

From Scene 9 of KAGGIA by J.E. Sibi-Okumu (2014)

(STACEY AND XAN are both giving this proposition some thought, holding their positions on stage. Lights fade to blackout. The spotlight emerges and pans to the other side of the stage, to find WAMBUI, facing the audience, in mid-interview, answering a question.)

WAMBUI: Yes, our history books have to be rewritten. But, there is one important thing: It is not enough to remember our freedom fighters and heroes; we must also remember the traitors who betrayed our cause and our people.

(She pauses to listen to and take in another question-understood-before she replies to it.)
Your last, 'personal' question, as you call it, is quite a challenging one, but I shall try to answer it, truthfully: *(Pause)*

When I was growing up, we were taught to work hard and to serve others. There was water and firewood to be fetched. There was land to be cultivated. There was livestock to be herded. There were homes to be built. And it was women, and young girls, who did a lot of this work. Of course, there were women who were considered beautiful. *(Pause)* I like to think that I was one of them. *(Pause)* But, it was not beauty that singled you out as a desirable bride. It was how long the furrows you dug. It was how much water you fetched in a day. It had nothing to do with your figure but everything to do with how powerful a human machine you were. A machine made to serve men. Women knew no such thing as a wardrobe and no such thing as a woman's personal shoe collection: You wore clothes to cover your body and, most probably, you walked barefoot. If you were lucky, your husband gave you enough money to buy material for a new dress for special occasions, like going to church and weddings and funerals. *(Pause)* Women were the property of their husbands. I saw men beating women, with sticks, as if they were animals, for no good reason and as a matter of course. But from this servitude you also won your respect in the community as the wife of so and so and then as the mother of so and so. If you were lucky, you got married to a man who respected you and treated you well. If you were unlucky, you got married to a monster. *(Pause)* I suppose, that much hasn't changed. *(Pause)* A woman was meant to accept the life that was offered to her and to ask for nothing. A woman had no personal ambition, except to be a wife and mother. *(Pause)* So much for being a woman. *(Pause)*

As for 'Sex,' now there's a taboo subject. *(Pause)* You gave sex on demand, without demands. As long as, at some point, it resulted in childbirth and motherhood. *(Pause)* We... I myself, never questioned this scheme of things. It just wasn't the done thing: It's a bit like religion: beliefs and conduct are ingrained into you. You don't dare to question them, as it is sinful to do so. *(She pauses, as if thinking about her response to another part of the question. She laughs as begins to answer.)*

One thing a person should never do is to reveal intimate family details to strangers. *(Pause)* Have I been happy? Have I been fulfilled? *(Pause)* I do not know, really. *(Pause)* As I was trying to explain, the pursuit of happiness was never part of the equation. The equation states that:

'one is because of what one does, not because of what one expects.' And there is fulfilment in living like that. *(Pause)*

As for Kaggia, I made a point of getting to know and understand the man that fate had assigned to me *(Pause)* I didn't marry him for his looks. *(Deadpan)* But he, observant fellow, married me for mine. And let us not forget that I was a very good dancer. *(Pause. Deadpan.)* My father couldn't stand him but that, to me, was a recommendation. *(Pause)* But, in all seriousness, I was drawn to the fact that he seemed fearless and adventurous. That he was inquisitive of mind. I could see that he could be stubborn. I had a feeling that he would be trustworthy and dedicated and faithful. After all, he had not forgotten his pledge to marry me in all the years that he was abroad. *(Pause)*

And I tried as much as possible to accept him as he was because I knew that we had to make the best of it, till death do us part and that our marriage was never meant to be perfect. Luckily for me, I married a good, decent man. It was hard for me and the two children all the years that he was away in detention. And it was hard for me and the children, more of them as it turned out, all the years that he was engrossed in politics. But I saw my role as a supporter and protector, as much as I could support and protect, because I respected him and what he stood for. My own needs were always an afterthought. That's all I would say on the matter. Thank you. *(WAMBUI exits and, after she has done so, the spotlight is switched off abruptly, much like a candle which has been blown out.)*

Scene Ten

KAGGIA: *(Enters slowly and deliberately through the audience and positions himself, mid centre stage to address an imaginary congregation of mourners, taking in the whole audience. STACEY and XAN can still be seen on stage with him, but in silhouette.)* Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, thank you for coming to be with me at this burial ceremony. *(Pause)*

I stand before you, a man diminished. Half of me is gone. Half my sight. Half my hearing. Henceforth, I am to lie in my bed alone. *(Pause)*

People are always keen to ask: 'How did you meet your wife?' 'How did you meet your husband?' We met in a small village, here in Murang'a. In those days her full name was Deborah Wambui Nelson Gitau but she was known as Miss Nelson. I was smitten by her, but I was too scared to declare my intentions verbally, so I put them in writing sometime after I had arrived at my posting in the army. She replied in the affirmative - which, for the youngsters among you, means that she said 'yes' to my proposal of marriage. To tell you the absolute truth, I had first thought of marrying someone else, but she was too slow in responding. *(Pause)*

I do recall that Miss Nelson carried my metal suitcase to the railway station when I left for Egypt as a soldier. She had to wait for me for four years. Yet her faithfulness to me was never in doubt. It would have been sinful of me to betray her trust and steadfastness. She suffered blows because of me at her father's hands before I joined the army and went away; she suffered blows because of me at her father's hands in my absence and, once we were married,

she suffered blows because of me when my political foes sent their lackeys to try to kill me. She was persecuted and even imprisoned for being associated with me. Yet she never wavered in her resolve. *(Pause)*

Wambui was a resolute woman. She took care of our first two children alone during seven of my years in restriction. She ignored the many taunts that swirled around her ears. She was a thick skinned shield to my combative soul. I would not have done what I have done had she been faint of heart. She shared my vision of the world. I know I wouldn't have done what I have done had she spurned the life that I offered her and our children; had she assailed me constantly with comparisons to other men who had seemingly done better than me. Her affection and support were a constant solace. However, such is human decay that she spent her final days weak and bedridden, a shadow of her former self. She needs to rest, now. She must rest, now. *(Pause)*

She has gone on, ahead of me. But, I am sure that, when my time comes, Miss Nelson will help to carry my baggage as part of the reception committee to the eternal life beyond life. *(Pause)*

I yearn to follow her. *(Pause)*

That is all I have to say. I thank you, once again.

(KAGGIA exits slowly through the audience, with religious music in the background)