

LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE

A Comedy By
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DEDICATION

To Ama Ata Aidoo: author, poet, playwright
and academic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

...and to you, thank you for reading

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SYNOPSIS

Life in the womb is a daily challenge, though it comes with its share of fun and laughter. Panyin and Kakra, twins in their ninth month in the womb, must confront their fears, fumble over love, and debate on the principles of right and wrong as seen through the lives of their parents.

Their pregnant mother wants to be rich and famous, but their father doubts that becoming a corrupt politician, an illegitimate chief or a false money-grabbing prophet is the way to go about it.

CHARACTERS

Panyin: The older twin

Kakra: The younger twin

Maame: The mother of the twins

Paapa: The father of the twins

Mena Esi: An elderly friend of the family

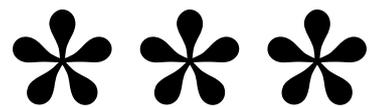
Kofi and Ama: Mena Esi's grandchildren

Yaa: Kakra's love interest

Sonsono The Worm: The twins' greatest fear

ACT

ONE



SCENE

ONE

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Panyin and Kakra are nine-month-old babies inside Maame's womb, close to the time of birth. Their portion of the stage could be lit in red in order to separate it from the other settings.

They live in a single room apartment, which contains a toilet, an electric cooker, a broken shower, two little beds, a football, a television set, a telephone, and a periscope that makes them see their parent's world through their mother's eyes.

It is morning and the twins are still in their little beds. Maame is singing a self-composed song.

Maame: (Singing) I am going to have a little angel. She sleeps in my stomach now. But it won't be long, she will be here. My little brown angel, come quickly. Come and break my plates. Come and break the naughty boys' hearts.

(The twins turn in their beds and slam the pillows over their heads).

Paapa: You mean, "Break the little girls' hearts?" Just feel the

way he kicks; only a boy
could do that.

Maame: Or a very strong girl.
Sweetie, remember the
Beijing Women's
Conference. Remember Yaa
Asantewaa. Remember
Boadicea. Remember Rosa
Parks. Remember Margaret
Thatcher. Remember....

Paapa: Okay. Okay. I get it. I
remember the sun, the moon,
the stars, the breakfast I had
on Christmas morning when
I was ten years old.

Maame: You can be as sarcastic as
 you want, darling; it will not
 change what is real.

*(Maame repeats her song. The twins wake
up. They are not amused at all).*

Kakra: Man! We really have to do
 something about these early
 morning calls. One cannot
 even get a decent sleep
 around here nowadays!

Panyin: And what is this business
 about a little brown angel
 breaking the hearts of boys?
 What does she take me for?
 A girlie-girlie-girl? In the
 first place, I am a big boy,
 not a little one.

Kakra: Yeah, yeah!

Panyin: I am black, not brown.

Kakra: Preach, preacher!

Panyin: And I certainly am no angel.

Kakra: You are the man!

Panyin: And to crown it all, I do the
heartbreaking.

Kakra: Brother, *you* are superman!
Wait, wait! (*He grins in
amusement*). She thinks
there is only one of us; she is
going to get the shock of her
life.

Panyin: You don't say!

Kakra: I do say. By the way, why this '*I am*' and '*me*' business? Aren't you forgetting about *moi*?

Panyin: Cool your fires, chum. We are twins; when I say '*I*', I mean '*we*'.

Kakra: Just go straight to the point next time.

(Maame repeats her song again. Kakra kicks the side of the wall, irritated).

Maame: *(Excited)* Sweetie, she kicked! She kicked!

Paapa: *(Excited)*. He did?

Kakra: *(Irritated)*. That does it! I'm packing my bags! I'm leaving, bro.

Panyin: And where do you think you will go? South Africa?

Kakra: Not a bad idea. *(Scratching head)* 'Say! Whose turn is it to cook this morning?

Panyin: Yours, my good-deliberately-forgetful-friend.

Kakra: Gee thanks. I was hoping you would forget and do it for me. I probably shouldn't say this, but I will. Though I

love you, I hate your good
memory.

Panyin: Don't flatter me, and mind
you, no lumps in the
porridge this time. I haven't
completely recovered from
your previous meal yet.

Kakra: Very funny, wise guy.

Maame: Pass me the sugar and milk,
darling.

Panyin: She is about to eat. Quick!
You miss her, we miss
breakfast!

Kakra: If you don't put the brakes
on, you will suffer a heart

attack one of these days. *(He opens the only window, sticks out a saucepan and waits).*

Paapa: Go easy on the sugar, honey; you know you are expecting.

Kakra: What is that man going on about? I like my porridge very sweet. Go, mama, go!

(A torrent of porridge cascade past the window. Kakra fills the saucepan, closes the window and sets the saucepan on the stove. As he waits for it to boil, the lights go out).

ACT

ONE



SCENE

TWO

SCENE TWO

Panyin is on the toilet, moaning painfully and rubbing his belly. He tries to read a magazine because he doesn't want to give Kakra the pleasure of seeing him suffer. He grimaces as his poor stomach rumbles and tosses with the cramps. He begins to moan again.

Panyin: Oh my poor stomach! Oh, my poor stomach! Oh, my poor stomach!

Kakra: Would you kindly shut up? I am trying to think here!

Panyin: You? Think? Wow, that is something new. Oh *agyeeei* my stomach! And I wouldn't

make so much noise if my stomach wasn't waging war against me because you don't know how to cook.

Kakra: I tell you it is not my cooking. Why am I not foaming at the mouth, squirming on the floor and howling like a monkey with a bellyache?

Panyin: Nothing can harm that stomach of yours. Surely, it must be lined with some kind of metal.

Kakra: Yeah. Gold. *(Panyin makes a ceremony of wiping himself and tries to flush the*

*toilet. After five tries,
he gives up)*

Panyin: It is about time we called the plumber in. Something must be broken in the plumbing.

Kakra: Of course. I always said something must be broken in your room upstairs. Hey, stinker. Aren't you going to pour down some water...

Panyin does not allow him to finish. He throws a roll of toilet paper at him, and when he misses, chases him off stage with his brother shouting "Stinker! Stinker!"

**ACT
ONE**



**SCENE
THREE**

SCENE THREE

Maame drags herself onto the stage holding her midriff as though she carries all the burdens in this world in her stomach.

Maame: My baby is extra active today. I feel so sick; I wish she wouldn't kick so terribly hard. She feels like an army of little rascals.

Maame lowers her bulk into a chair and sighs audibly. Her husband storms unto the stage, obviously agitated. He paces back and forth, scratching his chin. Oblivious of his wife's presence, he begins to talk to himself.

Paapa: I was leading a practical, normal life without any

political ambitions, and now everything is turned over on its head in one afternoon. In just two hours. Maybe I should do it. The prestige alone is worth dying for; not to mention the money. Ah! The money. I can get a new car; something no one has ever owned before. A four-wheel drive... no, an eight-wheel drive, or a convertible. Maybe an eight wheel drive convertible. Fully air conditioned, power steering and all. No! Two ultra-super power steering facilities...power seats, power doors, power

wipers...All the dresses and shoes my wife wants...

Paapa's voice peters-out as he begins to daydream. Maame, who has been drifting in and out of sleep as if she snoozes with a stopwatch, is jostled awake, not by the extra luggage she packs in front, but by the mention of dresses and shoes, her uneasiness momentarily forgotten.

Maame: *Ei, ei*, my husband! Where is my share of the dresses and shoes? I will not let your sisters come for all of them. *Twiaah*. No! *(She bounces up from her chair as best as she can as she speaks)* And I want enough so I can leave some for my daughter when

she becomes a woman. My
husband, show me the
goodies *ooo*. Show me!

Paapa: *(Aside)* Women! A little
scent of water, just a little-
hard-to-tell scent of water,
and the ocean must be theirs.
(To his wife) What on earth
are you talking about? Were
you dreaming?

Maame: *(Slapping her chest)*. My
poor mother should come
and see me now. I will not let
this happen *da*. Tell me *ooo*!
Who is she? Who is that
witch who has turned your
head around, so you won't
mind me anymore? No, I will

not let her have the dresses; I
will not let her have the
shoes; I will not let her have
you.

Paapa: *(Guffawing uncontrollably)*
Hahahahahahah...Witch,
hehehe...dresses and shoes
hohoho... the madness of the
afternoon continues. My
dear, dear wife, no one is
trying to steal me away from
you, and there are no dresses
and shoes.

Maame: But... but... but I heard
you...

Paapa: Thinking aloud; dreaming
through my mouth. *(He puts*

his arms around her.) You know I could never make you unhappy, even if I tried. Hehehe.

Maame: *(Extricates herself from his embrace)* Then tell me what you were vividly thinking about.

Paapa: Nothing much. Just that some people think I should run for Assembly Man come next election. They think that with my popularity, my association with the ruling government, a few good or bad words thrown in here and there, and a few cedis scattered around, I have a

ninety per cent chance of winning the election. And then...

Maame: (Excitedly). And then there is parliament to think about, the ministries of Finance or Agriculture and... my God...of course, the presidency...Maame First Lady. It sounds so nice. Maame First Lady! We will be rich. FILTHY RICH.

Paapa: Wait a minute ...

Maame: Our daughter will go to the best schools in America, Britain, Canada, Australia, Egypt, Thames, Everest, and

then she will become a
cancer doctor, and
HIV/AIDS doctor, a poverty
eradicator...

Paapa: *(Irritably)* Woman! Pull your
bulk together! You have a
dangerous imagination.
Don't you know you can go
to prison for what you are
thinking about? Then what is
going to happen to our son?
Besides, I haven't agreed to
anything yet.

Maame: Why not? Eh! Why not?
Don't you want me to dress
well, ride in big cars and live
in mansions like other
women do? Don't you want

me to go for vacations in
London, New York, Las
Palmas, Paris and Vienna?
Ei! So, you want my friends
to laugh at me. Oh my poor
mother, rise from your grave
and mourn your daughter's
misfortune! (*She begins to
weep*)

Paapa: Come on, darling...

Maame: Don't 'darling' me.

Paapa: This is not fair. You know I
agree to anything you say
when you begin to cry. Play
fair. (*She sobs even more
uncontrollably*) I just don't
like this game called politics.

As much as people get rich off it, people also get killed. Please understand my reluctance.

Maame: *(She wipes her tears with the back of her hand)* Alright. I've heard you. Let's think of an alternative. You can always fight for the chieftaincy in your hometown. If you make the right fantastic promises to the wrong...the right people, and if you buy enough gallons of *akpeteshie* and a few bottles of whisky for the common people, they will be ready to die for you and to swear you are the rightful

heir to the stool. And, before
you know it, you are the
chief of your hometown.
You will control the sale of
lands and oversee
government projects. Ahhh!
The goldmines...think about
the gold mines...we will be
rich. CRAZY RICH!

Paapa: But that is not right!

Maame: So what? Everybody is
doing it, and if we have to
face divine retribution, it
would be extremely mild,
since it will be shared among
so many.

Paapa shakes his head in dismay.

Maame: There is also the last alternative. (*She clears her throat*). You could always become a pastor. Hide away for a few weeks, come back and call yourself prophet Zerubbabel. Wear a flowing *agbada*, set up a church under any tree and begin to prophesy good things unto people. Tell them they will go to the UK and America, and in no time, we shall roll with the cream of the land.

Paapa: I don't think any of your ideas are reasonable.

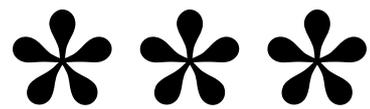
Maame: *(Addressing audience)* Now
he calls me a fool. *(Back to
her husband)* If you have
such impeccable morals,
then don't accept any of the
thousands of cedis Mr.
Sikape has been sending us,
because, if you have
forgotten, hello, he is a self-
made prophet. His wife is
even an Assembly Woman,
but me... I am only
pregnant.

*She slumps into her chair and pouts.
Paapa tries to speak and shuts his mouth
again.*

Paapa: *(Aside)* The war has just
begun, and I have already lost the first battle.
(He storms off the stage).

ACT

ONE



SCENE

FOUR

SCENE FOUR

The twins are busy. Panyin eyes are glued to the telescopic lens of the periscope, twirling the instrument around to follow the movements on the other stage. Kakra's right ear is slapped against the wall, catching every word.

Panyin: Good gracious! Can you believe this? Money, cars, fame, houses, holiday trips. Filthy money. Is that all people think about? Live for? If this is what awaits me, then I'm not getting out of here. No. Not me.

Kakra: And what is so evil about these things you so wish to

be *wombed* against forever?

The toilet does not flush; the plumbing is bad; the TV has

only one channel and we

don't even get Bugs Bunny.

I say we could do with some

more comfortable

arrangements.

Panyin: Even if it means stepping on others to get what we want?

Kakra: Just look around you, big brother. Life is all about survival, and to me, survival means: *get there*. I don't care if you fly or walk; leap or swim. Just make sure you *get there* and stay alive doing so. And we certainly

can't afford to be righteous about this, could we? Since some of the sources of our sustenance come from people you and Paapa do not er... admire.

Panyin quietly thinks for a moment after his brother's speech. He sighs and, sinks into a chair. He beckons to Kakra to sit down next to him.

Panyin: Listen carefully, Kakra. Whenever we give in to a selfish desire, somebody gets hurt and we are reduced to nothing but slave masters. Life is about loving, sharing, bearing one another on our shoulders; about making sure

that, the family next-door is also happy. Remember that if people follow you not because they love, trust and believe in you, but because you give them handfuls of cola nuts, they will desert you for the one who gives them sacksful of cola nuts.

(He gets up from his seat) If Paapa does not want to be a politician or a priest, then he shouldn't or else he will be looking over his shoulder for the rest of his life.

Kakra: Don't go all sanctimonious on me, big brother. What about what our parents take

from others? We also profit
from them

Panyin: That, we can't control,
unless we decide to go on a
hunger strike, turn off the
heat, hold our noses and
refuse to breathe. We are not
responsible for their actions,
but we shall have the chance
to make our own decisions
when we go to the other side.
The bottom line is, we must
never be the cause of agony
and sorrow to others. We
must have nothing to do with
theft; if something is yours,
it is, and if it isn't, it isn't.
We can't give up humanity

for insanity. Do you
understand me?

Kakra: I guess so.

Panyin: Hey! Why don't we grab the
ball, so I can teach you a few
tricks?

Kakra: In your dreams. I gave you a
run for your money last time.
Beat you five goals to three.

Panyin: When will you ever learn,
little brother? I let you win.

Kakra: *(Retrieving the ball from
under a table and dribbling
it.)* Well, don't do me any
favours any more.

*(The lights gradually peters out as they begin
to play)*

**ACT
TWO**



**SCENE
ONE**