

COMPREHENSION PASSAGE

This passage illustrates an old belief, common in the days when a high percentage of children died in infancy, that such children are evil beings from the supernatural odd-world who come into life for short periods and return 'home' whenever they wish. It is interesting that this belief in the changelings is rapidly dying out.

Mosun had suffered a good deal in her life. She had borne ten children and nine of them had died in infancy, usually before the age of three. As she buried one child after another, her sorrow increased to despair and then to anguish. The birth of her children, which was supposed to be the mother's crowning glory, became mere agony. The naming ceremony after seven days became an empty ritual. Her deepening despair reflected in the names she gave her children. One of them was apology *Ikudaisi* - 'Death-spare-this.' But Death took no apology. Daisi died in his fifth month. The next was a baby girl named *Kokumọ* - 'Die-No-More.' She died in her eleventh month, and two others after her. Mosun then became defiant and named her next baby *Ikupayi* - 'Death-snatch-this.' And so Death did.

After the death of Mosun's second child, Ajala had gone to an old fetishist to inquire what was wrong. This old magical talisman told him that the baby was a changeling. A changeling was a Born-to-Die child, one of those wicked children who when they died, entered their mother's womb to be born repeated times over and over again.

By the time *Ikudaisi* died, Mosun her mother had become too bitter a woman. Her husband's first wife had already had three sons, all very strong and healthy. When she had her third son in succession, Ajala slaughtered two cows for her in appreciation. Mosun had no grief but good wishes for her senior rival wife. But she had grown so bitter about her own destiny that she could not rejoice with others over their good fortune. And so, on the day that her senior co-wife celebrated the birth of her three sons with feasting and music and dancing galore, Mosun was the only one who went about with her eyes heavy with tears

of sorrow. Her husband's wife took this for a welter of envy and ill-will, just as husband's wives were accustomed with. How could she understand that Mosun's bitterness did not flow outwards to others but inwards into her own soul?

At last Durojaye – 'Wait-to-live', was born, and though sickly, she seemed determined to live. At first Mosun accepted her as she had accepted others – with sharp hopelessness. But when Duro lived on to her third, fourth and fifth years, love returned once more to her mother, and this love sometimes metamorphosed into fear, anxiety and anguish. Mosun determined to nurse her baby to health, and she injected all her life in nursing her to a nicety. She succeeded in this during which Durojaye bubbled with energy like fresh *puff-puff*. At such times she seemed beyond danger. But all of a sudden, she would go down again on sickness. Everyone knew she was a changeling. These sudden changes from sickness to health and health to sickness were typical of her kind in their usual evil rounds of birth and death and rebirth which preceded another death upon death.

Mosun believed deep inside her now that Duro had stayed to live long but all of a sudden, a snake emerged from under the mat on which she slept one afternoon. It struck her on the left leg, and before help could be rendered, she had bid the world a farewell.