NOLLYWOOD DREAMS

BY JOCELYN BIOH

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NOLLYWOOD DREAMS was developed by the Cherry Lane Mentor Project (Angelina Fiordellisi, Founding Artistic Director) in April 2017. It was directed by Saheem Ali, the scenic design was by Arnulfo Maldonado, the costume design was by Dede Ayite, the lighting design was by Chris Thielking, the sound design was by Matt Otto, the video design was by Crystal Arnette, and the stage manager was Michael Denis. The cast was as follows:

AYAMMA OKAFOR .................................................... Nyahalé Allie
DEDE OKAFOR ........................................................... Nana Mensah
GBENGA EZIE ............................................................... Irungu Mutu
WALE OWUSU .............................................................. Washington Kirk
FAYOLA OGUNLEYE .................................................... Kelechi Ezie
ADENIKEH ............................................................ Dorcas Sowunmi

NOLLYWOOD DREAMS was developed with the support of New York Stage & Film and Vassar’s Powerhouse Season, Summer 2016.
NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

In the 1990s, Nigeria, in the midst of economic and political turmoil, saw an explosion of films being produced. Many of the themes of these films dealt with love and family issues but were rooted in subtext about the political strife/temperature of the country. In one of the most popular films, a man falls in love with two women: a commoner and the daughter of the president. Veiled in the cloak of a love triangle, we follow the main character’s dilemma as he tries to choose living like the upper crust of Nigeria or a life of squalor with his (perhaps, true-love) commoner. Mainly released on video CDs (as they are easier to copy than DVDs) these films grossed such high revenue, by the early 2000s, “Nollywood” became and remains the second highest producing film industry in the world (“Bollywood” is first and the American film industry is third.) The quality of these films are usually low budget and are mainly improv’d by the actors based on loosely outlined storylines.

These are the films of my youth. I watched many of these films getting my hair done at my aunt’s house or sitting in the heat of my mother’s home all day on our family trips to Ghana. This play is my imagining of what it was like when the film industry in West Africa (namely Nigeria) was beginning to take the world by storm.
CHARACTERS

(All characters are of West African descent and are to be played by Black and/or African actors. Thank you.)

AYAMMA OKAFOR (I-yah-mah Oak-ah-fore). 20s/early 30s. Aspiring Nigerian film actress with raw talent. Works as a travel agent/secretary at her parents’ office. She is a big dreamer and hopes for a better life for herself as a famous actress.

DEDE OKAFOR (Dee-dee Oak-ah-fore). 20s/30s. Ayamma’s older sister. She works (lazily) at her parents’ travel agency. She loves all things pop culture: talk shows, soap operas, and celebrities, she loves it all. Close with Ayamma but also serves as Ayamma’s truth serum when need be.

GBENGA EZIE (Beng-gah Ehh-zee). 30s. Rising Nigerian film director. Is known to be rich and has studied in America but harbors dangerous secrets to his success.

WALE OWUSU (Wha-lay Oh-woo-sue). 20s/30s. Nigeria’s hottest rising star. He is half Ghanaian and half Nigerian. He is constantly being hit on by women but they rarely ever get to know him or his story. Quietly confident.

FAYOLA OGUNLEYE (Faye-oh-la Oh-goon-lay-ay). 30s. Wildly referred to as “The Nigerian Halle Berry with Tina Turner Legs,” as she is very beautiful and very sexy. She is pompous and arrogant and will say anything to get her way regardless of how it makes her look. She views Ayamma as her prime competition.


TELEVISION ANNOUNCER/MOVIE TRAILER VOICE. 20s and/or older; male. West African accent. The voice behind the television and on the movie trailer for The Comfort Zone.

SETTING

Lagos, Nigeria. Early 1990s.
Scene 1: Okafor Travel Agency

*Early afternoon at the agency. Dede hurries to sit in front of the television with a batch of cookies and a cup of warm tea. She is nearly bursting with excitement as the television announcer is heard.*

**TELEVISION ANNOUNCER.** *(Offstage/voiceover.)* Stay Tuned! Coming up next is a brand new episode of *Adenikeh*, where she interviews famous Nollywood film director—Gbenga Ezie! You won’t want to miss it!

**DEDE.** *(Singing along with the television, off-key—smooth jazz kind of sound.)* “Adenikeh! Bringing love into your home!”

As Dede eats her cookies, Ayamma enters the travel agency and hurriedly rushes passed Dede to the television.

**AYAMMA.** Has *Adenikeh* started yet?!

**DEDE.** Eh-eh, watch it! You will spill my tea.

**AYAMMA.** Oh sorry. I’m just so excited!

**DEDE.** What is it, eh? Making all this fuss… What is this book you have?

**AYAMMA.** This is the script for that new Gbenga Ezie movie I was telling you about. I heard from some friends that he is having an open casting call for his new movie, so I went down to his studios and picked up a copy of the script!

**DEDE.** *(Eating cookies.)* Okay… So, what are you going to do with that?

**AYAMMA.** Audition!

*Small pause. Dede chews.*

**DEDE.** What?
AYAMMA. Come on Dede, you know that my true passion is acting.
DEDE. Ayamma, are we still on this? I thought it was clear that you are…not…Good.
AYAMMA. Excuse me?
DEDE. Listen, I know that you have had a hard time getting over your breakup with Richard.
AYAMMA. Dede please.
DEDE. I understand. Finding out your boyfriend of two years has been cheating on you is devastating.
AYAMMA. Okay, can we not get into this right now.
DEDE. You know, he still calls here for you sometimes. But, me, I don't answer the phone.
AYAMMA. You never answer the phones.
DEDE. And I know that it has almost been a year since that poo-poo broke your heart and you have been passing the time with these silly hobbies, but honestly Ayamma—
AYAMMA. This is not a hobby Dede, this is my calling! And I would never give up on the plan God has intended for me.
DEDE. (Rolls eyes…sarcasm.) Uh…okay.
AYAMMA. And this isn't about Richard. I've always wanted to be an actress! Don't you remember how amazing I was in that church play when I was eight years old?
DEDE. Yes, I remember… And you were not good then. It's only we were in church, we could not be honest.
AYAMMA. Well, it doesn't matter. I know that I am perfect for this part. It's like I always say, all you have to have is good looks. The director will do the rest.
DEDE. Mmm-hmm. A director. He's not a magician!
AYAMMA. Dede, I'm serious! This could be my big break! Can you imagine? Your little sister… My name in the lights… Ayamma Okafor starring as “Comfort Aleshinloye” in *The Comfort Zone*.
DEDE. De what?
AYAMMA. That's the name of the movie—*The Comfort Zone*… There was a whole interview the director did in the newspaper about it. I'm
telling you—Nigerian movies are getting bigger and bigger. They think it might even cross over into America!

Small pause. Dede chews.

DEDE. Ayamma… I don’t mean to pop your bubble sky dreams or whatever, but if this movie is going to be “so big,” why would they put some nobody like you in it?

AYAMMA. You are not going to make jokes when I tell you the best part: Guess who is playing the leading man?

DEDE. Eddie Murphy?

AYAMMA. No… Think on it.

DEDE. It’s not Eddie Murphy? I mean his accent in Coming to America was pretty good.

AYAMMA. No Dede… It’s Wale Owusu.

DEDE. Wale Owusu?!

AYAMMA. Yes.

DEDE. As in my future husband?

AYAMMA. Yes!

DEDE. You mean, someone is going to PAY you for a chance to touch Wale Owusu?

AYAMMA. Not just touch… Kiss him!

DEDE. EHHH! We have to get in this movie!

AYAMMA. I know!

DEDE. So…how much does it pay?

AYAMMA. (Deep breath.) Two thousand dollars.

DEDE. Dollars? He’s paying in American money?! How much is that in Naira?

AYAMMA. Three…hundred…thousand…Naira.

DEDE. For one movie?

Ayamma nods her head excitedly.

Ayamma, if we do enough of these movies… WE ARE GOING TO BE RICH!

AYAMMA. Shhhh! Dede—just calm down. We can celebrate AFTER I actually get the part, eh.
DEDE. Okay, okay. I just cannot believe this!
AYAMMA. I know, me too! But I need to focus. My audition is in one week and I want to be off book by then.
DEDE. Which book?
AYAMMA. OFF book. It is how American actors say “memorize.”
DEDE. These people. As if learning English is not hard enough.
AYAMMA. (Gives Dede the script.) Okay, so you’re going to read all of the lines that say “James.”
DEDE. (Smitten.) Is that who Wale is going to play?
AYAMMA. Yes. And I’m going to read for “Comfort.” Let’s just go ahead and read the scene for cold— (Proud of herself.) —that means for the first time—and then we’ll go back.
DEDE. (Chews cookie.) Okay.

Ayamma begins a long version of what she thinks is “actor prep” before launching into the scene.

AYAMMA. (Melodramatic.) “But why didn’t you tell me? All this time I’ve been here waiting for you to come back to me. Only to find out you have a wife… A family…and a job that you cannot leave.”
DEDE. (Chews, uninvested.) “Oh Comfort. If only you know how much I want to be with you.”
AYAMMA. “With me? Oh please. Actions speak louder than words James!”
DEDE. “You don’t know how many times my heart beats for you when I lay in bed at night. And how I dream of being your liver.”
AYAMMA. (Breaking character.) Lover.
DEDE. Fine, “Lover.” Ah! But why are these words so small? I can barely see.
AYAMMA. Dede please. Just… Pay attention. I want to be perfect.
DEDE. (Sucks teeth.) Whatever. But as soon as Adenikeh comes on, I’m done.
AYAMMA. Fine. Where I was? Ah yes… (Back in character.) “Well if you dream of us being together, why don’t you just leave your wife? Be with me. Let us stay here and live our lives together. Forever!”
DEDE. “You don’t understand… It is so complicated. I just don’t
know what to do.” *(Sucks teeth.)* It doesn’t sound complicated to me. He is going to leave his wife, children, and green card in America to come here and live with you in some rundown flat in Lagos? This movie is stupid.

AYAMMA. *(Snatching the script back from Dede.)* It’s not stupid. It’s about love. What would you know about that anyway?

DEDE. Eh-eh! Much more than you Ayamma! Like the love I have for Wale Owusu! It’s strong, oh! And that is the only reason I will buy this movie… Oh and the money we will get.

AYAMMA. Eh, I will get.

DEDE. Yeah, yeah, I’ll give you some too.

*They laugh a bit.*

AYAMMA. Aww man Dede, if I book this movie, I don’t know what I’d do! Finally leaving this travel agency and living my REAL dream.

DEDE. *(Wasn’t listening.)* Oh, speaking of which, Daddy has a big account with some students from Europe and he wants to make sure you handle it.

AYAMMA. Ah, why can’t you do it?

DEDE. Well, first above all, you are the only one of us who knows how to use these crazy computers. And anyway, I’m older than you. I have other things to do.

AYAMMA. Like what? Sit in Mary’s hair salon all day and talk about what is happening on *Days of Our Lives*?

DEDE. Eh-eh! Where else am I supposed to watch it? We only get two clear channels on this thing and I can’t miss it! On the next episode, it looks like Marlena is finally going to escape from Stefano’s prison lair… I’m telling you. It’s going to be good.

AYAMMA. I think it’s best if I spend my time working on this script, thank you.

*Dede offers Ayamma a cookie.*

DEDE. Want one?

AYAMMA. No, no. I need to watch my figure.
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2 men, 4 women

It’s the nineties and in Lagos, Nigeria, the “Nollywood” film industry is exploding. Ayamma dreams of leaving her job at her parents’ travel agency and becoming a star. When she auditions for a new film by Nigeria’s hottest director, tension flares with his former leading lady—as sparks fly with Nollywood’s biggest heartthrob.

Also by Jocelyn Bioh
SCHOOL GIRLS; OR, THE AFRICAN MEAN GIRLS PLAY

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