

LIVING ON

David Crystal

Version 6: May 2007

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The *Living On* Project

Introductory statement by David Crystal

Fiction, in the temper of the times, stands the best chance of influencing opinion. (Disraeli)

The origins of this project lie in a commission from Gregory Doran, now associate director at the Royal Shakespeare Company, to write a play dramatising and drawing attention to the world's endangered language crisis. Greg had read my work on this subject, later summarised in *Language Death* (CUP 2000), and wanted a play to put on at his new theatre in Keswick. However, before the play was finished, Greg moved to Stratford, and was unable to continue with the project. Shakespeare - I suppose, not unreasonably - took priority.

I completed the play nonetheless, and through my linguist-turned-actor son Ben (who is the prototype for the character Derek), made contact with Robert Wolstenholme, a London-based director who wanted to take this project forward in the UK. He worked on the script, with Greg's blessing, and the final version is the result of this revision. Extracts from the play have been given readings in Britain, Europe, South America and Australia, and a rehearsed reading of the whole play took place at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London in April 2007, with the following cast:

Derek	Ben Crystal
Miranda	Emma Swinn
Shalema	Joseph Marcell
Ratu / Tamasa	Simon Manyonda
Amaana / Tamasa	Rhoda Ofori-Attah
Contrary / Elder / Tamasa	Nick Oshikanlu
Matu / Tamasa	Karl Kelly
Jason	Scott Ainslie
Other parts played by members of the company	

Director: Robert Wolstenholme

Performance notes

The play depends on the presence of a culturally diverse cast, especially the character of the lead, Shalema, but also for the members of his community. No particular racial group is assumed: the characters could be from virtually any part of the world. The rainforest setting used in the script could be altered to any other, without this affecting the plot. The two leading white characters also have a regional background: Derek is Welsh and Miranda is Irish. For parts of the world where the allusions to the 'Celtic fringe' may not be especially meaningful, the text could be adapted to incorporate alternative characterizations, also without this affecting the plot. The same point applies to any proposed translations.

The plot reflects a period when tape recorders were the standard technology for language investigation. It would be possible to adapt the plot, if a production wished to use modern digital recording devices instead, but this would have to be done carefully, as there are many references to tape recording.

The play involves original music and choreography/movement, for which appropriate specialists would need to be involved.

The text of the play is freely available to any group who wishes to mount a reading or production. I do ask to be kept informed of productions. I also ask that profits received from any commercial exploitation of the play should be assigned to the local endangered languages association, if there is one, and failing that, to the Foundation for Endangered Languages, UK.

A published version of the play will be available in due course, once it has had a full UK production. In the meantime, the latest version (following the 2007 London reading) is available from the author either as hard copy or electronically.

The play will readily adapt for a screenplay; indeed, the physical events which are depicted in some ways are easier to display through the medium of film. These events, though, would be difficult to portray on radio, and some rewriting and plot adaptation would be necessary for any radio performance.

Setting

The action of the play takes place in an unidentified country in the rainforest tropics. The sound of crickets from the garden outside. CSL is the front room of a house which Derek Lloyd, a British linguist, is renting while he is staying in the country. CSR is the bedsit occupied by the man Derek has come to visit, Shalema Maneshi. DS needs to be kept clear for various events unconnected with these two locations: flashbacks to Shalema's village, spirit dialogues, and a downtown bar. The time is now.

The bedsit is shabbily but comfortably furnished - table, chest of drawers, wardrobe. There is a fireplace, which has a small wood fire burning, and a chair by it. Shalema has lived there a long time. There are a few artefacts of his former home - some carvings, pots, weaving. Second-hand books are everywhere, and old newspapers. A tape recorder is on the table, and a tape cassette. There is a door to an inner room, CSR, and a front door US.

The front door to Derek's room is also US, and there is a side door CSL to his bedroom and bathroom. The room has been turned into an office, and it has seen better days. The shutters on the window are broken. There is a desk and two chairs, a table, an ancient filing cabinet, an old phone. Overhead an unshaded bulb. On one wall USL there is a large fan with big wooden wings, operated by a string pull. The light switch to the bedroom is on the wall by the door. An electric socket is near the floor, hanging off the wall. On one of the walls there are a couple of old political posters: one says 'Raimondo' with a big red voting tick across it; the other says 'Vota Peruz'.

USR	Front door	US	Front door	USL
Door to bedroom etc CSR	S's room		D's room	Door to bedroom etc. CSL
Entrance to front of stage		General area DS		Entrance to front of stage DSL

Notes on the characters

SHALEMA is the last surviving member of a tropical rainforest people. In his time he was an important person among his people - their orator on public occasions. He is old now, but it is difficult to say just how old. He is plainly not very well - a bit breathless, and he walks with difficulty. He is proud of having learned English, which he speaks carefully, and with a strong syllabic beat. He is neatly dressed, but the clothes are not of high quality. He looks careworn, but still has great presence, and one can sense his former strength. He now lives in a bedsit in the chief city of his country, having left his village many years before. (1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.2, 2.3)

DEREK is in his early or mid 20s, and at times we hear a Welsh lilt which identifies his regional background. He works in a linguistics institute attached to a British university for a few years. This is the second time he has visited Shalema's country. He is very committed, even to the extent of leaving his wife and new baby in order to get this current project completed. When he gets going on his subject, it is difficult to stop him. (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.3)

MIRANDA is several years older, and at times we hear an Irish lilt which identifies her regional background. She has a professional manner, but is more intuitive, more able to sense human problems than Derek, and she is better able to empathize with Shalema. She has lived abroad for only a short time, and gives the impression of someone prepared to make her own way in the world. She has left the UK for personal reasons, which we learn about in due course. There is an ongoing jocular battle with Jason, from whom she tries to keep her distance. (1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)

JASON is older, and not so well educated, but very sharp. He has lived abroad for several years and knows it all, including some of the less legal ways of life. He now works for the British Council as a driver, does routine maintenance jobs, and carries out various other tasks in their office. He fancies Miranda, and tries to impress her whenever he can. He doesn't get offended when he's put down. (1.2, 1.3, 2.3)

Tamasa people

RATU, a young man about to be married (1.1, 2.3), doubles as villager (1.2, 2.2)

AMAANA, his intended bride (1.1, 2.3), doubles as villager (1.2, 2.2)

CONTRARY, a colourful 'lord of misrule' in the village (1.1, 2.2, 2.3)

ELDER, the senior man in the village (1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 2.3)

MATU, the village healer (1.2, 1.4, 2.3), doubles as villager (1.1) and male Shanu leader (2.2)

GRANDMOTHER of Amaana (1.1, 2.3), doubles as MEGISHTU (1.2) and female Shanu leader (2.2)

Music

Music is an important symbol in *Living On* - representing the continual singing of the landscape. Apart from the occasions in the play when it is used, its ongoing presence should become apparent in the breaks between scenes, before and after the interval, and before the play starts.

The anthem referred to needs to be a drum-rhythm superimposed upon a drone. The closest example to what I have in mind is the anthem by Philip Glass in *Powaqqatsi: Anthem Part 1 and Conclusion* on the CD (Elektra/Asylum/Nonesuch Records, New York and Los Angeles, 7559-79192-2). The coda of the main song in 1.2 needs to be catchy enough to be recognized when Miranda sings it in 2.3, and for everyone to join in at the end. A composition by Marian Leeming is available.

When the first members of the audience arrive in the theatre, they should be able to hear the drone and rhythm, as if in the distance. There may be other tropical noises (crickets, etc) as well. A few minutes before the house lights go down, the loudness slowly increases, and becomes very loud in the moments of blackness before the stage lights go on. The last beat of the rhythm should coincide with the stage lighting up.

Language

The spelling of Tamasa is phonetic, with approximate values for the letters given below. Most words are two syllables in length, with the stress on the first syllable. Some words (most proper names, for example) have the stress on the second syllable. The stresses are shown in the text by underlining>. The overall rhythm is more staccato than English.

Tamasa is an inflected language, and when sequences of inflections occur at the end of a word, they should be said rapidly, without stress. This is something which can distinguish the native speakers of Tamasa from Derek, who at the beginning of the play has not achieved much fluency.

The most prominent element in the sentence is the verb, which is usually at the front (the normal order of elements in Tamasa is Verb-Subject-Object).

The language has 6 vowels and 19 consonants, shown here with approximate equivalents in English.

i	sit	e	get	a	sat	aa	ah	o	got	u	put
p	pin	t	tin	k	kin	b	bin	d	din	g	go
f	fat	s	sat	sh	shoe	z	zoo				
ch	chat	j	joe								
m	me	n	no	ng	sing						
l	lie	r	read	w	will	y	you				

Further notes on the language are available from the author.

1.1

The opening action takes place in DEREK's room. We hear footsteps on the veranda, and someone trying a key. The door does not open. We hear the key again. Then there is a crash as the door is pushed open by the force of DEREK's body, rucksack and bags all entering at once. One of the pieces of luggage is a tape-recorder. A small black bag is left outside the door, though he doesn't notice. There are airline stickers on the luggage. He has obviously had quite a long journey. He is wearing light clothing, a sun hat, and dark glasses.

He disentangles himself from his luggage, puts the equipment on the table, takes off his hat and glasses and puts them on the desk, then looks around. He has seen this kind of room before, and it's no better than he was expecting. He pulls out a handkerchief to get rid of some of the heat from his face. He sees the fan and pulls it on; its wings slowly start to revolve. He picks up one of his bags to take into the bedroom L. As he disappears we hear a muffled curse as he bangs into some object.

DEREK: Bollocks!

He reappears at the door looking for a light switch. It isn't there, but he eventually finds it on the office side of the wall. He switches the bedroom light on, and as he does so the fan stops revolving.

DEREK: Bollocks!

The relationship between the two dawns on him, and he switches off the light; the fan starts up. He plays with this a couple of times, then bangs the wall hard; both fan and light stay on. Satisfaction.

He looks around the room. Picks up the phone for a brief listen: it works, and he's pleasantly surprised. Goes to look at the first poster.

DEREK: Well you're dead. Sorry. *(He pulls it off the wall, and moves to the second.)* And as for you...

He pulls off the second poster, reduces both to paper balls, and looks around for a wastebin. There isn't one, so he pulls open the top drawer of the filing cabinet as a temporary measure. He drops the paper balls into the drawer without looking, and they fall straight out onto the floor. He looks inside the drawer, puts his arm in, and we see it emerging. He looks inside the second and third drawers, and finds they do have bottoms. So he pulls out the top two drawers together, stands at a short distance, basketballs the items into the top drawer, and they stay in. He closes the drawers. Satisfaction.

He goes over to the table, and starts to unpack his rucksack. Various domestic items, paperbacks, notebooks, pens ... He finds a picture his child, puts it on the filing cabinet, and angles it towards the desk. This reminds him. He picks up the phone, dials, and carries on unpacking the rucksack while he waits.

DEREK: Hi, it's me. *(beat)* If you're there, pick up. *(beat)* No? *(Looks at his watch.)* What's your time now? Oh sorry, I've lost track. *(beat)* Well, I only wanted to let you know I was OK, flights were all right, and so on. No problems. *(The fan stops by itself. He stares at it.)* Apart from a paranoid fan. *(beat)* Give Sarah a big hug from me.

There are footsteps outside and a knock on the door, which swings open. MIRANDA peers round the door. DEREK waves her in. She is carrying a carrier bag with some provisions in it - at least tea, coffee, biscuits, and several cans of beer - and a few pieces of mail.

Oh, someone's here. Gotta go. I'll call you again in the morning. Your morning. OK, bye. *(He puts the phone down.)* Sorry about that. Hi. I'm Derek Lloyd.

MIRANDA: Hi. I know. Miranda James, British Council.

They shake hands.

DEREK: Make yourself at home. Oh, hang on a sec. *(He bangs the wall, making MIRANDA jump. The fan starts again.)* Sorry. Just showing the house who's in charge.

MIRANDA: Been here long?

DEREK: About five minutes. Plane got in around three, and I got a taxi straight here. Well, I say straight. The driver got lost a couple of times.

MIRANDA: Typical. Good flight?

DEREK: If you can call fifteen hours good.

MIRANDA: That's better than when I came - nearly twenty. The direct flight's not been on long.

DEREK: When did you come out?

MIRANDA: About nine months ago. I'm here for two years, all being well. Putting together a new English-teaching package.

DEREK: Why here?

MIRANDA: Good as anywhere... *(beat)* I've brought along a few bits of mail that came last week. And I've got you some basic provisions. Coffee, milk, and so on. *(She starts to unpack the carrier bag, and pulls out a few cans of beer.)*

DEREK: I like the 'so on'.

MIRANDA: Is there a fridge?

DEREK: Dunno. Don't even know if there's a kitchen. The only thing I've established scientifically is how the fan works.

MIRANDA walks over to the bedroom door, and peers through. She switches the light on. The fan slows to a jerky rhythm, but doesn't actually stop. DEREK waits for it to stop.

MIRANDA: Do you know this part of the city at all?

DEREK *(still pondering the fan situation)*: Yes. No. Been here just once before. It was OK, but noisy, so I asked them to fix me up with somewhere quiet this time. *(He walks towards the wall, but as he approaches it the fan speeds up again. MIRANDA switches off the light, and the fan stops. DEREK is taken aback.)* I must say I wasn't expecting it to be so far out, though. I'm beginning to wonder if there'll be enough power to run my tape recorder.

He bangs the wall. The fan stays stopped. He bangs a different part of the wall. Still no reaction from the fan. They both try banging the wall in different places. DEREK switches the bedroom light on and off, and they bang again. Nothing. They give up.

MIRANDA: It's a bit iffy where I live, too. There's a power cut most days. You never know whether anything's going to work. Everything's gone downhill since the changeover.

DEREK: I know. The taxi-driver bent my ear on the subject. *(The fan starts again. They look at it, and laugh. DEREK finishes taking out the provisions.)* Thanks for these. How much do I owe you?

MIRANDA: Oh, buy me one back another time. I'll find the fridge.

DEREK: Use the light. I've not opened the shutters yet.

She turns the light on as she leaves. DEREK looks at the fan expectantly, but nothing happens. He shrugs his shoulders and turns to the mail. There are half-a-dozen items, most official looking, and he puts them on one side. One envelope is large and tattered, with his name and 'The British Council' written on it in big untutored letters. He looks at it, puzzled, turning it over, but there's no clue on the outside who it's from. He opens it, and pulls out a small piece of paper, as if torn out of an old exercise book. He reads what it says, and is dismayed by its content. MIRANDA returns, and sees his face.

MIRANDA: It's not very big, but at least it's working - What's the matter?

DEREK: He doesn't want to see me.

MIRANDA: What? Who?

DEREK: 'To Mr Derek. This writing is for thanking you for your letters to me, but I am sorry they must not continue. Thank you also for the books you gave me. I wish you well in your work and much happiness. I am very busy now, so I cannot talk with you again. Shalema Maneshi. *(beat)* Nangjata.'

MIRANDA: What's nangjata?

DEREK *(mechanically)*: It's a word in his language. It means someone who speaks in public for his tribe. He was the nangjata for the Tamasa people.

MIRANDA: Tamasa?

DEREK: They used to live in a single village about a hundred miles north of here.

MIRANDA: Used to?

DEREK *(nods)*: Shalema's the last one.

MIRANDA: The last survivor?

DEREK: Yeah. And for me, that means he's the last speaker of his language. That's why I'm back. It's a language nobody's ever studied before, so it's the last chance we've got to find out about it. Or, at least *(looking at the letter)* I thought that's why I was back. What on earth's going on?

MIRANDA: This is out of the blue?

DEREK: Absolutely. We've been writing to each other, every couple of months. Actually we send each other tapes. I left him a tape recorder and some blank cassettes, and showed him how to use it, and he sends me translations and things when I need them. We use the British Council office as a mailbox. It's not as good as face-to-face, but you can get quite a lot done. *(He looks at the letter again.)* This just doesn't make sense. 'Very busy'. I don't think so.

MIRANDA: How do you know?

During this next speech, the light slowly comes up in SHALEMA's room.

DEREK: Well when I first met him I saw him at his house several times, and he told me a lot about himself. I say 'house'. It's just a room he rents. Hardly ever goes out. No visitors. His room was full of books, old ones he'd picked up. Lots on English.

MIRANDA: English?

DEREK: Yeah. When he was moved to the city, he decided to learn English. Thought it would help him get a job. So he went around the markets and picked himself up all kinds of old dictionaries and grammars, and just - taught himself.

MIRANDA: That's me out of a job, then! (*The joke doesn't work.*) What's it like, his English?

DEREK: Not bad. Bit archaic, stilted. But he's fluent enough. Better than you heard in his letter. Great vocabulary. I think he used to learn words for fun. Probably still does. Did. (*Trails off. Beat.*)

MIRANDA (*gently*): How does he survive?

DEREK: Government pension because of what happened to his tribe. (*beat*) But I dunno if the new lot have kept it on. We pay him a bit for being a consultant, anyway. He just talks, and gets paid for it. Money for nothing, he said. Meant he could buy more books. (*Looks at the letter.*) Perhaps he's not well.

MIRANDA: Maybe someone at the Council might know what's happened. Did he have a contact there?

DEREK: Someone called Jason Shipley.

MIRANDA: Oh, Jason. He drives the Council car - if you can call it driving. He's a classic case of green go, orange go cautiously, red go like hell. (*DEREK laughs, despite himself.*) He does a bit in the office too. You want it? Jason'll fix it. He's sort of made himself indispensable. Knows the city inside out. And I don't think the office would ever get burgled. Any burglars are bound to be his friends. (*Gestures at the mail.*) He might have left you a message, but I doubt it.

DEREK flips through the letters.

DEREK: No, just official do's, stuff like that ... oh, this one looks more interesting (*he opens it*) - nope, happy hour at the university. Huh, that's a contradiction in terms. Cuts, cuts, and more cuts. Do you know, when I left, we'd just had a memo saying we're restricted to using the faculty photocopier just one hour a day?

MIRANDA: You can use ours. There aren't any restrictions on it. - apart from the dicky power.

DEREK: I might take you up on that. I haven't had a chance to copy any of this stuff yet., so all my notes and transcripts of Shalema are like gold dust at the moment. I carry them with me everywhere. (*Nods at his files.*) And the tapes. (*Looks around.*) The tapes. (*Searches.*) Bollocks, the tapes. I must've left them on the plane - no, I had them - shit, the taxi - that bloody taxi-driver -

MIRANDA: Hold on, hold on, what do they look like?

DEREK: Box.

MIRANDA: Black, about this big?

DEREK: Yeah.

MIRANDA: Then: *(She goes to the front door, opens it, and gestures)* Ta-raa. *(The box is where he left it.)*

DEREK: Oh. You're wonderful. I couldn't get the key to work, so I must've put it down. You're a genius. *(He picks them up and gives them a big kiss. Hugs Miranda, and might kiss her too, but she extricates herself.)*

MIRANDA: Why are they so special?

DEREK *(opening the bag)*: They're the whole of last year, that's why. Everything from Shalema since I started.

MIRANDA: It doesn't look much.

DEREK: About 10 hours of recording. That's quite a lot.

MIRANDA: Really?

DEREK: For my purposes, it is. It takes about a month to go through an hour - to get everything down, tones of voice, exact pronunciation, and all that. *(Proudly.)* They're pretty detailed transcripts.

MIRANDA *(fingering the tapes)*: A month for an hour? Hardly seems worth it really, just for an unknown little language. *(DEREK reacts, but says nothing. MIRANDA notices, and tries to recover the situation.)* It's not much for a whole language, though, is it? Less than a day's chat on Radio 2. Imagine if all future society knew about English was a single day from Radio 2.

DEREK *(deciding it's not worth an argument)*: Could be worse. Could be Radio 1. *(She laughs. He checks through the tapes.)* Gosh, that gave me a fright. I never let them out of my sight. Must be jet lag.

MIRANDA: I think you need a drink. That beer should've cooled down a bit.

DEREK: I'll get it. *(He goes out, switching on the light, and the fan stops. MIRANDA looks at it, judges the spot, then walks over and thumps the wall. It works. She walks to the desk, casually looking at the files. DEREK returns. He is carrying a small vase and a jug. He sees the fan is on.)* You're getting the knack.

MIRANDA: Oh I'm a qualified English teacher. I've been trained.

DEREK: Couldn't find any proper glasses. These'll have to do. *(He opens and pours. They have some difficulty finding the best points to drink out of, and eventually decide to drink out of the cans directly. They sit down. DEREK stares at the letter.)* This couldn't have happened at a worse time.

MIRANDA: Why?

DEREK: Cuts. Hanging over me right now. The Endangered Languages Foundation -

MIRANDA: Where you work, right?

DEREK: Sure - the idea is to do something about preserving dying languages –get them recorded before they disappear, maybe even help some of them live on for a bit.

MIRANDA: Like with wildlife?

DEREK: Sort of, yeah. We're only a few years old. Got a grant to get us off the ground, and that's just about coming to an end. We've applied for a renewal, but funds are very tight at the moment, and I promised some quick results. Shalema was crucial.

MIRANDA: Quick results? Sounds a bit optimistic.

DEREK: Well I was. With Shalema I thought my luck was in - him being the last speaker, and all. I knew a full report on his language would make quite an impact on the committee. That's why I'm here now. The final application has got to be in in a month. I need to plug some gaps, get more material, write up my report. Every day counts. (*Looks at letter.*) It's a bloody disaster.

MIRANDA (*thoughtful*): Why not go and see him?

DEREK: Huh?

MIRANDA: Go and see him. See if he'll change his mind.

During this speech, we see SHALEMA enter his room from the door CSR. He is evidently finding it difficult to breathe, and seems to shiver. He pours himself a glass of water from an old plastic bottle, and sits staring at his fire as he drinks it.

DEREK: Nah, it wouldn't do any good. He's never written to me before, and he's the kind of chap who wouldn't easily change his mind once it's made up. (*beat*) You in a hurry?

MIRANDA: No.

DEREK: I could play you a bit from the tapes, and you'll get a sense of what he's like.

MIRANDA: But I won't understand them, will I?

DEREK: Oh you will. They're in English. (*she's confused*) That's how I'm working with him. I ask him to tell me a story or something in Tamasa, then I get him to say it again in English. It's better than doing it sentence by sentence cos it doesn't interrupt the flow.

MIRANDA: But he'd never be able to tell the same story twice over exactly.

DEREK: Sure, but you get a much better sense of the fluency of the language that way. You get the gist down, and then you follow that up by looking at the actual words and grammar. That's what I meant by filling the gaps. And, boy, have I got some gaps to fill. A whole bagful of them. (*As he speaks, he's getting his notes out of his case. Then he starts to prepare his tape recorder.*) Now, the mains. (*He looks up at the fan, which revolves on.*) I'll risk it. (*He finds a socket, which wobbles precariously as he plugs his machine in. He switches on. A red light on the front of the tape recorder comes on. The fan slows, then picks up speed again, then stops.*) Bollocks! (*He unplugs the tape recorder, the light goes off, and the fan continues.*) Looks like we have to listen in the heat. (*He plugs in again, the light comes on, and the fan stops.*) Now ... (*Looks through tapes.*) Might as well take the first one he did for me. I'd asked him to tell me about being a nangjata. This is a good one. He starts off in English, then switches into Tamasa. I've done full transcripts of this one, so I can translate.

DEREK and MIRANDA settle down to listen, DEREK looking at his opening transcript. Every now and then they react to what they hear, but always to their tape recorder.

SHALEMA walks over to the tape recorder on his table. He picks up a tape, ponders, then looks at a set of instructions. All actions are tentative.

SHALEMA: Put tape in machine. Make sure side A is upwards. *(He does so.)* Check recording level knob is turned to 5. *(He does so.)* Press the red record button. *(There is a screech. He looks around for help, but there is none. He reads on.)* If you hear a loud noise, you have pressed the wrong button. Try the other one. *(He does so.)* Talk when you are ready. Relax. There is plenty of time. Imagine you are talking to people who do not know you. *(He stands self-consciously, then sits down. He closes his eyes. Then he decides to stand, and addresses the theatre audience as his imaginary listeners.)* Nangjata. I was nangjata. In my language, it means - the one who can talk well. I could talk well. Not to just anyone, you understand, but when the occasion demanded it. They would call on me. Shalema, they would say, nangjata. My mother is dying. You must speak at her burial. Or, Shalema, nangjata, we are to hunt tomorrow. You must explain our need to the Keepers of the Animals. It is a difficult matter, you see - not that you white people know *(looks at tape recorder)*, for you have not yet learned a sense of - respect. You kill without thinking, without even asking. *(To audience)* But what would you expect from a race that is still a child. The black peoples, the yellow and the red, they have all seen the birth of this child, and have often tried to talk to it, to teach it the ways of the landscape - but it has never listened. *(Pause.)* In my land no-one went out to hunt until they had reached an agreement. When they had chosen the animal, they had to ask its Keeper to beg the animal to sacrifice itself, so that the people might eat. And the Keeper would ask certain things of them in return. There would be obligations, do you see. An offering to be made, perhaps. Or a gathering of the people to heal wounds. And I would be called. And I would talk for them to the Keeper of the Animals. And I would use the old words. *(Longer pause, as he remembers. Then he chuckles.)* And at other times they would come to me and say Shalema, nangjata, I am to be married. You must speak for me. And I would say, no, it is impossible - for no-one could say in words how beautiful your wife is and how fortunate she is to have such a fine husband. *(Chuckles again, and half-turns away.)* It was the expected thing, you understand, even if the woman had a face like a turkey and the man had the skin of an old tomato. And they would ask a second time.

RATU'S VOICE *(off)*: Shalema, nangjata, nanetade ota kaasha pebiwe.

SHALEMA: There, you see? Shalema, great talker, you must speak for me. And I would say again: *(Speaks to RATU, who appears FR. SHALEMA is not breathless when he is talking to RATU.)* Mazaala nida. *(To audience.)* It is impossible. *(To RATU, making shapely hand gestures over his body.)* Shudanade niferodewe jaala. A fine husband. *(RATU pleased.)* He likes it, you see? They all liked it. And then they would say a third time.

RATU: Shalema, naa-nangjata, nanetade ota kaasha pebiwe.

SHALEMA: There, you hear that? Naa-nangjata. The greatest of talkers. The greatest of talkers. And that would always persuade me. I will do it, I would say. I will speak for you to your new wife's kinsmen. *(To RATU.)* Wanipide opi. Nanepide pedanewe, limikatelo noshantadane leshti. *(He walks to the front of his room, and meets RATU.)*

RATU *(bows, hands SHALEMA a gift of a carving, and leaves R)*: Chekena jatudanelo bamaana, naa-nangjata.

SHALEMA *(to himself)*: Yes, may your words be strong, naa-nangjata.

He takes the gift, and puts it on his sideboard, next to another, identical item. He moves the two so that they look nice together.

SHALEMA: We would call this a jatuta - a speech offering. It was usually something quite valuable, you understand. We have a saying: manuta penaaifuwe, jatuta pesaafuwe. It is difficult to translate. Naafu is our word for dog. Saafu means little. And jatuta you know. So: short words keep for the dog. I suppose in English you would say, you gets what you pays for? (*He is about to go back to the tape recorder when he hears noises off. He looks pleased, anticipating.*) Make no mistake. When the man's family meets the woman's at the ceremony of promises, this is a very important occasion. If the nangjata does not perform well, it is a very bad omen.

Sudden noisy entrance from both sides at front of stage: from R, RATU and his FATHER (the Tipaala family), followed by an ELDER and another VILLAGER, holding a spade; from L, AMAANA and her GRANDMOTHER (the Narayan family), followed by a clown-like figure, the CONTRARY. Everyone is in best clothes, but the CONTRARY is in highly coloured rags.

The families stay at opposite sides, eyeing their opposite numbers up and down, with the ELDER and VILLAGER standing between them. The CONTRARY bounces about. It is all in excellent humour, with mock seriousness. RATU knocks loudly on SHALEMA's wall.

RATU: He, Shalema, nangjata, ota zaa, ota zaa.

SHALEMA: I'm coming, I'm coming. (*Calls to them.*) Bata-pi.

SHALEMA goes to his cupboard and takes out his oratory hat and cloak. It is very worn. He puts it on, looks at himself in a mirror, tries to make the hat work, shrugs sadly, then slowly moves DR to meet the family. Half-way there he remembers he has forgotten a bag, which he finds after rummaging in the wardrobe, and secretes under his gown.

As he approaches the family, he holds his head high, his step lightens, he seems younger. He is no longer ill. He greets RATU and his FATHER effusively. They are delighted to see him. AMAANA and her GRANDMOTHER deliberately pay him no attention. Then the CONTRARY comes forward, clowning around, and talks to RATU.

CONTRARY: Tipaala rengshaalo! Ga taniti mashonawe nanede petidewe? Ga che nangjata?

SHALEMA (*turns towards audience*): The Nalaya family are paying that cockatoo to act for them. He is asking the Tipaala family if they have anyone to speak for them. Anyone to speak for them!

RATU sees that SHALEMA is not paying attention, and turns him to face the Nalayans.

SHALEMA (*looks back at audience*): He is no nangjata. Watch him closely. He is a tameshana - what you would call an opposite, a contrary. You will see why. His job is to make a fool of me. But he will not. (*He presents himself imperiously to the GRANDMOTHER.*) Nalaya rengshaalo! Wara naa-nangjata! (*RATU and his FATHER applaud, supported by VILLAGER and ELDER.*)

Shalema raises his hand, and everyone falls silent. He presents RATU, pointing out his features expansively. After each feature, and following the translation, the CONTRARY acts out its opposite.

SHALEMA (*makes smooth, flowing gestures over RATU's body*): Tanisha katebishi, chaalawe jaalawe.

DEREK (*to MIRANDA*): My man has a fine form. (*He then explains what is going on to MIRANDA, though we do not hear what he is saying.*)

The CONTRARY looks appalled. He twirls RATU around, makes a mock examination of all his parts, finding pimples, boils, and suchlike all over him. He tries to clean him up, taking off the

blemishes and offering them to the Nalayans and the VILLAGER (but not to the ELDER), who react in mock-disgust. RATU and FATHER jeer at the CONTRARY. AMAANA giggles. SHALEMA remains aloof, then holds up his hand to speak.

SHALEMA: Tanisha katebishi bamaawe, nonaraatilo manaatilo.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): My man has the strength of the tall trees.

The CONTRARY picks up a pebble from the ground, puts it in RATU's hand, and makes him drop it. He picks it up for him again, making it appear RATU has no strength in his arm, so that he drops it again. He makes RATU's arms wobble, then chops RATU behind the knees so that he falls down. All reactions as before. Quiet as SHALEMA raises his hand.

SHALEMA: Tanisha katebishi netemuwe, nodilaanara nomaanara.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): My man has the caring - (*changes his transcript*) no, the kindness of the mother earth.

The CONTRARY goes behind RATU and walks him round the stage, making his hands and legs hit out awkwardly at anyone in his way. A lot of movement, as people try to avoid him. Reactions as before. SHALEMA raises his hand.

SHALEMA: Tani-sha kate-bi-shi, warangawe no-Jarangawe.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): My man has the wisdom of Jaranga. I don't know what Jaranga means. Some kind of god, it must be.

The CONTRARY puts AMAANA and her GRANDMOTHER side by side. He grabs RATU and makes him stand in front of them, as if trying to decide. Then he makes RATU shake his head at AMAANA, nod at GRANDMOTHER, and give her a big cuddle. She is delighted. Reactions as before. SHALEMA raises his hand.

SHALEMA: Aterashade katebide, fo bunduwe nomundu.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): My man - I've no idea what he's saying there. Atera means 'work'. It must be some sort of promise to work well. That's one of my gaps.

The CONTRARY grabs a spade from a villager and makes exaggerated digging actions, showing a huge mound being dug. Then he pulls out from his tunic a tiny trowel, mock-presents it to RATU, hops about trying to dig the ground and gets nowhere. Reactions as before. SHALEMA raises his hand.

SHALEMA: Tanisha katebishi, mosuwelo kataabi petiwe rikaabi.

DEREK (to MIRANDA, *laughing*): My man has a thousand children waiting for you.

The CONTRARY can't believe his ears. He looks down RATU's trousers, and gestures dismissively. Then he mimes RATU approaching AMAANA, his arm erect then collapsing as he nears her. He moves away and it grows erect again; returns and it collapses. Plays with this idea. Great laughter all around. SHALEMA raises his hand and steps forward.

SHALEMA: Kore naa-zuti-naa.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): But most of all

SHALEMA: Tanisha katebishi, talemiwe palemi.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): My man has a great secret.

The CONTRARY looks puzzled. He hasn't heard this one before. Great anticipation all round.

SHALEMA: Ralushakatu talemika lijukawe, nu-maanara no-maanara no-maanara-kawe.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): It is a secret given only to him by his mother's mother's mother.

SHALEMA moves closer to the CONTRARY, and takes out the bag from under his gown.

SHALEMA: Na dozeshade noshu jukawe, li-tamashana-shiwe wara.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): And he will now reveal it to this contrary here.

SHALEMA opens the bag and shows the contents to the CONTRARY. The CONTRARY peers inside, and as he does so SHALEMA puts it quickly over his head, and ties it at the back so that the CONTRARY can't reach the knot. The CONTRARY dances around trying to get it off. Everyone is laughing, on both sides. The CONTRARY trips and falls over, ending up where RATU is. RATU triumphantly puts his foot on the CONTRARY's neck. Cheers all round.

SHALEMA (to audience): Timanusha ratamashi da, mundukalolo ratamaka. I think you would say, the old tricks are the best.

DEREK has no idea what is going on there.

RATU allows the CONTRARY up, and the FATHER helps him off with the bag. The CONTRARY joins in the laughter. SHALEMA and the CONTRARY bow to each other, a drum beats, and both sides join together in a short chant. The CONTRARY bows to the family and leaves, receiving some payment from the GRANDMOTHER on the way.

The people begin to regroup. The ELDER comes forward, with RATU and AMAANA at each side, the others behind. As SHALEMA says his next words, RATU and AMAANA slowly approach each other, each with an arm outstretched towards the other. Their aim is to join hands in front of the ELDER (but they will not succeed).

SHALEMA moves C and faces the audience, but he does not see them and is not talking to them. This is a ritual he has performed hundreds of times.

SHALEMA: Opi naa-nangjata.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): I am the great speaker.

SHALEMA: Femipika rulaajeshiwe no-Ratuwe lidiwe nafaa.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): I have told you all of Ratu's worth.

SHALEMA: Femipika gunotukawelo lidiwe nada.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): I have told you no lies.

SHALEMA: Ludasisha mifu tameshanada juwe.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): No contrary can defeat him.

Over the next speeches, SHALEMA's voice begins to falter. He becomes increasingly breathless, and loses the rhythm of the speech.

SHALEMA: Na bateresha noshu, jeme lin-Amaanawe.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): And now he approaches Amaana.

SHALEMA: Che laafushi no-Ratashawe.

DEREK (to MIRANDA): It is the wish of Ratasha.

SHALEMA: Semere-ta-tu da-we ... semere ... seme-e-e ...

SHALEMA repeats the phrase, trying to remember what comes next. He looks at the people around him, but they can be no help. As this happens, the various members of the engagement ceremony slowly leave - the VILLAGER and ELDER first, then the FATHER and GRANDMOTHER, with RATU and AMAANA last. Their hands have almost touched, but not quite. They look disbelievably at SHALEMA, then at each other, turn, and rush out, plainly upset.

SHALEMA stares at the empty stage, and we see him age, as he speaks. He walks slowly back to his room. He is tired and looks ill.

SHALEMA: It is no good. (*He takes off his cloak and hat, and throws it into a corner.*) It will not come. (*Sits.*) I cannot remember. (*To audience.*) I can tell you in English. That is the funny thing. I had to say next: May you be blest with the well-being of Satu. But I cannot remember how to say it. It is so long ago. Yet (*rubbing his head*) it must be in here, somewhere? I can feel it waiting, at the edge of my mind. Why will it not come? The wish of Ratasha. Laafushi no-Ratashawe. And the well-being of Satu. Well-being. It is such a simple word. I must have said it a thousand times. (*Goes to his bookshelf and pulls down an A-Z thesaurus.*) There. Well-being. Comfort, happiness, welfare, contentment. (*Shuts book crossly.*) I can say it in four fine ways in English. Why not just one way in my own language? (*Puts book back on shelf. Pause. Then to one part of the audience.*) I know what you're thinking. You think, fool Shalema, what sort of a nangjata are you? Look it up! Find the word-book of your own language on your shelf, and make new the words in your mind. (*To another part of the audience.*) Or else do not be proud. If you cannot remember a word, ask someone else. Visit your friends. Ask them. One of them will tell you. (*Pause.*) If only it was so easy. And you have it easy, you who speak English. You have a hundred word-books to choose from. Look. (*Finds them in various places.*) Dictionary of the English Language. Another one. Another one. I have them. I bought such books when I learned your language. And I have learned it well. You have heard me speak. I know many English words now. And they are beginning to squeeze out my own, turning them into - nothing. (*Sits.*) But my language, it has no dictionary. No-one has ever collected its words into a fine book. There is nowhere I can go to 'look it up'. (*To the recorder.*) You cannot help me remember. And there is so much to remember. And I have no friends to ask, you see. There is no-one left who speaks my language. They are all gone. (*Goes to lie down on the bed. He talks to the room.*) For you do not help me. Why will you not help me? Sanshaa? Ratu? Why do you leave it all to me? (*His side of the stage darkens.*)

MIRANDA: Wow. (*beat*) What's Sanshaa and Ratu?

DEREK: They're people. Ratu was the bridegroom in the story. Sanshaa is his name for the elder. It took me months and two tape-exchanges to work it all out. Even now there are lots of bits I'm guessing at. What that contrary's getting up to, for instance. I'm still not clear what went on in the 'thousand children' episode. I've asked him twice, and he just won't say.

MIRANDA: So why is he calling to them?

DEREK: My guess is that he believes they're still with him, in some way.

MIRANDA: And what was his problem in the middle? Why couldn't he remember the word? The whole thing seemed to just - stop.

DEREK: I've no idea. He's not well. He hasn't been, ever since I met him. I think he was just starting to forget things. I'm not surprised, really. He's got nobody to talk to. He hasn't been able to speak in his own language to anyone for years. (*He takes the tape out, and puts it with the others, on his desk.*) And there are lots like him about.

MIRANDA: Last speakers?

DEREK: Yeah. According to our records, there are at least 50 languages with just one speaker left. And a whole pile more with only a few.

MIRANDA: And you're trying to save them? Sounds like an impossible task to me.

DEREK: Well, no it's not just a matter of saving – (*Decides this isn't the time to argue.*) I'll have to go and see him. I can't just leave it.

MIRANDA: What, now?

DEREK: No. Tomorrow sometime.

MIRANDA: Well let me know when. You can use the office car. I'll send Jason over. (*She moves towards the door.*)

DEREK: Fantastic. About, I dunno, 10 would be great. (*beat*) Wanna come with me?

MIRANDA: Me? I'm not sure I've got rather a lot on.

DEREK: Well, I'd appreciate the moral support – but if you're busy ...

MIRANDA (*thinks, relents*): Ah - I'd love to. All those people wanting to learn English will just have to wait. (*Goes out.*) Hope you get some rest. Good-night.

DEREK: Good-night.

He closes the door, and slowly rests his forehead against it, depressed. The anthem begins and grows in volume while the stage darkens.

1.2

DEREK's house, the next morning. The luggage is not in sight. The fan is off. The desk still has everything on it. Sound of crickets outside.

A car stops outside, a door slams, and there is a knock on the door. Another knock. The door opens, and JASON peers round.

JASON: Shop? (*beat*) Anyone home? (*beat*) Mr Lloyd? (*beat*) Derek? (*beat*) Del boy?

DEREK emerges sleepily from the bedroom, wearing only shorts.

DEREK: Huh?

JASON: Jason Shipley.

DEREK: Huh?

JASON: Jason. From the Council. (*DEREK still doesn't follow.*) Driver? You wanna get over to Cajetana this morning?

DEREK: Oh yeah. Sorry. What time is it?

JASON: Just after ten.

DEREK: Bollocks, is it? Sorry. Jet lag. Didn't get to sleep till six.

JASON: No problem. You get yourself ready and I'll just potter about.

DEREK: Won't be a minute. (*He goes out, switching the light on, and shouts back.*) Is Miranda here?

JASON: In the car.

He wanders around the room, looks at DEREK's picture, makes an approving noise. He feels hot, so pulls the fan lead.

DEREK (*off*): Don't do that.

JASON (*startled*): Eh?

DEREK (*off*): There's something wrong with the electrics. If you turn the fan on, the light goes out in the bathroom. Or the bedroom. Or both. Sometimes.

JASON: I'll get someone up, if you like. (*He switches the fan off.*)

DEREK (*off*): Thanks, that'd be great.

JASON goes over to DEREK's desk and casually flips through his papers. He sees something odd and looks more closely. As he does so, DEREK appears at the door, pulling on his clothes and balancing a vase of juice while he does so.

DEREK: And when the fan's not working, nothing else in the room seems to work either. I'll need at least one reliable socket if I'm going to use my tape recorder, and that one's definitely dicky.

JASON is only half listening, as he's still trying to make out what he's reading.

JASON: This shorthand, then?

DEREK: What is?

JASON: This.

DEREK: Phonetic transcripts.

JASON (*knowingly*): Ah.

DEREK sits down, pulling on his shoes.

JASON (*beat*): How do they work?

DEREK: It's just a way of writing down the sounds of a language.

JASON (*beat*): Ah. (*DEREK looks for his comb.*)

DEREK: Comb, comb, comb. (*He remembers where it is in the other room.*)

JASON: What you want to do that for?

DEREK: What?

JASON: What you want to write the sounds down for? Why don't you just look 'em up in a book?

DEREK (*emerges, combing*): Because there are no books about this language. Nobody has ever written this language down.

JASON: Ah. (*Pauses, while he thinks. DEREK sees he's not got the point.*)

DEREK: Nobody knew it was there until a few years ago. The people who spoke it hadn't been discovered, and they hadn't learned how to write.

JASON: So how were they discovered, then?

DEREK: Well that's a tragic story.

MIRANDA enters, hearing this last sentence. Her banter with JASON is friendly enough, but lacks warmth. DEREK carries on getting ready.

MIRANDA: What is? You shouldn't be using big words like 'tragic' to Jason. You might blow his mind. Tragedy for Jason is when Madame Koto's runs out of whiskey, isn't that so, Jason?

JASON: Ha, ha.

DEREK: Hi there.

MIRANDA: Hot in the car. Came to see what's keeping you?

DEREK: Sorry. Overslept.

MIRANDA: Not surprised. I was out of sync for a week.

DEREK: Almost ready.

DEREK picks up his tapes, and looks for somewhere to hide them. He decides on the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet. Then he starts sorting out his notes on the desk.

DEREK: Just need a quick coffee.

JASON: I'll get it, Del. You crack on. Through here? (*JASON goes out.*)

DEREK (*shouts after him*): Matches on the table. (*To himself.*) God, it's hot. (*He pulls the fan cord. The fan starts, and there is a howl from JASON.*) Sorry! (*He turns it off.*) Jason says he'll get someone to fix it. Useful chap, like you said. (*They sit down.*)

MIRANDA: Don't bank on it. Anyway, what's tragic?

DEREK: What happened to Shalema's tribe - their language.

MIRANDA: I'm surprised he's interested. He usually lumps the local languages together as 'chicken talk'.

DEREK: Why?

MIRANDA: I think he heard us talking about pidgin languages one day, thought we meant pigeons, the birds, and stored this away in his head as chickens.

DEREK: Well I don't think he's that interested really. It's just that he saw some of my transcripts, and couldn't work out what it was.

MIRANDA: May I? (*She picks up some pages.*) My level's pretty basic, I'm afraid. (*She puts it down, then spots something else.*) What's all this?

DEREK: What?

MIRANDA: This 'read all about it' headline. DID YOU KNOW A LANGUAGE DIES EVERY TWO WEEKS?

DEREK: It's the latest newsletter work sends out. I found it in my mail last night.

MIRANDA: One every two weeks? That's a joke, right?

DEREK: Not at all. We don't pull our punches. Got to get the message across. (*beat*) Good, eh? And check the byline.

MIRANDA (*reading*): 'ELF Field linguist Derek Lloyd.' (*impressed*)

DEREK: Yep. Name getting out there. It's a start.

MIRANDA (*still reading*): 'One language is dying in the world, on average, every fortnight ... the dreadful finality of language death ...' I don't like the style much. Bit over-emotional.

DEREK: Well it is an emotional issue. After all -

He is interrupted by JASON, carrying a glass, a vase, and a jam jar, each full of coffee, and a box of matches.

JASON: 'Snot very hot. Gas doesn't seem to be coming through properly. And you need some more matches: there's only a few left in here. (*He puts the box on the filing cabinet.*) I found these in the cupboard. They looked clean enough. (*He gives the glass and vase to the others.*) There was a very nice postcard from Amsterdam on top of this one.

MIRANDA: Oh, I know what that was for.

JASON: So do I. Gorgeous looker in a shop window, and a big message in red: TWO LIPS FROM AMSTERDAM.

MIRANDA: I don't think what's on the postcard is the point. *(To DEREK.)* Jar-and-postcard combinations are quite common out here. People with an environmental conscience use them for getting things with lots of legs out of the house. *(JASON is starting to drink.)* I think your coffee should have a distinctive flavour of centipede, Jason. *(He splutters, and decides to leave it alone. So does DEREK. MIRANDA keeps hers. She carries on reading.)* 'Within your children's lifetime, up to half of the known languages of the world will be dead.'

JASON *(trying to be funny)*: I ain't got any children. *(He waits for a reaction, doesn't get one, but he's used to that.)* Ready to go? *(They pay no attention. He's used to that too.)* I'll wait in the car. *(He goes out.)*

MIRANDA: So how many languages are there anyway?

DEREK: 6,000, more or less. *(He picks up the page that MIRANDA was reading.)* Just a plain full-stop. You'd think they'd have given it an exclamation mark or two. *(beat)* It's difficult to take in, isn't it. *(Puts the papers down.)* Language death. A real language death. *(Pause.)*

MIRANDA: I've never thought about it.

DEREK: Yes, but imagine being there when it happened. To know that the person you've just been talking to was the last surviving speaker - the only one who had an instinctive knowledge of all its sounds and rhythms, its poetry and folktales ... And all the knowledge which that language represented. A unique way of looking at the world, of talking about the world. *(Pause.)* And when it's gone, it's gone. Unless we record it.

MIRANDA *(finishes off her coffee and turns towards the door)*: Plenty of jobs for linguists, then.

DEREK *(taken aback)*: Oh sure, if they can persuade the powers that be not to cut their grants.

MIRANDA: Isn't that why people become linguists, though? To make sure there *is* something left?

DEREK: Well, not me, actually. When I started I thought I'd be working on living, healthy languages - or maybe really dead ones, like Latin. But I'd no idea that so many were on the point of dying now. And it certainly didn't dawn on me that we ought to be doing something about it - or even that there was anything we *could* be doing about it.

MIRANDA: I suppose most of us are in the same boat. When I trained, the only endangered languages I'd ever heard of were Gaelic, of course, and Welsh. You sound a bit Welsh. Are you?

DEREK: Half. My mother was Irish, but I was brought up in Wales.

MIRANDA: Which part of Ireland?

DEREK: Wexford.

MIRANDA: We're probably related, then. My parents live in County Wexford ...

DEREK picks up a book he's bought for SHALEMA, and they go out, still talking. He remembers his notes, and turns back to put them in the bottom drawer of the cabinet, along with the tapes. He pulls the door to behind him, but it doesn't stay shut, so he slams it, and the fan starts turning. The anthem is heard in the distance as his room darkens. It grows in volume as SHALEMA's room lights up. SHALEMA is lying on his bed, dozing.

DEREK, MIRANDA and JASON enter DSL. JASON points towards SHALEMA's room.

JASON: It's that one up there, I think.

MIRANDA: Thanks. Shall we meet you here?

JASON: Yeah. I'll be in that cafe on the corner. I don't want to get snarled up in that traffic again. I'll wait. How long you going to be?

DEREK: We might be straight back. There's no guarantee he'll even let us in. If he does, I doubt it'll be more than half-an-hour. He got tired very quickly when I saw him a year ago.

JASON: What's wrong with him, anyway?

DEREK: I'm not sure. I imagine it's some sort of carry-over from what happened in his village. Plus his age - whatever that is. He complains of the cold, even in this heat. He makes a fire every day. Reminds him of his village, he said.

MIRANDA: What did happen?

DEREK: Not quite sure. The Tamasa lived in a very small community -

JASON (*interrupting*): Who?

DEREK: The Tamasa.

JASON: What's that mean, then?

MIRANDA: It doesn't mean anything, Jason. It's just their name.

DEREK: Actually, it's their word for 'people'. It's quite common, with language names. They see themselves as the special ones, you see - the guardians of their territory, if you like. Shalema's language they called Tamasa-nangja. 'Tamasa-speech'.

JASON: Hold on. You mean that if you went up to one of these - these Tamasas, and you asked them what the name of their language was, they'd just say 'Tamasa speech'?

DEREK: Yeah.

JASON: Well that's like going up to somebody called Smith and asking him what language he speaks and he says 'Smith-speak'.

DEREK (*resigned*): Yeah.

JASON: Weird.

DEREK: Not really. We call our language English, and that just means 'Angles-speak' - the way the Angles talked.

MIRANDA: You remember them, Jason? Angles and Saxons?

JASON: I did go to school, you know.

MIRANDA: Really?

JASON (*beat*): I'll wait in the car. (*He goes out L.*)

MIRANDA: A little Jason-baiting always brighten up the day. Sorry - go on.

DEREK: Well, the Tamasa lived up-river, in a valley well off the beaten track. They probably had a bit of contact with other groups in the area - in fact they must have had, because that's how they were found.

MIRANDA (*routinely, as she looks around*): Who found them?

DEREK: A group of prospectors.

MIRANDA: Where's the entrance?

DEREK: Round the back. (*She moves as if to go off R, but stops when she realizes that DEREK has more to say.*) Well it seems that somebody had told these prospectors that there was silver there and they were up like a shot, and they found the village. The Tamasa made them very welcome, by all accounts. It was all very friendly. Not like some places, where Westerners arrive to take the minerals or the timber, and the first sound the local people hear is the roar of a bulldozer or guns going off.

MIRANDA: So what was the problem?

DEREK: Very simple. One of the prospectors had flu.

MIRANDA (*finally attentive*): You're kidding!

DEREK doesn't really hear her. He is remembering the story vividly. He turns away and faces the audience.

DEREK: They'd brought all their Western bugs with them. One of 'em started to feel unwell a couple of days into the expedition, but he thought it would pass off. And so it did, eventually, for him. But when they arrived at the Tamasa village, he must have still been infectious. Then the Tamasa started to fall ill. They'd no resistance to it, you see. (*beat*) The first death was a week later. Within a month, half the people were dead. One of the prospectors went to get help, but by the time the doctors got to the village, there were only a handful left alive. (*He turns to MIRANDA.*) We have his story. It's in the file.

MIRANDA: It's surprising that Shalema is still around, then.

DEREK: Well, he did go down with the bug, but he seemed to get over it - there were a couple of others like him. The doctors took him to hospital, and eventually let him go. But he had nowhere to go. He wouldn't go back to the village. It was a place where evil had come, he said, it gave him nightmares. Even now, what, 30 years on, he still has them.

MIRANDA: How do you know?

DEREK: He told me. In my first session. He said he'd not been well, so I asked him how he'd been sleeping, and he just mentioned it in passing. It's on one of my tapes. As far as I can tell, he's never been really well since it happened. His breathing's awful at times.

MIRANDA: I can't imagine how you find someone like him. I mean, he's just one out of millions in this place.

DEREK: I know, it was a real fluke. On my first visit out here, someone from a missionary group told me about a chap who lived by himself and who nobody knew very much about. Well you get a bit of a nose for these things, and I thought I'd just visit him on spec and find out what he spoke.

MIRANDA: You just called in, on the off chance?

DEREK: Yes. I came to see him one day, and we got on famously. I brought him some books, helped him with his English, and he just opened up. Then when I realized what I'd got, I couldn't believe it.

MIRANDA: He was already the last speaker?

DEREK: Yes. The two others had died. *(Pause.)* They used to keep in touch. *(They start to move towards the house.)* The last remnants of their people. They would meet at each other's houses. It must have been awful, remembering all that death. No wonder he has nightmares.

SHALEMA shouts out in his doze, but MIRANDA and DEREK do not hear it. As they go off, DEREK passes MIRANDA the book he is carrying.

DEREK: Why don't you give him this. With the Tamasa it's usual to bring a gift when you visit a house for the first time.

SHALEMA sits on the side of the bed, wipes his face with a towel, and finds himself a drink of water. He gets up and goes to his shelf where the carvings are, and looks at them, half-stroking one. He is in a reverie, and is startled when he hears DEREK's knock on the door. He doesn't answer. There is another knock.

DEREK *(off)*: Mr Maneshi? *(No reply.)* Mr Maneshi, are you there? This is Derek Lloyd. I'd very much like to talk to you.

SHALEMA moves towards the door, but does not open it. He looks back at the carvings, as if for help, then at the door. There is another knock.

DEREK: Mr Maneshi?

SHALEMA: Why are you here?

DEREK: I've come to see how you are. *(beat.)* Can I come in?

SHALEMA: Did you not receive my letter?

DEREK: I did, but I wanted -

SHALEMA: It is not right for you to be here.

DEREK: I haven't come to do any recording. *(beat.)* I've brought you a new book.

SHALEMA pauses, then opens the door. DEREK comes in, followed by MIRANDA, who stays by the door. SHALEMA instinctively reverts to his traditional greeting: he bows, touches his forehead with both hands then presents his palms outstretched towards DEREK. DEREK does the same.

DEREK: Chekena jatudanelo bamaanadelo. May your words be strong.

SHALEMA: Fenaside kena dilamudaka, nala Derek.

They shake hands. DEREK brings MIRANDA forward.

DEREK: Nangjata, may I introduce Miranda James.

SHALEMA repeats his greeting, and MIRANDA copies the gestures, somewhat uncertainly.

SHALEMA: Cheta ranifu, nasu Miranda. You are welcome.

MIRANDA gives him the book.

MIRANDA: We've brought you a small present, for your collection.

DEREK: It's the latest English dictionary I could find. It has many new words in it.

SHALEMA (*strokes the book*): Your language grows like a healthy child. (*To DEREK.*) This is your wife?

DEREK (*embarrassed*): No, no.

MIRANDA: I work at the British Council office.

DEREK: My wife is at home in England - and my new baby.

SHALEMA: You have a child now.

DEREK: Just three months. A little girl. Sarah.

SHALEMA: Fenushakasu bamaana na lulaama. (*Bows to him.*) May she grow strong and beautiful. (*DEREK bows in return*) Sa - rah. It sounds well. What does this name mean?

DEREK (*caught off balance*): Er, well - it doesn't really have a meaning.

SHALEMA: All names must have meaning. How else would you choose?

DEREK (*waffling*): Well yes of course it does have one, an original meaning, as it were, but it's not - it's not -

MIRANDA (*cutting him off*): It means 'princess' - in Hebrew. It is a very old name.

DEREK looks gratefully at her, but she doesn't notice, because her attention is on SHALEMA. As the scene progresses, she finds herself increasingly drawn to him, and he to her.

SHALEMA: Princess. A fine name for a girl child. Princess. We too had such a name. Lesheme.

MIRANDA: That's a beautiful name too.

SHALEMA (*warming to her*): It was a very special name. Many would choose it as their sumaati.

MIRANDA: Their - ?

SHALEMA: Their sumaati. Their - I do not know what is best to say in English - their quiet name. The name only they know, their parents do not, nor anyone else.

DEREK: Their secret name?

SHALEMA: Their secret name. Only they know it, and the nangjata who blesses them with it when they reach the age, and also the landscape, which shares the secret with them. For all names must be told to the land, so that the land knows them when they pass by, or ask for its help. (*He suddenly stops, as if realizing what he is doing.*) But this is not good. I have told you, I must not speak with you again. (*He turns away and looks at the things on his shelf. DEREK and MIRANDA exchange glances.*)

DEREK: But nangjata, I have come a long way. And we've talked about many things during this past year. Why do you want to stop now? (*No reply.*) Have I upset you?

SHALEMA (*turns to him*): You have not upset me. You have always been most courteous.

DEREK: Than why? Why stop now, when we were doing so well?

SHALEMA sighs, then sits on his bed.

SHALEMA: It was - the right time to stop.

DEREK: But Mr Maneshi, that's not a reason.

SHALEMA: It is the best of reasons.

DEREK (*quietly*): Nangjata - why is it the right time?

SHALEMA: Because I have nothing more I can tell you.

DEREK: But there's lots more. There has to be. You must have dozens of stories and legends we don't know about. You haven't told me any of that yet.

SHALEMA: It is not yours to know.

DEREK: I don't understand.

SHALEMA (*thinks for a moment*): When I was a child, my father taught me the words of my ancestors, words which came from the land. And when I was made nangjata, the elders taught me how to listen to the special meanings of those words. Then I learned that these words are for the ears and hearts of the Tamasa alone. Those who are from outside have no right to them. You are from outside. I cannot tell you what you have no right to know.

DEREK: But you've already begun to tell me. You've told me about the way your people hunted, about the Keeper of the Animals -

SHALEMA: I should not have told you. It sits badly with me that I told you.

DEREK: But Mr Maneshi, I will do no harm to your stories. I respect them, you know that. (*Gestures to the tape recorder.*) Everything you told me is recorded exactly as you said it. I've changed nothing.

SHALEMA: Others will one day hear the stories of my people, and they will use them badly, for they will not know how to listen to them.

DEREK: But we can tell them how.

SHALEMA: They will not listen - any more than they did when they first came to our country, and took land away from those who lived there. What makes you think they will look after our stories

more kindly? They have already taken our land, but they shall not take our language too. I am ashamed that I have given you my voice in this way. My people feel this shame, and they have told me so.

SHALEMA is beginning to breathe heavily. MIRANDA goes to sit next to him, and gently puts her palm against his arm.

MIRANDA: But I thought all your people had died, nangjata.

SHALEMA: They speak to me still - when I remember to listen. *(To DEREK.)* And when you came to see me, I did not listen to them. Instead I gave you my language, and you gave me - *(dismissively)* your books.

DEREK *(not comprehending)*: I thought you loved books. *(Gestures around the shelves.)* And they're not empty - they're full of language.

SHALEMA: These? What are these? It is true, they are not empty. They are full of words, but they are dead words. They have no life-blood. No being. They are like corpses, waiting for burial. *(He picks up a large book, weighs it in his hand, then lets it drop on the floor with a thump.)* And you do bury them, deep within your libraries. You build storehouses of fossil language. And you look for your knowledge there, among the dead.

DEREK: But books keep knowledge alive.

SHALEMA *(sadly)*: You think, when you have written something down, you have saved it. But when you write down what someone has said, you kill it. Left behind is everything that made it live. You have lost the beating of the sound in the air. The melody which tells the world what you feel inside. The shaping of your thoughts while you speak and listen. All that is gone. On your paper there is only a pale image of what went before. It is no more than a skeleton.

MIRANDA *(gently)*: So where is the knowledge of your people, nangjata. Where does it live?

SHALEMA gets up and takes her over to the door. He opens it, and gestures. There is the distant sound of traffic, car horns, cricket noises, etc.

SHALEMA: Listen. *(Pause.)* What do you hear?

MIRANDA *(listening)*: Cars, lorries ... impatient people ... crickets ... *(She looks at him.)* What do you hear?

SHALEMA: The stories and songs of my people - but I do not hear them well in this place. *(He closes the door, and they sit down again.)* If I were in the hill country, I would hear them well. They are part of the land now. They are in the arms of the Keeper of the Landscape. They live on in his care. And they must stay there, where they belong, in the place where they were created. The stories do not belong to my people, they belong to the land. Just as my people belong to the land. And as I belong to the land.

DEREK: But is it right that your stories should die with your people? Isn't it better that they should be remembered?

SHALEMA: Even if it were so, I could not help you. The stories are already dead.

DEREK: But you remember them. You are their nangjata.

SHALEMA: Not any more. When I wake up in the morning, my head is no longer full of the sound of the rhythms of my language, as once it was. Your language is there now, making me think in strange ways, forcing my thoughts into strange rhythms. I have begun to forget how it was. Every day, I feel my language slipping away. The words which were my life are slowly leaving me. They are returning to their home, where they were born. I could no longer tell our stories well.

DEREK: But any version would do. At least we would get the gist.

SHALEMA: What is 'gist'?

MIRANDA: The essential bits. The outline of it.

SHALEMA: Ah, again the skeleton. (*Pause.*) You would turn our stories into a book. You would write them down. You would kill them. (*He turns to DEREK.*) You are always writing down. I have seen you. You are so busy writing down, you do not have time to listen. But our stories are not for writing down. They live only in the telling. They must be – (*he says the word with enjoyment*) enacted. Each time they are told they are enriched by those who do the telling. Each person gives something of himself to the story. The stories gain new life from them. They are never the same.

DEREK: If you told them once more, nangjata, they would gain from your telling.

SHALEMA (*loudly*): But who will tell them again to me? (*Pause.*) I need to hear them told again, do you not see? I need to hear them come alive in the mouths of others. And that cannot be. (*He gets up and goes to look at his carvings. He speaks to himself.*) Who will tell them again to me? (*He turns to DEREK and MIRANDA.*) There is no one. (*He moves towards the front of the stage, facing the audience. DEREK and MIRANDA watch him. SHALEMA's room darkens.*) They have all gone. (*Pause, as he remembers.*) The first to die was Megishtu, the wife of our Matu - our healer. She had helped to look after the one who was ill. She had stayed with him through the night, placing the farat roots on his forehead at the prescribed intervals. The Matu made him lie on the earth, in a place where no grass grows, so that the spirit of the land might work in him. And he became strong again. The earth took in his shaking, and it became the movement of the branches of the trees in the wind. He would be well.

We hear the anthem, quietly. Megishtu is carried in on a stretcher, accompanied by the MATU and the chief ELDER, or SANSHAA. They place her C, and sit round her, the MATU and others carrying out the tasks as SHALEMA describes them.

But with Megishtu it was different. She too began to shake - just a little at first, then in great waves. She became very hot, and the farat roots did not help her. They placed her hands on the earth in the prescribed way, and put leaf and rock and water against her, so that all the power of the land could work in harmony for her - well-being. But she only grew weaker. The Matu decided he must see the illness within her, and prepared himself. He presented himself to the Sanshaa, and asked for his blessing. Then he knelt by the woman and the Sanshaa laid his cloak across them both. He placed his hands on the woman's head, and began to search for the place of the evil.

The MATU begins to rock gently on his knees, in time to the anthem, which alters its rhythm, becoming louder and more urgent. The others in the circle begin to sway in sympathy, as does SHALEMA.

And then he saw it. He saw the disease inside the woman, and it was like nothing he had ever seen, and he gave a great cry (*the MATU cries aloud and the anthem stops abruptly*) and lay close to the ground. And then the Sanshaa called upon me to speak for them to the landscape, to ask for its help.

As SHALEMA says this, he approaches the edge of his room, but does not actually step over into the front stage area. The ELDER approaches him.

ELDER: Shalema, naa-nangjata, nanetade ota kaasha pejiwe.

The group see SHALEMA and watch him as he speaks the words of the healing song. After each English phrase they sing it in their language, using a variant of the anthem. There may be other activity choreographed.

SHALEMA:

spirit of the land, talk to us
keeper of the land, hear us
listen now to the beating of hearts
let your heart now move in ours
and all will sing to the forest again

wijeli nonamantene, lijiwe nanemaa
lizeri nonamantele, lijiwe lunemaa
dilamushilo jememe, rimadi janemaa
dilamudashi jememe, ujiwe benemaa
na maluchide tamasa, limatanawe jaa

all hear your voice in the harvest rain
all hear your word in the growing of plants
breathe, breathe life into our sister
let her heart beat with yours
and she will sing to the forest again

ulotuwe lanaadawe, nilunesi nafaa
ufuturiwe jatudawe lunesi nafaa
nazaashiwe shubaajiwe nizazu-zazumaa
dilamunushi jememe ladashwe madimaa
na malushade ba nude, limatanawe jaa

all see your word written in the water
all see your name written in the smoke
of the fire
make your servant move with your
healing power
and let her sing to the forest again
and let her sing to the forest again

ujanatawe jatudawe chari mosi faa
ufashunawe suladawe chari mosi faa
lamaabadawe shaabadawe benema shudaa
na malushama kaashofu, limatanawe jaa
na malushama kaashofu, limatanawe jaa

But it was no use.

The group looks away from SHALEMA to MEGISHTU, but she lies still. The movement and music stops. During this speech, she is carried out in silence for funeral, with appropriate reverence. As the MATU leaves, he looks back angrily at SHALEMA, though we do not at this point see why. SHALEMA moves forward and looks after the funeral procession.

I could not help her. My words did not help her. The Keepers of the Land did not listen to me. (Pause.) Nor did they listen next day (we hear the refrain begin again, offstage in the background, at first chanted by several people, and louder in the pauses) when the first child died. Nor ever again. (Pause.) I was their nangjata, but my words were as worthless as the howling of a dog. I spoke for each one of them, but the land would not listen. The trees had lost their power to heal. The visitors had made enemies of the soil. They had no right to be there. They did not understand the ways of the landscape. (Pause. The refrain now sounds thin, as fewer people are alive to sing it.) They did not even try to understand. So the spirit of the land went to another place. And when the spirit of the land departs, the people must die. (Pause.) Each day, it would be three or four. In the second week, the Matu himself died, and from that moment there was a great despair among the people. (Pause, as SHALEMA moves back towards his room.) We tried to show the visitors the right ways, but we could not make them understand. I did not have their language then. I did not know their words, and they did not know mine. (He enters his room, and turns to the audience.) You must never take the first fruit of the land, you see. When a man goes out looking for a medicine herb, and he finds it soon at the road side, he does not take it. He will pass it by. When he finds it a second time, he will also not take it. Only when he finds it a third time, will he take it from the ground. The third meeting means that the plant is truly a gift from the Earth Mother. So he must speak to it with humility, and ask its help to carry out its healing. And because it is a gift,

he must leave something in exchange. So, in the earth where the plant rested, he will leave something of himself - perhaps a cutting from his hair, or a piece of cloth from his home. And after the exchange of gifts, the herb would be strong and full of the spirit, and there would be a harmony between the man and the land. *(Pause, as he looks again in the direction of the funeral.)* But those men who came to our village, they gave the rocks no respect. They took everything they saw. They passed nothing by. I saw their bags, full of the silver stones. They had been torn from the land. They asked no leave of it. They gave no gift back. So the Earth spirit took our people in exchange. *(Pause. The singing is now very thin.)* Then they came with the healer from the river town, but his medicine was no better than that of the Matu. At least they were there to help me place the last ones in the earth. The last to die was Eshobe - you would know him as the contrary. *(Wry chuckle.)* I really thought he would live, if only to be different, but even he could not fight the evil one. And when he died, the Earth Mother gave a great cry, for there would be no more healing in that land. *(A single female voice sings the refrain, which deteriorates into a long mournful cry. Silence.)* There was no room for new graves, so we dug again in the places where we had lain others before. Then they took me to their hospital, in the great river city. I think they expected me to die, and so it was my wish. One night, in the hospital, I left my bed and went outside into the garden. And I lay on the earth and I spoke to the Keepers of the Land, and I asked them to take me too. To be with my people. It was not much to ask. But they refused me. I did not die. *(SHALEMA's room brightens, as he returns to sit on his bed. Just before he gets there he turns and calls, as if to the room.)* But why didn't she take me? Why did the Earth Mother leave me?

DEREK and MIRANDA are stunned. They sit there for a moment, then MIRANDA goes over to SHALEMA and holds his arm. SHALEMA does not look at them.

DEREK (with respect): You are still nangjata. *(Pause. He exchange glances with MIRANDA: it is time to leave.)* Mr Maneshi, we're sorry we have troubled you. We'll leave you now. But look *(he writes on a sheet of paper in his notebook, tears it off, and leaves it on the table)*, this is where I'm staying. If you change your mind, please get in touch. I'll be there for at least a week.

MIRANDA: I hope we'll meet again, Mr Maneshi. Thank you for telling us about your people.

They go out. SHALEMA gets up, goes to the door, and looks after them. He turns to the table and reads the address on the paper.

SHALEMA: I should not have told you. *(Angrily.)* I should not have told you. *(He gathers up the tapes and throws them into the fire. But he ignores an empty tape box lying on the table, next to the machine.)* And now you have my words, trapped in your machine. You will tell them to others, and they will laugh at them, treat them like monkeys in a cage. *(He paces.)* It must not be. *(He watches the fire for a while, and this gives him an idea. He gets his hat from a corner.)* It shall not be. *(As he goes out, the anthem swells.)*

1.3

A curtain or similar device hides the rear rooms. DS is now Madame Koto's bar, with a table and three chairs. MIRANDA, DEREK and JASON enter DSR. JASON obviously knows several people off-stage, and we hear fragments of his exchanges with them. They are each carrying a glass of wine, and JASON has two nearly-full bottles. They drink routinely during the scene, in most of the pauses. MIRANDA and DEREK are evidently trying to cheer themselves up, but they don't get drunk enough for this to seriously interfere with their dialogue.

DEREK and MIRANDA sit down at one of the tables, and JASON is pulling over a chair from the other, when he looks off-stage L.

DEREK: This is a good idea.

JASON: Be back in a minute. Just seen someone I need to talk to. (*Goes off L.*)

MIRANDA: You need cheering up. We both do. Slainte.

DEREK: Iechyd da. (*They drink.*) I'm buggered, aren't I.

MIRANDA: Yeah. (*a look from Derek*) Sorry. What a story.

DEREK: I shouldn't have spent so much time on the grammar.

MIRANDA: He seemed so – lonely.

DEREK: I've only got about a thousand words in the dictionary, and half of them haven't got any clear meanings. Not much use having a pile of sentence patterns with no words to put into them.

MIRANDA (*only half-concentrating*): You can't do anything with the material you've got already?

DEREK: Not much - not enough to put together a good report, anyway.

MIRANDA: What about his pronunciation? You must have a lot on that?

DEREK: Oh sure, but it's hardly the same, is it? You don't save a language for posterity by putting a couple of articles in an obscure phonology journal. (*Pause.*)

MIRANDA (*reflectively*): I really felt for him.

DEREK: So did I, that's the irony. Half of me wants just to leave him alone. The other half is howling 'No you mustn't. You can't just let a language disappear'. And I can't. Not this one. I've got too much riding on it. (*They finish what's in their glasses. DEREK repours.*)

MIRANDA: There'll be none left for Jason, if we go on like this. Shame!

The glasses are full enough, but DEREK tops up to the brim from the other bottle.

DEREK: Oh dear. (*Pause. Chuckles.*) I remember, early on, asking him how he would say 'I run' in Tamasa. I sat there, pen ready, waiting for something nice and simple, and then I got flooded. Out it came, yards of the stuff. I just sat there! So I said 'Surely all that doesn't just mean "I run"?' And he said 'Of course not. It means I am sitting in my house and I look out of my door and I see a wild pig so I quickly grab my spear and now I am running after it'. And then he looked at me as if I was an idiot and said 'Only a fool would run for nothing'. (*They laugh together. Beat.*) What really gets to me, though, is that most people don't give a damn. (*Looks off-stage L, and maybe at the audience*). Do they really care if some pathetic little language is about to disappear for good? They don't give a shit. Dying languages never make headlines.

MIRANDA: They do sometimes, though. Didn't you have a great success in your own country once?

DEREK: Wales, you mean?

MIRANDA: Mm.

DEREK: Oh sure. Welsh is the only Celtic language to really keep its numbers up. All the others ...

He makes a face and draws a steeply declining graph in the air. JASON enters and sees the empty bottles.

JASON: Look at that. You've been doing well. I'd better get some more.

DEREK: On me. *(He gives JASON some money.)*

JASON: Cheers, Del, you're a gentl You ought to join the British Council.

DEREK: No, I'm married already.

JASON goes out.

MIRANDA *(trying to help DEREK's mood)*: You do come across some weird characters in language teaching, though, don't you. I had a student once, a Mr Gallano, kept wanting to tell me *(puts on thick foreign accent)* 'the special secret words in my language'.

DEREK *(lperking up a bit)* Like?

MIRANDA: Kichwa taas.

DEREK: Kichwa taas?

MIRANDA: Yes - he said it meant headlamps! *(Gallano-voice)*: 'I tell you how we say headlamps in my language. *(Says sexily.)* Kichwa taas'. So I say to him, you have to put it in a sentence, Mr Gallano. So he says *(Gallano-voice, sexily)* 'I like kichwa taas'. Well, I try to get him to do a bit more, so I say 'And very useful at night-time', and his eyes light up, and he goes 'Oh yes, oh yes'.

DEREK: Why?

MIRANDA: Headlamps - slang for - *(she puts her hands on her breasts)*!

JASON arrives back with two more bottles. He pours out.

JASON: I dunno. Crisis, crisis, crisis. Old Ryan leaves his motor in the car-park for five minutes, and when he gets back some banana's reversed into him, crunched his headlamps. *(DEREK and MIRANDA look at each other, trying to suppress a laugh.)* Nice pair, too. *(They can't suppress it.)* What's so funny?

DEREK: Nothing. Just something we were talking about before. Don't feel much like laughing at all, really.

JASON: What's up?

DEREK: I've just lost my client.

Jason looks puzzled.

MIRANDA: The man he came out here to see.

JASON: So how've you lost him? *(beat)* He ain't died on you, has he?

DEREK: No, nothing like that. He just doesn't want to carry on working with me.

JASON: Doing that phon - phon - ?

DEREK: Phonetics, yeah.

MIRANDA: Derek's part of a project on the world's dying languages. He's a linguist.

Derek raises a glass to Jason as if in mock salute.

JASON: Cunning (*beat*) linguist. (*A look from DEREK, who's heard this millions of times*) You speak a lot of languages, then.

DEREK: Not really. It's about as much as I can do to cope with English. Bit of Welsh. Some French from school.

JASON: So how can you be a linguist if you don't know a lot of languages?

DEREK: Well, it's a different sort of linguist. I belong to a department of linguistics back in London. We find out about languages but don't actually end up speaking them.

JASON (*confused*): I don't get it.

DEREK: Well I don't mean, not speaking them at all, I mean not being fluent in them. Since I started, for instance, I reckon I've studied 30, 40 languages. (*JASON is impressed.*) I couldn't carry on a proper conversation in them, like we're having now, but I do know about how they work - sounds, grammar, and so on - and I could probably ask for a scotch in most of them.

JASON (*to MIRANDA*): Useful feller to have around.

DEREK: The thing is, when you're working on a language, you get to know it quite well, and maybe you do end up being able to speak it for a while. But then, when you've finished the job, you move on to something else, and you just forget a lot of it. It's the vocabulary that's the killer. Every language has got thousands of words, and you just haven't got the time to learn them off by heart.

MIRANDA (*reflecting*): Shalema didn't know what 'gist' meant, did he.

Pause, while they all have a drink.

JASON: So are you saying that all the languages are dying?

DEREK: No, no, no. Not languages like French and Chinese and English. They've got lots of speakers. But lots haven't. Hundreds have just got a few speakers left, and when they die, that's it.

MIRANDA: But what's causing it? Why are they all dying?

DEREK: Being killed off, more like. I mean when you start going into it (*etc.*) -

He is just about to launch into an explanation, when he is stopped in his tracks by JASON, talking into his glass, half to himself.

JASON: Well, it's not necessarily a bad thing, if you ask me.

DEREK can't believe he's heard that. MIRANDA is not so shocked, having heard JASON sound off before.

DEREK: Are you saying I'm wasting my time?

JASON: No, Del, easy - I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is that it could be a good thing if there were a few less languages about.

DEREK: Why, for heaven's sake?

JASON: Look, I was talking to Ryan in there. He works for Carreras? Branches in about 20 countries? He says it's a real pain, coping with all the languages. It's all right if you're in a place and everyone speaks English. But he was in Portugal a few weeks ago, and the people he had to talk to just didn't have enough English to manage, so he had to bring in an interpreter and it doubled the time it took to do everything - and the cost. (*He realises he may have spoken out of turn.*) Well that's what he said, anyway.

DEREK (*recovering*): I grant you, translation is an expensive business, but that's not the point.

JASON: Isn't it, though? I mean, I can see me paying interpreters in a place like Portugal, 'cos there's lots of people there who speak Portuguese. But I don't see how anyone could justify the money it would take to keep those languages going you were talking about, with just a few speakers. It's wouldn't be cost effective. (*Afterthought.*) Ryan says.

MIRANDA: And what do *you* say, Jason?

JASON (*after a drink*): Let 'em die off peacefully. Teach 'em to speak English instead.

DEREK sighs in annoyance. JASON doesn't notice.

JASON: You tell me. How much does it cost to keep a language alive?

DEREK (*irritably*): Dunno. It depends.

JASON: But you'd need loads of stuff to keep a language going. Schools, teachers, books.

DEREK: But it can happen. They do it in Wales. And they started a Welsh TV channel -

JASON: Oh yeah, I remember coming across that. A whole lot of gobbledegook, and then out pops a word you recognize. (*Puts on mock Welsh accent.*) Rubbarubba- rubbarubba - Manchester United - rubbarubbarubba. Ain't they got a word for Man United in Welsh?

MIRANDA: Yeah, a four-letter one. (*JASON snorts. MIRANDA tries to keep the peace*) Sounds like a lot of money, anyway.

DEREK: But worth it.

JASON: In Wales, maybe. There's a lot of people there. But not in Wagga-Wagga land. I mean, you're not seriously suggesting that they build new TV stations just for a couple of people.

DEREK (*drunker*): Look, of course I'm not saying that. You're missing the point. Course it's expensive to keep a language alive. When you try to keep a language going you're actually trying to keep a culture going. Culture, Jason, yeah? I know it's sometimes too late to do that. I'm not saying we should try to keep *all* these languages alive.

JASON: There we are, then.

DEREK (*continuing*): I know that if a language has got just a couple of people left, there's probably nothing anyone can do to stop it disappearing. All I'm saying is it's an absolute tragedy, and we need to be doing something about it before it goes completely.

JASON: And that's why you've come out here. To see that bloke.

DEREK: Yeah, to get as much of his language recorded as possible, before it disappears.

JASON: And you get to bask in the glory!

DEREK (*uncertain, carries on*): And trying to make people aware of the issues – cos in lots of cases quite large numbers of people *are* involved, and it might be possible to do something to save their language. But only if people care about it. And most people don't. That's the real crisis. It cheeses me off sometimes. Even Shalema doesn't care any more.

MIRANDA: Oh I think he does. But in a different way.

DEREK: Maybe.

JASON: I still think it would be better if everyone learned English - or Esperanto, if you like. Anything. So long as we get out of the hassle of having to cope with so many bloody languages. I mean, it has to be a good thing, surely?

DEREK: What, to have just one language in the world?

JASON: Yes, just like it was in the old days.

MIRANDA: What old days?

JASON: In the Bible. Remember? Tower of Babel? Folks all cocky - try to build a tower to heaven. God's pissed off. And how did he stop them? Make 'em all speak different languages, so they can't understand each other. Result? No more tower. You see? Languages messed everything up.

MIRANDA: Oh that's just a story.

JASON (*insistently*): And before the Tower of Babel there was just one language. It says so quite plainly: 'they were all of one speech'. I used to go to Sunday-school.

DEREK: Oh for fuck's sake! If the world had just one language again we'd all have a wonderful time? Everybody understanding each other? Peace on earth?

JASON: Yeah.

DEREK: Northern Ireland.

JASON: What's that got to do with it?

DEREK (*patiently*): What language do they speak in Northern Ireland?

JASON: Well, English, of course.

DEREK: Exactly. Everyone speaks English. Catholics and Protestants alike. And there was peace in Northern Ireland?

JASON: Hang on.

DEREK: Or in America, during the Civil War? Or in any country, actually, when there's a war on. If people want to kill each other, they don't let a common language stand in their way. There's no real connection between language and politics, Jason. Even if you managed to get rid of every language bar one the world would still be just as dangerous a place as it is now. (*Pause, as they drink.*)

JASON: Anyway, I tried to learn a foreign language last year.

MIRANDA: Really?

JASON: I didn't get very far.

MIRANDA: Didn't you do your homework?

JASON: Evening class. Geena.

DEREK: Geena? I don't know that. Where's it spoken?

JASON: Geena works in the mail room, yeah? She's gorgeous. Told me she'd seen a pile of envelopes addressed to the British Council office in Germany, and she'd sort of fallen in love with all the German names - (*puts on mock German accent*) - Frau Schmitzenberger, and all that - so she thought she'd start going to evening classes. Well I thought there was a chance here, so I said I'd always wanted to learn German, and did she want some company, and blow me she said yes. So I went along.

MIRANDA: How did you get on?

JASON: Enjoyed it, actually. Got quite fluent.

MIRANDA: Gosh, how long was the course?

JASON: I'm not sure. I quit after a couple of weeks.

MIRANDA (*stops a laugh*): Why?

JASON: Geena started dating the lecturer.

MIRANDA: Aw, shame. Handsome German hunk, was he?

JASON: Sort of. Annelise, her name was. (*Shakes his head.*) You just can't tell about people, can you.

MIRANDA: Aww, shame. But there you go, see. If everyone spoke the same language, that romance would never have happened.

JASON: I still think I'd've got further in English.

DEREK: A lingua franca.

JASON: A what?

MIRANDA: Lingua franca. A common tongue.

JASON: That's exactly what I had in mind with Geena. (*MIRANDA thumps his arm.*)

DEREK: Lingua francas are all well and good - but, but, but, but - not at the expense of other languages. It's all very well having everybody learn English, but not if it means people are then going to stop using their original language - or not be allowed to use their language.

JASON: Not allowed?

DEREK: Sure. Lots of places where kids come to school speaking their mother tongue, and they're made to speak some other language - and they're punished if they're heard talking to each other in their home language. It happened in Wales. If a kid was caught speaking Welsh, he was made to wear a card saying 'I am a donkey', or whatever.

MIRANDA: Same thing happened in Ireland.

DEREK: It's happened all over the place.

JASON: That really still go on?

DEREK: Oh sure. It may not be so obvious now, but there all kinds of subtle ways people can make a kid feel embarrassed about using his own language. Or an adult, for that matter. I think teachers are more sensible about this kind of thing these days. But your man in the street -

MIRANDA (*sweetly*): Person in the street.

DEREK: Quite. He, or she, is just as likely to be caught taking the piss out of somebody else's language today as a hundred years ago. Name-calling and all that. Chicken-talk?

JASON: Name-calling never hurt anybody. Sticks and stones will break my bones ...

MIRANDA: Well that's exactly where you're wrong, Jason, I can tell you. There's no greater lie in the history of English. Names never hurt me,! There's nothing bites deeper than name-calling. A bruise on your body can heal quickly enough, but people remember a cutting name for years. Sometimes they never forget it. I remember when my daughter was ill – never mind. (*Drinks quickly. DEREK looks at her, as if he is about to pick up on the point, but is forestalled*)

JASON (*meditatively*): Geena called me an egotistical prat, once. (*Laughter.*)

MIRANDA (*recovering*): There you are. That'll stay with you to your grave, Jason.

JASON: I dunno. I quite liked it, really. She'd never called me *anything* before. Oh there was something else, in German, but I never worked out what it was. Arschloch, or something.

MIRANDA (*reflecting*): I learned German in school, and French. Well, sort of learned. I got my GCSE in them. But I do remember one thing. We went on one of those - exchange trips? To - where was it? - place in Brittany, near - oh, I don't know, it doesn't matter - and we'd been there a day or two and none of us had spoken a word of French, of course - it was just a school trip to the seaside, as far as we were concerned. Anyway, I'd bought some postcards to send home, and I went out of the hall where we were staying to the end of the drive where there was a postbox - on my own. And just as I got to the postbox this car stopped by me and a woman wound down the window and asked me, I'll never forget it, (*puts on French accent*) 'Monsieur Robinson?', she said - that was our teacher's name - 'Monsieur Robinson, il est arrivé?' - and I thought God I understand that, so I said 'oui', and then I plucked up all the courage I'd got and said 'Il est dans la maison', and the woman gave me a big smile and said 'Merci' and off she went, and I stood there by the postbox absolutely scared stiff - thrilled to bits. I'd done it. I'd actually spoken to someone in their language

and they'd understood me. I felt really excited. All that slop about some verbs going with *avoir* and some with *être*, and here was someone who was actually doing it, without thinking twice about it - and not a teacher either. And I understood her. I felt really French.

DEREK: I know what you mean. I remember exactly the same thing happening to me when I was at school. You suddenly realise that a foreign language isn't necessarily a barrier. You *can* break through. It does work. And you begin to think, to get a glimmer, it's actually possible to get to understand another world, another way of life - and to become part of that world. Like having two identities - your own, and a mysterious other, one which makes you different from your family and friends at home. It made me feel, well, grown-up - independent, I suppose. And I still get the feeling, every time I work on a new language, and you get that first moment when you try something out and somebody understands you, and they're so pleased and you're so pleased, and - well, it's why I became a linguist, I guess. And one of the reasons why I get so upset when I hear that a language is about to die, and (*pointedly to JASON*) some people don't give a toss.

JASON: Have another drink. It's not the end of the world.

MIRANDA: It is for Shalema. He's the last person who knows how to speak his language.

DEREK: And he's not alone, you see. There are hundreds of languages in a similar mess. It'd be bad enough if his was the only one. But this is a tragedy on a world scale. (*Into his drink.*) And most people aren't even aware that it's happening.

JASON: Now, Del, don't go off on one, yeah? But haven't languages always died? Latin and that, like you said?

DEREK: Well yeah - but never at the rate we see happening now. The problem's been coming to the boil over the past three or four hundred years, when we started colonizing. Everyone was out for what they could get, and it was hard luck for the people who stood in their way.

MIRANDA (*to herself*): Like Shalema.

JASON: But that was progress. You can't stop progress. You can't stop people exploring.

DEREK: No, of course you can't. But you can't defend some of the things that went on in the name of progress. And are still going on.

JASON: Like?

DEREK: Well, in Brazil, for instance. There's a tribe there, the Yanomani.

JASON: The what?

DEREK: The Yanomani. Just a few years ago messages started coming through on the Internet that a whole village of these Indians had been massacred in the jungle - completely wiped out by a gang of illegal gold miners. And it wasn't the first time there had been such attacks. People after the trees, making roads, you name it, they've been doing it for years.

MIRANDA: But doesn't the government do anything about it?

DEREK: Well there's been a lot of words, but precious little action. Progress, Jason?

JASON: Yeah, but it's not always massacres, is it.

DEREK: It usually is - one way or another.

JASON: When we landed in America, we didn't go around killing everybody.

MIRANDA: No? Cowboys and Indians?

JASON: Oh yeah. I like a good Western, me.

MIRANDA: And who are the good guys?

JASON: The cowboys, of course. Clint Eastwood. John Wayne. Stagecoach. Great film.

MIRANDA: And what happened to the Indians?

JASON: Wayne whups 'em. Well, the cavalry do, actually. Best scene ever. The people on the stagecoach are just about to get shot to shit, and then they hear the cavalry trumpet - ta-raa - and they come charging across the plain. Brilliant.

MIRANDA (*laughs*): See.

DEREK: And it isn't always the cavalry that do the massacring. Here's a fact for you. Ninety per cent of the Indian tribes of America were wiped out by diseases brought in by Europeans. Typhoid, smallpox, TB, syphilis, they brought the lot. Or their animals did. Rats off the ships. Bugs in the sheep and chickens they brought for food. People think there were 100 million people living in North America before the Europeans came. Within a couple of hundred years, less than a million left.

JASON whistles.

DEREK: More people died then than in the whole of the First World War. (*beat*) It's a laugh when people say medicine is one of the benefits the West has brought to the Indian tribes. It only helps to cure the diseases we introduced in the first place.

JASON: But there are all sorts of other benefits.

MIRANDA: Like what?

JASON: Well, electricity, television.

MIRANDA: You consider television a benefit, do you!

JASON: Yeah, all right, all I'm saying is that they're likely to get more benefits from us than we get from them.

MIRANDA (*starting slowly, thinking it out*): But how do you know? You don't know what kind of thing we could get from them. None of us do. But the possibilities are vast. I mean, just imagine if we never had French, or Russian, or some other big language, what we'd have lost. All the plays of Molière or the novels of Tolstoy. The different ways of looking at the world they tell us about. *Every* language can give us that sort of special insight - a different angle, if you like, on what it means to be, well, human. Even Indian ones. (*Pause. Half to herself.*) I could only hear the traffic noise. He could hear the stories and songs of his people. He told me.

DEREK: And every language that dies without being recorded is a lost opportunity.

MIRANDA (*half to herself*): And crickets. I remember, I could hear the crickets.

DEREK: It might sound like a cliché, but we do understand ourselves more when we see ourselves in contrast with others. At the very least it helps make us more tolerant, more sympathetic to the way others live. Less bloody-minded English tourist. If you shout long enough in English they'll understand. (*Adopts northern accent.*) 'Can I have tea. Yeah. Read my lips. Bloody foreigners. Tea.'

JASON: Yes but French is different,. I haven't read those people you said, but we're not talking here about them, we're talking about primitive tribes. They haven't got anything to tell us. All they believe is a load of mumbo-jumbo. Witch-doctors, and all that. Superstition.

MIRANDA (*out of her reverie*): You mean we're not?

JASON: What?

MIRANDA: Not superstitious?

JASON: Well some people may be. I'm not.

MIRANDA: I bet you are.

JASON: Nope.

MIRANDA: You are. And I can prove it.

JASON: Rubbish.

MIRANDA exchanges a look with DEREK, who has no idea what she is up to.

MIRANDA (*enjoying the moment*): You like to go sailing, right?

JASON: So what?

MIRANDA: Well, say you got a new boat, and you had to give it a name.

JASON: So?

MIRANDA: Would you call it the Titanic? (*JASON is nonplussed.*) Would you?

JASON: I - uh -

MIRANDA: Would you? (*Pause.*)

JASON: Uh - no.

MIRANDA: Why not?

JASON: Uh - I dunno why not. Just wouldn't, that's all. It'd be stupid. It'd be - it'd be -

MIRANDA: Tempting fate?

JASON: I gotta pee. (*Leaves.*)

MIRAND (*calling after him*) Superstition?

DEREK: Miranda, you're a star. I'm going to buy you another drink.

MIRANDA: Haven't you had enough?

DEREK: Not nearly. (*beat*) Look, earlier, what did you -

MIRANDA (*getting up*): Well I have. Head's starting to spin. I'm gonna go. (*indicates drinks*) Thanks for these.

DEREK: If you're sure.

MIRANDA (*hesitates, then*): Yeah. See you tomorrow.

DEREK: See you.

She goes off R. He watches her, curious, then goes out to the lavatory. The anthem is heard again, the curtain rises, and the light goes up in DEREK's room.

1.4

DEREK's room is as he left it that morning, but the fan is off. The anthem stops. There are footsteps outside, and a movement at the door. We hear a first attempt to open it, then a stronger one, and it swings open. It is SHALEMA, holding the paper with DEREK's address on it. He is breathing hard, very tired after his long walk. He looks around the room, to see if anyone is there.

SHALEMA: Hello?

He enters, tentatively, and sits down for a moment. He puts the paper down on the nearest convenient surface, DEREK's desk. He goes back to close the door, then thinks to look into the other rooms. He peers through the bedroom door.

SHALEMA: Hello? Mr Derek?

He is satisfied no-one is in. As he walks back to the desk, he sees the picture of Derek's daughter, picks it up, and admires it.

SHALEMA: Princess. (*He puts it on the desk, turning it face down.*) You must not see. (*He looks around, then opens the desk drawers, then the filing cabinet drawer. When he finds the tapes, we hear a grunt of satisfaction. He flips some of the notes casually, then picks up two of the tapes, looking carefully at each one.*) You have my words. You have my worthless words. (*He looks up, staring into space. As he does so, the MATU appears DL.*)

MATU: Sametisha benata ladawe, (*contemptuously*) nangjata.

SHALEMA: You have told me so, many times. (*Changes tone.*) The blame rests with me.

MATU: Cheka jatudakalo bamaana bete da.

SHALEMA: My words were not strong enough.

MATU: Ganaasitaka mifuka lizeriwelo nonamanteladanawe.

SHALEMA: I could not persuade the Keepers of the Land.

MATU: Nemashaka lizerilo nonamanteladana kodawe.

SHALEMA: The Keepers of the Land turned against me.

MATU: Ralusika da baatuwe lichunudaka, e somorasika nonamante-ranatewe.

SHALEMA: They would not give power to the one who helped those who stole from the land.

MATU: Cheka notaka nangjata da.

SHALEMA: It is true. I was no nangjata. What you say is true.

The MATU leaves. SHALEMA stands up and turns to the audience, holding a tape in each hand.

SHALEMA: I was the first to see the visitors arrive. I saw them, climbing the long track. When they saw me, they fell back, frightened. I told them they had no need to fear me, but they did not understand. I offered them sweet corn, and they gave me a brightly-coloured cloth. They showed me how to wear it - here (*gestures around his neck*). Then they showed me a book with pictures of the silver rock, and pointed all around. I told them there were many such rocks, and showed them the hill where they were to be found. I brought them to my village, and offered them food and drink at my hut. They were *my* visitors, and they would bring me great fame among my people. They would have travelled on that night, but I made them stay. All the people were outside my hut, and chose me, me, to lead the kralasha - the greeting ceremony. The Matu, he was angry, for this duty normally falls to him. But I did it well. I invited them to stay, and they stayed. (*Pause.*) I invited them to stay - and they stayed.

MATU (*off*): Ra sameshi fe ne.

SHALEMA: The blame rests with me.

He bangs the tapes together in a sudden burst of anger. He looks around the room, trying to decide what to do. He sees the matches on the cabinet. He crouches down by the cabinet, as if by a camp-fire, and proceeds to tear strips of paper from the notes, making it easy to burn. He speaks in time with the tearing, and puts the tapes back into the drawer, one by one, as he builds his fire.

SHALEMA: And when the time came ... to speak well to the Keepers of the Land ... to ask them to spare my people ... I did not speak well ... I did not find the right words to make the forest listen ... The landscape did not listen to me ... I could not make the landscape hear my song ... (*Pause.*)

MATU (*off*): Sametisha benata ladawe.

SHALEMA: The blame rests with me. (*The anthem begins quietly, and the room begins to darken.*) But you shall not know it, Mr Derek. (*He strikes a match.*) The world shall not know it. (*He drops it into the cabinet. The fire flares up.*) Your world shall not know the shame of Shalema Maneshi, (*contemptuously*) naa-nangjata.

The room is quite dark now, leaving only SHALEMA's face illuminated by the glow of the fire. There is a pause, then he pushes the cabinet drawer back in. The anthem swells, as the stage becomes black.

INTERVAL

2.1

The next day. DEREK is in his room, kneeling by the filing cabinet, seeing whether there is anything salvageable. He is stunned, depressed, and a bit hungover, all at once. MIRANDA arrives, rushing in.

MIRANDA: How bad is it?

DEREK: Couldn't be worse. Look.

MIRANDA peers in. DEREK lifts some of the remains and lets them fall through his fingers.

MIRANDA (*it sinks in*): Shit. Is there nothing you can save?

DEREK: No. Everything's gone. Useless. Even the paint off the inside of the drawer, look. I'm surprised the whole place didn't go up.

MIRANDA: And your notes?

DEREK: The lot. Just ash.

They stare at it.

MIRANDA: When did you - ?

DEREK: Soon as I got in. Smelled the smoke. Never sobered up so fast.

MIRANDA: You should have called me.

DEREK: Not at that time of night. Anyway, it wouldn't have made any difference. Sorry, I didn't mean to mess up your Saturday. I just thought you'd want to know, especially after meeting him and all.

MIRANDA: You're sure it was Shalema?

DEREK: Oh yes. (*He nods towards the desk.*) He left behind the piece of paper I gave him with my address on it. (*Dry laugh.*) I did ask him to get in touch, after all.

MIRANDA (*goes to look at the paper*): And there was no sign of him?

DEREK: Long gone. The fire was well out by the time I got in. Just this musty smell of burnt - stuff.

MIRANDA: I don't see how he could have got here.

DEREK: Walked, I guess. Maybe he took a cab. Dunno.

MIRANDA: He can't have walked, in his condition. It'd take forever, and in the afternoon heat, it'd kill him.

DEREK (*irritably*): So what does it matter how he got here? Bloody donkey, for all I care. (*Pause.*) Sorry. (*He gets up off the floor.*) What the hell. It makes no difference. After yesterday's bombshell, what's a few tapes and notes?

MIRANDA: And you don't have copies.

DEREK: No. Never any time. Photocopying cuts, remember? (*beat*) I should've made time.

MIRANDA (*gives his shoulder a squeeze*): What are you going to do?

DEREK: Nothing to do. Go home. Face my wife. (*beat*) It was good of you to come over. (*Bravely.*) Stopped me making the headlines in the next newsletter - travelling linguist ends it all.

MIRANDA (*attempting a joke, but failing*): I couldn't allow that. The British Council doesn't like too many visiting suicides. Affects the cultural image. (*beat*)

DEREK: I can't believe he went so far. I mean, whatever he feels about me recording his language, he didn't have to do this.

MIRANDA: Perhaps you underestimated the strength of his feelings.

DEREK: It's not like him, though - I mean, he's a gentle man, a peacemaker. Not an (*beat*) arsonist.

MIRANDA: I don't suppose he sees it like that. Highly justified, if we take what he was saying yesterday seriously.

DEREK: Well we have to now, don't we. (*Pause.*)

MIRANDA idly turns over the picture lying on the desk.

MIRANDA: Derek, look.

DEREK: What?

MIRANDA: Your picture. Of Sarah. Did you put it here?

DEREK: No.

MIRANDA: Shalema must've done it.

DEREK: So?

MIRANDA: Well - don't you think that's a bit odd?

DEREK: He missed burning it, you mean?

MIRANDA: No - the opposite. He must have put it here specially, away from the cabinet. It's almost as if he moved it for safe keeping.

DEREK: Nice of him.

MIRANDA: He was really taken to hear you had a kid (*beat*) and her name - remember the way he picked on her name?

DEREK: Oh, princess, yeah. That was you. How did you know that, anyway?

MIRANDA (*wistful*): I knew a girl called Sarah once.

DEREK: I actually thought we were getting somewhere at that point. He seemed to like you.

MIRANDA: I liked *him*. (*She sits down. They stare at the filing cabinet. Then both speak at once.*)

DEREK: Want a coffee - sorry.

MIRANDA: Derek, listen - listen, I've got an idea. If I could persuade Shalema to do some more recording - would you?

DEREK: Eh? What do you mean?

MIRANDA: Would you start again?

DEREK (*puffs cheeks out*): Phew. I dunno. I don't think I've got the energy.

MIRANDA: Not at the moment, maybe. But after all you've said about this language, wouldn't you think it worth while, to have a second go at it?

DEREK: I don't know. It'd be too late to help my grants renewal.

MIRANDA: Forget your grant renewal. Do it anyway.

DEREK: And live off what next year?

MIRANDA: But would it be too late,? If you could get a fair bit recorded? You said you have a month. And it wouldn't be starting from scratch, would it, 'cos you're bound to remember bits of what went on before.

DEREK: True. I do know a bit by heart. And I suppose - hey, wait a minute, what are you on about? There's no chance he'd agree. I mean, look. (*He gestures at the filing cabinet.*) Does that suggest to you someone who's just waiting to be persuaded? Get real, Miranda.

MIRANDA: I am getting real. I think he might be persuaded.

DEREK: How?

MIRANDA: I - I'd rather not say. It's just an instinct I have.

DEREK: Miranda!

MIRANDA: No, listen, will you trust me?

DEREK: Trust you?

MIRANDA: Yeah, if I went over to Shalema's. Would you mind if I tried?

DEREK: You'd be wasting your time.

MIRANDA: But would you mind?

DEREK: Well - no, of course not. It's not as if I have a better plan. But what on earth makes you think -

MIRANDA: You stay here. Clean the place up. Get some coffee. Take a pill. Have a shower. Anything. You look awful.

DEREK: Thanks. You look beautiful.

MIRANDA: Just take it easy. I'll call if there's a problem. Otherwise hope to see me - us - in a couple of hours.

DEREK: What are you up to?

MIRANDA: Trust me.

She goes out. DEREK shakes his head, and picks up some of the burnt material to take outside. He goes out to the kitchen. We hear the anthem as his room darkens and SHALEMA's lights up.

2.2

Later that morning. SHALEMA comes into his room, walks over to his shelves, and looks at his mementoes. He is plainly very unwell now, after his long walk the day before. MIRANDA appears DL and as she walks across to the house she pauses, in order to check an object (which we do not see) inside her bag. She goes off R towards the house, and we hear her knock on SHALEMA's door, rather tentatively. The noise makes him jump, and he turns suddenly. As he pauses, she knocks again, more insistently. He opens the door, but says nothing when he sees her. It is as if he has been expecting a visit. He turns away, leaving the door open, and sits on the edge of his bed, looking into space. MIRANDA comes in, shutting the door behind her. She puts her hands out towards him, in an awkward gesture half-remembered from her previous visit, but if he sees it he makes no response. There is an awkward pause.

MIRANDA: May your words be strong, nangjata.

SHALEMA looks up at her. He speaks without any life in his voice.

SHALEMA: My words. (*Shakes his head. Pause.*) Is Mr Derek here?

MIRANDA: No. I came on my own.

SHALEMA nods slowly. MIRANDA sits at the table

SHALEMA: I am glad of it.

MIRANDA: I bring you his greetings.

SHALEMA (*looks up in surprise*): How can that be? Why should he wish to greet me? I have harmed him.

MIRANDA: But he listened to what you said yesterday, and he understands how you feel. I don't think he realized that maybe he had begun to harm you. (*beat*) He's upset, of course, because he

doesn't really know what to do now, but he doesn't feel angry towards you, truly. *(beat)* He's looking forward to seeing his daughter again.

SHALEMA *(showing some interest)*: His princess.

MIRANDA: Mm. *(beat)* I think you took care not to let her picture come to harm.

SHALEMA: It was not for her to see, even as a little one.

He coughs painfully, and stands up as if trying to shake it off. MIRANDA is alarmed, and also gets up.

MIRANDA: Are you all right, Mr Maneshi?

SHALEMA *(goes to the door, opens it, and listens)*: I cannot hear the forest today. *(He coughs again.)*

MIRANDA: Would you like me to get a doctor to see you.

SHALEMA: He cannot cure the poison of the city.

MIRANDA: You didn't walk all that way yesterday?

SHALEMA: I was not alone. My people walked with me.

MIRANDA: Your people?

SHALEMA: It was good for them to be there. *(Pause, as he closes the door, and turns to MIRANDA.)* Why have you come?

MIRANDA: I - I wanted to - well, to be honest, I've come because I want to help Derek. And despite what's happened, I've come to ask *you* to help him. *(She pauses, as if expecting SHALEMA to respond, but he doesn't. She struggles on, then realizes she's not making much sense.)* You see, he's in trouble now because of his grant application, *(beat)* or rather, the fact that he has to get a report on your language finished in time if he's to stand a chance of getting his grant next year... Oh. *(She decides to start again, opens her bag and brings out a tape.)* Mr Maneshi, I've got something I want to show you. *(She holds the tape out towards him in the palm of her hand. He looks at it suspiciously.)*

SHALEMA: Is this from Mr Derek?

MIRANDA: No. It belongs to me.

SHALEMA: It is not my language?

MIRANDA: No, it's mine. It's English. A very special kind of English.

SHALEMA *(picking up the tape and examining it)*: Why is it special?

MIRANDA: Because I made this recording myself, a long time ago, when I lived in my own country. I'd like you to hear it.

She takes the tape from him and tries to put it into the machine. There is already a tape in there, which she takes out and puts on the table. She inserts her tape. She seems nervous, and takes a deep breath before pressing the start button. The recording is of MIRANDA playing with a little

girl aged about 3 - we hear her happy voice, and both people obviously enjoying themselves. It is not important what is being said, but the word 'mummy' should be audible once or twice. MIRANDA finds she has to sit down as she listens. The recording can be any length, but after a minute or so she presses the stop button, then the rewind, and stays staring at the tape.

SHALEMA: Who is the child?

MIRANDA (*quietly*): My princess.

SHALEMA: She lives with you?

MIRANDA: She lives nowhere. She's dead.

SHALEMA: Ah. (*Pause.*) When did she die?

MIRANDA: Five years ago. She was only three. (*Pause.*)

SHALEMA: To lose a little one, it is the greatest of sorrows.

MIRANDA (*trying to keep her emotions under control*): Sorry, I haven't listened to it for a long time.

SHALEMA: What was the manner of her dying?

MIRANDA: When she was born, they found she had something wrong with her heart, and she'd need surgery. But they weren't able to do the op - the operation - for a long time. It was scheduled twice, and each time she was due to go in something happened, and they had to postpone it. She was always ill with something or other, and they just wouldn't do it if she wasn't well. Then, when she was finally well enough, and they decided to go ahead, she - well, she just didn't make it. She died a few hours after the operation. Ironic, isn't it. (*Attempts a laugh.*) Pete used to say, if you were well when you went into hospital, you stood a fair chance of getting out alive. Not that time.

SHALEMA: Pete?

MIRANDA: Husband.

SHALEMA: Were you able to share in the child's death?

MIRANDA: What do you mean?

SHALEMA: It is a great blessing to be at one with your own child when it returns to the Spirit. You become close to the Spirit, and fear your own death no more.

During this speech, MIRANDA only just fights the urge to cry.

MIRANDA: Ah. After the operation, she went into intensive care, you see, and we were told to wait in a private room - a small room for parents near the unit. You could stay the night there, while you waited for news. We'd been told the first few hours after the op were going to be critical. I asked could we see her, but they said wait, cos she was all wired up with tubes and I don't know what, and it would have been very upsetting, they said, and they'd be sure to call us if there was any change. We didn't have the energy to argue, they know best, don't they always? So we just went to the room, and waited. And after a while we dozed off. The op had taken most of the day, and it was well after midnight. (*She gets up and goes to look at the mementoes on the shelf. She takes one down and handles it while facing the audience.*) I remember the corridor outside - long, echoing - you could hear people walking all the way along it - a bang from the swing doors at one end, then

footsteps - sometimes sharp clacking heels, sometimes soft, squeaking steps - it didn't matter, each time we heard the door go we thought it was someone coming to tell us something. I could feel my heart pounding, steps getting nearer and nearer - and then they'd pass by the door and die away. After a while, I knew how many steps it took to be by our door - twenty-two. Twenty-two. We lay there like that for ages, sometimes dozing then suddenly wide awake, waiting to see what would happen, wanting the footsteps to stop, but not wanting them to, either. After I don't know how long, an hour or so, we couldn't stand it any more. We went out into the corridor ourselves, and looked for the intensive unit. There was no-one about to ask, so we just walked into the ward, and - there she was, right in front of us, with two people around her doing (*beat*) I dunno. I don't know whether she was alive or dead. You couldn't tell. Yes, she must have been alive because I remember the machines were very busy, all kinds of lights and sounds. Well anyway, one of the doctors, or nurses, whatever, saw us and came rushing over, and said we shouldn't be here. I remember asking whether there was anything we could do - silly thing to say, really. They'd let us know as soon as there was some change, they said. As we walked away I looked back, and saw her there, tiny little body surrounded by - stuff. We went back to the room - and it seemed no time before we heard the footsteps again. Only this time they stopped outside the door. (*She cradles the memento. Pause.*)

SHALEMA: I think you were with her. (*MIRANDA realizes she is holding SHALEMA's memento, and gives it to him.*) You have shared a great moment with me. (*He bows and puts his hands together in salutation.*) Raluside kena pemelashilo lidawe bamaashi. May your memories give you strength.

MIRANDA (*recovering*): Yeah. They weren't strong enough to keep Peter and me together.

SHALEMA: You are no longer with your husband?

MIRANDA: No. He got bitter, and we couldn't agree about what it all meant. He said she should have died at birth, it would have been easier all round. I couldn't bear that. They were three marvellous years.

SHALEMA: Your husband was wrong. She will live on for ever in your heart, and in your memory. And (*moving to touch the tape recorder*) I have heard her happiness.

MIRANDA (*looking straight at him*): Exactly. (*beat*) That's why I always keep the tape with me. (*beat*) So I don't forget. (*beat*) So she lives on.

SHALEMA sees the point straight away, and they look at each other in silence. MIRANDA breaks the silence by taking the tape out of the machine, and putting it back in her bag. She puts the tape that had been in the machine back into its place. In the following speech, she pauses after each sentence, allowing SHALEMA time to respond, but he stays silent.

MIRANDA: The Tamasa people need their nangjata to speak for them again. They need their nangjata so that others can hear how it was in happier times. You have heard the happiness of my child - I want to hear the happiness of your people. You are the only one. Let the words of your language live on, always singing to the forest, as surely your people would wish.

SHALEMA puts the memento down, and walks towards the front of the stage. MIRANDA watches the next scene as it is enacted, reacting as the audience does. He calls out.

SHALEMA: What do you wish? Abako? Enenke? How should it be? Must my shame now be known? (*Beat, then he laughs, turning back to MIRANDA.*) There were happier times. (*beat*) I remember the visit of the Shanu people. Everyone remembered it, long after. Oh they were so helpless. (*He tells the story to the audience, while participating in the events, and becoming younger as he does so.*) We had met them while hunting in a new part of the river, a long way from

our village. They were a peaceful people, like us, but not so many. Our boat had been damaged, and they helped us repair it, so we invited their leaders to our village for a malata - a festival of first meeting. It was difficult, because we did not speak their language, and they did not speak ours - but it was our obligation, for they had helped us, and we drew pictures on the earth to make them understand. When they arrived, they were so frightened. I don't think they had ever been to a big village before.

As he speaks, we see the two Shanu leaders, one male one female, peer nervously around the front of the stage R. They whisper encouragement to each other as they come on, looking for signs of Tamasa people.

I was sent out to greet them, along with Eshobe.

The CONTRARY jumps out with a shout L, wearing a big mask, scaring them (and the audience). He leaps around noisily, then goes to hide behind SHALEMA, who moves forward to greet the visitor with bows, gestures, etc.

Well, they had never met anyone like him before. His task was to make guests welcome. He would show by his actions that we were not - warlike.

The CONTRARY peeps out at them from first one side, then the other, making loud nonsense noises with each appearance. The visitors don't know what to make of it. All start to walk around the stage together, as if in the direction of the village. We hear jungle noises.

It was the only way. I spoke to them, but they could not understand me. Their language was very different from ours.

The visitors are about to walk in a certain direction, but the CONTRARY stops them, lying down in front of them and miming that there is a huge snake out there, so they should go another way. They don't understand, and argue between themselves about what he must mean, but after he mock-bites them a few times they get the message and follow his advice, partly aided by SHALEMA, who leads them on.

When we got to the village, the feasting table was brought out, and our elder joined us.

Two VILLAGERS bring out a low table, and four stools. The ELDER emerges L, greets the visitors, and he and SHALEMA sit with them around the table. The CONTRARY sits in mock-offence with his back to the table on the floor. The villagers then start to load the table with all kinds of food. SHALEMA turns towards the audience.

Now I must tell you what these Shanu did not know. You see, it is our custom when we have visitors to make our feasts truly magnificent. It is our tribute to the Earth Mother, to show her fruits in great abundance. Therefore we bring out everything we have. All goes on the table. Of course we do not expect everything to be eaten. It would be impossible to eat it all. After the meal is over, we take up what is left and give it to the children, or the animals, whichever is quickest to get it. That is our way. *(He gestures towards the visitors, who are looking at the increasing mounds of food in growing horror.)* But it was not the way of the Shanu. *(He laughs.)* We found out much later, when we learned their language, that at *their* feasts they do not think of the Earth Mother, but put out only as much food as is necessary. Their guests are expected to eat everything which is put in front of them. So naturally *(laughing)*, the poor Shanu thought that they had to eat everything we had provided. *(There is now a huge mountain of food on the table.)* They thought it would be disrespectful if they did not. So they began to eat - and eat - and eat.

The visitors mime great eating, taking a bit from each dish, and as they do the villagers come and take away these dishes, so that the mountain goes down. The CONTRARY watches them eat,

mouthful by mouthful, and expresses amazement as they continue, acting out the scene in exaggerated form with the other villagers.

Well our people had never seen anyone eat so much. And when they saw there was less food on the table, of course they went out to fetch more, for the table at the end of the meal must always be full.

The villagers bring on more food.

The Shanu nearly died when they saw yet more food coming. They must have thought we were going to kill them by eating. And our people thought them the greediest people we had ever seen, that they should keep eating so.

VILLAGERS, ELDER and CONTRARY are now standing around the visitors, not quite believing that they can manage another mouthful, and cheering them on. But the visitors carry on manfully, thinking that the Tamasa are wanting them to say thank-you for each dish, and miming their thanks, but with decreasing enthusiasm. Suddenly, they break off and rush off L. The CONTRARY follows, then returns, miming that they have been violently sick. Everyone laughs, and the table and stools are carried out. It has been a good day. Everyone leaves L except SHALEMA, who looks after them, then slowly walks back to where MIRANDA is, ageing as he does so.

The first visit of the Shanu was never forgotten. Ever after we called them fafaani - the great eaters. And we took care never to visit their village if we were hungry.

He sits down opposite MIRANDA.

The next day our Matu spoke to me, and said I must tell the story of the poor Shanu to the whole village, and I did so, and everyone thought it was a fine story, and at each big feast I had to tell it again. The story would grow, of course. By the time I had told it three times, there were a hundred Shanu eating for a whole week.

MIRANDA (*laughs*): I'm surprised there weren't a thousand by now.

SHALEMA (*smiling*): Maybe a thousand.

MIRANDA: But would you tell such stories again - to Derek - so that others can hear them, and remember the ways of the Tamasa?

SHALEMA: The ways of the Tamasa. And the ways of Shalema Maneshi.

SHALEMA's face falls, and he becomes silent, handling the memento on the table. The ELDER appears front L, and calls up to him. While the ELDER talks, SHALEMA reacts as if he is remembering. MIRANDA thinks at first that SHALEMA is talking to her, then realizes he isn't. SHALEMA hears only the ELDER, whom he seems to find in the memento. During this dialogue, the ELDER comes slowly closer to SHALEMA, and when he reaches him, he holds his head in his hands, cradling him, as SHALEMA is doing to the memento. At that point the ELDER ceases talking aloud, and SHALEMA's monologue speeds up. The anthem begins very quietly during this sequence.

ELDER: Washunataka tadewe.

SHALEMA: Sanshaa, what have I forgotten?

MIRANDA (*reaches out and puts her hand on his arm*): Miranda. It's Miranda. (*She thinks he's talking to her, then realises he isn't.*)

ELDER: Cheka mawaale nitamasa che tamasa jebu.

SHALEMA: The Tamasa have always been a special people.

ELDER: Mavusitu kaasha naalazuwelo puna.

SHALEMA: Their ways must be kept alive.

ELDER: Cheka lutaka chutepedaka.

SHALEMA: That was my task.

ELDER: Tipamari tamasajiwe, nonaalawelo nodilaanara nomaanara.

SHALEMA: To remind my people of the ways of the Earth Mother.

ELDER: Che kakedashi che gube saafu rawejuwe kazaanewe.

SHALEMA: Your shame is as a small stone on the bed of the river.

ELDER: Shilanata kaasha jeme nofefuwelo no.

SHALEMA: You must think only of the children now.

ELDER: Jobesi kaasha fefulo sa ripetisi ratalake-shiwe, ripetisi ramaafe-zuzushiwe.

SHALEMA: The children must learn that when they walk on the land, they walk on their own flesh.

ELDER: Che talemilo lizuwe no, na dunasi kaasha su zuwe life-fu-zuzuwelo.

SHALEMA: The secrets are theirs alone, and they must pass them on to their children.

The ELDER reaches SHALEMA.

SHALEMA: But when all the children are gone, to whom shall we tell this truth? When the people are about to die, to whom shall we go? When the last speaker is about to die (*beat*), to whom must he speak?

SHALEMA and MIRANDA speak a few words together slowly, without either realizing the other is speaking.

MIRANDA: Others must take care of the stories now. They must live on.

SHALEMA: Others must take care of the stories now. They must live on. Others must listen, and learn to make the stories their own.

He looks at MIRANDA, and puts out his hand to touch her arm, as she is doing to him.

SHALEMA: You must teach the children how to listen. How to listen to the landscape.

The ELDER leaves SHALEMA, and walks over to MIRANDA, putting his hands above her head by way of blessing. She doesn't react, but SHALEMA seems to see it.

SHALEMA: You will teach the children how to listen. (*Pause.*)

MIRANDA (*gently*): Shall I ask Derek to visit you again?

SHALEMA: No, I must go to him. I have harmed him. The journey is mine.

The anthem swells, as they get up and leave the room together, the ELDER watching them go. The room darkens.

2.3

An hour later. DEREK is sitting at his desk, writing a letter. The fan is on. He hears footsteps on the veranda, and he looks up at the door. MIRANDA and SHALEMA come in. DEREK can hardly believe his eyes, but before he can say anything, MIRANDA takes charge.

MIRANDA: Derek, a comfortable chair for Mr Maneshi. He's very tired. Have you got something which he could lean back in?

DEREK: Er - yes - I think so - but - hang on -

He goes out to the bedroom. SHALEMA stands by the desk, breathing heavily. He looks towards the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet, then sees Sarah's picture placed on top again. He goes to look at it. MIRANDA clears a space for the chair. DEREK returns with a chair-bed, which he is about to put up when MIRANDA intervenes, once again stopping him from saying anything.

MIRANDA: I'll do that. He needs a drink. Got something cold in the fridge?

DEREK: Sure. There's mineral water - and some beer.

MIRANDA: Stick to mineral water, I think.

DEREK: You too?

MIRANDA: Love some.

MIRANDA gets on with putting up the chair. DEREK goes out again. When the chair is ready, she helps SHALEMA into it. He settles down gratefully, and closes his eyes. MIRANDA goes over to the bedroom door, meeting DEREK as he returns with two bottles of water and two jars. They speak in low voices.

MIRANDA: He's not at all well.

DEREK: How did you manage to get him to come?

MIRANDA: Doesn't matter. I'll tell you later. Look, I'm sure he needs a doctor, but he won't have any of it. In the taxi, I thought he was going to pass out a couple of times.

DEREK: Why has he come?

MIRANDA: He wants to make a recording.

DEREK: But what about the taboo -

MIRANDA: History. Just get on with it. I'd like him to get home ASAP. I'm hoping Jason will be here before too long.

DEREK: I'd've gone over to his place.

MIRANDA: He insisted on coming here.

MIRANDA pours SHALEMA a drink, and puts it on the desk. She has a drink herself. DEREK starts to get his tape recorder ready. He plugs it into the wall socket, then looks around for a tape.

DEREK: Shit. Miranda, I've no tapes.

MIRANDA: What? You must have.

DEREK (*shakes head*): He burnt the lot, blank ones, everything.

MIRANDA: You sure?

DEREK: I know how many tapes I had. They're all gone. (*beat*) Council office got any?

MIRANDA: I might catch Jason. (*She telephones and waits.*) Come on, come on. (*Pause.*) Damned answerphone. Yeah all right, Jason, I heard you! (*She puts the phone down.*)

SHALEMA coughs painfully. MIRANDA looks at him, then at DEREK, then at her bag. She makes a decision, rushes over to the bag, picks it up, then seems to change her mind, holding the bag to herself. She slowly opens the bag, takes out her tape, and holds it to herself. DEREK is looking at SHALEMA. There is a pause, as she makes up her mind.

MIRANDA (*slowly*): I've got a tape you could use.

DEREK (*turns and sees*): What?

MIRANDA: I - I just happened to have it with me.

She offers it to him, and he takes it, but she holds on to it for a moment before releasing it. He puts it into the tape recorder, checks the dials, and presses the switches.

DEREK: Wonderful. Nothing on it, is there?

MIRANDA (*pause*): Nothing - important.

She stares at the tape recorder, moves towards it, as if changing her mind, then stops. DEREK doesn't notice, as he is making some quick notes, thinking what to do. SHALEMA opens his eyes and sees him.

SHALEMA (*weakly*): Ve nananta se, vala Derek.

DEREK: Shte fene maraafa, nangjata.

They clasp each other's hand. MIRANDA gives him his drink, and he takes some, then lies back again with eyes closed. She puts the glass back on the desk. DEREK pulls a chair forward, and tries to find a place for the microphone, but there is nowhere near SHALEMA's mouth. DEREK decides to hold the mike himself, but as a result the tape recorder is no longer in his field of vision. He uses his other hand as if to make notes on the pad, which is lying on the desk.

DEREK: Will you switch on when I say. I can't reach from here.

MIRANDA moves towards the machine.

DEREK: No, not the machine. Battery's dead. At the socket.

She goes to the wall, crouches down, and waits.

DEREK: O.K.

MIRANDA switches the tape recorder on, and its light comes on. She goes over to check that it's running. Behind both of them, the fan slows down, then stops turning. Neither notice. She strokes the tape recorder wistfully, then sits next to SHALEMA, holding his hand. DEREK looks at his notes. They settle themselves in such a way that they cannot see the tape recorder light, which goes off and on as the fan behind makes some erratic turns. The fan picks up speed. The light goes out. Neither notice.

DEREK: Thank you for coming, Mr Maneshi. I am very glad to see you.

SHALEMA opens his eyes.

SHALEMA: The time is good now. (*DEREK goes to pick up his pen, but SHALEMA stops him.*)
For you to listen.

DEREK: But I'll need my notes to help me remember.

SHALEMA: You write things down only so that you can forget them. I have told you. You cannot hear anything if you think only of writing. Amantenari, Mr Derek - janema, sana che mundushi, linamantenariwe.

DEREK (*translating*): Listen, while there is time ... Amantenari - what's that?

SHALEMA: Landscape - the landscape - listen to the - landscape.

DEREK: But I thought the word for landscape was 'talake'.

SHALEMA: That is also landscape.

DEREK: What's the difference, nangjata?

SHALEMA: Talake is - what you see when you look only on the top, the - surface. Look deeper, you see amantemori.

DEREK: Amantenari.

SHALEMA: Amantemori. It is the seeing landscape.

DEREK: I see the landscape?

SHALEMA: No, that is different. If you see beyond talake, it sees you, the landscape, amantemori.

DEREK: But you said amantenari before.

SHALEMA: That is the landscape that speaks to you, and hears you also, when you speak with it ... amantejari.

DEREK: Ah, I see. (*Half to Miranda.*) There's no one landscape - or rather, the word-ending changes. (*To SHALEMA.*) Nangjata, can you say just amanta, or amante, or something like that, just by itself?

SHALEMA (*laughs weakly*): Why should one wish to say that? There is no amante. There is only - only -

MIRANDA: A relationship. It depends on your relationship -

SHALEMA (*nods*): A possessing. This is so for all things - the forest, the rocks, the river. For why should there be anything if it is not to be a belonging?

DEREK: They belong to us, you mean?

SHALEMA: And we also to them.

DEREK: So how would you say 'my landscape' in Tamasa?

SHALEMA: I cannot say this. I must say amantebishi - the landscape has agreed to be with me, while I live. This is what I would say for the land on which I build my hut. It is amantebishi.

DEREK: Can the landscape do all things that we can? Is there a way of saying that it feels something?

SHALEMA: Amantezeri. The hurting of the landscape, when the visitors come to steal from it.

DEREK: Amantezeri - the hurting. Does that mean it hurts us or we hurt it?

SHALEMA: It is both - for when people damage the landscape they damage themselves.

MIRANDA: Nangjata, can the landscape love?

SHALEMA: Of course. Amantelaari.

DEREK: So it can do all human actions?

SHALEMA: Not all. It cannot lie. (*He closes his eyes, very tired.*)

DEREK (*to MIRANDA*): I thought so. Nouns aren't important in Tamasa. It's just verbs, or verb-like words. They don't see the world as objects, but as processes.

MIRANDA: So 'landscape' isn't a noun?

DEREK: Well, it is and it isn't. It's more like a cross between a noun and a verb. The first part of the word is like a noun - it focuses on what you're talking about - and the second part tells you what's happening to it. I can test this out. If it's like a verb then it'll change its ending when we talk about the past or the future. Let's see.

SHALEMA coughs, and MIRANDA gives him a drink.

MIRANDA: Do you want to stop, Mr Maneshi?

SHALEMA shakes his head.

DEREK: Nangjata, if we were in your hut now, you would talk about the land by saying 'amantebishi'. But what if you were telling a story about something that happened in your hut last week? What would you call the landscape then?

SHALEMA: I would say - amantebika.

DEREK (*nods at MIRANDA*): And next week? If you were talking about what is to happen to the landscape in the future?

SHALEMA: Then I must say amantebide.

SHALEMA lies back again, tired, and DEREK and MIRANDA have a quick conversation.

DEREK: There you are. It's like 'landscape now', 'landscape then', 'landscape to come' - present, past, and future.

MIRANDA: But we'd call that sort of thing tenses.

DEREK: Exactly. Except that in Tamasa it's the nouns that seem to have tenses. I've come across this sort of thing before - but Tamasa seems to have more options. Look, let's leave this till later. I want to get as much as possible on tape before he gets too tired, and there's a question that's been bugging me. (*Slowly, to SHALEMA, who has increasing difficulty answering from now on.*) Nangjata, how does the landscape listen to us?

SHALEMA: It must.

DEREK: Why must it?

SHALEMA: I cannot explain it well in English. Sa taminushaka Ratu - When Ratu build his first tafeli - the family boat, he must kita nonaratiwelo - take - from the trees, the wood, for the building.

We see RATU come on L stage front, carrying a half-built canoe and an axe. AMAANA is there, helping. He crosses the stage, and puts the canoe off R.. He wants to get on with the job. She wants to cuddle. After a bit of horse-play, RATU goes to the edge of the stage and prepares to use his axe. During this, MIRANDA gives SHALEMA a drink, while DEREK watches anxiously.

SHALEMA: He must name the tree, before he strikes it, and ask permission.

RATU: Shonaara, ga panepi kena nodashiwe petafeli-bidewe.

DEREK: Has each tree got its own name?

SHALEMA: Of course.

DEREK: But how would you be able to remember all the names?

SHALEMA: You would listen.

DEREK: To what?

SHALEMA: To the sound of the wind in the leaves. There lies its name. And in calling to the tree, the tree has to listen in return. For the breath of the man's voice joins with the wind in the leaves. The call must be four times, each time louder than the first, to be sure the tree hears well.

(Laughs.) And for the fourth call, his new wife will do it, for if the tree is tired and does not want to listen to the man, it will not be able to ignore the voice of a woman.

RATU: Shonaara, ga panepi kena nodashiwe petafeli-bidewe. (Pause, then louder Shonaara, ga panepi kena nodashiwe petafeli-bidewe. (Pause, then louder.) Shonaara, ga panepi kena nodashiwe petafeli-bidewe.

AMAANA comes forward, pushes him out of the way, and gives a real bellow.

AMAANA: Shonaara, ga panepi kena nodashiwe petafeli-bidewe!

RATU picks up his axe and strikes off R. We hear the wood splitting, and see RATU bring in a piece of wood, which he begins to shape with a knife. As he does so, he talks, but in a low voice which we do not clearly hear.

SHALEMA: And every action which the man does to the wood, he talks about it, and the sounds from his voice, they rest in the wood, and go beyond into the forest, and remain there. (Pause, while we hear RATU talk.) The woman, too, she will sing to the forest, and tell it what a fine man her new husband is, and ask the forest for protection for the new boat, and for the children who will one day ride in it. And the sounds from her voice, too, they will enter the forest, and remain there. Ah, my voice is too old to tell you how the singing was, but I remember it well.

SHALEMA lies back, while we hear AMAANA sing a verse of the anthem. SHALEMA seems uncomfortable, so DEREK and MIRANDA try to make him more comfortable. MIRANDA gets a pillow from the other room. She gives him something to drink, and gets a handkerchief out to mop his brow. During the singing, RATU stops work to listen, and when AMAANA is finished, tries to give her a kiss, but she runs off L with a laugh, RATU throws his knife and wood off R and runs after her, calling her name.

Amaana's song

spirit of the land, talk to us

wijeli nonamantene, lijiwe nanemaa

keeper of the land, hear us

lizeri nonamantele, lijiwe lunemaa

listen now to the beating of hearts

dilamushilo jememe, rimadi janemaa

let your heart now move in ours

dilamudashi jememe, ujiwe benemaa

and we will sing to the forest again

na maluchide tamasa, limatanawe jaa

SHALEMA seems stronger. DEREK, gently, tries talking to him again.

DEREK: How do the sounds remain there, nangjata?

SHALEMA: They are guarded by the Keeper of the Landscape.

DEREK: But how do you know they are there?

SHALEMA: Because I hear them. All sounds are there. Where else should they go?

DEREK: But sounds die away.

SHALEMA: Sounds never die. There is never silence. We have a saying. Sa che nere paasiri da, che lumaashiri da. Even when there is no sound, there is no silence.

MIRANDA: So all the stories, are held, stored, in the forest?

SHALEMA (to DEREK): She understands. (*He lies back again.*)

MIRANDA (to DEREK): It's not crazy. The words and songs are like (*beat*) energies in their own right. Sounds are vibrations in the air, after all. We think of them as dying away, but why shouldn't there be some trace left? And why shouldn't these traces be in the leaves, or in the water, or walls, or wherever?

DEREK: Sure, but -

MIRANDA: It's like when we say 'Even the walls have ears' - except he means it, literally. He thinks that all knowledge is out there, all the history of his nation, fixed in a kind of permanent vibration - controlled by no-one, waiting only for someone to reach out to it. A sort of super-Internet.

SHALEMA interrupts them, talking to those he believes to be in the room around him.

SHALEMA: The singing has great power. You remember, Ananke? You sang the song of Teresha. Shudashaka dakawe shoka jere. It nearly made you mad. (*Laughs.*)

DEREK: What made him mad, nangjata?

SHALEMA: He was in the forest, planting seeds. And batashaka malutukawe shunede-jukawe - a song came into his head. A song he had never heard before. And it would not go away. Baaneshaka nolu baka da. It went round and round inside him. And when he came back to the village he told people about this. And they came to me, and I told Ananke maluta kaasha notashi malutushiwe luti, he must sing this song. It was the song's right to be sung. So he sang it to the whole village. And Tamare, who was very old, heard it from her hut. And she shouted out, sefe malushari malutukawe no-Tereshakawe, Who is singing Teresha's song? And she told us the song belonged to Teresha, who had been village elder when she was a girl, before Ananke was even born.

MIRANDA (to herself): The song was lonely, with no-one to sing it.

SHALEMA: Chineta-i jimaanatari notashi. You *do* understand. Laanema jatuwelo, Miss - Miss -.

DEREK: Love the words ... Can you remember his song, nangjata?

SHALEMA: No longer. To hear the forest sing, there must be - dolenu lidilaanara nomaanara - closeness to the Earth Mother. She waits for us to listen to what she is saying. And I am forgetting how to listen. Other things are getting in the way. Your language is getting in the way. I cannot hear the forest in your language. Lunepiri mifuda matanashiwe nunanetadawe - nunanetadawe - nunane - (*He seems to be rambling.*)

MIRANDA: But could *we* hear it, nangjata?

SHALEMA: It is possible for anyone to hear it, pu jobesi janesi jaala, if they learn to listen well. But you will not learn. (*DEREK looks at his watch, and SHALEMA notices.*) Even now, you do not listen janeta nida. You think only of the time. Ku sharata limundushiwe? (*He waits for an answer.*)

DEREK: Wh - what?

SHALEMA: Ku sharata limundushiwe?

DEREK (*urgently translating to himself*): Why - why to look, looking, mundu, mundu - time. Ah, right. Why am I looking at the time? (*To SHALEMA.*) Just - just to see - to see how long we'd been talking - to see how much tape we've used.

SHALEMA: I went into the city once, to send your tape away, and I said to Palu: Ku risharatari liwachushiwe. (*Laughs weakly.*) Ku risharatari liwachushiwe. (*Shakes his head, as he thinks back.*)

DEREK: Why do you keep on looking at your watch.

SHALEMA: And he said it was to see what time it was. But I told him che da sumana luta.

DEREK: That was not true.

SHALEMA: Sharatari motashi munduno-mundulo che da! (*Laughs weakly.*)

DEREK: He was looking to see what time it *wasn't*. (*He and MIRANDA laugh. This attracts SHALEMA's attention.*)

SHALEMA: He always had somewhere else to be, and he was so worried he would miss it he never made good use of the time where he was.

DEREK (*to MIRANDA*): He seems to be -

SHALEMA (*unaware of the others, erratic*): Janeta mifuda, pu shilاناتari mawaale tike, bu shilاناتari dege. Janeta, mesuta jeleshiri litatushiwe. Shunata kaasha lino lacherishiwe jeludashiwe. Pu lezutari mawaale difeta lanamaazewe. Teshuta mifuda milushiwe teze janesha lidiriwe nowe no. Mopiri luruweshilo ketika usadoshiwe luti no. Amantezerishi ne gojekatu liwara lizaa. Kitakatu ununu lamunduwe, na nimundu che - nimundu che ...

(*He lies back, breathing fitfully.*)

DEREK: God, I understood that, all of it. (*He puts the microphone down, then speaks automatically, as if repeating it verbatim, with his eyes closed*): You cannot listen if you are always thinking ahead, or thinking behind. To listen, you need to be present to the moment. You must feel at one with what is around you. If you are always trying to find the point of balance, you cannot point the mind so that it listens to one place only. In this city I see only broken patterns, a landscape pulled in all directions, too much taken up with time, and a time that is - a time that is -

MIRANDA: What?

DEREK: He didn't finish it. He couldn't remember the words. I remember, in an early tape, he had some problems like that. (*They look at him.*)

MIRANDA: Derek, I'm going to call the doctor.

DEREK: Maybe you'd better.

MIRANDA goes to the phone, and gets through to the doctor, but we do not need to hear exactly what she is saying. DEREK offers SHALEMA some water, but he does not take it. He uses his handkerchief to mop SHALEMA's forehead.

DEREK: Nangjata? Nangjata?

SHALEMA (*eyes closed*): Sefe nangjata?

DEREK: Who is nangjata? Mr Maneshi, you are nangjata. Che oti nangjata. Che oti nangjata.

SHALEMA (*eyes open*): Sefe nangjata? Sefe nang ... sefe nang ...

SHALEMA tries to sit up, and DEREK helps him. SHALEMA stares at him.

SHALEMA: Che da noku jobe-ta kaasha leshti tadedewe. Tipamanuta kaasha fa cheka no.

DEREK: It is not as if you have to learn something new. You have only to remember how it was.

SHALEMA: Lezumaa tipamanumaa fa cheka.

DEREK: Try to remember how it was.

SHALEMA: Zele chanasika tamasadaka naala-zukawe.

DEREK: Before your people lost their way.

MIRANDA puts the phone down and joins him.

MIRANDA: He's on his way. But with the traffic it could be a while. How is he?

DEREK: He's rambling a bit. It's all in Tamasa, but I'm following it.

SHALEMA opens his eyes, and sees MIRANDA.

SHALEMA: Cheta ranifu, Miss Miranda.

MIRANDA (*to DEREK*): What?

DEREK: He says you are welcome. Say it back, Cheti ranifu.

MIRANDA: Cheti ranifu, nangjata.

SHALEMA beckons her to come close.

SHALEMA: Laafupi femipi lidashiwe tadeshiwe, nasu Miranda.

DEREK: He has something he wants to tell you.

MIRANDA: You must tell me in English, nangjata. Remember, I don't speak your language. Sorry.

She puts her ear to his mouth. He whispers something to her.

MIRANDA: He said how long it takes to grow a language, and how short a time to let it die.

SHALEMA is beckoning again. MIRANDA puts her ear to SHALEMA's mouth again. He closes his eyes. She gets up, looking troubled.

MIRANDA: He said - he said the language is mine now. He gives it to me to look after. And - and he told me his name.

DEREK: His name? Shalema?

MIRANDA: No, a different name.

DEREK: Maneshi?

MIRANDA: No, I've not heard it before. Alaara. I am Alaara, he said. Alaara gives his language to you, to look after. (*She remembers.*) His secret name. It's his secret name. (*Dawning on her.*) God, he's passed the responsibility to me. (*beat*) I must talk to him.

MIRANDA moves closer to SHALEMA, and strokes his head. She doesn't really know what she is saying. During this speech, SHALEMA dies, but without any obvious sign.

MIRANDA: Nangjata, the Tamasa language will live on. It will live on. We'll use all the means we've got to tell the world about it. We'll take this recording, and make copies of it, and people will be able to hear how it was. And then Derek will write about it, and - and we'll - we'll put it on the Web (*she looks at DEREK, who nods vigorously*) - you won't know about that, nangjata, but it's a special way of telling everyone about - of telling everyone a story. We call it a web, like the web of a spider, because it links up all kinds of places, in England, and America, and in your own country too. It's like what you were saying, the knowledge of your language will be out there, on the web, just as proud as any other language. Like your forest, always listening. And people here will be able to make contact with it too, and read about *your* people, and *your* language, and listen to it, and (*beat*) it will sing to the forest again.

She pauses, hums the anthem refrain (as in Act 1 Scene 2), then sings a line.

Na maluchide tamasa, limatanawe jaa.

Another pause. She looks at SHALEMA, and stops stroking his head.

MIRANDA: Derek.

She realizes what has happened, puts her head to his chest, looks for a pulse. She looks up at DEREK.

MIRANDA: There's nothing.

DEREK puts his hands over his face, as if trying to wake himself up.

DEREK: You sure?

MIRANDA: You try.

DEREK shakes his head. He knows.

DEREK: We'd better call a doctor.

MIRANDA: Yes. No. I've done that. He's on his way.

DEREK: Oh (*beat*) yeah.

There is a pause. They look at SHALEMA.

MIRANDA: He looks so peaceful.

DEREK: I don't feel anything. I should be crying, but I don't want to.

MIRANDA: Nor me. *(Pause.)*

DEREK: Gee, it's hot.

He turns round and sees the fan is turning. It dawns on him. He keeps looking at it. He looks at the tape recorder – no light – then back at the fan.

DEREK: Miranda.

MIRANDA: What?

DEREK: Look.

MIRANDA looks, but doesn't get it.

MIRANDA: What's the matter?

DEREK: The fan's on.

It dawns on her.

MIRANDA: And the tape recorder?

DEREK: Not been running.

MIRANDA: Not at all?

DEREK shakes his head. MIRANDA doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. She does both.

MIRANDA: Sorry. *(beat)* The tape ...

DEREK: You can have it back. It's no use to anybody now.

He takes it out of the recorder, and casually tosses it over to MIRANDA, who cradles it. She can't believe it.

MIRANDA: I'm surprised you're so calm about it.

DEREK: Well, what's the point about getting fazed. If there's anything you pick up from Shalema, it's a piece of his calm.

MIRANDA: But it makes a nonsense of what I was saying, doesn't it? How can we help his language if we haven't got any of it to show. It's all gone. What sort of responsibility is that? What am I supposed to do?

DEREK: You'll have to tell it as it is. We can't do anything else.

MIRANDA: Yes, but with nothing to back it up - I mean, the sound of his voice, the rhythms he used. You can't capture that.

DEREK: I know, I know. We just have to write down what we can, and send it out.

MIRANDA: I suppose. Except we don't just write it down, Derek. We tell it. Remember?

DEREK (*wry smile*): Yeah, of course. We tell it.

MIRANDA: It makes a mess of your grant chances, though.

DEREK: I guess. Just one tape would've made all the difference. Ah well. It'll make a good story, and that might impress someone. (*beat*) Maybe we just tell the story, like Shalema would - forget the academic side.

MIRANDA: What - write a documentary, you mean?

DEREK: Sure. Or a novel. A play, even. I could play the lead.

They laugh together, and look at SHALEMA.

MIRANDA: We should get a sheet to put over him.

She gets up to go into the bedroom, still cradling her tape. As she does so, she sings the last line of the anthem again.

Na maluchide tamasa, limatanawe jaa.

DEREK: Miranda. (*She stops and turns.*) What's that tune?

MIRANDA: I don't know.

DEREK: It's in Tamasa. Say it out slowly.

MIRANDA: Na maluchide tamasa, limatanawe jaa.

DEREK: All will sing to the forest again. Where did you get it from? You only know a couple of words in Tamasa.

MIRANDA: Dunno. I must have heard Shalema say it. Or maybe from one of your tapes.

DEREK: But you're singing. He never sang anything. Never. Not on any of the tapes.

MIRANDA slowly walks back to SHALEMA and crouches down by him, taking his hand in one of hers while holding her tape in the other. DEREK, aware that she is special, stands over her, and puts a hand on her shoulder. They maintain this tableau as their side of the stage darkens, with a focus of light on them, and the anthem is heard distantly, not as loud as before. As the light disappears, the light in SHALEMA's room grows to full day. The anthem stays in the background throughout the next action.

We hear a key in the door to SHALEMA's room. JASON enters, slightly out of breath, carrying a big suitcase and a deep cardboard box. He puts it down and looks around. He makes a 'whew' noise with his lips as he sees the size of the room-clearing job he's been told to do.

He sees the mementoes, and picks one up, casually admiring it. He looks in the fireplace, sees the burnt tapes, picks some up and throws them back. He can see they're useless. He decides to get on with the job. He opens the suitcase, puts it near one of the bookcases, and quickly fills it neatly with a pile of bookst. He sees the mementoes and some other bits of pieces, and sweeps them without ceremony into the carboard box. He finds some old newspapers on the bookshelf and these also go into the box. He stops and looks around. He sees the tape-recorder, and switches it on, hoping for some music. Various noises of a person trying to get the machine to work. He decides to leave the tape run. As he leaves the room to take the filled case outside to his car, he hears

Shalema's voice begin his speech. He pauses, doesn't recognise it, shakes his head, and carries on outside. The anthem increases in volume throughout the speech. The chant is always 'And he shall sing to the forest again': na malushade ba jude, limatanawe jaa.

SHALEMA (*sounding unwell, but trying his best*): Ah, Mr Derek, Mr Derek, I shall never learn how these machines work. (*Wavering volume.*) This one now. (*beat*) I am thinking now what people would say in my village if I went home with one of these. They could not imagine it. Hey, Ratu, are you looking? Look at this. Your nangjata lives in this machine! Tell your wife about that! (*Pause. RATU and AMAANA come on front L and watch SHALEMA, joining in the chant quietly.*) I have your questions, Mr Derek. You have so many questions. Always questions. I shall do my best. (*Sigh as we hear him sitting down.*) Oh, Matu, Sanshaa, you would never have thought this. None of you would. (*Breathing with difficulty.*) Cheka memaalaka nijaaalaka. All things shall be well. Cheka memaalaka nijaaalaka. (*The ELDER, MATU, and the GRANDMOTHER, come on front R, and watch SHALEMA, joining in the chant.*) And you, Eshobe, what do you think, eh? This is a match for you. This is a match for you. (*He rambles ad lib under the chant, but we do not hear what he is saying.*)

The CONTRARY leaps on, at the name of Eshobe, digs the others in the ribs, etc., then settles in the middle, joining in the chant. The tape of SHALEMA repeating the last phrase can no longer be heard above the chant, which is now a swaying, clapping rhythm, celebrating the language. Others join in ad lib, including backstage people, who might appear at the side of the stage, auditorium ushers, and the audience (if so moved), welcomed by the CONTRARY. Everyone should be trying to say the Tamasa words. DEREK and MIRANDA appear CS, as if attracted by the noise, and join in.

After a while, the villager voices start a different chant, of nangjata, nangjata, and this gradually dominates over the forest chant, which dies away. The villagers slowly join hands, still quietly chanting nangjata, and turn towards the tape recorder, where Shalema is now heard, speaking with great difficulty.

SHALEMA: I don't know ... I don't know ... I cannot seem to think today, Mr Derek ... I cannot answer your questions today ... Maybe tomorrow ... Maybe tomorrow ...

We hear him get up from the chair and switch the tape recorder off. The villagers stop chanting (but the anthem continues) as JASON comes back in with the suitcase empty again. He realises the tape recorder is still going. He stops it, sees the empty tape box next to the recorder, and automatically takes out the tape to put in it; then he throws it casually into the cardboard box. He carries on with the books, taking a pile of large dictionaries and dumping them in the cardboard box, one after the other, as the room slowly darkens. Each book is a shovelful of earth on a grave. The heartbeat anthem stops. The watchers remain immobile, desolate, aware of their impending oblivion, as they disappear into the final blackout.

Living On (synopsis)

Act 1 (c.1 hr 25)

Scene 1 (c. 25 mins)

We see Derek Lloyd, a British linguist, arriving at his rented house in the suburbs of a city somewhere in the tropics. He is here for a month, to complete his work on the language of Shalema Maneshi, who now lives in the city. Derek first met Shalema the year before, and has since obtained regular data from him by exchanging tapes, courtesy of the British Council office in the city.

Derek encounters a dilapidated apartment, with unpredictable electricity services, shown by the erratic movements of a large fan. Miranda James from the British Council arrives as he is unpacking, bringing some mail. There is a letter from Shalema, saying that he does not wish to continue with the sessions. This is a disaster for Derek, as he was relying on this final session to safeguard the grant funding his work back in London, which is under immediate threat from a new round of university cuts. Shalema is the last living speaker of his language, and a full report on him would have given Derek the evidence he needs to convince others of the importance of this kind of work.

Derek tells Miranda a bit about Shalema, and they discuss the problem. He plays her an extract from one of his tapes. As he does so we see Shalema in his apartment, enacting the session recorded on the tape. He is obviously not in good health. Shalema tells us something of his role in his village, and we see him at work as he recounts an engagement ceremony between two villagers from some years before. He becomes part of the ceremony, which is played out before us, with the villagers present, and we hear the anthem which recurs throughout the play. We also hear Shalema's mother tongue, with Derek interpreting. The recounting of the ceremony breaks off suddenly, because Shalema finds he cannot remember a word in his own language, and we hear him reflect on what is happening to him.

Miranda suggests they visit Shalema, to try to persuade him to carry on, and they agree to go the next morning. She will arrange for Jason, who acts both as a driver for the British Council and as a language laboratory technician, to take them. Miranda finds Jason a bit wearing, but he does do his job efficiently. As she leaves, we hear the anthem bridging to the next scene.

Scene 2 (c. 30 mins)

The next day. Jason arrives with Miranda to pick up Derek. Derek is late up, so they talk about the problem of dying languages while he gets ready. He tells them about the latest report which indicates that half the languages of the world are dying. Jason doesn't impress Derek much by his reactions. As they leave for Shalema's, there is an anthem link.

When they arrive, they pause outside Shalema's house, and Derek gives Miranda an indication of what happened in Shalema's village. Shalema is reluctant to see them, but he does so, and Derek tries to persuade him to change his mind. He will not do so, but at least they manage to get him talking about his feelings. An empathy develops between Miranda and Shalema. He tells them that he was always taught his stories are sacred, and should never be told to outsiders. By talking to Derek during the year he has inadvertently mentioned some of these stories, and has broken this taboo, and this should not have happened. It also emerges that, as the last speaker, he is scared of letting his language down. As he reflects on the stories, he recounts what happened to his people: we see enacted the growing impact of the plague, and the death and funeral of one of his people, with the anthem sung by the villagers in full. At the end of the narrative, Derek realizes that he will not succeed in persuading him to carry on, and they leave. Derek leaves his address on a sheet of paper, in case Shalema changes his mind. But Shalema decides to destroy the tapes in his room, and he throws them into his fire (however, one – as is later apparent – remains in the tape recorder). Anthem link.

Scene 3 (c. 25 mins)

Lunchtime that day. They decide to stop off at Madame Koto's bar in the city to cheer themselves up. Miranda and Derek swap some stories about themselves, and start feeling brighter. Jason infuriates Derek by showing no sympathy for the plight of endangered languages. He thinks there are too many languages around already, and one less would actually be a good thing. They get into a lengthy argument, which Derek just about wins, thanks to Miranda. Miranda leaves, but Derek stays drinking Anthem link.

Scene 4 (c. 5 mins)

Derek's apartment, later that day. We see Shalema enter, badly affected by the long walk from his apartment. He is holding the address which Derek gave him, and which he will leave behind. He hears a member of his village condemning him. We learn from the monologue that there is another reason Shalema cannot carry on: he believes it is his fault that his village died. He has let everyone down, by not speaking well enough to the Keepers of the Land. Also, it was he who first met the prospectors and invited them to stay, to improve his prestige among his people. He finds Derek's tapes and notes, and destroys them. As they burn, we hear the anthem again.

Interval

Act 2 (c. 1 hr)

2.1 (c. 7 mins)

The next morning. Miranda has called to see Derek, and they are devastated by the discovery. They have found the piece of paper that Shalema left behind, and wonder why he has done this. They reflect on how it's all over for Derek's project now. Then Miranda has an idea: she asks Derek if he'd be prepared to start again, if she could get Shalema to do some more recording. Derek agrees, as he has no other option. He is puzzled about what she intends to do, but she won't tell him. Anthem link.

2.2 (c.20 mins)

Later that morning. Miranda arrives at Shalema's, and he lets her in. He is very unwell, after his double walk. She tries to ask him to help, but finds it easier just to play a tape recording which she always keeps with her. It is of Miranda playing happily with her child, who died some years before. They listen to it together, and she tells Shalema of the events surrounding the death. The child is living on through a tape, and so could Shalema's language. Shalema is moved by the recording, and the happiness of the child reminds him of a time when his village was visited by people from a neighbouring village. He tells the story of the way they feasted together, and the event is enacted, with the Contrary and others involved along with him. The elder reminds him that there is a time when the taboo does not apply, and the stories can be passed on - if ever the Tamasa people are at risk of dying out. That time is now. Miranda and Shalema leave together, to return to Derek's. Anthem link.

2.3 (c. 30 mins)

Later that day. Miranda and Shalema arrive at Derek's. They are worried about Shalema's condition, but Shalema refuses to see a doctor. He wants to get on with the recording. They find him a chair bed to lie on. Derek finds he has no tapes, so Miranda sacrifices hers. He plugs his recorder in, and the session begins. Almost immediately the fan behaves erratically then picks up speed, indicating that the electricity supply to the tape recorder is off. The light on the recorder goes off, but Derek and Miranda are too intent on Shalema and do not notice.

Derek's questions give some further insight into Shalema's language, and the way the Tamasa think. They see the landscape as living, capable of reacting to human behaviour in the way humans do to each other. To illustrate how the landscape listens, Shalema tells of an occasion when Ratu and Amana were building their first family boat, and we see it enacted. He also tells a story of how songs seem to have independent existence, capable of being heard by people from later generations.

Shalema is now very unwell, and he loses control of his English. Increasingly we hear Tamasa used. Derek finds he can understand what Shalema is saying. Shalema gets more confused, and even questions the name which has been the hallmark of the play - nangjata. Miranda decides to call for a doctor. Then Shalema tells Miranda his secret name, and passes the authority to look after the language on to her. She tells him that his language is living on - especially through the Web, where his texts will be transcribed. The whole world will be able to read them. And his words will be heard again in his own country, where they belong. He dies at this point.

Derek and Miranda see the fan, and discover that the tape recorder hasn't been working. Miranda gets her tape back, unharmed. But they have nothing of the language now. They accept it, and agree to do what they can to tell others about it. Miranda finds herself singing a fragment of the anthem, and Derek points out that she has not heard it before - it wasn't on any tape.

Derek and Miranda form a tableau around Shalema as their side of the stage darkens. Anthem link. We see Jason arriving at Shalema's apartment, under instructions to clear the room. He starts filling a suitcase and a

box with stuff, and turns on the tape recorder. We hear Shalema's voice, in one of Derek's recordings, but it is of no interest to Jason, who takes the suitcase out to his car. While he is gone, we hear Shalema telling his people about the magic of the tape recorder, and asserting that 'all things shall be well'. As he names his people, we see them gather on the stage. They begin singing the anthem, which becomes a funeral hymn in honour of the language. Everyone joins in, and Derek and Miranda seem able to observe the celebration. The people slowly join hands, as they chant his title, nangjata. We hear Shalema (on tape) not well, and unable to carry on his recording session. The villagers fall silent. Jason returns, to carry on his job. He switches off the recorder, takes out the tape and dumps it unceremoniously in the box. He piles books into the box on top of the tape. The people watch, as the stage becomes black.