HOME SWEET HOME BY KEN SARO-WIWA

"Progress" spluttered lazily down the long, dirty road which stretched before us like the coated tongue of an ailing man. She bore a precious and varied cargo of rice, salt, and beans, cartons of soap and sugar, some yam and cassava; a basket of fowls tied by their legs loudly protesting their temporary imprisonment: a few goats too stunned to bleat; and men and women pressed together on the wooden benches in the body of a lorry like fish-hung on a string to dry, I sat in the front seat beside the youthful driver who wore his cap facing backwards.

'Progress' was Dukana's pride, it only fast line with the modern world of the brick town where ships berthed and foreign goods were bought and sold. It made the journey daily and was much valued by all. It was proud witness to the progressive and cooperative, modern spirit of Dukana. In spite of the ominous warning on its tail board. 'Look Be4 you put your head'. I was happy it was available; but for it, the journey to Dukana would be intolerable. I would have to ride pillion on a bicycle for some distance and then walk to Dukana.

The arduous journey to Dukana was not one to which I normally look forward. I had to do it once a year when I return from my annual holiday with my mother. What made the bumpy, dirty ride worthwhile was the thought that at the end of it, there would Mama, smiling and happy to see me, embracing and hugging and walking me home by the hand.

I always look forward to see my childhood friend Sira, who, though our paths had diverged, was still my best friend. We had attended school together and we loved each other even as sisters. Like most Dukana girls, her education had been terminated abruptly; she now had four children and was again pregnant when last, I had seen. Sira was always the one who regaled me with tales of the buffoonery of Dukana wag's, Duzia and Bom. And she was full of the latest town gossip. I had, as usual, bought some sweets for her children.

On this particular day, I had reason to be more excited than usual about returning home. I had concluded my studies at long last, and I was returning home to teach in Dukana's only school, St Dominic's, my alma Mata. I cherished the idea that I was going to give back something to my home and I was glad that I was going to live in Dukana and be part of the community. For Dukana is home, and as everyone will proudly tell you in these parts, 'home is home'. This cryptic saying means that it is far better than all those places you have visited or read about, that the dirt in which it wallows comfortably is to be preferred to the paved streets of the best cities of the world and its mud houses greater and more beautiful than the palaces of kings and queens of other lands. And how could anyone disagree? For to disagree was to be disloyal to communal wisdom and to disloyal to that wisdom so carefully distilled through the ages was arrogance. And arrogance is a deadly sin in Dukana.

Therefore, Mama had advised me often to get to understand Dukana, to know all the men and women, the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the juju priest and the Christian evangelist, the wicked and the kind, the very genie of the town. This is because it is only in this way that I will know what to do, what to say, when to say it and to whom, and that be saved from the sin of arrogance. Mama's counsel was law, the more demanding of obedience because it was given in a soft, kind reasonable way against which it is impossible to argue.

Of course, I knew Dukana as well as any young girl who had been born there might be

expected to know it. But as I grew older and travelled, its delight had diminished in my eyes and comparison had dimmed its supposed qualities. Some, taking a careful look at it, would have considered Dukana a clearing in the tropical rain forest peopled by three or four thousand men, women and children living in rickety and mud huts and making a miserable living from small farm lands in the forest or from fishing in the steamy creeks around the village. Some such not being of Dukana origin, would hold that the absence of a health clinic, of a good school, of pipe-borne water, of electricity, was a blight on the town, and would think it primeval.

Such ill-informed malicious people might look at it its emaciated, illiterate population and asset that there was malnutrition, that disease was rampant, that life for its inhabitants was brutish and short. And they would dismiss it as doom in the world where man was headed for space and science had transformed man's ability to control his environment.

No one worthy of his or her name and who owned any allegiance by birth to Dukana could be expected to agree with such a viewpoint. And I, for one could not agree. The chief of Dukana, we all knew, lived in a palace. The occasional letter from the district administrator was addressed to the palace. Our elders sat in the council of chiefs handing out justice according to pristine and unwritten laws. And if anyone dare suggested that Dukana was not a kingdom equal to any other on earth, we poured scorn and contempt on him.

Had not Dukana fought, and won wars against neighboring kingdoms? Had not she preserved her independence from time immemorial? And did the people need anyone to feed them? Was there not peace? And did not people go about their dial chores in tranquility? And if anyone thought Dukana was not progressive, what about the school they had established which had been duly approved by Government to present pupils for the elementary six certificates?

And what of their lorry "Progress" which was the only vehicular transport serving Dukana and her neighbors? And for water there was Maagum, a narrow-stream, full of vegetation, flowing lazily between the stems and roots of giant trees. It came fully alive in the rainy season. To ensure that she continued to flow in the dry season, Dukana had deified her, finding in her lean thin watery harvest, the breasts of a goddess whom the sacrifice of a chick would pacify. If she did not respond charitably in one year the next year would be better. And so on and so forth.

Such were the thoughts which crossed my mind as "Progress" gathered speed and careered dangerously towards Dukana. Its driver was a 'son of the soil', that is to say his umbilical cord was buried in Dukana. He wished everyone to know the fact. Don't talk when a free born is talking', he would gruffly shout at the conductor I could see that he wanted to impress me. He yelled at his brakes he exhorted 'Progress' to move like a lady, fine lady, and educated. He cursed the goats which crossed the road leisurely oblivious of the power "Progress" and himself to inflict instant pain and death.

And every village on the road to Dukana at which it was forced to stop so that passenger could disembark and embark was described as 'this bush town'. I must have exasperated him by silence and studied indifference to his antics. And he took it out on me by pressing harder on the accelerator. And when the passengers at the back of the lorry complained and wailed aloud for caution and care, he drove even more furiously whistling noisily the while careless of our limbs and lives.

And we drove past sleepy little villages hacked out of the forest, loudly embarrassing the earth and foliage. Then we drove past farms planted with a mixture of yams, cassava, maize, pepper and melon, mostly stunted and crying for fertilizers. Then we went swiftly past men who were riding rickety bicycles and women with large bundle of firewood or huge white basins on their heads and babies tied to their bags with dirty rags. Once in a smile, a building of modern construction, properly painted and maintained, would peep out of the bush, a remainder of other possibilities. Now and again, we would drive past a gas flare reminding us that this was oil-bearing country and that from the bowels of this land came the much-sought-after liquid which fueled the wheels of modern civilization. I felt then that excruciating pain which knowledge confers on those who can discern the gulf which divides what is and what could be. And my mind drifted to the men and women of Dukana acting out their lives against a backdrop of great forces they would never understand. I thought at length about them, the men and women whom I knew were awaiting my return because they were my relatives, aunts, uncles, cousin, my kin. And I felt for them.

I must have dozed off because when I opened my eyes, 'Progress' had screeched to a stop. We were in the Dukana town square, an opening in the middle off the town where the motorable road abruptly stopped. On all sides of the opening were mud houses, of a square construction covered by raffia palms. Now and again, in the confusion of houses was the odd mud house covered with rusty corrugated iron sheets and, much more rarely, a brick house, un-plastered and unpainted, its windows boarded with planks or old newspapers turned dull yellow.

For you must understand that building a brick house in Dukana is the task of a life-time. When its proud owner finds some loose change, he buys a bag of cement, makes bricks and add them to the existing structure. In this slow, laborious way, the block work might be completed over five to ten years. Then a bundle of corrugated iron sheets is added each year until the structure is roofed. The doors and windows might come later or not at all, for after all, is not a house the roof over your head to keep out rain and sun? Once there is a roof, and there are walls the owner moves in this might be ten years or after the commencement of construction. Time does not matter in Dukana.

As I expected, Mama was waiting when "Progress" arrived. She had been waiting all afternoon. I climbed out of my seat and fell into her arms. We cried for joy, Duzia, the lame one who never misses a scene of this sort, was there, reporter-like, taking in the scene and obliging us with a running commentary.

"That's what I have always said," says he, "There is nothing like having a beautiful, educated daughter. That's the way I always hug mine when she returns from a long journey. I say, young woman, I could do with a bit of a warm embrace myself." Everyone knew that Duzia had no children. They greeted his words with derisive laughter.

"Eh, you good-for-nothing man, Bom, came here and help our young Miss. You don't expect her to carry her box home, do you?"

In the twinkling of an eye, a small leach man in a tattered and dirty singlet had stepped forward to help bring my portmanteau from the back of the lorry. He made quite a show of carrying the box, pretending that it was very heavy.

"Bom, say, our young Miss has arrived heavily laden with all the good things of this earth. I should think that Dukana will soon be floating on a sea of wealth." Duzia interposed.

"I should think so, Duzia," Bom said, "I won't say any more till we get home and I see our young Miss open this box and share her wealth with us."

"Ah, there you have things wrong. Don't you see her mother hovering hawk-like around her? You think she'll allow anyone to touch a pin of her daughter's? You don't know a lot more about me than I know about myself, I wonder what you'd do if you could walk upright like the rest of us," "I shouldn't be here with you, then. I'd just take you luscious daughter away to the end of the world."

We all laughed. We were already on our way home. Mama and I. Bom carried my portmanteau on his head in front of us.

But the time we got home, just a few hundred yards away, a small crowd had already gathered in Mama's sitting room. They came in the usual assortment of rags: gowns picked up from the stalls of second-hand clothes traders, singlets bearing the words 'Oxford University', mildewed blouses. Some women wore shirts that were meant for men, one of them was in printed cotton nightgown that had faded beyond recognition. The men tied loin cloths round their waists; some had neither shirt nor singlet.

They kept up a stream of conversation, chattering excitedly and laughing. They either stared at me, or politely bade me welcome. There was pride in their eyes, I think. Pride that I had gone out to the world to acquire the new knowledge, new treasures; and that I had returned to plant some new seeds in the 'Dukana earth'. It was Duzia who put it most succinctly when he finally crawled up to us and ordered me out of my seat, so he could sit down.

"Daughter of mine," says he, "you don't know what your arrival means to us."

"We are poor and we are ignorant, but we know a good thing when we see it, even though it is beyond our reach. You're going to change the life of the women in Dukana. But whatever you do, don't teach them to disobey their husbands. I'm not going spend the rest of my life judging cases of wife-beating."

I laughed.

"As so you laugh. And laugh you may. The advice I give is good and it's free.

I say I hate all wife-beaters and I hate beating wives. I won't touch them with the smallest of my flabby toes."

The crowd giggled.

"What I want to know is, when is Miss going to open her box? I could do a few of those goodies from township." Bom said.

"Go then, you good-for-nothing fellow," said Duzia. "You should be giving her gifts, and here you are begging for dog's droppings for your wide nostrils. I say, Woman, give us a pinch of snuff," This latter to my mother.

Mama had already prepared for this contingency. She opened the door to her room and after rummaging in there for a while, returned with a bottle of gin and a snuffbox. The snuffbox from hand to hand and was soon emptied. The house was filled with the noise if sneezes and nose-blowing with mucus generously spread on the floor followed by the hard rubbing of bare feet on the screed floor. Then the tiny glass passed from hand to hand, the hard liquor lubricating the innards of the men and women.

Soon the men and women turned to song and dance. They composed extempore, praying to the gods that there be happiness, that they send their blessings so that a new day might dawn on Dukana. And they prayed the gods of Dukana that they bid the waves of the

mighty ocean be still so we could cross the seas together to the realms of peace beyond.

As they sang, they danced their prayers, their wishes and their hopes. In the twirling and twisting of waists and shoulder, in the rhythmic beating of the simple drums, I heard the call of nativity and I saw what united me with them inextricably, a bond which neither education nor distance nor time could destroy. And I leapt to my feet and joined them in their expression of joy.

It did not last long, that spontaneous outburst of joy. Gradually, the song died down, the music ceased and the room thinned out. Night had begun to fall. Dukana slink off noiselessly, the surrounding darkness swallowing them as they disappeared from Mama's house.

Mama and I had dinner together. It was a simple meal pounded yam and hot peppery fish broth. I was tired and did not speak much. Mama said how happy she was I had retuned and how delightful that Dukana had turned out to give me a fitting welcome.

We had hardly finished our dinner when Waale. Mama's best friend, came in.

She was a small emaciated woman with a pointed nose and small, sharp teeth. She came in, almost ghostlike, out of the enveloping darkness into the wan light of the hurricane lamp. I did not recognize her immediately, but when she greeted Mama. I knew the voice could only be hers. I sprang to my feet and fell into her outstretched arms. I could feel her arms tighten around me as sob escaped her involuntarily. And when she held me gently away, the grizzled and there were many grey spirals in her hair.

"Ah, my beauty, may lovely girl, the song in my heart, the joy of my life, you are back. How you've grown. The baby of yesterday is today's elegant woman", said she half to me and half to Mama.

"Its incredible", Mama said with a hint of pride.

"She's going to make a grandmother of you sooner than you realize."

"The sooner the better. I've waited long enough as it is. I should love to hold a grandson in my arms before I die."

"Don't think of death. Life is what matters. Your life. When you see her, you should pray for long life."

"Amen," Mama said.

My friend, Sira, was Waale's only daughter. As I said, we had grown up together, and had attended school together. She had not been able to complete her elementary schooling, although she was a brilliant girl. It was said that her mother could not pay fees. But that was only an excuse. Her parents had wanted her to have children, to procreate so that the family would not die off. And she had had to obey them. She had not married and her four children were by four different men. I suspected her fifth pregnancy was by a fifth man.

I had not seen her all evening and I wondered what the matter was. It was not most unlike her to be absent on the day of my arrival in town. I asked her mother after her.

Her face fell immediately, 'She travelled.' She said evasively.

"Where to?" I asked.

"I don't actually know."

"When is she coming back?"

"I'm not very sure."

Mama kept looking hard at me. I was at a complete loss as to the meaning of Waale's evasiveness and Mama's evident distress at my questions. I decided against asking further questions. Mama offered her friend some supper. She sat down to eat with a 'There, there that's a darling. What would I do without you?

I watched her as she dipped her fingers into the food and took the morsels into her mouth. She did not eat much, and took her leave as soon as she had finished, slinking into the night like a cat.

When she was gone, I asked Mama about Sira. I could see that Mama did not answer.

"Is she dead?" I asked, anxious, "No, she's not dead."

"Is she ill?"

"No, she's not ill."

"Then what's the matter?"

"The questions you do ask! You must be tired after your long journey. Why don't you go to bed? I've laid your bed already in the spare room and your box is in there."
I won't go until you yell me what's happened to my friend.

Mama saw I was determined to know; then she said, enjoining me to secrecy. 'Will, you remember her last pregnancy? She had twins. She could not stay in the town anymore. She went away across the river.'

I looked at Mama very closely. She averted her eyes from mine. 'She's not dead?' I inquired.

"Oh, no, she's not dead."

"And the twins?"

"I believe they died. And don't ask me any more questions." The words I wanted to say came flooding into my lips, but died there. I got up and walked heavily to my room and lay down. For a while I could not sleep and lay staring into the darkness.

And out of the bowels of the night came rhythm of drums in the distance, the hooting of owls, the swooping and beeping of bats, the burping of toads, the humming of night birds and the words of a mournful sing welcoming me to the embrace of the spirits of my home, my sweet home.

ALL STORIES ARE ANANSI'S

In the beginning all tales and stories belonged to Nyame, the sky God. But Kwaku Anansi, the spider, yearned to be the owner of all the stories known in the world, and he went to Nyame and offered to buy them.

The Sky God said: "I am willing to sell the stories, but the price was too high for them. Rich and powerful families have not been able to pay. Do you think you can do it?

Anansi replied to the Sky God: "I can do it. What is the price?"

"My price is three things," the sky God said. "I must first have Mmoboro, the hornets. I must then have Osebo, the leopard. For these things I will sell you the right to tell all stories."

Anansi said: "I will bring them."

He went home and made his plans. He first cut a gourd from a vine and made a small hole in it. He took a large calabash (A large fruit that is dried and made into a bowl or cup) and filled it with water. He went to the tree where the hornets lived. He poured some of the water over himself, so that he was dripping. He threw some water over the hornets so that they too were dripping. Then he put the calabash on his head, as though to protect himself from a storm, and called out to the hornets: "Are you foolish people?" Why do you stay in the rain that is falling?
The hornets answered: "Where shall we go?"

“Go here, in this dry gourd,” Anansi told them. The hornets thanked him and flew into the gourd through the small hole. When the last of them had entered, Anansi plugged the hole with a ball of grass, saying: “Oh, yes, but you are really foolish people!”

He took the gourd full of hornets to Nyame, the Sky God. The Sky God accepted the. He said: “There are two more things.”

Anansi returned to the forest and cut a long bamboo pole and some strong vines. Then he walked toward the house of Onini, the python, talking to himself. He said: “My wife is stupid. I say he is longer and stronger. My wife says he is shorter and weaker. I give him more respect. She gives him less respect. Is he right or am I right? I am right, he is longer, I am right. He is stronger.”

When Onini, the python, heard Anansi talking to himself, he said: “Why are you arguing this way with yourself?”

The spider replied: “Ah, I have had a dispute with my wife. She says you are shorter and weaker than this bamboo pole. I say you are longer and stronger.

Onini said: “It’s useless and silly to argue when you can find out the truth. Bring the pole and we will measure.”

So, Anansi laid the pole on the ground and the python came and stretched himself out beside it.

“You seem a little short.” Anansi said. The python stretched further. “A little more.” Anansi said “I can stretch no more.” Onini said. “When you stretch at one end, you get shorter at the other end.” Anansi said. “Let me tie Onini’s head to the pole. Then he went to the other end and tied the tail to the pole. He wrapped the vine all round Onini, until the python couldn’t move.

“Onini,” Anansi said, “it turns out that my wife was right and I was wrong. You are shorter than the pole and weaker. My opinion wasn’t as good as my wife’s. But you were even more foolish than I, and you are now my prisoner.”

Anansi carried the python to Nyame, the Sky God, who said: “There is one thing more.”

Osebo, the leopard, was next. Anansi went into the forest and dug a deep pit where the leopard was accustomed to walk. He covered it with small branches and leaves and put dust on it, so that it was impossible to tell where the pit was. Anansi went away and hid. When Osebo came prowling in the black of night, he stepped into the trap. Anansi had prepared and fell to the bottom. Anansi had prepared and fell to the bottom. Anansi heard the sound of the leopard falling and he said: “Ah Osebo, you are half-foolish!”

When morning came, Anansi went to the pit and saw the leopard there. “Osebo,” he asked. “what are you doing in this hole?”.

“I have fallen into a trap.” Osebo said. Help me out.

“I would gladly help you.” Anansi said “But I’m sure that if I bring you out I will have no thanks for it. You will get hungry, and later on you will be wanting to eat me and my children.”

“I swear it won’t happen! Osebo said. “Very well. Since you swear it, I will take you out.” Anansi said.

He bent a tall green tree toward the ground, so that its top was over the pit, and he tied it that wary. Then he tied a rope to the top of the tree and dropped the other end of it into the pit.

“Tie this to your tail, he said.

Osebo tied the rope to his tail.

“Is it well tied?” Anansi asked.

“Yes, it is well tied,” the leopard said.

“In that case,” Anansi said, “you are not merely half foolish, you are all-foolish.”

And he took his knife and cut the other rope, the one that held the tree bowed to the ground. The tree straightened up with a snap, pulling Osebo out of the hole. He hung in the air head downward, twisting and turning. And while he

hung this way, Anansi killed him with his weapons. Then he took the body of the leoapard and carried it Nyame, the Sky God, saying "Here is the third thing. Now I have paid the price."
Nyame said to him. "Kwaku Anansi, great warriors and chiefs have tried, but they have been unable to do it. You have done it. Therefore, I will give you the stories. From this day onward, all stories belong to you. Whenever a man tells a story, he must acknowledge that it is Anansi's tale."
In this way Anansi, the spider, became the owner of all stories that are told. To Anansi all these tales belong.

"All stories Are Anansi's" in the Hat-Shaking Dance And Other Ashanti Tales from Ghana, by Harold Courlander with Albert Kofi Prempeh. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Reprinted by permission of Harold Courlander. 1957, 1985 by Harold Courlander.

POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY BY CHIKA UNIGWE

As she listened to the man beside her snore like an airplane revving its engine for take-off, she thought that she should never have allowed her mother to blackmail her into marrying him. She should have plugged her ears with her fingers or stuffed them with pieces of cloth when her mother-headscarf going awry on her head had told her in a pained voice, 'Chief Okeke is our only hope. Don't you want to see me in nice clothes? And you, don't you want to be a madam? Have a driver? A big house? Servants? Don't you want to enjoy your life, nwam?'

'But I don't love him, Mother. How can I marry a man I do not love? I can't.' Her voice was sharp. Confident. Daring her mother to contradict her.

But her mother had contradicted her. 'Love does not matter, my daughter. There are things more important than love.' The older woman's voice was firmer. Solid. It knocked the confidence of hers.

As Chief's snore enveloped the entire room and kept her from sleeping, she whispered, 'Love does matter; Mother. You are so very wrong. It really does matter.' Her voice was weightless, floating like a ghost. Hovering above her head. She would not have known she was crying if she had not felt the tears scarificate her face.

Her mother had been persistent. She had been at it day after day, sometimes crying even, until she had eaten into Uju's reserves, corroding her confidence like acid on paper. Until there was nothing left but consent. A heavy heart. A slight nod of the head. And a voice as still as the night. 'Yes. I will marry Chief. I will marry him.'

Chief.

Uju had just turned seventeen. Chief said he was forty-six. He looked older, close to sixty. His stomach wobbled and preceded him whenever he walked into a room. It was like that of a woman on the verge of delivering quadruplets, but without the firmness of a pregnant stomach. The hair on his head was sparse, and white, like cotton wool that had been haphazardly glued on by a child. His lips were huge and drooped as if they were implanted with lead that weighted then down. And when he spoke, he tended to send a saliva shower on those closest to him. People said Chief never married because he was too ugly to find a wife.

She and her friends had made fun of Chief, laughing at his hair. His lips. His stomach. And now she was going to be Chief's wife. What fate could possibly be worse than that?

She wished she could die. She desired, more than anything else, to just lie down and never wake up. To disappear. Vanish. Dissolve. Like salt in water.

Her mother threw herself into the wedding preparations with a ferocity that was not commensurate with her skinny frame. She whirled around the town, organizing the caterer's, the music band, her daughter's wedding dress. She settled herself in one of Chief's cars and sat in the owner's corner at the back while the driver called her 'Madam' and asked where she needed to be taken to.

Toson's Supermarket,

Fanny's Bridal Shop.

Kenyatta market.

Love is Blind Bakery.

Your one stop tiara shop.

Wedding specials

Mau's Cakes and More.

She always came back, a huge smile on her face, her eyes shiny with new found wealth and her mouth full of praises for her daughter who had made the right choice. 'Uju. You are a daughter to be proud of. You do not know what a relief it is that you are marrying a man as rich as Chief.

Poverty is not something to be proud of. Afufu ojaka!'

Uju knew all about poverty. She did not need to be told.

She was the only child of her widowed mother. Her father had died when she was the only child of her widowed mother. Her father had died when she was seven and all she remembered of him was a man as skinny as an izaga masquerade, dragging a battered brown briefcase out of the house every morning. When she tried to remember his face, she could not. He was like an old Polaroid picture. Defaced. Effaced. Without a face.

She tried to recollect his voice but no matter how tight she shut her eyes and searched the crevices of her mind. She could not call up a voice.

Her mother told her that he had been a quiet man.

When he died in a car accident-the bus he was traveling in had been driving too fast and had hit a pothole causing it to turn over and kill every passenger in it- his family had blamed his widow for killing their brother.

'A prophet told us that he saw you in a vision, chasing Papa Uju with a sharp knife.' His older sister announced.

How could she have had a hand in it? The widow protested crying. The roads were full of potholes which she did not create. Eye witnesses said the driver had been going too fast. How was she responsible for that? Her voice was weak and hoarse from crying. But her protest could not stand up to the prophet's believed infallibility.

Supervised by Uju's uncle, her father's oldest brother, Uju and her mother had been sprawling out of their modest three bedroom flat in New Lay Out, to a less modest one room face-me-I-face-you flat on Obiagu Road, their property trailing behind them like unwanted children. The only things that the widow had been allowed to take out of the house were her clothes, Uju's clothes and the deceased's battered suitcase which had been discovered at the site of the accident, the lone survivor of the tragedy. Sometimes, Uju took down the suitcase from her mother's wardrobe and smelt it to catch a whiff of her father. But it just had the peculiar odour of old leather.

Uju knew how her mother had to borrow money from a women's cooperative to start a petty business, selling Dandy chewing gum and sachets of milk and Omo detergent in her kiosk of the house, right before the gutter which tank of urine and dying lives. Godfrey, the bachelor carpenter who lived in the same compound as they did had knocked the table up for her at a really cheap rate. 'Neighborly rate', he had said, showing off his resting on her breast until Uju's mother had asked him in a voice as cold as a harmattan morning if the rates included ogling the neighbor's daughter.

Uju remembered the days when all her mother could afford to give for lunch was Abacha, slices of cassava, soaked in water, salted and on lucky days, eaten with some coconut.

She could never forget the day her mother told he she had to quit school as she could no longer pay her school fees. She had to help her mother out at her added business of selling akara and fried yam beside her kiosk.

As Uju wrapped up the food straight off the pan for customers, she knew that at the back of her mother's mind, lurked the hope that one day, one of their richer clients would notice her daughter and ask for her and in marriage. So, she knew that Chief's proposal was an answer to her mother's constant prayer. She almost hated her mother's constant prayer. She almost hated her mother.

No matter how much Chief gave her, Uju could never forget being poor. It was inscribed on her, like ichi marks on an elder's face in her village, Osumenyi Marks to remind them of their status. No matter how low they could never rub off the ichi.

She sat in her new house which reeked of luxury, but the smell of poverty never left her nostrils. And she knew that the new wealth would never make her happy.

Her mother told her she prayed for her to have sons for Chief. 'A wife with male children has her position secured. Nothing can shake that. If a had a son your father's family would never had thrown me out of our home. We would not have used our eyes to see the kind of suffering that we saw nwam. But there is a God And he has brought Chief into our lives. So, I pray that same God will bless you with umu nwoke, many sons, I pray that those who laughed at our misfortune will see us blessed. You shall have sons for Chief and our joy will be complete.'

Uju prayed fiercely in her mind as her mother spoke. She prayed that she never had a son for Chief. She did not want her position crystallized. She wanted it to be shaky.

She wanted to find her wanting and set her free. Then her mother would not blame her for leaving her matrimonial home.

On her wedding day, as Chief sat beside her, looking fit to burst in his three-piece suit, she kept thinking, 'This man is an elephant.' When Chief slid a twenty-four-karat gold ring on her finger, the ring burnt her and she was tempted to pull it off right there, with everybody watching. She was sure that the skin under the ring was welting. She cried throughout the ceremony, sniffing into a white lace handkerchief that Chief had bought her especially for the day, and her mother told her they were tears of joy. Uju did not tell her that the tears were gritty, like gari. She did not tell her mother that they rubbed into her skin, like a beauty scrub, breaking open her pores. At the wedding reception later on in the day, her mother danced to the music being played by the live band. She glowed in her new George lappa, singing Alleluia with a halo of wealth around her mighty, starched, silk scarf.

She wriggled her buttock to the music and came close to the new bride and enveloped

her in an embrace that was so tight that it hurt the younger woman's ribs. Then she hugged Chief, her hands not making it around his enormous waist.

That night, when the new groom undressed and rested his weight on top of his wife she could hardly breathe and pushed her nose to the side to escape the assault of his breath. He heaved into her ears and called her name in many diverse ways.

Uju m. Ju-ju. Ujay. He parted her legs and thrust his manhood into her. In. Out. In. Out. In. Then he let it stay there. Layers and layers of pain seared through her and when she thought that there could be no pain stronger than that, she felt his manhood bulge and explode into a million different types of pain between her thighs. And she felt sure that this was what it was like to be dying. Then she heard him sigh and go limp.

She turned her head into the pillow and he held her and told her she was young and she would learn. And it would get better with practice. 'The first time is always painful.

Her mother had told her that she would fly. 'When your husband holds you for the first time, when he makes you a woman, nwam, you will gain wings and fly and fly and fly. You will soar and never want to come down. 'She had winked at her daughter as she imparted this piece of information.

But she had not known. The pain between her legs made walking a chore. When she gathered the stained sheets to wash, he was aware even then that inside her a stain was spreading that she could not get to.

And as her pregnancy grew and others noticed it too, she began to wish that she could reach into her and fling the baby out. She could not imagine having a baby that looked like chief. A baby that would be one half of him. She wanted nothing of him. And definitely a part of his flesh.

With her stomach getting rounder and firmer, her mother's frequent visits became even more so. Often, she would stay for days at a stretch. She always found something to compliment. The leather sofa that swallowed her buttocks. The television set that she said was as huge a cinema screen. The taps inside the house that answered to her command. The kitchen that was as big as their entire flat in Obiagu had been. The guest bedroom that was the size of their master bedroom in New Lay Out. The house helps that ran around dusting, cleaning, cooking.

'You are a lucky girl, Uju. 'She told her daughter. 'All these, for you.'

When she said this, Uju grunted a reply that was swallowed up by the whirring of the air conditioner that the older woman and just switched on.

'Negodu, just look,' she exclaimed giggling, 'the heat of outside does not touch you at all. White man's magic in my own daughter's house. God is great. 'She stuck close to Uju like a shadow telling her what to eat and what to avoid.

'Don't eat okra soup at all. It will make your child drool like an imbecile.

'Don't eat kola nut. It will make the baby hot-tempered.'

'Don't eat nsala soup. It can cause a miscarriage.'

Don't eat abacha. It will give the baby too much body hair.'

Uju listened furtively and ate okra soup and nsala soup and kola-nut. She waited with bated breath for the cramps that would expel the fetus in clots of blood, but they never came.

Instead, her stomach grew and her skin shone and her husband remarked that she seemed to be getting more and more beautiful each day. My mammy-water,' he called her. 'My own mermaid.' He rubbed her stomach.

Her mother and a driver took her to the private hospital on dependence Lay Out the day her water broke. Chief was away Abuja on a business trip, but his name was enough to gain her entrance into one of the best hospitals in Enugu. Nurses kowtowed to her asking, 'Are you okay, Ma?' 'Is the bed comfortable, ma?' 'Do you need anything, Ma?' Uju ignored the and her mother sailed on the attention they got, walking for the silent woman.

Get us a big room.

Nurse! Let her have some water.

Nurse! This water is not cold enough. Does the fridge not work?

Nurse! How does this remote-control work?

Nurse! Take this cup away.

Her labor was long and hard. As the contractions squeezed her inside like a multitude of pincers. Uju opened her mouth and let loose a torrent of words. She shouted curses on the man who was responsible for all the pain. She cursed the baby who was dragging her to the very depths of hell. She cursed the poverty that made her marry Chief.

Her mother who sat beside her on her hospital bed tried to cover her mouth with her palm, as if she as trying to stuff the words back, to stop new ones from spewing out.

'Shh, nwam. Don't day these things my daughter It will soon be over. Swallow your words, noda fa.'

The gynecologist came in and smiled at her. She inserted a gloved hand into her and said in a loud voice, 'eight centimeters dilated. We should get you into the delivery room right away' Her mother looked at the doctor and exclaimed at the miracle that made her daughter to be attended to by the most reputable gynecologist that side of the Niger. She knew of women who gave birth at home, or in hospital corridors because there were no doctors to attend to them. Why, just three months ago, Mama Chinedu, their neighbor in Obiagu Road, had died from complications while giving birth in her bedroom. She had not gone to the hospital because the government hospital was on strike and she could not afford the exorbitant fees charged by the private hospitals. And here was her Uju, with a retinue of medical staff at her behest. 'God is good. Chukwu ebuka,' the older woman exclaimed as she followed the bed being rolled into the delivery room.

When the baby came it looked like an angry geriatric. It was bald. And wrinkled. He let out a yell when the doctor, dangling him in one hand, spanked him on his scrawny old man's buttocks. The doctor laughed and said, 'This one is full of live! Hear him cry!' And handed him to the new mother. 'Here, hold him for a minute before we take him off to be cleaned.'

Uju held the baby close to her breasts. She felt its heart beat tat tat tat, like a tam-tam being beaten by a practiced hand. She brought her face down to meet the baby's and then she felt something else.

It started from the middle of her stomach like a tiny dot of warmth. And then it fanned out like an angel's wings spread vertically and touched her chest. She felt it flutter in her chest before it settled down. She closed her eyes and savoured the feeling. Of being there. Of smelling her baby. And then she knew that this was love.

She handed the baby over to the midwife to be cleaned and she thought, 'This is

mine. He is mine. All mine. I, Uju, I possess the secret of joy.' She almost laughed out loud. Her legs twitched and itched to fly.

When the doctor asked if she had any names for him, she said the one name that came to her.

'Ifunanya.' Love. As she waited, counting the seconds until he was given back to her, she repeated his name, her voice soft and reverential. 'Ifunanya.'

It was as if she was saying a prayer.

HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?

Translated by Louise and Aylmer Maude

1

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a shopkeeper in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life, saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theater, promenades, and entertainments.

The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a shopkeeper, and stood up for that of a peasant.

"I wouldn't change my way of life for yours," said she. "We may live roughly, but at least we're free from worry. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you're very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, "Loss and gain are brother's twain. It often happens that people who're wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a rich one, it's a long way. We'll never grow rich, but we'll always have enough to eat."

The elder sister said sneeringly:

"Enough? Yes, if you like to share with the pigs and the calves! What do you know of elegance or manners! However much your man may slave, you'll die as you live-in a dung heap- and your children the same."

"Well, what of that?" replied the younger sister. "Of course, our work is rough and hard. But on the other hand, it's sure, and we need not bow to anyone. Bu you, in your towns, are surrounded by temptations; today all may be right, but tomorrow the Evil One may tempt your husband with cards, wine, or women and all will go to ruin. Don't such things happen often enough?"

Pahom, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the stove and he listened to the women's chatter.

It is perfectly true," thought he. "Busy as we are from childhood tilling mother earth, we peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough. If I had plenty of land. I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!

The women finished their tea, chatted a while about dress, and then cleared away the tea things and lay down to sleep.

But the Devil had been sitting behind the stove and had heard all that had been said. He was pleased that the peasant's wife had led her husband into boasting and that he had said that if he had plenty of land, he would not fear the Devil himself.

"All right, though the Devil, "We'll have a tussle. I'll give you land enough, and by means of the land I'll get you into my power."

2

Close to the village there lived a lady, a small landowner who had an estate of about three hundred acres. She had always lived on good terms with the peasants until she engaged as her manager an old soldier, who took to burdening the people with fines. However careful Pahom tried to be, it happened again and again that now a horse of his got among the lady's oats, now a horse of his got among the lady's oats, now a cow strayed into her garden, now his calves found their way into her meadows and he always had to pay a fine.

Pahom paid up, but grumbled, and, going home in a temper, was rough with his family. All through the summer Pahom had much trouble because of this manager, and he was actually glad when winter came and the cattle had to be stabled. Though he grudged the fodder when they could no longer graze on the pasture land, at least he was free from anxiety about them. In the winter the news got about that the lady was going to sell her land and that he keeper of the inn on the high road was bargaining for it. When the peasants heard this, they were very much alarmed.

"Well," thought they, "if the innkeeper gets the land, he'll worry us with fines worse than the lady's manager. We all depend on that estate."

So, the peasants went on behalf of their village council and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper, offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the village council to buy the whole estate, so that it might be held by them all in common. They met twice to discuss it, but could not settle the matter; the Evil One sowed discord among them and they could not agree. So, they decided to buy the land individually, each according to his means; and the lady agreed to this plan as she had to the other.

Presently Pahom heard that a neighbor of his was buying fifty acres, and that the lady had consented to accept one half. Pahom felt envious.

"Look at that," thought he, "the land is all being sold, and I'll get none of it" So he spoke to his wife.

"other people are buying," said he, "and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible. That manager is simply crushing us with his fines."

So, they put their heads together and considered how they could manage to buy it. They had one hundred rubles(Russian) laid by. They sold a colt and one half of their bees, hired out one of their sons as a farm hand and took his wages in advance, borrowed the rest from a brother-in-law, and so scraped together half the purchase money.

Having done this, Pahom chose a farm of forty acres, some of it wooded, and went to the lady to bargain for it. They came to an agreement, and he shook hands with her upon it and paid her a deposit in advance. Then they went to town and signed the deeds, he paying half the price down, and undertaking to pay the remainder within two years.

So now Pahom had land of his own. He borrowed seed and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay off his debts both to the lady and to his brother-in-law. So he became a landowner, plowing and sowing his own land, making hay on his own land, cutting his own trees, and feeding his cattle on his own pasture. When he went out to plow his field, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass meadows, his heart would fill with joy. The grass that grew and the flowers that bloomed there seemed to him unlike any that grew elsewhere. Formerly, when he had passed by the land, it had appeared the same as any other

land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

3

So Pahom was well contended, and every-thing would have right if the neighboring peasants would only not have trespassed on his wheat fields and meadows. He appealed to them most civilly, but they still went on: now the herdsmen would let the village cows stray into his meadows, then horses from the night pasture would get among his corn. Pahom turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he forbore to prosecute anyone. But at last he lost patience and complained to the District Court. He knew it was the peasants' want of land, and no evil intent on their part, that caused the trouble, but he thought:

"I can't go on overlooking it, or they'll destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson." So, he had them up, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants were fined. After a time Pahom's neighbors began to bear him a grudge for this, and would now and then let their cattle on to his land on purpose. One peasant even got into Pahom's woos at night and cut down five young lime trees for their bark. Pahom, passing through the wood one day, noticed something white. He came nearer and saw the stripped trunks lying on the ground, and close by stood the stumps where the trees had been. Pahom was furious.

"If he'd only cut one here and there it would have been bad enough," though Pahom, "but the rascal has actually cut down a whole clump. If I could only find out who did this, I'd get even with him."

He racked his brains as to who it could be. Finally, he decided: "It must be Simon-no one else could have done it, and he lodged a complaint. Simon was summoned. The case was tried, and retried, and at the end of it all Simon was acquitted, there being no evidence against him. Pahom felt still more aggrieved, and let his anger loose upon the Elders and the Judges.

"You let thieves grease your palms," said he. "If you were honest folk yourselves you wouldn't let a thief go free."

So Pahom quarreled with the judges and with his neighbors. Threats to burn his hut began to be uttered. So, though Pahom had more land, his place in the community was much worse than before.

About this time a rumor got about that many people were moving to new parts.

"There's no need for me to leave my land," thought Pahom. "But some of the others may leave our village and then there'd be more room for us. I'd take over their land myself and make my estates somewhat bigger. I could then live more at ease. As it is, I'm still too cramped to be comfortable."

One day Pahom was sitting at home when a peasant, passing through the village, happened to drop in. He was allowed to stay the night, and supper was given him. Pahom had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the Volga(river in European Russia), where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were settling in those parts. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined the community there and had had twenty-five acres per man granted them. The land was so good, he said, that the rye sown on it grew as high as a horse, and so thick that five cuts of a sickle made a sheaf. One peasant, he said, had brought nothing with him but his bare hands and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.

Pahom's heart kindled with desire.

"Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if one can live so well elsewhere?" he thought one can live so well elsewhere?" he thought. "I'll sell my land and my homestead here, and with the money I'll start afresh over there and get every thing new. In this crowded place one is always having trouble> But I must first go and find out all about it myself."

Toward summer he got ready and started out. He went down the Volga on a steamer to Samara, then walked another three hundred miles on foot, and at last reached the place. It was just as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land; every man had twenty-five acres of communal land every man had twenty-five acres of communal land given him for his use, and anyone who had money could buy, besides, at a ruble and a half an acre, as much good freehold land as he wanted.

Having found out all he wished to know, Pahom returned home as autumn came on, and began selling off his belongings. He sold his land at a profit, sold his homestead and all his cattle, and withdrew from membership in the village. He only waited till the spring, and then started with his family for the new settlement.

4

As soon as Pahom and his family reached their new abode, he applied for admission into the council of a large village. He stood treat(stood treat negotiated) to the Elders and obtained the necessary documents. Five shares of communal land were given him for his own and his sons' use that is to say-125 acres (not all together, but in different fields) besides the use of the communal pasture. Pahom put up the buildings he needed and bought cattle. Of the communal land alone, he had three times as much as at his former home, and the land was good wheat land. He was ten times better off than he had been. He had plenty arable land and pasturage, and could keep as many head of cattle as he liked.

At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahom was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it, he began to think that even here he hadn't enough land. The first year he sowed wheat, but had not enough communal land for the purpose, and what he had already used was not available, for in those parts wheat is sown only on virgin soil or on fallow land. It is sown for one or two years, and then the land lies fallow till it is again overgrown with steppe grass. There were many who wanted such land, and there was not enough for all, so that people quarreled about it. Those who were better off wanted it for growing wheat, and those who were poor wanted it to let to dealers, so that they might raise money to pay their taxes. Pahom wanted to sow more wheat so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed much wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village-the wheat had to be carted more than ten miles. After a time Pahom noticed that some peasant dealers were living on separate farms and were growing wealthy and he thought:

"If I were to buy some freehold land and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing altogether. Then it would all be fine and close together."

The question of buying freehold land recurred to him again and again. He went on in the same way for three years, renting land and sowing wheat. The seasons turned out well and the crops were good, so that he began to lay by money. He might have gone on living contently, but he grew tired of having to rent other people's land every year and having to scramble for it. Wherever there was good land to be had, the peasants would rush for it and it was taken up at once, so that unless you were sharp about it, you got none. It happened in the third year

that he and a dealer together rented a piece of pasture land from some peasants, and they had already plowed it up, when there was some dispute and the peasants went to law about it, and things fell out so that the labor was all lost.

“if it were my own land,” though Pahom, “I should be independent, and there wouldn’t be all this unpleasantness.”

So Pahom began looking out for land which he could buy, and he came across a peasant who had bought thirteen hundred acres, but having got into difficulties was willing to sell again cheap. Pahom bargained and haggled with hi and at last they settled the price at fifteen hundred rubles, part in cash and part to be paid later. They had all but clinched the matter when a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahom’s one day to get feed for his horses. He drank tea with Pahom, and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkirs(nomads of region in Russia between the Volga and the Ural Mountains), far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land, all for a thousand rubles. Pahom questioned him further, and the dealer said:

“All one has to do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred rubles worth of silk robes and carpets, besides a case of tea, and I gave wine to those who would drink it; and I got the land for less than three kopecks (Russian money; one hundred kopecks equal one ruble) and acres.” And he showed Pahom the title deed, saying:

“The land lies near a river, and the whole steppe (vast Russian plains) is virgin soil.”

Pahom plie him with questions and the dealer said:

There is more land there than you could cover if you walked a year, and it all belongs to the Bashkirs. They’re as simple as sheep, and land can be got almost for nothing.”

“There, now,” thought Pahom, “with my one thousand rubles why should I get only thirteen hundred acres, and saddle myself with a debt besides? I take out there, I can get more than ten times as much for my money.”

4

Pahom inquired how to get to the place, and as soon as the grain dealer had left him, he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to look after the homestead, and started on his journey, taking his hired man with hi. They stopped at a town on their way and bought a case of tea, some wine, and other presents, as the grain dealer had advised.

On and on they went until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to a place where the Bashkirs had pitched their round tents. It was all just as the dealer had said. The people lived on the steppe, by a river, in felt-covered tents. They neither tilled the ground nor ate bread. Their cattle and horses grazed in herds on the steppe. The colts were tethered behind the tents, and the mares were driven to them twice a day. The mares were milked, and from the milk kumiss (fermented drink) was made. It was the women who prepared the kumiss, and they also made cheese. As far as the men were concerned, drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton, and playing on their pipes was all they cared about. They were all stout and merry, and all the summer long they never thought of doing any work. They were quite ignorant, and knew no Russian, but were good-natured enough.

As soon as they saw Pahom, they came out of their tents and gathered around the visitor. An interpreter was found, and Pahom told them he had come about some land. The Bashkirs seemed very glad, they took Pahom and led him into one of the best tents, where they made him sit on some down cushions placed on a carpet, while they sat around him. They gave

him some tea and kumiss, and had a sheep killed, and gave him mutton to eat. Pahom took presents out of his cart and distributed them among the Bashkirs, and divided the tea among the Bashkirs, and divided the tea amongst them. The Bashkirs were delighted. They talked a great deal among themselves and then told the interpreter what to say.

“They wish to tell you,” said the interpreter, “that they like you and that it’s our custom to do all we can to please a guest and to repay him for his gifts. You have given us presents, now tell us which of the things we possess please you best, that we may present them to you.”

“What please me best here,” answered Pahom, “is your land. Our land is crowded and the soil is worn out, but you have plenty of land, and it is good land. I never saw the likes of it.”

The interpreter told the Bashkirs what Pahom had said. They talked among themselves for a while. Pahom could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused and heard them shout and laugh. Then they were silent and looked at Pahom while the interpreter said:

“They wish me to tell you that in return for your presents they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You have only to point it out with your hand and it is yours.”

The Bashkirs talked again for a while and began to dispute Pahom asked what they were disputing about, and the interpreter told him that some of them thought they ought to ask their chief about the land and not act in his absence, while others thought there was no need to wait for this return.

While the Bashkirs were disputing, a man in a large fox-fur cap appeared on the scene. They all became silent and rose to their feet. The interpreter said: “This is our chief himself.”

Pahom immediately fetched the best dressing gown and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The chief accepted them and seated himself in the place of honor. The Bashkirs at once began telling him something. The chief listened for a while, then made a sign with his head for them to be silent and addressing himself to Pahom, said in Russian:

“Well, so be it. Choose whatever piece of land you like; we have plenty of it.”

“How can I take as much as I like?” thought Pahom. I must get deed to make it secure, or else they may say: ‘It is yours,’ and afterward may take it away again.”

“Thank you for your kind words,” he said aloud. “You have much land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure, which portion is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me? Life and death are in God’s hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it back again.”

“You are quite right,” said the chief. “We will make it over to you.”

“I heard that a dealer had been here,” continued Pahom, “and that you gave him a little land too, and signed title deeds to that effect. I should like to have it done in the same way.”

The chief understood.

“Yes,” replied he, “that can be done quite easily. We have a scribe, and we will go to town with you and have the deed properly sealed.”

“And what will be the price?” Asked Pahom.

“Our price is always the same one thousand rubles a day.”

Pahom did not understand.

“A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?”

“WE do not know how to reckon it out,” said the chief. “We sell it by the day. As much as you can go around on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand rubles a day.”

Pahom was surprised.

“But in a day, you can get around a large tract of land,” he said.

The chief laughed.

“It will all be yours!” said he. “But there is one condition. If you don’t return on the same day in the spot whence you started, your money is lost.”

“But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?”

“Why, we shall go to any spot you like and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Wherever you think necessary, make a mark. At where ever you think necessary, make a mark. At every turning, dig a hole and pile up the turf; then afterward we will go around with a plow from hole to hole. You may make as large circuit as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. Al the land you cover will be yours.”

Pahom was delighted. It was decided to start early next morning. They talked a while and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more mutton, they had tea again, and then the night came on. They gave Pahom a feather bed to sleep on and the Bashkirs dispersed for the night, promising to assemble the next morning at daybreak and ride out before sunrise to the appointed spot.

Pahom lay on the feather bed, but could not sleep. He kept thinking about the land.

“What a large tract I’ll mark off!” thought he, “I can easily do thirty-five miles a day. The days are long now, and within a circuit of thirty-five miles what a lot of land there will be! I’ll sell the poorer land or let it to peasants, but I’ll pick out the best and farm it myself. I’ll buy two o teams and hire two more laborers. About a hundred and fifty acres shall be plow land, and I’ll pasture cattle on the rest.”

Pahom lay awake all night and dozed off only just before dawn. Hardly were his eyes closed when he had a dream. He thought he was lying in that same tent and heard some body chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkir chief sitting in front of the tent holding his sides and rolling about with laughter. Going nearer the chief Pahom asked: “What are you laughing at?” But he saw that it was no longer the chief but the grain dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask: “Have you been here long?” he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga long ago, to Pahom’s old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man, prostrate on the ground, barefooted, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahom dreamed that he looked more attentively to see what sort of man it was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself. Horror-struck, he awoke.

“What things one dreams about!” thought he. Looking around he saw through the open door that the dawn was breaking.

“It’s time to wake them up,” thought he.

“We ought to be starting.”

He got up, roused his man (who was sleeping in his cart), bade him harness, and went to call the Bashkirs.

“It’s time to go to the steppe to measure the land,” he said.

The Bashkirs rose and assembled, and the chief came, too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahom some tea, but he would not wait.

"If we are to go, let's go. It's high time," said he.

8

The Bashkirs got ready and they all started, some mounted on horses and some in carts. Pahom drove in his own small cart with his servant and took a spade with hi. When they reached the steppe, the red dawn was beginning to kindle. They ascended a hillock (called by the Bashkirs a *shikhan*) and, dismounting from their carts and their horses, gathered in one spot. The chief came to Pahom and stretching out his arm toward the plain:

"See," said he, "all this, as far as your eye can reach is ours. You may have any part of it you like."

Pahom's eyes glistened, it was all virgin soil, as flat as the palm of you hand, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast-high.

The chief took off his fox-fur cap, placed it on the ground, and said:

"This will be the mark. Start from here and return here again. All the land you go around shall be yours."

Pahom took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his outer coat, remaining in his sleeveless undercoat. He unfastened his girdle and tied it tight below his stomach, put a little bag of bread into the breast of his coat, and, tying a flask of water to his girdle , he drew up the tops of his boots, took the spade from his man, and stood ready to start. He considered for some moments which way he had better go-it was tempting everywhere.

"No matter," he concluded, "I'll go toward the rising sun."

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself and waited for the sun to appear above the rim.

"I must lose no time, "he thought, "and it's easier walking while it's still cool."
The sun's rays had hardly flashed above the horizon when Pahom, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the steppe.

Pahom started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After having gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole, and placed pieces of turf one on another to make it more visible. Then he went on; and now that he had walked off his stiffness, he quickened his pace. After a while he dug another hole.

Pahom looked back. The bullock could be distinctly seen in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the glittering iron rims of the cart-wheels. At a rough guess Pahom concluded that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer; he took off his undercoat, slung it across his shoulder, and went on again. It had grown quite warm now; he looked at the sun-it was time to think of breakfast.

"The first shift is done, but there are four in a day, and it's too soon yet to turn. But I'll just take off my boots," said he to himself. He sat down, took off his boots, stuck them into his girdle, and went on. It was easy walking now.

I'll go on for another three miles," thought he, "and then turn to the left. This spot is so fine that it would be a pity to lose it. The further one goes, the better the land seems."

He went straight on for a while, and when he looked around, the hillock was scarcely visible and the people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something glistening there in the sun.

“Ah,” thought Pahom, “I have gone far enough in this direction, it’s time to turn. Besides, I’m in a regular seat, and very thirsty.”

He stopped dug a large hole, and heaped up pieces of turf. Next, he untied his flask, had a drink, and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahom began to grow tired, he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

“Well,” he thought, “I must have a rest.”
He sat down, and ate some bread and drank some water, but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did, he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first, he walked easily the food had strengthened him but it had become terrible hot and he felt sleepy. Still he went on, thinking: “An hour to suffer, a lifetime to live.”

He went a long way in this direction also and was about to turn to the left again, when he perceived a damp hollow: “It would be a pity to leave that out,” he thought. “Flax would do well there.” So, he went on past the hollow and dug a hole on the other side of it before he made a sharp turn. Pahom looked toward the hillock. The heat made the air hazy it seemed to be quivering, and through the haze the people on the hillock could scarcely be seen.

“Ah,” thought Pahom, “I have made the sides too long; I must make this one shorter.” And he went along the third side, stepping faster. He looked at the sun it was nearly half-way to the horizon, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the goal.

“NO,” he thought, “though it will make my land lopsided, I must hurry back in a straight line now. I might go too far, and as it is I have a great deal of land.”

So Pahom hurriedly dug a hole and turned straight toward the hillock.

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Pahom went straight toward the hillock, but he now walked with difficulty. He was exhausted from the heat, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs began to fail. He longed to rest, but it was impossible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

“Oh, Lord,” he thought, “if only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late?”

He looked toward the hillock and at the sun. He was still far from his goal, and the sun was already near the rim of the sky.

Pahom walked on and on; it was very hard walking, but he went quicker and quicker. He pressed on, but was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his flask and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

“What am I to do?” he thought again. “I’ve grasped too much and ruined the whole affair. I can’t get there before the sun sets.”

And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahom kept on running; his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a black smith’s bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him. Pahom was seized with terror lest he should die of the strain. Though afraid of death, he could not stop. “After having run all that way they will call me a fool if I stop now,” thought he.

And he ran on and on, and drew near and heard the Bashkirs yelling and shouting to him and their cries inflamed his heart still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the rim of the sky and, cloaked in mist, looked large, and red as blood. Now, yes, now, it was bout to set! The sun was quite low, but he was also quite near his goal. Pahom could already see the people on the hillock waving their arms to make him hurry. He could see the fox-fur cap on the ground and the money in it, and the chief sitting on the ground holding his sides. And Pahom remembered his dream.

"There's plenty of land," thought he, "but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life I have lost my life! Never will I reach that spot!

Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up the sun had already set!

He gave a cry: "All my labor has been in vain," thought he, and was about to stop but he heard the Bashkirs still shouting and remembered that though to him, from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the chief, laughing and holding his sides. Again, Pahom remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry his legs gave way beneath him he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

"Ah, that's a fine fellow!" exclaimed the chief. "He has gained much land!" Pahom's servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead.

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it.

Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.

A VENDETTA

BY GUY DE MAUPASSANT (1850-1893)
Approximate word count: 1764

Paolo Saverini's Widow lived alone with her son in a poor little house on the ramparts of Bonifacio. The town, built on a spur of the mountains, in places actually overhanging the sea, looks across a channel bristling with reefs, to the lower shores of Sardinia. At its foot, on the other side and almost completely surrounding it, is the channel that serves as its harbor, cut in the cliff like a gigantic corridor. Through a long circuit between steep walls, the channel brings to the very foot of the first houses the little Italian or Sardinian fishing-boats, and, every fortnight, the old steamboat that runs to and from Ajaccio.

Upon the white mountain the group of houses form a whiter patch still. They look like the nests of wild birds, perched so upon the rock, dominating that terrible channel through which hardly ever a ship risks a passage. The un-resting wind harasses the sea and eats away the bare shore, clad with a sparse covering of grass; it rushes into the ravine and rages its two sides. The trailing wisps of white foam round the black points of countless rocks that everywhere pierce the waves, look like rags of canvas floating and heaving on the surface of the water.

The widow Saverini's house held for dear life to the very edge of the cliff; its three windows looked out over this wild and desolate scene.

She lived there alone with her son Antoine and their bitch Semillante, a large, thin animal with long shaggy hair, of the sheep-dog breed. The young man used her for hunting.

One evening, after a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously slain by a knife-thrust from Nicolas Ravolati, who got away to Sardinia the same night.

When his old mother received his body, carried home by bystanders, she did not weep, but for a long time stayed motionless, looking at it, then, stretching out her wrinkled hand over the body, she swore vendetta against him. She would have no one stay with her, and shut herself up with the body, together with the howling dog. The animal howled continuously standing at the foot of the bed, her head thrust towards her master, her tail held tightly between her legs. She did not stir, nor did the mother, who crouched over the body with her eyes fixed steadily upon it, and wept great silent tears.

The young man, lying on his back, clad in his thick serge coat with a hole torn across the front, looked as though he slept; but everywhere there was blood; on the shirt, torn off for the first hasty dressing; on his waistcoat, on his breeches, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had congealed in his beard and in his hair.

The old mother began to speak to him. At the sound of her voice the dog was silent.

"There, there, you shall be avenged, my little one, my boy, my poor child. Sleep, sleep, you shall be avenged, do you hear! Your mother sears it! And your mother always keeps her word; you know she does."

Slowly she bent over him, pressing her cold lips on the dead lips.

Then Semillante began to howl once more. She uttered long cries, monotonous, heart-rending, horrible cries.

They remained there, the pair of them, the woman and the dog, till morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried next day, and before long there was no more talk of him in Bonifacio.

He had left neither brothers nor close cousins. No man was there to carry on the vendetta. Only his mother, an old woman, brooded over it.

On the other side of the channel she watched from morning till night a white speck on the coast. It was a little Sardinian village, Longosardo, where Corsican bandits fled for refuge when too hard pressed. They formed almost the entire population of this hamlet, facing the shores of their own country, and there they awaited a suitable moment to come home, to return to the maquis of Corsica. She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had taken refuge in this very village.

All alone, all day long, sitting by the widow, she looked over there and pondered revenge. How could she do it without another's help, so feeble as she was, so near to death? But she had promised, she had sworn upon the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What was she to do? She could no longer sleep at night she had no more sleep nor peace; obstinately she searched for a way. The dog slumbered at her feet and sometimes, raising her head, howled into the empty spaces. Since her master had gone, she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her animal soul, inconsolable, had retained an ineffaceable memory of him.

One night, as Semillante was beginning to moan again, the mother had a sudden idea quite natural to a vindictive and ferocious savage. She meditated on it till morning, then, rising at the approach of day, she went to church. She prayed, kneeling on the stones, prostrate before God, begging Him to aid her, to sustain her, to grant her poor worn-out body the strength necessary to avenge her son.

Then she returned home. There stood in the yard an old barrel with its sides stove in, which held the rain-water; she overturned it, emptied it, and fixed it to the ground with stakes and stones; then she chained up Semillante in this kennel, and went into the house.

Next, she began to walk up and down her room, taking no rest, her eyes still turned to the coast of Sardinia. He was there, the murderer.

All day long and all night long the dog howled. In the morning the old woman took her some water in a bowl, but nothing else; no soap, no bread.

Another day went by. Semillante, exhausted, was asleep. Next day her eyes were shining, her hair on end, and she tugged desperately at the chain.

Again, the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The animal, mad with hunger, barked hoarsely. Another night went by.

When today broke, Mother Saverini went to her neighbor to ask him to give her two trusses of straw. She took the old clothes her husband had worn and stuffed them with the straw into the likeness of a human figure.

Having planted a post in the ground opposite Semillante's kennel, she tied the dummy figure to it, which looked now as though it were standing. Then she fashioned a head with a roll of old linen.

The dog, surprised, looked at this straw man, and was silent, although devoured with hunger.

Then the woman went to the pork-butcher and bought a long piece of black pudding. Semillante, maddened, leapt about and foamed at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the flavor of which penetrated to her very stomach.

Then with the smoking sausage the mother made a collar for the straw man. She spent a long time lashing it round his neck, as thought to stuff it right in. When it was done, she unchained the dog.

With great bites she rent away the face, and tore the whole neck to shreds.

The old woman watched, motionless and silent, a gleam in her eyes. Then she chained up her dog again, made her go without food for two more days, and repeated the strange performance.

For three months she trained the dog to this struggle, the conquest of a meal by fangs. She no longer chained her up, but launched her upon the dummy with a sign.

She had taught the dog to rend and devour it without hiding food in its throat. Afterwards she would reward the dog with the gift of the black pudding she had cooked for her.

AS soon as she saw the man, Semillante would tremble, then turn her eyes towards her mistress, who would cry "Off!" in a whistling tone, raising her finger.

When she judged that the time was come, Mother Saverini went to confession and took communion one Sunday morning with an ecstatic fervor; then, putting on a man's clothes, like an old ragged beggar, she bargained with a Sardinian fisherman, who took her, accompanied by the dog, to the other side of the straits.

In a canvas bag she had a large piece of black pudding. Semillante had had nothing to eat for two days. Every minute the old woman made her smell the savory food, stimulating her hunger with it.

They came to Longosardo. The Corsican woman was limping slightly. She went to the baker's and inquired for Nicholas Ravolati's house. He had resumed his old occupation, that of a joiner. He was working alone at the back of his shop.

The old woman pushed open the door and called him:

"Hey! Nicolas!"

He turned round; then, letting go of her dog, she cried.

"Off, off, bite him, bite him!"

The maddened beast dashed forward and seized his throat.

The man put out his arms, clasped the dog, and rolled upon the ground. For a few minutes he writhed, beating the ground with his feet; then he remained motionless while Semillante nuzzled at his throat and tore it out in ribbons.

Two neighbors, sitting at their doors, plainly recollected having seen a poor old man come out with a lean black dog which ate, as it walked something brown that its master was giving to it.

In the evening the old woman returned home. That night she slept well.

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