

# OLADIPO AGBOLUAJE

## Mother Courage and Her Children

(Scenes 1-3 and 9-12)

**An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, this drama was premiered at Nottingham Playhouse in February 2004 before touring the UK. The production, directed by Josette Bushell-Mingo, starred Carmen Monroe in the title role.**

### 1

RADIO VOICE: Chief of Armed Forces Field Marshal Jigawa of the West Africa Union of Independent States is conscripting civilians for a counter-offensive against the rebel Dancing Hyenas Revolutionary Forces. He says they are building for a final push against rebel strongholds that will lead to regional unification. Commenting on the use of child soldiers, Field Marshal Jigawa said that in war, it is only right that children do their fair share of killing.

**Bola Fagburu a.k.a. MOTHER COURAGE loses one son.**

*Bush path near a village. SERGEANT and RECRUITER stand waiting.*

RECRUITER: This sun will kill us. Why did you choose a shade-less spot? Aren't you black enough? No wonder we can't find anyone to recruit around here. It's the sun that makes us Africans dishonest people, I swear.

SERGEANT: Ah, ah, *Oga*<sup>1</sup> Recruiter, that one is over the bar.

RECRUITER: OK, how many boys have we recruited? Have we not approached at least twenty starving villagers? I turn round to get the conscription form, before I say "nail your thumbprint here," they have dashed into the nearest undergrowth.

SERGEANT: Life is too easy for our people, Recruiter. Tell them you need a Champions League war, they eye you as if you are not well. It's simple maths. The nations that fought the First and Second World Wars are First and Second World nations. We that did not fight any world war, we are Third World. We fight our wars the wrong way. We should use propaganda to identify the Great Satan and to justify seizing another nation's resources. Invite the international media for proper coverage and make sure our website is updated regularly with news, views and outtakes. If we fight this war correctly we will become First World. Abi na lie I talk?

RECRUITER: My brother, no be lie you talk.

SERGEANT: Standing in this sun is the necessary groundwork. Once we learn from our mistakes you will see how things will improve. We will form a media company and market the war to the world media. We'll sell the live rights to Sky and the highlights to ITV.

RECRUITER: (*Admiringly*) You have brain. (*The sound of a radio in the distance*) Look, a mammy-wagon. In this god-forsaken area? Some people can be desperate. Two women. And two guys! Where are my recruitment forms?

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<sup>1</sup> Boss

*Sound of a radio playing a popular tune. Drawn by EKET and OPOKU, a mammy-wagon rolls in. On it sit MOTHER COURAGE and NGOZI.*

MOTHER COURAGE: Mornin' oh, Sargi-Sargi. How body?

SERGEANT (*Blocks the way*): Body dey inside cloth. (*Inspects the wagon*) I respect this your genetically modified wagon. Who you be?

MOTHER COURAGE: Market people. (*Sings*)

Captain, Sergeant, what's your pleasure?

My mammy-wagon's filled with treasure,

Booty from this war so long

It kills the weak and eats the strong

My goods care not who's wrong or right

If you can pay then you're all right

I'll join you on the bloodiest field

If there I'll gain the highest yield

Soldiers, rebels, the same to me,

It's when you're dead I'll let you be.

SERGEANT: Madam, you want to take cunning to pass us? Stay where you are! Who are you moving with?

EKET: Colonel Mensah's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, sir.

SERGEANT: Where are your particulars?

OPOKU: Sergeant, you don't know her face? It's Mother Courage!

SERGEANT: I don't know her. I've heard of women named Patience, Comfort – Incontinence, even – but Courage? Why are you called Courage?

MOTHER COURAGE: It's the praise name people gave me in Monrovia. I broke through rebel lines to the Government sector during a bombardment. I had fifty loaves of Ghana Bread in my wagon. They were going to spoil. I had no choice.

SERGEANT: So it is Ghana bread that brings you here. Your particulars.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Pulls out a bundle of papers from a tin box and climbs down off the wagon*) You and your paper government. Is that library enough for you?

SERGEANT: Don't be funny with me! Respect these stripes. You must have a licence for your wagon. You know that.

MOTHER COURAGE: I'm old enough to be your mother, you hear? Mind how you address me. Don't think because of war, some of us have forgotten our customs.

Colonel Mensah never asked me for licence. And you, ordinary Sergeant, behaving as if you don't have a mother.

RECRUITER: Sergeant, I smell insubordination in this Mama. Our camp needs obedience.

MOTHER COURAGE: What your rat-arsed camp needs is food.

SERGEANT: Name.

MOTHER COURAGE: Bola Fagburu.

SERGEANT: (*Writes*) The Fagburu family.

MOTHER COURAGE: I am the only Fagburu here.

SERGEANT: Are these not your children?

MOTHER COURAGE: *Ehen*<sup>2</sup>? (*Pointing to EKET*) My eldest, there, is Eket Messu-Essien. His father's a French mercenary. Francois was always telling Eket that he's an assimilé, a Franco-phoney. He wanted to name him Leopold. I refused. Sounded too

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<sup>2</sup> So?

Belgian for my liking. I was with a Calabar man then. I could have married Francois but he was driven out of Nigeria.

SERGEANT: Why?

MOTHER COURAGE: The frogs in our area disappeared. Our neighbours accused Francois of hunting them to make white man's juju. *(Points to her other children)* Anyway, they are birds of different feathers.

SERGEANT: They all have different names?

MOTHER COURAGE: You've never heard of such a thing before?

SERGEANT: *(To OPOKU)* So your father's from Lapland, *abi*?

MOTHER COURAGE: From Ghana, by the name of Ajayi. Although everybody called him Charlie. He was a fortifications engineer. Always fortifying himself with alcohol.

OPOKU *smiles and nods, likewise* NGOZI.

SERGEANT: If his father is Ghanaian, why in Eshu's name is he called Ajayi?

MOTHER COURAGE: Sergeant, I don't want to say it but it's obvious you did not do well in school. I was with my Yoruba countryman. He had kidney problem, although he didn't drink. The boy takes after him.

SERGEANT: How can the boy take after him when he's not his father?

MOTHER COURAGE: *(Crooks her finger)* Asking question. I call him Opoku.

*(Points to NGOZI)* That's Ngozi Enwerem. She's half-Igbo.

SERGEANT: You have a United Nations' family.

MOTHER COURAGE: Yes, oh. My wagon and I have seen the world.

SERGEANT: I'm documenting this for our records. (*He writes*) And you're from Ijebu in Nigeria. How did you reach this side?

MOTHER COURAGE: I should wait till the war meets me in Ijebu?

RECRUITER: (*To EKET*) You brothers are donkeys, eh, pulling this wretched mammy-wagon. Let me lead you to the field to graze.

EKET: (*Approaches RECRUITER*) Mama, let me dose him like say one-one blows!

MOTHER COURAGE: Get back! Two fine officers like you need quality belts. Sergeant, your belt has shed its last skin.

SERGEANT: What I need are your boys. Come and see chest! Why are they dodging conscription?

MOTHER COURAGE: Donate your own children to your war.

RECRUITER: It's *our* war! And it rains money. If you get the forecast right you'll be swimming in it. Selling court shoes is women's work. (*To EKET*) Stone Cold, come. Let's see if your talk is according to your muscle.

MOTHER COURAGE: His whole muscle is in his tongue! Look at him in annoyance and he will keel over with fear.

RECRUITER: And crush an elephant on his way down. (*Tries to lead EKET away*)

MOTHER COURAGE: Leave my boy alone I say! He is not for you.

RECRUITER: Just now he was talking like a warrior, pumping his chest at me, a whole recruiting officer. I just want us to go into the bush and settle the matter.

EKET: Mommy, don't worry. I will panel-beat his face! *Oya*,<sup>3</sup> inside the bush!

MOTHER COURAGE: Nothing in your head but fight. He has a gun. He will shoot you before you reach the clearing.

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<sup>3</sup> Come on

RECRUITER: (*Offended*) Ah, ah, Madam, I'm not that callous. I will wait until we get to the clearing. *Oya*, my brother, let's go.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To* EKET, *who is still eager to go*) If you move one more step... (*To* RECRUITER) You see? His head is not correct. Stop pestering us or I will report you to Colonel Mensah. He'll execute the two of you himself. His aide-de-camp is my daughter's boyfriend.

SERGEANT: (*To* RECRUITER) Easy now. (*To* MOTHER COURAGE) Madam, a uniform is the quickest way to a Presidency. What kind of mother are you, denying your son the opportunity of becoming Head of State? Your father died a military hero. You said so yourself.

MOTHER COURAGE: When? Bearing false witness against me! He is only a child.

RECRUITER: Children just out of their mothers' wombs are blessing us for putting guns in their hands. The army treats its soldiers like princes. Don't you want better things?

EKET: (*Cynically*) You go dash<sup>4</sup> me?

MOTHER COURAGE: Be my dentist, said the crocodile to the antelope. (*To*

OPOKU) Run, shout out your brother is being kidnapped! (*Pulls out a pistol*) I too have a gun. Touch him again and I will shoot you!

SERGEANT: Put that peacekeeper's peashooter away, old fool. Is the war not your bread? How can you bake bread without flour?

MOTHER COURAGE: Some of us prefer cornmeal.

SERGEANT: So your pikins should gain war dividends without investing? You call yourself Courage yet you fear the war that fuels your farts. Does the hunter fear the lion? Your boys are not afraid, I can tell.

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<sup>4</sup> Give

EKET: I don't fear any bloody war.

SERGEANT: Exactly! Army life is recommended by the best morticians. See me. It keeps my skin young and healthy. I joined at seventeen.

MOTHER COURAGE: You're not seventy yet.

SERGEANT: Soon.

MOTHER COURAGE: Soon seventy bullets in you.

SERGEANT: Mama, you are cursing me that I will soon be killed?

MOTHER COURAGE: The gods know. You don't believe? What if I tell you I can see if your credit has expired?

OPOKU: Mummy is a seer. She can tell you your tomorrow.

RECRUITER: Tell Sergeant his future. Who knows what the gods have in store?

SERGEANT: I'm born again. I'm not interested in devilish things.

MOTHER COURAGE: You're still African. Bring your helmet.

SERGEANT: (*Gives his helmet to MOTHER COURAGE*) It means nothing to me.

I'm a child of Christ. I only do it to reveal our Saviour's power.

MOTHER COURAGE: Whatever. (*Brings out a bag of cowries. Chants. Throws some into the bushes*) My children, this is how the war will scatter us if we befriend it.

(*To SERGEANT*) Sargi, I do this for you free. This black one—death. The rest represent life. (*Chants*) I put them in your helmet and shake them together. Pick. Let's see how soon you'll sleep in Christ's bosom.

SERGEANT *hesitates*.

RECRUITER: (*To EKET*) I don't pick just any gutter-boy. Only the best will do.

SERGEANT: (*Picks the black cowry*) Nonsense, pagan rubbish!

OPOKU: Oh-ho! He's picked the cowry of death.

RECRUITER: Don't fear. They've not yet made the bullet with your name on it.

SERGEANT: The Lord has forsaken me. You've played me.

MOTHER COURAGE: You played yourself when you joined the army. *Oya*, my children. The war will not wait for us.

SERGEANT: *Lai-lai*<sup>5</sup>! We're taking that bastard son of yours whether you like or not.

EKET: Mama, I don't mind to do army.

MOTHER COURAGE: Shut up you French frog!

EKET: Opoku too wants to do army.

MOTHER COURAGE: Thank you for the breaking news, Radio Africa. All right, then, let's see what your futures hold. (*Picks up the helmet, chants and shakes it*)

RECRUITER: (*To* EKET) People say that in our regiment we take prayers seriously.

Lies, damn lies. Yes, our C.O. is born again and insists on prayers every waking second. During prayer sessions, just imagine getting a blow-job from Miss World.

MOTHER COURAGE: Gather round. You want the war to adopt you? Let's ask our cowries. (*Gives* EKET *the helmet*) First Born, choose your fate.

EKET *chooses the black cowry*.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Snatches the cowry from* EKET) My mother's head! Was childbirth not painful enough that you will join our ancestors before me? If you become a soldier your life is over! Full stop! Period! Semi-colon! He takes after his father, no sense and foolhardy. The cowries have spoken. Now will you be wise?

EKET: Wise?

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<sup>5</sup> Never.

MOTHER COURAGE: To be wise is to stay alive. It means staying with your mother and if they mock you, laugh at them and go your way.

RECRUITER: Woman wrapper, if you still need Mommy to change your nappy we will take your junior brother.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Contorts EKET'S face into a smile*) Laugh, laugh! Ehen, you've shown him. Your turn, Opoku. I trust you; you're only half-Nigerian.

(*OPOKU picks the black cowry*) *Qu'est-ce que? Et tu* Opoku? Because you are a simpleton? Listen to your mother: be honest at all times. Sargi, help me crosscheck.

SERGEANT: It's the black cowry. But how is it possible for myself? That medicine man in Douala told me his bullet-proof juju is best in Africa. He gave me a five-year warranty. (*To RECRUITER*) Her juju must be real. It is catching her children, too.

OPOKU: It has caught me but I'll be all right. I hear my mother's word.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To NGOZI*) My daughter, you yourself make your own misfortune. Stop being kind to everyone. Fate has handed you a half-black cowry.

Let's try and change it. I'll pick for you. (*Picks for NGOZI. It is the black cowry*) This cannot be right! Maybe I did not recite the incantation properly. Another time.

(*Empties the cowries back into the bag, returns the helmet to SERGEANT and climbs onto the wagon*) My children, let us be going.

RECRUITER: (*To SERGEANT*) They are going!

SERGEANT: (*Falls to the ground, wailing*) I don't feel well. The black cowry is taking effect. Ah, I'm dying!

RECRUITER: Come on, don't be stupid! You've been in the sun too long without your helmet, that's all. Call yourself born again. Pretend to do business with her.

(*Loudly*) Mama, Sergeant wants that belt. (*Shoves SERGEANT forward*)

MOTHER COURAGE: Forty dollars. For you I do it for twenty. (*Climbs down*)

SERGEANT: Twenty dollars for a second-hand belt? You are not serious. In fact, I can't see well in this sun. Let's go behind the wagon. *(They go behind the wagon)*

RECRUITER: *(To EKET)* Let's go and drink palmwine at that village. I will sponsor you.

EKET *stands undecided.*

MOTHER COURAGE: Twenty dollars, last price.

SERGEANT: I just don't understand. Juju with five-year warranty should be genuine or what do you think? For added insurance when we go on missions I send those who want to appear on CNN ahead of me.

MOTHER COURAGE: Don't worry yourself. Continue to use the juju and stay at the back. Jesus is on your side. Here, have some ogogoro. *(She gives him some to drink)*

RECRUITER *takes EKET and pulls him to the back.*

RECRUITER: Twenty thousand naira, cash in hand. You will become a warrior and fight for your country. Uniform is a babe magnet. You will not remove your trousers and ten women will fuck you at the same time—believe!

EKET *is being lured away.* NGOZI *makes warning noises, to no avail.*

MOTHER COURAGE: Hold on, Ngo'. Sergeant is paying. *(Holds up the notes to the sun, bites the tip)* Have to make sure this is not fake. I've been done before. This is Federal Reserve. Sargi-Sargi! All right! Let's go. Ah, where is Eket?

OPOKU: He's followed the recruiter.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Puts her hands on her head*) Idiot! (*To NGOZI*) It's okay, my daughter. It's not your fault.

SERGEANT: (*Hands her the glass*) Have the rest, Mama. Na so life be. Being a soldier is not too bad. But you self, you want to chop the war but you don't want the war to chop you. How can?

MOTHER COURAGE: Daughter, you'll have to replace your brother.

OPOKU and NGOZI *harness themselves to the mammy-wagon and start pulling.*

MOTHER COURAGE *walks alongside them. The wagon rolls on.*

SERGEANT: (*Shouts after them*) If from war you benefit, then you must give back to it.

## 2

**Two years later. Further West. MOTHER COURAGE reunites briefly with EKET, who is being honoured for bravery.**

GENERAL MENSAH'S *tent, next to the kitchen. The sound of mortar fire. COOK is arguing with MOTHER COURAGE over the price of a chicken.*

RADIO VOICE: It's two years since Jigawa's conscription drive. The war shows no sign of ending. General Mensah of the West Africa Forces refutes accusations of genocide. Questions are also being asked about Mensah's Operation Starve And

Shoot. Mass graves are being discovered everywhere. The truth is atrocities are being committed by both sides in this increasingly bloody war.

COOK: (*Laughs sarcastically*) Sixty thousand cedis<sup>6</sup> for this miserable bird.

MOTHER COURAGE: This steroid-injected chicken imported from Thailand? The general who can die for food won't eat tonight because he cannot find ordinary sixty thousand cedis.

COOK: I can get ten of those for thirty thousand cedis by the roundabout.

MOTHER COURAGE: Under a siege? People are eating relief aid sacks! Maybe you'll get a cricket—*maybe*, oh. Fifty thousand cedis for a Thailand chicken in a state of siege.

COOK: We are the ones launching Operation SAS.

MOTHER COURAGE: Na that one you go chop? The rebels are surrounded yet their bellies are full. We are here making mouth on empty stomachs. I've gone round all the farmers. They have nothing left.

COOK: They have. They hide it when they see your stingy arse coming.

MOTHER COURAGE: Rubbish! They are boiling their own toenails for soup. And you want me to depart with my dearly beloved, juicy chicken for forty thousand cedis.

(*Clicks her fingers over her head*) Abomination!

COOK: Thirty thousand. I said thirty thousand.

MOTHER COURAGE: My friend, this chicken's Dad fought alongside Colonel Sanders in the Gulf War. This one is Asia's former kung fu fighting champion.

COOK: Indeed. (*Holds up a bit of rancid meat*) Premium intestines. This will be the General's dinner instead of your substance-abusing champion.

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<sup>6</sup> Ghanaian unit of currency

MOTHER COURAGE: It still reeks of the mass grave you dug it out of.

COOK: This bull was shitting last night.

MOTHER COURAGE: Obviously it hasn't finished.

COOK: I will dip it in acid if I have to.

MOTHER COURAGE: Dip it well, or the General will think you've poisoned him with anthrax.

GENERAL MENSAH, CHAPLAIN *and* EKET *enter the tent.*

GENERAL: (*Slapping EKET on the back*) Sit down beside me. Your medal is waiting for you. You are the true son of your father. To keep West Africa one is a task that must be done. God knows you are fighting for him on the side against these pagans and Moslems. We prevent regional disintegration; what do these lowlifes and unbelievers do? They dash their livestock to their priests and imams. God punish all of them in Jesus' name. But you showed them. I have a bottle of White Horse. (*They drink*) None for you, Chaplain. Jesus will turn your saliva into wine. What will my hero eat?

EKET: Chicken, sir. I want fried chicken.

GENERAL: I feel like chicken tonight, too. Chicken it is! Cook! Chicken!

COOK: (*Hisses*) There's no food and this man is inviting the whole world to dinner.

MOTHER COURAGE *signals to him to keep quiet so she can listen.*

EKET: It's hungry work carrying out genocide.

MOTHER COURAGE: By my ancestors, it's my Eket.

COOK: Who?

MOTHER COURAGE: My eldest. They kidnapped him two years ago. He must be making it if he's the General's guest. Did you not hear our hero wants chicken?

Luckily, I have one for a special sale price of only one hundred thousand cedis.

GENERAL: (*Sits down with EKET and CHAPLAIN*) Cook! Chicken!

COOK: You this thief. Give me the chicken.

MOTHER COURAGE: Market forces. You want this miserable bird?

COOK: Yes. God won't forgive you for selling me that miserable bird for seventy thousand cedis.

MOTHER COURAGE: God won't forgive me for selling it for one hundred thousand cedis. No amount should be spared on my son, the General's best friend.

COOK: (*Grudgingly gives her the money*) That includes service charge for plucking the feathers and stuffing it while I boil another pot of water.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Sits to pluck the chicken*) Imagine Eket's face when he sees me. He's the professor of the family. I have a stupid one, too. He's honest *and* half-Nigerian. What are the chances? My daughter is—there. She is dumb but I suppose she can keep a secret.

COOK: A woman who can keep a secret! What are the chances?

GENERAL: Swallow, my son, swallow. White Horse is my favourite. None of the local rubbish. I've only one bottle left but I will share it with my real soldiers. You still believe in our mission. Unlike Chaplain who prays but cannot make a crucifix from two twigs and string. I want to hear how you ventilated those farmers and captured their cattle. When are they being brought here?

EKET: In about two days, sir.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Stuffing the chicken*) You see—the boy protects his mother’s interest. He delayed the cattle’s arrival otherwise you would have told me to stuff the chicken.

EKET: I discovered the herders took the cattle out every night to a bush clearing to sell to city traders. I let them gather the cattle as usual. I starved my soldiers.

GENERAL: Smart.

EKET: Then we attacked. But we didn’t realise the farmers had weapons. Mostly swords and knives. But a few had dane guns. And they outnumbered us three to one. They rushed us. Before I knew it they knocked my machine gun from my hand. I started reciting “the Lord is my shepherd.”

GENERAL: After reciting Psalm 23, what did you do?

EKET: I started laughing.

GENERAL: You started laughing!

EKET: I was using brain for them. Once I convinced them I wasn’t mad we started haggling. Then I said: “Eh? Two hundred thousand francs for one cow is a crime against humanity. I will pay you one-fifty.” Bloody illiterates, while they were dazed by my audacity I dived for my machine gun and minced them. When you don’t have a spade, a plough will do.

GENERAL: Chaplain, what do you think of that?

CHAPLAIN: Literally speaking, there’s no such saying in the bible. It might be in the seventh book of Moses. But our Saviour did feed the five thousand, minus though who brought their own lunches. There was no civil war and no tribes forced to live together so he could ask people to love each other. Things have changed.

GENERAL: (*Laughs*) Indeed! You deserve a drink for that, prophet of Baal. (*To*

EKET) Blasted them to hell to save your men from starvation. I hope you covered up

their bodies. Anyway, the bible says, “Whatever you do to the least of my children you do unto me.” And you gave them beef to go with their gari so that they may fight for regional unification and for God on the side.

EKET: That’s why I picked up my machine-gun and blasted them to pieces.

GENERAL: You are a young Bokassa. Soon I will introduce you to Field Marshal Jigawa.

EKET: I saw him on television, outside his multi-million dollar mansion standing beside his custom-built Limousine. Sir, he is my role model.

GENERAL: Already you resemble him. You are like a son to me, Eket. Brave soldiers are as scarce as an honest arms dealer. (*Shows EKET a map*) See. Even with Operation SAS we are not doing well.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Plucks the chicken angrily*) Useless General.

COOK: I know the man can die for food. Why is he useless?

MOTHER COURAGE: If he’s so great a General why need heroes to fight his war? When he was sleeping during military strategy class. The rebels use children and they are winning. Pity heroes. They can’t sell film rights when they’re dead, so what’s the point?

GENERAL: Your father must have been a soldier.

EKET: A very brave mercenary. My mother doesn’t like it that I’m a soldier. She taught me a song. I can sing it for you.

GENERAL: Music to go with our drink! (*Shouts*) And when is the food coming?

EKET: It is called “Song of the Woman and the Soldier.” (*Sings*)

The rifle shoots, the cutlass cuts  
When out of bullets, use your butt  
See there’s danger in everything

A soldier does even peace-keeping  
My woman's love seems not enough  
For you a warrior rough and tough  
Lend me your ears my soldier boy  
A bit of common sense employ  
You'll be a proverb for the foolhardy  
Because you refused to listen to me

The soldier held his love and laughed  
I am warrior king, don't be daft  
Next time you hold me to your breast  
Will be against my medal-filled chest  
The woman stepped back, began to quiver  
As she begged, "Love beware of the river"

MOTHER COURAGE *sings from the kitchen, banging on a pan.*

Lend me your ears my soldier boy  
A bit of common sense employ  
Don't become a proverb for the foolhardy  
Because you refused to listen to me

EKET: Who's that? (EKET *enters the kitchen. Embraces* MOTHER COURAGE)

Mummy! I don't believe it! Oh, wonderful day! What of Opoku and Ngozi?

MOTHER COURAGE: They are fine. Ngozi is with me. Your brother is paymaster of Fourth Marine Corps. I tried to stop him from joining. At least he's not seeing action.

EKET: Are your feet OK?

MOTHER COURAGE: A bit. You see I have to wear slippers all the time.

GENERAL *joins them.*

GENERAL: Are you Mama Eket? Welcome! I need more of your children, oh.

EKET: You heard us? You heard my heroic story and the General's praise for me?

MOTHER COURAGE: I heard. (*Slaps EKET*)

EKET: Yeh! You slapped me for stealing cows?

MOTHER COURAGE: For not surrendering when those herders trapped you, stupid.

Am I not always telling you to be careful?

GENERAL *and* CHAPLAIN *laugh.*

### 3

**Three years later. MOTHER COURAGE is imprisoned with part of the Army.**

**She saves NGOZI but OPOKU dies.**

*Afternoon. A pole with the battalion's flag. MOTHER COURAGE ties a washing line to a cannon. Her wagon is richly loaded. She is folding clothes with NGOZI and haggling with QUARTERMASTER over a sack of bullets. OPOKU in his paymaster uniform is watching the proceedings. ASHEWO AJEGUNLE, a pretty woman, is sewing a headtie and drinking liquor. She is wearing leggings and high-heeled shoes.*

RADIO VOICE: (*Advert*) You've been marching for days. You come across a village filled with women. It's time to bring out Camouflage Condoms. Specially designed for black men on the go. With their unique ribbing system, Camouflage Condoms give maximum comfort. Camouflage Condoms, the best a man can get.

QUARTERMASTER: OK, two hundred dollars for everything. I'm selling cheap because the colonel and the officers have embezzled our allowance.

MOTHER COURAGE: If I'm caught I'll be shot with them. You're selling the bullets you should fight with.

QUARTERMASTER: This is business. Scratch my back, I scratch yours.

MOTHER COURAGE: I don't want army trouble at cost price.

QUARTERMASTER: Cost price? Sell it down the road to Seventh Battalion's QM. He'll pay you one thousand dollars. Write him a receipt for two thousand five. He's sold off all his own ammunition and not for the bargain price I'm selling to you.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Suspicious*) That's serious business for you to overlook.

QUARTERMASTER: He eats with his mouth wide open. If that's not a sign of dishonesty, then tell me what is.

MOTHER COURAGE: Just say you won't tell me what the two of you are up to. For such a price I'll take my chances. (*Takes the consignment. To NGOZI*) Put this away and pay Quartermaster one-fifty. (*QUARTERMASTER protests*) For insurance. I don't trust either of you. (*QUARTERMASTER continues his protest*) One-fifty and that's all. (*NGOZI takes the consignment round the back*)

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To OPOKU*) Take your pants. No woman will marry you if you keep leaking like that. Make sure you use protection when sleeping with the battalion's financial records.

OPOKU: (*Embarrassed*) They are safe from all kinds of liquids, Mama.

MOTHER COURAGE: And don't soil your father's name by running away with it, oh. They made you paymaster because you're not sharp. Hide your pants before someone sees them.

OPOKU: I'll put them under my mattress. (*Starts to leave*)

QUARTERMASTER: I will follow you.

MOTHER COURAGE: Don't teach him fraud, oh. You Nigerians.

QUARTERMASTER *leaves without acknowledging her.*

ASHEWO: (*Waves after QUARTERMASTER*) You don't know our face again, Oga Quartermaster.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To ASHEWO*) I don't want him near my boy. He will spoil him for me.... Ah, the war favours us. In a few more years all of Africa will be engulfed and will be one big common market for us. You are drinking with your condition.

ASHEWO: Which condition? Who are the people telling lies against me!

MOTHER COURAGE: Everyone.

ASHEWO: Because they don't want better for me. Everybody avoids me as if I am smelling. This useless headtie! (*Throws it away*) I used to avoid alcohol. It ages the skin. When I was with 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Division all the soldiers knew me in a biblical

fashion. I should have stayed with my husband when he took another wife behind my back. Pride is a luxury for the common people. If we don't take shit we get nothing.

MOTHER COURAGE: I beg don't start with your epistle of Peter. Not in front of my daughter. She's innocent.

ASHEWO: She's naive. Let her learn from my experience. Then she can harden her heart against love.

MOTHER COURAGE: You can never harden the human heart against love.

ASHEWO: Then my heart will carry less load. Ngozi, I'm from Monrovia where I met my husband, an army cook from Freetown. He was fine and slim. Ngozi, God did not make West Africans to be slim. Beware of slim people, they are very dishonest. All the time we were together he was plotting to bring another woman into the house. And she wasn't the only one he was sleeping with. His nickname was Peter the Pipe because he never stopped smoking when he was performing. It was as if he was fucking by force. *(Takes off her shoes. Sings the Song of the Fraternisation):*

I was young, of marrying age

The war was all the rage

Into town came the army

They all wanted to get laid

CHORUS: They said it was the policy

Of their organisation

Public relations of a sexual kind

They called Fraternisation

The one who took me looked

Good enough, he said I was a babe

In truth I was his bit of rough

He just needed to get laid

They said it was the policy

Of cross-pollination

Public relations of a sexual kind

They termed Fraternisation

It must have been

Love at first sight

The bushes kept moving

Far into the night

All good things must come to an end

One day they packed up and left

Rules of engagement

Became constructive estrangement

God knows we girls did our best

CHORUS

I've wasted five years looking for him with no success. See what foolishness can do  
to a person?

*She walks unsteadily behind the cart.*

MOTHER COURAGE: Don't forget your headtie.

ASHEWO: Forget it.

MOTHER COURAGE: Learn from her, Ngozi. Don't marry a soldier. Love is God's free gift. Anything free is too good to be true. Even with us civilians love is risky. Because you're a woman you become the man's slave. Be grateful you can't talk. There'll be no quarrelling.... Look, it's our General's cook. What are you looking for?

*Enter COOK and CHAPLAIN*

CHAPLAIN: Eket sent me to you. Cook came on his own. He likes you.

COOK: (*Hisses*) I came to receive some fresh air. Don't mind him.

MOTHER COURAGE: What is Eket's problem? I've no more money for him.

CHAPLAIN: Actually, I was sent to his brother, the paymaster.

MOTHER COURAGE: He is not here. He did not give his brother money to hold. He's trying to exploit him. (*She gives CHAPLAIN some money from a purse she keeps in the folds of her dress*) Give him this. Using system to exploit a mother's love. Shame on him.

COOK: How much is this? Add more! He's off with the division and who knows, to his death. When he dies now you will start wailing. You women: callous now and regretful later.

CHAPLAIN: What is your own, Cook? To die in this war is a blessing. This is a religious war, not just a war for regime change and regional unification.

COOK: (*Sarcastic*) But of course, how stupid of me. On the surface it looks like an ordinary war, what with battling over natural resources, and with multinationals supplying arms in exchange for mining concessions. Let's not forget the collateral damage of rape, ethnic cleansing and looting. In fact, this is a war made in heaven. All the same it dries the mouth.

CHAPLAIN: (*To MOTHER COURAGE*) I tried to drive him back but he said you've bewitched him with love medicine. He keeps dreaming about you.

COOK (*lights his pipe*): Only of your pretty self serving me palmwine. Don't mind Chaplain! (*To CHAPLAIN*) You, *nko*?<sup>7</sup> Telling me dirty jokes all the way here.

MOTHER COURAGE: A whole chaplain! You no get shame? Let me get you something to drink, before you come on to me.

CHAPLAIN: You're tempting me, said the Bishop to the prostitute, as he entered her bedroom. (*Sees NGOZI*) Fine lady, who are you?

MOTHER COURAGE: She's not fine. She's modest, and she's my daughter, Ngozi.

CHAPLAIN, COOK *and* MOTHER COURAGE *go behind the wagon*. NGOZI *watches them go, then leaves the washing. She picks up the headtie and sits down to put on the high-heeled shoes. From behind the cart we hear MOTHER COURAGE talking politics with CHAPLAIN and COOK.*

MOTHER COURAGE: These useless rebels! Putting their noses where it does not concern them. Okay, we invaded their country. But whose fault, when they cannot govern themselves? And under the cease-fire agreement we withdrew our army when they attacked us. They caused the bloodshed. It's on their heads.

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<sup>7</sup> "You, *nko*?": What of you?

CHAPLAIN: Don't mind them. Our Life President only wanted to liberate their mineral resources from their Eternal Dictator's clutches. If not for him all their country's money would be in America instead of Switzerland.

COOK: Exactly. (*Sarcastic*) Your President only wants true African liberation. A man of his integrity had to stop the Dictator from exterminating his people when they refused to cede their land to the multinationals. Then he discovers that they prefer living under a bloodthirsty bastard. What to do? He starts killing them, too. Then he brings in Western businesses to teach those left how to be civilised democrats by working as underpaid labourers. Poor man, he removed food subsidies at home to fund the war, even though his people screamed, "Not in my name!" But he's a religious man. Church on Sunday, Mosque on Friday. God is on both his sides. Without doubt, the President is a man whose moral compass points North. (*Laughs cynically*)

MOTHER COURAGE: You're not Nigerian, or else you would not be talking about our President in that manner.

CHAPLAIN: And you eat his food aid.

COOK: I cook his food and sell the food aid on the black market.

MOTHER COURAGE: He will be Life President because people follow his lead. Ministers talking of God-given duty and moral justification, that history will judge them. But they know people aren't stupid. Everybody is fighting this war for personal gain. Else how does a small person like me get involved?

CHAPLAIN: Next time check which border you've crossed before talking about another man's president.

MOTHER COURAGE: You are thinking the old way! We're all loyal West Africans now with one president. More drink?

NGOZI is parading around in ASHEWO'S headtie, imitating her walk. Suddenly, the sound of rocket fire and automatic rifles. Drums. MOTHER COURAGE, COOK and CHAPLAIN leap from behind the wagon with their glasses in their hands.

QUARTERMASTER: (*Rushes in*) The rebels! A surprise attack! (*Runs away*)

MOTHER COURAGE: My washing, oh! My clothes! (*Tries to rescue her washing*)

COOK: The General needs his cook! Courage, later, so we can talk properly. (*Runs away*)

MOTHER COURAGE: Your pipe! You've left your pipe!

COOK: (*From afar*) Keep it for me.

MOTHER COURAGE: What kind of bad head is this. And we were making money.

CHAPLAIN: I must disappear too. It is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers." A designer *agbada*<sup>8</sup> would cover my uniform most stylishly.

MOTHER COURAGE: I don't lend out clothes even if your life is in danger. I won't fall for that trick again.

CHAPLAIN: If they see my uniform, they'll know I'm of the President's Church.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Gives him an agbada*) Take. I will never learn. Go on.

CHAPLAIN: God bless you, Mother. I will stay here. The rebels will suspect a man running around in a designer *agbada* during a firefight.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Sees NGOZI with the headtie*) Yepa! What are you doing with that tart's headtie? You want to catch AIDS? And with the rebels approaching? (*Snatches it off NGOZI'S head*) They will turn you into an instant prostitute. See,

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<sup>8</sup> *Agbada*: flowing robe worn by men

she's even wearing the shoes. Off! (*Tries to take the shoes off NGOZI'S feet*)

Chaplain, I beg, help me take these shoes off her. I'm coming. (*Goes to the cart*)

ASHEWO: (*Returns, powdering her face*) The rebels are coming! New customers for me. Who has taken my headtie, oh! I left it here. The rebels will think I'm cheap, dressed like this. I cannot even find my mirror. (*To Chaplain*) Do I look all right? The powder is not too much?

CHAPLAIN: You look fine.

ASHEWO: Who has taken my shoes, oh! (*NGOZI hides the shoes under her wrapper*) I left them here. Now I have to return to my quarters with my bare feet. (*Exits*)

*Enter OPOKU running, with a small box.*

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Enters, her hands filled with ash. To NGOZI*) Here, Mama's special powder. Guaranteed to make you man repellent. (*To OPOKU*) What's that?

OPOKU: My unit's cash box.

MOTHER COURAGE: Get rid of it. You are now Retired Paymaster.

OPOKU: It's my responsibility. (*Goes behind*)

MOTHER COURAGE: (*To CHAPLAIN, harshly*) You will not take off your gown? You think they won't recognise you because of the *agbada*? (*Rubs NGOZI'S face with ash*) If you move again I will slap you. A good rub of Mama's Special keeps you safe. These rebels, after looting, next thing is to find women. Face front. Better. No one will touch you now. (*To OPOKU*) Where did you put the cashbox?

OPOKU: I hid it inside the wagon.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Furious*) In my wagon? God punish you, you bastard of a child! They will shoot all of us!

OPOKU: I will remove it from the wagon and run away with it.

MOTHER COURAGE: It's too late. Stay here.

CHAPLAIN: (*Half undressed*) *Lakuli!* The flag! Take down the flag!

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Takes down the flag*) My head, oh! I forgot about it!

*The rocket fire gets louder.*

*Early afternoon, three days later. The cannon is gone. MOTHER COURAGE, NGOZI, CHAPLAIN and OPOKU sit together, anxiously.*

OPOKU: We've been here for three days. Sergeant trusts me but even he will be saying, "Opoku has disappeared with our cashbox."

MOTHER COURAGE: Thank the gods they are not looking for you.

CHAPLAIN: What of me? My spirit is overflowing but I dare not pray.

MOTHER COURAGE: See me see trouble, oh! One with religion, the other with a cashbox. Which one is more dangerous?

CHAPLAIN: Our fate is in the Lord's hands.

MOTHER COURAGE: It hasn't reached that stage yet, even though I sleep with one eye open at night. Opoku, you're the liability, but I think I've been able to keep up appearances with the rebels. I shout out what a bastard the President is, that they should rip his eyes out when they catch him. I ask where I can buy "I Love Rebels" t-shirts. I hear they're all the rage in Cotonou. Among the Moslem ones I show them

that I can point to Mecca. They're still not sure about us but they need a canteen. We are prisoners but so are foetuses in a womb.

CHAPLAIN: (*Eating greedily*) Mother, we must ration our intake. After all, we are the losing side.

MOTHER COURAGE: Victory and defeat are not the same for everybody, even if you're on the same side. The poor can make gain from defeat. Only honour is lost. In Ouagadougou the rebels overran us. In the confusion I took an engine for my wagon. I used it for seven months before we repelled the rebels and they discovered it was missing. Since then we've been pulling the wagon. Victory and defeat are a burden for the poor. The ideal situation is for things to remain in a state of confusion. (*To OPOKU*) Eat!

OPOKU: I don't want to. How will Sergeant pay the wages?

MOTHER COURAGE: Their pay is performance related.

OPOKU: They are soldiers, not mercenaries.

MOTHER COURAGE: I fear for you. I told you to be honest only because you're not smart enough to talk your way out of trouble. It's now becoming a liability. Chaplain and I are off to buy meat and a rebel flag. Chaplain is one in town for finding good beef. Just be glad we're still trading. You don't ask a businessman which side he supports, only how much. (*Goes inside the wagon*)

CHAPLAIN: She's still worried about if the rebels discover the cashbox.

OPOKU: I will hide it somewhere else.

CHAPLAIN: Don't, oh. It's dangerous. The rebels have spies everywhere. Yesterday I was relieving myself in the bush. One of them jumped out from hiding. He was so close I thought I shat him out of my anus. He was a dirty-haired bastard with a patch over one eye.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Climbs down from the wagon with a basket*) And who do these belong to, you prostitute? (*Holds up ASHEWO'S shoes*) Ashewo's shoes. Chaplain, you are the cause of this for saying she's fine. (*Puts them back in the basket*) I'm returning them. She's poisoned her body for money. That one I can understand. You'll do it for free, with cashback! Wait for peace to arrive before you start chasing men, you hear?

CHAPLAIN: She wasn't displaying herself.

MOTHER COURAGE: That wink alone will see her done for. She's got to be part of the landscape. (*To OPOKU*) Leave the cashbox where you kept it, OK? And take care of your sister. The two of you will send me to my grave prematurely.

MOTHER COURAGE and CHAPLAIN leave. NGOZI clears away the dishes.

OPOKU: Not long before the harmattan<sup>9</sup> winds arrive. (*NGOZI points at a tree*) Yes, the forest is drying up. (*NGOZI gestures to ask if he wants a drink*) No, my sister. I'm thinking. Mama doesn't sleep because of anxiety... I will hide the cashbox. Ngo' let me have that drink. (*NGOZI goes behind the cart*) That hole I found by the riverside will do. I'll retrieve it when it's safe to rejoin my unit. They couldn't have gone so far away in only three days. Sergeant will be shocked when he sees me. He will say, "Opoku, Opoku, you will not pass go before going straight to Heaven."

NGOZI returns with a glass. She is confronted by SERGEANT and EYE- PATCH.

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<sup>9</sup> Dry, dusty wind from the north-east of West Africa

EYE-PATCH: Allah rain blessings on you, sister. Have you seen any soldier from the Fourth Marine Corps?

NGOZI, *frightened, runs away, spilling the drink. The two men look at each other and withdraw after seeing OPOKU.*

OPOKU: Oh, you've spilled it, now. Why are you making face? Something in your eye? I don't get you. Anyway, I have to go. There's no way around it. *(He stands up. NGOZI tries to alert him to the danger. He shrugs her off)* I wish I could understand you. I know you mean well. If it's the drink don't worry about it. Save some for another time, eh? *(He takes the cashbox from the wagon and puts it under his shirt)* I'll return in a while. Let go. See you soon.

OPOKU *pulls himself away and runs off. She is distraught.* MOTHER COURAGE and CHAPLAIN return. NGOZI *rushes up to her mother.*

MOTHER COURAGE: What is it? What's wrong? Did someone hurt you? Where is your brother? Calm down and tell me. He has taken the cashbox away? I will kill that boy. Calm down! Use your hands. Ehen, ehen. There was a man with eye-patch.

CHAPLAIN: The eye-patched man is a rebel spy. Did they arrest Opoku? *(NGOZI shakes her head and shrugs her shoulders)* We're finished!

MOTHER COURAGE: *(Takes a rebel flag from her basket. CHAPLAIN attaches it to the mast)* Dance the Hyena Dance.

*Voices in the background. Enter SERGEANT and EYE-PATCH with OPOKU as their prisoner.*

OPOKU: Leave me alone. You found nothing on me.

SERGEANT: This boy is from here. He knows you.

MOTHER COURAGE: Us? No!

OPOKU: I don't know them. I only bought my lunch from them and it was too expensive. Maybe you saw me sitting here eating their salty food.

SERGEANT: Who are you?

MOTHER COURAGE: Honest traders. Maybe he bought food here. Maybe it was a bit salty.

SERGEANT: So, you pretend you don't know each other?

MOTHER COURAGE: I don't need to—I don't know him. I don't go round asking every Timi, Diop and Haruna what is your name or are you an unbeliever. Are you an unbeliever?

OPOKU: How can?

CHAPLAIN: He ate properly, like a European. His lips were sealed even when he was shoving food into it.

SERGEANT: (*To* CHAPLAIN) And you are?

MOTHER COURAGE: He's my houseboy. You must be very thirsty. Let us get you something to drink. Palmwine?

SERGEANT: No alcohol on duty. (*To* EKET) I saw you carrying something. You've hidden it down by the river. Your shirt had a bulge.

MOTHER COURAGE: He might not be the person.

OPOKU: I'm not the one. I saw this man running away. He had a big bulge inside his danshiki. He is the person.

MOTHER COURAGE: You see? A classic case of mistaken identity. It happens. I'm a great judge of people. My name is Mother Courage. Of course you know me.

Everybody knows me. This man's face is honesty itself.

SERGEANT: We are looking for the cashbox of the Fourth Marine Corps. We know the face of the soldier in charge of it. It is you.

OPOKU: It is not me!

SERGEANT: Bring it out or you are finished, take it from me. Where is it?

MOTHER COURAGE: If he was the one he would have shown you where he kept it. When he is not stupid. Open your mouth. The Sergeant is giving you a chance.

OPOKU: But I said it's not with me.

SERGEANT: Follow us, then. We will get it out of you. *(They lead him off)*

MOTHER COURAGE: *(Shouts after them)* He would say if he were the one. He is not stupid. Don't break his arm!

*She runs after them.*

**Later the same evening. CHAPLAIN and NGOZI wash glasses and polish knives.**

MOTHER COURAGE: My son's story has got K-leg. We can talk to the Sergeant, so long as we pretend Opoku is not one of us, otherwise we will join him in front of the firing squad. It is a money matter. Has Ashewo come? I passed her on the way back. She is bringing her colonel boyfriend who wants to set her up in business.

CHAPLAIN: You're not planning to sell the business, are you?

MOTHER COURAGE: How else am I going to raise money for Opoku's release?

CHAPLAIN: But how are you going to live?

MOTHER COURAGE: God will provide.

*Enter ASHEWO, with an old fat Colonel.*

ASHEWO: (*Hugs MOTHER COURAGE*) Mother di Mother! You again. (*Whispers*) I've sold him the idea. We need just a little push. (*Loud*) This is my business advisor. I heard that you want to sell your wagon. I want to enter the business.

MOTHER COURAGE: I want to pawn it out for a while, that's all. This wagon, you can't find it easily during wartime.

ASHEWO: (*Disappointed*) Only for pawn? I heard you were selling it. I'm not sure I want it anymore if it's only for pawn. Or what do you think, Colonel?

COLONEL: Whatever you say, sugar in my tea. I'm behind and in front of you, one hundred per cent.

MOTHER COURAGE: It is for pawn only.

ASHEWO: But you said you were desperate for money.

MOTHER COURAGE: Then I should sell my life away? This wagon is all I have. You don't know when next you'll find another wagon and have a certified financial advisor by your side. For someone with your condition hiring is more sensible.

ASHEWO: Which condition? Stop spreading lies against me! Don't mind her, Colonel. You think it's a great opportunity? But hiring.... You advise an outright purchase don't you?

COLONEL: Outright and Inright, my darling.

MOTHER COURAGE: See, over there, where those men are squatting? They sell wagons there.

ASHEWO: What's your problem? Colonel, well? Should we buy or go find another wagon?

COLONEL: We can go looking.

ASHEWO: That gives us two weeks to have fun, and you know how I love having fun with you.

CHAPLAIN: She has/

ASHEWO: (*Sharply*) Shut up!

ASHEWO: When can you repay me?

MOTHER COURAGE: Two weeks, even one week, self.

ASHEWO: I'm not sure again. Colonel, advise me now. (*Takes COLONEL aside*)

She has to sell the bloody thing, don't mind her, playing tough with me. I can get the money from the Major. He is ready to die for me. He says I remind him of Jennifer Lopez, but with a bigger bottom.

COLONEL: I've told you not to even smell the same air as that hardened pimp. I have money more than him. I will buy the wagon for you. I will buy ten wagons for you.

ASHEWO: You do enough for me already. I spread myself about only so that I don't burden you. But if you think the Major is a pimp, and since you are my one and only advisor, I will do what you say.

COLONEL: Exactly.

ASHEWO: Because you are the one that said so.

COLONEL: (*Salutes*) See me standing to attention.

ASHEWO: Colonel-di-Colonel! (*To MOTHER COURAGE*) Colonel has advised me. Draw up a contract: the wagon and everything in it is mine if after two weeks you

don't square me. I will show you the money later. (*To COLONEL*) Colonel, go on ahead of me. Just bear me in mind for tonight.

COLONEL: What else do I have to think about—the war?

ASHEWO: Just remember...

COLONEL: Safe sex is no sex.

ASHEWO: Colonel-di-Catholic! I want to do a stock take. (*She kisses him. Exit*

COLONEL. *She climbs into the wagon*) You no get better shoes?

MOTHER COURAGE: Which stupid stock take again! The wagon is already yours.

When are you going to talk to the Sergeant? After the execution?

ASHEWO: OK, let me count the shirts.

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Pulls her down by the wrapper*) You looter! So soon you've forgotten about Opoku. Run! Don't tell Sergeant our relationship to him. Say you're his girlfriend, God knows they'll release him on compassionate grounds.

ASHEWO: That is not funny. I've organised with One-Eye. He should be waiting for me in the bushes.

CHAPLAIN: Where else do you meet men?

ASHEWO: Shut up!

CHAPLAIN: Haggle. Don't just offer him the whole amount. Start low and let him bid up. One thousand dollars should be enough for them.

MOTHER COURAGE: Ashewo, don't haggle. My boy's life is at stake. Run!

CHAPLAIN: But how are we going to feed? Your daughter isn't exactly God's gift to men.

MOTHER COURAGE: I'm banking on the cashbox. They'll reward Opoku's honesty.

CHAPLAIN: My dear, it would be easier to believe in God. You think Ashewo can do the deal?

MOTHER COURAGE: Of course. See how badly she wants my wagon. And for how long can she depend on financial aid from the Colonel? *Oya*, to work! Ngozi, wash the cutlery. Chaplain, the glasses. I'm expecting customers tonight. We will celebrate Opoku's return as well. Thank God bribery is the only thriving industry left. As long as there's a palm to grease, the innocent poor will escape the firing squad.

ASHEWO: (*Dashes in, breathless*) Two thousand is the last price. And they want it now, now, before the CO arrives to take over. I will go and call the Colonel to meet with One-Eye. Your boy owned up to having the cashbox after they lit cigarette lighters under his armpits. The real *wahala*<sup>10</sup> is that he threw it into the river.

MOTHER COURAGE: Into the river! How will I get my money back?

ASHEWO: So, you wanted to get money from the cashbox, is that it? You nearly played me. Well, you have to find money elsewhere or they will smoke the rest of your son. Or we can drop the matter and you can keep your wagon.

MOTHER COURAGE: Ashewo, don't harass me. I've said the wagon is yours. It has been my backbone for God knows how long. Have to think! Where will I get two thousand dollars? You should have bargained with him. I need money in reserve. I don't want to become a refugee. Go back and tell him fifteen hundred, last.

Whichever way it goes, my wagon is gone.

ASHEWO: But I've told you; One-Eye says their CO will soon arrive. He wants two thousand, final and quickly.

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<sup>10</sup> problem

MOTHER COURAGE: No way. I've worked for thirty years. This one is already twenty-five with no husband. I still have to look after her. It's fifteen hundred or finish.

ASHEWO: What's my own? He's your son. (*Exits*)

MOTHER COURAGE *avoids looking at* CHAPLAIN *and* NGOZI. *She sits down to help* NGOZI *wash the cutlery.*

MOTHER COURAGE: If you like, break the tumblers, you hear? They are not ours anymore. Don't look at me like that! Opoku will return to us, even if I have to pay the whole two thousand. With a few thousand naira we can stock up and start again.

CHAPLAIN: The Lord will provide.

MOTHER COURAGE: Dry those tumblers properly. (*They wash the cutlery in silence. NGOZI suddenly runs sobbing behind the wagon*)

ASHEWO: They said no. I told you. One-Eye wanted to leave instantly. He said what is the point. The drums will start beating soon and they'll pronounce judgement. I begged him to hold on for one minute while I get back to you again.

MOTHER COURAGE: All right, give him the two thousand. Run! (*ASHEWO runs off. They sit in silence. CHAPLAIN stops washing the glasses. The sound of drums in the distance*) Did I bargain for too long?

CHAPLAIN *stands up and goes to the back.* MOTHER COURAGE *remains seated. It grows dark. The drumming stops. It gets light again.* MOTHER COURAGE *remains still. Enter ASHEWO, distraught.*

ASHEWO: What kind of mother are you, putting your business first? The rebels gave your son eleven bullets. Normally they give ten. They discovered he supports Manchester United. The real danger is that they think he kept the cashbox here with you and that you know him. They are bringing him here for you to identify. I beg you don't know him, oh. Let me hide Ngozi from all this. (MOTHER COURAGE *shakes her head*) She knows?

MOTHER COURAGE: She knows. Bring her here.

ASHEWO *gets* NGOZI *who goes to stand beside her mother*. MOTHER COURAGE *holds her hand*. *Enter two stretcher-bearers with a body*. SERGEANT *walks beside it*. *They put down the stretcher*.

SERGEANT: We want this man's name for our records. He bought food from you a while ago, maybe he told you his name. Do you recognise him? (*Removes the sheet*. (MOTHER COURAGE *shakes her head in denial*) At all? (MOTHER COURAGE *shakes her head again*) Okay-oh. Take the body and dump it in the mass grave. He is an Unknown Soldier.

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## 9

**Two years later. Half the population of West Africa has died. Epidemic kills what is left by the slaughter. In the former flourishing country there is famine. We meet MOTHER COURAGE in the mountains with the Union Army. The harmattan is bitter. Business is very bad. COOK gets a letter from Monrovia and departs.**

*In front of a wrecked Church. A grey morning in the dry season. The wind howls.*

MOTHER COURAGE and COOK *in near rags are pulling the wagon.*

COOK: This is real darkness. Nobody's awake yet.

MOTHER COURAGE: But this is the Church. The pastor will have to wake up to come and ring the bell.

COOK: What would be the point? The whole place is bombed to hell.

MOTHER COURAGE: But people are still living here. I heard a dog bark.

COOK: If the pastor has food, he won't be willing to share.

MOTHER COURAGE: Let us sing some hymns for him, then.

COOK: This is rubbish. (*Suddenly*) I received a letter from my aunt in Monrovia. My mother has died. I've inherited her beer parlour. Here, read it. Ignore the part where she condemns my philandering and roaming about.

MOTHER COURAGE: Cook, I too am fed up with this nonsense life. I'm like the hunter's dog that retrieves the game but gets sod all. I've nothing to sell. People have no money to buy. Last week someone tried to sell me a set of kente cloth for two eggs. For a bag of salt, she'd include her dishwasher. A dishwasher can you imagine? People are eating their young. Imams have been caught stealing.

COOK: Africa is dying.

MOTHER COURAGE: I'm seriously considering a refugee camp for Ngozi and myself. To have at least a few years of peace together.

COOK: We could form a partnership and run the beer parlour. Consider it, Courage. My mind is made up. I'm returning to Monrovia with or without you.

MOTHER COURAGE: I must talk to Ngozi first. You've only just told me. I don't just make decisions like that. Ngozi! (NGOZI *comes out of the wagon*) Cook and I want to settle in Monrovia. He has inherited a beer parlour there. We get on well and he has a nose for business. The peacekeepers have kept the place stable. You'll have a great opportunity to catch a husband. Looks don't count for everything and God knows what with all the amputees around, a little scar won't be a blemish. It's time for us to live life. Look at your body covered in lice. We must decide whether we want to keep on the road or to settle down in Monrovia. So we have decided.

COOK: Courage, I need to speak with you alone.

MOTHER COURAGE: You can go, Ngo'. (NGOZI *climbs back into the wagon*)

COOK: I thought you took the hint. You can't take her with you.

NGOZI *sticks her head out and eavesdrops.*

MOTHER COURAGE: You want me to leave my daughter behind?

COOK: I don't have enough money to look after a third person. I know we are African and family is important, blah, blah, blah. God knows how many children I have to cater for back home. They will all pop out of the woodwork once they discover I'm back. Let her keep the wagon and find her way.

MOTHER COURAGE: I was hoping she would find a husband in Monrovia.

COOK: For where? She might be good for a fuck but to have in the house 24-7?

Which man in his right mind wants a zombie for a wife?

MOTHER COURAGE: That's my daughter! Lower your voice.

COOK: And if I lower it, will she turn into Miss Africa? She cannot come with us, period. She will scare off customers. Tell the truth. A creature like her would put you off your drink.

MOTHER COURAGE: Shut up! Don't talk of my daughter like that.

COOK: Look, a light in the Church. Quick, sing!

MOTHER COURAGE: She cannot survive on her own. How will she pull the wagon by herself? She's afraid of the war. She has nightmares all the time. All it takes is a report on the radio. She's too gentle. She kept a rabbit we ran over last week. She was sorry for it.

COOK: That is not my problem. The parlour cannot accommodate three of us.

*(Shouts)* Peace unto this house! We bring you the Song of Solomon, Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor and other great fallen leaders. This is proof that you're dealing with honest people who are really struggling through this war.

You know of wise King Solomon

Knowledge over gold his choice

*(In itself the choice of a wise man)*

He soon realised the way of the world

And wished he'd lost his voice.

He soon took to wine and women

And building castles in the air

For he realised the way God made him

God was only being fair

I think you understand me. Virtues are the most dangerous things on earth. Science and religion have proved it. Nature comes up with a mechanism to displace virtue and restore balance to the earth.

VOICE: *(From Upstairs)* You down there! Come and get some food!

MOTHER COURAGE: What you've said has killed my appetite. I'm not saying you're wrong but is that final?

COOK: Yes. Consider it.

MOTHER COURAGE: Consideration's out of it. I can't leave my child behind.

COOK: I didn't expect you to. Common sense has little place when it comes to family. But I stand my ground. Let's get some food. I didn't sing for nothing.

MOTHER COURAGE: Wait, let me get Ngozi.

COOK: When they see three of us they will drive us away. Food is scarce. We'll go in and save some for her. *(They go)*

NGOZI *appears from the wagon with a bundle. She looks around to make sure COOK and MOTHER COURAGE have left. She arranges on the ground an old pair of COOK'S trousers and a skirt of her mother's next to each other, so that they will be easily spotted. She finishes with it and wants to leave with her bundle when MOTHER COURAGE returns.*

MOTHER COURAGE: *(With a bowl of food)* Ngozi! What are you doing with that bundle? *(Inspects the bundle)* She's packed her things. You were listening to us. I told him I'm not going to Monrovia without you. What would we do there even? There are still drops to be squeezed out of this war. *(Sees the skirt and trousers)* You are stupid. What do you think I would have thought when I saw that and you had gone? *(Holds*

NGOZI *tight*) I didn't reject him because of you, so don't get any ideas. It was because of the wagon. Offload Cook's stuff for him and let's go in the opposite direction. (*Climbs up onto the wagon and throw out the rest of COOK'S belongings*) That's that. From now on, it's just the two of us, mother and daughter. Come on it looks like it's going to rain. Harmattan is ended.

*They hitch themselves onto the wagon and go. COOK comes back and looks uncomprehendingly at his things.*

10

**For the entire year MOTHER COURAGE and NGOZI pull their wagon after an increasingly dishevelled army.**

*Country road. MOTHER COURAGE and NGOZI are pulling the wagon.*

MOTHER COURAGE:        This war don tire person  
   Thank God for the rain  
   Make farmers till dem fields  
   So trader like me fit gain

11

**The following year. Union troops besiege Umuahia City. MOTHER COURAGE loses NGOZI and continues on her own. The war is far from being over.**

*The wagon, in dire shape, stands near a farmhouse with a huge thatched roof, which is leaning against a mud wall. It is night. Out of the woods appear a sergeant and three soldiers heavily armed.*

SERGEANT: Maintain silence. Anyone opens their mouth, shoot to kill.

SOLDIER 1: (*Shouts*) Yes Sir!

SERGEANT: (*Hisses*) Are you deaf?

SOLDIER 1: (*Whispers*) Sorry sir.

SERGEANT: Sorry for yourself.

SOLDIER 2: But Sergeant, we need a guide. We'll make noise when we knock on the door.

SERGEANT: Eh, you can blow the door down with your grenade instead. (SOLDIER 1 *makes to brings out his grenade*) Look at that fool! Knocking is a natural noise. It could be me knocking that one's head against a wall. Come on.

*They go up to the door and knock. A Farmer's wife answers. They do not say anything. Two soldiers go in.*

MAN'S VOICE: (*Inside*) What's happening?

*The soldiers bring out a farmer and his son.*

SERGEANT: (*Points at the wagon, from which NGOZI has emerged*) There's another person. (SOLDIER 2 *drags her out*) Is there anyone else living here?

FARMER: This is our son. This girl is deaf. Her mother is in town buying supplies. People are fleeing the town and are selling their property cheap. They are travelling traders.

SERGEANT: All right. Now, do your mouths like this. (*Covers his mouth with his hand. They copy him*) That's right. Not a sound, otherwise I shoot you. I need one of you to show us a way into town. (*Points at YOUNG FARMER*) You.

YOUNG FARMER: I don't know a way.

SOLDIER 2: (*Grinning*) Oh, yeah?

YOUNG FARMER: I don't help Union troops.

SERGEANT: Is that so? (*To SOLDIER 2*) Land him one. *Only one, oh!*

SOLDIER 2 *lands YOUNG FARMER a blow in the stomach with the butt of his rifle.*

YOUNG FARMER: (*Cries and falls to the ground in pain*) Ah! Even if you kill me, I will never betray my people!

SOLDIER 1: Sergeant, I know how to open his eyes. (*He goes to the cowshed*) Two cows and an ox. Either you show us the way or they eat lead.

YOUNG FARMER: Ah, please, don't kill our cattle!

FARMER'S WIFE: (*Weeps*) Sergeant, I beg, don't kill them. We will starve.

SERGEANT: Well, then.

SOLDIER 1: Mister Ox, you first.

YOUNG FARMER: (*To FARMER*) Daddy, should I help them? (*FARMER nods*) I will help you.

FARMER'S WIFE: Thank you, Sergeant. God will reward you. You will not miss road. All your enemies will be vanquished/

FARMER: Enough!

SOLDIER 1: I told you. Cut off their oxygen, and they become cowards.

*Led by YOUNG FARMER, the soldiers depart.*

FARMER: They want to bombard the town again. When civilians are fleeing.

FARMER'S WIFE: It never stopped them before. Maybe these ones are just scouts.  
What are you doing?

FARMER: *(Puts a ladder on the roof and climbs up it)* They might be part of a battalion. I have to find out. Ehen, what did I say? An armoured division! Tanks, cannons, rocket launchers all up the hill and beyond. They want to exterminate the town. God help the people.

FARMER'S WIFE: Is there any light in the town?

FARMER: *(Climbs down)* No. They are still asleep. Once they get into position, they will massacre everyone.

FARMER'S WIFE: The guards will see them and warn everyone in time.

FARMER: Which film are you watching? They must have been killed by now or else they would have sounded the alarm.

FARMER'S WIFE: If only we had more people...

FARMER: It's just ourselves and a mute.

FARMER'S WIFE: We cannot do anything?

FARMER: Nothing we can do.

FARMER'S WIFE: *(To NGOZI)* We can pray. Pray, girl, pray! You can't talk but you can pray. God will hear you more than he will hear us. *(They all kneel down, NGOZI behind the farmers)* Our father, who art in Heaven, hear us in this hour of

need. Preserve this city and the lives of those who dwell therein. Except for Mama Sheni who owes me two thousand naira. Her house is Number 45 Kelly Street, opposite Ibukun Cinema, next to the barbershop close to... (FARMER *gives her a withering look*) But of course no need to give you directions Lord. Wake up every man, woman and child, oh Lord, I say wake up every living thing in that town and give them wings to fly away. Oh Protector of the Weak, watch over our families and their children who are sleeping. Including my nephew, baby Paulina, who is going to become either a lesbian or a criminal. She fondled my breast in an adult way. (*Throughout the prayer, NGOZI is disturbed*) We would be your messengers Lord, but it has been written that we will not be your instruments in this case. Thy will be done, oh Lord. (FARMER'S WIFE *and* FARMER *possessed by the Holy Spirit flail about and speak in tongues*)

NGOZI *sneaks unnoticed into the wagon and takes something out of it and hides it under her wrapper. She climbs up onto the roof of the cowshed. FARMER and FARMER'S WIFE continue to be in rapture. NGOZI sits on the roof and beats the talking drum, which she had hidden under her wrapper.*

FARMER: God is answering our prayer!

FARMER'S WIFE: No! It's the mute!

FARMER: Has she gone mad?

FARMER'S WIFE: Get her down from there!

FARMER *runs towards the ladder. NGOZI pulls it onto the roof.*

FARMER'S WIFE: She's going to get us killed.

FARMER: Stop it! Come down right now! Come down I say!

FARMER'S WIFE: The Union troops are going to slit our throats.

FARMER: (*Searching for stones*) I will stone you, oh!

FARMER'S WIFE: You have no heart at all, this girl. The Union troops will kill us.

NGOZI *stares in the distance and continues drumming.*

FARMER'S WIFE: (*To FARMER*) What did I tell you? I said we should not allow these riffraff onto our farm. They don't care if we lose our cattle.

SERGEANT: (*Enters running*) You people are finished!

FARMER'S WIFE: It is the girl. She sneaked up there while we were praying for you.

SERGEANT: Where's the ladder?

FARMER: (*Points*) She took it.

SERGEANT (*To NGOZI*) I command you to throw down your drum right now!  
(*NGOZI keeps on drumming.*) You will all suffer for this.

SOLDIER 1: (*To SERGEANT*) Permission to suggest something, sir. (*Whispers in SERGEANT'S ear. He consents*)

SOLDIER 1: Young woman, let's make a deal. Come with us to the town and get your mother. (*NGOZI continues drumming*)

SERGEANT: (*Pushes SOLDIER 1 aside*) She doesn't trust you. With a face like yours, I don't blame her. (*Shouts at NGOZI*) MY sister, I give you my word as an officer and a gentleman.

SOLDIER 2: Sarge, you got promoted and didn't tell us. Congratulations/

SERGEANT: Shut up! Sister, what do you say? (NGOZI *drums harder*) Na wa for this girl, oh.

YOUNG FARMER: Sir, it's not for her mother.

SOLDIER 1: We're running out of time. They'll soon suspect something's wrong in the town.

SERGEANT: We have to cover the noise with another noise. Something louder.

SOLDIER 1: Sir, you said we should not make noise.

SERGEANT: Not a war noise, fool.

FARMER: I could get my own drum and blend it into her own beat.

SOLDIER 1 *and* SOLDIER 2 *become mesmerised and start dancing. A glare from SERGEANT brings them to their senses.*

SERGEANT: (*Holds FARMER*) Get the drums. (*YOUNG FARMER runs to get drums for himself and for FARMER*) Very good, now start playing as if your lives depend on it. They do.

NGOZI *has been listening and drumming less. Worried, she continues, harder.*

SERGEANT: You call this drumming? We can still hear her.

FARMER: (*To YOUNG FARMER*) You hear that? She is disgracing us. Follow her beat and play! (*They follow NGOZI'S beat and soon the drumming becomes synchronised into a rhythm. NGOZI understands what they're trying to do and changes the rhythm to that of a war tune*)

SERGEANT: Stop, you fools! You're alerting the town! Stop!

*The farmers stop drumming. NGOZI laughs and continues drumming.*

SERGEANT: She's mocking us, and for good reason! Last resort, I'll blow her head off but we'll lose the element of surprise. *(Brings out his pistol. To the soldiers)* Operation Wreck and Dissect. Now! *(To NGOZI)* If you don't stop, we will blow up your wagon! You're not the only one who can do Ms Dynamite here.

*The soldiers pretend to lob grenades into the wagon.*

FARMER'S WIFE: Stop it, you dumb animal!

*NGOZI looks pitifully at the wagon but continues drumming.*

SERGEANT: *(Aims his pistol)* I will shoot you, oh!

SOLDIER 1: Those townspeople can sleep! We should have heard gunfire by now.

SERGEANT: *(Shouts at NGOZI)* You see? They cannot hear you. They won't be grateful to you for disturbing their sleep. If I shoot you now, I'll be doing them a service. This is your last chance!

YOUNG FARMER: *(Starts beating his drum in tune with NGOZI)* Drum, sister, drum! We can save their lives! Drum! *(SOLDIER 2 knocks him down with the barrel of his rifle. NGOZI cries but keeps on drumming)*

FARMER'S WIFE: Please don't kill my son, I beg you!

*Army radio. SOLDIER 1 responds. His face drops.*

SOLDIER 1: It's the Major. He's going mad. We're in line for a court martial.

SERGEANT: Political Correctness has done me in! All right, you dumb mother-fucker! This is really the last chance!

NGOZI, *in tears, keeps drumming*. SERGEANT *shoots her*. NGOZI *beats the drum a few more times then falls*.

SERGEANT: Thank you for the music—bitch.

*At the same time as NGOZI'S last beats, cannons from the town fire.*

SOLDIER 1: (*Respectfully*) She did it.

## 12

**Before dawn. The sound of drums and whistles of marching troops.**

*In front of the wagon. MOTHER COURAGE is crouched over NGOZI. The farm people are standing beside her.*

FARMER: (*Hostile*) You must go! There's only one regiment left. You can't make it alone.

MOTHER COURAGE: Hush, she's sleeping. (*Sings*)

Little darling, sleeping still?

It's time to for us to go  
We can't stop moving, not until  
Our hearts and minds say no.  
You must be dreaming,  
No more hunger, permanent peace at last  
I've made this bed I'll lie on it  
And leave the past to stoke the past  
Though I believe you're better off  
Sleeping as you are  
I'm the last one standing out of four  
Thanks to this bloody war.

You should not have mentioned the children.

FARMER: And you, too busy profiting from the war, you didn't think of your child.

MOTHER COURAGE: Not too loud, she's sleeping.

FARMER'S WIFE: With the ancestors.

FARMER: You have to go. This area is infested with rebels and wild animals. You can't tell which is which.

MOTHER COURAGE: All right. *(She gets a sheet and covers NGOZI)*

FARMER'S WIFE: You don't have any other family?

MOTHER COURAGE: One son, Eket.

FARMER: Go and look for him. We will bury this one for you.

MOTHER COURAGE: Take money to cover the cost. *(Gives FARMER some money. They shake hands and carry NGOZI away. A dirge rises. FARMER'S WIFE shakes*

MOTHER COURAGE'S *hand while at the same time tries to hurry her away.*

MOTHER COURAGE *resists and continues to look at NGOZI being borne away)*

FARMER'S WIFE: If they find you here that's your own business. (*Hurries away*)

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Slowly hitches herself to the wagon*) Age slows us all down, even my old faithful wagon. I should be able to manage by myself. The war has lifted a load off my head. It's just me and my wagon. Me and my business.

*Another regiment passes with music.*

MOTHER COURAGE: (*Starts pulling*) Wait for me, my children! I'm your Mother Courage!

What a friend we have in war,  
It cares not whose ox it goes  
Friend today, foe tomorrow  
One moment joy, the next sorrow  
The instant you make gain  
You ask if it's worth the pain  
  
The poor the gentle and weak  
Chicks before the eagle's beak  
Vultures hover over us  
Pick our remains with equal lust  
Think it's done after this feast?  
Wrong, my friend, not in the least

As long as man is politics  
The poor will scoop to eat his sick  
So let us shout, "Bring on the war!"  
And may it reign forever more!