

The 3 Chairmen

By

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Chapter 1

'I remember
When I won the contract (Repeat 4x)
Yippee ya ya
Yippee yippee ya ya (Repeat 3x)
I remember
When I won the contract'

Sir Skido sang to himself as his driver manoeuvred his jumbo sized Mercedes Benz through the Lagos rush hour traffic.

The driver percussed the horn like a deaf one-handed drummer who had smoked tons of Igbo to the point where he was as high as the tallest palm tree in his village.

Many other drivers played with their horns; a favourite national past time. The unmarked roads were chaotic. The junctions had neither 'yellow fever' nor traffic lights. It was everyone for himself.

Sir Skido was unperturbed by the noise. His mind was miles away. The car's interior had such a relaxing effect on him. 'This car', he told his friends 'was like being in ones mother's womb'. It was that comfortable.

A young boy knocked on the window and smiles.

He displays a set of teeth which would embarrass the countries many dentists. Sir Skido hit the switch and the electric windows descended slowly.

'Chai, money good o!' he thought to himself.

'Ehen?' said Sir Skido.

'Spring water. Fresh spring water' the boy said displaying his bottles on a tray.

'How I know say no be tap water?' asked Sir Skido.

'True to God oga. Na spring water. If I dey lie, make...em...make... '

'No swear for yourself because of water jo' said Sir Skido.

He brought our some notes from his glorious Agbada and thrust them on the little boys tray. He then picked six plastic bottles of water and awaited his change.

The traffic began to move.

'Oga make I go?' the driver asked.

'No' replied Sir Skido.

The honking from behind intensified.

The driver of the taxi behind drove up close with his hand fixed permanently on his screeching horn.

'Oppressor! Move now!' he shouted.

Sir Skido was not perturbed.

'Small boy, why are you not in school?' he asked.

'Oga teacher no dey. Them never salary them for two months ends now'. The boy said handing over the change.

As they drove off Sir Skido looked back at the boy.

'Sunday, so this boy is a leader of tomorrow eh?'

'Oga with no education and so much street sense I think he is on the right track to where we are headed o!' replied Sunday.

A large crowd had gathered outside the giant prison gates brandishing placards of contrasting craftsmanship. As they drove past, one caught Sir Skido's eye. It read- **'THE DEATH PENALTY IS INHUMANE'**.

'Na you sabi ' muttered Sir Skido to himself.

Walking through the long prison corridor that lead to the death chamber frightened Sir Skido. The whole atmosphere made his blood run cold.

The death chamber was bustling with activity. Three men sat on the electric chairs spaced out on top of the low stage that had been erected the day before. Two of the condemned men looked extremely sombre while the man who sat in the middle, a psychopath who went by the name of Killiwe was tucking into his last meal; roast turkey suya.

An adjoining room had been converted to a public sitting area and the intervening wall had been knocked down and replaced with a large glass partition. The crowd of just over a hundred people sat quietly in anticipation.

A woman was feeding her baby amongst the crowd.

'Lagos people just love to watch criminals die sha' thought Sir Skido as he took his seat.

There were microphones, lights, TV cameras and miles of cables everywhere. The stage microphones amplified the noisy chewing and cracking of turkey bones.

The woman with the baby, Mama Bomboy stooped forward with the tiny child balanced between her shoulder blades and undid her African print wrapper revealing a bright green slip.

Naturally all eyes were on her. With one swift movement of both hands she had the baby tied tight on her back.

After working at a knot above her breasts she sat down packed away the feeding bottles and began to shout looking at no one in particular.

'See how e dey eat turkey leg. Eat well o! But make you know say you go die today'. Killiwee heard her clearly and laughed.

'Mama Bomboy wetin now? I never die yet. Leave me make I enjoy my last meal jare'.

'Stupid armed robber. Na im kill my brother. You go die today!' shouted Mama Bomboy before letting out a protracted hiss.

Sir Skido smiled. This is just the beginning he thought. To himself.

It all started six months ago. The Prison Governor General other wise known as the PGG who incidentally was an old class mate of Sir Skido had decided in his wisdom that death by hanging was archaic and that to move with the times the electric chair had to be introduced into the country.

The 'Chair' had an aura about it, which he figured would strike fear into the hearts of potential criminals and thereby help to stem the epidemic state of brutal crimes that had now become commonplace in the country at large and in Lagos in particular.

The crimes ranged from ritual killings and armed robberies to assassinations and kidnapping for large ransoms. Support from top governmental officials was phenomenal and in no time a large sum of money was available for the project.

It was at this point the telephone call came. Sir Skido won the contract without tendering. So far, he had supplied ninety electric chairs to various states in the country and the best was yet to come. Today however was the first time these chairs were being used and the future of his new trade depended heavily on what happened today.

Sir Skido had intentionally turned up late. The idea of an opening ceremony for a death chamber didn't seem right to him.

Neither was this whole business of public execution, but saying that 'business is business' was his motto. He knew quite well that if war should break out in the country he could easily live with selling ammunition to both sides.

The reporter from K-TV moved into position a few feet in front of Killiwee and live transmission commenced.

'Good Evening and welcome to this historical programme live from the heart of the maximum-security prison. This is Ben Benito Junior in the newly opened death chamber.

For those who didn't know what this was all about, for the first time ever we shall see the electric chair at work. I believe it's the first time in Africa. We are indeed leaders of this great continent'. The K-TV's producer lifted a card, which read 'APPLAUSE' and the stern faced crowd clapped.

'Trust us to bring you live and exclusive action as it happens. You know the name K-TV. See you all after the break'. The reporter then asked for his nose to be powered while the advertisements ran.

A pretty student on work experience rushed to him. Her incompetence as a make up artist was obvious from the amount of white powder she had heaped on the faces of the three 'chairmen'. Ben Benito Junior smiled as tons of powder was heaped on his magnificent Delta shaped nose.

'Abeg start execution make we go home. Which one be all this exclusive eh?' Mama Bomboy said loudly. The producer came up to the glass partition to gesticulate to Mama Bomboy to keep silent.

Back on the air, Ben Benito Junior flashed his teeth and resumed his monologue.

'We have not just one, not two but three criminals...'

'Condemned men' shouted Emeka from somewhere in the audience.

'Sorry condemned men. Yes three executions on live TV. But before they are executed we shall be hearing from them.

Emeka and his friends began to speak in Igbo. They complained of the injustice of the jury that found Oga Landlord guilty of murder.

'This is a man who if a mosquito is sucking his blood he will politely ask it to leave rather than kill it. Now they say he has committed murder' said Emeka reverting back to English.

The noise threw Ben Benito Junior off track and he looked to the producer for help. The producer went on his hands and knees to beg the Igbo contingent to shut up.

They obliged but shook their heads as if in a daze. Emeka took Oga Landlord as a father. For when he needed to open his electrical goods shop at the Alaba International market in Lagos and had run out of funds, Oga Landlord gave him a shop space without receiving any monetary advance for rent, despite the fact that a three year rent advance payment was the norm. In addition, from time to time he had helped Emeka out with 'payable when able' loans.

Many traders had good reports of Oga Landlord 's kind-heartedness and had campaigned incessantly against this death penalty to no avail.

Ben Benito Junior , 'Bibi J' as he was otherwise called walked past Killiwee and stood next to Oga Landlord whose grey hairs seemed to have doubled during the last few months.

'I am innocent!' he cried into Bibi J's K-TV microphone before a question could be poised.

'Innocent my foot!' screamed Mama Bomboy. The Igbo contingent scowled in her direction and she froze.

'With all due respect sir, if you are innocent why are you strapped to this electric chair?' asked Bibi J. The old man shook his head remorsefully.

'Benito you were at the trial yet you ask these questions. Were you asleep?' asked Oga Landlord.

'No sir, I ask for the benefit of the viewers at home. Please explain'. The microphone was back under Oga Landlord's chin. His body heaved as a wave of grief took control of him.

'The victim was Yoruba as were the judge and jury. What chance did I have?'

'What part of the country do you hail from sir?' asked Bibi J.

'I am John Duvie otherwise known as Oga Landlord form Delta State' he paused to look at the ceiling. Many eyes went up in the direction of his gaze. There was nothing to be seen.

'Na that my tenant Fatayi put me for trouble. To cut a long story short that guy smokes drugs, but that one na different matter. You see, one day at about 2 AM, I couldn't sleep so I decided to watch a late night movie on a satellite television channel. Much to my surprise half way through the movie it switched to a football match.

I grabbed the remote control and switched back to the film but it flipped back to the football. On closer inspection I noticed a strange cable going from my decoder all the way through the wall. It was a cable I didn't know anything about. I then went outside and traced this cable till it led me to Fatayi's flat'.

A murmur swept through the seated crowd. Although many knew the story well by heart, the tale had become like a favourite soup that tasted new each time it was eaten.

'People, I went into Fatayi's parlour to find the man watching football. I don't know when he did it but he had tapped into my decoder. He even had a decoder and a remote control. That was when the big quarrel started and everyone woke up'.

'Er Oga Landlord did you threaten him?' asked Ben Benito Junior.

'I didn't mean it. I said I would kill him. It was vex talk. Do you know he was owing me one-year rent?'

'Is that why you killed him er? Who will train his children now? Murderer!' screamed Mama Bomboy.

Oga Landlord continued. 'I was annoyed because he told me to 'gerrou of his house'. Me. Which day dem born am? Insult!'

'Oga Landlord I have followed this case closely. Was the murder weapon not found in your room?' asked Ben Bentio Junior cautiously.

'So if I kill person I go leave the knife next to my window? Am I that stupid?'

'So what are you inferring?' asked Bibi J.

'Na person put that knife there' said Oga Landlord.

Many of the Igbo contingents nodded their heads in agreement. Oga Landlord lowered his head slowly and began to cry. 'Ha, they would not even release my corpse to my family. They say my body will become property of the state. Last night in my cell an inmate told me I have been earmarked for the anatomy dissection tables of the local medical school. Me. Oh, life!'

Seeing the conversation could not continue Bibi J moved to the next chair where a smiling Killiwee awaited his interview.

'What do you think of this whole affair?' asked Bibi J.

'Benito, there is absolutely nothing to think about. Ol' boy you get toothpick there?' was Kelliwee's reply as he struggled to free a strand of tough turkey trapped between his teeth.

Ben Benito Junior whispered a word of caution into his ear. It was a brief reminder that he (Killiwee) was being paid the most for this live coverage and that if he didn't start 'performing' his prospective widow will not see the 'balance'.

Killiwee appeared invigorated. 'Ah, I don't care much for all this show. We all must die one day. That includes everyone in this room, young and old. Has any of you ever seen an armed robber throw a retirement banquet at Sixty-five years of age? Oti O! Never. We die young in this business and I am ready!' said Killiwee.

Bibi J waited a few moments to let Kelliwee's word sink in.

'Aren't you scared?'

'No'.

'Do you think this initiative will deter viewers from pursuing a life of crime as you have done?'

'Lai, lai! Never! My people are probably in bed by now, or perhaps in prison. No criminal worth his salt will watch this children's play' said Kelliwee.

'So what will stop armed robbers and murders in this country?'

'Kill everyone over ten years of age and we start afresh' said Kelliwee who was now looking bored.

'We shall start the killing with you!' screamed Mama Bom boy.

Many clapped. A man flew out of his chair in rage.

'Barawo. See how e dey talk. When electric touch ya bodi I go see how your mouth go take sharp'.

Mayhem descended on the place, as curses were unleashed on Killiwee in great quantities. He smiled and returned to his Turkey suya.

The last man was known as Mile Two for he started his 'illustrious' career in that part of Lagos State.

'Mile Two, how are you?' began Bibi J.

Mile Two looked straight into the camera and hollered 'make una no tief o! See how I come disgrace my family like this eh. See how them go shock me like animal experiment. People make una watch with eye open o! God forgive me!' He looked up towards Heaven and everyone followed his gaze.

Bibi J now wore the face of a clergyman administering the last prayers by a deathbed. He placed a comforting hand on Mile Two's shoulder till he calmed down.

'What are your offences?'

'I be assassin. I guilty well, well'.

'So why did you take up such a profession?' enquired Bibi J.

'Bad friends plus demand and supply principle'.

'Ah-ah, you are an economist?' asked Bibi J.

Mile Two beamed with pride. 'To O-Level standard sir. I got A3 in my WAEC after months of cramming O.Lawal'.

'I used that book also' said Bibi J whose mind had been transported to the 'good old days' of his secondary school education.

'Look, this is not why we are here jo. Kill the goats and lets go home!' screamed Mama Bom Boy. The loud applause and cheering that followed proved she spoke for many.

'Sorry I got carried away. Now what do you mean when you say demand and supply principle?' asked Bibi J.

'It's the demand for assassinations and spare parts that pushed me into the supply business'.

'What spare parts?' asked Bibi J.

'Human parts for rituals. I used to be a big supplier. It is society with its dark and ugly demands that pushed me into the trade. Where are all my clients eh?'

'I was about asking. Can you name them?' asked Bibi J.

'What proof do I have eh? Who would believe me?' replied Mile Two.

'Society will soon supply you with two thousand volts. Your cries will be heard in Mile Two!' Prophesied Mama Bom Boy.

'Mama Bom Boy have respect for the condemned now' said Killiwee with his mouth full.

'Not if the condemned has no respect for the lives of the living!' screamed Mama Bom Boy to much applause.

Ben Benito Junior turned to face his audience. They looked miles away. The large glass partition gave the impression one was staring into a large aquarium. 'Please, at least respect these condemned men's last words. Some of you think them not guilty don't you?' said Bibi J.

'Leave them jo. I deserve it. I have sinned and will embrace my fate with open arms' said Mile Two.

Saying that he lost control and began to wail like a child forcibly wrenched away from its mother's breast only to be dumped in cold water.

Bibi J smiled, this was going well. Will guarantee his immortalization. This was his 'Oprah Winfrey' fantasy come true. He would be asking his bosses for a pay rise and his own talk show after this. 'This telecast was bound to make Bibi J a household name all over the Country' he thought. He looked at the three chairs mounted on the podium, the audience, the lights and the cameras. He felt a satisfying warm feeling engulf his whole body.

Chapter 2

A man broke through the doors of the death chamber running. He had the look of evil on his face. The pot-bellied prison officers in pursuit seemed to be moving towards their target in slow motion.

Bibi J saw him too late. The crazy man clashed heads with Bibi J producing a sickening sound. Next they wrestled and rolled on the floor. The crowd who thought it was all pre-arranged began chanting "Bibi, Bibi, Bibi, Bibi...."

The grunts and groans interspersed with shearing fabric was music to Killiwee's ears. He slapped his thigh in delight.

'Stop the broadcast. Ban the death penalty. Stop their madness!' screamed the intruder as he thumped the now helpless Bibi J on the chest.

Re-enforcement soon arrived. More prison officers appeared on the scene. They joined in the wrestling match and soon wrenched the intruder off Bibi J, with many of them losing their caps in the process.

Bibi J promptly rose to his feet completely disorientated. He licked off the tiny rivulet of bright red blood flowing from his upper lip and grabbed the microphone. 'Are we still live?' he asked. His producer nodded.

'This is still Ben Benito Junior live and direct from this historic electrocution. Sorry for that interruption. I can assure you it wasn't stage-managed'.

Killiwee took over 'You Mr. Protester, who made you our saviour?' he said pointing with his turkey bone at the crazed intruder who was now being restrained by all seven prison officers who slapped and kicked him randomly.

'Life imprisonment yes! Death penalty No!' he shouted.

Killiwee looked to his left at Oga Landlord and asked 'Is this fool a relative of yours?'

'I have never set eyes on him in my life' replied Oga Landlord.

'You nko?' said Killiwee to Mile Two who lifted his face slowly and squinted in the intruder's direction. 'I don't know this man'.

Bibi J passed the microphone to Killiwee and slipped off for treatment to his facial wounds.

'So why are you fighting for us now?' asked Killiwee of the intruder.

The intruder screamed 'This is madness. Why are we destroying precious life like this?! Lynching is evil! Death penalty is evil! Abortion is evil!'

'Sharrup ya dirty mouth!' screamed Killiwee. 'See the dirty mouth you dey take talk. So you mean say you get sense pass all the people wey dey watch us for television eh? Your Papa life imprisonment. Don't you know life imprisonment in this country is the same as death penalty, only it takes a bit longer to die. Inside this prison Tuberculosis and Aids dey nyanfu, nyanfu. Even sef we dey rape each other when we dey bored'.

'So you get women inside?' asked the intruder.

'I say sharrap your mouth. You send your sister come find us inside here wey we go get woman. Nonsense!' shouted Killiwee.

'Disgusting. I don't know what to say' said the intruder.

Well my advice to you is to protest against poor conditions in this prison and let me be. I wan die quick, quick. Your head like life imprisonment. Do you know what the official food budget per inmate is?'

'No, I don't know' said the intruder.

'No, I don't know' repeated Killiwee mimicking the voice of the intruder.

'One hundred and Fifty Naira. But I tell you, they budget for Five hundred inmates yet we are eight hundred. On top of that Prison officers go chop dia own inside the money!' said Killiwee.

A murmur swept through the crowd. The prison officers hurriedly pushed the intruder out. Bibi J rushed over to grab his microphone from Killiwee. The prison Governor General was beside himself with rage. He signalled with his fingers he wanted the execution to be got on with quickly.

Bibi J was now in front of the camera. He had on his producer's jacket, which was two sizes too small. Coupled with his swollen upper lip he looked like a student who had just lost a fight.

'We are now ready to enter the solemn part of this historic occasion. I sincerely hope there will be no more hitches. I now call on Pastor Jimoh to administer the last prayers'.

'Let us pray' said Pastor Jimoh the former full time Super Eagles supporter turned Reverend. All heads were bowed. All except the mosquitoes. One landed gently on Killiwee's neck and struck. Killiwee slapped his neck so hard everyone jumped.

'Sorry' he said sheepishly on discovering all eyes on him.

Pastor Jimoh resumed the prayers. After the loud 'Amen' it was time to go one on one starting with Oga Landlord. K-TV took a break for advertisement while many in the audience took the opportunity to visit the toilets.

'Welcome back, this is Ben Benito Junior reporting for K-TV' began Bibi J as soon as transmission was resumed. Bibi J stopped the Reverend who was now making his way to Killiwee.

'How did it go?' asked Bibi J.

'I am not at liberty to say. That is between Oga Landlord and his God' said Pastor Jimoh.

'Tell them. I have nothing to hide' said Oga Landlord.

'Fine then. Well Oga Landlord claimed his innocence. I reminded him of the fact that we have a saviour who went to the cross even though he had committed no crime. He seemed to derive great comfort from that' said Pastor Jimoh somewhat nervously, as he was not used to TV cameras and bright lights.

'With all due respect sir, how do you know that he is innocent?' asked Bibi J.

'Em... well...em... I can only go by what he told me' replied the Pastor Jimoh.

Killiwee was not keen on prayers. He looked away and chewed at his turkey bone completely ignoring the Reverend.

'Pastor, no waste ya saliva on that one. E guilty well, well' screamed Mama Bom Boy.

'That's true. I guilty. So lef me alone.'

The Pastor tried to get through to Killiwee but failed.

'Christ died for us all. Guilty and not guilty. In fact there were three on the cross that day. And he promised one of the criminals he would be with him in paradise' said Pastor Jimoh.

'Only one eh? Well Oga Landlord has taken the only seat, so there's no hope for me and Mile Two, abi attachment dey?' joked Killiwee. He slapped his thigh and laughed noisily.

Mama Bom Boy stood to speak.

'Excuse me Pastor, did they not carry their crosses on the streets in Bible times eh? Why you no advise make these Barawos' carry their electric chairs through the streets of Lagos make we for take koboko waya dem back. By now Killiwee tongue for don retire'. Mama Bom Boy received a round of applause. Pastor Jimoh moved over to Mile Two.

King Bibi J resumed dialogue with his 'subjects' at home basking under the limelight.

'Many rang in for tickets for this execution but unfortunately we had only a hundred and twenty to give and I would like to thank you all for your interest Now if you would like to be among the live audience at the next execution to be staged in a fortnight ring the number now appearing at the bottom of your screens. The prison Governor General has asked me to reiterate that this is no freak show but rather a demonstration of Government's determination to put back law and order into our lives. We would be right back after a few messages from our sponsors'.

An air of expectancy descended. Engineers worked frantically. Bibi J and crew vacated the death chamber, as did Pastor Jimoh. The 'three chairmen' were being strapped down in their respective seats of death and a black sack was being put over Mile Two and Oga Landlord's heads. Killiwee refused to have his face covered, as he wanted to see the Angel of Death eyeball to eyeball.

To while away time, Bibi J began to interview members of the audience.

'And why did you come sir?' he asked a bald man who sat on the front row.

'I brought my son. He is only nine but has started stealing meat from his mother's pot. I believe watching this execution will shock stealing out of his system' said the man, looking down at his son.

The little boy was embarrassed. He knew his friends would be watching.

'Isn't it easier just to teach him not to steal?' asked Bibi J.

'No, this is much better' said the man.

Bibi J moved on, scanning the audience.

'So who else thinks this execution is a deterrence to crime?'

Mama Bom Boy stood up and practically snatched the microphone off Bibi J.

'I love this electric chair business but I think public lynching would be cheaper'. The audience clapped. Mama Bom Boy was fast becoming a TV star.

'But lynching is barbaric and more so, TV coverage would be completely impossible' said Bibi J.

Another gentleman raised his hand at the back.

'That Mile Two has killed so many. I'm here to see him die'.

'Anyone you know?' asked Bibi J.

'Oh yes, two of my friends'.

The gentleman stopped abruptly following a signal from the producer. It was time. Bibi J felt a strong urge to scream -'and now, for what you've all been waiting for!' but controlled himself.

An ill mood descended on the place. Sir Skido who had remained anonymous in his seat throughout broke into a cold sweat. Surely the Angel of Death is now hovering above us all he thought. He looked up and saw nothing. His mind drifted to when he was a lad and had followed his father to wave goodbye to Uncle Joe who was bound for 'Greener Pastures' abroad. He couldn't understand how the same adults who had partied till late into the night during the 'send-off' were reduced to tears as Uncle Joe boarded the plane. Even Uncle Sam, a sworn enemy of Uncle Joe shed a few tears. 'Those were the days' thought Sir Skido. He remembered vividly what his father had told him when he asked what the crying was about.

'I cried because I feared I may never see him again' Sir Skido's father had explained on the way home. Sir Skido looked around. All the faces in the place looked grim.

The official executioner walked into the death chamber with quick strides.

The audience let out a gasp of horror. His face was partially covered with a rag that could best be described as a rather shabby version of the Mask of Zorro. It served its function though. The executioner's identity was concealed.

'Say your last words' he said out loud. He didn't address anyone in particular and there was silence for a few seconds.

Oga Landlord being the oldest assumed he should start the ball rolling. He began talking through his black headpiece. His voice sounded muffled and distanced like the sound of a radio playing from the bottom of a well.

'I am innocent but not withstanding I have lived a good life. I have educated all my children to University level and my widow will not want for anything. O Lord! In to your hands I commit my spirit!'

Next Mile Two cried out 'Lord forgive me. Viewers at home forgive me. Anybody wey wan become Jaguda look and learn o! God na ya hand I dey o!'

And eyes now centred on Killiwee.

'I am innocent ,wa lai!' he screamed. People looked at each other in puzzlement.

'Only joking. Ha'.

Mama Bom Boy brought out a placard she had kept under her seat. **THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH** was written in bright red.

'I hear Mama Bomboy. Now, my last words. I Killiwee have just one thing to say. Fellow Nigerians, may I seize this historic moment to canvass for a new state to be created in this country. I have

called this state Switzer-state. It would be a haven for all crooks through this great land. Why export our looted funds abroad when we can hide them in Switzer-state.

I propose a land where all men will be free of police or Army harassment. Where the banks would be immune from government or police investigations. A land to be mapped out of the existing Abuja FCT, where all thieves and have automatic immunity from prosecution.

For example, if a lynch mob is screaming "Ole! Ole!" in hot pursuit of a thief, as soon as he runs into Switzer-state's soil, he is free.

I also propose we exploit our image with a huge theme park to be located within Switzer-state. I am sure the tourists will all rush in to watch us perform 'live' 419, Gbomogbo, kickbacks, open bribing of policemen at road junction and of course setting fire to sky scrappers for the fun of it. Long live the movement for the creation of Switzer-state!' Killiwee finished with a flourish and now stared into space like he was in some kind of trance.

'Are you finished?' asked the executioner.

None of the 'three chairmen' spoke.

The executioner walked over slowly to the engineer and talked for a while before making his way to the lever. He made a quick sign of the cross and pulled the lever down. The current rushed into the 'chairmen' with violence. Everyone screamed.

Chapter 3

The 'three chairmen' all looked like they were strapped to seats in a molue doing a hundred miles an hour down a dust track. The K-TV cameraman focused on Killiwee's face being the only one on view.

His bulging eyes and neck veins made him look like one who was straining to deliver a baby African Elephant via the back passage. Screams emanated from the audience at random. Most could not bear to look and hid their faces.

The 'three chairmen' continued in their vibrating death dance. They released ungodly grunts and smells.

At this time the first casualties in the audience slumped to the ground. The attending physician seemed confused as to whom to save. The dying 'chairmen' or the four people who had fainted. He saved neither. For out of the thin air, darkness exploded.

The screams intensified in the darkness. It was an electric power failure. Mama Bomboy's son began to cry. A high-pitched lamentation that seemed to protest his being born in this country.

Oga Landlord was the first to return.

'Lord where am I? I hear babies crying. I am in heaven. I am in heaven o!' he screamed with a voice that still sounded distant due to the cloth covering his head.

Killiwee shouted 'Shut up!' No one else spoke.

'Killiwee is that you?' asked Oga Landlord.

'Yes, it is I' came the reply.

'Ye pa! Mo'gbe. I don die finish. I am in hell oooo!' cried Oga Landlord.

The entire room erupted in laughter.

'Oga Landlord, electric power don disappoint as usual' said Mile Two when the laughter settled. A few lighters began to spring up in the dark.

'Mama Bomboy, where is that your ye-ye placard now? Put it up let me see it in the darkness' teased Killiwee.

'You will die today, the wages of sin is death' she replied.

'But you know this country now. Its sometimes impossible to get your wages. Abi....' As Kelliwee spoke the Prison's electric generator came on with full force. Two thousand volts of electricity flowed into the 'chairmen' yet again. The executioner raced to lift the lever up making all the three men slump in their chairs.

'You for leave them make them die. I think na 'wages' Killiwee want eh?' screamed Mama Bomboy in anger at the executioner.

Following a signal from his producer Bibi J was back talking to his TV audience.

The executioner made a hasty exist for the toilets and fainted souls began to slowly rouse back to consciousness.

'Where am I?' screamed Mile Two.

'Still on earth poor chap' answered Bibi J who motioned to the prison officers to take off the black headpieces on Mile Two and Oga Landlord.

Both men blinked like startled rabbits caught crossing the road by the headlights of a powerful jeep.

Bibi J began his interviewing.

'Any problems?' he asked before thrusting his microphone at Mile Two.

'What do you think? I had enough electric to light up Festac Town going through my brains and you ask 'any problems?''

'So what happened?' asked Bibi J.

'You tell me'.

'You experienced it'

'All I saw was brilliant flashing lights. Next minute I was in this wicked world' said Mile Two.

'Na people like you make this world wicked' screamed Mama Bomboy.

Killiwee was asked the same question. He appeared sombre.

'I was speedily being transported through the air by the Angel of Death. I asked why the hurry and he said he had many engagements tonight in Lagos'. The audience began to look worried. 'Some of you are on his list' said Killiwee when he sensed their fear.

'So how did he take you. Horseback?' asked Bibi J grinning mischievously.

'No, no, no. It was Okada' said Killiwee causing great laughter.

'Laugh all you want but I tell you, many of you will ride that motorcycle this year. The Angel of death told me so' said Killiwee.

A man in the audience began to complain about the Government. 'See how dem yab themselves. How can a visiting dignitary such as Angel of Death be given Okada. The Minister of transport must resign!'

More laughter followed. Before Bibi J could get to Oga Landlord the executioner returned drying his hands on his black trousers. Bibi J made a hasty exit from the death chamber. This time no one's head was covered. A quick sign of the cross followed by the pulling down of the lever and the look of death was back on the faces of the 'chairmen'.

Bibi J now sitting amongst the audience commented animatedly about the grotesque exhibition of death by shock treatment. People began to scream and faint.

The 'three chairmen' quivered relentlessly. Suddenly the lights dimmed and then came another black out. Once again the entire place was thrown into utter confusion and darkness. Those with cigarette lighters provided a semblance of light.

The prison Governor General went livid with rage, demanding to know what was going on. Soon the electric generator technician appeared through the doors of the death chamber with a hurricane lamp, which he held high in front of various faces till he found his boss. 'Sorry Sir, but diesel don finish' he said nervously.

'What!?' screamed his boss.

'Them don thief all the diesel commot for generator pata pata. How the thing take switch on, me I no know'.

'I can't believe this! Stealing in a Prison! Heads will roll'.

'I agree with you sir. It must be an inside job' came the technicians reply.

The prison Governor General then took the hurricane lamp from it's owner and signalled the K-TV producer and the engineers to follow him out for a meeting.

'We never die? God abeg o!' said Mile Two in frustration when he regained consciousness.

Bibi J and his crew switched to battery power and began filming but not before he had told the executioner to push the lever up just in case the power came back suddenly.

He started with Oga Landlord's end. The solitary bright light on the old man's face made him look twice his age.

'Any comments?' asked Bibi J

The old man shook his head 'Retribution' he said slowly.

'What do you mean Sir?' asked Bibi J.

'I feel I am being punished for a crime'.

'But you have always pleaded not guilty or have you been lying?'

'No. This crime was committed years ago. I have a confession to make.'

Everyone was now all ears. For another great pastime was hearing confessions.

'Go on sir,' urged Bibi J.

'During the last civil war my neighbour and best friend, Uchenna, was gunned down in the street by soldiers. His wife and four children escaped into the bush.' Oga landlord began to cry. A few people who had expected tales of wizardry or secret cults hissed in disappointment.

It was in Port Harcourt. I took over the running of Uchenna's house. I rented it out. I thought his wife and children would have been killed. Two years later they were back to claim their father's property. I drove them out. I claimed never to have known them. You see, I had become accustomed to being a landlord and receiving monthly rent. It was from there I began to build other houses and subsequently moved to Lagos.' Oga landlord began to wail noisily. 'Ah Uchenna, forgive me!'

The Igbo entourage of Alaba market traders began to talk amongst themselves. One stood up in the darkness and began to curse Oga landlord. 'To think we were spending money to secure his release is unbelievable. Tuffia'. With that he left, as did many other traders.

'I have confessed and my conscience is clear. I am now ready to meet my maker' said Oga Landlord with great finality.

Bibi J walked over to Killiwee.

'Any comments?'

'I move for the creation of a police and army free Switzer State.' People began to boo Killiwee.

'Ah-ah. Why boo me. Ah? Why hate us?. We are but a few molecules of water atop the giant iceberg of national criminality. OK, how much have I stolen in all my life? I am done ojare.' With that said Killiwee refused to speak.

The prisons Governor General walked in and cleared his throat in a way which demanded silence. He began to make his speech with a lot of stuttering.

'Once again we have been failed by the electric power people. K-TV has invested heavily in this live broadcast yet the whole of Lagos is in darkness and I'm afraid we have no TV audience. The purpose of this endeavour will therefore be defeated if we continue. This execution is thereby postponed till tomorrow, same time same place.'

'Ahhhh!' screamed the condemned men in unison. The national anthem was sung hastily signalling the end of the macabre event.

Sir Skido pondered the evening's drama as he was driven out of the prison. 'Them laugh too soon,' said the chauffeur as he passed the jubilant protesters.

'Where there is life...' said Sir Skido. 'There is hope O!' said the chauffeur and they both laughed. Silence followed.

Doubts appeared from nowhere in Sir Skido's mind about the wisdom of getting involved in the electric chair importation business. This is blood money he thought. He soon found an antidote for the sprouting conscience. The thought of his plush flat in St John's Wood area of London brought a wry smile. After all, business is business, he thought.

At home Lady Skido was dressed for war. She bore a military frown on her face, which Sir Skido recognised instantly like the voice of an unwelcome visitor who persisted with daily visits,

'Where have you been?'

'Is that the greeting I get?'

'Is it not you who says don't answer a question with a question?'

'Woman, just leave me alone. I am not in the mood,' said Sir Skido collapsing heavily in his favourite armchair. An awkward period of silence passed.

'What's for dinner?'

'I thought you said I should leave you alone?'

'Look, I am not in the mood for games.'

'There's nothing for dinner.'

'What?!'

'No gas, no kerosene and you want dinner. I should use my blood to cook, eh? What's the use of all this money you are making when we can't even cook?'

Sir Skido changed into his green tracksuit and gathered three of his male relations from the small bungalow behind the house; the 'boys' quarters'.

'Don't forget diesel for the electric generator O! Ehen and no branching in any beer parlour O. Driver, watch your master well, well. And most important, softly drive that my jeep' screamed Lady Skido from the partially open door.

'Yes madam!' answered Sunday the driver.

As they drew closer to the filling station jerry cans of all shapes and sizes became the essential accessory. Almost every pedestrian had one.

'Chineke!' screamed Sir Skido on seeing the long tortuous queues. There was one each for petrol, kerosene and diesel. Like three over grown boa constrictors, the queues went round the block twice.

Sunday found a parking space with great difficulty and they all made their way to the front of the queue. Sir Skido led the way. 'How can I be lining up with jerry can like a refugee? A man of my class.'

His relations hailed him 'Uncle Skido! Na you O! Oga sir!

Suddenly Sir Skido heard a loud and somewhat familiar voice screaming at people to make way for him. He spun round to see Killiwee heading in their direction. The other two chairmen were present and each of them held a jerry can in one hand and was handcuffed to a prison officer on the other side. 'Commot for road or I kill you all! I will die tomorrow so what difference does one more murder charge make'.

'Commot!' shouted Killiwee, his heavily made up face making him look like a cousin of the rare White throated monkey of Okomo sanctuary.

Beads of sweat drew lines in the white powder on Killiwee's face, further increasing his ugliness.

Killiwee led his group through till he met an old school mate seven places from the front of the queue and stopped to chat. The schoolmate for his part was embarrassed to be known so well by a psychopath but forced a smile.

Sir Skido enquired of the prison officers as to why they came here only to be told the prison's quota for fuel had been stolen and they had to now queue like everyone else. The rationing of fuel meant the only way to get around the 'one-man one jerry can' rule was to bring all the 'chairmen' to queue for their diesel. 'After all, it's them who need the fuel tomorrow,' added the prison officer. Sir Skido didn't laugh.

A man whispered to Sir Skido that his place in the queue was up for grabs.

Money exchanged hands and the man left with his empty jerry can and bulging breast pocket heading for the back of the queue. Sir Skido gave his driver and relatives money and ordered them to the petrol and kerosene queues. 'Find professional *queuers* like that man. I need to leave soon,' he said glancing at his Rolex with exaggerated movements.

Bibi J appeared on the scene with a film crew to cover the fuel crisis for K-TV's news at ten. He intercepted the P.Q. who had done business with Sir Skido.

'What is your name?'

'I be Charlie.'

'And what's your business here?' asked Bibi J.

'I be P.Q.'

'What's that?'

'Professional *Queuer*.'

'How did that come about?'

Charlie smiled. 'Before before, I be messenger. Small time Internet begins to carry file so them retrench us. Na im I use ma number six begin dey queue for a living. When I reach front I go either buy fuel go sell for market or I go sell my place.'

'Man must survive ni O!' said Bibi J laughing.

'Which level? Man must wak. In fact my wife dey kerosene queue and I don commot my children from school make dem tanda for petrol queue.'

'Charlie you dey O!' said Bibi J laughing.

'Na im now. I must dash off,' said Charlie running off to the back of the diesel queue. Firemen arrived on the scene holding jerry cans.

Bibi J extracted a familiar tale from them. Someone had stolen their fuel at the fire station.

Bibi J then headed for Killiwee who was holding up the queue. He refused to move until he had finished sucking his orange.

The street vendor had her tray on the ground and was peeling away in artistic strokes. Every one in the vicinity had an orange stuck in their mouths.

The pretty girl could slice the orange down its equator into two perfect halves or cut out a cone at the top. Most preferred the cone, which meant a lot of squeezing to get the juice out. Her tray was soon empty and she asked for money.

'I have no money jo! I'm dying tomorrow and you ask for money!' screamed Killiwee.

Sir Skido reached out to pay but it was too late. Killiwee unleashed a vicious kick, which connected with the young girl's face. Her jaw instantly took on a different shape and she collapsed to the ground with blood spurting from her mouth.

Everywhere went dead silent. Loads of 'Area Boys' rushed to her aid. She was well known and well loved. They ferried her away hurriedly to her Auntie's house.

Killiwee oblivious to the commotion continued with his orange. Sir Skido gave a wad of notes to one of the 'Area Boys' for the girl's oranges and medical treatment.

People began to murmur about a possible reprisal however no one dared to question Killiwee about his attack on the girl. Soon shouting and screaming could be heard in a distance. The girl's aunty was on the way.

'You again' screamed Mama Bom Boy. 'You killed my brother you useless armed robber now you want to kill my niece!'

Many of the 'Area Boys' struggled to restrain Mama Bom Boy. 'You will injure the baby on your back O!' a woman warned. Mama Bom Boy calmed down.

'He's not worth it Mummy. Let's go home and take Sikira to the hospital,' pleaded Mama Bom Boy's daughter.

The filling station manager was now very apprehensive. He knew one of the treatments meted out to armed robbers was the 'burn alive' treatment, which would no doubt wreck his station. 'Please

this is a no smoking, no matches zone O! I take God beg una O!' He pleaded. He then called one of the tallest Area Boys into his office for a small "business meeting".

Next, commotion gave way to pandemonium. A woman caught a glimpse of Oga Landlord's made up face from the kerosine queue and thought she had recognised a ghost. She screamed loudly like one who had her pants full of angry stinging scorpions. She ran wildly and threw herself at Oga Landlord's feet crying.

A man shook his head. 'See what fuel shortage can cause. She don craze finis'.

Another said 'No bi fuel shortage. Na money shortage make am craze'.

Some laughed while others shook their head in pity. All the pump attendants stopped working to watch the 'free cinema'.

The woman on the floor screamed 'Ghost of Oga Landlord, don't take me away. I confess I killed my husband and dropped the knife through your open window. Don't kill me. Please o!'

'Who is this woman?' asked Sir Skido to no one in particular.

'Mama Kunle, my tenant, the late Fatayi's wife' answered Oga Landlord visibly shaken.

'You mean...?' began Sir Skido.

'Oh yes. The wife of the man they said I killed'.

Oga Landlord lifted both hands towards Heaven and screamed 'Thank you Lord!'

Even the depressed Mile Two managed a faint smile.

'Ghosts, please don't kill me'. Pleaded the woman on the floor afraid to look up.

'Sharrup ya mouth you daughter of Jezebel!' screamed Killiwee.

This time the prison officers caught him before his boots could swing into action.

Sir Skido transformed himself into a judge and took control. He made Mama Kunle stand and repeat her confession. Between much sobbing and nose blowing she told how when Oga Landlord had left their flat that 'fateful night', she challenged her husband on his drug taking and various other disgraceful acts.

He gave her a beating. She picked up a knife and threatened him. Next minute it was buried in his stomach.

'Sorry to disappoint you madam but this is no ghost and you are going down' said Sir Skido.

'But..but..but I saw him dead on TV ke. Ah-ah, I watched him die on K-TV before the power cut interrupted my viewing'.

'The power cut affected the execution madam' said a prison officer.

'You don become 'Chair lady' be dat O!'

'Ehen? So you are not a ghost. In that case I didn't kill Fatayi. You killed him. You killed my husband o!' screamed Mama Kunle.

Her tactics didn't go down well. Some police officers in the petrol queue needed to rush over and rescue her from being lynched.

'Oga Landlord I will testify to all I have heard this day in any court' said Sir Skido. 'So will I' promised Killiwee.

'How can? You will soon be dead ke' said Mama Bomboy.

'You again. What do you have against me? Your brother whom I killed was a thief like me'.

'Mummy let's go se' said Mama Bomboy's daughter tugging at Mama Bomboy's fat arms.

'You sef, you look familiar. Have we met?' asked Killiwee of Mama Bomboy's daughter.

'Earlier today. I won the K-TV contract to supply your Turkey Suya'.

'And I helped with the preparations' said Mama Bomboy smiling wickedly.

'I don die' screamed Killiwee before attempting to attack Mama Bomboy. He was quickly restrained.

'Before nko? This will teach you not to mess with my family. Electric or no electric, you will die today'

'Are you hearing? I have many witnesses o! No wonder everyone I offered the Turkey Suya declined. I have been poisoned. I don die!' cried Killiwee.

'Yes, but not from poisoning' came a hoarse voice from behind Killiwee. The owner of the voice was a well-known Area Boy called Alaye Supreme. He fled away while Killiwee slumped face down to the ground taking with him his Prison officer. Alaye Supreme had left his knife behind in Killiwee's back.

'Does anyone recognise that youth?' asked the prison officer handcuffed to Killiwee as Alaye Supreme went by. He struggled to free himself, jumped up and ran off in pursuit. As soon as he turned the corner the prison officer went home. 'I no fit die for government work!' he exclaimed aloud dusting off his uniform.

'Anyone foolish enough to identify Alaye to the police must be wise enough to leave money for his funeral' said a man aloud. Everyone knew who the murderer was. He had gone into the filling station manager's office to be bribed to ensure fire was not used to kill Killiwee. He was also Sikira's boyfriend.

'The fool that reports the murderer to the police must also leave money for his wife's and children's funerals also O!' said a youth in a threatening tone.

It was soon back to business as usual. Everyone returned to their places in their respective queues. A few arguments broke out as to who was in front of who in the queues but those were soon resolved.

Killiwee's body was side stepped as the purchase of Diesel commenced.

The peace was further broken by the filling station manager. He ran out excited with 'breaking news'. 'The senate has just announced the abolition of the death penalty!' A murmur swept through the crowd.

Mile Two cried bitterly. He knew life imprisonment was a prolonged death sentence. Oga landlord shook hands and hugged new found friends and well wishers like a politician certain of victory.

On the way home, Sir Skido's phone rang. 'Park the moto,' he told the driver. Very few business associates had this number. So he reckoned it must be an important call.

He got out of his jeep and walked a few feet away. Street vendors rushed to him. They sold everything from groundnut and puff-puff in wooden boxes with a glass side for "window shopping", to oranges, bread, bootleg copies of popular music recordings, batteries and spring water. He gesticulated violently and they fled from him.

'Hello,' he said.

'I will make this quick, you know who I am. We are going to be selling all the electric chairs to a neighbouring African country. I am sure you have heard the news. Naturally you have won the contract. My usual cut to the usual place.'

'Yes Sir,' said Sir Skido almost prostrating on the floor in respect. The line went dead. All the way home Sir Skido had a new song on his lips. The driver and his relatives joined in. He stopped at a roadside bar to 'tank' the boys up with beer. Back in the car they all sang with great zest.

Winner Oh Oh Oh

Winner

Winner Oh Oh Oh

Winner

Sir Skido you don win O

Winner

Pata Pata you go win again O

Winner

The End