

EATING WITH CHOPSTICKS

BY

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1. NZOZI – President of Zariba
2. MARY – The First Lady
3. PAUL KITUNDA – Minister for Finance
4. GEOFFREY KATU – Minister for Foreign Affairs
5. ZEDONG – Investor
6. CHANG – Investors.
7. GRACE – President’s daughter
8. ELIZABETH – State house employee
9. MUCHOTI – Political adviser
10. CHARLES KEDI – A member of Parliament, later minister for internal security
11. ZULI – Minister for Finance
12. GALI – District commissioner
13. JOSEPH – A parent
14. DORCAS – Joseph’s wife
15. CLARA – Joseph’s daughter
16. GUARD at the factory
17. 5 MEN at the factory
18. INSPECTOR – General of police
19. POLICEMEN
20. HARRY PULO – An NGO activist
21. PROFESSOR PATO – A research scientist
22. SOLDIER

ACT 1 SCENE 1

State house. In the garden. PRESIDENT NZOZI sits relaxed in an easy chair next to the first lady, Mary. It is a fine June morning.

NZOZI: What a fine morning, so lovely. Dear, behold the sprightly Jacaranda in full bloom. The flowers drop rhythmically like violet snowflakes. Listen to the pleasant choirs of the busy bees and merry birds. Behold the colourful butterflies that flit as if to complement the scenery. Nothing becomes haven more than a lovely June morning.

MARY: Love, it is a lovely day and life is so sweet. You have been poetic since I first knew you. Maybe it is such a streak that attracted me to you. Do you remember college days? Your sermons in church laced with poetic diction? Your movement on stage was graceful. They always assigned you roles that befitted your personality. And even your runs as you made for the try line were graceful and poetic. You're still the same except for the loss of that pristine human tenderness that defines a Godly human being. There is a scratch on that pristine goodness.

NZOZI: Human beings do not drastically change. They put a veneer on their primordial personality. I'm the same Nzozi you fell in love with at college.

MARY: All the same I have no regrets (laughs) It never occurred to me that I would be married to the president of Zariba. It is amazing to be the first lady. The trips abroad, the dinner parties, the cheering and the feeling that you are at the top cannot be compared with anything. Power attracts vanity. Sometimes I miss those blissful days before politics sneaked into our lives.

NZOZI: Yes, politics slipped into our lives. Very few people successfully plan to be leaders. Leaders are created by accident, unexpected opportunity and being born at the correct time and in the correct family. What defines a leader is the ability to take advantage of any situation. That's what happened to me.

MARY: You ruthlessly and assiduously worked for it. That marked the beginning of the erosion of pristine goodness. Ambition is made of sterner stuff. Ask the Bard.

NZOZI: I took advantage of the situation. I was the chairperson of the Christian union in college. The president attended a college church service. I gave a sterling performance; great poetic speech. A bit of Shakespeare here, a bit of Mandela there. My speech oozed with such confidence that the head of state was awed. He took me under his wings and I took full advantage of the opportunities that came my way. It helped a lot because we come from the same ethnic community. When his two year term ended, I was the obvious successor. I even outsmarted his two sons.

MARY: There is a certain mysterious power that controls our lives. Some call it fate. The pious or opportunists call it God. I think God was with you. You have always been a good Christian. You do not drink, you donate generously at fundraisers and you never miss church. God cannot forsake you. But now you have to temper the sterner stuff with Christian love and humanity.

NZOZI: (Laughing cheekily) When you are speeding downhill you do not suddenly veer or break. I'll change by and by as my final term draws to a close. Religion serves me well. In this country it is fashionable to go to church. You portray a picture of

pious humility. This greatly appeals to the electorate. They will disbelieve unsavoury rumours by malicious detractors.

MARY: You never cease to amaze me. So good and so stained.

NZOZI: Call it delicate balance. It has served me well. I have also learnt lessons from tennis. I used to be a wonderful tennis player-I'm sure you do not know that.

MARY: Of course I know, I used to come and watch you play. I would sit in the background so that I could not distract you. What surprised me is that you always won, despite appearing to play poorly. What was the trick?

NZOZI: I never used to go for balls that were beyond my reach, or those that would make me injure a limb. But those that were in my favour, I would strike with venom and precision. They always landed where I wanted them. I do not believe in wasting energy or effort. If an opportunity is favourable to me, I take full advantage of it. If there are signs of uncertainty, I do not take the risk. That is why I am where I am.

MARY: Life has been good-too good to be true. My high school teacher used to say that if everything is going your way, stop and think. You maybe careering to the edge of a precipice.

NZOZI: If everything is going your way, that is the time to relegate worries to the obscure and focus on your good fortune. That's exactly what I'm doing.

MARY: What do you mean?

NZOZI: Dear, you do not know me. Next year we have the general elections and I have to plan.

MARY: Plan what? Do you intend to contest?

NZOZI: It is my constitutional right.

MARY: It is, but didn't you have an MOU with the vice president? Peter Kedi knows that you'll go for one term and then support him. He has been very loyal and supportive. He has sponged your occasional gaffes and acted the embracement when firing at opponents. Surely you can't betray him. You cannot break the MOU. It will be your political grave. Remember, the man is so amiable and outgoing that he has won the respect and love of both friend and foe. Respect the MOU. We can live quietly in retirement as good human beings.

NZOZI: (Laughs derisively) In this part of the world MOU'S and pacts are made to be broken. Otherwise, what would we break? Laws and constitutions are made to be broken. What do you think would spice up our dull politics? Don't be naïve, my dear.

MARY: Such cynicism: What has become of you?

NZOZI: I'll not be breaking the law. It's my constitutional right.

MARY: As things stand, my dear, you just have to honour the MOU. God has been kind to us. The rains have been good. No part of the country has suffered drought. The food is plenty and for the first time we have not experienced crippling strikes by workers and our soccer team has done us proud. For the first time we will be at the world cup. And finally, the tourists are back since we have effectively contained terrorism. This is the time to leave. Your legacy will stay intact.

NZOZI: Do you expect me to leave and let someone else bask in the glory? God wants me to continue ruling. That is why He has given me good health and made life easy. As for the strikes, I know how to be solicitous to union leaders. (Laughs) They

know when opportunities are favourable. (Conspiratorily) We do not have surplus maize.

MARY: (shocked) What?

NZOZI: (Laughing) Kivaza has surplus maize. We import the maize duty-free and repackage it. Then we export it. The proceeds are used to assuage inquisitive opponents and pamper the national soccer team. That is why polls are rating me at 75%. It will be foolhardy to step down if polls rate you so highly. I just have to ride on this crest. And (laughs) kickbacks from Chinese projects are staggering.

MARY: I cannot believe it. When the ambassadors castigate us for being corrupt, they have a point? What has become of you? Let us step down before you degenerate into a beast. The ambassadors...

NZOZI: They are a nuisance. That is why we are turning to the orient.

MARY: You know you cannot win without Peter Kedi's support.

NZOZI: (Laughs) In this part of the world nobody wins the presidency. It is ethnic communities that win. I'm lucky my ethnic community is the largest, followed closely by Peter Kedi's. That is why I am the president. I can easily do away with Peter Kedi and bring on board two large communities. Promise one the vice presidency-they have never tasted anything close to that-and the other three some prestigious cabinet posts. You see, I have already planned ahead.

MARY: That is being callous.

NZOZI: Callous or whatever it is, this is politics.

There are no rules in politics. What we have is instincts.

He with the better instincts rules.

MARY: I cannot understand you. Sometimes you act like a saint and other times like Lucifer himself. You are an enigma.

NZOZI: (amused) An enigma for being honest.

MARY: For being cold and callous

NZOZI: That is the reality and one cannot escape from it. In this part of the world ethnic communities win elections .Period. You may have a brilliant economist who is honest and selfless with the charisma of Obama, the stature of Mandela and the wisdom of Gandhi but if he comes from a small ethnic community, he will never be president. That is the sad reality. Who am I am to alter this? You know what Professor Muchoti refers to as tyranny of numbers.

MARY: That is our tragedy.

NZOZI: No, their tragedy. The small communities.

MARY: I'm amazed you so openly talk about these things. You even gloat. Yet you know it is not right.

NZOZI: I talk openly to you only.

MARY: I don't think so. You have friends like Muchoti-I am sure you speak a lot

NZOZI: I do speak to him-but guardedly. Those who avidly eat from your palm can readily eat from another palm.

MARY: Politicians are unscrupalous. Sometimes I ask myself: how did I end up with a politician as a husband.

NZOZI: (amused) You could not resist the charm.

MARY: (laughs) You are right. Politicians are captivating (pause) By the way, what would happen if your coalition of ethnic communities fails to win the elections?

NZOZI: (laughs) Whoever heard of an incumbent in this part of the world losing an election? The election commission and courts know the benefits of being friendly. If they don't, they can always be reminded.

MARY: Wouldn't it rile the international observers?

NZOZI: (derisively) International observers dare not antagonize a sovereign state. They know our Chinese friends are becoming cosier. They do not want to be displaced. They will give us clean bill of health. There were a few irregularities, because nothing is perfect. The elections met the threshold.

MARY: My dear, I begin to develop a queasy feeling that something bad is bound to happen. You know even an accomplished acrobat misses a step and disaster follows. For the sake of the country and family just honour the MOU.

NZOZI: (Sourly) You are betraying me.

MARY: Me? No

NZOZI: A wife is supposed to stand by her husband in times of strife and in times of peace. She is his flange. I need you by my side. The constitution limits one to two terms. I assure you I'll not attempt to change the constitution so that I can have a third term.

MARY: The MOU is known by everybody. Do you think our friends will back you?

NZOZI: What friends?

MARY: You know them. The donors.

NZOZI: (Laughs) Those are just imperialists wearing a cloak of benevolence. They hold us hostage with their so called aid. Then they play holier-than-thou as if they are the epitome of integrity. Always asking questions about governance and corruption. What they don't know is that I can easily seek options from the orient. If I contest, I will not be violating the constitution. I'm sure they will not raise a finger for they would not like to lose a key ally to the Orient. Do not worry, my dear. What I need is your full backing.

MARY: Do not expect me to back you when you commit treachery? You can switch to the Orient if its suits you, but could you be jumping from the frying pan to the fire?

NZOZI: No. The Orient option suits me. They don't ask irritating questions about governance and corruption.

MARY: They are only interested in ostentatious projects and what they give you attracts an interest that is exorbitant. Then they bring their personnel and deny locals a chance to make a living.

NZOZI: That is just Western propaganda. The case of a jilted lover. Dear, you have to support me.

MARY: If it is my duty to stand by you, I will. However, I still have doubts. I hope we do not come out with bruised noses and helpless knuckles.

NZOZI: No, do not worry. (Laughs). The press does not call me the professor of politics for nothing. Where is our dear Grace?

MARY: She's at her computer. Always chatting, tweeting and playing games. She can stay indoors the whole day.

NZOZI: Do you encourage that?

MARY: She's a grown-up. At twenty-four I have no control over her. Let her pursue her interests.

NZOZI: (Seriously) A president's daughter must always be in the limelight, gracing occasions like fashion shows, youth concerts and even singing in the choir. It adds a feather in the cap. In my case she can be very useful. She could attract the youth vote from opposing communities. Sometimes the youth are not persuaded by ethnic considerations to vote. Many of our youth did not vote for us in the last election. We garnered only 60 % of the votes. If they had voted we would have garnered 75%. And in politics that's a big statement.

MARY: I presume she advances your cause through the social media

NZOZI: There is this MP who is single. He is from the Lunda ethnic community. Lunda is the third largest tribe.

MARY: What do you have in mind?

NZOZI: If this young man can marry Grace in an ostentatious wedding we will be assured of the community's backing. I will first appoint him to the cabinet and offer him something prestigious as Minister for Internal Security.

MARY: Mr. Sisi, the current minister, has not done any wrong.

NZOZI: He is from my tribe. He can be sacrificed with the least injury to my voting block.

MARY: You're making a blunder. To offer this portfolio to a member of another community will be detrimental to our safety. During recruitment he'll make sure many members of his community join the police. In case of trouble, we'll be unsafe. You should have some foresight.

NZOZI: Do you think I have not considered that? The second largest tribe has the vice presidency. Charles Kedi from Lunda will be groomed to replace me when my term expires. With Grace as his wife, the Presidency will still be in the family. You know how women can be influential (laughs) Of course you know. I don't make a drastic decision before seeking your advice. That is why I want you to support me.

MARY: Everybody expects the vice president to be the president.

NZOZI: That will not be the case. His ethnic block will be replaced by the Lunda. Charles and Peter share a surname. Many semi-illiterate voters will vote for Charles thinking they're voting for Peter.

MARY: That will not be the case if Peter vies for presidency.

NZOZI: He will flop. My tribe is the biggest. I have brought on board the third, through Charles Kedi. The fourth and fifth are still in my clutch. If Peter Kedi's tribe votes for him plus the rest of the small communities, he will not garner more than 40%. That is why I'm going for the second term.

GRACE: You're a real genius, my husband.

NZOZI: And you a genius for understanding and supporting me.
(They do a jig, embrace and resume their seats)

Enter ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH: Your excellency, the minister for Foreign Affairs and the minister for finance are here. Do I guide them to the boardroom?

NZOZI: Let them come here. It is good to discuss serious matters in a wonderful natural environment.

MARY: You should meet them in the board room. I presume it is a formal meeting.

NZOZI: Not really formal. I think they just want to update me on their agreement with investors.

MARY: That is formal.

NZOZI: Not in the real sense. There will not be a record of the meeting. No cameras and reporters.

MARY: May I leave? I'm certain I won't be needed.

NZOZI: Don't leave, dear. The presidency comprises the president and the First Lady.

MARY: (To ELIZABETH) You are still here? Go and ask them to come to the garden. We have enough seats here.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, your excellency (exit)

NZOZI: She's a fine lady. She never talks to the press or to anyone about state house matters. Such people are rare to come by these days.

MARY: Some are very nasty. They sell tidbits to the press Remember the one in Vendia who leaked to the press that a presidential body guard had impregnated the President's daughter. It was a terrible scandal.

NZOZI: Indeed it was. Such a thing cannot happen here. I'm always well informed. I have trusted people in the media houses. If they sniff a scandal they inform me instantly. If it is a story to be published I persuade the editor to drop it. If perchance he is recalcitrant, masked men raid the establishment and perform some mechanical adjustments.

MARY: Did you have a hand in the raid on 'The Reliable'?

NZOZI: It was just a little lesson on courtesy.

MARY: The things that power can do!

NZOZI: I have a wonderful working relationship with the media. We respect each other just like antelopes respect lions.

MARY: All the same, our Grace cannot drag us into a scandal. She is too wise for that. I believe her education abroad has had a positive influence on her life.

NZOZI: I hope so. I'll ring Charles to invite him to tea or dinner. My plan has to start rolling. I'm sure Grace will like him.

MARY: I know she is sensible. Let us not force her into a relationship she objects to. She's our daughter and we cannot sacrifice her on the altar of political expediency. If she likes him, the better. If she doesn't, that's it.

NZOZI: She must like him.

Enter KITUDA, KATU, ZEDONG, CHANG.

KITUDA: You excellency, we are indeed sorry to intrude in your privacy. We wouldn't have come had we known that you were enjoying a private family session with the First Lady. We're indeed sorry sir.

NZOZI: Don't be too formal Mr. Kitunda (Shaking hands) Make your selves comfortable. You know the President is human too.

KATU: Thank you, your excellency. I wish we had reporters to document your humility as human beings. It goes down well with ordinary citizens.

NZOZI: (To Mary) May be you could tell them to serve us tea here. I like eating in the open.

MARY: Very well. Make yourselves comfortable (exit)

KITUDA: Your excellency, this is Mr. Zedong and this is Mr. Chang. They are directors of High pride International. The company is in manufacturing and construction. They are very useful investors.

NZOZI: (Shakes their hands vigorously) Feel at home. We value investors. It is through foreign investment that our economy can develop. We really appreciate the work you brothers from the Orient are doing to uplift the lives of our people.

ZEDONG: Thank you, your excellency.

CHANG: Thank you, your excellency.

KITUDA: As you requested your excellency, I negotiated on behalf of the government with High pride international. They are putting up a multi-million dollar factory that will be churning out five thousand mobile phones daily. Your excellency, you are cognizant of the fact that the three major mobile phone servers are the highest remitters of tax. What this means is the country's revenue collection will treble.

NZOZI: (Excited) A boon for the economy is an advantage to all of us. Feel welcome.

KITUDA: The same company is to construct a grandiose highway from the port to the capital. This will provide employment to many people. When the construction is over goods will be transported cheaply.

NZOZI: (Excited) I think this is great! Mr. Kituda, We'll eat with chopsticks. Ah, thank God! Life is so wonderful. Great stuff.

KATU: I wish we had reporters. This is great news! Can I summon the Presidential Press Unit?

NZOZI: Please do so. I would like major media houses to come. (to ZEDONG and CHANG) Friends, you may accompany Mr. Katu. I'll be joining you soon. Meanwhile I would like to have a word with Mr. Kituda.

ZEDONG: Thank you, your excellency.

CHANG: Thank you, your excellency.

[They stand to leave. Enter Grace and palace staff bringing tea]

NZOZI: (Proudly) This is my daughter Grace. She is as intelligent as her father. Just finished her masters degree in law at Oxford. I'm very proud of her.

ZEDONG: (Obviously mesmerized by her beauty) Glad to meet you.

GRACE: Glad too.

CHANG: Glad to meet you.

GRACE: Glad too.

NZOZI: (To staff) We'll not be having tea in the garden after all. I'll make it a state dinner. We need to celebrate the signing of two monumental contracts. [exit staff]

KITUDA: This is a great occasion (exeunt all but NZOZI and KITUDA)

NZOZI: (Excitedly) Do you realize the importance of these contracts?

KITUDA: Well...well... The mobile phone one has no financial implication for us. We just gave them a license to set up a factory. They will employ our people and pay taxes. The common person will have access to cheap mobile phones. As for the other deal ... well ... it has some financial implication. It is a loan, to be repaid twenty times.

NZOZI: Twenty times!

KITUDA: Yes, twenty times. But the kickback is fat and round. We have wired it to you Swiss account. The way you wanted it done.

NZOZI: That is great. I expected it to be Commensurate with the risk.

KITUDA: When the deal is too delicate, the kickback is bigger (aside) And the job shoddier.
NZOZI: Now slippery politicians can slip into my palm. (laughs) These Chinese projects are my bread and butter. I hope some busybodies will not dismiss this one as not necessary. Have you talked to our lawyers in case there is some misunderstanding?

KITUDA: I have. You know them well. (derisively). The rich and privileged are the mouth that gorges on choicy delicacies. Lawyers are the anus that takes care of the waste.

NZOZI: (very much amused) You are a cracker! I just hope this project was necessary.
KITUDA: It was necessary. It is a high profile project. The whole world will see or hear about it. Your profile internationally will rise. You will have a place in the who-is-who clique of heads of state. And the citizens will see it as development and adore you. Ordinary citizens do not know the implication of loans. They only see development.

NZOZI: Will the repayment of the loan put a strain on the economy? I don't like Arab style revolts.

KITUDA: The gains outweigh the disadvantages. By the time we begin to repay the loan in earnest your term would have expired. Who cares about those who occupy your house after you have left?

NZOZI: I see a great future. The economy will grow. The people will be happy and my rating will go high. We will eat with chopsticks (laughs) Let those who eat with folks and knives wallow in their foolishness.

KITUDA: Opting to do business with the Orient is a wise move.
NZOZI: (Aside) This helps me in my determination to seek a second term (aloud) Let us join the others.

(Exeunt)

SCENE 2

Scene same as Act 1, Scene 1. Evening. Enter NZOZI with a briefcase

NZOZI: It is a lovely evening. The sun is descending and bathing the tree tops with golden splendor. So lovely in this evening that one wishes it could last forever. It is a connundrum. The sun is mellow and beautiful in the evening. It is just like we human beings. As children we are lovely angels, as adults rough devils and as old people grumpy angels. One of these days I'll write a book about humanity. If I have time. Will I have the time? May be after I have retired from politics. If I win a second term-nay-when I win a second term I'll try to be a grumpy angel. Then I can retire gracefully and try my hand at writing. Who knows, I could even win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Enter Grace and Mary

O sweet ladies! I can see you have come out in the garden to savour the evening's mellow sweetness. Few things are as touching as twilight, especially on a cloudless evening. It is a rude reminder that sweet things must come to pass.

GRACE: Dad you are in the wrong profession. You should have been a poet or philosopher.

NZOZI: They say politics is the graveyard of brilliant brains.

MARY: You amaze me. You are so candid.

NZOZI: Only in your presence. There are certain things I cannot tell anyone else. We all have a conscience yet very often pretend not to. Some things cannot just be told openly.

MARY: I can see you are in buoyant spirits. The dinner was great! Oh life is so sweet, so sweet!

NZOZI: Our friends from the Orient are great. Dear, when we win the second term, we'll eat with chopsticks.

GRACE: (Surprised) Second term?

NZOZI: Yes, second term.

GRACE: I thought you have an MOU with Mr. Peter Kedi.

NZOZI: (Mischievously) MOU'S in this part of the world are made to be broken. To spice up politics.

GRACE: How will you win? That MOU was the glue that held your political alliance.

NZOZI: You will have to help me.

GRACE: Me? Help you? Dad, I don't get it.

MARY: Your father sometimes has outlandish ideas. He has elaborate plans to make sure that the presidency stays in the family.

GRACE: You want me to be the president?

NZOZI: (With a wink) You could be if you are smart.

GRACE: Politics is a whirlwind I wouldn't like to find myself in.

NZOZI: When you plunge into it you will find it difficult to leave. Whoever stuck their index finger in a honey jar and did not do it a second and third time? Politics is exciting and titillating.

MARY: Cut to the chasis. She'll understand.

NZOZI: My daughter, you are educated and now an adult. Your mother married at 24. It is my feeling as a proud father to have you espoused to a man of great substance in an ostentatious wedding. The citizens will love it.

GRACE: (Laughs) So there are men without substance?

NZOZI: Of course there are. In Chinua Achebe's Ibo community they are efulefu, in Swahili vinyangarika. They are a disgrace to my gender.

MARY: We have this dashing and charismatic MP. You know him. He is a frequent visitor here. He was even at the dinner. You see, my daughter (drawing her close) such men are not easy to come by. And he is a gentleman to boot. He can make a perfect husband.

GRACE: (Laughs) I didn't know in this digital age we still have things like match-making.

MARY: Of course match-making is crude and archaic. We cannot stoop that low. We are talking of safeguarding the future. Your dad intends to make the young man the minister for Internal Security. It is a plum portfolio. It will give him clout. When your dad bows out after the second term, he'll anoint him as the Presidential Candidate. Everything is being put in place so that nothing goes awry. When he is the president and you are the First Lady, you are as good as being the president-if you are really your mother's daughter. You do not need to go to the polls to be president.

GRACE: That's brilliant! I've become used to the State House and leaving it would be traumatic. Is he ready to marry? You know, marrying a sitting president's daughter is quite intimidating. Very few men would rise to the challenge.

NZOZI: Only men with substance would let such an opportunity slip by. And I know he is quite level-headed.

GRACE: I feel confused.

NZOZI: (Aside) when a woman says she is confused, she means she is in love (aloud) I would advise you to go to your room and think it over. A tranquil meditation will restore your topsy-turvy mind. And when you cotton on him, you'll find him the perfect man most women desire.

GRACE: I hope so. Enjoy the twilight.

NZOZI: We will.

MARY: We will.

Exit GRACE

NZOZI: That was a cinch. I never expected she could so willingly acquiesce. Ambition for power does wonders (laughs) Things are turning out much better than I expected. I hope the investments by our friends from the Orient excite the citizens. I'll be assured of a second term-and a third term by proxy. (They do a jig)

MARY: (Out of breath) Enough! Servants might see us. Or some malicious paparazzi could claim a scoop.

NZOZI: It would be to our advantage. The president and the First Lady are human beings first and leaders second. Now we have to talk to Charles Kedi.

MARY: I'm sure he'll be more than willing. I was opposed to your intention to seek a second term, but somehow I've come round to it. You always say the allure of power creates miracles. Saints metamorphose into deamons, brilliance into sloppiness and friends into enemies. He won't let us down.

NZOZI: You mustn't show a cow to the slaughter house your intentions. Let him not know why we want him to marry our daughter.

MARY: We seriously need a marriage in the family.

NZOZI: A marriage in the family is always exciting. It can only be compared to the first meeting of two lovers.

MARY: (Excited) Do you remember how we met?

NZOZI: Of course! I was coming from the rugby field.

MARY: And I was coming from the library.

NZOZI: (Transforming himself into a college student) Pretty lady, that's a nice book you have.

MARY: (Transforming herself into a college student. Coyly) I don't know if it is nice. I have not read it (tries to proceed. Nzozi bars her way) Please, can I pass? I'll be late for supper.

NZOZI: Of course you won't be late. The kitchen staff know too well they cannot close up before the rugby players have eaten. We'd simply pull down the doors.

MARY: (Confident. Laughs) You guys are arrogant.

NZOZI: We just have a passion for the game. And we are a bit weird. However, we are humble and harmless; We are only beasts on the field.

MARY: (Feeling his biceps) You are friends with the gym?

NZOZI: Not friends. Brothers. How else can you be a rugby player if you are a wimp?

MARY: I presume you eat like gluttons.

NZOZI: Not gluttons. We eat to fill the stomach. If a bucket of rice fills the stomach is that being gluttonous?

MARY: (Laughs) A bucket of rice? Isn't that enough for ten men? I don't know what gluttony is if eating a bucket of rice is not.

NZOZI: I know what it is.

MARY: What is it?

NZOZI: Gazing at your angelic face. My, you're so lovely! How long have you been in this college?

MARY: Three weeks. And don't say such impudent things about me. Excuse me (tries to go. Nzozi moves in her way) Are you bullying me because I am a fresher?

NZOZI: I'm complementing you because you are a stunning beauty.

MARY: You make me embarrassed.

NZOZI: You're ten times more beautiful when you're embarrassed.

MARY: You're a lunatic.

NZOZI: We're all lunatics when we are in love.

MARY: In love? Well... I don't get it.

NZOZI: I think I'm rather hasty to make a try. I mean, to convert before making a try. What is your name?

MARY: Mary Renzi-are you satisfied?

NZOZI: Satisfied? I have not eaten. I have to take a shower first before I go to the kitchen.

MARY: (Laughing) You're a bastard!

NZOZI: Bastard? No. Call me by my name.

MARY: I don't know your name and I don't care.

NZOZI: Of course you care. I can sense it in your quivering voice Gracious! You have become thirty times more beautiful. I am Mpata Nzozi.

MARY: What a queer name! You don't have a Christian name?
 NZOZI: For a woman a sweet Christian name augments her beauty and charm. For a man it enfeebles him. I have ambitions. I want to be a world class rugby player like Jonah Lomu. Or a Hollywood actor. Or a world class writer. Or even a distinguished politician. These are situations that require a unique name. I'm John when in a Bible study class.

MARY: You're an interesting fellow.
 NZOZI: I feel flattered fully to be complemented by a lovable lovely lady. Note the alliteration.

MARY: (Laughs) You're something else.
 NZOZI: Yes, something else called love.
 MARY: You're impossible.
 NZOZI: Not me. It is love that makes it impossible for you to turn me down. I'll look you up. I'm sure you stay in Rwenzori. Most freshers stay there I'll look you up after supper.

MARY: How will you find me? You don't know my room!
 NZOZI: Your sweet scent will guide me to your room.
 [They laugh and do a jig. They resume their characters]

MARY: And you and I hit it off.
 NZOZI: I have never regretted it.
 MARY: Unfortunately Grace may not have such an experience. To meet your true love quite unexpectedly is quite romantic.
 NZOZI: I'm sure she'll be happy.
 MARY: We humans are rather strange. Sometimes we do and say things we know are not good but somehow convince ourselves it is alright. We are throwing our daughter into the clutches of a man we hardly know just because of political expediency.
 NZOZI: Trust me, all will be fine.

Enter ELIZABETH and PROFESSOR MUCHOTI

ELIZABETH: Your excellency, here is professor Muchoti. I have shown him here as you instructed.
 NZOZI: Very well. You may now leave. How are you professor?

Exit ELIZABETH

MUCHOTI: I'm fine, your excellency. I trust her excellency is fine too.
 MARY: I'm fine, thank you. I can see two of you have important issues to discuss. I'll leave.
 MUCHOTI: Thank you, your excellency (exit Mary)
 NZOZI: Have a seat. And do not be very formal. When I'm in this garden I drift to informality. Nature by itself is informal. That is why we should be relaxed and informal when we savour the beauty that nature offers.

MUCHOTI: You're quite right.
 NZOZI: I asked you here so that I can have your opinion regarding certain issues.
 MUCHOTI: I'm all ears your excellency.
 NZOZI: You may not be aware of it but I intend to go for another term. I need your advice on how to go about it.

MUCHOTI: I know you expected me to be surprised. I know too well that once power is tested it is difficult to let it go. In states with a constitutional limit of the presidency, the incumbents are often tempted to alter the constitution in order to stay on. In your case the constitution allows you to go for another term. It is a silly MOU that inhibits you.

NZOZI: You're right. How do I circumvent this inhibition?

MUCHOTI: I'll give you a story. My grandfather was a poultry farmer. He had two prize cocks. They kept going at each other and most of the time not doing what they were supposed to do. The eggs were unfertilized. He had to make a drastic resolution. He had to get rid of one cock. One was younger and the other was older but with pedigree. He slaughtered the younger and served it to guests who praised the delicious meal. The immediate effect was he started having wonderful chickens. It is my considered opinion that you get rid of your vice-president. He is the ambitious young cock with no pedigree.

NZOZI: That's fine. Fine indeed. There's a snag. If I get rid of him, I'll lose his community's votes.

MUCHOTI: According to Machiavelli the king must get rid of the king maker. It is good for his own safety and comfort. A strong and reliable leader shoots and asks questions later. Get rid of him at once and somehow the situation will solve itself. Our people have a reputation for complaining and rioting but after one week everything is forgotten. Life goes on.

NZOZI: The question is: How do I get rid of him?

MUCHOTI: A helicopter accident will do the trick. The accident must occur in his stronghold. Before take off a special technician must make sure the plane is safe for takeoff. He can be paid handsomely for inspecting the V-P's plane. Records about the identity of the technician should vanish.

NZOZI: Professor, sometimes my conscience pricks me. I just can't do certain things. It's this strong Christian background. What Mary calls pristine good. You should know I was the chairperson of Christian union in college.

MUCHOTI: Don't be sentimental about a political decision. People do not respect sentimentality. Your excellency, your religious background should work to your advantage. When the V-P is fatally silenced, you should address the nation on national TV. Your countenance should be all humility and grief. You were an accomplished actor in college. You can put to use histrionic skills. Talk about the usual things in a solemn touching tone... No stone will be left unturned... He has left a gap that will never be filled... there will be a state funeral... his widow will be part of the contingency to the UN... such stuff. Most importantly there should be a religious ceremony with all the pomp.

NZOZI: (Amused) I can see why you are a favourite with the Minister for Culture and social services. You must have done an excellent job for you to be paid 380 000 dollars.

MUCHOTI: (Uneasily) My company was paid, not me. The job was worth the money.

NZOZI: Of course it was.

MUCHOTI: (To avoid the topic) The accident should occur just six months before the elections.

NZOZI: I fear Mr. Pulo, the NGO man. He is nosy and irritating. He might smell a rat and start a mass agitation.

MUCHOTI: Mr. Pulo is no push-over. You can make him busy.

NZOZI: How?

MUCHOTI: Send sleuths to find out the source of the NGO funding. Initiate rivalry in the NGO. Initiate a scandal and blame it on him.

NZOZI: That is great.

MUCHOTI: He'll be too busy to bother you.

NZOZI: Thank you for the advice. I know by the time I act my rating will be up. The investments by our friends from the Orient will do the trick.

MUCHOTI: Of course they will.

NZOZI: Thanks a lot. You may now leave. Pass through the office of the comptroller of state house. (Winks) He appreciates visitors. I've informed him about you.

MUCHOTI: Thank you, your excellency (exit).

NZOZI: Things are falling into place. I must get the second term. It is good advice but it is dangerous and it pricks my conscience I do not like this bit about shedding blood. Appoint Charles? What if Peter manages to rally his community and two other big ones behind him? That will do it for me. I cannot allow it. I'll go by professor's advice. We are born good and remain good but situations in life turn us to evil. After the deed I'll go to church and confess. King David was remorseful and God accepted him back. I too will ask God for forgiveness and build a big cathedral in memory of Peter.

Enter ELIZABETH and CHARLES KEDI

ELIZABETH: Your excellency, Mr Kedi is here. I have shown him here as instructed.

NZOZI: (Shaking his hands) Have a seat Mr Kedi (to ELIZABETH) You may leave.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, your excellency (exit)

NZOZI: I'm glad you stayed after dinner. There is an important issue I have to discuss with you.

KEDI: Thank you, your excellency.

NZOZI: I have been watching you keenly and listening to your speeches both in and outside parliament. I have come to a conclusion that you are an intelligent and charismatic man. Such attributes should not be put to waste. It is therefore important that you become a member of the cabinet. I'd like to appoint you the Minister for Internal security. I'm dropping the incumbent because he's doing a lacklustre job. I know it has taken you by surprise. Surprises that are pleasant are to be cherished.

KEDI: Your excellency, it is pleasant to learn that you hold me in high esteem. Indeed I'm humbled sir. It has always been my ambition to be useful to the state in a higher capacity. This responsibility you bestow upon me fits in my cherished dream. I humbly accept it, sir. Thank you so much for the distinct recognition.

NZOZI: I will announce on state television this change in the cabinet. Mr. Kedi, here is a small token. It will help you sort out things. With such a heavy responsibility you cannot miss a few hitches. (He hands him a brief case).

KEDI: I'm humbled. Thank you sir (exit)

NZOZI You are now a ductile toy in my hand (laughs) The scheme is underway. Tomorrow after I announce the cabinet reshuffle, I'll invite him here. Mary will handle the rest. She must make sure that Kedi and Grace hit it off. An ostentatious wedding can soon follow. No, the wedding will come after the fatal helicopter accident. No, that would be a bit suspicious. The wedding must take place as soon as possible. O I will eat with chopsticks...
The sun, weary is about to dip behind yonder trees. Birds are already coming to brood. I too must return to the house. It has been a great day (exit)

SCENE 3

MARY State house, MARY'S office. MARY paces, talking to herself.
We are human beings created by God and with pristine goodness. We are born angels, innocent and vulnerable. What I cannot understand is what happens to these angels years later. Is it the people they encounter, the challenges in the environment or fickleness that drives them to evil? How easy an angel metamorphoses into a beast! I can still remember Nzozi as a student. He was a paragon, pious to a fault, strong rugby player, brilliant actor on stage and very amiable. The girls envied me for landing such a catch. My Nzozi would have been a Hollywood star, an international televangelist or a world class writer. He only had to choose one. Then he slid into politics. And what has he become? A selfish-go-getter who would trample anyone in his way as he ascends to his political apogee. The once warm, soft eyes are cold and hard and the sweet drawl is now husky [pauses to wipe a tear] was he really good? Some people have a proclivity to evil from a tender age but do not show it until somebody or something stirs up the incubating vice. Did I trace any evil in his voice or touch? What about me? Am I good? Why am I inclined to his way of thinking? Am I imperceptibly becoming a beast? Why did I not oppose him when he suggested that Grace should wed Charles?
I know it's not right. A man or woman should be left to choose whomever they want to be with. Are we taking cognizance of Grace's feelings? Or of Charles' feelings? What if their marriage turns misery? They will always blame me and it'll itch my conscience.
A mother always wishes the best for her children (wipes a tear) Why is it that we see wrong but never speak against it? Of course when wrong suits us, it is invisible. Sometimes we do wrong and know it is wrong yet try to convince ourselves that it is *faute de mieux*. Why? Are we moral cowards? Are we blind-folded by the exquisite prize ahead? Oh God, if only I could become the human being I was before we plunged into politics (a knock) Come in.

Enter ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH: Madam, Mr. Kedi is waiting. Can I let him in?

MARY: It's alright. Let him in.

Exit ELIZABETH, enter CHARLES KEDI

Come in and make yourself comfortable.

KEDI: Thank you, your excellency (sits uneasily)

MARY: It pleases me to see youthful politicians like you in our political arena. You give fresh breath to politics. I hope you are enjoying your term in parliament.

KEDI: Indeed it is enjoyable. It is also a challenge.

MARY: A challenge? Can you explain?

KEDI: I think we got it all wrong in the first place.

MARY: Got what wrong?

KEDI: The role of an MP. I believe a member of parliament should be the link between the government and his constituents. Just as it is in most developed countries. He is representing the people because not all of them can sit in parliament. They tell him what they want the government to do for them and he delivers the message. The first MP's were power seekers. Becoming an MP opened an avenue to riches and power. To keep power they bribed voters or silenced serious opponents. For us, the new generation, if we don't shower money to voters, we stand little chances of being elected. The voters see us as money conduits. The needy ones expect us to pay fees for their school going children, to settle their hospital bills, name it, they want us to do it.

MARY: You mean you showered voters with money in order to be elected?

KEDI: (Laughs) 'showered'. Is rather strong.

MARY: I'm sorry.

KEDI: I won because of my charisma. Also my youthfulness appealed to the majority of voters who are young. However, you cannot run a campaign without money. A few coins must be dished out.

MARY: That is the tragedy of our country (sighs).

KEDI: It is this unrealistic expectation from the electorate that sparks off corruption and greed.

MARY: Please explain.

KEDI: We elected leaders enjoy certain privileges. We are addressed as 'honourable' and revered everywhere. If we go to a social place, the revelers say, "Honourable sir, prove that you are honourable." So you buy drinks or indulge them in whatever way you desire. You're protecting your honour. How do you sustain the honour? You agitate for astronomical remuneration or just become venal. We progressive and youthful politicians find ourselves in a swift flowing stream. We cannot go against the strong current. We cannot even stop. We just swim with the current.

MARY: Must you swim with the current?

KEDI: Yes. If you don't, you drown.

MARY: Can something be done?

KEDI: Unfortunately nothing can be done, madam. Maybe it can, if all these people are uprooted and exiled in some far away land. Then a new untainted population is brought. And you know too well that is impossible.

MARY: So we let things go on as usual?

KEDI: No. some of us try to temper the nasty situation. An article in the papers condemning corruption. A paper at a workshop suggesting how to end corruption or how to achieve good governance. Generally we try to be good. Maybe someday good will triumph.

MARY: The president holds you in high esteem.
 KEDI: I'm deeply humbled.
 MARY: You're the new minister for Internal Security.
 KEDI: Yes, but it is not yet official.
 MARY: As a politician do you harbour ambitions?
 KEDI: A politician who does not harbour ambition has no business being in politics. Everybody has an ambition. Members of any congregation aspire to be pastors or officials in the church. Barmaids aspire to own bars and street children fight to get at the top of the hierarchy. I have political ambitions, madam.
 MARY: How high? President?
 KEDI: (Laughs) That is treason, madam.
 MARY: Treason? Why?
 KEDI: Your husband, his excellency, is still in power.
 MARY: So you're biding your time?
 KEDI: (Laughs) No. That's being cruel.
 MARY: Sorry for being rather personal. Where did you go to school?
 KEDI: (Confidently) That's not personal, madam. I went to a local primary school. Then I went to St Andrews High school.
 MARY: St Andrews? It is obviously the most prestigious boys school in the country. You must have been brilliant to win a place there. That's quite fantastic.
 KEDI: I admit I was brilliant. Maybe I'm still brilliant.
 MARY: I'm sure you are. After St Andrews?
 KEDI: I went to the National university. I read Economics and Maths. I topped the class.
 MARY: You must be a genius.
 KEDI: People say I am.
 MARY: Then you got employed?
 KEDI: No. I won a scholarship. I went for my masters at Yale.
 MARY: Yale! You should be the minister for finance, not internal security.
 KEDI: I have no choice over that. I'll be comfortable in my portfolio.
 MARY: My daughter went to Oxford.
 KEDI: Brilliant. Is she employed? She must be self-effacing. We do not know her.
 MARY: She's still under the wings of her parents.
 KEDI: I hope she is not in a hurry to walk away (laughs)
 MARY: You never know. Young people are difficult to understand.
 (A knock) Come in.

[Enter GRACE, hesitatingly]

Come in. Mr Kedi, this is my daughter Grace. Grace, this is Mr. Kedi , the new Minister for Internal security.
 GRACE: (Shaking his hand) I thought the Minister for Internal Security is Mr Zipo?
 MARY: The president has relieved him of the portfolio. Apparently he has been quite lucklustre. Mr. Kedi is the new minister, though it has not been officially announced.
 GRACE: Congratulations.
 KEDI: Thank you.
 MARY: I'll leave you to talk. Young people usually have a lot to tell each other.

KEDI: We surely have a lot to talk about.

(Exit Mary)

GRACE: How did you manage to win a parliamentary seat at such a tender age?

KEDI: (Laughs) Tender age? I'm 28 and that's not a tender age. I know a lady my age who is a grandmother.

GRACE: That's impossible.

KEDI: She dropped out at 14. She was pregnant. The daughter she begot has just given birth.

GRACE: Men are so evil.

KEDI: It takes two to tango.

GRACE: Two grown-ups. Not a man and a baby.

KEDI: That is moral decadency, a social evil pervading the country. There is some good from NGO's. They try to address the issue.

MARY: You members of parliament should enact laws to protect the girl child.

KEDI: There are laws, but are they enforced?

GRACE: That's a question for the Minister for Constitutional Affairs and the attorney general.

KEDI: You read law?

GRACE: Yes, and you?

KEDI: Economics

Grace: What a shame. They dumped you in the ministry for internal security. You should be the planning minister or the finance minister.

KEDI: I have no choice but to accept the responsibility. When I get settled, will you pay me a visit at my new office?

GRACE: (Pleased) I'll willingly come. I'd like to see how an economist deals with police impunity, daring robbers, political agitators and terrorism.

KEDI: (On a light note) You're so mean.

GRACE: Maybe your bodyguards will not let me near you.

KEDI: I would have them fired.

GRACE: (On a light note) learning the ropes first, eh?

KEDI: Some things are inevitable. I expect you at my office.

GRACE: It's a deal.

(Enter MARY)

KEDI: Madam, I'm sorry we have invaded your office.

MARY: Never mind. I can see you're getting on well.

KEDI: Your daughter is intelligent. I admire brains.

GRACE: Don't mock me. He is a brilliant economist. The president should have offered him the Ministry of Finance.

KEDI: I'm content with whatever has been offered.

MARY: That's the spirit.

KEDI: Thank you for the hospitality. I beg to leave (rising)

MARY: You're welcome. Come and see us quite often.

KEDI: That's a promise. I will (exit)

MARY: The young man has a brilliant future.

GRACE: He's a good fellow. A bit sullied by politics, but still good.
MARY: Did he tell you he holds a masters from Yale?
GRACE: What is he doing in politics?
MARY: You remind me of your father.
GRACE: My father?
MARY: Were it not for politics, your father would be an award winning writer or actor or even a renowned rugby player or all at once. He cheekily says politics in this part of the world is the graveyard of brilliant brains.
GRACE: I admire his candour. I agree with him. Imagine a young man like Mr Kedi dirtying his hands in politics. He could be at the WB or IMF. Such wasted brains. However, he is a good fellow. He has invited me to his office.
MARY: Invited you? That's fine. Who knows, we could be celebrating a wedding soon.
GRACE: (Coyly) Mother, who talked about wedding? We've just met and we hit it off...
MARY: I'm sure you'll hit off. If you make the effort.
GRACE: Mother, this is not the west. Here it is the man who takes the initiative.
MARY: And it is the woman to do the prompting.
GRACE: I'll not do that. Let nature take its course.
MARY: Nature is helped to take its course-by we mortals
GRACE: Call it interference.
MARY: Whatever it is, make haste to visit him.
GRACE: Mum, you can be pushy.
MARY: Call it maternal instincts.
GRACE: You are a sweet mother! Let me go to my computer (exit).
MARY: Everything is going on well. I had this fear that I could be sending my only daughter into the clutches of a beast. He is a good fellow. Can one be in politics and still remain good? Sometimes I wish we could move out of politics and retreat to some Eden where there is good in everything.