My Southern Love

(A Play)

Faith Ajet

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CHARACTERS

CHIEF OKONKWO'S GHOST

CHIME

NNEOMA

MR ZWELINZIMA

MR. OBI

MAMA CHIBUZOR

JOHN

SERGEANT

COMMANDANT

KINSMAN 1

KINSMAN 2

KINSMAN 3

KINSMAN 4

KINSMAN 5

SOUTH AFRICAN AMBASSADOR TO NIGERIA

IGWE

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESIDENT

NIGERIAN AMBASSADOR TO SOUTH-AFRICA

OKAFOR

NNA ANYI EZEONU

NKEM

CHIEF OKONKWO'S WIDOW,

NIGERIAN YOUTH, POLICEMEN, SECRETARY, CAFE OWNER, ELDERS, MINISTER OF INFORMATION, SECRET SERVICE AGENT, CATHOLIC PRIEST, SENATORS, GOVERNORS

I

A native son of Nsukka, grandson of a prominent well respected chief, named Chief Okonkwo, has been murdered. The news is brought to his grandfather who drops dead on hearing it. The scene opens with Chief Okonkwo's ghost, as he walks around his dead body, his widow, his kinsmen, the village chiefs, Mr. Obi, and those who have come to mourn with his grieving household. He begins to soliloquise, the actors on stage all come to a halt.

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: What are you going to say at my funeral, now that you have killed me? Here lies the body of your friend, supporter, and strength when you were weak. Here lies the body of your love from the West, who gave nothing but care in your darkest moment; who became enemy with your enemies, and friend with your friends; whom you have killed for nothing; whom you have killed out of jealousy. Your friend; who invited you to his abode to sell your merchandise, talent, food and display your diversity!

Here lies the body of your love from the West, who became imprisoned when you were in prison, who encompassed you with nothing but love, who you killed with no prick in your conscience. Without saying a hearty goodbye. The love whom you took for granted. Now all that will be said is: rest in peace. (*Flares up*) Rubbish!

The stage comes alive as action begins. Earlier the same day, Mr. Obi, an elderly man and one of Chief Okonkwo's student from way back in the 70s, who happens to live in South Africa, arrived Nsukka to deliver a rather terrifying news: Okonkwo's grandson, Chime, whose father was killed during a fight with an intruder at his farmland, has been killed. He was murdered on Wednesday around 2:30am, on a windy night in Soweto. On hearing the news, Chief Okonkwo drops dead. This, one of his kinsmen confirms as he stoops to check his heart beat.

Kinsman one: Obi, this is not the way to deliver such bad news. Your stay in South-Africa has affected your sense of reasoning. You do not think like a real Igbo man! You should have called us to a corner to deliver the message. Then we would now think of how to pass it on to a very old man like Nna anyi Okonkwo.

Kinsman two: That is right my brother. That is no way to tell Nna anyi Okonkwo that his only grandson whom he is hoping to carry on their lineage is dead.

Kinsman three: Alu! (Abomination)

Kinsman four: The deed has been done my kinsmen. Let us proffer a solution.

Kinsman five: You have spoken well. We have no choice than to make burial arrangements for both grandfather and grandson.

(Chief *Okonkwo's widow and Chime's grandmother is devastated. She sits on the floor, mourning, surrounded by neighbors and family members.*)

Kinsman three: Chai! But Obi, how did this happen exactly?

Mr. Obi: (*sighs*) Chime, who owned clothing shop in a mall close to mine, in Soweto, came to my shop one early morning and told me he had a problem. 'What is it?' I asked.

(*Flashback*)

Chime: My Landlord, Mr. Zwelinzima, has asked me to vacate his shop. He said a Soweto native is in serious need of it. I asked him, 'Why are you treating me unfairly? "You are not one of us, Chime,' he replied. 'But I am an African like you,' I said to him. He grabbed the collar of my shirt then, saying, 'We are the true Africans. You know nothing about the struggle. Only a South African knows the struggle of being called an African. Only those who speak Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sesotho, IsiZulu, isiXhosa, these and ancestors, whose blood were shed so we can be where we are today, only them know what it is to be called African'. He said this with so much venom Uncle. I told him I had no place to go but he insisted I move out in five days.

(*Flashback ends*)

I told Chime as an elder and someone with more experience in South Africa, to take things easy and be slow to anger. He left, and the next day called to inform me he was going to Mr. Zwelinzima's house to plead with him.

I advised him to tread with caution, knowing Mr Zwelinzima to be a reckless womanizer and nasty towards Nigerians hiding from what I have heared from Chime. Being one of Soweto's richest landlords, a lot of our people had experiences with him. Chime told me he would take things easy before ending the call. Hours passed, and towards evening, Mama Chibuzor, my wife, asked if I had heard from Chime. I thought it wise to call him then. He picked at my third try and began lamenting.

Kinsman three: (*cuts in*) Chai! Was that when he was killed?

Mr. Obi: No Nna anyi, I am on it.

Other kinsmen: Will you let him speak!

Mr. Obi: (*continues*) So, I said to him, 'Chime, calm down!'

(*Flashback*)

Chime: Uncle nobody will chase me from my shop! Nobody! I can't lose my business. I have a lot to do right now. This December, I plan to go ask Nneoma's hand in marriage, back in Nigeria. This man wants to spoil my market.

Mr. Obi: Nneoma, the Owerri girl who sells Nigerian costumes close to your shop?

Chime: Yes Uncle.

Mr. Obi: (*Laughs*) Ah, that is good news my brother! That girl has used Ofe Owerri to scatter your head my boy!

(*Flashback ends*)

Mr. Obi: He then told me something that did not shock me.

Kinsman one: What can that be?

Mr. Obi: That Mr. Zwelinzima, who is married with grown up children had his eyes on Nneoma. I acted like it was all new to me, because I did not want to plant ideas in his head. Then I asked him to explain to me exactly what Mr. Zwelinzima said when he went to plead. He replied that Zwelinzima told him to go back to his country; that we Nigerians were taking over their lands, taking over their corporate jobs, their shops, their women but will never share their women with any other nationality. He said that Mr. Zwelinzima insisted that he had four days to vacate the shop and walked him out of his house, cursing his late senior brother for renting out the shop to a Nigerian in the first place.

(*The actors on stage all come to a halt as Chief Okonkwo's ghost begins to soliloquize again.*)

Chief Okonkwo's Ghost: How grateful can they be? He has the guts to chase my grandson from his shop, telling him Nigerians have taken over their lands, shops, jobs and women. Hmm, to think we opened our gates to them during the apartheid regime! We opened our doors and told them to feel free and feel at home. Their youths came to our land and most of them were given scholarships, we supported them relentlessly and we joyfully declared that Africa cannot be free if the South Africans are not. We walked with them hand in hand in the time of despair and today they see us as intruders. How grateful can they be? (*Stares at his lifeless body, shakes his head, then moves away.)*

(The other actors on stage unfreeze.)

Mr. Obi: Having heard all he had to say, I told him to calm down, that everything will be fine. I also advised him to still try to appeal to the man, that he should remember he was in another's land and wisdom need be applied. He told me he had begged and begged to no avail. Seeing he was already frustrated, I promised then to accompany him the next time he intended seeing Mr Zwelinzima. He was happy to hear this, and thanked me, adding that the fact that Zwelinzima and I were in the same age grade could actually be of advantage.

Kinsman two: That was quite kind of you my brother.

Mr. Obi: Thank you my elder. So, the next Monday, I left one of my boys in charge of my restaurant and accompanied him to Mr. Zwelinzima’s office.

Kinsman three: (*Cuts in*) What is it you sell again?

Kinsman two: You have no shame. Is that the issue at hand?

Mr. Obi: (*Smiles*) Nigerian delicacies. That's what I sell. (*Resumes*) We went in Chime's car. When we got to the office, we were asked to wait because Mr. Zwelinzima was in a crucial meeting. We waited all day and Zwelinzima only showed up with his briefcase, when he was about to leave for the day. We immediately approached him.

(*Flashback*)

Mr. Obi: Good evening sir.

Mr. Zwelinzima: Yes, good evening. How may I help you?

Mr. Obi: I am here in respect of my son who purchased a shop from you.

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*glares at Chime*) Yes!

Mr. Obi: My son has not had a good night rest for days now Mr. Zwelinzima: And he told you I'm his personal doctor?

Mr. Obi: Of course not. You do know why we are here. It's because of the shop.

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*flares up*) I have asked him to leave my shop. Or have you come personally for me to spell it out to you in my language? Please you leave my office! You Nigerians are all the same. Deaf people who like repetition!

Chime: (*angry*) Please don't speak to my Uncle like that. He is like a father to me. I pleaded with him to come help beg you. What wrong have I done by that? (*Turns to Mr. Obi*) Let us leave Uncle!

Mr. Zwelinzima: Now listen to me. You have two days to vacate that shop! I have promised someone the shop will be free for him to move-in three days from now. I will not disappoint him.

Mr. Obi: (*calmly*) I have heard all you have said, but I beg that you give him some time to find another shop. You really are being unfair to him. His rent has not even expired. Remember he is a young man, trying to find his feet in life. We should as elders encourage his diligence.

Mr. Zwelinzima: That is none of my business! He can do whatever he likes. All I want is for him to vacate my shop in two days. And diligence my foot! All he does is disturb the innocent lady beside his shop. She has reported him several times!

Chime: (*exclaims*) Uncle! Nneoma is my girlfriend; she will never do a thing like that.

Mr Zwelinzima: Are you calling me a liar? (*Calls out*) Security! Security! (*Uniformed men appear.*) Get these mad men out of this place!

(*Flashback ends.*)

Mr Obi: My elders, that was how Chime and I were bundled out of the man's office.

Kinsman four: Alu! Abomination!

Kinsman five: Is it by force to stay in South Africa?

Kinsman one: Ama m? Do I know?

Mr. Obi: (*continues*) Although embarrassed by this man's act, I put myself together and told Chime to get into his car and take us home. I gave him some advice as we left.

(*Flashback*)

Mr. Obi: My son, I will advise you leave Nneoma alone. From what I heard from that Zwelinzima man, Nneoma is the problem, he desires your woman.

Chime: Uncle you are right; he wants a romantic relationship with her. But I won’t let go of her, I love Nneoma. She is

beautiful, homely, hardworking and has a good heart. This Zwelinzima man has a wife and four children now! He should let go of my fiancée! He just wants to take advantage of her then dump her. He is a greedy man. He can go rot in hell!

Mr. Obi: My son, listen to me and let Nneoma be. What an elder sees when sitting down, a child cannot see while standing on top an Iroko tree. Let this Nneoma be and let peace reign. There are many beautiful Nigerian women here in Soweto, many even attend our church Saint Mary's. I can ask Mama Chibuzor to speak to one of them on your behalf. She even told me many of them have actually been making enquiries about you.

Chime: (*laughs*) No Uncle. Things don't work that way again. I have found the woman I love. And I will stick to her, no matter what.

Mr. Obi: Hmm, I have said my own o.

(*Flashback ends*)

So, Chime dropped me at my house and left for his. For a few days we didn't talk. All the while I was thinking he was looking for another shop. Three days after that day, I was seated outside, watching my son Chibuzor wash my car, when I noticed a group of young men approaching. They looked like Nigerians, and because I love recognizing with our people over there, I called out to them.

(*Flashback*)

Mr. Obi: Good morning my children.

Youth: Good morning Sir.

Mr. Obi: Are you Nigerians?

Youth: Yes sir.

Mr. Obi: (*smiles*) Yes! I thought right. So what brings you all here my people?

Youth: We are looking for one Mr. Obi, a Nigerian too.

Mr. Obi: Yes, that's me. What brings you here, my children? Come in. (*Rises to lead them into his apartment*)

Youth: No sir. We are here for something very important.

Mr. Obi: (*worried*) Okay. But hope no problem my son?

Youth: Sir, we are sorry to be the bearer of bad news but it has to be done. (*Clears throat*) Erm, one Mr. Chime and one Miss. Nneoma have been found dead in an apartment.

Mr. Obi: (*screams*) Ewooo! Mama Chibuzor! Chai! Mama Chibuzor come o! (*A few neighbors and South Africans, peep through their windows, muttering obscenities, angry at the disturbance.*)

Mama Chibuzor: (*rushes out, alarmed*) What? What is it my husband?

Mr. Obi: (*sorrowful*) Chime is dead! Chime and his fiancée Nneoma, are dead!

Mama Chibuzor: (*screams*) Ewoo!

(*Flashback ends*)

Kinsman three: They didn't tell you how?

Mr. Obi: He was butchered in his apartment.

Kinsmen: Ewooo!

(All actors on stage freeze. Enters Chief Okonkwo's ghost.)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: Whose son was butchered? No! Someone please tell me it was a cow butchered at an abattoir. Tell me it was a chicken slain for Christmas. Tell me it wasn't my dear grandson, who I suffered to raise, who I gave my all so he could live a life better than his father's and mine. Please tell

me he was not the one butchered like a cow! Oh Zwelinzima! Oh South-Africa! You have no idea what you have done! Now you think you hold sway over people's lives? You who I cried for when your people were treated like rags coated with faeces. You who I cried for when your people were turned into slaves in their own land. You, who I cried for when your people were not allowed to move freely in their own land. You, who I cried for when your beloved brothers were slaughtered for daring to fall in love with white women. You who I cried for when the fruits of their love were treated like outcasts. You who I cried for when your freedom-fighter, Nelson Mandela, was put in prison for twenty-seven years. You who I cried for when he lost his son without saying good-bye. I fought by your side till we saw the light at the end of the tunnel. I rejoiced with you when you gained freedom, and the chains were broken. I rejoiced, even better, when you began to smile again. Now you have paid me back with this? You have taken away my future. This is not what we fought for—this vile act you now portray. Those who bought your freedom with their lives are enraged, shamed at your acts. This is not what we fought for! (*Exits. Actors unfreeze.*)

Kinsman one: Chai! Chai! I told Nna anyi Okonkwo it was a bad idea to send Chime so far away. Ifu kwa? Can you see now?

Kinsman three: (*shakes his head then turns to Mr. Obi*) Continue, what happened after that? Were you able to see his corpse?

Mr. Obi: Yes. (*Shakes his head, sorrowful*) I couldn't recognize him and the beautiful Nneoma when they took me to the scene of the crime. Their bodies were dismembered in a horrifying

manner. *(Okonkwo's widow breaks into another round of tears. The women around her, held onto her, consoling her.)* I asked the youths what exactly happened.

(*Flashback*)

Youth: One of Chime's kind neighbors, who works in my office, was the one who called me. I immediately rushed down here. When I saw this, I was shocked to my marrow. *(Sighs)* I met a policeman who asked me if I knew any relative of Chime's they could reach out to. I knew Chime had once spoken about an uncle here in South-Africa but I didn't remember your name. It was one of the people who gathered around, a Nigerian who happens to be his neighbor, that said he knew of a relative and led us to your house. (*Enters John, Chime's apartment neighbor, crying.*)

John: Oh no! And Chime was a good man! (*Shakes his head*) My very good Nigerian friend.

Mr. Obi: (*turns to him)* Do you know how this happened?

John: I had seen him last yesterday evening. I came to collect a wine opener from his apartment but he stopped me at the door, smiling. I asked if he had company and he nodded, smiling still, then whispered that he it was his girl, and he was about to surprise her by proposing. I was so happy for him. He went to get the opener for me and I wished him luck then returned to my apartment. (*Shakes his head.*) It was at midnight I heard noises and screams from his apartment. I wanted to rush out but my brother cautioned that I should call the police first; it could be risky out there. So we called the police, waited until they arrived and things seemed safe, before we stepped out. I was shocked when I saw this. I

couldn't believe people were capable of this act. One of the policemen told me it was one Mr. Zwelinzima and his gang, and they had been arrested.

Mr. Obi: Ewo! Ewo! Zwelinzima!

(*Flashback ends. Lamentation fills the air.*)

Kinsman one: The son of Nna anyi Okonkwo treated like nama. Like common meat!

Kinsman four: (*shakes his head, sorrowful*) Nna anyi Obi, please go on, tell us what happened afterwards.

Mr. Obi: I left and went straight to the police station, Dobsonville police station in Soweto, I was so filled with rage I could have killed Zwelinzima with my bare hands. When I arrived there, a sergeant led me to the Commandant's office. We got into his office and the sergeant explained why I was there. To my utter shock, the Commandant rose and slapped the sergeant, an elderly man, rebuking him for not taking me to someone of lower rank before coming to his office. 'Take this fool out of here!' he said, and ordered us out. I was shocked at his unruly behavior but I pitied the sergeant more. I had gotten him into the mess. The poor man was struggling to hold back tears. The man who had slapped him was way younger than him.

Kinsman four: Alu! Abomination!

Mr. Obi: The rage in me fizzled out. I felt bad for him.

(*Flashback*)

Mr. Obi: I am sorry my brother.

Sergeant: It is okay my friend. I am already used to this.

Mr. Obi: You mean he embarrasses you this way all the time?

Sergeant: (*smiles sadly*) This is the price I have to pay for not going to school early enough. For not making hay while the sun shone.

Mr. Obi: But it wasn't your fault. We all know what apartheid did to this country.

Sergeant: (*shrugs*) Why did he murder your cousin and that fair pretty lady? I mean that big man.

(*Mr. Obi narrates what happened.*) Really? (*Shocked*) That was why the beast took their lives just like that?

Mr. Obi: (*shakes his head in sorrow*) That was it my brother.

Sergeant: Oh no! Sorry for your loss.

Mr. Obi: Thank you

Sergeant: You are good man. Can I give you an advice?

Mr. Obi: Yes you can.

Sergeant: Do not go to see any of the other officers. Go home. Here is my number. (*Collects Mr. Obi's phone, dials his number then looks around to be sure no one is watching.*) Call me this evening; there is something you need to know.

Mr. Obi: (*slightly surprised*) Okay. If you say so, I will do just that.

(*Flashback ends*)

Kinsman two: So what happened afterwards?

Mr. Obi: I left the police station and made sure what was left of Chime and Nneoma's bodies were deposited at the mortuary. Later that day, I called the sergeant who revealed to me that the commandant and Mr. Zwelinzima are childhood friends, so sooner or later, the case would be erased. I begged the sergeant to help me in any way he can, so he advised that I organize the Nigerians in Soweto to protest. I did just this, as peaceful as it could be, but the police came and tear-gassed

the gathering, injuring many in the process. The case was thrown out and Mr Zwelinzima was freed sparking media outrage. There was no justice for Chime and Nneoma.

(*All freeze as Chief Okonkwo's ghost enters.*)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: They had the nerve to frown at justice when I frowned when late Nelson Mandela was wrongly put in jail. I frowned when I heard that the blacks were made to sit in separate rows from the whites in the House of the Lords. I frowned when I heard that the whites labeled some places "for whites only'' just to make sure there were no contacts with the blacks. This I frowned at in my teachings as a history lecturer at the University of Nigeria. I cried when I read in apartheid literature that a man had to change his identity by suppressing his real self just to have a worker's permit. And they dare frown at justice when my only grandson is murdered? They dare frown at doing the right thing by persecuting the guilty? They dare frown at justice when Chime and his fiancée were murdered just when he was about to make me a great-grandfather? Alu!

(*Actors unfreeze. Chief Okonkwo's widow begins to lament and is consoled by members of her age grade. As night falls, Chief Okonkwo's body is taken to the mortuary. The male elders in the community meet to deliberate on the unfortunate happening. They decide then to if necessary travel to South-Africa to seek justice. By the next morning, the news has spread round the town of Nsukka and the youths prepare for a procession in memory of the lost. Chime had been loved by all.*) He was a proud Igbo man that came back home for the slightest meeting and held a prominent role at the Igbo youth's group in Soweto before his painful demise.

(Lights fade)

II

Days have passed since the news of Chime and Nneoma's death was brought home by Mr. Obi, leading to Chief Okonkwo's death. His kinsmen, some community elders, the traditional ruler (Igwe), alongside Mr. Obi have decided to go all out of their way for this matter. They all decided to go see the South-African ambassador to Nigeria, hoping that they will be able to get justice before considering their trip to South Africa. They arrive in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory and after a few setbacks are granted audience by the Ambassador.

Ambassador: (*rises*) Welcome my dear friends. (*Notices there is an Igbo traditional ruler amongst them and greets as is customary.*) Igweeee!

Igwe: May you live long.

Ambassador: Please make yourselves comfortable. (*Calls out to his secretary*)

Secretary: (*enters*) Yes Sir.

Ambassador: Get these gentlemen and my Igwe something to drink and...

Igwe: (*cuts in*) That will not be necessary dear Ambassador. We are here to talk about something very crucial.

Ambassador: Alright then. You can leave, Lisa. (*Exits Lisa*) I am listening, your Highness.

Igwe: Yes, we are here, bearing grieve in our hearts because our son and daughter have been murdered in South Africa.

Ambassador: (*solemn*)I heard about it. It is a very bad act I must say.

Igwe: (*shakes his head*) No, Ambassador. What is very bad is the fact that the murderer has been released to walk freely, like nothing ever happened.

Ambassador: No that can't be! But, if I may ask, what really happened? Because, erm, you know, things like these are a reaction to certain, erm, acts too. I have heard about what happened from the Nigerian ambassador to South Africa who alerted me but tell me your perspective.

Kinsman five: (*flares up*) So Mr. Ambassador, are you justifying murder? What did he tell you, tell me what did he tell you?

Ambassador: Gentleman please calm down, of course I will never justify murder. All I want to know is what led to this.

Mr. Obi: (*briefly narrates what happened*) Well, our Chime was a very responsible young man. His only wrongdoing was in falling in love with a girl who happens to be from his own tribe and country.

Ambassador: What did the police do about the situation?

Mr. Obi: They arrested and then released Mr. Zwelinzima. He is a prominent man and is friends with the police commandant in Soweto.

Ambassador: Come on. That may be too much an accusation to lay. Our police are quite credible.

Mr. Obi: Accusation you call this? (*Getting angry*)

Ambassador: (*smiles*) Let's not get all riled up now. That wasn't what I meant. (*Smiles again*) Anyway, this is a report that needs to be looked into thoroughly. I assure you all that immediately we finish here, I'll be in communication with my country and the right authorities on this.

Igwe: (*nods*) Thank you Mr. Ambassador for your time then. We do hope to hear from you soon.

Ambassador: (*rises*) Definitely Igwe. I will hear from them and get back to you.

Mr. Obi: Please do help. Justice needs to be served. (*They all rise, shake hands and leave the Ambassador's office. When they are back in their cars, heading out of the Embassy, Mr. Obi sighs and shakes his head.*) That man will not do anything about it.

Igwe: I sensed that too. He might, for formalities, but will not push it. We have to take action ourselves.

(Lights fade)

III

Days after the visit, the Ambassador has not reached out to the group with a satisfactory answer. The Igwe then speaks to the members of the South Eastern senate who alongside with the Nigerian Senate, decide to sponsor the representatives of this case to South-Africa to champion protests they hear has begun by Nigerians in Soweto, demanding justice. The situation has got a lot of publicity now, the Nigerian senate and government at large have demanded that the South African government act immediately or relationships between both countries would be strained. The South African President acts, calling up the Soweto Police Commandant and asking to meet a few members of the protesters. Mr Obi, the Nigerian train honorably led by the Igwe and some of the villages cabinet are all part of those to meet with the President. They all arrive the Presidential official residence at Mahlamba Ndlopfu, Pretoria and are all seated at the mini-conference room waiting to be addressed by the president. The South African ambassadors to Nigeria and Nigeria's to South Africa are also in that gathering. The President soon walks in and they all rise.

President: Please have your seats. (*He walks towards the Nigerian ambassador, shakes his hand then that of the Igwe who is seated next to him.*) You are welcome Igwe.

Igwe: (*smiles*) Thank you for having us Mr. President.

President: It's a pleasure. I wish it were under more favorable conditions.

Igwe: Same as I Mr. President. Thank you.

President: (*goes to take his seat*) To begin with, on behalf of our great Nation, I want to extend our condolences to our Nigerian friends and the families who have lost these wonderful young people. We are shamed by this act! It is considered

intolerable! And I will make sure all those who have a hand in this are brought to book.

Igwe: (*nods*) Thank you Mr. President

President: (*faces the Commandant*) Word has reached me of your acts down in Soweto and I'm highly disappointed. I have asked that investigations be carried out on this whole issue, and the role you have played in it. Believe me, if the investigations come up with facts about your acts, you will be demoted. That's if I don't give an order for you to be sacked! (*The Nigerian train nods their heads in assent. The Commandant is visibly seething with anger.*) My government will give no room to people like you. (*Enters a Secret Service agent who whispers something in the President's ear*) Oh! Bring them in then.

(*The agent heads out and returns followed by Chime's apartment neighbor, John, and another neighbor, Okafor, from Mr. Zwelinzima's plaza where Chime had a shop. The two are a bit uncomfortable, being so close to the President for the first time in their lives.* Don't be scared young men. All I want to hear from you is what you know about this whole issue. Which of you is Chime's apartment neighbor? (*John signifies.*) Thank you. Please tell us what happened that night.

John: (*narrates the event*) That night Sir, my brother I were scared to come out when it was all happening. After we called the Police and they showed up, we stepped out, and one of the policemen we saw told us it was one Mr. Zwelinzima and his gang, and they had been arrested. (*Pauses*) But something

strange later happened. (*Pauses and looks towards the Commandant, scared.*)

President: Don't be scared my friend. Nothing will happen to you.

John: (*nods*) After Mr. Obi came back and told me how he was treated when he went to the police station, I went there myself, to look for the policeman who had told my brother and I about Mr. Zwelinzima's arrest. I found him and got the biggest shock ever. He denied ever meeting me or being at any scene of murder that morning. He threatened to arrest me if I did not leave the premises immediately. I was shamed and shocked. But, to tell the truth, I believe he was acting under orders. And since Mr. Obi had told me what the Commandant did, I just knew he was the one who gave that order.

President: (*turns to the Commandant*) You see how you have dragged your name in the mud? (*The commandant bows in shame.*) Let's hear from the other witness.

Okafor: My name is Okafor Sir, an immigrant and a humble shop owner in Soweto. (*Everyone outside the Commandant smiles at his words, relieving the tension in the room.*)

President: (*smiles*) Don’t blow your trumpet young man. We will be the judge of that. Tell us what you know about Chime’s death.

Okafor: (*sighs and shakes his head*) My dear brother from Nigeria. Chime was well known in Jambolana mall for selling cultural merchandise from Nigeria. The real owner of the mall, Mr. Mitchell, died from a seizure and his mall was forcefully inherited by his brother, Mr. Zwelinzima, who is known well to be quarrelsome, a tyrant and quite sentimental

as opposed to his elder brother who was calm and liberal. Mr. Zwelinzima is also popularly known as a radical womanizer. Chime's grave was dug when Mr. Zwelinzima fell in love with Chime's woman, a Nigerian lady named Nneoma who also sells local Nigerian costumes in the same mall. (*Shakes his head, sad*) Poor Nneoma! She was beautiful, kind and very intelligent. Her responsible way of life drove irresponsible men away. Mr. Zwelinzima, in his covetousness, tried his best to woo Nneoma but she refused because she was deeply in love with Chime. Everyone knew about it. So Mr. Zwelinzima tried to get Chime out of his way at all cost. This he did by asking Chime to vacate the mall. Chime and I talked about this issue, and it was quite disgusting that Mr. Zwelinzima who had a daughter Nneoma's age would go that far. I remember the day things really degenerated. Sales were low that day and most of us in the mall were gathered at a cafeteria owned by an elderly Dutch woman in the same mall. We were having a good time, eating and conversing. Nneoma was sitting on Chime's lap, we always teased them of being too attached to each other. We all liked them; really, they were cool together, really nice people. Then Mr. Zwelinzima walked in, saw them and went red in the face.

(*Flashback*)

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*furious*) What the hell is happening here? What rubbish is this? (*Walks towards Chime and Nneoma*) Nneoma!

Nneoma: (*rises*) Good afternoon sir.

Mr. Zwelinzima: What is good about the afternoon? And what is the meaning of this foolishness you are displaying with this beggar?

(*Everyone seated get irritated at his words.*)

Cafe owner: Come on Zwelinzima. Let the two lovebirds be.

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*flares up*) Will you mind your business you old Dutch witch. (*The cafe owner turns away shaking her head*)

Nneoma: (*furious*) Mr. Zwelinzima, Chime is my man. We are lovers. I do not see how this should be your problem. (*Everyone nod in agreement.*) Why are you being so protective? Are you my father? I don't have any family member alive except my grandfather. If I need advice, he is the only I will call on.

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*hurt*) But I love you Nneoma. (*Everyone break into laughter. Zwelinzima is hurt the more by this.*)

Nneoma: Sir, you are old enough to be my father. What you desire is impossible!

(*Mr. Zwelinzima moves close to her and raises his hand to touch her face. Nneoma slaps his hand away, leaving him really embarrassed. Chime rises at this point, ready to defend his woman.*)

Chime: (*angry*) Now that's enough Mr. Zwelinzima.

Mr. Zwelinzima: (*ignores Chime*) You hit me?

Nneoma: (*boiling with rage*) Yes! And I will hit you again if you dare lay your filthy hands on me! You shameless man! (*Chime leads her away, out of the cafe. All the other shop-owners also rise to leave, clearly irritated by Zwelinzima's act.*)

Cafe owner: (*angry*) Now that you have chased all my customers away, do you feel fulfilled?

(*Flashback ends*)

Okafor: As Mr. Zwelinzima passed us on his way out that day, the look he gave Chime and Nneoma was murderous. I had a feeling something was going to happen but I never expected

him to do this. He can have any woman he wishes (sighs) I warned them to be really careful. (*Shakes his head again, sad*) Not until I heard the wicked man had taken their lives. That w-w-wicked... (*Moved to tears, he becomes speechless.*)

John: I have one more evidence and this is more than enough if justice really is to be served.

John brings out a video coverage of the incident that led to the death of Chime and Nneoma. This was due to the fact that he recently installed a CCTV camera gifted to him by his friend who sells electronics and CCTV installations.

President: Oh! Really young man, let's all watch it then. You can take your seat.

The president asks one of his private security men to insert the disk for everyone to watch. The recordings indeed confirm the fact that Chime and Nneoma were murdered all adding up to the evidences presented against Mr. Zwelinzima. This makes the Igwe, Mr. Obi and everyone who came to this meeting smile in victory.

Mr. Obi: There is no other evidence we need than this. He did this. He killed Chime and Nneoma. That wicked man did this.

Nigerian Ambassador: This is really unfair. Mr. President, this is troubling.

Igwe: (*shakes his head in grief*) Oh, he murdered these innocent two! What wrong did they do? Why is our world so wicked!

President: Igwe, my Nigerian friends, I am really sorry for your loss. All evidence truly points to the fact that Zwelinzima carried out this beastly act. (*The Nigerians nod in agreement.*) And you. (*Faces the Commandant.*) I am highly disappointed. How dare you shade such evil crime with sentiments? Is this what our Police force has degenerated to? What happened to

the virtues of the Force? What happened to your oath to protect all lives, foreign and local?

Commandant: I am very sorry. It is the devil's work.

Mr. Obi: (*exclaims*) Ezi okwu. Truly it is. It is the Devil that is to blame now right? Mr. President, can you believe this man asked me out of his office when I went to seek justice? Now he stands here and says it is the work of the devil.

Kinsman four: Work of the devil indeed.

Mr. Obi: Right in front of me, he gave a dirty slap to the elderly sergeant who directed me to his office.

Commandant: (*lies on the floor, begging*) I am very sorry Mr. President. It is the work of the devil.

(*The South African ambassador to Nigeria bows his head in shame, feeling bad that he had not taken the case serious from the start.*)

Mr. President: You will go make a re-arrest of that evil criminal before the end of today, after which you will be indefinitely suspended. If we ever deem it fit to lift that suspension, you will be demoted to the level of a sergeant.

Commandant: Please Mr. President. Don't do this to me! Please!

President: (*signals to one of the security agents around*) Take this heartless idiot out of my sight. (*The Commandant keeps begging, close to tears, while he is led out.*)

Kinsman 1: (*shakes his head*) People act never remembering that every man is answerable to another. Shame! (*The others nod their heads in agreement.*)

President: (*turns to the South-African Ambassador to Nigeria*) Mr. Ambassador, you do know that you were unfair to these dear friends of ours. Reports have reached me that they laid their

complaints to you back in Nigeria but you didn't take them so seriously. If you had, things wouldn't have degenerated to the protests we have all over both countries. We would have acted fast and brought this heartless Zwelinzima to book. So do tell, how well are you representing our dear country there?

Ambassador: (*fidgets*) I am sorry Mr. President.

President: Sorry? That's all you have to say now. (*Shakes his head, disappointed*) You do know this can strain the relationship between both countries. You are no child; you remember what the Nigerians did for us to be where we are today. Why then are they constantly been treated unfairly? Or have you ever heard of a South-African treated unjustly in their country? To think of it, the biggest telecommunication company in Nigeria, the biggest chain of malls and many other businesses in Nigeria are owned by South-Africans. What then is the problem?

Ambassador: I am deeply sorry. I am very sorry. Since I was assigned to work in Nigeria, They have shown me nothing but love. They are good people Mr. President. I am deeply sorry.

Igwe: (*smiles sadly*) Mr. President, I thank you for the attention you have given this issue. You are a good man with great desires for the people of South Africa and foreigners alike. I also thank you for calling this *anuofia* to order.

President: (*curious*) What does *anuofia* mean?

Igwe: (*smiles*) it means 'great ambassador'. (*The Nigerian train can barely hide the smiles on their faces. The president gets the drift but just laughs, shaking his head.*) I also want to thank Mr. Ambassador for seeing reason with us now. Our hearts

are open to all Africans. We all are siblings of the same mother, as such, should care for one another.

President: You are right *Igwe*. You are very right. I am willing to make amends for this totally condemnable act. For starters I give orders that the Ambassador, alongside the Information Minister, do a television broadcast on my behalf and that of well-meaning South Africans to totally condemn this punishable act and advise South Africans to learn to treat visitors well.

Igwe: Thank you very much Mr. President. May your reign be long. You have indeed acted like a leader. And I have learnt from you today.

President: Thank you Igwe for the maturity with which you have handled this heart-wrenching issue. I thank you all too for seeking an amicable solution to this. Like Igwe said, we are children of the same mother. Have always been, will always be.

(*Lights fade*)

IV

The next morning, on the order of the South-African president, the Nigerian trains as well as the corpses of the two lovers are flown back to Nigeria in a chartered jet. As instructed, the South African ambassador to Nigeria and the Minister deliver a speech to the people of South Africa, advising peaceful coexistence with people resident in the country, Nationals or non-Nationals.

Ambassador: Good day great people of South Africa. Good day, my amiable Nigerian brothers and sisters. The attention of the government has been called to the maltreatment of non-Nationals, particularly Nigerians in our country. We are saddened by to say more; our president totally condemns this dehumanizing act of 'sheer wickedness' in his words. This has threatened relations with this dear country as well as other countries who have written to our government to express their shock and disappointment. Dear South-Africans, it has been a long walk to freedom. (*Ambassador freezes. Chief Okonkwo's ghost enters looking depressed. He walks around the Ambassador soliloquizing.*)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: A long walk, a long walk indeed. What a shame! (*Shakes his head.*) The great Nelson Mandela took twenty-seven steps forward, but his people are all out to smear his good deeds with filth. Nelson Mandela fought against segregation but now they cause their heroes pain as they have decided to segregate themselves from their brothers, Phew! They will stop at nothing to see his legacy rubbished all for nothing

but strife, sheer jealousy and hatred that appeared out of the blue. (*Exits. Ambassador continues his speech.*)

Ambassador: A very long walk indeed and we must try our best to keep marching on. Nigeria, our great love from the west, one of the strongest pillars of this continent was there for us in times of despair. She said Africa cannot be free unless we are. She therefore played a significant role in the fight against apartheid, voicing our pain to the World at large, providing aid for our people, taxing her people to see that we gain what we have today. All this was done not minding the geographical difference between us. (*Freezes. Chief Okonkwo's ghost interrupts.*)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: Despite the geographical difference you say. We gave our support to the utmost, showing nothing but love. Now you are free and I sent my only heir to your land because I felt I could entrust him in your care, but you return him back to me, cold, lifeless. How callous?! Who would have imagined the land Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and other great freedom fighters fought for will turn to one that devours its own brother? This is not the South-Africa I know. Not the one I love. This is all a dream; all I see are vultures. This is not my southern love. (*Exits. Ambassador continues.*

Ambassador: They made our pains theirs. The Nigerian government collaborated with other concerned Africans to put an end to the hardship we suffered. (*Freezes. Enters Chief Okonkwo's ghost, enraged.*)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: I remember those days I predicted to my students at Nsukka that South Africa will one day be free. I remember then how my country led a boycott of the 1978 Olympic and Commonwealth Games in protest of New Zealand's contacts with apartheid South-Africa, and 32 of 59 nations from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean joined in. Now this is how we are repaid? (*Exits. Ambassador continues.*)

Ambassador: Is it now right to return their love with hate or discord? We will not! These xenophobic acts will not be condoned. We will not allow rotten eggs destroy a longtime relationship. We are taking a firm stand on this! Anyone or groups who from this day on, lift a hand against foreigners domiciled in this country, will receive the full wrath of the law. Enough of this evil acts! (*Freezes. Enter Chief Okonkwo's ghost.*)

Chief Okonkwo's ghost: (*shakes head then smiles*) A relief this is. It is comforting to know there are still good and right-thinking people in this country. (*Nods, smiles then fades away.*)

Ambassador: I want to use this medium to apologize to Nigeria and other African countries who have been affected by this act of senselessness. We are assuring you of your safety. Security has been beefed up to ensure these acts are stamped out and peace reigns once more. My dear South Africans, our Nation is a great one, let us reflect this greatness in our good acts towards others. Let us, as one, say no to Xenophobia. Long live the Republic of South Africa! (*Lights fade*)

The corpses of Chime and Nneoma have been brought back to Nigeria amidst mourning from the people of Nsukka and widespread sadness in the country. The day after the arrival, Mr. Obi and some chiefs travel down to Owerri, Nneoma's town, to see her grandfather. They locate her grandfather, Nna anyi *Ezeonu's compound, after much search. Seated under a palm tree in front of his compound taking snuff, Nnayi Ezeonu is startled by the sudden entry of people.*

Mr. Obi: Good afternoon Nna anyi.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Good afternoon. (*Cocks his head slightly.*) These faces don't look familiar.

Chief one: Yes, Nna anyi, we are new in this land. We came all the way from Nnsuka.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Ehen, you are welcome. (*Calls out.*) Nkem! Nkem! (*A male voice answers from the house. Enter Nkem.*)

Nnkem: Yes Nna anyi.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Bring these men seats, and go bring the palm wine and cola in my room.

Nkem: Ok Nna anyi. (*Exits*)

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Please be patient. He will be here soon.

Mr. Obi: Thank you Nna anyi.

(*Nkem returns bearing a long bench, he places it down for the guests then goes in to get the palm-wine and Kolanut, returns with it and goes to stand some distance away, in case he is needed.*)

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*shocked*) Ahn ahn! Look at this stupid boy. You walked away! Are they to serve themselves? Why are you such an idiot! (*Nkem rushes back.*) Pour the wine for them osisor!

Chief one: Thank you very much Nna anyi, but this can wait. We actually came here to tell you something very important.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Ehen, what can that be that makes you reject fresh palm wine from an old man like me?

Chief two: We are sorry Nna anyi. But we can't take the drink. What we came to tell you is... (Stutters) Y-Y-your g-g-granddaughter.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Yes? She's in South Africa.

Mr. Obi: I came all the way from South Africa, Nna anyi. I am so sorry. Your granddaughter was found dead in her fiancé's house, Chime.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*stunned*) I did not hear you correctly. (*Adjusts his wrapper and dusts of snuff from his singlet*) I only heard the part where you said Nneoma and her fiancé. I know Chime. We spoke on phone and he told me he would be coming by chrrri-ssii-mas to come pay my granddaughters bride price. Ehen what did you say they did. Are they planning to get married earlier than we agreed? Is my granddaughter pregnant? You know children of nowadays...

Nkem: (*cuts in, crying*) Papa, they said aunty Nneoma is dead.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*exclaims*) Ewo. Alu, alu, alu. (*Rises in shock, arms akimbo. The others all rise.*)

Nkem: (*in tears*) How! How! What happened?

Mr. Obi: A jealous landlord murdered Chime and her.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Chai! (*Slumps and begins to cry. The men all gather around and help back onto his seat.*) Alu! Alu! If I had known, I would have married her off and not allow her go that far away. (*Goes quiet for a while, and then shakes his head, composing himself.*) Where is her corpse?

Chief one: It is at Nsukka. We have also come to seek your permission to have her burial ceremony alongside Chime in Nnsuka. This is because the state government intends to handle the buiral because of the circumstances surrounding their death. Afterwards, her body will be transported here for her final burial. We are willing to pay for the private burial. Chime would have wanted that

pay for it l but we need a go-ahead from you. We know they weren't married yet and so she wasn't officially ours, but all the same, if not for this tragedy, she would have been in a couple of months, and for that reason we count her as one of us. But it is all subject to your approval.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*sighs*) My dear grandchild.

Chief two: It is indeed a painful thing for all of us. Chime's grandfather dropped dead when he heard the news. Too many tragedies!

Nna anyi Ezeonu: Alu! What is our sin? (*Shakes his head in pain*) I agree. You can start the arrangements.

Chief one: Thank you Nna anyi. May evil never find us again.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*sighs*) But I will have to be there.

Chief two: Of course Nna anyi. Our intent is that we head back to Nsukka together.

Nna anyi Ezeonu: (*nods and rises*) I will come with you.

Nkem: (*crying, follows* Nna anyi *Ezeonu*) Aunty Nneoma! Aunty Nneoma! (*The men shake their heads in grief as they watch the two go into the house.*)

Two days later, Nna anyi *Okonkwo, Chime and Nneoma are given a befitting burial, first of its kind in Nsukka. Dignitaries ranging from governors of the*

eastern states, to senators and even the South African ambassador to Nigeria are all in attendance. A powerful sermon is given by a Catholic priest — a call for peaceful coexistence amongst people all over the world. The South African ambassador uses the opportunity to once again apologize to Nigerians. The burial ceremony is streamed live by international TV stations, spreading the message of peace around the continent, and the world at large.

Today, the people of South Africa have begun to tread with care, knowing the world is watching.

(*Lights fade*)

(*End*)