1. THE COACH: Your commitment is admirable. But you seem to have come here with assumptions. Correct me if I am wrong?

2. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W N Q R Z Z K D W \ R X P H D Q

3. THE COACH: µ $ssumption is a hea Y \ D U P R X U ¶ ' R \ R X know who said that?

4. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W

5. THE COACH: Well you should. It was your own countryman. Robert Burns.

6. YOMI: (Hesitant) Okay -

7. THE COACH: To play Scrabble you must have the correct attitude . The Tile Gods do not favour the arrogant .

8. YOMI: µ 7 L O Gods ¶ "

9. THE COACH: To be successful in this sport requires a unique combination of dedication and fate. Tell me, are you a humble person?

10. YOMI: I think so.

11. THE COACH: Do you work hard ?

12. YOMI: Of course.

13. THE COACH: Because, without dedication, how can you expect the Tile Gods to smile upon you?

Beat

1. THE COACH: Come with me.

SCENE 3 - NARRATION

2. YOMI: I used to have this recurring dream . Where , ¶ Gfall into this huge pool of S crabble tiles. / L N H R Q H R I W K H P N L G V ¶ E D O O S R R But ful l of little plastic squares . Right now, I feel like , ¶ Pchoking on Zs , Xs and Js . As I stand there in front of them. Rows and rows of men behind desks. All look ing at me. Some bemused. Some smiling. Some not. But all of them staring r ight at me. And W K D W ¶ V Z U H Q Ge r. The only woman in the room. She ¶ Vhostile and i ntense. Stares right through me. Then looks away.

1. THE COACH: The remaining eight will make it to camp. But only six will be on the plane to China. And remember. Do not be afraid. Because fear is like fire. It can be your greatest friend. But if you let it rage out of control, it will burn you. Use your fear my brothers and sister. When it feels like the Tile Gods are against you. That is when you must draw down upon your innermost resources and earn your victories. Now, let us pray together.

FX: The room is filled with murmurs of prayer in the background.

2. THE COACH: Dear father, we pray that you will support us today, and bring us luck and judgement LQ RXU KRQHVW HQGHDYRXUV«

FX: The murmurs of prayer are gradually replaced by the sound of clacking tiles.

SCENE 5 - NARRATION

3. YOMI: I open my eyes during those prayers. And VKH¶V staring right at me. Everyone else is praying. Except her and me. And she MXVW VWDUHV 'RHVQ¶W ILQLVK RRRNHV away. Just stares. And after those prayers, I wander around. Watching the games. Waiting for the biggest game of my life. Observing the intensity. Then, during a break in the action «

SCENE 11 - NARRATION

FX: The distant street sounds of an African city by night.

1. YOMI: That night. In my hotel room. No sun in the sky, but the heat is ~~still~~ sweltering. I listen to the sounds of night time Lagos

SCENE 13 ±COURTYARD

FX: The distant sounds of a city in the background

1. YOMI: I just wanted to say thank you .

2. AMIRA: Thank you f or what?

3. YOMI: For backing me up in there.

4. AMIRA: I was no W µ E D F N L Q J \ R X X S ¶ , Z D V expressi ng an opinion.

5. YOMI: I know that, but -

6. AMIRA: It was a fortunate coincidence.
Nothing more.

7. YOMI: Well thanks anyway.

8. AMIRA: You are welcome.

Beat

9. AMIRA: Why are you here anyway?

10. YOMI: The same reason everyone else is here .

11. AMIRA: µ (Y H U \ R e Q s e

1. YOMI: And I want to play Scrabble for Nigeria too.

2. AMIRA: A white man?

3. YOMI: How can you even say that?

4. AMIRA: A b rown man th en. It i s the same thing . And you still have no t answered the question.

5. YOMI: I want to go to the World C hampionships.

6. AMIRA: And you think you are good enough?

7. YOMI: I used to think I was .

8. AMIRA: Until Victor taught you a lesson?

9. YOMI: Well, yeah.

Beat

10. AMIRA: You know, I actually hope d you would beat him. Even if it meant you stole a place from a p r oper Nigerian.

11. YOMI: Sto l e?

Beat

1. YOMI: , W G R H V Q ¶ W P D W W H U

2. AMIRA You are here now. You should be happy.

3. YOMI: I want to learn.

4. AMIRA: Learn then. What i s stopping you?

5. YOMI: I watched you play ing earlier . Will you help me?

6. AMIRA: Why would I do that?

7. YOMI: Maybe we can help each other.

8. AMIRA: What exactly can you do to help me?

9. YOMI: It was only an idea.

10. AMIRA: The Coach will help you . You a re his responsibility. It was him who asked you to stay.

11. YOMI: I just thought -

12. AMIRA: That we should be friends?

13. YOMI: No, just -

Beat

1. AMIRA: You are a strange man.

2. YOMI: (Downbeat) Thanks.

3. AMIRA: There is no need to look so sad. I am sure your behaviour is perfectly normal in your own country.

Beat

4. AMIRA: You know . Maybe we can play one practice game tomorrow during the break . I will instruct you. And observe. Only once though.

5. YOMI: Fair enough.

6. AMIRA: And, by the way, my name is Amira.

SCENE 14 - NARRATION

7. YOMI: 6KH¶V ULJKW WKRXJK 7KLV SODFH LV different. It might feel like home in a VWUDQJH NLQG RI ZD\ %XW ,¶P WKH RQH talks different. And acts different.

re than just words.a

SCENE 15 ± TRAINING CAMP

1. THE COACH: So, this morning, we overca me the first major hurdle that stood in the way of team bonding . But, as we all know, t his game i s about mo re than just words.

2. VICTOR: It is about t echnique.

3. THE COACH: Of course Victor .

4. VICTOR: 3 And m ental composure.

Z d Œ] ‰ o t } Œ Draft 4 } o Œ Be n Tagoe

e 1 72 104 514.99 Tm [(4.)] TJ BT 1 2d [r(0 1 100.82 555.79 Tm [(THE COACH:)] TJ BT 1 2d [r(0 1 158.42
e than Just Words a

1. THE COACH: But if you want to opt out, then you must explain why .

2. VICTOR: Let him do what he wants. He will only slow us down anyway.

3. THE COACH: For now, he is part of the team. Same as anybody else.

4. VICTOR: Then he should no t be asking us to change our methods.

5. YOMI: , ¶ P Q R W D V N L Q J D Q \ E R G \ W R F K D Q J H D Q \ V

6. VICTOR: Then what exactly are you doing? Perhaps you should ask fewer quest ions and concentrate on learning words and improving on your techniques .

7. THE COACH: I will not tell you again Victor.

1. THE COACH: Any performance improvement will be welcomed. µ : L W K R X W F R Q W L Q X D O J U R Z W K D Q progress, such words as improvement, D F K L H Y H P H Q W D Q G V X F F H V V K D Y H Q R P H Do you know who said th at one ?

2. YOMI: No idea.

3. THE COACH: You are not going to guess?

4. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W N Q R Z Usain Bolt?

5. THE COACH: It was Benjamin Franklin. Now go and get ready to run.

SCENE 16 - NARRATION

FX: The sound of feet pounding the pavement and the puffing of breath.

6. YOMI: When in Rome and all that. Or when in Lagos, a s the case may be. I had Q ¶ W U X Q anywhere for years. I made an art form out of avoiding cross co untry at school. And , ¶ Y H added a good f ew pounds since then. But I find myself slogging through the streets of Lagos . With a bunch of µelite ¶ Scrabble players . Lagging at the back , puffing and panting in a pair of brown E U R J X H V s , W ¶ Madness. Utter madness .

SCENE 17 ± OUTSIDE TRAINING CAMP AS THE RUNNERS RETURN

1. AMIRA: The running is a problem for you?

2. YOMI: , M X V W G R Q ¶ W V H H Z K \ L W ¶ V Q H F H V V D U \

3. AMIRA: They hav e already explained it to you. Are your ears made of cloth?

4. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W U X Q D Q \ Z K H U H D W K R P H

5. AMIRA: < R X ¶ U H Q R W mD W ow K R

6. YOMI: , ¶ P just not used to it.

7. AMIRA: Well you should get used to it. You can train yourself to do anything you want. Anything at all.

8. YOMI: % X W , GtR wQa¶t to train myself to run .

9. AMIRA: And that is your problem. You think you should always be able to do what you want. You have no discipline. You a re out of shape . Y ou need to reduce your size.

10. YOMI: What?

11. AMIRA: I think you heard what I said.

12. YOMI: Are you for real?

1. AMIRA: You want me to say nice things about you ? To butter you up and flatter your ego ?

2. YOMI: Well no, but -

3. AMIRA: The running will h elp you. You should do it.

4. YOMI: Fair enough.

5. AMIRA: Back home in Daura, I ran to and from school. Mles and miles every day .

6. YOMI: Daura?

7. AMIRA: Do y ou want a geography lesson or a Scrabble lesson ?

8. YOMI: The 6 F U D E E O H ¶ V I L Q H

9. AMIRA: Good. S top asking quest ions and listen then .

10. YOMI: I think you could maybe do with being a wee bit more forthright.

11. AMIRA: Shall we start?

12. YOMI:

1. AMIRA: You know lots of words. But you do not know how to use them properly.

2. YOMI: , ¶ P Q R W W K D W E D G

3. AMIRA: It is like owning a Ferrari sports car and not being able to drive. You would be better with a pedal cycle.

4. YOMI: , ¶ P Q R W V X-U H ,

5. AMIRA:

1. THE COACH: I do no t care if you saw me or not. I asked you a question.

2. VICTOR: Her behaviour is unacceptable. You need to manage this small girl -

3. THE COACH: You ar e telling me what is acceptable now?

4. VICTOR: No, but -

5. AMIRA: All I did was point out an error in his strategy.

6. VICTOR: She should not be speaking to me in that manner.

7. THE COACH: And what manner is that ?

8. VICTOR: It was inappropriate.

9. THE COACH: Please e xplain to me what is inappropriate about a fello w player assisting you in camp?

Beat

10. THE COACH: Go on. I am waiting.

11. VICTOR: I have nothing more to say on the matter.

12. THE COACH: You are sure?

13. VICTOR: Yes.

SCENE 20 ± COURTYARD

1. THE COACH: It is important that we have a harmonious camp.

2. YOMI: , ¶ P V R U U \ , M X V W

3. THE COACH: I know that Victor can be troublesome. But you must temper your emotions at all time s. Both of you.

4. AMIRA: He attacked me verbally.

5. THE COACH: I will take this opportunity to remind you of the old story about the madman and the clothes. Have you heard that one?

6. AMIRA: No.

7. YOMI: Me neither.

8. THE COACH: One day, you are ta king a bath. You fold your clothes up neatly while you are taking a soak. And a madman burst s in and steals y our neatly folded clothes. So you chase him out into the street , through the busy market place. Remember, you are naked . B ecause he is carrying your clothes. But you are the one shouting and screaming . Naked in the busy market place. Ask yourself this. Who will the people think is the mad man?

Beat

1. THE COACH: Do you understand the point of this story?

2. YOMI: Of course.

3. AMIRA: Yes C oach.

4. THE COACH: You must make sure you are never pursuing a madman through the streets when you are naked . And do not ever be the madman either.

5. AMIRA: But C oach, please, you know exactly why he had a problem with me challenging him.

6. THE COACH: Perhaps I do .

7. AMIRA: Then , please, why do you not do something about it?

8. THE COACH: Because I am not a one man court of law. And Victor is a very talented player.

9. AMIRA: So am I.

10. THE COACH: There is no question mark over that. There is also no question that h e is lacking in manners.

11. AMIRA: So s omeone should teach him a lesson.

12. THE COACH: I would not disagree with that. But it should happen on the field of play.

1. AMIRA: Then it is settled. I want to play him. In a challenge match.

2. THE COACH: Do you really think that you are the correct person for this task?

3. AMIRA: Of course. I will defeat him.

4. THE COACH: It is highly likely that you will. And then you will probably have to spend two weeks in his company in China. Two weeks while he is wounded and even more difficult. With you as a constant reminder.

5. AMIRA: I do no t care about that.

6. THE COACH: Well I do. Because, in order for us to return victorious from China , I need a harmonious atmosphere in the camp at all times . So we need an alternative plan.

Beat

7. YOMI: 1 R Z D \ , ¶ P Q R W U H D G \ W R S O D \ K L P D J D L

8. THE COACH: Whatever happened to that young man who came here full of confidence?

9. YOMI: I was never all that confident.

10. THE COACH: Perhaps now is the time to µearn your stripes ¶. To gain your place in the team legitimately.

1. YOMI: Thanks for that . Very helpful.

2. AMIRA: You need to stop looking for so much meaning in the words all the time .

3. YOMI: , G R Q ¶W understand -

4. AMIRA: I have watched you learn ing words. You ponder far too long with your dictionary.

5. YOMI: How can you learn words without the dictionary?

6. AMIRA: It is an essential tool , yes . But f or the purposes of this game, the words do not need to have any meaning.

7. YOMI: I know all that, but -

8. AMIRA: You say you know that. But you still seem to be learning words the wrong way. You need to think of them as mere combination s of numbers. A means to an end. Nothing more.

9. YOMI: How can I remember words if I G R Q ¶ W H Y H Q know what they m ean?

10. AMIRA: Nobody can know everything.

11. YOMI: Except Victor.

12. AMIRA: This is not a time for joking.

1. YOMI: Filing cabinets?

2. AMIRA: Use them to store the words and patterns. In an orderly fashion. If we start now, you can at least make some more progress before you play him again.

SCENE 22 - NARRATION

3. YOMI: And that was it. The next three days. More intense than ever. Doing it her way. Twelve hours a day. Putting the words and patterns in µfiling cabinets ¶ in my head. And I was just starting to make progress, when the last day of camp arrived. The day of the big rematch.

SCENE 23 - SCRABBLEROOM

4. VICTOR: So, we meet again on the field of play .

5. YOMI: Looks like it.

6. VICTOR: And y ou believe you will emerge victorious this time?

7. YOMI: I E H O L H Y H ,gfYH chance.

1. VICTOR: Maybe so. You h ave been working hard. I have watched you.

2. YOMI: You must have got better yourself .

3. VICTOR: There was less room for improvement with me.

FX: The shake of a bag of Scrabble tiles as the game begins.

SCENE 24 - NARRATION

4. YOMI: $ Q G W K D W ¶ W H L W U H R I With everyone watching . She smiles at me and nods. I start with. EMPUSA. Doubled up for eight. He coun W H U V Z L W K 0 $ & . I R U short, ¶P vowels. So I go for a consonant dump. BRR . Double word score . 18 points . I stretch into a lead. But he chips away. Relentlessly banging in two, three and four letter words. ACME for 19 . CAM for 14, WAN for 17. Round after round. Like that. Until we reach the closing stages. , ¶ P 10 points ahead. With only 47 tiles in the ba g. Then he plays ZIRCON for 63 . 41 left . 7 K H 4 P L J K W V W L O O E H W K H U H , I L W not on his rack. That and the J . L ast chance s for a big score «

1. YOMI (Cont): The next few rounds. More of those little words. Twos, threes and fou rs. CH, VOWand PA and OM. Then out comes the Q . Eight tiles lef t . 539/52 5 in his favour. No room for big words. I catch her eye as I play QANAT for 54 points . She almost smiles. A double word score on the Q. 539/579 in my favour. T K H U H ¶ V Q R Z D \ K H FDQ Z L Q

FX: A spontaneous round of applause.

SCENE 25 ± SCRABBLEROOM

2. THE COACH: Perhaps it is time to be a bigger man , Victor ?

3. VICTOR: He was blessed with good fortune.

4. THE COACH: It was you who said the game was about practic e, skill and strategy.

Beat

5. THE COACH: Well?

6. VICTOR: He played a good game.

7. THE COACH: You are correct, but you should say it to him . Not me.

Beat

1. VICTOR: You played a good game. It was a deserved victory.

2. YOMI: Thanks. But f unnily enough, t he harde r I practice the luckier I get.

Beat

3. THE COACH: You want me to guess that one?

4. YOMI: If you can.

5. THE COACH: You really think I do no t kno w the most important sporting quote of them all?

6. YOMI: Are you bluffing here coach?

Beat

7. THE COACH: It was Gary Player. The golfer.

8. YOMI: Worth a try I suppose.

9. VICTOR: If you will both excuse me.

Beat

10. YOMI: He looks

1. YOMI: When you put it like that .

2. THE COACH: You have your reasons for playing Scrabble. And for travelling here to do it. V ictor also has his reasons for playing. He is a family man. People depend on him. Scrabble is how he pays his bills.

SCENE 26 - NARRATION

3. YOMI: I tried not to let them, but those words took the shine off my victory. For these guys, Scrabble was something else altogether. I was starting to realise how much this game means to some people .

SCENE 27 ± HOTEL COURTYARD

4. YOMI: Victor, a ny chance of a word?

5. VICTOR: There i s nothing to discuss. You won the match. The Coach has made a decision. I must respect that.

6. YOMI: I just wanted to say -

1. VICTOR: It was only one game, but it was a good game. You worked hard for your victory. Perhaps I could have worked harde r myself.

2. YOMI: I got decent tiles to be fair.

3. VICTOR: You deserved to win.

4. YOMI: Thanks.

Beat

5. VICTOR: So you go to China now. To represent Nigeria. As a Nigerian. You have got what you wanted. Now, if you will excuse me.

SCENE 28 - NARRATION

Beat

6. YOMI: After all these days, spent learning new words. And new techniques. Pounding those Lagos streets. Learning the Nigerian way of doing things. All of the discipline. And the focus. , V K R X O G I H H O O L N H , ¶ Y H earned this victory. I should feel happy. (F V W D W L F H Y H Q % X W V R P H K R Z , G R Q ¶ W tiny part of me does feel more Nigerian. % X W L W ¶ V Q R W E H F D X V H , ¶ P D E R X W W R J W K D W S O D Q H W R & K L Q D , W ¶ V J R W Q R W K L do with that.

SCENE 29 ± & 2 $ & + ¶ 6 2)) , & (

1. YOMI: Coach, can I have a word?

2. THE COACH: Of course. What can I do for you?

3. YOMI: , ¶ Y H G H F L G H G , ¶ P Q R W F R P L Q J W R & K L Q D

4. THE COACH: May I ask why?

5. YOMI: , W M X V W G R H V Q ¶ W I H H O U L J K W

6. THE COACH: You played a good game earlier. You have travelled a long way and worked hard for this.

7. YOMI: , N Q R Z W K D W E X W 9 L F W R U ¶ V D J R R G S O D And-

8. THE COACH: And what? You came here to play because your father was a Nigerian. You ha ve earned your pla ce.

9. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W N Q R Z , W M X V W G R H V Q ¶ W I H H O U

The Coach starts to laugh.

10. THE COACH: You are a good man, Mr Yomi from Scotland. Can I be honest with you?

11. YOMI: Of course you can.

1. THE COACH: You ha ve had enough of Nigeria?

2. YOMI: Of course not. , ¶ O O E H E Dne day .

3. THE COACH: I certainly hope so. And I also hope you eventually get the chance to comp ete at the Championships .

4. YOMI: So do I.

5. THE COACH: As they say, µ < R X P X V W F R Q F H Q W U D W H D O O your thoughts on the work at hand. The V X Q ¶ V U D \ V G R Q R W E X U Q X Q W L O W K H \ D U E U R X J K W W R D I R F X V ¶

6. YOMI: Is that a nother quote?

7. THE COACH: I will let you guess who it is from.

8. YOMI: , G R Q ¶ W N Q R Z

9. THE COACH: You must guess.

10. YOMI: Beyonce Knowles ?

11. THE COACH: You are being ridiculous now.

12. YOMI: I give up then.

13. THE COACH: It was anothe r of y our compatriots . Alexander Graham Bell. They are wise words. Do you not think?

1. YOMI: Did it now?

2. AMIRA: So why did you come here?

3. YOMI: I just did.

4. AMIRA: That is not really an answer.

5. YOMI: Because I wanted to.

6. AMIRA: That is not much better.

7. YOMI: , ¶P QRW JRLQJ WR Scotland in China LI WKDW¶V ZKDW \RX¶UH ZRUULHG DE

8. AMIRA: I am not worried, but I am simply curious. You must have had a reason for coming here when you could have played for Scotland anyway.

9. YOMI: $ ZLVH ZRPDQ RQFH WROG PH WKDW \RX G have to understand the reason for everything.

Beat

10. AMIRA: Your father never brought you to Nigeria ?

11. YOMI: , FDQ¶W UHDOO\ UHPHPEHU KLP +H ZDV D Scrabble player though.

12. AMIRA: Same as mine . He taught me to play. Then he sent me here to study a few years ago .

1. YOMI: + H ¶ V V W L O O L Q ' D X U D "

2. AMIRA: For now. Yes.

Beat

3. AMIRA: So, y ou will travel home now? Back to Scotland.

4. YOMI: I reckon so.

5. AMIRA: And you are finished with Nigeria?

6. YOMI: , ¶ O O E H E D F N

7. AMIRA: To attend the training camp?

8. YOMI: ~~Either that or a holiday.~~ But G R Q ¶ W Z R U U \ , Z R Q ¶ W E H W U \ L Q J W ¶ any more places from Nigerians.

9. AMIRA: I do no t think I would call it stealing . Not any more.

10. YOMI: Thanks.

11. AMIRA: I a m only speak ing the truth.

12. YOMI: What about you? Will yo u go back to Daura when you get back from China?

13. AMIRA: Daura is not an easy place for a woman who loves Scrabble.

1. SUNDAY No problem Boss man. Whatever you say.

Beat

~~SCENE 33 – EPILOGUE~~

~~FX: An aeroplane lands~~

~~2. YOMI: It ended up being a mixed tournament for my Nigerian team mates. Victor got beat by the eventual winner in a nailbiting semi-final. Some chemist from Thailand who could barely speak a word of English, but knew every word in the Scrabble dictionary. The team finished second overall. Their highest ever placing. But Amira had the biggest victory. She was the highest placed female competitor with the highest ever score by a Nigerian. I could never understand why they have different categories for men and women on Scrabble. But they do. And Amira wrote her place in Nigerian Scrabble folklore.~~

FX: West African Highlife music plays.

Ideally 'Viva Nigeria' by Fela Kuti.

ENDS