

ERIMMA

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INTRODUCTION

In all the books I have written, what I try hard to do is to give students of the Igbo language, and others who read Igbo, something that will satisfy them like food, because one does not criticize well-prepared soup.

I also encourage those who want and those who are able to write Igbo language, to persevere, because if a person fails to lick his lips, the harmattan will make them dry and cracked. It is necessary that we persevere in giving Igbo language its rightful place among other languages of the world. Igbo has interesting traditions and proverbs to read about in books, and therefore we ought to persevere in writing them down in order not to become fools like one who does not know when the people of his house finish distributing firewood from breadfruit.

Any people who have read the other books I have written, which are *The Chicken Scattered the Image*, *Night Falls in the Afternoon*, and *Traditions of the Igbo People*, will see that the hand that wrote them was not a hand that was improperly washed but went into the cooking-fire proudly.

In this book I tell a story about a young woman, Erimma, who caused the young men in that town to come to blows over her. Erimma was unbelievably beautiful. She was mature in every womanly respect. She was very intelligent. But what gave everyone gooseflesh was her two eyeballs, which made all the hairs on a man's body stand up. But a big disagreement occurred between her mother and her father, concerning giving her in marriage, but after this happened, they came to an agreement and decided to marry her to a husband who would be a lifelong asset to her.

But one thing that wanted to concern them all was what concerned the mother and father in seeking to select for their daughter the man they wanted her to marry. Love was not one, because sometimes, the love a woman has for the body of a man causes her not to marry another one who would take care of her very well. Sometimes, what the girl decides in her own mind is the best for her.

When you finish reading this book, you do not fail to see how they use their feet to find what fell into the bottom of the river. This story is very nice, so go on and read it, and at the end of the month, let the worker be paid his wages. People of our house *kwenu, kwenu, kwezuonu*.

Izugbeakū ran like a mad dog, looking around wild-eyed, shouted and ran out into the Onyeansi compound, then took her hand off her mouth and words streamed out unchecked (spoke what her mouth asked her, and what her mouth did not ask her). But what came out of her mouth each and every time was, "One who gathers wealth but does not eat what he wants, please go and see how the mouths of the dead are."

If there was a cloth around her waist, she did not know it. Neither did she think about whether her head tie was on or if it had fallen off on the road. If she had borne a child, never mind, it was not something she was thinking about, because the world and her life were there, and occupied her more than food.

Tears streamed from her eyes, her whole body was wet like a person bathing, but she was not bathing. The townspeople, men and women, old and young, all ran in together, both those who held their breasts as they ran one who gave way to the tortoise, and those who used their canes to hobble as best they could, all of them, and anyone who arrived where Izugbeakū was writhing on the ground and looked at her, held his head very still, because Izugbeakū had a body everyone pointed to as an example in that town, very smooth and spotless, now turned rough like sandy ground. Bruises covered her back and were bleeding, which showed that somehow water had entered the stem of the pumpkin, and also, that something caused the cocoyam to cry "nwurim" in the mortar (proof that something must be amiss).

The townspeople, both men and women, called her name and asked her what had happened? She was filled with anger, she had no words to describe what caused the toad to run in the afternoon. But the people, if one looked at her, he shrugged his shoulders, and asked what had happened to Izugbeakū, who was a playful person, that resulted in such tears of injury like that.

The people asked Izugbeakū over and over what caused the chicken to start to cry "foro teghete, foro teghete" but nothing came from her mouth to explain to them. The people got angry and started to go to their homes one by one, saying that they were not the ones to be blamed for what happened. Others talked wildly, scolded her loudly, and asked her why she ignored them like that. They asked her if she thought that it was a dog barking, and that it was not human beings questioning her?

Izugbeakū gathered the end of the cloth she had used as tie around her waist and wiped the saliva and tears streaming down her face. Then she tried to speak and tell them how she had married a husband just as others had married, but hers was a person with a bad chi that was different.

Izugbeaku said to them, "It is Nnajiọfọ, he has killed me, he has beaten me, he has done to me what makes the eyes bleed (something unthinkable), because there is nobody to speak for me. There is nobody to rescue me, he has done what his mind told him to do. Nor is there one thing I did to him that made him treat me like a poor person. Look at me, see how my body is. See my arms, head, body, feet and all of me. Alas! My God, have you seen me the way you have treated me today?"

At that time, several people turned back, and heard the disaster that had occurred. Several people bit their fingers (in puzzlement) and said that they had not known that Nnajiọfọ had such a hot temper, that made him beat Izugbeaku like that. Others murmured, and said that they would not make a judgment when they had heard only one person's side, and therefore they would go and hear what Nnajiọfọ had to say about what caused the love he had for Izugbeaku to be lost in an instant so he would jump on her like a leopard and put out her eyes.

Now, the townspeople ran in two directions. One group stayed consoling Izugbeaku, and trying to find out the full story of what brought on the problem that day. Others went to the house to hear her husband Nnajiọfọ's side. Among those who went to Nnajiọfọ's house, one group felt angry, as the way he used a strong man's hand and beat up his wife like this, was not good. Another group went to spread gossip, and get information on what they would tell others, how problems had started at Nnajiọfọ's house.

You know well that not every person is pleased when husband and wife live in peace. Whether in heaven or on earth, there is no one who can know what his fellow man has in mind, only if he speaks out about it, or does some action that will reveal it.

Now, the thing that gripped Izugbeaku so strongly had left her, her mouth started to run like a parrot, to tell those around her how he changed into a devilish person who beat his co-wife on the head and her legs then swelled up. "I did not steal anything, I did not reveal any secrets. It was only that I said that our daughter Erimma was not mature enough to marry. That was all I said. Nnajiọfọ then asked me what I said and I repeated it. He then beat me thoroughly, which caused sparks to come out of my eyes. I fell to the floor, urine flooded out from me, I shouted for my mother and my father, my god and my hands. He then approached me, hit me with his fist as hard as he could, kicked me as hard as he could and then picked up a stick leaning on an orange tree, broke it and beat me as much as he wanted, until he was tired." Everyone opened wide their eyes, their mouths and ears and gazed at her in amazement.

One person asked her, "Why did you not shout so people would run in?"

run out, because he took me by surprise. Even as to biting, I could not bite him. I could not scratch him, and he finished doing all these things. Now, look at my body."

Another person asked her, "During the time you were struggling?, what did your daughter do, like someone whose progress you were wanting?"

"There wasn't one thing the child could do, so she kept knocking herself to the ground and begging her father to leave her mother alone. Twice her father pushed her off since she was holding his arm to stop him from hitting me, and Erimma then fell down and somersaulted on the ground. But if she was hurt, I don't know now."

Several people then hissed and said that Nnajiọfọ really took on a lot, as one who owns something will notice (bit off more than he could chew?). They asked if the end had been reached of the quarrel that caused Nnajiọfọ to start to see the bones in his young man's hands in Izugbeakụ's body (beat her strongly). Why did they not have the same agreement they had in bearing the child and raising her as when they sought to provide her with a husband?

The women who gathered there then began to console her and told her to have patience, because the bedbug had told its child to have patience, that what was hot must get cold. But she said that her brother and sisters must hear and see with their own eyes what her husband Nnajiọfọ had done to her that afternoon.

She then got up, did not rub the sand from her bottom, nor did she dry the tears that filled her eyes, and started to go to her mother's home. Several people begged and begged her to let them intervene in the quarrel. She told them that before agreeing, her mother and brothers should see her. They then left her and only a few people went after her begging her, but the others went to the house to hear what her husband had to say.

Nnajiọfọ sat in his *obi*, held snuff in his hand and was looking out at the compound. Everything that had happened in his house seemed like a dream to him. He himself was confused because if a dog passed gas, the land would start to chase him. (guilt feelings) Because of this, Nnajiọfọ remained calm, looking at the compound vacantly.

The first man who opened the door and entered his house was his friend, Aghaibeka. He didn't call Nnajiọfọ's name as he always did; rather, he entered the house quietly, called Nnajiọfọ to the back of (behind) the house and told him that what he had done was bad, beating his wife so as to make the whole village gather round. Nnajiọfọ looked at him sheepishly. Aghaibeka told him that the snake had entered the grass, that his wife had gone to their house to tell her parents what had

happened to her, therefore, he should hurry to go and see that she did not reach them. He told him to make every effort to change Izugbeaku's mind so that she would come back.

He told him that if he allowed her to return to her house, he would surely spend a lot of money, it was not exposing your buttocks to a titled man that the quarrel involved, it experiencing what would follow that kind of behavior. When he told him this, Nnajiọfọ looked up and down, and he broke out in perspiration. He agreed that he should do as his friend told him to do. He then ran from the back of the house out into the compound, and hurried to go and find his wife on the road, before she reached her native place.

But as he was going, a crowd of people entered his house, both those who were angry and said that if there were two things, one would not fail to happen, and those who wanted to lecture him on how he should settle things so that he and Izugbeaku could live again in peace. When they did not see him, they sat down and said that he would not fail to come out into the compound on that day, that they would use their eyes and see him, because they thought that he had run into the house out of great fear.

Nnajiọfọ ran along the highway but did not see her. Indeed, he met some people on the road, he did not look at either men or women or greet anyone. This frightened a certain strong man who was his compatriot, because he thought that he was going to hang himself in the bush. The fellow ran like a dog and chased him until he got close to him and grabbed his neck and told him to come back.

Nnajiọfọ told him that there was someplace very important to him that he wanted to go in a hurry, but the person adamantly refused to listen. He then begged him with every plea he had learned, until the person realized that what he had thought in his own mind was not what Nnajiọfọ was going to do. He then released him and Nnajiọfọ left speedily without looking back.

But people who heard what had happened were talking nonsense (nturubibi) about what had happened, because the stories women told when going to gather firewood in the bush, and in fetching water had caused their mouths to chatter like oil beans.

Izugbeaka had almost reached their house when Nnajiọfọ met her and ran and embraced her and kissed her and begged her up and down and made big promises to her about everything he was going to do for her, and things he was going to buy for her if she would forgive what was in the past. Everyone who was there then stared at them, to see what would happen between them.

Izugbeaku looked at him, her heart softened, and she remembered the love she had for Nnajiọfọ. She looked up at the sky and looked into Nnajiọfọ's eyes,

and tears came to her face.

Nnajiọfọ took his hand and dried her tears, kissed her, begged her forgiveness and promised her again that he would not lay a hand on her again in this world.

It was like what the doctor ordered, they both laughed and held hands. Then, Nnajiọfọ looked at Izugbeakụ's body and expressed his sympathy. Izugbeakụ agreed with him, and they both trembled. They both knew well that it was the devil who had done that bad thing, because beginning from the time they had become husband and wife, Nnajiọfọ had not struck her and they had not quarreled even one day. It was the devil and his fighters who had kindled that great fire that burned between them.

After a little while, Nnajiọfọ told her that they should go back, Izugbeakụ agreed, and they both then turned around and went home. But everyone who saw them was speechless, because they had never seen anything like this before. The story then spread in the town like a tongue of fire before they reached their house. Many people then gathered so they could see what their ears had heard, and saw the two of them holding hands going along as though nothing had happened that day, until they reached their house.

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When they entered the house and saw the huge crowd of people around their house, Nnajiọfọ was scared, because he thought that it was his in-laws who had gathered at his house. He then looked all around very well, and recognized the faces of those who had gathered at his house. And the two of them went along holding hands. All those people who gathered there got gooseflesh. Both men and women looked at each other when they saw those who had caused a commotion in the town that afternoon walking along holding hands.

At that time, a loud roar went up, everyone then laughed, and both men and women looked for the way home. The story of what happened on that day went around all the surrounding towns. One who heard the story snapped his fingers and said that he could not judge between husband and wife, because when they wanted to settle what was drawing them apart, they would use him and start to make up their differences again.

There was also not one man or woman who had entered their house to find out how they settled their quarrels between themselves, except for the time they completely embarrassed themselves. When Erimma sat crying and saw her mother and father enter their house holding hands, she was amazed, because she had not seen anything like that, nor had she seen her mother and father quarreling or fighting.

Erimma then rubbed her eyes, went out into the compound, and found laughter everywhere. And she looked at them out of the corner of her eye in order to find out if what she saw was a dream. Then, Nnajiọfọ called her name, she answered him and went to find out why he called her. When she got there, her father told her to sit down. He then sat down in front of Erimma and made a promise to Izugbeaku that he would not raise his hand to her again. While they were speaking, their friend, Osuinyi, picked up his walking stick and opened the door and entered the house, grunting as he went, and sighing deeply. He called Nnajiọfọ's name and asked if he was at home. Nnajiọfọ answered him and told him to come in, he entered and looked at all of them; they all had smiling faces. All those things surprised him the way Nnajiọfọ and Izugbeaku sat together in the same chair, Izugbeaku leaning on his legs, the same people who caused the town to get excited on that day.

Nnajiọfọ told him to sit down, he went and sat down, took his walking stick and placed it behind the chair, and leaned it against the wall. At that time, Osuinyi's thoughts started to run around like a clock, because what he saw when he arrived, was not what he thought he was going to see.

Nnajiọfọ pushed Izugbeaku aside, then told her to wait while he got up. Izugbeaku then got up and sat down by herself. Nnajiọfọ got up himself, and told Erimma to go and pick alligator peppers for him so they could chew kola nut. Erimma agreed and went. Nnajiọfọ went inside the house where he slept, and it was not long before he came out, holding a plate with pieces of kola nut and small pieces of chalk on it. When he went to the chair and sat down, he took chalk and threw it on the ground and then presented the kola nut plate to Osuinyi and told him that he (Nnajiọfọ) had the kola. Osuinyi put out his hand, which was scarred because hot water had splashed on his hand when he was a youth, and then received the kola from him and thanked him very much.

He took the chalk, threw his own and then put it on the plate. He looked thoughtfully around (took his mind and thought around) to make sure that he was the one who should break the kola. But he wanted to do things the proper way, so he asked Nnajiọfọ, "Should I do it the way it should be done?" Nnajiọfọ replied, "Yes, you the doctor are the one who should make the sacrifice." They both broke out in laughter. Osuinyi cleared his throat, licked his lips (rubbed his mouth with camwood), then lifted up the kola nut plate and said, "Lord who can do all things, Man who has great eyes and oversees the whole world, one who is more powerful than any human, doctor surpassing all doctors, one who created heaven and earth and then swept the firmament sparkling clean, we thank you. Come take this kola and bless us. And take away bad things from us, bad people and various works of devils, since you know well that we are your children, babies who bathe by washing only their stomachs."

After he said this, he raised his neck like a sky-hawk and said, "Master, please have mercy on us, and snatch us from the hands of those who would take our lives, because there is nothing we have done to bad people. We do not kill people. We do not oppress our fellow man, or forcibly take his possessions from him.

At that time, Nnajiọfọ replied, "It is what has happened."

He (Osuinyi) said further, "We have offended no one, we have not conspired against our fellow men, and if anyone does not like the lives we live, may he go to sleep with the chickens (die young). If someone sees us and remembers his dead child, may the living one do what mate did. But if someone sees us with a glad heart, may everything go well for him."

Nnajiọfọ shouted, "Ọfọ."

Osuinyi said, "Elders great and small, please gather round, because if one offers the baby chick as a sacrifice, the vulture descends. One (of the elders) who knows what he eats, let him take it. May the spirits not harm humans, and may humans not harm spirits, because we believe that the hawk should perch, the eagle should perch, and if any of them tells the other not to perch, may his wing break off."

Nnajiọfọ answered him, "It is what happens."

Osuinyi said, "May God take in his hands Nnajiọfo, your life." Nnajiọfọ answered, "Thank you!" He spoke again, saying, "Wife Izugbeakụ your life, the life of your daughter, Erimma. The life of myself and my household, because the doctor blows the flute and wipes his nose, and also, Okoye Ugokwe said that what he says should not happen to a man, let it not happen to him."

Nnajiọfọ replied, "Osuinyi, you will pray more than expected in old age (i ga-agọka nka-o)."

While they were saying this, Nnajiọfọ's daughter, Erimma, took the alligator peppers that she had picked and she came and placed them on the kola nut platter. Osuinyi took his lobe of kola and chewed it, because he would not break Onyekwu kola. He also took one alligator pepper and chewed it, then presented kola to Nnajiọfọ. Nnajiọfọ received it, took his own and chewed it, also took pepper and chewed it and then presented it to Izugbeakụ, she took kola only, and said that the pepper would pain her a lot. Erimma was one who refused outright to chew kola. Nnajiọfọ cleared his throat, got up and carried the kola nut platter, placed it on the bed, and came back and took his seat.

Osuinyi cleared his throat and gave a great cough. Osuinyi had a bad cough that was troubling him. Nnajiọfọ said that what he (Osuinyi) and a man were

fighting was a big problem. Osuinyi replied, "If I do not fail to conquer it, it happens in vain."

After they chewed the kola, Osuinyi nodded his head, thanked Nnajiọfọ for the kola he brought, and he acknowledged it. He then opened the lid of the pot he had brought with him and told Nnajiọfọ that if one continued to avoid a chief, one would cover his head with a basket to talk to him. He told him that it was because of what happened on that day that he came to settle their quarrel. But now, he had used the eye of an adult to see what fell into the water and what had been crooked had been straightened. He then congratulated them both for the way they had settled the quarrel between them. He said that it meant that they intended to see that things between the two of them should go well. He then extended his hand and shook hands with them both.

He then told them that a marital dispute was such that the two people affected by it should settle it, but if it was not possible for them to settle it, their kith and kin and friends should come and join in giving their opinions in the dispute. He told them that the reason he came to their house was not for them to tell him what caused the quarrel and what one person or another did, or to advise them, because one does not become a wealthy man by dispersing wealth. He told them that one would not want a bird to perch on that day and then perch again. He told them that if the mouth did not say what the stomach ate, another person would not know [about it].

He told them that he would be happy if beginning from that day they would open up their hearts and live in peace. If there were something between them, the two of them should sit down and settle it between themselves without telling the villagers about them. After he finished saying this, he told them that a word to the wise is sufficient, and they should watch out well, because it is not when the rain is falling that it is absorbed by the earth.

Nnajiọfọ then shook his hand again and thanked him very much for the love he had for them, which made him come to see that they were living in peace. He also told him that all those things that happened were the bad hand of that person the devil, but a stick does not pierce a man's eyes twice. He said that what happened was a lesson, that now, they had learned something that they would not forget. He promised him faithfully that beginning from that day, no quarrels would come between them, to greatly embarrass them as their two eyes had seen on that day.

Nnajiọfọ called Osuinyi's name, and he answered him. He then told him please to greet Izugbeakụ in his name. He said that on that day he had learned well how he loved her. He said that it was good if the neck struck the ground, but let it not break.

Osuinyi then extended his hand again and shook hands with Izugbeakū, Izugbeakū's face was wreathed in smiles, because it is said that if a woman prepares tasty soup, she sincerely says that if she put in a large amount of periwinkle, a person would not fail to bite off his finger [because it would be so tasty]. Osuinyi told Izugbeakū that if any person told her to hold on to what she had, that would mean that her behavior was good, and that was the reason he would tell her to hold on to what she had.

Izugbeakū agreed, thanked him for his concern for them, and said that if the hand was good to a person, let him lean it on his head, and if everything starting from that day was good, sleep has not spoiled the eye. She said that for her part, she was looking for something that would be good for their house, and she would not tire in continuing to do that or to do even better than she had done in the past. She said that she would be happy if her husband realized that she did not want anything that would bring on quarrels in their home, but rather that she desired peace and progress. If they were open (pure-hearted) while chewing nothing but kola nuts in their house, no one would know that they did not eat meat and fish. She said that that was what she wanted for the rest of her life.

Osuinyi thanked her and said that it was something like that that he wanted in his life, because if you speak well, you sleep on your mat, and again, if hunters plan well, they kill well-known animals. He then rose, picked up his (in-law has no mat - an over-the-shoulder cloth) and slung it over his shoulder, took his (oji ude aga, oji ude ala - walking stick?) and told them that he was returning to his house, because the morning's journey had been late. They thanked him and told him to return in peace. He then went and opened the door and went out, then closed it.

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When Osuinyi had left them and gone home, Izugbeakū called Nnajiōfō and told him that if one stood up and dug and broke a yam, one sat down to look for its tail, therefore, she wanted them to discuss marrying a husband for Erimma without it causing them another disagreement.

Nnajiōfō cleared his throat, thanked her very much, and told her that she had spoken well, because a person does not see the face of a yam and then put the yam-digger into the ground in vain. Nnajiōfō told her that he had seen how Erimma was one daughter born to them who had grown up to be extremely beautiful. He said that on many nights he was unable to sleep, as he thought deeply about Erimma. What brought on these thoughts was that he was considering in his heart whether the child was also a good child.

And there was one thing he didn't want to see happen in her life. That was to see that young men did not ruin Erimma. He told her that he looked carefully (inside the river) and saw that young men did not allow their daughter to rest.

When she went to the forest to collect firewood, they followed her. When she fetched water, they prepared to join her in fetching water. There was no time that they allowed the child to breathe. He said that that was why he had refused to listen, that his eyes would not see his ears.

Nnajiọfọ told Izugbeakụ that she used her tongue to count her teeth, only if she wanted them (Nnajiọfọ and wife) to do something in vain (wash their hands and break palm nuts for the chicken). Izugbeakụ lifted her face and brought it down again, sucked her teeth and shook her head back and forth. She then told Nnajiọfọ that she saw what he was saying, but that one thing in her mind was that they should not peel of the skin because of an itchy rash. It was something requiring deep thought. It was also not a thing that one should do in haste, so as not to do something they would regret in the future.

Nnajiọfọ told Izugbeakụ that he well knew that they had only one female child. It was in that child's hands that all their thoughts and their progress and whether they would eat or not eat when they became old depended. If they looked carefully and looked for a good in-law who would remember them, times would be good for them in the future, but if they allowed the fools who filled their town to spoil their daughter, it would be sure to be unprofitable to them (they would regret it). He said that one thing he would not countenance (stay alive and see) was that Erimma should become pregnant and give birth in their house, which was an abomination in all their villages.

Izugbeakụ nodded her head and told him that everything he said was as it should be, because truth should not be twisted, rather that what she had in mind was that they should think very carefully about the matter, because one who had one eye would not sacrifice time. "Now, I want us to consider carefully the trip Ikenna made to this house to say that he wanted to marry our daughter." She told him that men looked at things on the surface but women think in depth. She told him that her ears were full of hearing stories about Ikenna. That was what alerted her, saying that her daughter must never live in Ikenna's house. Ikenna was not one who would take care of his wife well. Ikenna must go and marry another woman, he must not marry Erimma.

Also, Ozoekwe, who was someone who was coming every day to their house, was not fit. He did not take good care of his mother, a woman who gave birth to many children but died of starvation. How do you think that he will take good care of Erimma, or remember that he has a father-in-law and a mother-in-law? Erimma is extremely beautiful. Men do not use their eyes to see good things. That is why they come every morning and afternoon giving them trouble. It is not the voice one uses to borrow money that one uses to repay it. If a person uses his eyes to know whether corn is ripe, going to pierce it is nothing but impatience.

Nnajiọfọ told her that he had heard everything she said, but they should be very vigilant to see that their work was not in vain. He said it would be good if they called Erimma and advised her, that she should be very careful, so as not to fall into the hands of wayward men (with no head or tail). They both agreed, and Nnajiọfọ then called Erimma.

When she came, he told her that she had seen with her own eyes what had happened on that day, that it was something concerning her that had caused it. He told her that now, they had settled all the disagreements between them, but what they wanted to do was to give her words of advice. He told her that he well knew that she was the only eyeball that owed a debt to blindness, therefore they would not want her to be useless, or not be of much benefit to them and herself.

He told her that only the patient animal drank good water, and again, it was patience that the porcupine used to give birth to a child with thorns all over its body. It was true that she had grown into a young woman, she had breasts, men were chasing her everywhere, giving her lots of trouble, but it was good to use plenty of common sense in following them, because men became great temptations for women. Sometimes, they took what they wanted, they ran away and left the woman to undergo all alone the great suffering he caused her. He said that that was what caused them to become concerned (shrug their shoulders) when they saw how people gave her trouble, and that caused the quarrel between them which she witnessed.

He told her that one thing they wanted to see her do was to not listen to the voices of the men that were sweet as honey, because all their words were misleading, to deceive and put a person into bad things, which would lead her into great suffering. He told her that if any man gave her trouble that she did not want, she should come and tell them, so they could decide what to do. And if anyone wanted to marry her, let him come and see them in person.

After he had spoken, Izugbeakụ got up herself and told Erimma that she should listen carefully and hear the things they were telling her that would benefit her. She told her that they were not scolding her, but it was good advice, that a mother and father who loved their daughter were telling her, that they were dispensing to her, that she should take it and do something. She told her that many times, she used her ears and heard things concerning those who became pregnant in the homes of their parents, and they did not have husbands. Many times, those who made them pregnant denied it and then abandoned them to suffer alone what happened to them. Something like this was a bad thing, which they did not want to happen to her.

And she should be very careful everyplace, the way all those people who did not have anything to do and wanted someone they could put into everlasting fire, followed people as dogs follow behind children and filled their stomachs.

She told her, "Any time a person gives you a lot of trouble, shout loudly and tell him to go away. If that person wants to marry you, he should go and see your mother and father because it is not a matter that concerns you. Even if he talks up and down, leave him and go away."

Nnajiōfo told her that he well knew that not every word a man told her came straight from his heart. Sometimes, that person thought one thing but said another.

Izugbeaku told her, "Also, you should be very careful about the way you make women friends, because men can deceive you by means of your friends. You know well that bad friends bring a person bad behavior and a bad name. Another thing, a man can beg a young woman and give her money so that she will bring you to him. That is why you should be careful in anything you do and in the women friends you make, that you know if they are people who will benefit you or if they are people who will mislead you. Have you heard what we said to you?"

Erimma answered her, "I have heard."

4

Izugbeaku had been very careful in bringing up Erimma very well, so that if she married, she would do everything she (Izugbeaku) was doing. She then tried to teach her how the people of that town cooked various things. Erimma had learned how to cook bitterleaf soup, soup from the seed of the *ugili* tree, melon seed, okra, and nsala (watery soup made from fresh fish). She had also learned how they cooked corn, but there remained a few things that Izugbeaku wanted her to know well. One of them was how the townspeople prepared *ncha* (curdled oil preparation for eating certain foods like yam, etc.).

Early one morning, Izugbeaku told her that they were going to their cassava farm. They got their baskets, took knives and placed them inside, took their head pads and placed them on their heads, placed the baskets on their heads and went. The cassava farm they had planted the previous year was two or more. They went from the Oḡioku road next to the Ozowata river and reached the farm called Onye-marakaḡiya. That was a farm between their town and another town. When they reached there, they went from bush to bush and arrived at their farm.

They lifted off their baskets and placed them on the ground, then began to uproot their cassava tubers. All the cassavas had grown very large, so they could carry off only four mounds. They then gathered them and stuffed them into their baskets, and also gathered cassava stems, put them on top of their baskets and tied them well with string. They then carried the baskets of cassava and went home. When they reached their house, they went and warmed their soup on the fire, boiled water and made garri (cassava tubers grated and fried to semicoarse flour). At that time, the food was ready, and they all, including Nnajiōfo, then ate.

Izugbeakū told Erimma to go and gather firewood so they could cook the cassava. Erimma did as she was told. Izugbeakū cut all of the cassava into small pieces, then dipped up water and washed them, then put them into the large pot they used for cooking and placed it over the tripod and lit the fire. Erimma watched carefully how she did everything.

Every time she wanted to go and see if the cassava had finished cooking, she told Erimma to come close to her and look. After she saw that the cassava was done, she told Erimma to put the pot down on the ground and pour out the water in it. After she had done this, she spread the cassava on the floor of their house so they could cool.

Izugbeakū went to get a tin fish cup that she had perforated, which she used to peel the cassava, then went and brought a chair where a woman could rest her back and sat down. Then, the (real) work began. Erimma watched the way she peeled the cassava and learned, then joined her in peeling them. Each time she picked up one, she took a knife and cut off the tips before she started to peel it. The cassava-peeling then went along smoothly. Erimma was happy that she knew how to peel cassava.

After they had peeled all of them, Izugbeakū placed them in their big basket, used a plantain leaf to cover it and then tied it well with string. When it was time for those who collected night wine to go to the stream, they took the basket of cassava, and took their water pot and went to the Oḡowata river, then put in their basket of cassava, fetched their water and returned home.

Early the next morning, they took their water-pot and went to the stream to carry home the cassava. When they reached the place, they saw several other people washing the cassava that they had placed in the water. They all greeted each other. Izugbeakū then went and took out their basket of cassava from the place she had put it in the evening. She then washed it well, Erimma gazing at her like a sheep. After she finished this, they gave some cassava to several people who were their friends, those who had come to fetch water, before they (the friends) scooped up water. Erimma carried the cassava basket, and her mother carried the water pot, they and the others then exchanged some conversation and went home.

When they reached their house, Izugbeakū put down the water pot, then took the cassava basket from Erimma and took out those that they were going to eat. She well knew that where Nnajiōfō was concerned, sliced cassava (tapioca) was like a baby chick which one used to attract its mother.

Izugbeakū went and fetched her large basin and put all of the cassava into it, spread it out well, then took it and placed it on top of the akpata (drying tray) they had dug in front of the compound, where everyone would see it when

chasing any chickens that wanted to scatter sand in the garri. Nnajiọfọ went and broke off two heads of coconut, cut them open and scooped out their insides, then cut them and put them on the fire. Izugbeakụ put the sliced cassava on the fire and dropped some water on it. They all brought chairs and sat around the fire. Then, the evening meal was ready. All the sunlight that shone on that day then dried up the cassava.

That evening, Izugbeakụ took the cassava and placed it on top of the fireplace shelf of their house. They cooked the evening meal and ate, then went to sleep for the night. The next day was a big day in all their villages. It was the day of big Nkwọ, which the villagers chose as the time when they would rest from all the work of the week. Therefore, the villagers cooked the food they liked, brought out a few pots of wine and invited their friends and told them to come to rest at their houses.

Early in the morning, Izugbeakụ prepared to make salad from the cassava. She had potash that she obtained from pieces of burned shaft of palm nut, which she had put aside to use in making potash. She then went and brought out the old pot (ekpuru) from the place where she had put it. She also went and brought out the pot of oil she had pounded and put aside to use in making the potash, and told Erimma to go and cook it over the firestand, and she told her not to make it watery. Afterward, she put water on the fire and put in the potash and stirred all of them around. She went and took a bag to use in straining the potash and put it aside, then picked some alligator pepper and put it in their large mortar, but did not put salt in it. She then pounded the pepper well, took (ọnumọny) okra, or fresh-picked young okra, and put them in the mortar and pounded all of them well.

When she finished this, she told Erimma to slowly strain the oil into the mortar. Erimma did as she told her until she told her that it was enough. Izugbeakụ then took a wooden spoon and stirred them all around in the mortar, and told her again to strain the potash into it. She then went and got the potash and strained it. After she had stirred it around, she told her again to go and bring her castor seeds (fermented oil bean seeds), or castor plant, which would make what she was cooking be tasty, she brought it, opened its leaves and put the castor seeds into the mortar. Izugbeakụ then stirred the potash until it was very good, then left it.

Erimma asked her why she did not want to use watery oil in the potash. She replied that watery oil caused the potash to be thin, or not be tasty (which the mouth would receive well). Erimma nodded, because she had learned how to make potash. Her face was wreathed in smiles.

Izugbeakụ went and brought out the cassava, then picked them up and put them in the hot water that was in it (the fire). When they had become well softened, she pulled them out and put them in a basket so that the water in them

could drain out. After that, she took the cassava and put it in the potash pot (made of clay), added salt and stirred them all together very well. She then went and took out dried fish she had bought at the market on Afọ day, broke it up and put them all into a different basket.

They then picked out their own, took the fish that would be their portion, Nnajiọfọ joined them in eating, also poured a few cups of wine as they wanted and then drank, but left (some) for invited guests to eat what was left, and drink the remaining wine, when they came to their house. Erimma then snapped her fingers and told her mother that they must not fail to make that cassava salad any time, so that she could learn very well how it was made, but what she had in mind was that that food was very tasty.

5

If a person reveals a secret, then rejoices and shoots a gun into the air, has the one who is called a thief agreed? This was the question for Erimma's mother and father, because they did not ask her what her thoughts were about the subject of marriage. And Erimma took a big stone and covered her heart, and was laughing at them in her heart, because as she thought to herself, no one could tell her which man to marry. She thought to herself that one who thought that he could make her marry someone she did not like, was looking for a horned sheep (an impossibility).

Her mind told her that it was in the time of the ancestors that a mother and father had the power to make their daughter marry the person of their choice, whether she liked it or not. She was turning over in her mind that it was not what the mother and father had in their minds, when they looked for a husband for their daughter, that the girl had in her mind when she chose the person she wanted to marry her.

First of all, mothers and fathers do not know that there is something called love, which must exist between a man and a woman, and that love must be equal between them. They do not know that marriage requires that two people want very much to marry, that love exist, which will cause the marriage to go forward and become something people will use as an example in the town. That love is very necessary, because if a mother and father give a man their daughter, whether he pleases their daughter or not, they will not join them (the couple) in going to the house they will live in as husband and wife. Erimma thought that it was things like this that caused husband and wife to divorce shortly after they married.

Another thing, many times, a mother and father would on account of the office job the man who wanted to marry their daughter was doing, bestow their daughter upon him. They do not know how much money the employers pay that man, the education he has which he uses to do that work, or know well if there will be any promotion for the man in his work.

Again, a mother and father would require that they receive money on their daughter's head and then make their child marry, when they had not properly investigated the character of the man, whether he was someone who would take good care of their child, or was a good-hearted person, or if he was someone not hard-working, whose people scraped together the money to get a wife for him. This caused that when they went and lived as husband and wife, (ike na akwa ekee nsị dī n'ibe ike). At that time, those parents' eyes would be opened, to see what they did to put their child in trouble.

It is not sufficient, when mother and father say that they know the mother and father or sisters and brothers of the man who wants to marry their daughter, and because of that he must be a good person. The mother and father can be good people. The sisters and brothers of the man who wants to marry the girl can be good people, but the man may not be (good), because the same mother and father can give birth to children, but they do not have the same character.

Another thing that misleads parents is that a man who wants to marry their daughter has an automobile, or that he comes to their house in an automobile, and they look at that automobile. Many times, it does not belong to the man but is one he got from another person. They say they will not look at the one who comes to their house using an old bicycle, or the one who comes on foot, but rather the one who uses an automobile. People like this do not know that a man who wants to marry a woman can go to the place of someone who lends garments to people, borrows from him, takes shoes from people, hats and various things and then travels that way, but it is not the mouth one uses to borrow money from a person that is used to pay it back.

Erimma thought to herself that things concerning marriage were life-and-death matters that concerned those who wanted to get married, therefore, it was something those people should agree on very well, since they well knew that it was something concerning their lives and their future. It was all these things that made her laugh at them to herself, and said that they were not going to tell her what to do.

But the main thing that Erimma had in mind was that she would not get married while she had not completed her education. She saw and heard how many men treated their wives, and it was only because those women were not well educated. It was things like this that made her swear that she would study hard, so when her husband was working, she herself would work in her own right, so they could get enough money for the house. Also, so her husband could not say that it was only he who was earning money and then do something bad to her. Again, if her husband treated her badly or did something unspeakable to her, she would be able to leave him and marry again, or live alone and earn money to use in taking good care of herself.

Erimma said, "How can I marry now, my age-mates, have they all married? And couldn't it happen that one man will keep me in his house and then do something unspeakable to me, which will make Erimma, who is someone people in the town point to as an example of beauty, turn to dirt, or become someone disgraceful to look at? There is no doctor who can cure that. I will study, go to the white men's land, or have special power which will earn me honor, and make any man who will be my husband give me the respect due to me. And if that does not happen, by hook or by crook, Erimma will not get married.

Now, Erimma's thoughts had become known, but her mother and father did not know these things. People, whether teachers, various types of workers, traders and those who did various kinds of work, flooded their house. The one thing they had in mind was to marry her. When one person went away, another carried wine into their house. Her parents were glad, because one who has something to sell that many people propose a price to buy look proud like a young woman. But they used their common sense and went all around to find someone who would be a big help to them, someone who would remember them as a true in-law, after they grew old.

Nkwọ day, which was three days off, was when a certain man who was black, and tall, went and told Nnajiọfọ and Izugbeakụ that they should wait for him in their house at four o'clock in the evening. The man's name was Osita, a worker in the administration of the village hospital (okwu ahụ ike). Erimma's mother and father did not tell her why that person was coming. They forgot that one does not conceal a corpse in the earth, because when an arrow finishes flying it falls on a toad.

Before Osita began the journey, a certain woman gave the man good advice, that he should go and see the young woman, because as has been said, she was a good person. And the man who was 27 years old thought like a fool, not knowing that one did not hide a crab in secret, and that one did not pick clean the skin of a chicken. There was not one thing he told Erimma, or question he asked her, so she could know his intentions in the matter.

The woman who gave the advice was Urimma. She loved Erimma very much, which was why she made such a great effort to say that a relative of hers must marry Erimma. They all came from the same town, but from different villages, because that town had nine villages.

One day, Urimma told Osita all about Erimma, how the girl had a good character, was a person who could work, was light-skinned, was tall and had a straight nose. She told him that Erimma's teeth shone brightly, and her body was silky and soft, which made young men unable to sleep at night because of thinking hard about how they could get her to be their wife.

Osita nodded, and began to perspire profusely. He took a deep breath and told Urimma that he would try hard to go and see her parents.

As Osita sat in his chair, rested his face in his hands and thought hard about how he could take possession of the girl, he dozed off, so that he did not know when Urimma left him, took her market things, went out and went to market. But Urimma had in mind that when she returned from the market she would go to Erimma's house and see her mother and father, so they could all have a talk.

When Urimma approached the school for kindergarteners, she met Erimma on the road. They greeted each other, and Urimma told her to come and embrace her; she did as she was told, but Erimma did not realize that she was the (proverbial) chicken that Urimma was using to get to its mother. Urimma's thoughts went around and she remembered what to do in order to have Osita meet Erimma. She asked Erimma to take a message to her house, because she had forgotten something. Erimma agreed.

Urimma got down her market basket, put in her hand and brought out a packet of wool thread. She took it and gave it to Erimma and told her to go to her house and give it to a man whose name was Osita. She told her to tell Osita that that was the wool thread that he was looking for. Erimma took it and quickly went to Urimma's house. Several people were in the house. She greeted them, and they greeted her. She then asked which was the person named Osita. At that time, Erimma didn't know why Urimma had sent her to the house to confront Osita, because the hawk does not carry off what is right underneath it.

Osita jumped up in that house where he was sitting and came out and looked at Erimma, but he did not know who she was. His thoughts went all around, asking himself where he had seen that young woman who was so attractive and made him shiver like that. Osita's body trembled, because one need not tell a blind man that there is no salt in the soup, but what one tells him is that oil has not been put in that soup. Erimma then asked him, "Are you Osita?"

Osita replied, "I am."

Erimma gave him the packet of wool thread and told him that Urimma had told her to take it to him, because it was the packet of wool thread he was looking for. That message surprised Osita, because he did not know where the water entered the stem of the pumpkin. He then took it quickly, but used his tongue to count his teeth. But the palm-wine tapper who passes gas at the top of the palm tree is like (a friend to) the old woman who passes gas near her soup pot which is on the cooking tripod.

Now, Erimma had used her brain and knew very well that she had completed her task and the only thing left was to return home. She then told Osita that she wanted to return home. Osita then asked her, "Please wait, who are you?"

Erimma looked at his face, and felt shy. She cast down her face and made markings on the ground with her toes. Osita asked her again. She then replied that she was Erimma. Then, Osita's mind ran to what Urimma had told him and the name of the person she had told him about.

Erimma wanted very much to go home, because when a person invites a woman on the spur of the moment, his mind is on something else. Also, she knew that if she stayed for a while, he would surely tell her to come and take kola. And any kola a woman chewed in a bachelor's house involved something else. She then told Osita again that she must leave. Osita told her to wait, please. He asked her again, "Please, what is your father's name?"

Erimma smiled a little, used her head and said that the handshake had gone beyond the shoulder. She then replied, "My father is Nnajiọfọ." Osita shouted, nodded his head, then told her that he knew her father well, and looked at Erimma admiringly, like a sheep. He did not know what else to say to her, because the girl's beauty rendered him speechless. After a minute, he told Erimma to enter the house, that he would give her bread and wine. Erimma laughed, but told him that she did not want it. And she knew in her heart that he was bringing up things that men used to win over women. She then shrugged her shoulders and stood up, because if the goat goes to lie on the ground, one must lie on top of its skin. Osita looked up and down, nodded and then told her to go well. And the girl he was talking to had reached the gate of the path to the compound.

Osita went and sat down, and thoughts filled his mind. But one thing was very important to him, how he could obtain that girl who consumed his heart, to make her his wife. Whether he ate or not was not something he thought about, because all his thoughts concerned that girl. He was turning that around in his mind when he became very sleepy. Whether in daylight or in his dreams, (okwori) was the only thing that fell into the water, that was very important to him.

When he got up, he told his older brother that they must go to Nnajiọfọ's house, because his eyes had seen what his ears had heard. When they went, they took one pot of wine and told the girl's parents that they should wait until four o'clock in the evening on Nkwọ day. Although Erimma's parents did not tell her anything concerning that visit, she saw them come into their house and also saw the preparations her parents were making for those who were coming. But her common sense told her, even when her parents said nothing to her, and also that

the man had asked her no special question, that he was going to see them in order to find out what their thoughts were. And she herself had decided what she would do at her parents' place, that the man had thoughts, and good character, only if the python bit her. (over her dead body).

6

Early in the morning of Nkwo day was the day Osita told Erimma's parents that he was going to come to their house. Nnajiọfọ and Izugbeakụ got up from their bed and began a deep discussion about how they were going to entertain the guest well. At that time they remembered that if you have a discussion behind a strong man, you have that discussion twice. So they called Erimma and she came and took a chair and sat down. They asked her if she had slept well that night and she replied that she had. Now, they knew that if everyone spoke well, they would sleep well on the mat.

Nnajiọfọ then told Erimma that the snake seen by one person changed into a python, and that is why they say that one does not hide a corpse in the earth, or if one defecates and does not close the opening, it becomes diarrhea. Again, if a person should not abandon the drum and beat on the stomach, and if you scratch a tick off a dog and fail to show it to him, it is as though it were a fingernail that pinched it. And after these proverbs were spoken, Erimma knew why he was beating around the bush. And they were waiting for her to cut open the coconut like the people of Nsugbe.

But if you start to wrestle, the waistcloth falls to the ground. Nnajiọfọ then told her that a certain person had told them to wait for him on that day. He told her that the person did not tell them why he sent them that message; however, they thought that he was looking for someone to marry. He told Erimma that they wanted to find out his intention during the discussion. And she herself must see the person when he came as he had told them. Erimma looked up and down, thanked her mother and father, the way they desired what would benefit her, because one who loved a person desired what would benefit her. But she told them that a child who began to cry only when his mother returned from market did not start to cry early enough. She told them that one proverb said that a person should not raise his child by begging. She told them that they would see many people who fell into the fire only because they wanted to marry hastily, and because of this, she hoped they would have patience, that they should look around very well, because she was not among the group of older girls who tried hard in their fathers' houses, who the storytellers said were worried about getting married.

Erimma told them that she didn't say that she wouldn't marry, rather that what she asked of them was that they should not be too hasty in consuming a deer with hernia, because they were hungry for meat. She told them to remember very well what happened a few weeks before, that caused the people of their village to

run to their house. She said that that was what made her ask them not to become like the old woman who fell down twice, so that people counted the things in her basket.

After she said this, Izugbeakụ nodded, looked at Nnajiọfọ, and the two of them looked at each other a few times and sighed. Nnajiọfọ gave a little laugh that did not come out of his heart. He put his hand into his bag and took out his snuff box, tapped his right index finger on top of the lid of the box a few times, opened it, poured out a bit into his left hand, then closed the box and put it back in his bag. He said nothing, then made the first draw it into one nostril, and made another draw into the other nostril and shook his head vigorously, tears streaming from his eyes.

He then took a breath, cleared his throat but kept silence, because if a person commits murder in anger, when the anger cools, the murder will not go away. But he said to himself that when a cow becomes tired, people use a rope to lead it. He then told Erimma that she knew very well what one did to yam before eating it, and blessing kola was only to honor it, because when one started to chew it, he would not deny that it would not fall into the stomach. He said that he had heard what she said, but that one thing he would tell her, that if the monkey shaved its head and then broke the razor, its hair would not fail to grow again. In addition, that Ejiuche said that when a matter reaches the ears of the elders, it has reached the ears of the spirits.

He asked Erimma to tell him if she was the one supposed to select the one who would marry her, or was it her mother and father who should be the ones to use their judgment to select a husband for her? Erimma replied that the eyes are used to know if the corn is ripe, therefore, whenever a good man came to marry her, all eyes who saw him would praise him.

Nnajiọfọ then got up forcefully, struck his chest, and asked Erimma if he was the father who bore her, or did she bear herself, which caused her to speak to him like that? Those words struck Erimma's ears like a bell, which made her very afraid. Nnajiọfọ lost control of his mouth and said what ears should hear and what they should not hear. He said that he was capable of saying what would happen in his house, but Izugbeakụ and her daughter did not agree. He angrily and loudly said that in things concerning Erimma's marriage, he would show that he had suffered greatly to marry, to have a child and to raise her. He told Erimma that if she said in her heart that she was not going to benefit herself, the medicine would not be effective. But let her be very aware that it was he, Nnajiọfọ, who would say who would marry her, whether she liked it or not.

Now, what you saw had come out. Erimma went near the door, ready to run out, and said it was not time for her to marry if she had not finished up her studies. And no one was going to tie her with a rope and drag her to some man. She said that she didn't want a wretched husband (one who cuts and gathers - refers to poverty).

Nnajiọfọ ran after her, and she ran out of the compound. Nnajiọfọ lost his temper again and said to her, "May the leopard chew your mouth there. The thing you want, you will not see it in my house. Who will send you to school again? Prepare to go to abroad (said sarcastically). That will not be done while I am alive. Let us see."

Then Izugbeakụ became one who was pacifying ing them, because a strong man uses wisdom to open the package whose source is hidden. Nnajiọfọ told her that when a child tries to kick her father, hair covers her face, and if you avoid murder, it is cowardice. He said that a child who did not agree would surely agree on the mat, because she knew what happened to the yam before eating it.

Izugbeakụ then fell to the ground and shouted loudly, tears streaming down her face. She said, "What have I brought on my head, which caused a folktale to be told without mentioning the tortoise?"

Ojiokwu said, anyone who seeks to beat a wife to death should first beat her husband to death, because if he doesn't do this and then beats the wife to death, he will definitely be looking at a fight. Tortoise, which is smarter than all other animals, said that if a person removes a pimple and carries it out to the compound, when he goes, the pimple returns. It was something he held as very important that Nnajiọfọ should use common sense and straighten out what was crooked.

He then went into his *obi*, sat down, rested his cheeks on the palms of his hands and sat there like a he-goat. Thoughts filled his mind. After some time, he sighed, shook his head from side to side and bit his lower lip. Izugbeakụ stayed inside the house, crying bitterly. Erimma stood in the compound, near the fence that was at the door to their compound path. She wasn't crying, but stayed gazing at the compound, thinking about what she and they (parents) should do on that day.

When Nnajiọfọ came to his senses, he rose, took his walking stick, gathered up his "in-law has no mat" cloth, threw it over his shoulder and headed for the compound. When he emerged into the compound, Erimma looked at him to see how he was walking which would show her whether her father was very angry. Nnajiọfọ went and opened the door to the path, went out and then closed it. He said nothing, nor did he look at Erimma where she sat.

Erimma got up again and went into the house where her mother sat and called her, "Mother," and saw that she was drying the tears from her face. Izugbeaku looked at her but said nothing. Erimma told her that she didn't want her father to say any more bad words to her. She told her mother that she was surprised when she saw that she (mother) was agreeing with her father in what he was saying. And she (mother) should know very well that if she did not marry well because of the way her father wanted to go ahead and marry her to a man just to get money, she would not be able to take care of her well when they were old.

Izugbeaku gathered up her cloth and put it between her legs, then sat down and told Erimma to sit down, because she had something she wanted to tell her. Erimma went and sat down, and used her two eyeballs to look directly at her. Izugbeaku told her that anyone who proceeds slowly does not hurt himself. She told her to listen to her voice. Erimma then stared at her like a giant rat and watched her mouth.

Izugbeaku told her that it was not her idea about the words that Nnajiọfọ spoke that morning, but there was nothing she could do because she was his wife. She told Erimma that she (Erimma) saw how she (Izugbeaku) had refused, on the previous day, when they were talking about it, and that behavior brought calamities on them. She said that she (Erimma) knew well that her father was not one to agree with things another person suggested, but only with his own ideas. Izugbeaku told her that Nnajiọfọ wanted to turn her over to a man and get money. It was what he wanted to do. No one could give him any other idea which he would listen to.

Izugbeaku told her that when he called her early in the morning and told her that they should consult on what to do, she told him that they should be very careful, that they should not be too hasty and give their only child to someone bad. When those words made Nnajiọfọ angry and he sought to speak bad words, she closed her mouth, because the meat that is in the fire belongs to everyone. Now, the thing had brought on great confusion. She told her that it would not be good for her and her father to come to blows and kill each other, rather that what she should tell him was that she agreed with him, but have patience; however, the two of them (she and Erimma) must discuss strategy (how they could make a pregnant teen-ager have an abortion).

Erimma nodded and told her that she had heard what she said, but her idea was that she would not sit down in the house when that man came.

Erimma told her mother that when one respected a chief, one covered his face with a basket before talking to him. She said that that was what caused her to open her mouth and talk back to her father as she never had done since she was born. But what she would not agree to was that her father should insist on turning

her over to be married to someone she did not like. And when she said these things, her mother nodded.

Afterward, Izugbeakū asked her, tell me now, what do you think about all these matters, so I can know what to do. Erimma called her name and told her that she wouldn't speak with water in her mouth (beat around the bush), her thought was that she would not lay eyes on that man that her father said was coming to their house. If the man came, her father could give her mother to him and take money. And if he didn't do this, let him take money from him, and when he gave birth to a daughter let him give her to the man in marriage, but as for Erimma, that would not happen.

Izugbeakū asked her, "My child, now tell me, where do you want to go when that man comes?" Erimma laughed a bit, looked up and down. After a while, as she didn't speak, Izugbeakū sat down and watched her steadily. Then she told Izugbeakū that she wanted to go and tell her (maternal) grandfather what was going on now, and possibly she would stay there and start school until such time as she was of great importance to her father, and when her father saw that it did no good to make her, like it or not, marry someone she didn't like, only to get money. As she was saying this, her mother was nodding.

Izugbeakū told her that she knew well that her father was a hot-tempered person, and one who acted in anger, but when he got over the anger, he began to blame himself.

7

The sun was shining brightly, the earth was hot, everyone was perspiring. Five people were sitting around in Ekwuigbo's house, listening to the divination he was performing. They had not all come in a group, because each of them had come to his house to have divination done for their own various problems. And Ekwuigbo was divining for them one by one as they all sat listening.

The house where they sat for the divining was small, as it didn't hold many more than ten people. It was a thatched-roof house, but the walls were of red earth. The house was rough, because no one had smoothed it. Nor was there any good-looking chair inside it, except for two wooden planks, two branches of kolanut tree and one titled man's chair on which the diviner was sitting.

The ceiling of the house was filled with various articles and packages that had been tied up and hung in various places. Other things in the ceiling were various feathers of chickens, bush fowl, turkey, vulture, eagle and others. Heads of animals such as goat, cow, deer, bush cow and ram and those of other animals also hung from the roof.

On one plank planted against the wall of the house, the diviner had hung his

calfskin bag and his cloth that was all torn. A straw hat was also near the front part of the house. At the door, where people came in, there was a large bundle of firewood that had been split and put down, and two palm fronds which the diviner had gathered so he could then (kpaa nkata aja) and the matchet which he had placed beside it.

Beside the house there was one jar of foaming wine. Two chickens that people wanted him to take in order to divine for them had been tied by the feet and then tied to an oil-bean tree which grew at the entrance of the house. Everyone sitting in the house was watching the diviner intently.

The diviner's face was fearful to look at, because of the charcoal he had painted on his face and the chalk he had rubbed on both of his eyebrows. And all the others who sat in the house had also rubbed chalk on their eyebrows and on their toenails, just as he had. But what was different about all of them was that the others sat in chairs, but the diviner sat on a deerskin and spread his legs and did his divining.

All the others, four elderly men and one strong woman, folded their arms like people who were very cold and looked at him like the head of an animal that had been skinned, and a voice came from the man like breadfruit in a hot potsherd on the tripod (crackly), and his hands moved sharply. The diviner took up his divining beads and threw them on the ground, looked at them for a few minutes, then gathered them up again and threw them on the ground again, took a gong and struck it, then said that the child who was being chased and then ran to her mother had reached her well. That was what caused these people to come to ask questions of the powers of the world, to find out deep things that perplexed them. Powers of the world, ancestors great and small, do not permit them to return home in vain.

Those who can see in the dark, those who know hidden things, come and listen to these who want to see good fortune from your bodies. Ezennaya, our grandfather, we greet you. Dunu, a man who sired many children, help your children, because there is no one else they have to inquire of on their behalf. Do these things, so they will have great hope in worshipping you as our forefathers and foremothers did.

The diviner then turned around and said to the people around him, "People of our town, it will go well with you." He took the chalk and threw it again on the ground, took up his divining beads and threw them on the ground and said, "Okara turu, o turu mgbakwu (incantation?). Walking is hard for the snake, that's why it drags its stomach along the ground in two directions. It is true, it is what happens. That's it, that's it. Indeed! Yes." He then nodded and pursed his lips.

"Has she been sold? Indeed, what will the children of (okpuru) do? This is what is done to the grandchild when he grows up and sees. The suffering of their ancestors came upon them. They then kidnapped a young nubile woman and forcefully sold her, because her mother was a widow with no one to speak for her."

The diviner took his divining beads and threw them again on the ground, held his small *ofo* in his hand and turned around and addressed a man who sat there whose name was *Ochiogba*. *Ochiogba* answered him. He told him that the divination said that he wanted to give him grace if he changed his ways. He told him that a spirit (something that possessed people) had been wanting to eliminate his household entirely, because as the divination said, his grandfather had been with a man named *Ojeuga* and kidnapped a citizen, a widow's daughter named *Odunwa Anuta*, who was a full-breasted woman, and sold her away.

The diviner said that within a short time, his house would become a forest. He said that *Ochiogba's* eldest son died during the dry season, for the same reason. His brother died last year on account of it. Another one went mad for the same reason. Now his son who had fallen sick must die, and after this happened, another would die until death finished off everything that breathed in all of their houses.

While he was saying all these things, *Ochiogba* took his hands and lifted up his two ears. Great thoughts filled his head. His body shivered, but worst of all was that perspiration covered his body and made him look like someone who had fallen into the river and climbed out again.

Ochiogba asked him, "Please *Ekwuigbo*, ask the divination, what can we do so that the contaminated water will be uncontaminated again. How will we carry a person with a broken hip?" And as he was speaking, his mouth trembled and his hands shook. He then took a deep breath and ground his teeth.

Ekwuigbo nodded, looking at his divining beads closely. After *Ochiogba* said this, some time went by, *Ekwuigbo* took up his divining beads and threw them on the ground again, picked them up and threw them down again, then took a small stick and struck it on a tortoise shell four times, then stared fixedly like a cow at his divining beads. After that, he took up the divining beads again and threw them on the ground and said, "The thing that confuses him that he is asking, is how he is going to cause the big rain that is clouding the sky to stop falling. He begs you elders, who created the world that holds death cupped in its palms, and divinities great and small, to look at him and the people of his house with mercy, because their problem is longstanding and is what their ancestors ordained for them."

Ọchịogba told him that he was not going to deny that the child he carried on his back picked the fruit, because he did not know if he reached up and plucked it, so he would not defend their ancestors, but rather he was petitioning in the names of all those in his household.

Ekwuigbo listened to him and then began his divination again. After he ran through the divination, he went out and caught a cock, took a knife and cut its throat, then spread the blood of the chicken on all the articles he used for divining and on the base of his father's *ikenga* (carved ritual figure). When he did this, those around him knew that the matter was a serious one. After he did these things, he started to say things the divination told him and said that Ọchịogba and his people and those of Ojeuga's house would marry a woman for Anuta's household as consolation for their daughter whom they had sold away in olden times. Also, they would use one cow, two he-goats, two rams, eight lengths of various cloths, forty large yams, six cocks, six hens, six two-handled pots of wine, two barren sheep, four baskets of peeled cassava and four pots of potash salad dressing, four *dried* fish, twenty-four small white kola nut with one lobe, and pounded alligator pepper. He told Ọchịogba that the water that remained (oguru?) in the calabash was waiting for the dog, therefore, he should hurry to find out what he would do because the strong man's cry was "Toa!" (Taa?) Ọchịogba nodded and told him that death was the only thing that one did not know how to fix.

Ekwuigbo again took up his divining beads and threw them on the ground, took them up and threw again, then raised his face and looked at Nnajiọfọ as he sat with folded hands. He told Nnajiọfọ that the trip he made to the divination to ask questions was good. He told him, "Your trip is good, as you want to ask something concerning your daughter. The divination says that your daughter is joining those of her group who go around in the town. She is in the group. There are many in their group, and are strong, therefore, they have taken an oath among themselves that no one among them will leave their group. But there is something they said. Several among them said that they would not be useful to their parents. Several said that they would die when they married and bore their first child. Others said that if any person did anything to cause them great emotional injury, they would die."

While he was telling him all these things, a great fever came upon Nnajiọfọ, which caused his heart to pound *kpum, kpum, kpum*. He then looked at Ekwuigbo in amazement.

Ekwuigbo then spoke again, saying, "Nnajiọfọ, the divination says that your daughter loves you and her mother very much, therefore she says that she will not give you trouble like the others give their mothers and fathers. Your daughter says that the only thing she will do to you is that you will not have

another child. That is why you have not had another child. Also, she says that she will not give you trouble, unless you start to give her trouble. But above all those things is that she says that no one will force on her the person she will marry. That is why she argued with you in the matter concerning marriage."

The woman who prepares oil-bean soup knows the blind fly. Therefore Ekwuigbo told Nnajiọfọ deep things that the divination told him. Nnajiọfọ asked him, "What shall I do so that my daughter will leave that group, which will cause all those things she said not to happen, because she is the eye that owes a debt to blindness?"

Ekwuigbo stared at him, then took up his divination beads again and threw them noisily to the ground, took them up again and threw them again, took his *ọfọ* in his hand and told him that he should do several things. The first was that he should go and cook food at the base of the apple tree which was in Eziakpaka. He should kill a chicken, bring three yams that would surprise the town, a two-handled pot of wine, three kola nuts and all the ingredients used to cook food. After doing this, he should go and give food to Ogwugwu. What he should use to do that was dried fish, one length of cloth, a cock, one egg, a basket of seed yams and a pot of potash salad dressing, and two kola nuts and a two-handled pot of wine.

He told him that no man should taste what he would cook at the base of the apple tree. The men should only chew kola nut and drink wine. Only the young women should eat what he cooked, and join in drinking wine. What he cooked for Ogwugwu should be eaten by adult men and women.

After he did these things, he should go and dig up his daughter's *iyi ụwa* (special ritual stone or pebbles buried by *ọgbanje* children) which she buried in the Ichekọkọ village square at the base of the large silk-cotton tree which was near the shrine ? where people perform rituals. He said that the time the person who was going to dig up the *iyi ụwa* should dig it up should be early in the morning, before sunrise (sun fills the sky), and it should be Afọ day or Eke day, because it was on Nkwọ and Orie that the group members held their meetings. In addition, before they dug up the *iyi ụwa* they should go to the base of the monkey apple tree that was behind Igbobuchi's house, kill a rooster and run around the base of the tree three times, then sprinkle the chicken's blood on top of the stone placed there. He told him that that was very important, because it was there that they (the *ọgbanje*) were gathering before they began their journey.

Nnajiọfọ looked at him like an animal that had been dragged out, and he nodded his head. Ekwuigbo told him that there were other things he should do after he finished all those things. He told him that he should send his daughter diviner to have him make a mark on her face. And he told Nnajiọfọ that when

that time came, he must come to his house again and he would tell him all the things he was to do, because the ashes in the bachelor's house wait for his return.

Nnajiọfọ agreed, thanked him very much and told him that he was leaving. They told him to go well. Nnajiọfọ gathered his *ogq-enwe-ute* and threw it over his shoulder, took his snuffbox and left.

As he was going along the road, his mind was completely on what the diviner had told him, and how he could carry a person with a broken hip when he reached home again. If he met anyone on the road, he did not know it. If anyone greeted him, his mind was in a faraway place. If he greeted anyone at all, he did not think about it. The only thing in his mind was to go home and tell his wife Izugbeakụ where he had gone and what the diviner had told him, so they could confer and decide what to do so that Erimma's heart would again be pure. Also, so they could confer and agree on what to tell the man who had told them that he would come to make an inquiry in their house on that day.

When he arrived home, he saw Izugbeakụ looking around, like one who was looking for someone. He called Izugbeakụ twice and she answered him. He asked her why she was looking around like someone who was expecting someone. Izugbeakụ told him that she had not seen him. Also, that Erimma had gone off to the home of her grandmother. Nnajiọfọ asked her, "What did she go to do?" Izugbeakụ replied that she did not know, but that she had come and told her that she was going to her grandmother's house.

Nnajiọfọ gazed and thought about what he should do, but nothing came to mind. He then bit his lower lip, took his left hand and held his beard. After a while, he started to grind his teeth. Then, he told Izugbeakụ that he had gone for divination and the diviner had told him many things concerning Erimma. Izugbeakụ told him that they should go into the house for him to tell her, because they did not know if there were ears listening to what they were saying. They both then entered the house.

Nnajiọfọ took a seat, and Izugbeakụ took her own. Nnajiọfọ then began to tell her about his journey, what the diviner told him, and what his thoughts were about all those matters. All those things surprised Izugbeakụ. She then snapped her fingers, nodded, and gave some thought to everything that had happened, and what had happened earlier, to believe that everything the diviner said was correct. When Nnajiọfọ had finished his story, Izugbeakụ snapped her fingers. The two of them looked at each other and nodded.

Afterward, they consulted about what they should do and how to accomplish all those things the diviner had told him. And they sent a message to the man whose house she had gone to for him to tell Erimma to return, because their problem had ended.

After they finished discussing the matter of Erimma, Izugbeaku got up and told Nnajiọfọ that she was going to their house and bring Erimma back, because if they left her she would not return on her own. Nnajiọfọ agreed, and Izugbeaku then went.

The kindergarten school had closed when Izugbeaku and her daughter Erimma returned. Nnajiọfọ was tying together some yam sprouts on his farm when he saw them. Soon, after he left the farm, he picked up some dried stumps of palm fronds which he gathered together and went to his *obi* and dropped them down. He would use them to light the fire in the evening, when elderly men got very cold.

He then entered the house, called Izugbeaku and Erimma, and they came and sat down. He took out his snuffbox, put snuff in the palm of his left hand, took the index finger of his right hand, took some and drew it into his left nostril, and took some again and drew it into his right nostril, then cleared his throat. Izugbeaku and Erimma watched him. But Erimma's heart was not pounding (from fright), because of what her father was going to do, because Izugbeaku had told her how her father had sent her to go and bring her back from their house.

After Nnajiọfọ had drawn in the snuff a few times, which made small tears come under his eyes, he raised the hand he had put the snuff in and drew in the remainder all at once. He then rubbed off what stuck to his hand, stood up and went to the yard and sneezed, and wiped his hand (with the nose snuff on it?) on his legs. When he entered the house again, he told Erimma that it was true that he was very angry at her, because of the way she had talked back to him, but now his anger had cooled. However, what he wanted to warn her was that she should know how to address the father who sired her. He said that he and her mother Izugbeaku would never lead her astray at all, because she was their child.

He told her that he had been for a divining and the diviner had told him what to do concerning her marrying or not marrying. That is why he was saying that they would not give her any more trouble on the matter of marriage. But there were several things he told him to do for her health. Those were things they wanted to start doing. He told Erimma that the matter of the man who said he would come to their house was something he and Izugbeaku wanted to explain to her. Erimma stared at him.

Nnajiọfọ told her that they had agreed that they would tell that man that it was not their wish that their child should marry at this time. At that, Erimma's face broke out in smiles, because what a person searched for on top of the shelf he found below the shelf. Nnajiọfọ also told her that the things concerning her

health, as the diviner explained, were things they would start to do that week. Nnajiọfọ asked Izugbeakụ, "Is what I said not true?"

She replied, "It is what happened." They all got up, Erimma and Izugbeakụ entered the women's house to cook, while Nnajiọfọ took his knife and returned to his farm to start working with his yams again. After they finished cooking, they called him to go and eat his portion. While he was eating the food, Osita and his brother came and knocked at the door. Nnajiọfọ told them to come in and they entered and set down a pot of wine they had brought near the door, where it was foaming. Nnajiọfọ raised his voice and greeted them and told them to join him in eating something. They thanked him well but told him to eat because they had eaten at home before beginning their trip.

When Nnajiọfọ finished eating, he rose and went out to his obi, they greeted him again, and he greeted them. Then they all shook hands and Nnajiọfọ told them to sit down. They sat down. Nnajiọfọ rubbed his right hand on his head and got up and told them to wait until he returned, they agreed, and he then entered the house.

When he came out again, he carried a kola nut platter with a large piece of white kola nut in it, and went and sat down. Those people who had come to the house stared at him. He called his daughter, Erimma, and told her to go and pick him some alligator peppers from the garden. As she started to go, he called her back and told her to tell Izugbeakụ to come and greet the people who had come to their house. Erimma did as he told her, then went to the garden to pick the peppers for them. And all this time, Osita's eyes were on Erimma, whether she went up or down. But Erimma did not look at them as people she had seen before.

When Izugbeakụ entered the obi, she smiled broadly and greeted the guests well, shook hands with them; they also smiled broadly, returned her greetings and shook hands with her. Izuagbeakụ then went and sat down. Nnajiọfọ told them that he had kola and he presented it to them. They both nodded and thanked him very much and told him that the chief's kola was in the chief's hand, so he should break the kola and they would all partake of it. Nnajiọfọ nodded and they all began to laugh.

He then began to bless the kola and said, "We ask for health, good fortune, fertility and prosperity." They all replied, "That's how it is." Nnajiọfọ said that a certain man from Enugu-Ukwu once said when he was blessing kola that what he asked from the creator of the world was three things, fertility, money and long life, because if something was lacking, money could always buy it. They all then broke out in hearty laughter. Osita told him that that was true, because a person who had those three things had everything. They all laughed heartily again.

Nnajiọfọ then licked his lips and started to bless the kola again. He said, "What we say is this, if the termite sees us and hides ? the soldier ant, the black ant breaks off its (the termite's) head."

They all answered him, "Ọfọ."

He said also, "What we believe is that the hawk should perch and the eagle should perch, and whichever doesn't want the other to perch, let his wing break."

They all shouted, "Ọfọ."

He said that the *ọfọ* was what the termite used to break the earth, because the termite told the who earth-treaders in the town to keep on trying, because when he came he would gather a large amount of earth that his father had shown him. When rain began to fall, the termite went and broke the earth and gathered a large amount of earth that his father had shown him. They all broke out in great laughter.

Nnajiọfọ said that they were alive when the water was contaminated, they remained alive when the water started to settle, therefore, they asked the creator of the world to give them all long life so they could see that water be well settled. He said that in old times women were called wealth-consumers, which made them stuff their mouths with food. Men were the ones God created with suffering, but now, both men and women suffered a lot, therefore, it was not only women who should become wealth-consumers, men should also become wealth-consumers.

They all broke out laughing and looked at Izugbeaku. Izugbeaku also broke out laughing and asked, "Are you telling me?" They all laughed, which made some of them drool and tears stream down the faces of others. One who was laughing greatly fell across the body of his neighbor. After they had finished laughing, Nnajiọfọ began to bless his kola.

"We ask God who created human beings, one who swept the wide heavens, one who sees the way when it is dark, one who knows hidden things, one who is merciful, one who creates, one who loves mankind and gives mankind various gifts which we cannot buy with money, to come and bless us, and also bless this kola, so that when we chew it, he may give us pure hearts brought by the kola that a person brings out in sincerity."

They all answered, "That is what we ask for."

Then Erimma brought him the alligator peppers he had told her to pick. She greeted the visitors and went and placed the peppers in his kola nut dish. But there was one thing that caused laughter. When Nnajiọfọ threw chalk on the

ground and invited them to throw, before he began to bless the kola, Osita did not know how to throw chalk. Because of that, he made three marks on the ground and threw the chalk back to Nnajiọfọ. Now, Nnajiọfọ was blessing the kola when he noticed the marks he made.

Nnajiọfọ then stopped blessing the kola, took the chalk and threw it back, then told him to go ahead and make a fourth mark, or more, because people did not throw chalk three times in their village. Osita felt ashamed, and he pleaded, saying that what no one knew was who was his elder (greater than he). They told him that they well knew that he didn't know, and so it was not a problem.

Nnajiọfọ then lifted the kola platter, took out the kola and said, "Osita, your life."

Osita replied, "Ọfọ."

He spoke again, saying, "Your brother, his life and those of his household."

He replied, "Ọfọ."

He said, "Izugbeaku, your life, Erimma, my daughter, your life. My own life, because Okoye Ugokwe said, what he says shouldn't happen to a person, let it not happen to him."

They all said, "Nnajiọfọ, you will tell the story of the elders. You will also bless old age."

He then broke the kola, placed them in the kola platter and looked at it and said, "The Lord who created the world, I thank you." They all looked at him intently. He took his piece of kola, took pepper and chewed it, passed it on to Osita, and everyone then ate.

Nnajiọfọ cleared his throat, then took the kola platter and set it aside. He took out his snuff box and put some in his left hand and gave it to Osita and his brother to take their own. Osita said that he did not take snuff, but that he smoked (cigarettes). He put his hand in his garment and brought out a package of cigars, took one and put it in his mouth and took a match and struck it, then lit it, and smoke rose up (tii.)

Osita's brother Ikenna was the one who took the snuff box from him, took out his own (snuff) and began to draw. At that time, Erimma went inside the house, and only Izugbeaku stayed watching them all closely.

Then, Ikenna called Nnajiọfọ's name and he called him in return. He then told him that the reason they came was on account of that matter they had

mentioned to him and Izugbeakū the previous day when they came to their house. He told him that it was a good market that they saw and asked someone about it and that person told him that it was in his house that the market was. He said that it was a good road that a person would travel twice. To cut the matter short, he said that they had seen his daughter, her ways looked good to them, they then desired, if it was the opinion of those who bore her, and also was the opinion of the creator, to marry her. That was their purpose. And again, that there was one pot of wine they brought out and wanted them to drink it while they talked together.

Nnajiōfo thanked them very much, and told them that their journey was a good one. He said that a child does not belong to one person, therefore, they (he and his wife) wanted him to give them time so they could ask questions and that he himself should ask questions. He told him that he would not fail to receive a message he was going to send him, at that time, they should come and meet together again to find out where the pounder had placed the pestle, and how the python lay in the sun (the lay of the land). They all nodded and said that those words were good to them. After they finished drinking wine, Nnajiōfo poured out what remained in his pot of wine. Those people took their own pot and returned to their house. When they were preparing to leave, Erimma refused to accompany them to the road.

9

Nnajiōfo then prepared to cook the food at the base of the apple tree at Eziakpaka, as the diviner had told him. He bought three yams, a two-handled pot of wine, three white kolanuts and one young cock. Izugbeakū brought the things needed to cook, such as oil, salt, pepper, water and pot and ladle and bowl. They sent a message to Ekwuigbo and told him that the diviner who did the divination should perform the sacrifice.

When the time they had appointed arrived, they brought together all those things and they and Erimma went together to perform the ceremony. When they arrived there, some young girls who did the apple-tree dance in that quarter had gathered, singing and dancing. They then set down at one side all the things they had brought and waited until Ekwuigbo came there.

Ekwuigbo placed his chair on the ground and also placed his goatskin bag beside his walking-stick. He went and gathered the end of his *ogō-enwe-ute* cloth and placed it between his legs. The girls had finished sweeping around the base of the apple tree. They then went and sat down quietly at one side, watching what the diviner was doing. After the diviner had blessed the kola, he broke it and took his own share of the kola and chewed it, gave it to Nnajiōfo, he took his own and chewed it and gave it to the others and they all then ate. Ekwuigbo looked around to see how the group of girls had come, whether a guest had joined them or not. He went and caught the cock, ran around the base of the apple tree as he had said

and then killed it and threw it out to the girls. They went and took it and began to clean it up.

He picked up the three yam tubers and gave them to them and they began to peel them so they could cook yam stew. He then brought a pot of wine, poured one cup and then threw it out on the shrine, then began to pour it into his cup. After he had drunk his, he poured it for all the others and they all drank. While the girls were cooking their food, the others were drinking their wine. When they finished cooking, they collected all of it into a large bowl and they all gathered around it and ate them all up in the twinkling of an eye.

When Ekwuigbo had drunk all the wine he could, he took the bottle and poured out what remained and left, and everyone then dispersed. After two Igbo weeks had passed, Nnajiọfọ sought to do the next ritual which was going to Ogwugwu and giving him food. He went to the big Eke Oyibo market and bought the things the diviner had told him to buy. They were dried fish, one piece of cloth, a young cock, one chicken egg, a two-handled pot of wine, and other things that Izugbeakụ bought, which were two kola nuts, a basket of peeled seed yams, and a pot of potash salad dressing that she had prepared herself.

He and Umeanọ who was the Chief of Ogwugwu had decided when they would perform the rituals. On that day, they all brought the things they had bought and went to Ogwugwu. When they arrived there, all the elders involved in doing the Ogwugwu thing and Chief Ogwugwu had all gathered, waiting for them to arrive. A few vultures had landed and were going around the compound, when they saw a group of people in Ogwugwu's house, because when young chickens are sacrificed without vultures being seen, you know that something has happened in the land of the spirits. But one very important person was not there when they arrived. He was the messenger in Ogwugwu. Chief Ogwugwu went and blew his flute, which was the way it was done any time a person gave food to Ogwugwu. After that, the boy came running.

Chief Ogwugwu then went to the Ogwugwu shrine, took kola and blessed it, and took wine and poured it on the shrine. He then turned back and went and broke some other kola nuts and everyone ate. He poured a cup of wine and drank, then set aside the rest, one young man poured out and gave one cup to each man. He fetched a chicken, went back into the shrine and killed it, threw its body on the ground, and the messenger took it and went to clean it. They took two tubers of yam that were in a basket and began to peel them. Izugbeakụ also began to mix the cassava. After they finished mixing, Chief Ogwugwu went and gave the shrine its own and brought out the rest, the elders shared the dried fish and everyone then ate the cassava. The eggs that Nnajiọfọ had collected the diviner scattered in the shrine, in the place where the carved statues which were the ogwugwu stayed. When the yam porridge was done, they all took spoons and ate everything, but Chief Ogwugwu took a bottle, collected wine and carried it into

his house. He picked up the cassava and the pot of potash dressing that was left and the dried fish that had been brought to him. Everyone went home, and the vultures started to eat their own. At that time, Nnajiọfọ had a pure heart and he had done a few things that were very important. The things that remained were going to the base of the monkey apple tree and doing the rites concerning it, and digging up the special stone for Erimma. These things would cost a lot of money. Therefore, Nnajiọfọ wanted to wait a while to catch his breath.

One month passed, or thirty days, before Nnajiọfọ said again that the water in the potsherd waited for the dog, so he was going to persevere because the eyebrow waits for the eye, that he should take the time while he was alive to finish doing everything the diviner had said, so his people should not suffer too much if he should die. He then went and told Ekwuigbo that he should go with him to do the things he had divined. Ekwuigbo told him that there was someone he had told to wait for him so he could give his sick child some medicine. The two of them then discussed a time that would be good for them. After they appointed a time, they went to the base of the monkey apple tree that was behind Igbobuchi's house. Ekwuigbo caught a chicken and ran around the base of that tree three times and then poured the chicken's blood on a stone that lay there, then brought its corpse. That was for the diviner to eat. When they had completed the ritual as the divination had ordered, Nnajiọfọ told him that the next day he would go and dig up the special ritual stone for Erimma.

On the day they were going to dig up the stone for her, the person they told to dig up the stone came. They went out early in the morning to dig up the stone in Ichekọkọ. When they arrived, the diviner asked Erimma where she had buried her ritual stone. She went and pointed at the base of a large silk-cotton tree where people piled up the grass they had swept from their compounds. That person cleared away the grass and began to dig there. After he had finished digging the ground well, he grasped the young cock and sprinkled its blood in the hole, then took his hand and struck it around there. He also took the medicine he used to dig up the ritual stone and hung it on a stick he had stuck into the ground facing the place where he was digging up the thing. Then he started to dig forcefully, and was watching carefully to be sure to see anything like that thing that had been buried in the earth. He had dug in up to his waist, but the ant was not pecked up by the small bird. He looked up and down and then sucked his teeth, sighing. Everyone stood there watching him silently.

Nnajiọfọ asked him, "Why did the drum sound, because the (head of) salt that is not tasty in the soup pot is like chalk. The man ground his teeth and said that he would look for another chicken. Nnajiọfọ became angry and counted the teeth in his mouth, because the proverb one applied to the bird should be applied to the *nza* (small bird). Nnajiọfọ hurried (used dog's legs) and went to his house to catch another chicken for him, because when the eye sees meat it sees nothing else. But his thoughts were not on everything he had spent on account of

Erimma, because one does not count the millipede's feet, rather what his mind told him was that anything that had a beginning had an end, and what was most important was that he should find what he was seeking.

When he came back, the diviner killed the chicken in the pit, also took the medicine he had taken out of his goatskin bag and sprinkled it around the pit, and murmured a few words, those who sat there not understanding what he said, then began to dig for the thing again, perspiration bathing his body. He had finished digging up to his shoulder, when he used spiritual eyes and saw the ritual stone. He then dug it out and raised it up. It consisted of seven fingers, a small white ring, another thing that glittered, and a black arm bracelet. Then his face broke out in a big smile. Although a poor child may indeed have been up to a year old, yet the poor child's eyes saw the spirits.

If you open the road, you open the mouth. That is why the diviner began to describe to them what he saw while he was digging out the ritual stone. He said that if he had not been a strong man, he would not have dug it out. He told them that the people in Erimma's group struggled especially hard to collect it, and that was what was very unusual (the eye would see and bleed). But he was a tough person. He then did to them what the river toad did to the house toad.

Izugbeaku asked the diviner, "What would happen if those people [Erimma's group] could collect those things?" The diviner smiled, nodded and told her that something bad would have come out of it. Izugbeaku bit her lower lip and shook her head. When the diviner was ready to go, he filled his stomach with wine and ate as much food as he could. Nnajiọfọ gave him the money they had agreed on and also gave him a chicken. The chickens they had killed in the place where they had dug up the ritual stone Erimma took and cooked and ate. But there was one other thing that happened that made everyone laugh.

When the digging was difficult, the diviner called Erimma and asked her what she wanted her parents to do to her, or what she wanted them to buy for her? Erimma laughed and said that she didn't know. He asked her again to bring out anything that she had in mind. Erimma thought a bit and then said that they should buy her a dress and anything else they thought of, because she did not want to give him [the diviner] trouble.

Because of this, her parents were pleased with her, because many young girls at such a time would say everything they could think of, both what they [the parents] could do and what they would not be able to do. This encouraged them a lot and they then remembered how the diviner had told Nnajiọfọ that Erimma loved them very much. Afterwards, they went to the market and bought Erimma four lengths of attractive material, a head tie, shoes and earrings, lotion and various other things to please her.

From that day on, no one bothered Erimma about getting married. This is like when a woman marries twice, she knows which one she likes better. But one good thing that came out of all those matters was that it brought those people together and caused a great love between them, because when a big rainfall is finished, the land dries out.

One thing that also pleased Erimma's parents was that when they had done all those things, Erimma no longer burned with a great fever as she had before. Also, she did not shout out during the night or talk in her sleep as she used to do. This showed her parents that indeed Erimma was no longer in the *ogbanje* group of the world.

10

You don't cut off the hand with one knife-stroke. Erimma then called her mother and father and told them that she wanted to start her schooling again, because she had finished only Standard 5, when Nnajiọfọ had told her that he did not have the money to pay her school fees. Now, all the people of their town were paying the school fees for all the children of the town. At the time all the villagers, both men and women, had a meeting in the compound of their chief, Igwe, they agreed that all the men would contribute 40 naira each, and the married women would contribute 20 naira each. Izugbeakụ and Nnajiọfọ had contributed theirs.

They then thought about what Erimma had told them, because one did not contribute money to train other children when their own child did not have her share. They then supported her and said that she would study through Standard 6 that remained, so that when she came out, whichever hand was good for a person, let her lean her head on it. If anyone wanted to marry her and wanted her to go to high school, that would be his decision.

They then bought various readers and writing-books for her, and also bought her a bag for carrying her books. On the day that school began, when the first bell rang, Erimma took her book bag and when she finished her breakfast she went to school. She picked five oranges and put them in her bag, took a small knife with which to peel them and put it also in her bag. When she emerged onto the road, she went to the house of her friend Adaora and called her so they could go to school. Adaora was ready, and the two of them went together.

As they were going along the road, several people, both those who were just starting school and those who had been there before, all joined together, each one going along carrying his bag. They arrived at the school when the second bell had rung. The male and female teachers then wore their beautiful garments and came out of their houses. One assistant headmaster assembled all the students on the playground and they stood in line. After he inspected and discovered that their garments, their teeth and fingernails and feet were not clean, and warned them

that they should not be that way the next day, he took them on a walk around the paths of the school, so they would learn how to walk around at the same time. After that, he took them into the school building and they all took their seats and remained quiet. Then they started to sing songs. After this was over, he read the Bible and then explained to them what he had read and told them what they ought to do every morning in their various homes before taking their bags and going to school. They all listened very attentively. After he finished speaking, he told them to close their eyes so they could pray to God. Then, everyone stood up. He then began his prayer. After he finished praying, he rang a bell, ding dong, and they then greeted the teachers. He rang it again, ding ding, and they greeted the students.

The teacher then told how the students should work to sweep the whole school so it would look good. But before beginning their work, they should go and write their names to their various teachers. He explained to them where the first-grade students should stay, where the second-graders should stay, and the third, fourth, fifth and sixth. They all then went to the places where each of them would study. Erimma went to the place where they told her the sixth-graders would do their studying. The one who would teach them was a man, the one who had prayed the morning prayer.

When he saw Erimma, he looked at her and then turned away as though the girl did not attract him. When the teacher started to write the names of the people in the school, he asked Erimma what her name was. Erimma told him her name and that of her father, and the teacher wrote them in the book. After he had finished writing the others, he selected one boy to be the one to bring him a chair, and Erimma he selected to be the monitor to write the names of those who made noise when the teacher was not in school. Also, she and Chikezie, the boy, would give out the work to the students whenever it was work time for the students.

Erimma's beauty caused all the teachers who came to school in the schoolhouse on that day assembled and talk together when the students were working. Erimma and Chikezie called the others and went and assigned their work in the places given to them to clean off or the places they were told to cut down the grass with knives. The diviner with a sharp tongue does not divine for a person, therefore, that teacher did not agree to tell the other teachers that he loved Erimma, rather what he told them was that they should please stop sowing confusion where his student was concerned.

While the others were working, one girl came there and told Erimma that their teacher had summoned her. Erimma went quickly to find out why he had sent for her. When she arrived, their teacher asked her the name of her village, and she told him. He asked her about her parents and she told him. He asked her why she had stopped going to school. Erimma told him that her father did not have the money to pay the fees. The teacher told her that he wanted to know their

house, if she would like him to come? Erimma looked down, smiled a little, and then told him that he could come to their house.

The teacher asked her if there was anyone wanting to marry her. Erimma told him that several people were struggling with each other to marry her, but there was no one she had agreed to. Then the teacher threw his eagle into the air. He told Erimma that he loved her. Also, that he wanted her to be well educated, and afterward he wanted them to be married. He asked her if she would like that Erimma smiled again and told him that she would agree.

When Erimma returned to school, their teacher gave her something to study at home and bring it the next day for him to look over what she wrote. Then, she was very happy because the bedbug told its child to have patience because what was hot would not fail to get cold. Now, she had found someone she liked, and who was also a mature adult who was a good-looking man. A lucky day does not dawn every day, therefore, when she reached their house, she showed her mother what their teacher had given her to do at home, but she did not tell her everything she and the teacher had discussed. Beginning from that day, the teacher supervised Erimma well, and gave her things to do when she got home. That made Erimma apply herself well to her studies. In that school, a few people knew that the teacher loved Erimma very much.

The teacher used Chikezie to make Erimma go to his house for food and drink. Any time he wanted to give Erimma something, he put it in his house and told Erimma that she and Chikezie should go to his house. After they finished eating, they returned to school and thanked the teacher. Sometimes, Erimma invited her friends to go. But the teacher tried to see that he and Erimma should not be seen together in his house, so he could show her that he didn't want to do anything to her that could cause gossip (a mouth to say what it saw or did not see).

One Sunday, the teacher saw his students in church and told them that he would come to their houses to visit them. In the afternoon, he took another teacher and went out and they went to the home of a student whose house was behind the school. After they had finished visiting his mother and father, the student led them to the houses of some others, but they did not stay long in their houses, until the time when they reached Erimma's house. Erimma's mother and father were at home when they came.

When they knocked, Erimma's father told them to enter, they entered and shook his hand and told him who they were. Erimma's father shouted, shook their hands again and gave them chairs and they sat down. He then told Erimma to go and tell Izugbeakū that the teachers had come to their house. Erimma went and did as he told her. Her mother then came, greeted them, shook hands with them, and Erimma told her which one was her teacher, who supervised her well and

gave her lessons to do at home. It surprised her mother very much, the way that one loved her child so much.

They wanted to cook food for them, but the guests firmly refused (clapped hands over ears). Nnajiọfọ went and brought a pot of wine for them. They chewed kola nut, then began to drink wine and to discuss various things. When they were ready to leave, Nnajiọfọ thanked him very much for the help he was giving to his daughter, and told him to persevere, because one who is told not to stop what he is doing is showing that he is doing a good thing. When they were ready to leave, Nnajiọfọ went and gathered four large yams for them and one chicken for them to cook and eat. Erimma's mother picked oranges for them and gave them two bunches of ripe plantains and told them to go in peace.

Erimma's mother told them that she would be glad if they came to visit her any time they had a chance, so they could all talk so she could learn how her daughter was studying in that school. They then thanked them all especially well, the boy who had guided them gathered up everything people had given them and followed behind them when they returned to the teachers' houses.

Now, the teacher had achieved what he wanted, so he was going to Erimma's house any time he pleased. Erimma's mother and father loved him very much, and were giving her things to take to the teacher. Afterwards, as they all loved each other, the teacher took Erimma's house as his second home, so that when he was ready to go and tell her mother and father that he wanted to marry Erimma, they did not give it a second thought, because they saw with adult eyes what had fallen into the river and knew that the greetings of a woman and her friend had changed into an embrace. They used their tongues to count their teeth (sized up the situation), and it was their desire that the man should become their in-law.

When the teacher asked Erimma's mother and father what they thought, they did not waste time in agreeing. The man then did things for them that made them very happy. He bought them many things, and was buying them various kinds of food, until they agreed that they would discuss what he should do before he married their daughter. You all know that the nose that draws in snuff does not sniff ashes, therefore, Erimma's mother and father proceeded to close their ears to what was told them by people who did not want the teacher to marry their daughter.

On the day they were going to discuss Erimma's bride-price, some people gathered in their house and the people of the teacher's house carried pots of wine, not allowing the townspeople to drink it all. The discussion went well, he then gave them one bag of money out of the bag of money plus 400 naira they had agreed on as her bride-price. All the customs they told him to fulfill, he wanted to use money to do them. They also told him what those things cost in money and

he then gave them the money. Now, the mouths of Erimma's mother and father were running like a piece of oil-bean tree (boasting), because a thing in the house of a wealthy man is in the house of his counterpart. The teacher then was very happy, because when a child eats what kept him awake, he goes to sleep.

After the teacher finished everything he was told to do for Erimma's bride-price, Erimma finished her sixth grade and took her examinations; he then sent her to another school, where those who wanted to become teachers were going to study. Erimma stayed there for two years. They then got married, before her husband had the good fortune to go abroad to study. A year after he went abroad, he sent Erimma a message to come abroad. Erimma then prepared, took the money he sent her and bought what she needed and then joined him there. After she arrived, her husband studied to be a physician and she studied to become a nurse and a midwife. After they had finished studying and returned to her husband's village, which was next to Erimma's village, they became the first in all that area to go abroad for education. Now, Erimma's mother and father had learned that the animal who has patience drinks the good water, and a person does not know which womb will bear a chief.

Now, Erimma and her husband, Adindu, took good care of Erimma's mother and father and they forgot that they did not give birth to a son and they also forgot that as they say, the one-eyed person owes a debt to blindness. Our people, if the earth gets tired, it becomes (mgboko--useless?), therefore, those who wanted to prevent Erimma's parents from allowing the man to marry her, now, had become people who gave them messages for their daughter and son-in-law to help them, any time they came to visit Nnajiọfọ and Izugbeakụ.

Emecheta said that anyone who climbed down from the old, worn-out thing and then failed to speak English, it was as though he had climbed down from the top of the broken-down wall. (Has to do with status improvement.) May it be on the day of hunting that we hunt for the bush rat behind the house.

THE END