DAPO ADENIYI

The Return of Timbuktu

III

THE SAME VIEW AS BEFORE. Noontime. The door and windows of the house's upper sections are shut. Some windows below are hanging open. Visible through one of them is the upper trunk of KOI, who is seated, his back to the view and his face and turbaned head set gazing out straight to the sea. From somewhere on the sea-shore sounds can be heard of repeated strokes of a carpenter's hammer on nails - at intervals, continuous over a length of time.

Long silence. Punctuated by sound of hammer. KOI is unmoving in his state. A rope is now visible, hanging from the apex of the southward post. More silence. A hand thrusts the window open upstairs and IGHU comes into view in the window, staring at the southward post; he draws the window's doors towards himself and shuts them. Long pause. Sound of bolts being unscrewed behind the main door up-head. KOI moves his hand to adjust his turban; then he is still again. BAKHUD appears, dragging a large sack with him, perspiring and panting; he starts to labour down the staircase with it. IGHU closely follows, wrapper about his buttocks, carrying what looks to be BAKHUD's baggage. BAKHUD leading, they walk some distance to the post and stop. BAKHUD opens his sack, tips dry skulls of rams on the ground, and begins to lace the environs with them one after the other. IGHU follows suit and starts to produce rams' bones from his sack, after BAKHUD's example. When the contents of both bags are used up, IGHU collects the empty sacks, and both start to retrace their way back to the staircase. Half-way, BAKHUD looks back, then continues. He looks back again, turns to IGHU.

Nobody will complain that we also name a place a place of the skulls.

BAKHUD takes the lead; they climb up the house and bolt the door. Pause. Sound of hammer as before. KOI turns his face again toward the sea. Pause. Shuffle of feet on sand: ISCARIOT appears bearing a full-size box. He lays it down close to the

foot of the house and departs. Pause. ISCARIOT reappears with another box, places it near the former, takes his leave. Pause. ISCARIOT appears with another and places it next to the other, leaves. Pause. ISCARIOT reappears with yet another, places it next to the preceding one, goes. Long pause. Resumption of nailing with hammer.

Sound of bolts again. Door opens and BAKHUD reappears, a tin in one hand; with the other hand he stirs a liquid substance in the tin with a stick. IGHU, behind him, is bearing luggage consisting of scrolls under his armpit, across his chest, etc. They descend and IGHU rolls the lot onto the floor, picks one very outsize scroll and spreads it out on the ground with his hands. BAKHUD looks on, stirring the contents of the tin.

BAKHUD: That's the one with the sketches, I think. (draws a step closer and looks) I thought so. The best that I have tried with my hands. Plainly the best. (still looking) Not even the sketch I did for the desert and Makete can stand near it. I couldn't keep a steady hand all through, that was the problem. (stirring for a while) To draw a map, eh, of a place like this on paper is not all that easy, you know. Only way I could see out was to go low-profile, do a very simple illustrative sketch. That we've been able to get this place down, the road (looking round), position of the tree, the town also squeezed in somewhere there at the bottom at the periphery ... where else? (looking down at the scroll) If I splash this blue watercolour (gestures with the tin) over the thick borders of the scroll, that would be enough to tell anybody that what it stands for is the sea at the back here. (stirring) If I could just pour it on like this (demonstrating again with the tin) or, alternatively, if I got a volunteer whose hand is just appropriate so I may deploy it to spread the sea around across the scroll ...

(looking about, ends up bending to peer in the direction of KOI inside the house; gives up. He continues stirring the tin. Pause. ISCARIOT enters, his tape-measure unit drawn pointed at the ready in his hand. BAKHUD looks up, stops shorts, puzzled. Pause)

What am I, what can I do for, Iscariot?

(ISCARIOT casts his eyes downward and is silent. Pause)

Better come off it, aboki na. Every single hour counts, you should know that.

ISCARIOT: I have come to ... take your measurement, Ibn.

BAKHUD: Measurement? My measurement. You are ... what are you, then? A tailor or something, Iscariot?

ISCARIOT: (his eyes kept downward still. Pause) No, Ibn...

BAKHUD: Then what is yes?