

“Welcome to the White Man’s World”: An English Translation of Isaac Oluwole Delano’s Historical Novel *Aiyé D’Aiyé Òyìnbó*

Michael Oladejo Afolayan
M&P Educational Consulting International
Osogbo, Nigeria and Springfield, Illinois
mafolayan@yahoo.com

Welcome to the White Man’s World

By
Chief Isaac O. Delano

Author of Soul of Nigeria, An African Look at Marriage, One Church for Nigeria, Notes and Comments from Nigeria, The Singing Minister of Nigeria, Ìran Òrun, Ìtàn Ogun Àdùbí, and Ìwé Atúmò Yorùbá (Yoruba – Yoruba Dictionary)

London: Thomas Nelson Ltd.,
1953

Foreword

I appreciate the kind of love with which you, my readers, embraced my previous books, whether those I wrote in the English language or in Yoruba.

For the record, one important thing I would like to say right here is that all names, be it of towns or of people, that are used in this book are totally fictional. We had no one in mind when this story was being written. The story is purely fictional but based on our various experiences in the Yoruba society.

Isaac O. Delano
Bajiki Ake, Abeokuta
London, 1953

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà (The Society of Sons and Daughters of Oduduwa), which is frantically engaged in working relentlessly towards the progress of the Yoruba society.

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I

Inside the Polygynous Home

In our days, life was a breeze. There was peace. There was plenty of food to go around. Everyone lived by the dictates of their conscience. The conscienceless power flaunted it with impunity. They lorded it over those without power, and there were no consequences attached to their actions. Anyone with the good fortune of being of a noble birth lived the life of wanton greed with reckless abandon and no one dared to challenge their authority. I was of a noble birth. I was raised in aristocracy and accorded royal pleasantries. I, Asabi-Ogo, one born with the silver spoon in her mouth; a child of the splendid class. I was born naturally like any child in town; I was bred and nurtured. My father held a big title of the warlord, the Balogun, right in the town of my birth. If he went a-warring, he returned home with all sorts of bounties. He came home with captured slaves, some of whom he sold off; some he just killed; while others, he chose to keep as wives. Our household was often crowded like the marketplace. We children were more than twenty in number, without counting children born of slaves, or those born of servants, and not even counting those who came to our household as bridal extras – kids who accompanied married women to the household and ended up getting married there as well. Oh, my mother, Solabomi – arrayed in riches, honor and majesty. Her praise poem was “She who was honored with royal titles; one who goes for the kill; the rich fellow that exhumes controversies; one who set up snares with money.” Such was the panegyric with which my father often hailed my mother as she stayed on her knees early in the morning to greet him. With greetings, heroic chants and praise poetry he would usher her into the dawn of a new day! Guess what? My mother was elated at the sounds of my father’s praises and doling over her.

My mother was astonishingly beautiful. Slender and ebonic in completion, she was freeborn. My mother was not a slave, neither was she a servant in Father’s household. (The fact of the matter is that neither a slave nor a servant had praise poetry attributed to them, except when they were in their natal homes). My mother was betrothed in the tradition of true marriage. My father went through the traditional rituals of engagement, and then married her. She was a trader. She traded in beads of varying categories – corals beads, èsùrú beads, and tubular beads. She strung them in big sizes and in large qualities for my father to wear. This is because my father was not just a great titled warlord, but also a chieftain in our town.

And as for my father, that’s another great tale to tell. He was elegant. How my father would wear those beads! With them on, father would stride in

styles, elegantly groomed and carrying himself like the classical lady's man that he was. He loved and favored my mother over and above all the other wives. This bilateral love rubbed on us, children of my mother. As often said, the favorite wife's children are often best loved and embraced. Our father loved us more than he did of our siblings. This one-sided love almost turned into palace coups. Indeed, it almost turned into community riot. This is because we became the target for others' envies with a promise of vengeance. "One of these days, you are going to get it," they would point at us and swear!

My siblings from my mother's womb were two. In other words, three of us were my mother's children. On one fateful day, one of us just dropped dead. Obafunke, one whose complexion was like that of the white man. Tall and slimly built, she was the apple of our parents' eye – their choice pet! Our father was particularly fond of her because her light skin tone made her a spitting image of Father; after all, our mother was ebonic black. Obafunke's death was a stab in the hearts of our parents. They were deeply sorrowful. Folks soon spread rumors that it was the work of the co-wives – they conspired to get rid of our family jewel! Our father believed this seriously and so was our mother. They both wept bitterly on that ominous day. Our father betrayed manhood, weeping openly like a woman. Family members and neighbors tried hard to console them, counseling them to leave everything to God, but our father was inconsolable. They urged Father to man up; but he refused to heed their admonishment on that day. He would suddenly stare at the bare space, rise suddenly from his seat, and shout, "Where is my Obafunke? May whoever had a hand in this tragedy, die childless!" He would pick up crying again. Talk less of Mother. She cried her eyes out! Mother dunked herself right in the front yard, rolling on the ground like quicksilver, and as one possessed with childhood neurosis. We children in the house did not keep quiet either; we were literally wailing. The entire family compound was left in a state of mourning with everyone weeping on that day. News had spread all over the place. Did the neighbors stand by us on that day – bless their hearts! They were truly sympathetic to us and took good care of us. It was truly a day that would go down in disrepute!

Obafunke was buried the same evening right in front of the family compound. Men came and dug what looked like a shallow grave and buried her in there. Wailing further ensued on that dreadful evening time. There was great lamentation as the body was being lowered into the grave and covered up. Countless times mother would go and sit right on the tomb of my sister, calling on her, crying and chanting praise poems on her baby that laid low in the grave. No doubt, the death of Obafunke took a toll on our mother's strength; it was a burden too heavy for her to carry on her fragile mind; too much a yoke for her to bear!

In the dead of the night one day, under the cloak of darkness, as mother snuck into the grave of Obafunke to cry, guess who she met there? It was Father, who had also come to make his own round of weeping at his beloved daughter’s graveyard. They had been coming incognito, unbeknown to each other, but here, face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball, the couple were united in sorrow and they cried their eyes out, wailing in unison in the middle of the night! Family members were woken up; neighbors rose from their sleeps. It was an elegy of an unprecedented proportion! No pleading could console them. It was after this that the elders of the neighborhood had a step-aside conversation with Father. I had no idea what they talked about, but this much I knew: Father never went back to mourn the parting of Obafunke at her graveside.

I, Asabi, was the middle child. My younger one was called Adekanmbi. It was our oldest sibling that had been snatched away by the cold hand of death. The only two of us now left quickly became treasures in the eyes of our parents. Their love for us now exceeded any measure. It now baffles my understanding even more now that I am myself a grownup and a mother. I still marvel how my father, a heroic hunter, a warmonger, and an artful trader suddenly became a jellyfish, a woman in a man’s skin, all because of a child! He consequently started petting us, spoiling us, pampering us, I mean the kind of pampering capable of blemishing a child. In reality, a child is a child. The birthing process of the freeborn is the same as that of the slave. Boy, our father did love us. Our father pampered us!

Because they loved us a great deal, our parents started protecting us spiritually so we might be above any sudden death; that we would not be victims of any unforeseen illnesses; and that we might rise above human treacheries. That way, the wizards would not be able to cast any evil look at us, and witches would not exert any negative influence on us. We were administered skin deep incisions on all joints of our bodies; they hung talismanic amulets around our necks; they placed waistbands around our waists; they claimed to have infused on us the magical protective potions, and nothing evil would consequently come near us. They were confident in the efficacies of these spiritual protections. In fact, one day, they made me wear a pair of bangles around my ankles. They said this was because the Ifá oracle had pronounced that I was *eléré* – a wandering spirit. They kept having various offertory meals on our behalf, slaughtering animals, cooking beans - black-eyed peas (even though we were not twins); they would make fried yams, fried plantains, inviting everyone in the neighborhood for communal sharing – that is, sharing prescribed sacrifices. Our parents spent so much money on us. In all seriousness, I was totally oblivious of the significance of all this at the time – not until now that I am narrating the story. Let us face it: parents really love their children! Definitely, parents do love their children far more than their children love them.

I was looking at all these hardware on my body, sleeping with them on me, and waking up, still with them all over me. Whenever I looked at my brother, Adekanmbi, I would talk to him in fond derision, that he looked like a masquerade in our neighborhood known as Fikuyeri. Fikuyeri was often arrayed in all sorts of amulets, scaring all neighborhood children with his appearance. It's like I was blind to my own appearance, a pot calling a kettle black! Adekanmbi himself was never in short supply of expressions to ridicule my funny appearance. He would say I looked like Sorowanke. Indeed, Sorowanke was an insane woman who roamed the streets. She arrayed herself in debris and street garbage complete with bangles around her ankles and dancing unprompted in the open. The very day I was shown Sorowanke and recognized the person called my look-alike, I went into a feat of rage, dumping every single amulet worn around my body.

On the day in question, Adekanmbi had gone hanging out with friends around the community. On his return, he came with a drummer. They were praising him, hailing him with music and chants. He, on the other hand, was dancing frantically, taking on the real appearance of Fikuyeri in the act. I laughed hysterically, and shouted "Hail Fikuyeri!" The drummers were drum-talking and praising him as: "Son of Balogun, may you outlive the fame of your father." I laughed even more, tearing up as I laughed but no one was really cognizant of why I was laughing. My actual point of laughter was that the dance of Adekanmbi to the rhythm of the *àpàlà* drum snugly resembled the appearance of Fikuyeri a great deal. As he retired back home, he saw me but could not recognize me. In fact, he was asking of my whereabouts from me. I smiled broadly and still pretended. He looked around but could not find me; apparently, coming from the sun, his vision was fussy. He was sweating profusely. He still did not recognize I was the one standing next to him. He further shouted my name, calling on me, and saying, "Where is Asabi? That Asabi who looks like Sorowanke." I was pressed to laugh but constrained myself from doing so. Two kids were standing nearby but I quickly motioned to them not to spill the beans. I was already cracking them up big time. They too were laughing, but I still tried to conceal my own laughter. When this second time around Adekanmbi asked the same question, all of us could no longer curtail ourselves but burst into a loud laughter. Now, the die was cast: Adekanmbi now knew it was I he had been talking to all along unbeknown to him. He was flabbergasted. He again asked me about myself. I responded: "It's me, rascal, you Fikuyeri look-alike!" He gave me a nonchalant laughter with a smock on his face, chasing me around so as to hit me. Adekanmbi was a riot. Without much ado, he too instantly started unplugging those hardware off of his body, liberating himself of those encumbrances. Those burdens lifted, Adekanmbi now came out in his natural look, very handsome and well-built.

This proved to be a great day in the household of our father. When Father came home and found us bare of those bangles and amulets, he was pissed off, totally enraged. He did not notice immediately. It was close to one whole hour of coming home before he noticed it. Funny enough, father ought to have discovered this a whole lot earlier because I literally threw my ankle bangles right on the porch of the family compound, the path on which he walked home. Father was infuriated. He yelled out in anger and frustration, throwing things around the house, and cussing out in blasphemous rage. In all honesty, he was not railing insults at us; he loved us more than that. He swore it was our mother that gave us the moral courage to attempt such outrageous act. He made it clear that the joke was more on mother than on him, after all, we were the only two that mother had left, and he on the other hands had more children with the other wives if our nonchalant attitude pushed us into early mortality. As it turned out, we neither died nor took ill; we were both under the care of our father in heaven. And who is this father in heaven, by the way? It better be our paternal progenitor, *egúngún*, the ancestral spirit, the guardian force that descended from the sky above. Let me confess outright, I was petrified to see our father in this rage of anger. I never saw him in such anger and frustration. But the silly Adekanmbi was laughing discreetly, hiding his face from father’s unpleasant countenance. As for my brother and I, we were now free, unshackled from the burden of “protections” against the evil forces which had forced us to be tethered to the world around us!

That same night, following a supper of *iyán* - the pounded yam paste, we retired unto the outer pavement and enjoyed our usual rounds of folktales and storytelling. As the saying goes, the young start the evening pastime unknitting riddles before the main cuisine of folktales and storytelling began. After all, the elders used to say, one who chants the folktales without first unknitting riddles is nothing more than an uncivilized heath dweller. I was the one who started the evening off posing riddles for the audience to unknit. I shouted, *àlò o* - “here comes my riddle,” to which Adekanmbi and the household kids responded, *ààlò o* - bring it in! Then I posed my first riddle: Who dared to pass by the front yard of the palace of the *oba* without paying him a homage, doing him obeisance in the open? To this riddle, Adekanmbi gave a wrong response, saying “It must be Sorowanke;” another in the audience said, also wrongly, “A fool.” Then, came the right answer as someone said, “The downpour torrential flood of the rain flowing past the palace.” I acknowledged the correct answer, saying indeed, it was the torrential flood of the rain. I vividly recall the riddles and folktales of this particular evening but can’t tell it all. The moonlight shone brilliantly like the ray of the sun. It was one of those all-night moon shine that had just taken off. Not long after we took off, other male kids in the neighborhood started another evening game called

Onotoro, and that technically put our storytelling session to a halt. For children, the game of *Onotoro* was far much interesting than storytelling.

Every evening, young one like us had our exciting and entertaining games. Oh, our childhood days were so much interesting. I should add, though, this my adult, senior citizen days are not that bad either if not for the barrages of issues to deal with, which were carryovers from the early times.

When we were young, those older than us were not without their own games as well. The young men played games that occupied them in the evening times. Except for our mothers - poor mothers, even without being in religious seclusion or constrained by slavery, were always behind-the-scenes. They hardly came out to have fun in the evenings. They were too busy implementing domestic chores, working like jackals. They were busy caring for infants and toddlers, cooking meals and working hours on end in the courts of our fathers. The fate of women as of that time was nothing to write home about - it was that bad!

This thing called the passage of time! Time and tide wait for no one; they fly even without wings. I was getting grown. My brother, Adekanmbi was growing as well. We all witnessed the passage of time as we gradually aged. What a sacred thing we call time! Time, indeed, does not linger for anyone. Therefore, my friend, whatever your hand finds to do, do it swiftly and with seriousness of purpose. As the days roll by, time is advancing. The Master Keeper of time keeps tabs of the passage of time. As days accumulate upon days, so are months upon months and years upon years. It all looks like yesterday. In the twinkling of an eye, I had become of age, a complete lady in my own right, well-built and beautiful. My mother started having conversations with me about the fact of becoming a full-grown lady. She spoke about the delicate nature of womanhood. If a woman made a wrong step in life, reconstructing the bad deeds could take a tedious lifetime.

My mother kept telling me the expectations of a married woman; she also told me some expected behavior in one's husband's home. She told me how to care for my future husband and how to be caring to my mother-in-law. She also told me of things not to do regardless of who my mother-in-law turned out to be. She spoke to me about the need to be kind-hearted to my husband's family members and neighbors. These and many other things are what mother told me all the time. She also revealed to me those who genuinely loved us among her co-wives and those we should watch out for. In fact, one day she specifically told me the name of the person she suspected to be responsible for the demise our big sister, Obafunke.

In my father's house, the co-wives were not fond of each other at all; yet, they were all feasting - eating and drinking together day-after-day. They even went on public outings together. They groomed together in the same attires

like friends; yet, they were sworn enemies of each other. They were just pretentious to each other. Even myself, I started seeing some of them as my own friends and some as my enemies. I even decided I would never say hello to one of them, whom I believed was the culprit in the death of my sister.

Such was the nature of hate, suspicion and deceit that permeated a polygynous household. I am just beginning to understand that complexity. As for me, if I were to be a man, I would never marry more than one wife. My first-hand experience in the household of my father with the clashing and crashing of multiple wives and even in my own household later in life, have been my teacher in this life journey of understanding the danger of polygyny!

As I was growing up, my mother kept showing me the secrets of many things in life. She taught me how to live in my husband’s home, especially in a polygynous home. This is no joke! It is a way of life that calls for wisdom. Mother taught me trading skills, her own kind of trade. We went to the marketplace together. We went together to where she purchased her market stocks, watching her as she haggled for the purchases. I quickly realized that trading in merchandise is a particularly difficult vocation. I soon became skillful – very skillful, in trading. To that end, my father endowed me with the start-off money and I became a trader.

Now, I have become every man’s favorite, a potential bride, and so they would not give me a break, all of them coming after me, chasing me, hoping to be my suitor. As for me, I’m attracted to all sorts of men. I loved some that were dark-skinned; I loved some that were light-skinned; I loved men that were tall. Boy, God knows how much I hated a short man! I considered to be a major flaw. I was in a fix, a dilemma, a crossroad in the valley of decision! I kept sharing these with my mother; after all, a girl’s mother should be her Number One confidant in a situation like this. Calmly, mother would say: “Don’t rush at marriage; don’t do without marrying; be patient; after all, men are no easy nuts to crack.” Those were words of elders, packed full of wisdom. In all honesty, I did not fully understand what she meant at that time. But now that I am older in age, I have acquired a full grasp of all they meant. The fact of the matter is that a child that does not carefully make a choice of the man or woman to marry will regret it down the road in life. It’s unbelievable; those days were something else; you would think I was wearing some love potion! Wherever I turned, I was bombarded with men seeking my attention. If I went to the market, I was sure at least one man would come after me, waylaying me to gain my favor and win my love. If I was returning from the market heading home, of course, they would be there waiting for me. And it’s no bragging, I was a beautiful girl, pure and simple. I knew that to be true and would not be caught in the feat of false humility. Honestly, I flirted, walking seductively, and carrying myself with elegance.

One day, Father called me early in the morning and said, "Asabi, it shall be well with you; may you be fortunate in life; may all your paths be smooth. I just found you a husband." I quickly caught in, "Found a husband for me?" Father said, "Yes, I did." I responded in a snappy way: "When did I appeal to you for a husband? Husband in this life or in the life to come?" It only sounded like I was being sarcastic with my father but in reality, I was furious with him. Who the heck was the husband that my father found? Could it be Babalola, son of the head masquerader in our community? I laughed mockingly, and posed another jest at my father, forgetting that I was standing before an elder, my father of all people. I asked, "Did I appeal to you for a husband?" Sorry, I already have a suitor of my own; he is the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers." My father also laughed like I did, but his eyeballs were red hot. His anger was palpable. He responded, "You? You must be joking! Is that a conversation between you and your mother? You are both deceiving yourselves." Little did I know this matter had become a big deal for my father on that fateful morning. It was common knowledge that every fault of a child was heaped upon the mother. I did not get it then, I still don't get it even clearly now why that should be the case. My father was adamant, insisting that I must go along with his choice of someone for me to marry. He also felt that my mother was my counselor on this matter and had chosen a husband of her own choice for me. According to my father, she had ill-advised me. I insisted that I was going to be married to the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers.

My mother hid her face away from all our back-and-forth conversations, and she said nothing. After all, a woman had limited roles to play on matters pertaining to their children in those days. However, mother called me aside that day and warned me against rude exchanges with my father any other time. She advised me that I should go along with my father's choice; after all, no matter how situated one could be at her husband's place, one could not afford to break the bridge behind her, leaving without securing a place in the home of the father as well. This was because a husband's home did come with its own challenges and may not always be a hitch-free home away from home. She advised that I should return early in the morning of the following day to apologize to my father for my rude behavior to him. But I refused flatly to do so, at least, not on that very day. Today, on a hindsight, I could so easily see my error of judgment in the whole matter. My mother was right, her instincts were right on the money; but at that time, my eyes were blind because I had given my consent to the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers and besides, I loved him. This was what my father heard that prompted him to make the statement he made. Love is blind indeed.

II

Reasons for These Hullabaloo?

There are assorted humans on the face of the earth; children are of different sorts as well. Babalola has been unique, call it peculiar, from childhood. He was slow in speech, slow in actions, and looking as if confused all of the time. Yet, he was thoughtful, thoroughly investigating matters before reacting; listening a whole lot, but saying very little. He stammered. Because of his disability condition, many thought he could amount to nothing in life; and there was no way he could carry on well in his lifetime. But that was a big mistake. Even though he was not a big talker, whatever managed to come out of his mouth was deep. In essence, he was taciturn and aloof. Yet, Babalola was handsome. Pitch dark in his skin tone, he looked like the seed of *ishin* - the akee apple. What an ebony! However, Babalola was a short man.

The very day that my father said Babalola, son of the head masquerader, was the one he would betroth me to, to be perfectly honest, I derided and discounted his counsel. Let us face it: all of us in the community knew each other closely. All of us knew who Babalola was as a less exciting fellow, too gentle and non-pushy; certainly, he was not one of those popular, quite charismatic dudes in the corner of the street. He went about his business unperturbed, cool as cucumbers, never engaging anyone in brawls, hanging out with no one in particular, but fighting no one either.

I could not but ask myself what prompted Father to insist on me marrying this man! I thought about the matter over and over again but could not get it. Babalola of all people – the short goblin with permanent cargo on his head! Damn! Arrant nonsense. He is not fashionable. He does not carry himself well. He does not sport well in attires. Were he to put on the masquerade costumes, he could not even scare anyone. He could not sing; he could not chant; neither could he make any moves that would be impressive and attractive to ladies. What a put down to imagine myself being married to such a jerk. No way! Not me, Asabi – the cutie of a girl; slim-built enigma – the weightless dainty that fell on the fragile chinaware and it could not break but fell on the heavy mortal and rendered it shattered to shreds! I, a girl with class, a girl with the cool pose. I am well skilled. I know my trade. None of my peers is as beautiful as I am, let alone out-classing me in beauty. What an insult on my person! Over my dead body would I embrace Babalola as husband. If arms would fail to swing, they could be held at rest over the head. Rather than be married to a sloth, I would rather stay put under the roof of my parents and better engage myself in my trade. For me to accept Babalola as husband? God forbid. No way. I repeat: over my dead body!

Truth, going by the history we all knew, Babalola's grandfather was the late ruler of Ojusongo. His father, however, did not care about a chieftaincy title or about anything for that matter. All he cared for was trying to impress women with his masquerade performances. Should I start my own married life with this bravado of nonsense, a baggage of rubbish? Would I be saddled with these negative incumbencies? So, is that saying I would have to wait until the goat is sacrificed to the Egúngún before we would eat beef in the house? Do we have to wait until the Egúngún comes out begging before we put cloths on our back? How on earth would this kind of a person contribute more to my existing trading investment when I am married to him? What on earth did Father see in this man that prompted his insistence on me marrying this scum of a man! My father is not a bad man. Could it be that he had received some kind of bribe from Babalola's family? What could they have to give my father, the Balógun himself, for him to accept this kind of bribe on his prized daughter and sell her out into marriage so cheaply? Rather than the death of the ground, the ground would rather turn barren.

As I was roaming and foaming in my mind, I heard a voice from my deep consciousness, saying "This world is a marketplace; *òrun* – the heaven, is the home." I lifted up my eyes and felt that was father's voice. I looked again and responded, "My father, what did you just say?" He answered me, again with another coded phrase, "large leaves don't grow tiny ones. God will not shame the strong before the weakling. However, if the strong becomes pompous, he would be found wanting." I was confused by those words. I said to myself what is all this coded communication from an adult to a child? I mused over this matter for a long time. My anxiety was heightened much of the time. I felt a thunderous challenge right in my head. My eyes seemed to see lightening. Often, I would come to, and say to myself, "Should I really be the one cut out to marry someone like Babalola?" It was me thinking this way and talking to myself unknown to me that my father was overhearing, prompting him to talk the way he did. Credit should be given to the wisdom of elders!

For many days, my father never made any reference to the matter of Babalola again. The matter has spread like wildfire, gone viral in the whole community. Relatives of Babalola, most especially his mother, started honoring me, petting me whenever we met on outings. His mother would be praising and hailing me, left, right and center but my responses were always lukewarm and cold. Sometimes I would even insult her. I used to whisper to myself and ask, "Who the heck would want to be married to the son of this woman?"

Knower-doers have invaded this earth – their deeds are palpable. From early childhood, I have been observing some of these, even before I became this old. Many folks, especially my peers and age groups, started carrying the rumor that Babalola suffered from the feat of epilepsy. They said he fell into an

epileptic episode right in the marketplace at the main market called Obada, and many saw the spectacle. Truly whenever Babalola spoke, he foamed a bit in the corners of his mouth but he was not epileptic. They said he was an imbecile. They said his family had Haskin’s disease, also known as leprosy. They said his grandfather was a troublemaker in town and it was by the power of the *orò* cult that he was sent into exile.

All these supposed defects were made up, they really never existed. No one ever had leprosy throughout all his generations. His grandfather was a respected elderly statesman. He was the ruler of Ojusongo. Later on, they rumored that Babalola had head lice. At that point, it became clear to me that they just wanted to ridicule him. All these so-called faults originated from the side of the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers, to whom I had given marriage consent. It was true that the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers loved me, and I had promised to marry him. I, on the other hand, loved him a great deal. It was he, indeed, who was carrying the false tales around about Babalola. Whenever he and I had one-on-one meetings, Babalola was the subject of our ridicules. We spoke about him endlessly. We mocked him and lampooned him. However, when the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers started to spread negative words about him, my heart bled within me. I did not approve of such behavior. I did not appreciate the action. Why spoil someone else’s reputation for no apparent reasons other than rivaling on one woman? That, to me, was unacceptable – totally uncalled for. Even the girl who was the bone of contention would have to see this herself as wrong. Besides, such behavior could only emanate from an evil mind. I thought within myself that a man engaged in this act could not be a good man with whom one could navigate the water of life together in peace and harmony down the road.

With subtle and fraudulent victimization and harassment, plus malicious envies, coming from the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers, he thought he could win me over from Babalola, my father’s choice. Little did he know that he was only shooting himself in the foot. With his action, he was about to give a woman to the man she did not plan or hope to marry.

The son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers was a troublemaker. Any woman that rejected his overtures would face the music, paying heavily for the rejection. He would hire thugs to deal squarely with the woman. He would harass such woman until she regretted that she rejected her proposition and she may end up not finding a suitable husband in a long time. Yet, I loved him. I did not know what exactly drew me to him. Could it be because of his restlessness and bad boy demeanor? It’s true, women seem to love a macho man, who engages in difficult things over a man who acts in

a gentle manner, akin to a woman. Babalola truly acted like a woman – a gentle man who just faced his work squarely.

Whenever there was a street fight, you could bet it was the son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers behind it all. If a masquerade performed public magic in spectacular ways, don't look too far; you could be sure it was the macho man under the mask. Even I would feel proud to think it was my suitor doing wonders.

This character assassination directed at Babalola on daily bases did not sit well with me. I was not impressed, not satisfied with such behavior. One day, I told him clearly that "Son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers, this is not good at all. Come on, do you really have to be the snag in the back of Babalola this way – antagonistic of him? This person has no lice on his head; he is not epileptic; there has never been a trace of leprosy in his family. This is just not fair. Am I not here with you? Do I have anything to do with him? Why are you so afraid? You seem to be paying attention to the noise of the marketplace, not giving due attention to the merchandise you are there to purchase. Babalola and his folks are just noises of the market. Why are you giving so much attention to them? I have nothing to do with him. You are the one. Let me repeat: You are my beloved."

The son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers fell into a feat of rage. There was nothing filthy that he did not utter to me on that fateful day. He called me all sorts of names: traitor, conformist. In fact, he held his fist tightly and was about to hit me. He called my father names also – greedy fellow who had received the head of a he-goat as an in-law to the Babalola's family. Isn't this something to think about? For someone to act this way to someone being proposed to be married; isn't it clear that only a fool would not rethink of a future husband heaving insults on one's father? This really annoyed me as well, but I kept my cool. Yet, he did not just shut up. He asked if I were going to follow my father's counsel. He said, "Your father is apparently chief among evildoers." When I heard this, my head became light on my neck and I almost lost it. My father? How dared a future husband would have the audacity to insult my father with impunity this way? My father was a titled warlord; a great man, full of virtues as known in the entire compound and the entire township. How would this Mr. Nobody even think of lifting his filthy mouth against my father? I said nothing but resolved in my heart, and making sure my resolve was fulfilled, that I would never say hello to this man again. A would-be husband making negative sport of one's father – what an effrontery!

As the day was dawning on that day, I saw Babalola in our neighborhood. He hardly visited our neighborhood. It was whenever he saw me in town that he bothered me. I used to say within me, "This one is surely not ready to marry a woman. He could not impress anyone, neither was he zealous like his

counterparts.” But this evening, he managed to come, whistling and going to and fro. I said in my mind, “The fool is beginning to act like a man.” As he went up and down, my stomach was churning as I was looking at him with contempt. Were it to be that son of the head woman of the Obatala worshippers, the rascal would have zoomed into our backyard under the pretense of some irrelevancies, like looking for someone who never lived in our compound and it would not take a diviner for me to know that he was on the look for my attention. Soon, I did not see Babalola any longer. Truth be told, he waited a long time.

That evening as I went to the marketplace to purchase cooking ingredients for stew, I was just about to reach the stall of one of the market women shortly after leaving the *róbó* snack seller, I heard the slurry voice, “A-a-sabi; wouldn’t you greet us?” I looked back and lo and behold, it was Babalola. I responded and said, “Babalola, you are full of it!” I said in my mind again, “The fool is beginning to act like a man.” He too manned up and said to me, “A-a-sabi, do not pump my blood; I’ve seen the likes of you before.” I was shocked, taken unawares, totally unprepared for this kind of response. Even though it took him moments to complete the sentence, both of us burst into utter laughter. I went to run my errands.

I deliberately did not return via the *róbó* snack seller’s stand; instead I went through an alley that faced the stall of the *ògìrì* sellers. The alley led to our house, only it could be darker at night. As I came out of the dark alley into the open, I ran into Babalola again, and he was quick to say, “A-a-sabi” I pretended not to hear his voice; instead I dashed swiftly into our compound. Babalola blacked out: he was stunned and unable to complete the sentence because he was a stutterer.

As I laid down resting in the evening, my mind kept going back and forth to all the dramas of Babalola during the day. Sometimes I would speak to myself, asking “I, Asabi, Babalola of all people! For me to marry Babalola?” In the wandering of my mind, I fell into a deep slumber, and I did so only for some time. I soon woke up suddenly. I went to sleep again. I woke up again. It was more of a chicken nap. I went to sleep again. I woke up again. I slept again. Then, I had a dream.

In this dream, I saw Aboderin, an elephant hunter who lived near our house. I knelt down to greet him. He greeted and showered me with praise poetry saying, “Asabi-Ogo.” I kept going. I arrived at a junction of which one road went to the house of the son of the Obatala head woman. I hesitated. I looked back. I saw Aboderin again. Little did I know that he was following me all along. This looked like a protracted time in the dream. It was as if he had been following me for a whole day. Dream could be tricky. “Aboderin, I never knew you were stalking me all this while.” He replied, “That’s true.”

We then started staring at each other. Aboderin then said, "Turn right and go straight." I obeyed as instructed. I went straight, with him accompanying me. We kept going. Later on, Aboderin disappeared and I was left alone by myself. Then, I arrived at another three-way junction. As often said, "A three-way junction poses a dilemma to a stranger." I had no idea which way to turn, whether to go straight, go right or turn left. As I was in this dilemma, I saw Aboderin appear behind me again. He motioned for me to go straight at this time, and straight I went. I kept going for up to fifteen miles in that dream. After that, I met my father, greeted him and he in turn greeted me, showering me with our family heroic praise poetry. My head swelled up. There and then, father went pass me. I kept going. Next, I met my late Sister, Obafunke. In this dream, she did not appear like someone already dead. We rejoiced in felicitations. She asked if I had met our father on the way. I told her I just met him not just quite a minute ago. Look yonder, and you could see him. Obafunke then said, "Lay no blame on the pest that consumes the leaves of the green vegetable; let's look at and blame it on the charm of the cute and appealing leaf." I asked in exasperation, "Obafunke, what the heck are you talking about? What do you mean?" She answered, "In the absence of true humans, people become deceptive; therefore, keep your secret to yourself." I asked again, "What do you mean by all these adages? You are confusing me!" She further said, "A person with the goiter looks down cheaply on neck bracelets; one with a fashionable neck would pay any amount to own them." I was to query this idiom once again, but then, I woke up. I was heavily puzzled. Could it just be my Obafunke I saw this cheaply? I felt a sense of eeriness. I almost burst into tears on that day. It was on the market day of Obada Market; and my mother and I went to trade in the market. However, I was not myself throughout that day. I was sorrowful all day, saying nothing and divulging my dream encounters to no one.

All mother's naggings of the morning in reacting to my lateness getting up added insult to my injury. Sometimes she would call me all sorts of names, saying, "the cat sleeps like the indolent. Keep it up and watch the consequences down the road. At your age, you are sleeping in like one without anything to look forward to." It was almost the dawn of the day when I finally slept, having spent all night long in nightmarish dreams. All these mother's naggings prevented me from even remembering the dreams, and so I did not utter a word of it to anyone, not even to my mother. I rose like a man, packed my merchandise and hurried up, heading off to the marketplace together with mother.

Sales were slow on that day. We hardly sold anything of consequence. We were used to returning home with decent money, but today, we brought in just a meager amount. To this end, mother was upset, nagging and berating me all

day long. Nothing I did was right in her sight. I did something else, it must be wrong by her assessment. She would insult me verbally and abuse me physically sometimes. The market outing that day was a hellish experience for me. I wonder what my fault was in all this. Did I prevent the good fortune of sales? Did I prevent us from selling? I did not harass any potential customer. The fact of the matter was that any day of ill-fortune or poor sales performance to a trader was always a day of trouble for the young one accompanying adults. These reactions could be to their slave, servant or any child for that matter.

On arriving from the market, we ate and drank; then, my father called for me. He shouted, “Asabi, quickly run and let Aboderin, the elephant hunter, know that I needed to see him.” That was exactly when the memory of my dream came rushing like a flood. Everything came back to me crystal clear. As I headed to the house of Aboderin, I recalled all the wise sayings of my big sister which she uttered in the dream.

I delivered father’s message to Aboderin. As always, he greeted and praised me exactly the way he did in my dream. I almost felt that he was going to discuss the dream with me because it all seemed like an earlier live conversation he and I had. However, the poor man knew nothing about the dream.

Instantly, Aboderin heeded my father’s summon. We literally walked on each other’s heels to our home. Aboderin never wasted time whenever father summoned him. It’s like the proverbial Aare – the war General, calling on you, his subject, and you claim to be consulting the oracles. What difference would it make if the Oracles give positive prediction prognosis and the General comes up with something negative? After all, my father was a titled warlord. As Aboderin entered, my father started praising him with the hunters’ heroic poetry. It is a taboo for a younger person to recite the praise poetry of an elder, else, I would have repeated exactly the way my father chanted Aboderin’s praise poems. Aboderin kept responding back in humble adoration to my father’s position, “Homage to the Chief!” He then sat on the floor near my father.

Since they were contemporaries, they shared jocular pleasantries; after all, they did this joking together while engaging each other in the *ayò* game. The difference between the two was that one was an animal hunter, the other a human hunter. The warlord of old were truly human hunters during the time of peace. They went about looking for other people’s children to kidnap or capture and sell. In all honesty, my father sold so many of such other people’s children. He did not even care if they were children of neighbors; he did not even care if some were relatives’ children when he needed them. However, he never sold any of his own biological children.

“Hear me, Aboderin; I think this matter of Asabi deserves to be revealed to the public. As often said, when you tell someone about ‘the issue of yesterday,’

it means you already shared secrets together, right? I'm afraid, this matter may become something that would explode in the face of her and her mother. I told her to marry Babalola, son of the headman of the Egúngún worshippers, but she refused. My gut feeling is that her mother is the girl's enabler in this act of disobedience. I want to entreat you to speak to them because days are moving fast, waiting for no one. I am getting old; my days are fast approaching and I have no idea what my very last day would be." That was how my father brought the issue of my imminent betrothal to the ears of this man, Aboderin, the elephant hunter.

"Asabi, here we are at the crossroad of decision. Can't you now see that the pest that consumes the leaves of the green vegetable is not one to blame? We just have to look at the charm of the cute and appealing leaf! Men have to swamp you; but a fish must just learn to swim in the direction of the river's flow. Otherwise, the fish would get itself in trouble. Adhere to what your father is saying to you." I did not utter a word after what Aboderin said. Then, my father said, "This insult is too much; people are instigating my daughter to rebel against my counsel. The cloud of shame is forming and a heavy downpour is about to unleash on Asabi and her mother, Solabomi, the ridiculous!" Aboderin called my name again and said, "Asabi, know that in the absence of true humans, people become deceptive; therefore, keep your secret to yourself." My mother's countenance changed; she became furious. She wanted to utter some things, but my father's look prevented her from saying anything because she dreaded the fury of my father. Father further spoke, "Aboderin, warn Sola dearly, so she would not interfere in this matter of my daughter and I. Enough is enough; else, there would be trouble if Asabi continues to disobey my orders." Now, my mother's anger intensified. She then said, "Warlord, Head-hunter, please be aware that you both need to refrain from washing my dirty linen in the open; after all, even if one eats a rodent with defect, as long as one eats it under one's roof, it is okay. Please stop broadcasting my affairs and those of my daughters to outsiders. You are belittling the position as the head of the family, if you don't understand. No credible head of a household does that. You are no God. Let there be fire or brimstone falling from the sky over me and over my daughter. Is it by force? Let trouble and evil become comrades; it's none of my business. Just leave me alone. You are no God, you are an ordinary warlord. You are acting like the proverbial elderly chicken that does not recognize the value of its age. And you, Aboderin, you are an elder. Do not abuse your status before me. There had never been a confrontation between you and I. Steer clear of my daughter's matter if you don't want the unexpected. I really don't blame you; it's this unceremonious elder incapable of ruling his own household that has brought this clamor to the family. Come to think about it, what are your take on this? Are you saying my

daughter should keep me in the dark on matters that pertain to her future, or what the heck did you mean by the adage you uttered the other time? You were saying ‘In the absence of true humans, people become deceptive,’ referring to the relationship between the daughter of my womb and I? Who cares who and who become deceptive, even treacherous? It is my God-given right to have a say in my daughter’s affairs, never mind the spineless head of the family who is incapable of leading his home right. And it is true indeed, a person with the goiter looks down cheaply on neck bracelets...” With this, my mother broke down and burst into bitter wailing, weeping like one bereaved. She was outraged beyond expectation. I was just a spectator, looking helplessly. What could I do? Left to me, this matter was never as serious as it had turned out to be right now. Aboderin was mad as well, but said nothing. The proverb uttered by my mother spoke volumes to him; after all, he never fathered a child.

I stood trembling. My mother and father were exchanging words all because of me. I never witnessed anything like this in their relationship. The fury of a woman to the husband is something else; all rules of courtesy are broken. Now, we are talking about my father of all people, who was literally venerated by all townspeople, and who all women of the compound held in reverence; yet he was the one being verbally assaulted here! Seriously, he was prepared to pounce on my mother, to beat the daylight out of her, but he was prevented from doing so by members of the household.

None of us had supper on that fateful day – not me, my father or my mother! Never had I witnessed anything like this between my parents. This was also an unexpected fasting. All of us were caught in the web of involuntary starving. When the heart is hurting, food has no taste in the mouth, all appetite must be lost. You could be sure that my mother’s co-wives were rejoicing, ridiculing the couple who were at loggerhead over their daughter’s proposed marriage.

Early in the morning of the second day, my mother called on me to go to my father and revisit the matter. As I entered his room, Father asked, “Who are you there?” I responded, “It’s me, Asabi.” “Come on straight in by my headrest, Asabi.” That was what my father said as if he was already expecting me. He didn’t even permit me to say a word when he spoke, “Asabi, please rethink your stand on our conversation of yesterday. I did not catch a wink on the matter all night. I don’t want you to suffer in the future. You should know that I am not going to be around forever. And you should know that you are not going to be the daughter of Balógun, the titled warlord, forever either. This is because I must go the way of the elders and another Balógun will come to the throne. There is ample evidence that the son of the woman leader of the Obatala worshippers is no human at all. He is a certified thug. Although his mother is devout, the son is no good. Answer me, Asabi, what choice would

you make?” I responded and said, “It is true, the young man is annoying, ridiculous, murderous, obnoxious, filthy mouthed, rude and contemptuous. He has no regard for anybody. All along, I had wanted to accept your choice, but Babalola is just not someone I would like to be married to. He does not appeal to me. He is not smart. He is sluggish. What am I going to do with Babalola?”

My father called out, “Sola...!” My mother was within earshots of our discussion listening on the father-daughter conversation. She responded to the call, kneeling down by my father. My father looked at her intently and said, “Sola, may you forever look radiant. This matter with Asabi, the bone of contention for all the hullabaloo of yesterday, comes down to this: would you consider your contemptuous attitude to Aboderin yesterday appropriate? Was it not I who invited him into our conversation? That was not right; it falls below expected dignity. You should not have ridiculed him that way. Regardless of what we think, we can only propose, God is the one to dispose. It shall be well with Alasabi (our daughter) in life. May she enjoy a peaceful married life. May she procreate in males and females – countless in number. After all, I never wished other people ill in life. Let people rumble if they wish, but let us not get ourselves caught in the web of people’s evil machinations. Trust me, I have good reasons to make the choice of Babalola. I have consulted with the oracles and they have assured me that the future is good for her and that she will be victorious in all challenges she might face in her matrimonial home. As our people say, seekers of the truth don’t go astray.”

My mother then spoke. “This world of enigma – heavy and light. A child belongs to the father. I will go along with your choice. It’s just the way you involved Aboderin that infuriated me, especially his response. This is our family business. This is about our daughter. What business did Aboderin have on the matter? Even if you involved him on the matter, he should be smart enough to know that it was none of his business and watch what he needed to have said, after all he calls himself an elder.”

My father replied saying, “You are both right and wrong; after all, a child belongs to everybody. The important thing is that Asabi will be married to Babalola; let’s just watch. I am confident in this, and can swear by the god of iron and warfare that this is a fact. They will live a prosperous life, it shall be well with them; and they will hold each other in a deep loving relationship.”

“I will die and be joined with my ancestors. My legacy is in your hands, Solabomi. Be a good counsel to your daughter. Mother is always the confidant to the daughter. If Asabi were to be a boy, I would know the burden I’m supposed to carry concerning her. You have taught her how to trade; and, thank goodness, she now knows how to trade; she is prudent; she is thoughtful and patient. But as good as all these are, they are not sufficient to carry one

through a marriage experience. Please explain to her the danger of jealousy in a home with multiple wives. Fighting should be avoided between husband and wife. Let her know that it is her duty to be respectful of her husband as you have been to me. What happened yesterday was my fault; I brought it on myself. I realized that it was wrong for me to bring my friend into our daughter’s matter without first ironing it out under our roof between you and I. It just happens to be a taboo, something unheard of, else, I would have apologized to you. But for Balógun, the titled warlord to come so low as to apologize to a woman? God forbids!”

III

Joy After Sorrow

Not long after all these, Babalola started frequenting my place every afternoon. In fact, with the pandemonium his matter had brewed among my father, my mother and I, I just did not care for him as much as he did for me. His love to me seemed fire hot. Had I had someone to counsel me, I would have initiated my love for him immediately after my father approached me about him. My mother stopped advising me on the whole thing. Yet, a good number of my peers kept asking me all the time, “Asabi, are you truly going to be married to this Nobody?” Many derided him with all sorts of verbal assaults. But my baby brother, Adekanmbi, seemed to be Babalola’s strong advocate. He kept counseling me all the time to heed my father’s advice.

In a slow but steady progression, I began to love Babalola. I started loving him because of his consistence and insistence in seeking my face, and visiting me all the time. Come rain or shine, in the moonlight or in the depth of darkness, he came visiting with me. His back-and-forth, relentless pursuit of my favor, his palpable, and apparently undiluted love for me made me to start loving him in return. That love was beginning to sprout. It started to grow and spread bit-by-bit. Whenever my peers were deriding him, I slowed down my participation in the act. As time went on, some of my friends started to see clearly that it was no longer prudent to continue speaking ill of him in my presence. But, of course, conspiracy and jealousy persisted. The son of the head worshippers of Obatala did not keep quiet. He was roaming the neighborhoods in rage like someone who’s woman had been stolen from him. He was threatening all over the place until it came to the ears of my father who summoned his father, and gave him a notice. My father forced him (the father) to be on his knees while warning him to talk senses to his son. If the son did not back off and leave his daughter alone, both he and the son would suffer heavily for it. The warning worked like magic.

As time went on, the storm calmed; only the inconsequential folks had anything to mouth about in the relationship between Babalola and I. Little by little and at our chosen pace, Babalola and I soon gave a consent to marry each other. How fast things changed! All those friends of the past who insulted and verbally assaulted him had nothing but praise to heave on Babalola. Indeed, they started lauding him. The only one or two fellows who did not desist from their harassment of Babalola were dropped from my list of friends.

What a glorious day it was when Babalola and I stood face-to-face and spoke to each other about the need to get married. The conversation was brief; after all, our matter had been all-noise beforehand. Hardly had there been anyone who did not know about our relationship anyway.

“A-a-sabi, what are you up to? Are you for it or not?” I then asked, “For what are you talking about? What was the previous conversation you are referring to?” Babalola was embarrassed. He looked down to avoid eye contact with me. He kept looking down. He held my hand and I did not resist. He pulled me towards himself and I did not resist either. He led the way and I followed him. We kept going without saying a word to each other. As time went on, Babalola stuttered out, “A-a-sabi, let bygone be bygone.” I responded, “Let it go to the sea of forgetfulness.” A-a-sabi, I will take good care of you if you marry me.” I said, “I know that to be true. May God take care of us, all.” On that note, we departed that evening. I kept watching him down the road before he turned the corner. He looked back. He waved goodbye to me. I waved him goodbye in return. I then ran inside the house swiftly, knowing full well that I was in our neighborhood.

News started spreading like wildfire when people heard that we were engaged to be married to each other. My father was exceedingly glad. All naysayers refrained from their gossips. All those unfounded rumors about him being dirty, physically deformed, untrustworthy, epileptic, and so on, were silenced. Those who refused to stop completely did so at their own perils. (I say this because I knew two or three fellows for a fact who did not stop gossiping about us and fell sick at that particular time). One of them was the gossip that got himself in big trouble. I whispered a prayer gently in my heart that “Whoever does not desist from talking ill of me may he or she face adversities and taste of their own medicine.” Whenever Babalola and I met, he derided some of those gossips; and we spoke more of the events of the past, all of which had gone under the bridge for us.

The entire period of my courtship with Babalola turned out to be the best time of my life. What a pity; all these have become a thing of the past! It's too bad to know that many women do not wait in life to have this kind of experience. This is certainly a big loss. How I wished the love relationship between us continued to wax strong the same way it was at that time and continue

forever. In those days, I was madly in love with Babalola, almost insane! Everywhere – on the way to the farm, on the way to the stream, or on the way to the marketplace, we were always inseparable. He visited me every night. We spoke endlessly, almost to the irritation of passersby.

Not long afterwards, his parents visited our home for the family introductions, otherwise known as “mothers heard; fathers heard.” This was a part of the engagement rites according to the customs of our people. After this ceremony, the parents of the bride now saw the young man as their son-in-law. He could now officially come inside to visit his betrothed and both could sit down and have conversations. But everything must be in the open - visible to the members of the family. This did not make Babalola comfortable because he was a shy person. He did not have the freedom for loud and free laughter as when we used to stand outside the house and chat. After that, they performed the rite known as *ìjòwùn*, literally meaning “Saying yes to the proposed marriage,” in concert with formal engagement. The best of the *àjòòpa* cola-nut was the main staple brought for my engagement. The bitter kola, honey, alligator pepper, wrapping cloth, and wine were also brought. These symbolized the custom practice in my hometown. In some Yoruba towns, however, different other ingredients were used in the engagement ceremonies. In some places, for example, fish would be a part of the items in addition to the ones I listed for mine.

The day of my engagement was grand beyond measure. With dancing, drumming, trumpeting, singing, and other festivities abound, there was abundance of joyful noise. The entire town was caught in the festive mood. After all, this was the engagement of the daughter of Balógun, the titled warlord of the town. Yet, get this: even the day for the real wedding was not yet set or announced. This was just a prelude to the big thing to come. At long last, the day of the wedding was set. My father performed all sorts of rituals. He offered sacrifices to the gods; and the fateful day soon arrived.

On my wedding day, it’s no exaggeration, we pulled a crowd. It was indeed, a society wedding. A huge silver chain hung around my neck. I was majestically adorned. The crowd was uncountable. It was everywhere you turned. Food and drinks – be it the palm-wine, wine, native brewed drinks, early morning palm-wine, rum, you name it - were all in abundance. Of course, Solabomi, the bride’s mother, was on cloud nine – her joy knew no bounds; after all, her golden baby, the beautiful Asabi, is now a bride. The rest, as they say, is history. The ceremony of the day was beyond description.

Between the festivities of the joyful sounds and dancing, Aboderin the elephant hunter, was hiding in the dark to do me bodily harm. He had proposed in his heart that for generations to come, there would be vengeance from his family to mine because of the ridicule my mother exposed him to shortly

before my wedding. It turned out that Aboderin was an evil and acrimonious person, full of evil charms even though he was my father's confidant. He was mean-spirited, malicious and unforgiven. He was relentlessly seeking my life so as to bring pain and sorrow upon my mother, even though I never personally offended him.

Slothfulness is dangerous. I was hanging between the valley of life and death but no one knew that to be the case. I had no idea. My husband had no idea either. Even my parents were clueless on the matter. But we noticed some ominous signs on that fateful day. Some people make a big deal out of some signs they witness whenever they plan something, or during a particular occasion. Sometimes, too, even if what they are doing was not particularly significant, some would give particular attention to certain signs. I used to think that all these signs were of no consequences before, but what I saw on my wedding day did not go unnoticed. I saw them as bad. Even now, I am further convinced that it was a bad omen when I put together all that I experienced immediately following my wedding.

As I was caught in the mood of dancing on the central stage on my wedding day and people were honoring me with a shower of gifts, suddenly a black butterfly landed right on my eyelid. Babalola noticed it. Even the wives in Babalola's family household who were traditionally referred to as senior wives to me, who themselves were there to honor me with gifts, saw it. Babalola wanted to kill it, but it perched on a delicate spot. Yet, he attempted to kill it but the butterfly escaped. It was baffling, and curious minds would like to know what on earth a butterfly wanted right at the central stage in the dancing floor of a wedding reception. This was a bizarre occurrence. All those who saw this considered it to be an extremely bad omen. My husband was dejected. He was sore afraid. He asked himself, what kind of bad omen this could be, and concluded that he was certainly in for a long and stormy ride.

It did not take long before I fell sick. Babalola's mother quickly pointed to the butterfly episode as the culprit. There was another one she saw on the edge of the tray on the day I came as wife to the house, and Babalola also recalled the one he saw on my eyelid. Prior to this time, neither of them shared their individual observations or ever mentioning it to each other. Mother and son now had a backdoor conversation about the matter. They were puzzled about the direction to take in addressing the strange phenomenon. Here comes death; here abounds losses; here comes the casket – or how else could one interpret all these inexplicable portents! A black butterfly perching on the eyelid of the newly wed bride. Who ever heard of such, for crying out loud! Babalola could not be comforted, crying uncontrollably like a woman; but the mother consoled him, occasionally crying alongside the son, and the son, in turn, consoling her. They decided to keep the secret between the duo

and that they should stand strong with me. However, they decided to consult with the oracles on this matter. The prescription for the sacrifice was for them to secure one black male goat, one black sheep, one three-year old male chicken together with a brand-new cover cloth of black color to cover everything as sacrifice. They went looking for these prescriptions with immediacy even though it took a long time to get the prescribed black animals to purchase. Yet, my sickness did not abate.

Balogun, my father, went all the way and did all he could to restore the health of his prized daughter. My mother suffered a great deal; she was troubled beyond measure. Who could be behind this evil? My mother queried why of all people, I, Asabi, good mannered, gentle, hardworking, well behaved, charming beauty, would start my married life this way. What a calamitous event this could be!

Could this be an activity of the witches? Could it be that of the wizards? Or could it be some sinister forces, “elders” straight from the pit of hell, a company of enchanters and enchantresses from some evil covens? Could I have been poisoned? All we could do was just to slice and dice on a daily basis but with no resolution forthcoming. My father, Balogun, cried to Aboderin, since the latter was a great hunter, pleading with him to please come to his rescue concerning his daughter’s inexplicable illness. Many hunters were known for being skillful in the art of herbal preparations – whether to do good or unleash evil. My issue brought about a jamboree of healers, ranging from diviners, to ventriloquist and herbalists. They were uncountable; yet, my illness did not depreciate. If it was neck pain today, it might be an excruciating headache tomorrow; and yet an agonizing soreness of the leg the following day. It was as if these bodily beatings were migrating from one point to another in my body. All sorts of sacrifices were being offered on routine bases. Money was being expended on my ailment like no man’s business. My father spent so much on this matter that he became almost penniless; let alone my husband himself, who in his own case, would also weep bitterly without stopping. My mother-in-law cried her eyes out of sockets. Oh, my poor mother – her eyes were bloodshot for daily weeping, accompanied by a headache that would not abate. What on earth was all this? Aboderin kept coming to care for and encourage me. As he was gathering herbs, so was he chanting incantations. Yet, no relief was upcoming for me!

One day, Aboderin came with some good news that he had found a healer that would take care of my ailment. My husband consented instantaneously. Aboderin brought in the old man, who pitied me as soon as he saw my condition. He requested that a dove be found to be offered as propitiation to evil forces concerning my illness. They sought for the dove, found it, and brought it to him. After all these great offerings of sheep, rams, male and female goats,

and all sorts of animals, would an ordinary dove do the tricks that all these could not do? You could not but wonder. Well, as it is often said, cynicism is not in the art of belief, certainly not an attribute of faith. You've got to make yourself a servant to your need, and so, we obliged.

This healer took from us one bottle of the palm-oil, two hundred cola-nuts, two hundred bitter-kola, six yards of white linen, and requested us to provide a casket as well. My husband provided all of these instantly. The casket was made to my size. After all the preparations were done, and the healer put the sacrifice inside an open white calabash, he commanded that Babalola should take the sacrificial offering to a particular junction deep in the night, and do so in the nude. Babalola did not refuse (but he confessed to me after I was healed that he had to put on some slim underpants to do this because it was just too difficult for him to go out naked). He wondered how embarrassing it could have been had he met a familiar person on the way. However, he never made this confession before anyone else besides he and I. Even her mother never knew of the matter until her death. It was all an enigma. Who knew the role played by going out nude? Who knew whether or not the palm-oil had anything to do with it? who knew if the healer just used all these shenanigans to bamboozle us? I could not tell then, and I cannot even tell now.

It was inside this coffin that I was placed after being shrouded like a dead person. The healer kept chanting incantations over me every single day that I was inside the coffin. He offered me concoctions to drink right there; and was busy performing all sorts of rituals over me. I slept every day and woke up every day still inside the coffin. It was inside there that Babalola fed me with my meals. It was inside there that I drank. It was there that Babalola kept whispering in my ears in his characteristic stammers that, "A-a-sabi, if my fate facilitates your healing, I will forever love you. I will nurture you; I will never fight with you; just get well, my wife; and not turn me into an ill-fortuned fellow." With these words, he would be robbing his hands gently on mine. In return, I used to say, "Just know I'm not to blame; it's not my fault at all; it's just how I am feeling right now; if it pleases the Lord, I will be well. I will not end up being ill-fated; may we not see evil; may we only see good fortunes forever." All this chatting was taking place while I was still inside the coffin; apparently, I must be feeling better.

After three days inside the coffin, I started feeling comfortable there. It seems my body was getting used to the place. Sometimes I would sleep so deeply as if nothing was ever wrong with me. I was feeling better indeed; all those unhealthy feelings were depreciating significantly. On the twenty-first day of passing nights and days domiciled inside the coffin, I was completely healed. Sacrifices and propitiations were apparently efficacious. My father, Balogun – the titled warlord, used to visit me before daybreaks. Even my mother

moved into our house on the very day that I entered into the coffin residence. Now, I came out of the coffin. I was healed. I ate. I fed on pepper soup. Every member of our household rejoiced greatly. My mother was over joyous. Now, she could return to her home; and she did. But right in the back of her mind, she believed that Aboderin, the elephant hunter was the culprit in the calamitous event that befell her daughter. My mother held him accountable and promised to revenge one of these days.

For many days afterwards, I kept using the herbs, bathing in concoctions, sipping concoctions- drinking and bathing in it cold. My urine was blood-red. My excrement was fluid-like and slippery. Whenever the healer saw these, he would remark that I was just releasing whatever was left inside of me through urine and stool. Truly, I was getting better by the day. Not quite long, I started taking slow walks, strolling around the house. I was feeding well. I loved pap gruel, and it was made in fermented water for me. Sometimes, I would eat it with *jógi* – the bean pudding. Sometimes I would eat with *àlapà* - the melon seed pudding – many don’t even know the difference between the two. And sometimes, too, I would choose to eat with the bush meat or even eat it with nothing else accompanying it. I was also surrounded by countless snacks – *àádun*, honey pepper, fried melon seed pudding, fried peanut pudding - some spiced with pepper, some seasoned with salt.

Finally, I was totally healed. I passed through the fire of sickness. On that day, it was as if I was going through another wedding ceremony. It was as if I was being remarried by my husband. I had put on much more weight, becoming more fashionable and robust, even showing off my physique! Babalola put on the expensive traditional flowing garments; he was attired in all sorts of traditional fashion grooms. He wore brand-new cloths specially crafted for this outing in celebration of my macabre experience with the sickness and eventual healing. He was exceedingly joyful and openly jubilant! He provided drinks, numerous in number, to our well-wishers. He did just as he did one year earlier at our wedding occasion. My father was not found wanting on that day either, entertaining folks in his community. People were thronging his home. Folk would dance heartily at our place and dance to my father’s place as well. Sometimes, too, two entertainers would meet half-way between our home and my parents’ and dancing would take another central stage. Even Solabomi, my mother, hired her own separate entertainers. With her group, she danced all the way to our house. As soon as Babalola saw this, he ran to me and shouted, “Mother is here with dancing.” I asked, “You mean my mother?” He said to me, “Yes!” We quickly rushed out to meet her and we all joined in the circus of dancers. She was greatly honored by our family members. They ushered her with money, and placed expensive clothes on the floor on which she danced. Mother would look at me with admirations and

smile broadly, dancing even more in elation. Babalola whispered in my mother's ears. She shook her head. I asked my husband what he said to my mother. He said he invited her to come in and have a sip of the wine. The honor of the day was great. Mother danced, and returned to her house without she or members of her troupe, including her friends and entertainers, entering ours on that day.

Upon leaving our compound that day, my mother headed to the front yard of Aboderin's compound. She went to lampoon him, to sing the songs of parody in his ears. Here was what I heard that she sang on that day:

Asabi has become àràbà – the giant cotton tree, providing the shade all around her,

All your threats have come to naught; shame on you; shame on you, all.

The rightful child of the land owner does not arrive without the shaking of the

ground – we are the ones coming on the way today.

All your schemes have been put to shame; Asabi is healed, now shinning as diamond.

There was an uproar, loud noises, songs and jubilations when my mother raised this parody. It was as if the drum major was now possessed, beating the drums incessantly. The refrainers were chorusing behind the drummer and all those that were present seemed to be in festive moods. The drum major kept changing lyrics and the refrainers and dancers did not stop either. Occasionally, the drum major would anchor the drum stick on his shoulder, and toss the drum thrice in the air. The *sẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀* – large cowrie-beaded calabash instrumentalist did the same; the small drum operator played the high-pitch drum incessantly. In spite of her old age, Solabomi, my mother, danced like crazy. She danced what I call the dance of parody right in the front yard of Aboderin. That was one great day. It was so memorable.

Before departing from Aboderin's place, news had gone around town. When we heard the news, I was sore afraid! Babalola grumbled, complaining bitterly about the matter. "What on earth prompted Mama to do this yet again? We are trying to ease off the matter, why set another conflagration of trouble?" Babalola queried in exasperation. I also detested the act. Even if it was true that Aboderin was behind my problem, was he not the one instrumental in solving the problem? We were totally displeased with mother's action. A woman would always act like a woman. After all, my mother herself was a woman.

As our people used to say, anyone smeared with a ridicule and does not lift a finger of protest is a spineless folk afraid of confrontation. Aboderin and

members of his household knew they were the ones being ridiculed, subjected to public ridicule. They then promised a revenge – against me, as well as my husband, who was totally innocent in all these; plus, my mother who was the culprit of it all – the trigger and bone of contention, and even my father who was oblivious of all my mother’s plot. To this end, Aboderin came to report my mother to my father. Babalola and I were quite pleased to know that he took that step because we were convinced that it would offer us an opportunity to intervene on the controversy and settle the dispute. But he only did this to put up a façade, a mere camouflage, being convinced within himself that my father was instrumental in all this embarrassing show that my mother displayed against him, Aboderin. My father apologized profusely, saying that he did not expect that my mother would intentionally lampoon Aboderin, after all it was he that God used to bring the much-needed relief, call it deliverance, to the macabre experience of her daughter. My father knew it was true that my mother lampooned Aboderin in the open but was only trying to play the role of a peacemaker. He appeased Aboderin earnestly.

As far as Aboderin was concerned, the whole issue was behind him on that same day. But the truth was that the matter never ended, at least in the minds of his wives, slaves, servants and all his family members. They were determined to revenge, quipping that someone who exposed them to public shaming could not turn around to apologize in the private chamber. When the Mogaji - head of their family unit, heard of the occurrence, he detested it. He called on Aboderin and castigated him for not supporting those of his own who were vindicating him of the insults from his sworn enemies. It was not long that this particular Mogaji died, and it was the turn of Aboderin to take his place. There and then, the women in the household decided that they were going to embarrass Solabomi as a payback. *Ojò Ìje* - the seventh day of the Chief’s death, was when they planned to embarrass my mother. It was that day they were celebrating the life of the Chief. They couldn’t wait to arrive at my father’s front yard. They all dressed up, putting on their best attires. They arrayed themselves in costly beads, and wore waist beads as well. As soon as they arrived at my father’s compound, their drum major stopped beating the drum. Then, the lead singers started to sing their own parody. Here was their song:

That the ram recedes does not suggest the fear of combat;

The first glass could break irrevocably;

Except if anyone ever uses the broken mirror -

Warlord, be ready; trader, be prepared -

The gauntlet is thrown into the circle of fight; now comes the battle; the war is yet

to begin, shame on the butterfly pretending to be the canary.

The rumble of this exchange had now gone around. The most ironical of it all was the fact that the same drummers of the last time whom my mother hired, were the same ones being used against her today! The drum major was at his best, putting up some spectacular performance. It was exactly as he did the other day. As far as he was concerned, he was just doing his own job of a drummer. Just imagine: the same person who was hired to satirize someone the previous day was the same person hired back to come and satirize the one who had hired him. What a model of the trend of life!

Thank goodness, sound health had returned to me. I now walked around elegantly. It was exactly three months after the event that the die was cast. You ask what it was? My mother, Solabomi, suddenly died! There was no warning sign whatsoever - She was never sick; she did not even have a single coughing episode; no stomach upset; no headache; nothing whatsoever! She just said she was a bit tired, and the husband persuaded her to take a rest break because of all her activities of the past days. It all took a turn for the worse, and it all went out of hands. I wailed on that day like no man's business. I can't tell the amount of words proceeding out of my mouth. I yelled out: "Woe betide whoever is responsible for this evil deed." All eyes turned towards Aboderin, claiming he was the one behind the death of my mother. But Balógun, my father, did not believe any of that.

My brother and I performed the funeral rites in honor of our mother. We invested heavily into it, spending a lot of money. We performed all rites imaginable - the Ceremony of the Third Day, and the Ceremony of the Seventh Day. We entertained all our guests with the undiluted palm-wine. We provided *iyán*, the pounded-yam; *àmàlà* - the yam flour pudding; *dòdò* - the fried ripen plantain; *dùndú* - the fried yams; even *ìpékeré* - the fried unripen plantain. We cooked in abundance the okra stew; *ewédu* -the jute leaf stew; stew of all kinds of other green vegetables including varieties of the waterleaf - *tètè*, *ebòlò*, *gbúre*, you name it; *ewúro*, the bitter-leaf; *òsùn*; and its sister leaf, *òdú*. Our guests could ask for anything and everything; they were all in abundance. There were combination stews - waterleaf mixed with the powdered onion seeds, seasoned with the shredded shrimps, dried fish, and other indigenous seasonings and spices. Everything was finger-licking good! All those who attended the burial ceremony enjoyed the powdered bean stew that was capped with dried fish and shrimps. *Adiẹ irànà* - the ritual fowl, was slaughtered and sheared among all household members. The dead was buried right in the front yard of my father's compound, not far from where we buried my big sister, Obafunke, the other time.

Babalola spent a lot of money on my mother's funeral. "May you be more blessed" was my prayer for him throughout that time. I returned to my husband's house after the funeral. I soon became pregnant and gave birth to a

baby boy whom we named Olanrewaju. It was while we were caring for the new boy that I truly missed my mother. I knew that were she to be alive, her care for me and the baby would be boundless. My mother-in-law, as well as Bàdíàrán – my husband’s younger sister, did not let me miss my mother’s service too much. We did the naming ceremony in the tradition of my husband’s family customs. Palm-oil was dripped into his mouth of the baby. I ate a small part of the rat meat as prescribed by tradition; water was tossed up the roof of the house, and I bent down for it to flow into my back. I danced heartily. I rejoiced exceedingly. Here I was, becoming a mother after a life-threatening sickness.

Babalola did not say much because it was difficult for him to do so, anyway. But anything that came out of his mouth was loaded with wisdom. The day I gave birth, he rejoiced with me, and congratulated me, stammering, he said: “I, Babalola, has now become complete – not like one who strayed into this world as a spectator, accomplishing nothing. Oh God, I thank You.” In our days, a man or woman who did not have children was terribly ridiculed. On the naming day, as multitudes thronged into our compound to rejoice with us, my husband was elated. In his characteristic way, he muttered some words, saying: “The good thing of life has come to be mine; as the broken calabash no longer has a business of frequenting the spring, so illnesses should have no more business visiting my home.” He looked at me with admiration; I looked at him the same way, and we fell into each other’s arms.

Children are the heritage of the Lord. Children are the ultimate gift with which God could endow a person. Children are what would cheer one up at old age. Children are one’s replacements when one departs this world. Just like the ashes are left behind the burning fire; and the banana offshoots are left when the banana’s life ends, so it is that when one dies, children take one’s place in the sand of time.

And so, the child started to grow. He was a splitting image of Babalola; but the tall stature was all mine; that was what he took from me, his mother. Looking like his father increased Babalola’s affection for the baby and even for me. He did everything to please us.

Babalola was far from being a lazy person; only that he was not talkative. He worked like a jackal, never slothful in duty; no eye-service; but when it comes to gossiping, tattletaling, insinuations or instigations, count him out. This had nothing to do with his speech impairment; it’s just his natural policy to detest evil. After all, there were many speech impaired individuals who were gossips, even more than those without speech impairments. It’s whatever God lays on Babalola’s heart that he did, not wanting to get into conflicts whatsoever. If I reported to him that a member of Aboderin’s household crossed me in the marketplace during the time we were at loggerhead, he

would simply respond and warn me with the wise saying that, “A nursing mother is the adversary to the barren; just as the hard worker is the enemy to the indolent.” If I vowed never to say hello to someone because he or she offended me, my husband would simply say, “Not so; keep saying hello to him or her. There are no friendships without conflicts, and there should be no conflicts without friendships.” If I swore I would revenge something, his response was always, “Most are destroyed by foolishness; wisdom seldom kills anyone.” If I was working too hard just to obtain a nice bead or clothing item, my husband would say, “Those who seek the face of God for their needs are never in a hurry.” If I said I would not attend an occasion because someone I perceived to be my enemy could be there, my husband would say, “Decency trumps riches; courage outweighs the fear of charm.”

Brevity was the nature of Babalola in speaking. But his words were packed full of wisdom. More importantly, he lived by example for me to follow, a privilege denied many wives. He never led me astray. He never encouraged me to eavesdrop or gossip. He did not let me follow any evil deed.

Babalola was never perturbed. The cocoa plants on his farm were uncountable. The cola-nut plants on his plantation had started to yield. During the harvest season, his barns were full of corns, yams, cassavas, rice, and beans. Hauling them to the Obada market on market days was a big commitment. He would carry some; I would carry some, and together we would be complimenting each other, saying: “Greetings for the hauling; greetings for being industrious.” Whatever day we chose to sell plantains in the market, the price of plantains would have to fall on that particular market day. Those workers processing our palm-oil were uncountable. Money accruing from minor item sales was more than sufficient to maintain us. I’m talking of minute consumable items like leaves of all sorts, woods, and the cocoyam. Those were more than enough to feed us. Our servants were numberless. Yet, Babalola would muse and say, “This world is like a marketplace; only heaven is home.” Sometimes, he would say, “This life is the meeting point of three roads; it has the tendency to confuse strangers.” And some other times, he would say, “Twenty children cannot play together for twenty years.”

I was getting overwhelmed by all these. It is a challenge to have a husband with too much wisdom and intelligence. With his wisdom and intelligence, Babalola was still very rich. It was common knowledge to me that with the abundance of money, it was a whole lot easier to endure marital challenges. In spite of his intelligence and superior wisdom, we were able to get along well. As far as a woman is concerned, if there is money in the picture, other things are minute. The same is true of men as well. Let us face it: without money, human is no good! When money is gone, people find their ways to wherever

they come from. My prayer at that time was that nothing in life would separate my husband and I from each other.

This is no self-glorification, I was not a bad person at all either. However, I always acted like a typical woman. Could you believe that my husband and I got into disagreements on occasions? And, to confess, I was always the guilty party. Once he started uttering his wise sayings, I was put off. And once he said something casual, I picked up a fight. Too much of wise sayings, no moments of fun chats. I was overwhelmed.

After a while, Aboderin himself died. His funeral rites were done in the tradition of hunters. After some time, my father, too, died. Both funeral ceremonies were great. There were no fights; no songs of parody; no lampoons. Babalola was particularly instrumental in averting all these nonsense during the two ceremonies. After all, he could handle me quite well, just as a good husband should, and I hardly objected to his views. I never objected to his counsels. Badmouthing was no longer a part of me. I was blessed with more children. I lacked nothing. Forgiveness and justification go hand in hand. My husband and I started our lives in full. Plain or hill, we were moving on. Once we got used to each other and understood ourselves, our love for each other blossomed in honesty. Each of us could vouch for the other. We could even give our lives for the other. Babalola once told me that he could go to jail or head to the gallows for my sake.

Not too long, Babalola took another wife. We became two wives in his household. We became two in the hands of my husband. He and I planned it together. In fact, we both worked together towards her dowries. Not long after this, he married yet another one. In those days, the number of wives was a status symbol. A single woman in a household was a shame to the wife. And so, we became three in the bosom of the same husband; but I was the senior wife.

Our husband was stinking rich, getting richer by the hour. Money was just coming in for him. He had myriads of servants and countless number of slaves. Even I also became a famous person in town, wife of the rich man, wife of Babalola, “The Wise Man”, as his friend used to fondly refer to him. Even all townspeople hailed him with this same praise name.

Not long after all these, Babalola was selected to become the Chief of a small town called Ojusongo. This was a town under the jurisdiction of our town. The chieftaincy title of that town was always under the lineage of Babalola. To this end, we moved to Ojusongo – my husband, myself, my co-wives, our children, our servants and our slaves. Our numerous herds, chickens, turkeys, ducks, guinea fowls, and all sorts of birds that Babalola kept, went along with us. It was his brand-new white horse that he rode in triumph into the town on that day. He was received with fun-fare – in utmost jubilation and

hilarity. Babalola's fame already preceded our arrival into the new community as a rich and wise man.

While there, he added more wives, fathered many more children. He already gained some weight and appeared more handsome. He looked rested. His stuttering reduced tremendously except when he was boiling mad. This was the time the Whiteman introduced tobacco smoking into the hinterland. He learned to smoke it and he enjoyed it. He would puff out the smoke in the mouth and through the nostrils like a chimney. Wine also came and so he abandoned the palm-wine and started drinking the new wine. Sometimes, he would be drunk, staggering all around. He would be surrounded by his wives, chanting praises upon him. Some would be flirting and invoking his family praise chants. He too would like to show off like the proverbial king of the bed-bugs. Babalola was having fun.

He was no longer giving me attention – not much time for me. This had nothing to do with any disagreements; he was just darn too busy. Sometimes, it would be a while before we ever saw each other; yet, we lodged under the same roof. There were so many kinds of people in our compound who answered to him, those were at the beck and call of the Paramount Chief and they were a part of his chieftaincy entitlements. These people were always at the service of the Chief. All sorts of people – whether magicians, gamblers, lazy drones, vagabonds, beggars, they all came to our compound to dine and wine in the palace of the new ruler. Fortunes came in from all sorts of life for us. Babalola was wallowing in riches and honor. He was battle-ready, armored for war, even in the absence of chaos and anarchy of life. He was a warrior. He was powerful. He had the key of life of sort in his hands. He was fearless concerning any adversaries. He was totally oblivious of the fact that great men were always surrounded by a huge cloud of terrible, evil, self-serving, conceded, acrimonious folks. As comfortable, secured and resolved that Babalola was, he faced the fury of acrimony. The fact of the matter is someone who would face the tide of time hardly sees it coming. His wives by counts were now nine in number. In our days, even people of low reputes had like four or five or even seven wives.

IV

The Dawn of a New Day

In our days and the days of our fore-fathers, things were so different compared to what they are now. Through traditional stories, maybe I should say oral traditions, elders handed down so much to us. These traditions revealed their ways of life, including their occupations, health, sicknesses, politics, and a way of life totally different from what we now have. The difference lay on a

variety of things – for better or for worse, including to our advantages and disadvantages. Yet, if we look at the whole thing critically, without biases, we should arrive at the conclusion that the difference leaned more favorably towards the advantages than the disadvantages, benefits rather than deficits.

Life challenges poses different perspectives to different people. Young, adolescent, and aged, perspectives changed on the same issues. Childhood neurosis gives way to the exuberances of adolescence; but the carefree, lackadaisical stances of adolescence would give way to perseverance, experience and character of the aged. Therefore, rigid comparisons would be a dangerous exercise. Today’s youth might look closely at the aged and ask: “Sir, how did you live adolescent life in your own youthful days without modern vehicles and other basic amenities of life that we have today?” The aged, on the other hand, would ask the adolescent: “Young man, how do you live this same life today which we had enjoyed in our own days but now fraught with the modern-day hullabaloo of life such as scrutiny and incursions of health inspectors, immunizers, mandatory taxations, duties, and more etc. Aren’t all these invasions of privacy and impositions of foreign values?” However, there were many members of the older generations, even some that I knew, that value the challenges of modernity. Such even rejoice with the new generation for the benefits they derive in the new order. Today, we have the changing of the old order, to give way to the dawn of a new day, and the opening of a new era.

In the days of yore, long before the arrival of the Whiteman to the hinterland, the burden of running the affairs of the community lay solely on the elders and the chiefs. They were the arbitrators for the people. Such was the privileged position that Babalola, my husband, occupied in Ojusongo, the town where he ruled as Chief. In those days, warriors had so much power. This was because it was through their exercise of power that towns were established and made stable and peaceful. Without them, some intruders would simply invade and take folks into slavery. People’s children, wives, and slaves would be hauled away and become slaves to intruders. This was how life was as I grew up knowing my father as Balogun, the titled warlord of our town. It was in this same dispensation that Babalola was at this time, even though he, in his own case, had never been to war. There were no rights in the real sense of the term at that particular time in history. If you had power, you did virtually whatever you felt like doing. The powerless suffered under the yoke of oppression. The powerful would take away the wife of the less powerful with such impunity! Wives of the powerless would carry merchandise to the marketplace to sell, but the children of the powerful would grab the said merchandise and haul them away without paying anything, and with no promises to pay later. Who dared to ask? Who dared to administer consequences? It was under the umbrellas of their fathers’ fame and honor that they had taken the

law into their hands! Even though these were the days when the wars were over, and rebellions had been crushed. Yet, the extravagant and lawless lifestyles of the rich and the famous prevailed.

Although today, the law would seem somehow in place, such that no one could just seize his or her debtors in public and unleash punishments or any forms of maltreatments on them or to cease the debtors' house. Whoever feels cheated could seek redress in the court of law (and this could be in the western or customary court), where there would be a judge who would thoroughly investigate the case and apportion justice on the matter. Yet, elders like Babalola still abound who occupied the place of honor and power in town, and felt they were constituted authority to do what they felt like doing; after all, they occupied the throne of their fathers and trod the ground which their forefathers tilled. They were sons of the soil. Their forefathers ruled the land. They were not trying to insubordinate the power of the new government; they only operated within the confines of their basic and rustic understandings. Many times, they suffered the consequences of their ignorance.

Babalola got into a distressful dilemma at one time that he would never forget for ever and ever and from generations to generations, his life stories would be told. This was due to the erroneous pattern of thinking that I just described. The power to rule Ojusongo was in his hands and a few elders, including his two immediate lieutenants – Otun Baale (The Chief's Right Hand Man) and Osi Baale (The Chief's Left Hand man). They were the judges in town. They occupied the seat of power and were also the peacemakers in town. If anything drifted contrary to the order of peace, they were in the position to resolve the matter and set things right. They were patriotic to their town and did everything to promote it above neighboring towns. The aftermath of their efforts was that Ojusongo was famous and became the model of excellence for other neighboring communities to emulate. Neighbors saw the town in positive light and as a place devoid of blemishes that characterized those around it. This was because Babalola was a no-nonsense person, who did not settle for less. He set a standard that could not be breached. He was wise, courageous, and audacious. Yet, he was kind-hearted. He did not permit effronteries from anyone against another person, more so if the victim was a resident of Ojusongo. Babalola was a honest man. He was extraordinarily brilliant and wise. His intellect was sound and he was revered throughout the community. That anything tarnishing was approaching Ojusongo, it would be over Babalola's dead body. He would rather die than live to see anything that would tarnish the reputation of the Town of Ojusongo.

At that time, there was a man in Ojusongo whose name was Adanoja (literally meaning the lone ranger of the marketplace). He was not a native of Ojusongo, but he had domiciled in the town over a protracted period. Indeed,

he had lived there long before Babalola was selected as the Chief of the town. Upon realizing that the new Chief in town had no stomach for nonsense, that honesty had now become the prevailing culture of the town, and that anyone that challenged the people’s resolve and tried to take the people for granted would pay heavily for it in the hands of Babalola and his Council of Elders, he reacted. This man had a mind of his own, and his plan was no good. This man that took away the wife of one of the residents of Ojusongo in an audacious manner. For his deed, he became contemptuous in the eyes of members of the community. He realized the extent to which people detested his act and spoke ill of him. But he did what he did on purpose. The woman was pretty. The friends of Ajanoja summoned him in secret and warned him of the repercussion for his bad deed; and warned him not to do so. They told him point-blank: “Adanoja, let go of the innocent man’s wife. The new Chief of Ojusongo does not take such affront kindly.” Adanoja did not give a damn. He said he would rethink the matter, and muse over it. On occasions, he seemed to genuinely think over the matter, but as soon as he went back home and saw the charming beauty of the woman, his heart melted, and was hardened.

Adanoja was fairly educated; after all, he used to be a low-class civil servant, possibly a messenger, in Lagos, and had been errand boy to white men in the past. And so, he had seen a bit in life relative to the average villagers. His knowledge was not exactly like that of a smart person. He could write or read in the native language. He could mutter some words in the English language and could probably strike some degree of conversations with a white person without the service of an interpreter. Indeed, he had himself served as an interpreter in my presence. And to be fair, he was trying to learn the English language. When we first heard of him on our arrival at Ojusongo, he did not seem like a bad man at all, were it not for the issue with the other person’s wife that belittled him all around Ojusongo. He was beloved of many in the past. He had been a benefactor to many. He had served as an interpreter between a good number of people and the Colonial Administrative Officer. He had rendered help to so many at a variety of times and in various ways. He, too, was not ignorant of the right things to do, after all, he was of age. Besides, he had lived long in Ojusongo to know basic expectations there and how the powerful elders of the town would react to untoward behavior he demonstrated in grabbing someone else’s wife away from him. His real fault laid on the fact that he was too spineless to let go of someone else’s wife. He did not even seem to know the gravity of his offence and the extent to which this could get him in trouble. Indeed, this would not have become as much a big deal had Adanoja not resorted into blatant disrespect and insubordination towards authorities on this matter. Probably he did this to impress the woman he had acquired illegally or just to act big in the sights of the few folks who still saw him as

educated and important, or perhaps it was just a display of effrontery on his part, no one really knew.

Had he known the right thing, he would probably have repented and released the beautiful woman to her rightful husband. But to be honest, this issue took the Town of Ojusongo like a storm and shook it to its foundations at that time. This was because soon as the Whiteman entered the stage, women affairs became the first victim; it became something with no value ascribed to it any longer. A great deal of ceremonies and celebrations were no longer ascribed to that institution. A woman could walk away and divorce her husband, yet, walk across to the other side of the road and marry another man. Who dared to confront her on the matter? The ruler of town could grab the wife of the commoner and a police officer could take away the wife of the ruler of the town; once he was able to pay the dowries, case was closed! Adanoja misjudged the resolve of the leadership of Ojusongo. He was rude to them when they confronted him on the matter. He said to them: "What the heck is going on? What's all the noises about? Just for taking possession of someone else's wife is what has preoccupied all of you this much? Rural living must be a curse. I was hoping you had something more important to talk to me about." Yet, the husband of the woman that Adanoja took away was a popular man. This matter cut deep into his bones. He would on occasion cry like someone mourning. When the woman now presented him with the divorce paper, the man lamented: "Right on my own fatherland, in the town of my birth, who could imagine that an ordinary stranger, a man from the Ibarapa sub-ethnic extraction, would be the one to take away my wife and get away with it? No matter what it would take, I must seek redress by all means necessary. I refuse to accept this punishment. I reject the reproach. I abhor the audacity. Adanoja must pay heavily for it. I will mobilize my cohorts, my army of supporters, and they will vindicate me of this patronizing act from this antagonist."

And so, the man and his cronies started harassing Adanoja. Sometimes, they would gang up with drums and lampoon him in the open, threatening and challenging him for a fight. Yet, the man was unperturbed. He did not pay them any attention. He kept on being in love with the woman. In fact, the whole thing seemed like a lost cause; Adanoja had taken hold of the woman for good. It was at this point that the issue went back to the palace of the Chief for the second time. The husband brought the matter to the attention of the Chief with a bleeding heart, stating that an ordinary stranger had taken possession of his wife. There and then, the Bale sent an emissary to Adanoja to summon the culprit before him. Adanoja refused to heed the summon.

Bale was irate for the audacity of Adanoja. He then ordered that Adanoja should return the wife to the husband or move out of town; otherwise, he would not like to know, let alone see, the aftermath of his disobedience.

Adanoja was a bit reluctant; but once he realized he was running out of time and at the verge of a major crisis, one day, at twilight, he escaped with the woman and was no longer found in the Town of Ojusongo. There was an uproar. Noises were all over the place as everyone was spreading the news the following day that Adanoja had escaped. But in reality, Adanoja did not just run out of town; he only went to report the matter to the white Colonial Administrative Officer. The white man thought over it and was puzzled, not knowing how to handle the matter immediately. He thought, however, that what Adanoja did was not criminal enough to warrant being chased out of town. He then told Adanoja to go back to Ojusongo and that in a few days, he too, would find time to stop by and settle the matter with the Chief.

Adanoja then returned to Ojusongo. He walked around town in style and with arrogance. There was another wave of uproar this second time. Noises went around about the return of Adanoja. The few followers of his were hailing him, saying: “Adanoja is no one to take lightly. He is a man of power. He is educated. With his education, he has terminated the matter with a wave of the hand. No one is equipped to deal with him.” He too was puffed up, acting like a man above the law. When the chief and his Council members heard of Adanoja’s return, they were fuming with rage.

It was during a court session that news came to them that Adanoja had returned, and what a day it was in the Town of Ojusongo! The entire community was irate. Many left their legitimate businesses just to gossip on this matter with Adanoja. Traders left their businesses just to know what would come out of this deliberate defiance of authority. All town gossips and busybodies were engaged in the business of enlarging the story just to fuel the matter.

At the following court session, the members of the Council were on seat, and the court was in session, Bale raised the matter of Adanoja before everyone. It was then that each one started giving the news of what they heard Adanoja saying around the community. The chief was gravely angry. So were the Council members. Bale put every court proceedings on hold that day. Members of the Council set all their works for the day aside. This matter of Adanoja was worthy of their attentions. They sent an emissary to Adanoja, ordering him to appear before them instantly at the court, without which he would face grave consequences. The messenger returned only to let them know that Adanoja refused to heed their call. Instead, he sent to them that: “No one was capable of inviting him verbally without a government subpoena, a paperwork that would be vested with authorities.” Instantly, the Chief and the Council ordered that the court clerk should commence the paperwork

that would provide a bench warrant for his arrest and forceful removal to the court. The court clerk then wrote a note: "Chief, these days are different from the previous ones; it's not easy to bring Adanoja to trial. He is an educated folk."

The Chief and the Council members were irate beyond limit to hear this. They berated the clerk for not knowing how to do his job. Adanoja himself was mocking them in his house, bragging that neither the Chief nor his Council members could do anything to him because he had brought their matter before a higher authority. The Chief sent another order, and yet another, and another, commanding Adanoja to get out of town. Adanoja refused to leave. Actually, Adanoja could not afford leaving town that day because many co-conspirators were whispering in his ears, saying: "Adanoja, you are a macho man; you are up to their challenge. Don't loosen the noose on their necks. The Chief is just bluffing; the Whiteman is far superior to him. If the worse comes to the worst, we are squarely behind you. What can the Bale do?" Adanoja must have forgotten that, "remove your rooftop and I will rebuild it for you" is a statement credible in the mouth of someone who already has a heap of the roofing reeds set in place for the replacement. Adanoja himself acted foolishly on that day. He sent a rude message back to Bale. He must have felt a swollen head like that of a war leader being praised by his subordinate at the warfront, all because of the empty accolades being showered on him.

At long last, Bale and the Council had private briefing, where they agreed to teach Adanoja a lesson he would never forget. They ordered the court clerk to dismiss all those who had court hearings to return to their respective homes, and that court was closed for the day. They told him to let the people know that something urgent came up and all other important matters had been truncated.

Bale now called upon Akindede and Ogunmola, his marshals, that they should bring down the sacred drum of the Orò cult from the roof top (the fact of the matter is that the Orò drum never came down from the hiding place in broad-day light without a serious matter). The marshals obeyed as instructed. The Chief and the Council called on the elders of the town to an assembly. They all agreed to make an example out of Adanoja, a scapegoat for those violating law and order in the town. The sound of the sacred *orò* drum shook the ground. The oracle murmured and rumbled. The eeriness of its presence sent everyone taking to their heels, hiding, and scared; it sent a panic wave across the entire township. All women went into seclusion. Adanoja himself entertained a second thought, asking himself, "Oh my goodness; is the whole matter this serious?" He then fled to the house of Akintunde, his bosom friend. Akintunde himself was scared to death. He yelled at Adanoja, saying: "Adanoja, please don't get me in trouble." Adanoja himself responded, "It is well;

may God keep all of us from trouble!” It seemed Adanoja still did not recognize the gravity of the matter. The Chief sent emissaries to Akintunde asking him to let go of Adanoja from under his roof, but Adanoja did not oblige. Akintunde only did Adanoja a favor since they were bosom friends.

Babalola, the Chief, sat on his throne, surrounded by his Council members. He ordered that someone should set the house of Akintunde ablaze, right where Adanoja was hiding. Akindele and Ogunmola obeyed as instructed. Instantly, Akintunde’s house was consumed in fire. It was a great conflagration. Pandemonium broke out. Instantly, all residents of the house ran out, including Akintunde and Adanoja. Akintunde’s mother escaped through the back exit. It was chaotic, everyone found his or her own way out of the commotion. Whether to put the fire out or just stay there and witness the spectacle, no one knew what to do. When a house is on fire, the normal thing is to put it out; but for the first time in the history of Ojusongo, a house was burning and no one lifted a finger to quench it; instead, everyone stood by and watched. The sound of Oro rented the air. The youths on the side of the Chief raised songs, and started dancing – jumping up and down. The sacred drum of the *orò* cult kept blaring out loud. Even the Chief was living witness to the whole spectacle until the house was smoldered to the ground. Adanoja and Akintunde now escaped and ran out of town finally!

Later, it was reported to the Chief that there was an elderly woman who was vision impaired in the house while it was being torched. She struggled to escape but fire and smoke affected her severely. The woman was by the name Bamijoko. Bale commanded that the woman be cared for because it was not her fault. She was given the indigenous medical care but even the herbalist himself was afraid because people were concerned that the burning down of Akintunde’s residence could come with negative consequences. The matter might not end peacefully. They had the impression that Adanoja would not go without a fight because he was a literate person. As far as many were concerned, he had clout.

As expected, Adanoja reported the matter to the Colonial Administrative Officer, who in turn brought the matter to the colonial police chief. On the third day after the whole fiasco, about twenty police officers marched straight into the Town of Ojusongo, asking for Bale Babalola. The Chief came out and identified himself to them. He offered them a seat, which they declined, saying they were on assignment and a police officer was not supposed to take a seat on duty. He offered them the drink of the palm-wine; this they took and gulped down quickly because they seemed thirsty. He asked if they would take a meal; they refused the offer. The Chief joked a little bit that day saying, “Hmm, a policeman does not sit on duty, does not sit to be entertained as a visitor, does not take a bite of food, but he can sip the palm-wine.” He was

just kidding about the matter, taking the police matter lightly, even though he too had two constables standing by him who were arrayed in the proverbial shroud without carrying a baby with it. In reality, a police matter is no joke!

These police officers asked questions of Bale, and he responded equally. Members of the Council and the entire townspeople gathered at the palace except for those who had gone to their farms. The Chief was casual in stating the whole thing as-a-matter-of-factly that he indeed ordered the torching of Akintunde's residence because he did what was wrong to the townspeople by conspiring to lodge Adanoja against the will of the people. As time went on, more questions were posed. At that point, the Chief expressed his annoyance to the barrage of questions. He requested their refrains from asking him all those nonsensical questions. They asked him that day, "Why did you not report the matter of Adanoja to the Whiteman or let the husband and the wife settle their matter in the court of law in the first instance? Do you think you could just sit down in your neck of the woods and be meting out jungle justice?"

The police officers walked around town to survey the crime scene. They went inside the burnt house of Akintunde. They measured it, took pictures of it, and inspected everything closely. They went all over the town, asking people questions and wanting to know if people knew of anyone injured in the incident. Someone mentioned that an elderly woman was injured but was being cared for by the Chief. The policemen wanted to see the old woman. They brought Bamijoko to them. The officers put her in the vehicle that they drove to the palace.

The policemen were thronged as they went around town on that day. There were all sorts of people. Some were rejoicing that the Chief was now in trouble. Some bragged that the Whiteman had no power over him and had no say over whatever action he took; after all, Ojusongo was the land of his ancestors, and the Chief could do whatever pleased him.

After the police investigation, the Chief thought they were only there to settle the dispute. However, that was far from being the case. All of a sudden, the police unpacked their wares, and pulled out handcuffs. To the chagrin of the people, they handcuffed their Chief! The Chief looked perturbed. He shook his head despondently. His eyes were blood shot. He said on that day, "What a pity! Welcome to the Whiteman's world. The Whiteman has destroyed our lifestyle. How would a man take ownership of his neighbor's wife and we, as a people, would have no right to intervene by disciplining him?" The policemen had no single response to his musing. They shoved him, tossing him in front of them. My eyes turned on my head; I could not stand such embarrassing and disgraceful moment of my husband, the Chief. He too looked at me. All Council men were handcuffed on that fateful day, and that included

Ogunmola and Akindele. Even spectators that were too slow to briskly depart the scene were handcuffed as well. They kept saying, “We have nothing to do with all this. We are not Council members. We are not the court policemen. We are not court marshals, neither are we messengers of the Chief. We are not related to the Chief either.” The police just pushed them to the front. One of them even said that he warned the Chief and his Council men on that day that they were playing with fire but that they did not listen to him because he was a commoner. But the police did not give any attention to his whining. When ordinary spectators were denied the ability to wipe away sweat from their faces with their hands, and could not use their hands to do whatever they wanted to do, many took to their heels, confessing that indeed, Adanoja was no ordinary person.

People started saying all sorts of things. But many stood up and vowed they would rather die with their Chief than abandon him; even without being handcuffed, they readied themselves and followed the Chief all the way to Ibadan, the headquarters of the colonial police. As far as those were concerned, Bale did the right thing. They said if they were to be in his position, they would have done likewise, or even done worse.

Bamijoko was taken to the hospital in Ibadan, where she succumbed to the pain after a few days. The Chief was sorrowful on learning of her death because she was well known to him. She was the woman who sold the locust beans seasonings to his wives. She was a lively, quite funny person. She was friendly to all the children in the compound.

The police now made a big deal out of the woman’s death. Babalola, the Chief, was now accused of, and charged with murder. The Council men were co-murderers as well. Even the Chief’s messengers were murderers. The police processed their cases as murder.

When this matter was brought to the Chief, he laughed hilariously. He jokingly said, “Wow, could all these men join hands together to murder one old woman? Even if the person were a monstrous bully, I, Babalola, could single-handedly wrestle him to submission and kill him, let alone this old blind woman. These white men must be thoughtless.” He did not take the matter seriously at first.

Thus, Babalola became a criminal. A lawyer, apparently public defender, was retained for him so he could argue his case for him. But Babalola refused the service of any lawyer pleading for him. He said he could speak for himself in the court of law, and even if they would kill him, so be it. He said he was okay with it. As far as he was concerned, the lawyer was not a witness to the whole debacle. How on earth would the lawyer advocate for a case that he was not a witness to. If the white men were not into a shady business of cheating, a lawyer should not be required for him. Gradually, the case was built up

with preponderance of evidence mounted against Babalola. Many citizens of Ojusongo were frightened and sick worried. They became scared and some quickly ran back to their homes. Yet, many, even myriads, stood behind their Chief, contemplating on the matter. Some resorted into appeasing the gods to cause a dissolution of the case. They chanted incantations, offered propitiations, invoking that the verdict from the judge be nothing but favorable to the Chief. They invoked that the matter with the police should be discarded as nonsense, and words of the prosecutors should be nullified. Curses, incantations, wishes of good fortunes were all thrown in the direction of the spirit world to ensure herbal efficacies on the side of their Chief.

Official government witnesses were many in number. The case was mounting by the day. It baffled Babalola that all these witnesses were called against him in spite of his innocence. My co-wives and I were in disarray, crying incessantly. The great man would look at us whenever we met at court hearings, shaking his head; the poor Chief had been in custody ever since the arrest and no bail was granted him.

The white judge was exceedingly patient. He investigated the matter carefully. He looked through many documents thoroughly, patiently listening to the testimonies of the Chief, those of the Council members, as well as those of the palace service men. He took copious notes because as he listened, he wrote things down meticulously. As he was writing, he would read back to us what he was writing. When the matter reached the climax and the judge announced the day for the verdict to be heard, the Chief was gravely saddened.

All the time when this case was being heard, the Chief never uttered a single lie. He stood by the truth and never deviated from his belief. He promised to speak according to the dictates of his conscience, and as his father would do in similar circumstances. Ogunmola and Akindele gave white lies. The Chief looked at them with sympathy as they behaved like juveniles. The judge was sorrowful but said he had to follow the law in the discharge of his duty. The judgment was for the Chief as well as Ogunmola and Akindele to be executed. He set other members of the Council free. He added, however, that the accused had the right to take his verdict to the appeal court, where three justices would preside over it.

The court was packed to the brim on that day. Even the windows were packed full of spectators trying to know what the verdict would be. There was dead silence. You could hear a pin drop. In all, the death sentence was handed to the Chief.

There was commotion in the outside. There were upheavals everywhere. Wailing and sorrowful chants prevailed. And so, we co-wives of the Chief, plus his children and other well-wishers, were rolling on the ground in

anguish. I wept bitterly – but who wouldn’t? I was chanting the praise poems of my husband. Calling on him like this:

1. Today is the day that defies forgetfulness, the day of stories,
He who drinks the wine never goes stale; drinkers of fermented *bàbà* never ferment,
The big yellow yam is never disgraced among other yams,
The life of the honey is never destined for bitterness,
May you never be disgraced in life, no matter what -
My husband, father of Olanrewaju.
2. Chief among the woods stay atop the packed logs;
Aranu stands on top of the fence;
May you stand on top of your enemies; may you defeat all rebellions against you;
You did nothing unheard of,
It’s just the Whiteman’s world,
My husband, father of Olanrewaju.
3. May you not run to eat at the prompting of the bell,
May you not till the ground with the farming equipment of authorities,
May you not be the one to dance smoothly to the rhythm of unknown drums;
Only prisoners await the prompting of bells to eat;
Only the ones in sane dance smoothly to the rhythm of unknown drums;
My husband, father of Olanrewaju.
4. Someone who dies in battle dies the death of a hero,
Someone who dies in the river dies the death of a cold spell,
He who dies in a vehicle accident dies a painful death,
He who is hanged in the neck dies the death of degradation;
May you not be a part of any of these deaths;
My husband, father of Olanrewaju.
5. May yours be a journey of fortune, may yours be an intersection of blessings,
May Edumare – the Almighty God forge the path of our meeting again;
Even as the melon fruit is tossed in any direction, so may Edumare –
Edumare – the Almighty carve your path of redemption, my husband,
Because you did not intentionally commit the murder of any person,
My husband, father of Olanrewaju.

Chief Babalola looked back as he was being shoved by the police officers; his eyes and mine met, and he wept bitterly.

V

The Whiteman's Government Could be Fair

“Help, help! Neighbors, please come to my rescue! The Whiteman is killing off my husband, my Babalola, the titled Chief of Ojusongo, father of Olanrewaju! He never stole. He never spoke evil. He never militated against someone else's fortune. He never planned a scheme against slaves. He never planned any scheme against the freeborn. He took on the job of his father. He inherited the character of his father. The Whiteman is the wrongdoer. The Whiteman is the murdered. My husband's heart is cleaner than the road path. He could not kill a chicken. His heart is as clean as that of the denizens of heaven. He never offended anyone on purpose. I am alone in the battlefield today but there is no strong man to support my effort. The Whiteman is the one that hung my husband like a mere bird in innocence, void of corruption. The Whiteman is on the way to execute my husband in abject agony, not in the warfront, and without him bringing evil to his townfolks.

“Citizens of the world, hear my cries; denizens of the heavens, heed my voice. This land belongs to our fathers; let the Whiteman leave us alone! The wisdom of our elders has taught us that one that plants something good will reap something good; and the one that plants evil will reap evil. After all, the evil-good combo will always go hand-in-hand in life. Edumare is the harbinger of vengeance. Undoubtedly, he would heave vengeance on the head of the Whiteman that ordered the execution of my husband. I am convinced that my father is not sleeping idle in the other world; neither is he slumbering as we speak. He is the one that apportions justice unperturbed; he will judge the Whiteman rightfully, and that is for sure.

“Father of Olanrewaju, if you have a chance to be a part of this life again, you've got to be fantastically careful. The war hero often dies in battle; the celebrated swimmer often meets the end in the torrent of the river. Be careful about matters of the populace, individuals' issues of no personal consequence to you. I know you are always on the side of the truth, that things should go in the right direction, and it is for such that your life is now being terminated. Life is delicate and must be trodden with apprehension. An elder should not be blind to his or her surroundings. This, indeed, has become the Whiteman's world; this has become a fragile world. Adanoja, I thank you, and I thank you one more time. You should immortalize and never die. On the very day you both meet, you will have to revisit the conversation.”

For days on end, I had different things to say in the open courtyard and in the private, directing my words to the Whiteman, the police, and even to the judge that presided over the case, just as I have simply stated. For many days, people would visit with me to further console me of the death of my husband. Aina’s support were memorable. She would cook and bring me meals. She stood firmly by me. She cared for me. In times of need, whoever comes to the rescue is a hero and should never be left unnoticed. Aina rocked!

I became an unexpected widow and so were my other co-wives; but I can only talk about myself. The death of our husband pained me to the bone. I felt my co-wives felt the same pain. Yet, all lizards crawl in their bare bellies, no one could tell which one suffers a stomach upset.

He had been hauled away by the police. The Whiteman had ordered his execution. Nothing was forthcoming by way of the news. We had no particular set date for his execution. I am talking of the day the rope would be tied round his neck for hanging, when he would dangle until he gave up the ghost.

Regardless of circumstances, God always paves the way for someone’s shoulder to cry on. Aina was the only one left to console me in those days of my calamities. Aina, whose praise chant was, “Aina, mixer of the camwood ointment; he who owns the house on the right side of the road does not think one well; so is the one on the left side planning evil against someone.” All my co-wives were mocking me, calling me all sorts of names – the husband’s bosom; the husband’s eyes; husband’s pet – now, it’s all over! So were they deriding me, adding more pain to my sorrow. At one point, I consoled myself. Life is not pushy, only people do. I got myself out of the pity party. I manned up, took up courage just like a man would do. I could not do any less, I, Asabi, am I not the daughter of the celebrated and titled warlord?

Many times, I contemplated and entertained doubts about this friendship between Aina and I. In fact, I would vow to break the friendship. But, seriously, this kind of care and intimacy had to be rare and appreciated. The care was immeasurable. Ordinarily, Aina was known to be extremely carefree; sassy, and shameless. Prior to this time, Aina and I were never friends. Everyone was whispering behind me that, “Well, let’s watch and see where this friendship is headed.” But, really, with Babalola gone, I had no one left with me. Living in the house had become unbearable – no husband, no co-wives, no confidants. Aina was the only one who cared for me in the true sense of it. My son, Olanrewaju, had made enemy out of me on this same matter of my friendship with Aina. Was I mentally blind - completely oblivious of matters around me? Couldn’t I disengage myself from her? I just couldn’t stop her from coming into my house, even though I never visited hers. At any rate, our friendship continues.

Days accumulated upon days. Nine days, thirteen days, one month, three months and more, questions lingered in my mind as to whether or not he had been executed or not. After three months, I told myself that for sure, he would have been executed. I left the matter in God's hands.

All this while, Aina frequented my house. She was coming and going. Relatives were watching the two of us without saying a word. I was overwhelmed with grief. Family members of my husband now rose in rebellion. Siblings of my husband were not passive on the matter either. Some of them wanted to inherit my husband's estate; and there were some who wanted to inherit my husband's wives. I sometimes shook my head, saying, "The dead may be scarce; the inheritors are numerous."

I called my son, Olanrewaju and warned him not to be involved in all these matters. He was a bachelor okay, but must never be a party to the inheriting any of his father's wives. As for me, I was an old woman; no one dared to approach me for inheriting me. Why should they I already had a child who himself was old enough to be married. I warned him again that he should not participate in sharing his father's possessions. This was because, as I told him, "Nobody could tell what tomorrow may bring." Olanrewaju was not satisfied with my position on this matter. He said he could not just open his eyes, sit idle and watch his siblings on the other women's side squander all his own father's possessions; he said he would be a part of the sharing if it came to that point.

I went to intimate the Otun Bale (second in rank to the Bale) and he commanded that no one must make an attempt to divide up the inheritance, and no one dared to take possession of the wives of Babalola, even though among the wives and the family members of Babalola, there have been subtle designs and stealthy arrangements on who would go to who among the wives. Otun lambasted all of them. He asked if they had anticipated this kind of calamity for the Chief beforehand. He said the town had not executed his funeral rites; they had not been told of the actual day of his death. These were to be precursor to marking the third and seventh sacred days, "Yet, you folks were preoccupied with sharing the man's possessions." Otun dismissed all of them as mere squanderers and non-thinkers; and that literally terminated that aspect of conversion for that period.

There should be no friendship without conflicts; and there should be no conflicts that terminate friendship. Aina and I quarreled. Her counsels were not amiable to me.

My greatest grief at that time was Aina badmouthing the Chief. Sometimes she would say, "Who sent the proverbial idiot inside the vehicle for him to now complain of being a victim of wreckage? Who sent Babalola on the errand of burning down Akintunde's home? He was just too underhanded. A man of

wisdom should follow the trend of time. Was he related to the husband of the stolen woman? Hadn’t there been a ruler in town before his time? As for you, you better stay where you are here; it’s good enough for you; after all, this is your place of birth, right?” I said to her, “Come on, Aina, are you saying I should not even mourn my husband’s death for one year before beginning to think of sharing his property?” Her response was, “Well, the chicken that passes excrement without urinating, that is its own problem. The problem is all yours; the dead is all gone.” After this conversation, our friendship was strained but she kept on watching my every step.

Whenever I was by myself, this matter occupied my mind. I shed tears. Anyway, at long last, I started relieving my mind of the whole matter. Yet, Aina had planted the seed of the painful matter right in the soil at the bottom of my heart. I thought over the fact that if, indeed, the inheritance was distributed, I was sure to suffer. It was this man and I who actually labored to amass all this wealth. All those who had no roles whatsoever might end up taking possession of it all. That was the product of our duo’s efforts over the course of many years! However, what else could I do I just left my heart in the absolute hand of God, my Creator, and I tried to dismiss the matter altogether.

There was no denying the fact that the Whiteman brought us civilization; they gave us more amenities of life. Life and living were more bearable than before. There were beautiful houses with windows; they introduced motor vehicles and bicycles, all of which were very good. One had to be an ingrate not to appreciate those provisions or to be disillusioned to saying that life now was not as bearable as it was in the past. We traded our goods and made gains. Our efforts yielded positive financial gains. We freely walked on the streets with no fear of sudden internecine warfare or harassments. What about electricity that one could see everywhere in our towns? There were medicines for all kinds of illnesses. There were schools everywhere. In fact, there were going to be free schoolings in accordance with the new government’s plan. There were many beautiful and new decorations to adorn the body. There were beautiful cloths of one’s choosing, with gold and other forms of jewelry. Seriously, who in a clean heart would not acknowledge the good things the Whiteman brought to us? Yet, their moral compass remained suspect to me. It was baffling to me the day they handed down the death sentence on Babalola, my husband. Even now, their honesty still eludes me in light of all my experiences of life.

I stretched my neck every day, looking afar in anticipation of some news about Babalola. I kept feeling uneasy. What I was told was that the day they took him from Ibadan to Lagos for his execution, Babalola gave his final words to those near him, and said: “If I die now, it does not mean anything; after all, I have been blessed to father sons and daughters, small and big. My

only real pain is the execution of Ogunmola and Akindele because I was the one who sent them on the errand for which they delivered – they only carried out my order.” I also heard that he lamented greatly about me, and frequently spoke about me and his son, Olanrewaju, until his arrival in the Lagos prison. After this, I heard nothing more of him. Such was life in the interior. I then realized that I could have even accompanied him to Lagos myself, but we were all afraid of going there; we were afraid of the Whiteman, even the giant bridge over the lagoon in Lagos scared us. How would you walk over this? What about the dreaded crowd of Lagos! The police arrest in Lagos was without pleading, so we heard. Think for a moment about all the hullaballos of Lagos. Where would someone even reside if one went there? Only special people like Adanoja ever frequented Lagos from Ojusongo in those days, and whenever he returned, he gave reports of Lagos as if talking of heaven. This is the same Lagos where I am comfortably sitting down and writing this story! Lagos, home of learning to be smart; a place of rumbling, full of threats with no corresponding action!

Even Otun himself would swear of the complicated Lagos, having visited only once when his daughter eloped with her husband to the city.

On one fateful day, a policeman entered Ojusongo. I tell you, it was chaotic. Everyone ran away, hiding in their homes. All citizens lived in fear at this point. The police officer said he was looking for Asabi, wife of Babalola, the Chief. It was Aina who came with the police officer on that day because her husband’s house was on the way as one entered the town. I stepped outside the house and identified myself saying, “Here am I, Asabi, wife of Babalola.” I was looking closely at the police officer’s hands if by chance he was holding another set of handcuffs. The man did not frown, neither did he smile; he was an officer with two rank stripes. We stared at each other. I looked at him intensely. He then said, “You are to come to Ibadan because your husband, Chief Babalola, wanted to see you before returning to Ojusongo. He has been forgiven and released. Three judges from West Africa had examined his case and advised the Governor-General to grant him a pardon because he did all he did innocently and out of the purity of his heart in ordering the burning of Akintunde’s house, inside which Bamijoko lost her life. Your husband is right now in Ibadan and would like to see you, his wife, Asabi, immediately. He wanted you to come and meet him in Ibadan so you may both have a triumphant journey together back to your Town of Ojusongo.”

I could not believe what I just heard. There was an uproar! These were tears of anguish mixed with joy. Could this be true? Who could really tell at this point? I almost clung to the neck of the police officer. I wept bitterly, but these were tears of joy. I was in disbelief, telling the officer he was probably lying to me. The officer kept looking at me. Immediately, folks throughout the

town gathered together and it was boisterous. Denials and disbeliefs were the order of the day. Who had ever heard of the Whiteman sentencing someone to death, hauling the person away, yet coming back released and alive? I was running inside and coming out of the house like someone who embezzled her husband’s money. I was confused and did not know what to pack. I put on cloths the wrong way. I put on my wrapping linen inside out. I used the shoulder shroud as my head dress. I used the head dress as the shoulder shroud. It was all chaotic. I was overwhelmed with joy on that fateful day. More importantly, the officer was in a hurry. “Hurry up, lady; I am in a haste, as I must head back to Ibadan and sleep there tonight.”

I was on Cloud Nine! How I got to Ibadan – on my head or on my bare feet, I had no idea. We were at the outskirts of Ibadan when I realized that I wore my waist wrapper inside-out. It was right while we were still on the way that I had to unwrap and re-dress myself.

It was at the police station that I met the paramount Chief of Ojusongo, Babalola, my husband. He sat on a chair unceremoniously. I jumped at him, hanging on his neck, hugging him for a long time. I wept over him. The great man was just looking blankly; smile had long eluded him; cries, too, had eluded him. Later on, he looked down and starred up; then, he started shedding tears uncontrollably; and, together, we wept bitterly.

All our neighbors, relatives, my co-wives, children and friends who came with me stayed outside. When the Chief appeared to them, there was a shout of joy – much jubilations and hilarity. Someone lifted him up and placed him on the shoulder. Another raised a song. The rest joined the chorus in unison. Immediately, the policemen sent us away, saying we were getting too noisy.

We slept in Ibadan on that day. We slept in the house of the Chief of Ibadan. We arranged how we would return to our town the following day.

Suddenly, Olanrewaju who had lagged behind all along came with an expensive sanyan - the flowing garment attire (recall it was the same attire that Babalola wore on our wedding day). He brought the same quality of long pants, and an expensive covering linen of velvet. These were accompanied by a hat that was dignifying, and the cow-tail tassels plus a pair of brass shoes only meant for royalty in the tradition of Ojusongo. Before now, all that the Chief was wearing were filthy. The drummers were there as well; these were the palace musicians. Chanters were there as well; and these were the Chief’s chanters. The crowd was mounting. The wives of Ogunmola and Akindele also came to meet their husbands, but they forgot to bring cloths for them to change into. The Chief of Ojusongo ordered that cloths be purchased for them immediately in Ibadan so that the celebration of the day in Ojusongo might be complete. I swiftly took off to Gbági Market in Ibadan and purchased assorted

clothing materials. I also went to Gégé Market, where I gave them to a tailor to sew, and he did. All expenses were covered by the Chief.

The procession was such that the drummers led the throng; they were followed by others – those others were numerous in number and assorted: the friends of Bale; those previously deriding him; those who were carefree; the gossips; and more, were all in the float, flowing together like the wave of a mighty stream. The chanters were positioned behind the throng. It was in the very rear that Bale stayed, and I, his wife walked in front of him, chanting his heroic poems, and going back and forth in spectacular ways on that memorable day. Chanters and chroniclers were invoking his family heroism. My husband, the paramount Chief, would walk for a short distance, and his supporting chiefs would carry him shoulder high for another short stride until we finally arrived at the vehicle that convey us to Ojusongo. We all disembarked the vehicle one mile short of entering our town, ushering the Chief, Babalola, into the town in a big circus of felicitations, honor and royal dignity that fateful evening. The entire hunters' guild waited on hearing the news of the release of their Chief. They formed a brigade of honor on both sides of the road that led to town. They were giving the hero's welcome with multiple gun salutes. The sound of their guns filled the air, and the smoke blanketed the sky. Yes, it was the arrival of the great Chief. Shame on those who did not give him a hero's welcome!

The entire town rejoiced. Bale – the Chief, had arrived; both Adanoja and Akintunde had left town, but Aina, my friend and her husband waited at the outskirts of town to welcome us. They welcomed us with dancing and rejoicing. Aina knelt down and greeted the Chief, while her husband prostrated on the ground. The Chief greeted the husband cheerfully but ignored the wife. He looked at her as if she did not exist. It was a great disgrace that was apparent to everyone on that day. Oh, I should say there is no remedy for a memory lapse. All along, it escaped my mind to let people know who Aina was. She was the woman that Adanoja took away forcefully from her husband but when the matter became explosive, and folks from the burning house sought their exit out of town, she went back to her first husband and divorced Adanoja. Apparently, she did not escape with Adanoja when he ran out of Ojusongo after the death sentence had been handed down to the Chief. Surprisingly, the husband actually received her back, saying it was not her fault. And so, they made up, and he forgave Aina. How could Aina be innocent on this matter; Aina, whose praise chant is Orosun! Never again would I befriend Aina.

VI

Enemies are From Without; Real Killers from Within

The Chief narrated his ordeal, and we were almost overwhelmed by his stories, and overcome by emotions. The prison yard is no fun. It is a place reserved for all kinds of criminals – thieves, murderers, robbers, coup plotters and all sorts of criminals. But, sadly, many are those innocent people that are incarcerated with criminals. This should not be a place for people of good virtues. Anyway, many people gave reports to the Chief of the things that happened in his absence. Everyone had something to report, all of which were good ones. Of course, the Chief was a wise man himself. Someone would come and give him a report of the troubling things that somebody else did, the Chief would reply and say, “Thank you very much; I am very grateful; I appreciate your love; thanks for standing by me; human tongues are uncontrollable.” If another came and started talking ill of yet another one, the Chief would give the same response. Even I wanted to have a chat with him about the counsels that Aina gave me, but the Chief was not interested. He simply said, “Thanks a great deal. The eagle on the high sky does not know that those on the ground could see it.” I looked puzzled. Those words caught me like a storm. This was a deep code between husband and wife. I wondered if he heard of something bad that I did. I wondered if someone had lied to him about me. Yet, we were wining and dining together every day, and he never asked anything of me or about anything. If I tried to initiate conversations about what he heard, he would resort into discussing something totally different; sometimes, he would just stand up and walk away. I was fed up even with myself. The suspicion was so palpable that even the Chief knew for himself that I was warring within myself. Yet, he refrained from striking conversations with me about what he had heard.

My heart was burning within me. It was apparent that the Chief had heard something bad about me. No doubt, some malefactors must have made up some devious and conniving tales about me to my husband. The Chief did not ask me – the man of valor kept his lips tight. I praise his courage and perseverance. But this had pushed me to the edge, almost into the miserable feat of melancholy. It came to a point when I had no option but to start talking endlessly. This was when I noticed that even while on his reclining chair, the Chief would look at me with contempt, shake his head and hiss. At any time that I started rehashing matters, the Chief would rise on his feet and walk away, not wanting to hear anything from me. I was now surrounded by a barrage of disgust and gossip even in the same community where I was void of any blemish - highly respected and warmly embraced. My co-wives started saying, “You see now? See the one who made herself the eye of the Chief, who danced from

Ibadan, all the way to Ojusongo. They must have sworn into secret allegiance; Asabi could not betray the Chief, right? Oh yes, it's easier to see the back-head of someone else; only others could see one's. Now it's all over for Asabi; all her secrets have become revealed to the husband!"

I lamented painfully. I wept bitterly all the time because I knew that a mountain of lies had been heaved on my head when I also knew that I was innocent of everything. This mutiny around me was massive. Early one morning, I was pushed to the wall, completely at my wits end and feeling the end of the world. I woke up before cockcrow, and started uttering curses upon curses: "Whoever had lied against me to my husband, the Chief, may good things never come their way; may they not live to fulfill old age before they meet their demise; may such persons die in ignominy; may terrible diseases be their portion in life; may whoever that may be end life in rags and utter penury."

The whole thing was a mystery to me because I really had no idea what kind of lies were told against me; and I was totally oblivious who the perpetrators of such lies were. I felt the bite of a poisonous serpent in my heart. The connivers had turned my husband against me, becoming my antagonist. Nothing I did was right any more in the sight of my husband. Sometimes the Chief would look at me with disgust, gnashing his teeth. I was restless for many days. I was depressed. I would on occasions strip myself naked, cursing myself incessantly.

Very early in the morning one day, the Chief called on me, saying: "You were rejoicing in iniquity. You met me with kisses in Ibadan, caring for me and honoring me; you even wept bitterly over my circumstance when you saw me, and you did all that only after you had done all these things I've heard that you did. This your actions have left me speechless. You've got to go. I must hand you a divorce. On my arrival, you were the one who shaved my beard, even without being a barber. You robbed your hands on my bald head. Yet, after a short incarceration, having been sentenced to death in spite of being innocent of all charges, you proposed in your heart to inherit my possessions. You just must go. I have to divorce you. You are a dangerous killer-woman.

I went on my knees, sobbing. It was a bitter cry, saying: "They only made up stories against me. I had nothing whatsoever to do with any inheritance. I was the one who took the matter to Otun, and Otun castigated, and silenced them over the matter. I swear to God that if I had anything to do with sharing your inheritance, may I die a miserable death or wander away in utter confusion, never to be found again." Babalola had a smirk on his face as his nature was whenever he was angry. He looked at me with disdain and shouted, "Die miserably if you wish, old woman! Is that your wish? Go, die miserably. Don't you have a child old enough to be married? Die miserably, why not? Shame on

you if you dare not die miserably. As for me, Babalola, I wouldn’t give a damn. In fact, you would be given a befitting burial – observing the rites of the Third Day and of the Seventh Days. I just hope you are not a part of this conspiracy.”

“I tell you, Babalola, for God sake, this is a blatant lie! This must be a conspiracy of the highest order. This is borne of nothing but hate and treachery. For God sake, I want you to believe me. But let a curse be upon whoever planned these lies against me that they will end their life in abject poverty, die in ragged miseries and immeasurable lacks.” I shouted; I cried. Babalola started looking at me. We started starring at each other. He suddenly rose up like a man, and went out. I sat down, shouting and crying like one bereaved of a mother. I asked myself, Is this life? Who could be responsible for all these fiascos? Could it be my co-wives? Could it be Aina? But I knew Bale was not fond of Aina; in fact, they avoided each other like a plague all the time. I just could not put my fingers on who could have been responsible for this mess.

The Chief entertained many visitors all the time. He avoided me altogether. For days, he would only just look at me intensely. We slept; we woke up. At the peak of my desperacy, almost considering myself worthless, I went straight to him early in the morning while he was still lying down on his mat. I regurgitated this matter once again. I swore, saying: “If I had betrayed you in any way, may I be the one to bury Olanrewaju, our son.”

On hearing this, the Chief sat up immediately, and said: “God forbid! May Olanrewaju be the one to bury you. May he be the one to stand firmly by you when the time comes for you to bury me. I stood quiet. There was an air of tranquility. Then, the Chief said, “Asabi, the praiseworthy Asabi, remember that you are fatherless, and the fatherless do not raise an arm against formidable enemies. Whether the whole matter is true or false, I henceforth leave you to your conscience. I forgive you. You are a vital person in my life. You, too, know this to be true. Imagine how long we’ve come along together. It has been long even before I became the paramount Chief, let alone becoming rich and famous. You are not known to be a traitor, neither are you known to be greedy, adulterous, or slothful. I won’t divorce you as promised. I won’t even listen to all those hearsays about you. You and I have been together for too long to allow such things. I have never heard any bad tidings of you conspiring against me in any way. Issues between us have no beginning, no tales, and no end. After all, you are my head-wife. From one corner to the other in this compound, you are all-in-all to me. Whatever offence you’ve committed against me, I have completely forgiven you. Remember, I married you as a virgin. You were young and impressionable. It was right inside my home that you budded and blossomed, my dear wife, mother of Olanrewaju, my son. No creditor ever went after you for owing them anything; and today, I make a new covenant with you, establishing your feet more firmly than ever before.

Please I count on you to keep watch over this household. How much could I see by myself in this humongous household? My eyes are henceforth in your hands. From now on, be rest assured that all the rumblings of slanderers have come to naught.

I stood agape, hung my jaws and could not close my mouth. I asked Bale if it was Aina that orchestrated all these blatant lies against me. I asked him repeatedly who the person was, but my husband, Babalola, just starred away and gave no response. I drew closer to him, robbed my hands over his bald head, plucked a few strings of hair off his head, robbed my hands on his body, doing all I could to appease him, yet, he did not oblige. He did not respond to my appeal one bit. When he was getting overwhelmed with my inquisitiveness, his single response was, "Asabi, the stew does not shake in the stomach of an elder." After this encounter, I refrained from asking him anything else about the whole matter. He, too, never visited the matter again until he was convicted within him.

On that fateful morning, the compound was hustling and bustling. My co-wives kept on conniving among themselves. Some of them were saying among themselves, "Guess what? Those duo folks chatted all night long. All Asabi did was stay on her knees begging the husband; the husband was begging Asabi as well; she must have fooled the husband; Asabi had consulted her medicine man yesterday, and the medicine man had loaded her with the love potion. Shame on the husband; all he knows is the woman. He is too gullible, believing anything and everything Asabi tells him." So were different folks in our compound saying all sorts of things on that day. It was not only my co-wives saying all these, even there were also the gossips, those relatives of the Chief who had fought and left their own married homes to come and reside with us – all engaged in these endless gossips. But I pretended hearing nothing. I dismissed them in my mind as the proverbial noises of the marketplace, totally inconsequential to the purpose of being at the market.

The day looked gloomy, dull and cloudy. The sun gave no ray; even the Chief did not step out of the house. He had his breakfast of the cornmeal gruel. He ate a lunch of àmàlà - the yam flour mix paste; had snacks of boiled corn in the evening, and a supper of *iyán* – the pounded yam.

The following day was a court hearing. Court hearings were not held every day. They were often scheduled. Sometimes, hearings were held thrice a week, and sometimes more than that. The Chief went to court to adjudicate. Since these past fifteen days of his arrival, he had not presided over any court hearing; we were only entertaining guests, and commiserating over the sparing of his life. He too sat majestically and welcomed everyone, saying: "Greetings, folks, I hope you are in good health and it is well with you and your households." Whenever guests were not there for him to entertain, he would take

a walk into the backyard to see his domestic animals; he had those in abundance. He had countless numbers of chickens, turkeys; he also had a few camels, plus many ducks, sheep, goats, he-goats, rams, cows, donkeys, and even two little reindeers that the hunters captured and gifted to him. The Chief would walk around and chat with his male and female workers, warning them not to be slow in discharging their responsibilities. In the evenings, he would sit down to enjoy the *ayò* game until nighttime. On occasions, he would take a walk to the farm to see how the slaves and servants had been doing since his absence. Sometimes, he would empty his boxes of cloths and spread the linens in the open sunshine. He would then fold them back. Sometimes, he would just sit back and have a drink of the palm-wine, eating the dried bush-meat along with it and joking with me. He would say at times, “Asabi, had I been executed, you guys would have shared all these. Kindly hold on the sharing, even I, the rightful owner, would like to hold on to them a bit longer.” Me, on the other hand, would laugh without even saying much about the joke. At one point, he added some more anecdotes to his joke. He would say, “Had you shared my possessions, what about even you, my wives, who are supposed to be a part of my possessions? Tell me, Asabi, who would have taken possession of you? After all, age is not a deterrent for a goat itself to be shared, right?” I just laughed, having no comeback anecdotes of my own to counter his joke without provoking bad memories or triggering a new one. That would amount to an unforced error that I could ill afford to commit.

On court days, the Chief would wake up earlier than usual. He would always eat heavy breakfast. Sometimes he would eat *àmàlà* – the yam flour pudding; sometimes, it would be a pudding of black-eye peas and mixed corn; and at times he would eat the thick cornmeal paste with *egusi* - the melon seed stew. On this particular day in reference, his choice was *iyán* – the pounded yam meal, because he felt the court hearings might take a long time to conclude. This meal is highly celebrated. *Iyán* is the meal that is often hailed with its own praise poem, “Enemy of the slothful; the white morsel that travels down the path of the throat; the finger-held thick morsel that hangs between fingers; the meal eaten with the left hand holding to the chicken; the meal taken that makes the wife to stagger into the hands of the husband; the meal that forces the wife to chitchat with the husband.”

Truly, it was a bit late before leaving for the court on that day. There were so many cases to hear. Both the junior and Senior Colonial Administrative Officers were in attendance. They came to celebrate with the Chief for his life being spared from the jaw of death. They also came to re-introduce him to the people and declare to them, “Behold your Chief!”

After adjudicating a divorce case involving a woman who wanted to leave her husband, an offender was brought before the court. This was a man

accused of brewing an illicit liquor. The customary police explained how the man was arrested and how they caught him in the act with all illegal paraphernalia found in his residence. Even before the accused would speak, the Chief interjected: "Wait a minute, police man, officer of the government, you need to take it easy. The Whiteman does not forbid anyone from brewing the liquor. Could it be they enacted this decree while I was gone? The entire court applauded. The Chief continued, "Someone tapped the palm-mine, added a few ingredients to it, boiled it and turned it into liquor in his father's house, he served it out to himself, drank and served it to his visitors, you said he violated the law and I should punish him – this is too new a law to me. I have never heard anything like this. The Whiteman never sent you on such errand. What about all the wines we purchase; did the Whiteman brew his own right from heaven? They bring them to us in abundance, as if they are just water drawn from the stream; did they not brew theirs as well? As for me, Babalola, I will never take the seat of the wicked, and I will not take such stand until I take my last breath, and I see my father face-to-face. I will always follow the dictates of my conscience, as inspired by God. Instantly, you better release this gentleman. There is a limit to how far one should be a snag to the progress of another person. For goodness sake, for this tangential matter you've locked an innocent person in jail for five days. I know what it means to be in jail; I have a firsthand experience being locked up. It means for the last five days the wife has not seen him; his children have not seen him, neither have his own parents seen him. If you, as a police officer, have no regard for human beings, shouldn't you have regard for God? As for me, Babalola, I follow what is written in the tablet of my heart. As far as I am concerned, this man who brewed the liquor did nothing wrong. If the case came to the hearing of the Whiteman, let him know that I, the Chief, have found him not guilty, and released him. I feel bad that they had gone before we attended to this case, they, too, would have been living witnesses to the whole thing once and for all. How wonderful would it be if each judge all over the world would be mandatorily incarcerated for three months at first before becoming a court judge. That would give them the firsthand experience of where they are committing people to through their sentencings. How great that would have been! Again, everyone in court applauded. They complimented the Chief greatly on that day, saying: "Here comes Babalola; Wisdom is restored!"

The following day was another court day because the cases were just too many. The Chief rose earlier, as usual; he ate and headed to court. The hearings proceeded. In the process, they brought an accused before him for adjudication. He was accused of purchasing a servant for thirty cowries, but the Whiteman had forbidden the practice of purchasing servants. The Chief looked astonished around the court, asking, "Wait a minute, folks, is it true

that the Whiteman actually made this law? No one said a word. He asked again: “Answer me, folks, I am confused, because even I, myself, have countless number of servants on my plantations working for me. I also have myriads of slaves.”

The police officer responded that it is true that the Whiteman had actually promulgated the decree after he was incarcerated. The Chief then ordered that the Whiteman be summoned on this matter because he was not prepared for another round of incarceration in light of his advancing age.

The Chief did not go to court on the third day. He was working from home attending to cases. Boundary disputes; cases of spouses refusing to accept divorce notices; cases of creditors and debtors willing to continue their friendships; cases of sibling rivalries; and other such minor issues that were not taken to court but brought to the Chief for resolutions were what he dealt with. Many of such disputes were resolved by the Chief on that day, after which he retired for the evening relaxation on the popular *ayò* game. Lots of humors were flying around at the game. The Chief was having an endless fun. Apparently with some sips of the wine, he was soaring high. He was always at his best in the *ayò* game whenever he was slightly drunk. He would roar, yelling and sweating; coming up with all kinds of jokes. And of course, he himself was a master at the game of *ayò*.

The common kinds of humorous utterances coming out of his mouth were, “Come on, play me the *ayò* game, my friend; or have you forgotten the Whiteman has forbidden us from owning servants? Play on, man, the Whiteman came from his own place forbidding us from brewing our own liquor, or drink it or entertain our visitors with it; we only need to buy the wine coming from their own country. Play on, man, you slave of the Whiteman; children of the Whiteman. Play on, loser; the master is talking; the novice must shut up. Play on, challenge me – even I, who would never punish the innocent; you are on step three . . . poor you, you can’t even go beyond step three; slave to the Whiteman, play on; I will knock you out up to six rounds before the Whiteman comes to your rescue; put the chain in the house of the fool; you are dosing off in action. It’s looking as if you are the real husband of Bamijoko. It’s you? It’s not you? Oh well, just stay put and fall flat the third time.” The other man also had his own quick comeback verbal jabs. “You’re right, Chief; but you don’t earn the bragging right yet, even women folks inside my own household are winning two games in a row; let’s see how well you fare on the third round. Only the one who wins three in a row is the true champion.” “Oh no,” Babalola responded; “You are trapped; you can’t escape this one; you are only holding to the tree trunk, and I will unwind you; wait a bit more and be pummeled this third time – quickly before the Whiteman comes to your rescue; the Whiteman with the smart head, they are

only crafting; I, Babalola, will not succumb to their craftiness; after all, my father did not allow such craftiness; he outsmarted them all. Or is this actually the true brother of Adanoja? Play on, relative of Aina; just play on! You relative of Bamijoko; I say play on – not long, they were in the process of executing Babalola; I, who is able to appease the most ardent heart, and dismantle the package of the evil one with a heart of transparent honesty!”

And the game went on and on. The tintinnabulating sound of the ayò seed pebbles is fun to hear and the game is sensational to watch. The Chief would take another sip of the wine, and one bowl of the palm-wine, snacking on the dried venison of the gazelle as he seemed possessed with the spirit of this hilarious board game. Everyone who played the game on that fateful day received a three-round-straight whooping defeat of Babalola, the Chief. He was such a Master player of the game. Many came there to watch.

Anyway, this was how the matters of native liquor brewing and indentured servanthood became points of comedies at the game joint. People didn't even give them any serious attention any longer. The unbridled verbal jabs of disjointed utterances often made the game so much fun! Spectators were always numerous. Yes, once Babalola was into it, there was no end, even to the point of poking fun with his own near-execution. This is the nature of the Ayo game: even if one's house is on fire, once he is carried away by the spirit of the game, he wouldn't pay attention to the yelling. Even if one's child is face-to-face with death, once entrapped in the spell of the game, he would care less, and the person could even turn it into a humorous jab. If you saw two artful players squaring off, give me a yell, I'd be there too, even I, Asabi, wife of Babalola, I was that skillful a player.

I, Asabi, was having fun in the home of my husband. On occasions the Chief would wink at me, and I would instantly know what he wanted. If he stared back a bit, I knew what he meant. I was his confidant and he was my bosom pal. Our compound was as hot as hell. Now, my enemies had mounted against me with fierce determination. They were gossiping around that I must have tainted the Chief's food with some love potion; that I had turned him into a buffoon and imbecile. They always built all kinds of lies against me. They were all in one accord to militate my downfall. And indeed, they would have succeeded were it not for the support of the Chief and the service of someone who was filling me in on their evil plots.

More than anything else, I, Asabi, never planted the evil seed against anyone; I was a good and loyal wife to my husband; I never conceived of evil against anyone – slave or freeborn. And ever since the misunderstandings between the Chief and I were settled, I had nursed no animosity against anyone. I parted company with Aina. She too stayed in her husband's home. I joined no one in loose talks; I joined no one in conspiracies; I plotted with no

one against another; I am neither envious of a resident nor of a stranger to the community. My husband occupied the utmost space in my heart. I praised him, and I honored him. I always saw him as my benefactor. He was the husband who never believed any evil report of me brought before him.

More often, I would warn the Chief to be mindful of the Whiteman. I would warn him that time had changed and we had to move with the wave of time. He should remember the wise saying that, the child that knows how to wash the hands clean would secure a place of honor in the banquet of elders. I told him God had placed the Whiteman as elders over us. No doubt, they improved our lifestyles; things were better for us than in the past. I begged the Chief to please appease them, walk on eggshell around them, and do all it would take to get through with them and survive. I told him that on the long run, if problem arose, it would become only the Chief’s burden; he was the one known to the Whiteman, after all, he was the leader, and he should know that the ground of life must be trodden softly. The Chief would respond, saying: “What do you mean by treading softly? Are you telling me to compromise my integrity – see the truth and not say it? Is that what you call treading the ground softly? You would want me to punish someone who in my true conscience is not guilty of the offence he was accused of? Let the Whiteman do what pleases him; I will always stand by the truth; I will follow my father’s footsteps; I’m sick and tired of the Whiteman’s palavers. Listen, Asabi, if you ever stepped into the prison yard, then you would know that people really suffer in life. For me, Babalola, to condemn another person to such punishment without a thorough investigation of the matter and ensuring that the person is truly deserving of it, would be unconscionable. The ordeal of the prison is no joke at all!” This was how my husband would dismiss my counsel on this matter whenever I offered it.

A short while later the announcement was made that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was visiting. The Chief planned to have a heart-to-heart conversation with him in the presence of everyone on the matters of the indentured servanthood and brewing the indigenous liquor. The court was packed on that day. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was already on seat before the Chief left his house. The court chanters led the convoy ahead of the Chief, chanting praises on him, saying:

1. *Ìrókò* father of all trees,
Ọlómọ̀ṣíkàtà father of all corns,
 You are the father of them all,
 Husband of Asabi-Ogo, father of Olanrewaju.

2. The heavy downpour is the father of all rains,
The lion is the king of the jungle,
Bale is the father of residents and strangers,
You are the father of them all, husband of Asabi.

3. March on in elegance on your father's soil,
The Whiteman that envies you is nothing but a mere carved doll,
Purity of the heart has placed you above the Whiteman,
March on in elegance, husband of Asabi.

4. The wood trap cannot catch the ant – the Whiteman can do you
nothing,
I say march on in elegance.
Gossips at home, gossips in the outside are all liars,
Husband of beloved Asabi, father of Olanrewaju,

5. See you later – today,
Tread softly with the Whiteman – today,
Act true to your forefathers – today,
Husband of Asabi, father of Olanrewaju.

VII

Servants and Slaves, All the Same

The day the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came, I went to court with the Chief because I knew that whenever the Chief took a stand, no one could change it. As we were walking along and the chanters were raising praises upon praises on the Chief, he bumped his right foot against the stone and looked back to make an eye contact with me, saying: "Asabi, did you noticed I just bumped my right foot against the stone? It symbolizes that today is going to be a nasty day of confrontation with the Whiteman. I guess we are going to compete for supremacy." My heart sank into my chest. I said to myself, "O my, in spite of all the warnings I gave this man, he is still bent on being confrontational with the Officer today." I was overwhelmed with anxiety, hoping the Chief would not get himself into another round of trouble with the Whiteman today.

Just by the pillar of mud at the front yard, we met a street beggar, begging for alms and saying, "Please give unto me in the name of God. May you not be a victim of an undeserved accusation or trouble for which you are innocent. May other people's evil deeds not be robbed around your neck." I told

the Chief to respond with agreement, a resounding sound of Amen. He did not respond; instead he snapped at me, wondering why I even wanted to accompany him to the court on that day. He increased his strides. I opened my treasure belt and handed some money to the beggar. The Chief did not give a damn!

We had not gone any farther when we met another beggar who sat in the breeze of the early morning sunshine. Begging for alms, he pleaded: “Chief, kindly give something to me for God’s sake; may you not die before you die; may you not fall before you rise; may you not lack before you have.” On this, the Chief paused, and offered him alms. I really did not understand the language of the beggar, but the Chief explained to me later on, to the best of his knowledge.

To cut the long story short, we arrived at the court. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer had been there before our arrival, and the court was packed. Otun, the immediate in rank to the Chief had arrived. Osi, who was next in rank to Otun had also arrived. On entering the court, Otun greeted the Chief, and the latter responded, saying: “Otun, man of valor, greetings for being there.” However, noticeable to all present, Osi did not greet the Chief. The Chief felt slated by this lack of obeisance on the part of one of his subordinate chiefs, most especially because it was right in the presence of distinguished citizens of the town as well as even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. There were representatives from the suburbs. The interpreter sat close to the court clerk and were having quiet conversations. I suspected that day that they were having conversation about the snubbing of the Chief by Osi.

Osi was known for being ill-natured. The bone of contention was a petty disagreement between him and the Chief over one of the cases on which the Chief presided. That would explain why he gave the Chief a cold shoulder. More often, Osi would lean on the side of the Whiteman and the Chief would dismiss him as spineless. Osi was a man of noble birth. He was unpredictable, though. If there was any form of conspiracy in town, you could guess correctly that Osi was behind it. The Chief himself knew that he was a renegade.

The Chief exchanged pleasantries with the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, shaking hands with him, and the court took off immediately. After the clerk gave minutes of the last meeting, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was the first to react. The interpreter rendered his response as follows: “I greet the Chief; I greet Otun, Osi, and all Council members as well as representatives from the suburbs. I greet all citizens of Ojusongo – male and female, who are present today. I came here today to address a very important matter. As you know, you don’t see me this often, since I was here just a short while ago. The constant engagements all the time have always prevented me

from coming to visit you so often, but I am pretty sure that your Colonial Administrative Officer visits with you quite often.”

“Once more, I would like to congratulate the Chief for being acquitted from the case mounted against him of late. Your Chief is such an honorable man, he is not known for being stubborn-hearted, and he is not fraudulent either. He is not corrupt – never accepting bribes; he is transparently honest, and is a man greatly endowed with wisdom. He holds the love of all of you and the town at heart. You should be thankful to God for having such a caring leader at this particular time. This is the kind of person that the Governor-General wants as leader for the people.

“There is only one blemish I find in your chief. In his zeal to serve you, he occasionally violates the government positions unknowingly (just like the type that brought him in trouble not too long ago), and sometimes, he demonstrates contempt for authorities. The yoke of the colonial government is very easy; it is quite light. We are not here to make life unbearable for anyone; everything the government does is to your benefits even if you may not be able to see those benefits clearly now. I heard that some among you were brewing illicit liquor and when apprehended, the Chief released them because he felt there was no reason to punish them or even arrest them in the first instance. Even more so, he sent a message of contempt to me as the sole representative of the Governor-General among you. This is not right. I want to make it clear to all of you that anyone found brewing this illicit liquor violates the law and the Government would punish such person according to the law. It’s not for me or the Chief or anyone else for that matter to be questioning the rationales for the law here, those who made the law had deeply contemplated on it before enacting it into law. In fact, some of those who came up with the law were even your children. Our collective responsibility is to keep the law. My own duty is to ensure that all of the government laws are fully kept. I will find time to explain to the Chief and his Council members why this law is a beneficial one. However, whether or not I explain its benefits, I would like all of you to know that it is all to your benefits. It is not to make life difficult for you in any way.”

“The law of indentured servanthood is difficult these days. Kindly stop making servants of your fellows. It is unfair for the person purchased as servant. It is only slightly different from slavery in which your fathers engaged in the past. Anyone caught in the act, whether someone purchased a servant or even the servant who agreed to be purchased, would be severely punished. Certainly, this matter of servanthood had been brought before your Council in the past, and I explained everything to you clearly but I felt like sounding this note of warning publically one more time so that everyone would know that this is a law to be respected.”

“Right in front of everyone, I would like to tell the Chief as well as Otun, Osi, and all Council members that it is their duty to safeguard this law, keeping it and making sure everyone else does so. More importantly, it is their duty to keep all the laws of the colonial Government and to make sure everyone does the same. It is not the right of any single person to cause controversies or to make amendments to the existing law which had been thoroughly discussed by the Central Colonial Council in Lagos. I have said this once in the past and I am just emphasizing it now. Your Colonial Administrative Officer will visit you often, just as he has been doing. If anyone is confused about any matter, or especially if your leader is doubtful of anything, you should ask him for clarification or even call on me and I will gladly stop by.”

“Once more, I give my greetings to you before I take my seat. This year, please give attention to the payment of your taxes – tenement tax, and your pol tax. You’ve been doing well in the past, but it seems you have relented this last year probably due to the absence of your Chief. Again, I greet all of you.”

Otun was the first to respond to the statement of the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. As soon as he rose to speak, all in attendance hailed him as, “Otun, man of valor. He whose fate defends him more than placing a curse on his enemies. He who silences the voices of his naysayers.” He responded by saying, “I bow down to the storm,” to which they all responded, “May the storm pass you over.”

Then, Otun spoke proverbially: “The heavy downpour fills up the valley at the displeasure of the hill; just as our elders would say.” To this, the audience responded, “May you have more words of wisdom to inspire us.” He then continued, “What business does the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer have on the matter of brewing our indigenous liquor? I am confused, and that is why I am asking. In my household, under my roof, inside my own house, I choose to purchase the palm-wine, I add a few more ingredients, I boiled it and made liquor out of it, and the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer now says I’ve broken his own law? I don’t get it! I guess, when he proffers his explanation, we would be in the know. Now, on the matter of purchasing servants, please tell me, has anyone seen a black man purchasing a white folk as servant? Does the Whiteman go into debt to acquire his wives? Aren’t they known to marry only one wife? Come on, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, are we now trying to purposely whip up controversies that are not there? Are the white folks deliberately kidding us? Come to think about it, aren’t we the ones supposed to protest the white folks using us as their servants? Yet, we are saying nothing; whereas, is it not apparent that all of us farmers are only a little different from slaves in the hands of the white people? When wanting to purchase produce from our farms, they, not us, determine the price; whatever we want to purchase from them, they determine the

price, and offer them in exuberant rates, totally overpriced; yet they get ours in prices way lower than their actual values. Isn't this slavery? This is worse than servanthood. But this is not the matter for this time. When we can no longer purchase indentured servants, would the cocoa produce be in abundance for the Whiteman? What about the palm-kernel, even wouldn't there be abundance of the palm-oil for him to haul away cheaply? With homage to our elders through whose mouths the words of wisdom should come, wouldn't this be a typical case of the proverbial ingrate who is castigating the person laying down his life to protect him?

"Please let us make it known to the white folks that it is to better serve them that we engage in the act of acquiring indentured labor servants so as to work on the farm. If we stop the practice of acquiring servants, do they expect folks like me to go and work on the farm and get our produce? Or would I be able to carry my harness and climb the palm tree? Or would wives of folks like me be the ones to carry the calabashes to go and fetch water from the stream? Kindly help ask the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer if taxation would cease since we would no longer be able to acquire those that would work for us on the farm. No one ought to serve another, right? We just have to hope against hope that no one would invade our town any longer since we will have no one to defend us, isn't that true? The fact of the matter is that the road on which the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer traveled into our town today was constructed through the labor of our servants, the servants of yours truly included. Isn't this the case of a person who has gathered his own clean water out of the stream and now giving no damn whether or not the stream is now muddled up? - I bow down to my elders for uttering a word of wisdom in their presence.

"What kind of confrontation is this? Let the Whiteman be warned; this is treading on the verge of shaking our tradition to its foundation. We thought you came to make friends with us in the first instance. We never knew you came to challenge our existence. Stop hiding behind a transparent camouflage; we are no fools, we've seen through where you are coming from. You are looking for someone to scapegoat. Moderation should guide every action. Please don't harass us. There is more to say. I yield the floor with all humility."

There was a loud applause at the conclusion of Otun's rebuttal.

Osi spoke next. His was brief. "We thank you white folks who have made life a whole lot easier for us," he said. "Slavery is terrible. We are all aware of this fact now. Probably our fathers thought the white folks cheated them by abolishing the slave trade. They resisted the abolition. In the same vein, indentured servitude is no good. Our children, too, will have a deeper understanding and appreciation of this fact down the road, at least, more than we do right now, just as we understand the evil of slavery now than our fathers

did. It’s this brewing of native liquor that I am confused about; but for sure, the Whiteman is no fool; they know what they are talking about. Personally, I am on the side of the Whiteman’s position on this matter. Paramount Chief: You need to act like an elder, sounding and acting like the fury of thunder and lightning does not solve any problem. You need to understand that these people are aware of what is going on. I am expressing my feeling in public, right in front of everyone. Paramount Chief: take it easy; gentility is no stupidity. This is no timidity; the Whiteman is no one to mess with. You, yourself, are a living witness to the Whiteman’s fury. Who could have rescued you from the snare of the Whiteman except for God who Himself made the Whiteman our superior? I yield the floor with all humility.”

It was the Chief’s turn. I was scared to death, almost melted on my seat. The valiant lifted his flowing garment in the upper arms, and hanged them right back on his shoulders; he looked through the window and spat out phlegm – he had been having some feat of coughing for the last three days or so. His face could not conceal his anger and frustration. He was prone to quick rage by virtue of his stuttering condition. As soon as the people saw his no-nonsense demeanor, they applauded, and shouted in unison, “Now, we are talking. Here comes the voice of reason!”

“I greet you much, Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. May you meet your home intact – returning peacefully in the embracing arms of your healthy wife and children. Interpreter, I count on you for nicety and truthfulness today. Kindly ensure you transmit my words to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer with clarity and professional finesse. He said we should refrain from engaging in home-brewed liquor, right? Please do tell him that we’ve heard him well. We will refrain from doing so. But please ask him that when I have to spend One Pound out of my salary of Seven Pounds as the Paramount Chief of this town in purchasing the Whiteman’s wine, how much would I have left? Should I stop entertaining my visitors? If the weather is blowing its cold breeze, should I not have something to sip to warm me up in the inside? With or without visitors, I cannot use anything less than twelve bottles of drinks every month. Let the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer apply logic to my circumstance. As for the issue of indentured servants, we will also stop it at his command. The implication is simple: once I rise from this judgment seat, I must go and cut the grass to feed my horses; I must go and mow the weed on the farm; I must go and hew down and cut in small pieces the log of woods on my newly cultivated farm; I must go and plant the crops; when it’s harvest season, I must go to the farm to harvest the produce so that I may appease the Whiteman, and be in his good book, right? Let the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer know that his words are well taken; we will stop acquiring servants. Henceforth, whenever somebody loses father

or mother, they have to go to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer to borrow money for the burial ceremonies. As we sound a note of warning to the proverbial thief, we should equally warn the attractive yams growing by the roadside. Be it known henceforth, then, that everyone is forbidden from coming to my house to seek financial succor.”

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer rose to his feet and proffered a great deal of justifications for the law on the two matters. He explained to everyone of how injurious the illicit liquor could be to the body of its consumers as well as to other things. He also talked about the unfairness of purchasing a human-being as a servant to another person. After his response, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer opened the meeting to a Question and Answer session, asking anyone to comment on the issues. One young man then stood up; thanked the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, and said, “God forbid; what a taboo – once the rain has fallen, the dew better not drop anymore. The Chief has spoken; Otun has spoken; and Osi has done the same. No one else dare to say anything afterwards.”

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer insisted on hearing the views of others. For a long span, nobody uttered one word. At long last, someone raised his hand from the very rare, which prompted everyone to look back to catch a glimpse of whoever it was. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer beckoned on this person to step forward to the front and speak his mind. Lo and behold, it was Adanoja! Everyone in attendance murmured. They hissed in contempt of him but the presence of the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer did not let them know what to do. Some walked out in anger. Both the Chief and Otun walked out. But Osi sat down, looking on. Later, he and the interpreter stood up and walked out, following the Chief and Otun, and urging them to return and letting them know it was not right to walk away from the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. He said they ought to have honored him and that walking out was a disgrace to him. On this, Otun responded and said, “We do not want Adanoja in this town any longer. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was not the founder of our town. Wherever the likes of us are present, Adanoja has no mouth to speak there. It was for his matter that the Colonial Government almost killed our Chief recently.” Even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer himself came to join them when they seemed to be wasting his time because time was of the essence for him, just as he was always pressed with time whenever he attended the meetings. It could be that his responsibilities were truly enormous, or perhaps he never felt comfortable sitting down at those meetings, we could not tell. All I knew was that he was always in a big rush.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer explained that Adanoja had the right to speak like anyone else at meetings since his matter had been settled

legally. Like a loose cannon, the interpreter opened his mouth suddenly and said: “Actually, Adanoja must talk; after all, he too is a taxpayer.” But this was not what the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said. The statement infuriated the Chief, looking at the interpreter with disgust. It was commonplace for interpreters to say the wrong things – what the person never said. Sometimes they would deliver the message not sent them. The work of an interpreter was a delicate one; often, they ended up causing confusions and sometimes, too, getting matters resolved. So many were interpreters who deliberately played the role of the devil to exonerate the wrong person and pass guilty verdicts on the innocent. I knew so many of them who became rich because of such vile deeds. Their job was just too delicate.

Due to the efforts of the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, the Chief and Otun came back to the gathering. Otun said to the Chief, “Let’s head back so we don’t become rude in the sight of the Whiteman. As our people say, ‘The hands of the child may be too short in reaching the ceiling top, but so also are those of the grownup - theirs may be too large to enter the narrow passage of the calabash container.’ But let us just refrain from saying anything on those matters today. Although our people say, ‘We cannot say for the sake of keeping a group together, one would watch the youths knocking the elders on their bare heads;’ but at this point, so be it; let the axe fall where it may. If the group would shatter into smothering, let it be; we are saying nothing.”

The matter plummeted into utter confusion. Yet, the Chief said nothing. He placed his hat, tobacco container and his horse tail tassel next to him, and kept staring down at Adanoja, the gossip as a worthless skunk. He shook his head in utter disgust. In his heart he was saying, the Whiteman has completely spoilt our universe. Indeed, welcome to the Whiteman’s world!

Osi stood up at once after Adanoja’s speech, and said: “I call on you, Adanoja, and all citizens of Ojusongo, can’t you all see the world turning around you? It has become the Whiteman’s world; the Whiteman has messed up our world.”

The assembly shook. The interpreter did not interpret to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer because Osi did not pause for the interpreter to interpret – he was so furious on the whole matter. But the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer asked the interpreter to explain everything to him and he did. Even before then, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer could tell that the speech was borne out of anger. People were in tumult. They cried out: “Adanoja, a robber, ruffian, greedy, wife stealer, thief!” The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was patient; he was thoughtful, knowing full well that the people feared him more than to be yelling at him this way without a cause. Adanoja then walked away from the assembly and ran out of Ojusongo.

After all these tumultuous events, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was in a big hurry to go but just wanted to put these matters of illicit liquor and servanthood to rest. Otherwise, it would be as if he did not complete his assignment for the day. Osi further spoke on the matter, speaking indirectly and not really hitting the bullseye on it. The Chief, Otun, and Osi said they would further look into the matter but that they had already heard all that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer had said. They said this was not so much because they fully agreed with all that he said, or that they were willing to do them, but they were leery of getting themselves in any trouble or especially getting the Chief in trouble the second time. Besides, everyone was exhausted sitting at the endless meeting on that day.

“So long, folks;” the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said to the Chief and his chiefs. In a loud noise, his vehicle ignited, and he drove off.

The Chief and his Council members left the meeting distressed on that day, and many accompanied them as they took off. The chanters were forbidden from chanting because the Chief was not in a good mood. I walked in front of him. People were chatting on the matter. The Chief did not utter a single word. Otun tried to have conversation with Osi, but Osi did not respond, totally ignoring him. That was how everyone went in a somber procession to the Chief’s place.

All day long into the evening, the Chief was not himself. He stayed inside the house, in the inner chamber and did not venture out. He did not want to have contact with anyone. He laid on his back looking up like someone on the assignment to count the brims on the house ceiling; he was pondering. I drew close to him, tried to encourage him, and told him this new life with the Whiteman was one to be treaded softly. He simply ignored me. His rage on that day was too overwhelming when Adanoja came to the meeting. Late in the evening, the Chief called on me, and said. “I swear divine visitation on this whole matter except if it were not on these true traditions of our forefathers that we stood when these white folks came today to insult me. But, it’s not over. Everything has a remedy. Asabi, today’s affront was just too much! When the arms become impossible for swinging, there is nothing wrong folding them on one’s head. How dared the Whiteman handed the proverbial chicken combs as toy for the fox to play with, as they did today?” I counseled and encouraged him; but my co-wives were carefree about the whole matter. This might be because they were not witnesses to the whole drama.

Very early the following day, I woke up and greeted the Chief. The Chief answered and said: “Patience is the watchword. The matter has cared for itself – patience has forced itself into the matter as it stands. We are like someone who was pummeled in the bare back with six rounds of the club; or someone whose mother was mauled to shred by the grizzly bear; or someone

whose child was washed away by the torrent of the river. What else is there to do or say than console oneself and embrace patience? Yes, indeed, patience has forced itself in, and I have no option but to be completely patient. The Whiteman has destroyed our universe. Were it not for the new life the Whiteman has brought to us, with my experience of yesterday, I would have slept never to wake up again, just the same way my forefathers would have done in their own days. But, Asabi, just imagine if I had to take my own life just because of the matter of liquor brewing or no liquor brewing, or because of the issue of owning servants, even if owning servants is forbidden, what about all that the servants have done for us – are they not still there? Should I take my life simply because of this debacle with Adanoja after God had spared my life of execution? Kill myself and leave all of you alone by yourself, prematurely? That I may also not enjoy all these amenities of life the Whiteman has endowed us with? That kind of suicide deserves rethinking. I am not even crazy about such sleeping, anyway!”

I felt so relieved and happy when I heard him say all this. I further advised him about how stealthy he should walk and work with the Whiteman, and the fact that politics is a delicate responsibility. I said: “Babalola, the truth is that when it’s all said and done, individuals would be responsible for their own problems. You are taking the matter of town politics too personally. No one does politics, especially running the town, that way. As you know, I, myself, was the daughter of a titled Chief – Balogun, our town’s warlord. If my father were not as crafty as he was, he would not have lasted as long as he did. Sometimes he would do some things that would scare me as a child. He never poked nosed into the affairs of others. He never favored anyone against the other in settling disputes. If a husband came reporting his wife to my father, his judgment would be based on the facts so stated; after all, it is common knowledge that the way one presents a matter concerning a wife he plans to divorce would be different from the way he would present the matter about the wife with whom he wants to reconcile. Deal with individuals as they so desire to be dealt with. No doubt, you are wise and knowledgeable, however, when it comes to the kind of wisdom and knowledge needed for politics, it’s a totally different ball game. When you were hauled away for execution the other time, my ears were full of negative stories concerning you, even from those you thought were on your side. Supposing you were executed at that time, wouldn’t that have been it? What could anyone have done? What could your friend, Otun, have done? As for Osi, he already found his own survival mechanism. You need to make friends with the Whiteman. Be the Whiteman’s favorite; everything else is minor. Even we, women, know that once we forge friendship with the husband, all others - relatives, in-laws, or anyone else for that matter, would be a bliss in dealing with. There is nothing anyone can do

with a wife who is the husband's darling. So is politics, Chief. I beg you in the name of your forefathers, I am on my knees begging you, please think about all these precious ones God has surrounded you with, and kindly refrain from all these disagreements with the Whiteman's positions. God has imposed the Whiteman as the head, like the husband, over the Black race today. Or should we continue to deceive ourselves? But they better know how to be husbands. Else, we, their women, would divorce them and marry another husband. If it's a difficult, stubborn husband, we walk away from him and move to our father's home. We make a choice of ours – to re-marry or not re-marry. We can stay-put in our father's home and continue our trades, enjoying life as we find it fit. Time is everything. The Whiteman will not be our husband forever. But if they know how to play the game, we could live together; we could dine and wine together, living as members of the same household. After all, God is the husband of us, all. The things that Otun spoke the other time were words of truth. But there is a limit to how to speak the words of truth when the one who has been a snag to one's life was on seat. You are not getting younger. There is a limit to how far one could carry the burden of others on one's shoulder at one's old age. Tread gently with the Whiteman, and you would yourself see that life would be a whole lot easier for you and even for all of us."

The Chief looked thoughtfully, shaking his head, he said: "No lies at all in all you just said. Such is life. When I was sentenced to death and taken away, I knew the evil chats all of them were spewing out behind my back. Imagine all those things that Aina said about you as well. Anyway, let's just set all those aside. They are matters as good as dead. They stink. I am profoundly grateful to you for your counsel, and you will notice henceforth that my actions will change. I am no baby to this matter. As for those white folks, I just pity them. A mean-spirited husband cannot enjoy the service of his wife. If a husband in the family lets the wives gang up against him, he will forever regret it. The conspiracy of women is no joke. Women could easily run even a whole monarch out of town, and send him into exile. Watch it, it could be ordinary women that would run these white folks out of town one day if they continue to act improperly among us. They worry us too much!"

I quickly jumped in and asked, "How could women possibly send the white men packing, without guns, without machete?"

The Chief responded: "The gun is no longer capable of sending the white men packing. Are they not the ones who manufacture those guns? Rebellion, mutiny, scandalizing, and blacklisting are weapons that would send them packing one day out of exasperation. After all, they have told the whole world that we are friends with them. When their enemies, those of equal par with them, know that it's false stories that the English folks are spreading

around, they will feel embarrassed, change their ways, or pack up and go away altogether.”

I said, “Chief, are you talking about these English folks who are already well fed and nourished on our soil that could be shamed out of our land? I don’t agree for once. In my mind, it would take divine intervention, What I’m saying is that only God can uproot them out among us. Either the home becomes unbearable for them, an enemy that is greater than them rises against them, or God sends an epidemic their way that would send them running. Without one of these, I can’t see how the Whiteman could leave us alone without a fight.”

VIII Politics

Days were accumulating upon days; years upon years; age was telling on me. Simply put, I was getting old, stepping into the realm beyond the prime of life. Babalola, the Chief, had learned the lesson of playing low key; he was now laid back in dealing with the Whiteman and the townspeople. He hardly got frustrated any longer over the affairs of town’s politics; he now danced to the rhythm of the Whiteman’s music. He had long realized that claiming the rights of being a man on his father’s soil did not play well with the Whiteman – that reality, unfortunately, had starred him right in the face, and he got it.

Bit by bit he and Osi were forging friendships because it was clear to them that they were both hunting the same proverbial jungle. Osi had long mastered the skills of relating well with the Whiteman but until Otun entered the Mother Earth, his love for the town never waned and his uncompromising stand never changed. He did the work of his forefathers and followed their deeds. He never compromised. For this purpose, his relationship with the Chief was no longer as intense as it used to be and remained so until he finally met his end. Even the Chief had himself recognized that it was not to anyone’s advantage – be it a chief or a monarch, to be at loggerhead with the Whiteman. Unfortunately, too, even the townspeople started to grudge the Chief for his compromising stance. They spoke ill of him in his back, saying: “Our Chief is no longer himself; He has now completely become a woman in his character. He has become a conformist, taking orders from the Whiteman. He has been chained, totally shackled by the white folks. He has been bridled like a horse. He is now a slave to the Whiteman. He is now buddy-buddy with the Whiteman.” They poked all Sorts of trash talks at him. Initially, they were saying all these in secret, but as time went on, they said the same in the open. They even turned it into the humor at the ayò game joint. They would say things like, “Come on, play the game, my friend – child of Babalola, slave of

the Whiteman, baby sibling of Babalola. If you don't play the game, Babalola will call on the Whiteman to come and haul you away. Haven't you heard in your neighborhood that Babalola has entered into allegiance with the white folks yesterday? Just play on so I may beat you thrice before Babalola calls on the Whiteman for your arrest." Later, they started singing parodies against Babalola in the open. They sang all sorts of songs to ridicule him ever since he had a change of heart in dealing with the Whiteman. By a change in his outlook, we are talking about his resolve to only act on the basis of his own conscience alone. Amazing, who knew that the journey from grace to disgrace could be so short! Who could ever imagine that Babalola could be this tarnished within this short time in the Town of Ojusongo. In fact, they sang to satirize him one day that:

Pàgbonjẹ is the name of the attire we wore in the past year,
 Babalola is the name of our current ruler;
 He has become a slave to the Whiteman, having sold his people
 cheap,
 We should have no time for a befitting burial on the day the
 conspirator dies.

He too heard as they sang the song right on the front yard of our residence. Residents of our house also gave him reports of hearing folks sing such songs in the marketplace. In fact, we heard a small child sing the parody right inside our compound. You can't blame a child who had no idea what the song meant. This was how the Chief became a Nobody, especially among the young men and the young women in our town. The elders of the town, most especially members of the Ogboni Fraternity, made life a bit difficult for him but they knew how to manage the situation among themselves better. Sometimes they would meet and deliberate over what their Chief had changed into. Some would make attempt to counsel him to dissociate himself from the Whiteman; some would attempt to remind him of the seed he had planted and the legacy he would be leaving for the coming generation if he sold out to the Whiteman and let them overrun the town. Some would even say openly, "Our man had received the Whiteman's bribe." Some applied wisdom and life experience to the matter, saying: "Tread softly in the era of the Whiteman. We can't blame the Chief. How many of you could wait and face trouble? When pandemonium broke out the other time, how many of you stood by him? When he was hauled away for execution the other day, have you forgotten all the negative chit-chat you hewed upon him? What if you or I were to be in his position, what would you do?"

This was how Chief Babalola was totally belittled. Yet one or two individuals stood up for him at the Ogboni Fraternity house. These were the Oluwo and Apena. This situation with the Chief affected all of us, members of his household, most especially me, known to everyone as his soulmate. All of us, our children included, were verbally assaulted all around town. They would raise songs of parodies against us. Verbal assaults and dressing down in public places were common experiences for all of us. But the Chief commanded us never to respond to any of those assaults. Mine was chief among it all. After all, is it not common knowledge that if the outside was unbearable, at least one should find solace in the inside? Sadly, that was not the case for me; towns folks hated my guts, members of my household were doing everything to squeeze life out of me; they were making life literally unlivable for me. But, thankfully, I found genuine love in the arms of my husband, the Chief.

Even chanters and drummers turned against us. Our house now seemed sour, like a house of mourning, you would never know that this was the same home that used to be known for honor, dignity, jubilation, opulence and splendor.

This was the time that the new tax law was enacted. The previous taxation was not that much. All of a sudden, taxes were doubled. The white officer visited the Chief’s residence and had lengthy conversations with him on the matter. The Chief agreed instantly, to the astonishment of the officer who used to be cautious around the Chief on matters of this nature. Even I was myself surprised because he quickly agreed and said the amount was not much and that he would talk to his people about it and that they would agree to pay the amount. The Chief’s position was simply that he was prepared to go all the way to becoming the Whiteman’s henpecked, and let the axe fall where it would. He said he would not play double game – being for the people and being for the Whiteman. I told him he had acted contrary to my counsel. He ought to have promised first that he would look into the matter and let the officer make his own case before them. The Chief realized his folly for not first presenting the matter before the Council. Afterwards, he now called the Council and brought the matter before the members in accordance with my counsel, pretending as if he never knew anything about it beforehand.

The Council was enraged, rejecting the proposal outright. They said even the ones they had paid earlier were just to keep peace, and that anything added would bring about war. They said they did not fear death on this matter, neither were they afraid of any sort of punishment. They made it clear to the Chief that henceforth if the white folks, who were now his friends, should bring issues bordering on nonsense to him, he should not present such to them. The Council meeting of that day ended in brawls.

On arrival at home, the Chief reported the matter to me, and I put it right at his face that I had warned him against accepting the proposal of the Whiteman on the matter before presenting it to the Council members. Now, his dilemma was how he would report back to the Officer. The matter soon spread around town like a wildfire. The entire town rose like one body and headed straight to our front yard, yelling: “We won’t agree, we refuse to pay any tax. Babalola is now comfortable and ready to sell us to the Whiteman. Having made it big, he is no longer for us. We regret his escape from death the other time; wouldn’t his death been better for the people? The sick man has been healed and now he is looking down at the healing wand. Were it not for us when he was led to the execution, he would have been killed. What about the mobilizations of those potent spiritual forces – services of the ventriloquist, the enchantments, invocations, bewitchment of judges, curses railed on adversaries, all in attempts to help Babalola get out of trouble and find favor before the judges; but now, see what we got from it; he has become the hook in our mouth, choking us to death – shame on you, Babalola!”

The chaos of the day was big and scary to the extent that we had to put Babalola in hiding. We kept him in the innermost chamber, perspiring in exasperation and sending secret messages for Osi to stop by and see him. Indeed, Osi came and they both reasoned together for a long time. After Osi left, I asked the Chief how they had addressed the matter but his response was that it was not an issue meant for a woman. I didn’t like the response; I just said to myself, “It’s okay; apparently, the Chief has now become a man again.”

All night long, the front yard of the Chief was packed full, like a marketplace. Folks were singing their parodies, drumming and dancing. Of course, they were singing all these to ridicule the Chief. Some in their group sang on that day that:

Babalola is in a lockdown; we are performing rituals,
 Babalola is in a lockdown; we are performing rituals;
 If Babalola would dare to step out, he will be done for.

The bull-whizzer was humming all over the place, accompanied by attendant noises. Some were just yelling that “Shame on you, Babalola: greedy Babalola, trucebreaker, shameless, conspirator, good-for-nothing, useless skunk; come out and see yourself in utter disgrace. Come and hear the secrets of your forefathers.”

This was how the matter of taxation became a big deal in Ojusongo. It was as if taxation was an alien concept, never a discussion, in the town before then. Thanks to the intervention of some elders in town who stepped in,

some pig-headed young men were ready to stay in front of Bale’s home until he came out to assure them that taxation would be prohibited in Ojusongo.

It seemed Osi’s advice was a help and an encouragement to the Chief on that day because he seemed cheerful after Osi left the house. He did not feel unhappy any longer, neither did he feel dejected; he just sat down, looking taciturn and meditative. One thing that amazed me on that day was that the crowd dispersed without getting the matter resolved in spite of all their threats and intimidations.

After that, no one said anything or followed up on the matter. It seemed everything was again going on smoothly. Noises subsided rapidly. But everyone said all they wanted under their roofs. This matter affected everyone – commoners, noble ones, rich folks, well-to-do folks, even chiefs in town were all affected. People carried on conversations with irritation but loud noises were no longer heard. This was a big surprise. If someone were there on that day and witnessed that level of threats with no correspondent action, neither any follow-ups on the matter, other than mere gossiping around about it, it would baffle one’s curiosity. Often, following the multitude to do anything is not a good idea. Many people seemed senseless; sometimes totally thoughtless. As far as they were concerned, only their leader was the one who had issues; they just followed him sheepishly. My own fear was that in light of the tumult of the day, our town would never enjoy peace again. But I was wrong. After only one day, everyone was gone doing their businesses as usual! Those who kept vigil at the front yard of the Chief were all totally exhausted by now. The lesson is clear: activism of the people were always of no avail without a particular leader that would keep on spurring them.

After all this, even the Chief did not know what next to do. Those uproars were dying down. Sometimes they would express contempt for him in the public; sometimes they would greet him with excitement. Sometimes, too, no one even knew what their thoughts were. The Chief and all of us who were members of his household ventured into the open with apprehension. Sometimes, we would hear rumors that they were about to get at it again, and we would all be frightened. They did not put up much show; if they did, it was nothing to write home about, after all, Osi was not lending them any support. Osi and Bale had become buddies. It seemed all three of them (the white man included), were now in sync.

When the Chief would bite more than he could chew, he set a date for the wedding of his son, Olanrewaju. There was a great deal of rumbling. There were disbeliefs among the people that the Chief would even dare to think about doing something like this knowing full well his current predicament in the town. They thought he must be out of his mind. In their minds, this was an indication that the Chief must be in the grit to embarrass himself.

However, such were thoughts in the minds of people of no consequence in town. Even the subordinate chiefs were not excited about the whole thing relating to the wedding in spite of the fact that the Chief brought all of them in on the matter.

As plans for the marriage were going on, evidence abounded that people were not going to cooperate with us. The Chief reclined one day, thinking; and he pitied himself. He then called me and said, "Mother of Olanrewaju, have you or have you not seen the spectacle of life?" We sat down and reasoned together and arrived at the conclusion that this would be a low-key marriage ceremony. On hearing this, Olanrewaju was put off, being desirous of a society wedding. He said he had participated in other people's joyous moments, why would it be his own turn and his celebration would be subdued. Of course, we were aware of his concern and felt his pain. But his father and I were just apprehensive and cautious; after all, who would not want high level joyous celebration for their child's marriage?

Osi stood firmly by the Chief throughout this pivotal moment. He objected to a subdued ceremony. He dismissed all those threats and bluffing as mere braggadocio, void of substance and assured the Chief that the wedding of Olanrewaju – his son, would be done with jubilation and fanfare. Osi was a suborn dude, and a politician extraordinary. He knew the weakness of a group that lacked any strong leadership. Truly, he heard the threats of the people and their plan to disrupt the day's wedding. They threatened to supernaturally call down a heavy downpour; they threatened pandemonium in the whole town; and promised that the Chief would regret it if he did not put them into consideration.

Days were passing by swiftly. The ceremony was coming up in two days and àisun – the bachelor's eve party, would come up the next day; yet, everyone in town looked at the Chief and all of us, members of his household, with contempt. To be honest, inside of me, I was scared to death. I advised the Chief to consider postponing the event until people were in good terms with us. Were it not for Osi's insistence, we would have postponed the ceremony. He insisted we should not, even blackmailing the Chief as less a father if he was afraid to pull off his son's marriage based only on petty threats of some disgruntled individuals. But the Chief explained to Osi that this was not a matter of just a few disgruntled dissenters but that the entire town was opposed to it. Osi would not take any of that; he told the Chief that only an insignificant few objected to the whole thing.

Gossips abounded, lies upon lies were flying around town. Reports of all that the Chief said, and what he did not say were being thrown all over the place. All preparations for the ceremony were in top gears; everything was

going on hitch-free. Thanks in no small part to Osi, who kept assuring us that all was well.

Early in the morning of the eve of the occasion, all wives in the household were up. They came to wish the Chief and the husband-to-be the very best of luck as they were looking forward to the great day ahead of them. They all came showering them with chants and praises, and the entire household was bubbling with rancorous noises of festivities, but no outsiders were involved in all these. Some were only pretentious, after all, we knew quite well that not all those rejoicing actually had the welfare of me, the bridegroom’s mother, at heart. But on that day, it was as if the bridegroom was deified. All women in the household were honoring him. He too was, in return expressing appreciations by showering them with money, and changing attires quite often. His father’s chanters were chanting his praise epithets. All my co-wives were kneeling down to reverence my son, and inundating him with praise poems. It didn’t take long before I felt overwhelmed by all these ovations. But I cheered up, I took on the “all is well” appearance. Like it or not, it was increasingly looking as if my son’s marriage day was going to be a blast.

On the very day of marriage, the sky was pitch dark, ready for a downpour. I sank in my heart, wondering if the rain would spoil the day. The knuckle heads among us still called down the rain anyway. It was stormy. Violent wind was blowing incessantly and tornadoes were spinning on the ground. There were loud blasts of thunders. Then came more thunders; winds were blowing; and then came the real heavy downpour, which lasted until mid-morning. Then, it stopped abruptly. Not long, the sun released its rays; the sun warmed up the wet ground, and not quite two to three hours after the rain stopped, everyone started feeling the warmth of the sun. I looked down, and looked up, saying in my heart, “What a real marvel this God is! Today’s rain has still ushered in its sunshine.” Even the Chief had resolved in his heart that the rain was going to be the spoiler. But he said nothing, just looking at us, and the children at the front yard playing with the dripping water from the roof of the house as the rain was falling. I was dashing in and out of the house; I, proud mother of the groom. I was transparently happy now that the rain stopped and the sky was clear. Now, the sun was shining brightly.

The ground remained wet and muddy. People were walking with mud-splattered feet all over the place. They did not even care if they were smeared with the mud. Folks were going back and forth. They were felicitating with us and bringing us gifts, especially to the bridegroom. Osi sent a flowing garment of the expensive *sányán* - the flowing garment attire, plus two loads of yams to Olanrewaju. Loads of yams, gallons of palm-oil, sheep, goats, chickens, and a variety of gifts filled our compound – I mean filled to the brim! The less privileged folks came with logs of wood, their wives came with drums of

water to fill up all earthen vessels in the household. The wedding just went on smoothly. Even some that we knew to be sworn enemies were hanging out in the periphery of our compound during the evening time and as soon as it got a little dark, they swamped in one-by-one. They came to felicitate with us, had a drink of the palm-wine and rushed out. Only Otun, the obstinate calf, did not send any gift to the Chief of all his subordinate chiefs. This hurt the Chief's feeling, especially his guilty conscience making him to think that he had betrayed Otun in so many ways. On that wedding day, no one saw any sign of bad things in town. Those who did not come for the celebrations only went to their respective works. Yet, the place was packed full. Everything went hitch-free, just as planned. Only Otun and a few of his followers did not stop by to greet us or bring us gifts. Truth be told, Olanrewaju's wedding was celebratory!

It became crystal clear now that the Chief and Otun were no longer in friendship. In the same vein, everyone now knew that the Chief and Osi were in good terms because on that wedding day, Osi was the right-hand man to the Chief; it was as if the wedding occasion was his sole responsibility. The misunderstanding between the Chief and Otun was one thing that everyone had their own different takes on, and of course, those opinions varied. It's such a terrible thing for two friends to become enemies; and of course, such often prompt varying speculations.

Some coincidence brought the Chief a rare opportunity at that point in time. One of Otun's children was at a loggerhead with someone in town over a piece of farmland. This person brought the case before the Chief and his Council men to challenge Otun's son. Many knew that the piece of the farmland did not belong to Otun's son. However, being the son of one of the popular chiefs in town, he felt he could just walk over the other fellow. In other words, Otun's son wanted to use his father's influence to cheat another person of his farmland. They tried to settle this dispute informally, but Otun's son did not agree. They took the matter to the council of the Ogboni Fraternity, Otun's son did not succumb.

On the hearing day for this issue, many came to the court. The Chief was on seat; and both Otun and Osi also took their sitting positions. Otun's son boldly lied through his teeth but there were many witnesses to refute his claims of ownership to the farmland. Even his friends and associates knew he was wrong. After the two stated their cases, to avoid conflict of interest, the Chief asked Otun to excuse the Council since the case had to do with his son, and they needed to deliberate on the matter. Otun refused. After all, Osi was a part of those who dealt with his daughter's divorce case a short while ago; and even the Chief, himself, had presided over matters relating to his family members before. Otun hesitated, but everyone hailed the Chief's position as right.

Otun went out alright; but he just stormed off to his house. The son was found guilty and ordered to leave the other person’s farmland alone and pay all the costs incurred by the other party in persecuting the case. In the judgment, the Chief stated all the hypocritical steps Otun’s son had taken on the matter. He clearly stated that Otun’s son just wanted to cheat the other person. What a tragedy! Both Otun and his son became laughing stocks! A few folks came to court on that day in the company of drummers and entertainers, singing:

He wants an inheritance, he wants an inheritance,
The ill-fated bastard does not know where inheritance comes from,
Yet, he wants an inheritance.

As often said, “A person with the mindset of inheritance leaves himself open to misery.” Otun became a good-for-nothing fellow. In the words of our elders, “Were it not for one’s cooked yam, what else could make one dip fingers into the soiling palm-oil?” It was Otun’s son that brought him this disrepute; Otun was never a bad man in any way. He was a jolly good fellow, going quietly in his own way. He acted the way of his forefathers. Bale now became a hero, a good man, even in the eyes of all those who despised him just a short time ago.

All those threats preceding the wedding of Bale’s son were over. The following day, Osi came to our house to ridicule the matter, reminding the Chief what he had told him that they needed to orchestrate the clashing of heads between Otun and the townspeople. The judgment was more to clean up the unpleasant cloud hovering over the town, than a matter of truth and justice. Osi was the one who counseled the Chief to cause a blemish on Otun to the extent that people would hate him and his son. That counsel worked like magic. As it stood now, only Otun and his family members were the enemies of the Chief. With the judgment, everyone was made to part company with him. Folks, this matter of politics is another ball game!

IX

Light After Darkness

For days and months, it seemed as if the whole town was back in love with the Chief. It was as if the past affections were restored. No one visited the matter of taxation any longer. Even the Colonial Administrative Officer did not mention it again.

The Chief continued to act circumspectly. He too was getting old and must act like an elderly. He was careful around the Whiteman. He was careful

around his people. Even the Colonial Administrative Officer was careful around him as well. Truly, the Whiteman was shrewd indeed. They would never force an issue on people. Sometimes when the Chief was opposed to something, they eased off on the matter for a while. In the process of walking on eggshells around the Whiteman, Chief Babalola would occasionally come up with some bogus falsehoods, intentional fabrications, when he deemed it fit. Sometimes he would come up with white lies to appease the Black, and come up with lies to appease the White; that way, he ran the town in peace. Interesting, indeed! This was a man who never engaged in any matter that was not attended by transparent honesty! It became apparent that his survival depended on occasional falsehoods, a sort of fabrications that would forge a delicate balance and avoid enmities from the left or from the right.

Whenever I told him that he had become something else, he would tell me that survival in life required actions by all means necessary. He said he was still drawing from the pool of the past wisdom, but applying the philosophy of “how it fits” prevailing circumstances. Alas, this was a stand the Chief would never consider in the past.

Even members of the Council and elders of the town were cautious, watching the Chief’s every move like a hawk. They all knew that all those confrontational activisms were a thing of the past for him. Ever since the drastic change of the Chief, neither the Colonial Administrative Officer nor the senior Colonial Administrative Officer spoke much any longer at meetings. Whatever the Colonial Administrative Officer had to say, it was the Chief that expressed it to the Council; all explanations were offered by him as well. In fact, more often he and the Colonial Administrative Officer would have settled a matter between them before it came to the knowledge of the whole Council. This was the subtle survival mechanism for Babalola, how he managed his new life with wisdom. He kept on to administer justice with fairness and wisdom, and followed the counsels of the Whiteman rather than rule by his own personal consciences.

One day, he called me when he just returned from a court hearing. He told me that it was clear that the Colonial Administrative Officer had truly replaced his conscience. He said whatever the officer wanted was what he did. He added, however, that the good thing was that the Colonial Administrative Officer had never misled him.

Not long, people started talking about the changed Chief, most especially how his administrative policy in running the town was such a dissent from his combative past. They said he had now become a woman in attitude. This did not pose anything new to us, we’ve seen worse; after all, the eye that has seen the bounteous sea can no longer be intimidated by the sight of the mere lagoon. Our newfound popularity did not appeal to Otun’s emotion. The

judgment handed his son a short while ago continued to infuriate him. His resentment was not so much for the judgment but the embarrassment that the Chief exposed him to and how his reputation was tarnished among the people at that time.

Everyone was now fully aware that Otun and the Chief had ceased to be friends. They had clashed. Otun himself must have said in his heart that the Chief had betrayed him, and vowed to part company with him completely. Even the Chief knew in his heart that he offended Otun. Their friendship had become superficial with the court being their only meeting point. They had ceased visiting the homes of each other. Even in the inner chamber of his heart, the Chief was troubled, knowing that he had offended Otun because both of them had vowed never to give in to the Whiteman, regardless of what he did. Otun was a determined person, almost an obstinate calf, because whatever he determined not to do, no Jupiter would make him to change his stand. And so was the Chief in the past; but his was just for a season. Much of their resolve as to how they would deal with the Whiteman had been pruned by the Chief’s new life. He had departed from that path and refused to live by it. He never even warned Otun before he had a drastic change of the heart and Otun did not see it coming; it was his own survival mechanism. The moment the Chief adhered to my counsel about following the model of the ruling style of my late father, Balogun – the titled warlord, that settled the matter. Unfortunately, Otun did not have the luck of any smart wife. It made me to think quite often that indeed, the conventional wisdom that a woman was the one that could make or mar a man in life was an indubitable fact, an unquestionable reality that Otun’s life epitomized.

But town politics can never be a clandestine activity. This matter of taxation was still there (after all, it is often said that taxation is a fact of life) but it was a no-no issue in the presence of the people. At the end of the year, everyone paid what they had paid in the past years, and no one further commented on it. As inconsequential as the Council had become, agreeing to the increased taxation was not an issue it was ready to accept or hear, let alone have serious deliberation over. It was apparent that this would not sit well with Otun. Even Osi, as undoubtedly on the Chief’s cliques as he was, would not buy into that controversial taxation law since it was something that would affect him personally, too. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer had left the whole matter in the hand of the Chief, trusting that he would see to it as of when fit.

Tactically, the Chief was buying the hearts and gaining the favors of members of the Council one-by-one. When the issue of indentured servants was becoming unbearable, the Chief volunteered to give personal loans to individual members of the Council to be able to hire paid laborers in place of relying

on the labors of indentured servants. Yet, Otun refused to take a loan. He was just not a party to the abolition of the use of indentured servants, which was the custom of his forefathers. When it became apparent to Council members as to what the Whiteman was capable of doing to them on this matter, they agreed to the abolition of the practice of using indentured servants. The new law was established without any qualms. Anyone found guilty of practicing this was heavily punished. Truly, this was a pain in the neck of the people but they lacked leadership and all they had was followership; and so, not much could be achieved by way of dissent, and progress must be stunted. To this end, whatever the Chief decided was agreeable to the Council members. The Chief's salary had been increased by the colonial government, and the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer had spoken well of him to the Governor-General in Lagos. In fact, it would be right to say the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer stood by him firmly just as God would stand firmly by mere mortals.

The Chief now uses crafty stratagems to outsmart the Whiteman's wishes. Even the Colonial Administrative Officers had known that the Chief had changed in his embrace of the colonial government's wishes, and they, on the other hands, kept on encouraging him. Even when he made mistakes, they never spoke of it in the open; they only whispered it among themselves, unlike how they used to blow open such matters in the presence of Council members when the Chief just returned from incarceration. He was highly revered now. If he somehow broke the law these days, they just overlooked it. Even if and when illicit liquors were hauled into his house in broad-day light, it was the police guards that would open the courtesy door for them to come in. Even among many citizens of the town, he was beloved because anyone in town that wanted to pose an obstruction to the colonial government operations, the Chief pacified and won them to his side through his good heart, warm deeds, patience, generosity and overwhelming love. He married off many of his daughters to many so that the parents of his sons-in-law might always be on his side on this matter of town governance. Countless were those he secretly gave loans to, just to silence them on public matters. Many were those he defended and fought off unfair treatments that targeted them just to gain their loyalties. In essence, all minor chiefs and notable citizens of the town were strongly behind the Chief except for Otun and a few inconsequential persons, who sworn never to be on the side of Chief Babalola. Otun's conscience rested on the fact that he had sworn that he would be guided by character and integrity of his forefathers. Otun was conservative, his conscience being guided only by the spirit of his forefathers.

Many working class folks stood up against Otun, and neither were they for the Chief either. The Chief tried all he could to win their support but it

did not work out immediately. At one point, it seemed as if they were all for Otun. They heaved all sorts of insults on the Chief, and all those in his circle, all over the place. They would sing songs to ridicule them. To be fair, not all these were with the prior knowledge or approval of Otun. Also, all those on the side of the Chief were not docile on the matter as well; they were returning fire for fire. Often, they would sing:

Anyone wasting time shaking the stump of the wood shakes nothing but self,
 No matter how small the needle is, the chicken would dare not swallow it,
 Small as the snake may seem, none would use it as a waistband,
 Babalola is all-in-all to you,
 Quit feeding yourself with shit!

Thus, we see the duo schism in town. On one hand, the chiefs, the affluent, the celebrities, the well-known, the rich and the famous, and traders of all sorts made a clique in the circle of the Chief. On the other hand, servants, slaves that had not purchased their freedom, relatives of slaves, hoodlums, ragamuffins, gossips, and even good people who lived by conscience were all on the side of Otun. Many of those in the circle of the Chief were those who had acquired riches in questionable ways, and for them, as often said: “The bottom of riches is often muddled with dirt.” Without a doubt, the Whiteman was on the side of the Chief. In fact, one could say they were the originators and promoters of that circle; they were the power behind it. From the highest Colonial Administrative Officers to the least of colonial police officers, they all stood firmly behind the Chief. Town politics was going smoothly although there were many in town that were not satisfied.

All these palavers did not give the Chief what used to be a wiggle room. Indeed, he no longer had the time to relax on his usual *ayò* game. He was constantly engaged in strategizing his next line of falsehood that would be indubitable. He would sometimes think about another lie that would strengthen the previous one. He must always come up with a battery of technical lies to shield the previous ones. Whatever he said that would make everyone happy was what preoccupied his thinking; maybe I should say “preoccupied our thinking,” since he and I tactically weaved those lies together in order to succeed in our town’s politics. I wonder now who could ever engage in politics without a conglomerate of little lies all of the time! This was particularly so in our time.

Chief Babalola had become a totally different person. He had become an apple of the Whiteman’s eye; those folks loved him. If one white officer left, he would be sure to hand Babalola over to the new one. The great king of

England who resided in London was impressed by all the good works Babalola did in advancing the smooth running of the colonial government in his native land. He was honored with the title of O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire). After all, the good news of his great deeds had reached the ears of King of England, thanks to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer and the Governor-General, who sent in such good tidings of the deeds of the Chief. In other words, his good deeds had traveled across the Ocean. Yet, some citizens of the town still loved him. After he had lobbied all Council members, one of them moved that his salary be increased. Everyone accepted the proposal. Otun, the lone voice against the move went home on that day humiliated.

One day, when the Chief was at his best, having fed and wine to his heart content, he called me and said, "Asabi, I greet you. This time of the Whiteman is truly pleasant. All laws enacted for the people are so good. I want you to take a look at this example: One obtains an indentured servant who works for himself one day, works one day for his master as his interest on the loan, the same servant is responsible for his own feeding, takes care of his own family, pays his taxes, and must pay his loan back - in full probably after many years, wouldn't this be an apparent unfair treatment? Should one be surprised that it would take the servant a long period to be able to pay back that loan? How many have been indentured servants that had paid just **Forty cowries** back this way over a protracted period of time - amounting to many years? Think of this: a man became indentured servant because he borrowed money to pay for marrying his wife. He was kept in servitude for twenty-five years. This was because he could not pay the loan back until he was able to get money from the dowry he received from the marriage to his daughter who was born by the same woman on which he took the loan so as to be able to marry twenty-five years earlier. Here is the punchline: Can't we see that indentured servitude is only slightly different from slavery? But, seriously, to make people understand the gravity of this concept is like pulling teeth - it's no joke!"

I responded humorously by saying, "Wow, apparently someone's eyes are now opening, right? It must now be clear to you that servanthood is no good at long last. Good grief, it seems clear now that the soothing balm heals where it feeds. I greet you, child of the Whiteman, my husband, Babalola, the Chief. The Whiteman is no fool at all. You are not talking about how they acquired the land yonder the river bank to build their beautiful mansion; you did not address the deep forest in which they chase out all the farmers and destroyed it to grow their rubber plantation; you are not talking about the incredible amount of money paid to divisional officers who are just about the age of Olanrewaju; anyway, why do you need to confront all those issues any longer, haven't you received your own salary raise? Haven't you been conferred with

three titles at one time? Anyway, if possible, you may want to transfer one of those three titles to me!”

The Chief looked informed. It seemed he immediately started to see the light on the evil deeds of the Whiteman. Yet, he still said, “Asabi, the house built by the Whiteman in which he lives, should we consider that an offence? Let’s be realistic, would it be fair to expect the Whiteman to live inside the kind of diminutive dwellings in which folks like us live? Aren’t they creatures of a different breed? Can’t you see their white color? These are good people. Inside them is as pure and clean as the paved road. It was out of sheer ignorance that I took them as enemy in the past. Not killing me in the past was evidence of the cleanliness of their hearts. It was in setting me free that has made it possible for me to return home and start living a better life. If the three titles awarded me were to be sharable I would not hesitate to give you one. After all, we worked together to earn them. In fact, you should earn more than one; were it not for you, I would have none. I want you to know that forever and ever, I will not toy with your counsels. But we should know that these white folks are good people. Or, if I may ask, have you seen something bad they have done specifically?”

I responded: “Chief Babalola, I can’t believe you have turned to this. Finding the evil deeds of the Whiteman is not farfetched. The Whiteman cruises around in their vehicles, you are dragging yourself around on your bare feet; yet, you are saying the Whiteman is good . . .” I did not finish my conversation when the Chief rose on his feet, saying: “Asabi, do not offend God; no one in your family history ever rode a vehicle; even this little pleasurable life we live is with thanks to the Whiteman’s goodwill. We should not turn ourselves into ungrateful souls.”

I kept quiet. I looked at the Chief in bewilderment. He too looked at me for some time. We looked at each other deeply. Then, the Chief spoke, “Asabi, the Whiteman is my savior. I will die serving the Whiteman. Even if they depart today or tomorrow, I must go with them.”

X

The Ray of Light

Members of the Salvation Army arrived in town. They built schools, and they built churches. They did their works among the people. People appreciated their arrival. Folks honored the white representative of the group whenever they saw him. Wherever kids saw him, they ran after him shouting, “The Whiteman on Oke Eleru.” No doubt, civilization had indeed come to Oju-songo. The population was growing as many immigrants swamped the town.

The amazing fortune of the town came as the rail system made the junction of Ojusongo its path. Rail construction workers constructed the line right through the center of the town. Then, came the population explosion; our town was host to many strangers. People came in all shapes and sizes. There were many ethnic and subethnic groups – many were Hausa people, so were many Ijebu folks, but Ibadan and Ekiti people were not so many. The Colonial Administrative Officer frequented the place. He would confer with the Chief and they would both deliberate on how the town could progress. On occasions, they would both stroll around town just to have a feel of how things were going.

Many of these new immigrants came with new ways of life, some contra-cultural in nature. Anyway, even the Chief himself had become a totally different breed. Debtor sought refuge in Ojusongo. Those who eloped with another people's wives took refuge in Ojusongo. Some criminals hid in some rooms in town until secret investigations would reveal their hideouts. No doubt, things had changed in our town. If someone with only one wife came to complain that someone from Lagos took his only wife away, the Chief would entice him to take the case to court. If a debtor ran to the Chief, the Chief would tell the creditor to take him to court and stop bothering him.

At one time, a group came from Ibadan claiming to hold adult classes. They held a meeting at the courthouse. They had conversations with various people. The Chief supported them on that day, stating that adult education was a good idea. He said even he too would also try to enroll and learn some; his wife would also learn some, he said peradventure he might not need an interpreter for communication between him and the Colonial Administrative Officers in the future. Everyone yelled out in derision on that day, "Goodness, it would be the marriage of two hypocrites!" The Chief heard; after all, they said it to his face, but he said nothing in response. That was the day it dawned on me that the Chief had become an object of contempt. I was deeply distressed. For someone to be contemptuous of the Chief this way with no repercussions was too much for me to bear. On arrival at home I called the attention of the Chief to the matter, and his response was simple: "Welcome to the Whiteman's world. You better leave those distractors alone." Thus, I realized that it was impossible for someone to be acceptable to the Whiteman and gain honor among his people.

The Chief, myself and all members of the Chief's household started learning to read and write. The Chief tried but time constrained him from being able to face it squarely like me. That was how I acquired the skills necessary to read and write in our language, the skills that helped me in writing this story by myself. Writing is such a big task! My experience was no joke. If the teacher was not patient, God knows how many times he would have given up

and walked away. This was because often, what we learned yesterday or two days ago, by today, we had totally forgotten, forcing the teacher to start all over. But as time went on, we started making progress.

Children attended regular school every single day. Their teachers were two or even three. There was one woman among them. One day, one of my co-wife’s child came home with bruises for being beaten by a teacher. It was by the eye, and this really incurred the anger of the Chief. He promised to pay the teacher a visit the following morning. He did, warning the teacher to never touch his child again; otherwise, the teacher would truly experience his rage. He let the teacher know that their humanity was intact before the coming of the Whiteman, and that not having book knowledge would not condemn a child to a lifetime of not achieving. The teacher heeded the warning, especially since it came from the Chief of the town where he worked. In fact, since that day, the occurrences of daily beatings in school abated.

When school began, many grown-up kids were admitted. In some cases, some old enough to have wives were enrolled in school. Some whose wedding days had been set would postpone them so as to accommodate school enrollment even if it would be for a short period. In our neighborhood school, where our school children attended, there was one who was older than all children in the school. He was certainly old enough to be married. He had been indentured as servant in the past and had worked to purchase his freedom. He could plow two hundred heaps, and easily harvest forty bunches of the palm fruits. If he held his hoeing instrument, none of his equals could beat him in action. He was the one that the wicked teacher who beat the son of my co-wife a short while ago started beating. He beat him so much that he forced him into a feat of rage, beating him for not mastering certain things in class. He was teaching the student the English language, asking this fellow to say what was difficult for him. He would ask him to pronounce the sound ‘th’ but the students could only say ‘t’. This was because the student had a gap in his teeth, preventing him from ever being able to pronounce it the way the teacher wanted. And so, the teacher kept beating him, with the threat that he would continue beating the student until he pronounced the sound correctly. He was hitting him mercilessly – anyone could hear the unpleasant sound of those beatings. The student had had it, and said the teacher should stop hitting him. “If you continue beating me, you will earn yourself a serious beating too,” the student warned the teacher. From his dialect, it was clear this fellow was from the town of Owu.

This teacher did not listen to the student’s warning; instead, he continued beating him. The student then fastened his belt to hold his pants firmly; he then grabbed the teacher, lifted him above the head and gave him a slam dunk. In a moment, the teacher was wasted on the bare floor. All other

students were yelling at the top of their voices: “Help, the teacher has been floored; the teacher has been thrashed; the teacher has been punished.” The teacher got his ass whooped; his tail was clipped right in front of the other school children. Henceforth, he became a gentle and tamed teacher, refraining from ever beating another child indiscriminately. Yet, the teacher beater continued his schooling hitch-free.

News soon went around the entire neighborhood, and traveled to the Chief. All of us rejoiced that the teacher got himself the much-deserved serious beating. The Chief welcomed the news and said the lousy teacher met his equal.

The Colonial Administrative Officer arrived one day unannounced. He found the Chief at his pastime *ayò* game. Instantly, the Chief rose from his seat and they both took a walk around town. They went to inspect the piece of land intended for the town’s maternity, the dispensary, and a dedicated marketplace for the use of the people. On their return, after the Colonial Administrative Officer had left, the Chief called me; and, in his characteristic way, gave me a load down of all that transpired between both of them. He spoke about their resolution about the proposed marketplace, the place dedicated for the “Sabo” where the Hausa people would settle; another place where the Ijebu people would carve out as their residence; also, where those from Lagos would build their own settlement; and so on. I told the Chief to mentally mark out a place for my stall at the marketplace because I knew that very soon it would become a matter for scrambling, and that was exactly what happened eventually. But, thankfully, the Chief had set mine aside. He also set aside those for my co-wives.

All these had been set in place even before the matter went to the Council for deliberation at all. At that time, it seemed as if the Council no longer had much power. Whatever the Chief wanted was what it endorsed, and that was what happened. It was after concluding on the matter with the Colonial Administrative Officer that he presented it to the people; and he knew how to talk to the people in such a way that they would all consent to his prior decision.

The Council now comprised mostly of young people. Otun had stopped attending the Council meetings. Osi himself only came every so often because he too was getting old. Most chiefs had left; only those at the Chief’s wits who would always answer “Yes” to his proposals were left. Everything was going honky-dory for the Chief. Yet, in the eyes of townspeople, he was not more than a farthing worth needle.

Since the train and ground transportation had arrived, Lagos to Ojusongo became a stone throw. A past journey of two days had now become one of just a few hours. The market of Egbeda, where we used to haul our merchandise on our bare heads, became where vehicles traveled several times in a single

day. And, of course, life in town was becoming more interesting. During the Christmas season, the house, compound and the backyard of the Chief would be packed full of gifts that the Christians brought for him. During the Muslim *iléyá* festival, quartered meat – thighs, and arms would pile up in the entire house. In fact, quite often we had no idea who brought what. The Chief did not adhere to any of these new religions. Yet, he did not put on the ancestral spirit masks of his father’s Egúngún, which he used to do annually in the past. He was neither a metaphoric rodent nor a bird in his religious persuasion; he did everything with everybody generally, and embraced none specifically.

Right now, one serious fear had occupied the mind of the people of Ojusongo. The immigrants started to marginalize them in everything. They were the ones whose homes were built by the roadsides. All of them were building different shops and renting them out to people. The Hausa people were trading in cola-nuts. Those from Lagos were trading in clothing. People from Ojusongo were into farming. This was creating a kind of resentment between the immigrant communities and the native Ojusongo people. The immigrants had more money to their credits than the natives of Ojusongo, and here was the Chief who had become the ultimate conformist. He was no longer defending the cause of the citizens of Ojusongo as he used to do in the past. He only preached the gospel of appeasement whenever a conflict broke out between the natives and non-native Ojusongo folks. He would say we were all the same; that we were all Yoruba; we were all black people; yet, the visitors continued to flourish more than the indigenes.

Apparently, the visitors were giving bribes to the Chief. If one of his wives gave birth to a child, all sorts of Whiteman’s medications, bread, and their foodstuff would fill our house to the brim. The Chief would speak of how humane those white folks were. People from Lagos, also known as Lagosians, were very generous. Sometimes Lagosians would bring a huge live sheep to the Chief just for his eating pleasure. The Chief would express appreciation. And in all honesty, they took good care of me as well. Countless were their gifts of traditional blouses, *asọ òkè* – hand-woven clothing, *ànkàrá* - cotton linens, *gèlè* – head dresses, earrings, and more to me. Since they had no court cases or involved in any criminal matter for which they needed respite from the Chief, who could suspect that it was just a mere setup to buy up the Chief?

The immigrants virtually killed the Chief’s voice completely. Every nice spot in town was in the hands of the non-indigenes before the Chief finally woke up to the reality of the whole thing. However, it was too late before it dawned on him. By the time he saw the light, it was almost far beyond repairs. They had amassed buildings and mansions all over the place, the choicest spots in town. Like the Tapa people of old, having found a space to

spread, they had built for themselves a circus for their entertaining *igunnu* masquerades.

After a while, the Lagosians, the Ijebu and Hausa people jointly came to the Chief to ask for his permission to have their own chiefs to lead them. They needed leaders among them. The Chief asked of them intently how come they all came together to him at the same time – whether it could be a mere coincidence or not. They could not offer any concrete explanation. He concluded that the implication was that they, the non-indigenes, were having their own separate meetings. They confessed that to be true. The Chief was terribly disappointed and angry. I did not understand the whole matter initially because when the Chief raised the matter in my presence, he did not do so with clarity. He only said the non-indigenes wanted to set him in another confrontation with the citizens. At any rate, the Chief was opposed to the proposal, and they then took the matter to the Colonial Administrative Officer behind the Chief's back. The Colonial Administrator, on the other hand, told them that he would have deliberation with the Chief on the matter and that both of them would come up with a lasting solution to it. Indeed, the Colonial Administrative Officer spoke to the Chief about the matter, but the Chief vehemently opposed the proposal. The Colonial Administrative Officer concurred with the Chief. They then told the people that this was not acceptable to them at all.

I thought within me that those people would turn the matter into a hostility between them and the Chief. Reverse was the case; they never acted in hostility. In fact, the Lagos people were frequenting our house more than ever before. Whenever I went to purchase cloths, they would sell to me at discounted rates. If I purchased salt, they would tell me to keep my money. One evening, the Chief told me to bring out four bottles of wine for some visitors. I brought the wine to him. I saw two Lagos folks who stooped at the feet of the Chief and spoke to him in a whispering tone. It's no exaggeration to say that the Chief was an elderly man full of wisdom, and I had no right probing into his conversations or probe into his affairs except the ones he wanted to bring me in on. They received the bottles of wine and left.

We did not revisit the matter. The Chief did not brief me concerning it either. Not long after this, however, the Chief started building his house facing the main road, and I had the instinct that he probably had received some bribe from the Lagosians. I knew he himself was rich, and this matter was not the type one could question in my utmost respect of his position as husband, even if he loved me more than he already did, and, no doubt, he did love me a great deal. A building comprising of eighteen shops was what he built, and he did it with an amazing swiftness. He asked the Colonial Administrative Officer to help him find a white trader who could rent the units and he did.

I cannot say categorically how the conferment of chieftaincy on the non-indigenes came to become a reality but it was not that long after the Chief completed his building project, which I just talked about, that the white folks moved there. Then, we learned that the Lagos folks were going to have their own chief, the Hausa people wanted their own Seriki, and the Ijebu people also wanted their own chief. I was puzzled by all these. I looked at the Chief in the mouth. He, too, looked at me in the mouth, but neither one of us uttered a word about the matter.

But, seriously, what I hated the most was for me to be referred to as the wife of the Chief and for other people’s wives to be called by the same title. I detested it with passion. I called the Chief aside and told him this fact. I told him that he belittled himself by conferring chieftaincy titles on those visitors. He told me that it was the Colonial Administrative Officer that said the people had the right to be conferred with the chieftaincy titles. He said he went along with it because he did not want to annoy the Whiteman on the matter. For a long time, we went back and forth on this issue but with no conclusions. After this, I advised him to present the matter before the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, after all, he was his friend, and it was common knowledge that white folks are more intelligent than black folks. Let’s hear his take on the matter. Indeed, the Chief brought the matter before the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer but he did not take it seriously. However, when the Chief kept hammering the matter and supporting it with little white lies that folks were confusing them for their titles, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer started rethinking his stand on the whole thing.

His advice was that the title of the Chief should be changed to a totally different one because it would be difficult to stop those chiefs from enjoying their newfound titles. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer instructed the Chief to go and consider what new title he would like and let one member of his Council on his side bring the matter before the General Council.

This was a colossal deal. I slept deeply over the matter and thought about how I would love for people to recognize me and call me. Would it be Wife of the Monarch, Wife of the Olu, or Wife of who else would I bear that would be stronger than that of the “Chief?” which was what everyone knew me for, and for which I am used to? As I pondered over this matter, the Chief also was consumed by the thought. We both agreed that the Chief should become a monarch – the King. That way, his title would be “Olojusongo”.

The question now was who would present this matter before the Council and be believable? Who was the friend of the Chief who we could present the matter to? We thought about it for a while until the Chief mentioned Osi. I exclaimed, “Thank you, Babalola, the wise man” and his response was, “Asabi, are you kidding me?”

I was very glad about the matter, and I considered the counsel a completely wise one. The matter now was how to present the matter before Osi. The Chief assured me to relax and leave the rest to him and that was what I just did.

The Chief called Osi that same evening and presented the whole matter to him as a friend. But Osi refused to do the Chief that favor. He said, “Babalola, does the world revolve around you alone? The money that the Lagosians brought to you, you kept it without sharing with anyone. Are you an ingrate? This was what precipitated enmity between you and Otun. I will deal with you on this matter and it would shock you.

The Chief came up with excuses before Osi, denying the allegation levied against him regarding having received bribe from anyone. Getting home, he told me the whole thing. I advised that if the people of Lagos gave him something, he should go and share with Osi because a fight between both of them should be unheard of. The Chief doubled down on his story of not getting money from anybody. He said however, he would not mind bringing a bribe to Osi so he would not kill his dream. I looked suspiciously and concluded within me that he probably got the money but he was only too embarrassed to come clean to me on the issue. I agreed that we should take money to Osi to pacify him so that he did not make an issue out of it all. Even if our title did not change, at least we should not get ourselves in hot water because the new Colonial Administrative Officer in town was yet to be real close with the Chief.

Osi refused the money blatantly. I then took the money there myself but he refused again. He was in rage, hauling insults on my husband and branding him as selfish, worthless, and ungrateful. I was at my wit’s end on this matter. I told myself that I was the harbinger of this brouhaha and we regretted bringing the matter to Osi. We probably would have had somebody else to confide in on the matter and get it behind us on a day that Osi was absent from the meeting. What else was our option? The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer wanted to know the progress about this issue. For a long time, we ran out of ideas.

Then, we started thinking of how Osi learned about this money issue and in my own mind, I asked myself also that if indeed, the Chief did not receive the bribe why on earth would Osi make up such bogus story? We started investigating, and we did this for a fairly long time. Then, we heard that it had even been reported in the newspaper in Lagos that the Chief of Ojusongo took money from some individuals before giving them land in his town. On the day we heard this news, the Chief did not sleep all night long. Even I did not sleep either. Of course, all other members of the household slept lie logs of wood. We were the ones chased around by our guilty conscience. We were awaiting the coming of the Colonial Administrative Officer as well as the

colonial police plus the shame and ridicule that would accompany it. I wept bitterly. Sometimes I would say, “Babalola, here comes incarceration again!” Babalola responded saying, “Never will an innocent suffer. It was a favor I did the people from Lagos; I received not even a penny from them.”

They did not come after him, but when the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came to Ojusongo, he jested about the matter and dismissed it as nonsensical write-up in one of the newspapers in Lagos accusing the Chief of receiving bribe. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer pulled out the newspaper and gave it to the interpreter to read and interpret to the Chief. The interpreter interpreted the content. The Chief denied the allegations; even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said he knew the report to be false, anyway. He noted that all the records and paperwork left to his credit had proven to him that the Chief was a good man and totally innocent, a man who would not accept any bribe no matter how pressured he was.

When the Chief gave me this good tidings, I was overjoyed. I then warned him to be very cautious because it’s the Whiteman’s world. The Chief gave the impression that he did not take kindly what I just said. But he did not come out straightforwardly. He simply said, “What is it about all these people who are writing all these untrue stories about someone else in the newspaper? Don’t they get a life?” I responded, “Newspapers are a part of the Whiteman’s culture. Anyone is free to say anything inside it.” Ever since then, the Chief has become sensitive to newspapers, even more cautious of it than he was of the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer.

There were some among the people of Ojusongo who abandoned farming for trading at the marketplace. They purchased cocoa, palm-kernels, hauling wares around, and serving as conductors for transportations. They, too, were beginning to see what the people from Lagos and those from Ijebu were up to, and they were reporting back to one another, especially those who still remained on the farm. They even exaggerated the matter because they were insinuating at one point that the Ijebu people were planning to send the natives out of town, remove the Chief of Ojusongo, so that the Ijebu chief might become the paramount Chief of Ojusongo. However, this was nothing but falsehood, a white lie. Indeed, the Ijebu people were working their butts out, building houses in the choicest part of town. They built shops in the middle of the marketplace, shops directly facing the paved road, and owning huge mansions behind the Chief’s place. The Hausa people also built all kinds of small houses in which they lived; they were truly rich but never built any elaborate homes, quite unlike the Ijebu and Lagos people. The Ojusongo people became naturally jealous and uneasy.

It took some time before the rumor concerning the bribe purportedly received by the Chief spread. Many came to the Chief to inquire about the

matter. Even people from Lagos said to give the bribe to the Chief swore that they gave not even a penny to anyone. And so, we were all at peace, especially me, since I had entertained the possibility of the Chief having received the bribe. He denied the matter in the open.

For some time, nothing was eventful. There was peace and pleasure in town. People were giving and taking in marriage. I became very suspicious of the variety of gifts pouring in. Babalola kept saying he did not elicit gifts from anybody. He would say, "If they bring it, I'll take it and nothing would come out of it." Even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer would come and hangout with the Chief on a glass of wine, chatting as they relaxed, jesting and deliberating on civic matters. In fact, the Colonial Administrative Officer had some proficiency in the Yoruba language. Whenever he uttered some, they would both laugh hysterically; and we all would say indeed this white man was a good man.

Right now, they did not need the interpreter, as they both had become friends, sharing camaraderie at all times.

XI

The Hypocrisy of Life

Urbanization comes with its own pain in the neck. Just as many good things came into Ojusongo, so did the bad ones as well. Robbers were there in abundance. Thieves were breaking into homes in broad-daylight. Pickpockets would easily grab stuff off of folks walking down the street, and no one could tell who performed such heartless act. Some of these border on the ridiculous. I recall the episode of a woman coming from Church and carrying her Bible on her head. Those bandits thought it was money she was carrying on her head and rode pass her on their motorcycle and snatched away what the poor women carried on her head that day. She yelled at the top of her voice, "It's no money; it's the Bible!" Further down the road, she found her Bible flung by the roadside and the hoodlums had zoomed off in their shameless, cowardly getaway quest. That was easy: the owner simply picked up her stuff and went her way. On hearing this story, the Chief simply burst into laughter, saying, "These muggers are just knuckleheads, queer in all their ways." The Chief did nothing about it; he did not bring the matter to the Council; in fact, it did not even sound like any big deal to him. I whispered to myself that Babalola had indeed turned himself into something else.

Just as homes were springing up in Ojusongo, so was a prison facility was being erected there. The prison was built at the outskirts of the town, and was soon packed. The Council soon began to deliberate on the need to build another one since they already ran out of space in the present location. Besides,

the old one was not that strong. A fence was built around it just, about seven to eight feet high; yet, there were many times that prisoners escaped from there. Sometimes they would look for some of the escapees and find them, punishing them for such criminal intents. Some would be lucky and would never be apprehended. They would sometimes take a hike from Ojusongo through Sojuolu en route Ajase, never to be found again. It was the duty of the Colonial Administrative Officer to oversee prison facilities, coordinating all activities there. Matters like feeding, clothing, accommodations, and everything that pertained to the running of the prison system fell under his oversight. Truly, he performed the duty quite well. Once or twice he asked the Chief to visit the place and the Chief let me tag along. He said it would be nice for me to see what the prison looked like so as to appreciate his ordeal during his incarceration. When I went with him, I was overwhelmed by all that I saw. I strode around the yard in the stylish fashion of the Chief’s wife. All prisoners were looking at me winking as if to beg for me to hand them some gifts. One woman there got my attention. I had no idea what her offence was, but she was chained on both legs, and she sat down, covering her leg as if concealing those chains. She too wanted me to give her something but that was not possible at all. Here I was, in the presence of my husband and the Colonial Administrative Officer. Neither my husband nor I could do anything on that day.

As we were walking away from the bathroom of the prisoners, one winked at me and asked for a cigarette, even if it were half-smoked. The Chief was not a cigarette smoker; he only smoked the pipe. I just dropped some coins on the floor in case this person could pick it up and use it to purchase cigarette during their labor furloughs. Some other prisoners saw it and also asked me to do them the same favor, which I did. In all, I must have done the same for five or six prisoners on that day.

We returned home and the Chief told me that those prisoners were only spoilt; if they had seen how the prison looked like in Lagos, they would know what fun they were having there in the Ojusongo facility. He told me that he was not unaware of my gifts of money to some of them. I told him the inmates actually begged for it. The Chief thought it was okay, after all, we knew many of these prisoners quite well in person, anyway. We knew some before they were incarcerated; we knew some when they came to work at our compound. Our courtyard was usually swept clean by prisoners. They hewed down big logs, cleaned the open sewage, singing as they executed their chores.

One day, it came to our attention that one prisoner had escaped. His name was Faripo. He was known for minting fake money, and was sentenced to prison for fifteen years. The sentence was handed down to him by a white judge. Faripo was not considered a serious man, seen as totally

inconsequential. News spread all over the place as it used to be the case whenever a prisoner escaped. The search crew charged with the responsibility of looking for him went about doing their business. It was none of my business, neither was it that of the Chief. That was the duty of the police and the prison warders.

The Colonial Administrative Officer did all necessary investigation; yet, the jail-walker was not found. We learned that those that were responsible for the escape were duly punished because it became clear that it was an insider's job. After all these, it seemed the matter came to a close. Well, not long after, the Colonial Administrative Officer went for a visit to the prison and was stopped by two prisoners, who told him they had something important to tell him. They confessed that they were the ones who murdered Faripo and that he never really did escape. The Colonial Administrative Officer was shocked on hearing this confession. They confessed that it was only that at that time their guilty conscience was pricking them. This was due to the fact that some innocent warders were punished for a crime they did not commit. The Colonial Administrative Officer did not at first believe them, saying they were only talking nonsense. But getting back to the office, he mentioned this to his big boss, who then said it was a matter worthy of a thorough investigation. The Colonial Administrative Officer then came back to the prison, requesting the two prisoners to rehash their story. They even said they were prepared to take the Colonial Administrative Officer to the shallow grave where they buried Faripo. The white man agreed, and they took him to the site. On getting back to the office, the Colonial Administrative Officer narrated the development to his big boss again. The latter then ordered that the two prisoners be put together in a separate protective custody. That way, they would not have contacts with any other inmates. This must be a matter of top secret.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer himself visited the prison on this same matter and called on the two confessors, asking them intensely about Faripo that they had confessed to his murder. Their explanation was this:

“Long live the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. They were incarcerated for burglary and prayed for God's forgiveness. However, on getting to the prison, they were confronted by this tragic event. They said they were assigned to work at the Chief's yard and the Chief pulled them aside to seek a favor of them, promising that if they could implement an assignment for him, he would do everything in his power to get them released from prison. The Chief implored them to please help murder Faripo whenever they went to perform labor on the field and bury him in the sand. We asked why he wanted to get Faripo murdered. He said he was the tattletale that revealed to the public that he received money from the Lagos people before being allocated their

chieftaincy spot. He told them that if the man was not murdered and he came out alive, he would get him in another trouble. We agreed to his request. But after murdering the man and the Chief started to punish the innocent warders, we lost heart and repented of our evil deed. We felt the best to do is to confess and be punished once and for all so that we might receive forgiveness from God.”

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was perturbed. The matter was beyond speech, and so, he was speechless, confused of what could be done immediately. He asked himself, “The Chief requested that Faripo should be murdered. The Chief received bribe and so, ordered that Faripo be murdered?” Indeed, Faripo was from Lagos. He was a popular person in town. Truly, he could know if the Chief did receive money from someone. But why would he want to tattletale on the Chief? Even if the Chief did receive some money from the Lagos folks, it could be because he did them a favor; what would be his fear if the Lagos people revealed this fact?

This matter was confusing to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. It was beyond the scope of his imagination. However, by virtue of his duty, he must do right with the matter. And so, the first thing he requested was for them to take him to the site of the grave. He asked them, “When you were killing Faripo, where were the other prisoners and the warder who brought you to the worksite?” They said that was not exactly where they worked on that particular day. They pointed at a different spot up yonder where they worked. They said they only snuck out of the worksite bamboozling Faripo into following them to the place. They said he followed them until they got to the back of the tree. One of them said he then pulled out a club and clubbed him on his bare head. He fell down and they started beating him up until he died.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said all was well and then sent a message to the head health inspector that he had an important assignment for him. He contemplated whether or not to get the Chief arrested before exhuming the corpse of Faripo. This confusion was so much that he quickly drove himself to Ibadan and went to seek counsel from attorneys. The advice was for him to quickly arrest the Chief as soon as they arrived at Ojusongo. If there was going to be further investigation, it would be only after the arrest.

It was the eve of the Council meeting when the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer arrived at Ojusongo. There were many things he needed to do at the meeting that day. One of such was the increment in taxes which had been left unattended since the other time. He had arranged that it was time to take the bull by the horn on the matter. He also wanted to break open the truth of the matter to everybody the same day. Among matters at hand was the new administration, which he had been pondering about for some time,

and which needed to be presented to the Council. But more pressing now was the arrest of the Chief. He was really puzzled on this serious matter. He decided it would be after the meeting that the Chief would be arrested. That way, the two serious matters before him would have had resolutions.

When the meeting commenced, it was the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer who stood up to speak. He said, "For months or even years now, the Governor-General had approved the increment in taxation. This is the third year we presented the matter but it was without any cogent resolution. Last year I asked your Chief who said he had not had the time to present the matter before you. In all communities around here, we are the only ones that have not started paying the new tax. I am here at today's meeting to let you know that from next month, which would be the beginning of the new tax season, there will be an increment of four and one-half shillings on men's tax, and two and one-half shillings on women's. The tenement taxation is also there. I will have to look into this one because it seems that those who are supposed to be paying this are barely doing so. This is not fair. It is the size of one's income that should determine how much one pays to the government. I would like to add to this announcement that I will no longer have a different deliberation with the Council about this matter beyond what I am saying here right now. I will not have conversations with the Chief about it beyond what I am doing here now. This is an order from the Governor-General, and we must all abide by it. Even the Governor-General pays his own tax. I also pay mine as well. It is the civil responsibility of all of us to pay these taxes."

"When those whose job is to collect these taxes come to you, kindly pay them immediately. The law punishes anyone who fails to pay his or her own taxes, and it is not my heart desire to see any of you punished on this matter. Therefore, let us act like the truly civilized and discharge our duty to the government of the town. As things are going on in this town, there is brilliant hope for your future. It takes money to provide all these amenities of life."

This was how the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer concluded his speech. He spoke in a tough tone (this might be because of his sadness on the problem with the Chief). It was clear to everyone that this had become a matter of compulsion for everybody. No one responded to the matter immediately. The chief of the Ijebu people was the first to stand up and speak, saying: "Long may the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer live. Long may the Chief live. Long live all our elders. Ladies and gentlemen: May God keep your homes in peace. May you prosper in all your ways. May you be successful in your enterprises. This matter brought to us by the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer is a very important one. In fact, we should acknowledge and appreciate his patience. We should give kudos to him for a job well done. The issue of taxation is a mandatory one. This is a commonsensical thing. Looking at

all these amenities of life with which we are endowed would it not be clear to anybody that a lot of money must have been expended to make them happen? There would not be the proverbial tasty stew if money has not been in the picture. Therefore, please don’t let us waste the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer’s time; let us just agree that paying the tax is a done deal, and we will do so from the bottom of our hearts.”

The chief of Lagos stood up and seconded the opinion of the Ijebu chief. The Chief looked befuddled; Osi looked befuddled. Then, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer called on Osi to air his view before the Chief would round everything up. Osi looked stupefied, unsure of what to say. He looked at the direction of the matter and it became clear to him that there was no wiggle room on the payment of the increased taxes. Osi refused, saying it was not yet his turn to contribute to the conversation; he urged common citizens to address the matter first. A good number of people contributed to the discussion; some were for the matter, some were against it. Then, Osi spoke:

“Senior Colonial Administrative Officer, you are our friend. You have never deceived or cheated us. You never misled or misinformed us. Why shouldn’t we pay government taxes? The government has no cola-nut plantation of its own; it does not have a cocoa farm; it has no shop where it sells cloths or liquor; yet the government spends money. Where then would the money come from if we do not pay taxes? We will all pay those taxes; but the Chief has the final say on the matter.” And so, the conversation then shifted to the Chief.

All along, the Chief and the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer did not make an eye contact. There were no quiet conversations between them as their custom was; he did not glance in his direction for an exchange of pleasantries or just any small smile. The Chief was in utter confusion on that day. What the heck was going on? This was not typical of the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. Could it be that he heard some bad news from his folks in his country? Could it be that his wife was sick? What could it be that made it difficult for him to look him in the face and stare in his direction as usual? Yet, the Chief took heart and spoke: “I greet this congregation. I thank Osi, the chief of the Ijebu people, the chief of the Lagos people, and all of you that have contributed to this conversation. The matter has resolved itself. The new taxes must be paid. It is true that this matter has lingered for too long; but it is my joy that it has finally been laid to rest today.”

After this, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer rose and spoke. “Those of you reading the newspapers would have read that we are currently organizing a new government policy right now. This policy has been in the consideration of our King in England for a fairly long time. He and the Governor-General had been deliberating on it. After that, many politicians had talked about the matter. Many Yoruba monarchs have also addressed the

matter. Now, it is time to explain it to the people to some extent. The first thing is that this matter affects every citizen. In coming up with the laws to be used in this town in the future, we want all of you to be involved in the process. That way, you will need to elect your representatives. Once your representatives are aware of what is going on in government affairs, it means you too are involved in government. One junior Colonial Administrative Officer will be coming here very soon, who would go around the surrounding communities to explain the whole process.”

No one said a single word. This was because no one understood what he was talking about. The whole assembly was numbed. Then, the Chief spoke: “We greatly thank the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. For some time now, we’ve been hearing and seen a flash of what is being said right now. Today is the fourth day that a group of people came to me saying they wanted to start an organization. They called the name of their organization “Egbé Afénifére.” They said it was a civil organization. They said they were arranging to elect people to serve under the new government administrative structure, which is supposed to start soon. I told them to come back so as to give them a chance to address the Council about the organization. They are yet to return. They went to Sojuolu, but I never heard back from them. However, I am sure they have not yet started this organization in Sojuolu. It is possible that we too may welcome the organization here. This is up to all of us. That would be my only knowledge of the new organization. Otherwise, I’ve not heard of it anywhere else. After all, I don’t know how to read the newspapers. And those of you who do read them never share anything with me except when an issue about me is written in them. I think we might want to pause until the junior Colonial Administrative Officer comes to town to educate us on the matter.”

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said that was okay. He only managed to say hello to the Chief that day when the meeting was over. When the Chief arrived at home, he mentioned the matter to me. I said it might be that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was grappling with his own domestic problems, which prompted his giving the Chief a cold shoulder.

The ground was circling around us but we were totally oblivious of our predicaments. Sadly, the deafest - totally oblivious person who knows the least about a matter, is always the one to whom the matter is most affected. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer took the matter of arresting the Chief a totally secret one. One would think that at the level of our friendship with this white man, he ought to have mentioned it to us even once. But he never divulged the matter to the Chief. Even we, too, were having some premonitions concerning the whole thing. This is because whenever something sinister is about to happen, the person concerned should at least have an instinct – the body has its unique way of communicating the evil to come to the person’s

mind. The Chief became inactive, neither going to the farm nor stepping out to play his usual ayò game. At one point, he said: “Asabi, I have no idea why I am feeling a strange instinct. I am not happy. I don’t feel like doing anything – just not excited; kindly go and visit Olanrewaju; after all, the due date for the wife is fast approaching.” I told him I was not feeling like going anywhere on that day; and for the very first time I refused to go on an errand for the Chief, and he did not take offence of it.

That night, I slept and had a dream. I saw my father, Balogun – the titled warlord. He frowned at me. I greeted him but he uttered no response. I then drew closer to him and said, “Father, why are you acting to me this way?” He responded, “Lay no blame on the pest that consumes the leaves of the green vegetable; let’s look at and blame it on the charm of the cute and appealing leaf.” I asked what that adage meant. He further replied: “Keep your secret only to yourself; real people no longer exist; life has become an abode of hypocrisy and lies.” I was about to ask for the meaning of this proverb yet again when I woke up. I was scared to death. I recall vividly the same proverbs that Aboderin, the elephant hunter, uttered to me in a dream when I was a young woman. I was curious of all that happened on that day following the strange dream, and suspected something sinister was about to happen again. I rose from sleep, lit the lamp, and went to wake my husband up. I narrated the dream to him. We speculated but could not come up with its possible meaning. We then went back to sleep. For the remainder of the night, I could neither sleep nor even doze off a bit. I was just incessantly scared inside my own room, in a room in which I had lived in excess of thirty years.

I went to the backyard. The moon shone brightly. The full moon with its all-night appearance, had begun. I was confused, knowing not exactly what to do. I then went back inside. The cockcrow could be heard clearly from a distance. All I wanted was for the day to finally break. I went back to say hello to the Chief, who was in a deep slumber in his own case. I said to him, “Chief, I have not been able to catch a wink since the middle of the night when I woke you up. Sleep just eluded me completely.” The Chief said nothing in response; he was still in a total sleep mood, a man who had no problem sleeping at any time.

At daybreak, we had a conversation about the matter. But the Chief did not make any big deal out of the whole thing. He said things do happen that way occasionally.

XII

It's All About Fate, Not by Spell

Today is a Friday; tomorrow, a Saturday. On Fridays, the tradition here was that all Muslims would converge at the Chief's residence following their returns from their mosques. They would come to pay him a visit and in turn receive parting gifts. Strangely, on this particular Friday, nobody stopped by. We had no idea what prompted that action or inaction. We were astonished, not sure exactly what the heck was going on around here, or what to make of it. In the evening, the Chief called on the chief of the Ijebu people, who was a Muslim and asked him what exactly was going on that prompted the Muslims not to pay him the weekly visit. The chief said he was not at the mosque on that day but that he would inquire from the chief of the Lagos people, who, too, was a Muslim and find out the reason they did not stop by the Chief's place on their return from the mosque that afternoon.

We left this matter alone until Saturday morning. The Chief had been up for some time, sitting in the room but doing nothing substantial. I had been up too but stayed indoors as well.

Then came the sound of a running vehicle. Thereafter, the Chief called on me, saying, "Asabi, here comes the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. He apparently came to make amend of his bad behavior of the other day. I will stare him down when he enters. I will ignore him, just to give him the taste of his own poison that he gave me in public some five days ago." I said to him, "Please don't be crossed with this white man. Remember that it was just yesterday we were complaining about the Muslims who did not stop by to pay us a visit. Are we just going to make enemies of everyone?" That was how we were chatting on as a constable walked in and told the Chief that a Colonial Administrative Officer wanted to see him. This was not the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer he was expecting. The Chief then called on me saying, "Asabi, he only sent his subordinate; he could not appear in person." I said, "Hurry up and step out to see him." And so, the Chief stepped out and saw a completely different Colonial Administrative Officer whom he had never met in the company of four colonial police officers. The Chief greeted them; they returned his greetings. He offered them a seat. The Colonial Administrative Officer said they would not sit down but they had come to him. The Chief asked if they needed privacy for a conversation. He said that would not be necessary. As the Chief was talking, one of the police officers tapped him in the shoulder and said, "I arrest you on the authority of the King." The Chief asked, "Arrest me for what? I don't get it!" Arrest me on the authority of the King? Which King? Having done what?" By the time he finished his chats with them, those police officers had brought out their handcuffs and

handcuffed the Chief. Only he and they were there. No one inside the house knew what was going on. The whole episode did not last more than five minutes. I was just trying to take a look at them outside when I met the Chief shackled. Looking at me, he said, “Asabi, here we go again; what you are seeing is all I’ve seen too.” I held my head with my hands and yelled out in exasperation. The entire compound rushed to the scene. I shouted, “Here I come again. The Whiteman is at his game one more time. They’ve come to arrest the Chief again.”

Thus, the entire household assembled. We women were wailing; it was as if we were bereaved. The Chief looked baffled. Then, the officers said there should be no further delays; the next stop would be Ibadan. I asked on that day whether they came all the way from Ibadan to arrest him; and the policemen answered in the affirmative. I quickly dressed up. We were all in a state of utter confusion. I implored one child to quickly go and get Olanrewaju from his house for me since he might not be aware of what was going on. They dashed off to get him but by the time he arrived, they had taken the Chief away in handcuffs. I quickly rushed to Osi’s house and intimidated him with what was going on. He smiled wryly, and said, “Now, all is out in the open!” I spoke for about five minutes but he said little or nothing. I asked if he would find me a vehicle so I could go to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. I got to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer’s house and he said no one could see him. I dashed off to the home of the chief of the Lagos people; they told me he was away to Lagos since the previous day. I bolted to the home of the chief of the Ijebu people, only to be told he was called from his town on an emergency, having experienced a terrible bereavement. I launched myself to the home of Otun, but was told he stepped out to see off a visitor. I then decided to wait for him. After a long wait, the rascal emerged from the room fuming at me, “Asabi, now you know your way to my house, right? Don’t you know the way leading to the homes of Osi and the chief of Lagos people?” I prostrated on my face and pleaded for him to come to my aid at this difficult time. He said he was powerless on the matter since it had gone to the hands of the Chief Justice in Ibadan.

O my goodness; it’s clear, Ibadan was beckoning at me again! I headed straight to Ibadan on public transportation and in the company of Olanrewaju and two or three other people from the compound. We arrived in Ibadan but had no idea of where to go. We then headed straight to the home of the Chief of Ibadan. He was asleep on arrival but we waited until he woke up. We then narrated the whole matter to him. He said he had heard nothing about this story beforehand. He said this was an issue with the Whiteman and it would be in the Whiteman’s court that the trial would take place. He sympathized with us gravely, saying were the case to be heard by his own court, he

would have known how to handle the situation. We then head to the home of the Balógun – the titled warlord, of Ibadan, and we were just going from the home of one chief in Ibadan to another with no respite; everyone only sympathized with us. I thought about the whole thing and felt that we should return to the home of the Chief of Ibadan, letting him know we were the same group of people he housed about twenty years earlier when the same Chief had another issue. We went back to see the old man intimate him with all the efforts we had made since leaving his place. He prayed for a respite on the whole matter. I introduced myself as the person he met twenty years earlier when this same Chief had a court case and we slept in his house. The Chief smiled, telling us that the Chiefs of Ibadan never had lengthy life expectancies; they often died like chickens. He said in the last twenty years that I was referencing, he would be the third Ibadan Chief. I looked perplexed, thanked him and we moved on.

On our way out, we met a woman beggar, begging for alms. She was a borderline between slight insanity and stark madness. She must have been bewitched somewhere. From her mouth came a barrage of prayers and invocations: “May you not get cut in crisis with Ibadan; may you not face a hostility with the Whiteman.” Even in the midst of my huge problem, I opened up my waist wallet and handed her one penny that day. Because her prayer was just what I needed.

Where else could we go? Then, Olanrewaju suggested that we should head on to the same prison of that time, and that it could be where Babalola was taken. We headed there but we were prevented from entering the building. However, we were told that it was there that they had kept Chief Babalola. We inquired of the warder that we met at the gate if he was aware of the case they made against the Chief. He responded by saying, “I heard them saying that he murdered someone.” Astounded, I burst into a bitter cry. The Chief, murdering someone? When did he murder the person? At night or in broad-day light? We hardly left the company of each other. If he was not home, you could bet he was in court. If he was not in court, you were sure he was at the *ayò* game joint, enjoying the game. If he was not at the *ayò* game, he had most likely strolled to the farm to pay a visit to his servants and laborers. When, then, did he have the time to commit a murder? This was how I was cutting and slicing everything in my characteristic way, and doing so for a long time. I asked about the time we could be permitted to see him. The warder told us it would be after the weekend since Christians did not work on Sundays.

We returned to the home of the Ibadan Chief who ordered that we be cared for. It was there that the chiefs of the people of Lagos and Ijebu, plus other important citizens of Ojusongo came to pay us a visit. They commiserated with me a great deal. They expressed their sorrows on hearing the new

development. I asked when they heard of the matter; they said their knowledge of the matter preceded the meeting the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer had with them on taxation. That would be about five days before the Chief’s arrest; yet we did not hear as no one deemed it fit to come and talk to us about it. The chief of the Lagos people said such matter was difficult to disclose since it was those responsible for the whole debacle that came to whisper the matter in their ears, and that they did not believe the matter to be true. I asked intensely of their knowledge of the whole thing. The chief of the Lagos group told me everything. I was agape. I mused but knew nothing to say. He said the matter had been under investigation for a couple of weeks but they did not want anyone to know. They were all coming to visit with us and they chatted with us, but none of them brought the matter to our attention.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer kept on with the investigation. He again invited the health inspector of the other day and they exhumed the corpse and kept it in the mortuary at the hospital. The police officers were going back and forth. They were repeatedly eliciting more information from the prisoners who came forward to admit murdering Faripo. They invited the mother of Faripo to come forward and identify the corpse if it was indeed that of her son. When she saw the corpse, she burst into tears, saying: “Thanks a lot, Babalola; my son did not kill anyone; he only minted illegal money, and the government did not sentence him to death but I better receive back my son alive from the government but here is my son’s dead body.” So, she did cry inconsolably, saying she was sure the corpse was that of his son.

What other witnesses would one need? Those who murdered him confessed, and stated their reasons for murdering him. The mother positively identified the remains to be those of his son. Faripo was nowhere to be found in prison. Tell me, what other witnesses could be needed?

On Monday, Babalola was taken to the police station from prison. They read to him the case they had against him. They then asked if he pleaded guilty or not guilty. He said he had no idea what they were talking about. They asked if he had something to say; he said he had none. They prodded him much but he had nothing to tell the police. They then returned him to the prison. They constantly visited him in prison to interrogate him but he had nothing to tell them. And, really, he just did not know what to say. It all seemed to him as if he was dreaming. Whether he was in a trance or in real life, he was unsure. Later on, he was appointed a public defender, who also visited him in prison and asked him a great deal of questions. All that Babalola told him was that he had nothing to say. The lawyer made it clear that he was on his side and it was his duty to get him out of his predicament. But Babalola said he knew nothing about the whole thing. The lawyer was shocked on

that day, thinking that Babalola just wanted to conceal the truth from him on purpose.

After all this, the police took Babalola to the court in Ibadan. This was a small court. The judge inquired of all that the policemen had had to say. Those prisoners said what they had been saying in secret openly. Everyone was surprised. The health inspector spoke of how they exhumed the dead body. The doctor testified to the fact that he thought that they clobbered the person to death. He also explained that the person had died so long that it was difficult for him to be able to do a thorough job on the body. Then, the judge asked him, "Doctor, do you think Faripo was beaten to death?" He responded, "It is possible he might not have been beaten to death because there were no broken bones found on the body and the body had been so much decomposed that it was hard to tell specifically what manner of death he suffered."

They called on Faripo's mother and she said categorically, "The dead body was that of my son." The judge then asked, "But how do you know?" Faripo's mother responded with questions, "How would I know if it were my son? Even if I see an ordinary bone of my son, I would identify it; that was the son whom I carried in pregnancy for nine months, whom I gave birth to, and whom you people beat to death, and now, you are . . ." The judge stopped the woman, telling her that she had said enough and had responded to his questions; the rest was just unnecessary sermonizing. The woman then broke down in bitter tears.

Babalola's lawyer rose on his feet, giving the impression that he wanted to do something significant. He said that all he and his client needed to say would be stated before a higher judge. He said they had nothing to present before the lower court; but suffice to say that Babalola was not guilty of any offence.

Afterwards, even though they did not grant Babalola a bail, the lawyer was granted permission to pay him a visit several times. The day Babalola and all of us saw each other, we wept bitterly. Olanrewaju cried like a woman; I burst into tears; even Babalola himself wept like a woman. I couldn't look him in the eye, neither could I ask him any question. When our wailing was getting too much, the warder of the other day consoled me and entreated me to go home and come back another time.

I sent Olanrewaju back to Ojusongo, and he returned to Ibadan with an earful of reports of all that he heard and how different people had acted to him. He just went back to bring some money, clean up the house so as to put it in order since we left home in an emergency. He also needed to check up on his wife who was heavy with pregnancy when we left home. Money was at hand, but we had no idea what to do with it. To whom should we turn to

seek relief? Ibadan is not like Ojusongo. I am a complete novice in Ibadan. We went to the home of our lawyer and he spoke to us at length, promising we should not worry and that he would ensure Babalola was released, and that even all of us would be amazed. It was there in Ibadan that we went to seek the help of a medicine man to help bring about the release of my husband from the hands of the Whiteman. It was also there in Ibadan that I was introduced to the Order of the Seraphim Church, asking them to pray for my husband’s release. It was yet in Ibadan that I went to the Muslim clerics to help confuse the judge on my husband’s court day so he would be found innocent of all counts. What a wise man Cleric Apalara was. He told us on getting to his place that my husband would be released. Truth be told: there was so much spectacle to witness in Ibadan!

After a protracted time of waiting, the court date was set. The Chief’s lawyer came the previous day to coach him. The Chief refused all counsels, insisting on being totally oblivious of the whole charade, and that he had no case to speak to. The lawyer was fed up on that day. In a manly fashion, he just told the Chief not to worry and that there was going to be a bright tomorrow for him.

Certainly, the Chief did not catch a flicker of sleep that night. Of course, even I did not sleep one bit. I kept reflecting over the strange dream I had on that fateful day that he was arrested. I recalled my inexplicable instincts the day before his arrest. I reflected over how people looked at me when they had heard that my husband was about to be arrested, while I was totally ignorant of the fact. I was gravely sad on that day. I wondered the purpose of a life that was so full of care and anxiety with no breaks on the way. Seriously, I was tired of life. I knew the same would be true of my husband.

We all met in court the following day. Everything that the government witnesses said at the lower court was repeated through and through. The two prisoners had this to say:

“We are the people who murdered Faripo, and it was the Chief that contracted us for it. He sent us on the errand while we were at his house. He called us into the inner chamber before sending us on the errand. He was the Chief, after all; no one dared ask him not to talk to prisoners. He gave us nothing on that day but promised to ensure our release from prison if we carried out the assignment for him. Who would like to stay in prison? That was why we agreed to murder Faripo. And even more importantly, we were afraid that if we did not carry out the assignment, he could order that we be punished or even that somebody else should murder us. This was a whole Chief sending mere prisoners on an errand, who would question his motive? We could not confess this to our warder, since he was the one whom the Chief sent to call us in the first instance. It’s not that hard to kill someone if one could hit

him suddenly; just clobber him in the head suddenly and he would fall flat. Just keep hitting him on the head until he stops breathing. Both of us were beating the same person. We used our work tools to dig the shallow grave. That was the instruction the Chief gave us for disposing of his body after the murder. We did not report this incident to the Colonial Administrative Officer because the Chief did not keep his promise, but it was for our conscience that kept pricking us. Certainly, even if he had kept his promise, we would still have said the same thing. He did not tell us the purpose for us to kill the man. However, he said he could reveal his own dirty secret whenever he got out of prison concerning the bribe he received from Lagos and Ijebu people. He mentioned the amount to us; he said it was Five Hundred Pounds. He did not tell us what he used the money for. He did not promise us any monetary compensation; all he promised us was what we already stated. If we had lied, doesn't the government have a consequence for liars? Let us face the repercussion. If we had lied, we pray that life may be unbearable for us. We are aware of the evil entrenched in murder. We are aware of the possible punishment we could face. We are aware that we could be executed. But to die is better than living with a guilty conscience.

The matter now turned to the mother of Faripo again. She exclaimed, "The corpse is my son. I knew him because that was my son. I may not have seen his face since it was swollen and had ruptured, that does not stop me from identifying my son's corpse. If that would not be my son's dead body, please produce my son to my face. You all heard now as the murderers hired to kill him testified. Could they have killed him in error? There were many motives for the Chief to order his murder. Let's talk about his son, Olanrewaju. It was he who used the influence of his father in society to take away my son's proposed future wife and married her. He paid a lot of money on this matter but got away with the woman in a fraudulent manner.

The doctor stated his own as he did the other time, taking nothing, and adding nothing to the testimony.

It was now the turn of Chief Babalola to speak. As he was called upon and being led by the police to the witness stand, the entire court started crying.

Babalola's lawyer started cross-examining the two prisoners with a variety of questions. They answered all his questions. "We and the Chief never had a disagreement. Is it possible for a poor citizen to disagree with the Chief, anyway? He was not the one who found us guilty; it was the white judge that did. We stole, and the police arrested us in the process of burglarizing a house. Why should we be whining for paying the price for a crime we knew we committed? We would have confessed sooner, but we were afraid. However, we confessed when our guilty consciences would not give us rest. That was the

judge’s responsibility; we had no idea what the government could do for the Chief. But we will stand on the truth forever.”

Babalola’s lawyer spoke endlessly but even someone without a law background but who had his intelligence intact knew that he was just trying to make a case that was not there.

The judge looked at Babalola and asked if he had anything to say to him. Babalola said he knew absolutely nothing about all that they were talking about. He said it was just a matter of human conspiracy. If they considered death for him, so let it be; he would not act contrary to manhood. The judge explained to him that he needed to realize that there was only one judgment for the offence which he was accused of. Babalola said, “This is no big deal to me; after all, we are all debtors to death, and we will all pay it one day.”

There was silence throughout the court. It was just twenty years ago that Babalola was in this same situation. It was inside this same court. What on earth is this with me? All I could do was cry. The Chief looked at me; his eyes were blood shot. He sweated as he spoke on that day. For some time, the judge just looked, apparently unsure as to what to do. The entire court was quiet, totally motionless. This was truly a junction of great decision for life or death.

Someone whispered to the ears of the judge and he rose suddenly and dashed curiously into his chambers. A loud noise could be heard. Who could tell what the noise was all about? Lo and behold, Faripo had arrived. But arrived from where? He was coming from his escape route. The judge returned to his judgment seat. Two police officers escorted Faripo to the court right before our eyes. There was commotion. The Chief was looking bewildered; he never even knew who Faripo was. All they were saying was Greek to him. Was this a dream or reality? Then, the judge turned to Faripo curiously, and Faripo responded, “My name is Faripo. It was the white man that sentenced me to prison in Ojusongo because I was minting money illegally. It was Yesufu and Bakare that counseled me to escape from prison and they opened the gate for me when people were sleeping on the day that I took a flight. My fellow prisoners were the ones questioning my wisdom of not being fearful of the possibility of never surviving a fifteen-year incarceration and dying in prison. They said their own sentences were shorter and they were willing to finish their times. I thought they were helping me but they never ever mentioned anything about the Chief.”

After this, his mother was presented to him. They hugged each other. Faripo’s mother said, “Truly, the corpse that I saw was swollen and busted; but when the confessors said they were the ones who murdered him, and the height of the corpse that I saw was identical to that of my son, I was convinced it was my son.”

All eyes turned to the Chief in the witness stand. The judge ordered that a chair be offered him to sit on. He stood, shaking, and even when he sat down, he was sweating profusely.

The judge regretted the trouble and distress and all sorts of pain and suffering they had made him to go through. The judge spoke at length. He ordered that Babalola be released and that the two prisoners should enter the witness stand and explain to him why he should not punish them severely on that day. The government lawyer and the police did not want their case to be hastily disposed of on that very day. They wanted the date for their case to be set for future trial so that their punishments may be severe. The judge said this was not a day he ever wanted to remember again and so would prefer to deal with the matter once and for all on that same day.

The two men said, "We crave the indulgence of the judge to please have mercy on us. We lied. Osi was the one who asked for us to make up this bogus lie against the Chief. We've never met the Chief. All the time we went to work in his house, he never had a conversation with us. What conversation could a Chief have with a prisoner? Indeed, we asked Faripo to escape so we could carry out Osi's request. The judge looked at them disdainfully and gave them a piece of his mind, adding an additional year to each of their time.

Osi was summoned. He denied the matter completely, railing curses upon himself. The judge also gave him a mouthful. But he was let go of.

Even Faripo did not go scot-free. The judge lambasted him and added an additional six months to his prison time.

Faripo's mother also was called into the witness stand; she too was given a piece of the judge's mind. She received a verbal lashing. However, she was forgiven because the assumption was that she acted true to a mother's zeal.

The Chief came out of the witness stand and we headed straight to the house of the Chief of Ibadan. We went to debrief him of how all went. He rejoiced greatly with us. All his household members congregated and were looking at Chief Babalola with pity and thankfulness to his fate. The Chief of Ibadan said humorously, "Guess what? You are just looking at the face of a reincarnated man." We got ready and looked for a vehicle that took us back to Ojusongo. On the way, as we were returning, the Chief was somber and gravely sad. As many were visiting and congratulating him, he could not just respond. He was only thinking that it had been twice in life that he had faced a life and death situation; yet, all his friends heard about the impending arrest but not even one mentioned it to him. He thought about how he would have left me in utter sadness had he been executed. He imagined so many things. We entered Ojusongo on that memorable day without any fanfare.

XIII

The Tyrant Knows not Tomorrow

Many kept coming to visit the Chief. “Congratulations!” they would say over and over again; and as for him he would respond simply by saying, “Here you see me; this is my second time.” They would pray for him for a reversal of fortune and that this kind would never happen to him again. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came. When the Chief heard the sound of his vehicle, he rushed quickly inside and wept bitterly. I went in with him and spoke sternly to him that he was just about to betray manhood. When he came out he was well composed; he greeted him and shook hands with him. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer advised him a great deal, telling him to keep it up as he had been doing. He too advised the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer and entreated him to keep doing what he had been doing. After all, the Whiteman had no idea of coded speaks. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer just smiled, having no idea of what the Chief actually meant. Nothing pained the Chief more than the realization of the fact that people, especially his best of friends, knew he was about to be arrested, and yet kept this matter from him.

Osi came, prostrating flat on his face in front of the Chief, cursing himself that all the good fortunes from the high places should elude him if he indeed sent those prisoners on the errand for which they claimed he did. He said, “Chief, you know that disagreement does not amount to a death wish for one another.” Otun also came; each one dropping by to wash themselves clean in front of the Chief. All non-natives came together to rejoice with the Chief, appearing in communal uniforms. The women picked a head dress, native blouse, while the men picked hats and other outfits. They hired entertainers, even arraying the lead drummer and his groups with the same uniforms. The day of entertainment was set. Early in the morning they danced around the town; in the afternoon, they took a lunch break; and at night they set up a circle at our front yard. The circle of the *sákàrà* ensemble was different from that of *jùjú* music, and those were different from that of *sèkèrè* and *aro*. The entertainment of that night was grand. It was an all-night event and people were spending money, sharing drinks and honoring each other.

The following day, assorted gifts were brought to the Chief. Four people carried those gifts. They included a variety of drinks; a variety of flowing garments for men; two or three wrappers for even me. We received everything and toasted every one of the visitors to a nice time. Men came that same evening to visit the Chief and cheer him up. He too spoke a lot with them; but these were just mere surface chats.

The citizens of Ojusongo honored the Chief immensely. They once brought the *kiriboto* entertainment ensemble, dancing and rejoicing, and having all sorts of acrobatic displays. They were chanting the Chief's heroic poetry. They danced into our compound and we gave them parting gifts.

The Christians had a thanksgiving service for the Chief, a man who had rendered them no small favor since their arrival in town. They thanked God for the miraculous way He had spared the Chief's life by bringing Faripo to the scene at the nick of time, right at the time he would have been sentenced to death. After service, they filed in procession to our place. They too were given their parting gifts. After this, they came in successions, saying it was high time the Chief recognized that there was one true God above all other gods. It was that God that rescued him from the jaws of death the first and the second times. Therefore, they said it was high time he became a member of the body of Christ.

What other evidence did one need more than the Chief's experience for one to be convinced of a true God? What benefits does one want to derive above what the Chief had seen to be able to know that there is a God? The Christians took advantage of the situation very well and by so doing, gained the Chief into their circle.

The Muslims did not claim that it was their own God that saved the Chief. They also did not dispute the fact that it was the Christian's God that saved him. In the same vein, the Egúngún worshipper, the Oya worshippers, the Buruku worshippers, the Agemo worshippers, and those followers of the Ig-unnuke who were not Nupe people did not claim so. Only the Christians had the audacity to say so. All followers of other gods agreed along with the Christians and came to the Christian service the day the Chief was christened. They made it a day of celebration for all people. The Chief slaughtered a cow. Everyone ate, drank, and they too kept spending a lot of money at the occasion.

It was on that evening that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came to pay the Chief a visit, congratulating him for becoming a Christian. Before now, the Chief embraced all faiths, following after every deity, and saying the Chief of the town had no religious affiliation of his own. The Colonial Administrative Officer congratulated him. The Chief asked what he was congratulating him for. Would it be for the fact that he escaped execution or for becoming a Christian. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said he came to congratulate him on his conversion to the Christian faith. And then, the Chief spoke, "You, white man, there is no bone of humanity in you. All along, you had realized that the Christian faith was good; and that those in that faith were fortunate. Yet, you never opened your mouth to share that faith with me; what kind of a friend are you, by the way?" The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer considered that to be a mere jest, and replied that

something like that was not his duty to do; it belonged to the ministers. As for him, he felt that they had done all they could but that the Chief was not responsive to them.

All these celebrations of the Chief’s harrowing escape from death soon died down. Now, I was left with myself, the Chief, and his conscience. We sat down and thought deeply about the whole thing, thanking God profusely for sparing the Chief’s life from the traumatic experience. What then lay in the future? We were all fed up with the whole thing about life. I said I was fed up and the Chief echoed the same sentiment. But what were we to do? All the barrages of tribulations, accusations, wrongful accusation of murder, how should we handle all these life challenges? Thinking about all these had become overwhelming and we came to the conclusion that we would just give this newfound faith of Christianity a chance and see where it would lead us.

And so, we started a new leave in life. There were no Council meetings all this time that the Chief had been held in custody in Ibadan. There was, therefore, a lot to do. The Colonial Administrative Officer came to the Chief to deliberate on what to do: his work at the court had been neglected. No one had done anything for the six weeks that he was absent. The Colonial Administrative Officer and the Chief agreed that he should just concentrate on court matters. After that, they would arrange for the Council.

At the first Council meeting, the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came and commended the Chief to his people once more, saying: “People of Ojusongo, here comes your Chief.” The Chief looked at him with contempt. However, the Whiteman does not know eye signals. Even if you are kicking them with your eyes, they would have no idea. If you looked at them with contempt, they might even ask if you had a debris stuck inside your eyeball. But the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer knew that the Chief was not happy with him. He dismissed the matter as a leftover from the previous incident.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer spoke about the new administrative policy that he had mentioned before the arrest of the Chief. He said the Colonial Administrative Officer who would explain everything to the people of Ojusongo would be on ground the following day. He then spoke a bit about the new order, encouraging everyone to please set the following day aside to come and listen to what the Colonial Administrative Officer would come to talk to them about. The entire Council agreed.

So many things had happened since the Chief was sent to prison this second time. Many things came out of the daily newspapers. The Afénifére Group had frequented the town and held several meetings. They often said, “Our prayer is that your Chief would be spared and come back to you in good health.” That was when they planted all sorts of things in the hearts of the people, which the Chief never did before being arrested. Before now,

everyone was afraid on hearing about the Whiteman but now, rumors were flying around that the Whiteman was about to leave town, and that we would start to run our nation as we deemed it fit. All of the Whiteman's privileges would be taken away and they would return to their country. These matters were at first just coming into the ears of the Chief, but now it seemed they were getting into his mind. He would often ask, "Are they talking about these white folks or are they talking about other ones?"

Anyway, the Colonial Administrative Officer that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer promised would come did not come on the set date. Some were speculating that it might be that he had returned to his country. Even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer did not turn up, quite unlike him; after all, white folks are not like black people when it comes to keeping appointments. The Chief started entertaining the possibility that the rumor that folks were throwing around might even be true.

This was the time a man rose by the name Maku. His nickname was Akérékorò. Some called him "Ata" while others called him "Ata L'ójú Òyìnbó." He started talking down at white people. He would talk unharnessed, badmouthing the Whiteman as he pleased. Folks would hail him for his disrespect of the Whiteman. He would say he was there to speak for the Afénifére organization. Yet, he was speaking for nobody, and the organization did not send him. He would belittle the monarchs and chiefs, dismissing them as mere farming utensils in the hands of the Whiteman. He accused them of having sold their country to the Whiteman cheaply. Sometimes, he would say, "Babalola, the Chief, that mere slave to the Whiteman, will soon be disgraced. Never mind that they have been unable to truly catch him. One day, he will truly fall into their hands, and those white masters of his will execute him."

All around town he was causing mayhem. The Chief had no idea of what to do with this man. In just six weeks, he, the Chief, had almost become a stranger in his own town.

One young white man finally came and expressed regret to the Chief for his inability to come as at when promised by the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer. He came to our house and spit the guts, saying, "Chief of Oju-songo, I regret that I could not come on the very day that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer promised you that I would come. The fact of the matter was that I was sick and was taken to Lagos. It was the fever - the fever that was capable of killing the Whiteman so easily. But I am pleased that I am completely healthy now. I just came today to explain the circumstance. I would want the Chief to give me another day when I should come and address the people." The Chief proposed five days for the Colonial Administrative Officer to return and address the people. He then made a public announcement for his people to gather together for the occasion.

Indeed, the people gathered on that day. The Colonial Administrative Officer did not come with this young man. That made it a bit hard to get things done on that day because this white man was a total stranger. We later learned that he too was a junior Colonial Administrative Officer but was just new at work.

The white man said, “I greet the Chief and members of the Council as well as all citizens of Ojusongo. I am pleased that you honored the invitation in spite of the fact that I missed my earlier appointment with you. It was due to circumstances beyond my control. Please know that I did not miss the appointment on purpose. It was just due to the fact that I was sick. I fell victim of one bad fever. But, now, I have fully recovered.”

“My job is to explain the new government structure in this town to all of you. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer said he had explained this matter to you a little bit but my own particular duty is to give the information to you in greater details. Here is how the new order will be: Your community has now been divided into different units, according to how large those communities are. Sometimes, we combine two or three villages; sometimes we combine four or five villages, and sometimes, too, one large village may be alone by itself. These individual divisions will be responsible for selecting their representatives that will go to the big assembly at Ojusongo. There, the larger assembly of Ojusongo will elect their representative to go to Abeokuta, where the representative for this town will be elected. It is at all these meetings that representatives will elect among themselves. No one can be selected who had not already been elected as representative of his own village community.”

“Permit me to give you a small example to underscore this point. If I have a big basket and place large stones inside it, and I add smaller pebbles into it and then pour much sand into it; if I start to shake the basket together, the smaller pebbles will go down while the larger pebbles will stay up as I shake the basket together. In the same way, from the gatherings of villages, many will be selected to come to Ojusongo. There, they will be shaken there; and the stronger ones will head to the Abeokuta meeting. There, they will also be shaken; the strongest of all will head on to Ibadan, where the large Council of this town will be represented.”

This white man did not say more than this before asking if we had questions for him. Many questions were directed at him. However, when Maku started asking his own questions, everyone was exhausted. He first said, “For God sake, when are you white folks going to leave?” “The citizens asked that you leave; yet, you insisted on not leaving; do you white folks even have any shame?” “If the landlord tells his visitor to leave his house, and the visitor ignores the order, setting the wishes of the landlord aside, isn’t that visitor turning himself into a vagabond and nuisance?” “As you white folks have

stayed-put in our town, do you not know that we are not satisfied with it?" Thus, Maku came up with all these questions that really scared everyone that was present at the occasion. The Chief was worried and attempted to stop Maku several times but that was totally impossible.

The white man was patient beyond any scope of imagination. He responded to some of the questions and laughed half-heartedly at times. He pretended as if he was happy with all those questions. After responding at length to some questions, he would add that, "I have only tried to answer those questions, if there is anyone else who has more questions, please do let me know so I may try to respond." The same Maku would be the one that would stand up again and again to pose more questions. At one point, the meeting completely became all of Maku's, where he and the white man were opposing each other. We all became mere spectators.

Maku became a celebrity in Ojusongo on that single day. He was seen as the master who could subdue the Whiteman. His own education was greater than that of Adanoja of recent memory but he was more of a radical mutineer. The Chief planned to summon him and put him on notice, but I warned the Chief not to go there. I said he should ignore the matter, and not get involved; after all, the Whiteman was certainly capable of defending himself.

Right in front of Maku's house, he started a new movement. He called it "Movement for Emancipation and Liberation from the White Race." The Chief warned everyone from his household never to attend the gathering. He called me and said, "Asabi, Maku does not seem to know that it is the Whiteman he is messing with? He is looking for trouble, and trouble he will find. Does he even have the faintest idea of what the Whiteman is capable of doing to him?" I kept warning the Chief to just calm down and not get himself entangled with the matter in any way. The Chief suggested that he might just go to the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer and detach himself from the whole matter, but I advised him not to do so, knowing full well that the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer was fickle-minded and you could not tell which side of the fence he belonged. He was a man who heard of the impending arrest of his friend but never did give him a hint of it. And so, the Chief looked on as Maku continued his dangerous exploit.

The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer heard of the matter and asked the Chief about it. The Chief told him he knew nothing about it. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer called on Maku but Maku completely refused to come; claiming he was busy at a meeting.

Maku kept adding insults to injury. He kept writing insulting and harassing letters to the white man until one day a policeman was sent to arrest him. They took him to court, and he was sentenced to prison and thrown behind bars as if flung in derision. Maku then became totally subdued all of a sudden.

Not one single person sympathized with Maku or missed him the day they learned of his incarceration in Lagos. In fact, many rejoiced on hearing the news. They called him an obstinate calf, blatant over-doer. The Chief and I felt the same way about him.

Surely, the Whiteman was beginning to lose respect among the people although putting Maku in prison boosted their status a bit. The seed that Maku had planted against the white folks did not die easy. He had put them in disrepute beyond limit. He had dishonored the monarchs and Chiefs. He had coached citizens to believe that they were the masters over their rulers because they were the ones who put the monarchs there. He said the citizens had the power to remove the Chief like ridding of a mere bug under the skin. These were the kinds of evil doctrines Maku had spread against the Chief and the Whiteman, both of whom he had so much belittled.

But then arrived the society called “Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà.” The secretary of the organization explained to the people that the citizens were not bosses over the monarch and that the monarchs were powers of their own. We all felt at ease on hearing this. Even citizens that were not related to monarchs felt at ease on hearing this because all the evil doctrines of Maku against the rulers had confused each and every one of us. We used to ask each other, “When had water started to flow from down below up the mountaintop and citizens had become bosses to the monarch?” Thanks to the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà organization, which made it clear that although a new order of governance had arrived, yet, the monarchs were an institution in their own rights, set apart as leaders of their people.

Knowing myself as the wife of the Chief and my husband as the Chief for the town, I called on my husband and told him that this organization was one we should seriously be a part of. We should identify with it. I felt that the safety and continuous survival of the monarchs and Chiefs rested on that organization. The Chief agreed. He hosted the secretary of that organization. He took care of him and called him in privacy to assure him if indeed the institution of monarchs remained solid and respected under their organization. The secretary assured him it was true and that nobody had the authority to mess with that institution or ever remove them from their rightful positions. The Chief was very glad to hear that.

The meeting was held at the front yard of the Chief’s compound, and was chaired by the Chief. At the start of the meeting, the secretary looked around and called on the Chief, “Chief: Your Royal Highness. Aren’t there women in this town? Where are they? Our organization, Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, is meant for men and women. Kindly call on all women to assemble here, let all of them gather before the meeting can start.” The Chief sent a message to bring in Ìyálóde – the lead woman; he also sent a message to her assistant; he then

whispered in my ears to call on all women in our household to come out and join the meeting.

Swiftly, our front court was packed full of people. In reality, there were more women in town than men. Women were often home while men would have been gone out of the house for their daily preoccupations. Thus, the whole town assembled, with the Ìyálóde's sitting next to the Chief as if she was the wife. The secretary of Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà said a lot on that day.

Many questions were thrown at the secretary; even among we, women, questions were asked. When I raised hand to ask my own question, the Chief reclined differently on his seat and looked in another direction. I asked, "Secretary, when are the white folks leaving?" The secretary answered briefly, saying: "They will go, but there is no timetable yet for when it would happen." Someone else asked, "What if they refuse to go, what will the organization do?" The secretary responded by saying, "This organization will mount a great deal of pressure." The young man who asked a question the other time at the inception of the meeting, asked again: "Secretary, you said whatever anyone could conceive as progress to the Yoruba race is the primary duty of this organization; if that is true, what is the organization doing to address the unfair treatment of the Whiteman by purchasing our products cheaply and selling theirs exorbitantly? What does this organization see to the tendency of the Whiteman to force us to buy their own merchandise that seem to be unneeded, forcing innocent people to get into debts? What is this organization doing to facilitate the establishment of schools in all our rural communities? What is it that the organization is doing in providing hospitals, maternities, motorable roads connecting all our rural communities? What is this organization doing to ensure that Yoruba people – home and abroad, are liberated from the yoke of taxation, and all other ways the Whiteman kept robbing us of our hard-earned resources? As the secretary smiled in admiration, and wanted to respond, the same young man continued, "Secretary, excuse me please, don't prevent me from finishing my questions. I have more questions to ask." The secretary said, "Sorry about that; please keep asking. I thought you finished your questions." The young man continued, "Secretary, what is this organization doing with regards to the new order of colonial administration that is being echoed in our ears daily for some time now? What is this organization doing about the educated and illiterates becoming bosses to the monarchs?"

The response of the secretary was brief, certainly not as long as the questions. He said, "We thank this questioner. He is a lover of his town. He is a thinker. All his questions are very good and my own question to him is what would he himself think of what could be the path to the progress of the Yoruba race? He does not need to provide an answer openly, but should give

the answer to himself, and I want him to know that those answers are the duties of this organization. I want all of you to do likewise. It is when you do so that you would have a deeper insight into the work of this organization, even better than we can even possibly explain it to you. Take for example, If the departure of the white folks would lead to the progress of our town, we want you to know that it would be the duty of this organization to make sure they leave. If building more schools, building hospitals, making road networks, respecting our monarchs and chiefs, are paths to the progress of our town, be rest assured that they would be the duty of this organization to facilitate them.” This was how the secretary tactfully addressed all questions on that day.

After responding this way, someone reminded him that he had yet to speak to the issue of taxation. He said he was sorry for the omission. He then spoke: “Thanks for your patience and for taking your seats over such protracted time. Forgetfulness has no remedy. I just completely forgot. Certainly, if it would bring progress to our town not to pay taxes to the government when the government has no other means of financing the town, pay the police, repair the roads, pay the Chief, pay civil servants and being forced to lay them off, and there would be no more health inspectors, no more hospitals, the roads to be grown with weeds, if it would facilitate progress to eradicate taxes so that all these things would be as I just described them, certainly, it is the duty of Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà to eradicate taxes.” All the people at the meeting shouted in unison, “This is wisdom!” Some shouted, “We hail you, Secretary. You are not another Maku; your sound wisdom will not make you become another “educated” prisoner like Maku.” Some said, “This organization should be nicknamed, “The Organization of Wisdom.”

So much was said on that day. All said and done, more than two hundred joined the organization, Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà. The meeting adjourned. The chief congratulated the secretary for good presentation of his ideas. He also told him how much he had experienced since becoming the Chief for the town. He spoke of the harrowing experience of his near executions twice, and how I had stood by him through those ordeals. The secretary expressed interest in getting to meet me; I came out to see him. He greeted me, saying: “The Chief had said so much about you; thank you so much; please keep it up. A honest person will never die in the company of the wicked. Kindly help to energize this organization in this town because it seems many are cognizant of the prevailing tide of our time and all that is going on in town right now. You women cannot afford to play a minor role or be in the background at this time. You all equally have a lot to do for our town. I responded that, “Well, we are getting old; it would be in the hands of our educated women to play pivotal roles in the good things that we’ve heard are about to come to our town.”

The secretary ate, greeted the Chief, and left.

XIV

In the Game of Ayò, The End is All that Matters

That same white man visited again. In fact, he came back countless times. He took time to explain the new political order to us. Many barraged him with questions. Everybody felt that Maku deserved his incarceration because they felt he was too pushy on the matter of the town's politics. Who was he speaking for, by the way? Who was his sponsor? No one could say. Nobody knew why he was so consumed with such inordinate passion. It was as if all of us forgot him completely, rotting in prison, and we moved on in our own paths of life. Nobody said a word about him any longer. The evil seeds that he planted had died a natural death since he had no one to nurture them into growth. Who dared to water an evil seed? A seed that posed a threat to the Whiteman, opposed to the Chief and the Council of the town could be no good! The seed that is opposed to the continuous survival of the institution of monarchs and Chiefs, and all that matter in the town, advocating that they become subordinate to their citizens could be no good. Without a doubt, this was an evil seed.

We continued to hear about the organization known as “Ègbé Afénifére.” But we hardly see their representatives. The chief of the Lagos people and I were chatting one day when he came to visit the Chief but the Chief was not at home. He said, “Lest I forget, please let the Chief know on his arrival that I just returned from Lagos yesterday and met some among the members of Ègbé Afénifére. I asked them to tell me what I needed to know about the organization, and they explained to me. I heard that the Oba of Lagos is a member of the organization. I also know that it is an organization we need to belong in Ojusongo.” I said that could be another organization trying to choke Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà. The chief of Lagos people said that should be far from being the truth. He said we should give them a chance to showcase their organization too, and if we considered it to pose a problem to Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, we should ditch them.

On the Chief's arrival, I gave a report of my conversation with the chief of Lagos people. He responded, “Let me tell you this: no organization will be welcomed in this town. All of us will be for this Odùduwà group. You have no idea what the Lagos people are capable of doing; don't even mess around with them. Never would I engage with them on anything that matters. I almost died in jail. They knew what was going on, and that I would be arrested, yet, not even one of them thought it fit to hint me of the impending doom. The human blood in them is thin. I cannot have anything important to do with the people of Lagos.” I said, “Chief, this is a political organization; those who will bring it will probably be the same ones that will mess it up. It does

not hurt for you to sit down and look on.” Just as we were speaking, the chief of Lagos people came in. In his hand was a note that he said was written to him by the secretary of Egbé Afénifére, asking him to facilitate a meeting in Ojusongo.

The Chief agreed and asked him to go ahead and organize everything. The chief of Lagos people asked if the Chief would make the public announcement, calling everyone to the meeting. The Chief did just that. He announced through the towns’ crier that “In three days’ time, members of Egbé Afénifére will hold a meeting. Therefore, every citizen should gather together at the courthouse.” The meeting held.

The Chief also chaired the occasion. The secretary talked a whole lot. He was asked a variety of questions as well, just as the secretary of Egbé Oṃo Odùduwà was asked. The meeting was rounding up when the Chief indicated that he too had a question. The secretary was happy to hear this and asked the Chief to go ahead and ask. The Chief then asked, “What exactly is the difference between Egbé Oṃo Odùduwà and Egbé Afénifére?” The secretary responded that there was no difference whatsoever. He said their proverbial hunters hunted in the same forest. The Chief said if that were to be the case, then, the man should come back together with the secretary of Egbé Oṃo Odùduwà. In that case, they might have to do both; and that as things stood, they would think it over before signing up on the new group.

Not long, the secretary of Egbé Oṃo Odùduwà accompanied the secretary of Egbé Afénifére to Ojusongo. The Chief called a major meeting in which they both agreed that they were one organization, except they functioned differently. This matter posed a riddle to the Chief. He asked intensely whether or not they were the same or if there was any difference between them. When the secretary of Egbé Oṃo Odùduwà perceived that the matter was becoming somehow controversial, he set the record straight as he declared categorically that they were not the same. The Chief then said, “Now, you are talking! All your awkward manner in which you were explaining that your association was the same with each other was way above my head and beyond my comprehension.” The entire gathering laughed.

We held the meeting of our own region. Ojusongo was the only one charged with the responsibility of coming up with three representatives because Ojusongo had become a big metropolitan community. Olanrewaju, my son, was chosen. The chief of Lagos people was chosen to represent the non-natives. Another citizen of Ojusongo was chosen as the third delegate. Everything that happened at the meeting after the delegates were chosen came to my knowledge through Olanrewaju, my son. If there is any misinformation about it all, you have my son, Olanrewaju, to blame.

I had earlier told Olanrewaju not to bother himself about competing. I said this was a job meant for literates. He had started to pay heavily for his lack of education. He concurred. However, when he went to Obada Market and saw all sorts of spectacles being put forth in the process of wanting to be elected to the Abeokuta convention, he too said he would try his very best, even if he would not be able to go beyond Abeokuta, he would at least go as a spectator.

He started hustling. There were one hundred people at the meeting of Ojusongo among which twenty would be elected to go to Abeokuta. It was among these twenty people that Olanrewaju wanted to be and the chief of the Lagos people also wanted to be. The third indigene of Ojusongo couldn't care less. He was apparently not interested.

By the time we knew it, the meeting for the election was nine days coming. That was when many among those one hundred people started knocking on our door at night. Some from other regions also came to appeal to our people – our husbands, their children, and relatives who were among the one hundred delegates. There were many influential people who came prostrating flat on their faces even before me asking favor that Olanrewaju should endorse their candidacies for the Abeokuta delegation. I called the Chief and brought this matter to his attention, how so many had wanted to be elected. The Chief said he was not surprised they were hustling this much since the job in Abeokuta related to money-making. They would be paid serious money if chosen. The Chief also said each one would receive up to one hundred cowries per month if finally elected to go to Ibadan. I held my head in utter amazement, saying, "Lord have mercy! The Whiteman is about to run himself into bankruptcy." The Chief said if they ran into bankruptcy, they knew how to pack their bags and head back to their country. I now saw clearly that the whole thing was worth hustling and fighting for.

The fact of Olanrewaju's lack of education pained me to the bone. I pitied myself saying I wish my son were literate he would have suddenly become a great man. In fact, he would have been greater than his father the Chief. Chief Babalola did not want to hear that. He asked me, "Are you saying the educated people could be better than the Chief?" I responded, "That's how it seems to me." The reason I said that was because I had heard a whole lot at the meetings of Egbé Afénifère, where they spoke of what the Ibadan representatives would do, the honorable position that they would occupy, the power that they would have, the dignity and honor that would be given to them, making me to conclude within myself that no honor could be greater than all these.

Olanrewaju took this matter seriously right now. The secretary kept frequenting the Chief's place, explaining how things were progressing. The Chief once asked him, "What's your plan for this my son, after all he is among the one hundred to vote as representatives of your constituency?" The secretary

said, “It’s nothing but good. His name is among those identified for the Abeokuta delegation.” I was glad a little bit to hear this. The Chief further inquired, “Is it possible for the young man to go beyond Abeokuta?” The secretary hesitated and we got the point even without him saying anything. All we knew was that Olanrewaju was not that educated. The secretary said, “This decision would be made in Abeokuta. Whether or not he could proceed beyond Abeokuta to Ibadan, I cannot tell at all. All I know is that the Abeokuta delegation is the absolute determinant of everything.”

It was the third day to the meeting when the secretary was looking for Olanrewaju. He had visited his house a number of times and did not get to see him. He stopped by our house a few times, too, but did not find him. He had gone to the farm since the night and had not returned. Then the Chief said, “Hope there’s no problem for all these searching for each other.” The secretary smiled and said there was no problem; all was well but that they had an urgent matter to deal with. He and Olanrewaju had become bosom friends on this matter of delegation.

When Olanrewaju arrived, the secretary showed him twenty names of people that more than sixty people had promised to vote for. Olanrewaju’s name was among them. Olanrewaju himself promised to vote for these people as well. This secretary brought out the list containing the names, which everyone should take with them to the voting place and show to the Colonial Administrative Officer.

Sixty people were already sure of what they would do. The remaining twenty were unsure. Among the eighty people whose names were not on the list of the secretary were two or three who were still knocking on doors of those to vote for them on election day. These two or three were trying to push out two or three on the list among the twenty already decided on, so they could take their spots.

They too were hustling, spending and being spent, with some people promising to vote for them. On that election day, so many surprising things happened. Many were desperate, and their demeanor that day took on the appearance of someone at the funeral of his mother. Many were muttering some unintelligible words as if they were chanting incantations. Some were just bragging but with their eyes blood-shot. Suddenly, the vehicle of one of those not on the list of the twenty took off from where it was packed moving with no driver on seat. There was commotion. The vehicle ran into a woman’s shop. It was by divine providence that passersby on the road were not victims.

The owner of the vehicle was right inside the house and voting was about to start. It was the commotion that brought people outside only to see what was going on. One of the major supporters who had assured him that he would work for the man to ensure that he would be among the twenty delegates

headed for Abeokuta was enraged. He said, "Goodness, is that your next line of action? Don't worry, I will go home and recoup." He rushed home and returned. He too started chanting unintelligible words, possibly some incantations.

After casting votes, everyone was shocked. All three candidates that were not on the list of twenty were elected. That way, they booted out three of those on the list. How they accomplished the feat was a marvel to everyone. After the election, there was nothing else to say with anyone who had promised to vote for one. The election is over; what's left? The three that lost hung their heads and headed home. The three lucky ones were rejoicing, poking fun of those who did not want them to win.

At Ojusongo, the matter had ended completely. All that was left would take place in Abeokuta. In Abeokuta, only five of the sixty would go to Ibadan. But who would these five be? About twenty people wanted to be candidates in accordance with the election rules. Among these twenty, sixty delegates will choose five. These twenty started to lobby. Olanrewaju said even without his education, there was nothing wrong for him to go to Ibadan, where he could even enroll in evening classes. For one hundred cowries to elude him just like that, without a fight? He promised himself he would give it a shot. If by chance he got to Ibadan, even if he had no understanding of what they would be talking about, he would join in voting. He would watch the majority and follow the float. "Life is good," he said, "I should also be a part of it, and why not?"

Nine days to the Abeokuta election, Olanrewaju headed there. On the third day that he went I looked back and suddenly saw him. "What happened?" I asked. "My mother, that place was no good. You've got to look for Two Hundred Pounds for me. It takes money to make money. Money rains in Abeokuta." I yelled at him, saying he must be a loose spender. I said he was just bent on wasting the little I had on me. He said, "If I waste it and it all worked out, I will recover it several times over." I asked him what happened if it did not work out, who would pay my money back? Just as we were having the heated conversation, his father walked in. He said, "Olanrewaju, greetings for being there. News have come to my hearing about the amount of money that all those Lagos and Ibadan lawyers have been spending in Abeokuta so as to be elected and go to Ibadan." I said that was exactly what we were talking about. I told him I did not have the Two Hundred Pounds to waste. His father said the matter deserves thoughts, and he walked away.

I knew that once the Chief reacted to a matter that way, he was not interested in it. I knew if he smiled the way he did the other time, he was not approved of such matter. I called Olanrewaju and urged him to let the matter rest; besides, his father did not seem to be interested and even I could

not afford to waste such amount. Olanrewaju negotiated the money to Fifty Pounds; that he would go and make an effort with that amount. I refused totally, telling him that the Fifty Pounds that he had on him the last time, what did he achieve with it? He stated how he spent everything – he said he used Fifteen Pounds as deposit, and that he had distributed the rest. I asked him to go back and claim his deposit, vote and come back home. I told him that he was not in the caliber of those meant for Ibadan delegation.

The following morning was when next I saw him. His wife came that night and said, “Mother, my husband has been moody since the other time, refusing to eat.” I said, “Don’t mind him; he is a wasteful spender. Ask him about the Fifty Pounds he received from his father, which he took to Abeokuta, what he had done with it?” His wife also went. The next time I saw him, he was no longer angry; the wife must have advised him and he too must have heeded the advice.

He returned to Abeokuta and participated in the election. He came back to give us the report. The report was unbelievable. It was a spectacle. So much happened in Abeokuta.

Now, the villagers were now bosses to city dwellers; farmers became masters to the elites. Water, indeed, flowed upstream into the mountaintop. Big names that we only used to hear, removed their flowing garments, visiting homes of villagers begging them to come and vote for them. They were coming with sacks of money and distributing them. People were giving them false promises; and sometimes some gave true promises. They too were acting as if they were good people. Some lawyers would prostrate flat in the presence of farmers, floating on the ground like a heap of rubbish; some would kneel down and swear that they were good people that were just victims of character assassinations in the past. Some educated folks would come in flowing garments, dragging around at night looking for potential voters. That was how money was going around uncontrollably.

The electorates now turned themselves into pseudo-gods. They were dictating how they would want to be treated and how they wanted government to be run. Cursing over any of the politicians that disavowed their promises if they ever won. In fact, they too held a big meeting on the eve of the election.

Outside the meeting place, twelve candidates seeking votes were perambulating around. They were restless. Some sat inside their vehicles. When the villagers did not finish the meeting on time, they slept, snoring inside their vehicles.

When the meeting was over and the villagers came out, those big men started holding hands with the local people, whispering in their ears, and we were hearing things like, “I have been to your house several times, Sir, but I was told that you were at the meeting. I came to follow up on my matter.

Kindly help me out Sir.” The farmer would respond, “Relax. Be rest assured, you will win. It’s only that you’ve got to chip in a little more.” The candidates would quickly respond, “Of course, I will add more to it, Sir; just kindly be sure that these people are not making false promises to me.” Audaciously, the farmer would raise his voice, “Look at you! Have I ever lied to you before? You see, so you don’t even trust people. I don’t think I can do things with folks like you!” The elite would respond, “Sorry, I retract what I just said. It’s all because bad people have given bad names to good folks. But I should know better that people like you will never belong in that group.”

All this lobbying palavers and arm-twisting were going on, and indeed, some elites were out there until daybreak, rushing back home, unable to even have breakfast before dashing straight to the polling stations.

This was not peculiar to Ojusongo; it happened everywhere elections were held. On this single night in our town, mouth could not tell all sorts of shenanigans that took place! It was like a theater. Some elites quickly paid off the back taxes that folks owed. Some changed their tones of addressing those poor folks, as if those less privileged villagers were their bosses – referring to those who were even young enough to be their children as “Daddy” and making promises left, right, and center. Some residents left their lights on all-light to attract the attention of candidates who would come knocking on their doors to lobby them, and usher them with money.

What a day the election day was! Some were rejoicing; some were crying inside them; some were winking at folks around, saying, “Please don’t forget our conversation,” and those who only trusted in divine providence were looking up to the sky. In the same vein, some were quietly arguing among themselves saying, “How did you distribute the loots such that only that small amount came our own way?”

When the ballot was counted, even some monarchs left the election hall forgetting to pick up their royal tassels. Whose fault would that be, you may ask? It was out of anger, frustration and disappointment that they had to zoom out. All losers dragged out of the arena humbled since they all had expected winning. They felt they had worked hard to earn victories, spent a whole lot for it, lobbied intensely, lobbied diligently, and had been promised with the assurance of winning. What else could they have done? It was chaotic. All the promises of the previous night had turned out empty for some. Who should be confronted? Why block the exit hole of the proverbial rodent when the clever beast had escaped, anyway? At any rate, that was how the election ended.

Those who won rejoiced greatly. They were carried shoulder high. They sang for them and they danced. Drums were beaten for them to dance. They were very happy, to say the least.

Olanrewaju returned to Ojusongo. He gave a lengthy report, even more than I had stated. He too got some things, I must add.

After all these, we were only hearing news. We heard of the great work that the House of Representatives was doing. Suddenly, we heard that the monarchs and Chiefs would also hold their own elections. We were confused. The Senior Colonial Administrative Officer explained it but we did not get it. And, of course, whenever the Chief and I were left by ourselves, we used to say, “Indeed, our world has become the Whiteman’s world.”

The election for the House of Chiefs was not much of any noise. It was a done deal. In our own community, who would not know that this was the natural right of Chief Babalola? He was elected unopposed and the election was hitch-free. When he came back from Abeokuta, he spoke endlessly of the various things being spoken by all other chiefs that were not elected to the House of Chiefs.

Babalola was elected. I had my peace. I would sometimes imagine how great it would have been had Olanrewaju himself been elected. It’s all an attribute of human selfishness and inordinate ambition. You would think having a taste of the good things of life and the benefits of politics as I had already, should satisfy me, right? I would travel to Ibadan in a vehicle, striding in style and bouncing in elegance among people of great repute, flaunting my status as the First Lady of the Chief who had just been elected into the House of Chiefs.

More so at Ojusongo, the respect for me had skyrocketed. My honor knew no bounds. The Chief and I used to thank God that our evenings had turned out to be more pleasing and rewarding than our mornings.

Many were trooping into our compound to congratulate Babalola for being elected into such a high position. He himself did not seem to know the gravity of this position since he did not struggle to be elected into it. Even as much as people were talking about it, he did not seem to appreciate his new status until I started educating him seriously about it.

We thought about it all, and felt the need to celebrate with the people. We therefore organized a get-together. We had a separate one for the Muslims and feted them by their tradition; after all, their dietary restrictions and those of Christians were different. At a different occasion, we called members of our church and provided them with abundance of pork and rice. We celebrated with every one of them. Even the Senior Colonial Administrative Officer came, so were the Colonial Administrative Officer and the other young white man of the other day. No doubt, that was a great celebration.

XV

Aging Has No Remedy

Twenty children don't play together for twenty years. Life is just like the game of Ayò: all is well that ends well. Between the time of the new political order and now, it looks like a short time; it looks like a long one as well. It was a time of turning life around for good. When life is enjoyable, time often seems too short. When life is full of tribulations and anxieties, time seems too long. In those days when life was full of troubles for me and my husband, whenever the day broke and it was morning, I wished it would quickly turn dark and let the evening time come. That way, it would be time to run around to folks to seek refuge and beg for respite. Each passing hour would seem long and endless. When it was finally night time, I would pray it stayed that way. Conversely, when we were in bliss and all was well, the day went by too fast. Whenever night parties were going on, the day would break in no time. My husband would even chastise me at times that I had been staying too late, partying all-night. I would tell him I thought it was just the early cockcrow, and the night was still young. This life is so fickle; its vicissitudes go beyond measure!

The downpour of the rain one day trumps a thousand days of the drought. For the short time that my husband was elected into the House of Chiefs in Ibadan, he almost forgot completely that he ever experienced any hardship in life, after all, the person who eats late should not eat the rotten meal. All those nasty experiences now became our mere side talks. We laughed and joked over our past pains and sorrows. We would humor each other by saying, "Chief, you must be a woman by nature; you just drowned in tears the day we thought was going to be our last day of seeing each other in Ibadan!" We just laughed the situation to scorn.

The Christians truly supported us and we also realized the advantages of being around them. During the Harvest Thanksgiving celebrations, the Chief would throw a big party in honor of the Christians in Ojusongo, and our compound would be bubbling in jubilations and festivities. The choral group would come separately, and eat to their heart contents. The lay readers, two or three in number, would accompany the priest and feed themselves to the brim. The priest would put on the collar in elegance and walk around delicately, surrounded by his team of service people. So were many groups in our church; they would grace the occasion and be fed.

Whenever they came like that, it was always a place of humor and artful yarns. Trust me, this was a gathering of humor mongers! Everyone was cheerful and hilarious. The Chief would walk around them, turning to one and the other as everyone was engaged in maximum comic reliefs. As the clergy and

his group sitting at the separate end of the house were posing humors, there would be a loud applause. The Chief would quip jestingly that a bunch of lies must be taking place at that particular corner, with clergies deceiving each other there! He would go and join them. But then when the laughter would increase and would not stop, I also would take a leave and go to join the Chief so I may also benefit from whatever was bringing about the loud laughter.

Pastors were lampooning each other. They told the story of a pastor who was preaching during a Harvest Thanksgiving occasion, and he said: “People of God, let us thank God for the light He has given us; let us thank Him for the good health since last year; let us thank Him for the fire for cooking our meals; let us thank Him for the water we drink, without water, how would we be able to eat the gari gruel?” Apparently, the pastor must be an Ijebu man, where gari was the staple food. It was this short joke that led the pastors into the loud laughter, and we all laughed together.

Even the Ijebu people poked fun of the Egba people; the Muslims were poking fun of the Christians; Ekiti people were jesting about Ondo people; everyone was just having fun; after all, they were all assembled in the Chief’s residence.

The story was also told of a pastor, who was from Owu. He went to conduct an Easter service at a church. Some church representatives then started collecting Easter offerings. After the offertory song was over, offerings collection still continued. Another song was raised and it ended without the collection of offerings being over. The pastor then called on one of his people to go and investigate what was causing the delay. The person sent on the errand came back and told the pastor that it was the exchange of money that caused it (some may want to pay a less amount but had a bigger denomination and so would drop the larger denomination and pick up the change. A person hoping to pay half a shilling, for example, might drop one shilling coin and then pick up half a shilling for his or her change).

Then, the pastor asked all those who needed change to form a line in front of the church, and they did. Each one stated how much he or she needed to have back. After each one received their changes, nothing was left in the collection plates. The pastor was enraged. He yelled at the congregation saying, “My fellow brethren, don’t come here again for money-changing. The house of God is not a place for money-changing! If you want to do your money-changing business, go to Agbeni and change money; if you want to change money, go to Ekotedo and do your money-changing. Please stop coming here to change your money.” (The fun in this is that the Yoruba people call prostitution money-changing; and some communities were known for such activities).

Often, the Chief would entertain people and feed them. For years, we were at peace and all our townspeople were at peace. We were in opulence and splendor; it was as if we never experienced problems in the past.

Otun became old and went to join the ancestors. Osi also became old and went to the abode of elders. But prior to their deaths, they had made up with the Chief. Osi repented and came to do obeisance to the Chief. Even Otun became so old that he could no longer contribute to our town's politics before the end came to his life.

The Chief himself, even though not as old as Otun and Osi in age, has become pretty old. The two were already in chieftains when Babalola joined them at Ojusongo; he was only of a higher chieftaincy order than they were. He, too, was now of age and could no longer rise early as it used to be. Sometimes, it would be early in the afternoon before he would come out of his chamber. What about even me? Age is taking its toll. However, I was younger than Babalola by birth. But whenever I looked at the child of Olanrewaju, I would muse and say to myself, "Age is slowly catching up with me as well."

In the Town of Ojusongo, a lot had changed. Maku had returned from prison. Yesufu and Bakare were back, but nothing was heard any longer about Faripo; and who knows, perhaps he ended up dying in prison.

By the time Yesufu and Bakare returned, Osi had died. They came to the Chief's house but the Chief did not recognize them. They introduced themselves and begged for forgiveness. The Chief said, "May God forgive you; mine is no big deal." They were feted on that day. After that, they visited us several times. As for Yesufu, he was always around at the Chief's service. If anything needed to be done at our compound, once the Chief called on him, Yesufu was there in a flash. Bakare, on the other hand, took a leave of us and never returned.

After that fateful election, Olanrewaju moved to Lagos to work at the Ebute Meta area. He had a merchant's shop there. It was his father and I that endowed him with the funds to start the business. He started with a substantial amount of money, and so his shop was filled with merchandise. Many times, I would travel to Lagos whenever his wife gave birth. I would be striding in styles on the shores of Ehingbeti. Whenever I saw the unbelievable activities of Ehingbeti, I would say proverbially that indeed, as long as Ehingbeti remains dignified, the Lagos harbor would retain its own dignity as well. In the evening, I would go and hangout at the Ido Bridge, just to relax and watch actions. I would be looking at Ebute Ero from a comfortable distance, looking at the glittering lights of Ikorodu in the horizon.

Only once did Babalola travel to Lagos to visit his son, Olanrewaju. When I was bragging about the fact that he did not know Lagos as much as I did, he too bragged comically that I did not know where he knew in Lagos. At first,

I did not get it; but clearly, the rascal was only humoring me. After all, it was about twenty years earlier that he was taken to Lagos in handcuffs and was driven to the big prison, where he was remanded for weeks on end before being released. That was where he knew that I did not!

Many new changes and new ideas had taken place in the Council in the last forty years that Babalola led Ojusongo together with his Council members. Only Otun, Osi and the Chief did not change that much. Many Senior Colonial Administrative Officers came and countless junior Colonial Administrative Officer came and went. Many white folks – preachers, traders, surveyors, soldiers, and many of sorts, were coming and going in Ojusongo.

I once traveled to Lagos and before my arrival, the Chief fell sick. By the time we knew it, it was getting out of hands. But when it turned into diarrhea, then, I was scared. I sent an urgent message to Olanrewaju who quickly came from Lagos with a physician.

The doctor tried all he could but told us it had to do with old age, hinting us that it probably meant that the Chief was rounding up his earthly sojourn. The doctor returned to Lagos and was paid for his service. Yet, the final days of the Chief were not yet written. He could engage in conversations, and also had some soup to eat.

After the doctor had gone, Chief Babalola called me, and said, “Asabi, time is far spent. The bell toll is almost ringing. What plans do you have for the time ahead?” Hearing this, I started crying, literally wailing. He turned away, facing the wall. I called him several times, but he gave no response. I shook him violently, and he said, “Stop bothering me.” He said nothing more for another five minutes. But I knew he was still breathing. I yelled out the name of Olanrewaju who had been around for the past few days.

He rushed in, looking at me and said, “Mother, hope there is nothing.” I said, “It’s your father; I’ve been calling him with no response.” The Chief then responded, saying: “I responded; I told you not to bother me.” Olanrewaju sat by him, watching him curiously, talking to him, but with no responses. Olanrewaju asked if he had used his medicine. Then, the Chief responded: “What medicine are you bothering me with? Am I not old enough to go?” On hearing this, Olanrewaju burst into tears. He wept like a woman. I said, “You are too feminine.” Yet, his father said nothing and did not even move at all.

All night long, we were not able to catch a brief rest. People were trooping in, and we kept telling them that the Chief was sleeping and had asked that nobody should bother him.

Early in the morning, I woke up and heard a conversation going on between the Chief and Olanrewaju. The Chief had woken Olanrewaju up in the middle of the night and spoke with him at length. I rose up in a hurry and both of them just laughed at me. The Chief said, “If the rascal wanted to leave,

he would have checked out before you woke up, Asabi.” I said, “I was just overwhelmed by all those activities of yesterday.” I then kept quiet.

Here was what I heard the Chief say to Olanrewaju: “Olanrewaju, you are now of age; be sure to take care of my legacy. No dedicated day is needed for conversations. I might say I would recover, but it might not turn out to be so. If it happens that I die, be sure to let my heritage be in good hands. Take good care of your siblings. Watch out for humans. Never should you forget what I went through in dealing with people. And here is life. Looking back, I just have to thank God because in spite of what I went through with people, how much they made me to pass through fire, I could say my end is not that bad, after all. Watch your own character. Take care of your mother. Be careful about excesses; it only leads to disgrace. Know that human love is ephemeral. At this era of the Whiteman, I would entreat you to desist from politics. Politics is not a game for the young; it is an adult’s job. Only those called for this mission of politics could do so without permanent injuries. Politics should be considered even before the work of Christian pastors, who often see it as God Himself calling them into it. Anyone who forces himself into politics would be disgraced out of it because politics itself is the work of the Lord. Only God chooses the shepherd for His own people; He chooses leaders of His own people; and chooses judges for His own people as well. Did you not see the disgrace of the chief of the Ijebu folks? The very day he attained the position, I knew he would not last long. How did I know? I knew because he paid to get himself there. He purchased it. He did not deserve to be there. The rightful person was well known to all of us. I approved what they wanted for themselves but it was the same people that removed him.”

“Therefore, run away from politics except if God Himself called you into it.”

Olanrewaju said nothing; he was just weeping. Then, his father looked at him, and was upset, saying, “Olanrewaju, what is the crying for? Have you ever seen a person on a journey with no intent to return to his home?”

The Chief turned to me and said, “Asabi, the praiseworthy Asabi, I greet you. Congratulations. You have followed me so well on this path to the extent that I am no longer afraid of the remainder of the journey. I am not afraid of death at all. If there is a good place to be, I will be there with them certainly. I am nostalgic . . .” As the Chief spoke these words, I started crying, literally wailing. Then, the Chief turned his back and faced the wall without further talking. I called him; he did not respond. I shook him, he did not move. Olanrewaju also called him in quick successions. Then, he spoke and said, “Why all the crying of Asabi? Today should be a day of rejoicing. Of course, one could not but feel nostalgic on a parting day; after all, I am fully aware of what my instinct is telling me. It does not seem to me that I will survive this sickness,

and would it not be a good thing, then, if we chat with one another, bid each other farewell given all these days we’ve hung out together?” Even Olanrewaju himself started crying; and I also kept crying, but the Chief stopped talking throughout that day.

He kept vigil all night, not having a drop of sleep. Whenever a sick person is not sleeping, it’s no good news. He did not bother anyone. Only that he was not sleeping. He just lay down like a newborn baby. In the morning, we were telling each other that he did not even change the same side on which he was laying all night long; he did not stand up to go and ease himself or pass excreta either. It was then that we realized that all his cloths were soaked wet, dripping. Olanrewaju lifted him up saying, “This sickness has turned to something else.” Then, the Chief opened his eyes and prayed, “May your child pay you back the same favor.” I cried again at that moment, but the Chief did not even open his eyes to look at me.

The doctor had returned to Lagos. I rushed to the priest of our church. He followed me in a hurry. In fact, he arrived home before me. That pastor was such a caring and benevolent person. He entered the room and found the Chief in the arms of Olanrewaju. The Chief’s back head was resting on the chest of Olanrewaju. As the priest entered, Babalola opened his eyes and said, “Priest, you came.” I said I was the one who went to quickly get him. The Chief then said, “Why are you bothering the poor man? It’s not yet time for me to go, when I will go past the river onto the shores that I am looking at right now at a distance. The priest drew his chair closer to the Chief, held his hands, and shook his head. The Chief did not open his eyes to look at him any longer. The priest then started to talk, saying: “Chief, I greet you for your good age. Are you at peace? Hope you are not afraid of anything ahead of you. Have you seen Jesus Christ the Lord? The Chief opened his eyes; they were red like balls of fire. He looked at the priest but still said nothing. All of a sudden, the Chief yelled out, “I bow down, God Almighty!” The yelling was so loud that even Olanrewaju who stepped out to go and get something from outside heard, and ran inside.

The priest asked more questions of the Chief, but he gave no single response. Even I also chatted with him after the priest had left but he offered no response either. We offered him some medicine, he shook his head and did not open his mouth. We also offered him soup to eat, he refused it. The following day, the Chief passed away. He took his last breath right in the arms of Olanrewaju.

His was a glorious exit. He died peacefully without talking gibberish. I just narrated his final words. I am pleased that his end came this way. In truth, I mourned greatly; and what would you expect of two people who had been together for so long; but now only one was left? I wept sorely. The priest assured

me, however, that I should be of good courage because the Chief died the death of a believer and was resting at the feet of Jesus.

All funeral rites were great. There is nothing more excruciatingly painful than for a woman at the funeral of her husband. As all children and grandchildren were immersed in the funeral activities, I was in deep sorrow. Olanrewaju did a great job of effecting his father's funeral rites. We performed the three-day rite; and did the seven-day rite as well. We went for the church outing. I became a widow. We wore the widows' attire. All of us widows of Babalola were five in number. Each one of us was by our children. Olanrewaju did not let me feel his father's death at all. He gave me everything I wanted and never denied me of anything. I was in the widow's rite for one year. After the one year of widowhood, we returned to the church for thanksgiving the second time. The children provided a great deal of food. They invited entertainers. They all danced to their heart contents. They set a date for the sharing of the inheritance.

They divided the inheritance only among the children. They also commanded that all the children should make it their duties to care for their mothers. Those deserving of the cocoa plantations were given. Those deserving of the cola-nut plantations were given. The same was true of those deserving of the palm-tree plantations. All monies kept in trunk boxes, those buried under the ground and unearthed, cloths, livestock, and those animals left after the funeral celebrations, were shared among surviving children.

I had lived in Ojusongo for more than forty years. What else did I have left there? My sojourn in Ojusongo was literally over. My destiny was not tied to it. After all, I only went there with my husband, who, now, was gone. Olanrewaju had relocated to Lagos. All his siblings – that is, my other children, also got married and they also lived with their husbands in Lagos. What else should I be doing in Ojusongo? What further business did I have to finish there? Of course, I had many friends there and I was the matron for many organizations in town and at our church, but so what? My husband had died, and all my children had left the town. Clearly, my heart was no longer there; it had completely left that place. Ojusongo was no longer an option. I then moved to Lagos.

Today, I live in the home of my son, Olanrewaju. My duty is to take care of my grandchildren. It's there I am today, comfortably sitting down and totally contented with life. It is from there I am writing this story. In this place, I am given everything I want. I am comfortable, very comfortable. Olanrewaju and his wife are petting me, like a lamb in the nurturing hands of the mother sheep.

May we all live our final days fulfilled with the joy and blessing of being survived by good children.

The End.

Glossary

Adánọ́jà: A nickname literally meaning, “The lone ranger of the marketplace.”

Adiẹ irànà: Literally meaning, “A chicken for purchasing the right of passage.” This is the ritual fowl de-feathered live ahead while the coffin of a dead person is being carried to its final resting place. It is eventually slaughtered and sheared among all household members. The proverb, *adiẹ irànà kì í ÷ohun àjẹgbé* (*adiẹ irànà* is never eaten without a payback), meaning that everyone will die one day and their own *adiẹ irànà* would also be shared.

Àdùn/Àádùn: A snack food made of dried and powdered corn mixed with oil and pepper.

Agbeni: A community in Ibadan.

Àisùn: Literally meaning “sleeplessness” or vigil.

Ajóòpa: A special kind of cola-nut known for its superiority and mostly used during marriage ceremonies for the payment of dowries.

Àlapà: A snack food.

Àlọ́: These are folk traditions among the Yoruba believed to be reserved as evening pastime. Etymologically, it means the art of twisting or knotting. The two versions are the riddles and the tale narration. For the first one, puzzles are posed and solutions are proffered. The second one is when a tale is told, and most often, it comes with songs and refrains. Both have didactic goals, making sure lessons are learned. Both, particularly the first one, are intended to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Àmàlà: The yam flour pudding made from dried yams or green plantains.

Ànkàrá: A kind of textile in Yoruba.

Àpàlà: This is a part of the talking drum ensembles in the music culture of the Yoruba.

Apènà: Meaning “Invoker of the road” or “slaughter of person” the Apena is the head of rituals in the Ogboni secret cult.

Àràbà: The cotton tree, often seen as a major sacred tree among the Yoruba.

Àwọ̀n Àgbà: This is a special name given to witches and people in high spiritual authorities.

Bàbà: Millet or guinea corn.

Bàdíàrán: Pet name often given by new brides to the young girls in the family into which they are married. It literally means “one with a bottom of velvet.”

Balogun: This is the title of the Commander of the army in the ancient Yoruba kingdom. Literally meaning Father in Battle (Baba ní Ogun), the Balogun was the titled warlord. Today, it has become a chieftaincy title reserved for families of known warriors in major Yoruba towns and cities with histories of warfare. This is not a honorary chieftaincy title but one defined by lineage of military ancestry.

Bamijoko: A male or female name, meaning “Sit along with me.”

Dòdò: Fried ripe plantains.

Dùndú: Fried yams.

Ebòlò: A form of green vegetable.

Èbúté Mèta: A community in Lagos.

Ègbé Afénifére: An Association of the Progressives.

Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà: The Association of Odùduwà Descendants

Egúngún: There is no exact equivalent of this concept in the English language but often it is called “masquerade” because of the masked costumes that the people behind the mask often adorn themselves with. Egúngún festivals is often a celebration of the spirits of departed ancestors in Yorùbáland.

Ègúsí: Melon.

Èhìngbẹ̀tì: A community in Lagos.

Eléré: Literally meaning “One who plays around”, the Yoruba believe in a group of children possessed by the wandering spirit and it would take traditional spiritual intervention for such children not to torture their parents as they engage in diabolical gustoes with other members of their “juvenile” wandering spirits.

Èsúrú: This is a kind of bead that has the yellowish color of the èsúrú yam (*Dioscorea dumetorum*) for which it is named after.

Ewúro: A form of green vegetable, known for its bitter taste and often called bitter leaf.

Fikúyerí: Literally meaning “One whose head puts death on fashionable display”, this is a popular masquerade in some Yoruba communities.

Gbági: A community in Ibadan known for a huge open market.

Gége: Another community in Ibadan known for a huge open market.

Gèlè: Female headdress. The men’s counterpart is called filà.

Ìgunnu or Ìgunnukó: A kind of masquerade believed to have spiritual powers, not of Yoruba origin but of Nupe ethnicity but with cultural inclusion into the Yoruba masquerade culture.

Ìjówùn: Etymologically, ì-jẹ́-ohùn simply means “the act of responding to a voice uttered in request for a favor.” This is the special ceremony where the families of the bride-to-be and the groom-to-be come together and the groom-to-be is given the consent of marriage between the two young people.

Ìkòròdú: A community in Lagos.

Ìpékeré: Fried unripen plantains.

Ìrókò: Another tree often seen as a major sacred tree among the Yoruba.

Işin: The akee-apple, common in the savannah region of the Yoruba Oyo North. The fruit is succulent and its seed is external, always dark and shinning.

Iyán: Most respected of Yoruba meals, *iyán*, although often translated as “pounded yam” could be made of several other tubers or fruits other than, or in addition to, yams. For example, there are “pounded yams” made with unripen plantains, some made with the cocoyam tubers, while some others could be made with *gbẹ̀rẹ́fúùtù* - bread fruit – (*Artocarpus communis*). The thickened paste meal is always swallowed in mussels accompanied by a variety of stews, soup and meat.

Jógí: A snack food.

Lagos: The most commercial and cosmopolitan city in Nigeria. The real name is Èkó, an Edo name for settlement but which the colonial Europeans called Lagos, probably after the Portuguese city by the same name.

Mògàjí: A compound title.

O.B.E.: Order of the British Empire.

Ọba: This is not the same as the English word, “king.” The institution of the indigenous monarchical order is known as the Ọba among the Yoruba. Unlike what in the Western political culture is called “kings,” the Yoruba Ọba is a line of natural rulership laced with sociological processes and spiritual ceremonies. These are rulers in traditional Yoruba societies, especially in towns and cities.

Ọbádá: Usually the market associated with the ruling monarch of a town, or probably the market place established by the first ruling monarch of a town.

Ọbáfúnké: Literally meaning “The Ọba has given me to pet”, this is a name given to a female child.

Ọbàtálá: There are two Ọbàtálá – the primordial and the human (the celestial and the terrestrial). The primordial Ọbàtálá was the divinity appointed by Ọbàtálá as creator of humans and the earth. An *òrìṣà* himself, he was the father of all *òrìṣàs* and his portfolio included being a sky dweller and the spirit father of the sky. Olódumarè granted him the permission to create the earth but on getting there, in his characteristic way, was drunk to stupor. His brother, Odùduwà, then usurped his power. The mortal Ọbàtálá was an Ọba in Ilé-Ifè but was overthrown in a palace coup by Odùduwà. Either way, Ọbàtálá retains the status of a deity and still remains a powerful *òrìṣà* among the Yoruba at home and in the Diaspora.

Òdú: A form of green vegetable.

Ogei: Cold (this is most likely an Egba dialect for “Òtútù” in Standard Yoruba).

Ògìrì: A form of aromatic spice-seasoning made from the melon seeds, common among the Ile-Ifè and Ijebu people.

Oke Elérú: A community in the fiction, literally meaning, “Mountain of Ashes.”

Ọláńrewájú: A popular male name, meaning “My honor is pressing forward.”

Olómọ̀ṣíkàtà: A type of corn which has scattered cobs on its cobs.

Olúwo: “Olú-Awo” literally meaning the overall head in the Ògbóni secret cult.

Orò: A cult among the Yoruba, strictly forbidden to females to see.

Ọ̀run: The Yoruba word for the mysterious and mythical place beyond the skies, where the Supreme God, Olódùmarè dwells and the souls of the departed return.

Òsì Baálẹ̀: A chieftaincy title meaning. “The left hand/side of the Chief.”

Òsùn: A form of green vegetable.

Ọ̀tún Baálẹ̀: A chieftaincy title meaning. “The right hand/side of the Chief.”

Polygyny: This is what is practiced among the Yoruba. It is the branch of polygamy where a man could marry as many wives as he is able to care for and treated equally and equitably. It is different from (and indeed a reverse of) what is culturally acceptable in some societies where a woman could marry as many men as she pleases with all of them living with her at the same time. This particular practice is known as polyandry.

Róbó: This is a popular snack finger food among the Yoruba, made by deep-frying either mashed peanuts or mashed melon seed balls.

Sábó: The community set aside for Hausa people to settle in all Yoruba towns.

Şẹ̀kẹ̀rẹ̀: Like some maracas, this is an instrument in the musical ensemble; an instrument made of a beaded calabash gourd with strings of cowries and beads.

Şorowanke: A name or nickname given to a mentally challenged person in the fiction, possibly because of the way s/he dressed and/or walked.

Tẹ̀tẹ̀: A form of green vegetable (often called “callaloo” in the West Indies).