

# **WAAFRIKA 1 2 3**

by Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko

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People pay for what they do, and still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it simply: by the lives they lead.  
—JAMES BALDWIN

This play is dedicated to my father, ALS, and mostly, to GOD.

## **THE SETTING:**

**Luoland.** Fictitious village some two hundred and fifty kilometers northwest of the Kenyan capital Nairobi.

## **LOCATIONS:**

**Burial ground.** Most graves are marked by flowers. One grave, that of Awino's mother, is at a distance, designating her status as the deceased wife of a Chief. Her grave is specially marked.

**Interior of Awino and Bobby's kraal.** Elemental, dim, zero electricity, lit exclusively by candlelight. Tiny hole at the back serves as window. A picture of (now former) Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi, former Tanzanian President (the late) Julius Kamburage Nyerere, and former Ugandan President (the late) Milton Obote in their younger years hangs beside the "window" at the back. This picture is obligatory: Awino as the "daughter"/child of a Chief must have it in their home as a symbol of patriotism to the national government. It also dates the play in the post-colonial era after 1977 when the East African Community collapsed, a period noted for its (extreme) nationalism. Small makeshift cupboard with few, very basic utensils—knives, spoons, cups, one plate piled neatly inside. Pot of water sits somewhere below cupboard. In the foreground is a bed, small pillow, no sheets. Nightclothes scattered on top of the bed, a few falling off its edge. Tiny goatskin drum serves as table. On top of the "table" are newspapers, candles—some lit, some not—plus battery-operated radio.

**Interior of Chief's kraal.** Elemental, zero electricity, lit exclusively by candlelight. Has a washbasin, small goatskin drum serving as table, thin mattress on the floor and picture of Kenya's first President, Jomo Kenyatta, on the wall. This photograph is obligatory. As Chief, his loyalty to country and government are paramount. Photo also dates Chief among the generation of Africans—like Mandela—who fought hard for independence, hence his strong national and tribal sentiment.

**Kiosk.** Sign reading "kiosk". Line of Coke (or preferably Fanta) bottles in front of said sign.

**TIME:** 1992. Around Kenya's first ever democratic elections, when a wave of freedom plus unprecedented expression hit the country.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**AWINO:** Kenyan Luo. 20's to early 30's. S/he is a large-boned, extremely boyish AFAB (=Assigned Female at Birth) person who often "passes" (for a man). Transgender, genderqueer, gender-variant or non-conforming gender pronouns like hir, they, and s/he (pronounced "ze") are welcome when describing, referring to and casting Awino who is of non-conforming gender presentation.

**CHIEF:** Kenyan man, cis. Late 40's to early 50's. Wears traditional African garb befitting his honored status as Chief: lavish colors, gold embroidery. He carries a staff-like wooden cane or walking stick symbolic of royalty.

### **MAMA MUGABE, MAMA OTIENO, MAMA OPIO:**

The Chief's wives, Awino's many mothers.

**MAMA MUGABE:** Chief's first, oldest wife (40's)

**MAMA OTIENO:** Chief's fourth wife (30's)

**MAMA OPIO:** Chief's youngest, most recent wife (20's)

### **\*\*WIVES DOUBLE AS RADIO VOICES AND VIGILANTES**

**BOBBY:** American woman, preferably QWOC=queer woman-of-color and most preferably African-American. Late 20's to mid 30's or older. Ex-Peace Corps volunteer. Her emotional and tonal range is that of someone feminine, delicate, and sensitive but tough; sarcastic but loving. Her toughness should not be underestimated when casting this character (because she and **AWINO** are evenly matched).

### **RADIO ANNOUNCERS:**

**RADIO VOICE 2:** African-American woman involved in community outreach

**RADIO VOICE 3:** White American woman involved in outreach in communities of color

**KBC NEWS ANNOUNCER:** Kenyan man or woman. Speaks in a Kenyan-British accent

## **Glossary of Gender-Neutral Pronouns Used in WAAFRIKA 123 by Nick Mwaluko**

Gender-neutral pronouns employed in WAAFRIKA 123 by Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko denote genderlessness, no gender, every gender and/or gender equity. They are mostly found in stage directions and are directed at Awino, the play's protagonist. They also denote language's impossibility to legislate desire and gender; they also accent the inability of language to capture the (play's) gender journey on bodies in transition and transformation. In no way are pronouns or language surrounding pronouns a declaration or normative posture adopted by the playwright, Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko. Pronunciation sometimes differs from spelling:

**Her-hir:** Used to reference Awino in the burial scene with her-hir father, the Chief. It illustrates Awino's transition from female "her" to genderless "hir"; the hyphen representing the actual transition, the flow of transformational change from the so-called social and cultural imperialistic "norm".

**Her-hir:** Used to reference Awino when Awino is in the same scene as anatomical males—like the Chief, rioters, radio broadcasters, etc. A distinction is being made between the distinct, so-called "normal" male gender and a non-conforming one.

**S/he:** Used to reference Awino when s/he is with other women. Again, this is to make a clear distinction between socially imperialistic "norms" and an identity created from the core that speaks to Awino's core. Spelt "s/he", it is pronounced "ze" sometimes.

**Hir:** When Awino is in a safe space, safe enough to claim hir gender identity, "hir" is used.

**Her:** Used in times of threat. When those referring to Awino occupy to oppress "her body" thanks to body fascism. An example can be found in section 2.12. Similar oppressive forces from cultural imperialism and gender fascism plus pronoun shifts hold true for the use of "she" and all other so-called "traditional" pronouns, etc.

# PART ONE: MWENA MWENI

## 1.1

*In Darkness:*

AWINO  
(Spoken)

Chakula hichi ime toka kwa mkono wango  
Naomba ita kaa kwa mdomo wa Mzee  
Mzee mwenyewe atai penda-ah-ah  
Yake nii kuu sema ni yeye  
Sio yangu-eu-eu  
Ni yake  
Yake  
Mzee

*AWINO strikes a match. Light grows from a candle on a small dish.  
AWINO picks it up, walks across the stage to CHIEF's kraal.*

(Sings--)

*Mwena mweni*

Not mine, his

*Mwena mweni*

Not mine, his

*Mwena mweni mwena mweni*

*AWINO reaches CHIEF's kraal, enters. Speaks to CHIEF.*

Baba? Your food, here.

*Puts the dish-candle down on the ground.*

Chapati, soupu-soupu mixed with thick gravy sauce on the side. Yessir, I sang *Mwena mweni Mwena* on the way to your kraal so the food is blessed. Eat whenever you're ready... Want salt Baba? 'Cause I can run get you salt if—  
No? How 'bout paprika? Ama that new spice at the kiosk? No worries Baba, I don't mind going barefoot so long as you're pleased, that's most important above all... You like the dish?

*The flame dances.*

Good. My cooking? No, I can't cook, I can only burn ...

*Takes a step closer.*

Baba? Um, please, one minute, if you have for us to talk ... Well, um, Sir, can I go for schooling—please?... Everyone reads... Everyone who? Cleopa, Peter<sup>1</sup>, Joshua, Mark, Steven, even Merinyo. You should see, this is me at the kiosk: One two three—counting my fingers in front of everyone like a baby... Daddy, please, I can't do Maths, not even simple numbers someone as dumb as Merinyo can—

Yessir, I know Merinyo is my brother but—

Sir please I know but (*Pause*) I am ten times more intelligent, and more serious, and more ambitious, and love progress more than Merinyo, you said so yourself so why can't—

Boys do schooling. But I am a boy...

Repeat what? Oh. Mimi nii mwanume: I am a boy.

So can I go for schooling? What kind? Of boy am I? Not traditional.

(*To the audience*) He slaps me.

*AWINO registers the sting of the slap.*

It hurts. Not my face, inside (*touches hir heart*).

Sorry. I did not mean to disrespect you...

No Sir, I am not jealous of my brother... I have great love for him, my family, my tribe.

Yessir, I will marry. A man will purchase me from you with cows. Then he will be my husband. Then I will bring the cows to your home. Then you will be proud of me because

I will be (*Closing eyes*) a woman...

Open my eyes? When I say it, you want me to...?

(*To the audience*) I open my eyes.

*Repeats, struggling with each word:*

I

Will

Be

A—(*Pause*) woman

When I grow up.

*AWINO stands.*

The dish, are you finished Father?

*Candle light dies.*

*AWINO picks up the candle-dish.*

*Blackout. In darkness:*

I'll tell my mother you like her cooking.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced *Pee-tah*

1.2

*Lights up.*

*Daybreak: the sun glides across the stage.*

*Sound of cattle grazing in the open fields, occasional sweeping light breeze. AWINO talks to a cow:*

AWINO

Cow! I don't want trouble. Stay.

*(AWINO slips under the cow)*

Don't move.

*(tickles fingers in the air)*

Grab...your...nipples...

*(grabs nipples)*

Squeeze...milk...sq—

What's that?

*(drumming)*

Far off coming closer 'n'—Woman!

Cow, look!, she's—

Wait lemme see if I have something to offer her when she gets here Water maybe or...

*(Finds the candle-dish. Picks it up.)*

*(To the woman, who appears in silhouette)*

Well hello

*(To another woman who appears in silhouette)*

Hey there, Cutie.

*(To another woman who appears in silhouette)*

You're all sooooo beautiful. That sweet loose swaggah swaggah

WOMEN TOGETHER

Left *(move their hips)* Right *(move their hips)* BOOM

AWINO

Women from my tribe carry the continent between their legs. Are you one of those? Who cook maragwe, speak Kigogo, dance Lingala slipping ever so steadily down your hips...

WOMEN TOGETHER

Left *(move their hips)* Right *(move their hips)* swaggah swaggah BOOM

AWINO

Like soup glides down the throat. If so, I will buy you.... for six cows...

Not enough? Seven, eight cows?

Your shirt—off.

...You like that? What I'm doing? Do you feel like a woman?

WOMEN TOGETHER

*(Gasping)* Huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh

AWINO

Underwear—off.

WOMEN TOGETHER

*(Gasping)* Huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh

AWINO

*(Suddenly)* No. I'm not taking my shirt off. Because. I'm the man. You're the woman. I touch you. You can't touch me. Look at me, Sweets. These? *(tickles the air with his/her fingers)* work wonders. I'll make you feel good, so good you'll cry.

WOMEN TOGETHER

*(Laughter)*

AWINO

Where's the joke?

WOMEN TOGETHER

*(Laughter as continuous overlap)*

AWINO

So why are you laughing? What do you mean "funny"?, what's funny about me? I am a man. *(Laughter)* Don't laugh. I am. Where are you going?

*(The women encircle AWINO)*

### **1.3**

WOMEN TOGETHER

Chief, eh?!, she lives like a man  
Chief, eh?!, she dresses like a man  
Chief, eh?! she loves like a man  
Chief, eh?!, lives like a man...

AWINO

*(Undressing)*

Off!

WOMEN TOGETHER

Chief, eh?!, dressing like a man

AWINO

*(Wears baseball cap)*

On!

WOMEN TOGETHER

Chief, eh?!, she loves like a man

AWINO

(Displays sock-penis-dildo to the audience, then puts on sock-penis-dildo)  
On!

WOMEN TOGETHER

(Sing)  
Revelation  
(Raising their hands skyward)  
Ancestors  
(Hands circling the sky, hands coming down slowly)  
The cure

*(...is to circumcise AWINO which they do.  
AWINO, instead of bleeding from hir vagina, grows a penis instead  
The women run away from hir)*

Legs / Open

WOMEN

Listen

AWINO

Razor / Inside

WOMEN

I hear him

AWINO

Clitoris / Off

WOMEN

I hear him calling me

AWINO

*From between AWINO's legs a penis appears.  
The WOMEN gasp.*

WOMEN TOGETHER  
(Exiting, screaming) AAHHHHHHHHH!

*Penis AWINO rises from the ground.*

*Steps back until Awino is eclipsed by the light and disappears, is swallowed by the world.*

BLACKOUT.

PAUSE

The word: "SCHOOL" appears, then "GIRL", then "WOMAN", then "MAN", then "AFRICAN", then "AFRICAN MAN" AWINO crosses out the word "GIRL", then crosses out "WOMAN"; puts question mark on "MAN" so it reads "MAN?", then question mark on "AFRICAN" so it's "AFRICAN?", then question mark on "AFRICAN MAN" so it's "AFRICAN MAN?", then crosses both "MAN?" and then "AFRICAN MAN?" out, then AWINO writes "BOI?" then crosses out the question mark so it reads "BOI", then AWINO writes "=SCHOOL" so that the remaining language and sentence should read:

"BOI = SCHOOL

#### 1.4

*Darkness:*

VILLAGE

Years later

*...Years later...*

*Blinding darkness abounds but for a lone spotlight at center stage cast on CHIEF, in full regalia, standing head up, hands outstretched, eyes closed to the heavens. His full tribal dress is lined by gold embroidery. His elaborate headdress is made of lion mane, symbolic of his status as Chief and indicative of his glory days as a young forest warrior who killed a lion then was given its mane before the village to honor his courage, bravery, an important quality for a leader which will be tested throughout the course of this play. CHIEF stretches his hands to the side after a while, looks out at the audience. Full stage lights reveal the village setting.*

THE VILLAGE *is not on stage.*

*Music begins: it starts slow, rises strong as heart-pounding syncopated rhythmic drumming. The drumbeat stops.*

THE VILLAGE, *dressed less ornately than CHIEF, carry the body of CHIEF's deceased third wife on stage. She is not in a casket, but on a plank/board, draped over in a kanga, the traditional cloth of East Africa. VILLAGE entrance with corpse is slow, specific, controlled.*

CHIEF

Habari (=Hello) Village!

ENTIRE VILLAGE

Habari Chief!

CHIEF

Let us mourn.

*Pink petals fall from the sky onto the corpse, deposited by the VILLAGE onto the sacred ground that is Luoland.*

*Drumbeat resumes.*

*The VILLAGE circles the corpse round and round non-stop, screaming, an exaggerated version of their grieving sorrow on public display as tradition dictates. With each new scream, their bodies become more loose, wilder, freer and freed by the musical beat to articulate their bodies' sorrowful song. It's an articulation of the buttocks, hips, shoulder girdle, grief-stricken feet, then it STOPS.*

*CHIEF puts his hand out, imploring the VILLAGE.*

CHIEF

I ask a favor, please. Help me watch my daughter.

*LIGHTS up on AWINO, standing aloof from the village.*

*S/He, AWINO, discards traditional wear from the previous scene, for western clothing.*

CHIEF

I am less Chief than grieving husband.

*AWINO takes off traditional dress from previous scene*

CHIEF

More grieving husband than dutiful father.

*AWINO puts on a baseball cap.*

CHIEF

My difficulty is an important responsibility.

*AWINO twists the baseball cap backwards.*

CHIEF

As I help my daughter mourn the death of her mother...

*AWINO holds hir penis in the air.*

CHIEF

Help see that she, my daughter, doesn't stray too far.

*AWINO inserts hir penis into hir pants.*

*AWINO kneels on the scattered petals fallen on the sacred ground*

*LIGHTS out on AWINO*

CHIEF

Talk to her like a mother would now that she has none. Say, village: "It hurts..."

VILLAGE

It hurts....

CHIEF

“I know it hurts, but if you need us....”

VILLAGE

I know it hurts, but if you need us....

CHIEF

“Your village is here....”

VILLAGE

Your village is here....

*THE VILLAGE carries the cloth-covered corpse off stage.*

CHIEF

Heh Village,?, as members of our tribe, heh? Watch her.

BLACKOUT

End of Part One

## PART TWO: HOMEWARD BOUND

### 2.1

*AWINO and BOBBY's kraal.*

*BOBBY, in T-shirt and glasses with kanga wrapped awkwardly round her waist, is sitting on the floor, pencil in hand, reading and rewriting her resume while the radio plays in the background.*

BOBBY

“...While most of my professional career has been devoted to the not-for-profit sector, working with underprivileged communities in hopes of bridging social and economic gaps”—Cross out “gaps”, replace with “disparity”—“...bridging social and economic disparities between rich and poor”

*(She scribbles something quickly)*

Don't assume Bobby. You can fight social inequality not cure it.

RADIO VOICE 2

Nah nah nah nah see? I wanna know what you think you got that I don't?

RADIO VOICE 3

Why me? Is that what you're asking?

RADIO VOICE 2

I know I'm Black but that don't make me stupid.

RADIO VOICE 3

In no way am I insinuating that—

RADIO VOICE 2

What gives you the right to go into *our* community? African folk--

BOBBY

“There is a drought. It's causing famine. People in this village are dying of disease and starvation. I am aware of my privilege, that I have shelter, a safe place to put my head down at night, a place to eat every day. Therefore, I propose a ten per cent cut in my salary.”

RADIO VOICE 2

Africans. *My* people. Nobody but people of color are entitled to do the kind of work you are stealing from us—again! By the sweat of our blood, we've earned that right as well as the right to pop your racist mentality with a hot poker...

BOBBY

My hope is that this money will be given to families in need within this village. For food, clothes, drinking water. Maybe save enough to build a generator for electricity. This is a small but personal contribution...”

Has to sound more professional Bobby, c’mon [*Scribbles*].

RADIO VOICE 3

The effect of poverty on--

RADIO VOICE 2

Communities of color?, yes or no?

BOBBY

“This personal donation to heal...”

Less professional, more honest, c’mon Bobby.

RADIO VOICE 2

Rephrase: how come you go to Africa but won’t go into Black neighborhoods in America?

RADIO VOICE 3

Know what I think your problem is, Mrs. Johnson?

BOBBY

“...I hope my donation can help heal the Luos, a people who love me as deeply as I love them.”

RADIO VOICE 2

Punk-ass prostitute barbarian bitch ass white cow. Coming out the cave naked on all fours with nothing but drool to put on the table, which you most likely stole from my Daddy ‘n’ his Daddy before him. Bust in to feed the noble savages of Africa with the illicit ways of the white world. Fuck you think you’re talking to? I’m so black I color midnight, got that Bitch?

*BOBBY EXITS, leaving the room to go to the kitchen.*

RADIO ANNOUNCER

We interrupt this segment for a brief news bulletin. Two Kenyan men were found kissing late at night in the Kenyan capital Nairobi during routine patrol by police officers.

Twenty year-old Njoroge Kamau and twenty-three year old Michael Onyango were under a tree in Uhuru Park, lying on top of each other, legs intertwined when two plain-clothes surveillance officers made an immediate arrest. Their trial, set for early this week, marks a milestone in Kenyan history. The young men are rumored to be linked to the infamous Umoja wa Wasenge, a clandestine organization in pursuit of homosexual rights. If guilty of sodomy, both men face the death penalty. And now—back to our scheduled broadcast.

*BOBBY re-enters.*

RADIO VOICE 2

White trash bitch ass blue-eyed fucken American apple pie-eating cunt bucket bitch ass whoring thief. This feels soooo good! Decolonizing. White trash bitch blond haired blue eyed...

*A knock at the door. BOBBY switches the radio off. She goes to the door.*

BOBBY

Who is it?

2.2

*Burial ground. AWINO kneeling alone on the scattered petals. Awino is now bald, wearing a man's white T-shirt and vest, chest tapered/bandaged down, blue jeans, men's army boots. At her-hir mother's grave kneeling, s/he bows her-hir head down in solemn prayer.*

AWINO

Naomba uni samea, Mama, tafathali, nii ache sasa

*AWINO lifts her-hir head up to the sky, then down to the ground again, caressing the grave. S/he is visibly distraught, holds her-hir head in her-hir hands, pounds her-hir temples repeatedly with her-hir knuckles, breathes heavy gasps in and out. When s/he looks up again, s/he sees her-hir father, CHIEF, watching her-hir torment. AWINO's expression changes immediately to one of cautious surprise.*

AWINO

Shkamo.

*(CHIEF extends his hand forward, allowing Awino to greet him as tradition dictates, by bowing down on her-hir knees to kiss each ring on each finger of each hand. After s/he does so, s/he stands up.)*

AWINO

Shkamo Baba.

CHIEF

Marhaba Awino. How are you?

*There is an awkward silence as they both stare at the grave.*

AWINO

I've come to worship my mother and the ancestors. In peace and prayer, Baba. Did you come to worship with me, Baba?

CHIEF

You've changed.

AWINO

*(massaging her-hir bald scalp)* I cut my hair.

CHIEF

I hear you've changed a lot.

AWINO

Do you like it?

CHIEF

Our women don't cut their hair. Not unless you're mourning. Your mother's been dead for more than nine months now. Are you mourning her death still?

AWINO

No, Sir.

CHIEF

So, you decide to remember tradition at the burial ground, in front of your ancestors, but forget tradition once you leave here?

AWINO

No, Sir, it's just that my new haircut, I thought it would make life easier.

CHIEF

Easier than what? And those trousers, that shirt, the men's vest, everything mannish you're wearing makes life "easier", I suppose?

AWINO

Baba, I didn't mean—

CHIEF

There are a number of stories I've been hearing about you from the other villagers. They say things I dare not repeat lest my lips burn with shame.

AWINO

What things? What are they saying about me?

CHIEF

How dare you question your own people, especially considering what you've been up to. I am the one who is Chief, Awino, and you are my daughter. But it seems you've forgotten that too.

AWINO

Sorry Baba, forgive me, please.

CHIEF

They sat me down like a little boy. In the middle of a circle of *women*. Imagine-- surrounded by ki-Mamas, not able to say a word while they literally lectured me about my own daughter. "Chief, eh! She lives like a man. Chief, eh! She eats like a man. Chief, eh! She sleeps like a man, eh? Chief, dressing like a man." And all that time I sat there, wondering, "Are they sure it's my daughter they're talking about? It can't be her, not my Awino, not the girl I raised for nearly thirty years. She respects her tribe, our tradition. My Awino carries our ways in her heart wherever she goes, no matter the cost. What they're saying are lies." True?

AWINO

Baba let me explain.

CHIEF

NowNowNow, I'm asking: have you chosen to ignore our ways to live like a white man?

AWINO

Baba—

CHIEF

Yes or no, have you?

*Pause.*

AWINO

No...It's not true.

CHIEF

So what of this mzungu woman?<sup>2</sup>

AWINO

Yes, I live with an American woman it's true. But she's just my friend, promise.

CHIEF

Friendship, ok, let's get you married.

AWINO

NO!

CHIEF

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<sup>2</sup> So what of this white/foreigner woman?

Why not Awino? What kind of friendship is this? The kind your neighbors hear strange noises coming from inside your kraal at night?

AWINO

Baba, she's helped me find myself.

CHIEF

Where did you go?

AWINO

What I mean is I can ask myself questions I wouldn't be able to ask if I were still at home. I can get to know who I really am. What I really want. Where I need to go to find it. I can listen to myself, alone if I need to. It's been really good for me, Baba. You would be so proud.

CHIEF

So proud you can't come home to tell me what's good? That's fine, Awino, a father must accept that his children will leave home some day. But I am Chief. And no daughter of mine will disgrace my position, understand? I must know how you choose to live.

AWINO

Yessir.

CHIEF

Tell me the truth.

AWINO

Yessir.

CHIEF

*(With difficulty)* They say...you love like a man. Is it true, Awino? Do you...love like a man?

*Pause.*

AWINO

No—Sir, not me. They're lying.  
Only the outside's changed. On the inside—

CHIEF

Inside where eh, dark corners? Inside those men's trousers?

AWINO

*(With emphasis)* Inside me.

CHIEF

Tradition, that is what is inside you. Inscribed on the inside because it is deeper, bigger, stronger than anything you can hope to become.

AWINO

I know Baba but how can I claim what's inside me when I don't know who I am on the inside? Let me search for it.

CHIEF

Very well, let us begin your search right here among your Ancestors. *They* can provide you with answers. Question: which is great—the name or the person behind it?

AWINO

The name makes the person great.

CHIEF

What is your name?

AWINO

Ah, Baba, now what kind of game is this? Surely I know my own name.

CHIEF

Humor your Ancestors.

AWINO

Awino Eliel Mwendua Sechelele Odhiambo.

CHIEF

Meaning?

AWINO

Awino....

CHIEF

Meaning?

AWINO

Girl born early morning as the sun ripens.

CHIEF

Eliel: meaning?

AWINO

Moon among the month of choice moons.

CHIEF

Mwendua?

AWINO

Still waters, meaning peace is my true nature.

CHIEF

Sechelele?

AWINO

Meaning: Born of the harvest.

CHIEF

Odhiambo?

AWINO

Meaning: Royalty from Luoland, territory of the great Luo tribe.

Awino Eliel Mwendua Sechelele Odhiambo. Born early morning as the sun ripens after the choice moon whose nature brings peace and plenty at harvest as first-born child to the third wife of His Excellency Chief Odhiambo of the great Luo people. My full name and meaning. There!

CHIEF

Who named you?

AWINO

You did.

CHIEF

And?

AWINO

My mother.

CHIEF

And?

AWINO

I don't know.

CHIEF

Think hard.

*(Pause)*

Awino. Have you any idea how important my first-born is to this village?

*(He jabs his cane at her-hir side several times with increasing intensity)*

Don't make me beat the answer out of your thick skull. Not here in front of your (dead) mother. For the last time, Who?

*(CHIEF lifts his cane up in the air then smacks it down on the ground, missing Awino by a fraction of a centimeter. AWINO buckles over, holding her-hir side.)*

Who? *(Beats stick)* Who? *(Beats stick)* Who? *(Beats stick)* Stupid childish complete idiot, did you—

AWINO

*(On the verge of tears, overlapping)* I told you, Baba. I said everything I can remember. I can't say anymore because I don't know who else. I don't know how it came about. But Baba please, I have a right to find out who I am.

CHIEF

I know who you are. And I'll show you today. Come.

*(AWINO hesitates then takes a step forward. CHIEF takes her-hir by the shoulders and forcefully shifts her-hir in the direction of her-hir mother's grave.)*

Look over there, at the earth on your mother. Go to her.

*(AWINO goes)*

Sometimes, to know your truth, you have to touch it, hold it in your own hands. Pick up the dirt.

*(AWINO picks up the dirt)*

And sometimes you need to smell your truth.

The dirt, smell it.

*(AWINO smells it)*

What do you smell?

AWINO

My mother.

CHIEF

Sometimes you have to taste your truth.

Lick the dirt.

*(AWINO licks it)*

CHIEF

What do you taste?

AWINO

Our tribe.

CHIEF

Come here back to me.

*(AWINO returns to him. He shifts her-hir shoulders again, this time out in the direction of the audience)*

What do you see? CHIEF

Our village. AWINO

There? CHIEF

Kisumu Market. AWINO

And here, right now? CHIEF

*AWINO looks down.*

Don't be shy. It's ok. CHIEF

...I...see you. Baba. AWINO

Ask me to look at you. CHIEF

*AWINO hesitates.*

Don't be shy.

Baba, look at me, please. AWINO

*He does.*

Ask me who I see. CHIEF

Baba, who do you see? AWINO

CHIEF

I see you, Awino. I see me. And I see your mother. I see our flesh joined in you. And I also see our village. I see the mango you plucked as a child. And the lake where you wash your hands. Sun and moon rise right there on your cheekbones. Remember the route you took to come here? How every person you saw showed you respect, why? Because of what is written on your face. It says, These are my people. I belong here with my tribe.

And me, the only father you will ever have in this or any other lifetime, I want you back where you belong—with your own. Because as much as you represent me, I represent them, and they represent us. So don't you dare stand before me, Awino-eh, to tell me I alone named you.

AWINO

Sorry, Baba, I didn't know.

CHIEF

You are Luo from the Luo tribe. Like it or not, you were born Kenyan African. Like it or not, you will die a Kenyan African. This will never be the white man's land. Not now or ever.

AWINO

Yessir, but—

CHIEF

Ata<sup>3</sup>.

Stand where you are, ask yourself two simple questions.

One: Who named you? Two: Who has been with you from the beginning and will continue to be with you until the end—your ancestors, or this friendship?

And when you find the answer to those two questions, Luoland will be where she always is—waiting, arms wide open for you.

*(CHIEF exits. As he leaves, he turns. AWINO turns to ask him a question but he is gone.)*

### 2.3

*AWINO and BOBBY's kraal. AWINO walks through the door.*

BOBBY

Hey, what's up?

AWINO

Have you been outside yet?

BOBBY

Why, are people fighting?

AWINO

Why would you say that?

BOBBY

Because someone came with a—nevermind. I spent most of the afternoon polishing my resume. Wanna hear my edits?

---

<sup>3</sup> No more/ enough.

AWINO

What?

BOBBY

Hope you don't mind, I rewrote yours too. No narrative overhaul, just me sneaking in some small but really important changes, to polish it up. Whaddya say we go grab a job application from the post office or at least drop off your resume later in the week, yeah? They're always hiring, right?

AWINO

Hunh?

BOBBY

Sweetie, what's wrong?

*AWINO heads to the window. S/he closes the curtains.*

BOBBY

Awino? I can't read in semi-darkness.

AWINO

Use the torch.

BOBBY

You buy batteries?

AWINO

With what? My good looks?

BOBBY

What's got you in a pissy mood?

AWINO

Light a candle.

BOBBY

Humidity this high you say "light a candle"?

AWINO

You told me just now you did not go outside today.

BOBBY

Sweetie, what's wrong?

AWINO  
It's hot. Nearly a hundred degrees.

BOBBY  
You're right, I'll open the window.

AWINO  
Nooooooo!

BOBBY  
'Kay, chill, I won't. You look—sick Sweetie.

*AWINO sits next to BOBBY, making very sure not to touch her.*

BOBBY  
Comere Babe. Look at me.  
*(Searches AWINO's face)*  
What is it?, typhoid? Malaria again? Closer, come.  
*(AWINO leans into BOBBY just enough for her to caresses her-hir face, touch her-hir forehead with the back of her hand checking for fever, etc.)*  
No trace of fever, head's not burning, it's normal.

AWINO  
Normal...yeah.

BOBBY  
Let's take this shirt off, take a look.  
*(She unbuttons her-hir shirt revealing layering: a man's white undershirt, the bandages s/he uses to taper down her-hir chest/breasts are visibly poking out. AWINO takes off the shirt, letting it fall on BOBBY's resume)*

Baby no, not on the resume, not when your shirt's all sweaty.  
*(AWINO moves it. BOBBY massages hir.)*

Guess what?, Fixed your favorite—Coconut rice, maragwe with sukuma wiki, cup a iced tea, not sweet, not bland.

Take off your shirt.

*BOBBY goes to take off undershirt.*

AWINO  
No.

BOBBY  
What?

AWINO

I'm not in the mood right now.

BOBBY

Awino, I'm not asking for sex, I'm just— Don't you wanna cuddle with me?

AWINO

(*moving away*) No. I'm fine here—waaaaaaay over here.

BOBBY

What's going on?

AWINO

"Normal"—like you just said (right now).

BOBBY

What (are you talking about)?

AWINO

Things have to change in this house—TodayToday new rules. To make things as normal as possible. Number one—

BOBBY

Rules?!

AWINO

No one walks in here naked anymore, not unless the window is shut and the curtains fully drawn. Number two—

BOBBY

Are you serious?

AWINO

Come, go, free like the wind, I don't care Well I do care but I can't control your movements only mine so me I go my way, you yours. Separate, alone, always, Amen. Come through that door by yourself, out that same way. Same thing for me. Three—

BOBBY

This is ridicu—

AWINO

Someone, anyone I don't care who comes near our kraal, we need a signal, some kind of—(*whistles*). Try it. Pretend I'm far away. You see me coming, walking up to you, now—(*whistles*). Can you whistle? I'll teach you tomorrow remind me okay? But from now on, no one, hear me?, not a single soul raises their voice while we're here. Let's try—

(Normal speaking voice) Why? BOBBY

Starting now Bobby, whisper. AWINO

For what? BOBBY

For me. AWINO

That doesn't make sense. Does that make sense to you? BOBBY

Final warning: lower your v— AWINO

This is our kraal. We pay rent. Mind our own business. I think that's reason enough for us to do whatever we want in the privacy of our own home because that's what we're paying for, am I right? I'm right. BOBBY

(Heading for the door) And I'm leaving. AWINO

No wait! Baby don't go. BOBBY

Then keep your voice down. AWINO

Promise (*whispers*) What's going on?, tell me. BOBBY

It's the whole village... AWINO

I'm fucken confused. Clarification. BOBBY

People don't need to know. AWINO

BOBBY

Ohhh...now I know what you're talking about. Look Awino, if you're nervous about not having a job, it's okay we'll be fine. We will. The check comes tomorrow morning with the mail when—

AWINO

Think it's normal for the whoooooole entire village to know what we're up to?

BOBBY

Whoa, wait a minute you don't know if—

AWINO

No you wait, you don't know. I do, I know. They're babbling all our personal business all over the streets. Everyone knows Bobby. Then we end up disgracing our family, friends, not to mention our Ancestors who are not dead by the way. Ata, they're alive. Watching me—Fulltime. Whenever we open or shut that door. One step out into the real world, it smells of how normal we are not, why? Because we're different, why? Because we're freaks.

*Pause.*

AWINO

Say something.

BOBBY

*(Hurt deeply but tries to hide it)* Gimme a second to, um...

*BOBBY curls her hair round her ears, a nervous gesture she makes.*

AWINO

Don't do that.

BOBBY

Don't do what?

AWINO

Curl your hair round your ears like that. It turns me on. Rule number five.

BOBBY

Have you been drinking?

AWINO

*(Sucks teeth)*

BOBBY

No?, 'kay, so where is this sudden surge of doubt coming from?

AWINO

It's been on my mind.

BOBBY

Since when?

AWINO

I'm not sure but—

BOBBY

Was it on your mind when you came to live with me?

AWINO

I mean, who knows what I was thinking then, heh? Kara-kara, pressure, heart racing, me running from my father's kraal to your place like a refugee from war it was like—Bobby, I *really, really* don't wanna talk anymore.

BOBBY

Last night?

AWINO

What about last n—

BOBBY

Was it on your mind then? While licking my pussy—

AWINO

BOBBY WHY ARE YOU SO—

BOBBY

With all five fingers inside my wet, juicy, hungry cunt—

AWINO

I'm WARNING YOU—

BOBBY

Fist-fucking me, at that point did you think, "Gee whiz, maybe, just maybe"—

AWINO

STOP Bobby! Ok?! Why do you—

BOBBY

Because it's something I should know, what makes—

AWINO

All I know is—

BOBBY

What makes us normal one day Awino then not normal two minutes later—huh?, huh?, because it doesn't make (AWINO's *overlap begins*) much—

AWINO

(*Overlap begins from BOBBY's "make"*) "Make sense", why must everything have to make perfect sense before you can—

BOBBY

Huh?, quick, think of something smart to say so you can change the subject on a dime like you do when you don't wanna talk about shit that's hard for you to process because you're terrified and can't trust me enough so I have to push you 'n' push you 'n' push, hoping you'll trust that I'm not the enemy here, I'm not the American—(*Stops talking. Pause*) FUCK!

Think I didn't know the second you walked into the room there was something wrong? You're withholding, I know you are. Tell me.

AWINO

Are you done? With interrupting me? Have you stopped talking to me like I'm six years old? If not, tell me when you're done controlling my thinking process by finishing my sentences like I am your child.

Want the truth? Really? Ok, ok well the whooole entire village is talking about us and me, myself, Awino Odhiambo, *I* cannot afford to live like that, why? Because unlike *certain people* in this kraal, I have to think about many things other than this relationship. "Like what?" "Other people." "Who?" You know who Bobby because we talked about this before I came to live with you and I hate repeating myself, every time rewind repeat never fast forward. Noooo, end of topic, switch subjects, and don't you push me anymore or—

BOBBY

Awino—

AWINO

I swear on one God Bobby, DO NOT PUSH—

BOBBY

I love you. I do. (*AWINO melts instantly*) I'd never ask you to compromise your family or values. That's not love, not how I see it. Look at me. You've taken risks, I understand completely. With family, friends....

AWINO

Ancestors...

BOBBY

Right so where'd you get the idea that the village knows what's going on in our kraal all of a sudden?

AWINO

I went outside today.

BOBBY

To look for work and?

AWINO

No—burial ground.

BOBBY

Oh.

AWINO

I couldn't sleep. Something said "Go pray to your mother" so I went. While kneeling at her tombstone, my father he came.

BOBBY

God Baby, was he angry?

AWINO

Really hurt Bobby.

BOBBY

Because of the way you left? *(Beat)* Don't, no, don't close up, Sweetie talk to me.

AWINO

I'm such a disgrace.

BOBBY

No you're—

AWINO

I am. Everything done in secret, the way I packed my bags, never looking back, running here to you straight like a thief, worse than a thief. No goodbye note, not even a kah-small message, just me sneaking off. And look at my life: I don't have a job, I'm not in school, or technical college or even some rinky-dink training institute, I'm a useless bum loafing around my own village like *(Can't stomach to finish the sentence)*

BOBBY

Trade school, that's a perfect idea. We could afford to enroll you in—

AWINO

*(Vicious delivery because of the self-loathing)*

For what, eh? How does that solve *our* problem?

BOBBY

Jesus, what'd your Dad say to you?

AWINO

Bobby look at me.

*She does.*

AWINO

Not like that, harder, study my face.

BOBBY

Ok.

*(to herself)* I like this. Intensity. In a good scratch that great way.

*(And)* Why am I doing this, Awino?

AWINO

What do you see?, written on my face?

BOBBY

*(Cupping AWINO's face in her hands)* You know how I feel about you, you're gorgeous, sexy. I'm always telling you how I'm attracted to—

AWINO

*(Cupping her-hir own face with her-hir hands)*

Noooo, don't you see my tribe? Written here is my whole world. Bobby, there are things I *cannot, should not* be doing. My people shed their blood for this soil. So my Ancestors can take their place *right here*. And one day, when I die, I want to be buried among them. But my body, it has to be worthy. I don't want to be rejected. I want peace, yani, when I die I don't want to wander like a ghost from place to place, searching. See what I'm saying? Every time the two of us have—Whenever we're intimate, Bobby—I don't know how else to put this...

BOBBY

*(Concerned)* What?

AWINO

This is not about *me*. It's about *us*.

BOBBY  
Okay.

AWINO  
They know we're together.

BOBBY  
Is that what your Dad said? And what d'you mean exactly when you say "together"?

AWINO  
Living together.

BOBBY  
We are.

AWINO  
No together together.

BOBBY  
Meaning queer lesbians?

AWINO  
*(Disgusted with the word)* Eh-eh yesu whisper!

BOBBY  
*(Sarcastic whisper)* Sorry, I forgot, queer lesbians don't exist in Kenya, I'm the only one. (You came crashing through the roof, landed SMACK on top of me—naked, no less. But that was an accident. Until the accident never stopped so...)

AWINO  
He asked if we have sex.

BOBBY  
And you said...?

AWINO  
Eh! Never ever! Not true.

*BOBBY is obviously disappointed and more than a little irritated at AWINO's response but refrains from commenting. AWINO detects her annoyance.*

AWINO  
I had to Bobby...

BOBBY

I know, you handled the situation as best you could, I guess.

AWINO

Because of the rumors...

BOBBY

Understood, no need to explain. Can we just drop the subj—

AWINO

If you were me, you would've said the exact same thing.

BOBBY

Honestly? If I were you I don't know what I would've said. But if that was me, after kneeling down on the ground at my mother's gravesite, praying to her spirit and her spirit listening for my truth... I'm alone with my father, a man who loves me more than life itself, I'd tell him my truth, yup. Look him straight in the eye. "Yes I am in love with a woman. And her name is Bobby. Yes, we make love. Scratch that, we fuck—frequently. And it's totally true, our love is a huge threat to this village but I soooo wish, Dad, I sooo wish people could see past their blinding bigotry and fear so when they look at us, they see this relationship as empowering for women. Because it's transformed my life: beyond roles, compartments, categories, labels, and stereotypes, closure, and any other tiny neat little limited boxes that rob me of my complex humanity. The freedom in this relationship is empowering. I want that for my tribe, especially our women. For them to be less confused, less lost, less afraid to question and discover whatever's within them, no matter how terrifying the discovery is. Because I know what I know. This difficult, soul-searching journey has brought me that amazing gift of clarity. And that's why—look at me, Awino—that's why I am powerful." That's what I would've said. But your point is noted: he is your Dad not mine and this is not the United States. It's 1992 Kenya and we live in a rural village where African men, patriarchy laced with post-colonial trappings rule and your one expectation is for me to bow down to it like your good femme trophy wife. Point taken.

*Silence.*

BOBBY

Switching gears onto another—

AWINO

Talk like that is disrespectful to my father's office as Chief.

BOBBY

(*Ignoring Awino*) Let's come up with plan A, B, or C for fall back.

AWINO

He'd kill me if I told him.

BOBBY

Your father will not kill you.

AWINO

What do you know?

BOBBY

Nothing, I'm the American, that makes me automatic enemy number one. (Muzungu—I pronounce that correctly?) Let's face it Awino, all I do know are rule numbers. One—Your mother's (*gently*) gone. Two, you're her only child, the eldest, your Dad's favorite who three—runs away from home so four—he'll do anything to get you back meaning five—I honestly doubt, after all that's happened to you recently, he'd lay a finger on you.

AWINO

Maybe not my father...

*BOBBY goes into the kitchen.*

AWINO

But the village might.

BOBBY

(*Tasting her cooking*) Mmmmmm....village will what?

AWINO

Bobby.

BOBBY

I'm starved. Taste this, tell me what you think.

*BOBBY shoves a spoonful of food at AWINO.*

AWINO

Bobb—

BOBBY

Aaaaaah.

AWINO

What if the vill—

BOBBY

Aaaaaah....

AWINO

Stop. What if the village tries to get us, kill us?

*Silence.*

AWINO

If we don't change, they'll force us.  
The truth is...

BOBBY

I should leave.

## 2.4

*Inside CHIEF's kraal.  
He's in bed with two of his wives, MAMA OPIO and MAMA OTIENO.  
They're giggling, basking in the afterglow of a post-coital venture.  
CHIEF starts to get out of bed.*

MAMA OPIO

Don't leave.

CHIEF

(*To MAMA OTIENO*) I want you again. (*To MAMA OPIO*) And you again.

MAMA OPIO

Ah Maze, say it with feelings. Like you mean it, Chief.

CHIEF

That's when they turn against us isn't it? Because as fathers, we can't show them love?

MAMA OTIENO

Who?

CHIEF

Awino.

MAMA OPIO

Eh! Here we are half naked in bed with you and you're thinking Awino.

MAMA OTIENO

Leave him. He has much up in here (*indicating his head*).  
Tell us those big big needs, Chief.

MAMA OPIO

Yeah. What should we expect? From such a big, tough man?

MAMA OTIENO

Eh-heh, Chief.

MAMA OPIO

Royal. Majestic. Handsome Big-shot Chief-eh.

MAMA OTIENO

Very handsome eh. I'm sure a man so well endowed has many needs to be met.

MAMA OPIO

No doubt. Chief? Were you born to please me?

MAMA OTIENO

Or were we born to please you?

MAMA OPIO

What do you want us to do for you?

MAMA OTIENO / MAMA OPIO

Chief?

CHIEF

For an African strong man, life is goooooood.

## 2.5

*BOBBY packs, preparing to leave.*

*AWINO paces up and down, nervously biting hir nails.*

BOBBY

Stays or goes?

*BOBBY holds up an item to pack, a pair of folded socks maybe.*

BOBBY

Awino?

AWINO

Huh?

BOBBY

Socks? Stay, go?

AWINO

Go.

*BOBBY packs the item. AWINO unpacks whatever BOBBY's just packed.  
BOBBY repacks it.*

BOBBY

You tell me what to pack. I pack it. You unpack it. While pacing up-n-down while I repack what you just unpacked.

AWINO

*(Pacing, nail biting)* Biting my nails.

BOBBY

Nervous?

AWINO

No, yes, what (did you say)?

BOBBY

Come help me pack. It might soothe your—

AWINO

Don't want to.

BOBBY

Maybe if you—

AWINO  
*(Blurts it out)*

I don't want you to leave me ever.

BOBBY

What? What'd you just say?

*No answer. AWINO paces, nail biting.*

BOBBY

Stays or goes?

AWINO

Huh?

Idi Amin. BOBBY

Who? AWINO

*BOBBY holds up a massive Black dildo.*

Idi Amin. BOBBY

*Red heat issuing from the crackling earth thanks to famine  
Red heat on Chief's kraal with both wives—Opio and Otieno—having fun, laughing, etc.  
Red heat on rioters as they gather  
Red heat on Awino and Bobby's kraal—pacing, packing, nail biting, intense confusion  
Heated Mama Mugabe holds up her hand, STOP!*

AWINO  
So...first thing tomorrow morning? After the mail comes, you'll leave?

After the mail, yeah, I'm gone. BOBBY

Where to? AWINO

We just talked about this. BOBBY

AWINO  
*(Looks confused and upset and anxious and hurt)*  
I'm confused. Remind me again, what's the plan?

BOBBY  
Peace Corps, headquarters, Nairobi, tomorrow, remember?

AWINO  
You're coming back though?

BOBBY  
You said stay away, don't you think I should? Or d'you want me back?

AWINO  
I don't want you to leave me.

BOBBY

What do you really want, Awino? Do you even know?

AWINO

I want you here. I want you to go. You are sooooo cute, sooo sexy, sooo hot, soo beautiful I can't stop looking at you. And at the same time, I wish on the Ancestors that I never laid eyes on you. I want my father's acceptance without destroying him. I need to be a safe rebel. Impossible, I know but where would I be if they forced me into exile? Roaming the streets with people who don't speak my language, or share my culture or beliefs? Who would I be then?

BOBBY

You would be me. Living right here right now. Because the heart wants what the heart wants. And I think your heart is asking you to come to terms with who you really are. To find your very own personal truth and live by it. Regardless of who or what convinces you it's safer any other way.

AWINO

...My truth?

BOBBY

Is your freedom. Even when your truth is a lonely, terrifying place. Freedom is still the one thing worth fighting for.

AWINO

These are my people.

BOBBY

*Your* truth. I feel it roaring inside you. Look, I don't talk about this much but I've taken risks too you know? When my contract ended with the Peace Corps, I could've gone back to Colorado. Worked a non-profit. Made a decent living.

AWINO

I know Bobby.

BOBBY

Why stay? Because I never thought I'd meet anyone like you, Awino. I don't have a choice. I'm here (*touching her heart*) because of what's in here.

AWINO

Know what our customs say about the truth in your heart?

That's where your ancestors live. BOBBY

Where they write your destiny. AWINO

Is that what you believe? BOBBY

What does it matter anymore what I believe? AWINO

It does to me. BOBBY

*AWINO, somewhat embarrassed at her overt flirtation, looks away.*

What's the truth in your heart? Awino? BOBBY

*BOBBY caresses AWINO's chin, lifting it up so they can meet eye-to-eye.*

Right now? AWINO

*SPLIT SCENE: Lights on CHIEF, OPIO, and OTIENO still in his kraal. All 3 are standing cuddled in spoon position, foreshadowing AWINO and BOBBY's position later.*

This second? CHIEF

Yes. MAMA OPIO and BOBBY

I want to gather a bed of African violets... CHIEF

Pluck the petals.... AWINO

One by one... CHIEF

AWINO  
Smear them all over your beautiful naked body...

CHIEF  
I want to smell you...

AWINO  
Inch by inch, lick you.....

CHIEF  
Up 'n' down...

AWINO  
With my queer tongue...

CHIEF  
Romance you with song and dance...

AWINO  
At our wedding as my father looks up and smiles at us.  
*(CHIEF looks up and smiles at them)*  
Fling wide open that door is what I really, truly want...

CHIEF  
Really *(Beat)* Truly

OPIO / BOBBY  
With me in your arms! / With me in your arms?

AWINO  
Kissing you forever in broad daylight so the whole entire village knows.....

CHIEF  
Who you are to me...

AWINO  
Who *(beat)* You *(beat)* Are *(beat)* To me *(beat)* What you mean to me...

CHIEF  
What you mean to me...

AWINO  
Let them see how much I looove you Bobby. That's the truth. In my heart. Right now.

MAMA OPIO / MAMA OTIENO / BOBBY  
So then do it!

CHIEF

Yes, I can do it!

AWINO

I can't! Stop, I can't.

*AWINO pushes BOBBY away quite violently. Meanwhile CHIEF, OPIO, and OTIENO solidify their symbolic vows with a lengthy deep kiss.*

BOBBY

Look look. I'm shutting the window. Where's a blanket? (*Rushing*) To cover the—Here.

*BOBBY throws a blanket over the window.  
BOBBY and AWINO's kraal dims.*

BOBBY

See? Nobody can see us.

AWINO

Bobby, please don't—

*BOBBY bolts the door shut.*

BOBBY

Door bolted shut, see? Nobody can get in.

AWINO

Bobb—

BOBBY

Look at me Awino. It's safe now. You're safe Baby.

AWINO

You know what would happen if—

BOBBY

Kiss me.

*AWINO hesitates for a moment. BOBBY takes control, kisses AWINO.  
AWINO pulls away to look at BOBBY, assessing impact of the kiss.*

AWINO

Then...no going outside?  
Is that what you want?

*BOBBY advances, kissing AWINO more passionately, longer this second time round. AWINO is nervous they might be seen by outsiders. Meanwhile CHIEF and MAMA OPIO are invigorated, like two innocent love-struck teenagers.*

AWINO

We can't show anyone.

*BOBBY gets up, goes to the window to shut it even further but it's stuck. She takes off her kanga, the east African cloth wrapped awkwardly round her waist, and drapes it over the window. Stage lights go black for CHIEF and OPIO, dim for AWINO and BOBBY. Now in T-shirt and underwear, BOBBY goes back to AWINO seated on the floor.*

BOBBY

Double secure.  
Now we're invisible, Awino. We don't exist.

*BOBBY sits behind AWINO. They are in spoon position, BOBBY on the outside enveloping AWINO. She strokes the side of his arms up and down, up and down. After a while, they rock silently back and forth, back and forth in maternal silence. They close their eyes.*

### **INTERLUDE ONE: The Vigilante Voicing**

*A group of vigilante have assembled. They are poor, angry, disenchanted young men teeming with threat. No leader is evident. They argue in Kiswahili, Sheng and Engsh (dialects of Kiswahili and Kenyan English).*

RIOTERS/VIGILANTE

Heh heh!  
Hayi Hayi!  
Heh heh!  
Hayi!  
Heh heh!  
Hayi Hayi!  
Heh heh!  
Hayi  
Heh heh!  
Hayi Hayi!  
Heh heh!  
Hayi  
Yee

*CHIEF's kraal.*

MAMA MUGABE

You don't eat. Hardly talk. Barely sleep. What is it?

CHIEF

Struggles.

MAMA MUGABE

Tell me.

CHIEF

Things on my mind.

MAMA MUGABE

People are talking. You know that, don't you?

CHIEF

This is a small village. There's always talk.

MAMA MUGABE

Know what they're saying?

CHIEF

About Awino?

MAMA MUGABE

Forget Awino. They want to remove you from your post.

*CHIEF is silent.*

MAMA MUGABE

Look at you. I say they want to take away your title, you sit there quiet like a lump of salt. Is that how it goes?

CHIEF

That is how it goes. I am Chief.

MAMA MUGABE

Not without your title.

CHIEF

Given to me by my father's father and his father before him. The people are not above our Ancestors.

MAMA MUGABE

Maybe you weren't listening properly. Or maybe I failed to make myself clear. The elders held a council meeting in your absence.

CHIEF

Oh did they? Well, if there's a decision to make, it's mine to make. When or if I do make it, it will be final. That's what tradition dictates, that's what keeps this village alive. Full-stop, end of story. So if you came to make a special request on behalf of—

MAMA MUGABE

Do you not see—

CHIEF

I see perfectly well woman. Awino is suffering from a temporary—

MAMA MUGABE

Seven months is temporary?!

CHIEF

She has an identity crisis.

MAMA MUGABE

Who does? Awino or you?

*Beat. This is a typical moment where an elderly African woman would perform her theatrics—hissing, clapping her hands, turning her head to the side in mockery of the very idea of “identity crisis: what is that?”. In a sense, she dramatizes the preposterous through means permitted exclusively to her through seniority and gender.*

MAMA MUGABE

Ehhhh Odhiambo woye eh-eh. “Identity crisis”. What is that? Biiiiig words for a curable disease. Odhiambo? Identity crisis is marrying someone from a different tribe. So says tradition. Identity crisis is a mother who cannot give birth. So says tradition. Identity crisis is a mother with no son. Tradition. Identity crisis is a woman who is not circumcised—our tradition. One woman touching-touching the vagina of another woman, that is not identity crisis. That is where tradition is mute. But I say it's a sick joke.

CHIEF

Who's laughing? No one. Least of all Awino. She is in pain.

MAMA MUGABE

And in men's trousers. And bald. Becoming a white man by the hour. Meanwhile her father says zeeeeero, not one word.

CHIEF

She's defenseless.

MAMA MUGABE

Who is fighting *against* her? Remind me.

CHIEF

Who is fighting *for* her now that her mother is dead?

MAMA MUGABE

A lesbian. From United States. Is that the answer you want? An outsider. Causing chaos within from behind the scenes, dragging foreign ideas into our village, why should such a person live among us? Why should we allow such? What does the American *say* she wants and what does she *really* want from us? Because--and you know this to be true—it's her behavior that provoked our Ancestors to curse us with this famine.

CHIEF

True.

MAMA MUGABE

I pity Awino, truly, but other people's children are dying like dogs because of this famine. What am I supposed to say to a mother to bring her dead child back to life? As a mother myself, what am I supposed to be feeling, thinking?

CHIEF

True.

MAMA MUGABE

Wait, when one of our own dies because the tribe has faced too much heartache, then what?

CHIEF

Awino has only me.

MAMA MUGABE

Odhiambo, how many children do you have? Including Awino?

CHIEF

Twenty-nine.

MAMA MUGABE

They have needs too. How many wives besides myself? Two. You think we married you for what? Your beautiful big belly? We want a Chief. We deserve a Chief. Where is my Chief? The man who can solve crisis. That's the man I married. That's who my father sent me miles away to spend the rest of my entire life with. The man I married craves authority. Breathes status. That way my children and their children can live into the next

generation no matter what issue we face. That's why I married you. Why we all married you. Little did we know we'd have to sacrifice our lives for a girl—playing with vaginas [*Sucks teeth*].

CHIEF

I'll speak to the elders.

MAMA MUGABE

Let me handle this. I will whip this sick behavior completely out of her system. A good, hard, sound beating.

CHIEF

You'll kill my daughter.

MAMA MUGABE

If she doesn't change—

CHIEF

She will—

MAMA MUGABE

If—

CHIEF

There is no "if." She will. I know.

MAMA MUGABE

How? I'm asking, What do you know about Awino that will end this situation forever?

CHIEF

Awino is a first rate coward.  
Don't do anything. I'll take care of everything.

MAMA MUGABE

When?

CHIEF

Soon.

MAMA MUGABE

Good.

CHIEF

Good. Good.

MAMA MUGABE

Good.

CHIEF

Good. Good. Good good good. As The British say, "Very good." Good.

MAMA MUGABE

What is it? What's wrong?

CHIEF

You know my father says to me—I'm eight years old—and Baba says, "Odhiambo. You will marry Mugabe."

"Which one is she?" because you have so many sisters I don't know. So my father decides I have to see you first before we marry, which is unusual. Anyway, he goes from kraal to kraal, asking everyone for a donkey to go. Because your village is so far from ours. I'll never forget. Here is this old man, gray haired with a walking stick, asking for a donkey. "Hodi." No one has the donkey so he goes to the next kraal, "Hodi", nothing, next kraal, then next until he decides, "Let's just walk."

"All that way?"

"All that way son."

MAMA MUGABE

Why are you telling me this?

CHIEF

To show you what defeats tradition. So, we get to your village, and he says, pointing, "There. That one."

"May I look at her Baba?"

He agrees then I say, "My God. She has the eyes of a gazelle. Is she mine?" He smiles. Mind you, I'm eight years old. I'm not supposed to see you until age eleven, no sooner. And not before our parents meet to arrange the marriage plus dowry price of cows. But my father decides otherwise, breaking tradition, for what? For love. Whose love? Mine, his son's. Did my father struggle with that decision? I cannot know for sure. All I know is the connection between the beloved and the loved one is defined by a beautiful struggle.

MAMA MUGABE

Awino's struggle I know. What is ours?

*CHIEF goes down on one knee, holds her hand.*

CHIEF

I—wish to marry.

MAMA MUGABE

Again? You—Do I know her?

*He knows who she is but won't answer. She knows intuitively from his silence that he has a specific woman in mind.*

MAMA MUGABE  
Is she circumcised?

CHIEF  
Not yet.

MAMA MUGABE  
So she's still a girl, not a woman. From our tribe?

CHIEF  
Yes.

MAMA MUGABE  
How many cows?

CHIEF  
Is she worth?

MAMA MUGABE  
Dowry price.

CHIEF  
I'll purchase her for two, three cows at most.

MAMA MUGABE  
Not much.  
Is she educated?

CHIEF  
Beautiful.

MAMA MUGABE  
But dumb. How old?

CHIEF  
Ten.

MAMA MUGABE  
And her father agreed?!

CHIEF  
I am Chief of this village.

*He goes down on both knees, takes her hand, bows his head down.*

CHIEF

Mama Mugabe, please. As my first wife. I'm asking for your permission, may I marry?

MAMA MUGABE

I wash my hands. Take care of Awino's business first, foremost. Then you will have my blessing and permission. Marry as many women as you wish. But I grant you nothing, not 'til then.

**INTERLUDE TWO: Time for Payback**

*Vigilantes. LEADER is hoisted on someone's shoulders.  
The crowd roars with approval.*

VIGILANTES/RIOTERS

Heey!  
Hayi Hayi!  
Heey!  
Hayi Hayi!  
Hey hey!  
Hey hey!  
Yee

LEADER

I say!

*The crowd roars.*

LEADER

Nani katika nyi nyi

*They roar.*

LEADER

Haja onja nja?

*They roar.*

LEADER

Eh? Eh?

TOGETHER

EHHHHHHHHHHHHH? EHHHHHHHHHHHHH?

LEADER

Who here among us has not eaten today? Because of this famine!

*All of them raise their hands fiercely in the air.*

LEADER

Who here can say, without doubt, who can say “I don’t know what it means to go hungry. Every family member is alive. Healthy. Because of this famine.” Who can say? Can anyone?

*They put their hands down, dropping LEADER to the ground. He circulates among them.*

LEADER

We are here because every one of us is hurt by the famine on our land. We have sacrificed for this land. Fought to keep it. Planted in it. Prayed to it. Bled for it. Buried our own into it. And now, my brothers, it is time for the land to payback!

*They roar.*

LEADER

Payback!

*They roar, Payback!*

LEADER

I can’t hear you!

*They roar Payback! louder. LEADER cups his ear.*

LEADER

Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?!!!!

*They roar Payback! even louder, lifting LEADER back up in the air, carrying him out into the beyond while stomping and chanting.*

## 2.7

*AWINO and BOBBY’s kraal.*

*They are caressing each other, rocking back and forth on the floor.*

BOBBY

I’m right here...

Won’t abandon you...

Won’t ever, ever betray you..

Never let anything or anyone hurt you...

*(Rocking)*

Nothing can touch us...  
Not while I'm here...

AWINO

Tell me....

*BOBBY answers through song. She speaks it rather than sings it this first time as they rock back and forth:*

BOBBY

I'll go to the cunt,  
I'll go to the cunt,  
I'll go to the cunt-TREE-side (*Sound like "cunt-TREE" but means "countryside"*)  
To see the pussy,  
To see the pussy,  
To see the pussycat.  
Fuck you,  
Fuck you,  
Fuck you-reeosity (*Meant to sound like "Fuck curiosity" but mean "For curiosity"*)  
Fuck you, even you,  
Fuck you-reeosity.

*Rocking.*

AWINO

Tell me.

BOBBY

Easy Baby. Relax.

AWINO

Say you love me.

BOBBY

I love you.

*BOBBY snuggles up even closer to AWINO and begins to kiss hir gently on hir face, hir forehead, cheeks, all over. She kisses hir more and more to calm hir down.*

BOBBY

Always....

*BOBBY resumes kissing AWINO's face gently while whispering, "I love you" to hir over and over again.*

*AWINO hesitates now and again, breaking off, looking round lest someone sees them, but s/he is gradually consumed by BOBBY's commitment to the act, her intense focus.  
A portion of stage-lights are cast so their silhouettes are seen clearly against the back wall of their kraal at the rear of the stage. As they separate and draw closer to one another, the intersection of their silhouettes grows lighter and dimmer, lighter and dimmer like a shadow-dance against the clay-colored back wall. Their "dance" continues for a while until they are standing at the front of the stage.*

We shouldn't. AWINO

*They kiss.*

That's why we should. BOBBY

*They kiss.*

Danger... BOBBY

Makes it hot... AWINO

*They kiss.*

Not normal. AWINO

*They kiss.*

Normal's overrated. Toxic. [Kiss] We're freaks!

*They laugh.*

Perverts! BOBBY

Freaky, deaky perverted, Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay! AWINO

*They kiss.*

BOBBY

Outcasts.

AWINO

Triple: yaay-yaay-yaay

*BOBBY sings a rendition of the song again, though still preserving the deliberately stilted rhythm and tone of normal speech. As she sings, she flirtatiously makes her way down to AWINO's man cunt, nibbling then sucking on hir man nipples, kissing hir stomach or mid-section, blowing skin farts along the way...*

BOBBY

I'm going for the cunt,  
I'm going for the cunt,  
I'm going for the cunt-TREE-side.  
To see the pussy,  
To see the pussy,  
To see the pussycat.  
Fuck you,

AWINO  
(Sings)

Even you...

BOBBY

Fuck you...

AWINO  
(Sings)

Even you, hoo-hoo...

BOBBY

Fuck you-reecosity.

*She is kneeling, eye to eye with AWINO's man cunt. She unbuttons AWINO's jeans, unzips hir zipper, pulls down hir jeans, pulls down AWINO's boxers. AWINO's t-shirt covers the upper portion of hir naked thighs.*

BOBBY

Know how many queers learn to hate their bodies? Are shamed so they can't appreciate their own pussy as men?

*She is looking directly at AWINO's man pussy.*

BOBBY

Man, your pussy is manly, so powerful. Beautiful.

*BOBBY removes two black socks from AWINO's man pussy. These are AWINO's testicles.*

*BOBBY pulls out AWINO's stick or penis. She eats hir.*

*They fall to the floor, kissing, rolling around, one on top of the other, then they switch so the other's on top. They yearn to cement their connection at the risk of being caught. Understand, this is lovemaking under the pressure and tension of possible discovery. It is lovemaking heightened by risk. Therefore the boundaries of threat become the very windows of exploration, an opportunity for them to fully express their passion for one another. So they scream, gasp, grope, groan, giggle out of sheer ecstasy, sheer pleasure and fun. This is fun for them. AWINO, completely calm now, bursts out laughing once in a while. The full expression of their sexual passion should be uninhibited at this point.*

*Eventually, when they are completely depleted from their sexual ventures and basking in its soothing aftermath, they embrace. They end up cuddling in spoon position, AWINO at the exterior, BOBBY the interior. They are cheek-to-cheek, tightly knit, looking out at the audience, daring them.*

*AWINO blows a long loud skin fart on the side of Bobby's neck.*

BOBBY

(orgasmic) Aaaaaah God I came so hard for you!

AWINO

Amazing!

BOBBY

WE are amazing.

AWINO

(Shouting) Hear that village! My African penis is on fire!

BOBBY

(More to herself than Awino) Say "cock", not "penis". Cock's a well-rounded word, fills the mouth more when you say it, "cock".

AWINO

Cock-a-doodle-doooooo! America exports my erection! Bodyslamming! I'm deadly like a lion on the prowl for those stupid fucken rules and regulations of yours, fucken village!!! Where are you, eh? Bang my fellow Africans with my cock-a-dooooo!

BOBBY

Awino they'll hear you.

AWINO

My Ancestors have spoken! Great sex! I'm young 'n' fulla cum! Squirt! Off the charts! We—yey-yes-es-es! Chief's kid with mzungu! (*Singing Stevie Wonder/Paul McCartney*) Ebony and Ivory we're doing this this this in harmony:

*S/he rolls her over, humping the floor to perform the sex act, making noises. BOBBY giggles.*

AWINO

Oi oi oi Transatlantic electric humpin'!

BOBBY

Stop.

AWINO

Give a shit about their stupid tradition when I can have you in my mouth. Smell.

*BOBBY leans in to smell hir open mouth.  
AWINO then leans in to lick BOBBY's fingers one by one.*

AWINO

Cunt juice! That's (*licking*) the taste (*licking*) of freedom.

*AWINO rolls her over again. BOBBY enjoys the journey.*

AWINO

Freedom smells...tastes raunchy, beautiful.

## 2.8

*MAMAS MUGABE, OTIENO, and OPIO holding a tribal meeting.*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The tribal meeting is held sitting on a wooden bench in a semi-circle outdoors exposed to the elements. A setting sun colored every shade of lipstick appears on the horizon. We hear children playing, cows mooing, goats, chickens and a rooster crowing in the background. Maybe hair is being braided, women stuff, etc. Typically these tribal meetings take place on a Sunday, are gender and age specific and exclusive to the most senior, and most elder (status-wise) members of the tribe. They take place at the end of one week and beginning of another, from Sunday afternoon into early Monday morning sometimes. Men talk men's talk; women talk women's talk. In this scene, the women drink their local brew, smoke pipes, cigarettes. Seating arrangements tend to be stratified according to seniority, eldest to youngest from left to right. Rules that usually apply to status and seniority need not be strictly observed since they are implied automatically in*

MAMA OPIO

He agreed? He gave you permission?

MAMA MUGABE

Yes.

MAMA OPIO

But why now?

MAMA MUGABE

She's mannish.

MAMA OTIENO

Blame the father.

MAMA MUGABE

Who blames himself. So he's given us the cure.

MAMA OPIO

He specifically said, "Circumcise Awino"?

MAMA MUGABE

He said, "Take care of it Mugabe."

MAMA OPIO

Oh! so he didn't say, "Circumcise her"?

MAMA MUGABE

(To OTIENO) Why is she looking at me like that?

MAMA OTIENO

(To OPIO) She wants to know why you're looking at her like that. Report back to her, not me.

MAMA OPIO

Because I don't believe you that's why. Because nothing makes sense.

MAMA MUGABE

Which is why we're making sense out of nonsense.

MAMA OTIENO

---

*the seating arrangements. For example, a junior wife can and will interrupt a senior wife and the senior wife is more than likely to yield to her junior; under any other circumstances this is out of the question.*

Remember we told him, “Chief, please. Don’t treat this girl like a boy. Pull her out of school.”

MAMA OPIO

But she begged to go.

MAMA OTIENO

All Awino has to do is beg, then Chief suddenly flips like chapati.

MAMA MUGABE

What good is a girl in school?

MAMA OTIENO

In the end, all she does is marry anyway.

MAMA MUGABE

But what did Chief do? Give his daughter a full, expensive education, from primary all the way to secondary school. While my children work the fields—even my boys, my sons doing women’s work while Awino is learning. My son fetches water from the river. My daughters have babies, tend to their husbands meanwhile Chief is throwing money and all his resources at Awino for what? to read novels.

MAMA OTIENO

Western novels.

MAMA MUGABE

With western romance. Where do you think this sickness comes from?

MAMA OTIENO

It’s a western disease.

MAMA MUGABE

What is it about this younger generation of African: when they see any foreigner they automatically assume she has their best interests at heart? Don’t they know history? Don’t they know how hard we fought so their generation didn’t have to fight, not so they could spit [*She spits*] on the blood shed from our struggle for their liberation.

MAMA OTIENO

I struggled to tell Chief, “Awino is fourteen. I said, “Chief, take her now-now-now to be circumcised. One more year it’s too late.” But what did he do?

MAMA MUGABE

Nothing. When left uncircumcised, the vagina grows and grows into a penis, see?

MAMA OTIENO

From a tiny boat into a loooooong, ripe banana. Isn’t it (so)?

MAMA MUGABE

That's how a girl becomes a boy. Acts...

MAMA OTIENO

Dresses...

MAMA MUGABE

Walks...

MAMA OTIENO

Talks...

MAMA MUGABE

When circumcised a woman cannot masturbate: what is there to rub? You are a true woman depending only on a man for total pleasure. As it should be. Awino masturbates because she has a penis. That's why she touches women. No wonder her peers refuse to associate with her.

MAMA OTIENO

Which decent African would? Which man would even think to marry her?

MAMA MUGABE

Mmm-hhmm, if she weren't royalty, the daughter of a Chief, Awino would be hopeless. No man would even consider her for marriage. It's as though Chief practically delivered her to this foreigner. (*Sucks teeth*) Breeee.

MAMA OTIENO

The father is not the real source. Let me tell you eh? The same way they brought AIDS here to us at home in Africa is the same way this woman came to our village. Westerners are crafty people. You have to watch them with more than your eyes and listen with more than your ears. They are aaaall FBI children with secret service hearts.

MAMA OPIO

Meaning what?

MAMA OTIENO

The western AIDS doctors hid in the forest. This woman hides Awino at the edge of the village. Why is that? It's because she wants to contaminate Awino. Then slowly slowly contaminate the rest of us. That's her plan.

MAMA OPIO

Not true.

MAMA OTIENO

It is. The reason it's succeeding with Awino is because she is lost.

MAMA OPIO

She's searching.

MAMA MUGABE

For what?

MAMA OPIO

She went to the foreigner/mzungu not before but after her mother died.

MAMA OTIENO

That's what I'm saying. Her mind was already weak. Easy to contaminate.

MAMA OPIO

She is searching for someone to care for her. To listen. Another woman, a mother figure.

MAMA OTIENO

Eh?!, my mother never touched me that way. Please.

MAMA MUGABE

We're her mothers now.

MAMA OPIO

It's not the same. Competition-competition between wives. Chief buys you something, the rest of us (get) jealous/y. Our children, same thing-- always competing with each other.

MAMA MUGABE

It's one thing to look elsewhere. It's another to change who you are.

MAMA OPIO

Maybe she's mourning her mother. The way a man would. Like her father.

MAMA OTIENO

Eh?, can someone please fill my cup? Because only alcohol can make sense of this bullshit.

MAMA MUGABE

*(dramatic change of subject, holding court)* I was planning to take this secret to my grave.

MAMA OTIENO

*(Tipsy, bordering on drunk)* I loooooove gossipy.

MAMA MUGABE

I know how it all began.

MAMA OTIENO

I hear American women don't wear underwear.

MAMA OPIO

We all know how it began.

MAMA OTIENO

It helps them feel the wind blowing. In fact I can hear the wind, why?, because I'm not wearing underwear. And I'm not an American!

MAMA MUGABE

I mean the beginning of the famine.

MAMA OPIO

(To OTIENO) Are you drunk?

MAMA OTIENO

No but I'm hearing a lot from this alcoholic brew. It travels ziiiip to your head then [*Dancing*] dances.

MAMA MUGABE

It began with Awino and her mzungu, They were in the kraal together. Alone.

MAMA OPIO

Where?

*MUGABE points to a spot--actors gather there.  
Flashback to nine months earlier. Light goes dim on the wives. Drumbeat  
in the background. There is a gourd filled with water on the floor.  
AWINO, in ceremonial dress, is seated next to the gourd.  
MAMA OPIO joins her, sits.*

MAMA OPIO

Close your eyes.

*AWINO closes hir eyes.  
OPIO smears the substance from the gourd gently, slowly on hir face.*

MAMA OPIO

How do you feel? Nervous? Try not to be. The funeral won't be long. Cry for your mother then leave, okay?

AWINO

Yes.

MAMA OPIO

Don't talk. Mouth shut, eyes closed, relaxed breathing. You look beautiful.

AWINO

Thank you.

MAMA OPIO

ShhT, mouth zip, eyes shut. I mean it, close them tight.

*OPIO leans in to kiss AWINO.*

*BOBBY enters right before their kiss.*

BOBBY

I—Sorry, I'm the new—

*They freeze.*

BOBBY

Hi. I'm, my name is, I'm the new Peace Corps volunteer. I'm looking for Awignio? Aweero? I couldn't catch the exact pronounci—

AWINO

Awino. Welcome. Please, come in.

BOBBY

Thank you. Hey, um, I'm really sorry. For your loss. It must hurt. My favorite aunt passed when I was a little g—never mind. Um, if there's anything I can do for you, or anything I can help with, or if you need someone to listen and feel comfortable enough sharing, it would be an honor. Unless I'm interrupting something...? I can come back, no problem, if this is a bad ti—

*Unnoticed, MAMA OPIO exits.*

BOBBY

I say something wrong?

AWINO

Come, please, feel free.

BOBBY

Thank you.

AWINO

Can I get you something to eat, drink?

Awino, what can I do for you? Ask. BOBBY

Anything? AWINO

Yes. BOBBY

What is your name? AWINO

BOBBY  
(*Smiling, extends her hand*) Bobby Lynn Swiatek. New Peace Corps volunteer.

*Lights down.*  
*Lights up. A few weeks later.*  
*AWINO and BOBBY in their first sexual encounter.*  
*AWINO is hecka nervous.*

BOBBY  
Is this your first time? With a woman?

AWINO  
(*Gasping*) Huh huh huh huh huh

BOBBY  
Nervous? Your breathing, it's....

AWINO  
Don't look at me while I say this, Bobby.  
When I masturbate, when I dream of fucking you, I'm me and I'm not me. I'm a man. I dream I fuck you the way my father would. Mask, face, soul. I've never told. You're my first Bobby. I'm going to show you how to read my body. So you can unmask me.  
(*points*) What do you see here?

BOBBY  
Breasts?

AWINO  
No. My chest. Say it.

BOBBY  
I see your chest.

AWINO

And this is my penis.

BOBBY

You don't have to do this. It doesn't make you a coward or any less of—

AWINO

Say it or I won't take my clothes off during sex.

BOBBY

Sssssh please Awino, if I struggle it's because—

AWINO

Ssssssh—

BOBBY

But I self-identify as lesbian. It's a struggle for me to refer to male body parts during—

AWINO

I want—Saaaaaaaay it.

BOBBY

I...see...your penis, Awino. It's big, beautiful.

AWINO

This is my penis too

*AWINO holds up all ten fingers*

This is my penis too.

*AWINO sticks out her tongue, also points to her eyes*

And because they are my penis, all mine, they can never hurt you, or rape you, or make you feel less or whatever you don't want because you are a woman, my woman can't, my woman won't let you be disrespected. Do you understand—me? All of me?

BOBBY

I want to.

AWINO

But do you?

BOBBY

(Pause) .....I do.

AWINO

Until now, I didn't think I could show my fullness to someone. Until now, I didn't believe I could exist. Do you believe I am who I am not when I am who I am?

BOBBY

I do. Absolutely.

*AWINO pulls BOBBY's head back.*

AWINO

How does it feel, as witness? To see my all?

*Shift to BOBBY alone, on the phone.*

BOBBY

Hello? Sandra, listen they charge over three hundred shillings for three minutes...Hell yeah, that's expensi—What? ... just the sex act but—...yeah...Right, no, not a lesbian...right...Not a woman. Awino's—Well, I don't. ...Correct, I'm still queer and lesbian, officially anyway. ...What's my definition of love? Shared psychosis, same as Shakespeare's... William Shakesp—?, yeah, the cis het white male closeted gay playwright, don't knock his talent. Sandra?, I'm losing you...Hello? You still there? Yeah, we're back up. I don't know what kind of sex...Just the power...of affirming our identity is so...Maybe sex is better because our genders are improved— more fluid, more free, less anchored, more flowing, more huge, larger than the body or language or labels or compartments or roles at our disposal. "Woman", "man", "lesbian", what the fuck?, why should labels mean everything—or anything? Haven't they confined Awino—and me? Boxed us into stereo...Asif Black people need—No, remove their politics away from my vagina...Yeah, village. East. Africa, I know. How fucken insane is that? Trans. Or a man. Or all, or none, or more, or less or mystery I dunno. ...I don't know what that makes me.

*(Hangs up)*

And I don't care.

*Lights fade back to the women seated at their tribal meeting.*

MAMA MUGABE

That's exactly when the famine started. To show us something unAfrican is here.

MAMA OPIO

UnAfrican?

MAMA OTIENO

Mmmm-hmmm.

MAMA OPIO

Then why does the word exist in our African language? If the behavior does not exist also? You mean to tell me those young boys, the ones who spend six, seven years in the forest training to be warriors. What do those boys do at night together? Sleep? Teenage boys age eleven to eighteen?

MAMA MUGABE

Who here among us is a boy? Not me. So how would you know what those boys do in the forest at night? All we know is once they get out of that forest they marry—women. And my dear sister, that's all we need to know.

MAMA OPIO

I won't do it.

MAMA MUGABE

Duty. You will.

MAMA OPIO

I won't circumcise Awino. I nearly bled to death.

MAMA MUGABE

So?

MAMA OTIENO

I nearly bled to death.

MAMA MUGABE

*(To Mama Otieno)* But did you?  
*(To Mama Opio)* Did you?

MAMA OPIO

She scraped me clean with a rusty razor. Tied both ends of my vagina together with thorns. I can't use the toilet properly. My monthly (blood) barely comes out the hole is so small. Five years now I can't urinate without crying. Five years! And giving birth is hell. They rip the thorns from my vagina, I bleed nonstop like a red river, out pops the baby, they sew my vagina back together with those same thorns, those same thorns! I'm dying while giving birth. Life equals death. And I won't bring that death to Awino, no.

MAMA MUGABE

You didn't die.

MAMA OPIO

I won't do it, not to another woman, on God I swear.

MAMA MUGABE

Let me make clear some things you might learn five, six years from now. When you're not as beautiful, or as young. In life there is always something larger than yourself. And

that thing is what you owe your life to. For me it is my status as first wife to Chief. If I suffer every day of my life that means nothing to me. Provided I hold that title. For Awino, what is it? What is larger than herself? She is selfish. To put this village at risk, you think about that then argue with me. Let her learn through circumcision how to love her own people. How to love something larger than herself for once in her life.

MAMA OPIO

Maybe, just maybe there is something beyond tradition.

MAMA MUGABE

There is nothing—except Awino.

## INTERMISSION: 15 minutes

### 2.9

*AWINO and BOBBY's kraal.*

AWINO

*(Laughter)* Ha ha ha ha!

BOBBY

*(Tracing her fingers along Awino's skin)* When the light falls at an angle on your skin, see? I trace the different boundaries with my fingertips. Light, dark, shadow, bright. Laced then intertwined into a luminary dance.

AWINO

What else?

BOBBY

Look who's fishing for uber compliments.

AWINO

What do you find beautiful about yourself?

BOBBY

*(Struggles)*...Hmmm, what do I like about myself? *(Struggles)*...Um...I like who I've become. I have...fewer expectations. Honor simplicity. From three meals a day, table, fork and knife to on the floor, eat with your hands, no electricity. My best friend Sandra, she thinks I'm crazy for my deliberate self-marginalization. Like any woman-of-color needs more. But it feels, I dunno, honest. Vital sometimes

AWINO

What do you hate?

BOBBY

About me? Pretty privilege thanks to white supremacy. I'm light-skinned, femme, cute, curvy, petite, come from more money which screams pedigree. Meaning my life is worth more than yours. Complete fucken total bullshit. Who do you think I will always get the higher paying job between the two of us? Why else do you think we can live off my Dad?

AWINO

He's a rich American.

BOBBY

Less than an hour of his salary pays our rent for a month, more than. Your father's fluent in five different languages, five. Mine speaks American. Your father comes from a long line of royalty. A Chief in Kenya working himself to the bone to barely feed his own family. Why?, because the lottery in his mother's womb sealed his fate from birth. It must get to you, how fucked up the system is.

AWINO

Where did you live before?

BOBBY

My lover had an apartment on the South side.

AWINO

Which one?

BOBBY

You really wanna know this?

*AWINO nods hir head.*

BOBBY

Her name is Miko.

AWINO

Same tribe?

BOBBY

Is she white? Is that what you're asking? I don't date white women 'cause I can't stand white people, especially white lesbians. Never ever have or will date—well, never say never but—never. A tofu loving tree hugger who took ten million classes in Feminism, Women's Studies, Gender and Ethnic Studies and has a cornerstone dedicated to the Goddess at one of the seven sister schools where "deodorant" is a curse word and they chant "progressive left" to the point where she creams? Now she might be a top lesbian at sexual theory but that's not exactly my idea of an intoxicating fuckbuddy or life partner. I prefer my women to be men. Miko is...tall, taller than me anyway. Broad over here

(*indicating shoulders*), facial hair. Passed really well. And maybe something like....I think Miko's about two three shades darker than you. I don't carry her picture around anymore so don't ask.

AWINO

Does she work?

BOBBY

Dunno.

AWINO

Eh?!

BOBBY

She was let out of prison last I heard. Stolen credit cards. It's hard to get work with a felony record. Right now I bet she's on a stoop somewhere. Smoking a pack of Newport Lights.

AWINO

They arrested her.

BOBBY

Get this, I'm minding my own business in the organic food co-op, stocking something innocent like pinto beans while listening to gossip, your basic vagina-speak plus victim-slash poverty porn from a certain generation of lesbian feminist who doesn't trust male genitalia—penis, cock, dick, even dicklettes are strictly off limits. Anyway, in comes these two guys who have to be police officers 'cause only cops could be so stupid 'n' ugly and think they're actually professionals.

"Where's Miko?"

Everyone turns round.

"Miss?"—he's talking to me, sticks out his hand, protocol says shake it so I do, Ewww cop energy—"Miss, have you seen Miko?" (*Cop Two asks in this sissy voice.*)

I shrug my shoulders, "Miko who?" But after lunch, while the cops are still hanging out at the store to see if Miko'll eventually show up, a bunch of card-carrying lesbians get together, basically out her to the police. "She stays here, goes to such-n-such club to party, smoke weed, hang, etc etc." So—that was the end of Miko, and that was the end of us, and that was the beginning of a new chapter in our relationship set off by new decisions that needed to be made...decisions like "should I take on a relationship when my partner's in prison? Is it a long-distance relationship or three-party relationship since the authorities are privy to whatever we do or say? Talking to your lover through glass. Touching the glass barrier that separates you, still feeling our electricity because nothing, not even stone cold glass windows can segregate my lover my lover my lover's love... But paradox then contradiction set in when I leave for the real world while Miko's locked behind steel bars like some fucken caged animal and I feel—Is my being there even supportive?...Can we not talk about this anymore? Please.

AWINO  
Bobby? Do you belong?

BOBBY  
Here?

AWINO  
Anywhere? Even on the South side with Miko?

BOBBY  
I dunno. Ideally, the world wouldn't be segregated. An ideal world has nothing but celebrated space. For us. But...world's less than ideal so I put my body in places where I'm not comfortable. Pushing. Towards hope...

AWINO  
Want more space?  
*(S/he gets up, pretends to fart)*  
There's more space. Stinky space. What we need now is to add color to that stinky space. Change of atmosphere.

*AWINO goes to the table, turns on the radio. S/he adjusts the station.  
Light romantic African music is playing.  
S/he opens hir arms in BOBBY's direction.*

AWINO  
Come.

*BOBBY gets up and literally collapses into hir arms. They sway very slowly, gently.  
BOBBY leads, AWINO follows; AWINO leads, BOBBY follows.*

AWINO  
...Listen... The pulse Bobby, the beat. It goes straight to my legs.

*Like all bad dancers, AWINO believes those terrible moves are super cool, super impressive, totally in-style and current. Go for it!*

AWINO  
Like my moves? Check this out, heh!

BOBBY  
Is this the national radio station?

AWINO  
Sweet moves, eh? That's why you're laughing, right?

BOBBY

What's this song about?

*AWINO whispers something in BOBBY's ear*

BOBBY

Really? On national radio? No, really?

*AWINO whispers something else in BOBBY's ear*

BOBBY

Liar, not on national radio! Think I'm dumb?

AWINO

You're beautiful. That's what I think.

*(AWINO kisses her for quite a long time as they sway to the music.)*

This is where you belong Bobby. In our space.

*The radio crackles with static. They stop.*

BOBBY

What is it?

AWINO

Stupid radio.

BOBBY

Maybe the batteries are low.

AWINO

No matter how much you spend on these batteries, the guy at the kiosk always steals from you.

*AWINO walks over to the radio on the table, lifts it up, opens the back where the batteries are stored. S/he takes the batteries out; music stops. S/he wipes the batteries clean with the corner of her-his shirt.*

AWINO

Maybe they're sweaty.

*AWINO blows on the batteries then reinserts them back into the radio. Music resumes. S/he returns to BOBBY. They kiss, dance. Static crackle from the radio again.*

AWINO

(Sucks teeth) Now what is it?

*AWINO walks over to the table again, lifts the radio, shakes it, puts it back down on the table. Music resumes. S/he returns to BOBBY to dance. All music suddenly stops for the following:*

RADIO ANNOUNCER ONE

Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, KBC. We interrupt our regularly scheduled musical program for a brief news bulletin. His Excellency President Daniel arap Moi issued the first of a series of fire-y speeches condemning the recently formed Kenya Gay, Lesbian and Queer Alliance, *Umoja wa Wasenge*. In his remarks, the President said quote: “I will use everything in my power as Supreme Commander and Chief of the armed forces to crush this ridiculous crusade for homosexual rights.” President Moi went on to say, “I personally sanction fellow Kenyans to do whatever is necessary, by whatever means necessary to root out this extremely perverse behavior from our national soil. This will make you a true Kenyan citizen. This will make Kenya great again.”

*Umoja wa Wasenge*, a clandestine organization claiming social justice for all, won national attention a week ago today when its leaders, two Kenyan men, were arrested for kissing in a local park. Their case has sparked a wave of violent protest throughout the country. Both men remain on trial for the death penalty. Meanwhile fighting continues to escalate in response to the President’s inflammatory remarks. Now onto sports...

*AWINO pulls violently away from BOBBY as the sports segment begins.*

BOBBY

What the fuck is—

*AWINO goes to the table, switches the radio off, wanders about the kraal pacing. S/he picks items off the floor, tossing them onto the bed. BOBBY approaches AWINO, reaches out to touch her-hir.*

AWINO

Touch me again and I swear I’ll beat the shit out of you. On the only God I know—

BOBBY

What?!

AWINO

*(on top of her line)* There’s no time. / We...

BOBBY

Listen to me. / Listen. We have...

AWINO

Put the clothes inside / the...

BOBBY

If we don't—Are you listening to / me ...

AWINO

Get the suitcase out from / under...

BOBBY

Tell me where we're going first and I'll—

AWINO

Just! Pack!

BOBBY

I! Am! I am pac—

*They pack together in silence.*

BOBBY

Listen, Baby, look at me just for one—

*BOBBY tries to position herself as a visual focus.*

BOBBY

Will you listen to me please? Sweetie? You and I, we both have to think of a plan for us to be able to pick up, / please...

AWINO

What? Eh? What? / Are you...

BOBBY

I can't—I can't do this by myself. Where do you want us to / go without...

AWINO

Is this your country? Is. This. Your. Country? Is it?!

*Silence.*

AWINO

Do you, can you know how / they will react to us? Lesbians, deviants, faggots, queers.

BOBBY

But what can we do when—

AWINO

Do you know anything? No. So shut that stupid big American mouth of yours. Take the rest of the clothes. And put them inside the suitcase.

*BOBBY doesn't move. AWINO walks over and literally shakes BOBBY.*

AWINO

What do you want me to say? That I'm scared? Here: I am terrified. When they come Bobby, that's it. We'll be arrested, in prison, electricity here (*indicating their genital area*). No me, no you, no us no more Bobby. And believe me they're on their way. So either you help me pack—

—I'll do it myself. I couldn't care less what you decide at this point Bobby.

BOBBY

Listen to me! Listen!

AWINO

WhAAAAAAAAAAAAAAt!

BOBBY

We up and leave this house, where are we gonna go? Who will house us? Nobody. We're the sick contaminated lesbians, remember? And we're broke. We're so broke it's not even an option to—All I'm saying is—

AWINO

You say, you say, you you you. Who are you? And what are you doing here—really? Today morning I told you this would happen didn't I? First thing through that door what was I saying, eh Bobby?, "We're going to die. They will kill us"—but what did you say?, eh Bobby? What did you say? "Who is "they" Awino?. There is no "they" Awino, only personal truth." Biiiiig ideas and me being the stupid idiot that I am, I ignore everything I know about my own people and believe in you say, you say, you say. Think I'm stupid? Think because I'm quiet, don't say a word, just sit there watching that I'm that African fool you can seduce, control, manipulate, right? You are an American with a passport. With a passport!!! You will leave me here in a minute with you say you say, fly back to United States, never mention my name or what happened here. That's *your* plan, right? So you listen me and listen to me good: I know you are nothing but death to me you stupid American privilege rich whore. That's what I say.

*AWINO resumes packing.*

*BOBBY takes a moment to register AWINO's pain, confusion, etc.*

BOBBY

I will not leave you. I will never ever—Look at me. I said I will—sorry, I didn't mean to say "I" or suggest that I'm at the center of everything, we are, you and me together Awino. But Baby, please let's look at the larger picture here. We leave this house to go where? To whom without two cents in our pockets? Look, we get the check first thing tomorrow morning. One of us should stay to collect—

AWINO

So you do want to leave me then?

BOBBY

Fine, you stay, collect the check if that makes more—

AWINO

They will kill you. They will bust open that door and—

BOBBY

Ughhhh!, stop fucken—The situation is bad enough as is. Calm down, use your smarts for a second, just—They will not kill me. I'm an American. I worked for the Peace Corps Awino. They so much as touch me there will be a media frenzy so big, every news station in the United States plus Kenya and—

AWINO

And me? What happens to me?

BOBBY

You are not gonna like what I have to say—

AWINO

**WHAT HAPPENS TO ME?!**

BOBBY

Go to your father.

AWINO

YESU (Jesus) Mungu wangu!! What have I been saying all day? What has the radio been saying? This is beyond Chief and child. Beyond Peace Corps<sup>5</sup>, it's—

BOBBY

Nothing in this village is beyond Chief / and child...

AWINO

Sometimes your stupidity is / so...

BOBBY

Yeah, think I'm stupid? Think I have no clue what I'm saying? We run, how far do you think we can get? How far before they find us then out us as contaminated lesbos? It's splattered all over the national radio. Everyone is listening and talking. So it's not a

---

<sup>5</sup> Pronounced "corpse"



village fluent in English. You've gone to high-school. You're Dad is royalty, but you're unemployed for how long now because you look too much like a man to stand behind a fucken counter. Is that the love you want me to protect? Is it worth my life, our lives lived in fear, spinning lie after lie after packs of lies to everyone from neighbors to family to ourselves just so we don't get toooooo crazy—in the name of the love you want me to protect? I mean once, just once I'd love to talk to someone here about my relationship instead of spending millions calling the States for a conversation, is that the love you're talking about? Lookit, Point to one, just one sex-positive space in our home Awino, space where we can celebrate the uniqueness of who we are, what we share together-together!

*(Pointing to the picture of the smiling presidents on the wall of their kraal)*

But look, look! There's no picture of you on the wall. No. God forbid my lover be on my wall in our home where we live. Naaahhh, instead we have three stupid heterosexual cisgendered patriarchal males hanging over my bed flexing like African presidents. Like strongmen. Dictators! See how they're grinning? Who in fuck do you think they're laughing at Awino? In this fucked-up!, secluded!—

*(Speaks to the picture of the smiling presidents on the wall of their kraal)*

I was out and proud and freeeeeeeeeee but now I'm fucken—

*In her frustration, BOBBY marches to the cupboard, takes a pot of water from underneath. She throws the water then pot at the picture of the smiling presidents.*

*This is considered an act of high treason.*

*The picture liquidates to the ground. AWINO is utterly shocked. They both stand perfectly still.*

*Suddenly AWINO lets go of everything, breaks down, hugs BOBBY tight from behind to soothe her.*

AWINO

Holding you.

BOBBY

I know, Baby, I know.

I know how much you're terrified, Baby, I can feel it screaming from your inside. You're scared like hell you could lose another parent, not to death this time but to abandonment which feels so much worse, trust me I know how much it hurts to be denied, to be erased, to be exiled. By the person you love most. Pain piercing past heart to your core, touching even screaming in places you've been told are unlovable, unwanted, unreachable, I know what that's like. But I swear to you Awino, your father, he will not, cannot abandon you. Never ever deny you.

*(With real, real intensity, cupping AWINO's face)*

It is okay—to be seen. To not be invisible. Give yourself permission. Permission to scream back at a world that keeps constantly screaming at you for being you.

*AWINO pulls away and resumes packing.*

BOBBY

How long did you think we could stay invisible? How long were we supposed to make ourselves absolutely nothing and call that love? This is a threesome between you and me and oppression. What is love worth to you? I am asking. It's a serious question.

AWINO

Bobby, I do not want to die.

BOBBY

You won't. I promise you.

*Suddenly pounding is heard at the door. AWINO rushes to put on her-hir jeans. BOBBY locates her kanga and wraps it round her waist. Knocking at the door in the interim.*

AWINO

Who is it?

*Knocking persists, becoming increasingly stronger, menacing.*

AWINO

Who?

BOBBY

*(whispering)* Ask in Swahili.

AWINO

Ni nani? (Who is it?)

MAMA OPIO

*(While knocking hard)* Fungua mlango!

AWINO

Ni nani je? (Fine. But who is it?)

*Knocking stops. Barely audible:*

MAMA OPIO

Mama Opio. Fungua mlango saa hi! (It's Mama Opio. Open the door now!)

*AWINO hesitates, then opens the door.*

*MAMA OPIO is panting, sweaty from the run across the village.*

MAMA OPIO

Hiye, eh-eh Awino. Hakia Mungu, nili kimbia kama nyege kuu fika hapa Awino. (I ran like shit to get here)

AWINO

*(Hugging her tight for a while)*

Mama, karibu karibu karibu ndani. (Mama welcome welcome welcome to my home)

MAMA OPIO

So you know?

BOBBY

Riots, yes.

AWINO

Bobby, remember Mama Opio. My fourth mother. Mama Opio, this is...Bobby.

MAMA OPIO

*(To BOBBY)* Pleasure. *(To AWINO)* There's been a meeting with the elders, men and women. Everyone is veery upset. They want things done.

BOBBY

What things?

MAMA OPIO

*(To AWINO)* Chief out. You two dead.

AWINO

Yesu (Jesus)!

BOBBY

They can't do that.

MAMA OPIO

*(To AWINO)* At this point? There is no difference between what can and cannot be done. It's chaos. They're burning shops, houses, kila kitu bwana, burning down for destruction.

*AWINO paces up and down, holds her-hir hands on her-hir head.  
S/he's crying.*

AWINO

Yesu woye woye. Jamani nta kufa. (Jesus dear God. Lord I'm going to die)

BOBBY

Awino.

AWINO

They told you to come after me. To take me to them so this can stop. Then they'll kill me.

MAMA OPIO

Nooooo. Eh, Awino how? They would come themselves if they want you dead.

AWINO

Yesu. Jamani jamani woye. (Jesus. Dear Lord O God)

BOBBY

Awino.

MAMA OPIO

Leave these things behind—clothes, documents, everything. Come back with me. Ongea naa Mzee face-to-face. (Talk to your father face-to-face)

AWINO

My father?

MAMA OPIO

Talk to him. Tell him everything from beginning to end. It's the only.

AWINO

I can't. He'll—

BOBBY

Listen to her Awino.

MAMA OPIO

Believe me.

AWINO

He'll kill me.

MAMA OPIO

Nooooo, Awino, nooooo. Uta ona jinsi ata zungumsa naa wewe. Trust me. I know a secret way. Through the forest. Next to the burial ground. Let's go now now now. When the next meeting starts, if I'm not there, they'll suspect me.

AWINO

And Bobby?

*Silence.*

BOBBY

I'm an easy target. It's too dangerous.

MAMA OPIO

Twende sasa, We go Awino.

AWINO

I'm not leaving if Bobby can't—

BOBBY

Leave me. Go. We've gotta separate. It's better that way.

MAMA OPIO

You heard her, twende basi Awino, we go now. (Let's go Awino)

*MAMA OPIO begins to exit. She pulls at AWINO who is holding BOBBY's hand.*

BOBBY

I'll be fine. Tomorrow. Eight o'clock at the kiosk. Meet me there. Promise?

AWINO

...Promise.

BOBBY

Say it.

*AWINO looks at OPIO, hesitates. Then turns to BOBBY.*

AWINO

I love you.

MAMA OPIO

*(Sucks teeth)*

*AWINO kisses BOBBY. MAMA OPIO pulls them apart. MAMA OPIO and AWINO exit.*

### **INTERLUDE THREE: The Rape**

*Frenzied dancing from the villagers in a circle.*

VIGILANTES/RIOTERS

Heh heh!

Hayi Hayi!

Yee!

*Lights down for an extended period of time where heavy pounding, heavy footsteps are heard. Dogs barking viciously in the background.*

*Blinding bright white light is cast directly at the audience.  
The light then modulates to the dim candlelight of the previous scene.  
LEADER of the vigilantes, his two assistants (with German shepherds)  
and a stream of male and female rioters carrying jerry lanterns and  
flashlights burst into the kraal. They ruthlessly vandalize the entire area,  
toppling the suitcase, spilling its contents on the floor, burning documents,  
tossing clothes about, trampling papers, newspapers, smashing the  
window, throwing pots, pans across the room, breaking, destroying items,  
burning underwear, bras, causing absolute destruction, mayhem, chaos.  
BOBBY, now alone in the kraal, addresses the audience directly as the  
rioters vandalize. As her rape is enacted:*

### BOBBY

They stream into our kraal, a group, all male. Cis. Focused, ruthless, angry, violent, they toss, they tear, they burn, they smash the window to destroy our lives. [*Sound queue of shattering glass*] Glass shattering. “Who the fuck are you? Assholes! ASSHOLES!” I scream, no answer. Time stops. The whole world exits. They descend. One after another after another. Rape. No condom. Rape. No condom. They kick They spit They punch They squirt semen on my face Pull my hair Twist my roots Force the dildo into my mouth while they gang rape me. I fight to survive. Maybe not. Maybe I fight because all I know is fight. That struggle looks like a dance, body coiling towards—nothing? I can’t breathe. Do I want to die? Do I want to live? When will life seize me?, I-I-I, I want, I need, I have, I must. I rise to fly, to lift my upper body off the dirt floor slowly slow even slower. Reality is so fucked up. Still, I will narrate my own pain, speak to it, take control of it. Claim vocal agency. To take back my body, to own my house, to claim my space. To rob rape of male glamour by shaping that story with my voice my voice my voice. I-I-I I refuse to be a woman for them I refuse to be a woman for them I refuse to have a gender I refuse to have a gender I refuse to be their scapegoat I refuse to play any role or be their stereotype No, I will not be forced to live inside their neat little compartments No, my body will not be their gravesite, nor will it be the dumping ground for their toxic masculinity I refuse to be cis, be het, play femme trophy wife, be anything, not for them I will not lay claim to their version of my existence I refuse to be burdened or broken by patriarchy I refuse to cement intimacy with a shared language so they can pervert history to contaminate the Truth as male, pollute all that I make sacred “YESSSS” to queer loving I scream “No No No” to hate My joy, my pain, my suffering, my helplessness are my core superpowers To dust I am and to dust I willingly return And at that moment, that moment of complete surrender/surrender/surrender [*V/O echoes layering: surrender x 3*] my black queer body is not their prison NOOOOO! [*Pause*]. . . . But right here right now, I decide: the one person who live without my narrative, the one I’ll never ever tell is my lover—

*Lights up on AWINO at hir mother’s gravesite.  
Gently, s/he runs hir fingers along her tombstone, looks up at the  
audience.*

*BOBBY and AWINO erupt in guttural screams.*

BOBBY

*(Echoes)* AWINO! AWINo! AWino! Awino!

AWINO

*(Echoes)* BOBBY! BOBby! BOBby! Bobby!

TOGETHER

*(Overlapping echoes)* AWINO/BOBBY AWINO/BOBBY AWINO/BOBBY  
AWINO/BOBBY!

## 2.10

CHIEF

Here I am Awino.

*CHIEF has arrived at the burial ground to meet with AWINO. He is a fraction of his former self—exhausted from excessive thought, sorrow, riddled with guilt, physically diminished.*

AWINO

Baba, you're here.

CHIEF

Of course I'm here for you Awino.

AWINO

We can't stay.

CHIEF

“We”?

AWINO

Me and Bobby.

CHIEF

That woman.

AWINO

She has a name.

CHIEF

Awino, what do you want from life? What do you think the future holds for you?

AWINO  
Says the man who hates me.

CHIEF  
Hates you?

AWINO  
And because of that you have the whole village after us.

CHIEF  
Awino, you don't know how hard I fight—

AWINO  
Does anyone want my truth Baba? Besides Bobby?

CHIEF  
She can leave this place anytime she wants. She's an American.

AWINO  
Has she? Abandoned me?

CHIEF  
She will.

AWINO  
She won't. She sacrifices for me.

CHIEF  
And me? What about all I've given up for you?

AWINO  
Do you want my truth Baba?

CHIEF  
*(Down on his knees)* I'm begging. Do you see? Look: you have brought a Chief of the great Luo people down to his knees. Look! For you Awino. Please stay.

AWINO  
To do what? Live my life in fear?  
Everyone either thinks it's because I wasn't circumcised, or when Bobby came on the scene that these feelings developed. Not true. I've had these feelings from the time I was young. I came here to tell you.

CHIEF  
And I'm telling you I killed tradition for you.

AWINO

Kill it again. Tell the village, “Awino has every right to live here, as much as any other Luo in this compound, in this village, in our tribe. (*CHIEF struggles*) You’re Chief, you have that power, convene a meeting with everyone—elders, sub-chiefs. Make them accept us. (*CHIEF struggles, doesn’t move*) Kill tradition Baba. Kill it to introduce a new one. Say it, please, I’m...

*AWINO decides to plead on their knees.  
They are face-to-face, CHIEF on his knees too.*

AWINO

Look, me begging, you have brought me down on both knees for you Baba, look  
(*breaks down*)

Do you know what it would do for me? If you said it? Do you know what it would say?  
That means you love me, Baba, ME.

Do you see the pain in my tears? Do you hear it in my voice? Do you hear how much I miss you in my life? How I search for you in the stars at night. I don’t want to be away from you Baba. That is true exile. Please, please just say it, please Baba, I cannot continue to live like this, please...

CHIEF

(*Cups Awino’s face*) Awino—

*Pause.  
AWINO recovers.*

AWINO

No?, Baba?

*AWINO rises, wiping away tears.  
CHIEF remains kneeling.*

AWINO

Now we both know what you’ve killed. Now we both know what is dying inside. Now we both know who is willing to kill tradition so my truth belongs in a safe place. So I can be who I am. Now we both don’t need to lie to ourselves because we both know, now.

CHIEF

No African can accept this behavior from a fellow African. From a foreigner, yes, but not from us. They will kill you in another country. Do you want to die?

AWINO

Name one place free from death.

CHIEF

So you would rather die exiled in another country?

AWINO

No. But if I must, I'll die in exile. Next to the woman I love.

*CHIEF looks at hir-her intently: there is no way to convince hir-her.  
CHIEF rises.*

AWINO

I have to meet Bobby at the kiosk.

CHIEF

Eh-eh. You can't go alone. Let's go.

AWINO

Baba you can't. It's not safe.

CHIEF

You are my special one Awino. I love you. We go.

## 2.11

*Post-rape, messed up BOBBY waiting at the kiosk.*

BOBBY

Big bold blue sky hugs the earth without actually touching it. Endless rolls of green grass burnt at the tips from a downpour of sunlight the color of egg yolk. Slow motion movement of six maybe seven maybe eight pairs of young thighs lapping one by one against the dust on their way home from school. They laugh, the school children do, giggle in anticipation of nothing except that tomorrow is theirs which, at the age of fourteen, is true. They have forever in their eyes. The future belongs to them. Higher than their giggles dissipating like thin wisp into the sky, becoming that endless ever-present question marking their lives until they are no more. This is what I'll miss about Kenya.

He put the check in my palm, the mailman did. "Quick Bobby, lock the door. Run past the brick-red valley between the hills that look like giant breasts hanging on either end of that dusty path shaped like a bra strap, have you seen it?" Course you have, you know this village like the back of your palm. I'm thinking Bobby plus Awino make it to the car zoom zoom southward to the border Malawi Zimbabwe two days west to Ghana who knows? Stop, let that new space soothe the fragile ends of our desperation, gather brokenness to distill it to quiet.

Massage what was lost in anxiety, erased through memory, silenced by fear but never ever invisible. [*Stage lights pulse RED*] That pulsing bright red light, the one out there, it will turn invitation green [*Lights turn GREEN*]. Just like our future, right? I'm waiting. Don't you leave me. Hear me? Come back to me, Awino.

*AWINO enters.*

*AWINO approaches her, caresses her bruised face gently.*

AWINO

Bobby, I'm—*[gently caressing Bobby's bruised face]* What happened? What did they do to your face?

BOBBY

Careful.

AWINO

They hurt you?

BOBBY

What did your father say?

AWINO

*(Still caressing her bruised face)* Ssssssh. Did they beat you? Tell me Bobby.

BOBBY

Can we go to your father?

AWINO

If we leave—

BOBBY

Is that what he said? That we should leave?

AWINO

How can we?

BOBBY

Through the border, we could—

AWINO

I don't have a passport.

BOBBY

We'll get you one.

AWINO

In a year maybe but--

BOBBY

A fake one. We'll pay a bribe, doesn't matter.

AWINO

How? They won't give me a passport unless I say I'm a woman, wear a dress

BOBBY

So what? Do it. To save our relationship, you—Oh God. Awino, I'm so sorry for saying that, I'm so—T

AWINO

Is that what you really want? Tell me what happened.

BOBBY

I want us together Baby. I don't care where. I don't know what to do Awino, what did your father say?

AWINO

Why won't you tell me what happened to you? How did you get those bruises on your f—

*For the first time AWINO sees the rape blood on BOBBY's clothes.*

BOBBY

Why won't you tell me what your father said?

AWINO

Don't you want to go back? To the States?

BOBBY

No.

AWINO

You could go to New York.

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

AWINO

Back to Miko.

BOBBY

What the fuck?!

AWINO

You need to leave.

BOBBY

You're pushing me away! Are you pushing me away?

*AWINO turns to go.*

BOBBY

Where are you going?

AWINO

I'll be back.

*Lights fade on BOBBY.*

AWINO

I've gone too far, Bobby. I've taken you tooooo far. I put you in danger. The bruises on your beautiful face, blood all over your dress. And you won't tell me what happened so I can protect you. Because the truth is, there is no way to protect you. And I know you Bobby, no matter how hard I push you away, you won't stop, won't let go, even if it means death and I can't let that happen to you. I can't let you sacrifice. That's not love, not to me.

*In a separate space we see BOBBY squatting, toilet paper in the air. The toilet paper is stained with blood.*

AWINO

*(While beating on hir chest, crying)* I am. I am.

*(Removes baseball cap)* Mask. I am.

*(Removes vest)* Face. I am.

*(Removes T-shirt)* Soul. I am.

*(Removes chest bandages)* I am

*(Removes western clothing)*—woman. I am.

*(Beat)*

Village, I will marry.

## 2.12

*The women of the village descend on AWINO.*

*The nature of this scene is quasi-real, quasi-surreal.*

*The scene takes place in the open air.*

*Actions are taken with much deliberation, intensity and pain. Characters assume the persona of figures rather than individuals whom the audience has journeyed with throughout the course of the play.*

*There is a table.*

*Women are in a circle, most notably Awino's mothers.*

*Music begins.*

*The circumciser emerges. She does her dance with a knife.*

*Awino enters, strips naked, lies on the table, opens her legs.  
Her mothers grab at her legs and ankles. A big strong Luo sits straddled  
right on her shoulders, right on her neck like a physical barrier or curtain  
hiding her lower body from visibility.  
The circumciser cuts her first. She screams.*

AWINO

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*One by one each mother scrapes at her, beginning with MAMA MUGABE.*

AWINO

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*The circumcision ends with MAMA OPIO who hesitates but eventually  
does it; has to.*

AWINO

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

*AWINO is bleeding profusely, screaming, kicking, crying until finally her  
resistance wears down.  
The surreal nature of the scene continues...  
AWINO gets up off the table to center stage, blood dripping like a flowing  
red river down her legs. She is deformed, atrophied, ugly, falling...*

AWINO

Falling. I am...

*(She falls)*

Falling...Falling....

*(She falls)*

Who will catch me when I fall? Who will receive me if I die?

*(She drops to the ground)*

I am dead.

*It is raining blood.  
Briefly, the women drink it then freeze.  
CHIEF emerges.  
He is a shadow of his former self, tired, ashamed, distraught.  
CHIEF sees the trail of blood, scoops it up from the ground, smells it,  
licks it. Then CHIEF notices that the trail leads to his daughter, now on  
the ground, zombie-like. Following the trail, CHIEF cuddles her, weeping  
miserably for her:*

CHIEF

(*Cuddling and rocking AWINO*)

I want my daughter!

I want my daughter!

Ancestors!

(CHIEF *looks up*)

Blood rain.

*Blood rain falls.*

CHIEF

The famine is over.

*CHIEF walks away, looking yonder at AWINO as lights fade on him. Spotlight remains on AWINO, a beautifully atrophied, deformed monster. Final stamp on the play: From “hir” to “HER”, AWINO, blood dripping between legs, in complete agony, wades in the red waters of a village feeding off a severed clitoris.*

End of Part 2.

## **PART THREE: POWERFUL LOVING IS QUEER AFRICA**

**Important Set/Design Changes for Awino’s Post-Circumcision Kraal/Hut:** Awino must be taken to a special kraal (hut) specifically created for her post-circumcision “healing” process prior to her marriage to a man. Its location is key. It symbolizes the “in-between” or “transitional” stage Awino or any woman experiences after circumcision. The circumcision kraal is like a cocoon in that the tribe’s idea is to shield, hide, protect and therefore separate the woman from the larger community almost immediately after circumcision takes place. Then she is revealed as healed with a womanly body in front of her community when she marries in much the same way a butterfly breaks free from its cocoon in transformed to full bloom for flight into the outer world, returning while unreturning. The analogy is this: the wedding ceremony occurs for the woman to “break free” in her new, real, transformed body and “flight” is understood as her first sexual experience with her husband following circumcision because this initial sexual encounter is, paradoxically, the release that cements her commitment to perpetuating, furthering by procreating in the name of the tribe. So she is ready as a woman and a woman is someone who wants to use her body to procreate in the name of her people to preserve her tribe. Why “in between” or “in transition”?; because she is between many, many stages in her life as she heals; between a girl about to become a woman; between single about to be married; between girlhood and becoming a woman as

someone's wife; between her father's home and her new home with husband-to-be; between mutilated body in the process of healing, understood as becoming a fully embodied woman; and, above all, she is between life and death should the circumcision prove to be too much for her body so she passes onto the Ancestors. Given this transitional "in between" stage of her life, the post-circumcision kraal (hut) is built and positioned literally between her father's compound and that of her husband-to-be. Awino's post-circumcision kraal (hut) should be constructed/deposited right there, between her father the Chief's kraal and that of her husband-to-be during the intermission break.

**The Makings of Awino's Post-Circumcision Kraal/Hut:** Use branches if you'd like. I would very much like its circumference to be outlined with sand or white chalk-dust sprinkled as an anointing with ritual incantations spoken aloud to the Ancestors (then branches can cover the outlined chalky or sandy area). Or a simple cloth that completely covers Awino can be used once she's deposited in the area designated as her post-circumcision kraal for healing. Discretion is left to scenic designers and the director who are encouraged to be as creative and magically seductive as their aesthetic and budget allow for.

**Sound of Awino's Post-Circumcision Kraal/Hut:** Constant buzz of swarming flies and mosquitoes drawn to the constant flow of blood dripping between Awino's legs spreading everywhere.

**Smell of Awino's Post-Circumcision Kraal/Hut:** Rich in humanity—blood, sweat, excrement, mucus, all things unsanitary secreted from the body.

**Awino's clothes:** Masculine "butchish"-wear has been discarded, taken away to be burned thanks to Mama Mugabe's orders as she captains and champions the process of Awino's healing transition. Awino, as tradition dictates, wears a cheap, very shabby black dress identical to a peasant's tattered sackcloth circa eighteenth century Europe. Feel free to exercise creative license here but clothing for Awino's healing should reflect (accent) erasure and invisibility since Awino is being hidden from community while in the post-circumcision kraal (hut) for healing.

**Awino's Pronouns during the Circumcision Process:** She, her, and all other traditional female pronouns should be used here. This will help the feelings of revulsion, repulsion, confusion that inform the performance and storytelling at this stage in the play. It also accents body fascism, that Awino's body is subject to powerful external forces and must identify with them but then, later on, rejects them to birth a new world: Queer Africa.

**Awino transformation while in the post-circumcision kraal (Section 3.3):** While Awino is in the post-circumcision kraal/hut Awino transforms into someone who has been to hell. Dirt, leaves, blood, etc. saturate body and clothes. Also not specified in the script is Awino's confusion, Awino wincing in pain, Awino in agony throughout delivery of any language including monologues after Act 3, Scene 3 (Section 3.3). Not mentioning where and when Awino winces is deliberate; it is to encourage the director, actor and

other theater practitioners to take as many liberties, offering the actors great artistic license to punctuate Awino's performance at the play's climax. Feel free to play with volume, tone, leave out certain words, let blood gush between the legs, from the mouth and other body parts to punctuate the nightmarish, horrific, grotesque queer spectacle leading to Awino's penultimate performance, etc.

## PART THREE: POWERFUL LOVING IS QUEER AFRICA

*In agony, in the throbbing and deadly stillness, AWINO lays on the dirt floor, dead to the universe and its surroundings, bleeding red waters from her circumcised body.*

*Lights gradually cross-fade to BOBBY who stands, knowing her lover is mutilated. She is less and less Self.*

BOBBY

I am

*(swipes between her legs, displaying the massive blood from rape)*

Lesbian ....I am...

Falling...

*(she falls)*

Falling...

*(she falls)*

Who will catch me when I fall? Who will receive me if I die?

*(she hits the ground)*

I am dead.

*In silence sitting knees folded, BOBBY rocks back and forth, back and forth for what feels like forever. In a trance, she's a human zombie turned pendulum tick-tocking back-n-forth as a smaller Self.*

*Lights cross-fade from BOBBY to the three MAMAS.*

*Bathed in surreal light, statuesque, frozen in time, all three are completely motionless.*

*Suddenly, in an instant, all three simultaneously break from their frozen state to take immediate and purpose-driven action, captained by MAMA MUGABE who is elder stateswoman in charge of AWINO's post-circumcision healing process.*

*No one speaks: MUGABE points, directs, ordering OPIO and OTIENO who execute, exiting quickly then returning just as quick and busily with branches and leaves to sweep AWINO's new hut; with pots and pans for collecting blood rain water; with rags to wipe the blood that is everywhere-everywhere; cloths to wipe the blood between AWINO's legs; with the shabby black dress AWINO must wear during the healing process; with the blanket that must cover AWINO's body completely while in the circumcision hut when healing. Busy, quickly, exit, enter, function, performance, precision: theirs is a systematic (#cistemic), ancient, well-rehearsed ritual written in their hearts.*

*Finally, they surround AWINO: MAMA OPIO stands at her head. MAMA MUGABE and MAMA OTIENO stand at each leg.*

She dead? MAMA MUGABE

*OTIENO shrugs.*

Check. MAMA MUGABE

*OTIENO checks.*

Alive. MAMA OTIENO

Opio? MAMA MUGABE

Yes'm. MAMA OPIO

Grab both arms. MAMA MUGABE  
Otieno?

Yes'm. MAMA OTIENO

MAMA MUGABE  
Take that leg, I take this one, countdown one two three then lift.  
And one...and two and three and...  
Lift!

AWINO  
AAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

*They carry AWINO across the stage to the post-circumcision kraal/hut where AWINO must heal before marriage.*

MAMA MUGABE  
One...  
Two...  
Three and... Drop her, move, QUICKLY!...

Gentle now, easy. MAMA OPIO

And down. MAMA MUGABE

*(Lifts AWINO's men's trousers)* This? MAMA OTIENO

What is it? MAMA MUGABE

Awino's white man's trousers. MAMA OTIENO

Burn them. MAMA MUGABE

*(Lifts Awino's baseball cap)* Her American hat, and...? MAMA OTIENO

Burn it all, everything mannish. MAMA MUGABE

*(Searching on all fours then raises it in the air)* Found it! MAMA OTIENO

What is it? MAMA OPIO

Awino's penis! Look. MAMA OTIENO

*(Secrets the penis-clitoris)* Give to me. *(lies)* I'll burn it, promise. MAMA OPIO

Black dress Mama Mugabe? MAMA OTIENO

Put it on her. MAMA MUGABE

Blanket? MAMA OPIO

Here. MAMA OTIENO

Cover her. MAMA MUGABE

Invisible, she stays hidden. MAMA OPIO

We pray. MAMA MUGABE

*The women hold hands.  
They form a series of stylized poses.  
POSE #1: Ancient  
POSE #2: Prayer  
POSE #3: Sisterhood*

Ancestors, MAMA MUGABE  
(*Scoops up chalk*)  
We forever serve tradition.  
(*Holds up chalk in the air*)  
Obedient.

Humble. MAMA OTIENO

Steadfast. MAMA OPIO

*MUGABE sprinkles the chalk on the ground to form the kraal's boundary.*

MAMA MUGABE  
This sacred space for Awino to heal, I outline its boundary with chalk dust...

TOGETHER  
We pray...

MAMA MUGABE  
Awino will exit, (*sprinkling chalk*) she only crosses (*sprinkling chalk*) this sacred line (*sprinkling chalk*) only! when she Awino is a woman...who will soon marry a man.

TOGETHER  
We pray...

*The women lock shoulders.*

TOGETHER

In the name of tradition  
We shake the earth

*They stomp the ground to rock the earth.*

TOGETHER

In the name of Waafrika  
We shake the earth

*They scream as they stomp the ground with dying frenzy becoming lesser,  
lesser, slowing to a freeze.  
Suddenly, MAMA MUGABE breaks away to address the audience directly:*

MAMA MUGABE

White/Western woman, what gives you the right to judge me? Do you know my life? Have you *ever* lived it? You come from a village, do you? Where is your tribe? And your Chief? Is he your husband? With more than one wife? At the same time? Look at me, white/western woman. Look closely: Have you been circumcised? Could you live through it, accept it, submit to it, honor it? Can you hold that belief-balance with its stark, bold yet beautiful contradiction inside your body, between your legs? I'm asking, Are you woman enough to be African? You want me to deny my tradition, I will not. You want me to say we are primitive, I will not. You want me to live in shame, I do not. You want me to be like you and if not I should be small, erased; I am not. When you've lived my life, felt my pain, held my experience, shared my suffering with my sisters, then transformed it into traditional tribal powerful joy, that is the day you can judge me. Until then, do not write my story, not for me. And do not cast me as your African victim. Not until you are fluent in the power of my experience, and as deeply rooted in my indigenous knowledge as universal wisdom from the beginning. That is my voice my voice my voice. That is my truth. One I live it without you. Breathe without you. Written without you. And I can narrate it to the world—without you.

*MUGABE returns to her post at the post-circumcision kraal/hut. Freezes.  
MAMA OPIO breaks away to address the audience directly:*

MAMA OPIO

Darkness is not blackness is not Africanness. So what is African Tradition? Where do you find it? Where is its source, its power? In our music? Our cloth? Or is Tradition between a girl's legs... What is a traditional African woman? Is she a woman who obeys men? A woman who gives birth to sons? A woman who betrays other women? A woman who betrays herself? A woman without a clitoris? She called me "mother" and what did I do?, (*with weight:*) what did I do? *I pinned her. I took her down. I forced her legs open. I pushed a razor deeeep inside her. I cut her open. I-I-I wounded her. I heard her scream*

scream scream. *I did that—Me. Knowing what it feels like because it was done to me...and I'll do it to my children...who will do it theirs. And so will Awino. Is that tradition? Is that what it means to be a woman?*

*OPIO returns to her post at the post-circumcision kraal. Freezes.  
MAMA OTIENO breaks away to address the audience directly:*

MAMA OTIENO

Eehhhh?! You people, you still think you can save Africa? Good luck.

*OTIENO returns to her post at the post-circumcision kraal/hut. Freezes.  
All three wives are frozen, still.  
All three wives hold hands.  
They stomp to encircle the post-circumcision kraal one last time.*

MAMA OTIENO

My shift to take care of Awino begins tomorrow afternoon. Gone.

*MAMA OTIENO exits.*

MAMA MUGABE

*(To OPIO)* Your shift to take care of Awino begins now.  
I will relieve you tomorrow morning. Gone.

*MAMA MUGABE exits.*

*OPIO, crossing the line of chalk-dust, enters inside to pray over AWINO.*

MAMA OPIO

I call upon my Ancestors, yes, those women warriors who made a path for me when I was not yet born. Ancestors You are forever present, forever protecting, forever providing, forever here. I ask this on behalf of Awino (Sechelele Mwendua Merinyo) Odhiambo, your child and creation whom you do not, cannot judge. Unleash your divinity. Anoint Awino with Your sacred healing power. Connect her to your mighty source. Touch, move, hold, heal, breath, breathing, love. I speak to you who cannot betray my African, and say with all power within me: to my Ancestors, Glory be. Ase.

*OPIO exits, looks this way, that way, left, right, then sneaks off.  
The sun sets across the stage.  
Nightfall.*

### 3.2

*Lights up on BOBBY.*

*She still sits on the ground knees folded rocking back and forth in her zombie-like state, staring out at the audience while rocking unceasingly.  
OPIO approaches.*

MAMA OPIO

Bobby?

*BOBBY keeps swaying.*

MAMA OPIO

It's Mama Opio, remember me?

*BOBBY keeps swaying.*

MAMA OPIO

Bobby I don't know exactly when but...Awino will marry—soon.

Can you hear me Bobby? Do you understand me? I'm worried...I don't know about Awino's health...how long Awino has left to...

*BOBBY stops swaying. She looks up at OPIO.*

BOBBY

*(Spoken as if it is the most precious word in Bobby's vocabulary at that moment)*  
Life?

MAMA OPIO

I'm here to take you to Awino. To see her.  
Come. Please.

*Transition to outside AWINOs post-circumcision kraal.*

MAMA OPIO

Before you go inside I must prepare you for what you're about to see because it is faaaaar from what you can imagine. Bobby, do not, I repeat, do not look at me with terror in your eyes. If Awino suspects, if she even senses terror, fear or panic in you Awino could decide, Why live? Why go on?, are you understanding what I'm saying?

BOBBY

Yes.

MAMA OPIO

Every moment, a fragile step towards her healing, are you understanding?

BOBBY

I will try.

MAMA OPIO

Eh-heh no! you will do much more than “try”. You will claim space you do not hold. You will summon strength you don’t know of. You will voice truths you have never ever spoken before now. You will be everything and everyone that brought you to the power of this moment. And you will hope, see and act when everything before you refuses to do so. That is the definition of an African woman. Say it.

BOBBY

Promise.

MAMA OPIO

Now that is the sound of my sister, [*hugs BOBBY*] sister, Now, the smell, it’s awful and strong. It is fresh blood mixed with dry blood mixed with stale urine mixed with shit mixed with mucus mixed with sweat mixed with more. And that stench sticks to your clothing. Mosquitoes plus flies, they buzz everywhere-everywhere, most especially where the blood is thickest between Awino’s legs. Oh!

*(pulls out clitoris)*

Sorry, I forgot. Here, take.

BOBBY

What is...?

MAMA OPIO

Awino’s penis. I secreted it for you.

*OPIO hands BOBBY the severed clitoris.*

BOBBY

*(Under her breath)* Oh my G—

It’s the first time. For the first time in my life I don’t know what to say. To my Awino.

MAMA OPIO

SssssshhhhT. I’m hearing fear in your voice again. Tell it sssh-sssh-sssh quiet.

BOBBY

But I don’t have—

MAMA OPIO

What is it that you don’t have?

BOBBY

The tools, I don’t have what it takes to—

MAMA OPIO

No you do not but I do—

BOBBY

Yes you do, you must, you know. When you were in pain and in agony and alone, Mama Opio when you were like my Awino, what did you need to hear?

#### MAMA OPIO

A voice larger than myself. Language so powerful it would carry my pain to a quiet city called healing, forgiveness. Because everything outside and everything inside me was screaming it would be so much easier, it would be sooooo much better if I died. But I need you to hear me when I say this, Bobby: Who can make sense of this thing? Can anyone? No. So do not think, not even for a minute, that I brought you here to fix anything. Eh-heh, no. See that line of chalk dust? I want you to cross that line, go inside, and be there for the love of your life. Bruised as you are, broken maybe, can you be there for the love your life? I think you can, I know you can. You have to, you must—See, look, stand, strong. Do it. Now. Go.

*OPIO goes, heading to another spot where, unseen, she stands guard.  
BOBBY takes a really, truly deep breath to prepare herself for entry.  
She takes measured, cautiously fearful steps. It's obvious she's very scared.*

*BOBBY enters AWINO's post-circumcision kraal/hut for healing.*

*BOBBY rushes out, gasping, coughing, gagging, puking/vomiting—the stench inside is so powerfully repulsive.  
BOBBY pounds the ground, an insane internal struggle.*

#### BOBBY

I can't! I can't! I can't! I can't!  
(*deep breath*)

Get it together Bobby Get it together Bobby Get it together Bobby  
(*several more deep breaths*)

You have to do this Have to Look See Face it Bobby, got to, got to face the whole complete unfiltered total truth Bobby, no looking back inside now go go go.

*BOBBY reenters circumcision kraal.  
In shock, she can't believe how unAwino AWINO is.  
The incessant, nonstop buzzing of flies and mosquitoes slowly dies down.*

#### BOBBY

Oh God...look how small they want your greatness...But you're...still powerful, my only Love...It's ok, it'll be ok, everything will be ok, I'm here now, Bobby is here for you Baby...I will always, always be with you right here...

(*blows light breaths onto AWINO's face*)

I'm breathing life into you...[*blows*] feel it?  
...feel me here... (*blows light breath*) ...does it (*blows*) soothe you...(blows)...my life (*blows light breath*) for you...  
May I Awino? Look?

*BOBBY looks between AWINO's legs.  
This is the first time BOBBY breaks down.*

Oh God Baby. It's my fault. I brought this to you. This death. The pain 'n' suffering, it's my fault, all mine. But I had no idea, I swear nothing told me it would come to all this. I never saw this coming. You've got to believe me Baby...please? Jus...  
Stay alive. D'you hear me? Promise me. **Fight—fiiight.**

Hear me?

Do you hear me?

*No answer*

I'm coming. I'll be back. To take you away. [BOBBY motions to leave, returns] Promise.

*BOBBY exits running.*

### **3.3**

*Flaming red lights intensify inside Awino's post-circumcision kraal.  
Simultaneous rise of the soundscape to BOBBY's rape is reenacted: buzz of mosquitoes, flies buzzing, high-pitched scream from a boiling kettle, dogs barking in the background, all of this fever pitched scream becomes the dominant soundscape.*

*As lights and sound rise, AWINO rises slowly, wobbly, trembling, shaking.  
In agony, AWINO screams—DEATH! then twists, turns, this way, that way.*

*WIVES chant underneath, sotto voce: Death, Death, Death (continuous), etc.*

*AWINO pours gobs of blood between her legs, down her legs, on her body,  
AWINO throws dirt on herself, breathes madly screaming—DEATH!  
Soundscape returns as AWINO falls down. Mosquitoes, flies, screaming kettle, dog soundscape dies down.*

*Utter silence.*

*AWINO lifts upper body off the ground, head back, mouth open but no scream, not a sound. AWINO slumps back to the ground as if—dead?*

### **3.4**

*BOBBY raging at the burial ground.*

*She stands with her middle finger aimed at God in the sky, screaming.*

### **BOBBY**

FUUUUUUUUUUUCK YOOUOU GOD! Homophobe!, transphobe!, queerbashing!, sexist misogynistic racist!, patriarchal!, binary-loving!, privileged!, colonizer God You! Celestial heavenly bigot sitting on Your diamond-studded throne on top of a toxic male cloud in the big blue stretch of sky!, Fuuuuuuck You, do You hear me God?, I hate, hate You for what You did to my—(Beat) Lover. Why make a world where no queer can live fully YOU FUCK? SPEAK! Or am I too black 'n' too queer for an answer? All my life, I've spent all my life trying to make sense of a senseless world. Where the rules are there

are no rules. Murder, maim, mutilate whatever makes someone special, unique. Why spark my electricity for Awino, why give me these feelings, why create a beautifully complex identity then maim then mutilate then torture it? Whhhhhy create a toxic world so queers of color can't fully exist? WHY WHY WHY You fucken cis hetero male white supremacist racist bigoted queerbashing—*(Beat)*  
Help.....I dunno I dunno I dunno anymore. I can't, I helpless, I alone, I die. I submit to You God, I have no more fight left, see? I'll do anything for You God so long as You let Awino live. I mean it. Is this You? Which God are You? Jesus? Queerness? Blackness? Which God? Whichever, prove Your love supreme. Say, Awino lives!

CHIEF

Leave.

BOBBY

Wait, please, I can expl—

CHIEF

Never in all my life did I think I would see a foreigner, an outsider at the sacred burial ground of our Ancestors. How dare you come here to insult—

BOBBY

But Awino—

CHIEF

Awino is dead.

BOBBY

No....

CHIEF

If you don't leave my village...

BOBBY

*(re: AWINO's death)* Oh God no...

CHIEF

I will do everything in my power to make sure you never come here again, understood?

*CHIEF exits.*

BOBBY

Awino is—d—

AWINO

(Off) Bobby?

BOBBY

What? Is that—

AWINO

(Off) Bobby it's—

BOBBY

Awino? Is it really—

*AWINO enters.*

*AWINO struggles to walk, struggles to breathe.*

AWINO

Ah...huh...ouch

BOBBY

I'll come to you Baby. [*Multiple kisses etc*] Thank God you're still alive...

AWINO

Bobby—

BOBBY

We have to get out of here, quick

*CHIEF returns, holds up a gun, pointed at BOBBY.*

BOBBY

Please Sir...

CHIEF

(To BOBBY) I warned you...

AWINO

Baba...

*MAMA OPIO enters.*

CHIEF

(To BOBBY) You brought this sickness to us.

AWINO

No Baba! This is about me...

*MAMA MUGABE enters, then MAMA OTIENO.*

MAMA MUGABE

Kill her...

BOBBY

I don't wanna die.

*Rapist/vigilante LEADER enters.  
The entire village is on stage.*

AWINO

[*To CHIEF*] Don't shoot her [*To BOBBY*] He won't shoot. [*To CHIEF*] Baba?

MAMA OTIENO

Oh God...

BOBBY

(*Raising both hands in the air to surrender*) Look!

MAMA MUGABE

(*Raising AWINO's trousers in the air*) Look!

BOBBY

(*While kneeling to the ground*) Look!

MAMA MUGABE

(*Raising AWINO's baseball cap in the air*) Look at this sickness!

AWINO

It's me!

MAMA OPIO

My God...

BOBBY

I surrender. Down, look, hands, knees, on my—

AWINO

This is not about Bobby! It! Is! ME—

*AWINO moves to become a physical barrier between BOBBY and CHIEF's gun.*

BOBBY

Awino!

CHIEF

Awino! Move!

AWINO

It's my chaos!

BOBBY

Don't Baby!

AWINO

*(Swipes blood between legs)* This is not me.  
*(AWINO holds up hands to show blood)*-I am dead.

CHIEF

Awino-eh get out of the—

AWINO

BABA YOU said when we name our children we look to the stars for the glory of the world to shine on a great people like us. That's exactly what you told me. Here. At this very burial ground. But today I have no name, why? Because I take my husband's name. So what happened to my glory? Did it die in that circumcision kraal? Along with me? Is that what it means to be woman, to you Baba? Death to one body. Resurrection to another body that must be erased, invisible, nothing, gone, [*shows CHIEF blood-stained hands*] dead?

Then, just when everything in my world screamed death, guess what happened? A miracle. Love found me. Me. And no matter how hard I resisted, it would not let me go. Oh, your resilience Bobby, it came so beautifully. Held me. Accepted me completely naked. On my own terms. Even when everything was impossible, your love said Here I am! But because I was a committed coward, my fear killed that too. I couldn't risk. I thought, Maybe, maybe if I manufacture more lies I can survive long enough to save myself for a better world, one among my Ancestors. But the pain the pain the pain says, RISE!, says NO MORE—

MAMA OPIO

Awino!

MAMA MUGABE

Don't!—

AWINO

I AM GAY. FULL PROOF, FULL GROWN GAAAAY. I AM A MAN. Even if you make me marry a man, I LOVE BOBBY. Even if you make me marry one million men, I LOVE WHO? BOBBY BOBBY BOBBY Even if you circumcise me 1, 2, 16, 55 times

to become a woman 55 times, I AM A MAN WITH A HUGE PENIS, IN FACT I HAVE 555 PENISES THAT LOVE WHO?! BOBBY! AND WILL FUCK BLAST SPERM PREGNANCY FOR ALL MY LIFE FOREVER. MY BODY WILL NEVER BE YOURS, I WILL NEVER BE WHO YOU WANT ME TO BE. THIS IS HOW MY ANCESTORS MADE ME THIS IS WHO MY ANCESTORS MADE ME!!!! PERFECT POWERFUL AND—

CHIEF

AWINO! DON'T YOU DARE—

AWINO

ANCESTORS!—

CHIEF

Cursed! DO NOT CURSE yourself among our great ancestors, not at this sacred burial ground. Don't open your mouth...

AWINO

ANCESTORS DO YOU HEAR ME?

CHIEF

Awino I beg you! If you love your father, if you have a pinch, one small—

AWINO

Drop of love for my father who wants me in exile? Hidden away. Like a filthy secret. I refuse! I will not run, I will not hide, I will not let you shame me. I will not leave the land or my people, noooooooo. I am not dirty. I love my people too much to run. Baba—

CHIEF

Awino—

AWINO

Don't you know? You you you are my first love Baba. Be like Bobby. Deal with me. Make sense of me. You ill have to bare witness as I tell my ancestors—

CHIEF

No!

AWINO

ANCESTORS I AM A GAY! I AM AFRICAN MAN! I FUCK—

CHIEF

Cursed! Now it is my duty as Chief to kill you....

AWINO

LOOK AT ME! Can you live with my truth Baba?

CHIEF

Flesh of my very flesh, bone of my bones, spirit that houses my own spirit...

AWINO

Or kill me Baba.

MAMA MUGABE

*(Holding up baseball cap)* Nothing ends, not until you kill her Chief!

AWINO

Death? *[holds up blood-stained hands]* I have already died.

ENTIRE VILLAGE

KILL HER! KILL HER! KILL HER!, KILL HER!, etc.

*Continuous cacophonous soundscape: buzzing flies, dogs barking, screaming kettle, etc*

MAMA MUGABE

*(overlapping)* I ordered these to burn. Know why they won't burn? It's a sign. Nothing ends, not unless we kill her. Why else did it rain when we circumcised her? Our ancestors were weeping with joy!

ENTIRE VILLAGE

KILL HER! KILL HER! KILL HER!, KILL HER!, etc.

AWINO

*(overlapping)* I come to my death at peace. No fear. Only powerful, glorious. Prepared to swallow your bullets. When I taste death *[AWINO dramatically licks blood off one finger]* it is lesbian *[dramatically swipes between legs]* queerness *[licks the blood off another finger]* African. Then I return to the place where my ancestors created me exactly as I am. So when you say "she" at my funeral ceremony, a new world called Queer Africa will be born. Wherever my fullness is. And yours too Baba. Are you ready? *[AWINO points the butt of the gun on face]* Here I am. Reclaim me. Take ownership of loving me, my dearest father. That is our new beginning. Do you want my truth, Baba? *[No answer from CHIEF who is stunned AWINO is no longer a coward]* Then kill me, Baba.

CHIEF

I cannot.

*CHIEF shoots himself.  
The whole stage erupts in blood red.*

3.5

*Legend on the Screen:  
Forgive me,  
Forgive me Africa for killing a Chief on stage  
—Nick Hadikwa Mwaluko*

3.6

*Legend on the Screen:  
Beyond Patriarchy is where Queer Africa is.*

*We are now in Queer Africa, a place more magical than Luoland proper. Same village, different reality and because the villagers have completed a significant part of their collective gender journey, the one beyond tolerance towards acceptance, their bodies are illuminated. Within transparency, free from pain and suffering, imbued with newer knowledge rekindling indigenously.*

AWINO

Where are we Bobby?

BOBBY

Now? Careful Awino. Go slow, quit pushing yourself. Jus' take baby steps in my direction so it doesn't hurt.

AWINO

But nothing hurts here. I don't think pain exists, not in this place. Look at this place. It's—beautiful. Smells rich, peaceful, looks magical, new. And out there, over there I can still see my village, do you Bobby? Do you see everyone?

BOBBY

Their bodies illuminated...

AWINO

My tribe, lit like stars.

*Lights rise on each member of the tribe, a star among a constellation burning bright to illuminate the new, mythical landscape that is Queer Africa.*

AWINO

Listen:

ENTIRE VILLAGE

(Singing) Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh

AWINO

Hear them?

MAMA MUGABE

*(to the Audience)* After Chief killed himself, I remarried his brother next in line in keeping with tradition. His brother is now Chief. I'm not his first wife but his fifth. We have two children, both sons. Where am I? Same village, same customs, same beliefs. That is where I am now.

MAMA OTIENO

*(to the Audience)* Me? Remarried, same brother, sixth wife behind Mama Mugabe. We have three children together, no sons, only girls—I think. One thing this new generation taught me: never make assumptions.

MAMA OPIO

*(to the Audience)* When they caught me, they branded me a traitor. I was stoned to death. And they refused to bury me, a traitor, in Luoland. Where am I now? Waiting for my ancestors to accept me. If I could do it again, I would dare to face the consequences of my truth.

AWINO

Your name I say as prayer eternal: Baba Baba Baba, where are you?

*CHIEF, now an Ancestor, is bandaged at the head from the suicidal gunshot.*

CHIEF

Here I am, whispering pure blessings to the love of my life—Awino?

AWINO

Are you among the ancestors?

CHIEF

Awino-eh...

AWINO

Are you with my mother?

CHIEF

What should I tell her?

AWINO

That you're proud of me. That I'm ancestral but not strictly traditional. So I belong because I'm just as much African. Then tell my mother, tell her how much I miss her.

CHIEF

Ooooh Awino-eh, she knows.  
May I enter? Into this space?

AWINO

Baba, in my world, there is always room for my father. Always room for my village. Always room for my elders. Always always room for my Ancestor. Come inside Baba.

*CHIEF enters*

CHIEF

[*Prayer*] Ehhh, heh, Shemegi ye heh-heh, Listen: Our Great Ancestors, are feeding me Truth I did not, could not have known before. Listen: Our Ancestors always, always had a place for you Awino. Listen: You, yes Awino, are indigenous, queer and ours. Homeland, tribal, Listen: there was always, always celebrated space for your fullness. And mine. Our Great Ancestors have told me so. I am so sorry I hurt you and confused you but I did not know what I know now Awino.

AWINO

I forgive you. Here, take. Give this to my mother. It is my sweetness, the one I shared. I want her to have it so she transforms pain to fullness.

*Stretches hand forward to give the severed clitoris to CHIEF, not touching.*

*CHIEF stretches his hand to receive the clitoris, releasing it into the Afterlife.*

ENSEMBLE

*(Panting, moaning, sexual satisfaction)* Huh huh huh huh huh etc.

CHIEF

Your mother has received it. Wait. [*Listens*] She says her body, sweet with the fullness of pleasure, is now whole. Full.

ENSEMBLE

Whole.  
Full.  
Bodied.  
African  
Queer.

AWINO

Tell her to prepare a place for me.

BOBBY

I know Queerness as a love-centering religion. Without rules. Rooted deeply in divine truth. Powerful as only a shared covenant can be. That is its power—to me. This journey taught me to honor its indigenoussness. I never fully acknowledged what your culture, your home gave your love—and queerness, Awino. And for that I am sorry. Truly. Please forgive me.

AWINO

Ssshhhh, Beloved, no-no-no. Because of you Bobby I live the power of love, queerness, my culture, community and my truth. Without you, I dunno if I would be here. Your focus gave me strength, the strength that kept me alive. You you YOU powered us, even when we had no clue what's next. We really didn't know and the knowing is my Ancestors dear Darling, my Sweet, my Beautiful Only, there is absolutely nothing, for you to be sorry about or me to forgive you for. I need you Beloved.

[THEY KISS IN FRONT OF THW WHOLE VILLAGE: Finally, YAY!]

ENSEMBLE

Step 1: Shock, gasp: HUUUH

Step 2: Anger, fist: HUUUH

Step 3: Acceptance, clap, fist-pump in air: Yay!

BOBBY

Now we are part of a community larger than a dispossessed people. Fast approaching the question of how to be queer when you, my partner, are circumcised. And damaged...

AWINO

But not destroyed...

ALL OTHERS

Step

BOBBY

Hurt

Bent

But not broken

ALL OTHERS

Step

AWINO

Bruised

BOBBY

Penetrated

Raped

Circumcised  
AWINO

Step  
ALL OTHERS

Unwanted  
BOBBY

Abandoned  
AWINO

They thought they could steal our dream  
BOBBY

They thought they could kill us  
They thought I could not transform pain into joy  
And now...  
Look!  
AWINO

Gone.  
MAMA MUGABE

*MAMA MUGABE blows out her light.*

Gone.  
MAMA OTIENO

*MAMA OTIENO blows out her light.*

Gone.  
MAMA OPIO

*MAMA OPIO blows out her light.  
With that, the great pantheon of female deities is unlit.*

Never gone. Step. Right here. In Queer Africa. That's what this healing place is.  
BOBBY

We survived.  
AWINO

CHIEF

I anoint you Awino [*CHIEF places his crown/hat on AWINO*]  
You birthed a whole new world Awino...

AWINO

Made it queer enough for me and you Baba. For everyone

*AWINO reaches out to hir dead father*

CHIEF

*(Reaching for AWINO)* Yes...

AWINO

So now when I look at my world...

Finally,

For once

And I see myself, yes

I

*(Arms stretch wide to a New Africa)*

Exist

*(Lights slowly fade to black)*

*End of play.*

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