up, rubs her eyes and reflects on her encounter with NYATU at Kigali the year before. Light reveals the women in a conversation.

VALERIA: Nyatu, please. I know it is not right for me to ask you to do this. I know you have said it may even cost you your job. But please, consider the implication of the evidence against my brother, my only brother. We have lost our parents and he is the only relation I have left and you are our only hope. I am told that the file is in your possession and you can do as you wish with the contents. Please, I beg you. For the sake of whatever you hold dear. Please.

NYATU: My sister, I have told you the truth. What you are asking for is against my conscience. I'm really sorry. I cannot help you.

BLACKOUT

(VALERIA *nods her head vengefully and taps her husband to wake him up.*)

VALERIA: Boma, wake up. There is something you need to hear and act upon.

BOMA: (*Grunts.*) What woman? Can't it wait?

VALERIA: No, it can't.

BOMA: (*Sitting up and pulling off the head socks which had covered his ears.*) Okay, let's have it.

VALERIA: There is trouble, real trouble in Kibumba camp.

BOMA: Why do you say that? How can that be?

VALERIA: Division! Some people are forming camps within the camp.

BOMA: (*Thoughtfully scratches his head.*) In this camp?

VALERIA: Yes. Two days ago, I received a message from Angie that the women had plans to go to Lake Kivu to fetch clean drinking water. I was a bit puzzled when we set out because we walked passed Lac Vert and Tshondi.

BOMA: Why did you go so far?

VALERIA: En ehn! That is the right question to ask. It was a secret meeting! The intention of the women (*counted them on her fingers*); Nyatu, Florentyna and Sambu is bad. I don't know what gives them the courage to call us and instruct us. I am a seamstress, I didn't go to school but I know the right thing to do is to table matters before our husbands at home and hope that they discuss such matters at the male gathering. But here they came, (*She jumps out of the bed spitefully attempting to imitate the women but failing woefully.*)

trying to impress us giving speeches with ideas they stole from men as if they are the only ones that went to school.

BOMA: (*Cuts in with irritation.*) Can you tell me what was said to divide the camp so that I can go back to sleep. (*VALERIA pauses from her rattling; a bit irritated he had cut her short.*)

VALERIA: They first started with issues on the presence of Hutu opposition leaders that are highly sought after in the camp and the implication of the Tutsi militia striking because of them. I'm sure you know they are referring specifically to you and Aju.

BOMA: What else?

VALERIA: They mentioned issues relating to hygiene, children's education, nutrition, and cultivation of vegetables and sweet potatoes. Hehehe... (*She claps her hands as if in amazement.*) The interesting one is about women knowing how to manoeuvre their husbands so that they won't get pregnant. They mentioned cooking with herbs that will destroy the male libido. Of course, she is jealous of the other women who have husbands because her weak husband couldn't escape the soldiers in Kigali. Imagine such evil counsel when people like us don't even have children!

BOMA: (*Jumps up.*) Ha!

VALERIA: Yes, I now remember, (*She smiles spitefully.*) Nyatu said she knows all the men and children that are wanted for the genocide; I cannot remember whether or not she said she was going to expose them.

BOMA: (*Now angry.*) You mean that? (*He swears in Hutu.*)

VALERIA: Yes! I have always told you that she is power

conscious; she seeks popularity among the women. She definitely has political ambition; why else would she summon the women? You need to tell the leaders so that they can curb the excesses of the three women. Particularly Nyatu's.

BOMA: It's alright, I know what to do.

(She nods her head in satisfaction, as though she had got even with NYATU at last).

BLACKOUT

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Scene V

KIBUMBA CAMP

GATHERING OF MEN

Absolute silence prevails apparently after a contentious discussion.

AJU: Brethren, brethren ... *(He pauses.)*

OTHERS: Speak on.

AJU: We cannot contend with ourselves, disagree sharply as we have done and remain morose and silent over these issues. We must dialogue and reach a consensus over this impending doom. *(A number of the men grunt, some nod their heads in agreement.)* Something must be done. I have a feeling that the women and children have got wind of the developments and the general mood in the camp is restive and depressive. Let us put our heads together, let us resolve these issues. Are we to go back? Are we to remain here? Are we to send the children and women back?

KAMAN: I am surprised at some of the questions you have put to us. You are the main representative of this camp before the U.N and the leader of the opposition of our clan. Make the issues clear. The *Mzungus* have finally intervened, so you reported to us time and again. What are they saying now? This is the question you must first answer.

AJU: The Whiteman is a little hesitant, sympathetic no

doubt, but we must know that international politics is complicated. The U.N and the political leaders in the world have, in many ways, implied that they have no strategic interest in Rwanda. Their intervention since the state of emergency was declared in Rwanda is apparently as a result of the full implication of the genocides which has now hit the world. (*Murmurings.*) For now I am told that attempts to appease the Tutsi have failed. They insist that the responsibility of the massacre will be borne as an ethnic guilt and that posture does not spare any Hutu. They also insist that we must be tried legally and punished before returning to Rwanda. Their cry for justice has been met. A commission is being set up in that regard. (*Reactions and side talk.*)

MUSOGA: What will the *Mzungus* do?

AJU: Negotiations are still on but the success of this *coup d'etat* is strategically in favour of the Tutsi.

KIRUNDO: Finally, we are where I knew we would be. When the reprisal for the assassination of the president through ethnic cleansing was being proposed, I, with a few others opposed it because it clearly spelt doom for the nation and the fragile yet turbulent ethnic formation in Rwanda. As a people, we had severe limitations, military incapability, financial incapability and almost non-existent technological expertise. Our aim was unity. It has failed. The goal, eliminating the Tutsi and subduing their imagined superiority, has become figments of our imagination. We have succeeded in generating eternal enmity and creating a permanent state of emergency in Rwanda. For how long shall we continue to live aimless, frustrated and stagnated lives? For how long will we continue to inhabit the thick forests of Central Africa? We had better go back and face what awaits us.

MUSOGA: Some camouflage as men but hardly ever change or mature. It would be better if such persons remained silent in the presence of real men. Since they cannot but be unreasonable, such are the men who have no Tutsi blood on their hands or on their necks. (*He turns in the direction of KIRUNDO.*) Would you have preferred us to continue living under the social and political oppression of those nomadic exploiters without lifting a finger?

KIRUNDO: I will not dignify you by responding to your insults. We have been charged with ethnic genocide. Thousands of Hutu are in prison untried and tortured daily to reveal secrets pertaining to the operations and whereabouts of Hutu leaders who led the massacres and who are on the run. Men, women and underaged children have been turned into murderers, to echo you, 'having Tutsi blood on their hands and on their necks'. Over two million of us are now herded in the forest and outskirts of the Great Lakes Region as though we were apes, caged, camped and in some cases abused, and without identity. I need not remind us that men like Aju and I lost our entire families to the war because, 'reasonable' agrarian Hutus decided to go to war against the nomadic Tutsi. The question we should ask in our closets after evaluating the absolute futility of the war is this. (*He pauses.*) What have we achieved? (*Another pause.*) Nothing!

MUSOGA: It is your lack of understanding ...

MUYINGA: Enough of this! (*MUYINGA, an elderly but sprightly man in his sixties springs to his feet.*) We have had enough bickering! This, I tell you, is neither the forum nor mood for that, for all we know, the presidential troop may be on the way to launch its attack on us in Kibumba camp. Our arguments have remained sharp on

what has been done and what should not have been. As important as these are, we all know that hindsight is really useless. The burning issue now is what to do and how to go about it. We are all learned men; we don't need to impress ourselves with much pedantic wrangling.

(Boma seizes the opportunity to voice his grievances.)

BOMA: I'm afraid, but I must inform us that there are spies in the camp.

ALL: Spies?

BOMA: Yes, and traitors in Kibumba camp. *(Confusion and side talks take over.)*

AJU: Let there be order. Boma can you substantiate your claim?

BOMA: Yes. Our enemies have recruited some of our people. These informants are all females. These women are planning and instigating a revolt against the male leadership of Kibumba camp. They have been holding secret meetings and I am told that they intend to expose the 21 children that were involved in the massacres as well as expose those of us that were involved in the killings.

ALL: *(The men voice out sporadically, interrupting one another.)*

What are their names?

We need to round them up immediately.

Give us their names.

BOMA: Nyatu, Sambu, and Florentyna.

ALL: Haa!

BOMA: They summoned the women to Lake Kivu a few days ago to solicit their support and to declare their

intentions.

(Some of the men whose wives had also attended the meeting are no longer shocked but appear puzzled.)

AJU: Boma, get a few of the boys, round the three ring leaders up and bring them here straight away.

BLACKOUT

(NYATU, FLORENTYNA and SAMBI kneel in the midst of the men. They are apparently shocked at being rounded up so forcibly.)

AJU: You should not be surprised you are invited to this meeting *(He laughs, stands up and waves his hand in their direction before continuing.)* After all, you invited several women to Lake Kivu to hold a meeting of your own design. We have been informed that you, Nyatu, with your cohorts had the guts to incite the women to expose the men who took part in the Tutsi's killing along with twenty one children. That plans are underway for us to be handed over to the government for prosecution. We are also told you have revealed the political ambition you have been nursing while working as a magistrate's clerk.

NYATU, FLORENTYNA AND SAMBI: Haaaaaa!

(They look at each other in utter despair and dismay.)

BOMA: Nyatu is the ring leader, let her speak. *(She shakes her head.)*

AJU: *Kanjogera*,⁴ (AJU *laughs menacingly*.) We have a *Kanjogera* in Kibumba camp. *Niyaruchi*⁵, *uruvuze umugore ruvuga umuhoro!*⁶ I have heard you were husband to your husband and he was your wife and that was why he did not make it out of Kigali! Speak now or your silence judges you.

SAMBI: With due respect, the worst that can happen after our good intentions have been ruptured by mischief makers is death. I know some people who hate us must have said these terrible things, none of which we conceived or said. (*She faces NYATU.*) For our sakes please speak. (*NYATU hesitates.*)

AJU: You must have mysterious powers, Nyatu. (*AJU throws back his head in another harsh and brittle laugh.*) Will you stop the snakes from biting us or withdraw the ability of our dead resurrecting or prevail over death? You'd better have something to say or your head will roll.

NYATU: (*Taking a deep but confident breath, she begins in a measured tone.*) We heard news, both propaganda and truthful reports, of the situation of things in Kigali, Butare, Ruhengeri, Gikongoro and its environs. We also heard reports of the insistence of the Tutsi on ethnic justice and reprisal on Hutus. We also heard of the untold sufferings many of us who fled the comfort of

⁴ Female ruler in Rwandan history. Remembered as a mean leader who ordered the deaths of several of her subject with a degree of casualness, a personality remembered for notorious interventions and formidable authority. More contemporary references or portrayals of *Kanjogera* refer to ruthless and cruel female politicians.

⁵ Royal name for *Kanjogera*.

⁶ A homestead with an outspoken and assertive woman will consequently suffer bloodshed.

our homes because of the bloodbaths caused by the carnage in Rwanda now experience in the refugee camps. We were told of the epidemic in Kagenyi, Rubwera and Kyabalisa I and II camps. We became scared. Particularly because we know that the situation that we find ourselves in may be for an extended period. Some refugees are known to have lived in camps in West Africa for over five years. (*Sighs from some, side comments from others.*) Our mothers, before the tap water became a social amenity, had meetings by the stream and counselled one another while these trips were made to better the lots of their husbands and children. The meeting at the Lake Kivu was not different. It was out of respect for the men folk that we decided to discuss these problems ... ways women can cope ... while going to fetch drinking water.

BOMA: Liar! (*He points an accusing finger.*) You told them that you would use your legal influence to round up all the men and twenty one children wanted for genocide and deliver them to Kigali!

FLORENTYNA: She said no such thing! Who ever told you that is a liar from the pit of hell! (*She crosses her heart in the Roman Catholic way.*)

BOMA: Brethren, my wife was at Lake Kivu. She is no liar from the pit of hell and she told me of all your machinations. (*He waves his thin finger in the direction of the three women as he speaks.*)

AJU: Let us speak only when called upon. The allegations against you three are grave. Nyatu, why are you instigating the women to create chaos in Kibumba camp? If what you discussed was to help the women why will a woman condemn you?

NYATU: My fathers, I will speak one more time. It became clear that we may spend years in this purposeless state. We know of a few of us that managed to escape with our travel documents, we learnt some refugees ended up being trafficked as slaves or sex workers by those who promised to help in Europe and the Americas. We wanted to give a ray of hope to boost the morale of the women and enhance the future of our children. Specifically, I discussed continuing education for our children by those who have experience because they were tutors in Kigali; we discussed feeding and hygiene in the camp. We also discussed...Ah!

(Gunshot is heard from a distance and NYATU who had stood facing leaders had been hit by a bullet aimed at AJU. She clutches her chest and bends over. Soldiers in camouflage burst in. There is pandemonium as the Hutu men who had been enraptured by NYATU's speech pull out their weapons, albeit belatedly, in self defence and with a degree of despair.)

CAPTAIN JACK: Aju, Musoga and Boma, you are under arrest! There will be no more shooting if you surrender now!

BLACKOUT

(Dim lights. NYATU is being nursed by FLORENTYNA and SAMBI.)

NYATU: Sister, I'm not sure I will recover from this gunshot.

SAMBI: You will. The wound looks better since the bullets were removed; scars are forming at its edges now. So there is hope.

FLORENTYNA: I know it is painful, but please don't give up. Most of the women look up to you. Our detractors are already put to shame. Valeria fled in the middle of that night you were shot after her husband and others were captured. For our sake, be strong. You will make it. (NYATU *smiles weakly.*)

NYATU: I don't think so ... Florentyna, take charge of the women. We will need a lot of coordination for things not to get worse. Aju's capture means a lot for Kibumba camp. There should be relative peace. Hmmm Sambu! ... (She clasps SAMBU's hand as though remembering something.) ... My children! Take care of them. (She smiles weakly as the Grim Reaper quietly harvests her soul.)

(A dirge is solemnly rendered.)

What did we choose?
 We chose war.
 We ran to death,
 Then we had war,
 And ran from death,
 We fled from death,
 And ran into death,
 We still run but death's feet are swifter,
 We run still but the Grim Reaper is swift-footed,
 Swifter than Nyatu's nimble feet.
 Beacon of hope run over by the swift-footed one.

BLACKOUT

Act III

Scene I

KIBUMBA CAMP (GOMA AREA)

Meeting at the camp square, MUYINGA stands addressing the gathering.

MUYINGA: Brothers and sisters, my children, I greet you all. We will continue to forge ahead in spite of all the pain we suffer. The collective guilt we must bear as a people because of the inconsistency and contradiction of war. We are still in the early stages of the beginning and we must be strong! Our camp Kibumba has been struck because it is believed that the instigators and leaders of the genocide are pulling resources and capabilities together to strike Kigali from here.

ALL: Ha!

MUYINGA: Let me reassure you. There is no such movement here. Yes, We did not join those forces because we were already negotiating through Aju to resolve the issues of justice that Kigali's 'Darling Dictator' wants as social reconciliation and peace pact. Our host, upon whose land our camp is, says there are reports that arms are being supplied to Kibumba camp and that military training is taking place here at night as it is done in Lumasi camp. We know we are aggrieved enough to be involved in a hit back but both allegations are erroneous. Our position here is to maintain a peaceful atmosphere until things are resolved. We finally lost Nyatu a few days ago to the gunshot of the invaders

who were after Aju ... (*The people express their grief in diverse ways: some wail, some clutch their heads in their hands and some just shake their heads in sorrow.*) It is well my people. We all know the circumstances in which she was shot. Had the wrong allegation not been made against her, she would have been in the camp with the other women and would not have been in the crossfire. It is a real pity, but we found out that Valeria had deliberately misinformed her husband to create mischief. (*Reaction.*) Her children, Mulekatete and Gatete, are here with us. I have adopted them as my own and they will be in custody of Sambu, her friend. Let us all watch out for the well-being of these children.

(*There are more lamentations and wailing triggered off by the injustice of the circumstances surrounding NYATU's death.*) I want to advise that we allow peace to reign rather than set people against one another because there are old scores to settle. Rumour mongers beware. We have to appreciate our women and the efforts they make to sustain their loved ones. From now on, the women will meet and deliberate on all issues in the centre of the camp. No needless journey will be made to deliberate on our welfare. Nyatu had the interest of all of us at heart; survival in spite of being refugees was her message. We should not just preach it now that she is no more but practice it until we return home.

Aju sent word: he and Musoga escaped. (*Shout of jubilation.*)

(*Responses from the audience.*)

Aju! Mwami⁷ Aju!

⁷ King

Aju!

MUYINGA: Aju and Musonga won't come back here because the strikers may hit Kibumba camp again if they return. Aju's family is still being held hostage in Kigali. Brethren ... A more deadly threat than that of the strikers looms over us. The rivers are drying up and there is urgent need for flowing water. The weather will become harsher in the next few weeks and we may need to move to avoid an epidemic.

KAMAN: Thank you our dear elder, Muyinga, your words are really seasoned and full of wisdom. We need to consider the full implication of moving out of Kibumba. We need to carefully examine where we will be moving to. Most of the countries have run out of sympathy. Tanzania, for instance, has closed its borders to refugees because of the ecological impact of accommodating refugees. There are also security challenges posed by the multitude of refugees. I agree we may have to move, but we need to be sure our hosts are not those that have been made hostile by the indiscretion of some of us, refugees.

KIRUNDO: True, in some communities, refugees are seen as pests, worse than locusts and grasshoppers. Some refugee clans also have no consideration for the host community. School classrooms are vandalized, chairs, tables used as firewood. Trees, farms, plantations are ruined as refugees move in throngs. People flinging the corpses of their dead into compounds of innocent hosts. We really need to be sure we have better options.

MUYINGA: I agree. We will send our men out to explore the possibilities. There were reports of cholera epidemic in Katale camp. There are reports of deaths of refugees, the toll increasing at an alarming rate. I will suggest

that we send six strong men to make enquiries. There must be sufficient land for us to camp in Kajembo and Runingo, though Kagunga seems to be the best option, we must still enquire.

KAMAN: True, I travelled via Lake Tanganyika before the war. Kajembo and Runingo are good locations. But I gathered that there are at least twenty nine refugee camps between Mugunga and Biriba. I can also confirm that it is quite a distance from here.

MUYINGA: We need volunteers, on this mission. Kaman, you will lead the team since it's a terrain you are familiar with.

(Some raise their hands; they are handpicked and congratulated by the people around them for their sense of duty.)

LIGHT FADES OUT.

Scene II

MUYINGA *and two men sit, chatting and eating fresh bananas.*

MUYINGA: That is good news; another baby is born in the camp, really good news; life in the midst of pain and death.

1ST MAN: Kita is a responsible boy, I know he can and will fend for his family.

2ND MAN: That is gladdening in many...

(Two of the men sent to enquire about the possibilities of relocating the camp come in with a troubled expression.)

MUYINGA: Welcome. What brings you back so soon?
(MUYINGA asks with alarm.)

JUSTIN: Kaman sends his regards.

CYPRIEN: We are to tell you that the cholera epidemic in Katale has spread to Kahindo.

(MUYINGA rises to his feet with his hands on his chest.)

JUSTIN: We were told by people fleeing the boundaries of the North of Zaire that the spread is rapid.

CYPRIEN: So rapid that it claimed the lives of over 1,000 victims daily in Katale.

JUSTIN: The death toll is rising alarmingly in Kahindo. They

say there are stacks of decomposing corpses everywhere. Many are sick and there is even no space to bury the dead.

(The men with MUYINGA, place their hands on their heads in horror.)

1ST MAN: Elder, what do we do? The trickle of water that still flows here comes from Kahindo. (MUYINGA *remains silent. Light fades gradually.*)

BLACKOUT

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Scene III

KIBUMBA CAMP

Dead bodies strewn everywhere. A dying woman sits down by her child vomiting; a man passing by holds his throat as he vomits a torrent of greenish fluid. A hungry child suckles the breasts of a dead woman and yells in dissatisfaction. Two people run out of the camp houses yelling.

TAY: Oh! He is dead, he is dead too.

MAY: What do we do to stop this plague? Ah! Ah! Ah!

(She weeps and sinks to the ground with her head in her hands.)

ANGIE: Robina! Can it be true? Will it be true? So it is true!

(People keep dying ... the death toll increases.)

BLACKOUT

Scene IV

NIGHTFALL IN KIBUMBA CAMP

MUYINGA: It's nightfall. How many corpses did you count today?

KIRUNDO: 626 in all. 280 women, 198 children and 148 men.

MUYINGA: The death toll is reducing in comparison to about 1,000 per day recorded last week. Spread the news in camp. There is hope. The people should use more of the medication and solutions. They should take the supplements sent through the units. Let us have hope that we won't all be wiped away with this epidemic.

RIOJA: (*Aside.*) I still can't believe that Nightmare and her demons visit us in day time. Robina's dream comes true with precision: the war, the exodus, the nightmares, the epidemic, a nightmare, our nightmare...

THE END

Stolen Seeds

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For Niyi Osundare; Nurturer indeed

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Stolen Seeds is a domestic play. It captures in a swing issues that arise from marriage and childbearing. Other complications arise from infertility, deception, adultery, and the discontentment that is characteristic of living a lie.

To the would-be director, tragedy in many contexts, including the Yoruba context within which this play is set, varies. While some occurrences necessarily require an outward show of sorrow or regret, some tragic occurrences just transcend effusive wailing and yelling. This should set the pace for the mood of the performance of this play. Matters of infertility are core to the essence of marriage particularly in most cases where the woman is always 'guilty' and in this case where the man's discontentment leads him astray. The selection of the members of cast, particularly Banke Adebajo, should be with a sense of acknowledgement of the graveness of the psychological setting and the gravity of the circumstances the couple are in.

The rapid movement and interconnectedness of the scenes are deliberately conceived. Mrs Adebajo should consistently be elegantly dressed in easy-to-wear caftans as she appears in most of the scenes. The modern day prayer contractor and his sophisticated congregation are not necessarily the *aladura* type but those who vaingloriously seek for what is missing in the wrong places and contexts.

Doyin Aguoru
May 2016

Characters

Banji Adebajo	Father
Banke Adebajo	Mother
Dunni Adebajo	Daughter
Dunni Adebajo	Son
Sile Akinola	Banke's childhood friend
Ahijah	Prophet
Johnson	Male participant at a convention
Romoke	Female participant at a convention
Eyiwunmi	Banji's wife
Relatives	
Congregation	

Stolen Seeds was first performed on the 10th of April, 2014 in the Department of English and Performing Arts of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye.

Members of cast of the premiere

BANJI	Kehinde Olaniyi
YOUNG BANJI	Onah Matthew
BANKE	Ayomikun Ajayi
YOUNG BANKE	Taliat Ebunoluwa
SILE	Ojemua Grace
PROPHET	Onibiyo Sodif Temitope
DUNNI	Adegunle Simbiat
DUNNBI	Fatai Hammed
JOHNSON	Makinde Adeniyi
ROMOKE	Taliat Ebunoluwa
BABA LASEENI	Razaq Afeez Abiola
GBEMI	Idowu Oluwatosin
SISI DELE	Mohammed Suliat
MAMA LAKANMI	Akande Mariam Atinuke
JUDGE	Hope Obade
PROSECUTING LAWYER	Adebesin Samuel
DEFENCE LAWYER	Alakija Toluwani
COURT CLERK	Folorunsho Atinuke

CONGREGATION

Bello Damilola Victoria
Osisanya Abimbola Olubunmi
Ogunro Temitope Esther
Owolabi Habibat Owomide
Adebanjo Azeezat Busayo
Sunday Blessing Cynthia
Gbegbin Odunayo Titilayo
Unuafe Favour Faith
Idowu Oluwatosin
Omowunmi
Obrifos Sarah Agbkogho
Banjo Sherifat Abosedo
Sodeinde Joshua Oluwasewa
Okusanya Michael

DIRECTOR

Laide Nasir

Act I

Scene I

Dull lights reveal a bed and a set of wardrobes in the luxurious master bedroom of the ADEBONAJO home. A television set and a side stool with a bottle of water and glass cup stand by the other corner of the room. It is a night of frantic prayers. BANJI ADEBONAJO, a man in his mid-fifties, walks around the room singing and praying in staccato.

BANJI: Every iota of deceit in this home; be exposed!

All lying spirits; be rebuked!

All liars will go to hell!

(Singing.)

Ogun oso o

Ori mi sa

Ogun esu o, ko sa wo 'le

O wo, o wo o

Ogun esu ti wo lu 'le

O ti wo, o ti wo

(BANKE, his wife, is startled from sleep with the force and intensity of his prayers, she rubs her eyes and looks at him in puzzlement. BANKE ADEBONAJO is a pretty fair-complexioned woman in her late forties or early fifties who is graciously aging. She still looks appealing in her silk nightgown. He continues as though oblivious of her being awake.)

Lord deliver,
 Deliver me and my household,
 My wife, from lies.
 Living a lie amounts to proceeding to hell!
 Deliver us from hell, heaven is my goal, oh Jehovah.
 Every frustration,
 Stagnation,
 Deception that is the platform for sin
 Destroy! Destroy, oh Jehovah!
 Set us free!
 He who the son of God sets free is free indeed.
 Set us free.
 Bless us with your blessings.
 Every good gift comes from you, the father of all lights...

(He picks up his bible, turns the pages and nods.)

Yes, yes... in whom there is neither variableness nor
 shadow of turning.
 Yes, no shadow,
 No evil shadow in you.
 Deliver us from shadows,
 Shadows of the past,
 Shadows of lies.
 You can not lie. Yes...
 Sanctify us from lies, oh Jehovah...

(BANJI kneels, then rolls on the floor, BANKE sitting up and clutching the pillows to her chest, is now evidently petrified.) Fire! Holy Ghost fire burn all chaff, chaff of lies as wind... *(Raises another song.)*

Emi Mimo l'agba,
Emi Mimo lo ga,
Emi Mimo l'agba o ju baba baba to bi mi lo.

(Resumes the wailing and supplication.)

Oluwa oooooooooo!

Gbami l'owo ese, ese igba aimo, ati ese aimomoda.

Idariji oooooo!

Forgiveness is what I'm entreating you for.

(Lights fade as BANKE watches his antics with great alarm.)

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Scene II

Lights come on a modestly furnished apartment. BANKE ADEBONAJO sits with her friend, MRS SILE AKINOLA on the sofa, exchanging pleasantries.

BANKE: The policy in my work place has become more stringent since the members of staff protested and got the wage increase. We now have to clock in and out, even when going for the lunch break. If not, I would have been here earlier to see Bolu.

SILE: Really? The wage increase is good and I think the price you are paying is fair, after all you also got an official car in addition to being promoted. Promotion, we all know, means more work. *(They both laugh.)* Bolu is now fully recovered and will write her final exams in the next few weeks.

BANKE: I happy about that. Thank God for everything. We haven't seen since you told me of the transfer of that clown boss of yours on the phone. Congratulations once again ore, I rejoice because I know it's answered prayers that took him that far, where he won't be in a position to influence things. We will soon celebrate your long-delayed promotion.

SILE: Amen oh. Thank you. Ah ha, what is it that you wanted to tell me that you couldn't even hint me on the phone?

BANKE: Hmmm, Sile, *(Bows her head.)* There are puzzling developments in my house.

SILE: Really?

BANKE: Yes ... and I am deeply worried.

SILE: Tell me? I can see it all over you, what is it?

BANKE: My husband has recently joined a church.

His religious observances and change of attitude ... (*She shakes her head.*) I have never witnessed such strange acts since I have known him.

SILE: Which church is that? Where? Banji, your husband who doesn't go to church? Religious observances? Who took him there? (*BANKE remains silent while SILE rattles on.*) Have you been there with him?

BANKE: You can never change! That is why I couldn't tell you on the phone. Be kind enough to ask one question at a time.

SILE: I'm sorry. But it sounds alarming. Banji in church with strange religious observances! You are hardly troubled by issues but I see that you are upset about this. (*She scratches her head.*)

BANKE: Hmmm. My observation in the past two years is that he has been quite withdrawn. His business has not blossomed as we both expected, but it has not done badly either. I was initially wondering if it had to do with post or middle age crises – he will be fifty six on his next birthday – or lack of fulfilment in his business particularly his initial plan to make it an international business with branches in Southern Africa and the Middle East ... but his recent attitude confounds me.

SILE: Okay, (*Reflectively scratching her head, she asks.*) tell me about the attitude; is it towards you particularly? Eh? I know your husband to be gentle, soft-spoken and loving. Are you sure you have not offended him in anyway?

BANKE: Not that I know of ... you know me to be peace-loving. Since our undergraduate years in Benin, I have been cooperative with him, even to a fault and to my detriment often. I believe. I have kept our secrets even from the closest of my friends and relatives and I have never betrayed him in any way.

SILE: Have you tried to speak to him about it? The change in his attitude? But you still haven't told me what has changed in his attitude.

BANKE: Yes I tried. He just seemed enclosed in an unreal world and now this new near fanatic existence.

SILE: (*Claps hands and stands up.*) I just don't quite get it? Fanatics, how do you mean?

BANKE: (*Stands up.*) In the past 20 days, he has risen up at midnight to sing and pray. Quite unusual ... unusual, even choice of songs he sings. Songs like:

*Esu gbe,
Esu gbe o,
Abuku kan Satani
Esu gbe o*

He continues making declarations about lying spirits and hell. You need to see the rage and outrage of his outbursts ... you will simply be terrified. (*Claps hands and leaves them clasped under her chin as she sits on the chair near her friend.*) Really startling, unimaginable but its real, I have witnessed it every night in the last twenty days. I wake up; sit up watching him practically dumbfounded. What pricks my heart is that he acts as if I am invisible, even when the prayers are over.

SILE: Ha ha! Ee ehn?

BANKE: He seems to have discovered something which is

yet to be clear to me.

SILE: Discovered something? Like what? And where? Ask him; ask him to tell you what he has discovered.

BANKE: His posture ... I can't dare to penetrate.

SILE: Have you tried to join him in the prayers?

BANKE: No! Don't you know when you are not invited?

SILE: Well ... (*She says thoughtfully.*) Why not join him in the prayers and or ask him to tell you what is troubling him so that you can pray along with him. *Abi?* You have never told me that he ever prays before now. Then, on your own, pray o! Pray, so that your 24 years of marriage will not go down the drain.

BANKE: *Abi?*

SILE: You need to also observe him for the purpose of psychosis o! So that we can get him help fast. *Olorun oni je ki a ri ibi o.*

BANKE: *Amin.*

SILE: But twenty days is a loooong time o!

BANKE: I think so too.

SILE: What of the children?

BANKE: Dumni and Dunbi just returned to school after the prolonged strike. Thankfully they didn't witness all this. They will be home for Christmas and I pray things would have changed for the better by then.

SILE: Amen.

(*Lights fade out gradually as BANKE picks her bag in readiness to leave.*)

Scene III

Back in the ADEBONAJO home. BANJI sits, reading a newspaper with a grim look on his face. He holds a drink in one hand and flips the newspaper on his lap with the other as BANKE comes in.

BANKE: Hello dear. *(He stands up to give her a routine hug.)*

BANJI: Welcome back. How was work today? You are a bit late.

BANKE: Yes, really sorry, I stopped by Sile's place to check on her after work. Her daughter had been down with fever. I could not visit them while she was admitted in the hospital.

BANJI: Okay. So how is she now?

BANKE: Recovering and recuperating.

BANKE: How was your day? Were you able to clear the shipments?

BANJI: No, I was told it would take two more weeks. *(He puts up the newspaper to cover a part of his face.)*

BANKE: *(Rolls her eyes heavenwards.)* I told Akpan to get dinner ready.

BANJI: I'm okay for the day; I had a very late lunch.

LIGHTS FADE RAPIDLY.

Scene IV

The bedroom clock chimes at twelve midnight. BANJI leaps out of bed with a dramatic rendition of a church song.

Olorun Agbaye o!
Olorun Agbaye o!
Olorun Agbaye o!
You are mighty!
Sebi iwo lo fi oju orun se a so bo'ra.
Sebi iwo lo fi oju orun se a so bo'ra.
Olorun Agbaye o!
You are mighty!
Ni inu ile mi
You are mighty!
Ni inu aye mi!
You are mighty!
Ni inu ile mi... You are mighty ooooooh! *(He repeats the song a number of times before he starts praying.)*

BANJI: Lying spirits, spirits of deception, away! Be cast out of my life, my home and my surroundings. I receive boldness against every obstacle to making heaven. All liars shall go to hell. The devil is the father of all liars! *(He sings as he flips open his bible. Banke is no longer startled but stands up with folded arms and observes his antics with awe.)* Yes! God cannot lie by two immutable things by which it is impossible for God to lie! I am a child of God, lying will no longer be found in me and in my habitation. Hummmm ... hummmm ... haaaa! Yes! Yes.

BLACKOUT

Scene V

BANJI and BANKE are at breakfast.

BANKE: Thankfully one will get some rest, today being a public holiday. One can scarcely get a day off without something coming up.

BANJI: *(Munches his bread.)* Hmm ... *(Nods his head.)*

BANKE: I have been planning to discuss with you for some days now. I feel there are things happening around us that I do not quite understand.

(BANJI gives her a queer look and sips from his mug.)

BANKE: It is as though you have discovered something I don't know of and you are keeping me in the dark.

BANJI: *(Gives her another long look and roars in laughter.)*

Really, really? Now, that is interesting.

Why would you say that?

What gives you that impression?

BANKE: I am even surprised that you are asking me those questions.

BANJI: Why?

BANKE: Well, your recent modes of prayers It is unlike the type of prayers we have been saying in this home over the years.

BANJI: What kind of prayers were we saying before?

BANKE: You know, the orthodox prayers in the hymnals.

BANJI: Ah ha ...Well ... Let's say I have changed. Orthodox prayers beget orthodox results. I now have better understanding of God, heaven, hell and I intend to make heaven.

BANKE: But ... But ...

BANJI: But what?

BANKE: What of the spirits you have been casting out for over a month ... lying spirits? *(She sputters as if finally letting a weight off her chest.)*

BANJI: What about them?

BANKE: Is it something related to your business? Tell me, so that I can pray along with you. Share this new revelation with me. I feel left out.

(To BANKE's surprise, BANJI roars in laughter.)

BANJI: Business? You, join me in prayer? *(He chuckles.)*

What do you know about prayer?

Are you denying the lying spirits?

You can not perceive them?

As a matter of fact,

I think we should drop this discussion right now.

(He stands up from the table and walks away with a smug smile on his face. BANKE sits still with her head bent in consternation.)

LIGHTS FADE OUT.

Act II

Scene I

In the sanctuary of a church, a few lines of plastic chairs are occupied by fervently prayerful worshipers. A secluded place with a back wall painting of the image of Jesus ascending to heaven while his twelve disciples watch him prayerfully with hands clasped is demarcated from the space occupied by the worshipers. HOLY, HOLY, LORD GOD ALMIGHTY is inscribed in red over the arc that separates the brown wooden altar from the holies fenced off with brown wood. A hot prayer session is being rounded off and Banji briskly leads a queue that builds up fast to see the prophet in seclusion for counselling. The senior prophet, PROPHET AHIJAH, conducts the special counselling sessions. He looks queer with his moustache and in his hand-made white suit decorated with an array of multi coloured medals.

PROPHET AHIJAH: Ah! My brother in the Lord. *(He laughs heartily.)*

BANJI: Ah Prophet, well done, God bless you.

PROPHET AHIJAH: You are welcome, hope all is well?

BANJI: Ah, ehm... *(BANJI scratches his head as though unsure of himself.)* Prophet, there are developments.

PROPHET AHIJAH: *(He laughs heartily again.)* There should be... *(He laughs as though under some influence.)*

(Cautiously, BANJI chooses his words. He is apparently afraid of the strange prophet.)

BANJI: My wife is beginning to feel uneasy because of the prayer sessions and declarations.

PROPHET AHIJAH: I told you there would be effect. That is just stage one, are you casting out the spirits?

BANJI: Yes sir.

PROPHET AHIJAH: Yes! You need to! Now! *(He bangs the table with his hand, Banji is apparently startled whereas Prophet Ahijah seems to enjoy the fear he instils in him.)* Begin to declare: Restitution! Restitution! Restitution! You must retribute all that was stolen!

BANJI: Ha!

PROPHET AHIJAH: *(With a sparkle of mischief in his eye.)* You need to create an impossible situation; an impossible situation I say *(Lowering his voice in conspiracy.)*, if our plan must work and if you also want to be fulfilled. *(He raises his voice again.)* Declare it loud and clear: Restitution or hell!

BANJI: Hmmm ... *(Scratches his head dumbly.)* Okay Sir, But what if er, er ...?

PROPHET AHIJAH: What if? If? No ifs! No ifs! Just scream: RESTITUTION OR HELL. If she does not agree, the plan is perfect! Expose her! Charge her to court! Then send her away with the children!

BANJI: *(Dumbfounded.)* Ah – hmm ... yes Prophet. Thank you. *(Hands him a brown envelope.)*

PROPHET AHIJAH: Ah! *(Brimming with a wide smile that jerks his moustache in an awkward manner.)* Thank you, thank you. How old is she?

BANJI: Forty-nine.

PROPHET AHIJAH: And you?

BANJI: Fifty-five.

PROPHET AHIJAH: Ah! Hmmm! Good ...

BANJI: Why sir?

PROPHET AHIJAH: A fertile twenty-seven or thirty year old woman will suit our purpose (*Strokes his moustache.*) and our plans ... I have several of them in this assembly. I am speaking with them for you already, making your choice will be easy. Just make sure you dress well and bring your big car when coming to see me. Like a dashing young man. Hehehe ... You will regain, hehehe. (*He laughs.*) I declare: You will recover all the lost years. But (*He points a finger with a long nail at him.*), I need to fast on your behalf and pray on your behalf as I have been doing. Even you agree that you are seeing the rippling effects.

BANJI: Yes, Prophet.

PROPHET AHIJAH: Just make the resources available and I will pray and fast for you.

BANJI: Ah, I will. Thank you, I will be really grateful.

LIGHTS FADE OUT.

Scene II

BANJI, *alone in the bedroom, hums, sings and whistles to himself in ecstasy. He is apparently lost in fanciful thoughts.*

BANJI: Yes! I will also be happy ... (*Hums again and again ...*) My faith will work for me this time. (*Twirls round in a dance.*) I will no longer be sorrowful at heart and smile in pretence. I can no longer bear it. (*He sings.*)

Ope mi po
Jaburata o
Ope mipo
Ojo mi lo ju
Gbope mi,
Te'wo gbo'pemi
Te'wo gba ope mi...

I can envision my new life
Full of joy!
No longer living the lie
Yes I will scream it
RESTITUTION!
HELL FIRE!
RESTITUTION!

BLACKOUT.

Scene III

In SILE's house.

BANKE: Trust your children are fine? How are you faring generally?

SILE: Fine O! We are fine. What is the matter? You seem so troubled. The worry lines are etching deep into your beautiful face.

BANKE: Things are worse now! I am really, really now afraid it may be a mental condition. Sile, he now yells on the top of his voice: Restitution! Hell fire! His eyes aglow as if he is an explosive.

SILE: Heehh! You know I suggested that he might need medical help. Have you suggested going to the hospital for help to him.

BANKE: Hum? I nearly received a slap for suggesting it. He wouldn't hear of it! He claims he has never been more clear-minded in his entire life. You know, he seems happy in an unusual way. He, in fact, told me to get my head examined for refusing to understand what is going on.

SILE: Ehn? You are listening to him? He seems happy *ke*? Don't all stark naked mad people you see around seem happy in an unusual way? You must go see a psychotherapist on his behalf o! When will your children be home?

BANKE: Tomorrow, I have a dreadful feeling in me and I

worry about them coming home with him acting so strangely.

SILE: Ha! Let's go and see Dr Olaitan straight away. He is into psychosomatic therapy but he will surely help us. The children must not see their father in that state of mind, he needs help and urgently too. Though he may calm down once he sees his children.

BANKE: I hope so.

SILE: Anyhow let us go and see Dr Olaitan now. We can request for a female psychotherapist to come with us to observe him for a while. (BANKE *nods her head with a faraway look in her eyes.*)

BLACKOUT.

Scene IV

A few days to Christmas. The children return home from school in high spirits for the festivities. DUNNI and DUNNBI ADEBONAJO arrive in a chattered cab.

DUNNI: Moooom! *(She rushes in to hug her mother.)* I missed you so much. Where is Dad?

BANKE: I missed you too. We are fine; he has gone to see a friend who is bereaved. How were your exams?

DUNNI: Super fine, mom. Much to tell you but first of all, I heard that Mrs Oguntoyinbo's triplets are wedding this December and we are invited.

BANKE: Yes, it's true. Where is Dunnbi? Don't say you left him with the entire luggage you came with. *(Enter DUNNBI, a lithe young dark-complexioned undergraduate with two heavy travelling bags.)*

DUNNBI: Good afternoon Mom.

BANKE: What kept you so long? Was just coming out to find out what's keeping you.

DUNNBI: The driver was sorting out the change and the receipts for the company records.

BANKE: I see, you look healthier this end of semester.

DUNNBI: Really? Though I didn't suffer the usual malaria attack all through.

(He appears calmer than his boisterous brown-haired twin sister who is full of words.)

DUNNI: So mom, about the Oguntoyinbo wedding, what are the colours for the *aso ebi* and what are we wearing?

DUNNBI: That's the real reason you are interested in the Oguntoyinbo wedding. With the variety of *aso ebi* you have acquired, one would think you would be tired of collecting them by now.

DUNNI: How many have I ...

(Enter BANJI, with his brief case. The children run to him to hug him, he barely responds. He is deliberately cold and unwelcoming.)

DUNNBI: Good afternoon Dad.

DUNNI: Welcome back dad.

BANJI: Oh! You are back? Welcome. I'm sure you are both fine.

DUNNI AND DUNNBI: Yes sir.

BANKE: Welcome back, how was it?

BANJI: Tough.

BANKE: *Pele*, I can imagine.

DUNNI: So mom, about the *aso ebi*, will the youths wear a fabric different from the adults? That is the new vogue. I have also discovered a new designer that works on unisex designs and can make something unique for Dunnbi and me.

DUNNBI: Mom, don't buy me the *aso ebi*; in fact I won't attend the wedding. I need an external disk to back up my data. So Dunni is speaking for herself.

(BANJI observes the gathering initially with indifference and subsequently with growing indignation. Unable to stomach his irritation, he goes off in a huff.)

DUNNI: Mom, what's wrong with Dad?

DUNNBI: Yep! He was rather quiet.

BANKE: Really? (BANKE *shifts uncomfortably in her seat.*) I thought I told you he went for a funeral service. It was a busy week for him. He must be tired or something.

BLACKOUT

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Scene V

Kwara State. JOHNSON and ROMOKE walk in from outside. ROMOKE is a lady in her twenties and JOHNSON's appearance is that of a successful young business executive.

JOHNSON: So I returned from France last year to resume work in my father's company.

ROMOKE: Very nice. You have lived a very interesting life.

JOHNSON: Really? *(She nods.)* If you say so. *(He smiles broadly.)* You are such a quiet person, I scarcely know anything about you since we got talking yesterday. Now that you know everything about me won't you tell me a bit about you? *(She smiles.)*

ROMOKE: My life has not been as interesting.

JOHNSON: Oh really! But tell me about yourself all the same.

ROMOKE: I was born in the East, I schooled in the North and I now work in the Southwest.

JOHNSON: Wow! I like that. I hope you are enjoying the convention. Are you also lodged in this hotel?

ROMOKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: I'm in room 104. Will you join me for dinner in my room or I join you in yours?

ROMOKE: Don't come to mine, I will come to yours.

JOHNSON: Really? *(He studies her face intently.)*

ROMOKE: Yes.

JOHNSON: Time?

ROMOKE: 6.45p.m.

JOHNSON: Okay, let's go in for the last session. I will expect you.

LIGHTS FADE

(Lights falls on ROMOKE pacing around the room. She nervously twists her hands and repeats the action of covering her face with her hands.)

ROMOKE: Oh God. Help me. You know I don't want to do this. I don't know if I have a choice ... I can't even tell anyone because I promised him I won't. I don't want to do this, but I love him so much. *(She sobs and covers her face with her hands. She checks her wristwatch, nods her head in firm resolve, cleanses her face with a face towel, gets up and picks her bag.)* I will do it.

BLACKOUT

Act III

Scene I

BANJI *paces the room quietly, ruminating over what he is about to do. He shrugs his shoulder as though his mind is made up. He rouses BANKE from sleep.*

BANJI: Banke, I have something to discuss with you, I hope you are awake now?

BANKE: *(Rubs her eyes and sits up.)* What? Hope you are fine. *(She asks, innocently alarmed.)*

BANJI: *(Sharply.)* Yes! I am fine and this is not about me. I have told you several times that I am fine and mentally sound. It is not about me, it is about you and your children.

BANKE: 'Your children'? or 'our children'?

BANJI: Quiet woman! This will be easier for both of us if you listen to me rather than correct my grammar.

BANKE: Oh! Alright. *(She nods meekly.)*

BANJI: I have been reflecting over numerous issues in the past few months. I have come to a conclusion that I have been living in sin and in deception since I married you. Those have been the reasons for my stagnation as well as the cause of my delayed blessings.

BANKE: Me? Delayed blessings? Stagnation?

BANJI: Yes. (*He looks away.*) Since I joined the new assembly where I worship, I have come to a better understanding of the will of God. That we should not solve problems for Him but have faith in Him. Our inability to have children as a couple when we got married is not peculiar to us, but we took wrong steps and that has to be corrected with immediate effect!

BANKE: Ha! Ehn? (*She leaps up from the bed.*) I can't believe my ears!

BANJI: You'd better believe them. I have destroyed the lying spirits in this home and every deceit has been shattered spiritually.

BANKE: How?

BANJI: I still can't believe how I married such an unintelligent woman! You ask how? You witnessed the prayers and the midnight declarations, didn't you? (*He asked with irritation.*)

BANKE: So?

BANJI: Now, It is time for restitution so that our eternity can be guaranteed.

BANKE: Restitution? What restitution? What does restitution mean?

BANJI: The return of stolen items to the owners after genuine repentance. You have to return the stolen seeds to the owner.

BANKE: Stolen seeds?

BANJI: Yes, the children. It is not too late for God to bless us with our own children. But for that to happen, you must return them to their rightful father.

BANKE: Ye! (*Bursting into tears with her hands on her*

head.) Ha! You can't do this! You can't mean this! You can't do this! So was this what all the prayers were for? The curses and the spirits? It was about me and the children. (BANJI *faces the wall.*) Is this the word of God? Have you forgotten so soon that you swore me into secrecy ... You pleaded with me to do it, you swore me into secrecy. And I have never uttered a word of it to anyone. I did it for you, for us, for our love ... Banji, (*She goes on her knees.*) If I have offended you, punish me in other ways if you can't forgive me, don't ... but don't ...

BANJI: It's enough! The word of God is of greater value and I am following it. Restitution! And it has to be now! If you don't agree, you will leave me no option but to take you to court! (*He exits the room furiously. Bewildered, BANKE collapses on the floor with her head in her hands.*)

BANKE: Where do I go and where do I start? What do I tell the children, and my parents? Could he have forgotten so soon when I remember it just as if it was yesterday? (*Lights fade on her and lights fall on the other side of the stage to reveal a young couple, apparently BANKE and BANJI in their younger days. BANKE holds a piece of paper and weeps.*)

BANKE: The result is the same. (*She sobs. BANJI despairingly comforts her.*)

BANJI: Is it?

BANKE: There is no hope for us. It's zero percent sperm count.

BANJI: Banke, don't worry, there must be a way out.

BANKE: Banji, there is no hope for us. Your mother is already

saying things and becoming more hostile. Particularly because she thinks I am the one with the problem.

BANJI: Don't worry, I can handle her. All I need is your cooperation. I have an idea that will work. I love you dearly, I don't want to lose you. You have brought me so much joy and fulfilment. (*He cups her face in his hands and wipes away her tears.*) Stop crying, don't cry, all will be well. Trust me; I swear, I will never leave you, I will never ever forget your sacrifices. I will forever be faithful. (*He walks a few paces away from her, bending his head reflectively.*)

BANKE: But your mother told me she is coming to visit again next week, what will I do? What will I tell her again this month? (*She bursts into tears.*) I am so scared.

BANJI: I told you not to worry about her. I will handle her. Just cooperate with me. We will travel before the end of this week.

BANKE: Travel? Why? Travel where?

BANJI: To Ilorin or Niger State.

BANKE: Why?

BANJI: (*He rushes to her side and holds her hands.*) Please don't ask questions, just trust me. You need to be away a few days before your ovulation, I want you to attend an international corporate convention coming up at Kwara Hotels next week. The participants will be going to Niger State for a symposium on Friday 15th, which is next weekend.

BANKE: What does my ovulation have to do with the international corporate convention? Is it on infertility-related issues?

BANJI: Please don't ask questions, you will have to trust

me absolutely on this one. There will be responsible, good-looking and young fertile men that will instantly fall in love with you there.

BANKE: (*With alarm.*) No!

BANJI: I know you are a decent woman with a high sense of responsibility. I won't count it as unfaithfulness because you are doing it for me.

BANKE: No! No! No! No! I can't. I won't!

(*BANJI pulls her to a chair, sits her down and kneels in front of her.*)

BANJI: Please Banke, save me, from myself; save our love; save our marriage. Just this once, I know it will work. (*She continues to weep.*) Please. I will drive you down, and lodge in another hotel in town. Just disguise, do not reveal your name or identity. There will be a responsible man who can father our child. I will continue to love and cherish you and the precious seed that you will bring, it will be the bond and the seal to our life of bliss. I know I will be successful; I will take you and our precious child to South Africa, Asia and all the places I intend to extend my business globally. (*She keeps sobbing profusely.*) You will own all I have. All, I promise. But, you must be careful not to reveal your identity to anyone so that we can disappear without trace. That is the plan and I know that it will work by God's grace.

BLACKOUT

(Lights slowly fall on BANKE rising sorrowfully from the floor.)

BANKE: How? How could I have been so foolish? How? How? I should have left him, I would have been better off. Where do I go? Where do I start? What do I tell the children? Their father? I can't even face him.

BLACKOUT

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Scene II

A gathering of the ADEBONAJOS; siblings and relatives of BANJI.

BABA LASEENI: ... that is why I have summoned this meeting. Banke called me about two weeks ago and revealed the gory details. She pleaded with me to talk some sense into his head. I visited him early in the morning last week Saturday. I advised him and told him the consequences of what he had done and the far-reaching consequences for him and his entire family if he goes to court or makes it public knowledge. He remained adamant. Iyabeji called me yesterday that he has filed for a divorce and she received the letter yesterday morning.

GBEMI: Ha! I can't believe that aunty could have done such a thing, such gullibility.

SISI DELE: For the sake of love? Whose love?

MAMA LAKANMI: One shouldn't actually pity her; it was joint deception. Now it's blown up in her face. Come to think of it, *Broda* is an ingrate o! I still can't imagine it ... she suffered so much ... was always accused by Mama in those early days of their marriage as being a male pawpaw tree.

GBEMI: Mama called us several times to deliberate on it, even ways to send her packing, while it was *Broda* Banji that was infertile all the while. It is a pity that Mama is not alive to see how wrong she had been.

MAMA LAKANMI: *Beeni*, Iya Ibeji stooped as low as to source for men to sire her children in disguise, with *Broda's* consent. Now he is discontented, he wants his own children. (*Hisses.*)

SISI DELE: I am surprised she didn't mention it to anyone. They always created an impression that they were so much in love and had no problems.

BABA LASEENI: Did he not think of the consequences? He was only concerned with saving his face? Why did he not tell us, it has been over twenty years. It is only human that he will want his own children or feel cheated with the prevailing arrangement.

GBEMI: To imagine that she is faced with a legal suit and *Broda* insisting she takes the children to a man who never knew they existed ... in fact ...

MAMA LAKANMI: *Beeni*, she claims not to know the father of the children, I doubt that. She knows him, but how does one show up with fully grown up children and present them to a man who never knew of their existence – a set of twins for that matter.

SISI DELE: *Abi o*, double trouble. I agree that it is wise for her to say she doesn't know the father o!

MAMA LAKANMI: Baba Laseeni, you are our *olori ebi*, whatever you say is final. Since Banji has refused to heed your counsel, we do not have much choice than to watch him as he sets the stage for his ruin. His image, his business and especially his family will suffer when the deception becomes public knowledge. (*Lights fade out.*)

Scene III

SILE *sits crossed-legged glancing at a health magazine, BANKE slips in quietly. SILE rises and drops the magazine and rushes to her friend's side, hugging her and searching her face with scrutiny.*

SILE: I've been calling you; I have been to the house on several occasions. Is it true? Is what I'm hearing true?

BANKE: Yes, that was our secret. It's true (*Sobs, hugs her friend.*) I did it for us, for him, to save our marriage.

SILE: The children?

BANKE: Devastated, shattered, yet to reconcile the issues or face the implications and consequences.

SILE: Their father? Does he know?

BANKE: No, he wasn't to know, Banji and I planned it. He doesn't even know my name. (*Covers face.*) I can't face him.

SILE: Hummm ... I know, you know I won't judge you. I will always be here for you and the children. But ... What did Banji want? His own children? From you? Or from another woman? (*BANKE nods.*) Post-menopause? After making such sacrifices? He is asking for the impossible.

BANKE: He is in court in spite of all persuasions. He wants us to leave and leave we will. (*Lights fade out.*)

Epilogue

Two years later. Lights come up on a beautiful and elegantly dressed woman pacing up and down the living room of the Adebónajós.

EYIWUNMI: This is not what I bargained for. Ha! Not what I bargained for at all! Over two years! Or can he be fake? No! *Won o ni fe te! Won o ni fe te!* All the prophecies ... humm! All the prayers. All the monies ... all the testimonies I heard and the ones he shared with me ... it must be true or ... it should be true ...
(BANJI enters from the side of the door.)

BANJI: Hello dear, *(Smiling with arms outstretched.)* I've bought the tickets and we have two window seats; nice and exclusive. We will be able to see the Red Sea before we take the connecting flight in Egypt.

EYIWUNMI: *(Indifferently.)* Really? *(He gazes at her as if just observing her mood.)*

BANJI: Are you fine? You don't look alright.

EYIWUNMI: Oh, I am alright. By the way, I resigned my job today.

BANJI: *(Alarmed.)* Why?

EYIWUNMI: What do you mean 'why'?

BANJI: I thought you told me a few days ago how happy and fulfilled you are with your job and how you intend to make a successful career...?

EYIWUNMI: (*Spitefully.*) Hey, hey, hey! It is enough! I know what I said and what I did not say ... Did I hear you right? Happy? Fulfilled? Did I hear you right? Two years have passed us by and I have never missed my period. Not once. Yet you speak of fulfilment ... my mind is running wild and you better do something about it.

BANJI: Oh, I see ... Okay, it's alright. (*He scratches his head in confusion but simultaneously struggles to be in charge of the situation.*) That's not a problem at all. I have also been thinking about it. (*He unknits his tie and pulls it down casually.*) Can we have dinner?

EYIWUNMI: Dinner? (*She rises to her feet, pulls off her head gear, and ties it around her waist.*) Dinner? Did I hear you ask for dinner? What are we 'dinnering' about? I'm talking to you about having children to carry in my hands and bear on my knees and you dare ask for dinner? Ha! Banji! You don't know me at all, at all ... (*She says wagging a well manicured fingernail in his face.*)

BANJI: Calm down ... it's not as if we can have the children tonight, I actually wanted us to discuss the matter over dinner. (*She sits on the edge of the chair, fixing a strange look at BANJI who looks around and calls the domestic hands.*) Nympha! Nympha! Adele! Adele! By the way, where is everyone?

EYIWUNMI: (*Caustically.*) Sacked. I sent both of them away.

BANJI: You what?

EYIWUNMI: Yes, I did.

BANJI: What do you mean? I have tolerated this nonsense long enough. How could you send them away without informing me? Who is the husband in this house?

EYIWUNMI: Husband; that's the word! Yes, husband! Can

we now get back to the main issue? I need to know why I haven't got pregnant despite all my efforts since we got married.

BANJI: Efforts. How do you mean? Are you not the woman? You should answer that question, and besides you should know what to do. I have also been patiently waiting for you to tell me you are pregnant.

EYIWUNMI: I too have run out of patience, and I am also tired of roaming around for medical help, popping fertility pills and supplements without results. I have also noticed that you seem rather unruffled.

BANJI: Unruffled? After spending millions furnishing the nursery for the expected children? Can you tell me why you have been roaming hospitals? You must be doing that because something is wrong with you. In that case I must be really unfortunate marrying you.

EYIWUNMI: What? What did I hear you say? *(She walks up to him and pulls him up by the collar.)* You are just about to discover how unfortunate you are. I will show you what stuff I am made of. Now is time for you to go for a full medical test which you have been avoiding. Yes, now! *(He shakes himself free in indignation.)* I'm certain from all the tests I've run that there is nothing wrong with me; so you also need a check as well. Mind you, I am tired of you and your annoying gifts. Stop distracting me with the new cars and holidays abroad. *(Waving her hand threateningly in his face.)* You had better cancel the flight you just booked. I told you I wasn't in the mood to travel.

BLACKOUT

(In PROPHET AHIJAH'S sanctuary. The usual gyrations that symbolise spiritual activity are on at fever pitch. BANJI and EYIWUNMI enter after a few minutes. The prophet is a bit alarmed but he fakes a confident smile.)

PROPHET AHIJAH: Ah my brethren, you are looking so radiant! My brother, you are really taking good care of my daughter.

BANJI: Good evening, Prophet Ahijah.

EYIWUNMI: Good evening, *Alagba*.

PROPHET AHIJAH: You are welcome. I thought you were abroad; that is why we have not been seeing you.

BANJI: Em ... thank you. We are back now.

EYIWUNMI: You'd better tell him why we are here ... in fact show him the result ... show him.

(BANJI hesitantly brings out a piece of paper neatly tucked in his bible... PROPHET AHIJAH takes the report from him and carefully places a pair of glasses on his nose and examines the report with dismay.)

EYIWUNMI: You see? Zero sperm count! Prophet, *Alagba!* What have you to say? We have been married for two years. Hun! Prophet, Hun! *Alagba!* Is this the life of bliss you promised me? Is this all the money you charged could procure? With all the fasting and prayer, sacrifices paid for? You give me this thing ... that ... *Alagba!* You'd better have a solution or else ...

BANJI: Prophet, (BANJI looks imploringly at PROPHET AHIJAH.) say something. You saw the vision. You prayed. You told me God sent you to me. You told me I will have children. You told me to carry out restitutions. You

told me to go to court. You told me to remarry ...
Prophet Ahijah, I believed you and I did everything
you told me God told you. Prophet ...

PROPHET AHIJAH: (*Clears his throat and looks up from the report he has been studying all the while.*) Yes, I prayed!
Yes, I fasted! Yes, I prophesied! But I am not God! I told
you God, not I, would do it!

EYIWUNMI: Enh! (*She clutches her head with both hands.*)

BANJI: Ha Prophet! I am finished! (*Lights fade out with sombre music in the background.*)

THE END

Glossary

List of Yoruba words, phrases and sentences

Ore	Friend
Abi?	<i>Abi is a fluid and elastic word that seems to take the form the speaker chooses in this context it means "At least"?</i>
<i>Olorun oni je ki a ri ibi o.</i>	<i>May the Almighty God prevent us from seeing evil</i>
Amin	Amen
<i>Aso ebi</i>	Attires selected to be worn by relatives at ceremonies or parties has since become a part of the national identity of Nigerians.
Broda	A honorific manner of referring to an older brother
Abi o	In this instance abi o is consensual or in agreement to the previous statement.
<i>Olori ebi</i>	Head/Leader of our clan
Won o ni fe te! Won o ni fe te!	He/They won't want to be disgraced!
Alagba	Elder and in this case prophet
Oluwa oooooo!	Almighty God!
Gbami l'owo ese!	Deliver me from sins.

Ese igba aimo!	Sins from the days of ignorance
Ati ese amomoda.	Along with sins committed with deliberateness!
Idariji oooooo!	Forgiveness!

Songs and their translations

Ogun oso o	Forces of wizardry
Ori mi sa	Flee before me
Ogun esu o	Demonic hosts
ko sa wo 'le	are subsumed underneath the earth

O wo, o wo o	Falls down flat, Falls down flat
Ogun esu ti	demonic attacks have fallen down
wo lu 'le	flat
O ti wo,	
o ti wo	It's fallen, yes, it has fallen down flat!

Esu gbe,	The devil is doomed!
Esu gbe o,	Say, the devil is done for!
Abuku kan Satani	Satan is Disgraced!
Esu gbe o	The devil is doomed!

Emi Mimo l'agba,	The Holy Spirit is the elder. (The Ancient of Days)
Emi Mimo lo ga,	The Holy Spirit is the boss. (He's in charge, controls all)
Emi Mimo l'agba	The Holy Spirit is the elder. (The Ancient of Days)

o ju baba baba
to bi mi lo.

Most revered and more advanced
than my grand father (possessing
more power and having greater
significance than ancestral spirits).

Olorun Agbaye o!

God of the universe

Olorun Agbaye o!

God of the universe

Olorun Agbaye o!

God of the universe

You are mighty!

*Sebi iwo lo fi oju
orun se a so bo'ra.*

*Are you not the one that spreadeth
the Skies as a covering*

*Sebi iwo lo fi oju
orun se a so bo'ra.*

*Are you not the one that spreadeth
the Skies as a covering*

Olorun Agbaye o!

God of the universe

You are mighty!

Ni inu ile mi !

In my home!

You are mighty!

Ni inu aye mi!

In my life!

You are mighty!

Ni inu ile mi...

In my home!

You are mighty oooooooh!

*(He repeats the song a number of times before he starts
praying.)*

Ope mi po Jaburata o

My gratitude is plenteous

Ope mi po.

My gratitude is plenteous

Ojo mi lo ju

So plenteous, that I marvel

Te'wo gbo'pemi

Receive my thanksgiving (with open
hands)

Te'wo gbo'pemi

Receive my thanksgiving (with open
hands)

Te'wo gba ope mi... Receive my thanksgiving (with open hands)

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