

The Mercurian



A Theatrical Translation Review

Volume 1, Number 2

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The Mercurian is named for Mercury who, if he had known it, was/is the patron god of theatrical translators, those intrepid souls possessed of eloquence, feats of skill, messengers not between the gods but between cultures, traders in images, nimble and dexterous linguistic thieves. Like the metal mercury, theatrical translators are capable of absorbing other metals, forming amalgams. As in ancient chemistry, the mercurian is one of the five elementary “principles” of which all material substances are compounded, otherwise known as “spirit”. The theatrical translator is sprightly, lively, potentially volatile, sometimes inconstant, witty, an ideal guide or conductor on the road.

The Mercurian publishes translations of plays and performance pieces from any language into English. *The Mercurian* also welcomes theoretical pieces about theatrical translation; rants, manifestos, and position papers pertaining to translation for the theatre; as well as production histories of theatrical translations. Submissions should be sent to: Adam Versenyi at anversen@email.unc.edu or by snail mail: Adam Versenyi, Department of Dramatic Art, CB# 3230, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3230. For translations of plays or performance pieces, unless the material is in the public domain, please send proof of permission to translate from the playwright or original creator of the piece. Since one of the primary objects of *The Mercurian* is to move translated pieces into production, no translations of plays or performance pieces will be published unless the translator can certify that he/she has had an opportunity to hear the translation performed in either a reading or another production-oriented venue.

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Volume 1, Number 2
Summer 2007

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Editor's Note

The interminable drought parching the Piedmont of North Carolina makes this late September summer issue of *The Mercurian* appear right on time. Perhaps its publication will spur the rain gods to smile upon us and sending a soaking rain! This second issue of the journal contains four plays and two articles. We begin with James Maraniss' translation of one of Calderón de la Barca's most famous *auto sacramentales*, *The Great Theatre of the World* from the Spanish Golden Age. Next come Jill Mac Dougall's translations of two plays from Francophone Africa, Koffi Kwahulé's *Bintu* from Ivory Coast, and Pierre Mumbere Mujomba's *The Lost Envelope* from Congo/Kinshasa. These two black comedies of corruption are preceded by Mac Dougall's article, "Beans, *Haricots*, *Madesou*: The Challenges of Post-Colonial Translation" reprinted from *Translation Perspectives*. These are followed by Caridad Svich's adaptation for U.S. audiences of Duška Radosavljević's British English translation of Serbian playwright Uglješa Šajtinac's play *Huddersfield*. *Huddersfield* is a play that I read with a sense of encountering a strong theatrical voice, but with utter puzzlement as to what it was truly about. Svich's introduction, "Dreams of England: On Uglješa Šajtinac's *Huddersfield*," provides the necessary context in which to appreciate this work. This issue concludes with the re-printing of an article from *Latin American Theatre Review* by Heidrun Adler. Adler's "When Translation Creates Encounters," meditates on the challenges posed when translating Latin American theatre, both linguistically and culturally, for a German audience. As the theatre is nothing without its audience, *The Mercurian* welcomes your comments, questions, complaints, and critiques. Submissions for consideration for publication in Vol. 1, No. 3 of the journal should be submitted by December 1, 2007. Enjoy!

--Adam Versényi

Allegorical Auto Sacramental

The Great Theater of the World by Pedro Calderón de la Barca

Dramatis personae

The Author

The World

The King

Discretion

Grace

Beauty

The Rich Man

The Peasant

The Poor Man

A Child

A Voice

accompaniment

translated by James Maraniss

Translator Biography:

James Maraniss has been teaching Spanish Golden Age literature at Amherst College since 1972. He wrote the libretto, based on Calderon's "La vida es sueno" for the opera "Life is a Dream" (music by Lewis Spratlan) which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 2000. He is currently working on a translation of Cervantes' Don Quixote, which perhaps the world doesn't need another one of, but in which he believes fervently. He studied Spanish literature at Harvard with Stephen Gilman and at Princeton with Edmund L. King. He has translated three major works of Cuban author Antonio Benitez-Rojo: Sea of Lentils (El mar de las lentejas), The Repeating Island (La isla que se repite) and A View from the Mangrove (Paso de los vientos), plus one yet to be published in English: Woman in Battle Dress (Mujer en traje de batalla). A Wisconsin native transplanted to New England, James is married and has three children.

(Enter the Author, wearing a starry mantle and a crown of light.)

Author: You, beautiful construction
 of great and lesser forms,
 usurper of heaven's light,
 rival of countless stars
 in flowers that will bloom and die.
 Field of elemental strife,
 where sea and air attack the land
 illuminated by the fire's rage,
 you, the all-diverse,
 the happiest structure in the universe,
 first unseconded, Phoenix uncurled
 from all-consuming falling inward.
 You, to call you once by name,
 the World...

World: Who's there?

Author: Your sovereign author, with a touch
 to inform your dark matter.

World: What do you want of me?

Author: I the thinker, you my eidolon,
 we working now will execute
 a new conceit -- a festival
 to my own power. Since Nature,
 to display my greatness, celebrates

Author:
(cont.)

continuously, since drama
always pleases most, and since
it's true that human life is play,
let your presentation today
favor heaven with a play,
I, Author-impresario, may choose
the cast. From the beginning I've had men
as my companions. They will enact
a four-part play
in the Great Theater of the World.
For each I have a role.
Costume, production, all
advantageously displayed,
beautiful and plausible,
these are up to you.

World:

Generous Author, I obey.
I'll tell each who acts upon
The Great Theater of the World
just what his part demands.
You will ordain, and I, obedient,
will carry out, and though
the work I do, the miracle is yours.

World:
(cont.)

Here's a veil to hide the set
until we need it --chaos
where matter is confused.
This obscure cloud will disappear
to leave a stage alight beneath
two luminaries: heaven's own lantern
by day, and a nocturnal lamp
to which a thousand garnets
give living influx
on the forehead of the night.
Act One: simplicity, sincerity,
Nature's first laws ingenuously sketched
within a garden scene, to make one doubt
so beautiful a sight was drawn
by an untutored hand.
Flowers, come out!
--the first time ever -- (aside to Author)
See the puzzled dawn!
Trees, bear fruit! (takes a bite) Delicious!
- Untainted by the asp of envy - (to Author)
Crystals, shatter into glittering shards!
Move the dawn to weep with tears of dew!
To adorn this earthly paradise (turns to audience)
I inlay it with some wilderness:

World:
(cont.)

where mountains and deep valleys are required
valleys and mountains there shall be.
Sagaciously, astutely, I crease
the land with rivers, arms of the sea
detached and sent through variegated paths.
We opened with no buildings, but now at once
you'll see republics founded, cities made,
castles unveiled. And when
the mountains press their bulk too hard
upon the land, the scene changes.
An angry flood covers everything.
In the midst of so much gulf,
through swelling waves and clouds,
furrowing unknown seas,
fluctuating and serene,
a ship comes, its belly full
of men, birds, brutes.
A changing three-colored arch,
blond and purple, signals peace.
The waves recede. The earth shrugs off
its watery cloak, reveals
a noble face, unparalleled---
though somewhat parched.

World:
(cont.)

With this complete, we begin
the Second Act: The Written Law.
I need a set
of movable appearances to get
the Hebrews out of Egypt.
Two fiery columns
light the desert. Moses enters
with the law. A mountain disappears
beneath a cloud of rapture.
An angry eclipse closes Act Two:
the sun is almost killed.
Its shuddering finale jerks
our own blue orbicle into
contrary motion. Parallels,
meridians are erased. The hills,
the walls, glorious and decadent,
tremble with delirium,
fall to a pallid ruin.
Act Three sets the law of grace
with miracles I reveal
from time to time, calmly, until
the final scene. Here our set,
so plausible, so technical, so fine,

World:
(cont.)

dissolves in a consuming flame,
a pure and terrible ray of light.
I cringe and stammer to imagine it.
I wish nobody ever had to see it.

(pause)

I'll put a door on each side of the stage
for actors to step out of your conceit
into the world and then return: a cradle
and a tomb. The man born to be king
will dress in purple. There is a captain,
I have arms for him, and books for the scholar.
The scoundrel will receive my insults,
the aristocrat my honors
and the commoner my liberties.
He who makes the earth produce
through work alone will get rude instruments;
she who plays the lady will receive
a pretty poison of perfection, and
the poor man will go bare. If any thinks
that with more help he could have better played
his part, the fault is his, for I've
provided all that's needed, and the scene
is set, so mortals: Come out! Adorn
the stage of The Great Theater of the World!

Author: Mortals! Though you haven't even lived
I call you mortals. You've always been
attending me. Come to the garden, where
I stand among the cedars: I will cast
you in your earthly roles.

(Enter actors who will play the Rich Man, the King, the
Peasant, the Poor Man, Beauty, Discretion, and a Child.)

King: We're here as always at your service, Author,
without feeling, impulse, reason, soul or life.
We are unformed. We are the dust beneath
your feet. Blow on us and we begin to act.

Beauty: We live entirely by your conceit;
we don't quicken to a feeling or a touch;
we are indifferent to the Good, and have no
joy in sinning, but as we take our parts
we'll try to make them seem convincing.

Peasant: My new-found lord, my Author just revealed,
maker and knower and distributor of lives,
give me a part. If I should fail
I'll blame the actor, not the role.

Author: I know if you were all allowed
to choose, no one would take
the role of the afflicted. Everyone
would like to be the one who rules.
But that commanding life, as rare
as it may seem, is a representation.
It's not real. And I, your Author, know
what all your talents are, so take
these parts. You play the King.

(Author begins distributing scripts.)

King: A privilege.

Author: Beauty of humankind, the leading lady, you.

Beauty: How wonderful!

Author: You are the rich, the powerful.

Rich Man: A fine debut, an entrance to
the pure light of the sun!

Author: You're going to be the peasant.

Peasant: Does that mean work?

Author: Yes.

Peasant: Well I won't be a good worker.
I have pretensions to a life

Peasant: of idleness. With no experience,
 (cont.) how can I dig up the earth
 or get my bread from it?
 If I could turn you down, I would.
 You're going to see some rotten acting.
 (Sighs.) I guess you know what I can do.
 You'll dignify my boorishness
 with decent work, then you'll forgive me
 with your love, I know it,
 so I'll do the part, but slowly.

Author: You are Discretion.

Discretion: I'll be discreet.

Author: You will die before you're born.

Child: An easy part to learn.

Author: You are a beggar.

Poor Man: Who, me?

Author: You.

Poor Man: That's a part I want no part of.

Listen, Author, why choose me
 to play the pauper in this comedy?
 Why have a tragedy just for me?
 When you handed me this role

Poor Man: didn't you bestow a soul
 (cont.) that's equal to a King's? Equal feeling?
 Equal being? Why then the unequal casting?
 If you had given me less life, made me
 insensate, then perhaps your justice
 wouldn't seem as strange. But you gave
 the better parts to ones who are
 themselves no better, maybe worse.

Author: If you can play the Poor Man with intensity,
 with soul, you'll satisfy an audience.
 I haven't written in your pain
 to denigrate your part..
 Outperform the king!
 I'll pay you better at the end.
 Human life is just a play.
 At the curtain I will have
 the most convincing actors at my side.

Beauty: What are you calling this new work,
 so soon to sound upon the tongues of fame?

Author: "Act well your role, for God is real"

King: That sounds important. We should display
our talents in this mysterious play.

Rich Man: If it is important, we should get
rehearsal time.

Discretion: Impossible. Our lives
begin with our entrances.

Poor Man: I'll be terrible; I haven't learned my lines

Peasant: Nor I. The pauper and the peasant
will make a pair, both unprepared.
Even an old comedy, performed to death
will die again when lines are lost.
How can we do justice to your work
without rehearsing it?

Beauty: How do we recognize our entrances,
our exit cues?

Author: You don't.
Just figure out the meaning of your being born,
what it will mean to die.
You have one chance for this.

Author: Be ready always for your part to end.
 (cont.) I will call you when it's done.

Poor Man: If our sensations carry us away?

Author: I must refer you all, the king, the beggar,
 he who ignores and he who errs,
 to one or another passage of my Law.
 It tells you what to do.
 You never need complain to me.
 Your wills are free; the theater is now
 prepared. Go out and take life's measure.

Discretion: What are we waiting for?

All: Let's act well our roles, for God is real.

(Upon leaving, they run into the World, who stops them. The
 World is carrying some appurtenances.)

King: Purple and laurel you must give to me.

World: Why?

King: Because I play the King.

(Shown the World his script, takes the purple and the crown,
 and leaves.)

Beauty: Give me nuance, subtlety
 of rose and jasmine.
 Make me like the red carnation.
 Leaf by leaf, ray by ray,
 unravel all the lights of day,
 all May's flowerets. Feature me.
 Make the sun my flower.
 Make its gaze follow me.

World: So vain a role!

Beauty: Composed for me.

World: Which one?

Beauty: Beauty.

World: Oh, I see.

Pale rose and crystal
 set off your shadows
 naturally.

(World gives her a bouquet and a crystal mirror.)

Beauty: Flowers, colors, you will be
 my carpet.

(Beauty strews flowers before her. Takes the mirror.)

A crystal looking glass! (Looks in it.) **Me!** (Exit.)

Rich Man: I come here for prosperity;
 give me your happiness.

World: I split my entrails, pull out my
occulted treasures. Here, take these.
(Gives jewels to the Rich Man.)

Rich Man: I'm rich and proud, and I am free! (Leaves.)

Discretion: I ask for room on earth to live.

World: What is your role?

Discretion: Discretion.

World: I give
to one so righteous, fasting and prayer.
(Gives a hairshirt and a scourge.)

Discretion: Nothing else would I take from thee. (Leaves.)

World: What is it, child? Do you have a script?

Child: I don't need one for the life I live.
I will die before I'm born. I stay
with you no longer than the time it takes
to leave one prison for a darker one.
You must give what I ask. I ask for a grave.

World: What shall I give to you, you clod?

Peasant: What I wish you'd given him instead.

World: Come, I need to know your role.

Peasant: Come, I don't want you to know.

World: From your behavior I infer
that brutishly you'll have to turn
the soil to get your bread.

Peasant: That's right.

World: Well take this hoe. (Gives hoe.)

Peasant: (Reads label.) Inherited
from Adam. Adam I know you thought
you knew a lot, but did you know
your wife would want to know too much?
You could have let her eat alone,
you didn't have to help, but **no**,
you ate, then had to go to work.
Now I've inherited the role. (Leaves.)

Poor Man: You give out benefices, talents.
Catastrophe give to me!
Not purple, laurel, silver, gold.
I don't need them in my role.
I need a handout.

World: What **is** your role?

Poor Man: Anguish, suffering, affliction;
passion and compassion;
to need and not to have,
to have to beg for everything;
to live beneath contempt,
to live in sordidness,
to starve.

I answer only to necessity.

I suffer every wrong, inconsolably,
and poverty itself's the worst of these.

World: You won't get anything from me.
The poor man never gets a break
at the world's hands. In fact I'll just
take back these clothes, dress you in nakedness.
(Strips him.) You won't find me ignorant
of what my part in this should be.

Well...we now have all estates--
an emperor of dilated realms,
beauty to agitate and anodyne the sense,
a rich and celebrated man,
a beggar, a worker, a devotee.
Author, come out and see the play!

(To a musical accompaniment, two globes open at once; one contains the throne of Heaven, on which the Author sits; in the other is a space delimited by two painted stage doors, one a cradle, one a coffin.)

Author: You, who leave an icy cradle
for the world, who step out of the world
into a grave -- give me a good performance.
Your Author watches from his throne,
where all eternity is now.

(Discretion enters and sings.)

Discretion: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
 Praise the Lord of Earth and sky;
 praise the Lord of moon and stars.
 Let beauty's characters, her written flowers,
 let winter, summer, fire, ice,
 let everything that lives in doubt
 praise the Lord of dark and light,
 praise the Lord who finds us out.
 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

(Grace appears, on an elevation above where the World stands.)

Grace: I, who am the law of Grace,
 now act the prologue to this piece.
 Concerning now man who errs,
 I have two helpful lines. (Opens a scroll.)
 They read: "Love thy neighbor as thyself."
 "Act well your role, for God is real."

(Grace gives the scroll to the World and retires. World takes scroll to the wings, then returns.)

World: Now the prompter has the law.
 I hope this play's a success,
 since I'm the subject and the crowd.
 Be quiet, crowd, the play begins.

(Beauty and Discretion enter through the door marked CRADLE.)

Beauty: Come out with me, and run
 through this sweet meadow, where the sun
 gives light and color to the flowers.

Discretion: You know I never like to leave
 my self-enclosure, my quiet tower.

Beauty: Why should bleakness rule the world?
 Can't pleasure have her day as well?
 Why is there perfume in these flowers
 if not to provoke our sense of smell?
 Why did God create the birds
 -those feathered fretted instruments-
 if not to play upon our ears?
 Why clothes, if not to provoke
 the fervid touch that lays us bare?
 Why fruit, if ripeness doesn't serve
 to scatter flavors for the tongue?
 Come, tell me, why did God create
 the mountain, valley, heaven, sun
 if not to please? Only an ingrate
 would ignore these ecstasies.

Discretion: 'Tis licit to enjoy, affirm, be thankful;
 but not to forget in passion's suffrage the Lord
 who gave eternal life. I am Discretion.
 I chose this Christian religion to entomb
 this life.

Beauty:

I'm beauty. I see and I am seen.

World: Late or soon, these two will disagree.

Beauty: I'll set out to inflame the hearts
 of the ascetic, of the reticent.

World: One's a good actress; the other's heading
 for a forced retirement.

Discretion: How can I act on what I know?

Beauty: How can I make my attraction grow?

Grace:
 (offstage) God is real. Act well your role.

World: I'm sorry Beauty missed her cue.

(Rich Man enters.)

Rich Man: Since prodig'ly Heaven has given me wealth and
 then prodig'ly spend them on luxuries I'll try. ^[power.]
 Let appetite alone impel me.

Rich Man: Let all creatures enroll upon my table,
 (cont.) and Venus enlist to serve my bed.
 Let envy, ambition and gluttony
 conform delight to sensibility.

(Peasant enters)

Peasant: Where is work harder than mine?
 Open I plow my beloved's breast.
 I plant, I cicatrize her face
 I scratch my hoe around her vines.
 Hydropic in the month of May,
 without water still worse: I pay
 a heavy rent to go to work.
 But work I do, and sweat, and then
 I reap - and sell at a seller's price:
 My crop gets whatever it gets.
 May my neighbor's crop be spoiled;
 then the region's richest rogue
 I'll be. But what's a fat rogue to do?

Grace: Love they neighbor as thyself.
 (offstage) Act well your role, for God is real.

Peasant: What's that?

Discretion: The fat rogue missed his cue.

(Poor Man enters)

Poor Man: Who upon this stage must live
a misery like mine?
The ground's my bed; my canopy
the beautiful, indifferent sky.
Abandoned to bitter cold am I,
to scorching heat, to hunger, thirst.
Give me patience, my Lord, for life!

Rich Man: How can I best display my wealth?

Poor Man: How can I suffer my misfortune?

Grace: God is real. Act well your role.
(offstage)

Rich Man: How tedious!

Poor Man: But a consolation.

(King enters.)

Discretion: His majesty!

Rich Man: Oh how I hate
to have to kneel to anyone!

Beauty: Oh to beguile him, to obsess the King!
To have him kneeling at my feet!

Peasant: So long. You see, if I am seen
it's back to shoveling shit for me.

King: I think this kingdom limits me.
 My provinces extend through all the sun
 lights up, through all the sea surrounds.
 I am the master absolute;
 my vassals kneel before my feet.
 But I want more. What shall I do?

Grace (off.): Act well your role, for God is real.

Poor Man: My narrow, wretched vantage
 lets me see His Majesty
 as he forgets I need him.
 Beauty sees herself and me
 aesthetically.
 The devotee
 serves God, it's true,
 but serves Him
 comfortably.
 The peasant's work exhausts him-
 still, he eats.
 The rich man plays with more
 than Nature needs.
 And I need something from them all;
 from me nobody needs a thing.
 (to Beauty) Help me, for the love of God!

Beauty: Water that repeats my image endlessly,
 (looking in
 a pool) tell me what costume I should wear...

Poor Man: Do you see me?

Beauty: ...tell me how to do my hair.

World: Poor fool. You're looking vainly here.
 (to Poor Man)

Poor Man: What you have is much too much for anyone.
 Can't you give some of it to me?

Rich Man: There are doors where you could knock.
 How did you get in? The shadow of
 the entrance hall would better suit you.

Poor Man: You spend so much on luxury. Now help me. Please.

Rich Man: You see, I won't.

World: That scene
 has been prefigured prototypically
 in the Gospel of St. Luke, 16.

Poor Man: Your Highness, pity me!

King: I have
 a royal almshouse.

World: His conscience
 works through his bureaucracy.

Poor Man: Yeoman, the Lord blesses you.
 Each seed you plant is multiplied;
 you could subtract a few for me.

Peasant: I had to work. Aren't you ashamed
 to be an able-bodied man
 and yet to beg? Do something!
 Don't hang around! If you
 would really like to eat, take this. (Offers hoe.)
 Go out and earn your bread.

Poor Man: I'm not a worker. I'm the poor man in this comedy.

Peasant: My friend, your author didn't mean
 for you just to malingering.
 The undeserving poor should work.

Poor Man: Show mercy, for the love of God.

Peasant: You're asking for too much, my friend.

Poor Man: Help me!
 (to Discretion)

Discretion: No, you help. Take this loaf and pardon me.

Poor Man: This gift could only come from you.
 Our daily bread from our Religion.

Discretion: Oh!

King: What is it?

Poor Man:

It's a tribulation

that Religion suffers.

(Discretion almost faints, and the King gives her his hand.)

King: I will uphold Religion.

Discretion: Better you than any other.

Author: If I were so inclined, I could
 correct these ludicrous performances.
 However, I gave each player a will
 which is supposed to be a little
 stronger than the passions, thus to allow
 for good performance and renown.
 Now let everyone have room
 to improvise, to play upon
 the moment. My vision penetrates
 the muddled interplay. Into it
 I send my Law.

Grace: Love thy neighbor as thyself.

Act well your role, for God is real.

King: Supposing that our life's a play
 and that we walk along a road
 together, let's make our travel easier;
 let's talk,

Beauty: There wouldn't be a world
without communication.

Rich Man: Each of us
will tell a story.

Discretion: That's too boring. Instead
let's talk of our imaginations.

King: Observe my empire dilate;
watch as Nature moves
her forms to make
a realm expressive of my greatness.
Now I see myself described
in lofty fortresses, portrayed
with vassals whose every touch is loveliness.
I know my people's poverty, their wealth
lie hard by fate's honest engineering
and not by my injustice. I live
in heavenly consideration,
knowing how to rule.

(A Voice sings from within the tomb.)

Voice: King of this empire in decline,
your act is through, your time has come.
Cease to pretend, now you must leave
the Great Theater of the World.

King: Finished! That mournful voice confirms
 what I've always known. I need to think,
 but I've lost my speech and reason both.
 I leave the stage; I don't even know
 which way to go. My cradle door
 through which I came into the world...
 (He tries the door.) ...is closed!
 I can't go back. Each step I take directs
 me in a sequence to the tomb! It's horrible!

The river, the ocean's severed arm,
 will join the sea again.

The spring, far from its hidden source,
 returns to it in time.

Man alone, torn from his center,
 can't go back to what he's been.

Author, if my role is done,
 forgive me my sins.

(He leaves through the coffin door, through which all will follow.)

World: That's a good way to leave the stage:
 to beg for absolution.

Beauty: Pulled from his pomp, his vassals
 and their fervent adoration!

Peasant: Let's just keep the rains of May
when it's the growing season.
A good, though kingless, year
will get us through.

Discretion: Still it's a cause for grief.

Beauty: And notable confusion.
What will we do without the king?

Rich Man: Pick up the conversation.
(to Beauty) I want to hear you talk.

Beauty: Well, here's what I imagine.

World: How soon the living are consoled
for losing one they knew!

Peasant: How much more quickly when the deceased
has left them what he owned.

Beauty: My ornamental image, pure and fair,
not envying the triumphs of the king,
lives to imagine an illumined land
within a thralldom, where my beauty reigns.
Men pledge their lives to kings, but unto me
they pledge their souls. I rule the little world
that is a man. Man is my earth; I am
his heaven, his brief and lasting universe.

World: She hasn't read Ezekiel, who said Pride
converts perfection into ugliness.

Voice: Like the flower is human loveliness.
Fade now, flower; your dawn has met its night.

Beauty: A mournful song of Beauty in decline.
Let Beauty not fail yet; let her not die.
Let her reenact the Springs awakening.
Yet--oh!--there is no rose of red or white
who to the adulation of the Sun,
who to the day's beholding, strips herself
of all her petals, yet lives on, survives
unwithered to return to her green bud.
What does a florid twilight mean to me?
Am I really like a flower, a thing whose being
and not being are continuous terms? I'm not.
My beauty flourishes for such a time
that if the Sun saw my beginning, he
won't be there when I die. Can Beauty die?
Voice, what do you say to that?

Voice: The soul of Beauty lives eternally;
her body, like the flower, fades and dies

Beauty: I guess there's nothing left for me to say.
I've left the cradle; now, for me, the tomb.
I wish I'd done my part more thoughtfully.

(Beauty leaves through the coffin door.)

World: Nice touch. To leave the stage a penitent.

Rich Man: Stripped of her fine clothes, her ornament.

Peasant: I won't miss her, if for Easter
we have suckling pig, and wine and bread.

Discretion: Still it's a cause for grief.

Poor Man: And notable compassion.
How do we live when Beauty's dead?

Rich Man: Let's pick up the conversation.

Peasant: When I'm excited with concern,
and think I've done a lot, and when
I've got the weather licked,
and when I'm sitting on my crop,
I sometimes look into my heart
and find it tepid, flat,
and then I blame myself
for my ingratitude to God.

World: He knows he owes a debt to God.
He's on the verge of thanking Him.

Poor Man: I could begin to like this working man,
 though with me he's been too harsh.

Voice: Peasant! To your laboring
 the fatal terminus has come!
 Now you will work another land.
 Where it is, God knows!

Peasant: Author, I appeal my case;
 give me a review.
 Wait until a better time,
 don't execute me now.
 Let me settle my affairs;
 they're in a mess, because
 I am a rotten worker,
 as I said to you before.
 My vines will testify to this:
 thistles grow so high
 that when I look for grapes
 I can't uncover where they are.
 Someone hearing this would say
 that I, precisely now,
 should leave my fruitless field.
 But I don't want to go.

Peasant
(cont.)

I want to leave a legacy
for those who are to come.

Well, this is no time to talk.
I heard a voice pronounce me dead.
The tomb has opened up its mouth
to swallow me. I wasn't good
in acting out my role.
I'm sorry I can't grieve about it more.

(Peasant leaves through coffin door.)

World: A boor I judged him; I was wrong.
The Peasant ended well.

Rich Man: His hoe, his plow, his dust and his fatigue
will miss him now. Exit the worker.

Poor Man: Enter our regret.

Discretion: Our sorrow.

Poor Man: Grief.

Discretion: Lament.

Poor Man: Confusion.

Discretion: What do we do now?

Rich Man: Why not pick up the conversation?
I'll tell you how I feel.

Rich Man: Who is not astonished,
 (cont.) in witnessing a life
 that opens like a morning glory,
 ends in darkness with the night?
 Brevity defines us. So
 let's live our lives accordingly:
 Let's eat today, and drink today.
 Tomorrow we will die.

World: Isaiah deals with that idea.
 Pagans live by it. It's shallow.

Discretion: Who follows now?

Poor Man: The Poor Man follows.
 Perish the hour that I was born.
 Perish the night I was conceived
 in bitter cold, for suffering.
 Banish the pure light of the day.
 Oppress, becloud, obscurantize
 the World, my Lord,
 punish the night with blackened moon,
 remove the stars, remove the sun,
 give darkness to the dawn.

Poor Man: I ask You this not from despair
 (cont.) at the condition that I'm in,
 but as what's due to me and others
 who like me were born in Sin.

World: Like Job, who cursed the day
 as if to purify the world,
 the Poor Man tricks himself:
 by living without hope he sins.

Voice: Each day of pleasure has a number,
 days of suffering as well.
 Now is the time to reckon up
 those days of happiness and pain.

Rich Man: Oh no!

Poor Man: At last!

Rich Man: Do you not tremble
 at the voice that summons us?

Poor Man: I do.

Rich Man: Yet you don't try to run?

Poor Man: Why run? Shuddering is natural
 to the man who fears his God.
 But flee from death? Impossible
 Where is poverty to run?

Poor Man: Beauty, Power. both were called;
 (cont.) neither got away.
 It's good to think that with my life
 my pain will end today.

Rich Man: This great theater! Does it sadden you at all
 to leave the stage?

Poor Man: No. I leave behind no pleasure that is mine.

Rich Man: Destroyed! I leave my heart behind
 with everything I own.

Poor Man: What joy!

Rich Man: Affliction!

Poor Man: Comfort!

Rich Man: Pain!

Poor Man: A stroke of luck!

Rich Man: An execution!

(They leave.)

World: The Rich Man and the beggar
 find each other as they die.

Discretion: Now the Great Theater of the World
 stands empty, but for me.

World: Religion always has remained
 the longest at my side.

Discretion: Religion never ends. However
 I am not religion. I'm just one
 who makes her living through devotion.
 Already from within my life
 I've chosen not to live.
 I will anticipate the Voice:
 I leave the stage,
 I find a grave,
 and now I end the play.

(Discretion leaves. Globe closes.)

Author: Punishment, reward I promised
 to the actors on this stage.
 Soon everyone will listen
 to the notices I give.

(His globe closes.)

World: The play was short! But life is short
 and shorter still to one who sees
 an entering and exiting in everything.
 All the players leave the stage
 reduced to their first substance, bare.
 They came as dust, desolate now, dust they depart.

(World stands at exit door. King enters, approaches.)

World: You, the first to come to me,
 what role was yours?

King: I was the king of everything
 that's gilded by the sun,
 who dresses in a splendid light
 to leave the arms of dawn
 and then lies down in darkness. I
 commanded all, ruled everyone,
 inherited, got what was mine,
 deliberated and then judged,
 possessed, took over, and enjoyed.
 I chose my favored counsellors;
 history I made and wrote.
 Mine was the purple canopy,
 the laurel and the sceptered hand.

World: Give up, let go, take off the crown,
 forget the majesty you had.
 Go on, get out, remove yourself.
 Leave naked from the farce of life.
 This purple that you used to wear
 will fit another actor now.
 Never will my cruel hands
 give back the sceptre or the crown.

King: You gave me all of this yourself!

World: I lent it. Now another man
walks through the stations of your role.

King: What payment will I now receive
for having in the world been King?

World: That's not my business. Ask the Author.
My job is to retake your costume,
send you out as you came in.

(Beauty enters)

World: What have you been?

Beauty: Beautiful. Elegant.

World: What gift was yours?

Beauty: A perfect loveliness.

World: Where is it now?

Beauty: Behind in the grave.

World: Nature herself will never understand
the brevity of beauty's mortal term.
The King has shed his greatness, majesty,
left them with me--but beauty is not shed,
does not return, and when its owner dies
it dies as well. Where is the loveliness
I lent you? Can't you give it back?

Beauty: I can't. The grave consumed it all.
There color, nuance, radiance I outlived,
roses exhausted, flaming flowers left
with cracked and broken bits of stone and glass.
The innocence I had disturbed,
the plans I'd altered, the designs
I had enriched with my reflection
all lie back there in the tomb
with beauty's visage. All are gone.

(Peasant enters.)

World: You, villain, what was your effect?

Peasant: If it was villainy, don't be surprised.
The world's vain style named me a villian
because I worked the land. Your courtiers,
your fancy folks all treated me
with vile contempt. To me they never
spoke direct. They said: "That boor,
that rustic, calculating clod." It hurts
me to remember.

World: I stand here to collect.

Peasant: You? Whatever did you give?

World: I gave a hoe.

Peasant: Oh, what a gem!

World: Good or bad, you must repay.

Peasant: It breaks my heart to find out now
that from this sorry world, this world
in which I worked so long, so hard,
I cannot even take the hoe
that fed my mouth, that broke my health.

(Enter the Rich Man and the Poor Man.)

World: Who's there?

Rich Man: The one who never wants
to leave you.

World: Well, let go of these. (Takes jewels.)

Poor Man: World, I just want you to know
how satisfied I am to leave.

(Enter the Child.)

World: You were here at the audition, right?

Child: That's right, you offered me a grave,
and there I left you what I had.

(Enter Discretion.)

World: What was it that you received?

Discretion: I asked for a calling; religion you gave,
abstinence, mortification--a scourge
and a hairshirt.

World: Give those things back.
But I won't take away the good work that you did.

King: Oh, to have ruled upon a broader stage!

Beauty: Oh, to have walked in greater beauty still!

Rich Man: Oh, to have had more wealth on wealth compiled!

Peasant: To have bent beneath a more unceasing toil!

Poor Man: To have longer lived in anguish!

World: It's too late.
Your deaths have canceled all of your desires,
erased perfections beauty could not hold,
terminated all your vain ambitions,
equalized the sceptre and the hoe.
It's time you left the theater of fictions.
Step into the theater of truth!

King: So cold! And you were gentle at our entrance.

World: When someone holds his hand out to receive,
 gently he cups his palm, and when he throws
 a gift away he turns the cup around.
 A cradle facing up receives a man,
 a cradle facing downward is his tomb.
 The hand that cupped you is your coffin now.

Poor Man: The world has thrown us from its center,
 but the Author said he'd hold a supper
 in honor of our work. Let's go.

King: You dare to lead, so soon forget
 you were a wretch, subservient
 to me?

Poor man: The play has ended. Nobody
 remembers you. We dress alike
 in the cloakroom of the grave.

Rich Man: You seem to have forgotten soon
 that yesterday you begged for alms.

Poor Man: You alone have now forgot
 that yesterday you gave me none.

Beauty: You might still be slightly awed,
(to Discr.) perhaps, at one more beautiful.

Discretion: Here in the dressing room we are
 each one of us the others' equal.
 The shroud we wear has no degrees.

Rich Man: Peasant, get out of my way.

Peasant: It's time that you began to live
 like the shadow that you are.
 You are eclipsed. Your sun is dead.

Rich Man: I don't know why, but I'm afraid
 to go before the Author now.

Poor Man: Author of Heaven and of Earth,
 here is your company entire:
 those who made of human life
 a comedy, not good, but short.
 To dine with you we now have come.
 Roll back the curtain of your throne!

(To a musical accompaniment, the celestial globe opens once
more, and within it is a table, with a cup and a monstrance.
The Author is seated at the table.)

Author: This table, where I've set the Bread
 that Heaven loves, that Hell respects,
 awaits you now. First I must know
 which roles you played. I don't want those
 who lost a sense of all the Good
 I showed them, those who failed to save
 themselves. They cannot sup with me.
 I want the Poor Man and the devotee.
 Come here. Although you've left the world
 and cannot eat this Bread, just to
 adore it will sustain you. It
 holds Glory itself.

(Poor Man and Discretion join Author at his table.)

Poor Man: I would have lived in greater pain,
 I would have died in suffering
 to be reborn in Glory.

Discretion: So many times I wept, confessed
 my sins, reproved myself, lived as
 a penitent. Now I am saved.

King: Lord, while still a king I asked
 forgiveness. Won't you give it now?

Author: Beauty and Power wept to lose
 what made them vain, what made them proud.
 They too will rise, but not just yet.
 The peasant, though he gave no alms,
 meant well, and someday he will come.

Peasant: I wanted him to help himself!
 (pointing to
 Poor Man)

Author: Of course you did. You three,
 who wept and begged my pardon
 as you died, will weep again
 in long purgation of your sins.

Discretion: Author, in the depth of my affliction
 the King gave me his hand, and now
 I offer mine to him.

Author: Then I remit
 his sentence. As he stood up for
 Religion, as he lived in hope,
 let his century of penance
 be but an instant, end at once.

Peasant: I wish a papal bull or else
 a pardon would descend on me.

Peasant: Something from the Pontifex
(cont.) in Rome, to let me out of this
 dark prison where I purge my sins.

Child: If I was honest in my role,
 why don't you reward me, Lord?

Author: Because your part was small and dull.
 Remember, you were born in sin
 and will remain in blindness.

Child: A fearful night, as in a dream
 keeps me from glory and from pain.

Rich Man: The actors who played Beauty and the State,
 vainglorious before, now penitent,
 astound again as they excoriate
 what once they were. The peasant weeps hot tears,
 he trembles in the Author's sight, and I
 then dare step forward? How can I presume?
 I must. There is no place for me to hide.
 Author!

Author: You are perhaps accosting me?
 I am your Author, but I have no ear
 for you, no place here in my company.
 Descend in torment to the house of pain
 where every moment you will beg to die!

Rich Man: Oh God! I fall consumed in flame!
 I drag my shadow into hell
 where I see nothing face to face
 within the darkness of these rocks
 that bury me forever!

Discretion: Glory is mine.

Beauty: And one day mine.

Peasant: Beauty, in your wanting it
 you won't outdo me.

Rich Man: I abandon hope,
 eternally.

Child: For me there is no glory.

Author: One ending, of four possible to each,
 by each is here portrayed before your eyes.
 To make it known that one of them will be
 withdrawn, I will invite, gladly invite,
 Beauty and the Peasant to my table.
 They have felt pain, and so deserve to taste
 of mystery and glory here with me.

Beauty: Fortune!
 Peasant: Consolation!
 Rich Man: Torment!
 King: Restoration!
 Rich Man: A sorrow.
 Discretion: A relief.
 Poor Man: A sweetness.
 Rich Man: And a poison.
 Child: Not damned, and yet forever hopeless of salvation.
 Author: Now heaven's angels,
 and the people of the world,
 and even the arch-demons
 must kneel before this Bread.
 Let heaven, the world and hell resound
 with sonorous voices in accord.

(Oboes play the tantum ergo.)

World: And since this life entirely
 is a representation,
 our play will surely be forgiven
 by all who came to see.

END

H U D D E R S F I E L D

By Uglješa Šajtinac

Translated by Duška Radosavljević

Adaptation by Caridad Svich

Original text: Zrenjanin – Belgrade, 2001– 02
American English version: 2005-2006.

This translation was developed as a part of
INTERPLAY, a playwright exchange project of New Dramatists, Inc.,
Funded in part by The Trust for Mutual Understanding.

Biographies

Uglješa Šajtinac (PLAYWRIGHT) Born in 1971, in Zrenjanin. Graduated Playwriting, Drama Arts School in Belgrade, Ugljesa is the Dramaturg of the Serbian National Theatre, Novi Sad. His play *The Propmaster* was produced at the Belgrade Drama Theatre, translated and shown at the festival of Contemporary European Plays, Huddersfield, UK; *Pravo Na Ruse* was produced at Serbian National Theatre, Novi Sad; *Do You Speak Australian?* at NT Tosa Jovanovic, Zrenjanin. His latest play *Banat* was given a reading at West Yorkshire Playhouse in November 2003. He published a novel *Marvels of Nature* and books of short stories. *Huddersfield* was produced at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds in 2004 (in Chris Thorpe's UK version) and later the same year at the Yugoslav Drama Theatre, Belgrade; in 2006 it received its US premiere (in Caridad Svich's US version) at TUTA Theatre in Chicago where it was selected as Critics Choice by the top three Chicago newspapers. *Huddersfield* won the Best Serbian Play award for 2005.

Duška Radosavljević (TRANSLATION) has worked as dramaturg, teacher and theatre critic. Originally from the former Yugoslavia, she was based in the North of England for over twelve years where she collaborated with a number of young theatre companies as a performer and director as well as working as a dramaturg with the NSDF, West Yorkshire Playhouse and New Writing North. She was the Dramaturg at Northern Stage and [Newcastle University](#) for three years and has written almost 500 reviews for The Stage Newspaper. For two years she was involved with the Festival of Contemporary European Plays (FestCEP) in Huddersfield, UK, where in 2002 she directed G. Zimmermann's controversial play *Vouchers*.

Caridad Svich (ADAPTATION) is an award-winning playwright and translator. Recent premieres: *The Tropic of X* at Artheater-Cologne (Germany), *Thrush* (a play with songs) at Salvage Vanguard Theatre/TX, *Iphigenia...a rave fable* at 7 Stages/GA, *The Booth Variations* at 59 East 59th Street Theatre/NY and Edinburgh Fringe Festival/UK, and her version of Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* at the Pearl Theatre/NY. Her free adaptation of Lope de Vega's *The Labyrinth of Desire* receives its professional premiere at Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon spring 2008. She is alumna playwright of New Dramatists and founder of theatre alliance NoPassport. Some of her translations are collected in *Federico Garcia Lorca: Impossible Theater* (Smith & Kraus). Her US adaptation of *Huddersfield* was developed at New Dramatists INTERPLAY program with support from the Trust for Mutual Understanding, and premiered at TUTA in Chicago in 2006. Her website is www.caridadsvich.com.

**Dreams of England:
On Uglješa Šajtinac's *Huddersfield***

By Caridad Svich

Uglješa Šajtinac's *Huddersfield* is a savage tragic-comedy about a generation of Serbian men caught between the legacy of Tito and Milosevic's regimes and the uncertain present before them. Told through the time-honored dramatic device of the long drunken night of the soul, the play examines what happens to a young man named Rasha, the possible intellectual light of his thirty-something generation, when one of his best friends Igor returns from England to visit the small town where they both grew up. Igor is the play's catalyst. As such, he serves as witness to the troubled and troubling state his friend and country are in. But Rasha is the play's protagonist. For Šajtinac, Rasha not only is obsessed with *Hamlet* but is a modern-day Serbian Hamlet: an intelligent slacker intellectual haunted by a broken state, a failed raging father, and a history-erasing teenage girlfriend who is Ophelia-bait for his sexual needs and misogynistic tendencies.

The play opens *Ubu Roi*-like with a profane shout and the roar of an unhinged toilet door. Rasha's father, flailing in rage and despair, lives a meager pension-less existence and makes ends meet by selling off bits of the house. In the remains of this house, Rasha engages in a passive-aggressive relationship with his father, and an oddly tender but critical relationship with his next door neighbor, a mentally fragile man named Ivan who has been destroyed by his stint in Milosevic's army. Ivan is the play's acknowledged naïve artist and the poems and sculptures he crafts are disjointed narratives that speak to the torn histories of the Balkans, and the deep rupture in the land and psyche of the former Yugoslavia, which likely will never be healed. In Ivan, Rasha sees his tormenting reflection. His Horatio and fool at one and the same. During the course of the play's long night of reunion and drinking, Ivan will become Rasha's scapegoat, and release in Rasha a cathartic self-destructive vengeance that by play's end will turn into something resembling spiritual peace.

In this broken-down scenario of old college friends seeing each other for what may be the last time – Doole, the yuppie who no longer tolerates Rasha; Igor, the friend who has moved away to in Huddersfield, England and returns after a long absence to try to re-connect with his roots – lives also the generation before and generation to come: Rasha's father and the lost teenager Mila. Framed on the one hand by the bearer of "useless" history and the shopper of all things new, Šajtinac deepens and widens the expanse of his dramatic terrain in a cleverly compact manner to speak to the past, present and unknown future.

What makes *Huddersfield* an important play, beyond the fact that Šajtinac is one of Serbia's leading young dramatists and this is his breakthrough play, is that this seemingly static piece driven by fierce characters indulging too much perhaps in their wastefulness is actually a ferociously angry, compassionate piece that encapsulates with caustic humor, elegance, and wit the exact state of being in which a generation of Serbians find themselves in. It is a deeply personal and political play influenced as much by the 1990s

British 'in-yer-face' school of new writing as it is by Shakespeare, Pushkin and Kusturica. It is also a play that speaks outside its own borders.

Originally produced in Britain at West Yorkshire Playhouse (in Chris Thorpe's UK adaptation drawing from the literal translation by Duška Radosavljević), the play began its production life in the England that Šajtinac's characters dream of, and only premiered in Belgrade, where Šajtinac is resident dramaturg at the National Theatre, in 2005. This US adaptation, developed as part of INTERPLAY, a playwright exchange project of New Dramatists, Inc., funded in part by The Trust for Mutual Understanding, premiered at TUTA Theatre in Chicago, Illinois in 2006 under the direction of dado, a talented young director who has worked at the Goodman and other venues in the Windy City.

The US adaptation, which stresses US rhythms and vernacular and expands some of the play's poetry and raging humor, was developed with Šajtinac. The difference from the UK to the US version is not only one of cultural adaptation, but mainly one of tone. Thorpe's fine UK adaptation is anchored by distanced, highly mordant alienating tone. My US version keeps Šajtinac's slacker humor and clinical approach to behaviour intact but offers perhaps a more empathetic take on character and situation. When I spoke to Šajtinac during the adaptation's development, he stressed quite clearly that although he was critical of his own generation and in effect himself within it, he wanted his audience to empathize in a realistic way with his screwed-up characters. He wasn't after a heightened, theatrical tone with the play (something that could occur in production, given the play's outrageous humor and seemingly surreal interior landscape), but rather a down n' dirty, almost documentary-like take on a specific time and place and a group of figures caught in their own negated existence.

Through love and reason, cruelty and tenderness, chaos and absurdity *Huddersfield* paints an acid-edged, lucid portrait of a lost generation. It is a play that seeks reconciliation and peace from its characters and society but one that knows in its dark heart the spiritual price a country and its citizens often pay for the promise of such peace, and indeed, the tenuous nature of living a "normal" life when norms have been dismantled, destroyed and are in the process of being re-made. With its dreams of a grey industrial town in England nearly as grey as the Serbian economically-depressed town in which the play is set, *Huddersfield* is an ironic valentine to the confused survivors of a severe social-political collapse. Abandoned by media coverage in the West and living in the after-effects of NATO bombing and a "forgotten" war, Šajtinac asks of his characters and his audience to look closely at themselves for the strength and nearly impossible hope to go on.

CHARACTERS

RASHA, 30, grad school dropout, writer, volatile and adrift

FATHER, his father, 60s, alcoholic: the “last” of his generation

IVAN, his neighbor, 30, a broken man

MILA, 16, his current girlfriend/past-time: the new generation

IGOR, 30, long time friend who lives in England

DOOLE (pronounced Doo-leh), 30, low-level sales executive, casual long time friend

TIME AND PLACE

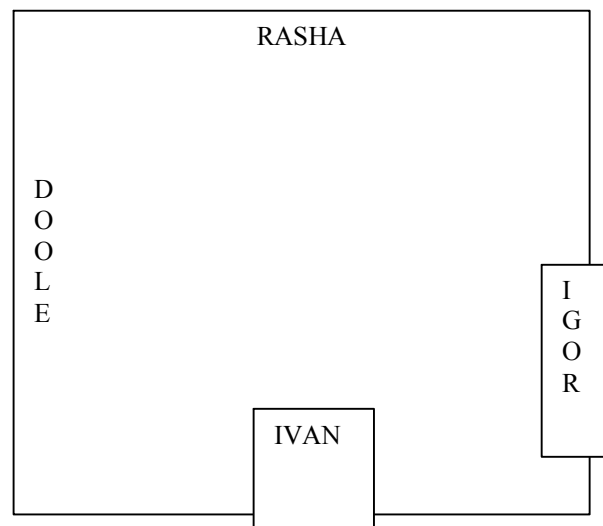
24 hours in the living room of Father’s apartment in the ex-industrial town of Zrenjanin, Serbia.

Adaptation’s history:

This version received readings in New York City at New Dramatists (under Michael Sexton’s direction) and the New Group (under Dalia Ibelhauptaite’s direction). This adaptation premiered at TUTA Theatre in Chicago at the Victory Gardens Studio in June 2006 under the direction of Dado.

FATHER

MILA



1. FUCKING MOTHERFUCKER!

/The living room. Rasha sits at the table, smoking and sipping coffee. A mix of voices and noise are heard in the background. Father enters./

FATHER

Fucking motherfucker!

/Rasha continues to sip coffee calmly. Father rushes in. He is drunk, enraged and completely off his gourd./

FATHER

What'd I tell you? Thirty fucking years, for thirty fucking years you've been ragging on me! Thirty fucking years, motherfucker! What? What are you looking at?

RASHA

Want some coffee?

FATHER

Coffee? You are offering *me* coffee in my own house!? Fucking wise-ass. You are offering me my own coffee!? Everything here is mine, all mine, you hear me? What the fuck have you ever contributed to this goddamn house?

RASHA

Nothing.

FATHER

What?

RASHA

I've contributed nothing.

FATHER

Fuck right; so fuck off, then... I don't want to see you any more, you got that? When I get back, I don't want to see you here. Go on, get out, do whatever, go wherever... I don't give a fuck. Where are the car keys?

/Rasha rises, gives the keys to Father./

FATHER

I'm gonna sell it! Fuck it! What? It's mine! What the fuck is it to you!?

RASHA

Nothing.

FATHER

What?

RASHA

It's nothing to me.

FATHER

Nothing! You're 'nothing'! Where're you going?

RASHA

For a shit.

FATHER

Go outside and shit! This is my can!

/Father goes to the bathroom-door. He lifts the door off its hinges, and holds it up in his hands. It's obviously a strain for him to do so, but he is steadfast in his stubborn-ness./

FATHER

What're you looking at!? This my door! I can do with it what I damn well want...

/Father goes to the front door. Rasha follows him with his eyes./

RASHA

You're taking the door...

FATHER

Yeah, I'm taking it. What the fuck is it to you!? Go on, pack your shit, get out, move to England, to Canada; if you've already given up on this country, then what the hell are you doing hanging around here...? Fuck me... I don't wanna see you here any more!

You understand? Fucking motherfucker! ...

/Father exits with the door in his hands. Rasha goes to the bathroom and sits on the toilet. He looks into the room. He looks at the frame of the bathroom door. Knocking at the front door./

RASHA

Yes!

/Ivan enters, carrying a small book in his hand. He looks around, and closes the door behind him./

IVAN

Rasha?

RASHA
Here. ...I'm trying to take a shit. Sit down.

/Ivan goes to the table, and sits. Rasha gets up from the toilet, and walks in./

RASHA
I can't. Want some coffee?

IVAN
I heard the shouting, so I thought you must be up... Here. I brought you the book I was telling you about: "The Tale of a Spiritual Life" by Father Neil Sorski. Remember? This is the book about the eight sinful thoughts.

RASHA
Eight?

IVAN
Eight: Lust, anger, despair, melancholy, greed for material things, pride, vanity and extreme appetite.

RASHA
He took the door away. I've no dignity left. It's gone. Shattered. Goodbye, dignity...How am I supposed to take a shit now?

IVAN
You had a fight with your dad?

RASHA
We don't fight. We just put up with each other. He went ballistic.

IVAN
Why'd they let him out of rehab if he's not -?

RASHA
Cause he's beyond help, that's why.

IVAN
He's gotta quit. He should read the book too. Tell him to pray. He must ask the Good Lord to help him; he mustn't forget the Judgement Day -

RASHA
OK, OK, I'll read it... I will.

IVAN
People don't commit a sin just like that. There are four steps. First there's the SUGGESTION, right? That's when the devil insinuates himself into your imagination or

your thoughts. Even the greatest and noblest of minds have had to deal with this. Then there is CONSENT. This is when you wrestle with your sinful thoughts, trying to determine what to do, right? Should I or shouldn't I give in? ... And then there is POSSESSION. It requires an enormous effort to banish evil thoughts from your mind, even with the help of God. Cause they just want to stay in there and do you in. And then, after all this, when you think, what next, comes the fourth step, which is the absolute worst...

/Knocking at the front door./

RASHA
Come in!

/Mila enters./

RASHA
...he even took the house key...

MILA
Hi. You haven't forgotten, have you?

RASHA
Hi. No,no. Ivan, this is Mila, my student.

IVAN
Ivan. Pleased to meet you.

RASHA
Ivan's all right. He's cool. Sit down. Check this out. We're getting to the fourth step now...

MILA
Of what?

RASHA
Of sin.

IVAN
Yes. That's OBSESSION: exquisite pleasure turned into mere habit. That's when you're a slave to sin. You can't imagine how much determination and willpower it takes to get back onto the right path. Excuse me ...

/Ivan rises and starts to go ./

RASHA
You haven't had your coffee.

IVAN

I told my mother I wouldn't be long. Rasha, would you mind if I - if I would... I'd like to bring you - a poem. You don't have to read it immediately... May I?

RASHA

Sure.

/Ivan exits, closing door behind him. Mila throws herself at Rasha, and kisses him on the mouth - a long, passionate kiss. He puts his hand between her legs./

RASHA

you little bitch...you're all wet.

MILA

Yes, I am...

RASHA

Take me.

/Rasha undoes his trousers. Mila backs off a little./

MILA

Who is that guy? What the hell was he talking about? What kind of book is this?

/MILLA leafs through the book that Ivan left behind./

MILA

/reads / " keep yourself away from women, from conversing with them and looking at them; also refrain from looking at all manner of young, feminine, and pretty faces..."

What kind of faggoty shit is this?!

RASHA

It's whatever... Come on...Leave it.

/Rasha goes to caress her face but she moves away, looking around ./

MILA

Look at this freakin' mess! So, what - You want to fuck first, or do you wanna tell me all about *Hamlet*? I've got a test on Monday...

RASHA

I'd like to take a good shit...

MILA

Go on, then.

RASHA
I can't. The old man took away the bathroom door.

/Knocking at the front door./

RASHA
OK, Ivan! Come in!

/Ivan enters with a sheet of paper in his hand./

IVAN
That's it. It's called "A Snail"...

MILA
Rasha...

RASHA
What?

MILA
There must be some place where your old man can get some help.

RASHA
You think? "Some place," huh? What kind of place, baby-doll?

MILA
I don't know. Some kind of...institution.

RASHA
Institution?

MILA
Maybe...

RASHA
Oh. I see. You want me to put my old man in a nuthouse?
Ivan, tell her what it's like in there.
Come on. Milla here is interested in what it's like to be in a nuthouse.

MILA
I'm not, really.

RASHA
Fuck off! You are interested. And here is the expert who can explain it all to you. Ivan,
tell us what a typical day in a nuthouse is like?

/Ivan is reluctant to do so. Rasha takes the paper which Ivan brought over, and scans through it./

IVAN
May I sit down?

RASHA
Go ahead.

IVAN
The nurse presses a switch and a light comes on in the ward...every morning at 5:45 sharp ...

/Rasha notices Mila's lack of interest and obliges her to listen./

RASHA
Excuse me, Ivan. Mila, sit down and listen

/Mila listens to Ivan. At first she is bored and then gradually her interest increases./

RASHA
Ivan. Go on.

IVAN
All the patients bound out of their beds like soldiers rising to attention. Then everybody stands in line to go to the bathroom. It's a long line because there are too many people crammed into the small ward. Lucky is he who makes it to the toilet first...

/Mila laughs, as does Ivan./

RASHA
What's so funny? At least in the nuthouse you can have a shit like everybody else, even if you do have to stand in line. Do they have a door to the stinkhole-?

IVAN
Of course.

RASHA
There. You see? Only here in my own home...

IVAN
Should I go on?

MILA
You don't have to.

RASHA

Shut up. Get a pen and paper out; take goddamn notes! Go on, Ivan.

IVAN

In the morning, you have to move very fast because you have to make your bed, get dressed and get ready for exercises in a matter of seconds. After that, you have 20 minutes of down time in a dirty little room called the 'smoke-room' – coffee and a cigarette, you know. And then – breakfast.

RASHA

What's for breakfast?

IVAN

(with nostalgia) Farina.

MILA

What's that?

IVAN

A kind of cereal. Or sometimes we'd get a piece of bread with margarine and jam, or a greasy omelette with ham... But when the wars started, everyone and everything went into crisis mode... So, after breakfast, we all were sent our separate ways – to the carpenter's workshop, the metal workshop, the art studio...

RASHA

What kind of work did you do?

IVAN

I was in the art studio. For several months.

RASHA

You painted?

IVAN

No. I made a sculpture. Out of wood.

RASHA

And did it turn out okay?

IVAN

Badly. The instructor liked my work, but it wasn't any good.

RASHA

Will you show us the sculpture?

IVAN

If I can find it. It's in the basement somewhere... Sorry, I have to go. Rasha, please look at the poem; tell me what you think.

/Ivan gets up and goes. Rasha grabs the paper Ivan left behind him./

RASHA

There. You see? Even in the nuthouse they have a door to the bathroom.

MILA

Oh, fuck the door!

/Mila takes hold of a curtain, rips it off and hangs it at the entrance to the bathroom./

MILA

There. You've got a curtain now. Cool, isn't it?

RASHA

Cool.

MILLA

Could've done it yourself.

RASHA

I could've but my motto is "Don't do anything."
I'm more useful to society that way.

MILA

Do it for me. Fuck society. Take a shit.

/Rasha goes through the curtain and into the bathroom. He takes the sheet of paper upon which is written Ivan's poem with him./

RASHA

This is better. I'm not used to shitting out in the open. I can't concentrate... */reads/* ... "A Snail" ! ...

MILA

No way?! In the toilet?!

RASHA

No, I'm reading Ivan's poem; that's the title! ... "A Snail" ... */reads/*

"Wondrous creature
shell-backed, divine,
you carry a home on your very own spine.

You crawl about
Searching for food
Midst the dirt and grass
awaiting the rain
So it can cool you at last.

Gleaming in the grass,
Bedewed you slide
Through the inside of a raindrop
Cursed, all alone!

Your home has room for you,
And only you;
This you know,
Cursed, all alone.

And yet you hope,
Oh wondrous wonder,
That someone will come along
To share in this and that and the other:
A cup of coffee, some tea, or more,
Within the shell of your back,
your carapace
of stone.”

... This is terrific!

MILA
The guy's a basket case.

/Mila leafs through the book on the table./

RASHA
He's not that bad. Just a little, you know...

MILA
So, what's his deal?

RASHA
He's a bit fucked up, but he's intelligent. Incredibly organized, you know. And he's got an amazing memory. His mom, on the other hand, is really crazy. Ivan's just neurotic.

MILA
Check this out! */reading from the same book/...*

“And if at all possible, do not stay with them on your own, says Vasily the Great, not even in most exceptional circumstances; for nothing is more important to you than your soul for whose sake Christ has died and risen” ...

RASHA

Do not stay with whom on your own?

MILA

Bitches, I guess...

RASHA

Naturally. Bitches are satanic beings.

MILA

Cut the shit!

RASHA

Too late now! Just done it.

*/The sound of the toilet flushing. Rasha looks out from behind the curtain. He stares at it.
It meets his approval./*

RASHA

Fuck it. My dad's beyond help. ...It makes me feel bad, though, to think of him
waltzing down the street with that shitty door in his hands.

MILA

Rasha, ... Wash yourself.

RASHA

What do you mean?

MILA

Wash it...

RASHA

Why?

MILA

I want us to try you know what...

RASHA

Do you?

MILA

Yes.

RASHA
Will you kiss it?... Put it in your mouth?

MILA
Yes!

2. MONGOLIA

/Mila and Rasha are lying on a mattress in the living room. Rasha is smoking, and gazing at her sleepily. Mila is restless./

MILA
Great. It was so great. It's so cool when it starts to get, like, really big in your mouth....
How was it for you?

RASHA
Mhm...

MILA
Have you had other bitches blow you?

RASHA
Mhm...

MILA
You know some guy was all blackmailing my friend Anita, like, "I can't fuck you unless you give me a blow job, I can't get it up otherwise"...

RASHA
Mhm...

MILA
Is your video working?

RASHA
Mhm...

MILA
I wanna play something for you...

/Mila goes to the table, takes a video tape from her bag, slots it into the player. A man and a woman's sexual panting can be heard. Rasha watches. He gets upset./

RASHA
What's this?

MILA
Watch.

RASHA
Where did you get this?

MILA
Oh, shut up. Tell me about *Hamlet*. I'll touch myself.

RASHA
You've gone ape-shit, you little slut...

MILA
Hamlet! Hamlet! Hamlet!

RASHA
You want me to tell you all about *Hamlet*?... OK... I really like those vaguely Eurasian cheek-bones of yours. They're really sexy... I bet you're a genuine Mongolian...

MILA
I'm not.

RASHA
It's no use lying... Once upon a time, some Mongolian got the hots for some great-granny of yours and made a little Mongolian. And then that little Mongolian made your grand-dad's grand-dad, and little by little a hot little Mongolian girl rose up steaming all over the place... What's the big deal... The Mongolians are a proud people. They'll rise again, you know... They'll fuck us all over, but they won't touch you... When they see you, they'll say – ah, here she is! Our little princess! And you'll call for revenge over the Christians... Princess, who shall we draw and quarter for you? Whose throats shall we fill with molten lead!? ... And you, you'll look at them with contempt from your golden throne draped in designer silk... You'll be ruthless... You'll grant no one forgiveness... And no one will know where you got that terrifying yet impossibly tender expression on your face... And they'll never find out, because the one who knows the answer won't be there...

MILA
And who is that? ...

RASHA
Who do you think?

MILA
You...

RASHA
That's right, my little princess...

MILA
And why won't you be there?... You think the Mongolians will kill you?... I won't let them... I'm their princess and they'll obey me...

RASHA
I won't even be here by the time the Mongolians arrive. I'll have had my judgment day by then. I'm not that lucky...

MILA
And what secret do you know?

RASHA
About the princess?

MILA
Yes ... Why is her expression so – what did you say – terrifying and...

RASHA
Terrifying yet tender? ... Because underneath her ravishing designer silk... in that warm place between her legs... the princess hides her fingers...in her little wet spot...

MILA
Do you love me? ...

RASHA
No... but I'll take you to some field of tall grass and we'll fuck there like Mongolians.
OK?

MILA
OK. ...

/Rasha stares at the screen absent-mindedly./

RASHA
Look at the old fucker... Splitting that slut apart... Who are they?

MILA
Never mind... Tell me about *Hamlet*!

RASHA
Poor fucking Hamlet... He got fucked up by his own father. Hamlet was full of shit. He didn't have anyone to screw. So he got himself stuck on some lame-ass pills and whenever he took them, he'd trip out about the ghost of his dad. During those trips, his

old man would seep bloody poison into his mind. He'd call out to him from the dank earth and ask that revenge be taken.

MILA
So Hamlet's a jerk-off?

RASHA
Yeah. Fucked up by his dad. He got into so much shit that he even sold his own kingdom for it. He was crank-fucked. ...Oedipus, too. He got damn hot about his mother. Impotent jerk-off. Traitor.

MILA
Stick a finger in...

/The telephone rings./

RASHA
I'll stick something else in...

/The telephone keeps ringing. Rasha jumps up and answers./

RASHA
Hello! ... Yeah, it is. ... Speaking. ... No ... Igor!? ... Hey, Iggy, man!? ... I'm here, where are you, you fucker!? ... Here!... No, I'm not expecting anyone, man... Fucking ten years... Eleven!

/Rasha covers the speaker, turns to Mila./

RASHA
Turn that down, for fuck's sake! ...

/He continues talking into the receiver while Mila turns the volume down with a remote control./

RASHA
So, you're here?!... I'm still in the same place where I've always been... Me and my old man... Yeah. On our own... I'll tell you all about it. Fuck you! You're coming over? Oh, you're going to meet up with Doole and then come over? Okay. Great. Yeah, yeah, come together!... This afternoon. Great... He knows how to get here... Great. See you! */puts the phone down/*... Iggy...

MILA
Shit. I have to go to school...

RASHA
Fuck school.

MILA
What do you mean? Not go?

RASHA
Why the fuck should you go? I'll teach you all you need to know about *Hamlet*... Iggy's coming. We haven't seen each other for eleven years.
It'll be a blast.

MILA
Yeah?

RASHA
He's been in England.

MILA
Yeah? Great.

RASHA
We'll get some beer...

MILA
And some red wine.

RASHA
And have a party.

MILA
Will there be some weed?

RASHA
There most definitely will.

MILA
And Hamlet?

RASHA
Hamlet fell into temptation, and didn't stay cool. He triggered a tragedy. A really bad trip. He's not a funny guy, that Hamlet. He's dark. Deep, you know. Guys like him should be gotten rid of...

MILA
Fuck me.

RASHA
I will. For fuck's sake, who are these two that've been at it for half an hour!?

MILA
You got a hard on?

RASHA
From this? No way...

MILA
You're lying!

RASHA
Who are they?!

MILA
Mom and dad.

RASHA
Mom...?

MILA
That's my mom and dad...

RASHA
You little slut ...

MILA
You're the slut!

/Mila pulls Rasha on top of her, they fall onto the mattress./

3. IN THE MEANTIME

/Mila on the phone, behind the curtain, on the toilet./

MILA
Anita! Can you hear me!? I know you're in class; fuck off... I don't know; I didn't feel like it...I had some business... Yeah, and that too... Fuck it. I think he liked it... Man, what a feeling. *(laughs)* Fuck it. How could I know that? I've never done that before with someone I wasn't in love with... Listen, I won't be dropping in today, but I've got your cash... I know; I'm a little nervous carrying it around with me. ...Come on, let's see each other, at least for a bit... No, I can't right now. In an hour, an hour and fifteen... Why do you need to go to the last class?... Fuck it. I'll tell you later...

/Knocking at the door./

MILA

Fuck it. Somebody's at the door... Anita, cool it now, somebody's at the door and I'm in the toilet, for fuck's sake...

/Knocking again, then Ivan comes in./

IVAN

Rasha?...

MILA

I can't believe it... Anita, I've got to go, see you!... Bye!...

/Mila puts her head through the curtain, her shoulders and arms are bare./

MILA

Rasha's out.

IVAN

I have something to tell him.

MILA

He's out...

IVAN

When did he go out? I didn't hear him...

MILA

Sorry, I can't talk to you like this...

IVAN

All right. When will he be back? Did he say?

MILA

No.

/Ivan goes to the table and sits down. Ignores her./

IVAN

I'll wait. I don't care. He has to help me. I've a big decision to make...

MILA

Can I ask you a favor?

IVAN

Yes.

MILA
Can you step out for a minute so I can get dressed...?

IVAN
All right.

/Ivan gets up and goes. Mila comes out, wrapped up in a towel, picks up her clothes, looks towards the front door and goes behind the curtain again./

MILA
You can come back in now!

/Ivan comes back in, looks around slowly and goes back to sit in the same place he was earlier./

IVAN
That was quick. Where are you?

MILA
I'm here! Getting dressed!

IVAN
Don't be afraid. I won't look at you while you're getting dressed...

MILA
Great!

/Mila comes out wearing only her bra and panties. Ivan looks around, gets flustered, looks away./

MILA
Then I can finish getting dressed here...
You won't look at me?...would you fuck me...?

/Ivan gets up angrily, looks at Mila, turns away and goes towards the door. Mila goes after him and stops him. Ivan turns back, angry and confused./

MILA
Sorry, ... Ivan. I got annoyed when you came in... Couldn't you wait for me to let you in...? You made a mistake. You have to learn some manners...

IVAN
I made a mistake. Yes. I thought Rasha was in. I didn't expect...

MILA

Sit down. I have to go now. You sit here and wait for Rasha, OK? There's no one here, and I haven't got a key.

/MILA goes to the bathroom to finish getting dressed; Ivan returns slowly to the table and sits in 'his' place./

IVAN

Please forgive me. It was my fault. I made a mistake.

MILA

So what kind of big decision is it?... Is it a secret?

/She comes back out, grooming herself./

IVAN

It's not a secret. You know I write. Stories and poems... Rasha encouraged me, you see. He praised me once and so I've kept writing. I write almost every day. Two or three phrases a day. Sometimes a whole sentence! Every day. Rasha is a very good writer. Did you know that? I read some of his stories...

MILA

Really?

IVAN

Yes. Hasn't he ever given you his stories to read? They're a bit dark, but very good. He used to write poems too; I haven't read them. He says they're not that good... I don't think anything I've done so far is any good. I've re-read everything. Over and over again. It's not good at all. So, I was thinking...

MILA

Yeah. What were you thinking?

IVAN

I'll burn them all.

MILA

Really?

IVAN

When I read everything I've written, I see all the weaknesses.... It's as if they're not my own sentences... I haven't made any progress...

MILA

Great! Well, you stay there, and wait for Rasha. I have to go. Tell him I'll be back later...

IVAN
What's keeping him so long?

MILA
He's gone out to score some weed for tonight... You should join us! We can take a couple of hits, relax a bit...

/Mila exits./

IVAN
I can't do those sorts of things...

/Ivan gets up. Turns, He looks around the room. Looks down. Sees something on the floor beside the mattress upon which Mila and Rasha were lying. He slowly picks the object up. It's a pair of lace panties. Ivan is puzzled. At the same moment Father enters. He has a hangover and is in a foul mood. Ivan is rooted in his spot with the panties in his hand. Father doesn't notice him right away; he puts a grocery bag on the table and slowly pulls out of it a bottle of brandy, a piece of ham and a piece of cheese./

IVAN
Good afternoon.

FATHER
Oh , hello there, neighbor, how are you!?... You don't give a fuck about anything, do you... Are you hungry!? Are you thirsty!? What is it, you look as if you've taken a shit all over yourself!?

IVAN
I'm waiting for Rasha.

FATHER
Looking after our house, huh? That's a good boy.

IVAN
There was a girl here, she...

FATHER
Oh, the panties! Did you get a good screw, then, you and your friend Rasha? ... Come on, come on, it's good for you! You're not a man until you stick your dick into a woman's pussy.

/Father exits, re-enters with a knife, sits down and starts eating. Offers a bit to Ivan, indicating he should help himself to the food. Ivan is still standing there with a perplexed look on his face, holding the panties in his hand. He puts the panties on the mattress. Ivan goes to the table. Father offers Ivan the knife. Ivan takes the knife from him carefully and holds it away from himself with a mixture of fear and awe./

FATHER

What is it? No fuck for you?
Your friend let you down... He got the booty, and didn't you leave anything... Except for
the panties... Have you been smelling them? Come on, what is it!?

/Ivan sits at the table./

FATHER

You want some brandy?

IVAN

No, thanks. I'm taking medication.

FATHER

Screw medication... Go on and get me a brandy glass from the kitchen; it's on the tray...

/Ivan sets the knife down, goes out, slowly and obediently. Brings back a brandy glass./

FATHER

If only that asshole would do something like that for me sometimes... If he would only
try and help... Help himself... Fuckwit... Dear Ivan, it's all gone to hell!... *(fully settled
now with his food and drink)* How's your mother?...

IVAN

She's fine, thanks.

FATHER

'Fine', my ass... All alone, with you... She complained to me the other day that you'd
brought home some whore...

IVAN

No. That's not true.

FATHER

I'm just kidding... If only... You're not as bad off mentally as she seems to think... I told
her. Let him get a little bitch, so he can get it out of his system a bit... No, of course not.
She's dragged you round to every doctor from here to kingasscome and I say, if she had
found you some whore to put you right, it would've been cheaper, and turned out for the
better, if you don't mind my saying. Fuck me if it wouldn't have made you feel better...

/Father pours some brandy for himself, drinks./

FATHER

You're thinking, look who's talking, aren't you?... If I knew what was good, I wouldn't
be where I am now... But you disappointed me... your generation... All of you, young
people...you've wounded me. Right in the heart. Fuckers.

/Ivan gets up./

IVAN
Sorry, I have to go.

/As Ivan exits, Father talks to him without looking at him. He continues to drink./

FATHER
Go ahead, young man... Thanks for looking after my fucking house... You are my only friend in this den of fuckwits... */After Ivan's left, he continues./* If I had to look after you, I'd kill myself... Maybe you're not crazy, fuck it... Maybe you're pulling the wool over all our eyes... My wife gave me two lunatics, and created another... Out of me...my blood... She had everything, the cunt, and she was unhappy... I 'fucked her up'!?... Fucking trash cunt; I pulled her out of the pigsty and dragged her here to the city, didn't I?...And what do I get? A lunatic looking after my house... The house's gone to hell and he's 'looking after' it... Lunatic!

/Knocking at the door./

FATHER
Yes!

/Knocking is heard again./

FATHER
Come in. I'm not getting up!

/Doole enters the living room, followed by Igor./

DOOLE
Good afternoon, Uncle John.

IGOR
Good afternoon.

DOOLE
Well, here we are, Uncle John... Rasha was expecting us. Is he here?

FATHER
Do we know each other?

DOOLE
Hey, Uncle John, it's me, Doole...

FATHER

Pleased to meet you... I'm Pozhunats¹, a retired, recovering alcoholic...

/He shakes hands with Doole and then with Igor. Doole and Igor feign sincerity, but Father is quite serious./

FATHER

Pozhunats, pleased to meet you...

IGOR

Igor, pleased to meet you... Uncle John, how's it possible you don't remember us? I know it's been ten years since I've been round, but...

FATHER

You were around, my son, but I wasn't... Not only ten, but fifty years! I've never been around... Excuse me, I gotta piss... May I?
I mean, this used to be my home, so if you don't mind...

/He goes to the bathroom and is heard urinating while he continues to speak./

FATHER

I'm talking shit; this never used to be my home... Fuck it; I know, I'm not even being charming...

IGOR

Uncle John, do you remember that Rasha and I had our farewell party together before going off to the Army?... We did our duty together too, until he was relocated to Slovenia... I'm in England now. I've been living there for ten years...

/Father comes out, gets caught in the curtain./

FATHER

Who stuck this thing here so it could stick on my dick?

/Igor and Doole try to free Father out of the mess./

FATHER

Who's in England?

IGOR

I am.

FATHER

Ah, it's you?! *(embraces him)*... My Rasha got relocated to Slovenia, and you stayed here!... Your old man arranged it all for you. What the fuck. He's got bigger balls than I

¹ Pronounced Po-zoo-nuts.

do. He's a bigshot... I wasn't even informed when they moved my boy, motherfuckers!... We waited for him for two months! For two months they kept them stuck there in the (*slurring, drunk*) Slo-Nat...Natural...Nitteral...guard...Fuck. And you're living in England, you say?...

IGOR

Yes.

FATHER

Fuck off! ... Good for you, good! London?

IGOR

Near Leeds.

FATHER

Where near Leeds?

IGOR

I don't know how well you know England...

FATHER

Yorkshire! Lancashire! Northumbria! Kent! I went there, son... In nineteen sixty-something, there was this rag-tag industrial delegation that went there and I went with them to Wales... The English tried to get rid of some old technology by giving it to us. They had moved past it, you see, but they still wanted to make a buck, so they thought 'why not pawn it off on some other damn country?'... They're clever that way, son... They stick your face in it with their cleverness, and smile while they're doing it. Good fuck up the ass with a smile, that's the English for you. But the Welsh!... Not a sober minute I had! All I remember is nothing. You get me?! Ah, the Welsh just kept saying 'don't buy that shit, old boy, it's good for nothing! Listen to the Welshman, he's been getting screwed by the English for centuries...' Some machinery, fucking terrible... Swansea!... We went to Swansea! Ah, the Welsh, yes... Good people. Great... And you're in Leeds?

IGOR

In Huddersfield. 'Oodersfield', as they say in Yorkshire...

FATHER

England is big; can't fuck with that...

IGOR

It's not that – big...

FATHER

Are you fucking with me?

IGOR
No.

FATHER
England is mammoth, son; don't you know anything...?
You think it's just what you can see, eh! And what about the islands? And the territories?
England, my son, is fucking huge; you can't even make out how big it is...

DOOLE
Where is Rasha, uncle John?

FATHER
In England...

/Doole and Igor look at each other. Father goes over to the table, pours himself another glass and drains it./

DOOLE
Did he say when he was coming back, Uncle John? Shall we drop in later...

FATHER
No! I've gotta go... You sit down, eat, drink, smoke... I'm going... I've got things to do, gotta go and make my rounds – to the “The Sweet Lamb,” “The Lucky Rose,” “The Pig n Whistle,” “The Dawn”... those are my houses!... You wanna come?...

DOOLE
No, thanks, Uncle John... Do you want me to drop you off somewhere, I've got a car...

FATHER
Well, that would be wonderful!... I used to have a car, but I sold it this morning... I think...

DOOLE
OK!... Wait here, Iggy, Rasha can't be far...

IGOR
OK.

/Father puts his coat on, Doole helps him. They start to go. Father turns towards the bathroom again./

FATHER
It's good that curtain, isn't it?!... Whoever thought of that has a drink on me...

DOOLE
Let's go, uncle John. Where are we going?

FATHER

Drive me to “The Lucky Rose”! No, to “The Pig n Whistle”! No. First “The Pig n Whistle” and then “The Dawn”...

/Doole and Father go. Igor is standing still. Goes to the curtain. Straightens it./

4. THERE, YOU SEE...

/Igor and Rasha are sitting at the table. Mila is lying on the mattress. Mila lights a joint, which she and Rasha share./

RASHA

There, you see...Everything's wrecked.

IGOR

If I missed anything, though, it was our crew.

/Igor gets up, stretches, walks slowly around the room./

RASHA

Yeah, we're nowhere now, it's true. We're washed up. Rabbit's in Belgrade. The Russian got married, had a couple of kids... Want some?

IGOR

Not now... And where are your mother and sister?

RASHA

My father's insane. He doesn't know what he's doing anymore. Delirium... Mom tried to put up with him at first, but... She left him five years ago. My sister went with her. Check this: my mom found herself some old age pensioner guy full of dough... And my sister's at the University in Novi Sad...

IGOR

Fuck it. Shit. Your old man used to be a cool guy.

RASHA

Used to be. Got ruined with retirement. He died the day they closed the factory. You know what it's like when they take your baby away? He always used to say he had three children: my sister, me, and the factory. “And the factory feeds us all!” Fucking loon... One day he's throwing me out of the house, the next he's ringing the police to look for me. I left for a month once; I had to let things cool down a bit... And he goes and rings the police and says “I want to report a missing child; My child's gone missing. He ran away and has been missing for a whole month...” So, the cop asks him for stats, right? Sex, date of birth, physical appearance, so on.... And Father says “He's thirty years old...”...

/Rasha starts laughing, chokes./

IGOR
And the cop?

RASHA
Told him to fuck off!

MILA
Why?

RASHA
What'd you mean, why, Mila? ...

MILA
Where does that pig get off telling people to fuck off like that, motherfucker...

RASHA
Cool it sweetie, don't let the joint out!

MILA
Fuck off. You think it's funny? Huh? He's calling for help and they make an ass out of him? I can't believe you'd laugh at something like that...that is so whacked. That is so fucking like you, isn't it?. Actually, it's not funny, is it? You're lying, right? You're just pretending that it's funny. You just wait till you have to call some pigs for, like, an ambulance or something fucking fucked up like that...and then see what happens, see if you feel like laughing it up...You just wait until you get puking sick and lose your shit.

/Mila starts coughing, grabs hold of her head and stays in the same position. She remains in this position for a short while./

MILA
Crap ass fuck...

RASHA
If it hit me, imagine how it's hit her... My brain is fried... I've had it. I've reached my limit. We're not young anymore. Our youth is gone, my friends.

IGOR
And the young lady?

MILA
The "young lady's fucked..." Does everybody in England talk like that?

IGOR
I didn't mean anything by it. Just talking.

MILA

Well let me tell you straight up: this young lady is so fucked up, there is no fucking way she's ever going to sound like the BBC. Sorry.

RASHA

Come on now, baby-doll... Let daddy kiss it and make it better...

/Mila gets up, stumbles towards the bathroom, and goes behind the curtain. Through the sound of running water, Mila is heard coughing and spitting./

IGOR

Hey, how old is she?

RASHA

Enough... High school... They're reading *Hamlet*... I'm helping her get ready for her exam...

IGOR

When'd you finish grad school?

RASHA

I haven't finished anything, not a single thing I've started...

IGOR

Why don't you finish it?

RASHA

I haven't been out of this shit-hole for five years, man, haven't even seen the University; I've forgotten where it is...

IGOR

What do you live on?

RASHA

Suffering... I'm freelancing. I write an occasional article for the local paper. I get a couple of hours on the local radio... Plug some artsy magazines...

IGOR

And you can live on that?

RASHA

You see anyone 'alive' around here?

IGOR

You're going out with a fucking teenager – you're alive!

/Mila is heard mumbling behind the curtain./

RASHA

I'm finished; I don't know what to do.... We don't go out. We fuck, that's all. Like Henry Higgins and Liza Doolittle. "Step right up, ladies and gents, and see some porno Pygmalion to soothe your troubled souls..." You know me. I like educating pretty girls. It's not even that important that they're pretty, as long as they're nice. *Enchante, mon cher*. You know where the French got that term from, don't you? *Enchante...* *Entre...*...dick. You get a hard-on and you don't care about anything else but where you can put it, as soon as possible...

IGOR

It's good, though, right?.

RASHA

Good, yeah, like fuck... Eleven years, man! Where have you been? What have you been up to? Sit down... This house is ruined. My old man keeps taking things out of here. Every day, something else goes. He's gutting the place. He took the toilet door out this morning.... He's taken the freezer, a kitchen shelf... He even sold the complete works of Dostoyevsky... There isn't a scrap of furniture left upstairs... He even took away the electric heaters... And now what? Winter's coming...

IGOR

Doole should be here any minute now. He said he'd bring some beer.

RASHA

Dickhead. Doole's sold his soul.

IGOR

He looks like a good yuppie to me. What is it exactly that he does again?

RASHA

He sells shit-cakes, what else! He looks after a warehouse for some guy who sells Swiss chocolate. He's put on so much weight he looks like the Blob. Have you seen him?

IGOR

He's got money; that's OK.

RASHA

This money thing is riding my ass. As soon as the weekend comes, he can't be bothered to get out of his house. He just farts around and scarfs down Toblerone – fucking jerk-off. Watching The Simpsons, staring at the same old stories... Sick.. Pathetic.

IGOR

You don't watch The Simpsons?

RASHA

/laughing/ I don't even have a fucking antenna! My old man sold it a year ago. I'm holding onto this video here by the skin of my teeth; he'll take that away too, if I'm not careful. I watch movies, though. Porn, and the classics. Russian fairytales. They're the best. You know what my absolute favorite trip is? To sit down alone, roll up a joint and put on 'The Stone Flower', 'The New Gulliver', or 'The Crippled Mare'... I'm telling you, the Russians are unbefuckinglybelievable... Have you seen their old movies? God knows what kind of magic funghi they were on when they were making those flicks... midget sorcerers with 50-foot beards, hunchbacked witches making insect pies, guys talking backwards to half-bird, half-women creatures... absolutely delirious stuff... sends your mind...

Mila, doll, are you alive?

/Mila is mumbling behind the curtain./

RASHA

Take a crap! Take a tinkle, babe! Throw up! Wash your face!

IGOR

I've often thought of you. I thought, he must be in some school, torturing some kids with literary theory. I thought I'd come across your poetry someday ...

RASHA

Fuck it, Iggy. You're out there in the big bad world. Haven't you heard? Poetry is dead.
C'est mort, my friend.

IGOR

What?

RASHA

Don't you fucking remember it?! Winter, 1993. All the newspapers in the world ran it on their front page – in big black glossy letters: "Poetry is Dead"...

IGOR

It's impossible for poetry to die.

RASHA

Well, it died.

IGOR

When was the funeral? Where did it get buried? Where is the grave?

RASHA

Everywhere.

IGOR

You never published that collection of yours...

RASHA

Forget it... I almost wrote a book about my own view of the decline of the Slavic civilization... The publisher was very interested. I had him piqued there for a while. But, in the end, I couldn't be bothered to write it.

IGOR

Why didn't you try?

RASHA

[on a jag, altered] Well, nobody is seriously interested, really... My view of history is anti-historical. It's also got a bit of latent anti-semitism; the neo-nazis would have a field day with something like that... Some racist moments too, I'm afraid... The Slavs and the Germans are part of the same tribe. The Germans hate the Slavs because they never gave a fuck about the state, about order and organization. That's why they wanna get rid of us.

Hate your kind, right? Hate your kin. Kill the brother who thinks the same, who is the same, who is your perfect reflecting mirror... The German eagle has one head, the Slav – two. They think the Slav eagle is a mutant. They're afraid of it because they're fucked up by rationalism. They're afraid of it the same way they're afraid of imagination. The Slav eagle is the eagle of imagination. The German eagle is a one-headed eagle. It looks like the ones that still exist, the ones that still fly about, the ones you see in the goddamn zoo, right?... What I wanted to say was that the Slavs are basically destroyed, if you think about it, absolutely wrecked religiously and culturally... Not a single fucking authentic pre-Christian ritual has survived... I mean, do history books tell us anything about them? Fuck no... The Jews invented Christ to stir up the Romans; then the Christians and the Romans got into bloody wars with each other; and so the Christian faith spread for centuries, all under the control of Jewish rabis... They invented Islam too, just to stir up the Christians... The Eastern Christians smashed the wooden idols of the Slavs, the Greeks finished off the job that the Romans started, and Prince Vladimir killed off hordes of people in the name of Christ... Byzantium was a travesty. ... Byzantium destroyed the Slav spirit... And thus destroyed our imagination... No fucking sailing to Byzantium for us... I mean, how come the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans, the Celts, and the Aborigines all preserved their precious divinities, and the Slavs didn't...? We just rush headlong into everything... delirious with killing everything off... We don't have our own god...

We've lost our imagination... We need to invent Him again... Some people want to print things like that, but not everyone would understand... I know it's racist crap all that anti-semitism shit, but it's also typically Slavonic... It's who we are. We have to face up to that... It's only when you face up to things, right?... ... You need a god, so, there you go – create Him!

IGOR

Would they really print something like that here?

RASHA

It'd be a bestseller with a bullet...

/Mila comes out of the bathroom. She is very pale. She goes over to the mattress and collapses onto it./

RASHA

And so the destruction of healthy, young people goes on...

MILA

Spare me your shit, fucking zombies.

/In a daze, she slides off the mattress and onto the floor./

RASHA

Let her sleep a bit... *Hamlet* is fucking hard... What did they used to make us read?

IGOR

Come on. School was great.

RASHA

Bullshit! *Tom Sawyer*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Red and Black*... Enough to send you to the loony bin – Huck and Tom chasing up and down the Don river, Raskolynikov in Paris, the Kosaks on the Mississippi – fucking horror – then all of a sudden T.S. Eliot turns up right in the middle of everything and nobody knows which end is up...

IGOR

You take everything too much to heart.

RASHA

To heart, my ass. I used to respect – I still respect – the Pioneers' cap and scarf. That used to be a good trip. 'We're all one army!' Look at her, do you think she'd be screwing around, smoking weed and whatnot if she had to make a solemn oath to the Pioneers'!?

/Doole comes in with a crate of beer./

DOOLE

"Today when I become a Pioneer,... I solemnly declare that I will defend..."!

/Doole puts the crate on the table, hands a can out to each./

IGOR

Right on time!

RASHA

Fuck off; you're mixing up the Pioneers' oath with the oath you made to the Yugoslav National Army!

DOOLE

I never served in the Yugoslav National Army; I served the Army of Yugoslavia...

RASHA

That's why you're such an idiot... Your general was fucking Milosevic. Listen up: we never served in the same army. I served the people and you served Slobo!

IGOR

So what – that means there are two sides now?

RASHA

Yes... So we can exterminate each other...

DOOLE

Shut your trap. What's the matter with the little lady?

RASHA

She's just diving to the bottom of the ocean where she's fishing out an abso-fucking-perfect purple diamond, and when she resurfaces, we'll be completely wasted... Cheers!

/They toast each other./

DOOLE

Who is she?

RASHA

She's a god.

DOOLE

You're trying it with children again?

RASHA

No. I'm telling you, the kid's a god. Not a goddess, but a god. You follow me? God took her form, you see? He put on firm tits and a juicy little ass, and he decided to visit us mere mortals in disguise; so, there you are; bow down and pray to our newly baptized, age-perfect god...

DOOLE

And a very pretty god it is.

RASHA

Hey. Don't fuck around with god...

DOOLE

I need to take a leak ... What's this?

RASHA

The curtain.

DOOLE

So, what's the punchline? Where's the door?

RASHA

Doors are dull.

DOOLE

OK.

IGOR

Come on guys, let's drink, let's have fun...

DOOLE

/while urinating/ It's easy for you to have fun when you're raking in pounds sterling, fuck you!

IGOR

Wanna swap?

DOOLE

Kiss my Euros.

RASHA

What are you doing over there, anyway?

IGOR

I'm working as a lab technician in a firm that tests chemical products.

DOOLE

/Coming out of the bathroom./ In Leeds?

IGOR

I work in Leeds, but I live in Huddersfield. We're planning to move to Leeds and out of 'Oodersfield', as they say in Yorkshire, soon...

DOOLE

You have your own apartment... A car...?

IGOR

I have a car. We're renting a flat.

DOOLE
You have a chick...?

IGOR
A fiancée. Her name is Ana. She's Polish – a really wonderful girl.

RASHA
Catholic...I bet.

IGOR
Jewish... actually... We went to grad school together. She's doing her doctorate now.

DOOLE
Polish girls are great...

RASHA
Cut the shit!? How do you know what they're like!?

DOOLE
They look great...

RASHA
And you say 10 euro-an-hour Moldavians are great too... This guy talks nothing but bullshit! He never screws anything.

DOOLE
Who never screws anything?

RASHA
You, comrade! Look at yourself! Putting the tonnage on, jerking off in your sleep, scarfing down Nestle all day; your sperm is turning into Swiss cheese...

IGOR
French cheese....

DOOLE
Whenever Doole screws, he screws with discretion.

RASHA
Oh, come off it... You've grown cobwebs on your cock...

DOOLE
I had a fuck... um... four hours ago...

RASHA
For the first time?

DOOLE

I had some old broad. Not bad.

RASHA

The granma took pity on you.

DOOLE

This broad's been coming on to me for a while. She's a secretary in the wholesale department. She kept smiling at me, so...

RASHA

I can't believe it. ... You fucked a granny?

DOOLE

She's 45. A real sex bomb.

RASHA

And you turned her on...?

DOOLE

I go over to her department today, and she's like - 'Stay. Have a coffee', so I did. 'We're alone', she says. And she was right. We were. Not a fucking suit for miles. So, she takes me into her office and starts to suck me off... Fuck, it was good...

RASHA

So, Iggy, how's Huddersfield?

DOOLE

What is it, you don't believe me, you cunt... At least I got it off!

IGOR

I'm planning to move to Leeds. Working all the time.
Trying to keep in touch with friends, by email... Do you have email?

DOOLE

I do. At work.

RASHA

I don't. It's better that way. My old man would figure out a way to sell it off to some bastard, so he could keep his stock of liquor from diminishing.

IGOR

I'm getting married next month.

DOOLE
That's great.

RASHA
"I'm getting married next month", for fuck's sake – it's unreal... The guy is planning things months in advance...

DOOLE
That's how it is...

RASHA
What the fuck do you mean 'that's how it is'!? What? In the world? You can't count on being alive here one month to the next!

DOOLE
You can. The times are changing, you have to get used to it.

RASHA
You're up a tree, Mr. Dylan.

DOOLE
We'll be like England one day. We'll be like the West. We'll be able to plan...

RASHA
Listen to him. ... You're one of those screwy guinea pigs who believes that one day you'll get a knock on the door, and somebody will tell you: Good afternoon, Mr Nestle, here are your stocks and bonds, and your dreamy bank account in Basel; you're a capitalist now: kiss, kiss, yum, yum, finger up your crack, blah, blah, blah...

IGOR
It's not like that anywhere.

RASHA
Fuck it. I've been telling him for years... The Bolsheviks have had it. The Bolsheviks have fucked off; all that's left is the Mensheviks; they're our capitalists. All the rest of us are plebeians: poor fucking peasants! It's backwards, don't you see? The money's already been forked over, the world over, and he's still waiting!

DOOLE
I'm not waiting, I'm slaving away. I'm working hard and saving up...

RASHA
You can thank capitalism for the fact that you can fuck grannies in the wholesale department – that's your progress!

DOOLE

Who the fuck are you to talk to me like that...? You haven't lifted your ass off that chair to do anything in five years; you haven't earned a penny in your life; you just spew shit, and hate everything and everyone around you...

RASHA

I don't hate anyone.

DOOLE

He's talking shit; he's fucked up... You're thirty years old and you haven't got a day's worth of work in your file. The law's out: if you get a job tomorrow you won't get a pension till you've worked to the age of ninety...

RASHA

The world will fall apart by then. There won't be any kind of pension, nothing...

DOOLE

Fuck you. Wouldn't we all like to sit around talking amateur garden-crap philosophy...?

RASHA

Come on, Igor, tell him that the world's gone to hell! Tell him to cool it... Tell him how it is!

IGOR

Well, Doole, you see, the world has gone to hell... but there's no reason not to drink to that!

/They clink cans, then drink. Mila wakes up, holds her hand to her mouth. Rasha gets up./

RASHA

What is it, baby-doll?

/Rasha takes her behind the curtain, Mila vomits./

IGOR

I don't want you to fight now. I just wanted to have some fun, relax a bit.

DOOLE

I'm sorry, fuck it. I work a lot, that's all; I do my part, but I don't like anyone riding me, you know, putting my ass down...

IGOR

Why don't you help him?

DOOLE

Help who? ... Help Rasha?

IGOR

It would be good for him to live on his own. His old man is terrorizing him; he looks really bent out of shape.

DOOLE

You're wrong; he likes it. He has this theory that everything is 'falling apart', so it's good for everything to be falling apart around him. Cause it supports his theory.

IGOR

It keeps him rooted.

DOOLE

Exactly. I know it could have been different. He had that fall-out with his parents five years ago. So, he got disappointed. What you don't know is that he had other disappointments along the way... He had a girlfriend. Yeah. They were together for a long time. Almost six years! They lived together, in Belgrade, while he was at the University. He wanted to get a job, and just stay there and live with her, you know. He didn't give a fuck about his parents or anyone. He would have followed her anywhere. He even worked for a while for some respectable literary magazine. He was paying the rent, you know, seeing it all through...

IGOR

And?

DOOLE

Nothing. The bubble burst, and so did he. So that's where he is now. It's been two years, but he's still fucked up about it...

IGOR

When you hit thirty, it's not as easy to roll with the punches and let things slide...

DOOLE

I thought he was stronger than that.

IGOR

What does he want with this girl?

DOOLE

I don't know. Some kind of reverse masochism. He feels spiritually superior, so he takes it out on kids. Then he loses his shit, dumps them, and moves on to another. He's just making more of a mess for himself. Older women are where it's at, cause they're not after commitment.

IGOR

Commitment is hard for almost everyone.

DOOLE

You're talking shit. Like him. 'People have lost their concentration, their attention span, they can't see or hear anything', blah, blah, blah...

/Rasha comes out from behind the curtain, takes Mila towards the mattress./

RASHA

OK, guys, try and avoid the toilet for a bit. Come on baby-doll, bedtime...

/She embraces him./

MILA

Rasha...lie down beside me. I told my parents I was sleeping over at Anita's tonight.

/Rasha sets her down upon the mattress gently. Mila falls instantly asleep. Rasha looks at her./

RASHA

I love her...

DOOLE

We get the point, yes...

RASHA

I'm going to clean up the toilet a bit and then I'll play you some really good music...
Motherfucking good! Give me that beer...

/Rasha takes a big gulp of beer, and disappears behind the curtain./

*

5. "LIKE A HURRICANE"

/Igor, Doole and Rasha are sitting at the table, eating kebabs with gusto. Mila is sitting on the mattress, eating off a plate. There are cans and glasses on the table. In the background the unplugged version of Neil Young's 'Like a Hurricane' plays on a loop./

IGOR

Neil Young!

DOOLE

Hey guys, we are listening to it for the fifth time in a row!?

RASHA

And we will listen to it for another five times!

IGOR
This kebab is amazing!

DOOLE
Yummy.

IGOR
I could do with a bit of ketchup!

/Rasha jumps up out of the chair./

RASHA
Fuck. I have ketchup!

/Rasha runs in with a plastic bottle of ketchup, puts it on the table. They continue eating./

DOOLE
Where did we get to...?

IGOR
Middle row, first desk!

DOOLE
The Radyenovich girl, she got married! She's got a kid, and her husband's a cop. She was sitting with...

IGOR
I know! Oh, what was her name? Come on, Rasha.

RASHA
As if I give a fuck what those morons from class are up to!

DOOLE
Yasna Pavkovich! She's working in the city council as a secretary; her father got her the job. She's not married yet.

RASHA
How can she get married when she's a dog?!

IGOR
Then, Yakshich and Vladan!

DOOLE
Yakshich died in Kosovo.

IGOR
No shit?!

DOOLE
He was in a special unit. Got himself blown up on a routine transport mission.

IGOR
Fuck...

DOOLE
In the middle of the bombing. I remember. I'd bumped into him a month before, he was pushing his kid around in a stroller. 'You're not at the front?' – I ask him. 'I'm going back, brother, we'll have them all fucked, fucking NATO!' I'm looking at him, looking at the kid in the stroller, thinking 'You know where I'd go if I had a kid like that'?!

RASHA
Serbia is full of orphans. Orphans and kebabs!

IGOR
Fuck...

DOOLE
They made kebabs out of him!

/Igor pushes his plate away./

DOOLE
Then, ... Vladan, yes! He's in the States, an IT engineer. I think he's working at IBM... Behind the two of them – Savich and Stepanov. The Savich girl is also abroad somewhere, she married a French guy... Stepanov is selling fruit at the market... Kostich is working with his dad, designing business cards and pushing some software on the black market... Pinter spent two years inside – due to 'unlawful possession of public property'. While he was working at the fish farm he had some dirty deal going on with the fishmongers. I saw him at the outdoor market recently; he was selling some stuff from Hungary...

MILA
There are worse things than that.

IGOR
Sure. But we're talking about people who've been through the same shit as we have. This stuff doesn't mean anything to you now, but it will... in ten years you'll understand.

MILA
I understand. You've turned their stories into a whacked-out epic poem of tragic proportions.

/Rasha shakes the ketchup bottle and accidentally sprays Doole's shirt./

DOOLE

Fucking hell, man! You've ruined my best shirt!... This is a fucking Italian shirt! Do you realize you've ruined a shirt that costs 70 euros!?... Fuck you, I gave up half my salary for it!

/Doole runs to the bathroom. Water is heard. Igor is feeling uncomfortable. Rasha laughs. Doole is heard behind the curtain./

DOOLE

What the fuck are you laughing at?!... It won't come off!

MILA

It'll come off, if you go home now and stick it in the washing machine.

/Rasha laughs even louder. He takes the ketchup bottle and squeezes it all over himself. Doole comes out of the bathroom without his shirt on. He looks at Rasha and bursts out laughing. They all laugh./

IGOR

It's my fucking fault; I asked for ketchup...

/Rasha turns up the volume on the music. Ivan tentatively enters the room. Rasha beckons to him to come in, turning the music down again./

RASHA

Guys, meet the genius! Ivan! A poet! A spiritual soul! Ivan, come on in, have a bite, chill out.

MILA

You're just in time, Ivan. We were worried the messiah would never come.

IVAN

My mom sent me. She says if you could please turn the music down...

RASHA

I just turned it down. What are you up to?

IVAN

I've been reading.

RASHA

Why don't you chill out a bit, and relax?

IVAN
I don't know.

RASHA
Everything is OK, see? Now go tell your mom we've turned the music down and that you'll stay in with us for a while.

IVAN
OK.

/Ivan goes out./

MILA
What, in your opinion, would be a good reason for him to come back and chill out with us? What kind of fucking chill-out do you have in mind? He's going to sit around with three drunken morons who just want to fuck around with him? That's going to chill him out?

IGOR
What's wrong with him, anyway?

DOOLE
You don't remember Ivan?

IGOR
Where from?

DOOLE
He was in our year... He went to technical college. A judo champ. You know the guy who fought ten cops at once!

IGOR
Rings a bell...

RASHA
He's amazing! A white wizard, a yoga teacher, an orthodox mystic...

IGOR
I don't know.

RASHA
He weighs twenty kilos less than before. Has an artificial hip...

IGOR
Oh, yes, I remember now! Is that him?... He doesn't look like himself.

RASHA

How could he look like himself after ten years of treatments in loony bins?

MILA

Tell me he's not coming back.

RASHA

He's our friend from high school, baby-doll...

IGOR

How come he's had it so hard?

RASHA

I don't know, Igor; we were crazy when you left us, but now we're crazier. He'll tell you all about it...

DOOLE

About what?

RASHA

I'll ask him to tell you his life story...

MILA

Awful!

RASHA

I'm with you, baby-doll. It's fucking awful...

DOOLE

Oh, come on, he won't do it... Guys like that don't tell things to strangers...

RASHA

Well, he'll get to know you first. We'll have some fun... By the way he also has a collection of poetry. I'm trying to find him a publisher...

/laughter/

RASHA

It's not funny... He's a really great writer.

IGOR

What's his diagnosis?

RASHA

He's a neurotic.

DOOLE

We are all neurotic, Rasha; that's not an illness.

RASHA

It is for him. He's afraid of everything.

IGOR

The fear of fear.

RASHA

Exactly... When he comes back, we'll turn the music down... Mila, roll another joint...

Come on, let's go crazy...

MILA

Crazy? Oh yeah, that's all you need.

DOOLE

I can't believe it...

IGOR

What's the matter now?

DOOLE

I'm craving something sweet!

RASHA

Me too! Get some Mallomars!

DOOLE

I will! Fuck, I'm gonna have to miss the beginning...

/Doole quickly exits./

RASHA

We have to soften him up a bit. The most important thing is to listen to him carefully...

You'll see that when he talks he doesn't look you in the eye but somewhere else, you know, off to the side. When you talk to him he looks down...

IGOR

Is he dangerous?

RASHA

He wouldn't hurt a dead fly... I tell you, you listen to him and you'll get the whole picture: you'll see what kind of machine's been bearing down our throats all these years, and what's left of us...

/Ivan enters./

RASHA

Sit down, Ivan. This is Mila, you've met her. Remember?

MILA

Hey, how are you, Ivan? This is Rasha. Remember? You know him.

RASHA

And this is Igor, my friend... Would you like some kebab?

IVAN

No, thanks.

RASHA

You don't want a drag, do you?... Do you want some ketchup? */laughs/...* Fuck, it's all gone... I spilled the ketchup all over me!!! */he laughs/...* Want a drag?

IVAN

No. I shouldn't.

RASHA

OK, we'll smoke, and you enjoy yourself. By the way, Igor is interested in helping us publish your book...

IVAN

Mhm.

RASHA

I told him your poetry is very good. Listen, he's cool. He's one of us. And he wants to help us out with this book thing, so, you know, it's a done deal. There's just one thing... Igor's interested in your case history. See, we all trust each other here, as I'm sure you've noticed. So, go on now, tell him... When did you first start to feel afraid?

IVAN

You sure you want me to talk about that?

RASHA

Please. Tell him what you've told me. How it was, what happened, what therapy you've had, how you felt, what you did to pass the time...

IVAN

Everything...?

RASHA

Oh yeah. And since Ivan can't talk for long because he gets tired quickly, don't you, Ivan?, then he'll give us his story in bits and pieces; I'll help you along... deal?

IVAN

Deal.

RASHA

When did it all start?

/Rasha, Igor and Mila are smoking, drinking beer, from time to time they try to stifle laughter and sometimes they are very engaged in Ivan's story. Ivan speaks with a somber tone; he crack his knuckles throughout./

IVAN

I was 12 years old. It was the month of May. Father used to live with us then. We didn't live here. I was on a balcony. Suddenly I felt scared. The line between what was real and what wasn't got blurry. And my imagination got lit...

RASHA

Were you afraid of heights?

IVAN

Yes, that too; I had an inexplicable fear of everything. It would come over me without warning. I'd break out in a sweat and turn pale. My mother took me into a room; I recovered for a while... At the time I was reading medical encyclopedias; I read a lot...

RASHA

Would you say you read a bit too much...?

IVAN

Oh yes. Too much. And I have, I had a fear of sharp objects. The fears just accumulated. I also had a fear of open spaces.

RASHA

How old were you then?

IVAN

16.

RASHA

And is that when you started to read books about yoga?

IVAN

Yes. Yoga. At 17, I got a fear of madness. So, I kept reading books about yoga. I read everything there was on the subject.

RASHA

You had your own yoga teacher?

IVAN

Yes. He helped me release my fears through meditation. I was under his care. My 18th birthday was coming up. And it was at about that time that I developed a fear of women. I mean, I had the desire to be in their presence, but the fear of being open, you see, was stronger than my desire.

RASHA

So what happened then...?

IVAN

Suddenly all my fears disappeared. Just like that. Then I started to read books about the occult. The Kabbalah, to be more precise. I was carrying out exercises with imaginary objects in space. As a practitioner of judo I didn't have problems with either yoga or the kabbalah. I was stronger, more flexible; I knew my body completely.

RASHA

But there was black magic.

IVAN

No! Only white magic. I knew some people who were doing rituals with the inverted pentagram, but I didn't do that...

RASHA

Who did?

IVAN

You know... I told you.

RASHA

It was your yoga teacher.

IVAN

Yes.

RASHA

You can be candid with us. Tell us how you discovered he was into black magic. Goran. Right?

IVAN

Goran. Yes. That was his name. During one of our sessions I noticed a drawing in his studio.

RASHA
Where exactly?

IVAN
On the floor. It was drawn very skillfully, almost imperceptibly, so that if you weren't paying attention, you wouldn't notice it, but there it was: an inverted pentagram.

RASHA
What did Goran want to do to you?

IVAN
He was trying to stick larvae into my aura, but I was stronger than him.

RASHA
What kind of larvae?

IVAN
There are larvae that contain negative energy. Some people make them so they can stick them into the auras of others, so they can live like parasites, sucking the positive energy out of you. But if you're strong, very strong, they can't penetrate your aura and they die, or just move onto someone else's aura where they can thrive... After that I went off to the military...

RASHA
But before that?

IVAN
What?

RASHA
When you fought ten cops at the same time?

IVAN
Oh, that ... I don't want to talk about that...

RASHA
I will, then!... Ivan discovered the location of a secret meeting place of the masons and he tried to break in during the middle of one of their rituals. But the cops intercepted him and took him away, clubbing him all the way along with their sticks. Right?

IVAN
I discovered their meeting place, and I tried to break in to expose-

RASHA
Where was that?

IVAN
In a school.

RASHA
Which school?... You won't tell us that, I know... Maybe it was even in our school, eh,
Igor?

IGOR
In some school. Never mind.

/Doole enters with a bag of sweets, panting./

DOOLE
Fuck it. What did I miss?

RASHA
You've missed what you've missed. It's not coming back, man. Give us those
Mallomars!...

/Doole and Rasha rifle through the bag of sweets./

MILA
(to Igor) Do you really live in England?

IGOR
Yes. I really do.

MILA
That's too bad. Although, when I get a good look at you, yeah, you do look like an
Englishman.

/Igor looks about, turning away from her casually./

IGOR
I'm from here.

RASHA
Fuck you, these are nougat cubes! Can't you tell the difference between Mallomars and
fucking hard cubes, for fuck's sake!?

DOOLE
Shut up, it's OK; give me that beer!

RASHA
Fuck you. They'll never let you into Nestle! Man, you can't tell the difference between
fucking nougat and Mallomars!... You must've gotten distracted by some elderly female

aisle-checker! You would've bought cat-shit from one of those... Look, I'll buy you some Mallomars so you can carry them in your pocket every day, and remember what they look like!

DOOLE
Don't give me that shit.

RASHA
No. Don't you give me shit. Mallomars have a marshmallow filling, man. And he brought me nougats!!!

DOOLE
What did I miss?

IGOR
That's enough now. Be quiet, let's go on...

RASHA
I'm sorry, Ivan... You go on... This is Doole; he's a granny-fucker! He's can't even recognize a pair of Mallomars if they sat on his lap and cried "Meow. Give me my milk."... How was it in the army?

IVAN
I was in intensive training...My health got worse in the army...

RASHA
You trained with the special units?

IVAN
Yes. I was a good at judo. I was twenty pounds heavier in those days...

RASHA
How long did you last in there?

IVAN
I got inducted and then did another two months. I started getting insomnia. I kept quiet. I wasn't able to communicate with anyone. So, they sent me to therapy. I was released from the army permanently. I spent the next six months on sedatives. Never went outside. The medication was too heavy for me to read or even think...Excuse me if I don't go on...I'm getting tired.

RASHA
Of course. Would you like a beer?

IVAN
I'd really like some coffee, if you wouldn't mind...

RASHA

Come on, baby-doll, make some coffee for our man Ivan here.

MILA

Do what?

RASHA

Make some coffee. Ivan wants some.

MILA

So, that's it, huh?

RASHA

Fuck it. Move your ass and do something. Be of some use around here.

MILA

What about you, bitch? Why don't you move your ass and be of some use to all of us?

Fuck off.

RASHA

What? What's that? "Of use to all of us?"

MILA

Fuck right. It would be useful to all of us if you just fucked off.

(quietly, away from Ivan) Instead of fucking him up.

/Mila gets up slowly and goes into the kitchen./

RASHA

That sweet little teenage shit is just the perfect topper to the pile of shit I'm under...Sorry, Ivan. Which medication?

IVAN

'Meleryl'. It also suppresses sexual desire...

RASHA

Doole should take that one so he stops pouncing on all the grannies...

IVAN

Then they gave me "Leogenretard" – 24 hours of 'calm and collected thinking'... My muscles atrophied... At 19, I ended up in a hospital in Belgrade... I was told to stop reading – a ban got put on yoga, kabbalah, tarot... Then for the next 7 or 8 years I stayed on medication, 407 mg every day... They changed bits and pieces of the therapy along the way... They decreased some of it...

/Doole, Igor and Rasha are looking at each other. They can't suppress the laughter caused by the marijuana and beer./

IGOR

This is too fucking depressing!

DOOLE

They ruined the guy!

RASHA

407 mg! For all these years! They should all be sent to prison!

DOOLE

Why didn't they hand him a whore when he was 17?!

RASHA

Why didn't they hand him a granny when he was 17?!

IGOR

Even some hot oil would've done the job!

RASHA

Hey Mila, baby, why don't you give us some sweet oil from your pussy?

DOOLE

You have to wonder how many other cases like this one there are around here!

RASHA

How many!?

DOOLE

Too fucking many?!

RASHA

Sorry Ivan, we're fucked out of our minds from the weed, I can't control myself! ...

IGOR

No, really, it's not funny!

/They are crying with laughter./

DOOLE

Stop it, I'll piss myself!

RASHA

Me too!

/Mila enters, gives a cup of coffee to Ivan./

DOOLE

He'll be OK, once he's had the coffee!

IGOR

He'll be born again!

RASHA

Hey, cut the shit; now!

/Eventually, they calm down./

RASHA

Sorry, Ivan... It's stupid... Really, what the fuck's gotten into you!?

DOOLE

Into us?!

RASHA

He's embarrassed...

IGOR

'Embarrassed' is an understatement...

/They calm down. Suddenly, as if frozen, they listen on to Ivan./

IVAN

For seven or eight years I lived primarily with the notion that the essence of the world, of life, is reincarnation.... For three years I worked in a factory lifting and carrying things and then I had a serious injury. I had my hip replaced. I started to get sick pay... I live with my mother now. I'm thirty years old. Three years ago I was baptized in the orthodox church. I'm only on sedatives now: "Haloperidol", 5mg. It also prevents psychosis. And 5mg of "Artan" – it prevents stiffness. I like walking. I have a friend and I walk to his house and back every day... Rasha, you can keep that book I gave you...

RASHA

Neil Sorski?

IVAN

Yes.

RASHA

What does Father Neil say?

IVAN

Well, St. Anthony the Great says: “Deep down inside we should believe that we won’t live till the end of a day...”

/Rasha jumps up to the surprise of the others who are completely stoned and half-asleep./

RASHA

Isn’t he a genius!?... Look at him! Great Father Ivan! A yogin! An alchemist! A kabbalist!... You see how difficult the path is to true faith?

What kind of shit one has to go through!? 407 mg a day, and for years! I wouldn’t be surprised if God himself wouldn’t come to you personally after all that shit! Look at how far this man has got! Nowhere! Completely wrecked, physically and psychologically...

But he writes damn good poetry!... I’m kidding... Fuck it, Ivan, at least you can hold your God in your hand... Go on, show us what your God looks like!... Who’s your God? Who’s your God?

/Rasha grabs hold of Ivan roughly, shakes him, forcefully pulls things out of his pockets – prayer beads and a bottle of pills. He forces open the bottle and takes a pill out ./

RASHA

A-ha, there it is! He has a name too! “Ha-lo-pe-ri-dol”! A nice name for a God! “Haloperidol”! Like, “hello, here I am, I am your God!” What is he like? Round. Porous. Small. Small, but a god all the same! There you are – your little god, your savior! It’s all... so... fucking simple...

/Ivan puts down his cup with coffee. Walks out quietly. Everybody is serious, except Rasha. He is dangerously drunk and increasingly irritated./

RASHA

What the fuck is up with you!?... We’re just having fun, eh?

IGOR

You’ve screwed up, man... Look what you’ve done to him.

RASHA

Oh, come on, we’re friends...

DOOLE

You’ve fucked him up, motherfucking awful... You talked loads of shit...

RASHA

What the fuck is wrong with you!? I look after him every day. I try to pull him out of his shit! You only need half an hour to really fall for his story... He’s ill! Possessive! He hangs onto me all the time... For fuck’s sake, not even his own mother talks to him as much as I do! Anyway, stick around till tomorrow and you’ll see... As soon as the sun comes out, he’ll come knocking on my door with some harebrained theory about the

importance of prayer, like “the devil envies the man who prays earnestly” or some
crockshit like that! I don’t have to give a fuck about him, but I do, right? ... Check this
out!

*/Rasha goes to another room and comes back with the Pioneer’s cap on his head with a
red star sown onto it and a red scarf around his neck./*

RASHA

Ta-da! What do you say now, fuckers?!!! What about your Pioneers’ oath!? ‘I give my
Pioneer’s word of honor’, eh!?

/Doole and Igor chill out a bit, take a can each, laugh at Rasha. /

DOOLE

Come on, let’s fucking drink... We haven’t seen the guy for ten years and we’re getting
him teed off!

IGOR

Let’s drink!

RASHA

Go on, baby-doll, put the tape on, so we can have some fun!

MILA

Which tape?

RASHA

Home ‘fucking’ movie, baby!

MILA

Fuck you! I brought it for you, asshole; not for your buddies here!

RASHA

Hey! Fuck you! They’re my friends!... Give here!

/Mila lunges toward the video recorder but Rasha pushes her away roughly./

MILA

No!!! Really, I’ll go fucking crazy!!! I’ll scream!!!

*/Rasha grabs hold of her, twists her arm, covers her mouth with his hand. While Mila is
kicking in vain, Rasha manages to press the play button on the video. Panting can be
heard from off screen, Doole and Igor are looking on in amazement./*

DOOLE

What’s this? Fucking...

IGOR
Not what I would call it...

/Mila sobs./

DOOLE
What the fuck. I know this guy...

RASHA
And the ol bitch?

DOOLE
Fuck it. Looks familiar...

RASHA
Welcome to the little town on the prairie. Everyone knows everything about everyone,
and everyone knows everyone...

DOOLE
Fucking hell... It's that lawyer and his wife... Where did you get this?

RASHA
Have you fucked this ol bitch?

*/Mila jumps up, hysterically, angrily grabs the tape out of the video-player, yanks the
tape out of the cassette, destroying it./*

MILA
Fucking cocksucker!!! Bastard!!! Motherfucker!!!

/Mila slaps Rasha, runs out./

RASHA
Her dad... And her mom...

DOOLE
What the fuck did you play that for!?
I can't believe it... I'm going...

/Doole, resigned, gets up and starts to go./

RASHA
Fuck you, the world's falling apart, and you're leaving. You turn your back on us, you
don't give a fuck. You're all pure and moral till some granny grabs hold of your cock...

DOOLE

This is disgusting... I've had enough... I'm sick...

RASHA

We're all sick...

DOOLE

Where the fuck do you get off with all this pontification!? You're fucked up, so everyone else has to be fucked up too!? You're the same fucking jealous bastard you always were. You never made anything out of your life, so you just shit all over people!... Go figure yourself out, man! You're your own worst enemy! Hating yourself until you find your next victim! What the fuck are you trying to do!? Making scenes here!

RASHA

Let's just say I'm happy that at least I've managed to draw your attention to something... People are losing their concentration when they most need it...

DOOLE

I already know all that shit of yours about 'the general attention deficit disorder and the threshold of concentration'!...

RASHA

Just see how long you've lasted listening to me! Nobody is listening to anybody anymore, nobody sees anyone; it's all just blips and dots and fragments! You think this conversation has any point?

DOOLE

I don't know... Probably not... I'm going...

RASHA

Exactly. You're going. Where? I don't give a fuck. What did we talk about? Who gives a fuck. Who are we? We don't give a fuck. Who gives a fuck about what he was doing for ten years in Yorkshire. Who gives a fuck whether he's moving to Leeds and whether he's fucking the wonderful Polish chick!?

IGOR

Yeah, you're right...

/Igor is the closest to being sober. He tries to stay cool, drinking his beer slowly./

RASHA

We are nothing! Zero! A millisecond of a millisecond of nothing. If someone was giving all of us 407mg a day, within a couple of years, none of us would give a fuck about 'who we are', 'where we are', 'who we're with'! We're worms with too much intelligence! But we just keep screwing, eating shit, eating our own shit, eating, shitting, eating, shitting in the same place over and over, and then there are these pile of images and sounds doing a

fucking remix in our brain twisting everything around and what the fuck is it for!? Scrape together 30 seconds of meaning for me out of all that shit and make me a goddamn commercial for life!

DOOLE

I can't listen to you anymore... I'm sorry we have to part like this...

RASHA

Pathos. Of the worst kind...

DOOLE

I'm tired. I've got work in the morning... See you later, Igor...

/Doole waves and goes./

IGOR

Whew. *[putting on British accent a bit]* Bloody hell.. Looks like we've had a bit too much of everything tonight, eh?...

Once every ten years; that's enough. It's too much for me.

RASHA

What'd you do these last ten years?

IGOR

I've done a lot of things... How about you?

RASHA

I've done nothing...

IGOR

Don't say that... Doole told me... About your big love story...

/Rasha gives Igor a pointed look. He continues to look at him; his eyes well up./

RASHA

Five years, seven months and twenty two days... If you only knew how much I built into that... My love was a cathedral.... And now... There isn't a more beautiful ruin in the whole district, believe me... I'd like to declare it a national treasure... Bring the tourists to look at it... Organize trips... */in the same position, without any grimace, he lets his tears roll down his face/*... Every fucking day... I go to bed with it, I wake up with it... It doesn't go away...

IGOR

Sometimes, when it starts raining in Huddersfield in that boring way that it does... A sadness gets hold of me... I swear it always happens when I'm alone in the house... and I think – what an awful place this is: a valley filling itself up with rain. Grey. Heavy. And

then I think of us here and I think 'it was never that grey over there'... This used to be a sunny town for me...

RASHA

There you see... And Huddersfield sounds sunny to me...

IGOR

Huddersfield's over. We're finally moving to Leeds...

RASHA

Huddersfield... What is there in Huddersfield?

IGOR

Rain. Wind...*(laughing)* You know what really caught my eye in Huddersfield when I saw it for the first time?...A lion.

RASHA

As in "an animal?"

IGOR

No. A sculpture of a lion.

RASHA

A sculpture?

IGOR

I didn't notice it for days. Then I saw him from the window of a tall building.

RASHA

You never noticed a lion?

IGOR

No, because the lion is standing on the roof of a building.

RASHA

How's that?

IGOR

He stands on his strong legs and looks out.

RASHA

What's he looking at?

IGOR

The town. A white, stone lion. I was captivated by it. It seemed... so familiar... I was very glad when I saw him...

RASHA
It cheered you up?

IGOR
It did. It reminded me of the big garden near City Hall. Is that stone lion still there? The sleeping one?

RASHA
It is.

IGOR
Why was it that when we were kids we really liked it when our parents took us to the garden? Because that lion was there and we could sit on his back. I have a picture of it. Me as a kid sitting on the back of a lion while he's sleeping peacefully on his front paws...

RASHA
I have a similar picture. The yellow lion is sleeping and we're riding on it...

IGOR
That's what went through my head. The one in Huddersfield is white, though, not yellow.

RASHA
Ours is yellow... Because we piss all over what we've got...

IGOR
...I'm fading. I'm tired. I'll have to go...

RASHA
Well, that would be a solution! That's the only good thing that bastard Hamlet thought of: Fortinbras. It's almost a patriotic act... I didn't tell her why he brought Fortinbras over... That's what we need. The Turks! The Mongols! Whoever! You understand? Foreign rule would strengthen our unity... Cause everyone hates a foreign enemy! As long as we've got a foreigner to band together against, we come together like...Pure cohesion. That would be good for the birth rate, for the spiritual life of our country – the enslaved multiply themselves... It's important...

/Igor gets up and goes. Rasha is looking aside, drinking his beer./

RASHA
Huddersfield...

6. EVIL TIME

/Night. The living room is dark. There's a faint light emanating from the toilet. Rasha can be seen in the darkness, sleeping on the mattress. A shadowy figure can be seen standing near the table. As the figure approaches the light, Ivan is revealed./

IVAN

I've tried to help you. I've tried everything... Unlike you, I never did it insincerely or with the intention of insulting you. You have lied to me and you have insulted me... I made it very difficult for me today. Very difficult. Something happened which was strange and unexpected. You showed your true face. You couldn't resist. You spilled out all your thoughts and all was clear... Now I know you lied to me. I could forgive you for doing that, but I cannot forgive what was behind it all: your intentions. You want to stray me from my path. You're laying satanic traps for me. You're the same as Goran. You serve the same master... I've burnt all my manuscripts. I don't need them. They weren't the real me. You stirred up my imagination, approved of my weaknesses and envied my true faith and spiritual peace. We'll clear that up now. You know very well what I'm talking about... I have to put an end to this. It's my destiny.... That was Goran's curse... I loved him truly and prayed for the salvation of his soul... You're the same... I know you're not sleeping. I know you can hear me. A demon needs neither sleep or rest...

/Ivan draws closer to the mattress. A large knife can be seen in his hand. Rasha turns in his sleep./

IVAN

God forgive me...

RASHA

What is it now ... Who is it? ...

IVAN

Your judge.

RASHA

Ivan, is that you?... What's the matter with you? ...

IVAN

Prepare to face the truth.

RASHA

... Come on now, Ivan, what the fuck's gotten into you coming here with that knife in the middle of-

/Ivan bends over Rasha and starts stabbing him. Rasha falls, and silently lets out a painful cry. He doesn't move. Ivan covers Rasha's body with a blanket./

7. A WAKE UP CALL

/Rasha is lying on the mattress, on the floor, in his clothes, sleeping 'as if dead'. Father enters, drunk and staggering. He stumbles over to Rasha. Looks at him. He is startled./

FATHER
Son?!

/He bends down and grabs Rasha who is still covered in ketchup and sleeping. Father lets go of him, starts sobbing, and looks at his hands as if they were covered in blood./

FATHER
Rasha, my son! Rasha! Fucking motherfuckers!

/Rasha wakes up with a start, mumbles some disapproval, props himself up on his hands./

FATHER
Rasha, who did this to you!? Who!?

RASHA
What, father?

FATHER
Why are you covered in blood!?

/Rasha gets up, rocking with a hangover./

RASHA
Ketchup... Dad, it's ketchup...

/Father is speechless. Slaps Rasha across the face. Rasha falls to the floor./

FATHER
Fucking motherfucker! You want to do me in, eh!? You want me to get a heart attack!? Motherfucker! I'm going to get the police right now... I'm going... I'll go and tell them that you want to kill me... Fuck me if they don't put you in the hole. You're ready for prison! You'll end up in there, you know!? I'll go and report you, and let them take you away...

/Father hurries out. Rasha gets up. Goes over to the table and sits down. He strokes his face where he got hit. Knocking is heard. Rasha doesn't respond. The door opens slowly. Ivan's voice is heard./

IVAN
Rasha?... Rasha?... It's me...

/Rasha doesn't respond. Ivan comes in tentatively. He's got a wooden sculpture under his arm. The sculpture is roughly done, child-like. It is of a woman's head; her hair is braided, and her mouth is open as if she is yawning or shouting. Ivan comes in, puts the sculpture on the table, and sits. He seems upset./

IVAN

Rasha...I have to tell you something. I've been thinking, you see. And it's clear to me. It's over. Everything. ...I'll never find a girlfriend. I don't even know why I'm trying to find one. ...I'll never have a wife and kids, a family of my own. I can see that. Quite clearly... I like your girlfriend. She's so pretty and you're such a smart and handsome young man. You deserve the best. Everyone should. ...And if I did something wrong last night, I'm sorry. I had to say those things to you and to your friends and to your girlfriend. Mila. Isn't she?

RASHA

Yes. Mila...

IVAN

Please give her my sincerest apology.

RASHA

I fucked it all up, Ivan. I really fucked it up. Everything.

/Rasha doesn't move./

IVAN

You want to be on your own?... Sorry...

/Ivan slowly goes to the door./

RASHA

I dreamt of you last night...

IVAN

You dreamt of me?

RASHA

I'm sorry, Ivan...

/Rasha starts crying. He shakes uncontrollably and cries simperingly./

RASHA

Forgive me...

IVAN

Are you all right?... Shall I bring you something to calm down?...

/Rasha lays his hand on the table, puts his head down and continues to cry more and more audibly. Ivan comes over to him and rests his hand on his shoulder./

IVAN

Sometimes it's best to have a good cry... Go on... I'm here; don't worry...

/Rasha raises his head, looks at the sculpture on the table, looks at it for a long time./

IVAN

Here. I brought a piece of art for you to look at...

/Rasha stops crying, wipes his face with his sleeves./

RASHA

Did you make this?

IVAN

Isn't it obvious? I've never seen anything uglier in my life...

/Rasha laughs and Ivan joins him, even louder./

RASHA

And what does this masterpiece represent?

IVAN

It's called: "Mother – Fatherland!"

/They look at each other, then start laughing heartily again. Calm down./

IVAN

I wanted to make a portrait of my mother, but as you can see it doesn't look like her. My teacher suggested that I call it "Fatherland". So in order to bring the two together I called it "Mother Fatherland".

/Rasha, serious, takes the sculpture in his hands and looks at it from all angles./

RASHA

This doesn't look that bad at all! Why is her mouth wide open?

IVAN

She's shouting. Warning. Admonishing. Something, someone, has hurt her... Take it if you like...

RASHA

I like it.

IVAN
Would you like a nice cup of coffee? Or tea?

RASHA
No!... You sit down, I'll make it.

/Ivan sits down, Rasha goes to the kitchen./

IVAN
Your father said something about the police. Are they coming for you?

RASHA
Coffee or tea?

IVAN
Tea!

/Rasha comes back from the kitchen, sits down./

RASHA
If they come, you'll defend me... Won't you?

/Ivan is serious. Somber and determined./

IVAN
I will.

RASHA
That poem of yours is very good.

IVAN
"A Snail"?

RASHA
"A Snail".

IVAN
And you like the sculpture too?

RASHA
"Mother – Fatherland"?

IVAN
"Mother – Fatherland"...

/They laugh, louder and louder, until they cry.

END OF PLAY/

**BEANS, HARICOTS, MADESOU:
THE CHALLENGES OF POSTCOLONIAL TRANSLATION***

JILL MAC DOUGALL

Biography:

Jill Mac Dougall has been translating works from the Francophone world since 1980. She has seen to publication or production over a dozen contemporary playwrights from various African countries, Europe, and Québec. She has also worked in theatre for social change and published scholarly articles on translation/performance, as well as two books: *Performing Identities on the Stages of Quebec* and *Contaminating Theatre*.

Dès l'origine de l'original à traduire il y a chute et exil.
Jacques Derrida

1. EXILE AND POSTCOLONIALISM

Rendering a script into another language destined to pass through other creators into the live medium of theatre is *ipso facto* a form of exile. Translating not only from the page to the page, but to a virtual director and cast and an even more nebulous target audience, is a radical dislocation. Impossibly anchored in the semiotics of the original text—which is itself, as Derrida¹ points out, an abyss, a banishing—translation speaks from spaces of exile.

The inherent notion of exile is even more dramatic when applied to postcolonial translation where the original itself is marked by cultural dislocation, by historical, social, and linguistic conflict. I am addressing this issue through two plays I translated by francophone African writers: Koffi Kwahulé's *Bintou* and Pierre Mumbere Mujomba's *La dernière enveloppe* (translated as *Bintu* and *The Lost Envelope*²). Both authors were born in 1956, four years before independence, Kwahulé in Ivory Coast and Mujomba in Congo/Kinshasa. Although they emerge from divergent contexts, use divergent styles, and communicate divergent concerns, both plays are written in French and are dynamic elements of the postcolonial paradigm. Reminding us

*This article is reprinted with permission from Mac Dougall, Jill. 2003. "Beans, haricots, madesou: The Challenges of Postcolonial Translation" in *The Theater of Translation, Translation Perspectives XII*, 2003, Center for Research in Translation/SUNY at Binghamton.

there is not just one French, as we were taught in school, but a multitude of *français*, their verb is impregnated with colonial history and strikes back to define its difference.

Its translation is fraught with political ambiguities. If the reader moves beyond the assumption that a translated text is transparent, the discrepancies between the playwright's African resonating name of Kwahulé or Mujomba and the translator's name of Mac Dougall — which is about the WASPiest you could find— jump out. This is not to give credence to an essentialist notion of ethnicity as determinant of knowledge, but to point out the inherent power struggles behind postcolonial translation and the necessity for the “transculturator” to experience original and target contexts as well as to recognize his or her own contradictions.

Outside of the inevitable issue of translating from one context to another, these two plays present another challenge. Both make use of English expressions which take on different valences in the plays, but point to the anglo-dominant new world order and the global market. If anything is untranslatable into English, it is English in the original text, expressions which harbor different meanings in their francophone context and, if transliterated, can never convey the fact that Anglo-America is —wide-eyed innocent— the latest colonial power.

Beyond reminding us of this play of power on the global scale, my primary objective is to share *Bintou/Bintu* and *Enveloppe/Envelope* through the pitfalls, strategies, and delightful meetings involved in the dialectical transculturation process. I will speak to the contextual and linguistic dissonance specific to each play and touch on their New York City staged readings, before concluding this reflection on postcolonial translation.

2. KOFFI KWAHULÉ'S *BINTOU/BINTU*

Born in Côte d'Ivoire, Koffi Kwahulé moved to Paris at the age of 21. He currently lives in France where he writes, directs, and teaches theatre. One of many French-speaking African expatriates living in Europe, Kwahulé is a witness of his times whose plays call out from his particular site of exile.

Produced and published in French in 1997, *Bintou*³ is Koffi Kwahulé's eighth play and the second of his works I have translated⁴. Produced by UBU Repertory Theatre and directed by Sandra McClaine with a multinational and multigenerational cast, the English version was

given its first staged reading in New York City in May 2000. It is scheduled for a viewing by Montreal's Black Theatre Workshop in April 2002.

The play is set in the immigrant projects of metropolitan France. The name Bintu suggests girl, daughter, sister in a number of Bantu languages. The central and title character of Kwahulé's play is a second generation African immigrant thirteen-year-old girl. She leads a gang of three young males between 16 and 18 called the Lycaons, whose name evokes wild dogs and ancient Greece. Indeed, classic Greek theatre serves as a theatrical device and a way of projecting the action beyond an all too familiar social reality, which uses the theatrical framing poetically to push beyond narrow cultural references into the realm of pure symbolic consciousness.

The Lycaons include: Blackout, born Okumé, a high-school drop-out who is respected by his peers because he owns a gun; Kader, an Arab boy and a poet, considered a "positive element" until he quit school to join the gang; Manu, Bintu's white boyfriend. Other characters include Bintu's family —her mother who works as a cleaning woman, her uncle and his wife who appear relatively well off, and a significantly absent father, who never appears or speaks, who hides in his room because he has lost his job and all purpose in life —; L'tle John, a teen-age drug addict who aspires to join the Lycaons and reveres Bintu as a virgin mother savior; L'tle John's mother, an immigrant of indeterminate origin and a Christian fundamentalist who spouts apocalyptic phrases when she is martyred by her son looking for drug money; Nenesse, a kind of has-been mobster who runs a bar near the canal where the Lycaons hang out; and Moussaba, "lady-of-the-knife," a female circumcisor who practices clitoridectomy in the expatriate African community and who serves as the operator of Bintu's tragic end. Bintu is always accompanied by a chorus of three adolescent girls who chant in French rap.

Although the play is set in a contemporary *cité*, it recalls Greek tragedy: the choir, the Lycaons, the death scene of the heroine. The word "cité" itself refers not only to the projects of French cities but to the ancient Greek metropolis. Bintu is a kind of Antigone defying the patriarchal order which puts her to death through the instrument of a woman.

Meshed with this recall of 'originary' western theatre is an MTV structure where scenes

are presented in flashbacks and interview bites, with references to video game and American pop-culture heroes such as Rambo. Through this disrupted narrative style the story unfolds. Bintu is a vigilante who protects her guys from adult authorities (she burns down the high-school one night when Kader is denounced as a truant) and the scourge of drugs (her guys can deal to wipe out the enemy, but never use). Her gang would do anything to please her, including killing a man as Blackout claims to have done.

Bintu has been practicing belly-dancing in order to make money for herself and her mother by working in Nenesse's club. Terrified by her sexuality and by her defiance of adult authority, her father's brother, who has tried to seduce her, his wife, who is jealous of the girl, and Bintu's mother, who is simply overwhelmed, conspire to have her *excisée*, excised⁵. Uncle Drissa hires L'tle Jean, who has been refused entry into the Lycæons because he's a user, to kidnap her. He does so with the help of two strays named Terminator and Assassino. Bintu is brought back to her parent's apartment in the projects where the lady-of-the-knife is waiting.

The procedure is symbolically staged with the family on one side, the choir on the other, and the circumcisor standing over Bintu at dead center stage. Hemorrhaging, Bintu hallucinates she is betrothed in a gown of red sewed by her mother and visited by her three guys dressed as African, Arab, and European-Renaissance princes. L'tle John also appears, a devastated Judas who shrinks away with her blood on his hands. Her princes carry out her body. The play ends with the uncle digging in the concrete of the *cité* to bury the corpse while the chorus pursues him in silence.

Although there is an obvious mythic dimension to *Bintu* which flows directly into the translation, the immediate context informs the play and does present a problem of transculturation. *Bintu* is set in an immigrant *cité*, rows of huge cement edifices, veritable global villages where neighbors who meet and clash can be from diametrically opposite sides of the planet. Their children play in the hallways and elevators. This is where they grow roots, not through any genetic or linguistic tie to the home land. As Bintu, resisting being sent back to her home country for a so-called vacation (in fact, to have her excised) says to her mother: "I know nothing about your backwater country... this is my country, Mama. The city, the hood, the

concrete, my guys... I was born here...⁶“ Although “project” or “hood” evoke a specifically American social context, these proved the most adequate nomenclatures. Attempting to capture the double connotation of the Greek metropolis and the inner city, I alternately used “city.”

Other contextual ambiguities crossing this translation are teenage violence and female genital cutting. In contemporary Europe, teen-age violence is as common and as misunderstood as it is in the United States. There is a difference, however, in the fact that kids do not have the easy access to guns they do here. This is what makes *Blackout*’s owning a piece remarkable and the *Lycaons* unique.

A deceptive familiarity is one problem of contextual dissonance. The other is exoticism as demonstrated in Bintu’s *excision*. In France the female circumcision practiced in some regions of Africa and its exportation have been the source of public outrage —disproportionate in relation to the number of excisions actually undergone in France— as well as recent subjects of litigation where practitioners of female circumcision have been tried. In the U.S. it is a clinical aberration and an oddity cloaked in the mystery of the African Other. Ideally, what the American audience might capture here —perhaps better than the French— is the use of excision as a tragic device and the parental violence implied in this act.

Navigating in these uncertain territories does not stop at the unstated context. It also runs through what *is* enunciated in the play, notably the language of the dialogue. As I have mentioned, and would seem obvious if we’re thinking of English, there is not just one French. In *Bintu* there are at least four types of French: the language of the elders which is laden with African proverbs, and, in the case of L’tle John’s mother, biblical quotes; the language of Nenesse, the bar owner who speaks like an old Belmondo gangster movie, and the argot of the gang members which is peppered with anglo-american expressions. Then there is Bintu who is fluent in all these languages, who glides among these worlds accompanied by her trio of adolescent girls, and who lights up the gray world of the projects with her poetry. As she dies hemorrhaging, she sees herself “a great crimson bird plunging into the blood-shot sky.”

Rendering the speech of Bintu’s family is a translator’s delight. African proverbs and metaphors, in all their poetic opacity, flow directly into English. “Woman’s thoughts are like a

chameleon's colors" murmurs the uncle. "Even impotent, the penis still spouts urine" snaps the aunt. The lady-of-the-knife, claims the uncle, is "as discrete as the excrement of a cat," meaning however strong the odor, its source cannot be traced.

The language of the Parisian *cit  * youth is more problematic, particularly the anglo idiom which circulates through the international mass media and finds its way into the esoteric language of teenagers —created to forge community among themselves and to break away from their elders, a borrowing by youngsters who, emphatically, could care less about the preservation of the French language or the Acad  mie fran  aise. But how do you translate *elle est le top*? Certainly not "She's the tops." How do you translate *tires* (car), *scotch  * (stuck), *dealer* (to deal in drugs)? How does one transculturate these infiltrations of the "world language" back into an American context?

Since I do not speak contemporary American street-kid slang, I enlisted the help of two early-twenty consultants who had been involved in gangs and served time in prison. Here follows a short sample of our collaborative efforts in Blackout's first speech where he relates having killed a man for Bintu. The gang members are lined up under spots and their parallel monologues suggest a police interrogation or a TV talk-show. Caught in the spots and the audience's gaze, the characters/actors suggest both vulnerability and bravado. The audience cannot be sure whether Blackout's words are supposed to be fact or fabulation.

BLACKOUT: We jacked a ride, Bintu and me. I don't know where we were, some place on the coast. We were feasting on a Big Mac wherever and this guy keeps scoping her. So I tell him to roll off. Then he gets all excited, see, like he'll look at who he wants, it's a free country, I should mind my own business and a bunch of crap like that. But I hold my ground, I say stop checkin' out my girlfriend or I'll bus' you. But, then sudden, the fool gets aggressive. He says "So?" and starts wavin' his arms, "So, who are you, just a snotty-ass-hole little bitch." And suddenly bang! I don't like being called a bitch. Bang! And his face pisses blood and he falls at my feet and his blood is spilling all over... Not even Bintu ever called me a bitch. Nobody can call me a bitch. Not even Rambo can call me a bitch...⁷

To the New York cast this language appeared full of fantasy, but familiar, as did the

situation. However, they thought I should have adapted the location of Nenesse's bar "near the canal" where the Lycaons hang out to something like "under the bridge," a setting which resonated in their context. "Just where are we?" asked the director. The situation was disarmingly familiar, yet appeared exotic, uncanny.

As translator, I resist adapting, erasing the cultural references or domesticating the language for the cast and the audience to feel safe at home. The whole point is we are and are not in France or the U.S. of A.; we are in Micky D's, "someplace on the coast wherever" as Blackout says. We are anywhere and nowhere, in a postmodern no-man's land rendered the site of tragedy.

There is a fine line between what should be made comprehensible to the audience and what should remain alien, strange, *verfremdung* in Brechtian terminology. The issues of disparate and coinciding context and language in *Bintu* proved even more complex in Mujomba's *The Lost Envelope*.

3. PIERRE MUMBERE MUJOMBA'S *LA DERNIERE ENVELOPPE*/THE LOST ENVELOPE

Of the same generation as Koffi Kwahulé, Pierre Mumbere Mujomba was born in Nandé country in the current Democratic Republic of Congo, alias Zaire, alias Belgian Congo. Mujomba has served as professor of French and a mainstay of community theatre groups in the capital city of Kinshasa where he currently lives, continues to write, and directs the Archives and Literary Research Project at the National Library. *La dernière enveloppe* was first written in 1985, during the Mobutu regime, and revised after its fall to receive the Découverte Radio France International-Sud prize in 1999. Co-produced by UBU Repertory Theater and the Lark Theatre, *The Lost Envelope* was given a workshop and public reading in New York City in October 2000 with an African-American cast directed by Michael Johnson-Chase. A second version directed by Rajendra Maharaj is scheduled at the Lark in December 2002.

Although an American audience might be vaguely aware of Congo/Kinshasa colonial history, of the three-decade Mobutu dictatorship, and perhaps of the civil war raging on this African subcontinent after Laurent Kabila's takeover in 1997 and his assassination in 2001, few are aware to what extent the U.S. supported the Mobutu dictatorship during the cold war and the stakes it had in the country's scandalous mineral wealth.

Although rewritten for a European jury, the play is definitely intended for a Kinshasa audience. Full of political innuendoes, *La dernière enveloppe* is a biting comedy which, in the spirit of African oral traditions, uses parodic hyperbole to denounce abuses of power in postcolonial Africa. Behind Mama Domina, an inordinately rich African woman, stand the shadowy figures of a corrupt neocolonial regime and of global capitalism. Through the structure of a Molièresque comedy —replete with characters popping in and out of doors and ingénues hiding under tables— Mujomba creates an African farce marked by the cruel grotesque and political acidity of writers such as Congo/Brazzaville's Sony Labou Tansi.

The drama takes place in one of Mama Domina's 23 opulent salons in one of her 42 luxurious mansions guarded by 584 ferocious canines and a moat full of crocodiles. Mama Domina—who feeds her adored dogs daily-imported Scandinavian milk, who flies regularly to Geneva or Paris just to see a film, and who orders her groceries from Fresh Fields in Philadelphia— exemplifies the excesses of a ruling caste in a dehumanizing system where everyone lives off the back of the other, indeed, where everyone feeds off the spoils of the other. Feeding is a recurrent trope in this play. Food, empty stomachs, Philadelphia supermarkets, carnivorous animals, cannibalism, consumption.

Domina's household includes her nephew Boulos, a fatuous university student who beds teen-age girls, and her faithful servant Kisimba, who, Scapin-like, succeeds in manipulating all the characters of the play. The opposing force, who will eventually undo Mama Domina, is Mafikiri, a poor professor who serves as language tutor to Domina and her daughter, Doris.

The main plot revolves around a missing envelope containing Professor Mafikiri's miserable salary of ten dollars. From the first lines, the audience is privy to the fact that nephew Boulos stole the money to buy a rainbow-colored, sequined hat for his date to go to a dance contest at a nightclub. What is revealed during the play is a pernicious scheming to grab profits and cover misdeeds from the higher powers in a country where the rule of law, imported or indigenous, is a total farce.

When the professor comes to claim his envelope, both the nephew and the servant, desperately trying to protect their status, connive to hide its disappearance. They threaten the

professor with the torture and death of his predecessors: frozen in meat lockers, boiled in cauldrons of oil, devoured in snake pits, electrocuted in wired rivers. When Mama Domina returns from her weekly “cultural trip” to Europe, with her Sabena jet lag and Swiss Air malaise, she must decide who is at fault. The professor turns the tables when he reveals secrets of her satanic cult he has learned from the houseboy as well as the fact she has but a flimsy grounding in the regime. Mama Domina attempts to pay off Mafikiri to keep her secrets, but the professor says this is “technically impossible... your Swiss bankers and Philadelphia supermarkets are incompatible with my savage stomach.”⁸ Convulsed by her “Pan Am, Swissair, Sabena neurosis,” Domina collapses. The curtain falls on Boulos and Kisimba carrying her off like a piece of used furniture.

Although very little is stated in the stage directions, the play suggests a picture to the translator familiar with the Kinshasa elite setting: Domina’s *nouveau riche* salon filled with overstuffed furniture, brass and laminated wood, lit glass shelves replete with multicolored bottles of imported liquor, guards at the door communicating through an elaborate intercom system, the chauffeured Mercedes waiting at the gate. Contextually and linguistically, much more is implicit in Mujomba’s text than in Kwahulé’s. Written at the decline of the Mobutu regime, the play relies on locally common knowledge and also uses satirical devices to skirt the problem of censorship.

Domina is an international business woman and former *animatrice*, a leader of cultural storm-troopers enlisted to sing and dance the praises of the regime, a haughty but ignorant woman who earned her fortune—as Professor Mafikiri says—by “wiggling her behind to the dictator’s glory”. She belongs to a secret cult, “the Evangelical Community of the Shore Dwellers of the River Jesus and His Branches and Apostles”⁹ led by “the Living Prophet,” which, under a complicated code system, trades in human flesh such as “white ore” (virgin mulatto breasts) and “red ore” (pygmy liver). The sect is a clear metaphor for an absolute material and political power which cannibalizes its subjects.

The grotesque humor, the terrible and delicious ironies of the play can best be appreciated if one is fully aware of the political context where both Christian scriptures and

“African tradition” are ideologically manipulated to support a corrupt and abusive regime (which would not survive very long in a veritable traditional African setting), where the terror of the state and the almighty global market runs wild through petty *sous-chefs*, where a professor accepts to teach a woman he denigrates the language she needs to secure her power for a measly \$10 a month, simply because his own salary is insufficient, overdue, or lacking entirely.

The Congolese context —the extent of the kleptocratic state where teachers remain unpaid, and equally unpaid agents of the bureaucracy and the police or army dictate the law— cannot be fully grasped in an American context.¹⁰ However, the role of the global network in perpetuating this neocolonial situation is skillfully brought out in the dialogue of the play.

Mujomba uses language to depict global class struggles. The servant’s French does not differ greatly from the master’s, with one notable exception: the use of English. Understanding the power of the world language, Mama Domina is learning English to better dominate. In her mouth it becomes an expression of the class superiority to which she aspires. On the other hand, Lingala, the principle language of the Congo basin, becomes an object of disdain referring to the vulgar masses, the *lumpen* proletariat. The following scene is an example of Domina’s value system and also an illustration of the challenge of repatriating these “exotic” anglo tropes back into English.

Kisimba has just prepared a dish of navy beans and fish which he offers Mama Domina. Insulted because she thinks the produce has not been imported by jumbo jet from the U.S. or Europe, she dumps the beans on his head and stuffs a piece of fish in his ear declaring:

Ici on ne broute pas de *madesou*, nous mangeons des haricots, que dis-je des *beans*, *american beans*, pas vos *madede-de-tiers-monde-et-de-climat-tropical*... Ici, on ne broute pas de poisson. Nous mangeons du *fish*, pas même; we eat fish hia, you andastand?

“Yes, you andastand, my boss,” replies the cook. “Nous mangeons mondial, vous mangez village, est-que you andastand?” barks Domina. Cowering Kisimba replies, “Yes, tout a fait, you andastand, my boss.”

Impossible to render Domina’s linguistic arrogance through English. I kept the Lingala and used a polyglot mixture of European Union languages. Here is the ‘English’ rendition of the same scene:

DOMINA: (*Shoving the fish in his ear*) Beans again! How many times do I have to tell you? Here we don't feed on your bushman *madesu*. We eat only organically-grown, hand-selected American beans. B-E-A-N-S. Not some *madede*-tropical-third-world mush. ...In this house we do not feed on vulgar fish. We eat "*poisson*" or "*pesce*." We eat "*das Fisch*," period! *Comprends-tu? Capisch? Verstehts?* You understand, Kisimba-Houseboy?

KISIMBA: Oh yes Mam'... I mean *oui, Madame*... I mean *si, padrona*... I mean *ja, meine Dame*.

DOMINA: We eat in the global fashion. You eat in the village fashion. You understand?

KISIMBA: 'Deed I do, 100%, mein boss.

You are what you eat; you eat what you speak. Authority is in the mouth. The relation between money, power, food, and language demonstrated in this scene illustrate the social dynamics crossing *The Lost Envelope*. The visible tip of the power pyramid is Mama Domina, but she is only one small link in the global economy food chain. Her crash will hardly disturb those on the upper tiers who wittingly or unwittingly profit from Swiss banks and Philadelphia Supermarkets.

Yet, however bleak and demobilizing this picture may appear, the end of the play offers hope. As the playwright says through the voice of the nephew when Boulos confesses to having stolen the envelope, "Nothing is more stubborn than the truth."

I think the translator's faith that this stubborn truth—beyond cultural relativity, enigmatic social contexts, or ideological positions—will somehow emerge is the motor driving the transculturation process.

4. A TEETER-TOTTER ART

Translation is a teeter-totter art which strives to unlock meaning while retaining the flavor of the original. Paradoxically, transculturation must appear seamless while revealing its seams, open doors for the public while suggesting they do not possess the codes which allow entry. It is a delicate balancing act between the familiar and the uncanny. By definition operating in the liminal, transculturation should allow the audience comfortable access while disturbing pat notions of origins and identity as well as assumptions of the Other.

The translation strategies I have suggested through *Bintu* and *The Lost Envelope* attempt to bridge the gap between languages and contexts, yet allow the gap apparent enough to provoke the curiosity of the reader, the production team, and possibly the audience. I have occasionally used footnotes, which are never of immediate use to the audience, but inform the play for the director and performers, hopefully sparking a desire to further explore the underlying meanings and socio-historical context of the play.

I cannot translate the context or control how the audience perceives the work. But I can introduce signs of the missing language, of the missing subjects who people these works. Meshing with Walter Benjamin's idea that translation should not conform to but transform the target language¹¹, the performance artist Coco Fusco came up with what should be the motto of all translators into the-world-language: ENGLISH IS BROKEN HERE¹². Twisted, fractured, challenged, reinvented, our language is enriched by new voices speaking from spaces of exile.

NOTES

1. "Des Tours de Babel," *Differences in Translation*, ed. Joseph Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

2. Pending publication, all copy and production rights to the English translations are held by the authors and the translator.

3. *Bintou* (Editions Lansman, Carnières: Belgium, 1997).

4. My first Kwahulé translation was *Cette vieille magie noire* or *That Old Black Magic* (in *New French Plays*, New York: UBU Repertory Theater Publications), which —of interest in relation to multiculturalism and transculturation— tells the story of an African-American boxer depicted as an overtly theatrical Faust. The audience at the staged reading in New York could not believe the playwright had never set foot in the United States.

5. In French, the word *exciser* covers all forms of female genital cutting, from a token incision to ablation of the clitoris to infibulation. As in English, the term also denotes any surgical amputation. The word is never uttered in the play, just referred to by the female circumcisor as "cutting off her stinger" and symbolically staged. The play's references simultaneously suggest the violation of the girl's body, the ablation of her sexuality, and her literal elimination as a family or social problem.

6. The French script reads: "...je ne le connais pas, ce bled... ..mon pays, c'est ici, maman. C'est

la cité, le quartier, le béton, mes mecs... C'est ici que je suis née..."

7. The French script reads "On avait volé une tire, Bintou et moi. On était je ne sais plus où, quelque part sur la côte. On mange dans un Macdo et un type n'arrête pas de mater Bintou. Je lui dis, au type, de reluquer ailleurs. Aussitôt, tu vois, le voilà qui s'enflamme, qui me dit qu'il regarde où il veut, que je dois me mêler de ce qui me regarde et un tas de conneries de ce genre. Moi, je ne me laisse pas démonter. Je lui dis: tu cesses de mater ma copine ou je te botte le cul! Du coup, le mec devient agressif, il fait de grands mouvements dans tous les sens en me traitant d'enculé, de petit morveux. Soudain, bang! J'aime pas qu'on me traite d'enculé. Bang! Et son visage pisse le sang et il s'écroule à mes pieds et il se vide de son sang. ... Même Bintou ne m'a jamais traité d'enculé. Personne ne me traitera d'enculé, même pas Rambo!"

8. The French script reads: "Techniquement impossible. Vos supermarchés sont incompatibles avec mon ventre sauvage."

9. "La Communauté Evangélique des Riverains du Fleuve Jésus et de ses Affluents, les Apôtres."

10. The New York cast and director at the Lark Theatre workshop and public reading researched the Congolese context and made considerable effort to appropriate the language of the characters. Finding an appropriate tone or costume (such as Mama Domina's leopard scarf recalling Mobutu's garb), the actors became translators.

11. "The Task of the Translator," *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

12. *English is Broken here, Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

BINTU

a play by Koffi Kwahulé
(from *Bintou* published by Editions Lansman, 1997)

translated from the French by Jill Mac Dougall
(for Ubu Repertory Theater, 1999)

* Kwahulé, Koffi. 1997. *Bintou*. Éditions Lansman, Carnières, Belgium.

Note:

The English version, *Bintu*, was commissioned by UBU Repertory Theater in New York City and first produced as a staged reading there.

CHARACTERS

BINTU, black African girl of thirteen, leader of the “Lycaon” gang, called Samiagamal by her friends¹

MANU, white boy of eighteen, birth name Emmanuel, Bintu’s boyfriend and member of the Lycaons

KELKHAL, Arab boy of seventeen, birth name Kader, a Lycaon

BLACKOUT, African boy of sixteen, birth name Okoume, carries a gun, a Lycaon

MOTHER, Bintu’s mother, in her fifties, works as a cleaning woman

UNCLE DRISSA, in his forties, the younger brother of Bintu’s father

AUNT ROKIA, in her thirties, Drissa’s wife

MOUSSOBA, called the lady-of-the-knife by the chorus

CHORUS, three adolescent girls

NENESSE, white man in his fifties, runs a bar

L’TLE JOHN’S MOTHER, in her forties, could be of European, African, or Asian origin

L’TLE JOHN, her son, eighteen, leader of the “Pitbull” gang

TERMINATOR, eighteen, member of the Pitbulls

ASSASSINO, eighteen, a Pitbull

¹ *Bintu* refers to “daughter” or “girl.” A *lycaon* (pronounced ‘li-kay-on’) is a wolf-like animal or hunting dog.

TEMPTATIONS

The modest home of a black African immigrant family. Uncle Drissa, his wife Rokia, and Bintu's mother are visibly watching for someone. Bintu enters, preceded by a chorus of three adolescent girls. They are carrying a mirror and a makeup kit. Bintu crosses the room without paying the least attention to her elders.

MOTHER: Bintu!

Bintu freezes. Suspended time.

CHORUS:

Bintu
Bintu Bintu
Little wild flower
growing against and in spite of everything
growing out of the cold concrete
of a city where even cops
dared not go

Bintu
Bintu Bintu
Bintu little gang leader
little amazon of the projects
This city, I did not like
The school, I did not like
The law of the father, I did not like

Bintu
Bintu Bintu
Bintu liked only three things in this world
her gang
which her aunt named "the Lycaons"
her belly button
around which she danced
her switch blade
which Manu had given her

Manu her boyfriend
swore only by Bintu
breathed only through Bintu
listened only to Bintu
Bintu

Bintu Bintu
Bintu “good for nothing”
as her mother said
Bintu “good for nothing but blasphemy”
as her uncle said
Bintu “the little slut”
as her aunt said

Yet I had a dream
a dream I would do anything for
Hours on end
days on end
I locked myself in my room to practice
over and over again
the steps and the hip movements
until my head reeled
until my body failed

Bintu learned to dance like a goddess
and her boyfriend
called her Samiagamal

But here the family approaches
But here approaches the shadow of the lady-of-the-knife
But here approaches the hour of great decisions
Bintu has just turned thirteen

BINTU: What’s wrong this time, Mama?

MOTHER: You know your father...

BINTU: I told you not to talk to me about that fool.

MOTHER: That is no way to speak of your father.

BINTU: Me, that’s how I speak.

MOTHER: Where are you going?

BINTU: I’m going out.

AUNT: Where?

BINTU: Why? You wanna come with me?

UNCLE: Who's waiting for you?

BINTU: Don't give yourself away, Uncle Drissa. Aunt Rokia might get the wrong idea.

AUNT: Rid your blasphemies of my name, you little witch.

BINTU: Witch yourself. You're no one to tell me what Bintu should get rid of or not. Bintu gets rid of whatever she wishes and whenever she wishes, don't you see or are you blind?

MOTHER: Bintu!

AUNT: Your only good fortune is you weren't born my daughter. I would have taught you long ago in what season the rice is sown.

BINTU: If your little finger just brushes the tiniest hair on Bintu's body, then my guys, the ones you call the Lycaons, will drag you by your hair down to the street and expose you naked for all to see the jaws of the beast hiding under your cloth.

MOTHER: Bintu! If your father could hear you...

BINTU: But my father does hear me. Since he spends his days leaning against that door, listening to everything we say. He hears me, Mama. (*Shouting toward the bedroom*) He just won't get off his butt; he doesn't dare come out of his room to tell me what to do and what not to do. It's so convenient to play dead... so peaceful to stay stuck there ruminating about lost honor because you've lost your job... instead of breaking out to kick life in the ass. (*To the uncle and aunt*) And you two, what do you want with me? Because I can tell from your faces that you're plotting something. Otherwise you wouldn't be hanging around here all the time, getting Mama all riled up this past month. Whispering, plotting, huddling together for your low mass. What's on your mind? Huh? Spit it out and get it over with.

UNCLE: Bintu, that's quite enough. You will not go out tonight. You will go back to your room.

BINTU: And I bet you'll be happy to take me there, won't you?

UNCLE: I forbid you to talk to me like that! I am not your mother nor your aunt Rokia. Even your father has never talked to me this way.

BINTU: Well, I guess I'm just not my father, am I?

UNCLE: Girl, you are going to get a thrashing and you deserve it.

BINTU: (*her voice full of innuendos*) If I were you, Uncle Drissa, I'd be a little more discreet.

UNCLE: I have decided you will not leave this house today.

BINTU: You have decided, you have decided... You weren't always so decisive, Uncle Drissa. Like the last time you came to my room when I was getting ready...

The light focuses on Bintu, creating a small circle. The chorus joins her. One of the girls holds up a mirror; another helps with make up. The uncle moves to the rim of the light; the aunt and the mother remain in the shadows, observing the scene.

UNCLE: Bintu, are you there?

BINTU: Come on in, the door's open.

He enters the circle of light. Bintu, busy getting ready, has her back turned to him.

UNCLE: You're getting ready to go out?

BINTU: As you can see.

UNCLE: Have you fallen in love?... What is he like?... Nine cannot fool ten, Bintu. It's obvious you have a little boyfriend. You're decked out like a city celebrating Independence Day. I know you're not at the age when... Even when the entire universe sleeps and the Almighty himself stoops to closing His eyes to rest from the glory of His creation, one thing always has its eyes wide open... In these times, death is lurking in the fever of the embrace, licking its chops to capture the green before the ripe fruit... I hope you're not doing anything stupid, are you? With this garment that barely covers your body? ...Couldn't you at least cover your navel? You know, there are sick people, perverted people in this neighborhood. A beautiful flower barely blossoming that passes, with her belly button exposed, that can only give them ideas... Because people have all kinds of thoughts itching in their brain... with their looks...

BINTU: You too, you look at me too, Uncle Drissa.

UNCLE: Me?

BINTU: In the mirror. I've felt it even before I saw it in the mirror. Your gaze. I felt your eyes creeping between my skin and "this garment that barely covers my body." I saw your eyes crawl down the valley of my spine like an army of red ants and slip into the crack between my buttocks and down the length of my legs right to my heels. And there, whoops, you stop. Because your eyes longed to meet mine but that wasn't possible. So, Uncle Drissa, they just imagined they did. And then... whoosh. Your eyes jumped into my crotch like eels. Then, brutally, your eyes began sucking the nectar, sucking, sucking the damp crest of my secret, before climbing back up to the

plain of my belly and moving to lick the hills of my breasts under “this garment that barely covers my body.”

UNCLE: Sin is in you, Bintu.

BINTU: It’s in your eyes that sin lurks, Uncle Drissa. Am I the one who came to tell you that your clothes barely covered your body, that your belly button was exposed, and that you would therefore attract the look of sick women?

UNCLE: Bintu, when did you stop being a little girl?

BINTU: Who told you I’d stopped?

UNCLE: In any case, you need to be careful. You have so much beauty in you, Bintu; don’t lose your way.

BINTU: I have one question for you, Uncle. Why are you so nice when you are alone with me... yet when Mama and Aunt Rokia are there, you are so hard, so mean to me? Huh? Why is that?

UNCLE: Because you don’t wade into the blood of battle with the same heart... that you slip into the folds of love. Bintu, I have to leave, Rokia will be getting impatient. But you... you have to be careful of yourself. Start by wearing a bra.

BINTU: How do you know I’m not wearing one?

UNCLE: I can guess. (*He approaches Bintu, still turned toward her mirror, busy getting ready. While talking, his index finger draws across and down her back.*) Walking down the street, I like to watch women to see if they’re wearing bras or not. Under the blouses of those who do, you can spy two thin lines, right there, reaching down each shoulder blade, two vertical streams which drown in the horizontal band below. When I observe women from the front it is easy to see who’s not wearing a bra; their breasts are much more mischievous... When you were a very little girl, you never wanted to wear underpants. But now that you are a big girl...

BINTU: Uncle Drissa, it is in fact time you went back to join Auntie Rokia.

UNCLE: How can I go back to sniffing smoke now that I’ve tasted the fire? ...Is it true what they say? That you dance the dance of Arab women?

BINTU: You know what I think, Uncle Drissa?

UNCLE: The chameleon can change color, Bintu, but it can never take on the color of a woman’s thoughts.

BINTU: Uncle Drissa, I bet you have a little lizard bouncing around in your head like an electric billiard ball. And you would like little Bintu to help you bring it home, wouldn't you?

He slips his hand under her buttocks. She turns around immediately, brandishing a switch blade in her hand. For the first time they are face to face.

BINTU: (*Harsh and firm*) If you ever try that again I will cut your throat and let you bleed like a pig in a slaughter house. Now get out.

UNCLE: I just wanted to see if you were wearing...

BINTU: Out!

The uncle moves out of the circle of light. Bintu puts her knife away. The circle expands as the chorus moves back to their original position.

AUNT: Blasphemy, again and again, always blasphemy.

MOTHER: She's lying. I know she's lying, I know her, she's my daughter.

BINTU: Mama, I'm not lying.

AUNT: The carp does not give birth to a hawk.

MOTHER: Don't trust what you see. I've always been a good mother. I did the best I could, I did all I could... Bintu, for the sake of your father and for me, your poor mother, please excuse yourself to your uncle.

BINTU: But Mama, it's true.

AUNT: What truth, little slut? Any word that escapes your lips is irrevocably twisted into a lie. What do you know of the truth, you viper?

MOTHER: Please don't answer her, Bintu. I beg of you, don't talk back to your uncle's wife.

BINTU: Mama, don't get your voice mixed up with the rattle of these snakes. Let me take care of this reptile business... Poor Auntie Rokia. I just have to snap my fingers (*snapping her fingers*) and I've got Uncle Drissa crawling around my toes.

AUNT: Bintu, everybody knows that at your age you're already spreading your mat out everywhere you go. So you want a war, a real war between women. Well, know that I am ready. I'll even let you choose the arms.

BINTU: I'm prepared for any war... if the stakes are worth it. (*The uncle charges toward Bintu, ostensibly to beat her, but then stands stock still, not daring to touch her.*) What's this? Are we playing the offended husband? Flying to the rescue of his wife? But, go right ahead, beat me. Show us how a real male won't let himself be put down by a woman, much less by a girl. Come on, what are you waiting for?... It's the truth that holds back your fist, Uncle Drissa.

MOTHER: Drissa, for the love of God, pardon her; she's but a child. I beg of you, just this once, Drissa, let her go out. Just this one time... the last...

UNCLE: She has to change clothes at least. I can't bear to think of her running around God knows where in that...

BINTU: ...garment that barely covers her body, right, and maybe with no underpants on. Do you really want to know if Bintu wears a muzzle? Tonight, when you're waiting for sleep to come, lying next to the cold flesh of your wife, try to guess what it's like to be under Bintu's skirt.

MOTHER: Oh dear God, pity her soul, she is but yet a child.

BINTU: Mama, I'm leaving. I'll come back to see you from time to time. As far as these fools are concerned, I never want to hear from them again. Let them know I will not answer to them or even grace them with an insult. And Mama, one last thing: the day I need to be pardoned I will come to you, not to God. (*She leaves, followed by the chorus.*)

AUNT: This is heresy! This time it is truly heresy. A girl who is barely pubescent but whose mouth is full of adult language. It can only be witchcraft. Her father is the guilty one. Just because he lost his job is no excuse to lose control over his depraved daughter. Even impotent, the penis continues to spout urine. Whatever way you look at it, blasphemy engenders blasphemy.

MOTHER: You should round your lips before you whistle. You've gone too far, Rokia. Have a child of your own, then you can start giving lessons in educating her.

AUNT: God did not find it useful to grant me the joy of motherhood.

MOTHER: Or maybe God didn't find you worthy.

UNCLE: Shut up, both of you. Can't you see we have to hurry? There is no longer any doubt: Bintu is sick in the soul. But she is young and the tree can still grow straight. We must do what we have agreed to, because only this will save her. She's your daughter and it's up to you to convince her to go back home for a month or two, time enough to... Tell her it's a vacation or... I don't know. Make something up.

MOTHER: And if she... you know Bintu.

AUNT: If she refuses, we'll do it here. I will make the arrangements. I know a woman, Moussoba, she's as discreet as the excrement of a cat...

MOTHER: Very well. I will talk to her about this trip. For the moment, you must excuse me. I have to lie down. This whole business has exhausted my nerves. (*She exits.*)

AUNT: The look can not judge the eye itself wrong, Drissa. But now that we are alone, can I ask you a question?

UNCLE: We will talk about whatever you want once we're home.

AUNT: No, please, we have to talk now. I couldn't later.

UNCLE: Okay, go ahead.

AUNT: Earlier, why did you allow Bintu...

UNCLE: Enough. The Bintu problem is over.

AUNT: You bury a corpse, Drissa; you don't bury a problem. Why did you let this kid talk to me like she was my rival all of a sudden?

UNCLE: Why did you let her talk to you as if she were your rival?

AUNT: So I'm the one to blame?

UNCLE: Don't raise your voice with me, Rokia. Just a piece of advice, don't ever raise your voice with me.

AUNT: I won't raise my voice again, Drissa. But I want to know why —without raising my voice— when this little slut insulted me to the core, up even under my cloth, why did you say nothing? She is your niece, after all... You don't want to answer? Then maybe you can tell me at least this: Is it true what she's accused you of, of the unthinkable?

UNCLE: Bintu lies. That's all she knows how to do. If she talks like an adult, she also lies like an adult. Her goal is to create trouble, to mine the granite of our trust with quick sand. That's all I can say and I ask you to be satisfied with that. In any case, it's the truth.

AUNT: And yet —notice I go on without raising my voice— I don't understand how your very words, words that I would recognize among any others on earth... how these proverbs that you love to repeat endlessly, how did they rush from her mouth spontaneously? Because Bintu may speak like an adult, but she never uses proverbs... I am stating, in a calm voice, that I am not

satisfied with your answer, Drissa.

UNCLE: And I am repeating in a crystal clear voice: Bintu is lying and I am telling the truth. (*He turns to leave.*)

AUNT: Drissa, you know if you're telling the truth. You also know if you're lying and what it will cost you.

He exits. The lights come down.

JAZZ

A vacant lot. This scene resembles both a television interview and a police interrogation. The only lights are spots focused on each person as they speak. The characters seem to be responding to questions from someone whose presence and voice have been edited out. The result is three monologues caught at different moments.

MANU: (*Aiming at random with an imaginary revolver*) Bang!

BLACKOUT: Okoume, sixteen. But Bintu likes me named Blackout, you see. So everybody calls me Blackout.

MANU: Before we didn't have no name. It's Bintu's aunt. She kept saying "those beasts... those lycans..." so we thought, okay, we're Lycans. All of a sudden everybody started calling us the Lycans. Samiagamal didn't like that at first, but now she does.

KELKHAL: Samiagamal, that's Bintu. It's my father who... when he saw her dance... My father is a musician and my mother is a belly dancer, was anyway... Seventeen, Kader... I mean Kelkhal, Bintu named me that. Before the Lycans, I was, I don't mean to brag, but I was what parents and teachers call "a positive element," someone with a good future ahead. I got the high school prize for poetry and all that stuff... No way I can tell Samiagamal and the others that. I couldn't take it if Blackout started calling me a faggot because I write poems.

MANU: Samiagamal? She's like the sun: the closer you get, the less you see her. She is the bomb, yo, like fire. I think I got too close.

BLACKOUT: Bintu? You see, at first, she came to our place to see my kid sister. They're friends. Already I noticed she had a big mouth and didn't let anybody get in her way. But it wasn't my business, you see... But then one day I go out. Who do I hear calling my name? It's Bintu. I stop and she says, just like that in the street, "Show me your gun." Fuck, I think, how she know that? It's true I got a hell of a nina. (*He shows his nine millimeter.*) With this baby, you

see, you got power, I mean like you're immortal. No more shit. You pull the trigger and bang, it's over. Even Tarzan, even Rambo, bang, they're history. Just the idea, you see, well I don't actually get off on that but, yeah, almost. ...I found it in a car I jacked. Everybody has their thing. Mine is rides. When I see one I like, I gotta have it. Then I roll on, not knowing where I'm going. I drive and drive, I drive as far away from this shit hole as I can, you see. Sometimes I roll on until I get to the ocean. That calms me, the ocean, don't know why... it's just peaceful.

KELKHAL: It was at Nenesse's bar, that's the first time I saw her.

MANU: Nenesse promised if she ever learned how to make her navel twirl in a circle like the real dancers, he'd hire her in his bar.

KELKHAL: I knew instinctively when I laid eyes on her, her beauty like a forbidden fruit, that I hadn't come to join a gang, but to follow, straight over the cliffs of the absurd, a girl of thirteen. In school where the legend of the Lycaons had been growing a long time, people talked about a girl nine years old... fifteen... eighteen... twenty... Nobody knew Bintu's exact age. But everybody was sure she reigned over a dozen boys and that together they'd scared the cops from the neighborhood. They also told stories about how they'd hang out after their adventures at Nenesse's, a bar near the canal. They'd close the doors and the windows and then Samiagamal would dance to Arab music composed by the devil himself, offering her naked body to the bodies of her Lycaons, tense with desire. She would make love to them until out of breath, until the last one fell at her feet, drained. ...The fact is, there were never more than three Lycaons in all.

MANU: (*Still aiming at random*) Bang! Bang! Bang!

BLACKOUT: I'm not carrying, I tell her. And besides, I don't like little girls following me around. But then she gets all excited and starts talking, talking, talking... bababababa... bababababa... spitting out grown-up words. Then she says, and this really makes me laugh, you see... she says: Bintu follows nobody, you follow Bintu. So I start laughing like an idiot, I'm rolling with laughter there in the street and everybody's staring at me, like they don't get it. To tell Okoume who will lead Okoume! But she doesn't give up. I've heard your thing is jacking rides she says. Okay, you're going to prove you're following me from now on. You see that car over there? Steal it and you'll have the right to take Bintu for a drive. So then, I don't know what got into me, but I was like a zombie, you see, I just went and jacked that car like all I'd ever wanted to do in my life was take a drive with my kid sister's girlfriend by my side.

KELKHAL: Samiagamal danced around her navel to Arab music whining from the juke box. Bintu didn't dance well and she didn't dance badly. She danced like a wild poem, without paying attention to the number of feet or the stress of the rhyme. She danced like a poem run out of control. Nenesse couldn't take his eyes off her. Just to grab her attention, he told her if she could learn to dance like a real belly dancer he'd hire her in his bar. So I jumped at the chance to talk to her. I told her my mother was a dancer and she could help her. Right away, she threw herself in

my arms, jumping up and down like a little kid, hugging me with joy.

MANU: Bintu always jumps in your arms when she's happy.

KELKHAL: I got up the courage to ask her if I could join the Lycaons. She stopped moving right there and then. She looked me straight in the eye for a long moment then said, "I'll wait for you tonight, on the other side of the canal." That evening, as soon as I got there, Blackout and Manu grabbed me and started punching. A fight. Horrible. At some point, Bintu ordered them to stop. She came close to me and said, "From now on, your name is Kelkhal. Follow us." That's how I became a Lycaon.

BLACKOUT: One time when we're driving along the freeway she says, "Take that lane." But it's one way I say. Okay, so take the wrong way she answers. Cars are honking like crazy all around, you see, but steering clear. I tell her they'll run into us, but she says never, they're much too scared for their little fucking lives to dare. Faster she tells me. I say I can't go any faster. So she slips her foot down between my thighs and pushes on the gas pedal. So then her legs are spread wide open and she has this tiny little skirt like she always wears, then I see she has nothing on... It's not that I've never seen one... No, you see, that's not the problem... But there in the middle of the freeway, driving at 90 miles an hour in the wrong lane, with all those horns blasting, I thought I was hallucinating. Bintu, we're gonna get killed I say. And you know what she answered? "What could be a more exciting way to go?" And then she pushes the gas pedal down to the floor, straight to the fucking guts out of the ride.

MANU: Bang! ...Blackout, he done it. Chillin', yo, the tightest. I mean, you gotta hand it to him.

KELKHAL: The first time my father saw Bintu dance he said she was like Samia Gamal, the greatest dancer of this century. Even during the time of my mother's glory, he never dared make such a comparison. Samia Gamal! I told the others, and then Manu and I started calling Bintu Samiagamal... in one word like that... Samiagamal. Blackout, he never calls her Samiagamal... For him she's just Bintu, that's all.

MANU: That's a lie. That is just so fucked up. Me, jealous? What kind of bull shit is that? I couldn't be jealous of no brother and Blackout is a brother. Anyway, he done it already. So you gotta find something else. Otherwise, they'll say, "Yeah, but Blackout already done that." So you gotta find something different, something bigger, that like blows out the box. Yeah, bigger even than what Samiagamal did when the principal snitched on Kelkhal, like he'd been skipping classes and his peoples punished him. A whole week, locked up in his room. So when Kelkhal tells us this, Samiagamal says, "Tonight, look up at the sky. The stars are going to get closer to the earth." Then she walked off.

KELKHAL: She wanted to be alone. She walked off, beautiful and troubling like a full moon... like in the awful moments when she's about to give up on Samiagamal and become just plain Bintu again.

MANU: That night the three of us were over at Nenesse's when we heard the fire trucks. We went outside and looked up. Flames and sparks were shooting all over the sky. They were coming from the high school. Samiagamal had set the fucking school on fire, just like that. Bang!

BLACKOUT: Nobody ever knew who set fire to the school, except us. We knew it was Bintu. She never bragged about it; we just knew. She was blown, heated as hell about what happened to Kelkhal.

KELKHAL: Samiagamal never does anything out of hate. Whatever she does is out of love. For the school fire, that was her, even if she never said it and nobody really tried to find out. We just knew it. Whenever she does a good deed, what we Lycaons call a good deed anyway, Samiagamal doesn't let show the least sign of satisfaction. No, it's what we do that gets her all excited. She jumps up and down like a little kid filled with pride.

MANU: All night long the fire squad tried to put it out, but the whole fucking school burnt to a crisp, right down to the tiniest piece of chalk... Tight, yo, tight. But compared to what Blackout did? I gotta find bigger, gigantic.

KELKHAL: It happened brutally. All of a sudden, she stopped coming to our house. My mother wouldn't tell me why and my father was silent. So I decided to go talk to her. I waited for her when we might be alone, without the others, to ask her. We were under the trees on the other side of the canal. She was lying on her back with her eyes half closed and her lips half open. I was sitting next to her wondering how to ask her. She tucked her legs under her and since her skirt was real short, I couldn't help see she had no underpants on. I felt bad; I felt odd... Yes, I have to admit seeing that, I felt ill at ease. I pulled my eyes drowning under her little skirt up to bask in her navel which shimmered like an oasis in the desert of her belly. Samiagamal still had her eyes closed and her lips half open. Before I could even think, my tongue plunged into her belly button. And a strange vision shot through my brain...

A woman is dancing. I can't take my eyes from her navel. I move away from the crowd. They try to hold me back, but the dancer beckons and they open the way for me. I am now in the circle. With a throw of her hips that leaves no doubt she offers her navel to me. I kneel down and thrust my tongue, once, twice, three, ten, one hundred, one thousand times into the dancer's navel. Then, while my exhausted tongue continues to lazily explore the rim, the music stops. I hear a voice. "Oh, Kader" sighs the dancer. I look up. It is my mother...

My tongue pulled away from Samiagamal's belly button. Her eyes were still closed and her lips half open. I felt feverish and I was sweating bullets. I had to do something, say something, or run away. Painfully, my mouth shaped the question: Why don't you come to the house anymore? Her lips opened in a smile, but her eyes stayed closed. Without hesitating she said, "Men are just always men, Kelkhal, and I didn't want your mother to suffer."

MANU: Blackout already smoked a fool. Bang! Blown away! Dead issue.

BLACKOUT: We jacked a ride, Bintu and me. I don't know where we were, some place on the coast. We were feasting on a Big Mac wherever and this guy keeps scoping her. So I tell him to roll off. Then he gets all excited, says he'll look at who he wants, it's a free country, and I should mind my own business and a bunch of crap like that. But I hold my ground, I say stop checking out my girlfriend or I'll bus' you. But, you see, the fool gets aggressive. He says "So?" and starts waving his arms, "So, who are you, just a snotty ass hole little bitch." And suddenly bang! I don't like being called a bitch. Bang! And his face pisses blood and he falls at my feet and his blood is spilling all over... Not even Bintu ever called me a bitch. Nobody can call me a bitch, not even Rambo can call me a bitch... Bang! So people start screaming "He killed him, he killed him, call the fire department... an ambulance... where's the police? He's losing all his blood..." and stuff like that, you see. Then I feel Bintu tugging on my sleeve, pulling me out of Micky D's. She grabs the burner and shouts "Start the car, we're out of here." I was surprised I was so calm. I thought something like that would scare me shitless, make me 'noided, you know. But no, I drove off calm like, at top speed, but real cool. Bintu kept hugging me. When she's happy, Bintu always throws herself in your arms and then you remember she's just a kid. She was so hyped up, so proud, I could tell she was proud of me. She stroked the nine still warm and said: Now you're a man, Okoume, a real man. From here on, your name will be Blackout. That's how I became Blackout, you see.

MANU: Tight. Blackout smoked some fool for Samiagamal. And that is mortal, man, you can't beat it. The dream. So I'm looking, trying to find what I can offer Samiagamal that's really big. When I first wanted to go out with Bintu she said, "It's me or crack. Choose." So it was her, but I told her no way I would stop hustling. She's okay with that, "As long as you don't fry your own brain, my Bewitching." Yeah, she calls me "Bewitching," that's cool. So as long as I don't waste myself, I can deal. I thought when I got off crack that was the tightest thing anybody could do for her... But then I hear about Blackout and bang... that blew me away. I gotta find the thing, something bigger than life. I could smoke a fed. First I need a tool like Blackout. And bang... That's it, knock off some pigs then we'll see. The best would be an AK47... way to go, blast them away... Actually my name is Emmanuel; Samiagamal started calling me Manu, she thinks it's cute. I'm cool with that, Manu, my Bewitching. I'm cool with whatever comes from her. We groove together, that's all there is to it. But I gotta find the thing, the megathing... My name is Manu, I'm eighteen and I'm Samiagamal's boyfriend. (*Toward Bintu who enters*) Bang!

BINTU: Cut it out, Manu.

BLACKOUT: Hey, Bintu, where you been?

BINTU: My peoples are on my back again.

KELKHAL: Your uncle, huh? Do you want me to...

BINTU: I don't want anything. It's private family business. Where's L'tle John?

MANU: (*aiming at the audience*) Bang! Bang!

L'tle John emerges from the audience. He has the disjointed movements of a junkie.

L'TLE JOHN: Hi Bintu.

BINTU: So, what's up?

L'TLE JOHN: Well...

KELKHAL: Why do you want to join the Lycaons?

L'TLE JOHN: 'Cause... 'Cause it's like a family. (*Silence.*) Yeah, a family. (*Silence.*) You stick up for each other... You know, you do stick up for each other... And some people are lookin' for me... they're lookin' for me...

KELKHAL: Is it true what I hear? That you call us the three crazy Magi?

L'TLE JOHN: Huh?

MANU: Ever hit somebody up?

L'TLE JOHN: What?

MANU: Bang! Bang!

L'TLE JOHN: Ah, no. No, no...

KELKHAL: Could you do it?

L'TLE JOHN: I dunno. Maybe... maybe... Depends.

BLACKOUT: On what?

L'TLE JOHN: On what? Gee, I dunno.

BINTU: Come here. (*L'tle John joins them on stage. Bintu signals to Blackout who passes his gun to L'tle John. Pointing at the audience*) You see those fools out there. Shoot one.

L'TLE JOHN: For real?

KELKHAL: At random.

L'TLE JOHN: But...

MANU: Bang! Bang! Just for the hell of it.

L'TLE JOHN: But... I... I don't know them...

BLACKOUT: Oh no... Yo, if we had to get to know every dude before knocking them off!

BINTU: Don't you ever see people in the street that make you want to throw up?

L'TLE JOHN: Well, sure, but...

KELKHAL: You see that so-called man there? You're going to blow his brains out. Because he's bald.

MANU: Kelkhal doesn't like bald guys.

L'TLE JOHN: Oh, come on, guys, you gotta be kidding, right?

BINTU: Do we look like we're kidding?

BLACKOUT: Come on, make it quick. We got stuff to do.

L'TLE JOHN: I don't have enough hate in me to killl somebody off for no...

BINTU: And you want to join the Lycaons? Listen here, L'tle John: You discover you are a Lycaon when you wake up one day with the shame of being born into the human race stuck in your craw and you feel like chucking it all away, like blowing the brains out of the whole frigging planet. For nothing! You don't learn to become a Lycaon, you wake up one day knowing you are.

MANU: Now that you know we can kill somebody just because he's bald, what do you think we're gonna do to you?

KELKHAL: Because you might snitch on us, right L'tle John?

L'TLE JOHN: Aw, come on guys... cut it out.

BINTU: (*Grabbing the revolver from him*) Give it to me. (*Aiming at L'tle John*) Get over there.

L'TLE JOHN: Hey, stop it, Bintu... Guys, tell her to... Don't mess around with that...

Faced with Bintu's cold determination and the other's impassivity, it is gradually dawning on L'tle John that he is in serious trouble. He remains mute and paralyzed. Bintu holds the gun barrel to his forehead.

BINTU: See, this is how you kill a man, L'tle John. In a few seconds you won't remember you even had a head and you will enter into the great secret.

She pulls the trigger which clicks but does not go off. L'tle Jean collapses at her feet. He covers her feet with kisses.

L'TLE JOHN: Oh, thank you, Bintu, thank you...

MANU: That's it. Feel free.

L'TLE JOHN: What?

KELKHAL: You think we didn't notice your fingers creeping like spiders up Samiagamal's thighs?

L'TLE JOHN: But...

BLACKOUT: It doesn't even have the balls to bump off some poor fool and then it wants to slobber all over a girl's thighs.

L'TLE JOHN: That's not true... Bintu, tell them it's not true. I was just kissing her feet.

KELKHAL: On top of that, he's calling us liars.

Kelkhal slaps him violently. At the same moment a furious rap bursts out. L'tle John falls face down and the three Lycaons begin plummeting him with their feet and their fists.

BINTU: Defend yourself, L'tle John. If you're scared, they'll eat you alive. Show them you have the right stuff. Fight back, L'tle John, fight for your life.

L'TLE JOHN: Stop! Bintu, tell them to stop. They're gonna kill me. Tell them to stop... they're killin' me... stop... Stop!

BINTU: If you're scared they'll eat you alive, L'tle John. Prove you can wake up a Lycaon. (*But L'tle John does not respond to any of the blows.*) Okay guys, that's enough.

The beating ceases. In pain, L'tle John crawls over to Bintu.

L'TLE JOHN: Thank you, Samiagamal... Can I call you Samiagamal?

BINTU: Get up. (*He struggles up.*) You have a problem, L'tle John.

CHORUS: You have a problem, L'tle John.

BINTU:

You've given up your will
hands and feet tied to junk
push it on them
live off their stupidity and cowardice
but don't you touch the stuff

CHORUS:

You have a problem, L'tle John.
How can you blow up the world
if you're already wasted?
Deal, L'tle John, deal,
Deal, deal

BINTU:

Deal to their stressed-out wives.
Deal to their overworked husbands.

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John,
Deal, deal

BINTU:

Deal in front of their children's schools
Deal in front of their old folks' homes

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John,
Deal, deal

BINTU: Waste them, the way they wasted solidarity.

CHORUS: Waste them, the way they wasted friendship.

BINTU: Waste them, the way they wasted love.

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John,
Deal, deal

BINTU:

Deal like they deal
the innocence of the world.
Deal like they deal
the virginity of their children.

CHORUS:

Deal like they deal
their dignity and their baseness
their truths and their lies

BINTU:

The sky and the earth
The air and the ocean

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John,
Deal, deal

BINTU:

Push it on them
as much as you want
Blow up the brains of the world
with stones of crack

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John, deal,
Deal, deal

BINTU:

Deal
but don't you touch the stuff
Let them bear the weight of your death
on what takes the place of their conscience
Deal, deal them death too.

CHORUS:

Deal, L'tle John, deal,
Deal, deal

BINTU: Now beat it. We'll meet again another time, after you've stopped using.

L'TLE JOHN: Don't desert me... don't leave me...

BINTU: L'tle John, I said we'll meet again. (*L'tle John exits. Bintu moves forward to the edge of the stage. A spot focuses on her face.*) My name is Bintu. My guys call me Samiagamal. I know I'll never reach my eighteenth birthday, but that doesn't bother me.

SON

A poorly furnished room. L'tle John's and his mother's home. The table is set. The mother is sitting at the table alone, waiting. L'tle John enters and sits down across from her.

L'TLE JOHN: H'lo, Ma.

MOTHER: Eternal Savior bless this food
and the hands which prepared it.
Give us this day our daily bread,
We ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son
who died that we might live.
Amen.

You were fighting again?

L'TLE JOHN: No, it's not what you think. It's not what you think, Ma.

MOTHER: Eat while it's still hot.

L'TLE JOHN: (*visibly high*) I went to see Bintu, Ma. When I kissed her feet, it wasn't like what they said. It's not at all what people think. Those are just lies they say about her, Ma, just lies. Bintu is a saint. She loves people, Ma. So loves the world so much she's wound up hating us. But even in her hate she has enough love left to save the world... When I kissed her feet, I was like in a state of grace, like I'd just prayed the right prayer...

MOTHER: Eat, L'tle John.

L'TLE JOHN: Bintu talked to me, Ma. She talked to me like a grown up. She talked to me and from now on... What's it mean to be ashamed of being a man?

MOTHER: Eat. It's getting cold.

L'TLE JOHN: Everything is clear. I have to kill those three other bozos. She talked especially about you, Ma. Like nobody has ever talked about you. Clear simple words. So, I've come to ask your forgiveness, Ma. She is a saint and nobody sees that. Forgive me for all the love you shower on me but that I've never respected, forgive me for hurting your feelings, forgive me for keeping you awake all those nights wondering where I was, forgive me. Forgive me for using... yes forgive the drugs. Forgive me for everything, Ma. Bintu talked to me and the darkness has lifted. I'm off crack. That's final.

MOTHER : Eat at least a little piece of bread.

L'TLE JOHN: I swear, Ma...

MOTHER: Don't swear.

L'TLE JOHN: May Jesus forgive me. Bintu! That girl is a saint and nobody sees that. People speak nonsense, just lies! She talked about you. She talked well of you, how you've bled and sweated for me, how you... Even in her hate, there is still love. She opened my eyes. I'm going into the French Foreign Legion, Ma. To repent. I have to make up for what I've done. I've seen them on TV. That's what I need, the Foreign Legion. Those three other guys, they're just savages. I want to go to Guyana. I saw them on TV, the legionnaires. When they were thirsty, they drank the sap from jungle vines. I saw them. They swam in waters infested with man-eating fish. They wrestled with alligators. I saw them. They climbed up on vines to the tree tops to jump on the throats of giant spiders and eat them alive. They came back at night covered with mud and emptied of themselves. I saw them on TV. And they're not on drugs, Ma, a life like that is a permanent high. When they're cleaned up, they look like, with their heads shaved close, they look like monks. The legionnaires are monks, Ma, with deep down in the eyes of each one the prison of the terrible secret they've come to atone for in the jungle of Guyana. Me too, I need that, ever since I kissed her feet, I need to atone for the all the suffering I've caused you.

MOTHER: Stop turning in circles and eat some bread, L'tle John. It's good leavened bread.

L'TLE JOHN: I should have helped you more when Pa went to prison.

MOTHER: We agreed never to talk about that again. Eat.

L'TLE JOHN: I won't talk about it anymore. You know, Ma, I want to join the Legion right away. I need some money to get to their office right now. And I want to buy a new T-shirt so I'll look good.

MOTHER: There's no money, L'tle John.

L'TLE JOHN: I need to get a hair cut too. I gotta look good, you see? I wanna be good.

MOTHER: There's no money left.

L'TLE JOHN: You don't trust me because of the crack, huh? I told you that's over.

MOTHER: L'tle John, we don't have a cent left.

L'TLE JOHN: Pa would have given me the money. When he was here...

MOTHER: I know, I know! When John was here, he'd carry you on his shoulders. When John was here, he'd take you to play in the sand. When John was here, he'd teach you to play ping-pong on the cement in the park. You'd go walking in the woods and he taught you all about the mushrooms... I know! I know everything he supposedly did for you. And it's so you wouldn't constantly have to throw that in my face that I've always given you money, even though I had no illusions about how you spent it. But this time, you can blame me all you want, I won't give you any simply because we don't have a cent left in the house, L'tle John.

L'TLE JOHN: You managed to find the money for this meal... Ma, I need the money.

MOTHER: If I had it, I wouldn't hesitate...

L'TLE JOHN: Don't mess with me Ma. I'm in bad shape and I need the money. *(In sudden fury, he sweeps everything on the table to the floor.)* Right now! *(He starts rummaging through the room, knocking things over, looking for money.)* Where did you stash the god damn money?

MOTHER: L'tle John...

L'TLE JOHN: The money! Don't abandon me, Ma. I'm in bad shape, don't you abandon me too.

MOTHER: I would so like to help you, but we don't have any more...

L'TLE JOHN: Stop giving me that shit over and over. *(He slaps her.)* Where's the money?

MOTHER: Lord Jesus! So was it written. "Weep not for me. For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." Do not weep for my unworthy person, because the Word must be accomplished.

L'TLE JOHN: Shut up! Where is it? *(He grabs his mother by the hair and drags her around the room screaming.)* Find it! Where did you stash the god damn money? *(He throws her on the ground.)* Give me the money or I'll set the fucking house on fire. You know I'm not kidding. *(Suddenly he spies the crucifix his mother is wearing. Calmly, he bends over and starts stroking*

her neck.) So we have no money, but we can afford to wear a golden crucifix?

MOTHER: No, not that. It's blasphemy. No blasphemy, my son.

L'TLE JOHN: Who's talking blasphemy? Just relax, Ma, take it easy. Isn't that better now, Ma?... It's pretty. I forgot it was gold. Really pretty... (*With a quick yank, he rips the chain off.*)

MOTHER: No, in the name of Jesus...

L'TLE JOHN: Shut up! You try that number on me next time and I really will set the place on fire, you hear? (*He exits.*)

MOTHER: Thank you Lord Jesus because I know you have already forgiven him. For he is one of the sinners you are calling forth, for he is part of the lost flock you have come for, because it is not the healthy that need to be saved, but the sick who need your medicine. I know you have already forgiven my son.

CUSTOMS

At Bintu's parent's. The mother, the uncle, the aunt, and an old woman named Moussoba. African music.

MOTHER: When the hand fails to reach, it is the forked stick that gathers the fruit. Praise be to the great Consoler. Thank you for coming, Moussoba, thank you for answering my desperate calls for help.

AUNT: Bintu has quit school. Every day the Almighty gives us she spends her time exciting her lycaon wolves, like the cheapest little slut.

UNCLE: She has moved in with one of them. She is living, at her age, with one of her Lycaons, the white fellow...

MOUSSOBA: A white man?

AUNT: To the bottom of her soul, Bintu has no shame, no pride, what so ever.

MOUSSOBA: A white man. May the great Forgiver have mercy on her soul.

UNCLE: Bintu has become the dead branch of the river.

MOTHER: But can the river accept one of its branches dry up and die forever? No, oh no. So

how can I as her mother accept what the river refuses? A quarrel among the members of one family is but hot water; it does not burn the house down. But my daughter will not listen to reason... Oh, Moussoba, if you knew how ashamed I am! Our family is pointed at like the sick limb of the community body. Yet, I have done everything to avoid her building her life like a giant monument to depravity...

MOUSSOBA: What does her father say?

UNCLE: My brother was betrayed by life. He lost his job. Since then, Bintu will not listen to him. He has locked himself behind that door, hiding behind his own shame. It's been months since he's seen the light of day... and Bintu's sacrilegious behavior is pushing him over the brink into the grave.

MOUSSOBA: Wanzo, the demon of lust, has crossed the ocean to take hold of your daughter's stinger. Why did you not send her home to...?

AUNT: I swear as her witness, Moussoba, her mother tried everything. But you don't know Bintu yet. I was there when my sister-in-law called her...

MOTHER: Bintu! Bintu! Bintu!

Bintu enters. Fragments of Arab music float in between her opening and closing her door. She is out of breath; she has been rehearsing her dance. She holds a switch blade which she plays with during the conversation.

BINTU: What is it? I'm listening.

MOTHER: What were you doing in your room?

BINTU: Cough it up, mama. I've got lots to do.

MOTHER: Your father and I have...

BINTU: My father? What father? I don't have a father.

MOTHER: We have been thinking of something nice for you. A vacation. Wouldn't it be fun to go back to the home country for a vacation?

BINTU: A vacation? What for? I don't work, I don't go to school, why would I take a vacation? And I don't know what you mean by home; I know nothing about your backwater country.

MOTHER: Exactly. It would be a good chance to meet the family, to learn about your country...

BINTU: But this is my country, mama. The city, the hood, the concrete, my guys... my Lycans as Aunt Rokia says. I was born here and I don't need to know about anything else. It's enough for me.

MOTHER: Where did you get that knife?

BINTU: What's your problem? Do you think I stole it? Manu gave it to me, if you need to know. *(Calling out)* My Bewitching! Magic man! Come here...

MANU: *(Entering from the room along with a splattering of the Arab music which persists)* Bang!

BINTU: Stop that, time out. And shut the fucking door, we can't hear a word we're saying. *(Manu shuts the door and returns.)* She thinks I lifted the knife.

MANU: You old lady, you are so far off track...

BINTU: Manu! She's my mother!

MANU: But Samiagamal...

BINTU: There's no "but Samiagamal." She's my mother. Talk to her with respect or I'll...

MANU: *(aiming at Bintu with his fingers)* Bang!

BINTU: Manu!

MANU: Cool, okay, I'm cool... Ma'm, excuse me, but the knife was mine. I gave it to Samiagamal as a present.

BINTU: So you see, Mama, I didn't steal anything. Tell me, my Bewitching, how would you like to go show your pretty face to Africa?

MANU: What for?

BINTU: Just for the hell of it. For a vacation. For free.

MANU: For free?

BINTU: All expenses paid, guaranteed.

MANU: Well... sure. Yeah, I mean... Africa, I mean that's like the tightest, yo, the real trip. Yeah, I could get into that.

BINTU: Mama, this is the good news and this is the bad news: One, I've found somebody for you to take this vacation. Two, I won't be part of the trip. I'd be ready to go most anywhere... China, Brazil, Australia, Russia, Kansas even, why not? But Africa is out of the question... At least not now, I'm not ready for Africa... Is that all you wanted to tell me? (*The mother is silent.*) Okay, since everybody agrees, I'm going back to my dancing. You know Mama, I do a lot of stupid things, but I do think about you too. I'm not happy to see my mother spend her life cleaning other people's houses, not at all happy about that. Don't think I'm wasting my time away doing nothing. I am learning to dance, to belly dance. So one day, you won't have to clean up the spit and the shit of other people ever again. Don't forget what I'm telling you, Mama. Okay, time's up. Come on, Bewitching.

Bintu and Manu exit. Arab music wafts in and out as the door closes. Silence.

AUNT: We are at wits' ends. We don't know how to reach her, Moussoba. We are losing Bintu. And her father who... Oh, Moussoba... her father who claims my sister-in-law is a bad wife, that she should have known how to control her daughter better. But who can control Bintu? She is like a catfish you think you've caught, but no, she's already slipped away again. I am afraid she will rot before spring, like a fruit ripened too soon for life.

MOUSSOBA: You know the price?

UNCLE: We have raised the money.

MOUSSOBA: I am not talking about the fee. You know what you propose to do is sacriligious in this country? This country, which is a cult to heresy, treats us, the healers of the soul, as vulgar assassins... Even drunk, the egg will not dance on gravel. Therefore, I demand the utmost discretion, total secrecy. If she refuses to travel to Africa, then Moussoba, the queen of the potters and of the clay, will take Bintu to her ancestral country under the blade of my knife. We need clarity. Bintu is crossing the realm of doubt, the gray empire of the ambiguous. It is the world of the Incompleted where woman is also man and man also woman. Is it by chance that Bintu, although so young, has flaunted men, starting with her own father? Bintu has no notion of masculine authority... we need clarity. Otherwise, she will live without a husband, the men she lies with will be pierced by her stinger sooner or later and will die of her venom. If she is not doomed to infertility, her infant will also die from the sting during the great passage. We need clarity. And my knife will cut through the confusion which celebrates the Incompleted. (*She reaches out her arm. The uncle stuffs a wad of bills in her hand.*) Tonight, while she is sleeping, grab her and tie her up. I will come back, just before dawn, to chase away Wanzo, the demon of lust, from the girl's body.

MOTHER: Moussoba, I... I don't know... Bintu has not been sleeping here for a while. She comes by sometimes... without warning... and I don't know where she sleeps. Just that she is often in this bar... near the canal.

UNCLE: I have hired a young man to do what must be done as soon as you agreed...

MOUSSOBA: I don't want to know anything about that. I will come back right before dawn and I want her bound by her ankles and wrists.

UNCLE: She will be, Moussoba.

REPENTANCE

A vacant lot. In the background, Assassino and Terminator are on the look out throughout the scene.

L'TLE JOHN: (*very hyped up*) You've heard, huh? I didn't think it was that complicated to join... Not good enough for them. I knew your plan wouldn't work. "Not good enough to wake up a Lycaon," she said. Not good enough. You'll give me what you promised me, anyway? You brought it? Anyway, it would have taken too long. Get inside, play buddy-buddy, Lycaon-Lycaon, and then... too long, much too long.

UNCLE: Who are those two?

L'TLE JOHN: Friends. Assassino and Terminator. 'Cause I got another idea.

UNCLE: Fine. It's for tonight.

L'TLE JOHN: Tonight? Not enough time.

UNCLE: They've given me no time either. It absolutely must be tonight.

L'TLE JOHN: Ah? You'll give it to me anyway?

UNCLE: You have to kidnap her.

L'TLE JOHN: Sure, I'll just grab her right from under the nose of the three mad dogs she hangs with. You must be nuts. Why do you want to kidnap her?

UNCLE: It's a private family affair.

L'TLE JOHN: Anyway, I don't give a shit. None of my business. Show me.

UNCLE: Later. We don't have much time. You have to get her.

L'TLE JOHN: Later when? I need it now!

UNCLE: You don't stand on tip toe to see what's coming...

L'TLE JOHN: Oh, cut the crap. Now! Show it to me at least. And a piece. I'll need a gun. Blackout has one already. Would you like to meet my mother? A tool. So money. I'll need a lot of money.

UNCLE: No, no, no guns, no bloodshed... I don't want any harm to come to her.

L'TLE JOHN: Oh man, what planet are you on? You think I'm gonna walk in with my hands in my pockets, whistling a little tune, and just stand there in front of her and her pack of wild dogs. You've seen them hanging around, but you've never been beat to shit by them. Me, I have. Those three Magi are lunatics, they are like sick these guys who... How would you like to meet my mother?

UNCLE: Why do you keep insisting I meet your mother?

L'TLE JOHN: That's it, huh? You don't think she's good enough for you? Say it, she's not good enough for you. You have to see her first... have to see her to understand that my mother... I would rip out my eyes rather than see her hurt... If you knew how filled with joy I was when I kissed her feet.

UNCLE: I see. So she makes your blood boil too?

L'TLE JOHN: No, not boil. Not boil. Not exactly. More like foam up. Foam like beer. Like the homemade beer my father used to talk about. You must have drunk that too? She makes my blood foam... My mother deserves a little happiness... Like the millet beer, ochre, hot and spicy.

UNCLE: Millet beer doesn't foam. Not like you seem to think.

L'TLE JOHN: I know. My father explained it to me. But when my lips touched her feet, I felt the foam rise in me, ochre, hot, spicy. I told my mother, I told her it was like I'd said the right prayer... but she didn't get it. She thinks prayers are just in the Bible. But that girl is so beautiful. Just looking at her is like praying.

UNCLE: Bintu is much more than... You are going to get your wings burned, young man. Bintu is too powerful for you.

L'TLE JOHN: That body, blossomed too soon and so ripe, it's... So, how can you harm a prayer? The dogs that prowl around her don't get it. They think only of soiling her. With their hands, their tongues, their dicks... Have you met my mother?

UNCLE: Because you, you do not dream of soiling her?

L'TLE JOHN: Why do you want me to kidnap her?

UNCLE: (*Holding out a small package of powder*) Here.

L'TLE JOHN: This time I need money. I need a piece. Don't worry, not a drop of blood. A magnum. To keep them in line. Fuck man, Blackout already has one. Samiagamal won't have the tiniest scratch. I swear... For my mother it would be good... (*The uncle holds out a wad of bills.*) More. Lots more. 'Cause I need Assassino and Terminator. Real Pitbulls. Worse than Legionnaires.

UNCLE: (*Giving him more money*) Use whoever you want, buy whatever gun you want, but I want her home this evening and without a scratch. You hear? Without a scratch. (*He starts to exit.*)

L'TLE JOHN: Sir... (*He rushes to the uncle and hands back part of the money he's received.*) A prayer. Have you met my mother yet? You don't see it right away, but she's still young. You'll see, she's still... pretty. What are you going to do to Bintu? (*Silence.*) Since my father left... Pa's in for life... she's gone to seed. But she's a beautiful woman... You don't have to marry her, no... just visit a few hours a week. It just takes a man's look to make her glow again... wait till I get hold of those crazy Magi... just men's hands to wake the joy sleeping in her body so that her beauty flowers again and she... Don't you like Christians? (*Silence.*) My mother's a good Christian, she was a good wife and I'm sure she'll be... A tool, a 357 would be great, that baby blows your head off... You have eyes that can make a woman feel beautiful. A blessing; I ask you this for like what she'd call grace. Women get bent out of shape when they're alone, they start growing a mustache, they get old all of a sudden. After my father, since me I'm leaving, she could die. But I have to go; I can't keep lying to her. Every time I open my mouth to talk to her a lie jumps out... Maybe your religion forbids you, so maybe you have a friend who could... because I'm leaving... a good man, it would have to be a good man. Sir, what does it mean to be ashamed of being human?

UNCLE: (*Handing back the money*) I will go see your mother. I promise. (*He exits.*)

GANGSTA RAP-T

Nenese's bar. The juke box is playing a French song from the 1930s. The Lycaons enter. Manu is carrying a boom box with a huge amplifier.

BINTU: Nenesse, I'm ready.

NENESSE: Ready for what?

BINTU: I'm a dancer now. Watch...

She signals to Manu who starts the boom box. Arabic music mixes with the French song.

NENESSE: Hold on, Bintu. I don't get it.

KELKHAL: What do you mean, I don't get it?

BINTU: You promised. If I could dance like a real dancer, you'd hire me in your club.

NENESSE: Wo, slow down... I was just talking...

MANU: What? You were bluffing?

NENESSE: Just shooting the breeze like usual... like whatever. Just fooling around.

BLACKOUT: Nenesse, you shouldn't have done that.

NENESSE: Get serious you jerks. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't hire her. Thirteen years old, jees'! I could be in real shit, Bintu.

MANU: Thirteen? That never stopped you from peeping her before.

NENESSE: Thirteen! They'd throw me in the clink. Condemned for life!

KELKHAL: Aren't you exaggerating a bit?

NENESSE: Listen, my pedigree is not exactly white as snow. So it's not the moment to get the yellow jackets on my tail.

BLACKOUT: Because you think the cops care about this hood? When was the last time you saw a jump out here?

KELKHAL: No, really. You take us for idiots or what?

BINTU: Calm down, guys, just chill out. *(She slips behind the bar and picks up a bottle.)* So that's the story, Nenesse. You were just stringing us along, just kidding around, hey? *(She drops the bottle which shatters on the floor.)* Oh dear, how clumsy of me... *(She picks up another bottle which she lets drop.)* Whoops, sorry, just not my day. You know I was counting on you,

Nenesse. A lot. For my mother. (*She picks up another bottle.*)

NENESSE: Bintu, don't mess with me like this. You know I've always been a father to you.

BINTU: (*Dropping the bottle*) Please spare me your idiocies, Nenesse. I don't need a father anymore. Listen good now. Learn that Bintu hates three things: that you talk about fathers, that you waste her time, that you break your promises... I have been busting my ass learning to belly dance and you can't keep your word. Okay, let's try to save some time here. You know why nobody comes to this little ass-hole bar of yours, Nenesse? No magic! Magic is the only thing that makes man bearable. I will dance in this sorry joint free of charge for one month. No salary for one month. An experiment. Down in the basement where people bury themselves to play forbidden games. If after one month magic does not enter this bar, we're even. But if your customers come back... and they will because I've gotten to know men and not a single one will miss the chance to see a thirteen-year-old girl shaking her ass to Arab music in a low-down dive... Not one... Then, after a month of trial, when the customers rush back, I'll set my own salary and working conditions. I'm not negotiating Nenesse; I'm offering you a last chance to buy yourself back.

NENESSE: I appreciate that Bintu. But it's going to take some wiggling to get around the vice squad.

BINTU: No risk, no magic. You've been knocking around long enough to know that.

KELKHAL: You didn't keep your promise. At least let Samiagamal keep hers all the way.

BLACKOUT: (*Pulling out his gun*) In any case, we don't give a shit about what you think. A fool who breaks his word isn't worth much.

MANU: You know, Nenesse, Blackout already smoked a fool.

NENESSE: Oh, come on, Okoume. You think you put fear in my heart by sticking your big bad Luger in my face? I've been there. Bintu, listen, I'm talking to you like a father. Yeah, like a father... it's not worth it. It doesn't make sense.

BLACKOUT: (*Mocking Nenesse's tone*) "Oh, please, you're breaking my heart, daddy."
(*Grabbing him by the collar*) Stop pretending you're the fat cat who seen it all, who done it all. I don't give a fuck about your washed-up history, you hear Nenesse. All I want is you keep your promise to Bintu or I'll burn a hole between your eyes.

L'tle John enters followed by Terminator and Assassino. L'tle John is carrying a revolver and Assassino a boom box blasting a rap. The French song, the Arab music, and the rap mesh. L'tle John signals to Assassino who brings up the volume on the rap. Immediately, Manu turns up the Arab music. Another signal from L'tle John and Assassino turns up

the rap. Manu follows. Both boom boxes are at maximum volume, drowning out the French song. The two gangs glare at each other. After a moment, L'tle John signals to Assassino who turns off his player. Manu then turns his off. Only the voice of the French singer remains.

L'TLE JOHN: Bintu, I've been sent by your... Tell him to put his piece away.

BLACKOUT: You first.

L'TLE JOHN: Tell him to put it away!

TERMINATOR: L'tle John has a nervous finger. Any wrong move and... you get me?

BINTU: L'tle John, put yours away first.

L'TLE JOHN: No, after.

BINTU: (*Calm*) Stop arguing. You first, then Blackout... You have my word.

L'tle John puts his gun down. Bintu signals to Blackout who does the same.

L'TLE JOHN: I've been sent by your father to fetch you.

BINTU: (*Aggressive*) L'tle John, I warn you, never mention my father.

TERMINATOR: Don't talk to L'tle John like that... or I'll rape you.

BINTU: Oh, really? With what?

TERMINATOR: (*Troubled*) Whadda you mean with what?

L'TLE JOHN: Terminator, shut up.

ASSASSINO: But L'tle John... let's punish her with our dicks.

L'TLE JOHN: For Christ's sake, Assassino, just shut up! Bintu, I have come to fetch you on your parents' behalf.

BINTU: It looks like you've come up in the world since I last saw you, L'tle John. One tool and two retard nuts. Put together, that makes a whole gang.

ASSASSINO: We're the Pitbulls.

TERMINATOR: Yeah.

KELKHAL: They're too just too cute for words.

ASSASSINO: We're here to suck Lycaon blood.

TERMINATOR: Yeah.

MANU: I'm pissing in my pants already.

TERMINATOR: You'd better wet, you dick head 'cause we're the Pitbulls, we're gonna make you bleed for what you did to L'tle John.

Terminator and Assassino pull out their knives.

BINTU: L'tle John, honestly! Look at me. Do you want blood?... Why do you keep pretending you're so tough? I know you weren't made for this world. But if you really want... Get your head up and look me in the eye. If this is really what you want, here's my knife. *(She holds out her switchblade which he doesn't take.)* Look at me... Here's my chest, wide open. Stick it in my heart, relieve yourself of my blood. If that's what you want.

L'TLE JOHN: *(After a pause, to his Pitbulls)* Chill out you two. Put your knives away.

They do so.

BLACKOUT: Do your mommys know you're out playing with knives?

Abruptly, Terminator jumps on Blackout. A fight begins at the same time the Arab music and the rap explode again. The bar is soon in shambles. L'tle John takes advantage of the confusion to grab Bintu and leave. The Lycaons try to follow. The Pitbulls run after them. Once all have left the space, the Arab music and the rap die. Remain the strains of the 1930's French music.

RAPE

At Bintu's parents. African ritual music. Blindfolded, Bintu is standing center stage, surrounded by her relatives and Moussoba. Bintu rips off the blindfold and the stage lighting becomes harsher.

BINTU: What do you want from me?

MOUSSOBA: Take off your clothes.

BINTU: Who are you to ask such bullshit from Bintu?

MOUSSOBA: Don't you dare thrust your witch tongue at me.

BINTU: Then stop polluting the air with your breath.

MOTHER: Bintu... This is Moussoba.

BINTU: You can invite in any human waste you find trailing on the street, Mama, that's your business... but I don't have to hold a conversation with her.

Moussoba signals to the uncle.

UNCLE: Get undressed.

BINTU: You, I told never to speak to me again.

UNCLE: Get undressed!

BINTU: Come do it yourself

He moves closer to her.

MOTHER: It's for your own good, Bintu.

UNCLE: Take off your clothes!

BINTU: Take them off yourself.

He slaps her. The chorus rushes forward.

MOTHER: Drissa!

UNCLE: Shut up, woman. If you had acted as a proper mother, we wouldn't have come to this.

AUNT: The woman who gives birth to a depraved child suffers less than the one who must raise her.

BINTU: Who said you were supposed to raise me? Does my father know what you've been plotting?

AUNT: Since when have you worried about your father's opinion?

UNCLE: *(Bruatally tearing off her skirt)* Take off your clothes.

Bintu spits in his face. He slaps her.

BINTU: As excited as ever, huh? Tense like a stag in rut. Go ahead. What are you waiting for? Drop your pants and come rub your dazzled itch against the slippery pole of my virgin sensuality. What's holding you back from at last sucking on the ripe spring of my tender flesh?... Maybe you're waiting for Aunt Rokia to give you the...

Suddenly, in a demented rage, the uncle attacks Bintu, ripping at her clothes and screaming "Take off your clothes." Gradually the fever dies down. Kneeling beside her inert and naked body, the uncle absently strokes Bintu's face as if to be sure his blows have not disfigured her.

UNCLE: Bintu... did I hurt you? Bintu? Bintu, are you hurt?

AUNT: Drissa!

The uncle snaps back, suddenly aware again of the situation. He picks up the inert body. The whole family stands on one side; the chorus stands on the opposite side. Moussoba alone stands at the center. She brandishes a butcher knife while the mother holds Bintu's switch blade. All are frozen during the following scene in which none of the lines are acted out. Visually the scene presents a strange family portrait.

MOUSSOBA: Spread her legs apart.

CHORUS:

Hands, strong and brutal
Male hands
Opened her legs
Then she felt the shadow
The fingers of the lady-of-the-knife
Snaking up the length of her thighs

I struggled
The male hands grew
Stronger and more brutal

MOUSSOBA: I hold the stinger!

CHORUS: I imagined the knife held up
Already drunk with the breath of my blood
I imagined the blade rusted
With blood
With all sorts of blood
So I begged my mother
They not touch me
With a knife
That had bathed
In so many bloods
Since I was condemned
I implored them to use my own knife
I begged so long and so strong that my mother...

MOUSSOBA: Very well, give me her cursed knife and let's get this over with. I have three other operations before dawn.

The mother hands her the switch blade.

CHORUS:
With ashes
Between her thumb and her index
The lady-of-the-knife massaged
The stinger
Then Bintu had the feeling
Her body was getting longer
Her body was dilating

To the edge of the earth
My body stretched out
My body lay calm
When suddenly...

The click of the switch blade which Moussoba opens.

Immediately I felt the icy kiss
Of the blade on the crest of my secret

One girl in the chorus screams. Slowly, blood trickles from the handle of the knife down the raised arm of Moussoba.

Then it was
Fire
Blood
Night

The uncle lays Bintu on the ground.

BINTU: (*Sitting up, as if in a dream*) Of course, Papa didn't come. Even on such a special day, he preferred to hide in his room. Thank you, Mama, thank you for my gown. It is beautiful, truly beautiful. This red veil studded with precious stones is sumptuous. I am fulfilled. I had no idea that getting married would fill me with so much joy. I am so happy, Mama, I would like to embrace the entire world.

My Lycaons! (*The three Lycaons appear: Kelkhal is dressed as an Arab prince, Blackout as an African prince, and Manu—who is holding a police officer's hat in one hand—is dressed as a European Renaissance prince.*) I was afraid you might be mad at me for... Come, Okoume, my killer with silken hands, come. (*She kisses him.*) And you, Kader, my warrior with your eyes full of secret poems, come. (*She kisses him.*) Emmanuel, my Bewitching... (*Manu hands her the police hat.*) For me? So you did it at last. Blackout lent you his gun and bang! Then Kelkhal covered for you... And to think I was afraid you wouldn't come. But you're all here and bearing a wedding gift, the scalp of a boy in blue. (*She kisses Manu.*) My Lycaons, my three crazy Magi, as L'tle John says... Where is he? Where is L'tle John? (*L'tle John appears.*) Ah, there... Don't be shy, come closer. (*She hugs him.*) Isn't my gown beautiful? My mother made it herself. (*She lifts up her leg toward him.*) Go ahead, it's for you. Come now, don't be so shy, take the garter, it's for you. (*L'tle John reaches out to take the imaginary garter but then recoils. Horrified, he stares at his hands.*) From where is all this blood on your hands screaming? L'tle John? (*He covers his face in his hands and runs across the stage.*) And my gown... it's covered with spots. I'm losing my blood, all my blood is spilling out... Mama, my life is spilling out, I'm being emptied of myself, of everything... All this blood. I had no idea I had so much blood in me...

He has come at last
my great crimson bird with golden wings
My blood is a great bird
who carries me away on wings of fire
I am the great bird
plunging into the waiting blood-shot sky

Sinks into me the hard impatience of the void
I am the great red bird

Bird... circle... line... point...
I am... I am... I am

Bintu falls to the ground. The chorus sings an Arab mourning song while the Lycaons lift the body above their heads and carry her out. The family, visibly worried, scatters.

MOUSSOBA: Your daughter was not brave. Bintu preferred to crawl into bed with death. Your daughter was not made for this world and she has returned to the source. Only the night is witness to this drama. Clean away the blood and dig her grave here. Nobody will ever think of looking inside your home. And remember that as long as the cracks are sealed, the cockroach can not nest. Abstain from any sign of mourning. Especially, refrain from weeping; your grief could betray you.

She exits. Each in their corner, the family glares at each other. Silence. The uncle leaves then returns with a shovel. He begins digging while the lights go down. When the lights come up again, he is throwing the last shovels of dirt on the grave. Suddenly, he notices the choir surrounding him.

UNCLE: Who are you? (*Silence.*) When did you come in? (*Silence.*) What did you see? (*Silence.*) Who are you? Friends of Bintu? (*Silence. The uncle begins to panic and back away.*) If you're friends here for Bintu, she's not home. She's gone away, back to her country. Our home country. But she'll be back. In a month. Just the time to meet her whole family, then she'll be back. (*Silence.*) But speak, say something! Who are you and what do you want from me? (*Silence.*) You know, Bintu had never set foot in her country, so her mother thought it was a good time for the trip... for her good... But you know Bintu. She may decide she won't ever come back again, on a whim... For God's sake, stop following me around.

He backs out followed by the chorus.

LIGHTS DOWN

THE LOST ENVELOPE*

A tragi-comedy by PIERRE MUMBERE MUJOMBA

Translated from the French and adapted by JILL MAC DOUGALL

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Mujomba, Pierre Mumbere. 2002. *La dernière enveloppe*. Éditions Lansman, Carnières, Belgium.

Mujomba, Pierre Mumbere and Mac Dougall, Jill. *The Lost Envelope*.

Note:

The English version, *The Lost Envelope*, was originally commissioned by UBU Repertory Theater. Both the English and the French versions were revised after playwright workshops with the author and translator and staged readings at the Lark Theater in New York City

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

BOULOS, Mama Domina's nephew, a university student

KISIMBA, Mama Domina's head servant

FREDERICK MAFIKIRI, a professor, Mama Domina's language tutor

ZAWADI, a high school student, one of Boulos' girlfriends, Mafikiri's niece

MAMA DOMINA, an extremely rich and powerful woman

MARIO PRIMO, a popular bandleader, one of Mama Domina's gigolos/suppliers

CAROLINE MAKYADI, Mafikiri's wife

TIME/SETTING

The action takes place over one weekend in one of the numerous luxurious salons in one of Mama Domina's numerous luxurious mansions.

Nouveau-riche decor, opulent wood, brass, over-upholstered furniture, antique bureaus and table. A backlit bar with shelves of glasses and bottles. At the back wall, a huge safe masked by faux tableaux and mirrored panels.

Besides the main door to the hall, multiple exits lead to the master bedrooms, the hidden corridors and the labyrinthine tunnels of the mansion.

SCENE 1
Saturday afternoon

Dogs barking.

Popular African dance music.

Boulos is alone on stage, admiring himself in one of the mirrors as he dances a few steps. He has his cell phone to his ear. He turns down the music when his call comes through.

BOULOS:

(Excited) Hey, Albatross. Boulos here. We're all set. I found the money, so I've got enough for the hat... It was there all along. Don't know where my head was. So I'm on my way... No, I'd rather we go buy the rainbow hats together. You'll see, the effect will be spectacular, with the two girls and us in matching outfits. Like in February with the two hairdressers... What?... The party will go on all night... but around two we can slip away someplace with the girls... No problem. Auntie Domina is off on one of her cultural tours and won't be back until tomorrow night... Listen, Albatross, don't forget to bring your cell phone. I'll have to turn mine off to avoid any unexpected calls from Auntie. Bye now, I'll meet you in twenty.

Kisimba enters.

KISIMBA:

Brother Boulos—

BOULOS:

Master Boulos! How many times have I told you that I am not your brother, that you address the nephew of Mama Domina as Master, Sir, Boss? Tell me, Houseboy Kisimba, do I, Boulos bin Pavassa, look anything like your brother?

KISIMBA:

No, bro... Boss... No, sir.

BOULOS:

What's going on out there? You're sweating like a water jug. Did a snake bite you or what?

KISIMBA:

There are two snakes at the gate biting each other: your fiancée Angela, student at the polytech high school, and your fiancée Rosalie, who's finishing medical school.

BOULOS:

Those crazy women. Get rid of them. Whatever you do, don't tell them I'm home. I crossed them off my list a long time ago.

KISIMBA:

How could I know? They seemed awfully good looking to me.

BOULOS:

Get rid of them, I tell you, or I will get rid of all three of you forever. If they don't obey, wake up Mbwa Mabay, the most ferocious of Mama Domina's dogs. His big beautiful teeth will discipline them as he did the others last evening, that haughty Marie Jeanne and her rival Marie Josée.

KISIMBA:

Madame Domina has forbidden me to wake Mbwa Mabay during his constitutional nap.

BOULOS:

Do as I say. Auntie left this afternoon for Switzerland.

KISIMBA:

What? This afternoon? She said she was leaving this evening as usual.

BOULOS:

Mind your own business and get rid of those two beggars at the door. I'm going out in three minutes to meet Albatross. I won't be back tonight. If Auntie phones, tell her that I've fallen ill again, that I've taken sleeping pills and turned my phone off. Give Mbwa Mabay 140 centiliters of okapi blood, 140 of Scandinavian breast milk, 140 grams of aboriginal liver, and 140 of pygmy roast.

KISIMBA:

Boss, there's also Mister Professor waiting. He came to get his salary. I left him in the ninth salon of the people. I don't know if Madame had time to prepare his envelope.

BOULOS:

When has Auntie ever left without first preparing the professor's envelope?

KISIMBA:

Never. She always puts it in the third drawer of the third bureau here in the Kifunga Tumbu salon. (*Opening the drawer*) But, for some odd reason, it's not here. She must have forgotten, but that's alright. She'll do it tomorrow.

BOULOS:

Look in all the drawers of all the bureaus of all the salons in the mansion.

KISIMBA:

It's never in another salon or another drawer. She always puts the envelope in this one, every last Saturday of the month before leaving. But... I guess you never know.

Both search frantically in all the drawers in vain.

BOULOS:

Kisimba, the game is up. Admit you stole the professor's envelope.

KISIMBA: How could I steal the envelope when I know that to steal even a peanut would cost me a lot more than my job?

BOULOS:

But you said Auntie never forgets to prepare the envelope, so why would she have forgotten? And, on top of that, why did you say, before even opening the drawer, "I don't know if she had time to prepare the professor's envelope"? Huh? Tell me. Because you already knew it wasn't in the drawer. And how could you know that? (*Pause.*) Question mark...

KISIMBA:

Because Madame left earlier than usual. Normally, she prepares the envelope here in the Kifunga Tumbu salon and slips it in this drawer at exactly eight o'clock. Then she gives me her instructions until eight forty-five when she leaves for the airport.

BOULOS:

No, Kisimba Houseboy, if you said "I don't know *if*" it's because you already knew it was missing. It couldn't be there because you had taken it.

KISIMBA:

Master, listen to me, (*gesture of slashing his throat with his index finger each time he swears*) I swear on my father's tomb, I swear on my grandfather's tomb, I swear on my—

BOULOS:

—that you have not *yet* spent the money in the envelope you absconded with?

KISIMBA:

That I have not seen, nor touched, nor hidden, nor used the envelope in any way.

BOULOS:

If you want my advice, it would be better to put it back right now. Tomorrow morning will be too late. You know the law in this house is implacable and that your predecessor spent two years in prison for having stolen merely a banana.

KISIMBA:

I spent ten years with the missionaries and I am incapable of stealing so much as a button. In any case, I'm sure Madame just forgot to prepare the envelope and she will attend to it as soon as she comes back.

BOULOS:

Attend to what? To the envelope that you emptied in hopes Auntie would prepare another for the professor. You are wrong, Kisimba Houseboy, and tomorrow you will meet the same fate as your predecessor who joined his ancestors after being thrown in a cauldron of boiling oil.

SCENE 2

A knock at the door. Professor Mafikiri enters.

MAFIKIRI:

Good afternoon, Boulos. I have come for my envelope and I am in a hurry.

BOULOS:

I will leave you with Kisimba about this business. I have lots of errands to run up and down town. You see, Auntie flew off on her cultural trip to Switzerland as she does every last Saturday of the month and she left me all kinds of business to tend to. Can I serve you something to drink? A cold beer? A little Bordeaux? A scotch perhaps?

MAFIKIRI:

Just a glass of water, thanks.

BOULOS:

Kisimba, a bottle of water for this gentleman. (*Teeth clenched, he murmurs something in Kisimba's ear then waves to Mafikiri.*) Bye now. Good luck. (*He exits.*)

KISIMBA:

(*Quickly and nervously serving Mafikiri the water*) As Madame told you, you won't have any classes with her daughter, Miss Doris, until next Wednesday because of her rehearsals for the beauty pageant at the Intercontinental Hotel. As for your envelope, Mister Professor, just come by tomorrow. You can't get it before then because Madame is away.

MAFIKIRI:

What happened to the one she prepared before leaving as usual?

KISIMBA:

She was in such a rush she didn't have time to get it together before she left. We went through all the drawers of all the bureaus of all the twenty-three salons of this mansion. Not a trace. Conclusion? You must come back tomorrow.

MAFIKIRI:

Suppose she doesn't return tomorrow?

KISIMBA:

That is absolutely impossible. In all four years I've worked here, every weekend Madame goes to see a film in Switzerland, she always returns... tomorrow.

MAFIKIRI:

No, tomorrow is too far away, too late. First of all, I have a very sick child. Second, my family will starve if we don't get some food soon.

KISIMBA:

Sorry, but you'll have to wait until tomorrow evening.

MAFIKIRI:

Then just give me some food for my family until she returns. When I get my envelope, I'll reimburse you. How will I look this evening if I go home empty-handed?

KISIMBA:

Sorry, everything is calculated by computer here. Nothing goes out and nothing comes in without the agreement of this intelligent machine, extraordinarily intelligent, but without pity.

MAFIKIRI:

Yet I was offered whisky and wine without going through any kind of machine.

KISIMBA:

Ah, yes. For beverages it's different, we have faucets for our guests. Faucets with lemonade, beer, wine, liqueurs, whatever you wish, everywhere in the mansion, next to the mausoleum, on the banks of our Tupacamaru River, all around each of the fourteen swimming pools, in each of the ninety-nine baobabs, in each of the four zoos, and God knows where else.

MAFIKIRI:

I'll just spend the night in this armchair and wait until Madame returns.

KISIMBA:

(Grabbing back the water before Mafikiri sits down) Oh, no sir. Just who do you think you are and just where do you think you are? You may have walked into the Philadelphia mansion unannounced, but you're not going to squat here all night!

MAFIKIRI:

But I must see Mama Domina. I need my envelope to get my son to the clinic. As a brother, you must understand.

KISIMBA:

Sir, I am not your brother. Don't force me to tell you what Boulos said to do with you in case you refused to leave.

MAFIKIRI:
What's that?

KISIMBA:
You really want to know? You swear you will not get angry and that you will leave this house immediately?

MAFIKIRI:
I swear.

KISIMBA:
He said, if you do not go peacefully, I have his permission to arouse all the forty-two dogs of the mansion who will turn you into mincemeat, just as they did yesterday with the two recalcitrant, I mean recalcitrant young ladies. That's what.

MAFIKIRI:
Very well. I will come back early tomorrow. *(He exits.)*

KISIMBA:
(Shrugging to the audience) Bah, what am I supposed to do? I'm just protecting my job.

The lights come down.

SCENE 3 *Sunday evening*

Humming, Kisimba is cleaning the salon, dusting, polishing, fluffing up the pillows. He looks right and left before settling into an armchair with a lordly pose. He brandishes his feather duster like a chief. Suddenly, he feels an object under the cushion.

KISIMBA:
(Pulling out a remote control device) By all the sons of Abraham! What have we here? Someone's lost their remote control to the safe!

He presses a button. A glass drawer in the safe cabinet glows. Behind the glass, a large gold coin twirls.

KISIMBA:
Holy Moses! The Coin of Lucifer!

Trying to open the drawer, Kisimba presses other buttons. Stacks of bills, of coins, of gold bricks light up behind other glass drawers.

KISIMBA:

My lucky day! Open sesame...

Frenetic, Kisimba presses the keys. He does not succeed in opening any drawer, but remains dazzled by their content. A warning begins to beep. He manages to turn this off and stuff the remote in his apron pocket just as voices are heard in the hallway.

Boulos enters with Zawadi at his side. Both are decked out in gaudy outfits, including elaborate multicolored hats.

BOULOS:

Kisimba!

KISIMBA:

(Clicking his heels) Ah, it's you bro.... Good evening, sir. You couldn't come home last night of course.

BOULOS:

Why are you cleaning this salon at six-thirty in the evening?

KISIMBA:

All the twenty-two other salons have been cleaned by the staff, but I always tend personally to the Kifunga Tumbu salon. It's been a busy day. Madame Domina called four times and I told her you were sick in bed, just like you said. Mister Professor came by four more times about his envelope. A woman also called on you, then another, then a few others, about eight in all, not counting the two mastodons who ripped off each other's skin right before my very eyes.

BOULOS:

Stop your prattling and get out.

Kisimba scurries out.

ZAWADI:

So, ten women called on you...

BOULOS:

He's a pathological liar. He lies like he breathes and babbles anything he dreamt up during the night.

ZAWADI:

In any case, I told you: no diseases, no pregnancies, no scars. I'm fourteen years old, I'm beautiful, I love life and I love school. I have to finish my studies.

BOULOS:

And you will. Thanks to Boulos. I will pay your lowly professors in American dollars.

ZAWADI:

In the meantime, give me the money for the jewelry you promised.

BOULOS:

Why such a hurry? You're not going anywhere, are you, lovely Zawadi?

ZAWADI:

Yes I am. I told you I could only come in for a second just to see where you live. This is the first time I spent the night out. My family must be worried about me. And suppose my uncle were to drop by and find me here?

BOULOS:

What family? What uncle? You mean that miserable professor who lives from hand to mouth and can't even feed you? Who in this world doesn't have relatives to deal with? Who doesn't have aunts, uncles, cousins, huh? I have real relatives, Zawadi, the kind who throw away \$5000 a day without blinking. I have an aunt made of gold, little Zawadi.

ZAWADI:

My fiancé doesn't know where I am either.

BOULOS:

What fiancé? You mean that miserable little student who eats nothing but leftover cassava day in and day out? How much does this guy in his ragged clothes offer you, huh, how many dollars a day?

ZAWADI:

At least he's finishing his degree in economics and has a firm promise of a scholarship in Canada. Whereas you, you're still messing around in your freshman year.

BOULOS:

(Slapping her) Shut up. Idiot girl. Have you no shame to insult me like that in my own house?

Zawadi covers her face, pretending to cry, but then bursts out laughing.

BOULOS:

What are you laughing at?

ZAWADI:

I love it when you slap me with your caressing hand, your caressing slap that holds all the caresses of the world. It makes me want to turn the other cheek. Zawadi's right cheek, delighting in the second slap. The slap of Boulos. The one that resounds like a love poem. That contains all

the happiness in the world. Ah, Boulos, kiss me, Boulos. (*He lunges for her, but she slips away.*) No, not yet, a glass of whisky first.

BOULOS:

(*He grabs a bottle and a glass which he hands to her.*) Here's a full bottle, help yourself. To your health, my dear.

She pours herself a glass. The intercom phone rings.

BOULOS:

(*Picking up*) Hello... Yes, this is Boulos speaking, Boulos bin Pavassa, yes, who is this?... The gate man? Imbecile, why are you calling me? I am trying to get some rest, you cretin... What? Mama Domina is back? How could...? In two minutes! Okay, thanks. (*Frantic*) Put down your glass, Zawadi. Auntie is on her way. Her plane from Geneva got in an hour early and she'll be here in thirty seconds. I am doomed, I am damned, I am down the tube. Quick. She mustn't find you here. I'm supposed to be sick in bed. Go hide in my room. This way, second corridor, third door to your left. No, come back. Here, hide under the table.

Zawadi follows his instructions, bobbing in and out, up and down.

BOULOS:

No, not there, come out... (*As she does so*) No, no, stay there.

ZAWADI:

(*Sticking her head out from under the table*) What about my jewelry?

BOULOS:

Yes, the jewelry. Where is the stuff Albatross gave me? Ah, here. (*Rummaging through his pockets, he grabs some bills he hands to Zawadi.*) Here, make do with that.

ZAWADI:

Thank you, Boulos.

KISIMBA:

(*Entering*) Boss...

BOULOS:

Oh, there you are! Straighten up the room. Auntie will be here in a few seconds.

KISIMBA:

What do you mean? In a few seconds?

BOULOS:

Do as I tell you. Okay, I am ill as we know, and I am returning to bed. You will bring a thermos of hot tea to my room (*pulling off his clothes*) and take these (*handing Kisimba the clothes, the bottle, the glass*). Check to see I have sugar and pills in my room. And bring me my nightshirt.

KISIMBA:

Yes, Boss. (*Laden down, he rushes about "straightening up the room" in double-time. He manages to slip the remote device back under the cushion before exiting.*)

BOULOS:

(*To Zawadi*) Auntie allows me anything I want, but when she's on one of her cultural trips, I am not allowed to leave the house.

ZAWADI:

(*Still under the table*) What am I supposed to do?

BOULOS:

Come over here, behind the door. Hide there until Auntie comes in, then, as soon as she turns her back, you zip out.

ZAWADI:

(*Falsely innocent*) If she finds me here, will she beat me black and blue?

BOULOS:

Be quiet.

ZAWADI:

(*Hiding behind the door*) But, Boulos, you promised me jewelry.

BOULOS:

Just shut up, you little parrot.

KISIMBA:

(*Popping in again*) Boss, here's your nightshirt, your thermos, your cup... (*Looking around*) But where did the most favored of the favored of the moment go?

BOULOS:

She's hiding behind the door. Listen, as soon as Auntie gets here, I'll come out of my room and you disappear with the girl while I'm welcoming her home. (*Hearing steps*) Watch out! She's coming.

KISIMBA:

I—

BOULOS:
Shh. Just get behind the door.

Kisimba goes behind the door with Zawadi who is busy counting her money. Boulos rushes out.

Hushed conversation between Kisimba and Zawadi.

SCENE 4

Mama Domina storms in.

DOMINA:
Where the hell is everybody?

BOULOS:
(*Entering from his room in his nightshirt*) Ah, hello Auntie, welcome home.

He gives her a peck on both cheeks while gesturing to Kisimba and Zawadi.

Kisimba and Zawadi sneak out.

DOMINA:
Every single time I come back from my cultural tour, the house is in havoc.

BOULOS:
Oh, me too. Every single time I'm sick, like today, and that I stay in bed all day, like today, things just turn into fish stew.

DOMINA:
Kisimba!

Kisimba enters briskly.

KISIMBA:
At your service, Madame.

DOMINA:
Get the car parked in the ninth row of the fifth garage. Get the truck unloaded in the thirteenth warehouse.

KISIMBA:

Yes, Madame, but first allow me to give my report. Your prize hound, Mbwa Mabay, has lost interest in his food. He did not finish the fifteen pounds of filet. He shows laziness in his drinking and dogly duties.

DOMINA:

Double his ration of okapi blood and Scandinavian breast milk. Add five grams of ultraviolet gold and spike it with a hint of scarlet gold.

KISIMBA:

And your fourth daughter called from boarding school. She needs a thousand dollars.

DOMINA:

Okay, fine.

KISIMBA:

And her older sister called too. She said to tell you: "I've thrown out the Yugoslavian for a Japanese guy."

DOMINA:

Smart move. Any other calls? Is Mario Primo here yet? Did Professor Mafikiri come by?

KISIMBA:

Yes, Madame, and they're both waiting to see you. What should I tell them?

BOULOS:

Auntie, in my opinion, the professor is becoming quite a bother. I think you should just say you're tired from your trip and he should stop pestering you.

DOMINA:

What's gotten into you, Boulos?

BOULOS:

The professor has to learn to respect you, Auntie. You can't be at his beck and call, he can't just drop by at any moment of the day or night, on a Sunday besides. I am simply keeping in mind all the daily advice you've given me on rigor, logic, geometry, punctuality, order, and discipline.

DOMINA:

(*To Kisimba*) Show Mario Primo in first. I'll see Professor Mafikiri later if I have time.
Kisimba exits.

BOULOS:

Auntie, I have scheduled a work session with Albatross, for homework we have to hand in tomorrow.

DOMINA:

No, Boulos, you can't go out. Clearly, you have a raging fever and—

BOULOS:

It's going down as we speak. A little outing would do me good.

DOMINA:

Then we can go into town together after I've dealt with my appointments.

BOULOS:

Alright, I'll just get some fresh air in the meantime.

DOMINA:

You'll get some fresh air *on* the premises, you hear.

BOULOS:

As you wish, Auntie. See you later. (*He exits.*)

KISIMBA:

(*Entering to announce*) Madame, Mister Mario Primo-the-First.

DOMINA:

Show him in, then leave us alone.

Kisimba exits.

SCENE 5

Mario Primo enters, striking a cord on his guitar.

DOMINA:

Mario, sweetheart, come give Mama a big kiss.

MARIO:

(*After a long, sensual embrace*) How was your trip?

DOMINA:

Great. Except I'm jetlagged jittery.

MARIO:

Just relax. (*He massages her shoulders.*) I hope you brought me...

DOMINA:

(*Enjoying the massage*) M-m-m... Lots of stuff. A sound system, more electric guitars and shoes, real Italianis, the latest fashion as of last week in Rome, Venice, Florence, even the Vatican.

MARIO:

Cool. They'll be hot on our TV show. All the rival bands will die of jealousy. How many guitars did you bring me? What about the drums?

DOMINA:

I'll show you later, after the service. We'll meet at the Intercontinental Hotel. Go straight to my suite and wait for me. I'll join you around two in the morning, after the prayer, unless the Living Prophet detains us through dawn for the Nocturnal Smorgasbord.

MARIO:

The Nocturnal Smorgasbord? What's it like? Perhaps I could join you for the ceremony?

DOMINA:

Hardly. You have to be initiated.

MARIO:

I thought as the next-in-line High Priestess of the E.C.S.D.R.J.B.A., you might intervene...

DOMINA:

(*With pride and delight*) Yes, I am next in line. I will become High Priestess of the Evangelical Community of the Shore Dwellers of the River Jesus and His Branches and Apostles in exactly three years, three months and four days. I will be coronated on the banks of the river just before sunrise. Then I will be at the right hand of His Eminence, the Living Prophet.

MARIO:

I would love to learn more about your religion. I would love to take part in—

DOMINA:

Patience, dear little Mario, is a virtue you seem to lack. (*Briskly*) Run along now and wait for me at the hotel. We have lots to talk about. Last night I hit on a Swiss market, several millions. By Friday evening I'll need a dozen crates of okapi marrow, a thousand liters of pygmy blood, and several pounds of virgin mulatto thigh. Plus the usual diamonds and Colombo-Tantalita. I hope you and your band are ready for this week's tour. I need the merchandise by Saturday morning at the latest. Have you packed yet?

MARIO:

We're all set to go... Except... except... except...

DOMINA:

Except, except, except, what? We can't allow any excepts here.

MARIO:

We've run into a snag. Two of the musicians left the band to join the Ngobila Stars. They were corrupted with an offer of ten thousand dollars. So I need to—

DOMINA:

What! Who? How much do they know? Who are the Ngobila Stars working for? Do your musicians know the codes?

MARIO:

No. Just the location. They were on tour the last time when we found the Kyabirimu diamond mine and the bone marrow spring.

DOMINA:

Santa Maria! This is a disaster! How could you let them go? You should never have left them out of your sight! Mario Primo, just when will you grow up? Idiot boy, are you still blind in your mother's belly?

MARIO:

Calm down. We can fix this.

DOMINA:

And just how are we going to fix it? We need the stuff by the end of the week. Santa Lucia! You've stirred up my United ulcers, my Air France frenzy, my Lufthansa lumbago—

MARIO:

Mama, just take a deep breath. (*Massaging her temples*) There now. All we have to do is triple the offer the Stars made. Believe me, they'll come running back.

DOMINA:

(*Gulping for air*) Are you sure?

MARIO:

Absolutely. I know my guys.

DOMINA:

(*Calming down*) They'll be back by tonight? You'll take care of it? You promise?

MARIO:

Yes, Mam'.

DOMINA:

And they'll come back for just... (*Breaking away*) Hey, wait a minute, that means thirty-thousand bucks! Santa Madre! Couldn't you manage with a double offer?

MARIO:

Triple is better.

After a long sigh, Domina opens the safe with her remote, and counts out the money.

She is about to hand the bills to Mario.

MARIO:

(Eagerly grasping toward the money) I'm on my way as soon as...

Domina pulls back the money, catching Mario off-balance.

DOMINA:

Hold on. I think we need a little vocabulary lesson before you go. Or have you forgotten? When you come here, is it just to take home your sound system, your shoes, your money?

MARIO:

No, Mam'. I come here for my little vocabulary lesson.

DOMINA:

I had your predecessor, Mario-the-Soccer-Player, quartered in pieces for forgetting three words. You wouldn't believe what happened to *his* predecessors. Go ahead, recite it to me. At the least hesitation I'll withdraw my signature from your credit card.

MARIO:

Obviously, with all the emotions I feel seeing you, the joy, the surprise, I—

DOMINA:

Emotions have no effect on your memory.

MARIO:

Emotions have a lot of effect on the memory, Mama. For example when I run my hands through your hair like this, when I stroke your arm like this...

DOMINA:

(Weakening at first, then furious, barking) Stop it. How dare you contradict me? I'm the one who keeps you alive, who takes care of all your problems. You have no right to contradict me at all. When I say yes, you say yes. When I say no, you say no. When I change my mind, you change your mind. During the day, you think what I think. At night, you dream what I dream. With your eyes closed, literally and figuratively. You do not exist. You are Mama Domina's shadow. You

are programmed like a video. I push a button and you appear. Another button and you disappear. I push a button and you go backward, another button and you stand still. I am America the almighty and you are a microscopic Micronesian dot. Do you get my gist?

MARIO:

At your orders, Mam'.

DOMINA:

Very well. Now, do emotions affect your memory?

MARIO:

Not at all, Mam'.

DOMINA:

So let's hear the lesson. Ultra-white gold. What is it?

MARIO:

Chapter three. Referring to the gold codes. "On our planet, some commodities are..."

DOMINA:

Cut to the chase. What is ultra-white gold?

MARIO:

Ultra-white gold: Adolescent marrow.

DOMINA:

What is ultra-violet gold?

MARIO:

Ultra-violet gold: Pygmy roast

DOMINA: Scarlet gold?

MARIO:

Infant organs. Petrol-blue gold is—

DOMINA:

That will do. Tell me now, what does "to draw palm wine" mean?

MARIO:

It means to extract organic fluids, which happens at 3:40 on Friday morning, on the banks of the river, in the presence of the Living Prophet, the Divine Odun Mulawatu, and his twelve disciples.

DOMINA:

Good. Give me the commercial definition of the human body.

MARIO:

The human body is the most lucrative merchandise in the world. It is the greatest palm oil tree. From the hair down to the toe nails, each part in its own way is like a precious stone, more valuable than diamonds or cobalt or—

DOMINA:

Satisfactory results. Listen now. (*Brandishing the bills just out of his reach*) Here's thirty-five thousand dollars to win back your stray musicians and for your gas on tour. Grab these guys back in the next hour. Then go wait for me at the Domina Intercontinental suite.

MARIO:

(*Anxious to grab the money and exit*) At your orders, Mam'.

DOMINA:

(*Tempting him back and forth with the money like a puppet on a string*) Go now. But beware, little Mario... One more mistake and you're cracked, cooked, crocked. Never mess with Mama Domina like that again. You owe me everything and don't you ever forget it. The day I suspect you're more interested in your sound systems, concerts, your little folk music than in me—I mean in our business venture—out you go just like the other Marios before you. And never, ever betray me or you will have to beg the thirty-two crocodiles of the Tupacamaru River for mercy. Go now.

She hands Mario the money with a papal grandeur. He kisses her hand as he takes the bills.

MARIO:

(*Bowing out*) Yes, Mam'.

DOMINA:

And remember: A man forewarned...

MARIO:

(*Pausing before exiting*) ...is a man forearmed.

DOMINA:

Exactly. (*Again seductive, blowing him a kiss*) See you in a bit.

Mario Primo exits.

SCENE 6

DOMINA:

Mario Primo thinks he really is the first and the last, Mario-the-Be-All-and-End-All. As if I didn't have Marios by the dozen. Ah, just to put my feet up, enjoy a nice little whisky and a juicy hamburger.

Kisimba enters holding a plate.

KISIMBA:

Madame, here is the supper that you ordered.

DOMINA:

What? I ordered something?

KISIMBA:

Boulos told me you wanted a plate of fish and beans and also that you wanted Mister Professor to leave and come back tomorrow evening.

DOMINA:

Really? And did he leave?

KISIMBA:

No, he refuses. He refuses more stubbornly than ever to leave unless you see him.

DOMINA:

(Approaching) Just what is this dish? Beans, huh? Do these look like real beans imported from America? And what is that rotten stench?

KISIMBA:

What stench, Madame?

DOMINA:

You don't smell the stench of rotten flesh?

KISIMBA:

No, Madame.

DOMINA:

Because you stink even more yourself. Where did these beans come from? National cargo, I bet.

KISIMBA:

Yes, Madame. They were delivered yesterday. Excuse me, but I can't refuse the delivery. First of all, it's free. Second, they're always in such a hurry that I never get the time to tell them you don't want the stuff.

DOMINA:

Did you take the trouble to ask if they'd come by boat or by air?

KISIMBA:

Madame, I can't believe they would insult you by sending you merchandise by boat!

DOMINA:

Therefore it is you who insult me, willingly and whole-heartedly, by serving me beans you willingly and whole-heartedly prepared without an inkling as to where they come from?

KISIMBA:

Please, Madame... I had the cook prepare them for me, but Boulos told me that you wanted—

DOMINA:

(Pouring the dish on his head) This is what I think of your technicolor scatter-brains. How many times have I said never to pollute my pans with national rot that's shipped by boat? The Concord, the Jumbo Jet, the DC 10, never heard of them? Lufthansa, British Airways, United, never heard of them? What got into your head to serve me your culinary insanities that reek of all the fumes of all the boats in the world? *(Picking up a piece of fish and observing it disdainfully)* This for example. Just what is this for fish?

KISIMBA:

It came yesterday with the beans.

DOMINA:

(Shoving the fish in his ear) Beans again! How many times do I have to tell you? Here we don't feed on your bushman *madesou*. We eat only organically-grown, hand-selected American beans. B-E-A-N-S. Not some *madede*-tropical-third-world mush.

KISIMBA:

Madame, I thought they were real B-E-A-N-S! I heard the truck driver say they were from Nigeria and Nigeria is a big, important place as far as I know.

DOMINA:

And you never stopped to think that Nigeria and malaria have the same ending?

KISIMBA:

I'm sorry, Madame, I didn't. It's only now that you mention it—

DOMINA:

Here we do not feed on vulgar fish. We eat “*poisson*” or “*pesce*.” We eat “*das Fisch*,” period! *Comprends-tu? Capici? Verstet?* Do you understand, Houseboy?

KISIMBA:

Oh yes Mam’... I mean *Oui, Madame*... I mean *Si, padrona*... I mean *Ja, meine Dame*. Yes, indeed I do.

DOMINA:

Here we eat only pure, domesticated European Union or United States of American trout, salmon, rockfish, mai-mai, and etcetera. We do not feed on *makayabou* that stink of transport ships and anchors and sailors and sea sickness and river sickness and whatever. Is that clear?

KISIMBA:

Crystal clear. Me understand you, Boss.

DOMINA:

Boy, while you are sucking up fodder, we are sucking up culture. Do you understand?

KISIMBA:

Yeah, me *verstets* you Mam’.

DOMINA:

We eat in the global fashion. You eat in the village fashion. Do you understand?

KISIMBA:

Oh *oui*, oh *si*, oh *ja*, oh yeah, Mam’.

DOMINA:

Now, do you smell that rotten stench?

KISIMBA:

‘Deed I do, 100%, Mam’.

DOMINA:

When primitive merchandise arrives through the very primitive national cargo, what have I instructed you to do?

KISIMBA:

To be careful.

DOMINA:

And if you hear they are from some ludicrous, bush, so-called nation?

KISIMBA:
To refuse. Out of the question.

DOMINA:
From third-worldliness?

KISIMBA:
Out of the question.

DOMINA:
If it came by boat?

KISIMBA:
Out of the question.

DOMINA:
By DC 4?

KISIMBA:
Out of the question.

DOMINA:
By DC 10?

KISIMBA:
Out of the question.

DOMINA:
Kisimba... Be careful...

KISIMBA:
Out of the question.

DOMINA:
What!

KISIMBA:
Oh, yes, sorry, Madame, yes, I must be careful, of course.

DOMINA:
I am ordering this carpet be burned and replaced by tomorrow morning. Otherwise it's you who will be burned and replaced by tomorrow night.

KISIMBA:

Certainly, Madame. At your service. (*He exits.*)

DOMINA:

(*Sighing*) Oh my. First holler, then philosophize. How else could I keep the role of Mama Domina? I have to yell at everybody, every day, all day long. What other way could I breathe in my power and smell my richness? How else without a multitude of bowing and scraping, down-trodden subjects? How would Europe and America ever have become masters of the world without the poverty-stricken Africas, the Asias, and all the other Latinas of the world? As the Living Prophet says "How could Mama Domina be Mama Domina if she could not feel with her own fingers and see with her own eyes the beautiful and inspiring suffering of the miserable masses?"

SCENE 7

Professor Mafikiri knocks then enters.

MAFIKIRI:

Good evening, Madame Domina.

DOMINA:

Ah, yes, Professor Mafikiri... I'm sorry I kept you waiting. There are mindless pigs running the house who have forgotten I just returned home with all my nerves jet-lagged jangled. You cannot imagine how dizzy you get grass-hoppering between Geneva, Paris, Rome before heading back home, especially after seeing a head-spinning film in equally head-spinning conditions. Would you believe it? The theatre rotates and climbs at appropriate moments. The movie is in four dimensions, plus the interactive dimension. When the scene takes place in a restaurant, the smell of the food rises to your nostrils. Not to mention the buttons you push when you feel the need to spit, sneeze, scratch or whatever else. And the ha-ha function that laughs for you when you don't feel like it. You must understand, with all that going on, I didn't have time to stop over in London for the dictionary you recommended.

MAFIKIRI:

You can do it next time.

DOMINA:

Did Kisimba tell you that from here on you will come on even days for my lessons and odd days for my daughter Doris. As for your payment envelope, you will henceforth receive it the last Thursday of the month, whatever the date. I presume you picked up the last one yesterday?

MAFIKIRI:

In fact, no. That's why I came by this evening. It seems you forgot to prepare the envelope.

DOMINA:

What! Has he totally lost his mind? All he had to do was look in this drawer... but... but... the envelope is gone. Professor, I must remind you that you have neither the habit of joking with me nor the right.

MAFIKIRI:

I am not joking, Madame.

DOMINA:

(Pressing a button that makes her voice reverberate) Kisimba. Boulos. Kisimba. Boulos... This is outrageous. Neither Kisimba nor Boulos has the right to touch an envelope. This is the first and last time, believe me. You'll see, I will show no mercy.

Kisimba and Boulos rush in.

DOMINA:

We'll clear this up right now. Kisimba Houseboy, did the professor get his envelope last evening?

KISIMBA:

I don't know, Madame.

DOMINA:

Boulos...?

BOULOS:

I don't know, Auntie.

DOMINA:

Very well. Professor, you will have to come back tomorrow morning.

MAFIKIRI:

Madame, if it weren't for the fact that—

DOMINA:

Professor, I can't tell you anything at this point except that I will personally look into this business.

MAFIKIRI:

Madame, I have a child who is seriously ill.

DOMINA:

Professor, I am not a doctor.

MAFIKIRI:

He is so sick that if he doesn't get care now, he'll—

DOMINA:

(Shouting) You will treat your off-spring tomorrow morning and that's all there is to it!

MAFIKIRI:

(Hesitating) Very well, Madame. Until later then.

Discouraged, Mafikiri exits.

DOMINA:

Now to you two. Tell me immediately what happened to the professor's envelope.

BOULOS:

Auntie, I can't tell you anything about this missing envelope. First of all, it's none of my business and certainly not my priority. Second, I was not here the entire day.

DOMINA:

Ah, so, in spite of the fact that, less than an hour ago, you declared you were sick in bed, you now you tell me you weren't here all day!

BOULOS:

When I tell you I wasn't here all day, I mean I wasn't *here*, in the Kifunga Tumbu salon where the envelope was.

DOMINA:

Houseboy Kisimba?... I'm listening.

KISIMBA:

Madame, I thought Boulos had taken the envelope from the drawer to give it to Mister Professor. In fact, yesterday, I saw Brother Boulos three times in the Kifunga Tumbu salon and the third time he was indeed with Mister Professor.

DOMINA:

Listen, both of you. I am still dizzy with my Concord vertigo, I am at wits end with your crummy contradictions. I give you ten minutes to find the envelope, otherwise you will learn first hand how I treat vulgar crooks. Excuse me, you will *know* it, not learn it. You will have a lesson burned into your flesh and not live to tell it. I warn you, I will be without pity, I will be draconian, and I forbid you to add another word!

She exits slamming the door.

SCENE 8

BOULOS:

Houseboy Kisimba, I have homework to do, I have important errands to run before midnight, and I have to meet Albatross for a question of life or death. In other words, I have no time to waste. Just give her the envelope and Auntie will forgive and forget.

KISIMBA:

I have no idea where it is.

BOULOS:

So you lost it.

KISIMBA:

I didn't lose it.

BOULOS:

So you know where you hid it.

KISIMBA:

I didn't hide it.

BOULOS:

So it's within reach.

KISIMBA:

I suppose.

BOULOS:

You suppose or you know?

KISIMBA:

Yes... No... Yes... No...

BOULOS:

Why don't you just stop all this double-talk, fetch the envelope, and give it to Auntie. We'll turn the page and I can go back to my business.

KISIMBA:

How can I fetch an envelope I've never touched?

BOULOS:

Such contradictions! “I’ve never seen,” then “I’ve never touched,” “I never hid,” “I didn’t misplace.” You touched it without seeing it, hid it without touching it, lost it without misplacing it?

KISIMBA:

I could not misplace it since—

BOULOS:

Since you still have it.

KISIMBA:

I don’t have it.

BOULOS:

Therefore you spent it.

KISIMBA:

I didn’t spend it.

BOULOS:

Kisimba, listen to me. Auntie is not as mean as she seems and I will do everything in my power to get her to forgive you as she did for the disappearance of the electronic pruning shears, a thousand times more precious than a measly paper envelope with a few bills. And why did she forgive you? Because you had the good sense to confess to the crime.

KISIMBA:

And why did I confess? Because I had in fact lost the shears. What can I confess in this case?

BOULOS:

So you suspect me?

KISIMBA:

I didn’t say that! But, perhaps you might have confused it with your nightclub budget, out on the town with lovely young things?

BOULOS:

Houseboy, what is left of your brain? You forget I have credit cards that let me in free anywhere, that allow me to drink and eat in any club, restaurant, or hotel in the country.

KISIMBA:

What I meant was—

BOULOS:

Shut up, enough talk. You're wasting my time with this. My time is worth diamonds. If you have already spent the envelope, just hurry and fess up to Auntie.

KISIMBA:

I'll never confess to something I didn't do.

BOULOS:

Since my time is even more precious than diamonds, I will settle this. Go confess to Auntie that *you* made a mistake. To err is human, after all. And I will personally plead your cause to Auntie.

KISIMBA:

Last week, when I lost the electronic shears, I begged you to defend me and you refused. And this Sunday evening, if I admit to a mistake that you know perfectly well I didn't make, you expect me to believe you? Oh, no Mister Master Boulos. If you think you can catch me in a trap and pull a worm out of my nose that was never there, forget it.

BOULOS:

Listen here Houseboy, if you think I'm trying to trick you, just go pour that story in Auntie's little ear, just see what happens to you then, just try—

KISIMBA:

I could. I could also tell her you did not spend the night here, that you ran off with one of your teenage concubines, and that—

BOULOS:

And that since I was out all night, you were alone here, and being the only one who knew the place of the professor's systematic envelope...

KISIMBA:

Uh...

BOULOS:

And how naive do you think Auntie is to believe I'm out on the town when you yourself told her over the phone that I was sick all day yesterday and today, and was safely in bed.

KISIMBA:

Uh...

BOULOS:

And what relationship could there possibly be between the professor's ten puny dollars and the tens of hundreds I regularly spend at clubs with my girlfriends?

KISIMBA:

Uh...

BOULOS:

And last, you forget that suspecting me is to mock Mama Domina. Like this poor-miserable-nephew of a poor-miserable-auntie needs to embezzle a poor-miserable envelope. This is the kind of insult for which your predecessor, the defunct Sinamali, was properly emasculated by the electronic shears before being properly hung up to freeze in the meat locker and joining his ancestors in hell.

KISIMBA:

Brother, listen to me—

BOULOS:

For God's sake, am I going to waste any more of my breath giving sound advice to a hopeless moron! Farewell, Houseboy. It was your choice. Prepare to join the country of your ancestors. (*Pretending to exit*) See you later in the deep freeze.

KISIMBA:

(*Grabbing him by the sleeve*) Oh no, please don't do this to me. Have pity on my three wives and sixteen children.

BOULOS:

(*Magnanimously*) I do have pity. And to prove it, I'll lend you five dollars. If you can come up with the other five, we'll just put it in an envelope and tell Auntie you misplaced it like you did the shears.

KISIMBA:

Madame will want to know where we found it and why I misplaced it. She'll be watching me like a hawk.

BOULOS:

Alright then. Let's just tell the truth. Since we didn't find the envelope, we put together the ten dollars to be done with the problem.

KISIMBA:

Madame will still want to know who the culprit is and since she'll probably conclude I stole the envelope, she won't bother with a trial before cutting off my head and throwing my remains to the flesh-eating plants.

BOULOS:

Then suppose we put my head at stake. Let's give her back the envelope saying that I, Boulos, misplaced it while looking for a textbook or my remote control, and that you have absolutely nothing to do with this family business. What do you think?

KISIMBA:

Great idea! You'll see, she'll have no problem at all forgiving you. Let's be quick. (*Digging into his pockets*) Here's the five dollars. Quick...

BOULOS:

(*Jubilant*) Ah, ha! You are not supposed to have a penny to your name in this house. Now that I have evidence you have ready cash, prove to me you did not steal the professor's envelope.

(*Pause*) Bad move. Very bad move, poor, poor, poor Kisimba Houseboy. Keep the whole envelope and you can spend it in hell. I am ready to expose you. Auntie! Auntie!

KISIMBA:

Boulos, brother, master, listen to me—

BOULOS:

(*Calling out in the hallway*) Auntie! Auntie! Auntie!

KISIMBA:

Boss! Boss! Boss! Lord, what will happen to my sixteen children?

DOMINA:

(*Bursting in*) Who is the neurotic making all this noise, blasting my name in the hallway with no respect for the vertigo of Mama Domina? You don't believe the Concord made me dizzy, is that it? If you have nothing better to do than scream at the top of your lungs, if you mock my frazzled nerves, then I will show you straight away how to make mincemeat of two petty thieves.

BOULOS:

Of one petty thief, Auntie. He's the one who made off with the professor's envelope. I had to use all the Greco-Roman-Egyptian science I've learned to wheedle it out of him. Only then did he suggest we both contribute to restore the ten dollars.

KISIMBA:

I swear I never saw nor touched the professor's envelope. What I wanted to suggest was—

BOULOS:

—that we each contribute to restore the money! He has as much as confessed and he is not ashamed to keep on lying. A compulsive crook and an equally pathological liar.

KISIMBA:

Who's lying here? Maybe it was one of your two square-headed mistresses who came by yesterday and took the money... Or maybe it was the latest and loveliest who—

BOULOS:

Auntie, he's lost his mind. He obviously has no idea what he's ranting about and he should be brought under control. The next minute he'll probably say I spent the night out! Boy, isn't that what you were about to say?

KISIMBA:

It's true. Boulos spent the night out. He was never sick at home in bed.

DOMINA:

And who exactly told me over the phone four times that he was sleeping?

KISIMBA:

Ah, Madame, because—

BOULOS:

Because, Auntie, this man is only inches away from stark raving madness. I have studied pathological behavior and I can assure you the next thing he'll say is that eight women called on me beside the two who ripped out each other's eyes at the gate. Isn't that true, Boy?

KISIMBA:

Yes, Madame, ten in all. Plus his latest concubine whom I hid behind the door when you walked in. She was decked out in rainbow colors and sequins. And do you know who this girl is? Professor Mafikiri's fourteen-year-old niece!

BOULOS:

What! Liar, filthy liar.

KISIMBA:

And Madame, do you know what she told me? That Boulos had given her \$250 in cash for the jewelry he'd promised. She thanked me for seeing her safely out by giving me the \$5 that I was offering this scoundrel to pay back the envelope.

BOULOS:

Auntie, this is called "polychromatic dementia." It is the sign of an oncoming episode, a very dangerous phase. If we don't do something immediately, he will go into a raging fit, start foaming at the mouth and ripping off his clothes before attacking us.

KISIMBA:

You will regret this tactic. If I have to wind up in the deep-freeze—

DOMINA:

(Slapping Kisimba) What did you say?

BOULOS:
Raving again, blabbing off secrets.

KISIMBA:
In any case—

DOMINA:
Both of you shut up. Stop this senseless argument and leave me alone.

BOULOS:
I just wanted—

DOMINA:
Get out or I will flip the Coin of Lucifer!
Boulos and Kisimba gasp.
Mama Domina draws out her remote control like a gun. A light flickers behind the glass drawer where the Coin twirls

DOMINA:
Boulos, do you know what this is?

BOULOS:
Oh, yes, Auntie.

DOMINA:
Kisimba, do you know what this is?

KISIMBA:
Oh yes, Madame.

DOMINA:
What is it?

BOULOS and KISIMBA:
(Together, like choirboys) The Coin of Lucifer.

DOMINA:
(Still threatening with her remote) Would you like me to flip the Coin?

BOULOS and KISIMBA:
Oh, no. No, Mama, no.

DOMINA:

(Putting the remote away) Very well. Now leave me alone. Await my verdict in three minutes. As you know, it will be irrevocable. I will show no mercy.

BOULOS and KISIMBA:

But Auntie... But Madame...

DOMINA: Out!

Boulos and Kisimba scurry out.

SCENE 9

Domina is about to pour herself a drink when there is a knock at the door.

DOMINA:
Oh, for God's sake! Who is it?

Mafikiri enters.

MAFIKIRI:
Pardon me, Madame Domina... I was on my way home, but I had to come back. I implore your help. Surely, you understand... My people haven't had a bite to eat for the past three days. It's nothing but agony at home. My wife, my cousins, my nephews, my nieces, my children, all agonies. I can't go home without my envelope.

DOMINA:
Rest assured, Professor, I am preparing to harshly punish the guilty party and, sooner or later, the envelope will be found.

MAFIKIRI:
Madame, my point is that it must be sooner. I cannot wait. Couldn't you prepare another envelope now, until you find the original?

DOMINA:
That is technically impossible. We never keep cash in this house. All our staples and fresh goods are provided for by the Philadelphia Supermarket, Philadelphia USA. We have a subscription and whatever we need is supplied daily by jet.

MAFIKIRI:
Then at least give me the equivalent of my envelope in goods.

DOMINA:
Technically impossible. All our expenses are electronically controlled by the Philadelphia Supermarket every evening at midnight.

MAFIKIRI:
Then, for the love of God, just give me a little food for charity's sake... some fish, some flour, some beans, some—

DOMINA:
Technically impossible. With all the diplomas you have, my religion forbids me to treat you like a common beggar.

MAFIKIRI:

Then refer me to one of your friends who is, like you, charitable, and who also subscribes to the Philadelphia Supermarket, but who doesn't know about my diplomas and would therefore accept to give me a donation.

DOMINA:

Technically impossible. All my relations are controlled through the net, day and night. Besides, Philadelphia only sends us American products to which your stomach is not accustomed. I would not want to be the cause of one of your children's diarrhea due to the transgenetically-engineered Florida oils they use. You should never abuse your system with interconti-nutritional traffic jams. You have to eat according to custom, Mister Professor. You see, *haricots* are not gobbled up like vulgar national beans, and *pesce* is not your vulgar national fish. Here, sir, we eat in French-Italian-German-European-Union and proper English. You eat in local dialect. Therefore, we can never sit at the same table, never get back into the archaic, village spirit. Why do you think you're tutoring me in western languages? So I can learn to speak as I eat, as I breathe, the fluid world language in which I operate and travel. Not only to bring me up to my higher-class status but to avoid confusion in the products, the orders, the recipes, and whatever we need to know.

MAFIKIRI:

(*Exasperated*) All I need to know, Madame, is whether you think an empty stomach is capable of listening to endless speeches.

DOMINA:

Uh... What other purpose could it possibly have?

MAFIKIRI:

The purpose of an empty stomach is to die or to eat. I am entitled to my envelope. Give it to me now and stop distracting me. I've had enough of indigestible speeches.

DOMINA:

For the past fifteen years all my earnings have gone into a trust fund in Geneva, which I can't touch for another fifteen years. The Swiss bankers are not about to open it up for your ten piddling dollars. Those Swiss, they're very strict over there, you know, Mister Professor.

MAFIKIRI:

What I know is that over *here* (*pointing to his stomach*), the gut is stricter than any Swiss bank. And over *there* at my house, each of my agony's gut is stricter than all of your Philadelphia supermarkets. (*Voice rising*) The empty stomachs of my agonies at home need more than empty rhetoric to be filled. They need rice, they need meat, you hear, they need—

DOMINA:

Santa Maria, no need to shout! You are provoking my Concord convulsions, my Boeing backache, my jumbo-jet jitters again.

MAFIKIRI:

Mama Domina, please listen to me—

DOMINA:

Professor Mafikiri, I have offered to severely punish the party responsible for your lost envelope. However, if you continue to aggravate me, I will simply drop the whole business. All things considered, I don't know whom I would punish. Boulos has credit cards with which he buys whatever he wants. As for my head servant, Kisimba spent fifteen years with the missionaries and is incapable of stealing so much as a banana. Nobody else has access to the Kifunga Tumbu salon.

MAFIKIRI:

Very well, Madame, since you claim everyone in this household is beyond reproach, just tell me this: What happened to my envelope? (*Pause.*) Well?

DOMINA:

Listen here you, since you think I know where your shitty little envelope is—

MAFIKIRI:

No, you listen to me. Just deliver my envelope or I will take it by force, I swear.

DOMINA:

(*Defiant*) By what do you swear?

Both seething with anger, they stand face to face.

Dogs barking.

Kisimba enters hurriedly then halts, surprised at the scene.

KISIMBA:

Excuse me, Madame. Should I—

DOMINA:

(*Screaming*) Should you shut up? Yes! Get the hell out? Yes!

KISIMBA:

Because the dogs, Boss—

DOMINA:

Dog yourself. Move on or I'll have you incinerated on the spot.

KISIMBA:

Sorry, Madame. (*He exits.*)

DOMINA:

So, Mister Professor, are you aware of what I do to people who dare to speak to me as you have?

MAFIKIRI:

From what I just gathered, you burn them alive. Unfortunately for you, I come from Kibombo where men never burn. We are unburnable as were our ancestors. Even the wood of our trees won't burn. So if you don't want to see your own insides turn to ashes, don't mistake me for the sheep you've been burning in this house for the past fifteen years.

DOMINA:

That's enough! (*In a low voice*) Look me in the eyes.

MAFIKIRI:

I'm looking you straight in the eyes.

DOMINA:

Just who sent you here? What are you looking for? What do you want from me?

MAFIKIRI:

All I want from you is what you owe me. Give it to me this minute so I can go home to my family. If not, it's war. In any case, you'll never see me in this infernal house again.

DOMINA:

(*Exploding with rage*) Just who do you think you are with this stupid little job, the thirty-three hours a week you spend spewing out God knows what tripe? You could be replaced in nothing flat. There are hordes of professors out there who would come running if they heard I wanted to replace my language tutor. The whole country would be begging me, brandishing their diplomas, their titles, their experience, their children, their tribe. Oh, yes sir, go right ahead and resign. I won't even bother to replace you. I'll go to Europe, I'll spend three months in England to learn the Queen's English, not your pidgin Negriollo-Biafro gibberish. I have no more time to waste with you.

MAFIKIRI:

Thank you very much. Good-bye then, Madame. You will be hearing from me.

Mustering all his dignity, Mafikiri opens the door to exit at the same time that Kisimba rushes into the room, colliding with the professor.

KISIMBA:

Madame, excuse me for bothering you. I must inform you that all hell has broken loose at the main gate. Mbwa Mabay has torn to shreds a woman named Caroline Makyadi who claims to be the wife of Mister Professor.

MAFIKIRI:
My wife? Here?

KISIMBA:
According to what the guards said, I am not sure her poor husband will recognize her anymore.
The dog is yapping for joy and the woman is moaning in pain.

DOMINA:
What did she come here for?

KISIMBA:
Ask her poor husband.

DOMINA:
Professor, I warn you, if your wife has rabies, if she is trying to contaminate my dogs...

MAFIKIRI:
Watch it, Domina, just watch it...

DOMINA:
Shut up. How dare you open your hippo jaws again after your wife abused my dog!

KISIMBA:
For sure. One of the guards saw the witch step on Mbwa Mabay's paw and since then he's been limping, pitifully.

DOMINA:
Professor, if my dog dies of rabies, I will hire a regiment and your entire village will be bulldozed to the ground.

MAFIKIRI:
We'll see about that.

KISIMBA:
Madame, what should I do?

DOMINA:
Santa Maria, deliver me from this idiot! My dearest dog has just been contaminated by a raging bitch and you stand there like a stick asking what to do! You rub his paw with camphor.

KISIMBA:
But I have to—

DOMINA:
(*Moving to exit, to Kisimba*) Come, come along now.

KISIMBA:
But his wife—

DOMINA:
First my dog, then his bitch. (*She exits.*)

KISIMBA:
Mister Professor, wait for your wife here. I'll send her up in a minute. (*He exits.*)

MAFIKIRI:
(*Boiling with rage*) Cursed country, cursed people. When I think this woman prefers to care for a dog in perfectly good health while my children are starving. When I think I am the one who devotes all his energy to teach her the languages she needs to get rich. When I think she didn't even make it past second grade. When I think that the only work she's ever done is as a national dancer, which is nothing more than shaking your butt to the glory of a dictator, then I say cursed country, cursed people. But this will change one day. When we are ready, things will change. This woman and her like will stop bullying us all. And I swear by my word as Frederick Mafikiri that she will know what I am capable of. And may I be struck dead if I ever set foot in this damned house again.

SCENE 10

Disheveled and furious, Makyadi enters.

MAKYADI:
(*Pouncing on Mafikiri*) Ah, there you are. Hiding like a scared grasshopper in the straw while I am being torn to shreds...

MAFIKIRI:
But... Caroline... Dearest, I was trying to—

MAKYADI:
Just keep your mouth shut, you louse. I am not your dearest, I am no longer your wife, I won't be the wife of a low-down rat, I won't be anybody's wife again. Pig, where did you spend the night?

MAFIKIRI:
When I was on my way home after coming back here last night, I ran into a group of soldiers armed to the teeth, and—

MAKYADI:
What soldiers? You were with women armed to the hips in some hotel squandering our money—

MAFIKIRI:
Makyadi, listen to me—

MAKYADI:
You're an irresponsible pig. Leaving your family with nothing to eat for three days while you squander our envelope on loose women. It's monstrous.

MAFIKIRI:
Please, dear, listen—

MAKYADI:
No, Frederick Mafikiri, you listen to me. Never did I imagine you were the kind of man who would throw money away in bars and brothels with a sick child and a dozen empty stomachs at home. Plus your niece who has disappeared.

MAFIKIRI:
My niece? Disappeared?

MAKYADI:
Yes, your niece Zawadi. She might have been kidnapped or taken by the police while you were out carousing.

MAFIKIRI:
How could I know? I spent the night in—

MAKYADI:
Never in my wildest dreams did I think that I, Caroline Makyadi, could be dishonored by the hellhounds of some haunted house. Tell me, Frederick, before I throw myself in the river, just tell me, is this the vow you took in front of all those witnesses? In sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow?

MAFIKIRI:
If you'd just listen to me, Caroline—

MAKYADI:
Sir, I have nothing to hear from you. I did not come here to listen to your speeches nor your excuses. I came here to tell you my decision and it is final. Unless you give me the envelope immediately, I will not go back to that hut you call home. I am going to throw myself head first into the river.

MAFIKIRI:
Please, Caroline—

MAKYADI:

(*Thrusting out her arm*) Do not come near me. Just hand me the envelope now or in a quarter of an hour you'll find my body in the river.

MAFIKIRI:

I wanted to—

MAKYADI:

I will count to five. If you do not give me the envelope, prepare to meet again in heaven or hell. One. Two. Three. Four—

Kisimba rushes in.

KISIMBA:

Mister Professor, Mama Domina wants to see you right away. Urgent business. She is talking final settlement with dots on the i's. Go to her immediately. She's in a great hurry to leave.

MAFIKIRI:

Very well. Caroline, come along.

KISIMBA:

Oh, no. Caroline Makyadi, you must stay here for the moment. Madame can't stand the sight of you and she will fly into such a rage that there will be no dots on the i's if you go with your husband.

MAFIKIRI:

Then wait here. I'll come back to get you in a few minutes. With the envelope I hope.

Mafikiri exits.

Kisimba and Makyadi are alone. He sidles up to her.

KISIMBA:

(*Drawing a medicine vial from his pocket*) Madame Caroline, do you know what's in this bottle? It contains Totolimycine, better known as Totolito.

MAKYADI:

So? What's it for?

KISIMBA:

Madame, Totolito is the most potent antidote for dog bites. Do you realize, dear Madame Caroline Makyadi Mafikiri, that you are at great risk, that you could die within two days?

MAKYADI:

I could die?

KISIMBA:

Yes, because Mbwa Mabay, the illustrious canine who bit you, is on a very special diet. In addition to his vitamins and anti-anxiety drugs, his diet of okapi meat and other delicacies, he gets granulated Bucaramanga roots, imported from Columbia every four hours. Anyone he happens to bite dies within the next forty-eight hours. If you don't let me help you, you will meet the same fate.

MAKYADI:

Fine. Give me the medicine. I'll take it when I get home.

KISIMBA:

Ah, sorry, that won't do. Let me explain. If I let you take the bottle, Mama Domina will catch me, and I will not only be fired, but burned to a crisp. You see, I stole this Totolito and it's one of her most prized possessions. What we have to do is sneak out to the twelfth suspended pool where I will give you first aid, the explanations, the bottle and the rest.

MAKYADI:

Listen, I don't even know you. How can I trust you?

KISIMBA:

My name is Kisimba Kya Baloyi, registered number 614 dash 614 dash 614 and Number One Houseboy in this mansion, Mama Domina's Number Three mansion, also known as the Philadelphia Mansion.

MAKYADI:

Just give me the bottle and the instructions now. If we hear somebody coming, we'll act like we were chatting together and nothing happened.

KISIMBA:

Ah, no, Madame Caroline. It has to be behind the suspended pool, on the bank of the Tupacamaru River, behind Mama Domina's mausoleum. That's where I will heal you with Totolito. But, there is one condition. You have to agree to divorce your husband, who is the sole cause of all your misery and only wishes your death.

MAKYADI:

My death?

KISIMBA:

We must hurry to the twelfth suspended pool. There I will administer first aid while telling you the whole truth. Then, you will administer to me.

MAKYADI:

To you? What's wrong with you?

KISIMBA:

Ah, Madame Caroline, I suffer from lack of affection, from forced celibacy. You must agree to divorce your husband and replace my last wife who went back to her village three years ago.

MAKYADI:

You must be the devil himself.

KISIMBA:

No, Madame, I am a god. Because I want to heal you of the dog bite, of your misery, and of your husband who only wishes you dead.

MAKYADI:

How do you know that?

KISIMBA:

You think he adores you, huh? How can someone who loves you let you suffer so? But, of course, you are right, since you are not aware of how much you suffer or how much he deceives you... Do you know the tricks he plays on you, the money he throws away every payday? No, certainly not. Do you know what he did just yesterday? Last night, he picked up his envelope and—

MAKYADI:

I know that.

KISIMBA:

Do you know he spent it all in a motel called "The Gazelle" with a charming gazelle still in high school whose name is Isabella and who is as beautiful as an angel and who is ready to replace you (*snapping his fingers*) like that?

MAKYADI:

He really is a pig.

KISIMBA:

And after squandering the contents of your envelope he was so afraid of facing your scorn that he came back here begging for a second envelope. If Mama Domina makes the mistake of restoring his ten dollars, mark my words, he will just gobble it all up again with the charming Isabella.

MAKYADI:

The bitch.

KISIMBA:

Leave this man, become my wife, pull your children and yourself out of poverty, hunger, disease. Become the loveliest woman in the country, the happiest woman in the world. Madame Domina gives me whatever I want. You will be covered with jewels, you will wear gold-embroidered cloths, a new one every day, and you will eat roast beef seven days a week.

MAKYADI:

You really are the devil.

KISIMBA:

But you're a devilish temptress. You are hellishly beautiful and demonly charming. You glow like a thousand infernal suns in spite of your gloomy existence. And me, I'm in the dark limbo of celibacy. Leave this man, marry me, let me heal your wounds, because your so-called husband—

MAKYADI:

No, I have no husband. Don't ever mention him again. He cheated on me with whores and now he'll pay in hell.

KISIMBA:

He'll pay here on earth. This is where all accounts are paid up. Become my wife and you will be happy in this life. Stop sacrificing your children. They are innocent. They have the right to eat meat and drink milk like all children. Become my wife and your sick child, *our* sick child will be cared for in the best hospital of the city.

MAKYADI:

I just hope he's still alive when I get home.

KISIMBA:

If you hesitate, his life is more than ever in danger. If you obey me, our child will be healthy tomorrow. Just say yes, and this very evening you will get fifty pounds of national corn meal, fifty of beans, fifty of milk powder, fifty of whatever else you need.

MAKYADI:

(Hesitating) Do you really think...?

KISIMBA:

Let's stop this useless thinking. We need concrete solutions to concrete problems: You have a mortal wound and children to tend to and you have a man ready to help you for one small favor. I have a long-term abstinence to tend to and the most beautiful creature in the world before me. Remember, the Lord said "Heal one another as I have healed you." And He was certainly right about that.

MAKYADI:

... But I can't. I had a Christian marriage.

KISIMBA:

So you'll starve like a Christian martyr along with your children. You forget that if your wound is not religiously healed, you will cease to be religiously married within the next forty hours.

MAKYADI:

(Vacillating) ... No, I can't. God sees me.

KISIMBA:

When lives are at stake, all the sins of the world turn into virtues. When sin is the way to salvation, the Lord forgives. When sin can save children, the Lord closes His eyes and His ears.

MAKYADI:

Blasphemy. You are the voice of Satan. Never can the path of sin lead to salvation.

KISIMBA:

All the roads of heaven pass first through hell. Did not Jesus Himself work on the Sabbath to heal a blind man, who wasn't even in danger of dying?

MAKYADI:

(Pausing to think) ... Listen... I have a good friend, a very beautiful friend who is not married and who is looking for a man, who is longing for a man. Suppose...

KISIMBA:

Ah, no! I want Caroline Makyadi and that's all there is to it. Not Julia, not Albertine, not Marie-Louise, but the one and only Caroline Makyadi. *(Hearing approaching steps, whispering)* I hear your killer husband coming. We will pursue our conversation later. Here is my business card and five dollars for your taxi home.

MAKYADI:

(Hesitatingly, she takes the money and the card which she reads) "Kisimba Kya Baloyi. Number One Houseboy, Philadelphia Mansion. Certified Healer."

KISIMBA:

(Loudly) So, as I was saying, we must do everything to save the life of this innocent child. As soon as you have the prescription, then we can—

SCENE 11

Looking uneasy, Mafikiri enters without knocking.

MAFIKIRI:

Kisimba, you sent me off to Madame for no reason. Boulos told me she was busy with her dog and did not call me at all.

KISIMBA:

He must be confused. Boulos himself told me Mama Domina urgently needed to see you.

MAFIKIRI:

Apparently not. In fact, he... Uh... Kisimba, as head servant of this mansion, you must know if there's a ditch someplace on the grounds.

KISIMBA:

A ditch?

MAFIKIRI:

Yes, you know... a ditch, a waste bin, somewhere to throw something away...

KISIMBA:

(Eyeing him suspiciously) Something like what?

MAFIKIRI:

Pffh... I don't know, something like a bottle say...

KISIMBA:

Why do you ask?

MAFIKIRI:

Just out of curiosity.

KISIMBA:

Sir, I must inform you that this is an American-style mansion. As in the US of A and in all our other mansions, we do not just throw anything in any old place. We sort, we compost, we recycle, we—

MAKYADI:

(Exasperated with both men) Houseboy, where are your facilities?

KISIMBA:

Third corridor to the right, fifth door on your left, the people's toilet. Go quickly then exit through the blue-neon corridor to your right. Do not take the candelabra-lit corridor, nor the red-velvet hall, for you might, God forbid, run into Mama Domina.

Makyadi exits.

KISIMBA:

Mister Professor, as you know, Mama Domina is very angry with you. If you are not careful, you will lose not only your envelope but your head. I would advise you to simply confess to having

stolen your own money. The consequences will be less drastic than if the guards catch you with incriminating materials.

MAFIKIRI:

You know very well I never touched the envelope.

KISIMBA:

We have all the evidence necessary to prove that you did. If Madame threatens to make me disappear with you, it's because she suspects we're in this together. Mister Professor, just go confess, but keep me out of it.

MAFIKIRI:

I see through your game. After stealing my envelope, you want me to take the blame so you can run off to spend it all by yourself.

KISIMBA:

Very well, Sir. Since you thwart me, I will have to search you. Please hand me your briefcase.

MAFIKIRI:

(Clutching his briefcase to his chest) Certainly not. You have no right.

KISIMBA:

As Number One Houseboy it is not only my right, but my duty to search you. By force if necessary.

Kisimba lunges for the briefcase. They grapple.

MAFIKIRI:

(Trying to fend off the attack) What are you...? Let me go. Enough... Kisimba!

Kisimba grabs the briefcase and rummages through the contents. Jubilant, he pulls out a bottle of scotch.

KISIMBA:

Praise the Lord! What have we here? *(Brandishing his prize)* Ah, ha! A bottle of Mama Domina's best single malt.

MAFIKIRI:

(Anguished) Shh, keep your voice down. I can explain this. Please just get rid of the bottle and say nothing to Mama Domina. I will tell you the truth.

KISIMBA:

The truth is you are about to join the country of your ancestors, to be hacked up for spaghetti sauce like the unfortunate Professor Mutembezi or turned into an entertainment video cassette

like the poet Sinamali, who was thrown to the sharks while they filmed the scene, there below the suspended pool. You do not seem aware of how many serpents live in our subterranean labyrinths, how many lions in our zoos, how many man-eating plants in our gardens. Not to mention the 600,000 killer bees and the zillions of disciplinary red ants always on the alert for human flesh and operated by remote control.

MAFIKIRI:

Shh, Kisimba, listen to me.

KISIMBA:

Obviously, if Madame heard me revealing the deepest of her ultrasonic secrets, she would be forced to toss the Coin of Lucifer—

MAFIKIRI:

The what?

KISIMBA:

—and deliver us to the Living Prophet, His Eminence Odun Mulawatu, who would make goblets of our skulls. We would be the 168th and 169th of the skeleton-dish collection.

MAFIKIRI:

Shh, suppose she hears us.

KISIMBA:

If she does, you're dead meat. She'll order you be hung up and smoked alive, or thrown into the electric river, or your bone marrow turned into ultra-white gold, before salting, roasting, slicing, and peppering you for Sunday dinner.

MAFIKIRI:

Stop this nonsense and just listen to me.

KISIMBA:

Sir, it is too late for explanations. It is my humanitarian obligation to warn you of the fate that awaits you when Mama Domina learns you have stolen not only your envelope but her best scotch.

MAFIKIRI:

If you give me the chance, I can explain the bottle. As for the envelope, you know damn well I never laid eyes on it. You were with me the entire time I was in this salon. When I came back later, I didn't even get beyond the first gate. It is you I suspect who stole my envelope. I'm sure Mama Domina suspects you as well. She's no fool. You're just trying to save your own skin by accusing me.

KISIMBA:

She does suspect both of us. So we're in the same boat... But with this bottle in your hands... Who knows if you haven't taken something else?

MAFIKIRI:

Like what? I haven't a cent to my name. My pockets are empty. (*He turns his pockets inside out. A dollar bill falls out. He picks it up.*) Except for this one dollar... Perhaps you...

KISIMBA:

(*Eyeing the bill*) Well, well, well... You never know... (*mentally calculating*) ...the least little dollar can turn into a fortune.

MAFIKIRI:

(*Holding out the bill to Kisimba*) ... Perhaps you ... Perhaps I... could offer you this small dollar as a token of my gratitude if you get rid of this bottle for me.

KISIMBA:

(*Indignant*) Sir, are you trying to bribe me? Do you think I'm just another one of those corrupted not-so-civil servants?

MAFIKIRI:

Not at all. I consider you a fellow father who is acting exclusively out of humanitarian concerns.

KISIMBA:

Great. That sentence just saved your skin. It's a fact, I have three wives and sixteen children and I know what it means to be a father. I cannot accept your gift, but I can help you. I will put this compromising bottle back on the shelf.

MAFIKIRI:

(*Needing to trust him, but wary*) That's very kind of you.

KISIMBA:

I am willing to forget about this ridiculous bottle, if you are willing to forget about your envelope.

MAFIKIRI:

But I need to know what happened.

KISIMBA:

I will also help you with some food for your family. If you go wait for me under the third baobab by the river, I will bring you a bag of beans to replace your lost envelope.

MAFIKIRI:

At this point I'm more interested in finding out the truth than anything else.

KISIMBA:

Professor, be realistic. What do you have to gain with this obstinate search for the truth when your family is starving? The truth is too expensive. It will cost you too much. Let me give you the food and you slip away forever.

MAFIKIRI:

(Hesitating) How will you get the food? I don't want goods stolen out of the mouth of Mama Domina.

KISIMBA:

Don't worry. We have 800 pounds of national beans she ordered me to burn tonight. I will simply salvage, say, forty pounds for you. Go wait for me on the bank of the Tupacamaru River. I'll meet you there in fifteen minutes with the beans. I'll also throw in some bags of national corn meal and salted fish.

MAFIKIRI:

Very well. I have no choice but to trust you. You promise you'll get rid of the bottle.

KISIMBA:

Cross my heart. But you must promise to walk away and never set foot here again.

MAFIKIRI:

I swear, that is all I wish to do. So we agree.

They shake hands.

KISIMBA:

Give me the one dollar lest you be frisked by the guards on the way out of the mansion. I will give it back to you later and accompany you with the bags past the armed guard at the gate. Quickly, we must take the blue-neon corridor to avoid meeting Boulos or Mama Domina.

MAFIKIRI:

I'll follow you.

KISIMBA:

And don't touch anything while you're waiting at the river. You might wind up in a crocodile's stomach.

MAFIKIRI:

Are you saying that everything you've revealed about the geography of this house, the flora and the fauna and other mysteries, this is all true?

KISIMBA:

I'm afraid so. Yes, it's the sad truth, the electric river, the cauldrons of boiling oil, the man-

eating plants, the disciplinary army of red ants, the Coin of Lucifer, your poor predecessors turned into tomato *ragù* and video films, yes all true, mathematically and statistically, 100% true.

MAFIKIRI:

(Shaking his head, then softly to himself) How could this woman become so powerful?

KISIMBA:

As you know, she was the chief dancer of a local brigade before she became the head of all the female battalions of the National Song, Dance, Praise and Propaganda Department. And she was an informant, of course. And then there's her international business dealings in spare organs and human gold exchange.

MAFIKIRI:

In spare what?

KISIMBA:

She is also a high-ranking member of a religious sect, *(looking right and left, then whispering)* the E.C.S.D.R.J.B.A.

MAFIKIRI:

The E.C... what?

KISIMBA:

The Evangelical Community of the Shore Dwellers of the River Jesus and His Branches and Apostles. The disciples of the Living Prophet Odun Mulawatu offer \$10,000 and three relatives to belong. Their monthly subscription is then \$2,500 plus one human sacrifice per year. She is slated to become the next High Priestess, if she manages to liquidate the current one. It is a most satanic religion.

MAFIKIRI:

Kisimba, what are you talking about?

KISIMBA:

The ceremonies take place between midnight and dawn every other Sunday. They close with a Last Supper where they feast on okapi blood, Scandinavian breast milk, pygmy roast, mulatto thigh and other delicacies.

MAFIKIRI:

Impossible! Tell me more.

KISIMBA:

And that's not all. Would you believe, Mister Professor, that after the sacrifice, they finish their ceremony with the Nocturnal Smorgasbord where they all throw off their clothes before playing

a special game of hide-and-go-seek and dance the dance of “Each to Each’s Own and the Others Too.”

MAFIKIRI:

It’s revolting! Beyond belief! Go on.

KISIMBA:

Mama Domina keeps her position by participating regularly in the Last Smorgasbord and religiously following the seventy-seven commandments of the Carnivorous Order.

MAFIKIRI:

What on earth is the Carnivorous Order?

KISIMBA:

It is much too dangerous to talk about here. The walls have ears. But... *(looking around, then whispering)* ...in fact, she has no right to belong. Her papers are fraudulent. She lives in holy terror of being found out by the True Carnivorous Order, the Inner Supreme Council. If a single one of her secrets were to be publicly revealed, it would be the end of her career, her religion, her wealth, her empire, her life.

MAFIKIRI:

Why are you telling me all this?

KISIMBA:

(Hand over his heart) Brother, it’s because I am an honest man who recognizes a fellow honest man. I am waiting for the first opportunity to leave this evil house. As soon as I can lay my hands on enough money, I am heading for America. I— *(Hearing Domina’s voice approaching, he freezes.)* Shh... she’s coming. Go to the third baobab on the riverbank and I will tell you more. Quick, out this way... No, out this way.

Mafikiri and Kisimba sneak out a side entrance.

SCENE 12

Mama Domina enters talking on her cell phone.

DOMINA:

Listen, Doctor, that is beside the point. I’m not going to let my dog die just because of one of your silly conferences... It’s yes or no... You hop on a plane and are here within the next hour or you are no longer Mbwa Mabay’s personal physician... Now, now, no reason to get upset... Why don’t you just come with an assistant? If you can make a diagnosis and assure me Mbwa Mabay has no life-threatening disease, then the assistant will accompany him to the States and you can run back to your little conference... Fine. See you then. *(She hangs up and goes to the bar.)* Santa Lucia, how tiring they all are... And I will be late for the ceremony. A nice single malt

would do me good. *(She pours herself a drink.)* And why not a tender little cell-phone kiss? *(She settles in an armchair, sips her drink, and punches a number on her cell phone.)*

...Intercontinental Hotel? Give me the Domina Suite, room 1300... Hello... Who is this?... A friend of Mario Primo's? *(Screaming)* Put him on right now!... What do you mean he's sleeping?... Me? Who am I? And who the fuck are you?... His friend Doris?... Doris who? *(Horried)* What? You? My daughter Doris? Domina the fifth? What are you doing in my suite with Mario? And you didn't even recognize my voice! *(She throws the phone across the room.)* Little bitch, you're going to vomit out your guts before dawn. *(Suddenly dejected)* Is there no sense of honor anymore? My own daughter in the bed of my own lover. Mario Primo, how should I kill him? And that little harlot of a daughter? Five husbands, five daughters, five whores. What a lot I've been dealt, what a shitty life. To think all I dreamt of when I was a girl was a steady husband, a good family. I would have been faithful as a nun and gentle as a lamb. All the money, all the gold, all the petrol-green diamonds in the world are not worth one personal husband who loves you regardless, who cares for you blindly, and who embraces you without political motives. Maria Magdalena, what have I done to deserve —

A knock at the door. Kisimba enters.

KISIMBA:

Madame, may I come in?

DOMINA:

You again! What are you doing here instead of tending to Mbwa Mabay? You saw how he limped, you know he's in agony.

KISIMBA:

I was just double-checking to be sure that the Professor's unfortunate wife had left the premises.

DOMINA:

How can you even think about that woman when my favorite dog is near death? What's gotten into you? Some kind of new-found feminist values, is that it?

KISIMBA:

Not at all, Madame. I was simply investigating the business of the lost envelope and I must report that—

Boulos rushes in.

BOULOS:

(Eagerly) Auntie, I have accomplished my mission. As we speak, Mbwa Mabay is in an ambulance speeding toward the airport. There's a flight to Chicago at quarter to midnight, another to Dallas at five to, and a third to Minneapolis at half-past.

DOMINA:

Good. The dean of the Petropolis Veterinary School should be here soon. If he doesn't show or refuses to accompany Mbwa Mabay, he's fired.

BOULOS:

I guess Mister Professor has left, I hope.

DOMINA:

In fact, no. The guards informed me he is still on the grounds. And this is my decision concerning the envelope. You either cough up the money between the two of you or I will cough you both up to the crocodiles.

BOULOS:

Auntie, you shouldn't get all riled up about a silly envelope. Money is not worth your good health, nothing is.

DOMINA:

Don't worry about my health, Boulos. I have thirty-four personal physicians abroad and thirty-four right here, ready to jump at the least little scratch on my body. You know I'm less concerned about ten puny dollars than punishing those responsible for the disappearance.

KISIMBA:

Exactly! And I have something vital to report. The professor—

DOMINA:

Shut up. You'll feel the blade of the electronic shears before the night is over. You will piss out all your blood before bathing in the Tupacamaru River, before chucking up petrol-green diamonds, before gobbling up your own intestines.

BOULOS:

Exactly like he gobbled up the professor's envelope! Why won't you believe me?

KISIMBA:

Ah, no, Madame. It is Mister Professor himself who is responsible for the lost envelope. You wouldn't believe what he told me, what he gave me, what he did...

DOMINA:

(Pause.) What did he tell you?

KISIMBA:

Ah, Madame, it's too shocking... He said you were the ugliest woman on earth, the most degenerate, the most miserly, the most egotistical, that you had a heart of rusted iron, and that you were nothing better than a clump of stinking-rotten garbage.

DOMINA:
(*Icy calm*) And what did he give you?

KISIMBA:
(*Holding out a dollar bill*) Because he ignores I am the best-paid head servant in the entire country, he tried to bribe me with this measly one dollar bill. One small dollar, the tenth of his small envelope... Now, I ask you, where did he get it? Everyone knows teachers are officially paid but twenty dollars a month and it never lasts long in their pocket. And do you know why he gave it to me? Because I caught him red-handed with a bag of national beans he stole from the warehouse. And that's not all. He was about to make off with a—

BOULOS:
(*Cutting Kisimba off*) Auntie, Houseboy Kisimba is nothing but a miserable liar. He lies like he breathes. He invents scenarios that are pure nonsense.

KISIMBA:
Really? And am I lying when I tell you Mister Professor has hidden on his very person a bottle of Madame Domina's best single malt scotch?

BOULOS:
You are a thousand-fold liar! Who told you that? Who gave you permission to search a dignified professor? He is lying, Auntie, he is lying through his teeth.

DOMINA:
(*To Kisimba*) And what is your proof?

KISIMBA:
You will find the bottle sleeping peacefully at the bottom of the culprit's sack of beans. I have reconstructed the entire sequence of events. One: Last night the professor crept stealthily into this very room and stole his very own envelope. Two: He snuck away to the Gazelle Motel, where he spent the night filling up on liquor and the juicy young Isabella. Three: He was too ashamed to go home empty handed, so he returned here to claim his envelope a second time. Just now, when I threatened to reveal the missing bottle, he—

DOMINA:
(*Screeching*) Alert the guards! Get Mafikiri before he runs away!

KISIMBA:
Do not worry, Madame. He won't run away. On the contrary, he is waiting for me under the third baobab by the twelfth suspended pool. I convinced him I would return with a lot more beans, corn meal, meat, fish, and etcetera. I promised to escort him off the grounds through a secret passageway so he would not be searched at the gates. I invented this story and left him there waiting so I could come back to tell you the whole adventure. Ask me to fetch him, Madame. He will confess.

BOULOS:
(*Nervous*) Auntie, be careful.

DOMINA:
Careful of what? Where did this one dollar come from? You wouldn't believe how he treated me earlier, stirring up all my Concord neurosis. Such insolence! He actually tried to threaten me with his so-called "unburnable ancestors"! Have him brought in. If he begs for mercy on his knees, I will pardon him. If he denies the whole business, then he can tell his story to the Guatanamera regiments of disciplinary red ants. He will beg pardon from the 2000 degrees of the ovens in the mausoleum. Go fetch him, Kisimba.

KISIMBA
Immediately, Madame. I'll bring him through the bunker tunnel and straight into the Kifunga Tumbu salon. You'll see the look on his face when he sees he's back here and what he'll say when you confront him with the evidence. (*He exits.*)

BOULOS:
Please, Auntie, you have to realize the professor is a human being just like you and me. Even if he lacks the courage to tell the truth, you must forgive him. What is an envelope of ten dollars, after all? We spend thousands every day just to maintain our forty-two mansions and the 584 dogs who watch over them. Why torture the professor?

DOMINA:
What difference could it make to you? How much is it worth sparing him?

BOULOS:
I could give up one of my five cars if you forgive and forget.

DOMINA:
That's not enough.

BOULOS:
Two cars and half of my credit cards.

DOMINA:
Not enough to pardon him. He deserves to pay dearly, something worthy of all his so-called diplomas.

BOULOS:
Auntie dear, a human being is by nature unpredictable. You can't consider him a vulgar earthworm to be crushed under your foot.

DOMINA:
And just why do you consider him a human being? To me he is, in fact, an earthworm. Of little

importance when they're alive and no loss when they die.

BOULOS:

Sooner or later, this will cost you more than you realize.

DOMINA:

Oh, come on. What has it cost me the past fifteen years? It will cost us nothing what-so-ever as long as we remain who we are. And everything indicates we're here to stay. We're installed in our easy chairs for a long time to come, in spite of the jealous grumblers who call themselves the "political opposition." What a joke! I am who I am. No, Boulos you're barking up the wrong baobab. I am a very solid tree and I have no intention of bowing down. Especially to a spineless worm who thinks he can casually insult me.

SCENE 13

Kisimba enters with Mafikiri carrying a large burlap sack. Mafikiri is startled to be back in the Kifunga Tumbu salon. He glares at Kisimba.

KISIMBA:

Madame, Mister Professor Frederick Mafikiri.

DOMINA:

Ah, dear professor... This man, who is my Number One Houseboy, told me that, after he had stolen your envelope, he—

KISIMBA:

Ah, no, Madame. What I said was—

DOMINA:

Don't you dare interrupt me! So, as I was saying, this man not only stole your envelope without a qualm, but also claims you said I was the ugliest woman in the world.

MAFIKIRI:

He's lying. I never said that.

DOMINA:

(Ignoring him) And that you spent last night at a motel with a sweet little Catholic schoolgirl named Isabella.

MAFIKIRI:

Madame, going home last night after my visit here, I was arrested at a checkpoint. Since I did not have a penny to bribe the soldiers, they made me spend the night in jail.

DOMINA:

And that this very evening, he caught you red-handed absconding with a bag of national beans. When, where, and how did you get them?

MAFIKIRI:

Kisimba himself begged me to take them in place of my envelope. He promised me he would—

DOMINA:

But, most serious of all, he claims to have found this one dollar bill in your pocket and that you were trying to bribe him so he would not report on you. He says this one dollar must be what remains of your unfortunate envelope since you squandered the nine others with little Isabella.

MAFIKIRI:

A good Samaritan I met in the hall of the jail this morning gave me the dollar.

DOMINA:

So, you deny every one of these charges?

MAFIKIRI:

Absolutely.

DOMINA:

You have never seen, touched, pocketed, nor spent your envelope?

MAFIKIRI:

Never.

DOMINA:

And you never had the intention of stealing it or the beans or anything else?

MAFIKIRI:

Never.

DOMINA:

Your conscience is totally clean and if there were the tiniest spot, you would confess immediately?

MAFIKIRI:

My conscience is absolutely clean.

DOMINA:

(Pause.) Are you sure you're not forgetting something?

MAFIKIRI:
I've forgotten nothing.

DOMINA:
Except for that bottle of scotch nestled comfortably at the bottom of that sack... Kisimba, empty the bag.

KISIMBA:
At your service, Madame.

Kisimba empties the sack on the floor. The bottle rolls out.

DOMINA:
(*Picking up the bottle*) Now, Professor, tell me. Does this look anything like a bean? Who gave it to you? Another good Samaritan from the jail, I suppose.

MAFIKIRI:
(*Growling at Kisimba*) Kisimba, you scoundrel. You tricked me into believing—

DOMINA:
No use trying to pin the blame on my trusty head servant. He only pretended to be in cahoots with you in order to bring you to justice. How do you plead?

MAFIKIRI:
(*With a deep sigh*) Madame, please try to understand. There are times in a man's life when—

DOMINA:
Professor, spare me your philosophy. Of course, you know everything about life, including how to sneak away with a bottle of my best single malt scotch.

MAFIKIRI:
If you'd just let me explain, I'm sure you would understand.

DOMINA:
So you plead guilty.

MAFIKIRI:
No! All I want is to reveal the truth. This evening, when—

BOULOS:
Professor, stop! Out of sheer pity and on the condition you never set foot here again, I solemnly promise to pay back ten times the cost of the bottle and twenty times your envelope.

DOMINA:
(*Emphatic*) We are not talking about payment in cash!

All pause.

MAFIKIRI:
(*Slowly, as if awakening from a deep sleep*) And just what sort of payment are we talking about here? Some other currency perhaps, like ultra-white gold made of the professor's bone marrow? Or perhaps of his children's?

DOMINA:
(*Her jaw drops.*) What on earth do you mean? (*Stammering*) Uh, ultra, white, what? What is it?

MAFIKIRI:
Unless you throw the culprit to the man-eating plants or launch the regiment of killer bees or turn him into a home-entertainment video.

DOMINA:
Wh-where did these wild ideas come from? Did you eat something that disagreed with you? Did you sleep poorly last night? Boulos, what do your professors call this type of behavior?

MAFIKIRI:
Or perhaps to be done away with the embarrassing witness, you'll simply hack him up to be served as the spaghetti sauce that everybody in this house finds so delicious.

DOMINA:
Professor, you should get some rest. You must be over-worked. I can forgive you, but tell me where these technicolored ravings come from?

MAFIKIRI:
I know everything, the poor Maray Sinamali writhing in the snake pit behind the hanging gardens, the unfortunate Ngabo Palangbo whose skull became an ashtray, the regretted Chirakera who was skinned alive and grilled with hot peppers before being thrown to the ravenous canines of Mama Domina. I know everything. And (*savoring the moment*)... I've made a list.

DOMINA:
A list? ... Show it to me.

MAFIKIRI:
Ah, no. My wife took it and if I do not return within the next hour, she will send it straight to the top.

DOMINA:
(*Stunned*) To the top?

MAFIKIRI:

To the very top of the True Carnivorous Order, to the Inner Supreme Council who would be very interested in discovering you're nothing but a fraud!

DOMINA:

What? Who told you all this?

MAFIKIRI:

A little bird. Unless of course Boulos admits he told me.

BOULOS:

God forbid. What day, what time, Professor?

MAFIKIRI:

Then perhaps it was Houseboy Kisimba?

KISIMBA:

Me? Ah, no, I swear. May I be struck dead by lightening!

MAFIKIRI:

The little bird also told me this: "Count down to zero with the Coin of Lucifer. If at zero, the party who gobbled up your envelope has not confessed, his stomach will explode like an over-inflated balloon and the money will be parachuted onto the floor." (*Pause.*) Well, Domina?

DOMINA:

(*Meekly*) Yes, Professor?

MAFIKIRI:

Give me the Coin of Lucifer.

DOMINA:

(*Dazed*) Luci-who? What is it?

MAFIKIRI:

The Coin of Lucifer. The coin you flip to decide who lives and who dies.

DOMINA:

But...

MAFIKIRI:

The coin that sealed the fate of the poor Professor Malay of Petrapolis and so many others. The coin my little bird told me to toss to find out who stole my envelope. Give it to me now and I will leave you in peace. Otherwise, my little bird will fly off to the Supreme Council of the True Carnivorous Order and you—

DOMINA:

(Resigned) Oh, very well. We might as well get to the bottom of this tiresome envelope business.

She punches in a code on her remote control. The safe drawer containing the Coin of Lucifer opens. She hands it to Mafikiri.

DOMINA:

(With a sigh, to Kisimba) Sorry, Kisimba. I will miss your services.

MAFIKIRI:

When I reach zero, the stomach of the culprit will explode like a balloon. I will begin the countdown. *(Each time he tosses the coin which lands on the table.)* Six, tails... Five, heads... Four, heads... Three, tails... Two—

BOULOS:

Professor, stop!

DOMINA:

Why?

BOULOS:

I hear a bird too and this is what it says. One: Nothing is more stubborn than the truth. Two: Even the ants crawling under the ground can be seen. Three: The choice between life and death is the only clear choice a man ever makes. I see the bird... It isn't a little bird at all. It's an enormous vulture... It's a whole flock of vultures... *(Swatting at imaginary birds)* They are perched above, watching us with hungry eyes. Aaah....

DOMINA:

(Coolly) Boulos, stay calm. This ordeal will soon be over. Proceed with the count down, Professor.

MAFIKIRI:

Two—

BOULOS:

(Stopping Mafikiri's hand in mid air) No, Professor, no, stop now.

DOMINA:

But why?

BOULOS:

I know who stole the envelope.

DOMINA:
What's his name?

BOULOS:
Boulos bin Pavassa, alias Mbarga Si.

DOMINA:
Oh, God, no. It can't be true. My own nephew! Tell me you're lying.

BOULOS:
Last night, I was not home sick in bed. I was at the Parisiana Club. There was a dance contest between the Jackson Boys from the university and the Rasta Boys from the engineering school. As president of the Jackson Boys, I had to be there, even though you've told me never to leave the house during your absence. We wanted to knock the socks off the engineers with fabulous outfits. My friend Albatross and I needed identical costumes for our dates. At the last minute, I remembered I had to get a rainbow hat for the girl. It cost fifty dollars and I only had forty in cash. I didn't want to put anything suspicious on my credit card and have you checking the date. And I had lost my remote to the petty cash drawer. The closest money was in the envelope, so I took it. You will be happy to know we roundly defeated the boring engineers with our dazzling outfits and dance. Then Albatross won \$500 at the drawing and he lent me half. We spent the night out with the girls. When I came back this evening, I was going to slip the money back into the professor's envelope, but you were on your way up and the girl wanted the jewelry I promised her, so I gave her the money instead.

DOMINA:
Just who was this girl you allowed in?

BOULOS:
None other than Mamie Zawadi, Professor Mafikiri's niece who disappeared two days ago.

MAFIKIRI:
Good Lord, my missing niece! She was here?

DOMINA:
She was here? With you? In the Kifunga Tumbu salon?

BOULOS:
Yes, I confess. And that's not all. The bottle of scotch...

DOMINA:
What about it?

BOULOS:
I gave it to the professor so he'd forget his envelope and leave. At first he refused, but then I

threatened to tell you I caught him stealing the bottle and he'd be subjected to the electronic shears.

DOMINA:

To the what! How dare you mention...?

BOULOS:

Auntie, please stop plaguing me with these questions. Punish me as you wish, but stop this excruciating interrogation.

Domina stares at Boulos in dismay, then turns to Kisimba.

DOMINA:

(Shrilly) Kisimba!

KISIMBA:

(Flinching) Yes, Mam'.

DOMINA:

Houseboy, how many times did you tell me Boulos was home sick in bed?

KISIMBA:

I didn't have any choice. Boulos threatened me with the ABCs—the ancestors, the bees, the crocodiles—if I didn't cover for him. When I tried to tell you the truth, you wouldn't believe me. I went crazy, ready to throw myself at your feet and beg for mercy. Then I discovered the professor had the bottle. He asked me to get rid of it, but I took advantage of the situation to compromise him.

DOMINA:

(To Mafikiri, slowly) So, you were telling the truth. But, Professor, there's something that mystifies me. Why would you want to get rid of a bottle worth five times as much as your envelope?

MAFIKIRI:

First of all, I didn't come here looking for a bottle of scotch, but for ten dollars to tend to my sick child and hungry family. Second, I did not want my conscience bothered or my reputation sullied. Third, I did not want to leave without my due or, at least, confronting you.

DOMINA:

And how did you learn all... my little secrets... in such detail?

MAFIKIRI:

I have my sources.

DOMINA:

(*Panicking*) Who are they? Who sent you here?

MAFIKIRI:

Who sent me here? Blood, sweat, rage, that's who. You are just a heap of rot with a stone in place of a heart, a fine specimen of molding rock. That you know. What you don't know is this is not going to last much longer. There are infrared beams directed at you and they will melt you like a block of ice.

DOMINA:

Uh... Could you be more specific? Are you some kind of under-cover agent? Are you going to expose me? Whose orders are you following?

MAFIKIRI:

Only the truth's, and, as Boulos said, nothing is more stubborn.

DOMINA:

What is your real mission here? Just fill me in a little and I'll give you all you need... food, money, gold, diamonds, oil...

MAFIKIRI:

That is technically impossible. Your supermarkets are incompatible with my primitive stomach and your bankers are as merciless as red ants.

DOMINA:

Help! Santa Maria, I implore you.

MAFIKIRI:

If you think I cannot keep your secrets to myself, why don't you just make mincemeat of me, like the unfortunate dermatologist Kasilembo three years ago?

DOMINA:

Santa Magdalena! Santa Mariiia!

Frenzied, Domina presses several buttons on her remote. She pulls out wads of bills.

DOMINA:

Here, take these. Professor, here's a thousand dollars. It's worth millions in national currency. Just take it, but promise you will not expose me.

MAFIKIRI:

Mister Professor does not need your millions. A person is not equivalent to the total of any bank account. I would rather be an honest earthworm than a member of the Carnivorous Order. I

would rather starve than have truckloads of okapi blood, of virgin mulatto breast, of pygmy roast.

DOMINA:

Mother in heaven! Professor, I have a heart condition. Do not torture my nerves. (*Digging into drawers and thrusting papers at Mafikiri*) Just take coupons for ten bags of corn flour, two hundred pounds of beef, a thousand bottles of whisky. Here, take them. Take this check for ten thousand U.S. dollars and then, by all the saints, I implore you, go take care of your sick child, your suffering wife, your needy cousins, your disappeared nieces...

MAFIKIRI:

Technically impossible. The Swiss banks are all closed at this hour. All your aboriginal liver won't buy—

DOMINA:

Mother of God! Stop rattling my nerves, Professor. Here, take \$25,000 in cash.

MAFIKIRI:

What is twenty-five thousand to you? Isn't that what Professor Alvarez in Bogotá wires you every Saturday at midnight for 0.09 barrels of ultra-blue diamonds, otherwise known as infant brain?

Domina and Boulos are stunned.

DOMINA:

You even know about Professor Alvarez! (*In a far-away voice*) Ah, Boulos, I knew it. I knew they would get to me. What a bunch of ungrateful bastards. Years on end, day and night, you wiggle your ass for them and then all of a sudden they just drop you. "We don't dance the same dance anymore, sorry." They send you a fake professor to undo you. And then they dump on you like Hiroshima. Unless I'm dreaming... I must be dreaming.

She appears to be swooning. Boulos and Kisimba rush to her side.

BOULOS:

Professor, stop this torture. She has palpitations, you know. Her nerves...

MAFIKIRI:

Very well. I will leave you in peace now.

DOMINA:

(*Grabbing on to Mafikiri, screeching*) No, Professor. Don't go yet. Here's \$50,000 in cash. Here's the keys to our pantries, our meat lockers, our liquor cabinets—

MAFIKIRI:

Since you just don't get it, here's what I think of you and your pissy liquor. *(He grabs the scotch bottle, opens it, sniffs it with disgust, and breaks it on the table.)* And this is what I think of your money... *(He throws the bills around the room and spews the whisky over them. He throws a wad of bills in Domina's face.)* Here, on the carpet, the armchairs, the electronic system, in your face. Walk on the stuff. Recycle it. Make it into rags, handkerchiefs, toilet paper. Just stop walking on human beings. Mama Domina, stop using us to wipe your ass. *(He moves to leave.)*

DOMINA:

Mister Professor, dearest Mafikiri, Frederick... Wait...

MAFIKIRI:

(Pausing on his way out) And here is what I think of your sick sect and your gory guru.

Mafikiri throws the Coin of Lucifer in the air. Domina, Boulos, and Kisimba duck. The coin lands with a thud on the floor. Lights begin flashing.

MAFIKIRI:

Farewell. May you three enjoy your whiskey, your dollars, your Lucifers, and other Philadelphianisms together. When you get tired of it all, just donate the rest to your Living Prophet Mulawatu, better known as the Flesh-Eater.

Mafikiri exits slamming the door behind him.

DOMINA:

What? He denounces the Divine Prophet? *(Weeping and whining)* Oh, Boulos, what's to become of me? The ungrateful bastards... They infiltrate your home with so-called tutors and so-called lovers. They debauch your daughters, your nieces, your nephews, poor darlings. Unless it was all but a nightmare, the Professor, the Prophet, the Supreme Council...

She collapses, falling into the armchair where Boulos' remote control is hidden. Flashing lights, alarms, drawers opening and closing.

Bills begin spewing out of the safe gone haywire.

BOULOS:

Auntie, are you alright? Kisimba, what should we do? Should I call a doctor?

KISIMBA:

Yes, call Dr. Hochwiller in Zurich, immediately.

Boulos rushes off to get the number.

Kisimba begins picking up the bills Mafikiri has strewn around the room and those spilling out

from the safe. He stuffs his pockets full.

BOULOS:

(Off stage, shouting in his cell phone) Hello, Zurich... *Ich bin* Boulos, *ja* Boulos bin Pavassa... Uh... I'm nephew von Mama Domina. *Ja*... Can I speak to *Herr Docktor*, uh... Hochwiller? *(Calling out to Kisimba)* Kisimba, how do you say "heart" in German?

KISIMBA:

(Still gathering money) Herz! *(Busy counting to himself)* Hertz, \$1000, rent a car, \$3000, rent a plane, \$5000, rent a house, \$10,000, \$25,000....

BOULOS:

(Still off stage) *Ja, mein Herz*, I mean... my... my Auntie's Herz is... *kaput*.

DOMINA:

(Writhing, babbling) Ohh, my Concord convulsions... my United ulcers... my Swissair scleriosis...

KISIMBA:

Bye bye, Domina. Each to his own America!

Kisimba exits.

BOULOS:

(Entering with cell phone clutched to his ear) Kisimba, how do you say "stroke" in German? Kisimba... Kisimba... ? Help!

Dogs barking. Lions roaring. Domina moaning.

BOULOS: *(Tapping her cheeks)* Auntie, stay calm. Kisimba! ... Ah, yes, *Herr Docktor*, at last! The Philadelphia Mansion. ...What? You don't know where we are?

The lights come down on Boulos rushing about, trying to negotiate with the doctor in fractured German and revive Domina who lies inert, and shouting out for help amid the bills that continue spewing from the safe.

The lights continue to flash. The alarms and animals continue to wail as the lights fade.

END

When Translation Creates Encounters

Heidrun Adler

The translator is an intermediary who transmits his or her sense of the theme directly between two languages, between two literatures. Theatrical translation, however, doesn't end at the translator's desk. A stage, the actor, and direction are also always required. There the ideal contact between author and reader, mediated by the translator, comes about in a concrete encounter between the actor/direction before it can move to the abstract encounter between author and audience. It sounds banal, but this is the *quid pro quo* that is the basic distinction between theatrical translation and translating poetry or prose.

It is written: 'In the beginning was the *Word* !'
I'm stopped already. Who will help me further?
I cannot possibly rate the *Word* so highly.
I must translate it otherwise,
If I am rightly enlightened by the spirit.
It is written: 'In the beginning was the *Thought* !'
Consider the first line well,
Lest the pen write too hastily.
Is it the *Thought* that works and creates all?
Should it not be: 'In the beginning was the *Power* !'
Yet, even as I write it down,
I feel I can not let that stand.
The spirit helps me! Suddenly I have it,
And confidently write: 'In the beginning was the *Deed* !'
(*Faust*, 36-37)

Faust's reflections while translating the first line of the Book of John, during which he successively translates the Greek notion of *logos* as *Wort*, *Sinn*, *Kraft* and *Tat* (word, thought, power, and deed), not only paradigmatically sets forth the difficulties presented by any task of translation, but also signals the hermeneutic possibilities of translation. Goethe reflects here upon translation theory—*Wort* (word) and *Sinn* (thought) respond to the classic method of literal translation in the first case, or according to meaning in the second case.

At the same time *Kraft* (power) could represent and seems to anticipate (modern) theory of linguistic communication that situates the relationship between emitter and receptor on the

This article is reprinted with permission from Adler, Heidrun. "Cuando traducir conduce al encuentro," *Latin American Theatre Review*, 40/2, Spring 2007. Heidrun Adler is the Editor of the series "Teatro en Latinoamérica" published by Vervuert Iberoamericana that has published numerous volumes on Latin American Theatre including Adler, Heidrun, Kati Röttger (eds). *Performance, Pathos, Política-de los Sexos. Teatro postcolonial de autoras latinoamericanas*. Madrid 1999; Adler, Heidrun and Adrián Herr (eds.). *De las dos orrillas: teatro cubano*. Madrid 1999; Adler, Heidrun and George Woodyard (eds.). *Resistencia y poder: Teatro en Chile*. Madrid 2000; Adler, Heidrun, Adrián Herr (eds.). *Extraños en dos patrias: Teatro latinoamericano del exilio*. Madrid 2003; and Adler, Heidrun, Jaime Chabaud (eds.). *Un viaje sin fin: Teatro mexicano hoy*. Madrid 2004.

highest plane, or, that is to say, does not propose (represent) a literal translation according to meaning but an equivalent effect upon the reader/listener. Finally, the translation of *logos* as *Tat* (deed) could suggest (represent) a pragmatic theory of language that embraces an even more ample context for each linguistic action—also each translation—as an action. (Costazza 87-169). None of the numerous polemic investigations of our time regarding the possibility or impossibility of translating a literary text, culminating in the demand to “reproduce the intellectual content” (Koschmieder 48-59) or to “reproduce the cognitive experience” (Jakobson 232 ff.), to “transform the text by a matter of translation (Gadmer 184-98) or for a “radical translation” (Quine 27-50), are as useful as Goethe’s verses to the theatrical translator. Goethe’s verses show us the two poles of being faithful to the text and of free translation (Eco), where what is underlined is the untranslatability of certain concepts, images, or nuances that go beyond direct reference, and demonstrate the possibilities inherent in exploiting diverse uses and meanings of words.

Spoken language is dynamic

Theatrical dialogue carries with it a functional relationship not only with the reader’s speech, but also with the other actors on the stage, the audience, and the character that speaks. Therefore, anyone translating theatrical literature cannot proceed as if they were translating novelistic dialogue. Theatrical dialogue isn’t a closed linguistic system. It constitutes, rather, a dynamic system from which, along with all the other factors of scenic representation (actors, stage), is developed the dramatic interaction between the characters. For this reason the theatrical translator’s *modus operandi* with a theatre text cannot consist of the substitution of one temporal style for another.

The translator has to embrace the foreign text with a methodically variable instrumentality. Fluctuate between finding the right shade of meaning and the right style and intonation. Certain portions of dialogue offer the necessary information the translator needs to interpret the character. Since spoken language is dynamic, a character’s way of speaking defines and motives its actions beyond (not only within) the semantic context. By employing certain syntax, certain turns of phrase and terms, long or short sentences, correct or incorrect grammar, an actor develops the *gestus* that makes both the character’s qualities and the social context visible.

The author’s stage directions can specify the scenery, the characters’ costumes, and particular stage movements. Aside from what she does, a character’s idiosyncrasies are only recognizable through what she says, and how she says it. This is why the translator’s work can determine whether or not the play functions onstage. A translation error in a prose text is seen as “unfortunate” and earns the author a bit of sympathy. A theatre text that doesn’t charge its characters with life condemns it to death.

Characterization seems relatively simple when a character’s mode of speech is based directly upon a particular linguistic register: biblical, epochal, cultivated or popular language, etc. In *La noche de Hernán Cortés*, Vicente Leñero makes a distinction between contemporary popular speech and cultivated speech in order to mark distinct temporal planes. For fictitious historical citations he resorts to an archaic written language.

Cortés: We fled the fuckup.

Or

Cortés: I thought that having worked hard as a youth would enable me to rest in my old age, and thus I have occupied myself for forty years in not sleeping, in eating badly, sleeping with my weapons, putting my person in danger. . . (34)

Cortés: (remembering). . . nor disobeying your captain. There is no turning one's face to the enemy that doesn't seem like flight, there is no flight, or, if you would like to color it so, no retreat, that doesn't cause the person who flees infinite problems. . . (44)

The constant shifting between linguistic planes has a dramatic function. It is designed to present Cortés as a person from our time that moves into the past through dreams and memories. As he pokes at his memory the apparitions spring forth. The only real characters in the play are Cortés and his secretary, who is writing a history of México on his computer. Leñero uses similar techniques in his other works. *El martirio de Morelos*, the action of which takes place during the wars of independence, contains anachronisms like a computer or cigarettes and a lighter that fulfill the same function as the use of different linguistic planes: they help produce an impression of simultaneity. Leñero suggests that this man is not only an historical figure. He is also a contemporary individual. The situation described inserts itself simultaneously in both the past and the present.

We are more accustomed to the choice of a particular linguistic register to establish a character. As a rule, every part of a dramatic role doesn't carry the same importance. Sometimes a character's first lines present and resolve the problem of characterization for that role. This makes them of extreme importance for the translator, since they have to transmit an image of the character's personality to the spectator that will barely admit correction later on. For example, Cortés' secretary says:

Secretary: ¿Nos fue de maravillas señor?

Several possibilities for translation offer themselves here. To me the "nos" seemed decisive. That this "we" implies lightly and ironically servitude as much as familiarity (nurses are the only ones who use the first person plural when addressing others) is demonstrated when, in the course of the action, it becomes clear that within this secretary a number of people coexist: Cortés' historical secretary, López de Gómara, the chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who narrated the Conquest of México and Sancho Panza. The secretary also incarnates the politics of his title, with his servile attitude, falsity, cynicism, and opportunism, his hypocrisy and fawning. All these qualities are ironically underscored by the fact that Cortés at times calls him Pancho, a nickname for Francisco. This is what servants and politician's chauffeurs are called in México. The actor has to keep all of this in mind in order that the character's first replies don't seem to be a caricature to the German audience.

Translating Latin American variants of Spanish

Characters in Latin American theatrical literature establish themselves by means of a whole complex of idiomatic traits with social and national origins with which we Europeans are completely unfamiliar. The singular social structures and historical processes of the distinct countries have coined modes of behavior that aren't directly transferable to our social context. Latin American writers often use archaisms to indicate a provincial setting, but they also use them to indicate hierarchical levels. Leñero puts ancient Spanish turns of phrase such as “vide” for “vi,” “truje” for “traje,” or “ansina” for “así,” into the mouth of a maid. The Mexican audience member knows immediately that this woman is from the provinces and never went to school in her life. Translating similar turns of phrase into German presents difficulties. Given that we recognize a person's social and intellectual position to a great degree by means of manner of speech, these and many other idiomatic turns of phrase that lack exact equivalents in the target language, force the translator to move away from the original. Confronted with such cases, Karl Kraus recommends with a play on words *nicht übersetzen*, not to translate, but better put *üb-ersetzen*, “study to substitute”.

If this weren't enough, Latin Americans use a different kind of body language than we Northern Europeans. They speak much more imitatively, moving the head, the hands, and the entire body. In order to understand this ample expressive palette one has to live with them for a while. There are Latin American theatre texts whose meaning frequently only reveals itself to us through the characters' body language, seeing and hearing them. An effect achieved in the original by means of a tone of voice, a melodic vocal pattern, syllable or vowels left unpronounced, aspirated consonants, or nasal qualities, the translator has to try to translate through word choice and unusual grammar to a great degree. This plethora of acoustic features, when combined with physical elements, situates the characters in their respective social contexts and is visible in the printed text.

A theatre text is an unfinished work of art that reaches its conclusion upon the stage. The word still needs to be put into the scene, incorporated into *gestus*. As Héctor Azar said in a talk given in Frankfurt in 1993, the translator also enters into this process harmonically. A workable translation must, above all, facilitate the text's insertion into the *gestus* of the target language. The German actor's task consists of declaiming a text that, within his own habitual idiomatic *gestus* expresses what the author wanted to express in the original.

Should we, then, produce theatrical translations that are like synchronous films of the original production caught on video? For a number of reasons, this doesn't work. A given production of a play is never valid for all time. The theatre is much closer to its audience than the cinema is to its audience. This is why the deciding factor isn't that the roles be played in a manner similar to the original cast, but that the audience understands the idiomatic *gestus*. There are innumerable cases of plays that continue to work equally well in different productions across international boundaries. One example is *Apareceu a Magarida (Miss Magarida's Way)* by Roberto Atayde. The play, a monologue about a teacher in front of a schoolroom, was presented in two versions: one from Bogotá, the other from New York, at a theatre festival in Kansas. These were two different productions presented to an audience each time of similar composition: equal parts North Americans and South Americans, with a few Europeans mixed in. During the

Colombian production a complete, tense silence reigned. Even afterwards little was said about the play. The New York version sparked animated audience participation, with audience members in effect, behaving as if they were the schoolchildren. Each version succeeded in transmitting—albeit in completely different but workable ways—the authoritarian terror incarnated in the play by the teacher. What does this mean? The translations each gave the actress the possibility of transferring the text into the *gestus* necessary for their respective idioms. The author was present and was equally delighted with the different versions. This confrontation unleashed a long and beneficial debate during the festival about theatrical translation. The debate culminated in the simple, provocative thesis (sustained by the Faustian reflections cited at the beginning of this essay) that a translation can/should move far away from the original in order to find the correct version.

Another example is the encounter that occurred in Hamburg between the original and the translation of Juan Radrigán's *Contienda humana* (*Human Battle*). A critic paying attention to the play's meaning wrote: "what the Chileans brought to the stage as a lunatic party has become a parlor piece in the German version." Such an opinion disqualifies the German version to a certain extent. Even more so, it says that the critic expected something synchronous, an exotic spectacle in German idiom. In its place the play's message: anxiety, fright, and individual self-destruction under a regime that annihilates human beings, was presented onstage translated to the Northern European *gestus*. It wasn't clear to the critic that we Germans react in an introverted manner where Latin Americans react in an extroverted manner, that where the Chileans may behave impassioned and rowdy, we are reserved. But when the translator and the director/actors work collaboratively all these kinds of contradictory forms of behavior come to the fore. In fact, the German audience responded to *Contienda humana* just as the author had foreseen: it provoked anxiety. The decisive question, posed by the author, and immanent in the text, "How would you react in this situation?" had affected the spectator. On the other hand, the passionate Chilean production was the object of an animated political discussion. If the German theatre group had tried to perform the play in the Chilean fashion, the piece would have degenerated into farce. Our expectations and prejudices play a great part here. Something we won't go into further since they introduce factors irrelevant to the literary survival of a work. The important thing about both these cases, that of Atayde and Radrigán, is that the productions underlined the exemplary nature of the plays. They eliminated the exotic without stripping away the play's origin.

Translation and adaptation

The translator always moves between two extremes: on the one hand, he or she must reproduce the text as exactly as possible, on the other hand, he or she has to constantly keep in mind that the play will be, from the point of view of the original text, performed by foreign actors and has to be accepted by a foreign audience in its own context. The characters have to live in the new language in the same way they were designed by the author. At times this isn't possible without considerable interventions on the part of the translator. A literal translation frequently means that the work's charm goes up in smoke. The entire spirit of the work turns false when entire passages provoke undesirable guffaws in the other language.

Nevertheless, the question of whether or not to give the translator free license to adapt a text in order to make it more comprehensible to the audience unleashes strong controversy. We expect that in practice, the author's authority, whether it is with regard to the original or a translation, ends the moment the director begins to work. No translation can perfectly reproduce the original. But at the same time a production of a play can only be realized to the extent that the director and actors understand the text and can bring it to life. In this sense theoretic disputes about the impossibility of translation are shown to be phantasmagorical.

The translation as much as the production—the latter with the help of the former—has to try to capture the author's intent. They have to get as close to that intent as possible. Now then, the translator should bring about no adaptation of the text alone. Rather the translator should, in collaboration with the theatre (the playwright/actors) pay attention to the text and create a workable version that, despite any efforts to convey itself to the local audience, maintains a cultural and sociological distance.

Whoever looks for his or her own personal complete understanding of the text always runs the risk of projecting their own conceptual baggage on to the text, thus preventing the possibility of it being truly understood. Translations shouldn't cover up the distance between the original and the translation but realize it. Certainly, when the foreign turns out to be incomprehensible one shouldn't maintain the foreign hue called for by Baron Wilhelm von Humboldt. This quality reveals itself more in the inequality with which one takes a risk in order to make things comprehensible to the audience. In Goethe's opinion, to translate you have "to approach the untranslatable, for only then will you perceive the foreign nation and its idiom."

Translation from Spanish by Adam Versényi

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