

TOMORROW IS PREGNANT

by Walter Chukwuma Eneore

Cast of Characters

Odenigbo:	Father of Onyema and Egondy
Ugboaku:	His wife
Nwandanda:	Oldest sister of Odenigbo
Iwunze:	Brother of Odenigbo
Osuji:	Brother of Odenigbo
Ugodie:	Sister of Ugboaku
Egondy:]	
Onyema:]	Children of Odenigbo
Oji:]	
Nevo:	A gossip
Chief Nwosu:	The chief to whose house Egondy ran
Ekemma:	Oldest daughter of Chief Nwosu
Ugonne:	Oldest sister of Chief Nwosu
Court Clerk William: .	An interpreter
Okoro:	A winetapper
Obilo:	A seller of slaves
Chief Mberedeogu: . . .	Chief of Umuokpara
Uzoma:	His wife
Igboji:]	
Okereke:]	Messengers of Chief Mberedeogu
Ibe:]	
Nweze:]	Brothers vying for their father's title
Akunebu:]	
Chienye:	Woman who sells wine
Ude:]	
Odumodu:]	Friends of Oji
Agy:]	
Ekenta:]	
Nnenna:	Female friend of Oji
Unoma:	Friend of Nnenna
Igwe:]	Elders
Ubadogu:]	

FOREWORD

The Igbos have a proverb which says that if a cow has no tail, its *chi* [personal god] will chase away the flies for it.

They also say that one should not blame the day if night has not yet fallen because you cannot use the early morning to predict a bad (or good) market.

If death does not kill the yam used for sacrifice, it will eventually sprout.

If you continue to go after a poor person, he will be driven to good luck.

As is the way of the world, if one is absent, his yam is removed from the fire.

Ugboaku started to mistreat Onyema and Egondy badly, treating them in such a way that their lives were miserable, and rubbed their noses and mouths on the ground. Finally, these two children turned out to be children whom God does things for and became people who were used as models for the town, because no one knows how water enters the pumpkin stem. For death does not kill merely by pointing, for it is said that if one's god has not killed him he will not die entirely [he will still be able to achieve something], and any mouth speaking ill will start to speak well of him.

Act One

Scene One

(In the house of Chief Odenigbo) *ital.*

Odenigbo: *(Odenigbo sits on his bed taking his morning snuff)*

Ugboaku: *(Goes and peeks through the door where her husband is sitting)* Odenigbo, hey! What keeps you so late, when the morning winetappers have returned but Odenigbo has not yet gotten up.

Odenigbo: O-O-Oyal! What is this? Ugboaku, what are you trying to do this morning? What sense does it make to shout at Odenigbo so early in the morning as though something had happened? Have I stomped your chicken to death?

Ugboaku: Master, please don't be angry. I thought that you had gotten up.

Odenigbo: Hey! Watch yourself o! [Know your limit.]

Ugboaku: Master, please, there is something I want to tell you.

Odenigbo: What is it?

Ugboaku: What I want to tell you is something about these two children of my husband's wife--Onyema and Egondy.

Odenigbo: What have they done? Speak quickly because Igwebuike and I are going to go somewhere.

Ugboaku: Have you seen Onyema and Egondy? Those two have become our fishbone. I have not seen children like this since I came into the world. You know that since their mother, Nkuwiji, died, these children began to act like wild beasts. What shall I tell you? Wild beasts are twenty times better than they are.

Odenigbo: My ears are open. What I want is for you to tell me specifically what they did or what they are doing, that madewild beasts better than they are. It is also good, if a person says that something is bitter, let him say what it tastes like.

Ugboaku: Do you mean to tell me that you have not known that these two children are very bad? That is, you haven't known that the time has for you to know that my son, Oji, is the only child you have; that these children that my husband's wife bore are nothing but goats? The advice I want to give you is that you should start immediately to find Egondy a husband, and sell Onyema, take the money you will get for him, and see about raising Oji, your son, well. I have seen that Onyema and Egondy have the character of their dead mother.

Odenigbo: I do not want you to remind me of Nkukwji, my first wife. I have heard what you said. If you stand and stretch your neck, you hit your head. I will send for Obilo and hand over Onyema to sell him, while we will start immediately to find Egondy a husband, even if it means forcing Egondy on him. If a first child turns out badly, we take the last one and make him the head child.

Ugboaku: Good. We'll get started immediately to follow up on this, because it is better to look for a black goat in the afternoon, because when night falls, they all look black. Let me go to the back of the house and get food for the goat.

(Behind Odenigbo's house)

(Egondy sits behind the house cracking palm kernels, eating and brooding about her life. Onyema approaches her.)

Onyema: Egondy, I have told you to stop this kind of crying that you do all the time. Crying won't do any good. Crying will not save us from this hellfire we have been in since our mother died.

Egondy: Then what will we do? You have seen that I haven't had any food at all for three days. [things cooked in the fire have not entered my mouth] Alas, what death causes! What death causes! If our mother were alive today
(Tears start to fall from her eyes.)

Onyema: We must find something to do. One thing that encourages me is that if the cow has no tail, its god chases away the flies for it.

Egondy: It's you, as a boy, I'm sorry for. Since I am a girl, if it becomes so difficult that I can't bear it, I can run away, run to a man. Let's try to find out what to do for you because it is only the tree that continues to stand after it is told it is going to be cut down, but if it were a man You have seen that what Ugboaku, our father's wife, wants to do is kill us the way she killed our mother.

Onyema: My idea is that you will run to our mother's village, and I will go to my friend, Amadi, and he and I will live together.

(While Onyema and Egondy sit conversing about what they will do, Ugboaku enters suddenly.)

Ugboaku: Oho! Oho! These thieves! Here you are making arrangements about what you are going to steal. Goats! *(She brings a switch to beat them.)* Just wait! What happened to your mother will happen to you. *(They all run out.)*

Scene Two

(In the house of Chief Nwosu)

(Chinyere is straightening up the house when Ugonne arrives.)

Ugonne: Is anyone home? Is there anyone there of the house of my brother, Chief Nwosu?

Chinyere: Yes, someone is here. *(Chinyere comes out and peers through the door.)* Ooh! Welcome, mother.

Ugonne: How are you, Chinyere? Why have I been knocking for so long without anyone answering me?

Chinyere: Mother, I have just now come from the back of the house, cleaning the house.

Ugonne: What about my brother, the Chief?

Chinyere: He is in.
(While the two of them are talking, Chief Nwasu enters.)

Chief Nwasu: Oho! Welcome, my sister. Is everything all right? What brings you so early?

Ugonne: Everything is fine. I saw your market people, Igboji and Okereke. They said that they were going to come and tell you that they were ready to go to Igwenga market, in such a way that there is nothing holding back the dog's death, and they will set out and go. They have finished buying plantains, palm kernels, yams and oil and have packed them into the boat waiting for the storm to subside. Please, try to see that your message reaches them.

Chief Nwasu: Good. I have heard what you said. The message will reach them quickly, because one does not use the same thing to poke the ears as was used to poke the eyes.

Ugonne: Good. I must return.
(Chief Nwasu walks his sister out of the compound.)

(In Odenigbo's house)
(Odenigbo is in his house thinking about Oji's behavior.)

Okoro: Is anyone home?

Odenigbo: Who's there? Come on in.

Okoro: *(He enters the house and takes a seat. Odenigbo calls to Ugboaku to bring kola.)*

Ugboaku: *(Enters with the kola, carries it to Odenigbo, greets Okoro, and asks him to excuse her. She then goes out.)*

Odenigbo: *(He blesses the kola as it is done in Igboland. They both chew it.)*

Okoro: Our father Odenigbo, you know that the matter that has already been discussed needs only a nod to agree to it. I have come about that wine money.

Odenigbo: Welcome, there is no problem about it.
(Odenigbo gets up, brings down his bag from the wall, and starts to look for the money in it. Finally he does not find the money in it.)

Oh-oh! Uh, Okoro, please go and come back tomorrow to get your money. I had put some money in this bag, but I can't find it. Please, go then, don't be angry.

Okoro: I'll leave. It may be that you misplaced it. Don't worry about it. Tomorrow, Eke day, I will come after I have finished my morning winetapping.

(Okoro picks up his tapper's rope and leaves.)

Odenigbo: *(Odenigbo is angry. He starts calling for his son Oji.)*
Oji, Oji! Ohoo! Where has this child gone?

Ugboaku: *(Enters.)* Father, are you calling Oji?

Odenigbo: Look at this! This woman, are you Oji? When did you change your name to Oji?

Ugboaku: *(Starts to look around and at the same time Oji comes in.)*

Odenigbo: Oji, where have you been while I was shouting for you?
Where did you go?
(Odenigbo brings a switch to strike Oji, while Ugboaku tries to stop him.)
Oji, look at my bag, did you take any money out of it?

Oji: Money! Money, I never touched this bag, honestly.

Ugboaku: Master, I have told you that my son Oji does not pilfer. Remember that I have been telling you for a long time that we have a thieving rat and he lives in this house. This thieving rat is Onyema and his sister Egondy. If you talk at all about looking for something, the one to ask is Onyema.

Odenigbo: I have heard what you are saying. It downs on me that for a long time I have been looking for things in my bag. However, I could not for the life of me say that it was this one or that one who was doing it. Every day is a thief's day, but eventually the owner of the house will have his day. Speakers of proverbs say that when the hill learns to break the waist, the climbers learn to pace themselves. Call Onyema and Egondy for me.
(Now Onyema and Egondy enter, Odenigbo asks them if they have ever taken money from his bag.)

Egondy: *(Starts to sob, declaring that at no time did it enter her mind to touch that bag.)*

Onyema: *(Shaking his head over this state of affairs.)*
Father, they say that when a child is killed at the boundary of the land, it was his own father who killed him.
(Onyema and Egondy continue to bemoan their fate.)

Odenigbo: All right. Death is the only thing one can do nothing about.

Ugboaku: *(Ugboaku and Oji are in their own house.)*
Oji, there is one thing I want to ask you.

Oji: Ask me, mother.

Ugboaku: Tell me. Was there ever a time when you saw Onyema touching your father's bag? It is clear to me that there must be, because you would never go to take anything there.

Oji: I sometimes see Onyema touching our father's bag. Sometimes I see him with something in his mouth. Sometimes he gives me things like bitter kola.
(While the two of them are conversing, Odenigbo enters.)

Ugboaku: Aha, my master. I told you long ago that you should find out what should be done to these children, Onyema and Egondy.

Odenigbo: I have heard. We should go slowly all be in dealing with the matter. One should not be hasty in licking the hand, because one does not hang it on top of the shelf. Let me go and see Chief Mberedeagu, because he says that there is an important matter that he and I must discuss.
(Odenigbo and Ugboaku set out. Onyema and Egondy enter discussing what they will do now which is to start slowly to gather their belongings.)

Scene Three

(In the house of Mberedeagu)

(Chief Mberedeagu and Uzoma are in their house.)

Uzoma: Master, live long!

Chief Mberedeogu: My wife!

Uzoma: Master, please, there is really something that has been bothering me for a long time. Whenever I opened my mouth to tell you about it, I couldn't get it out.

Chief Mberedeogu: What is it?

Uzoma: You have seen your son, Dike? I have started to watch him.

Chief Mberedeogu: Watch whom?

Uzoma: What can I tell you? I have heard that he and Oji the son of Odenigbo have started to become friends. On last Afo day, Enyidie, Uzoka's wife, called me and was telling me this. Many others had said it first, and I pretended that I had heard nothing.

Chief Mberedeogu: *(Becoming angry)* Oji and whom? Oji the son of Odenigbo whose name smells in this town like rotten pumpkin seeds! Go, I will show Dike that he will not keep this kind of company in my house.

Uzoma: This is terrible!

Chief Mberedeogu: You know that the thing about this that pains me badly is that Odenigbo wants to show me that he has money, then fights me underhandedly in various ways. Odenigbo is one who comes out and says plainly that he does not support my leadership, and he does not know why he was left out as a person with money in this town of Umyokpara, and then I, Mberedeogu, was given the governing position. However, he does not know that the child he is doing divination for is the son of a diviner.

Uzoma: It was only last week that I heard that Odenigbo was

looking for a way to push you down, so he could govern. We will warn Dike that he should not set again in Odenigbo's house, because Odenigbo can use him to get at you, because it is said that through the chicks one can catch their mother.

Chief Mberedeppu: Let us start keep watching. No matter what, before one month, I will show Odenigbo that I am the chief of this town.

Act Two

Scene One

(In the house of Odenigbo)

(Odenigbo is sitting. Ugboaky enters and approaches him.)

Ugboaky: Master, please, it is that same matter that I am coming for. You know they say that it is only the tongue that can be held in the mouth, at all times, without resulting in something bad.

Odenigbo: What matter? Will you let it be dawn before you start your endless talking?

Ugboaky: Master, it is because of the importance, because ears do not rest when palm kernels are still in the mouth. It concerns Onyema and Egondy. One thing I discovered about you was that you do not act quickly. You will stay until the water reaches your mouth without making a move. You don't know that by remaining silent like this, Onyema and Egondy will shock us in this house.

Odenigbo: What! Is it I, Odenigbo, you are opening your mouth to like this? Ugboaky, I am telling you again, don't let this matter of Onyema and Egondy bring the kind of trouble to you and me that we didn't expect in this house. I have seen Obilo, the chief slave-dealer. He promised that

they would come and take Onyema to sell him. As for Egondy, I have seen Nwiwu, who is the one to whom we will take Egondy so that his oldest son can marry her.

Ugboaku: *(Ugboaku shows her joy at these predictions.)*
This is excellent. Please, did you remember to tell them about Onyema and his pilfering ways?

Odenigbo: *(Angrily)* Look here! Have you seen a person mix a potion to cure the eye and then put pepper in it? Didn't you know that if you talk about this, it will be like the molded pot splitting open? [Letting the cat out of the bag?]

Igboji and Okereke: *(They knock at the door)* Please, is anyone here?
Are Odenigbo's people here?

Ugboaku: Who is it?

Igboji and Okereke: It is Chief Mberedeogy's messengers.

Ugboaku: Come in. *(Ugboaku goes to open the door.)* Welcome.

Igboji: Master Odenigbo, Chief Mberedeogy sent us to . . .

Odenigbo: Have you seen trouble? Who are you, that you do not greet Odenigbo before you start to tell your story . . .

Okereke: Master, do not be angry. Greetings!

Odenigbo: Greetings yourself! What do you say has happened?

Igboji: Master Odenigbo, Chief Mberedeogy sent us to give you a message.

Odenigbo: Does he say that I trampled to death his goat or his chicken?

Okereke: Master Odenigbo, Chief Mberedeogu says that you should remove the monkey's hand from the soup before it becomes a man's hand. He says that we should tell you that you should stop your son Oji and his son Dike from associating with each other. That if this is not done, trouble will befall both of you.

Odenigbo: Oho! Now I see.
(Odenigbo is still angry, but he will not show it.)
Please, does Chief Mberedeogu say that my son Oji trampled to death his chicken, or what?

Igboji: We do not know. That is all that Chief Mberedeogu said that we should tell you.

Odenigbo: All right, you may leave. I will come and see Chief Mberedeogu to find out what he is saying.
(Now Igboji and Okereke greet Odenigbo and leave.)
See how a man can stay in his own house and break his waist? If Chief Mberedeogu wants war between us, he had better come out plainly with it, rather than doing it through children. Anyway, I understand that his anger about all the palm trees and land that I have causes him to fear that I will push him out of his position as chief. So be it. One who has done nothing does not fear the thunder.
(Odenigbo calls his wife, tells her he is going to see his farm workers, then starts to go out. Ugboaku reenters the house and is preparing food for Onyema and Egondy to eat. That will be fufu and soup with nothing in it except salt and pepper and oil.)

Ugboaku: Let Egondy and Onyema play any trick they want. When they come in, they will use this soup to eat this food. If they try to refuse to eat it like this, I will show them what the fire uses the rat's ear to do.

Scene Two

(In the house of Chief Mberedeogu)

(Chief Mberedeogu and his wife are discussing some trouble that has befallen their town, especially concerning teenagers, and concerning arguments about palm trees and land. Soon, Ibe brings in two young men who are contesting for their father's title and they enter forcefully. They all greet the chief.)

Chief Mberedeogu: Aha! Have you brought those who are trying to bring trouble to our land?

Uzoma: Look at these fine young men who ought to be living in harmony like breast and chest, coming and fighting with each other.

Chief Mberedeogu: What are your names?

Nweze: Chief, may you live long. My name is Nweze Uzodimma.

Akunebu: Chief, may you live forever. Mine is Akunebu, son of Uzodimma.

Chief Mberedeogu: I, Chief Mberedeogu, sent for you.

Ibe: *(Stands looking around.)*

Uzoma: Look at these children. Do you know where you are? Put your hands behind you. It's as though you think you are in your own house where you and your brother are playing dog and cat. The children of today, it is terrible.

Chief Mberedeogu: I hope that you understand that I made a law in which I forbade any noise and commotion in this town of Umuokpara. My man, what is your trouble?

Nweze: Master, something caused the cocoyam to cry. Our father,

Aluka, has two wives. My mother and Akunebu's mother. Akunebu is older than I but my mother did not have a son in time, which caused our father Aluka to marry Akunebu's mother. What made me vie for my father's title was that my mother was the first to be married in our household.

Chief Mberedeogu: Akunebu, why do you put your finger in your brother's eye?

Akunebu: What Nweze says is true. His mother was married first, then my mother was married, but my mother was the first to bear a son. I myself am the oldest son in my father's household, which means that I am the one who should inherit my father's title.

Chief Mberedeogu: Hmm, I have heard what you said. You can go. The elders and the town leaders and I will look into this matter. But let me warn you again. If I happen to hear that you have started any more trouble, I will show you what this tortoise is sold for in the Ogbu Eke market. Leave now.

(Nweze and Akunebu thank the chief and go out.)

Scene Three
(In a wine house)

Chienye: *(The wineseller is displaying the wine she is selling, tasting it to show that it was a winetapper who brought it direct to her. Oji's friends Ude, Agu, Odumodu and Ekente arrive at the wine house and sit down.)*

Ude: How are you, ma'am? Is today's wine like what we drank yesterday?

Chienye: Oho, do you doubt it? Is it that the son of Mgbeke does not know how to cut hair, or that the razor is not sharp. I maintain my quality. Today's is fine!

Agu: Quickly, bring it.
(Chienye brings them wine.)

Ekenta: But, how about Oji? Is Oji going to abandon us today?

Odumodu: It is not a question of abandonment. I saw Oji this morning. He said that he would come. And if we should get here first, we should start to eat, that there is money.
(At the same time that they start to drink their wine, Oji comes in.)

Agu: Oji! Oji!

Ude: Great tree. (strong man?)

Odumodu: Untouchable vulture.

Ekenta: Walker on thorns. Male dog who uses his head to get warm.

Oji: Ehe! You are already here? Greetings!

The friends: Yay!

Oji: Eat!

The friends: Yay!

Oji: Drink!

The friends: Yay!

Ude: The hand that holds wealth!

Oji: It is I. Don't be afraid. Go ahead and eat, because one does not come into the world twice. Woman, you know all

that cane rat meat you cooked today, I want it here,
before I get angry.

Chienye: I'm ready. I'm always ready. You don't use my knife to
kill a bad person. There is oil palm wine, there is raphia
palm wine, there are dumplings, there is fresh fish, oil
beans and stockfish--the dibia's bag lacks nothing.
*(Chienye brings everything out to them, small and large.
They eat, chew, drink.)*

Oji: Why are we humans resembling [smelling like] the dead?
Odumodu, please give us a song.

Odumodu: *(The wine song heats up.)*
Rather than the wine staying in the pot . . . let it stay in
the stomach. Rather than the wine staying in the pot, let
it stay in the stomach. It stays in the stomach . . . it
stays in the stomach.

Ude: Are you going to keep some wine overnight? Are you
going to keep some wine overnight? Don't you have
brothers?

Agu: At first I was in the dark. But the oil palm wine and
raphia palm wine I drank have made me learn something.

Ekenta: Friends, we should head for home.
(He starts to sing a wine song.)
Return, return, our time to depart has arrived. Return is
what we must to. The wine has done its work.

Oji: Good. Woman, how much is the bill?

Chienye: Thirty pounds.

Oji: *(He puts his hand in his pocket and takes out twenty
pounds.)*
This is the amount that I have.

Chienye: Oji, have you come again? Remember the money for the oil beans you bought last week.

Oji: Mother, please take this. Tomorrow I will bring you the rest.

Chienye: *(Gets up and pulls on Oji's shirt)* You are not telling me this. Oji, pay me the money for the wine you bought.

Odumodu: Please, mother, you heard what Oji said. Let him go now, tomorrow he will bring you the rest of the money.

Oji: Ekenta, please, do any of you have any money in your pockets?

Ekenta: *(Odumodu and Agu put their hands in their pockets, bring out only five pounds, and give them to Oji.)*

Oji: Quickly, take the money. What is left is five pounds.

Chienye: *(She angrily snatches Oji's cap, which she will return to Oji when he brings the money he owes.)*
I am going to sell this cap if I don't see you. You fool.
(Oji and his group angrily leave.)

Scene Four
(in Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo is sitting in his house taking snuff from his bag. Ugboaku comes in and sits down, not saying anything. This behavior annoys Odenigbo.)

Odenigbo: Ugboaku, what is the meaning of this? When has it come to this, that you ignore me? Listen. The thing that is in your eye, one day I am going to remove it. I don't know from which adult you learned to use the left hand in your old age.

Ugboaku: Master, it is not that way. I learned that the drowning person does not know himself.

Odenigbo: Who is drowning? Do you say that I, Odenigbo, am drowning? It is you who will drown first.
(Odenigbo becomes so angry that he wants to push out Ugboaku.)

Ugboaku: *(Calms down.)* Master, it is not like that. What I wanted to ask you was concerning the market people who buy people. Did you remember that we talked about selling Onyema?

Odenigbo: I have told Obilo about it. He promised that he would come this week.
(While they talk, Obilo comes and knocks on the door.)

Obilo: Is anyone home?

Ugboaku: Who is it? We are home.

Obilo: It is Obilo.

Odenigbo: Aha, come in. *(Obilo enters the house.)* Welcome. How are your family?

Obilo: They are all right. How about yours?

Odenigbo: There is no trouble. Ugboaku, go and look for kola while Obilo and I whisper together.
(Ugboaku goes out.)

Obilo: Aha! I have seen the slave-dealers at Igwenga. They said that the white people have started to arrest them, saying that selling people is against the law. Because of this they said that they will now do everything concerning this at night. There are three people they want to sell out before they reach yours. What this means is that

next week we will come to get Onyema.

Odenigbo: That's good. What I will do is call Onyema so you can see how big he is. But don't act as though there is anything secret going on.

Obilo: All right.

Odenigbo: Onyema! Onyema!

Onyema: Father.

Odenigbo: Come here so I can send you on an errand. *(Now Onyema comes out and greets Obilo.)* Go and see if that goat that I just bought is still on the tether.
(Onyema goes out.)

Obilo: There is money in this. He meets the requirements.
(Ugboaky comes in with the kola. They chew it, and Obilo leaves.)

Ibe: Is anyone home?

Ugboaky: Who is knocking?

Ibe: It is Ibe, Chief Mberedeogy's messenger.

Ugboaky: Come in.

Ibe: *(Enters.)* Greetings, master. Chief Mberedeogy told me to come and call you. He says that he wants to see you now.

Odenigbo: Does he say that it has happened again? Yesterday he sent a message about my son Oji. Today it is I who must come. Please, does he say what he is calling me for?

Ibe: I don't know, but he says that there is a message from the District Commissioner.

Odenigbo: All right. Tell him that I am coming.
(Ibe leaves.)

Ugboaku: Master, please, if it is something about my son Oji, don't believe anything. If Chief Mberedeogu knows that he wants war between you and him, he should come out with it, he should stop running around the pepper tree.
[beating around the bush]

Act Three

Scene One

(In the house of Chief Mberedeogu)

(Chief Mberedeogu and his wife are in his house.)

Uzoma: Master, let me call Ibe to see if he went and called the elders as you instructed him yesterday.

Chief Mberedeogu: It is important, because this child, Ibe, is slow at times. Go on and call him.
(Before Uzoma calls Ibe, the elders knock at the door.)
Aha, come in.
(Igwe, Ubadogu and Odenigbo come in.)

Chief Mberedeogu: I was just now talking about you. Welcome.

Uzoma: *(Brings in kola.)*

Chief Mberedeogu: *(He blesses the kola according to custom.)*
Elders, welcome. It is I who sent for you. The District Commissioner called all the Chiefs in this town on Nwaparj Hill and said that he was planning to retire. He said that he wanted us to give him a young man he would take home with him, and he would train him to be District Commissioner to succeed him.

Igwe: Where would he train that person?

Chief Mberedeogu: In Europe.

Ubadogu: Ohoo! That's terrible! That person has gone forever.

Chief Mberedeogu: In what way?

Igwe: One who goes with the District Commissioner to Europe, will he escape and fly back? Have you seen anyone who has gone to Europe?

Chief Mberedeogu: What happened was that I was going to say that I should give him my oldest son, Ezenta, but he is the only living son I have. If he goes away, and something should happen to me, you know that we would have no chief. Another thing is that I have wealth, palm trees and land, plenty of yam barns, which Ezenta is unable to eat up throughout his life, he and his children. What good do you think it would do if he went and looked for a place where wealth would enter this house? (Enough wealth already.)

Igwe: Chief, you have spoken the truth. Your sending Ezenta away will cause us to be without a chief. I think that we should look around this town of ours, Umụọkpara, to find some worthless young man. Even if he is a thief, we can use this means to get rid of him. We then see what is on the shelf above and the shelf below, and kill two birds with one stone.

Ubadogu: I support what Igwe said. You know the white people and the way they live. It looks as though the District Commissioner wants someone he would take as a slave but he comes out to talk like this. We will look for a foolish person to take to him.

Chief Mberedeogu: Odenigbo, are you here with us? Why are you so

completely silent? Since we began to discuss this matter, nothing has come out of your mouth.

Odenigbo: What do you want me to say? Have you forgotten that last week you sent Ibe to warn me concerning my son Oji? I am waiting for you to bring up this matter. That is that you are in your house calling my son Oji a thief.
(Now Odenigbo gets up in anger.)
The respect I have given you is because you are Chief, but there is a point a thing will reach . . .

Chief Mberedogu: *(He gets up in anger also.)* Odenigbo, you ought to know how to talk to me. Since you are deputy to the chief, we will give him your son Oji.
(Commotion and trouble breaks out now. The rat runs and the lizard runs. Everyone scatters.)

Scene Two
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Onyema and Egondy are chewing palm kernels and corn and roasting a cocoyam which they brought from a farm where cocoyam was harvested. Soon, Oji comes in, asking them to give him some. Onyema reluctantly gives him a bit of palm kernel and corn, but refuses to give him cocoyam. Egondy begs Onyema for the sake of God to give Oji cocoyam, even a small piece of it. Just as Oji is putting the cocoyam into his mouth, Ugboaky comes upon them suddenly, her hands on her hips.)

Ugboaky: Oh! What am I seeing--is it a dream in broad daylight?
Oji, what are you and these wild animals doing here?

Oji: *(Oji begins to wipe his mouth and holds what he has in his mouth to look as though he were doing nothing.)*
Mother, nothing, I was in the house again listening to palm kernels being cracked, piam, piam, piam. So I came out to find out what they were doing. Onyema and Egondy were here chewing palm kernels and corn and eating cocoyam and I didn't know where they got them.

Ugboaku: Aha! Onyema and Egondy, you want to lead my son Oji astray. Now, where did you get this food that you hid here and were eating?

Onyema: *(Frightened, he gets up, while Egondy almost escapes.)*
It was . . . it was . . . in the farm where our mother planted food that we gathered these.

Ugboaku: So that's it. Your mother came from the land of the spirits and planted cocoyams for you.
(Now, she gets a broom to chase Onyema and Egondy. The two of them shout and run away. Oji stays where he is.)
Oji, do you say that you did not join Onyema and Egondy in pilfering?

Oji: What concerns me and Onyema and his sister? I came out watching them eat these things and telling them that I was going to report them to my mother. It is when they begged me please, please, that you came and found us.

Ugboaku: Let Odenigbo come back in so I can find out where we will keep Onyema and his sister, Egondy.
(Just then Odenigbo comes in and calls Onyema. Instead of Onyema answering and coming, it is Ugboaku.)

Odenigbo: Are you Onyema then?

Ugboaku: Master, no. Something larger than the ant has entered the ant's hole.
(She starts to tell everything forcefully.)

Odenigbo: What happened?

Ugboaku: Master, do you know that you and I have no one who eats food like Onyema and Egondy? Do you know that these children fill their stomachs and then go out to steal our corn and cocoyams that we planted on the farm, and then

eat, saying that it is their mother's farm that they got them from. Today nothing was told to me. I saw this with my own eyes. My son Oji also saw them in the same way when they were eating these things they had stolen. What I said, I am still saying. I am not carrying water in my mouth [not mincing words]. One day these children will steal someone's goat and bring it into this house. Odenigbo, I am telling you again, let us know what is to be done to these children. One does not probe the eye with what is used to probe the ear.

Odenigbo: All right. I have heard what you said. These children and I will meet, so I will find out [understand] what is carried on the head and the weight is on the legs, and what is carried on the legs and the weight is on the head. Why is it that a person can not drink water and hang up the cup in this house? All the time, my ears never cool off.

Anyway, the thing one does not know how to do, there is a way to do it. When the hill learns how to break the waist, climbers learn how to pace themselves.

Ugboaku: Master, look, I almost forgot what I wanted to ask you. Please, what about your trip to Chief Mberedeogu's the day when he called you and the elders?

Odenigbo: It was terrible. Chief Mberedeogu and I almost went from taking tobacco to entering the bush (went from something small to something big).

Ugboaku: In what way?

Odenigbo: People would have told stories will that day because no one could believe that Chief Mberedeogu and I would point our fingers in each other's faces.

Ugboaku: Master, you know that one does not tell the ear that one is going to tell it something. What happened . . . ?

Odenigbo: Chief Mberedeogu did something very bad that day. He told us that the District Commissioner had decided to retire and wanted the oldest son of a chief to be brought to him whom he would train to become District Commissioner. We found out that there was a trick in it because whenever he goes on vacation, he does not ask for someone to be brought to him because if he goes, he comes back. It then seemed that this time when he was not going to come back, he wanted someone he could take with him. Then Chief Mberedeogu decided that since he had only one male child, it would be my oldest son, Oji, who would be given to him, because I am his deputy.

Ugboaku: Ohhh! Master, don't agree to it. My son Oji! My son Oji will go where? What did you say to him?
(Anger and sadness take hold of Ugboaku, causing her to start to weep sorrowfully.)

Odenigbo: Wait!

Ugboaku: I told you that Chief Mberedeogu was jealous of you, which is why he is trying to spoil Oji's name. When it comes to this town of Umuokpara, Oji is the only bad child he sees.

Odenigbo: You know that on that day, things almost went from bad to worse. Igwe, Ubadogu, Chief Mberedeogu and I were very close to coming to blows.

Ugboaku: What is bringing about all this? What happens is that we should go carefully in dealing with this matter. One person can not overcome a crowd. Even if it means going to beg the Chief to leave Oji alone and look for someone else, we will go.

Odenigbo: We can go because what made him say that Oji should be taken to the District Commissioner was that I have two sons - Oji and Onyema, especially, that Oji is older.

Ugboaku: All right, let us wait until the time approaches. When all is said and done, Chief Mberedeogu will bring on his own head those quarrels and he is wanting from you. What is clear to me is that the one who chases a chicken takes a fall.

(Ugboaku enters the house.)

Igwe and Ubadogu: *(Knocking)* Is anyone home?

Odenigbo: Aha! We are home. Come in.

(They come into the house and sit down.)

Welcome. Wife, bring us kola.

(While they are sitting, Ugboaku brings kola, they break it and chew it.)

Ubadogu: Odenigbo, we have come to your house.

Odenigbo: Welcome.

Ubadogu: Odenigbo, we don't want a long talk this morning. It is Chief Mberedeogu who sent us to you. He says that we should come and tell you that the elders and titled men have fined you one cow, a goat and one hundred pounds.

Odenigbo: All right. Does Chief Mberedeogu say that I trampled to death his goat or his chicken?

Igwe: He said that you broke the law of our town by pointing your finger in the Chief's face and insulting other people a week ago when we had a meeting at the Chief's house.

Odenigbo: Please, don't say that I am asking too many questions. Who are the other people? Are they not you two, Igwe and Ubadogu? Who could endure what Chief Mberedeogu told me today? Igwe, you also have a son, Ubadogu has too, yet it is my son he wants to send out in trickery. The egg of the chicken gets the fire, while the egg of the guinea fowl stays talking (safely?) in the nest.

Ubadogu: Odenigbo, we have not come here for a long discussion, nor have we come to argue. Only the errand we were sent on brought us here. What happens is that the townspeople can remove the goat you were fined for provoking Igwe and me, but we don't think that there is any way to persuade them to remove the cow and the hundred pounds involved in this fine. One more thing you should understand is that the whole town, from the highest to the lowest, is backing Chief Mberedeogu.

Igwe: We will leave. Afterward, we will report to Chief how we did.
(As Igwe and Ubadogu stand up to leave, Odenigbo gets his box to take something from it, which he will start to look for suddenly.)

Odenigbo: Oh no! May my god not kill me, look at this!

Ugbokuy: *(Ugbokuy runs in quickly.)*
Master, what happened?

Odenigbo: Give me a chance! Woman, please give me a chance because the goat has eaten the palm frond on my head. [I've been let down, put to shame.]

Ugbokuy: What? What are you looking for?

Odenigbo: *(This surprises Odenigbo.)*
Thirty-five pounds! Thirty-five pounds I saved that I was going to use to pay the debt I owe my friend, Uzoegbu! Alas, just today I went out and forgot to lock this box, and this money disappeared. I am going to go to dibia Nwaraga immediately; he will prepare for me the medicine for the worst kind of illness to.
(Odenigbo goes out angrily, while Ugbokuy wrings her hands, talking in an undertone and murmuring.)

Scene Three

(In the house of Chief Mberedeogu)

(Uzoma is straightening up the house. Soon, Igwe and Ubadogu arrive and knock at the door.)

Uzoma: Come in, we are at home.
(After they exchange greetings, Igwe inquires of Uzoma about the Chief.)
Chief is here.
(Immediately the Chief enters.)

Chief Mberedeogu: Welcome. The reason I sent for you is so you will be here when the matter is brought up of the two young people, Akunebu and Nweze, who are vying for their father's title.

Ubadogu: How much time were they given?

Chief Mberedeogu: The time is overdue.
(While they are talking, Ibe comes in, greets the Chief, and tells him that the two young men have come. Chief tells him to bring them in. They both enter, greet the Chief and the elders.)

Chief Mberedeogu: These are the two young people who want to use knives to kill themselves since they are contesting over which one will take over their father's position.

Ubadogu: Hm! What is your name?

Nweze: I am Nweze.

Akunebu: My name is Akunebu.

Chief Mberedeogu: *(Chief arranges the shrine he will show these two young people which he will tell them is their father's personal god.)*

Now you will take a stone and throw it at your father's personal god three times each. The one who hits it the most times will be the one who wins.

(Nweze is told to throw first.)

Nweze: *(Nweze throws three times at the great elders' shrine and after he has finished, showing great joy from the thought he has that it is like sprouting fruit [an easy task].*

Father, you have seen it, it is I who will take over my father's position. You have seen that my hand did not shake at all.

Chief Mberedegyu: Good. Now, Akunebu, it is your turn.

Akunebu: *(Akunebu lifts a stone high, and shows himself to be sensible by not throwing the stone at his father's personal god. Tears fill his eyes, before he begins to speak.)*

Father, it is not right that I, Akunebu, as a sensible person, should be able to lift a stone high and say that I am going to throw a stone at my father's god.

Ubadogyu and Igwe: Ah, my child. This is the behavior of an intelligent child.

Chief Mberedogyu: Compatriots, everything has taken place in our presence. You have seen it. It is good that when the wind blows you can see the chicken's bottom. Akunebu's behavior has shown that he is a smart child, while Nweze's behavior shows that he is truly a child. Akunebu, go home to prepare for the ceremony of taking over your father's title.

(Akunebu and Nweze thank Chief and the others. While Akunebu goes away happy, Nweze is consumed with anger and resentment because of washing his hands and cracking kernels for the chicken.) [Laboring in vain.]

Igwe: Chief, we are going to report to you about our going to Odenigbo's house last week.

Chief Mberedeogu: Aha, I know that it went well.

Ubadogu: We arrived and told Odenigbo how the town had fined him one cow, one goat and one hundred pounds for insulting the Chief and the others. He then started to tell that long story that he always tells. You know that Odenigbo is one who would rather argue than eat. Anyway, that madness seized him as soon as he saw us. The way he humbled himself and then spoke caused us to promise him that one could remove the goat that he had been fined on account of the others, as long as he would see that he brought the cow and one hundred pounds.

Chief Mberedeogu: What are you talking about? *(He becomes angry.)*
Did I tell you to go and argue with Odenigbo? Don't you realize what is happening? All this behavior Odenigbo is bringing out is to show me that he has wealth. I have come out to show Odenigbo that the money he has should not swell his head. I want him to bring out that money. Regardless, you will go home until we will know what he has in mind. What happens is that if the sheep wants to fight trees, let his skull be strong.
(Ubadogu and Igwe thank the Chief and leave.)

(At the Eke (Imuokpara) market)

(The market people are buying and selling many different things. Soon, Oji leads Nnenna and marches in. He starts buying her everything she point to, like bags, leather shoes, dresses, headties, cream and mascara.)

Oji: Nnenna, one thing I'll tell you is, one does not climb the iroko tree every day, which means that when one climbs the iroko tree, he should fetch a lot of firewood for himself.

Nnenna: You know that I do not understand proverbs. What is the meaning of your words?

Oji: Now, now, it is nothing difficult. What I said was that not speaking is the fault of the mouth, not traveling is the fault of the legs. My point is that you have the say now. Our coming to the market today was on account of you. Everything you point to will be yours, immediately.

Nnenna: *(She smiles, rejoices, and calls Oji all the names that she knows a strong man is called.)*
Oji, really I don't know how to thank you; it is fine, because one does not keep on eating until the teeth fall out.
(Nnenna starts to put into her bag all the odds and ends that Oji buys for her. Pretty soon, Oji sees his father, Odenigbo, near them.)

Oji: Nnenna, I'm out of here! I'm gone! I am not here!

Nnenna: *(This kind of behavior puzzles Nnenna.)*
What is it? What is it?

Clothseller: *(Grabs Oji while he tries to run away without paying her for the last piece of cloth he bought for Nnenna.)*
Look at that fellow! My man, why do you run away so fast without paying for what you bought?

Oji: Please let me go, see my father, see my father, Odenigbo.
Oh! Oh!
(Oji runs away from the woman clothseller and Nnenna.)

Scene Four

(In Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo is angry. He is frowning like someone to whom something has happened. While he is there, his sister arrives.)

Nwandanda: Oh! Odenigbo, what is this now? My brother Odenigbo!

Odenigbo: Welcome.

Nwandanda: Ugboaku, how are you?

Ugboaku: I'm fine. There is no trouble. The only trouble we have is that Egondy is missing.

Nwandanda: What has Egondy done? When did this happen?

Ugboaku: Sister-in-law, don't worry, Egondy has done what she wanted to do. You know that she and her brother, Onyema, have put me in this condition. I have been telling Odenigbo this for a long time, and he is cool toward it.

Odenigbo: Who is cool? I'm saying to you, who is cool?
(Odenigbo is so angry that he almost strikes Ugboaku.)

Nwandanda: Odenigbo, calm down. Don't cut with the knife as much as you have lifted your hand. One uses the leg is to look for something that fell into the water. Remember that if you hurry to kill the female goat, you have to carry her on your head. This child Egondy will be found. What we should do is go to dibia Nwaaraga to inquire. Let me go home first.
(Nwandanda leaves.)

Ugboaku: *(Ugboaku enters the room where Onyema is fixing his catapult.)*
Oho-o, so here is where you are hiding. Why is it that up until now you have not swept the whole compound? Is it not you? Egondy, with whom you are always conversing in this house has run away. You are left. I am going to do something to you that will make your eyes see your ears.

Onyema: *(Onyema angrily puts a stone into his catapult, tries to shoot it at Ugboaku's head, Ugboaku suddenly lets out a scream.)*

Ugboaku: Oh! Look at this! Master Odenigbo! Odenigbo, Odenigbo, Odenigbo are you there? Onyema is killing me!

Odenigbo: *(He hurries in.)*
What is it? What is it? My sister, come and look!
(Nwandanda runs in. While Odenigbo tries to separate Ugboaku and Onyema, Ugboaku falls, hits her lower back on the ground and cries out.)

Ugboaku: Oh! People of Umuokpara come here! Odenigbo, is this a plot of you and your child Onyema?
(While these things are happening and settling down, Nwandanda advises her brother Odenigbo before she goes.)

Nwandanda: My brother, please, you know what you should do to calm down your house. You know that where the fire burns you, you should take it out. Look at Onyema, if it is sending him to a place where he will learn palm tree tapping, you should do it so you will be free. Tomorrow I will come to find out how things stand.
(Nwandanda leaves and goes home. Soon, Obilo arrives.)

Obilo: Odenigbo, people who talk say that it is only the tongue, which is held in the mouth all the time, that does not turn bad. I have come concerning the matter of that child. The slave-dealers will come here tomorrow night to take Onyema as we arranged last week.

Odenigbo: Welcome! Please, this matter is not turning out the way we thought. Something bigger than the cricket has entered the cricket's hole. Chief Mberedeogu called the elders and titled men and others to a meeting and said that the white District Commissioner of our town is going to retire. He said that he wants the oldest son of a chief to go with him, and said that he would train him to be his successor. The whole town is now examining this matter. Chief Mberedeogu has only one son, so he said

that I as his deputy, having two sons, should give him one of them. What I am thinking of now is giving him Onyema, so the sacrifice can be taken care of.

Obilo: Is that what is going to happen? All right. If the animal escapes today, tomorrow will be another hunting day. I will go home. We will see each other later so I can find out how things are settled.

Oderigbo: What you will tell them is that they should wait a bit, so I can find out something about Chief and his matter.
(Now Obilo leaves, promising that he can inquire again before two weeks have passed.)

Act Four

Scene One

(In the meeting house of Chief Nwosu's village)

(The gang is sounding which will tell all the people of Umu-dara town that Chief Nwosu wants them in their village square. Slowly all the residents of that town start to gather, before Chief Nwosu arrives.)

Townsperson: May the chief live forever.

Chief Nwosu: May you also live!
(When everyone is seated, Chief Nwosu goes straight to the matter about which he has summoned them.)
Our people, greetings. Greetings. Drink! Eat! Become wealthy! I have called you to tell you what the District Commissioner told all the chiefs around this town last week. The District Commissioner said that he was going into retirement, and that he wanted the people of Umu-dara to give him a young woman to train to become a European doctor.

A Man: May the chief live. Please, we do not hear well what you are saying.

(Chief Nwosu starts at the beginning and repeats everything.)

A Woman: Hey, this is terrible. Do you say that there is no trick in this matter? What about this being the last return home and the D.C. remembers that he wants someone to take with him?

Chief Nwosu: What happens is that we will not treat this matter like the palm nut that is sprouts today and ripens today. Everyone should think this over. We will use our eyes to look around for a person we will send to the D.C.

(Some people can ask questions before they all disperse.)

Scene Two
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Chienye knocks at the door of Odenigbo's house. She is received by Ugboaku.)

Ugboaku: Welcome, my friend. How are you and yours?

Chienye: Not bad. Please, are you Oji's mother? Oji the son of Odenigbo?

Ugboaku: I am. Is everything all right?

Chienye: It is your son Oji I am looking for.

Ugboaku: Who are you?

Chienye: I am Chienye, the woman who sells wine in Eke market.

Ugboaku: Why are you looking for my son Oji?

Chienye: Please, if he is around, call him for me. It is Oji who

caused the situation affecting me now. For a long time he has been coming to drink wine at my place. After he finishes drinking, sometimes he pays the bill, and sometimes he incurs a bill that he does not pay. The last time was the day he and his friends came and drank wine and he has owed me fifteen pounds until today. Since that day, no one has seen Oji in my market stall. I came to get that money.

Ugbokwu: Oho woman! Have you finished saying everything on your mind? It is not Oji the son of Odenigbo you are talking about. There are lots of people by the name of Oji in this town of Umu dara. Go and look for your Oji who drinks that wine. Get up and go home before I turn around.

Chienye: Really, Oji's mother, do you want to say that I am crazy? Do you want to tell me that I don't know my customer Oji? Bring Oji to me.
(While the two of them are raising their voices, Oji enters. He trembles when he sees Chienye.)

Ugbokwu: Oji, this woman says that she is looking for you. Do you know who she is?

Oji: *(Oji peers at the woman's face as though he has never seen her before.)*
Mother, I don't know her.

Chienye: Oho! Look at this! Look at the person who calls her husband her inlaw. Do you say that you do not know who I am?
(Chienye gets up and starts to fight with him.)

Ugbokwu: Should I stay in my house and break my waist? Please get out of here before I take up my pestle and break your head.
(Osuji, Odenigbo's brother, enters while the fight goes on with pushing and scuffling). They tell him about the trouble that has befallen them.)

Osuji: Woman, it does no good to come and start a fight here. You should leave instead, and try to come when the master of the house is at home.
(Chienye agrees, but she and Ugboaku continue to have words until she leaves. Osuji advises Ugboaku to leave everything until Chienye arrives to see Odenigbo.)

(Odenigbo is in his house. Ugboaku enters, greets him and tells him that there is something she wants to tell him.)

Ugboaku: Master, it is said that the toad does not run in the daytime for nothing. Please, there is something I want to tell you this morning.

Odenigbo: Say it then, because one does not tell the ears that one is going to tell them something.

Ugboaku: Since last week when you and your son Onyema pushed me to the ground and struck me, I have not felt well. Especially I have observed that you do not eat what I cook. If I greet you, you ignore me, turn your ears away. It is clear to me what is causing this type of behavior in you. If you are secretly plotting to sell my son Oji, it is not going to happen in this household. Indeed, rather than selling Oji, everyone in this house will be dead. This is what I want to say. I am not mincing words.

Odenigbo: *(Angrily)*
Woman, whom do you say will be dead? It is the household of Odenigbo that you are using the mouth you use to eat yams and cocoyams to say that they will be exterminated on account of your son Oji. Ugboaku, do you know that it is an abomination that you are speaking now? Watch, let me wait a while without seeing Egondy, and I'll show you what the fire uses the rat's ear to do, because anything that befalls the child is on your head. Give me a chance here. Give me some space immediately!
(Ugboaku slowly goes into her house. Igwe and Ubadogu)

knock at the door and then enter.)

Igwe: Odenigbo, Chief Mberedeogu sent us to come and tell you that the message you sent through smoke has reached the sky. He says to tell you that he has received the cow that you were fined, so there is no trouble.

Ubadogu: In addition, he says that he has forgiven you from bringing one goat and the one hundred pounds that you were fined separately for insulting the others. Rather he says that you should be warned that what you did should not be repeated.

Odenigbo: Who should be warned? Are you starting trouble again? Rather than accept this version I will give you the goat and give you the one hundred pounds. I will say that today, Odenigbo has all it takes to take care of things. e

Igwe: Odenigbo, are you starting up again? Why is it that when medicine is prepared for the eye, you put pepper in it? You have money, but Odenigbo, let me ask you, have you taken title? Have you held the funeral ceremonies for your deceased father? So, please keep quiet about your being a wealthy man, a wealthy man.

Odenigbo: I am going to use clear eyes in watching your secret discussions with Chief Mberedeogu. Who among you will allow his oldest son to be taken out and given to the District Commissioner, right? Will Chief allow me to send anyone, if it is a male?

Ubadogu: All heads are heads. One young man the town wants from you. If you want, go and buy yourself a person.
(Now Ugbokuy enters and greets their guests.)

Ugbokuy: Elders, this is what I have thought about for a long time. I am saying that my son Oji should be left alone and that we should look hard to find some child to be taken to the District Commissioner.

- Igwe: Don't worry. There is a way to do the thing we don't know how to do. We will go.
(Igwe and Ubadogu go away.)
- Ugboaku: Master, please look at me kneeling. What I beg you now is that you gather all the bad words that have been spoken for a long time, and throw them into the forest. Please. It is said that if there are no mistakes there will be no forgiveness. I have killed a chicken to beg you with.
- Odenigbo: I have heard what you said. But remember that there is nothing like bad words. Do you also know about using the mouth to commit murder? You yourself, Ugboaku, you open the mouth that God gave you and say that the household of Odenigbo will perish. If it is a charm, it will not be effective. I remember what my sister told me when I wanted to marry you . . . but . . . let it be.
(Ugboaku goes out, takes the chicken she had prepared for her husband, and carries it to him. Odenigbo, with a change of heart, takes the chicken from her and starts to eat.)
- Odenigbo: What happens is that a woman puts on a sweet face to get something from her husband. Leave, there is no trouble. The one you and I need to hook hands and struggle (jump over the fence) with is Chief Mberedeogu.
(While they are talking, Nwandanda comes back.)
- Nwandanda: My brother, it is said that one should not leave something in the eye and go to sleep. The Igbos also say that the ears do not rest while the mouth is still chewing palm kernels. Well, has Egondy been found?
- Odenigbo: Where is she to be found?
(He continues to eat his chicken.)
- Nwandanda: You are looking for something as big as a human being.

and you sit here enjoying chicken. Did day break before you attacked this meat?

Odenigbo: Sister, be quiet. If you are hungry, take ...
(He gives her a piece of chicken but she tells him that her mouth is not ready to eat meat this morning. Soon, they hear knocking at the door.)

Odenigbo: Come in. Oh-oh, who are all of you?
(He asks this type of question because he has not seen these two people in his house before.)

Nnenna: Sir, my name is Nnenna. The person with me is my friend. Her name is Unoma.

Odenigbo: Where are you from?

Nnenna: We are from this town. I am the daughter of Kenechukwu, Unoma is the daughter of Ukadike.

Nwandanda: Welcome, my children.

Odenigbo: What is the purpose of your coming?

Nnenna: *(Nnenna uses firmness to answer this question because the trip is not what they expected.)*
We ... uh ... we ... were ... uh ... fetching water, and we decided to come and greet Oji.
(Odenigbo calls Oji. Oji runs, comes and peeps in, sees Nnenna, then slips out immediately.)

Odenigbo: Where can Oji be? Please, my children, do you have a message?

Nnenna: No. We just came to greet him.

Odenigbo: All right. When he comes in, I will tell him that you came. Stay well.
(Nnenna and Unoma leave.)

Nwandanda: My brother, why does Oji associate with girls like this?

Odenigbo: Sister, you have seen with me (you know as much as I do). The monkey says it is only the child she carries in her stomach that she can defend, but if it is the one she carries on her back, she will not swear in its defense because she will not know if it plucks fruit while on her back. Long ago I began to observe Oji and his doings, but Ugboaku doesn't let me act like the head of the household.

Nwandanda: Never mind, that is the way of the world. The bedbug told her children that they should have patience, because what is hot eventually becomes cold. Let us pray to Amadijha to show us where we will find Egondy.
(Now Nwandanda leaves.)

Scene Three
(In Chief Nwasu's house)

(Chinyere hears a noise around the house where they live. She goes to investigate and sees a young woman dressed like a mad person, chewing corn and coconut that are tied into the cloth she is wearing. This surprises Chinyere.)

Chinyere: Young woman, who are you? Where have you come from?

Egondy: *(Egondy looks at her and remains silent, continuing to chew the corn and coconut. Chinyere goes back and calls her mother. Her mother goes with her to see the young woman behind the house.)*

Ekemma: How are you, my child? Who are you?

Egondy: *(Egondy does not speak. She only cries. Ekemma leads her into the house in order to find out who she is.)*

Ekemma: Dry your tears. Tell me where you come from and who you are.

Egondy: *(Egondy tells her the story of her life. How her mother has died, and how their father's wife rubs their noses into the ground. How it was better for her to run away before her father's wife, Ugboaku, killed her. How when she cooked stew, she would put water into the stew which was used for their portion.)*

Ekemma: Did your father know where you wanted to run?

Egondy: The only one who knew that I was going to run away was Onyema, but he does not know where I ran to. It has been a long time since I left Umuokpara and followed the road. I stopped here to rest before resuming my journey.

Ekemma: Chinyere, take this girl, give her water for bathing and find her some food.
(They go out. When Chief Nwasu comes in, Ekemma tells him about Egondy. She goes and shows him Egondy.)

Chief Nwasu: My child, whose daughter are you?

Egondy: I am Egondy, the daughter of Odenigbo from Umuokpara.

Chief Nwasu: That is good. Welcome.

Scene Four
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo is alone. Soon, Ugboaku enters.)

Ugboaku: Master, I went out very early this morning. Where I went was to the house of that wine-seller woman--what did she say her name was--Chienye?

Odenigbo: What business did you have with her?

Ugboaku: I went to pay her the fifteen pounds she said that my son Oji owed her. The reason I did this was to prevent

disgrace. It is obvious to you that our name pleases people, which means that it is notorious in this town of Umuokpara. Do you know that people named Oji here are numberless? You know that there is Oji son of Okoronta, there is Oji son of Okeosisi, there is Oji son of Okonkwo, Oji son of Nweke, Oji son of Eneogbu, and Oji son of Osondu. But the one everyone talks about is Oji son of Odenigbo. It seems to me that the reason the wine-seller accuses my son Oji of buying her wine is that it is obvious to her that we have money.

Odenigbo: You can talk till the cows come home, what I know is that I'm not going to defend anyone. Look, this morning, two girls came here while my sister was here. Whom were they looking for? Oji. Since then, I haven't seen Oji; if he went out from the back of the house to join them, Odenigbo does not know.

Ugboaku: Master, you know how children are. They must have seen each other on the road to the stream. Have you seen Oji with young women? You know that there are some children who eat dog's feet and they love to wander. It is that type who came on this type of visit. My son Oji has not turned into a bad son.

Act Five

Scene One

(In Chief Nwosu's house)

(Chief Nwosu is alone in his chief's seat when his wife Ekemma enters.)

Chief Nwosu: Ekemma, sit down. One thing I always regret is that some people seem to be human but smell like spirits. I don't finish speaking and then fall into the water.

Ekemma: Master, what do you mean?

Chief Nwosu: Look, two weeks ago I told the townspeople to look for a young woman to take to the D.C., and up until this very time, not one person has come to tell me to look at the efforts they are making. I let them know that money would not be a hindrance in this matter. Especially, word has reached me that the Umuokpara people have found a young man whom they will take to the D.C., because the way this thing was shared, we were given a young woman, and the Umuokpara people a young man.

Ekemma: Really? Master, please don't say that I'm asking too many questions, but if we don't find anyone, what will the District Commissioner do?

Chief Nwosu: You are asking me what the D.C. will do? What else will he do but come and take away your daughter Chingere?

Ekemma: Don't say that. I have only one child. Our land will not agree.

Chief Nwosu: Am I telling you not to tell people? [Am I lying?] Rather, one thing that occurs to me is to marry a young woman and call her to be my wife. After paying all the bride price, I'll take her and give her to the D.C.

Ekemma: Master, please, I say that we should close our eyes and deliver to him this child Egondy who ran to us. You know it is said that the animal that has not been killed does not become meat. Let us take the runaway child who ran to us as something looked for above which is seen below. Let us use her as a sacrifice. If it had not been for this, I would have said that she and we should live together, especially with the sweet character and behaviour she has.

Chief Nwosu: Oh! I will settle this, because taking Chingere means being childless. Please, call the child.
(Soon, Egondy and Chingere come out and greet the Chief and his wife.)

Chief Nwosu: Egondy, would it please you to live with us?

Egondy: Master, I would like it, because returning to Odenigbo means going to eat suffering just as yams are eaten.

Chief Nwosu: Good. Please, take yourself as the daughter of a chief. If anyone asks you who your father is, you will tell him that you are Chief Nwosu's daughter. Do you hear?

Ekemma: Master, but she is not dressed like one who is going to be the daughter of a chief.

Chief Nwosu: *(Chief Nwosu takes out money and gives it to his wife.)*
Take this money, go and buy her various kinds of garments, so that if she wears them she will look like the daughter of a chief. I will kill a ram for my god Amadioha in order to thank him for saving me from this temptation that would have come. One who does not know where the rain starts to beat him does not know where it stops. Look, last week a storm tried to snatch my loads away from my market people, but my god Amadioha did not allow it. Today, out of the blue, the young woman they are looking for to take just appears here.

(Now Ekemma enters the house. What is seen is Egondy eating, mourning her fate, remembering her brother, Onyema; Chinyere is there consoling her.)

Egondy: Look at the fine food I am eating here alone. If I had known that things like this could happen to me, I would have told my brother Onyema so the two of us could have run away together.

Chinyere: Egondy, I have told you, stop thinking about Onyema. Remember that if the cow has no tail, his god chases the flies away for him. Know too that God does not forget his creatures. Onyema's god will lead him.

Scene Two
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo comes out and calls his wife.)

Odenigbo: There is something important I want to say now.

Ugboaky: What is it, because words do not stay in the stomach and be bad.

Odenigbo: You know that it is today that Chief Mberedeogu wants the person brought to him who will be given to the D.C.

Ugboaky: I know.

Odenigbo: It will not be long before the elders will come to take the person it will be. I am thinking, let us take Oji and Onyema with us, because taking only Onyema, he can use the tongue to count the teeth in his mouth to know that there is a snake in the grass which can cause him to run away.

Ugboaky: Master Odenigbo, have you come again? I have told you, don't go too far. Why is it that you talk one way and then you talk the opposite? Why will you take my son Oji and go to Chief Mberedeogu? Don't you know that there is a way that arguments can change, and the one who is first becomes the last, and the one who is last becomes the first? Don't you know that we can reach there and Oji will be selected, and it then becomes a case of going to buy tobacco and entering the yam stall [ending up buying yam], and Oji becomes the one who will be taken to the D.C.?

(While the two are arguing, Nwandanda comes. The gist of the matter is explained to her.)

Nwandanda: Woman, I understand what Odenigbo is saying. Don't you know that if Onyema is taken and told that they are going

to Chief Mberedeogu, while en route he can run away? What will happen? They will then come and get Oji and you become the childless one. Agree that Oji and Onyema should go together, because we are using the eyes of an older person to look at this.

(While Nwandanda is talking, Igwe and Ubadogu enter.)

Igwe: Odenigbo, the proverb-speakers say that the matter that has been decided needs only a nod to agree to. It's now time for going to the Chief.

(Odenigbo calls Onyema and Oji. They greet those who came to their house.)

Odenigbo: Oji, there is something I bought that you will go together and carry for me from Chief Mberedeogu's house. Go and get ready, and look for headpads. *As soon as they come back, they all get up and go to Chief Mberedeogu's house.)*

Ugboaku: My husband's sister, my heart tells me that there is a trick in these things. It is clear to me that Odenigbo will surely give Chief Mberedeogu my son Oji. If he does this, I will kill him and go and hang myself, and Odenigbo's house will end, because I will not stay alive and see this.

Nwandanda: I've told you, don't worry. I don't know how you think such thoughts. I don't want to hear this type of talk from you any more.

(Nwandanda gets up and leaves angrily.)

Ugboaku: Woman, goodbye. *(Ugboaku starts to murmur.)* What happens is that I know dibia Nwaaraga well. If things come to the worst, I will go there and get charms that I will use to kill Odenigbo and Onyema, and then decide what I will do to myself, since Egondy has taken it upon herself to make herself a fugitive.

Scene Three

(In Chief Mberedeogu's house)

(Chief Mberedeogu's servant comes and tells him that the elders have arrived. He tells him that they should enter right away, and Odenigbo, Onyema, Oji, Igwe and Ubadogu come in.)

Odenigbo: Chief, these are my two sons. This is Onyema. The other is Oji.

Chief Mberedeogu: Good. Welcome.

Odenigbo: I want to bring you Onyema. Oji came only for company.

Chief Mberedeogu: The one I want is Oji, because Oji is not a human being.

Odenigbo: Oho! Oho! Chief, are you starting up again? What bad thing is my son Oji doing? Have you seen Oji pilfering? It would be best if you confess, and say right out that you do not want Oji to stay in this land. It is not that Oji is a bad child. Did you and I give birth to him?

Ubadogu: Odenigbo, please calm down. Let us be honest and understanding in pursuing this matter that we came for.

Onyema: Chief, live forever.

Chief Mberedeogu: My child.

Onyema: It will be good if I go to that place that is being discussed. If it means death or life, let me see it, rather than stay alive with my father's wife rubbing my nose and mouth in the dirt. My sister Egondy has decided to run away on account of that woman's ill treatment of us, and no one knows where she is today.

Chief Mberedeogu: Fellow citizens, you have used your eyes to see and your ears to hear. What are your thoughts?

Odenigbo: It does not help to start asking questions in this matter because Onyema has said that he would go.

Chief Mberedeogu: Good. Onyema, starting from today, you will answer to the name of Onyema Mberedeogu. You will answer to this name until you return.

Igwe: Onyema, have you heard what Chief said?

Ubadogu: Onyema, who bore you?

Onyema: Odenigbo.
(They all laugh.)

Igwe: What happens is that slowly he will get used to it.
(Now Chief Mberedeogu calls Uzoma to come and take Onyema into the house to bathe and eat.)

Chief Mberedeogu: You may leave. I will call you when the D.C. sends a message that he is coming.
(They all rise and go out.)

Scene Four
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo is there, looking angry. Soon, Nwandanda comes.)

Nwandanda: My brother, one thing concerning you that I worry about is that sometimes you are softer-hearted than a woman. Why do you always worry yourself to death? Look, would anyone who saw you two weeks ago today think that this is really you? Indeed, I am not pleased with the way you are losing weight.

Odenigbo: Who would feel good about losing two children? See, Egondy is lost. Onyema has gone with the D.C.

Nwandanda: *(Nwandanda frowns sorrowfully.)*
Oh dear, has Egondy not been found? Have you gone to dibja Nwaraga?

Odenigbo: I went. Dibia Nwaraga said that Egondy has not died.

Nwandanda: Really? Lord have mercy!

Odenigbo: He told me that Egondy ran to a certain wealthy man, but he did not say the name of the man or the name of his town.

Nwandanda: Really? Since she is really alive, let us keep hoping because nothing is impossible for God.

(Ugboaky enters and greets Nwandanda.)

Ugboaky: Mother, you have heard how the matter of Onyema turned out. Anything that happens, people say that Ugboaky has done it. This time, will it also be said that Ugboaky did it; that it is Ugboaky who gave Onyema away?

Nwandanda: What happens is that you should stop thinking about it, whether Onyema said to you or didn't say to you.

(Ugodie, Ugboaky's sister, who joins in supporting her, enters and greets everyone.)

Ugodie: Odenigbo, I have seen your hand. You are a man of your word. You are a man. Now you are doing things like a man. Now you won't keep asking all the time, what will be done with Onyema, what will be done with Egondy?

Odenigbo: *(Odenigbo tells them how things went at Chief Mberedeagyu's house.)*

Nwandanda: It is good like this. If it means death, let him die, so you and Ugboaky can now live in peace.

(Nwandanda takes Odenigbo's right hand, spits on the ground, and gives it (his hand) to Ugboaky.)

Ugboaky, look at your husband, my brother Odenigbo. You have gotten rid of Egondy and Onyema, so you and your son Oji can sit down satisfied, eat and drink.

(Ugboaky becomes angry because of the way Nwandanda spoke to her.)

Ugboaku: See how a person stays in his own house and breaks his waist. Please woman, go home. When Onyema and Egondy were here and tried to kill me and my son Oji, what did you do? One who wants to run away says that he was winked at. Who drove them away? You don't know that it was their bad behavior, because there is a saying that a person of bad behavior runs when nothing is chasing him. Are you going to leave your husband's house and come to my husband's house to lay down the law to me?
(Odenigbo angrily tries to lay hands on her.)

Odenigbo: I do not want this. Ugboaku, are you starting up again? Ugboaku, are you nursing some more trouble? If you are not careful, I will expel you from this house.

Nwandanda: Leave the mad woman alone to wag her tongue. I will leave. Let us be listening to find out where Egondy is.
(Nwandanda leaves.)

Ugboaku: *(Happiness fills her heart.)*
Ugodie my sister, please join me in thanking Odenigbo for the way he used the wisdom of the elders to remove Onyema from this house. We can say that if Onyema continued to live in this house, Odenigbo and I would have died before our time.

Odenigbo: Not me.

Ugodie: Odenigbo, you have tried. Now you and my sister Ugboaku will be able to drink and hang up the drinking horn. You know too that Ugboaku saved you from Onyema and Egondy. These two children would have been a great trial to you (removed your teeth), if instead of sending them away, they stayed here to grow to maturity.

Odenigbo: It is well. Leave all these things. Let God's will be done. Nothing that the eye sees makes it shed blood [rather than tears].

Ugodie: Odenigbo, I thank you for all the cloth you bought my sister. This is the beginning of the happiness you two will have. Let me go now.
(Obilo enters.)

Obilo: It is on account of that matter that I come. Look at the money those people brought in order to pay the price of that child.

Odenigbo: Welcome. What happened is that something bigger than the cricket entered its hole. The people of our town, Umuokpara, decided that it would be Onyema who would be taken to the D.C. Last week he was taken. Now I have only one son. We will abandon the matter because something that will not go through should not be forced into the mouth.

Obilo: Is that what happened? All right. I will go somewhere else and start to inquire.
(Obilo leaves.)

ACT SIX

Scene One

*(Within the town's meeting area)
In the town square*

(The people of Umuokpara slowly enter their meeting place. Those who come out greet their companions. The last ones to enter are Odenigbo and his household and those of Chief Mberedeogu. Soon the "Court Clerk" arrives and tells the people that the District Commissioner is approaching. Four strong men are seen carrying the D.C. when they arrive. Immediately, everyone stands up and greets the D.C. When he begins to speak, the "Court Clerk" explains it in Igbo.)

D.C.: I want to do a favour to this town by training Chief Mberedeogu's son to succeed me as the D.C. following my retirement.

Court Clerk: A choro m imere ndi Umuokpara otu ihe ga-abara ha uru, nke bu izu di okpara Chief Mberedeogu di ka nwa D.C. ga-anochi m mgbe m nabara ezumike nka.

D.C.: Do you like it?

Court Clerk: O masikwara unu?

Crowd: Yes!

D.C.: Chief, I hope you are in full support of this idea?

Court Clerk: Chief, e ji m n'aka na i kwadosiri amumaa ike?

Chief Mberedeogu: I support it.

D.C.: Any questions?

Court Clerk: O nwere ndi choro iju ajuju?

An elder: I do. Please, tell the D.C. that I myself am asking this. For a long time he has been going on leave and coming back, going on leave and coming back, how is it now that it is a situation where he is not going and coming back again, that he wants someone given to him? How will we know for sure that he will send back anyone we will give him?

Court Clerk: You always go on leave and now you are going home finally, you are looking for someone who will go with you, why? What will convince us that whoever that goes with you will eventually come back?

D.C.: No problem. He will surely come back.
(Many others ask him questions like--how many months will he train him, or why one does he not bring those books he will read to our town so he can stay here and read them. After this, Chief Mberedeogu hands Onyema over to him. The women also give the D.C. a basket of

eggs and bananas. He is carried on the head the way he was carried on the head when he came in and they go out, while Onyema carries his bag and the gifts that were given to the D.C.)

Chief Mberedeogu: Friends, I thank all of you, especially Odenigbo who brought his son and gave him in my name. Things like this indicate one who is a strong man. If we had not given someone to the D.C., he would have taken away my chieftaincy warrant. Let us see what tomorrow will bring concerning Onyema. Thank you.
(Everyone gets up and leaves in great surprise.)

Scene Two
(In the house of Chief Nwosu)

(Chief Nwosu and his wife are in his house.)

Chief Nwosu: Ekemma, I hope that you remember that it is today that the elders are coming because of that matter about the young woman who will be given to the District Commissioner.

Ekemma: Master, I remember it. What is it?

Chief Nwosu: What I want to say is that it is necessary that I show them Egondy, and explain to them how she entered our household, since up until now there has been no one the townspeople have found.

Ekemma: Master, is it you saying this? Why do you think it necessary to explain to them how Egondy came here. Don't you know that in explaining it to them, the news can reach Umuokpara, because no one knows how water enters the pumpkin stem. At that time, the Umuokpara people might come and say that we kidnapped their child.

Chief Nwosu: You speak the truth. I will give up the idea of relating a long story.

(While they are talking, the elders come in.)

Chief Nwosu: I received the message you sent that the people have not found a young woman we can give to the D.C. Especially, you said that no one agreed to give his child. What I am asking, then, is how can we be carrying someone with a broken waist on our backs?

An Elder: What I think is that there's a snake in the grass [thatch]. There's a trick in this thing that the D.C. is saying. Rather than tell us the truth that he wants a woman given to him to marry, he says we should give him someone he can train to be a European doctor. Have you ever heard such a story? Therefore, let us bring the mad person who stays at the Nkwog market. What's her name?

A Titled Man: Is it Nwamgbeke?

An Elder: That's the one . . . Nwamgbeke. Let us bring her, let us shave her head, dress her up, and take her to the D.C. If she feels like biting him, that is not our concern.

Chief Nwosu: Elders, your words are satisfactory, but giving the monkey water is easy; it then becomes a question of who will get the drinking cup back? Your advice about bringing Nwamgbeke is good, but who will go and see about this?

A Titled Man: If getting Nwamgbeke is difficult, let us search in all the neighboring villages to see if we can get any young woman who has limitations [not mentally o.k.].

Chief Nwosu: Elders, titled men, what you are saying now surprises me because it is not something I expected from you. How is it that you will be human beings but smell like spirits? Let me tell you something. You know that since it was announced that we should seek a girl to go home with the D.C., my wife Ekemma has looked high and low and has found one.

Elders and Titled Men: Really?

A Titled Man: Strong woman!

An Elder: Please, how much did she buy her for, so she can be repaid by our townspeople?

Chief Nwosu: It is a friend of ours, he and I are very close, who sent us his daughter since he saw that I had only one daughter.

A Titled Man: Oh-oh! Have you seen what people say? A person seeing something that was on the upper shelf, on the lower shelf. Please, is that child nearby?
(Chief Nwosu calls Chinyere to come with Egandy. They enter and greet the elders and titled men, then go back into the house.)

Chief Nwosu: Do you know what happened? Yesterday evening all the chiefs went to see the D.C. on Nwaparí hill; he said that he had received a young man to go home with him, who is someone he will train in Europe. It is this that caused my wife and me to make strong efforts to see that we found someone to take to him in order to avoid disgrace.

An Elder: Chief, we do not know how to thank you and your wife. Rather, when an animal escapes today, tomorrow is another hunting day. You have done well.

A Titled Man: How will she be taken to the D.C.?

Chief Nwosu: My daughter, my wife, and some women of this quarter will take her to the boat dock tomorrow, which is where the D.C. will be receiving her.

A Titled Man: Good. We will leave.
(The two of them leave. The Chief's wife brings Egandy in with her.)

Chief Nwosu: Egondy, I understand that not knowing where your brother, Onyema, is, is worrying you a lot.

Egondy: It is worrying me. That is the only thing that is troubling me.

Chief Nwosu: There have been people saying that they saw someone they thought was Onyema. Tomorrow these people are going. You will prepare to join them to find out if it really is Onyema.

Egondy: *(She is filled with joy.)*
Master, I will join them.
(Egondy goes out.)

Ekemma: Ah! The way we did it is good, because if we told her that we were going to send her away, her heart might leap and she might die.

Chief Nwosu: You will get ready. Tomorrow, you will take her and go.

Act Seven

Scene One

(In Odenigbo's house)

(Iwunze and Nwandanda come in. They are received by Ugbaku.)

Odenigbo: Welcome. It is I who invited you. The reason I invited you is to tell you that I want to write my will in your presence.

Nwandanda: In what way?

Iwunze: Does a person suddenly write a will [for no reason]? Is there some trouble?

Odenigbo: There is no trouble except ^{That} ~~that~~ a man ^{knows} ~~has~~ his ^{mind.} ~~thought.~~

I want you to know that when it comes to this world, there is nothing else that I, Odenigbo, have. The only thing I have is money. My first wife, Nkuwiji, has died. Onyema has gone with the D.C. Egondy, the search for her has been carried on for a long time. The woman I live with is the cause of Onyema and Egondy leaving the house of Odenigbo. My sister, ask Iwunze, will he tell you that it was his wife who was feeding Onyema and Egondy, because of the way Ugboaky was starving them. The reason I have been silent for a long time is that when a child who is not yet grown starts to ask what killed his father, the thing that killed his father kills him.

Ugboaky:

(Ugboaky gets very angry.)

Please, don't say that I am interrupting you. Have you used your ears to hear what Odenigbo is spewing out of his mouth?

Iwunze:

Ugboaky, wait until we finish hearing Odenigbo's words. Hold on, you will afterward tell your own version.

Odenigbo:

The only son Ugboaky has is Oji. Oji himself, Odenigbo does not control him. Every day, something is missing from this house, and I do not know the hawk which carries it off. One thing that surprises me again is that the name of Oji is notorious in this town of Umuokpara. Chief Mberedeogu has sent a message that he and his son Obinna should stop associating with each other. The day that the townspeople were looking to send a person to the D.C., the one who came to mind was Oji because of his bad behavior. The thing that kept me from supporting them was the love I had for Ugboaky.

One day, a woman came here pulling off Oji's shirt, saying that Oji owed her a debt for the wine he drank. To bring this story to an end, I am saying that there is no longer a reliable person living in Odenigbo's house today.

Ugboaky:

Whatever it pleases you to say, say it. I have seen that this has become the talk of a mad person.

Odenigbo: *(Odenigbo gets up angrily and seizes Ugboaky, but Iwunze and Nwandanda stop him.)*

Nwandanda: Please, calm down. There is nothing people don't know how to solve.

Odenigbo: One thing you will ask Ugboaky for me is that she stop doing anything that can remind me of Onyema and Egondy, and also that Oji stop doing anything that can make me angry.

Iwunze: All right. Ugboaky, what do you want to say?

Ugboaky: Do you see my son Oji? Oji does not steal. Oji does not drink wine. Oji does not go out. Oji is quiet, quieter than a snail. All these things people say, Oji does this, Oji does this, are only false accusations made against a dog before striking him. If there is anything bad that Oji does, it comes from Onyema and Egondy. I am sorry about the way Odenigbo declares that Oji is not his son.

(Ugboaky takes Odenigbo's hand.)

Master, Odenigbo, do you say that it is not you who fathered Oji? Did I carry Oji in my stomach before I came to your house? How is it then that you are childless?

Odenigbo: You see how Ugboaky is touching me? When I was speaking, did I touch her?

Ugboaky: He says that it is I who chased away Onyema. Do you know that it was my son Oji that they were going to send away, and Onyema then volunteered himself? Kindhearted Onyema. It is clear to me that Odenigbo regrets the way Onyema volunteered himself.
(While these things are being said, noise and commotion are heard outside. Immediately, four people enter, dragging Oji and a dead chicken.)

Nevo: Greetings. My name is Nevo from Umuda. Master Odenigbo, for a long time Oji has been coming to kill chickens at my house. It is said, every day belongs to the thief, but one day becomes the day of the owner of the house. He kills the chicken, and he and Obinugwu, son of Akaha, eat it.

Nevo's Wife: Master, this is not the first time, neither is it the second. What we regret is that he pretends that it is a bush fowl that he killed, and not a chicken. That is why we dragged him here.
(Now Ugbakye looks as though she should fall into the river.)

Odenigbo: Please, my friends, welcome. Oji, what happened?

Oji: Nothing. It was my trap that killed this bush fowl. It was while I was returning with it that these people came and seized me and said that I had stolen a chicken.
(Nwandanda and Iwunze take the animal, to find out if it is a chicken or a bush fowl. They discover that it is a chicken.)

Iwunze: Oji, where did you set this trap?

Oji: Er . . . er . . . It was behind these people's house.

Nwandanda: Oji, what is this thing?

Oji: Mother, it is a bush fowl.

Nwandanda: You say that this is a bush fowl?

Oji: It looks like a bush fowl.

Odenigbo: Please, my sister and brother, I know what is done to a thief. What do you think we should do?

Nevo: We have already gone to Chief Mberedeogu, who was the

one who told us we should find out what you had to say. We will go back and tell him that we have seen you.

Odenigbo: All right. Please. Be calm. Whatever happens, we must find out what to do. I will follow behind you going to the Chief.

(This thing renders Nwandanda, Ugbaku, Odenigbo and Iwunze speechless.)

Scene Two

(In the house of Mberedeogu)

(The people at Chief Mberedeogu's house are he and his wife and his elders. They are talking and looking into how they can get rid of some of those who join in sailing the face of Umuakpara town. Soon, Odenigbo, Ugbaku, Oji, Nwandanda and Iwunze arrive.)

Chief Mberedeogu: Our people say that a matter that has been decided needs only a nod to agree to it. It is said that it is only the tongue that is kept in the mouth all the time that does not become bad. It is in the matter of Oji that we have come. In reality, I will say that this talk is needless because it is something that everyone knows about. Especially since we already know what is done to one who does things like this.

Elder: Elder Meniru handles this type of work. I advise that we take him to Elder Meniru who can show him what the fire does to the rat's ear, which will make him stop doing this type of thing again.

Odenigbo: Master, please, one thing I ask is that he not be cut with a knife the way the hand is raised. This Oji you are looking at is an eyeball who owes a debt to the head [an only son]. Please, see me kneeling. You should warn him, but it is my job to warn him myself, when we reach home. I am begging you.

Chief Mberedeogu: Our people, it is said that the toad does not run in

the afternoon for nothing. Let us use the eyes of an adult to see what is involved in this matter. Oji, do you know what you did?

Oji: *(Oji) begins to cry and beg forgiveness.)*

Chief Mberedeogy: The proverb-speakers say that when wine sees the one it knows, it fills the pot. It is also said that the hardness of the tree dulls the knife. We will give a light punishment to Oji so that he will realize that what he did was bad. Another day, if he is caught in this type of behavior . . . Em . . .

Odenigbo: Please, my brothers, I thank you. Let the matter stand this way for now.
(They all go out, while the Chief's servant drags Oji into the house.)

Scene Three

(Inside the meetingplace of Chief Nwasu's town)
town square

(Slowly, the townspeople arrive inside their meetingplace. They stay waiting for Chief Nwasu. It will not be long until Chief Nwasu's messengers lead him in.)

Chief Nwasu: Our people, greetings. What I called you for this morning is to thank all those who made efforts to come and join in the leading of Egondy, the girl we gave to the D.C. Another thing is to tell you that Egondy has arrived safely in Europe. This shows us now that what the D.C. said was true. This is a letter that the D.C. wrote. This other thing is a picture of himself and Egondy.
(Chief Nwasu shows them the picture. This astonishes everyone because this is the first time they have seen anything like this. Especially it is seen that it was the truth that the D.C. was going to train the girl, and that its meaning was that it was not a trick he was playing. An interpreter starts to read out to them the letter that the D.C. wrote.)

Court Clerk William: "Egondy and I arrived London safely."

Mụ na Egondy rutere London n'udo.

"She is now a student of Medicine in one of the schools here." Egondy abanyela igụ akwụkwọ ebe ọ ga-anọ wee mụ ihe gbasara ọlụ arụ ike.

"I seize this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of you, especially Chief Nwosu, for the co-operation given to me during my tenure of office in your area." Aga m'iji oge ugbu a wee kele unu nile, tumadi Chief Nwosu, n'etu unu siri wee na-akwado m mgbe nile m biri n'ala unu. Jidenu ka unu ji.

A Man: Court Clerk, all these things you say that you are reading to us, I do not think that one small word of truth is in it. Who went there to see for himself? Does paper speak words?

A Woman: What happened is that you don't argue with one who killed a leopard. What is obvious to me is that the girl has been sold and the money used to satisfy his needs.

Another Man: We should be quiet, because one does not hide a pregnancy with the hand. If death has not killed the yam used for sacrifice, it will afterwards sprout. Let us watch, before those five years we were told about, we will see the truth in this matter.

(Court Clerk tries to show the townspeople that what was written in the letter is true. He reads again, both what is in the letter and what is not in it.)

Court Clerk William: "See that you give interpreter William a goat, two baskets of eggs, a pot of palm oil and ten yams monthly." Gekwanu nti, o. Ọ si n'unu ga-agba mbọ hụ n'unu na-enye mụnwa bụ Court Clerk William, onye ọkọwa okwu, etu ewu, nkata akwa abụọ, otu ite mmanụ na nnukwu mba ji iri kwa ọnwá.

(Now people start to murmur.)

Court Clerk: Why are you doing this? This is what I read from the paper. Whoever thinks it is not true, let him come and read. Please, I do not want you to treat me like a local dibja, for whom low-grade yam is cooked.
(Noise and commotion take place, in which some people leave in anger.)

Chief Nwosu: Since things are like this, everyone can go home. Tomorrow, all the elders will come so we can discuss this matter.
(Everyone leaves.)

Scene Four
(In Odenigbo's house)

(Odenigbo is sitting in great sadness when Ugboaku enters.)

Ugboaku: Master, please, if there is anything I, Ugboaku, have done to you, forget it. Please, see my knees on the ground. You have seen your son, Qji, if he should be killed today, you and I would be childless. Our situation will become as someone who washes his hands and cracks a palm nut for a chicken.

Odenigbo: Oh! Has Qji changed into my son now? He is no longer your son as you have been claiming earlier when people did not know that he was secretly pilfering.

Ugboaku: Please, forget all that. Honestly, there was no time I knew that Qji was misbehaving up until the day they dragged him here. Please, we should beg Chief Mberedeoggu to forgive Qji for what he has done. We will promise to make sure that he will not again do anything that will cause people to call him bad names.

Odenigbo: Do you believe now that Qji is not a good child?

Ugboaku: Master . . .
What happens is that there is still time to make Qji

become a good child. Today is early. We will start to give Oji a kind of training he will use to mend his behavior, because a child is not above those who bore him. The pepper plant is never bigger than the one who planted it.

Odenigbo: There is no trouble, rather it is good that the wind blows so the chicken's bottom is seen; if the ant stings the buttocks, it learns common sense. If Oji does not have sense, he will use what has happened to get some sense. The fact is that I don't know how to talk to him properly. *(Now Iwunze and Nwandanda come, in order to join in going to plead with Chief Mberedeagu. Before they sit down, Chief Mberedeagu's messenger enters.)*

Ibe: Master, Chief told me to come and give you a message.

Odenigbo: Please, what does he say?

Ibe: He told me to come and tell you that the people Oji stole the chicken from sent word that Oji should be forgiven for his thievery, but should be warned.

Odenigbo: Oho, thank you. Tell him that the message has reached my ears. Later I will come and see him. *(Ibe goes out, while Iwunze, Nwandanda, Odenigbo and Ugboaku start to talk of the happiness they feel and how they will go and thank Chief Mberedeagu.)*

Odenigbo: There is a dream I dreamed night before last. It was a dream that left me speechless.

Nwandanda: When did you become a dreamer?

Odenigbo: It was nothing like that. You know what happened? When this morning came, a certain man wearing a type of dress I had never seen came here. This man used something like a mirror to cover the front of his face which made him look like he had four eyes.

Nwandanda: Did he say where he came from?

Iwunze: Do you think that it was not spirits?

Odenigbo: I do not think that it was spirits because he said that it was the Court Clerk who sent him. But one thing that happened was that he spoke through his nose. And the biggest thing was that he had no feet.

Ugboaky: There is something else we saw. We almost took off running. As soon as he came, he took out a paper which he said that Onyema had written.

Nwandanda: You don't say!

Iwunze: This thing, was it real or was it a dream?

Odenigbo: Have I told you not to tell anyone? He said that what that paper said was that Onyema and Egondy had met each other in Europe.

Nwandanda: Did it really happen?

Odenigbo: Read the paper. He said in it that Egondy ran to the house of Chief Nwosu of Umuḍara, where she stayed and then was taken to the D.C. when the D.C. went home and wanted the people of that town to take him a young woman to educate for them.

(Nwandanda stands up, and starts to dance to thank the land of her ancestors who are leading these children.)

Odenigbo: Since that time, happiness began to intoxicate me like wine. What happens is that we will go to see that Chief Nwosu and thank him as Onyema said.

Iwunze: Tomorrow we will go.

Odenigbo: This is a good thing. The happiness I feel again comes

from knowing that they are both well.

Nwandanda: What is the name of the town in which he stays?

Odenigbo: Is it one town or two? He said that they were going to various towns. He said that they had gone to Yosinkam, Yohikaya, London, and Holintin.

Nwandanda: Really! Tomorrow I will come so we can go and see Chief Nwosu.

Act Eight

Scene One

(In the house of Chief Nwosu)

(Chief Nwosu is unhappy because of a letter Egonye has written him, thanking him and telling him about her life in Europe. Ekemba comes in and shows her unhappiness, lamenting which shows that if they had known, it was their daughter Chinyere they would have taken to the D.C. While they sit there unhappily, some elders come in.)

A Titled Man: How are things?

Chief Nwosu: Welcome, elders. I sent for you.

A Titled Man: Is everything all right?

Chief Nwosu: This is a letter Egonye sent from Europe.
(This surprises the elders and titled men greatly.)

An Elder: Please, start from the beginning. What did you say happened?

Chief Nwosu: We received a letter from Egonye in which she said that she had seen her brother Onyema in Europe. She also said that when it was time for them to return, she would return to their town of Umuokpara before coming here.

Ekemma: *(Ekemma's face shows great sadness.)*
Elders, we are also hearing . . .

Chief Nwosu: This thing has shown me that this world of ours is deep. If we had known, would it not have been my child Chingere we would have sent? Hm . . . let it be.
(While they are talking, Odenigbo, Iwunze and Nwandanda come in carrying wine, and identify themselves.)

Nwandanda: Master, we received word that it was to your house that our child Egondy ran a few months ago, when she became a fugitive.

Chief Nwosu: That is what happened.

Nwandanda: We understand that you are the one who turned her over to the D.C.

An Elder: We have received a fine letter she sent from Europe.

Nwandanda: Good. What happens is that we are not happy about how a child like that could run off to a Chief like you, and rather than find a way to send her back where she came from, you turned her over to the D.C. who was retiring. We have no other thing to say until we see Egondy again with our own eyes.

Iwunze: Master, Amadi [a dignitary] not knowing what to say said that the first person said what he was going to say. It is like that. What my sister said is what I, Iwunze, say. Anyway, we came to thank you as Egondy wrote in the letter she sent us. Another thing is that if God has mercy and all of these things she wrote are true, you know that it will be good for all of us; the road between us and you will be like a road to the stream but if not like that, you know that Egondy is still in your hands.

Odenigbo: Please, Chief, don't be angry at all this talk. It is the fact that she is just a child that has brought this on.

See, this is wine we used to knock on the door because one does not see a child's tooth emptyhanded.

(Chief Nwosu thanks them, then calls Ibe to share the wine.)

Chief Nwosu: Welcome. Welcome. Please, I will say that it surprised me the way you spoke concerning Egondy. Rather than thanking me for the way I sent her out for training, you started to blame me. In any event, what we will pray is that the oil bean produces as its head looks. Let us pray that God should be merciful so that this child will return alive.

Ekemma: Friends, welcome. In all truthfulness, when we sent Egondy out, we had nothing bad in mind. We would have sent our daughter Chinyere but it is said that a person with one eye owes a debt to the head. We have only that one child. So, people, don't be angry.

Odenigbo: Let us forget discussing the sweetness of the palm tree and start to drink what the palm tree brought. Speakers of proverbs say that when the cow has no tail, its god chases away flies for it. No one knows tomorrow. So let us stop thinking too much about these children Onyema and Egondy, because the god of the poor person leads him.
(All these people go after they finish drinking the wine that Odenigbo brought.)

Scene Two

(In Odenigbo's house)

(Ugbaeky is mourning her fate. She is still like that when her sister Ugodie arrives, and sees her crying.)

Ugodie: I have told you to stop killing yourself for nothing. One thing you will say that I told you is that you took a stone and put it in your mind. Take your mind off Onyema and Egondy.

Ugbokwu: The reason this thing is killing me so badly is that my son Oji could have been sent out and I refused. Are we going to take Onyema then as a prophet, which made him volunteer himself to join the D.C.? Rather, what happens is that I have not agreed that all these things they say are written in the letter are true. Can a letter have something true in it? Do letters talk?

Ugodie: What you should understand is that we will watch to see if indeed all these sayings are true.

Ugbokwu: Do you think that I can stay alive and be a witness to Onyema becoming a big man in this town, and then witness Egondy becoming a European doctor, while my son Oji is tapping palm trees?

Ugodie: There is nothing the eye sees that makes it run blood. We will be alive to see anything that will occur.
(Now Iwunze, some elders, Nwandanda arrive. As soon as they walk in, the gong sounds.)

An Elder: Friends, you have heard that the gong has sounded, which means that there is nothing now that keeps the dog from dying. Today we will find out the truth of these things people have been saying for a long time.

Odenigbo: What happens is that we must reach the town square, since the Court Clerk has gone to meet Onyema and Egondy; what we see, we take. If it be their corpses that are brought, we'll see.

Iwunze: Quickly, let us go, let us not stay to clean off our mats until dawn.
(They all get up and go to their town square.)

In Scene Three
(Around the meetingplace of the Umuokpara people)

(The townspeople, from young to old, enter the ^{square} enclosure, which has been

well prepared. Odenigbo and his household arrive. Afterward, Chief Mberedeogu and his people arrive. Musicians are there playing their

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Chief Mberedeogu: Friends, welcome. Drink! Eat! Ahem, the appointed day has arrived. Court Clerk has gone to the coast to meet Onyema and Egondy.

(While he is speaking, Court Clerk comes and tells them that Onyema and Egondy have arrived at the coast and they are right behind him now. Just then, Onyema and Egondy are seen, in European-style clothes. There is commotion everywhere. Everyone wants to embrace them and shake their hands. Music is blaring. Court Clerk stops the noise and tells the townspeople to listen, to hear what the letter that the D.C. sent has to say.)

Court Clerk: This is a letter sent by the D.C., who has entered his retirement.

"I am happy to let you know that Onyema and Egondy have completed their educations. Onyema will replace me as the chief ruler of your town, as D.C. Egondy has become qualified as a European doctor. It will not be long before she builds a hospital in your town. During the coming year, I will visit your town to see how you are progressing. Thank you all."

(The townspeople are happy and clap their hands to show how they feel. Egondy is seen lining up some small children who are in the square, giving them various gifts such as European biscuits.)

Onyema: Fellow citizens, I greet you. I am happy to see you face to face again. In truth, I didn't know that a thing could be as it is today concerning my situation, because the day I left Umuokpara, what I was told was that there was a load that the D.C. wanted me to carry. Nevertheless, it turned out to go from dipping snuff to buying yam [from small thing to big]. Afterwards I went to various cities, like Washington, Yorkshire, London, Ireland and many other places you have not heard of. The place where

Egondy and I met was Yorkshire. On that day, it was wonderful because we two had not dreamed of seeing each other again alive in this world, let alone in the land of the Europeans. Now that I am the D.C. of our town, I promise to see that I look after the life and wealth of everyone.

If Chief Nwosu had known that things would turn out like this, he would have sent his daughter, but he did not know. However, thanks be to God for his wonderful works on our behalf. Thank you.

(Everyone joins in dancing. Odenigbo injures his leg while he is dancing. Egondy hurries to go and treat him. Onyema and Egondy are seen giving Oji a box from which he can take a fine garment to wear to come to the square, because what Oji is wearing is very ragged. Afterwards he is seen wearing that new garment.)

Chief Mberedeggu: Fellow citizens, the eruption has broken out on the cow's face. Everyone has seen with his own eyes what we have been hearing a short time ago. Thanks be to God. One promise I make to D. C. Onyema is that I and all the people of my town will give him honor and respect without reservation. No one will treat him like the local doctor for whom inferior yam is cooked, because it is said that the fish caught by someone who is known is not tasty in the stew. The way we took the D.C. who went home is the way we will take D.C. Onyema. I thank you.

Odenigbo: Fellow citizens, greetings. Eat. Drink. Multiply. Train [nourish]. I am speechless. The only thing I know is that the one who has not died is still alive. Especially it is said that if death does not kill the yam used in sacrifice, afterward it will sprout. That is what happened to Onyema and Egondy. If you are dispersing, everyone should come to my house. Thank you.

(Dancing starts. They all dance in their own way until they are tired. Then, it is announced that Onyema and Egondy will go home to rest.)

THE END