

# **OBAABERIMA**

**TAWIAH M'CARTHY**

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## SCENE 1

*(Sibongile; up stage centre, hunched over on the floor with her back to the audience. Drumming begins as a spot light slowly reveals Sibongile rising from the floor like a phoenix from ashes. She stands with her back to us, her arms outstretched. She is wearing an orange prisoner's jumpsuit. She is wearing it in a way that feminizes it, that sexualizes her. She sings a long call and slowly turns around to face the audience.)*

**SIBONGILE:**

*(a long call) Ehhhhhhhhhhhh! (Drums. She walks slowly down the stage.)*

*Wafra mo mobra mobra mobra (her gesture summons light in front of her, she walks into it.)*

*Wafra mo mobra mobra mobra (her gesture summons light from the USR doorway)*

*Wafra mo mobra mobra mobra (her gesture summons light from the USL doorway.)*

*(She walks down the stage)*

*Yebedi agoro*

*Yebedi agoro (her gesture summons light from the CSR doorway)*

*Yebedi agoro (her gesture summons light from the CSL doorway)*

*(She walks down the stage)*

*(a long call) Ehhhhhhhhhhhh! (her gesture summons light from the DS doorways)*

*(She slowly moves through three distinct postures, (Obaa, Oberima, and Obaaberima). Music stops at the last pose. Sibongile speaks.)*

This orange looks good on me doesn't it?

I think it is because of the color of my skin. I want to show more skin in it.

Oh, don't be repulsed, I don't wear it like this because I have to, I wear it like this because I want to. In the mist of all these oranges, a change like this serves a very good purpose...my survival.

And if you are looking at me and thinking,

Poor boy she must be someone's bitch

I'm not!

I was...I was!

That was before I got here.

Here, a home that is far from the every day I grew up knowing; waking to the cock crowing... *(in a high voice) kokro krooo!! kokro kroo!!*...it starts in a dream... *kokro*— and then you are awake.

Here, within these walls, with metal doors, on metal beds that sits right next to the metal toilets; within the smells of the laid down shits of others.

Here, in *abroachi*, abroad, in Canada, in prison.

I was scared my first night here. I heard stories of what happens to men like me within walls like these...I also heard stories of how men like me rule within walls like these... I have always wanted to rule in heels.

I've been in here 1,123 days, counted in years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds, heartbeats?...regrets, anger, tears, fears, shame, dreams and change. In here the metal bed is cold; warmth only comes from hearing my heart beat;

pa pam, paa pam, paa pam... one more day, one more day, one more day, to freedom.

Tonight is my last night in here but it seems like I have been counting all my life.

**SIBONGILE:**

Where I come from, when a child is born, they are kept indoors for no less than 7 days. If that child makes it through the first week, then the beginning of their life is marked by a ceremony called “**out-dooring**”: a naming ceremony at which the child is brought out of the house, is introduced to family, friends, and the community. The child will taste water and alcohol for the first time to learn that though they might look the same, they are different. The child is told never to take what doesn't belong to them, and never to lie about what they know to be true. The child is then given a name that tells of where they are from and who they are to be.

30 years ago, a mother was blessed with a child in the likeness of God. Mother sees the makings of a great preacher in this child: she hopes he will become a pastor. Father sees the makings of a great leader in this child; he hopes he will become a lawyer serving justice.

A week later on the day of his out-dooring, this child is named Agyeman: he who saves nations.

Agyeman follows the word of God, becomes a lawyer at the age of 24, but at 27 he finds himself in jail.

Tonight on his last night behind these walls, he is about to re-introduce himself to the world.

*Akwaaba*; welcome to my *out-dooring*. Come back with me to Ghana; West Africa, where the young Agyeman was born.

## SCENE 2

**AGYEMAN:**

*Maame!!! Wow, wo hon ye feh.... Atade no fatar wo paar*  
You look beautiful, the dress fits you perfectly.

**SIBONGILE:**

8 years old, Agyeman stands in front of his mother's mirror. No one is at home. It is the perfect time to find out if it's like he imagines. *(Sibongile becomes 8year old Agyeman)*

**AGYEMAN:**

Black dress with a red belt with butterfly buckle hook  
Wrapped around my waist, tighten

Red high heels, the one with the glow and the rose on its toe.....she keeps them here, they are still in the box.

*(He slowly picks up the box from the closet, he puts it on the floor and slowly takes out his mother's red high heels and tries them on. He looks at himself excitedly in the mirror and begins to talk to himself dreaming out loud.)*

Room at the back of my heel  
Room to grow

**SIBONGILE:**

Not yet woman, to fit into  
Not yet grown as a man to not want to.

But today, wanting so badly to fit these shoes!

**AGYEMAN:**

Maame says I am getting taller every time she blinks, soon I am going to be as tall as her, and I can fit into her clothes as well .....dark, like her, her ears, her lips, her nose.

Very soon, these shoes will be perfect on my feet

I will wear the shoes when we are going to church, Maame will let me borrow them, and I will walk like this

Kroo chiah, Kroo chiah  
Kroo chiah.....Kroo chiah

*(He walks around in the high heels swinging his hips as he walks)*

And everyone says, "oh...such beauty, he looks just like his mother."

Kroo chiah... Kroo chiah... Kroo chiah...

*(Sounds of a heartbeat can be heard slowly on the drums, Agyeman begins to dance, as the drumming evolves in rhythm so does Agyeman in his dance as he slowly manifests the reflection in the mirror through his movements ...the drumming stops abruptly. Agyeman snaps out of the dance, he hears footsteps in the house ...he hurries out of the shoes, he puts them back in the box and the box back in the closet like he found them and runs to meet his mother in the corridor)*

**AGYEMAN:**

Maame, *Akwaabaa*.

How was work?

**SIBONGILE:**

*(she summons her mirror light)*

In the reflection Agyeman sees the being that sings songs to every beat of his heart;

She is like a queen, she glows like a flame.

He saw every bit of himself in that reflection;

It is perfect.

We have the same eyes, the same ears; nose, lips and their hearts beat the same...

pa pam... pa pam... pa pam...

*(She throws light forward into the space and moves into it.)*

## SCENE 3

**SIBONGILE:**

Little Agyeman runs home from school every day, because of Ayele the girl in his class, who is always chasing and calling him names.

**AYELE:**

Obaaberima! Obaaberima! Obaaberima!

**KOBENA:**

*(in a high voice)* Obaaberima! Obaaberima! *(continues taunts under song)*

**AYELE:**

*Obaaberima Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

Agyeman walks like Obaa; watch him run, like a girl.

Agyeman talks like Obaa, watch him cry, like a girl.

Where is your *Koti*, girlboy!

Where is your manhood?

*Obaaberima Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

*Yediwaichi oo!*

**AGYEMAN:**

My name is not Obaaberima, *Ye fre me* Agyeman. I'm a boy, not a girl. If you call me that again, I will tell your mother.

**AYELE:**

Go ahead, she won't care, she said boys like you do not grow up to be men.

**SIBONGILE:**

All the children from school are all shouting;

*(Kobena joins in:) Run Obaaberima, run Obaaberima*

Maybe if he stops he can apologize for whatever he did to make her so angry,

*(Kobena joins in:) Run Obaaberima, run Obaaberima*

Maybe if he stops someone will come to his rescue, they will see how he is being wronged.

*(Kobena joins in:) Run Obaaberima, run Obaaberima*

Maybe if he stops he can actually challenge her to a fight - he can defend himself.

*(Kobena joins in:) Run Obaaberima, run Obaaberima*

He stops. Ayele catches up and pushes him to the ground.

Agyeman gets up.

**SIBONGILE:**

Ayele slaps him across the face, Agyeman grabs a hold of her blouse and it rips, her breasts are bare... she is angry. She begins to hit and kick and everyone is egging her on - to beat the girliness out of him. Obaaberima! (*she scratches him*) Obaaberima! (*she hits him*) Obaaberima! (*she kicks him*) Obaaberima! (*she kicks him again*)

Opayin the shop owner down the street hears them fighting. He walks over.

**OPAYIN:**

Hey!!! Hey!!! *Mo gyei na mo kyrei wo ho no*

Stop right now!

Ayele!! Get off him!!...go home and tell your mother what happened, I am coming to see her tonight.

Go.

Agyeman, I am taking you to see your mother.

**AGYEMAN:**

Opayin *mi pa choi*; please don't tell my mother. I didn't start it; please I will do anything.

**OPAYIN:**

This is not the first time I have seen you run down the streets like that. Why is she chasing you?

**AGYEMAN:**

Please don't tell my mother.

**OPAYIN:**

Go on home, next time this happens, you come and you find me, you tell her you are coming to me after school. She will not follow you. Go.

## SCENE 4

**SIBONGILE:**

Opayin owns a shop down the street from Agyeman's house, "*But for Love Dressmaking Shop*". Since the fight, Agyeman walks past the shop everyday by himself. Opayin has so many beautiful things in his shop; brightly woven Kente cloths, dresses, well-tailored suits and trousers. He prints shapes and images on the fabrics that he uses, paintings that end up on the walls of his shop and in piles behind his sewing machine.

Agyeman always looks forward to seeing Opayin, and makes sure to greet him whenever he is by his shop.

Fridays after school.....

**AGYEMAN:**

Good Afternoon Opayin!

**OPAYIN:**

Good Afternoon Agyeman! How was school?

**SIBONGILE:**

Saturday afternoons on his way back from the market...

**AGYEMAN:**

Good Afternoon Opayin!

**OPAYIN:**

Good Afternoon Agyeman. How is Ayele? Is she still bothering you?

**AGYEMAN:**

She is always bothering me and now everybody is calling me Obaaberima. They don't know my name is Agyeman anymore.

**OPAYIN:**

Aahh. Is it because they forgot your name is Agyeman or that they call you Obaaberima that has you worried? Well you should have no shame in who you are and what makes you different. Let me tell you a story. When *nipa*; humankind was first created by *O'Nyame*; the great one, *nipa* was both *Obaa* and *Oberima* in one like *O'Nyame*, the great one. It says so in the bible, in Genesis chapter 1; *O'Nyame* said, "Let Us make humankind in Our own image, according to Our likeness; let *Onipa* have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So humankind was created, in the image of *O'Nyame*; male and female, *Oberima* and *Obaa*..." But with time we have forgotten we have both within us, you should not forget the power you hold within. You are as perfect as you were made to be.

**SIBONGILE:**

Opayin speaks and all Agyeman can think about is his reflection in his mother's mirror; the woman he saw, the *Obaa* to his *Berima*, complete just like Opayin said; in the likeness of *O'Nyame*, she is his heartbeat.

Pa pam. Pa pam. Pa pam.

Soon Agyeman is visiting Opayin's shop any time he has.

## SCENE 5

**SIBONGILE:**

11 years old. Agyeman's mother expresses concern,

**MAAME:**

About how much time you spend at Opayin's shop and how little time you spend studying. *Agyeman ewosei wo soia adi*, getting into a good Senior Secondary School, becoming a leader, does not happen with you playing around at Opayin's shop.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman calms Maame with a memory verse he has learnt from Opayin.

**AGYEMAN:**

Maame, Opayin says that we are children of God because of how great *O'Nyame's* love is for us. He says it is because of God's mercies that we are saved. *Titus 3:5; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...Amen.*

**SIBONGILE:**

Maame is happy to hear Agyeman understanding God's words from Opayin's teachings.

Agyeman stands in front of Opayin's shop, and watches as he slowly paints with beautiful colors, shapes and images, that Agyeman only sees in his dreams.

*(Movement piece; Opayin painting. The Seprewa illustrates the movement.)*

**OPAYIN:**

Good Afternoon Agyeman, how was school? What did you learn today?

**AGYEMAN:**

We learnt about puberty..... and the changes the body goes through when we become teenagers. Our teacher talked about growing hair under our arms on our stomachs and down there.

**OPAYIN:**

Aaahhh! Many years ago, a person's life was not measured by years and numbers, life was marked by change; growth, survival, often celebrated.

It starts with a naming ceremony; *abadinto; out-dooring*. Then when that child crosses to womanhood; *Obaa* she is celebrated with music, dance and food... *nkosua* (boiled eggs), *bayerie* (yams)... She is put in a room, she is washed, and her skin is bathed in *nkoto* (Shea butter). New beads are placed on her hips, and she is introduced as a woman, no longer a child, having learnt everything a woman needs to know. Her introduction takes away all the childish things she has done.

**AGYEMAN:**

What happens when a child becomes a man?

**OPAYIN:**

Aaahh. *Oberima*, when a child becomes a man, he becomes a man.

*(pause)* You seem disappointed.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

**AGYEMAN:**

Father says I will be a great lawyer; Maame says I will make a great pastor. They say I will lead. I want to study in *abroachi*. I will work hard, I will get rich, I will come back home and be powerful.

**OPAYIN:**

Aaahhh! All that you want to be adds up to the kind of *nipa* you become. You can be whoever you want to be, and if you fail at it, it is only because you were not true to yourself and did not try hard enough.

Agyeman, I want to show you something. Come in to the back room with me for a second. Come on in. Come. Come.

**SIBONGILE:**

The back room is where all the dresses, kaba, and suits are kept. It is Magical.

*(They go inside.)*

**OPAYIN:**

Can you try something on for me? You must be Auntie Adowa's size? Here, try this on for me.

**AGYEMAN:**

A dress?!

**OPAYIN:**

I want to see how it falls on the body

*(Agyeman puts on the dress, he spins around and poses)*

**AGYEMAN:**

Opayin, what do you think?

Do I look beautiful?

**OPAYIN:**

That dress looks good, walk for me... *(Agyeman walks for him.)* Ahh! There you are.

**AGYEMAN:**

Opayin are you a tailor or a seamstress? Everyone says you are the only tailor here in Kaneshie who makes women's dresses.

**OPAYIN:**

I am the things I want to be. I am a tailor, dressmaker, a painter.

I have something for you.

I painted a picture of you

I painted you a black woman

You are wearing a beautiful veil that falls from the very crown of your head to your neck.

Your mouth is held shut with nails.

They pierce through your thick black lips.

You have not found your voice yet.

I left your eyes open, so everyone can look into them; the body, charm and beauty she carries is not yours yet, Obaaberima Agyeman but the eyes, they remind us that she is you.

She carries the tune of your woman.

You were both born by the coast of our motherland

You were both born where "the blacks" are from

You are of this woman.

Her lips carry the contours of your lips

The curves of her face are yours, the length of her neck is yours, the colour of her eyes is yours, she is you. Hair, skin, eyes, lips, nose, breast, buttocks, hips, and legs.

**SIBONGILE:**

In Opayin's words and the painting, Agyeman sees her again. He feels his soul dancing to the beats of Opayin's words... paa pam...paa pam... paa pam...

**OPAYIN:**

She is yours to name, what will you call her?

**AGYEMAN:**

Sibongile

**OPAYIN:**

Ahh Sibongile. Which means thanks.

## SCENE 6

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman is 13 years old. Every Friday night, Maame and father go to an all night meeting at church, and when they leave, Agyeman goes to Opayin's Shop.

But this Friday when he arrives, Opayin is asleep in his bed in the back room of his shop... *(he snores)* the cloth around his waist has come undone, and he is *Naked!*

*(Agyeman quietly walks over to Opayin's bed, he kneels beside the bed, staring at Opayin asleep naked. He looks around to make sure he is alone. Agyeman gently puts his hands on Opayin's manhood and begins to caress it. Opayin wakes up with Agyeman's hand on his penis)*

**OPAYIN:**

Agyeman!

*(Opayin grabs a hold of Agyeman's hand...Pause)*

You can only touch me like this as a woman.

There is a dress on a hanger behind the door, take off your clothes and put it on.

You cannot tell anyone about this. They will not understand.

*(Movement piece as Agyeman slowly puts on the dress, Sibongile starts to emerge.)*

**AGYEMAN/SIBONGILE:**

Red belt with butterfly buckle hook

Wrap around my waist and tighten, tighten, tighten

Have no hips but I can walk with a swing in my ever so tiny frame. I am her now, the woman in the painting. Sibongile.

Paa Pam Paa Pam Pa Pam

*(Sibongile emerges and begins to seduce Opayin; dancing)*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

**SIBONGILE:**

Now every Friday night he gently turns me around, and pulls up the dress and with one hand holding my socks stuffed breast and the other holding on to me, he makes love to Sibongile, in Auntie Esi's Red dress, or in Auntie Adowa's *Kaba*, or in Mansa's *Slit*..... that he has just finished sewing with the red heels with the shiny covered glow and the perfected crafted rose on its toes, I borrow from Maame's Closet.

He is Oberima, I am Obaa, and there is nothing wrong with that.

I am her now, the one in the painting. Sibongile.

Look at me.

## SCENE 7

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman is 14 years old. He works every day after school at Opayin's shop, learning the skill of suit and dress making as a hobby. He cuts, he sews, he measures, he fits, he picks-up, he delivers and he models.

**OPAYIN:**

Thank you Agyeman, you can take off the dress now.

**AGYEMAN:**

Do you want me to take the dress to the seamstress, for the stitches?

**OPAYIN:**

Now? The boys are playing football behind the market, you can wait and do it later when they are done.

**AGYEMAN:**

Opayin they don't bother me anymore. They are afraid I will curse them with my tongue.

*(Opayin gives him a look)*

I told one of the boys that I am a fetish child, Obaaberima Sibongile; I am both girl and boy, born in the likeness of *O'Nyame* himself. I told him if he bothers me again I will curse his unborn children to never see his lifetime. I then threw my hands in the air snapping my fingers away, and pointed in between his eyes! *(dances and chants)* The fear of being impotent has scared most of them off.

**OPAYIN:**

Obaaberima Agyeman, *Payinsem na eye yo deh*, you enjoy being older than your age.

And Agyeman, I have told you, you don't wear your trouser like that. There is no need in showing to the world your manhood when you are dressing like a gentleman. Come here, let me adjust you... a gentleman hides his privates from unnecessary attention.

I want you to take this dress to Auntie Esi, Nana Osei's mother. Nana Osei is getting confirmed at church next week, Auntie Esi wants to look her best, she wants a new *Kaba*.

*(He hands Agyeman the dress)* Here you go. I will see you on Friday.

## SCENE 8

**SIBONGILE:**

Auntie Esi owns the Big American Store at the market. She is always spectacularly dressed and drives really nice cars. Her son Nana Osei has just moved back from *abroachi*, from abroad. Since the beginning of the school long vacation, everyone has been talking about him, they all want be his friend. Agyeman has seen him at the market before. Nana Osei sits outside his mother's store and reads, that is all he does. His head is always buried in a book. He never says a word. Agyeman likes the way he dresses. He always has a handkerchief in his shirt pocket, it peeks out.

This will be Agyeman's fourth visit to their store this week.

But today Agyeman will not give him the pleasure of ignoring him.

**AGYEMAN:**

Good evening Auntie Esi! Here is the *kaba* from Opayin, I will wait outside.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman sits outside the store beside Nana Osei and watches him read. They don't say a word to each other. *(They sit in silence. Agyeman looks at Nana Osei, then looks away)*

**AGYEMAN**

*(sings)* It's my prerogative. *(looks at Nana Osei. Looks away)*

*(sings)* It's my prerogative.

*(sings louder)* It's my prerogative-iiive! *(looks at Nana Osei)*

**NANA OSEI:**

I like that song. You are Agyeman right?

**AGYEMAN:**

*(pause)* ...so you do know who I am.

You always ignore me when I come here.

**NANA OSEI:**

*(laughs)* You stare, it's uncomfortable. I was just waiting for you to stop looking at me and say something; "*eti sen*"; how are you?

**AGYEMAN:**

So are you asking me how I am? "*Me hon ye*", I'm fine and you?

**SIBONGILE:**

Nana Osei smiles at Agyeman. His heart beats.

Nana Osei smells warm, like cocoa butter on a harmattan morning.

**AGYEMAN:**

What are you reading?

**NANA OSEI:**

Ali Baaba and the forty thieves, I am almost done. Have you read it? My mother doesn't allow me to lend out my books. My father brought them from *abroachi*. I can tell you the story when I finish.

**AGYEMAN:**

Were you born in *abroachi*?

Where did you live? New York? London? Amsterdam?

What is it like in *abroachi*? I am going to go there one day to study.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman and Nana Osei sit behind Auntie Esi's store and share stories. They talk about *abroachi*, they eat digestive cookies from the store, they often share a bottle of Fanta, that is Nana Osei's favorite, he calls it orange pop! They listen to BoysII Men cassettes on Nana Osei's brother's walkman.

Agyeman and Nana Osei become best friends.

*(They do their secret handshake)*

**SIBONGILE:**

When school starts, Nana Osei convinces his driver to drop him off at Agyeman's house in the morning. They walk to school together hand in hand as best friends do. They talk about their future and the men they will grow up to be. Nana Osei tells Agyeman that he is going to be a Doctor. Agyeman tells Nana Osei that he is going to be a lawyer.

**AGYEMAN:**

I will go abroad to study law, I will make a lot of money, I will come back home and I will change things.

**NANA OSEI:**

Agyeman, it does not work that way, you change things by being change. You lead by example. We will be the Nkrumahs of our generation.

**AGYEMAN:**

Kwame Nkrumah led our country to independence, but he also studied in *abroachi*.

**NANA OSEI:**

I want to be a Doctor, so that I can help people who are not well, right here at home.

**AGYEMAN:**

Nana Osei, I don't come from money like you do. I will not have the same opportunities after university, here at home, even with a scholarship. I have to go to *abroachi*, There will be more for me with a scholarship abroad.

**NANA OSEI:**

Agyeman, it will not be the same when you leave. I have never had a friend like you.

## SCENE 9

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman is 16 years old, last week of vacation. After visiting at the market, Nana Osei walks with Agyeman home. As usual, they are talking about the future and their dream to change their world.

They get to the house.

Nana Osei wants some ice water, so Agyeman invites him in.

Maame will not mind. They are home alone.

Agyeman goes to the boy's quarters to change into his house clothes, Nana Osei follows him; he wants to come.

Agyeman takes off his shirt and folds it.

Nana Osei's eyes are on him.

Nana Osei spills his water on his shirt, he is wet.

**AGYEMAN:**

Nana Osei, do you want to change? You can borrow my clothes, here, take off your wet clothes and wear this, Maame will not mind.

**SIBONGILE:**

He takes his shirt off and just stands.

Nana Osei, is sixteen years old and he has hair on his stomach, it travels right into his trousers.

Agyeman wants to see how his manhood shows. He wants to see how much hair he has around his *koti*. His thoughts betray him. Nana Osei sees and chases him around the room.

*(Nana Osei chases Agyeman around the room. Chase turns into slow motion flying dance)*

**SIBONGILE:**

Nana Osei catches up to Agyeman, they touch, and his heart begins to beat fast. Agyeman doesn't know this, he doesn't know how to love him like this. He is not Sibongile. Nana Osei continues with his fingers, then his hands, then his lips and then his body. Agyeman feels Nana Osei's hand on his *koti*, it is growing big and hard in his trousers. *(Sibongile sings in breaths to welcome his touch.)*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

*Oooooo-oo-*

**NANA OSEI:**

Shh...Agyeman, don't do that.

**AGYEMAN:**

It is not Sibongile he wants.

*(to Nana Osei)* Nana Osei have you ever been with a boy like this before?

**NANA OSEI:**

No, but I have always known I want to and you are more perfect than I imagined. Have you been with a boy like this before?

**AGYEMAN:**

No.

**SIBONGILE:**

He kisses Agyeman. Agyeman kisses back, the two boys have found each other, body to body, together as Agyeman and Nana Osei,

Nana Osei comes over again, and again, and again.

## SCENE 10

**SIBONGILE:**

On Friday nights he is Sibongile at Opayin's shop. He never loves me wrong.

*(Sibongile pulls up the dress, and sings the song of their love making.)*

*Oooooo-oooooh*

On Mondays after school he is Agyeman behind Auntie Esi's store with Nana Osei.

*(Handshake, giggle. )  
(Sex movement piece:)*

*Huh-huh*

*Haaa...*

Agyeman gives part of himself to Opayin. He is being loved as a woman and yet he is lonely.

Agyeman gives part of himself to Nana Osei. He is being loved as a man, and yet he is hungry.

Obaa and Oberima are separate, living in the same body, but surviving on the love of different men. Agyeman feels lost in the space between them.

He begins to spend less time at Opayin's shop.

*(at Opayin's Shop)*

**OPAYIN:**

Why don't you come by anymore? I miss Sibongile.

**AGYEMAN:**

School is really busy and I have to give it all my attention.

**OPAYIN:**

Agyeman, have I upset you in any way?

**AGYEMAN:**

No. you can never upset me. I am tired from school. I have been studying for the exams. I have one more exams on Friday and I will be free again. I will come by Friday night like I used to, when Maame and father leave for church.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman begins to make excuses to Nana Osei.

*(At the market)*

**NANA OSEI:**

Do you want to come over on Friday night? My mother said I could invite a friend over to watch a film at home. It will only be the two of us.

**AGYEMAN:**

I am doing something for my mother on Friday night.

**NANA OSEI:**

Agyeman, is everything ok?

**AGYEMAN:**

No, yes, no, yes... I can come by after school for a bit but I have to be home by 6pm.

**SIBONGILE:**

And so, that Friday after school, Agyeman goes home with Nana Osei. They eat and they listen to music, they quietly kiss in the bathroom, they go into garage and silently make love.

At 6pm sharp, Agyeman leaves to go home so that he can have dinner with his parents.

Once they go out, Agyeman sneaks out and heads to Opayin's Shop. He goes into the back room and quietly changes into the short black dress Opayin has just finished sewing for him. He puts on the red belt with the butterfly buckle hook and Maame's red high heels which are now fitting perfectly.

He gently turns me around so he can unzip the dress holding on to my breast.

I end up facing the back window which has been left slightly open because of the hamatan heat.

*(in a whisper)* Nana Osei?

And he was gone.

**AGYEMAN:**

Someone was there... Someone saw through the window... They will tell Maame... I have to go... I am going home.

*(he quickly takes of the dress and shoes and puts on his clothes and begins to run out)*

Nana Osei wait. Nana Osei *mi pa choi*. Nana Osei.

**NANA OSEI:**

Opayin is taking advantage of you. He has turned you into his doll and you are playing the part so well.

**AGYEMAN:**

I'm no one's doll. I found love with you because of her. I'm obaaberima, I'm both obaa and oberima in one like O'nyame the great one.

**NANA OSEI:**

I don't want you as a woman.

**AGYEMAN:**

Nana Osei, please. I'm telling you this because I love you.

**NANA OSEI:**

You're telling me this because you got caught.

**SIBONGILE:**

Nana Osei shuts the gates. Agyeman sits down outside Nana Osei's house and weeps.

## SCENE 11

**SIBONGILE:**

Two weeks go by and Agyeman hides at home. He does not hear from Nana Osei. He doesn't visit Opayin. He makes no trips to the market, he is afraid. One evening, his father brings home a letter.

**AGYEMAN:**

I got the scholarship from the Cocoa Marketing Board in Tema. I am going to study abroad. *(jumps up and down in excitement)* I am going to *abroachi!* I am going to *abroachi!* I am going to *abroachi!* I am going to Canada! I need to tell Nana Osei.

**SIBONGILE:**

He puts on his Sunday school shirt, Nana Osei likes the color, he fold his sleeves. Well ironed khaki trousers, he wears his new Suede shoes, 2 handkerchiefs, and combs his hair. Perfect!

He gets to the gate of Nana Osei's big house.

*(Agyeman bangs on the gate...pooompooompoom)*

A watchman appears.

**GATEMAN:**

What you want for here?

**AGYEMAN:**

Good morning sir, I am here to see Nana Osei! I am his friend Agyeman...I am Mr. Opuku's son from North Kaneshie

**GATEMAN:**

Make you wait for there.

**SIBONGILE:**

Auntie Esi, Nana Osei's mother comes out

**MOTHER:**

Nana Osei is not here, he has gone to live with his father abroad.

**AGYEMAN:**

Oh! But he didn't tell me that he was leaving.

**MOTHER:**

Young one, he left last week. Go away.

**AGYEMAN:**

Nana Osei is gone.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman runs to Opayin's shop... Opayin is not there. It is empty inside...

**AGYEMAN:**

Someone knows about him, about me, about us.

The heart beats. They are both gone and I do not know who has told and what was said. The heart beats: I am alone.

**SIBONGILE:**

Agyeman's name is whispered in conversations over and over again:  
They say Opayin was arrested.  
They say he is at Kaneshie Jail.  
They say he was caught with a young boy.  
Some say it was Nana Osei and now he is gone.  
They say Agyeman is lucky that Opayin did not touch him. Maame says that,

**MAAME:**

Agyeman, you were saved from the evil plans of the devil.

**AGYEMAN:**

Agyeman is alone, and he knows it is all his fault. He believes the emptiness, shame and heart break is a punishment for who he has become. So he prays to O'Nyame.

*O'Nyame ah wowo soro Mereye saah biom. Mereye Sibongile. Mereye Obaaberima.*

*O'Nyame ah wowo soro Mereye saah biom. Mereye Sibongile. Mereye Obaaberima.*

*(A movement piece.)*

If you see me through this. I will change.

When a child becomes a man, he becomes a man. This part of the journey he will take alone, Sibongile will be left behind.

## SCENE 12

**AGYEMAN:**

18 years Old, I fly from Accra; Kotoka International airport, and I land in Canada on 13th of October. It is cold, very cold and I am lonely. Making friends isn't easy; I spend most of my time in the library, hiding from conversations that have me repeating everything I say. I am now Agyeman, the Black African, the one who talks with an accent. I become quiet, afraid to speak, ashamed to be seen as other.

Where do you come from?

Ghana..... no not Guyana, Gh-a-na

Some treat me differently, every so often interpreting my tone as idiocy

Some, in their attempt to not offend me; I become a discovery like on the discovery channel

Do you have elephants in your backyard?

Do you eat monkeys?

Do you know how to throw a spear?

Do you have a big .....?

I learn to ignore. If I don't see them, they don't see me.

I have come to study.

I have come to learn, I will contribute to the home I come from.

I will be change. I will be a source of pride to them that believed in me, invested in me.

This is my focus.

I dress like Opayin taught me, making sure my manhood is never on display in my pants, my shirt is always tucked in and my belt matches my shoes. I talk like a man, sit like a man, walk like a man.

## SCENE 13

**AGYEMAN:**

First Year University, 3 months, two weeks and four days since I left Ghana, I still spend my time alone. I join the Scripture union. I want to make friends, good Christian friends that will keep me focused. The devil finds work for idle hands.

I meet a girl from Accra, she knows some of the people from North Kaneshie.

**PHILIPA:**

Philipa Mensah, from the Christian Girls' Secondary School in Accra?

**AGYEMAN:**

I am Agyeman Opuku, an old boy of Christian Boys'.

**PHILIPA:**

Agyeman Opuku, now I can put a face to your name.

You know Ayele, she is my cousin's best friend?

Ha...she is a bit much, I know.

So do you go to church?

Do you have a home church?

You should come to my church, there are lots of Ghanaians there, and it's like back home.

Really, it is just like back home; the music, the people....

Are you seeing someone?

Is there someone back home?

We should hang out together some time?

We can make some *waagye* or *banku*.

**AGYEMAN:**

I visit Philipa at church, it is fun, the music, the dancing; they sing songs like we did at church back home. Philipa loves to sing.

**PHILIPA:**

*(sings) Danase danase da onyame nase*

*Danase danase da onyame nase*

*Efise oyea na nadooie doso mamei*

*Danase danase da onyame nase*

**AGYEMAN:**

Philipa and I spend a lot of time together. She is intelligent, hardworking, and independent; it is in the way she dresses, how she speaks, her dedication to God and her drive to succeed.

Every Sunday, we meet at 9 am, we fast in the morning. We go to church.

***(Agyeman sings)***

*Shout hale*

*Hallelujah shout hale*

*Hallelujaah*

*O'Nyame ni diena ye ber bo dai biara daa*

**AGYEMAN con't***Hallelujah shout hale**Hallelujah shout hale**Hallelujah shout hale**Hallelujaaaah*

Praise the Lord, Hallelujah, thank you Jesus.

After church we break our fast at her house. She cooks, *Banku, Waagye, fufu*... we eat, we talk in twi.

**PHILIPA:**

*Ewo Seir wo woh babia wo rekko. Babia Eradie pe sei wo ko na wo yie bibia ewoso woye ko do ho.*

It is all a matter of being able to stay focused, knowing what God's plans are for you, knowing where you need to be and strategizing a way to get there.

Of course going home is part of the bigger picture. The pride I have in being Ghanaian comes from knowing as a young Black woman, I am part of its change.

## SCENE 14

**AGYEMAN:**

Second Year University; one year, four months, two weeks and four days since I left home; Philipa and I have been dating for a year now. She becomes my woman, she is easy to love. Philipa is a born again Christian who believes that sex before marriage is a sin, so we do everything else.

**PHILIPA:**

*Wo paa. Agyeman gye na wo chirie no.*

That is always how it starts.

**AGYEMAN**

Philipa, let me play with your ass, I won't put it in, I will just rub it in between.

**PHILIPA:**

My ass? No! Why?

You are not getting any until you put a ring on it.

Ohh... you are so hard. Maybe you should pick up a hobby to work some of this energy off.

**AGYEMAN:**

I begin to work out at the school gym. First it's the shirtless men at the gym. Then it is the guys from my classes, from the subway and streetcar... I undress them in my mind picturing what they look like naked.

I stop going to the gym and I pick up running.

But I still wake up hard...wet, from dreams; images of naked men in my head.

I need to pray more, so I pray.

But there is this guy at the library: Ray Jay! *(He inhales a joint as Ray Jay, does a small wave)* Ray Jay has dark skin, brown eyes and a scar on his left brow. I like looking at him. One day I speak before I can stop myself. "Are you studying for the exams tomorrow?"

**RAY JAY:**

*(nods)* I'm just smoking a joint before heading back to the library. You smoke?

**AGYEMAN:**

Haaha! Yeah... but I'm good man!

**RAY JAY:**

Cool! See you later bro!

**AGYEMAN:**

Cool...Uhh... You know what? Why not?

*(he takes a drag, coughs)* Ray Jay laughs at me. We exchange numbers and set another date to hang out.

It doesn't take long. We hang out all the time, smoke joints, watch movies, eat and complain about our chicks who won't to give us love. Ray Jay says:

**RAY JAY:**

My girlfriend won't give me head because I'm too thick.

**AGYEMAN:**

I call him a liar. We compare sizes. He asks:

**RAY JAY:**

Yo, if I blow you will you blow me?

**AGYEMAN:**

Hey I am not your girlfriend.

**RAY JAY:**

It's all cool. You have a girlfriend, I have a girlfriend and we are not taking it up the ass. It's all good, trust me, we can do it on the DL, I can be very discreet.

**AGYEMAN**

We take turns going down on our knees in front of each other.

We find comfort on the down low. I have girlfriend, I don't get fucked in the ass, so it is all good.

But I want more, more of that touch, more of that kiss, more of that cock, more of that ass...on the down low. The internet, makes it easy. Adam for Adam.

Josh; pale skin, long hair and green eyes. He is so beautiful. His love is for the shade of the skin that covers my heart. Josh likes to be fucked by African men. He loves it when I swear in twi during sex. *Beia wo tuo na me di wo. Beia wo tuo na me di wo. Beia wo tuo na me di wo.*

We don't look at each other when we fuck, on the down low.

School, studying, exams.

Dinner with Phillipa on Sunday. Phillipa!

**PHILIPA**

Aaaaaiie! Agyeman!

**AGYEMAN**

Jake, tall with big hands he likes cars and parking lots on the down low.

School, studying, exams.

Dinner with Phillipa on Sunday. Phillipa!

**PHILIPA**

Aaaaaiie! Agyeman!

**AGYEMAN**

Paul

Maxwell

Derrick On the Down Low. There's an emptiness inside and the only thing that fills it is sex with men.

School, studying, exams.

Graduation. Phillipa!

**PHILIPA**

*Aiyiechoo!*

**AGYEMAN**

I am 24 years-old and a junior lawyer at Maud-Lesley and Associates. I am on the fast track to becoming a partner. The 5-year plan now is to make money here in Canada, save, and then go back home. And marry Phillipa. So I work hard.

*(to a client)* Come on in, have a seat.

*(to his secretary)* Stephanie, I'm in a meeting, please hold all my calls.

*(to a client)* It was a pleasure – see you at the golf course.

*(to his secretary)* Stephanie, I'm gone for the day.

**AGYEMAN**

Friday and Saturday nights I go dancing with new friends, I have fun,...there is comfort on the down low.

*(Club music, Agyeman dancing)*

I dance and there she is, she creeps in with the alcohol, she takes over in the darkness and seduces with movements of her body.

...then one night I meet Elijah.

*(Elijah dances energetically, he mimes over the music to Agyeman: drink? He goes to the bar, looking over his shoulder at Agyeman. He gives Agyeman his drink.)*

**ELIJAH:**

You're a really good dancer.

**AGYEMAN:**

Thank you.

**ELIJAH:**

Are you here by yourself?

**AGYEMAN**

Yes.

Elijah asks me out for dinner, and I say why not?

A week later at dinner, I catch him smiling at me a few times so I sit and cross my legs like Sibongile and I smile back. I see his green eyes light up. He likes me. Pale skin, soft lips, strong arms. I notice the way his shoulders lift when he laughs.

**ELIJAH:**

When I finished university, I moved here. I finally accepted that I was gay, I saw the life I wanted and I knew it wasn't gonna happen for me in North Bay so I came out to my family and I moved here.

My family is okay with it. Everyone knows. Are you out? I couldn't tell.

*(he laughs)*

**AGYEMAN:**

Elijah works hard, he gives back. He works as a counselor at the men's clinic, and he's also a carpenter. He believes honesty is a strong foundation to a healthy relationship.

Elijah wants to meet my friends, I tell him:

**AGYEMAN:**

I don't really have friends. Philipa is my only sister; *(to Elijah)* She doesn't agree with my "lifestyle".

**ELIJAH:**

Ooh... You are a loner eh, Mr. Africa! Dangerous!  
Will you ever tell your sister about us? *(he shrugs)*

**AGYEMAN:**

Mr. Africa. Dangerous.

**AGYEMAN:**

Dinner with Philipa on Sunday.  
Philipa travels a lot for work. She is home for one weekend every month; we spend them together. We speak in twi, we talk about what is going on back at home, she plays high-life music when she is cooking, sometimes we stop to dance. *(she dances)* She reminds me so much of home.

**PHILIPA:**

*Agyeman, wa ti nia ekoso wo fie?* have you heard what is going on at home?  
There are a bunch of Ghanaians in london who are petitioning for the law against homosexual acts to be decriminalized in our constitution. *enkosia sem beng so nie.*  
I swear to you, this is the devil at work.  
This whole gay thing is demonic. It is an agenda. They should keep it there in london and not bring that *abrofo nima no* back home. We are a God fearing nation.  
We need to pray more now, than ever before.

**AGYEMAN:**

I listen and just nod. Yes, we should pray for Ghana.

Elijah and I have been dating for months now.  
Elijah wants me to meet his friends, build a new family. He encourages me to come out. So I'm out, only with him and his friends. He believes in me. He sleeps in my bed, I cook in his kitchen. We go out dancing. He loves to dance, but cannot dance but I'm beginning to love him for that.

**ELIJAH:**

I've been thinking, we spend so much time together, we should move in together, Mr. Africa. Maybe start thinking of a future, you know, I will like to get married one day, but not in a church though. We can have a beautiful love celebration with our friends and family. I want two kids, a boy and a girl. Am I am scaring you? I can see my future with you. But we should live together first, I can take your second bedroom. I know how you like your personal space.

**AGYEMAN:**

I am happy with Elijah. There might be a future here. I might be happy in it.

**ELIJAH:**

I love you, Mr. Africa.

**AGYEMAN:**

The most I could say is; *(to Elijah)* I really love... being with you too.

Dinner with Philipa.

**PHILIPA:**

Agyeman, are we okay? I understand that we can't live together before marriage, but you still haven't set a date for our engagement in Ghana.

**AGYEMAN:**

Philipa, maybe we shouldn't move things too fast. Let's work hard for another couple of years, save money, and then move back. We could both be present for the engagement, I could even help plan the party.

***(to his audience)***

She smiles and my heart breaks.

***(to Philipa)***

By the way, I'm thinking of getting a roommate for my place; his rent would take care of the property taxes and the utilities.

***(to audience)***

She agrees. Elijah moves in.

## SCENE 15

**AGYEMAN:**

I am 26 years old. I am now an Associate Partner at Maud and Lesley. I am living with a man. I send money home every month, to my family, but I never call. I haven't been home since I left 8 years ago and now the very thought of going home scares me. I will lose this if I go home.

Philipa stops asking about when we will be getting engaged. But I know that she is waiting for me. I try not to think about that.

I tell Elijah that Philipa is my sister, she is family.

*(to Elijah)* I told you Elijah, she doesn't want to meet you. She's not into this whole gay thing just like the rest of my family. I told you if we're going to be together you have accept that you are not going to meet my family, I can't bring you back home, I told you this, you said you understood, you agreed.

I am good at keeping them apart.

I tell Philipa

*(to Philipa)* Elijah is a bit odd, you know, he is a bit of a loner and does not really believe in God or Christianity. He is just beginning to get comfortable with me and I am just slowly introducing him to Christ's love. I think it's best I gain his trust one on one. God is working on him through me.

I am good at sliding through.

Until one day after work, I get home and there they are; Elijah and Philipa sitting in my living room, waiting for me, the earth underneath me begins to open...

*(to Philipa)* Philipa...! What are you doing here? When did you get back?

**PHILIPA:**

A letter came for you from home; I wanted to come drop it off, so I called and Elijah invited me over. I just met your 'roommate'. the one you've been fucking up the ass. Oh wait is he fucking you up the ass? Agyeman why would you do this to me, why would you hurt me like that? I thought I knew you, I believed you were a Christian, that you believed in God and his word. if you believed in your heart that this is who you are suppose to be. Then there would be no need to hide; there will be no need to lie about it, Here is your letter. May God save your souls. What a waste of a man.

**AGYEMAN:**

With that she walks out. I don't stop her.  
Elijah leaves into the bedroom  
He is upset, I will give him his space...we will talk about it later.  
Elijah walks back out of the bedroom carrying his bags.

**ELIJAH:**

You told her you were going to marry her?

**AGYEMAN:**

Elijah, I can explain. Just let me explain. The pressure from home, the pressure to be this person

**ELIJAH:**

I don't think you know who you are and it is all because you don't love yourself. I am done. I tried, I really tried, and I deserve better.

**AGYEMAN:**

Elijah, I am sorry.

**ELIJAH:**

You are not sorry Agyeman; you are saying that because you got caught.

**AGYEMAN:**

Don't leave. *I... I love you.*

**ELIJAH:**

This is not love.

**AGYEMAN:**

He turns around and walks away...

Elijah, Elijah, Elijah!

He will come back, he will come back.

I will wait.

*(He walks up and down the apartment aimlessly.)*

He will come back.

*(sees the letter on the floor, he looks at it)*

**NANA OSEI:**

Dear Agyeman,

I hope life has been kind to you. It has been years since we last saw each other. I hope you have found happiness.

I am in Ghana, I came back 2 years ago, and I am a Doctor, practicing and teaching at the 37 Military Hospitals in Accra. It is great to be home working, giving back like we said we would when we were young.

I am writing to you today with news of your old friend. I came in to work three days ago and was greeted with a rumor of a gay man badly beaten and brought to the hospital. Agyeman, it was Opayin. He had come into the city to meet a man he met on the internet. It was a trap; they ambushed him, robbed him and beat him.

Two days in the hospital and your name was always on his lips. I never knew he loved you that much. It's all so long ago; I can barely remember it all. But please know that I was only trying to protect you.

He asked me to write to you; he wanted you to know that your home is waiting for change. I do not know what he meant, but in his last breath, he wanted me to tell you to remember the painting. Agyeman, Opayin is dead, he passed away last night at the hospital. I was with him, he was not alone.

I'm sorry to tell you this.

I wish you love always,

Nana Osei

**AGYEMAN:**

Opayin, Nana Osei, Philipa, Elijah. They are not coming back.

This not how it is supposed to happen. This is not how this is supposed to be.

I tried.

I dressed like I was supposed to

I spoke how I was supposed to

I walked how I was supposed to

I stood how I was supposed to

I played the parts how I was supposed to

I did it all...

A world of dreams falling all around me,  
it falls into the endless floors and hollow ground below.

I can see it all unraveling.

This is how quickly it all disappears,

A world made of papers lined with words;

Words of beauty and possibilities.

A world made of stolen scraps of fabrics left over from another's well tailored suit.

Made of shapes and colours, made of hidden shames and dreams

The painting. The woman with the veil with the nails in her lips

The being that I see is stuck but everything around her is moving.

The being that I hid is waking up. (*unzip, arm out of jumpsuit*)

She is waking up in painful heartbreaks. (*stomping movement*)

She is dark, not only her skin but her eyes, (*roll up pant legs*)

Her blood pumps through these hands.

**SIBONGILE:**

She had to get out. I didn't know where I was going, but she was going somewhere, we were going out. She had to get out! I walked down the street with the letter still in my hand. My heart was heavy in its beats. I was at the stop lights, there was a guy at the other end, no older than 18. Lights change, we walk towards each other. Just as he walks past me, he bumps into me, he whispers something, "faggot", and then laughs. Nana Osei's letter falls down, my heart beats... he steps on it, my heart beats... He laughs, my heart beats... and then it all went dark.

*(We hear a scream, and then it goes dark.)*

## SCENE 16

**SIBONGILE:**

And now I am here. I had nothing more to lose. The ones that loved me once were all gone

All I had left was that letter, its words spoke of a person I used to know.

It was all I had left.

It was a fight,  
Because I did not walk like him,  
I did not dress like him, I did not sound like him.

It was a fight and I fought it standing up...

I heard my heartbeat. She had to survive...

I am not sorry for what I've done. But I will never do that again.

I built walls around myself. I hid part of myself to please others.  
The dress, the belt, the nails, the veil, the lies they all fall.

When I was named, when the elders of the family gathered to speak my truth, they did not know parts of me. They had no name for those parts.

I was Obaa  
I was Oberima  
I was Sibongile  
I was Agyeman  
I was Opayin, Nana Osei, Elijah  
I was Philipa, Ayele, Maame

But there is no name for all of who I am.

I survived 27 years, putting parts of me in orange. I was not changed in here, I was born out there.  
Within the cries and pains but I've paid my dues within these walls, dressing like every one of you.

And now I wear it like this because it is the only way it fits me right

I wear it like this because it looks good on me.

And if you're still are looking at me, and thinking: "Poor boy, he must be someone's bitch."

Well this is my story. This is my out-dooring.

The doors are about to open and I can no longer slide through.  
The doors are about to open, and I need to be seen.

Watch me walk.

*(She turns)* Kro Chiah... Kro Chiah...

*(She summons light, and walks away)*

*(The lights slowly fade on her as she disappears into the prison bars)*

THE END