the burdens

john ruganda



nda

INTRODUCTION

This set is not strange to Wamala. Way back, he had played on this humble stage—'thumbing pieces of chalk'. But on the eve of independence, he had made his harangue effectively and had subsequently found himself Minister, with all the licensed and unlicensed accessories befitting his office. The trouble is that once you surprise yourself with this find, you not only forget your former self, but you also keep looking forward to bigger surprises. There is always an extra rung to climb and a ready audience to cheer you on, and on, and on . . . until one day the axe falls and you are all alone.

Then the excuses: 'It was these Yankees and their dollars. Said I could make a better boss . . .'; a rather belated realization. Commissions of inquiry have by now come up with prescribed 'cures'; detention doors have opened and closed; and if you are unlucky, the firing squad has executed the order.

After some years in the 'freezer', Wamala is pardoned and soon finds that the journey back to insignificance is unbelievably bleak and swift. He has been stripped of everything, everything except his wife and two children—his co-actors, who are also his audience. No more ministerial laughs and confident gait. Orders are given, but this time not taken. The feel of power is now an irritating memory for Wamala and his family. And as we say, an aged dancer is known by the constant tremors of his shoulders: Wamala relives his former station through dreams and illusions.

Men who have been on top find hunger, poverty and the failure to meet family obligations a humiliating affair. It is all the more incapacitating when, as Wamala puts it, '. . . power hungry bastards with twitching hands . . .

hands eager to grab and get rich, get rich quickly . . .' are still at large. He finds it difficult to accept his defeat, so he resorts to drink to steel himself against the new realities.

His wife Tinka is much more down to earth. She has comfortably descended the ladder of success and settled down to brewing *enguli* and weaving mats to provide for the family. If occasionally she permits herself a moment of reminiscence of 'the happier times', she keeps her feet to the ground and has to struggle to bring her man back to the challenges of slum life. Her slogging is rewarded by curses and ingratitude on the part of Wamala, but she has to stick it out for the sake of her children. 'I live for you, my children,' she pleads to Kaija, who resents this self-imposed martyrdom. In effect she becomes the husband of the household, and subtly makes Wamala and the children aware of the fact. Tension mounts and for both Wamala and Tinka, the subtle traps they set in order to gain the sympathies of the children in the end symbolize the very struggle for life in the outer world.

The effect of politics on the two is total isolation. Success had made them regard themselves as set apart from the common herd. Failure has become an impregnable wall between them and their fellow men. What superficial contact remains (Wamala through his cronies at the Republic Bar, Tinka, incidentally, through her customers for *enguli*) only increases their sense of material loss and debasement. The play tries to diagnose the symptoms and damage of this modern cancer—empty-headed ambition and its attendant spirit, self-pity.

J.R.
Kampala, 1972

CHARACTERS

TINKA	Mother
KAIJA	Son
WAMALA	Father
NYAKAKE	Daughter

The Burdens was originally produced by David Rubadiri for Makonde Group in January 1972, at the Uganda National Theatre, Kampala, with the following cast:

TINKA	Christine Nyakana
KAIJA	David Kihazo
WAMALA	John Kalema
NYAKAKE	Rose Mbowa

The Burdens

Act I

The curtain rises on a little semi-permanent house made of mud and wattle. The walls of the sitting room (part of which room is used as a kitchen) are smeared with cowdung. Home-made furniture. Big stool covered with lion's skin. Royal drum. A spear, and other items of regalia. There is kitchenware too. Everything has grown dark with continual smoke. From the ceiling hang strands of soot . . . dangling precariously.

Tinka is sitting alone, weaving a mat. Passing time? Waiting for Wamala? She wears an 'I have been through hell' kind of face. Her son Kaija enters quietly. He is wearing badly-patched shorts and a nylon shirt and carrying a hurricane lamp. He yawns. Tinka is slightly startled. Pause.

TINKA: (*reprimandingly*) What is it?

KAIJA: (*innocently*) Nothing, mother. . . . Why?

TINKA: You should be in bed, this hour of the night.

KAIJA: Nyakake has done it again.

TINKA: Done what?

KAIJA: One would think she drank a potful of water. (*Pause. He stretches himself.*) Isn't father back yet?

TINKA: Give him three hours as usual. If he's to come back at all.

KAIJA: A great pisser . . . (*Pause. Silence. Stare.*)

TINKA: Who?

KAIJA: Nyakake. I think she does it on purpose; to annoy me.

TINKA: She's younger, Kaija. Five years younger. (*Pause.*) We don't need two lamps, do we now, son? You don't seem to realize that paraffin in this house is as hard to come by as everything else.

KAIJA: (*blows out the lamp*) I'm sorry mother. I forgot to blow it out.

TINKA: Your sister doesn't wet the bed intentionally.

KAIJA: What kills me is that she first wets her side and then edges towards me and does it again. I can't stand the daily stench any longer.

TINKA: Give her time. Nothing can stop her from doing it, not at her age.

KAIJA: What a pool! What awful smells! What discomfort! I wish I had a bed of my own. Like all the boys at school. (*Silence. Stare.*) Can I have some food, mother?

TINKA: At this time of . . .

KAIJA: I'm very hungry.

TINKA: (*teasingly*) I knew it wasn't the pool, after all.

KAIJA: I feel most hungry tonight.

TINKA: Where does the food you eat go? Food or no food, you were always as skinny as a tooth-pick.

KAIJA: Must be the little snakes inside. Teacher calls them tapeworms.

TINKA: I call it worry. Here, have a share of father's beans and potatoes.

KAIJA: And he?

TINKA: Knows how to take care of himself, don't worry.

KAIJA: Brooklax clears the stomach, he says.

TINKA: Who?

KAIJA: Teacher. And adds, a boy of fourteen should have a bed of his own. To prevent the little snakes wriggling

from body to body. You know, mother, I'm the only one without a bed of his own.

TINKA: (*resuming her weaving . . . then sympathetically*) I know son, I know. You are the only one who doesn't have a lot of other things as well. A lot of other things.

KAIJA: But a reed bed isn't very expensive, or is it, mother?

TINKA: Ask your father why you haven't got one.

KAIJA: I did.

(*Footsteps treading on dry leaves are heard from without. Silence. They both stare listlessly.*)

TINKA: (*in whispers*) What is that noise outside?

(*Both stand in readiness. They continue whispering.*)

KAIJA: Footsteps. . . . A dog perhaps.

TINKA: Most likely a night dancer.

KAIJA: Maybe *kondos*. They stole Ruyonga's goats and his new radio two weeks ago. When he woke up he was as cold as a corpse. They slunk away with all his bedding and clothes. Never bothered to close the door behind them.

TINKA: Terribly hard up.

KAIJA: Who?

TINKA: The *kondos*.

KAIJA: We got them scared.

TINKA: Never. They are listening and calculating. And yet what can they steal from us? Tatters and soot strands?

KAIJA: Father's regalia.

TINKA: Not worth a cent.

KAIJA: Teacher says tourists like royal souvenirs.

TINKA: The Crafts Market is right under their noses.

KAIJA: They prefer items that have actually been used at official functions, teacher says.

TINKA: No more footsteps. (*They relax.*)
KAIJA: They've gone.
TINKA: The other day at the bus park.
KAIJA: Yes?
TINKA: Two of them snatched a suitcase from a girl in high heels and sunglasses. Do you know what they found in it?
KAIJA: Her shopping?
TINKA: The cold corpse of an infant.
KAIJA: In a suitcase?
TINKA: She was taking it to the father. A salesman in some oil company, she said. The crowd killed the two *kondos* on the spot.
KAIJA: Served them right.

(*Footsteps are heard. She musters some courage.*)

TINKA: Whoever you are, we have heard you. If you dare step in this house, you'll curse the day you were born. (*Fast footsteps. Her courage oozes. She follows movements outside*). Rubbish pit . . . pit latrine . . . granary. Heading for the back window. Nyakake is in danger. (*Calls for help and makes ululations.*) Help! Help! They're killing my daughter! *Kondos*! Help! (*Dogs bark from without. Tension relaxes.*)
KAIJA: Dogs after all.
TINKA: (*relieved*) You were right.
KAIJA: And scared stiff. Dogs chasing shadows. (*Nyakake's prolonged coughing. They stare at each other in silence, concerned.*)
KAIJA: Is it T.B., do you think, mother?
TINKA: Ask me another.
KAIJA: Teacher said it might be . . . T.B.
TINKA: It wouldn't be that bad . . . if only we could take

her to a proper doctor. But your father prefers his bottle. (*Silence.*) One night he will find three dead bodies in here if he goes on like this. (*They sit. Kaija resumes his eating.*)

KAIJA: Who?

TINKA: Your father—you asked him about the bed?

KAIJA: Two days ago. Oh damn these soot strands. Look what they've done to my food.

TINKA: Remove them. (*He does.*) What did he say about the bed?

KAIJA: He simply kept quiet and stared ahead of him for a long time. I felt I had asked a wrong question. (*Pause.*) He frightens me when he keeps quiet, for I'm never sure whether he's thinking or cooking up something.

TINKA: (*sarcastic laugh*) So he actually kept quiet when his son asked him. Our loving father kept quiet? (*Another derisive laugh.*) That's him, Kaija. That's the old man if you don't know. Keeps quiet to make others silent.

KAIJA: Silence that gnaws.

TINKA: You've said it.

(*Silence. Kaija stares at her accusingly.*)

KAIJA: Then as if to himself he said, 'Ask your mother why you haven't got one.'

TINKA: (*with dirty, damaging laughter*) Oh! Our adorable father! Next time ask him, innocently of course, 'Father, do all mothers buy beds for their sons? Pay school fees for their children and . . . *poll tax* for their husbands?'

KAIJA: (*innocently*) Is it true what he says, mother?

TINKA: What does he say?

KAIJA: Is it true you dragged him down? That you never helped him? That you drove away his friends and relatives and that, *that's* why there was nobody to help him when the soldiers came? Is it true you were always dragging

him down?

TINKA: That's what he tells you....

KAIJA: That you kept pulling him down and down. A millstone round his neck, he says. A big burden.

TINKA: He has never been up, Kaija, I want you to know that. Never been really up. As high up as men like Isaza, or Isimbwa. A lamb is not a lion, son.

KAIJA: But everyone calls him 'Chief'... they respect him and seek his advice.

TINKA: Flattery, that's what it is. Mere flattery.... When a leper is around you can't talk about boils, can you?

KAIJA: He doesn't have to have been up to be my father, I suppose. I merely wondered... that's all.

TINKA: (*hurt*) Of course he was up enough to give us a leaking roof over our heads and meagre food for our stomachs, but that's not being really up, is it?

(*Kaija ignores her question.*)

KAIJA: When I told him I didn't have to have a bed, he said, 'Is that what your mother is ramming into your head? Is that what she says behind my back, that I don't have enough money to buy you a bed?' I kept quiet. (*He's finished eating. He stands up to take back plates, etc.*)

TINKA: Let me have those plates, and bring some water.

(*Kaija goes to bring water.*)

KAIJA: Then he said sadly, 'You don't have to say anything son... I can tell the kind of poison she spreads against me. But—remember. She dragged me down.'

(*He puts the water down.*)

TINKA: (*with anger*) It's not spreading poison to say he

can't pay his poll tax, is it?

KAIJA: (*with sarcasm that stings*) And pay my school fees and buy me a bed?

TINKA: (*apologetically*) I wasn't going to say that.

KAIJA: I'm joking.

TINKA: (*trying to win him over*) Next time he'll say you are a burden, dragging him down with your fees and beds and . . .

KAIJA: I don't have to have a bed of my own, I suppose.

TINKA: (*rubbing it in hard*) A boy with a father should have a *bed* of his *own*.

KAIJA: It wouldn't matter if Nyakake were more considerate.

TINKA: (*exaggerating*) Give her *three* years or so and she'll be fine.

KAIJA: Three years! Three years! Mother, you know I have never really asked you for anything.

TINKA: Yes. Ask anything you want, son.

KAIJA: A simple favour.

TINKA: Go on.

KAIJA: Something I want very badly.

TINKA: Ask son.

KAIJA: Will you grant it?

TINKA: Sure, sure, son. Have I ever denied you anything?

KAIJA: Good. Can you lend me two shillings? Just two.

TINKA: (*puzzled*) Whatever for, son?

KAIJA: I'll tell you. I want to start selling roasted groundnuts at school. It pays a lot, mother. No, no, no. Please listen to me. In a month or two I'll have accumulated enough money to buy myself a bed.

TINKA: Impossible. Absolutely impossible . . .

KAIJA: You promised, mother.

TINKA: How can a son of mine sell groundnuts at school?

KAIJA: A promise is a promise, you always say.

TINKA: How can it be said . . . oh no. Not as long as I have these two hands . . .

KAIJA: But if father has never been really up . . .

TINKA: I know, I know. It's the mother's pride, son. Staking a mother's pride . . .

KAIJA: Nobody will care whether I sell groundnuts or carry pailfuls of excrement from the junior staff quarters. And besides, other boys do it.

TINKA: Let them. You won't do a thing like that. No. How can I bear the derisive laughter of the slum women? Their shocked whispers. Their malicious gossip. Their mock pity. A maimed tigress dies clawing at the soil, son. Don't put your mother's pride at stake.

KAIJA: A beggar's knees are supple, you have always told me, mother.

TINKA: Yes, but your mother is still alive, that's all. Listen, child. This mat I'm weaving will be ready in a week or so. I'll sell it and buy you a new pair of shorts before Kateba sends you out of school. The next mat I make will buy you a nice little bed. All right?

KAIJA: (*uncertain*) All right.

TINKA: If only my *enguli* was selling, things would be a lot easier. But my customers have taken to Uganda Waragi.

KAIJA: (*excitedly*) Good old mother, good old mother. (*Pause.*) But don't you think I could also help, mother?

TINKA: Save your sweat for the future. It doesn't look particularly bright.

KAIJA: Thanks. (*Excitedly.*) Good old mother. Good old mother. You're just wonderful, mother.

TINKA: (*setting a trap*) And don't breathe a word about this to him. Promise you won't tell him.

KAIJA: I promise. Oh mother . . .

TINKA: I'm happy, to see you happy, son. I am very happy. I've noticed of late you carry on as if you were an orphan. As if your mother didn't care and worry about you. Is anything eating on your mind?

KAIJA: No, no, no . . . . Nothing is worrying me. Nothing at all.

TINKA: Then why don't you play and laugh and relax? Like you used to do. You used to laugh beautifully once . . . wholesome thrilling laughter that always made me think—'How wonderful it is to be young'. But now you only sulk, like some abandoned luggage waiting for its owner.

KAIJA: I guess I'm growing up . . . that's why.

TINKA: You don't have to be afraid of your mother, son. Tell me the truth.

KAIJA: (*regards her for a moment*) It seems it doesn't please father . . . sometimes. My happiness sparks anger in him; and besides, you have become bad-tempered . . . of late. Only of late mother. Your smiles used to embrace me, fill me with comfort . . . . As long as they were there I felt everything was fine. Where have they gone, those smiles? Where, mother?

(*She tries to smile without much success.*)

TINKA: You're imagining things, son . . . simply imagining things. You don't know the ways of the world, but your mother doesn't like to see your face wrinkled with worry, prematurely. When I was your age I used to have wonderful times with my mother.

KAIJA: Did you ever have such wonderful times . . . with my grandfather, as well?

(*Something bumps against the roof of the house, and they both bolt up. Tinka lets out a muffled scream.*)

KAIJA: What is it this time?

TINKA: They're stealing my bunch of bananas.

KAIJA: Hunger knows no bounds, our teacher says.

TINKA: We break our backs for the benefit of others, he should—(*listens*)—he should have added.

KAIJA: Which others?

TINKA: Chiefs and thieves.

KAIJA: Thieves or chiefs?

TINKA: Where?

KAIJA: Outside.

TINKA: Let's wait and listen. These night noises wear me out. Every little noise is ominous at night. Blind bats and the wind whistling through the leaves. I hardly wink when he is out . . . . No wonder my eyes are sore.

KAIJA: I wish father was here now.

TINKA: Ask his other women why he isn't. (*To herself:*) Thinks tarts and beer tubes will solve his problems. (*They listen intently.*) Perhaps the wind brought it down . . . the bunch, I mean.

KAIJA: Let's go and bring it in . . . the bunch.

TINKA: Not me.

KAIJA: A long hand will take it.

TINKA: Instead of our heads.

KAIJA: Wonderful times (*sits down*) with my grandfather?

TINKA: Oh . . . not a bad father really . . . but men are mean, son. The only times they seem really happy is when they are outside their homesteads. (*Sits.*)
But your grandmother was kind, loving and generous. She was wonderful to me. I'd sit by her side listening to her sweet voice telling me stories of old: of

drunken men stabbed to death by their jealous wives in the dead of the night; of loving fathers reciting heroic poems to their sons; of little children singing themselves to sleep on their mothers' laps. I used to listen to her night after night, till sleep would steal on me. Yes I had wonderful moments once . . . with my mother. I remember her most those times: me half asleep on her lap and her voice weaving out stories and songs and recitations.

KAIJA: You sound very sad, mother, and very distant. A moment ago you tried to smile. I'm afraid what I saw behind the attempt was not the smile I used to know.

TINKA: What do you think you saw?

KAIJA: The radiance was not there.

TINKA: What did you see?

KAIJA: The waning smile of the moon.

TINKA: The moon in full splendour, Kaija.

KAIJA: Splendour soured by anger and bitterness.

TINKA: Bitterness?

KAIJA: About hopes unrealized.

TINKA: I know of no hopes, son.

KAIJA: All those cows and cars, all those servants and the free mansion, the ranch; and that power father talks about, must have aroused some hope.

TINKA: (*angrily*) In him. Hence his perpetual backward glances to make the present tolerable and the future worth waiting for.

KAIJA: All the same there was no warmth, no happiness, behind the smile.

TINKA: Age, I guess. I'm growing old, as you say.

KAIJA: But you're not growing old, mother. No grey hairs on your head. No deep wrinkles on your face either.

Bone structure firm. . . .

TINKA: You'll understand when you grow up. Time tires the poor, internally. The little vermins that eat up the spirit are not visible to young eyes.

KAIJA: I'm grown up, mother, am I not? My friends say so and teacher thinks I'm too sensitive for my age.

TINKA: Do you have friends then?

KAIJA: Oh yes. All sorts of friends.

TINKA: (*a bit jealously*) Girl friends . . . as well?

KAIJA: (*vaguely*) Well . . .

TINKA: (*to herself*) Like father, like son.

KAIJA: What, mother?

(*Silence. They stare at one another.*)

TINKA: (*resentfully*) They will keep you from your mother, son. Women will.

KAIJA: Mother really . . .

TINKA: I know women . . . and their ways. They will turn you away from your mother. You'll do everything for them and their mothers and nothing . . .

KAIJA: Do you think I'm so ungrateful?

TINKA: Women have their ways son and . . .

KAIJA: Am I so forgetful then? Don't I know that if it hadn't been for Nyakake and me, you would be a very happy woman . . . somewhere else?

TINKA: Herbs and women have a way with men, son. Have all sorts of friends but remember, son, I tried to do the best for you.

KAIJA: We have been a burden to you.

TINKA: No. I live my life for you, my children. *He* is the burden. Now go to bed. He's about to come—if he is not too drunk to see the way.

KAIJA: Those tales my grandmother used to tell you,

those songs . . . do you think you can sing them now, to cheer up your son?

TINKA: It's very late, and the night outside has ears.

KAIJA: Just one . . .

TINKA: We shouldn't wake up Nyakake.

KAIJA: Softly.

TINKA: Nyakake is not well, remember.

KAIJA: 'The Simple Pleasures of Youth.' You used to like singing that.

TINKA: I have forgotten the words.

KAIJA: Try mother, try.

TINKA: I don't want to sing, son.

KAIJA: Then a story will do.

TINKA: No stories.

KAIJA: The leper who climbed a tall tree . . .

TINKA: I'm tired.

KAIJA: And brought down Ngoma's beautiful gourd.

TINKA: I have told you that several times before.

KAIJA: Each time I hear it, it sounds fresh.

TINKA: I'm fed up with it.

KAIJA: It is your life, mother, and ours.

TINKA: Absolutely fed up with it.

KAIJA: Once upon a time Ngoma, the chief, had a beautiful daughter, Nyenje.

TINKA: It no longer works.

KAIJA: He placed Nyenje's umbilical cord . . .

TINKA: The spirit in it is dead.

KAIJA: Just to cheer up your son, please.

TINKA: No.

KAIJA: Please mother, just once.

TINKA: (*violently*) I said *no*.

KAIJA: Temper. That's the bad temper I was telling you about, mother.

TINKA: You don't understand. It doesn't work any more, son.

KAIJA: Grown bad-tempered of late . . . only of late, of course.

TINKA: You wear me out, Kaija. Why do you have to pester me?

KAIJA: Once upon a time Ngoma had . . .

TINKA: (*giving in*) All right, all right. But let this be the last time.

KAIJA: But it is your life.

TINKA: Promise this will be the last time.

KAIJA: I promise.

(*Tinka clears her throat and starts narrating the story, at first softly, lost in childhood memories. With Kaija's encouragement she progressively becomes freer, more relaxed and even happy.*)

TINKA: There was a hill from which ran a maze of paths. Do you remember the old name of the hill?

KAIJA: I've forgotten.

TINKA: Never mind. In the middle was a big palace.

KAIJA: Now that is a new addition. The palace.

TINKA: There must have been a palace because it was blown down. First a strong wind that whirled through the leaves and frightened the chicks. Then came the storm that wrecked the foundation of the palace and battered down the reed fence. The thatch scattered far and wide.

KAIJA: Last time you narrated this story, there was no palace and no storm either.

TINKA: Memory fails you, son. There must have been a palace or else the song would never have been composed.

KAIJA: The song? What song?

TINKA: 'Guns to Play the Drums', it's called. (*Recites.*)

'Your father, dear son, has gone away
Has gone away to the land of light.
The land of light where the earth doesn't grow
The land where guns play drums on the snow.

They have rotted the spears in your father's hut
In your father's hut where there's a sharp knife
A sharp knife for cutting fresh meat
The meat of the enemies we'll have to eat.

The meat of enemies can be tender, sometimes
Can be tender when the heart's full of sorrow
Your father, dear son, has gone away
Has gone away to bring guns to play the drums.'

KAIJA: That's a sad one.

TINKA: A stubborn memory still lingers in the minds of a few. The few old ones whose duty it is to think and hide relevancies in irrelevancies and share their uneasiness before graves overtake them.

KAIJA: The palace.

TINKA: Yes, the palace. There was excitement in that palace. Little children running naked in the rain. Boys digging up crickets at dusk. There was the bursting of dew at dawn and the teeth chattering with hailstones. God, there was excitement in that palace! Drumming and dancing and singing.

KAIJA: Down in the valley women crumbled soil between their palms.

TINKA: And in the forest men hunted hogs. God, there was activity and excitement before the storm. Down at the well the marsh kept the smell of childhood . . . and the odour of first intimacies. Ngoma, Paramount Chief. Eighty-five years. No sons; only Nyenje, the daughter. And Ngoma sent word round that whoever wanted her beautiful hand had to prove his prowess by climbing a

very tall tree and bringing down, in one piece, the gourd containing her umbilical cord. Chiefs and princes tried their luck without success. Hunters and herdsmen, too. The *mvule* tree was very tall, you see.

KAIJA: And Nyenje's beauty dazzled their eyes.

TINKA: You have it. Then came the leper. A common leper stinking with leprosy and commonness. Dragging misery behind him. A leper . . . he, too, wanted to climb the *mvule* tree.

KAIJA: People ran away in horror.

TINKA: And from safe hide-outs they laughed tears and threw stones at him. He simply said he did not mind their laughter. For laughter, he said, was like rain. It comes and goes; and besides, he said, the wise laugh at ugliness, the fools at disease. They laughed. Those people laughed. But Ngoma was a fair man. He let him try his luck.

KAIJA: Nyenje was tucked away in a corner drenched in tears. . . .

TINKA: As the leper climbed the tree and sang his song.

KAIJA: The tune . . . let's have the tune mother.

TINKA: The night, too, has ears, son.

KAIJA: Just this once, mother.

TINKA: Just the words of the tune. He said Nyenje's beauty was unequalled. He climbed. He wished he was the moon up in the skies for then he would see her full beauty as she bathed. He said he envied the barkcloths on her bed, for they knew how warm her embrace was. He climbed higher.

KAIJA: Nyenje's heart sunk low.

TINKA: You have it. Her neck was like the crested crane's, he said. With rings and rings of beauty beads. Her teeth whiter than milk. He climbed higher and higher

still.

KAIJA: Ngoma regretted his fairness.

TINKA: Her gums were darker than soot, he said, her foot a *musambya* leaf laden with dew. The gourd was now an arm's length from him.

KAIJA: Ngoma bid his subjects tie a band around his tired loins.

(*Wamala's voice can be heard faintly from without.*)

TINKA: To cut the long story short, the leper brought down the gourd.

KAIJA: That's father's voice.

TINKA: Let it be. That's how a common leper, stinking with leprosy and commonness . . .

VOICE: Thank you, thank you very much for helping me. I couldn't have managed that bed. (*Laughter.*) Yes it was a good brew.

KAIJA: The bed?

TINKA: To bed at once.

KAIJA: The bed, mother.

VOICE: It was a marvellous time. Really marvellous. The wrestling match? No, I'll avoid it this time.

TINKA: Off to bed at once.

VOICE: The old boy will be pleased, no doubt, bed and all.

KAIJA: Did you hear mother? The bed. A bed for me.

TINKA: I said off to bed and at once. If he sees those tawny legs of yours, he'll start howling again. He forgets that a tin of water is ten cents at the tap.

KAIJA: Good night, mother. And thank you very much.

(*He leaves.*)

TINKA: Good night.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

WAMALA: Open the door.

(*Tinka opens the door. Wamala enters dragging in a safari bed. Second-hand but still in reasonable condition. He's drunk, which in his case means over-excitement, a detectable physical unsteadiness rather than incoherence.*)

WAMALA: Well, well, well. How is the old girl tonight? Things under control, eh? (*No response from her*). Still plaiting away at your mat, are you? Like a witch-doctor stringing lies together.

(*He unfolds the bed in one corner and lies on it to test its comfort. He is obviously delighted with his purchase; and victory.*)

WAMALA: Very good value for money, if you ask me. What's ten shillings after all? Give me ten minutes and you'll find your ten shillings spouting in the urinal at the Republic Bar. But a bed . . . . (*Sits up. Hands and buttocks testing its strength.*) Not bad, not bad at all. (*Looks at Tinka who is indifferent to his excitement, because her trap has been side-stepped.*)

WAMALA: Come on old girl. Like to feel its comfort?

TINKA: (*not looking up from her weaving*) We are fed up with second-hand things.

WAMALA: Come on Tinka, don't be nasty. The bed's still in reasonable condition. Strong and comfortable. Bet it'll excite the old boy out of his senses.

TINKA: There are some homes which have never known second-hand . . .

WAMALA: And there are others that can't afford even tenth-hand things, for your information.

TINKA: You should be ashamed of second . . .

WAMALA: Kaija must come and have a look.

TINKA: Not at one o'clock in the morning.
WAMALA: (*calling*) Kaija! Kaija! Ka—
TINKA: (*firmly*) Wamala, don't wake up the children.
WAMALA: It is his bed. Kaija! Kaija!
TINKA: You should have come earlier if you wanted him to see it
WAMALA: He must see his new bride. Must sleep . . . Kaija! Kaija!

(*Wamala stands up to go for Kaija.*)

TINKA: Don't shout. Nyakake's not well.
WAMALA: (*going to the bedroom door*) Kaija. Kaija, a new bride . . .
TINKA: (*intercepting him*) You're not going to disturb the children.

(*They stare at one another hatefully. They move away from the door. Kaija, who's been following their argument behind the door, opens it quietly and:*)

KAIJA: Did you call me, father?
WAMALA: Oh my boy. Behold . . .
TINKA: Go back to sleep.
WAMALA: Behold your bride. I betroth you to your . . .

(*Kaija is obviously excited, but unsure whether to go to his new acquisition.*)

KAIJA: Good old father, good old . . .
WAMALA: Tonight you'll have the embrace of . . .
TINKA: (*advancing menacingly*) I said *get back to bed, now*!
KAIJA Father, you're just wonderful.
TINKA: (*to Kaija*) Didn't you hear me?
WAMALA: Let him feel the softness of his bride, Tinka.
TINKA: Tomorrow. (*To Kaija:*) Go to sleep.

(*She sweeps Kaija out of the room and closes the door. Wamala gives up the argument. They both sit; Wamala lights his Crown Bird cigarette. Tinka resumes her weaving.*)

TINKA: (*resentfully*) You didn't come back last night.

WAMALA: (*excited at what he thinks is fantastic news*) I have got it, Tinka, at long last.

TINKA: Where were you last night?

WAMALA: No more starving for us.

TINKA: I said where . . .

WAMALA: Tear up the tatters.

TINKA: I'm serious.

WAMALA: Pull down this hovel. A big mansion awaits us.

TINKA: Are you mad or . . .

WAMALA: A limousine is beckoning.

TINKA: Or drunk? (*Sarcastically.*) Maybe you have won the National Lottery?

WAMALA: I lost fifty quid in the bargain, all right. Damn the clerk at the Public Employment Board. You know the rascal?

TINKA: What's the trick now?

WAMALA: The board said I was a nut and a reactionary, he told me. That I can't operate in the new political spirit. Can you imagine? A nut and a reactionary, and my fifty quid gone crying in his throat.

TINKA: Are you trying to avoid my question?

WAMALA: A mighty rage vibrated through me. It was hard controlling myself. I could have strangled the cheat. I simply walked away to the Republic Park and did a great deal of thinking. Real concentrated thinking.

TINKA: I'm asking you where you slept last night.

WAMALA: Then suddenly this evening, as I sipped my beer in the Republic Bar (*pause, stands up*), it came.

TINKA: Is that where you slept?

WAMALA: First, a kind of itch in the brain; then a sudden jerk and finally, the birth of a new baby.

TINKA: In the Republic Bar?

WAMALA: The simplicity of it kills me. Never occurred to me that small ideas take long to ferment in the mind. All the time we're busy wrestling with great ideas, or ideas we think great.

TINKA: I'm sick to *here* (*indicating her neck*) with your ideas. Small ideas, big ideas, creative ideas. Safety matches . . .

WAMALA: Now *there* is a million pound maker for you, if it weren't for these capitalist companies and their monopoly mania.

TINKA: It's all rubbish.

WAMALA: Rubbish, my word! It's exploitation mentality. Look at these safety matches (*takes a box to her.*)

TINKA: Not interested.

WAMALA: Come on, don't be afraid. It's not a time bomb.

TINKA: I'm not interested, do you hear? Who is she this time?

WAMALA: It's only a box of safety matches, Tinka.

TINKA: The same old dirty tart who seduces you with *kwete*?

WAMALA: Come on, give it a look.

(*She does.*)

TINKA: What exactly do you want from me?

WAMALA: What is it?

(*Wamala indicates the box of safety matches.*)

TINKA: A plain box of safety matches with match-sticks in it.

WAMALA: Nothing more?

TINKA: Nothing.

WAMALA: Nothing unfinished about it? Nothing incomplete?

TINKA: None whatsoever.

WAMALA: That's the price of conceit. Perpetual ignorance. I wanted to tell you the other night. You said I was out of my mind. Give it another look. An imaginative look.

TINKA: You're yet to tell me where you slept.

WAMALA: (*sits*) Why do you think Associated Matches puts two friction surfaces on the box?

TINKA: Because they're not as stupid as you are.

WAMALA: Suit yourself. Now take a look at the matchsticks.

TINKA: I'm fed up with you.

WAMALA: Why do you think they fix the chemical head on only one end of the stick? Why, why in the devil's name?

(*Tinka is genuinely confused but manages to hide her confusion in silence.*)

WAMALA: Why? (*Pause.*) I'll tell you. Look at me.

(*She looks. He strikes a match violently, lights a cigarette and throws away the match-stick.*)

WAMALA: Do you get the meaning?

TINKA: What meaning?

WAMALA: Extravagance. Extravagance, Tinka. And there are only thirty-five sticks in the box. Do you get me?

(*Tinka, completely lost, stares at him blankly. Wamala picks up the spent match-stick and holds it up for her to see.*)

WAMALA: Forty millimetres—the length of this stick; and after careful use you still have your blinking forty millimetres. Intact, except for the charred head. Do you get me now?

(*Tinka shakes her head in a puzzled manner.*)

WAMALA: I'll tell you, my girl. This is luxury. The opium of the *bourgeoisie*. Big business, big mansions, big-bottomed wives. An endless search for extras that one doesn't really need. That's luxury. The cornerstone of exploitation. (*Heating up:*) Why in the devil's name can't they put chemical heads on both ends of the stick?

(*Finally the point dawns on her. She is most excited and full of admiration, so much so that she goes and embraces him in spite of herself.*)

TINKA: Wamala, you're a genius.

WAMALA: I ignore the book matches. But with the lucifer matches and safety matches, hell, the chemical head should be on both ends. (*He demonstrates.*) You strike one end and light your cigarette and keep the match for the second helping. I'm telling you it's luxury and exploitation through and through. They're bent on sucking the blood out of us until we drop dead.

TINKA: Bleeding a leech to fatten a heifer.

WAMALA: Precisely.

TINKA: (*iokingly*) Poverty has turned even you into a socialist.

WAMALA: Poverty is the best incentive to creativity.

TINKA: So this is the new baby you . . .

WAMALA: (*overwhelmed by the apparent success*) Do you know how much money our nationals could save on such a household item?

TINKA: Thousands and thousands, I am sure.

WAMALA: Do you know how many other items we could cut down expenses for?

TINKA: It only needs a creative mind—a genius.

WAMALA: But who cares, who cares except old Wamala and his tatters?

TINKA: Let's sell the idea to Associated Matches.

WAMALA: You're telling me.

TINKA: They'd pay you a million.

WAMALA: Do you know what happened when I went to see the Managing Director?

TINKA: He invited you to a business lunch.

WAMALA: Don't be pedantic. His secretary, a non-national of course, threw me out of the office.

TINKA: What?

WAMALA: She looked at my tattered jacket with scorn, pulled out of the drawer a 'HAKUNA KAZI' poster, and sweetly said the Managing Director was busy. And all the time the bugger was in there scratching his balls. I told her I wasn't looking for a job. She said I was becoming a nuisance. The Securicor Guards threw me out.

TINKA: What a shame.

WAMALA: And that, my dear, was the end of a great idea patiently borne by a man in tatters. A rejection of a poor man's contribution.

TINKA: The cut-throats.

WAMALA: But fortunately, once a creative mind, always a creative mind.

TINKA: Another idea yet.

WAMALA: More profound.

TINKA: Let's hear it.

(*Wamala, full of himself, walks about as if in a trance.*)

WAMALA: When the secretary woman foiled my chances I began to see our predicament as it really is. In a way I'm grateful to her. I suddenly realized we couldn't

take the situation much longer. You, me and the children. We get up at the crack of dawn. Tea without milk. Cold potatoes and beans. The searing sting of smoke and the smell of urine from Kake's bedding. We wash our faces with dew because water costs a fortune and there isn't any in the house. Kaija goes to school. The cold morning making his teeth chatter and biting his bare buttocks. Kake chases butterflies or walks around the house in silence because you and I have nothing much to talk about.

TINKA: We should take that girl to a proper doctor, Wamala.

WAMALA: Ten o'clock comes. You start your weaving or setting out tins and tubes for distilling *enguli*. I borrow the previous day's newspaper and begin an endless search for jobs in the vacancies column. When I see one I think I can do, there is still the problem of the three referees. And yet the only people who know me, who dare associate with me, are fellow drunks; drunks at the Republic Bar who best know the predicament of developing nations.

Then lunch comes. Potatoes and beans, sometimes *kaunga* and *dodo*, and our indefatigable silence—except for occasional mediocre jokes to reassure the children. In the evening I go to the Republic to meet the outside world, to meet the new breed who are susceptible to praise and can afford to stand us drinks. I drink and drug myself against depression and frustration. I come back home to the silent curses and to the empty eyes of the children of uncertainty, who know but dare not say they do. You slink away to the bedroom and I have to follow knowing full well that neither you nor the room welcomes me. Another dawn. Tea without milk.

Cold potatoes and beans. The searing sting of smoke. Day in, day out, until the Second Political Coming. We can't stand it any longer.

TINKA: You haven't told me where you were last night.

WAMALA: (*irritably*) Don't nag.

TINKA: Where?

WAMALA: (*gesticulating*) I was here, I was there, I was everywhere.

TINKA: Doing what?

WAMALA: Doing this and doing that. Doing everything, which means I was doing nothing.

TINKA: I'm going to kill that bitch of yours, I warn you.

WAMALA: Whaat?

TINKA: I'll pluck out her squinty eyes.

WAMALA: (*alarmed*) Tinka, what's the matter with you?

TINKA: She's making all of us suffer.

WAMALA: Can't I spend a night with a fellow-suffering man?

TINKA: I have heard that story before.

WAMALA: Things will be all right, you'll see. It's living with uncertainty that is eating on our nerves. This idea of mine is going to work this time. You will see. Nothing like the safety matches idea.

TINKA: You've got to change. I didn't come here to make beds which you don't sleep in.

WAMALA: The idea, Tinka, the idea.

TINKA: Keep your day-dreams to yourself.

WAMALA: Day-dreams? You can't sell day-dreams, can you?

TINKA: Sell?

WAMALA: Fifty shillings in fifteen minutes. Do you know how much that would be in an eight-hour working day?

TINKA: Fifty what? Now I know you are mad.

WAMALA: (*showing her the money*) Look, Tinka. Thirty shillings.

(*Tinka is visibly impressed and is more attentive now.*)

WAMALA: Ten shillings for the bed. Ten for my thirst. Thirty remaining. It will work, Tinka. Only be patient with me. Give me a chance. It's bound to work.

TINKA: How many minutes do you give it? Thirty?

WAMALA: What?

TINKA: The thirty shillings, at the Republic.

WAMALA: I won't, Tinka. Things are different. I want you to know that.

TINKA: Let's save it for the doctor, then.

WAMALA: People don't get jobs for nothing. You need money to tune the ears of your prospective employer.

TINKA: That girl is not well, Wamala.

WAMALA: I know, I know, but be patient. Give me your blessing. Promise you will, Tinka.

TINKA: Not before I know the project.

WAMALA: (*to buy her off*) Look. Let's split my first earnings. Take fifteen.

(*She does but is instantly suspicious of this sudden wave of generosity.*)

TINKA: What is the idea then?

WAMALA: I.S.S.

TINKA: What is I.S.S.?

WAMALA: The International Slogan Syndicate.

TINKA: What?

WAMALA: I'll start selling slogans.

(*Tinka, deflated, stands up to collect her gear.*)

TINKA: I'm going to bed.

WAMALA: (*intercepting*) Easy, old girl, easy. Mine are slogans with taste. In fact, very creative. Nothing like the 'PUT A TIGER IN YOUR TANK' stuff. My slogans must emphasize self-pride. Must exploit international prejudices against the African. Must redeem us from the rags of our humiliation.

TINKA (*sits*) Give me one.

WAMALA: (*off the cuff*) 'WARAGI WINS THIGHS.'

TINKA: What?

WAMALA: 'DRINK VAT FOR VIRILITY.'

TINKA: Good God!

WAMALA: 'REX AND SEX
FOR A MAN OF TASTE.'

TINKA: You're dirty-minded.

WAMALA: The only thing that works these days.

TINKA: Dirt?

WAMALA: Sex. Our new religion, forgetting alcohol for a moment.

TINKA: Your mind is as tattered as your jacket.

WAMALA: Look at it properly, Tinka. Why should there be so much prejudice against the blacks? Why should white mothers sweat and freeze with horror when a black man ogles their blonde daughters? You know why? Our colour suggests real power and mystery. When you stand in a crowd you can't be seen through. Our unpredictability nags on the white conscience. Hence the reality of black power. My slogans must exploit white fear and emphasize our pride. We can't go on being insulted. Every blinking advertisement asserts the beauty, the virtue, the superiority of whiteness. Shit. Even when we manufacture goods ourselves for the home market, it is for the white to persuade us to use them. Cars. Cigarettes, drinks, deodorants, toilet paper, tablets; the lot. (*Pause.*) Is

your 'kill-me-quick' sold out?

TINKA (*to distract him*) Yes.

WAMALA: Half a bottle will do. People praise your *enguli* as the best in the slums.

TINKA: I don't see them coming to buy it.

WAMALA: Then you have some?

TINKA: Sold out. (*Diverting him*:) How did this I.S.S. idea come to you?

WAMALA: Oh, it's this man Vincent. You know him?

TINKA: Tell him to use deodorants, next time you meet him. He stinks.

WAMALA: He's too fat.

TINKA: The more reason.

WAMALA: He comes to the Republic and finds us screwed to our pints. Each one of us lost in our glasses and thoughts. You know how bouncy he is. Says, 'Come on chaps, what's the cause for moaning?' Silence. Then the barman, 'What will you have, Chief?' Then the bomb-shell. 'I am prepared to contest a parliamentary seat in the next general election.' Everybody bursts out laughing. Thought it was a joke. But then we realize the man is serious. *That* even caused more laughter. Hell, we had cause to. Old Vincent. Sixty years. Retired Saza Chief. Fellow drunk and thigh-monger. Four wives; and a dozen daughters—married one way or another. What bleating business does he want with politics? Should content himself counting grey hairs on his head.

TINKA: I'm going to bed.

WAMALA: But I haven't told you how the idea came.

TINKA: I'm waiting.

WAMALA: A quarter bottle of 'kill-me-quick' would spin it out more quickly though. (*No response from her.*) Any-

way, before we adjust ourselves to this shattering news, old Vincent is busy making promises. 'My main emphasis will be on building schools, constructing roads and dispensaries. Free education. Free medical attention. Monthly allowances for the unemployed.' And all the usual crap. You're sure you don't have some left? (*She eyes him questioningly.*) 'Kill-me-quick'. (*She nods.*) 'We know those promises,' someone says. 'You arrested me for poll tax,' adds another. 'Procedure is procedure,' old Vincent pleads. I reminded him he didn't belong to the Party. He said they would welcome him with a hundred hands. The man was serious, you see. But no one was impressed. Then he drowns us in drink, old Vincent did.

TINKA: Are you ever going to get to the point?

WAMALA: Presently. Then it occurred to me I could teach old Vince a trick or two about campaigning. I took him out and made a deal. Told him people are tired of pleas and promises and long speeches. All they need are a few catchwords. Appropriate slogans. Slogans given a poetic texture. Haranguing can't work. In his case, I said, he could use the Three Vs Dimensional Attack: 'VOTE VALOUR; VOTE VALUE; VOTE VINCENT.' When he tried it out in the Republic, it worked. People went mad with the slogan—'VOTE VALOUR; VOTE VALUE; VOTE VINCENT!' They clapped and chanted and sang: 'VOTE VALOUR; VOTE VALUE; VOTE VINCENT!!'

TINKA: It was the drink he offered them.

WAMALA: Those slogans beat the silence out of them.

TINKA: Don't deceive yourself, man.

WAMALA: (*showing off*) 'VOTE VIGOUR; VOTE VETERAN VINCENT . . . VOTE VETERAN VINCENT?' (*Thinks.*) Does stick in the mouth though.

TINKA: Can't even impress a monkey.

WAMALA: But it worked wonders in the Republic.

TINKA: 'VOTE VAPOUR; VOTE VIOLENCE; VOTE VENGEANCE; VOTE VINCENT.' You see. You forget what damage the opponent could inflict on your Vs rubbish. I'm telling you it was the drink. A round of free drinks and you have everybody yapping away like mad monkeys. That includes you, sir.

WAMALA: (*deflated, then consolingly*) I got the fifty shillings all the same. I'm to see him tomorrow to discuss the syndicate business.

TINKA: (*sarcastically*) Congratulations for having acquired a respectable profession.

WAMALA: (*sounding sophisticated*) The only respectable thing is that there's nothing respectable any more. (*Admires his originality.*) You see, I have a mind for quotable quotes. You needn't be sarcastic. I am a *Thinker.*

TINKA: (*bursting the balloon*) Thinker? Give it up man and try something else.

WAMALA: I haven't told you the entire plan, Tinka.

TINKA: Don't bother. You know what the papers will say if you go on with this syndicate muck heap? Front page mark you. 'THE EROSION OF ADVERTISING STANDARDS. THE BETRAYAL OF ORIGINALITY AND THE SPREAD OF MEDIOCRITY.' That's your International Slogan Syndicate.

WAMALA: You're a very subversive woman, Tinka. You're a big burden.

TINKA: So I am.

WAMALA: The only thing you are good at is undermining my efforts. Now where's that drink? I'll pay cash.

TINKA: From the right hand to the left hand. I don't call that selling.

WAMALA: (*precipitating a quarrel*) Look here, Tinka, I'm running out of patience. I have pleaded with you, persuaded you and offered to pay cash. You are still stubborn.

TINKA: You've had enough.

WAMALA: This is my house, you know.

TINKA: And so?

WAMALA: If you are so ungrateful I'll start charging you a sales tax. This is not a brewing house, remember. Not a bar either.

TINKA: Intimidation.

WAMALA: There is still the trade licence and the liquor licence I could impose on you.

TINKA: You are joking.

WAMALA: How about the police? If they got wind of this . . .

TINKA: I know how to look after that.

WAMALA: I could give their chief a hint or two, you know.

TINKA: (*scared*) You dare do it.

WAMALA: 'Chief, you may not believe me, but my woman brews and sells *enguli* illegally . . . in my very house.' Six months, that's what you'd get for it, plus a five hundred shillings fine. Twelve canes a day will screw the stubbornness out of you.

TINKA: You know they wouldn't believe you.

(*All tricks having failed, Wamala decides to use force. He storms into their bedroom to look for the drink. Tinka is not worried because she thinks her drink is safely hidden. Wamala comes back fuming.*)

WAMALA: Where the devil did you hide it?

TINKA: (*half laughing*) I've told you it's sold out.

WAMALA: Liar. (*Goes to her threateningly.*) *Where* have you

kept it?

TINKA: Are you deaf?

WAMALA: Tinka, I don't want to cause trouble here. Where is the drink? I'll pay cash.

TINKA: Sold out. Yesterday, when you were away.

WAMALA: The money?

TINKA: Mine.

(*He regards her silently. Thinks. Clue seems to be coming. He opens the front door and goes out. Tinka is somewhat worried now. After a moment she peeps after him. Wamala is back with a full bottle of* enguli. *She is determined to get it from him. They chase each other around the room. Wamala is taking it as a joke.*)

TINKA: Give me back my drink.

WAMALA: Hide it in hell next time.

TINKA: You're not going to have it.

WAMALA: If you gag my throat.

TINKA: You should be ashamed of yourself.

WAMALA: After I have drained the bottle.

(*She catches up with him. A scuffle. She is hurling insults at him, and administering feeble blows.*)

TINKA: You pig! You parasite! Filthy fool! Skunk! Porcupine!

(*They are tugging away at the bottle. Wamala seems to be losing. She is pulling and pushing him all over the room. He decides to finish the game and pushes her hard against the drum. Tinka falls with a moan. Big clatter as the* Kyanzi, *kitchenware and spear etc. scatter. She hurts her elbow.*)

WAMALA: You deserve it, you idiot.

(*He sits down and drinks from the bottle. Tense silence. Tinka gathers herself up, looks at him hatefully, spits and slaps her thighs contemptuously and makes to go. He flings a shoe at her, catching her back. Tense silence. She sits down again sobbing.*)

WAMALA: (*drily*) Did it hurt?

(*Sobs answer him. He hiccups, goes across to her and suddenly realizes what he has done. Looks repentant but decides not to apologize.*)

WAMALA: (*tenderly*) Does it hurt? Let me look at it.
TINKA: Leave me alone.
WAMALA: Come on, old girl. Let me look at your elbow.
TINKA: Leave me alone, I said.
WAMALA: (*looking at her elbow in spite of her protestation, gets alarmed*) It's swelling.
TINKA: Go away, leave me alone.
WAMALA: I'll give it a rub.
TINKA: I can do it myself.
WAMALA: (*pleading*) Just a little rub and you'll be all right.
TINKA: Must it always be battles?
WAMALA: (*notices blood*) You're bleeding.
TINKA: I'm not a stone.
WAMALA: You actually are bleeding like hell.
TINKA: What is that to you?
WAMALA: You see it was your fault. Just wanted a little drink with my own cash.
TINKA: You'll pay for this, dearly.
WAMALA: You provoked me. Shouldn't have treated me like that. A man always wants a little bit of respect. Just a little bit, you know. To make him feel he is the

boss in his own house, not a door-mat for every bastard to wipe his shoes on. You shouldn't tread on a man like that, poverty or no poverty. The blood s flowing fast. I'll get a bandage and dress your elbow.

(*He goes inside their room, wisely taking the bottle of* enguli *with him. After a moment or two he comes back, carrying two glasses and an improvised bandage as well as the bottle. He then brings water in a basin and starts dressing her elbow.*)

TINKA: Blows, battles, hunger, hatred, poverty and a cold bed. I can't stand it any longer.

WAMALA: Any iodine in the house?

TINKA: Finished.

(*Kaija has been awakened. He's peeping through the door.*)

WAMALA: Cobweb will do. Used to be popular before the age of hospitals. (*Stands up to look for cobwebs around the room.*) The world outside is hell let loose. It's ruthless. It breaks one. Everyone orders you to walk with your tail limp between your thighs. They don't want you to raise your head. They want you to know that your life is in their hands.

(*He sees a cobweb, gets it and goes to dress her.*)

They can break it like a dry stick, if they choose to. And they always do, because it gives them the feel of power. They want you to know they are now on top, sitting on your head. And you beneath their buttocks, suffocating. So when a man comes home from this hell, this crowd full of power-hungry bastards with twitching hands — hands eager to grab and get rich, get rich

quickly—a man wants sympathy and sweetness, tender care and kindness. Not silent curses.

(*He is about to finish dressing the cut.*)

Is it too tight? The bandage.

TINKA: It is all right.

WAMALA: Not poisonous whispers and despising stares. He's looking for something to lean against and take in a little breath to enable him to continue the struggle. He's hungry for love. A tiny drop of it, you know. Just enough to keep him going. It is a hell . . . (*He notices Kaija in the doorway.*) What is it, Kaija?

KAIJA: Is anything the matter, father?

WAMALA: Oh no, old boy. Everything under control.

KAIJA: (*looking ar her bandaged elbow*) Mother, mother, what happened to your elbow? It is bandaged.

WAMALA:Your mother stumbled against the drum.

TINKA: Yes. Your mother did.

KAIJA: One of your shoes is here father. (*Going to it.*)

WAMALA: Then bring it here.

(*Wamala serves himself a drink. Kaija brings the shoe*).

KAIJA: I'm sorry, mother.

TINKA: I'll be all right, Kaija. Nothing to be alarmed about. Just a little accident.

KAIJA: Don't do it again, father. Don't. It hurts.

WAMALA: What did I hear?

KAIJA: It will make me scream, father. It will break . . .

WAMALA: Now look here, old boy. Don't start getting ideas. Off to bed.

KAIJA: Yes, father. Promise you won't do it again, please.

WAMALA: What did I say?

KAIJA: You don't know how much it hurts . . .

WAMALA: Will you shut up and go to bed *now*.

KAIJA: (*going out*) Thank you for my bed, father.

WAMALA: (*curtly*) Tomorrow. (*Waits until Kaija closes the door.*) Why do you set the children against me?

TINKA: We suffer, Wamala. It is difficult for us especially after such a past.

WAMALA: (*dreamily*) Oh the glorious past . . .

TINKA: At least with you and the children it's okay. You have your drink and women to turn to. Kaija was very young then. He doesn't remember much. Kake was not born yet. But *me*? I'm one huge lump of pain and suffering.

WAMALA: They wrenched it out of my arms. The bastards! Who'd have known we would come to this? (*Pause.*) Have a sip. (*Offers her a drink.*)

TINKA: I'm fine.

WAMALA: Have a sip or two. It helps. Drugs one and keeps one hoping. And the politicians know it. Drink will be the last thing to ban in this country. Come on Tinka, have a glass. (*She accepts.*) Because quite frankly, if they banned drinking, and excessive drinking at that, it would only be bullets in their bellies and either the gutter for everyone, or government mansions. We are breeding a nation of desperate alcoholics and sycophants. Sycophants flaunting their hypocrisy to absent-minded elders. (*Pause. Drinks.*) Tinka, do you remember?

TINKA: (*puzzled*) What?

WAMALA: The happier times?

TINKA: (*jokingly*) Your blows and tarts have wiped out the memory.

WAMALA: Seriously, do you? Our courting? In the park behind the chapel? On the bench . . . at night?

TINKA: The nuns praying in the convent and singing 'Ave

Maria.'

WAMALA: (*eyes her and gives her a roguish hug*) You prayed me to be merciful then.

TINKA: To be considerate.

WAMALA: All that talk about the Mother Superior and the hell-fire, I knew, was an empty excuse.

TINKA: I broke my vow.

WAMALA: By the doorstep of the chapel... on the cold cement?

TINKA: While the stars spied on us.

WAMALA: Then in the cemetery too ... down the valley.

TINKA: You said it was safe.

WAMALA: And so it was.

TINKA: Except for the holy ghosts weeping ... turning away, ashamed.

WAMALA: Guilty now, are you? Rather late in the day.

TINKA: We didn't have to defile the holy grounds.

WAMALA: Soft moans waking up the dead. I liked it. Every ticking second of it.

TINKA: The things you made me do!

WAMALA: Do you know why I found it *particularly* exciting?

TINKA: Curiosity. That's all.

WAMALA: The pleasures behind the habit?

TINKA: Precisely.

WAMALA: The warmth beneath the wimple?

TINKA: You have said it.

WAMALA: Wrong track.

TINKA: The forbidden fruit that banished Adam and Eve.

WAMALA: It was interesting to find that the little Tinka who had turned into a nun at sixteen, was no *Virgin* Mary, after all.

TINKA: Accusation?

WAMALA: Observation, which Mother Superiors deceive themselves about.

TINKA: Only once. At fifteen. In the banana plantation . .

WAMALA: (*knowingly*) I can believe that.

TINKA: After my mother's funeral. Sam said it would make me forget.

WAMALA: And did it?

TINKA: Yes. I forgot the sight of mother dying in grandmother's hands. Grandfather was away.

WAMALA: Conveniently . . . with another woman.

TINKA: Men!

WAMALA: And then after thirteen years of abstinence, thirteen years during which Mother Superiors and the venerable Father had turned your desires and emotions white and unholy, you made a grand come-back. All the repressed desires suddenly became illicitly desirable and burst forth into a rebellion. (*Joking:*) I have a feeling you seduced me. In a way.

TINKA: In a way . . . every woman does.

WAMALA: In your case it was more pointed. 'Can I come to your house to borrow the Complete Works of Mao Tse-tung?'

TINKA: I don't know about that.

WAMALA: No room for self-reproach, my dear. It happens every day. Ask any ex-seminarian.

TINKA: Curiosity brought you to me. And you know that.

WAMALA: Not your pretty face?

TINKA: Curiosity that killed the cat.

WAMALA: You're wrong. I wanted to hit back at my enemies.

TINKA: Political opponents?

WAMALA: No. The Church. Priests preaching hatred in pulpits.

TINKA: You didn't tell me.

WAMALA: Rallying nuns, fellow priests and faithfuls against me. Branding our Party communist—communists who would rape the nuns and turn churches into casinos.

TINKA: (*disappointed*) Wamala, you were using me. All along, I thought . . .

WAMALA: But how could I have told you? Your father was a progressive Christian chief.

TINKA: Poor father! All those cows he gave you to slaughter after political rallies—

WAMALA: Were appreciated. They won me the independence election, one might almost say. May God rest the old man in peace.

TINKA: So the talk about a political marriage was true, after all.

WAMALA: Cheap propaganda by my opponents.

TINKA:And the reward father got for his co-operation?

WAMALA: I married the daughter.

TINKA: Why in the church, if they were your . . .

WAMALA: To spite the leaders. To render the enemy quite ineffectual. By God! I did chew that Holy bread of theirs.

TINKA: So you lied to me?

WAMALA: About?

TINKA: Confession.

WAMALA: What do you think I am? I'd seen those priests pressing their chests on young boys. And did you expect me to say to them: 'Sorry Fathers, I'll take to boys next time'?

TINKA: Blasphemy.

WAMALA: Boy, I gave them what they deserved. Their most trusted nun, the only daughter of an eminent Catholic chief. Ha ha, it was a political masterpiece. And in your spiritual dusk, my dear, was my political

dawn and their defeat. The way I chewed the host would have made a bone bleed.

TINKA: Poor Jesus! He'll never forgive you.

WAMALA: I got away with it and retired to a sumptuous reception.

TINKA: The police band playing.

WAMALA: Whisky and champagne for one and all.

TINKA: Female eyes envying.

WAMALA: Males eyeing females and the Bishop blinking.

TINKA: Glasses breaking.

WAMALA: Men staggering.

TINKA: Women chattering.

WAMALA: Thighs parting in the dark.

TINKA: Business men boasting.

WAMALA: Intellectuals in sandals . . .

TINKA: Their hair messed up sisal . . .

WAMALA: Complaining about the national extravagance between bouts of whisky and champagne.

TINKA: It was fabulous.

WAMALA: Absolutely farcical.

TINKA: They left their sandals behind.

WAMALA: And after independence they became loud-mouthed about our achievements. Blasting us by boosting themselves in the dailies, but secretly crawling to us for directorships. The deceit!

TINKA: The way you held me when the Union Jack was lowered. Do you remember?

WAMALA: (*reminiscent*) Hand-in-hand among the independence crowds, on to the decorated rostrum. We were big pots then.

TINKA: Shopping at the Supermarket over the phone.

WAMALA: Business deals done at the Inter-Continental.

TINKA: The hairdresser coming home.

WAMALA: Bank managers in my study.
TINKA: An insidious upsurge of relatives and friends.
WAMALA: You always threw them out.
TINKA: Where are they now?
WAMALA: The vermin.
TINKA: Now it is this hovel. No friends, no relatives. It was all your fault.
WAMALA: Blame the Yankees and their dollars.
TINKA: Too much ambition breaks a man.
WAMALA: Too little gets him nowhere.
TINKA: It wouldn't have brought us here. Chinks in the walls, the roof leaking, rats . . .
WAMALA: Damn the Yankees. They said I had a presidential gait, and I rather fancied I had a voice of authority. The folly of it. (*Pause.*) I think I'll go back to the old Veteran and ask for clemency.
TINKA: You're lucky he clapped you in for only two years. In some countries I know, it would have been the firing squad. Your back to the wall.

(*She demonstrates.*)

WAMALA: But he left me with nothing.
TINKA: That wasn't him. It was the Commission of Inquiry.
WAMALA: Damn! Damn! Damn! Still, I think he'd forgive me—give me an opening somewhere.
TINKA: The Slogan Syndicate?
WAMALA: No. Something more concrete. I'll go to him on my knees and say (*he kneels before her*):

Your tongue and mine
Your Excellency
Whipped the Britons out of this land
The Union Jack between their legs.

Remember the old days, Veteran
Have mercy.
It was these Yankees and their dollars.
Said I could make a better boss.
Do you think he'll grant it?

TINKA: What?

WAMALA: The pardon?

TINKA: You won't get beyond the guards.

WAMALA: (*puzzled*) What guards?

TINKA: At the Lodge. *Onataka nini hapa*? Remember?

WAMALA: Damn *onataka nini*. (*Thinks.*) How about a direct ring.

TINKA: Some Yankee secretary or other will hang up.

WAMALA: A Yankee secretary! These bastards know the game.

TINKA: Trusting a black lamb to a white lioness.

WAMALA: But why can't these Yankee bastards leave us alone.

TINKA: Because we don't want them to. As long as they are around we can always stuff our pockets and blame it on them. They don't mind it provided we nurture their indispensability complex.

WAMALA: How about a letter to the old Veteran?

TINKA: Wastepaper basket. The Yankee secretary is paid to do that. Frustrate the bad boys.

WAMALA: Is it as bad as all that? For how long are we going to carry the sins of the white man? God! will we ever take ourselves seriously and run our own show. This is sad.

TINKA: Sometimes worse.

WAMALA: I give up. (*Sits and drinks.*) I'm tired. Very tired. If there were one quiet place where one could retire peacefully . . . .

TINKA: Let's go to bed.
WAMALA: What time is it?
TINKA: About two, I think.
WAMALA: I'll have another shot. And off to bed. (*Fills his glass.*)
TINKA: You said it's the only thing that works.
WAMALA: The drink?
TINKA: No. You know . . . the other thing.
WAMALA: Oh, the only thing that works these days.

(*He laughs hopefully.*)

TINKA: When you are around, remember?

(*Wamala empties his glass. They go to bed hand-in-hand.*)

CURTAIN