

Enemy of the People

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“Omosh, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Omosh. Will you stop, Omosh?” The Governor of Bichibichi County pleads with the Minister for Finance, as he pulls away his new creamy chocolate Galaxy S7 Samsung tablet. Their feet swish dryly across the smooth floor tiles as they scramble for the phone. In the first quiver of the morning sunshine, these two are really plunged in a milieu of melee.

“So, I am a ‘nobody’ to you. Perhaps, you don’t trust me. I won’t tell anyone. I swear.” Omosh stabs his finger on the floor, then licks it as an assurance of a deal done. Honorable Gentleman Bazu manages to snatch back his tablet. His eyes are still fixated on Omosh.

“Spies are all over. Even friends can be traitors,” Bazu says. “Last week alone, three ministers were fired because of allegations of corruption. Close friends, who spied on their secret projects and reported them to the Director of Criminal Investigations, betrayed them. I don’t want this. Of course, I trust you. But if you betray me, you will have gained no ticket to heaven. You are a smart thief just like me!” Silence follows.

“I can feel it.”

“What?”

“Fear is delicious when death is near.”

“And death isn’t delicious when fear is near!”

“Exactly!”

Bazu scrolls through photos in his gallery.

“This is the thing,” Omosh says, beholding one of the photos Bazu shows him. He takes the tablet in his hands and studies the photo more keenly. His voice is tremulous. Delicious jets of anxiety massage his mind. He bites his lower lip. Sweat scrawls out of his wiry hands.

“Impeccable!” Omosh’s voice scrapes out.

“Of course!”

“How did you manage to build this palace ... He! He! He!”

“Come over!” Bazu takes Omosh by hand. “Last time you told me it cost you fifty million Ricafan shillings to build this palace. Where did you say you got your money?”

“That Dispensary on the left of my compound ... That, take a closer look.”

He points towards it from the window. Bazu’s eyes follows Omosh’s finger to his pointing.

“I was in charge of its renovations and expansions. It was supposed to be a ‘Level Five’ Hospital. The government allocated seventy million for that purpose. I used my wisdom and managed to renovate and expand it at a cost of twenty million Ricafan shillings only! The rest... As they say, is history.”

“Sure, you told me this good news last year when we met for your birthday.”

“What about you? Your house has mesmerized me for a while now. I used to think I have the most palatial home, but yours is at another level in size and perfection. The tiles in this photo were imported from France. The roofing materials were from Italy. The glasses of the windows were from America. I cannot detail even the design itself. It is heaven on earth. Its grills are gold coated. Each aspect of it is a manifestation of the crude wealth soaking our nation. Congratulations! It is the best palace I have ever seen!”

“Thank you for your kind words. In my case ...” he scrolls the tablet and displays another photo of his house, with the neighboring road clearly captured.

“This road was meant to be tarmacked. It is fifty kilometers long. Two hundred million was allocated to this project. Out of my wisdom, I built the palace you see in the picture. At least, I now own a palace like you. It cost me one hundred and fifty million to build. The other fifty million was used to coat murrum on the road.”

“Congratulations!”

“Thank you ...”

“How can you spend fifty million on murrum?”

“Ah! I spent only two million. I kept the rest of it in my house for each day I have beggars at my gate. A good number of them come. Some are students who want me to clear their school fees. They complain that the bursaries are not sufficient. Out of my wisdom, I organize fundraisings and people contribute, but I ensure I give twice as much as them. Come to my place, students from campus sing my name.”

“You are a rabbit!”

“Some of the beggars are elderly. I bought some millet that I fermented. I feed them on porridge each day they visit me at dawn. I give them a few cents to go look after themselves as they wait for their deaths.”

“You are a man of the people!”

“For pregnant women, I buy them a few items when they go into the labor rooms.”

“Wow!”

“Since last week, unfortunately, I have realized my money is getting depleted. With an election coming next month, I will have to sell my car and use the money to nest my name in their hearts.”

“I tell you, you are the wisest man I have ever met.”

“I am humbled bro!”

As the men talk, Sophy, Omosh’s wife, walks into the room and serves them breakfast. On the table, there is a pink thermos flask of boiled milk. Some tea bags, coffee, and chocolate tins elbow each other on the brown tray. Hot cakes, oven fresh, sit in the middle of the table. Their sweet aroma fills the air.

“Good morning,” she says. “Welcome to breakfast!” she adds with a smile and leaves the room.

“Oh, thank you!” the two exclaim as though on cue.

“It is self-service! We are men!” Omosh says.

“Alright. Where do we wash our hands?” Bazu asks.

“Follow me,” Omosh says. He rises and heads to the sink in the next room to his right.

When they return to the table, they relish their breakfast for about five minutes.

“What a wonderful meal! We must build our bodies with these fruits of our independence,” claims Bazu.

“No objection!”

“Are we attending today’s meeting?”

As Omosh is about to respond, there is a knock at the door. “Come in!” he says.

Sophy enters. She draws Omosh aside and softly whispers something into his ear. He smiles. She patiently waits for his feedback.

“Now, who is that coming to see me at this time?” Omosh says with irritation. “I’m about to leave for the meeting.”

Sophy waits patiently for his response. Flip flop! Flip flop ... A woman pops into the sitting room breathing heavily.

“Onarepo! Pris. My son is dying. He akstentary hit his arm wit a brant opchect wair digging in the farm. I haf tried ooro the haps I know. Pat no rikafary. He needs the tokta. Pat poor me, no cent. Onarepo, pris help. He is a form four candidate. Pris, onarepo, haf massi on him. I wir do anything you want, pat pris, help my son, he is dying, pris onarepo ...”

“I am sorry,” Omosh says, but he does not mean it. His eyes betray him as though detached from the distressing news.

Sophy covers her eyes to restrain her tears. Bazu pulls Omosh aside.

“Bro, this is a bucket of votes. I came with my limousine. Let us rush her son to the hospital. The villagers will be glad to hear you have helped their son. You could offer to pay his hospital bill. When you stand for the presidential office as you are planning, you can count on their votes...”

Immediately, they leave the sitting room. As they step outside, they meet several villagers who need Omosh’s help. He hands his wife a bundle of notes to distribute to them.

“Let Kevo collect your identity cards and help you register as new members to our party. We need to recruit more members to our party. *Everyone* should belong to the Ricafa of Today (ROT) party,” Bazu pleads.

“I cannot and I will not do that,” Kevo shouts in protest. “It will be a violation of their freedom. Let those who wish to belong to this party do so without any compulsion. Do you want these people to belong to you because you have fed them on fermented porridge and given them some tokenism?”

“This is the problem with our universities today. Students go there and become stupid. This boy doesn’t understand that I am your man. And it is my duty to take care of you as I am doing now,” Omosh says.

“Don’t mind him,” Bazu shouts, his eyes are scarlet red.

“If it is philanthropy, let it be one of empowering people to be free and autonomous. Not what you are doing. We want better roads, better schools, better hospitals, better pay for our tea and coffee ...” Kevo yells, jerking forward in confronting Omosh.

Everyone is afraid. Omosh swings his hand to slap Kevo, but Kevo folds his into a tight fist ready to receive Omosh’s blow.

“Wait a minute!” Bazu intervenes and pulls Kevo aside. Omosh’s slap nearly licks Kevo cheek.

Leaning forward, Bazu whispers gently into Kevo’s left ear, “This is the *big* man. You need him today and tomorrow. Don’t annoy him. Just walk away. He could shoot you, you know!”

Then, he turns to Omosh, “Forgive him. He doesn’t know what he is saying. He will understand in due time. Let us rush the sick boy to the hospital!”

“Get out of my compound, you enemy of progress!” Omosh orders Kevo, who gives in to his command without a word. The crowd watches this exchange in silence. Kevo storms out of the gate and disappears. His mind is filled with rage, as he contemplates what to do next: *I will roast him at that meeting today.*

“Let’s all converge for the meeting at eleven o’clock,” Omosh reminds the crowd.

“Yeees!” they all shout in unison.

Omosh, Bazu, and the woman enter an air-conditioned limousine. As they rush to her home, their limousine is stuck in the mud. The trio disembark it while the guards remain behind to keep an eye on it, protect it from would be thieves. Omosh, Bazu and the woman hire two motorbikes instead. When they arrive at the woman’s home, they pick-up her sick son and dash to the Bichibichi Dispensary.

After meeting with the receptionist, a nurse tells them that the doctor is not around because he had been urgently called to join fellow doctors in their demonstrations for a better pay. The men and woman looked at each other in dismay. Omosh wonders why he didn’t know about this. He remembers Dawa Safi Hospital in Bichibichi town, a private hospital about ten kilometers away.

Before they can decide on what to do, Omosh receives a phone call.

“Hello sir! ... It is time ... shall we go ahead and start the meeting or put it off?”

“Continue as planned,” Omosh yells into the receiver. “We are on our way. Sorry for the delay.”

Before they leave, Omosh advises the woman to take her son to Dawa Safi Hospital and gives her a wad of notes to pay for her son’s treatment. She is glad. Her son smiles. Omosh and Bazu board one of the two motorbikes. They must get to their limousine first before going to the meeting. The woman and her son head to the hospital using another motorbike.

Along the way, Omosh and Bazu solicit the help of a few strong men to rescue their stuck limousine. After that, their drive to the meeting is slow, but steady paced because of the previous day’s downpour. The road to Mamboleo Stadium, with its yawning chasms and potholes, splash mud on their creamy limousine. Upon arrival, the crowd jubilantly welcomes Omosh and his other officials. As the people surround their vehicle, he doles out brand new notes to those near him.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” the master of ceremony bellows, trying to calm down the excited crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen, let’s all rise and welcome our guest of honor: The Honorable Gentleman, Francis Moku (Omosh). I see he is accompanied with our beloved Governor, Honorable Gentleman Erick Biringi (Bazu).” The men walk on the red carpet to the podium.

Omosh is upbeat. This is a moment for him to make his case for his presidential candidacy and to sound the trumpet about his manifesto on building a ‘bottoms-up’ economy. By now, everyone is standing up. The volleys of applause sustain the grins of these two men. Bazu takes the microphone and congratulates the people for coming. He then welcomes Omosh. Omosh steps forward to speak.

“My noble friend, Bazu, fellow officials, ladies and gentlemen ... good afternoon!” he bellows.

“Good afternoon, Big Man!” the crowd thunders.

“Today, I was really touched,” Omosh says. There is a sparkle in his eyes. “My people, let me tell you!” he adds. “A woman came to my house seeking my help this morning. She had a sick son.”

He falls silent and allows a brief murmur from the crowd to follow. “I took her and her son in person to our dispensary here! Do you know what happened?” he asks. He doesn’t wait for their response. “The doctor was not there! My people ... You see, the modern disease of demonstrations ...”

The crowd is silent, absorbing Omosh’s message.

“The boy’s mother took him to another hospital. I paid for his hospital bill—twenty thousand shillings. I am still willing to assist if need be.” He pauses, takes a deep breath and scans his audience.

“My people, it is time for change. And I have a good plan of a ‘bottom-up’ economy. Using this strategy, my government will engage the ‘hustlers’ to build a ‘hustler nation’ that is sensitive to the needs of the economically struggling citizens. Your needs are what I esteem most. This is why, for example, I took the initiative to paint the gate of our Bichibichi Dispensary, which was horrible before I came into office as the Member of Parliament ...”

“We want a well-equipped modern hospital! Not paints and gates ...” Kevo explodes from the crowd.

“Of course, I was coming to that point. I have a mega plan to eradicate corruption in this community. Without it, our hospital cannot receive the modern equipment it deserves. Without it, our roads cannot also be built.”

“Nooo! ... What have you done so far to eradicate corruption?” Kevo challenges him and the crowd breaks into laughter, applauding the speaker.

“Look, I want to be your next President,” Omosh says. “I have served you as a Finance Minister for long and I understand how to run a nation. Many people strongly support my ambition and decision to be your next President. As president, all thieves will be imprisoned!”

Hearing this, Kevo remembers how his sister came home late, on her birthday last month after a celebration in Bichibichi town with Bazu. She brought home a heavy shopping bag as a gift from him. She said that when Bazu was drunk, he explained how Omosh looted the money meant

to build the local hospital.

Kevo whispers gently to those around him, “Let the intellectual and moral faculties of mankind be declared impotent, if you still believe in the empty words of Omosh. Omosh is the hyena we hear about in our folklores. He has stolen money from the people and plans to loot more. Omosh is a liar.”

A searing silence follows.

“Honorable Omosh! Rumor has it that you were involved in the theft scandal of the money that was meant to build our hospital ...” Kevo challenges.

“Thief! Thief! Thief!” the crowd retorts.

“My people, if I were corrupt, I would not have opened my mouth to condemn corruption,” Omosh says in his defense. He pauses for a second before speaking again.

“Can a person cut the hand that feeds him?” he adds. “Those rumors are delicious lies cooked up by my competitors who think by tainting my name, they will change your views of me. That by calling me a thief, you will run away from me.” Omosh pauses once more and wipes tears from his eyes.

“Omosh is our man! Viva Omosh! Viva Omosh!” a few voices sing his praises. The rest click and mutter against Omosh.

“My people! Don’t be deceived by my enemies. They are the enemies of the people. I have your success in my heart. I know you need a better affordable education for your children.”

“Yees!” the crowd roars in unison.

“I know you need better roads”

“Yees!”

“I know you deserve better hospitals, with modern equipment!”

“Yees!”

“This will be good for our health. We will not need to travel far to get medical attention. Our expecting mothers will find assistance right here in our local hospital! That is a promise I hope to keep!”

“Wooow!”

“I will create jobs for our idle youth by inviting investors to our nation to open up industries that will use our agricultural produce as raw materials: Our bananas, sisal, pyrethrum, coffee, tea. All of them will find a global market with better pay.”

“Amazing. Omosh you’re a man of the people!”

“I will build giant dams for irrigation and generate hydroelectric power that will even be sold to our neighboring nations.”

“You indeed will be our president, Omosh!”

“I have been keenly watching our leaders and I can tell you that they are disgusting. They are corrupt. They are thieves. They think only of themselves. That is why our local hospital is now in decay and not modernized. That is why our roads are still horrible. That is why our bursary

budgets are too small. That is why our youths are jobless ...”

“But you have been with them, *SIR*,” Kevo interjects. “Twice, have you not served as the Finance Minister? Haven’t you?”

Omosh is tongue-tied. The crowd laughs loudly and claps sporadically.

“My people, it is true I have been a Finance Minister, but I haven’t served you as President,” Omosh says. He sucks in a large clump of air, adjusts his navy-blue suit, made in Italy and awkwardly taps the podium. His eyebrows are wrinkled and his forehead creased in rage.

“You arrived here ten minutes ago in your air-conditioned limousine. You strutted on this red carpet to the podium. Your wife, with her milky skin and golden hair, sat beside you. Bazu, our Governor, stabs his forehead with his finger asleep. Have you seen our rags? Do you know how we are dragging our lives as a burden? Your presence made us collect the crumbs of our dead happiness ...” Kevo shouts in tears. The crowd claps for him again.

“Calm down young man,” Omosh says. His patience is tested as rage boils within. “We are here to join hands and build our nation ...” he growls.

“Your presence here is a scandal. We don’t want to hear your sweet lies. We want to see progress. We want to see our society developed. We need better actions, not sweet words deficient of commitment,” Kevo insists.

“Tell him!” the crowd roars in unison.

“He is mad. He can’t understand what a manifesto is! Guards! Take him to the mental hospital!” Omosh barks. The guards grab Kevo and drag him aside for interrogation.

Meanwhile, the youths, who had dropped out of school for lack of school fees, flock in Mamboleo Stadium in droves. They are jobless and hopeless. Some of their parents are arriving as well. They are in rags and most emaciated because of malnutrition. Pain and sorrow crisscross their faces. Among them are many who cannot afford three meals a day. Some have not eaten since morning. They long for a leader who can wisely emancipate them by good government policies. They are tired of the current corrupt regime.

“This village, Mamboleo, has no hospital. No electricity. No internet. Dear citizens of Ricafa, Ricafa is rotten in underdevelopment, greed and corruption ... even our political party is rotten ... ROT ...” Kevo says in protest. The guards apprehend him with their guns cocked.

“Leave him alone! Leave him alone! Leave him alone!” the crowd cries.

Beste, the village mad woman takes them by surprise with a huge clod of soil in her right hand. She throws it to the podium and strikes Omosh. Some particles fall on Bazu who ducks them to no avail.

“*Sitiubiti!*” she shouts and runs away. “Rif my son free ... do you want to kir him as you ...”

Before she can finish her sentence, the guards whisper something into Kevo’s ear without blinking and command him to leave the meeting. He takes off like someone who has fifteen lungs and joins his mad mother. The crowd follows them with their vacant eyes. He is their last hope on earth and now no more. Somewhere in Beste’s heart, out of the depths of her flesh, blood and bone, she unconsciously invokes justice to reign for her murdered husband. For he had opposed the area

Governor's decision to construct a dumpsite across River Mogusi. Yet, this river serves the natives with drinking water. The murderers injected Beste with mercury in the head. She has never been sane again. She has two children: Kevo and Joyce. Both of them were at school when this tragedy took place, three years ago.

Right now, the woman who had taken her son to the hospital for treatment arrives in tears to the meeting. Kevo and his mother have long gone. The guards, like poster boards, stand still.

"My son ... my son is deti ... Onarepo! Pris teki tis your money. I nefa spent it. My dear son, as we araift osibito, they tacht him, ten seit he is deti ... Uuuuuuuuu ... Uuuuuuuuu ... Uuuuuuuuu ... my son is deti ..." she cries.

The crowd calms down to listen to the woman's lament, but for a brief moment before they break into revolt.

"He has deti on my way to osibito. Pad roads. And the osibito ... far away ... my son is deti ... Onarepo! Pris teki tis your money. They tacht him, ten seit he is deti ... Uuuuuuuuu ... Uuuuuuuuu ... Uuuuuuuuu ... my son is deti ..." she adds.

Bazu stands up to the rowdy jeering of the crowd.

"You must resign! Enough is enough Omosh! Omosh must go! Omosh must go!" the embittered crowd roars.

Bazu sees the woman penetrating the crowd, heading towards the podium. He tries to alert Omosh as she approaches in tears. Omosh switches off the microphone and turns aside to Bazu:

"Bazu, stop. Stop, will you? Stop, Bazu. Will you stop, Bazu?" Pleads Omosh with his friend who is calling his attention to the woman. "I can deeply feel it. I can deeply feel it. I must resign. Enough is enough."