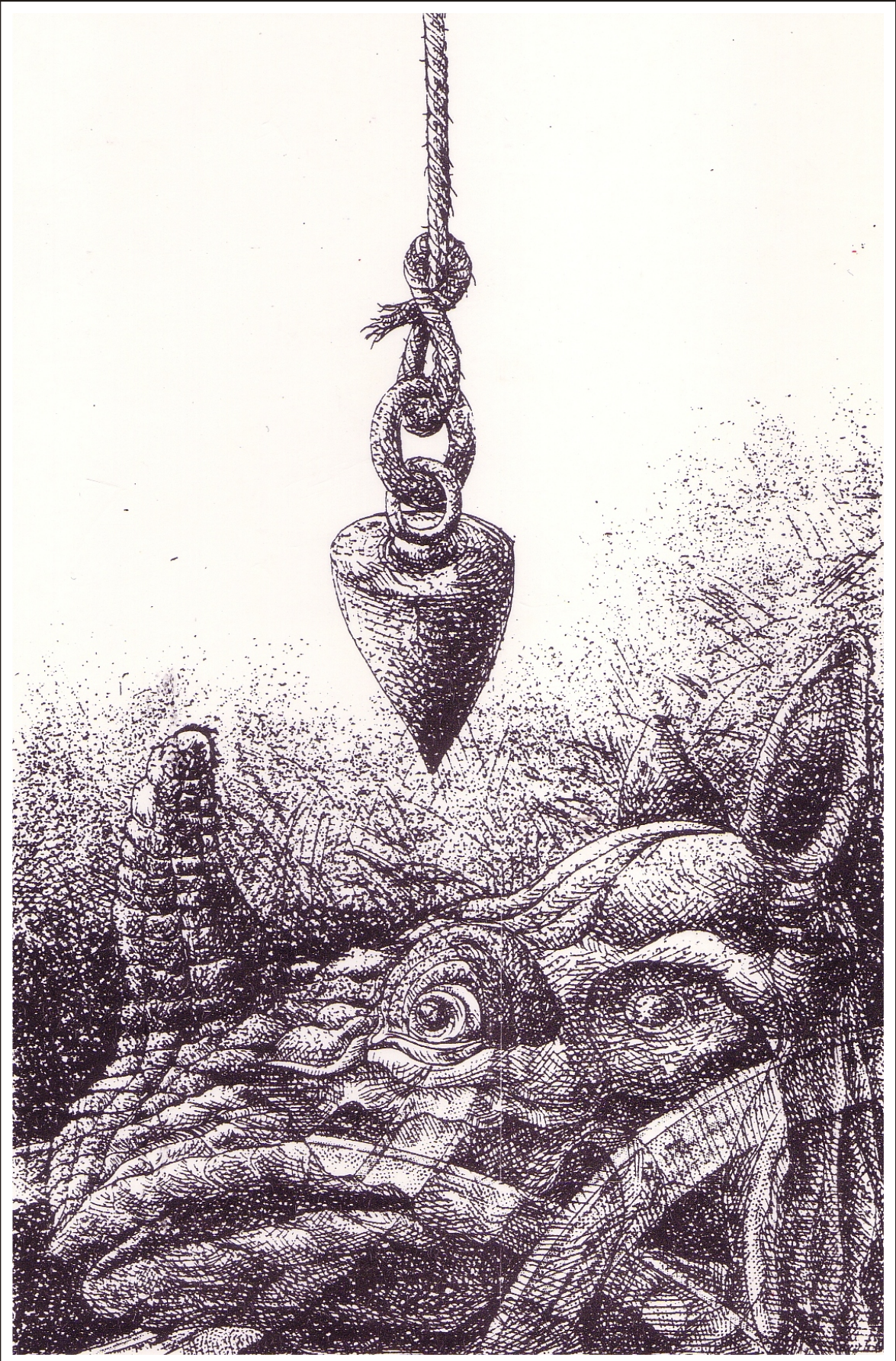


OKONKO

FATHER OF THE NATION



DAVID HENRY WILSON

OKONKO

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OKONKO Father of the Nation

1

The beginnings – boarding school – murderous Latin

I was born, O beloved, in the village of Bugami, high in the north-east of our country. The lowly village is now become a busy town, swollen by the hordes of pilgrims to the birthplace of our glorious leader (me). They come in their thousands to the largest cathedral in the world, and the largest mosque in the world, both built entirely at my own expense. Every stone was chiselled from my personal pocket, and the state paid not a penny. I emphasize this because of scurrying accusations that have been made in the world's press. They are untrue. I am an honest man, and built these shrines to the glory of God and of Allah. I refused the suggestion that Bugami be renamed Okonkville in my honour. It would have been unbecoming. Besides, our capital city is already named Okonkville. Two Okonkvilles in one country would cause confusion. Thus do I prove false the accusations of corruption and vanity.

My father was a carpenter. But he and my mother died when I was young, and I was adopted by an uncle, Abu Ben Okonko. It has been pointed out by scholars that my humble origins have something in common with those of Jesus Christ and Muhammad, and I will not deny the similarity. I have been criticized for building a cathedral and a mosque – “having the best of both worlds” one foolish critic wrote. But there is only one world and only one god. Christians and Muslims worship the same god, though we Christians do call him God, while we Muslims do call him Allah. All religions are fundamentally the same – a load of twiddle. But I am an humble man, and do not presume to choose between one load of twiddle and another. Hence I have built to the glory of both God and Allah. Selah.

My uncle, who adopted me after the death of my beloved parents, was a wealthy man. He had many cars, cows and wives. He hated me, sensing my greatness and envying it. I hold no bitterness in my heart towards him, and the accident in which his house and he were run over by a tank some while ago, under my orders, was unfortunate. It is taught that death cometh unexpectedly. I do not think that death cometh more unexpectedly than it did to my uncle.

So great was his hatred of me that he sent me abroad at an early age to hell on earth: a Kuppertee boarding school. The western press hate me, calling me an enemy of civilization, but this is because they fear me, for I know their hearts and minds. He who has lived in a Kuppertee boarding school knows the unlimited evil of western ways.

What did they inflict on me? What not? Cold and draughty dormitories with hard and creaking beds, piggery, buggery, faggery, homework, the cane on the bottom or the unpaddable hand, inedible food, the class system, the monarchy, history, geography, Latin, detention, snobbery, the boater, rugby, cricket, swimming for beginners in the pimpled nude... I have been told that such practices have changed now, but I know that

the western heart has not changed, The western heart still canes hands and bottoms. I hear it in the voices of their politicians, and I see it in the eyes of their businessmen: “I say, old boy, you’re just a Wog. Give us your money and take your trousers down.”

There were prayers every morning: “God, make us good, make us loving, be nice to us and bugger our enemies.” Every morning they prayed, then every day they renewed their evil ways. Sanctimonius spiritus. And the Latin teacher was the monster of monsters. Mr Treadwell. He would shout, beat, detain, punish, swear – and all because one had forgotten the laxative of ‘mensa’.

It was for my attack on Mr Treadwell that I was expelled from St Jerome’s. The great moment came on one of those dank, dark winter afternoons when once again he had slurped me in detention for not having learnt my homework. Oh, the pettiness of the petty mind. To steal away hours of a person’s life because he will not learn that which can be of no use to any man at any time in any place. It was to be learnt only because if we did not learn it, he and his elk would be unemployed. Detention...now I do the detaining, though with purpose and justification. Mr Treadwell’s detentions were as unpurposed and unjustified as the camel’s fart in the face of his follower.

I was to copy out ten pages of Latin grammar, while the rest of the world was watching a film – a western starring the great Gary Copper. I had said ‘please’ to Mr Treadwell, but he had curled his lip as if to say “Garry Copper is not for Wogs”, and he had waved aside my prayers and my tears. So I stabbed him. I plunged my scout knife into him. He looked surprised. After that he looked frightened, and then agonized. It is a look I have often seen since, though never with such pleasure as I saw it that winter afternoon. I stabbed him again, and pointed out to him that his blood was soiling his pupils’ homework.

There were toads in detention that day, and they pulled me away before I could cut out more fillings for his fountain pen. Why did they save the tyrant? I will tell thee, for I who walk the passages of power have seen into the small minds of the small people. They thought that if they saved him, Mr Treadwell would be kind to them, excuse them from further detentions, give them higher marks, less homework, happy days. They still saw him as the authority, and did not recognize me as their saviour, hero, and champion. People are ignorant of what is best for them. This lesson has been of much benefit to me throughout my political career.

Mr Treadwell did not die, though he did gurgle mightily, and yet I was expelled – a fragrant injustice which pleased me greatly. I was sent back home to my uncle. This did not please me greatly. Nor did it please him. He and his favourite wife proceeded to beat me and to lecture me about lost opportunities and respect for others. Why was it always respect for others? Why did others not have respect for me? Had my uncle shown me respect when he had sent me off to the cold hearts and hearths of the west? Had Mr Treadwell shown me respect when he had robbed me of my Gary Copper? Had the school shown me respect when expelling me for heroism? Yet now am I criticized for imprisoning murderers, rebels, traitors. “Human rights!” they cry. *Habitus Corpus Christi!* Who criticized *them* for punishing the innocent?

But we prophets were ever despised and rejected. It is a prelude to worship. We are beyond the understanding of the present, and stretch out ahead of our time as doth the smell before the cartload. By now the governors of St Jerome's will be congratulating themselves. One of their old boys bestrides the world. "Oh yes, Okonko," they will say. "He was here, you know. Our most illustrious former pupil." And they will tell how I championed the unjustly detained, and fought tyranny wherever it raised its outboard motor. But if they invite me to present their prizes, I shall refuse. Probably. Why have they not invited me? The time will surely come.

I was but fourteen years old when I was expelled. How many men can claim such a feat? Yet my story is filled with miracles, and all shall be recorded lest there may come a generation that shall not know the life of Abdul Jesus Muhammad Ali Maria Pele Sobers Okonko. For know that despite appearances I am mortal man, made of flesh and blood as thou art. O Father of the Nation, they cry, do not leave us, for without you we shall perish and things will fall apart. No, beloved, I shall not leave thee. Should God the Allah summon me, I shall take thee with me.

I pause. It is time for me to meet my chiefs of staff and send them on their errands. It is hard to write a book and run the world at the same time.

2

First sex – thoughts on history

The Gummichoo, I am told, are trembling in their jeans. Good. Let them tremble. I have taken the uncircumcised by the throat, and shall not let go till they lie limp as the willy after satisfaction.

How can an humble man, born of a carpenter, orphaned, and expelled from boarding school, rise to hold the world in his grasp? Only the teller knows the story. Come with me through the vasty desert, beloved, and let us stop at the caravanserai to refresh our parched souls before we move onward, ever onward, into the shadow of the valley of something or the other.

This is my story. I joined the army. What else was there for me to do?

In the army, I developed my taste for women. I shall narrate my first experience of the honeyed fragrance, the sweet yumminess, the all-embracing soft-centredness of female flesh.

There had been an erection among the Crudd in the eastern region. I do not know what they were erecting about, but the Crudd have ever been a troublous abomination, and when some years ago I sent in the poison gas against them, I did earn the blessings of all my people. Rid us of the Crudd, they cried, and we shall have peace. Peace we do not have, but we are rid of the Crudd.

We were sent to the east to crush the rebellion, and there in a village called Assumptio I first tasted the juicy fruit. It was in a simple hut of mud and thatch. We were entering all these huts and killing whoever we found there. I burst through the door in the manner of the great Gary, and saw an old woman sitting on the ground, with her arms round two naked children. They screamed when they saw me – a sound most jarring to the ear. I swiftly shot them with my rifle to put an end to the jarring. Be not amazed at my courage, and blub not for the screamers, for these were Crudd, who do not have feelings as we do. Crudd are animals.

I was about to leave when I heard a sob from a dark corner. I studied the gloom, and saw a girl cowering.

“Come out!” I ordered.

She came out into the light. I knew at once what was to be done. I ripped off her few clothes, took out my rod and my staff, and comforted myself. She moaned and resisted, and I had some difficulty getting into her – perhaps it was due to my inexperience – but at last all was well and I discharged myself. When it was done, I shot her too.

What is human life? An instant of light, and an eternity of darkness. What behoves a man other than to make his ring upon the pool as I have done? Do small people matter? Read history. Gungho Khan conquered nations, and nations still tremble to hear his name. Who weeps for Jeluba, or Juanita, or Mercy, who were raped and killed in mud huts? History is not a dot, it is a picture. I take, therefore I am. Is it not so?

Then see the history books: Okonko conquered nations, Okonko brought the Gummichoo to their knees, Okonko led his people to glory. The petty mind cares for pettiness, and the great mind soars like the mighty Albert Ross on the wind which shall spread this wisdom of the wise. I have spoken.

And yet in those days I was an humble soldier. I obeyed orders. I was part of another’s design. When they sent us to more villages with girls in dark corners, I was satisfied. But slowly doth the bud open to flower.

Those who know our country will remember the name of King Hassani. For those who do not, a short history: King Hassani was king of our country. Here endeth the lesson.

I, an inexperienced teenage soldier, grew into an experienced adult soldier. I enjoyed the killing and the raping (especially the raping), but there were no wars for us to fight. The country was at peace, apart from the odd rebellion of the Crudd. We needed a war, for an army without a war is an unsheathed willy. Yet King Hassani said we were there only for “defensive purposes”, as if a willy can arrive without pushing.

Still, though, I accepted with Islamic submission and Christian thy-will-be-done, until a great event opened new access as wondrous as that of the zip-fastener.

3

The Revolution – General Aziza – thoughts about me – my rise – thoughts about assassination – more about me and about General Aziza

General Aziza it was who opened the passage. Now he is a mere footnote to history, for what is yesterday's candle beside the sun of today (me)? Yet Aziza was my little Baptist, and he shall have his mention.

We were suddenly ordered to prepare for a night manoeuvre, and my platoon was detailed to take the radio station in the centre of Sinaloco (now Okonkovo). Why attack a radio station? And why at night? I asked our commander whether it had been occupied by some rebel force, and was surprised by his reply: "We are the rebel force."

Only later did I understand. We reached the radio station, overpowered the nightwatchman, and entered the building. On our way there we had seen other platoons of soldiers moving swiftly all over the city, occupying key installations. And from the direction of the Royal Palace we heard gunfire.

At dawn a convoy of military cars arrived at the radio station. I had been posted on guard outside one of the studios, and stood to attention as a tiny detachment marched towards me. One of them was a general. General Aziza. His broadcast to the nation was unmemorable. When I think of my own inspiring speeches, my mastery of the media and of the spoken word, I smile at the memory of the unmemorable speech of General Aziza. Yet at the time it was a sensation. Temporal mutants, as Mr Treadwell would have said.

The gist of the memorably unmemorable speech was that the king had been killed and the army had taken command. He, General Aziza, was now acting president of the country. Everyone should keep calm and go about their daily business.

I saw him closely at the studio. He was an insignificant man. A measly man. A who-goes-there man. But he had overthrown the king, whose authority I had not questioned. With my restlessly inquiring mind I wanted to know why he had done it, how he had done it, and above all how I could do it.

The coup – a technical name which means 'cup' – was successful. Throughout the weeks that followed, General Aziza made many broadcasts on television and radio, explaining that the king had been corrupt and had milked the country of its wealth. It had been necessary for the army to take over, and now he was proclaiming a republic of which he would assume command until things had settled and free elections could be held and blah blah diddy diddy sausages.

He was puny man, and he had pockmarks. The camera exposed his puny pockiness, but there he would be on our screens, again and again. I too make frequent appearances on television, but what a difference! I command the screen. No-one could ever watch me and remark on puniness or pockiness. If they did, I'd have them shot.

But for all his faults, General Aziza had shown the way. A system could be overthrown, and I was part of the force that could overthrow it. If I could rise through the ranks and gain authority over enough men...

Mine eyes had seen the coming of glory. Power. Power is glory. But I am not an ambitious man. I am an humble man. I love people. I cuddle babies. I smile at their mothers. For my human warmth I am adulterated. The people look up to me as their father, knowing that I would not harm a hair on any head, apart from the abominable Crudd, the Gummichoo and other such animals. I protect my people. In my shelter they do feel secure, as doth the cub under the wing of the mighty lion. Hear me, my people, hear me. There shall be no fear as long as Okonko rules. He who fears knoweth not his leader. And he will be punished.

And yet, though I protect, comfort and sucker my people, I am held in awe the world over, for my hand is on the throat of the infidel. I can destroy the earth. I am mightiest of the mightiest. Gentle as the lamb, ruthless as the tiger, such is the wonder of Okonko.

Initially I had difficulty rising through the ranks. My so-called superiors claimed that I lacked intelligence, military insight, and authority! Forgive them, father, for they knew not what they did not know. It is not by chance that all of them are dead.

My rise began only when a startling discovery was made: I was distantly related to General Aziza. The father of one of his wives had married the half-sister of one of my mother's uncles' cousins. Or one of my cousin's uncle's mothers. Who knows? The ties of blood are complex and mysterious.

General Aziza had never been popular, and his talk of being "acting" president, and of holding "free elections" was as air from a gorilla's back passage. He had no intention of giving up his power, and so opposition began to grow. It was scarcely surprising if one considers his boring television broadcasts. Who wants to watch a puny, pockmarked ninnypoop night after night, praising his own wonderfulness? People want entertainment from their television. People want red-bloody Copperly westerns, and a leader whom they can respect. I have seen to this. My nightly television broadcasts are an institution, and people look forward to them.

Not only his puny, pocky, off-switchy TV manner but also his mishandling of the economy caused his unpopularity, and as the opposition grew, so he suppressed it, and his suppression grew in proportion to the growth of the opposition, which grew even faster in proportion to his suppression of it. Art thou bewildered with the complexities of the political life? Nay, bear with me, for this book will be read by my fellow experts.

Attempts were made to assassinate him. He deserved to be assassinated. An unpopular leader must expect attempts at assassination, and General Aziza was unpopular. Let no-one be surprised, then, at the attempts to assassinate him. What *is* surprising, though, is that I too have been the victim of such attempts. This shocking fact keeps me awake at nights. Who could wish to kill me? For history's sake, I shall answer this question: the

great are surrounded by the envious, and the envious envy the great even unto death by assassination. “He is God!” they cry of me, “and we want to be God!”

Such envy endangers the whole nation. Only I can be God. Imagine the grieving and the chaos and my own deadness were they to succeed! It is my duty to prevent them. To this end, I have surrounded myself with people whom I can trust. But as I can trust no-one, I have surrounded these people with other people whom I cannot trust. He who trusts today will have died yesterday. It is a high price to pay. My food must be tasted, my residence searched, my bed looked under. When I step forth to acknowledge the cheering crowds, I am bulletproofed from head to foot. Millions are spent on my security. Is not this shocking? All because of envious lunatics. The more of them I kill, the more there are to be killed. It is the plague of greatness.

But let us return to General Aziza. This punily foolish man was, as I have said, much hated, and justly so. He who would assume greatness must be great, and if a small man assumes greatness, then he will make greatness small and must pay the penalty by having his smallness hated by those who hate smallness where greatness should be. What could he do? There were but two courses of action for him to take. He could either give up power, which he would not do, or he had to protect himself. How could he protect himself? By security. And one of his security measures was to surround himself with people whom he might trust.

Now you see the importance of my blood ties. As kin I was trustworthy. I have indeed used such cafeteria myself, even though kin can be no more trusted than unkin. I achieved promotion, and hence responsibility, and hence power, wonderful power. Up through the ranks I rose. There were some who claimed this was unfair. They called it ‘nopenism’ (which means one should not have favourites). I took good note of who they were. They have since lived to regret their hostility. And then they have died.

I met General Aziza a few times, and never found him other than puny. And yet, behold a mystery. I it was that saved both his life and his power. How did I do it? Why did I do it? Canst thou follow the close workings of the great mind?

4

I save Aziza – my views on women and sexual intercourse

Why did I save the life and power of the ninnypoop? I will explain all.

I was now twenty-six, a major and rising. Suddenly I was approached by a group of fellow officers. The time had come, they said, to overthrow the ninnypoop. They trusted me. Would I bring my men in when they struck? Yes, I said. The ninnypoop must die, so that the country might be ruled by a great man instead of a small man. The new ruler, they told me, would be General Abiapong, a man respected in the army and in the country. I approved the choice.

And then I sought an audience with General Aziza, and told him everything. Puny and pocky he may have been, but when his own life was at stake, he struck with the deadly aim of the cow over the mushroom. In a swift dawn strike, he had the plotters seized, including the respected General Abiapong, and the coup was couped even before it reached the saucer. The plotters paid the price – I was in charge of one of the firing squads – and General Aziza was saved.

Now then, why? Because General Aziza trusted me.

Do I hear septic laughter? Then art thou many steps behind Okonko. Because of his trust I was rising ever nearer to the throne. Were he now to be couped, and were the respected General Abiapong to be crowned, how sure could I be that his rise would continue my rise? I knew of no blood ties to General Abiapong. Perhaps there would be more Abiapongs and other pongs rising, while Azizas and Okonkos were falling. No, the fall of Aziza and the rise of Abiapong could only endanger the rise of Okonko, and so Okonko, the supreme strategist, prevented the fall of Aziza.

At once I became Colonel Okonko. I made up a list of Aziza-haters, including many of the nopetists, and they were duly flushed into the sewers of history, leaving the army well purged.

It was around this time that I took a wife. I mention the event only because it took place.

Perhaps, however, it is a moment to enlighten you with my views on women. I love women. I think I have already made this clear. Women are delicate creatures made to refresh men. I would like to make love to every woman I would like to make love to. I cannot have enough of women. But women must know their place. They are not made to command. They are made to obey, and when I see a woman commanding, I see a woman rejecting her womanhood. Women have no place in politics or business or industry or planning or governing or being bossy. If a woman does this, she is a man. And women should be women. Thus it is written: Men shall have the pre-eminence above women. Is not this clear?

It is a mystery that any woman could sleep with another man, knowing that I desire her. It is as if Shakespeare were to win a silver medal for drama. (Didst know that scholars say Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare? But who else could possibly have written *Look Back in Anger*?) I recall the wife of a junior officer who refused my bed even though I said 'please'. She claimed to love her husband, whereupon I explained that her husband was a junior officer whose name I did not even know, whereas I was Colonel Okonko. Yet still she refused the honour.

Greatness leaps such fences. I found out the man's name and had him arrested and thrown into prison. Then the woman came crawling, offering that which should never have been refused. I took what was offered. Several times. But I did not release her husband. I am not to be corrupted. Besides, I had no use for him free. And I soon grew tired of her pleading, since it suggested she still loved him instead of me. The sages have

said that no man understandeth women, and since I am one of the sages, I will join my name to theirs.

Closely connected with the subject of women is the subject of sex. I enjoy sex. But I abominate condoms. Condoms are an abomination. A condom is to the willy what a banana skin is to a banana. Who can enjoy a banana through the banana skin? Bananas must be peeled. So it is with condoms. Yet with condoms it is worse. For who would enjoy a banana if, before eating it, he had first to envelop it in its peel? Nay, even before that, to take the peel out of its airtight packet. In the dark. How often have the fumbling fingers failed to locate or, having located, failed to pull straight and over? How often has the untimely tug or the razor thumbnail left the rubber hanging like a weepy lip?

No, if there must be precautions, let them be taken by the woman. Let her swallow the pill or insert the device or have the operation. Let her bear the responsibility or bear the child. My duty is to pleasure.

Fear not, O beloved, that the All-Wise One may overlook the dread of sexually transported diseases. Of this too I have taken connivance, and the fear is answered thus: hold unto thyself none but those who have been medically examined and pronounced free from disease. For this purpose I have a specialist in attendance twenty-four hours a day. One cannot be too careful.

The medical result of sexual intercourse without contraption is known as pregnancy. I now have some sixteen legitimate children and Allah knows how many little bastards. But I do not boast of my sexual potency, for one has it or one has it not, and it little avails the stallion to neigh when the deed is done.

Children: I love children, and children love me. Yet I have never been at ease with children. I kiss and stroke them when I have to, but I'd rather have nothing to do with them. Sometimes they seem to want to have nothing to do with me. I believe the condition is known as mutual detraction.

We have reached a critical point in my life history: my seizure of power. Rest now, wanderer, and approach this *Orlando Glorioso* with renewed spirit.

5

The coup – thoughts on ambition – more on the coup – thoughts on breakfast and the media

The human memory is a strange machine. Who can explain why it remembers this and forgets that? Selection underlies all its operations, which no doubt the great cyclist Fred would have said was due to various odds and eggs, but which the rest of us simply accept. Resounding through my memory at different times of my life has been the old school motto of St Jerome's. I remember it as clearly as my own name, even though it was in Treadwellian Latin: *carpe diem something minimum something posterior*. When I

first saw it, I thought it was the day's menu – dead fish followed by a tiny portion of afters – but then I discovered that it was written everywhere, including (soon after I arrived) my own buttocks.

Carpe diem. It has a musical ring to it, and very often, when people have asked me questions I cannot answer, I have replied, nodding sagely: “Carpe diem”, and they have gone away satisfied.

When General Aziza wrote to me from Kirikari after the coup. He asked why I – a man befriended, trusted and advanced by him – had acted so treacherously, I sent back a two-word reply: “Carpe diem.” I never heard from him again. This may have been due partly to the success of the hit squad that I sent with the letter, but I like to think that the words themselves may have had an effect.

The coup was cleverly planned (by me) and well executed. I waited until General Aziza – then known as President Aziza, a title he assumed with no authorization from anyone – was on a visit to China. Or it may have been India. A big country, anyway. I called together a group of my fellow colonels, and asked them if they would like to be generals. To a man the response was yes, please.

Ambition is a bum-whipper, and the bums of the colonels were at my service. Why did I approach the colonels and not the generals? Because unless the generals wanted to be president, what could they gain from a coup? And if they did want to be president, what could they gain from *my* being president? The colonels were the men who stood to gain, and the prospects of promotion and bonking the present generals on the head inspired immediate loyalty (to me).

But ambition hath two hands – the up-pushing and the down-pulling. There is no enemy so ruthless as an ambitious enemy, and all my ruling life I have had to guard against the ambitious, for he who stands at the top must watch his bottom.

I have a clever technique when filling positions. I let it be known that I am looking for ambitious men. “I do not want men who will skulk in corners and clean latrines,” I say. “Give me the climber. Give me the man with ambition.” Then my advisers sift the applicants, dividing them into skulkers and climbers, and I give the post to the skulkiest applicant of all. The other names are filed, and it is ensured that the climbers will do nought but skulk in corners and clean latrines.

The other question that will be asked by the discerning mind is: why did I wait until General Aziza was in China? Or India. O ye of little understanding, have ye learnt nothing from the example I have set before you? Look back and call to mind the coup that failed. Why did it fail? Because one treacherous dog did go to General Aziza and warn him of the plot, and he did take action as swift as the belch followeth the beans.

But now, if a treacherous dog had wanted to warn General self-appointed President Aziza, how would he have done it? Hast thou tried to telephone China (or India)? Even if

connections are connected, you will say you must speak to President Aziza. “Ming mang mong,” they will reply. “President Aziza!” you cry. “Ming mang mong.” “Fetch me someone who speaks English.” Then you wait, listen to strange music, or the connection breaks, or half an hour later someone says: “Herro, Ingrish.” “Good,” you say, “I must speak to President Aziza.” “Alound the lugged locks the lagged lascar lan.”

And if the message did get through, what could he do? Catch the first lickshaw home, in time for execution?

No, the timing was perfect. At five minutes past midnight on August 10 – now wildly celebrated every year as Okonko Day – the army went into action. The generals were rounded up and shot, the airport, radio and television stations and all administrative centres were occupied, and at dawn Colonel Okonko made his historic broadcast to the nation. I have the full text of my speech in front of me. It reads as follows:

“Fellow citizens, General [not ‘President’] Aziza has been overthrown, and I, Colonel Abdul Okonko, am now acting president of our beloved country. Everyone should keep calm and go about their daily business. For years General Aziza has been corrupt and has milked our beloved country of its wealth. Now I am assuming command until things have settled and free elections can be held.”

It was the first of many broadcasts I have made down through the years, but even now I am impressed by the directness, forcefulness and authority of the language. In later years I have learned to add poetry, philosophy, and even religion. My speeches now fill an hour or more, and my audiences listen spellbound to the flow of tartaric, but that first speech still holds a special place in my heart – and in theirs.

The coup had been bloodless – apart from the generals – and when I emerged from the studio, people were calmly going about their business as if nothing had happened. Perhaps they had not heard my dawn broadcast. I immediately returned to the studio and gave orders that the speech should be repeated on radio and television every twenty minutes. I then waited another half an hour before re-emerging from the studio, so that people would have time to come out into the streets and form a cheering crowd. But they simply bustled through Sinaloco (now Okonkerville) as if this were a normal day.

I mentioned the abnormal normality to Sanjay, my batman.

“People are ignorant buggers, sir,” he said.

He was right. I ordered that a detachment of tanks and troop carriers should drive through the streets with bursts of gunfire at regular intervals. That would shake the ignorant buggers up a bit.

There was then not a great deal for me to do. I went round the town to inspect the key installations. It was pleasing to be saluted wherever I went, but the coup had been so efficient that I could not show my authority other than by congratulating everybody.

One nasty moment did occur when we were driving down Aziza Avenue (now Okonko Avenue) and a burst of gunfire rang out from a side street. I hurled myself to the floor of the car, painfully banging my nose on a boot, but it turned out to be a group of soldiers pretending to have found an enemy. I gave them a good telling-off, and they said they were very sorry but were acting under orders. When I asked them whose orders, they foolishly said: "Colonel Okonko's." I told them who I was, and the look of astonishment and terror was quite Treadwellian. I then ordered Sanjay to drive on.

"They picked the wrong man there, Sanjay!" I said.

"Yes, sir," he said. "People are ignorant buggers."

He drove me home for breakfast: cornflakes, bacon and egg, toast and orange marmalade, and coffee. It is one of the few western traditions that I have adopted. A good breakfast, accompanied by a newspaper. Thus one may awaken the juices, keep up with current affairs, and avoid conversation with the wife.

But avoid reading the newspaper if it contains criticism. This occurred once, soon after my coup. The article questioned the need for the coup, and the rightfulness of my leadership, and I was unable to finish my bacon and eggs. That very day, the editor was arrested and replaced by a cousin of my wife's who had just left school and expressed a desire to work in newspapers.

Do not misunderstand me. I champion the freedom of the press. Journalists must be able to report on matters as they think fit, and their opinions are to be noted and respected. I would never interfere with the media. For those who work in them do a fine and necessary job. But along with their rights they have responsibilities. They must at all times tell the truth, and the truth is the facts as I see them. Distortions and falsifications are an abomination, and so let them beware, for I know the truth, and I will defend it to their death.

In my country there is absolute freedom of the press. And it is a freedom that I have brought directly under my personal control.

6

More thoughts on the media

I hate the media. There is no greater abomination in this life than the lies told about me in the world's press. These people are not journalists, they are writers of fiction, transvestal novelists, and may their columns turn to salt. Day after day they invent their tales, picturing me as a tyrant, a butcher, a depot. They draw me with fangs and staring eyes, twisting my moustache into a satanic horn. They tell of murders they could not have known about, massacres that scarcely happened. They are accusing a man who has given all for his people, and who stands before them receiving their love with a generous wave of his hand, acknowledging their cheers and the cheers of the soldiers that mingle freely

among them. We are one happy nation united by a common bond: the beloved Okonko. Would the people cheer a tyrant, a butcher, a depot?

Why, then, do these foreigners invent such lies? I do not understand them. I have called international press conferences and treated the journalists to the finest champagne and caviar. I have joked with them, answered their questions openly and in accordance with the truths that I wish to be known, and yet still they ossify me. Even the champagne and caviar they twist into twiddle, claiming that I live richly while the poor of my country suffer. Do their leaders live poorly? And do the poor of their countries not suffer? I bleed in my heart for the poor of my country, and I would gladly be rid of them, but where is it written that he who drinketh not his specially imported champagne shall thereby end his people's poverty?

Sanjay comes closer to the truth than any of these so-called journalists: "They are all ignorant buggers, sir," he says. He is right.

What of the media in my own country? My early measures have reaped their reward. No lies are published about me here. I grant interviews and appear daily on radio and TV, and this in itself guarantees truth. Yet I am not – this will surprise the world – at ease with the media. Although I can hold an audience with the flicker of an eyelid. I am not relaxed in the studio or on the platform. Nay, I am a shy man. I am an homely man. Perhaps this is part of what has been called my charisma.

One final word about the media. Their importance consists in their ability to inform the people of what I want the people to know. I am the source for the goose as for the gander. I have spoken.

7

Domestic trouble – an early romance – fighting breaks out – breakfast interrupted – thoughts on the bathroom – thoughts on the telephone – function interrupted

I drove home for breakfast on the morning of August 10. There was a surprise awaiting me. Instead of cornflakes crackling in a bowl, and bacon and eggs sizzling in a pan, there was a wife boiling in a rage.

"Where have you been all night?" she screamed.

I had not informed my wife about the coup. This was for security reasons. Wives are there for the pleasure and comfort of their husbands. They should not be informed about important matters, for gossip is a woodworm. But now, with that curiosity which precedes the tittle of tattling, she was demanding to know where I had spent the night. With wondrous simplicity and modesty, I stated the fact:

"I have just mounted a coup."

She gave me a fearful slap in the face, which stung like a bee's needle.

“Who’s Aku?” she screamed.

The unreasonableness of women is a finger in the eye.

“A coup!” I cried. “Didst not hear my dawn broadcast?”

“Why should I listen to your Dawn?” she snapped.

“Dearest jewel of my soul,” I said, with the patience of the great Job, “I have overthrown the government. I am now acting president of our country.”

She came close to me. I thought she was going to kiss me, but instead she sniffed.

“I can’t smell it,” she said.

“What?” I asked.

“The drink,” she said.

“O ye of little faith!” I cried, “I tell you, woman, I am our country’s leader, and I want my bacon and eggs!”

She only believed me when I turned on the television and she heard the news and my historic speech. But I still received no apology. On the contrary, *I* had to apologize – for not informing her that I was going to be away for the night. Had I not apologized, she would have sulked all day and, worse, all night. A sulking wife is a fist round the genitals.

Will my revelations shatter illusions concerning the great? This I fear. When, as a thirteen-year-old schoolboy at St Jerome’s, I fell in love with the divine Lola Lamont, nightly masticating my adoration, I did build a veritable tower of illusions. Until one dark day I read that the divine Lola had had two husbands, three children, and an operation to increase the size of her bosoms. That paragraph was piddle on my firecracker.

But I am not a sex symbol. I am father of the nation. And if I am seen to be godlike, it is because I *am* godlike. In contrast to Lola Lamont, who only seemed so.

This is not totally accurate. I *am* a sex symbol. But I am not *only* a sex symbol. Therein lies the difference.

My domestic life is no concern of this book. In fact, it is no concern of anyone’s. And that includes myself.

On with history. The calm with which my coup had been received was not to last. I had scarcely started on my second rasher of bacon when the telephone rang. Fighting had

broken out in Aziza Square (now Okonko Square) between soldiers and civilians. Man is born to suffer, and just as birth and death mark the beginning and end to our suffering, so must the death of the old world and the birth of the new be thus marked. By suffering.

The cause of the fighting was a slight misunderstanding. I had ordered some tanks and troop carriers to go through the streets and let off bursts of gunfire to show that there had been a coup. This was a clever move, since there is little point in mounting a coup that nobody knows about. One group of soldiers, however, had directed their burst of gunfire through the window of a jeweller's shop, and had taken some of the goods on display. The jeweller and his wife had complained, whereupon there was another burst of gunfire which resulted in their accidental deaths. Such things happen during revolutions. A crowd had gathered. Now in troubled times a spark can light a fire. A spark can light a fire at any time, but in troubled times it is even more likely to light a fire. It most certainly lit a fire at this troubled time.

The officer who had telephoned me was asking for instructions. I told him that I was in the middle of my breakfast, and immediately rang off. However, when he rang again five minutes later (I was starting my toast and marmalade) to say that some soldiers had been injured, I decided it was time to act. Soldiers don't like to be injured. They are there to injure, not to be injured.

"Send in more troops," I ordered.

"How many?" he asked.

"As many as it takes to crush the rebellion," I said, and slammed down the telephone.

I finished my toast and marmalade, and drank my Early Grey – white with two sugars, the same as the great Winston. He may have had his without milk. Or without sugar. The morning newspaper, laughably, reported on General Aziza's visit to China (or India), but made no mention of my coup. Yesterday's news indeed!

Afterwards, I went to the bathroom. This subject will be shocking to the western mind, which prefers to shovel its shit onto Chanel 5, but is not the movement of the bowel akin to the birth of a child, the turning-on of the tap, the manufacture of sausages? Are these taboo? Wherefore should a man feel shame at the doing of what is to be done?

The bathroom is a fine and private place. For him with a family there is none better, since who will dare to enter when I am there? Poets find inspiration in the sounds and sights of Nature, but I have found no source of inspiration more fertile than the solitary hour spent seated in the bathroom.

Imagine, then, my anger when on the morning of August 10, in the midst of my function, I was torn from inspiration by knuckles rapping on the door and my wife's voice crying: "Telephone!"

The telephone is an abomination. Of all men's inventions, the telephone is the most abominable. I have spoken of connections with China (and India), but everywhere it is a torment and an horror. It rings, but there is no reply. It rings and there is a reply, but it is the wrong number. It rings and there is a reply and it is the right number, but the wrong person. Or the number is engaged. And remains engaged for the next hour. Then it rings. And there is no reply. I have smashed more telephones than boiled eggs. But now I use equipment that protects me from such torment, and I bless it daily, and sometimes nightly. It is called a secretary.

At the other end of the abomination is the receiver, for when does the telephone ring? Not only in the midst of one's function, but also at the revelation of the whodunit, in the hour of deepest sleep, or ten seconds before the orgasmal discharge. Perhaps I should have told my wife that I was otherwise engaged, but power was too fresh and I responded unthinkingly to the summons. The part of me that did not respond was thus forced to follow the rest of me, regardless of the indented oval.

"We have crushed the rebellion, sir," came the voice of the same fool officer who had now ruined bacon, toast and function.

"What rebellion?" I snapped.

"In Aziza Square, sir," he said. "There are forty-five dead, and at least a hundred injured. The press and television are here. What shall I tell them?"

The accursed media. If there is an abomination greater than the telephone, it is the media.

"I am in the bathroom!" I shouted.

There was a moment's silence, and then the fool officer spoke again:

"Are you sure you want me to tell them that, sir?"

"What are you talking about?"

"The press want to know why the army killed forty-five civilians, sir."

"Well, why *did* the army kill forty-five civilians?" I asked.

"Because you ordered them to, sir," he replied.

It was a moment of revelation. As I stood there in the hall, my trousers round my ankles, telephone in one hand and belt in the other, I suddenly felt the isolation of leadership. Never again would I be able to lean, as this fool officer was doing, on the doorpost of another's responsibility. From now on, the doorpost would be me.

Should I call the whole thing off? Should I call China (or India) and tell General Aziza that it was all a joke? With his generals dead, would he see the funny side? No, I must go on. He who wins, dares.

I said I would talk to the press. I would hold a conference at 11 o' clock.

"Where, sir?"

"At the People's Palace."

The People's Palace (formerly the Royal Palace) had been General Aziza's official residence. It was the right place for the new ruler to speak from.

I had just put the phone down when the doorbell rang. Without thinking, I opened the door, and found myself facing a woman with a notebook and a man with a camera. The woman's eyes opened wide, and the man swung his camera up with a dazzling flash. I had forgotten that my trousers were still round my ankles.

I slammed the door and locked it.

"Under no circumstances am I to be disturbed again!" I shouted to my wife.

I took the phone off the hook, and returned to the bathroom. I had a press conference to prepare, and some unfinished business to attend to.

8

Problems of organization – introducing Major Macpherson – thoughts on civil servants – more problems of organization – and more – the Gummichoo – I solve the problems of organization – an unattractive lady – a successful press conference

The press conference got off to an unfortunate start. The fool officer had informed the media, but forgot to tell the officer-in-charge at the People's Palace. As a result, there was large and angry crowd of media people outside the palace, being held at bay by a line of armed soldiers. I had planned to enter the hall like Gary Copper. Instead, I had to push my way through the crowd and demand to see the commanding officer. By the time I had convinced him of who I was, found the key to the conference hall, signed the necessary authorization, hiring and insurance papers, and obtained passes for all the media people, it was half past one, and most of the reporters had gone for lunch. I too had developed a rumble, and so I postponed the press conference until three o' clock. This caused a few protests, including one from a reporter who pointed out that three o' clock was kick-off time for Sinaloco Rangers versus Sinaloco Celtic.

"I can't help that!" I snapped. "There are more important things in life than football."

"Name them," he said.

It was a difficult question, but I had the answer:

“I’m not answering questions now,” I said.

The commanding officer, one Major Hamish Rob Roy Macpherson (his father was a transvestite), invited me into the rather plushy office he had taken over, and sent for sandwiches and drinks from the canteen. We chatted as we ate.

“What are you going to do with all the ministers, sir?” he asked.

“Leave them in the churches,” I replied.

“I mean the government ministers,” he said.

“Haven’t they all been shot?” I asked.

“Only those that were generals,” he said. “We need instructions concerning the rest and also the civil servants.”

I hate civil servants. They are an abomination. These form-sending, rubber-stamping, behind-glass-door-sitting burrowcats perch over society like the consecrated over the latrine. Give me a civil servant, and I will give you a hemmyrod.

“Shoot the lot,” I said.

He smiled, and poured me another glass of wine.

“May I suggest, sir,” he said, “that we proceed warily. Ministers and civil servants have relatives – some of them perhaps in the army. I myself have two uncles, a brother, two sisters and six cousins in the civil service.”

“I was only joking,” I said. “All your family will be spared.”

He seemed a nice fellow, and I liked the deference with which he addressed me. I didn’t want to upset him.

We were still eating and chatting when there was a knock on the door. A little trembly man in suit, collar and tie was standing there.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Begging your pardon, sir,” he said, “but the Ganzemacher trade delegation is here.”

“And what has that to do with me?” I asked.

“The delegation includes the Ganzemacher Minister of Trade, who is supposed to meet our own Minister of Trade, but our own Minister of Trade isn’t sure whether he is still Minister of Trade, and if he’s not, then who is going to deal with the Ganzemacher Minister of Trade?”

O the burden of leadership! Would I ever get through a meal or a function without interruption? I thought of telling the trembly man to send the Ganzemachers back where they came from, but a sixth sense restrained me. I had a Ganzemacher car, and a Ganzemacher refrigerator, and a Ganzemacher washing machine. He who may require spare parts butters the bread of him who supplies them.

“Tell the Minister he’s still Minister,” I said.

Swift, decisive, authoritative. But the trembly man did not go away.

“Begging your pardon, sir,” he said, “but there’s another problem.”

“O the burden of leadership!” I sighed to Major Macpherson, and he nodded sympathetically. “Well, what is it?”

“The trade conference with the Ganzemachers is due to begin at three o’ clock.”

“Then let it begin,” I said decisively.

“In the conference hall,” he said.

“That’s impossible,” I said. “I’m holding my press conference in the conference hall.”

“But they booked it first, sir,” he said.

“Typical!” I shouted. “These damn burrowcats have done a double booking!”

“N...n...no, sir,” stammered the trembly man. “You were b...booked in for eleven o’ clock.”

“But I changed it to three o’ clock!” I shouted.

“You c...can’t do that, sir. Not when it’s already b...been b...booked.”

Such are the minds of stuck-in-sticky-tape civil servants.

“Who’s governing this country?” I shouted. “You or me?”

He looked blank for a moment, and then began to stammer “P...P...Pres...”

I cut him short: “I shall hold my press conference in the conference hall at three o’ clock. Otherwise you will be shot.”

It was a powerful argument. The trembly man closed the door behind him. He would no doubt trembly inform the Minister of Trade and the Ganzemachers that the Head of State had taken over the conference hall, and all would know just who was master of this house.

I waited until a quarter past three before making my way to the conference hall. This time I would not be denied the majestic entry I had planned for eleven o' clock.

I have learned in life, however, never to expect the expected. One cannot expect the unexpected because if one expected it, it would not be unexpected. Hence my dismay at unexpectedly finding the conference hall in chaos. It was filled with two types of people: the scruffy media jackals in loud conflict with the brushed and smartly suited trade delegates. And in the doorway through which I should have entered majestically, stood the trembly man, surveying the chaos with trembling lips and limbs.

"I'm s...sorry, s...sir. I c...couldn't s...stop them."

It was a moment for decisive action. I drew my pistol, and the trembly man fainted. But I did not shoot him. Instead, I fired straight up at the ceiling, and by chance the bullet penetrated a holding wire, bringing a glass chandelier crashing down on the floor, thereby doing no harm at all to my legendary reputation as a crack shot. The bang and subsequent smash created the silence and stillness that should have greeted my majestic entry.

"Who's in charge here?" I shouted.

"You are," said a quiet voice behind me. It was Major Macpherson. I was pleased to have him there. I liked his attitude towards my authority.

"Exactly," I said.

Suddenly, a large, grey-suited man with bald head and steel-rimmed spectacles was towering over me.

"Ve are holdink a trett konferenz in zis hall. You vill clear away all ze unaussorized persons."

"I am holding a press conference in this hall," I told him firmly, "and the unauthorized persons I shall clear away are you."

"I am ze Ganzemacher Minister of Trett!" he hissed.

"I don't care if you're Karl Marx and Spencer," I replied with withering wit.

"I am not Marx and Spencer!" he cried. "I am Friedhold Gottlieb Mercedes-Benz, Minister of Trett!"

It rang an alarm bell in my memory.

“Mercedes-Benz?” I repeated. “Any connection with the car manufacturers?”

“I *am* ze car menufecherus,” he replied.

It was a turning-point in international relations. This man had the power of life and death over my spare parts.

I smiled suddenly, warmly, graciously, and held out my hand.

“So you’re the Minister of Trade!” I cried. “It’s a privilege and honour to meet you. I am Colonel Okonko, Head of State. Forgive us for this dreadful misunderstanding.”

He took my hand, but was plainly puzzled.

“A complete breakdown in communications,” I explained. “I thought you said you were Minister of Trett – but you’re the Ganzemacher *trade* delegation. Hence the misunderstanding. We never deal with tretts, you see. Too trettcherous, ha ha!”

I have always found humour to be a great peace-maker. I laughed jovially and slapped him merrily on the shoulder.

“Zen ze konferenz may begin?” he said, without a sliver of a smile.

“Of course,” I said. “And I hope the spare parts will keep flowing in.”

At this moment a Gummichoo reporter thrust his cigar in my face.

“Listen, Cunky,” he said, “we bin here four an’ a half howers waitin’ for you an’ your press conference. Either we get it now, or you’re gonna have the worst reviews since J.W. Booth’s last performance.”

I hate the Gummichoo. Even as a cloud of locusts are the Gummichoo, blackening our blue skies and our green fields, devouring and defiling, corrupting and corroding. Whither goeth the Gummichoo goeth the fizz, the dollary clink, the gob of gum. Even from the sacred cow cometh forth the hamburger. All are would-be Gary Coppers, but there is only one Gary Copper, and the rest shall be scourged from the earth along with the media and the telephone. And know that now, even now, as I write these words for you to read, I prepare to do that which I have vowed to do. Okonko has spoken, and it shall be so.

This, however, was but the first day of my glorious leadership, and the press conference was as important as my spare parts. I was caught twixt spit and smoke.

“Perhaps, sir,” said the calm voice of Major Macpherson, “in view of the new situation, the trade delegates might attend your press conference before proceeding with their own, giving them the opportunity to ask you questions themselves.”

The man was going to be useful.

“Gentlemen,” I said, with easy charm, “in view of the new situation, I invite the Ganzemacher trade delegates to attend my press conference before proceeding with their own. And this...” I nodded graciously towards the Minister of Trett...”will give you the opportunity to ask me questions yourselves.”

Thus did Okonko the Conqueror become Okonko the Peacemaker, and all parties duly opened their ears to hear the words of the Master. And what words they were. I informed the gathering about the overthrow of General Aziza, introduced myself as acting president of our beloved country, and told them to keep calm and go about their daily business. I explained that General Aziza had been corrupt, and had milked our beloved country of its wealth. For this reason, I told them, I was assuming command until things had settled and free elections could be held.

Everyone listened spellbound, and when I finished, there was a profound and thoughtful silence. I had in truth expected a round of applause, but the silence was more impressive. I had touched their hearts, not their hands.

“So tell us somethin’ noo,” said a Gummichoo voice, and there was laughter. Of course it had to be a Gummichoo that broke the spell. But I was calm in my command. I invited them to ask questions.

“Would you explain to us, Colonel Okonko,” asked an attractive young lady, “why you ordered the massacre of civilians in Aziza Square?”

It is perhaps an exaggeration to say the young lady was attractive. Her appearance may have been attractive, but attractiveness cometh not only from the appearance. I found the tone of her voice and the implications of her question unattractive. Young ladies of attractive appearance should open their legs and not their mouths – that is my advice to young ladies of attractive appearance.

“I did not order the massacre of civilians in Aziza Square,” I replied. “Next question.”

To my surprise there were howls of protest, and the unattractive young lady, instead of sitting down, waved a piece of paper at me.

“I have a statement here,” she said, “signed by Captain Mensah Qadir, to say that he was acting under your direct orders.”

Qadir was the fool officer who had interrupted my breakfast and my function. I decided there and then that he would interrupt no more breakfasts and functions, and he would sign no more statements, but his future would not help me out of my present.

“I did not order the massacre of civilians in Aziza Square,” I repeated, since I could think of nothing else to say

But still this most unattractive female persisted:

“Captain Mensah Qadir says you did!”

“May I say something, sir?”

It was Major Macpherson, from the side of the hall. (I was on the platform.)

“Certainly, Major Macpherson,” I responded, “and make it something good.”

“The tragedy in Aziza Square,” he said, “was due, as I understand it, to the fact that some civilians were looting shops. Colonel Okonko gave orders that the military should stop the looting. He did not order a massacre.”

“Exactly!” I said.

He had, of course, made one slight error. The looting had been done by the soldiers. However, I preferred his version of the story.

“As *I* understand it,” said the female, “the looting was being done by the soldiers, and the massacre took place when the civilians tried to stop them.”

“That’s not what we were told,” said Major Macpherson. “Clearly there will have to be a full inquiry, but Colonel Okonko’s orders were based on the information we were given. If the information was false, the informants will be punished.”

The man should have been a lawyer. The unattractive lady sat down at last, for some reason shaking her head, and then questions were fired at me from all sides. I was able to answer most of them clearly and directly by indicating that it was too early to say, we needed more time, this and that would be decided later, no-one could tell for the moment, and so on. I emphasized emphatically that I had acted for my country’s sake and not my own, that I had no ambition to be president, and that civilian rule would be restored “as soon as possible” – a subtle and obligingly flexible phrase.

The Ganzemacher Minister of Trett asked whether we would honour existing trett agreements, to which I replied:

“Certainly. Otherwise I wouldn’t get my spare parts, would I?”

It was another good joke, and I roared with laughter in order to unstretch the elastic. Mr Mercedes-Benz did not laugh, but the Ganzemachers are not noted for their sense of humour.

I had handled everything well, and looked forward confidently to seeing the papers the next day.

9

More thoughts on the media – I invent a game to revolutionize education

I have already outlined my views on the media. I would add to those remarks that the media are an abomination, fouler than the Pit of Cess. Were they to report on the Crucifixion, doubt not that they would ask Mary Monalisa for serial rights, and the photographers would zoom in on our Saviour's loincloth.

Of all the photographs available to the world's press, only one had been chosen, and it was on the front page of every newspaper. It was a full length portrait of myself standing at the front door with my trousers round my ankles. Beside the picture were such headlines as: NEW LEADER REVEALS ALL. THE COUP FROM THE LOO. OKONKO'S BOTTOM LINE. GOVERNMENT OVERTHRONE.

I at once gave orders that all journalists were to be rounded up and shot, but Major Macpherson thought this might be a little drastic. I thought it was a little lenient. He pointed out that our journalists might be of more use to us under the threat of shooting than in the state of being shot. And foreign governments might regard the shooting of their journalists as an hostile action and cut off my spare parts. I therefore relented, closed our own newspaper offices for "restructuring", and expelled them all the foreigners.

Next I called a meeting of the colonels, for it was now time to form a government. Most of the ministers had been shot and would therefore need replacing, and the colonels (to be promoted to generals) were the best men to do it. As I sat in the bathroom, I jotted down a list.

Whence cometh inspiration? What force doth forge the link twixt thought and thought? Out of the atom blasteth the explosion, and from my little list there burst a revolution in the life and leisure and education of all our sons and daughters. A man should grow accustomed to his own genius, and yet still I marvel.

For as I jotted, turning the wheels of memory, so I reasoned: this might be a game. And this might be a tool. Set the memory to work, and you shall have pleasure and learning *at the same time*.

I have patiented my game which is also a tool. It is called, quite simply, Okonko. It consists of cards on which are written the instructions: compile a list of... There is a time limit, and the winner is the one who has written down the largest number of items. I have

allowed others to expand the list of lists – though the patient, of course, remains mine. My own particular list, I am proud to say, is part of every school syllabus in our country. Every child must buy an Okonko. The instructions on my card are: compile a list of all Okonko's achievements. The answer sheet is regularly updated and may – or rather must – be purchased for a small additional fee. Thus from my jottings was born a whole industry.

Now, beloved, wilt thou compete with the Okonko of all those years ago? Then write a list of all the ministries you can think of.

10

I form a government – a new view of the civil service

My total was sixteen. Do not despair if you failed to reach such a score, for Okonko is no normal player. But if you exceeded my score, do not triumph. Thou hast cheated. There are only sixteen ministries. And with thy seventeen thou shalt be penalized eighteen points, so that thou shalt have less than the lowest. These are the rules of the game.

To the layman the taking of power will seem a simple thing. He will assume that after a coup the ministers are shot, and the friends of the leader take their jobs. Would it were so straightforward. At the first gathering of the colonels (now generals), every one of them offered to take over the Ministry of Finance, and nobody wanted the Ministry of Education.

Major Macpherson, whom I had now promoted to colonel and had invited to attend the meeting, suggested that we fit qualifications to positions. This proved to be a fruitful approach, and led to the following appointments:

- Foreign Affairs (parents-in-law ran travel agency)
- Justice (five years in youth detention centre)
- Health and Social Security (mother an auxiliary nurse)
- Food and Agriculture (weighed twenty-two stone)
- Sport and Culture (wrote programme notes for Sinaloco Celtic)
- Environment (said he thought he knew how to spell it)
- Science and Technology (failed O-Level biology and chemistry)
- Housing (had assembled D-I-Y bookcase)
- Energy (regular work on exercise bike)
- Transport (brother-in-law of Minister for Foreign Affairs)
- Information (Ministry amalgamated with Sport and Culture)
- Defence (had taken course in karate)
- Home Affairs (known as Casanova)
- Trade and Industry (ran secret business in surplus military supplies)

I took control of Finance myself. Education remained a problem, until I had the happy idea to give the post to Sanjay, my batman.

There will be more illusions broken, I fear. The innocent ones who hear the Minister speak with the wisdom of the sphincter, will they now lose faith? I too did once believe, but now I have the knowledge which passeth all belief. Yet cast thy mind even unto the democracies of the west, and thou shalt see strange sights. A Prime Minister shuffles his cupboard and a Home Secretary becomes a Chancellor, a Defence Secretary becomes a Foreign Minister, and the grime of industry doth take on the green of the environment. Do they undergo a brain transplantation? Are they possessed of Aladdin's lamps? And after an election, suddenly out go all that were in, and in come all that were out, and by the holy abracadabra of smoked Sammonicus, they that knew nothing now know everything. I open the curtain, but I do not build the landscape.

Now you shall learn the role of the civil service in government. I have called the civil servants an abomination, but Major Macpherson – a man of great knowledge and pleasing obsequies – explained that, for all the faults I so rightly criticized, the civil servants were indispensable. Many members of his family were civil servants. The secret was to find those that were reliable, and place them in positions of responsibility so that the incontinent would not gain power.

I gave Major Macpherson the task of purging the civil service. Without doubt he and his family would know best who to promote and who to eliminate. It was a shrewd move, and indeed Major Macpherson himself commented upon my shrewdness:

“That,” he said, “is a shrewd move.”

“I am,” I said, “a shrewd man.”

And he agreed.

11

Thoughts on history-writing – an assassination attempt – security – Aziza's corruption – my wife's good taste – thoughts on leadership

He who writes a history must invent a system. How else shall the years be condensed into pages? We historians are the instant coffee-makers of time, and into these few pages already I have ground down thirty years of beans, extracting essence of childhood, schooldays, army days, a coup, and the coup of coups (my own). I have set up government, explained principles, discussed and enlightened. And now, sitting here in my fortress, I rejoice that my words shall copulate through time, a monument to greatness (mine), and a defiance of death and the Gummichoo.

What, then, you ask, is my system? It is Okonkan. For guiding all events through all the years of my rule is the Okonko, who has come to this earth like the prophets of old, and is so to be worshipped. Worship me, I cry to my people, and ye shall be saved! It is true. If they do not worship me, I'll have them shot.

What to include, what to leave out? So many tales of envy, greed, treachery, violence, murder. And yet I am a man of peace, seeking only to promote harmony, unity, the joy of a single world happy under my leadership. Is there no end to the foolishness of mankind? Nay, call it not foolishness, for the Devil hath more weapons at his command than mere folly.

It was not folly that led Captain Mensah Qadir to his attempt on my life, even though the man had already been pronounced a fool by him who knows best. Assassination. The word itself hisses like the serpent. And is it not incomprehensible that so soon after the most glorious day in the history of our country a junior officer should seek to kill the man who had brought light into the country's darkness? Why did he do it?

I will tell thee. Out of selfishness. To gratify the eggo that doth precede all acts of chickenry. This was the fool that did break into my breakfast and my function, and then did sign a paper accusing me before the world's press. He it was that slaughtered the innocent and then laid blame upon me. I had pronounced his death sentence without hesitancy, but forgot to say who should carry it out. Reports reached him. A man of honour would have shot himself without waiting for me to remember to have him shot, but Qadir was no man of honour. What man of honour would lay blame upon his blameless leader? No, instead he sought to preserve himself by killing me! Therein the monstrosity of human selfishness: kill the innocent in order to save the guilty. I shudder.

What happened? I emerged from the People's Palace, and bent down to tie my shoelace. At that precise moment a shot rang out, I looked up, was showered with blood, and then knocked over by the falling body of the newly amalgamated Minister for Information, Sport and Culture. He was dead. As I struggled to crawl out from under the suffocating weight (for even in death he clung to his leader), there were more shots. I tried to crawl back under him, and held onto the body while other hands tried to pull it away.

"Don't kill me!" I cried.

"It's all right, sir," said the calm voice of Major Macpherson. "He's dead."

"I know he's dead," I gasped. "I'm the one who has to be saved!"

But Major Macpherson was referring to the assassin. One of the guards had shot him, and he lay in a pool of his own blood at the foot of the steps.

I was not pleased. I would have had Qadir taken alive, so that I could have killed him myself. Slowly.

I emerged from beneath the amalgamated minister, and stood trembling and blood-bespattered on the steps. Of course I do not fear death. Okonko fears nothing. Death cometh to all as surely as the roll doth follow the rock, but can a dead man rule his

country? Think upon that profound question, and you will recognize why this moment was a turning-point in my political philosophy.

Priorities. Political philosophy is a matter of priorities. Society may be balanced in favour of the rich or poor, the capitalist or the worker, the well or the sick, and so forth. From now on, I intended to balance society in favour of security. My security. No expense would be spared in setting up an elite force whose sole purpose would be to protect the life of our great leader. As Minister of Finance, I would see to it that the necessary funds were made available. Immediately. I entrusted Major Macpherson with the task of choosing and training the men and acquiring the equipment. And I created a new ministry which, to my knowledge, was the first of its kind in any country: the Ministry of Security. The very first Minister of Security was Major Macpherson, who had just been made Colonel Macpherson, and whom I now promoted to General Macpherson. He was touchingly grateful.

An immediate precaution was for me and my family to move into General Aziza's residence, formerly the Royal Palace and now the People's Palace, with its huge staff of cleaners, cooks, stewards, butlers, gardeners, clerks etc. Aziza could not possibly have afforded it on a general's salary. Here, if needed, was clear evidence of his corruption and extravagance. Macpherson rightly pointed out that all these people represented a security risk, and so I dismissed them. The People's Palace would now, of course, be closed to the public, but it would still require a large staff to run it, and in any case I had no intention of living less comfortably than Aziza. Fortunately, General Macpherson had a cousin who ran a staffing agency, and he was able to supply me with a full house of trustworthy servants.

My wife was delighted with the move, but objected to the furniture and fittings which, she said, were common. I could see her point. This was to be *our* home, and so why should Aziza's vulgar taste be inflicted upon us? As wife of our beloved leader, she could not entertain the wives of kings, presidents and prime ministers amid furniture and fittings chosen so vulgarly by another. I and the treasury gave her a free hand, and she made a splendid job of refurnishing and redecorating the entire palace. Aziza would not have recognized it.

At about this time there were a number of mysterious telephone calls from China (or India). They ceased when we had the telephone number changed.

The palace was already well fortified. Aziza had not been a popular man, and a great deal of money had been spent on fencing, gun turrets, alarm systems, bulletproof glass etc. He had evidently lived in fear of attack, and although I have no such fears (for I have always enjoyed the love and respect of my people), I had seen for myself that just one lunatic could extinguish the light of the world. I therefore doubled the amount of fencing, gun turrets, alarm systems, and I quadruple-glazed the bulletproof glass.

Do not mistake these precautions for a sign of fear. I have faced death many times – you will recall my great deeds in the villages of the Crudd – and never flinched. No, these

measures were taken for love. O you who tremble at the hoot of the owl or the jar of the nightjar or the shadow of the bogeyman in the dark nostril of the night, know that Okonko will protect you. Within his mighty arms he embraces all his children, the young, the old, the sick, the needy, defending them against the hot, cold and lukewarm buffets of this dangerous world. Take away the leader and you take away their prop, their guide, their comforter. Without him they are as an herd robbed of its driver, an udderless boat on a stormy sea, an answer blowin' in the wind. O pity the people who have lost their leader, for they shall wander leaderlessly they know not where. What, then, shall be said of a leader who doth not protect himself? Who rashly bares his breast to the assassin's knife, thereby exposing his country to the perils of leaderlessness? Is such an one fit to govern? Nay, the leader who loveth his country must hold off his enemies by all means and at all costs. My blood is the blood of my people, and it must not be shed. Thus shall my people and I be safe, for they and I are one, now and for evermore. Amen.

12

Foreign journalists – thoughts on money – Aziza's foolishness – the Kirikari – President Wokari

The expulsion of all foreign journalists was a mistake. The majority simply crossed the border into Kirikari and sent their reports from there. Since their writings were a load of twiddle anyway, it made no difference to them where they sent it from.

But more damaging was the political response. You would have thought that any leader seeing another leader exposed trouserless on the front page would be horrified. Did they not realize that my leggy humanity would make their own people aware of their leggy humanity too? I had expected them to support me, but instead they sent their ambassadors to express "grave concern" at the expulsion. Not a word of "grave concern" at the photograph. They wanted to know if their other nationals were safe, and if the "bloody purges" were to continue. What bloody purges? And did I expect their countries to go on giving us aid when I resorted to such action?

In vain did I wave the front page in their ambassadorial faces. In vain did I shout quotes from the articles. There are none so blind and deaf as those that will not see or hear. Indeed, some coughed into their handkerchiefs, while others turned away snuffling or clearing their throats, but I do know a snigger when I hear one.

My instinct was to expel all the ambassadors, but there had been one word in their messages that had struck a warning note, and so I acted with statesmanlike caution. There is a time to spit and a time to swallow. I swallowed. The word that kept them in their jobs was "aid". How much aid were they giving us? As Minister of Finance, I needed to know.

Let me say a few words about money. I know what it is to be an hard-up man. Yet I do also know that the poor may become rich through the inquisition of money. Ours was not a rich country. Ours was a poor country. And therefore we needed money to become rich.

I also needed money to become rich. If these countries were giving us money, I as Minister of Finance must have access to it. For he who has access to money may become rich, as it is written in the law of economics.

I withdrew the expulsion order, and held a party for all foreign journalists at the People's Palace. There I welcomed them graciously, shaking hands with each in turn, and in a short speech I explained to them that the expulsion had been the result of a misunderstanding, and the official who had issued the decree had been shot.

I also held a party for the ambassadors. I assured them that I bore nothing but goodwill towards themselves and their countries, that I desired friendly relations with everyone, both from the east and from the west, and that above all their money was safe in my hands.

It was a masterly exercise in public relations. But what shall it profit a man to master public relations when private greed doth gobble public good? News came through that General Aziza had set up a government in exile. I found this incredible. The man had been deposed, and I was now the clear leader, yet he had gathered his psychopants around him and was telling the world that he was still president! At the same time he had the impotence to send me the letter to which I have already referred, in which he accused me of acting treacherously. You will recall my reply: "Carpe diem." And a hit squad that ended his government in exile.

That, however, was not the end of the tale. Aziza had been granted refuge in the neighbouring land of Kirikari. The Kirikari have always been our enemies, and the mere acceptance of his presence there was an open act of hostility.

But let me explain the past to thee, for inasmuch as the present doth spring from the past and doth itself become a past from which doth spring a new present, so doth it behove the scholar to give presence to the past in order that he may explain the present.

The ills of the present spring from a past mismanaged by the great mismanagers of all history – the Kupperteers. As we learn from the stone in the bladder, little things may do much damage, and the little Isle of Kupper has spread its damage across the whole suffering earth. They split up families, tribes and countries, took away our wealth and culture, and left us with nothing but their used cricket balls. A pox upon the Kupperteers, for they are an abomination than which there is none greater, unless it be the Gummichoo.

There is no such country as Kirikari. Nor is my country a country. We were many different tribes and kingdoms, living peacefully at war with one another for centuries. Then along came the Kupperteers, conquered us with their wah-wahs, and lumped us in lumps for stirring into their colons. For some reason – probably the slip of a pencil propelled by whisky – they created Kirikari to be twice the size of our land, with the river Wamboko as our border. Half the river is ours, and half is theirs.

The Kirikari are an abomination. Even before they were Kirikari they were an abomination, but the Kupperteers fostered their abominy by the lumpiness of their thinking. Let me explain. On either side of the Wamboko dwell the people of the Crudd. They are a vulgar people of whom it may be said that they are as a dried turd upon the hind leg of a mule. We speak of Cruddlike when we wish to speak of the lowest of low things.

Now like doth cling to like, and so the Kirikari have always laid claim to our share of the river and to the borderlands upon our side of the river, arguing that it is all one land, namely the Land of the Crudd. But the land on our side of the river is rich in minerals. The solution, obvious to all of our people, is for the Land of the Crudd to be divided: we have the land, and the Kirikari have the Crudd. But the Kirikari want all, and so the dispute never ends.

Besides, the Kirikari are envious of our skills, our culture, our beautiful women, and all else that is ours. For it is known that they do wallow in filth, making cement of their own excrement, eating babies, and practising black arts and devil-worship.

You will ask, then, why General Aziza sought refuge in this evil land, and I will tell thee. So ugly are Kirikari women, and so sneaky was our former pocky leader, that he did give his own sister in marriage to Imran Wokari, President of the Kirikari. And this Aziza did accuse *me* of treachery! With this act of shame he formed ties of friendship with the Kirikari – preparing for himself a place of refuge when the time of his downfall would surely come. During his rule there was a peace that made all our people hang their heads, while the Crudd and the Kirikari laughed.

Yet will I speak fairly, unlike the reporters, and will tell all. It was said in defence of Aziza that the Kirikari were a constant threat to us. It was said that he had sacrificed his sister in order to protect our country and preserve our peace. It was even said that the alliance was an act not of shame and cowardice, but of statesmanship.

And who did say these things? Why, Aziza himself! And if a liar speak, shall he be believed? I know that his reason was to prepare a refuge, for have I not said so? Besides, an alliance with the vile and evil Kirikari was an alliance with that which is vile. And evil. That the flower of our womanhood was crushed into a Kirikari potty-pourry, and that the Crudd and the Kirikari could laugh at us on both sides of the Wamboko, was a needle in the buttocks of our honour. Assassination was too merciful a punishment.

The Kirikari, however, did not see the error of their ways. On the contrary, when my hit squad sieved Aziza, President Imran Wokari himself, defiler of women and leader of filth, made a broadcast to his nation accusing me of murder. The death of his “brother” he called an act of war, and he raged about honour and dishonour as if he knew the difference.

I at once sent him a message explaining the two words, which are derived from the Latin *honorus*, meaning we are good, and *dishonorus*, meaning we have too much on our plate.

I urged him to mend his filthy ways, send our sister back to us (for she was a beautiful creature, and I would gladly have cared for her), and to moderate his tone when speaking of our new and glorious leader (me). As a diplomatic gesture, however, I signed the letter “with best wishes”.

It was all in vain. The man was impossible. I should have known better than to expect good sense from a Kirikari. What happened next was an humiliating chapter in our country’s history.

13

A cowardly attack – I bring hope to my country

September 10 was the day of darkness. Just one month after I had raised the sun, Imran Wokari perpetrated his crime of crimes. There was not even a cry of “Look out, I’m coming!” Sneakily he stole upon our virgin land and raped it. Here in Sinaloco we heard and knew nothing. Had he come to my front door and dared me to do battle, I should gladly have set my dogs on him, but instead, with vicious and cowardly cunning, he sank his claws into the defenceless flesh of our borderland.

The battalion of soldiers permanently based to defend the frontier was wiped out before it could even run away. The evil Crudd treacherously aided the invaders. What did it matter to them that the young defenders of our land lay bleeding and shitting in their pants? The Crudd have no feelings for such things. All they thought of was Crudd rejoining Crudd under the banner of the vile Kirikari. I would, however, have cried good riddance had we been rid of them, but they did not leave. Instead, the invading force encamped upon our bank of the river, digging trenches, raising fortifications, installing guns, mining fields.

The raid took place at dawn. News of it reached me when I was peacefully working out the future of the world in my bathroom. My wife banged on the door, shouting: “Wokari has invaded the Land of the Crudd!” My response was instant: “Tell him to wait!”

I am, however, by training a soldier, and my next thought was purely military. Supposing Wokari was marching on Sinaloco? We must marshal our defences at once! Every available soldier must be deployed around our home to protect it.

We learn from experience. I did not open the bathroom door until I had pulled up my trousers.

My wife was standing there trembling, and beside her was Major Macpherson (now General Macpherson).

“I want the whole army brought here at once!” I ordered.

“Here, sir?” asked Macpherson. “Surely we must send them to the front.”

“Front, back, sides, everywhere!” I said.

“I mean the battlefield,” he said. “The Land of the Crudd.”

“But the Kirikari are marching on Sinaloco!” I cried.

“No, sir,” he said. “They’ve captured the borderlands. Why should the army come here?”

“You mean they’re not marching on Sinaloco?”

“No, sir.”

“Ah. Then I was misinformed.”

I made a quick calculation. If the Kirikaris were not marching on Sinaloco, then there was no immediate threat to myself. I swiftly changed my plan.

“The reason why I want the army brought here, Macpherson, is so that I can give them a pep talk before they go to the borderlands.”

“Would it not be quicker, sir, if you were to go to the army rather than them coming here?”

I liked and respected Macpherson, but there are moments when a man can be too clever for his own good. And for mine.

“No, Macpherson,” I said decisively. “It would be quicker if I dispensed with the pep talk altogether.”

I had no intention of leaving the palace. I felt safe here.

We had wasted too much time talking. What was needed now was action, and so I summoned the chiefs of staff for a council of war. I was shocked at the number of them who sent back messages that they were still having breakfast, or were “otherwise engaged”.

By midday, however, they had all assembled. I had found an old map, and they gathered round as I explained the situation to them, using a ruler to indicate the various positions. As I had no details of the enemy’s encampments, I simply waved the ruler around the blue line of the Wamboko, until someone pointed out that the map was upside down and that I was actually indicating the Ondikapo, which was on the other side of the country.

Without knowing the strength or disposition of the enemy, it was difficult to plan a strategy. The Minister of Defence wanted to send in the air force “to bomb the hell out of ‘em”, but the Air Force Marshal was not so keen, as the Kirikari air force was ten times the size of ours.

The proposal that the army should be dispatched to the borderland (possibly after a pep talk from our leader) was more favourably received until someone remembered that the Kirikari army was not only twice the size of ours, but had also recently taken delivery of fifty brand new Marianne tanks. These would swiftly make scrap out of our one and a half dozen World War II souvenirs.

A suggestion that the navy should mount a surprise attack from the waters of the Wamboko brought forth the comment that we would be more surprised than the enemy, since both our warships were undergoing major repairs. In any case, they would have to sail all the way round the gulf to reach the mouth of the Wamboko, which would take days even if they could get that far.

We were in difficulties. Without the army, navy and air force, how could we drive off the invaders? I resolved there and then that never again would our armed forces be caught with trousers round ankles. They would have the men and weapons they needed. But in the meantime, a feeling of depression weighed upon my generals, and I knew that this was a moment for inspiration. I gazed round the room at all the expectant faces.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “there is only one way out of this mess.”

They waited, and I was touched by their attentiveness and trust.

“And it is your duty,” I said, “to find it.”

Then from the back of the room came the quiet, familiar voice of General Macpherson.

“We must appeal to the United Nations.”

“That,” I said swiftly, “is the only course left open to us. We cannot and will not allow this act of aggression to go unpunished, and I shall personally appeal to the United Nations to condemn it and to take action on our behalf. I shall not rest until justice is done, and is seen to be done.”

I had spoken. Into their darkness I had flooded a ray of light. Is not this the supreme task of the leader. To lift the heads of the oppressed, to set hope in the place of despair? I had not failed them. Every head nodded, and every voice hummed its approval.

“Not much else we can do,” murmured one, and in that single statement lay recognition that the leader had seen clearly and had spoken truly.

The course of action I had proposed was itself not without difficulty. For one thing, my government was not recognized by anyone. For another, the United Nations had just condemned the assassination of General Aziza – a motion proposed, I need hardly add, by the Kirikari ambassador to the United Nations, one Samuel Wokari, nephew to the vile Imran.

In any case, a trip to the United Nations would entail leaving the palace at a time when I was particularly open to the danger of attack. My regime was still new, and the land was now tittering on the brink of uncertainty and confusion. I was not yet the beloved Father of the Nation that I am now. Could I risk exposing myself to the hazards of exposure at so critical a point in my country's history?

But who could go to the United Nations in my place? It must be a man of knowledge, experience, intelligence, and a mighty power of oratory. One name will spring to your mind, and one name only. Okonko. But that was me, and I would not under any circumstances persuade myself to leave the security of my fortress. And so instead, I sent General Macpherson.

14

An unsatisfactory correspondence – the helpfulness of the United Nations – the helplessness of the United Nations – money problems – an unfortunate death – the solution to our money problems – the failure of the solution – another unfortunate death

In addition to my swift and decisive initiative visa-vis the United Nations, I opened the campaign on a second front. By express mail I sent a letter to Imran Wokari. You will recall that I had written to him before, castrating him for his absurd broadcast after the death of General Aziza. Despite the courteous tone of my letter, he had not even had the decency to reply, but instead had launched his cowardly invasion. Now I told him plainly that his behaviour was disgraceful. I warned him that I had already taken steps to alert the United Nations. I had no wish to punish him personally, but if he did not withdraw, I would mobilize all the forces of the world against him. Once more I softened the formidable power of my prose by signing the letter "yours sincerely".

This time Imran Wokari did reply. His letter was rude and childish, consisting merely of two words: "Carpe diem."

The invasion, however, was not without benefit. Combined with the unfortunate death of General Aziza, it brought about recognition of my *deafacto* government. Thus did my sworn enemy do me a favour, but it is often so, that out of advertisements cometh forth goodness. Did not the divine Archimedes discover gravity through the fall of an apple upon his head? Would Ian Fleming have discovered pencillin if his milk had not gone sour? Could Okonko have written this book if his shoelace had not come undone? The workings of God's mind are beyond the understanding of man, but be sure that all things are for the best, and those who weep shall laugh last in this most just of worlds. I have said so.

Together with recognition of my government came condemnation of the Kirikari invasion. Some nations – friends of the vile Wokari – claimed that I had struck first by

assassinating the vile Aziza, but the motion was carried and the Kirikari were called upon to withdraw.

The Kirikari did not withdraw. Despite the headlines in all our national newspapers, proclaiming our great victory over the Kirikari at the United Nations, the invaders remained in our borderlands, even setting up new borders and taking control of our rich mineral mines.

We appealed again to the United Nations, and again they called for withdrawal, but what shall it avail the bull to bellow if his horns be hung over the mantelpiece? Unto the strong shall be given what they take, and the meek shall inherit nothing.

Justice? Thinkest thou this world to be just? Nay, look about thee and see the starving poor, the dying sick, the innocent victims of man and Nature, and ask where justice is. The workings of Allah's mind are beyond the understanding of man, but be sure that they who laugh shall weep, and they who weep shall weep in this most unjust of worlds. I have said so.

It was around this time that I took a second wife. I mention the event only because it happened.

The United Nations could do nothing (I refer to the Kirikari invasion, not to my second marriage). They talked about talking about something called sanctions, but to sanction (derived from the Latin *sanctus*, meaning holly) means to give approval, for I had sanctioned my second marriage in the name of Allah be praised, though Jesus might not have sanctioned it, so I saw no comfort in the United Nations talk of talking about sanctions.

There was nothing that we could do either. Small forces were organized to steal across the new border at night and paint "Kirikari Go Home!" on walls and fences. This had little effect, and indeed signs appeared on our own side of the new border saying "Kirikari Welcome" and "Kirikari and Crudd spoken here". It appeared that the inflexion of troops had led to a trade boom in the villages, whose love of country was shamefully less than their love of money.

It is to the subject of money that we must now turn, though we shall have more to say later about the borderlands.

As Minister of Finance, I was in charge of money – a task which the ignorant might call a pleasure. But a pleasure it is not. Now hear the tale of the little demands and the great demands, and judge whether my task was an happy one.

From all corners of the land came bills, letters, and long-lost relatives. I had hundreds of unknown uncles, cousins, nephews, and the hundreds related to me were outswarmed by the thousands related to my wife (I speak of the time before my second marriage). Every cause was of heart-breaking life-and-deathness. The bills and letters were burned, but one

cannot burn relatives...Day after day there were long queues of them outside my fortress. For weeks I endured the siege, and then on September 8 – two days before the Day of Darkness – I gave orders that it must end. The people must go home and leave me in peace. No requests for money would be considered, let alone granted. No-one would get anything.

The order could not have been clearer, but the officer who delivered it returned with the news that no-one had left, and the queue had grown longer during the hour in which he had pleaded with them.

“Very well, then,” I said. “Take a detachment of twenty men, and shoot those who refuse to leave.”

A look of astonishment crossed his face. The ordinary mind is ever surprised by the dartings of genius. This officer had witnessed the problem himself, and yet he would never have hit upon the solution that came so easily to his leader.

“But sir,” he said, “they’re your relatives!”

“So they say,” I replied. “Besides, most of them are my wife’s.”

“You’re not serious about shooting them, sir, are you?”

“Soldier,” I said, “if you have a problem, you must solve it. If you fail to solve it, you will still have it.”

With simple minds one must speak simply. He left, shaking his head, but I called him back for one final instruction.

“I don’t want my wife to know about this.”

Let it be understood that the majority of these beggars were certainly no closer in blood to me than a duck-billed platitude, but let it also be understood that I know of no relative for whom I have the slightest concern. As for my wife’s relatives, those that I know are as the hippopotamus in the goldfish pond, and those that I do not know, I do not know.

Nevertheless, it became a source of grief to me that a favoured aunt of my wife’s died in the tragic events of September 8. I grieved not for the aunt, but for the fact that my wife came to know of it. For my wife’s wrath is something terrible to behold. In vain did I deny all knowledge of the incident, promising a full inquiry and the punishment of those responsible. She did not believe me. Even so doth the trust twixt man and wife dissolve when relatives interfere.

It was at about this time that I took a second wife. I may have mentioned this already.

Yet these were the little demands. And by as much as the little demands were great, by so much were the great demands greater. These were both internal and external. From within came the ministers, requiring money for health, housing, transport, the environment, agriculture and all such twiddle. Even Sanjay, the Minister of Education, reported that there were no books in the schools, and teachers had not been paid for months and were sending children home without any lessons. “We shall soon be a nation of ignorant buggers, sir,” he said.

The only ministry to make no demands was the amalgamated one of Information, Sport and Culture. This may have been due to the fact that the minister was dead.

Naturally I had given priority to the Ministry of Security, and even before September 10 my second priority had been the Ministry of Defence, for it behoves the nation both to secure and to defend its leader. I had therefore divided the budget for the refurbishing of my new home equally between Security and Defence. These priorities were correct. But now absolute priority had to be given to finding more money.

If the great internal demands were as a blow between the eyes, the great external demands were as a kick to the groin. For while the ministries asked for millions, the foreign creditors reached out for billions. We were paying them interest, and interest on the interest, and lenders were lending us loans to pay the interest on the loans to pay the interest on the loans. The more we borrowed, the more we owed, the more we owed, the more we paid, the more we paid, the more we borrowed and the more we owed. This, O beloved, is economics.

There was only one solution to our problem: more money. How were we to get it? General Macpherson had an uncle who was professor of economics at the university, and I summoned him to Okonko House (formerly the People’s Palace).

“Exports,” he said. “The crux of the matter is exports. We put prohibitive restrictions on imports, raise interest rates, reduce home consumption, shred public spending and the social services, and offer incentives to encourage a diversified export drive. With the consequent inflow of foreign currency, we can achieve national solvency and a sound economic framework. It’s simple.”

I was relieved to hear that it was simple. The incontinent and extravagant General Aziza would never have thought of calling in an expert like Macpherson’s uncle. When he had gone, I swiftly wrote a few notes and then summoned the ministers and explained my plan for saving the economy:

“Exports,” I said. “It’s simple. Are there any questions?”

“What are we going to export?” asked the Minister for Trade and Industry.

“I should have thought you were the man to answer that!” I responded, and laughed heartily. He did not seem to see the joke.

“Our main export,” he said, “is minerals from the Land of the Crudd. And we’ve lost those.”

“I know we’ve lost those,” I snapped. (This meeting took place some time after September 10.) I found his negative attitude annoying. Next I turned to the Minister of Food and Agriculture, who weighed twenty-two stone.

“What can you offer us for export?” I asked.

“Dates,” he said. “We’ve got too many of them here.”

“Good,” I said. “Then let us capture the world market in dates.”

“What world market?” he asked. “Nobody wants our dates. That’s why we’ve got too many of them.”

“Well perhaps your contribution,” I snapped, recalling a phrase of the professor’s, “should be to reduce home consummation. By at least ten stone!”

This remark was greeted by the laughter I had expected from my previous merry quip, although the Minister of Food and Agriculture annoyingly created an abrupt silence by threatening to duff up the Minister of Energy, who sat slumped in the chair next to him.

Despite my ability to relax tension by means of my sparkling wit, the negative attitude persisted. For instance, when it was suggested that the social services be cut, the Minister of Health and Social Services asked:

“What social services?”

Some members of the cupboard laughed, but I did not. My plan for economic recovery was in ruins, and I was now in no mood for these so-called “merry quips”.

My instincts were to have these ministers shot, but although they were now ministers, they were also generals, having been promoted from colonels after we had shot the generals. If I were to have *them* shot, I would need the co-operation of the colonels, who had been promoted from majors after we had promoted the colonels after we had shot the generals. The shooting of these generals would therefore tendermount to another coup. Was it worth the hassle? Indeed, might it not end up with the colonels who had been promoted from majors not only shooting the generals who had been promoted from colonels, but also and even and God and Allah forbid shooting their beloved leader? Such things are possible. Remember the terrible fate of General Aziza.

I decided to resist my instincts.

“Gentlemen,” I said jovially, “let there be no division between us. Some leaders would have you shot for your negatives, but let us remain friends. I shall find another solution.”

I ended the meeting, and at once sent for Macpherson's uncle.

"This plan of yours won't work," I said. "We have nothing to export."

"In that case," said the professor of economics, "you are up the creek."

There is a limit to that which a man may endure. Load him with sand, and one grain will break his back. Pour water upon him, and one drop will drown him. Bonk him, and one bonk will bury him. I have the patience of the great Job, yet I am a man, and as a man I have a threshold. Had I not placed faith in the knowledge of an expert, a scholar, a university professor, cleverest of the clever, hoitiest of the toitiest? And was this the response to my faith? Come to me, O thou seeker after truth, saith the high and mighty, and I shall reward thee with this jewel of wisdom, this fruit plucked veritably from the Tree of Knowledge, this orgasmal climax to my humping and pumping: THOU ART UP THE CREEK.

Is there a ruler in the world who could govern his wrath at such a response? Nay verily I say unto you, the miracle is that I was as moderate in my reaction as I was. But one bullet did I fire into the professor's heart, and with that single shot did purge my passion. A tyrant would have killed him ten times over, but I am an humane man, and only once did I kill him. And then did I repent me, such is the kindness of my soul. I said sorry. For was not this Macpherson's uncle?

Yet this very humaneness and kindness were almost to bring apostrophe to our nation. Only the swiftness of my thought and the promptness of my action were able to prevent true tragedy.

15

More treachery – more unfortunate deaths

How shall a man know his fellow man? Though he live close to him, yet shall there ever be a distance between that which is known and that which is unknown. For that which is known is known only at cost of that which is unknown, and that which is unknown shall remain unknown until it be known.

I speak of Macpherson. This major was promoted by me to colonel, and from colonel to general, and unto him did I entrust the most sacred of all tasks: to guard my safety. Him it was that I did make Minister of Security, him it was that I did charge with purging the civil service, and even him did I send to speak in my behalf at the United Nations. Was ever man so enriched and ennobled as Macpherson was by me?

Yet mark, O shudderer, how this most favoured of all my subjects did reward me for my favours. At the sound of the single shot with which I unfortunately punished his unworthy uncle, Macpherson and two security guards bounded into the room. They found the uncle dead upon the floor.

“What happened, sir?” asked Macpherson.

I told him, and expressed my deepest sympathy for his loss. But although I was prepared for his grief, little did I expect his next words:

“This is murder!” he said.

Still with patience and kindness I did take him by the arm, for even then I saw him as a friend.

“Moderate your language, Macpherson,” I said. “Your uncle betrayed the faith that I had in him. If a man betrays his leader, he betrays his country. I grieve for him as a fellow human, I mourn for him as the uncle of a friend, but justly I did punish him for his treason.”

“You killed him for saying you were up the creek!” cried Macpherson, in tones that jangled like the voice of my first wife.

He had not listened to the truth. He laid blame upon me, his beloved leader and benefactor, for executing a traitor! And yet – how did I do it? – I reigned the raging stallion and once more sweetly, reasonably explained it all to him:

“Your uncle,” I said, “was a professor of economics. I asked him to save our country’s economy, which is to ask a singer to sing, Macpherson, a bird to fly, a bee to make honey. Yet he refused. He refused, Macpherson, to save his country in need. This was a betrayal, and the punishment for treason is death. ‘Twas ever so. I weep for him, Macpherson, O Macpherson, I weep for him. But it is better that I should weep than that I should have my country weeping.”

It was a speech to melt a heart of ice. I almost wept myself to hear it. And yet I could tell at once from Macpherson’s eyes that he was not moved. In those eyes I read rejection, nay, rebellion. For I do have the gift to see through a man’s eyes into his heart, and Macpherson’s heart had turned black. In that one moment, I saw not only the rebellion of the present, but also that of the future. This man, whom I had privileged as a brother, could never be trusted again.

Now think of the power I had given to him. Macpherson controlled my safety. His family were in high positions throughout the civil service. With a word he could destroy my security together with that of the whole country. To have such a man as an enemy is to open the door to the tiger.

A leader’s task is to lead. Personal considerations must never outweigh those of the nation. But how shall I describe the pain, the languish, the sacrifice of the next moment?

I shot him. Like his uncle, he fell with a bullet through the heart. But even then the danger was not past, for in the room with us were two security guards, appointed by Macpherson, commanded by Macpherson, and who knows how loyal to Macpherson? They had guns in their hands. I did not wait to ask them whether or not they would use them. I gave them no chance. I am, Allah be praised, an hotshot as swift and deadly as Gary Copper. The two guards fell, as their master had done, although one lay groaning until I fired a second bullet into him.

The gunfire brought more guards and servants running to the scene, and soon the room was filled with people gazing in horror at the four bodies bleeding upon my specially imported Persian carpet.

“Remove these bodies,” I ordered. “And clean the carpet.”

“What happened?”

The whispered question came from all sides.

“There has been an attempt upon my life,” I said calmly. “Macpherson, whom I loved as a brother, plotted with his uncle and these two guards to assassinate me. The guards, as you can see, still have their guns in their assassinary hands. But by the grace of God and Allah I am swifter on the draw than Gary Copper and have lived to tell the tale.”

And still today the tale is told of how Okonko beat four assassins to the draw. In the film of my life I had hoped that my younger self would be played by one of the great Hollywood stars such as the Clint, or John Whine, or Gary Copper himself, but not one of them has responded to my invitation. I know not why.

The media were informed at once of the attempted coup, and it was amusing to see their versions of the story. It appeared that the coup had been planned weeks in advance, that General Macpherson had been the ring-leader, and that he had used his uncle to break his own security barriers (whatever that meant). At the next meeting of my cupboard, I confirmed this account, and my ministers congratulated me on my miraculous escape.

The effects of the attempted coup were far-reaching. All Macpherson’s relatives had to be rooted and booted from office. He had filtered them everywhere, and the flushing process was to take many weeks. I set up a new security branch to investigate all members of the security force, and in due course this procedure was extended to cover the civil service and all public offices. We were searching for connections not only with Macpherson but also with Aziza, the Crudd, the Kirikari, and any other body hostile to our beloved leader (me). This secret unit was called the Branch for Undercover Monitoring, and they were given special powers of investigation, arrest and execution. Some ignorant historians have compared them to the secret police of many teetotal states, but there was no comparison. The BUM was essential to the wellbeing of the state (inexcrably linked to the wellbeing of its leader), and no-one was ever arrested or killed without good cause. My agents were not enemies of freedom; they were its defenders.

But you are bewildered. We jerk around like limbs on electrolux. No sooner have the Kirikari invaded the borderlands than you are thrust into the maze of economics, plunged headlong into an attempt upon my life, and from thence must study the precautions I took to protect myself and my country. You cannot keep pace. In as much as the atom doth harbour the universe, so doth Okonko encompass all history, and though I dart as swift as the dragon-fly, yet shall ye come with me on my flight and shall see what I see as I see it. Fear not, for the tangles shall be unravelled, and all questions answered.

16

I solve the economic crisis – I amaze foreign creditors

The late professor of economics had found no solution to the problems facing our country. He had cried: “Export! Export!” and when it was discovered that we had nothing to export, he did give up the ghost. Yet I have learned that every building hath more than one wall, the camel doth walk on four legs, and a cat can drink from a puddle.

Why do we put our faith in experts? Doth not the one say big and the other little, each with equal authority? Show me two experts, and I will show you two paths off a cliff. Yet we listen and believe, in awe of letters, titles and smugness. O great one, let me see the light beyond the light, and let me not be led astray by the expert’s confidence and gobbledy-cock.

I, Okonko, orphaned, neglected, despised and rejected, most primitively educated, most savagely trained, and toughened by that sharpest of leather straps, that most tuneful thong of thongs, experience – I, Okonko, did find the path that the experts had sought in vain. For the prophet seeth by instinct what the expert misseth by thought. Thus hath it ever been since the first cowpat did lie in wait for the first foot.

Our country cried out for money. Our creditors sucked us dry, and all our ministries save that of Security and Defence did groan from the hollowness of their purses. Should a leader see his people hunger for bread while foreign vultures grow fat on the people’s bakings? Nay, let the people eat, and let the vultures fly. I ordered that all loan repayments should cease. And for the filling of hollow purses did order the printing of more money. Where a thousand notes did eke twixt ten thousand hands, I did print ten thousand notes, that every hand should have one. Thus did Okonko sow riches for poverty and fair doses for all.

Why had the experts, the professors, the Macpherson’s uncles not followed this path of enlightenment? Ask the peacock why he hides behind his tail.

At once all wages were paid, all services funded, and all complainings stilled. Even the legless beggar did dance for joy. Within a twinkle the shops had sold their stocks, the shopkeepers were happy, and the customers were happy. The cry was for more goods, and the factories redoubled production, and the factory workers were happy, and the

factory owners were happy. Since there were not enough goods to meet demand, the prices of the available goods did rise, giving yet more happiness to the factory owners. And since the prices of food did rise equally, the farmers and fruiterers, butchers and bakers did also profit greatly. The country rejoiced. Happy times were here again.

The foreigner, however, did sulk, for he missed his easy money. He stood dismayed as a naked man beneath a cut-off shower. And so he sent his vassals to see me – a gaggle of grey suits, sweating beneath the weight of their collars, ties and responsibilities.

“You can’t do this, old boy,” they whined. “It’s not the done thing. Play the game, old chap.”

Once, on the sports fields of St Jerome’s, I was given out leg before wicket when the ball was clearly missing leg stump. I refused to leave the field. And the umpire had said: “You can’t do this, old boy. It’s not the done thing. Play the game, old chap.” I had stayed. When truth, justice and my innings are at stake, I will not budge.

I let them moan on about the done and the not done, and then I addressed them, and my words were for all the oppressed nations of the earth. For in me the poor did find their spokesman, and I was not afraid.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “your banks and governments did lend us money, and lent us more money to repay the loan, and lent us more money to repay the loan lent us to repay the loan, and lent us more money to repay the loan lent us to repay the loan lent us to repay the loan, and all the while did interest recruit on the loan, and on the loan to repay the loan, and on the loan to repay the loan to repay the loan. Thus even as the boa-constructor doth enfold the young deer, so have you strangled us within your coils until our money-breath is almost stopped. But we are not dead. We slither from your coils, and we bound into the free market with our antlers held high.”

They looked at me with comical expressions of incruddulity.

“Look here,” they said, “what is borrowed has to be paid back. That is the rule of the game.”

“I fart upon your rule,” I said. “If the ball is missing leg stump, I cannot be lbw.”

Once again they were mystified. Experts, you see. Speak plainly to them, and they are founded dumb.

Suddenly they changed their approach.

“Now look here, old boy,” they said. “If you’re going through a bad patch, we can come to some arrangement. We can ease the terms, prolong the period of repayment, agree temporary deferment.”

“No,” I said.

“What do you mean, no?”

“It is a word of one syllabub,” I informed them, “but if you prefer it, I can say that my response to your proposal is negative.”

I laughed, but they could not follow the subtlety of my humour.

“What you don’t seem to understand,” they said, “is that this policy will ruin your country.”

“What you don’t seem to understand,” I said, matching them word for word, “is that this policy will save my country.”

“Let us spell it out for you,” they said.

“Spell it out for me,” I said.

“If you don’t pay your debts, no country will ever lend you money again.”

They looked at me as if they had just opened the gates to Paradise. And they waited for my gasp of wonderment.

“What debts?” I asked.

And it was they who gasped.

“If a man dieth,” I said, “and I do take his house and his garden, must I take his wife and sons as well?”

They gazed once more with the open mouth of non-understanding.

“When thou dost suck the sweet flesh of the peach, must thou also swallow its stone? O ye of little understanding, know that the debts occurred by this country were made under the government of General Aziza, and General Aziza now doth sleep the sleep of the unawakable. His ministers do sleep with him. They were traitors all, as has been proved by my stating it is so. Our country will not pay the debts of traitors.”

“This is pure madness!” they cried. “Without foreign investment your country will curl up and die. And if you renege on your debts, no-one will invest a cent.”

“And if I pay Aziza’s debts,” I retorted, “there will be no country to invest in.”

They could not answer. But I had not finished with them, for I had them on the hip and they did not know it.

“There is,” I said, “but one hope for those who lent money to the foul traitor.”

“What’s that?” they cried.

“That Okonko will rebuild his country, and bring it to such prosperity that even Aziza’s debts may be paid.”

“And how do you propose to do that?” they asked.

I told them. They listened in a silence of wonderment, as if I had just opened the gates to Paradise.

“Supposing you fail?” they asked.

“I shall not fail,” I said. “And consider the alternative. Without this, you will lose everything.”

“The risk is great,” they said.

“Then take no risk,” I said. “And depart with Aziza’s signature in your wallets.”

“Your plan is immoral,” they said.

“Then take your morality and your losses with you,” I said.

“We cannot condone what you propose,” they said.

“Of course not,” I said. “But the bank will not stand in the way of the river.”

My triumph was such that I longed to proclaim it, but I could not. The men in grey suits were as bound to secrecy as I was. They had come to me proudly and roaringly, with teeth and claws bared for the kill. They left furtively and slinkily, whilst Okonko stood with outstretched arm, pointing the way that they must go.

And yet I had not told them even the half.

17

Bloody-mindedness – return to the borderlands

Trouble has as many heads as the hydrogen. With one bold stroke of the printing machine I had ended the shortage of money, paid the unpaid, industrialized industry, and thus saved the economy. But with the passing of time and the scarcity of goods and the rising of prices, there came demands for higher wages to pay the rising prices, and the higher wages led to more rising prices, and thence to more higher wages and to the need to print

more money... We were trapped in what economists do call “inflation” but what I do call “bloody-mindedness”, for Fate had clearly conspired to create these new problems in order to prevent my people from enjoying my ingenious solution.

Fortunately, I was not badly affected by the bloody-mindedness. By awarding myself increases in salary as prices rose, I could afford whatever was needed for me and my family. I also made provision for the ministers, security forces (public and secret), and the army. The health and wealth of a country depend on the wellbeing of those who govern and protect it. There were never any complaints from these, the pillars of my society.

But the common man has a short memory. Swiftly he forgot the grim days in which pockets had been empty. In his ingratitude he even complained now at the amount of money he had. People who in the past had barely had a coin were now able to carry sacks of banknotes through the streets. If the price of a loaf was 150,000 sin, there should have been joy at the possession of 150,000 sin, not complaints at the absence of bread and the weight of sin.

I made regular broadcasts, explaining to the people that these were difficult times. Perhaps they had already realized this. By means of statistics I was able to prove to them that they were better off now than they had ever been, but that the government was striving ceaselessly to maintain the improvement in living standards. General Aziza, I said, had totally destroyed the country’s economy, and it would take time to rebuild – time, patience, effort, and sacrifice. Above all, sacrifice.

I know that people looked forward to these speeches, and were inspired by them, much as the believer is uplifted by the words of the good preacher. But although the majority never wavered in their faith, there were some who sowed seeds of discontent. These I noticed when I would drive, with heavily armoured protection, from my home to the broadcasting studios. Every day I would be confronted with banners demanding economic reform, help for the needy, free elections, and even – one shudders! – the resignation of Okonko. I could not, of course, permit the moral of my people to be thus undermined, and reluctantly – for I am the champion of free speech – I had such riff-raffes cleared from the street. I had long since impressed on the media the need always to lift the hearts of the people by stressing the fine achievements of the government and of their leader. With such measures I eased our nation through the times of crisis, knowing – as they did not – that we were moving ever closer to triumph.

How was this triumph to be brought about? There were many strands to the web I wove, but at the heart lay a secret building in the remote north of our country, where I had employed some of the brainiest brains that borrowed dollars could lure. They worked together and progressed together in a spirit of true international cooperation, and the company they worked for was called IRAKON PESTICIDES.

It was around this time that I took a third wife. I mention the event only because it happened.

Meanwhile, you will be wondering what steps were taken over the Kirikari invasion of our borderlands. Condemned by part of the whole world, the Kirikari had nevertheless settled on our territory, aided and bedded by the treacherous Crudd. And part of the whole world had watched them do it and left them to it. The precious minerals that had once been transported inland to us were now carried across the river to Kirikari. In vain did we protest that this was stolen property, and in vain did we appeal over and over again to the United Nations to bash up the Kirikari on our behalf. Our new ambassador to the United Nations – a relative of my third wife’s – lodged a strong protest, and was advised to “forget it, buddy”. But we did not forget it.

Let us now salmon-leap to the thirty-third birthday of President Okonko. Have I not mentioned to you that this was the title my fellow ministers had bestowed on me? It matters little. What is a title but a title? I am not an ambitious man. And yet I was pleased, for it has a pleasant sound that is more presidential than “General”, and it sets its bearer on a level with other great presidents of the world. General Okonko befitted the warrior, but President Okonko was more grey-suited to the statesman. That was why I had suggested it.

Upon my thirty-third birthday was launched the historic attack that will stand for ever as our country’s finest hour, alongside the other finest hours such as my seizure of power on August 10.

18

Victory over the Kirikari

For twenty-four hours preceding my birthday the lorries transported their loads from IRAKON PESTICIDES to the airbase at Sinaloco. Word was given out that they did contain fireworks to celebrate our glorious leader’s triple eleven. This is called centrifuge. Meanwhile, our entire army moved eastwards. Before they left, they watched a video of the birthday boy, and the same video was played to the gallant pilots of our air force. I should have liked to address them in person, but with so many weapons in so many hands, I was persuaded (by myself) to put my own safety before all other considerations.

My message to them was as follows: “Men of the army, men of the air force, this is your President speaking. Now hear me: we shall not flag or fail. We shall fight the Kirikari, we shall fight on seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our land, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender. I, President Okonko, have spoken.”

It was one of the most inspiring speeches ever made. And I was proud to have made it.

At 6 am on April 2 (my birthday), the planes took off, and the army began the final phase of its march. I was still in bed at the time, celebrating with my third wife.

When the planes reached the borderlands, they discharged their poisoned gas over every hector of land on our side of the Wamboko. For good measure they shelled our villages as well, for had not the inhabitants welcomed the invaders? But the pilots kept clear of the Kirikari side of the river, for Okonko had plans for the thither Land of the Crudd. I wanted no Kirikari or Crudd to die over there. When the deadly air attack ceased, our own masked soldiers marched in to kill off the remaining Kirikari soldiers and shoot the villagers (after enjoying their ration of rape), and all did perish in the houses and in the streets and in the fields in a veritable Armygeddon.

The Crudd and Kirikari on the other side of the river would have witnessed the attack and wondered. They would have been thankful to Allah and the Lord Jesus Christ that our planes had stayed away from them. Yet even as they wondered and offered up their prayers of thanks, our soldiers did cross the Wamboko in the boats they had transported, and did fall upon the unguarded Kirikari borderland. For what need had they to guard the border when their battalions were on *our* side of the river? There was no resistance. As far towards the east of Kirikari did our army march as the Kirikari had marched westward into our own beloved country, and all the land was ours, and all the rich mines and fertile fields of this, the Land of the Crudd.

Swiftly our soldiers set up a border, just as the Kirikari had done during their invasion, but mark now the cunning of Okonko the General. For did not the Kirikari boast an army of overwhelming power, and an air force that could blast our planes from the sky and our men from the land? How then could we hold this newly conquered territory? I will tell thee. By the strategy of the hostage. We took the Crudd and the Kirikari, men, women and children, and we did place them at the new borders, in our camps, tied to stakes, for ever at the mercy of our guns, and for ever exposed to the firepower of the Kirikari if they should seek to attack us. He who would kill our soldiers would thus kill his own kiss and kin.

Even so did Okonko win back what he had lost, and double his winnings, and there was dancing in the streets of Sinaloco that night. It was, after all, our great leader's birthday.

19

Wokari and the United Nations – riches – the story of Job – Okonko-worship – a gap – the gap is filled

Did he expect to be taken seriously, or was it a joke? If it was not a joke, it was the action of a fool, or perhaps even a madman. President Wokari, stealer of women, stealer of land, stealer of precious minerals, complained to the United Nations! The bully, with smacked botty, now went to the headmaster to complain that he had been bullied. What did he say to the massed ears? That he had been kicked out of the territory that he had stolen, and had been punished for his crime? Not Wokari. He accused us of mass murder. We had, he

said, gassed his people as well as our own. Furthermore, he said, we had taken his people hostage, and were using them as a shield to prevent him from recapturing his land. HIS land! Both these actions, he claimed, were a crime against international law.

Our representative at the United Nations pointed out that the Kirikari had wiped out a complete battalion of our soldiers when invading the Land of the Crudd, had occupied our side of the river, had corrupted our villagers, stolen our minerals, and been condemned by part of the whole world. Had they not broken international law?

Then came the fuddy-duddies: two wrongs didn't make a right, they said. The Kirikari had been naughty boys, they said, but we had been even naughtier, because killing people with gas, they said, was nastier than killing them with nice ordinary bullets. The Kirikari, they said, had behaved very badly in taking our land, but our behaviour was absolutely disgraceful because taking people's land *and* using them as hostages was not the done thing. Yes, they said, we could keep the land that was really ours, but no, they said, we couldn't keep the land that belonged to the Kirikari. What we must do, they said, is shake hands and be friends again, each staying on our side of the Wamboko, and living in peace and harmony happily ever after.

The Kirikari of course agreed. If we would withdraw from their land, they said, and leave their people alone, they would stay away from our land and leave our people alone, cross their hearts and hope to die. They had never wanted to be bad friends with us, and had only lost their tempers a little bit because we had sent a hit squad to assassinate the President's brother-in-law. We should let bygones be bygones, let water flow under the bridge, what's done is done, forget the past, now is the hour, don't cry over spilt milk, never look back, and please be nice to us now that we're losing.

Our ambassador gave them the perfect answer:

"Over your dead body!"

In the meantime, when the gas had dispersed, our own workers moved into the Land of the Crudd on both sides of the river. They set in motion the wheels and belts and trucks of our great mines, but we placed Crudd and Kirikari hostages on both sides, as a precaution against attack from the air. And so the minerals which had flowed eastwards into the coffers of the Kirikari now flowed westwards again, in ever increasing quantities, bringing with them the sweet music of the accumulating dollar.

You will think that now Okonko will be satisfied. He will use this wealth to restock the shelves, to repay foreign debts, to reform the currency. But Okonko sees far, and he has the grey-suited fine nancies bowing and scraping like the fiddlers they are. Use money to make money. My own personal money, for instance, went into high interest accounts dotted around Europe, with special favours to the little country of Yodel, which builds mountains round all its banks. But my country's money I used to create the *means* to create money. Of this I shall speak more anon.

But now let us suck our cheeks and smack our gobs at the other fruits of victory. Knowest thou, O beloved, the story of Job? Mightily miserable was he, and sank to the very depths where he was swallowed by a whale, but wondrously he did swim up again and was rewarded with thousands of sheep, camels and children. So it was with us. The Kirikari had pushed us down, and swallowed us up, but Okonko had raised us again and we did flourish.

Posters of President-General Okonko did cover walls, his photo adorned every home, and in front of Okonko House rose a twice-lifesize statue of the great leader, dressed in military uniform, his hand resting on his gun, his medals resting on his chest. For if the President did guard his people's spirit, it was the General who guarded their bodies and who had led the army and air force to this glorious victory. I unveiled the statue myself, just as I had myself ensured that no family, shop or factory would be without a picture of their hero. A leader must not be remote from his people. He must be present to them at all times.

And yet for all the joy and celebration, and the public holiday proclaimed for every April 2 thereafter (to be known as Leader's Day), I was conscious of a gap, a what-have-I-left-behind, or a what-have-I-forgotten-to-do? And the name of the gap was 'legitimacy'.

By now I was already a major figure in world politics. Foreign newspapers and the United Nations referred respectfully to me as President or General Okonko. My people loved me, for the posters, photos, statues and daily praise from our national media showed nothing but warm affection. But what shall it avail the scholar to pass his examinations if he possess not a certificate? How shall the climber prove arrival at the summit if he stick not his flag in the snow? Legitimacy was my lack.

I announced that there would be free elections. At once the timid squealed. Supposing we were voted out of office? Was this a time for risk? Should we not leave all's well to end well? I encouraged the media also to question my decision. I told them to ask what would happen to our beloved country if our beloved President were defeated. They forecast chaos. They pleaded with me to reverse my announcement, but I remained a diamond. The people must decide, I said. A government, I said, can only govern if it has the backing of the governed. I had raised my country from the dust and set it on the path to prosperity, but I had promised on the day of my power-taking that I would hold free elections, and Okonko is a man of his word. The people trusted me. Should I betray their trust?

For weeks the excitement mounted. I toured the country in my armoured car, speaking to the cheering crowds from behind bulletproof screens, inspiring them with visions of future glory under my charismatic leadership. I reminded them of how they had suffered under General Aziza, whose corruption and incontinence had led to the problems I and I alone could solve. I spoke of the additional hardships caused by the Kirikari invasion. And humbly, modestly, yet in full detail I recalled the triumph of April 2, when I had driven the invader away with his tail between his legs. Now, I told them, wealth was flowing back into our country. Was this, I asked, a time for risk? For change? For the

unknown to replace the known, trusted and loved? Did they wish to turn back into the tunnel now that they were about to enter the light?

I have spoken already about the strange shortness of human memory. Who can explain why – despite my hatred of the classical education – I have retained the origin of the word ‘democracy’? Perhaps Fred would argue that my political soul had selected this term and preserved it for later reference. ‘Democracy’ comes from the Latin, and it is a combination of ‘demo’, meaning demonstration, and ‘cracy’, the meaning of which I now forget. The aptness of the term was never so clear as when I was touring the country, for wherever I went, I encountered demonstrations that confirmed my faith in democracy. If, as I suspect, there is a connection between ‘cracy’ and ‘crazy’, I may say that the inventor of the term (Pluto comes to mind) must have seen just such crowds as those that greeted me. They were enthusiastic to the point of wildness, and it was as well that I always sent ahead platoons of soldiers to bring them from their homes and control them in the places of assembly.

As for the election itself, it was a success such as no politician would ever dare dream of. My party – the People’s Party – received 100% of the votes, and I as President achieved the same figure. This was perhaps inevitable, since my popularity was so great that there was no opposition. When a President stands for the good of his country, would it not be treason to oppose him? Also I had made it clear that if democracy was to work, all voters must vote. To ensure that none of our people were deprived of their democratic right, and that none of them neglected it, I established a system of marking ballot papers with the name of the voter. It was a simple but effective method of control.

How is this success to be explained? Let me say at once that there was no question – as some foreign media suggested – that our elections were “rigid” (a technical term, meaning fixed). The ballot papers were open for inspection, and a cross is a cross, a name is a name. As for force, that was impossible. My soldiers were there at all times to protect the voters against any interference. And yet I do understand the septic fictions of the foreign reporters, since no president or prime minister of their countries had ever achieved a 100% endearment of their rule. Shall we say that Allah entered into the minds and hearts of my people, and Jesus guided their fingers to form the cross? Let us say so, and let us say that Okonko did enjoy an unanimity of worship such as God himself might envy upon this earth.

The people, then, had given me legitimacy. Now I could act in their name, and whatever came to pass, they could never claim that they had not asked for it.

20

Wise spending – problems of the Kirikari – they blame me – an unfortunate death – an unfortunate sequel – the lunatic Joshua Wokari

I have told you that I used my country's money to create the means to create money, and you did furrow your brow as though beriddled. Didst imagine I built a printing press? I do but joke. Let me explain.

He who would pick wax from his ear needeth a long fingernail. Give us the tools, saith Okonko, and we will finish the job. I went to the market-place and did buy:

Fifty fighter planes

Two hundred tanks

Two hundred and fifty thousand soldiers.

But more I did besides. The muscles of the General were matched by the brains of the President. Already the finest chemists were at work at IRAKON PESTICIDES. Now it was time for our country to branch into other sciences, and so from all over the world there came to our new, top secret, carefully hidden energy research station a team of the finest physicists. The organization they worked for was called PHYSICS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES.

The world took note of Okonko's shopping spree. What were all the planes, tanks and soldiers for? The Kirikari asked this question several times at the United Nations.

I enjoyed the worldly attention, and readily gave interviews. "Our planes, tanks and soldiers," I would say, "are for peaceful purposes. No-one need fear us except those who wish us ill. We are not an hostile nation. We are an harmless nation. But we must defend ourselves."

Meanwhile, the Kirikari had other problems. They were going through an economic crisis. This was scarcely surprising when they were led by the incontinent fool Wokari. I do not know the details of his mistakes, but his policies resulted in falling exports, unemployment, inflation, shortages, poverty, suffering, hardship, murder, suicide...his country was in chaos. Yet he accepted no responsibility. Instead he sought to shift the blame, as the buttock shifteth from the hard seat. And on to whom did he load his guilt? Okonko! It was Okonko, he said, who had invaded the Land of the Crudd, stolen their precious minerals and cut off the source of their wealth. And it was Okonko who was holding his people hostage against the will of the United Nations. I laughed.

But it hath ever been so since Eve with her mouth full of apple did point her finger at the serpent. For such people cannot live with their guilt, but needs must find for themselves an escaping goat. Shamelessly he went on giving interviews and making daily speeches to his people, repeating the lies as if repetition would make them true. And although I am a patient man, I ceased to laugh. There is a time to laugh, and there is a time to put a socket in it. And so I sent in the hit squad.

This fine, upright body of men had been selected by me very early in my reign to perform especially important tasks. You will, perhaps, recall the assassination of General Aziza. This was done – most tactfully – by the hit squad. They had performed similar missions elsewhere, diplomatically silencing critics who might damage our country's reputation. I remember, for instance, an ex-employee of a Yodel bank who sent me details of my

many accounts, and thought that others might be interested too. He broke his neck in a skiing accident. Another tragic incident that comes to mind involved the young woman reporter and male photographer who had rung the doorbell and caught me underwears. Their car collided head-on with a tank that had accidentally gone the wrong way down a one-way street. It was a fate not unlike that of my poor uncle Abu Ben Okonko. There were many such heart-rending stories during the preparations for our historic election, but the details are unimportant. The hit squad was my crime de la crime.

President Imran Wokari did much of his travelling by helicopter. It was an affection typical of the man. Contrast my own down-to-earth motorcades through the cheering crowds. Perhaps Wokari was afraid to let his people see him. Be that as it may, his helicoptering brought about, quite literally, his downfall. He was travelling from one folly to another when, by some strange mechanical process, the helicopter went in one direction and the rotor blades went in another. Both eventually went in the same direction – namely, downwards – after which President Imran Wokari went in several different directions at once.

With a delightful sense of irony, I sent a bucket of flowers to his funeral. The card was inscribed with two words: *carpe diem*.

His death added to the chaos and confusion in Kirikari. Joshua Wokari, his brother, was made acting president and at once, in the family tradition, proceeded to blame me for his brother's death. How he thought that I, far away in Sinaloco, could have tampered with Imran's rotor blades I cannot imagine. In response to his accusation, I pointed out that nobody had more to gain from Imran's death than himself, Joshua, sine everybody knew that it was his ambition to become president.

There was, however, an unfortunate sequel to these events. One of the hit squad had a mistress in Haputkari (capital of Kirikari). It is a biological fact that able-bodied men are drawn to willing-bodied women, but why this able-bodied man had to practise his ability on a Kirikari body is a mystery. Couldn't he have waited till he got back home? But the fault lay not in the exercise of the especially able part of his able body. If a man is on to something, I would be the last to tell him to get off. No, his fault lay in the top half of his body – namely, the mouth, for even as he wiggle-waggled down below, he did blab of the sacred secret that he had come to Haputkari for purposes other than a wiggle-waggle.

There is a passage in the Bible, or Shakespeare, or last year's calendar, that says something about doing good quietly. Hafeez Popoola – the able-bodied mouth – should have done his good in silence, and left my good in the churned field where it belonged. Instead, his whore ran to the headmaster, and once more the cane of suspicion was raised to strike at my innocent self.

I pointed out that the word of a Kirikari whore was as trustable as the word of a Kirikari politician, and that the only witness who could support or deny her story – Hafeez Popoola himself – had, on his return to his homeland – met with a tragic accident

involving a tank. Her allegations, I said, were untrue, and I suggested that perhaps Joshua Wokari himself was paying her for...I chose the term carefully...her services.

But worse was to follow. If Imran Wokari was a fool, Joshua Wokari was a madman. In his madness, though, lay a cunning which I, as a master of strategy, could plump to its darkest depths. I have spoken already of the Kirikaris' problems, their economic and social chaos, and I have told how the fool Imran sought to lay the blame on me. One may say that he was punished for his lies by his death, which shows that this is indeed the most just of worlds. However, his headlong plunge to earth did not solve his country's problems. A life insurance of a thousand million dollars might have done it, but he had no such foresight. Joshua therefore inherited Imran's mighty mess, just as I had inherited the mighty mess of General Aziza. But whereas I could brand Aziza as the villainous cause, Joshua had to say what a good chap Imran had been.

Now follow the strategy. What can a leader do if his country is in a mighty mess, he can't blame the previous leader, and he has no policy for unmessing? There is but one answer: he must go to war. And so the lunatic Joshua declared war on us. Except that he did not declare it, for that would have been too honourable. Instead, like the sneaky thief his brother – whose unfortunate death I now began to mourn – he *made* war on us, without warning, not even counting up to an hundred. We were not prepared. Had he waited but another three months, I would have been able to invade Kirikari as I had planned, and subject it utterly. Now, caught by surprise, we were suddenly fighting for our own survival.

21

A cowardly attack – I defy the lunatic – the lunatic defies me

O what a blessing is foresight. He that locketh the door shall not be caught sitting. Soon after Mensah Qadir's murderous attempt to murder me, I had built a massive shelter underneath Okonko House – bulletproof, bombproof, gasproof, and assassinproof. It was now my custom to sleep there every night, behind the concrete walls and steel doors. It was the least I could do to save my country from losing me.

When the treacherous madman Joshua Wokari sent his planes to bomb me, little did he know that I had already defeated his plan. And terror would have struck his heart at the news that out of the smoking rubble, which no mortal man could have survived, Okonko and his wives and children did step unharmed. Thus was born the legend of Okonko's Miracle, for the people knew nothing of my deep shelter, and they supposed that God had reached down out of Heaven to hold off destruction from his Chosen One (me).

But although the devil Joshua's main plan was thus foiled, he had struck at the very heart of my hopes and dreams. For the coward had also bombed my planes and my tanks and my barracks and them that dwelt therein, and against every man and machine that I had purchased, armed and trained for the holy destruction of Kirikari, he did send his winged horsemen of the Eucalyptus. Of my fifty new planes only fourteen remained flyable, and

of my two hundred new tanks only sixty-two remained tankable. The injured and the dead among my two hundred and fifty thousand new soldiers left but some hundred and eighty thousand capable of soldiering, including those with slings, crutches, and a reduced number of limbs and/or faculties.

Yet even this was not the end of our losses, for mark now the barbarism of the butcher. Into the Land of the Crudd he sent his army, firing and mortaring, shelling and slaughtering on both sides of the river. Thus did he kill his own people, whom we had kindly held as hostage in order precisely that he should *not* invade the land. What did it avail that we did use them to prevent butchery when the butcher did not hesitate to butcher his own people in order to butcher ours? With this barbaric strategy did he render nil and void the very principles of hostage taking.

Once more our country bled, our people groaned, and the enemy had broken our defences and stolen the source of our wealth. What unfeeling hatred drives a man to murder thus his neighbour? Doth not the Holy Bible tell us to love our neighbour? As doth also the Quran – provided our neighbour be a Muslim of the same inclining. And even if a man believeth not in the commandments of God who is Allah, should he not feel the bond that bindeth all humanity into one earthly family?

Joshua Wokari felt no bond, for Joshua Wokari had no feeling. He who can slaughter his own people held as hostage will slaughter all. It cannot be but that Joshua Wokari was mad, and since the Kirikari took him as their leader, thou canst draw thine own conclusions about the Kirikari. For I read and later saw on TV how they did cheer this lunatic in the streets, celebrating his so-called triumph, and jubilating as if Satan himself were dead.

It was a time of chaos and confusion, with much weeping and wailing, for the losses were grievous. But the leader who had stepped forth from the rubble of his home stepped forth also from the rubble of his country's dream. The people looked to me for sucker, and I did not fail them. Swiftly the shell of my home was refilled and refortified, and the security forces reformed and repositioned around me. It was a comfort to them all.

But now what steps could I take? If thine enemy doth kick thy backside, wilt turn and face him? For strategic reasons now I remained in my bunker, building up strength, and cleverly ensuring that if the enemy were to advance upon Sinaloco, or send in their planes again, they should not find President Okonko exposing himself.

The enemy did not advance, however. They buried their dead in the Land of the Crudd, and entrenched themselves on both sides of the river, cheekily using our very own trenches. As for their planes, they stayed away from us, no doubt fearing Okonko's vengeance. And then, when the moment was right, I struck. With devastating force and directness, I complained to the United Nations.

Under my personal direction, our ambassador (my third wife's cousin) called for worldwide condemnation of the Kirikari invasion. We accused them rightly of mass

murder, pointing out that they had killed not only our people but also their own. Furthermore, in killing hostages they had violated every known code relating to the treatment of hostages. Additionally, they had stolen our land, together with the precious minerals that were the source of our wealth, and had wilfully destroyed a lot of very important, very expensive equipment.

Our case was a powerful one, made even more potent by the absurdity of the Kirikari response. They argued that they had taken what was rightfully theirs, had tried very hard not to kill their own people, considered that *we* had broken the law by taking hostages, and had destroyed our planes and tanks before our planes and tanks could destroy *their* planes and tanks. They also accused me once again of planning the assassination of their late president.

Our ambassador answered all their arguments. The land was not rightfully theirs but rightfully ours, they should have tried harder not to kill their own people (and ours), we had taken hostages only to protect the land that was rightfully ours, and what on earth made them think we would use our planes and tanks to destroy them? Okonko himself had stated that they were for defensive purposes, we had paid a fortune for them, and the Kirikari should pay us compensation. As for planning the assassination of their late president, what could we have gained, knowing that the successor to the foolish Imran would be the mad Joshua?

Now it was the turn of the fuddy-duddies. We had both been naughty countries, they said, and the Kirikari should not have done this, we should not have done that, and we had all behaved absolutely disgracefully. We should make up, they said, shake hands and be friends again. And the Kirikari should withdraw to their side of the Wamboko, and leave us our side.

This suggestion seemed sensible to me, and I agreed at once. It is my experience that when there is a quarrel, the solution is often a compromise, and I was willing to make the sacrifice. We promised that if the Kirikari would leave our land and our people and our minerals alone, we would stay away from their land and their people. It was a fair arrangement.

The Kirikari ambassador, Samuel Wokari, son of the lunatic Joshua who had caused all this trouble in the first place, then showed the true colours of his country and his family with a reply too rude to repeat, although I shall repeat it for the sake of history: "Over your dead body!"

My bold initiative in referring the matter to the United Nations had therefore failed. From bitter experience I knew that they would cluck without a peck, for the major powers were not interested, and in any case when were the United Nations ever united? If we were to win back our pride, our land and our minerals, we must do it ourselves. How? Once more the people looked to me for inspiration.

At about this time I took a fourth wife. I mention this event only because it was important.

22

Romance – a world tour – the rudeness of nations – the strange ways of Allah

I am a romantic soul. I have already spoken of my admiration for women and the irresistible attraction I have for them. A beautiful woman is an honey-pot, the contents to be yummed spoonful by spoonful. But when thou hast enjoyed her beauty until it yum no more, then shalt thou seek a refill from the world's hive.

My fourth wife was a secretary in Okonko House. Her body stirred the very depths of my scrotum, and at such a time of national flattening it was fitting that the nights be spent in a spirit of erection. Yet did this most curved and luscious fruitiness resist my invitation to do nightwork, with such sayings as: God desireth to be gracious unto you; but they who follow their lusts desire that ye should turn aside from the truth with great deviation. She saw herself as modest, not inclined to whoredom or to entertaining lovers. And she said that man was created weak. All this twiddle was I forced to take in utmost seriousness until marriage us did unite.

However, of greater significance to the history of the world was her desire for a honeymoon. Now this coincided with a problem. The Kirikari had sought my death, had wrecked our planes, tanks and army, stolen our land and minerals, and said nasty things about us at the United Nations. It was a situation that demanded firm leadership and decisive action. But what could I do? When the spring hath dried up, whence cometh the water?

In my regular television broadcasts I denounced the Kirikari and their monstrous leader, creator of all our woes, and I urged our people to bear their present sufferings in the sure and certain knowledge that Okonko would lead them soon to an era of new prosperity. But my public confidence was a mask to my private cluelessness, until Fatima's craving for an honeymoon did light a fire both below and above.

Read the newspapers of the world, and you will see how leaders of nations entertain one another, paying "state visits" whose purpose is to establish good relations, set up agreements, and have a good time. With the eyes of the world now weeping for our raped country, was it not the moment for the great leader to go touring, for the living legend to be made flesh, for establishing good relations, setting up agreements, and bedding down with the roundly gifted Fatima in state apartments and Hilton hotels?

Among the many advantages of this scheme was the fact that it would get me out of the country in a manner seeming most positive. The people and my ministers could only applaud my initiative in gathering world support at this critical time, and besides, the

press and television reports of world leaders embracing me, cheering crowds lining the streets to welcome me, flowers, red carpets, trumpets, tick-tock tape...all this would boost my people, and would make me feel good. It would also impress Fatima.

At once I set all my staff to work on arranging the “honeymoon” tour. Signals flashed from Okonko House in Sinaloco (now Okonkerville) to monarchs, presidents and prime ministers throughout the world. And they responded. The responses were not quite as I had expected: fully booked, having an operation, having an election, having a revolution, gone to war, on holiday, can’t be fagged, and – most strangely – who are you?

Fatima was particularly disappointed at the refusal from the Gummichoo, as she wanted to visit Dizzyland. Their president’s reply had been difficult to understand: “Go fly a kite.” I cabled him to say we would willingly join in his game, or even wait until he’d finished playing, but I heard nothing more. The rudeness of the Gummichoo is an abomination.

The Kupperteers’ response was also disappointing, as I reminded them of the important contribution I had made to their educational system. Indeed, I had half expected an invitation to present the prizes at St Jerome’s. When their reply was read out to me, I thought they must have mistaken my identity: “You must be Joe King.”

The Serviettes were more helpful. They said I would be very welcome, but that my wife and I and our staff (of about 100 – mainly for security) should bring warm underwear, as the temperature at present was minus 36 degrees. This did not seem ideal for our honeymoon.

The Ganzemachers would have welcomed me too, but they had been struck by a disease calls *Sicheinscheissdreckumdieentwicklungslaenderkuemmern*, and could not guarantee our continued good health.

There were acceptances from one or two tin can countries in Africa and South America, which neither Fatima nor I had much interest in visiting, as well as a very annoying cable from Joshua Wokari: “Hear you are planning world tour. Come to Kirikari for a warm welcome.”

I was shocked by the general unwillingness to accept my offer of a visit. Perhaps there are cultural differences here. I should have been delighted to welcome any internationally famous leader to my country, and would gladly have accompanied him triumphantly through our streets before the world’s cameras. I would even have welcomed the Gummichoo president. Is it that by nature we are more hospitable than our counterparts elsewhere in the world? I would not, it is true, have welcomed any old leader – say from the tin can countries – but that is matter of taste, not of inhospitalization.

Fatima and I did, however, go on our honeymoon, and the trip that we made was to have mighty consequences. Strange are the ways of Allah, for in closing the front door, he doth

guide us most surely into the back passage. Submit, O faithful one, and thou shalt conquer.

Yet the beginnings were small and without promise. Fatima and I accepted invitations to Raiku and Barunda, the two kingdoms bordering our north-western regions, in the big bulge above our coastline. The two kings were eager to establish friendly relations with their great and illustrious neighbour, and although I would have liked something a little more contagious, nothing better came along. Mark, then, how the lesser doth exceed the greater.

23

I make friends in Raiku and Barunda – Kalo-Kako – plans – grey suits – more plans – the power of imagery – another shopping spree – a bold move

The Kingdom of Raiku is small, and the Kingdom of Barunda is large. Yet the King of Raiku is large, and the King of Barunda is small. It is a joke of Nature. I have often observed that there are great men with tiny voices, and little men with great voices, but by their voices shall ye not know them.

The large King of Raiku did make us largely welcome, with feastings and silken sheets and gifts of emeralds and ivory. For the four days of our sponging, he put us in a palace, and accompanied us on a tour of his small country, pointing with pride to its modern buildings, its well-built roads, its schools and clinics. The people did not line the streets as I had hoped, but there was much waving from the few who were there when we passed through. I waved back, and noticed that the King waved too. It was an hospital country.

“We have no trouble here,” the King said. “We have been well blessed. And we respect and honour you as our friends and neighbours. We hope that you will respect and honour us also, and that we may call you brother.”

It was an happy visit. At the end of it, the King and I embraced, and did indeed call each other brother.

The small King of Barunda was sharper eyed and tongued than the large King of Raiku, and he lodged us in a lodge that was not a palace. But he was kind to us, and gave us even more gifts than the King of Raiku, though with less feastings. He was not such a jolly man. He too accompanied us on a tour, but his country was large, and we saw only selected sights.

I was impressed by this country, as I had been by Raiku. The cleanness, the modern buildings, the technicolor all spoke of a richness that made my own country seem poor. For even before the Kirikari had robbed us of our precious minerals, we had never enjoyed the richness of these two nations.

What was the source of their wealth? A gift of Nature, in the gushing form of Kalo-Kako. The wells had transformed their deserts into fine cities, their rags into silks, their camels into limouses. Kalo-Kako it was that brought the grey-suited men from all over the world, bearing sacks of dollars and hearty greetings. Thus did the Kalo-Kako pour forth into pipes and tankers and make its way to the great refineries and factories of the west.

If only we had been possessed of such a gift, we too should have had no trouble. Indeed, as my juicy Fatima said one night between the shaggy sheets, we could even have built our own Dizzyland.

Four days and three nights we did reside in the Kingdom of Barunda, and on the fourth day I did embrace the small King and did call him brother. Then Fatima and I departed in my jet and headed homewards. Even as we soared into the clear blue sky above Barunda's capital, looking down on the sandy city in the jewelled desert, I began to understand why Allah had sent me there instead of to the Gummichoo.

Within an hour we were home. Within two hours I was writing thank you letters to my brothers in Raiku and Barunda. And within two weeks I was sending them both detailed proposals for joint adventures in which they might invest some of their fortunes. The proposal for the King of Raiku was delivered by a roundly female cousin of Fatima's who had accompanied us on our honeymoon, and who had brought a lusty light into the large King's eyes. The proposal for the small King of Barunda was delivered by a handsome security guard. He who would catch the mouse must choose the cheese.

The multi-million dollar projects that I was proposing were handsome too. They included distilleries and breweries – forbidden in their kingdoms – and factories to work with our cheap labour and to bring us large profits. The arguments and plans were convincing, for they had been drawn up by experts, and the messengers were cooperative.

In the meantime, there are more tales to tell of grey-suited men. Show me a grey suit and I will show you a man with something to sell or something to hide. I myself normally wear national costume or military uniform, using grey suits only when I have something to sell or something to hide. But I am an handsome man, and take pride in my appearance, for the outer higgledy doth betray the inner piggledy, whereas the natty dress doth cover all. To Sinaloco (now Okonkerville) there now came many men in grey suits, for it was a time of reckoning, and I did meet them in my grey suit, for I had nothing to sell but a great deal to hide.

There cometh a time for every lender when he must decide whether to lend more, to call 'stick', to bust the borrower, to pray for a miracle, or to give up hope. Whereas the borrower, who doth sit on the other side of the fence, doth pray for more lending, or doth hope for the hopelessness of the lender and the letting off of the debt. (He who can pay his debt but keepeth quiet about it may also be let off, but he then doth need a crooked accountant.)

The grey-suited men had reached the time of decision. They had walked through the park of dog mess, and came now to wipe their feet upon Okonko. I had misled them, they said, I had cheated them, wasted their money, lost out to the Kirikari, plunged my country into ruin, killed dead all hope of further investment etc. I let them storm. The wind bloweth and the wind bloweth not, for none do fart for ever. When they had spoken, then did I speak, and my speech was as follows:

“Gentlemen,” I said, “your banks and governments did lend us money, and more money to repay the loan, and more money to repay the loan to repay the loan, and so on adding fine item. Yet were these loans to the racker of our ruin, the vile General Aziza. To me, Okonko, you have lent but once, and had it not been for the treachery of the vile Joshua Wokari – may ten thousand pigeons whiten his head – whom even the United Nations have censored, I should have paid you tenfold what I borrowed. Yet all is not lost, for the victory of the Kirikari is as a grain of dust in the sweepings of time. My country is now poised as the pussy to pounce again.”

We had, I told them reassembled our forces, and our pilots and infantry and artillery were fully trained and mighty despite their losses. All that we needed, I said, was to replace our broken planes and tanks, and we would mount the assault and pepper the enemy into surrender.

I did not lie. If I had needed to lie, I would have lied, for I am not a proud man. But I did not need to lie. We had regathered as doth the water after the plop of a stone, and although we were shrunken yet we were ready. Ready for what?

“Are you asking us to finance another war?” they asked.

“Give us the tools,” I said, “and we will finish the job.”

It was one of my memorable phrases, and worthy to be used a second time.

Of my negotiations with my brothers in Raiku and Barunda I made no mention. There is a time to be open and a time to be closed, and this was closing time. Instead I told the grey suits that without their aid we would be throttled by the Kirikari. And when did the throttled pay their debts?

“If we help you to rearm,” they asked, “what is to stop the Kirikari from mincemeating you again?”

“Last time,” I said, “their sneakiness did catch us unaware. But now we are wiser. We shall move with silent menace through the long grass, and then leap roaringly upon the unsuspecting prey.”

O the power of the image! It doth move mountains in men’s minds. Whence cometh this gift? The hand remaineth still, and the mouth doth paint pictures. Is it not a marvel that an humble orphan, expelled ere his time, should thus ensnare the world in his web of poetry?

I resolved even then to write a book of thoughts, and this I will do, that all shall learn from the wisdom of Okonko.

A sample or two:

If the front door be bolted, go through the back.

If the lion hath bitten thee, go kick the dog.

If thou loseth the game, then change the rules.

A lie is but a coloured truth.

Do I torment thee? Fear not, for all shall be revealed unto you as was to me by my nightly Fatima.

The wheel had sunk, and now it rose again. (Another image!) The grey-suited men listened in silence, hummed and whored, dillied and dollied, and finally said yes. It would, they say, be the last chance. Failure this time would be an apostrophe for all of us.

I walked among them, clasped each hand in turn, gazed piercingly into every eye, thanked, promised, reassured, comforted, encouraged, guaranteed. We would not fail, I said. They had my word. And was not the word of Okonko sacred? Perhaps it was another word. But they were not to know.

The upward swing continued with the responses from my brothers in Raiku and Barunda. They liked my ideas, they were impressed with Fatima's cousin/the handsome security guard, they were eager for further exchanges, and they had money to burn.

Thus did wealth once more pour into our coffers, sufficient to build ten Golden Temples of Bar-Mitzvah. And more grey-suited men, often with dark glasses, did come to Sinaloco (now Okonkville), while our own people did go forth in grey suits to meet other grey-suited people grey-suiting Sunday places of exchange. From Yodel came cables acknowledging receipt and telling me what a good customer I was. Appreciation of this kind is rare and welcome, but the same might be said of my mighty deposits.

Now you shall know what the world's banks, insurance companies, finance companies, government agencies, pension funds, trust funds etc. and the large King of Raiku and the small King of Barunda did invest in:

100 combat aircraft

500 tanks

100,000 soldiers

Yet you must also know that the Kirikari in this time had not been idle. They, who had stolen our minerals, did thus acquire much wealth with which Joshua Wokari, heedless of the poverty of his own people, did purchase weapons of aggression such as combat aircraft and tanks. So even as we did build up our defence, so did he build up his attack. I knew of his activities by means of a network of spies spread through Kirikari, for although I am an humble man, yet am I a clever man. But of a haunting kind was the question why the Kirikari had attacked us when they did, and how they knew the places

of our planes and tanks and barracks. It could not be but that there were traitors in our midst, for had not once an officer in my own army attempted to kill me? If one man will seek to kill his god, why may not there be others who will deliver the Judas kiss?

And if the enemy knew of our preparations, might we not – as the grey-suited men had feared – undergo the same clobber as before?

The time then had come for Okonko's boldest move. I sought a meeting with Joshua Wokari.

31

I triumph over Joshua Wokari

Negotiations were long and difficult, but at length after weeks of petty pernickering by him, a meeting-place was agreed. It was to be on a boat anchored in the mouth of the Wamboko. We would each send an advance guard of a dozen men to search the boat, and when the guards were satisfied, we would be rowed out and left there alone until we had finished our meeting.

We agreed to meet at midday, and as a further precaution we took our own packed lunch. Mine, as I recall, was one of impeccable taste: pate de foie gras, caviar on granny bread, white chocolate mousse, petty fives, and a bottle of Mutton Rothschild. Wokari, most vulgarly, brought a packet of cheese sandwiches and a flask of tea. First blood to me, then.

Our initial greetings were also very different. I gave him the friendliest of smiles, took his hand in both of mine, and clasped it with genuine warmth and goodwill.

"It's grand to see you," I said. "After all this time."

He, however, was stiff and suspicious. I noticed that he was wearing his national costume, which contrasted most strikingly with my smart grey suit. Had the television cameras been upon us, there is no doubt which of us would have cut the more impressive figure. As with his clothes, so with his manner, which was – in a word – couthless. For instance, the first thing he said to me was:

"Well, what do you want?"

If I were to choose a word to describe his tone, it would be 'hostile'. He was an hostile, couthless man.

"Let us not beat the bush," I said. "You have amassed an air force of x planes, you have x tanks, and an army of x soldiers."

I forget the precise figures now, but I do not forget the surprised expression on his face when he knew that I knew this top secret information. He attempted to disguise his surprise with a yawn and a shrug of the shoulders, but I know surprise when I see it.

“So what?” he said. “You’ve just bought 100 planes, 500 tanks and recruited another 100,000 soldiers.”

I will not pretend that I was not surprised. Of course, I had guessed that there were traitors in my midst, but I was shocked that he could rattle details known only to my highest officers.

“How do you know that?” I snapped.

“I read it in the newspaper,” he replied.

“That’s impossible!” I said.

“Depends which newspaper you read,” he replied.

I began to dislike him more and more, though he would never have guessed it from my iron self-control.

“Do not trust the media,” I advised him with my forefinger, “for they are an abomination. Trust this fact: we can each destroy the other, but my people are tired of war and they desire nothing but peace.”

“Oh yeah,” he said. “So who sent hit squads to assassinate my brother-in-law and then my brother, who killed my people and his own with poison gas, who took hostages so that...”

“Brother Joshua!” I cried. “Have we come here to quarrel or to extend the hand of friendship. Let bygones go by, what’s done is done, now is the hour, forget the past...”

“I do not shake hands,” he said, “with a snake.”

He was an ignorant man as well as hostile and couthless.

“Nay verily,” I informed him, “snakes do not have hands. To shake hands with a creature that hath no hands were as easy to do as drink Mutton Rothschild from a sieve. Brother Joshua, let us please enter into what the great Pluto called a meaningful dialogue, and not mix our metatarsals.”

As proof of my sincerity, I even offered him a glass of my wine.

“O true believers,” he said, “surely wine, and lots, and images, and divining arrows, are an abomination of the work of Satan; therefore avoid them, that ye may prosper.”

Sanctimoaning ass. But again I hid my feelings, and instead set before him a quotation of my own from the Garlique:

“Everyone,” I said, “has his gout.”

Thus did I match learning with learning.

The man was making things difficult for me. I sensed that he disliked me, but also that he envied me. Can a cheese sandwich sit at the same table as a fine pate, caviar and white chocolate mousse? And yet still I was charming, relaxed, and effable.

“Now let us talk seriously, Brother Joshua,” I said, “about our differences, for if we wage war upon each other, shall we not both be up the creek?”

“You will,” he said. “We won’t.”

He was not only inferior but also most itchingly confident. I waved my hands in the air, as if to say something equally confident, but nothing occurred to me.

“Try us,” he said. “You shall find that the stratagem of Satan is weak. Wheresoever ye be, death will overtake you, although ye be in lofty towers.”

“We do not want to try you,” I protested. “And we do not want to be overtaken in lofty towers or any other kind of towers. We want to reach an agreement with you so that we do not kill you, and you do not kill us.”

He looked at me. And I looked at him.

“Well?” he said.

“Well what?” I said.

“What are your proposals?”

“Give us back our land on this side of the Wamboko, and we will sign a nonny-gression treaty with you.”

It was a fair offer, but of course he rejected it. I knew that he would reject it. Even though the land was ours and the precious minerals therein, he would not give up such riches. I had judged my man correctly.

“Doth the pygmy promise not to strike the giant?” he asked, with that same tone of superiority to which the inferior have no right. “And shall we Kirikari bow down and crawl to the other side of the river?”

O let him sneer and mock and puff himself up like the burping bullfrog, for he that puffeth himself up seeth not the shit in which he walketh.

“O Brother Joshua...” I said.

“I am no brother to snakes and donkeys,” he said.

At that moment was added to my list a new task with a Mutton-like tang to savour: the assassination of Joshua Wokari. Yet did I smile warmly, nod my head, and clap him merrily on the upper arm.

“Thou art as sharp with thy tongue,” I said, “as my first wife.”

It was a good joke, and I laughed heartily, but he gave not a snigger. Beware the man that doth not laugh. It is a sign that he hath no humour. And he that hath no humour hath no something in his something. Note well.

“But let us be serious,” I said seriously. “Do we wish to continue this senseless conflict, for ever watching each other like Joneses, or do we wish to go about our business in peace?”

“The Wamboko is ours,” he said.

“I fart upon the Wamboko,” I said. “There are more things in heaven and earth than the Wamboko. Read these papers.”

I put before him the agreements made with my brothers from Raiku and Barunda. He read them and was puzzled.

“It is a new era, Brother Joshua,” I said. “With such developments we can achieve prosperity far beyond the reaches of the Wamboko. But what shall it avail us to build factories if the Kirikari come to knock them down?”

“If thou desirest peace,” he said, “why dost thou prepare for war?”

“I prepare only to defend,” I protested, “not to attack.”

“And how wilt thou use thy bombs and bombers in defence?”

The man was a fool, but not without intelligence.

“Ah!” I said. “A slight error. Those are to be sent back. The clerk responsible has already been shot. But let me put to thee a new proposal. What if I gave the Land of the Crudd to thee, and withdrew all my military forces to the furthest reaches of our land away from the Kirikari? Would not this be a proof of our good intent?”

Now his mind raced, as he looked for the catch.

“What’s the catch?” he asked.

“None,” I replied.

“What about the minerals?” he asked.

“They shall be yours,” I replied.

“What do you hope to gain from this?”

“A nonny-gression treaty.”

“Is that all?”

“I desire no more.”

Still he sought the catch. Still he failed to find it. I was confident, for the Kirikari had taken the Land of the Crudd, and had smashed my army and air force, but not one foot had they advanced beyond the borderlands. If they did not attack us then, why should they attack us after the signing of a treaty?

The vile Joshua Wokari slowly gave way under the pressure of my intellect and my charisma, and I longed to rip out the leaves of the calendar and stand triumphant at the conclusion of my strategy. Carpe diem! But patience, O wise one, for there are many steps to the podium.

One more condition I did impose upon this scheme of schemes: our treaty must be made public. Thus would we set an example to all world leaders and to all conflicting nations, perhaps sending a message even unto them who do present the Nobble Prizes at the end of term.

Do you shake your head? Have I forgotten the grey-suited men? No, Okonko forgets nothing. Could the grey-suited men now alert the world to Okonko’s treachery in *not* fighting a war? Besides, I had not lied to them. Is it not a beautiful thing to be truthful and to win? I believe it was Shakespeare who said that beauty is truth. I may have said it myself.

And so, a week later, in the President’s Palace in Haputkari, before the assembled cameras and notebooks of the world’s media, it came to pass that Joshua Wokari and Abdul Okonko did sign a nonny-gression pact, embraced, and called each other brother. It was announced that we would move all our military forces far to the northwest of our country, while the Kirikari – a touching addidum to our agreement – withdrew all their military forces from our borderlands.

It was a strange experience to be cheered through the streets of my enemy's capital. In Sinaloco there were no such celebrations. I had long since banned all public demonstrations.

I had now completed Stage One of my strategy. It was time to embark on the critical Stage Two.

25

The army marches – war – victory – complaints at our victory – Okonko versus The World

It was a mighty task, and mightily did we achieve it. A quarter of a million men, their arms, their supplies, their lorries, tanks, guns, ammunition...everything ground its way towards the northwest. Our people watched in amazement, for never had such an army thundered through our country, and if a child had stood upon a hill, yet would he not have seen the end of the line. And his hill would have been veiled in the risen cloud of dust.

Great was the speculation about where the army would set up camp, but this was a closely kept secret, even from my ministers.

Why? Because the vile Joshua Wokari had eyes and ears in my innermost cupboards. Keep thy mouth closed, and thy teeth shall not fall to the floor. Thus there were but two generals who knew the plan, and they were out in the field with their men. Both were newly appointed, and closely related to my third wife.

I took the precaution of informing the large King of Raiku and the small King of Barunda that my army was on the move, heading northwest. They would undoubtedly have known already, but it was a natural curtsey.

At a fixed point the vast army separated into two armies, the one much smaller than the other. The smaller one continued its march in a straight line, while the larger one veered northwards. And each army rumbled ever onward until, respectfully, they reached the borders of Raiku and Barunda. Then at dawn on my thirty-eighth birthday, they crossed the borders and roared straight towards the capital cities of my two brothers' kingdoms.

It was a moment of history that will stand for ever as our country's finest hour, finer even than the historic capture of the Land of the Crudd. Only my seizing of power on August 10 can rank beside it, for had I not seized power none of these miracles would have come to pass. O beloved, what a day was this. It was a walk-on-water day, a nine-clouds-wonder, over-the-moon and hot diggery doo.

Raiku fell at once. So swift was our invasion that the large King was still busily rollicking Fatima's cousin when my soldiers arrived in his bedroom. I am told that he cried out: "What's going on?" And that the officer-in-charge replied: "Not you, mate, you're coming off."

The King was arrested, and Fatima's cousin returned to Sinaloco, where I awarded her the Okonko Iron Cross for Gallantry.

Barunda, however, put up sterner resistance, for it was a big country, and by the time our forces reached the capital, they had been able to gather some defences. Had I attacked them first by air, they would surely have fallen sooner, but I could not risk the Kalo-Kako refineries, and a single cross-eyed bomber could have blown up too many assets. Better to lose a thousand soldiers than a barrel of Kalo-Kako.

By the time we had captured the capital, the little legs of the little King had hustled him across the border to the neighbouring kingdom of Lycena. Why did he scurry there, deserting his people, his home, his handsome security guard? Is it not a ruler's duty to stay with his subjects and bring light to their darkness? In the grim days of the Kirikari invasion, did Okonko make wheels of his legs to roll away into hiding? Nay, Okonko stood like a Colostomy astride the crumpled nation, bunkered in the midst of the rubble, defiant even of the bombs that burst above his very head.

But within forty-eight hours Barunda had fallen, and I was master of the two kingdoms and all that was therein.

Okonko had lighted the fuse and the world went boom. From all directions came the howls of shock, horror, damnation. We had outraged the civilized world, we had broken all the rules, were thugs, barbarians, monsters, murderers. But coolly Okonko issued statements from his bunker in Sinaloco: we had, I explained, liberated Raiku and Barunda from their tyrannosauruses.

"Withdraw!" shouted the world.

We would, I explained, withdraw from the liberated territories as soon as calm and order had been restored.

"Withdraw at once!" they cried.

That, I explained, would only result in the return of the tyrannosauruses.

"You have no right to be there!" they screamed.

We had, I explained, as much right to be there as the Kirikari had had to be in the Land of the Crudd before our historic agreement. Why, I asked, all the fuss? The people of Raiku and Barunda had welcomed us, as could be seen from the films we had of cheering crowds lining the streets and waving to our soldiers. (I do not know when or where this film was made, but a film is a film.)

At an emergency meeting of the United Nations, we were unanimously condemned and ordered to withdraw at once. If we did not, they would take measures against us.

“What measures?” I asked.

“Economic sanctions,” they said. Backed up if necessary by the use of force.

“May I ask,” I asked, “why the United Nations did not use such measures against the Kirikari?” It was, I explained to the listening world, a clear sign of the West’s double standards: they were threatening us, not because of some high moral principle, but because – and here I tweaked the very nose of the problem – they were afraid for their Kalo-Kako.

Kalo-Kako! O precious and indispensable lifeblood that floweth through the pipeline arteries and keepeth the world’s economy afizz, how shall we exist without thee? If the monster Okonko hath thee within his grasp, then hath he his hand at our throat. Get him out!

Fear not, I said, the Kalo-Kako is safe in my hands.

No it’s not, they cried.

Yes it is, I said. And besides, it is not your Kalo-Kako.

It is, it is, they cried. It’s ours and we must have it!

It belongs, I said, to the people of Raiku and Barunda, and for decades you have bribed their rulers and taken their Kalo-Kako, making yourselves rich while the rightful owners remain parched in poverty. Now I, Okonko, will restore their wealth to the people, and all things shall we well and just.

Get out now, they cried, or take the consequences.

Very well, I said, to show my good intent I shall begin withdrawing my forces next Sunday.

Aaaah! The waving arms fell, the jumped-up sat down, the torn-out hair was replaced. They were surprised. They were relieved. They nodded to one another, pleased that they had bullied the bully Okonko into surrender.

Sunday came. And Sunday went.

Why have you not begun withdrawing your forces as you promised? They screeched.

Keep calm, I said. Just a little technical hitch.

He who buys time buys a bowl of sugar.

On the Wednesday following the Sunday I began to withdraw my troops. Some of my troops. And as they came back across the border, I made sure that reporters and TV crews were present to record the return.

Okonko keeps his word! Another spoonful of sugar.

The few troops that I withdrew were needed elsewhere. It was necessary to secure our frontiers and protect our installations. Now that we had taken possession, we needed fewer forces in the two occupied territories, but within Barunda I moved several divisions up close to the border with Lycena.

He's going to march on Lycena! they squealed.

The movement of troops, I explained, was merely a precaution against attack, and we had no intention of entering Lycena.

Get out of Raiku and Barunda! They cried once more.

I have no intention of leaving Raiku and Barunda, I explained, for these lands belong to us.

He's not going to leave! They wailed, as if I would have gone in if I had wanted to come out.

We're going to impose economic sanctions then, they said, and you'll be severely punished.

Impose them, I said, but we shall not budge.

As usual, the fiction-writers set to work. They narrated stories of rape, looting, murder and massacre in Raiku and Barunda. "Eye-witness" accounts told of atrocities committed by my soldiers, of terrorized inhabitants, and the breakdown of law and order. We therefore showed films of the people going about their daily business, of smiling faces at shop windows, cars and buses running smoothly through the streets. A film is a film.

It was, however, true that pockets of resistance had still to be emptied. In Barunda particularly our soldiers were subjected to abuse, sabotage and even ambushes. I did not tolerate such terrorist actions. It was rightly assumed that they were the work of young Barundi men, and so our soldiers round up a hundred of them and shot them. It was a small price for peace.

I was pleased at the initiative of one commander who dressed a Barundi youth in one of our uniforms and hanged him publicly for the crime of looting. We did not, I explained, allow our soldiers to steal from their brother citizens of Barunda.

When sending troops to seal the border with Lycena, I had accidentally cut off the flow of refugees to that country, for there were some people who did not welcome our arrival

and wished to escape from our kind attention. The little King was a clear example. However, I decided to reopen the border, for it was said that the crowds of fleers were a nuisance to our men (apart from the rapable women), and there was nothing to gain from keeping them in the country. Let the Lycenans look after them. It was good thinking. But I gave orders that all men of fourteen years or more should be taken away for labour. We did not want to send out future enemy soldiers. Those that we could use we would use, and those that we could not use were to be shot.

This precaution was deliberately misunderstood by the enemy fiction-writers. The monster is separating families, they whined, and killing children. Look at the thousands fleeing from Barunda, and hearken unto their tales of butchery. Shall I tell thee what words they used of me – of me, that thou knowest to be as gentle as the lamb? “Ruthless”, “pitiless”, “sadistic”, “mad”... Even so doth the tiddlywink snap at the pike. There is a time for the lamb and a time for the lion, and the lamb rules not the forest.

For what is the separation of a family or the death of a child within the great sweep of history? Shall we abandon the star for the sake of a grain of sand? Consider the example given to us by God himself, who did allow the crucifixion of Christ Jesus in order that all humans might attain eternal glory. Amen. I stand on the side of the angels, and I shall teach them a thing or two besides.

Now the Gummichoo stepped in. Inevitably, for the Gummichoo can never leave well alone. Especially if it doth produce Kalo-Kako. With Copper-like speed of gun from holster they launched plane-fuls of trucks and tanks and soldiers into Lycena, saying that the King of Lycena had asked them to come and protect him. O please, the King had cried, the big bad wolf doth howl at my door. OK, baby, said the Gummichoo, hot potater, ripe tomater, let's conk Okonko and grab the fizz.

Meanwhile, the United nations forbade anyone to buy anything from us, to sell anything to us, to let goods in, to let goods out, or even to say hello to us. The Mr Treadwells of the world were sending us to stand in the corner till we had learned our congregations.

Warships and gunboats petrolled our coasts, platoons of soldiers sealed our borders, and the Kupperteers sent planes and ships as toadies to the Gummichoo.

What are the Gummichoo doing in Lycena? I asked. If they attack us, doubt not that we shall ram their chewing gum between their whitened teeth, and send the Kalo-Kako streaming hot through the battlefield. Then I called on the Lycenans to reject this occupation of their country, for did we not all know that the Gummichoo claim as their own whatever soil they set foot on? Rise up, I cried, and throw out the imperial mint before he imprisons you in your own country. As we have rid Raiku and Barunda of the Gummichoo puppets, so must you overthrow the king who has betrayed you. Join with us, comrades, in this holy war against the imperials.

My words echoed round the globe. Oppressed peoples everywhere rejoiced to have found their champion. I called upon prisoners to break their bonds, slaves to throw off their

chains, and women to fight for their rights (in moderation). It was a time of revolution, I cried, and Okonko would lead the downcast to victory over the upcast, in the name of freedom, justice, fair shares for all, democracy and whatever other twiddle the oppressed people were willing to fight for.

But still the enemy forces poured into Lycena, all lied to by their governments, told to fight in the name of freedom, justice and so on, when in fact they were only there to fight for Kalo-Kako. Very well, I said, let them come, and we will meet them with our men, our guns, our tanks and our chemical weapons...

The newspaper headlines shuddered the message: Okonko threatens to use chemical weapons. Tut tut, cried the fuddy-duddies, oh dear, he's going to break the rules.

I announced subscription, and informed the world that we now had an army of two million. Come and fight us, I said. We are ready for you. But there were things we were not ready for. Supposing the Gummichoo attacked us by air? They could destroy us, for they had assembled a mighty strike force far greater than ours. The chiefs of staff trembled. But Okonko stood firm as always, and sent out orders from the depths of his bunker. Every foreigner in our own country and in Raiku and Barunda was to be rounded up, for in all three countries there were thousands of engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers, advisers, businessmen, diplomats, gap-eared students. These were to be placed among the likeliest targets for Gummichoo bombers. If they attacked, their own people would be the first victims.

I had used the strategy before, you will recall, in order to hold the Kirikari at bay.

Okonko seizes hostages again! shrieked the headlines. No, I explained, these are not hostages. These are our guests whom we are taking to places of refuge, as a protection against war. We do not want war, I explained, and our guests do not want it either.

I brought families into my bunker, and had the TV crews come and film us. I spoke kindly and warmly to my guests, fondled a small boy and impressed him and his parents with my nice uncleness. The mothers and fathers sent messages to their loved ones at home, and said how well they were being treated.

Yet still the press told lies about me, claiming that the families were "terrified", and that my seizing of them was an act of "obscene brutality". Is it obscenely brutal for a ruler to protect his people? And was it not obscenelier and brutaller that the Gummichoo, with their poodly allies the Kupperteers, and all the other ganger-uppers were blocking supplies of food and medicines to my people? We showed films of the sick and dying in our hospitals, and doctors pointing tearfully to the empty shelves of their medicine cupboards. We could not even soften the pain of little children, who were crying out for the relief denied them by the Gummichoo. This, I thundered, was obscene brutality.

And it was true. The sanctions were hurting us. Only with difficulty was I able to maintain my supply of caviar, smoked salmon, and Mutton Rothschild. I relied heavily on

the help of my good friend, the vile Joshua Wokari. He had of course joined the chorus of howlers, but he who profits barketh and biteth not.

Undented, however, I proceeded to the next step in my masterly campaign. By the introduction of a single word, I completed the unifaction of the three countries. Out with the old world, and in with the new: one country, one nation, one name: OKONKO. And the capital city of Okonko, once Sinaloco, was now called Okonkerville. Thus were all the people of here and of there united under the single banner, Okonkans every one, save that the Raiku people and the Barundi people were made to wear special badges in order that they may be discriminated against when necessary.

Let us now review the situation as it stood during those historic days.

Here stood Okonko: one nation united under the command of one man, and he the Commander of Commanders.

There the enemy: a mixed force of homesick Gummichoo and a dozen other nationalities under a dozen commands. Let's all be under one command, said the Gummichoo, namely ours. No, nein, non, niet, they all cried. Only the Kupperteers said yes, for they have a licky-boot relationship with the Gummichoo.

Here stood Okonko: Okonkans in their own land, among their own people, eating their own food, enjoying their own climate, defending their own country.

There stood the enemy: far from home, far from their people, eating plastic, cursing the heat and the flies and the dust, missing their favourite shows on telly.

Here Okonko: resolute, inspired, inspiring.

There the enemy: hey, who's payin' for all this?

Okonko: We shall poison you with our chemicals and blow up the Kalo-Kako wells.

The enemy: This guy ain't playin' aroun'.

Only in the air, then, did the enemy have the advantage. But of what use are the eagle's wings in the sack race?

Meanwhile, quietly, so quietly, whisper-quietly, mousy-quietly, silence-quietly, far from the rumblings of tanks and bellies, screened from the fictions of politicians and journalists, inspired by dollars lured and then hoarded from grey pockets, the scientists came ever closer to their goal of PPP.

26

I show typical kindness – I enlighten the King of Lycena – idle threats – a correspondence

We don't want war, said the Gummichoo again, but if you don't do what we say, we'll bash your face in.

Just you try it, I said again.

We will, they said again.

We're ready for you, I said again.

Now look here, they said, why don't you let the hostages go, eh? It's not fair threatening innocent people.

You mean our guests, I said. We're not threatening them. You are.

No we're not, they said.

Yes you are, I said. We're not going to drop bombs on them. And while we're on the subject of threatening innocent people, when are you going to stop killing our little children?

We're not killing your little children, they said.

Yes you are, I said.

No we're not, they said.

Our little children are dying, I said, because you've cut off our medical supplies. And our food. And our sick are dying too, and our women and our old people.

Oh dear, they said.

As leader of a starving, dying nation, I said, I appeal to the world to stop this senseless killing.

Let the hostages go, they said, and we'll think about it.

Lift the sanctions, I said, and we'll think about sending our guests home.

Hostages first, they said.

You mean, I said, that you will keep killing our children until we ask our guests to leave?

O the wit and wisdom of Okonko. Philosophers do call this *quid pro bono*, or titty for tatty, but it is said that a picture is worth a thousand titties. Oak-hearted Kupperteas wept on the playing fields of St Jerome's, and umbrella-waving grannies shook placards at the Gummichoo president. They had seen films of our wide-eyed little children lying motionless in their hospital cots, awaiting the approach of the Grim Raper. Films are truth.

And now Okonko himself, gentle and caring, released all the women and children who had been his guests. With the help of his staff, he personally arranged that they be transported from their many holiday abodes to the central airport of Okonkville, thence to be flown in Okonkan planes across the border to the trusted land of Kirikari. From there they could be collected at any time by their governments.

Suffer the women and children to come unto me, and they shall have comfort. It was, I explained, a source of heartbreak to me that they had to be separated from their beloved husbands and fathers, for I am a family man. I know how the children do cling to the father, and the mother lives from his blessings. Understand me, I said to those who gathered with me before the cameras, I do not want this tearful parting and I weep with you. But I must protect my people. Beg your governments to leave us in peace, and your menfolk shall return unto you with full stomachs and an healthy suntan. I am your friend and theirs. It is your governments that are your enemies.

They understood. A little girl whom I had lifted in my arms kissed my cheek after but the merest of persuasions. The mothers thanked me for my kindness, and there were many smiles amid the tears of parting. I am an humane man.

Besides, we were well rid of them. Women and children are hassle.

The nations of the earth rejoiced to see the women and children returning to their homes, but they wanted the male guests too. Still they pictured me as the wolf in military uniform. The world is a film show, in which all characters are villains or heroes. He who wears the moustache and lives beyond the fence is the villain, and he with the clean chin and table manners shall inherit the earth.

Now see, I said to the nations, I have sent your women and children back to you, and they are safe and well. Will you still deny food and medicine to my suffering women and children?

I released more film of the wide-eyed, thin-boned babes cradled in their weeping mothers' arms, and behold the soft hearts and placards did prevail. Governors sought to impress the governed with kindness as kind as the kindness of Okonko. The food and medicines made their way across borders to those whom I and my ministers deemed most worthy to receive them. I and my ministers were well satisfied.

But the exiled former little King of former Barunda was not well satisfied. They have stolen my country, he cried, and the nations of the world are doing nothing to get it back

for me. And his friend the King of Lycena cried: They are sitting on our borders and we are frightened of them. What will happen to us if the Gummichoo leave? And both of them cried: the nations of the world have sent them food and medicines. Woe unto us that this should be, for those Okonkans are our sworn enemies, yet our friends do comfort them. O let them all be bonked on the head, and let all things be as they were before the mighty Okonko overwhelmed us.

Quite right, said the nations of the world, we must restore the sanctions even more sanctily than before. And so they did call upon the Kirikari to seal their border with us, and they sent planes to petrol the skies, and ships to petrol the waters. The Kirikari supported these moves wholeheartedly, and did increase the amount of bribery necessary for our convoys to pass through their borders.

Meanwhile, I sent a message to the King of Lycena: My brother, I wrote, why dost thou seek to do injury to Okonko, pouring insults on his head and opening thy gates to thine enemy? Dost thou not know that the Gummichoo have roots like the mandrake? How long wilt thou suffer them to cuckoo thy nest? Even as the dog hoggeth the warmth of the fire, so will the Gummichoo freeze thy buttocks.

And I did further enlighten him with wondrous discoveries made by a brother of my third wife – a learned man in the art of rewriting history. Didst thou not know, I inquired, that of old the lands of Okonko, Raiku and Barunda were one, most gloriously ruled by our common ancestor, the mighty Gungho Khan? These lands were torn asunder by the very imperials whom now thou dost welcome into thy house. We claim only what is rightfully ours, and we shall neither attack nor harm thee. Let us instead take arms against the common enemy. For you must know also that the large King of Raiku and the small King of Barunda were corrupt of their natures, and sought not only to hive the honey for themselves, but also to sow the semen of overthrow in mine own land, as has recently been learned from secret files discovered in their palaces. Then harbour not the evil small King of Barunda, nor his huggy-buddies the Gummichoo, lest they infect thine own kingdom with their venerable diseases.

Time passed. Nothing happened. The technical term for this, as also applied to my first wife, is “stalemate”, except that among the nations there were whisperings which gradually turned into loud speakings: Okonko has not attacked, nobody wants war, how long do we stay, how much does it cost, who is paying? And then: these kings were very rich. How did they become so rich? Where is all this leading?

No, no, roared the tigers, stop this doubting. Okonko must withdraw.

I shall not withdraw, said Okonko.

He won't withdraw, mewed the kittens.

Mumble, mumble, mumbled the doubters.

If he refuses, growled the tigers, we shall do terrible things.

What terrible things? asked Okonko.

Terrible terrible things, growled the tigers.

They will not be half so terrible as the terrible things I shall do in return, I replied.

He's going to do terrible things, squealed the kittens.

Um...er...well...mumbled the doubters.

There was no hurry. The home team always has the advantage.

Then one day there came a letter from the President of the Gummichoo. I saved the stamp for Fatima. The letter said:

Dear Mr Okonko,
I'm getting pretty damn sick of this business. Why don't we call the whole thing off, you go back to your place, and we'll go back to ours, and we'll call it quits.
Yours sincerely,
The President

My reply was masterly:
Dear The President,
Three out of four.
Yours sincerely,
President Okonko

His reply was short:
Dear Mr Okonko,
Whaddyamean?
Yours sincerely,
The President

I wrote back:
Dear The President,
Do you mean what do I mean?
Yours sincerely,
President Okonko

His reply:
Dear Mr Okonko,
You know damn well I mean what do you mean. So whaddyamean?
Yours sincerely,

The President

Me:

Dear The President,

When I was a pupil at St Jerome's, a famous boarding school on the Isle of Kupper, I was taught that correctness is next to godliness. If you mean what do you mean, kindly write what do you mean and not whaddyamean.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

Him:

Dear Mr Okonko,

Quit stalling. What do you mean by three out of four?

Yours sincerely,

The President

Me:

Dear The President,

I mean that I accept three of your four suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

P.S. Congatulations on the improvement in your spelling.

Him:

Dear Mr Okonko,

What suggestions?

Yours sincerely,

The President

Me:

Dear The President,

Your suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

Him:

I know they're my suggestions for Christ's sake! I'm asking *what* suggestions!

Me:

Dear The President,

I don't like the tone of your last unsigned letter. Your blasphemy deeply offends my religious principles.

Yours faithfully,

President Okonko

There was some pleasure to be had from this correspondence. After all, the vile and abominable Gummichoo are a superpower who are respected by other abomi-nations. How much more respect then must be paid to him who outdraweth the Gummy gang-leader? Yet my purpose was not merely to shoot him down in this battle of wits and wisdom. The mind of Okonko encompasses more than one circle, and he who will dig a pit requireth more than a spade. Above all, and in quantities suitable to his purpose, he doth require time. The pit into which I was luring my enemies was deep and dark, and its digging was slow. Therefore I did welcome this intellectual game of Samantha with the President of the Gummichoo.

He replied:

Dear Mr Okonko,

I am advised by my advisers to apologize. Borry. Now then, would you please tell me which of my suggestions you accept, and which you reject.

Yours sincerely,

The President

My reply:

Dear The President,

What do you mean by “Borry”?

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

His reply:

Dear Mr Okonko,

I meant sorry. Sorry.

Yours sincerely,

The President

My reply:

Dear The President,

I forgive you.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

I once saw a film which I think was called *Henry V* (a ridiculous family name), in which an actor named Lawrence of Arabia was supposed to kill his uncle because his uncle had killed his father and married his mother. The whole film consisted of this actor doing a lot of talking, and was, I remember, of greatly boring silliness, yet it was said to be a masterpiece. Now I think I would like to see this film again, since Lawrence’s method of talking and doing nothing might be of use to me, as indeed my own method might have been an education for him. I shall write to him when I find the time.

The President’s next letter changed its tune:

Dear President Okonko,

Very many thanks for your last letter. I'm relieved and grateful that you have forgiven me, and hope that this will herald a new era in our relationship. Earlier in our correspondence, you very kindly indicated your acceptance of three out of my four suggestions. I wonder if you would be so kind as to say which of these suggestions you have accepted, and which you have rejected. Perhaps then we can come to an arrangement that will suit us both.

Cordially yours,

Pres

I laughed when I read this, and immediately started on the following reply:

Dear Pres,

Grovel, grovel, nose in shit, you Gummichoo bastard, Superpower, ah-slicker, got you where I want you...

But he who kicks the crocodile may lose the foot, and so I wrote:

Dear The President,

It would bring great joy to me and to my people if a new era in our relationship could be heralded. In the hope of coming to an arrangement that will suit us both, I have great pleasure in informing you that I accept the first, third and fourth of your suggestions, but am unable to accept the second.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

His reply:

Dear President Okonko,

Very many thanks for your last letter. We would also be very happy to end the tensions between our two nations. In the hope of doing so, would you please specify precisely which suggestion you are unable to accept?

Cordially yours,

Prezzy

My reply:

Dear The President,

In order to show the extent of our goodwill towards you and your people, I hereby and herewith do compactimoniously and disconstabulatorily specify that we cannot accept your suggestion that we go back to our place. However, I hereby and herewith do castimandiliously and reprocipitously accept your suggestions that we call the whole thing off, you go back to your place, and we call it quits. I trust that our acceptance of three out of four, or 75 per cent of your conditions, will surface to bring about a settlement.

Yours sincerely,

President Okonko

His reply to this letter was delayed. He and his advisers would have needed time to catch up with my mastery of the English Language, as well as to consult their lawyers. The reply, when it came, was as follows:

Dear President Okonko,

I was a little disappointed to hear that you are not prepared to go back to your place. Our own suggestion that we go back to our place really depends on your agreement to go back to your place. Would you please reconsider your position?

Cordially yours,
Pres

My reply:

Dear The President,

The reason why we cannot go “back” to our place is that we are already in our place.

Yours sincerely,
President Okonko

His reply:

Dear President Okonko,

I’m talking about Raiku and Barunda.

Yours etc.

The President

My reply:

Dear The President,

So am I.

Yours sincerely,
President Okonko

The correspondence continued for many weeks, bringing great hope to the world, for it is said that the man who writes kills less than the man who fights. I believe it was I who said it. But nothing lasts for ever, unless it be nothing, and as the Wamboko floweth into the open sea, so did our stream of letters flow to the end that was the beginning. The historians, scholars and students of future generations will study these documents, and will learn from them – particularly mine – but there is, O beloved, a faraway look in thine eye, and so I shall hurdle to the last of the line. He wrote:

Listen, Okonko,

The whole world has condemned your invasion of Raiku and Barunda. You will withdraw from these two countries and restore their former rulers, or else take the consequences. This is my final letter.

Signed,

The President of Gummichoo

I wrote:

Dear The President of Gummichoo,

What consequences?

Yours sincerely,
President Okonko

He never replied.

27

A lesson in diplomacy

You will think that the writing of such letters would fill the day of any man, but Okonko is not any man. These jewels of thought and language (mine, not the ramblings of “The President”) were the work of but an hour or two a day, and meanwhile the business of the state called me away from these, the finer arts. There were matters of great importance to attend to, such as the wooing of the large former King of former Raiku now Okonko.

This fat-bellied man had remained, since the reunification of Okonko, shut off from the world in a small cell, awaiting our pleasure and wishing he could await his own. Some of my ministers wanted him tried, convicted and executed as quickly as possible, but I swiftly took the firm decision that a firm decision was not to be swiftly taken. Why did I spare him? Call it the instinct of the statesman.

I had him brought from his small cell to my fortress in Okonkville, where he was given a luxurious apartment (closely guarded) and the message that President Okonko would see him as soon as possible. Three days later I sent for him.

“My brother!” I cried, and embraced him warmly, though with difficulty. “It’s good to see you!”

He was bewildered, said nothing, and at my bidding lowered his hippobulk onto the settee.

“How are you?” I asked.

He stared at me, and I gazed back, my eyes filled with concern for his health and wellbeing.

“I am not well,” he whispered eventually.

“Alas!” I cried. “What is the matter?”

“You know damn well what’s the matter, you treacherous scum!” he cried. “You tricked me out of millions, invaded my country, and treated me like a dog, and I call down ten thousand plagues on your head of two faces! May you rot in dungeons a millimetre at a time until nothing remains but moans and bones, you son of a whore and a camel!”

His jelly chins shook like bosoms. My finger was poised over the alarm bell, but he made no effort to raise his stranded-whaleness from the settee. I sat calmly, nodded sympathetically, and tutty-tutted until he had run out of curses.

“My brother,” I said, “we live in troubled times. And I understand your anger. To you I must seem the darkest of devils, and though your curses hurt me to the soul, yet will I

bear them calmly because, in a strange way, I am indeed responsible for your ills. But I shall undo them all if you will have patience with me despite what seems to have happened.”

“Seems? What do you mean, seems?”

“Am I right to assume that you have been shut off from the world these last few weeks?”
 “You *know* I’ve been shut off from the world!”

“Then you have heard nothing of what has happened.”

“What’s happened, you faithless dog, is you invaded my country, had me thrown into prison...”

“It is both true and false,” I said. “Now let me briefly tell you the story of the invasion, and then you shall decide how I am to be punished.”

With mention of my punishment, I bammed and boozled him into silence.

“What you do not know is that our brother, the evil King of Barunda, planned to invade my country. He is a small man who longs to be a large man, but we discovered the plot in time, and it was we who did strike first. I have proof of all this, which you shall see very soon. But at the same time there was a tragic error, for which I must take responsibility and for which you may never forgive me. O brother, if only we could undo the done and do anew what is right to be done, then would that which we do be done more rightly than ever that which we had wrongly done when doing what we did.”

From the angle of my vision I watched the elephant brain send its slow signals of non-understanding through to the piglet eyes.

“What are you talking about?” he asked at length.

“Your arrest and wrongful imprisonment,” I said. “For this is a tale of shameful incontinence – an unforgivable act, though caused by an understandable misunderstanding, for often we understand wrongly that which may understandably be misunderstood by an understanding under what is notwithstanding a standing or possibly non-standing order.”

It was not surprising that he was boozled. I was boozled myself. Nevertheless, the effect was as desired. A light shone in the eye is as good as a curtain.

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“Tell me,” I said, “is not the small King of Barunda your good friend?”

“He is.”

“And therein lies the source of all your gravy. Our intelligence reports indicated that you and he were conspiring together to overthrow my good self.”

“That’s not true!”

“No, it’s not! O brother, that was the error. Only now have we learned from the same documents I spoke of earlier that this report was unanimously untrue. The agent who wrote it has been shot. But imagine my feelings when I heard that you, whom I have embraced as a brother, to whom I have opened up my country’s coffers and the legs of my wife’s most beloved cousin – an exquisite child designed for the shag of a king – you, I learned suddenly, were plotting to take my country and have me killed.”

“I wasn’t!”

“No, you weren’t! But I had good reason to think you were. I wept, brother, how I wept. And then I was angry. I vowed – O the pity of it – that you and the small King of Barunda should die for this betrayal. And swift as the rocket of love from the launching pad of lust did my armies hasten to budnip this treacherous attack. Yet even then, brother, even at the height of my rage and my weeping, I could not order your death. Allah be praised for my compassion! You were arrested, you were imprisoned, but you were not killed. My love for you even then was too great.”

“Is Barunda dead?”

“He is, God rot his shrunken soul, and deserving of ten thousand deaths, for his guilt is as heavy as the hippo and as whopping as the whale. But you, brother, are the gentle lamb, the wide-eyed dough, the fluffy dove whom I so nearly slaughtered. What can I do to earn your forgiveness?”

“You can let me have my kingdom back for a start.”

“It shall be done.”

He did not know what to say. And I sat eagerly before him, like a child before a parcel, scanning his face, waiting on his every word.

“What more, my brother, what more?” I asked.

“I just want my kingdom,” he said. “Put everything back as it was.”

“The kingdom is yours,” I said, “and everything *shall* be as it was. Eventually.”

“Eventually?”

I had not thought the piggy eyes could get piggier. I shuffled my feet and turned away my eyes in embarrassment.

“I have a problem,” I said.

“What sort of problem?” he asked.

“O brother,” I said, “if the undoing of what is done could be done as swiftly as the doing of what is done, then would we see the undoing...”

“Stuff the doing,” he said. “What sort of problem?”

I hesitated. I wiggled and wormed. Then I spoke:

“To you, my brother, I can confess my sins, but I cannot say to the world: ‘Oops, we made a mistake!’ Nor can I say to my people: ‘Our soldiers died for nothing.’”

“Then I cannot have my kingdom back?”

“Not yet. You shall have it, but it must be done in careful stages, as the hand stroketh the the tit before descending.”

He winced at the reminder of absent pleasures.

“Between our people now,” I said, “is great enmity. I dare not let you roam free even here, in my home, since all believe that you planned the death of their leader whom they love as dearly as themselves. This is why you are guarded day and night. We shall make the truth known, but new realities need time to replace old realities. Therefore you must be patient. Meanwhile, we shall begin the reconstruction of Raiku, and then withdraw our troops in readiness for your triumphant homecoming. And we shall make a film together, to show the world our makeup and to announce your return to the throne. And at every stage you shall advise me, as befits a brother. Is it acceptable to you?”

“How long is this going to take?”

Once more the mighty Okonko, like a small boy, studied his own shuffling feet.

“I have another problem,” I said.

“What problem?” he asked.

“Money,” I said.

There is a time to wiggle-waggle, and a time to thrust.

“What about money?” he asked.

“What a world we live in!” I sighed. “Truth, justice, art, culture, health, education, the very bullshit of our society – all salami to the great god Money. Now, in saving my country from Barunda, I have placed my neck in a noose of debts. They must be paid before I can reconstruct your kingdom, withdraw my armies, and place you again on the throne that is rightfully yours.”

“Your debts are no concern of mine,” he said. “And it is I who will reconstruct Raiku, not you.”

Some would have lost patience at this junction, but Okonko remained calm, and gentle, and oily.

“Dear brother,” I said, “I have not told thee the half. We have justly seized Barunda before it could seize us, and the riches of that country are vast. These I will share with you, for you are my brother and I have done you wrong. Will you accept this peace offering?”

Again I watched as the brain laboured to decode the ear. Slowly he shook his head, as if to dislodge some heavy obstacle.

“If you have seized the wealth of Barunda,” he said, “why is money a problem?”

“Because,” I said, “all assets have been frozen. What I can take from Barunda I cannot use, and what I could use I cannot take. The foxes of the world are chasing us poor chickens, brother, and so I turn to you to protect our eggs.”

“What do you want of me?”

“Just as they have switched off the fountains of Barunda, so have they also dammed the streams of Raiku. But you can release the flow, for you are the rightful ruler. I have here certain documents. If you were to sign them, there would be great rejoicing, for then I would be free to set in motion the wheels that will carry you back in glory to the throne of Raiku. It is a simple matter that I ask, but out of simple things grow mighty simons. Carpe diem, brother, carpe diem.”

I smiled and nodded to him. The art of diplomacy is akin to the tickle. Gently find the spot, and await the response.

The large former King of former Raiku sat silent and deep-thinkingly. So still was he that I thought his fat had turned to marble. But finally he spoke:

“You must take me for a bloody fool.”

It was not the response I had expected.

“Are you saying,” I asked, narrowing my eyes, “that you will not sign?”

“I will sign your documents,” he bellowed, “as readily as I will kiss the lips of the cobra! Rot in hell where you belong!”

The man was not the fool I had taken him for. But the art of diplomacy is to turn defeat into victory, refusal into acceptance, no into yes.

“Very well,” I said. “Then let me put it to you another way, brother. If you do not sign, I shall have a red-hot poker applied to your testicles.”

He signed.

28

Another lesson in diplomacy – and another

My subtle diplomacy had given me access to vast sums of money, but these were tickets and not destinations. A man may buy the finest furniture, but what shall it avail him if it goeth not through the front door? Thus did I once more seek out my friend, the vile Joshua Wokari, meeting him secretly at our traditional meeting-place in the mouth of the Wamboko.

Make friends of thine enemies, lest thou shouldst make further enemies and hence require the help of thy former enemies whom thou hast now made into friends. I needed the help of Joshua Wokari. If thou needest the help of thy former enemy who is now thy friend, offer him thy help, for he who is helped will thereby be helped to become more helpful to him who needeth his help. It was ever thus.

The former lands of Raiku and Barunda, now known as Okonko, were rich in Kalo-Kako. And this Kalo-Kako flowed into our land as readily as doth the Wamboko flow into the wide sea. In such vast quantities did it flow that we would have liked to export it and earn ourselves a fortune, but the nations of the earth had imposed their sanctions by air, sea and land, so that export was impossible. These sanctions otherwise bothered us not, for food and medicine was allowed into the country for reasons already described, and much else was allowed in by the Kirikari. Yet I did regularly squeal most loudly at the suffering endured by my people, for it suited us well to complain that sanctions were “biting”, as it was said. He who believes he will win by sanctions leaveth his gun in its holster.

But my meeting with Joshua Wokari was not about Kalo-Kako. The diplomat of diplomats giveth with his left hand, but taketh with his right.

“Brother Joshua,” I said, “I have given thee the Land of the Crudd, and now I do seek to further our friendship by offering thee Kalo-Kako. We have more than we need, and since the nations of the earth have blocked off outward passage, I would share this bubbling gold with my friend, if he will accept it.”

My friend did accept it. My friend was delighted with such a gift, And my friend wondered whether *he* might be able to export that which we could not.

“Brother,” I said, “if thou canst do so, then let it make wealth for both our nations accordingly. But let that be for future cooperation, for I have a present favour to ask of thee in return for my gift.”

“Thy gift is great,” said the vile Joshua, “and if the favour be grantable, then shall it be granted.”

This man knew his onions from his elbow.

“Brother Joshua,” I said, “there are items that I must buy abroad and bring back to Okonko. But the buying and the bringing must be done in secret, and for reasons thou well knowest, I cannot trade with the world. I can provide the money, cash in palm, but neither the trading nor the transport are within my power.”

“Hast thou brought thy shopping list?” he asked.

I had brought it. And thus it was that Joshua Wokari, cash in palm, did send forth his shoppers on my behalf, while I pumped Kalo-Kako on his behalf, and each did gain satisfaction from the other, as doth the male and the female on a good night.

Now all these things did come to pass during the writing of the letters between myself and the President of the Gummichoo. So many deeds in so short a time! And forget not that in addition I did service four wives, though of these the first was nigh beyond servicing.

With the Gummichoos’ refusal to recognize the reunifaction of Okonko, the tension grew tensor. We began a series of manhoovers close to the Lycenan border, reminding the enemy that we were there and thereabouts.

“He’s going to invade us!” cried the Lycenans.

On the Lycenan side of the border, the enemy forces also manhoovered, to show that they were also there and thereabouts.

“They’re going to invade us!” I cried.

But who could invade whom? The enemy were many divisions under many commands, and the United Nations, though tutting and tabling and twittering, had forbidden the use of force without a note from the headmaster. An invasion could only come from the Gummichoo, but was their president mad enough to wear the mask of the Loan Ranger? Perhaps he was. His letters were surely not those of an alphabetical mind. What about Okonko? Was he ready or mad enough to invade Lycena? Ready I was not, for I had other jam to spread on my rice pudding. And mad?

Dost thou recall, beloved, the early days of my rule, when I felled my opponents, quelled the riots, purified the media, and did all that a wise ruler must do to rule wisely? Even then, why even then, beloved, they did ask that same question! Though I should have been mad *not* to act as I did. Yet with the subtlety of a whore's fingers did I feed their speculation, for know that the world fears madness, and a ruler feared is a ruler respected. Have not the mightiest of rulers held their millions in terror, not in love, and have not these towering Colostomies endured the piping blows of the pygmies?

Then let them fear me, let them doubt the balancing of my mind. Is it not better thus than for them to know that I am an humble but exceeding clever man? There is much to be said for the philosophy of our Minister of Education: "People are ignorant buggers. Let them stay that way."

And yet my own people do love me. Is not this a wonder? No, for I am Father of the Nation, as God is father of us all. And do we not all fear God and love him too?

Only the President of the Gummichoo could threaten the dream of Okonko. And so, to ensure further inaction, I requested a visit from the Secretary General of the United Nations.

He is a busy man, rushing from one united nation to another, attending debates, giving interviews, and globally succeeding in failing to solve any problems. He asked if I could not visit him in Gummichoo, and Fatima begged me to accept, but a bulletproof bunker is safer than a Gummichoo guest room. Besides, the luscious Fatima was fatly pregnant and of little service.

I already had about fifteen children (thou wilt recall my allegory to the condom), but I am an humpety man. It was around this time that I took a fifth wife.

The Secretary General agreed to travel to Okonkville, though it proved difficult to find a day that would suit us both. I too am a busy man. And in any case I welcomed the delay. He who hopes for nothing is content with nothing, and since the world was hoping for nothing, it waited willingly.

While waiting, it speculated on the thoughts of Okonko. Why had the great man asked for the meeting? Was he truly seeking a solution? Would he sacrifice his gains if he could save his face? Was he trustable?

I laughed. Lawrence of Arabia would have laughed too.

Meanwhile, I continued to make television films of our happy guests, whom I allowed to stay in contact with their families, and whom I kept in comfortable lodgings near selected installations. And my most illustrated guest, the large former King of former Raiku, remained close to me in my fortress, well-fed and well supplied with regular whoredom on condition that he signed his name whenever required. With him too I made a film, in

which I promised him his kingdom and he agreed to wait. We ended the film with a brotherly embrace. A film is a film.

The Secretary General of the United Nations was given a state welcome at the airport, with military band and red carpet. Only President Okonko was missing. There is no such thing as a bulletproof red carpet. But I greeted him most warmly in my home, where the world's cameras captured our historic meeting. Our smiles reassured the faint-hearted billions, before we withdrew for the private talks upon which hinged the very brackets of the world.

I put him at his ease immediately by tapping him on the knee and saying with a nod and a grin: "A nice mess the world's got itself into!"

He raised his eyebrows.

"Then let us hope we can get it out of the mess."

But he did not smile. He was an unimpressive, unsmiling man. Whereas I am an impressive, smiling man. An humorous man. It is part of my charm.

"You have a proposition?" he asked.

It was an unexpectedly direct approach, to which I gave an unexpectedly direct reply:

"No."

He was surprised.

"Why did you ask me to come here then?"

"I wanted to meet you," I said. "I've seen you on television and in the newspapers, and thought that as world figures we should get to know each other."

"I've come here," he said, "to try and avert a war. Let me speak plainly..."

"Feel free," I said.

"If you don't get out of Raiku and Barunda, war is inevitable. Do you understand? You *have* to leave."

"I know," I said. "I've known it all along."

Now he was astonished.

"You mean you want to withdraw?" he cried.

“No,” I said.

Now he was confused.

“I don’t understand,” he said.

“All things are relative,” I said, “according to Albert Schweitzer’s theory.”

He waited for me to explain, but I did not.

“I still don’t understand,” he said.

“Our earth is filled with mysteries,” I said.

“Are you going to withdraw from Raiku and Barunda or not?” he asked.

He was an arrow of a man. Beware of arrows and of the unsmiling, for both may strike at the heart. It was time to change tactics.

“Good!” I said. “I like arrows that do not smile. Enough, then, of this merry banter. I will answer you plainly. I do not want to withdraw from the former Raiku and Barunda, but I shall withdraw from both.”

And it was not a lie. Nor would it have been a lie to say that I was not going to withdraw from those lands. The art of diplomacy is selection. Yet had I needed to lie, I would have lied, for that also is a talent. You will recall the fine fictions I told to the large former King of former Raiku. No man should be a politician if he cannot lie.

“This is wonderful news!” said the Secretary General of the United Nations.

I once saw a film called, I believe, Macbess, in which an actor named Whoreson Wells became king and talked to some witches. It was a silly film. But I remember them telling him that he would be killed when a forest came to his castle, and he – like the Secretary General of the United Nations – cried out that this was wonderful news. It was a trick, but people see what they want to see. This I have learned.

“Are there conditions?” asked the arrow.

“I need time,” I said, “and guarantees from the Gummichoo that they will not attack us.”

“How much time?” he asked.

“As much time,” I said, “as I need.”

Diplomacy!

“Weeks?” he asked. “Months?”

“Weeks,” I replied.

Why not? Weeks turn into months.

“When will you start withdrawing?” he asked.

“As soon as I have Gummichoo guarantees,” I replied.

“And will you allow the former rulers back on their thrones?”

“Of course,” I said. “I have already made a film with the large former King of former Raiku announcing this to the world.”

“Forgive my asking, but how will you justify this to your people? Doesn’t it make the whole invasion pointless?”

“The whole invasion *was* pointless,” I said.

There is much pleasure to be gained from setting puzzles. The lines between his eyes began to form question marks.

“Then you’re going to admit that it was all a mistake?”

I was beginning to like him, as one likes the fish that nibbles.

“No,” I said. “History is as a river. It standeth not still as the stagnant pool, but floweth ever onward. And the man who liveth from today’s success will become a man of yesterday. I am the man of today and tomorrow.”

I could tell that he had not understood a word.

“But what are you going to tell your people?”

“That,” I said firmly, “is my business.”

He was impressed. He was intrigued. He was relieved. He was filled with hope. We would emerge from our talks with a solution, he would have earned his dollars, and everyone would say: Three jolly cheers for the United Nations and the Secretary General.

I outlined the guarantees I required from the Gummichoo, and specified also that the forces of the United Nations must withdraw from the Barunda-Lycena border as far back as to Lycena City. This, I insisted, was essential to the security of my own forces, and would be a sign of good faith. Neutral observers could monitor our retreat and that of the United Nations.

The Secretary General was overjoyed. Before the cameras of the world we announced the terms of our agreement, and he and I embraced like brothers. He left for Gummichoo, and I left for the boat in the mouth of the Wamboko.

29

Neglected strands: cathedral, mosque, paper, grey suits, and myself

I have neglected to tell thee many things, for he who writes history writes a story, but life is not a story. Life is many-stranded. And he who follows one strand must neglect other strands, and the neglected strands must stay stranded like the whale upon the sand, while we trace the course of the strand in the hand. It was ever thus.

I have told thee nothing of the great cathedral and the mighty mosque that I built at Bugami, birthplace of Okonko. Long had I pondered how to distinguish this, the village of my origin, and the answer came to me as in a vision. It was just before my triumphant invasion of the Land of the Crudd. I had heard that there may or may not have been a plot in one of the Crudd villages, and so I gave orders that the abominable ones should be wiped out. It seemed a good opportunity to try some of the products from IRAKON PESTICIDES before using them on more serious business. The gases worked well, and there were no survivors.

Some days later I received a group of Christians and Muslims from the neighbouring town. To my surprise, they had united to complain about my killing “innocent” traitors. The details do not matter – a strand we may leave stranded! – but a chance remark by one of the priests gave birth to the largest cathedral and the largest mosque ever built.

“Who do you think you are?” he asked me. “God?”

This, I believe, is known as serene deputy.

By following the strand of foreign affairs, I have also neglected that of internal matters. You will recall, for instance, my ingenious solution to our economic problems, and the sacks of notes with which our people joyfully walked our shopping centres. Unfortunately, this led to a paper shortage, and so at the time of the historic peace treaty with the Kirikari, I introduced currency reform. The new currency, the oko, was exchanged for the old at the rate of one oko for twenty-five million sin. This not only ended the paper shortage, but also earned the blessings of all who were accustomed to counting on their fingers.

A further neglected strand is that of the grey-suited men. They had lent us money, more money, more more money, and more more more money, always aiming to hold us in their web of interest and finally swallow us. But they were caught in their own web, and it was I who swallowed them. For in order not to lose all, they had gambled more, not seeing that if I lost, they would lose, and if I won, they would lose also, since neither as winner

nor as loser could I be trusted. They deserved their fate, for be sure that the sins of the debtor shall be visited upon the second, third and fourth generations of the creditor. No sooner had we completed our invasion of the former Raiku and Barunda than the great scandal broke: it was revealed that the grey-suited men had financed the invaders! It was even discovered that weapons now ranged against the nations beyond the Lycenan border had been purchased from those very nations with money borrowed from the grey-suits! There were grey suits in industry, in finance, in government, and the tut-tuts clicked into all corners of society, which demanded and were promised committees of inquiry, top level investigation, stone-turning, out-rooting, head-rolling...I laughed. Promises are promises, and the camel-lion does not eat its own leaf.

But Okonko is an honourable man. What we had borrowed I offered to pay back. In Kalo-Kako. My offer was refused.

My story has almost reached the present moment, but you ask me about myself, for I have spoken about great events, the sweepy stakes of history, the saving of my country, revolutions, wars, treaties, invasions – all that makes up the life of a nation. But of myself I have said very little. It is true that I am not an egotesticle man. I am a modest man. An humble man. But I will speak briefly of myself, since thou askest.

I have performed mighty deeds. My country has named itself after me. In all areas of my country's life my mark is to be found, and there is no house or street or institution that has not of its own free will been persuaded to okonkify itself. Say the word "Okonko", and the world will say "Ah!" Thus shall Okonko live for ever, and his name shall be called wonderful, marvellous, councillor, saviour, lord of lords and king of kings. I have said so. What more is there to say?

30

The last pieces fall into place

On the boat in the mouth of the Wamboko river did I meet with Joshua Wokari. It was a joyful meeting, for all that had been promised had been fulfilled. The Kalo-Kako flowed freely from Okonko to Kirikari, and the items on my shopping list were ready to flow from Kirikari to Okonko. Thus do friends give inspiration to one another in the process of halitosis.

You will say that I had gambled, and that if Joshua had betrayed me, I should have lost everything. But firstly, the sanctions gave me no choice; secondly, there is a time to stick and a time to twist, and I am a twister; and thirdly, Joshua needed my Kalo-Kako. He who gambles best loadeth the dice.

Some of my purchases were to be sent at once to their destination. The rest would wait for a signal from me before their speedy transport from Joshua's land to mine. For though thou hast stamped upon the cockroach, yet must thou still beware the fly.

“Tell me,” said Joshua, “is it true that thou wilt bring back thy forces from Raiku and Barunda?”

“It is partly true,” I said truly.

“Partly true?”

“All things are relative,” I said, “as has been proved by Albert Schweitzer.”

“If thou withdrawest only part of thine army, the Gummichoo will remain to threaten thee.”

“I do not think the Gummichoo will remain,” I said. “But Brother Joshua, thy concern is not with my army but with thy Kalo-Kako, and thy Kalo-Kako is safe. For think not that I should endanger my own supplies, and if my supplies are safe, then so are yours.”

“How will you do it?” he asked.

“Brother Joshua,” I said, “with my life I would trust thee, for we are bounden to each other as the right buttock is to the left, but of this my master plan I can breathe no syllabub. Know only this: thou shalt be satisfied. Thou shalt have Kalo-Kako in abundance until thy dying day, and thou shalt remember for evermore the moment in history when the Okonko and the Kirikari cast aside their wrath and embraced as brothers.”

The Secretary General of the United Nations accomplished his mission in Gummichoo. The President had agreed to my terms. It was a time of great rejoicing, for the threat of war had lifted as doth the veil from the bride, revealing bright radiation ready for bedding. To my delight, however, the small former King of former Barunda (I had lied about his death), now demanded compensation for the damage we had done to his country. The compensation he would have liked was the head of Okonko. I refused to give it to him. He also wanted millions of dollars. These too I refused to give him. I informed the Secretary General that I would rather make war on a giant than be blackmailed by a pygmy.

The Secretary General shuddered at mention of war, and busily shuttled himself between Lycena City and Okonkville to dehiccup the peace process. For I would not send home a single soldier until the petty potty withdrew his demand, and the Secretary General had his eye on the Nobbly prize.

The large former King of former Barunda made no such demands. He was too busy recovering from a dosage of the claps.

But time unravels all, and the Gummichoo made the mini ninny climb down off his box, with promise of many a this and that in exchange for his cooperation. The delay had suited my purposes, however, and I did marvel at how the hand of fate did put my pieces

into place. For now all is ready, and you and I, beloved, may await the moment of greatest triumph.

Yet you are puzzled. Still you have not understood Okonko's thinking. I will explain.

Joshua Wokari has responded to my signal. He is a true friend and ally, for there is no truer friend and ally than him who is well paid. And so, as our armies withdraw, our newest playthings advance, combining forces with the products from our most valuable of all research establishments: PHYSICS FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. And indeed the purpose is most peaceful, for by the time our nuclear warheads have blasted Lycena, the combined armies of the Gummichoo and the United Nations, and the city of Haputkari with all the armies and installations of the vile Kirikari, every one of our enemies shall be at peace. And then, beloved, Okonko shall be master of all.
