UMOREN'S HOUSE

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PREFACE

Serious African literature did not begin to emerge until the early 1950's. Before this time, most of the writing about Africa was undertaken by writers who observed Africa from without. One of these foreign writers, Joseph Conrad, whose youthful curiosity took him to the Congo in 1890, thereafter wrote Heart of Darkness stereotyping Africa as a "journey by way of experience to painful maturity."[1] The period Conrad spent in the Congo was so short that any sustained effort on his part to fully understand the people he wrote about was impossible. Although he did not mention the Congo or Africa by name, rather the Thames or Europe, it is easy to discover through details of the fiction that the river Marlow's steamer cruised to Kurtz's station is certainly the Congo, and that the continent is Africa. Because of Conrad's inadequate knowledge of Africa and its people, he created in his Heart of Darkness a mood of horrendous evil, of gross ignorance juxtaposed with the unrestrained cruelty and stark avarice of European civilization. Conrad was accused of 'narrative prejudice', which Michael Echeruo defines as "that total and powerful ascription of a

definite moral character to event and location; . . . that complex of fact and attitude which makes the people, the jungles, the rivers, the crocodiles. . . even the rain and sun of Africa -- the permanent symbols of a dark and violent mystery."[2]

It took more than half a century from the time of Conrad before literature about Africa took a different turn. After World War II, most of the African colonies were beginning serious discussion for self-rule with the countries of Europe that claimed jurisdiction over them. Along with this surge for political independence, there appeared in literary circles the search for the African people's past. As Shatto Arthur Gakwandi has observed, "a tradition with its own distinctive characteristics did not begin to emerge until the early fifties."[3] This new literary revolution stressed one major theme, "an assessment of Africa's contact with the West."[4] Post-war African writers, in order to make a proper assessment of Europe's colonial presence in Africa, had to first look back to their own past. They had a duty to rediscover Africa's past, their cultural roots, on to which western culture had been grafted. With their past balanced against the present, these writers at once agreed that colonialism, in Africa at least, had brought about great spiritual, social, and political change. They set themselves the task of discussing the implica-

tions of these changes. Thus, one may now "see the African novel as a creative interpretation of history."[5] In this way, most post-war African writers were concerned "with portraying tensions which arise from the co-existence of two distinct ways of life, the western and the traditional."[6]

The cultural tensions which African artists wrote about touched on the moral values and social customs of their societies. All three of Chinua Achebe's novels, for instance, "light up the struggle between values that linger longest in rural areas and the values of modernity."[7]

There were certain conditions that helped herald the emergence of post-war African indigenous writers so that "the African novel has attained maturity in a relatively short period of time. . . "[8] I agree with Gakwandi that the growth of African literature has been rapid; a relatively large number of works have flooded African libraries since 1945. Conditions similar to those which gave rise to the growth of literature in nineteen century Europe occurred also in Africa. One such condition seems to have been an increasing rate of literacy. Another, perhaps more important factor, is the nature of the relationship between the individual and the society of which he is apart.

In Africa, people began to question the validity of

the new morality that emerged after 1945. But the way most African writers began to take a look at their society differed in tone from one part of the continent to another. Most writers in the southern part of Africa emphasize racism, a product of colonialism. A majority of writers in this region asserts African identity and rejects the idea of eliminating racism by a process of assimilation. Most of the works from this region are violent in tone. According to Gakwandi, Alex La Guma's "A Walk in the Night is perhaps the most poignant distillation of this hostility."[9] In this novel the conflict stems from the tense co-existence of the two races, white and black. As Gakwandi very correctly summarized, in A Walk in the Night, "The black man's suffering and the white man's fears collide with irreconcilable ferocity."[10]

While writers from the southern part of Africa are confronted with political suppression and resistance, those from the west face social and cultural conflicts. West African writers generally appear to be pacific in their approach. Although they write of socio-historical situations, there is a difference in tone and emphasis between the Francophone West African writers and the Anglophone West African writers. Leopold Senghor, a representative of the French-speaking West African writers, is considered by some "perhaps the most famous

contemporary African poet."[11] He emphasizes Negritude, "the immediate emotional response to nature. . . the 'sum total of all the cultural values of Africa.'"[12] But Senghor's emphasis on Negritude is not well received by writers from other regions of Africa. Martin Tucker, has remarked that Ezekiel Mphahlele, the Mosothoan critic and novelist from the south, along with many writers, "objects to what he feels is the cultural insularity of Negritude."[13] Clearly objecting to the isolationist tendency of the principle of Negritude, Mphahlele seems to attempt to accommodate the different peoples of Africa. Because African society is multi-racial, Mphahlele believes Negritude isolates one African from the other if the writer defines an African's blackness in terms other than the color of his skin. According to Mphahlele, "an African can only express the African-ness in him when he does not consciously or self-consciously exclude his world heritage."[14] What Mphahlele advocates is a literature that deals with a particular problem without losing its universal appeal. Paradoxically, the colonial French administration pursued the policy of assimilation, while the English did not plan to make Africans British citizens. Ironically, however, it is the French-speaking African who cherishes his Africanity to the extent that he appears to consider others incapable of possessing African-ness by accident

of birth, except by color. So Senghor, with his disciples, has yet to reconcile his views with the French colonial idea of assimilation.

Tucker has noted that Nigeria is "now the most important source of indigenous literature in Africa."[15] And while the French-speaking Leopold Senghor of Senegal is likely to be considered the leading African contemporary poet, two English-speaking West African artists, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe, both from Nigeria, appear to dominate the drama and fiction genres respectively.

Undoubtedly Wole Soyinka is Nigeria's leading dramatist. His works include many poems, plays, and a novel, The Interpreters. Jonathan Peters has observed that Wole does not accept Senghor's idea of Negritude insofar as he attempts to present one race as being superior to others. Instead, because of Wole's dark vision of the human race, he sees an innate sameness in all men's evil nature. This "equality" of the races which Wole posits makes it difficult for Senghor to find common literary ground with him.[16]

Between Senghor's enthusiasm for the potentialities of his race and the apparent pessimism of Wole, Chinua Achebe appears to reconcile these opposing idealogies. He asserts that the black man had a culture and dignity, and that he is both good and evil. He sees not only the

dark side of man as Wole seems to show, nor does he see only the positive value of the black man, as Senghor's Negritude philosophy indicates. Achebe, moreover, very sharply disagrees with Wole in his assumption that a writer should be concerned with contemporary issues. Achebe "wishes to show the black man's cultural values in their historical perspective."[17] He has written poetry and novels, the best known being Arrow of God, a story in which a tribal chieftain is confronted by the realities of modern Africa.

Cybrian Ekwensi, another Nigerian writer, has written many novels, One of them, Burning Grass, deals with the city and urban problems, and relies heavily on sociological materials.

There are also other African writers who have made considerable contributions. Timothy Aluko is one. His One Man One Wife portrays the conflict between polygamy and Christian ethics. Another of his novels is One Man One Matchet. In this novel, Aluko discusses economic problems in Western Nigeria. The novel has a heavy political overtone, describing the western crisis accompanying the transfer of power from the British to the people of Nigeria.

These are some of the writers who have recorded their perceptions of the society of which they are a part. Their main concern is their society and, unlike

the foreign writers who viewed Africa earlier, they are primarily interested in writing about their own social and political problems.

To portray African society was what the typical African writer attempted. These authors had a strong feeling that what they wrote about should relate to the real world -- their society -- with considerable fidelity. The realistic approach of African writers did not originate on the African continent. Discussing the modern novel, Martin Seymour-Smith states that realism is "a technical term in literary criticism. . . a strand in the history of novel-writing that culminated in the nineteenth century. However, all forms of the novel attempt to be realistic. . . they represent true reality as it is seen by the author."[18] I have a strong inclination toward this mode of literary portrayal, for I believe that literature should faithfully depict a people's culture. It is a means whereby the culture of a people can be recorded, though not with the bare-fact accuracy of a historian nor with the imaginary exaggerations of the romanticist; the narrative details of a fiction should be such that they enable the reader to imaginatively learn the fiction's milieu almost as readily as if it were his own.

Umoren's House is not far removed from the works of those African writers cited above. Like the work of my

predecessors, Umoren's House is steeped in issues that place the fiction in the mode of social realism. Although Frederick Karl and Leo Hamalian have indicated that realism is the preferred literary approach for Third World writers who have lived with a more traditional literature and a more traditional culture,[19] I do not think it is justifiable to say that realism should always be equated with traditionalism. I am a traditionalist, but that is not the reason I prefer to write in the realistic mode. I consider social realism a convenient frame of reference through which I can take a look at my society, but a social radical could employ the same frame of reference if he wanted to. Social realism is simply convenient for the examination of the problems of a given society.

African artists differ widely in their subject-matter, but the general tone of African novels is one of restlessness; the society depicted reveals a people caught up in what Gakwandi calls a "cultural cross-roads."[20] And it is his understanding of the conditions creating the fragmented African self that leads Gakwandi to state that "The African novel has developed as a response to the far-reaching social revolution of the twentieth century on the continent."[21]

By joining a majority of my countrymen in response to these social changes which have engulfed the African

society, I recognize that Umoren's House shares many of the ideas Achebe has expressed in his work. Achebe's No Longer At Ease also exhibits several of the features Umoren's House portrays. Obi Okonkwo is Achebe's tragic hero, baptized abroad into western culture and western tradition. When he comes home, he becomes the victim of his own sophistication: he receives bribes in order to maintain his acquired high standard of living. Consequently, he is imprisoned.

In Umoren's House, Ini, like Obi, is married to western values by the circumstance of his university education. However, unlike Obi, he is not the fiction's tragic hero. The impact of western culture does not directly fall on him. It is his father, a representative of the old culture, who, when the cultures clash about him, suffers a shock he cannot survive. In Achebe's earlier novel, Things Fall Apart, the hero, Okonkwo, is similar to Umoren in Umoren's House. Both Okonkwo and Umoren are tragic heroes, but they differ with respect to the reasons for which they suffer. Umoren is the direct victim of westernization in his country; Okonkwo is not: he is the victim of his own norms.

According to Gakwandi, "In the African novel the only instances where the criticism of society is based on the tyranny of its norms are in the novels of the

past, as in . . . Things Fall Apart."[22] Okonkwo suffers because he has broken the tradition of his people, although it is the white man who drives him to his fate. Umoren suffers as a direct result of the clash of the two cultures, western values imposed upon a traditional Nigerian way of life. It is the effect of this cultural "evolution that has brought about a complete overhaul of traditional ways of living."[23] During this process in his society, Umoren is enmeshed in a tangle of family and village conflicts.

Umoren's House and Achebe's No Longer At Ease differ significantly in yet another aspect, place. Place features prominently and differently in the two novels. In No Longer At Ease, Obi is in Europe when the full cultivation of his westernization occurs, whereas Ini is westernized in his own homeland. He seems to have no choice as the tide of modernity sweeps him away from his home and carries him to Lagos. Cities like Lagos are the centers where cultures meet, where the West inculcates and nurtures western values side by side with the traditional cultures of developing countries. Tucker has observed in his study of Ekwensi's novel, People of the City, that the author places emphasis on cities and the urban problem, and that Ekwensi attacks the city because he considers it a repository of vice. And concluding his comment on Ekwensi's People of the City,

like John Wat in Umoren's House, Tucker cautions that since the realities of the new Africa take place in the city, the city cannot be avoided if the new Africa is to emerge.[24]

There are other social issues in my fiction. In Achebe's Things Fall Apart, Okonkwo is alone, and the spirit of collective action against the foe -- the white man -- is no longer present in his people. The white man has destroyed all and is in control. In No Longer At Ease, Obi defies his people's tradition and marries an osu, a tabooed girl. Umoren's House also chronicles these ills. Age, wealth, social rank, and religious cult, which once played very important parts in the social and political system of the people, are no longer of great consequence. Umoren's yam, like Okonkwo's yam stack, once a symbol of wealth, no longer has any appeal for Ini or Obi, nor do Umoren's three wives any longer vest him with the symbol of chieftaincy. Ini prefers to measure economic wealth and social status in western terms. His three-story house proclaims his family's importance.

Umoren's House also exhibits what Martin Seymour-Smith has pointed out in Jane Austen's work, ". . . that individual behavior must at all cost be regulated by the conventions of society."[25] This is a feature common to social realism, a term I find more pragmatic and less

abstract than naturalism. Gakwandi has the following definition:

> With social realism, the individual is treated as a social unit; most often he is silhouetted against the institutions, traditions and general behavior of his society so as to underscore his insignificance. His aspirations, achievements and disappointments are seen as conditioned by his place in a given society and can be used to raise wider ethical, moral and social issues.[26]

Social realism stresses the importance of moral issues in society. I cannot pretend that the issues in this narrative have not been raised before by many writers, but I found it necessary to write this novel in the hope that it might treat specific areas which my African predecessors have left out. A novel like Achebe's <u>Things Fall Apart</u> depicts African culture, indeed Nigerian culture, but focuses on the culture of the Ibo people. When Achebe's Okonkwo plans to take refuge because of the offence he has committed, he elects to remain in the village where his mother was born and buried. But in <u>Umoren's House</u>, John's father advises his son to regard his father's village as his primary place of abode, while he should think of his mother's birthplace as his secondary home only, for his mother "won't even be buried there."

It is this cultural differentiation in the diverse cultures of the peoples of my country that I intend to

bring out in this short novel. While attempting to explore some particular areas of the cultural life of my Ibibio people, I have tried to avoid confusing my reader by making some minor compromises. This sacrifice involves, what Anne Tibble calls, "avoiding very obscure ritual in order to maintain the balance between known and unknown experiences."[27] My effort thus focuses on elaborating the more commonly known aspects of tribal life in order to explain the less familiar. I do not intend to sacrifice the general and the universal on the altar of the particular and the specific. Nevertheless, effort has been expended to make my people, the Ibibios, emerge with a uniqueness in specific areas of their culture, while blending them into the larger common culture of my country, Nigeria.

In attempting to define a novel, Peter Nazareth states that "A novel deals with society, i.e. with a group of people interacting upon one another."[28] In my fiction, the society involved is that of my people, the Ibibios of the southeast Nigeria. The narrative action is set in the post-Independence era before the civil war of 1967-1970.

It is a fact that at the moment there is no dominant contemporary Nigerian culture. What we have as Nigerian culture today is not Nigerian. We cannot say it is Western either. When the West met face to face

with Africa in the nineteenth century through the process of colonization, the cultures of the two collided in conflict. Our present day Nigerian culture is a hybrid of the two that has emerged from that collision. In order to understand this cross-breed, it is imperative that the past be understood. It is this past Achebe considers, the novelist's "fundamental theme [that] must first be disposed of."[29] Like Reuben in Umoren's House, Achebe realized that this past holds good and evil. But most things Western have had a stronger appeal and a greater grip on the people in Umoren's world, as Min in Umoren's House observes.

There are aspects of life quite desirable in both cultures, which is why the conflict between the old and the invading Western values continues. The novelist should seek to bring out the past. It is his society's root that can provide a basis for the future and, which can also give people a feeling of identity they can be proud of.

The present must be accommodated. Ini finds one practical solution by setting up a building where the old value of togetherness can be compromised with the Western habit of individualism. In this way his three-story house seems to solve the problem; Umoren's extended family can live separately, yet together as in Nigeria's Federal Government, which imposes political

unity on the nation's ethnic diversities. Ironically, it is in the Western-style building that Ini hopes his family can survive in much the same way that the English language, a colonial import, is regarded as the medium of communication uniting the various peoples of Nigeria.

In precolonial times, the problem of communication was acute on the African continent; local languages ranged "from 800 to 1000."[30] Africa's communication problem is exemplified in Nigeria where "The official language, English, is likely to remain unchanged since there are more than 200 different languages spoken by the many national groups living in the country."[31]

It was appropriate to write Umoren's House in English, not only because of the particular academic context of its composition, but also because, as one of the pioneer works in English about my Ibibio people, it would be worthwhile presenting it in the language my fellow Nigerians share. The first two major writers, E. N. Amaku and E. E. Nkanga, to create literary works of consequence about my people did so in Efik. Because of the communication barrier, their works are not yet accessible to other Nigerians, let alone the rest of the world, and will not be until they are translated into English.

Nkanga's novella, Mutanda's Search for Namondo, written in Efik, the native language of the Ibibio, is

set in the same Ibibio region as Umoren's House. The story involves a chief searching for his drowned son. During the search, suspects are named and an oracle is consulted for clues. Ultimately, Mutanda discovers his son emerging from a stream. The story is an allegory of the spiritual journey of a man searching for his lost soul.

Mutanda's Search for Namondo is a powerful fiction, better crafted than most of Amaku's Efik works, except for Abasi Ekpenyong (no translation is possible; the title is an Efik personal name). Amaku has also written extensively on many historical topics. Efik Eburutu (no translation; the title is a clan name) treats the beginning of the Efik people and the related peoples of the Cross River basin. Abasi Ekpenyong is tautly written, rich in Efik idioms, and challenges comparison with Mutanda's Search for Namondo. Abasi Ekpenyong is a story of two rival chiefs, Abasi Ekpenyong and Okono Ekpe, one struggling for superiority, the other opposing his claim.

Communication can be difficult when one uses English to portray an experience alien to the culture of native English-speakers. Commenting on the language problem of one of India's best English-language novelists, Narayan, Peter Nazareth said, "Like his African counterpart, Narayan is faced with the problem of making

characters speak in English whereas they do not speak English in real life."[32] In Anne Tibble's collection, this is referred to as "mental block,"[33] a common problem for writing in a second language. As the writer tries to capture and translate local customs into English, he consistently faces this problem.

My immediate problem was that most local customs have no real counterpart in the culture of the native English-speaker. Thus, the rhythm of my vernacular speech does not correspond to English speech patterns. When it comes to local idioms, the vitality of Efik local speech is for the most part lost.

Despite such problems, the African writer, like any other writer using a second language, must try to communicate his experience in such a way that his audience, though unfamiliar with such an experience, might grasp the meaning. I try to do this by leaving out the very obscure experience. Depending on selectivity, what Achebe calls "glossing over inconvenient facts,"[34] as a solution to the communication problem may create another serious problem for the fiction. Achebe warns that "by too wholly accepting European or American standards Africans invite aridity."[35] But an African writer wants to project an authentic African culture. His presentation of his society must be one "that breathes the spirit of Africa."[36]

Like Narayan, I had tried to solve the problem by using a very simple English. Nevertheless, part of the problem remained. Simplifying the language even to the grade school level is not enough. Most native African experience has no direct correspondence in English. As Ini's cousin Sunday discovered, the Efik language defies word for word translation in most cases. Some words were stripped of their vitality in the process of switching from Efik to English. When Ini and Hope say 'good night' to Umoren's family at the end of the family meeting in which Ini introduces her to his parents, I was at a loss to find an English expression to faithfully render the meaning of the Efik word _esiere_. _Esiere_, translated as 'good night,' carries no reference at all to night in Efik. Instead, it focuses on the next day: "Till day breaks", or, "let's hope we'll see the break of day" are better translations. The word _esiere_ ignores the word _night_ because _night_ represents evil. In Efik, the word _esiere_ not only wishes, but also invokes with the promise of certainty: it is dynamic.

With such difficulties in mind, one might ask: should a writer using English as a second language abandon writing in English, or should he have to learn English as thoroughly as the native speaker before he can write? Achebe offers some advice: African writers, he says, need not know the English language like the

native speaker, just well enough to use if effectively. As a world language, English must submit to different kinds of use; the writer should fashion an English at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience without mutilating the language so that it loses its value as a medium of international exchange.[37] I found Achebe's advice very helpful. He has devised a convenient means for accommodating his intentions, applying it at great length in Things Fall Apart and No Longer At Ease, where he successfully pushes his Ibo proverbs into the medium of English.

One other point of information about my story concerns the form -- why I chose to project the culture of my people in the novel genre. Simply, my response to the question is that short fiction has been the area of my concentration in my creative writing program. But it goes further than this. Although a poet like Leopold Senghor conveys his African experience as poetic inspiration, and Wole Soyinka conveys his through drama, a majority of African writers prefer to express their experience in fiction: short stories or novels. I prefer the short novel. It is not too long to exhaust my energy, not too short to fail to carry my experience. Since I am writing about a culture, a whole society, the novel is an appropriate form. Discussing the various forms open to a writer, Gakwandi has this to say of the

novel: "More than any other form, the novel can evoke the whole way of life of a people at a given time,"[38] and also critique the social structure.

In the introduction to Innovative Fiction, Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer state that "Realistic fiction presupposed chronological time as the medium of a plotted narrative. . . "[39]. Umoren's House is chronologically plotted. Today, plotted narratives still characterize most fiction, but do not dominate the genre as they once did. But most 'plotless' narratives do have recoverable narrative sequences. I weave two different but similar strands, the Umoren-Ini conflict and the Min-Wat struggle into one story, moving them simultaneously. In my narrative development, Min's story is juxtaposed with Umoren's story; for the deeper meaning of the fiction, Umoren's story is a montage of the other. Because of Umoren's incompetence as a leader, he is unable to handle the village crisis properly, since he has not been able to solve the problems of his family, a microcosm of the village.

One important element of a story of this length is that it should be rich in symbolism for meaning to emerge. Many short story narratives are apt to have "symbols which function to question the world of appearances and to point to a reality beyond the facts of the extensional world."[40] In Umoren's House, there

are numerous instances where symbols are self-consciously used. At the very beginning of the story, the Chief's effectiveness as the leader of Asatong is indirectly questioned by the statement that he resembles a bride. In a culture of male dominance, for the Chief to be likened to a bride is to say that he is weak, unable to prevent the ensuing conflicts from widening. The Chief's ineffectiveness as a leader results in his being relieved of his duties, a symbolic death, since it means that his line has reached an ancestral dead-end. This idea of death is amplified in many sections of the story. The Chief's compound, rectangularly-shaped, is replaced with three oblong grass plots; croton and acalypha are lined along the edges of the plots. The flowers have red, purple, and green leaves. The Chief's new room and bed are oblong in shape. These flowers are characteristic grave-yard decorations in Umoren's village. The oblong shapes are associated with the shape of a coffin.

Another symbol is that of the number <u>three</u>. Ini's mother knocks thrice at her son's door; Umoren's council meets three days before something happens, or something happens three days after the council meets. Mkpa Ifia addresses the council with three salutes. Umoren has married three wives. The number three forms a recurrent pattern having to do with religion.

Ironically, the number three symbolizes both the white man's religion and the Chief's. The Chief's religion is sectioned into three categories: the air, the sea, and the land gods. The white man's is structured by the Trinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Umoren's House displays another technical element, the flashback. Wayne Booth appraised the use of flashback, saying that in most stories with flashbacks to fill in the chronology "the technique of the flashback had been highly effective."[41] And as Umoren's House attempts to reconstruct the recent cultural history of a people, flashback became necessary. Killam has recognized the effective use of flashback in Achebe's No Longer At Ease, where the technique is employed "to concentrate attention on the causes for Obi's conviction and the complexity of events, actions and decisions which lead up to it."[42]

Apart from surveying the techniques and assessing their effectiveness, a literary critic might be interested also to consider some of the social issues dramatized in my fiction. One is the problem of marriage. Umoren's concern is: who should be Ini's bride? In Achebe's No Longer At Ease, Obi's bride is rejected on the grounds of social taboo attached to Clara on account of her birth. Ini defiles no traditional taboo, but he does challenge his parents' right to choose a bride

for him. And by marrying outside his tribe, he widens the cultural horizon of his community.

Another is the religious issue, a prominent feature in contemporary African novels. Of the nature of religion, Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtin have this to say:

> All African religions are monotheistic in the sense that there is a single High God, who is said to be the creator of the world and of mankind, and a central source of order and of whatever sense is to be found. Many African religions are also polytheistic in that either pantheons of gods or large numbers of spirits or ancestors or some other kind of divinities may stand between man and the ultimate God.[43]

In Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, there is abundant conflict between traditional faith and the white man's god. In Arrow of God, the fetish priest Ezeulu believes he has obtained supernatural powers from his god. This assumption of false omnipotence helps to bring about his downfall. In Umoren's House, the Chief feels it is the church that destroys his house by depriving him of his son, who he hoped would serve as the village's priest of the ancestral religion. But Ini was not trained in Umoren's local priesthood, only in Western culture.

Another social issue treated is bribery, which thrives most among those Nigerians who claim a considerable degree of sophistication. It is echoed in many

Nigerian novels, but is most prominently portrayed in No Longer At Ease; Obi loses his job and goes to jail for receiving bribes.

Umoren's House also treats the issue of the relationship between parents and children. This relationship involves the extent to which children should obey their parents. In Umoren's world, age does not determine maturity, and maturity does not guarantee independence or responsibility for children. Ini's submission to parental authority is not timidity; it is a cultural trait he has not yet fully shaken off.

Umoren's House portrays a society where there is no government-sponsored social security to take care of the aged; the responsibility of caring for the aged and burying the dead rests with family, usually the next of kin who has the right of inheritance. It would be a serious loss if the rightful heir were deprived of the right to inherit the land and compound of the deceased. Such a denial carries with it the force of a curse sanctioned by ancestors. To prosper in this world, every son or daughter threfore must try to receive his or her parents' blessings. Ini is not exempted from the custom, so his mother must say to her husband "you can't say this" when she senses Umoren is about to deny her son that right.

There is no romantic love episode in Umoren's House.

This is to emphasize Umoren's society as one where people of opposite sexes are not expected to mix freely. On the grounds of decorum and simple morality, unmarried couples are not permissible.

Umoren is the viewpoint character in my fiction, and remains consistently the 'center of consciousness' throughout the story. By keeping to this point of view, I am able to effect a unity, bring seriousness to the subject-matter discussed, and hopefully generate a sympathetic response to Umoren in the reader. It is for the reader to judge how reliable my narrative personae is and to determine whether or not "he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work"[44] he is speaking for.

I do not pretend this novel, my maiden work on Ibibio culture, is exhaustive. To understand the culture of my people, it was necessary for me to examine the sources of the present hybrid of western and native Nigerian values, but not possible in the short novel to go into the distant past. It was thus common sense to focus on a point where I could dramatize both the invading western values and the persisting ancient native traditions. In this way, I endeavored to place the two on balance for my readers to make judgements.

In a work of art there must be both the general and the universal, yet the writer should also involve

his reader with the particular and the unique. When John Wat uses his two hands and his head to perform the ceremonial greeting of his Chief, the basic act is easily understood: greeting, the universal. The gestural accompaniment with hand, head, or even knees, falls in the domain of the particular and the unique. Thus, "Fiction constitutes a way of looking at the world."[45]

Chief Umoren is progressive, but is unable to make a decision that will accommodate the changing times. He still drinks from the cowhorn, even though he has tumblers for his elite guests. Yet he has a profound sense of order; the sun and stars invoke the hierarchy of his social spectrum.

I found it useful to apply to Umoren's House Peter Nazareth's question: "Does it [story] reveal anything about my society, directly or indirectly. . . ?"[46] I hope that it does. Umoren's House attempts to present the metamorphosis that occurred in the life of Umoren's people, a process of social change, a conflict between new values and the prehistoric traditions of the Ibibio way of life.

I hope that Umoren's House introduces my reader to the culture of my Ibibio people, and that my story conveys to its audience the cultural conflict that characterizes the life of emerging African nations,

like Nigeria, even at the present moment.

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I. UMOREN'S HOUSE 1

Chief Umoren and Ini looked in different directions immediately after the council had adjourned. Almost back to back, their necks turned left and right respectively, father and son exchanged bitter words. Min Nde, teamed behind with his relations, held up his two fists, looked through them, and advanced toward James Wat. Chief Umoren quickly left Ini alone and dashed to where the contending groups stood.

"The issue is yet to be decided. Why worry yourselves now?" Chief Umoren told them as he forged ahead to separate them with his hands stretched out.

Chief Umoren wore a gray Lanchiki with flowing sleeves. The gown reached down to his ankles and swept behind him, as if he were a rich young bride striding to the altar. He was five feet six inches tall, his complexion light. His eyes were black and bright, especially when he fixed them on his prey. He could say much with a gaze: approval; disapproval if the gaze were accompanied with a twist of his mouth; anger if the gaze were accompanied with a bite of his lower lip. But he was never known to be severe.

"Two weeks isn't a very long time until council meets again. Then we'll settle everything. So, go

home. You all, go in peace," the Chief pleaded in an effort to keep the quarreling parties from breaking into a fight. But the men lingered. The Chief was accustomed to seeing men loiter in the courtyard for ten or fifteen minutes after the council adjourned, but that particular day, he was worried to see them there. He dared not go inside to rest. He was never known to listen to people's casual conversation or gossip, but that day, he strained his ears in order to pick up scraps of conversation, trying to guess what the groups were about to do. He watched their movements. That day he made sure he heard their conversation.

Some repeated the arguments Min and Wat had raised. Some strengthened their group alliances by airing emotions suppressed when the council was in session. This time, it was much more than mere giving vent to inner conflicts. It was not just families grouping to oppose others. It was like the preparation for a war, a civil war in which once friendly people turned against one another. However, Chief Umoren was still in control. The quarreling factions eventually left without a fight.

On the eastern side of the village, about one mile south of the Anglican Church, was Chief Umoren's compound. He was proud of it; he knew that his was one of the most magnificent homes in the village.

Rectangularly shaped, the two opposite sides of the structure were living quarters. He had these quarters closed in by low walls with thatch-roofs. That left an open court where Chief Umoren often enjoyed seeing children play. He was often found relaxing in the front part of the compound where he lived. From there, he would walk to the opposite block at the back side to see his three wives and their children. The front part of the block, the Chief's section, was an open hall with a fire-place where family members and near-relatives frequently met for discussions or recreation. Wine drinking took place in that hall. Often, the Chief and the adults relaxed with small calabashes of palm wine in that hall, playing their role as spectators while the young people sang and danced.

This was the home in which Ini, later christened Joseph, grew up. Ini was the first child of the Chief's first wife. On Ini's twenty-third birthday, Chief Umoren had one boy and two girls by his first wife, two girls by his second wife, and a boy by his third and last wife.

Chief Umoren relaxed on his veranda, watching his son toss and catch a bunch of keys, whistling, humming a tune. "He might lose those keys," he said to himself. He saw Ini put his left hand in the pocket of his gaberdine trousers. Chief Umoren admired

his son as he stood still, adjusting his Moroccan hat on his head. He watched him sit on a cane chair, looking straight in front of him, as if he were in some communication with the unseen. "I know he is still angry. All he can do now is to submit to me. I'm his father, he the son," he said softly. Once Chief Umoren saw his son looking at him obliquely, but quickly turned his eyes away. "I love you. But you must listen to my advice. I'm your father," the Chief said to himself, watching him.

Umoren reclined on a goat skin, not cleaned of its fur. He did not look at his son this time. He watched his village folk as they walked the one-quarter mile-long lane to his home. John Wat and his people were far ahead of their opponents. With some three hundred yards between the two factions, the Chief felt they would not get close enough for a fight unless the advancing group slowed down or the approaching group tried to overtake the other. He knew they were not eager for a fight at this time. "I would like to see the whole business settled without shedding of blood," he said. Min Nde, twenty-nine, wore a loin cloth with pictures of umbrellas on it, a long sleeve shirt, a khaki helmet on his head, a staff in his right hand. The Chief regarded him as a rich man. Rich by the local standard. A week before, he heard that

Min's ship had berthed in one of the obscure creeks in Oron. From there, he shipped scotch whiskey, rifles, and textiles to his store. These goods came from France via the former French Cameroons. The Chief knew Min often made 200% profit on such items as rifles and whiskey. Chief Umoren had visited the shop, where he bought his wristwatch and radio.

The Chief did not meet with John Wat as often as he did with Min. "He would not visit home on weekends," the Chief once said to John's father, Idim, when the Chief asked him how John was doing at his job. The Chief remembered when John used to visit him often during his long vacations. At that time he was a high school student at the famous Presbyterian Church Institute at Calabar, eighty miles from his home. The Chief still admired John, now twenty-six years old. He thought him easy-going, and observed that he moved freely with the young people of the community. The Chief was also aware that John had offended most parents by urging their children to go to school and to accept the white man's job after leaving school. "I wonder why they should blame their children's disobedience on the young man?" he said. John often wore blue jeans, a white, short-sleeve nylon shirt, a blue tie, a pair of suede shoes, and a felt hat. But this day, when he came to the Chief's court, he had

no tie on, and he wore no hat. He, did however, have a pocket watch and a small radio he always carried about in the evening. He often bragged about his work. For three years he had worked for the United African Company, a British commercial firm based in Calabar.

It was about supper time, the day the council adjourned, when Chief Umoren told his son that wisdom came by experience and that age, not book knowledge, yielded the needed experience, "Thus, you are obliged to listen to me by virtue of my age and experience. Even your white friend said something I'll not forget," he said to Ini.

"What is it, Father," Ini asked him.

"He said you should listen to me - 'Children, obey your parents.'"

"Regarding what?" Ini wanted to know.

"Regarding your association with the Church, and your not being ready for marriage now."

"Well Father, the two issues pose no problem to me."

"They bother me. I'll continue making noise about them." The two looked at each other. "I love you, Ini," he said to his son.

"I love you dearly, my Father," Ini said to him.

Supper was ready. It was Ini's mother's turn to cook the meal. Umoren's second wife would prepare

the next meal, then the third wife would cook the next. The main dish was yam foo foo and chicken soup. Father and son sat to it. At the end of the meal, Ini drank Seven Up, his father palm wine. Then the Chief called Ini's sister to come in and clear the table. Ini told his father he was going out for a stroll in the neighborhood.

Umoren said "It's late now. I would like to talk to you tomorrow." Ini went out. Soon, the Chief heard his wife rebuke her daughter for not washing the plates fast enough.

"Will you lower your voice a little bit?" the Chief told her. He drew near to her to watch her clear her goat-and-sheep pen. He did not like to see the pen littered with leaves and food the animals rejected. "You have to let out the animals before you can do thorough work," he advised her. His wife did so, and the Chief watched the freed animals run about. The braying of the goats and sheep, the cackling of the hens, the crowing of the cocks made the Chief very uneasy. "Drive the animals back into the pen; I can't keep up with their noise," the Chief said.

Before the animals came in, he went in the pen where his wife was cleaning. He pointed to the corners where she left out some trash. He told her to dump the refuse in the holes he had prepared for planting

his yams. A year before, he planted one very close to his house. That particular yam was a high-yielding breed. From that one hole, he harvested five yam tubers, weighing altogether thirty-five pounds. The next year, he hoped to dig more holes for that particular breed. There were other sets of yams he planted among his fruit trees. He wanted the vines of those yams to climb his avocado pear, orange, and mango trees. But he never planted yams in his coa-coa farm.

It was getting dark, so the Chief left his wife out in the sheep pen and returned to his veranda. He sat down on his bamboo chair.

Chief Umoren saw Ini come back from his stroll. He called Ini's sister to give him some palm wine and kolanuts. Ini sat down on a cane chair and asked for a bottle of Seven Up.

"That was a long walk," his father said to him.

"Yes, I walked to the churchyard. I met Deacon Fred and chatted with him."

"So you had a meeting with the Anglican Church people?"

"Father, nothing really was planned. We met by chance. We discussed nothing serious."

"I know what you discussed."

"Father, what did we discuss?"

"Ini, you are plotting to destroy my gods."

Ini got up, holding the bottle of Seven Up, and stalked away angrily. Chief Umoren remained calm. He saw his wife talking to Ini as he was leaving the veranda. "Don't leave your father's house," he heard her say softly. He saw his son turn back and head toward his room. His mother came directly to where the Chief sat.

"Why are you so bitter with Ini?" she asked him.

"I am not," he defended himself. He heard her tell her daughter to ask Ini to meet them in the parlor. He saw the girl come back to inform them Ini had gone in for the night. He saw his wife go to his door and knock thrice. In a few seconds, the Chief saw Ini as he came out of the room, stood by the doorway, held the door frame with his right hand.

"Come, my dear son. Let's get this thing out of the way," she said. The Chief yawned and mumbled. He was fond of yawning and mumbling. Ini's mother came with her son to where he sat. His two other wives came a few minutes later. The Chief chewed a piece of kolanut and drank some palm wine.

"Please, let there be no more quarrel. Let's settle everything this night," Ini's mother pleaded with him. The Chief gnashed his teeth.

"I do not quarrel with him. But he must do two things for me: quit going with the white man and

consider marriage seriously."

"Marriage is a good thing. We want to increase this family. But what's the problem between Ini and the white man?"

"The white man wants to use my son to destroy my gods."

"Father, that's very unfair to say of me. I'm not doing that."

"You are! Indeed, you are trying to do just that!" His voice was heard beyond the parlor. Chief Umoren's eyes brightened. He chewed another piece of kolanut. He cleared his throat and continued chewing. He gnashed his teeth again and again, occasionally taking a deep breath, letting it out with a sigh. He was worried. He knew his first wife had noticed his predicament. He was listening to them, though pretending not to do so, as she discussed it with the other two. But they could not understand how serious the problem was, or what action he would take.

"Is he going to be an instrument of disaster for my family?" he thought. Sad and worried, he assured himself, "Not in my lifetime. I'll do everything I can to arrest the situation."

The women stopped whispering to one another, were silent, watching him. They looked at Ini, who sat in a chair in a corner of the parlor. The Chief took snuff

out of his snuffbox with his fingers and, with one deep breath, inhaled it in both his nostrils. He sneezed and some teardrops dripped from his eyes. He sneezed a second time and cleared his throat.

"Ini must quit the white man's church," he told his wives, looking straight in his son's mother's face.

"What's the problem with that?" Ini's mother wanted to know.

"I don't want to lose him," was his sharp reply.

"You won't," his wife assured him. "He is still your son, and he'll remain so," she said. But the old man did not take that seriously. Ini looked at his father, but said nothing.

"See?" the Chief said to Ini's mother. "I must have a son to take care of my gods, who, if ignored, could cause untold suffering to this family and the village. Think of their being provoked to cause a series of calamity: deaths in the family, famine in the land, barrenness among the women, and miseries!"

"Mother, please, don't plead on my behalf any more," Ini told her, but his mother continued to persuade Chief Umoren. Umoren was untouched by her words. He continued looking at his son. He knew Ini was thinking deeply.

"What should I do next?" Ini asked, exhausted.

"You must listen to me. I'm your father," Umoren

replied sharply.

"I can't understand why my father expresses concern where none exists."

"Ini, please don't talk any more," his mother advised.

"I must explain myself, Mother. I became interested in the Anglican Mission activities when I was at college. The organization stressed helping others, a thing my father has been doing himself. There is nothing new," he said to his parents.

"There are many things new! How about marriage? No marriage. Isn't that true?"

"Yes, there is, except in the Roman Catholic Mission, and only where the candidate plans to enter priesthood. This isn't a Roman Catholic organization, and I'm not keen for the priesthood."

His mother looked at his eyes and said "Ini, your eyes are dull. Go in and sleep."

Her son said "Good night, Father; ladies, good night!" and retired. His wives sat with the Chief, pleading with him to be lenient with Ini.

"Don't be too harsh on him," the second wife told him.

"We all will talk to him. I hope he'll listen to you," the third said.

"Bend him, but don't break him," Ini's mother said to the Chief. Then, the women said good night to him

and went to sleep. The Chief sat alone for a long time and then went to sleep.

About four-thirty in the morning, the bells of the Anglican Church tower woke the Chief up. "They won't let me sleep," he said. In half an hour's time, he heard the congregation singing and shouting _Halleluia-Amen_. Many things floated across his mind. He thought of Ini, but quickly stopped. "I will look at the more serious problem first," he said.

"Min and Wat must live in peace," he thought. Suddenly, he heard the bulbul sing. Whenever that bird sang in the morning, Umoren looked through the holes between the walls and the roof to determine if it was daylight yet. This day he knew the weather promised to be fine. He observed that as the sun rose its light began to warm the land, casting its radiance down, turning the eastern horizon into a fiery blaze. He heard more birds begin to sing. To him everything looked as if it were full summer. But it was not summer. "Summer does not come with a torrential rain," he said. He remembered seeing children the day before, hunting bees and butterflies, attracted by the fragrant smell of flowers. "Don't destroy them," he had said to them. He hated seeing these poor insects destroyed.

It was a beautiful world, a world in whose spell

the Chief was caught up. Elevated in spirit, he stretched himself outside his home. During the walk he took along his one-quarter mile lane, he felt the fresh morning air, purified by the midnight showers. He sat under a walnut tree, on one of its beautiful buttress roots. Now, he stood up, raised his hands, and stretched his body, leaning backwards. "What's today?" he asked himself. He counted back three days to the day the council met informally. "Surely, today is Obo," he said. He called his servants to start cleaning his yard and his long lane. He guessed his friends would call in to see him; the day was a very important market day in Asatong Nsit. With the promise of good weather, he expected as many people to attend the market as they would at Christmas time.

This particular Obo, the Chief had planned to counsel with Min Nde and John Wat. Min Nde arrived first. After exchanging formal greetings, he and the Chief took a few steps forward and sat on the trunk of a fallen tree. The Chief took out his snuffbox, opened it, and gave it to Min. They watched three young boys cleaning up the Chief's compound.

"Your compound is very nice," Min said.

"Yes, I always keep it clean," the Chief said with pride.

"That is John turning the corner," Min told the

Chief. The Chief looked, and saw a figure on a bicycle approaching.

"There he is," the Chief said to Min. John got off his Raleigh sports bicycle. John stretched his two hands out to the Chief. With the Chief's right hand in his two palms, John completed the traditional greeting by bowing to him. The Chief said, "Thank you, my son." He returned with his two visitors to his house for entertainment. He ordered the oldest of the three boys to leave the cleaning to the others and go with him. He made the two men sit together in the hall.

"Bring some palm wine, boy," he ordered. In a few minutes the boy returned with a jug of palm wine, and set it on the table in the center of the hall. He left and came in again with two tumblers and a cowhorn, some kola, and alligator pepper. Min and John picked up the tumblers; the Chief picked up the cowhorn, poured the palm wine into it, and drank it.

"Do you have any 'illicit'?" Min asked the Chief.

"Certainly I have some," he told him. "Boy," he called his servant, "go back and bring a bottle of gin." The boy brought him the drink.

"Any soft drink, Chief?" John asked.

"Which one in particular?" the Chief asked.

"Seven Up, please," John said. The Chief asked

the boy to give John a bottle of Seven Up. They dipped their hands in a common plate of kolanuts.

"How's your business coming up?" the Chief asked Min.

"Pretty good. It's coming up real good," Min replied, then took a gulp of his drink. His right leg crossed over the left, holding his right ankle with his left hand, he leaned backward against his chair.

"You need to come to my store one of these days," Min invited the Chief informally.

"I will. Certainly, one of these days," the Chief assured him. The Chief noticed that John only listened to them, did not join their conversation.

"How are you doing at Calabar?" the Chief asked him.

"It's pretty good there Chief," he responded. The Chief noticed Min turned his face away from John.

"My good friends, my duty as your traditional leader is to see that you live in peace, everybody in this community."

"I'm not a trouble-monger," Min defended himself.

"I am glad you aren't," the Chief said. He turned to John. John smiled before he talked.

"Chief, I'm peace-loving. I'm not against any person. But if anybody stands in my way, I shall act."

Immediately, Min got up from his seat and sat on the chair opposite John.

"Both of you want peace. You both share my own idea that there should be peace in the community." He looked at his two visitors. Min nodded his head, indicating his agreement. John stared at him.

"To be more pointed, let me ask you: Why can't both of you get along with each other?"

He looked at Min. Min rubbed his hands as if he were cleaning some dirt from them. Then he said, "In this struggle, I am not considering my own interests, but those of others in this community. This young Mr. Wat is threatening progress in this community, and even your position as our future leader."

John Wat stood up, adjusted the sleeves of his shirt, and told the Chief he was going home.

"And why?" the Chief asked him.

"With all respect, Chief, I don't want to receive such a frontal attack from Mr. Min Nde. He has no right to brand me a conspirator, and say I'm attempting to bring about economic failure for the community."

"This is the more reason you should be patient with me for a while," the Chief pleaded with him.

"To continue here to be insulted by Min's blunt assault on me?"

"No, we are not for that," the Chief assured him.

"But it's only in your presence that he can attack me so blatantly and get away with it."

"I'll hold my own no matter where," Min cut in.

"You won't because you know. . . " John said.

"I know what?"

"My strong muscles, don't you?" John replied. The Chief stood between the two enemies. The Chief knew it was a taboo for any of his people to physically assault him. How could they struggle with the annointed ruler, their gods' representative among men? That would be to sin against their ancestors, whose wrath none of the villagers could stand. Even the richest ambrosia would not pacify them. Chief Umoren was confident that Min and Wat would not fight in his presence for the simple reason that they might hit him in error.

Then, turning to the Chief, Min said, "Please Chief, see that John does not bring foreign people, intruders, and enemies of freedom into this community."

The Chief raised his head and said to him, "We will find a peaceful solution to this problem." Then Min said goodbye to the Chief and departed.

John told the Chief his people would not intrude in local affairs, that they were friendly and they would, above all, recognize Umoren's chieftaincy and enhance it.

"These are the good points about your business. Are there no bad ones?" the Chief wanted to know. John told him that the bad side of it was Min's importance in the community would diminish.

"In what ways?" the Chief asked. John told him his rival shop would cause prices of goods to go down, so that Min would have to give up the excessive profits he had been making. There would be better market terms for customers; they would be able to return the products that failed to satisfy them and get back their money.

"I believe most of my councilors will like your plan. Don't you think so?"

"I hope they will," John responded.

"John," he said, "I hope you know how much I love you," Umoren added, looking at him. John nodded his head, smiling. "Let me stress that the crisis should be settled by my court through discussion, not by violence." The Chief paused, looked at John, and patted him on the back.

John nodded his head again and said, "That is fine with me."

The Chief, pleased with John's words, said, "Go home and remain peaceful. And be assured my council will take up the matter as soon as possible." John assured him he would not resort to violence, and departed.

When the day broke, Chief Umoren was the first in his family to wake up. He made a little fire on the veranda, sat down, and warmed himself. He listened to the early morning songs of the birds. One of them had nested beneath the roof at the gable end of his house. Whenever it came down from its nest, Chief Umoren fed it with some corn seeds. This morning the bird sang, but the Chief knew it would come out for food only in the afternoon.

The next morning sound he enjoyed was his fowls. "That must come from my big rooster," he said when he heard the crowing. His big rooster usually made a deep, mellow sound. His wife's rooster sounded differently when it crew, a dry, shrill sound. The Chief had bought his rooster from the government extension farm, twenty miles away. He expected to have a generation of bigger fowls from that one English rooster. He would have a lot of money at Christmas when big fowls were often in great demand. He fed his rooster morning, afternoon, and evening. He did not care to feed his small native fowls, which he allowed free range, letting them fend for themselves.

When his first wife woke up, he heard her sing one of the Anglican tunes as she cleaned her backyard. She was singing it when she came from the backyard to say good morning to him. He returned her greeting

and added, "Is it Church service time already?"

He tried to look unruffled when she laughed and went away. He looked at her as she went to the kitchen area. Even after she was completely out of sight, he continued looking in that direction for some minutes. Then he looked down and said, "I must stop it before it is too late." He called his wife back from the backyard. When she reappeared, he told her to meet him in his parlor with Ini. When they came out and sat before him, he listened carefully as his wife suggested that her son should go back and put on his new short sleeve shirt in case other people came in to see the Chief. When Ini wanted to do so, his father told him to hold on. "We don't have much time," he said. "This is supposed to be a family thing," he added. Ini, who had already stood up, sat down.

"Listen, my son," the Chief said to him.

"What is it, Father?" Ini asked him. The Chief looked at his wife instead, noticed she was already frowning.

"You must keep your face straight," he ordered. "You and I have a duty toward Ini's future well-being."

"I'm not opposing you in any way," she pleaded with him. Then he returned to Ini, looking at him. "My dear son," he said to him. "I am worried about you."

"You don't have to, my Father," Ini told him. "I'm not a boy. I can take care of myself."

"So, I'm no longer your father?"

"That's not what I mean, Father."

"What do you mean, Ini?"

"That you are my father, but I have the freedom to do things my own way."

"You do not. My father never allowed me such freedom. I'm glad he didn't. As the leader of my people, I cannot have a prodigal son to defile the traditions of our beloved ancestors. What a shame!"

Ini looked at him and said, "Father, what do you want me to do?" The Chief looked at his wife before he returned to Ini. "A good question," he said. "Have no dealing with the Anglican Church. Then, consider marriage seriously."

"I am in favor of marriage," Ini said.

"And in favor of the Anglican Church too?"

"Yes," he said.

"Damn it! That can't be!" the anguished Chief said.

"I do not deserve all this." Ini almost wept.

"You bring unrest to this family," his father said.

"Father, I do not offend you, I'm convinced."

"You can't have your way, Ini, while I'm living."

"Why?" Ini asked him.

"That is evil," his father told him.

"It is a pity that our home is now a hell for me. I shall go back to Lagos since I can't spend my one month leave with my beloved but not loving parents." His mother immediately got up and knelt before Ini, pleading that he should not leave his father's house for good.

"It would be shameful for you to lose your dear son," his wife said. "How would you explain it to the villagers when they will ask you of Ini?" she asked him. Turning to Ini, she said, "You can't leave us, Ini! This is your father; this is your home. It's just a disagreement between father and son. The present temper will cool down with time."

There was apparent calm. The Chief was not ready to compromise his views with those of Ini. Not at this point. "How can I give in to my son? He knows little about this life we live," the Chief said. While Ini was sitting quietly, looking at his mother, the Chief looked at them, one after the other. He wanted to read a message from their facial expressions, but found only the naked expression of sadness. Fixing his eyes on Ini, he said, "If you disagree with me and our beloved ancestors I represent, then you and your mother must leave my house. How can you, with all

your unmitigated stubbornness, expect to have your birthright and your right of inheritance in this family? Do you think you will attend my funeral? If you had a son as bad as you are, would you let him?"

"You can't say this!" his wife pleaded with him, crying so loud that her daughter and his other wives came in from the backyard, joined with Ini's mother to plead with father and son.

Ini stood up and went out to the veranda. His father followed him there, saying, "You must give up your evil ways! You must not bring disaster into this family, into this village!" Ini stepped off the veranda.

"Where are you going, Ini?" Umoren asked.

"Father, I must have fresh air," Ini told him. Umoren stood there with his wives and daughter. Leaning on the pillar, he watched his son stroll along the long lane. He heard Ini's mother say, "I wish he had his breakfast." His wives and daughter returned to the backyard and the Chief went back to warm himself by the fire.

In the afternoon, Missionary Westgarth and Deacon Fred arrived at Umoren's compound. The Chief remembered the first time the missionary visited his house to ask him for permission to preach the Gospel in the village. This time, the Chief suspected what

these churchmen were looking for in his house. He began to feel uncomfortable before his two uninvited guests.

"Peace be with you, Chief," Deacon Fred greeted him. The missionary also greeted him.

"Have I committed an offence?" the Chief asked them, trying to smile. Deacon Fred laughed and told him there was nothing to worry about, that the missionary only had something to say to him.

"Go ahead," the Chief responded.

"Thank you very much Chief for letting me speak with you. I came here to bring peace to your family," the missionary said. He could hear the ticking of the missionary's wristwatch. He said nothing; his visitors looked at him. After another minute, the missionary asked the Chief to be peaceful with Ini and his mother.

"You are the one causing the trouble in my house."

"We are for peace, Chief." Deacon Fred repeated their mission to the Chief's family.

"You aren't for peace," the Chief told him. "Your mission here is to rob me of my son and so destroy my gods."

"We won't," Deacon Fred argued. He told him that Ini would remain his son, even after his baptism.

"How about marriage? How about my ancestors?"

"Ini is free to marry," the deacon assured him.

"Yes, but only one wife, for each husband," the missionary said.

"But what about my ancestors? You have not answered this question. Have you?"

"Those are dead and gone. There is nothing Ini can do for them now. 'Let the dead bury their dead,'" the missionary asserted.

"We want to have from you the assurance that there will be peace in this family," the deacon said to him. The missionary told the Chief that Ini's association with the Church would later benefit the family. He further said that to maintain peace in the family was the only way Chief Umoren could keep his family together.

Ini came from the backyard to shake hands with the two churchmen. The Chief watched him chatting freely with them.

"Let me think about your request for a while," the Chief told them. He watched them go outside, Ini following. He sat quietly for a while, then started talking to himself. "To make peace with Ini? That means to give in to his ways? Peace, at what cost? If your baptism won't cause my son to leave me and forsake his ancestors, his root, I may give in. If Ini won't turn around to destroy my gods, perhaps I may

not quarrel over his baptism," he whispered to himself.

As Ini's mother came from the women's quarters, she heard her husband. Seeing no other person with him, she asked, "Are you talking to me, please?"

"No, I'm thinking out something," he told her. "Go back to your quarters. Gentlemen are here." She returned immediately to the other women.

The churchmen met with the Chief before they departed. When they returned to the parlor where he sat, he greeted them. He knew the white man was eager to have Ini baptized, and he felt he might let him do it. Chief Umoren was pleased to learn from the missionary that his son would not be ordained a priest. After his baptism, he would be nominated one of those to take care of the church and church property: land, a few elementary schools, bookshops, dispensaries, and a hospital. The Chief also learned that to become a member of the board of trustees for the Anglican Church, Ini had to be baptized, remain a member in full standing, and study his Bible. A friendly atmosphere began to prevail between the Chief and the missionary. The missionary looked at his wristwatch, then told the Chief they had to go back to the mission house in order to attend a meeting of the church elders. Before they departed, the missionary told him they would like to visit him again.

Chief Umoren remained quiet for a while after the two churchmen had left him. When Ini's mother came to the parlor, she found him sitting on his cane chair, his elbows bent, resting on his knees, his chin resting on his open palms. She asked him why he was looking so sad. "Are you feeling unwell?"

"I am feeling well," he said.

"What's worrying you. Please?" she insisted.

"I am remembering those good days when I had the feeling that my son would be one I would be proud of. Don't you remember those days when Ini turned out more industrious than those other boys his age? He used to get up earlier than any other person in this family except the older women. He would clean up this yard with the help of other boys. He would often feed the animals without my telling him to do so. He was a good boy. What I now see is nothing like my Ini of those days. He neither has any time for me nor listens to me at all. Do you see?"

"I think Ini loves you the more even now. Who would not be proud of a father such as you are, the chief of this community? Remember that Ini is just maturing into manhood, so don't expect him to be the same person he was thirteen years ago."

"You help to spoil my son. You!" he told her.

"How?" she asked.

"Instead of blaming him for what he does wrong, you always take his side against me."

"That isn't so. All my concern is to see that you are not too severe in your attempt at correcting him." The Chief looked at her.

"I am not severe with my beloved son," he told her.

His wife looked at him and said, "Please, don't be." Then she returned to the backyard.

About ten o'clock that morning, Min called in to see the Chief. He found him sitting alone, outside his veranda, by a low burning fire. Min greeted him.

"Can I hold a brief discussion with you, Chief?"

"Are you in a hurry?" the Chief asked him.

"Yes. I need to get back as quickly as possible to my shop."

"Just a minute, I'll be with you." He put some wood into the fire and sneezed. Holding a pinch of snuff in his left hand, he said, "Yes, go ahead."

Min told him two girls, Joy and Alice, had behaved in a manner contrary to the community's accepted standard. Their conduct had caused many in the community to doubt if there were still law and order and proper behavior of the people. He told the Chief that the Saturday before, from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m., the two girls attended a dance where popular music, imported

from Calabar, was played. He hinted that John might have supplied the Western records. He told the Chief that, besides attending the dance, the girls strolled in short pants in the village square on Sunday afternoon. "That wasn't proper outdoor dress, was it?" Min looked at the Chief, but the Chief made no response, not even nodding his head. Min persisted: "Many of the parents in this community are concerned over the moral behavior of their daughters. In light of this, I urge you to treat the matter seriously. Otherwise you may fall into disfavor with even your strongest supporters."

"I will try my best," the Chief assured him. Then Min departed.

The next day, John Wat called in to see the Chief in the morning. He met him in his parlor, relaxing in his rocking chair. Ini came out of his room and joined them. Chief Umoren watched the two young men embrace.

"How is life in Lagos?" John asked Ini.

"Life is very fast over there. Moreover, everybody talks politics," Ini told him.

"How about life in Calabar?" Ini asked John.

"There is nothing there to compare with life in Lagos," John replied.

"But it's better in Calabar than in this village. Isn't it?" Ini asked. His father cleared his throat.

The two young men stopped talking, but the Chief did not say anything. After a minute, they resumed their conversation.

"You are quite correct," John said. "Calabar and Lagos are both capital cities, but the difference is that Lagos, being our national capital, is more cosmopolitan than Calabar, our provincial headquarters. Lagos is more Western than Calabar," John added. Ini told John about the Lagos go-slow.

"Sometimes it takes me one hour to drive five miles from our bank to my apartment. Sometimes you may be robbed at gun point if the go-slow suddenly comes to a stand-still. Car theft is rampant," Ini said. The Chief cleared his throat again. The two men stopped talking and looked at him.

"Why can't you quit working in that kind of a city?" his father asked. Ini looked at him, but said nothing.

"Chief, that's not how to do it," John said to him.

"Tell me how, will you?"

"All he can do is to hope that bad things won't happen to him. Once overwhelmed with fear, you become impotent. When we fly, we do not expect the plane carrying us to crash. When our fathers climb palm trees to tap the wine, they do not expect to slip off

the trunk. We prefer to be optimistic about our future, though disaster may unfortunately come our way anyway. What Ini must do is to hope to be safe in Lagos. In that way, he can live without fear of disaster hovering about him."

"You may be right, but, still, very often the wind of mishap won't blow into the sea or to the far beyond as we would want it, but may blow instead on our loved ones. So, to only hope doesn't help in the circumstance; therefore, to act, to flee such a city, is sensible," the Chief told him.

"That's true Chief. But there must be people to live in the big city, and live freely. To live there without fear is to hope the ills of city life won't come your way," John said. He told Ini of his dream, to bring a British firm to the village.

"What's the name of your company?" Ini asked.

"It is the United African Company, the British commercial firm based in Calabar."

"That sounds like an African indigenous company," Ini told him.

"No. I think the name African simply refers to the area where the company operates. There may be a united European or Asian company as well," John said.

"I think it's a good idea. Where will the shop be situated?" Ini asked.

"The village council will have to decide that. Such details are not yet worked out. Why not consider bringing a branch of your bank here?" John asked.

"That is a good idea. I never thought about that," Chief Umoren said.

"That is very impossible," Ini told John.

"Why? You are one of the senior service personnel there. You are in a position to influence decisions, aren't you?" John asked.

"Don't forget ours is not a private commercial bank. It does not belong to a commercial company either. It is a Federal Government institution for national fiscal control and research. Moreover, Government does not make risky enterprising adventures. Besides, our community may be suited for a shop, but it is too small for a bank," Ini told him.

"Are you saying banking enterprises would not thrive in this vicinity?" John asked.

"I don't think it would," Ini said.

"But it would in the far away Lagos, won't it?" his father asked, looking him in the face, his lips tight. Ini looked down, saying nothing. There was two minutes' silence in the big hall. John looked at the Chief, but Umoren looked only at his son.

"Chief, I appreciate the way you are supporting my plan to open a UAC shop in this community," John said.

"I should support you. We want all our sons to come home. We need you here."

"I am proud of you, Chief. You are progressive and enlightened."

"Thank you," the Chief responded.

"Did you discuss my plan with the four members of your council? You told me you would," John enquired.

"No, not yet. Personally, I welcome the idea of having a shop here. I am confident my four strong men will support your plan," the Chief said.

Ini told John he would like to see the shop opened in the village as quickly as possible. John thanked the Chief for his encouragement and departed with Ini escorting him. As the Chief watched him from his veranda, he noticed John had not gone far when he stopped to meet two boys and two girls strolling from the village square, approaching his court.

"Those two girls," the Chief said. "I can tell them to inform their parents to come and see me. Alice and Joy," the Chief said, watching. He decided to send for their parents through village messenger. "That will make them more worried about what the problem is." He stepped off his veranda and sat down on the trunk of a fallen coconut tree rolled a few inches into the low bush bordering his lane. John and the teenagers were chatting and laughing. With his

Raleigh sports bicycle by his side, John turned on his portable radio. Ini and the four teenagers gathered around him to listen to the BBC news.

"More volume please," the Chief heard one of the boys request. He could hear the news gathered around the world: risings in Northern Ireland, the Congo crisis, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

"Can we have some Congo music please?" one of the girls asked.

"Away with your noise!" the Chief said. They did not hear him at that distance. The Chief strolled back to his house. He sent one of his servants to tell the village messenger to come and see him.

At ten in the morning, the sixteen elder statesmen of the community met at Chief Umoren's. The first case on the agenda concerned the two teenage girls, Alice and Joy, accused of wearing racing shorts in their leisure hours in the village square. The girls appeared before the Chief and his men.

"Have you ever run away from your parents' homes?" one of the councilors, Udo Inyang, asked.

"Yes. Only once, and not a whole day though. Just last Saturday, from ten in the morning till five in the evening," Alice answered.

"How about you, Joy?"

"I went with my friend, Alice."

"Where did you go to?" the councilor asked again.

"We had a Pop Music dance party to celebrate John Wat's birthday," Alice told the councilor.

"What is a party for a birthday? Is that important?" the councilor said.

"John Wat must quit partying for his birthday in this village. Once a person was born, there is no need to remember when he was born. We rather should remember when a person died, if he was a useful member of the society. John is not yet dead, and we are not sure anybody will care to remember his death if he continues doing things the way he does now. This John is turning things upside down," Mkpa Ifia, the Chief's right hand man, said.

"When we celebrate the anniversary of his death, John will not join with us. A birthday affords him a unique occasion for his sharing in the celebration involving his life," Emem Inim, a councilor and friend of John, responded. Uko Ndo, one of the Chief's men, told them they were getting to something else, urging that they should first treat the cases of the defaulters before them. They abandoned discussing John Wat and turned their attention to the girls. The councilors looked at Chief Umoren. For a few seconds, no one said anything. The two girls folded their hands behind them, looking down, wriggling their toes.

"Look up! You bad eggs, spoiling other girls!" the spokesman, Udo Inyang, told them.

"Shame on you, foolish importers of alien culture!" Uko Ndo, another councilor, rebuked them.

"You who incite our young men into committing rape!" another councilor, Abiakmo, remarked. Alice blushed, Joy wept.

Chief Umoren said, "My daughters, be good girls," and handed them back to their parents. Their movements were restricted to their parents' homes for two weeks. Their parents were to watch them strictly and report their general behavior to the Chief during this period of confinement. If their conduct improved, their parents, with the consent of the Chief, could allow them to go out and mix with other girls in the community.

The next case concerned a teenage boy, Etim. Etim was brought up before the council.

"Did you say you would kill your father?" the Chief questioned Etim.

"Yes, Chief."

"Why?"

"Because he almost beats me to death, especially when he is drunk. He cares nothing about my life. Moreover, I'll be nineteen next month."

"Your way is evil," the Chief told him.

"Your age! That's nothing important in this case. You've indeed threatened patricide!" Udo Inyang told the boy.

Chief Umoren passed his verdict on the boy. Etim was to move out of his father's compound to a relative of his who lived on the other side of the village. He was also conscripted into the community's band of guardsmen, whose duty entailed shutting up water wells at night, watching over homes, and guarding road junctions and other strategic locations at night or during day in an emergency. He was to remain in the service for three months.

Having made the pronouncement, the Chief resumed his seat. He sat on his stool, his hands resting on the armrests. His body was very erect, chest out, his neck straight. The applause from his council brightened his eyes.

"That was a good judgement," Asuquo Ita, one of his strongest supporters, told him, shaking hands with him.

"Live long, Akpa Umoren!" Mkpa Ifia shouted. Chief Umoren stood up. He appeared taller than his five feet six inches. His men also stood up. He signalled for silence and asked his deputy, Mkpa Ifia, to dismiss the meeting. Mkpa Ifia invoked the blessings of his ancestors upon the Chief, his deputies, and the people. Everyone retired.

At dawn, Chief Umoren woke up early to watch his son prepare to return to his work in Lagos. "Why are you in such a big hurry? You have enough time." He urged his son to slow down.

"Why didn't you wake me up when you got up?" Ini asked. Their conversation caused Ini's mother to wake up. She found Ini's belongings already set together on his bed. She reminded her son he had missed his new black T-shirt. Chief Umoren, hearing that, looked at her and said, "He hasn't. That one remains here for me!" Ini laughed. His mother apologized to his father for being inquisitive. Ini busied himself, packing his clothes into his suitcase; he placed his comb and stationery in his briefcase. He looked at his wrist-watch; it was 5 a.m. He picked up his luggage, stood up, looked at his parents, and said goodbye to his father. Turning to his mother, he said goodbye, smiling. His mother told him to come and visit again soon. The Chief told her to let him go, he must not be late.

Two days had passed since Ini left for Lagos. When it was time to go to bed, Chief Umoren called his wife to the room where Ini had stayed. He discussed his intention to contract a marriage engagement for their son. "Let us give our son a big surprise. I hope he is ready for it," he said to her.

"Ini never objected one moment to marrying a wife,"

she responded. The Chief then asked his wife to suggest a possible bride-to-be. "How about Edem's daughter?" she said.

"A definite No. Edem's father was known to have had sticky hands when he was a minor. Think of another," he told her.

"Nta's first daughter immediately comes to my mind," she suggested.

"Cast her off. Her mother had very many boyfriends before she finally got attached to Nta. Also she once gave birth to twins. Daughters follow their mothers' steps. Any other?"

"I can't think of any right now," she told him.

"My choice is Ene's daughter. How about that?" He looked at her, smiling, nodding his head.

"The girl is too skinny. Our women will not consider her a suitable match for my son."

"She will gain weight during her fattening ceremony after her first childbirth, won't she?" her husband asked, his lips tight.

"She may, and she may not. Even if she does, it would take much of our effort to make her gain 5 lbs. in one month. What's wrong if we choose a girl who won't give us that much trouble?" his wife argued.

"What's wrong if we choose Ene's daughter where we can find no other? I am satisfied with her family's

history: her mother is hardworking, her father, a man of high morality. She's a good girl. Don't you think so? he asked her.

"She is acceptable to me," she said.

"Fine," he said, nodding his head. "I'll inform my friend Ene of our intention."

"Maybe the girl has already been engaged?" his wife said.

"No. Edet Inuen, Ene's neighbor, a good friend of mine, told me many suitors had shown up there, but her father refused to give her up to any so far. That's why I have to act quickly. Ene will accept our family. I am sure of that. He likes my son, no doubt. As soon as I receive favorable words from Ene, we'll visit his family. Before Christmas, we will find a wife for Ini. That's my hope!" Chief Umoren said.

"Ini must get married as soon as possible," he told himself when he recalled his meeting with his wife the previous evening. "Ini must marry to strengthen his social standing in the community, and to continue our line when I'm gone." To communicate his plan to his son, Chief Umoren got his nephew, Sunday, to write a letter to Lagos for him.

While Chief Umoren waited for a reply to his letter, a visitor, Ene's neighbor Edet Imuen, arrived conveying a message from Ene, Ini's prospective father-in-law.

Edet Inuem was an old friend, once a member of the team that performed one of the community's most famous cultural dances, the Oyo. When modern dances sprang up like mushrooms, the technique of Oyo fell into desuetude. One group of the Oyo Dance, the Young People, was to stage the ceremony in three days' time in Chief Umoren's village square. Chief Umoren and Edet Inuen loved to watch the young people dance the Oyo. Both agreed that Oyo danced by the young people was different from the one they organized when they were young. Both noticed that more and more brass instruments were slowly replacing the locally made wooden ones. Drums still played a significant part of the music but, as the two friends observed, some were made of brass and leather instead of wood and leather.

The morning was bright and gay the day the young people staged the Oyo Dance in Chief Umoren's village. Bright as the morning was, the villagers did not want to take it for granted. They did not want nature to trick them. Chief Umoren reminded them that "morning does not tell the day." During March and April, a heavy downpour was common in the district. The previous day, it had rained torrentially. About two o'clock in the afternoon, with no visible rain clouds in the sky, it rained suddenly, lasting for fifteen minutes. If it rained again the day Oyo was staged, the dancers and

spectators would have to take shelter, perhaps in the nearby Anglican Church or in the community hall a few yards from the square. Usually, when such afternoon rains fell, the sun continued to shine brightly, the temperature rising as the ground dried up immediately after the rain stopped. The scattered dancers and musicians would regroup and take up their performance. That was what Chief Umoren's deputies told him when he asked them that morning the best way to prepare for the players' and spectators' comfort. The Chief, not satisfied with their solution to the weather problem, suggested the hiring of the local rain doctor, Udo Idip.

Chief Umoren sent for him, and Udo Idip arrived immediately. He was forty-five, with a small round head stuck on a huge body. With prominent eyes and a protruding abdomen, he started to sing and jump on his tiny, short, knock-kneed legs. By ten in the morning, two hours after Udo Idip arrived, rain-bearing clouds were sailing low in the sky. Chief Umoren was worried, Udo Idip looked at the Chief; the Chief looked at him. Both left the square, hurrying back to the Chief's home. They sat in the hall where wine was usually served.

The Chief asked his second wife to serve the rain doctor gin, kolanut, and alligator pepper. His wife could not find the pepper. The Chief warmed himself by the fire. He turned right, throwing his right hand

backward, then crossed his left leg over the right. In that position, he swung himself to the right, where his left hand caught hold of the pillar that supported the roof, and then he was immediately up on his feet. His right hand reached for the staff he had placed close to the pillar. His young nephew called this staff Grand-father's third-leg. With his staff, he quickly made his way to a small calabash suspended under the roof of his sleeping room. The calabash was powdered brown by constant smoke from fires in the room on cold nights.

He took out one dried pepper and brought it to Udo Idip. He broke open the fruit, took a few seeds, and chewed. He cleared his throat, his mouth open; tear-drops trickled down the grooves on both sides of his cheeks, merging in his bearded chin before finally drop-ping on his loincloth. Then the Chief asked Udo Idip how much his services would cost. They bargained for a few minutes before they came to fifteen shillings. What-ever the cost, the villagers were ready to pay. The two men then left for the village square.

The young Oyo dancers had already started. The drummers used rattles and drums of different sizes to produce the necessary music. Each dancer appeared in costume: a decorated T-shirt and a long flowing loin-cloth, six yards in length, a one-yard length of yellow cloth tied on the upper left arm, a blue ribbon round

the head, and a bunch of rattles worn on the right ankle. The dancers divided themselves into two teams. Each of the two teams had a leader, usually male, and an assistant, sometimes female.

Chief Umoren keenly watched the particular team on which Ene's daughter was an assistant. The leader in that team blew his whistle to get his members ready. Ene's daughter laughed and quickly ran to take her position at the rear. A long blast on a whistle was followed by a short one. The leader started the song, and his team immediately picked it up. The other team repeated the same song while Ene's daughter's team listened, and when her team sang, the other team listened. This time, the two leaders blew their whistles simultaneously. The teams formed a semi-circle, so that the two assistants and the two leaders faced each other.

Then again a long blast of the whistle was followed by a short one. The assistants positioned themselves at the center of the circle and immediately started a song, one team singing, the other dancing. At times, both teams remained silent except for the drumming and whistling. Then the four team leaders whistled continuously for several seconds just at the time the beating of the drums gathered momentum. The dancers appeared to be flying in their movements, as if they were free of

the earth they danced on.

The teams extended the circle by stretching their hands sideways, middle fingers barely touching. The four leaders took their positions again in the center to demonstrate the way they wanted their teams to dance. There was a short whistle blast followed by a long one, and all the dancers put one foot forward. Bending forward at the same time, they heaved their trunks, as if they were writhing snakes.

Chief Umoren was impressed with the way Ene's daughter danced. He squeezed himself into the center of the teams, watched the four leaders at work, then imitated their steps. As he danced, he waved his ostrich-feather fan in front of the four leaders. He danced, and waved his fan in front, behind, and over Ene's daughter, then went back to his seat. Drumming again gathered momentum, whistles shrilled, applause crowded the air. Ene's daughter took three steps forward, then one backward, displaying the heaving movements of her buttocks, shoulders, and abdomen. When she stood up to sing, her beautiful neck, indicative of her womanhood, was conspicuous. Close to her shoulderplates were two strings of tiny beads. Smooth and swan-like, her neck helped to accentuate her feminine delicacy, and added much to her elevating and dignified personality.

With another blast on the whistles, all the dancers came to a standstill. They bent backward, as far back as each could go. Now the spectators, parents of the dancers, relatives, loved ones, friends, were excited to see who could touch the ground bending backward. A majority of the dancers were successful. Ene's daughter, though not the first to do it, came out well with the last set.

A strong east wind suddenly began to blow; the dance of Oyo was only half over. Chief Umoren looked at the sky, worried.

"Where's the rain doctor?" young men in the crowd shouted. Udo Idip emerged from the low bushes where he had secluded himself to watch the dance. The short-limbed rain doctor, wearing a loincloth, had painted his body, hands, and face with white and black stripes. Facing the west, he uttered some incantations, tiptoeing back and forth; he strutted left and right, singing and whistling. He told his audience to say eyo three times as he threw three eggs into the bush where he had hidden to watch Oyo.

It was not long before the sun reappeared and the clouds sailed away; the wind decreased and died. The dancers continued, and the spectators worried no more about the weather. To the Chief, Udo Idip said, "The business works." The Chief nodded his head. Oyo lasted

till evening, when everybody left and the village square was quiet again.

Early in the morning of the day the village council met again, a majority of the village women, organized by some related to Joy and Alice, assembled at Chief Umoren's court to protest not only his verdict, but also the council's meddling in women's affairs. There was a counter protest by the wives of the Chief, some councilors, and by some conservative women who were bitterly against the importation of alien culture into the village. They said this new breed of girls, such as Joy and Alice, might become mothers who would starve their babies, refusing to breastfeed them. They said that animal milk in place of human milk for the babies was like animal blood in place of human blood for the sick.

At ten that morning, the council met; it was quite unusual for the women to meet with the men. The liberal women wanted the council to recognize their association as a force to reckon with, capable of handling matters that directly affected them. They wanted the verdict against Alice and Joy repealed. The Chief's deputies listened to all the complaints. Then Umoren and his councilors met briefly behind closed doors. When they returned, the Chief's right hand man, Mkpa Ifia, made the following address:

"A salute to the women!
And to the men!
And to the gods of the earth!"

There was quiet. Mkpa Ifia added, "I now turn everything over to your Chief. He has a message for you." He went to his seat as Umoren came forward.

First, he assured the women that a committee would be set soon to look into their grievances, but the verdict, once passed on the girls, could not be revoked. One woman immediately raised her hand and started talking at the same time.

"Hold there!" the Chief's bodyguard, Ime Unung, rebuked her. Other voices were heard here and there.

"Allow her to speak her mind!" a relative of hers shouted.

"Hold your peace!" the guards shouted.

"She must speak out!" a woman answered. The Chief stood for two minutes, listening. The noise continued. He sat down as the noise increased.

"This is not the way your father handled our affairs," one old woman said to him.

"You are not the kind of chief this village needs!" Umoren heard, but he could not see who said it.

Outside and in the hall, women were pitted against their neighbors. Men rolled up the sleeves of their shirts. Everywhere, people howled like dogs at one another. Mkpa Ifia whispered to the Chief. Then the

deputy dismissed the meeting. The guards were there, all ready to make sure the people left the court peacefully.

"Now that they are gone, I know they will not fight. I'm glad they have left my court in peace," the Chief said.

The Chief watched Mkpa Ifia ride his bicycle out of his compound. A few minutes' later, Chief Umoren heard his deputy calling out for help. Taking his staff, the Chief hurried to the scene where he met Joy's fifteen-year-old brother, Ufiong, standing with Mkpa Ifia. A few seconds after the Chief arrived, the boy slipped off and ran away.

"What's this!" the Chief exclaimed, touching Ifia's left cheek to look closely at the wound. "Not very deep," he said.

"It's deep. See the blood flowing continuously," Mkpa Ifia cried.

"It's not deep. Just a slight cut with a torn skin," Umoren said. Don't try to remove the loose skin. I think it will grow back," he advised. He went into the bush to look for plants with the potency to stop bleeding, and numb the skin around a wound. He came out of the bush with the stem of the Sierra Leone bush cane, twisted it, then squeezed out the juice, dripping it into the wound. He watched for a

minute to make sure the treatment worked.

"See, the blood flow slows. Before we get home, it will stop oozing out. Let me have the piece of wood in your hand," the Chief said. Mkpa Ifia gave it to him. "This is what he threw at you," the Chief asked.

"Yes, the thing came flying right at me and hit my cheek. I did not know I was hurt until I saw my blood on the handlebars of my bicycle."

"Don't worry. You'll get better very soon. See, the wound has already formed a clot. That's better now," the Chief assured him.

The Chief sent for five able-bodied men, four of his councilors, Ufiong and his parents to come to his court immediately. Before the Chief and his people, the boy admitted that he wounded Mkpa Ifia to protest the verdict passed on his sister. The Chief and his men decided that the boy be laid flat on the table and given twelve strokes of the cane. The man to do the flogging came up with a cane whip. Those holding the boy down had the additional job of counting aloud so that the caning might be accurately executed.

Several other relatives of the boy came to the court, among them Joy's mother and her four-year-old sister. Ifia's family and his relatives had already queued up behind him. Chief Umoren talked to them.

"This is a minor thing," he said to them. "The wound isn't deep. But the boy must be punished," he said.

"One, and two, and three," the counting started. "And four, and five. . . ," the boy delivered one long shrill scream. "And six, and seven. . . . " The boy pled for leniency, calling for his parents to come to his aid. By the time the eighth stroke was administered, the boy's four-year-old sister began to cry. Then the boy's words were no longer clear; he made croaking sounds, like a cat groaning in pain.

By the time the count reached ten, the boy had surrendered his body and soul to the pain. Only a faint, very faint groaning convinced his relatives he was still alive. His breathing was deep and slow when he received the eleventh stroke. At the count of twelve, the last stroke, most people shed tears. The boy's parents called him a poor tortured creature as they watched him struggle to walk. Released, he wobbled a few yards, but the pain was too severe. He went on all fours for a few minutes. Then he got up and followed his parents home.

Five days after the boy was punished, two Federal Government policemen arrived at the Chief's compound. They greeted the Chief and he gave them seats in his parlor. He told one of his servants to serve the visitors palm wine, soft drinks, and beer.

The Chief sent for the village drumsman to beat the special drum to summon the leading men of the village to his court. While they waited, the policemen drank.

When a majority of the villagers had responded to Umoren's call, the Chief asked Mkpa Ifia to bring the people to order. Mkpa Ifia stood up and addressed them:

"A salute to you."

All the people said, "We are here." Then there was silence. He introduced the two visitors to the people.

"We salute the good Chief. We salute all of you," one policeman said.

The Chief turned to them and said, "What's your mission here? You are never a messenger of goodwill."

"Not always so, Chief," he told him.

"And how about today, what news?" the Chief insisted.

"We are here to serve a summons on the Chief and his councilors. Under this summons, the Chief and his councilors will come to the Sergeant's office in our barracks on the date specified, eight days from today. That boy who was brutally beaten and his parents must also go with the Chief. When our senior man reviews the case, he will decide whether he should dismiss it or pass it over to the magistrate court. Our Sergeant has the power to warn people on first

offenses."

"But we were trying to restore law and order in the village. What's wrong with that?" Mkpa Ifia asked.

"Look here. Our job now is to issue the summons and not to make a decision on the case. Understand, it's a criminal offense to shed someone else's blood," the tall officer said.

"That's exactly what the boy did before we disciplined him," Mkpa said.

"Know that the boy is yet a minor," the tall officer returned.

"We did not shed any blood," Mkpa argued.

"You did. There are open wounds and some blisters on his buttocks and the back of his thighs," the taller policeman said.

"Our senior man has remarked that this village seems to be drifting into chaos. If we confirm his observation in our report, he may order indiscriminate arrests of villagers without delay," the shorter office told them.

"Our respectful Officers, is there no way you can help us?" Usen Ekong asked.

"It's going to be difficult because you people don't show that you care about anything. You are taking the law into your own hands," the short policeman told him.

"We aren't, please," Usen Ekong pleaded.

"It's not just enough talking about it. You must prove to us that you care," the policeman said. Usen Ekong chatted softly with the Chief.

After that, the Chief walked up to the officer and said softly, "I need to speak with you confidentially." They stepped a few yards away from the noisy crowd. They chatted for five minutes, then returned to their seats. Then the Chief whispered to Mkpa Ifia. Mkpa Ifia nodded his head. The Chief stood up, greeted the people, then made the announcement that the men had to subscribe six pence each, the women three pence each to give the officers for cigarettes since they would not be fed as their tribal custom demanded. The officers were pressed for time and said they had to depart immediately for other assignments. Umoren said, "These officers are our guests; our instincts tell us we must show them our usual hospitality, which is a part of our lives." Then he shouted, "Do all agree?"

Before him and his official guests, all responded "Yes." As they said so, the Chief looked at his people from one end of the hall to the other end.

"Your _ya_ wasn't loud enough, and so, not quite convincing that you welcome my suggestion," he said, looking at them. He went on, "Are we not known to

have a high degree of hospitality? Have we ever allowed a guest under our roof to depart with an empty stomach? What a bad image of ourselves we create through the slightest display of bad behavior! Is this the way our fathers of blessed memory treated their guests? Why should some of us look down while saying _ya_? Can we say _ya_ loud enough, looking down? If you want to say _ya_, let me hear you once more!" He paused, and the people said _ya_, so thundering and so long, that it took Umoren and his aides several minutes to quiet the people again. When he finally succeeded in getting the people to maintain quiet, he said, "That was good. You are now in your fathers' spirit. I'm proud to be your Chief." He sat down. Mkpa Ifia stood up and dismissed the meeting. The officers and the villagers departed.

Before the Chief and his men went to Uyo in response to the summons the two policemen issued to them, Chief Umoren met with the village treasurer and collected the money his people donated for the officers' cigarettes. The Chief felt satisfied in the way he had handled the business of hospitality. When he, the councilors, the boy, and his parents got to Uyo, the police sergeant they were to meet referred them to the District Officer, about three blocks away. The officer accused the Chief and his councilors of taking the law into their hands. The Chief defended himself and

his men by saying that they were attempting to bring the rule of law into the community. During a fifteen minute coffee break, the Chief and his councilors had the chance to chat with the District Officer's aide.

"The D.O. isn't harsh with you," the aide told them.

"Can you convince him that we are good people, law-abiding, and hospitable?" the Chief requested. The District Officer's aide assured them of success, that his superior was bound to change his mind later. After the short break, the Chief and his councilors appeared again before the District Officer. The District Officer then warned them against further acts of violence and brutal treatment which, he told them, were a common practice in the village. He ordered the village council to pay the boy five pounds sterling for his hospitalization due to the injuries he sustained when the Chief ordered his beating.

"Our honorable officer, help us maintain order in the village, please. If we pay the five pounds, we are creating a precedent of paying offenders to commit more crimes in our village," Umoren pleaded.

"The five pounds is not enough," the boy's father said.

"See how you treated my son, as if he were your slave," his mother said.

"Officer, for the sake of order and for the interest of the villagers, do not levy any fine on us," Asuquo Ita said.

"If this district council denies us fair treatment, then we will go to the Magistrate's Court for justice. If we fail there, we go to the High Court. If that too fails us, we go to the Appeals Court, if necessary, to the Supreme Court," the boy's father said.

"Officer, I do not see how we will pay this fine, then hope to be able to maintain order as village leaders," Mkpa Ifia said.

"The fine, yes, there is much more to it than mere dishing out of money," Ime Unung said.

"You have caused substantial damage to the boy. The law requires you make restitution. If doing what the law requires motivates others to commit crimes, bring such persons to me. We will provide measures for deterence," the District Officer assured them. The Chief did not look at him. He looked at the parents of the boy, his lips tight, frowning. Then the District Officer, raising his voice, said, "Let me remind all of you that the legal system the country inherited from the British administration supercedes native jurisprudence. Thus, you must streamline your local ways and method of judging offenders and administering punishment to meet the requirements of

our modern legal system."

When the meeting came to a close, the aide met with the Chief. He said, "Remember, our people say a 'day's rain, however heavy, is never enough for the crops severely scorched by long drought'. You need to come back and see us." But the Chief and his men returned home, frowning and complaining. "Why should we continue with this foreign rule?" they asked each other.

A month after Chief Umoren had written his son in Lagos, the Chief's nephew returned from the District School, carrying a letter from Ini. District School was very famous, the oldest in the vicinity, not only a learning center and a civic center, but also a post office.

"Uncle, here's a letter for you, from Ini," Sunday said. His uncle told him to read the letter. The boy opened it with his pencil, the Chief watching eagerly. Sunday took time to read it through before translating it into Efik.

"Is this like his last letter?" his uncle asked.

"How, uncle?"

"Are those words back there again," the Chief asked.

"Oh, you mean _television_, and _refrigerator_, and _air_ _condition_?"

"Were those the words that bothered you last time?" Umoren asked him.

"Yes, but they aren't here in this letter," the boy said.

"Did you ask your teacher for their exact Efik equivalents?" the Chief asked.

"Yes, but he did not know either."

"Do you say your teacher did not know those words my son knows?" the Chief was surprised.

"No. He told me there are no Efik words for them."

"Why then did Ini write them to me? When sending him a reply to this letter, I shall tell him never to write me again in English. Can you read the letter?"

"Just a few minutes, I'll finish translating, then I'll read it to you. Uncle, when I get to Standard Four next year, perhaps I'll no longer need a dictionary to translate Ini's letter to you. This one, I think, is quite easy. Here we go, uncle." Sunday read to him in Efik:

13 Bassie Ogambi Street
Suru-Lere
Lagos
August 5, 1966

My dear Father,

I have got your letter. I do not plan to marry right now. We shall consider that when next we meet.

I shall visit soon.

I hope everyone is faring well.

I am, your loving son,

Joseph

Chief Umoren asked his nephew to read the letter again, much more slowly this time. Again, he asked him to repeat exactly the second sentence, and as the boy did so, he stopped him at the word marry.

"That isn't the end of the sentence," his nephew told him.

"Stop there," Umoren said. He looked down for a moment, his head in his palms, elbows resting on his knees, feet drawn together, in a crouch. "Read that again slowly," he said, still with his head between his hands. As his nephew read the second sentence, the Chief repeated word for word. As they neared the end of the sentence, the Chief raised his voice, at I, not, and marry.

"What does he say his name is? Will you read the last sentence again to me?"

"I am, your loving son, Joseph."

"Who?" Umoren asked his nephew.

"Joseph," the boy said.

"You can go, my boy," he said to Sunday as the boy handed the letter to him. He looked at the letter in his hand, and said, "Ini, do you say you are no longer

my son? Have you rejected your birthday name, a life-long gift from your father?" Umoren cautiously raised himself to a full standing position. He remained standing for a while, stretching his legs, his hands, his neck. He remembered his snuffbox, looked for it, and found that it was on the ground where he had placed it. He turned around, took two steps forward, bent down, and picked it up, his left hand holding firm to his staff. He left the room, stepped off his veranda, and walked to the walnut tree a few yards from his house. There, he sat down, took a pinch of snuff, inhaled it, and sneezed several times.

"I never saw it in this fashion," he said. He bit his lower lip, then ground his teeth. He said, "A son opposing the good intentions of his loving father! I'm most unfortunate! With my eyes, I witness the last of the Umorens! My family line terminates, and terminates cleanly!" He paused, took a deep breath, let it go in a long sigh. He got up, wiped off the beads of tears on his cheeks, cleaned his wet nostrils of the snuff he had inhaled with the back of his hand.

A week later, late in the evening, as the moon peeped out from the eastern horizon, Umoren strolled out, then heard the sound of a motorcycle approaching with its lights shining. "Can that be my son?" he said. He stood still, watching. The motorcycle

approached him, then came to a stop. Ini got off the machine.

"Why look so worried, Father?" he said.

The Chief said, "My beloved Ini!" They embraced each other and walked the long lane home. As they got close to the house, Chief Umoren saw his wife running toward them.

"You've done right to bring him to me! You drove him away, you!" she said. He cast an angry look at her.

Ini was embarrassed. He looked at his father, then his mother. "What's wrong, please?" he asked his parents. His mother embraced him; his father stood by his side, holding his hand.

"Ini, go in and change your clothes," his father told him. "Woman," he said to his wife, "do not speak to me."

In the morning, the Chief sent for his friend, Edet Inuen, Ene's neighbor. Edet arrived at ten after all the women and children had gone, some to the farm, some to the market. The Chief took him to the east end of his veranda. He gave him some snuff.

The Chief asked his friend to inform Ete Ene that on the evening of Obo his family would visit him to initiate a formal marriage contract between his daughter, Adadiaha, and Ini. Edet assured him he would pass the

message on to Ene.

Late in the evening, the Chief and his wife, Ini's mother, sat together outside his veranda, discussing Ini's future. He saw Min on the farthest side of the lane riding on his five-year-old Hercules bicycle, approaching his compound. When he got to the house, Min placed his bicycle against the wall, came to where the couple sat, and greeted them. His wife brought Min a chair and he sat with them.

"What a beautiful evening," Min said.

"Yes, it's cool out here," the Chief said. Min told the Chief that if he and his councilors did not act soon, John might succeed in his plan to open the European shop in the village.

"Why do you think so?" the Chief asked.

Min told him that a day before he met two of his friends in the square talking and swearing. "'What's going on here? A quarrel already?' I asked them. 'Not at all. It's a European shop for us,' they answered. 'How is that?' I asked. They said through the effort of John Wat a British firm would open a branch of the UAC shop in the community. I told them the villagers were opposed to business of that nature," Min said.

"What did they say?" the Chief asked.

"They liked the idea. John is gaining ground it

seems. I'm worried." Min said, looking down. Then Min's uncle, Utu, joined them.

"You couldn't come earlier as planned?" Min asked his uncle.

"No, my bicycle had a flat and I had to fix it," Utu said. The four walked toward the veranda. Min, his uncle, and the Chief went to the parlor, his wife to the backyard. Behind closed doors, they discussed how John's plan would place young ladies in jobs not suitable to their sex. "In Calabar, the company's headquarters, girls do not behave right," Min told the Chief. "If we raise bad girls, we will have bad families, and thus, bad society." He said that young men behaved even worse in Calabar. He went on to tell the Chief that in Calabar, the youth disobeyed their parents, drank a lot of wine. Some smoked marijuana, some abandoned school, and the young men eloped with girls of their choice. Min emphasized that the presence of the firm would attract an increasing number of police officers to the village. The Chief told them to allow him time to think about it. They urged quick action and then departed.

No sooner had Min left with his uncle than John Wat arrived at the Chief's court with several young people of the village. The Chief greeted them. As he went inside for his snuffbox, he said to himself, "I'm

glad the two did not meet in my house. Let them not fight in my house."

John and the young people told the Chief they wanted him to introduce their plan in the village council and debate it so that the council might make a decision on it as soon as possible. The young men asked the Chief what support he would give John in the council. Chief Umoren told them that his court would discuss the plan, and that he hoped his supporters would approve it. John told the Chief he would also discuss it with some of the Chief's supporters. He said he was sure of convincing some of them, those related to him. Then they left Umoren's compound.

A little while later, Mkpa Ifia visited the Chief and reported that when Min met John talking to a dozen young men and girls, Min moved in with ten of his ardent supporters. One of Min's supporters took a piece of wood taken out of an old fence and threw it at them. The wood hit John on the upper arm, causing a slight abrasion. Mkpa Ifia told the Chief that Min was eager for a fight.

"Does he think fighting will solve the problem?" the Chief said.

"It will only help to make things worse for us at Mbiaso," Mkpa Ifia guessed.

"Min is moving too fast in his business. I told

him to calm down," the Chief said.

"One problem with Min is that he drinks too much wine."

"You know him very well," the Chief confirmed.

"Yes, I do. He smokes cigarettes, stammers in his speech, and swears often in an argument. He chats more often with older people than with those his own age," Mkpa Ifia said. Both laughed.

Chief Umoren decided to move with speed. He consulted five of his top council members. They met informally under a small redwood tree at the edge of his garden. The Chief and his five deputies decided to hold a meeting of all the sixteen councilors and invite John Wat and Min. They all decided that Fionaran, at ten in the morning, would be a good day for this.

On Fionaran, Min and John came to Umoren's court, each with his relatives. Chief Umoren preferred to interview them separately. After each party had met briefly with him, the two quarreling groups separated; Min and his uncle to one end of the court, John and his father to the other.

"They must not fight in my court," Umoren said. He walked back and forth between the quarreling families. When he came close to where Min sat with his uncle, he heard Utu say to his nephew, "Money is the solution." The Chief knew Utu was watching him. Min asked him

how much would be necessary. Utu told him it was difficult to determine. He said how much would depend upon two factors: how much John would spend and how much opposition they would face. Min said that John's company did not even pay him a very good salary.

"The worth of my merchandise from one single boat is enough to pay all of John's salary for a whole year," Min boasted. The Chief heard Min point out to his uncle that he had one other factor much to his own advantage, the fact that the village considered John a radical, a spoiled child, and a drunkard. He kept mistresses and refused to marry. He was the village's prodigal son.

"That's true," his uncle agreed. "You have, indeed, an advantage over him." Min told his uncle he had set aside £250, to obstruct the building of the British shop.

"Do you think John has done better than we?" his Uncle asked him.

"I'm not aware of his activities in this direction," Min told him. "We are doing fine, I think. We'll start this night spending the money."

The Chief, hearing Min say that to his uncle, looked around then said softly to himself "Spending the money this night? Yes, do just that. Give up fighting. Nobody benefits from that." He cleared his

throat and whistled as he approached them. They stopped talking and looked at the Chief.

"Have you come out with something positive?" the Chief asked them. Min and his uncle told him they had decided to step up campaigning, to meet the people and explain the issues to them individually.

"Do that," the Chief urged them, and added, almost in a whisper, "I do not want to go back to Mbiaso." He asked them to go home and work hard and remain peaceful. As they were departing, he said again "Go in peace." Then he went to the other side of his court.

There he listened to John and his father discuss ways to convince the people to support their plan. John said he had already spent a week of his three weeks' vacation. He told his father he hoped things would move fast enough to enable him to accomplish his goal before his leave was over. His father told him the one problem he saw was lack of money. His son said that was not a problem, the problem was not acting fast enough.

"John, we need to meet some of the key members of the Chief's council."

"That's a sheer waste of time," John told his father.

"What do you want us to do?" his father asked him. John raised his eyes and saw the Chief close by. Then

he said, "It's for us to ask the Chief to get the council to meet, discuss the issues, and vote. Nobody would reject this."

"Supposing they do?" his father asked.

"Then I would not hesitate taking it to another village, my mother's village being a possible one," John told his father.

"You won't build it there. That isn't your mother's village. She lives here, and will be buried here," his father told him.

The Chief drew closer, "John," he said, "you should listen to what your father tells you. Your Chief cannot do the business of the whole village all by himself," Umoren told him.

"There is the need to campaign for it before the council meets," his father emphasized.

"What is the main reason for my having to see them individually in their homes instead of meeting them as a group?" John asked. "That would be a cumbrous business."

"In life," continued Idim, John's father, "we must motivate the people with whom we wish to curry favor. All governments require the giving and receiving of some kind of inducement in words and in deeds."

"That would be bribery, Father. I do not see why I have to bribe people to accept something that

would be beneficial to them."

"John, I never use that nasty word," his father said. He said, "Take for instance, during an election, our representatives spend money openly to motivate the voters into siding with them. If that were not legal, they would not do it. Our leaders promise to build roads and bridges, give workers more money, decrease the gasoline tax, separate the department of education from that of the welfare, simply to court votes in order to win an election. Even our presidents and governors invite our representatives to their mansions for costly cocktails; our representatives in turn visit local chiefs and family heads, promising to submit bills to the government for tax relief for corporate companies, expecting from these corporations handsome donations to boost their electioneering activities. We, therefore, have to contact the Chief and his men in the usual way," his father said.

"This is true," the Chief confirmed.

John said to his father, "Let's go home. I give you a free hand in this business. It's getting too much for me." He said goodbye to the Chief and departed.

When Missionary Westgarth and Deacon Fred visited Umoren's compound again, the Chief told them it was well-timed.

"Why do you say so, Chief?" the deacon asked.

"Because Ini is holidaying home now," the Chief said. Deacon Fred told him the missionary was interested not only in Ini, but also in everyone in the family. "I am glad to hear that you come here as friends," the Chief said.

"Tell us what you think of our church?" the missionary said.

"I don't care about a white man's organization. I care about mine," Umoren responded. The white man smiled.

"I think this family should care about our religion much more than any other family in this village," Westgarth said.

"Why do you think so?" the Chief asked, looking the missionary in the face, trying to show no emotion. Missionary Westgarth took a piece of paper from his pocket notebook and looked at it closely.

"Your father gave us a piece of land to erect God's house, is that correct? That means your father was one with the white man's God," Missionary Westgarth said to the Chief. The Chief raised his head and stared, fixing his gaze at the blank sky, biting his lower lip, nodding his head, as if he was receiving information from above.

"Indeed, we are your friends. But I do not want

my son initiated into the worship of a foreign religion. Who will take care of ours when I'm gone?" the Chief said. Westgarth smiled at Chief Umoren.

"The Christian religion isn't a foreign religion. It's the religion of all, with no specification attached to color or tongue. Our God is a God for all."

The Chief, shaking his head, said, "Do you forget your favorite song? 'God of Abram, God of 'Esek', God of 'Jekob', God of Israel, Hear our prayers.' Thus your God won't be willing to accept my son. Our gods associate with Umoren's line, not one of Jekob's ancestry."

"That's not so, Chief," the missionary argued.

"Our gods are here. Why need we more? And foreign," Umoren said. With the word 'foreign' the Chief, cocking his head, looked at the white man where he sat, his mouth agape.

The white man, looking at him, cleared his throat and said, "Chief you say your gods are here. I don't know your gods."

"Our gods are all about us," the Chief said, twisting his buttocks on the goat's skin he sat on. He looked as if he were about to stand up, but did not. Then he settled down, drew his knees up close to his chest, rested his arms on them, and spread his hands

over the low burning fire.

"Chief," the white man said.

"Ah, let me speak, my white friend!" the Chief said sharply. "Our gods. They are here! The gods of the sea, the gods of the land and forest, the gods of the air. The chief of our water-gods resides in the ocean. The larger the body of water, the more powerful the water-god is. In this village, the most important god doesn't reside in water; it isn't a water-god because we haven't any large body of water. Any water-god we may have here must be a local one, inhabiting our streams and ponds, and it must submit to the ruling god."

"Well," Missionary Westgarth said. "You complicate things."

"What's the complication?" the Chief said.

"It's this, Chief. We don't say you have no gods. Indeed, you do have many of them. I understand this. But they aren't the true and universal God! We are trying to introduce your family to the Almighty God!"

"That is what you say," the Chief said. "Our gods are generally of a multiple nature to be powerful. Then from the multitude emerges the most powerful. Like in the hierarchy of your gods. There is the Almighty 'Yihuver' with His attendant hosts, so, He becomes the Lord of hosts - with the host of Gods,

some of them being the God of Abram. Yes, 'Isek' has his own too, and what of the God of 'Jekob', lest I forget? And so with the rest of the members of that tribe. They all had their individual gods. You can see from their names that your tribe has more gods than we have. Your religion is a person-to-person kind of thing. Ours is a group worship. Our children won't think of their individual gods and address them after their own names. No. Never!"

"Well, Chief, I will not argue with you. Have I your permission to have Ini baptized!"

"Ini is a man. He can do whatever he wants to do for himself," the Chief said.

"We know that. But we still want your consent. We do not intend to bring disunity to this family; neither would we like to see Ini written out of your will because of your anger at his action," Westgarth said.

"I would not do this to my son," the Chief said.

"Will you promise us that Ini will not lose the right of his succession to your younger son; that you will not think of denying his inheritance, or telling him not to come to your funeral service? You will not divorce your wife simply for being his mother? We want understanding between us. We need your cooperation. We want to help build a strong, respectable family for

Chief Umoren, a family where the father rules the village, and his son directs the Church," Westgarth stated.

The Chief smiled, looked at him, and said, "Are you sure?"

"Let Ini be baptized. We want him to help provide leadership in our church. We like your son very much," Missionary Westgarth insisted.

"The problem is only that your god is foreign to me. I fear my son having dealing with strange gods."

"The God and the religion we are trying to introduce to your people will free them from bondage, rid them of the power of Satan acting through necromancers and magicians."

"The Roman Catholic people have also said this," the Chief said.

"Just one point, Chief," the white man said hastily. "Let me repeat my promises: we are here to bring peace, respect and greatness to this family. After baptism, your son will help direct the affairs of the church, appointments of personnel and fiscal business of our hospital, our dispensaries and bookstores, our primary and secondary schools."

The Chief sighed and thought for a while. "They will nominate Ini a member of the board of directors

for the Church," he said softly. "I will allow it. We have the land, the white man has the religion," Umoren said. And before the churchmen left his court, he said to them "I have granted your request." They thanked him, and he said to them "Go in peace."

Ini was to be baptized the next Sunday. His father noticed how he was excited about the ceremony, and so was his mother. Ini asked his mother to give him a special dinner that afternoon. The Chief watched his son leave for the Church to be baptized, accompanied by his mother, his father's other two wives, and some neighbors. Some men stayed with the Chief, waiting their return. The Chief and his friends drank palm wine and engaged themselves in conversation. The Chief told them the position his son would hold as a member of the Church. Nyong Ete, his neighbor, said, "You will urge him to ask the white man to build their second hospital in this village; their first hospital is too far away from us." The Chief said that the church officials would listen to him now.

"Westgarth likes my son," he said. Then he saw Ini and his company coming back from the church, and said to his neighbors sitting with him, "Here they are!"

Ini told him of the excitement in the church. The Chief told his mother to prepare his special dinner,

which she served to everybody. The neighbors thanked the Chief and departed. The Chief and Ini relaxed in the parlor. Ini gave a large picture portraying some biblical stories to his younger brother. Deacon Fred had given it to him in the church. Umoren drew nearer to look at it. Ini spread the picture on the table and explained to his father and his little brother the illustrated story of Jacob wrestling with the angel.

"That's a brave man there, isn't he?" Chief Umoren asked his son.

"Yes. This man quarreled with an angel, so they fought," Ini explained with an air of authority.

"Yes, I like him. A man should be brave and bold enough to face anything, be it man or even a god. That's the way it should be," his father said. Before he left the parlor, he told his son of his proposed visit to Ene's within a week.

"Father, I have my plan for marriage," Ini told him.

"I want to see you married while I am yet alive!" Chief Umoren said, raising his voice so that his wife, Ini's mother, heard him and came to the parlor.

"Has it started again?" she said, looking at her husband, then her son.

"This your son!" he said, pointing his left hand

at Ini.

"What has he done this afternoon?" she wanted to know.

"He is not ready to go with us to Ene," Umoren said.

"That is no problem," she told her husband.

"It is a problem. I've already sent a message to Ene. Don't you remember?"

"That is true. Ini will come with us to Ene. We have an obligation to visit his family, but Ini is not obliged as yet to marry his daughter."

"Are you saying Ini will not marry Ene's daughter?"

"No. That is not what I am saying. When she arrives in our house, the atmosphere will change. Affection is achieved by degrees. Ini, go in and rest. You will come with us to Ene's," she told him. Ini stood up, stretched himself and went to his room. His father raised his head, and, gnashing his teeth, he cast one angry look at him.

"This is not how to talk to young people. Don't worry, he will come with us," she assured her husband.

"He must come with us. We have to keep our commitment to Ene," he said to her. Then his wife left him in the parlor and went to the backyard.

The sun was low in the sky and shadows were getting

longer when Ene sighted Chief Umoren's men a little distance from his house. "There they are!" Ete Ene shouted. Chief Umoren stepped forward from his group, and Ene embraced him. He seated his guests in his parlor. Adadiaha, his daughter wooed for Ini, served alligator pepper, kolanuts, and palm wine. When the visitors had relaxed sufficiently, Ene's two wives and their older daughters set a table in the parlor for dinner. They served yam foo-foo and soup savored with periwinkles, dried-ground crayfish, okra, melon, smoked fish, and roasted fish.

After the dinner, the men sat in groups according to their ages. Nobody was serious. The women sat together, and the atmosphere in the women's group was rowdy. The noise from the women's corner drowned the bellowing voices of the men. Some of the women shouted their disagreements with one another. Some told of their hilarious experiences of the day. There were whispers, sighing, screaming, chatting, laughter, shouting. At last, Ene brought everybody to order. He told them Chief Umoren had something to say.

"Thank you, Ete Ene," the Chief said. "We are here in your house because we like to be here. The center of attraction is your beautiful daughter Adadiaha, whom my son Ini would like to marry. Thus, my people here request that Adadiaha, your daughter, come out

and give us the courtesy we deserve to enjoy in your house." All eyes turned to Adadiaha.

She waited an order from her father. Ene asked her to come forward and greet his guests. She was seventeen, light-complexioned and tall. And, starting with Ini, she shook hands with the men, and embraced all the women guests. Ene then thanked his relatives and his friends for cooperating with his family to receive his visitors, and thanked Chief Umoren and his people for the honor accorded his family with their visit. The Chief thanked him for the supper, and assured everyone he was satisfied in everything. The visitors returned to their village late in the evening.

In less than an hour, the Chief and his people arrived home and relaxed. Chief Umoren knew his son would return to Lagos by dawn, so he decided to chat with him before bedtime. He told Ini and his mother to meet him in his parlor. When mother and son came to the parlor and got seated, Umoren said, "That was a good trip, wasn't it?"

"Indeed it was. The weather was good, the food was good, our hosts were warm toward us. I enjoyed everything," his wife responded.

"I enjoyed the family," Ini said.

"Which day are we going back for a formal marriage contract? Usually two weeks after the first visit,"

Umoren said.

"Let us not go back," Ini told his father. Umoren threw down the snuffbox he was holding in his hand, raised his head, looking at Ini. His wife picked it up and placed it beside him.

"Calm down," she said to her husband, and turning to her son, she said, "Ini, we've got to go back to Ene's. What we have done today is a serious commitment. We would look mean in that family if we do not go back."

"That is my concern," Umoren cut in. "Go ahead!" he told his wife.

"If you tell us not to go back, what reason have we to offer for not honoring our commitment? Remember the warmth we felt and the hospitality we enjoyed at Ene's. We have thus an obligation to proceed with our next visit," she told Ini.

"Good talk. Do you now realize that it is the duty of both of us to guide our son to manhood?" he said to his wife.

But Ini told them it was for his family's interest not to go back. "I do not see how our not going back to Ene now will later belittle our family," he added.

"Listen to him! He will not see things the way we do. Is this impetuousity of youth? I was once young!" Umoren said.

"Ini, I am very proud to be your mother for the fact that you always listen to us. Do you know that?" she said.

"Yes, Mother," he said to her.

"I know you do. When we go back to Ene, his daughter will have to come along with us for a week before she goes back to her parents. Her stay with us will enable us to understand her better. If we find her character totally objectionable, we can reject her. As for now, what evidence have we to offer for our rejecting her since she has not been exposed to our observation? One casual visit to her family is just not enough," she told her son.

"If that is so, then you can go ahead. Does it matter if I cannot come again with you?" Ini asked.

"No, you don't have to come since you came with us the first time we went there," she told him. Then Chief Umoren suggested that Etaha be the day his family should go back to Ene's. His wife agreed, and left the parlor with Ini.

Two weeks after the visit, Ene's neighbor, Edet Inuen, came in to see the Chief in the evening. The Chief sat alone on his veranda. When he saw Edet the Chief said "Welcome. I'm glad you are here. What news from your neighbor?"

The man told him he had no news from Ene for him;

however, he did have some information to share with him. He told the Chief that one week after the Chief had visited Ene, his wives started to worry. He aaid Ene heard his wives conversing. When they saw him at a distance, they lowered their voices. As he approached them, they changed the topic. But, before they did so, he had already heard enough of their conversation. They were afraid the Chief's family had rejected their daughter, since no message had come to give the Chief's approval of Adadiaha. If the first daughter were rejected, that would stamp bad luck on the family, on the younger girls yet to be married. The Chief shook his head and told him he had already sent Ene a message of acceptance.

The next day, Edet Inuen came back to inform the Chief that he had delivered the message personally, and that Ene's family was pleased to receive it. The Chief then asked him to convey another message to Ene. Chief Umoren proposed to Ene that his family planned to visit him on the evening of Etaha.

On Etaha, at sunset, the Chief's party had already arrived at Ene's. The Chief did not see him in his front yard. He did see his little boy playing in the sand. The boy told him his father was in the backyard with the women. Umoren sent for him, and Ene came out to see the waiting company. He called his two wives to come out and receive the visitors with him. The

women carried palm wine, home-made gin, and money.

Ene made a short address of welcome to the Chief, introduced his people to the Chief and the Chief's people, and told the people the purpose of the get-together, to give his daughter, Adadiaha, in marriage to Chief Umoren's son, Ini. The Chief thanked him and introduced his people to him and those Ene invited. Kolanut, palm wine, and dry gin were served. After that, the Chief asked Ene what he wanted from them as a token for giving his daughter in marriage. Ene told the Chief he needed an eight-yard piece of material for clothes, a shirt, a helmet, and a staff. He also needed a bottle of White Horse Scotch and a he-goat. He added that he expected the Chief to give his wife, Adadiaha's mother, a six-yard piece of cloth, a headtie, and a big basin, plus a she-goat. The Chief would give her, in addition, a bottle of schnapps. The Chief was also obliged to give Ene's relatives twelve bottles of dry gin and two sheep, and to the relatives of his wife, six bottles of dry gin and two goats.

"Those fall under the preliminary aspects of this marriage contract," Ene went on. "Let's get to the main business. My daughter has been rendering services to me and my wife, farm work, keeping the house, and so on. Shortly, I shall henceforth be buying these services form other people. You are therefore obliged

to pay for part of these services we shall be hiring people to do for us. Thus, I need £40, her mother needs £30." The Chief bargained with Ene, and had it reduced to £35 and £25, respectively.

The guests presented their hosts with gifts and money; the hosts provided their guests with various drinks and sumptuous food. Before the visitors departed, Aunt Nse-Aya, Ene's sister, offered prayer. Ete Ene invoked the god of fertility to make Adadiaha a fruitful lady in the Chief's family. Adadiaha embraced her father, mother, and all the rest in her family. She was no longer Adadiaha of Ene's family. Chief Umoren knew how much his friend was feeling as he departed with his family group increased by one.

Much to the satisfaction of the Chief, his relatives and friends prepared his house on a Saturday morning for the visit of the provincial governor scheduled for Monday at ten o'clock in the morning. The Chief was aware the governor was coming to assess possible areas for development in the district. He was also aware that accompanying him would be European business representatives, some members from the local chamber of commerce, and many district representatives.

He made sure every piece of work received his personal supervision. He asked some men to clean the yard, some to cut the bushes around the courtyard low,

some to trim the trees. He also made sure some women expert in house decoration were there. They brought some carvings along with them. They set two small elephants made of bronze on the table where the Chief and his visitors would sit. They decorated the porch with palm leaves, weaving in assortments of wild flowers. A few yards from the court, the Chief asked one of the men to place the community's three greatest masks at intervals of five feet along the edge of the outer court. In the outer part of the court, he asked them to arrange relics of great value on five small tables. The ancestral stool of the Chief was well polished. He brought out his traditional dress to see that it was clean enough for the occasion. In the evening, the workers were well fed.

Very early Monday morning, the Chief inspected his ancestral stool once again. He sat on it, considering his life as he had passed through it to this moment. He knew his son was doing very well at his work in Lagos. The village prospered through contraband goods. The provincial governor was due to visit the village shortly, perhaps to bring them some enterprise. Umoren envisioned a future of peace and prosperity for his village. "Which other village in this vicinity does the governor intend to visit? None, as far as I know. The next village on his itinerary is twenty miles away,"

he said to himself. Chief Umoren turned on his radio and listened. "No crisis in Eastern Nigeria." He looked at his wristwatch; it was 6:30 a.m. He changed the station.

"Milton Obote is still in office. Idi Amin is a rebel. He and his clique shall be crushed." He laughed and turned it off. He looked at his stool. He loved the beautiful carvings, two eagles, one on either side of each armrest. An elephant, mounted at the back of the stool, was four generations old. At one point, one of his great-grandfathers had inherited it from a distant uncle who happened to have no male child. When his father died, Akpa Umoren, at twenty-eight, had started his career as the traditional leader of the Asatong Nsit people now in the Cross River State of Nigeria. He remembered once being a political representative in the defunct Native Administration, in the British Colonial Administration.

When Mkpa Ifia arrived, Chief Umoren walked around his compound with him to make sure everything needed was in place. They went to relax on the east end of the veranda where a low stool, a cane chair, and a rocking chair were placed. The Chief inspected them to make sure they were clean. He sat on the low stool, Mkpa Ifia on the cane chair. "Look at that rocking chair," he said to his deputy. "My father inherited

it from our great-grandfather, and from our great-great-grandfather." The Chief stood up and stretched himself. Then he sat on the rocking chair and Mkpa Ifia sat on the stool, resting his feet on the footrest, while his hands held fast against the stool's edge. The Chief opened his snuffbox, took a pinch and inhaled it, clearing his throat at the same time. "It's going to be a busy day," he said to his deputy.

"Yes, our governor's visit. That's an honor to this village," Mkpa Ifia said. He stood up, ready to go home for his breakfast, and said he would return as soon as he could. The Chief agreed, and Mkpa Ifia departed.

At 9:30 a.m., many prominent men and women in the village filled the Chief's compound, awaiting the arrival of the provincial governor. The Chief sat on his stool, his first deputy Mkpa Ifia on his right, Asuqno Ita on his left. He wore his flowing long gown which overlapped either side of the stool. Around his neck he wore a chain with a cross resting on his chest. On his right hand he wore a gold bracelet, a ring on his third finger. On his left arm, a tattoo of the sun, two inches in diameter, had been skillfully worked in under his skin with indigo. The center of the decorated sun was darker than its periphery. A thin line circled the center. Seven lines radiated

from the center. Two lines of stars extended from the top of the sun to his elbow, one alternating with the other. Each of the seven stars had five points. The two stars closest to the sun were the largest; the others got smaller with their distances from the sun. His upper arms were very muscular. There were two scars left on his left arm from vaccinations.

By 10:15, Chief Umoren's compound held a crowd so large that it was difficult to move a few yards without running into another person. It was so noisy that it was difficult to hear what a person next to another was saying. The Chief ordered his five aides to set twenty jars of palm wine at different locations in the compound for the people to drink. They also served kolanuts and alligator pepper. Then the aides shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen, please serve yourselves!" The Chief was served a glass of wine, and was the first to drink.

At ten-thirty, two riders arrived to inform the people the Governor was due soon. A few minutes later, the Governor and his entourage arrived. The Chief's first and second deputies stepped forward to receive the Governor. Mkpa Ifia introduced him to the Chief, and Asuquo Ita conducted him to his seat. His followers sat with him. His Excellency, Sir Francis Ibiam, the Governor of Eastern Nigeria, stood up,

greeted the Chief and his people, and delivered a speech about unity, peace, order, and hard work on behalf of His Excellency Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Governor-General of Nigeria. He thanked the Chief, the elders, and the women for the warm welcome they gave him and his companions. He particularly thanked the community's active youth, whose constant letters of concern for their community's development had given him an added incentive to make the visit to the village.

He said that the youth asked the government to establish some industries in this village, and also urged the government to assist them in their rural development. He told them he was impressed by their desire for progress. He warned them, however, against expecting too much from the government. "The government cannot do everything for everybody," he said. He then invited questions or suggestions on the topic of rural development from the people.

The Chief told him his village needed one of the district's trunk A roads to be routed through their community, and a hospital. Mr. E. N. Akpan, the Governor's secretary, wrote it down. The Governor stood up and asked again, "Are there any questions from you, the women and the young men?"

In response, John Wat handed a letter to the

Governor. While the Governor read the letter, a woman, Nwa Ema, raised her hand. The Secretary, Mr. Akpan, granted her permission to speak.

"We want our organization recognized by the village council, and we want it to be given the power to treat matters affecting the women," she told the Governor.

The Governor looked at her and asked, "What's the purpose of this organization?"

"To enlighten the women, promote cooperation during the funerals of our members, a member's spouse or children, for cooperation in the farm work, and also we make every effort at pomoting decent behavior among our members," Nwa Ema said.

"These ideals are too lofty to be ignored. Get your secretary to send a letter of application for registration to my office. I will use my office to get it registered with the appropriate authority," the Governor assured her. Then, looking at the letter in his hand, he said, "I am glad to have this letter, to read that one of your sons is trying to have a UAC shop built in this community. I hope the Chief and the council will cooperate with him by providing the land needed for the enterprise. If John Wat encounters any problem, he should inform me. Anybody trying to obstruct his plan will have trouble with my office,"

the Governor warned.

The Chief looked at Min. Min left his seat and went to the Chief. "Do not argue with the Governor here and now. He is our guest," the Chief told Min.

"I think we should let him know what our people think about the shop. Can he impose it on us?" Min said.

"The Governor will respect our views. He will do only what our people want. He will surely consult us when he wants to act upon those ideas he has gathered today," the Chief told him. Min returned quietly to his seat.

After his address, the Governor introduced one of the dignitaries on his right, Sir Clement Clifford, the British coordinator of commercial enterprises in Nigeria. He delivered a short speech about friendship and cooperation between the peoples of Nigeria and the United Kingdom. He said his government requested the people of Nigeria to trade with no other European power except the United Kingdom, and to help fight against the smuggling of French goods through the Cameroons, and Spanish merchandise through the island of Fernando Po. The provincial governor asked the Chief to respond to the officer's speech.

To Sir Clifford, the Chief said that his people would not appreciate Britain's interference in their

local affairs. Then the provincial Governor thanked Sir Clifford for his offer of friendship and cooperation with the people of his province. Then the visitors took a tour of the Chief's compound, led by the Chief's deputies. The Governor desired to take a photograph of the Chief, his people, and his compound.

The Chief dried his face of sweat to pose for the photograph with his guests. His checks were round and rosy, his nose broad, with hair sticking out of his nostrils, long eyelashes, eyebrows thick and black. His lips were thick. Under his lower lip, a few long strands of hair grew, thicker where they merged with his beard. His beard was thick, about six inches long. From his chin the beard was brown, but got darker at the tip where it curled upward. Two strings of hair from below his ears also merged with his beard.

The Governor completed his round of the Chief's compound. He was delighted to see the antiques the Chief had collected. He took a photograph of the Chief, his men, and the eight men who came with him. He took one exposure with the Chief. The Governor and his entourage left at noon.

After the Governor and the people had left the Chief's court, the council held an emergency meeting. The councilors asked the Chief to find out those responsible for the letter to the Governor, and the

content of the letter.

"They are the black sheep of this village," Asuquo Ita said.

"They should live with the Governor in his mansion," Usen Ekong said.

The Chief grumbled. "We never saw it in this way. Age and order dismantled," he lamented.

"See young John, see Mary Inyang. Mary forgets that she is but a woman, who must remain subordinate to the men," Mkpa Ifia said.

"Are we worth anything in this village any more? Only shadows, not those cast by the morning sun, but shadows of the evening," the Chief said.

Usen Ekong told the Chief he had an idea. He said the government was no longer a white man's government. It was run by fellow Nigerians for the interest of the Nigerian people. He told them that the government could not impose anything on Nigerians except taxes. "It is important for us to be unanimous in our demand, and united in our opposition," he told them.

"That's true. We must work hard to convince the people. This government, unlike the former British administration, responds only to the voice of the masses. 'The majority carries the votes' is the motto," Utu said.

"What's our decision then?" the Chief asked.

"To investigate those who signed the letter to the

Governor, and also to continue the debate between Min and John in the council. Let the people hear the two sides of the argument from the horse's mouth. Then it will be easy for us to convince the people and win them to our side. The majority in this village are traditionalists," Mkpa Ifia told them. It was agreed, and the Chief adjourned the meeting.

When the council convened a few days after the Governor's visit, it was a busy day for the Chief and his men. Min and John appeared before the councilors, who asked John what his proposal was. He told them he wanted a mandate from the people authorizing him to invite the British firm to the village.

"For what advantage?" Utu asked John. John told them the advantages were numerous. First, it would enhance their chance of having a hospital built for them. Second, he said that young men would have more opportunity for employment. Protection of the community would be taken over directly by the Federal Government, and the local guards could be displaced by the Royal National Guards. Third, things would be sold cheaper. It would be a paying undertaking. John received applause from the young people and a few relatives of his.

The council members then asked Min to state his case. He told them he was trying to block any attempt

by any foreign firm to open a shop in the village.

"Why?" John's father asked.

Min told the council that the European establishment would expose the community to a variety of dangers: young people, particularly the girls, would be led astray. They would be given an unnecessary independence that would make them rebel against parental authority. It would bring British interference in the community's affairs. "Though we've had our so-called Independence, we are under 'political probation.' The British are still within and around, watching us. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe is no more than the Queen's representative in Nigeria. Has our army not the epithet _royal_? This country is nothing other than a British Dominion. We must, therefore, be careful about what we do with these people," Min cautioned. The people cheered and applauded, so deafeningly that he had to stop talking. The Chief announced that in a week's time the council would meet again to vote on the issue. The meeting was adjourned.

A few days after the emergency meeting, Mkpa Ifia reported to the Chief that Min and Wat had stepped up their campaign efforts. Min, he said, was willing to spend much more than he had been doing before, while John's campaign was taking on a different twist. He spent no more money, but went about threatening people

if they opposed his plan.

"John is turning this society upside down," the Chief said.

"The young man assumes too much power these days. Do you see?" Mkpa Ifia asked.

"He is only a boy, but he is a threat to our position in this village. Our forefathers' only threat came from without, from our neighbors, never from within, from our sons and daughters. A new age!" the Chief lamented.

"We are in a terrible situation," his deputy said.

"Do you think the people will listen to him?" the Chief asked.

"Yes. The people are intimidated. They fear being sent to jail. Remember what the Governor said," Mkpa Ifia reminded him, then departed.

It was late December, harmattan time, cold. The cold leaned down from the misty sky. The biting, dry wind started, causing dry skin to crack into painful wounds on the shins and lips. Chief Umoren had started feeling the effect of harmattan and had sent for a big jar of vaseline to fight it. Fallen leaves dried up, brittle and crisp when stamped upon or pressed under foot.

Chief Umoren was burning dry leaves a few yards away from his house, at the base of a corkwood tree

he was destroying. Reuben, one of his distant relatives just returned from Fernando Po, where he spent five years working for a Spaniard as farm laborer, stood there with him. If the wind should blow hard, he would help the Chief put out the fire before it got out of control.

The Chief noticed some motion beneath the fire. Suddenly the fire began to spread, the embers scattering. Umoren stepped a few feet away from the fire; Reuben drew closer, a machete in his right hand, a club in his left. He ran forward, beat the ground three times with the club, and stepped back. He stepped forward again, ran the sharp edge of the machete through the ground where he saw the movement. He had chopped the head off its huge body. They watched it wriggle.

"I've got the damn thing," Reuben told the Chief, trembling.

"Do you? Fine. You are brave!" the Chief congratulated him, and drew closer. "It's a phython," he told Reuben. They dragged it out and buried it beside the fire. Then they returned to the house, and sat in the parlor.

"Is it three months before Eyop Edu Festival?" Reuben asked. "Uncle, are you aware of what I'm saying? Eyop Edu Festival?"

The Chief raised his head, looked at him, and said, "However deep in his hunting, the fox can't forget

returning home. I'm calling a meeting soon to discuss many urgent matters concerning the festival. How can we eat the new yams without first thanking the god of harvest?"

While the Chief discussed plans for the celebration of the festival, young people in the neighborhood were out for a night of entertainment and recreation. The moonlight was bright, the brightness of a full moon in a clear summer night. The young voices, singing and hooting, attracted the Chief; he and Reuben got up and walked to the veranda. The Chief felt like chewing something. He told Reuben to bring some alligator pepper. The pepper, he told him, was hung on a string and suspended over the fireplace. Reuben came with one fruit that had turned brown through prolonged smoking. The Chief called in one of his little girls who was playing with her mates outside in the moonlight. He asked her to bring him some kolanuts and a bottle of gin. The girl brought the nuts and gin to her father, exchanged greetings with Reuben, and quickly returned to her playmates outside.

The Chief called her back to serve them. She opened the dry fruit, took out all the seeds and put them in a calabash that had animal designs carved in on its outer surface. Then Umoren told her to go. He took one seed of the pepper from the decorated shell,

held it in his hand, and looked at Reuben. Reuben did the same thing. Then they put the seeds in their mouths and chewed. They were satisfied; the pepper seeds were good ones, hot. They chewed more seeds. Reuben found them so hot that he could no longer chew without drinking water. He chewed, opened his mouth to draw in cool air, released the air, closed his mouth and chewed till he swallowed. He cleared his throat, and, using the tip of his tongue, licked off all the tiny bits that stuck on to the corners of his mouth. He cleared his throat.

Chief Umoren told Reuben he was feeling very unhappy, dissatisfied with life generally. "I wish I were not born," the Chief said.

"That's a hard thing to say, Uncle," Reuben said. Umoren told him that it looked like Ini was not serious about his marriage with Ene's daughter. "Ini ought to have come home, knowing the girl is here with us now," Umoren said.

"Does he know about it?" his nephew asked.

"He knows."

"Let's hope he will be here before the girl returns to her family. I shall find out from Ini if there is any problem. He is always free with me," Reuben assured him. Then they retired for the night.

In the morning Chief Umoren woke up a little late.

Reuben was still sleeping, snoring loudly. The Chief stood for a while where Reuben slept. "Let me not wake him up," he said to himself, and left the parlor. He went outside to the courtyard, and picked up a broom that was placed against the wall at one end of the building. He began sweeping the yard between the veranda and the low surrounding bushes. He came to the side of the yard adjacent to the room where Reuben slept. He saw an empty kerosene tin lying on top of an earth mound by the base of the wall. Using the broom, he pushed it off and watched it roll till it rested on the grass edging the bushes nearby. He kept on sweeping.

"Good morning, Uncle," Reuben said.

"Yes, it's a good morning," Chief Umoren said. Reuben stretched and yawned. He came to the Chief, and, stretching out his hand, said, "Uncle, let me have the broom. You should be resting."

"Yes, I need to," Umoren said, handing the broom over to him. "Those who live with me should help keep the yard clean," he said softly, so that Reuben would not hear him. Reuben finished cleaning up the rest of the yard while his uncle followed after him, telling stories of the past, when elders enjoyed the true obedience of their children. In those days, the security of a man's house was not a problem. Doors were without

padlocks, for the doors were not meant to prevent men from breaking into the house, but to stop animals from having access to kitchens. "Our men were too decent to break in, but animals weren't," the Chief said.

"Those were the good old days, Uncle."

"Yes, they were. But not now, because of the foreign word 'government', borrowed from across the big waters of the south. In those days, parents and children remained together. The children learned the crafts of their parents."

"Uncle, we have bad memories of the past too, don't we? I'm thinking of those sacrificed to the Long Juju of Arochuku. Thanks to the British government, the oracle was dismantled, and human sacrifice to the oracle ended," his nephew said.

"You are talking of 'government'. I'm not talking about that. Government is a very bad word for me," his uncle told him. Before they had time to speak further, Ini's taxi arrived.

"That is Ini!" Reuben said to his uncle, then went to help Ini with his luggage. Ini carried his brief-case in his hand. He came to his father and said, "Good morning, Father."

"Good morning Ini," Umoren said, smiling. Ini went to his room, while the Chief went to his wife's kitchen where she and Adadiaha were preparing to cook breakfast. Adadiaha brought a kitchen stool to him. Umoren sat

on it, watching her cut whole okra into slices, while his wife peeled yams. They heard Reuben and Ini talking and laughing, approaching the kitchen.

"Who are these?" his wife asked.

"They aren't strangers," he told her. Ene's daughter left the kitchen. When she came back, she wore a different dress, and had changed her hair style. The Chief watched her, pretending not to.

Ini and Reuben came to the kitchen. Ini stood still, looked at Ene's daughter, and smiled at her. His father and mother watched him. He drew close to his mother, embraced her and Ene's daughter, then went to where his father sat, stood in front of him, and said, "Father, I'm here." He smiled at Umoren.

"It's good for you to be here, Ini," Umoren told him, smiling and nodding his head.

Ini sat down with Adadiaha, watching what she was doing. "How are your parents?" he asked her. She told him they were doing fine when she left them. When the meal was ready, everybody ate together. Afterwards, the Chief and Reuben went to the veranda to relax. Ini went to his room. His mother and Adadiaha cleaned the kitchen.

Later, Ini came to his father and Reuben on the veranda. He sat with them and said, "Father, I want to talk to you for a minute or two."

Reuben looked at them and said, "Should I leave?"

"I think you can stay," Ini said.

Chief Umoren said, "Ini, please speak."

"Father, send this girl home with all the gifts you can provide her."

"Two questions, my son: why send her home, and why with gifts?"

"First, I won't marry her; therefore, she must go back home. Second, she has served you so far; thus, she deserves to be rewarded." Chief Umoren looked at his son and began to weep. He asked Reuben to call Ini's mother to the veranda. When she arrived, he asked his son to repeat what he had said. Ini told her what he told his father.

"Ini, your action has put us to shame. See how many compliments we have received from friends! See how much we have enjoyed this girl!" His mother left the veranda and went to the backyard, weeping.

Ini got up from his seat and told his father and Reuben he was going out to the mission house. When he left, Reuben asked the Chief to give him time to talk to Ini.

"Ini has caused my relationship with Ene to go sour. I am now a liar. My son has painted me black," Umoren said.

While Ini was at the mission house, a young man

came on a motorcycle and stood before Chief Umoren and Reuben. "Honorable Chief, is this Chief Umoren's compound?" he asked.

"Yes, young man. What do you want?"

"I need to see Joe, your son. He is my colleague at the Central Bank in Lagos."

"Joe? My Son?" the Chief said, looking at Reuben. He shook his head and said, "I don't have a son by that name."

The young man looked embarrassed and said, "Well, here's a letter for Joseph Umoren, your son I think." He read the name as it was on the envelope. The Chief repudiated the letter. "But, Chief, don't you have a son working at the Central Bank in Lagos?"

"I do, but not Joseph. My son is Ini!"

"You may be right, Chief," the young man said.

"Not maybe. I'm quite right."

"Okay, I have to get back home for now. Goodbye Chief." The young man mounted his motorcycle and rode away.

"I don't have a son by that name. I do not," the Chief said softly, turning his head to Reuben.

Reuben said, "There might have been another Umoren somewhere else. Surely, that sometimes happens?"

When Ini returned, Umoren told the story to him. "And where's the letter now?" his son asked eagerly.

"Listen, the letter was not yours," he said sharply.

"Whose then was it?" he wanted to know.

"It was for 'Joseph'!"

"Then it was for me."

The Chief looked at him and said, "Do I hear that?" Then Umoren wept again.

Early the next morning, the Chief woke to see Adadiaha busy, cleaning the whole compound alone, both the back and front. After she had eaten her breakfast, she came to him and said "I am going home. Thank you for your kindness throughout my stay with you."

The Chief looked at her and said, "Wait, till tomorrow." He then met with his wife to discuss what to do for Adadiaha.

The following day, the girl got dressed and came back to the Chief. "I am ready to go," she told him. The Chief gave her five yards of cloth plus one pound sterling. His wife gave her a casual dress, a pair of earrings, a necklace, a headtie, and ten shillings. Ini gave her three dresses, one heavily embroidered, a pair of brown shoes, and an all-weather umbrella. The Chief conferred with Reuben briefly. Then he asked his wife and Reuben to escort her home. His wife and Adadiaha each carried a jar of palm wine for the girl's parents, and Reuben carried a bottle of dry gin and a

bottle of wine for them.

The Chief learned how vigorously John and his supporters had been campaigning immediately after the visit of the provincial Governor. He heard that John's supporters sang a song that went, "Our success lies with the people, not with the Chief, nor with his council. Our government is to serve the people. Thus, we must convince the people, for in the end, the people's will must triumph." The Chief and his men were worried about the propaganda committee John had just formed. They expressed their concern over John's men meeting with the youngsters in the community. They heard the youth sing about John Wat and his 'big plan'.

"To confuse these children is the worst thing John has done to us," Asuquo Ita said.

"A new song praising a hero. Are you aware of it?" Utu asked.

"John Wat is now the number one man in this village. Is he not?" Edem remarked.

The Chief looked at him and said, "That's too true," nodding his head. The deputy suggested banning such songs in the community.

"Banning such songs?" the Chief said, looking at him. He told his deputy he was uncomfortable with that way of solving the problem. He looked at his left toe, as if he was keeping time with it; then he looked up.

Turning to Mkpa Ifia, he said, "Don't you think that might stir up riots, demonstrations, perhaps our being called up again at Mbiaso?"

"Riot or no, we've got to do the right thing. I can't imagine a young man coming to tell us what to do, or a woman telling us when to convene a meeting," his deputy told him. The Chief reminded him of the warning given to them at Mbiaso.

He said "One little error, the whole thing explodes. Do you see?" Mkpa Ifia then told the Chief that to keep quiet about it was to allow one individual to continue sowing the seed of discord and confusion in the village. "I'd rather give up my leadership than retain it under a situation like this," he told the Chief. Chief Umoren told him that, given a little time, that seed of confusion would be choked by that which the confusion had generated within itself.

"Why do you think that will work?" Mkpa Ifia asked.

"Young adults are beginning to rid themselves of parental control. Parents won't like that. The fragile harmony within John's party is simply a marriage of convenience. They will soon disagree among themselves, and all complaints will come to me." He also told his council that the Dance Group in the village was more loosely organized than before, and that the group was even losing members. His deputies insisted on a more

aggressive posture.

Two other members of the council joined the discussion. They came up with fresh information for the Chief. They told him that Wat's supporters had convened a meeting of the leaders of the major churches in the community, the Apostolic Church, the Anglican Church, the Christ Army Church, and the Lutherans. The leaders of the Baptist Church and the Church of Christ were not represented. Wat and his men had asked the church leaders to speak to their congregations and implore them to support Wat's plan, stressing that the shopping center would attract people to the village, and that many of the newcomers might associate with their churches. Wat further stressed that the shopping center would attract such facilities as a hospital, more schools, and some recreational centers.

Inyang Ete and Imo Udo told the Chief that the Anglican Church pastor, Jonah Ube, was the first to translate Wat's suggestion into action. During his sermon, he had frequently told his audience to pray hard that Satan might not obstruct the good plan from which everybody would benefit. He urged his congregation to pray that God should guide John Wat and his supporters in their attempt to bring progress to the village. The Chief was pleased to hear that the following Sunday Jonah Ube found that his church

attendance was down by 2%. Attendance for the Baptist Church went up 1%. That was the same Sunday leaders of the Christ Army Church and the Apostolic Church carried John Wat's message to their pulpits.

As the conflict between Min and Wat increased, five men from the village got together with the Chief to discuss ways of restoring peace to the village. They suggested to Umoren that the traditionalists, headed by Min, should give John Wat a chance. One of the five men, Peter Ndem, counseled, "There is nothing to worry about. The Europeans are simply coming to sell us their goods. If we do not like their products, they will pack up and go back. Should they succeed, and we find later that their presence is objectionable to the people of this village, we can still force the company out."

The Chief and the five men agreed in principle. They told him to arrange for them to meet with Min and his men so that they might make a formal request for common sense and calm.

When the committee of five went back to the Chief after two days, they were disappointed to hear that Min had said he was too busy to see them. They told the Chief it was a mistake for Min to refuse to see them. The Chief told them, that his duty was to ask Min to come and see them, not to pressure him. That having

been done, and Min not responding, the Chief felt there was nothing else he could do as a leader of free people. The men, having been told this, gave up hope of conferring with Min, said goodbye to the Chief, and departed.

After the five men departed, the Chief faced his family problem concerning his son Ini, and his idea of marriage. The fear that Ini might remain a bachelor for life grievously afflicted Chief Umoren. He and Reuben relaxed in the veranda conversing, when suddenly Ini came along.

"It's a cool evening," Ini said, drawing close to them. Then he said, "Can I join in your conversation?"

Reuben said "Yes." Umoren said nothing.

"Father doesn't want my company," Ini said. The Chief looked over his fence, but said nothing. After a while, Ini said, "Tomorrow, I shall return to Lagos."

"Why not after tomorrow?" Umoren asked.

"I know I can stay home as long as I want. No problem. I am a senior civil servant, so nobody bothers me for getting to work late. If I miss a day's work, I can write in sick. No problem."

"If so, why can't you miss tomorrow? When you get to work the day after, you write in sick?" the Chief asked.

"You can't do it too often. Otherwise you get

yourself into trouble." Ini said. He looked at his father and said, "Father, I have something important to tell you. Could I ask my mother to join us?"

"Does it concern her?" Umoren asked.

"It is important she be here." The Chief sent Reuben to call her.

When she arrived, Umoren said, "Ini are we ready?"

"Yes, Father. I've got two projects: One is to marry. The other is to build a house. My father will be proud to see a permanent building in this compound, a three-story building, the first story belonging to my Father." Ini paused, smiling. "It will be my gift to you, and to our family, a home to proclaim your importance as the Chief of this village."

"I'll have more space for visitors. That is fine!" Umoren said.

"That will be fine," said Ini's mother.

"That's fantastic," Reuben said.

"I'm glad you have not ruled out marriage," the Chief added.

"I'm glad too," his mother said.

"Who and when might that be?" Umoren asked.

"An Ibo girl, Hope by name, and --"

"Down with it! An Ibo girl? I can't speak Ibo. An Ibo girl! Ini is dreaming!" Umoren said.

"Let him finish what he has to say, Uncle. Go

ahead, Ini," Reuben said.

"We intend to wed in December. May I add that Hope is half Ibo, half Efik. She speaks Efik very well. So my father won't need an interpreter to communicate with her. Her mother, a Calabarian, is married to an Ibo man. Both parents now live in Lagos."

"Is she with her parents in Lagos?" Reuben asked.

"Yes, she lives with them and works at the Central Bank."

"Damn it! You work together! Do you also live together as husband and wife? What's the need for a formal wedding?" he said, looking at his son.

Ini got up without speaking and left the veranda. His nephew pleaded with the Chief not to be so harsh with him. "See, he has chosen to marry, that is the important thing. Your next concern should be whether or not the girl will be able to bear children. I think you are concerned with his having children to perpetuate your family tree?" Reuben said.

"Some educated, city ladies have the problem of child-bearing. One such lady visited a doctor to find out the cause of her not having a child after she was married for two years. Much to her regret, the doctor told her that her infertility came as a result of the pills she had been taking for birth-control," his wife told Reuben.

"Perhaps the pills were overactive," Reuben said. "Let's hope that Ini's girl will be different."

Chief Umoren would say nothing more on the subject.

The Chief was informed of the women's preparation to celebrate the birth of their organization, founded a year before. The women told their leader to ask him to prepare a speech to deliver at the celebration. Mma Ete Udo told the Chief she was reluctant to accept John Wat's request to also speak to the women. Wat's father, who went with the women to meet the Chief, argued she was wrong to think of rejecting the request.

"I am afraid," Mma Ete said.

"Of what?" Wat's father wanted to know.

"I may lose members," she said.

"He shouldn't campaign there, should he?" the Chief asked.

"Just to explain his position. He is not seeking converts," Wat's father told him. Mma Ete agreed only to let him speak at the end of the celebration. Wat's father insisted she announce it.

"Make sure I understand everything you will do there," the Chief said to the woman. "If you don't plan it well, I'll not attend," he warned.

"Your absence would lessen the importance of the function. Please, don't do that," Mma Ete pleaded.

When Min learned later that John Wat would speak

to the women, he came immediately to complain to the Chief. When he entered the parlor, the Chief gave him a seat. "Is everything going on well with you?" the Chief asked.

"No," Min said.

"Why then?"

"John will speak to the women this Saturday. Are you aware of that?"

"Yes," the Chief said. Min looked down, saying nothing for a while. The Chief looked at his toe.

Min looked up at the Chief, then asked "Will you attend the function?" The Chief told him he would. Min intimated that the function might end in chaos if used as a forum for campaigning. He suggested that the Chief should revoke the organization's mandate to meet if Wat was invited to speak. The Chief told him he would talk with the organizer, Mma Ete, urging her not to allow John to mention his company when delivering his speech. Min doubted this would be effective, but the Chief told him he should give him the chance to see how it might come out.

When Umoren asked about his business, Min told him it was going very well. He said more people were turning to European goods, though they were dearer than those produced locally. Shoes made in Italy were more important to the people than those made locally by a

branch of the same Italian company. The same was true of soap, beds, aluminum pots, textile goods, and leather bags. A finger-ring made in Nigeria sometimes had more gold in it than the one with made-in-England on it; in spite of this, people preferred to buy the one made in England, though it cost more. "The label is what matters. Quality or cost doesn't matter," Min declared.

"Well, distant music sounds sweeter," the Chief said.

"You are right. Exotic things appeal more to our senses. The more mysterious will charm the more," Min said.

"If your business continues to be so good, do you still plan to change over to locally-made goods?"

"No, Chief. Locally-made goods would sit for months without being sold. Our goods are for the poor who have little money to spend. Imported goods are for the rich, always in high demand, because our government helps to make them scarce by banning them to protect the local ones," Min explained.

"The ban does not seem to work," the Chief said.

"No, it doesn't yet. We will have them, come what may," Min said shaking his head. He told the Chief it was time for him to leave, and reminded him to meet Mma Ete Udo. The Chief assured him he would. Then Min departed.

The women's celebration took place Saturday morning in the village. They assembled in the community hall where their local band played. The band music reminded most women that it was time for them to hurry to the hall; it warmed the village, and gave it a festive air. At eight-thirty, the women lined up in twos and marched around the village before they came to the Chief's compound.

Before they arrived, the Chief had set out several jars of palm wine for them. On the table at the center of his compound, the Chief had placed eight bottles of champaign and eight bottles of beer for the sixteen leaders of the organization. They sang and danced, and the Chief came out and danced with them. There was loud applause. Having spent an hour at his compound, they marched away to the community hall. The Chief was told they would resume their meeting at one o'clock. By that time, he had finished preparing his speech and dressing in his traditional gown, ready for the function.

He went to the community hall where the women gathered. He watched them sing and dance, deliver short speeches, and present donations for use in running the organization. The first to deliver a speech was the leader, Mma Ete Udo. She gave a brief history of the organization and its objectives.

She recalled that the women in the community first

came together a year before, when they felt the need to group and oppose, indeed, obstruct, the government's attempt at westernization. They gathered together and marched to a neighboring village, where they set a fire to destroy an oil mill under construction there. They contended the milling complex would displace human labor, and so render the women jobless.

After recounting their success in demolishing the palm oil mill, Mma Ete reminded the members that they were obliged to attend the funeral of their fellow members. The organization, she said, aimed at encouraging unity among the women in the community, enlightening them, improving their conduct by reprimanding the wayward, and counseling those fond of pilfering. She told her audience that since its inauguration their organization had been lending money to needy members. She ended by saying that they were planning even more activities for the future.

When it was John Wat's turn to talk, he praised the women for their cooperation, determination, and unity. He added that women in the community were better organized than men. There was loud applause from the women. He told them that at the end of the ceremony he would be outside, ready to hold some discussions with them. The Chief, nodding his head, said, "You've done well. Keep the company palaver out of this hall."

When John Wat sat down, Iquo Efiong, the mistress of ceremonies, announced that the next item was band music, during which time the leaders would accept donations, before Min spoke to the women. As donations poured in, the music played loudly while the Chief watched the women and children dance informally. Then, looking at Min, he noticed how he followed the mistress of ceremonies with his eyes. When the woman came close Min attracted her attention by beckoning at her with his head. Immediately, the boisterous fifty-year-old woman skipped sideways to him, bending her head close to Min's while keeping time with her right leg.

The Chief wondered what might happen next. The woman, still keeping time to the music with her leg, left Min, heading straight toward where the band played. She whispered to the band director and the music died down.

"Perhaps, Min felt the music lasted too long," the Chief said to Mma Ete.

"That may be so. He is a business man, and might want to leave early," Mma Ete responded.

The mistress of ceremonies brought everybody to order before Min spoke. He first thanked the women for inviting him to attend the function. He told them that he was proud of them. He told them that what impressed him most was his memory of what the women did a year

before, when unnecessary industrialization would have dislodged many women from their jobs, causing them untold miseries. He said, "Thanks to your foresight and undying efforts, you have retained your jobs because there is no oil mill. I urge you to watch out for something similar to the European oil mill you destroyed last year." Min received loud and long applause.

Then came the Chief's turn to speak. Being the last to speak, he first invoked the blessings of their ancestors upon the people. His speech was mainly advice to the women. He told them to be enlightened, but not to forget to play their role as women, submitting to the whims of their husbands, feeding their children, not only home-cooked meals, but also their God-given breast milk. Young girls should marry according to the local customs before living together with their men, and none should wear short dresses, above the knee, outside of their homes. He said, "We the men want you to prosper and be happy in this community! And may the blessings of our fathers be with us all!"

People left the hall, shouting, "Chief Umoren, live forever!" This chanting gathered fervor in the men's section of the hall, while in the women's section, it was more modest. People dispersed singly or in small groups. Some loitered, chatting with friends as the

full moon emerged from the horizon.

When the Chief got outside, he saw Min talking to a group. Many others collected around John, shouting, "John Wat, we are for you, John Wat, live long!" The Chief walked past them, heading toward his home. When he got home, he went into his room to change his gown for casual dress. When he came out of the room, he sat on his veranda, saying, "Thank God, it's all over." He ate some kolanut, rocking himself. It was thirty minutes after he had left the civic center when he heard a loud chorus from the center. "That must be applause for either Min or John," he said. The shout attracted some of the children from the backyard to the veranda.

"What a big shout!" one of the boys said, looking at the Chief.

"It's for either Min or John," he told the boy.

"Why do people shout for them?" the boy wanted to know.

"Perhaps they have said what the people wanted to hear," the Chief told him. But the cries continued. Then children and women were running past his compound. The Chief stepped off his veranda and went outside the courtyard.

"What's the matter," he asked a woman as she approached his house.

"It's the worst calamity yet," one young man in

the crowd said. The women, gasping for breath, kept running toward the Chief's court despite his attempts to halt them to find out what was wrong.

"What's happened at the center?" the Chief asked another woman.

"It's John Wat!" she said.

"And what has he done?"

"He is bleeding. It looks as if a basin of blood has been poured on him from his head down to his feet!" the woman said.

"Where is he now?" the Chief asked.

"I do not know," replied the woman. The Chief took his staff and hurried to the civic center. There, he found the crowd had moved to Wat's compound. The Anglican Church pastor and some of his members gathered around John's father, appealing for calm. It was not easy for the Chief to get their attention. He tried to think about what to do next. The local taxi driver, Udo Abasi, who had taken John to the hospital, returned.

"How is my son?" John's father asked him.

"He was doing fine when I left him," Udo Abasi told him. He saw the Chief and went to greet him. Umoren talked softly with him, asking him how it happened. Udo Abasi told him John was hit on the head with a bottle of beer.

"By whom?" the Chief asked him. The driver told him

John said Min's hired thugs did it.

"Was Min there?" the Chief asked.

"I did not see him there."

John's father came to the Chief to talk about the incident before he left to go to the hospital to visit his son. The Chief told him to inform him of John's health when he returned from the hospital. After shaking hands with him, Umoren left for his court.

In the afternoon of the next day, three policemen came to see Chief Umoren. They met him on his veranda. In ten minutes, he dressed and went with them to the civic center to see the place where the incident occurred. Then they returned to the Chief's compound for more investigation. Some of Min's relatives and John's father and uncle were waiting there for them. John's father suggested to the officers that Min should be sent for. He said Min plotted to destroy his son.

"Fathers have been known to plot against their sons. Don't you know?" Akpan Utere, one of Min's relatives, told John's father.

"Min and his people must account for this incident!" John's uncle, Eyo Ikpe, said.

"Accusations must be proved!" another relative of Min said.

The senior police officer wrote in his notebook while the two factions quarrelled over who should be

held accountable for the crime. After he had finished writing, he called for order. "Chief," he said, "I need to see the person who wounded Mr. Wat. Then, I would like to see the following: the leader of the women's organization, John Wat's father, the Anglican Church pastor, Min, and of course, I will hold a discussion with you and with some of your council before we depart."

The Chief sent the village messenger to summon the people. In twenty minutes' time, the messenger arrived with the young man, Inuen Ekpo. He handed him over to the Chief, who turned him over to the policemen.

"I will return to the barracks with you very shortly," the senior police officer told the young man as he placed handcuffs on his wrists and locked them. He seated him in a corner of the Chief's veranda. Then the Chief led the senior officer into his chamber where he could conduct his interrogations. The officer asked the village messenger to bring in the assailant. He questioned Inuen Ekpo closely before the others who were in the room with him. Inuen Ekpo pleaded guilty to the charge, but denied his action was a result of conspiracy. He said his motivation for the act came from John Wat himself. He said John called him a bastard, so he had to attack him. The officer asked the messenger to take him out to the veranda.

Next, the officer told Mma Ete Udo to come inside

with any one of her relations. She came in with her uncle. The policeman asked her what she knew about the incident resulting in John's injury. The leader spoke for fifteen minutes before she left the room with her uncle.

When John's father came in, the officer asked him to explain why he felt Min might have masterminded the plot that resulted in the wounding of John. Idim Wat told them Min opposed his son for planning to bring a European shop into the village, fearing that the new shop would become a potential rival with his. Thus, when the incident occurred, it was logical to assume Min was behind it.

"What evidence can you give us?" the senior policeman asked him.

"Twice, here at the Chief's compound, they exchanged bitter words that would have led to physical assault, but for the timely intervention of our Chief," he told them. But the officer said that that was not evidence.

"Did John ever tell you Min was about to attack him in any way?"

"There was no need to discuss the obvious. For instance, once, one of the boys who stood with Min hurt my son," John's father said.

"We are concerned only with the present incident," the policeman told him. He let him go while inviting

the Anglican Church pastor, Jonah Ube, into the chamber. The churchman denounced the deed in all its form. He said people in the community should be able to live in peace. Bribery in conducting public affairs should be eliminated, he said. The officer warned him of the trouble he could face if he dodged his questions.

"I am telling the truth," Rev. Jonah Ube told the officer.

"You aren't," the officer said. "What you say has no relevance to the business in hand. You aren't in your pulpit."

"Why did you invite me in the first instance if you are not prepared to listen to me?" the churchman responded.

"We invited you hoping that you could provide us with information needed to conclude our investigation."

"That's just what I'm doing," Rev. Jonah said.

"You aren't. What has bribery got to do with our business here? Our time is running out!"

"Then let me go. I thank God I have done my duty," the churchman said.

"You'll be charged with covering up," the senior officer threatened him.

"You cannot convict me for a crime I never subscribed to." The officer allowed the churchman to go as Min was called in. Min stood before the officers,

saying nothing. The senior officer took off his reading glasses, rubbed his eyes, dried them with his handkerchief. Looking at him, he said, "Mr. Min?"

He said, "Yes, Min is my name."

"Did you plan with anybody to destroy John?" the officer asked him.

"No," Min said, shaking his head.

"Did the young man who wounded John meet with you at any time before or after the incident occurred?"

"No sir," Min answered.

"But you are opposing him in his plans for the community, aren't you?"

"I am simply expressing my opinion and the opinion of others who object to his establishing that kind of business in this community. Expression of personal opinion and a demonstration of personal hatred toward somebody are not the same," Min said.

"A great animosity exists between you and John. Can you deny that?"

"I may disagree with John in principle, but I do not hate him as a person. It's important that you understand this point very well," Min said, frowning.

"This is a serious matter!" the officer said, raising his voice.

"Mr. Min, you are involved. Help yourself," the second police officer said. In a very soft tone, he

added, "We're trying to help you, but you don't seem to want to cooperate with us."

The senior officer opened his notebook and began to write in it. Min looked at the notebook. He said, "Sir what do you want me to do?" The officer conferred with his colleagues for a minute.

Turning to Min, he said, "You can go, Mr. Min; however, you will have to come to the police barracks. You need to talk to our superior. This is a most serious case."

Min looked down, stroking his scanty beard with his fingers. Looking up, he said, "I will."

When Min had left the chamber, the Chief said, "Min will come to see you. I promise this."

The police officer told the Chief to assemble his councilors in the big hall so that he might talk to them. The Chief did so. He sat with his official guests on one side, his councilors on the other. The Chief heard Mkpa Ifia whisper, "I knew it would not be easy."

The Chief then addressed his council, telling them the officers wanted to speak to them before their departure.

The senior officer thanked the men for having kept the culprit from running away. "Of course, you all know that the whole village would have been in

trouble had he escaped," he added. He told them Mr. Min had to meet their superior at the police barracks.

"Must he?" Mkpa Ifia asked.

"Yes indeed! What do you think?" the senior policeman asked him.

"What is the need?" Mkpa Ifia asked.

"What need? Our senior man will determine that! Remember that the opinion the police administrator has of this village is very low," the senior officer said.

"Because of this incident?" the Chief asked.

"This incident is just the climax, an evidence of internal turmoil that has been building up for some time," the officer told him. He told members of the Chief's council that they must prevent further riot in the village. It was their responsibility to maintain law and order.

Immediately after the policemen left the court with their handcuffed prisoner, John's friends and relatives in the council began talking of revenge.

"The police must investigate this matter thoroughly," Inyang Ete said.

"Min is behind this, no doubt about that," Eyo Ikpe said.

"He has plotted against John many times," Idim said.

"Our Chief has kept quiet all along," Usen Ekong said.

"John is a rascal!" Utu said.

"Is that why you want to get rid of him?" John's father responded.

"If John dies, Min will not live," John's cousin, Peter Ndem, said.

"We must have an effective Chief in this village," Imo Udo said.

The Chief picked Mkpa Ifia and Asuquo Ita to go to the barracks with him the next day. He told the village treasurer he would speak with him after the others departed. Then the Council was dismissed.

Late in the evening Min came to the Chief and conferred with him. The discussion lasted fifteen minutes. The Chief told him he would be meeting shortly with John's father. Min said, "Thank you Chief," and departed.

It was dark when John's father arrived at Chief Umoren's, carrying a lamp. He met the Chief by the fireplace on his veranda. They talked together for a short time. The Chief told him he would like to talk with him again as soon as he returned from the police barracks. He left and the Chief retired for the night.

When the Chief went to the police barracks the next day, he was very worried. The police sergent he met referred him to the District Officer. The District Officer told him the case was a serious one that could

damage traditional administration in the community. He told the Chief that he had to talk to Min and John Wat's father before he could finally decide the matter. When Umoren returned home, he was even more worried.

Chief Umoren expected his son would be home for the Independence Day Anniversary celebration. In his conversation with Ini's mother the night before the celebration, Chief Umoren told her their son had sent a message through Udo Abasi, the taxi driver, indicating his intention to spend his Independence holiday at home, and would perhaps bring a visitor. His wife told him she would do her part. Chief Umoren bought ten big yams, five full-grown fowls, and some roasted meat. His wife bought rice, beans, and plantain for a banquet.

The Chief sat outside his house, watching his children play in the moon-lit night that Thursday when, suddenly, he was blinded by the bright lights of the taxi that conveyed Ini and his guest. Ini stepped out and went to the left side of the car where Hope sat. His father stood on that side, but he did not know somebody was inside. Ini said, "Father, let me open this door please." Umoren stepped aside. Ini opened the door, and Hope stepped out. Turning to her, Ini said, "This is my father, and that is my mother." To his parents, he said, "This is Hope Onyedu, who also works at the Central Bank." Ini went with her to the

trunk of the car, holding her right hand in his left. His father, seeing Ini holding her hand, whispered to his wife, "The young lady must be feeling unwell."

"Why?" his wife asked.

"See, Ini has to help her walk."

"She does not look sick to me at all," she told her husband.

"I think if Ini leaves her alone she may collapse," he insisted.

"I believe Ini just wants to hold her hand. Let me ask him to make sure," she said.

The Chief watched his wife whispering to her son. Ini laughed, then ran to his father. Standing before him Ini whispered, "Father Hope is well and sound. It's just the way we walk together in Lagos." Umoren tried to smile.

The Chief watched his wife set a table for supper? "Is your guest ready for supper? We are ready," he called Ini, looking at his wife. She nodded her head. Ini led Hope into the room.

"Good evening, Chief. Good evening, Madam," Hope greeted them. They returned the greeting, smiling at her.

"That was a long drive, wasn't it?" Chief Umoren said.

"It was indeed. Boring," Hope said.

"She needs to rest. Let her eat supper first," his wife said. They sat to eat. The main dish was rice eaten with chicken stew. They also had banana and pawpaw. The Chief and his wife preferred to drink palm wine. Ini and Hope drank Seven Up. After supper, Hope whispered to Ini, who nodded his head. Then she helped his mother clear the plates to the kitchen, and wash them before she came back.

The family assembled again in the main hall that night. With a smile, holding her hand, Ini stood up before his family and said, "This is Hope Onyedu." She stood up, smiling. Turning to the members of his family, he said to Hope, "These are the members of my family." Hope stepped forward, stood before the Chief and his family, and courtsied.

"I am happy to be here with you all," she said.

Everybody responded by saying "Welcome to our house." Then all the members stood up, embraced her, and sat down again. Hope went back and sat with Ini. Ini then told them they planned to be married on the seventeenth day of December.

"How long is that?" his mother asked.

"About three months," Hope told her. She then tried to repeat the names of the individual members in the family. Ini's parents asked Hope questions about her family. Her father was a wealthy Ibo man in the

Federal Ministry of Labor, her mother a businesswoman, rich, popular with various women organizations. She had two brothers and three sisters.

Some of the younger children fell asleep. Ini looked drowsy from the long drive through the hot, humid day. He stood up and stretched himself, yawning at the same time. His mother said "You need rest. Go in and sleep."

He turned to Hope, saying, "Let's go in."

Umoren watched them. Ini smiled. Then his father said to him, "Hope is not feeling sleepy yet," and turning to her he said, "Are you?"

Hope smiled and said, "I am tired."

Ini's mother said, "Yes, she is tired." They said goodnight to the family and retired. The women and children returned to the backyard, the Chief to his room, where it took him a long time to fall asleep.

When the Chief got up early in the morning, he saw Hope and Ini cleaning the courtyard. When they saw him, both said, "Good morning, Father."

"Good morning, my children," the Chief said.

"Let's get to the backyard," Hope told Ini.

"Forget about the backyard. Children will do that," Ini told her.

"Please Ini, or I'll do it alone," she said. The Chief said, "Rest. Others will take care of that."

But Hope said, "Let me do it," and went on cleaning alone.

Chief Umoren and his son watched her. When Ini's mother came, she tried to persuade Hope to give up cleaning. "You are our guest. You are working too hard," she said. She told her to give her the broom, but Hope refused.

She said, "This is a good exercise for me. I do not overwork myself." Then she finished the backyard with Ini's mother and the children.

Breakfast for the family consisted of yam balls, soup, and fried fish. Ini and Hope preferred to drink hot Ovaltine with a few slices of bread and a little fish.

"Eat some yam," Ini's mother told her.

"I'm satisfied. I don't want to gain weight before I get back to Lagos."

"That's what I want you to do. I do not want your parents to think you did not have enough food to eat in my house."

"They won't think so," Hope told her.

After breakfast, the Chief and his wife remained in the parlor, but did not speak.

Ini told his father he had arranged to build the new house for him. Umoren was pleased to hear that his son's plan was about to materialize. "Do you still want

the building here on this compound?" his father asked.

"Yes, Father," Ini said. "I intend this building to keep the memory of Umoren's family, a marker to indicate that members of Umoren's family have been here. A three-story building. Yes. And the oldest has the first story." His father raised up his head, looked at Ini, and smiled.

When it was time for Ini to return to Lagos with Hope, Hope gave the Chief an elephant carved in ebony, and a bottle of snuff. To Ini's mother, she gave an umbrella and a handbag. The Chief gave her five pounds sterling, and his wife gave her three pounds. "Use this money to buy anything you want," the Chief told her.

"And come back to see us," his wife said.

The Chief took a pinch of the snuff Hope gave him. It smelled good. He thought snuff from the west was better than that available in the east. He so loved the sweet smell that he decided to look for the same brand when he next visited the local market. "If I can't find it there, Hope will get it for me when she comes back. But how soon? I do not know," he said.

"I thank her for cleaning the yard for me," Ini's mother said.

"And mine too. See, she motivated Ini to clean my yard, something he had given up doing since he went to college," he said.

"I want to see her come back," she said.

"She will. She appears to like our home," he assured his wife.

The next day, the Lagos company contracted to build Ini's house started work in earnest. The Chief enjoyed visiting with the builders.

"How soon will the house be ready?" he asked the contractor.

"Very soon. Perhaps a couple of months or less," he answered.

"Do you know it's going to be three-story?" he asked the contractor.

"Of course I do. When we finish it, it will dignify your compound."

"I'm proud of Ini," Umoren said.

Daily, the Chief watched the workmen build Ini's house. "They are working hard to get it finished soon," he said to himself. But what worried the Chief was not the completion of the house, it was the situation in the village. John Wat's misfortune had caused great unrest in the village, and had generated strong sympathy for him, even from some of his foes. Umoren had heard one man say, "I don't like his idea of bringing foreigners here, but I don't like his being injured for that either."

A group of young people had emerged and banded

themselves together under the name of The Citizens of Tomorrow. They sent a letter to the provincial Governor protesting the way Chief Umoren handled affairs in the village. The Governor responded by setting up a two-man commission of inquiry into the conduct of affairs in the Chief's village.

When the commission was slow in its work, the group sent a reminder to the Governor. They held demonstrations in the village, agitating for a change in leadership, and vowed not to rest until they achieved their goal.

When the new home was completed, Ini told his father he meant to demolish the old compound. Umoren sighed. "My desire is to see the old building remain where it is," he muttered.

Umoren congratulated his son on the new building, then asked him when it would be convenient for him to settle his marriage with Hope. Ini said, "Father, I will do that when I am ready. Let me complete my building first."

"What else do you want to do at the building?" Umoren asked him. Ini said nothing. "That building is finished. All my friends who see it admire it very much. Anything more will spoil its beauty, and you'll disappoint my friends," he said.

"I'm not spoiling it, Father. I'm trying to make

it look more beautiful," he said.

"How, Ini?"

"Father, the old building has to go."

Umoren grasped the pillar of the hall with both hands. "To tear down my home, the symbol of my family, the memory of my father and all that Umoren's family stands for? No!"

"The new one does that, Father," Ini said.

"Where will I live?"

"The first floor of the new home is yours, Father," Ini said.

"No. Never." The Chief turned his head to the right and to the left; each time he did so, he said, "No, never, no, never!" He sat down, then stood up. He sat and stood up again. He looked down, leaning on the central pillar of the hall.

"And why not, Father?"

"Because there's no safety, Ini!" Umoren squatted, exhausted.

"Safety? Safety. A concrete building. Safety in a permanent building?"

"Ah!" the old man gasped. "Go ahead. Do. What you want to do," he said, defeated.

"Father, the job will be done on Fionetok, three days from today."

Chief Umoren sat in his parlor late in the evening

when Ini came and sat down to talk with him.

"Is there any problem?" Umoren asked.

"No problem," Ini said. "It's six weeks to Christmas, and I have to bring the Christmas mood into this family early."

"Why early, Ini? Are you going back to Lagos so soon?"

"Yes, Father. I must miss the family at Christmas. I feel that Christmas this year should be a special one for me and my family. I have made the biggest preparation ever to celebrate Christmas since I graduated from college. Previously, I had not been able to subscribe enough toward Christmas expense in the family. The bulk of expenses usually lay heavily with you, my mother, and your other wives."

"Did you not give me a shirt and one pound ten shillings for my drink last Christmas? I remember you gave your mother a frock and some money. I don't remember how much you gave my other wives. Was it one pound? And dresses to my children. That was good."

"But I want Chief Umoren's family to celebrate this Christmas in a big way," Ini said. Umoren looked at him and smiled.

"I need your help, Father," Ini said. "I'm requesting that you ask all members of our family to assemble in the parlor. I want to talk to them before

presenting them the little gifts I have bought for them."

"When?"

"Now."

Late that night, Chief Umoren assembled his family. When his son came, he said, "Ini, we are ready."

Ini greeted them, then said, "I shall miss you this Christmas. That is why I choose to meet all of you tonight."

"Perhaps his bank authorities will send him on some business tour," his father said.

"It is my intention as a result of long planning to make this Christmas a special one. I intend to use the joyous occasion to thank all of you for the sacrifices you made when I was at college. I was not lacking in pocket money throughout my three years in Ibadan. Thus, I decided to use the festive occasion of Christmas to formally indicate to all of you that for the three years after I graduated from college, I have enjoyed my work, and thus I assume my responsibility as a mature man who must play a role matched to his maturity."

Everybody cheered, clapped hands, and shouted, "Long life!" His mother said "Haleluya." Umoren was silent.

Then Umoren said, "Yes Ini, only one thing can match your maturity. You need to marry your Hope."

Ini looked down, then looked at his father, smiled, and said, "Father, I know that."

Ini gave his father three big yams, each tuber weighing more than 20 lbs., three pounds sterling for a he-goat, a pack of five big dried fish, and a bottle of whiskey. He also gave him a six-yard piece of cloth, a shirt, a helmet, and a staff.

He gave his mother two big yams, a pack of five medium-sized dried fish, one pound sterling for a cock, a bottle of French wine, a big basin for domestic use, and eight yards of cloth for headties, blouses, and loin cloths. To his father's two other wives he gave two yams, five fishes, a bottle of wine, one pound sterling for a cock, and an eight-yard piece of cloth. He gave ready-made dresses to two of his half-brothers, his half-sister, and his sister. To his two cousins, Sunday and Reuben, he gave a shirt each.

On Fionetok, Ini sent a team of hired workmen from Lagos, and the old house and compound were leveled. Umoren stood by and watched, occasionally exchanging words with his son's laborers. He stood near one of the pillars taken out of the destroyed building. He told one of the laborers the age of the wood, the place if came from, and who sold it to him. In a little while, there was a shout from the leader of the crew. "Save your life!" the leader shouted again. The old

building fell.

"The damn thing is gone!" Ini's younger half-brother, Udo, shouted with joy.

The house fell. The old man watched it crumble. "It's gone!" he said softly. See this pillar." He held it. "It once stood upright. That is all!" The laborers carried away the useful parts of the materials and piled them at a little distance. Fire was set to what was no longer useful. Umoren drew close to the ruin. He watched the fire burn.

"Yes! The fire. Clean up everything!" he said to himself.

Three days later, three oblong grass plots were prepared where the old compound once stood. The species of croton whose leaves displayed assorted colors, red, purple, and green, interspersed with acalypha, variegated and based in red, were lined along the edges of the three rectangular grass plots.

The Chief watched his son. He heard him say *That's a job well done!* He heard him saying *Now we can have more sunlight on the western side of my new building.* He watched his son walk around the building.

That evening, Umoren walked around the old compound. He looked at the new grass plots. He looked at the drooping flowers. He wept. He went to his new home.

Inside the first story parlor of the new building, Chief Umoren sat on his goat's skin and looked out; he saw nothing.

He called Ini in and asked him where he would sleep; the night approached. He asked his son where he might make fire. Ini plugged in a small electric heater and showed him his sleeping room, oblong-shaped with a low, double bed. There were windows cut into three of the walls. Chief Umoren sat and looked out.

"There aren't shutters in the walls," he complained. "Where are the window-shutters?" he said.

"There are windows, Father," Ini said proudly. "See these windows! The glass is beautiful and costly. These windows are more beautiful than the wooden window shutters of the old building."

"What happens if a wanton boy hits it with even a small pebble? Consider a pebble hitting your beautiful and costly window and a small pebble hitting my window-shutter!" Umoren looked around his new home. He remembered his own house and wept. "Oh me!" he wept. In his fury, he hit at the window with his staff and broke the glass, shouting, "All's gone!"

Hope arrived from Lagos to arrange for her wedding ceremony. The Anglican Church pastor Rev. Jonah Ube came to the compound to explain the responsibility marriage entailed.

"Does it not include obedience to parents?" the Chief asked.

"It's an essential ingredient, but has no direct bearing on marriage. When they obey their own parents, they will expect their children to obey them. Otherwise, they can still have a successful marriage without it," the pastor said. He then talked to the Chief, urging him to minimize the bitterness and tension in his family. "One cause of your bitterness comes from Ini's association with my church," Rev. Ube told him.

"I do not say that," Umoren said. Rev. Ube told the Chief that he was bitter because the church gave Ini a Christian name at baptism. "You may still call him Ini, but we will call him Joseph," the pastor said.

"I do not understand this!" Umoren said, weeping.

A policeman delivered a letter to the Chief from the provincial Governor. The Chief returned the letter to the officer and said, "Tell me what it says, will you?" The officer opened the letter, looked at it for a few minutes, then said that Min was to serve one year in jail for smuggling and for hiring a thug to injure John Wat. The district police administration had found the Chief to be overindulgent and incompetent. Therefore, he had to dissolve his council and surrender his chieftancy in the village. The Governor nominated three middle-aged men, Akpa-Ayara, Akpa-Obong, and

Ete-Akpabio, to run the affairs of the village, reporting fortnightly to the local council office at Mbiaso. John Wat was urged to go ahead with his plan to open the UAC shopping center in the village. The policeman folded the letter and handed it back to Umoren.

Umoren sat on his stool, his face turned to the wall, weeping, when his son came in.

"Father, turn your face to me," Ini said. Umoren and his son looked at the broken window. "Don't look at me, my son!" Umoren said. His son embraced him, but Umoren could not stop weeping.

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