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ACT TWO - SCENE ONE  
PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

(Seated are the PRINCIPAL and MR. & MRS. MAKATINI, the two visitors who were robbed in the Visitors' Room. KIBASO ENTERS with SPONONO, who is wearing his bandage)

SPONONO

(warmly)  
Good morning, Uncle. Good morning, Auntie. Auntie, I'm sorry I couldn't get Henry for you, because of all the trouble.

(MRS. MAKATINI smiles at SPONONO)

PRINCIPAL

This is Sponono.

(MRS. MAKATINI smiles again)

Is he the boy who asked what he could do for you?

MRS. MAKATINI

That's the one, meneer. And he wished us a Merry Christmas, and went away to get Henry for us.

PRINCIPAL

Do you remember him too, Mr. Makatini?

MR. MAKATINI

Meneer - well you see -

(he laughs aloud, nervous, inappropriate laugh, shocking in that office) -

I was not remembering very well.

(he looks as though he has made a fool of himself)

MRS. MAKATINI

We were afraid to come to the reformatory, meneer, but this boy was so nice, that we thought that the stories we had heard could not be true.

PRINCIPAL

What stories did you hear, Mrs. Makatini?

MRS. MAKATINI

(apologetically)

We heard it was dangerous to come here, meneer. I didn't want my husband to come in, carrying all that money. But I was also afraid to leave him outside.

MR. MAKATINI

Meneer - well -

(he laughs again)

It was Christmas you see.

PRINCIPAL

I am sorry that after you heard these stories about the reformatory, and that after you met this first boy, and you were beginning to believe that the stories could not be true, that a second boy should come and make you believe they were true after all. But we are hoping to find this second boy, and perhaps find your money too.

MRS. MAKATINI

That would be wonderful, meneer

MR. MAKATINI

Oh we hope so, meneer.

}  
} Together.  
}

PRINCIPAL

(pointing to Sponono's badge)  
When the second boy came in, was he wearing a badge like this.

MRS. MAKATINI

I don't think so, meneer.

MR. MAKATINI

(trying to control his laugh)  
I can't remember, meneer.

MRS. MAKATINI

In any case the second boy was bigger than the first.  
(SPONONO cannot conceal his pleasure)

PRINCIPAL

Did this second boy have a bandage?

MRS. MAKATINI

(emphatically)  
No, meneer.  
(the PRINCIPAL is lost in thought)

SPONONO

Can I go now, meneer?

PRINCIPAL

Not yet, Sponono. I want to ask you some questions.  
(SPONONO shows the faintest trace of discomfort)  
How is your eye now?

SPONONO

Nearly better, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You told me the bandage was coming off.

SPONONO

Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Is it safe to take it off now?

SPONONO

(apprehensively)  
Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Then take it off, Sponono.  
(SPONONO makes a great ado about taking off the bandage, which is really an eye-pad with two strings tied at the back of the head. When the eye-pad is off, he screws up his eye a bit, but in reality he is watching the MAN and WOMAN. They show no sign of recognition and SPONONO breathes again.)

Why did you go to the Visitors' Room?

SPONONO

I saw the lights there, meneer. I thought, why should the lights be on at this time. So I went to see

PRINCIPAL

And you saw these people there and you said you would go and look for Henry?

SPONONO

Yes meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Where did you go and look for Henry?

SPONONO

(with each lie his discomfort is increasing)  
In the chapel, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Did you get him?

SPONONO

No.

PRINCIPAL

Why not?

SPONONO

(after a pause for thought)  
I heard the shouting in the Visitors' Room, meneer, and  
I ran back with the prefects. I thought something has  
happened to the Uncle and Auntie  
(he gets an inspiration)  
So I ran fast, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

(with slight irony)  
Did you speak to the Uncle and Auntie when you got there?  
To tell them how sorry you were?

SPONONO

No meneer.  
(a slight pause)  
The prefects spoke to them, meneer.  
(he has another inspiration)  
You know I am not a prefect, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Sponono, your badge. Who stitched it on? Was it done  
in the tailor's shop?

SPONONO

I stitched it on, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You know every badge is stitched on in the tailor's shop  
Why did you have to stitch it on?

SPONONO

It came off, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

How did it come off?  
(SPONONO'S distress is now visible. His forehead  
is covered with sweat. He cannot look at anybody.)  
Why do you not answer?

SPONONO

(protestingly)  
You are frightening me, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

I am only asking you questions.

SPONONO

I can see you are angry. This bad thing has happened, and someone wants to blame me for it.

(He is now in great distress. The sweat is pouring off his face.)

PRINCIPAL

Mr. Mabaso, I would be glad if you all left me with Sponono.

(MR. MABASO and MAN and WOMAN go. The PRINCIPAL speaks quietly to Sponono. Most of the time he does not even look at him at all.)

Sponono.

SPONONO

Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

Johannes Mofeking was saved from prison by you, because you told me I was doing wrong. Is that not so?

SPONONO

Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

(bringing out WOMAN'S bag from a drawer and placing it on the table.)

Now it is your turn to be saved from wrong. You will not lie to me, will you?

SPONONO

(in a low voice)

No, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You were fond of Ha'penny. He was like a small brother to you.

SPONONO

Yes meneer.

PRINCIPAL

His death was a great grief to you.

SPONONO

Yes meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You did not go to the chapel. You wanted to be by yourself.

SPONONO

Yes, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

And you were angry too. Because I would not let you go to fetch Mrs. Maarman. You were so angry that you burst all the Christmas balloons in the Yard.

SPONONO

(in a low voice, not because he burst the balloons but because the PRINCIPAL sees too much)

I did wrong meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You saw lights in the Visitors' Room. Two people were there. You were not thinking of anything evil, except you were angry. You did not wish to hurt anybody.

SPONONO

No moneer.

PRINCIPAL

Suddenly a great temptation was put in your way? Something you saw?

SPONONO

Yes.

PRINCIPAL

But you resisted it. You went to fetch Henry.

SPONONO

Yes.

PRINCIPAL

But when you were outside the temptation came back to you, stronger than ever. And before you knew, you had done something wrong.

(SPONONO is silent)

But now you are sorry for what you have done, and you would like to make amends.

SPONONO

(in the same low voice)

Yes moneer.

PRINCIPAL

You will show me where you hid the money?

SPONONO

Yes moneer.

PRINCIPAL

Now listen to me carefully. Don't be sorry that you confessed. Even if you are punished, don't be sorry. It is better to tell the truth and bear the consequences, than to lie and escape the consequences. Do you understand? Or am I speaking too high for you?

SPONONO

I understand, moneer.

PRINCIPAL

(calling out)

We are ready, Mr. Mabaso.

(MABASO and the MAKATINIS return. MAKATINIS sit)

I am glad to tell you your money is found.

(the MAKATINIS are overjoyed)

I must tell you also that the first boy, who wore the bandage and the badge, was also the second boy who stole your money. But now wishes to return it to you.

MR. MAKATINI

We do not know what to say to you, moneer.

MRS. MAKATINI

(half laughing, half weeping)

To think I thought there were two boys!

(To SPONONO)

The first boy was nice. I shall remember you by him.

SPONONO

( he responds to this with a brief smile; he is too concerned about his own future)

Will I lose my freedom, moneer?

PRINCIPAL

Yes.

SPONONO

For how long?

PRINCIPAL

For six months, Sponono.

SPONONO

(desolated)

Six months! And the job with you, meneer? Must I lose the job?

PRINCIPAL

Yes.

SPONONO

(agonised)

Don't do that, meneer. Do anything else you like, but don't do that.

(the PRINCIPAL makes no response)

If you don't take me meneer, what'll I do? What'll become of me? Can't you forgive me, meneer?

MAKATINI

(moved by SPONONO'S pleading)

We forgive him, meneer.

MRS. MAKATINI

(greatly daring)

It was our money that was stolen.

SPONONO

(Going down on his knees)

Don't take my freedom, meneer. Or take it for these two months, till William goes home. I'll be safe with you, meneer.

PRINCIPAL

You were with me here in the Yard, but you weren't safe. You attacked two innocent people in the Visitors' Room, and robbed them of their money.

MRS. MAKATINI

Couldn't you forgive him, just this once?

PRINCIPAL

You can forgive him, Mrs. Makatini. And your husband can forgive him. And I can forgive him too. But I also have a duty to teach him. Mr. Mabaso, Sponono will lose his freedom for six months. What will happen after that time will depend on him.

(To MR. AND MRS. MAKATINI)

Sponono will take you and show you where he has put your money.

(TWO PREFECTS enter to accompany them)

SPONONO

(defiance returning)

Meneer, I said I would show you where I put the money.

PRINCIPAL

You mean you will not show Mr. and Mrs. Makatini?

SPONONO

I could have run away.

PRINCIPAL

(coldly)  
You could have. Will you show them the money? Or will you not show them?

(SPONONO cannot continue his defiance. He goes off between the TWO PREFECTS. It is clear that he thinks he has been unjustly treated)

MR. MAKATINI

(diffidently)  
We would like to give you a present for getting back our money. That was our Christmas, meneer. We would like to give you a pound.

PRINCIPAL

What we did is our work and we are paid for it. We cannot take other money.

MRS. MAKATINI

Could we give a little present to - to Sponono?

PRINCIPAL

(with the slightest of smiles, he shakes his head)  
No, I don't think so.

(MR. AND MRS. MAKATINI go. PRINCIPAL writes up SPONONO'S punishment in the Punishment Book)  
So you were right, eh?

MABASO

(trying not to appear too knowing)  
I know Sponono's kind, Principal.  
(a pause)  
I would have handed his case over to the Police.

PRINCIPAL

I thought of it. Then I thought, No.

MABASO

So you're going to give him another chance. His record's growing worse. You'd even take him to work for you after all.

PRINCIPAL

Yes, I would.

MABASO

And he'll let you down.

PRINCIPAL

That's what I have to find out.  
(He looks frankly at MABASO. Their discussion is without rancour. The two men understand each other very well)  
You trust nobody, so you never find out anything, except that they're all bad. I trust them, and I find out many things.

MABASO

I'll say you do, Principal. But I can find out things too. I've good reasons to believe that long before Sponono got any freedom, he was seen at night in Victoriatown. And more than once.

PRINCIPAL

How did he get out? Surely you don't mean the Main Gate

MABASO

I swear by every man who works at the Main Gate. There are enough risks here without making new ones. Don't you ever get frightened.

PRINCIPAL

I get anxious. When boys go out on leave, I never rest till the last one's back. But it's the telephone that frightens me - at night, I mean. I know that a telephone ringing at night could be the end of me. I know that a boy could take the life's work of a man, and break it to pieces in a minute. Murder, rape, brutal assault.

MABASO

That's what Sponono could do.

PRINCIPAL

If he did - that might finish me.

(Lights dim)