

## It Is A Curse To Fight Forever

Albert Lee

### *Act 1: Things Come Together*

With a gasp, Okonkwo rose. His hands shot to his neck, searching for the noose he had set just moments ago, but to his surprise his neck was bare.

“Impossible” Okonkwo thought, as he looked around.

He was in a vast field of grass; his presence shielded from the sun by overhanging branches. He noticed he was equipped with his war dress. His machete laid beside him, the blood on the blade piercing through the tall grass of the Savanna. Though the sun was out, and the air was hot, his body was cold, as if he were just hanging in the night. With his right hand, he reached for his blade, warmed by the familiar grooves of the hilt embracing his palm.

“The afterlife?” Okonkwo wondered, as he stood, patting down his raffia skirt and putting on his feather headgear.

In the corner of his eyes Okonkwo was met with a glare. His shield laid against the base of the tree, decorated with small beams of sunlight that navigated through the thicket of the branches. With pride, Okonkwo strapped his safeguard to his left forearm, remembering his days of battle, when arrows flew from the sky in hoards.

“Perhaps the Gods are punishing me for my weakness. For taking my own life and abandoning my people. Do they wish for me to redeem myself through battle?”

He stepped forward out of the shade and looked up into the sun, the hilt of his machete shielding his eyes. The blood on the blade gleamed with excitement. The sky was cloudless, and a vibrant blue that Okonkwo could only remember from his childhood days. Okonkwo chuckled and raised his arms.

He exclaimed, “blessed to battle once again! I will not fail! Oh Gods, guide me to the strongest!” Marching through the steep grass without direction but full of intent, Okonkwo had finally felt the warmth his body had yearned for.

### *Act 2: Fatherhood*

Dakarai held a large basket of yams, and sprinted towards his hut. Today was the big day, and he couldn't be late.

“Hurry, Dakarai!” his father shouted as he opened the door.

Dakarai ran into the hut, slamming the basket on the ground as he collapsed onto the floor.

“Dakarai! Watch the yams!”

“Sorry father” Dakari responded, panting from the heat. “I’m tired. The sun was roasting me alive!”

His father laughed and playfully shook Dakarai’s leg. “Did you thank Ada for the yams?”

“Yes, father. She was delighted with the plantains you offered.”

Dakarai's father, collecting the remaining yams that had fallen from the basket, responded, "Good. Come child, help me prepare the fufu."

In the distance, Okonkwo marched. He had been marching for hours, and though the sun had battered him, and wild animals had tested him, Okonkwo was full of energy, hungry for a fight. The sun was finally starting to set, but Okonkwo had not noticed. He was focused, ready to strike when the God's had shown him his opponent. Up ahead, Okonkwo noticed the flickering of fire, as a child played outside, running in circles. There stood a hut: its door was opened, and a shadowy figure stood inside.

"May this be it?" Okonkwo wondered, as he tightened his grip around his blade.

Okonkwo approached the child, and asked, "What is your name, boy?"

Dakarai, surprised, fell to the floor. In front of him stood a tall, broad man. He had only ever seen one man rival his build.

"My name is Da-a-akarai", he stuttered as his body shook. He glanced down at the stranger's machete. Its blade was emboldened by the flame, pronouncing a vivid red.

Just then his father shouted "Dakarai! Help me carry the fufu! We must go to the ceremony now!"

As he stepped out of the hut, his eyes were locked with Okonkwo.

"Who go-o-e-es there!" He shouted, as he dropped the fufu and grabbed his hunting spear. He ran toward his son, shielding him from Okonkwo.

Okonkwo immediately observed weakness in his opponent. His shoulders were narrow and his frame was skinny. His body shivered; the grip on his spear was shaky and uncertain; his feet were uneven; his elbows wide. He lacked all form and principle.

"This is not the man I have come to battle" Okonkwo thought as he dropped his machete onto the floor.

"I come in peace. My name is Okonkwo, and I am a warrior from Umuofia."

"Umuofia?" the father responded. "I a-am not fa-a-miliar with that tribe!"

"Yes, I have traveled far." Okonkwo responded. "I assure you I have not come to hurt you or your son."

The father had dealt with bandits before, and was unconvinced with Okonkwo's treaty. "Then what do you seek!" the father stammered as he adjusted his spear pushing it closer to Okonkwo's chest, momentarily losing balance.

Okonkwo was disgusted. The inexperience of the man hurt his soul, but oddly, it was a familiar sight. Where had he seen it before? As he pondered, buried memories started to reemerge and cascade in his mind. The hut before him blurred as it began to transform into his own compound. A familiar figure loomed at the door.

"My son...", he murmured.

A loud ruckus cried from the hut: echoes of his own voice mixed with the screams of one of his wives. Nwoye looked back at the hut, then began to flee into the night.

"Nwoye!" Okonkwo screamed, but his voice produced no sound.

As the image of his son grew fainter, he noticed a book was tucked in between his arms. It was marked with a cross.

“He-e he left me.” Okonkwo bittered, as he gritted his teeth. “*For the white man!*”

As the vision faded, Okonkwo's chest burned with rage. When he returned to the sight of his trembling opponent, all he could see was *weakness*. Violently, Okonkwo grabbed the spear. He breathed heavily, his free hand shaking with fury as he wrestled the spear out of the hands of the father. With a roar, he threw it deep into the night.

“How can you call yourself a man!” Okonkwo snarled, as he struck his fingers into the father’s chest.

“Look at you! Skinny, weak, *pathetic*. You should’ve been so much more, *Nwoye!*”

Okonkwo swiftly grabbed the father’s neck, tightening his grip, a scorching heat rushed through his veins.

He screamed, “Why did you run, *Nwoye!* Why did you betray me! Your *people!* Your *village!*”

The father was stunned, frozen with fear. Dakarai screamed as tears ran down his face. “*Let my father go!*”

The father strained, “Pl-lease, not in front of my son!”

But Okonkwo’s world was quiet. He couldn’t hear the pleas of the father nor the cries of the child. He only saw disappointment and betrayal.

“You are no son of *mine*.”

Dakarai quickly ran to his father’s aid, striking Okonkwo in the thigh.

“*Let him go!*” he cried.

With every punch, Dakarai’s hand began to bleed, as if he were hitting a rock. The pain seared through his hand, disfiguring it with every joint he shattered, but even through the pain he continued. Blood began to mix with tears as Dakarai cried for his father. He screamed for Okonkwo to stop, but to no avail.

As the father wailed, Okonkwo could see the weakness evaporate; he began to grip harder. Blood pumped rapidly through his forearms and circulated into his fingers. His eyes widened and a twisted smile grew on his face as he felt bones crack between his palms and the squeal of flesh.

“No more weakness.”

A sharp *crack* pierced the night. The father fell onto the floor. His body laid, lifeless.

Dakarai screamed in pain, releasing a cry louder than humanly possible that echoed for miles violently releasing Okonkwo from his hallucination. As his screams reverberated throughout Okonkwo’s system, another buried memory began to resurface in his mind: screams of a child, of a boy– his son. *Ikemefuna*.

The remembrance released a sharp shiver up Okonkwo’s spine. His legs grew weak from the pain as he toppled to his knees. His headgear fell to the dirt as a surge of memories of Ikemefuna began to hijack Okonkwo’s mind.

“It wasn’t my fault! It wasn't my fault” he rapidly shrieked as he tried to convince himself of his innocence.

He breathed frantically as he violently clawed at his scalp, drawing blood.

*“make it stop, MAKE IT STOP!”*

His screams joined Dakarai’s, creating a symphony of pain, a siren of distress. Suddenly, the world responded as a crack of lightning ripped the sky. A beam of light raced through the atmosphere as the wind roared in anger. As Okonkwo’s machete laid in the dirt, the blood on the blade grew more illuminated as the beam grew closer to the ground, eventually making contact. With a thunderous shockwave, Okonkwo flew across the plains with an explosion of dirt and grass.

### *Act 3: A Voice*

When Okonkwo awakened the screams were gone. The savanna was quiet, kindled by the sounds of the fire. Okonkwo immediately noticed that the boy had disappeared, along with the body of the father. He breathed heavily, examining the damages of the blow. His body was scathed from the flying debris, his face covered in blood. As he got to his feet, Okonkwo groaned in pain, reaching for his side.

“Your ribcage, it's fractured” revealed a voice.

Instinctively, Okonkwo reached for his machete, but it was nowhere to be found.

“Who’s there?” Okonkwo asked frantically, as he raised his shield, supporting his ribcage with his free arm.

“I’ve hidden myself from you” answered the voice. “Your feral nature demanded it.”

“Hidden yourself?” Okonkwo retorted, as he winced in pain. “Don’t play games with me!”

He groaned again, dropping to his knees. A pool of blood erupted from his mouth.

“Even in this condition you wish to fight?” the voice questioned.

“A warrior neve-er surr-en-ders.” Okonkwo responded weakly between coughs of blood.

“Your shield. Unstrap it” advised the voice. “Your body can’t bear its weight for much longer.”

“Don’t tell me wh-”

“Your heart, it's punctured. Please, take off the shield”

Okonkwo grunted, shaking his head. “Lies.”

Another hurl of blood shot through Okonkwo’s throat as he dropped to his knees, grabbing at his chest. He refused to believe that his journey would end like this, but deep down he knew the voice was telling the truth. His heart ached, and his vision began to blur. Frustrated, Okonkwo gave in to the pain, unstrapping his shield.

“The boy, where did he go?” Okonkwo winced as he slowly laid on his back.

“Dakarai is at my palace.” the voice responded. “Along with Davu, my personal chef, whom you have slain.”

Okonkwo closed his eyes with remorse. “Davu... I-I meant him no harm.”

“When I was younger I wouldn’t have believed you.” The voice softly spoke. “I would’ve been consumed with rage, and torn you piece by piece.”

The voice paused. The fire calmly crackled, as a light breeze filled the air. “I used to have a hunger for battle, much like you. I wanted to be the strongest. I wished for my name to be carved in the skies so that everyone would know my name. I wanted my name to symbolize strength, power– *domination*.”

Okonkwo opened his mouth as he began to gasp. His lungs were failing him.

“But after living so long, I realized that I had focused on the wrong things.”

Okonkwo now coughed frantically, groaning in pain: it felt as if a fraction of his life had slipped away.

“I had a wife,” the voice continued. “She was lovely. She died many moons ago. But I–”

The voice stammered, its tone trembled. “I took her for granted. My desire to build my legacy had consumed me, and before I knew it, she had passed.”

The voice weakened, “I had spent her whole life battling, instead of being with her... I was no better than that wretched prince that had enslaved her.”

“Why- why do you tell me this?” Okonkwo asked, his voice weak, quieter than the silent breeze.

Pain filled the voice. “Today is the day she died. Every year I hold a grand ceremony in her honor, hoping to repay the time I had lost with her– but I know that–”

The voice paused. “Some debts can never be paid.”

Okonkwo’s mind raced back to Ikemefuna. He gritted his teeth. The swift swing of his blade.

The heavy *thud* of the body. The blood on his hands as he washed his blade. His face winced, his heart beat faster.

“Legacy, pride, the desire to be great. All of it. It’s rooted so deeply in *greed*. And yet I always hungered for battle.”

“Stop–” Okonkwo pleaded. The screams of Ikemefuna began to grow louder in his mind. His chest pounded with regret.

“This world is so *broken*, Okonkwo.” The voice hesitated. Its throat tightened before it spoke. During my days as a warrior, I brought senseless pain and suffering to others... In my head I called it justice, but in my heart–

The voice staggered, as if he were fighting tears between each word “I knew I did it for glory.”

Okonkwo pulled at his chest, gasping for air between sharp exhales. The world grew darker.

“I was bestowed with all this power” the voice continued. “And yet I have done *nothing* with it.”

“Nothing” Okonkwo thought, the word echoed in his mind as his body grew numb, balancing in limbo. “My strength... where has it brought me?”

Okonkwo’s heart began to beat slower as his life flashed before his eyes, releasing a series of trauma and pain. As he sank deeper and deeper, he saw his sons, Ikemefuna and Nwoye. They had journeyed into the forest together. They were hunting. They were laughing, smiling, as Ikemefuna readjusted Nwoye’s grip on his spear. They were happy. Okonkwo smiled.

His thunderous heart had finally stopped.

“Rest, warrior. You have fought well.” The voice softly cried. “It is a curse to fight forever.”