

BLOOD BROTHERS

SCENE FOUR

Mara Crossing. Morning. At curtain rise, Kim has just finished telling Bwana Forodha about the Chalbi. He taps at his boot with his stick, turns and points off stage left.

BWANA FORODHA. I have a Landrover, just like yours, behind my house . Shall we continue?

Then he continues poking in their luggage and consulting his clipboard. Very near despair, he stops to wipe sweat off his face and his hatband. He shakes his head, as he regards Kim doubtfully.

KIM. You said you'd believe anything I told you.

BWANA FORODHA. I am a Government man, Mama Ruben.

KIM. So you lie?

BWANA FORODHA. I cannot tell a lie.

He replaces his hat on his head and sets it squarely.

BWANA FORODHA. What is SDRI?

He is pointing at a large, wooden crate inscribed with the logo SDRI.

KIM. San Diego Research Institute.

BWANA FORODHA. What is in the box?

RUBEN. Scientific equipment.

BWANA FORODHA. More scientific equipment? And here?

RUBEN. More.

BWANA FORODHA. More! (*thinking out loud*) In my long and illustrious career at Mara, where, admittedly, more wildebeest crosses the border than people, I have apprehended all sorts of bad people. From poachers to diamond smugglers, from thieves to gunrunners, I have met them all. I have been lied and told numerous tall tales by people who consider themselves smarter than a customs man; total strangers with criminal minds bent on cheating my Government of its rightful duty. I catch them all in the end when they get so entangled in their own lies they can't find their way out again. But, in all my years of catching liars and thieves, I have never come across a pair as strange and devious as this one.

He scratches his head, smiles at Kim.

BWANA FORODHA. Mama Ruben, you haven't told me everything, have you?

She ignores him. He turns to her husband.

BWANA FORODHA. Before the new road took them to Namanga, travellers passed through here in big numbers. Some came wearing masks, innocent faces and insincere smiles, pretending to be my friends and patriots while all the time trying to deceive me and avoid paying Government duty. Sometimes they came carrying coffins full of contraband radios and watches and said there was nothing of interest to my Government; that the coffins contained only the remains of their cousin Athumani who had died in Nairobi, which they were taking back to Tabora for burial. You see, half clever stories, like that. Sometimes the coffins turned out to be full of textiles, blankets and such like. Sometimes they were full of sugar, and rice or motorcar spare parts. Everything came through here disguised as something it was not. Sometimes an old car passed here on the way to Nairobi for the weekend only to speed back the next day with new tyres, new carburettor, gearbox, fuel pump, alternator, radiator, suspension and seats, engine - in fact a new car inside the old body. And no matter how often I caught them, they came back, again and again, never getting tired of trying to make a monkey out of Bwana Customs. (*wistfully*) But no one ever tried this before.

He glances from Ruben to Kim, expecting them to confess or say something in their own defence. They just look at each other, each expecting the other to speak, but in the end both say nothing. Bwana Forodha scratches his head, sighs wearily and turns to Ruben.

BWANA FORODHA. Tell me, Bwana Ruben, whose baby is it? Really?

RUBEN. Really? For the hundredth, millionth time? This is my wife's baby.

Kim looks up sharply.

BWANA FORODHA. Your wife's baby?

RUBEN. And mine.

BWANA FORODHA. And yours?

RUBEN. With me.

BWANA FORODHA. With you?

RUBEN. It's our baby, okay? Our baby.

Bwana Forodha looks from one to the other, tries to understand them. He whips the swagger stick back under his left arm and reaches into his pocket for their passports.

BWANA FORODHA. I find no baby in your passports.

RUBEN. That's because it was born last night.

BWANA FORODHA. Last night?

RUBEN. Last night.

Bwana Forodha thinks about it for a moment, picked up his clipboard and starts writing.

BWANA FORODHA (*almost to himself*). I had hoped that you might change your story now that I am closing in on you. (*write*) Born last night. By your wife?

RUBEN. By my wife.

BWANA FORODHA. By this wife?

RUBEN. I have only one wife.

Bwana Forodha nods and scribbles it down.

BWANA FORODHA. Mind you one wife is quite enough for a poor man.

RUBEN. I'm not a poor man.

BWANA FORODHA. You are a rich man then?

RUBEN. I'm not rich.

BWANA FORODHA (*writing*). Not rich, not poor.

RUBEN. Does it matter?

Bwana Forodha considers.

BWANA FORODHA (*shakes his head*). No, not at all. Rich or poor, big or small, good or bad, everyone must pay customs duty.

He glances at Kim, standing back and out of it, holding the baby like a tedious burden. It is clear her arms are not familiar with babies.

BWANA FORODHA. Go rest in your motorcar, Mama Ruben. Your man and I can sort out this problem together, man-to-man.

She does not seem to hear him.

BWANA FORODHA. Bwana Ruben. You are a man like me, you can tell me the truth. Where did your wife get the baby?

RUBEN. At the Bush Hospital.

BWANA FORODHA. At the Bush Hos ... Who delivered it?

RUBEN. A MATRON.

BWANA FORODHA. And where is this MATRON now?

RUBEN. I don't know. Back at the hospital, I suppose.

BWANA FORODHA. At the Bush Hospital?

RUBEN. At the Bush Hospital.

BWANA FORODHA. And where, exactly, is this ... Bush Hospital?

RUBEN. In the bush?

Bwana Forodha frowns, shakes his head at Ruben.

RUBEN. I don't know. Somewhere in the bush; I have no idea exactly where.

BWANA FORODHA. You were not there when the baby was born?

RUBEN. I was there. But we were lost. Why don't you just finish your damned inspection so we can pay whatever you think your Government is owed and get on our way?

BWANA FORODHA. I am trying, Bwana Ruben.

He pokes at the luggage with his stick, turns.

BWANA FORODHA. Can you show me this ... Bush Hospital on a map?

RUBEN. It's not on our map.

BWANA FORODHA. Not on your map? How did you find it then?

RUBEN. We weren't looking for it. I told you we were lost.

KIM. You were lost.

Bwana Forodha looks from one to the other.

RUBEN (*explains*). I was driving.

Bwana Forodha nods and resumes searching.

BWANA FORODHA (*loudly as he searches*). I have met all sorts of strange people before, but I have never seen a husband and wife gang. The way they work, one moment together and the next apart, baffles me. Either they have not been in smuggling business long or they are more cunning than I thought. (*turns*) All right. Come with me.

He leads Ruben to the customs office, throws the door open and ushers him inside.

Curtain.

SCENE FIVE

Mara Crossing Customs office. The curtain rises on a dark and dusty room with no windows. In the centre of the room is a huge desk on which sits an old, military-style two-way radio, two empty IN and OUT trays, and a pile of faded files. Against the wall is a rickety filing cabinet without doors. By the entrance, next to a set of old Landrover wheels, is a wooden bench. A large map of East Africa covers nearly half of one wall.

Enter Bwana Forodha, closely followed by Ruben. Kim enters and sits on the bench by the wall.

BWANA FORODHA (*points with his cane*). My map is the best map in Africa. It has everything in it. Now you show me your Bush Hospital.

Ruben steps boldly up to the map. Then he stops and regards it flabbergasted.

BWANA FORODHA. Well?

RUBEN. How old is your map?

BWANA FORODHA. Old enough. It has everything, as you can see.

RUBEN. It is indeed a detailed map. I see villages, clinics and police posts, every stream and waterhole, every track and footpath. Only the people are missing. Contrary to my recent experience, it appears that the bush is well equipped with all the things a traveler might wish for. (*tapping them on the map*) A post office, an airports and all-weather roads everywhere, hotels, lodges, airstrips and ... and, apart from Mount Kilimanjaro and the Indian Ocean, there isn't a single feature I recognise.

BWANA FORODHA. Can you see your Bush Hospital?

RUBEN. I can't see your border post either.

BWANA FORODHA. Of course, it is not there. How else would I catch clever smugglers like you?

Kim speaks up suddenly.

KIM. I'm not a smuggler.

BWANA FORODHA. I am talking to your husband, Mama Ruben. Let him tell me.

RUBEN. We are not smugglers.

BWANA FORODHA. The baby?

RUBEN. It's her baby. Our baby.

BWANA FORODHA. Prove it.

KIM. What proof do you need? A receipt?

BWANA FORODHA. You have a receipt?

RUBEN. A receipt? We didn't buy it, for heaven's sake.

BWANA FORODHA. What papers have you got then?

KIM. Papers? What bloody papers? It was born last night!

BWANA FORODHA. At the Bush Hospital. Give me your car keys, please. I'm impounding your motorcar until I conclude my investigations.

RUBEN. What investigations?

BWANA FORODHA. Keys, please.

Ruben flops down on the bench next to Kim, trying not to look at the baby in her arms. He buries his head in his hands.

BWANA FORODHA. You make my work very difficult, Bwana Ruben. It would be easier if we remained friends, Bwana Ruben. Give me the keys, please. Give them to me now.

Ruben makes no move to comply.

KIM. Give him the keys, Ruben.

Ruben goes for the keys.

BWANA FORODHA. Make yourself at home. I'll make a call before I let you go.

KIM. So you will let us go?

BWANA FORODHA. Of course, I will let you go. I have no wish to keep you here forever.

He turns on the radio, gives it a blow, turns a knob, and flicks a switch and waits. The radio crackles with static.

BWANA FORODHA (to Kim). Mama Ruben, it would save us trouble if you told me the truth about Bush Hospital.

Before the answer, the radio squawks to life. He pounces on it.

BWANA FORODHA. Hallo! Arusha? Mara here. Mara Border Control. Can you hear me now? Mara. Yes, One Bullet. I sent a signal about some strange people here. With a baby. What? Yes, yes, I understand, I hear you. They are here with me now. I have apprehended them. Why Dar-es-Salaam? Why? All right, I will do that. *Kwaberi*. Hallo? Hallo?

He turns a knob, gives the radio another blow, flicks a switch, and rattles the handset to no avail.

BWANA FORODHA. Solar. It must charge again for ... who knows how long?

They wait for it to recharge.

KIM. Do you work here all by yourself?

BWANA FORODHA. My assistants are on leave. They went on Christmas leave a year ago and I have not seen them since. But they are young and unmarried and I would understand if they decided not to return. Mara is a lonely place not at all suited for young and ambitious people. So little revenue comes through here that even the Government forgets about me. But I will man the post until I am too old to do it any more. Then I will go back to Dar-es-Salaam or Tabora and leave it to someone younger. I have not received my salary for eighteen months due to lack of transport to bring it here. But that is all right, the Government can keep my money until I have something to do with it.

KIM. What do you do with the duty you collect?

BWANA FORODHA. I keep it here. It's not much. No one comes here any more. One of my officers took most of it with him when he went on leave. There is no record of it reaching the head office, and I do not expect I will be seeing him back soon. But such is life. Sometimes people do foolish things for money.

Ruben returns, looking demoralised, and gives him the car keys.

BWANA FORODHA. We are waiting for instructions from my superiors in Dar. Have you been to Dar-es-Salaam?

RUBEN. We have never been to Tanzania.

BWANA FORODHA. You have now.

RUBEN. So you tell us.

BWANA FORODHA. I tell you, Dar-es-Salaam is very different. You will like Dar-es-Salaam, Mama Ruben. I was there many years, before I came to Mara. They know me very well at the port in Dar. They call me *Risasi Moja*, One Bullet, because I never miss with my rifle. Even old smugglers are afraid to come through here. You have not heard of me?

KIM. We have not heard of you because ... we are not smugglers.

BWANA FORODHA. I don't think so, Mama Ruben. But let us wait and hear what my superiors think. You may speak to them if you wish.

RUBEN. I wish. I wish that very much.

BWANA FORODHA. Good then, we wait.

Ruben sits down by Kim, seething with rage.

KIM. But for your incompetence, we'd be in Nairobi now talking to someone who understands, someone who could help.

Bwana Forodha watches them, rocking in his chair and wondering. They all look up at the entrance as MARIAM enters bearing a tea tray. She is short and round and dressed in kangas, one hanging from her neck and the other wrapped round her waist, and a pair of flip-flops that tap out her steps when she walks across the room and places the tray on the desk.

MARIAM (to Forodha). Karibu chai, Bwanangu.

BWANA FORODHA (to Ruben). This is Mariam.

MARIAM (to Ruben and Kim). Karibuni.

Then she sees the baby and her face lights up. She rushes to Kim and holds out her arms. Kim promptly hands it over, almost gladly. Mariam hugs the baby to her bosom, then caresses the cheeks, the hair, as she walks up and down rocking it in her arms and making crooning sounds. She walks up and down rocking the baby. Ruben watches mesmerized while Kim appears totally disengaged. Bwana Forodha sips his tea and continues looking from his wife to Kim and back, intrigued.

BWANA FORODHA. *Mariam*. These people tell me their baby, this baby, was born in Bush Hospital. I tell them there's no such hospital in Tanzania but they do not believe me.

RUBEN. I didn't say it was in Tanzania.

BWANA FORODHA. Where is it then? We have looked at the map of Kenya and of Uganda too. No one ever heard of it.

MARIAM. I have.

They turn to her full of expectation. She continues walking up and down, rocking the baby, unaware of the tension she has created.

BWANA FORODHA. You have what?

MARIAM. Heard of Bush Hospital.

BWANA FORODHA (carefully). *Mariam*, you have heard of what?

MARIAM. Bush Hospital. But that was a long time ago.

They wait for more. Mariam continues minding the baby.

KIM. You have heard of Bush Hospital?

She nods and smiles, puts the baby's cheek to hers and rubs gently. Ruben gapes. Bwana Forodha observes the effect she has on Ruben, sips his tea with a loud sucking sound and puts the cup aside.

BWANA FORODHA. *Mariam*, stop walking about and listen to me. From where did you hear of this ... Bush Hospital?

MARIAM. A long time ago.

BWANA FORODHA. Where?

MARIAM. Here. From people who came here. They too were lost when ...

BWANA FORODHA. Did I say these people were lost?

MARIAM. Why else would they come here?

Ruben glances at Kim. They have found an ally.

RUBEN. Did they say where they were going?

MARIAM. I did not ask them. But they were lost in the bush when they found it.

BWANA FORODHA. Did they have a baby?

MARIAM. No, but one of them had a bandage on his head. He said they were lucky to have found Bush Hospital.

RUBEN. See? There is such a place. Bush Hospital does exist.

Bwana Forodha picks up his cup, slurps his tea loudly, turns to his map and regards it thoughtfully. He glances at Ruben, back at Mariam and again sips his tea.

BWANA FORODHA. *Mariam*, how long ago was it?

MARIAM. A long time ago.

BWANA FORODHA. How long ago?

MARIAM. Before people stopped coming here.

BWANA FORODHA (to Ruben). That is a long time ago.

Then he leans back in his chair, nodding slowly and looking from his wife to Ruben and back again, and getting more and more sceptical.

BWANA FORODHA. A long time ago.

MARIAM. A long, long time ago.

The radio crackles to life. Bwana Forodha looks from his wife to the radio and back, hesitates. He seems undecided.

BWANA FORODHA. Give them something to eat. They must be very hungry.

He dismisses her with a wave of the hand and snatches the handset from its cradle.

BWANA FORODHA (*in the radio*). Dar? Mara here. Mara. Mara who? What do you mean *mara ngapi*? This is Mara Border Control. Yes, border control; *mpaka*. Naam, yes, that Mara. This is he, One Bullet. *Risasi moja*. One Bullet. Yes, one shot. You remember me? Good. I am still here, where else is there to go? No, not yet, I am too young for retirement.

Mariam hands Kim her baby and withdraws.

BWANA FORODHA. No, I have not shot any smugglers today. I do not shoot people. I told you smugglers do not come through here any more. Everyone is afraid to die. No, not me, I am not afraid to die. You? I do not believe you, Bwana Director. How can you be afraid to die when you are such a big man? When you retire? Do not worry about retirement, sir, anyone can die after they retire. Here? Nothing happens here. Yes, except this now. Yes, the baby. No, no, not half-half.

He glances at Ruben and Kim, lowers his voice.

BWANA FORODHA. *Siyo nusu-nusu, mweusi kama mimi. La, siyo mweusi kama nyungu, lakini akaribia kuwa.* I see you remember me. I am still here. No, no, I told you *wote weupe*. He says his wife gave birth. *Ati* Bush Hospital. He was there when it is born, assisting. No, no, he is not a doctor; he is an American. That is what he says, that he assisted the MATRON. She is not here. At the Bush Hospital. That is what I am telling him, but he does not believe me. He insists that it is his baby.

He glances up to find Kim glaring at him.

BWANA FORODHA (*turns away from them*). *Wajua, yaonekana buyu bwana kafichwa mbegu. Ndiyo, yaweza ikawa nusu-nusu, lakini sidhani ... Wajua mambo siku hizi ni mengine.* What do I tell him? What? I see, I see, I'll wait.

He drops the handset back in its cradle, turns to Ruben.

BWANA FORODHA. We wait.

RUBEN. How long?

Bwana Forodha shrugs and indicates the radio. They wait. Mariam returns to serve them tea.

MARIAM (*to Kim*). *Karibuni chai.* Is it a girl?

Kim and Ruben look at each other. Bwana Forodha takes note.

RUBEN. A boy?

Mariam glances at Bwana Forodha. He nods his permission. She takes the baby back from Kim. They wait tensely as she uncovers it to check the gender.

MARIAM. It's a girl. A beautiful, baby girl.

Kim and Ruben glance at each other. Bwana Forodha watches and waits for them to explain. The radio squawks. He pounces on it.

BWANA FORODHA. Hallo? Hallo? Hallo! Yes this is Mara Crossing Control. Bwana Forodha speaking. Yes, sir, I sent the signal. From Mara Crossing. The PPO? And the PIO? Why does the Provincial Intelligence Officer want to come here? Why? Why do you not ask him; you are big like him? Ask him, yes, you ask him. I do not do anything without asking the reason. Yes, sir, but this here is Mara, not your Provincial Headquarters. I am the boss here, and I want to know why. Ask him. I will hold on, you go ask him.

Ruben and Kim look at each other.

BWANA FORODHA. Bwana Ruben, they want me to arrest you.

RUBEN. Why?

BWANA FORODHA. They will tell us.

They wait. The radio beeps. Bwana Forodha snatches it.

BWANA FORODHA. Yes, sir. Yes, sir, I am still here. Bwana Forodha, *Risasi Moja*, that is I. Still here. Where else is there to go? What investigation? By whom? No, I cannot leave this place, sir. I am alone at this post. They went on leave, sir, many months ago. Dismissed? Why? No, I am not informed. No, no, it is not a problem. I can manage. Nothing ever happens here. They do not come here any more; they know I am always watching. No one comes for the diamonds; they are still here under my desk. A full toolbox, sir. I have no use for such things. It is Government property now; you come for it. Yes, sir, you can come for it. What about these people, what shall I do with them? I have no cells to lock them

in. No, they will not escape me. I have their car keys. Do not worry about them; I will take good care of them, sir. I will make sure they are comfortable. Yes. Hallo? Hallo? Who? Put him on.

He listens for a moment, nodding and shaking his head, looking progressively bewildered.

BWANA FORODHA. Closed by whom? No one told me, sir. Why? When? Back pay? I don't know, sir. You are the accountants, you count it.

He slams the receiver down and sits staring in space. Finally, he rises, adjusts his belt, picks up his stick and hat, and exits. Ruben glances at Kim. She nods. He rises and follows Bwana Forodha.

MARIAM (*to Kim*). Men!

She continues rocking the baby in her arms, stealing sympathetic glances at Kim when she is not looking.

MARIAM. Shall I pray?

KIM. Pray?

MARIAM. For you.

KIM. For me?

MARIAM. And your baby.

KIM. Why?

MARIAM. For health.

KIM. Oh, ...where is this place Ruben has landed us?

MARIAM. I pray when I am lonely.

KIM. Good for you.

MARIAM. When I am angry and confused too; when life hurts.

KIM. You do your praying but leave me out of it.

She waits for Mariam to leave. Then, realising she's not going, she looks.

KIM (*warns*). As long as you don't touch me.

Mariam raises one arm over her head and prays loudly in Kiswahili. Kim watches the raised arm apprehensively, expecting it to come down on her head. When nothing happens, she relaxes, closes her eyes.

Curtain.