

**THE
PRINCE
OF
SOVENGA**

(a South African Oedipus Rex)

By

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CHARACTERS ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE

M.C.

King Sekhurama

Sifiso

Mantwa

Priestess

Makhudu

Drunk

Buniswa

Gontse

Dineo

Dhlamini

Masemola

Prince Sekhurama

Andiswa

Khaya

Smangaliso

Sibusiso

Sibongile

Scribe

Sword-Bearer

Old Sword-Bearer

Queen

Venda Group

Zulus Group

Tsonga Group

Sepedi Group

Swati Group

East Africa Group

West Africa Group

Southern African Group

North African Group

FIRST PROCEEDINGS

The play opens with the singing of old South African songs in the palace of King Khunbulana of Sovenga Kingdom. The palace is glamorously furnished in peculiar local South African style, with all tribal colours and garments represented. The fourth and youngest Queen has given birth to a child. The King sits, surrounded by four wives, one of which is the youngest wife, carrying the new born child. Villagers are also present as well as visitors from neighbouring nations in the land of the brown man. Everyone is dressed traditionally. The praise singer eulogises the King. Special wrestling matches will soon be on display to entertain the King and the crowd. The Praise singer eulogises the King before Malaika continues.

PRAISE SINGER: Vhonani (Introduces the play with eulogy to Sovenga ancestors)

MALAIKA: Your majesty. May you live long on the throne of your ancestors. Welcome everyone to the palace of the King of Sovenga and, as we are all aware, it is the dedication of the son of our King. As it is the custom in Sovenga, in the spirit of celebration, we have invited the strongest wrestlers and fighters in the kingdom to entertain your majesty. And then, today is also the day for our monthly debate. The King's scribe is here to record the proceedings. (To the crowd) Are you ready people?

CROWD: Yes!

MALAIKA: Alright then, let us begin.

Eight wrestlers, four on each side, file out from back stage to wrestle in pairs. They wrestle while the crowd cheer. After the matches, the King speaks)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: People of Sovenga.

CROWD: May the King live long!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Welcome to this occasion as we celebrate the birth of my son, the heir to this throne of my ancestors.

CROWD: May the King live long!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I have fought battles, routed my adversaries and took their sons and daughters as slaves. Today, these kingdoms and their Kings pay tribute to my Kingdom. Ours has become the richest kingdom in the South.

CROWD: May the King live long!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: We are also the strongest. Our military campaigns have innumerable conquests in the South. I defeated our enemies from near and far, even the umulungu who came to take our land and tried to make the peace-loving tribes of Sovenga enemies of one another. Like my fathers before me, I was furious, even devastated. Imagine our brethren, up in arms against one another.

CROWD: Ah!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Believe me! Our different tribes turned against one another. Just imagine, the Sothos against the Ndebeles. The Shangaan against the Vendas. Imagine the Pedis against the Zulus. The Swatis against the Tsongas. It does not make any sense. No, no, no, my people. Do not turn families into enemies. They divided our people in order to rule over them but I, King Khunebulana, have united our people in order to free them. I defeated ama umulungu.

CROWD: May the King live long.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Today, all the tribes of the South are represented in the Sovenga council. Generals of war have visited me from the north, east and west of the brown man's world in order to discover the secret of my prowess and strategies in battle.

CROWD: May the King live long!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: However, although I fought battles, I was yet troubled and wearied within my soul.

CROWD: May the King live long!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: What wearied me is that which haunted my bedroom for years.

CROWD: May the King receive comfort!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Ah! That comfort eluded my throne for many years. Through the prowess of the gods and my ancestors, my hands have built this great kingdom. My people live in prosperity and tranquillity.

CROWD: May the king prosper forever.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: But, for a long time, the gods forbade that I had an heir through my wives. For reasons I do not know, my Queens and slaves have been fruitful of female children alone. But what is that to my Kingdom? Useless.

CROWD: May the King receive comfort!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I tried repeatedly with my wives and some of the beautiful slaves without fruits to show for the efforts in my closet. Rumours even had it that my loins are defeated, even cursed.

CROWD: Ah?

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Yes, it is true. Oh, the pain of bareness grew unbearably painful. I wept in complaint to the gods. I woke my ancestors from sleep. Wake up, wake up dear ancestors. This sleep is no longer honourable. Remove this shame. This pain. This agony. I was mocked by neighbouring villages. Places where my sword has shed blood, now jeered in their songs, daily. The powerful King is powerfully impotent. Women chanted in their market places. The warrior in battle fields is feeble in the bedroom.

CROWD: Ah!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Yeeees! Those were the disgraceful lyrics of their provocative chants. They mocked me. They mocked your king. They sneered. And then jeered, and

sneered some more. What a temerity, what a mockery, what a madness.

MAN: May their tongues permanently stick to the roof of their mouths!

CROWD: So shall it be.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Well, the gods indulged them no further. Now that the gods have smiled on my throne, let our hearts pour out gratitude. For those detractors who mocked the absence of a Prince in this Kingdom, let their agony only increase.

CROWD: *(cuts in)* Yes!

KING

KHUNEBULANA:because, now, to their disgrace and to their charging, we now have a Prince. Today, we have a son. Ah, but it came through one of my slaves. For those of our neighbours, friends and well-wishers who have been anxious, seize from anxiety. At last, we now have a King in waiting. My people, it is time to celebrate. Roll out the drums, let the musicians entertain. Let the people eat and drink. Welcome your Prince. The Prince of Sovenga!

Men and women servants serve numerous guests from the different South African tribes: Venda, Sotho, Sepedi, Zulu, Ndebele, Tshonga, Shangaan. Guests are also present from all over Africa. The North, West, East and Southern Africa are represented and appropriately costumed. Everywhere speaks of class and glamour. The African beer is served. Dancers from different Sovenga tribes entertain and acrobats display their talents. The MC continues just after the dance, which lasts for about 3 minutes)

MALAIKA: Those were terrific dances, were they not?

CROWD: Yes! *(Clap)*

MALAIKA: Amongst us today are our families from Lesotho.

CROWD: Yes!

(The Lesotho people make a small parade)

MALAIKA: And all the way from Swaziland, our families.

CROWD: Yes!

(The Swati people make a small parade)

MALAIKA: And then, all the way from East Africa, are our Massai warriors. Asante abari! Applaud them. Sawa!

CROWD: Massai!

(The Massai people make a small parade)

SIFISO: I am a Massai!

MALAIKA: You become a Massai by birth, not by just screaming.

CROWD: *(Laugh)*

MALAIKA: And from the north of Africa, welcome our family.

**NORTH
AFRICANS:** Assalamu Allaikum!

CROWD: Wallaikum Assalamu!

(The North Africans make a small parade)

MALAIKA: And from West Africa, welcome our family. Ekaabo o, Akwabaa, Do oo.

(The West Africans make a small parade)

MALAIKA: This is good. You know, let it be on record that we are here experiencing the brotherhood of Africa. In actual fact, the brotherhood of all humanity. This is Africa. The cradle of human kind and civilization. The love we share today, the togetherness you here witness, are traces of the Ubuntu which our ancestors spoke of and lived for. We must do likewise. May the gods bless Africa.

CROWD: God bless Africa!

MALAIKA: Ubuntu! We must be our brother's and sister's keepers. *(To the crowd)* Have I spoken your minds?

CROWD: Yes! Ubuntu

(At this point, everyone, North, West, East and South of Sovenga, rise dance and sing a choreographed version of "Nkosi sikeleli' Africa", holding hands together. After the singing, the debate will begin).

MALAIKA: We may begin with the debate now, my people. Who first? Let it be educative please. Not like that of last year when, ok let us forgive about that one. Yes, Malaika.

MANTWA: You speak of Ubuntu as the nature and lifestyle of our ancestors.

MALAIKA: Yes, indeed, it was their way of life. Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu: a person is a person through other people.

MANTWA: And so?

MALAIKA: You don't know? Ubuntu embodies the essence of African humanism, which crosses boundaries of race and culture. It is the sum total of the highest human values and ideals.

MANTWA: But in my opinion, Ubuntu, historically, caused us problems than solutions.

MALAIKA: How?

MANTWA: Our kindness as Sovenga people made us to open our doors too wide to those people who pillaged and stole our land.

MALAIKA: Historically, our land was defended by our ancestors, shedding the blood of the innocent and the villain in the process. Now we have our land. We do not regret our Ubuntu, even if others took advantage of its magnanimity. Truth always triumph.

MANTWA: And then?

MALAIKA: And then, it begs no offence. Ubuntu way of life must be ours too, in this day and age. There exists a lot to be remedied in our time, through the ubuntu philosophy.

MANTWA: Of course, but we live in a different and complicated world today. Mfwetu, times have changed from those days when there was trust and everyone looked after the interests of others. They were,

because others were. The others were them and they were the others. Today, our shame is our selfishness, bigotry, nepotism and corruption. We are shamelessly alienated from Ubuntu today unlike our forebears. Their days were peaceful, ours, chaotic.

MALAIKA: It was Ubuntu, way back.

MANTWA: As you could imagine.

MALAIKA: (...cuts in)...Mantwa, if your tone is scrutinised, you sound pessimistic about the Ubuntu ways of our forebears.

MANTWA: No, no, no, of course not. I bear no grudges, except that...

MALAIKA: (...cuts in) No exceptions.

MANTWA: I differ. Is one to swallow every philosophy that chances by, hook, line and sinker? We are supposed to be rational beings, not animals. Can we not, at least, interrogate?

CROWD: (Laugh)

MALAIKA: Go on, child. Challenge your ancestors.

MANTWA: For someone your age, it is unfortunate that you do not use your ears very well. I never said challenge. I only said interrogate. Can you not at least spot the difference?

Everyone laughs at Malaika. Suddenly, one of the flamboyantly dressed lady guests begins to manifest strangely as one that is possessed. She swirls around a few times. She screams. She then brings out from her handbag a pouch of divination bones. She is a Sangoma. She finds a corner down stage left. She takes her time, moving hither and thither. She sits. Everyone is shocked. The Mantwa must take charge and rescue the gathering from this embarrassment.....

MALAIKA: Attention everyone. Em em ...it is actually not what you think. Calm down. The lady is just acting. It is comedy. Ignore her please everyone. Do not be distracted at all. It is not what you think.

CROWD: (Laugh heartily)

MALAIKA: Too much Soveng beer. It is not what....

PRIESTESS: (*cuts in*) What is it then, foolish one?

MALAIKA: You tell me. You must be delighted that you are disrupting a noble occasion.

PRIESTESS: It has not been chosen for me to meddle in debauchery. The gods have chosen a dignifying role for me. Not this sacrilege.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Since when has thanksgiving become sacrilegious?

MALAIKA: Are you not at all disturbed that you are disrupting a noble occasion? This indiscretion must cease.

PRIESTESS: Indiscretion? Children of these days. I came with prescriptions for your malady and, rather than be grateful, you call it indiscretion what the gods prescribe. What effrontery! For interrupting the mouthpiece of the gods, here is your punishment.

CROWD: Punishment?!

PRIESTESS: Check your testicles.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Testicles?

PRIESTESS: How many are they, foolish one?

MALAIKA: How many are they? That is preposterous. Of course they are two, woman.

MAKHUDU: Are they?

MALAIKA: What do you mean by are they? (*He checks again*)
Yes, they are.

CROWD: (*They laugh*)

PRIESTESS: Check again, foolish one. The one who interrupts the messenger of the gods. Check and unveil your buffoonery.

MAKHUDU: Quick. Check it, fast.

(Malaika begins to check his testicles right there, frightfully. His face changes to that of horror. Something is missing)

MAKHUDU: Why does it take so long?

MALAIKA: I am looking for them.

(He checks further more. He begins to remove his clothes one after the other)

MALAIKA: Ah! Nothing. They are no longer there. Ah!

PRIESTESS: Keep searching. A representative of the gods is not to be mocked. I take my leave before my ancestors are dragged into this buffoonery.

MALAIKA: Ah! Not yet, wise one. Where is it. I mean, where are they?

PRIESTESS: I have overstayed amongst irredeemable mortals.

(She makes to continue her exit)

MALAIKA: My things. You cannot leave as yet.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: The lesson is learnt, strange one. You may pardon the lad.

PRIESTESS: The ancestors pardon you, partially.

MALAIKA: Partially? What do you mean partially?

(Reaching out to search his testicles)

MALAIKA: I feel one.

PRIESTESS: The other one will show up when you have conjugation. Who else wants to query the gods?

(Utter silence that the drop of a pin could be heard. The Priestess makes to leave)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Wait!

PRIESTESS: Your highness. I must leave.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: It is an order!

PRIESTESS: The tone of your voice does carry offence in the ears of the gods.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: The gods gave me the voice and its tone to lead my people.

PRIESTESS: Apply wisdom in its usage.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: You were going to say something.

PRIESTESS: Not anymore.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Speak!

PRIESTESS: And if I do not?

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I bear not authority in vain and no one refuses my order.

PRIESTESS: Aha! There goes the folly of mankind. Watch your pride.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: She who calls me proud is ignorant of the power of the gods within me.

PRIESTESS: The gods are orderly, hence the power bestowed on me provides checks and balance of power in the Kingdom.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: That was then. Today, I possess the checks as well as its balance. I am Sovenga!

PRIESTESS: Tread carefully.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: This King receives no instructions from subjects.

PRIESTESS: I detest your arrogance *(Turns to leave)*.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Stop! I own you.

PRIESTESS: Not since I became a priestess. The gods and my ancestors own me now and besides, Priests anoint Kings.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: After which the anointed King bears rule over the Priest.

PRIESTESS: I must leave now.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I said stop!

MAKHUDU: *(To the Priestess)* May our ancestors save Sovenga).

PRIESTESS: *(To Makhudu)* My ancestors decry arrogance. *(To the King)* This arrogance of which you reek has reached unprecedented heights.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I could order your immediate execution.

PRIESTESS: I dare you

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Dare not my anger.

PRIESTESS: I just did.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Do not test me. I do as I wish in this kingdom.

PRIESTESS: There it goes. Pride, before a fall.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: You rag. A mere woman. You call me proud? The gods must be crazy to have bestowed on a woman the gift of divination.

MAKHUDU: Nkosi! *(Tries to plead with the king)*

KING

KHUNEBULANA: *(To Makhudu)* Stay out of this! *(To the Priestess)* Will the Priestess speak or shall I command her execution?

PRIESTESS: Your anger, like a thunderbolt, made you the choice of the gods. Watch out, for it shall destroy not a few things.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: My sword!

MAKHUDU: *(To King) Nkosi! (To Priestess) Speak, Priestess. His wrought may conflagrate this whole palace.*

(A sword bearer arrives with the sword)

PRIESTESS: Well, I.....

KING

KHUNEBULANA: *(cuts in) Speak!*

PRIESTESS: Dismiss the people.

MAKHUDU: Why?

PRIESTESS: The message from the gods is bitter. Dismiss the people. *(To the crowd) Go away everyone. Go home. You must have no part in this curse.*

MAKHUDU: Curse?

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I am not afraid of the gods or of their curses. He who has not offended fears no curse.

CROWD: Ah!

PRIESTESS: Your contempt is worrying, be careful.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Too late to pacify me. Speak.

PRIESTESS: Today is not a day to rejoice.

DRUNK: It is a day to drink.

(The joke is not funny to anyone. Someone quickly cups the mouth of the drunk)

PRIESTESS: There is trouble in this palace. Find it!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Trouble. Are my ancestors grieved?

PRIESTESS: Beyond grief. They are amused.

CROWD: Amused?

(The crowd is confused and amused at the same time)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Speak clearly and reduce this affliction that befalls the people.

PRIESTESS: Not the people! This affliction is in your palace.

MAKHUDU: Be kind, strange one. Today bears the celebration of that which we long expected. Let the gods not be offended that through our King, his ancestor has reincarnated.

PRIESTESS: Today is a day of, pain, sorrow and doom.

DRUNK: Kill the cockroaches!

PRIESTESS: You jest with words from the gods. You are a dog.
(To the sword man) Kill him.

(Presently, the sword man seizes the drunk to take him away, but is stopped by the King...)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: He lives. Life and death are in my hands.

(The sword bearer releases the drunk)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Continue.

CROWD: *(Murmur in confusion)*

PRIESTESS: There is evil in Sovenga.

MAKHUDU: Evil?

PRIESTESS: To eliminate the evil, blood must be spilled on the four corners of Sovenga kingdom.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Let us sacrifice to the gods at once. How many bulls?

PRIESTESS: This child must be offered to the gods.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: My son...but, appeasements to the gods usually require the blood of bulls. What makes the gods demand my son's blood?

PRIESTESS: The child is cursed.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Curse?

PRIESTESS: One of your women will kill you and go on to procreate with your son.

(Silence in the palace)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: One of my women will kill me and procreate with my son. Is this a joke?

PRIESTESS: Are the gods now comedians?

KING

KHUNEBULANA: It is funny. One of my women will kill me and procreate with my son. *(He goes to inspect his wives)* One of these women. Ridiculous! But how and which of them?

PRIESTESS: The gods did not say.

MAKHUDU: *(To the King)* Nkosi! *(To the Priestess)* Em, em wise one, what shall we do to avert this curse.

PRIESTESS: Nothing you do may erase the future.

MAKHUDU: The gods usually provide ways of escape from imposed or merited curses. They are not callous.

PRIESTESS: The child is a curse!

KING

KHUNEBULANA: The child...but it is one of my wives that is charged with killing me and procreating with my son in the future. How is that the child's error?

PRIESTESS: The gods did not say.

KING

KHULEBULANA: Show us the way out of this calamity.

PRIESTESS: Sovenga will know no peace until there is blood sacrifice. Kill the child.

QUEEN: No!

PRIESTESS: *(To the Sword Bearer)* Away with the curse. Hurry!

(The Sword-Bearer goes for the child as the mother fights him off. Other Queens and women go to the Queen to console her. The Priestess starts to leave as the sword bearer finally retrieves the child and follows the Priestess. A dirge is raised. Everyone start to leave the Palace. Suddenly.....)

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Stop! I waited for years before my son came? When will another come? Are these wives not but slaves? The child is innocent. Since we do not know which of my wives is implicated in this prophecy, take them all.

PRIESTESS: Your wives?

KING

KHUNEBULANA: Slaves. Sacrifice them all to appease the gods. My son lives.

PRIESTESS: Watch your anger.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: My son lives, that is final.

PRIESTESS: The gods forbid your action.

KING

KHUNEBULANA: I also forbid theirs. My wives are my properties and with them, I do as I wish. I shall sacrifice them for peace in Sovenga Kingdom. Take them away!

CROWD: Ah?

(The Crowd is confused. As the Sword-men seize the Queens and tie their hands, the women struggle and yell, the singers continues with the dirge)

SECOND PROCEEDING

(Three girls are seen with traditional pitchers, walking to the stream to fetch water. They are in an on-going conversation...)

BUNISWA: Fire in Sovenga kingdom. The Palace was ablaze today.

GONTSE: The Queens were all sacrificed to the gods. Their bloods flowed like a river. Why was the infant not sacrificed?

DINEO: Because it is worth more than all the Queens put together. The King called them his properties. Such has become the fate of women.

GONTSE: Patriarchy!

DINEO: What is that?

BUNISWA: It means that men assume and behave as the superior of the two genders.

GONTSE: And that women are subservient to men. In order words, women are expendables.

DINEO: What is that?

GONTSE: A thing you could do away with anytime. Something useless.

DINEO: Imagine!

BUNISWA: Now, Sovenga men are beginning to treat women as nothing.

DINEO: Like king, like his male subjects. We must stand up and defend ourselves.

BUNISWA: Exactly. I was offended that one of them proposed to me.

GONTSE: Who?

BUNISWA: That boy who ran away from the initiation mountain.

- GONTSE:** Makungu. The boy whose father has many cows.
He proposed to me, too.
- BUNISWA:** The boy is indecisive.
- GONTSE:** He has no idea what he wants.
- DINEO:** Or who he wants.
- (All girls laugh)*
- GONTSE:** His father has a lot of cows to pay as lobola.
- BUNISWA:** Are we now for sale, or does my father also not have cows? In fact, the words, "pay" and "negotiate" must be looked into. Why have we been treated so badly that when we become pregnant, even after a consensual thing, we are called damaged and our families receive money for.....?
- ALL THREE:** *(cuts in)* Damages!
- GONTSE:** As if we are commodities. Discussions about marriage have become like transactions in the purchase of commodities. Very preposterous.
- BUNISWA:** Prepo what? What is that?
- DINEO:** Have you been flirting again with that fellow?
- BUNISWA:** Who? What am I missing?
- DINEO:** Ask her. Rumours has it that she now spends time with the school teacher.
- BUNISWA:** The teacher from Africa?
- DINEO:** People say that both of them have become an item.
- BUNISWA:** Help me now my ancestors. Gontse, is this true?

GONTSE: Are you trying to criminalise my inalienable right of association?

DINEO: Don't inalienable us. Do you or do you not spend time with the teacher from Africa?

GONTSE: Yes.

DINEO: What else?

GONTSE: He is circumcised.

BUNISWA: G-O-N-T-S-E!

DINEO: Is he?

BUNISWA: How did you know?

GONTSE: How else do you get to know such thing?

DINEO: Gontse, so you admit you are no longer a maiden?

BUNISWA: Trouble for you if you fail virginity test.

GONTSE: Another patriarchal rule. Why is this community not bothered if the boys are virgins, too?

BUNISWA: Tell us. Is the circumcised one better?

DINEO: I hear it protects from diseases.

GONTSE: Not only that. There is an umbrella, no, a raincoat that he uses to cover the thing. The teacher said it keeps unwanted children away.

BUNISWA: That teacher is evil. Is it not the gods who give children? Now the white man plans to stop them from coming by using umbrella to cover their crowns.

DINEO: All the men who cover their crowns are monkeys.

BUNISWA: Just a meagre contact with the white man has corrupted the mind of the teacher.

DINEO: A meagre contact with the teacher has corrupted the mind of our Gontse.

GONTSE: It is called family planning.

BUNISWA: It is called evil.

DINEO: Are you both an item? Yes, or no?

GONTSE: The being an item rumour is mere preconceived speculations.

**BUNISWA
& DINEO:** Preconceived speculations.

DINEO: What is that again?

GONTSE: Forming opinions and jumping into conclusions before investigations.

**BUNISWA
& DINEO:** Hmmmmmm!

GONTSE: After investigations, people must give critical analysis about narratives, and, in the process, if necessary, form possible counter narratives.

**BUNISWA
& DINEO:** Investigations, narratives and counter narratives?

BUNISWA: The world is coming to an end. What is that?

GONTSE: It means contrary innuendo.

DINEO: Innuendo?

BUNISWA: Why do you not use simple words as normal people do? These innuendos are too confusing.

GONTSE: The world is not simple. Things are muddled up on this terrestrial plane.

DINEO: Muddled up.

BUNISWA: Terrestrial plane.

DINEO: What are those?

GONTSE: Muddled up means complicated. Like the case at the palace when the Prince was to be presented to the whole Kingdom. That one of the Queens would kill the King and copulate with the Prince is the height of muddled-up things. So, you see, things were muddle-up in the palace of the King of Sovenga. And then, terrestrial plane means on this earth. The King refused the Queens to live on this earth. In crude terminology, to be killed.

BUNISWA: Now, we are not sure if we should celebrate or be frightened about your closeness to the teacher.

DINEO: The white man's language and culture has muddled up things in this life and....

BUNISWA: *(Cuts in)* Gontse's head is muddled up on this terrestrial plane.

(The girls laugh)

BUNISWA: Talking about complications. Why does the white man complicate things? He does unnecessary things.

GONTSE: Like what?

BUNISWA: Like traveling on the seas on a tiny wooden board.

GONTSE: It is called surfing.

**BUNISWA
& DINEO:** Surfing?

GONTSE: It is sport, not travelling.

DINEO: Same difference!

(All the girls laugh)

DINEO: An unnecessary sport at sea on this terrestrial plain.

**BUNISWA
& DINEO:** *(They laugh)*

BUNISWA: This teacher from Africa has really muddled up your head.

GONTSE: It is called education. I am now more educated than I was before I met the teacher. I am well informed now.

BUNISWA: Serious?

GONTSE: I even had an encounter. In actual fact, an experience. Listen, I saw this thing in his hands. Not a thing. A machine, actually.

BUNISWA: Machine?

GONTSE: Believe me. A machine with which you speak with people who are far away from you.

BUNISWA: Speak with people with a machine? What is wrong with the teacher's mouth that makes him need speech support from a machine?

GONTSE: You missed the point. Okay, where is your grandmother?

BUNISWA: Botswana.

GONTSE: Botswana. Good. What do you do if you want to speak with her?

BUNISWA: I will travel by taxi. Why?

GONTSE: Waste of scarce resources and precious time. That is not cheap, is it?

DINEO: It is not. But that is how it is.

GONTSE: Illiteracy keeps people drenched in backwardness when technology has made things easy now. You can speak with your grandmother right away, here and now.

BUNISWA

& DINEO: How?

GONTSE: Nothing is simpler. You speak into this machine and the machine instantly carries your words and delivers it to the other person, in this case, your grandmother, in faraway Botswana.

DINEO: How?

(Gontse tries to demonstrate how the cellular phone works. She moves Buniswa and Dineo far apart from each other; puts a stone in each of their hands and asks them to speak to one another. The girls are more confused)

GONTSE: Forget it. You will never understand what I am talking about. You need education.

(All the girls laugh)

GONTSE: Back to our gender talk.

DINEO: It is high time someone protested about this lobola thing.

GONTSE: Why, for instance, must it be the man who pays lobola: can we as women not also pay bride price for our husbands?

BUNISWA: As in, paying bride price for the groom.

DINEO: Exactly. And negotiating. Just like the family of the men do.

BUNISWA: And the girls would do the proposing. Role reversal.

ALL THREE: How nice.

BUNISWA: Can it work though, this role reversal?

DINEO: Do I care? I can only imagine the shock on the faces of boys when it is us who now make proposals.

GONTSE: Let them be shocked to death. I will love to scare some boy someday.

BUNISWA: But then, is it not unnatural?

GONTSE: Rubbish! Since when has buying and selling become unnatural? It is business transaction. Bride price is what you do when you want to charge the highest fee, as the bride's family or to pay the lowest fee, as the groom's family, for a girl in marriage. It is big business these days, especially if the girl is educated, or, as our proposed new trend will be, if the boy is educated.

DINEO: We are holding a press conference now.

(Dineo begins to organise imaginary spectators and the Press for the "conference")

DINEO

Excuse me ladies and gentlemen. Please let us all be orderly. This is the order. First, we shall have the declaration and then questions and answers shall follow. Thank you. Thank you. Dr Buniswa, please.

BUNISWA

Thank you, Dr Dineo. It is my singular honour to invite our speaker from this terrestrial plane, to the stage to address muddled up gender issues. She will also take her time to address series of civilization innuendos which causes people like you to make illiterate preconceived conclusions. Please welcome to the podium, the gender rights advocate, Prof Gontse.

(Buniswa and Dineo clap. Gontse steps out to play a role)

GONTSE

Thank you, thank you and thank you. I am very honoured to be invited to this august occasion as we celebrate gender equality day in Sovenga land. I shall shortly make known to you all the resolutions from our just concluded annual general meeting. Please pay attention and feel free to seek clarifications at the end of my delivery, should you be unclear about anything. We, the women of Sovenga land, have lived for too long in the shadows of men. May it be known from this day, that it is now criminal for any male

to propose to a woman in this kingdom. Women must do the searching, the choosing or picking and the proposing. Women will, from this day forward, propose to men, as well as..

ALL THREE: Pay bride price.

(All the girls cheer)

GONTSE: In addition, no group of men in this kingdom, shall sit down as committee to discuss issues that pertains to the sexuality of women. This declaration is the beginning of role reversal. Women will now play the roles that are traditionally regarded as men's.

(All the girls cheer and laugh)

May I now have your questions, please?

(A boy enters)

BUNISWA: Speak of the devil.

(All the girls laugh)

MAKUNGU: What could be amusing today, ladies?

BUNISWA: Who wants to know? Are you not done shopping for a girl?

(All the girls laugh)

MAKUNGU: *(To Dineo)* I have been looking for you darling.

BUNISWA

& GONTSE: Darling?

DINEO: I have no idea what he is talking about.

MAKUNGU: It is you I want Dineo.

BUNISWA: Did you not say it was me you wanted?

MAKUNGU: Yes, but you declined.

GONTSE: Did you not propose to me, too?

MAKUNGU: But you also decline. Should I commit suicide?

BUNISWA: If you like. Thank you for coming. You may leave now and continue your hopeless search.

ALL THREE: For the foolish girl.
GONTSE: Potato head.
ALL THE GIRLS: Potato head.

(The girls laugh uncontrollably. Makungu starts to leave, head bent in defeat)

BUNISWA: Wait. Do not leave.

(The girls gather in a cluster to have a quick meeting. After a brief moment, Dineo breaks out of the cluster to address Makungu)

DINEO: Yes, come here, handsome.

(She looks at the other two girls for approval. They nod)

DINEO: So, where did you say that you were going?

MAKUNGU: Em, em to look for my father's lost cow. It has been missing for two days. Did you, perhaps see any sign of it anywhere?

DINEO: No I did not.

(She looks at her friends for further approval. They nod)

DINEO: Tell me my dear, what is your name?

MAKUNGU: Makungu.

DINEO: M-a-k-u-n-g-u. Nice name.

MAKUNGU: *(He blushes)* Is it?

(She looks at him in a seductive way)

DINEO: Makungu, I like you. I like what I see.

(Makungu is flattered and embarrassed)

MAKUNGU: Well, thank you. I need to leave.

(He makes to leave)

DINEO: Not yet. Wait.

(She runs to her friends. They quickly have a meeting)

MAKUNGU

I need to leave now. My father might become worried.

DINEO

Not yet my dear. I like you and I want you to belong to me.

MAKUNGU

You are really serious about this?

DINEO

Of course! So, what do you think?

MAKUNGU

I like you too.

DINEO

So, is that a yes?

MAKUNGU

Yes, it is a yes.

(The other girls beckon on her to come. She goes to them)

BUNISWA

So, how far?

DINEO

He said yes to my proposal.

GONTSE

Did you kiss her?

DINEO

Kiss, what is that?

GONTSE

You join your mouths in a passionate lock of love. The teacher taught me.

DINEO

Me, put my mouth into another boy's mouth? Not in this life.

(Dineo returns to Makungu)

DINEO

Kiss?

(They both hug each other. The other girls disapprove, but Dineo seems not to notice or she pretends not to)

MAKUNGU

Kiss, what is that?

(Dineo demonstrates by kissing him. They kiss passionately. Further disapproval by Dineo's friends are unnoticed. They kiss again. Buniswa and Gontse come to break them apart)

MAKUNGU

What is this?

BUNISWA

What does it look like? *(To Dineo)* You, we must leave at once. You were disgusting. You did not know how to kiss.

DINEO

Gontse taught me.

GONTSE

Idiot! You were not supposed to go that far.

DINEO

How far is far?

(Frantically, Buniswa runs to kiss Makungu.)

BUNISWA

Like that! You were not supposed to kiss. That was grossly disgusting.

(Gontse goes to repeat what Buniswa just did)

GONTSE

Like that, even more disgusting.

DINEO

It was not. I enjoyed it. I want more.

ALL GIRLS

We want more!!!!

MAKHUNGU

These girls are not normal. (*Makungu runs out of the stage*)

ALL THE GIRLS

Come back here. (*All the girls laugh and sing*)

Wati ten bafasi, wa ti ti bogotho! Ke nako!!!

Lights out

THIRD PROCEEDING

(Two friends, Dhlamini visits Masemola in Masemola's fruit store and both get into a conversation)

DHLAMINI

Peace be upon you my friend.

MASEMOLA

Peace unto you who comes in peace.

DHLAMINI

Six winters have gone since the coronation of our King.

MASEMOLA

Six winters are a long time in the life of a struggling peasant like me.

DHLAMINI

Did I see you at the coronation?

MASEMOLA

A Sovenga coronation hosts a sizeable crowd. Where you there?

DHLAMINI

I was. Were you?

MASEMOLA

I was, even though my mind was somewhere else.

DHLAMINI

I did not see you.

MASEMOLA

People saw me, and I saw them.

DHLAMINI

I did not see you.

MASEMOLA

I was there, right in the middle of it all. You must be blind not to have seen me.

DHLAMINI

You have not changed. Must you always be abusive?

MASEMOLA

Neither have you. Must you always doubt other peoples' claims?

DHLAMINI

Rest the argument. The palace is no longer empty. We have a new King.

MASEMOLA

A King of six winters is no longer new, my friend. Besides, that foreigner brought nothing good beyond his first winter on the throne.

DHLAMINI

Give him time. Fortune will still smile upon Sovenga.

MASEMOLA

Fortune? Study the seasons my friend. Peace seized at the start of his second winter as King of Sovenga. Now, caution is needed.

DHLAMINI

Caution?

MASEMOLA

Our tradition forbids foreigners becoming King of Sovenga Kingdom. There are dire consequences for those who aid the ascendancy of strangers into our high offices.

DHLAMINI

But the one you call stranger is one of us.

MASEMOLA

Is he?

DHLAMINI

The oracle chose him.

MASEMOLA

I hope the gods are not mistaken.

DHLAMINI

The only worry is that he is from Africa. He said so himself.

MASEMOLA

Hardly impressive.

DHLAMINI

I share your sentiments.

MASEMOLA

The oracle was not supposed to even anoint a person who is not a Sovenga citizen.

DHLAMINI

He was chosen because he helped Sovenga defeat her last war mongering neighbour. We needed a mercenary to help defeat our enemies at all cost. We agreed to make him king if he helped us. He did. We made our promise good.

MASEMOLA

Good way to choose a war general, but wrong for the choice of a king. Day to day administrative duties of a king differ from a soldier's occasional battle duties.

DHLAMINI

He is from Africa. We have common ties as brown people.

MASEMOLA

What part of Africa is he from?

DHLAMINI

The West side I think. I am not sure.

MASEMOLA

West side of Africa is far. He ought to have come from closer to us here. Like from Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho or even Mozambique. Those are better people.

DHLAMINI

Better people?

MASEMOLA

Well, closer people.

DHLAMINI

We are still related, one way or another. History says all brown skinned people, in fact all people, are from a single ancestry.

MASEMOLA

Skip history. This land is cursed. Look at me. I have had no sales since daylight broke. It is now close to the end of business. This land is cursed.

(Presently, Sovenga citizens begin to file past the stage. They are all suffering from different ailments. The two men observe the people filing past)

MASEMOLA

Look. Afflicted, bereaved, diseased, malnourished and in pains. Our land is cursed. Where are you going, everyone? No answer.

DHLAMINI

It must be the palace. Let us go with them. The king must have something to say.

(They both exit with the crowd)

Lights out!

FOURTH PROCEEDING

(The palace of the Sovenga King. Citizens are presently occupying the palace. Some standing, sitting or lying down according to the severity of ailments. Pain is written all over their faces as they sing "Senze nina". The king is seated with his wife and leaders. On-going discussions and murmurings in the palace. The King continues...)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Anyone else?

ANDISWA

My king, it was her birthday and she was livelier than usual. She was adorned in a new dress that she refused to take off long after well-wishers left our home. In the middle of the night, when sleep is deepest, my daughter screamed from sleep, stretched her body in pain, foams from the mouth. I rushed towards her, as her father tried to keep her mouth open. Too late. My angel would not be revived. Now, tell me how to ever live a normal life after Gugu was taken?

(The song Senze nina continues amidst tears. The King speaks)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

That song, my people, represents the questions in my heart. In our hearts. The crises we have on our hands is a collective.....

KHAYA *(cuts in)*

....collective my foot.

CROWD

Ah?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Allow, allow! Go on Khaya. Speak freely. Anyone. Speak. It is a family meeting. But look within you and say only the things which are truthful. There reside pains and agony within us all, yes, but Speak with the kindness of a reasonable and merciful judge. Speak, my people.

SMANGALISO

We are not your people. Depart from us.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Thank you. I do not fault you. In fact, I feel what you feel.

KHAYA

You do? Have you got feelings?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

I do, Khaya. I feel your agony. My hands have buried a child of my own in this palace.

SMANGALISO

May you boast like I do, for my hands have planted a child each in the past six months.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Smangaliso, news reached me about your misfortunes.

SMANGALISO

News reached you. And then, not a visit or a word of condolence from you or any of your pathetic emissaries. You brought ill luck to Sovenga kingdom. Just leave.

CROWD

(The crowd react with mixed feelings) Leave!

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Smangaliso, your King and his emissaries are not spared from pains and loses. Personal tragedies have kept our hands weak and our heads bent, too.

SIBUSISO

My people. Our King is faced with the same tragedies that have besieged the kingdom of Sovenga. Let us be reasonable.

(The crowd angrily protest Sibusiso's comments)

KHAYA

You speak thrash, Sibusiso. Be reminded that there were no tragedies before this man arrived our shores. Trouble began a winter after his coronation. The records are there with the Scribe. Let him be reasonable and depart from Sovenga kingdom.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

To where shall I depart?

KHAYA

Wherever it was that you sprang from. Hell, perhaps.

CROWD

Ah?

KHAYA

Yes. If we do not exorcize this evil, we shall all perish like dry veld under fire. Go!

(The crowd react with mixed feelings)

SIBUSISO

Dear citizens of Sovenga. Let us tread with caution as we vent our frustrations. We all know that the land of Sovenga is ravished with misfortunes. What is not clear is the cause.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

My people.

SIBONGILE

We need answers, not rhetoric.

SIBUSISO

Treat not the king with contempt.

SIBONGILE

Rubbish! The real contempt is the King's insensitivity to the feelings of bereaved families.

SIBUSISO

Your mouth will lead you into death.

SIBONGILE

Go on. Use your unwashed mouth to add death to the mortality in the land.

(Sibusiso and Sibongile reaches out to fight. The crowd react with mixed feelings. Chaos in the Palace)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

My people!

(The chaos continues)

Please be quiet.

(The chaos continues as a few begin to leave the palace. For the first time, the Prince becomes furious and regal at the same time. He vents his anger at the crowd)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

I said quiet everyone! And stay right where you are. If any of you as much as move a muscle, I shall have that person regret the day he or she was born. *(Silence)* How heartless could a people be?

SIBUSISO

Forgive us, your majesty.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Have you all lost your senses to the ongoing plague? A few winters ago, I accidentally staggered into your midst, as a foreigner. At a precarious season when your best soldiers were discouraged because of the might of your neighbours that turned your men into cheese under hot knife.

CROWD

Ah?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Your men were like pregnant women in battle fields, routed by your enemies. Like your great King before me, I won battles. Unlike him who had meagre victories, I won seventeen. Him, three. I found a new life amongst you. I became free, far away from my cursed land where I was ostracised and treated like a criminal, because the King's daughter was in love with me.

CROWD

Ah?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

How could you, a Princess, be in love with a wrestler? Are there no sons of nobles in the kingdom? Those were the king's words to his daughter as I stood in the King's court for judgement. And you, he said to me, could you not have refused her love even if she was hell bent on having a relationship with you? Oh, I was derided and persecuted by my own people. My own King. The judge put me in jail, but friends broke me out.

CROWD

Whao!

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Yes, trusted friends and kinsmen. Not vultures like you all. Tshepo, Malema, Vhonani, Andile and Azwi. Valiant warriors. I left my people, forever. After wandering in the forests for two years, the gods smiled on me and led me here.

CROWD

Hnmmm

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Quiet! I met you in trouble and your battles became mine. I became one soul with Sovenga Kingdom. I motivated and retrained your wearied soldiers. For reward, I received your love. I was conquered. No, it was not the many wars that conquered me, it was the affection you gave me. Oh, the warmth of Sovenga Kingdom. The Ubuntu of its people. After leading your army to victory, your gods chose me to sit on the throne of your ancestors. I sent for my wife and children and I decided to stay with you and become your king. Now, in the face of calamities, you turned your backs against me. You come into this sacred chambers, bloated with a concoction of arrogance, ignorance and amnesia, and throw insults to the gods of your ancestors.

CROWD

Ah?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

I said quiet! When you criticise the choice of your oracles, do you not know that it is the gods you chide? You sit in this revered

chambers disrespecting your ancestors with contempt. If it was the land of my birth, heads would have rolled.

(Suddenly, there was screaming from inside the palace)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Somebody, keep those children quiet. *(To a guard)* You, go fetch the witch doctor. No one moves until I get answers to all these calamities.

(Two people run in, one of them bearing the body of the youngest child in the palace. The Prince sees them and asks).

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

I pray your words be gracious. *(The body bearers are silent)*
Hide nothing from your King. Or has she also lost the fight?

(The one bearing the body merely nods)

Bring her. Let me feel the warmth. Or is she now cold?

(The Prince receives the body)

Mpho. I cherished you like a gift. You are like sunshine in the palace; in Sovenga Kingdom. Now your demise causes light to diminish. Sovenga gropes in darkness. Mpho my beloved.

(He continues to address the Crowd, still carrying Mpho)

You treated me as if I and my household are divorced from these miss-happenings. This is the eight death in this palace in six days. Six of my slaves and, this is another child of mine. I am also mourning. Yet your mouths drip with accusations that I am the source of the calamities in Sovenga land.

CROWD

No!

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

How dare you? How dare you reduce your forebears to mere mortals. Do you disparage the ancient wisdom and judgement of your ancestors?

CROWD

No!

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Of course you do. That is what you do when you criticise their choice. Your gods chose me. I also need answers.

(The blind witch doctor enters, in tow of a guide.)

Ah, too late, wise one. But all the same, welcome to this tragic cocktail. Do you, perhaps, have answers for the people of Sovenga Kingdom, or you have also come to join detractors in accusing the innocent?

PRIESTESS

I must leave at once.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Stay.

PRIESTESS

I cannot.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Your King commands your obedience.

PRIESTESS

You overestimate your continued relevance in Sovenga Kingdom.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Oh, yes, remind me. Go on. Go ahead. Remind me that I am a foreigner in your midst.

SIBUSISO

You are one with us, your highness.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Deceptive rhetoric, Sibusiso. I heard that before.

PRIESTESS

I must leave now.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Not a chance. You must drink of the trouble you have brewed. When a seer prophesies wrongly, she must be present to savour its results.

(Prince Sekhurama places the dead child at the foot of the Priestess)

You said I overestimate my continued relevance in Sovenga kingdom? Explain.

PRIESTESS

(To the Prince) I have nothing to explain and, besides, I will not stand before a murderer.

CROWD

Ah?

PRIESTESS

(To her guide) Lead me out.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Did you just call me a murderer? The seer of yesterday has become blind today. What a tragedy.

PRIESTESS

Tragedy is that you have murdered an innocent one.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Liar! There are no innocents in battles and the gods know that. See something new. Ask the ancestors.

(The blind Priestess is led to a corner. She throws some bones to the ground)

PRIESTESS

The King has blood on his hands.

(The Prince laughs scornfully)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Another lie. I have been a warrior since my youth. Bloodied hands are normal in my world. Speak of a new thing.

PRIESTESS

My tidings bear ill for the public. I must speak with you secretly.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Never! You called me a murderer and dishonoured me before the people. You must vindicate me before them.

PRIESTESS

I pray we attend to this in private.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Ignore privacy. Your drumming was heard by all; you will not dance behind closed doors. Speak. *(To the sword-bearer)* My sword!

PRIESTESS

You live by the sword. You probably killed the former king of Sovenga.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

(He laughs)

Your words bear humour than fact. Such laughter is needed in this tensed palace. Humour me some more.

(The Prince moves to address the scribe who is seated in a corner, taking record of the proceedings)

The records reported that the King died of natural causes on his way to the West side of the brown man's continent. Does it not?

SCRIBE

The records say so, your highness.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Check again. Sceptics need confirmation.

PRIESTESS

Records of the Scribes are not trustworthy.

SCRIBE

The records say that the King died of natural causes on his way to the West side of the brown man's continent.

PRIESTESS

Any witnesses to support the records?

SCRIBE

All witnesses have joined the ancestors.

PRIESTESS

Our traditions and histories are passed down orally. Surely there must be oral records of that incident.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Wait! Where did the records say the King met his death?

SCRIBE

On the way to the West side of this Brown continent.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

On the way to the West side of this Brown continent.

SCRIBE

Your highness speaks the truth.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Coincidence! On that same way to the West side of this Brown continent, I encountered a man with a sizeable entourage. An argument ensued when I insisted on feeding my animals first at the stream. He called me a vagabond. I killed the man.

SCRIBE

Nkosi yami!

PRICE SEKHURAMA

But he was not a King. Not even the appearance of a Prince. More like a rich merchant.

PRIESTESS

And your wife, the Queen with whom you begat children, is probably your mother.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Ridiculous probability! My mother died a year after I absconded my homeland. I missed her funeral because I was a fugitive. Is that all you can say about this trouble in Sovenga?

PRIESTESS

A child is the reason for these calamities.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

A child?

PRIESTESS

Years ago, thirty winters precisely, a child was born to the King of Sovenga after many years of barrenness. Prophecy had it that his mother would kill his father and procreate with her child.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

It was a popular story in my homeland. I heard it a few times. And what happened to this child and how does this story address our predicament?

PRIESTESS

The child was killed.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

(To the crowd) You see? It has no bearings to today.

PRIESTESS

No, the King was advised to kill the child.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

I see.

PRIESTESS

But he ordered his Queens to be killed.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Now you confuse matters. The child was killed and then the Queens were killed. Elaborate. Has your memory also failed you like your eyes?

PRIESTESS

The kingdom of Sovenga was raided shortly after by the Dark Angels. A group of notorious women from the Arab world. Rumours had it that the raid was in protest against the execution of the Queens.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Women raided Sovenga Kingdom? Women!

PRIESTESS

And the prince was also taken away and sold off by the Dark Angels as punishment for the Sovenga kingdom.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

And then?

PRIESTESS

I was part of the team sent out to search for the stolen Prince. After forty days, we gave up the search when we heard he was sold off. We did not know where to look.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Interesting. And then?

PRIESTESS

That is all I know of the matter my King. Keamogetswe, the father to the current sword-bearer heard unconfirmed rumours that the child later became a mercenary.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
Sword-bearer.

SWORD-BEARER
My lord lives.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
Your father was the sword-bearer to the last King of Sovenga?

SWORD-BEARER
The King speaks well.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
He yet lives, does he?

SWORD-BEARER
Yes, my King. But your servant is ill my lord. His sight failed him two winters before you were crowned.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
Go bring him. Now!!!
(The band sings a dirge as the palace waits for the old Sword-Bearer. Shortly, he was carried into the palace, feeble)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
Speak old man. A Prince was stolen from this kingdom.

OLD SWORD-BEARER
(He looks around, almost unsure if he should respond)
My lord speaks well. He was better stolen. The child was cursed.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
This infant, how may we know if he lives or not.

OLD SWORD-BEARER
It is tedious my King.

PRIESTESS

How tedious?

OLD SWORD-BEARER

My eyes, my King. It aches.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Use your mouth. How may we know if that infant lives or not?

OLD SWORD-BEARER

The child bears a peculiar birth-mark. Check every male born at the same time in Sovenga kingdom and all tribes and tongues within seven-day journey radius.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Fair enough. We shall begin this search in Sovenga and, if no luck, we shall continue in neighbouring nations. All male born thirty winters ago, step out.

(Few men step out)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Where exactly is this mark?

OLD SWORD-BEARER

It cannot be missed, my lord.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Must you make this matter disturbing beyond what it presently is; where is this mark?

OLD SWORD BEARER

My eyes fail me, my King.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Since when do people speak with their eyes; where exactly is this mark, old man.

(To the men who stepped out)

Take off your clothes. *(The men remove their clothes, but.....)*

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

There are no marks anywhere.

OLD SWORD-BEARER

At the tip of the anus.

CROWD

Ah?

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

(To the men) Remove everything. Now! *(The men begin to remove their pants)*

CROWD

(Murmur)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Quiet! *(To the men)* Wait. It is I that have been accused, not you. Although I do not belong here, still I want the search to begin with me, since I was accused. If it is not on me, then the witch doctor is a liar and you all will go home in peace.

PRIESTESS

No one may behold the anus of the King. It is forbidden.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Say that to the dogs, old woman. This King must be cleared of wrong doing. Besides, rules are made by mortals.

(The King hurriedly makes to remove his pants. Everyone covers their eyes. He beckons on someone to check. The fellow refuses. Yet another person refuses. The King then commands his Sword-Bearer to look for the mark in his anus)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Let my Sword-Bearer come take a look.

SWORD-BEARER

Your majesty?

OLD SWORD-BEARER

It is forbidden.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

Come. Your father started this. Come finish it off.

OLD SWORD-BEARER

Do not. It is forbidden.

SWORD-BEARER

I obey the King only, father.

(Slowly, reluctantly, he goes to see the King's anus. He screams and collapses without saying a word)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

(Scared. Quickly wears his pants)

What happened? What did you see?

OLD SWORD-BEARER

What happened? Did he? It is forbidden. Did he?

(The King begins to go round everyone who covers their faces and asks...)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA

What happened? What did you see? What happened? Did you see it?

What happened? What did you see? What happened? Did you see it?

(All along, the Queen is seated quietly. She stands up. Brings out a vial and swallows from its content. She begins to feel the poison as she speaks)

QUEEN

We pleaded with the palace executioners. We have been kind to them in the palace and they paid back by releasing us and asked us to travel far away from Sovenga. I did not. I needed to stay close to where my son was. I stayed in the forest nearby and became friend with strange creatures. My hopes died when I heard Sovenga was raided, the Prince stolen. Twenty years after, a mercenary came to the forest to train his men. He was the warrior I admired. He came to me and his prowess was irresistible. We bonded. I saw the mark and I recognised he was my son.

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
What did you see?

QUEEN
I said nothing. He loved me. I did not want to lose him again. The pain of it could kill me. We bore children. We came to help Sovenga defeat her enemies and he was made King. Are the gods cruel or is it fate?

(The Queen slumps and dies. Prince Sekhurama continues with his quest)

PRINCE SEKHURAMA
What happened? What did you see? What happened? Did you see it? What happened? What did you see? What happened? Did you see it?

(He picks the vial that his wife/mother drank from. Takes some powder out of it and swallows. He continues with those words as he leaves the palace. He slumps and dies)

PRIESTESS
Away, away, away, with the plague, away, away, away, away.....

THE END!

About The Play

Under the powerful King Sekhurama, the erstwhile peaceful and prosperous Sovenga Kingdom suddenly, in spite of the arrival of the much expected Prince, finds itself in a dilemma. The new born Prince must be sacrificed to put away a predicted calamity in the land. In a twist, the King defies the gods and their messenger and chooses to sacrifice his wives. What follows is a manipulation of the fate of Sovenga's Oedipus Rex.

About the Playwright

Dr Ogungbemi Christopher Akinola studied Theatre Arts at University of Ibadan, Nigeria and holds a Master's degree from Drama and Film department at Tshwane University of Technology, and a Doctorate in Applied Theatre from English Department of University of Limpopo, South Africa. He is a theatre expert with over twenty-five years' experience as playwright, director, theatre administrator, teacher of acting and film director. He has developed keen interests in African post-colonial literature and cultural studies. Ola-Kris, as he is popularly known is the author of "Hakuna Matata" (a play), which has toured Nigeria and South Africa, as well as several unpublished plays and poems. He has featured in a number of Nollywood and South African movies such as Jacob's Cross on MNet and Room 9 on SABC. He has also directed a number of Nollywood films such as "The Dragons" and "The Lincoln's Clan". His "The Prince of Sovenga" premiered in May of 2018 at the University of Limpopo. "Ghost Twerkers" premiered between 1-14 of April 2019 at the University of Limpopo. Ola-Kris currently lectures at the Performing Arts Centre of University of Limpopo, South Africa.