

LOOK BACK IN GRATITUDE

DRAMA

Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan



Kraftgriots

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Dedication

This play is dedicated to my late brother, Adebisi Ademola Ademilua (1979-2010), who was there when it mattered most. I am lost in the mysteries of God. Your departure conceals for me illuminations which God alone can transform into gratitude.

Author's Note

At the time of writing this play, I had just lost my dear brother. I was in a state of psychological shock. He was a dear brother who had been there for me since we lost our father. God used him in many ways to inspire and encourage me. He would buy books for me from the UK just so I could finish my PhD. Unfortunately, he could not even wait to see all the beautiful things I wrote about him in the thesis. God knows best. Certain things happen in life that we, as humans, cannot comprehend—just as his death a month to his 32nd birthday, without a wife and a child, is incomprehensible. But there is hope. I just hope that through this play, someone out there will find hope to live on even when bad things occur.

Moreover, this play holds an inter-textual debate with John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956). I read this play over and over again for my PhD thesis in 2010. Osborne's play explores the anger of the youth in post-war Britain. The youth represented by Jimmy Porter shows a lot of disenchantment with government policies. This lead character is angry and frustrated by an establishment that has nothing to offer him. He resorts to vituperations and invectives. His upper class wife remains the butt of his anger. I have decided to rewrite the Osborne's play by giving it a Nigerian setting where issues of unemployment and social ills are rife. Jagunlabi Fijabi replaces Jimmy Porter but the socioeconomic problems in Britain in 1956 are similar to those of Nigeria in 2010 and beyond. All the disillusionment and political disgust of young people find a spokesman in the cantankerous Jagunlabi Fijabi. This reinterpretation affirms the fact that the human condition is the same everywhere.

This play was first performed at the Main Auditorium, University of Lagos, Nigeria on the 17th of August, 2012 by the members of the Theatre Workshop Class made up of Year 1 students of the Departments of English, English Education and Creative Arts. It was directed by Lekan Balogun and had the following cast:

CAST

Tokunbo	–	Omosun Zuma/Esongba Rebekah/Adetoye Adeola
Jagunlabi	–	Kofoworola Kayode
Femi	–	Obafemi Dare
Labisi	–	Salako Oluwafisayomi
Prof. Jones	–	Akintola Tosin
Mrs Jones	–	Okatho Eunice
Landlady	–	Ogbonna Annie/Braide Yemi
Younger woman	–	Ogunlaja Omobola
Troupe Leader I	–	Adeagbo Titi
Doctor	–	Ogunsola Yomi
Josh	–	Okenkwa Benjamin

Chorus

Uchella Jude
 Akwuzie Uche
 Ibidapo Oluwatosin
 Adebowale Taiwo
 Lead Vocal – Fawole
 Assistant – Amos

Intrumentalists

Saxophone – Maduagwu Glory
Drums – Ajewole Olayemi
 – Oladipo Oni
Rattle – Omogbemi Ajoke

Dancers

Nwalisi Ifeoma	Aditan Adetomiwa
Nwajel Chizoba	Alabiade Oyindamola
Ekeleme Taiwo	Asekun Damilola
Adelaja Similoluwa	Abokobo Timipere
Osayomi Olubukola	Okeke Juliet
Adolphus Promise	

CREW

Costume

Yewande Titilayo
Alao Feyisayo
Oputa Igwe
Olatinwo Funke

Make-up

Odion Emmanuella
Adesanoye Adeola
Tinubu Mayowa
Chibueze Theima
Adelekan Adekunbi
Olaseinde Toyosi
Gbadamosi Omowumi
Joseph Patience
Akinsanya Joyce
Oladimeji Morenikeji
Olatujoye Mercy

Set and Light

John Okocha
Ayewole Omotunde
Adekoya Adefunke
Kuye Samuel
Williams Alfred
Arowooye Ayyub
Oliwaya Oluwatosin
Alasela Saidi

Production Secretary

AbdulHadi Bushrah
Arikewuyo Umamat

Logistics

Bakare Kunle

Asst. Stage Manager - Akinlade
Oluwaseun

Stage Manager

Agianbekong Oluwaseun

Director

Lekan Balogun

Dramatis Personae

Jagunlabi Fijabi	– <i>aka</i> Jags
Tokunbo	– Fijabi's wife— <i>aka</i> Toks
Labisi	– Toks' friend
Femi	– Jags' friend
Landlady	
Professor Jones	– Toks' Professor father
Mrs Jones	– Toks' mother
Doctor Teju	– The Jones' family doctor
Old woman (can be acted by Landlady)	
Younger woman	

Prologue

A spotlight reveals a middle-aged woman wearing a housecoat over a nightgown. Her hair is neatly kept in a night cap. She sits holding the hand of a younger woman. The younger woman looks worried and in some kind of trouble.

LANDLADY: (*Addresses YOUNGER WOMAN.*) Dear, you don't have to look so worried and unhappy. Life is like that. In this part of the world, men dictate the terms. It is a male-dominated world after all, and women, no matter their level of education, must abide by the rules of the game.

YOUNGER WOMAN: But I love him and I try to show it all the time. What else does he want?

LANDLADY: You don't have to explain to me.

YOUNGER WOMAN: You don't want to listen to me?

LANDLADY: No, you don't have to explain because I know. I was like you once. Look at me here, with a doctorate degree, my husband abandoned me shortly after we set foot on this shore from the UK. It was not because I could not bear him children, nor because I failed to respect him and love his family as my own but because he wanted out ... He wanted variety (*Mimics him.*) "Variety, my dear is the spice of life" he said and before I came to my senses, he had left! Unbelievable, eh?

(Speaks directly to the audience.) How many of you seated here can vouch for your husband? "The African man is traditionally polygamous", I was admonished. *(As if in trance.)* The day Josh left me and the children ... that was the day it dawned on me, like a heavy blow but the joy of the Lord is my strength. *(In a flash, the action comes to pass. Enter JOSH with two hefty men.)*

JOSH: (*Matter-of-factly.*) Alright, gentlemen, the bags are in the spare-room by your left. Put them in the van downstairs.

(*The movements and doors banging draw LANDLADY's attention. She comes to the sitting room to see packed bags and strange men moving things out. Alarmed, she accosts them.*)

LANDLADY: Hello! Who are you? What are you doing in my home?

(*The men ignore her and continue with their assignment. She is about to hold on to one of them when she turns to see her husband coming out of the room. She runs to him panting.*)

LANDLADY: Darling, what's happening? Who are these men? Who brought them? What are they doing here? Who invited them? (*Silence.*) Can someone just say something to me?

JOSH: Woman! Woman! When will you learn? (*Exasperatedly.*) You ask too many questions all at the same time. I have told you, you lack patience. If you are patient enough, you will soon know.

LANDLADY: (*Dejectedly falls down into a seat holding her head in her hands.*) Alright. But who are they?

JOSH: Patience. Patience. My dear, patience. (*The two men continue to move suitcases and bags out and when they carry JOSH's red portfolio, she runs after them.*)

LANDLADY: (*Holding on to her husband; on her knees.*) Please, what is happening? That is your red portfolio, containing all the papers of our landed property and the children's birth certificates.

JOSH: Oh, thank heavens you are learning at last.

LANDLADY: Learning what? Explain to me, sweet darling,

please.

JOSH: (*Mimics.*) Yes, sweet darling, I am out of your life for good.

LANDLADY: (*Alarmed.*) What? What have I done? What did I do wrong? (*She tries to touch him, but he waves her off.*) Okay. (*She wipes her face.*) What of the children? How do I explain it all to them when they come home from the boarding house? (*Shocked.*) Please, don't put me to shame in the neighbourhood and in my family. Please. Think about the good times we shared at least.

JOSH: Well, that is something worthwhile at least. (*Shakes her hands off his trousers.*) Don't worry about the children. I was in their school yesterday and they already know. As for you ... you have always coped. You are strong and educated. You are still very young. Don't worry, someone, somewhere, someday will notice you ... I am almost certain you will cope with him.

(*JOSH storms out laughing derisively as she screams his name. Back to the present.*)

LANDLADY: To say I was mad is an understatement. I felt lost. Bewildered. Alone. I ran after the van, shouting. It was a Saturday morning. The whole neighbourhood saw it all. Hmm! They peeped out of their windows and I was sure they mocked: "the me-and-my-husband" woman has been put to shame. (*Pensive.*) But time has a way of healing the deepest of all wounds. See me today ... a living testimony of the faithfulness of God, a result of perseverance, a combination of hard work and doggedness. (*Turns to YOUNGER WOMAN again.*) Such is the lot of a woman on this continent. It is the way of the world! We try our best to keep our homes, but is our best ever enough? Think about it and wipe your face, go home to your husband and be a good wife.

YOUNGER WOMAN: (*Tearfully.*) Is that all you will say to me?

LANDLADY: Don't be troubled, my dear. Everything will be fine.

(*Lights fade.*)

(The action takes place in the FIJABIs' one-room in a "face-me-I-face-you" apartment in Mushin. It is a sparsely furnished room. A few items decorating the wall reveal their taste in the arts. There is a shelf housing a collection of books. A flower vase stands on this shelf and on the wall, there is the wedding picture of the FIJABIs. When the curtain rises, we hear a woman's voice calling out to someone on the bed. This is TOKS, a young woman of twenty-five, good-looking, slim with long hair and could easily pass for a beauty queen.)

TOKUNBO: Darling. *(She calls out endearingly.)* I'm off now. I'll see you in the evening. *(She listens for a response and when there is no answer to her call, she goes out.)* Bye for now.

JAGUN: *(Gets out of bed immediately he hears the sound of her car leaving.)* Foolish woman, it's not her fault. Not her fault at all. Look at me, for four years now, I have been out of job. Every day I sit at home doing nothing. I have spent the last two years looking for a job which is not available. The first two years I coached students after school and for how much? Stipends! Money that couldn't pay for this single room. I had to stop. The insults from parents and the children ... those children were another case entirely. Overfed spoiled children of parents who do not have time. How much were they even paying to be insulting me? That I teach their lazy children does not make me a nanny. Some will call in the middle of the night asking why I did not give the children take-home work. Some will ... *(Seems to remember something.)* Ah, Chief Dr Mrs Lucas, our doctor, called in one night in her white overall. *(Mimics Mrs Lucas.)* "My dear Mr Fijabi," she says in her most soft voice, "you need to do more in Jide's use of words. I want that boy to study medicine in England, you know, but he seems to be using such slangs that I wondered where he got them from. To pass the TOEFL exam, his oral production needs to improve. You know, it was The Braithwaites that recommended you, if it is money,

I can add to it.” Arrogant wealthy Madam. Can you imagine? She has seen a poor teacher eh? Not her fault. Ask me what I will do about a child that has been left in the care of a maid all his life with no father-figure to monitor him and an almost absent mother. A mother who comes home late at night after rounds of night calls. Her “off-days” are spent in private hospitals making extra money. (*He mimics her.*) “I try”, she says, “to make more money to keep up my taste and my only child. What can I do? A single parent!” What is my business if you are a double parent?

Anyway, I thought leaving that ‘After School Coaching’ would work, so I started visiting offices, mainly the National Theatre, banks, corporate organizations, just anything. But they all turned me down. When I even thought of settling for a teaching appointment with the Teaching Service Commission, yes, there were openings, openings only for indigenes of the state and English Language teachers, with an Education degree.

“Sorry, there is no vacancy for a Theatre Arts Graduate. If you had read English Language or English Education, we would have had a place for you” *Hmn?* What is wrong with Theatre Arts? What foolish excuse to keep people like me on the street. So many doors were closed on my face. My shoe had become tattered and worn-out from combing the streets for nothing.

My wife, Toks, oh, she bought some new pairs for me. Yes, she did. But I would not have anything to do with them. Why should a woman buy shoes for you and you will wear it? Me, take something from a woman! *Kamari*, God forbid! You know our women. The moment they do things for you the whole world will hear about it. I don’t know why they cannot keep their mouths shut. And they are all the same—young and old—all of them.

(He moves to the kitchen area of the room. He sees the note TOKUNBO left for him on the table and reads it out.)

Darling *(He snorts.)* I have left some
money on the dressing table for you
There is hot water in the flask, some
bread and boiled egg for you.
Love you,
Toks

Yes, my dear Toks, she tries but who would ever tell a woman she is good. That will get into her head. Ha! That will make her pompous and arrogant. *(Sits down to breakfast. There are knocks on the door. He gets up to open the door: FEMI, his friend enters. He is married and jobless.)*

Hello, FC! Please join me if you have not had this same treatment too.

FEMI: Jagajaga, what treatment again?

JAGUN: Can't you see what Toks left for me as breakfast?

FEMI: Okay! How much did you give her as feeding allowance? Jags, you should be grateful and stop complaining.

JAGUN: Don't come again with your sermon, I do not know why you are always supporting her or are you interested, eh? *(Laughs.)*

FEMI: Come on! Don't be ridiculous. That girl has received more ill-treatment from you that I wonder why she's still here with you.

JAGUN: *(Visibly angry.)* Stop it! *Haba!* Stop this nonsense, what treatment! I have not done anything to her yet. That spoilt rich girl of a blown-up mother! I haven't finished with her yet. You remember, the last time her mother visited, she could not even sit well on our sofa. She perched on the edge and had her hands on her laps as if the seat

was infested and she did not want to be infected. She did not even drink the water her daughter offered. She carried the glass daintily to her mouth, looked doubtfully into it with her glasses on her nose, shook her head and put it down. My mother-in-law, hmmh, all her fingers are adorned with rings from Italy, from Dubai and I am sure from India too, to hold down her Professor Randy husband. Randy Casanova Professor Olanbiwonninu Jones! A man of timbre and calibre. (*Pompously now.*) Professor, Doctor, Chief, LLB, BL, LLM, MSC, MON, GCFR etc, etc ... Houses in VI, Ikoyi, Lekki and Apapa. Rides the car whose colour goes with the colour of his agbada. Where does he get all the money? Ask me, eh? Conference here, seminar here, fellowship in the US, visiting in Gainneville and Bayreuth, leave of absence for ten years ...

FEMI: If you hate them so much, why marry their daughter?

JAGUN: (*Stops as if thinking.*) Who married their daughter? Me? Nooo! They were too ashamed when they met me. It was their daughter who married me o. All the girls admired me, especially my brilliance and football skills. Who didn't know Jagunlabi on campus, not even the girls?

FEMI: Ha ha! Jagajaga! You are impossible! Remember how you used to run after the girl when we were in the university.

JAGUN: (*Conceding for once.*) That was at the beginning before I discovered that she was a lovey-dovey sentimental girl. Who wouldn't fall for her pretentious innocence or what did you call it then?

FEMI: I didn't say that, please.

JAGUN: Well, at least you said a thing about her innocence and you actually pushed me on her.

FEMI: You are simply a pathetic liar despite your brilliance.

JAGUN: Oh, that is it. At least, you acknowledge my brilliance

FEMI: That is the only good thing about you. Everything else is simply a shame.

JAGUN: Your luck then. You are stuck with me for the rest of your life. Anyway, let's go and play snooker at the junction with those boys.

FEMI: Where are we to get the money to pay for playing?

JAGUN: Why worry? Toks, lovey-dovey, left some money.

FEMI: And you can't even appreciate that?

(FEMI gets up and goes out with him, shaking his head in wonder. Lights fade.)

The FIJABIs' one-room in Mushin.

JAGUN: I don't know why I still read these newspapers ... It's always the same story. Stories of embezzlement and of corruption. Now, it's not even perpetuated by men. Women are doing it! Look! (*Shows FEMI.*) A woman leader in the House of Assembly renovated a building for 60 million naira! The same house that has just been vacated by her deputy! How much, then, will it take to build a new house? Where are we going in this nation? (*Claps his hands together.*) Nigeria, we hail thee! (*To TOKUNBO.*) Did you hear now, Madam Feminist? A woman took our money! What do you have to say to that?

TOKUNBO: (*Stops ironing.*) Hmm? What did you say?

JAGUN: Nothing. I knew it. She wasn't listening. How will she listen to me? It's just me, a nobody talking. (*Pause.*) I said, a woman like yourself stole ₦60 million. Now, you know. What do you have to say?

TOKUNBO: Well ... who is this woman?

JAGUN: Is it the person you are concerned with or the act?

TOKUNBO: But you said it is a woman?

JAGUN: Yes! How dare you raise your voice at me, Madam Feminist? I know you will rise to her defence. That's one of the problems we have in this country — putting women in positions of authority. Leave them in the kitchen. That's what they know how to do. They don't deserve such delicate, great responsibilities. (*Turns to FEMI.*) Have you finished with the one you are reading? Let's see if it has better news.

FEMI: I haven't finished.

JAGUN: (*Snatches it.*) Give it to me. You can't even afford to buy your own. All you do is come here and disturb me.

Go and buy yours. (*Flips through the paper and reads on.*) The House spends 25% of the National Income! (*Reads.*) "Jumbo Pay" for our legislators! (*Chuckles.*) Let the naira flow into their pockets while the masses languish in poverty. (*More to himself and the audience.*) Do you know how many of our graduates roam the streets without a job? Do you know how many unemployed live under Lagos bridges? (*Drops the paper in disgust.*)

FEMI: (*Picks up the paper and reads.*) Have you finished? (*Opens a page and reads.*) See page two: To feed the President's lodge, ₦1.57m is needed for one day! Here you are grumbling and complaining, Jagun. Why don't you go and enlist as a chef for the President?

JAGUN: (*Angry.*) Enlist as a chef? Me? Jagunlabi Fijabi! After a 1st class degree in Theatre Arts and four years at home without a job? Me, go to the market, buy pepper and cook rice?

FEMI: At least, you will be able to feed yourself and your wife. It's dignifying!

JAGUN: That I can't feed my wife is none of your business. Even then, have I fed myself not to talk about a wife? Or is she complaining to you?

FEMI: Don't take offence. It's just an advice.

JAGUN: Advice rejected. Learn to mind your business. (*Snatches the paper from FEMI.*) Now, go! Go to your house. I've had enough of you already.

FEMI: If you're so concerned about the state of affairs in this nation and you want to take it to the other side, why don't you do a one-man riot or call a press conference? Maybe you'll be heard.

JAGUN: Where do I get the money for the placard or to invite the media houses to broadcast my views? Not to worry, my wife should be able to sponsor me.

Finally, FEMI disentangles himself.)

FEMI: *(Breathing hard.)* You have injured her. I told you; you are a brute!

JAGUN: *(Goes over to TOKUNBO.)* Have I injured you? Is it painful?

TOKUNBO: Go, just go away!

FEMI: *(Touches the hand, she winces.)* Shall I bring a bar of soaps and water.

TOKUNBO: The sponge case is just under the bed.

FEMI: *(Brings the soap.)* I'll just rub a bit on the injured area. If it pains, just scream and I'll stop.

JAGUN: Alright, I'm out. I'll leave the two lovers alone. *(Goes back to the newspaper. After a while ... to TOKUNBO.)* I'm hungry. Boil some rice for me.

FEMI: But you've just eaten ...

JAGUN: What business of yours is that? Toks, I say I am hungry. Boil rice.

TOKUNBO: I'll do just that after I finish ironing this last shirt. Let me finish quickly. You know how erratic our power supply is.

JAGUN: How long will it take you to boil rice for me? Is it because I'm not responsible for the purchase of the foodstuffs?

TOKUNBO: But I have not said that.

JAGUN: *(Gets up angrily.)* I'll teach you a lesson today. *(JAGS gathers the clothes TOKUNBO is ironing, the iron and the table. He brings out a bucket of water, threatens her with the iron and dips the cloth inside the water. He turns to FEMI and threatens him with the iron. FEMI runs back. He puts the iron on the table)* In fact, I have just had enough of your nonsense. *(Storms out.)*

FEMI: (*Moves to TOKUNBO who is still holding her cheek.*)
Toks, please forgive him. I am sure he doesn't mean all
he has said and done to you. (*Holds her hand.*) Please,
forgive him and pray for him. (*They sit on the sofa. Lights
fade.*)

TOKUNBO is in front of the room knocking on the door. It is about 8 O'clock at night. She has a scarf on her head and is carrying a Bible.

TOKUNBO: (After knocking for a while, she calls out.) Jags love, open the door, please, I want to come in.

JAGUN: (After a while from inside.) Go back to where you are coming from.

TOKUNBO: But I told you where I was going. (Pleads.) Please, open the door.

JAGUN: *Iya ijo*, go back to your church. What of the Pastor? He could not house you? Or why are you back? Go back and tell him I divorce you, he can go ahead and marry you.

TOKUNBO: Jags, please open the door. (Whispers.) The neighbours are already looking at me and I am sure they have been listening to everything. Please.

JAGUN: (Shouts.) Why does that bother you? Don't they see you and the way you carry on with your pastor? Half the respect you give to your pastor, you don't give me. *Iya ijo*, go and sleep in your church.

TOKUNBO: (Whispers.) You know I have never done that, Jags, please, Jags, I am begging, let me come in.

JAGUN: Only if you promise never to go to that church again.

TOKUNBO: But you know that is not possible.

JAGUN: Then, go and stew up with your pastor and leave this jobless man alone.

TOKUNBO: (Still pleading.) Jags, please open the door, it will not happen again.

JAGUN: I have had enough of your insolence. That's how you talk and next, you go back to that church of yours. What

do they even give you there? (TOKUNBO is silent. She sits on the floor. When she does not reply. He continues.) Why are you silent or the devil has taken your mouth? (Silence still. the LANDLADY passes and sees TOKUNBO sitting on the floor.)

LANDLADY: *Iyawo mi!* What are you doing on the floor?

TOKUNBO: Nothing, Mama, I forgot to take my own key that's why I have to wait for my husband. (She smiles.)

LANDLADY: *Iyawo.* But I saw your husband entering the room some minutes ago while I was returning from the market. Call his phone now, or have you forgotten his number?

TOKUNBO: Maybe he is sleeping or has gone out again before I came.

LANDLADY: *Iyawo.* If he's sleeping, call him now or bang the door he may wake up.

TOKUNBO: Yes, Ma. I will do that. Thank you. (LANDLADY tries to move off, stops and turns.)

LANDLADY: You don't have to deceive anyone, you hear? If you can't bang the door, I'll do it for you (With that she bangs the door with her fist.) JAGUNLABI, open the door, your wife is out here. (Silence.) JAGUNLABI, I know you are in there. Open the door for your wife. (Silence Still.)

TOKUNBO: Ma, thank you. As you can see, he is not in. I will wait for him. You may go, Ma. I appreciate your gesture. Thank you.

LANDLADY: Don't thank me. I am on my way. (She goes out.)

TOKUNBO: (More to herself.) What kind of life is this? All the neighbours can see the way my husband treats me. What kind of shame is this?

JAGUN: (Opens the door a little.) So, you are still there? I thought your Mother Teresa has taken you with her to

her room. That's where you will sleep tonight, stupid girl!
(*Before he can close the door, the LANDLADY is seen coming.*)

LANDLADY: But you said your husband wasn't at home?

TOKUNBO: (*Stammers.*) No, Yes, No, Ma. He just got here.

LANDLADY: (*Ignores her.*) Jagunlabi, why not open the door for your wife?

JAGUN: What is your problem, old witch? Mind your business. It is none of your business, if I open my door to anyone or not. So, go away, old gossip!

LANDLADY: Jagunlabi, are you calling me names now because I've asked you to open the door for your own wife? Enh? *Olosi, oloriburuku*, bastard.

JAGUN: Yes, *amebo*, mind your business or go and die. Witch!

LANDLADY: But what have I done to warrant this insult from you?

TOKUNBO: (*On her knees.*) Mama, please don't listen to him. Go, Ma, I will manage here. Don't let him insult you any further on my account.

LANDLADY: (*Pushes her.*) *Na wa o*. Is this the kind of husband you have married? Many nights, we hear your tears, your sobbing and yet, you pretend in the morning after. What is a beautiful girl like you doing with the animal? And if we asked you after, what was wrong, you say nothing. Even with a black eye, you still say nothing. Are your parents here in Lagos? Can't they come for you? Or can't you save yourself?

TOKUNBO: Everything is alright, Ma. I will manage. Thank you.

LANDLADY: You are dismissing me, enh? Alright, I will go. But remember, if he doesn't stop beating you, I will drive both of you out before he kills you. I can't buy a coffin.
(*With that, she hisses and leaves.*)

TOKUNBO: (*More to herself.*) Oh my! What do I do? I can't go to my parents. They will say, "We told you so." Where do I go this time? (*Looks at her watch.*) Ha! It's 10 o'clock. I have been here for two hours! Oh, my God! Where did I go wrong? Please touch his heart again, O Lord. Where do I sleep tonight? (*She looks at her wrist, sighs with resignation as she sits on the floor.*) God, please keep me safe. (*With that, she puts her head on the wall and doses off. Lights fade.*)

Night. TOKUNBO is seen asleep only faintly defined. A single light shows an old woman. The dressing and make-up suggest that it is an older generation. TOKS should be shown in a dream.

OLD WOMAN'S VOICE: Omotokunbo Agbeke, wake up (*Taps her on the shoulder.*) Wake up, my child.

TOKUNBO: (*Half-asleep, half-awake.*) *Hmmh, who is this?*

OLD WOMAN: It is me.

TOKUNBO: (*Recognizes the voice.*) Grandmama, is that you?

OLD WOMAN: Yes, Agbeke, *omo owa, omo ekunlaafin.* (*Chants her cognomen.*) You, the daughter of the lion, Agbeke, the one to carry, pet and pamper. The child of the great hunter of Eshinmo. What are you doing alone, outside, at this time? (*Does not wait for an answer.*) I have seen your travails, child, wipe your tears. You will laugh again.

TOKUNBO: Grandmama, I am at a loss. I do not know what to do again.

OLD WOMAN: Child, reach out. Come closer and rest your head on my laps as you used to do. I will tell you a story. Yes, a story to lift you up.

TOKUNBO: (*Rests her head on OLD WOMAN's lap.*) Alright, Grandma.

OLD WOMAN: In faraway land, there lived a couple who were always fighting. Today, the husband will break the wife's head; tomorrow the wife will bite the man's ear. This cantankerous couple had scars all over their bodies to show for their several altercations. Then the wife was advised to visit her grandmother for advice. She went. The grandmother listened to her complaints and saw the scars on her body and the black eye she had on. She told her granddaughter that she had a medicine that she could apply which would make her husband stop beating her. The young woman was given a piece of chalk by the

grandmother. She was admonished that when her husband wants to beat her, she should put the chalk in her mouth. Upon returning home, the usual fight ensued, the young woman ran into the room and put the chalk in her mouth. The husband looked at her and left. The same situation repeated itself for the rest of the week. This woman was so happy that the beatings had stopped. She went to report the effectiveness of the chalk to her grandmother. There, the grandmother told her that the piece of chalk had no power; the man stopped beating her anymore because she did not provoke him with her hurtful words as her mouth was literally barricaded by the piece of chalk. Child, "the glory of young men is their strength and the beauty of old men is the grey head." (*The words echo as they are repeated.*) The beauty of old men is the grey head ... head ... head (*Her voice trails off.*)

TOKUNBO: (*Not fully awake, mumbles.*) Grandmama, please wait, wait ...

In the morning. It is a Sunday. The compound is bustling with people going up and down with their daily activities. TOKUNBO is seen at her door. The LANDLADY passes but says nothing. JAGUN opens the door.

JAGUN: So you are still here? I thought you have been given a room by your advocate. Stubborn girl. *(Taps her on the head.)* Get inside now before you make a fool of yourself. *(TOKUNBO gets up and follows him inside. The door is closed.)* So, you think you can expose me eh? *(Tries to slap her, she dodges.)* Oh! Now, you are dodging me. I know what to do about you. Come to think of it; you got what you wanted. You married the most eligible first-class graduate. *(Goes on his knees and looks under the bed.)* I have bought a cane for you.

TOKUNBO: Please, Jags, don't do this to me. Don't try that path ... please.

JAGUN: You have turned me into a nonentity. Since I married you, I have not known any peace. I have not progressed in any way. You brought your bad luck into my life, that's why I must teach you a lesson today. We've been married for four years, no child, no job. Only you, growing more beautiful every day, sucking me up for your witch friends! What shall I do with you? I am going to beat you silly.

TOKUNBO: *(Yelling.)* Please, Jags, don't treat me like this.

JAGUN: You are a child. You never learnt anything under your parents. I am going to instil some discipline into you before you infect me with your mammy-water spirit. That's how evil women like you will be doing fine and their husbands will be going wretched everyday. Toks, Toks, Toks, go back to your parents! *(With that he storms out.)*

Two weeks later. TOKUNBO is seen by the kitchen area, arranging plates and pots, singing. Then her phone rings. She picks it up.

TOKUNBO: Hello, Labisi, is it you? After such a long time? Where are you? *(Pause. She listens to the person.)* Oh, you are in Lagos already? Where are you staying? *(Pause.)* You are coming to my house? *(Alarmed, she stammers.)* But, eh, eh ... eh you know we live in Mushin? *(Pause.)* You will still come. I warn you, it is not to your taste. *(Pause.)* It's alright if you will manage, I will love to catch up on old times too. *(Pause.)* Alright, since you are already in a taxi, I'll wait for you at home. *(Sighs.)* This is going to be rough. Labisi, what if you don't do this? *(The door opens and JAGUN comes in.)* See you later then.

JAGUN: *(Cuts in.)* Who are you seeing later?

TOKUNBO: *(Stammering.)* It's Labisi. She has a movie to shoot in Lagos for two weeks and says she wants to stay with us.

JAGUN: And what did you tell her?

TOKUNBO *(Stammers.)* I ... d actually wanted to tell her to stay off. I swear. Jags, I wanted ...

JAGUN: But you know she can't. Tell her I say she cannot. Call her now to go back. Is she not the one who said you should not marry me when we were in school? Did she not say I was a good-for-nothing brute? No ambition, no dream, nothing nothing? Why now? Why does she want to stay in my house? *(Pause.)* Okay, I know! You told her you are the one paying the bills here?

TOKUNBO: How can I say that?

JAGUN: Yes! You told her you are the breadwinner. Yes, the breadwinner of my life even, so you can take whatever decisions without consulting me.

TOKUNBO: No, that is not what I meant, Jags. Please, you need to understand.

JAGUN: Yes, of course I understand. Toks is actually the man of the house. If you know what's good for you don't let her come here or I will kill her with my bare hands. That bitch of a girl. Too smart for her own head! Is she even married now? (*Waits for an answer, when he gets none, he continues.*) Didn't the company make arrangements for housing their actors/actresses? Let her beware if she comes here. This room cannot contain the two of us.

TOKUNBO: (*Mildly.*) I tried to dissuade her from coming but you know, we have not seen since our NYSC days. I would really like to see her for old times' sake.

JAGUN: Old times' sake! If she comes here and opens her smug little mouth at me, I will teach her that I have no moral scruples for beating up erring little girls like her. I will show her the way out. I'll beat her black and blue. I will swallow her up like a cobra.

TOKUNBO: Must you really do this all the time?

JAGUN: That "brute" of a husband will never change. That was your mother, wasn't it? She even hired a detective to follow my movement and to dig up my past. The moment she found out I was dating you, all decorum was thrown to the winds. (*Sarcastically.*) Some mother, your mother!

TOKUNBO: Don't bring my mother into this. Well, why not try to be nice to her? She arrives in less than twenty minutes. Remember, she is the only friend I have.

JAGUN: Friend? You call that tart, a friend? The one that was sleeping with every male actor she worked with? Have you forgotten we were in the same department? Warn her against stepping on the tail of the cobra or it will swallow her up. (*As if on cue, they hear a knock on the door. JAGUN rushes to sleep on the bed, pretending to snore quietly. Enter LABISI.*)

TOKUNBO: (*Rushes to meet her.*) Eeh! Labisi! Is this you? (*Inspects*

her.) You have not changed at all! You still look the way you were four years ago. Please, sit down (*Carries her bags in.*) Make yourself comfortable.

LABISI: (*Inspecting the room.*) Toks, I feel so great seeing you again after a very long time! Come here. (*They embrace happily again.*) You are looking beautiful as ever. How has married life been? (*Notices the man on the bed.*) Is that your husband? (*Tries to seat on one of the tattered chairs. She is uncomfortable.*)

TOKUNBO: Yes, that is him. Jags, wake up, meet LABISI. (*He gets up reluctantly.*)

JAGUN: I heard the noise and I was wondering who could be that intruder?

TOKUNBO: It is no intruder, Jags. You must remember Labisi, my friend. She was in your department.

JAGUN: Yes, I remember her and her foolishness. Anyway, Madam, what are you doing in my house? Did I invite you? I hear you are doing one movie here in Lagos. Don't they have accommodation for their cast and crew? Or you want to come and rescue your friend from the clutches of "that brute"? Was that not what you called me sometime ago? Miss High and Mighty! Where has your smartness landed you? You are not even married yet. How can you? Who will take you home to his mother, this mess of a girl?

LABISI: (*Stands up.*) Are you tired? Or is the bag empty? I thought after some time, you would have outgrown your bad behaviour. Trouble becomes you, Mr Jagunlabi Fijabi. I don't blame you; it is in your name, you are a fighter. Once a fighter, always a fighter. *Oruko lo nro e* – you are behaving true to your name. Toks, you are really trying. I thought he has changed.

TOKUNBO: Forget that. Sit. What will you have for dinner?

LABISI: I am fine. (*She sits.*) Please, just give me a glass of water.

JAGUN: Are you sure you can drink our water? Madam, this is Mushin o. It is a ghetto!

TOKUNBO: (*Cheerfully.*) Labisi knows, Jags. She is happy to see us again. (*JAGUN goes out.*)

LABISI: This is dangerous. Do you think you can manage the situation with your angry husband?

TOKUNBO: Really! He is a nice person. Only you have not taken time to understand him.

LABISI: Understand who? Jagunlabi the warrior! I keep telling you, he must have put love potion in your food for you to have stayed with him this long. Even in school, he was like this. And you still put up with this cankerworm.

TOKUNBO: *Haba*, Labisi, you do know how much I love him.

LABISI: Love him, to the point of death? You remember that incident in school? Have you forgotten when you gave him the Golf car your father bought for you? Remember, how you received the beating of your life when we saw him with those girls driving to the staff quarters where he used to stay? You saw him and called out to him but he refused to stop. Yet you trekked to the BQ. You met one of the girls in his arms. You said so yourself. Oh, come on, Toks. Stop being love-struck.

TOKUNBO: (*Sadly and meekly.*) But that was then. He loves me and married me and discharged other girls. That has some meaning, don't you think? Let's consider that at least.

LABISI: Wake up, Tokunbo, wake up from your slumber. This man cannot change. Open your eyes.

TOKUNBO: (*Sadly but firmly.*) Let's drop the issue. Can we talk about something else? (*Folding some clothes and putting*

them on the rack.) Labisi, what of Olu? When are you two getting married?

LABISI: Olu is just there. Marriage? (*Laughs.*) That's not in my thoughts now. Olu can either wait or leave. I still want to see the world and by the time I am through I'll see to marriage.

TOKUNBO: Time is going. You know, 'gather rosebuds while you can.' Time doesn't wait for anyone.

LABISI: Says who? Enh? You want me to be trapped in the mess you call marriage? Not me. I see many who hurried into marriage, hurrying out of it. Or you want me to be love-blind like you. He beat you even when you were dating. You ran to the hostel and as soon as you were all healed up and the black and blue stains disappeared on your face, you ran back to him. (*Mimics her.*) "It's Jags, we are going to his BQ. Jags, he is so cool." Poor you, so blind.

TOKUNBO: LABISI, it's okay now. But what can I do? You know I love him.

LABISI: (*Shakes her head in disgust.*) Alright. Just warn him to stay off me for the time I am here or I'll show him that some women are made of "sterner stuff."

(The door is angrily pushed open and JAGUN enters, his eyes red, his hands shaking on the doorknob; shaking. When he opens his mouth to talk, his lips are shaking, the hair in his nostrils, flaring and standing tall. The girls turn sharply to face him.)

JAGUN: So you are here gossiping, enh? You don't have anything better to do with your time. Anyway, it is a woman's trade. You gossip, you giggle, backbite, you spread tales and destroy other people's homes (*Turns to LABISI.*) I am sure that is what you have come here to do. (*Hisses and walks to the bed.*) I want to sleep now.

Just be warned that your blabbering annoys me. So, it is better you shut up ... okay?

LABISI: (*Angrily.*) What's the matter with you, Jagunlabi. I pity this girl who married you. You quarrelsome, cantankerous man. Which home do you have that someone has come to destroy? Is this a home? Useless man! Tell me. Is this what you call a home? (*Looks round.*) This cubicle where there is no love. I'll educate you, old devil, a home is where there is love, and a place you run to for succour away from the problems you may encounter in your sojourns outside.

JAGUN: (*Threateningly.*) If you open your mouth again to say what you don't know, I'll slap you whether you are Toks' friend or not.

LABISI: (*Moves closer to him.*) Slap me! (*Laughs throatily.*) You think I am Toks eh? Toks and I may be friends, but we are different. Slap me if you dare. I may have been brought up in Ikoyi, but for your information, I was given kung-fu training and I will take you down before you can call your own name. (*She demonstrates her skills.*)

JAGUN: What did you just call that worm-like movement?

LABISI: Come back and I will show you.

JAGUN: (*Slaps her.*) Shut up! Who do you think you are talking to?

LABISI: (*Retaliates sharply.*) How dare you? Animal.

TOKUNBO: (*Silent at first.*) Please, stop. For God's sake, I do not want any of this. Please!

JAGUN: (*To TOKUNBO.*) Shut up your trap, you simpleton! I told you not to allow this tart to come here. But you forced your way. She's slapping your husband in your presence and all you can say is "Stop, please, stop, I don't want any of this". You have just started. You will have your hands so full with fights, you will ask her to leave and as

she's leaving, you will leave with her. (LABISI stands by the wall, fuming. TOKUNBO looks on, not knowing what to do or say.) Ask her, why she is not married after she left school years ago.

LABISI: (*Retorts sharply.*) And I ask you, macho man, male chauvinist, why is it that after four years of marriage in this hell you have put your wife in, you haven't had a child?

(TOKUNBO burst into tears and runs out.)

JAGUN: You! (*Threateningly.*) You and your big mouth! Did you see that? How could you say such a thing to your best friend? Is she really your friend or you came back to get back at me for the way I treated her back in school? Is this your revenge? Why has it become your problem?

LABISI: Toks, God bless her. She knows I won't hurt her but you, you must be taught a lesson. You think you are the only one suffering? You think that life has treated you badly, that you are from a poor background, no job, no family so you can hit at anyone in sight? You are most miserable because of your response to your situation. You abuse, maltreat and violently attack others. Ignorant man! You think you are the only one who can abuse, or has a bad mouth? You are wrong. I will finish you before you know it. You have met your match today. This girl here can hold her own among rascally boys like you.

JAGUN: (*Dumbfounded.*) I don't even have time for you. Let me go and attend to my wife.

LABISI: (*Laughs out.*) Your wife, enh? So, she's your wife now? You are no husband. A wife is taken out of her husband's ribs ... the bone of his bones, the flesh of his flesh ... Any man who cannot feed his wife is worse than an infidel. That's who you are—a shameless infidel for that matter. You don't think I can see how you treat her? (*Mimics him.*) I want to go and see my wife. (*Spits.*) Your

wife, my foot, she is more your doormat. Unfortunately, she loves you so much and my heart bleeds for her especially after seeing marks and bruises on her hands.

JAGUN: (*By the door.*) Go and weep for your sins, not for my wife.

LABISI: (*JAGUN is out but she is still fuming.*) Idiot, a fool. Who gave a dog a child's food?

(*JAGUN returns, must have heard her.*)

JAGUN: Who is a dog enh? Answer me! (*They are seen wrestling and Jags is gaining the upper hand but he suddenly slips and falls on the bed. LABISI falls on him and pounds his chest and face. Lights fade.*)

In the FIJABIS' one-room apartment. TOKUNBO is in the corner boiling water to make eba. JAGUN is sitting on the bed playing his guitar. LABISI sits with FEMI on the couch reading the newspaper.

TOKUNBO: It is so good to have you here this evening, Femi.

FEMI: I am always happy to be here you know that, don't you?

LABISI: I am happy to be here, too, in this cramped little room, it is rather cosy when you think about it. But what I don't like is that each time I feel like using the bathroom I have to go down the corridor before I can. It is rather old-fashioned and awkward. What if one has a running stomach in the middle of the night? Toks, how do you manage?

TOKUNBO: (*Cheerfully.*) I've got used to it. At first, it was a big problem but you know, through practice, I have got used to it ...

LABISI: (*Cuts in.*) That is very bad. Remember yesterday, I was in the bathroom and someone knocked at the door. I asked who it was. The voice said, "please hurry up o, I need to use the bathroom," and to think that I had only been there for just ten minutes. I hurriedly packed my things, poured water on my body and left. And at the door, I saw this woman with a towel wrapped around her, arms akimbo and evidently angry with me. I was shocked and afraid that I had to apologize for keeping her. You know what she said? "You stayed too long in the bathroom; this is not a flat apartment so you should know that others are waiting to have their baths." She hissed and almost pushed me out of her path. I looked back at her but she didn't even look back. I left the place immediately. Life here is hell. Toks, how do you cope?

TOKUNBO: No problems. I just mind my business. (*Whispers.*) I

wish Jags would stop playing his guitar before the Landlady comes to harass us for making a noise.

JAGUN: (*From the bed.*) I heard that and for your information, I have not started yet. The whole street will know Jagunlabi Fijabi is here. I paid for this room with my own sweat and nobody can harass me. (*He continues plucking the strings of his guitar. He picks up his music book.*) Do re mi fa so, so fa mi re do.

LABISI (*Quietly.*) Does he drink?

TOKUNBO: (*Whispering.*) Of course not, he is just very vocal and outspoken.

FEMI: Jags, please stop the noise. I am trying to concentrate.

JAGUN: (*Stops.*) What's your problem? I have even had enough. Go to your house.

FEMI: You can't force me out. I came to see Toks and keep her company.

JAGUN: Are you sure it is only that, or are you hungry and waiting for food?

FEMI: (*Humorously.*) Yes, that too. You know she is a very good cook. I've even asked my wife to come and take lessons from her.

JAGUN: I have told you, marry her once and for all, all your problems will be solved.

FEMI: She's already married to you. That's enough for me. I can always come here for the treat.

TOKUNBO: Food is ready. Labisi, could you please give this plate to Femi so that he will stop praising me?

FEMI: You know the truth. You are not just beautiful, you are also a good cook. Jags is really blessed.

TOKUNBO: Thanks.

JAGUN: Is it because of food you are so excited? For once, though, you spoke the truth. I like Toks' food.

(They all sit down to eat. JAGUN'S phone rings. He leaves his food on the bed and answers. It is his father.)

JAGUN: *Baa mi.* Good evening, Sir. How are you, Sir? *(Pause.)* I am listening, Sir. *(Pause.)* I should come right away? I hope there is no problem. *(Listens to his father at the other end.)* The cough. O God, but I thought it had gone. Alright, I will set out for Makoko immediately. *(Washes his hands, puts on his shirt and looks at TOKUNBO who had just finished eating.)* Toks, *Baa mi* is not feeling well and wants me to come right away.

TOKUNBO: What's wrong with him? Did he say?

JAGUN: It is that terrible cough again. In fact, I could barely hear him. He was having spasms of cough all through the call.

TOKUNBO: And he asked you to come right away?

JAGUN: Yes. Will you come with me?

TOKUNBO: I am sorry. You will have to send him my regards. I have to go to church by 8 o'clock.

JAGUN: I knew it. I am aware that church is more important to you than my father. Toks, my father loves you like his own. He always talks to you with so much love so I'm surprised that you can't spare some time to see him. Anyway, why would you want to go to Makoko? You wouldn't want to be seen in those houses on stilts. How would your friend rate you? It is bad enough to be seen in Mushin in a face-me-I-face-you one room but Makoko? That would be very bad for your reputation. What will dear Daddy say? Even Mummy will fall ill just from inhaling the air around the place. Don't worry, Toks, my father is my father, and I will not deny him because I married a Professor's daughter. *(With that he goes out*

slamming the door behind him.)

FEMI: *(Runs after him.)* Wait, Jags, I will go with you. *(Goes out. TOKUNBO slumps into the couch, suddenly tired. LABISI pulls out a chair and sits in front of her.)*

TOKUNBO: *(Almost in a whisper.)* What kind of life is this? I have not known a moment of peace ever since I met Jags. Looking back now, it has been one tale of woe after another. My family has abandoned me. When my brother writes, I keep the letters in my box so Jags won't see them. Once, I came back to find the letters spread out on the bed, and when I asked him what he was doing with them, he accused me of betraying him. Do you know, Labisi, that he even accused me of sucking him up when he discovered I was a virgin. He said it was bad that he was my first and despite the blood stains, he said it was all a lie that I was just bleeding. Can you beat that? *(As if lost in thought.)* Looking back, there is so much sadness, but I am trusting God for a bright future. I hope that in the midst of this sadness, there will be joy.

LABISI: I also remember your wedding day. Why didn't you want your parents to be there?

TOKUNBO: Of course I wanted them to be there, but Jags said they were going to spoil his day with their rich and educated friends. He wanted only the two of us and our Best Man and Maid-of-Honour. But of course, Dad and Mum got the address. How? I do not know and they attended.

LABISI: But then he came late to the wedding and was dead drunk.

TOKUNBO: And I remember I was afraid he wasn't going to show up but he eventually did and he managed to control himself throughout the wedding.

LABISI: How on earth did you even meet him?

TOKUNBO: (*Smiling.*) It was at a staged play at the Pit Theatre. He was on the cast and was so full of life; very energetic on stage. I was struck by his effervescence. He seemed so full of life; bustling with vitality. I saw the exterior and I fell for it, not minding the anger and bitterness of the interior. After the play, I went with Dupe—you were away then—to shake hands with him in the dressing room. He held my hand for what seemed like eternity. He looked straight at me and I knew I had been bought over. I fell head over heels in love with a volcano ready to erupt. The rest of the story you know. The series of beatings he gave me yet I would crawl back into his arms. Here I am today still being battered on a daily basis not just verbally but physically and emotionally.

LABISI: So, what do you want to do about this? You can't continue like this, can you? He will kill you one day. I can see the scars and bruises on your hands. Your face bears telltale signs of sleepless nights. Does it not bother you? Why can't you go home, back to your parents?

TOKUNBO: Labisi, my shame cannot make me go back home. Apart from that, I really would like this marriage to work. If only I could have a child ... (*Her voice trails off.*)

LABISI: Is there a problem there? Does he not touch you?

TOKUNBO: Occasionally, he does. But more often when he is angry, he punishes me by practically raping his own wife. How can one pray for a child with such tumultuous affair ... yet my heart craves for a child. Did you know that one day he actually taunted and said if I became pregnant, it would result in a miscarriage.

LABISI: Ha! And what did you say?

TOKUNBO: Nothing. I just prayed that such would not be my portion. He laughed, and when he came to bed, he was fast asleep within a minute.

LABISI: (*Visibly disgusted.*) That's Jags for you, an animal.
(*Pause.*) Well, just to inform you, I have sent a text message to your Dad informing him that you would like to come home and he will be here in the morning with his driver to pick you.

TOKUNBO: (*Alarmed.*) Why did you? I am okay.

LABISI: (*Sarcastically.*) You are, really. Tell it to your dad when he gets here. (*Leaves.*)

TOKUNBO: (*Runs after her.*) No, Labisi, you don't understand. This is my home. (*Slumps into a seat, tired.*)

At the bus station. The bus is late in coming. JAGUN and FEMI sit at first, each deep in his own thought. JAGUN breaks the silence.

JAGUN: Hmm. My life has been one long disaster. My father that sends for me now, does not know how I got through university. We are twelve children from my mother. When she had the last child, she gave up the ghost and Father brought in an old woman to look after the little ones, especially the last baby. Can you believe it? All of us shared the same room! The old woman made sure that life was unbearable for all of us. The little money Papa made from catching fish in the Lagoon, he gave to her after every day's hard work. This woman would not buy food for us. Rather, she would send the money to her children in the village. It was sheer torture. No food during the day, at night, we drank *garri* and *kulikuli*. It was either *garri* or nothing. My siblings developed big tummies, big heads and small limbs. I had to leave, but go where, I did not know. I had to leave in order to do something to help my siblings. That was how I started living under the Eko Bridge. During the day, I roamed the streets, begging and carrying loads for marketwomen on Lagos Island. At night, I scrambled for a place with other area boys, miscreants and beggars. Sometimes I leaned on the footbridge when I was tired and woke to see the light of another day.

FEMI: So how were you able to go to school?

JAGUN: A group of women came one day to take all of us under the bridge to school. I was so happy when they promised to give us food and clothes if we promised to stay away from the bridge. The women put us in different homes as domestic helps while we attended school during the day. I was lucky to be put in a kind woman's house: Chief Mrs DaSilva. She took care of me as though I were her child. But as fate would have it, she died as I finished

my Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination. The new woman who became Mrs DaSilva had no time for “hangers-on” as she referred to us. She made us sleep outside and woke us up by kicking us. She soon dispensed of all of us as we constituted a burden on her. A week after her arrival, we were out. It was as if she had planned it. Can you believe it? I was trekking back to our one-room house-on-stilts in Makoko with the little belongings I had in a carton.

FEMI: (*Inquisitive.*) So how did you go to secondary school and the university?

JAGS: *Ha!* (*He laughs.*) That’s another story. I stayed in school three days a week and the remaining two days, I was back on the streets, carrying loads and doing all kinds of chores in exchange for money. The poor traders were better than the rich customers who treated us poorly. They would willingly part with their food when they saw hungry boys begging, but the rich ones would poke their noses at us, wipe their hands quickly whether consciously or not after handing us money. They quickly looked away if we touched their windscreens. Rich people with so much money and no compassion. One rich woman even got out of her car to whip a boy who had accidentally bumped his cart into her headlamps. She dragged him by the collar while the boy gasped for breath. Anyway, while I was in school, I copied the notes for the classes I had missed and stayed in the library even at break time. Mid-term holidays and vacations were moments to work and save up for the following term or class. Femi, how I managed through those five years was a miracle. My literature teacher took special interest in me and introduced me to an NGO owned by a well-to-do woman. My teacher must have filled the woman in on my humble background for she singled me out for special care. Five of us were registered for JAMB. Because I knew I would

not have the extra funds for a law degree, I filled theatre arts in the form. At least, I would be able to manage with the stipends the NGO gave after paying our fees. That was how I got to the University of Ife. But the financial secretary of the NGO made life bitter for us. She looked down on us in contempt each time we went to collect our allowances. She would keep us waiting days on end and whenever she decided to give us the envelope, she threw it at us with such demeaning statements as “Take, you dog. Why did your parents give birth to you when they knew they could not take care of you?” It was that bad. I felt like an animal but I had no alternative and I was determined to succeed without resorting to crime. But I tell you, my self-confidence was eroded. I lost all sense of self-dignity. What dignity could a Makoko boy like me have? I remembered my past and wondered why God had deposited so much in some people and left nothing for others. I did not ask to be born in Makoko. But here I am, I must do what I can to better my lot. I became frustrated and angry. *(He looks up to see a danfo bus and he says.)* See, Femi, here is our bus. Let’s go.

In the morning. PROFESSOR and MRS JONES are in the FIJABIs' house with their driver. MRS JONES is in the background sitting uncomfortably. Lights on the PROF. already sitting with TOKUNBO and LABISI.

PROF.: So, here you are, Labisi. How are you doing? Your friend says you are in a movie. What movie is that?

LABISI: The movie is titled *Estrangement* and it is a new addition to the Nollywood pictures in Nigeria.

PROF.: I see a lot of these Nollywood movies but I have really not seen one that has depth and profundity.

LABISI: This movie has all those qualities, and the actors and actresses are professionally trained. I think you should see it, Sir; it should change your view of Nollywood.

PROF.: I do hope it will. No fetish, ritual killings in this new film?

LABISI: None, Sir. But then, Sir, you must know that all those issues you mentioned are peculiar to our culture and we cannot do away with them.

PROF.: (*Looks at TOKUNBO packing a bag.*) You are right, Labisi. Call the driver outside to help your friend carry her bag to the car. (*LABISI steps out.*) Toks, are you sure you want to leave your husband for a while?

TOKKUNBO: (*Meekly.*) Yes, Dad. It is in our best interest.

PROF.: Where is he now?

TOKUNBO: He went to visit his sick father.

PROF.: And you think this is the time to abandon him?

TOKUNBO: Dad? Let's just say I need sometime out of here.

PROF.: This husband of yours, he doesn't even want to see us—your family.

TOKUNBO: But you have not made any attempt to see him, too.

So he sees you as an enemy.

PROF.: Enemy? But I have not done anything to him.

TOKUNBO: You could have stopped Mum from hiring those detectives trailing him all around town. He got to know that they were my parents' handiwork.

PROF.: But then, he seems to have no manners. You know that. No etiquette, no scruples, no background. How I wish you had married the Richardsons' son. He is in America now with his wife and you in this god-forsaken filth.

TOKUNBO: Stop it, Dad. It is my choice.

PROF.: Is it your choice to have your face black and blue from beatings?

TOKUNBO: Dad, please.

PROF.: I offered to give you a house in Victoria Garden City, he rejected it. What's his problem? What have I done wrong? I also have my own problems, you know? But for your mother's financial acumen, I would have been out in the rain when the government laid us off for "anti-government activities." She saved some money and invested well. That's what we are enjoying today.

TOKUNBO: Jags says you are a fighter and for that, he gives you credit.

PROF.: Me! A fighter? (*Laughs.*) Jagunlabi! I thought he hated me. He said so to my face. That I was too rich to be real.

TOKUNBO: Jags. (*Laughs.*) I remember that. And you were so shocked that you walked away from him.

PROF.: You didn't expect me to stand there exchanging words with that ... that ...

TOKUNBO: It's okay. You can call him a moron. It doesn't matter

now. (*Firmly.*) Let's go.

MRS JONES: (*Moves round the house touching everything and cleaning her hands, showing disgust.*) You spoilt this daughter of yours. Did you give her a husband? Let her live with the consequences of her choice.

TOKUNBO: Mum, don't abuse me.

MRS JONES: Why should I not abuse you? You have chosen a *jagajaga* for a husband.

TOKUNBO: He's my choice.

MRS JONES: Is living in this dump a part of that choice?

TOKUNBO: It is my matrimonial home.

MRS JONES: (*Looking around and laughing in derision.*) Which home? This is a prison. (*Moves closer to her and whispers.*) I hear poverty is a tradition in his family. Tell him you don't want to be a part of this poverty.

TOKKUNBO: (*Insistent.*) It is my matrimonial home.

(LABISI enters.)

PROF.: Labisi, where's your bag? Aren't you coming with your friend?

LABISI: No, Sir. I'll stay for the movie to be over and then leave.

PROF. & TOKUNBO: (*Shocked.*) Alright, as you wish. (*They drive away as JAGUN and FEMI enter the stage.*)

JAGUN: (*To LABISI.*) Who was that in the car with Prof. Rich Man?

LABISI: (*Shrugs.*) I don't know. Why don't you stop them and ask? (*Walks inside the room JAGUN on her heels.*)

JAGUN: So, she could not wait for me to come back? I always knew she had a chicken's heart. Spoilt girl. She couldn't

stomach it anymore, so she either chickened out or you encouraged her with your evil little mind. Anyway, you had better stay out of my way now that you have refused to leave with her. *(He hisses and falls on the bed.)*

FEMI: Alright, Jags, I am off to my house.

(JAGUN does not say a word.)

LABISI: Jags, why didn't you answer your friend? He cares for you, you must know that.

JAGUN: What problem of yours is it whether I answer my friend or not? Or do you want to curry his favour now that Toks is not here?

LABISI: Curry whose favour? You think I like the way he carries on with Toks? Or are you blind to the way he ogles after her?

JAGUN: Woman, mind what you say about my friend and also about my wife even if she's not here.

LABISI: Sorry, Sir. *(Sniggers.)* I was only joking, *Oko Iyawo.*

JAGUN: What are you still doing here after your friend's departure? *(He gets up from the bed and yanks her off the couch.)* Answer me! What do you want? Look, Madam, you're in my space.

LABISI: *(Now face to face with JAGUN, draws him closer and kisses him full in the mouth.)* That's why I am here.

JAGUN: *(Shakes his head.)* What? *(Shocked.)* Why did you do that?

LABISI: Someone needs to teach you how to truly love.

JAGUN: *(Grabs her and pushes her to the bed.)* You want some love? I'll teach you. *(They roll on the bed, each fighting for supremacy. Lights fade.)*

A bare stage. JAGUN and FEMI on stage. It is a rehearsal. JAGUN is seen walking around impatiently.

JAGUN: If they are not here by 4, I'll call it off.

FEMI: No, you can't. We've already been paid for the show.

JAGUN: Just wait and see.

Enter TROUPE LEADER and her troupe. They dance.

JAGUN: (*Angry.*) Go and get me new dancers, not these hungry-looking zombies.

FEMI: But this dance is okay.

Lights reveal Dance II: Akwa-Ibom Dancers choreographed. JAGUN stops them midway. The dancers move to another side. TROUPE LEADER I fights with JAGUN.

TROUPE LEADER I: No one will dance here until you pay our fee.

FEMI: (*Drags JAGUN to a corner.*) Please pay her for the show. Or else she will cause *wahala* for us.

JAGUN: I'm the professional here. I know what's good. These are infants, not dancers.

Enter the Obitun Dancers from Ondo. They dance.

JAGUN: (*Stops them midway again.*) The worst dance I've ever seen.

FEMI: But this dance will do.

JAGUN: I am to tell you what's good, not you telling me.

TROUPE LEADER I: (*Interrupts.*) I'm still waiting for you to pay my money, and know that you cannot order me around, I am not your wife.

JAGUN: Don't you dare mention my wife here.

TROUPE LEADER I: (*Moves closer to him.*) What if I did?

What would you do?

JAGUN: Then, I'll skin you alive.

FEMI: *(Brings out money to pay and JAGUN snatches the money from him and sits on the floor.)*

EVERYONE: *(Chorus.)* You need rest. You need deliverance.

FEMI: *(Falls into a trance, everyone forms a circle around him while he pretends to be possessed and he sings and the dancers form the chorus. Lights fade.)*

At the JONES'. A tastefully furnished living room reveals the opulence of the JONES'. We see TOKKUNBO sitting beside her father.

PROF.: Darling, I am glad you are back even if it's only for a while. Try to rest and enjoy yourself.

MRS JONES: You spoil this daughter of yours, Prof. Did you choose a husband for her? Let her reap the consequences of her choices.

PROF.: No, no, no. It's okay, must you rub salt into injury?

TOKUNBO: Mum, I know you never liked him. Besides, I have not told you I ran away from my home. I am just here for a while.

MRS JONES: Who is fooling who? I am a woman, my dear and your mother even if my comments do not matter to you anymore. Look at yourself, how emaciated you are. Look, look at your nails, not filed and painted as I taught you. Your hair is rough and needs retouching. *(Looks her up and down like a scientist inspecting a specimen.)* Tell me, when are you going to wake up from your slumber? That Jagajaga will be your death.

PROF.: *(Walks over to his wife.)* Look, Darling, can I see you for a moment in our room? *(Looks back and winks at TOKUNBO while practically dragging his wife with him out of the living room.)* You see, I'll like to see those things you told me you bought at Shoprite. Let's go.

MRS JONES: *(Laughing and falling on her husband's shoulder.)* I know your trick. Anyway, let's go. I'll leave your daughter alone. *(They leave.)*

(Left alone, TOKUNBO is in a pensive mood.)

TOKUNBO: See, see my parents even at 60 and 65 years. Look at them. They understand each other perfectly. Look at how they fall naturally into each other's arms. God, where did I go wrong? Where, God? If it is my sins, Lord, forgive

and help me. (*She weeps. Enter PROF. JONES, sees his daughter weeping and rushes to her side.*)

PROF.: Toks, be strong. It is a phase, it will pass. Now, clean your face or do you want your mum to see you broken like this? She would just be too happy. You know she was not happy with the way your husband treated her the last time she visited you.

TOKUNBO: I don't know where my life is heading. I am tired and sad.

PROF.: (*Admonishes her.*) Keep quiet. The first few years of a marriage are always turbulent. There is trouble and anguish but it will smoothen out with patience and care. Toks, have you been showing your father's wealth to your husband knowing who he is and his background?

TOKUNBO: No, Father. You know me better than that.

(*There's a knock on the door. A maid shows DOCTOR TEJU in.*)

DOCTOR TEJU: Good evening, Prof., and how are you, my dear Toks? You look great. How is your husband?

TOKUNBO: (*Gets up.*) I am fine, Sir, and he is doing great, too. (*Makes to leave.*)

DOCTOR TEJU: Not so fast, Toks. I'll like to have a word with you.

TOKUNBO: Okay, Sir, (*Looking at her father.*) Did you call the Doctor, Daddy?

PROF.: Dear Daughter, why? The Doctor is a regular visitor here. (*Faces him with his back to TOKUNBO.*) Don't you call here every evening on your way home?

DOCTOR TEJU: Toks, I have known your parents since you were born. I must take permission to come here? I was the doctor that delivered you, you know!

TOKUNBO: (*Smiling now.*) You've told me that times without number. I remember, you said I was born one cool Sunday evening, rain fell that day and it was also the first anniversary of my parents' wedding ...

(*Both PROF. and DOCTOR TEJU exchange glances while PROF. quietly takes his leave.*)

DOCTOR TEJU: Toks, how are you "truthfully"?

TOKUNBO: I am fine.

DOCTOR TEJU: Remember our agreement; no secrets between us. What's bothering you?

TOKUNBO: Was it not my dad, who called you? Doc., don't try to deny it. I appreciate your concern but it is not necessary.

DOCTOR TEJU: Let me decide what's necessary and what's not. How's your husband?

TOKUNBO: I told you before he's fine. I just feel tired a little.

DOCTOR TEJU: Can I run some tests? (*Does not wait for an answer.*) Lie down on the couch. (*She complies. Brings out his instruments. Examines her. Shakes his head.*) Okay, you may get up. (*Looks at her eyes.*) Hmm!

TOKUNBO: What's the matter, Doc? I just need to rest.

DOCTOR TEJU: I know. I know, but bring me some specimen first thing in the morning.

TOKUNBO: Doc, tell me the truth. Is there something wrong with me?

DOCTOR TEJU: No problem. Just do as I say. I'll prepare a sick leave note for your office or have you notified them since you got here?

TOKUNBO: Thanks, Doc. I only got here on Friday. Dad called you, Sir.

DOCTOR TEJU: (*Packing his bag.*) Your father loves you. Now, I must

run. My wife's food calls me. Greet your parents and don't forget to see me tomorrow morning. Bye. (*Goes out.*)

TOKUNBO: Bye, Doctor. (*Silence. TOKUNBO looks forlorn.*)

(*To no one in particular.*) The Doctor, my father's friend. Maybe the same age too. He runs home to his wife's meal ... my life is the opposite. I cook with my hard-earned money, I try to be good but what do I get in return ...? Beatings as if I am a goat.

Landlady advised me to attend church. I did. The Assistant Pastor calls for my husband to counsel us. The change was only for a week. After a week, we were back to square one. He came to church one day and openly abused the Pastor. That was the beginning of the disgrace. At another time, he wanted to drop me off in church. He was busy talking and when I had nothing to say, he stopped the car in the middle of the road, left the key in the ignition and walked off. I was too dumbfounded to say anything. After some time, I had to move to the driver's seat to get the car off the road as it had caused some traffic.

As I did that, he ran back to the car, snatched the key from me and rained abuses at me. That day, I was not myself in church at all. Hmm. Life with Jagunlabi has been one hell. (*She gets up. Light fades.*)

JAGUNS' room. JAGUN enters, followed almost immediately by FEMI.

FEMI: I said I am sorry. It was only a joke really.

JAGUN: Only a joke? Femi, are you all right at all?

FEMI: Yeah, I am fine. I thought you would pick up something from what happened.

JAGUN: Yes, I did pick something. You are not to be trusted. You call yourself my friend, but you went out there and humiliated me in the presence of those inexperienced dancers.

FEMI: No, I didn't set out to humiliate you actually. Jags, stop being petty; those guys are good. Didn't you see the way they responded to me? I just pretended to be in a trance, and, their response was so spontaneous, so powerful and magical to say the least.

JAGUN: Just go ... please. Let me be.

FEMI: But you know we have a contract to execute.

JAGUN: I don't want to be a part of your contract anymore.

FEMI: Jags, you need a job, can't you understand?

JAGUN: I said I don't need you or your job.

FEMI: Come on, don't stretch this too far. (*Playfully.*) I will go and report you to *Baa mi o!* (*Prostrates as if in the presence of JAGUNS' father.*) *Baa mi*, you see ...

JAGUN: Stop ... just stop. Don't play around with my father.

FEMI: You know I can never do that. (*Door opens. TOKUNBO enters, with some bags.*) Oh, see the angel of this house. This is really timely. Toks, are you all right?

TOKUNBO: Oh, yes I am fine, Femi. Em, Femi can you please excuse us for some minutes? I like to have some words with Jags.

JAGUN: You had better stay where you are. I don't have time for any woman talk.

TOKUNBO: This is not woman talk, Jags. It's better you listen to me.

JAGUN: Are you giving me an order?

TOKUNBO: No, I am advising you.

JAGUN: And, when did you start giving advice in this house?

TOKUNBO: Right now, this very moment, even though I have tried in the past, just that as usual, you never listened to me.

JAGUN: I don't want to listen now, either. And for your information, you had better go sit somewhere because I am angry.

TOKUNBO: You have always been angry.

FEMI: I think you should listen to your wife.

JAGUN: She is not my wife. She stopped being my wife since last week when she left my house.

FEMI: Just like that?

JAGUN: Yes, just like that.

FEMI: Then, what we did at the rehearsal was not a joke then. You really need deliverance.

TOKUNBO: Yes, I think he really needs deliverance.

JAGUN: What did you say? Can you just repeat that?

TOKUNBO: I said you, Jagunlabi Fijabi, really need deliverance.

JAGUN: Are you mad?

TOKUNBO: No, I am not.

JAGUN: Toks, are you talking to me?

TOKUNBO: Yes, I know who you are and who I am talking to.

JAGUN: Ah, I will kill somebody today.

TOKUNBO: And, you will add murder to your name.

JAGUN: Femi, did you hear that?

TOKUNBO: Can you just sit down for once and think? I have seen people who emerged from a much more filthy and ugly background succeed. I have seen people, trapped by difficulty, emerge to tell good stories, great stories worthy of emulation; what would you say happened to you and turned you into a beast? How is your situation different from those of countless others?

JAGUN: Will you shut your mouth?

TOKUNBO: Don't you ever tell me to shut up!

JAGUN: (*Shocked, withdraws.*) Femi.

FEMI: I think that's a good one actually.

TOKUNBO: No, I don't think it's your background that is turning you into a monster. This is not the man I saw and fell in love with. This is not what I think you should turn yourself into. (*Door opens, LABISI enters.*)

JAGUN: (*Turns to LABISI.*) This is your making, isn't it? You wanted this, now you are having it.

LABISI: (*Surprised.*) What? What are you talking about?

JAGUN: Take her. Take Tokunbo and go wherever you like; in fact go and get her another husband, I don't care!

TOKUNBO: Labisi is not taking me anywhere. I am the one going by myself. At least, it is obvious you never wanted me. I have been the one trying to convince you to love me, but no more.

FEMI: No, I don't like the way this conversation is going. Can you both just stop this, please?

LABISI: (*Moves closer to TOKUNBO.*) Toks, I know this is not

you. Who is doing this?

JAGUN: Her mother of course, who else?

TOKUNBO: Oh, it is no longer Labisi, it is now my mother. When will you just learn to be reasonable? I am the one doing this and I have my reasons. (*Silence.*) Here, take it and read. I said take this and read ... it's for you. I said take and read because after now, you won't ever have the opportunity to do so. (JAGUN *does not move*. FEMI *goes to collect the paper.*)

FEMI: What is the meaning of this, Toks? You are pregnant? (*LABISI rushes to FEMI and snatches the paper. She reads quickly.*)

LABISI: You are carrying his baby?

TOKUNBO: Yes, that was what I came to tell him.

FEMI: But you said you were leaving?

TOKUNBO: Yes, I came to tell him that, too.

LABISI: No, that was a joke.

TOKUNBO: I am not joking! (*Silence.*) I will go and have this child. I don't care whether it is a boy or a girl ... but I will love my child, dearly, very dearly, very deeply and give it all the love and attention that you cannot give. And, when the child comes of age and asks me about the father, I will tell this child, our child, that the father is a handsome and brilliant man. I will have my child, our child, grow up with that lofty memory, and not that of an abused and frustrated young man, who could not rise above the troubles of his time.

JAGUN: (*Angry.*) Stop ... please, just stop!

LABISI: You can't do this, Toks.

TOKUNBO: Let me be, Labisi. Can't you see? I am tired of this.

FEMI: (*Shakes his head.*) Oh, I have never seen this kind of love. I have never been this overwhelmed.

JAGUN: (*Stammers.*) I ... I never prayed for this kind of life. All I have ever wanted is to succeed, to be somebody useful in life.

TOKUNBO: Then stop blaming others and move on. Stop thinking about the past, because it doesn't exist anymore. Stop allowing your shameful past tie you down. Rise above all these noise and poverty and be a man. Do anything and everything, within the law, and be successful, so that this child, our child, can one day say that I did the right thing by marrying you. So that this child, our child, can say "I am proud of my father!" (*JAGUN stands and walks away. TOKUNBO follows him.*) You have it in you, Jags. I know you do because I saw it. Bring it out. Use it anyhow, but just succeed with it. (*JAGUN turns, looks at her intently, walks up to her and embraces her. LABISI is so excited, she claps. FEMI taps her on the shoulder, she turns and FEMI embraces her. Sharp blackout.*)

Kraftgriots

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- Ahmed Yerima: *The Ife Quartet* (2009)
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- Arnold Udoka: *Still Another Night* (2011)
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