

# THE JUDAS WEB

(A PLAY)

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a Nigerian drama play

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### **Synopsis**

The Play *The Judas Web* outlines the primary ills, which has bedevilled Nigeria – and in extension, Africa – for decades. And it adroitly captures in fiction, some of the key, and of course unscrupulous, characters that – through constant abuse of their various positions of power – are pointedly responsible for these evils.

These power-drunk individuals are the real enemies of State, who will stop at nothing to protect and maintain their selfish and perverted interests.

But their empire of gold soon crumbles – as the operatives of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) – Nigeria’s foremost anti-graft agency – duly brings them to *overdue* book.

*The greatest threat to freedom is the absence of criticism.*

– Wole Soyinka

*The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making, or wooing of it, the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.*

– Francis Bacon

*If you want to test a man’s character, give him power.*

– Abraham Lincoln

## Characters

THE POET  
OIL MINISTER  
OIL MAGNATE  
POWER MINISTER  
POWER MAGNATE  
EFCC CHAIRMAN  
TOP EFCC FIELD AGENT  
BARBER  
CUSTOMER  
SELLER  
BUYER  
1<sup>st</sup> BOY  
2<sup>nd</sup> BOY  
GIRL  
TENDER BOARD CHAIRMAN  
TENDER BOARD SECRETARY  
CONTRACTOR/UNDERCOVER EFCC FIELD AGENT  
OTHER EFCC FIELD AGENTS

### THE POET

*There is a blackout on stage. Soft drumbeats, at intervals, can be heard in the background. Gradually the beats grow louder and louder and louder – almost deafening. And then it abruptly stops. Everywhere is quiet, dark and quiet – as if the night is dead. Suddenly the spotlight comes on and centres on the POET. He is dressed in Buba and Sokoto\* – dipped in a mixture of leaf and snow. A matching and fitted cap sits grandly on his head, while his feet readily host an equally matching pair of sandals. His neck, wrists and ankles are meticulously graced by a variety of exquisite and colourful beads. He is seated on a low stool; his expression, doleful. He sighs, sucks in some air and verbalises, in a rather melodious voice, his beautiful piece of imaginative writing:*

\*traditional top and trousers

**NATIONAL PLAGUE**

*Our beloved nation trudges  
Up the slippery scarp of regression,  
Circling blindly on a mission  
While lacking due perception.  
Can we really seek solution  
Without genuine conception?  
Or doggedly pursue our vision  
Without detailed confirmation?*

*Our people are lost  
In the blinding field of confusion;  
Our leaders having enormously failed  
To make the requisite impression.  
Truly, a plan bereft of utter execution,  
Is surely not the way  
To run this Federation.*

*Our country remains soused in depression;  
Our state, where decisive decisions normally sails  
Through – minus required consultation.  
These masters of corruption  
Should expect neither unalloyed co-operation  
Nor affection from almost all the  
Population stationed in each jurisdiction.*

*The wail for general attention,  
Constantly falls on the sealed  
Ears of the servants in each position.  
Painfully, we, the objects of derision,  
Remain victims of circular manipulation –  
Darkly reflecting that we gave them authorization,  
Through each tainted election.*

*(Lights fade)*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene I**

*Lights come on to show a BARBER's shop. It's morning. The BARBER, a young man in his late twenties, is busy arranging his barbing implements when a CUSTOMER walks in. The young BARBER quickly wraps up his arrangement routine and addresses the CUSTOMER.*

**BARBER:** *(pleasantly and with a smile)* Good morning, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** *(also with a smile)* Good morning, my young man. How are you?

**BARBER:** Fine sir. Thank you for asking. *(He ushers the CUSTOMER into a seat facing a large, horizontally positioned mirror. He continues)* How do you want it, sir? Do you want me to barb your hair, or trim your moustache, or do both?

**CUSTOMER:** *(considers briefly)* Hmm...I want you to do both.

**BARBER:** *(deftly wraps a piece of cloth around the CUSTOMER's neck, chest and shoulders)* Let me quickly switch on the generator, sir. I'll be back in a jiffy.

**CUSTOMER:** That's all right. *(The BARBER, after a few draws of the rope, starts the generator – popularly, and locally, known as 'I pass my neighbour.' He returns, and is about to commence work on the CUSTOMER's head when the CUSTOMER seems to remember something)* By the way, my young man, how much is your service?

**BARBER:** It's four hundred naira, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** *(raises his eyebrows in surprise)* Four hundred naira...are you serious?

**BARBER:** *(briefly hesitates and considers how best to explain the situation)* Well, sir...er that's the charge whenever we use the generator to do our job.

**CUSTOMER:** *(still surprised)* I don't understand. What do you mean by: we?

**BARBER:** By that, sir, I mean the Barbers Association of this community.

**CUSTOMER:** Oh...I see. So it's a collective thing.

**BARBER:** Yes, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** Ah...but the price is on the high side, my young man.

**BARBER:** Actually, sir, that's attributable to the recent increase in the pump price of fuel; and the rather unfortunate epileptic power supply. Sir, you won't believe that our area have not had light in the last five weeks.

**CUSTOMER:** *(taken aback)* My goodness!...that's terrible... I mean, I really understand what you're saying...er... where I reside we're given light every three days. And it doesn't even last for twenty-four hours on each day. But talk about not having light consecutively for five weeks...now, that's simply pathetic. *(Gestures to the BARBER to commence barbing)* And as for the current hike in the price of fuel...it's nothing short of barbaric; and the so-called palliatives in place are nothing to write home about.

**BARBER:** *(nods in agreement)* It is very regrettable sir, that a country as immensely blessed as ours has continued to wallow in the mire of hardship. As expected, organised labour has given the Federal Government, and all the parties involved, a 10-day ultimatum to revert the pump price to what it was – or face an indefinite, nationwide strike.

**CUSTOMER:** Hmm...yes, of course...that's the appropriate thing to do. But, you see, the real problem, my young man, is bad leadership, nothing more. It's our bane, really. At this stage I'm inclined to believe that there's something, perhaps more spiritual than physical, fundamentally wrong with the leadership of this country. It seems there's a cyclic curse on our great nation that as long as it exists it will remain an object of disdain in the hands of a continuous stream of dark handlers.

**BARBER:** *(grins as he recalls a thought)* A friend of mine suggested that – aside from asking for divine intervention, or organising political debates – anyone vying for any political office in this country, including that of the president, should be subjected to a polygraph test, prior to election. Naturally, the idea is to determine, before hand, whose interest the contestants are out to serve – theirs or the nations.'

**CUSTOMER:** *(guffaws)* That's not a bad suggestion, you know. I believe if it is scrupulously done, it may just work... *(he pauses and reflects)* But then there's no guarantee that the results of such a test won't be doctored at the end of the day – should we decide to adopt the concept of polygraph testing anyway.

**BARBER:** *(a bit muddled)* How will the results of the test be doctored, sir?

**CUSTOMER:** *(laughs quietly, shaking his head from side to side)* My dear, young man...we're talking about Nigeria, here. In a cut-throat, 'do or die' political arena such as ours, anything is *more than* possible. The almighty naira, on centre stage, remains an irresistible drug for many, you know.

**BARBER:** *(nods with clarity)* I see your point now, sir.

*(Several seconds passes by in silence)*

**CUSTOMER:** *(to the BARBER)* I noticed you have a rather good command of the English language, my young man. It's quite obvious you're educated; that you went to school.

**BARBER:** *(carefully trimming the CUSTOMER's moustache)* Yes sir, I did. I'm actually a graduate.

**CUSTOMER:** *(looks at him with interest)* Really – what course did you study in school?

**BARBER:** Geology, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** *(quite impressed)* That's a good course, a really good course. If you don't mind my asking but...what *class* did you finish with?

**BARBER:** Second Class Upper, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** *(further impressed)* Not bad, my young man, not bad at all. *(Then he regards him curiously)* Please pardon my intrusion once more, but...what are you doing here...working as a barber?

**BARBER:** *(with a sad look)* Well, sir, I finished my higher education seven years ago. After that, I did my NYSC\*... and I've spent the last five years job hunting – to no avail. My poor parents have done their possible best to see me through school. Not wanting to remain a burden to them I took up barbing. The profit isn't much; and a good portion of it, as a contribution on my part, is used for the family's upkeep.

**CUSTOMER:** *(with a sympathetic expression)* I'm sorry to hear that, my young man. It's quite disheartening to see young and creative minds being channelled wrongly *(he reflects again)* Unemployment...no wonder crime is dangerously on the increase. Thousands of graduates are yearly churned out of our various higher institutions, with nowhere to adequately fix them. For years we've heard various governments passionately promise to decisively tackle the problem of unemployment among the teeming youths. But, as always, nothing tangible is done at the end of the day. In fact, the government even had the nerve to exploit its own people...its own youths...oh... it's abysmal.

**BARBER:** *(again recalling a thought, then smiles)* Sir, are you by any chance referring to what a former Eastern governor did some time ago?

**CUSTOMER:** *(bluntly)* As a matter of fact I am. I mean, what on earth was he thinking; asking the unemployed among his own people to purchase an employment scratch card, at such an outrageous amount – with no assurance of getting the advertised positions? It's simply crazy. And the most infuriating aspect of the tragic incident is that nothing was, or has been, done, to bring the dolt to book. Indeed, to say the least, this country never ceases to amaze me. It just never does.

**BARBER:** Sir, one can only pray that the present government, unlike the previous ones, will pay due attention to all the ills bedevilling our country.

\*National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) – a one-year service, by graduates of higher institutions, to the nation.

Like its predecessors it made many mouth-watering promises to the masses, prior to the last elections, to diligently deal with the nation's vast problems. One can only hope that such lofty promises don't, as usual, end up dead on paper. Unemployment is one heavy keg of gun powder that, if not critically addressed, will soon explode. *(He finishes barbing and trimming. He dusts off bits and pieces of hair from the CUSTOMER's head and chin, with a small, cube-shaped, foam, before removing the piece of cloth around his neck, chest and shoulders)* In fact, sir, going by what happened a few days back, I believe things *are* already getting out of hand.

**CUSTOMER:** *(curiously asks)* What happened?

**BARBER:** A seven-man gang of armed robbers was nabbed by the police, after a shootout. Surprising, it was discovered that all the thieves were graduates! Four of them even finished with First Class!

**CUSTOMER:** *(adjusting his clothes, frowns)* That's rather sad. However, sadder is the fact that the current government, which is over two years old, is yet to implement programmes that will remarkably improve our lot as a people. *(He pauses briefly)* As far as I'm concerned this government is doing nothing concrete to curb corruption. It's obvious that it has adopted the 'siddon look'\* approach – just like all its precursors. *(Admires himself in the barbing mirror)* You did a nice job, my young man, a pretty nice job. *(He brings out a thousand naira note and gives it to the BARBER – who searches for change)* Don't worry about it; you can keep the change.

**BARBER:***(quite grateful, even prostrates)* Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. I really appreciate the kind gesture, sir.

**CUSTOMER:** Please get up. It's nothing really. Er... *(he hesitates)* do you, by any chance, have your C.V here with you?

**BARBER:***(gets to his feet, surprised, but quickly regains composure)* Yes, sir, I do.

**CUSTOMER:** Good. Let me have it. I have a couple of friends in the oil and gas industry. I believe I'll be able to get you a good job through any one of them.

**BARBER:***(overwhelmed with joy fetches his C.V from a nearby draw)* Thank you very much, sir. God bless you, sir. God...God... *(stops as he is short of words)*.

*\*Deliberately ignoring one's core responsibilities*

**CUSTOMER:***(receives the C.V from him)* It's okay. You don't have to say anything. Really, your resolve not to give up, or remain idle, or dabble into any sort of vice, despite your inability to secure a job after years of graduating, is worth emulating. *(He inserts his right hand into his trouser pocket, brings out his business card and gives it to the BARBER)* Here's my card. *(The BARBER respectfully takes it. The CUSTOMER heads for the door entrance)* You'll hear from me soon, I promise. *(He smiles)* Have a great day, my young man. *(He walks out into the morning sun)*

**BARBER:** Okay, sir. Thank you, sir. Have a great day too, sir. *(He raises both hands up and offers an inaudible prayer of thanks to God. Lights fade)*

**ACT ONE**  
**Scene II**

*Lights come on to show a room in one of the hostels of a higher institution. Three undergraduate students, two boys and a girl are seated, discussing. The 1<sup>st</sup> BOY is sitting on a table while the 2<sup>nd</sup> BOY is doing the same on a bed beside the GIRL.*

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** *(angrily)* I can't believe the strike eventually took place – with just a week to the commencement of our second semester examination...after preparing so hard...for Heaven's sake, what was the School Management thinking? Why didn't they wait for us to round up the semester, with our exams around the corner, before jumping into the same ship with other higher institutions...it's...it's preposterous!

**GIRL:** *(sighs)* As much as I also find it quite annoying, I think the School Management did the right thing. *(Both boys are startled, and looks at her)*

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** And how exactly did they do the right thing?

**GIRL:** Well, I believe it's evident that if anyone should be largely blamed for the strike then it's the government – since it, once again, has reneged on most of the promises it made to the Academic Staff Union. That's wrong. For so long our lecturers have been denied all that should duly accrue to them. They're human for God's sake; and like everyone else they have their needs and limits. This frigid neglect by the government has spanned for many years. Admittedly, it is rather regrettable that we, the students, are the ones who feel the negative impact most – primarily in terms of extending our stay in School.

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** I don't think the government sincerely cares about our Federal and State higher institutions. A thoroughly look at the substandard academic facilities present in all our Schools says a lot.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** Yes, that's true. Clearly the private-owned higher institutions are given more priority over those that are government-owned. In fact, the way I see it, in the next couple of years the number of private-owned higher institutions will far outstrip that of those owned by the Federal and State governments, combined.

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** You're absolutely right about that, my friend.

**GIRL:** Hmm...and you know, only a few *top* government officials allow their children to school here – in the private higher institutions I mean. Most of them send their kids to the best schools, abroad.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** Well, they can send their kids to school on the moon for all I care; as long as the government, at both levels, squarely tackles the decay plaguing their *own* higher institutions, and our ailing education sector as a whole; and this can only be done by allocating 26% of the nation's annual budget to the education sector as recommended by UNESCO.

**GIRL:** I can't agree more with you.

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** (*bitterly says*) The question now is: how long will the present strike last? No one knows. If you guys recall, the last one went on for months.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** (*reflecting*) Yes it did...but truthfully, I wasn't angered by that particular strike as much as I was by the visible, nonchalant attitude adopted and exhibited by the then Minister of Education. If I remember correctly, during a particular T.V interview, the Minister was asked what his take on the ongoing strike was. The man insolently responded that the strike action was not his problem; that it *was* Nigeria's problem. And to worsen matters, while the strike was at its biting stage – while parents, guardians and other concerned Nigerians were busy imploring the government to resume dialogue with the representatives of the Academic Staff Union and put an end to the strike – this inane Minister of Education organised a birthday bash, worth millions of naira, for his wife! Can you believe that?! That, my friends, was the height of callousness. (*The other two readily concurs*)

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** The other day I read in one of the newspapers...where the Federal Government wooed Nigerian professionals, who are abroad, to come home and use the knowledge they've acquired for the benefit of the country.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** (*chuckles*) Given the present state of things I'm quite certain that even the government knows just how ridiculously impossible that is. I mean, what exactly are they coming back to? Where is the security? Where are the infrastructures? Specifically, and importantly too, where *exactly* is the power? Indubitably, coming home now for these 'brains' will spell nothing but catastrophe.

**GIRL:** Speaking of power, some days back I overheard one of our lecturers telling a colleague that the School Management spends over thirty million naira monthly on diesel to power, as well as maintain, the two gigantic generators situated in our school – owing to the erratic supply of electricity.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** *(whistles in astonishment)* Over thirty million naira! God have mercy. That's an awful lot of money being expended on a monthly basis.

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** *(regards the 2<sup>nd</sup> BOY with a slight smile)* I see you're quite surprised at that. Hmm...don't you know that there are higher institutions that spend more than that monthly?

**GIRL:** And let's not forget the current hike in the pump price of fuel. *(Sighs again)* It's egregious that a country such as ours, with an enviable abundance of crude oil, and the vast amount of money regularly realised from its export, still imports refined fuel. Isn't that worse than pathetic?

*(Both boys laugh)*

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** *(now solemn)* I know what you mean. But listen – what you guys need to understand is that there are people, a cartel actually, who, for years, have remained pleased with our decrepit refineries. This rapacious and unpatriotic group of individuals, in collusion with their foreign partners, own standard refineries that are stationed in various countries of the world; refineries, where our oil, our *blood*, is taken to, refined and brought back to us to buy at ludicrously high prices. These enemies of Nigeria employ, and handsomely pay, the citizens of those countries, to work on their refineries; and they pay taxes, in addition to other nameless monies, to the governments of those foreign countries where their refineries are sited, thus contributing, in no small measure, to the economic advancement of such countries – while our own economy remains below the grid of development – utterly necessitous. What's more; I seriously doubt the sincerity behind the privatisation of our refineries. For me, it's nothing more than a grand opportunity for these vultures – posing (or more specifically, fronting) as buyers – to sink their greedy talons deeper into the heart of our oil – thus adding to their loot.

**GIRL:** *(blurts out)* That's dreadful! What exactly do these traitors hope to gain from these atrocities?

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** What else but money, more and more of it. But the real question is: what has the government done – or is doing – to *decisively* deal with the situation – and in extension these national exploiters?

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** *(says with scorn)* For now, nothing solid. It seems these acolytes of Judas have very strong links in government; powers that, perhaps, brands them untouchable.

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:** I guess it is part of the leadership curse; like we're doomed to bad leadership, no matter what we, the masses, do to right things. I just don't get it.

*(There is a moment of silence as the students mull over all that has been said so far)*

**GIRL:** It's funny how the youths are constantly referred to as the leaders of tomorrow. But the thing is, how can that be actualised when those who have been in power since 1960 are still, one way or another, clinging tenaciously onto it; unabashedly refusing to let go.

*(The other two smiles)*

**2<sup>nd</sup> BOY:***(with the look of someone searching for apposite words to express a deep curiosity)* I...think a little part of our malady is linked to the fact that we, as a nation, have an *undefined* identity. *(His colleagues are fuddled, so he continues)* Er...well, and of course, to the best of my knowledge, every country of the world has a distinct identity as either a HE or a SHE. For instance, the United States of America is a HE. In fact, he is jocularly referred to as Uncle Sam. Russia on the other hand is a SHE. She is referred to as Mother Russia. England is also a SHE. But...I don't know *which* exactly Nigeria is. *(He pauses. His colleagues remain quiet, so he goes on)* Okay, check this out. In our national anthem Nigeria is referred to as a HE. The word 'Fatherland' denotes a HE. However in our national pledge Nigeria is referred to as a SHE. Two lines in the pledge read thus "...to defend *her* unity" "...to uphold *her* honour..." I mean, correct me if I'm wrong, but...is our dear country a *hermaphrodite*?

*(His friends laugh convulsively, but are obviously quite impressed with his observation)*

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** My friends, if we continue to reel out and dissect our beloved country's ailments then believe me we will go on forever. The truth however is this: Nigeria is our only country, our only home. It is a great nation – with the potential of becoming one of the greatest nations on earth – thus taking its rightful spot among the first world countries. Shooting *him* or *her* to such a glorious height requires unflinching revolution – both spiritually and physically. Remember, **'before kingdoms change for good, men must change for good.'**

*(The others nod solemnly. There's a momentary silence)*

**1<sup>st</sup> BOY:** Anyway, enough of that for now. *(He suddenly taps his stomach with his right hand)* Wow...I'm ravenous, and I can feel the worms squirming on the inside – which

means they're hungry too (*His friends also admit to feeling famished*) Then what are we waiting for? Come on, let's head for the cafeteria. (*The students troop out of the room. Lights fade*)

*Once again, the spotlight centres on THE POET – as he verbalises another of his beautiful piece of imaginative writing. His expression, however, remains doleful.*

### **THE LOOTERS!**

*The tainted ancients sit in high places,  
Proud at their contemptible achievements,  
Quite ingenious at the game of deception,  
Offering sweet-scented, self-serving programmes;  
Turning the masses into economic mops;  
Branded: an unworthy lot!*

*The living standard constantly drops  
With cleverly angled policy pits.  
Lying on our tables are plates of lies,  
As served by these despicable cooks;  
What an unqualified set of physicians!*

*Visibly, an assembly of hungry parasites –  
Brazenly gobbling up their dainty meals.  
To the denizens are cast charitable bones –  
Prized-trophies for dogs to lift.  
They leave the palace in disarray,  
After looting the people's gold.*

*Our taps epileptically trickles water.  
Our lights are virtually blind.  
Our roads are grossly afflicted by boils.  
Our state is plagued with helplessness.  
Our tomorrow is painted bleak.*

*(Lights fade)*

## **ACT TWO**

### **Scene I**

*Lights come on to show the residence of the OIL MINISTER. A visitor, an OIL MAGNATE, is seated and patiently waiting for him in his tastefully furnished living room. There is a silver-coloured suitcase on the floor beside the right knee of the visitor. A door suddenly opens and the OIL MINISTER, rotund, and clad in an expensive-looking agbada\*, ambles in. The visitor rises and both men shake hands and exchange warm pleasantries. They both sit down.*

**OIL MINISTER:***(genially says)* You told me over the phone that your flight touched down, in Nigeria, early this morning?

**OIL MAGNATE:** Yes, Your Excellency,\*\* I did.

**OIL MINISTER:** So...em *(suddenly remembers something)* I'm sorry... I...er... forgot my manners for a bit there. Please, what would you like to eat? *(His visitor declines – stating he had already eaten)* How about a drink then?

**OIL MAGNATE:***(considers the offer)* That would be just fine, Your Excellency.

**OIL MINISTER:** Good – so, which do you want...beer, whiskey, champagne...? *(The OIL MAGNATE opts for champagne)* That's an excellent choice. Akpan! *(No response)* Akpan!! *(Still no response)* Where is this moron when you need him? Akpan!!! *(A moment later AKPAN literally flew into the room like someone pursued by a host of demons)*

**AKPAN:***(somewhat breathless)* Y...ye...yes Oga.\*\*\*

**OIL MINISTER:***(with disdain)* Are you deaf or something...didn't you hear me calling you?

**AKPAN:***(flustered and apologetic)* Oga, sorry sir. *I dey wash my clothes for backyard. I no quick hear\*\*\*\*...* *(the OIL MINISTER cuts him short and instructs him to go over to a nearby mini bar and bring a phial of champagne)*

*\*African traditional top and trouser worn under a loose fitting garment that can be folded at both arms. It is usually worn by men.*

*\*\*The use of 'Your Excellency' is deliberate.*

*\*\*\*Boss.*

*\*\*\*\*Boss, sorry sir. I was washing my clothes at the backyard. I didn't instantly hear you...*

**OIL MINISTER:** I specifically want you to bring the green-labelled one I ordered from France a few days ago. *(AKPAN promptly fetches the bottle, along with two curvaceously-shaped drinking glasses; pours both men a sizeable measure each, and swiftly disappears from the room)*

**OIL MAGNATE:***(picks up his glass of wine, inhales the liquid's aroma, sips it, and briefly swills it in his mouth before swallowing it – all under the gaze of his host. The OIL MAGNATE's expression reflects both surprise and satisfaction).* Your Excellency, this wine tastes really good. I don't think I've tasted any wine quite like it in a long time.

