

Aphra Behn's Oroonoko

Bandeled-Thomas, Biyi; Behn, Aphra . Aphra Behn's Oroonoko In a New Adaptation By 'Biyi Bandele . 105 p. Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1999.

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FULL TEXT

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Aphra Behn's

Oroonoko in a new adaptation by 'Biyi Bandele

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Front matter

Foreword

It is said of Eshu, the Yoruba trickster-God, who is the ubiquitous reverse hero of *Oroonoko*, that 'he threw a rock today, and killed a bird yesterday.' In other words, what is to happen in the future is the cause of what is happening now. The present, says this paradox, is defined by the future. Eshu, and his metaphor of transcendence has inspired this feast-of-a-war—which is to say jam session—between a myth and two mythmakers situated three hundred years apart. Together they contemplate a past that resonates in its future. A past that is forever echoed, distorted, amplified, invoked and interrogated by the present.

The African kingdom known to Europeans as Coramantien existed in what is known today as Ghana. But Aphra Behn's Coramantien is a notional one. I have situated the first part of my re-imagined *Oroonoko* in a Yoruba—which is to say Nigerian—setting chiefly because the characters in Behn's novel bear names that are recognisably Yoruba. Ultimately, though, Coramantien, our fabled kingdom, is born of a distilled evocation of a metaphorical megalopolis of intersecting universal dreams.

'Biyi Bandele
London, 1999

Oroonoko was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 7 April 1999.

The cast was as follows:

Israel Aduramo	LAYE
Rod Arthur	CAPTAIN STANMORE
Kemi Baruwa	BOLA
David Collings	BYAM
Ewen Cummins	OTMAN
Michael Fenner	TREFRY
Geff Francis	OROMBO
Nadine Marshall	IMOINDA
Jo Martin	LADY ONOLA
Nicholas Monu	OROONOKO
David Oyelowo	ABOAN
Farimang Singhateh	ROYAL DRUMMER
Ewart James Walters	AKOGUN/KABIYESI
Nicky Reid	Percussion

Directed by Gregory Doran
Designed by Niki Turner
Lighting designed by Tim Mitchell
Music by Juwon Ogungbe
Movement by Alex Oma-Pius
Fights by Terry King
Sound by Martin Slavin
Company voice work by Andrew Wade and Cicely Berry
Production Manager Mark Graham
Costume Supervisor Jenny Alden
Stage Manager Diana Stalker
Deputy Stage Manager Pip Horobin
Assistant Stage Manager Joanna Stone

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Oroonoko, the Prince
Aboan, his friend
Laye, his friend
Imoinda, the Princess
Lady Onola, her adoptive mother
Akogun, a General
Kabiyesi, the King of Coramantien

Chief Orombo, the King's chief adviser
Bola, Orombo's daughter
Ibn Saeed, an emissary of war
Ibn Sule, an emissary of war
Captain Green, an English sailor
Captain Stanmore, an English sailor
Various warriors, musicians, servants, crews, & other persons
<i>Part Two: Surinam</i>
Oroonoko
Aboan
Imoinda
Mr Trefry
Mr Byam, Deputy Governor of Surinam
Captain Stanmore
Otman, a slave
Various slaves, planters, Indians & other persons

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Main text
PART ONE

CORAMANTIEN

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Act One
Scene 1

The main court of the palace of the KABIYESI, King of Coramantien. Although we do not see the King we are

immediately made aware of his presence through the gathering of MINISTERS, GUARDS and COURTIERS, whose gaze, to a man, is focused in one direction: towards the King's antechamber, which is concealed behind an elaborately draped door at one end of the richly embroidered mat stretching across the court.

ORONOKO, a powerfully built young man in his late teens, is standing immediately behind the AKOGUN, the Generalissimo, head of the kingdom's armed forces, whose face, inscrutable, is focused on two visitors standing in the centre of the court.

Although the visitors, IBN SAEED and IBN SULE, are, like their hosts, Africans, they are dressed in turbans and other such accoutrements of the desert-farer: clothing that immediately marks them apart from the people of Coramantien, who are dressed in the coastal Yoruba style of 'agbada' and 'dashiki'.

IBN SAEED is reading out loud a letter written, in Arabic script, on a scroll of parchment.

IBN SAEED

[1] To sum up: if you respond to the oath
[2] Of allegiance and to its conditions—
[3] Namely, that you expel into the wild all
[4] Those of our enemies who come to your
[5] Land, and that you allow free passage
[6] To all the people of the kingdoms which
[7] Lie beyond you who have come to enter
[8] Into obedience to us—which is an obligatory
[9] Duty for both them and you, then you
[10] And your subjects and your lands are safe
[11] And secure, protected by our mercy which
[12] Shall guard you from all sides so that you
[13] Shall not experience from our Exalted Abode
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[14] Anything which shall harm you or alarm
[15] You to the end of time, if it be the will of God;
[16] You shall be safe and secure, and you shall
[17] Have support from our divinely
[18] Victorious armies over your enemies.

[19] But if you refuse to respond
[20] And your bad judgement causes you
[21] To deviate from the path of success,
[22] Then receive the glad tidings of our
[23] Conquering armies aided by God and
[24] Our extensive military forces made
[25] Victorious by God, which shall pour over
[26] Your land from Kebbi—if God wills,
[27] Like torrential floodwater or the raging sea.

[28] You will think it a downpour flowing with
[29] Ignominy and destruction, until
[30] By God's might, they shall reduce your
[31] Land to a barren wilderness and bring
[32] You to the same plight as the erstwhile
[33] Monarch of your neighbours, the Kitipa,
[34] Whom they made to taste death and whom
[35] Together with his kingdom they swallowed up,
[36] Since he had disobeyed our Exalted Command.
[37] We have given you fair warning and notice,
[38] So choose yourself and pursue the path
[39] Which your better judgement commends.
[40] Peace.

[A charged silence ensues as IBN SAEED carefully and fastidiously folds the scroll, betraying, for the first time, his tension by tugging absentmindedly at his sword and looking to IBN SULE for guidance. IBN SULE directs a bow at the draped door of the antechamber.]

IBN SULE

[41] Your Highness, that is the message to you
[42] From our Lord and Master,
[43] His Exalted Eminence the King of Kebbi,
[44] El Hadj Sani Farouk,
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[45] Messenger of the Prophet,
[46] Defender of the Faithful,
[47] Teacher of Teachers,
[48] Conquering Sovereign of the Desert Country,
[49] Of whom it is said, 'The sandstorm is the answer
[50] To the man wearing a rain-coat,' because
[51] He descends upon his enemies with
[52] The blinding ferocity of a desert storm.
[53] He requires an immediate response.
[54] He sends felicitations.

[The AKOGUN, who is positioned nearest to the antechamber, leans forward and listens to instructions from the KABIYESI. The instructions are short. The AKOGUN bows and nods, then turns to the visitors with great formality.]

AKOGUN

[55] His Royal Highness, the Kabiyesi—
[56] Long may he reign—

IBN SULE

[57] Long indeed may he reign.

AKOGUN

[58] –Wishes to confer in private

[59] With you, Ibn Sule.

IBN SULE

[60] Very well, General.

[IBN SULE *walks towards the door, which the AKOGUN is now holding ajar.*]

AKOGUN

[61] Oroonoko.

OROONOKO

[62] Yes, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[63] Follow me.

OROONOKO

[64] Yes, my Lord.

[*Exit* IBN SULE, OROONOKO *and the veteran* AKOGUN.]

[*There is a long silence during which* IBN SAEED *tries not to fidget. Then—offstage—a sharp, abbreviated scream lasting no longer than a second. IBN SAEED starts. His body sags. He goes completely ashen.*]

[*Enter the* AKOGUN, *followed by* OROONOKO.]

[*The drumming stops as abruptly as it began.*]

[*The AKOGUN approaches IBN SAEED.*]

AKOGUN

[65] His Highness had a most lively
[66] Palaver with Ibn Sule. They talked
[67] About many things: the fluctuating price
[68] Of salt, the constellations, the trade in slaves.
[69] Ibn Sule even entertained His Highness
[70] With a joke whose punch-line escapes
[71] Me now. Something about a Portuguese
[72] Tailor. Or perhaps he said sailor.
[73] Let me assure you, though:
[74] His Highness did not forget to laugh.

IBN SAEED

[*fidgets*]

[75] Where is Ibn Sule?

AKOGUN

[76] Your brother-messenger desired a shave—

IBN SAEED

[*his heart skipping a beat*]

[77] A sh—shave?

AKOGUN

[78] Yes, a shave. Luckily for him
[79] The Royal Barber was at hand.

[*He snaps his fingers. OROONOKO reveals the content of the sack. It is IBN SULE's head.*]

AKOGUN

[80] As you can see the beard

[81] Is unlikely to grow back.

[IBN SAEED *stares in stunned silence at his beheaded colleague.*]

AKOGUN

[82] Your master required an immediate

[83] Response to his petition. His Highness,

[84] The Kabiyesi—

OROONOKO

[85] —Long may he reign—

AKOGUN

[86] —Long may he reign—is a

[87] Courteous man, he loathes to keep people

[88] Waiting. He wants you to take this head

[89] Back to your master without delay.

[90] He begs you to pass on the following message:

[91] We know that the gods, in their great wisdom

[92] Or for amusement, sometimes give nuts

[93] To those that have no teeth. But a joke is a

[94] Joke. Should ever your master take leave of his senses

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[95] Again, should he ever slur our land with

[96] Such discourtesy again, we shall walk

[97] All the way to his palace, drag him out on to the

[98] Pestilential wilderness of his sand-strewn

[99] Kingdom, and shave his beard for him.

[100] Ibn Sule's clean-shaven chin

[101] Will testify to the sureness of our touch.

[102] That is my King's message to your master,

[103] Ibn Saeed. Go, Ibn Saeed,

[104] And as you go, dwell on this truth

[105] Which it has pleased His Highness to share

[106] With you: this earth is great, and so is our kingdom.

Scene 2

A military camp on the outskirts of Coramantien.

OROONOKO *is busy re-stringing his bow.*

Enter ABOAN, LAYE, and several other CONSCRIPTS carrying drums. They run to OROONOKO and drag him up.

OROONOKO

[107] Oh no.

LAYE

[108] Oh yes, Oroonoko. You're

[109] Playing the Old Sage.

OROONOKO

[110] No, I'm not.

LAYE

[111] Yes. you are.

OROONOKO

[112] Leave me alone, Laye.

LAYE

[113] Come on, Oroonoko.

[114] Don't be an elephant's fart.

OROONOKO

[115] If the General catches us.

LAYE

[116] The General won't catch us.

[117] The General is at the palace

[118] Attending a meeting of the War Council.

ORONOKO

[119] Precisely what I'm saying.

[120] We are on the brink of war.

[121] This is no time for games.

LAYE

[122] And what happens when

[123] There's war?

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ORONOKO

[124] Your gallant father's long-lost

[125] Backache suddenly reappears. What

[126] Do you think happens when

[127] There's war?

LAYE

[128] People die.

ORONOKO

[129] Deep thinking.

ABOAN

[130] That's not thinking. That's what

[131] Thinking *becomes*.

ORONOKO

[132] I was being sarcastic, Aboan.

ABOAN

[133] So was I, Oroonoko.

[OROONOKO *drops his bow.*]

OROONOKO

[134] Alright, alright. But I do

[135] This under duress.

[He stands up, and as he does so, he contorts his body into the shape of an infirm, but 'very wise' old man leaning on a walking stick. LAYE, ABOAN and the others gather around him and hold their drums at the ready.]

ALL

[136] You danced, Old Sage,

[137] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[as the Old Sage]

[138] I didn't, I didn't!

ALL

[139] Oh yes, you danced!

[140] You danced, you danced!

OROONOKO

[141] I didn't, I didn't!

ALL

[142] Go home and tell them

[143] The Old Sage danced!

OROONOKO

[144] I didn't, I didn't!

ALL

[145] You danced, Old Sage,

[146] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[147] Look at my beard:

[148] It's grey and thinning!

ALL

[149] You danced, Old Sage,

[150] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[151] Look at my eyes:

[152] All rheumy and sightless!

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ALL

[153] You danced, you danced!

[154] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[155] Look at my arms, trembling,

[156] Just trembling!

ALL

[157] You danced, Old Sage,

[158] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[159] Look at my feet,
[160] I can hardly walk!

ALL

[161] You danced, you danced!
[162] You definitely danced!

OROONOKO

[163] Alright then, I'll have a go!

[The drumming, mock sensual, commences and the 'Old Sage' starts dancing, slowly and clumsily at first, then as the drumming gathers pace, energetically and with great skill. Soon, OROONOKO is so absorbed in the role, not just his ears but his eyes as well are closed to all else.]

[The other youths, ever vigilant, spot the AKOGUN from afar.]

[Enter the AKOGUN.]

[Exit LAYE and ABOAN and the other CONSCRIPTS.]

[OROONOKO continues dancing even after the drumming has ceased.]

[The AKOGUN watches him with bemused interest.]

AKOGUN

[barks]

[164] Oroonoko!

[OROONOKO practically jumps out of his skin.]

OROONOKO

[165] My Lord!

AKOGUN

[166] What exactly do you
[167] Think you're doing,
[168] Oroonoko?

OROONOKO

[169] I ... we were playing
[170] 'Old Sage You Danced.'

AKOGUN

[171] Old-who-you-what?

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OROONOKO

[172] 'Old Sage You Danced.'

[*The AKOGUN picks up OROONOKO's broken bow.*]

AKOGUN

[173] I see. Remind me, Oroonoko,
[174] What were you meant to be doing
[175] Out here in the Forest of Demons?

OROONOKO

[*gruff with embarrassment*]

[176] Training, sir ... my Lord.

AKOGUN

[177] Training to be what?

OROONOKO

[178] Warriors, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[179] Training to be a warrior,

[180] That's right. This is a military

[181] Training ground, not a playground

[182] For court jesters, Oroonoko.

OROONOKO

[183] Yes, my Lord.

[184] They forced me, my Lord.

[185] I didn't want to join in, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[186] It wasn't your idea. 'They'

[187] Forced you. You disappoint me,

[188] Oroonoko. Let me remind you of

[189] The story of the five fingers—

OROONOKO

[190] The five fingers, my Lord?

AKOGUN

[191] The first finger said: I'm hungry.

[192] The second finger said: I'm broke.

[193] The third finger said: Let's steal some mangoes.

[194] The fourth finger said: And if the farmer catches us?

[195] The fifth finger said: Go and steal; I'll stand apart.

[196] That is the story of the five fingers, Oroonoko.

OROONOKO

[197] I'm sure, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[198] Each finger had a choice.

[199] Each finger made a choice.

OROONOKO

[200] Yes, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[201] Nobody forces you to do a thing,

[202] Oroonoko. Let me attempt to tell

[203] You why: His Highness, the King—

OROONOKO

[204] —Long may he reign—

AKOGUN

[205] —Long may he reign—the King

[206] Is now getting on in years. In his younger

[207] Days, he had many sons, thirteen in all.

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[208] Now he has none: they all died in battle.

[209] Conquering when they fell.

[210] I fought alongside those gallant heroes.

[211] I cherish the memory of their bravery.

[212] Now, the King has left for him for his

[213] Successor, one grandchild, son to one

[214] Of these dead victors. This grandchild,

[215] As soon as he could walk, was sent into the

[216] Field to be trained by one of the King's most

[217] Experienced Generals. And from his natural

[218] Inclination to arms, and the occasions of war

[219] Given him, and—we believe, with the good

[220] Conduct of the old General, the boy became,

[221] At the age of seventeen, one of the kingdom's

[222] Most expert captains. Am I getting through

[223] To you, Oroonoko?

OROONOKO

[224] Yes, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[225] You are a prince, Oroonoko.
[226] The heir apparent to the throne
[227] Of our land, a king-in-waiting.
[228] You have already proved your
[229] Bravery in war, I was there when
[230] You claimed your first scalp, just
[231] As I was when your father,
[232] Abiodun—may he guide you from
[233] The land of the ancestors—
[234] Slew his first man. He was born
[235] A leader, your father, a prince
[236] Among men. And so are you,
[237] Oroonoko. But to be a leader,
[238] It is not enough to excel as a
[239] Warrior. That, and more is required:
[240] To be a leader, you have to lead,
[241] And leadership means taking responsibility.
[242] It was bad enough that you
[243] Took part in that childish game.
[244] That was the least of it. But to try
[245] And evade responsibility ...

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OROONOKO

[246] Forgive me, my Lord.

AKOGUN

[247] There's nothing to forgive.
[248] But do remember this,
[249] My king-in-the-making:
[250] 'I entered but took nothing,'
[251] Will not save the thief.

[*He hands the broken bow back to OROONOKO.*]

AKOGUN

[252] Hurry up with that bow, warrior.

OROONOKO

[expectantly]

[253] My Lord?

AKOGUN

[254] The War Council has decided.

[255] We are going to war.

[Exit the AKOGUN.]

Scene 3

The military training ground.

Enter ABOAN, LAYE and the other TRAINEES.

LAYE

[in exasperation.]

[256] War? I thought we had a

[257] Peace treaty with those animals.

[258] I thought it said, 'no more war.'

ABOAN

[259] It does say no more war.

[260] That's why it's called a peace treaty.

OROONOKO

[261] But now they are violating

[262] The rules of engagement.

LAYE

[263] Rules? What rules?

[264] I thought it simply says:

[265] 'No more war!'

ABOAN

[266] Not that simply, it doesn't.

LAYE

[267] I've had enough of your

[268] Lip for one day, Aboan.

[269] War! I hate it.

OROONOKO

[270] Why?

LAYE

[271] It interferes with my social calendar.

ABOAN

[272] What social calendar?

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LAYE

[273] The one that mentions

[274] Your mother and me

[275] In bed together.

ABOAN

[276] Come here. What's that

[277] In your eye?

LAYE

[278] What?

ABOAN

[279] My fist.

[*He hits LAYE. LAYE flings himself at ABOAN. They wrestle.*]

Scene 4

The battlefield.

Enter the WARRIORS of Coramantien and their ENEMIES.

A fierce hand-to-hand battle rages. Bodies fall to the ground like so many leaves. OROONOKO excels, cutting through the enemy with ease, and slaying them as they accost him.

Exit ABOAN pursued by an enemy.

Exit LAYE pursuing the enemy.

Exit an enemy pursuing LAYE.

OROONOKO sees that the AKOGUN is outnumbered. He rushes to his aid. Together, they see off the attackers, but the AKOGUN is fatally wounded. OROONOKO holds him in his arms, as he lies dying.

The battle rages on all around them.

OROONOKO

[280] Persevere, my General,

[281] This battle will soon be over.

[282] I beg of you, hang in there.

AKOGUN

[283] It's no use, my king-in-waiting,

[284] That savage's arrow has sliced

[285] Through parts of my body I

[286] Didn't even know existed. I'm dying,

[287] My fellow warrior.

OROONOKO

[emotionally]

[288] You will not die, my General.

[289] You will see this through.

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[Enter LAYE, with a knife embedded in the back of his skull. He is leaning on to ABOAN, who is slightly wounded.]

LAYE

[ecstatic]

[290] Tell him, Aboan. Tell Oroonoko

[291] How I nailed those bastards.

ABOAN

[292] The savages had me cornered.

[293] Laye saved my life.

LAYE

[swaggers]

[294] I sent them screaming to the

[295] Dunghill of their ancestors.

OROONOKO

[disconsolate]

[296] Laye, Laye.

LAYE

[collapses.]

[297] They've killed me, Oroonoko.

[298] Those bastards have killed me.

[*He dies.*]

AKOGUN

[299] Promise me, Oroonoko,

[300] That you'll look after my daughter Imoinda.

[301] She is a child that must

[302] Not be touched by dew. And since

[303] Her mother died so long ago, she

[304] Has been the light with which I've

[305] Found my way. Promise me, Oroonoko

[306] That you will look after her for me.

OROONOKO

[307] Upon this earth, my General,

[308] Upon this earth, I pledge you

[309] My word that as long as there's breath

[310] In me, Imoinda will want for nothing.

AKOGUN

[311] You left the palace a lad, you go back

[312] A leader of men. Be careful when you go.

[313] The King is old, his grip on the

[314] Reins of power has grown shaky. But do not

[315] Be fooled, do not be in a hurry to succeed

[316] The throne. Help me up, Oroonoko,

[317] Prop me up on my feet. Let me walk

[318] Up to my ancestors.

[*He dies.*]

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Act Two

Scene 1

The King's palace in Coramantien.

Enter OROONOKO and ABOAN, lately returned from the wars.

OROONOKO *approaches OROMBO, chief adviser to the King.*

OROONOKO

[319] Does His Highness know I'm here?

OROMBO

[320] He knows.

OROONOKO

[321] Will he be long in coming?

OROMBO

[coolly]

[322] His Highness will take as long as

[323] It takes for him to come.

OROONOKO

[324] We could come back later.

[325] It's been a long trek

[326] And we haven't had a wash.

OROMBO

[327] I share your interest in personal

[328] Hygiene. Have you tried soap?

[329] It's the new invention. My wives

[330] Swear by it.

[Enter LADY ONOLA, a middle-aged courtesan.]

OROMBO

[331] Look, General, there's nothing

[332] I can do. His Highness is attending

[333] To eminently urgent affairs of the state.

ONOLA

[334] Affairs of the state? Did you say

[335] Affairs of the state?

[336]

[to OROONOKO]

What Chief Orombo means is that His

[337] Highness our dear King is keeping

[338] His visitors waiting while he attempts

[339] To insert his Royal Privilege

[340] Into the comely virtues of a young maiden.

[341] Much ado—dare I say—over nothing.

[342] Were the King's penis a warrior—he

[343] Wishes it were—it would have been beheaded

[344] Long ago for persistent dereliction of duty.

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OROMBO

[to OROONOKO]

[345] Let me introduce you to Lady Onola.

[346] She is an abandoned mistress of

[347] His Highness.

ONOLA

[348] It is well known in the seraglio

[349] That though the King never can

[350] Sleep, his penis is forever nodding off.

OROMBO

[*indignantly*]

[351] Two of my own wives have had the rare

[352] Privilege of supping with the King. And

[353] Upon their word—they have no reason to lie—

ONOLA

[354] –They do lie—with every boy-slave in the land.

OROMBO

[*chokes*]

[355] –Upon their word, the Royal Manhood is as

[356] Long as the Royal Python.

ONOLA

[357] Your wives may have slept with a snake,

[358] Chief Orombo, but not with the one

[359] Between the King's legs. It is a worm

[360] Bereft of limb, flattered into thinking

[361] Itself a reptile.

OROMBO

[362] How dare you, Lady Onola!

[363] How dare you!

ONOLA

[364] I did tell your second wife, Kemi, when she said

[365] She was marrying you that you had not

[366] Done badly by her, for she is beautiful and

[367] So is her smile. You bedecked her with gold and bales

[368] Of cloth. But I could see, from looking at you,

[369] That you could not satisfy her in bed. What

[370] She needed in bed—I told her—was a man who once he

[371] Mounted her would not let off until the roof fell

[372] Through. Not a glorified pimp who farms out

[373] His wives and children to curry royal favour.

OROMBO

[*stiffly*]

[374] It's called loyalty, Lady Onola, which

[375] Comes from Good Breeding. Have you
[376] Heard of Good Breeding? Ah, there I go again.
[377] Forgive me. Just like me to forget that you
[378] Were bred in a bordello.
[379] In any case I don't see how what I do or choose not to
[380] Do with my family is any of your business. And we are
[381] Talking not about me but about the Royal Manhood.
[382] Help me out, Praise-Singers!

[Page 29]

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[383] It is as your wives say, Chief Orombo,
[384] The Royal *Thing* is long indeed.

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[385] We haven't had a chance to size it up.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[386] But it's either very long—

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[387] Or as long as it is!

[OROMBO *glares stonily at them.*]

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[388] His Highness—long may he reign—
[389] Fathered a child in Liverpool
[390] While emptying his testicles
[391] In Coramantien!

OROMBO

[*to ONOLA*]

[392] You see? You see?

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[393] That is not all. When once His Highness

[394] Took the Royal Cock for a constitutional

[395] In the marketplace—

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[396] It sought the welcoming thighs of

[397] A barren woman.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[398] The King entered deeply, deeply.

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[399] He moved this way,

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[400] And that way,

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[401] And then straight on.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[402] Like an intrepid hunter running—

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[403] —Then slowing down—

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[404] –And then running again.

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[405] He entered deeply, deeply.

[406] He touched the base of his cock–

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[407] –Was it asleep? Was it fatigued?

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[408] He found that his cock, the fearless

[409] Rogue, was not fatigued.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[410] It was thrusting, thrusting.

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[411] Except for his testicles.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[412] Except for his testicles

[413] Which were emptying.

OROMBO

[to ONOLA]

[414] You see? You see?

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[415] His Highness shivered and screamed.

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[416] The barren woman shivered and screamed.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[417] The King shivered and screamed.

[Page 30]

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[418] The woman shivered and screamed.

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[419] She birthed twins nine months later.

OROMBO

[*delirious*]

[420] You see? You see?

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[421] She had twins nine months later,
[422] Yet the Royal Cock still hung rigid—

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[423] Dripping thick, sticky tears—

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[424] Was it from joy?

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[425] Was it from pain?

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[426] When we asked it why it was crying—

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[427] The King's cock said,

2ND ROYAL DRUMMER

[as *'the King's cock'*]

[428] 'Crying? Crying?

[429] Who said I was crying? This is how we

[430] Grin, where I come from.'

OROMBO

[431] You see? You see?

ONOLA

[432] I did not come here to listen to the

[433] Idle prattle of jesters and eunuchs. As for

[434] The King—if you want my opinion—

[435] The problem with His Highness is that

[436] His brain is in his penis. More's

[437] The pity, since he has no penis.

OROMBO

[438] I'm warning you, Lady Onola!

[439] I'm warning you!

ONOLA

[440] Run along now. I did not come here to see you.
[441] I came here to see these strapping
[442] Warriors for myself. Word reached me
[443] They had come to pay homage to the
[444] Kabiyesi. Welcome home, young warriors,
[445] Your reputation precedes you like the crackling
[446] Roar of a bush-fire. And you, my Lord Oroonoko,
[447] You have a message from the Princess Imoinda, most
[448] Esteemed daughter of our late Generalissimo. She
[449] Heard that you were with her father when he breathed
[450] His last. If you would care to honour my compound this
[451] Evening with a visit, she will be there waiting to thank
[452] You in person.
[eyes ABOAN]

[453] There's no reason of course why your gallant friend
[454] Shouldn't come along. The more the merrier.

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[Exit LADY ONOLA.]

[Enter KABIIYESI the King. He is old and infirm, and practically carried to his throne by two HELPERS. He appears to be drunk, and is trying, rather ineffectually, to re-knot the belt-string of his trousers.]

[OROONOKO and ABOAN exchange looks. They prostrate themselves in greeting. OROMBO does likewise and more.]

OROMBO

[chants]

[455] I salute you, my King:
[456] You are, like a needle,
[457] Sharp at both ends.

[458] You pick your teeth with a sword.
[459] Any mortal who scoffs at you
[460] Will use his teeth in place of a knife
[461] To peel cassava.

[462] I am addressing you, my master:
[463] You are the swift warrior moving
[464] To battle in the enemy's bush path.

[465] You are the waddling warrior

[466] Cautiously advancing in enemy territory.

[467] I pay you homage, my King.

[468] You are a torrent of rainwater:

[469] You go everywhere.

[470] You are the forest fire that destroys the undergrowth

[471] Together with the mass of leaves under it.

[472] I salute you, my King.

[*The KABIYESI is still struggling with his trousers.*]

[*Enter a young woman, BOLA, from the King's chambers. She is distressed and weeping.*]

KABIYESI

[473] Orombo!

OROMBO

[474] Kabiyesi!

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KABIYESI

[475] Why do you insist on

[476] Bringing me these passionless hags?

[*OROMBO eyes the distressed BOLA.*]

OROMBO

[*choosing his words carefully*]

[477] Kabiyesi, she's only ... sixteen.

KABIYESI

[478] *Only sixteen—?*

OROMBO

[479] Which, I admit, is getting on quite a bit.

KABIYESI

[480] Only sixteen?

[481] Do you contradict me?

OROMBO

[482] Oh no, Kabiyesi! I was merely trying

[483] To say ... I know her age ...

[484] She is my daughter.

KABIYESI

[485] She may well be your daughter, Orombo,

[486] She behaves like your very own grandmother.

[487] I need young blood.

[488] Go and find me a winsome young virgin.

OROMBO

[489] But, Kabiyesi—

KABIYESI

[490] Go.

OROMBO

[491] Yes, Kabiyesi.

[492]

[to BOLA]

You have disgraced us, Bola, you have ruined

[493] The good name of our family. We'll never

[494] Hear the end of it. Wait till your mother

[495] Hears about it. All you had to do was lie

[496] Back and think of our good name.

[Exit OROMBO with BOLA.]

OROMBO

[off]

[497] Is that too much to ask of a daughter?

BOLA

[off]

[498] But father, I'm with child.

OROMBO

[off]

[499] With child?

[500]

[shouts]

With child?

BOLA

[off]

[501] Father—

OROMBO

[off]

[502] Take me to the wretch

[503] Who did this to you!

OROONOKO

[504] Oroonoko, my King—

KABIYESI

[505] Oroonoko! Come forward and embrace

[506] An old man. My gallant General,

[507] You have grown into a man.

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[OROONOKO *embraces him.*]

KABIYESI

[508] I feel all alone, Oroonoko. I'm blind in one eye,

[509] Deaf in one ear, and I'm losing my looks.

[510] My ministers all are plotting against me.

[511] And against one another. I am surrounded by

[512] Spineless fools and sycophants. Do you think

[513] I should secede?

OROONOKO

[514] A thousand needles do not make an axe, Kabiyesi.

[515] A thousand wells do not make an ocean.

[516] The earthworm cannot impersonate a snake—

[*The KABIYESI raises his eyebrows. OROONOKO quickly goes on.*]

OROONOKO

[517] A man whose father is alive cannot be king.

[518] Whether the moon shines or not, my father, my King—

[519] You shine in the dark.

[*The KABIYESI laughs, flattered. His COURTIERS titter nervously.*]

KABIYESI

[520] You are wise beyond your years, Oroonoko, you

[521] May yet survive the intrigues of this place.

[522] A rot-infected yam does not

[523] Harm the knife used in cutting off the rot.

[524] Go, Oroonoko, and weed out the rot in our kingdom.

Scene 2

A slave port.

A group of SLAVES, all shackled together.

Enter OROMBO and CAPTAIN GREEN, an Englishman.

GREEN *examines the slaves one by one. His method of examination involves opening their mouths, checking their dentition and tongues, checking their hair, their backs, and often their private parts.*

OROMBO

[525] Don't thank me until you've

[526] Finished examining them.

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GREEN

[527] Where do they come from?

OROMBO

[528] The King's own personal collection.

[529] Where else do you imagine they come

[530] From, my dear Captain Brown?

GREEN

[531] Green. The name is Green.

OROMBO

[532] Of course it is. Of course it is.

[533] You very well know, my good friend, that

[534] I deal only in the very best cargo.

[535] No runny-nosed, sore-infested wretches from me.

[536] No diseased items, no lazy, malnourished

[537] Shipments. I bring you, my good friend.

[538] Only the best. You see, I have done the King

[539] Many a favour over the years.

OROMBO AND GREEN

[*together*]

[540] I scratch your back—

OROMBO

[541] —You scratch mine.

[542] I am that sort of man.

[543] His Highness has rewarded

[544] My enduring loyalty by granting me exclusive

[545] Licence to administer the royal supply of slaves.

[546] That means I sell them on his behalf:

[547] I do all the work, he takes ninety

[548] Percent of the proceeds—

[549] And why shouldn't he? I am by

[550] Definition his slave as well—

[551] And everybody's happy. Except of course

[552] For the slaves themselves.

[553] This supply came in

[554] Only this morning. The King's

[555] Grandson, a brave man—

[556] May the gods make a lesson of him,

[557] Or surely I'm finished—

[558] Commander-in-Chief of our brave warriors—

[559] Took them captive from the theatre

[560] Of war. They hail from a race of

[561] Fierce warriors and hunters—

[562] You

[563] Can see that from their torsos

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[564] —From

[565] The interior. They are hard workers

[566] And in great demand. In normal

[567] Times they would be kept in

[568] The palace and trained to be attendants,

[569] Guards—that sort of thing. But these are

[570] Not normal times. Times are hard,

[571] The King's coffers are not what they

[572] Used to be, and—my dear Captain

[573] Brown—

GREEN

[574] Green.

OROMBO

[575] —My good friend,

[576] One is used to a certain standard

[577] Of living.

Scene 3

LADY ONOLA's *household*.

LADY ONOLA, PRINCESS IMOINDA *and several* SERVANTS *are there*.

Enter OROONOKO, *followed by* ABOAN.

ONOLA

[578] Ladies. My friends and workers.

[579] Sisters, let me present to you the

[580] Mighty Oronoko, in praise of

[581] Whose patron God, Eshu, the God

[582] Of fate, it has been said that:

[583] When he stands up

[584] Even a day-old suckling

[585] Beggars him in height.

[586] But when he lies down, the world

[587] Clammers mountains to catch

[588] Sight of his face.

[589] Eshu slept in the house—

[590] But the house was too

[591] Small for him.

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[592] Eshu slept out in the open—

[593] But the open was too

[594] Small for him.

[595] Eshu slept in a nut—
[596] At last he could stretch himself!

[597] Oroonoko, you're the jewel
[598] Of your God's eye:
[599] Did you not drive back
[600] To their farthest borders
[601] The galloping army of the Kebbi?

[602] You worked havoc in the
[603] Hinterland, stalking forth
[604] Like a God aggrieved.

[605] You did not spare the cities
[606] Nor the rivers, nor farms
[607] Nor the markets.

[608] Your campaigns have
[609] Been a matchless triumph
[610] In the path of your God.

[611] You are—
[612] Our hero.
[613] You are—
[614] Oroonoko. We welcome you
[615] And your brother-warriors.

OROONOKO

[616] We thank you, our mother.
[617] You are—
[618] The thorn in the rhino's foot.
[619] The pebble that breaks the leopard's tooth.
[620] The rope that drags the elephant along.
[621] The back that carries its brother.
[622] The leaf that is bigger than a forest.

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[623] The hare that climbs a mountain running.
[624] The sea that cannot be emptied.
[625] The flood that struts through fire.
[626] The silence that births a song.
[627] We salute you, mothers of our land.

ONOLA

[628] Our visitors must be hungry.

[629] Look sharp, my daughters.

[630] Let's prepare a feast fit for warriors

[631] For our Princes.

[*Exit* SERVANTS.]

ONOLA

[*to* ABOAN]

[632] The Prince and Lady Imoinda

[633] Have much to talk about. I suggest

[634] We retire to another room and leave

[635] Them to themselves.

[*Exit* LADY ONOLA *and* ABOAN.]

[*The attraction between* OROONOKO *and* PRINCESS IMOINDA *is immediate and mutual.*]

IMOINDA

[636] You must thank Lady Onola for me.

[637] Since my father passed she

[638] Has been my mother and father. All

[639] Over the kingdom, whispers are

[640] Forever flying around about her.

[641] Lies mostly, spread by wretches

[642] Envious of her success in the palm

[643] Kernel trade. She has farms that stretch

[644] Further than the eye can see, and over a

[645] Thousand people working for her.

[646] And she treats every one of them as

[647] Though they were her very own children. You

[648] Saw that yourself just then.

OROONOKO

[*nods*]

[649] Is it true what I've heard

[650] That she once was the King's

[651] Paramour?

IMOINDA

[*laughs*]

[652] It is true. But that was a

[653] Long time ago, when she was

[Page 38]

[654] But a girl. The King sent her the Royal Veil

[655] Of Invitation, which is customary,

[656] When His Highness has a mind to

[657] Honour a lady with his bed.

[658]

[*hurrying on*]

As I said, that was

[659] Long ago. She has freedom of

[660] The palace still, the only man or woman,

[661] Outside of royalty, that enjoys the privilege.

[662] The King lets her. His advisers are scandalised.

[663] I have heard her say the most outrageous

[664] Things to his face. He merely

[665] Laughs, saying that he wished only that all his

[666] Ministers put together possessed half a nought

[667] Of her nerve. She enjoys royal immunity.

[668] But the King's councillors would get her if they could.

[669] She makes them uneasy.

[670] Speaking of courage: how did my father

[671] Die? What happened during his last moments

[672] Of life?

OROONOKO

[673] Your father was a great and valiant

[674] General. His going was quick. After

[675] The cowardly blow that felled him, he

[676] Tarried along only long enough to

[677] Speak about you.

[678] This is what he said:

[679] That you were

[680] A child that must not be touched

[681] By dew.

[682] That you were

[683] The light with which he found his way

[684] On difficult journeys
[685] And in seasons of darkness.
[686] This is what he didn't say—and I
[687] Wish he had, I wish he had—
[688] That your smile
[689] Rises like the sun on the misty
[690] Wilderness of a warrior's life.

IMOINDA

[*mock frown*]

[691] It does?

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OROONOKO

[692] That your smile
[693] Is like the dawn going poaching
[694] In the dark orchard of this warrior's
[695] Sleep.

IMOINDA

[*smiling*]

[696] Is that so? My smile is now a thief?

OROONOKO

[697] That the stars.
[698] Melted together, cooled in the sea,
[699] And cut into a stone brighter than
[700] The sun, are bright. But not half
[701] As bright as your smile.

IMOINDA

[702] Are you being serious?

OROONOKO

[703] I haven't been more serious in my life,
[704] Imoinda.

IMOINDA

[705] I can see that, my Lord, I can see that.
[706] I don't know whether to run or to jump
[707] For joy.

OROONOKO

[708] Your feet are set deep
[709] In the sea, home of the Goddess Oya,
[710] Who when she wakes up in time present,
[711] Her eyes heavy with dream, shakes her
[712] Head crowned with a nest of birds
[713] Baited into her trap with promise of fish.
[714] Escaping one by one, the birds carry
[715] Between their beaks greetings, hope, regrets
[716] And dreams from time past to time future.

[717] I am one of those birds, Imoinda.
[718] I have burrowed my past, a
[719] Bloodstained bundle wrapped in
[720] Seaweed, into the cleansing salt-water vaults
[721] Of the sea goddess. I wear time present
[722] Like a charm for luck.

[723] And the future that I am soaring
[724] Into is you, Imoinda.
[725] I have come
[726] To your feet, set deep in the sea.
[727] Home of the Goddess Oya
[728] Who alone knows the path

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[729] That leads into this world
[730] And the road that guides
[731] Us out of it.

[732] Give me your ear, Imoinda, I
[733] Have but one thing to say to you,
[734] And it's the most important thing

[735] I've said in my life:

[736] Be with me.

[Enter OROMBO, unnoticed by OROONOKO and PRINCESS IMOINDA. He eavesdrops.]

IMOINDA

[737] My Lord, Prince Oroonoko,

[738] I do not know the secret of the sea,

[739] Where it goes or from where it sets

[740] Or if its fish are thoughts made flesh.

[741] But I know this for I've seen it with my eyes:

[742] That from it the sun rises in the morning

[743] And into it it plunges at night.

[744] I do not know the secret of rain,

[745] How it shelters from the sun

[746] Or whether its mistress is the ocean.

[747] But I know this for I've seen it with my eyes:

[748] Rain is the beard of God, rinsed in milk, the

[749] Flag of being. No barber on earth possesses

[750] The blade to shave it off.

[751] I do not know the secret of the mirror,

[752] Whether it sees the world or sees illusions

[753] Or whether it sees a world filled with illusions.

[754] But I know this for I've seen it with my eyes:

[755] From this day till I'm ninety-nine or more.

[756] Or till I die before making ninety-nine, I shall do up

[757] My hair in the mirror of your eyes.

[758] Be with me, Oroonoko.

[Exit OROMBO with a thoughtful smirk.]

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Scene 4

The Palace.

The KABIIYESI is on his throne. He has the glazed look of deep drunkenness. He is bored to distraction.

Enter OROMBO. He has the urgent comportment of a man who has come with a message.

Exit the ROYAL DRUMMERS and DANCERS, dismissed by the KABIIYESI with an almost imperceptible gesture.

OROMBO

[759] When others drink wine,
[760] You drink blood, my King.
[761] When others plant yams
[762] You're planting the heads
[763] Of men. When others reap
[764] Fruit, you're harvesting
[765] The breath of warriors.
[766]
[*prostrates himself*]
I am your most devoted
[767] Slave, my Warrior King.

KABIYESI

[768] You waffle a lot, Orombo,
[769] But there's salt and pepper
[770] In your waffle.
[771] What is it this time?

OROMBO

[772] I bring you news, Kabiyesi.
[773] I bring you tidings that will
[774] Make your heart sing, your
[775] Loins dance, and the seraglio
[776] Roar at your hunting skills.

KABIYESI

[777] You have found me a maiden.

OROMBO

[778] Not just any maiden, my King,
[779] But one that dwells at
[780] Heights unknown on the crest
[781] Of beauty—

KABIYESI

[782] –Does this beauty have a name?

OROMBO

[783] Her name, Kabiyesi, is baked

[784] In honey, coated in honey, and

[Page 42]

[785] To be relished like honey. Imoinda,

[786] 'The little honeyed one'. She

[787] Comes with pedigree: her father

[788] Was your very own Generalissimo,

[789] The Akogun, our departed chief of warriors.

KABIYESI

[790] I do remember her. She was but

[791] A child when she last came to

[792] Court.

OROMBO

[793] She's bloomed, Kabiyesi,

[794] She's bloomed into full-blown

[795] Splendour. A purple star blown

[796] Into our earth by the crack of

[797] Lightning at dawn, Kabiyesi.

KABIYESI

[*heartily*]

[798] Orombo!

OROMBO

[799] I mention the dawn, Kabiyesi, because

[800] She is fresh like the dawn.

[801] Her face is fresh, her hands are fresh,

[802] Her bosom is fresh—discretion

[803] Prevents me from naming all

[804] Other parts of her that are
[805] Fresh like the dawn, Kabiyesi.

KABIYESI

[806] Go on, Orombo.

OROMBO

[807] If you insist, Kabiyesi.
[808] Her face is fresh, her bosom is fresh,
[809] Even the swollen valleys between her
[810] Thighs are fresh like the dawn.

KABIYESI

[811] A virgin? And not spoken for?

OROMBO

[812] Spoken for! Don't swear in
[813] The presence of His Highness,
[814] Your Highness! Spoken for!
[815] How can she be spoken for,
[816] When this very night His Highness
[817] Will honour her with the Royal
[818] Veil of Invitation? 'Spoken for',
[819] Kabiyesi!

KABIYESI

[820] All the same, has she no suitors?

OROMBO

[821] The queue of noblemen knocking
[822] At her door stretches from here to
[823] Djenne and Timbuktu.

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KABIYESI

[824] And she has said no to every one of them?

OROMBO

[825] She has said no to every one of them.

[826] She hands out 'no' to her suitors

[827] Like alms to beggars. She likes to

[828] Say no, Kabiyesi.

KABIYESI

[829] You mean to say she's headstrong?

OROMBO

[830] She likes to say no, Kabiyesi.

[831] That is all I am prepared to say.

KABIYESI

[832] I like them headstrong.

[833]

[to a PAGE]

Slow, Painful Death!

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[834] Slow, Painful Death at your

[835] Service, my King.

KABIYESI

[836] Fetch the Veil of Invitation.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[837] Right away, my King.

[Exit SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH.]

KABIYESI

[838] You know I like them headstrong,

[839] Orombo.

OROMBO

[840] I am but your slave, Kabiyesi,

[841] I dare not presume. I merely

[842] Anticipate.

Scene 5

A room in LADY ONOLA's household. It is raining outside.

Enter OROONOKO and LADY ONOLA.

OROONOKO

[843] I hope you don't mind

[844] The suddenness of it all.

ONOLA

[845] Affairs of the heart are never

[846] Too sudden.

OROONOKO

[847] Thank you, Lady Onola.

[848] I'd be most grateful if the

[849] News didn't go beyond this

[850] House until I've had the

[851] Chance to tell the King.

ONOLA

[852] Your secret is safe in my house.

OROONOKO

[853] He'll be thrilled by the news.

ONOLA

[854] I'm sure he will.

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[*Lightning captures them in a snapshot. Thunder.*]

ONOLA

[855] That girl is like a daughter to me.

OROONOKO

[856] I know.

ONOLA

[857] I'm like a mother to her.

OROONOKO

[858] I know, Lady Onola.

ONOLA

[859] Of all the women of our mighty

[860] Kingdom, Prince Oroonoko, from

[861] Those that dwell in the gaze of the palace

[862] To those that dwell in the shade of the hills—

[863] The wives-to-be and the newly married brides.

[864] The maids with burnished marks

[865] On their cheeks—those caramel stripes

[866] That enhance their beauty still.

[867] The ones with radiant gaps in their teeth

[868] –An emblem of beauty, gifted by the Gods–
[869] The elegant ones: the ones for whom a prince
[870] May lust, the ones for whom a slave revolts.
[871] The ones with childbearing hips.
[872] The ones with hips that spark unrest in
[873] The loins of happily married men.
[874] The ones that glow like the pearls on their neck.
[875] The ones with the grace of a lounging cat.

[876] –Take them one and all together,
[877] Ask them all bar none together,
[878] And you'll find, Prince Oroonoko, that
[879] None is as happy as my daughter is
[880] Tonight. And fewer even still, as happy
[881] As I am for the both of you.

OROONOKO

[882] Thank you, Lady Onola. My
[883] Happiness knows no bounds.

ONOLA

[884] I do not question your honour.

OROONOKO

[885] I'm sure, Lady Onola.

ONOLA

[886] Nor would I for a moment doubt your
[887] Word.

OROONOKO

[now not quite so sure]

[888] I'm sure, Lady Onola.

[Page 45]

ONOLA

[889] I am just a woman who
[890] Likes to speak her mind:
[891] I know that many a time, on your
[892] Numerous campaigns, in the course
[893] Of your distinguished career, you have
[894] Deflected from your side the arrow tipped with
[895] Pestilent poison; the spear that quarters
[896] An elephant's flesh; the white man's brutal
[897] Burning beans that spread like smallpox
[898] Through the air.

OROONOKO

[899] Luck has been on my side, Lady Onola,
[900] The Gods have been kind to me.

ONOLA

[901] May they continue to do so, Prince
[902] Oroonoko. But all those scourges will be nothing,
[903] Nothing! Compared to the boundless bane
[904] Of my bitterness should you ever break my
[905] Daughter's heart. You would wake
[906] Up on that day and find that your dreams
[907] Have turned into a rising pillar of dust.
[908] Do we understand each other—?

OROONOKO

[*stunned*]

[909] —Only too well—

ONOLA

[910] —My Lord and warrior?

OROONOKO

[911] –Lady Onola.

ONOLA

[*smiles.*]

[912] Don't look so hurt.

OROONOKO

[913] Me, hurt? The very thought of it!

[*He looks very, very hurt.*]

ONOLA

[*laughs.*]

[914] I'm glad we've got that out of the

[915] Way. We can now go back and join

[916] The others. We must discuss

[917] The wedding.

OROONOKO

[918] The *wedding*?

ONOLA

[919] Yes. It would be a shame if all the troubles

[920] I went through this past week; the rams

[921] I bought, the countless kegs of wine I

[922] Ordered, the sacks of yam, the tons of

[923] Fish, the musicians I hired—

[Page 46]

OROONOKO

[*trembling*]

[924] Wait, wait.

[925] You—you have been preparing

[926] *What* for a week?

ONOLA

[927] The wedding.

OROONOKO

[928] *My* wedding?

ONOLA

[929] Yes. I hope you don't mind.

OROONOKO

[930] I don't understand any of this, Lady

[931] Onola. The Princess and I met only

[932] Tonight.

ONOLA

[933] I knew, long before you arrived, that

[934] You were meant for her and she

[935] For you. Call it an older woman's

[936] Intuition. Upon my honour, Prince Oroonoko,

[937] The Princess knew nothing of my designs.

OROONOKO

[all too casually]

[938] Have you set the date?

ONOLA

[939] You're free tonight,

[940] Aren't you?

OROONOKO

[941] Yes, I'm—

[942]

[*in disbelief*]

Tonight? Did you say tonight?

ONOLA

[943] Yes.

OROONOKO

[944] But there's protocol, Lady Onola.

[945] I have to inform the King.

ONOLA

[946] Protocol allows also for the King

[947] To be *pleasantly* surprised.

OROONOKO

[948] Why the haste?

ONOLA

[949] Trust me, Prince Oroonoko, I'll

[950] Explain to you when I have

[951] A moment to spare. But not now—

OROONOKO

[952] No, Lady Onola. I demand an

[953] Explanation. Now.

[*Enter a servant of the King, SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH. He is soaked to the skin.*]

ONOLA

[954] Here comes your explanation.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[955] Evening, Lady Onola.

[956] I bring a message for Princess

[957] Imoinda.

ONOLA

[958] Give it to me. I'll pass it on.

[Page 47]

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[*haughtily*]

[959] I'm sorry, Lady Onola, but

[960] It is a matter strictly between

[961] The palace and the Princess.

ONOLA

[962] In that case, sir, go back and tell

[963] The palace that I swept away

[964] Your feet from the threshold

[965] Of my house. Tell the palace that I

[966] Used a broom. If I see you

[967] Here again, I shall use a

[968] Lash or worse.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[*loses his temper, shouts*]

[969] Do you know who I am?

ONOLA

[to OROONOKO]

[970] The poor man doesn't know

[971] Who he is. Can you help him?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[972] I am a servant of the King,

[973] You hear! A servant of the King!

[974]

[*gives up, pleads*]

I'm only doing my job,

[975] Lady Onola. You know

[976] I bear you no ill will.

ONOLA

[977] I suppose I should be grateful

[978] For that. Now, leave.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[979] You know what will happen to me.

[980] If I go back to the palace

[981] Without delivering this errand—

ONOLA

[982] I have no pity to waste on you.

[983] You're spineless. You have no

[984] Manners—and, I didn't quite

[985] Catch your name.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[986] They'd kill me, Lady Onola, you

[987] Know they'd kill me! I beg you,

[988] Lady Onola, please, let me

[989] See Princess Imoinda.

[LADY ONOLA *does not budge.*]

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[*sighs*]

[990] You didn't hear it from me:

[991] His Highness—long may he reign—has

[992] Decided to honour Princess Imoinda

[993] With the Royal Veil of Invitation.

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OROONOKO

[994] The Royal Veil of Invitation!

ONOLA

[*with a 'you see?' look at OROONOKO*]

[995] Leave this to me.

[*to SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH*]

[996] Why are you so drenched, O servant

[997] Of our King?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[*confused and irritable*]

[998] It's raining, you can see that it's raining.

ONOLA

[999] Was it raining when you left the palace?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1000] No, it wasn't.

[1001] But as I stepped outside the main gates

[1002] A great wind struck me in the face.
[1003] I looked up into the sky and saw
[1004] A flaming brand with dark
[1005] Wisps high above the towering
[1006] Cliffs of cloud. Flashes of lightning gave
[1007] Way to booming thunder. Ahead of me
[1008] The earth shook with shrieking sounds.
[1009] The wind collided with whirling dust.
[1010] They heaved and twisted like wrestlers.
[1011] The storm came swiftly. The rain, roaring
[1012] Like a great beast, began to pour.
[1013] I was frightened, Lady Onola. I'm not
[1014] Ashamed to admit to you that I was frightened.
[1015] Out there, as we speak, Lady Onola, the wells are
[1016] Filled to the brim, the creeks are
[1017] Overflowing, valleys are welling
[1018] With water, trees felled by the wind,
[1019] Thickets squashed. I saw an entire compound
[1020] Bounding away on a rush of floodwater.
[1021] Like a boat caught in roiling rapids. The
[1022] World is a frightening place tonight, Lady Onola,
[1023] People are dying out there.

ONOLA

[1024] Have you wife or children?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1025] None.

ONOLA

[1026] Good. The matter between us is
[1027] Simple. You want to keep your
[1028] Head and body together.
[1029] I want to keep the King
[1030] Away from my daughter—

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SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[*prostrating himself, in tears*]

[1031] Please, Lady Onola—

ONOLA

[1032] Hear me out. You say that

[1033] You bear no ill thoughts towards me.

[1034] I wish you no evil either. This is what

[1035] I propose we do: you will

[1036] Shelter here tonight or until

[1037] The storm abates. I shall arrange for

[1038] You to be ferried out of town

[1039] And on to some place else

[1040] Where you can settle down, with

[1041] Three bags of cowries or more to your

[1042] Name, and start your life anew.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1043] But, Lady Onola! His Highness will

[1044] Declare a bounty on my head.

ONOLA

[1045] He will do no such thing.

[1046] How is he to know that you were not

[1047] Swept away by that great storm out there?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[despondently]

[1048] Very well, Lady Onola, I shall do

[1049] As you say.

ONOLA

[1050] Follow your right hand. The guest

[1051] House is there.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[in a daze]

[1052] Lady Onola?

ONOLA

[1053] Yes?

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1054] Did you say bags?

ONOLA

[1055] I did.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1056] Did you say cowries?

ONOLA

[1057] I did.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1058] Did you say bags and cowries together?

ONOLA

[1059] I did.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1060] Did you say three?

ONOLA

[1061] I did.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1062] Did you say three bags of cowries?

ONOLA

[1063] Yes. But of course if that's not enough—

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1064] God bless you, Lady Onola.

[1065]

[tearfully, joyously]

I'm rich. I'm rich. God bless

[1066] You, Lady Onola.

[Page 50]

[Exit SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH.]

OROONOKO

[1067] How did you know that

[1068] That would happen? That

[1069] My grandfather would send the

[1070] Veil of Invitation?

[Enter SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH, looking lost.]

ONOLA

[1071] I said follow your right hand.

[1072] Your right hand is the other way.

SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH

[1073] I'm rich. I'm rich. God bless

[1074] You, Lady Onola. The world

[1075] Is a wonderful place.

[Exit SLOW, PAINFUL DEATH.]

ONOLA

[1076] I know the King and his minions.

[1077] I know the workings of their minds.

OROONOKO

[1078] I'm clearly out of my depth.

ONOLA

[1079] You've been away far too long from

[1080] The court, my warrior. You'll learn,

[1081] My Prince, you'll learn soon enough.

[1082] But it won't be long now before we can

[1083] Breathe easily again. Tradition forbids

[1084] The King to go near his grandson's bride.

[1085] Come on, child, there's no time

[1086] To waste. Every moment wasted is

[1087] Another arrow added to the enemy's

[1088] Quiver.

[Exit LADY ONOLA and OROONOKO.]

Scene 6

The Palace.

Enter OROMBO, wet.

The KABIYESI, fallen into a light sleep, stirs.

OROMBO

[1089] Still no sign of him. Your Highness.

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KABIYESI

[1090] Perhaps it's the storm?

OROMBO

[*doubtfully*]

[1091] Perhaps.

KABIYESI

[1092] Perhaps he's stopped for shelter.

OROMBO

[1093] Perhaps. But he would not do that,

[1094] Your Highness. He knows not

[1095] To do that. I observed him carefully

[1096] When he left. He had the

[1097] Look of a man with burning

[1098] Ambitions to live long enough

[1099] To see tomorrow.

[*He paces restlessly about, then comes to a sudden, decisive halt.*]

OROMBO

[1100] Red, Dark Death, warrior!

[RED, DARK DEATH *comes forward.*]

OROMBO

[1101] Slow, Burning Death, warrior!

[SLOW, BURNING DEATH *comes forward.*]

OROMBO

[1102] Swift, Violent Death, warrior!

[SWIFT, VIOLENT DEATH *comes forward.*]

OROMBO

[1103] Sly, Sudden Death, warrior!

[SLY, SUDDEN DEATH *comes forward.*]

OROMBO

[1104] Savage, Brutal Death, warrior!

[SAVAGE, BRUTAL DEATH *comes forward.*]

OROMBO

[1105] Blue, Numbing Death, warrior!

[1106] Blue, Numbing Death, warrior!

SAVAGE, BRUTAL DEATH

[1107] Blue, Numbing Death's off sick today, Kabiyesi.

[1108] Down with the fever, my Chief.

OROMBO

[*curtseys to the* KABIYESI!]

[1109] Follow me, all of you.

[1110] Here we come, Lady Onola.

[*Exit* OROMBO *and* GUARDS.]

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Scene 7

A spacious hall in LADY ONOLA's house.

The storm outside has ceased.

LADY ONOLA *and the other* WOMEN *as well as* DRUMMERS *and* MUSICIANS *are gathered for the wedding.*

Enter OROONOKO, accompanied by ABOAN. OROONOKO is holding a torch. He approaches PRINCESS IMOINDA and hands her the torch.

OROONOKO

[1111] Take this flame. I will marry you.

[1112] If anyone objects, burn their house.

[The DRUMMERS beat out a song of applause.]

IMOINDA

[all smiles]

[1113] Those standing—let them stand well.

[1114] Those stooping—let them stoop well.

[1115] Those sitting outside on the veranda—

[1116] Let them receive our thanks.

[1117] Those who tried to but couldn't make

[1118] It here—we do understand.

[1119] You the elders, who have braved the storm,

[1120] I thank you for honouring this day.

[1121] I pounded yam softly,

[1122] And offered it to Eshu, the trickster-God,

[1123] The God of fate. Eshu refused to eat.

[1124] Then I asked him:

[1125] 'Will you stay indoors or outside?'

[1126] He said:

ALL

[1127] 'Outside.'

IMOINDA

[1128] When Death comes looking for me—

ALL

[1129] It will meet Eshu outside.

IMOINDA

[1130] When Illness comes looking for me—

ALL

[1131] It will meet Eshu outside.

IMOINDA

[1132] When Poverty comes looking for me—

ALL

[1133] It will meet Eshu outside.

IMOINDA

[1134] When Evil comes looking for me—

ALL

[1135] It will meet Eshu outside.

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IMOINDA

[1136] But if a child comes looking for me—

ALL

[1137] Eshu will bring him in to your room.

IMOINDA

[1138] If Laughter comes looking for me—

ALL

[1139] Eshu will show him in.

IMOINDA

[1140] If Good Fortune comes looking for me—

ALL

[1141] Eshu will tell her to knock on your door.

IMOINDA

[1142] You people of the world,

[1143] Help me to thank my mother,

[1144] For she decked me out in clothes

[1145] Rich enough to make Oya,

[1146] The sea-goddess, envious.

[1147] Let everybody thank my mother:

[1148] She did not allow me to borrow dresses

[1149] From those who would turn round and abuse me.

[1150] She dressed me in clothes so rich

[1151] I could confuse a god.

[1152] And you my parent, Lady Onola:

[1153] When you don't see waves

[1154] Will you forget the sea?

[1155] When you don't see the lightning

[1156] Will you forget the rain?

[1157] When you don't see me any more

[1158] Will you forget me?

[1159] It was you who decided

[1160] That I was old enough

[1161] To move to another house.

[1162] Don't leave me alone in that place.

[1163] I look right, and left,

[1164] I look behind and in front of me,

[1165] But I see nobody

[1166] Who resembles my other parents,
[1167] The ones who birthed me.
[1168] What kind of god created me
[1169] In a sickly world

[Page 54]

[1170] To make my mother die like rotten yam?
[1171] What kind of god created me
[1172] In a violent world
[1173] To make my father die in war?

[1174] If luck is not against me
[1175] I shall have them back with me
[1176] In my husband's house.
[1177] If luck is not against me
[1178] They shall re-enter the world
[1179] Through me.
[1180] My head—which is wearing a
[1181] Bright scarf today—
[1182] Will surely give me
[1183] Male children and female children.

[1184] I honour the bitter kola nut
[1185] For through it I shall gain Shango's favour.
[1186] I honour the red kola nut
[1187] For through it I will gain the favour of the other gods.
[1188] I honour the hot pepper
[1189] For it cures sickness.

[1190] The melon seed soup only offends the hungry man
[1191] Who was not invited to the feast.
[1192] The aroma of fried plantain only offends the hungry man
[1193] Who was not invited to the feast.

[1194] My people, mothers and fathers:
[1195] Today is a glorious day!

[*Applause, music, dancing.*]

[*The GUESTS, especially the men, launch into a comical song in which individuals improvise alternate lines in response to the chorus lines.*]

ALL

[*singing*]

[1196] Oroonoko's friends came in a band of three.

[1197] The threesome came wheezing with glee.

[Page 55]

[1198] I'll swim across the river,

[1199] He said, to the third.

[1200] And I'll fight the weever,

[1201] He said, to the third.

[1202] I'll run against the drift,

[1203] He said, to the third,

[1204] Just to lie atop your gift,

[1205] He said, to her.

[1206] Oroonoko's friends came in a band of three.

[1207] The threesome came wheezing with glee.

[1208] His good first friend offered him tripe.

[1209] His great second friend offered him a pipe.

[1210] His best third friend offered him her breast.

[1211] Not once did he blink, he accepted with zest.

[1212] Not once did he blink, he went for her breast.

[1213] Oroonoko's friends came in a band of three.

[1214] The threesome came wheezing with glee.

[1215] I'll swim across the river,

[1216] He said, to the third.

[1217] And I'll fight the weever,

[1218] He said, to the third.

[1219] I'll run against the drift,

[1220] He said, to the third.

[1221] Just to lie atop your gift,

[1222] He said, to her.

[Enter OROMBO with his 'WARRIORS'. They have their bows at the ready with arrows.]

OROMBO

[1223] I see you're already celebrating

[1224] Ahead of the great news.

[He pulls out the Veil of Invitation and places it round PRINCESS IMOINDA's neck but she shrugs it off. OROMBO does not bother to pick it up.]

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OROMBO

[1225] May I congratulate you, Princess Imoinda

[1226] On this most special occasion of your

[1227] Inauguration as the King's a hundred and

[1228] Fifty-eighth consort.

[OROONOKO *moves threateningly towards* OROMBO. ABOAN *holds him back.*]

ONOLA

[1229] Welcome to my home, Chief Orombo.

[1230] Do make yourself comfortable. Wine?

[1231] Food? Please help yourself to anything

[1232] That catches your fancy. As you can see,

[1233] We are celebrating a great and joyous

[1234] Occasion—the coming together in sacred

[1235] Matrimony of our Prince and his

[1236] Princess. We meant to invite

[1237] The King. We meant to invite you too.

[1238] But what with the storm, and youthful

[1239] Impatience—and who can blame our Prince

[1240] And Princess?—we were unable to do so.

[1241] As you can see—and we all of us here can testify.

[1242] They are now man and wife—

OROMBO

[1243] Let me stop you before you go any

[1244] Further. He may be her man but she's not

[1245] His wife. The Prince cannot be wed

[1246] Without the King's say-so.

[1247] It is the law of the land, passed on to us

[1248] By our fathers.

ONOLA

[1249] That is a lie, Chief Orombo. You know

[1250] It's a lie.

OROMBO

[1251] It is in my nature to lie, Lady Onola.
[1252] It comes with the job.
[1253] But I lie, remember, on the King's behalf.
[1254] And the King does not lie. The King
[1255] Cannot lie. It is theologically impossible for the
[1256] King to lie. Therefore, in my capacity as Special
[1257] Envoy to the King—or, if you like, the King's Chief
[1258] Liar—and for the reasons stated above, etcetera, etcetera,
[1259] I declare this marriage illegitimate and void.

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IMOINDA

[1260] But you can't!

OROMBO

[1261] Oh yes I can. Watch me, I'm a wizard. On a
[1262] Good day I can even predict that tomorrow
[1263] Will surely follow from today. Usually, I'm right.
[1264] When you're ready, Princess Imoinda, the King's
[1265] Bedroom awaits your sumptuous presence.

OROONOKO

[being held back]

[1266] I'll kill him! I'll kill him!

OROMBO

[1267] You're a warrior, Prince Oroonoko. It
[1268] Is in your nature to kill. I sympathise with
[1269] You. But I am the King's slave, and there's the rub:
[1270] Unless His Highness decrees to the contrary,
[1271] My neck and body remain together. There's nothing
[1272] I can do about it, I'm afraid. It's the law of the land.

ONOLA

[1273] Tell the King who sent you here
[1274] That the sky will light up with stars once more.
[1275] Tell him that soon, on a night like this,
[1276] A million fireflies will be seen,
[1277] And the luminous half-disc of the moon
[1278] Will be sent by God to watch over us.

[1279] Tell him that the sun will spread across the land
[1280] That had been laid dank by the floods.
[1281] Tell him that the farms will suffer no more
[1282] And crops now drowning will be nursed back to life.

[1283] Tell him that rocks of mist will rise from the ground
[1284] And the glut of water that has surged into many homes
[1285] And taken many lives will be scooped up by the sun and
[1286] Poured back into the sky.
[1287] Tell him that among the creatures
[1288] That have survived the flood there will be mothers in milk.

[1289] Tell the King who sent you here
[1290] That prayer is the bounty of God
[1291] And that the King like God
[1292] Must know this truth:
[1293] That life is a whip that strikes
[1294] The strong and the weak alike.

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[1295] Tell him that life is a journey.
[1296] And that no matter how large
[1297] A forest may be, there is a town
[1298] At the end of it. And if there's
[1299] Not town, there's the sea. And
[1300] If there's not sea, there's the
[1301] Desert. And no matter how
[1302] Large that desert may be,
[1303] There's a town at the end of it.

OROMBO

[1304] I love it when you're angry.
[1305] You speak such cultivated nonsense.
[1306] Pity you're not my wife. I'd knock
[1307] That rubbish right out of your head
[1308] With an onslaught of semen that'd
[1309] Hit you like a wild storm.

ONOLA

[1310] Dream on, Orombo.

[1311] Go with them, my daughter.

[1312] The King is a neutered dog

[1313] On heat. I should apologise to dogs on heat.

[1314] He's impotent. You have nothing to

[1315] Fear from him.

OROMBO

[1316] The King is the King, Lady Onola.

[1317] If you say that again, I shall

[1318] Be very angry with you.

ONOLA

[1319] I said the King cannot perform.

[1320] Is that another theological

[1321] Impossibility?

OROMBO

[1322] Keep theology out of this.

[1323] The King is well equipped.

[1324] You'll have to excuse me, fellow

[1325] Citizens, good people. Duty calls.

[bends down and picks up the Veil of Invitation]

[1326] Let the feast continue, indulge yourselves

[1327] On the King's behalf.

[Exit OROMBO with PRINCESS IMOINDA his captive.]

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Act Three

Scene 1

LADY ONOLA's house: later that night.

The party has dispersed and OROONOKO is alone.

Enter ABOAN.

OROONOKO

[1328] Any news?

ABOAN

[1329] We followed them right

[1330] Up till the palace gates.

[1331] But the guards wouldn't let

[1332] Us inside.

OROONOKO

[1333] Didn't they know you? Didn't you

[1334] Tell them that I sent you to the King?

ABOAN

[1335] They would not be swayed.

OROONOKO

[1336] How was the Princess?

ABOAN

[1337] She held her head high.

[1338]

[*swallows*]

She wept all the way.

[1339]

[*beside himself with fury*]

Things cannot go on like this.

[1340] Orombo is destroying Coramantien. The King

[1341] Listens to him alone. His other advisers

[1342] Are dead, exiled or too scared

[1343] Of Orombo to speak their mind. Orombo

[1344] Is dangerous, my General. Anyone can see

[1345] From a week's trek off, that his sight is
[1346] Set on the throne. We must do something about
[1347] Him.

OROONOKO

[1348] Are you suggesting, Aboan, that we
[1349] Rise against the King?

ABOAN

[1350] I suggest no such thing, Prince Oroonoko.
[1351] All I'm saying is, Orombo is a scourge.

OROONOKO

[1352] He happens also to be the King's Chief
[1353] Adviser. Any deed against him is a deed
[1354] Against the King. It's called treason,
[1355] Aboan. I'll hear no more of it.

[Page 60]

ABOAN

[1356] With all respect, my General:
[1357] You're making an error
[1358] We may not live to regret.

OROONOKO

[1359] You threaten me if you threaten
[1360] The King, Aboan. Are you threatening the
[1361] King, *warrior*?

ABOAN

[*gives up*]

[1362] No, my General. I've overstepped the
[1363] Bounds. Forgive me.

OROONOKO

[1364] Can't you see, Aboan, that Orombo
[1365] Was right? I had no business doing
[1366] What I did tonight without the King's
[1367] Express permission. It was foolish of
[1368] Me, and childish. You, Aboan,
[1369] Should have advised me against it.

ABOAN

[1370] I did too, my General. You enjoined
[1371] Me to share my counsel with the breeze.

OROONOKO

[1372] I'd had too much wine to drink.
[1373] You should have tried harder.

ABOAN

[1374] I shall not fail to do so next time.

OROONOKO

[1375] If there is a next time.
[1376] At the rise of dawn, I shall
[1377] Go to the palace and throw
[1378] Myself at the mercy of the King.
[1379] My behaviour tonight was unbecoming
[1380] Of a man in my position. I expect him
[1381] To ask for my head.

ABOAN

[1382] I am to blame, sir. Let me go
[1383] With you before the King and
[1384] Let him know that the blame is
[1385] Mine.

OROONOKO

[1386] Your words are kind, Aboan, and
[1387] I value your friendship. But you know
[1388] This as well as I do, that the tree that
[1389] Falls in the forest does not kill people
[1390] In the house. The roof that crashes down
[1391] In the back room does not kill people on
[1392] The street. We were not born together, my
[1393] Dear friend, why should we die together?

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ABOAN

[1394] You flatter me when you call me your
[1395] Friend, my Lord. You know as well
[1396] As I do that you're my master
[1397] And I'm your slave. I shall go with
[1398] You before the King.

[Enter LADY ONOLA.]

ONOLA

[1399] I've come straight from the palace,
[1400] Prince Oroonoko—

OROONOKO

[to ABOAN]

[1401] Tell this woman that I do not
[1402] Wish to speak to her.

[Exit OROONOKO.]

Scene 2

The Palace. The Royal Bath.

Music wafts like incense across the room.

The KABIYESI is sat naked in a resplendent marble bath enjoying a massage from the hands of a EUNUCH. The

KABIYESI *frequently picks up a mirror and admires himself.*

Enter PRINCESS IMOINDA, *led in by GUARDS.*

IMOINDA

[in tears]

[1403] We've been taught, Kabiyesi, that you're

[1404] Like the ripe coconut that falls on a child

[1405] At night.

[1406] If a man greets you, there is trouble.

[1407] If a man forgets to greet you, there is trouble.

[1408] Our fathers say that anyone

[1409] Who shakes a tree trunk

[1410] Succeeds only in shaking himself.

[1411] I do not resist you, my King.

[1412] The seeds of the ayo board game

[1413] Do not complain about being shoved about.

[1414] You kill your enemies gently like the leopard

[1415] –When it kills, its tail rests gently on the ground.

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[1416] Do not smile at me, my Lord,

[1417] Your smile frightens me.

[1418] Whenever you open your mouth

[1419] You swallow a hero—

KABIYESI

[1420] Enough of that, my dear, take off

[1421] That lovely dress and join us in

[1422] This fabulous bath. Come in and

[1423] Swallow a hero.

[The EUNUCH forces back a giggle.]

IMOINDA

[1424] My King—

KABIYESI

[1425] Yes?

IMOINDA

[1426] I'm married.

KABIYESI

[1427] So am I.

[1428]

[laughs]

I've been told that you like

[1429] To say no. I on the other hand

[1430] Have always been deaf to the

[1431] Sound of no. It's a congenital

[1432] Affliction, you see, no always

[1433] Sounds like yes to my ears. I

[1434] Tend to take a no and yes it up.

[1435] Come in, lovely girl, don't begrudge

[1436] An old man of those ripe delectable

[1437] Bosoms.

[Slowly, silently, PRINCESS IMOINDA takes off her clothes one by one until she is stark naked. She gets into the bath. The KABIYESI places her hand on his crotch.]

KABIYESI

[1438] There's no need to be coy, my dear,

[1439] It's your very own plaything

[1440] Tonight.

IMOINDA

[wearily]

[1441] I don't think it wants to be disturbed.

KABIYESI

[irritably]

[1442] Only a shut-eye, my dear, only

[1443] A short nap.

[1444]

[reaches for her head]

Perhaps it sulks. Let's see what

[1445] It does when you bid it welcome.

[He pushes her head down between his legs. PRINCESS

[Page 63]

IMOINDA stays there for several seconds. Then she raises her head, choking, gasping for breath. The KABIYESI pushes her down once more. Once more, she chokes and gasps for breath. On a reflex she reaches for the mirror lying by the side of the bath. In one swift movement of her wrist she brings it slashing down between the KABIYESI's legs. There is a long silence. The bath water turns red. The EUNUCH starts screaming. The KABIYESI flies out of the bath, limping around in agony. Blood flows freely from his crotch. PRINCESS IMOINDA is in a state of shock.]

[Enter OROMBO.]

[The GUARDS rush to cover KABIYESI with a gown and tend to his wound.]

KABIYESI

[as he is carried off]

[1446] Hang that witch! Hang

[1447] Her!

[Exit the KABIYESI.]

[OROMBO smiles broadly.]

OROMBO

[to the GUARDS]

[1448] Let's show her how real men do it.

[He lowers his trousers.]

Scene 3

LADY ONOLA's house.

ORONOKO *is on his feet, fast asleep.*

A sharp knock on the door.

Enter ABOAN, agitated.

ORONOKO *draws his sword, startled out of his slumber.*

ABOAN

[1449] It's only me, my General.

ORONOKO

[1450] Learn to knock.

ABOAN

[1451] Something terrible has happened

[1452] At the palace.

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ORONOKO

[1453] What?

ABOAN

[1454] No one knows why but

[1455] The King has decreed that the Princess

[1456] Must die.

ORONOKO

[warily]

[1457] And why would His Highness do such a thing?

ABOAN

[1458] Nobody knows.

OROONOKO

[1459] Let's go.

[*He stumbles.*]

ABOAN

[*anxiously*]

[1460] Oroonoko!

OROONOKO

[*steadies himself*]

[1461] Let's go, warrior.

[*Exit OROONOKO and ABOAN.*]

Scene 4

The slave port.

Enter OROMBO, followed by PRINCESS IMOINDA in chains and led in by the GUARDS. She is all bloodied up and can hardly walk.

OROMBO

[1462] Consider yourself lucky

[1463] That I decided to commute

[1464] Your sentence to this. You didn't

[1465] Know that I had it in me to be

[1466] Compassionate, did you? Well,

[1467] I am that sort of man. Hard on

[1468] The surface, soft as a whispered

[1469] Sigh on the inside.

[*Enter CAPTAIN STANMORE, looking not a little irritated. He is followed in by several of his CREW, all like himself, European. They are armed with shotguns and pistols.*]

[CAPTAIN STANMORE *examines* PRINCESS IMOINDA.]

STANMORE

[1470] Is this why you had to disturb my

[1471] Sleep?

OROMBO

[1472] She's a princess, you see. The King

[1473] Wanted her dead. I had to bring her

[1474] At once.

[Page 65]

STANMORE

[1475] How much?

OROMBO

[1476] The usual.

STANMORE

[1477] Out of the question.

OROMBO

[1478] Less five percent.

STANMORE

[1479] She's all swollen.

OROMBO

[1480] Less ten percent.

STANMORE

[1481] She hardly can walk.

OROMBO

[1482] Fifteen.

STANMORE

[1483] She looks half dead.

OROMBO

[1484] Twenty.

STANMORE

[1485] And five.

[1486] Five and twenty.

OROMBO

[1487] Done. Give her a good scrub—nothing fancy,

[1488] Some porous rocks will do the trick.

[1489] And she'll be as good as new.

IMOINDA

[1490] Do as the King commanded. Kill me.

OROMBO

[ignores her]

[1491] Kabyesi was involved in an accident

[1492] Earlier tonight. It is unlikely he'll recover.

[1493] If he passes, as I'm sure he will, I intend to

[1494] Be first in line for that lovely little trophy that's

[1495] Called the throne. In order to do so as smoothly
[1496] As possible, I intend to round up this woman's
[1497] So-called husband and all his men. His name
[1498] Is Oroonoko. He harbours ambitions of succeeding
[1499] The King. He is a dangerous character.

STANMORE

[1500] I don't quite catch your drift.

OROMBO

[1501] What I'm saying, Captain Stanley, is that
[1502] There is a lot more waiting where this wench
[1503] Came from. What I'm saying, Captain Stanley,
[1504] Is that you can have them all for half the going rate.
[1505] All I ask of you—you and your men—is that you help
[1506] My men and I bring them to heel. Scratch my back,
[1507] I scratch yours, I'm that sort of man.

STANMORE

[thoughtfully]

[1508] So I've heard. I happen
[1509] To know Captain Green.

OROMBO

[1510] How's my friend Captain Brown?

STANMORE

[1511] Green. His name is Green.
[1512] Cursing your very name.
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[1513] Half the men he bought from
[1514] You have dived into the sea.

OROMBO

[1515] I did tell him they were warriors.

[1516] They either kill or die.

IMOINDA

[1517] Jingling horseman, fast traveller

[1518] Who settles his quarrels with a spear,

[1519] The road is clouded in dust

[1520] When you pursue your enemy.

STANMORE

[1521] What's the girl saying?

OROMBO

[1522] Don't mind her, she's praying to

[1523] Soponna, the God of the pox.

STANMORE

[*steps back*]

[1524] Has she the plague?

OROMBO

[1525] No need to be alarmed, Captain

[1526] Stanley—

STANMORE

[1527] *More.* Stanmore.

OROMBO

[1528] Don't be alarmed, Captain More Stanmore.

[1529] She hasn't got the plague. She's merely

[1530] Praying for death. Why don't you and

[1531] Your men retire to the boat and discuss

[1532] My little proposal?

STANMORE

[1533] Wait here.

[Exit CAPTAIN STANMORE and his MEN.]

IMOINDA

[1534] Jingling horseman in a cloud of sand,

[1535] In the wake of your visit

[1536] Many fall asleep

[1537] Who will never wake up.

[1538] Spare me, O horseman, and spare my

[1539] Household too. But if you want to carry

[1540] My load, horseman. If my time has come

[1541] To go, horseman. Let me follow you to

[1542] Your home, horseman.

[1543] Jingling horseman in a mist of sand,

[1544] Carry me to your home beyond the trail of dust.

[1545] Hold me, heavenly tormentor,

[1546] Hold me in your arm.

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[She tries to strangle herself. OROMBO strikes her.]

OROMBO

[1547] It's fine by me if you want to

[1548] Kill yourself. But have the decency

[1549] To wait until the white man has paid

[1550] For you.

Scene 5

The Palace.

The KABIYESI has died. His freshly deceased body, covered, is carried in by a couple of PAGES.

Enter OROONOKO, ABOAN and LADY ONOLA.

OROONOKO

[taking in the situation]

[1551] When did it happen?

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[1552] Soon after the first cockcrow, my Lord.

OROONOKO

[1553] Send out the town crier.

TOWN CRIER

[1554] The King is dead! Long live the King!

[Exit TOWN CRIER.]

OROONOKO

[1555] Call a meeting of the council of elders.

[1556] Can anyone tell me where the Princess's

[1557] Hanging was meant to take place?

TOWN CRIER

[off]

[1558] The King is dead! Long live the King!

1ST ROYAL DRUMMER

[1559] Your Highness—long may you reign—

[1560] Princess Imoinda will not be hanged.

[1561] I overheard Chief Orombo talking

[1562] To his men—

ROYAL DRUMMERS

[*all*]

[1563] He mentioned the port.

ONOLA

[*gasps*]

[1564] They've gone to sell her.

OROONOKO

[1565] The horses, Aboan. Saddle the horses.

[1566] Rally the men together.

TOWN CRIER

[*off*]

[1567] The King is dead! Long live the King!

[*Exit ABOAN.*]

OROONOKO

[*to LADY ONOLA*]

[1568] I pray you forgive me,

[1569] Lady Onola.

ONOLA

[*smiles, sadly*]

[1570] I have forgiven you. Hurry now

[1571] And fetch me my daughter.

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[Exit OROONOKO and ALL except LADY ONOLA.]

ONOLA

[1572] Don't let me down, Ogun.

[1573] Don't let me down.

[falls on her knees and weeps]

[1574] Bring me back my daughter, Ogun.

[1575] You know she's the only one

[1576] I've got.

TOWN CRIER

[off]

[1577] The King is dead! Long live the King!

[Exit LADY ONOLA.]

Scene 6

The slave port.

OROMBO *is addressing his MEN. He is bitterness personified.*

OROMBO

[1578] You all heard what the white man

[1579] Said. He does not want to get involved.

[1580] That's all the thanks I get for these many

[1581] Years of loyalty and honest trade with

[1582] Him. He does not want to get involved!

[1583] All I asked of him was a few men with

[1584] Those nifty fire-spitting metals that

[1585] Go 'shakaboola'! And a man is dead.

[1586] That was all I asked. But what does

[1587] He say? He does not want to get

[1588] Involved, that's what he says.

[1589] You all know what that means, don't you?

[1590] It means that we're in serious trouble

[1591] If the King dies. It means that we're in hot

[1592] Pepper with that witch Onola

[1593] And her twin-devil Oroonoko. If the

[1594] King dies, those two will use our
[1595] Scalps to drink palm-wine. We must
[1596] Get back to the palace now, and be
[1597] Ready to flee if the King's
[1598] Condition worsens. If he

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[1599] Makes it till noon, that
[1600] May give us time to summon some
[1601] Help.

[Enter OROONOKO, ABOAN and other WARRIORS.]

OROMBO

[to OROONOKO]

[1602] She's dead, my General.

OROONOKO

[simultaneously]

[1603] Where's she?

OROMBO

[1604] Gone, my Lord. The King—

OROONOKO

[1605] I know His Highness—may he rest

[1606] In peace—ordered her death—

OROMBO

[1607] Kabiyesi is dead?

[He weeps.]

ABOAN

[1608] The King is not dead, you scavenger.

[1609] You stand before the King.

OROMBO

[prostrates himself]

[1610] Long may you reign, my King.

[ABOAN kicks him.]

ABOAN

[1611] Where's the Princess?

OROMBO

[1612] She's now with our ancestors. After the King,

[1613] May He Rest, ordered that

[1614] She was hanged, I took pity on her,

[1615] And brought her here—

ABOAN

[1616] You took pity on her and brought her *here?*

OROMBO

[1617] She died from her own hands

[1618] As we waited for the white man to

[1619] Come down from his boat.

OROONOKO

[grief-stricken]

[1620] Her body?

OROMBO

[1621] She rests in the water.

ABOAN

[benumbed]

[1622] The Princess died and you

[1623] Dumped her in the sea?

[He pulls out a dagger.]

ABOAN

[to OROONOKO]

[1624] Your Highness—long may you

[1625] Reign—have I your permission

[1626] To slaughter him like a dog?

OROONOKO

[1627] Make it slow and painful.

OROMBO

[deliberately]

[1628] You'll be pleased to know that

[1629] She didn't die a virgin. I saw to it.

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[OROONOKO pulls out a dagger and pounces on OROMBO all in the same moment. OROMBO dies spluttering blood. His MEN watch, huddled together, terrified.]

OROONOKO

[1630] Kill them.

[1631] No, take them back to the palace.

[1632] Feed them to the crocodiles.

[Enter CAPTAIN STANMORE and his MEN.]

STANMORE

[1633] I changed my mind.

[He sees OROMBO's body.]

STANMORE

[in mock sorrow]

[1634] Oh no.

[One of the WARRIORS makes to attack CAPTAIN STANMORE but is brought down in a hail of bullets.]

STANMORE

[1635] So, which one of you is the

[1636] Great pretender to the throne

[1637] Of Coramantien?

OROONOKO

[formally]

[1638] I am Prince Oroonoko,

[1639] Commander-in-Chief of the gallant

[1640] Warriors of Coramantien.

[1641] You are—?

STANMORE

[shakes OROONOKO's hand]

[1642] Captain James Stanmore,

[1643] Prince Oroonoko—

[1644] May I call you Bob?

OROONOKO

[1645] You may not.

STANMORE

[1646] From this moment onwards,
[1647] And until it pleases me to dispose
[1648] Of you in a manner that I deem fit,
[1649] You are my cargo, my slave.
[1650] That means, alas, Your Highness—
[1651] I'll spell it out—that I am
[1652] Your lord and master. And
[1653] Your name, *Prince Oroonoko*,
[1654] Is Bob.

[*Slow fade to black.*]

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PART TWO

SURINAM

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Act One

Scene 1

A portside slave-hold in Surinam: several months later.

Enter MR TREFRY and DEPUTY GOVERNOR BYAM.

We can hear a nearly inaudible welter of voices singing a slow lament in the distance.

TREFRY

[1655] Well, Byam, Captain Stanmore
[1656] Has brought us a fresh supply.

BYAM

[1657] Aye, and I'm sure we've never had
[1658] More need of them.

TREFRY

[1659] And I'm afraid we shall never have

[1660] Less.

BYAM

[1661] What do you say, Trefry?

TREFRY

[1662] We shall have enough of them, I

[1663] Warrant you, when they come to breed.

BYAM

[1664] Breed! They are lazy, obstinate and unruly pagans—

[1665] Half of them are so sulky when they arrive

[1666] That a Christian may beat them till he drops

[1667] Before he can make them to eat, if they

[1668] Haven't a mind to it.

[1669] He may beat those that will eat, long enough

[1670] Before they will work. And what with their

[1671] Starving themselves, they die as fast

[1672] As flies and the poor industrious planter

[1673] Loses the money they cost him, and his ground

[1674] Runs to ruin for want of their labour.

[1675] A Christian colony has a hard time of it,

[1676] That is forced to deal in this heathen commodity.

[1677] Every time a ship comes in, my money

[1678] Goes for a great raw-boned Negro fellow

[1679] That has the impudence to think he

[1680] Is my fellow creature, with as much right

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[1681] To Liberty as I have, and so grows sullen

[1682] And refuses to work; or for a young wench

[1683] Who will howl night and day after a brat or

[1684] A lover, which nothing can drive out of her

[1685] Head but a cat-o'-nine-tails. And if recourse

[1686] Is had to that remedy, it's ten to one that

[1687] She'll take the next opportunity to pick

[1688] My pocket by hanging herself.

[1689] The women are worse than the men.

[Exit BYAM.]

[Enter CAPTAIN STANMORE.]

STANMORE

[1690] Mr Trefry.

TREFRY

[1691] Captain Stanmore.

STANMORE

[1692] How fares our illustrious

[1693] Deputy Governor, Mr Byam?

TREFRY

[1694] Somewhat out of sorts.

STANMORE

[1695] In love still?

TREFRY

[1696] Captain?

STANMORE

[1697] I hear the Deputy Governor has taken

[1698] A fancy to one of the female slaves

[1699] And yet, would you believe, she gives herself

[1700] Airs and will scarcely speak to him. What do

[1701] They call her—Clemene?

TREFRY

[1702] She was in a lot that I drew for the

[1703] Lord Governor.

STANMORE

[1704] The Lord Governor? And when do we

[1705] Expect his Lordship's return from England?

TREFRY

[1706] Any day now.

[Enter BYAM.]

BYAM

[to TREFRY]

[1707] There's no resisting your fortune, Trefry.

[1708] You draw all the prizes.

TREFRY

[1709] I draw for our Lord Governor, you know;

[1710] His fortune favours me.

BYAM

[1711] I grudge him nothing this time, but if fortune

[1712] Had favoured me in the last sale, Clemene

[1713] Would be mine.

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TREFRY

[1714] Are you still smitten by her?

BYAM

[1715] Every day more in love with her.

TREFRY

[to STANMORE]

[1716] Captain, who is this Prince that's fallen

[1717] To my lot for the Lord Governor? Let me know

[1718] Something about him, that I may treat him

[1719] Accordingly: who is he?

STANMORE

[1720] He's the Devil of a fellow, I can tell you,

[1721] A *Prince* every inch of him. You have paid

[1722] Dear enough for him, for all the good he'll

[1723] Do you.

TREFRY

[1724] But who is he?

STANMORE

[1725] He is the grandson and heir to the throne

[1726] Of the King of Coramantien, a mischievous

[1727] Monarch in those parts, who would never

[1728] Let any of his neighbours be quiet. This

[1729] Son, Oroonoko, was his General, a fearsome

[1730] Fighting fellow.

TREFRY

[1731] But if he's a Prince, why is he now a slave?

STANMORE

[1732] He was brought into my hands

[1733] By the treachery of one of his father's own

[1734] Ministers.

TREFRY

[1735] Is that his name, Oroonoko?

STANMORE

[1736] Yes, Oroonoko.

BYAM

[as if trying it out on his tongue]

[1737] 'Oroonoko.'

STANMORE

[1738] I was forced to clap him in irons and
[1739] Did not think the ship safe neither. He even
[1740] Resolved that he and his followers
[1741] Should perish for want of food. I had to give
[1742] Him my solemn word as an Englishman that if
[1743] Only he would relent from his resolve, and also
[1744] Encourage his men to eat, I would allow him
[1745] His freedom as soon as we reached Surinam.

TREFRY

[1746] But you have not done so—he is here
[1747] In my lot.

STANMORE

[1748] Ah, sir, he was not to know it—
[1749] But I kept my fingers crossed.

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TREFRY

[1750] Captain, I'm afraid the world won't speak

[1751] So honourably of this action of yours as

[1752] You would have them.

STANMORE

[1753] I have the money, let the world be damned.

[1754] I have other matters to mind.

[Enter OROONOKO in chains, followed by other SLAVES including ABOAN and others of OROONOKO's warriors, all in chains and the very picture of dejection. They enter singing a lament, but sink into silence as soon as they see the white men.]

OROONOKO

[to STANMORE, with sarcasm]

[1755] So, sir, you've set me free.

STANMORE

[bristles]

[1756] I am a better Christian, thank you,

[1757] Than to keep my word with a heathen.

OROONOKO

[1758] If your god teaches you to break

[1759] Your word, I need not curse you.

[1760] Let him cheat you.

[1761]

[to ABOAN]

Whatever world we are next thrown

[1762] Into cannot be worse than this. Farewell,

[1763] My brother-warriors.

ABOAN AND SLAVES

[1764] Farewell, my General.

[Exit the SLAVES, including ABOAN.]

STANMORE

[1765] You see what a bloody pagan he is, Byam.
[1766] I took care that none of his followers should
[1767] Be in the same lot with him, for fear they
[1768] Should undertake some desperate action,
[1769] To the danger of the colony.

OROONOKO

[1770] Live in fear; it is the villain's curse. Fear
[1771] Even me who has no power to hurt you.

TREFRY

[to STANMORE]

[1772] Take off his chains.

[CAPTAIN STANMORE *makes a great show of being too busy lighting a pipe.*]

TREFRY

[to OROONOKO]

[1773] The Lord Governor's on leave in England.
[1774] You are his slave. In his absence it shall
[1775] Be my duty to serve you. My name is Trefry.

[Page 77]

[*He takes off OROONOKO's chains.*]

OROONOKO

[1776] I am ready, where must I go? What slavish
[1777] Habit must I wear? Hard fare, and whips
[1778] And chains may overpower my flesh, and
[1779] Bow my body down but there's another
[1780] Part of me, out of your reach, which you

[1781] Can never kill.

STANMORE

[1782] You have him, Trefry, and much may you

[1783] Do with your Prince.

[*Exit* CAPTAIN STANMORE.]

TREFRY

[1784] You shall find nothing of this wretchedness

[1785] You apprehend. We are not monsters all.

[1786] I shall presume to call you Caesar.

OROONOKO

[1787] I am myself, but you may call me what

[1788] You please.

BYAM

[1789] A good name, Caesar.

[1790] And fit for his character.

OROONOKO

[1791] Was Caesar then a slave?

BYAM

[1792] He was a conqueror, but unfortunate in

[1793] His friends—

OROONOKO

[1794] His friends were Christians?

TREFRY

[1795] No.

OROONOKO

[1796] No! That's strange.

BYAM

[leaving]

[1797] They murdered him.

OROONOKO

[1798] I'd be Caesar then.

[1799] Do what you will with me.

BYAM

[1800] We will, sir—depend on it.

[Exit BYAM.]

TREFRY

[1801] When once our noble Lord Governor arrives

[1802] —He is a generous soul—I will tell him

[1803] Of Stanmore's double dealing. You may find that

[1804] He does all in his authority to find the

[1805] Means to send you home again to Coramantien.

OROONOKO

[1806] I thank you, sir.

[1807] But my friends, sir, my honest, wretched

[1808] Friends! Their chains are heavy, they have

[\[Page 78\]](#)

[1809] Hardly found so kind a master.

[1810] May I ask you, sir, what will become of them?

TREFRY

[1811] I'll use my best endeavours

[1812] To see they're gently used.

OROONOKO

[1813] You tempt me to bid my hopes return, and

[1814] Wait a better day.

[looks despairingly at the moonless, bleak skies]

[1815] Would you kill a dog because it barks, my God?

[1816] Would you kill a bull because it has horns?

[1817] Would you kill a parrot because its tail is red?

[1818] Let all those who are angered at me,

[1819] Let all those who are plotting against me,

[1820] Let them have no power over me,

[1821] Let them forgive me, no matter what I may have

[1822] Done amiss,

[1823] Let their anger subside, my God.

TREFRY

[1824] I dare not ask you more than you're willing

[1825] To tell me. But if you think it convenient

[1826] To let me know your story,

[1827] I dare promise—if I can—to assist you.

OROONOKO

[1828] Her name, sir, was Imoinda.

[1829] She died.

[1830] They killed her.

[They exit.]

Scene 2

A plantation: a few days later.

It is early evening, after a heavy storm.

Enter ABOAN and other SLAVES.

1ST SLAVE

[1831] We must go back to work—if

[1832] The overseer catches us—

2ND SLAVE

[1833] Shh—I hear him.

1ST SLAVE

[*listens*]

[1834] No, it's not him.

ABOAN

[1835] Would he beat us then?

[Page 79]

1ST SLAVE

[1836] *Would he?* Experience will

[1837] Soon tell you that.

ABOAN

[1838] Has experience ever told you?

1ST SLAVE

[1839] I wish I could say no.

ABOAN

[1840] They've beaten you to silence—

[1841] To patient drudgery.

1ST SLAVE

[1842] I'm ashamed to confess it.

ABOAN

[1843] You should be ashamed to

[1844] Suffer it.

2ND SLAVE

[1845] We would not—if we knew

[1846] How to help it.

ABOAN

[1847] Suppose a friend told you how?

1ST SLAVE

[1848] What do you say?

2ND SLAVE

[1849] How?

1ST SLAVE

[1850] Tell us.

ABOAN

[1851] I see you're not completely broken.

[1852] I'll tell you news that'll string

[1853] Your nerves anew.

SLAVES

[*all*]

[1854] What news?

ABOAN

[1855] There's a mighty Prince, come among

[1856] You now, a God in arms. Before his sword

[1857] These pale, cold, half-formed tyrants would

[1858] Vanish like mist before the sun.

1ST SLAVE

[1859] He came on your ship?

ABOAN

[1860] He came with me. I am myself

[1861] Distinguished by his friendship.

[1862] He will not bear this dull patience

[1863] We suffer now.

2ND SLAVE

[1864] And will this Prince help us

[1865] To be free?

ABOAN

[1866] If you will join hands with him—

[*Enter OTMAN, a slave from a neighbouring plantation, an angry-looking man. ABOAN does not know him.*]

[*As soon as he notices OTMAN, ABOAN launches into a chant and is quickly joined by those of his companions who know the chant and who also recognise it for what it actually is—a decoy to confuse this stranger—OTMAN—in their midst.*]

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[ABOAN and the other SLAVES gather in a circle, around a log fire, holding one another's hands and swaying gently in a ritual dance to Shango, the God of thunder, and also the God of justice and fair play.]

ABOAN

[1867] Be my guide, O Shango

[1868] My God of thunder!

1ST SLAVE

[1869] You are the death

[1870] That drips *to, to, to*

[1871] Like indigo dye

[1872] Dripping from a cloth.

2ND SLAVE

[1873] You are the leopard

[1874] That kills the sheep—

3RD SLAVE

[1875] And bathes in its blood!

4TH SLAVE

[1876] You are a huge morsel:

[1877] If anyone tried to swallow you—

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1878] —You'd be out of their anus

[1879] Like lightning!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1880] You do as you please, Shango

[1881] My God of thunder!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1882] Fire-eating masquerade,
[1883] You frighten the big cat!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1884] Invulnerable One:
[1885] Who can behead a fly?
[1886] Who can swallow a hedgehog?

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1887] You walk alone,
[1888] But enter the town
[1889] Like a swarm of locusts.

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1890] You are the King who knows
[1891] Today—and tomorrow, too!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1892] You've been known
[1893] To make yam porridge
[1894] From orange pips!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1895] Even when you do not fight,
[1896] Shango—

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1897] —We fear you!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1898] But when war gleams

[1899] In your eye—

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SLAVES

[*all*]

[1900] When war gleams

[1901] In your eye, enemies

[1902] And worshippers run alike!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1903] Fire-in-the-Eye!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1904] Fire-in-the-Mouth!

ANOTHER SLAVE

[1905] Fire-on-the-Roof!

SLAVES

[*all*]

[1906] You ride fire like a horse!

[All through this OTMAN watches, with unconcealed disdain, and then leaves, shaking his head. He has hardly left when the SLAVES turn to one another.]

ABOAN

[1907] Who was that?

1ST SLAVE

[1908] I've seen him about.

2ND SLAVE

[1909] I haven't.

1ST SLAVE

[1910] I have.

2ND SLAVE

[1911] I haven't.

ABOAN

[1912] Enough!

[1913] Who is he?

[A FEMALE SLAVE *steps forward.*]

FEMALE SLAVE

[1914] His name is Otman.

[1915] He's owned by the Deputy Governor,

[1916] Mr Byam.

ABOAN

[1917] What more do you know

[1918] About him?

FEMALE SLAVE

[1919] He hates Mr Byam.

ABOAN

[1920] Why?

1ST SLAVE

[as if it were self-evident]

[1921] Why else? Because Mr Byam

[1922] Owns him.

ABOAN

[1923] Is he ill-used by Mr Byam?

FEMALE SLAVE

[1924] On occasion. But that is not

[1925] Why Otman hates him.

ABOAN

[1926] Why does Otman hate him?

FEMALE SLAVE

[1927] Otman

[1928] Hates him because Mr Byam is

[1929] Known for a fool in the colony. When

[1930] He's not drunk and raging like a

[1931] Loon, he's to be found forcing himself on his

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[1932] Female slaves and making brats

[1933] By the dozen. That's why Otman

[1934] Hates him

[They hear a cry.]

2ND SLAVE

[1935] They whip a slave.

ABOAN

[*thoughtfully*]

[1936] Let's go back to work.

[*All exit.*]

Scene 3

The neighbouring plantation: later that night.

Enter PRINCESS IMOINDA singing a sad, sad song.

Enter BYAM moments later, followed by OTMAN attending on him.

OTMAN is, all through the following, scrupulously servile and betrays nothing but deference to BYAM.

BYAM

[1937] I have disturbed you, I confess my fault,

[1938] My dear Clemene; but begin again.

[1939] And I will listen to your mournful song,

[1940] Sweet as the soft complaining nightingale's,

[1941] While every note calls out my soul and

[1942] Leaves me silent, as the midnight groves.

[1943] Sing, sing again and let me wonder at the

[1944] Many ways you have to ravish me.

IMOINDA

[1945] I can weep enough for you, and me,

[1946] If that will please you.

BYAM

[1947] You must not weep: I come to dry your tears,

[1948] And raise you from your sorrows.

IMOINDA

[1949] How can that be, when everything you do

[1950] Convinces me that you'd keep me here,

[1951] Far from those I shed tears for?

BYAM

[1952] Forget the past, Clemene. Look toward
[1953] Now, where better prospects rise,
[1954] And new pleasures court and invite you.
[Page 83]

[1955] My heart has all the soft sensations
[1956] That love inspires—

IMOINDA

[1957] Could your heart, forced to some distant land,
[1958] Unknown, forlorn, a slave, dependent on
[1959] Another's will, cut off from friends and family,
[1960] Could your heart forget all these?

BYAM

[1961] Look at me, Clemene. I come to offer you
[1962] Your liberty, and be myself the slave. Do not
[1963] Turn away—
[follows her]
Let me hold this
[1964] Pretty hand, let me—I know your modesty
[1965] Would draw it back—but you would take it
[1966] Ill if I should let it go, I know you would. You
[1967] Shall be gently forced to please yourself; that
[1968] You will thank me for. But, if you struggle
[1969] With me, I must take—

IMOINDA

[1970] You can take my life. I'll freely part with
[1971] That.

[Exit PRINCESS IMOINDA.]

[Enter CAPTAIN STANMORE.]

STANMORE

[1972] So, Byam, I don't disturb you, I hope.

[1973] She's thankful for the honour of your attentions,

[1974] I suppose?

BYAM

[1975] Quite insensible to all I say and do.

[1976] When I speak to her she sighs or

[1977] Weeps but never answers me as I

[1978] Would have her.

STANMORE

[1979] There's something nearer than her

[1980] Slavery that touches her. What do

[1981] Her fellow slaves say of her?

BYAM

[1982] Some of them, who hate her for being

[1983] Better used than they are, will needs

[1984] Have it that she is with child.

STANMORE

[1985] Poor bitch. You cannot blame her if it

[1986] Be so.

BYAM

[1987] I had Otman check on that.

[1988] Otman?

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[OTMAN *bows.*]

OTMAN

[1989] Aye, master. I checked on that. She is not

[1990] With child. She broods, they say, for her

[1991] Husband.

BYAM

[1992] Her husband? What husband?

[They start as a sharp clang of alarm sounds in the distance.]

[Enter MR TREFRY and OROONOKO.]

TREFRY

[1993] Make what haste you can, Deputy Governor,

[1994] To save yourself and the colony.

BYAM

[1995] What's the matter?

TREFRY

[1996] The Indians are come down on us.

[1997] They have plundered some of the

[1998] Plantations already, and are

[1999] Marching this way as fast as they can.

BYAM

[2000] What can we do against them?

TREFRY

[2001] We should be able to hold them back

[2002] Until more planters arrive, if you would

[2003] Show yourself and put us in order.

BYAM

[2004] Come with me, Trefry. You, Stanmore, stay

[2005] Here and look after the slaves.

[As MR TREFRY and BYAM begin to leave, together with OTMAN, CAPTAIN STANMORE seizes OROONOKO.]

TREFRY

[*turning back*]

[2006] What are you doing?

STANMORE

[2007] Securing the purchase.

[2008] He is an enemy of the state.

OROONOKO

[2009] My constant friend.

STANMORE

[2010] He has the malice of a slave in him

[2011] And would be glad to be cutting

[2012] His masters' throats.

TREFRY

[2013] Let go of him.

[2014]

[*to BYAM*]

He's in my care, I shall answer

[2015] With my life for his behaviour.

[*We hear the sound of Indian drums and soft flutes approaching.*]

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TREFRY

[2016] Hell and the Devil! They drive away

[2017] Our slaves before our eyes. Deputy Governor,

[2018] Can you stand tamely by and suffer this?

[2019] Your mistress, Clemene, is among them.

BYAM

[in despair]

[2020] We're outnumbered and will throw

[2021] Ourselves away, in the attempt to rescue

[2022] Them.

OROONOKO

[2023] Give me a sword. I'll deserve your trust.

[MR TREFRY hesitates then hands him a sword.]

OROONOKO

[2024] Follow me.

[All exit.]

[Enter the SLAVES, fleeing for their lives.]

[Enter the INDIANS, in pursuit of the SLAVES.]

[Exit the SLAVES.]

[Enter OROONOKO, in pursuit of the INDIANS.]

[Blackout.]

[Exit the INDIANS, pursued by OROONOKO.]

[Lights up.]

[Enter BYAM, MR TREFRY, CAPTAIN STANMORE and OTMAN.]

[Enter OROONOKO.]

[BYAM grabs OROONOKO in a grateful hug and a firm handshake.]

BYAM

[2025] Accept our general thanks, Prince Oroonoko, you're
[2026] Something greater save than Caesar ever was.
[2027] What we can do more to recompense such
[2028] Noble services you shall command.

[Enter PRINCESS IMOINDA.]

BYAM

[2029] Clemene too shall thank you—she is safe.

[2030]

[to PRINCESS IMOINDA]

Come, my dear, and bless

[2031] Your brave deliverer.

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[PRINCESS IMOINDA and OROONOKO both look up and recognise each other at the same time. PRINCESS IMOINDA gasps.]

OROONOKO

[blinks]

[2032] Do not mock me, O Gods of my fathers,

[2033] Do not mock me with this illusion.

BYAM

[2034] What does he stare at?

OTMAN

[2035] It would seem, master,

[2036] He's her husband.

BYAM

[2037] Husband? How so?

IMOINDA

[in a breathless whisper]

[2038] Is it really you, my Prince?

OROONOKO

[2039] Imoinda, you're—alive?

IMOINDA

[2040] I am—now, my husband.

[They fly into each other's arms.]

STANMORE

[with great pleasure]

[2041] Where's your mistress now, Byam?

BYAM

[2042] Why, where most men's mistresses

[2043] Are forced to be sometimes,

[2044] With her husband, it seems.

TREFRY

[to OROONOKO]

[2045] Sir, I do most heartily congratulate

[2046] Your happiness.

BYAM

[2047] And all of us. But how did it all—?

OROONOKO

[2048] That will require more time
[2049] Than I can spare you now. I have
[2050] A thousand things to ask her—

IMOINDA

[2051] And I, many more to know of you.

OROONOKO

[2052] This little spot of earth you stand
[2053] Upon means more to me than the green
[2054] Vastness of my father's Kingdom.
[2055] Your love is my Empire, and my heart,
[2056] Princess, is your throne.

[*All exit.*]

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Act Two

Scene 1

The first plantation: later that same night.

The SLAVES are singing as they go home from a long day's work.

Enter OTMAN, bristling with rage.

OTMAN

[2057] What's wrong with you all? This is no time
[2058] To look to the past. This is no time to dream
[2059] Memories! It's time to think of *now!*

[*ABOAN looks at OTMAN.*]

ABOAN

[2060] What do you know about *now?*

OTMAN

[2061] That we're slaves! Slaves to cowards!
[2062] Slaves to rogues who can't even defend
[2063] Themselves!

ABOAN

[to 1ST SLAVE, *whispers*]

[2064] He talks as if he knows our purpose.

OTMAN

[2065] Go on, sneak in corners, whisper so your
[2066] Masters don't hear you. Cringe and crouch
[2067] Under the whip, like dogs licking their wounds.
[2068] I feel as much as you feel, but I won't groan.
[2069] As long as I have life and tongue I'll curse
[2070] Them all.

ABOAN

[to OTMAN]

[2071] Have you been long a slave?

OTMAN

[2072] Many years.

ABOAN

[2073] And what do you do, except curse?

OTMAN

[2074] What else can I do? I am but one man.
[2075] If only someone with a soul of fire, a leader
[2076] Of men, were to come forward and make a
[2077] Body of us all, then I shall do something more
[2078] Than curse.

ABOAN

[2079] You'd better be the legs of such a body,

[2080] To make it march?

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OTMAN

[2081] I'll be the heart of it—the head, the hand,

[2082] And the heart of it!

ABOAN

[to SLAVES]

[2083] I like this spirit, we need more like him.

[2084]

[to OTMAN]

I may yet hold you up to that.

[Enter MR TREFRY.]

[OTMAN *stares stonily at him.*]

TREFRY

[to ABOAN]

[2085] Are you Aboan?

ABOAN

[2086] I have been called by that sound.

TREFRY

[2087] Follow me.

[All exit.]

Scene 2

The neighbouring plantation: that same night.

Enter OROONOKO and PRINCESS IMOINDA.

OROONOKO

[2088] Eshu, the trickster-God, came walking
[2089] Once along a path between two farms.
[2090] He wore a hat that was white on one side,
[2091] Red on the other. The two farmers on either side
[2092] Of his path saw him walk past. Later
[2093] That day, as they drank palm wine together,
[2094] One said to the other:

IMOINDA

[as the farmer, laughs]

[2095] 'Did you see
[2096] That odd man, in a white hat, who walked
[2097] Past the farm today?'

OROONOKO

[2098] 'I did see the man,' said
[2099] The other, 'but his hat was red.
[2100] I saw it with my
[2101] Own two eyes,'

IMOINDA

[2102] 'Well, then,' said the first farmer,
[2103] 'You must be blind.'

OROONOKO

[2104] 'You,' responded the other,
[2105] 'Must be drunk.' The argument went on and the
[2106] Two friends came to blows.

[Page 89]

[2107] They became sworn enemies. The
[2108] King heard about the quarrel and sent for them.
[2109] Eshu was there at the trial and when the Kabiyesi
[2110] Could not apportion blame or praise, the trickster
[2111] Divinity revealed himself and showed the
[2112] Hat. 'Pardon them,' he told the King, 'they
[2113] Could not help but quarrel.
[2114] I wanted it so—'

OROONOKO AND IMOINDA

[together, laughing]

[2115] 'Spreading strife is my greatest joy.'

OROONOKO

[2116] When I heard you were dead, my Princess,
[2117] And then that scoundrel Stanmore kidnapped
[2118] Me, I thought the trickster-God had
[2119] Twice in one day mocked me with a cruel joke.
[2120] But I see now what my God was doing. Eshu knew you
[2121] Were not dead; he knew you'd been brought
[2122] Here and he knew that to bring us back together
[2123] He had to bring me here as well. Now, my Queen,
[2124] We can go back to Coramantien and resume the throne.
[2125] If we guess the future by the past
[2126] Our fortunes must be wonderful.

IMOINDA

[unsure]

[2127] Good or bad, it must be in extremes.
[2128] Extremely happy or—

OROONOKO

[2129] It's in our power to make it happy now.

IMOINDA

[2130] But not to keep it that way.

[Enter MR TREFRY and ABOAN.]

TREFRY

[2131] I have a present for you.

OROONOKO AND IMOINDA

[2132] Aboan!

ABOAN

[starts when he sees PRINCESS IMOINDA]

[2133] Princess Imoinda!

[2134] We thought you were dead!

[He falls at her feet in greeting.]

OROONOKO

[2135] Orombo lied to us. He did sell her

[2136] To Stanmore.

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[2137]

[to TREFRY]

We all thought she was dead.

[2138] How shall I thank you, my friend?

TREFRY

[2139] Trust me, and that would

[2140] Be more than enough.

[2141] I have seen to it that all your followers

[2142] Will be gently used. This gentleman, your

[2143] Chief favourite, sir, shall wait on you

[2144] During your stay in Surinam.

OROONOKO

[2145] I owe everything to you.

TREFRY

[2146] You must not think you are in slavery.

OROONOKO

[2147] I do not find I am.

TREFRY

[2148] Your deliverance shall soon come.

[2149] In the meantime,

[*pulls OROONOKO aside*]

[2150] You have enemies. People that represent you

[2151] Dangerous and would be glad to find

[2152] A reason, in your discontent, to fear.

[2153] They watch your looks.

OROONOKO

[2154] I thank you for the caution.

TREFRY

[2155] I will leave you.

[2156] Be assured, I wish you liberty.

[*Exit MR TREFRY.*]

ABOAN

[2157] He thinks highly of you.

OROONOKO

[2158] He means us well.

ABOAN

[2159] Are you sure, my Lord?

OROONOKO

[2160] Am I sure? What's to be gained

[2161] From doubting?

ABOAN

[2162] You shield yourself from disappointment.

[PRINCESS IMOINDA *pulls* ONOONOKO *closer to her.*]

OROONOKO

[2163] We must be patient.

ABOAN

[*testily*]

[2164] My King, as our fortune stands,

[2165] There is a passion that would become

[2166] You better than your love—Forgive me,

[2167] My Princess, but I must say this ...

[2168] A great resentment which, if inspired by you,

[2169] Might kindle and diffuse a searing rage

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[2170] Among the slaves,

[2171] To rouse and shake

[2172] Our chains, and our struggle to be free.

OROONOKO

[2173] How can we help ourselves?

ABOAN

[disappointed]

[2174] How can we help ourselves?

[2175] I knew you when you would

[2176] Have found a way. We need only stand

[2177] Up to them, as the Indians have done.

[2178] We have enough hands ready to be employed,

[2179] Double the number of our masters' forces.

OROONOKO

[dismissive]

[2180] What's holding you back?

ABOAN

[ignores the sarcasm]

[2181] We need you—to lead us.

OROONOKO

[2182] You're in jest, Aboan.

[2183] What would we do?

ABOAN

[2184] Cut their throats.

OROONOKO

[2185] And you would have me join

[2186] In this murderous conspiracy?

ABOAN

[2187] It deserves a better name.

[2188] It's called self-defence, my King.

[2189] And natural liberty.

OROONOKO

[2190] I'll hear no more of it.

ABOAN

[2191] I'm sorry to hear that.

OROONOKO

[2192] Nor shall you think any more of it.

ABOAN

[2193] Not think of it!

OROONOKO

[2194] And that's an order, warrior.

ABOAN

[2195] Not think of it! Since the first moment they

[2196] Put on my chains, I've thought of nothing

[2197] But the weight of them. Goodnight, Princess.

[2198]

[deliberately]

You, sir, are yourself a slave.

[He begins to leave.]

OROONOKO

[shocked at the discourtesy]

[2199] You will not leave until I say so, warrior.

ABOAN

[2200] Try and stop me, slave.

IMOINDA

[2201] Aboan!

[ABOAN *turns back He is weeping with rage.*]

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OROONOKO

[2202] Remember this, Aboan, if we are

[2203] Slaves, these planters did not make us slaves.

[2204] They were not to know of Stanmore's treachery.

[2205] They bought us in an honest way of trade

[2206] As we have done before them, bought

[2207] And sold many a wretch and never

[2208] Thought it wrong. They paid our price

[2209] For us and we are now their property,

[2210] A part of their estate, to manage as they

[2211] Please. Mistake me not: I do not tamely

[2212] Say that we should bear all they could

[2213] Lay upon us, but we find the load so

[2214] Light, so little to be felt—considering they

[2215] Have us in their power and may inflict what

[2216] Grievances they please—we ought not to

[2217] Complain.

ABOAN

[*to PRINCESS IMOINDA*]

[2218] If you saw the bloody cruelties this people

[2219] Inflict on us—the poorest dog here is treated

[2220] Better than any of us—

OROONOKO

[*despondently*]

[2221] I know that, Aboan.

[2222] And I wish I could honestly do more.

ABOAN

[2223] You must do more, and may with honesty.

[2224] Remember who you are, my General, a Prince,

[2225] Born for the good of other men, whose god-like

[2226] Office is to draw the sword against oppression

[2227] And set free mankind.

[2228] I know they claim to think highly of you,

[2229] And that they've promised you freedom.

[2230] But think what it is to wait on the promises

[2231] Of men who have always lied to us.

OROONOKO

[2232] Trefry is an honest man.

ABOAN

[2233] I do not doubt his honesty,

[2234] And I'm sure he means all he says.

[2235] But he's only one man in a government

[2236] Where you have many enemies.

[2237] What have they to gain by freeing you?

IMOINDA

[2238] He does make a point.

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ABOAN

[2239] I know that you've been persuaded

[2240] To believe that the Governor's arrival

[2241] Will prevent any mischief and bring

[2242] You liberty. But who is sure of that?

OROONOKO

[*brusquely*]

[2243] Summon your men.

ABOAN

[*jubilant*]

[2244] You will lead us?

OROONOKO

[*dryly*]

[2245] You underestimate your powers

[2246] Of persuasion, Aboan.

ABOAN

[2247] O Gods! Thank you, my Lord, thank you!

OROONOKO

[2248] There'll be this reservation however.

[2249] There will be no butchery. It would be wrong

[2250] To break the ties of honour through fear others

[2251] Should break them first.

[*Exit ABOAN.*]

[*OROONOKO turns to PRINCESS IMOINDA.*]

OROONOKO

[2252] Is it Wise?

IMOINDA

[2253] It isn't foolish.

[OROONOKO and PRINCESS IMOINDA exit.]

Scene 3

The first plantation: later that night.

Enter ABOAN and OTMAN in mid-conversation.

OTMAN

[2254] I don't like the sound of it.

ABOAN

[2255] I know how you feel. But is freedom,

[2256] Without the loss of lives, not worth

[2257] Accepting?

OTMAN

[2258] To our pale lords, perhaps, who only dare

[2259] Strike those whom others bind, it might

[2260] Be acceptable. But not to me. I thirst for more than

[2261] Freedom. I want revenge. Let me think on it.

[ABOAN and OTMAN exit.]

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Scene 4

The neighbouring plantation: later still that night.

Enter OROONOKO, PRINCESS IMOINDA and the other SLAVES.

OROONOKO

[2262] Impossible! Nothing's impossible.

[2263] We know our strength only by being tried.

1ST SLAVE

[2264] Great sir, we have heard you
[2265] With great joy and admiration.
[2266] But we have wives and children
[2267] Who are unfit for such an expedition.
[2268] What must become of them?

[*Enter ABOAN and OTMAN.*]

OROONOKO

[2269] We cannot wrong the virtue of our
[2270] Women to believe there is a wife among
[2271] Them that would refuse to share her husband's
[2272] Fortune. While we live and have our limbs.
[2273] We can take care of them.
[2274] I still propose we lead our march down
[2275] To the sea and plant a colony where we shall
[2276] Live free and able to defend ourselves till stress
[2277] Of weather or some accident provide a ship
[2278] For us.

IMOINDA

[2279] An accident!
[2280] The luckiest accident presents itself.
[2281] The very ship that brought us and
[2282] Made us slaves swims in the river still.

SLAVES

[*all*]

[2283] Let's seize it!

OROONOKO

[2284] It shall be so.
[2285] There is a justice in it that pleases me.
[2286]
[*to OTMAN*]
You do not relish it.

OTMAN

[*gingerly*]

[2287] I am afraid you'll find it difficult

[2288] And dangerous.

ABOAN

[2289] Dangerous! I thought you didn't know

[2290] The word danger, you who would be the

[2291] Head, the hand, and heart. Sir, I remember

[2292] You, you can talk well. I do not doubt you

[2293] Shall keep your word.

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OROONOKO

[*aside, to ABOAN*]

[2294] This man is not right.

[2295] I'll try him further.

[2296]

[*to OTMAN*]

The danger will be certain to all of us.

[2297] We must expect no mercy if we fail,

[2298] It's either liberty or death.

[2299] There's no man here, I hope, who does

[2300] Not come prepared for all that befall him.

ABOAN

[2301] If there be one among us who can fear

[2302] The face of death appearing like a friend

[2303] As this cause of honour death must be, how

[2304] Will he tremble when he sees death dressed

[2305] In the wild fury of our enemies in all the

[2306] Terrors of their cruelty?

OTMAN

[*trembling*]

[2307] What will become of us?

[OROONOKO *and* ABOAN *exchange looks.*]

OROONOKO

[2308] I could die altogether, like a man,

[2309] As you, and you, and you, and all

[2310] Of us may do: but who can promise

[2311] Bravery when tortured on the rack,

[2312] His skin flayed off and roasted yet

[2313] Alive? The quivering flesh torn from

[2314] His broken bones by burning pincers?

[2315] Who can bear these pains?

OTMAN

[2316] They—they're not to be borne.

OROONOKO

[2317] You see him now, this man of mighty

[2318] Words!

ABOAN

[2319] I cannot believe it.

[2320] Such a blaze, and not a spark of fire!

[2321] What shall we do with him?

OROONOKO

[2322] We are not safe with him.

ABOAN

[2323] Do you think so?

OROONOKO

[2324] He'll betray us.

ABOAN

[2325] That he shan't.

[ABOAN *goes to stab* OTMAN. OROONOKO *stops him.*]

OROONOKO

[2326] Are you mad? His murder would

[2327] Alarm all the rest, and make them think

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[2328] We're barbarians. We'll not set out

[2329] In blood.

[2330] We have, my friends, this night to furnish

[2331] What we can provide for our security and just

[2332] Defence. If there's any one among us we suspect

[2333] Of baseness or vile fear, it will become our

[2334] Common care to have our eyes on him.

[*The SLAVES turn and stare at OTMAN.*]

[*Exit OTMAN, fleeing.*]

[*Exit 1ST SLAVE in pursuit of OTMAN.*]

[*All exit.*]

Scene 5

DEPUTY GOVERNOR BYAM's house: *later that night.*

Enter BYAM and CAPTAIN STANMORE, followed by a breathless OTMAN.

BYAM

[2335] To seize the boat, you say?

OTMAN

[2336] Yes, my Lord.

STANMORE

[2337] At what hour?

OTMAN

[2338] Sometime tonight.

BYAM

[2339] Didn't they trust you?

OTMAN

[2340] They did, but then the Prince—

BYAM

[2341] Caesar?

[OTMAN *nods.*]

[2342] Your honest service to the government

[2343] Shall be rewarded with your liberty.

[2344] I shall order all the militia under arms

[2345] Directly.

[OTMAN *stands still and does not respond.*]

BYAM

[*puzzled*]

[2346] What do you want, Otman?

OTMAN

[*after a quiet pause*]

[2347] My liberty.

BYAM

[2348] How many hands have you

[2349] On deck tonight, Captain?

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STANMORE

[2350] Enough to do the business.

[2351]

[*slowly turns round*]

Deputy Governor?

BYAM

[2352] Yes, Captain?

STANMORE

[2353] I thought I caught the hint

[2354] Of a glint in your eyes.

BYAM

[*irritably*]

[2355] What? What?

STANMORE

[*smiles*]

[2356] I thought I caught you thinking

[2357] About your mistress.

BYAM

[gruffly]

[2358] Nonsense, Captain.

[2359] That's all in the past.

[2360] She will hang together with her

[2361]

—[mockingly]

Prince.

[All exit.]

Scene 6

The first plantation: later that night.

Enter OROONOKO, ABOAN, PRINCESS IMOINDA and other SLAVES.

OROONOKO

[2362] Come friends, the moon will rise soon.

[2363] We must be swift and silent. We'll surprise

[2364] The ship and win without loss of blood.

[Enter 1ST SLAVE, *breathless.*]

1ST SLAVE

[2365] Otman has betrayed us.

ABOAN

[2366] No!

1ST SLAVE

[2367] I saw him go into the Deputy Governor's house.

[2368] The boat has now moved

[2369] Farther from the shore. The

[2370] Captain and his crew are up in

[2371] Arms, all the planters are out and—

[Enter BYAM with OTMAN and several other MEN.]

ABOAN

[bitterly, to OROONOKO]

[2372] Forgive me, my Lord, for trusting that slave.

[He eyes OTMAN murderously and makes to attack him.]

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OROONOKO

[2373] Hold, Aboan.

[2374]

[to BYAM]

Withdraw your men.

BYAM

[2375] What can you do even if we did withdraw?

[2376] Where will you go? What more can you

[2377] Resolve? Be sensible, sir, you are outnumbered,

[2378] Surrounded. Save yourself, throw down your arms.

[The SLAVES begin to panic.]

BYAM

[to the SLAVES]

[2379] To everyone of you seduced

[2380] Into this foolish act, we offer a full pardon.

[OROONOKO prepares to fight.]

[The SLAVES desert him and rush to BYAM.]

SLAVES

[all]

[2381] Pardon, mercy, pardon!

[Enter MR TREFRY.]

BYAM

[2382] I'm asking you to give up, sir,

[2383] Before it is too late. Give up now

[2384] And you shall have whatever terms

[2385] You propose for you and yours.

[2386] Talk to him, Trefry.

OROONOKO

[2387] Have you too come against me?

[MR TREFRY *in reply pulls out his sword and lays it on the ground.*]

OROONOKO

[2388] I know what I have done.

[2389] I'd be a fool to think I'd walk free.

BYAM

[to TREFRY]

[2390] Offer him what you will.

[2391] I'll confirm and make it good.

TREFRY

[2392] The Deputy Governor offers you unconditional

[2393] Pardon, for you and yours.

[*looks from PRINCESS IMOINDA to OROONOKO*]

[2394] Sir, don't throw away the happiness

[2395] You've just found, I beseech you.

[OROONOKO *looks at PRINCESS IMOINDA. She nods, slowly. OROONOKO puts down his sword.*]

OROONOKO

[2396] We are in your hands.

BYAM

[to STANMORE and OTMAN]

[2397] Chain him.

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TREFRY

[2398] You cannot mean—

BYAM

[2399] This is not your concern.

[2400] Chain him.

[OROONOKO *is seized.*]

[ABOAN, *without warning, leaps at OTMAN and slashes him across the throat with a swift flick of his dagger.*]

[OTMAN *dies.*]

[BYAM *looks on, shocked.*]

[ABOAN *is seized.*]

BYAM

[to his MEN]

[2401] Dispose of them.

[2402] [to PRINCESS IMOINDA] I must take care of you.

[PRINCESS IMOINDA *stumbles and falls as if by accident. She quickly picks up the dagger with which. ABOAN had killed OTMAN and hides it on her person.*]

[All exit.]

Act Three

Scene 1

DEPUTY GOVERNOR BYAM's house: *later that night.*

Enter BYAM and MR TREFRY.

BYAM

[2403] The public good requires that he should die.

[2404] The planters want him hanged.

TREFRY

[2405] Have you no reverence of future fame?

[2406] If you confess humanity, and believe there is

[2407] A God, to punish or reward our doings here,

[2408] Do not provoke your fate. The Hand of Heaven

[2409] Armed against these cries with hotter thunderbolts,

[2410] Prepared to shoot, and nail you to the earth, a sad

[2411] Example, a monument of faithless infamy.

BYAM

[2412] Tell me no more of fame and breach of faith!

TREFRY

[2413] He gave himself up. Remember, sir,

[2414] He yielded on your word. Your word!

[2415] Which honest men will think should

[2416] Be the last resort of truth and trust on earth.

[2417] Give him his liberty, sir, and I'll be his surety.

[2418] I will answer for him.

[2419] My friend, the Lord Governor, will thank you.

BYAM

[*relents*]

[2420] You know where he's kept.

[2421] Send a slave. Send word I ordered the release.

[Exit MR TREFRY.]

[BYAM *pauses a moment then opens a door leading into an inner room. PRINCESS IMOINDA is revealed, motionless, as if in a trance.*]

[BYAM *seizes her.*]

BYAM

[2422] Come here.

[2423] I'll no longer court you.

[2424] The man that asks deserves to be denied.

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[PRINCESS IMOINDA *pulls out the concealed dagger and stabs BYAM in the shoulder. He reels back in shock.*]

[Enter MR TREFRY.]

IMOINDA

[2425] He does indeed, that asks unworthily.

TREFRY

[2426] You heard her, sir: that asks unworthily.

BYAM

[2427] You are no judge.

TREFRY

[2428] I am of my own slave.

BYAM

[2429] I granted your wish.

[2430] Why did you come back?

TREFRY

[2431] To take the Princess with me

[2432] To see her husband.

BYAM

[2433] Get out, leave us alone.

TREFRY

[2434] When you let her go.

[BYAM *and* MR TREFRY *draw swords.*]

[PRINCESS IMOINDA *flees, the bloodied dagger still clenched in her fist.*]

[BYAM *swings his sword at* MR TREFRY. MR TREFRY *easily parries. He knocks the sword out of* BYAM's hand, *then bends to pick it up and return it to him.*]

[BYAM *pulls out a pistol and swings it down on* MR TREFRY's head. MR TREFRY *slumps down unconscious.*]

BYAM

[2435] She shall not escape me. I've gone

[2436] Too far not to go farther.

[*Exit* BYAM.]

Scene 2

The first plantation: later that night.

Enter OROONOKO *chained to a post, followed by* ABOAN, *who is all bloodied up.*

OROONOKO

[2437] Aboan! My ever faithful friend!

[2438] You're gashed and mangled.

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ABOAN

[lies down]

[2439] The hangman's hand would have

[2440] Been kinder than what they did to me.

OROONOKO

[2441] I'm sorry, Aboan.

ABOAN

[2442] I do not come for pity, my Lord.

OROONOKO

[2443] Let me attend to your wounds.

ABOAN

[laughs weakly]

[2444] That won't be necessary, my Lord.

[2445] I dragged myself all this way to beg

[2446] To be discharged.

OROONOKO

[2447] What can I do for you, Aboan?

ABOAN

[2448] My soul is tired and I have no strength

[2449] Left in my body. I want, with your

[2450] Permission, to leave this world.

OROONOKO

[2451] If I cannot provide you with an honourable
[2452] Means of life, the least I can do is to bestow
[2453] You with an honest means of death. Here.

[OROONOKO *gives ABOAN a dagger.*]

ABOAN

[2454] I cannot stay to thank you.
[2455] I shall not say farewell.
[2456]
[stabs himself]
I shall wait for you
[2457] In the next world, my Lord.

[He dies.]

OROONOKO

[2458] Farewell, my friend.

[Enter PRINCESS IMOINDA, running.]

OROONOKO

[2459] Who chases you, my Princess?

IMOINDA

[2460] It's in vain to call him villain.

OROONOKO

[2461] Call him Byam. It is Byam, isn't it?

IMOINDA

[2462] There isn't another man so vile.

OROONOKO

[2463] What has he done to you?

IMOINDA

[2464] I cringe to think about it.

OROONOKO

[2465] What did he do?

IMOINDA

[2466] What he could, he dared.

OROONOKO

[2467] May his own gods damn him.

IMOINDA

[2468] That worthy man, your friend—

OROONOKO

[2469] Trefry.

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IMOINDA

[2470] Trefry came in and saved me

[2471] From the Deputy Governor's rage.

[*She is very frightened.*]

[2472] You must promise never to see me

[2473] Forced from you again.

[2474]

[*sees ABOAN*]

Aboan!

[OROONOKO reaches for the dagger in PRINCESS IMOINDA's hand and makes to stab himself in the stomach.]

IMOINDA

[stays his hand]

[2475] You cannot leave me here all alone.

[2476] We must go on this journey together.

[They hold in a tight embrace.]

IMOINDA

[2477] Be quick, make haste,

[2478] Our enemies have eyes.

[They kiss]

IMOINDA

[2479] I'm ready.

OROONOKO

[listlessly]

[2480] I can't.

[She takes up the dagger.]

IMOINDA

[2481] Then I must assist you—

[As she makes to stab herself, OROONOKO stays her hand, takes the dagger away, and grabs her in a tight embrace. They hold onto each other as if for dear life. Then, in one swift movement, OROONOKO breaks her neck.]

[She dies immediately.]

[OROONOKO holds onto her, and weeps bitterly, violently. He reaches for the dagger and makes to stab himself in

the stomach.]

[Enter BYAM together with CAPTAIN STANMORE, both armed with shotguns. BYAM is still bleeding. He looks ashen, ill, at death's door.]

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[BYAM sees PRINCESS IMOINDA's body. He goes and examines her, sees she's dead.]

BYAM

[gasps]

[2482] Who did this, Caesar?

OROONOKO

[2483] I, Byam, I killed her.

[Enter MR TREFRY armed with a shotgun.]

BYAM

[raises his gun]

[2484] He shall die.

TREFRY

[raises his gun and points it at BYAM]

[2485] He shan't. Leave.

BYAM

[2486] Do you threaten me, Trefry?

TREFRY

[2487] Tell him to leave, Stanmore.

STANMORE

[2488] Come, Byam, let's leave.

[*Exit BYAM, practically carried by CAPTAIN STANMORE.*]

TREFRY

[*to OROONOKO*]

[2489] I'd come with news.

[2490] The Lord Governor has arrived,

[2491] This past hour, from England.

[2492] He has agreed to give you liberty.

OROONOKO

[*looks at PRINCESS IMOINDA*]

[2493] It's too late.

TREFRY

[2494] No, it's not.

[*OROONOKO raises the dagger, to stab himself.*]

TREFRY

[2495] Don't, Oroonoko.

[*MR TREFRY begins to raise his gun.*]

TREFRY

[2496] I shall not let this happen.

OROONOKO

[2497] Leave, Trefry.

TREFRY

[2498] No, sir.

[MR TREFRY *takes aim at OROONOKO.*]

OROONOKO

[2499] Very well, then, you leave me no choice.

[OROONOKO *charges towards MR TREFRY with every intention of stabbing him.*]

[MR TREFRY *hesitates, then he shoots OROONOKO.*]

[OROONOKO *falls down.*]

[MR TREFRY *runs over to him.*]

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TREFRY

[2500] Oroonoko!

[OROONOKO *dies.*]

[MR TREFRY *remains standing in the same spot, looking suddenly very tired.*]

[*The sun begins to rise.*]

[*A slaves' lament rises with the sun.*]

[*Black.*]

Back matter

THE END

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