



THE FIGHT HAS JUST BEGUN

"A traditional Metaphor for Modern Dictatorship"

Effiong Johnson

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*"A Traditional Metaphor For
Modern Dictatorship"*

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DEDICATION

Ken-Saro-Wiwa.
And the Ogoni eight, nine, ten and
eleven?

Who were brutally murdered in a
just fight which has just begun...

CHARACTERS:

UDOBONG	(25)	-	Imo's uncle, a poet and product of the African People Institute (A.P.I).
ETIDO	(27)	-]	Udobong's mates at A.P.I.
UNEN	(27)	-]	Civic Activists.
IMO	(10)	-	Mobio's king to-be
EKA IMO	(42)	-	Imo's mother.
EDIDEM EKARIKA	(35)	-	The present king of Mobio
AYARA EKARIKA	(57)	-	Mobio's elder, a one time king of Mobio
INI-EKEM EKARIKA	(30)	-	The one to rule after Imo.
AKPAISONG	(70)	-	An old man, staff bearer of Mobio

CITIZENS OF MOBIO/DRUMMERS/DANCERS.

PALACE GUARDS.

THE BRIEF

The world has witnessed societies strongly built but mercilessly destroyed. It has seen the coming and going of several generations, with heroic characters one after another. But there is one thing that has cut across all dispensations, standing transfixed for generations and defying every form of transformation - The Nature of Man. That intrinsic tinge of dirt in every heart, seeking to stain that which is clean, crawling subtly into the midst of orderliness, and turning crooked what was originally straight.

Udobong's strong belief in the right course of justice has led him to his peril. But his friends believe that his fight has only just begun. That though Imo his nephew, is young and inexperienced, as claimed by the Ndidems, he yet remains the right and accepted one to ascend the throne of Mobio, a little rich village situated in the riverine area of Ekondo. This strong determination of Udobong's friends vis-a-vis the resolute resistance mounted up by the Ndidems who wish to continue in power, is the cause of the fight, in this play.

Effiong Johnson

November 1985.

SITUATION ONE: A STREET IN MOBIO

A throng of Mbire Mkpawara and Asian groups litter the street. It is the rehearsal for the grand performance during the coronation of the next king. The drummers are trying to get the right rhythm under the strict supervision of Udobong and his two friends. Eventually a good rhythm emerges, followed by a song. Dancers take the stage, but don't quite perform to the satisfaction of the "choreographer". They try again, this time, the steps are well synchronized to the rhythm of the drums. Even Udobong and his friends join in the dance. The rhythm suddenly changes to the familiar beat of Asian dance, and the dancers on cue take the scene. There is no mistake about their preparedness for the performance. Udobong is quick at observing that the Asian girls are set. He stops the dance by holding the hands of the lead drummer...

UDOBONG:

The rehearsal is over! We are satisfied with what we've seen. Aren't we friends?

ETIDO:

We are.

UNEN:

Yes we are!

UDOBONG:

I shall not be chanced to watch the rehearsal again as I must attend to other crucial issues. I hope that the performance shall be such that Mobio had never seen in the history of the coronations of her kings.

The crowd cheers. The drums resound and build into a crescendo. Udobong conducts the tempo and the beats dwindle to a diminuendo and crash. All disperse in top spirits leaving the trio, Udobong, Etido, and Unen.

UDOBONG:

It is five days to the ceremony, yet, nothing by way of preparation has been done by the Ndidems.

UNEN:

O, come off it Udobong. There is a lot already fixed for that day. I know how spectacular you want the day to be. Don't get mad, it will turn out well.

UDOBONG:

The royal robe ought to have been sent in before now. You know of course that it has to be worked on to fit our new king.

ETIDO:

Well, that I guess will be done. It is not too late. I heard that it is only today that one of them took the staff to Akpaisong.... In any case, that is indicative that change is imminent.

UNEN:

The much expected change, Udobong! How we've yearned for it all these years. Today, we saw some citizens of Mobio dragging cows to the palace. And the Mbire mkparawa and Asian groups are of course ready. Certainly Udobong, in just a few days...

UDOBONG:

Just a few days... (*Changes mind.*) Just a few days and the baton will change. And we shall have the one chance we've been yearning for all these years to right so many wrongs. I want to go to the palace. What do you say?

ETIDO:

What do you say, Unen?

UNEN:

You can go, but be careful. You are now aware of what has been done. You may very discreetly ask them of the royal robe. You mustn't look in anyway ambitious. Just be concerned and naturally so, okay?

ETIDO:

Go, but don't forget Mr. Otito's advice way back in the African Institute. "Observe your audience well, listen carefully and do sensible but little talking".

UDOBONG:

I'm on my way *(they shake hands)* God keep all of us to be partakers of this impending transformation.

UNEN:

The dawn of a new era...

ETIDO:

We will hoist our flag and sing our anthem when Imo shall be given the mantle of kingship.

UDOBONG:

In just a few days. *(He turns back while they watch him go. Light fades to total darkness).*

SITUATION TWO

A well furnished reception in the palace. Everything in it depicts the pomp that Mobio's Kings are characterized. The throne, the carpet and the seats are of no mean value. Seated are Edidem Ekarika III on the throne, while Ayara and Ini-Ekem sit to his left and right respectively.

EDIDEM EKARIKA:

This has happened too soon. Seven years have only too speedily run out with many plans yet uncompleted.

AYARA:

That is how it normally happens. Before you begin it, there seems to be a long road ahead but by the time you get to the end of it, you wish you had more years to continue. But this is not the time to lay wreaths on yesterday's failures. You didn't call me from my chambers to come and watch you moan over uncompleted plans. Did you?

EKARIKA:

Certainly not, father. But a man who is beaten today ought to get up to fight harder another day..

AYARA:

So? How relevant are all these to the handing over plans everyone is anxiously waiting for? You should be talking about your address to the people of Mobio in a short time from now. They are patiently waiting for you to tell them with your own mouth what you have accomplished in your seven years' reign; what you have used the resources from the wide expanse of the village farm for.

INI-EKEM:

That is the problem father...

OKPO:

The child should tell his mother that he is hungry, Ukot Okukim. Stealing is never a good thing. Pass on the box Da Ekiko, I knew that the name Asukwo Ntefiok will not but rouse your appetites.

OKUKIM:

(Collects the box and takes a good quantity into his nostrils. Sneezes and sneezes again.)

OKPO:

Eh-eh, that's a good one! Wot Okpo! wot Okpo! Da Okukim, don't give your son-in-law soured wine as the ugly appearance on his face can force you to reconsider giving him your daughter. Don't scare us with your novice games.

EKIKO:

Okukim is an old customer of soured wine. What he is not used to is a good brand of snuff.

OKUKIM:

(Cleans his face with the hem of his wrapper.) It is true da Ekiko, I normally go to where the price is cheap. I rob myself of good things and good experience. Thank you Okpo. Your presence in this meeting is undoubtedly rewarding. *(The main entrance to the courtyard opens gently and Enang, the king's personal body guard emerges majestically and stands at the door surveying the courtyard to make sure it is safe for the chief. He advances stoutly to take his position behind the chief's*

throne.) Enang Iden, the one that broke the limb of Ikwot like a child playing with broom sticks...

OKPO:

Enang, the elephant's feet that never complains of the hugeness of its body.

EKIKO:

Enang, the proud man of Rebem, the cat whose back never knows there is dust on the ground.

ENANG:

I am the one, our elders; the he-goat's odour can never be mistaken. The lion is always dreaded by its subordinates. You are welcome elders of Rebem. Your chief will soon be with you. But, a terrible thing has happened in Rebem. Prepare yourselves, the chiefs fury can swallow the wind. *(The chief enters frowning, looks at nobody in particular but moves straight to his throne. The elders all stand and bow before him.)*

AYARA:

(Indifferently) You may sit down elders of Rebem. If the squirrel falls down from the palm tree then its nature should be doubted. It is good you all came and sat down before my arrival. This thing that has happened, is the work of all of you here. Your blindness, insensitivity and bad counsel has resulted in the mockery of Rebem before her envious neighbours...

the forgiveness of the new king and the generality of the people of Mobio; then hand over.

EKARIKA:

What did you just say father? Do you mean that we should bend low to that ten year old? Impossible!

INI-EKEM:

That is too degrading father, God forbid.

AYARA:

There is no alternative. God already sanctions him as the new king of Mobio.

INI-EKEM:

We are not handing over, father. Let the odds happen. We had promised the people of Mobio the building of an oil mill, for easy processing of oil and at a much reduced human labour, only two years ago. Everyone in this village contributed as demanded towards that project. Yet, today, that hasn't been done, neither is their money... er... er... anywhere to be found.

EKARIKA:

The secretary of Mobio's cooperative society has complete records of the sales of all the items in the village stalls. This money was supposed to be kept safely in the village treasury. But I tell you father, nothing is there.

AYARA:

You have no one but yourselves to blame for this corruption, misuse of office and the betrayal of Mobio's trust.

INI-EKEM:

Well, if you say that these failures of ours are not enough reasons to refuse to hand over, what of the government's decision only last week to grant recognition and legal authority to village chiefs for the maintenance of law, order and discipline at the local government levels? Don't you see our successor being too

young and immature to cope with this sort of responsibility?

AYARA:

And would you say that you, who are mature and experienced, are in every sense fit for this responsibility? Look here my children, I think you have dreamt long enough, you had better be awake to the realities of every situation.

EKARIKA:

Father, this boy is only ten years old. He is unfit for any position of authority in Mobio. Even our traditions do not advocate that. I strongly see his youthfulness as the will of God to give me just another chance to make amends. Come to think of it father, this boy's father died with his two grown up sons before he completed his tenure of rulership. All these are pointers to...

AYARA (*Gets up!*):

Enough! Enough of this shallow reasoning. The tradition of Mobio does not specify age limits for her leaders. What of your grand father who ruled at his own time at the age of fifteen? Doesn't our record have of his government as one of the best in terms of prosperity, good management and the general peace of Mobio? And this boy's father, you said what about him? Better be careful at the careless words you utter about the dead heroes of Mobio. He and his two sons died in a war this village fought against Bokom in the last year of his reign...

EKARIKA:

We have not forgotten...

AYARA:

Of course you haven't forgotten that he built the cooperative shop whose proceeds you have now entirely mismanaged. In fact, left for the right thinking people of Mobio alone,

his only remaining son, only how many years old then, should have been installed king of Mobio, to compensate for that great loss. But here again our tradition was kept very strictly and you were made king. Justice must prevail as long as Mobio lives.

INI-EKEM:

(Gets up from the throne):

You are not helping us, father. You are insistently opting to remain adamant to all our suggestions... Well, you can go back to your chambers and shut yourself in. I suppose this is our business and we are going to handle it the way we deem fit to hide this shame. Udobong is the major obstacle to the success of our scheme. If we can take care of him, all will run smoothly on that day. Then we shall remain in power.

AYARA:

What ever you are up to, I'm not in it and I am sure the spirits of the ancestors of Mobio will never support any evil venture. My children, or rather my brother's children, desist from all your uncanny schemes contrary to tradition. If you don't, Mobio will fight you. You will be shocked at the reactions of the people of Mobio to apparent and deliberate attempts at changing their traditions. Good night. *(He storms out of the place).*

EKARIKA:

(Shakes his head) Poor old man, he is right, do you know that? No amount of intimidation can help us now.

INI-EKEM:

(Furious) So what? What use can his suggestions be to us now? Our whole lives are in jeopardy, the women will sing us in their "Ebre" songs. The elders will curse us. And the children will throw stones at us if we oblige his suggestions.

suggestions. Can't you foresee the contempt of it all if we bow to this baby? Suppose he refuses the pardon we expect and chooses to allow justice to take its course, where will we beheading for? From palace to prison? Unless you rationalize this matter like I do, you may have become persuaded to attempt at braving the situation the manner he has suggested. As for me, braving the situation is eliminating all suspected oppositions now before that day comes.

EKARIKA:

(Convinced) You are right and luckily for us our adversaries are not many. This baby can only ride on our backs when his uncle Udobong is alive, and you have not forgotten what a strong and positive minded fellow you said he was when you were together at the African People Institute.

INI-EKEM:

You can call him a zealot because he will defy any risk and every threat to stick out his stubborn head for any righteous cause. And he mixes this ingenuity masterfully with such strong propelling zeal...

EKARIKA:

Such people could have a sizeable following.

INI-EKEM:

Well, we are lucky there, because it seems to me that as though that craft has elluded him. He...

EKARIKA:

Sh! sh! I heard footsteps outside the palace. Go and see who that is... *(Just then someone knocks).*

INI-EKEM:

(Looks at Ekarika who tries to sit in some majestic posture. Ini-Ekem goes to open the palace entrance door). Light dims to total darkness.

SITUATION THREE

This situation introduces the courtyard of Udobong's sister. It is a magnificent place also. Almost like the palace of the Ndidems except that there is no throne. Udobong enters and unfolds the royal robe admirably, goes to put it on the seat and surveys its colours.

UDOBONG:

The emblem of beauty has been made ugly by the nature of man. That intrinsic tinge of dirt in every heart, seeking to stain that which is clean, crawling subtly into the midst of orderliness, and turning crooked what was originally straight. *(Reaches out and picks the robe)*. But your eyes shall see the dawn of a new era. You will now shelter an honest character, noble in words and deeds. And when you are on him, the world will see and not squint their noses in aversion but nod their heads in admiration, because virtue has eventually defeated vice, and justice deviant greed. *(Calls out)* Imo Ette! Imo Ette! *(Imo answers from the inner room)*. Come out for a while. *(Folds the robe and keeps it aside)*.

IMO:

Uncle, here am I. You went out without telling anybody. I and Mma have been wondering where you went to.

UDOBONG:

(Pulls him to himself) When you know what to do to save an urgent situation, you don't go about asking many questions. I went to the palace to bring your robe.

IMO:

You did? Oh uncle! *(Embraces him unreservedly)*. But where is it, uncle?

UDOBONG:

Where is your mother?

IMO:

Inside. Why? But I am the one to wear it.

UDOBONG:

I know. But go first and call me your mother. The robe will need some amendments. Tell her to come with a chalk.

IMO:

Uncle, a chalk?

UDOBONG:

Yes, a chalk. Go quickly! *(Imo darts inside and back within seconds)* Have you seen her?

IMO:

Yes!

UDOBONG:

What of the chalk?

IMO:

She is coming with it. Where is my robe, uncle?

UDOBONG:

(Unfolds it from his seat) Here you are Imo, the kingly robe of Mobio. Many of the kings have worn it, including your father. But you will wear it with a difference. *(Imo looks scared and shifts away)* Don't let the excitement vanish from your face. You will wear this robe. You have to wear this robe so that we can have the right to practise what we have preached these many years. *(Eka Imo comes out)*.

IMO:

You mean, my father wore this same robe, uncle?

UDOBONG:

Yes, Imo Ette. It is the traditional robe of Mobio. Every king wears this same robe. Unless it is torn or stolen, then

will a new one be made. More importantly, Imo, if you don't wear this robe, you won't be recognised as king of Mobio. Come near and try it. (*Eka Imo goes to Imo and gently moves him to Udobong*).

EKA IMO:

A lot of things have gone wrong since your father died. That's when somebody else had to wear this robe. I have told you the much you resemble your father. This is now the time for you, with all of us around you, to correct all the wrongs in Mobio, like your father did in his time. Put the robe on him!

UDOBONG:

(*Udobong puts the robe on Imo. It is bigger and longer than him.*) The sleeves will be folded in, while the length will need a considerable amount of reduction. This is why I sent for the chalk, Imo Ette. (*He collects the chalk and marks the positions where they will work on.*) Eka Imo, look at it very well. The body wouldn't be touched. You will neatly bend in the sleeves and fold in the length as well. I was warned by the king that every amendment mustn't reduce the exuberance of the robe, though Mobio's new king must look splendid in it. (*Chokes and holds his stomach*) Oh, my God, what type of biting pain is this?

EKA IMO:

Good for you! How many times have you eaten in this house today? I have always told you that a man who works very hard needs to cultivate a very good eating habit.

UDOBONG:

(*Chokes again*) I do not think this feels like hunger...

EKA IMO:

You have started your defence again so that you will end up not eating, eh? Imo, remove the robe and keep it here.

I will work on it later. Go and bring his food...

UDOBONG:

Imo, come, let me admire you again. (*Imo moves near him. He struggles, trying to hide the sharp pain inside, gets up and holds Imo by the shoulders*). All doubts are clear now, about their exit from the throne. You can call the drummers to play the music. Let the rhythm of the dance be frenetic.

EKA IMO:

You have started your recitations again so as to conceal the effects of the pain.

UDOBONG:

Who thought the yearnings of many years, sorrow, sadness and fears, would collapse at the turn of the century, as Mobios relax, because they are now certain of their treasury?

EKA IMO:

I will go and bring your food, because I want you to change your mood. (*Leaves them.*)

UDOBONG:

(*Holds his stomach desperately, staggers*) I am gla-d, I... have... seen... this... day.

IMO:

(*Shouts*) Mamá! Mama! come, uncle is in trouble. Uncle is...

UDOBONG:

(*Falls down, rolls, holds his stomach and gasps*)

I a-m, gl - ad, I ha -ve se - en th - is day (*gasps*) I kne-w it... Would even - tua - ly co - me, som - e day. So - me - how. (*collapses. Imo sends out a shrill*)

EKA IMO:

(*Rushes in and grabs Udobong on the floor*) Udobong, what is this? What is the matter with you? (*Shakes him*)

violently but sees no response, gets up and looks dazed and confused. Removes her headgear and ties her waist then lets out a loud shrilling cry) Udobong, you can't do this to us. You musn't. No Udobong please. Udobong please. Without you we won't make it. Remember all your plans. ...Oh Udobong, please. Udobong please, what is it?

IMO:

Uncle, please don't die. Without you I will not wear this robe.

UDOBONG:

You... will. Oh, my stomach! It is biting me... all... over. All... over. You... will Imo. Go... and... call... me... Unen... and and... Etido... ple...ase... be... quick... *(Imo wants to dart out with the robe, remembers at the door, removes it and throws it on the seat and slams the door)*

EKA IMO:

(Bursts out in tears) Oh Udobong, you are the only person remaining for me in this world. The war took my husband and all my sons away. You have been like a husband to me since then. You have been my son and you are my only brother. What will become of me, Udobong? Please, don't die and leave me alone, Udobong.

UDOBONG:

They... will... be... with... you.

EKA IMO:

Who? There is none but you.

UDOBONG:

(Struggles to speak. At this time he is completely overwhelmed) Unen... and... Eti-do. Stand... with... Imo... stand... st... st... st.

EKA IMO:

Udobong! Udobong! *(Holds him up but life has gone out*

of him. She lets him down gently and stands shocked for sometime, then screams and screams, Lights fades reluctantly out).

SITUATION FOUR

Few days after the death of Udobong, Unen and Etido are back to the courtyard of Udobong's sister to lament the death of their noble friend and to pledge support for the pursuit of his ambitions. Unen is draped in black at the far corner of the room whereas Etido stands at the centre, thinking aloud.

ETIDO:

I watched as they let him down the lonely grave and I couldn't believe it. What is life, I asked myself. A breath. Just one costly breath... They covered him up with sand but his mound still reminds us of him.

UNEN:

I remember that day... I will never forget that day.

ETIDO:

Is the wound not still fresh? Still painful?

UNEN:

Yes, but in the body of the beloved only. Probably our adversaries have forgotten.

ETIDO:

Why not, they had hit their target.

UNEN:

When he was lying in state, I went closer, I thought he was sleeping... Well, he was sleeping.

ETIDO:

I was outside, I couldn't bear to see it; and I felt abandoned and doomed. I listened and I couldn't hear the whisper of the wind. Trees stood at attention. Even their leaves were not shaking. The birds stopped singing and the crickets refused to chirp.

Only silence yawned and crawled coldly across the damp yard. Silence changed its colour like the chameleon.

UNEN:

The earth stood watching the heartlessness of her sons. Did she approve the goings on? Was she glad receiving him into herself at that premature age? I thought for moments... I thought the earth would *open up* in annoyance and *swallow* her wicked children. I thought she would *reprimand* them for their very wrong doings. But the earth too was silent.

ETIDO:

(*Shouts*) Silent for so long that I looked at the sky. There, another scenery, not very different.

UNEN;

I saw you gaping at the sky, so I too came out but when I looked, I found no rainbow. Instead, the sky was celebrating the funeral of the late moon. The clouds, all draped in black wept; wept aloud and their voices, deafening voices roared in thunderous echoes. Oh, those tears, those tears, dropping on our heads and bodies like gravels thrown by angry children.

ETIDO:

Yet we could not move, We did not run. We stood there weeping with the clouds, our only comforter.

UNEN:

The one that seemed to understand and share the feelings of a monumental loss.

ETIDO:

The only one that identified with our burning but sorrowful hearts.

UNEN:

We wept with the clouds. The tears soaked our clothes, pierced through the eyes of our skins and froze our blood. We stood like monuments. Two living tombstones erected

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in honour of a great hero.

ETIDO:

Two living, standing tombstones. Two tombstones that the dead will be proud of. The stones that will not only *commemorate* but will *resurrect* the ambition of the dead hero.

UNEN:

Yes, the stones that will *exhume* the memory of the hero from the *womb* of the earth.

ETIDO:

Earth shall not refuse us.

UNEN:

Mother earth is a quiet avenger. She will fight along with us. She may seem slow but we know she is a turgid pugilist.

ETIDO:

No, she won't refuse us. We have not forgotten that she collected our tears and kept it for a memorial.

UNEN:

Yes, whenever she sees those tears and *feels* its salted taste, she will *strike* at our adversaries.

ETIDO:

(*Smiles*) Earth always agrees with the skies, and there is no escape from their eyes.

UNEN:

We will soon find out the distance our foes could cover. You can be sure they wouldn't be untraceable. They wouldn't go very far. No, they wouldn't.

ETIDO:

(*Smiling still*) Come along brother for a sacred dedication of ourselves before the sky and the earth. Where our hero stopped, we must continue. Where he left the struggle, we must press further until we get to a positive conclusion.

This has become ineluctable because we don't want to fall victims to the strategies of our adversaries. One is enough pain already. (*They join hands and look down at mother earth.*) Oh you mother earth, in your bosom all living things abide. In you the big and the small all reside. You do not discriminate against your children. You give all and you receive all. Every blessing is a reward for goodness and hard work. You always cover your children even in death. Cover us from the eyes of our enemies. You see every footstep in the universe and recognize every foot print that walks this path. Help us, and also assist Akpaisong whom we have sent for, to expose their identities to us so that we may do justice to them and set them as examples to others in their colours. Do not fail us, our confidence is in you.

UNEN: (*They look up*)

And you majestic sky our father, we can never grow tall enough to meet your height. You tower above all so that you may see all. You are the umbrella of your children from the storms of wickedness. You have never supported your deviant children. Instead you have been punishing them by *knocking* them down from your great height. Shield us and cover us more securely. We will always look up to you. In this decision to invoke the memory of our friend and brother, support us, that we may witness the total collapse of this seeming miserable gloom that has threatened to catapult us into eternal doom. Remember your flowing tears...

ETIDO:

Your voice that *cracked* through weeping.

UNEN:

Our frozen skins...

ETIDO:

Stand with mother earth...

UNEN:

Stand with Akpaisong...

ETIDO:

Stand with us... *(The door opens and Eka Imo, Imo and Chief Akpaisong enter.)*

UNEN:

Welcome Chief Akpaisong. We sent for you. Come and sit down. We have a strong hope that you will show us the way of success in our determination to avenge our friend's murder.

(Eka Imo and Imo go to the inner chamber)

AKPAISONG:

(Sits slowly down, shakes his head and sucks his teeth) The sights of anthills may look frightening, yet it was the ants who erected them.

ETIDO:

What do you mean father?

AKPAISONG:

It is a proverb in honour of the ancestors. I knew about this... I knew they would do it...

UNEN & ETIDO:

Father, you knew...?

AKPAISONG:

When the staff of office was brought to me. Then it was clear that the bird that built the nest will sleep in it; at night. But I did not know what bird it was that owned the nest.

UNEN:

Father, tell us... I mean, we want to know, what killed our friend. He was with us shortly before he left for the palace.

ETIDO:

He talked about the royal robe not being sent in, on time.

AKPAISONG:

How would he know the face behind the mask? If only the fly had known that the spider had set traps all over the air, it wouldn't have left the latrine.

UNEN:

Father, we do not want to walk into the same trap and get eaten up. What we are asking you is who is this spider that is setting these heinous traps?

AKPAISONG:

An old man counts his words my children, not because he wants to be eloquent in his speech. But because each breath removes one strand of hair from his head. My children, you did not listen to me with your minds. Your friend walked into a net.

UNEN:

When father?

ETIDO:

Whose net, father?

AKPAISONG:

The face that harbours a crime must have a wrinkle, no matter the amount of powder on it. Such was the crookedness even on the face I had been used to... I should have spoken then...

UNEN:

Father, we do not understand...

AKPAISONG:

When he was gone, I examined the emblem of their office and behold where he handled it, was imprinted in the language of the wise, their desire to keep it with them. A desire which is against the tradition of Mobio. A desire that the fathers will frown at.

ETIDO:

What are you saying, father?

AKPAISONG:

An old man may have some of his nerves weakened by age but his eyes see far into time. His mind remembers farther than those of the learned. My children, you sent for me and I came to satisfy the cravings of your minds. Since I arrived here, I have been unbending in hammering the very things you wanted to know. What else do you want?

UNEN:

We want to know what killed our friend. I'm sure you haven't mentioned that yet, father.

AKPAISONG:

The fish that swallows a hook may swim frantically about. The fisherman knows just how far it will go. Your friend wouldn't go far with a hook in his stomach, would he?

ETIDO:

Father, (*Scared*) a hook? In his stomach? When did he swallow it?

AKPAISONG:

You said he was with you that day before he died, didn't you? Just after he left you.

UNEN:

But he said he was going to the palace.

AKPAISONG:

So, they do not eat and drink in the palace of Mobio, eh? The chameleon may feed on air but that does not stop it from changing its colours. Let me tell you what happened when he got there. (*Light dims to total darkness. As light returns, the scene changes to the palace for a flashback. Edidem Ekarika and Ini-Ekem are in the outfits they wore in Situation Two*).

EKARIKA:

Sh! sh! I heard footsteps outside the palace. Go and see who that is (*Just then someone knocks*).

INI-EKEM:

(*Looks at Ekarika who tries to sit in some majestic posture, then goes to open the door*).

INI-EKEM:

Oh, Udobong, it's you. Welcome to the palace. There he is, his majesty, Edidem Ekarika.

UDOBONG:

(*Bows in reverence*) Long Live the king of Mobio!

EKARIKA:

You are welcome my son. Sit down. If you had been a little earlier, you would have met all of us here. We have been trying to join heads to see how best we can manage this fast approaching handing over. Days are darting out like bees, you know.

UDOBONG:

I'm glad to hear that, Edidem. Infact I came to see what help I could render towards facilitating the handing over plans. You are aware of the nature of our new king to-be, I think some attention will have to be given to the royal robe to fit him well.

INI-EKEM:

(*Laughs derisively*) Yes of course, we had forgotten about that aspect, you know. Good you came over. We will gladly assign you that job. I think none else can better assess someone's son than his own father. (*All laugh*)

UDOBONG:

And I noticed something strange in the palace my king. Where are all the servants and even your guards?

EKARIKA:

Oh, I see, everyone is really occupied my child. All the servants have been sent on royal errands and the guards too...

UDOBONG:

I now understand.

EKARIKA:

Ini-Ekem, entertain our guest (*Ini-Ekem leaves*). Sorry you missed the better part of the feasting. However, some wine is still available for you (*shouts*). Ini-Ekem, take good care of our guest. You understand what I mean?

UDOBONG:

Oh, thank you my king.

EKARIKA:

Never mind my son, these royal gestures are very expedient at this juncture, particularly to demonstrate and enforce closer ties between the two ruling families of Mobio. It is in keeping with the spirit of our custom. Don't you think so?

UDOBONG:

I think so my king. And I quite appreciate the significance of it.

EKARIKA:

You are right my son, especially now that all is clear and certain concerning your sister's son becoming the new king of Mobio. (*Ini-Ekem arrives with the wine and with a clean smile on his face goes straight to give a glass to Udobong before he pours the wine into it.*) You'll like that I'm sure, we've already had our fill of it. (*Ini-Ekem drops the bottle near him.*)

UDOBONG:

Thank you my king, (*Sips*) Ah, it is the strong type.

EKARIKA:

Well, you wouldn't expect anything less in the palace of your king. I suppose you won't empty the bottle then?

UDOBONG:

Not at all my king. However, I will go another journey with it... (*Pours himself another half glass.*)

EKARIKA:

Eh-eh, that's like the man we know you to-be. Ini-Ekem, bring him the royal robe. (*Ini-Ekem leaves for the robe.*) Every amendment on it must not reduce its flamboyancy. The new king of Mobio must look splendid in it as his predecessors, if not better.

UDOBONG:

He will, my king. Leave that task for me. (*Ini-Ekem arrives with the robe*). I should be going back now.

EKARIKA:

(*Gets up from his throne to shake hands*) If we don't meet again before that day, have no fears, everything shall be done in accordance with the traditions of Mobio. My salutations to the young king to-be.

UDOBONG:

(*Bows in reverence*) Long live the king of Mobio!
(*He goes out*)

EKARIKA:

I didn't expect that it would be that easy; the chicken hearted power drunk uncle. Ah, (*Sneers*) how long will it work on him before we hear the cries?

INI-EKEM:

Thirty minutes! Only thirty minutes, and the greatest obstacle on our path would have been successfully removed. You were prophetic when you suggested the other day that we should prepare the mixture and keep it close by. What a foresight!

EKARIKA:

What dosage did you administer?

INI-EKEM:

Three quarters of that container.

EKARIKA:

Oh, my goodness! Then it wouldn't take that long to rupture his intestines. Three quarters of that container?

INI-EKEM:

Didn't you hear him complain of the strength of the wine? You should have had some idea then.

EKARIKA:

(Frightened out of guilt) I did. But three quarters... (Goes back to his throne and sluggishly lowers himself into it.)

INI-EKEM:

What? Is the king of Mobio mourning an enemy of his kingdom? It's incredible! I'm getting out of here! You know where to find me when you are through with your lamentations. *(Goes to pick the bottle of wine and the glass. Looks contemptuously at the king and sucks his teeth, then moves into the inner chambers of the palace. Then we hear the bottle and the glass crash into pieces).*

EKARIKA:

(Eyes closed and head shaking) There quarters of that... that... oh my goodness. What will become of this? Oh, Mobio... (Light fades to darkness while the scene returns to Akpaisong, Etido and Unen).

UNEN:

It is so clear now. The Ndidems want to rule Mobio again, against the practice. So they poisoned Udobong because they thought that he was the only force to defend Imo and fight for

his right. How short-sighted! How blind for them to fail to see that the fight has only just begun.

ETIDO:

Oh yes, the fight has just begun. We will resist them. I am sure that Chief Akpaisong here, the representative of the founding fathers of Mobio, will not risk a curse on his aged head to present the staff to the wrong man.

(He calls out Imo who rushes in).

UNEN:

Chief Akpaisong knows the practice in Mobio. He knows the ways of the ancestors. He knows the kingly pattern in Mobio. He shall not fail us.

ETIDO:

Father, say something. Will you stand by us?

AKPAISONG:

I listened to the fathers and they told me; "There will be several lamentations." There will be several lamentations in Mobio. But it is the only way that their resistance shall be broken... Fight well children, I will be with you. Long live the head that will wear the crown. *(Holds Imo)* Your father was a good man. He worked hard for the progress of Mobio. It is your task to restore to Mobio its pride of place. These ones with you, will stand by you. Work with them. The ancestors will support you. The spirit of your father is in you. Do not fail him. Do not fail Mobio.

IMO:

I won't, father. *(Light fades)*

SITUATION FIVE

The scene doesn't change. The atmosphere is a bit calm and relaxed. There seems to have been some courage to live and face tomorrow rather than bask in the misery of yesterday. Imo is dressed in the robe which has been worked on by his mother while the mother watches in admiration.

EKA IMO:

You look splendid as they said, my king.

IMO:

These sleeves, Mama, they still look big.

EKA IMO:

Every amendment, your uncle said, musn't reduce the flamboyancy of the robe.

IMO:

But you worked on the length Mama.

EKA IMO:

That was only bending it in, not slimming it. You are just all right in it. (*Touches him gently*) We have to rise up even though the weight is great on us, otherwise we shall lose everything. Tomorrow, Edidem Ekarika will hand over the crown to you before all the people. Chief Akpaisong will then present you with the staff of kingship. We must try to smile, son... Force a smile even though you are sad.

IMO:

Mama, I dreamt last night. I got very frightened.

EKA IMO:

What was it, Imo?

IMO:

I saw a lot of people. I think I could recognise many of them. They were all dressed in black. Then in front of them were some men carrying coffins...

EKA IMO:

You loved your uncle, you know. He was a father to you. You cannot of course easily forget about him.

IMO:

Mama, they carried coffins... Not a coffin... and many people wore black clothes.

EKA IMO:

I understand, Imo. So many people have felt the loss of your uncle in this village. So many weep over the loss of their Udobong. He was a man of the people. He was dearly loved by many.

IMO:

Well, let's hope so Mama. (*There is a tapping at the door and Eka Imo goes to open it. Ayara enters*)

EKA IMO:

Welcome Edidem!

AYARA:

(*Notices Imo dressed in the royal robe*) The world looks up to you. Son. Don't be afraid. Your age is no barrier to effective leadership. Some years ago, you were not born then, somebody ruled this land at the age of fifteen. And guess what, ask your elders, his reign was one of the most successful ever, in Mobio. Tomorrow, we will all back and hail you, Mobio's new King.

EKA IMO:

I am very surprised, Edidem.

AYARA:

Don't be, Eka Imo. There are faces and there are faces. I guessed right that you might be tempted to feel surprised. That's why I came. There is a lot of ambition in the palace. It is good to be ambitious. But the ambition to do the right things is what

Ayara supports. I, Ayara, who had ruled this land and known what it is to be loyal to established traditions, cannot be persuaded by selfish ambition, the ambition to hide corruption? That is what drove them to this insanity despite my warnings.

EKA IMO:

We know...

AYARA:

You know, how?

EKA IMO:

Chief Akpaisong was here.

AYARA:

Chief Akpaisong... White hairs are still sacred, dangerous to be treated with contempt.

EKA IMO:

It was very clear. He assured us that he will handover the staff of Mobio to the right king.

AYARA:

There might be confusion tomorrow but I have prayed to God to make the ground slippery for the enemies of justice.

IMO:

I dreamt last night, Edidem. So many people were dressed in black and some men carried coffins...

AYARA:

There shall be coffins. The people will carry coffins in lamentations for Udobong. Don't be scared, the guiding fathers of Mobio shall shelter their appointed king against all his foes.

EKA IMO:

We are not afraid. We are glad you came to see us. There is a pot of yam on the fire *(She leaves)*

AYARA:

Imo, the head one is born with is the same head one dies with. I wore this royal robe in my time. There are forces you do not see that either support or fight you when you wear that robe. In your own case, they will all smile at you, like they smiled at your father. All I'm saying is, this head is the right head, the best and the wisest head now to rule Mobio for seven years. Do not be afraid. Whatever confusion you witness tomorrow, don't run away. They will all give way for the staff to be presented to you.

IMO:

I will stay, Edidem. I will receive the staff. Let me keep my robe and see what Mama is doing.

AYARA:

I will be going now. Tell your mother so. One more thing, if you want to know the people that are against you, try them by saying you are not interested in the crown. You will be shocked at the things that will come out of their mouths. *(Imo leaves and just then Ini-Ekem enters.)*

INI-EKEM:

(In hot whisper) What do you want here? If you don't rest those old legs in your chambers, we will help you cripple them. What were you doing here?

AYARA:

(Also in whispers) And what do you want here? Aren't you satisfied your schemes are working out well? It's an open secret now...

INI-EKEM:

No, till after tomorrow. Then we shall know where's the right place to keep old men like you.

AYARA:

Tomorrow will be too busy for you to fix things at their

rightful places. Finish all your schemes today because tomorrow, Mobio shall hail her new king.

INI-EKEM:

Is that what you came to assure them? (*Giggles*) You confused them. Ah-ah, you successfully accomplished our plans for us. You see, no one needs to suspect any thing about tomorrow. Our dictum is "All will be well tomorrow".

AYARA:

You are walking faster than your shadow. No one need suspect anything, of course. People simply need to *know* just what is happening, just as Akpaisong has clearly made the people of Mobio know what you are up to.

INI-EKEM:

What? Akpaisong does what? (*Imo come out with Eka Imo.*) Em...em, good evening Eka Imo. Em. I came to see if the royal robe has been amended to fit the new king.

IMO:

It has been worked on.

EKA IMO:

Is that all you came to find out?

INI-EKEM:

Yes, (*Look embarrassed by the question and feels guilty*) er.. er.. yes, and to wish our new king well.

EKA IMO:

That should have waited till tomorrow.

INI-EKEM:

I know but, but... as an act of encouragement... something to strengthen him. You see, it needs courage for someone to rise up from a very tragic mood to accept a position of authority in a big village like ours.

EKA IMO:

(*Indifferently*) I thought that's how some people wanted it

to be. Well, it doesn't really matter now because...

IMO:

I am not interested in the whole thing.

EKA IMO:

What are you saying, Imo? (*She is surprised*)

IMO:

I said they can keep their crown. I don't want it.

INI-EKEM:

(*Surprised*) What: What did you say? That you don't want to be installed king of Mobio tomorrow?

IMO:

I'm not interested...

INI-EKEM:

This is news! The king should hear this. Then why have we been fighting? All this effort, all this... (*Becomes aware of his audience and withdraws immediately*) I am sorry that Udobong's death has affected the kingship pattern of Mobio. Can I therefore have the robe back? I can go from here to inform Akpaisong on the right candidate for tomorrow...

IMO (*With contempt*):

I now understand why my uncle was poisoned. (*This is a blow to Ini-Ekem. He becomes immediately aware that little Imo was playing on his intelligence.*) It is all very clear now, not only because Chief Akpaisong told us who; and why he was poisoned but because it is very clear now.

INI-EKEM:

Give me the robe and let me go.

EKA-IMO:

Which robe? If you are talking about the robe for Mobio's king, then it is with the king and we do not know you. Who are you?

INI-EKEM:

Woman, mind your tongue or...

EKA IMO:

Can't you see that your threats won't help you now? (*Unen and Etido enter*) What are you really up to? Are you not satisfied that the one who would have opposed you is out of the way?

UNEN:

What did Akpaisong say Etido, remind me.

ETIDO:

"The face that harbours a crime must have a wrinkle, no matter the powder on it."

UNEN:

And you are that face. Are you not the one that took the staff, to Chief Akpaisong?

INI-EKEM:

What are you all jabbering about?

ETIDO:

What do you want here? You came to mock, laugh, console, or you came hoping to get another victim to your heinous strategy?

INI-EKEM:

This attack is all misdirected, father, let's get out of here.

AYARA:

You did not come with me, son. Go your way. I know the way to the palace. I will slowly walk back on my own.

INI-EKEM

Well, I will go. You can keep the robe. You can say all you want to say but I tell you, it's all a misdirected aggression. I am not aspiring to be the king of Mobio. All I do is wait for my turn of rulership whenever it will come, if it will come.

You are wrong to think that I killed Udobong. For what? After all we were good friends when we were together at the African People Institute. You, Unen and Etido can bear me witness in this...

UNEN:

That was in African Institute. This is Mobio and a lot has happened during the years to make you a dreaded viper.

INI-EKEM:

All right then. Since all of you doubt my true identity and jointly accuse an innocent person, for your own interest and perhaps the interest of Mobio, tomorrow's handing over has been well planned. If any of you feels that he is drunk enough to alter anything in the ceremony, let him try. The palace guards will all be there. Armed to the teeth; and they will obey only one man's command. (*He bolts away.*)

AYARA:

Gets up and bows in reverence to Imo) Long live the King of Mobio. Remember all that I told you. Don't allow anything to frighten you. (*He makes his exit*)

IMO:

I have heard, Edidem.

EKA IMO:

We are glad you came.

AYARA:

We will all be there tomorrow.

IMO:

Good bye, Edidem

EKA IMO:

Good bye Edidem we will not forget your encouraging words. (*He leaves finally.*)

ETIDO:

What was that one doing here? Is he not one of them?

EKA IMO:

I thought so myself but I later discovered that he had been against Edidem Ekarika and his brother in planning to remain on the throne beyond his tenure.

UNEN:

Are you sure, Eka Imo? We don't want to take any chances in this struggle.

ETIDO:

Eka Imo; we don't trust anything that comes out of that palace. Anyone who has his sweet tongue can keep it to himself for now. All we wanted to know about the sudden death of Udobong, has been uncovered, and we are ready for tomorrow. We do not fear the guards and their ancient spears. Akpaisong has given us two strong guns that Mobio seized from the men of Bokom during the last tribal war with them. With that we are ready for tomorrow. Unless all will go smoothly according to traditional practice, otherwise we shall be forced to use them.

UNEN:

That was the message we brought. But it seems we have smelt danger already. Since we cannot predict the advances of our enemies, we shall rush back home and take the guns. We shall come back here to keep vigil over our king. The night is pregnant with many evils. *(They rush out and Eka Imo shrugs while Imo shakes his head).*

Light fades out.

SITUATION SIX

The scene changes once again to the palace of the Ndidems. But now, the palace has been well decorated in preparation for the handing over ceremony. The throne has been prepared to seat the new king (whoever he will be). The atmosphere of gay and pomp is however suppressed by the uncertainty of the moment. It is the night before the ceremony and the last desperate moves are made to set things 'aright'. Light is dim on stage.)

INI-EKEM:

They know... The news is all over the place. Why did we spare him? That ancient oracle... And Unen and Etido...

EKARIKA:

(He's busy about the palace, sitting on the throne, jerking it to feel whether it is solid. Dusting the seat, etc.) Who knows what news? There is no time my brother. It is already night and whap! it will be morning and before you know what is happening, the drummers will be here with streams of Mobio's citizens. Stop your lamentations and be the man you have always been. Isn't it too late to back out now? Who knows what? You wouldn't answer. *(Picks the crown from the nearby seat.)*

INI-EKEM:

They know... they know how Udobong was killed

EKARIKA:

And so? Who wouldn't? They have seen someone die of poison before.

INI-EKEM:

They know who killed him... Unen and Etido know...

EKARIKA:

What? *(Drops the crown and immediately picks it up and*

drops it on the throne) What did you say? They know? Who told them?

INI-EKEM:

Akpaisong, that ancient oracle crawled to tell them. I should have thought of it... I could have for sure dealt with him.

EKARIKA:

Don't be silly to think of a thing as absurd as that. You dare not lift your hand against sacred characters like Akpaisong. You would not only have failed but would begin one long hopeless life as punishment for your attempt.

INI-EKEM:

And what do you think is going to happen to us now? We don't seem to have any support: What should we do now?

EKARIKA:

That is the first useful thing you have said since you came back here. All you have been doing is sulk in self defeat. I am surprised you behaved like you have done. Even you?

INI-EKEM:

What should we do? Tradition demands that we send the staff to Akpaisong a week before the handing over and the royal robe to the king to be... Only the crown stays with the king so that he can give it to his successor as a sign of submission...

EKARIKA:

I shall not do that...

INI-EKEM:

If only we had some more sense and foresight...

EKARIKA:

(Annoyed) Stop all this... Look here Ini-Ekem, if you can't remain here, get out of the palace and let me face this alone. If you are bereft of all your senses, that's your funeral, I still

have mine intact. Is that clear? What do you mean we haven't got support, we haven't got sense, we haven't got foresight and all that? What of you, I, all the guards in this palace? If we mobilize all of them, can't we have a strong front? And do you think there are not people in this village who are still loyal to their king? You mean all of them have been bought by the oracle of Akpaisong? I can't believe it.

INI-EKEM:

You better believe it. We are very scanty. Even your father, Ayara, is in the forefront to cripple your moves. You know where I found him and what he told me?

EKARIKA:

I don't care what he told you. I don't care whether you found him in the village council preaching sabotage against me. Right now I only care about one thing. One last thing, and that is putting this crown on my head! *(Puts the crown forcefully on his head)* and remaining king of Mobio. *(He goes and sits on the throne, panting.)*

INI-EKEM:

Have you finished your ranting, blind king of Mobio?

EKARIKA:

(Rushes out of the throne to Ini-Ekem and spans him on the face) What has happened to you? Who has bewitched you? Now listen to me. Go to my guards outside and tell them to prepare all their spears. Tomorrow, they must be in their complete war regalia and guard all the corners of the palace. Tell them to go now and make sure they capture Unen and Etido. They must remain bound until all is over tomorrow. And tomorrow, instead of the traditional two guards behind the king, I need five men. One to take care of Akpaisong if he refuses to handover the staff to me. One to command Imo and her mother to surrender the royal robe. One to take

care of Ayara if he doesn't support us. And the rest to face the crowd in case of pressure from them. Go! When you come back, I will tell you what next to do. *(Ini-Ekem leaves humbly)*
It is a pity it has come to this *(Ayara enters from the village)*
I have been told of your deeds. The old man, a prostitute...

AYARA:
(Indifferently) Give it up, son. Give it up. Anything out of force wouldn't help the situation. Call it a mistake and implore the people's forgiveness. It is the only way to help yourself.

EKARIKA:
Only cowards give up the fight at the very crucial moments. Can't you see that I'm resolute and bent on fighting this out? Infact the fight has just begun. It is too late to withdraw myself from it. It is impossible to bring back to life what is already dead and rotten.

AYARA:
It is not too late, son. I can smell danger, confusion and death. We still have the long night to change minds. Even tomorrow wouldn't be too late if you asked the people's forgiveness before the handing over.

EKARIKA:
I am more deadly than the death you fear for tomorrow. I have set men to arrest confusion by its wings and if after all this arrangement death still desires to show its ugly head, then it will become inevitable and we will...

AYARA:
Then it will be too late...

EKARIKA:
Let it be!

AYARA:
A stubborn cock learns his lessons in the soup pot. My

prayer is that the innocent will be spared, because heads may roll.

EKARIKA:
Let them roll. Heads that will stubbornly stick out will definitely roll. No doubts about that.

AYARA:
And yours could be one of them...

EKARIKA:
That's all right.

AYARA:
I regret that my eyes have seen your generation. I wish that my blood were shed along with the royal others during the Bokom war. You are a shame and a disgrace to the family of the Ndidems. You have tarnished their image and destroyed the foundation they erected generations before you. You will never go unpunished. I am sure that if your father were alive, you would have taunted him the same way. You wouldn't have taken his advice. If we all should by any chance survive beyond tomorrow, may be you would start respecting an old man's counsel. *(Moves out in annoyance to his chambers.)*

EKARIKA:
Old man's counsel! *(Bursts out laughing and staggers from his throne. Ini-Ekem comes in and sees him and is amazed.)*

INI-EKEM:
What is it?

EKARIKA:
An old man's counsel! *(Laughs madly about. Ini-Ekem joins him laughing.)*

(Light fades out)

SITUATION SEVEN

(Light gently dawns on stage revealing a vacant throne eagerly awaiting the buttocks of a new king. On both sides of the throne are some benches which will seat the elders and members of the royal families of Mobio. From the near distance the Mbre Mkparawa drummings can be heard. In a short while, they are on stage. Behind them are the Asian Group, their female counterpart. On the stage they take their turns. But first, Mbre Mkparawa. Their march through the village to the palace attracted so many citizens and elders who all throng the stage for the greatest ceremony in Mobio. The festive air overwhelms even the secret plots of the day).

(Mbre Mkparawa sings)

Which two villages are alike?	Ake idung ebiet idung?
Which two names are alike	Ake enying ebiet enying
Mobio, there is none else (like her)	Mobio, nfen ibaha (nte enye)
In nature and in beauty	Ke mbiet ye ke uyai.
Or in the performing of deeds	Mme ke unam mkpo
In accordance with tradition	Nte mbet idung adoho.
Iya-o-o! Iya - o - o !	Iya-o-o! Iya - o - !
Which two kings are alike?	Ake edidem ebiet edidem?
Which two chiefs are alike?	Ake Obong ebiet Obong?
The king of Mobio, there's none else (like him)	Edidem Mobio, nfen ibaha (nte enye)
In attitude and in the face	Ke edu ye ke iso
Or in the performing of deeds	Mme ke unam mkpo
In accordance with tradition.	Nte mbet idung adoho.
Iya - o - ! Iya - o - o !	Iya - o - ! Iya - o - o !

The song is repeated many times. The drummers beat their drums boisterously, the dancers become more excited and gyrate their waists rhythmically. The women flaunt their dancing buttocks while the citizens clap their hands and cheer. In the midst of the excitement, the old man, Akpaisong enters.

CHIEF AKPAISONG:

(Holding the staff of Mobio marches straight to his position on the raised platform for the elders. The people hail him)
Mobio Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Mkparawa Isongo!

MKPARAWA:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Isongo!

MKPARAWA:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Iban Isongo!

IBAN:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Isongo!

IBAN:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Nte, eya enyime Mobio oduo?

CROWD:

Inyimeke!

AKPAISONG:

Eya enyime?

CROWD:

Inyimeke! *(Some people speak at the top of their voices in defence of Mobio. Others shout their willingness to fight the enemies of Peace in Mobio etc.)*

AKPAISONG:

People of Mobio, *(He begins rather sadly)*, my mind chased sleep away from my eyes last night, because it chose to walk across the past of Mobio, pausing where necessary to focus at times of leadership-changes. Surprisingly, all of them, though their achievements differed, though failures could also be identified here and there, yet, there was one characteristic that permeated the generations gone by. As far as my ancient head could remember, PEACE was phenomenal during the handing over. PEACE between the two royal families of Mobio. And today... I thought of it... I was still thinking when the rhythm of your distant drums came swirling through my confused ears. That was the moment I got up from my seat of yesterday to pick my regalia and the ancient staff of Mobio, down the slope to the palace of our King. People of Mobio. You have come out to watch a crucial event in Mobio, do not be persuaded by the tongue of any man nor become lured to accept any practice that has never been done in your much loved Mobio. Let peace and truth reign in your minds in support of your tradition.

CROWD:

(Cheers virtuously) We will support our tradition: Our fathers were right: we will fight confusion: etc. etc! *(Unen*

and Etido enter unnoticed, move to the walls to lean unsuspected, hiding their guns behind their backs. After that, Imo, dressed in the royal robe of Mobio enters with his mother following. The crowd is mad with excitement. Imo moves to sit near Akpaisong while his mother sits next to him.)

AKPAISONG:

Mobio Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Mkparawo Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Iban inno uyo-o-o-o-o

IBAN:

Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh

AKPAISONG:

Eya enyime?

CROWD:

Nsa nnyin-o Inyimeke!

(The crowd breaks again into excitement)

AKPAISONG:

(Speaks above the rumouring crowd) Today, we shall eat and drink, sing and dance. A lot has been done in the palace. But before the king comes out where are my proud women, the Asian dancers? *(The Asian Group sings while the Mkparawa drum for them.)*

Show us the red-eyed wine

Wut nyin adat enyin ukot

Show us the palm with rich oil

Wut nyin eyop atarake adran

Show us the strong veined men	Wut nyin mme nsong asip iden
Elsewhere -	Ke ntefen -
Apart from in Mobio.	Ke mibohoke Mobio
Mobio, Oh-oh-oh!	Mobio, oh-oh-oh!
The seat of pride, power	Idung asian, odudu ye uko.
and bravery	

(The song is repeated several times. Even the men join the dance. The centre of attraction is Chief Akpaisong who has been triggered up by the music for some very calculated and majestic steps. The music comes to a standstill as five guards emerge from the palace in their complete out fit for war. Then comes Ini-Ekem dressed as a prince for the occasion. Ayara is the one following Ini-Ekem while Edidem Ekarika in royal attire with The crown for the last time on his head, appears from the rear. They take their seats on the other side of the throne. Mbire Mkparawa resume their music.)

Which two kings are alike?	Ake edidem ibiet edidem?
Which two chiefs are alike?	Ake obong ibiet obong?
The king of Mobio, there's	Edidem Mobio, nfen Ibaha
none else (like him)	(nte enye)
In attitude and in the face	Ke edu uwem ye ke iso
Or in the performing of deeds	Mme kunam nkpo
In accordance with tradition	Nte mbet idung adoho
Iya - o - o ! Iya - o - o !	Iya - o - o ! Iya - o - o !

AKPAISONG:

(Gets up and signals the Mbire Mkparawa Group to calm their beats for a while) Mobio Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AKPAISONG:

People of Mobio, a pregnant woman does not carry her load forever; soon a baby cries to the joy of her relieve. The hunter does not live in the bush simply because he eats from there. Even our sons do not remain in the African Institute forever, they come back home with their heads loaded with knowledge. People of Mobio, we have gathered today as our tradition demands, to witness the handing over of the staff of Mobio from Edidem Ekarika III to Edidem Imo Ette VII *(The crowd rejoices)* This has been the practice as long as we can remember between these two ruling families. Today we ask the sky to hold its rains because we want to feast till we have been fully satisfied. Cows and goats have been slaughtered. Palm wine from every part of Mobio has been brought. Our women have been cooking in the palace since yesterday. Till this moment, the kings wives are still organising that sector. There will be enough for all. But first we shall hear from Ayara. *(They cheer joyfully.)*

AYARA:

Mobio Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AYARA:

Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

AYARA:

People of Mobio, I rejoice at seeing your happy faces but I know we would have been happier if war and death had

allowed all who matter to be alive to see this day. Some of us have been given extra responsibilities because we had to take the place of the dead and join to that of the living. This is true to many here including our new king... *(The crowd sighs, and grumbles in remembrance of the lost ones)* But since we are still alive, our tradition must be respected, kept and upheld. We must do what we know is right. I shall now present to you my son, who is my late brother's son, your king for the past seven years. He will tell you how he ruled the land and if he has any advice for his successor he will give it too. *(The crowd cheers again.)*

EKARIKA:

(Stands up amidst cheers. The guards adjust themselves taking positions of readiness for attack and the jubilation dies down) Mobio Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

EKARIKA:

Isongo!

CROWD:

Iyaah!

EKARIKA:

My people, first of all, I love to express my gratitude to all of you for your love, loyalty and cooperation these past seven years. It is unfortunate that the years ran rather too fast for me to accomplish all that I promised to do during my reign as king. However, I expect that when you listen to the reasons I'm going to unfold to you concerning the unavoidable delay in the execution of the major projects we planned for Mobio, you will have no doubts as to who should be your next king. *(Crowd murmurs unintelligently.)*

I admired your patriotic spirits towards the development of this village. It was very glaring in your generous contributions to the establishment of the proposed oil mill for Mobio. You know that the contractors for this job has to be looked for while huge sums of money will be expended for them to come and construct this mill that would be of immense advantage to the development of our village. Plans have reached conclusive stages and anyday from now, they will be here. *(Ini-Ekem claps his hands excitedly, then the crowd rather compulsorily joins him.)*

The secretary of your cooperative shop can testify that these past years have witnessed the biggest sales ever made in Mobio. This fact is not unconnected with the continental and intercontinental connections I tried to negotiate for this village. You could remember that I went out twice to other lands to work out this trade relationship. *(Ini-Ekem forces the crowd to cheer his brother again)* The gains this has made to us are neatly stored in the village treasury. Above all, through the efficient rulership this village has had these past years, the government, only recently, was compelled to grant some recognized authority to kings so that the much emphasized discipline in our nation can be well articulated from the grass roots. *(The crowd cheers madly)* All these and many more I wouldn't want to waste your time to recount, are the visible things my rulership has wrought for Mobio.

More importantly, what I implore every citizen of this village to receive in good faith, are these facts: All these attempts at improving the welfare of this village have borne my signature. The receipts of the documents for the construction of your mill, the trade links and even the government's white

paper in granting legal authorities to kings. Since we all cry for development and we earnestly want these good things to happen in our land, it has become very necessary therefore that I continue in the palace till all these plans are executed. *(The crowd is shocked at hearing this proposal which stands at all fronts opposed to the traditions of Mobio.)*

AKPAISONG:

The flame of thirst should be drowned with cold water. You have heard your king's proposal; what do you say?

CROWD:

(The crowd as if drunk with fresh palm wine screams:-)
No, we do not agree: We want Imo Ette for our King: Our tradition must be followed the way we have always done: etc etc. *(In the midst of the confusion two guards step into the crowd and there is some quite.)*

AKPAISONG:

The child that jumps into a fast flowing stream never really enjoyed his mother's foofoo. People of Mobio, we shall do what we are used to. Our king made an honest appeal, probably out of his sincere love to see our land make progress. But you see, the spirits of our ancestors who are right now present here, who do not expect the profanity of our practices; and those of us here who are loyal to our customs would not permit our king's request to be so granted. I shall therefore humbly ask him to see it not as a disfavour done him for all that he has done for us but...

EKARIKA:

I shall not bear to see all the initiated attempts crumble because of your blind keeping of custom... *(The crowd oppose him while he shouts at the top of his voice)* I shall not give this

crown to an ignorant ten year old! *(To the guards)* Take the staff from him! *(The guards advance to Akpaisong to seize the staff from him. Another guard goes to Imo and attempts at removing the robe from him. There is confusion and a gun explodes and the guard struggling the staff with Akpaisong falls... The other guard runs. Another gun explodes and Ekarika is down. Ini-Ekem rushes to him. At this time the first gun had re-loaded and there is a shot and Ini-Ekem is down on top of his brother. People run helter-skelter and as Ayara is trying to escape, a citizen of Mobio pushes him back and a gun explodes and Ayara is down. All the guards flee abandoning their spears. The women run falling over themselves. Some are dead in shock while others can be heard yelling outside. Only Akpaisong, Imo, Eka Imo, few strong elders who could not run, are left. Akpaisong picks the crown, dusts it and rests it on Imo's head. He then presents him with the staff. Etido and Unen emerge, masked, walk to the bodies of Ekarika and Ini-Ekem. Roll them over with their legs to ascertain them dead. Then pointing to the air, they fire two shots for the victory won. Masks off.)*

ETIDO *(To Unen):*

Go to the stall, untie the royal horse. The king must ride through Mobio as tradition permits. Tell the people to begin the procession. Let Mbire Mparawa play. Let the women ship the food to the palace of the king *(Unen leaves)*. There comes a time in a people's life that they must fight as a price for liberty. *(Distant drums are heard and a song.)*

THE END.