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Front of the house. High noon with sun-spots. A light sound of breeze and waves from the backwaters. Iscariot is lying face-up on the ground, his box for a head-rest; he swipes at a fly, rolls over on his side where his face is now trained directly on Bakhud’s quarters. The window is shut. Silence. Humbi enters, and Iscariot rolls over in the opposite direction, turning his face to the road. Humbi goes across and taps him.

HUMBI: Iscariot Iscariot.

ISCARIOT: Ugh?

HUMBI: Iscariot

ISCARIOT: Ugh?

HUMBI: Wake up, wake up.

ISCARIOT: What is it? [Going back to sleep, Humbi gives him a pinch in the side so he rises sharply on his buttocks.]

ISCARIOT: You nut?

HUMBI: He is back.

ISCARIOT: Who? Habibu?

HUMBI: No, not Habibu, the man, the one who came before.

ISCARIOT: [Rising, anxious] And he told you he will like to see the box now?

HUMBI: [Aghast] What box?

ISCARIOT: [Sinking back again, slowly] I thought he might be willing to take his measurement, that’s all.

HUMBI: What measurement?

ISCARIOT: [Puts his head back on the box. Philosophically,] He’ll have to take measurement some day anyhow. We’ll all take measurement.

HUMBI: What is he talking about? Get your friend down quickly because I think it’s him he wants to speak with.

ISCARIOT: [Rising, anxious] And he told you he will like to see the box now?

HUMBI: [Aghast] What box?

ISCARIOT: [Sinking back again,.] I should have known.

HUMBI: [Glancing again at the exit] We must get Bakhud before it is too late.

ISCARIOT: Why would he do a thing like that to himself? Is he a couple of screws loose or something?

HUMBI: You should have seen him yourself Iscariot, acts like he’s never seen water all his life. He’s been running about in the water his hands stretched out probing the sand under the water with his hands sometimes he would run up east and race back westward with all his dress on. It’s dangerous doing a thing like that in the sea but he doesn’t seem to realise it.

ISCARIOT: You don’t know him who he is, where he comes from?

HUMBI: I believe he’s a mute Iscariot

ISCARIOT: But why does he prefer it drowning? [Rising again as if on the spark of an idea] perhaps you could talk with him and persuade him about the other options.

HUMBI: What are you talking about!

ISCARIOT: [Sinking back again,] I should have known.

HUMBI: [Glancing again at the exit] We must get Bakhud before it is too late. [The rams bleat from the house, Humbi pauses, heads for the side of the house and picks a number of grass tufts, returns and pushes them through the window to feed them. Iscariot keeps his blank indifferent gaze at the sky. Rams bleat again - suddenly Humbi makes a discovery. Whatever it is makes him look in Iscariot’s direction with suspicion, puzzled and fearful he looks again into the house, peeping in, looks back all the way again to Iscariot]

HUMBI: [Hushed tone] Iscariot. [Iscariot giving neither reply nor motion, Humbi draws close to him.]

know what is the matter with him.
Photograph of the Bar Beach by Ako Amadi, exhibited last year in Lagos.

HUMBI: Iscariot.

ISCARIOT: [Without movement] Something eating you?

HUMBI: [Tapping him, nervous] Look, look Iscariot it's no joking matter. You know what I found?

ISCARIOT: That your friend has gone dipping himself again, of course...

HUMBI: It's the rams Iscariot. Look, do you know what I have been noticing for some time now, the rams have been vanishing one by one for a while. Between how many days and now, I tell you the number has reduced again by two rams.

ISCARIOT: And that is why you are going to burst your arteries, because a ram or two have decided to duck behind planks and you can't see them?

HUMBI: [Stubbornly] If they ducked I will know. And why will they duck? You can even hear it from their bleating. Look... [Glancing shortly at the exit] there was a whole crowd of them less than five...

[Movement of the bolts behind the door up, but door is not opened. Humbi starting crawls rapidly on his hands for the safety of the house lower section, waits. Iscariot also has raised his back from the ground in expectation. Silence. Prolonged silence. As Humbi plans to rise and return, door up the stairs is jerked open and Bakhud starts to race down the staircase, one opened scroll in his hand, followed closely by Ighuahide with the usual load of scrolls. Humbi petrified, scrambles under the staircase but with one leg partly visible. Iscariot has risen to his feet but Bakhud does not even appear to take any notice of him or of anything else save the top of Iscariot's box which he makes his goal. He stoops by the box and starts to crease his brows grasping some meanings which he proceeds to compare with the inscriptions on the opened page of his scroll.]

BAKHUD: [Stooping still, looks up to Iscariot] I thought you said you had no dossiers on those ones they took care of the other time.

ISCARIOT: Which Bakhud?

BAKHUD: The ones that went into the ground.

ISCARIOT: I tried hard but, no cooperation.

BAKHUD: What cooperation?

ISCARIOT: The men of the town hoarded all the facts.

BAKHUD: Town. You don't mean you got as far as the town? I can't remember giving any leave that you get in touch with them.

ISCARIOT: Of course, Bakhud.

BAKHUD: [Thinking, looks down to the box and on the scroll] But then what you have here sure looks like the dossiers all right, or what I think they ought to be.

ISCARIOT: [Embarrassed] I hadn't thought of that Bakhud.

BAKHUD: In that case let's just see.
BAKHUD: I didn’t think about that of course one disguising as your well...

BAKHUD: I came to report about it Bakhud.

BAKHUD: They ... they’ve been vanishing, vanishing for some time I noticed Bakhud.

BAKHUD: [Stealing a glance through the house] Vanishing. Who appointed you a keeper over the rams Humbi?

BAKHUD: [Glancing rapidly round the faces of the men about him. To Humbi - ] Yes. I said who made you an advocate for the rams? We’ve got little or no business with those creatures - true, we took over their habitation and forced ourselves upon them as compulsory neighbours. The best we could undertake at any stage, if one or two of them came into mishap or accident from time to time or even took a short stroll into the second life is organise a mourning session on their behalf. I’ve never heard of it - and so I guess is Iscariot - no, never have the fats of rams afforded the luxury boxes, Never. [A rustle of leaves and sound of feet on gravel from beside the house. All attention is diverted that way, as if he were a rat that I know he is?] Come, come on, you bloody rascal. What’s he doing in there as if he were a rat that I know he is? [To Humbi] Come, come on, you bloody thing.

HUMBI: I, I brought petitions about the rams Bakhud.

HUMBI: They ... they’ve been vanishing, vanishing for some time I noticed Bakhud.

HUMBI: What!

BAKHUD: And what about them?

HUMBI: They ...

BAKHUD: [Panting] The ... the ...

bloody rascal.

[Continues to probe through the signs on the box] It is the same dossiers all right Iscariot. yes ...

[Squeezing his brows harder to grasp] a head-on collision, all right, two locomotives ...

[I didn’t think about that ... what is ...

responsible for a coming clash - [Looking up, excited] you are actually sure of these facts Iscariot? Now dear me you really got yourself something here ... the first lorry dashed its foot against abump and then the drone of the engine-cries lowered. [Looking up again] I don’t get it. What you are trying to say is the first vehicle sank into a pothole and because of the severity of this the engine almost gets cut out. Am I right? [Thinking] It is safe to deduce from this that the engine caught cold, catarrh, asthma, bronchitis, never mind the precise prognosis for now, you interpret this to mean a premonition that a disaster is lying ahead ... I am right? So that there was this clash or head-on with another van which yet was more than a thousand feet away. Interesting. This is really interesting. [Rising, his face a flood of excitement.] I’ll really suggest that you come up right away and give me the full picture so I can arrange them in one neat calligraphy.

[Near to whistling, beams sweetly but as he peers down the South and his eyes catch the roadside post, he appears to whince and lose some sweetness, glances down at the box for reassurance.]

BAKHUD: Wait. Wait ... Iscariot. We have to cross-check certain details of this occurrence. This being, we might say, an eye-witness account ... but can you swear to the accuracy of the distance with the on-coming van? I mean did you swear to the accuracy of the distance ... but can this occurrence. This being, we might have to cross-check certain details of ...

BAKHUD: [Panting] The ... the ...