

# Achidi J's Final Hours

by Amy Evans

## Characters

*Isa a Black woman in her mid-twenties, Senegalese*

*Awa Thiam Isa's friend, a Black woman in her thirties, political refugee, Senegalese*

*Achidi J young Black man, nineteen, seeking asylum from Cameroon*

*Guy friend and colleague of Awa, early thirties, political refugee from Cameroon*

*Alex Isa's husband, late twenties, White German*

*Andy Alex's friend and co-worker, early to mid twenties, White German*

*Jürgen F (Officer 1), a White German man in his early forties*

*Stephan S (Officer 2), young White German man, twenty*

*Civil Servant a White German man in his early to mid forties*

## Setting

*A city near Frankfurt/Main, 1999 – 2001. Dates indicated here are used to clarify time sequence for the benefit of the company, and may or may not be made explicit to an audience.*

*Achidi J's Final Hours* was first performed on 6 May 2004 at the Finborough Theatre in London. The cast and creative team were as follows:

<i>Achidi J</i>	Winston Atour
<i>Alex</i>	Martin Brody
<i>Andy</i>	Dan Rabin
<i>Isa</i>	Amanda Wright
<i>Awa Thiam</i>	Linda Gathu
<i>Civil Servant</i>	Carsten Hayes
<i>Stephan S</i>	James Alper
<i>Jürgen F</i>	Kevin O'Donohoe
<i>Guy</i>	Eddie Daniels

Director	Ché Walker
Designer	Dick Bird
Design Direction	Fiammetta Horvat
Lighting Director	Alex Wardle
Sound Designer	Jack C. Arnold
Stage Manager	Vanessa Mobiglia
Assistant Stage Manager	Catherine Tronzo
Production Assistant	Jaci Clyde-Smith
Photographer	Clive Moore
Fight Choreographer	Steve Medlin
Print Design	David Hardcastle at rubbaglove
Produced by	Frontline

A staged reading of *Achidi J's Final Hours* formed part of *Frontline – New Plays, New Directions* at the Soho Theatre and Writers' Centre in November 2003, and was directed by Ché Walker and dramaturged by Jo Ingham.

Frontline is headed by Artistic Directors Timothy Hughes and Rebecca Manson-Jones. The Artistic Director of the Finborough Theatre in London is Neil McPherson.

### Playwright's Note

Thank you to everyone who lent their creative talent and critical readership to the development of this play. Also special thanks to the African Refugees Association of Hamburg, Black Students Organisation, Aischa Ahmed, ADEFRA Berlin, Nicola al-Lauré Samarai, Marcy Arlin at the Immigrant Theater Project of New York, Rose Ekoule-Djengue, Grada Ferreira, Timothy Hughes, Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, Caroline Jackson-Smith, Rotraut Junker, Al Laufeld, Jelka Lehmann, Rebecca Manson-Jones, Sipua Ngnoubamdjum, David Roderick, Otana Thiede, Ché Walker, and an exceptional company of actors and artists for allowing this story to be told. Finally, very special thanks to the memory of Dr. Slayton A. Evans, Jr. for making it all possible.

Dedicated to the memory of Mareame N'Deye Sarr and countless others who have suffered at the hands of racist violence and police brutality.

## Language Notes

### Scene 1

*Deutschland für die Deutschen,  
Ausländer raus*

Germany to the Germans,  
foreigners out  
Fire!

Au secours!

### Scene 7

*Bourde ta mère*

motherfucker

### Scene 10

*Leck mich (bitte)  
pleite*

lick me (please)  
broke

### Scene 23

*Deutsche Polizisten,  
Mörder und Rassisten*

German officers, racist  
murderers

## Performance Notes

/ indicates where one speech is interrupted by the speech or action that follows. / at the end of a line indicates where the following speech could cut the previous speaker off. ( ) indicates a line spoken low or aside, as someone muttering to herself or whispering under her breath. Upper and lower case letters are used to suggest pace and delivery.

Prologue

*Complete darkness. Faint sound of traffic on a bridge, wind.  
Footsteps, shuffling; breath and laughter.  
Alex and Andy's voices.*

**Alex** hey Andy. Feel that?

**Andy** yeah

**Alex** oh fuck . . . fuck fuck fuck FUCK

**Andy** Shhhh!

**Alex** yeah

**Andy** you like that, don't you?

**Alex** (fuck)

**Andy** OK. Let's do it.

**Alex** What are you doing?

**Andy** Come on!

**Alex** Andy, Andy, wait –

**Andy** what, you scared?

**Alex** Look

**Andy** what are cops doing out here, shit!

**Alex** can you see it?

**Andy** no, asshole, that's a shadow

**Alex** Andy . . . Andy . . .

**Andy** if there was someone in the river they wouldn't just be standing there

**Alex** oh shit

Scene 1

*August 1999.*

*A bed in an asylum hostel. A pair of running shoes are under the bed.*

*Achidi lies in the bed, tossing and turning.*

*Chanting can be heard outside: 'Deutschland für die Deutschen, Ausländer raus!' and other racial slurs.*

*He pulls the covers over his head. Then he holds his hands over his ears.*

*A scream from the next room, hysterical: 'Au secours! Au secours!'*

*Annoyed, Achidi puts his pillow over his head.*

*The sound of glass shattering. Achidi bolts upright.*

*The chanting is very near. It is joined by the sound of frantic footsteps. Somewhere there is smoke, flames.*

*Achidi gets up, pulls on ragged sweats.*

*He starts to run out of the room, then goes back for his running shoes. He exits.*

Scene 2

*Alex's apartment. The space is nearly bare except for a sofa and a window. The place is a mess, the remains of a party having been left to linger for some weeks. There is a second door, leading offstage, presumably to a hallway, bathroom and two bedrooms.*

*Alex is inside, looking at Isa. Isa stands near the door, staring at the mess.*

**Alex** it was nothing nice, believe me. You don't want to know.

**Isa** I would like to know

**Alex** are you OK?

**Isa** I'm fine.

**Alex** Someone should've told you to stay away from the station at night.

**Isa** Who? You?

**Alex** I needed cigarettes.

**Isa** Cigarettes are dangerous.

**Alex** Skins are worse

**Isa** . . . skins are children

**Alex** they're horrible to people like you

**Isa** Who 'like me'?

**Alex** You know what I mean

**Isa** tell me . . .

**Alex** People /

**Isa** yes?

**Alex** people who aren't /

**Isa** yes?

**Alex** people who aren't / like

**Isa** white.

**Alex** no

**Isa** yes

**Alex** just / different

**Isa** just white

**Alex** No!

**Isa** of course

**Alex** I'm not

**Isa** what?

**Alex** not a

**Isa** you're trying to say I'm not white

**Alex** No! But you aren't, you're

**Isa** do you have a bathroom?

**Alex** Through there.

*Isa disappears off. Once she's gone Alex frantically begins to straighten the room.  
Isa returns.*

**Isa** I've forgotten your name.

**Alex** Alex.

**Isa** Alex

**Alex** . . . yes?

**Isa** do you have toilet paper?

**Alex** I do. Of course I do

*Alex searches through his pockets and produces a plastic packet of tissues.*

**Isa** . . . thank you.

*She disappears off. Alex finds one bottle that's half-empty, opens it and downs the contents.*

*He chokes on the alcohol, coughs and sputters.*

*The phone starts to ring.*

*Isa returns and watches, amused.*

**Isa** Do you want to answer that?

**Alex** no

**Isa** . . . oh.

**Alex** Do you? I mean use the phone? Call your friend?

**Isa** Do you work?

**Alex** By the river at the moment.

**Isa** Shipping?

**Alex** Counting bricks. And stacking them one on top of the other until we've made a wall. Then we start all over again.

**Isa** That's . . . interesting.

**Alex** You know this bridge on the highway? Blue? Suspension?

**Isa** no

**Alex** I've climbed that bridge.

**Isa** oh

**Alex** see bridges shake but they have to or they'll ripple, metal can ripple and concrete and asphalt bends with the metal but snaps if it's not made to absorb a certain amount of tension -- the wind starts blowing and it starts to sway, the air gets to your head and you're like oh fuck -- you can see forever up there -- the factory, the plant, the lights on the towers and the houses -- and you're flying and swimming all at once even though really you're perfectly still -- and everything from there looks like a sketch -- if you don't like what you see, you take it back and start again -- I didn't mean to tell you all this, but -- I was up there tonight -- no cables, no harness, nothing -- it must've been hours, I don't know, I guess I thought if I stayed there long enough -- and then it was cold and I was down to my last cigarette -- and that's why I came to the station and you were in the waiting room and

*He looks in Isa's direction. She has fallen asleep.*

*He goes to her.*

*He touches her.*

*He examines her skin: her neck, wrists, whatever is exposed.*

*He takes one of her hands. He touches his face with her hand.*

*He kisses the hand.*

*He moves to kiss her face.*

*This wakes Isa. She looks at him.*

**Isa** Bastard

**Alex** I'm sorry

**Isa** that's not why I came

**Alex** wait, please



**Isa** you're all the same

**Alex** They'll attack you. Toss you in front of a moving train. Beat your brains out / it's happened –

*Footsteps on the stairs outside. Alex hears, reacts.*

**Isa** Not another train for hours, you said –

**Alex** Sh.

**Isa** 'I won't lay a finger on you / don't worry'

**Alex** Shut up!

*He covers Isa's mouth.  
She struggles to push him off.  
The footsteps begin to fade.  
He releases her.  
She springs to her feet.*

**Isa** . . . don't touch me / don't come near me FUCK OFF I SAID -- !

**Alex** I'm sorry I'll do anything just don't go DON'T, THERE'S SOMEONE OUTSIDE

**Isa** Where?

**Alex** The stairs.

*Pause. They listen.*

**Isa** Did they follow us?

**Alex** maybe

**Isa** they wouldn't

**Alex** I told you. We're horrible to people like you.

**Isa** the rest of them are horrible so you want a kiss for being good. Poor . . . it's Alex, right?

*She blows him a kiss and starts to leave.*

**Alex** I'll sleep out here.

*Isa stares at him.*

I do it all the time.

**Isa** you do?

**Alex** (well) . . . sure

**Isa** pervert

**Alex** I'm . . . (shit)

**Isa** I've made fools of men much richer than you

**Alex** Fuck!

**Isa** what?

**Alex** I've forgotten your name.

**Isa** Isa.

*Beat.*

Goodnight / Alex

*Isa goes to leave.*

*Alex fishes through his pockets, removes a set of keys.  
He holds the keys out to her.*

**Alex** Yours.

**Isa** What's this?

**Alex** One is for that door. And the other –

**Isa** Are you out of your mind?

**Alex** There's drinks in the kitchen. I don't have anything to eat, but . . . the phone's there. You can order something

**Isa** everything's closed

**Alex** make yourself at home.

*Alex tosses Isa the keys. She catches them, but doesn't come inside.*

**Isa** Your home is a dump.

**Alex** Goodnight, Isa.

*Alex lies down on the sofa, his face turned away from her.*

*After a long pause, Isa enters, watching him. She crosses and disappears through the door leading to the back bedroom.*

*Once she's gone, Alex gets undressed and lies back down on the sofa.  
Blackout.*

Scene 3

*Alex's apartment, very early next morning.*

*Alex is asleep on the sofa. His clothes are strewn all over the floor.*

*Loud knock at the door, then Andy enters, dressed for work.*

**Andy** You know what it is about hotels? Every room has the ghosts of a least a hundred fucks. It's like a Fuck Cemetery

**Alex** (shit)

**Andy** Christ, Alex, you're not even dressed.

**Alex** what'd I do with my keys?

**Andy** You cleaned. Jesus, she must be special.

**Alex** Who?

**Andy** Sleeping, right? I'll be very quiet.

**Alex** Andy, quit fucking around, Andy –!

*Alex struggles to keep Andy from going off.*

**Andy** Have you ever thought that whatever's wrong with your mother could be hereditary?

**Alex** Fuck Off.

**Andy** When's the last time you got laid?

**Alex** With your wife.

**Andy** Christ, has it been that long?

**Alex** It would've been last night, but you had to scare her off.

**Andy** How'd I manage that?

**Alex** Cunt. I thought you were coming, I told her she should go.

**Andy** You said 'try a hotel'

**Alex** I thought I heard you on the stairs.

**Andy** Really? I'm touched.

**Alex** Touch this.

**Andy** Should I call Chris? She'll do anything if you make her feel guilty.

**Alex** Is that why she threw you out last night?

**Andy** fucking neurotic. Tell me the point of being married if you still have to shrink-wrap your cock?

**Alex** I can't imagine

**Andy** She goes, 'I'm insecure'. I'm like, you're married for fuck's sake, how much security do you need?

**Alex** Maybe she doesn't trust you.

**Andy** She's my *wife*.

**Alex** So talk to her. Nod your head like this. Chris loves to talk.

*Beat.*

**Andy** Bitch.

**Alex** Don't call her that.

**Andy** I'm talking to you.

**Alex** What'd I do?

**Andy** You barebacked my wife.

**Alex** I didn't!

*Beat.*

She wasn't your wife at the time, OK.

**Andy** You prick.

**Alex** Big deal. I even forgot about it, see?

**Andy** Liar.

*Pause.*

You want to tell me what it was like?

**Alex** You know that bridge on the highway?

**Andy** What bridge?

**Alex** Blue? Suspension?

**Andy** Is that where you did it?

**Alex** Remember that time we climbed up?

**Andy** hurry up, we're late

**Alex** there were cops everywhere, we almost got caught and we had this idea / to jump - ?

**Andy** I'LL BE DOWNSTAIRS.

*Blackout.*

Scene 4

*Awa's apartment, September 1999.*

*Isa is seated on the floor, fooling around with a camera. Awa is behind her trying to braid her hair and talk on the phone at the same time. Isa first tries to photograph herself, then aims the camera at Awa.*

**Awa** Âllo? Âllo? Is Awa. Awa Thiam. Yes and how are you, are you fine? Good . . . Is Alain there? Thank you . . .

**Isa** . . . phone-in orders, delivery service, gift items, quality hairstyling on the side and we split everything fifty-fifty. Awa?

**Awa** Âllo? Oh, hi. Oh yes, fine, I need to speak to . . . Thank you, it's good to hear from you too. *(To Isa)* You're welcome to pay me if you wish, now shut up!

**Isa** That's not exactly what I meant

**Awa** Â-âllo? Is that you, Alain? Oh, hello! Yes, how are you, good, listen I am trying to reach Alain, I said I would call him at two o'clock . . . TWO O'CLOCK . . . *(Hissing at Isa)* Hold still!

**Isa** He's late!

*Isa holds still, but as Awa goes to work again, she begins to slump, pretending to faint.*

**Awa** . . . Alain? Thank god. I have news. A boy. In Frankfurt. We don't know, they say Cameroon. He was in the shelter when it was attacked. Guy is finding out what he can, we have an appointment at the embassy . . . we sent someone . . . OK. When can I call you again? Alain, wait, I have to tell you . . . Alain? Alain?

*Awa hangs up.*

ISA . . . !

**Isa** *swooning.* Your community needs you

**Awa** I'm about to strangle my 'community' on her own hair

**Isa** *straightening up.* Tell them it's a conspiracy. How you have to take the train all the way to Frankfurt just to find a bag of okra

**Awa** they have okra in the Asian shop

**Isa** 4.99!? For a little bag of okra? That is *injustice*

**Awa** What do you know about injustice? Stop playing with my camera!

**Isa** You expect your man to be waiting by the phone and still lecture me

**Awa** Alain never misses a call.

**Isa** *mimicking Awa.* (here we go)

**Awa** From the beginning I told him, I have two things in my life, my studies, my struggle and that's it. Most men can't understand that but

**Isa** why don't you let me introduce you to people who sleep with blankets and pillows instead of books and switchblades?

**Awa** why don't you BE STILL.

*Awa continues working. Isa sits still. Long pause.*

**Isa** Alex never misses a call.

*Pause.*

His great grandfather built the house he grew up in. Must be a pretty place.

*Pause.*

I always listen to you when it's about who you love

**Awa** You're in love?

**Isa** That's not what I said, I said

**Awa** with a man you met at a railway station?

**Isa** Yes, so?

**Awa** Why were you there so late?

**Isa** Awa, please –

**Awa** Don't 'Awa please' me

**Isa** I missed my train!

**Awa** how old is he?

**Isa** don't start

**Awa** twice your age

**Isa** stop it, Awa

**Awa** did he show you money?

*Isa begins to laugh.*

What's wrong with you?

**Isa** he can't even afford toilet paper.

**Awa** Be serious!

**Isa** Why should I? You're already serious enough for all of Senegal

**Awa** I've seen it many times, these men are all the same

**Isa** you don't know *him*

**Awa** I know that he doesn't use toilet paper, that's more than enough for me

**Isa** You're too young to be so like my mother

**Awa** if your mother only knew

**Isa** She knows she can depend on me. She knows she'll always have what she needs as long as I'm alive and that's enough. Maybe to you it's dangerous for a woman to know what she's worth.

**Awa** I will pull your hair out by the *roots*

**Isa** OWW . . . !

*During Awa's speech, we see Isa lose interest in the camera; she's getting dizzy, growing faint.*

**Awa** The reality is that nobody here owes you kindness. Nobody is going to commission you for enlightenment. They'd sooner throw you from a bridge and watch you drown. Stop looking at me like that! What is your ambition, your okra and hair extensions going to do about that? Go to Paris find your friends and your business partners do whatever you want to do but I'm staying right here and waiting until it's time to make my call.

**Isa** Awa?

**Awa** Isa, I'm not in the mood –

*Isa collapses.*

*(Scared)* I'm not in the mood for this girl, get up. Get up! Isa? Do you / hear me?

**Isa** I can't see.

*Blackout.*

Scene 5  
*August 1999.*

*Railway station, morning rush hour. A bench on a crowded platform.  
Achidi is crouched nearby, wearing same clothes and running shoes as in Scene I.  
A train approaches. Commotion as people rush to get on board.  
In the tumult a McDonald's bag gets abandoned on the bench.  
Achidi watches and when the moment seems right, races over, grabs the bag.  
Once alone Achidi sits down and opens the bag. He pulls out a half-eaten hamburger  
and quickly devours it.  
In the bottom of the bag he finds a strange object.  
He reaches in and pulls out a small plastic bag. He opens it and finds that it's full of  
weed.  
He sniffs it, smells its potential. Then suddenly remembers he's in a public place and  
pockets it.  
He looks in the bag for more, finds nothing. He discards the bag on the bench.  
He exits.  
Blackout.*

Scene 6

*Alex's apartment, October 1999.*

*Alex enters, he is very energetic. He plops down on the sofa, starts to light a  
cigarette. Isa follows behind and shuts the door.*

**Alex** . . . just ignore her

**Isa** ignore her?

**Alex** see she's been messed up all her life and Dad's too lazy to, well, to *not* do  
something about it – for himself, I mean – they still hold on to each other, but –  
whatever, she's an asshole, she's a fucking mess –

**Isa** You enjoyed that.

**Alex** The look on her face

**Isa** I couldn't see much from the garden

**Alex** fucking priceless

**Isa** beautiful garden. Cherry trees, apples, plums

**Alex** Sorry we made you wait so long.

**Isa** Did you tell her?

**Alex** Sort of.

**Isa** She was angry

**Alex** No . . .

**Isa** then why was she screaming?

**Alex** had nothing to do with you.



**Isa** My German maybe isn't perfect but I know anger when I hear it

**Alex** come here, let's work on your German

**Isa** The neighbors were at their windows

**Alex** were they? Imagine

**Isa** they were looking for the noise. Watching me

**Alex** thinking, 'Can't be her. Screaming her head off in perfect German.'

*Beat.*

A joke, Isa . . . forget it, come here . . .

*Isa takes the keys from her pocket and tosses them on the sofa.  
Then she grabs her jacket and opens the door.*

Isa . . . I'm sorry . . . / Isa wait

**Isa** Goodnight.

**Alex** I'm serious, listen

**Isa** all I do / is listen

**Alex** close the door

**Isa** I won't / close the door

**Alex** close the door do you want everyone to hear?

**Isa** let everybody hear I don't care!

**Alex** you can't just run away every time it's difficult

**Isa** not 'running away', leaving

**Alex** Where? Where to?

**Isa** Home –

**Alex** Where 'home'?

**Isa** AWAY FROM HERE

**Alex** shh ok listen would you listen to me?

**Isa** don't touch me!

**Alex** You want to know what she said

**Isa** I know what she said – !

**Alex** she said GET HER OUT like that she said she said if I wanted a *neger* I could have one but not marry one, not bring her home, that's what she said, isn't it? yeah, and then you know what else she said? she said she asked me did I want to be a *neger* too don't you want to be a *neger* don't you want to fuck *negers* then get out of my garden out of my house quick before the neighbors see her that's what she said / isn't it that's what you want to hear

**Isa** stopitstopitstopit STOP IT

**Alex** is that better?

**Isa** get away from me

**Alex** she said it not me

**Isa** then why did you repeat it!

**Alex** you think I believe

**Isa** I believe what comes out of your mouth

**Alex** for fuck's sake Isa DO YOU WANT TO BE HURT

*Isa freezes, scared. He sees her fear and softens.*

Is that what you want, to be – fucking – tortured?

*Pause.*

She asked me how we met. I swear that's all.

*Pause.*

**Isa** And?

**Alex** I told her.

**Isa** And?

**Alex** She called me . . . unconventional.

*Pause.*

**Isa** *Bourde ta mère.*

**Alex** What's that?

**Isa** Ancient African proverb, it means 'don't make it your problem if people dislike you.'

**Alex** Close the door

**Isa** Alex

**Alex** fucking peepshow

**Isa** look at me.

**Alex** Close the door first?

**Isa** Look at me with the door open.

*Pause. Alex looks at her.*

**Alex** OK

**Isa** Do you love me?

**Alex** No

**Isa** no?

**Alex** I'm not playing.

**Isa** It's no game

**Alex** bullshit

**Isa** You don't have to say it if you don't

**Alex** then tell me what you want to hear. Because that's what this is about

**Isa** no

**Alex** yes it is, it always is. For once let me get it right. Because in spite of your very stupid behavior I would be sad, I would be very sad, if you left.

*Isa exits.*

*Alex sits down on the sofa, stunned.*

*Long pause. Isa reappears at the door.*

**Isa** I don't really like your skin.

**Alex** what - ?

**Isa** Too red

**Alex** (you're crazy)

**Isa** But when you bend your lips like you did just now. I like that. Or the sound of your breath when you exhale. And your fingers, how they twist back like that -- you don't notice it, do you? When you scratch your head. Pick open the buckle on your belt. Rub your eyes. I take care to notice it. Will they ask questions about that? How

does your husband rub his eyes? When he smokes, which breath is the loudest? All those things I could answer, no problem at all

**Alex** Come here.

*Isa comes in and closes the door.  
Alex kisses her.  
She responds.  
They hold each other for a long moment.  
She starts to pull away.*

**Isa** Not a good idea right now.

**Alex** What's not a good idea?

**Isa** This.

**Alex** Don't you want to?

**Isa** Well –

**Alex** You do. Yes, you do . . .

*He moves to kiss her.  
She dodges him and places her hand on her belly.*

**Isa** I want to wait.

**Alex** What for?

*Isa stares hard at him.  
Finally Alex gets the point, starts to laugh.*

**Isa** Don't laugh at me

**Alex** Isa, *please*

**Isa** Can you not wait?

**Alex** Can you?

**Isa** Yes.

**Alex** He's *this big*, Isa, he won't feel a thing

**Isa** I'm tired

**Alex** you don't look tired, you look beautiful

**Isa** I said I'm

**Alex** tell me when to stop and I will.

*He kisses her.  
She doesn't respond.*

Tell me when.

*He continues to make love to her.  
The telephone rings. Andy and Chris speak on the answering machine, their voices competing with the background noise of a bar:*

**VO: Andy** Alex? A- lex! Pick up the phone you prick

**VO: Chris** *in the background.* Prick!

**VO: Andy** Chris and I

**VO: Chris** hi Alex!

**VO: Andy** we're in town

**VO: Chris** we're unifying

**VO: Andy** *laughing.* (shut up!)

**VO: Chris** we're coming together . . .!

**VO: Andy** and where're you?

**VO: Chris** where the hell are you Alex?

**VO: Andy** they're asking about you, what do I tell them Alex? Alex? (don't think he's there)

**VO: Chris** (he's not there -)

*End of message.  
Blackout.*

Scene 7

*November 1999.*

*A cramped immigration office.*

*The Civil Servant sits at a table, a middle-aged man. He is looking through a pile of papers, among them a passport.*

*Isa sit across from him.*

**Servant** Where do you come from?

*Isa is struggling to understand.*

Where Are You / From

**Isa** Senegal.

**Servant** Sorry?

**Isa** Senegal.

**Servant** And your parents?

**Isa** Also Senegal.

**Servant** What about your grandparents?

**Isa** My . . . ?

**Servant** Grand. Parents.

**Isa** Senegal.

**Servant** Great grandparents?

**Isa** My . . . ? It's . . . / They

**Servant** And their parents?

**Isa** Senegal.

**Servant** Are you sure?

**Isa** *no clue what he wants. . . . no*

**Servant** Are You / Sure?

**Isa** Yes . . . / no

**Servant** Yes or no?

**Isa** Yes, I think so. No, not sure.

**Servant** Why not?

**Isa** Lost.

**Servant** Sorry?

**Isa** Contact is lost /

**Servant** They're dead.

**Isa** Yes.

**Servant** Who else is dead?

**Isa** . . . don't understand.

**Servant** Are your great grandparents dead?

**Isa** Yes.

**Servant** Your grandparents too?

**Isa** No, I have . . . / my mother's

**Servant** Warum sind Sie hier?

**Isa** What?

**Servant** Warum? Sind Sie hier?

**Isa** The letter said come / today

**Servant** Wann sind Sie fällig?

**Isa** . . . don't understand.

**Servant** Wann sind Sie fällig?

**Isa** . . . don't know.

**Servant** *jeering.* Sind Sie nicht schwanger? Schwanger?

**Isa** *touching her belly.* May.

**Servant** Junge? Mädchen?

**Isa** A son.

**Servant** Was ist die Nationalität Ihres Sohnes?

**Isa** What?

**Servant** Seine Nationalität.

**Isa** He's not alive.

**Servant** Fraglich...

**Isa** Doesn't have a name.

**Servant** Kein Name?

**Isa** . . . no

**Servant** So spät und kein Name?

**Isa** We haven't decided.

**Servant** Sie haben sicherlich Optionen.

**Isa** . . . options?

**Servant** Alternativen? Optionen?

**Isa** No . . .

**Servant** *indicating Alex's chair.* Dieser Mann nannte Optionen.

**Isa** But we haven't decided.

**Servant** Was ist die Nationalität Ihres Sohnes?

*Silence. Isa shakes her head.*

Was ist seine Nationalität?

*Isa stares.*

Seine / Nationalität, was ist –

**Isa** Senegalese

**Servant** (Yesses Maria)

**Isa** and German.

**Servant** Senegaleser oder Deutscher?

**Isa** Senegalese and German.

**Servant** Das macht überhaupt kein Sinn

**Isa** but he

**Servant** he can't be –

*Pause.*

Dieser Mann. Wie haben Sie ihn kennengelernt?

**Isa** How . . . ?

**Servant** Dieser Mann.

**Isa** Yes.

**Servant** Am Bahnhof, sagte er.

**Isa** At the railway station in Frankfurt –

**Servant** Ja?

**Isa** . . . more slowly



**Servant** *handing Isa her papers.* You have until July 2001. Good luck with your son.

*Isa takes the papers and exits.  
The Civil Servant watches her leave.  
Blackout.*

Scene 8

*Railway station platform, rush hour.  
Achidi is seated on the bench as before. He still wears the running shoes, but his  
sweats are clean and new. He carries a McDonald's bag.  
He sees Officers 1 and 2 approaching.  
Very cool, he rises, slides the bag under his arm, and walks off.  
Awa appears, talking on a mobile phone.*

**Awa** Guy? It's Awa. Start without me, don't keep them waiting. I have copies of the reports, the same things they faxed to you . . . yes. We can forget the embassy. See you soon.

*She puts the phone away.  
Officer 2 approaches her, followed at a distance by Officer 1.  
Awa ignores them.  
Officer 2 clears his throat; this fails to get her attention.*

**Officer 2** Your passport, please –

**Awa** Have I committed a crime?

**Officer 2** Routine verification /

**Awa** then I'm innocent?

**Officer 2** That's not the question.

**Awa** You didn't observe me committing a crime, otherwise you would be obligated to stop me, arrest me, or at least let me know, is that not so?

**Officer 2** This is not a debate

**Awa** It is therefore unclear to me why you need to see my passport.

**Officer 2** General routine inspection. By refusing to cooperate

**Awa** there are other people here, you haven't asked them.

**Officer 2** I'm asking you at the moment.

**Awa** Then there's nothing general about it, why do you say it's general?

**Officer 2** A random check that's

**Awa** what is the probability of, out of twenty people standing on a platform, you would happen to choose the one with the darkest skin? Statistically there is nothing random about your routine.

**Officer 2** This has nothing to do with race.

**Awa** Then why haven't you approached anyone else on this platform?

**Officer 2** Because there is only one of me and I'm asking you.

**Awa** *nodding toward Officer 1.* Who's that over there?

**Officer 2** I don't have time for this

**Awa** and why isn't he asking anyone else?

**Officer 2** It's my duty

**Awa** Clearly there's more than one of you, why did you say you were alone? Why aren't you performing a truly random general inspection? Why don't you tell me / what this is really about?

**Officer 2** By not cooperating with me

**Awa** I am trying to cooperate but your requests are so convoluted

**Officer 2** you realize you are breaking the law.

**Awa** What law?

**Officer 2** Would you prefer to come with me?

**Awa** With us! Us! There are two of you!

**Officer 2** Quiet down please

**Awa** Tell me what law and I'll come with you, I'll even show you my passport if you can tell me what law says that Black people in this country / must at all times

**Officer 2** No law says / anything about Black people

**Awa** must at all times carry identification and produce it on demand

**Officer 2** it's valid for every German citizen in this country now if you don't mind

**Awa** Had a similar law in South Africa, do you know about South Africa?

*Officer 1 snickers.*

**Officer 2** We're not in South Africa.

**Awa** Then why am I the only person on this platform that you and your partner are bothering at the moment?

**Officer 2** We are looking for someone and would therefore appreciate your cooperation

**Awa** Looking for someone?

**Officer 2** Yes.

**Awa** You should've said that before.

**Officer 2** That's not your business

**Awa** I'm also looking for someone, maybe we're looking for the same person, who are you looking for?

**Officer 2** We don't

**Awa** tell me, maybe I can help.

**Officer 2** You can help by showing us your ID.

**Awa** I have extensive connections within Frankfurt and am well informed about individuals who have disappeared without single plausible trace, it's part of being involved in organizations whose purpose it is to keep track of our community /

**Officer 2** That's fascinating

**Awa** since generally speaking, *randomly* speaking, official channels do not seem particularly interested in protecting us

**Officer 2** Are you protecting someone?

**Awa** In fact one of our white allies

**Officer 2** Your *what*?

**Awa** presented information to the local police some time ago about a youth who's been missing for quite a few weeks now, which gives me reason to believe that you and I are looking for the same person

**Officer 2** a drug dealer, does that sound like someone you know?

**Awa** The person I am looking for is registered as an asylum seeker, I don't think drugs are the reason he came / to this country

**Officer 2** That doesn't mean / anything

**Awa** his shelter was nearly burned to the ground, better off even so because the shelter was like a prison but still

**Officer 2** you want to see the shelters burned, is that what you said?

**Awa** at least prisoners are protected, asylum seekers are left to fend for themselves

**Officer 2** Most of whom you call asylum seekers end up / drug dealers

**Awa** DROWNED IN THE RIVER

**Officer 2** capitalizing off poison and getting filthy rich or what do you call them?

**Awa** I don't know a single capitalist with refugee status.

**Officer 2** Come with me.

**Awa** Why?

**Officer 2** Refusing to cooperate with an officer and slander.

**Awa** How have I not cooperated?

**Officer 2** This way, please

**Awa** how have I insulted you?

*Train pulls in.*

**Officer 2** *rushing to write out a ticket.* THIS WAY.

**Awa** You're the one who's insulted me.

**Officer 2** What's your name?

**Awa** That's my train.

**Officer 2** Your name!

**Awa** Awa Thiam.

**Officer 2** How is that spelled?

**Awa** Just as it sounds.

**Officer 2** You're due in court on this date

**Awa** I can't make that date

**Officer 2** you're due in court

*Awa boards the train. The train pulls away. Once the train is gone, Officer 1 comes forward, laughing freely. Officer 2 looks at him, humiliated.*

**Officer 1** Asshole.

*He bursts out laughing again and ushers a confused Officer 2 off.  
Blackout.*

Scene 9

*November 2000, one year later. Alex's apartment.*

*Isa enters carrying her son.*

*Suddenly she winces; the baby has bitten her.*

**Isa** What kind of man are you? You get a little bit and you want more. Maybe you should go back to where you came from, how'd you like that? Warm, plenty of shade and very good food wasn't there? But you can't go back. You're stuck here on this side of the world, you have to find a way to be happy

*Alex enters in the middle of her speech and stands listening.*

**Alex** He bit you again

**Isa** You're early.

**Alex** We finished.

**Isa** Already?

**Alex** Yeah, imagine.

**Isa** The whole building or just the wall?

**Alex** You're funny.

*He goes to kiss Isa; she pulls back.*

**Isa** Hard to imagine that someday he'll be as big as you. Even harder to imagine him lying to his mother the way you just did to yours / if he ever, ever did that to me I'd take back the life I gave him and pass it on to someone who deserves it

**Alex** I didn't -- ! You wouldn't do anything because you would never know he was lying to you, that's the point, you're not meant to find out

**Isa** people in this country they raise their children like dogs, no manners, no discipline, well I am not afraid to slap him one or two good times before I let him –

**Alex** if you ever hit my son

**Isa** if I ever *have* to hit him, I will hit his father first because whatever bad behavior he's picked up belongs to you not me.

*Isa passes him the baby and stands, buttoning herself up.*

**Alex** Isa . . . I'm sorry, forget it

**Isa** I saw a space today

**Alex** Stop.

**Isa** down the road, five minutes away. Glass front doors, tile floor, shelves built into the walls and a tiny kitchen in the back with a water closet and storage room

**Alex** Do you know how much it costs to rent commercial space?

**Isa** it's being renovated.

**Alex** So?

**Isa** I could work

**Alex** doing what?

**Isa** we could save money, take the baby, visit my mother and bring back some things to get started once the space opens up.

**Alex** You've got it all planned.

**Isa** What do you think?

**Alex** No matter what I think the fact is that we're *pleite* and thinking about it won't change that.

**Isa** Beer in the middle of the afternoon will.

**Alex** We drink after work, what's wrong with that?

**Isa** I thought you 'finished'

**Alex** and him?

**Isa** I have friends who'll help

**Alex** the ones who hardly notice when you're gone

**Isa** and you have friends. I've heard their voices on the machine.

**Alex** You barely speak the language . . .

**Isa** *Leck mich.*

**Alex** You'll need more than that.

**Isa** *Leck mich, bitte.*

**Alex** We're OK right? Not starving, are we?

**Isa** I'm bored. I have a thousand ideas and nowhere to put them.

**Alex** I know women who'd kill to be bored

**Isa** then hire them to marry you

**Alex** I'm not saying never

**Isa** how much longer?

**Alex** just till we're secure

**Isa** HOW MUCH LONGER

**Alex** Three months! Yeah?

**Isa** I'll be dead in three months

**Alex** Isa, don't

**Isa** what?

**Alex** nothing

**Isa** say it

**Alex** Nothing!

*Beat.*

I was going to say don't exaggerate

**Isa** ah!

**Alex** but I know you don't exaggerate /

**Isa** what happens when he grows up eh? then what do I have to show for myself? what about the things my mother needs? what happens if she were to die and me without the money to bury her because I was sitting around here all this time

**Alex** are you leaving me now?

*Beat.*

**Isa** Our business partners keep threatening to pull out of The Deal. I fear sometimes I might have made the wrong decision when I introduced the idea of collaboration.

**Alex** What?

**Isa** How did you say it, like superstructure that can't take no tension, even in the best of times, it snaps

**Alex** Come here.

*She waves him off and goes to pick up the baby.*

**Isa** The world is changing, today's small business is all about the future, 'Mama, can I have a this, Mama, what about that, Mama you promised we'd fly to Nana's this year -' Promise me one thing

**Alex** yeah.

**Isa** that my son will meet his grandparents while they're still alive.

**Alex** *going off* . . . grandparents live in Frankfurt

**Isa** his *other* grandparents

**Alex** (sorry)

**Isa** promise me

**Alex** he will

**Isa** she'll put him on her knee, look at him like to figure what he'd fetch at the market - then she'll turn to me and say, Isa, it's your grandfather, and I'll say, yes, he's beautiful -

**Alex** yeah

*During this next speech, the phone starts to ring.*

**Isa** no gardens where she lives - but plenty of neighbors - if they hear a fight, oh, no staring out of windows like goats - come out, pick a side, join in . . .

*The machine picks up.*

**VO: Andy** Alex? A - lex? You there? We're heading out tonight. Call when you get this . . . otherwise I'll see you at the job office, bright and early . . . and grab a number for me when you get there, will you?

*Alex enters just as the message ends. Long pause.*

*He moves toward Isa; she brushes past him and goes off.*

*Alex watches her go.*

*Blackout.*

Scene 10

*February 2001. Unemployment office waiting room.*

*Alex and Andy sit on a bench. Both hold slips of paper.*

**VO:** 6.

*Andy heaves a deep sigh.*

*He looks to Alex for a reaction and gets none.*

**Andy** Adam and Eve are in paradise

**Alex** very original



**Andy** and one day they go to God and say, 'God, I want a divorce.'  
God says, 'Divorce? Whatever for? You have a beautiful wife.' Adam says, 'I know.'  
'Weren't you sad and lonely? Didn't you want a companion? Someone to make you  
happy, make a man out of you? Look at her, she's perfect, what more could you  
want?' Adam says, 'I know!' And God's getting pissed now, he says, 'I had to take  
out half your ribs to make her, you ungrateful little shit!' And Adam says, 'See, God,  
that's my point. You took out too many.'

*Andy waits.  
Alex gives up.*

'I can suck my own cock now, what do I need her for?'

**VO:** 7

**Andy** Genius. You should've been there.

**Alex** I was

**Andy** tired, right.

**Alex** Busy.

**Andy** you've just got the hump<sup>1</sup>

**Alex** shut up

**Andy** come on, Alex, give us a kiss . . .

**Alex** She heard your message on the machine.

**Andy** So it's my fault?

**Alex** I was going to tell her when the time was right.

**Andy** THE TIME IS NOW. Look at the sign!

**Alex** Could you shut the fuck up please?

**Andy** Forget her. Some money-hungry girl.

**Alex** You don't know her.

**Andy** you want pity?

**Alex** no

**Andy** 'poor Alex . . . '

**Alex** look, it's complicated

---

<sup>1</sup> You're just sore.

**Andy** complicated?

**Alex** yeah

**Andy** you wouldn't know complicated if it kissed you on the ass

**Alex** I said *shut up*

**Andy** it's not like you've got a wife and a baby on the way

**Alex** What?

**Andy** You heard me.

**Alex** How did you find out?

**Andy** How do you think?

**Alex** I don't know what to say

**Andy** 'My condolences,' that's not a bad place to start

**Alex** Let me explain –

**Andy** Two weeks she wouldn't speak to me. I tried to tell her that half the crew's out of work, but it didn't matter. Not a word. So I brought up you. Foolproof. Asked her like this, what's so special about you that she'll do you without a condom and not me? I mean, you got laid off too in the end, right? And Alex, let me tell you, she *exploded*. We shouted till the neighbors were banging on the walls. I ended up calling her a slag which I guess I shouldn't've done but then she said she'd show me what a slag she was and man, there is no better fuck in this world than a desperate liberal with a point to prove

**VO:** 8

**Alex** . . . congratulations.

**Andy** we'll name him after you

**Alex** thanks

**Andy** if they're twins, you can have one . . . twins, Christ

**VO:** 9.

**Alex** your number's up.

**Andy** Chris loves you. So do I. Maybe even more than Chris does. I'm not kissing you, though.

*Andy gets up.*

Rum and Coke, please.

*Andy exits.*

*Alex watches him go.*

*Blackout.*

Scene 11

*March 2001. Alex's apartment.*

*Isa stands before the mirror. Clothes and makeup are cluttered around her.*

*Awa sits on the sofa, books and newspaper beside her.*

**Awa** Where is he tonight?

**Isa** He has his friends, I have mine. Best not to mix them.

**Awa** Afraid it may cause an explosion?

**Isa** It might cause more babies, we wouldn't want that –

**Awa** I thought you hated going out

**Isa** 'hate' isn't the word

**Awa** there's a meeting next week. Guy is in town, a friend of mine. Alain knew him from when the student movements began

**Isa** more comrades, sounds exciting

**Awa** you could explain to him this business you want to do. He must know people, Guy knows everyone –

**Isa** *showing her dress.* What do you think?

**Awa** When will you be back?

**Isa** Too tame, yeah? *(She starts to pull off the dress)*

**Awa** Isa

**Isa** *finally satisfied.* Yes . . . yes . . .

**Awa** will you at least protect yourself?

**Isa** *starting on her face.* My mother sends condoms in the mail – then a month later I get a postcard asking if I've used them. 'European men are paid great sums to infect us with HIV, it's a fact, Isa'

**Awa** you haven't answered my question

**Isa** the best part is that she sends ten at a time. Every three months, ten condoms . . . you think Alex is getting paid?

**Awa** Isa look at me

**Isa** one minute, let me line my eyes

**Awa** I won't ask you anymore to tell me what's happened. I understand not wanting to talk

**Isa** Really? I never knew anyone who loved to go off at the mouth like you. Meetings this, meetings that. What is it you like to say? 'No one's going to commission you for enlightenment.' So go do something that they *will* commission you for, why don't you and your comrades have a meeting about that?

**Awa** Did he hurt you?

**Isa** No. Disappointed?

*Awa grabs Isa and forces her to look in the mirror.*

**Awa** She came back from Frankfurt one day in a rage. Why? Because the okra cost too much. 4.99 a bag, outrageous. Back home she could buy ten kilos for what one little bag cost here, she said, you know, all that talk about revolutionary transformation is very good, but in the end, you still have to eat. And I told her, shut up girl, stop wasting my time on your silly dreams

*Isa spots a flaw in her make-up, pulls herself free of Awa's grasp and leans forward to correct it.*

But she didn't shut up. She never shuts up. So what if the world is going mad, she'll keep going on about her okra and hair extensions and wholesale trading companies and no matter how I try to get her stupid dreams out of my head, I nevertheless discover that I'm hungry.

*Isa shrugs Awa off.*

**Isa** there. Queen of the fucking Nile.

*Sound of the baby crying.*

*Awa doesn't move.*

*Isa puts finishing touches on her face, then turns around.*

How do I look?

**Awa** don't ask me to look at you, I can't stand the sight of you

**Isa** *patting her pockets.* ( . . . keys, where are my keys)

**Awa** . . . here are your keys.

*She thrusts them at Isa. When Isa moves to take them, she hurls them at Isa's feet.*

*Isa slowly kneels and picks up the keys.*

*She exits.*

Scene 12

*Train station, platform. Late.*

*Isa enters and sits down on a bench.*

*She holds the keys in her hand. She looks at them, then puts them in her pocket.*

*Achidi enters. He still clutches the McDonald's bag.*

*He sees Isa on the bench and sits down. He tries to get her attention.*

*She finally turns her head and looks at him.*

*Achidi suddenly remembers the McDonald's bag. He fumbles to slip it under his arm, finds there's no place to hide it.*

*Isa doesn't appear to care about the bag. Achidi smiles.*

*Civil Servant approaches the bench. He sits on the other side of Isa.*

*Isa appears not to notice.*

*Servant looks Isa over, ignoring Achidi. Achidi sees him and his smile fades.*

*Servant slides his hand into Isa's.*

*Isa turns away from Achidi, but still does not look at Servant.*

*Together Isa and Servant rise. They start to leave, but Isa discovers she's left the keys on the bench and rushes back for them.*

*Servant stops, looks at her accusingly.*

*Achidi picks up the keys, hands them to Isa. She takes them from him.*

*She goes back to the Servant and tries to comfort him with a smile. They continue off.*

*Achidi watches them go. Then he opens the McDonald's bag. Cocaine wrapped in tight plastic pellets spill out onto his lap.*

*He swallows them slowly.*

*The sound of police sirens in the distance.*

*Achidi stands calmly, and goes off.*

*The sirens grow louder.*

Scene 13

*Early next morning.*

*Alex's apartment.*

*Awa tosses and turns on the sofa.*

*Isa enters. She turns on the lamp on the table, digs into her jacket pocket and removes a handful of bills, which she straightens and folds onto the table. She takes off her jacket and drops it on the floor: her dress is torn. She starts to struggle out of the dress, and bumps herself against the table. Awa jerks awake.*

**Awa** Isa?

**Isa** Don't touch me don't come near me leave me alone / FUCK OFF I SAID

**Awa** shhh Isa, is Awa.

*Beat.*

What happened?

**Isa** nothing

**Awa** your dress is

**Isa** yes it is, isn't it

**Awa** *going to help Isa out of the dress.* He kept calling. I tried to explain but he wouldn't listen. After an hour I stopped answering. All those messages are his –

**Isa** *shaking her off.* I know how to take off a dress

**Awa** Your man's got a problem, you know?

**Isa** We all have problems

**Awa** No, *he* has a problem. I'm telling you, Isa. You pack up your boy and come with me tonight.

**Isa** *takes off the dress and leaves it crumpled on the floor.* You can't stand the sight of me and still you want that I follow you into your house like a puppy you found on the street. You aren't going to like what I'm about to say, Awa, but you really do remind me of the men in this country.

*Awa gathers up the dress.*

**Awa** I'll get his things

**Isa** What are you doing?

**Awa** It's stained

**Isa** Put it in the trash on your way out

**Awa** think / Isa --!

**Isa** THROW IT OUT.

*Awa touches Isa very gently.*

*Isa brushes her off.*

*Awa straightens and exits.*

*Once she's gone, Isa plays the answering machine.*

**VO: Alex** *over the sounds of a crowded bar.*

It's

it's ok, it's me

uh

it's me, are you . . ?

listen, I

I was thinking, I

look

listen

*End of first message.*

*Sound of a key in the door. Alex enters.*

*Isa turns and they stare at each other.*

*He approaches her unsteadily and pulls her to her feet.*

**VO: Alex** (Long silence, except for bar noises)

. . . yeah whatever, later.

*End of second message.*

*He embraces her and kisses her.*

*She tries to pull away, but he holds her.*

**VO: Alex** *this time over the sounds of a train station.*

where are you?

(fuck) Isa

you can't

can't just

Isa (fuck) you can't

don't do this, you can't

keep

running

ok

(ok)

*End of third message.*

*Alex holds Isa tight, she struggles against him.*

*Finally she breaks away; he grabs her, pulls her back.*

**VO: Alex** *over the sounds of a street, late night.*

(fuck)

ok

ok look

I can't

don't

don't make me  
fuck  
where are you  
pick up!  
why don't you  
fuck - !

*The recorder is full.  
Finally Isa gives up. Alex continues to kiss her.  
Blackout.*

Scene 14

*May 2001. Police station. A table, chair and a bottle of Coke.  
Officer 1 and Officer 2 enter, dragging a limp Achidi with them. They force Achidi on  
the chair.*

**Officer 1** . . .behind the door with an axe.

**Officer 2** God.

**Officer 1** Lucky for him there was a mirror in the foyer.

**Officer 2** You saved his life?

**Officer 1** I did my job.

*Pause.*

Great guy. You remind me a lot of him.

**Officer 2** . . . thanks.

**Officer 1** I told him a hundred times you can't tiptoe your way through a minefield. You have to know what you're doing. That's the only thing that'll keep you alive. Not stepping light

**Officer 2** I'm sorry

**Officer 1** that's why they make the big money, those guys out there weeding for explosives. If you had to attach a price tag to your dick, what would you say? Don't be modest

**Officer 2** uh . . . hundred . . ?

**Officer 1** No amount is worth your life.



**Officer 2** Right.

**Officer 1** You should ask her how she feels about it.

**Officer 2** Huh?

**Officer 1** Your kitten.

**Officer 2** Oh yeah

**Officer 1** My first wife was tough as nails. But sometimes you don't want tough as nails. Really you want the kitten.

**Officer 2** The thing is –

**Officer 1** Because with her you've got two things. Comfort and control.

*The mobile buzzes to life.*

Do you know what kills it in the end?

**Officer 2** Scared you might get hurt?

**Officer 1** The hours.

**Officer 2** Should I get that – ?

**Officer 1** There was this other time, it was all over the news. You listen to the news?

**Officer 2** I read the papers.

**Officer 1** Which papers?

**Officer 2** The local. And the *Times*.

**Officer 1** You read a lot.

**Officer 2** Every other day.

**Officer 1** Do you read them on odd or even days? *Times* on the odd and local on the even? I'm fucking with you. No, that's funny. All the best shit happens on the odd day. Things are normal and then you realize, fuck, today is going to be *odd*. This one was a talker. We followed him in the car until we got to the bridge. Blue suspension, you know the one, your kitten's been across it a hundred times. We cornered him and he jumped, fucking swan dive into the water. That was just before the shelter burned

**Officer 2** the papers said

**Officer 1** We were on our way home. My wife had a bug that just wouldn't go away and here we were chasing some bastard down river in the middle of the night

**Officer 2** the 'bastard' drowned.

*Beat.*

Eyewitnesses said.

*Pause.*

**Officer 1** Listen carefully. Because I don't want you to end up the way my first partner did.

**Officer 2** I'm

**Officer 1** and I don't want your kitten to end up the way my first wife did

**Officer 2** I'm sorry

**Officer 1** do you have any idea how many years I've seen this?

**Officer 2** no

**Officer 1** more than I can fucking count.

**Officer 2** the papers said

**Officer 1** A gold medal Olympic dive! I can see it on his face and I tell him, don't do it, don't even think it, anyone who can pull off a jump like that doesn't need some rookie punk to save him. But the press got him down. Great guy. Don't remember what he does now. Something to do with kids. Do you like kids?

*The phone starts to ring again. Officer 1 looks at Achidi. Officer 2 answers.*

What do you think? Is today even or odd?

**Officer 2** the ambulance is downstairs

**Officer 1** who called an ambulance?

**Officer 2** I did.

**Officer 1** Did anyone ask you to?

**Officer 2** but

**Officer 1** did I ask you to?

**Officer 2** yes

**Officer 1** did I?

**Officer 2** yes

**Officer 1** oh

**Officer 2** should I --?

**Officer 1** Everyone you pick up thinks they're the first. It's exhausting. It's time-consuming. It kills you.

Scene 15

*May 2001. Unemployment office waiting room.*

*Alex sits alone, smoking. He has two slips of paper in his hands.*

**VO:** 123.

*Andy enters and sits down beside him.*

*Alex wordlessly hands him one of the slips.*

**Andy** Prenatal fucking nightmares. Ever had one?

**Alex** No

**Andy** you sure?

**Alex** pretty sure.

**Andy** My cock was this long. I could use it to scratch my chin. But Chris didn't even notice. I kept expanding and this huge . . . mushroom thing started blowing up inside her and tumbling around in her gut. I tried to hold off, but I couldn't help it. I killed her in the end. We talked about it this morning and you know what she said? 'It's the most natural thing . . . '

*Andy waits for a reaction, gets none.*

Does that sound fucking natural to you?

*Alex starts to respond, Andy cuts him off.*

Prenatal joke, stop me if you know it

**Alex** (fuck)

**Andy** Saturday night and this woman she's pregnant right she's got to have tuna with ketchup, tuna and ketchup for fuck's sake. So they get up and look and of course no tuna, no ketchup, so she says, 'Forget it, I'll go get more'. The only place that's open is the shop near the station so she goes in and there's this colored girl at the register

**Alex** Andy

**Andy** trying to explain what soy milk is, why? because this baby, this - fucking - *kid* she has

**Alex** Andy

**Andy** but she can't make him understand and Chris pregnant liberal *bitch* butts in and saves the day, and they start talking baby shit, how long, how old, oh, how sweet

**Alex** (shit)

**Andy** and this girl puts her hand on the counter and she's got keys in her hand -- little silver key ring with initials scratched into it -- stop me if you know this one . . .

**Alex** fuck off

**Andy** 'Looks just like one that Alex used to have. Coincidence . . . '

**Alex** coincidence, right

**Andy** and Chris goes, 'Can I see your key ring?' And there are the initials, right there along the edge and she goes fuck the tuna and ketchup and she comes home and says

**Alex** mind your own fucking business

**Andy** 'Have you met Alex's girlfriend?' And the man goes, 'Alex's girlfriend left him. Why?' And she's all quiet, then suddenly she says, 'Has he got a slave?'

**Alex** cunt

**Andy** who's a cunt?

**Alex** she's not my slave

**Andy** that's exactly what I told her, I said Alex screwing a girl like that, he's so frigid, he, how could he possibly . . . then she started laughing and so did I because I thought the joke's over, and I asked her open the tuna, pour the ketchup, I'm hungry, I mean I wasn't really going to eat it, but I wanted to change the subject, you know, because this was disturbing, this was really OUT, you know? but she says she forgot the tuna *forgot the tuna* you go out for the sole purpose of purchasing a can of tuna in the middle of the fucking night and FORGET. How could you forget, I'm asking her like that, because if she forgot then it means maybe this bullshit story is for real and this can't be for real because he would've told me, there's no way he would not have told me something like that, now where's the tuna, you wanted tuna, where is it? In the middle of the night bitching about your soft skin and your cravings and your cramps and all this crap I don't care about, I don't care about your cravings, I didn't ask for a baby, all I wanted was a decent fuck for once I didn't ask for the whole fucking world to change, and she goes Andy! looklooklook and sometimes I don't want to fucking look sometimes I want to be left alone can you understand that please? NO. no. So I help you look. All over the house. Why? Because I love you, right. Come up empty. Don't worry, I'll go out. No I'll go. No let me. Where are my keys, I give her her keys. And she comes back and wakes me up in the middle of the fucking night with this BULLSHIT not a can of tuna in sight CHRIST ALEX!

**Alex** you didn't hit her

**Andy** you've heard it already? You should've stopped me

**Alex** DID YOU HIT HER

**Andy** all that time. Where's Alex? Don't know. Home. Alone. Out with his girlfriend? Could be. Probably. No, this girl is having his *fucking* baby. Just some girl he met, who knows. Christ Alex, who knows? Does anyone know? Your mother, does she know? Them in there, do they know?

**Alex** of course they know

**Andy** how?

*Beat. Andy realizes 'how.'*

You stupid fuck.

**Alex** What was I supposed to do?

**Andy** Not marry her

**Alex** maybe I wanted to.

**Andy** Why?

**Alex** She's special

**Andy** special?

**Alex** yes.

**Andy** What's her name?

**Alex** . . . her name?

**Andy** if she's so special

**Alex** what do you want with her name?

**Andy** Is she paying you?

*Pause. Slowly Alex starts to laugh.*

**Alex** Isa

**Andy** huh?

**Alex** her name is Isa

**Andy** where'd you meet her?

**Alex** on a train, why are you making this so complicated?

**Andy** you walked up to some colored girl on a train and started talking?

**Alex** STOP ASKING ME STUPID QUESTIONS IT'S MINE NOW LEAVE IT

**VO:** 124.

**Alex** My son's got a German name. I had to fight her for it. But it's better like that. His second name can be different.

*Pause.*

Did you hit her?

**Andy** Your number's up.

*Blackout.*

Scene 16

*June 2001. Awa's apartment. There are photographs strewn on the table, one of Achidi.*

*Awa sits before the table, holding the baby. Isa is getting ready to go out.*

**Awa** Let's sleep for a bit, eh? You dream something nice for me, eh? How about a fog in Senegal -- so thick you can climb it like a flight of stairs and ride it all around the world and if it rises high enough people in heaven can get on it too and ride down to earth to visit the living -- so no borders in the world can separate them, not even death can keep them apart -- can you do that for me? -- yes?

**Isa** What's your urgent news?

**Awa** Tell me, if someone hit you, would you call it a kiss? No. You would call it a hit. You might even hit back, who knows? If they strangle one of your children, what would you call it? Murder? Oh no, that's terribly problematic, we're sure to get in trouble for that. They embraced him a little too tight, that's all, yes, why don't we call it an *embrace*? We'll be up half the night debating over words, 'problematic' words, if you lie, you're diplomatic but if you tell the truth, ah, 'problematic Awa'

**Isa** Are those the only bedtime stories you know?

*Pause.*

Ah. No answer.

*Pause.*

My man complained that the baby could say Awa before he could say Papa

**Awa** Fuck your man.

**Isa** Ah! She's ready to engage in a proper conversation.

**Awa** You're welcome to find another babysitter if you wish. Things are happening around you if you would stop to take a look around

**Isa** Did you hear that? I am now to take a look around.

*She does so.*

I don't see anything urgent.

**Awa** You're right. It's nothing. Go out and play.

**Isa** If you want to fight, you only have to say so. Urgent business, ha. You urgently need to tell me what to do, is that it? Urgently need to tell me what a whore I am, and how sick I make you? Yes, Awa, don't let me forget, I don't have enough people to remind me

**Awa** it's all about you, yes

**Isa** yes, who else? To my family you say fuck your man, and my son, you forget half the time he's mine

**Awa** then act like he's yours!

**Isa** you can't stand it when I do!

**Awa** what if you don't come home tonight, then what? What kind of mother will you be when you're dead!

**Isa** I'm not in the mood for this, good night

**Awa** That's right, don't let me bring you down. Your good mood is important, right? Like your make-up, like a new dress, that's a pretty dress you have on tonight by the way. It really brings out your inner beauty. Shame you'll bring it home torn to pieces.

**Isa** After tonight I will find another babysitter.

*Isa heads for the door, Awa stops her.*

**Awa** They arrested him in front of the station. An 'unfortunate occurrence' involving police officers and drugs

**Isa** happens every day

**Awa** they killed him!

*Awa forces Isa to look at the picture.*

on the way to the hospital, heart attack they said, if he died from a heart attack, why are there bruises on his neck, how can a nineteen year old boy die from a heart attack

**Isa** Let go!

**Awa** Tonight we decide what to call him. We have a thousand names to choose from. Including yours.

*Pause. Isa tosses the picture to the floor.*

All right. Queen of the fucking Nile. Run. *(She opens the door wide.)* Before you miss the last train.

*Isa doesn't go; instead, she picks up the picture and looks at it.*

**Isa** Achidi.

*Blackout.*

Scene 17

*A rally outside the police station.*

**Awa** want safe there is no safe back to the place we risked our lives to leave risked lives to save lives shelter asylum shelter no asylum 'home' not home like a prison not protection skins do the job that home office can't do ministry of interior can't do call it accident call it youth out of control but I call it murder all the same

keep the home office clean police station clean politicians clean come and take take take all the industry machine laser oil motor raw materials we industrialized Europe we industrialized this continent the cars run on Africa it's Africa on the operating table Africa in the morning coffee Africa at the bottom of the river Africa in the hospital dead what great 'economic burden,' what 'socio-economic crisis' show me the gold in 'golden exile' police you / murder politicians you murder home office you murder the same accident again and again the same mistake over and over see it happen over and over it's murder to kill a man it's murder for the love of god murder! murder! murder!

Scene 18

*Immigration office. Alex sits at the table.*

*Civil Servant sits across from him.*

**Servant** You understand the situation in this country.

**Alex** Yes.

**Servant** The implications.

*Awkward pause – Alex clearly doesn't understand.*

*(Explaining)* You're unemployed.

**Alex** I know. But --

**Servant** You're obviously not incapable.



**Alex** Incapable?

**Servant** I don't believe, from what you've told me, that you are a lazy person. I know Lazy People. Unemployed because they are incapable. Incapable because they are selfish. Selfish because they simply don't want to work. I've had them in my office, sitting where you are now. They call themselves all sorts of things, but in the end they really are the same.

**Alex** *uncomfortable*. I have a son.

**Servant** *opening his dossier*. How old is he?

**Alex** Thirteen months . . .

**Servant** *reading*. Here it is. April, millennium baby . . . no luck on the German market?

**Alex** *utterly lost*. The contractor went bankrupt . . .

**Servant** Your wife's from Senegal

**Alex** yes.

**Servant** Senegal is a very long way from Germany

**Alex** yes . . .

**Servant** How could such an ambitious, capable young man land so far outside of this country's society?

**Alex** Is this . . . part of the interview?

**Servant** *brightening*. Would you like a cup of coffee?

**Alex** No. Thanks.

**Servant** Do you mind if I drink mine while we talk?

**Alex** Of course not.

**Servant** Don't you get tired?

**Alex** Of what?

**Servant** All this. Bureaucracy.

**Alex** I suppose it's necessary

**Servant** but it must exhaust you. Reinventing yourself again and again . . .

**Alex** reinventing *what*?

**Servant** What if she's told me that her husband can't resist a good cup of coffee? You don't trust her. So you sit there. Dying for a cup –

**Alex** *realizing.* I said I'm fine

**Servant** you're sure? It's only in the next room.

**Alex** No. Thank you.

**Servant** So your wife works.

**Alex** I've heard her talk about starting a business

**Servant** a *what?*

**Alex** *sensing that he's slipped up.* It's talk. That's all.

**Servant** Does your wife speak German?

**Alex** Yes

**Servant** and do you speak Senegalese?

**Alex** There is no 'Senegalese'

**Servant** a few words? Something she taught you?

**Alex** I know a little French

**Servant** demonstrate.

**Alex** *Bourde . . . ta . . . mère*

**Servant** and what does she think she could sell?

**Alex** I don't know.

*Pause.*

*Servant puts a cigarette in his mouth and offers one to Alex. Alex accepts. Servant lights his cigarette and then lights Alex's.*

**Servant** Alex. Can I call you Alex?

**Alex** Yes . . .

**Servant** Nobody has a problem with you. I want to make that clear. I know that this atmosphere, the circumstances, can lead one to believe that we've got a problem with *you*. I want to make it as explicit as possible that this is not the case. Yeah?

**Alex** Yes.

**Servant** Wouldn't you like to go into business?

**Alex** It's not my thing.

**Servant** Right, what is your 'thing'?

**Alex** I'm looking --

**Servant** You're not looking, you're smoking! In *Senegal*. And waiting for returns on an investment that once it turns eighteen will leave you right back where it all started. Sitting on your ass and smoking

**Alex** Look, can't I smoke a cigarette?

**Servant** Go right ahead

**Alex** You offered it to me. I took it because you offered.

**Servant** What else would you take if I offered it to you?

**Alex** This is bullshit!

**Servant** *as if Alex has finally seen the light.* YES.

**Alex** *thrown off by such hearty agreement.* I don't know how to say this, but --

**Servant** yes?

**Alex** my

**Servant** yes?

**Alex** my son is all I have.

*Slowly the Officer begins to applaud. Alex starts to get up.*

**Servant** Have a seat, please.

**Alex** Look, I don't have to --

**Servant** SIT DOWN.

*Alex sinks back into his seat.*

What kind of mother is your wife?

**Alex** Huh?

**Servant** Is she a good mother? Caring, attentive? Is she shit?

**Alex** She's good.

**Servant** Could she be better? *(Alex starts to protest, the Officer cuts him off.)* Look. *(He rolls up the leg of his pants and shows Alex a scar.)* My dog did this. She

used to attack me if I came too close to her puppies. I got this the day I finally sold them. But you realize that the predicament you're in is very different. Everyone loves puppies, even cross-bred pit bulls. Cross-bred people don't enjoy the same kind of attention/

**Alex** My son is not a puppy.

**Servant** Of course he's not –

**Alex** He's human. My wife / is human too.

**Servant** Right, I'm only trying to point out that /

**Alex** What are you trying to point out?

**Servant** No matter how you see / them

**Alex** Yeah?

**Servant** . . . well . . . frankly, Alex . . .

**Alex** What?

**Servant** Fatherhood is the only job you'll have forever. The pay is quite bad, but it's better than nothing.

Scene 19

*Early July 2001. Alex's apartment, late evening.  
Guy, Awa and Isa are seated on the sofa.*

**Guy** The way she climbed the steps -- like an Olympic runner going to light the torch except slow motion, and imagine the torch is a microphone. And people clapping like rain crashing down, stamping feet and singing songs, the men first, then the women shouting back, and then all one on top of the other and the crowd looks like it's churning ocean water and they're chanting and it seems as if nothing can stop them! But when she – she there, yes – when she takes the microphone in her hand – there's a crack – feedback squealing, ooh, it hurt – and the rest of us down on the ground thought noooo, it's always like this, always such moments technology is destined to fail

**Awa** nobody checks these things.

**Guy** Awa!

**Awa** 27, 582 students Isa

**Guy** Awa listen

**Awa** and who among them can repair a broken microphone?

**Guy** That was not the problem

**Awa** what was the problem then?

**Guy** We concluded it was Awa's magnificent voice

**Awa** ah!

**Guy** that had short-circuited the cables in the sound system. It seemed that all was lost. But then something incredible happened, I will never forget it as long as I live. Silence. Like the top of a mountain, silent. Thousands and thousands of people, ever heard a place where there are people and they're all still? It's like the ground is breathing is what it sounds like. The sound before an earthquake is how it feels

**Awa** you were never in an earthquake, Guy

**Guy** like a storm speaking, if thunder had a tongue. Everybody listened. And then when she was done – you hear this one big breath – 27,000 lungs filling up with air – and then an explosion of chanting, a cloud of dust and for a moment it seemed there was no oxygen left in the air -- and I still remember how the dust stung my eyes, and how the crowd became a blur of faces

**Awa** it wasn't the dust that made you cry.

*Beat.*

**Guy** You should never interrupt someone who is singing your praises

**Awa** *to Isa.* Give him to me.

*Awa takes the baby from Isa and exits off.*

**Guy** That was before the massacre -- her children were still alive, she and Alain were always together – they'd never spent a day apart. So on occasions like these, when I want to cheer her, I remind her of who she used to be. You know she's due in court in a few week's time?

**Isa** What happened?

**Guy** She said some words she shouldn't have said. I tried to warn her -- it's like trying to warn a bird not to fly.

**Isa** It's going to get her killed.

**Guy** I don't think so.

**Isa** If something were to happen to her . . .

*Pause.*

**Guy** You know your eyes. They're very big. They take up your whole face. You look like a baby antelope. And the shade of your lipstick is not one I would choose. In fact you'd look better without it. You should emphasize your natural beauty more. And you don't talk very much, although I can see in your big eyes that you have plenty to

say and your voice is not bad, why don't you say a bit more? Look at Awa, how she goes on and on and

**Isa** is that the way you talk to a woman in her own home?

**Guy** I'm trying to flirt with you. Am I succeeding?

*Awa returns, ready to go.*

**Awa** Is he telling you more about the mountains he's climbed?

**Guy** I've climbed many mountains

**Awa** ignore him, Isa

**Guy** you see she always interrupts at the point where I am about to sing her praises

**Awa** *ushering him out.* It's after midnight already. Goodnight, Isa

**Guy** Isa . . . Isa . . . I did climb a mountain once. Horrible – alone, I was dizzy, my stomach was weak, my knees – but at some point there's no more choice of direction – if you're afraid, well, you take your fear with you -- and the view, such a view -- but better than the view is the silence – thick, round, and gentle – I thought this must be the sound of death –

*Guy opens the door and finds himself face to face with Alex.  
After a beat, Guy realizes, lets Alex in.*

**Alex** to Isa. Are you leaving?

*This dialogue runs simultaneously over the lines that follow it:*

---

**Guy** who . . . ?

**Awa** Her man

**Guy** should we

**Awa** no

**Guy** leave them alone

**Awa** no

**Guy** but

**Awa** not alone with him.

---

**Isa** Alex listen to me

**Alex** FORGET IT / doesn't matter

**Isa** listen to me / would you listen?

**Alex** yeah . . . yeah . . .

**Isa** I'm not going / I'm not

**Awa** She's coming with us –

**Isa** Awa –

**Alex** with you? /

**Awa** *to Isa.* Time.

**Alex** (who) the hell are you?

**Awa** don't act like you don't know who I am

**Alex** what's she saying?

**Isa** you know her Alex / you've met her before –

**Alex** yeah . . . yeah / we met . . .

**Isa** Alex listen / to me

**Awa** not going without you, Isa.

**Isa** no Awa

**Alex** no it's fine, it's

**Isa** Alex please

**Alex** can't you, can't you at least / tell me

**Isa** they're friends /

**Alex** friends of yours?

**Awa** can she have friends?

**Alex** sorry I don't know WHO THE FUCK YOU ARE

**Awa** you're lying

**Alex** (I'm lying)

**Guy** *to Isa.* Are you all right on your own?

**Awa** no

**Alex** she's not / 'on her own'

**Awa** I'll stay with her

**Guy** you're / sure?

**Awa** yes

**Isa** you don't / have to

**Alex** not here / you're not staying

**Awa** then come with me.

**Alex** *to Isa.* what's she saying? / Isa?

**Guy** you heard her

**Alex** Isa?

*Isa rushes off.*

**Awa** do you hear me / talking to you

**Guy** (careful Awa)

**Awa** break her / think that makes you a man

**Alex** (get out of here)

**Awa** she's not yours anymore

**Alex** I'm married to her

**Awa** *stepping up to Alex.* So am I, so is he / what's special about you

**Guy** don't

**Alex** GET OUT

**Awa** *to Alex.* COME ON

**Guy** *reaching for Awa.* Awa

**Awa** let me go!

*Alex advances toward Awa.*

*Guy steps between them just as Isa returns.*

**Guy** go on touch her



**Isa** don't touch him!

*To Guy.*

Take her and go.

**Awa** you can't, don't leave her with him!

**Isa** Now!

*Awa is hurt; reluctantly Guy ushers her out.*

**Guy to Alex, warning.** I'll come in the morning / Isa

**Isa** just go.

*They leave. Alex sinks down on the sofa.*

What's the matter with you?

*Pause.*

Answer me

**Alex** are you going?

**Isa** *tired.* Alex, no

**Alex** ARE YOU LEAVING ME?

**Isa** Stop shouting!

**Alex** You like that

**Isa** . . . what?

**Alex** his skin, that's what you want

**Isa** (you're crazy)

**Alex** you're right, too red

*Isa turns toward the baby's room.*

*Alex grabs her, manipulates her to the sofa and forces her on it.*

*He begins to rape her.*

*She screams, tries to fight him off.*

*Knocking, then pounding at the door.*

*Guy enters. Alex stops.*

*Without hesitation, Guy lays into Alex.*

*Isa gets up and runs off. She returns holding her baby.*

*Guy steps away from Alex and stands looking at him.*

*Isa goes to Guy and together they leave.*

*Alex gets to his feet.*

*He goes to the window and looks out.  
Blackout.*

Scene 20

*July 2001, a week later. Scene split to reveal on one side the unemployment office waiting room and on the other Awa's apartment. Alex and Andy sit in the waiting room; Awa's apartment is completely empty.*

**VO:** 589.

**Andy** Christ Alex.

**Awa** I don't like it

**Andy** You could press charges. Assault. Kidnapping . . .

**Isa** can't you wait until I'm through the door?

**Andy** I mean, what can she do? Alone? With a kid? You hear me, Alex? Alex!

**Alex** yeah

**Isa** you have to *negotiate* these things, Awa. But I suppose negotiating isn't something you do

**Awa** we're not in Dakar

**Isa** not yet

**Andy** go to the child protection agency, the police, get a lawyer

**Isa** I did her hair once. She's fine, just young

**Awa** young and stupid

**Isa** Would you rent a shop to a single woman wheeling a baby around?

**Awa** I would, in fact

**Isa** you are a sorry excuse for a businesswoman, all of you 'activists' are

**Andy** Are you listening to me?

**Alex** yes!

**Andy** so what do you think?

**VO:** 590.

**Awa** I would feel better if we had something. Documents. Signatures

**Isa** No one can take a nursing baby away from his mother.

**Awa** He won't be nursing forever

**Isa** I know men who nurse for decades –

**Andy** I'm not trying to tell you what to do.

**Awa** Security. Custody, Isa

**Isa** I'm his *mother*

**Awa** I've heard stories you wouldn't believe

**Isa** about men who breastfeed? Does the German man have tits?

**Awa** He has citizenship.

**Isa** *bitten again*. Ah, hey!

**Andy** But get someone

**Alex** yeah

**Andy** knowledgeable on your side

**Alex** 'someone knowledgeable on my side'

**Andy** yeah!

**Isa** you're jealous

**Alex** yeah how?

**Awa** shut up, girl

**Andy** Chris . . . Chris must know people, she knows people like that . . .

**Isa** Nothing I could do to tempt you away from your precious meetings. But still you mix your business with mine, always telling me to be serious and criticizing what I do, why? But I figured it out. It's his face you keep coming back for. To look at him makes you feel that the world is on your side -- even though it's not on your side at all. Go on to your hearing. Stop trying to live everyone's life but your own

**Andy** Forget how! Fuck how! I'd fucking do it if I could, toss her off the next bridge, if it were me

**Alex** it's not 'you', is it?

**Isa** Guy told me about your children.

**Awa** Guy is full of talk!

**Andy** I know that, I'm only saying –

**Alex** good.

**Isa** Tears don't frighten me –

**Awa** there's a box on the landing

**Andy** For fuck's sake, Alex

**VO:** 591.

*Andy gets up.*

If there's anything we can do, just –

**Awa** are you coming? I can't carry it alone.

*Awa exits.*

*Alex extinguishes his cigarette and slowly stands.*

*He crosses to Awa's apartment.*

*He collects the baby gently and hushes it as he carries it off.*

**Isa** I can see him. There he is in front of me, his red face, his cigarettes, I can see him, he's saying I'm his father, we'll be back in an hour, and she's looking at her watch and she's letting him go . . . you were right, Awa, you should've left it at 'embrace' because that's murder that's what murder means, yes Awa, come here, let's work on your German, you come from a place where a kiss is a kiss and a slap is a slap but here, ha, you need an extra stamp in your passport if you want to speak your mind, yes, Awa, let everyone hear, say murder loud, say it, Murder!

Scene 21

*Alex's apartment, late. Alex is alone, lying on the sofa, wide awake and perfectly still.*

*The phone rings. He ignores it. Finally, it stops.*

*Silence.*

*The phone starts to ring again.*

*He tries to ignore it, finally gets up and kicks it over.*

*He returns to the sofa, rubbing his side where Guy struck him.*

*He lies back down on the sofa.*

*A knock at the door.*

*Alex ignores it. Another knock, then the sound of a key in the door.*

*Andy appears.*

**Andy** . . . the unmistakable stink of abstinence.

**Alex** she keeps calling, over and over until the machine is full. Every message exactly the same

**Andy** Look. See that over there?

**Alex** what?

**Andy** Open it and then close it behind you.

**Alex** Andy

**Andy** It's easy, watch.

*Andy opens the door of the apartment.*

See?

**Alex** (close the door)

**Andy** *talking to imaginary neighbors.* What? This? Oh it's just a scratch. Fuck me, you should see what she did to my ribs, look

**Alex** CLOSE THE DOOR.

*Andy shuts the door.*

**Andy** Nice neighbors. You should meet them.

**Alex** Who?

**Andy** now you

**Alex** leave me alone

**Andy** gotta open the door if you want to kick me out, see?

*Alex gets up and opens the door, thoroughly annoyed.*

Very good, now again and this time turn off the lights and take these with you.

**Alex** How is he?

**Andy** Chris can't get enough.

**Alex** Is he sleeping OK?

**Andy** He waits until you're just drifting off, then he starts howling like a fucking wolf, every hour on the hour till the crack of dawn

**Alex** (fuck)

**Andy** Chris adores him. Calls him her chocolate bunny. She goes, 'ask Alex if he wants to trade.' And I tell her, how about getting rid of the one she's got and all three of us can share. It's not too late

**Alex** Tell her to come around some time.

**Andy** I did. You know what she said? 'Why doesn't *he* come around?' She's all concerned, I tell her, don't worry. Alex can't even get off the sofa these days

**Alex** a few days more

*During this next speech, Isa appears silently at the door.*

**Andy** Come on, Alex. You're free! Let's go get fucked –

**Isa** Did you hear? I got the lease.

**Alex** Congratulations

**Isa** I cut the man a deal he couldn't refuse. He thought he could outwit Dakar. But my tongue was much faster

*Pause. Then Andy slowly leaves, staring Isa down on his way out.*

**Alex** he's at my mother's, ok?

**Isa** how is your mother

**Alex** it's two in the morning, Isa

**Isa** I suddenly remembered her garden today. I called to tell her what I thought about all of her beautiful fruit. And do you know what she said?

**Alex** can't imagine

**Isa** she had no idea when she'd last heard from her son

**Alex** that's nothing new

**Isa** or her grandson

**Alex** maybe it slipped her mind

**Isa** I warned her in case she tried to call, her own son may refuse to pick up –

**Alex** that's enough, Isa

**Isa** and do you know what she said? Yes, you do

**Alex** go now, I think you should go

**Isa** 'at least he won't pick up any of your dirty African ways.' And I almost hung up, but before I did, I thought to ask her, who? You mean my husband or my son? You can't just take him

**Alex** Christ, Isa, he's not *yours*

**Isa** whose is he then? When the people look and wonder, what will you say? When he cries, will you hold him? Or will you leave him and let him cry on his own?

*Alex catches her by the wrists.  
She tries to push him off her; she loses her balance and falls.*

*He tries to pin her down. She fights him.  
Pounding on the door.*

**Officer 1** (off). POLICE

*Alex tries to go to the door. Isa realizes, struggles to hold him back.*

**Isa** no Alex don't let them in Alex don't Alex don't / don't let them in Alex no Alex  
NO!

**Officer 1** (off). POLICE OPEN THE DOOR.

*The door is being shaken from outside.  
Alex wrenches himself away from her. He reaches the door just as it is being forced  
open.*

Scene 22

*Officer 1 and Officer 2. Alex is seated between them, perfectly still. The rest of the  
space is completely dark.*

**Officer 1** My partner and I received an anonymous call at approximately 2.30  
am. Something about a break-in and a domestic dispute of a violent nature. The  
caller was very upset

**Alex** OK . . . let's do it

**Officer 2** she'd broken into the house

**Officer 1** the caller stated that she had forcibly entered the man's home

**Officer 2** you could see it on her face. Her hands. She'd wrecked the place.  
Broken glass was everywhere. Broken furniture. The man had a scratch on his face

**Officer 1** injured confirmed that he was OK. My partner assisted him and tended  
to the injury

**Officer 2** he kept saying make her leave. I didn't know it was his wife

**Officer 1** the woman was clearly agitated

**Officer 2** (that's your wife?)

**Alex** hey Andy. Feel that?

**Officer 1** We arrived at the address

**Alex** oh fuck . . . fuck fuck fuck FUCK

**Officer 1** the situation was out of hand

**Alex** yeah

**Officer 2** they were both on the floor. He was cut and she was screaming at the top of her voice for him not to open the door.

**Alex** (fuck)

**Officer 2** she got off the floor and ran into the kitchen

**Officer 1** there was an exchange of words, insults directed at ourselves, at the injured man. She was very agitated. A woman of her physical capabilities combined with an obviously excitable temper alerted me to potential danger. She had already ransacked the house. She could've been armed. Physical restraint at that point would have been justified. But I opted instead to talk her down.

**Officer 2** I don't remember that part.

*Officer 1 shoots a look at Officer 2.*

**Officer 1** my partner had concerned himself with aiding the injured and most likely did not hear our exchange

**Officer 2** I just heard her running

**Officer 1** she went to the kitchen and came back armed

**Officer 2** armed?

**Officer 1** She was brandishing a culinary implement.

**Officer 2** I don't recall that

**Officer 1** do you recall shooting her?

**Officer 2** you said

**Officer 1** do you recall shooting her?

*Silence.*

*Officer . . .*

**Officer 2** you said not to talk about it

**Officer 1** answer the question.

**Officer 2** She had a knife

**Officer 1** and

**Officer 2** she tried to

**Officer 1** what?

**Officer 2** use it



**Officer 1** so

**Officer 2** (no)

**Officer 1** you fired

**Officer 2** you said I didn't have to answer you said don't worry don't answer

**Officer 1** my partner acted in my defense and shot the woman once. Internal bleeding later lead to her very unfortunate death

**Officer 2** you said

**Officer 1** we administered first aid and did all we could to stop the bleeding until paramedics arrived

**Officer 2** I don't recall that

**Officer 1** my partner was in shock

**Alex** Andy. Andy look at that. Down there

**Officer 2** Her husband came and looked . . . he went back and sat on the sofa . . . he kept . . . he kept . . .

**Officer 1** understandably. He's young and quite inexperienced

**Officer 2** I tried to get him to stop, but he wouldn't

**Officer 1** I was cut during the attack, but nothing serious. Hardly worth mentioning, except for the purpose of this report.

*During this next monologue, Officer 1 and Officer 2 stand and retreat into darkness.*

**Alex** get down – did they see us? you're sure? – what are cops doing out here, shit! – wait a minute, hold on – what's that? can you see it? sh! – no, asshole, that's a shadow – if there was someone in the river they wouldn't just be standing there –

Andy –

Andy –

oh shit

*Blackout.*

*End of play.*