

# OROMAY- BA'ALU Girma!

Based on the true story of Ethiopian Novelist



By

**Aboneh Ashagrie Zeiyesys**

Directed by the author and performed at the Mandela Hall, Addis Ababa University for the closure of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual International Conference of CPVA, May, 2013.

## Characters:

**Ba'alu Girma:** *Novelist; Vice Minister of Information in the Ethiopian Military Government*

**Colonel:** *Top official in the Ethiopian Military Government*

**Captain:** *Top official in the Ethiopian Military Government; strong man of Mengistu Hailemariam.*

**Misraq:** *Secretary of the Colonel*

**Two officers**

**Year of the action:** 1975 E.C.

### Scene One

Place                      In the Colonel's Office

Time                        Before noon

### Scene Two

Place                      Wubie Bereha Street Corner

Time                        9pm

# OROMAY- BA'ALU Girma!

## Scene I

*An office decorated with a modern [leather] black sofa, hanging up in front of the wall is a portrait of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam. Below is an obese Colonel seated on a red chair wearing a military uniform. He calmly stares at the audience through the smoke of the cigarette he is smoking. He pulls out a pistol from a table drawer and then ejects four empty bullets and replaces them with new ones. He aims the pistol at the audience moving it from left to right laughing hysterically. When he pulls the trigger, a burst of heavy artillery is heard following an immediate black-out. On the back wall are successive flashes of the Derg's military parade, Mengistu's declaration of the Red Terror through throwing a bottle filled with blood, victims of the Red Terror and the Ethio-Eritrean war.*

*The stage light turns on and then enters Misraq, the secretary of the Colonel. She is slim, tall and beautiful.*

Misraq            Comrade Colonel, may I let in our Comrade Captain? He insists that he see you urgently.

Colonel            Let him in. Since when have you asked for my permission when you clearly know that my office is open for him any time?

Misraq            *(acts shyly)* I am sorry to hear from you such a remark Colonel. Your behaviour has changed much these past days. You rather bluntly tell me that you are bored of me.

Colonel            Come on Misraq! This is not the right time for such a joke.

*(Being annoyed, Misraq moves fast to the door to find the Captain already stepping in to the office. The fat, short and grey haired captain nervously throws himself on the sofa lying in*

*front of the Colonel. He takes out Oromay, an Amharic novel, from a large envelop and puts it on the table.)*

Captain            (*Gasps*) I read it again carefully line by line and page by page, and after that I was not able to sleep. I think my blood pressure and diabetes have risen way up.

Colonel            That son of a bitch has degraded all government top leaders indiscriminately. In this book he even dared to satirise Comrade Chairman Mengistu, our beloved leader. Everyone in town is busy reading this book. It's made us a laughing stock of the Ethiopian people. I can't imagine how Comrade Chairman will react to this book after reading it. God knows what will happen to me and you after a little while.

Captain            Comrade Chairman has already read it. I don't think he will react negatively to it. Ba`alu has

illustrated the character of Comrade Chairman positively. He praises him paradoxically both as a lamb and a black tiger, as well as water and fire.

Colonel I am afraid you have not carefully read the novel. I myself got the true meaning of the novel after one of our comrades, a leader in the Ethiopian Writers Union, advised me to read it critically from two dimensions, dissecting the covert and the overt meanings. Yes, indeed Comrade Chairman is praised overtly as an innocent lamb and furious brave black tiger, but when you observe the covert meaning, he is portrayed as an emotion-driven beast. A mindless beast that acts without reasoning. When you read the deeper meaning of Oromay you'll see that our Comrade Chairman has been depicted as an anarchist leader who rules without a strategy or plan. But are you sure that our Comrade has already read it?

Captain I am quite sure!

Colonel It may surprise you, but it was me who sent the novel to Comrade Chairman. Are you hundred percent sure that...

Captain Just a few minutes before the breakfast security report, I asked his opinion regarding the content of the novel. Before I completed my question, he started laughing continuously for more than three minutes... just staring at me. I am worried that our Comrade has not quite understood what Ba'alu has covertly written about him. What made him laugh; I presume it was what is written about me and our comrades. However, I am astonished by his memory of character identifications.

Colonel You mean he identifies comrades with certain characteristics?

Captain            Exactly. He said amidst his laughter that such characteristics refer directly to such and such a comrade. He thinks that he is exempt from the mockery. However, the case was different after I gave him a deeper analysis of the basic content of the novel.

Colonel            I can't believe you!

Captain            Believe me! He then turned instantly into a black tiger – to an offended black tiger.

Colonel            Which particular point triggered his anger?

Captain            What annoyed him most was the satirical defamation of members of the Standing Committee for Organising the Ethiopian Workers Party. He told me that he is in difficult position when handling their complaints.

Colonel            Any instructions given?



Captain            Don't ask me what you already know about Comrade Colonel. Sometimes you forget that we were in the same class at the school for intellectuals.

Colonel            Sorry captain...

Captain            Those top officials who identified themselves with immoral and vagabond-like characteristics in the novel are pressing very hard that Comrade Chairman takes the matter of Ba'alu seriously.

Colonel            I know that all members of the Standing Committee are infuriated with him. Most of them also suspect that you and I have cooperated with Ba'alu in publishing the novel. Some of them have directly ordered me to find out who gave permission to Ba'alu to publish Oromay. I hope you will grant me the disposal of your best men.

Captain            I have already invited Ba'alu to come here and confess. As we speak he is waiting in the office of your secretary.

Colonel            You mean he has come here?

Captain            Yes, but I doubt that he will tell us the truth. You know how arrogant he is. Rumour has it that he boasts that the permission for the publication was given to him by Comrade Secretary General.

Colonel            You mean Comrade Fikresellasié Wogderres?

Captain            That is what Ba'alu says. I don't think Comrade Fikresellasié would commit such a silly mistake though. He has denied that he gave permission to Ba'alu when Comrade Chairman confronted him.

Colonel            *(picks up phone)* send in Comrade Ba'alu *(puts down phone booth)*

Captain            I called him to come here so we could hear how he lies. I have got full information from my man working in Kuraz Publishing Agency, who has also analysed the entire content of the novel and concluded that anti-unionist political organisations had commissioned Oromay.

Colonel            I have no doubt that Oromay is the project of the EPLF and TPLF. They knew that Ba'alu could easily be enticed with beauty and drinks. He is fond of women and whisky. The secessionists have definitely exploited his weaknesses in order for him to write such an anti-revolutionary novel.

Captain            Never mind that he insulted us in the novel. How on earth could he expose both our own weaknesses and the secrets of our military

intelligence? The paradox is that the EPLF and TPLF have been provided with rich national secrets by our own Vice Minister of Information without even making a single effort!

Colonel            No wonder that Comrade Chairman suspects both of us as counter-revolutionary ...

Captain            What do you mean when you say “both of us”? Who and who?

Colonel            You and me; the two top government officials.

Captain            No way! Comrade Chairman would never suspect me as a counter-revolutionary. He may, of course, suspect you.

Colonel            What for?

Captain            He is aware of your close friendship with Ba'alu and he was informed that you were both

together at a small bar where Bizunesh Bekele sang. The fact that Ba'alu studied journalism in the USA and that you were trained by the CIA could make Comrade Chairman suspicious that you are both sympathisers of American Imperialism.

Colonel                   What are you up to? Even before the eruption of the revolution, Comrade Chairman himself used to drink beer with Ba'alu at the same bar you just mentioned. Also don't forget that Comrade Chairman was in the USA for military training. According to your logic then Comrade Chairman is also a supporter of American Imperialism. Is that what you are saying?

Captain                   Are you trying to incriminate me? This is indeed a serious case. Is it not a shame that such an ant-like thing as a revolutionary novel got published without our knowledge? Comrade Chairman was asking me again and again where we had been when the counter

revolutionary missile called Oromay was released.

Colonel            So, you've concluded that Ba'alu is a criminal?

Captain            Not only a criminal. He is a national traitor who deserves death penalty. Can I borrow that document?

Colonel            Which document?

Captain            The one analysed by your men.

*(Knocks heard at the Door. Misraq enters)*

Misraq            Comrade Ba'alu says he has an appointment with you.

Colonel            Let him in.

Misraq            Captain shall I bring you coffee?

Captain            *(Jokingly)* Thanks, I accept all of you offers.  
*(The Captain, attracted by beauty, follows her with his eyes as she walks back to the door. Misraq exits)*

Colonel            Captain, you are invading my territory. You better stick to your boundary.

Captain            I am just admiring nature. How on earth can you suspect me of dreaming to steal your personal property?

Colonel            *(Laughs)* I'm not surprised that you know my every secret. I bet you even know what type of food I eat.

*(He takes out OROMAY and two documents from the drawer and hands it to the Captain)*

Could you please go to my reading room and run it over. In the mean-time I will chat with

Ba'alu. You can order Misraq to offer anything you like.

*(Ba'alu enters. He is handsome: middle sized with clean-cut features and a light brown complexion. He is well dressed in a black suit and red necktie. He is a man of confidence. The Captain jumps up from his seat and walks out with disgust.)*

Colonel                    Good to see you again, Comrade Ba'alu.

Ba'alu                    *(Shakes the Colonel's hand)* Long time since we met. *(Jokingly)* It seems that we should declare another Red Star Campaign so that we can meet more regularly.

Colonel                    I know that you are fond of the Red Star Campaign because it has turned you into a millionaire *(jokingly)*. Is it not a paradox that the Red Star Campaign changes a communist



into bourgeoisie? I heard that your *Oromay* has become a bestselling novel.

Ba'alu            I wish I remained bankrupt and lived peacefully. Comrade Colonel, you know that my life is at a colder-sac because of the novel. I am sure you have read it?

Colonel            To tell you frankly, I haven't read it. I was busy controlling counter-revolutions that are mushrooming in every corner of the country.

Ba'alu            You have probably heard by now that Comrade Chairman is infuriated with me. You can't imagine how angry he was.

Colonel            No, I'm sure I can't!

Ba'alu            I am sorry that he considers me a counter-revolutionary. You clearly know that I am loyal to the revolution. I wrote *Oromay* not because my political stance has changed. I didn't mean

to degrade or to defame the revolution. I just wrote a socialist realist novel which I thought could contribute to the revolution.

Colonel Ba'alu, Comrade Chairman is a kind hearted man, what you are telling me and what he told me are totally different. To tell you the truth, he is happy for the caricature of the top officials. I remember vividly how he was dying of laughter when matching officials with their corresponding character in *Oromay*. They told me that you have also ridiculed me in this vein.

Ba'alu I never ridiculed any official. No one can produce any evidence to prove this. You can't find a name of a single officer mentioned. As a creative writer I have developed the characters despite the plot being based on the objective reality of the Red Star Campaign. Everything in the novel is my own imagination and creation. I am ready to defend myself in court on this matter. It is not my mistake if officials naively

identify themselves with unsavoury characters in the novel.

Colonel I totally agree with you. Our great revolution believes in socialist realism and freedom of expression. I don't understand why our comrades are so angry with you. What you did is not new. We all know you well; you've always spoken your mind and teased us with friendly jokes.

Ba'alu I had full trust in members of the Standing Committee when writing the novel. I particularly had full confidences in Comrade Chairman. But what has happened is the reversal.

Colonel I'm telling you Ba'alu, Comrade Chairman has loved your novel.

Ba'alu Loved my novel? Is that why he threw an ashtray at me?

Colonel            Maybe you met him when he was in a bad mood. I remember when some jealous writers and journalists attempted to create a gap between you and he, he often said, “Leave Ba'alu alone. I've known him well before the revolution.”

Ba'alu            That is true. We used to discuss matters related to the poverty of the Ethiopian people and the atrocity of the Imperial regime. But these days, he considers me a traitor.

Colonel            No He doesn't. What worries him much, though, is that everyone in the government complains about you.

Ba'alu            But he has already purged me from my position and my job!

Colonel            Never! Our Chairman does not have such a harsh heart to purge you from a job.

Ba'alu            You know all too well that I'm not lying. He even instructed me to stay at home. This is house arrest.

Colonel           Look! Didn't I tell you that he likes you? I myself would positively endorse his proposal. As you are tired of state propaganda work, it is advisable that you rest at home for months.

Ba'alu            I can't accept that. How can I stay in a cage like a beast just for writing a novel?

Colonel           May be he has another reason for that.

Ba'alu            He accused me of plagiarism. According to him, I've written *Oromay* with the data collected by military journalists and intelligence members. He accused me for robbing the wisdom of the Ethiopian masses. He believes that I've sold the historical treasure of the country in book form.

Colonel            In that case, it is a serious matter.

*(Misraq enters shining with a beautiful smile.  
She stares at Ba'alu to win his attention.)*

Misraq            Comrade Colonel, It is now lunch time. Small I  
wait or...

Colonel            Yes you can go. I will eat with Ba'alu. You have  
met, haven't you? I think I hear the voice of  
Comrade Captain. Let him come in and then  
please lock the main door from the outside.

*(She walks back to the door with an  
exaggerated movement of her hips. Ba'alu  
follows her with his eyes.)*

Ba'alu             For Heaven's sake! Please, help in making  
Comrade Captain calm down. I think he's  
furious with me. Did you notice how he  
ignored me when he walked out from your  
office?

Colonel            *(Laughing)* Oh Ba'alu! You shouldn't be disturbed that much by a joke you wrote.  
*(Captain enters. Ba'alu stands up in respect. Captain ignores him in anger and sits on the front sofa.)*

Ba'alu            Hello Comrade Captain!

Captain           Are you not ashamed to say hello to me after making me a laughing stock? How dare you write a sarcastic joke resembling my personality?

Ba'alu            Comrade Captain...

Captain           *(Disrupts Ba'alu in anger)* Don't call me Comrade from here on out. I and you can't be Comrades any more.

Ba'alu            Do you doubt my comradeship? Trust me; I will remain a revolutionary as I have been through out.

Captain           Is that why you made the members of the Executive and the Central Committee of the revolution a laughing stock?

Ba'alu            But I haven't mentioned any names of members of the Executive or the Central Committee in my novel. Please, just understand me as a writer of fiction with imaginary characters. *Oromay* is just a creation, not a direct copy of reality. I didn't write about men created by God, but by characters I've created.

Colonel           Alas! You have totally changed into an idealist. You had been a staunch communist, but now, you are intermittently mentioning anti-revolutionary words such as Heaven and God.

Captain           Are you still trying to be smart on us? Don't think that we can't read and understand such a dirty book even if we are not MA Degree



holders and a university lecturer like you were. Let me prove this to you. (*Turns page from Oromay*) Page 15 (*reads*) “Are you still on hung-over? You journalists... unless we stretch telephone wires for each of you at Jimma Bar and Hamlie 19 Bar, work can't be accomplished by you.” whose speech was this? Mine. The speech I delivered to criticise our drunkard journalists. After putting down what I said exactly in your novel and just to expose my personality you wrote this. On page 16 (*reads*) “When he laughs, his protruded fat belly and eyes laugh together.” you're referring to me exactly. (*Colonel laughs exaggeratedly*) Fine comrade! You have the right to laugh at me.

Ba'alu

Comrade Captain, the character who spoke the dialogue is Tedla Regassa, and you are not Tedla Regassa.

Captain            Though the name is not mine, all the characteristics are somehow close to mine. Shall I convince you with more evidence? On page 17... *(Reads)* "He becomes restless on every arrival of Comrade Chairman. He becomes restless and makes the others restless as well. He led me to the best rank of the protocol seats and introduced me to ministers, members of the executive and the central committee of the military Government." What do you say about this? Who was the protocol chief during the Red Star Campaign and wasn't he doing exactly what you write in here? Is it not me?

Ba'alu            Not you, Comrade. It is the fictional character.

Colonel           *(laughs wildly)* Comrade Ba'alu, what Comrade Captain has read exactly matches him.

Captain           It is clear that you mock us in order to satisfy secessionists and anti-revolutionaries. How on

earth could you ridicule the highest member of the Executive Committee – the elderly leader who is most respected, even, by Comrade Chairman... page 18 (*Reads*) “his face is very small. The scanty hairs that run in the middle of his bald head makes his face look like a pumpkin divided in two parts. He is very skinny whilst on the other hand his belly protrudes like a shaman's drum.” Do you really have the slightest bit of common sense? How dare you joke about this honourable man?

Colonel Frankly speaking, what bothers me much more is not how you've insulted us. Rather, the mistake you committed in your novel was highlighting the shortcomings of our revolution. Particularly, where you wrote about the inefficiency of the leadership and criticised the discipline of our beloved revolutionary army. You wrote as if we don't have any working plans like a disorganised body of anarchists. You portrayed us as brutal

and dictatorial, as people who are fond of grabbing and throwing others to the bottom of the pile. Don't you think you have boosted the psychological and moral stances of secessionists and counter-revolutionaries by exposing our shortcomings? What is wrong with every one suspecting you as an intruder or counter-revolutionary?

Ba'alu            My Lord, what did I say?

Captain           Stop being an idealist! You know that you have boiled the blood of all the generals, colonels and high officials of various ranks in the revolutionary Red Army.

Ba'alu            What bad words have I uttered about the Red Army?

Captain           On page 101 (*Reads*) "when a colonel instructs you to accomplish a task within 3 days which can't possibly be accomplished even in three

weeks, and after you tell them the truth they will pull out a pistol, put it on the table in front of you and say 'what did you say?' What can you do then? Your blood pressure immediately sky rockets..." Is there any equivalent paragraph written in the world that downgrades our revolutionary army more than this?

Colonel                    Comrade Captain, please go to page 120 and read the first two paragraphs.

Ba'alu                    *(Astonished)* What? I can't believe this! You told me you hadn't read the novel.

Captain                    *(Turns to page 120 and reads)* "The army is so sensitive that it turns mad at trivial matters and as a consequence indiscriminately punishes people in the harshest manner. The army robs people of their property. Sexual harassment and rape are considered the norm.

After shooting and killing someone, only then do they shout, 'Don't move! Who are you?...'"

Colonel            (*Laughs*) what a wonderful creature you are Ba'alu... "After shooting and killing someone only then do they shout 'Don't move! Who are you?'" Please continue reading Comrade.

Ba'alu             It is good to hear from you that you judge my work as a piece of creative writing.

Captain            Don't try to be smart again. On the same page you wrote "the army throws people into prison as it wishes. It kills without jurisdiction. It conducts mass killings at any time and buries the dead on the spot in mass graves. It is not because these people being chased, captured, tortured, jailed and massacred are anti-revolution, rather it is for mere reasons of adultery, bribery, personal grudges and vengeance. There are times when simple questions such as: is there money? Does he

have a gorgeous wife? How much birr did he withdraw from the bank today?... and others that evoke the murders of innocents."

*(Energetically smashes the table with anger)*

Idiot! Traitor! What more would an enemy say about us than what you've written!

Colonel            *(Calmly)* Comrade Ba'alu, by writing this, are you trying to disassociate yourself with the Red star campaign... that you are as clean as ... who was the one that said "I am not part of the killing of Christ"?

Ba'alu            Pontius Pilot?

Captain           Pontius Pilot and Christ are not our concern... Are you not ashamed to spread propaganda without any tangible evidence? Do you think our beloved Comrade Chairman gave you such a high post in the propaganda department to

propagate against our struggle and victory?  
You are a shameful person.

Ba'alu            (*calmly smiling*) Come on Comrade Captain. It is only when you smile and chat friendly that you appear to be a pleasant person. You do not radiate warmly when you call people names.

Colonel           Comrade Ba'alu!

Captain           Don't worry. Let him insult me. Didn't he freely insult and teas us in front of people in Asmara during the Red Star Campaign, enjoying himself when we shrank in shame.

Colonel           (*Laughs*) Comrade Ba'alu, he is very angry at you particularly with what you wrote about the Red Star Campaign. Your sentence that reads "The Red Star Campaign was a campaign of adultery waged against the women of Naqfa and Asmara" seems to refer to Comrade Chairman himself.



Ba'alu            This is a misinterpretation. You are pretty sure that I am loyal and respectful to Comrade Chairman and the revolution.

Captain            There is another thing on page 298, (*reads*) “thanks to the revolution, those who are incapable of working even as an assistant have been promoted to top ranks”. What do you mean by this? Who are these idiots who have climbed the ladder, reaching top government posts? Do you think that the military cap sits upon an empty head? Idiot!

Ba'alu            (*Laughs*) Oh! Come on Comrade. Please, don't throw bad words on me. Remember the good times we enjoyed together. You are forgetting our strong friendship.

Colonel            I don't like to see you laughing amidst such a serious conversation. By the way my brother,

which page was it that you wrote about laughter? I think it's on page 145.

Ba'alu            You say you haven't read the novel; but you remember everything in it including the pages.

Captain            On page 145 it says... (*Reads*) "There is a very dangerous person by the name of Tekesta. He is dangerous. Be fast to make him laugh ... a dead man cannot harm. In order to avoid a problem at the grass root level, the best alternative is to make it laugh".

Colonel            comrade Ba'alu, are you saying that anyone who creates a problem should be forced to laugh? In that case you are proposing that we make you laugh in order to avoid the problem you have created. You are sentencing yourself to laughter.

Ba'alu            (*smiles*) I don't believe that you are thinking about trying to making me laugh. Comrades,

even the slightest mistake would not make me laugh. I have already forwarded my request for forgiveness to Comrade Chairman. Please Comrades, I beg you all to pardon me for my wrong doings. Just give me another chance.

Captain            But you are begging for the death penalty in your novel, on page 319... *(Reads)* "I choose Addis Abba to be my burial place. I prefer to be buried at a place where flowers are in abundance and do justice to the name of our capital". How do you comment on this in relation to choosing your burial place?

Ba'alu            *(smiles)* Below what you read, I have also written, "No one can choose his burial place, even heroes."

Colonel            This is science Comrade Ba'alu. Nobody hates to be buried in Addis Ababa. However, the burial places for heroes are mountains, valleys, jungles and bushes. What a prophetic

expression...“No one can choose his burial place, even heroes”!

Captain            (*looks at his watch*) So then Colonel?

Colonel            Let us now stop nagging each other, and give mercy to Comrade Ba'alu because of our past friendship. Ba'alu, please calm down and feel more at ease. Comrade Captain and I will meet Comrade Chairman this afternoon and convince him to pardon you.

Captain            In the meanwhile, I advise you not to go out of your house. Those members of the Derg whose blood has boiled up in anger are looking to pepper your forehead with bullets, and I don't want to be suspected of making you laugh just because I am the most defamed person in your novel. Stay at home and wait there until we give you a call.

Ba'alu                Our proverb, “A policeman has no friends, and petroleum has no ashes” has turned untrue. You have now inspired me with a very interesting theme for my new novel.

Colonel              *(friendly)* As usual, you are going to write a novel on a theme that we gave you and then buy yourself whiskey to drink on your own.

Ba'alu                *(friendly)* No! No! I am even ready to cheer you with a drink as a result of *Oromay's* success, If Comrade Captain agrees. I will buy you bottles of any whiskey you wish as a gesture for my forgiveness.

Captain              *(Smiles)* Now I am hungry. If you want you can prepare yourself for a wonderful invitation tomorrow evening. But we offer you this invitation if and only if you promise to stop your mockery. Comrade Colonel, do you see it possible that Comrade Ba'alu could spill the holy water in order to baptize his crime?!

Colonel            *(friendly)* Captain because you are an intimate friend of his, Ba'alu knows you very well. Do you remember what he wrote about you on page 15? It reads something like this, "Though he often bursts with anger, he is not of such an evil nature. When he laughs, his teeth and eyes ...

Captain            *(interrupts with smile)* "... as well as his protruded belly all laugh together". I'll punish you with two bottles of whiskey for writing this. Now go back home and rest in peace. We will give you a call later.

Ba'alu             *(Walks to them and hugs them)* Thank you!  
Thank you!!

*(Ba'alu exits)*

Colonel            *(Looking into the smoke of his cigarette)* He said "No one can choose his burial place, even heroes." I appreciate this expression.

Captain            It's no wonder that you appreciate Ba'alu as you are not his victim like we are. The only thing he wrote against you is the sentence related to the resemblance of your physical appearance with that of the bourgeoisie class. He said "His face is oily like the face of the bourgeoisie."

Colonel            *(laughing)* Oh my God! Sorry. Oh my revolution! I am dying of hunger. Let me treat you to that recently opened restaurant. It specialises in a tasty raw meat dish.

Captain            Let us come to a conclusion first.

Colonel            Conclusion?

Captain            He has written, "it would be nice if one knows where he dies". He has also written, "I would be glad if I am buried in Addis Ababa amidst the flowers." He shouldn't know when he will

laugh, and he will never sleep amidst the flowers.

Colonel            Don't you think it is better to kill him alive without totally expiring him? You know what I mean. Let him die a thousand deaths whilst still breathing.

Captain            No! Quite the opposite!

Colonel            What time should he laugh then?

Captain            Not today, tomorrow night. The time gap is adequate enough for disinformation. From now onwards, we will spread a rumour that Baalu has run to unknown place to live as a monk. Our Comrades are very eager to hear the final results. The secret is just between the three of us. Now we can go and enjoy the raw meat for lunch.



*(Both of them suddenly pull out their pistols  
and fire at the audience. Satirical laughter is  
heard.)*

**Black out**

## **Scene II**

**The day after**

**9 pm**

**At the corner of Wube Bereha Street, Addis Ababa**

*(Misraq is seen standing underneath an electric lamp post wearing a miniskirt. Ba'alu walks towards her; he is in a disguise wearing a black hat, eye glass and a long overcoat.)*

Misraq            It is nice to see you again Ba'alu. You didn't seem to notice me when I gave you the light signal from my car.

Ba'alu             I did notice but I didn't want to follow you from the back for security reasons. Misraq, why is there such urgency to see me in a dark place like this?

Misraq            Ba'alu, I am your admirer. I like your novels particularly *Derasiwu*, *Kadmas Bashager* and *Oromay*. I just wanted to see you today in order to inform you that your life is at risk. I didn't want to tell you over the phone.

Ba'alu            I already know that my life is at risk. Can we talk about it in my car? This place is too dark and ugly.

Misraq            No, it is too risky for me to stay with you for any longer. The point is that Comrade Colonel and Comrade Captain are going to take a revolutionary stance against you. I advise you to cross the border to Kenya or to Sudan in order to save your life.

Ba'alu            But they told me that they have forgiven me for what I did.

Misraq            What I know is that they will take action against you.

Ba'alu            Thanks for informing me, but why are you telling me secrets from your office! Are you certain nothing will happen to you for doing so?

Misraq            I know it is dangerous for me but I want to do you justice because I believe you are innocent.

Ba'alu            I am surprised that you want to sacrifice yourself for an innocent person.

Misraq            Ba'alu, I am not doing this only because you are an innocent person. Frankly speaking it is because I really admire you. Don't you know that every woman who reads your novels falls in love with you?

Ba'alu            This is not the time for me to discuss love. It is the time to discuss death, and speculate its consequence. I have never felt fear of death in my life but at this moment I am engulfed with anxiety and fear... fear of departing from my wife Almaz and my children.

Misraq            I won't let you die. Let me drive you to the country side and help you hide in my relatives'

house. No one will suspect that you will be taking shelter in my relatives' house. You can stay there until the hot blood of the Derg cools down. In the meantime, I can arrange for you to get out of the country safely.

Ba'alu            Out of the country!?! Misraq, a novelist is like a fish. Just as a fish can't live outside a river, sea or ocean, a novelist can't live outside the confines of his society. For me, living outside the confines of my society is death. If this is the case, then I would prefer to die in my own country.

Misraq            Fine, then just let me drive you to a quiet restaurant where no one can trace us.

Ba'alu            Shall I go and lock my car first...

Misraq            Give me the key. I will do it for you. You'll be easily exposed in the street light.

*(Ba'alu hesitantly hands over the key to Misraq. She exits)*

Ba'alu            *(Staring at her from the back)* Why is it that I always obey any instruction given to me by a beautiful woman? Oh my lord! How ugly is the darkness? In spite of it life appears so sweet and urges you to crave for more days.

*(Light off. A sudden sound of thunder and a storm is heard in the darkness. The shrill voice of an owl is heard for a while. Then on the screen runs successive footage of the Derg's military parade, a bloody battle, dead victims of the Red Terror laying on the streets of Addis Abba, piled up, entangled bodies.)*

Ba'alu            *(Lights on)* No one can choose the place of his death. I am ashamed that I am thinking about death. Why should I? Death is inevitable and comes suddenly and unnoticed like a sneaky

thief. Oh why, oh why!? It is true that revolution eats its children like a cat. Oromay! Oromay!

*(Colonel and Captain enter from back stage followed by two low ranked army officers)*

Colonel            *(Smiling)* Oromay! Oromay! Comrade Ba'alu what is the meaning of Oromay?

Ba'alu             What is this?! Comrades, what are you doing here in this chilly and dark atmosphere?

Captain            Don't answer questions with a question. What does Oromay mean?

*(Ba'alu calmly stares at them)*

Colonel            You wrote that *Oromay* means 'The End'. But the end to what? To our revolution?

Captain            Do you remember what you wrote about laughing? About making someone laugh?

Ba'alu            I can't imagine that you are here to make me laugh. You can't apprehend or kill your comrade.

Colonel            *(Yells in a military manner)* Comrades attention! Move forward!

*(The two officers march forward and stand in front of Ba'alu. They give a military salute.)*

Ba'alu            What is this comrades?

Captain            *(Yells in a military manner)* attention for smile!

*(Officers get closer to Ba'alu and stand at his left and right side.)*



Ba'alu            Can you please postpone it until tomorrow? I don't want to die at this particular place where I enjoyed life for so many years.

Colonel           But you have already philosophised that no one can chose the place of his death.

Captain           *(Yells in a military manner)* Comrades attention! Make him laugh!

*(Officers strike Ba'alu, punching and kicking him from both sides. Ba'alu falls down whilst the soldiers continue to brutally and fatally wound him.)*

Colonel           Has he laughed?

Officers           *(salute)* Yes Comrades!

*(the Derg's musical anthem 'Yaleminim Dem Ethiopia Tiqdem' [Let Ethiopia triumph without spilling any blood] is heard. Colonel and*

*Captain, following the rhythm of the music march to Ba'alu's dead body, then salute. The execution song of the Derg, 'ye fiyel wotet, libbu yabetebet' is heard. Colonel and Captain shoot rounds into the corpse of Ba'alu.)*

Captain Comrade Officers! We are proud that you have accomplished your revolutionary obligation. We hereby pronounce that you are promoted, rather accelerated to the rank of Colonel.

Colonel *(the officers give military salutes)* But every thing must be kept secret Comrades. I am sure you will never utter a word.

*(Officers repeat military salute)*

Captain To help you keep this secret *(Colonel and Captain yell)* Oromay! *(They shoot the officers from behind)*

Col. & Capt. *(Turn their faces to the audience and salute)*  
We apologise for what may be construed as  
evil deeds! We did it to safeguard our  
victorious revolution. Please forgive us!

**(Black out)**

**The End-Oromay!**