

# ODUMODU'S JOURNEY

by Leopold Bell-Garn

## Chapter 1

### Odumodu's Journey

My father had six children, four boys and two girls. I am the third one. The oldest boy and the next oldest went to learn work where my father spent a lot of money. Because of it, he was unable to pay for my education. When I was fifteen years old I went to look after a small town called Ora, which was near Benin. This was the town to which a certain Benin chief, Oba Benin, hurriedly went when all the people of that other land under his rule wanted to kill him. Our work in that town was to take care of animals and do farm work.

I stayed in that land for three years before I began to think that I wanted to learn a craft. Because of this I left that town and went to Eko, where many knowledgeable craftsmen were, and I became a messenger to a certain chief of the craftsmen. At that time there were no automobiles and there were not many powered vehicles on the river of our town as they have today. One who wanted to go to Eko at that time had a hard time. Sometimes he would be on the water something like one month and a half. It took a wooden boat to go to Eko. Everyone knew that at that time it was throwing away life and taking death to use a wooden boat to go on any long journey, because those who caught people to sell them filled the waters, looking for those they might catch.

My brothers did not agree to my going on this trip, so I left home when no one knew about it. Because my brothers did not want me to go to Eko I waited and looked for a way to fool them and leave Ahaba. They knew this and kept guard over me so I would not find a way to escape.

One evening I thought of a way to leave Ahaba. What I did was to take three loincloths and buy some top wine. When night fell, I called all my brothers together, brought out seven jars of wine and set them down for them. No one knew what I had in mind in giving them that wine. After

they had drunk two jars of wine, they began to be inebriated. This caused some of them to fall asleep. Some were singing and went out into the compound.

I lost no time. I got ready immediately, carrying one box of clothes. I ran to the shore and entered a boat to go to Eko. Knives and guns and bows and arrows and spears were in this boat because people did not travel at that time without being prepared. We rowed the boat and crossed to Idah, then crossed to Lokoja, and we saw no one on the water who wanted to catch us. Because of this we thought that perhaps we would see no one before we reached Eko.

When we entered a <sup>tributary</sup> ~~branch~~ of the river coming from Lokoja, where the Niger and Benue rivers come together, and started to go to Eko, we met with trouble. Some Fulani from Nupe, who stayed around the river looking for people they could catch and sell, looked for a way to catch us. But we used the guns and other weapons that were in the boat and chased them away. There was only one person who was hit by an arrow. We did not have any more trouble before we reached Eko.

I did not want my master to pay me a monthly salary, but rather I wanted him to teach me his work, which was why I wanted to go to Eko. My master, out of the goodness of his heart, did what I wanted. After I had stayed six years in Eko, I had learned various types of work.

I had good fortune in getting work as a fireman on a European ship when I left my master. This work was very difficult. One thing I succeeded in doing while I remained on this job was to marry a certain woman called Mmaany. This woman bore me three children. They were all boys. The oldest and the second one resembled me very much, but the last one bore a facial resemblance to their mother, even though he was a boy. He was the one that my wife Mmany loved because he resembled her.

Since I was not making any profit in this work, I left that ship and returned to Eko. Not wasting any time, I began work teaching workers who were learning in a town called Akure near Ondo. During the time I was at Akure my wife died. Because of this I wanted to leave Akure and go to Eko where I would get on another boat, but I did not want to do fireman's work again. In that year I got on a certain boat that the Europeans called "The

World." It was a very large boat. There were three places in it where it was fired. There were several places in it for various kinds of recreation.

Many men and women were on this boat. Some of them were going to "St. Helena" to learn about that town, and others were going to take the good breezes of that land. European drums and flutes and guitars and their stringed instruments were on this boat. Because there was no great wind, everyone on the boat was happy. Some people danced, others played various games. My work on that boat was to cook food. Two other people helped me. This was very hot work, but the heat did not burn the body as much as it did the boat's firemen.

## Chapter 2

### The Splitting of the Boat

On the seventh day of that month we set sail for that town called St. Helena. It was that place the English had taken a certain general of the French, called Napoleon, in the year 1815 when they defeated him in war. This town was far from Eko and from any town in Nigeria. It was in the middle of a <sup>wide expanse</sup> ~~large body~~ of water called "Atlantic Ocean."

There was no trouble at the start of our journey. There were no storms. No one on the boat felt any fear; rather they were all happy, as I said earlier. It would not be good to trouble the reader by telling him everything I saw on all the waters we crossed. When there was only a little distance left before we reached our destination, a very strong storm carried our boat past St. Helena where we were going and threw it on top of a big rock. Everyone on the boat lost heart; our captain did not know what to do. He climbed up and down, down and up. The women and children on the boat started to cry because they knew that death was coming. The captain of our boat said many things to encourage us. We were singing and praying to God, begging him to forgive our sins and to save every single person on that boat.

While all these things were happening, our boat broke in two and everyone on it fell into the sea in a place where no one's feet could reach the ground. The women and children who were on that boat were lost

because the storm was very powerful. Six men who knew how to swim were able to get hold of a small boat which was passing by. It was these who took me from the top of the stone place where I stayed waiting for death because I had nothing to eat. But even if I had food, where would I cook it and eat it?

Because of the suffering we had seen in the splitting of that boat, we were unable to paddle the boat vigorously. We had not gone far when another storm came and overturned our boat and we all fell into the water again. The six men swam near the stone that had split our boat and I swam, going any place the water carried me. The water pounding me all over caused me to vomit until I was dizzy. One mouthful seemed as though I would stop breathing. When <sup>it was pitch dark</sup> darkness fell, I was frightened to death. At times I would stretch out my legs to see if they would reach the ground. When I was exhausted, God had pity on me and allowed my feet to touch ground. I was overwhelmed by dizziness. I did not know where I was. I cannot tell how happy I was when I swam out to the shore that night.

### Chapter 3

#### Breadfruit Is the Only Food

When I reached this land, because of exhaustion I lay down and went to sleep. Around six o'clock in the morning I woke up and discovered that no one lived in that place. I can not tell you how I felt on that morning when I thought about my mother and father, my brothers, my relatives, and all my friends whom I had left in my native land to come and put myself in a predicament like this. For about two hours I thought about all these things. I was afraid when I heard the roar of a lion and a <sup>gorilla</sup> ~~lion~~ and various other animals I can't describe. Because of this I said, "Let death claim me, let life claim me, whichever one claims me, let it be." God had mercy on me and nothing came to the place where I was. One part of my mind told me that there was nothing I could do if I stayed in one place doing nothing but thinking.

At this time I was dying of hunger and thirst. All the food we had was lost in the water when our boat broke up. As I said before, it would do no good to stay in one place thinking about all these things. Therefore,

I started to think about how to find something to eat. When I looked all around, I saw many kinds of trees with fruit on them, but none that I recognized. The blossoms on all those trees were beautiful and had a sweet fragrance. Because of the difficulty I was in, I could not look around and praise God because of the good work he had done in that place.

If I had not been in such difficulty, I would have wanted very much to hurry and take these trees back to my country. I forgot my troubles briefly while I was looking at these trees and their flowers. The land where these trees grew resembled a place where people swept every day just as a compound is swept. The thought struck me that any place like this would be a place where spirits lived, because when I was a small child my father, who worshiped spirits, told me about the place where spirits live. Thoughts like this frightened me. But since there was no way I could escape, I gathered courage, acted like a strong man and went under those trees. The spirits were not there. I went along, looking upward, seeing if I could see some edible fruit. I didn't see any. I traveled about six miles under those trees but I couldn't find anything edible. This made me turn back.

When I turned my eyes toward a place on the left, I saw a tree that resembled the breadfruit. When I looked at it closely, I discovered that it was a tree whose fruit the market people used to bring during the time I lived at Akure. I climbed to the top of it, plucked a head of breadfruit, as many as I would be able to carry to a place near the river, where I wanted to build a house where I could live until the animals ate me up. When I reached the shore, I remembered that I had no fire. This was another big problem because one cannot eat breadfruit if it is not cooked or roasted in the fire.

"God who gives the poor man forgotten [by the harvesters] yam will also give him a hoe to use in digging it up." This encouraged me.

Because of the scarcity of fire at that time, the Europeans had given everyone who worked on the boat or who entered the boat a small knife and a mirror which one could use to make fire through the sun. When I thought about that mirror, I put my hand into my shirt pocket and found the mirror and the small knife in it. I collected wood and dry grass in one spot and from the strong sun I made fire in them. The first thing I did was

to gather dry grass and wood in one place. When the sun shone I took the mirror and placed it on these pieces of wood and leaves. Heat from the sun went from the mirror into the wood and leaves and made them catch fire. Since I had no pot, I roasted the breadfruit and ate it plain.

The breadfruit tasted more delicious than the ones I had eaten when I was in Akure. The reason they tasted so good came from the land where they grew. Regardless of how the breadfruit was, it gave me new life and strength. I also saw many trees I recognized in that place, but those I should name are coconut, okra, eggplant, nut palm, thick bush fruit, and apple. The coconut milk was my wine anytime I ate anything. I liked the coconut milk very much. Hunger could not kill me now. What I feared was the roaring of animals like the hippopotamus and the chimpanzee and many other bad animals of various kinds.

#### Chapter 4

#### HOUSEBUILDING, FISHING AND WEAVING CLOTH

Another thing I did was to build a small house near the water. The work for this house was very difficult for me because I did not have a large knife. What could this small knife do? Since I did not have any other knife, I took this as it was and began to cut sticks. In one day I was able to cut only ten sticks. In this way I was cutting them until there were two hundred and four. It took a month to carve points on them. I used ten days to tread sand and fourteen days to put those sticks in the ground and cover them with mud. It took eighteen days to gather okra leaves. The total time it took me to build the house was two months and twelve days. The house building was very difficult, especially since there was only one person building it. I used the stripped midribs of the nut palm fronds to make a door and a <sup>bamboo</sup> bed. When the house was all put together, I lived in it. *mud dried on the house,*

Because I had a house, I lost my fear of animals, because if they came to attack me, I would run into my house and close the door. After I had stayed there around six months, I became tired of life. As everyone knows, loneliness is a bad thing. A human being is like sheep which do not walk singly but always join together in a group. My situation made me think many different thoughts. But when I ~~started to~~ remember ~~the~~ *the* problems

people like Osondu and Ogu and Ukaywa and many others had, my mind calmed down. This did not stop me from thinking every day about my mother and my father, my children and my friends, and those of my people who had died, especially Mmaanu, my wife, whom I loved very much. Pity took hold of me and I blamed myself for leaving Akure where I had lived in peace teaching workers. I remembered the time I lived in Eko in the care of my master who treated me well. I also remembered all the good houses in Eko and various good things in that town. After I remembered all these things and then turned around and looked at the place where I was now, my heart was very downcast .

After my housebuilding work ended, there was nothing else for me to do. Every time I finished eating I went to the shore looking into the water and watching the fish where they were swimming. There was no way I could kill them because I had no fishing gear, like a hook and a net. One day I remembered something like a basket my father used for fishing in our town. I took a certain plant that was split and wove it the way I had seen my father weave his. I cut a hole in a place where fish would be able to enter but <sup>not</sup> ~~unable~~ to get out. It took me three days to weave three baskets.

I put earthworms in them when I would go to put them in the water. The reason I put earthworms in them was something everyone knows. That would tempt the fish to come around the baskets and enter them. I used sticks to fasten them strongly against the bottom of the water so no fish would be able to carry them off and escape. At dawn I went to the shore where I had placed all the baskets so they could catch fish. I looked into the water and saw two baskets filled with fish. I did not see the other one. This made me think that a big fish had carried it off and escaped. I was very happy because I had found something I could eat with the breadfruit, which was the only food I had. I went down quickly, entered the water and carried out the two baskets filled with fish.

When I came out of the water, I saw <sup>a shark</sup> ~~an ofuruma~~ that the storm had cast out onto the land. Even though the <sup>shark</sup> ~~ofuruma~~ was a very strong fish, I was not at all afraid to go and carry it because I was well aware that a fish has no strength when the water carries it out to land. I cut open the fish's stomach and saw something shining like gold, but it was not gold. When I examined it, I knew in my heart that it must be a very valuable *stone*.

stone. I took it and placed it in one place in my house. I saw many other things in the stomach of this fish, hooks and various other things. I kept on eating fish that day until I was tired because it had been a long time since I had eaten any fish.

Another thing that troubled me was clothing. All our clothing was lost when our boat broke up. We had only what we were wearing. When my shirt was dirty I washed it and was naked, when it dried I took it and wore it. This made me think about weaving. The work of weaving was work my mother knew well. Because I was observant, I learned to weave <sup>cloth</sup> when I was a child. What I would use to <sup>make</sup> do this <sup>weaving</sup> was a big problem, because I had looked around the seashore but could not find any cotton. On another day, in order to get cotton I entered the forest that was near the water to look for it. After I had gone into the forest I saw the cotton trees I wanted, filling every spot. I removed my shirt, spread it on the ground and filled it with as much cotton as I was able to lift and carry home. After I processed the cotton, I made a board in the place where I was going to <sup>sew</sup> weave the cloth. I took the cotton and <sup>weave</sup> spread it on the board, took some of it and <sup>set</sup> set it aside. I used the small knife and carved a <sup>stick</sup> stick <sup>flat</sup> flat <sup>plant</sup> plant which I used to <sup>WT</sup> pound the cloth.

### Chapter 5

#### Arriving at Finda

One day I left the shore where my house was and entered the forest near my house. Something told me to persevere in discovering the end of that forest. What I had in my house was the mirror I had used to create fire with the sun, the small knife, that thing that resembled gold, and my clothes. I traveled for seven days but did not reach the end of the forest. On the eighth day I came out in a wide clearing where there was no one living. I looked at the ground and saw many holes like water holes that had been dug, but they were wide enough to accommodate human beings.

Because I was tired, I lay down in the wide clearing and went to sleep. My whole body looked like one who had been tied up to wood. I tried hard to get up but did not have enough strength. <sup>Being a stick at sunset</sup> ~~stamping a shadow~~, I lost heart. I began to shout. My shouts made everyone who lived in the holes, which I thought were holes where large animals lived, climb out to see the



person who was shouting like that. After they came out and saw how tall I was, they all ran away in fear. They had never seen anyone tall and dark as I was.

Some of them who were brave stood their ground to observe me. When they saw that I was tied with ropes on my feet and hands and head, they shouted, called their friends who had run away and told them to come, that there was nothing at all I could. When they heard this they became bolder, and they all came out to see how I was. When they had finished looking at me they entered their holes. After about two hours, they all carried me by the hands and feet and left.

At dawn they took handcuffs and put them on my feet but loosened the ropes that had been used to capture me when I was sleeping. They took me to another clearing which was wider than the one where they had captured me. Here we stopped to eat and gather strength to go to the town where the chief of the land lived. When we had gone about seven miles, I heard a commotion in that town, which told me that the town was a large one. From the place where I heard that commotion to the town was about five miles. This will tell the reader that this town was very large.

The town of Finda was on a hill. This allowed a person who was one mile away from the town to see a large storied house that had been built on it. A wall surrounded that land like the city of Kano that is in Hausaland. This wall had twelve gates through which a person could enter. The widest of all the gates was beautiful, and was the gate that went direct to the house of the chief of the land. They locked this gate at all times. A certain person guarded them so that a person could not enter or leave the town through them without permission. That person's work was to open the gate to anyone the elders of the land authorized to go and see the chief.

When we reached that gate I knew that Finda was a big place. They used iron to <sup>cover</sup> ~~the~~ the doors used to lock the main gate but they used gold to <sup>cover</sup> ~~the~~ that <sup>of</sup> the storied house in the middle of that town to show that it was the place where the chief of the land lived.

The one guarding the main gate opened the big door for us. When I looked inside, my heart sank because of what I saw. They had placed a

bridge of planks on the left side from the main gate to the place where one entered the house of the chief. One of those planks had spots like a viper that spreads itself from the main gate to where the bridge ended. That plank was very beautiful but anyone who came there would not fail to be afraid to step on it.

Soldiers were stationed on two sides of the road leading to the place where the chief of the land lived. They all had their swords out of their sheaths with the tips aimed at each other. This was something that made me extremely fearful and made me think of running back. The soldiers did not aim their swords at all times. They did this when an important person whose name was well known came to see the chief of the land. This was true, because when we entered the chief's house, they all brought down their hands at once and plunged their swords into the sheaths.

I am unable to describe the house of the chief of the land. There is no space in this book for me to relate everything I saw inside that house. My escorts made me enter a certain house. Here I saw the chief of Finda where he sat on his throne made out of glittering ? stones.

At the right of that throne there was a leopard carved out of stone. At the left was a large elephant, also carved. These things gave that place an unsurpassed awe. Behind the throne there were thirty soldiers carved out of stone, carrying guns and knives. A person not looking closely would think that those soldiers were living beings. They all wore garments resembling those that the gatekeepers wore.

I did not hear anything my captors said. I abandoned life and took death, and bravely waited for what the chief of the land would do to me-- kill me or let me live. It greatly surprised the chief to see a person as tall as I, and especially to see that I was black. Because it was dark when we arrived, he told them to take me and put me in a certain room, keep me tied up in an iron post that was in that place, so I would not be able to run. The chief also said that another day they should display me in the market. They took me and went to a house and put me there alone. They gave me food that night and gave me bedding. As I said at first, the people of this town had never seen a black person. This made them all come out to look at me. When I finished eating they took me to the market so that everyone

at me. When I finished eating they took me to the market so that everyone could look at me. The chief sent a message to the rulers of various other towns to come and see the black person he had. In this way they took me to the morning and afternoon markets, watching me for seven days. The rulers of the other towns who came to see me began to be jealous of the chief of this land, because he had something they did not have. When the chief found this out he no longer wanted to take me out to the market, so his enemies could not capture me.

All the houses there were round; their roofs were also like that. It was not zinc that covered them but something red molded out of clay and heated in fire. Europeans call it "tile." When the sun was shining, the one who stayed in that storied house would not be able to look outside because the sun would make it glitter. How can I name some things and not others? Shall I tell something about the trees and flowers on them and their fragrance, or the earth or the ocean and good breezes coming from it and blowing on a person? The town of Finda was a beautiful land in every way. It was a land that should be remembered.

## Chapter 6

### How Odumodu Married the First Daughter of the Chief

Because I am a black person, the chief of that land used me to brag. He boasted that there was no other chief near his town who had a black person except him. He had many beautiful garments sewn for me. When I was going to go out, he adorned me with gold and silver. Anywhere that chief went, he took me along. I followed him like a dog. One day he took me to the place where the deity of their land was. According to a tradition of that land, one who has something new will take it and go before the deity of the public land, and take money to give to that deity so that the thing will stay alive. We traveled about three miles before we reached the place. When we reached a certain shore the chief climbed down and went to a place on his left. We took a bad-looking boat that was there and crossed <sup>some water</sup> ~~a river~~ <sup>had collected there.</sup> that was at that place.

I don't know why the chief wanted to take me there. I thought he wanted to sell me to the people of another town, but when I remembered that he liked me and used me to show off, I realized that it would not be

for selling that he wanted to take me there. I also thought that he was going to use me for a sacrifice, because the owners of the land used expensive things and things they loved to sacrifice to the deity. I did not understand what they were saying; we were talking with our hands.

After we got out of the boat, we went about two miles to the place where the deity was. It resided in a mound which was in a rock resembling a house. We entered this mound. When I looked up I saw a human being carved out of stone. It surprised me very much how a person could take a very strong rock and carve a man. On this man, a fountain of clear water bubbled up. When I had been in that land a long time I discovered that it was the source of all the rivers in that land. The chief took that water and splashed it on my head and poured some on my mouth. After he finished saying several things, he took a container, fetched some of the water and told me to carry it on my head. When we reached the house, he took that water and again did as he had done at first, and drank what was left himself.

Because I did not understand the language of that land, the chief gave me a teacher whom he paid by the month and told him to teach me the language of that land. This teacher loved me and taught me with all his heart. After I had been in that town for one year I was able to speak their language and also learned to write it. After I had been there for three years I was educated enough, which caused the chief to make me his secretary. This was an important job in the eyes of all the towns because nothing could happen in that land that I would not know about and write it down. I was able to do this work well. This made the chief love me. When I wanted to marry his daughter, he agreed.

All the people of that town disagreed. They said that it was not good for me to marry the daughter of the chief because I was a black man. Also, they had captured me, they did not know my country, they did not know my parents; maybe I had been a slave in the land of my birth. Because of the love the chief's daughter had for me, she told her father that if not I, there was no one in the world she would marry. This made the chief call a public meeting to ask the people their thoughts. When they had gathered, the chief began to tell them about all the good things I had done in that land, and now I was behaving like a native. When they all saw that this marriage would please their chief, they agreed and said we

should marry. What they did was to write these rules for me:

- (i) "You will put it in writing that all your life you will be a slave to the chief of our land in time of war and in time of peace."
- (ii) "You will not leave our land if the public does not agree that you should go. Our chief by himself will not be able to let you go."
- (iii) "You will be working as public secretary at all times, and if you take the secrets of the land and tell them to other lands, all the people of the land will gather and kill you."
- (iv) "You will put it in writing that you will not tell the people of other towns that our chief eats human flesh."

After I had read all of the rules they had given me, I wrote my name at the bottom of the paper to show that I had agreed to everything they laid down for me. They took two months to prepare for my wedding to the chief's daughter. When the day came, they rang the big bells of the land, gathered everyone and told them that the girl's wedding day had arrived. My wife and I wore red garments. Gold and many other expensive metals were used to adorn them. The little girls who took cloth and used it to cover my wife's face and hands also wore dresses like ours. I can't describe the land on that day. They set up seats on the road, took ugbo cloth and decorated all the streets, took the skins of leopards and lions and spread them on the ground where we were going to walk. They beat drums, blew flutes, and sang songs.

## Chapter 7

### The Wedding Day

On the morning of that day everyone in the land dressed up; the chief's soldiers wore their uniforms and went ahead; my wife, her mother, her father and I, and her brothers and sisters followed them. The remaining townspeople followed behind us. There were people everywhere on that day. The big house where the chief's children had their weddings

stood outside near the house. The one who married us was the public treasurer, whose duty it was to marry the chief's children and their husbands.

That town did not use wedding rings. When we entered that house twelve soldiers conducted us to a place where they had set two chairs made of gold. We sat on them and those twelve pulled out their swords from their sheaths and stood behind us. The public treasurer walked to the middle of the house and began to speak. This is what he said:

"Beloved brothers, I am very happy to be the one to marry the chief's daughter and Odumodu, who is from Ahaba town, according to what he told us. When the chief, father of this girl, told us about this situation, we were unhappy because it was not good for a child of the chief to marry a black man, whose origins we did not know. Everyone here knows how we captured Odumodu about four years ago; because of his wisdom and good service in our land the chief has allowed him to marry his daughter. Because of this we, the people of the land, who help the chief speak out about things in the land, have also agreed. We have written some rules and Odumodu has agreed that he would do everything in those rules.

"Everyone here knows that Odumodu is well educated and knows all of our traditions. The good works he has done for us are many. I would like everyone here to agree, just as we the general public have agreed, that Odumodu should marry this girl."

Immediately they shouted that they agreed. This person began to speak again, saying,

"Odumodu, the people of Finda have given you the chief's daughter in marriage today. I have a few words to say to you. The first is to ask you if you will recognize this woman you are marrying as the one who owns you because she is the daughter of the chief of the land. Whatever she tells you, you will do. If this woman tells the people of this land that you are treating her badly, it is death that we will mete out to you. Another thing, you will continue to take care of your business better than you did at first. If you think that you have married the chief's daughter and do not have to take your work seriously, we will take the job away from you and take the girl away from you, whether or not the chief agrees."

When he had finished saying all these things, he took water from the deity that the chief had taken me to, put it in a cup, gave it to us and told us to drink it together, then took what was left and sprinkled it on our heads. The water we drank together was something to show that we were one, according to their traditions.

According to that law, the husband of the woman must say a few words at the wedding. Therefore the chief told me to speak. This is what I said:

"Chief and those he governs, I am very happy to see that all the people of this land have agreed that I should marry the daughter of the chief. This marriage, to speak the truth, should not have been agreed to at all, because it is not good for the child of the chief of a large town like this to marry someone like me. No one knows the town I came from, and no one knows who bore me, whether I am a person whose name was known in the place where I was born or whether I was a slave. It is not good for a person to brag about who he is; except for this, I would have told you that I was not a slave in my land. My mother's father was an Oba, chief of Benin, chief of a land as big as this, and one who was feared by all the villages around his town. My father is a chief; if he were not a chief, he would not have been able to marry the daughter of the Oba, chief of Benin.

"People have a proverb that one can tell by a person's behavior what lineage he came from. My actions from the time I came to this land will show you whether I came from a good lineage or a bad one. Love is something very strong and it is what made my wife say she would marry me, in spite of my being a black man. I have understood the rules you laid down for me and I will try my best to keep them."

When I finished saying all of these things, we left that house and went to the chief's house, where we stayed drinking wine and eating wedding food.

The people of that land played various games. What surprised me very much was one game they played on top of a rope. When I was a child I heard that the people of a town near Ikot-Ekpene were able to walk on a rope, but I had not seen them myself. As they said, those who danced on the rope would not eat any cooked food for four days. What they would eat

was roasted yam, so that they would not be heavy. The people of this land had no taboos at all. When they beat the drum they used to do this dance, four people climbed on top of that small rope they had tied between two sticks. The drum told them what they were going to do. When it told them to turn upside down, they turned upside down but took their feet and wrapped them around the rope.

Another beautiful dance was one that only small girls dance. All these dancers wear a certain type of dress of silver and gold. The little girl who is heavier than the others leads the way and the others follow behind her. Any way she danced, they all followed her dancing. The drum tells them how they will dance. On that day I saw how many people there were in that land. The things the children wore on their heads were like mirrors which helped make them very beautiful. The shoes they wore were of gold and were made of silky cloth. The chief spread expensive cloth on the ground where they were dancing. After the girls had danced four times, the drummer began to drum that the bride and her husband should hold hands and dance according to their custom. Everyone there got ready to laugh, because I was a stranger, and that was a difficult dance.

Because my wife knew their traditions, she spent a lot of time showing me how to dance this uri. It surprised the people very much that I could do this dance just as the natives did it. After I did this dance very well, the chief, my in-law, went and brought a plate filled with gold and gave it to me. If this gold were sold, it would have brought much money. Those who lived in that land donated money to us. By the time we finished dancing the uri, the money filled a large box they had placed there.

When I saw that money, I remembered my parents, my children and my brothers, who were poor in my country. It seemed to me that I should blow the money to them. I knew by this that what people say is true. Wherever a person stays, even if that place is more beautiful than heaven, he will remember his homeland. This land was ten times more beautiful than Eko. I had everything I wanted. My house was beautiful on the inside like the house of the head man of Europe. I kept on remembering my land and my relatives. I had a vehicle drawn by four horses. But all these things did not keep me from thinking all the time about my land, which I had not seen for so long.



This is why the elders have a proverb that says, "When you are holding a thief, his mind is on killing a goat." The small house where we lived in that village where I was doing farm work seemed more beautiful to me than the interior of the storied house in the place where I lived now. Any day when I remembered my relatives my stomach closed up and I did not want to eat anything.

One day when my wife saw that I was sad, she asked me what was wrong. I told her that I was thinking about my mother and father. This made my wife very angry, but since I knew that if she told it to her father he would use it to seek a way to kill me, I begged her strongly not to tell her father because I was just kidding. This woman reminded me how I came to their town, and questioned me about the people I saw when I came. She said that she did not see why I would keep on thinking about my land, because the chief loved me. Not only this, he gave me the daughter he loved in marriage. I replied that all those things were true, but begged her strongly not to tell the chief anything about the thoughts I was thinking. This was a good woman. She did not tell her father anything. What she did was to make me happy all the time so that I would not have a chance to think about my land. From that day on I did not tell her anything about the land where I was born.

## Chapter 8

### The Work of Odumodu's Children in Finda

At the time they captured me, the chief's eldest son was not at home; his sister told me that he was at school in a country close to America. She showed me his picture where he was holding his sword in his hand. One who saw it would know at once that he was a trouble-maker. When I asked about his behavior, she told me that he was a very bad person. Her father and all her brothers feared him. When he was twelve years old he was the head soldier, and at that time he conquered many towns which his father now governed. After she told all these things about this young man I was afraid, and thought he would not like to see that a black man like me had married his sister, the oldest daughter of the chief. My wife also told me that he was a very stubborn person and everything I heard about him was true. But she promised me that when her brother returned and started trouble she would show me what to do.

God blessed my wife and me and gave us many children. My oldest and second oldest sons resembled me very much and had heads for books. My other children were light like their mother. All my children went to the school where the children of the citizens were taught. They learned many things there, but the thing that was stressed was farming. This made me think about farming. In our land of Nigeria, children who are going to school and those who are growing up now think that farming is a useless occupation. They are foolish. Any thoughtful person will know that farming is the most important work in the world. From our farms we get food and the clothes we wear. If it were not for our trees we would not be able to build any houses. I would like it if those who teach children would emphasize to them always that they should not look down on farming. They should tell them stories about great yam farmers and many others, who through farm work did good things for everyone in the world.

When my oldest son left school, because of what they taught him there he became a well known farmer. Every morning he went by car to the places the townspeople were planting, to observe the way they were doing their farm work. He taught them new ways to plant things. He taught them that the earth needed food just as people did. He let them know that yam peelings and plantain peelings and other trash of various kinds made the land fertile. In that year, because of what he taught them, they had more food than they had ever had before. The chief was moved by this to give my son a large sum of money.

My second son learned about religion. When he came back from school and heard that the people of that land ate human flesh, he thought and prayed to God to help him make them give up cannibalism. Every time he saw the chief himself in church he began to tell his congregation that it was not good to kill people and it was even worse to eat human flesh. When the chief had heard this many times, he reflected and decided on his own that cannibalism was bad in the sight of God and humans. He himself, the chief, made a law that if anyone killed a person in that land, the judges would try him for murder and he would be killed. This made everyone in the town stop killing people and eating human flesh.

My other son learned things about the law in all the countries of the world. He also used his hands to do artwork. When he had not yet left

school, the people of that land had very bad laws. If someone was a thief or a gossip, the people would kill him, but the way they killed him was very bad. This is the way they killed thieves. When they had started a fire in the middle of the market, they all stood around it and held long sticks in their hands. They tied the thieves and threw them into the fire, and used the sticks to guard them so that they would not be able to run away. If they tried to run to the right or to the left they took those sticks and pushed them into the fire. They would keep on doing this until those people died.

Through the advice of this son of mine, the lawyers in Finda improved the law of their land so that it was very good, like that of other more advanced towns. These are the major laws he suggested that they use to improve the laws of Finda:

(i) "If someone steals, he will not be killed, but one ear will be cut off so that anyone who sees him will know that he is a thief. After cutting off his ear he will be told that if he is found stealing again, one of his eyes will be taken out. If this does not make him abandon thievery, he will be driven out and sent to another town far away where he will stay until he dies. The chief alone will not be able to judge anyone. He will have judges to help him, The judges will be people who are educated and intelligent and know the law of the land well. One who breaks a law will be able to invite someone who knows the law well to help him prepare his case.

(ii) If someone is a gossip, he will be put in jail for one year, and his case will be judged like the case of the thief.

(iii) If someone tries to harm the chief, by way of killing him or doing various other bad things to him, he will be put in jail for life so that he will not be able to do the things he thought of doing.

(iv) If someone commits murder, he will be killed in revenge for the murder of his victim. Before he is killed, he will first be judged in court. A legal expert will help the judges and the accused in preparing the case."

However, as I said at first, my son also used his hands to create works of art. <sup>He</sup> ~~It~~ is not only the law of Finda, <sup>improved</sup> that he improved, but he *showed them*

good ways to carve out canoes. As everyone knows, we Ahaba people are among those who have surpassed their counterparts in canoe-making in all the towns in Nigeria. This made us able to sail down the River Niger to the large water areas of Nembe, Akasa and Burutu, and sail to Lokoja and Ibi, using them to carry many things.

The canoes the Finda people had were very small, like the canoes used for fishing at the arms of small streams. Water entered them, so that their occupants had to bail them out all the time. Only strangers worked on ocean-going ships.

My son showed the Finda people how to carve good canoes that could carry three barrels of oil. When they felled the tree used to carve the canoe, they cut a piece of its trunk the length of the canoe they wanted to carve from it; then the experts took knives and axes, carving it until it came to have the likeness or shape of a canoe. They carried it to the river, took a forked tree branch, lifted it up and singed it inside and out. After singeing it, the experts took sharp knives and scraped it well all over the inside and outside, then put in seats and various other things they wanted in that canoe. The reason they singed it was so that it would be light and not heavy, so it would be able to float on top of the water.

The people of the other towns around that town heard about the good deeds a certain black man and his children did in Finda town. This made them jealous of the chief of Finda and they began to look for a way to make war with him so they would be able to take us to their land. While the people of this town were planning to fight them, the chief of Finda land died.

## Chapter 9

### The Burial of the Chief of Finda

When the chief of this land died, the people sent a message to call back his oldest son who was in the place where he was studying. There was great joy on the day he returned to the town. When he entered the house where the embalmed body of his father was, then decreed the people of the land should shot a round of gunfire, as their custom was, to tell the

people of the land and the people of other towns around theirs that the chief had died.

The people of this town, according to their custom, did not bury a person at the time he died. They dried him in fire until he was dry enough not to smell. The reason they dried people was that they did not bury the corpse at the time of death, as I said before. They wanted to have the chance to tell many other towns that the person had died. It was when the people of those various towns came that they put the chief's body in a coffin made of gold. The people of those towns came and stood around the coffin while his oldest son and oldest daughter were killing goats and chickens and cows and many other animals of various kinds. When they had finished doing this, they carried the person's corpse to the place where they had dug the ground. When I looked inside that grave, I was afraid. I will not be able to describe how the inside of that grave was.

It was only the corpses of chiefs that were cremated. The others were not cremated. Those corpses were put where they would be when they were alive, sat on a chair, the faces rubbed with a fragrant cream, and water sprinkled on them. It looked as though they were perspiring. If you examined them closely, it was as if they were alive, breathing and crying. After these things were done, from morning until evening, the corpse was buried.

The wide burial cloth spread in that grave was very expensive and very beautiful. Two mirrors were at the head of the coffin. One was the mirror the man's oldest son used to look at his face. And if you looked at the foot of the coffin, you would see the chief on his horse, holding his sword in his hand. This was a picture taken when he defeated the people of Yun. At his right, you would see the picture we took when I married his daughter. At his left, you would see the one he took when he killed a leopard. Killing a leopard was a big thing in that town and in many other towns. In the old days hunting was really a big thing. Anyone who killed a leopard was greatly respected because he was a strong man. The chief of this land was a very strong man, and when he was alive he had killed seven leopards.

When the coffin had been placed in the ground, the townspeople began to speak, one by one. This is what the chief of Mimba said:

"Now I agree that death is powerful, the way it has killed this person who is in this coffin now. I'm speaking with courage when I remember that he was my friend from the time our fathers were alive up until now that death has separated us. Talking a lot about the chief of this land causes the people of his town to cry many tears. Thus I will say only a few words.

"When his mother gave birth to him one tooth was in his mouth, and this was something that surprised people very much because babies do not grow teeth in the womb. His father because of this sent some people to the diviners. They told those people that this child would be a big person in the world. That one tooth he had showed that God made him stronger than any other person. He would defeat all the big towns that were around your town. He was not playing, his face would not smile. When he listened to them, his common sense and knowledge surprised the wise men. When he was fourteen years old he killed his first leopard and the story of that leopard deserves telling.

"In this town at that time a leopard was bothering people. It was killing goats and chickens and many other animals in the town. One day the chief's son was in the house eating when he heard a commotion in the compound. When he ran out he saw that leopard holding a small child to the ground. Everyone there had run away, leaving the leopard and the one it was killing. He entered the house, took a knife and went to confront the leopard. When the leopard saw him, it left the child it had strangled and started to chase him. When the leopard got close to him, he dealt one knife stroke and cut it in two. When the townspeople saw that he had killed the leopard, they all came and carried him on their heads and called him 'Tough one,' that is, a savior.

"Everyone there began to say that what the diviner had said concerning the child was true. Within that year his father died, and, because of this thing that he had done, the people of this town said that he should become the chief when he was only fourteen years old.

"His first task was to teach the people of his land how to wage war. He made a rule that every young man fourteen years of age must enter a training house where he would be taught how to wage war. After he

trained those soldiers, he began to fight all the towns around you. He carried on seven wars and vanquished his enemies. This is why all the towns around Finda are under its control now. The good things the chief did for you, the people of this town, are many, but if I started to recount them here we would never go home. Let us all pray to God to keep his soul alive."

After he finished and sat down, the people of the town told me, as a foreigner and one who had been the chief's secretary, that they would like me to speak about our chief whom we were burying. I stood up and thanked them for the honor they had done me in selecting me as one among the funeral speakers of the great chief who was in the coffin now.

"I do not have much to say because the one from Mimba, who was a good friend of our father, has said everything about him, and to say a lot would be to repeat what he said.

"All the citizens here now know how I came to this town. Those who have come will see that I am the only black person among all the people here. The story about how I went on a journey and reached that wide clearing where the Finda people saw me and captured me is a story I have told the chief, who was my master who loved me.

"It greatly surprised the chief when he saw me because he had never seen a black man before. This caused him to love me very much and make my fame reach every place in this town. The first good thing he did for me was to teach me the language of this town by selecting a person to educate me. Because I learned well, the chief, in spite of my being a black man, made me his secretary, which was an important work in this town as it is in all countries of the world. The best thing that he did for me was to give me his oldest daughter in marriage, not caring that I was a black man or paying attention to what people would say. There are many other things the chief did for me, but I will not be able to tell them to you."

After I finished speaking, his oldest son, who had returned from the place where he had been studying, stood up and said these things.

"I have <sup>thanked</sup> ~~grateful~~ the chiefs of various other towns who left many duties in their towns and came to the funeral of my father. This shows

the great love you all have had for my father since the time he was alive until now that he is being buried. I also thank the people of this town who have gathered here now to give my father his last respects. This too shows me that all of you loved him, and you appreciated all the work he did when he was alive. I do not have much to say because the two people who spoke here have said everything that should be said. What I ask of the people of this land is to help me as you helped my father during peace and war, because 'what makes the chicken heavy is feathers.'" [What made the chief great was the support of the people.]

After he finished speaking, everyone in that place, as one voice, sang a song that the chief liked when he was alive. The chiefs of the other towns who were there got up and started to throw the money they had and various other things into the grave. Everyone sang and danced; the soldiers shot off the guns they held.

## Chapter 10

### How Odumodu Left Finda Town

About one month after the chief was buried, the people selected twelve people to ascertain everything the chief had. Because I knew something about counting, they chose me to be one of them. While we were examining everything, we saw a paper that the chief had written, saying that when he died, I should be the one to take his place. According to a certain tradition of those people, the chief had the power to choose the one to succeed him when he died. Sometimes that person would be his son, but other times he would be someone else. The chief's oldest son was very angry to see that his father hated him. This made the young man seek to kill me.

When the people heard about the paper the chief had written when he was alive, they rang a bell to call together the general public to find out what they thought about this paper the chief had written. After the people had met together, the treasurer got up to speak and said,

"According to our custom, which everyone here knows, anyone the chief selects when he is alive to take his place will be chief; whether it is his son or any other person. It is the chief who wrote the paper I hold



in my hand now. In it he wrote the way he wanted the land to be after he died. This is what is in that paper:

“I, Magmaga, chief of Finda town, desire after I die that Odumodu of the town of Ahaba take my place as chief, and my oldest son will be under him. I know that this thing will bring much dispute and disagreement in this town after I die, but it will be indeed good if the people will help this man to govern the land well. It is not everyone who is able to take the place of chief in governing everyone who is under him in the right way. Every one knows about the good tasks Odumodu completed in this land since he first came here. This man and his children have enlightened the people of this town in various ways. All of this caused me to think that this person should take my place and be chief after I die. I will be happy in the land of the spirits if I see you make Odumodu the chief.’

‘I am, Magmaga, Chief of Finda land.’”

After he sat down, many people got up and came to speak their minds concerning this paper the chief had written. This brought a division in that land; one group sided with the chief's son, another group sided with me. Those who favored the chief's son very much were only the young men, but the adults and the general public favored me very much. Because of this I did not agree when they tried to put the chief's cap on me. I told them that it was not good to take from the chief's son what God had given him. The elders would not listen. What they did was to name a day they would put the chief's cap on me.

When the young men heard the plan the public had made, they went and told it to the son of the chief. This made him write me a letter asking me if it was true that I had agreed to be chief of Finda land. He told me in that letter that that thing could not take place, but rather he and I would fight until everyone who favored him had died. I did not know how to reply to this letter because I was of two minds. When day came I wrote a letter telling him that my heart did not want me to become chief in any land, and I did not want to be chief of Finda land because Magmaga was not my father. However, since there are many leaves in the forest and the chooser selected the hard leaf, and because of the way the law of their land was, and the choice his father made of me, I agreed to live in Finda land as the chief.

When my letter reached him he was very angry. He gathered the young men who had favored him so much and told them to kill me and also kill the people who had said that I should live in the land as his father had said. After he said these things, a certain person came to tell me that I should watch out for myself. On the day they would start this war, my wife and I should escape to Mimba town. This is what we did. While there I heard that the chief's son had killed everyone who lived in that land. Because running for one's life does not sap the strength, all my children ran and came to us where we were staying. I also heard that after he had killed all the people, he dug up the corpse of his father from the grave and burned it, because he had not done the right thing in taking his land and giving it to me, a stranger.

## Chapter 11

### The Reception Given Us at Mimba

The chief of Mimba town was very happy when he saw my wife, my children and me, because he had heard about me and had seen me at the time all the elders had come to the burial of Magmaga, chief of Finda. This to him was "what one searches for happens on its own." The first thing he did was to give us three-story houses in the eastern part of that town. Everything a person could want was in that house. After we had stayed in that town for eighteen days, the chief and his wife came to see if we were well and to ask us if their town pleased us. While we were conversing, the chief told us that he was very happy to receive us in his town, and he thanked God very much for the good thing he had done for him. He said that he had heard about the good works my children and I had done in Finda when we lived there, and he would be glad if I would be willing, just as I was in that town, to work for him. After he finished speaking, I answered him in a few words. I told him that I too was happy to live in his town, and I thanked him very much for his care of us from the time we had come to his place until now. I told him the highlights of the story about the way I had come to Finda and entered into the hands of the deceased chief. I also told him why I had run to him. I told him that when the Finda chief was going to die, he wrote a paper saying that I should replace him as chief. The elders of the land agreed with what he wrote in the paper and did all they could to make me chief as their deceased master had written. The young men helped the chief's son in his plan to kill me. That made me

run to this town where they would not be able to come and kill me. The ant said that rather than his head burn in fire, he should swiftly run away.

I was very happy that he knew on his own about the good work I had done in that town and the good reward the chief had given me. He had taken me as his son, and to prove to him that what I said was true, I told him that the woman with me was the oldest daughter of that Finda chief. Because of the love she had for me she came with me to this town. She is the one who gave birth to these three children who came with us. They are the ones who did all these well-known good works in Finda. The first one caused the townspeople to abandon their bad custom of killing people. The second showed the people of that land how to plant things so they would grow well. The children growing up in the world now do not know that farming is the chief work in the world. Those who are ashamed of farm work are foolish. Any sensible person will say that farming is good work. When God first created man, the task he gave him was farm work. The third son corrected the law of that land and wrote it on paper so that children could learn it in school.

## Chapter 12

### Building the First School in Mimba

Since there was no school there, I told him about the benefits people would receive from a school. A school was something every town that wanted enlightenment should have. The town that had no school where children could be taught what was in books would be ignorant. The school was the place of wisdom.

It is not only reading and writing that we learn in school. There are many things in the world about which we learn. It is good for us to learn things about the world in which we live. We ought to learn about the human beings and animals and birds and trees in the world. It is also good for us to learn about things in the sky and on earth and in the water. But most important, we should learn about the God who lives in heaven and who created all human beings and everything in the world.

The people in the town I had come from knew that learning was a big thing. They were serious about education because they knew its value. The most important thing was that children should learn to listen to what

their parents and adults told them. They also learned to respect their elders and the chief of the land. They loved the land of their birth, which would make them fight for it when people of other towns came to fight them. They also learned that it was not good for a person to steal. Especially, they learned about endurance. In school they learned good behavior. Many people behaved as one ought not to behave. A person ought to do only good and praiseworthy things.

After I finished saying all these things, he thanked me very much and told me that he and the people of his land, those who helped him take care of the land, would meet and think about what they would do. He also told me that the first thing he thought his people would want me to do for them would be to make their children "learn book," reading and writing. After two days, the chief's messenger came and told me that the chief was summoning me. When I arrived at his place, I saw about twelve people who were the judges of that town. They asked me many questions about what I wanted to do in their town. When I finished telling them what I would do so that the people of their land would know things like those of other towns around their land, they all shouted loudly and said, "Our savior has come, our savior has come." On that day my wife and three children and I joined the chief and his judges in going around that town, choosing a good place to build a school.

The work of building that school did not take much time because all the people of that land did it. When they had finished building the school, the people of my house and I began to think of how we could do this big job that fell to us. We thought that my three children would teach the little boys in the school, and my wife would teach the little girls, and I would be the one to supervise all of that work.

The death of my wife spoiled the hopes of us all. My wife died on the day the school was opened. This woman had not been sick for a long time. A fever was the sole cause of her death, but this made the people of that land who did not know God well think that it was sorcery that killed her. I did not believe this when the chief told me that they had gone to a certain diviner and found out that it was sorcery that killed my wife, and that the sorcery came from Finda town where she was born. It was the son of the Finda chief who chased me there who they thought used poison to kill my wife. The people of that town behaved like any other town that was not

enlightened. They thought that it was sorcerers who killed anyone who died. In the old days these beliefs caused many people to be killed for no reason when they had done nothing. This belief caused Arochuku to be famous because it was there that there was a divinity that told about the sorcerers. When the Europeans conquered the Aro and entered the shrine, the people of the world knew that the Aro were carrying on a fraud.

What killed my wife was malaria, because a mosquito had bitten her when we lay down in a clearing at the time we were running to Mimba. It was this that caused the death. If a doctor who knew medicine well had been there, my wife would not have died.

They buried her well and did for her everything that ought to have been done for the daughter of a chief. They prepared the ground to bury her like the chief of Finda. This made me give sincere thanks to the people of that land and the chief. The death of my wife made me start to think about my country. When she was alive, she made me forget my country because I loved her very much.

## Chapter 13

### The Misfortunes of Odumodu's Line of Descent

After my wife was buried, we began the work of teaching the children. We taught them with all our hearts, and six months after the school was built the behavior of those children changed very much. This made the townspeople send many of their children to school. The result of this was to make the work of teaching them too much for us, because one person was teaching sixty children.

Another thing we did was to tell the chief that we wanted them to build us a house where we could pray to God. After they finished building that house, my son who had learned about God's word went there on Sunday, speaking to the people about God's word. The first thing he taught them was the Ten Commandments that God gave people. He taught them the first commandment that told us that man should have no other gods before him. This commandment and the second one told everyone that they should take away their many charms, their idols and the many bad medicines they had and destroy them. Because of this, many of them came

to be baptised. Because of our work all of that town knew how to pray to God.

All the towns there did not know that killing people was a very bad thing in the sight of God. They all used to kill human beings the same as they killed chickens. Because of the sixth commandment the people of this land came to see that killing people was a bad practice. This showed me indeed that the word of God was powerful, that peace and love in the world came from the word of God that spread over the whole world. In olden times all towns did bad things. Those who read books about what used to happen in various towns will see that when the word of God had not come out, people did many bad things--people in Europe, in the lands of black people as well as red people. We should thank those who caused the word of God to spread over the whole world.

When we had stayed six years in that town, we had trained about 32 children who were well educated and who would be able to teach others. They all went to various villages around that town, building schools where they would teach children. When we had stayed ten years in that town, many people had been enlightened, and many children had been educated.

In the sixth month of the year (June) 1886, the year that Victoria, Queen of England gave the Royal Niger Company permission and power to govern the lands near the Niger River and to trade markets in those lands, something happened that made me start to wonder if I could find a way to leave that town and return to my birthplace, Ahaba. A certain young man married a woman on that day and he invited many people to join him in celebrating according to the custom of the people of that land. While they were in a certain house drinking wine and dancing, unaware, fire started in the gunpowder that was there. When I heard this I ran there because I knew that my three children were among the men invited to the wedding feast. When I reached the spot I discovered that all my children had died. I fell to the ground because my heart was broken, and I stayed there not knowing what to do. The death of my three children on the same day made me feel tired of living. The only thing I wanted now was to leave that town and return to my land.

The death of my children brought me great heartbreak because of which I wanted very much to leave that land. When my children were

alive, they and the children they were teaching had begun to make a boat they were going to use to go fishing. I helped the children finish the boat in the eighth month of that year. There was no other way I could leave this land except to use that boat to get out. That made me think of paddling it to go and find another land. No matter how frightening these thoughts sounded, at that time I did not care about anything that would happen to me. But just at the time I was preparing to leave, God sent me people who saved me from this foolishness. Some foreigners came from a certain place near America called Havana, to the town where I was, to sell fish. They advised me that it would be good if I went away with them. The first thing I made sure to do was to find a way to escape those who wanted me to live in Mimba.

## Chapter 14

### The Trick Odumodu Used to Leave Mimba

During the time I was in Finda town my fame had reached all the towns surrounding it. This made the chief of Mimba regard me as an important person. My house was situated in the middle of the town near the chief's house. Many soldiers surrounded my house so that my enemies would not be able to enter it at any time. They were there in the morning, afternoon and night.

There was no way I could escape. One night when it was about twelve o'clock, when everyone thought that everyone had gone to sleep, I began to look for a way to leave Mimba town. I had told the people from Havana who had come to sell fish to wait for me that night.

When I went out into my compound, I saw that the soldiers who guarded were sleeping. When I tiptoed across them one soldier woke up and blew on a horn which made them all wake up and prepare to follow me any place I went. What I did was to tell them that I had come to find out how they were guarding. I told them this so they would not know that I was leaving. I did not see any way to leave on that night, so I returned to my house.

Those who came from Havana did not see me that night as we had planned. Because of this, they came to the house at dawn to find out what

prevented me from coming as we had arranged. I hid nothing from them. I told them that I could not find a way to escape that night. I bribed them with money and begged them to wait for me that night around twelve o'clock. They agreed, and because of me they did not leave on the day they had planned to leave Mimba.

Finding a way to leave Mimba was my only thought that day. In the afternoon I thought of something I could do to help me leave that town. My thoughts went to a certain slave who had been sold in the old days to Benin and escaped to Ahaba. Immediately, without wasting any time, I began to put on a woman's dress. When I finished dressing, I took a certain leaf that is used to make a young woman's face shine and put it all over my face so that anyone who saw me would not know that it was Odumodu. I did not take many things so the guards would not think that I was a thief. What I took was one small container with gold and stones like "diamonds" in it. These things were what the Finda and Mimba people had given me as payment for my work.

I fearlessly carried the small box and went past the guards, but not one of them knew that it was a well-known person like me passing them. I greeted them, changing my voice to be like a woman's. After I had passed all of them I started to run, not looking back, reached the shore and entered the boat.

Those people did not know who I was because I looked like a young woman. When I took off the makeup I had used to cover on my face they all fell down laughing. I told them not to lose any time because if the chief of that land came and saw me at that shore, he would be sure to kill me. They listened to me and rowed their boat out immediately.

These boats were not heavy and engines were not used to propel them. It was four wide oars that were used to propel it. Because of this that boat did not go fast. This caused us to waste many days on the ocean. At that time it was the dry season. The sun that shone on us was indescribable. Storms also were troubling again. We were almost lost on that great ocean, except that those people were well acquainted with the ocean. Because of this and with the help of God we crossed safely and reached Havana.



We stayed on the ocean two months before reaching Havana. It was a land with water surrounding it. Its towns were not like the towns I had left. People, trees, birds, and everything in it were different. When I saw trees like palm trees I thought that I had reached my country. This brought new life to me and made me forget the reason I had left Mimba.

I had no money to use in returning to my country; therefore I thought about what work I could do. This made me buy polish used to shine shoes and I became a shoe shiner; everyone would give me one penny. I sat along the highway. This work was really regarded as menial, but because of the things my master who taught me in Eko told me, I did not scorn this work because it was work I would use to get food. Anyone who does not scorn any work will not die of hunger. When I was in Eko studying, the first thing the teacher told us was that it would be good if small children living in Nigeria, especially in Eko, realized that there was no work that was bad for a person looking for something to eat.

I stayed a few months in Havana working at shining people's shoes on the highway. Some days I earned a shilling and sometimes six pennies. This seemed better to me than stealing. This money was plenty for my food but it could not be enough to buy shirts and cloths, because the cloth of the people of that land was very expensive.

Anyone that God promises will become something, no matter what place he is in, he will give him the things he promised him. One day while I sat near the water shining shoes, a native of the land, a boy, fell into the water. The water carried him out to a place where his feet could not touch the bottom. Fear kept everyone from jumping into the water to save the life of the boy because the water was deep and filled with sharks and other man-killing fish. When I saw that this boy was going to be lost, I jumped into the water, dove down and pulled him out. What I did surprised everyone there and made them go and tell the chief of that land how I saved the life of that boy who was lost in the river. This deed became famous everywhere in that land, and everybody came to the highway where I stayed to see me. When the chief of the land heard this, he called together the people of his land and asked them what they thought about what I had done. They told him it would be good to thank me and give me twenty bags of money because of the good thing I did.

When this money came to me I returned to my country without wasting any time, because at that time many ships belonging to slave kidnapers from America and Havana and used to go to my country and back.

When I reached home, the elders there who knew me ran away and left their houses, because they thought I was a spirit. They all thought that I had died because it had been a long time since I left home. One courageous person returned, peeked into the house and saw where I was. They all ran back when they saw that I did nothing to that person. They knew now that I was Odumodu the traveler, and that I was not a spirit. They all crowded around me. Ahaba became excited on that day. The elders who knew me before and the children who had heard my name ran to see me. Everyone was very joyful, especially my brothers who had lost heart thinking that I had died.

I used some of my money to build a house, took the rest and kept it for my children. The people of our land met and decided that they would crown me chief so I could govern them. This gesture pleased me because I knew that it was something that came to me through my father. The day I was crowned was a day no one in Ahaba will forget. Europeans and chiefs and many prominent people from Onitsha and many other towns near Ahaba came to attend my coronation.