



I AM VINDICATED

by 'SANKIE MAIMO

CHARACTERS

- MR. OKENLA *an Ikorodu fisherman*
MRS. OKENLA *the wife*
BOLA OKENLA *son of Mr. Okenla*
BISI OKENLA *daughter*
YEMISI *sister to Bose Okenla*
MR. AKERELE *friend to Mr. Okenla*
BABA-KASIM *leader of all Ikorodu cults*
ATABONG *the Chief's Deputy & 1st. Minister*
DUROJAIYE *Chairman of the Council*
ARABA *a girl*
DR. LAMBO *Principal of Day Spring College*
MR. OKON-BASSEY *top form tutor*
LADY STELLA QUIN-YOUNG *a distinguished visitor*
ALLISON *the Prefect*
TUNDE, KAYODE, ELLIOTT,
SAGAY, BAYE *students*
THOMAS (MISS), SOFI (MISS) *students*

The time is the present.

Act I :

The scene takes place in Mr. Okenla's parlour. In the centre is a small table with three chairs. The room is poorly furnished. Mrs. Okenla is dusting a rack on which are hung two old nets. She is dressed modestly and her white apron is dirty from constant use. She is cheerful and lively and turns round as her husband enters.

Act II :

A classroom with seats in a semi-circle and a table in front with a chair for the master. There is a cupboard to the right of the table. A few pictures are hung on the wall and there is normal classroom furniture.

When the curtain rises the students are already in the classroom and they stand up as the class tutor comes in for the roll call.

ACT — ONE

Scene I

(All the action takes place in Mr. Okenla's parlour. Bose, the wife, is just tidying up and singing to herself. She turns as the husband enters — looking tired and worn-out.)

MRS. OKENLA : You are welcome home dear. (Okenla makes no reply.) I hope there is nothing wrong.

MR. OKENLA : No! There is really nothing particularly wrong. Only I have a queer feeling that nothing is right. (He puts away his net and reaches for a cup of water.) This will certainly do me well.

MRS. OKENLA : Please, sit down. You look very tired. Perhaps you would like something warm. I shall bring it round myself. (She goes out.)

MR. OKENLA : Is Ikrodu now changing? What on earth is the meaning to all this? Yet, I have worked hard all night and caught nothing in this Lagoon... this Lagos Lagoon teeming with fish, caught but a poisonous snake for that matter. Something must be in store for me. And I have lost my appetite for food. (She returns with a dish of food; he merely motions her to take it away.)

MRS. OKENLA : It is *dodo* and rice, your favourite dish. Just taste it.

MR. OKENLA : I shall touch nothing not to talk of tasting anything.

MRS. OKENLA : Let me call Bisi round. Mr. Akerele left behind you 'P' special. You would certainly love to see it. (She goes out. The daughter comes in with a calabash of palm-wine and snuff. He takes some snuff and sneezes; enter Mr. Akerele)

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MR. AKERELE : By Jove man! Not seen you for ages! What have you been doing with yourself this many a day? Thank God; your fish is cheaper now-a-days. One can always look up to you for something... something fresh for an old friend. (Slaps him on the back; Okenla remains coldly indifferent.) Slaw! Are you telling me things are that bad? Sit up and be yourself man. Has your wife deserted you? (Looks round and sees her.) Or are you ill? What's the matter with you? — Are you a victim to some night-mare?

MR. OKENLA : (Shaking his head and speaking slowly.) There is nothing the matter with me.

MR. AKERELE : And then you look as if you were waiting for your father's ghost?

MR. OKENLA : Well, I think I must tell you, after all. I am confused. My only kill after a whole night's work was a poisonous snake. Never, in all my life, as a fisher-man, have I had such an experience.

MR. AKERELE : Really? Sounds very uncanny to me. If I were you, I should see my juju-man straightway.

MR. OKENLA : I was thinking that way myself. I have not even had a bit since yesterday. I just feel queer. That's all.

MR. AKERELE : It is nothing new. That's the work of evil men. Meet force with force, they say; I always maintain... 'Juju for juju'. What more is there to be done?

MR. OKENLA : Whom do you counsel I should consult?

MR. AKERELE : Well, let me see. The only 'Babalawo' of some repute is Baba-Kasim. He was brought up at Otta, a place famous for its magic and powerful juju. You know that place, don't you? The old women grow beards. Everything there, I should say, is either upside down or inside out. There you may walk in its small lanes and alleys and a dead relation walks straight into you. In the night, or in the small hours of the morning, one is treated to big surprises of that kind. Its chief concern is juju. Go there and see.

MR. OKENLA : I? Not me! It all makes me feel out of sorts, just as I have told you before.

MR. AKERELE : You see, one is caught up in a mess like that, now and again. Only those who have juju know what to do to feel safe and secure.

MR. OKENLA : I too want to feel safe and secure; but I do not see my way through. I never get these things straight.

- MR. AKERELE : Do you think you can sit down here solemnly like this, and get things straight ?
- MR. OKENLA : Where can I run to ?
- MR. AKERELE : Run to a specialist, of course.
- MR. OKENLA : What about this medicine-man from Poona-City ?
- MR. AKERELE : Professor Ogun, you mean ? The professor is a man apart ; he controls spirits.
- MR. OKENLA : But how ?
- MR. AKERELE : From books. He graduated in Metaphysical Science in Bombay, Occult Science in Calcutta, Oriental Science in Egypt and held the chair of Magic for five years in Poona-City. His books ! If you read them you get blind. His library is terrific. Even the *'Five and Seven Books of Moses'* is there. He is always poring over or deeply buried in them... in his cabalistic signs and mystic spells. Professor Ogun is a magician in a big way.
- MR. OKENLA : What do you imply by that ?
- MR. AKERELE : Have you heard the like before ? He sits at home, in his library, and gets mails straight from India.
- MR. OKENLA : Are you trying to shock me ?
- MR. AKERELE : What for ? It's true. He has four eyes. It's no wonder people fear him. He knows too much. I fear him too, his magic and his hocus-pocus. Take a decision yourself. Like every magician, he will fleece you. Remember that. I must be leaving you now.
- MR. OKENLA : Now you have put fear in me, but that fear drives away another fear and I am a bit relieved.
- MR. AKERELE : That's something done any way.
- MR. OKENLA : Yes, I know now where my strength lies. Please call again when you can find the time. A person will always get something new from you. Please, remember me to your wife.
- MR. AKERELE : Will be seeing you again.
- MR. OKENLA : Cheerio ! (*Sees him off at the door. As he returns, he soliloquises.*) Yes. It is true. Meet juju with juju ; that is 'Diamond cut diamond'. We shall see who is who now. Bola ! Bola ! (*He calls out for his son. Bola runs in, in his school uniform.*)

- BOLA : Papa !
- MR. OKENLA : Are you just back from School ?
- BOLA : Oh yes !
- MR. OKENLA : All right then ! Run to Baba-Kasim's house ; see whether he is in, and run back quick and tell me.
- BOLA : Whose house ?
- MR. OKENLA : The house of Baba-Kasim, and be quick about it.
- BOLA : But he had told me never to come near his house.
- MR. OKENLA : Why ?
- BOLA : I was running home one day after school and accidentally fell over one of his big dirty pots.
- MR. OKENLA : Is that all ?
- BOLA : No. To my surprise, I uncovered a small boy hiding under it... like in a hide-and-peek game. I began to laugh and Baba came out to make a fuss about it.
- MR. OKENLA : You laughed at Baba-Kasim, perhaps ?
- BOLA : Oh no ! At the boy I uncovered. I can't recall whether I actually laughed, when I struggled to my feet. No. The boy's shock, confusion and the subsequent bewildering cries brought out Baba-Kasim.
- MR. OKENLA : Did you say a boy was under the pot !
- BOLA : Yes. I am serious. ...a little boy. He wore a talisman on his forehead. I think the juju-man must have put it there for one reason or another. I wonder what the boy was doing there. That old man has funny ideas. Only he does not know how to live properly in clean surroundings. Pooh ! the smell ! One day, he'll die suddenly.
- MR. OKENLA : You must respect him for his old age.
- BOLA : Yes. But why does he want to live on and on ? So many people die in this town — why not he ? He is a cheat.
- MR. OKENLA : Don't talk about death that way. You are becoming too bold.
- BOLA : Why not ? Will death take him, if I talk like that ?
- MR. OKENLA : Rather, he may take you. You do not know the risk you are running.

- BOLA : I don't take him for anything. His juju means nothing to me. He is just a big joker and nothing else.
- MR. OKENLA : Baba-Kasim a joker? You certainly don't know what you are talking about. You are going too far. *(The wife enters.)* Bose, maybe, you'll be able to talk to this boy. He has been teasing everyone around, even getting mixed up with Baba-Kasim of all people. To put it lightly, he shocks me.
- MRS. OKENLA : Bola! When will you stop embarrassing us? Do you suppose it is still my place, as your mother, to be responsible for your careless talks... or to teach you what to say? Listen, every one fears that juju-man. Keep away from him.
- BOLA : But I did not...
- MR. OKENLA : Silence, you idiot. I'm simply fed up with you. You want again to go on making excuses?
- BOLA : No sir. But...
- MR. OKENLA : Shut up I say. If all children were like you, I would never want to have any. You behave in a very strange way. Something dreadful must be coming on, coming slowly on, and surely coming to destroy this whole house. That thing is coming through you. You shall destroy only yourself. Get out of here. *(Bola walks out.)* I must see Baba-Kasim straightway, Bose. He needs an immediate apology. This boy's behaviour beats me. Bose, you may, in your way, regard this only as a thin cloud hanging over our heads. I assure you, it forebodes a terrible storm which may break suddenly on us. I am afraid we shall be swept completely off our feet, if we are taken unawares. I cannot disregard the omens I've seen. *(Pauses for a moment.)* No! An owl hooted over this very roof last night. *(With a warning finger out.)* I saw my late father's funeral rites last night, in my dream, performed in this very house. With such warnings, and many others, we must be on our guard.
- MRS. OKENLA : Are the very gods turning against us? Tell Baba to do something about it. Say that Bola is only a foolish boy.
- MR. OKENLA : Foolish boy, my foot! Remember to warn him not to trifle with things beyond his intelligence. *(He walks out slowly.)*
- MRS. OKENLA : Oh yes! I shall certainly do so. *(The daughter runs in with a big book under her arm.)* Bisi! What's wrong?
- BISI : Nothing, ma!
- MRS. OKENLA : You have been running, haven't you?
- BISI : Bola is after me.

- MRS. OKENLA : But why?
- BISI : I saw him laughing with this book open in front of him. He was actually laughing and tears running down his cheeks. I was amused. So I snatched the book away.
- MRS. OKENLA : Is the book yours?
- BISI : He wouldn't tell me what made him laugh that way. He only said that he was in Arabia listening to folk-tales.
- MRS. OKENLA : Ara... what!
- BISI : Arabia.
- MRS. OKENLA : What made him say that? Was he sleeping?
- BISI : No, he was reading. He claimed that he had travelled to Arabia transported by books. He called it 'travel by imagination'. I wanted to share the same enjoyment.
- MRS. OKENLA : I warn you not to take up his views; they are dangerous and he is a little queer at times. I shall burn all books in this house if that is the effect they are to have on both of you. *(As Bola comes in, Bisi runs out. The mother turns to him.)* It is a painful thing to have to correct one like you, Bola. But it is my duty.
- BOLA : I know your duty mum.
- MRS. OKENLA : You know the words I have to use too. Well, your father thinks your behaviour really outrageous.
- BOLA : If an old fellow steals a child and hides him for whatever reasons, that is not outrageous. But to discover the boy — that is outrageous.
- MRS. OKENLA : Who is this boy you are talking about?
- BOLA : I certainly don't know, it would be damnable to know the name of such a fellow.
- MRS. OKENLA : The way you say things! It's a pity. It's just ridiculous.
- BOLA : When other people say things, it's all right. But let me say them, it's all this. What am I in for?
- MRS. OKENLA : You know better. Tell me.
- BOLA : So you have no more to say. Run short perhaps?
- MRS. OKENLA : You are the fellow with bright new ideas — always quick about what to say.

BOLA : If that's a compliment, I don't know how to accept it. Anyway, I never say anything really new. Others have said them before.

MRS. OKENLA : Have they really? And this contempt for juju too?

BOLA : No sensible man compromises with juju. It has no place in our scheme of things.

MRS. OKENLA : Your scheme of things! How grand! What do you really believe?

BOLA : Oh! I believe in all the Freedoms — 'Live and let live'.

MRS. OKENLA : But first you must strangle juju. Then afterwards you shout, 'Live and let live'.

BOLA : No. Only juju is unduly usurping a position not meant for it. We only wish to put it in its rightful place... just where it belongs.

MRS. OKENLA : What place does it belong to?

BOLA : No place really... *no locus standi*. We must root it out, extirpate it.

MRS. OKENLA : Bola! Your ambition is exorbitant, your vanity ridiculous. Take note. Before you extirpate it, it may extirpate you. Who loses then?

BOLA : You, of course. Juju has influence only over those who believe in it. And it can destroy only those under its influence. Given a chance, I shall prove it. If you have nothing more to say, I shall go to my books. Thanks. *(He moves towards the door; the mother calls him back.)*

MRS. OKENLA : Bola, a word more with you. You may perhaps be right after all. I cannot express a personal opinion. You must try to understand the feelings of the people as well. To whatever you set your hand, this is the golden rule: be cautious. Therefore, go slowly, and do not deliberately make the place too hot for yourself.

BOLA : That's your opinion, mum. But how far is it useful? Going slowly one may never arrive, or, if one arrives eventually, one arrives too late. It is then a waste of time and energy. The Ikorodu pot is already boiling, I'm only preventing it from boiling over.

MRS. OKENLA : Do you want to ruin yourself? Granted that you are right; what do you gain in thus destroying yourself and making the family suffer?

BOLA : There can be no talk of destroying one's self, if one suffers in the name of Truth. Truth is sacred and we should be able to pay anything for it without counting the cost. Then one's name is immortalised. What more could one look forward to? We should endeavour to do even the wrong things — as you think them, at the right time. Then we cannot live to regret anything. Only those who rather pale into insignificance and succeed in immortalising their stupidities need regret their foolishness, mum.

MRS. OKENLA : I cannot see your point, my dear.

BOLA : It is generally admitted that we learn from experience, mum; but only those who are teachable ever learn from experience. Take Socrates for example, or Christ, if you like. The Athenians who made Socrates drink the hemlock or the Jews who nailed Christ on the cross, are now inconsequential. No one bothers about them. We, in fact, regret their ignorance. We must abhor ignorance, like leprosy. Its attendant consequences are too many to elaborate upon. Yet all Ikorodu is overwhelmed in ignorance. We cannot stay here to argue it out; some of us must suffer for the Truth to prevail. Truth in this case is the handmaid of Education, the arch-enemy of Ignorance. We must...

MRS. OKENLA : Remember that martyrs are born. They are not made of your stuff. Pushing your head into such certain death is unpardonable; it's sheer madness... simply premeditated suicide.

BOLA : In the present circumstance, mum, there is absolutely nothing to suggest suicide. In this town things often get out of control; then its ignorance becomes very exacting. The whole country is actually seething with the heat of esoteric cults that must mean the ruin of the country. Condoning juju now is like sitting on a time-bomb. To hold back is accepting ignorance and juju as inevitable and perpetuating them. That is treacherous. Anyone who makes a claim to some education, proper education, real education, thorough education, the education that justifies the name, must join in the crusade against ignorance. All hands are required. I've already enlisted. *(He waves to his mother and walks out as the curtain falls.)*



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