



THE **KING** *Never* **REIGNS**

By

DAN CHIMA AMADI



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FOREWORD TO THE KING NEVER REIGNS

The King Never Reigns, an incisive dramatization of the uneasy lives of sovereign rulers, aptly demonstrates the saying "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" but it goes beyond this to show why. Human beings are insatiable and ambitious by nature.

The play is vibrant in plot, as well as language. Its poetic dialogue reflects the motivations of the characters. Masterful use of proverbs contributes to the overall impact of the play.

In *The King Never Reigns*, Dan Chima Amadi has demonstrated unusual dramatic skills that remind the reader of the Elizabethan England dramatists.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Nanakaan:	King of Onoro
Oriji:	Queen of Onoro
Ogadi:	Prince of Onoro
Chinenye:	Princess of Onoro
Oduagu:	Mother of the Princess
Kelechi:	Friend of Chinenye and daughter of Chief Megideya
Chinanu:	A girl and the apple of Nanakaan's dream
Veronica:	Mother of Kelechi and wife of Chief Megideya
Okoroagu:	Soothsayer
Dimgba:	Head of the Army
Okenmuo:	Messenger of the king
Okete:	Palace Courtier
Abogida:	Palace Guard

OTHERS

Chiefs, soldiers, palace courtiers, dancers, flutist, government officials and audience.

ACT 1
Scene One

In a royal court Chief Megideya is in a garden. He looks up and down, then he imprisons his palms behind his back. He begins to murmur. King Nanakaan sights him, hesitates. Later moves nearer to eavesdrop.

Chief Megideya Mushrooming a kingdom is like holding a visor before a face. Merely like holding vassals with an army. A vista may hold a spark of hope, but too many small kingdoms are like too many short men. They like to quake like lornadoes. Engage giants in battles over nothing. (Gesticulating) Restlessness is their lot. Obstinacy is their creed. Their necks sprain each time like cranes and tortoises' necks. Because they feel they are abandoned, each time a man looks in their way or refuses to pay them homage. Why does the king want this? Dominion is ever attended to by envy. All then end in juju and charms.

(King Nanakaan coughs and Chief Megideya is startled; he turns round to face the king.)

Megideya: Did you call Your Highness!

Nanakaan: What did I hear you say Chief Megideya?

Megideya: (Gathering his breath) Nothing! Nothing. Your Highness. I only speak to unburden my mind.

Nanakaan: Were you making a jest of our autonomous communities?

Megideya: No, Your Majesty. How could I?

Nanakaan: Then know it today! Autonomous Communities will attract government amenities. Modern States give endowments based on the multiplicity of autonomous communities.

Megideya: I know that, Your Highness!

Nanakaan: I shall take no musing before my throne. Or take any back lash or hateful derision. About this proposal, we all sat, you included, all collectively. Approve we did. Aye we all shouted even when I as the king advised caution. Aye rent the air, yours included. That apart, all those proposed autonomous communities which you deride and call vassals are my subjects, you included, then and now. Above all, they pay homage to me. I in turn pay to the state at Enugu. Thanks to Lord Lugard.

(Chief Megideya hesitates and in respect and confusion crosses his arms over his breasts)

Megideya: I don't understand, Your Highness.

Nanakaan: What is it that you do not understand?

Megideya: Er---er your outburst.

(The king looks at him from head to toe and shakes his head)

Nanakaan: You hold the honourable title "Dikenagha", one and only conferred on you by us. Musing is a dangerous behaviour when a man holds a king's mandate, that is authority and recognition.

Megideya: Yes, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: If you know that, then you must come to the arena in the King's Court or the general assembly to air your opinion and not hide in the king's garden and make war on his throne

(Chief Megideya lowers his head in confusion)

Megideya: If that is what Your Highness means, did Your Highness consider the unity of the communities?

Nanakaan: *(Beats his palms together)*
Ase help me! Ojiji save me! We are dancing to the rhythm of a modern state, and you are looking for excreta in the anus of a dead man. Where did you ever see natives argue with gun men? *(Chief Megideya moves back as he pronounces the dates)* Since 1897, 1924, 1929 and recently on the floor of the Constituent Assembly?

Megideya: *(In recognition)* I accept the people's verdict, Your Highness.

Nanakaan: Oh-Oh! Why don't you go and argue with them! Why don't you wave an olive branch in the bush fire? Tell me Chief Megideya, why do your people no longer wear the lion's skin?

Megideya: It is history, Your Highness, it is history.

- Nanakaari: Did you forget so soon? Reason, Chief Megideya. We cover human manure to eat larvae.
- Megideya: It is enough, Your Highness. It is enough. You are in the right. A lone voice is like pushing and blast in between walls. It comes to nothing.
- Nanakaari: But it brings disrepute to a king's palace. It is worse when uttered in a king's court.
- Megideya: What can a mouse do to a basket of millet?
- Nanakaari: Alas, I can predispose I to the attacks of weevils and beetles.
- Megideya: Let me be forgiven, Your Highness. Let this musing evaporate like smoke, an ember that has just died.
- Nanakaari: *(Listens)* What is that music that I hear? *(He dances to the tune. Familiar and sweet and the music grows louder)*
- Megideya: More of it, Your Majesty. The Royal dance is like the aroma of a delicious dish.
- Nanakaari: Dance, Chief Megideya. Dance. Dance with me over this success. Over the creation of autonomous communities. *(Stops dancing)* Soon, we shall have a vaster dominion, ruled over by loyal subjects. I did not read it in books. My father told me himself. When the war came from Deribema, vassals saved him.

Autonomous communities are modern-day vassals. *(The king laughs loudly)* My father did not lose a soul, the vassals stood like shields. When slaves served other men, there was meaning in dominions and kingdoms. Now you want slavery abolished! Men have never been equal. What men have always done is bring old ideas in fresh skins. If I had lived then, slavery would never, never unto this day be abolished. There are men fit only to serve. No other honour befits them. Others are born to rule. Like me, Chief Megideya, I have never known servitude. Only born to be served. How do you, Chief Megideya, call the king of Deribema royal? Such minstrels should have been slaves in my court and labourers in my farms.

Megideya

If some men, as you said, should be either kings or slaves, may I ask, what do you call intermediate subjects like me?

Nanakaan

(Comes closer and pecks him gently with his fan) You are intermediate as you say. Never a king and never a slave. Yet lower or bigger of either. You are fit to be a messenger! To be accorded honour and accolades as you perform. You must not misunderstand me, Chief Megideya. That you are no slave is an honour. You are weak, too bad for hard labour. So nature and I, King Nanakaan, have elevated you a Chief. A member of my royal cabinet. As for a king, do not desire it. It is a heavier burden than that of a slave. For this we

Have enshrined a principle. A process they call primogeniture! That as soon as I die, my son rules. My son, the very first. To spare the kingdom of bloodshed we advocated this procedure. Otherwise, if you have any royalty, no army will assail your reign if you ascend my throne.

Megideya: I have no ambition, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: The throne is not vacant. Chief Megideya. *(A messenger, Okete, runs into the arena, his head covered with dust. The king stops, all he is doing, stands up and raises his head in command. He is followed in hot pursuit by Abogida, with a long sword.)*

Nanakaan: *(Raises his hand in command.)* Not yet, Abogida. Not yet. Do not behave! No, not until this displeasure has its cause. A cause without effect is as grievous as an effect without a cause. Put your mind in command, contain every entry and gate. See to it that no enemy escapes. A king is a king so long as his kingdom is secured. *(The messenger lies on the ground.)* What? You are here to kill us with adoration? Do not overtax our patience. Now rise. Let me know what the cause is.

Okete: *(Does obeisance.)* As the king lives, may he reign. No evil shall befall your kingdom.

Nanakaan: Yes. *(He pecks the lying man.)*

Okete: Ants! Ants! Ants! A sea of them!

Nanakaan: Ants? What did you say?

Okete: Ants, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: Ants? What about them?

Okete: They have taken our own arm of the village. They are advancing as an army over a plain. Big black ants, soldier-headed. You need to see them. Oiled soldier-headed ants as fresh as newly created ones. May the king reign!

Nanakaan: My God! First, you incurred our displeasure, by your riotous entry. Now you set the city ablaze with news of an advancing army of ants! *(The King rises. He extends his arm and Abogida places a sword on it.)* Abogida!

Abogida: Your Excellency!

Nanakaan: Rise. Take this arm! With a stroke, not two, behead the baboon. Then feed his carcass to the hounds. Better still leave it on the plain. To await the advancement of the ants. Which shall watch as vultures feed on his despicable remains. While I rule on this, let there be no plea. If men have degenerated to the level of pigs, we wash them in the mire. We do not need subjects, gorillas; who runaway from ants! Ants? Even an ember without flame can stop the advancement of any ant, be they as numerous as sands on a beach. And ubiquitous as Southern Ocean. What! What a day! That I, King Nanakaan, will stand unhorsed because of mere ants. Ants! Smoke, kitchen smoke, mere smoke

scare away any ant. Soldier-ants do not see when we set smoke against them.

Abogida: Your Excellency Now?

Nanakaan: Now!

Abogida: *(Raising the sword to behead Okete as two people run into the place, one a woman)*

Nanakaan: Another set of upstarts? Abogida!

Man and Woman: Ants! Ants! Ants! May the king reign!

Nanakaan: *(Rising)* Abogida! Let us have a swifter slaughter! Now two more call.

Abogida: Yes, Your Excellency! *(As Abogida raises the sword, a noise from women and children are heard from the palace)* See Your Excellency!

Nanakaan: This is no more news? Where are the ants?

Crowd: All over the town. We are displaced.

Nanakaan: Then King Deribema must be behind this. *(Laughs)* Instead of tributes and allegiance, he defies me. Abogida! Get my horse saddled. We shall not fight ants or locusts. But Deribema's army! To slaughter them this day. We shall reduce Deribema inhabitants to ants. Wash the blade of our swords with the tears of their wives and children. Abogida! The horses, I say!

Crowd

(Flourish and uproar) Our King is great!
He fumes and smokes! While Deribema
catches cold *(They sing)* Women with
balls fight Deribema battles.

Nanakraan

(He is clad in a war dress) Deribema, here
we come *(He raises his hand in
command)* Let's go. *(The crowd rushes
out.)*

(Lights out).

Act 1
Scene Two

OGADI watches a colony of girls heading for the village stream with calabashes under their armpits. He hesitates, then advances towards them. Chinenye lowers her steps and soon trails behind.

Ogadi: *(Looking around, he touches Chinenye by the shoulder)*

Chinenye: *(Frowning)* What is that touch for?

Ogadi: It is a sign and a song.

Chinenye: A song? People sing with their mouths and not with their hand.

Ogadi: A touch of peace, I will say. It speaks my mind.

Chinenye: Let it be the last. If you want to scratch affection, why steal it? Be brave and behave like other sensible men. So look for a wife.

Ogadi: I have her now.

Chinenye: Then advance towards her. What I don't like is thievery touches. If you want to know, I am not free.

Ogadi: *(Startled)* True? That must have been a few hours ago.

Chinenye: An hour or a century, be careful with another's wife.

Ogadi: *(Looking worried)* Tell me my angel, is it really true?

Chinenye Yes. (Listens to wall noise)

Ogadi (Holding her) Yet give me a little time.

Chinenye If you don't leave me now, I will scream.

Ogadi (Refusing to let her go) Chinenye, we have visited your parents.

Chinenye That is your business. Now, leave me. (She beats Ogadi and breaks free).

Ogadi Beat me again.

Chinenye Don't ever touch me again. Do you hear? If you do that, I am going to tell my father.

Ogadi (Excited) Tell him. Tell him. He is a Chief, remember.

Chinenye A chief he will never be. Mother has sworn with her life. All you want to do is to bring him to the village square under the rain.

Ogadi A date has been fixed for the presentation of the staff of office.

Chinenye I do not want to call your father here because he is our ruler, but his plot will never work.

Ogadi Will never work? I will tell you more. You will be my wife and I shall reign after my father.

Chinenye (Looks at him with contempt) Will you marry another man's wife?

Ogadi You are neither engaged nor married. You know that Chinenye. I have told my father and I have his consent.

Chinenye: (*Showing anger*). You can tell the government I shall marry whomsoever I desire.

Ogadi: (*Clapping*). That is me, Chinenye. You will be my Queen.

Chinenye: Whomsoever I will marry must never think of this madness. This courtly idea that everyone is a subject to him.

Ogadi: Everyone in Onoro is my father's subject now, including you and I. After that, we shall reign and all others shall pay us homage.

Chinenye: I am no one's subject. If you are, let it be.

Ogadi: You will no longer go to the stream to fetch water. Everyone will be doing your bidding.

Chinenye: (*With her hands on her waist*). Did I complain? Leave me alone, Ogadi. There are so many girls in this village. Go after them with your vain ambition. See, my mates have left me. (*She begins to walk away*).

Ogadi: (*Following behind*). I will see you to the stream.

Chinenye: No. Go back. You want the girls to follow me home with gossips?

Ogadi: Promise and I will go back.

Chinenye: Promise what?

Ogadi: That you will marry me. That henceforth you will admit my advances.

Chinenye: *(Stops suddenly)* I thought you were joking Ogadi! Now I know you are mad. Go away please

Ogadi: *(Pulls her backwards)* Wait. Give your word

Chinenye: What word?

Ogadi: Your love, your promise.

Chinenye: Leave me. *(She breaks loose)*

Ogadi: *(Watches her go and looking unhappy. At a distance he watches the girls singing back from the stream. Each looks him over and then walks away)*

Chinenye: *(Walks into their compound. Oduagu runs to assist her)*

Oduagu: Sweet daughter. My daughter! Gently! Gently. Put it here

Chinenye: *(Stretched her neck and removes the head tie on her head)*

Oduagu: *(Brings bariana to her daughter)*

Chinenye: Thanks mother

Oduagu: Before long, this daily exercise will stop

Chinenye: *(Stops suddenly from peeling the banana)*
What do you mean mother?

Oduagu: That you will soon stop doing this.

Chinenye: Even when I marry, I shall fetch my own water

Oduagu (Placing a hand on her daughter's knee) Yes, if you are not a princess.

Chinenye (Defiantly) Look mother, Ogadi has proposed to me and I have rejected him.

Oduagu That is still better. We do not need to accept him readily. No woman worth her salt does. We have honour in our lineage.

Chinenye Forget him mother. I have so wounded his ego that I am sure he will never talk to me again.

Oduagu He will. When you went to the stream, his father sent a message that they would come two market days from today.

Chinenye He is going to marry you, mother, not me.

Oduagu (Angrily) I think your madness has begun.

Chinenye (Begins to sob). Will no one ever ask for my consent before arranging to sell me off?

Oduagu The message was first sent to your father. He has accepted Ogadi. He has been nominated the village chief.

Chinenye (Stops crying) At last?

Oduagu Yes. Will I tell you a lie?

Chinenye I don't want this thing mother. (Candidly) Because I have rejected Ogadi's proposition, I do not want him to feel I am now accepting him because I want to be a princess.

- Oduagu: What is wrong with that? Anyway, do not worry my daughter. I shall do the rest. I shall give him the impression that I prevailed on you.
- Chinenye: Oh mother!
- Oduagu: Yes my daughter! You must know that before any man, all women come together.
- Chinenye: But is that not like plotting against them?
- Oduagu: It is not. Every hen must run away from the cockerel. He must get her through some efforts.
- Chinenye: Does that not sound like pretext, mother?
- Oduagu: (Signaling her daughter to keep quiet) *Let them run after us. It is what gives us joy.*
- Chinenye: Oh mother!
- Oduagu: You must adorn your face from now onwards. No man should see you squatting until Ogadi takes you home.
- Chinenye: Why are you so particular, mother?
- Oduagu: Because the rump of a hen excites the cockerel.
- Chinenye: (Cocks her head) Mother?
- Oduagu: Where a man lives, he walls round.
- Chinenye: I know mother, from now it is always Ogadi - Ogadi.

Oduagu: I want you to love him. His memory must enter your marrow.

Chinenye: And what if the marriage does not come up in the end?

Oduagu: What if you die before then?

Chinenye: That will be the end.

Oduagu: If the marriage does not come up, there are other young men who will come after you. Come, let us go to the kitchen.

"Lights Out"

Act 2
Scene One

King Nanakaan sits on a higher throne while three newly installed chiefs sit on a lower bench facing him. Two slaves, one on the right and the other on the left fan him with fans made of raffia. Behind them, the people sit. King Nanakaan does not stand but radiates royalty.

Nanakaan Today, according to our rule and the wishes of the state, you are now chiefs. For the sake of our people we have created new dominions, each sovereign, yet a deputy subject to me, my distant eye. To oversee our vast domain. My eyes rove but with a limit. With you, the range is wider.

(Dancers enter the stage, beat drums and shower encomiums on King Nanakaan. He waves and then acknowledges with his horse tail.)

And then, your reign must be thorough and more circumspect. You must be firm with your subjects. Your pronouncement must be solemn. Yet once given, it is irrevocable. A king is not sold for a penny. His pronouncement gives him away. All over the land, we hear of rebellion. No vassal breaks away except the sovereign totters. For men know a shaky foundation when they see one. They hold and lay siege and ram against its foothold. To bring it into subjugation. Nations have risen against nations. Colonies have toppled empires. Kings slew kings. Just as subjects slew kings. The best has not come from men. Neither have we seen the worst.

More kingdoms would be founded Many shall flounder and fall away But only the fittest survives

The people Long live the King! Long live King May your reign be longer

Nanakaan: *(Stands) Sound the trumpet! (The trumpet is heard across the stage. The king dances and the newly installed chiefs follow in the royal dance. Dancers reappear and drums vibrate on the stage)*

The people Long live the King! Long Live!

Nanakaan: *(Waves, and every music stops) We make no new law. Only the echoes of the old reverberate. A quarter of your taxes comes to my court. At the end of the year here we meet like today. We have divided the community but not mutilate the people. We remain a single people all loyal to me. (He looks at the subjects, then sits down)*

The people: Long live the king! Long live! *(Each of the new chiefs comes forward and shakes hands with the King with his fan)*

Nanakaan: Let the trumpet usher our children. The bride and the groom come, today we celebrate a multiple victory. *(The trumpet is heard and Chinenye and Ogadi come on stage. They are followed by a retinue of officials and bridal train)*

Nanakaan: *(Ogadi and Chinenye kneel before him and he fans them)* Today, we present the prince and beside him a bride, stars dot our domain

Yet only one shines. The sun is a senior star.
The moon is his bride. Let all rebellions be
unheard. Let no fear break over them.
O-Okoro achala O.
Those on the hill top
O-Okoro-achala
Those on the valley
Okoro-achala
Those who refuse the song of Ase.
May Ase kill them.
Ase, give them malaria
Keep them in-doors
May you not kill our own children.
Vegetables come in a heap.
But fill the pot.
Yet do not fill the stomach
We have kept the cups
But we have not poured the wine.
Our grief today and always
Is on the account of death.
Our hunters up, get up!
Be quick.
The kites are sailing.
We are children of Egbuchi
Who kills the cockerel
But does not fight over its carcass.

(The King waves to the dancers who enter the stage and begin a solemn performance. When he waves, they stop)

We have assembled, but are not complete
Not all have reported.
You fertility deity, we call on you
Take our maiden, give them fruits.
We are a great tribe,
Who teach others dance songs.

Learn this song, not us
Animals do not follow the gorilla when he
begins the waist related dance
Because animals which follow the sparrow
Die in the stress of flight
We are not troublemakers
Anyone who finds our trouble
Sees us in form
No bird sings better than us
We have gone to the Odoko spring
Where the sky splits into two
One goes up, the other down.

(The trumpet sounds and he stops, looks round)

Rise young prince (Ogadi rises)
Rise young maiden (Chinenye rises)
When I rise you sit
Under the heat of the sun
When my ancestors line up
And I join in response to a call
Which all men must answer
Swear you will not leave the people desolate.
You will not leave the heath undefended
That when the King of Deribema
The woman with balls between his thighs
Sends ants and locusts
You Ogadi will rise in defense
And take his livestock as booty.
The termite is never to be feared
It is ever our food.

The people: Long live the King! Long live!

Nanakaan: *(Signals and a tray with a sword and horse tail
is brought to him. He hands over the sword to
Ogadi and the horse tail to Chinenye)*

The people: Long live the king! Long live!

Nanakaan: *(Begins to dance as the music gets louder, later Ogadi and Chinenye join, and then everyone)*

"Lights Out"

Act 2
Scene Two

The King is on the throne, surrounded by courtiers. Six soldiers position themselves at his service. The prince enters, full of royalty. He walks swiftly, then emerges before the King. He looks round.

Ogadi: My father! Let your presence be stripped of soldiers and courtiers for a son wishes to have a word with his father.

Nanakaan: The tree cannot be stripped of all foliage.

Ogadi: For a while father, for a while.

Nanakaan: For a while? How long will that be? You do not know what you are asking. Some have asked for a while and secured for themselves all eternity. Others have given a while and lost out for all eternity. Which then are you asking? A throne as you must come to know cannot be without courtiers as the honey must not be without bees. *(Looks round)* Leave us a while but keep an eye on the throne. A king cannot be without his royalty. Stripped of all royalty, he stands naked before the world. *(The courtiers and soldiers withdraw)* What is it son? What craves so much for attention and waters down your sleep?

Ogadi: I have come to thank the king for making me your heir. A prince I have been but you have put me in a line of succession. But father, who is a king?

Nanakaan: (Stands, displays his royalty, then paces around) A king is the most important person in the world. He is next only to God. He is one who might have been born ordinarily but is destined to die great. Once he is elevated, he not only assumes the throne but his children become princes and princesses. From the oppressed class he enters the class of oppressors. From being the one to serve, he becomes the one to be served. A king is not sold for a penny. Are you the one to ask this question, Ogadi?

Ogadi: I want to know its relevance, father. Seeing all the havoc it has caused in our community with every autonomous community torn to shreds, what else can I say?

Nanakaan: In the world, you either be the cause of the harmattan or become the victim to be swept away by its haze. Let the king be served and let all men lie in wait before him.

Ogadi: But who is to ascend the throne?

Nanakaan: He is the most able, the one that has the means.

Ogadi: But must it be reserved for the rich?

Nanakaan: The poor must not ask for the throne. They must not come near it. The King must watch carefully the ambition of the poor. If he eyes the throne, then the incumbent must die. For the road to the kingdom for the poor is through blood and battles.

Ogadi: Father, you were once poor and you ascended through the concession of the people

Nanakaan: That is different, Ogadi. That is different. And you must not put the conscience of the king to test. The poor must not be given the lee-way, for all men are capable

Ogadi: But why did God create kingdoms?

Nanakaan: God did not create any kingdom. It is the making of men. If men were to have their way, they would oust even God

Ogadi: Is it not then better if we elevate women instead?

Nanakaan: What is that thing you said? Is the prince out of his mind? The throne belongs to women and they are the powers behind it. That is more than enough for a partner who knows more about the power and the throne. The day women wrench power from men, they will be served for all eternity. I have to say this and that is for all time. All the noise about the powers of a king is to be found in the women in his life or the one about to enter it. For the ambition is first with her, then she hands it over to him - First in a playful act, then in a frenzy. A woman is never without emotion. Without emotion she is as dangerous as an adder. The throne is without honour and intrigue without women

Ogadi: Then who is a king father, who is a King?

Nanakaan: He is a man born of a woman, who is a creature of a woman and must die for his creator

- Ogadi: Does that include my mother?
- Nanakaan: (Laughs) Is she not a woman?
- Ogadi: There must be exceptions to the rule. Surely, not all women are that ambitious.
- Nanakaan: True. Not all women are that ambitious. But no woman is without guile. That is the weapon. Therein then lies the kingship and leadership.
- Ogadi: What role did my mother play in your installation?
- Nanakaan: She made me a king. The people obeyed her.
- Ogadi: How? But the people nominated you? I was an eye witness to that.
- Nanakaan: Yes they did. And who are the people? Do they not include women?
- Ogadi: I don't understand you, father. I don't think I understand this your opinion about women.
- Nanakaan: Son, you must know this and that is for all time. No man knows any woman. But they know us. Even Christians say that the man was asleep when she was created. The only persons who know any woman are God, the other woman and the woman in question herself.
- Ogadi: (Deeply troubled. He folds his arms across his chest). If the ambition is to be found in a woman, then the first to be courted is a woman.

Nanakaan: No. She is the first to be feared. First for what she says that she must do. Second, for what she wants that she must get. The answer is in love. Love the woman and she will give you her ambition. For nature has sent a life-boat in their support. And that is our lifeline.

Ogadi: I must take my decision alone and not bring her in.

Nanakaan: No! Justice is not alone but must be found in the company of men and women. Only ensure that while taking decisions you are never in doubt. Once in doubt, then do nothing. Doubt is divine intervention to show inequity. And the king must not be unjust.

(Lights Out)

Act 2
Scene Three

In the King's garden. He is seen walking up and down. The soldiers are a little withdrawn from him.

Nanakaan: Who is there?

Okemuo: Did you call, Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: What do you mean by "Did you call?" Send for the princess.

Okemuo: Yes, Your Majesty! *(Exit)*

Nanakaan: *(He turns with head bowed)* Will she agree? What if she refuses? No shame should attend the King.

Chinenye: *(Enters)* You sent for me, Your Majesty! *(Panting)*

Nanakaan: The King is never without requests. How is our princess?

Chinenye: *(With eyes averted)* All is well, Your Majesty. Your will is my command.

Nanakaan: Morning angel. Well spoken. Our decision in bringing you in has continued to be a blessing. Ogadi is now always at home. You have caged him. You have put the eagle high at the tree-top where he sees the vast landscape.

Chinenye: On the contrary, Your Majesty. It is my family and I that are blessed. Your son is a knight for all seasons.

Nanakaan: A knight for all seasons? No. You have placed on his chest a bright armour. His blade now never blunts and his mother and I have acknowledged that. You saw how the world adored our kingdom. Your beauty out-shined the silvery of the early morning sun.

Chinenye: *(Blushes)* I am flattered, Your Majesty. You made all that possible. You set me high on a pedestal. You encased your son on the palm of the kingdom. You blessed him with your glory and the right to succeed you.

Nanakaan: That is what befits us. Who was that girl who attended to you?

Chinenye: My friend. My childhood friend.

Nanakaan: So beautiful, she never came to my palace?

Chinenye: She is withdrawn, Your Majesty. She is only a little girl.

Nanakaan: Little girl? No, she is not. She is a bird. I agree, ready for a flight. Her legs were well chiseled and her back straight like the hunches of a fine horse.

Chinenye: Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: Bring her to me!

Chinenye: But she is only a little girl. Your Majesty.

Nanakaan Little girl? Are you a little girl? Such is fit only for the royal family. I want to make her my wife!

Chinenye Yes, Your Majesty! I will seek her consent.

Nanakaan I don't want to hear of her approval. I want her hand in marriage. I want her in the royal court. Now you have opened a way for her. Send for her immediately.

Chinenye Yes, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan Until she comes and I agree with her, the matter is between you and I. Utter none of it to a soul. And that will include your husband and the queen.

Chinenye Yes, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan You may go now.

Chinenye *(Curtsies and exits)*

Nanakaan The king's matter is a must. The matter before the king is a minor. The king should do as he pleases. He should have what he wants. But a brazen King may not have all the women he wants - for the lever in women blunts the sharp edges of kings, with their wiles, with their smiles which they sheath the power on the throne. I shall have her but she will have access to the throne. The queen's place is not threatened. Her place is secured. I want to reach more ends and make more families royal. The king's glory is his vast assemblage

The prince cannot voice opposition. What would he complain about? He has the kingdom after I must have bowed my exit. He can then marry as many as he wants. To secure his ascension, I have made him heir. I have no fear. *(Lights fade)*

Act 2
Scene Four

The home of the mother of the princess is better made now. Oduagu is sitting with her legs stretched out. She is eating corn and pear. Chinenye strides in and mother and daughter are locked in embrace.

Oduagu: Since you made your way in, you have turned your back to us. What did I do to you my daughter?

Chinenye: How can you say that, mother?

Oduagu: Is it a lie?

Chinenye: Don't say that again, mother. What are you eating?

Oduagu: Have a bite *(They both sit)*

Chinenye: It is tasty.

Oduagu: How is Ogadi?

Chinenye: What can be wrong with him? He is busy dotting on me.

Oduagu: I want a child.

Chinenye: I don't want to talk about that. The king sent for me.

Oduagu: He did? That is as it should be.

Chinenye: He said I should not voice it to a soul. But I am worried. He asked me to send for Chinanu my friend. He wants to make her his wife.

Oduagu: His wife? What does he need another wife for?

Chinenye: I don't know.

Oduagu: You must not grant the request.

Chinenye: What excuse will I give?

Oduagu: Tell him that she has refused. If you accede to the request and she gets a male child, he can use him to replace your husband. The last wife is ever the favourite wife. With that your husband may never become king and you a queen.

Chinenye: What if he refuses?

Oduagu: Let him go and sleep with the sea goddess!

Chinenye: He is so confident he will have her.

Oduagu: Tell him what I said.

Chinenye: He is the king. Can anyone refuse him?

Oduagu: The refusal has begun.

Chinenye: What if he reaches her himself?

Oduagu: How many times did you see the king at the village square?

Chinenye: Never!

Oduagu: Never then can he reach her himself.

Chinenye: Let me tell him first.

Oduagu: Tell him. Be firm.

(Lights Fade)

(The King is still in the garden. His passive face lights up when Chinenye enters)

Nanakaan: Morning angel. When did she say she would come to me?

Chinenye: She has not agreed, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: She has not agreed? Who is her father? That I want to make her my wife is a blessing. What does the wretch want?

Chinenye: She has a man in her life.

Nanakaan: She has man in her life? Who is the boy?

Chinenye: She has refused to disclose his name, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: *(Fumes)* No to a king is yes to reprisal actions. The wretch must know I am the king! Bring her father to me!

Chinenye: *(Kneels down)* May I find favour in your sight, Your Majesty. Let him go. Do not punish a father who has not prodded a daughter.

Nanakaan: But he stands to benefit also. Let him know what they will miss.

Chinenye: Please, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: A little girl! How can a little girl say no? A wise girl will stoop to see the two nuts that make a King!

Chinenye: Please, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: You may leave me now.

Chinenye: (Exit)

King Nanakaan: (With head bowed) Did she really tell her? Women! With them, you can never know. I shall seek her out myself. I shall assure myself she has refused me. I shall not inflict a daughter's guilt on her father. I shall be fair.

(Lights Fade)

Act 2
Scene Five

In Ogadi's living room, Chinenye is worried. She gets up and goes to the window, satisfied that no one is coming, she returns to her chair.

Chinenye What if he looks for her himself? That means that I will be branded a liar. What do I do now?

Ogadi *(Enters)* What is this frequent visit to the king for? Do you wish to replace my mother?

Chinenye The king sought for my father's son, a personal matter.

Ogadi Personal matter? And it cannot be discussed with me?

Chinenye Oh Ogadi, why do you talk like that?

Ogadi Personal matters soon become very private matters. I don't think I like that.

Chinenye Your father is the king. Can't the princess have a private audience with the king?

Ogadi Yes, she can. But it cannot be on an issue that the prince has no knowledge of.

Chinenye Yet - *(knocks)* Who is it?

Kelechi *(Enters)* Greetings. *(She embraces Chinenye).*

Chinenye It seems like ages. Why do you keep away?

Kelechi: My father and his endless errands

Chinenye: Follow me now. *(They withdraw)* Kelechi, I am in trouble with the king.

Kelechi: In trouble with the King? What is it about?

Chinenye: Between you and I, can you keep it to yourself?

Kelechi: Have I ever divulged any of your secrets? Tell me.

Chinenye: No. You have not.

Kelechi: What is it about?

Chinenye: The king is in love with Chinanu.

Kelechi: In love with her? How did he come to know her?

Chinenye: During our marriage ceremony, when he presented us to the people.

Kelechi: But he never showed any sign that he noticed her.

Chinenye: That is a man for you.

Kelechi: But what will you do?

Chinenye: That was why I sent for you.

Kelechi: You want to channel her over?

Chinenye: I don't know. Advise me.

Kelechi: You better not. She may displace you from the throne.

Chinenye: But the King is insistent.

Kelechi: Will he take her by force?

Chinenye: What if he reaches her himself?

Kelechi: But he does not know her name except you tell him.

Chinenye: I did not.

Kelechi: You are always telling me stories. What do you have for me?

Chinenye: Let me bring you a little food in a plate.

Kelechi: At least to pay for the advice I have given you.

Chinenye: (Rising) Yes - oh (exit)

Kelechi: What is this thing that the king has done? All through that ceremony, I sweated to draw his attention. He never looked my way. I thought I had won him over when he patted my back. But he was busy losing his wits over Chinanu. Men are always animals. When you love them, they don't understand nor reciprocate. When they love you they see. He will never have Chinanu. She has been receiving too much attention lately. But I too need to be courted. (Noise) You are not lifting the entire pot, I hope?

Chinenye: (Enters) For you I can do anything. If you were the one the king asked for, I could not have hesitated. But Chinanu and her beauty make even us women envious.

- Kelechi: Remember the throne. ^{What is what should}
- Ogadi: To marry her? What will he do with my wife? ^{accuse you? Take the throne?}
- Chinenye: That is what worries me. ^{am so late}
- Kelechi: It is for God to say. ^{He will not marry her. He cannot while she is alive.}
- Ogadi: Have you told your mother? ^{She was the first I told.}
- Kelechi: The throne may be a miracle if he does. ^{The wife is ever the favorite wife. If he has a son, could replace you in line of succession.}
- Chinenye: Exactly what you said. ^{I will kill Chinanu if I see her in this palace.}
- Kelechi: We are united in this. Let him keep his queen. ^{It is better to stop the fight before it starts.}
- Ogadi: It is better to stop the fight before it starts. ^{Let him keep his queen.}
- Chinenye: Let him keep his queen. ^{after it has entered}
- Kelechi: Have you told your husband? ^{My princess. You say nothing. Are you not a princess?}
- Ogadi: My princess. You say nothing. Are you not a princess? ^{How could I? I should tell him.}
- Chinenye: How could I? I should tell him. ^{How can I? I want him stopped. But I cannot. But this is all I can do for you. I will tell him.}
- Kelechi: How can I? I want him stopped. But I cannot. But this is all I can do for you. I will tell him. ^{you stop him when the king is dead. I will tell him.}
- Chinenye: True. I shall tell him. ^{Leave that to me. He is my father.}
- Ogadi: (Enters) What are you two gossiping about? ^{"(Lights Fade)"}
- Kelechi: It is about your future our great prince.
- Ogadi: Tell me about it.
- Kelechi: Are you aware that your father is in love with Chinanu?
- Ogadi: No, he cannot be. What will he need her for?
- Kelechi: To marry her, our great prince, to marry her.

Ogadi: To marry her? What will he do with my mother?

Kelechi: It is for God to say.

Ogadi: He will not marry her. He cannot while I am alive.

Kelechi: The throne may be a mirage if he does. The last wife is ever the favourite wife. If he has a son, he could replace you in line of succession.

Ogadi: I will kill Chinanu if I see her in this palace.

Kelechi: It is better to stop the tiger before it enters the goats' village. You might never have a survivor after it has entered.

Ogadi: My princess, you say nothing. Are you in league with him?

Chinenye: How can I be? I want him stopped. But how can you stop him when the king has expressly forbidden me from telling you?

Ogadi: Leave that to me. He is my father.

"(Lights Fade)"

Act 2
Scene Six

The king is on the throne. He gets up and goes to his garden. His aides follow. He raises his hand and they stop.

Nanakaan: I want to be by myself. *(They withdraw)* How can she refuse me? Did she really tell her? I cannot believe it. Who is there!

Okenmuo: *(Enters)* You called, Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: This matter I want to tell you should be between you and I. Do you recall the lady, the young woman with the princess on the day of their presentation?

Okenmuo: Yes I recall, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: What is her name?

Okenmuo: Chinanu, the daughter of Ogbuefi Chakwas!

Nanakaan: Send for her immediately. Tell her she has a very important message to attend to and can only see me at dusk. Tell her to request a private audience.

Okenmuo: Yes, Your Majesty *(Exit)*

Nanakaan: Now shall we know what the future portends, whether to trust the princess or to keep an eye on her. The King must not be made jest of. His word is law. What the king wants he must have.

(Lights fade)

The King Never Reigns

SMA

On the opposite side of the road, a group of armed and some masked youths lay ambush and Ugadi is seen addressing them.

Ogadi: "The government is not concerned about the people's health."

China stands between the kingdom and our

1. I am a member of the following organization(s):

[illegible]

She shall remain a rich woman, never
the flower of her face adorn other lands. Let her

There is

grow wild like castor-oil in a thicket.

NEEDS

you and I Do you recall the lady the student

woman with the princess on the day of the

Ogadi Do you understand? ?noitatnsserq

[illegible]

Yes I recall your message

Ogadi: Now, let us go / *Eamus ibi* / *W*

[illegible]

Chinese, the band leader (left) and his band.

Very good, good, fair, poor, very poor

The lights revealed the king's hammer hot on his head.

of the garden in the other regions. In the north, the garden is a small, rectangular plot, often with a fence, and is used for growing vegetables and fruit. In the south, the garden is a larger, more irregular plot, often with a fence, and is used for growing vegetables and fruit. In the west, the garden is a small, rectangular plot, often with a fence, and is used for growing vegetables and fruit. In the east, the garden is a small, rectangular plot, often with a fence, and is used for growing vegetables and fruit.

audience

Nanakaan: Well -- how did it go?

Yes Your Majesty (Exit)

Okenmuo She is coming Your Majesty

Now shall we know what the future holds for us.

Whether anyone see you

is law. What the king wants he must have.

Okenmuo. No one.

(lights fade)

Nanakaan: I am elated. Let my private study be prepared. I

shall receive her there. Now you wait at the gate.

to receive her. Then conduct her to my study under the cloak of darkness. Your pains shall be rewarded.

Okenmuo: Thanks Your Majesty

Nanakaan: Put away all obstacles. Let me be put at peace. Bar all movements to my study.

Okenmuo: Yes, Your Majesty (Exit)

Nanakaan: I can't believe it. Can it really be true? I shall warm my way into her sweet tender heart. Her father I shall elevate to be one of my chiefs. She shall be my idol. I shall coil behind her to forget the bony structures of the queen. The queen is a decaying edifice. Nature should never be unkind to women by allowing them to grow old. The older they become, the more the guile and irrational. I want all that out of the way for a while! I shall take her soft palm and teach her royalty. Her beauty shall stretch from one kingdom to the other. Now that the princess has proved untrustworthy, I shall use her to equal appeal. She shall ~~serve~~ ^{serve} the link. She shall serve the purpose. But more of that later.

(Lights Fade)

Act 2
Scene Seven

The King is walking in the garden. He sees the worries of everyone and he goes to sit down.

Nanakaan: What could have happened between her home and the palace? Okenmuo said she left her father's house but never reached the palace. Who could have abducted her? Only yesterday that I made known my intention, there was an abduction. All who were behind this deserved to die. I shall put them all to the sword. But-- - what if the prince and the princess had something to do with it? Should they be equally put to death? Should I put the queen to death for plotting the abduction of a rival? *(The king hears a noise and he is startled)*

Okenmuo: *(Enters)* I, Sir ... Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: Has she been seen?

Okenmuo: No, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: Who do you think could be behind it?

Okenmuo: The prince was once seen at the gate but nothing was traced to him.

Nanakaan: Did the princess also make appearances at the gate?

Okenmuo: She was not sighted.

Nanakaan: Let me have a full report. Let all suspects be reported to me.

Okenmuo Yes, Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: You may go now

Okenmuo Yes, Your Majesty (*Exit*)

Nanakaan: This is a slap on the king. To thwart the efforts of the king is to derail the course of a kingdom. They have put a hand under the King's groin ... they have ruffled his hair. (*Aggressively*) They shall be made to pay. We shall salt their sores. Then put pepper in their anus. (*Turns round*) Who is there? (*No answer*) Everyone is deaf now. What will the world be like without Chinanu? My God! (*Lights fade*).

Act 2
Scene Eight

*The king sits in the garden for a long time while murmuring
Then he stands and begins to pace about.*

Nanakaan: Who is there!

Okenmub: (Enters) Did you call, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: Yes, send for the prince

Okenmub: Now or before your breakfast?

Nanakaan: Immediately, I say?

Okenmub: Yes, Sir! (Exit)

Nanakaan: Now is the time to know its details. But also the time to fight the battle. If the Prince can stop the king, then he can seize the throne, for the throne is merely an end which an ambition satisfies. Tell me God if the Queen has known. Tell me if they are in league. The greatest evil yet is for the queen to know she is rivaled.

Ogadi: (Enters) You called me father?

Nanakaan: (Quietly) Yes. Now tell me, did you hear anything about Chinanu? Some people according to some reports laid siege at the gate of the palace and seized her.

Ogadi: I did not hear a thing

Nanakaan: Who then must have abducted her?

Ogadi: The king should not concern himself with such a little thing

Nanakaan: Such a little thing? (Now aghast, You call an abduction a little thing? She is one of my subjects and you know that. How can you then call her disappearance a trifle matter?

Ogadi: She is not dead. She is just away. This is not the era of slave trade and so could not have been sold into slavery. She will resurface.

Nanakaan: I want her back immediately. Her family is in terrible agony. I want her to the comfort of her home and family.

Ogadi: Let her family look for her. The king should not run such an errand.

Nanakaan: I told you she is one of my subjects. I want her found.

Ogadi: Why is the king so desperate? Are there other purposes other than the matter of her abduction?

Nanakaan: Seek her out, Ogadi for my sake. seek her. You know her father is my friend.

Ogadi: I have a question to ask. Father, can I ask it? There are stories flying around that the king wants to take her as a wife. Is it true, father?

Nanakaan: (Furious) May thunder strike you dead, Ogadi. How dare you speak to me like that? What has that got to do with her abduction?

Ogadi: A father. Some who may be concerned with the welfare of the queen may not want the marriage.

Nanakaan: Who may not want the marriage? Is it you Ogadi?

Ogadi: Honestly, father, if I have my way, I shall oppose it

Nanakaan: You will oppose me? I shall strip you of all the honour and title conferred on you. I can banish you this minute from this palace and instal someone else in your place.

Ogadi: That is all the more better, father. But I cannot watch you replace my mother.

Nanakaan: Replace your mother? Who wants to replace your mother?

Ogadi: Well, what will happen to her if Chinanu has to flaunt her youth and nakedness before you.

Nanakaan: *(Fully enraged)* You dare again talk to me like that?

Ogadi: I am sorry, father.

Nanakaan: No, you are not. You do not know the future and the full implication of having an only son. Don't you ever know that the more the princes, the greater the chances of securing the throne for all time?

Ogadi: I know that, father. But also know it accentuates their individual ambitions and set them all against one another.

Nanakaan: Don't be an egg-headed pessimist, Ogadi. Try to see my line of thought. I have set you in line of succession. I have presented you to the people.

Your reign is secured. I love you above all else. I want this girl, if you truly want to know. I promise she will not unseat your mother

Ogadi: What will happen if she begins to kick?

Nanakaan: She will not. I have thought about all that. It is firmly under my control.

Ogadi: Her presence will kill my mother of grief.

Nanakaan: There will be no conflict.

Ogadi: What will happen to my mother?

Nanakaan: Nothing will happen to her. She is my wife and queen. Chinanu will be my wife but not a queen. There can only be one queen in a palace.

Ogadi: What will happen if she begins to assert her place?

Nanakaan: I will send her way.

Ogadi: After some kids?

Nanakaan: Ogadi, are you aware that I am the king of this kingdom?

Ogadi: I am father and I am your son and the prince.

Nanakaan: Now leave my presence, you wretched brat. And don't ever come to me until I send for you.

Ogadi: Well said, father (Exit).

Nanakaan: (Begins to pace about until the curtain falls).

Act 3

Scene One

(Chief Megideya emerges from his room into the living room. His wife, Veronica, comes from the kitchen with a plate of food. She sets it down with a loud thud. Chief Megideya observes her from the corner of his eye and sighs.)

Megideya: Set that plate gently down, Veronica.

Veronica: My Lord, this is a mortar and not one of your broken plates.

Megideya: But it is not iron. When you pound it, a tree is falling.

Veronica: It is my hurry, my Lord. You must eat this before you go to the farm.

Megideya: My workers are starving. Is their food ready?

Veronica: It is ready. But you must eat first. They are labourers and know the food is an incentive.

Megideya: Bring me the farm sandals.

Veronica: Yes. After the food.

Megideya: Where is Kelechi? Does she not know she is going to the farm with me?

Veronica: She does. She has gone to Ibeneme to plait her hair.

Megideya: This morning? Is the son of a bitch coming this morning?

Veronica: Lower your voice, my Lord. We have to show our daughter win a man just as Chinenye has done.

Megideya Crinenye is a princess and do you want her to run after her friend?

Veronica Your food is getting cold. (She places a jug of water beside it) That it well prepared. Your yam porridge!

Megideya (Placing a hand on her shoulder) You have done well. Did you stuff it with vegetable?

Veronica Like the old time.

Megideya You have always been my pride. Lately when the king is doing as he likes, you make it look like nothing.

Veronica Lower your voice. The water will take no time and will end itself.

Megideya (Lowering his voice) The autonomous community issue is a scourge. Do you know, if the government implements the Land Use Decree, that means the land, every land is under these sovereigns?

Veronica Including those at Ngodong?

Megideya Everything!

Veronica What of the cash crops?

Megideya The man who owns the plate owns also the soup.

Veronica That would be a mad ambition!

Megideya Now you know my fear. (Hears a knock on the door) What is that sound I hear?

Veronica: Someone is knocking at the door

Megideya: Should be Kelechi

Veronica: *(Goes out to find out. She escorts Ogadi in)*
Ogadi our great Prince. Ogadi, please be seated.

Megideya: The prince himself? *(Jumps from his seat)*. This is an important visit. Let it be proclaimed to our neighbours! Ogadi our heir. Quickly run around Veronica. Let something be prepared. We are caught in our nakedness. How is the King? Did he send you to us?

Ogadi: I came in peace. Please put a stop to this uproar! The king hardly knows about this visit.

Megideya: The prince does not visit without a cause. Let us know it immediately. Your pain is our honour. No burden at all.

Ogadi: *(Respectfully)* It is a private visit. I came to appeal to our noble chief to send a word on my account to our ruler, the king. My wife and I desire a trading mission to a far distant land, to be on our own. Build first with our own hands.

Megideya: *(Comes in with Kola in a wooden bowl)* Here my Lord, here it is. Call on the ruler of heaven for a visit we consider an honour. *(Steps back after offering it)*.

(Ogadi is quiet. Megideya speaks again)

Megideya: See this kola, our dear Prince.

Ogadi: Offer it to God. Offer it.

Megideya (*Takes the Kola in his right hand*) Chukwu, great God we call you. We pray for our king. For good health and long reign. We pray for our country. May those that are worthy rule. The prince is in our midst. May he not stumble as he leaves us. Let the kite perch. Let the eagle also perch. If one says no to his neighbor, let him show him where he will perch. Let the guest come in peace. Let the host also stay in peace. When he goes, let the host not develop hunchback. We have heard of wars, may they not reach us. May Ase take kola. So also let the spirits. May all creatures know the great God who rules over heaven and earth.

(He breaks the kola and throws some of it onto the ground. He takes a lobe and offers the other to Ogadi who also takes a lobe).

Ogadi: A great prayer you have offered. May it be as you said it.

Megideya: About your request. I sound a note of caution. A prince is like an only fruit. It cannot be lost in the fire. You cannot go away too far. One leg abroad, one leg at home. A more important role God has given: to rule over his people. This duty takes preeminence. And it is never learnt in a haste. A regent stays by the stool, lest if death visits suddenly, may God forbid, you spark off dynastic struggle. Then what has been given becomes a subject for affray. I have heard it said all over the kingdom. You will make a better king than the incumbent, your father. Not long ago, you were installed before the people, at peace time. *(Kelechi comes in and overhears the discussion)*

Ogadi: I have consulted an oracle to know the crown is still far off. My father is still a young man. I do not wish him an early home call. Let me go off a little while. If his health totters, send me a word.

Megideya: The regent and the king are one. Only the people determine who reigns.

Ogadi: This I know.

Megideya: Then why do you wish this? To leave a feast prepared for a beggar's hut? Be ruled by me on this. Our noble and dear prince. A time comes and before long the chick stands on roof-tops and crows to the hearing of all.

Ogadi: I shall sleep over this. Your request cannot be overlooked. You know the world more than I do.

Megideya: Forget that fancy for now. I cannot give you but good counsel.

Ogadi: *(Standing)* I have heard it. I abide by it.

Megideya: Thank you. Thanks again. It is not for your sake that I advocate this. But for the sake of the kingdom. The kingdom pays with blood when men seek fancy and folly.

Veronica: My Lord, as you see off our prince, order that Kelechi serves your purposes.

Megideya: No. It cannot be. I stand as the head of my family. In all things I seek to protect it. Kelechi alone cannot wander at noon in the forest when spirits recently awake celebrate their new freedom.

Veronica: True my Lord It is true

Ogadi: Let me set you free, Sir. While I seek other enterprise

Megideya: So be it then. We shall rub more minds on this. If need be, convene a meeting of the council of elders. There whisper into their ears, one after another as befits us.

Ogadi: So be it. (Exit)

"Lights Out"

Act 4
Scene One

Chinenye enters the stage from the rear and is closely followed by Kelechi. They sit facing each other

Chinenye What is this thing you sent word you would tell me?

Kelechi *(Looks round)* A time comes. That time is here. A woman must not wait while the future remains a mirage. Yesterday, I heard it from my father that you could make Ogadi a king. You cannot wait indefinitely.

Chinenye Kingship comes after his father. It cannot come by any other way.

Kelechi The future can be a subject of today if we will it.

Chinenye I do not understand.

Kelechi Put it into him. Infuse the thought. We make men when we wish. They are our Lords. But they suck at our breasts. Make Ogadi, make him now. If you go on a trading mission you rely absolutely on chance. Chance is a foolish pastime. *(Hears Ogadi coming in)* Start now. Begin. Message his ego.

Ogadi *(Enters)* Kelechi, you came to us so early. Not too long ago I spoke to your father, concerning Chinenye and I and found him a man of wisdom.

Kelechi No man can be wiser. Not because he is my father.

Ogadi: I found it as you said it

Chinenye: Will you not put a word to me, my brave Lord?

Ogadi: I have not forgotten. Our visitor hastened it away.
What is the pleasure of my queen?

Chinenye: Only when the crown, which you rightly deserve,
sits on your head then you can call me a queen!
Do you want your mother to accuse me of
usurpation?

Ogadi: Certainly not. But a queen you shall be.

Chinenye: Certainly. Before long when heaven and men will
it. We walk into our home. (A knock is heard)
Who is that?

Okenmuo: (Enters) The King's messenger!

Ogadi: Come in. What is his pleasure?

Okenmuo: The king sends for you. That you should come by
and by.

Ogadi: Tell him I shall come.

*(Lights fade revealing the king in his palace and the queen
sitting beside him)*

Nanakaan: Our heir and our son. We sent for you.

Ogadi: (Coldly) I am all ears, father.

Nanakaan: The officials of the state wish to come to the
kingdom. Send for the chiefs immediately. Let
them sit before their arrival.

Ogadi: What time will they be there?

Nanakaan: In the next hour. Give the matter some haste.

Ogadi: *(Standing)* It will be done.
(Exit Ogadi)

Nanakaan: *(Turning to his wife)* I do not like the look on the face of our son. It is so bloody and cold.

Orji: He is perhaps tired. You do not rule and be sure on the face of a tired man.

Nanakaan: He was cold and spiteful. But that he is my son, I could have interpreted envy.

Orji: Rightly said, my Lord. He is our son and heir. He can't be envious of you. I am worried that you said this. I think you are becoming old. One would say, even losing your wit.

Nanakaan: True. Go to him. See he gets the best from his wife. I do not want her to oppress him. Now that the matter of succession is settled, I do not know any better happiness.

Orji: *(Rising)* I shall be after him. But no more of this hallucination. I cannot bear it.

Nanakaan: That I accept.

(Exit Orji)

(Turns to the door) Who is there?

Messenger: *(Enters)* Did you call?

Nanakaan: Fetch the soothsayer. Instantly, I say. Let no one know I sent you.

Okerimuo Yes, Your Majesty. *(Exit)*

Nanakaan There is evil abroad. Everyday I smell about it. Could it be that I am old with my wits deserting me? I know not. Ogadi is my son and heir. That eye has never seen mischief. To see me and wear defiance signals evil of some sort. I know not what to believe. *(Knocks)* Is it the soothsayer?

Okoroagu Yes, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan What does the future portend?

Okoroagu Evil, my Lord.

Nanakaan I know it. I can see it. Why did you not tell me?

Okoroagu I knew you would send for me.

Nanakaan Send for you I have. Who is behind it?

Okoroagu I am afraid it is your son. He covets the throne?

Nanakaan I know it. I could see it all over him today. Is my wife also behind it?

Okoroagu No, she is not. That much I know.

Nanakaan Who else is behind him?

Okoroagu The vision was not clear. They will come over time.

Nanakaan Stay the whole night. Watch and see. Let me have your bill.

Okoroagu: Yes, Your Majesty

Nanakaan: Let me hear from you first thing tomorrow
Request a private audience

Okoroagu: Yes, Your Majesty *(Exit)*

Nanakaan: Now, one is known. What of the other? Before the outgrowth becomes malignant, let it be cut down. He will cut me down, if he has the opportunity. So let him see how it is. Who is there.

Okoroagu: Did you call, Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: Yes, I called. Where is the head of the Army?

Okenmuo: He has gone to see to the arrival of the officials of government.

Nanakaan: Send for him immediately. Let nothing delay him.

Okenmuo: Yes, Your Majesty.

(Exit Okenmuo)

Nanakaan: The success of plots are sometimes never seen on the faces of men. Young evil wears a cheerful face. When men work in concert they win all about them. Yet, a few men can lead the majority astray. I cannot believe it, what I see. That my own son plots evil, seeks to edge me out of the throne. How can he do it but put me to the sword? Then stain the kingdom with his father's blood.

Blood is blood but thicker when that of a relative is shed. They are deadly, fresh and red and cry for vengeance. *(Rises and paces about)* His mother said I was old. That my wits deserted me. Now, heaven and men confirm my fear. Away with women! That serpentine look! That makes you fear no evil when the enemy stands about. I shall shed his blood first, then behead his mother, who makes trifle of villainy and beckons to patricide. *(Knocks)* Who knocks?

Dimgba: The Head of the Army

Nanakaan: Proceed in. Immediately!

Dimgba: *(Enters)* What is your will?

Nanakaan: What I am about to recount shocked me first. You, it will frighten. I have been informed this day by both the oracle and my unwary observation that my son seeks the throne and my life included. Now, I stand between heaven and hell. I know not whom he has sent to put me to the sword. Then reign in my stead fresh and sticky with his father's blood.

Dimgba: Do you have proof, Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: Do I have proof? What is it that you said? The oracle says so. My observation confirms it.

Dimgba: Let me cut him short before he carries out his wishes.

Nanakaan: Proceed from hence. On his way back with the officials, put him to the sword and all about him.

Dimgba: It shall be done.

Nanakaan: Bring me no word except his murder. Let my blood be on his own head.

(Exit Dingba)

What a day! My son? The one I am grooming?

"Lights Out"

Act 4
Scene Two

The red cap chiefs are seated on the stage with Chief Megideya. The Official of the government is in a black suit and a long walking stick. Ogadi dressed in an attire of a prince is addressing them.

Ogadi: The King took ill. He is not well but sends greeting. The autonomous communities all stand as quasi kingdoms. In every kingdom we appreciate the benevolence of the state which enacted this move. Our people are republicans. Here the king administers his reign directly on a conscious people. Here he finds his match who can even question his reign.

Okenmua: *(Enters)* A word with the prince.

Ogadi: *(Frowning)* This is a rude act. At a solemn occasion, we should know our limit. Who ordered this interruption?

Okenmua: The king himself. He seeks your attention.

Ogadi: Now?

Okenmua: Immediately.

Ogadi: Let me be excused. Perhaps his illness has intensified.

(Exit)

Ogadi: *(Crosses the stage. Later he is followed by Dingba)*

Dimgba: Where is the ingrate?

Okenmuo: *(Enters)* He followed this way

Dimgba: Seek him or you perish. Murder a murderer. Spare him no minute. Any space given reverberates in vengeance. For, his every breathing is blood and merciless carnage.

Okenmuo: I have never seen such a thing. That a child seeks the life of his father.

Dimgba: I shall cut you from limb to limb if he escapes and carries out his plot.

Okenmuo: *(Shouts)* Who is there? Stop, I charge you. Less I claim your life in cold blood to assuage a lost temper! *(Rushes into the dark with Dimgba in hot pursuit)*

"Light Fade"

(At the other side of the stage, the light reveals the King pacing about restlessly)

Nanakaan: Evil like seed grows daily. And infect a peaceful world. Daily, men plot evil. Evil against a father is the most vicious. I have endorsed my son. Before the world I presented him. But that for him is not enough! He seeks my life. Any evil ever conceived deserves punishment. Execution of evil is only a part of the deed. Swift justice comes as and when due and meets us on the throne of settlement. *(Hears a noise, turns round sharply)* Who is there? *(He listens)* I cannot doubt it though unsaid, that my wife is in league to topple and slay me. For when a woman makes war against a man she wears a cheerful face. She

subjects herself to false loyalty. Then, huddled
concert with other men. Wherein at the
deadness of the night puts off her deceitful
charm, assumes her truest nature to do the great
mischief. By murdering the prince on his bed
(Violently) Let there be no belief! Let there be no
trust! Every word must be cross-checked.
Because only one spirit rules all women. Account
for their gregarious attitude and the source of
their mischief. *(Hears a noise and is startled)*

Onji: *(Enters)* What is all this thought for? Every
minute you wander about, call on the gods in
desperation. I cannot see the cause of this
umbrage that when men should be most happy
they make war on themselves.

Nanakaan: It is nothing my queen. I have not changed. What
has changed is the world. That men seek to
collect water with baskets instead of calabashes.
Why is it that men cannot see even the baseness
of life? Life is a bottomless pit.

Onji: The King is a man. You alone cannot provide all
the answers.

Nanakaan: At least let me see the questions though I leave
the answers. I weep over this charade that daily
roll out like an orchestra.

Onji: Where is our son?

Nanakaan: *(Curiously)* Is he back? I sent him to the officials.
He cannot be away for long.

Onji: I do not see the cause for fear. Is it the cause of
the fright?

Nanakaan: He cannot be. He is not!

Orij: Then let us go in. The table is laid. I personally supervised it.

Nanakaan: Is it the first or the last?

Orij: How can it be the last? It is not: a new meal. It is your pounded yam and ora soup.

Nanakaan: Let me be left for another minute. I shall join you before long.

(Exit) Lights Fade

Act 4
Scene Three

Ogadi: *(Runs straight across the stage then stops, looks around before he knocks at a door)*

Ogadi: *(Knocks)*

Oriji: *(From within)* Who knocks so hard at the queen's door at so late a time?

Ogadi: It is me, mother.

Oriji: Is it my son the prince?

Ogadi: Yes. It is me, mother.

Oriji: *(Opens the door)* Ogadi! This is an uncommon visit. Lately, I fear evil coming. Your father talks to himself. You wander about so late. These are not good tidings. Both portend great evil and signal something ominous since both are heralds of disaster. Tell me my son the cause of it. Sometimes a woman misjudges because men hide the facts and we rely on feelings.

Ogadi: *(Looks around)* It is nothing.

Oriji: It cannot be nothing. You are panting. And your father has not retired. His bed is still as they made it. How can you say all is well? Tell me, my son.

Ogadi: *(Looks around again)* All may not be well, mother. I too saw evil coming. Did my father not send for me?

Oriji: Yes, he did.

Ogadi As I swept to answer the call, two men, masked followed me. I did not know their mission. They fought me and I killed one. The other escaped mortally wounded. Tell me, who can be after me?

Orji It must be our enemies. Those who want your father's throne. Did you sustain any injury?

Ogadi No. None serious.

Orji I know evil knocks at my door. Now, I agree with your proposal. Leave immediately. Go on a mission. Fend for yourself and your wife. I shall tell your father of its importance. *(Hears noise and listens)* Who goes there!

Ogadi Let me see!

Orji No, hide in my bedroom. The queen's chamber is immune to murder. Men only seek the throne and he who occupies it.

Nanakaan *(From outside)* He has escaped! My son lives! The head of the army has faltered and he has created room for conspiracy. Now they are conferring. The stool is in jeopardy. Vultures are sailing, while evil men set the bush on fire. The escape routes are manned by kites, and hunters load their guns. What a day! What a great danger! *(Raising his voice)* Is my queen awake?

Orji My Lord, I am.

Nanakaan Who is that with you?

Orji It is your heir, my son.

Nanakaari Ogadi speak! Let me hear you

Ogadi It is me, father

Nanakaari *(Enters)* Why are you wandering so late?

Ogadi I narrowly escaped murder. Two men sought my life. One I killed, the other escaped. I did not know why, nor who they were.

Nanakaari What did they look like?

Ogadi I could not see their faces. They were masked

Nanakaari My brave lad! *(Looking serious)* Was he tall or short?

Ogadi The one I killed, he was tall and taller of the two. He was as brave as a tiger and fiery as an elephant. His fingers were as big as baskets covered with nails and thorns. It was a narrow escape slaying him.

Nanakaari Then I shall send for the head of the Army.

Ogadi It sounds reasonable. Anyone after the prince is after the king.

Nanakaari Very true. Send for the guard *(Exit Ogadi)* *(To the Queen)* Look around your room *(Exit the Queen)* Evil stirs up evil in men. The fear of tomorrow and the desire to secure it lead women to incite men. When they see blood they cry for mercy. But men writhe in satisfaction, and in vengeance against malevolence slaughter their fellow men.

Ogadi *(Enters)* I have sent for him.

Nanakaan: Do not go to your room. Go into hiding first until we can determine this.

Ogadi: Let me go on a mission. Immediately if the king permits.

Nanakaan: Not yet. Not yet. Let us ward off the evil first. When the kingdom is safe, then you can go on a mission. For now, no!

Oriji: *(Enters)* The room is safe.

Nanakaan: Let us all go to bed. Tell the guard to send word as a stopper to the head of the army. I do not want to be bothered until tomorrow. Tomorrow I shall think out a way to counter this mischief. I cannot wait until the evil comes.

Ogadi: Who can be after us, father?

Nanakaan: Anyone after the throne is after us. He deserves to die.

Ogadi: So I think.

Nanakaan: If men pronounce false judgement, they incur wrath on their heads. Good judgement is a curse well directed. It battles the course of malevolence.

Ogadi: Father, mother has seen all these. She sees serpents pursue her every day at night. Only once by day.

Nanakaan: The Queen has been telling me that dragons and tigers resurface each time she goes to bed. But what I know and yet to see is the nature of these

beasts that float about in sleep and dreams of men. These stones I have heard for thirty years. Dreams I know do not harm because they arise over slumber. What I do know and fear is the heart of men. Over slumber and dreams they have deceived men and the world.

Ogadi: Go to bed, my lord. Do not stir the world with your philosophy which you preach daily. Now I fear it is upsetting your mind. Come, let me take you in.

Nanakaan: No! No! Leave me alone. I have passed the age of infantile play where I can be lulled to sleep.

Ogadi: Let the king go to bed. Let the queen take you.

Nanakaan: Am I a king? Do I have a queen?

Ogadi: Yes, you have father.

Nanakaan: It is yet to be seen. May be tomorrow when the sun shines.

Oriji: Do you doubt me Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: Doubt? What is that you say? I have known you close to half a century. Even as a little girl, I knew when you bathed naked. **Now as my wife,** I know more. What I mean is not an issue of doubt, but a case of determination. The 'kingdom' is threatened. I as its head is more threatened than all. That with me and all I possess. Where then can I make a claim until my seat is protected, from within and without.

Oriji: Your Majesty, is this threat from within?

Nanakaan: How would I know, if the thief is hibernating in the palace? Only God can make absolute pronouncement.

Ogadi: I shall not go to bed this night. With all my might I shall keep an eye over every ant and insect. And put to the sword all invaders.

Nanakaan: It is better you go to bed. I have been a man of battle. A commander since my youth. I can fight my way through. Let no one live under the illusion that I leave everything to fate and chance.

Onji: Very well, my Lord. Let us all go to bed.

Nanakaan: By all means let us

"Lights Fade"

Act 4
Scene Four

In the queen's Chamber. The queen beckons to Ogadi. He sits him down on a chair beside her bed. Then she goes out. A later comes in. She hesitates pulls the curtains and then sits down.

Onji: *(In whispers)* What do you think? I see something wrong with the king

Ogadi: I see nothing. Nothing. I can see a startled man who worries about his throne.

Onji: Yes, worried he is about the throne. But I see something deeper. He fears even his family

Ogadi: It is nothing to worry about, mother. Men in their care cause themselves burden. Father wants the throne.

Onji: Only? Do you not see? His mind is at war with itself. Perhaps he is growing old or has lost his wits.

Ogadi: Both could be correct. But it is a matter that can't be helped. If the throne is threatened, the occupants feel unsafe

Onji: You must leave my son. This night

Ogadi: You heard me make the proposal. Flatly he refused. I cannot disobey him.

Onji: Yet, you cannot rest this case on him. He is my husband, you my son. I can read him as I can read my palm. There is danger in staying back.

Ogadi: This danger is as we all know. My life was threatened. Two men sought to take it away. By the hand of fate I killed one. The other I vanquished where I left him mercilessly wounded. As he took the only course of action, escape into the bush.

Onji: Has it ever occurred to you, this danger might be his making?

Ogadi: It cannot be, mother. Though men plot evil, on this he is innocent. He sent me to represent him. This I did honourably. At no time did he send assassins against his heir and son.

Onji: But your father suspects you. Do you know that?

Ogadi: That what? He cannot be. Even when he does, he is under deception.

Onji: Your father thinks you are envious of him.

Ogadi: Envious? What? Now, truth is naked! When ambition copulates with hallucination, we make tyrant out of the innocent.

Onji: It is true, my son. You must leave.

Ogadi: Then, I must go.

Onji: *(In whispers)* Now.

(Exit)

(On the other side of the stage, the King is pacing up and down. The light reveals Ogadi as he leaves the stage. Then he comes back with a clothe over his shoulder and a bag under his arm)

Ogadi

Now, I am at a cross-road. The predator has turned the prey. The spider's webs have caught their maker. Before me the plot is unveiled. To his face he sees beyond, in tragedy and tyranny over its author. O night who midwives all evil, straighten the course of destiny where the prince goes in hurried doom. Over the fancy of women and the greed of aides. Tomorrow at dawn let me live, I want to see the face of the sun.

Act 4
Scene Five

The king is on the thrones. His aides are by his side. He raises his horsewhip as soon as Okoroagu enters

Nanakaan: I sent for you.

Okoroagu: Yes, Your Majesty!

Nanakaan: Why did you not come immediately?

Okoroagu: I cannot see my way, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: You cannot see your way? What do you mean by that? You are playing jest with me? If you cannot find your way, who then led you to my presence?

Okoroagu: It is not that kind of vision, Your Majesty. I could not decode the stars.

Nanakaan: Why did you not seek the help of your colleagues?

Okoroagu: I did, but they could not succeed. The result was the same.

Nanakaan: What is this thing that you tell me? I cannot believe it. All the oracles cannot lose their vision. Are the stars falling? Is evil triumphing over good?

Okoroagu: They are not, Your Majesty. From the last two days, all the forces of heaven are at war. The stars have lost their shape. Graves have opened

up. Souls are in disarray. They are braking the path with their feet. Because of a mere celebration (called Holy Week). A man who claimed he was a Messiah had his death commemorated yesterday. His followers have subdued heaven with their prayers, fear and adoration. Chanting slogans and in mournful mood. All visions are now blurred. There is no power anywhere. This is a thing never seen or heard of before: that one man strips the world of its heritage. The powers to do and undo.

Nanakaan: I do not believe this thing you say. If his death caused so much uproar, the world is the worse for it. For him. He deserves to die.

Okoroagu: Believe me, Your Majesty. It is an honour to serve the King. It is even a greater honour to admit the truth. The truth must be told. Now, there is no power anywhere in the world.

Nanakaan: (Think a Think) gone his followers. Seek and tap this power. Let Us know the course of nature.

Okoroagu: (Nodding) There might be a way. But I have made this enquiry upon with. I have found it out for certain. No vision is possible today until at noon tomorrow when the stars in their meekness shall regain their nature. And sit before the face of heaven. In condescension shall adorn its face. You will admit, Your Majesty. I have never been once beaten, swallowed up this way in my craft. Yet, melodies do not obliterate. They only act as palliatives over sorrow.

Nanakaan: I admit. You are unrivalled.

Okoroagu Let me proceed then, Your Majesty. Tomorrow I shall bring you word how the heaven sits. From my count, I see a ray of hope.

(Exit)

Nanakaan The night runs its course in the dark. The sheet looms; the tyranny progresses. In wanton course I shall wait.

Light Fades.

Act 5 Scene One

In the royal court, King Nanakaan, visibly worried paces up and down. He is alone on the right side of the court, while his wife, the queen, frets about the room. She peeps to see if he is coming.

Nanakaan: My son, the heir I cannot believe it. To assassinate me? I shall meet him on the battle field. No one has ever wronged me which I did not avenge. None! No one!!! (Aloud) No--O--NE!!! In the world, except one man. My father, who begot me. In only one deed, one act, he performed an act which is unavengeable. The act-- which I cannot. The paternity of a father by a son. The father who begot me and I cannot beget him. Who married my mother and I cannot marry his, because she is my paternal grandmother (thoughtfully) But the two are not the same. It is not the same with patricide. Patricide is the killing of a father by a son. (Spits on the floor) No! No-O-O!!! The reward for analblast is in the anus. Do your own. (Smiles realistically) and (Calculatingly) I shall shed his blood!!! then behead his mother. To avenge this great ingratitude, and close a major route to evil. Yet can the route of evil be closed? One route opens another. Until the cup of the world is filled. And-- in what language is evil written? Except the act in which it is performed, its act is its form, its language. Evil has no language. (Hears a noise and is startled) Of what nature is evil? At conception it has no form. No flesh and blood. But its result can be tangible. And runs from generation to generation. (He paces up and down, mute and restless). Man is evil. From the top of his head, to the bottom of his feet. Because the enemy constantly assails him, as he thinks of good, then he commits evil. Evil premeditates evil. And the resultant notes revenge.

The ultimate aim of a blood. To make a slit in the life of a man. In doing it, he opens another. Then another, until a stream of it flows. There is no all time for man. Because he takes away the life-giving source, which is blood, his life, his source of life.

Onji: (Sneezes.) What is this haruspication all about?

Nanakaan: (Silent)

Onji: Is an army advancing upon the city?

Nanakaan: See and tell me.

Onji: Then what is the land of the dead?

Nanakaan: Leave me alone.

Onji: Leave you alone.

Nanakaan: Yes. Let me have a moment's time.

Onji: What is the use of a good time?

Nanakaan: To settle or unsettle it.

Onji: Have you not heard that behind any successful man there is a woman?

Nanakaan: Meaning?

Onji: That women are powers behind the throne.

Nanakaan: Yes I have heard. But I also know behind every evil there is some greater evil.

Onji Oh—(in anguish) what an unkind thing to say. Do you want to blame me?

Nanakaan No indeed. To praise you for every great deed in the world.

Onji Yet in spite of your outbursts, let us retire. It is late.

Nanakaan It is not late. It is early.

Onji See, the world is asleep. Even the dew's are tired. The flakes are no more falling.

Nanakaan There is no sleep until nature has had its way.

Onji Which is when?

Nanakaan What unsettles nature goes to the bottom.

Onji Oh—your philosophy. Will it ever end?

Nanakaan Leave me alone. Now, I say.

Onji It is unfair to bark at the queen. No matter what.

Nanakaan Oh my dear. Mari is an animal. Forgive me please. (Holds her) now let us retire. To your warm bed, where I know not what.

Onji What is that you say?

Nanakaan To the bed—to the bed—

"Lights Fade"

Act 5
Scene Two

Ogadi in flight has a bag under his arm. He is holding Chinenye with his left as he leads his way through the path. It is getting dark and he suddenly bumps onto a man, Okoroagu as he is searching the stars. Chinenye screams and the man in fear rises. Ogadi grabs him by the neck squeezing as the soothsayer begins to gasp.

Ogadi: At least I have found you. If you think you will escape, you are mistaken.

Okoroagu: I have done nothing wrong.

Ogadi: What are you doing here?

Okoroagu: Merely practicing my trade. I search the stars.

Ogadi: Are you a soothsayer?

Okoroagu: Yes.

Ogadi: *(Leaving him)* God has saved you. *(Looks at him carefully)* Okoroagu, is it really you?

Okoroagu: Yes, it is I.

Ogadi: Then you must help me. My life is in danger. A party seeks to take it. Twice they have made attempts. Twice they have failed. I do not know what to do.

Okoroagu: It is true, there is ill-will against your family.

Ogadi: Have you seen it?

Okoroagu: A long time ago.

Ogadi: *(Folding his two arms)* Really? Who is behind it?

Okoroagu: *(Thinks quickly)* The throne is threatened. A party seeks to take it.

Ogadi: Tell me Okoroagu, is it my father?

Okoroagu: *(Shakes his head)* No, he is not.

Ogadi: Then who is behind it?

Okoroagu: Enemies of the family. They are many.

Ogadi: Have they no names?

Okoroagu: Some are your father's chiefs. They seek to take the throne.

Ogadi: Name one. I want to know.

Okoroagu: Chief Megideya!

Ogadi: Chief Megideya? He is after me?

Okoroagu: Yes. He is after the throne.

Ogadi: His case is settled. Name another.

Okoroagu: King Deribema.

Ogadi: That is an old news.

Okoroagu: He has infiltrated the ranks. Some of your father's chiefs are disloyal.

Ogadi: Name them Okoroagu. Name them.

Okoroagu They are all disloyal

Ogadi All of them? None is loyal?

Okoroagu None

Ogadi Now I see what is my father's worry. Every subject has turned against him. That is why he hallucinates. Every time he talks to himself

Okoroagu * They are much against him as you

Ogadi Even me?

Okoroagu Yes. You are their target. For your safety I suggest you leave immediately to a far distant land. There await your turn. Your father has as much as thirty years of a healthy life and reign

Ogadi Thirty years you said?

Okoroagu Yes, thirty years

Ogadi Then I must leave immediately

Okoroagu Take your wife with you. Have a life of youth and patience until your star begins to shine. Now only your father's star is seen in the firmament

Ogadi Chinenye are you ready? Will you endure with me?

Okoroagu I shall endure with you

Ogadi Very well then. Let us go. (Exeunt)

Okoroagu (Looking around) That is one danger, a trap of crisis out of the way. Now the king can reign peacefully. As we put away the primary evil, which is patricide.

(The lights fade on Okoroagu, but gradually reveal Ogadi and Chinenye as they are making their way out of the village.)

Ogadi I find it difficult to believe it. This thing which the Soothsayer said, Chief Megideya cannot be seeking my life.

Chinenye Would you doubt an oracle? We came upon him by chance. How could he then fabricate lies? To me, Chief Megideya is a suspect. Only time can prove his guilt.

Ogadi What a wicked world we live in? That men wear different faces. And appurition roles they desire to act. I shall seek out Chief Megideya. If his face and act prove his intent, I shall put him to the sword, and all about him.

Chinenye Will that include his family? And Kelechi my friend?

Ogadi It does not include her. *(Hears a sound)* I hear a voice. *(They hide)* Gently Chinenye. Gently.

"Lights Fade"

Act 5
Scene Three

It is the living room of Chief Megideya. He is pacing up and down. Sometimes, he murmurs to himself. Then he sits down for a while before he jumps to his feet. From the door of the room, his wife watches with keen interest.

Veronica: *(Breaking in)* May I interrupt your thought?

Megideya: *(Startled)* What is it, Veronica?

Veronica: Can a wife know what worries her husband?

Megideya: *(Smiling)* Yes, she can. If she cannot, who can? I know you are speaking about me. What worries me is not far-fetched. The oracle has not spoken about me.

Veronica: The oracle has not spoken? Since when, my Lord?

Megideya: Over five days now.

Veronica: We must seek consolation in human worth. What has not been said is no evil. Let our conscience be our guide.

Megideya: We cannot grope in the dark. Daily we seek vision or man loses his direction.

Veronica: Is there a message from anywhere?

Megideya: A message? What kind of message? It appears you do not hear well. Or when you listen, you hear half. When there is no message it means none was given.

Veronica: Do not get into a rage, my Lord. I have to say I hear well. When there is no message when none is given, then there is nothing to fear. Silence is no evil. Absence of facts is no evil. We cannot account for what was not given.

Megideya: True! Very true.

Veronica: Why then does my Lord worry?

Megideya: Chief Megideya is a mere mortal. That relies on the tune of life. Before birth no herald is given; none except the frolicking of man and woman. This is the sign you may say. But in life uncertainty rules it! That is why we run to oracles. To see what we cannot see. To hear what we could not hear.

Veronica: When we invite the future, we call forward its flaws. Though the assets might be many, we add to our weight. In both evil and good.

Megideya: Put away this play on words. You want to distract me from a set goal.

Veronica: My Lord. *(Hears knocks)* Is that not a knock I hear?

Megideya: It is. See who is at the door.

Veronica: *(Let me see)* Prince Ogadi! You again! Oh my soul, you look younger and hale. Come in. Come in!

Megideya: Our great Prince!

Ogadi: *(Hushing him)* Haste attends me. Can you join me? To a farm. I have something to show.

Megideya To a farm?

Ogadi Yes

Veronica Can I come along?

Ogadi *(Bluntly)* No. It is for a man. Your husband will return presently.

Veronica Where is your wife

Ogadi She is at home

Megideya *(Looking around)* Let us go.

Veronica What of your cap and staff?

Megideya Yes. Give them to me. *(Takes the cap and staff)*

Ogadi Let us go

(Exit Ogadi and Megideya)

Veronica I do not like this haste. It does not sound well to me. I shall follow behind.

(Exit)

(Light reveals Ogadi and Megideya walking along a path. Presently, Ogadi draws a knife and pushes Megideya to the ground).

Ogadi You wretch! You bitch! Today I shall slay you.

Megideya *(With his hands up)* I surrender! What did I do?

Ogadi Shut up! You liar!

Megideya I never lied to you.

Ogadi: Did you not tell lies? What of the idea, I would become King?

Megideya: A king you shall surely be. First set me free.

Ogadi: Behave then, or I chop off your head.

Megideya: There is no cause for it.

Ogadi: What shall I do?

Megideya: First you must know this. Okoroagu has been peddling lies. He tells the king one thing, then another to you.

Ogadi: *(Interrupting)* He confided in me. The king has thirty uninterrupted years. To reign and be merry.

Megideya: It is not true. We speak to the same oracle.

Ogadi: *(Angrily)* What is true then?

Megideya: Be bold and take your turn. Bring down his reign.

Ogadi: How can this be?

Megideya: Poison his food. Then he shall abdicate the throne in fear and in haste he shall flee.

Ogadi: With what can I do this?

Megideya: I shall give you what to use. You shall leave it in the palace. Where in every dream he shall see blood. To keep him in perpetual fright. But before then, you on no account will see the face of the king. If he sets his face on you, you shall die. But after abdication, he shall make you king himself. That is the way.

Ogadi: Where is that charm?

Megideya: It is in the house.

Ogadi: You know the penalty if you play pranks.

Megideya: *(He nods)*

Ogadi: You shall die. Lead the way.

(Exeunt)

(The light reveals Ogadi and Megideya in the transaction. Megideya gives him the charm and Ogadi takes it)

Ogadi: You shall be my next in command. Only let it work.

Megideya: It shall work. Make sure you see the King only when he must have abdicated. He shall send for you himself.

Ogadi: I shall keep away until then. Thank you. Thank you. Until then, I must say.

(Exit Ogadi)

Megideya: *(Laughing)* I shall die? Now first let us know who to taste it. *(He begins to pace about)* Here, we set him between the devil and the deep blue sea. For on no account must you confront the youth. Raw energy and rage propel them. In an attempt to bring tomorrow today, they leave behind the sun to light up the dawn. Patience then, ultimate complacency, take them by storm. We must not shout them to order, but let them learn the lesson

age teaches. That wisdom rules the world, which age in the end confers.

Veronica: (*Panting*) Is that Ogadi going?

Megideya: Yes, it is. Why are you panting?

Veronica: I saw him throw you to the floor with a knife on your throat.

Megideya: You followed then?

Veronica: Yes, I followed. I saw everything.

Megideya: He has started with the sword. Let us see who gets consumed.

Veronica: I shall tell the king.

Megideya: You shall do what? You shall not, I say! Never! Let us see.

Veronica: What of your life?

Megideya: Do as I say, woman!

"Light Fades"

Act 6
Scene One

In the king's court. He is seated and the queen comes and sits beside him. She whispers into his ear and he smiles. Suddenly, a few dancers begin to perform before them. The King is excited and so is the queen. At the end of the first performance, they clap. The king then rises to see the performers.

Nanakaan: This indeed is a great show. To put laughter on stage, when merely you dramatize life. You mock when you laugh. And laugh when you mock. Man then becomes a theater where he unrolls for the world to see. In gratitude then, the king shall show what he makes of this performance. First send for the prince.

Onji: The prince cannot attend this show.

Nanakaan: When he comes, we shall recall this. He shall see this show again.

Onji: He shall see it.

Nanakaan: *(To the dancers)* Keep an open ear. But for now, you shall receive gifts. The king's attendants shall see to that. Now thanks. Rest your bones. We shall see you again. *(Exit dancers)*

Nanakaan: What is this thing that is happening, that the prince leaves at will only for the queen to recall?

Onji: He is your son. I merely gave an approval when I found you needed peace. He shall be here tomorrow or next.

Nanakaan: Tomorrow or next? And I do not need to know instantly? Did I not say he must not leave? The throne is under threat. The time is perilous and near for the enemy. Now I stand helpless.

Oriji: Let the king not look too closely. Sometimes a son whispers. Only the ear of the mother is caught. Soon all shall come to normal.

Nanakaan: *(Rises)* Who is there?

Okenmua: *(Enters)* Did the king call?

Nanakaan: Yes. Send for Okoroagu. The Kingdom is never relocated until the king is infected from the rear. Then and only then that he hears. But the queen is all ears when the business begins.

Oriji: No. Let the king not say this. The kingdom is never under siege. Nor will it ever be.

Nanakaan: I have heard.

Okoroagu: *(Enters)* What is the will of the King?

Nanakaan: Meet me in my palace.

(Exeunt the king and Okoroagu)

Oriji: Is there a meeting without me? The King meets without the queen. And with outsiders! Now we have safely entered a new age. When man wars on himself.

Light fades on her and then reveals the king sitting. Okoroagu is before him.

Okoroagu: Heaven is at peace with the throne. The prince has safely gone. To pursue a quiet life.

- Nanakaan:* Quiet life indeed. I gave an order he must not go. This is defiance.
- Okoroagu:* Let the king keep his peace. It is not defiance. He is out for good.
- Nanakaan:* Why didn't you tell me this?
- Okoroagu:* The queen knows! Who else is in doubt?
- Nanakaan:* But she said it was for a marriage. A ceremony that would last a day or two.
- Okoroagu:* It is not.
- Nanakaan:* *(Nodding)* Now, the queen lies to me.
First, it was the plot.
Now, decisions are reached without me.
Today then we shall know
Who is the first of the two
The cockered or the rump watery hen?
- Okoroagu:* Let this not inflame the king's anger. It is better as it is.
- Nanakaan:* Better as it is? Who is there?
- Okenmuo:* *(Enters)* Did Your Majesty call?
- Nanakaan:* Yes. I called. Send for Chief Megideya.
(Exit Okenmuo)
- Okenmuo:* *(Re-enters)* The king called?
- Nanakaan:* At the shrine at Ngodongo.
(Exit Okenmuo)

Okoroagu: Let no fear attend the king. The world is safe for your reign. Let the king take my counsel. First, let the king proceed to Ngodongo. There, wait and see what happens. Thereafter, charge the Head of the Army to put to the sword all riotous entry into the palace.

Nanakaan: What will that come to?

Okoroagu: From the vision revealed to me, mischief will attend the throne. But they shall be vanquished.

Nanakaan: Let them be vanquished. I immediately send for the Head of the Army. Now proceed to Ngodongo.
(*Lights fade*)

Light reveals Chief Megideya sitting with his wife. He turns to her.

Megideya: Where is Kelechi?

Oduagu: She is in the kitchen.

Megideya: All right (*knocks*). Who is that?

Okenmuo: (*Enters*) A message from the king.

Megideya: The king?

Okenmuo: Yes. The king has sent for you. To meet him at Ngodongo.

Megideya: Do you know what it is all about?

Okenmuo: How would I know the mind of the king?

Megideya How would you not? You could read him when he sent you.

Okenmuo Yes. I saw his face but not his mind.

Megideya In the palace, if I may ask, my son, who else was with him?

Okenmuo The soothsayer, Sir.

Megideya Was the city at peace?

Okenmuo I did not see an advancing army. Nor heard the whining of horses. Or the stamping of hoofs. Nothing except the face of the king.

Megideya Did you see the prince?

Okenmuo No. But the king has sent for him.

Megideya I want a definite answer. Was all well with the palace?

Okenmuo I cannot say, Sir. But the king looked worried.

Megideya To Ngodongo I shall go. Tell him I am on my way.
(Exit)

The historical moment is here at last. The King has abdicated or is about to. The reins of power shall all come at a price. Or slip through his finger to mine. There I shall pass on the bait. Through a city thirsting for blood. To keep it safe by bathing it. Let me play but let providence determine, as I climb the Iroko infested with pythons. (Knocks) Who is there?

Veronica It is the wind. I have had a dream. My mind is full of fear. To lie and wait at this craze. And you locked up in a cage. As the prince slaughtered men like animals. I sat in a pool of blood. While the city wailed in pains.

Megideya *(Raising up his hand)* No. No more. This is not a time for dreams. The king has abdicated the throne. The oracle said he would. He is at the moment at Ngodongo. If not, I shall reign.

Veronica The city shall fight back. I saw blood flow along the streets. The dream cannot be for nothing.

Megideya Who shall we believe? Is it you or the oracle?

Veronica *(Resignedly)* I do not know what to say. My dream has never been in vain.

Megideya *(Rising)* Ngodongo, here I come. To be or not to be.

"Light fades"

Act 6
Scene Two

The King is seated in the garden. Besides him is the queen who is holding a fan. She fans herself and then reclines towards the king who seeks audience with her.

Nanakaan: The dancers are ready. What shall we do about the prince?

Onji: He will be here soon. Let the dancers perform.

Nanakaan: The dancers are children. Can they withstand the sun? Through consecutive performances?

Onji: *(Smiling)* No they shall not be weary. They have been craving for this moment. They cannot now cry out when glory knocks at their door.

Nanakaan: *(Brightening up)* Let them perform. I want to be amused. As I withdraw almost into exile Ngodongo is a lonely hill. Yet the dancers sought me out. I want nothing but amusement. After this, they shall entertain the prince. To brighten him after the long journey, now let them enter!

Onji: *(Signaling)*

Dancers: *(Rushing in)* Long live the King! *(They dance as the king and the queen clap for them. They do series of performances, as the king watches with keen interest.)*

The dancers suddenly stop when they notice the entry of soldiers carrying the body of Chief Megideya and Prince Ogadi. The king immediately comes to his feet. The queen rushes forward as she sees her son.)

Orji: Alas! Alas! My son (She wails)

Nanakaan: Who is responsible for this?

Dimgba: Your Majesty! Ma the king reign! While we watched over the city early this morning, late night I should say we found a batch of soldiers some masked, others not, attacking the city gate. Quickly they overpowered the gate-men. Then they made straight for the palace. They took it by storm. But they lacked men and materials. They fought the whole night. Then when they became weak, they took to their heels. We followed in hot pursuit. When we found them about to escape, I sent a batch to surround them. We fought them from front and back and they fell man after man. At last to our greatest surprise, we saw two of the king's men. His son Prince Ogadi and number one Chief Megideya among the dead but valiant men. We brought them here to certify them dead. That tragedy has befallen the city. A prince warred on his father and his trusted man was also in league to put the king to the sword. The king our king and his household because of mere ambition.

Nanakaan: (Aghast) True? Prince Ogadi? Bring me a pot of ashes. Then pour it over my head. A goat has eaten palm fronds on my head. That death has chosen this day to bring me to disrepute. Declare a day of mourning. Let there be no life on the streets. Let there be no cooking. Let all be still. (The gong sounds three times). Arrange for a befitting funeral. The king's son is dead. Summon the autonomous communities. Let

their Chiefs see me for this great tragedy Which I
shall now weep over (The king lowers his head
and covers his face)

*(Lights fade on the king and the backstage gives a solemn
mournful song)*

Act 6
Scene Three

The king is lying on the floor. Gradually, he wakes up and sits. He lies again and after an interval sits up again. He is very sorrowful. His head is without cap and his chest bare. His condition suggests he is completely taken over by grief.

Nanakaan: What have I done? The human greed has made me a laughing stock. I killed my son. Now the kingdom fares without an heir. Why then did I labour? What if death calls sooner than I think? There I shall plunge the kingdom into dynastic struggle --- all I had laboured so hard to prevent. My God! Exchange my shame with a deep slumber. Recall now these wasted years. Send me a cloth over my loins --- over my shame.

Onji: *(Enters, eaves dropping)*

Nanakaan: *(Lies again on the floor)*

Onji: *(Walks to the other end of the stage-the arm housing her room)* Did he really kill my son? His actions show he loved him. See how he rolls on the floor. What is in the heart of men? The human heart wears many faces. That is why we react in different ways. Who can design the purpose of men? O gadi my son! Why are you dead?

Nanakaan: *(Rising)* And I can't have Children. If only I can have her. I shall be well again. I shall face tomorrow with hope and produce an heir through her. Her tender breasts wear sweet milk for the young. Her arms are long and delicate. In her

bossom. I see the clothe to wipe my face. The balm to soothe my heart. (Noise) Who goes there?

Dimgba: (Enters) The Head of the Army

Nanakaan: My sorrow has multiplied

Dimgba: What can soothe it Your Majesty?

Nanakaan: If only you can find Chinanu, the daughter of Chekwasi.

Dimgba: But no record has been made since her abduction.

Nanakaan: I know she is not dead! Find her. Look for her.

Dimgba: I shall, Your Majesty.

Nanakaan: I shall give you half of my kingdom if you can find her.

Dimgba: Let us make the effort. Let us see if we can amuse the king.

Nanakaan: My life depends on her. Find her. Find her. You may go now.

Dimgba: (Exit).

Nanakaan: Oh God! Let her not die.
(**Lights fade**)

(*The Lights reveal Dimgba and Chinanu talking*)

Dimgba: The king sent for you himself. Stand and honour the request.

Chinanu For a second time? The first I was seized at the gate of the palace. Now what will become of me?

Dimgba No evil will befall you. Only quickly honour the summon.

Chinanu May I know what his pleasure is?

Dimgba Why do you question if the king?

Chinanu I do not. I only want to prepare myself.

Dimgba Very well. He is his wife.

Chinanu As his wife? No. I do not so want me. I am like a daughter-in-law to Chinenye. I cannot. It does not sound good. I shall not.

Dimgba You decline the request of the king?

Chinanu It is not a refusal. I do not want to be any thing but a daughter to him.

Dimgba You must oblige him. At least to cheer him up after the death of his son.

Chinanu That is the more reason why I cannot. With what face will I see Chinenye?

Dimgba It is nothing. It cannot be. She wants it too.

Chinanu I know her as I know myself. She will be heart-broken.

Dimgba She will not be.

Chinanu Pray, sir, do not push it any longer. Tell him I cannot for all my life.

Dimgba: For all your life?

Chinanu: Yes, Sir!

(The Lights fade revealing the king in his sorrowful mood. His face lights up when he sees Dimgba)

Nanakaan: Did you find her?

Dimgba: Yes, Your Majesty. But she says she cannot for all her life.

Nanakaan: What was her reason?

Dimgba: That she would not be able to face the princess.

Nanakaan: The princess? *(Lowers his head)*. You may leave me now. *(Exit Dimgba)*

Dimgba: What is the use for my life *(Rises a bottle and drinks poison. Soon he begins to gasp)*

Nanakaan: For your sake Chinanu. For the sake of the kingdom ---- For ---- for. *(Dies)*

END.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan Chima Amadi hails from Aku, Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. He took degrees in English from Universities of Jos (B.A) and Nigeria (M.A). He is the author of the following published works: *Wait Till Tomorrow* (a novel) 1994, *Secrets Are Wavering Flames* (a novel) 1994, *Bishop G.M.P.*



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The King Never Reigns, an incisive dramatization of the uneasy lives of sovereign rulers, aptly demonstrates the saying "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown", but it goes beyond this to show why. Human beings are insatiable and ambitious by nature.

The play is vibrant in plot, as well as language. Its poetic dialogue reflects the motivations of the characters. Masterful use of proverbs contributes to the overall impact of the play.

In *The King Never Reigns*, Dan Chima Amadi has demonstrated unusual dramatic skills that remind the reader of the Elizabethan England dramatists.

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