

## SURA YA KUMI NA MOJA

The night was impenetrably dark.  
The moon had been rising later  
and later every night until now it  
was seen only at dawn. And  
whenever the moon forsook  
evening and rose at cock-crow the  
nights were as black as charcoal.

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The moon had been rising later  
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Usiku ulikuwa wa giza lisiloweza  
kupimika. Mwezi ulikuwa  
ukichomoza baadaye na baadaye  
kila usiku hadi sasa ulionekana  
alfajiri tu. Na kila mwezi  
ulipoacha jioni na kuchomoza  
wakati wa kuwika kwa jogoo,  
usiku ulikuwa mweusi kama  
makaa.

Usiku ulikuwa wa giza lisiloweza  
kupimika. Mwezi ulikuwa  
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kila usiku hadi sasa ulionekana

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whenever the moon forsook evening and rose at cock-crow the nights were as black as charcoal. Ezinma and her mother sat on a mat on the floor after their supper of yam foo-foo and bitter-leaf soup. A palm-oil lamp gave out yellowish light. Without it, it would have been impossible to eat,-one could not have known where one's mouth was in the darkness of that night. There was an oil lamp in all the four huts on Okonkwo's compound, and each hut seen from the others looked like a soft eye of yellow half-light set in the solid massiveness of night.

The world was silent except for the shrill cry of insects, which was part of the night, and the sound of wooden mortar and pestle as Nwayieke pounded her foo-foo. Nwayieke lived four compounds away, and she was notorious for her late cooking. Every woman in the neighbourhood knew the sound of Nwayieke's mortar and pestle. It was also part of the

alfajiri tu. Na kila mwezi ulipoacha jioni na kuchomoza wakati wa kuwika kwa jogoo, usiku ulikuwa mweusi kama makaa.

Ezinma na mama yake waliketi kwenye mkeka sakafuni baada ya chakula chao cha jioni cha yam foo-foo na supu ya majani machungu. Taa ya mafuta ya mawese ilitoa mwanga wa manjano. Bila hivyo, isingewezekana kula,-mtu hangeweza kujua ni wapi mdomo wake ulikuwa gizani ya usiku huo. Kulikuwa na taa ya mafuta kwenye vibanda vyote vinne kwenye boma la Okonkwo, na kila kibanda kilichoonekana kutoka kwa vingine kilionekana kama jicho laini la nusu-mwanga wa manjano lililowekwa kwenye giza kuu la usiku.

Ulimwengu ulikuwa kimya isipokuwa mlilo mkali wa wadudu, ambao ulikuwa sehemu ya usiku, na sauti ya chokaa cha mbao huku Nwayieke akimpiga foo-foo. Nwayieke aliishi maeneo manne, na alikuwa maarufu kwa kuchelewa kupika. Kila mwanamke katika mtaa huo alijua mlilo wa chokaa na mchi wa Nwayieke. Ilikuwa pia sehemu ya

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night.

usiku.

Okonkwo had eaten from his wives' dishes and was now reclining with his back against the wall. He searched his bag and brought out his snuff-bottle. He turned it on to his left palm, but nothing came out. He hit the bottle against his knee to shake up the tobacco. That was always the trouble with Okeke's snuff. It very quickly went damp, and there was too much saltpetre in it. Okonkwo had not bought snuff from him for a long time. Idigo was the man who knew how to grind good snuff. But he had recently fallen ill.

Low voices, broken now and again by singing, reached Okonkwo from his wives' huts as each woman and her children told folk stories. Ekwefi and her daughter, Ezinma, sat on a mat on the floor. It was Ekwefi's turn to tell a story.

"Once upon a time," she began, "all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for the great day. They

Okonkwo alikuwa amekula kutoka kwa vyombo vya wake zake na sasa alikuwa ameegemea mgongo wake ukutani. Alipekua begi lake na kutoa chupa yake ya ugoro. Akaiwasha kwenye kiganja chake cha kushoto, lakini hakuna kilichotoka. Aligonga chupa kwenye goti ili kuitingisha tumbaku. Hiyo ndiyo ilikuwa shida kila wakati na ugoro wa Okeke. Haraka sana iliingia unyevu, na kulikuwa na chumvi nyingi ndani yake. Okonkwo alikuwa hajanunua ugoro kutoka kwake kwa muda mrefu. Idigo ndiye mtu aliyejua kusaga ugoro mzuri. Lakini hivi karibuni alikuwa mgonjwa.

Sauti za chini, zilizovunjika mara kwa mara kwa kuimba, zilimfikia Okonkwo kutoka kwa vibanda vya wake zake huku kila mwanamke na watoto wake wakisimulia hadithi za watu. Ekwefi na bintiye, Ezinma, waliketi kwenye mkeka sakafuni. Ikafika zamu ya Ekwefi kusimulia hadithi.

"Hapo zamani za kale," alianza, "ndege wote walialikwa kwenye karamu angani. Walifurahi sana na wakaanza kujitayarisha kwa ajili ya siku hiyo kuu. Walipaka miili

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painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them with uli.

"Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of the animals ever escaped his notice, - he was full of cunning. As soon as he heard of the great feast in the sky his throat began to itch at the very thought. There was a famine in those days and Tortoise had not eaten a good meal for two moons. His body rattled like a piece of dry stick in his empty shell. So he began to plan how he would go to the sky."

"But he had no wings," said Ezinma.

"Be patient," replied her mother. "That is the story. Tortoise had no wings, but he went to the birds and asked to be allowed to go with them.

"'We know you too well,' said the birds when they had heard him. 'You are full of cunning and you are ungrateful. If we allow you to come with us you will soon begin your mischief.'

"'You do not know me,' said Tortoise. 'I am a changed man. I have learned that a man who

yao kwa mbao nyekundu za cam na kuchora michoro nzuri juu yake. wao na uli.

"Kobe aliona maandalizi haya yote na mara akagundua maana yake. Hakuna chochote kilichotokea katika ulimwengu wa wanyama ambacho kilimkwepa - alikuwa amejaa ujanja. Mara tu aliposikia karamu kubwa angani koo lake lilianza. kuwashwa na mawazo. Kulikuwa na njaa siku zile na Kobe alikuwa hajala chakula kizuri kwa miezi miwili. Mwili wake ulikuwa ukinguruma kama kipande cha fimbo kikavu kwenye ganda lake tupu. Hivyo akaanza kupanga jinsi ya kwenda anga."

"Lakini hakuwa na mbawa," alisema Ezinma.

"Vumilia," alijibu mama yake.

"Hiyo ndiyo hadithi. Kobe hakuwa na mbawa, lakini aliwaendea ndege na kuomba aruhusiwe kwenda nao.

"'Tunakufahamu vizuri sana,' ndege walisema walipomsikia.

'Umejaa ujanja na huna shukrani. Tukikuruhusu uje pamoja nasi utaanza ubaya wako hivi karibuni.'

"'Hunijui,' alisema Kobe. 'Mimi ni mtu aliyebadilika. Nimejifunza kwamba mtu anayewaletea

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makes trouble for others is also making it for himself.'

"Tortoise had a sweet tongue, and within a short time all the birds agreed that he was a changed man, and they each gave him a feather, with which he made two wings.

"At last the great day came and Tortoise was the first to arrive at the meeting place. When all the birds had gathered together, they set off in a body. Tortoise was very happy and voluble as he flew among the birds, and he was soon chosen as the man to speak for the party because he was a great orator.

"There is one important thing which we must not forget,' he said as they flew on their way. 'When people are invited to a great feast like this, they take new names for the occasion. Our hosts in the sky will expect us to honour this age-old custom.'

"None of the birds had heard of this custom but they knew that Tortoise, in spite of his failings in other directions, was a widely-travelled man who knew the customs of different peoples. And

wengine matatizo pia anajifanyia mwenyewe.'

"Kobe alikuwa na ulimi mtamu, na ndani ya muda mfupi ndege wote walikubali kuwa yeye ni mtu aliyebadilika, na kila mmoja alimpa manyoya, ambayo alitengeneza mbawa mbili.

"Hatimaye siku kuu ilifika na Kobe alikuwa wa kwanza kufika mahali pa mkutano. Ndege wote walipokusanyika pamoja, walianza safari wakiwa mwili. Kobe alifurahi sana na kurukaruka alipokuwa akiruka kati ya ndege, na alikuwa punde si punde alichaguliwa kuwa mtu wa kuzungumza kwa ajili ya chama kwa sababu alikuwa mzungumzaji mzuri.

"Kuna jambo moja muhimu ambalo hatupaswi kusahau," alisema wakati wakiruka njiani.

'Watu wanapoalikwa kwenye karamu kubwa kama hii, huchukua majina mapya kwa hafla hiyo. Wenyeji wetu angani watatutarajia. kuheshimu desturi hii ya zamani.'

"Hakuna ndege hata mmoja aliyesikia kuhusu desturi hii, lakini walijua kwamba Kobe, licha ya kushindwa kwake katika njia nyingine, alikuwa mtu aliyesafiri sana ambaye alijua mila ya watu

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so they each took a new name. When they had all taken, Tortoise also took one. He was to be called 'All of you'.

"At last the party arrived in the sky and their hosts were very happy to see them. Tortoise stood up in his many-coloured plumage and thanked them for their invitation. His speech was so eloquent that all the birds were glad they had brought him, and nodded their heads in approval of all he said. Their hosts took him as the king of the birds, especially as he looked somewhat different from the others.

"After kola nuts had been presented and eaten, the people of the sky set before their guests the most delectable dishes Tortoise had even seen or dreamed of. The soup was brought out hot from the fire and in the very pot in which it had been cooked. It was full of meat and fish. Tortoise began to sniff aloud. There was pounded yam and also yam pottage cooked with palm-oil and fresh fish. There were also pots of palm-wine. When everything had been set before the guests, one of the people of the sky came forward and tasted a little from each pot.

tofauti. Na hivyo kila mmoja alichukua jina jipya. wote walikuwa wamemchukua, Kobe naye alichukua mmoja, naye ataitwa 'Nyinyi nyote'.

"Mwishowe sherehe ilifika angani na wenyeji wao walifurahi sana kuwaona. Kobe alisimama katika manyoya yake ya rangi nyingi na kuwashukuru kwa mwaliko wao. Hotuba yake ilikuwa ya ufasaha sana hata ndege wote walifurahi kumleta. , na kutikisa vichwa vyao kukubaliana na yote aliyosema, wenyeji wao walimchukua kama mfalme wa ndege, hasa kwa vile alionekana tofauti na wengine.

"Baada ya karanga za kola kuwasilishwa na kuliwa, watu wa angani waliweka mbele ya wageni wao sahani za kupendeza zaidi ambazo Kobe alikuwa ameona au kuota. Supu hiyo ilitolewa nje ya moto kutoka kwa moto na katika sufuria ambayo alikuwa ametiwa. Ilipikwa. Ilijaa nyama na samaki. Kobe akaanza kunusa kwa sauti. Kulikuwa na viazi vikuu vilivyopondwa na pia viazi vikuu vilivyopikwa kwa mafuta ya mawese na samaki wabichi. Kulikuwa pia na masufuria ya mvinyo. Kila kitu kilikuwa kimewekwa mbele ya

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He then invited the birds to eat.  
But Tortoise jumped to his feet  
and asked: 'Tor whom have you  
prepared this feast?'

"For all of you," replied the man.

"Tortoise turned to the birds and  
said: 'You remember that my name  
is All of you. The custom here is  
to serve the spokesman first and  
the others later. They will serve  
you when I have eaten.'

"He began to eat and the birds  
grumbled angrily. The people of  
the sky thought it must be their  
custom to leave all the food for  
their king. And so Tortoise ate the  
best part of the food and then  
drank two pots of palm-wine, so  
that he was full of food and drink  
and his body filled out in his shell.

"The birds gathered round to eat  
what was left and to peck at the  
bones he had thrown all about the  
floor. Some of them were too  
angry to eat. They chose to fly  
home on an empty stomach. But  
before they left each took back the  
feather he had lent to Tortoise.

wageni. , mmoja wa watu wa  
angani akaja na kuonja kidogo  
kutoka katika kila chungu. Kisha  
akawaita ndege wale. Lakini Kobe  
akaruka kwa miguu yake na  
kuuliza: Tor umemwandalia nani  
karamu hii?"

"Kwa ninyi nyote," alijibu mtu  
huyo.

"Kobe aliwageukia ndege na  
kusema: 'Mnakumbuka kwamba  
jina langu ni Nyote. Desturi ya  
hapa ni kumtumikia msemaji  
kwanza na wengine baadaye.  
Watakuhudumia nitakapokula."

"Akaanza kula na ndege  
wakanung'unika kwa hasira. Watu  
wa angani walidhani ni desturi yao  
kumwachia mfalme wao chakula  
chote. Na hivyo Kobe akala  
sehemu bora ya chakula kisha  
akanywa vyungu viwili vya  
mvinyo wa mawese. , hivi  
kwamba alishiba chakula na  
vinywaji na mwili wake kujaa  
kwenye ganda lake.

"Ndege walikusanyika ili kula kile  
kilichosalia na kunyonya mifupa  
aliyokuwa ameitupa sakafuni.  
Baadhi yao walikuwa na hasira ya  
kula. Walichagua kuruka  
nyumbani wakiwa na tumbo tupu.  
Lakini kabla ya kuondoka kila  
mmoja alirudi nyuma. manyoya

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And there he stood in his hard shell full of food and wine but without any wings to fly home. He asked the birds to take a message for his wife, but they all refused. In the end Parrot, who had felt more angry than the others, suddenly changed his mind and agreed to take the message.

"Tell my wife," said Tortoise, 'to bring out all the soft things in my house and cover the compound with them so that I can jump down from the sky without very great danger.'

"Parrot promised to deliver the message, and then flew away. But when he reached Tortoise's house he told his wife to bring out all the hard things in the house. And so she brought out her husband's hoes, machetes, spears, guns and even his cannon. Tortoise looked down from the sky and saw his wife bringing things out, but it was too far to see what they were. When all seemed ready he let himself go. He fell and fell and fell until he began to fear that he would never stop falling. And then

aliyokuwa amemkopesha Kobe. Na hapo alisimama kwenye ganda lake gumu lililojaa chakula na divai lakini bila mbawa zozote za kuruka nyumbani. Akawaomba ndege wampelekee mke wake ujumbe, lakini wote walikataa. Mwishowe Kasuku, ambaye alikuwa amekasirika zaidi kuliko wengine, ghafla alibadili mawazo yake na kukubali kupokea ujumbe huo.

"Mwambie mke wangu," Kobe alisema, 'atoe vitu vyote laini ndani ya nyumba yangu na kufunika kiwanja navyo ili niweze kuruka chini kutoka angani bila hatari kubwa sana.'

"Kasuku aliahidi kufikisha ujumbe huo, kisha akaruka. Lakini alipofika nyumbani kwa Kobe alimwambia mkewe atoe mambo yote magumu ya pale nyumbani. Na hivyo akamtolea mumewe majembe, mapanga, mikuki, bunduki na hata. kanuni yake. Kobe alitazama chini kutoka angani na kumuona mkewe akitoa vitu, lakini ilikuwa mbali sana kuona ni nini. Wakati wote walionekana kuwa tayari alijiachia. Alianguka na kuanguka na kuanguka hadi akaanza



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like the sound of his cannon he crashed on the compound." ';;  
"Did he die?" asked Ezinma.

"No," replied Ekwefi. "His shell broke into pieces. But there was a great medicine man in the neighbourhood. Tortoise's wife sent for him and he gathered all the bits of shell and stuck them together. That is why Tortoise's shell is not smooth."

"There is no song in the story," Ezinma pointed out.

"No," said Ekwefi. "I shall think of another one with a song. But it is your turn now."

"Once upon a time," Ezinma began, "Tortoise and Cat went to wrestle against Yams--no, that is not the beginning. Once upon a time there was a great famine in the land of animals. Everybody was lean except Cat, who was fat and whose body shone as if oil was rubbed on it..."

She broke off because at that very moment a loud and high-pitched voice broke the outer silence of the night. It was Chielo, the

kuogopa. kamwe hataacha kuanguka. Na kisha kama mlio wa kanuni yake aligonga kwenye boma." ';; "Alikufa?" aliuliza Ezinma.

"Hapana," alijibu Ekwefi. "Ganda lake lilivunjika vipande vipande. Lakini kulikuwa na mganga mkuu katika jirani. Mke wa kobe alimtuma na akakusanya vipande vyote vya ganda na kuvishikanisha. Ndiyo maana ganda la Kobe si laini."

"Hakuna wimbo katika hadithi," Ezinma alisema.

"Hapo zamani za kale," Ezinma alianza, "Kobe na Paka walikwenda kushindana dhidi ya Yams - hapana, huo sio mwanzo. Hapo zamani za kale kulikuwa na njaa kubwa katika nchi ya wanyama. Kila mtu alikuwa amekonda isipokuwa Paka; ambaye alikuwa mnene na ambaye mwili wake uling'aa kana kwamba mafuta yamepakwa juu yake..."

Aliachana kwa sababu wakati huo huo sauti kubwa na ya juu ilivunja ukimya wa nje wa usiku. Ilikuwa ni Chielo, kuhani wa Agbala,

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priestess of Agbala, prophesying. There was nothing new in that. Once in a while Chielo was possessed by the spirit of her god and she began to prophesy. But tonight she was addressing her prophecy and greetings to Okonkwo, and so everyone in his family listened. The folk stories stopped.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o-o," came the voice like a sharp knife cutting through the night. "Okonkwo! Agbala ekme gio-o-o-o! Agbala cholu ifu ada ya Ezinmao-o-o-oi"

At the mention of Ezinma's name Ekwefi jerked her head sharply like an animal that had sniffed death in the air. Her heart jumped painfully within her.

The priestess had now reached Okonkwo's compound and was talking with him outside his hut. She was saying again and again that Agbala wanted to see his daughter, Ezinma. Okonkwo pleaded with her to come back in the morning because Ezinma was now asleep. But Chielo ignored what he was trying to say and went on shouting that Agbala wanted to see his daughter. Her voice was as clear as metal, and Okonkwo's women and children

akitabiri. Hakukuwa na jipya katika hilo. Mara kwa mara Chielo aliingiwa na roho ya mungu wake na akaanza kutabiri. Lakini usiku wa leo alikuwa akihutubia unabii na salamu zake kwa Okonkwo, na hivyo kila mtu katika familia yake alisikiliza. Hadithi za watu zilisimama.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o-o," ilisikika sauti kama kisu kikali kinachokata usiku kucha.

"Okonkwo! Agbala ekme gio-o-o-o! Agbala cholu ifu ada ya Ezinmao-o-o-oi"

Kwa kutajwa kwa jina la Ezinma Ekwefi alitingisha kichwa kwa kasi mithili ya mnyama aliyenusa kifo hewani. Moyo wake uliruka kwa uchungu ndani yake.

Kasisi huyo sasa alikuwa amefika kwenye boma la Okonkwo na alikuwa anazungumza naye nje ya kibanda chake. Alikuwa akisema tena na tena kwamba Agbala alitaka kumuona binti yake, Ezinma. Okonkwo alimsihi arudi asubuhi kwa sababu Ezinma alikuwa amelala. Lakini Chielo alipuuza alichokuwa akijaribu kusema na kuendelea kupiga kelele kwamba Agbala alitaka kumuona binti yake. Sauti yake ilikuwa safi kama chuma, na

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heard from their huts all that she said. Okonkwo was still pleading that the girl had been ill of late and was asleep. Ekwefi quickly took her to their bedroom and placed her on their high bamboo bed.

wanawake na watoto wa Okonkwo walisikia kutoka kwenye vibanda vyao yote aliyosema. Okonkwo alikuwa bado anasihi kwamba msichana huyo alikuwa amechelewa na alikuwa amelala. Ekwefi haraka akampeleka chumbani kwao na kumweka kwenye kitanda chao cha mianzi mirefu.

The priestess screamed. "Beware, Okonkwo!" she warned. "Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!"

Kasisi huyo alipiga kelele. "Jihadhari, Okonkwo!" Alionya. "Jihadharini na kubadilishana maneno na Agbala. Je, mtu huzungumza wakati mungu anazungumza? Jihadharini!"

She walked through Okonkwo's hut into the circular compound and went straight toward Ekwefi's hut. Okonkwo came after her.

"Ekwefi," she called, "Agbala greets you. Where is my daughter, Ezinma? Agbala wants to see her."

Ekwefi came out from her hut carrying her oil lamp in her left hand. There was a light wind blowing, so she cupped her right hand to shelter the flame. Nwoye's mother, also carrying an oil lamp, emerged from her hut. The children stood in the darkness

Alipita kwenye kibanda cha Okonkwo hadi kwenye kiwanja cha duara na kwenda moja kwa moja kuelekea kwenye kibanda cha Ekwefi. Okonkwo alimfuata. "Ekwefi," aliita, "Agbala anakusalimu. Binti yangu, Ezinma yuko wapi? Agbala anataka kumuona."

Ekwefi alitoka kwenye kibanda chake akiwa amebeba taa yake ya mafuta katika mkono wake wa kushoto. Kulikuwa na upepo mwepesi ukivuma, hivyo akaushika mkono wake wa kulia ili kuukinga moto. Mama Nwoye naye akiwa amebeba taa ya mafuta

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outside their hut watching the strange event. Okonkwo's youngest wife also came out and joined the others.

"Where does Agbala want to see her?" Ekwefi asked.

"Where else but in his house in the hills and the caves?" replied the priestess. "I will come with you, too," Ekwefi said firmly.

"Tufia-al" the priestess cursed, her voice cracking like the angry bark of thunder in the dry season. "How dare you, woman, to go before the mighty Agbala of your own accord? Beware, woman, lest he strike you in his anger. Bring me my daughter."

Ekwefi went into her hut and came out again with Ezinma.

"Come, my daughter," said the priestess. "I shall carry you on my back. A baby on its mother's back does not know that the way is long."

Ezinma began to cry. She was used to Chielo calling her "my daughter." But it was a different Chielo she now saw in the yellow half-light.

alitoka kwenye kibanda chake.

Watoto walisimama gizani nje ya kibanda chao wakitazama tukio hilo la ajabu. Mke mdogo wa Okonkwo naye alitoka na kuungana na wengine.

"Agbala anataka kumuona wapi?" Ekwefi aliuliza.

"Wapi kwingine ila katika nyumba yake katika milima na mapango?" akajibu kasisi. "Nitakuja nawe pia," Ekwefi alisema kwa uthabiti.

"Tufia-al" padre alilaani, sauti yake ikipasuka kama gome la hasira la radi wakati wa kiangazi.

"Wewe mwanamke, unawezaje kuthubutu kwenda mbele ya Agbala hodari kwa hiari yako mwenyewe? Jihadhari, mwanamke, asiye akakupiga kwa hasira yake. Nilettee binti yangu." Ekwefi aliingia ndani ya kibanda chake na kutoka tena akiwa na Ezinma.

"Njoo, binti yangu," kuhani alisema. "Nitakubeba mgongoni. Mtoto mchanga mgongoni mwa mama yake hajui kuwa njia ni ndefu."

Ezinma alianza kulia. Alikuwa amezoea Chielo kumwita "binti yangu." Lakini ilikuwa ni Chielo tofauti ambaye sasa alimuona kwenye nuru ya manjano.

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"Don't cry, my daughter," said the priestess, "lest Agbala be angry with you."

"Don't cry," said Ekwefi, "she will bring you back very soon. I shall give you some fish to eat." She went into the hut again and brought down the smoke-black basket in which she kept her dried fish and other ingredients for cooking soup. She broke a piece in two and gave it to Ezinma, who clung to her.

"Don't be afraid," said Ekwefi, stroking her head, which was shaved in places, leaving a regular pattern of hair. They went outside again. The priestess bent down on one knee and Ezinma climbed on her back, her left palm closed on her fish and her eyes gleaming with tears.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!..." Chielo began once again to chant greetings to her god. She turned round sharply and walked through Okonkwo's hut, bending very low at the eaves. Ezinma was crying loudly now, calling on her mother. The two voices disappeared into the thick darkness.

"Usilie, binti yangu," kuhani alisema, "ili Agbala asiwe na hasira na wewe."

"Usilie," Ekwefi alisema, "atakurudisha haraka sana. Nitakupa samaki ule." Aliingia ndani ya kibanda tena na kuteremsha kikapu cheusi cha moshi ambacho aliweka samaki wake waliokaushwa na viungo vingine vya kupikia supu. Alivunja kipande vipande viwili na kumpa Ezinma, ambaye aling'ang'ania kwake.

"Usiogope," alisema Ekwefi huku akikipapasa kichwa chake kilichokuwa kimenyolewa sehemu fulani na kuacha mtindo wa kawaida wa nywele. Wakatoka tena nje. Kasisi akainama kwa goti moja na Ezinma akapanda mgongoni, kiganja chake cha kushoto kilifunga samaki wake na macho yake yakimeta kwa machozi.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!..." Chielo alianza kwa mara nyingine tena kuimba salamu kwa mungu wake. Aligeuka kwa kasi na kupita ndani ya kibanda cha Okonkwo, akiinama chini sana kwenye michirizi. Ezinma alikuwa akilia kwa sauti kubwa sasa, akimwita mama yake. Sauti hizo mbili zilitoweka kwenye giza

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nene.

A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite. Ezinma's voice soon faded away and only Chielo was heard moving further and further into the distance.

"Why do you stand there as though she had been kidnapped?" asked Okonkwo as he went back to his hut.

"She will bring her back soon," Nwoye's mother said.

But Ekwefi did not hear these consolations. She stood for a while, and then, all of a sudden, made up her mind. She hurried through Okonkwo's hut and went outside. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am following Chielo," she replied and disappeared in the darkness. Okonkwo cleared his throat, and brought out his snuff-bottle from the goatskin bag by his side.

The priestess' voice was already growing faint in the distance. Ekwefi hurried to the main footpath and turned left in the

Udhaifu wa ajabu na wa ghafla ukamshukia Ekwefi akiwa amesimama akitazama upande wa sauti mithili ya kuku ambaye kifaranga wake pekee amebebwa na kite. Muda si muda sauti ya Ezinma ikatoweka na Chielo pekee ndiye aliyesikika akisogea zaidi na zaidi kwa mbali.

"Kwa nini unasimama pale kana kwamba ametekwa nyara?" aliuliza Okonkwo huku akirudi kwenye kibanda chake.

"Atamrudisha hivi karibuni," mama yake Nwoye alisema.

Lakini Ekwefi hakisikia faraja hizi. Alisimama kwa muda, na kisha, ghafla, akaamua. Alipita haraka kwenye kibanda cha Okonkwo na kutoka nje. "Unaenda wapi?" Aliuliza.

"Namfuata Chielo," alijibu na kutokomea gizani. Okonkwo alisafisha koo lake, na akatoa chupa yake ya ugoro kutoka kwenye mfuko wa ngozi ya mbuzi kando yake.

Sauti ya padre tayari ilikuwa inazidi kuzimia kwa mbali. Ekwefi aliharakisha hadi kwenye njia kuu ya watembea kwa miguu na

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direction of the voice. Her eyes were useless to her in the darkness. But she picked her way easily on the sandy footpath hedged on either side by branches and damp leaves. She began to run, holding her breasts with her hands to stop them flapping noisily against her body. She hit her left foot against an outcropped root, and terror seized her. It was an ill omen. She ran faster. But Chielo's voice was still a long way away. Had she been running too? How could she go so fast with Ezinma on her back? Although the night was cool, Ekwefi was beginning to feel hot from her running. She continually ran into the luxuriant weeds and creepers that walled in the path. Once she tripped up and fell. Only then did she realise, with a start, that Chielo had stopped her chanting. Her heart beat violently and she stood still. Then Chielo's renewed outburst came from only a few paces ahead. But Ekwefi could not see her. She shut her eyes for a while and opened them again in an effort to see. But it was useless. She could not see beyond her nose.

kukunja kushoto kuelekea upande wa sauti. Macho yake hayakuwa na faida kwake katika giza. Lakini alichukua njia yake kwa urahisi kwenye njia ya mchanga iliyozungukwa na matawi na majani machafu kila upande. Alianza kukimbia huku akiyashika matiti yake kwa mikono ili kuyazuia yasipige kelele mwilini mwake. Aligonga mguu wake wa kushoto kwenye mzizi uliotoka nje, na hofu ikamshika. Ilikuwa ni ishara mbaya. Alikimbia kwa kasi. Lakini sauti ya Chielo ilikuwa bado iko mbali. Je! alikuwa akikimbia pia? Angewezaje kwenda haraka hivyo Ezinma mgongoni mwake? Ingawa usiku ulikuwa wa baridi, Ekwefi alianza kuhisi joto kutokana na kukimbia kwake. Mara kwa mara alikimbilia kwenye magugu na wanyama watambao ambao walikuwa wamejizungushia ukuta kwenye njia. Mara moja alijikwaa na kuanguka. Hapo ndipo alipogundua, kwa kuanza, kwamba Chielo alikuwa ameacha kuimba. Moyo wake ulipiga kwa nguvu na akasimama tuli. Kisha mlipuko mpya wa Chielo ulitoka kwa hatua chache tu mbele. Lakini Ekwefi hakuweza kumuona. Alifumba macho kwa muda na



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kuyafumbua tena kwa jitihada za kuona. Lakini ilikuwa bure. Hakuweza kuona zaidi ya pua yake.

There were no stars in the sky because there was a rain-cloud. Fireflies went about with their tiny green lamps, which only made the darkness more profound. Between Chielo's outbursts the night was alive with the shrill tremor of forest insects woven into the darkness.

"Agbala do-o-o-o!... Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!..." Ekwefi trudged behind, neither getting too near nor keeping too far back. She thought they must be going towards the sacred cave. Now that she walked slowly she had time to think. What would she do when they got to the cave? She would not dare to enter. She would wait at the mouth, all alone in that fearful place. She thought of all the terrors of the night. She remembered that night, long ago, when she had seen Ogbu-agali-odu, one of those evil essences loosed upon the world by the potent "medicines" which the tribe had made in the distant past against its enemies but had now forgotten how to control. Ekwefi

Hakukuwa na nyota angani kwa sababu kulikuwa na wingu la mvua. Vimulimuli walizunguka na taa zao ndogo za kijani kibichi, jambo ambalo lilifanya giza kuwa kubwa zaidi. Kati ya milipuko ya Chielo usiku ulikuwa hai na mtetemeko mkali wa wadudu wa msituni waliowekwa gizani.

"Agbala do-o-o-o!... Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o!..." Ekwefi alijikongoja nyuma, hakukaribia sana wala kurudi nyuma sana. Alifikiri lazima wangeelekea kwenye pango takatifu. Sasa alipotembea taratibu alipata muda wa kufikiria. Angefanya nini walipofika pangoni?

Asingethubutu kuingia. Angengoja mdomoni, akiwa peke yake katika sehemu hiyo ya kutisha. Alifikiria vitisho vyote vya usiku.

Alikumbuka usiku ule, zamani sana, alipomwona Ogbu-agali-odu, mojawapo ya zile asili ovu zilizoachiliwa duniani kwa "dawa" zenye nguvu ambazo kabila hilo lilikuwa limetengeneza siku za nyuma dhidi ya maadui zake lakini sasa lilikuwa limesahau jinsi gani.



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had been returning from the stream with her mother on a dark night like this when they saw its glow as it flew in their direction. They had thrown down their waterpots and lain by the roadside expecting the sinister light to descend on them and kill them. That was the only time Ekwefi ever saw Ogbu-agali-odu. But although it had happened so long ago, her blood still ran cold whenever she remembered that night.

The priestess' voice came at longer intervals now, but its vigour was undiminished. The air was cool and damp with dew. Ezinma sneezed. Ekwefi muttered, "Life to you." At the same time the priestess also said, "Life to you, my daughter."

Ezinma's voice from the darkness warmed her mother's heart. She trudged slowly along.

And then the priestess screamed. "Somebody is walking behind me!" she said. "Whether you are spirit or man, may Agbala shave your head with a blunt razor! May he twist your neck until you see your heels!"

kudhibiti. Ekwefi alikuwa akirudi kutoka kijito na mamake usiku wa giza namna hii walipoona mwanga wake ukiruka kuelekea kwao. Walikuwa wametupa mitungi yao ya maji na kulala kando ya barabara wakitarajia mwanga mbaya uwashukie na kuwaua. Hiyo ndiyo ilikuwa mara ya pekee Ekwefi aliwahi kumuona Ogbu-agali-odu. Ila japo ilikuwa imetokea zamani sana, bado damu yake ilikuwa baridi kila alipokumbuka usiku ule.

Sauti ya kuhani ilisikika kwa vipindi virefu zaidi sasa, lakini nguvu zake hazikupungua. Hewa ilikuwa baridi na unyevunyevu kwa umande. Ezinma alipiga chafya. Ekwefi alinung'unika, "Maisha kwako." Wakati huo huo kuhani pia alisema, "Uzima kwako, binti yangu."

Sauti ya Ezinma kutoka gizani iliuchangamsha moyo wa mama yake. Yeye trudged taratibu pamoja.

Na kisha kuhani akapiga kelele. "Kuna mtu anatembea nyuma yangu!" alisema.

"Uwe ni roho au mwanamume, naomba Agbala akunyoe kichwa chako kwa wembe butu! Azungushe shingo yako mpaka

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Ekwefi stood rooted to the spot. One mind said to her: "Woman, go home before Agbala does you harm." But she could not. She stood until Chielo had increased the distance between them and she began to follow again. She had already walked so long that she began to feel a slight numbness in the limbs and in the head. Then it occurred to her that they could not have been heading for the cave. They must have bypassed it long ago,- they must be going towards Umuachi, the farthest village in the clan. Chielo's voice now came after long intervals.

It seemed to Ekwefi that the night had become a little lighter. The cloud had lifted and a few stars were out. The moon must be preparing to rise, its sullenness over. When the moon rose late in the night, people said it was refusing food, as a sullen husband refuses his wife's food when they have quarrelled.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Umuachi! Agbala ekene unuo-o-ol" It was just as Ekwefi had thought. The

uone visigino vyako!"

Ekwefi alisimama mizizi pale pale. Akili moja ikamwambia: "Mwanamke, nenda nyumbani kabla Agbala hajakudhuru." Lakini hakuweza. Alisimama hadi Chielo alipoongeza umbali kati yao na kuanza kufuata tena. Tayari alikuwa ametembea kwa muda mrefu kiasi kwamba alianza kuhisi ganzi kidogo ya viungo na kichwa. Kisha ikamjia kwamba hawangeweza kuwa wanaelekea pangoni. Lazima wawe wameikwepa muda mrefu uliopita,- lazima wawe wanaelekea Umuachi, kijiji cha mbali zaidi katika ukoo huo. Sauti ya Chielo sasa ilikuja baada ya vipindi virefu.

Ilionekana kwa Ekwefi kuwa usiku umekuwa mwepesi kidogo. Wingu lilikuwa limeinuliwa na nyota chache zilikuwa nje. Mwezi lazima uwe unajiandaa kuchomoza, uchungu wake umekwisha. Mwezi ulipochomoza usiku sana, watu walisema ulikuwa unakataa chakula, kwani mume mwenye hasira hukataa chakula cha mkewe wakati wamegombana.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Umuachi! Agbala ekene unuo-o-ol" Ilikuwa vile Ekwefi alikuwa amefikiria.

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priestess was now saluting the village of Umuachi. It was unbelievable, the distance they had covered. As they emerged into the open village from the narrow forest track the darkness was softened and it became possible to see the vague shape of trees. Ekwefi screwed her eyes up in an effort to see her daughter and the priestess, but whenever she thought she saw their shape it immediately dissolved like a melting lump of darkness. She walked numbly along.

Chiello's voice was now rising continuously, as when she first set out. Ekwefi had a feeling of spacious openness, and she guessed they must be on the village ilo, or playground. And she realised too with something like a jerk that Chiello was no longer moving forward. She was, in fact, returning. Ekwefi quickly moved away from her line of retreat. Chiello passed by, and they began to go back the way they had come.

It was a long and weary journey and Ekwefi felt like a sleepwalker most of the way. The moon was definitely rising, and although it

Kasisi huyo sasa alikuwa akitoa salamu kwa kijiji cha Umuachi. Ilikuwa haiaminiki, umbali waliokuwa wameufikia. Walipokuwa wakitokea kwenye kijiji kilicho wazi kutoka kwenye njia nyembamba ya msitu, giza lilikuwa laini na ikawa rahisi kuona umbo lisilo wazi la miti. Ekwefi aliyakodoa macho yake kwa nia ya kumuona bintiye na yule kasisi, lakini kila alipowaza aliona sura yao mara moja iliyeyuka mithili ya tonge la giza linaloyeyuka. Alitembea ganzi pamoja.

Sauti ya Chiello sasa ilikuwa ikipanda mfululizo, kama vile alipoanza safari. Ekwefi alikuwa na hisia ya uwazi mkubwa, na alikisia lazima wawe kijijini ilo, au uwanja wa michezo. Na aligundua pia kwa kitu kama mcheshi kwamba Chiello alikuwa hasongi mbele tena. Alikuwa, kwa kweli, kurudi. Ekwefi aliondoka haraka kutoka kwenye mstari wake wa mafungo. Chiello alipita, wakaanza kurudi kwa njia waliyokuja. Ilikuwa ni safari ndefu na ya kuchosha na Ekwefi alijihisi kuwa mtu wa kulala. Kwa hakika mwezi ulikuwa ukichomoza, na ingawa

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had not yet appeared on the sky its light had already melted down the darkness. Ekwefi could now discern the figure of the priestess and her burden. She slowed down her pace so as to increase the distance between them. She was afraid of what might happen if Chielo suddenly turned round and saw her.

She had prayed for the moon to rise. But now she found the half-light of the incipient moon more terrifying than darkness. The world was now peopled with vague, fantastic figures that dissolved under her steady gaze and then formed again in new shapes. At one stage Ekwefi was so afraid that she nearly called out to Chielo for companionship and human sympathy. What she had seen was the shape of a man climbing a palm tree, his head pointing to the earth and his legs skywards. But at that very moment Chielo's voice rose again in her possessed chanting, and Ekwefi recoiled, because there was no humanity there. It was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the market and sometimes bought beancakes for Ezinma, whom she called her daughter. It was a different woman--the priestess of

ulikuwa bado haujaonekana angani mwanga wake ulikuwa tayari umeyeyusha giza. Ekwefi sasa aliweza kutambua sura ya kuhani wa kike na mzigo wake. Alipunguza mwendo ili kuongeza umbali kati yao. Aliogopa nini kingetokea ikiwa Chielo aligeuka ghafla na kumuona.

Alikuwa ameomba kwa ajili ya mwezi kuchomoza. Lakini sasa alipata nuru ya nusu ya mwezi unaoanza kuwa ya kutisha zaidi kuliko giza. Ulimwengu sasa ulikuwa umejaa takwimu zisizo wazi, za kupendeza ambazo ziliyeyuka chini ya macho yake thabiti na kisha kuunda tena katika maumbo mapya. Wakati fulani Ekwefi aliogopa sana hivi kwamba alikaribia kumwita Chielo kwa uandamani na huruma ya kibinadamu. Alichokiona ni umbo la mtu aliyepanda mtende, kichwa chake kikiwa kimeelekeza ardhini na miguu yake ikiwa angani. Lakini wakati huo huo sauti ya Chielo iliongezeka tena katika kuimba kwake, na Ekwefi akajizuia, kwa sababu hapakuwa na ubinadamu huko. Sio Chielo yule yule ambaye aliketi naye sokoni na wakati mwingine alinunua keki kwa Ezinma,

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Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Ekwefi trudged along between two fears. The sound of her benumbed steps seemed to come from some other person walking behind her. Her arms were folded across her bare breasts. Dew fell heavily and the air was cold. She could no longer think, not even about the terrors of night. She just jogged along in a half-sleep, only waking to full life when Chielo sang.

At last they took a turning and began to head for the caves. From then on, Chielo never ceased in her chanting. She greeted her god in a multitude of names--the owner of the future, the messenger of earth, the god who cut a man down when his life was sweetest to him. Ekwefi was also awakened and her benumbed fears revived.

The moon was now up and she could see Chielo and Ezinma clearly. How a woman could carry a child of that size so easily and for so long was a miracle. But Ekwefi was not thinking about that. Chielo was not a woman that

ambaye alimwita binti yake. Ilikuwa ni mwanamke tofauti - kuhani wa Agbala, Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Ekwefi alitembea katikati ya hofu mbili. Sauti ya hatua zake zilizopigwa na mguu ilionekana kutoka kwa mtu mwingine aliyekuwa akitembea nyuma yake. Mikono yake ilikuwa imekunjwa kwenye matiti yake wazi. Umande ulianguka sana na hewa ilikuwa baridi. Hakuweza kufikiria tena, hata juu ya vitisho vya usiku. Alikimbia tu katika nusu ya usingizi, alipata tu maisha kamili wakati Chielo aliimba.

Hatimaye waligeuka na kuanza kuelekea mapangoni. Kuanzia hapo, Chielo hakuacha kuimba. Alisalimia mungu wake kwa wingi wa majina - mmiliki wa siku zijazo, mjumbe wa dunia, mungu aliyemkata mtu wakati maisha yake yalikuwa matamu kwake. Ekwefi pia aliamshwa na hofu yake iliyopungua ikafufuka.

Mwezi sasa ulikuwa juu na akawaona vizuri Chielo na Ezinma. Jinsi mwanamke angeweza kubeba mtoto wa ukubwa huo kwa urahisi na kwa muda mrefu ilikuwa muujiza. Lakini Ekwefi hakufikiria hilo.

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night.

"Agbala do-o-o-o! Agbala ekeneo-o-o-o! Chi negbu madu ubosi ndu ya nato ya uto daluo-o-o!..."

Ekwefi could already see the hills looming in the moonlight. They formed a circular ring with a break at one point through which the foot-track led to the centre of the circle.

As soon as the priestess stepped into this ring of hills her voice was not only doubled in strength but was thrown back on all sides. It was indeed the shrine of a great god. Ekwefi picked her way carefully and quietly. She was already beginning to doubt the wisdom of her coming. Nothing would happen to Ezinma, she thought. And if anything happened to her could she stop it? She would not dare to enter the underground caves. Her coming was quite useless, she thought.

As these things went through her mind she did not realise how close they were to the cave mouth. And so when the priestess with Ezinma on her back disappeared through a

Chiello hakuwa mwanamke usiku huo.

"Usikimbie do-o-o-o! Usikimbie sana-o-o-o! Mungu atamuua mtu aliyepoteza maisha na ujana wake!..."

Ekwefi tayari aliweza kuona vilima vilivyojaa kwenye mwanga wa mwezi. Waliunda pete ya mviringo na mapumziko kwa wakati mmoja kwa njia ambayo wimbo wa mguu uliongoza katikati ya mduara.

Mara tu kuhani wa kike alipoingia kwenye mduara huu wa vilima sauti yake haikuongezwa nguvu maradufu tu bali ilirushwa nyuma kila upande. Hakika ilikuwa ni kaburi la mungu mkuu. Ekwefi alichagua njia yake kwa uangalifu na kimya kimya. Tayari alikuwa ameanza kutilia shaka hekima ya ujio wake. Hakuna kitu kitakachompata Ezinma, aliwaza. Na ikiwa kuna jambo lolote lililompata angeweza kulizuia? Hangethubutu kuingia kwenye mapango ya chini ya ardhi. Kuja kwake hakukuwa na maana kabisa, alifikiria.

Mambo hayo yalipompitia akilini hakutambua jinsi walivyokuwa karibu na mdomo wa pango. Na kwa hivyo wakati kasisi aliyekuwa na Ezinma mgongoni mwake

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hole hardly big enough to pass a hen, Ekweffi broke into a run as though to stop them. As she stood gazing at the circular darkness which had swallowed them, tears gushed from her eyes, and she swore within her that if she heard Ezinma cry she would rush into the cave to defend her against all the gods in the world. She would die with her.

Having sworn that oath, she sat down on a stony ledge and waited. Her fear had vanished. She could hear the priestess' voice, all its metal taken out of it by the vast emptiness of the cave. She buried her face in her lap and waited.

She did not know how long she waited. It must have been a very long time. Her back was turned on the footpath that led out of the hills. She must have heard a noise behind her and turned round sharply. A man stood there with a machete in his hand. Ekweffi uttered a scream and sprang to her feet.

"Don't be foolish," said Okonkwo's voice. "I thought you were going into the shrine with Chielo," he mocked.

alipotoweka kupitia shimo lisilokuwa na ukubwa wa kumpita kuku, Ekweffi alikimbia kana kwamba kuwazuia. Aliposimama akitazama giza la duara lililowameza, machozi yalimtoka, na akaapa ndani yake kwamba ikiwa angesikia Ezinma analia atakimbilia ndani ya pango ili kumtetea dhidi ya miungu yote duniani. Angekufa naye.

Baada ya kuapa kiapo hicho, aliketi kwenye ukingo wa mawe na kungoja. Hofu yake ilikuwa imetoweka. Aliweza kusikia sauti ya kuhani, chuma chake chote kilitolewa ndani yake na utupu mkubwa wa pango. Alizika uso wake kwenye mapaja yake na kusubiri.

Hakujua ni muda gani alisubiri. Lazima ilikuwa ni muda mrefu sana. Mgongo wake uligeuzwa kwenye njia ya miguu iliyokuwa ikitoka milimani. Lazima alisikia kelele nyuma yake na akageuka kwa kasi. Mtu mmoja alisimama pale akiwa na panga mkononi. Ekweffi alipiga yowe na kunyanyuka kwa miguu yake.

"Usiwe mjinga," sauti ya Okonkwo ilisema. "Nilidhani unaingia kwenye hekalu pamoja na Chielo," alidhihaki.



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Ekwefi did not answer. Tears of gratitude filled her eyes. She knew her daughter was safe.

"Go home and sleep," said Okonkwo. "I shall wait here."  
"I shall wait too. It is almost dawn. The first cock has crowed."

As they stood there together, Ekwefi's mind went back to the days when they were young. She had married Anene because Okonkwo was too poor then to marry. Two years after her marriage to Anene she could bear it no longer and she ran away to Okonkwo. It had been early in the morning. The moon was shining. She was going to the stream to fetch water. Okonkwo's house was on the way to the stream. She went in and knocked at his door and he came out. Even in those days he was not a man of many words. He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth.

Ekwefi hakujibu. Machozi ya shukrani yalimjaa machoni. Alijua binti yake yuko salama.

"Nenda nyumbani ukalale," Okonkwo alisema. "Nitasubiri hapa."

"Nitangoja pia. Kumekaribia kupambazuka. Jogoo wa kwanza amewika."

Wakiwa wamesimama pale pamoja, akili ya Ekwefi ilirejea enzi zile walipokuwa wadogo. Alikuwa ameo Anene kwa sababu Okonkwo alikuwa maskini sana basi kuolewa. Miaka miwili baada ya ndoa yake na Anene hakuweza kuvumilia tena na akakimbilia Okonkwo. Ilikuwa ni asubuhi na mapema. Mwezi ulikuwa unawaka. Alikuwa anaenda kwenye kijito kuchota maji. Nyumba ya Okonkwo ilikuwa njiani kuelekea kwenye mkondo. Aliingia na kugonga mlango wake na akatoka. Hata enzi hizo hakuwa mtu wa maneno mengi. Akambeba tu mpaka kitandani kwake na gizani alianza kuhisi kiunoni mwake kwa ncha iliyolegea ya nguo yake.