

THE MASK



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The Mask is published by

Standard Mass Concept Company

Lagos, Akure, Nigeria.

Registered in Nigeria

Telephone: 234-8057783488, 07030908575

www.standardmass.com

First Published: December 2008

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ISBN 978-070-856-1

CHARACTERS

AFAGU	-	KING OF ISALA
OTUGU	-	RIGHT HAND MAN
OSIGU	-	LEFT HAND MAN
FAAMI	-	A PRINCE
AGU	-	A CHIEF
AGBO	-	HUNTER
OGBE	-	HUNTER
RINADE	-	AGU'S DAUGHTER
IFAMO	-	HIGH PRIEST
1 ST AND 2 ND SERVANT		
ETIMI	-	PALACE GUARD
		RELAY

ACT ONE SCENE 1

On a farm, Chief Agu and Agbo appear, exchanging pleasantries. They notice security men leading away a man, the man's hands tied to his back. Agu and Agbo look at one another and shake their heads sadly.

Agu Agbo, this land is doomed, Isala is doomed.

Agbo God protect us, mother-earth sustain us.

Agu Our God will not forsaken us, mother earth will not turn her back on us.

Agbo And who are these...and a man being led away bound?

Agu Open your eyes and see, but if your eyes are deemed by wine, then I'll lend you mine: That is Miro, the village black smith.

Agbo Eh! Is that Miro? Friend to Prince Faami?

Agu That's him. A man, in battle and in time of peace, being led away towards the king's palace. Who knows, this may be the last we will ever see him. And when I called down

the intervention of God, you said my mouth stank .

Agbo Heaven help us. This land is no longer our home but our common grave. Who knows, it might be your turn next, it might be mine.

Agu Isala has never known such a blood thirsty king. And no one dare stand against this evil vamp. Here, in Isala, suspicion is a crime and penalty for suspicion no less than death. Agbo, where are all those who helped Afagu to power? Where are all the rival Princes in both family linages?

Agbo Dead and gone, some have rotted away in Afagu's dungeon. Only weak and coward Princes walk Isala as lords.

Agu Empty lords, barrels empty of sense. Tolu, my neighbor, disappeared yesterday; detained by the kings guards.

Agbo What was his offence?

Agu Palace news had it that he blasphemed against the good name of the king. An offence graver than killing the corporate spirit of Isala people.

Agbo Every new day brings with it mortal news of death and sorrow. Isala fears the break of a new day. Gone are the days when great warriors make Isala proud.

Agu Where are the likes of Bobo, the lightening fisted Alala and the lion hearted Atila, brave men of war, warrior hunters who made a people proud? Where are they today?

Agbo Gone, they all disappeared in mysterious circumstances. I think mother-earth must be in league with Afagu. She opened her mouth and swallowed up, into her bowel, her own brave and daring children and will not question Afagu's lust for blood; and the chicken hearted left overs scattered abroad, all fled for safety. Now, cowards have been let loose to boast in their exploits in the war of tongues.

Agu And God have eyes, his hands are ready waiting for Isalians to arise and stand and the earth will be strengthened and will not cave in under us.

Agbo No! This must stop. The earlier something is done to stop this tyrant king and his clique the better for us all.

Agu And now is the time.

Agbo Shssss... the blades of grass are long here. The bushes harbor agents of darkness. Green calls to green; Chameleons abound every where.

Agu The water has only been split, the pot is not broken yet. We are on stony ground, and must not let drop our only water pot.

Agbo You will be in court with the king today? I hear he holds council with his chiefs.

Agu Yes, as a chief, in the order of conscience. Afagu called us on "an urgent matter", crucial matter of state, he called it. No doubt to seek approval for punishing one of his enemies. I must leave now, but we shall speak further on the former matter; the issue relating to Isala's only earthen-pot.

Both men take opposite directions.

- **Curtain** -

ACT ONE SCENE 2

King Afagu and his chiefs appear. Afagu is in a state.

Afagu I have said it, time without number, that all enemies of this great land of Isala will meet a common end. Where is Faami?

Etim He is safe in custody, as your lordship ordered.

Afagu Go, bring him before us (Faami is led in, bound in both hands). Your brother was a traitor, a shameless traitor and an enemy of our people. So today, before this court, we shall all see what befalls enemies of Isala. Etim! Bring in the black bowl. (Etim brings in bowl containing a human head). There you are, the result of treason.

Faami What! My...my brother. What has he done to deserve such an end... But dear brother, I promise your blood will not be shed in vain.

Afagu Take him away. Now, my dear chiefs, I sent for you on an argent matter. I have, this few days, been confronted by strange dreams, frightful nightmares and my nights have been restless.

- Otugu Great king, this is but a small matter. Ifamo, the high priest, should help in matters like this. Let us send for him immediately my, lord.
- Afagu I have done that, but I cannot understand what is keeping him so long.
- Osigu though, filled with wisdom, his bones are giving way to whims of old age and old bones are such trying deities, and they will take no oil. Give him time, he will not be long.
- Afagu These dreams are burden to my peace... and Agu! Where is chief Agu? He is not yet here. He has of late, withdrew into himself, Like a serpent in a shell, in him also my anxiety overflows. He is my day dream.
- Osigu You need not to worry about Agu, my lord, he is a loyal subject and he honors time as one need honour a father in-law. Something, no doubt, must be keeping him.
- Afagu What else could occupy him? What could be as important as the crown, the spring of life?
- Otugu Nothing...! No one dare dispute that. Not even the gods and powers.
- Osigu Aha!... there they come, the high Priest and Chief Agu.

The high Priest and Agu enters. They prostrate before the king.

- Afagu Have you two no respect for time? Why must you keep this court waiting for so long?
- Agu I dare not keep your lordship waiting. As I was passing by the high Priest house, on my way here, Isala calls it befitting to honour elders. No one passes the kings palace without a word of greetings. These explain why we came in together.
- Ifamo And that is the truth, your highness. (As he sits down and spread out his trade of divinity). **Regarding the matter you told me yesterday, honoured king, can we have them all over again? Let's have the first dream first.**
- Otugu **Shameless dreams.**
- Osigu **Dreams are no respecter of persons. King or slave.**
- Agu **They are allergic to denominations**
- Ifamo **Enough of that! Now, honoured king; tell us about your dreams**
- Afagu They are terrible dreams: In my first dream, I was presiding over a great festival. In the midst of dancing and merry making, a man emerged from the crowd carrying a child in his hands. This child dressed in rags and smeared with blood was weeping. As I stretched out my hands to accept the child, the child started to ascend up into the sky and

the higher it went, the louder the cry. Its ascent was gradual, until it disappeared from sight. This was followed by a thunderstorm; wind, claps of thunder and a heavy rain. There was spontaneous out burst of joy from the crowd. I was stunned and transfixed to one spot and I could not even rejoice with the crowd. When I awoke, my cloths were drenched with my own sweat. Now I want you to tell the meaning of this dream.

Ifamo (Consulting the heavens) My lord, this is a revelation of what is to come.

Afagu Go on; tell us of what is to come. I have already knowledge of the past and the present, I am in charge here.

Otugu Go on; tell the king all about it. The earth has nothing to fear as far as sky-droppings are concerned.

Ifamo My lord, from the days of our founding fathers, king Dekia to the present, this land has known peace and prosperity, except for minor pauses of palace intrigues, here and there...

Afagu Cut out history for now, go for the substance. Away with history.

Otugu How dare you keep the king waiting? The past and the present are with the king.

Agu God is praised.

Ifamo The weeping child you saw, with rags and drenched in blood, stands for the night that now engulfs Isala. The rising of the child into the sky represent the death of tyranny, and the end of blood shed. It is the evaporation of fear leaving the earth. The thunderstorm symbolizes burst of pent-up grief; and the subsequent rain represents a period of peace and prosperity, brought to this land by men of honour. The men who brought you this child of blood are one of these men of Isala.

Otugu This is good news my lord. The dream is definitely referring to us, men of honour.

Agu True honour can not be bought, we are men.

Osigu May our royal king see no evil days

Afagu And will I live to see this great day of prosperity in Isala?

Otugu Aha, my lord, it is unbecoming of your highness to think of death. May the earth never see death?

Afagu Go on, tell me, Ifamo; I said, will I be a witness to this great day?

- Osigu The taste of honey is sweet, no one spites it out. Isala's glorious days will know no end. Though kings and slaves may die, there is no killing the earth. Long live Isala.
- Otugu May your highness see no evil days
- Ifamo These great men of new Isala will make exploits in battles, far and near. Many truculent neighbors shall be brought to their knees, not by force of arms but largely by the love and truth in their hearts. All enemies of Isala will be at peace with her. My lord, you have nothing to fear. Only beware of palace intrigues. What will undo you is within, not without.
- Afagu Aha!, I said it, enemies within. Now you can all see why I had to descend so heavily on all enemies of Isala. My actions against trouble shooters and traitors are justified. Are they not, my chiefs?
- Otugu You will never go wrong, my lord. You are the perfect one.
- Osigu We propose and you dispose.
- Afagu Enough! Now listen to my second dream. It goes like this: I was standing on a sea shore with my chiefs watching and admiring the vast land and sea over which I am lord. The sea was calm and peaceful. Idly, I picked up some

- pebbles and threw them into the sea, one after the other; and watched ripples form and disappear, surprisingly, when I threw in the last one, the ripples it formed gradually grew into a wave. It grew strong, roaring and foaming like a wounded lion. It washed towards the shore, splashed all over me and carrying me along with itself, into the sea. When I looked back to my chiefs, they have disappeared, and I could not move or shout for help. I was all alone, gulping in the salty water, and no one was around to lend me a helping hand...
- Otugu If this dream was real, I must have taken to my heels in order to get royal divers. I have never been a good swimmer.
- Agu And you are such a bad diver-chief, you cannot make a bold-plunge against a stone throwing king.
- Otugu You ran away too, the king said so.
- Agu My heels are as plain as my palms...
- Afagu Silence! Miscreants. I am not through yet. When I awoke, I felt the taste of salt in my mouth. (He sits back exhausted, wiping his mouth with the back of his hands.)
- Ifamo (In the posture of divine meditation.) Mmnn... our dreams carry weightier meaning than meet

- Ifamo For the stone hearted, Noru's flood will be a child's play.
- Afagu A butterfly that gets entangled in a thorny bush will have its beauty turn to naught.
- Ifamo Very apt, only in this case, we can say the butterfly will come dressed in cloths of gold and wings of iron.
- * Osigu You have nothing to fear, my lord, all these will happen after you have joined your ancestors.
- Afagu I fear nothing!
- Otugu Our king is fear itself. Only a mad man would fear himself.
- Agu This is good news, king. We must rejoice. You will not be succeeded by a weakling, and your good works will not die with you.
- Afagu (thoughtful). On matters concerning succession, a wise man need to thread with caution. My dear priest, (turning to Ifamo) I want to know from which lineage this king will come. I hate uncertainties. Consult the heavens once again Ifamo. Tell us, from what lineage. This we must know.
- Ifamo (Going into consultations). The slate is blank, my lord.

- Otugu Impossible, you are hiding something from the king.
- Afagu look into it again, blind idiot. Blank is not the answer I expect from a man of your standing.
- Ifamo I dare not hide anything from your highness. All I see before me here is a white blank sheet
- Afagu I am greatly disturbed by this dreams, horrible dreams of blood and death that torment me nightly
- * Otugu My lord, caution is required, you must be bold and resolute. We must also intensify our full crack-down on enemies of our people.
- Afagu (Thoughtful). Yes... I know, I know what to do... Etemi... Etemi, (Etemi enters). Go and keep a closer watch on that Faami. Get more royal guards, if necessary. I shall tell you what to do next.
- Etim It shall be done my lord. (leaves).
- Afagu Yes, I will be cautious; I will leave nothing to chance. It's better to be doubly sure than trail on uncertain grounds. These dreams tell me more than I had bargained for.
- Otugu caution is needed, my lord.
- Afagu Ifamo, you can leave now. I will call for you if the need should arise again.

- Ifamo I am always at the service of our father land.
(Prepares to leave).
- Afagu Agu, remain behind after this. I will like to talk to you. My chiefs, if there is nothing more to talk about, you are free to leave (the chiefs greet and take their leave. Agu remain behind).
- Agu My lord, I hope the matter that warrant my remaining behind is not a serious one.
- Afagu My honorable Agu, it is nothing serious. It is a matter very dare to your heart and mine. Your daughter is the matter.
- Agu You mean Rinade, my only daughter?
- Afagu Yes, Rinade. Apt name: 'the heart of the crown'
- Agu Rinade. (suspicious). I hope she has not offended your highness in any way.
- Afagu Offence, far from that. Agu, don't you understand? I want her to be my wife.
- Agu Aha, your highness, (Laughs) I thought it's a very serious matter. You should have mentioned this earlier than now; I would have readily given my consent without any objection... but now...

- Afagu What do you mean... told you earlier than now? You mean to tell me Rinade is already...?
- Agu This few days, Rinade has been keeping us in suspense about a man she wished to marry, and would not mention his name. I wouldn't know, your highness, if that lover boy happens to be your lordship?
- Afagu My very self...? A man, what man can be so bold as to stand in my way?
- Agu She would not tell. You know these women with their little secrets. The person who might know, I bet, is her mother. It's her mother who has ears for all that "behind the wall games"
- Afagu Then, that game must stop! (Agitated). You must tell her of my intent, and that lover boy or what did you call the rascal and his games, must stop. Now! He must stop playing with fire that may end up consuming him at the end of it all.
- Agu I will mention it to Rinade, though the decision on the matter remains hers.
- Afagu You mean to say, you cannot give orders in your own house?

- Agu I can only pass to her your cup of water. I will not force her to drink from it. The ways of today, your highness, is not all force and order. A little persuasion here, a little advice there and a touch of firmness in between these, is the new craze.
- Afagu Agu, a chief of your standing and position must not talk like a weakling.
- Agu Often times, the over confidence of a strong-line sees him towards the open mouth of disaster.
- Afagu This is no longer the Agu I used to know. Though often, you do hold contrary opinion to that of other chiefs, but I must be frank with you, this stand is **unbecoming** of a high chief of Isala.
- Agu Whenever Rinade shall wed, I want her to marry a man of her choice. A man she will live with happily. I know Rinade very well, her choice will be right. And who knows, it could be your highness.
- Afagu Agu, your travels, outside the domain of your fathers have turned you into a woman in your own house. Now, you take orders from your sole instead of your crown. I am disappointed.
- Agu I am sorry your highness, my soul is married to my crown. Only a mad man, my lord, will

expect your highness to live up to every body's expectations. My lord, I will see what I can do regarding this matter. (He prostrates and leaves.) Afagu remains on his seat, shaking his head)

- **Curtain** -

ACT TWO SCENE 1

Faami enters with two servants and guards. In an hideout, far away from Isala.

- 1st servant You must remain here Prince, until such a time as will be safe enough to move to a safer place.
- Faami Must I continue to wonder from place to place because of that Afagu. I have had enough of him. I will rather die a man than turn my self into an antelope on the run from a hungry lion. I will go no further from here.
- 2nd servant We are only following instructions, Prince Faami; and it must be carried out to the letter.
- Faami Who dared to give such order, to restrict me thus. Is it not manly to be a prisoner under the roof of a tyrant than in company of rats and cockroaches...? Now tell me who gave you such orders?
- 1st servant That must remain a secrete. It is an order from a man of honour. He must remain unknown to you for now. (Faami sits in frustration)

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- Faami Okay, sir, (courtesy) As your prisoner, sir, will you grant, sir, this humble request of your prisoner sir?
- 1st servant (prostrates). Do not mock us, your humble servants. Your servants are listening and waiting for your orders.
- Faami I want to know what has become of my beloved Rinade. I heard that Afagu tried to force her into marriage with him. I want you to keep me informed of further development on this unholy affair.
- 1st servant That can be arranged immediately sir.
- Faami And send my greeting's to her, wherever she might be. Do not forget to make it look as if I am still under the kings custody, else she might try to find me out, if she realized I have been smuggled out of town.
- 1st servant It shall be done sir, (leaves).
- Faami (To the 2nd servant). Now, tell me, who is behind all this business? Where next, after here? Tell me quick, I must know now!
- 2nd servant True, I know little about this business.
- Faami Then out with the little you know.
- 2nd servant I agreed to join others when I heard of a rescue operation concerning you and chief Agu.

- Faami Other, orders, others, tell me, who are these others who gave you orders to keep me in the dark?
- 2nd servant Your servant, who left here a while ago and... and... I could't make out their faces in the dark... true.
- Faami What was the latest news, as at when you left Isala, or your face of darkness gave you orders against telling me that as well?
- 2nd servant News has got to the king of your escape. He has presently sent out his men to find and bring you back 'dead or alive'
- Faami The former is his greater wish for me.
- 2nd servant The king has executed the guards on duty, on the night of your escape.
- Faami As spiders to flies and cats to rats, traps and limps, we hear of nothing but death and rumors of death. The way Afagu's frozen heart keeps date, minutely, at the gate of death, one would expect the errand boy would turn his cold fury against the tyrant.

There is a coded knock on the door

- 1st servant It's okay, come in (1st servant enters with another person in turban)
- Man: Asallamu'alaikun...

- 1st servant Great Prince, I bring before you an Arabian Prince, who wish to pay you homage.
- Faami An Arab prince in such a time and place like this...I will not...

*The Arab prince embraces Faami. The veil falls off.
The servants withdraw.*

- Rinade, is this you or your ghost.
- Rinade It's me in flesh and blood.
- Faami Your disguise was so perfect. I should have guessed, a visitor from the north in such a time like this.
- Rinade I had to disguise to remove any suspicion of my movement
- Faami What news about our beloved Isala? How is your father now?
- Rinade My father is as safe as you were in Isala. The king ordered for his arrest. He was accused of planning your escape from custody. All this happened after the king, unsuccessfully forced my father into approving a dishonorable union with me. That old elephant. I will rather die than marry the bloody idiot.
- Faami Your father is a noble man.

- Rinade Faami, my love, where you go, I will go with you. Nothing will separate you from me any longer.
- Faami Rinade, my morning rose. This is a critical moment in the life of Isala. Our land is sick; we must nurse it back to sanity. Though our seedlings are ready, we must cure Isala first before we start sowing. Rinade, we must think less about ourselves for now, love making under the moon with serpents in the nearby bushes, preparing to strike anytime, is not wise for now.
- Rinade Yes, I know, but you are not sending me back to Isala, are you?
- Faami Rinade, try and understand. For now, it is wise you return to Isala. Your absence from home will only draw attention against your family, and the position of your father will be further jeopardized.
- Rinade It is wicked of you, to ask me to go back, and face that tyrant. But if this is your wish, it is well. I will return to Isala and await your return.
- Faami That is the wisest thing to do for now, and Rinade, my love, it will not be long. (Faami consoles Rinade.)

-Curtain-

ACT TWO SCENE 2

In the palace. Afagu is boiling with anger. He paces to and fro. Otugu and osigu stand close together, far from Afagu.

- Afagu Treason, bastard, treacherous brutes. Hopeless guards. Even death of these fools will not appease me. Faami escaped? No, this is conspiracy..."
- Otugu They must have been bought over my lord.
- Afagu Well, they will pay for this. I have sent out loyal men to get Faami and bring him before us, dead or alive. He must be brought here dead or alive.
- Otugu He cannot get far before he is caught, dead or alive.
- Osigu You need not worry, my lord. These men are all nose and very efficient. They will sniff their ways to were ever he is hiding.

- Otugu He could not have escaped all by himself. Disloyal persons in authority must have aided his escape. In fact my suspicion points to chief Agu.
- Osigu Otugu...haaa!
- Afagu There you may be right. Agu's recent aloofness which he called open mindedness is a development which demands check. I suspect he must be directly connected with Faami's escape.
- Osigu **Caution! caution my lord. We need substantial evidence to prove a man of Agu's person guilty. Besides, Otugu is only blind guessing.**
- Otugu **Osigu, wasn't it Agu who dissuaded us against additional guards watching over Faami.**
- Afagu **Indeed, now I know why he refused to compel his daughter to marry me. He told me, in front of her, that no one can force her against her wish.**
- Otugu Osigu, you have nothing to contribute to this discussion? Even chief Agu's praises?
- Osigu Death, from the hands of cowards, takes the brave from behind. These songs would have been sweeter in the presence of he whom we sing about. There is nothing left for Agu to listen to. By the time we set eyes on him, he will be deaf to our praises or condemnations.

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- Otugu He would have been caught in his own trap?
- Osigu No, radiant in the colours of honour and in loyalty to Isala.
- Otugu How you forget so soon, wasn't it Agu who stood against the execution of Prince Ara, Faami's elder brother, the traitor who plotted against our own dear king. He said Ara's execution will give us honorable chiefs, a bad name.
- Afagu Enough! I have sent for Agu. Today, I shall for once, know the leaning of his loyalty.
- Otugu My suspicion of Agu's double standard became clear to me, on the day the king summoned us in court in order to unravel the riddle of his dreams; Agu was reluctant to come. Then I became sure of his hidden agenda.
- Osigu The king said, enough! I think I have to be straight with you, Otugu. This is unfair. Agu gave a genuine reason for his lateness that day.
- Otugu Genuine reason indeed. It is only you who can swallow such lies not I
- Osigu Otugu, it is the height of betrayal and unmanliness to talk ill of a fellow chief behind his back.

- Otugu And if you don't know, what have you to say, on his behalf, about a secret discussion he had with some hunter on the morning of the said meeting... (A servant enters)
- Servant My lord, chief Agu is out of town. He left early this morning to visit a sick in-law.
- Otugu ... And now a visit to some in-law who has suddenly taken ill?
- Afagu Impossible! And no message to us on this sudden journey. This is very ~~much~~ unlike Agu.
- Otugu Over to you, Osigu, (turns to Afagu) my lord, I have nothing further to say.
- Osigu Your highness, I still cannot find my self disputing the loyalty of Agu to Isala. I believe there must be some mistake somewhere. I will rather you move with caution into conclusions.
- Afagu Care must be taken too, to avoid snail caution.
- Otugu Because, he might have gone to raise an army against our king. My dear chiefs, we must do something quick...
- Osigu lets send out scouts to verify his where about. His journey may be a genuine one.

- Otugu Yes, the flight is genuine, for a man in his position to leave town in that manner. By this single act, he has proved himself treacherous and a dishonour to the king in all his dignity.
- Osigu Otugu, this is sentiment, over a thing so trifle. If you have any personal score to settle with Agu, why not settle it with him when next you meet.
- Otugu You call such grave matter of state, small? You call treason, disrespect and dishonor, small? My lord, (turning to Afagu). I suggest we keep Agu's family under house arrest until we know what he is up to.
- Osigu Softly, Otugu, your sense of humor has taken a bend towards the absurd. Drunk with folly, you take real life-fire on your thatched roof top for display of fire works by fire flies. This ill-council is most unfortunate coming from a chief of your standing. You are not doing Isala any good, and you should be ashamed of yourself. My honorable king, I will not be a party to Otugu's suggestions. Let Agu's family be left out this until his loyalty is proved otherwise. Otugu, you must school your imagination before it brings you destruction.

Otugu Osigu, you invoke destruction on my head? When did I sprinkle corn on the floor and become playmate of the hen; and for gods sake, when have I become your tooth-pick to suffer the humiliation of your stinking mouth?

Osigu My only prayer is that, what you are now steering in your devilish skull, will not boil over and put off the lives of those who mistake your madness for wisdom.

Afagu Enough of this madness both of you! I will have none of this empty barking (chief's courtesy). Have you no shame? You spend the whole time tearing at each other, instead of cracking your brain to boiling point, pondering on how to solve problems that I put before you. Now, chiefs, I have heard enough. I have noted your suggestions and concerns. I have considered the best step I deem fit to check the issues at hand.

(Afagu rises and withdraws into his inner chamber. The chiefs watch him disappear, and turn to face each other: Otugu spits and storms out. Osigu sucks his teeth, shakes his head and goes out through the opposite direction.)

-Curtain-

ACT TWO SCENE 3

Hide out. Faami and Agu in discussion

Faami Agu, this action of yours I considered unwise; leaving Isala without any consideration for the safety of your family.

Agu Faami, my family is only a grain of sand in a vast beach. If I have to sacrifice their lives and mine for the return of sanity to our motherland, it will not be too great a sacrifice.

Faami Most honoured Agu, how were our people when you left home? What is the current event of note? What are Afagu's present exploits?

Agu Afagu is death itself. He is our tooth ache which draws, often, attention to itself. His long years of tyranny and blood letting has seen many innocent souls to their graves, thus making the living mere shadows, cowed subserviant followers.

- Faami A decade old corpse is no longer a stranger to the grave. I believe a pocket of Isala is steeled and prepared to put an end to his excesses. They now await the day of 'the great mask.' But now Agu, (concerned), leaving Isala in these circumstances is strange, I must say, your absence is a great disservice and courage-damping for sympathizers
- Agu I had to leave home when I realized I was next on Afagu's list of people to be eliminated. I felt it coming, but I have vowed to make Afagu bite dust, and I intend to do this without raising an army. Faami, Afagu is ripe for plucking. Now is the time to bring him down.
- Faami And how do you intend to do that without a fight? Go back to Isala and tell the king: "step down, I command you. You are no longer in charge!" is that what you intend to do?
- Agu I intend to bring him down without a fight, but if blood must be shed, then it will be his blood.
- Faami I must avenge the death of my brother. Afagu will pay with his blood.
- Agu Softly... (A servant enters).
- Servant Your lordship, A relly will like to speak to you. He said it's urgent.

- Agu Bring him in, immediately, (servant leaves and reenters with relly. He withdraws). News? Let us have it or why are you so breathless?
- Relly My lord, Osigu has fallen out of the king's favor. He is caught, so it was alleged, attempting to get chief Agu's family out of town.
- Agu Why, my family? Bloody tortoise, why should Osigu stick out his neck so carelessly.
- Relly After you left town, the king sensed you have deserted him and feared you have gone to raise an army against him. He now kept close watch on your household.
- Agu If by that single act, he hoped to force me back home, then my return to Isala will not be long
- Relly My lord, you have to listen...
- Faami Yes, let him speak.
- Relly The king has also locked Arinade, your daughter, away, in his highnesses bed chamber.
- Faami That bloody hippo will pay for this.
- Agu We must finalize all plans this night and move fast. Any further delay might prove disastrous.

Relly Chief Osigu shall face public execution on the festival of 'the great mask' coming up soon.

Agu That is three days to go. We shall be there to partake of the execution of 'the great mask'. Faami, I must take my leave now. When next you see me, it would be to welcome you into your rightful place as the true ruler of Isala.

Yes, the day of the great mask will be the appropriate day. The day of the great mask! The day of the great mask!! And right before the teeming crowd. (Agu is visibly excited). Go, (calling his servant). Go, tell Agbo and Ogbe, kile and Biru to prepare, we must rehearse now the hunters dance, before king Afagu. Hurry, its only three days to go, the great day is near.

Agu takes few steps of the hunters dance.

- Curtains -

ACT THREE

Body movement should be employed in this scene for dramatic effect.

On an open field, the people of Isala are in festive mood. The crowd awaits the king's arrival. In one corner Osigu sits, hand tied behind his back.

The king arrives amidst drumming and dancing. He says something into chief Otugu's ears, Otugu responds with nods, pointing towards chief Osigu's direction. The king, apparently satisfied, takes his seat and others of his entourage follow suit.

With his approval, the festival commences in full swing. Taking turns, each group dance pass the king, the leaders of each group dance towards the king, takes a bow and presents the groups gift to the king and withdraw to join his group again.

The masked hunters were the last to dance. The leader of this group moves in a dignified hunters steps to present his gift to the king. The king seemingly impressed by the performance of this group, rises up to receive the present.

The masked leader takes a bow and straightens slowly to present his gift. As Afagu stretches out his hands, the masked man unmasked himself with one hand and with the other hand, he draws out his dagger and stabs Afagu several times. Afagu staggers back with a shout "Aguuu..." His cry cutting through the crowd.

A moment silence followed, then pandemonium. Agu turns to the crowd in a victory song, but only the hunters remain. They carry Agu shoulders high in the mist of songs of victory.

Few brave men started to return to join in the dance. Faami and his entourage enter in colours. The two groups become one as all dance and sing.

- *Curtain* -

About the Author

Isaiah Ayinuola Atress is a graduate of the University of Ilorin and University of Lagos. Other works by him include 'Glimpse' - a collection of poems; 'The Mask' - a play. He also contributed poems into the making of 'Imagination of poets'.

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ISBN 978-070-855-3



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