

Broken Lines

The Bipiamina Story



Victor Oroyi

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Broken Lines

[A PLAY]

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Dedication

To those who suffer mischief without a cause.
Mothers, widows and under aged children,
who use political campaign as livelihood,
yet live in abject penury while their representatives live
in 'fortified glass houses' built with taxpayers money.

Acknowledgment

Life without gratitude is a denial of the existence of God and His mighty works on planet earth, therefore to forbid being caught in the web of ingratitude; I lift my voice to say, 'Thank You, the Almighty Creator of my being'.

Without the many shoulders upon whom I stand, I am a mere commoner walking the streets, without notice. This space cannot print the letters bearing the names of the people to whom I owe sincere gratitude and appreciation. Therefore, I ask for your forgiveness and understanding before mentioning the few that this space can accommodate.

To my parents, Reverend. E.S.T. Oroyi and Madam Helen Amos, your seed planted years past is beginning to bear fruits; you shall harvest and forget the years of pains by God's grace. My siblings, Wilfred, Rachael, Okwenbipi, Ibitamuno, Abiboye, and Helen (Jr.), our dreams are becoming realities, thanks for your prayers and encouragement in the years of toiling and disappointment. I really appreciate you all!

She is the sweetest taste of my experience in life; she came when the tide of my being was at the lowest ebb but brought the tide of hope, confidence and strength - former Miss Ebizimo Agedah, Her Majesty... I adore You! And my wonderful Princesses Ekiyos and Tula, you have re-shaped my thinking about life, I pray for God's guidance for you.

Special thanks to a father, friend and mentor, Deacon Igbikiowubo S. Frank and his dear wife, Deaconess Siyeofori for immense moral, spiritual and physical encouragement at the sphere of my existence I met them, may God reward your show of love.

My sincere thanks to my friend, colleague, teacher, mentor and career adviser, who found me trapped within the creek at low tide and brought me into this world of Thespians with his words of encouragement. I lack words to appreciate you, Dr. Benedict Binebai, you are a wonderful friend!

May I salute also all lecturers in the Department of Theatre Arts, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State for their guide.

I cannot stop without mentioning her name, she disregarded me because I wore a shirt without a label, but she is a strong pillar in all my play productions, Miss Nimi Agada, keep doing it and your reward shall find you as waters overflow their banks.

To the entire cast and crew of Reflector Theatre Troupe, from the artistic director, Promise Abiri to every other member, please don't pick offence that your names are not in print, you have left an imprint in my heart already.

And to my cherished friends and wonderful companions in my undergraduate days in the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, especially Cyril Bieh, Atake Efedue, Loveth Patani, Sarah Takogo, Brayefa Oruabena and Dou-ere Dio, God bless your endeavours in life. Also Kalaku T. Kalaku, Ernest Weridonghan Jackson and Brother Peter Uyvie.

Foreword

Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria, the country has seen the good, the bad and the ugly sides of politics.

Over the years, the selfish gains of the key players (politicians) take the centre-stage while the supporters are left to wallow in poverty, deprivation and reckless abandonment after being used by these politicians. The unhealthy political ambition of contemporary politicians have robbed our society of values that we had held sacred before now.

Family values have been bastardised to the extent that we now sacrifice siblings, spouses, children and even parents without any remorse. There is indeed an urgent need for us to re-evaluate our priorities and set things right.

In this creative work, Victor Oroyi has skillfully shown the consequences suffered by women and youths as a result of the negative effects of politics. He has subtly x-rayed the political decadence and decay, especially concerning the show of shame our women (married and single) are exposed to at the expense of their families and their self-esteem.

For empty, vague and shadowy promises, they are cajoled into doing unimaginable and abominable things. Note the misleading allure of those that hold the political sway in our society and how they use money as a bait to catch the weak, illiterate, hungry and down-trodden masses to satisfy their aims and ambition.

Furthermore, in this carefully articulated masterpiece, Oroyi marries politics, the homefront and the society via the characters, Nne, the councillor, and Bipiamina respectively. Though married by Owubokiri's mother, Nne has the innate ability to keep her household intact, run her business but delve into 'supporters' politics which by the way does not seem to pay off well because she was 'used' and dumped.

The playwright shows a twist in the society where women are

unconsciously turned into bread winners instead of their husbands. It is quite saddening that in her desperation to cater for the needs of her family, she ends up losing the very essence of her struggle - her son dies, her marriage is ruined and she is eaten up by guilt of her illicit and adulterous affair with the councillor.

It is also intriguing to see how the mystery surrounding the true identity of Bipiamina unfolds dramatically. She appeared like an angel to Nne but she was actually a 'wolf in sheep clothing'. She had 'skeletons in her cupboard' and was using politics to get her sweet revenge. But like the saying goes, 'what goes around, comes around'. At the end of the day, Bipiamina's revenge comes around and entangles her, too. This is just characteristic of how most self-centred politicians end up even in our present day society.

The storyline is so captivating that at the end of the play, it seems like the story has just started. I believe this is just a 'tip of the iceberg', the best is yet to come!

Margaret Iniabasi Buba

Vice Principal, Academics

Community Secondary School,

Igbogene-Epie, Bayelsa State.

May 2014

Author's Note

Broken Lines was first premiered with the title Bipiamina at the Arts Theatre, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State between 14 and 15 April, 2011. In re-thinking the play, the non-linear posture of society invoked the metaphorical condition and name of the play. The family is tearing apart due to the loss of moral value; government failing to exhibit transparency, accountability and willingness to build a stable and service-oriented democratic society.

The story of Bipiamina is not an unfamiliar tale. The past influences the future thus: Bipiamina, true to her name, sacrifices her niece for political gains, turns her fellow women into a 'mere supporters' club forgetting the essence of womanhood. This revenge story reveals the ties between the home front and politics. The community is aggrieved for the misconduct of their elected representative, while Bipiamina sees it as another opportunity to amass wealth and deprives them. It is a contemporary story set in the outskirts of an imaginary Niger Delta Island.

Theatrical efforts should be made to project the rich cultural and geographical locations through scenery and light effect to add aesthetics to the play.

The play is set in three tiny fishing settlements in the outskirts of an imaginary Niger Delta communities within the mangrove. Tall trees and meandering salt waters with a conference point as a market. The effective demarcation of the stage with the use of light and distinctive metaphors especially the scene of Nne's mother's death will hold the audience spell bound.

African tradition is aloud with the use of numerous sound bites from birds to domestic animals, therefore such sounds will add theatrical value to the production therefore no aspect of the theatre should suffer for the successful production of this play from dirges to language.

Dramatis Personae

Nne: Owubokiri's wife and mother of Belema and Nemi, a skillful dancer.

Belema: Nne's daughter.

Nemi: Nne's Son.

Owubokiri: Nne's husband and father of Belema and Nemi.

Iwo: Owubokiri's childhood friend and community leader.

Ibiene: Iwo's wife and woman leader.

Bipiamina: Ward women leader and director of mobilization.

Okwenbipi: Owubokiri's younger sister.

Aspirant: Male Councillorship aspirant in his mid-thirties.

Community Leader

Chief Ngowari

Teenage Boy

Elderly Man

Deinma: Ibiene's supporter

Amba: Nne's Mother

Ilaye: Nne's father

Mourner 1

Mourner 2

Women Group

Bodyguards

Dancers and Drummers

Premiere Cast and Crew

The play was first performed at the Arts Theatre, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State on 14 and 15 April 2011 under the title 'Bipiamina' with the following cast and crew.

Nne	Nimi Agada, Perekebena Lagos
Belema	Queeneth Ebiotu Charles Ogumima Azibaonin
Okwenbipi	Yoku Tina Tarila
Owubokiri	Timi Philip Kind Dickson
Nemi	Rufus Gift Lawrence
Aspirant	Tombri Amananaowei
Community Leader	Kaka Benson
Iwo	Briggs Osaki Damieibi
Ngowari	Rufus Gift Lawrence
Ibiene	Mercy Uguta
Bipiamina	Timi Romeo
Deinma	Princess Akpoboere Debekeme
Elderly Man	Edike Franklin
Mourner 1	Sharon Alozie
Mourner II	Princes Debekeme
Teenage Boy	Favour Teke
Women Group	Blessed Favour Erewari Precious Idibiye Favour Teke
Bipiamina Bodyguard	Matthew Kuroseidei
Aspirant's Guards	Briggs Tamunosaki Azibolanari Ogbari
Call Girls	Perekebena Lagos

Dancers

Favour Teke
Sarah Takogo
Ogumima Azibaonin
Nimi Agada
Mercy Mode
Aye Daniel
Bassey Victoria
Ikisa
Timipre Etete
Brother Uyevie
Meelubari Laka
Ernest Jackson

Drummers

CREW

Director
Stage Manager
Lighting Man
Set Design/Construction

Victor Oroyi
Atake Efedue
Williams Selekiowe
Meelubari Laka
Waya Daniel

Costume/Make-up
Props
Publicity
Choreography
Box Office

Magdalene Siemuri
Sharon Alozie
Princess Debekeme
Brother Uyevie
Thelma Friday

MOVEMENT ONE

Early morning, as the cock crows, the birds sing their song. The stage reveals a compound that suggests a poor living condition littered with dirt, unwashed pots and plates, pieces of cloth and broken pieces of plates. There are three huts, Belema walks out from the centre hut, sits on a bench by the wall, yawning. She is about 15 years old. She searches around to find someone; her mother suddenly appears from another hut on stage left.

Nne: Belema, you are awake already?

Belema: Mama, good morning... [**Yawning and stretching out her body**] Where were you this early morning?

Nne: My daughter. [**She examines Belema from the head**] I hope you slept well. I went to see your aunty.

Belema: For what?

Nne: For her to assist me with two bags of periwinkle that I can go to the market with. My customer from the neighbouring village refused to supply me because I still owe her some money.

Belema: [**Still yawning and not bothered about what her mother is saying. She looks straight into her mother's eyes**] Mama, my stomach produced so much noise all through the night. It was an unusual noise like thunder storms, last night's experience was

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terrible...

Nne: Why didn't you call me or your father?

Belema: The hut was covered with darkness; when I opened my eyes, I couldn't see anybody. I think the lamp ran out of kerosene.

Nne: I noticed that when the sun's rays poured through the tiny hole on the window. It was my fault; I didn't add more kerosene before going to bed. [**She looks around.**] Where is your brother and father?

Belema: Nemi is still sleeping as usual and I have not seen Papa this morning.

Nne: Get some water to wash your face and clean the compound.

Belema: Mama, I told you my stomach is singing an unfamiliar song this morning. I am hungry. You remember, we ate only once yesterday. Where is the strength to handle the broom and wash plates?

Nne: My daughter, all right wash the plates while I sweep the compound...

Nemi: [**Comes from same hut as Belema**] Mama, good morning. [**He walks away without looking at his mother.**]

Nne: Lazy boy, good morning. Young men of your age in the compound are already out trying to find ways to assist their parents. No... it is not my son... [**Hisses**] Now get the broom and sweep the compound.

- Nemi:** [Hisses] No... I can't!
- Nne:** When did you learn to bark at me...?
- Nemi:** Since... you failed in your responsibilities...
- Belema:** Ah... why do you blame her...?
- Nne:** [Cuts in] No... allow him finish... How?
- Nemi:** Why ask how? You compare me with others
but you cannot do those things parents of those boys
you compare me with do...
- Nne:** Those parents do things like what...?
- Nemi:** Stand there and ask me...
- Belema:** But... Nemi... she provides food for us even
when father fails to meet his legitimate obligation...
must she shoulder all the responsibilities?
- Nemi:** Then why describe me as a 'lazy boy' this early
morning...? And don't bring father into this...
- Nne:** Like your father, you toil the path of slumber.
The hand that fails to till the soil, doesn't eat of its
fruits.
- Nemi:** But... You cannot afford new uniforms and
books for us to attend the community school. I used
the uniform since JS 1; I can't continue using it, it's
worn out. [Goes into the hut]
- Nne:** Belema, what's wrong with your brother this
morning?
- Nemi:** [Comes out with the uniform and shows it to
his mother] What can you do about this? In fact, what
are you doing to help my father?

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Belema: Ah? Nemi, it hasn't come to that... why are you pointing fingers at her? Is she supposed to be the breadwinner of the family? She is only here to provide support and especially, to take care of us and I think she is trying her best according to her ability.

Nemi: And is she taking care of us by over protecting us...? I want to go to fish, 'No, don't go, go to school and learn how to read and write' but no uniform, no books and pencil. Yesterday, we only ate once and she is calling me a lazy boy.

Belema: Why are you talking like that? She is a good mother that wants the best for her children but may lack the means... Yet, she uses the little proceeds from her periwinkle trade to provide food and sometimes gets books for us. You really need to ask papa some questions too...

Nne: No, leave him... let him say what he has cooked up in his heart.

Nemi: Yes, I will say them. If I don't get my school fees and a new school uniform by next week... I am going...

Nne: Not... 'I am going'... Come and fight me now while you allow your drunkard father patrol the community chasing shadows of a better tomorrow without working or planning for one.

Okwenbipi: [Comes out from same hut as Nne on stage left] Mama Belema, I am out for the market, my son helped me carry the goods earlier. So let's meet at

the market place.

Belema: Good morning... Mama Iyo...

Okwenbipi: Good morning... my daughter. [**Turns to Mama Nne**] Let me see what I can do to help but you must refund my money.

Nne: Thank you, my sister. Yes, I will not disappoint you.

Okwenbipi: The last time, it took you five days to refund the money after selling the basket of fish.

Nne: Ah... Mama Iyo, don't wash my dirty clothes in the public [**Okwenbipi gives her a wave of hand as she turns to leave. Nne turns to Nemi**] This, your brother's son wants to kill me. [**Okwenbipi looks at him and leaves without a word.**]

Nemi: Why won't I kill you?

Belema: Why will you kill her? Is she solely responsible for our upkeep? She deserves some commendations. There are men in this community that use fishing and farming to provide for their homes, but our father will never indulge in any productive activities but always waiting for compensation from oil spillage in the community. Or he waits when the oil company pays them royalty which they never struggle for... which we don't know when it comes.

Nemi: This girl, close your mouth before I use needle to sew it. In this age, you expect my father to carry net to fish or carry hoe to the farm? Come let me

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examine your head... I am sure you are mad.

Belema: I am mad...! [**Walks away from him**] We will continuously remain at home until the veil covering your eyes and those of papa falls off. Do you think somebody will work for you and you reap what you didn't sow?

Nemi: [**Points at his mother**] Tell your daughter...

Nne: Nemi, you should be ashamed of yourself. Listen to the words from your younger sister... [**Someone stands afar listening to them**] Have you heard that a woman pays the bride price of a man in our land? It is the primary responsibility of a responsible man to protect and provide for his family. Your father is a failure, don't follow after his footsteps.

Owubokiri: Woman... Men differ, I am different! [**Enters aggressively, overpowered by the influence of alcohol**] You called me a failure and irresponsible man this early morning, before my children...?

Nne: [**Cuts in**] If not... who are you? A man that cannot feed his family but leaves home early for a drinking spree... you who find pleasure in the content of the bottle. You have turned yourself to a laughing stock in this community. Who is that man that uses alcohol to clean his mouth...?

Nne & Belema: Men differ, I am different... a.k.a Owubo... Kiri.

Nne: [**Owubokiri tries to hit her and she holds his hand due to his state**] Those days are over. Your strength should be translated into working on the

farm or fishing. Pull yourself out of your past mistakes.

Nemi: Mama, leave him, you'll kill him!

Nne: [**Ignores Nemi, faces her husband**] Look at the outcome of your irresponsible attitude... Nemi, now points fingers at the woman that bore him because his father is never with the family to carry out his obligations as the man of the house.

Owubokiri: You who are around with the family... What have you done?

Nne: Shameless man... I should be the breadwinner now... bear my father's name... since I am the man marrying you...

Belema: Mama... remember today is a market day... leave them, let's go to the market.

Nne: No... Belema... your father is setting a bad example for your brother... And he is learning very fast. He keeps late nights. He disappears and reappears at will. Your father is quiet over it... As a father... [**Turns to her husband**] you should set a good example for your son...

Owubokiri: [**Cuts in**] Did you call him my son?

Nne: [**Reflective mood**] Okay... because your mother did not complete the payment of my bride price... So, you have intentions... Your sudden change of attitude. The labours... maltreatment... You have fooled me.

Owubokiri: 'You have fooled me...' [**Tries to mimic her.**]

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Nne: That's why when the boy does something wrong, you can't correct him... you want to attack me.
[**She tries to attack Owubokiri.**]

Nemi: Mama... Don't kill him... [**Tries to hold the mother.**]

Nne: [**Turns to Nemi and holds him**] Keep quiet, I am talking... [**She leaves him.**] 'Don't kill who...' but you threaten to kill me. He is supposed to be the breadwinner but the reverse is the case in this house. Watch other homes in this Iwoama? Don't learn fast... He is denying you of your paternal origin.... Did you hear him?

Nemi: You are responsible...

Nne: Because he didn't pay my bride price and I opened my thighs for him...

Nemi: But...

Nne: Shut up! You must learn from industrious men who set good examples and not from an unproductive man like your father. [**Points to Owubokiri and takes a deep breath**] Belema, try and manage whatever you see. Let me go to the market; I pray to get something from your father's sister.

Belema: All right, ma... you'll find something to sell.

Nne: Thank you my daughter [**As she tries to leave.**]

Owubokiri: Mama Belema, as you rush out, I hope my meal is served?

Nne: Did you give me money before you left the house? Oh... the father of my children, forgive me, I forgot... [**Turns back angrily and gives him her breasts**] Yes, cut my breasts as your breakfast... [**She sighs**] Please, let me go before you curse my day with your alcohol-filled mouth. Did you pay my bride price... But you ask for food from me...? You even deny my children. You're not ashamed!

Owubokiri: Ashamed of what...?

Nne: Nothing... continue to roam the village path like a helpless he-goat looking for a she-goat... what example do you show your son? Despite the several cuts on a plantain stem, it grows and bears fruits continually except it is uprooted...

Owubokiri: [**Tries to hit her again, she runs away**] So this woman will not stop this habit of harassing me before my children. Men differ, I am different!

Belema: But, papa, do you remember that you have not given us our school fees?

Owubokiri: So, your mother has taught you how to disrespect me, too?

Nemi: Papa don't mind her... she is living in the past! She said you should start farming or fishing. [**Laughing as he leaves.**]

Owubokiri: Me... your father to go to the farm or carry net for fishing...

Belema: What's wrong with that...? At least you can assist mother... but I don't mean to insult you. Papa, I

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am sorry.

Owubokiri: Keep your sorry to yourself. Go get me dry garri, let me enjoy my drink.

[Light fades as she enters their hut.]

MOVEMENT TWO

At the village market, before noon, women are seen attending to their customers. Nne walks to Okwenbipi in her corner.

Okwenbipi: The sun is fast going down the sky; prospective customers may have finished purchasing all the items they need and you are just coming? What do you expect to sell at this time?

Nne: Your brother... he came immediately you left the compound. He left the bed very early as usual but came suddenly with his mouth oozing of alcohol...

Okwenbipi: [Cuts in] So what?

Nne: We had a quarrel generated by your brother's son.

Okwenbipi: Your first son?

Nne: Yes, Sese... you talk as if you don't know. How many sons do we have?

Okwenbipi: And if I don't know him... you don't know how to trim his little wings from now? And you allowed him set a quarrel between you and your husband this morning, forgetting your duties?

Nne: When his father is the chief drummer who beats the drum that makes him dance like a masquerade during our festivals, what else do you expect?

Okwenbipi: And you allowed him dance while you watch with admiration as a spectator in the dancing arena.

Nne: What have I not done...? I came to you this morning to complain; you said nothing. But remember he is your brother's son. Your brother, even denied his son but Nemi like his father lacks discretion, only talks but doesn't understand his own words.

Okwenbipi: How many bags of periwinkle do you want?

Nne: But our earlier discussion, what do you advice I do, Sese?

Okwenbipi: This is the case of one being beaten by her slave... Like the story of a woman who served her husband soup without pepper and taste of onion for fear of her hand not being hot and her eyes not running with tears as a result of the onion that she may cut in the kitchen... In the market, we exchange goods and services in monetary values and... [**Nne looks at Okwenbipi and there is a momentary silence.**]

Nne: [**She bends down to pack the bags of periwinkle**] Why do you hate your brother?

Okwenbipi: Please, we're in a market place...

Nne: Ok... As much that can pay my children's fees and at least put food on the table for the family.

Okwenbipi: You now pay their fees? What happened to my brother's oil business?

Nne: You talk as if...

Okwenbipi: No... don't confirm the rumours I hear around. Our mother's burial helped to ruin him?

Nne: Of course, it was after the burial... Not just that... I couldn't believe that after the burial, the business flopped as all his costumers flew away. **[Feels pity]** This resulted in idleness which led to his state of excessive drinking of alcohol. These twin devils ate up the remaining part of his savings in the business.

Okwenbipi: How did those twins creep into his life? **[Someone afar eavesdropping, pretending to buy something from another corner]**

Nne: Are you asking me... Sese, I am surprised, anyway, this is a place for the exchange of goods, and not to exchange my family matters.

Okwenbipi: **[Reluctantly]** These are four bags of periwinkle, make sure you bring my money before the hens return to roost.

Nne: Sese, thank you... **[She leaves Okwenbipi's corner and tries to find a place to sell her goods. She carries two bags to a spot up stage left. Goes back to carry the remaining two bags and returns when Bipiamina moved to her. Bipiamina stops her]** I have an already-made-customer... thank God. How many bags do you want...? It is just N200 per bags...!

Bipiamina: Nne... daughter of Amba. The great waist twister!

Nne: Who are you... that calls me with so much familiarity? Like the sound of my mother's voice.

Bipiamina: It's quite a long time. I know you would not recognize me... I used to tease you like this when you were a little child. Indeed, your memory was

still premature to capture times and events.

Nne: I know you not... but forgive my naïve mind and inability to recall those moments that you talked about. You must come from the city... judging from your well nurtured garden by a good gardener... I have never been to the city, it might be a mistaken identity.

Bipiamina: Mistaken identity...?

Nne: Yes... I have not seen this face in Oba Iwoama.

Bipiamina: [**Draws her to a quiet corner**] I am not sure and who do you think the gardener is? Ehen... you still carry your infant face and have not really changed much. What has been happening to you? Your tongue is still sweet... can you still dance as in your childhood...

Nne: Please don't mind my tongue...

Bipiamina: Don't bother, but do you still dance...?

Nne: Why do you ask?

Bipiamina: [**Tries to examine her waist.**] Your waist is still intact but ...

Nne: [**Cuts in**] ...I just collected these periwinkles to sell after a long discussion and don't intend to engage in another because the day is far spent and I must sell and make returns... [**Tries to leave and turns back**] Do you want to buy them?

Bipiamina: No...

Nne: See you next market day... [**She leaves**]

Bipiamina: [**Cuts in.**] Not so fast [**Follows Bipiamina**

from the back] I will pay for the periwinkle... I will double your price but... who is the gardener of ...?
[Nne looks at her] Never mind.

Nne: Why didn't you finish your questions... besides I tried surfing my memory to find your face but cannot locate it. Please tell me, who are you...?

Bipiamina: I decided to play by your tone... tell me because I want to know and think I should know... who is the lucky gardener?

Nne: Is that what it implies? I don't think it's important.

Bipiamina: You used the word 'gardener' first and I suppose you don't just play with words...

Nne: Ok, sorry. I started and let me end here. As I told you earlier these periwinkles are for sale. Can I go now... since you don't want to refresh my memory?

Bipiamina: **[Hands her some money]** Take the amount for the periwinkle... I hope it's twice the amount for the four bags.

Nne: Yes, thank you. I thought you were joking. How God blesses his children despite their short comings.

Bipiamina: That's true. This world is mysterious and full of surprises. No one knows what lies ahead of him or her. We only complain when things don't go our own way... **[Absent minded as Nne looks with surprise.]** Especially, as a woman, your destiny is held by the forces of greed and fulfillment by those that bore you, using you to achieve those things they never got in life. As women, we never take decisions

that affect us but we are left in the hands of those who have seen more days than us, but most times suffer for their choice.

Nne: Madam... [**Bipiamina looks at her with sheepish smile**] your words are confusing me... [**Gives her back the money but Bipiamina refuses to collect**]
Who are you?

Bipiamina: Don't mind... keep the money and also sell the goods. It will help you to pay the children's school fees...

Nne: Who told you... [**Looks at the direction of Okwenbipi**]

Bipiamina: No, she didn't but walls have ears... but the winds spread them... always remember that...

Nne: But you already paid for them...

Bipiamina: No, sell them; I have bought all I wanted before meeting you... It's been a long time I saw you... since when you were...

Nne: Then make me recall...

Bipiamina: Never bulge your mind with endless thoughts that you cannot find immediate answers to... but I will invite you for a dance rehearsal under the orange tree at Abam. I know you like dance... it was your hobby when you were growing up.

Nne: You talked so much about my growing days, yet I cannot get a flash of your memory in my head.

Bipiamina: Never mind. I will pay you well after your ceremonial performance...

Nne: I am worried as you refused to disclose your identity...

Bipiamina: There are people you remember easily at your old age because of their closeness to you while others seem non-existent yet they grew up with you before you all went your separate ways. A paradox we sometimes find difficult to explain but in your case, it's my fault...

Nne: How?

Bipiamina: No, let's not go into details but try to attend the rehearsals.

Nne: Remind me, it's been a long time, I left my mother's village to be with my mother's customer before marrying her son. [**She hisses**] I lost touch with my mother's people due to the unkind nature of my mother who never bothered about me, thinking that I was a burden to her.

Bipiamina: You see... what I said earlier... [**Nne tries to reply her**] No, don't bother. I hope to see you before sunset... but I promise you... you shall rejoin your gardener before the sun turns dark. [**General laughter**]

Nne: Already, my goods are sold out...At least by you but come to think of it, are you discouraged by the weight of the bags...?

Bipiamina: No. How can you say that... at least I can call any of these boys and pay them to carry it...

Nne: I will help carry it to the water side...

Bipiamina: No... Thanks.

Nne: How can you pay twice the amount for these periwinkle and not take it home? Did you come to the market for my sake?

Bipiamina: No, don't go philosophical... I just admire your courage to strive to pay your children's school fees and provide for them. Even if you don't want to talk about your gardener...

Nne: [Cuts in] My husband.... he is fine. Handsome... you ladies from the township think you are the only ones that have eyes for good gardeners but we do too...

Bipiamina: So... why are you here...

Nne: That's for another day but I insist, I must carry these goods to the waterside or else I wouldn't attend the dance rehearsals.

Bipiamina: If you insist...

Nne: Yes, I insist and if I want to sell more, I can collect from my sister in-law...

Bipiamina: All right, my time is far spent. Shall we go now... at least I will cook something nice for myself and give some to my neighbours.

Nne: For yourself alone... What about your gardener?

Bipiamina: Let's go and we talk on our way to the waterside but you must call some boys to help you carry the bags...

Nne: Okay, if that is what you really want. [As they leave light fades]

MOVEMENT THREE

As in Scene One, late evening that same day. Nne's husband sits in front of his compound, apparently searching for something to eat with a bottle of alcohol on a wooden table.

Owubokiri: Bele..... ma! Men differ, I am different! Where is this little like mother, like daughter looking girl? Bele....ma! **[Shouting]** Nemi! **[No answer from anywhere and he sits to take another shot. He shouts again]** Where are these children... Nemi.....! Bele....ma! **[Just then Okwenbipi returns from the market with basket on her head]**

Okwenbipi: Why shout as if you want to bring down the roofs in the compound?

Owubokiri: Men differ, I am different! Woman, when did the ant invite the elephant to a fight when there are other animals of same size with him? **[She hisses and ignores him]**

Okwenbipi: **[At her door post]** Where is the mother of your children?

Owubokiri: She is in your hut **[Takes another glass]** Eh... is that the way to greet an elder brother?

Okwenbipi: I wouldn't blame you... Please if she comes back tell her I am home. **[Looks at him with disdain as he continuously drinks the alcohol]** I wonder what is keeping her, just four bags of periwinkle.

Owubokiri: Turn me to your messenger...

Okwenbipi: Was I your messenger when you asked of your wife... It's painful we came out from same womb... it's a pity.

Owubokiri: And will you kill yourself or seize my breath? [She leaves him] Belema! [**Reflectively**] Has this woman ran away with my children? The night is far gone, even the hen is back from roaming the village to her resting place. Is it humans that forget their abode...? [**Looks around with eyes clear from drink**] I hope, they didn't run away from their home and leave me here with this bottle... she is angry with the quarrel in the morning? [**Footsteps from backstage**] Where are you coming from...? [**No reply**] No answer... Men differ, I am different... Ah... Ah... Nne should have known that by now... It was to tell the neighbourhood that we still exist and also saw the rising of sun? [**Walks towards Okwenbipi's hut and knocks**]

Okwenbipi: [**From within**] who disturbs my rest...? I cannot take a cup of drinking water to rest...

Owubokiri: Disturb your rest? Look... her family members are in danger... I don't blame her; she refuses to build a home with a man but stays in her father's house to eat fat. [**Sighs**] How can she feel the loss of two children and a wife?

Okwenbipi: Why disturb me... A man that knows how to marry but cannot feed his home? [**Goes back into**

the hut]

Owubokiri: Men differ I am different...

Okwenbipi: If you are different, that's to your wife and children. Why knock my hut?

Owubokiri: When will you regard elders... and give them the respect they deserve, no matter the condition.

Okwenbipi: When they start taking up their responsibilities and not give excuses for their failures.

Owubokiri: That's enough. Stop your lecture and let me tell you why I called. Did you see mama Belema in the market?

Okwenbipi: When did I become your messenger? Did you package her in a basket for me or when I left for the market, did you ask me to find mama Belema for you?

Owubokiri: I am not quarrelling with you and let's talk in low tones because it is getting to the hour when spirits roam the quiet paths.

Okwenbipi: You told me, she is in my hut...

Owubokiri: Did I say so... [A sudden realisation of events] You know how this thing works...

Okwenbipi: Influence of the drink...?

Owubokiri: Pardon me! [A teenage boy runs in, apparently tired, sits in a corner and finds water to drink] Yes... boy, who do you seek in my compound

when doors of the living are closing. [**Belema and Nemi appear**] Where have you been all through the day... did you join your mother in the market? [**Belema apparently confused**].

Okwenbipi: Maybe she has started the act of providing for her needs...

Owubokiri: What do you mean...? Okwenbipi [**Belema stands aloof biting her fingers and twisting her eyes**] And what is that eye wrinkling for... where is your brother? [**Ignores her and faces teenage boy**] Boy, who do you seek here, I ask again? [**Unable to talk**]

Okwenbipi: We shall see when the sun rises...!

Owubokiri: Who are you leaving this bundle of troubles for...?

Okwenbipi: You're the man of the compound, handle them... [**Goes into her hut**]

Owubokiri: Men differ, I am different... she goes to sleep... [**Turns to the young man who apparently looks tired and sleepy while Belema tries to look around to find her mother**] What's happening... Young lady, where is your brother, I ask again... which matter do I attend to first, this boy or my daughter who re-appeared without her mother or brother? [**Apparently confused and takes a shot from his drink**] Who are you looking for?

Teenage Boy: I am looking for her mother. I have

an urgent message for her. **[Owubokiri turns and look at the boy while Belema tries to go inside but scared with the looks from her father.]**

Owubokiri: Hey... where is your brother or mother!
[She is frightened] This boy seeks for your mother!

Belema: Is she not in...?

Owubokiri: No... **[Belema looks down]** What is happening... a woman goes to the market and never returns to meet her family and make food for them... a child leaves home and never finds his way to his father's house... **[A song rises from the background and he sits to take a shot while Belema goes in and comes out. She is confused and begins to cry.]**

Belema: Papa... what do we do...?

Owubokiri: Nothing... they're safe... **[Looks aside.]**

Belema: You got angry... when I said you should start fishing or farming... it will help the family... we will not be scattered like this...

Owubokiri: You were not at home all evening... didn't you hear any rumour...?

Belema: No... papa... You will not listen to what I am saying...

Owubokiri: **[He looks at Belema]** And where were you?

Belema: My friend's place... she said I should help plait her hair...

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Owubokiri: I hope they gave you food for today...

Belema: Papa... [**The song rises again and the light fades**]

MOVEMENT FOUR

Morning of the following day, leaders, men and women gather at the community square of Abam Ama, a neighboring village to Oba Iwoama. There are drum beats while others dance to the tunes and another section expresses surprise at the event. Two chiefs are in a serious deliberation. As the community leader calls the ceremony to order. A young man runs in to whisper into the ears of the community leader.

Community Leader: You that own my being, I greet you.

Crowd: We greet you! [**Whispering among the crowd, unsure of the purpose of the event**]

Community Leader: Owners of my being, I welcome you once again. Despite the short notice, you gathered to witness another landmark event... Our community is noted for peace and brotherliness within this kingdom... I must admonish us to keep this spirit alive. Because, it is with the help of the burning wood that a good pot of soup is made. [**A group of young men accompanied by uniformed group of women singing political songs enters the arena. Brief dance session and exchange of pleasantries, arrangement of seats for guests is being made and there are agitations.**] You, that own my being, I greet you, once again...!

Crowd: We greet you!

Community Leader: The atmosphere is friendly and our guests are here... We shall go straight to business.

[Turns to the guests] You are welcome. Before any other presentation... we shall invite our dancers to entertain our guests. **[A dance group comes out to entertain the gathering which comprises Nne and five other women who expose most of their bodily features.]** Thank you for that artistic and delightful dance presentation. I greet... Owners of my being.. I now invite our councillor to tell us why he invited us.

Aspirant: You that own my being, I...

Ngowari: [Cuts in] Hold your greetings. **[Goes round to examine him and his entourage as he turns to face the community leader]** Who is he... to address our people again?

Community leader: **[The people murmur among themselves and there are quarrels between factions as Bipiamina tries to oppose Chief Ngowari over his comments but is stopped by the community leader]** Please, my people, let's not brew trouble but listen to what he wants to say...

Iwo: A boy whose father couldn't repair his broken canoe until he died of poverty but just two years as our councilor, he drives big, big cars, and his father couldn't afford in the city. He should be ashamed that he could not persuade government to construct a bridge to his community. After seeking our votes, he shut his doors against our youths and women each time they approached him for help. **[Turns to Bipiamina]** And you danced beside him as his wife, shortchanging your fellow women.

Ngowari: Iwo, leave her; we know how to treat such people **[Turns to the aspirant]** Why did you come

again... You came to deceive us? [**Armed men in his entourage, try to threaten the people.**] You can only drink the water your cup can fetch in the river because you cannot drink all the water in the river...

Iwo: Ehen, Chief... [**Walks to the community leader**] How much did they pay you? [**Community leader tries to talk**] No... why did you allow yourself to be used by your second son's age group...? I marvelled at the zeal of the town-crier when he hit the gong across the community defying the rain. Ah...this is it ehen...?

Community leader: Please... Please... My people, let's be calm a little while... [**Shouts of 'No' fill the arena. Takes Chief Ngo, Iwo and the aspirant aside for a while.**] You that own my being... I greet you...

Crowd: We greet...

Community leader: All right, I can understand your misgivings at the sight of this young man but the emissaries he sent to me assured me of his readiness to fulfill his promises. He will turn a new leaf. But I seek your forgiveness for not seeking your consent before accepting his invitation. [**Whispers into the ears of Chief Ngowari and Iwo**]. Please, let's hear him speak. [**Turns to the Aspirant**] But... you must keep your promises. My people are peace-loving, but promises cannot develop us... "I will do..." or "I will provide..." phrases don't matter. However, as the saying goes, "If you beat the child with the right hand, you accept him or her with the left". You're our son.

Aspirant: [**Guarded by armed men**] You that own my being, I greet you!

Crowd: [Responses from uniformed women as community members remain reluctant] We greet you...

Aspirant: The community leader, chiefs, elders and youth leaders... Truly, I feel your passion but we as a people should grow pass sentiments and wishful thinking. Thank you for giving me your votes two years ago when I sought for your mandate to represent you in the council, although since the election, I didn't return to show appreciation. **[Crowd responds harshly]** However, this administration has provided a lot of infrastructure and met the basic needs of our people. We, as councilors only formulated the laws that bring development and prosperity...

Ibiene: **[Cuts in]** Where is the prosperity in our land....? You formulated laws to develop your late father's house... Women, can you see? He even forgets to recognise us in his introduction. **[Bipiamina tries to challenge her but is held back by the uniformed women]** You come to fight but remember, we have your history.... The person that wants to eat all the basket of fish will also eat the rotten ones. **[Turns to aspirant]** Where are the results of your formulated laws? **[Turns to Bipiamina]** See how you're dressed? Sacred things are not for public viewing... Bipiamina... see the women you coached to dance for your councilor... they are naked. Why do you bring shame to the women folk because of peanuts... perishable things? Forgetting your rightful place in the home... you use

married women who lack discretion for your selfish ends.

Bipiamina: H.D.C...!

Uniformed Women: Progress...!

Bipiamina: H... D... C...!

Uniformed Women: Developing the people...!

Bipiamina: [**Charges back**] Woman, hold your tongue...

Deinma: [**Cuts in**] Hold your tongue...! [**Hisses**] when women are given opportunity, they only oppress their fellow women and turn back to cry at political meetings... 'Women liberation'! You organise various workshops and seminars for women empowerment whereas, they empower themselves leaving the women in the villages in whose name they signed the monies. People like you... are responsible for the present status of women. How much did he give to you and how much did you give these women around you or those dancers you kidnapped from their husbands? [**Bipamina looks more agitated and provoked but persuaded by another woman to be calm. However, turns to face the aspirant.**] Did she tell you how she distributed the money during the last elections...? She gave women N250.00...

Aspirant: [**Intends to ignore woman's speech**] Woman, please hear me out...

Deinma: [**Cuts in**] No... we can't hear you, except you hear us too. I am reliably informed that the reminder letter we sent to you is still in her custody, but today you are here to curry our votes for another

term...

Community leader: Women... Women of our great community, let's be calm to hear our son.... [**Relative quietness.**] You, that own my being, I greet you...

Crowd: We greet you...

Community leader: Indeed peace is an important ingredient that guarantees security and development...

Ibiene: [**Cuts in**] ...peace is not the absence of war...!

Community leader: Yes... and I feel your crave for development and progress in our community but it cannot be achieved through rancour and backstabbing one another. Can we hear our visitor? Please continue.

Aspirant: Mothers of our land, be not offended but give me your ears... Please, let's forget the past as the future of democracy has great things in stock for us...

Ibiene: [**Cuts in**] ... hear him, he said we should forget the past... and listen to fresh promises. [**Turns to the aspirant**] Where are the development funds you have received? Okay... it is meant for your father's house.

Community leader: Iwo, please talk to your wife...

Iwo: What are you saying... is she not free to air her views...? We should stop listening to politicians.... they should also listen to us. After today, we will not see him again and even if we make contributions, it wouldn't make any difference, therefore, let anyone that wants to talk... talk... After all, you said it's a town hall meeting...

Bipiamina: [Cuts in as she points to Ibiene] You're not the only woman here... [The other uniformed women join her; there is another fracas in the arena between the women. The men try to calm them.]

Ibiene: All right. Let's do it, woman to woman. Aren't you ashamed that majority of the people here are women? Those that give the greatest support to politicians are women and youths. Women sing their praises in the open; the youth do the undercover jobs... See how the dancers exposed their sensitive bodily features while the men are well covered... Yet, we are the most deprived, neglected and short-changed, because as women leaders we think only of ourselves... [The aspirants hold Bipiamina while the community leader holds Ibiene.]

Aspirant: We cannot make progress by shouting at one another in this critical moment of our history. I have decided decisively to fulfill my unfulfilled promises to this community three months into my swearing-in as your councilor. [Some clap, while some mock him.]

Deinma: Exactly the same words... during the last campaign. You promised market stalls, health centres to reduce mortality rate, access to capital for business in three months...! [Looks at him with a faded smile.] You have skipped one question... before the next three months come, what did you do with the development fund for the past three years?

Aspirant: This time, it is different, I have noticed all the short-comings especially those around me...

[Beckons on his boys, whispers into their ears]
Indeed, new strategy has been adopted as a way to progress and development in our communities, especially the ward I represent. We shall not be reminded of our promises... again. Women Oye! Women Oye! [Responses more from uniform women 'Oye'] Eh... I shall support a woman to become the next chairman of our local government since it will be the turn of this community to produce the chairmanship candidate and the person is amongst us. [The uniform women jubilate around the arena].

Bipiamina: [She dances round the arena]
Women...Oye...! Can we do it...?

Uniformed Women: Yes, we can...! [The boys return with bags of rice, groundnut oil, bags of salt and maggi cubes.]

Bipiamina: H.D.C.!

Uniformed Women: Progress...!

Bipiamina: Hand D and C...!

Uniformed Women: Developing the people...!

Aspirant: My party the Hope Democratic Congress is adopting new campaign strategies in order to correct some anomalies... [Bipiamina goes to get the items]
Mina, if you don't mind, let me take charge... [Looks at the people] I shall be in charge of the equitable distribution of these items, today. [Hands over the items to the community leader.]

Community leader: We thank you for these gifts...

Ibiene: [Interrupts the speech of the

community leader] Ah... another deceit, this time you have brought us rice, salt and oil, you mean we are in an orphanage home, it is freewill donation to the home... Na wetin we want?

Deinma: [A section of the women chorus "No ooo"]
I hope these politicians are not exchanging our fortunes with theirs? Are we the less-privileged... that we cannot work to buy salt or pepper to prepare pepper soup for our households? [She shouts at another section of women] Oba eremine... Oye!

Women: Oye...!

Deinma: We need health centres... [Other women shout "Yes!"] We need schools... We need access roads... as we see in other places... Our community is 30 years backward from contemporary cities like Port Harcourt. Please, Mr. Councilor Aspirant, we don't need your rice, salt, pepper or maggi... even if this is Christmas season...

Ngowari: Women please, take it easy it... We feel your pain.

Ibiene: [She ignores, Chief Ngowari] My sisters... please remind them... But... we shall give this councilor a serious fight for votes in this community... he couldn't tell us what he did with our development fund...

Deinma: Maybe... to pay hotel bills... buy the latest model of cars... buy houses around the globe... build hotels on every street in the state capital...

Aspirant: No... [His supporters join him] No...!

Ibiene: That's not the answer but...

[**Restrains herself**] Women, are we ready... we shall mobilize the youths and women groups in this ward against you in the forth coming election... You denied us our development votes... we shall...

Bipiamina: [**Cuts in**] You can't do nothing...

Deinma: Women bring out the posters... [**The women bring out posters from their bags.**]

Aspirant: Is this a conspiracy? [**Looks at community leader and Bipiamina.**]

Community Leader: My son... I am not aware of this... these women have outsmarted us... [**Bipiamina runs to him**] No... don't show me that face... I am not your age grade... they are your fellow women.

Deinma: Let words go out from this place, that our candidate will not relocate her official residence to a hotel... We know her... well educated, after her retirement from public service, she has been with us in this community and involved in various voluntary services. She is our choice... let's give her our support... [**She shouts same party's slogan**] What we ask... and demand, create opportunities for our youths, they shall buy bags of rice for their parents and not five persons to one bag... formulate laws to check oil exploration and exploitation and our husbands shall see the reason to farm and fish to sustain their families. That is what a vote for Ibiene stands for... Great people of Ward 7, I greet you...!

Aspirant: Tell me something... these women are well-prepared. Is this part of their plan for the town hall meeting...?

Community Leader: Iwo... call your wife to order!

Iwo: What for?

Community Leader: She is causing confusion.

Iwo: She too... can vote and be voted for...!

Ibiene: **[Mobilises some women around]**
let's leave this gathering... We are not babies... We can farm or fish to meet our daily needs but... in this 21st Century, how can our children die of cholera? Why should we deny our children of basic education... we live in darkness.... We are a people that know what we want... Mr. Councilor Aspirant! **[They storm out... drags a woman.]** We shall deny you our votes too...

Aspirant: Please, our mothers...

Bipiamina: **[Cuts in]** Women... Oye... **[Women with uniform respond]** Yes, let them go... they'll come begging... She will fail, she doesn't have political muscle. Please finish your speech...

Ibiene: **[Meets Owubokiri as he staggers into the arena]** You came late... Why wouldn't your wife misbehave in this community... You now present sacred items for the community viewing... **[Goes to drag her husband]** Papa Soso, come and hold your friend before he causes another trouble... **[She leaves with her husband to meet Owubokiri as they take him home. Aspirant continues his speech.]**

Aspirant: Please, this is but only a token... Good people of Oba Ama, I thank you... but, my second coming shall witness a change of fortune... a new lease of life... hope and development. The Health

Centre must be built and your children will have classrooms to learn... [**Uniformed women dance around him**] A woman cannot have the time to go through the heat of politics especially at her age... She has a husband and children... we need young people.

Bipiamina: Women... Oye...!

Uniformed Women: Oye!

Aspirant: I'll ensure that women are given equal political space in the forth coming elections for participation and to partake in the decision-making process... Yes, I will open my doors to all. Thank you for your attention. [**Clapping and dancing.**]

Community Leader: Thank you for your beautiful dance steps. You that own my being, I greet...

Crowd: We greet you...

Community Leader: My people, thank you for your understanding and patience... despite all that happened, some of you showed great understanding and displayed maturity in your judgment. We thank the aspirant for remembering our community... Please, I must advice; fulfill your promises in the next six months despite the political turbulence [**Turns to the other chiefs, who respond to his comment with a nod of their heads**] Therefore, before we go... let's invite our dance group to entertain us before we leave. These dancers rehearsed all night due to the urgency of the ceremony... [**As the dance group comes out to dance, Nne is missing among them.**]
Light fades.]

MOVEMENT FIVE

In the afternoon, Owubokiri's front yard, seated with his friend Iwo while Belema stands aloof.

Iwo: Do you take the words of my wife seriously...?

Owubokiri: Kalipa, you're my friend... Forget the words of your wife and tell me in your own words exactly what happened in the community square.

Iwo: It's that same councilor, who represented us in the council; he came to curry our votes for another tenure... while we had a town hall meeting...

Owubokiri: So... why did you wife say, I now present sacred things for community viewing?

Iwo: I did not hear her... it was only a dance presentation by some women. Maybe your wife is among them... Are you not aware of the town hall meeting?

Owubokiri: At least the effect of the alcohol has reduced... I can see clearly... I can hear well... Why drag me home? **[A brief silence.]** You didn't tell me, a town hall meeting would be holding... and we were together yesterday.

Iwo: I got the message as soon as we departed yesterday. A call, inviting us for a town hall meeting with our neighbours, you know we belong to same ward... not knowing it was for a campaign...

Owubokiri: **[Cuts in]** So you honoured the invitation without me. Kalipa! Men differ I am different!

Iwo: But... the town crier is expected to pass through all routes. His zeal was unusual... and he didn't pass this way... **[Looks at Belema]** Belema didn't you hear the town crier? Why didn't you inform your father?

Belema: No... we were all at home. **[She leaves them and enters the hut.]**

Owubokiri: Yes... but engrossed with the search of my wife and son. It was during the search for them that I found out that there was a gathering in the other community square. We slept with a stranger, who was too weak to talk but after a deep sleep, he told us... he came from my wife's village, George Ama. He told us that my mother in-law was at the point of death...

Iwo: And no news of your wife's whereabouts...

Owubokiri: Ah! Even my friend tries to hide what he knows about my wife from me...

Iwo: What do you mean?

Owubokiri: Bele... ma!

Iwo: I am talking to you... leave the poor lady... she is worried over her missing mother and brother!

Owubokiri: Kalipa! You still pretend and want to hide the truth from me... I am drunk... and can't reason, my eyes are blind...

Iwo: Do not offend me...

Owubokiri: **[Mimicking Iwo]** 'Don't offend me'. Offend... for what... that as a friend, you can't tell me the truth no matter how hard... Maybe I should take a shot... **[Takes a shot]** I see why you offer me drink

without asking... to make me look senseless...

Iwo: I am leaving...

Owubokiri: Or are you shy to bear a bad tale? **[He looks around and shout again.]** Bele.... Ma...!

Iwo: **[Tries to leave]** But... you should understand...

Owubokiri: Understand what... that my wife was among the women who danced naked making a public presentation of sacred things meant for my eyes... **[Teasing him]** You even saw them... How did you find the buttocks? **[Iwo dumbfounded, watching with amazement]** He cannot talk... Men differ I am different... You can't use your walking stick to chase her away from the dance arena. You enjoyed the sight and want to pretend that you didn't see anything...

Belema: **[She runs out of the hut panicking]** Papa... I am here!

Owubokiri: Is the dancing parade over?

Belema: Papa, I was not there, so how will I know?

Owubokiri: Go and check...

Belema: But... I am hungry.

Owubokiri: That's the reason, I am asking you to go and check... You slept without seeing your mother. You should be worried for your mother and not food. Already we have clues where she is... go and find her. You are here crying for food. Maybe **[makes a mockery and looks at Iwo]** the two-day market system of your mother will give us good food.

Iwo: You are taking this issue in a different light... Why

not give her money to prepare food?

Owubokiri: You want to tell my daughter that I don't have money to feed her...?

Iwo: No. **[Pretending to forget the issue and takes a shot]** ...but do you really mean what you said; I should have used my walking stick to chase your wife in the full public glare? How can I? Why should I hit another man's wife or stop her from dancing... after the all night rehearsal as I was told by my wife?

Owubokiri: Kalipa, you now agree, you saw her...

Iwo: But... Kalipa, I didn't say so...

Owubokiri: No, don't deny it... **[Nods his head in a sober mood]** All night rehearsals! **[Shakes his head and takes a shot]** My wife... That lady.... **[Turns to Iwo]** who is she? Kalipa... do you know her? **[Iwo keeps quiet, only signals with his mouth]** ...took my wife for all night rehearsals without informing me in the name of dancing for a campaign rally? Ok... I am a drunkard!

Iwo: Don't talk like that... **[Nne enters from stage right, panting with her dance costume but a wrapper tied around her...]** Ah! She is here... where are you coming from? Where is your son?

Owubokiri: Kalipa! Thank you... you now mock my family... Nne... welcome **[Visibly angry]** Have you finished swinging your buttocks like a pendulum from left to right for the admiration of my friend and others at the playground... **[Shouts out]** Belema...! Belema, come with the little boy... that brought the message... **[Okwenbipi comes out from her hut.]**

Okwenbipi: Why are you shouting... To disturb the neighbourhood...

Nne: Father of my children.... [**She knees down**] Please, I am sorry.

Owubokiri: She is making me shout... your wife...

Okwenbipi: Whose wife...? Did I pay her bride price...? Or was I there when you paid her bride price? [**Walks towards Nne**] Ah... thank God you are back... Please, I am waiting for my money... I will be in my hut... please... [**She walks toward her hut**] Thank God... my money...

Nne: Please, I will bring the money... [**Knees again to beg her husband**] Father of my children... please I am sorry...

Owubokiri: I didn't say anything... Did I punish you... No... [**Belema comes out with the boy**] He paddled against the storm to tell you that your mother is sick... So, go with him and provide immediate medical attention for your mother who may be at the point of death...

Nne: [**She screams and runs towards the boy**] My mother... what happened to her?

Iwo: Kalipa! Take things easy... Allow her to rest and change her clothes before crossing the river... She just came back...

Owubokiri: When the boy told us the mother was seriously sick yesterday... She could not move her body. Do you know what may have happened? Let me tell her now.

Iwo: Kalipa, our people say 'you don't look at how sharp

the axe is to break the firewood; you may cut yourself in the process too...

Owubokiri: **[Ignores Iwo]** Also... your son didn't sleep at home just like you... I was thinking, he provided the drum beats for your dance steps. But I see... he is not with you...

Nne: **[Leaves the boy to meet Belema]** Where did he tell you, he was going...?

Belema: He didn't tell me anything...

Nne: I know he is stubborn...

Belema: He left the house immediately you went to the market yesterday...

Owubokiri: You see what negligence has caused....

Iwo: But... Kalipa...! Kalipa... providing care for children is not the sole responsibility of a woman.

Owubokiri: Stand here and talk because your wife is with you, she goes to the market and returns... but mine goes to the market and dances all night. Mock me!

Iwo: Please, let's think of a way forward... your mother-in-law's health and missing son...

Owubokiri: Kalipa! Thank you.

Nne: Please pardon me.

Belema: Father! Be accommodating for once... trouble lies ahead of us and we should be grateful that Mama's case has been handled...

Nne: **[Cuts in and stands up]** Belema... what do you mean?

Belema: Disregard the words of my tongue but convince father for his forgiveness and let's think of my only brother and my grand mother's health. Nobody knows her true state of health. By now... you should have known how to resolve your differences during emergencies.

Owubokiri: Shut up! **[Turns to Belema]** You see the effect of your lack of guidance and... Talking to elders rudely... Belema is losing her proper conduct as a girl; she is supposed to show great respect as our tradition demands... You want to take after your mother...

Iwo: Why do you exempt yourself from the upbringing of your children? Parents must be together to see the development of the children and not leave it for one party... Kalipa, the child is right, you two should find a common ground and think of ways of tackling the issues. She should go and see to her mother's health while we look around for your son...

Nne: Leave him alone, let him empty his mouth...

Owubokiri: You still have mouth to talk... **[Wonders around, unsure of what to do]** May God help you that I find my son...

Nne: You should be blamed... Wake up from your slumber and live up to your responsibilities...

Iwo: Woman... shut up!

Owubokiri: Do not shut her up... let her finish what she has in mind...

Iwo: Kalipa... please, there is no time for that... **[Turns to Nne]** Go and see how you can take care of your sick

mother... Hurry, before the tide goes down and you cannot find a canoe to cross.

Nne: I am sorry, Papa Soso, thank you for your understanding...

Iwo: Don't thank me... You women sometimes behave like children. You went to the market... never returned without telling your husband or even sending a message across to your family. For the sake of women liberation and gender equality.

Nne: It will never happen again... I can't imagine what Bipiamina did to convince me to follow her.

Iwo: And you followed her like an helpless she-goat to be slaughtered...

Nne: Let me go in and change my clothes... Father of my children, can I go now?

Owubokiri: No... stay here or let's go out for a drinking spree as an extension of your campaign dancing performance... **[Nne and Belema enter into their huts]** Pray that I find my son... **[Mimics her]** 'Father of my children, can I go now?'

Okwenbipi: **[Comes out of her hut]** Mama Belema, I hope you have my money... I don't want to be part of your sunset-dramatic piece...

Nne: **[Comes from her hut]** Sese, yes... but let me check on my sick mother... I'll give you your money. **[Okwenbipi enters her hut with a deep sigh].**

Iwo: **[Takes Owubokiri to his seat and they take some shots]** Take it easy... we shall find him. **[Light fades.]**

MOVEMENT SIX

Early evening. Light meets people walking in and out of a hut at down stage left side; an elderly man sits on a bench. For a few minutes Nne stands to observe what is happening, apparently surprised why such a crowd in her mother's hut. A dirge is heard off stage. Nne sights Bipiamina discussing with some men in a low tone; this keeps Nne worried, she makes effort to find out if it was truly Bipiamina and wonders what she is doing in her mother's hut.

Nne: What are you doing here? **[Bipiamina ignores her and continues the discussion with the men, while Nne excuse a woman.]** What is happening here...? **[The woman whispers into her ears and Nne runs into her mother's room, comes out with a loud cry and the dirge comes up]** Oh! Mother... My mother... why didn't you wait a little while? **[An elderly man approaches her.]**

Elderly Man: Didn't you get our message, my daughter...? **[She cries more bitterly as two women try to console her]** It's not time for weeping...

Nne: **[Runs towards Bipiamina]** Did she come here to mock me... my home is on fire and now my mother... she even got here before me... How sad?

Mourner 1: Who are you talking about...?

Nne: She... she deceived me... **[Points at Bipiamina]**

Mourner 2: How...?

Nne: I went for dance rehearsals organised by her all night without telling my husband and she didn't pay me... **[Turns to Bipiamina]** All right, make jest of me... My husband is poor and miserable... Okay... you heard he chased me out of the house... Oh, I couldn't take care of my mother in life, now even in death...

Mourner 2: Your mother's younger sister...!

Nne: Who?

Mourner 2: We call her Mina for short, but her full name is Bipiamina. **[Nne cries aloud.]**

Mourner 1: Hold yourself and think of what to do... **[Takes a deep sigh.]** Indeed, a man's enemy is within his household.

Nne: A man's enemy is within... what do you mean... You... you who are my mother's sister... who killed my mother? She didn't die a natural death...? **[Turns to Bipiamina, Bipiamina enters the room with the men]** What are you doing here?

Mourner 2: You mean... you don't know her...?

Elderly man: **[Cuts in]** Shut up before your mouth utters words that could set a house ablaze...

Mourner 2: But Bipiamina is her mother's younger sister...?

Mourner 1: Close your mouth and allow nature take its

free course...

Nne: What are you saying...?

Mourner 2: I hope my mouth is not saying forbidden things...

Nne: My mother's sister... How can that be?

Elderly Man: You don't know her...? Do both of you have a misunderstanding? The shock you expressed at your mother's sister is unnatural and shows that your mother never told you that she has a younger sister that stays in the city.

Mourner 2: That's why I was surprised at the things you said about her... Your mother's sister treats you like that...

Nne: **[Wipes her tears]** Nothing wrong, Papa... But I don't remember... how can I not recognize her if my mother did?

Mourner 1: Well, it is unfortunate but both of you will plan for her burial. **[Ibiene appears, Nne weeps bitterly.]**

Ibiene: Hold yourself... **[Tries to examine the environment in a show of confusion]** How is she? My husband asked me to join you that your mother is sick...

Nne: She is dead!

Ibiene: Oh! **[She runs into the room and rushes out]** What is Bipiamina doing here?

Nne: They say... she is my mother's young sister and I had never met her before, until at the market yesterday morning.

Ibiene: Sh! And she betrayed you during the campaign?

Nne: Betrayal... How?

Ibiene: You didn't hear... **[Becomes passive]** Let's find a way out concerning your late mother and forget the political campaigns...

Nne: If not for the political campaign, at least I should be at home when the message came, as well as by my mother's side before she takes her last breath despite our strained relationship... But Mama Soso, please tell me how she betrayed me... because the revelation of being my mother's sister disturbs me. Nobody can accept a relation like this... after what I went through that night at the rehearsals.

Mourner 2: What are you women talking about? **[Making jest of Bipiamina]** Mina is our pride in this neighbourhood. She'll be the next chairman of the local government council.

Ibiene: Please mind your business and attend to why you are here... Please! **[Nne ignores the woman with a disdainful look].**

Mourner 2: Please, Oh! Don't look at me like that o.... I only came here as a concerned neighbour and not to cause trouble... not to add pepper to the wound.

Ibiene: Eh... please don't add pepper to the wound...

Nne: Mama Soso, if you know what we call rehearsals with this woman... Terrible experience, I am a shame to womanhood... I regret getting involved and my mother's death has become the outcome... poor woman.

Ibiene: You have not heard the current rumour... already we have the details of the rehearsals. **[Nne expresses shock]** Don't bother; this is a place of mourning and not for discussing frivolous issues...

Nne: They are not frivolous issues; they are the causes of societal decay and failure. Please don't tell the father of my children, most times we shy away from discussing them, that's why they persist and the reason why one individual can loot the entire resource of the community... I am ashamed to open my mouth and say the things that happened that night.

Ibiene: And you think... we don't know... Why were we attacking the so-called aspirant and members of his team? Or do you think we are happy fighting our fellow women? No... but we fight against the manner things are handled during such political campaigns. **[Nne in a self realisation mood and apparently forgetting her mother's death. She listens to Ibiene with rapt attention]** Women want one of their own to become chairman of local government council, councillors and even governors

but when such opportunities come we use our selfish tendencies to destroy them and allow the menfolk tread upon us... But our enemies are within us... that's why we cannot enjoy our rights.

Nne: I am in deep regret. Why didn't I return home after the market? She asked me to go back but I refused when she gave me the initial proposals. Now, look at me... my son is nowhere to be found... **[Weeps]** Ah! Mama Soso, did you hear any news about his return?

Ibiene: No.... **[She answers reluctantly and in pretence]**

Nne: Mama Soso... if there is anything tell me... our people say any big trouble expires in three days...

Ibiene: Please don't turn me into a tale bearer...

Elderly Man: What is our world turning into...? **[Talking to himself as he leaves]** a place of mourning turned to a tale bearing ground...

Mourner 1: Pa... it's strange...

Elderly man: Shut up... and go home and attend to your children. **[Walks away.]**

Nne: I am not turning you to a tale bearer... but as my only sister and friend.

Ibiene: Indeed... you must be discreet when dealing with people, especially people like Bipiamina, your presumed aunty... but you didn't even tell me, I was at the market place yesterday? **[Bipiamina comes out from the room with two men,**

one of the guards standing outside whispers to her.]

Bipiamina: [Talking to Nne] Wait for me... So we can discuss the burial arrangements before meeting with the family... [Nne confused, could not talk as she makes to leave.]

Ibiene: Is that the way to treat a sister? [Looks at Bipiamina with great disgust] Look at her... she can even sell her sister for no cost. Deprive her of her pay? [Turns to Nne] How much did she pay you after the dance...

Bipiamina: Shut up... [Turns to Ibiene] Did you come here to set my family on fire...? You shall fail because I want to put my sister on the right track to set her loose from the shackles of marital chains.

Ibiene: [Visibly bitter and suddenly mimics Bipiamina] 'Set her loose from the shackles of marital chains...' meaning women should be primarily concerned with political issues and abandon the home front because our husbands are handicapped or bound by laziness...? [Walks towards Bipiamina] That's the reason you went away with the N1.5m meant for the dancers given to you a day before your purported town hall meeting turned political campaign?

Nne: [Shouting] What N1.5m? [Tries to grab Bipiamina but is withheld by the guards around her]

Bipiamina: Are you not afraid? You want to touch

me... who will bury your mother... Your drunkard husband.... **[Signals the men to leave her]** ... She told us 'no money'.

Ibiene: That's why you turned the truth to your favour? Women in this land especially, the Ijaw race are protective and accommodative. This is symbolized with their dressing... Have you ever asked yourself why you use two wrappers? One on top another... No... we as women must cover the nakedness of our husband, when they come home naked and not to ridicule them in public... Not the show of shame you ladies do in the name of dressing...

Bipiamina: Let him come and bury his mother in-law... **[She leaves with her bodyguards].**

Nne: **[Crying bitterly]** Mama Soso, is this my lot in life? She knows I am her niece, yet she treats me like her maid. At the market, I thought she was an angel, but she's a devil sent to destroy the remaining piece of my life...

Ibiene: **[Tries to console Nne]** Let's find a way out... How do we bury your mother...?

Mourner 2: It's difficult to imagine how human minds work. She is a true representation of her name... Bipiamina... Relationship that starts with the mouth and never gets to the heart...

Mourner 1: Nne, please, take heart... your mother's sister spent most of her life-time in the city. She

appears at times like these... Politics brings her to the village...

Mourner 2: Is that the reason she treats people in this manner?

Mourner 1: Hold your tongue... Woman.

Ibiene: Tell her to hold her tongue... that's the reason you will die in oppression.

Mourner 2: We should tell her the truth...

Mourner 1: What truth...?

Mourner 2: This has been her way of life... She always oppresses people. Recently, the government gave her some fishing and farming implements to distribute to women in the local government area, she sold them and told the chairman that armed men attacked her when she was coming with them...

Mourner 1: What are you saying?

Ibiene: Strange bedfellows...

Nne: No, this is time for change. I am not waiting for her... **[Belema shows up suddenly and embraces her mother and starts crying.]** What are you doing here...? Where is your father...? Have you seen your brother? **[Belema looks into the mother's eyes, while Ibiene looks away]** Belema... have you seen your brother?

Belema: **[After a long silence answers reluctantly]**
No...

Nne: You took time to answer me? [**Leaves her, walks towards Ibiene after two steps, looks undecided she turns back to Belema**] I am surrounded by calamity because I was involved in an all-night rehearsal that paid nothing...?

Belema: Mama... he is dead! [**Dirge rises**]

Nne: He is dead? How...?

Belema: He drowned... [**Breaks into tears**]

Nne: But... [**Cries bitterly, uncontrollably and almost goes naked**]

Ibiene: Mama Belema, take it easy... Belema is here at least...

Nne: Mama Soso, so you knew all the while?

Ibiene: I am sorry?

Nne: [**Temporarily puts herself together**] No need to be sorry... let me fight this issue from its root... At least, I know my enemy is in my family... [**The dirge rises**] I shall fight for the revenge of these deaths around me... This is unbearable... Why... [**She begins to cry**] why... Me.

[**Light fades**]

MOVEMENT SEVEN

Late evening, light reveals three ladies with the councillorship aspirant, drinking and smoking less concerned with the discussions of Bipiamina with the councilor. As he periodically caresses them with his hands. Suddenly, Bipiamina and the aspirant started a heated conversation in a popular local bar. The lighting suggests the sun has set finally...

Bipiamina: You must give me the balance...

Aspirant: Pay you for the disgrace and embarrassment?

Bipiamina: Didn't the campaign hold... my kinsmen despite your unfulfilled promises attended the campaign, using my skills? You don't imagine how it cost me to convince them.

Aspirant: You were paid handsomely...!

Bipiamina: That's what it appears to you...?

Aspirant: How...?

Bipiamina: You think consultation with those old men that pre-occupy themselves with fishing and drinking is free... Town hall meeting is not free... mobilisation is not free! In our political sphere every aspect of electioneering is cash-based. So what is N1.5m worth in the eyes of those money-cautious electorates whom you disappointed in your first outing?

Aspirant: That's why you were recruited from that

community to handle those elementary aspects of our campaign...

Bipiamina: Don't remind me of my responsibilities... as the director of mobilisation for your campaign, I discharged my duties. Now you discharge your responsibilities.

Aspirant: I am not sure I will get the votes from those wards in your community. **[Bipiamina sighs and looks at him with disdain]** You engage people to work for you... they betray the trust and make themselves a clog in the wheel of progress.

Bipiamina: What does that suggest... Me... a clog in the wheel of your political progress...? Just like that... **[Aspirant tries to speak but she stops him]** No... let me finish. But how dare you talk to me in that manner... Can you cast your mind back... how we gave you the ticket earlier...? You were practically an errand boy to me... Indeed, life has turned the table round.

Aspirant: Shut up... woman! Boys, teach her a lesson... **[Aspirant's guard come up but Bipiamina's guard pulls two shots in the air and aspirant's guard stands back. The three ladies pick their bags and run out.]**

Bipiamina: Has it come to this...? Ok... good,... boys stand back... I know how to handle this errant boy. You asked your boys to teach me a lesson... All right, I'll ignore that now and say it is a reflection of your status.

Aspirant: You're only a woman and can do nothing.

Bipiamina: Fine.... Mr. Councillor? Let's change the subject matter and come to why I'm here, but I only responded to the rumours I have heard. I have confirmed it. This was your reason for embarrassing me during the campaign? Things will surely be put into perspective and handled accordingly.

Aspirant: Speak up... if you have any other matter to discuss. I have official matters to attend to.

Bipiamina: I am mindful... Mr. Councillor? **[Takes a mockery bow]** Can I have the money given to you by the chairman for my sister's treatment two days ago...?

Aspirant: I am not your errand boy... Madam.

Bipiamina: Mr. Councillor, I am aware... The table has turned around...

Ibiene: **[From the audience, Nne and Belema enter from stage right]** Where are you going...? Did you not hear the gun shots?

Belema: Mother... Please...!

Bipiamina: Please give me the money, my sister's corpse is lying outside the morgue and ... **[Sees Nne and expresses shock]**

Nne: **[Cuts in]** ... You want to what... You knew about my mother's death but allowed me live in fantasy with this ungodly creature... **[Ibiene and Belema react with surprise]**

Bipiamina: Why did you come here...? You were told to wait for me...

Nne: Wait...? I can't allow myself to be used the second

time by you and your antics. How will you explain your actions...? You eldest sister's only child... she should be your daughter or younger sister you never had... but no... money... politics... you abandoned family values and allowed money to ruin your family members... and allow men to have their way with their cheap promises...

Bipiamina: Shut up! What do you understand about family, politics and the use of money in life?

Nne: No... you can't shut me up again... What is the interpretation of your name... not Mina... but your full name? **[Runs towards her and hits her. Bipiamina's bodyguards hold her]** Leave me... **[Bipiamina signals her bodyguards]** You traitors... Why will you allow my mother's corpse to rot outside for two days while I dance in the celebration of nonentities?

Aspirant: You women should watch your tongues...

Nne: Ask them to shoot me...

Aspirant: Mina, take your sister home and settle your differences...

Bipiamina: After satisfying your filthy desires, we can now go...

Ibiene: You know now... when we talk... you'll say leave these mad women... they still live in the past...

Nne: Why do we satisfy them and they turn their backs on us when we need their support? **[She cries as the dirge rises from off stage]** My mother... she doesn't deserve this treatment even if she was unfair to me

while I was growing up...

Bipiamina: Indeed, I betrayed you... [**She turns to the aspirant**] but, Mr. Councillor will pay for this one...

Aspirant: Pay for what...?

Ibiene: You still have a mouth to talk... May your tongue refuse to roll, as you find pleasure in melting pains on those who gave you life...

Aspirant: Hold this woman...

Bipiamina: Or else... you'll mastermind her killing as a political threat... Ah! I have been fooled... but if it means my life as a sacrifice to liberate women from political slavery... Although, I am also an instrument in binding the women politically in this community... I think I will do it... but before then... [**Turns to the aspirant**] Mr. Councillor, please give me the money for the burial...

Aspirant: Which money...? I can't give you any other money apart from the N1.5m. The money for the burial is part of it...

Bipiamina: Part of what...? You want to turn my sister's burial to a political campaign? The chairman gave you money to give to me and you stand there to exercise your authority as a man or government official...

Ibiene: Ehen... so these politicians even betray one another and not only the electorate...

Nne: And they do it with so much arrogance, Mama Soso... they will never win my sympathy again. [**Turns to Mina**] I came here to collect my money...

Bipiamina: No, I don't need your sympathy... We shall settle our differences; let me settle this one first. This one will not go without bearing the wrath of a woman which burns like a harmattan fire. **[Turns to the other women]** I am sorry for betraying your trust in this community. I never followed the footsteps of women like Margaret Ekpo to mobilise women to fight a common cause but strive to build my personal empire where I see others as my maids...

Nne: But... Why?

Bipiamina: A bitter story to tell but it's my fault. I took the wrong path for wealth. I now realise that it is the path of foolishness. Greed, selfishness and unforgiveness rule in my heart as a result of what I suffered when my sister turned her back on me because of your father. May his soul rest in peace... **[Flashback. As an oil lamp provides illumination in the dark, Bipiamina struggles with a man.]**

Bipiamina: Please, leave me alone, I am not part of this your unholy plot against my sister. How long shall this continue? Please put your emotions in check before you destroy your home...

Ilaye: No. What you perceive between me and your sister is a mistake...

Bipiamina: A mistake...!

Ilaye: Yes...

Bipiamina: But... She already has a 5-year-old girl for you, a very intelligent and beautiful child. Don't make me look stupid and jealous...

Ilaye: That's the reason...

Bipiamina: That's the beauty of life... most times we don't know what is good for us. These things happen in a variety of ways. Maybe my sister is the best for you, with the blessing of that beautiful daughter.

Ilaye: But... I know what I want and...

Bipiamina: And which is...

Ilaye: **[Cuts in]** You... Mina, remember, I met you before your elder sister and truly I never knew she was your sister... until you came to stay with us. You never listened to me, now see the twist and turn in life. You never thought we would meet again as you left that fishing settlement.

Bipiamina: That's in the past. You were impatient; you think I'll open my thighs immediately you beckon on me. How many months did pass before you met her...?

Ilaye: Help me amend my past, let me live with the one that I truly love and desire...

Bipiamina: Sorry, that can't be... Sometimes our mistakes lead us to our true destiny. **[She makes to run; he grabs her and a fight ensues, as he tries to force her]** Your professed love begins and ends in between my thighs... Your pleasure and passion is for what you can derive from me... that you will never get... **[He grasps her again...]**

Amba:**[She enters and shouts]** Mina! **[They both separate and the man tries to dress himself.]**

Bipiamina: You have got what you want...

Ilaye: [Points to Bipiamina as he runs away from her]
Mama Nne... it's not what you think... she has been
trying to seduce me several times ...

Amba: [Shuts her husband and faces Bipiamina] Mina,
look at my daughter... Can't you take pity on her...?
You try to seduce her father?

Bipiamina: Sese, it's not true...

Amba: What's not true...? Did you scream for
help...? I know this is not the first time just as he said,
but our gods have revealed your mission in my
house...

Bipiamina: He tried to force me...

Amba: You tried to seduce him or he tried to force you...?
That's why you couldn't scream to hide your
shame... with what I saw with my eyes... this night.
Why do you turn this season of joy to mourning for
me...? A time when people make joyful sounds to
herald the season... you make an unholy sound in my
garden.

Ilaye: That's not true...

Amba: I know... she wants you badly and could not wait
to get her own... She sees you as a weak vessel and
because I am worn out for bearing an only child for
you... she wants to satisfy your emotional needs...
That's the truth?

Bipiamina: Sese, how can you say that...? Don't talk
like...

Ilaye: [Cuts in] That's true...

Bipiamina: [Runs towards him.] Tell her, I am

innocent of the allegation. Why should I destroy your home...? Tell her the truth.

Ilaye: Tell what truth...? The truth that you want to destroy our happy family...

Amba: What is my offence for you to stay with me... Men are everywhere, go and find your own. Did I stop you from marrying a man of your choice...? Why my daughter's father...

Bipiamina: [Drags Ilaye] Tell her the truth... what happened this night...?

Ilaye: I already told her...

Amba: Don't put up a show. Look at the way you dragged him in my presence, forcing him to tell an untrue story... [He leaves Mina to meet Amba] Don't touch me...

Ilaye: Do you believe her...?

Amba: Who do I believe...?

Bipiamina: Sese... believe me... even if I couldn't tell you all the while but for this season, please forgive and believe... I don't desire him for anything...

Ilaye: She is pretending... she says, I will look fresher if she takes care of me...

Amba: You already have a scheme for him...

Ilaye: Mother of my daughter... she has more plans. She proposed to take me to another fishing camp for us to be far from you and your troublesome daughter... [Bipiamina is provoked and tries to slap Ilaye but was stopped by Amba.]

Amba: You want to slap him to prove your innocence in my house... All right... you shall surely prove it... be sorry for yourself because this unholy act of yours will not go unpunished by the gods of the land.

Bipiamina: Anyhow you want it... or you place a curse on my head and your daughter will be a witness with those innocent looks of the events as they unfold here...

Ilaye: Mama Nne... No need for that... my daughter cannot be a witness to any curse.

Bipiamina: Why.... Now you realize how you love your daughter? And want to put my name in disrepute on the entire island...? We shall use your daughter as the witness...

Amba: All right, I agree... In a season like this, by the gods of our land with the innocent blood of my daughter as witness... if you are innocent, let my daughter never know peace in the house of her children's father...

Ilaye: No... Women...

Bipiamina: So, shall it be... [The two women look at each other with a deep passion of hatred as light fades to reveal ... Flashback ends]

Nne: My father... nobody told me about him... My mother said he died when I was three...

Bipiamina: That's what everybody believes but who will blame her in the circumstance. She chased me out of her house when you were only five... when I told her that he wanted to take me to bed... she didn't believe me... Your mother accused me of destroying

her home when she found out that her husband tried to force me to bed... We were in a fishing camp.

Ibiene: A sad story... too hard to believe

Bipiamina: Too hard to believe because her grandparents... **[Walks to Nne and takes her by the shoulder.]** were poor and couldn't provide our basic needs, coupled with their premature death, opened the doors of struggle from the age of six for me and your mother. She asked me to leave the house and I vowed to pay her back in my own way.

Nne: These are sounds made in the dark under the moonlight, I have never heard... But they ring in my ears and hover over my head... Words spoken in the dark, working against my life... Makes a public show of me under the rays of sunlight... I am a victim of shattered womanhood and a product of a failed family... Please forgive her in death...

Bipiamina: Yes... I have forgiven her but you are innocent. My action stems from the pains in the past. I should not have involved you in seeking revenge from your mother... **[Burst into tears]** I shouldn't treat you the way I did. But you wouldn't blame me... These villagers didn't help matters. When I came back nobody took me in... Everyone deserted me. I am self made... So, how can I give to society when society rejected me at the lowest ebb in my life? Therefore, I decided no good thing will come through me to this community.

Aspirant: I can't be part of this episode in this drama of revenge...

Bipiamina: Yes. You're part of this episode [**drags a gun from her bodyguard and shoots at the aspirant with a subsequent retaliation from the aspirant's bodyguard**]

Nne: [**Runs towards Bipiamina and holds her**] Ah! An aunty, I never had... dying. What calamity that befalls me today... First my unruly behaviour with this ugly beast, this councillor, my son and mother's death and now... [**Owubokiri enters with his friend, Iwo**] Ah... my only relation dies in my arms... my mother is lying outside... who do I bury first...? [**The dirge rises as light gradually fades...**]

Ibiene: [**Out of the light, she steps out**]

The lines are broken!
Father and son slumber.
Mother and daughter trade.
Mother and daughter caught
In the web of father and son.

The lines are broken!
Uncle and brother seek their own.
Aunty and sister betray themselves.
The little ones are forsaken;
In shame and misery.

The lines are broken!
Promise markers turns promise breakers.
Lawmakers becomes lawbreakers.
Safe keepers to safe looters.

Oh...
Broken cords; broken value

Even trust is broken.
Broken lines....
Tearing family part.
Society losing its moral sense.
Government an oppressor.

Let's amend our ways...
From our homes,
To the society,
And to government,
We must amend our ways!



About the author

Victor Oroyi, a believer of transparent and focused leadership as a tool for rapid development in the society, was the former Head, Computer Unit of Banner Printing and Publishing Company, publishers of Banner News, where he started his media career and moved on to start his own community newspaper, *National Reflector*.

He is a graduate of the Department of Fine, Industrial and Theatre Arts in the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, where he studied Theatre Arts, also a post-graduate student of International Institute of Journalism, IJJ, Abuja.

He is a serving Secretary of the Kirikebese Development Association, Bayelsa State chapter and one-time Secretary, Wakirike Students Union, WASU, Niger Delta University Chapter, as well as Association of Theatre Arts Students, ATASNDU Chapter.

Oroyi enjoys adventures, travelling and writing; he has authored several articles and unpublished books. He taught script-writing, directing and mass communication at the Clara Film Innovation Institute, Yenagoa, with a strong passion of using the film media for socio-cultural engineering and promoting moral values in society.

The society where women are unconsciously turned into bread winners instead of their husbands. It is quite saddening that in her desperation to cater for the needs of her family, she ends up losing the very essence of her struggle - her son dies, her marriage is devastated and she is eaten up by guilt of her illicit and adulterous affairs with the councillor.

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Vice Principal, CSS Igbogene-Epie, Bayelsa State.

Broken Lines, is a reflection of upheavals in the political, economic and moral platforms of the society rush to the fore.

Eric Eweke,
Editor, The Dispatch Newspaper, Yenagoa.

A tragic play mirroring the divisive influence of Nigerian politics which counter produces family disintegration instead of unity. *Broken Lines* in rich with African proverbs.

Adegbemi Adeniyi J.
Editor, Innovation Publishers, Ibadan.

Broken Lines; broken promises... A work of art aptly depicting the political times we live in, when politicians want the electorates to forget about the past by making new promises to be broke upon election victory. Victor Oroyi succinctly portrays the ills of women mobilisation just the way it is seen in our clime.

Ebidenyefa Tarila Nikade
Producer/Presenter, Creative Xpression, Glory FM 97.1, Yenagoa

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