

Morountodun
(I have found a sweet thing)

FEMI OSOFISAN

CAST

The Director
Titubi
Deputy Superintendent of Police Salami
Police Corporal
Alhaja Kabirat
Alhaji Buraimoh
Lawyer Isaac
Lati
Warder
Baba
Marshal
Bogunde
Kokondi
Mama Kayode
Mosun
Wura
Molade
Moremi
Niniola
Oronmiyon
Warrior
Titubi's followers
Drummers
Yeye-Oba group

One

(Stage opens on the Dressing Area, marked out by mats and wooden frames, etc, of an evidently ambulant and somewhat amateurish theatre company. A bench. Tables and stools, and possibly a table with a long mirror. Lockers. A flurry of activity: actors making up, trying costumes, reading script, rehearsing gestures, miming some of the later actions in the play. Enter the DIRECTOR, rubbing his hands.)

Director Hurry up. Hurry up. Play opens in five minutes.

An Actor Fair house today?

Director Fair. Better than in the last town we stopped.

Another Actor And no signs of trouble?

Director No signs yet. But don't worry.

Another Actor That's what you said yesterday. Yet we were almost lynched.

Director This time I've sent for the police.

Another Actor The police! Is that a joke?

Director Please hurry up. We're doing nothing illegal. We can seek police protection as much as anybody.

Another Actor I hope you're right. Yesterday was hell.

Director There'll be no disturbance tonight. *(He watches them for a while, then steps out of place, and approaches the audience.)* Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We will soon be starting. But while the actors prepare, I will try and give you a rapid summary of our play tonight. The play, as you will soon see, starts in the year 1969, the month of September. That year, if you remember, the civil war was raging in the east of our country, but this play has nothing to do with that. It deals with another war, the one that was later to be popularly known as the Agbekoya uprising, in which ordinary farmers, in the west of the country, rose up and confronted the state. Maybe you remember? Illiterate farmers, whom we had all along thought to be docile, peace-loving, if not even stupid, suddenly took to arms and began to fight against the government! Two, three, four ... seven months! And the war was still hot and bitter. Farmers dying, policemen falling, soldiers going and not returning. Were they not all our kinsmen? If we could not speak about the war in the east, because of stiff decrees, would we also be silent about the one in the west? And suppose another should start in the north? Well, we decided not to be silent. We decided to go and rouse people up by doing a play on the subject. *(Noises begin, from the entrances. He looks up briefly, then continues.)* We decided to do a play about it, and take it round to all open places. And that was when our troubles began. *(Noises rise again, but subside as attendants are heard talking to crowd. DIRECTOR takes out a handkerchief and wipes his brow.)* We thought we were contributing towards the process of finding a solution. But before we knew it, we had become part of the problem. *(Noises grow. The actors freeze, anxious. The DIRECTOR fights to continue.)*

As I was saying ... the night of ... (*The noise drowns his voice now.*) Please excuse me ... I'll go and see ... (*He walks quickly towards the main entrance but is soon violently pushed back by a shouting, near-hysterical mob, consisting mainly of women bearing placards and some handbills which they begin to distribute round the auditorium. They are attended by a couple of drummers who are apparently trying to make money out of the occasion.*)

(*Full lights return, flooding the entire theatre. Most of the actors on stage have quickly sneaked out. Now we can read some of the inscriptions carried out by the agitators* DOWN WITH AGITATORS! WIPE OUT THE INSANE LOVERS OF POVERTY! AWAY WITH HYPOCRITES! CRUSH THE PEASANT REVOLT! CLEAN THE CITY OF LOUTS! DEATH TO THE JOBLESS! NO FOREIGN IDEOLOGIES! TO EARN IS HUMAN! WHO DOES NOT WANT MONEY? *etc.* *The intruders are also chanting.*)

Stand! Stand!
 Fight to be rich
 For happiness:
 Oh fight for your right
 To rise in life!

With good luck and stubbornness
 With sweat, sweat, and cleverness
 De - ter - mi - na - tion!
 Ma - ni - pu - la - tion!
 Oh fight for your share And do not care!

(*A little group, superbly dressed, with lots of jewellery and make-up, and wearing conspicuously the Moremi necklace then in vogue – a little gold dagger, surrounded with golden nuggets – takes over the stage. Leading them is TITUBI, a pretty, sensual, and obviously self-conscious woman.*)

Titubi (*Addressing the audience.*) Look at me. Go on, feast your eyes. Am I not good to look at? Ehn? So what is wrong with being rich? (*Her speech throughout will be punctuated by rousing calls, ovations, etc, from her followers.*) So there's a peasant rebellion. And then? What have we got to do with it? Is it a sin to be rich? Ahn'ahn! It's disgusting! Night after night! Day after day! Lies! Insults! In the newspapers! On the radio. On the television, nko? And then here they come with a play! But it's got to stop! This is our country too, and we shall not run away! I, Titubi, daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, I am stopping this play tonight! And if you're wise, you'll go and return your tickets now and collect your money back. (*Hisses.*)

Director (*Struggling vainly.*) Madam ... please. Excuse me –

Titubi Shut your mouth! Who are you?

Director Please, madam ... I I am the director of this play, and –

Titubi Oh so it's you! We've been looking for you. (*The mob seizes him roughly. A couple of slaps.*) No. No. Beat him ... gently. Don't make the

useless man into a hero. Where are your actors?

Director (*Shouting.*) Gone for the police! The police!

Titubi Very good. We'll soon have all of you in prison.

Director We shall see. We shall see. We are respectable people. And all the men there, who have bought their tickets –

Titubi Nobody will watch any show tonight. Either we stop it all, or we burn the place down. But nobody's going to watch anything here tonight. We'll all wait for the police.

Director But why? Who are you? What have we done to you?

Titubi It's now that you will ask. You go round the place, shelling us with abuse. Slanders! Yet (*Derisively.*) – 'Who are you? What have we done to you?'

Director I assure you there must be a mistake. We've never abused anybody.

Titubi No? Help him revive his memory. (*A couple of slaps again.*) Gently, gently, don't leave any mark on the wretched man. We have respect for the law, even though the law is a donkey. These beggars have been riding it with glee down our spine all these days. And it is enough. We've been bruised enough. And enough of pretending not to notice! We didn't ask anybody's father not to be rich, did we?

Crowd No-ooh!

Titubi Did we see anybody's grandmother trading and overturn her wares?

Crowd No-ooh!

Titubi Did we send locusts to anybody's farm?

Crowd No-oooh!

Titubi Don't we pay our own tax?

Crowd Yesssss!

Titubi So in what way are we responsible for the farmers' uprising? Ehn?

What does our being rich have to do with it? Or is it only when we wear rags that we qualify to breathe the air? Tell me, Mr Director! (*Slaps him.*)

You mount these stupid plays, calling everybody a thief, simply because we work and sweat and use our brain. You want to say you don't like money, abi? If I offer you cash now, hard, glowing cash, you won't dance for me? Ehn? Look at it! (*An assistant opens out her handbag. She dips into it and brings out a handful of currency notes, which she begins to paste disdainfully on the forehead of the DIRECTOR, who is now covered in sweat.*) Money! See, you're shivering already at the touch of it. It's given you a hard-on. Dance, *ijimerei* Dance for me! (*She starts the rousing song again, and her followers join. Again and again, clearly intoxicated now, she dips into the bag and flings out more money with increasing frenzy. There begins a furious scramble for the money, in which the DIRECTOR finally joins. The drummers too are very active.*) Yeeesss! I have money and I can enslave you with it! I can buy all of your ringworm-infested actors if I choose. Aaahhhhh.

(*The piercing sound of a police siren, outside. Sounds of car doors banging. Noise of boots. Then a loud blast on the whistle. Steps approaching. Enter a Police Officer – actually a DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT – in mufti, accompanied by a*

CORPORAL in full riot gear; shield, tear gas gun and canisters, etc. Among the crowd a moment of frozen indecision, and then – panic. Everybody runs out through various exits, in disarray, leaving *TITUBI*, and the *DIRECTOR* who is still on his haunches collecting the scattered money. The *CORPORAL* quickly holds him.)

Superintendent Is this the leader, ma'am?

Titubi Yes.

Corporal Got him! With stolen money too! You didn't think it wise to run, abi? You heard the law approaching, and you dared to wait.

Director But ... but ...

Corporal Silence! I gave you your chance to beat it. I shouted from a good distance. The others took the cue, and ran, but you, all you could do was offer your yansh. Well, the law's going to kick it!

Superintendent Take him away and lock him up. We'll take his statement tomorrow. And the name of his comrades. Madam, sorry for all this palaver. I was on a routine visit to the station when your actors came. My name is Deputy Superintendent Salami.

Titubi (*Taking his hand.*) Pleased to meet you.

Superintendent Thugs are all over the place nowadays. We try our best, but we cannot always predict where or in what shape they'll show up. But don't worry, I promise you there won't be any more disturbance tonight. Please continue your play.

Director But, officer ... Superintendent ... I am the director of the play!

Superintendent I beg your pardon?

Titubi Don't listen to him.

Director I sent for you. This woman led the rioters here.

Corporal Shut up your mouth. You think we can't recognise a rioter when we see one, eh? Slandering a decent woman. Look, come quietly with me now or –

Director But I swear to you that. Oh God, where are these actors? Listen – (*Casting about desperately, his eyes light upon the audience.*) – Ask them! They'll tell you.

Superintendent (*After a moment's thought.*) Madam, is it true what he says?

Titubi (*Arrogantly.*) What does he say?

Superintendent That you are the intruder here? That you brought the mob?

Titubi Do I look like someone who would lead a mob?

Director She's lying! She –

Corporal Shut up and come with me now, or I'll lose my patience.

Superintendent Madam, I want the truth.

Titubi Well, I did. I led them here.

Corporal What!

Titubi But they're not rioters. They're ordinary decent citizens. Some even more decent than you.

Superintendent You came to disrupt the play?

Titubi We came to stop it.

Superintendent May I ask why?

Corporal (*Looking at the DIRECTOR malevolently.*) He probably caused it.

Titubi Exactly, Corporal.

Superintendent Explain.

Titubi Ask him.

Superintendent I'm asking you. (*To CORPORAL.*) And you, release the man.

Titubi Please don't use that tone with me, Superintendent. If you'd been doing your work properly – the work you're paid for out of our taxes, remember? – I wouldn't be here.

Superintendent Not bloody likely.

Titubi And watch your language with me, Salami or whatever your name is! (*The CORPORAL, indignant, visibly changes sides.*) I wasn't bred in the gutter.

Superintendent I am still waiting for your explanation.

Titubi And I said ask him. He put up this show. They come here night after night and throw bricks at us –

Director But that's –

Superintendent I think this is enough. Madam, I appeal to you, please leave the stage now.

Titubi And will the show go on or not?

Superintendent Madam, don't force me to put you under arrest.

Titubi What? Let me hear that again.

Superintendent At least until the play's over.

Titubi (*Laughs.*) Here are my wrists. Bring out your handcuffs. (*The CORPORAL hesitates, looking at the officer.*) Go on, what are you waiting for? Snap them on. (*Laughs, strutting.*) How many markets do you know in this town, you who call yourself Salami. Ehn, or are you too busy salaaming to look around you? This town is one long chain of markets, a roaring world of tough, fearless women. And do you know whose name, all alone, rules over all these women? Do you know or shall I tell you? If I open my mouth, and utter one single cry of pain, one call for help, now, the entire city will be in cinders this time tomorrow. You hear? You understand, salami mouth? Hurry up and snap on your handcuffs.

Corporal Woman, if –

Superintendent Ah yes, that's what I was trying to recollect all along. Your face. Of course I recognise it. You're Titubi, the spoilt daughter of Alhaja Kabirat, head of the market women.

Titubi Whether I am spoilt or not, you'll see tomorrow when you get to the office. You hear? Your superiors crawl to my dog-kennel. Not even ten of you can arrest me.

Superintendent All right, if that's the way you want it. Take her in! (*The CORPORAL steps forward with handcuffs.*)

Titubi Dare it, you smelling pig. You offspring of some teak-laden litter at the back of a latrine! Dare to put your filthy hand on me and all of your

wretched family will never finish paying for it.

Superintendent Wait. (*Sniggers.*) Words are cheap, eh?

Titubi Words can break the likes of you.

Superintendent I congratulate you. Gestures are large, when the wind alone is the obstacle.

Titubi Don't think you're clever. Every cobra is poisonous, whatever its gloss.

Superintendent The hunter brings home a grass-cutter, and beats his chest. What will happen to the elephant-killer?

Titubi The shoulder is not smaller is it, simply because it has chosen to wear a low-necked blouse?

Superintendent Oh the cat has claws. The tiger has claws. But what feat of courage is it when the tiger goes up to the cat and says hm, your anus is smelling?

Titubi Enough. I can see you have some wit. You missed your calling. You should be making money selling cloth in one of my mother's stores at Gbagi.

Superintendent I am going to arrest you, my young lady. Go on, Corple! (*The CORPORAL, with determined struggle, and aided by the DIRECTOR, finally snaps the handcuffs on.*) But I'd like to tell you something. I'd like to say how terribly impressed I am by this show you've put up here. So you are Titubi, the Amazon going to war! You're wealthy, your mother owns the town, and you're going to defend with your very life all that possession. But tell me, if you're really serious, if you really want to save your fatarsed class, why haven't you offered your services to crush this peasant revolt? You know there is a battle going on now, don't you? That the farmers and villagers around us have risen in open rebellion, and are marching down upon the city? When they arrive, who do you think will be the first target? But you don't volunteer to help in fighting them. No. This mere wooden platform is your battlefield. Shit! This is where you come to put up a gallant fight, wasting my time! (*Spits.*) Go on. Titu-Titu, the magnificent Moremi of the sixties! Make your show, let them clap for you! Destroy the theatre! Burn it down! They'll put your name in the national archives! *Shi-oooh!* Corple, remove the handcuffs! Go on, free her! Give free rein to her prowess. (*The CORPORAL does so.*) Let's go, man. I'm going to sleep.

(*He begins to march off, the CORPORAL following. The actors have gathered, jeering. TITUBI seems about to collapse, sobbing. Then suddenly she looks up and calls.*)

Titubi Salami! (*SUPERINTENDENT stops, without turning round.*) Salami, suppose I do volunteer?

Superintendent (*Turns now.*) What?

Titubi I said, suppose I offer to fight the peasants?

Superintendent You're not finished with your pranks for tonight?

Titubi It's their leader you've not been able to capture, isn't it? That's why the war drags on?

Superintendent Well...

Titubi (*Hard.*) Yes or no?

Superintendent Well, yes ... and no. Their leader proves elusive, but –

Titubi But?

Superintendent He may not really exist.

Titubi He may not exist! A phantom leader!

Superintendent I *mean* ... there may not be just one leader, maybe a group of leaders ...

Titubi But someone leads that group?

Superintendent Actually –

Titubi You're a liar, Salami. You know he exists. And you know his name. You admitted it in your interview with the press last week.

Superintendent Okay, so I admitted it. They call him Marshal.

Titubi I can bring him to you.

Superintendent You? (*Laughs.*) Corple!

Titubi Don't laugh, Salami.

Superintendent (*Looks at her, stops laughing.*) My word, I do believe you are serious.

Titubi Two weeks. Give me only two weeks.

Superintendent This is a dream? (*Rubbing his eyes.*)

Titubi Two weeks. And I'll bring him here, on his knees.

Superintendent What the entire Police Force failed to –

Titubi Is that why you're afraid? That I might succeed?

Superintendent (*After a pause.*) What do you want?

Titubi Can you arrange for me to be captured?

Superintendent What!

Titubi That's all the help I'll require from you.

Superintendent You're not ... crazy?

Titubi Two weeks, I said. We've wasted five minutes of it.

Superintendent (*After a pause.*) All right, girl. I'm going to call your bluff. An idea has just struck me. Follow me ... to prison.

Titubi Prison?

Superintendent Yes. That's where it's all going to begin. Come, I'll explain it all to you ...

(They draw aside and the SUPERINTENDENT begins to talk. The CORPORAL goes out and returns with a prison gown. TITUBI steps aside and changes into the gown. The CORPORAL collects her old clothes, including her jewellery. But she refuses to remove the necklace. The CORPORAL looks at the officer, who replies with shrug. The CORPORAL goes out with her old clothes and reappears in WARDER'S uniform.

Meanwhile, on stage, the actors re-arrange the furniture of their Dressing Area, singing a prison work song. The set now approximates to a prison cell. They salute the officer with the mock song of prisoners, and go out.

The SUPERINTENDENT leads TITUBI into the cell followed by the WARDER.)

Superintendent You understand?

Titubi Yes. I'll wait.

(As the officer leaves – Blackout, except for a single spotlight from which the DIRECTOR now speaks.)

Two

Director And so that's it, ladies and gentlemen. We came here to do a play, a simple play. But History – or what some of you call Chance or Fortune – has taken over the stage. And it will play itself out, whether we like it or not. All we can do is either quicken it or slow down its progress. And let this be a lesson to you, my friends. In the affairs of men, History is often like ... like a ...

(BOGUNDE appears, walking stealthily, and calls out.)

Bogunde Sh!

Director Yes?

Bogunde May we come in now? It's our cue.

Director Yes, I think it's safe. Put on your costumes and make-up. Disguise yourselves well. For when you come in, no one must recognise your real identity. In this scene, remember, you'll be playing, not your real roles, but as ...

Bogunde Enough! Get out of the way!

Director *(Going, stops to talk to audience.)* See what I mean? I'll see you later. *(BOGUNDE ushers in his men into strategic positions round the cell for the following scene.)*

Three

(Lights come on upon a scene overlooking TITUBI'S prison cell. A number of petty traders form a ramshackle street market, with fruit baskets and trays, portable clothes racks, tinsel jewellery and wrist watches and other items common to the ambulant street traders of the West African cities.

Among the traders, in various disguises, are BOGUNDE and KOKONDI. They keep a careful, but not too noticeable, watch on the prison, even while pretending to trade and converse.

Then MARSHAL walks in, under a wide straw hat, carrying some marketable items, including a bundle of what looks like firewood, but are in fact local rifles and matchets camouflaged. He goes to BOGUNDE, who is selling oranges – or any other fruit available. During their conversation, the other traders will also be calling MARSHAL to come and buy their own goods, as is common in any such market.)

Marshal How much?

Bogunde All clear over there now, Marshal. One shilling.

Marshal Pardon? You know me too I be seller like you.

Bogunde Still the regular guards about the place. No reinforcements.

Marshal Make I pay nine pence now, I beg. Any visitors inside?

Bogunde Ah Oga! Na the price meself buy am! No one has come in or gone out of the place in the past hour.

Marshal They haven't noticed your presence?

Bogunde No.

Marshal Good. I pay eight pence and take three. God bless.

Bogunde I think we can attack the prison now.

Marshal No, you wait as planned. You fit peel am for me?

Bogunde Our warder is on duty. He'll open the gate as soon as he hears the signal.

Marshal Thank you.

Bogunde Alao's on the other side.

Marshal Why not? I fit sell am to you. How many you want?

Bogunde I'll take the whole bundle.

Marshal I know say I meet good man today. Come look. (*Some of the other traders draw near.*) This na good man. Listen carefully all of you. In exactly fifteen minutes the warders will go into the canteen for their lunch. The signal will be given. Be ready. Thank you. (*They all laugh as if at a joke.*) You know wetin? I get song wey I dey sing when I lucky like this. Make I teach you? You go sing with me?

Traders Ye-e-es.

Marshal Good. I go sing am. As you sing, you go put hand forward. Like this. Then draw back. Forward – draw back. Ready?

(*He sings. Lights fade on hands reaching out towards his bundle which, now partly undone, is seen to contain weapons. Slow fade-out.*)

Four

(*TITUBI, in a prison cell, humming a song in good spirits. The traders' song of the last scene remains in the background, occasionally breaking in strongly. Enter ALHAJA KABIRAT, richly dressed and holding a handkerchief to her nose.*)

Titubi (*Running to her mother.*) Mama!

Alhaja (*Coldly.*) So this is where they put you. Titu!

Titubi (*Excitedly.*) Yes, but only for a while. Did you get my note?

Alhaja That's why I am here.

Titubi Isn't it fantastic! I'm so...but how did you get in? I was told this place is on top security, no visitors and all that. Or, ah mama, you bribed the warders!

Alhaja (*Looking around.*) No bed. No window. No fan or air conditioner. The walls damp and clammy. A terrible stench that followed me all the

way here from the gates. (*Breaks down finally.*) Ah Allah! What have I done to deserve this?

Titubi But its all part of the plan. After that night in the theatre, I agreed to it. I stay here. I pretend to be a prisoner. Then when the peasants break in and find me...

Alhaja Quiet! You want to ruin me. Isn't it? That's your latest insanity, abi? To destroy me completely before my customers. Ehn? Just suppose I wasn't in the shop, and someone else had read the note before it came into my hands? Everybody would have known by now that my own daughter is in this, this latrine. (*She breaks down.*) Ah Allah, what on earth could she have done? What unpardonable crime to meet this kind of humiliation?

Titubi But Mama, it isn't a punishment! I wasn't arrested for anything. I came on my own free will.

Alhaja I thank you! Let's go now anyway. And the policemen who brought you here, they will wish they'd never been born!

Titubi Aren't you listening to me? I...

Alhaja Enough, I say! I've swallowed enough of this foul air into my lungs. Let's go!

Titubi You will spoil the whole plan. Maybe you've even spoiled it already.

Alhaja Are you coming or not?

Titubi Mama –

Alhaja Titu! Or isn't it my daughter I am talking to?

Titubi The peasant revolt, Mama! You talk about it every day with your friends. I see all of you tremble. The peasants are upon us. They will eat everything up, all your wealth, the entire meaning of your life, unless someone acts.

Alhaja And that someone is my daughter, abi?

Titubi They're coming, Mama, and the only way left is to infiltrate their ranks quickly, discover their real leader, and the source of their ammunition. I volunteered. (*More excited.*) You see, Mama, they are coming to this prison this week. The police have got the advance information that the peasants plan to raid this place to release their captured colleagues. So it's perfectly simple. The police will let them come, and free the prisoners, including me.

Alhaja And then?

Titubi And then I go with them to their camp.

Alhaja Are you still in your senses, Titu? You will go with who, to where?

Titubi Look at this, Mama.

Alhaja What?

Titubi This necklace, with its pretty dagger.

Alhaja What about it?

Titubi The latest fashion. Which we girls call Moremi.

Alhaja Are you teaching me! I sell it, by the hundreds.

Titubi You taught me her story, Mama. When I was still too young to

- understand. But I've never forgotten Moremi, the brave woman of Ile-Ife, who saved the race. Now, when I wear this necklace, I feel a passion deeper than any passing vogue. It is as if I have become history itself.
- Alhaja** Give me. Let me see. (*TITUBI hands over the necklace. ALHAJA flings it down and stamps on it.*) There! There goes your passion. I'll tame you yet, before you run naked into the streets.
- Titubi** I am going to do it, Mama. You won't stop me.
- Alhaja** We shall see. (*Calling.*) Lati! Lati! I had suspected something like this. Lati! (*LATI appears.*) Carry her!
- Titubi** Wait! Mama, I –
- Alhaja** Are you coming or not? (*An idea strikes her.*) Lati, when is the last plane leaving for Mecca?
- Lati** Tomorrow afternoon, Alhaja.
- Alhaja** Good, there's still time.
- Titubi** (*Reading her thoughts.*) I'm not going anywhere!
- Alhaja** You'll go on this year's pilgrimage, Titu. I was thinking of sending you next year, when you'll be more grown-up, but now, with this – Nothing like Mecca to help restore your mind.
- Titubi** But I tell you –
(*The WARDER comes running in.*)
- Warder** Alhaja ... Alhaja! Oga dey come! Quick, quick!
- Alhaja** (*Unmoved.*) Yes?
- Warder** Please, I beg, come. Come ... he go ruin me, I beg ...
- Alhaja** Who?
- Warder** Oga ... Oga patapata. We head for this place ...
- Alhaja** Let him come. I have a few words for him.
- Warder** But –
- Alhaja** Shut up, idiot! I say let him come. He won't be in a position to even touch your hair by the time ...
(*Enter the DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT who stops short, on seeing them.*)
- Superintendent** Well, well!
- Alhaja** I've been waiting for you.
- Superintendent** (*Sarcastic tone.*) I hope you made yourself comfortable.
- Alhaja** This is my daughter!
- Superintendent** Really? My name is Salami, Deputy Su-
- Alhaja** My own daughter!
- Superintendent** I'm willing to believe you, Alhaja Kabirat.
- Alhaja** What is she doing here?
- Superintendent** I'm more interested in what you are doing here, madam.
- Alhaja** You're going to pay for this, Salami. You're going to pay so much that you'll regret the day you joined the Force.
- Superintendent** I regret it already, Alhaja, if that will bring any comfort to you. In fact I've been regretting it ever since the day I signed up.
- Alhaja** Let's go, Titu. (*Shouting to LATI.*) Carry her! Carry the insane harlot for me!

Superintendent (*Calm.*) Warder! Take the gentleman to Room Six. Room Six. And then come back here. (*To LATI.*) I'd advise you to, go now, quietly, in your own interest.

Titubi (*As LATI hesitates.*) Go, Lati. Follow him.
(*LATI and the WARDER go out.*)

Superintendent He's your driver, isn't he?

Titubi Yes.

Superintendent And bodyguard? Maybe he'll get a light sentence.

Alhaja What do you mean?

(*The CORPORAL returns.*)

Superintendent Alhaja, your turn. A room in the B suite. Please follow Corple, or shall I lead you myself?

Alhaja You're full of jokes, I can see. Go on, amuse me.

Superintendent It's in the blood, madam. I can't help it. My father was the official clown at the State House for many years before he retired. He couldn't stand Independence, he'd said. Reality was so absurd that jokes were getting hard to invent. (*In a sudden sharp tone.*) Take her away.

Titubi (*As the CORPORAL steps forward.*) Mr Salami, that's my mother, you know.

Superintendent So what! You think that should make me fall on my face?

Titubi Your superiors do more.

Superintendent You amuse me. I come in and what do I see? An infiltration into a maximum security prison. At a moment like this! Madam, I don't care how you got here, but I am certainly going to keep you, at least till the operation has taken off. After that we may talk.

Alhaja You don't mean it, young man. Even if you're a dozen Salamis together, you wouldn't thrust your fingers in fire.

Titubi Listen, the deal is off. Talking to my mother like that, you ... you ... toad! I'm going home!

Superintendent (*Laughs.*) You're going home! As easy as that, eh? You think we're playing children's games here?

Titubi Dare me, you hear! I'll see how you'll force me to go on your mission.

Superintendent My mission! Is that what you believed when you volunteered?

Alhaja Does he ... does he know who I am at all?

Superintendent Listen to me. The peasants out there are not more than a thousand strong. Let's say, even two thousand. Two thousand men, armed mostly with crude dane guns, matchets, bows and arrows. What's all that before the awesome apparatus of the State? Before our well-trained and well-equipped fighting squads? A wall of vegetable! So why have we not been able to crush them?

Alhaja Are you asking me?

Superintendent You should know, Alhaja. After all, these rebels are of your own creation, you who are used to feeding on others.

Alhaja Look here –

Superintendent I'll tell you. The peasants are strong, and seemingly invincible, because they are solidly united by the greatest force in the world – hunger. They are hungry, their children die of kwashiorkor, and they have risen to say no, no more!

Alhaja It's a lie! No one has ever died of hunger in this country! I am surprised at you, a police officer, carrying this kind of baseless propaganda...

Superintendent They claim that you and your politicians have been taking off the profits of their farms to feed, your cities, to feed your own throats and buy more jewels and frippery. And so, at last, they are coming for the reckoning.

Alhaja And that's why you are paid, isn't it? To stop them. Not to stay here gloating on their imagined grievances.

Superintendent We will stop them, Alhaja, only when everybody concerned decides to cooperate. When those who are threatened are brave enough to offer their services. Otherwise – finish! For we are no miracle workers. And one of these fine days you'll wake to the noise of shooting in your kitchen. Your markets will be on fire, your pretty houses, your banks and insurance houses, the entire street will be burning. And there'll be nowhere for you to hide. No! There'll only be screams and blood everywhere, and you'll be made to watch as six, seven men mount your daughter and ride her to death...

Alhaja Stop!

Superintendent It could be tomorrow ... it could be tonight ...

Alhaja Stop him, I say! In the name of Allah!

Superintendent Allah, madam, is always on the side of those who do more than just fold their arms and watch. We needed a brave woman. Your daughter volunteered. She is to be commended.

Alhaja (*Cowed now.*) You think that if she ... if Titu follows this crazy plan?

Superintendent Your daughter has the best credentials for this kind of job. She's willing to do it, and she's richly endowed. Pretty, sensual, daring, and with quite a reputation with men, if my information is correct?

Titubi Thank you ...

Superintendent Above all, she's not known to be even remotely connected with the police.

Alhaja And you think you can do it, Titu?

Titubi I will do it, Mama. One woman did it before.

Alhaja A woman?

Titubi Moremi. Have you forgotten?

Alhaja Oh!

Titubi You think she was better than me?

Alhaja (*Clinging to her.*) My poor poor doll!

Titubi Wipe your tears, Mama. I'll come back safe, you'll see. And the war will be over.

Superintendent Good. If you've made up your mind –

Titubi Nothing can stop me now.

Superintendent In that case, there's no time to waste. Alhaja, I'm afraid I'll have to cut short the leave-taking. You can cry in your own house as hard as you'll cry here. Please – Corple! Please follow him, Alhaja.

Alhaja Goodbye, Titu. I'll not sleep till you come back. (*Exit.*)

Superintendent She'll not sleep till you return. She'll be counting her profits in the market.

Titubi You're just a dog, Salami. A loathsome dog.

Superintendent Hired by cannibals, to do your hunting. Anyway, let's stop arguing, and I'll give you your final instructions. For it's going to be this evening.

Titubi What?

Superintendent The attack. We've got news at last. The peasants will be storming this prison today, in a couple of hours. You've got to be ready.

Titubi I ... I didn't know it would be so soon.

Superintendent The important things in life are always like that they come too soon or too late, but never at the time we expect. Anyway you know the instructions. Let them release you from here, with the other prisoners. Then follow them to their camp. They'll question you, but we've already rehearsed that part. Maybe we'll go through it once more before I leave you. When you get there, find out as much as you can. But don't take any risks. That's an order too. You're not to take any undue risks. (*She has turned her back.*) Are you listening to me?

Titubi I heard you –

Superintendent Then–

Titubi (*Turning sharply.*) Tell me, Salami. You don't really believe it do you? You don't believe she existed.

Superintendent Who?

Titubi Moremi.

Superintendent Oh!

Titubi But she did exist, didn't she?

Superintendent A myth. We're dealing with reality here. And reality is a far more cruel thing.

Titubi Yet it is the same reality that softens with time, isn't it, that turns into myth?

Superintendent Well ... What's that got to do with it? (*Worried.*) You're sure you can go on this mission after all?

Titubi (*Laughs.*) My mother always complains that I dream too much. Do you think so?

Superintendent (*After a pause.*) We'll go through that interrogation scene we've rehearsed again. Then maybe I'll know. Get ready. I am the peasants' leader, and you have been brought before me. Are we set? (*TITUBI nods, falls on her knees.*) Here we go. (*Takes a different voice.*) Hey, treat her gently! You'll never lose your manners of an alaaruu. You think she's one of those bags of salt you used to carry at Agbeni, eh? A woman

is delicate. (*TITUBI bursts out laughing. He stops.*) Look, do you know they are already outside? And you're laughing! (*TITUBI composes herself again. He starts again.*) Treat her gently. Gently. A woman is delicate. Sorry, my daughter. You'll forgive his rough manners. What's your name?

Titubi Titu... you still don't think I should use some other name?

Superintendent No, not necessary. As I told you, none of the farmers has ever moved in the circles in which you are known. Your name won't mean anything to them. So you keep it, and you'll have no problems with remembering your identity. Shall we go on?

Titubi Yes.

Superintendent Rise, Titu. Sit down. (*Offers 'chair'.*) Now, can you tell us what you're doing here? My men say you insisted on coming.

Titubi I was locked up there in the prison, sir, awaiting my trial. I didn't ask to be released, but your men came and set me free. They forced all of us out of the cells.

Superintendent Well?

Titubi Of course I'm grateful, but where do I go now? If I return there, it'll be much worse for me. They'll think I had a hand in planning it all.

Superintendent You mean you want to return to prison?

Titubi I have nowhere else to go.

Superintendent You can't go home?

Titubi No. Not any more.

Superintendent Strange! ...What about ... your people?

Titubi I have no people now. They've all renounced me.

Superintendent Was your crime that terrible?

Titubi Abominable.

Superintendent You don't mind telling us about it?

Titubi Well ... do you really insist?

Superintendent I'm afraid we'll have to know.

Titubi What will you do to me?

Superintendent Depends.

Titubi On what? On my crime?

Superintendent Did you kill someone?

Titubi (*After a silence.*) Yes.

Superintendent Who?

Titubi I killed my own children.

Superintendent No!

Titubi So you see!

Superintendent Your own children!

Titubi I wasn't myself. I swear I didn't know what I was doing. Suddenly I wanted to end it all, but in such a way that no part of me would be left in his hands. I mean, my husband. How I hated him! How I hated myself! I hated the fact that he'd ever touched me and loved me. I wanted to scrape all my skin off, cut my tongue, my lips, all the parts of me that had ever come into contact with him. I swear I wasn't myself! At last I said

I'd kill myself and the children I had for him. I prepared the poison with a lot of sleeping drugs, locked myself in with the children... and we all drank it, one by one. The youngest, Ranti, just four months old, was the first to succumb. He dropped into sleep. Then the second, my daughter Yetunde. She too dropped her head on the pillow by my side ... It was then that terror struck me. I rose up to scream for help, but my feet gave way, and I fell in a crash to the floor. and that was the last thing I knew for a long time ...

Superintendent So you're the woman! The story came to us on Rediffusion. It was on every lip!

Titubi They wouldn't let me die. They kept me for months in the hospital and spent lots of money, just to make sure I survived to face the punishment. They will kill me in the end, but only after I have lived through the prolonged hell of agony and remorse.

Superintendent Yes, yes, I remember. I think you were a nurse at the General Hospital?

Titubi (*Breaking off.*) You're just adding that on?

Superintendent Yes. It just occurred to me. The woman was in fact a nurse. They might know.

Titubi So I answer yes.

Superintendent You went through the Nursing School, didn't you?

Titubi I didn't finish the course. I got bored.

Superintendent How much did you learn?

Titubi Enough, don't worry. I was in fact quite good.

Superintendent If we use it, it means the farmers will be needing your help. And that way, you'll win their trust even more rapidly.

Titubi Then let's use it. If they don't ask, I'll tell them.

Superintendent Right, where were we?

Titubi Almost the end of the interrogation. I was telling them about my children.

Superintendent Continue. Finish up.

Titubi (*Going into the role again.*) Three lovely children. My sons, so handsome and troublesome, thinking they owned the world ... and my daughter, so gentle ... ah, children are beautiful! Their voices echo in my head. I cannot sleep. I know I shall not know peace again till they put my neck in the noose that is waiting for me. Because I have lost the courage to take my life myself. I begged the warders, but they all shrank from me and that is why I followed your men. Please, I beg you, if compassion is one of the things that keep you together, please, help me. Help me end my life now. Kill me ... (*She begins to sob.*)

Superintendent Take her away!

Titubi (*Near hysterical.*) You won't help me? You won't end my suffering for me?

Superintendent (*Applauding.*) You'll live, woman. Very very good. Even I was impressed. If you can remember all that, you'll make it.

Titubi (*Unmoved.*) Thank you.

Superintendent Well, all that remains is for me to wish you good luck. (*He offers his hand. She does not take it.*)

Titubi Goodbye. (*He looks at her for some time, in silence, and then goes out. TITUBI walks slowly round the cell.*) They are already outside, he said. They'll soon be here! I ... I am afraid, suddenly ... (*Pause.*) No! Moremi was not afraid! (*Snaps her fingers backwards over her head.*) Fear go away! Doubt and trembling, retreat from me! ... (*She retrieves the Moremi necklace from the floor and looks at it.*) She was a woman, like me. And she waited all alone, for the Igbo warriors. All her people went into hiding, but she alone stood and waited. I can feel her heart beating, like mine... But how lucky you were, Moremi! How I envy you! Look, I have only the dampness of these walls around me, to wish me goodbye. But you, you had the scent of the market around you. The smell of fish, the redolence of spices, sweet decay of wood, smell of rain-washed thatches, the tang of mud at your feet ... ah Moremi! What were your thoughts at that lonely moment? Can I read your mind. Maybe it would strengthen me ... (*She puts on the necklace and seems to go into a reverie. Light changes occur, slowly, dimming gradually on the cell and brightening simultaneously on a small market square. The Moremi praise-song wells up and then sinks into a faint background. TITUBI, still in her reverie, joins in the singing. She remains visible throughout the following scene.*)

Five

(*The market square. MOREMI herself, sitting on a bamboo bench or stool, is only faintly defined yet. The scene is set near the dawn of the Yoruba civilization at Ile-Ife. The manner of dressing and make-up should suggest this historical context. A voice calls, from off-stage.*)

Voice Moremi! Moremi! Are you not afraid?

(*Startled, TITUBI turns to see, and then freezes, in a half-light, watching the scene. In the market, the lights grow into the brilliance of sunlight. MOREMI raises her head.*)

Voice Are you not scared, Moremi?

(*The speaker appears. It is MOREMI'S friend, NINIOLA.*)

Moremi Niniola!

Niniola Moremi! The Yeye-Oba group are coming, to pay our last respects, before the Igbo warriors arrive. I took a short cut to reach you first.

Moremi Thank you, Niniola. I am glad to see you.

Niniola I asked, are you not afraid?

Moremi Well, up till this moment, I never thought of it. Fear was ... a faraway land. When I went to Esinmirin to make my pledge, my heart was as stout as the iroko tree. Right up till the last moment of my

departure, when I held my son Oluorogbo to my breast and bade him farewell. The priests led me darkly into the grove for the appropriate ceremonies, and then slowly, we danced past the shrine of my husband's grandfather, Oduduwa. You know, going from god to god, looking into their impressive eyes, then walking through the streets, past the throngs of silent forms, the people watching, immobile, I felt like one drunk on wine. I felt strong and light, the noon breeze was in my veins ... but then we arrived here, in the market, and the priests left. And I was alone, alone with these empty spaces ... and ...

Niniola And?

Moremi You say our comrades, the Yeye-Oba, will soon be here?

Niniola Yes. If you listen hard, you can just catch their singing

Moremi It's as if ... as if it's suddenly grown cold. (*Sighs.*) Let them come quick. Perhaps, surrounded by their voices and the whirl of their feet, perhaps if we dance together again, like before, for a little while, perhaps Moremi will recover her courage.

Niniola Listen, if you're afraid –

Moremi No! Please, Nini, don't mention that word again. Please, or you will see me weaken and run.

Niniola But that's why I've come, Moremi. It is not too late. You can still change your mind.

Moremi What? Moremi should change her mind at the last minute?

Niniola Why not? Listen, I admire your courage, and I love you, but this is clearly the path of death. The Igbos are cruel and wanton. If they capture you –

Moremi I cannot turn back. If we never risked our life, how shall we come to value it?

Niniola I've heard you say this before, even in our much younger days when we understood nothing. The lure of death seems to have fastened to you unrelentingly like a leech. Your hunger for fame is limitless. You'll never have enough. Now you must step in even where the gods have failed. You must be godhead itself!

Moremi Are you angry, Nini?

Niniola Come with me. Step back from this mad adventure.

Moremi My friend ... perhaps you are right. I am too ambitious. When I see the stars, I long desperately to touch them. Yes, Niniola, I am jealous of the gods!

Niniola What!

Moremi We fall on our knees, we multiply our supplications, we pile up the sacrifices. But suppose, Niniola, just suppose the gods are indifferent to us?

Niniola *Eewo!* What are you saying? May such evil words never come from your mouth again. May the air dissolve them and scatter them into nothingness. Please, Moremi, if you must go, go. Follow the restless spirit that drives you. But don't add the burden of blasphemy.

Moremi You talk of beauty and success and glamour! But what is all that to me when, one fine day, in the midst of the most splendid rejoicing, with the choicest meat in my teeth, without warning at all, the Igbos can arrive suddenly, locusts in the air, and eat everything up? That is the life our gods have provided for us after all our rituals and sacrifices. No, no! Nini, it is time for use to rise, to stand and square up our shoulders by our own courage, and stop leaning on the gods.

Niniola The gods are with us –

Moremi With their backs turned to us –

Niniola The gods will never turn their back! May the afternoon never suddenly take on the shroud of night in our life!

Moremi Futile prayers! How many times already we've watched our festivals change into periods of mourning when the Igbos set on us. Yet we have made sacrifices upon sacrifices till the earth is glutted with blood. Our priests have scraped their throats hoarse on incantations, and their latest ploy is to try and make us accept defeat as fate. Tell me, my friend, what more shall we do to learn that the gods will not help us? I have decided. Moremi shall be the clay which the race requires to remould itself.

Niniola You frighten me, Moremi. You repudiate the gods! So what of your pledge to Esinmirin? Who will give you protection on your journey? Suppose you never come back now?

Moremi (*Amused.*) Come, Nini. Embrace me. I am glad you came and talked to me. Now Moremi is no longer afraid. Let the women come and we shall dance together, like the procession on a bridal night. Your doubt and your fear have strengthened me. I shall go, and I shall return.

(*Enter the women who make up the YEYE-OBA GROUP, singing a solemn dirge. They fan about MOREMI, NINIOLA joining them, and kneel, their hands extended in homage.*)

Moremi Oh stand, stand up my friends! What's all this song of mourning? Abeke, Bisi, Jumoke, Rama, ahha, am I gone already to the land of our ancestors that you accompany my corpse with such lament? This is a day of joy, my friends! The land is going to be reborn, by the daring of a woman! Adunni, come, you've always been my keenest rival. Let me have the joy of competing with you again, and of beating you as usual! Come. (*She calls out a song, which they pick up, and a dancing competition begins, first between MOREMI and ADUNNI, and then with other partners. At the height of it, a piercing cry, bringing them back to reality. A warrior runs by, calling 'The Igbos ! The Igbos ! Run!'*)

(*The women scatter at once in great panic, with NINIOLA, the last to go, making an unsuccessful attempt to drag MOREMI along with her. MOREMI, now alone, begins to preen herself. From behind her, ORONMIYON, dressed as another warrior, enters and calls her.*)

Six

Oronmiyon Don't be afraid. It's me.

Moremi My husband!

Oronmiyon Sh!

Moremi What are you –

Oronmiyon Hush, I said.

Moremi (*Agitated.*) At a moment like this, outside the palace and unprotected! And in this uniform!

Oronmiyon Listen –

Moremi You frighten me. It is taboo for the king – (*Recollecting herself, she curtseys.*) – Kabiyesi.

Oronmiyon Oh, forget that now.

Moremi It is taboo for the king to walk the afternoon like this, alone and unshaded, with your face naked. What is the matter?

Oronmiyon I slipped out through one of the hidden doors in the palace walls. Yes, the tasks of a king, who is also a husband, will sometimes require the tactics of a slave. (*Laughs.*) It won't be the first time.

Moremi But why now? The Igbos are –

Oronmiyon Listen to me, Moremi. I know the Igbos will soon be here. They have crossed the moat already on the east side. That is why I have come. For you. It is not too late to change your mind. I'll lead you back through the hidden passage into the palace.

Moremi What, my lord?

Oronmiyon I know you are a woman of tremendous courage. Right from the first day of your arrival you became my real favourite of the royal chambers with your beauty and your special grace, Moremi you were the principal ornament of the palace –

Moremi (*Teasing.*) And yet, my lord, only two moons ago, took another wife?

Oronmiyon Of course you understand. Kings are like Mother Bee. They must clothe themselves in people. The palace must fill its hives with the nectar of female voices. That is how our fathers made it. But your place of eminence was never in dispute, for your courage is strong, like our ancient rafters. Your name alone holds up with esteem the tottering roof of our besieged kingdom. And I suppose now that that was why I consented to this plan of yours, almost without reflection. I said to myself, echoing your words, that Moremi is the only person in this land who can succeed, if we are ever to discover the great power of the Igbos, if we are ever to find a counter to this mysterious power of theirs which turns my bravest warriors into helpless omolangidi each time the marauders come upon us ...

Moremi And now you have changed your mind, isn't it? You have found the great secret which can defeat the Igbos who even now are bearing down upon us?

Oronmiyon The secret I have found is you, Moremi.

Moremi When time presses, my lord, we discard the horse of enigmas.

Oronmiyon Well, I shall explain later. For now, just come with me.

Moremi And what will your subjects say afterwards of Moremi, the ambitious woman of Ile-Ife? Will they not laugh and say, look at the brave hero who lost her nerve at the crucial moment and fled with her tail between her spindly feet.

Oronmiyon This is no time to worry about that. Come quickly!

Moremi My husband!

Oronmiyon I say, do not worry. I, Oronmiyon, I am the public opinion. Subjects only echo the ruler's caprices.

Moremi So what about the mothers who will crowd to your palace tomorrow, as before, their hands empty again, those hands which only this morning held laughing children to their breasts? Ah, the thought that Oluorogbo, a prince born, can be stolen like that, stripped of his inheritance, and turned into a slave before nightfall!

Oronmiyon That will never happen, I assure you.

(Terrifying shrieks are heard, still rather far off.)

Moremi Do you hear them, my lord? The Igboes are drawing near, combing the streets and alleys, scaling our walls with ease. And you know what is happening, as our story repeats itself. Already our men tremble by their household shrines, their prayers stuck in their teeth. Our warriors are beginning to babble like Obatala's misfits. The women are pissing shamelessly in front of their screaming children. Your priests are again going to pieces in helpless rage, their vaunted charms now impotent like *Osanyin* left in the rain. *(Shrieks again.)* They are near, they approach, Kabiyesi, you can do nothing other than gnash your teeth. Once again we are encircled, and the mysterious paralysis is beginning to spread in our veins like the stupor of *majele*. Nothing in Ife has been discovered to counter it: no leaf or bark, no grass, no ritual amulet, we are lost, lost... And yet Moremi is prepared to stake her life, to take the risk of captivity in order to at last penetrate the enemy camp and learn their magic. What do you say, husband? Shall I stay behind and forsake all this so that this evening you can come and tickle my tender parts?

Oronmiyon *(Shouting.)* Stay! I command it!

Moremi And I say, no! Go back quick to the palace. For at this spot and in this moment, I am already beyond the lashing whips of your command!

Oronmiyon You ... you dare to defy me?

Moremi Face to face we stand together, in the onrushing waters of danger. In my own hands I hold the paddle of my destiny.

Oronmiyon Can I believe my ears, that this is Moremi talking to me!

Moremi My husband, be yourself. Be the hero you've always been. Like in those days when you hurried back from Ijebuland to claim your throne from usurpers. Your exploits refurbish the throne of your ancestors. But when muscles slacken suddenly in the midst of dispute, they say it is time

to use other tactics. I must go.

Oronmiyon And which husband, be he king and all, will dare walk proud again, who has openly sacrificed his wife to ward off his own death?

Moremi No! Nobody sacrifices Moremi. Nobody! I have chosen, all by myself. Neither by the gods' cajoling, nor by your designing. Moremi chose, and carries the burden upon herself. Please go now.

Oronmiyon I shall carry you, you stubborn woman! Come –

Moremi (*After struggling vainly with him and about to weaken.*) My husband! (*Bursts into tears.*) I see now that you really love me!

Oronmiyon But of course! What do you –

Moremi Ah alas! Why do you come to show me now that it's too late?

Oronmiyon What do you mean, too late? There's still time to slip back into the palace if you come quickly.

Moremi I ... I didn't know you loved me so much. And now ... I am no longer worth saving.

Oronmiyon Look, let's just go and ...

Moremi I thought you no longer wanted me. When you took your last wife –

Oronmiyon Asake, yes?

Moremi I became so jealous that ... that ...

Oronmiyon Ehn-hen?

Moremi Forgive me! It ... I ... it was Arogundade.

Oronmiyon Arogundade? Ah, I see, the trader from Ijesaland. What about him?

Moremi He ... he ... please forgive me. I've been unfaithful to you. I ... I slept with him.

Oronmiyon Abomination! You ... you . . . (*He knocks her down brutally. Shrieks much closer now.*) Well, your fate is sealed. By your own hands. No unfaithful woman may again enter the king's chambers, as you know. It would be instant death... (*He bends down and raises her up.*) As you said, Moremi, you have chosen the manner of your own exit. You have chosen well. And it's much better like this ... But I forgive you. I promise, this town will remember you. And if you can, by this act of daring, cleanse yourself, we shall be here to receive you. Farewell, my love. (*He runs off. MOREMI laughs and begins again to preen herself. Then suddenly she freezes, to become her legendary statue, watching the following scene.*)

Seven

(*Lights come up bright on the prison cell as, simultaneously, a war song fills the air in a sudden violent upwelling. Armed peasants, led by BOGUNDE, break into the cell, frightening TITUBI into a corner.*)

Bogunde Free the woman! You see how these animals behave, to keep a woman in this odious place! I am sorry for our brothers who have been

languishing here all these days. Woman, you are free. We farmers from the village release you. Go home and tell your friends. Goodbye. Men, let's go.

(They go. TITUBI, somewhat dazed, runs after them.)

Titubi Wait for me! Please, wait for me!

(Blackout.)

Eight

(Caught in silhouette only, the peasants sing and dance to a clamorous song of harvest. As the celebration begins to die down, the DIRECTOR appears in a spotlight and speaks above the song.)

Director There she goes then, my friends, bravely walking into danger. Stepping carelessly into the unknown. Ah, women! My friends, the world is strange and women reign over it. Let us salute their courage. Their capacity for love. Moremi, I remember you and I celebrate you. *(He goes off into the Moremi praise-chant, as lights gradually fade, leaving us with the farmers.)*

Hail Moremi!

The huge sacrifice that wards off death!

The big offering that prevents diseases.

Like the Ikoyi, you fearlessly faced battle.

Moremi! You dared death

To bring peace to the world

You braved war

That Ile-Ife might be peaceful.

No kind deed is ever forgotten

Moremi has become a deity (worshipped yearly)

Moremi, like the sun,

You shine so brightly!

(Yoruba translation)

Moremi o!

Ebo dede tii beku

Ese dede tii barun

Ikoyi rogun rile tori bogun.

A gbon bi asarun

A laya bi iko

Moremi a fori laku

Kaye o la roju

O faya raigun

Kile Ife o le toro.

Ohun rere o nii gbe o
Moremi doro, o dorisa.
Moremi doorun, o mu yan-yan!

Nine

(The set now represents a room BABA'S parlour, in the village. Modest furnishings. Bric-a-brac. Screams begin as the DIRECTOR'S voice fades and before the lights come on. Lights. We see a small wood fire, in a clay pot. By the fire, a small group of peasants. Two or three of them hold down a woman, only barely identifiable as TITUBI, on the mat. Her condition is as appalling as the others; only half covered, her cloth wrapper shredded and mud-besplattered. She is covered in sweat, groaning in evident pain. MOSUN holds a bowl of water. MARSHAL, on his knees or crouching, takes out a knife from the fire.)

Marshal Hold her again. Tight now. *(They do so. He applies the knife to TITUBI'S shoulder. She screams. He leans forward and sucks at the incision.)*

That's it! I've got it out at last. *(Shows it. Various reactions, of relief, etc.)*

Bogunde It's a splinter!

Wura Not the real bullet? *(Looking.)*

Kokondi How lucky!

Mosun Look, she's fainted. Poor girl.

Marshal She'll be all right. Bring the water. And the herbs.

Wura Leave the rest to us.

Kokondi I'll dress it properly. At least she taught us how to do that.

Marshal *(Washing his hands.)* Right. Go ahead with it.

(BABA comes in, tired. MARSHAL goes to him. As the dialogue progresses, the men wash the wound, apply the herbs, and then tear off a strip of cloth to make a rough but conspicuous bandage with which they bind the wound. TITUBI sleeps through it all. BOGUNDE carries out the fire and returns.)

Marshal How many?

Baba *(Gravely.)* Ten of theirs. Three of ours.

Marshal A heavy day.

Baba One of the reasons I called this meeting.

Wura Marshal's plan was good. With those trees we felled across the road, they could not bring their lorries and big guns close enough. They had to come on foot. And we were waiting for them.

Koko Otherwise the casualties would have been higher.

Marshal They've been buried?

Baba *(Nodding.)* Hm-hm. How is she? *(Indicating TITUBI.)*

Marshal A flesh wound. She'll survive.

Baba I'm relieved. She's been useful to us.

Marshal So you all say.

Baba We needed a nurse badly, and –

Marshal (*Ironically.*) And she served the purpose.

Baba More than. She surpassed even my expectations. (*They both draw slightly aside.*) There were nights she didn't sleep at all, nursing the wounded.

Marshal The bitterest poisons, they say, come in the most tasty mushrooms.

Baba You've never really liked her, have you?

Marshal Let's just say I don't believe she is what she claims.

Baba She nursed you, once –

Marshal (*Impatiently.*) I know. I am trying to repay it.

Baba Look here, she came here, badly battered. An abandoned woman, suffering from the burden of her past. We promised to help her. To give her a second lease of life...

Marshal You promised, you mean. Always too soft.

Baba Yes. I promised. And she's more than earned it.

Marshal You promised. You always promise. Words are cheap.

Baba I'll let that pass, Marshal.

Marshal You give your word. And we give our life.

Baba (*Angry.*) Everybody in this camp, Marshal. Whether we carry a gun or not. We all give our life.

Marshal Yes. And a few manage to live longer than others.

Baba (*Pause.*) Look, let's not quarrel, Marshal. You're a fine fighter, the best here. But the trouble with you –

Marshal And if the woman is a spy –

Baba I disagree. I've watched her work. It can't be all pretence.

Wura (*Calling.*) Marshal!

Marshal Yes?

Wura You want to inspect it?

Marshal You've finished?

Kokondi (*Proudly.*) Come and look.

Marshal No. Let her sleep.

Mosun (*Picking it up.*) What do we do with this?

Marshal What?

Mosun Her fancy necklace.

Kokondi Better put it on her. I hear it's their latest madness in the city.

Wura Yes. They call it Moremi.

Kokondi Indeed! Last year they were wearing a blade. Now it's a dagger. Soon it will be an axe.

Baba City people!

Marshal Put it back on her.

Mosun Right, Marshal.

Marshal And bring those two out, Bogunde.
(*BOGUNDE leaves, with KOKONDI.*)

Baba Prisoners?

Marshal You'll see.

(*BOGUNDE and KOKONDI return with prisoners.*)

Baba What! Alhaji Buraimoh!

Marshal And Lawyer Isaac.

Baba What are they?

Marshal They led the vultures here.

Baba It's not possible. You mean they're still at this game?

Marshal Tell them, Bogunde.

Bogunde They were hiding in the police lorry at the rear. They didn't know we would spot them. But Alao and I were there, the bush. We set the lorry on fire. They ran out like rabbits.

Marshal Now we know how the police were able to find this place.

Kokondi This used to be our last resort. The police had never been able to reach us here. But where shall we go now?

Baba I see. I'm sorry, Mosun... This must be hard for you.

Mosun Justice will have to be done, Baba.

Baba (*To MARSHAL.*) That means we have to move again?

Marshal Yes, I'm afraid.

Bogunde I've already given the orders.

Marshal Somewhere temporary.

Baba Good. We'll leave in the night.

Wura Marshal suggests we evacuate the women and the children at once. Bogunde and I agree.

Baba You think so?

Mosun It would be the wisest thing.

Wura Since our raid on the prison, we've had to move camp five times. Five times. Even at the beginning, before their so-called Commission of Inquiry, it was not so bad.

Kokondi The governor has obviously declared an all-out offensive against us. A total war.

Mosun And we're running short of ammunition.

Bogunde That is serious.

Baba We may have to agree to negotiate.

Marshal Over my dead body.

Baba Without ammunition –

Marshal We'll fight with our bare hands. Till death.

Laura With our teeth and fingernails.

Baba So you support him on that.

Bogunde We've gone this before –

Marshal City people have no compassion. The well-fed dog has no thought for those who are hungry.

Wura That is the truth. We cannot run away.

Marshal The rulers in the city will not rest till they've wiped us out completely, or brought us down, cringing on our knees. We'll not negotiate.

Baba Right. Back to present business. Alhaji Burai –

Wura Wait. Should Mosun sit on this?

Mosun Listen, we have a law, and we shall make no exceptions.

Wura But –

Mosun My father sent my mother out of his house when I was three. But even if I loved him passionately, I would still do my duty, as one of the chosen representatives of our people.

Baba That is true. Still, you don't have to stay –

Mosun Why? Because I wasn't there, an open target like the others, when the police brought their guns? Could my father tell the bullets to bypass his daughter? When the tax men marched through our farmlands, trampling our precious crops and our hard won harvests, did they spare those of my father's daughter? And the sanitary inspectors who dipped their dirty fingers at will in my cooking pot? Ehn? Did my buttocks not burn too on that hot tin roof they sat us on at the barracks when we went up to protest? Where was my father? And when they finally rounded us up and flung us in prison, and the warders stripped us naked, and began to poke their fingers in us to humiliate us, did they remember my father, the big Alhaji who wines and dines with the governor?

Marshal (*Quietly.*) He's still your father, Mosun.

Mosun Thank you for reminding me.

Baba I think we were talking about evacuating the children Kokondi
Mosun –

Mosun For God's sake! What's wrong with all of you today? Marshal, even you! Didn't you say oppression and injustice know no frontier of blood or decency? That treachery is a poison which must be burnt out wherever found? A viper! So why are you all trying to make exceptions for me?

Marshal (*After a silence.*) The women and the children will be evacuated, to stay with relatives and friends or in-laws in the city. That will save them from the continuous panic of our movements each time the government forces attack.

Bogunde And it will be better for our resistance, Mosun won't you say goodbye to your mother before they leave?

Mosun (*Going.*) Yes, I'll go and – (*Stopping.*) Ah, I see. You're with them too, Bogunde. You also wish to create privilege in our ranks.

Kokondi I think we'd better just leave her.

Wura She's right. We must share everything. Both the good and the bad.

Marshal They'll need an escort. Wura, you'll lead them?

Wura Are you coming along?

Kokondi Why?

Wura You know I can't handle them all alone.

Baba Sorry, but we all have our hands full with other things.

Wura Still it'll be too much for me.

Marshal Okay, I'll come along. At least as far as the edge of the forest.

Bogunde You and I were going to look to the defence lines –

Titubi Could I ... could I go instead?

(*They are startled; they've forgotten her presence.*)

Baba You?

Titubi (*Still in pain.*) They ... may need a nurse on the way too.

Kokondi But you are in no shape to –

Titubi I'm still alive.

Mosun You need to rest, Titu. Already you've done more than enough for us.

Titubi If I go, then Marshal can stay.

Marshal Out of the question. You'll stay. I'll go with the children.

Baba Thank you Titu, but we can't let you exert yourself again until you're healed. I mean, you, a stranger among us, you have –

Titubi A stranger! That's all I keep hearing. How much must one do to qualify to be one of you? (*Embarrassed silence.*)

Baba You're right, my daughter. Forgive us. The outsider who shares our salt and our suffering is already a kinsman.

Marshal She stays behind, whatever the case. Let's get on to the trial of these two.

Baba Now?

Mosun Now! I want it over with.

Baba In that case, let's –

(A sudden upwelling of noise, off-stage. On stage, the men and women go into swift movements of self-defence, with MARSHAL and BOGUNDE leaping in a crouch towards the door. BOGUNDE caterwauls out, with MARSHAL covering him. All these in a few seconds. There is a frozen moment. Then BOGUNDE returns, calling urgently.)

Bogunde (*To TITUBI.*) Sisi! Can you walk? They need you urgently.

Marshal What is it?

Bogunde Fresh tragedies, Marshal. The vultures had poisoned our stream before they retreated.

All What!

Marshal How many people?

Bogunde Only two yet, fortunately. Ligali and his daughter.

Baba You think Titu can still help?

Titubi (*Going peacefully.*) I'll see what I can do.

Baba Wura, you'll go with her?

Mosun I'll come too.

Wura Marshal?

Marshal All right, I'll come along.

(Exeunt BOGUNDE, MARSHAL, TITUBI, WURA and MOSUN.)

Baba (*After some silence.*) Bring them forward and remove the cloth from their mouths. (*KOKONDI does so.*) Alhaji! And you, Lawyer Isaac! How will you explain all this?

Isaac (*All shaken.*) Baba ... please ... help me. It wasn't my fault, I swear! It was Buraimoh, ask him. He misled me.

Buraimoh You'll always be a worm, lawyer. Go on, abase yourself before these pigs.

Baba We trusted both of you. When all this started, it was you we first approached. We met, all the villages in this Council area, and decided to

send a delegation to meet you. Bogunde Wura, poor Akande who is now dead, with a ball in his head, Kokondi and I, we were the people chosen. We took Saka's lorry, and then from the motor-park, we walked to your office, Isaac. I remember. It was raining, and we were all soaked when you opened the door. So you wouldn't let us into your office, but spoke to us on the balcony. After that you drove us to Alhaji's mansion on the hill. Both of you, we knew well. You were born here in our midst. Your father's farms, lawyer, lie next to my family land. And Marshal had his first employment as a boy, working on Alhaji Buraimoh's fields. So when the government announced its threats to raid us, and then flooded our villages with fierce-looking men with their guns and whips, it was you we immediately thought of. We said, they live in the city where these vandals come from. Both of them are big men, they can talk to government and make it listen. And you gave us your word ...

Isaac Please ... let me defend myself. Let me – (*MARSHAL and BOGUNDE return.*)

Baba Yes?

Bogunde It was too late. Sisi could not help any more.

Marshal Terrible, the way they writhed to death.

Baba May their souls rest with our ancestors.

Marshal and Bogunde *Ase!*

Baba Poison! What is the land turning into?

Bogunde All because we refuse to pay money we haven't got. Because we refuse to let men with two balls like us march upon our heads.

Baba Not even in the worst days of our history. Not even Gaha put *majele* in water for children to drink.

Marshal They will pay for this. The war will never end.

Baba You hear all this, Buraimoh and Isaac? What your friends did?

Marshal Baba, the women and children leave immediately.

Bogunde Titu is accompanying you, I hope you know.

Marshal You didn't –

Bogunde I agreed. She was very insistent.

Baba But I thought we had –

Bogunde You won't stop her now. Ligali's daughter died in her arms.

Baba I see.

Bogunde I've never seen a woman look so shaken ... and then so determined. She will come with you.

Marshal And if her concern is all an act?

Baba Then you will find out, won't you?

Marshal Right, let her come along. I can take care of serpents. But before we leave – the trial?

Baba Yes, call Wura.

Marshal And Mosun. We can't leave her out now. (*Exit KOKONDI.*)

Baba This will have to be quick.

Bogunde Yes. Soon it'll be nightfall.

Buraimoh (*Suddenly laughing.*) A trial! Ha ha. This one here, this common thug, his father came here almost in the nude. We took the wretched man in from the open roads to save him from starvation. We even married a wife for him. And now their son dares, dares to look me in the face.

Marshal It is true that my father and others slaved themselves to death, to make you rich and prosperous. Yes, I know, slave-owning becomes such a habit that you are enraged when the slave stands up to claim his rights as a human being. That is why you are doomed, Alhaji.

Baba Here they come. (*Enter KOKONDI, MOSUN, WURA.*) Let's begin.

Buraimoh Welcome, welcome. Lawyer, you see them? Stop shivering man! That's what inspires these ants to – Listen, what is our crime? I demand to know.

Baba Your betrayal of the cause.

Buraimoh Hear that! Allah-akbar! Where do you think you are? China? Cuba? Mozambique? Or some lunatic asylum? Who's been teaching you these funny words?

Baba Are you ready to defend yourselves?

Buraimoh Look at them, Isaac! By Allah, stop it I say! Aren't you a man? You took your share after all. Just look at who's going to try you. Kokondi, who drives your mammy wagon.

Kokondi Drove, you mean. I quit long ago.

Buraimoh You were sacked, idiot! After the accident at the bridge. You ran here to avoid the police.

Kokondi Yes? Ask Lawyer who took my money and yet gave me forged particulars.

Buraimoh I see. The day of reckoning eh? Each one with his little grievance. Mosun here was abandoned. I threw her mother out of my house. And Wura, welcome. Your child died. I refused to claim it on my return from Mecca. Go on, start your own accusation.

Wura Your life is filled with uncountable sordid actions, Alhaji. But you are merely wasting time. We are not here for private squabbles. Tell us why you turned traitor. Defend yourself.

Isaac I was never a traitor, I swear to you! I'd like you to consider my case separately –

Buraimoh Shut up, you professional liar! Let me think.

Marshal Think quick. Before the blood dries.

Bogunde We wanted your help, but you used us. You sucked our veins.

Isaac I did not use you. I defended you all as best I could at the Inquiry. The papers said so –

Wura And what came of it? After all the eloquence, what did you get for us?

Isaac It wasn't my fault. The government took the decisions.

Mosun Which merely happened to benefit you, isn't it?

Baba We said we couldn't pay the tax, that harvests were poor, that we could hardly feed our children. And what happened? The government

- said, all right, we'll change the tax collectors –
- Bogunde** And you, Isaac, our own lawyer, you became the new akoda –
- Isaac** We had to find a compromise. All I did was in your interest.
- Wura** And you hired your own men to go on tax raids –
- Isaac** Farmers! They were farmers like you.
- Kokondi** With whips and guns?
- Buraimoh** Why don't you just kill us, since you're so determined?
- Baba** We said we didn't want the Council any more. That its agents fleeced us, that inspectors smashed into our homes to remove whatever they wanted. That's what we told you to help us expose at the Inquiry. We said you should demand that all the officials be probed and made to declare their assets. And what happened? They merely reshuffled the Council, and made you, Alhaji Buraimoh, its new chairman. You came here, demanding our cooperation, and when we refused, you brought the police back –
- Buraimoh** I had a plan. If you had listened, instead of following this cannibal. Marshal indeed! Wallahi, I was going to get your sons scholarships into the big schools in the city. I was going to start a pipe-borne water scheme. Your roads would have been tarred, your homes lit –
- Marshal** And you would have accomplished all that, wouldn't you, the day fowls begin to grow teeth?
- Buraimoh** You see what I mean?
- Wura** Alhaji, the next time you have a nightmare, try and sell it to someone else ...
- Buraimoh** But listen, can one achieve everything in a single day?
- Marshal** A day was enough, Alhaji, to destroy Wasimi.
- Buraimoh** (*Cowed now.*) What ... What do you mean?
- Marshal** It was you that led the police there, wasn't it?
- Buraimoh** No ... no ... I swear by Allah ...
- Marshal** In the night, when the people were asleep. We were not even armed then. All we said was that we would not work with your Council. So you led the police men from house to house, identifying the so-called agitators. You had a mask on, but your voice, Alhaji ... we recognised your voice ...
- Isaac** I wasn't there. You know that. I refused to follow them.
- Baba** And today? Why did you come today?
- Isaac** The devil! I was misled!
- Marshal** They looted our homes and set them ablaze, while we loafed there in their city, signing worthless papers.
- Mosun** I think we've said enough. Let's have the verdict.
- Baba** Marshal?
- Marshal** (*Turning up his clenched fist.*) Guilty.
- Bogunde** (*Same gesture.*) Guilty.
- Wura** (*The same.*) Guilty.
- Kokondi** (*The same.*) Guilty.

Mosun (*The same.*) Guilty.

Baba Take them away.

Isaac (*Whining.*) No. no. I plead for mercy. please ...
(*KOKONDI and BOGUNDE lead them away and then return.*)

Marshal The sentence?

Mosun Death.

Wura Mosun, I –

Mosun Stop it. There will be no exceptions.

Marshal Death then. Do we all agree?

Baba No. (*They look at him.*) They say that when we scratch the body, we do not think of the itch alone. The skin also is delicate.

Wura So what do we do?

Baba Buraimoh is Mosun's father, we cannot erase that. And as long as there's blood between our fingernails, they say, there will be lice in the hair. Lawyer's father also sat with me on the same pew in church, at that time when we could afford the luxury of Sundays. The verdict cannot be death.

Mosun Go on, break me. Let my life lose all meaning.

Baba This will only enrich it, my daughter. It is legitimate to kill in war. We're jackals then. But executions are a different thing. Especially when the victims are our own kinsmen, even when they've gone astray. We don't want our people to lose all respect for human life.

Kokondi It is a strong point you have there, Baba. But what punishment then will be adequate?

Baba I propose they lose all the harvest from their farms. And they'll be retained here as hostages till the war is over.

Wura Well, I agree to that. In spite of all they've done.

Bogundi In view of the special circumstances.

Kokondi Marshal?

Marshal What do you want me to say? You've all decided. Just keep them out of my sight, that's all.

Baba I'll take full responsibility for their life.

Marshal Wura, can we leave now?

Wura I am ready. (*They start to go.*)

Baba (*Calling.*) Marshal?

Marshal (*Stops.*) Yes?

Baba Good luck.

Marshal I won't need it.

(*Blackout.*)

Ten

(*To a brisk rhythm, reinforced by the blasts of a police whistle and the barkings of a dog, the actors rearrange the set. It is now the office of the DEPUTY SUPER-*

INTENDENT. Furniture merely symbolic a desk, a file cabinet, governor's portrait, a table, chairs, etc. The CORPORAL stands behind the chair of the DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT, who is half leaning back listening to ALHAJA KABIRAT shouting across the table.)

Alhaja I say I want news of my daughter!

Superintendent I heard you, Alhaja.

Alhaja What has happened to her?

Superintendent I assure you we're trying our best to find out.

Alhaja That is not enough! Two weeks you said. Only two weeks. And now it's five weeks since she left.

Superintendent I know.

Alhaja And I've been rotting away in that hotel.

Superintendent What? Corple, I ordered the best hotel?

Alhaja You know that's not what I mean.

Superintendent You're not resting enough?

Alhaja I don't need rest!

Superintendent You're sure you've not seen her since?

Alhaja Where would I have seen her?

Superintendent (*Conciliating.*) Calm yourself, Alhaja. You agreed to all this. You offered to cooperate.

Alhaja Yes, I –

Superintendent We put out the news that you had gone away to Mecca with your daughter. We even had photos of your departure faked and printed in the papers.

Alhaja All so you can win another pip.

Superintendent We'll not go into our motives again, Alhaja. You know very well you're doing this as much for yourself as for us.

Alhaja Well, I want my daughter.

Superintendent And your shops are doing fine, you can't complain. I myself bring you the reports every night from your chief accountant.

Alhaja That rogue? You think I trust him behind my back?

Superintendent Well, it's all for the protection of your daughter.

Alhaja I ask you again, how is she?

Superintendent And I tell you again, we're awaiting reports. I know for certain that up to a few hours ago, she was fine.

Alhaja A few hours ago!

Superintendent Unless of course you've seen her since?

Alhaja You're not mad, Salami? Where would I –

Superintendent You're right. Corple here saw her with his own eyes.

Alhaja (*To CORPORAL.*) You saw her! Where? Where? Tell me?

Superintendent She was apparently helping the farmers to evacuate their children to the city. My men recognised her in time fortunately.

Alhaja Ehn? What do you mean 'fortunately'?

Superintendent There was a blunder. A stupid blunder. But perhaps you know the details already.

Alhaja By Allah, will you talk sensibly! What happened?

Superintendent You've seen her?

Alhaja What are you hiding from me?

Superintendent But you've seen her?

Alhaja Is my daughter hurt?

Superintendent (*Pauses, looking at her.*) I believe Titu is all right. (*Stands.*)

The sergeant who led the party is an ox. As dumb as a gun butt, I've had him detained. He ordered an attack on the people. And there were only women and children, unarmed.

Alhaja No! Allah!

Superintendent An accident of war. When people are stubborn, these things are bound to happen. Fighters can't always be gentlemen. Now see the cost. And the incident seems certain to have toughened the farmer's resistance. I doubt if anyone can break them now.

Alhaja Titu was not one of the casualties?

Superintendent Do you know?

Alhaja Listen, I –

Superintendent The lawyer. He was a casualty.

Alhaja Which lawyer?

Superintendent You haven't heard? Lawyer Isaac, who was helping us track these ruffians down. They were once with the peasants, he and Alhaji Buraimoh, till we found their price.

Alhaja How do they come into this?

Superintendent We bought them. But the peasants captured them and almost put them to death. During the evacuation, they seized the chance to escape. And then got shot by mistake, by my boys. You see the irony. That's war for you.

Alhaja And my daughter?

Superintendent This recurring question. 'My daughter! My daughter!' It's like a scene in a play. Do you like the theatre, Alhaja? Me, I'm simply crazy about it. Ask Corple, he's our Secretary in the Police Drama Club. I'm President.

Alhaja Look here, Salami –

Superintendent And its funny too, when you think that I first met your daughter in a theatre, where, permit me to say, she was making a fool of herself. But she gave us an idea. Our next play at the Club's going to be based on the legend of Moremi, and ... you know, a scene like this, me and you, this could be a scene from the play! I can just picture it! Note this, Corple. Alhaja is Moremi's mother, the Yeye Oba. It's, er, let's say three years. Yes, three years since your daughter left. I am Oronmiyon. You come furious to the royal chamber to confront me. Your eyes are on fire. Like an Amazon's. You stamp your foot and you scream –

Alhaja (*Beside herself, hitting the table.*) WHERE IS MY DAUGHTER, YOU MADMAN?

Superintendent Corple, your cue. You're Kabiyesi's bodyguard, and see,

his royal person is being assaulted.

Corporal (*Stepping forward into the game.*) Stand back, my Queen Mother. Stand back. The King's person is sacred. No one must foul it.

Alhaja Ah, Titu! Titu!

Superintendent Titu? Did I hear someone call Moremi? (*To CORPORAL.*) Leave her Majesty, Aresa. (*Going to her.*) Calm yourself, dear mother. This fury becomes common slaves, not the Queen Mother. We understand your distress. Your daughter Moremi was our favourite, and her absence hurts us. (*The CORPORAL controls his laughter with difficulty.*) But we always remember she took the pledge by Esinmirin, our river goddess, and we are reassured. She will return.

Alhaja Take me back to the hotel, please. I accept my fate.

Superintendent You lament your daughter. We lament the land. We weep for the lack of peace, for the violence in the air. We weep that rebels beyond our power fall upon us at will and make mockery of our manhood. Our towns are unsafe. Food no longer reaches the markets, taxes are unpaid. All over –

Alhaja WILL YOU STOP THE FOOLISHNESS! (*Long silence.*)

Superintendent Suppose she returns?

Alhaja What?

Superintendent Suppose she has already returned?

Alhaja Titu? When?

Superintendent The game is ended, Alhaja. Now I'm asking questions. Suppose your daughter returns, and for some reason she does not want to see us, whom is she likely to go to first?

Alhaja I don't know what you mean.

Superintendent Where are you hiding your daughter, Alhaja Kabirat?

Alhaja Me, hiding her?

Superintendent I told you the game's over. Where is she?

Alhaja But that's what I want to know.

Superintendent Don't play tricks with me.

Alhaja I should be saying that!

Superintendent A complete ambush. Carefully laid at the exact spot. No one could have escaped. But my men recognised your daughter and naturally spared her life, thinking she was coming to us. And then, what do you think happened?

Alhaja Yes?

Superintendent When the shooting was over, and prisoners were being taken, zero! Your daughter was not to be found anywhere. Now Alhaja, there may be such talismen; able to make men vanish into the air; but I don't believe in them.

Alhaja So you think ... I ... I am hiding her somewhere?

Superintendent With the collusion of my men, yes. Not all of them are above the temptation your money can offer.

Alhaja But why would I want to do such a thing?

Superintendent Tell me.

Alhaja I know nothing about it, I swear.

Superintendent Think again. I am a patient man. (*Holding it up.*) See? This is the file on your activities since this thing started. This is your protest letter to the governor. Of course he hasn't even seen it. So. And these? Both Isaac and Buraimoh were in your pay. These are copies of your cheques to them in the past few weeks. What were you paying them for, Alhaja?

Alhaja It is legitimate to try to save one's daughter from ruin.

Superintendent That's not what you said, that day it began. Why didn't you let me know you had changed your mind?

Alhaja You're an officer of the state.

Superintendent Protecting your wealth, or mine?

Alhaja Well, where is my daughter?

Superintendent Things will begin to turn rough soon, madam, if you don't tell me.

Alhaja But I don't know. I'm telling the truth.

Superintendent Where is Titu?

Titubi (*Appearing.*) Here, Superintendent.

(*They whirl round in surprise. TITUBI has MARSHAL covered with a gun, his hands in the air. The bandage is still on her.*)

Superintendent Titu! And –

Alhaja (*Her arms open, but not daring to approach.*) My... my ...

Titubi I said I would do it, didn't I?

Alhaja My daughter! (*She bursts out crying.*)

Superintendent You did it! By God! You're Moremi!

Titubi (*To MARSHAL.*) Sit down. But don't try anything.

Superintendent So this is the Marshal!

Titubi I went, and I returned, triumphant. Like a legend. You didn't believe me, did you? But mother, I did it!

Alhaja My daughter! (*Still sobbing.*)

Titubi But I am not the same as I went away. A lot has happened. And I have a long story to tell you.

Superintendent I am dying to hear it.

Titubi Then sit down. For it will be long. I lived among the farmers, just as you sent me. And this is what happened...

Eleven

(*Lights come up abruptly on another scene, by a streamside. Some peasant women, very shabbily dressed, but quite gay, are washing clothes, rinsing some, etc. The sense of their high spirits must be immediate with the lighting of the scene. TITUBI walks forward and picks up a bucket.*)

Titubi I'll go down again to the stream.

Mosun What for? Better don't kill yourself woman. You've been climbing up and down those slippery steps all morning.

Titubi It doesn't matter. My legs can take it.

Molade Take a rest. We've almost finished anyway. We don't need more water.

Mama Kayode Yes, it's true, Titu. You work too hard. All night you're up, nursing the wounded. And then you have to come down with us again to wash their clothes in the morning. Don't you get tired at all?

Wura She's trying to pay us for her upkeep, as they do in their hotels there in the town. If you haven't the cash, you wash the plates ... (*Laughter.*)

Titubi But really, I'm not tired.

Mosun Okay, but put down your bucket. We've said we don't need more water. Abi, Mama Kayode?

Mama Kayode I have finished. If I dare to rinse these pants just once more, Ba Kayode won't have a pair of knickers any more, he'll have a fishing net!

Molade But are they clean enough to satisfy our husband, the sanitary inspector? (*Laughter.*)

Wura Ah, the sanitary inspector, with his one leg. How I miss him!

Molade He's a lucky man. He had advance warning before the men put fire to the Health Office that day. He fled to the city. Otherwise, what your husband would have done to him!

Mosun Remember the episode of the umbrella?

Mama Kayode That day he stopped Titus in the rain!

(*She turns to MOLADE, and they begin to play-act.*) Come here!

Molade Sah?

Mama Kayode I say come here, and you are saying sah, sah!

Molade Sorry, sah.

Mama Kayode Sorry, sah. Where are you going?

Molade To Mama Laide, sah.

Mama Kayode In this rain?

Molade It's my wife. She's in labour. She needs help.

Mama Kayode And you wait till it's raining before you remember the way to Mama Laide's place, you cunning man!

Molade Sah? Can I go now, sah?

Mama Kayode Nonsense and subordination! I am talking to you and you tell me can I go?

Molade Sorry, sah. But my wife –

Mama Kayode Shorrop! Concobility! My wife my wife! Do you ever hear government mention his wife? I mean, if the governor were to talk of his wives, private, personal, official and confidential, do you think they will have time to run government? But you, bush man with your only wife, it's always my wife my wife!

Molade Please sah.

Mama Kayode Open your mouth. You see? Black gums. Wider! Hen- hen. Moro. Beriberi. Yellow comatose. Is this a mouth or an outpatient's clinic? My dear bush man, I am hereby issuing your mouth with warrant. Eight o'clock sharp on Tuesday, you are ordered to present it for prosecution.

Molade But ... sah ... sah.

Mama Kayode Case dismissed, God's case no appeal! I advise you not to open that mouth again. It's an offence under the bye-law to foul a public place, section dee chapter six, bracket roman letter two ... hey, what's that in your hand self?

Molade You mean this umbrella, sah?

Mama Kayode Hen-hen that's what you call it, this dirty, smoky, cob-infested jagbajantis! I bet it's got lice in it too.

Molade But it's brand new! Alabi just sent it to me from the city last week –

Mama Kayode Well, it's under arrest. You're lucky. I can't ask you to detach your mouth, which is exhibit one, Queen versus Baba Alabi, alias Titus, nineteen gbongbonrongbon. But I will certainly not allow this umbrella to go on soiling the rain, which is a public property under the bye-law. So hand it over at ... yeee-pah! Ori mi o! (*For TITUS has whacked him on the head with the umbrella. He hobbles after him, and then tumbles.*) ... you will see! (*Picking himself up.*) You will see! Are you laughing? Titus spent the next two weeks in jail.

Titubi What! Because he wouldn't give up his property?

Mosun All our properties were public property while the inspector was here. If you argued, you went to work free of charge for the government in the white college.

Titubi And you didn't protest?

Molade What are we doing now? Our men are killing them man for man.

Titubi I mean before. Before the bloodshed.

Wura We hired a letter-writer. Everyone contributed to pay him. First petition nothing. Second petition, nothing again.

Mosun A third. A fourth. Another one.

Wura Grievances upon grievances. The letters multiplied, the letter-writer grew pregnant.

Molade But not even a note of acknowledgement.

Titubi Nothing at all?

Mosun Oh yes! The council officials grew more daring and more ruthless.

Mama Kayode To punish us for all those petitions. Bribery rates went up.

Wura Kickback and kickforward hit inflation.

Molade Tax assessments began to gallop like antelopes.

Mosun One day we went and burnt down the Council Office. That was the first time in months I slept soundly.

Wura Eh the governor! Don't forget the visit of the governor!

Molade Yes! First they sent policemen to kill us, but we ran away.

Mama Kayode They sent soldiers, and we ambushed them.

Mosun Then one day, one man called governor came down from a giant

iron hawk, from the sky.

Mama Kayode He stood there. His cheeks were shining. My God, I remember, he was so handsome I was afraid to look.

Molade It was Baba who replied him. After the governor had spoken, Baba stepped forward. I was hiding behind my husband.

Mama Kayode The governor's voice was sweet, you could almost drink it. And at first it was difficult to follow his words. They seemed to come from a church organ. (*Mimicking.*) Ladies and gentlemen, I know you have some grievances. But I have come to speak to you as the father of all the people in this state. This killing must stop. It is senseless for anybody to shoot guns against the government. That person will be crushed. So I am appealing to you. Think of your wives and children. Lay down your arms now and let us talk. All the people who have been misleading you till now, you must hand them over to the government, for they are your enemies, who don't want you to have peace and progress. We shall deal with them. Arid above all, you must pay your tax, it's the only way we can help you ... Pay your tax! Pay your tax!

Wura (*Laughing.*) Ah you remember everything, everything.

Mama Kayode And then Baba stepped forward. He bowed. Like this, very low. He said 'Your Excellency, my son, we have listened carefully to your fatherly appeal. Our roads have been so bad for years now that we can no longer reach the markets to sell our crops. Even your excellency had to make your trip here by helicopter. Your council officials and the *akodas* harass us minute to minute and collect bribes from us. Then they go and build mansions in the city. Sanitary inspectors like Mister Bamsun are bloodsuckers. Your Marketing Board seizes our cocoa, and pays us only one third of what it sells it to the *oyinbo*. We have no electric, and we still drink *tanwiji* from the stream. Many of our children are in jail for what your people call smuggling. We protested and your police mounted expeditions to maim us and reduce our houses to ashes. But all these do not matter anymore. Now that we have listened to your kind and fatherly appeal, we shall forget all our sufferings and pay our taxes. I promise we shall now send in the money promptly, through the same route your appeal has come to us – by helicopter!' (*General laughter.*) Oh, you should have seen the governor's face!

Titubi So what did he do?

Wura What else, do you still ask? You nurse the casualties every night.

Titubi You know... before this ... I could never have believed that life was so unkind to anybody.

Molade It's unkind, only till you begin to fight back. After that –

Titubi Yes? Tell me. Teach me.

Molade You should teach us, good woman. Where you find your strength.

Titubi Me? What strength –

Wura Remember the song she taught us yesterday?

Mama Kayode Let's sing it. Enough of the talking.

Mosun I agree. Start it, you're Olohun-iyó.

(They sing the song Iyawo nfo'so. As they pick up the song again, singing softly, lights go up on the DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT'S office. The characters are still in the same postures. TITUBI walks back into the office with the gun to address them.)

Twelve

Titubi That was when I began to ask questions. Questions. I saw myself growing up, knowing no such sufferings as these. With always so much to eat, even servants feed their dogs. Yet here, farmers cannot eat their own products, for they need the money from the market. They tend the yams but dare not taste. They raise chickens but must be content with wind in their stomach. And then, when they return weary from the market, the tax man is waiting with his bill. It could not be just. In our house, Mama, we wake to the chorus of jingling coins. And when we sleep, coiled springs, soft foam and felt receive our bodies gently. But I have lived in the forest among simple folk, sharing their pain and anguish ... and I chose...

Alhaja Kabirat What do you mean?

Titubi Wait! I have not finished. Listen to the rest. For without knowing it, the shame of my past had come flooding into my eyes. *(Tears are falling freely from her eyes. Lights transfer back to the streamside.)*

Thirteen

(MAMA KAYODE goes to TITUBI.)

Mama Kayode My dear, do not cry, or don't you understand? We're fighting to live.

Mosun Our men fall, but we do not mourn.

Wura Water fertilises the earth, blood the spirit of the race.

Molade We struggle, our dirges wash us clean.

Mama Kayode We're older than pain and betrayal.

Wura Older than your politicians and your rulers.

Mama Kayode We own the earth, we are the earth itself.

Molade And the future is ours. Is for our children.

Mama Kayode So come, my daughter, wipe your tears.

Wura Tell us about your wedding song.

Titubi What? What wedding song?

Molade Will it be as sweet as the song you taught us?

Titubi But, what do you mean?

(The women laugh.)

Wura Ehn-ehn! Is it because I've not broken your head for stealing him

from me?

Molade She thinks we haven't noticed.

Titubi Noticed what?

Wura Nothing, nothing-o! But if I were to talk!

Mosun Don't mind her. The way her eyes devour him.

Titubi Who? Whom are you talking about?

Mama Kayode A riddle! Shall I tell it?

Woman Yes! Tell it!

Mama Kayode Listen:

Oruku tindi tindi

Oruku tindi tindi –

Woman *Oruku gba gbo!*

Mama Kayode I say

Oruku is in my hands:

Catch it! I launch a riddle-o!

Mosun *Oruku bi gba omo*

A thousand kernals

Nestle in a thousand nuts.

We await your riddle-o!

Mama Kayode *Oruku tindi tindi*

I launch a riddle-o!

Molade May your riddle ripen well!

As it falls! May oruku

Swell our mouths with succulence!

Wura I catch your riddle-o!

Mama Kayode *Oruku tindi tindi...*

(Pause.)

Molade Hen-hen you see now? Titu is silent!

Mosun Titu, the riddle hangs in the air. Won't you speak?

Wura Or is she afraid of something about to be disclosed?

Titubi OK, I catch it! I have nothing to hide. May your riddle ripen well –

Mama Kayode Oruku is growing:

A thousand baby seeds

In your fingers –

Titubi Seek me:

I turn your words

To costly beads...

Woman We adorn ourselves in the jungle:

And grown is the riddle.

Mama Kayode Listen:

The he-goat wears a beard.

The she-goat wears a beard:

Oba Lailo!

Mosun I know that one!

Molade Me too, but I won't say! Not yet!

Wura Titu, do you care to enlighten us?

Titubi Why me? This is a trap, isn't it? I withdraw from the game.

Wura All right, I'll solve the riddle. Love! Someone's in love! Tinrin tintin!

Mosun What an understatement! When the she-goat also grows a beard that means –

Molade An inferno! The love all-consuming!

Titubi So who is in love now?

Wura Why the panic? Has anyone mentioned your name?

Mama Kayode Listen:

Ruku ruku yekete

The carrier of the corpse is bow-legged,

The corpse itself is also bow-legged,

Oba Lailo!

Wura Now we're getting nearer to target. Who knows that one?

Mosun There is a horse, and there is a rider, both keeping the same secret. That's all I'm going to say.

Molade But who are they? I'm sure Titu wouldn't know anything about this either?

Titubi I've told you, I'm out of it.

Mama Kayode Listen:

Oruku is going home to roost:

Firewood is gathered

In a hundred places,

But the bundle is tied up

In a single spot,

Oba Lailo!

Mosun I know the man!

Molade I too can guess. Titu, can you tell us?

Titubi I am not in love with any man!

Molade She denies it again!

Mosun She thinks we've not been seeing them together!

Mama Kayode Anyway I must congratulate you. I didn't know anybody could ever bring him back again to what he was before the war began.

Mosun She's a good nurse.

Titubi Am I? You know, he still frightens me –

Molade Who? I thought you swore there is no man?

Titubi Stop teasing me...

Mama Kayode Lucky Marshal,...and look! See who is coming!

Mosun My friends, pack your things, our presence is needed at home!

(Laughing they begin to pack their things together.)

(Laughs die out on the streamside scene as TITUBI walks back to the DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT's office.)

Fourteen

Titubi And that was it. I knew at last that I had won. I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly. I am not Moremi! Moremi served the State, *was* the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is not true that the State is always right.

Superintendent (*Who has been watching her with increasing alarm, leaps up.*) By God, you bitch, you – ! (*But she is alert and keeps him covered.*)

Titubi Keep still Salami. My hands are jittery on the trigger, and I won't like to kill you in error.

Superintendent (*Raising his hands quickly.*) All right, all right, girl, just keep calm.

Alhaja (*Trembling with shock.*) Titu! Titu! Please don't do it. You're my only daughter. They'll kill you.

Titubi (*Laughs, but shrilly, she's overstretched.*) Mama, our life itself is not important. Nor all these glittering tinsels we use to decorate it. Ask your friend Salami. He knows the truth now. In another week he'll be asking to negotiate. He won't be in such a hurry to order the massacre of children, for there's no way you can win a war against people whose cause is just. As long... (*She's beginning to falter now.*) ... as ... long as the law remains ... the privilege of a handful of powerful men ... ah, I am tired ... Marshal! ... You didn't believe in me, did you? You never believed I was sincere?

Marshal Titu, I –

Titubi Take the gun. (*She hands it to him.*) Let a new life begin. (*Blackout.*)

Fifteen

(*As at the beginning of Scene Eight, dancing silhouettes celebrate harvest and gradually disappear. Lights now come up. It is a fortnight later. The peasant women again, by the streamside. They have finished their washing, the clothes piled up in the calabashes. Now they are relaxing, singing, washing their feet in the stream, etc. Someone is putting the finishing touches to the plaiting of TITUBI's hair.*)

Mosun So tomorrow we negotiate.

Molade Yes. And the war will be ended.

Wura Titu! I don't know how you found the courage to do it.

Titubi Don't ask me.

Mama Kayode God will reward you my daughter.

Wura What's that song of hers again?

Molade (*Starts to sing.*) Be always like this day, beside me. Wear hope like a jewel, it never fades. (*The others join the song.*)

Wura (*Looking up suddenly.*) Didn't I say it? Now look who is coming!

Woman What! What are we seeing! Eeeh-oh, Titu-Titu!

Titubi Tell me, what should I do?

Molade See how she's trembling!

Titubi He warned me yesterday that he would be telling me something important this morning. Something important!

Mama Kayode All right, let me handle this. Form a circle round her and leave all the talking to me.

(They do so, arranging themselves in a circle, with TITUBI in the middle. They pretend to be very busy as MARSHAL enters, accompanied by BOGUNDE and KOKONDI.)

Marshal Good morning to our mothers. I am happy to find you here, all together. *(Silence. MARSHAL looks at his companions in amazement.)*

Bogunde Dear women, we salute you. *(Silence.)*

Kokondi We come with a great joy. And we wish you to be witnesses of a memorable event. *(Silence.)*

Bogunde Mama Kayode! Toun! Mama Iyabo! All of you, Marshal is greeting you!

Marshal Bogunde, can it be that the war has done something to the ears of our women?

Kokondi Titu, Marshal is here. *(Pause.)* Strange disease. It must have come in the night.

Bogunde It's the Monster Majengboron! It has an appetite for female ears.

Marshal Women, have we done something to wrong you? *(Silence.)*

Bogunde, there's a cure for this. I learnt it from my great grandfather, that indomitable hunter of spirits. *(He takes his gun from KOKONDI.)*

Bogunde, I want you to go among them. Start with Mama Kayode in particular. This is what you'll do. *(Whispers in his ear.)* Good. Go on. And the first person who utters even the faintest sound will have her head blown off.

(BOGUNDE steps forward. The women look up, watching apprehensive. He goes to MAMA KAYODE, walks round her, and then suddenly bends to tickle her. She stiffens, tries to resist, but finally collapses in laughter.)

Mama Kayode Please ... please, I beg you.

Marshal What is that I hear? Give way, let me shoot at her!

(She flees behind another woman, who also runs, till finally they form a circle by linking hands and dancing round TITUBI, so that she's still inaccessible to BOGUNDE. They improvise a short song.)

Marshal *(Dropping his gun.)* We surrender, sweet women. Tell us now. Why may I not speak with her?

(The circle comes to a stop, but does not break up.)

Mama Kayode Shall we pity them?

Women Yes. Answer him.

Mama Kayode She does not want to speak to you.

Marshal Me? But why?

Mosun You're too brutal, she says.

Marshal I'm a commander of war –

Molade And you are too cruel.

Marshal Not to friends. Never to friends.

Wura But can you tell friend from foe?

Marshal I confess, sometimes it's hard –

Mama Kayode Your face often fills her with fright.

Marshal A mask only. A commander's make-up. Plead for me. Tell her, my face shall soften in the breeze of her caresses.

Mosun Hear that! He's talking of caresses already.

Molade Without winning her first.

Marshal Tell her, I bring her a priceless gift.

Mama Kayode Show us.

Marshal I want her to hold it herself, in her fingers.

Mama Kayode Give it to me.

Marshal No, into her fingers only.

Mama Kayode All right, go away. She won't take it.

Marshal No?

Mama Kayode No.

Bogunde Let's go, Marshal.

Marshal (*Retrieving his gun.*) Right, let's go. (*They make to go.*)

Titubi (*Running through the circle.*) I'll take it!

Women Traitor!

Mama Kayode Now he'll have you for cheap!

Marshal Don't be so sure. Let her open this packet.

(*Takes it from KOKONDI and gives her. She opens it to general exclamations of surprise. There are two coral necklaces, which TITUBI holds up in surprise.*)

Marshal You see? They are from my mother's long-forgotten casket. Wear them.

Titubi But ... but I... I can't. I c-

(*The women snatch them from her, force her to kneel and wear the beads round her neck. MARSHAL takes his gun, touches her forehead, the ground, then his forehead. The crowd hails.*)

Marshal This is a moment of delight, and I have chosen it to be among you all, in this place, where the journey of our ancestors ended. Titubi, I am going to dress you in a new name, so that, from this moment, the whole world knows how precious you are to me.

Mama Kayode May the name last her.

Women Ase.

Mama Kayode As long as the long length of a ripe life.

Marshal We have met your parents. We have been to the house from which your manners were furnished. We know the stream of blood along whose banks your family spreads its seeds. We have seen you in our midst, different from how you came. And we have grown to cherish you, and that is enough. Now, I call on this earth I am standing on. (*Takes gourd from KOKONDI and pours libation. BOGUNDE softly chants*

*an incantation, beating a rhythm on his weapon.) I call on you trees and animals which people our forests and are our kinsmen. I summon the seeing eyes our ancestors. And you, my very dear friends, standing in this charged embrace of sunlight and wind, bear witness. I give her, not a gun, nor a matchet, but costly beads of *iyun*. For her war is not to kill, but to heal. Her battlefield among the wounded and stricken. Therefore I pluck her name like this, all ripe and golden, not from the laden shelf of our violent heroes, but from the storehouse of beauty and tenderness. I name her – MOROUNTODUN!*

(Ovation! The women begin to sing the praise-song, Morountodun eja oson. They beat out the rhythm on their hands and feet. MARSHAL drinks from the gourd, and hands it to TITUBI who also drinks. She rises and embraces him. KOKONDI sings a love song. The dance and merriment are at a peak when BABA enters. Everything freezes.)

Baba I heard the sound of singing ...

Molade Yes! We were dancing.

Wura Marshal has just finished a naming ceremony.

Baba A new child, and not to my knowledge? *(The crowd laughs.)*

Titubi Baba, look at my beads!

Baba Ah I see.

Mama Kayode He named her Morountodun!

Baba *Eja oson!* A beautiful name!

Marshal She's the goddess of beauty herself.

Baba I am happy to hear such words from your lips again, Marshal.

Bogunde Baba, women are cunning.

Kokondi And dangerous.

Baba And sweet. Morountodun! I should have been invited. We have all gained from her sweetness. My daughter, I give you my blessings. May the name last you –

Women *Ase!*

Baba As long as the long eye of the sky.

Titubi *(At BABA's feet.)* I'm so happy, Baba. If only I could open my heart, like a book –

Baba I couldn't read it, my daughter. But I know you are happy. Alas.

Titubi Alas?

Baba These sounds should lead to a wedding, but –

Women Yes, Baba? Go on.

Baba When is it that we have carried weapons to a wedding? Marshal, is it true what I hear?

Marshal What do you hear?

Baba That you have summoned all the commanders to the grove?

Marshal Yes. *(Women exclaim in alarm.)*

Baba Why?

Marshal What other reason? To continue the struggle.

Baba Even when there's no longer need for armed confrontation?

Marshal It is you who say so.

Baba And the Committee? Tomorrow –

Marshal The other side merely wishes to buy time, to rebuild their spent forces. And to divide us.

Baba How shall we know their intentions if we don't give the truce a chance?

Marshal Are we to argue this out in front of the women?

Women We want to hear this too, Marshal.

Marshal Of what use is knowledge gained in the grave?

Baba Tomorrow, Marshal. Only a day. Why not give tomorrow a chance?

Marshal Tomorrow is too important for me to gamble with.

Baba And so, behind my back, you're preparing for an attack?

Marshal Can we do so in front of you?

Baba We declared a truce with the police. On our honour. Tomorrow we're supposed to hang our weapons.

Marshal Words! I am tired of words!

Baba I'm still the leader here.

Marshal Here, in the village. Not at the battlefield.

Baba So you're disobeying me!

Marshal We cannot follow you into a pit.

Baba And Bogunde, Kokondi? You're with him on this? (*They look away.*)

Titubi Marshal! Marshal ... you're not going away? You're not going to fight again? (*She's heartbroken.*)

Marshal I have been given no other choice ... Morountodun. I was born poor ... You understand? Look, it is well calculated. Tomorrow, when they think we are idling here, washing our wounds and hanging out our shredded hopes to dry, we are going to appear there, suddenly out of the air, and hit them. Now that we have the ammunition. Bang! Right where their heart is. The very building which houses their Commander and his odious officers. There can be no better time than this!

Baba Tell me again you mean you're going to attack the Central Police Station?

Marshal We'll destroy the place. Reduce it to rubble, for ever. Let all prisons fall!

Bogunde and Kokondi Let all prisons fall!

Baba You're insane all of you! That place is almost a fortress! You'll never get in!

Marshal You said the same thing when we were going to raid the prison. But we did it.

Baba I know. But that was just lucky. The Central Police Station is extremely fortified. You'll all be killed.

Marshal How do you know?

Baba How do I know? Haven't I slept there before?

Marshal Nobody will sleep there again, after tomorrow. All the filthy cells and dungeons in which our people groan their life out. And fine young men are broken, beyond recognition, into blabbering idiots. The torture

chambers and solitary confinements where men are changed to rat and roach. Every thing will go down in one huge conflagration. And then true freedom can begin at last ...

Baba He named you Morountodun. Speak to him.

Titubi Marshal... what about me?

Marshal (*As if unaware of the interruption.*) And who knows, maybe it will be time then to rest our weapons and let them grow to rust... at least until the next cry of desperation. And maybe afterwards our own children will have a decent chance to grow up like human beings, not like animals having to scrounge for left-overs in the sewer of history ... I am dreaming, and so much still to do! Bogunde! Kokondi! Kick me awake! Let me hear a song of fire to rouse my spirit! (*KOKONDI starts a war song, which they all pick up.*) That's better! Now I am a man again ... Morountodun, I have clothed you in a name of honour. My fists to a superb woman! I shall not see you again before the men and I depart early in the dawn tomorrow. But when we return ... let's go quickly, men. (*They salute BABA, and go out, chanting their song. There is a short pause, while BABA and his people look in the direction of the men's departure.*)

Baba (*Sighing.*) They will not come back.

(*All action freezes. A long pause. Short Blackout.*)

Sixteen

(*The actors begin to re-emerge to change their costumes. We are back in their changing room. The DIRECTOR, walking quickly from the audience, is going towards his actors, when he seems to check himself, and turns to the audience.*)

Director Oh, you're still there? I suppose you'd like to know how the story ended? (*He walks back a bit. The actors go on about their business, unconcerned.*) Well, the old man was right. Marshal and his men did not come back. It was, you'll admit, a suicidal mission? ... In the end, peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out. Yes, that's History for you ... But still, you must not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don't forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. The real struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the street, in your homes; in your daily living and dying ... We are actors, and whatever we present here is mere artifice, assembled for your entertainment. Tomorrow the play may even be different. It depends. Some of the scenes for instance seemed to be ...

(*A shout of irritation from the actors interrupts him. Then two or three of them overpower him, clamp their hands over his mouth.*)

Mama Kayode (*begins the song in which they all join, clapping.*)

Be always like this day

Beside me. Wear hope like a jewel:

It never fades

It never fades

It never –

(The song cuts off in a general freeze. Lights come on in the auditorium. On stage, on opposing platforms, MOREMI and TITUBI are caught in harsh spotlights, looking at each other.)

(Blackout.)