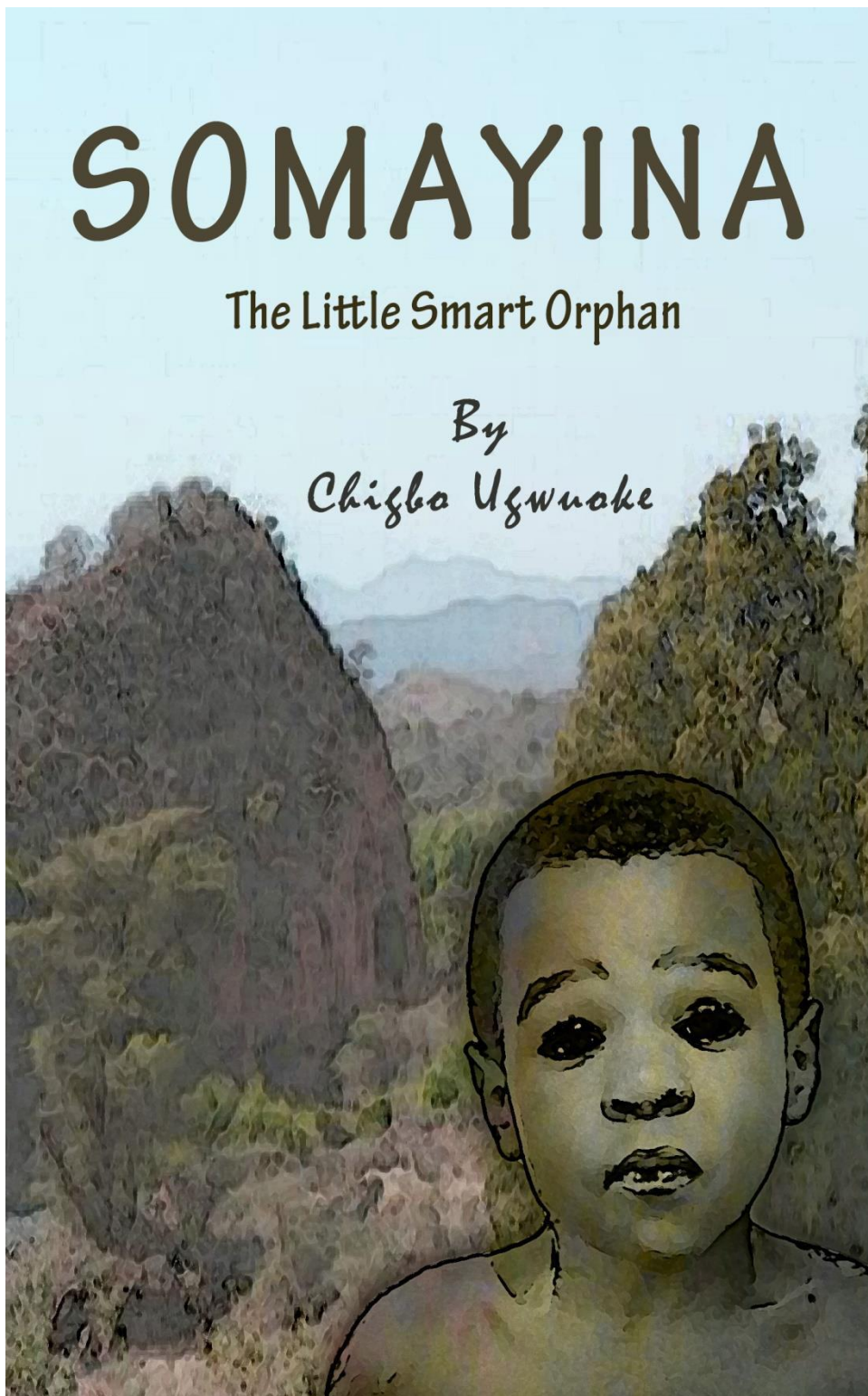


# SOMAYINA

The Little Smart Orphan

By  
*Chigbo Ugwuoke*



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## DEDICATION

To my family

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## Chapter 1

### A Long Walk to Udokamma Village

It was a bright Sunday afternoon in April 1989. Ginika, a tall, energetic girl climbed up the rigorous track road, leading a little boy by the hand as she climbed. The little boy's face was in such a glow that it sparkled through his dark chocolate skin, his teeth glittering like snow. The little boy, who was scarcely seven years old, marched forward like a little soldier. Little step after little step, he climbed, full of unknown expectations. His tiny feet were tied in his slightly undersized pair of brown sandals. Considering the hot sun, he was over-dressed in two layers of native jumpers and a matching pair of trousers.

They had been climbing for about an hour when they reached a hamlet half-way up the hills. This part of Udokamma is called Elkoro. It is Ginika's home, so she was greeted from every nook and cranny. People called her from homes, windows, shops and doors, and very often from the road. Answering them as she went by, she didn't stop until she reached the end of the hamlet. There, a few small zinc as well as thatch roofed huts lay scattered. Through an open door of the furthest of these huts, a voice called out to her. "Ginika, please wait one moment! I want to speak with you."

As soon as Ginika stood still to wait, the little orphan let go of her hand and promptly sat down on the ground.

"Somayina, are you tired?" Ginika asked.

"No, but I am hot and very hungry," the little boy replied. He only had a few pieces of sliced okpa and water for breakfast. He was obviously hot as a few drops of warm sweat drizzled down his little forehead.

"We shall be up in half an hour if you climb with all your might!" Ginika said, trying to encourage her little companion.

A pleasant-looking woman stepped out of the house and hurriedly joined them. The child had risen and wandered behind the two women, who immediately began to gossip.

"Where are you taking this little child, Ginika?" asked the gossiping lady named Monica. "Isn't he my husband's grandson, the one Uzoma, your sister left behind?"

"Yes," Ginika answered. "I am taking him up to his grandmother where I want him to remain."

"You can't really mean to take him there Ginika. I am sure the old woman will just show you the door without even listening to what you have to say."

"Monica!" Ginika called angrily, "maybe I should leave him with you and your blind husband. After all, he is your step grandson."

“No! Ginika, you cannot do that!” Monica replied quickly. “You know my husband’s condition. Besides, I want nothing to do with the boy’s weird grandmother. In any case, he will be better off there.”

“Ehee! Now you agree with me?”

“Yes Ginika. After all, he is her grandson. It is high time she did something for him. Even the heavens know, you have done your own bit.”

“Now you are talking. I have looked after the child all this while and now I have to look after myself,” Ginika murmured. “I have been offered a good job and this child shall not stop me from accepting it!”

“Serious?” Monica asked curiously.

“Six months ago,” continued Ginika, “some oil contractors from Port Harcourt lodged in the guest house where I work. In appreciation for how well I took care of them, they now want me to work for them, for three times my current salary.”

“That’s a good one! exclaimed Monica. “But... I am glad I am not the child.” she added with a shudder.

“That is not my fault,” Ginika howled stubbornly, “she won’t do her own grandson any harm.”

“Sure?” Monica retorted.

“Well, if she does, she is responsible, not I.”

“I wish I knew what weighs on the old woman’s conscience. Why are her eyes so fierce? Why does she live up there all alone? No one ever sees her and we hear many strange things about her. Didn’t your sister tell you anything, Ginika?”

“Of course she did, but I shall hold my tongue. She would make me pay for it if I didn’t.”

Monica seized Ginika’s left arm, looked around and lowered her voice, “I wish you would tell me the truth,” she said, “I know you know it all. Tell me, what has the old woman done that has made everybody turn against her? Since I married into this village, she has not been friendly to me at all. Did she always hate her fellow-creatures?”

“I cannot tell you whether she always did. She is sixty-five years old, and I am only twenty-six. You can’t expect me to give you an account of her early youth. Why not get the information from your husband? Being her ex-husband, he has all the information you want.”

“Unfortunately, my husband does not even let me say a word about her. He still has great regards for her. I believe he still loves her.”

“Okay Monica, if you’ll promise to keep the story to yourself and not set the whole village talking, I can tell you a good deal.”

“How can you talk like that, Ginika?” Monica hissed, “people do not gossip much in Udokamma. Besides, I can always keep things to myself, if I have to. You won’t regret having told me anything, I assure you!”

“All right... the old woman and my mother grew up together in Obodeze village so my mother knew much about her past... BUT keep your word!” said Ginika warningly.

Monica nodded confidently. "Why is the poor woman named Egonna? That means father's wealth? Did she or her father once have money?" Monica curiously asked.

"I should say so. Being the only child of the village chief, she was born a princess and heiress to a large estate. Her family owned a lot of properties and farms in Obodeze. Growing up, she began to play the beautiful princess. As a result she soon lost everything to fashion, jewelleries, gambling, and drink. She was wayward until she sold everything off and was eventually defrauded by con men. Her parents died with grief and she disappeared, most likely in shame. After many years, she returned to Obodeze with your husband and a half-grown boy, their son, Obinna."

"That's Somaiya's father? Monica interrupted.

"Yes. He became a carpenter and turned out to be a quiet, steady fellow, but many strange rumours went round about the woman and your husband. I think that was why they left Obodeze and relocated to Udokamma."

"What happened to Obinna, Somayina's father?" asked Monica eagerly.

"Just wait. How can I tell you everything at once?" exclaimed Ginika. "Obinna was an apprentice in Kafanchan. When he was made a master, he came home to the village and married my sister Uzoma. They had always been fond of each other. They lived very happily as man and wife. But their joy was very short. Two years later, when Obinna was helping to build a house, a beam fell on him."

"And he died?"

"Of course, he died," continued Ginika. "After that traumatic experience, Uzoma was thrown into a violent fever with grief and fright, and never recovered from it. Only a few months after Obinna's death, we buried Uzoma. Poor unlucky ones! May God bless their souls," Ginika stammered emotionally as she shook her head and continued her story.

"People said that heaven had punished Egonna for her misdeeds. After the death of her son, no one spoke to her and she never spoke to any living soul. Suddenly she abandoned Clement, her husband and moved up to the end of the village, to live there in isolation from man and in conflict with God. My mother and I took Somayina, Uzoma's little one-year-old, to live with us. When I went to Owerri I took him with me; but like I said, I have done my own bit for him. I can beat my chest and say that loud."

"And now you want to hand him over to that same terrible old woman? I still wonder how you can do that, Ginika!" said Monica reproachfully.

"Like I said, I do not know where else to take him and as you can see, he is too young to come with me to Port Harcourt. By the way, Monica, where are you going? We are half-way across your house already."

"Oh thanks for reminding me!" exclaimed Monica as she turned back.

Monica was known by the whole Udokamma as a very feeble-minded individual. She was born with a little bit of brain disability, but she was not mad in any way. Clement took her in after Egonna abandoned him, after the death of Obinna and other misfortunes befell



him. Not long after that Clement suddenly became blind. He was under a curse! Egonna thought. The news of his sudden blindness seemed to prove her right.

“Well Ginika, I wish you luck on your meeting with Egonna. I hope you meet her in a human mood.”

“I hope so. Thank you my sister,” Ginika replied as he walked along. “Good-bye.”

“Greet Egonna for me please.” Monica added.

“She will definitely hear,” replied Ginika holding Somayina by the hand. “Greet Clement too.”

“Oh I will!” Monica exclaimed.



The two ladies finally bid each other farewell and parted ways.

One bright Sunday afternoon in April, Ginika, a tall, energetic girl of this hilly region climbed up the rigorous track road, leading a little boy by the hand. . . . The little one, who was scarcely five years old, was marching forward like a little soldier in full expectation.

Chapter 2

**The Weird Woman**

**Chapter 3**  
**A New Home for the Orphan**

**Chapter 4**  
**The Beautiful Cheke Leke**

Chapter 5

**A Day with Grandfather**

## Chapter 6

# The Creaky House Rattles No More

**Chapter 7**  
**Not Today, Son!**

**Chapter 8**  
**A Sudden Change of Plans**



**Chapter 9**  
**Welcome to Eagle Island**

**Chapter 10**  
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**Good Bye to Eagle Island**



**Chapter 17**  
**East or West?**

**Chapter 18**  
**Home Is Best!**

**Chapter 19**  
**The End of the Beginning**

**Chapter 20**  
**The Beginning of the End**

## The Epilogue

“Who is that coming?” Clement asked as he tried to open his blind eyes wider.

“There comes Mr Simon Eze.” Egonna replied.

“The ward councillor? But why would he come here now, Egonna? We do not have any kids anymore.”

“My dear, don’t forget it is election time again.”

“Now I see, he could be coming to ask for our votes again,” he whispered.

“Hello Honourable, to what do we owe this visit?” Clement asked as Mr. Eze, the councillor came closer.

“Oh! Good afternoon, so glad to see you both so well. Egonna we were so pleased by your recovery. You have a letter from the post office. It has been lying there for two weeks now.” Mr. Simon Eze answered.

“A letter? We are not expecting any. Please open it straight away, let’s see what it is about.” Clement requested.

“If only Somayina were here, he would have read it even without opening the envelope.” Egonna murmured regrettably.

“It is my pleasure,” the honourable councillor said as he tore the edge of the envelope, “Ah yes! A letter from Lamido!”

“Lamido? Surprise, surprise!” screamed the couple simultaneously.

“I am sure Somayina wrote it for him.” Egonna mused.

“I am sure he did.” echoed grandpa.

The old couple could not wait. They listened attentively as Mr. Eze read the emotional letter:

*Dear Parents,*

*I hope everyone is okay. You will be glad to know that I am writing this with my own hand. Yes! I can now read and write very well. Chief Osisiego has been so nice to us. He put us in a very good school, where everyone is nice to us.*

*Tears rain from my eyes as I write. Though Somayina and I are away from home, we think of you always. We can’t thank you enough for your love. I remember the day the rain fell and the roof leaked while we slept. You covered me with the only blanket we had. Feeling the cold rain drops on my bare feet later, I thought I was dreaming, only for me to wake up soaked and freezing cold.*

*As I get older, I realize more and more how much you have done for me. I remember when life was so difficult, times when I’ve felt like giving up, but you reminded me of*

*my worth as a human being. Though I did not understand it, you said to me, "It is well!"*

*I wish to let you know that Somayina has helped me to trace my roots. Through some tribal marks, he discovered my cousin Saraki here in Port Harcourt. During the holiday, we shall visit Shehu, my grandfather, who is of the Bororo tribe in Sokoto State.*

*Though I am so excited, you remain my parents and will always be. I am alive today because you picked up that son of a stranger. Thank you for being nice to that son of a Fulani herdsman. Thank you, dad! Somayina and I can never stop thanking God for saving grandma from the heart attack that wanted to snatch her from us when we need her most.*

*I can't wait to visit home so that I may read your favourite hymns for you.*

*Thank you, dad, thank you mums,*

*Yours*

*Lamido Shehu*

## **TOP MORAL LESSONS IN THE STORY**

1. Respect and care for others, especially the older people.
2. Appreciate and protect nature and other things you may have.
3. Be kind to people no matter their tribe or tongue.
4. Believe in yourself and Work hard to be successful.

## GLOSSARY: VOCABULARY BUILDING

(Note that this is not a dictionary and the meanings given here are for this story only. The same words may have different meanings in other contexts. Students should use a dictionary to find other meanings and the meanings of any other unfamiliar words.)

### Chapter 1

1. Ancient — very old.
2. Every nook and cranny — all over, every part of a place.
3. *Okpa* — a traditional Nigerian pastry made from Bambara bean flour.

### Chapter 2

1. Defraud — cheat.
2. Adopt — to take up by law and become parent or caretaker of a child.
3. Graze — To feed animals on growing grasses and herbage.

### Chapter 3

1. Gnashing of teeth — to grind or bite noisily with one's teeth.
2. Muse over — to reflect or think about something silently.
3. Arthritis — joint disease that causes great pain, swelling and stiffness.



## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

### Chapter 1

1. What hill is the Udokamma village named after?
2. What did Somayina eat for breakfast before the journey to Udokamma?
3. Where exactly was Ginika taking the little orphan to?

### Chapter 2

1. Why was Egonna sitting outside the hut?
2. How old was Somayina when his grandmother saw him last?
3. Why did Clement and Monica adopt the Fulani boy?

### Chapter 3

1. Why did Egonna feel like cutting off her knees sometimes?
2. Why was Grandma juggling up and down like yo-yo?
3. What names did Grandma give to her two young goats?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Chigbo Ugwuoke is a native of Ihe, Obukpa, Nsukka in Enugu State of Nigeria. He is a London-based lawyer and a performance mastercoach. He studied and obtained a degree in law from Enugu State University and subsequently from BPP Law College, in London. He is a member of the Nigerian Bar Association and the Law Society of England and Wales. He lives in London with his family.

He is also the author of “Ogadimma”, “A new Africa”, “The African Prince” and many other books.

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

One after the other, a young couple dies, leaving behind a toddler called Somayina. At age seven, this adorable little orphan is returned to the village, to live with his father’s mother. Everyone is afraid of this weird, old woman, but Somayina is fascinated by her unkempt hair, bushy grey eyebrows and overgrown nails. He loves his life with his grandmother. He plays in the sunshine, growing up amongst the goats and birds. But this fantastic life is cut short. Like a fish from the river, he was removed from his grandmother and made to live with strangers. He can’t fit into city life; he is missing his grandmother so much. Will he ever find his way back to his grandmother in the tranquil hilly village? As the little orphan muses over all these in heart, something strange happens that gets him even more confused.