

The  
SPIRIT CHILD

RAMONU SANUSI

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# THE SPIRIT CHILD

Ramonu Sanusi



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*Published by*  
Spectrum Books Limited  
Spectrum House  
Ring Road  
PMB 5612  
Ibadan, Nigeria  
*e-mail: admin1@spectrumbooksonline.com*

*in association with*  
Safari Books (Export) Limited  
1st Floor  
17 Bond Street  
St Helier  
Jersey JE2 3NP  
Channel Islands  
United Kingdom

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First published, 2005

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ISBN: 978-029-570-4

*Printed by AKT Ventures Ltd., Ibadan*

## DEDICATION

*To the thousands of children and families affected by the  
unprecedented tsunamis that swept through parts of  
Asia and Africa in December 2004.*

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## Chapter One

### SEVENTH TIME CHILD

The seventh time I came into this world, many villagers gathered in my father's compound to celebrate my birth as they had done in the past. It was on a rainy day with an unfriendly cloudy sky, characteristic of the unusual mornings in which I was born again and again. On that day, cock crows in the village woke the inhabitants of Bagudu as usual with the noisy and crispy chant. It was in this same mysterious manner that I had come to this world six times before and villagers who were now accustomed to my frequent appearances converged once again at my father's hut. They did so because a boiling curiosity was pushing them to know whether I resembled previous children that my mother had given birth to before me and who had died on the seventh day. People in Bagudu wanted to know what I looked like, before drawing their conclusions and deciding on what to say or do next, if there was anything at all they could do to me.

In those days, it was not so common in Bagudu for children to die seven days after they were born. It was neither good for the village nor for its inhabitants. Sacrifices were made hurriedly to appease the gods and ancestors against anything considered abnormal. However, tradition had taught villagers many things about the *abiku* child (that is, a child who dies and returns constantly into this world). *Abikus* could be either

troublesome or famous children in the future. Despite the fact that they were still not sure of what kind of child I was, they kept wondering .

*Abiku* or not, they were resolved to know the nature of the child that I was. It is true that the villagers hated *abiku* children; nevertheless, they recognized their existence. In the same vein, inhabitants of Bagudu accused women whose children were dying constantly of being mysterious. Hence, they blamed the women who had those children and not the children themselves. This was so, because men feared women for the powers they had. Some women were viewed as witches, hence the reason for persecuting those who had strange children in the society.

Many Bagudu villagers thought that they should rush to my parents' compound, to blame my poor mother once again, as they had done in the past, on hearing that she had again given birth to a devilish child. Indeed, nobody felt any pity for my mother who had painfully endured her pregnancies and had lost her *abiku* children on several occasions. Were these children really *abiku* children as they often thought?

There was no doubt whatsoever that I was a carbon copy of the six previous children who came before me because I bore a strong resemblance to them – an ebony black boy. My face had the same oval form, my eyes were big, my nose was large with wide nostrils, my neck was tiny, and my legs were robust. The hair that covered my triangular head was longer than my whole body. These same traits that I brought to this world the seventh

time easily helped the villagers to know that I was the same child. They had not mistaken anything at all because I was the same strange creature, the same *abiken*, the same *abami eda* as people in Bagudu village would later call me. I must say here that those who did call me by that name suffered for it. I was an unforgiving creature and as a result, ready to crush those who said bad things about me, for I considered them my enemies.

Heavy rains had preceded my birth the six previous times. Rain, in the same manner also, preceded my birth the seventh time. After the rain stopped, a scorching sun rose immediately and its fire-like rays were burning the wet soil and drying the pools of water lying fallow. The day became beautiful again; birds, lizards, vultures and many four-legged animals were all moving about, showing their excitement. Some villagers, who had not yet visited us, converged hurriedly at my parents' house to greet them and to see what I looked like. Many of them were saying '*ba ba ba !*', as a sign of astonishment after they saw me. Their loud exclamation could simply be interpreted as 'what manner of creature is this again' so similar to the children they had seen before?

In Bagudu, there was an elderly woman named Ladisa who was known for spreading news of happenings in the village to its inhabitants. Ladisa acted as if she was the village newscaster. She was the first person who came to greet my parents and the one who actually propagated the news of my birth. This news immediately spread like wildfire and attracted people into my father's house, like locusts invading a corn farm.



Men dressed in *buba* and *sokoto* prostrated while women in *buba* and *iro*, knelt down to greet each other. In Bagudu, the custom was that young people prostrated to greet older ones. During the salutations, the long *sokoto* and *iro* swept the floor as people knelt down like camels.

The villagers who were in my parents' house were no longer surprised at my seventh coming; yet, they were still looking at each other's faces. They were murmuring as if they were afraid of my mother. Nobody at that particular time knew what was going to happen next. The business of the day was to eat, drink and dance to the sound of the giant drums. Villagers were seen dancing and rejoicing for there was plenty of food for them to eat, and large kegs of palm wine for them to cool their throats. In Bagudu village at that time, the birth of a child was always accompanied by eating, drinking palm wine and dancing the whole day of the naming ceremony. Like vultures that go after rotten meat, people crowded my parents' hut and feasted on whatever was there for them to eat or drink. The celebration of the birth of a child starts from the birthday and ends on the day of the naming ceremony.

At those times, people in Bagudu lived in huts and not in houses as we have them today. The apparently tired-looking hut where my parents were living was built with red clay and bamboo cut in the nearby forest so as to make the hut thick and durable. Huts constructed like this lasted for many moons without any major work being done on them. It was only the thatch roof that had to be changed from time to time, whenever it

became weak. Other people in Bagudu, who wanted their huts to be distinct, painted them with cow excrement to make them look more beautiful. That, of course, irritated my mother because the odour made her feel nauseated. Therefore, my parents did not paint their hut with cow excrement. This was at the insistence of my mother, whom my father respected so much because she was a strong woman.

Many times after my mother had me and I died repeatedly, no one in the village knew that I was a spirit child. Insults were poured like water on my father. My poor father was accused of keeping a mysterious wife (my mother) instead of chasing her away. Villagers mocked him for not being able to have another wife. They also said that he was afraid of my mother, though that was not the case. My father only treated my mother like a friend and indeed like a good life companion. This was because she helped him in so many ways, particularly in decision-making. Bagudu people did not like my father's attitude but that did not make him change towards my mother.

My mother, who was still recuperating after the seventh childbirth, was dressed in *ofi* after the village women had bathed her with the traditional black soap. That was the custom in Bagudu whenever a woman had a baby. The *ofi* my mother wore was made each time a woman was expecting a child in the village. Women never used the same *ofi* for two different naming ceremonies. Once women marked the birth of a child with one *ofi*, they always threw it away. My mother was

wearing her seventh *ofi* for her seventh child. She had no idea whether I would survive or not. The seven different *ofi* that my mother wore meant seven children. Unfortunately, that was not the case as she did not have seven living children. My worried mother was still waiting impatiently to see what the seventh day had in store for me, her seventh child. For her, if I did not die this seventh time, I would be her only child on earth. Whether I was to die after my seventh day or not, was not the concern of the people of Bagudu. What mattered most to them at that particular time was to eat, drink, dance and enjoy themselves.

My mother was smiling but she was not very joyous. She did not want her semi-happy mood to be marred by the usual evening sorrow that had previously accompanied my birth. I was the same spirit child. My mother had to wait for seven days before she could go round the village to dance, celebrate and greet the inhabitants if I failed to die. My mother would have to perform this dancing ceremony with *Iroko* leaves in her left hand, shaking them intermittently, as required by the ritual. There was a giant *Iroko* tree in my father's compound, hence my father never had any problem getting leaves for my mother. He simply used a long stick to pluck some of the giant *Iroko* leaves for her anytime she needed them.

For a long time in the village, my mother was considered an *Emere* simply because of her children, who were constantly dying. Villagers wrongly accused her of belonging to this group of *Emere* spirits, who are

much more powerful than the *Aje*. *Aje* are witches with a reputation of being very wicked. Despite the power the *Ajes* have, they are very much afraid of *Emere*.

The spirits called *Emere* come to this life with a promise to their group on what they would do in life, as a covenant of their loyalty and dedication to their group. *Emere* women are usually known to die on the day they get married; others are known never to have children in the real world, but have them in their mysterious world instead. However, some may have their children in the real world and cause them to die on the seventh day. Owing to the fact that my mother's children all died on the seventh day after they were born, villagers took her for an *Emere*. Nobody ever knew or believed that she was as innocent as a day-old baby. I was the real problem, not my mother, as the villagers thought. I am sure that if my mother was an *Emere* as Bagudu villagers claimed, she would have definitely punished her detractors by killing or harming them. *Emere* are very vindictive and often go after people who cross their paths. Once an individual is caught in their trap, he can never get out without being severely punished. *Emere* hardly ever forgive and the best way to stay away from their wrath is by simply avoiding stepping on their toes.

A long time ago, a young man met a very pretty woman but did not know that she was an *Emere*. He quickly got married to her and soon after their marriage, he started cheating on her by going out with other ladies. The *Emere* later knew of this and out of annoyance

punished her husband by mysteriously killing his genital organ. Though he did not die, he could not sleep with any other woman for the rest of his days, except with his wife. *Emere* do such things.

My father's name was Ladigun. He was a brave man because he decided to stay with my mother, despite the fact that the villagers took her for an *Emere*. Even though I was a spirit child and not a real human being, I considered him to be my father. I decided seven times to enter his wife's womb (I mean my mother's womb). I made up my mind to always go back to his house because I did not want to go far, like many other spirits. I simply wanted to be close to the giant *Iroko* tree in my father's compound. Ladigun never argued with my mother, no matter what happened. For that reason alone, I decided to be part of the family, knowing that they would not bother me if they later discovered that I was a spirit child.

My mother's name was Ladigan. I respected her more than my father because she was the one who carried my pregnancy seven times. I loved my mother very much, but as a spirit child, I was not supposed to pity any individual who was not from our spirit group. I saw my mother suffering and as a result, I vowed that I would never kill her. Other spirit children were not as nice as I was. Though I was not nice to other human beings, I was at least affectionate towards my mother and father. Many of my fellow spirit children killed their parents for no reason other than, "that is how it is meant to be".

My father and mother both had names that were musical. They thus decided to give me a musical name during my naming ceremony. They decided to call me Ladigana. My name sounded very much like that of my mother but with a little difference. I overheard my father saying to my mother that my name was similar to hers because she was the one who suffered most in the birth of their six children who later died.

My naming ceremony was held on the seventh day after my birth under the giant *Iroko* tree. My parents did not know what the tree meant for spirit children like myself, otherwise they would have cut it. However, cutting the giant *Iroko* tree without performing some rituals to neutralize the spirits inside the tree would have had serious repercussions on whoever attempted to do so.

Everywhere in Bagudu village, there were many *Iroko* trees and people from neighbouring villages preferred to call Bagudu the *Iroko* village instead of its real name. While many of those trees were cut down, many others were planted at the same time to replace those felled. The *Iroko* tree in my father's compound was not affected. People in the village knew how much my father liked it and this might have been the reason why the villagers allowed it to stand. My father and the inhabitants of the village knew rather too little about the tree. To them, the *Iroko* was a generous tree, a provider of shade from the burning sun. It was under it that they had their palm wine and exchanged pleasantries. This tree was twice as tall as all the *Iroko*

trees in Bagudu village at that time. Its leaves neither withered nor dropped, all year round. They were always green and fresh, no matter how harsh the sun was. Thus, to the villagers, my father was blessed to have this tree in his compound. They envied him for this and later dropped the idea of cutting it as they had initially planned to, simply because it became a place of rest, discussion, conflict resolution and especially drinking palm wine on great occasions. This *Iroko* tree was actually the abode of *abami eda's* children, that is the spirit children. The mysterious spirit children dwelling inside the giant *Iroko*, at night visited houses while some entered women's wombs and stayed there for eleven months.

My naming ceremony was going on as planned. The people were eating, drinking and dancing. It was during this merriment that I started talking, to the amazement of those present at the ceremony. It was the first time such a frightening incident was happening in Bagudu. The same people who had been rejoicing a few minutes earlier, started running helter-skelter like mad cows, for dear life. I was laughing at them because no matter where they ran to, they would still be within my influence. I was everywhere and they were all in my nest like an insect caught in a spider's web. Everything was like a labyrinth – a labyrinth of death – because these people did not have any way out of the danger befalling them. I could have killed them all but I killed only those who laughed at me and my parents, instead of pitying my mother.

My parents, though terrified as other people, did not go far. They went to hide in a place near their hut from where they observed the unfolding scene. They did not know that I was still watching them. As I considered them my parents, I did not want to run after them. I was already walking and running like an adult on that day.

It was after my naming ceremony that Ladigana became my name among the real human beings where I now found myself. My name among the spirit children was *Ajantala*. I was very respected among the spirit children of the giant *Iroko* tree where I lived before joining Ladigun and Ladigan to become part of their family. I was the king of the spirit children. Like in the world of real human beings, we also had our own rules and observed them to the letter. As king, I had servants who worked for me in my palace and on my farms too. None of the spirit children could challenge my authority. In view of my status, I decided to remain with Ladigun and Ladigan, and the spirit children could not challenge my decision to do so. I assigned work to the spirit children the way I liked. They could not refuse to do what I asked them to do, otherwise they would be severely punished. With the privileges I had, no human creature could overpower me. To show my authority over real human beings, I simply scared them a little bit during my naming ceremony when I spoke and walked. As a spirit child I could speak any language I wanted. I could also understand any language and communicate like a native speaker of any language that I chose.



Bagudu villagers in those days spoke *Yoruba* and that was the language I spoke as a seven-day old child. Contrary to all expectations, I did not die again on the seventh day. As I said before, my mother, Ladigan, was to go round the village with *Iroko* leaves in her left hand and greet people in celebration of my survival. My mother did not even remember that celebration again because she was scared to death. This was because she discovered during my naming ceremony that I was not an ordinary child. My parents did not know, that I was already hearing what they were saying before I was born. I did not want to talk on the first day so that I could hear what my parents and the villagers would say about me. That silent attitude of mine helped me to know the attitude of real human beings. Even though I knew certain things about them, it was when I was in their midst that I had the opportunity of knowing more about them.

When I was born, my mother breast-fed me for seven days. Whenever she put her breast in my mouth, it was not milk that was coming out as she thought. She did not know this secret and I did not want her to know. Actually, it was the water of the spirits that came into my mouth in a mysterious way. As spirit children, we do not eat the same food that real human beings eat, this was why my mother's breast milk was turned into spirit water. Apart from this, I also ate seven *atare* everyday. It was our secret and no one else knew this. Real human beings only knew what we wanted them to know. By and large, I was on that diet for seven good

days but because I spoke on that day, I began to eat forest leaves and some locusts. Those were to be my meal for the rest of my life, especially if I remained a spirit child.

As Ladigan could not go round the village to rejoice about my birth after seven days, I went round myself. It was along the way that I heard people who still did not know me saying that, I must be an *abami eda*, meaning a strange being. I decided to punish them immediately for saying this. I made it impossible for them to speak the same language again. They could not understand each other any more and, as a result, did not know where to go to. A *Yoruba* adage says that if you do not know where you are going to, you should know where you are coming from. These three people neither knew where they were coming from nor where they were going to. Other passers-by, who saw what had just happened, opened their mouths in surprise and were shouting *ha ha ha!* They too got punished, for I made it impossible for them to close their mouths. For the second time, I saw people running helter-skelter without knowing the direction to follow and they were screaming, "*abami eda ni, abami eda ni, abami eda ni*".

My destination was Bagudu market where I could buy *atare* before I returned home. I decided to change into a real human being so that people could sell me some *atare*. Though I had the power to scare people away and get whatever I needed in the market, I did not want to do that. When I finally got there, I saw many creatures walking on their heads. As soon as these

creatures saw me, they knew right away that I was not a human being just like them. They simply murmured some words and cleared the way for me to pass. If I were of a lesser power than they, they would have killed me on seeing me. They however knew that I was much more powerful than they were. These creatures were about a hundred in all and they let me go my way.

I approached a woman selling *atare* in the market. When she looked at my eyes, she knew that I was a strange being. The seller did not say a word to me. She already knew that only strange people fed on or bought *atare*; and/or used it for rituals or *juju*. In those days, there was nothing like money as it is today, people used cowries. I gave her three cowries, and I got enough *atare* to sustain me for some days.

After this, I decided to go back to my parents' house. On my way back, I saw a very young pretty woman who offered some bananas to me because she was selling plenty of them. I rejected the bananas but she continued to beg me to have them for the love she had for me. I told her I did not like women and she was surprised to hear that.

"Why is it that a very handsome man like you does not like women?"

I told her to leave me alone as I was in a hurry, but she would not listen to me. She followed me wherever I went like a dog following its owner.

"Listen pretty lady, this is the last time I will ask you to leave me alone and go your way," I told her.

The woman had already fallen in love with me to

the extent that there was nothing I could have said to stop her from following me. Some miles after I left Bagudu market, I transformed into a spirit child again. This pretty woman, whose name I did not bother to ask, started to scream. She now realized that I was not a handsome man as she had initially said. I was not even a real human being but an ugly spirit. She fell on the floor unconscious and I left her and returned to my parents' house. If it had not been for the fact that this pretty woman had a genuine love for me and offered me some bananas without asking her, I would have harmed her. Like I said before, we spirit children only know how to harm people and not how to help them. That was the category of spirit children that I belonged to. There are other spirit children who do good but they are very few. Evil spirit children, hate the other category of spirit children who do good. That is why we can never be in the same place at the same time. The woman who offered me bananas and decided to follow me was very lucky. Her kindness probably saved her because as bad spirit children, we do not have any word like "good" in our dictionary.

As I said before, my mother was a very wise woman. Unknown to me, she advised my father after I left for Bagudu market, that they should go and see *Yemaja*, the goddess of the river. My father, as usual, yielded to her advice and they quickly headed for the goddess's place. Ladigun, as I mentioned before, trusted Ladigan's judgment and wisdom. Whatever advice she gave to him in the past helped him considerably, to the extent

that my father dared not doubt her strength. It was very much later that I knew of this plan. If I had not gone to Bagudu market, I would have known their plan to see *Yemaja*. It was difficult for anybody to plan anything against me while I am around him or her. When I am around people, I have the power to know what they are thinking or planning to do, but once I move a little bit away from them, I lose that power. This is because I need my power to combat people around me. For this reason, I cannot afford to leave my power behind anytime I go out.

## Chapter Two

### THE RUPTURE WITH THE SPIRIT CHILDREN

My parents walked for the whole day before they got to their destination, Yemaja's place. When they arrived at the miraculous river, Yemaja's water-women who were waiting at the shore of the river received them. The duty of these water-women was to take guests into the river to meet the goddess. When it was my parents' turn, the water-women took them to meet Yemaja. If it had been my parents alone, they would never have been able to go inside that mysterious river. The river had its water in blue and white colours and remained so throughout my parents' stay. It was after they got inside the mysterious river that it dawned on them that there was another life there. The life my parents knew before then was the one on earth. They were surprised and at the same time terrified when they saw the life inside the miraculous river. They watched with mouth agape and trembled like leaves. They could not utter a word. It was then that they began to appreciate the wonders of *Olodumare* — the creator of human beings, *jinis*, spirits, trees, mountains, rivers, birds, forests, and all other things that exist in this world. It was much later in my life that my parents told me this story .

As spirit children, we had our limitations. We could not see the creatures living inside the river and could not fight them. For this reason, we had no power over

*Yemaja*. My parents told me that when they first got to the goddess, they were immediately ordered to remove their clothes. They were given a cotton wrapper that was as white as snow, which they tied round their waists. I must not forget to mention that my parents remarked that all the women there, also wrapped white cloths around their waists. They added that these women had *ileke* - special beads, around their wrists and their ankles. They also told me that these water-women had white spots of powder on their bodies and on their faces like tattoos. They did not tell me why the tattoos were on the women's faces. I am sure they did not know because they were not allowed to talk to them.

The water-women, according to my parents, were the prettiest creatures in this world. Besides cooking for *Yemaja* and her guests, they also went on errands for her. Most of the time they went outside the river to look for materials needed for rituals. They said that the water-women hardly talked to them because that was the rule there. Ladigan, who for the most part did the talking, added that these women behaved the same way to other women by not talking to them.

To my mother, it was as if the water-women were born with songs. They sang the most beautiful songs she had ever heard in her life. In her opinion, *Yemaja's* place was like a paradise on earth. Even though my parents were pagans, they believed in paradise and in the last judgment that would be carried out one day by *Olodumare*. They believed that *Olodumare's* judgment would be passed on all creatures without necessarily

sending anyone into hell fire. Creatures who were wicked in this world would be grouped together to fight each other whenever he made his judgment. Creatures that did good in their life time would also be grouped separately to continue to do good to each other.

It was a blessing to my parents when they got to *Yemaja's* place after all the trouble I gave them and the Bagudu villagers. They did not want to come back home to face me, Ladigana, the spirit child. They wanted to have an adequate preparation from *Yemaja* before doing so. Besides, in the river goddess's place, my parents could eat, drink, rest and sleep with their eyes closed without being afraid of anything. *Yemaja* is a powerful creature. Many people from Bagudu village and its environs went to her with different problems. No matter how urgent the problem was, one had to wait until it was one's turn to see her. According to them, it was a taboo for anyone who went to *Yemaja* to engage in any talk beside what had taken one there. The restriction placed on getting involved with the beautiful women was for the men in particular. The goddess wanted men who came to see her to behave well and face the business that took them to her.

*Yemaja* is the goddess of fertility, peace and beauty, as she herself is an alluring beauty. She is not married and will never get married. She has to remain unmarried as long as she lives and that is why the beautiful young women working for her are also spinsters and will never get married. There is abundance of everything in her place - food, drink, kolanuts, cows, *ileke*, gold: just name



it. *Yemaja* gives no preference to anyone but attends to people who come to her, going by the records of her young beautiful women. As a believer in justice, she always strives to do justice, “without putting a calabash inside another one”, as the *Yoruba* would say. People who go to her, whether rich or poor, are treated equally.

There is always a long queue waiting to see *Yemaja* and for this reason, she worked tirelessly day and night to help people solve their difficulties. She would first listen, before attending to people or providing them with solutions to their problems. She could not, however, be deceived because she could easily consult her oracle to know whether a person was telling lies. For this reason, it was not even necessary for an individual to give her a different version of whatever story he brought to her.

Eventually, it was my parents' turn after their long period of waiting. They did not waste time in narrating their story to *Yemaja* in detail. No aspect of the story was left out. For the most part, my mother was the one whom *Yemaja* asked to narrate the story because she was the one who suffered from the pains of the pregnancies and childbirths. What my mother said tallied with what *Yemaja* saw in her magical mirror. Looking at her magical mirror she was able to see the life of an individual in a flash, and thus could say if a person was lying or not. It was simply a routine for *Yemaja* to ask individuals who came to her to narrate their stories because she had a way of knowing them anyway. People needed to do this so that the goddess of the river could help them with their problems. After listening to their

story, she told my parents so many things about me and about the giant *Iroko* tree in my father's compound.

As my father heard the secret behind the giant *Iroko* tree, he became very furious but he was quickly ordered by *Yemaja* to control his temper. Of course, he did as he was asked but his lips were shaking like a leaf blown here and there by the wind. My father's attitude reminded me again of the courage of my mother because she was much more composed than my father. My mother simply held her chin in her two hands, on the bare floor where she sat. Her attention was completely captured by what *Yemaja* was saying about me, the *abami eda*.

Unknown to my parents, Maboyeje, the king of Bagudu, had already sent some of his subjects to *Yemaja* for help so that his village would not become *ahora*. The villagers were fleeing Bagudu since I was killing or putting whoever offended me on the death roll. As the royal father, his duty was to protect the people he was ruling, otherwise he would become irrelevant. I had already succeeded in rendering Maboyeje ineffective to an extent, because when he heard that I had already entered the market, he took to his heels. My entrance into the market was very scary. It was as if a lunatic had entered the market. Nobody could stop or handle a madman who had run amok in a market. That development scared Maboyeje to death.

Literally, Maboyeje means 'the king who will not jeopardize his throne'. As the king did not want his rule to be disrupted, he quickly sent his subjects to *Yemaja* for help. His subjects were already in *Yemaja's* place

before my parents got there. My parents, however, did not see them initially. As soon as these subjects saw my parents they started screaming . They were screaming because they thought they were going to relive their experience with me the *Ajantala, abami eda* spirit child. Their scream was so loud and so piercing that *Yemaja* shouted for silence from where she was attending to my parents. The king's subjects quickly stopped screaming. They remained silent as if their mouths had suddenly been glued together.

*Yemaja* told my parents all that she knew about me and asked them not to cut the giant *Iroko* tree in their compound for the time being. She warned that Bagudu could become the spirit children's village if they did not obey her. The king's subjects were to give the king the same information. She promised to tell them the appropriate time for them to cut the *Iroko* tree. *Yemaja* later gave my parents some mysterious tobacco that we spirit children hated to smell. She also gave them a black soap, asking them to use it to bathe me immediately they got back home. Besides, she also gave them some *juju* that could counter some of my powers by making me sleep temporarily. Luckily, when my parents got back to their abode, they found me sleeping. My mother was very brave. She quickly mixed the black soap with water and poured it on my body. Soon after that, she lit the tobacco and directed the smoke into my wide nostrils. I inhaled the smoke soundly without knowing.

It was after this ritual was performed on me that I lost most of my powers and gradually started behaving

like a real human being. However, this was the beginning of more troubles for me and for my parents. Spirit children remaining inside the giant *Iroko* tree decided to fight back. They were mad because I was no longer part of them. They were also annoyed because my parents were planning to chase them from the giant *Iroko* tree.

At night, the spirit children came out of their abode and went to different houses to fight villagers who were sleeping. Although the spirit children were unable to kill many people, they made loud noises which turned some villagers deaf. Not satisfied with this punishment, they started setting people's huts ablaze in a mysterious way, that only they could understand. Even though I did not have much power anymore, I still heard and understood their language when they came around murmuring like bees in a beehive. Unfortunately, I could no longer talk to them nor plead for forgiveness. I had lost all my powers as I was now eating real human beings' foods. I was also behaving like a human being. All the new qualities I had acquired were contrary to their way of life. These human habits were forbidden when I was a spirit child. Few days after the spirit children set many houses ablaze, they mysteriously caused a torrential rain to fall in the village. This rain ruined all the crops in Bagudu village and its environs. As one would have expected, famine came to the village. Villagers had nothing to eat and there was nowhere anybody could run to, for food.

Children were dying, many men and women died too, and those who did not die were like living corpses.

They were like skeletons and their heads were heavier than their bodies. My parents and I were able to run to *Yemaja's* place for help. I was qualified to visit the river goddess because I was now a semi-human being. The news had already got to her because she saw all these happenings in her magical mirror. She once again intervened by giving us additional *juju* that helped us to combat the spirit children. The fight was not totally over because the spirit children did not give up easily. The mother of all battles began when the inhabitants of Bagudu decided to cut down the giant *Iroko* tree.

The great and unforgettable day was the day the inhabitants of Bagudu village decided to drive out the spirit children from the *Iroko* tree that had served as a dwelling place for the spirit children for many moons. The *Iroko* tree in my father's compound had been there for many moons. Inhabitants of the village wondered about the longevity of this mysterious tree but none of them spoke about it. The spirit children had protected the tree and that was why nobody in the village ever remembered how long it had been there. Despite the wisdom of Bagudu villagers, they failed to realize that the tree in my father's compound was mysterious and not an ordinary one like those in Bagudu. It took the intervention of *Yemaja*, the goddess of the river, for them to know what exactly was going on inside that tree. If I had not scared the villagers who came for my naming ceremony by talking and walking after my seventh day, perhaps my parents wouldn't have gone to see *Yemaja* for protection. The mysterious *Iroko* tree

would have still remained intact for no one would have known its secret. It was as if I had betrayed my fellow spirit children; but it was not so. I was simply infuriated because Bagudu people who attended my naming ceremony laughed at me and my mother. That was why I revealed my real identity to them.

*Yemaja* gave a special tobacco to the villagers, my parents and me when we went to see her for help. This was after my parents had returned from her place and had succeeded in cleansing me spiritually by severing my ties with the spirit children. I did not want to follow my parents and the villagers to *Yemaja's* place but everybody in the village insisted that I should do so. Because I was no more a real spirit child, I easily gave in to their pressure and demand. Back in Bagudu after *Yemaja* had given us a special tobacco to neutralize the spirit children and chase them from the *Iroko* tree, the villagers did not waste time in doing so. All they wanted was to get rid of the spirit children as soon as possible so that peace could reign in the village.

The entire village followed Adiga, the sorcerer of Bagudu, who initially failed to drive away the spirit children from the giant *Iroko* tree. Adiga actually had paid a high price in the past, for attempting to chase them from the giant *Iroko* tree. Adiga, after that attempt, lost his wives and children. He therefore saw this mission as a revenge. The entire village agreed to wage war on the spirit children one particular evening because spirit children like to rest in the evening. On that memorable evening, Adiga lit a huge tobacco wrapped in an *Iroko*

leaf and threw it inside the big hole of the tree. Spirit children were busy sleeping when this incident occurred. The scent of the special tobacco woke them from their slumber. They started murmuring and with loud noises of discontent, fled the *Iroko*. The villagers could not see these creatures since they were spirits; but when the murmuring and noise stopped, they realized that they had succeeded in driving them away. The spirit children went in the direction of the river but because they were not water spirits, they could not do anything to *Yemaja*. Instead they went to take refuge in a nearby tree hoping to come back to the mysterious *Iroko* tree at night. Villagers later renamed the giant *Iroko* tree in my father's compound the 'mysterious *Iroko* tree' after they realized the mystery behind it. As I said before, after my spiritual cleansing with the river water and tobacco inserted in my nose, I lost all their qualities but I could still hear their language. I was the one who told villagers what I heard when they were fleeing the giant *Iroko* tree or the mysterious *Iroko* tree as it was now called.

They returned *en masse* the night of the same day they were driven away from the tree. To their amazement, they noticed that the villagers had already cut down the tree. It was at the order of Adiga, the sorcerer of Bagudu village, that this tree was cut into pieces. The villagers did not want them to come back and dwell there as they did in the past. It was not easy for them to cut the tree because when they started, the tree started talking like a human being. They were not afraid but instead, they continued to cut; because they

had already performed several rituals and invoked the spirit of their ancestors prior to that.

Cutting the *Iroko* tree did not pose any problem because the spirit children were not around at the time it was being cut down; and they were unable to use their power from where they took refuge. When they came back to Bagudu later that night, everybody in the village had gone to sleep. They came back in thousands and started setting many huts ablaze as a punishment for what real human beings did to them. Once people were outside their huts, they started chasing them like rats. The villagers started running amok again like mad cows, to unknown destinations. Spirit children are very vindictive. It was after they killed many villagers – men, women and children – and turned Bagudu village into a barren desert, that they left and headed for a new place that would serve as their new home.

The remaining Bagudu villagers who came back to their ancestral village rebuilt their huts, after all the beatings and killings carried out by the spirit children. They started living peacefully again as if nothing had happened. After the spirit children had finally left for an unknown destination, the people became happier than before and started drinking their palm wine as they had done in the past.

I lived with my parents and other villagers who were as lucky as we, because the spirit children did not kill us that night. If it had not been for the special tobacco we had lit when they invaded the village like locusts, we would have been dead by now. The tobacco



smoke actually prevented the spirit children from attacking us.

Many people in the village later mourned the death of the giant *Iroko* tree. Though the tree was mysterious, it had nevertheless provided shade, where the villagers sat, talked, danced, and drank their fresh palm wine. There was no *Iroko* tree in Bagudu similar to the giant *Iroko* tree. No *Iroko* tree in Bagudu had its leaves green all year round. No *Iroko* tree in Bagudu served the villagers the same purpose that the giant *Iroko* tree served them, even though it had been the abode of spirit children. Villagers later consoled themselves with the fact that it had been better to kill the tree than to have spirit children among them. It was a matter of choice and the villagers made their choice by killing the giant *Iroko* tree in order to drive away the mysterious spirit children.

### *Chapter Three*

#### THE SEVEN MOUNTAINS OF THE SEVEN EARTHS

Many moons after the giant *Iroko* tree had been cut down to drive away the spirit children who dwelled within it, these creatures found a new abode in the seven mountains of the seven earths. I was severed from them through the spiritual cleansing *Yemaja* asked my parents to perform on me with the river water she gave to them. I nevertheless still had a sign on my forehead which I had to carry with me for the rest of my life. That sign was a sign given to us, which no creature on earth could remove, other than the spirit children themselves. Irrespective of how many moons we spend on earth we remain small in stature. Real human beings do not live for as long as we do and this is because of the power we have. I must say here that I did not get that power back again. For this reason I had to be careful in order not to find myself where the spirit children live otherwise they would drag me back to their midst. No matter how long it takes them to do so, they always go after their fellow spirits.

After my spiritual cleansing, I lived in harmony with my parents and Bagudu villagers for many moons. I was no longer that scary creature who had made people in the village run helter-skelter for dear life in the past. Many of them became my friends and did not fear me anymore as they did when I was a seven-day old spirit

child. They feared me in the past because I massacred many villagers who insulted me when I was born. Bagudu people invited me to their houses for many ceremonies and to their farms as well, so that I could give them a helping hand.

The moon after the spirit children were chased from the giant *Iroko* tree, inhabitants of Bagudu harvested tons of crops from their farms. These crops were stored in small huts built with mud and covered with grass. Life became normal again and many good things were happening in the village. The good things happening in the village now reflected the peaceful atmosphere the villagers had enjoyed in the past before the spirit children started their trouble. People had plenty of food to eat because the rain that they prevented from falling, was now falling regularly. There was plenty of palm wine to drink in Bagudu because many palm trees were planted. These trees also beautified the village besides providing palm wine. Different birds that had disappeared and had gone to carve their niche in the forest when things turned upside down because of the wickedness of my fellow spirit children, all came back to the village. Birds were singing beautiful songs on those palm trees again, goats were roaming about the streets again and human beings were happier than ever before. The day was again brilliant with a radiating sun that had disappeared at a time, as if the spirit children were also controlling it then. At nights, the moon that had previously disappeared from the sky for long reappeared again and the moonlight provided brightness in the dark corners

of the village. Boys and girls again sat with elders who sang ancestral songs to the children before telling them amazing stories. Women in Bagudu who were once confined to their huts at night because of the darkness that had covered the whole village, also came out to dance, laugh and engage in long discussions with their neighbours. The women were very hard-working and spent most of their time in farms, tilling the soil laboriously like men.

My parents were very diligent because they had a big farm where they cultivated yams, maize and cassava. They were among the richest farmers in the village because their farms produced some of the best crops that the inhabitants and other people from neighbouring places came to buy. My mother was a strong woman and was not really affected by her successive childbirths for which I was responsible. She assisted my father in his farming activities and was the one who sold all the products of the harvest to whomever wanted to buy them and kept the money realised from the sales. Money used then was actually cowries and my parents had many of them in their hut. I did assist my parents too in their farms and so contributed enormously to their success. The spirit children did not entirely abandon me but came to work in my parents' farms, deep in the night when everybody in the village was sleeping. I was only aware of their presence in my dreams and did not actually see them again visibly after the giant *Iroko* tree was cut down. Since I was no longer a spirit child because of the spiritual cleansing my parents carried out on me, it

became impossible for me to reconcile with the spirit children and this was because I was eating real human beings' food.

My parents grew older and I was the one doing all the work in their compound and in their multiple farms because they were becoming very weak. Of course, I was their only child even though people still considered or called me *abami eda*, *ajantala* behind my back. It was because of the respect they had for me now that most people called me *Ladigana*. I could not fight anybody again as I used to when I was a spirit child.

One night, when I entered my father's room to wish him a good night before I went into my room, I saw him uttering some words to my mother. My mother still shared the same room with my father because they had decided to remain close. All the troubles they had with Bagudu villagers for having a child like me did not disunite them. All the villagers wanted *Maboyeje*, the king of Bagudu, to chase them out of the village after normalcy returned to Bagudu due to the disturbances the spirit children caused in the village.

As soon as I completed the greetings, he gave up the ghost. My father's death devastated my mother so much, that she too died seven days later. I buried my father and my mother in separate graves, side by side, in our compound. That was where they had told me I should bury them after they died, and I obeyed their words and respected their will. I made it a duty after their death to appease their ancestors so that they could

rest in peace since I was their only child and nobody else was there to do it, if I failed to.

The villagers came to my parents' compound for their funeral and, as one would expect, goats and fowls were slaughtered, food and drinks were made available for everyone to eat and drink till the following day. I enjoyed the company and solidarity of the people of Bagudu and since I was no longer a spirit child, they had nothing to fear by sleeping in our compound when they were tired. I only looked like a spirit because of my physical traits. I was smallish and I had spirit hair that was longer than real human being's hair. The hair on my head descended to the level of my feet since I had never cut it. My hair swept the floor as I walked. It surprised no one in the village any longer because villagers had seen it time and again.

Since I was not married, I decided to go on a trip alone after my father and my mother died, satisfied that I had given them a befitting burial. Having no other means of transportation than my legs, I began my journey one morning after the usual cock's crow. I walked a long distance and after seven days of walking I found myself in a place called the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, as an old man whom I met when I first entered that place told me it was called. The old man who told me the name of this place said that he did not live there. He further warned me that if I was going to the place, I should be very careful because it was the place of spirits. The word *spirit* made me curious even though I knew within me, that I had no power to defend

myself should any spirit attack me. The old man thought that I was a spirit by looking at me, though he mistook me for a good spirit because I greeted him. Spirits generally do not greet real human beings. This old man did not know that I had already lost my power and that I had lived among human beings like him before I met him.

This place called Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths was really strange. There were seven mountains there facing each other and on separate earth, because the seven different earths had seven different colours like the mountains there. These mountains faced each other and were arranged like a circle and in the middle of the circle, there was a scary light. As I approached this circle in the middle of the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, I started hearing some creatures murmuring. I was somehow scared but I said to myself that a man does not die two times and I continued walking. When I looked back, I saw that I was already surrounded by some spirits who arrested me like policemen arresting a thief. These spirits wore clothes of seven different colours corresponding to each of the mountains there. The seven colours were very bright and were shining like a full moon in the sky to the extent that even a blind person could see them. The colours were red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet as they appear in a rainbow after a peaceful rain. I did not know at first why these spirit children had these different colours because since I left them, many things had changed. It was much later, when I became their

king again, that they told me that they acquired more powers and that was why there were those different colours that I saw on the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths.

The spirits who arrested me led me to other spirits who actually recognized me. After my spiritual cleansing at Bagudu village with *Yemaja's* river water and tobacco smoke inserted into my nostrils to sever my ties with the spirit children, I had not eaten forest grass and locusts again. I ate those things when I was a spirit child but I now ate the food of the real human beings. This transformation in my life made me lose all the ties I had with the spirit children. On the first day of my arrest I was given seven *atare* to eat and this I did for seven days. It was just as if I had become a new born spirit child again. After that diet, I was introduced to forest grass and locusts again, which I remembered very well. It was after I started eating that meal again that I started recognizing all the other spirit children of the giant *Iroko* tree of Bagudu village. Many of these spirits were already old but they were still very strong and no human being could really know that they were old when he saw them. I knew this because I was a spirit child and we know how to differentiate the old from the young. Even though I was old myself, we were still spirit children because we were to remain spirit children forever.

To cut a long story short, I became a spirit child once more and because I was the king of the spirit children of the giant *Iroko* tree in Bagudu I was crowned their king again. Since I did not die and because the



spirit children knew that I was coming back to them. they had kept my throne for me. They knew that what had happened in Bagudu village was not my fault. For a long time after I became their king we lived peacefully, but we became very hostile to any human being because of the incident that happened to the spirit children in the giant *Iroko* tree. It was only the spirit children that knew that our new place was called Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, and only the spirit children could see the seven different colours there while ordinary human beings could not see them.

Ordinary human beings, would only see a thick forest in the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths and it was our design for them to see it that way. As real human beings like to hunt animals, with our extraordinary powers, we turned our home into a thick forest in their eyes. Our younger spirit children were transformed into different animals like rabbits, deer, bush fowls and other small animals that real human beings could run after. Real human beings on entering the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, would run after these small animals for a kill. As soon as they reached the centre of the forest they became blind and unable to run again. At that instance the spirit children that we transformed into small animals became spirit children again. Acting on the premise of the story narrated to them about the giant *Iroko* tree, they severely punished real human beings before killing them. Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths became a labyrinth of death to real human beings for so many years because

once they got there, there was no way they could get out again.

After I got back to my fellow spirit children and was made their king again, I still refused to get married despite the fact that they asked me on several occasions to do so. When the spirit children realized that as their king I refused to marry, they dethroned me.

In the world of spirit children, the king had to marry before others could have wives but since I refused, it meant that I was preventing them from getting married. So many rules had changed among us because it was not like that before. Now the spirit children could challenge their king and even remove him if he refused to yield to their demand. When I was their king in the giant *Iroko* tree before I joined the house of Ladigun and Ladigan, my authority was never challenged. After they were chased from the giant *Iroko* tree and they found themselves in the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, they changed the old laws. They were right in dethroning me; otherwise, my refusal to marry meant that I could not father other spirit children. Besides, they would stay unmarried if I were to remain their king and refused to marry. Therefore there would be no chance for them to think of getting married, not to talk of them having children.

When I was dethroned as king in the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, I had to quit that place as the law demanded. Spirit children gave me seven days to decide which direction I wanted to go. At the end of the ultimatum, they escorted me to the way out of the

Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths and I was shown two roads. One road, was going to the right hand side of where we stood and the other road was going to the left hand side. Without wasting their time, I chose the road going to my right hand side despite the fact that the spirit children did not tell me what I was going to find in whichever way I chose to go.

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## *Chapter Four*

### THE ARCANE GIRL

When I started my journey, I walked again for seven days without knowing exactly where I was going. When I was chased out from the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths, I was also given a bag of food that would sustain me for only seven days, at the end of which, if I did not find any meal, I would die as a spirit child, never to return to this world. I liked this world so much that I wanted to continue living here permanently. This idea had already blossomed in my mind like maize germinating from the soil after rain. I did not have any premonition that I would encounter any difficulty which I would struggle hard to overcome.

I had some powers with me which I hoped to defend myself with, should I encounter any trouble. My colleagues did not take all my powers from me because they thought that when I finished all my food, I would suffer before I could get another food. At the same time when they dethroned me, they had in mind that I might be somewhere one day living another life different from theirs, with other spirits that might woo me into their midst.

After walking for seven days, I got to an unknown place and decided to have a rest. I must admit that I got very tired and there was no way I could continue without sleeping a little bit, in order to stretch my legs and my whole body. I decided, after this thought crossed my

mind, to sit down under a tree to rest. I had hardly sat down before I fell asleep. I suppose I must have snored like a hyena which had eaten a huge meal after its kill. Nobody and nothing disturbed me throughout my very refreshing sleep.

When I woke up, I realized that the bag containing my food was no longer with me and I started to panic because I could see death coming if I did not find my bag of food. Since my food was spirit children's food, I knew that I could not easily get a replacement that would keep me for the remaining two days. Again, there was no way I could have gone back to the Seven Mountains of the Seven Earths to get food because, it was a taboo for me to do so. I was to die of hunger if I did not see the bag containing my food. I started searching for it everywhere I could. Even though it was daylight, any time that the idea of finding it crossed my mind, the day became dark and everything so black that even the owl with its large nocturnal eyes would be able to see anything. As this event was taking place, I heard a very loud scream that was more terrible than an exploding missile. My head vibrated and became heavier than before, I became completely confused. At first I did not know what to do but I knew that I was in the land of other spirits that I had to identify first before I could fight them and get back my bag, otherwise I would die of hunger. It became clear to me then that my bag of food had been taken by the spirits hiding where I was resting. These spirits began to laugh loud and everything

went upside down for me because I could only hear them but was unable to see them.

These invisible spirits started to beat me with their invisible whips and were laughing louder than before. As soon as I realized their wickedness, I chanted some incantations and felt no more pains from their constant beating anymore. These spirits then got mad and decided to inflict on me another punishment that was different from the beating they had just given me. I could not identify these unknown spirits who now decided to set my surroundings ablaze. Fire started burning everywhere around me and the heat it emitted was something that I could not describe. At first the fire was burning me and I saw that part of my body started shrinking like hide thrown into fire. I suddenly remembered another incantation that we used to chant in the world of spirit children and I quickly recited it. As soon as I did this, the fire stopped burning and the unknown spirits who were laughing during the punishment, got mad again. The mother of all punishments was when I found myself on the floor with my hands and legs tied up. I could not do anything to save myself from this situation, unlike in previous occasions that, despite the punishment inflicted on me, I still had my hands free. With them I could dig into my pockets to get an *atare*, which I chewed before I recited an incantation. With this third punishment, I was like a fly caught in a spider's web waiting for the moment of its death which only its captor could decide.

These unknown spirits angrily tied my hands and

my legs to render me powerless after noticing that once they tried a punishment on me, I dug my hands into my pockets and put something in my mouth, which neutralized the effect of their punishment. Their efforts paid off at this point. They could have instantly killed me but they did not. Despite the fact that I had no *atare* in my mouth, I recited some incantations so that these wicked spirits would spare my life, and they did for reasons best known to them.

Soon after I found myself on the floor, these invisible creatures made themselves visible to me and what surprised me was that they were all women, beautiful women indeed. At that particular time I suspected that they spared my life because, being all women, their leader probably wanted me as her husband. My hands and my legs that were initially tied up were freed and the leader of these beautiful spirit women ordered that her colleagues take me to her palace.

The palace was inside the tree where I had been resting after I got tired of walking. To be honest, the leader of the beautiful spirit women was very pretty and I do not know exactly how to describe her beauty and her palace. It is better for people to see the palace with their own eyes to be able to appreciate its beauty. Not only was the palace beautiful but everything there was splendid as well. I wondered if there was any other place in this world that could beat her place in beauty or if there were other women that could beat these spirit women in beauty.

Remember that I said that my parents, before their

death, told me that when they went to *Yemaja*, they saw some beautiful women there. I later saw them myself, when I followed Bagudu villagers to the river goddess to get some help to get rid of the spirit children from the giant and mysterious *Iroko* tree. I must admit that although those women surrounding *Yemaja* were pretty, they came only second in beauty to these beautiful spirit women who revealed themselves to me after giving me a series of beatings.

Immediately after we got to the palace of the queen of the beautiful spirit women, the six other women surrounding their queen gave me a hot shower with a very red liquid which resembled blood. The soap they used to bathe me was equally red and of course the towel they used to clean my body was also red. After that, I was dressed in red and given red food and red fruits to eat. Apart from the palace that was decorated with different colours like those one could find on a peacock, all other things they used on their body was red in colour, like the food and the fruits they ate. As a spirit, I had never seen such a unique place like that before, and it was from that day that I started learning new things from the world of other spirits. There are many different spirits in the world with different attitudes and different ways of life like real human beings.

Unknown to me, all my powers were rendered ineffective when I got inside the palace. After the hot shower I was forced to take with the red liquid, I got some of the *atare* remaining in my pocket, though I was amazed that these beautiful spirit women did not object



to my doing so. I chewed some of these *atare* and made some incantations, thinking that I could use my power to escape from them, but nothing happened. These women, who knew that all my powers had vanished immediately I entered their queen's palace, started laughing again and for the second time my head was vibrating because their laughter was deafening. As soon as the laughter stopped, the queen asked all her colleagues to leave and for the first time she decided to talk to me.

"What brings you to our territory?", she asked me.

"I am a wanderer and I don't know where I am," I replied.

"No other spirit comes here," she said.

"Now tell me what brings you here," she said again.

I told her my story from the beginning, to the time I was expelled from my throne, after I refused to get married as the king of the spirit children. She laughed after listening to all my stories and told me that, whether I liked it or not I was now in a place where I must get married. There was no doubt whatsoever in my mind at that time, that the queen of the beautiful spirit women wanted me as her husband. She got up from her throne, took two cups which she filled with some red liquid, gave me one of the cups and kept the second one for herself. She went back to her seat and started telling me her life story which she began this way:

"I was born a long time ago to real human beings in a village called Atuga where my parents were living before I moved to my uncle's place at his request. At

that time I was a spoilt little girl in my parents' home. My father loved me and the love my mother had for me was unlimited. My parents were traders, and were making a good living from their business. Thus they were able to help my father's siblings who were in school and therefore needed some help. I had two sisters and three brothers whom I loved very much and whom I never wanted to leave for a short moment, let alone to live elsewhere without them. In my father's house, I did not do any work; my mother and my father did everything at home. It was a good and loving home which any child would love because my parents were very caring.

"There came a day when my uncle asked my father to bring me to him so that he could send me to school. My uncle wanted to reciprocate my parent's kind gesture to him. My father took him for his word and since my parents wanted me to be in school and have the opportunity to be educated, they decided to take me to his house. My parents did not have the opportunity to go to school because during their time, their parents only taught them how to buy and sell like most children of their generation.

"My mother became sad because I was leaving her, she wept for many days but there was nothing she could have done to change my father's mind since he had already made up his mind to send me to my uncle. My brothers and sisters who were already used to me living with them became very sad when they heard that I would leave them to go and live elsewhere.

"The day set for my journey finally came and very

early that day after the morning greetings, my father and I embarked on the trip to where my uncle was living at that time. We walked for a whole day and eventually got to my uncle's village before nightfall. The name of this village, Aduga, sounded like the village where my parents were living.

"When we got to Aduga, my uncle and his wife were getting ready to sleep but our arrival changed their plan because my uncle's wife had to go back to the kitchen to cook something for us to eat. Even though my uncle and his wife knew that my father and I would come to them soon, they did not know when we were coming. I joined my uncle's wife in the kitchen to help her and she was very nice to me that night. After the food was ready, we all ate and later my uncle and my father stayed back to talk, while my aunt and I went to sleep.

"The following day, my father told me that he was to leave for Atuga, the village where I had been living and where my parents were still living. I cried and, when he saw tears rolling down my cheeks, he started crying as well but he eventually left me. I ran after him and asked him to greet my mother, my sisters and my brothers for me and he promised to do so.

"The following day after the departure of my father, I started a new life. I enrolled in a school very close to my uncle's house. My uncle made all the arrangements for my enrolment and because he knew many teachers in that school, everything went well. Aduga was a very nice village and people there were very nice to me and

to each other. After I got used to my new place and the people, I did not regret leaving my parents anymore even though I was still missing my siblings. Life was interesting in Aduga in the very first months that I was there and that was why I quickly forgot my parents for a while.

“A few months after my arrival, my aunt had a wonderful baby girl. This girl was very pretty like the moon and her name was Aduke. I loved Aduke very much because she was the first child of my uncle and, because she was a baby girl, I was happier. I did everything for her: carried her on my back, washed her clothes and stayed at home with her as soon as I came back from school, while my aunt slept all the time. In Aduga village, water was as rare as the tears of a dog and I had to trek many miles to fetch the water that everybody in the house used. My uncle’s wife no longer did anything at home since my arrival. I had no time to rest and I was treated like a slave, doing all the housework. Even though I was in my uncle’s house, I was not treated like a member of the family but like an outsider instead. I did not complain about this poor treatment, on the contrary, I continued to be nice to everyone in the house including my aunt’s younger sister who was also living with us.

“Two years passed and nothing changed in the way they treated me. I could not reach my parents to complain to them about this and my workload became enormous after they had their second child who was a boy. I had two children to look after, at that time, as if

I were their mother. My uncle's wife only gave birth to the children while I nursed and cared for them. Even though I was always tired, I still did this work without complaining. My uncle always took sides with his wife in whatever she did. As time went on, I became very annoyed that my uncle got very irrational whenever I complained about being sick. He would start beating me and insulting me as if I were a lazy girl. I was not lazy because I always worked hard and our neighbours, who always saw me running up and down to fetch water and buy one thing or another at odd times pitied me. I was like an orphan whom nobody in that house listened to.

“One day, as I was sick, I could not cook and despite the fact that everybody in the house saw the way I was shivering, nobody gave me food to eat. As if that was not enough punishment, my uncle started beating me when his wife told him that I had refused to cook. I almost died that day, though I quickly ran out of the house before he killed me with his beatings. When I got out of the house, I met two young girls of my age who came to me to console me. They told me that my uncle was just too wicked and asked me these questions:

“What did you do to deserve that beating from your uncle and why does he beat you all the time?”

“I told the two young girls that I did everything in the house but my uncle and his wife do not appreciate my efforts. The two young girls told me not to bother and that, since we were in the same school, we would continue our discussion the following day in school. I

thanked them for their kindness and sneaked into my uncle's house again. When I entered, everybody was already sleeping and that was why I did not receive any additional beating from him.

"The following day when I got to school, I met the two young girls who had pitied me the night before. They brought a lot of food to school and gave me some to eat. The two young girls introduced me to four other girls of my age and told me that they were their friends. As it was break time in school, the six girls and I went to a nearby mountain that was very close to our school. We had enough time for the break and there was no problem about that. When we got to that nearby mountain where no one could see us, they gave me some water to drink and from then on I became another being. The girls told me that they were going to visit me that day at midnight so that we could decide together on what to do to my uncle and his wife.

"When the clock struck midnight, they came into my uncle's house as spirits and woke me up. It was on that day that I became a spirit girl or, better, an arcane girl because I was no longer an ordinary being. The seven of us agreed to make the tree where you were resting our secret meeting place. Even though I still lived with my uncle and his wife, I was more of a spirit than a real human being but they did not know this for a long time. As a result of my loyalty to my other six girlfriends, I was named their queen. It is true that I joined the beautiful spirit girls of recent but because I became more brutal than any of them, they were very proud of me

and decided to promote me. Due to the wickedness of my uncle and his wife, I decided not to pity real human beings anymore. When I hated someone, I killed the person and sent his blood to our secret world where we drank it as vampires. The red liquid that we gave you to drink was blood. Everything that you see red in my palace is made with blood.

“I did not want to kill my uncle and his wife but simply decided to punish them, otherwise I could have killed them if I thought of the way they treated me. What my fellow spirit women and I did to my uncle was to prevent him from getting a job. He had the most beautiful credentials but whenever he applied for a job, we made sure that as soon as his would-be employers saw him, they hated him. This lasted for a long time and my uncle hated himself for this. We did the same thing to his wife who searched for jobs everywhere but she was never interviewed for a single job.

“To make matters worse for my uncle, we pushed him to do some business. He applied for a loan in a bank and we made sure he was granted this loan through our powers. We could have manipulated the bank officer who treated his file to reject his application. We did this on purpose, to punish him but he did not know because he was very happy the day he got the money from the bank.

“With the money in his hands my uncle went and bought bags of rice that he had planned to sell and make profit. When it was time for my uncle to sell his goods nobody was interested, while those who were interested

in them did not have the money. He sold all his bags of rice on credit and never got any penny from those who bought them. My uncle did not have the money to repay the loan and he became more miserable than before. Despite the fact that he and his wife cried at nights, I pretended as if I did not know what was going on in their life. I did not punish their children even though I had the power to do so, because my cousins did not offend me only their parents did. Their children though suffered partly because there were times when there was no food at home for them to eat. When I had punished my uncle and his wife to my satisfaction, I abandoned them to their misery and joined my colleagues, the beautiful spirit women, in this palace under the tree where you were resting.”

At the end of her story, the queen called the six other spirit women and we all started dancing. We danced for so long that I became very tired and was unable to move my legs again, but what surprised me was that they continued dancing. They did not punish me for not continuing the dance with them. In that place it was difficult to know if it was day or night, as everywhere was bright despite the fact that they lacked electricity or any natural light coming in from anywhere.



## Chapter Five

### THE SEVEN SPIRITS OF THE SEVEN POWERS

After the arcane girl and I got married, she decided to take me to meet some of her other colleagues. I initially thought that we were going back to the place under the tree where my bag of food disappeared. I did not know that the queen had other friends. My wife told me that after she got married to me, one of the remaining six spirit women would become the queen. She told me that this was the practice and that a long time ago before my arrival, someone else had been the queen and that it was after the latter got married that she was coronated. As a result of her marriage, another beautiful spirit woman from somewhere else would join that group she initially belonged, to make up the number to seven. When I asked her whether she would go back there, she said it was no longer possible for her to do so, but she could only visit them whenever she needed their assistance.

The way of life of these beautiful spirit women was totally different from that of ours - the spirit children of the giant and mysterious *Iroko* tree. Remember that I told you, that when I left the spirit children and became a semi-real human being in Bagudu village, the spirit children never took up my throne and never appointed another spirit child as their king because they knew very well that I was coming back one day. It was not the

same with the beautiful spirit women. I learned so many new things from my wife and since that time I realized how organized and powerful the world of beautiful spirit women was.

I loved my wife very much and she loved me as well; she did not hide anything from me and I never hid anything from her either, and that really was our strength. When I told her about the power we spirit children had, she laughed at me and told me that theirs start where ours ends. When my wife realized that I was very loyal to her, she told me that she was going to introduce me to her most powerful *Emere* group. Even though she belonged to an *Emere* group, she told me that prior to our marriage, she was in a group whose power was smaller than the one she now belonged to by virtue of her marriage to me.

My wife, now belonged to the most powerful spirit group called *Emere* known also as the seven spirits of the seven powers. These *Emere* of the seven spirits of the seven powers were all married and were to remain married till they died. It was just because one of them had died with her husband (who died at the same time with the wife), that I could join them and live with them. That was how their life was structured. I had no choice but to join her, especially as I had already sworn an oath of allegiance to her after I became her husband. Even though I was a spirit child, my power was not equal to that of the arcane girl - my wife.

The seven spirits of the seven powers all have common powers but, beside these, they also possessed

individual powers which were only known to their colleagues in their group. They demonstrated the different powers that they all had individually to us when we visited them.

The first spirit called *Eni*, had the power to see the future; the second spirit called *Eji*, had the power to remember the past; the third spirit called *Eta*, had the power to see what was happening now. The fourth spirit, named *Erin*, had the power to harm people wherever they were. The fifth spirit, who was *Arun*, had the power to harm people around her; the sixth whose name was *Efa*, had the power to neutralize any sacrifice real human beings made and the seventh spirit called *Eje*, had the power to fly anywhere to combat her enemies.

I was amazed, when all these spirits started to display their individual powers, and what they were capable of doing. A long time ago as a spirit child, I thought that we had many powers until I met the arcane girl and the seven spirits of the seven powers whom she introduced me to. As my wife was going to join them in the future and maybe because they thought that she was now with me, they all decided to give my wife and me their individual powers. Their purpose in doing so was that my wife should be well armed to fight real human beings whenever they posed any threat to us. We were very happy thinking that nobody would be able to threaten us and destroy our newly acquired powers in addition to the old powers we had already.

These seven spirits of the seven powers, after feeling very comfortable that I had become part of them

following my introduction to them by my wife, decided to tell me their individual stories and how they used their personal powers. It was *Eni* who opened the discussion on the matter.

“Now that you are among us we will give you a name,” *Eni* - the queen of the seven spirits of the seven powers said to me, “Your name will be *Odo*.”

All the seven spirits there started calling me by that name including my wife - the arcane girl, whom they called *Iberu*. Immediately after they gave me a new name, *Eni* said: “Now *Odo*, open your ears wide to hear my story.” I responded that I was listening to her and she started her story.

“A long time ago, I lived among real human beings as a spirit but no one knew this because I had all the traits of real human beings. I walked on my feet, ate food, laughed, cried and dressed like them. At that time my name among real human beings was *Tanimo*. One day, the family I lived with fell sick and they were all going to die. I used my power to cure them without them knowing that I was the one who cured them, because I did not want to share this secret with them. I met that family in a small village and decided to live with them because at that time, people welcomed strangers, provided that they bore similar traits to real human beings. After that incident, there was a great famine in that small village that started killing both children and adults. Then, I went to the king of that village and asked to see him. My request was granted.

‘Dear king,’ I said to him, ‘I can help solve this

problem of famine that is ravaging the whole village.'

'Are you sure you can do that?', the king asked.

'Of course,' I replied.

"I then commanded my invisible spirit colleagues to fill the king's place with food and palm wine. Immediately after I did this, the amazed king ordered his subjects to go round the small village and inform the villagers to come to his house for food. When they got to the king's house they were given food and drink that could last them for several moons without them bothering themselves about what they would eat or drink. I became famous in the village; people became very friendly with me and thanked me for what I had done to save the whole village.

"The day after I performed this miracle, life returned to normal again, as if there had never been famine in that small village. The following day, the king of the village called me and asked me to help him to stop inhabitants of the neighbouring village who were planning to attack his village. Remember that I said that the individual power that I possessed allowed me to foresee future events and as a result of this I knew before the king called me what he was going to tell me. I even knew before him, what people from the neighbouring village were planning: that is, to invade this small village and annex it to theirs.

"I invoked my fellow spirits to neutralize the king and inhabitants of the neighbouring village and this was done immediately. As the king of this small village noticed that he was becoming the king of the entire

region, he thought that he was very powerful and that he no longer needed my help. I did not say anything because I knew within me that if I wanted to deal with him it would not take me a second. I did not leave that village although I already knew that the king was planning to kidnap me and execute me publicly. I waited patiently and on the day he set aside to kill me, I eliminated him before he woke up from sleep. I commanded my spirit friends to tie him down in his palace and beat the hell out of him. This was done and because he did not have any way out, he gave up the ghost before daybreak. His subjects and the inhabitants of the small village realised that it was my handiwork and came after me. I killed all of them and after this I felt that I had accomplished my mission and came back to my group of seven spirits of the seven powers. I chose to punish all the villagers because I do not know how to do good for people and let them enjoy it forever. That is what you need to know about me and about my power and this is where my story ends.”

After I listened to *Eni* and her fascinating story, I realized how wicked the seven spirits of the seven powers were. I was still thinking of *Eni* and her story when *Eji* came in and told me that it was her turn to narrate her story to me. I remained seated on the same spot where *Eni* had narrated her story to me.

“*Odo, Odo, Odo*, how many times did I call you?”

*Eji* asked me.

“Three times,” I responded.

“My name is *Eji* as you already know and my

individual power is to remember the past. I was born many, many moons ago. My parents had three children and I was the only surviving child of them all. I don't know how exactly I survived because I fell sick when I was born, like my two other siblings who died. Even though my siblings died a long time ago, I still remember them and the way they died. My parents, who were afraid that I would die, took me out of the village where we were living, to see an old woman who had never had a child in her lifetime. This old woman was living under a rock and was very powerful. She had supernatural powers that nobody had at that time. When my parents got to her, she told them immediately that I was going to be her adopted child if they wanted me to live. Thinking that they would see me again in their lifetime, they accepted this deal so that I could survive. Indeed I survived but I did not see my parents again since that day, after they left me with the old woman living under the rock whose name was Janijani.

"I grew up with Janijani as she was the only person I considered as my parent even though people in the nearby village feared her a lot. Soon after I became a matured girl, Janijani died. However, before her death she had passed her power to me. It was from her that I inherited the power to remember things that happened in the past. I punish people when I remember the bad things they did to me or to my parents. I was actually a spirit girl but my parents did not know this. My abode was under the rock, I returned to Janijani because I belonged to her. She only sent me to my human parents

so that I would know a little bit about the world of human beings. My story is short but what I want you to know is that if you behave well to the arcane girl and you are very loyal to her, I will be ready, anytime, any day, to help you out if you are in a difficult situation. If you want to know about past things that real human beings did, I will be there to assist you.”

I listened carefully to *Eji's* story and I was really amazed that she could remember things that happened to her a long time ago without anybody telling her these stories. I became very confident that with all these seven spirits of the seven powers volunteering to help my wife and I, nothing would be impossible for us.

*Eta*, the third of the seven spirits of the seven powers, stood up and told me that she was going to narrate her own story to me and that I should open my ears and listen to her carefully. Since these spirit women were seven in number, there was no question anymore as to whether I would hear seven different stories. Even though I was getting tired, I applied all my energy to hearing various stories from them. The first two stories I heard were different and they kept me going. I must probably say that I had no choice but to obey them and do what they wanted me to do. I had become part of them and I simply had to comply with whatever wishes they had.

When *Eta* was about to start her story I heard a very loud noise that almost deafened my ears; I looked around me to see what was making that loud noise but I saw nothing. *Eta* started laughing and her teeth looked



very funny to me. I always thought that we spirit children had the dirtiest teeth of all the spirit creatures until I saw hers. After this loud noise for which I got no explanation from *Eta*, a wind started blowing and carrying dust around us. Again, *Eta* started laughing when she noticed that I was confused and did not know what was going on for the second time. My wife, the arcane girl, never told me anything about the funny behaviour of these seven spirit women. If she had told me of their unpredictable attitude before they started narrating their individual stories to me, I would not have been all that surprised. Maybe that was part of their secret, I do not know.

The two previous spirit women, *Eni* and *Eji* also displayed strange behaviours before they started narrating their stories to me. *Eni*, before telling her story, sang a loud song that I had never heard before. As this was going on, birds of all sorts came from nowhere and started dancing as if they were human beings. If I had not been a spirit child I would have fainted when I saw these birds dancing. This was because I could not control my laughter to the extent that tears were rolling down my cheeks. It was after *Eni* stopped her song and started telling her story that these colourful birds disappeared.

Shortly before *Eji* started telling me her story, I heard some invisible creatures weeping. I did not ask her anything about this because I knew she would not answer me. When *Eni* surprised me with her funny behaviour prior to her story, I remembered asking her

what was going on around us and she told me to be quiet. After that incident, I decided not to ask these spirit women about the strange things that I saw around them, unless they themselves willingly gave me explanations. It was at the end of *Eta's* funny performance that she started her own story. I understood nothing from this attitude.

“When I was born I had two horns on my head like those of a buffalo. My mother was lucky enough not to have died when I was born because these horns on my head could have caused her death. Contrary to the joy that usually accompanied the birth of a child, my parents could not rejoice at my birth. Thinking that I was a child of sorrow, they decided to leave Ikari village where they were living at that time. On their way out of Ikari they threw me into the forest, where only animals and dangerous creatures lived. To cut a long story short, and not to kill a snake with a long stick as the *Yoruba* would say, I copied the habits of animals with horns by learning how to fight with my horns. The spirit-creatures in the forest, where my parents dumped me, took care of me until I became a grown-up girl. One day, as I was sleeping under a tree, I heard voices that sounded like those of human beings. I then woke up and saw beside me two girls who introduced themselves to me as *Eni* and *Eji*. These girls actually came into this forest to look for some specific herbs for *juju* making but had searched for it to no avail. They politely asked me to assist them and I quickly remembered the name of the herb they were looking for since they could not even remember its

name. I also told them that I could see one of their friends crying for help, as she was going to die, since I have the power to know what is happening now.

“ After thanking me, they asked me to come and live with them. This invitation entailed leaving the forest that I had known since my first day on earth. Even though it was hard for me to leave the forest and all the friends I had made there since my childhood, I followed them immediately to help them save the life of their dying friend. After that incident I became a strong member of the seven spirits of the seven powers. When I realized that these spirits had their individual powers after joining them and living with them, I told them what my power was and since then I have utilized my power to know what is happening at the moment, whenever there was need to do so. Now that your wife, the arcane girl, has brought you to us as her husband, I will give both of you the power to know things that are happening presently, so that anytime you find yourselves in trouble, you can make use of this power if necessary. That is the end of my story.”

After *Eta* finished narrating her story to me, she called me *Odo* which was the name given to me by one of them and said, “you now know who I am”. All that was happening around me was spectacular and exciting at the same time, despite the fact that I was a different type of spirit. Barely a few minutes after *Eta* stopped talking to me, *Erin* stood up to tell me her story and who she was. These seven spirits of the seven powers were taking turns one after the other as if they were

respecting a kind of hierarchy unknown to me. I did not even bother to ask anything since I did not want to incur their wrath.

As soon as *Erin* stood up, I saw rats and snakes cuddling each other as if they were friendly animals. To be honest, it was the first time that I was seeing rats and snakes living together as friends, without snakes killing them and having them as a meal. This sight left me gasping in astonishment, that I was completely lost for words. *Erin* was looking at me without uttering a word, though she knew quite well that I was very surprised at what I was seeing before me.

After a long silence *Erin* said, “don’t be alarmed at what you are seeing now, I know that you are very much surprised.” She continued thus:

“A long time ago that was how the world was. Weak animals were playing with strong animals and strong animals were not killing weak ones. It was when human beings started killing animals for meals that everything in life changed. Human beings are very wicked souls and even more wicked than all animals in this world. They are responsible for lions killing weaker animals, and for snakes killing rats as well. It was not like that before. It was when they started killing animals, that I started harming them as well, no matter how far away they were or lived.

“Animals are my parents because, like *Eta*, after I was born, my parents abandoned me in a forest. The reason was that the king of their village refused to see new born babies, because it was a taboo for him. I later

learned that if the king saw a new born baby he would not live any longer. That was why he reacted the way he did. Many parents who insisted on having children in that village had to live elsewhere. The queen of the forest where my parents abandoned me was also the queen of all the animals living in that forest. She told me when I grew up how wicked human beings were and since that day I have hated human beings and liked animals, since I grew up among them. I use my power to harm them and I am prepared to give that power to you and your wife for your future protection, should you find yourselves in their midst one day.”

I thanked *Erin* for her kindness after she told me her story and her willingness to give her power to my wife and me. Soon after *Erin* finished, *Arun* stood up to tell me her story and, since it was getting late, the remaining spirits of the seven powers summarized their tales so that we could go to bed. Around us, owls were hooting in the nearby forest; gorillas and monkeys were also heard making loud noises instead of sleeping. Everywhere in the thick forest that surrounded us was noisy. This reminded me of Bagudu village at night when villagers would go to night markets and make loud noises after drinking their palm wine. *Arun* thus took her turn.

“*Arun* is my name as you already know and the power I have easily allows me to harm people around me and, like *Erin*, I harm human beings because they are the most wicked creatures I have ever seen in my life. Even though I was born of human beings, I was caned seven times before I was thrown away on that

very day. This was because I had what the villagers called “strange hair on my ears” and they concluded that I was a wicked spirit. Since that day I vowed that I would harm human beings around me anytime I saw them and that is why I am a member of the seven spirits of the seven powers.”

After I heard *Arun's* story and her willingness to help us to face our enemies in life, *Efa* started screaming and told me not to be afraid as she was adjusting her voice. Nothing surprised me anymore about the behaviour of the seven spirits of the seven powers because they all had strange behaviours like the stories that they had individually been telling me.

“Hey, listen to me now”, *Efa* said to me. “*Odo*, I have the power to neutralize sacrifices made by human beings because anytime they have problems, they go to *babalawo* for sacrifice, not knowing that I am the one that gave them their powers. If I want any *babalawo* to cure a sickness, I can give him the power to do so and if I do not want him to be able to fight a sorcerer, I can prevent him from doing so. Human beings waste their time, energy and money for nothing. Nothing on earth can make it impossible for me to destroy any sacrifice. This is the secret I got from my mother who was the most feared woman spirit of her generation. I joined the seven spirits of the seven mountains because they are my sisters.”

As my eyes started closing after *Efa* finished her story, I resisted falling asleep because this would have been termed being very rude to *Eje*, the last spirit who

was to tell me her story. I wanted her to give her power to my wife and me, as *Efa* did after she narrated her story to me. I sneezed loudly and woke up from my sleep so that I could listen to *Eje*'s story.

"*Odo, Odo, Odo*, how many times did I call you?", said *Eje* to me!

'You called me three times,' I said to her. *Eje* then started.

"One day, I saw a man who was hungry and I decided to give him food. I told him that he would not be hungry again till he died and the man was very happy on hearing this. Since that day, the man had plenty to eat and plenty to drink but one day, he revealed this secret to his neighbours. I had told him never to reveal this secret but he betrayed me. I then told him that he would neither have food to eat nor palm wine to drink till he died. I wanted to see what he would do after I told him all these, which in fact I did not mean to implement. The man went to the village king and told him what had happened and the king asked his subjects to come and look for me. I was arrested and taken to the king's compound where I was beaten and treated like a wicked witch. I did not say anything. I quietly left that village knowing that I had the power to fight my enemies from a distance. The man that I helped died first, and the following day, the king and all those he ordered to beat me died as well. On seeing these strange and horrifying events, the remaining villagers fled their village and since that terrible day, the village ceased to exist in that region. So, *Odo*, here is this power for you

and your wife. Use it from a distance to fight your enemies whoever they are. That is the end of my story and now, you should go inside and sleep.”

At the end of *Eje's* story, I was very relieved as I was very tired and had wanted to sleep without wasting any of my time on personal things that I had wanted to do before. My wife followed me and led me to the room prepared for us by our hosts. My wife, knowing that I was exhausted after listening to the various stories of the seven spirits of the seven powers, did not disturb me that night. She would have wanted us to play as we usually did before finally sleeping. I slept deeply as soon as I lay down and perhaps I started snoring loudly almost immediately. My wife elbowed me from time to time and murmured some words before I realized that I was disturbing her with my snoring. Throughout the night, all the stories I had heard from them were fresh in my head and everything looked like a nightmare. I must say that I had a terrible night even though I slept soundly. The nights preceding the big day the seven spirits of the seven powers told me the story of their lives and who they were, I had barely slept. That night was a very special night for me because I have never slept the way I did that day.

I woke up late the following day. My wife and the seven spirits of the seven powers got up before me and had already had their breakfast. They were waiting for me to join them. I woke up when the sun had already risen and gorillas in the bush were making their usual loud noise characteristic of these big animals. Lionesses



were having their cubs and roaring as it was the case for lionesses having their babies when it was sunny. Maybe it was the roar of these lionesses or the gorillas that woke me up, I did not know. All I remembered was that their loud noise coincided with my waking up.

My wife and the seven spirits of the seven powers served me the rest of the food they had for breakfast and within minutes I finished the huge meal. The mountainous food was so delicious that I demolished it without wasting time. At that time I did not even bother myself to ask what it was made of; it was when I finished it that my wife told me that it was made of forest cassava and mushrooms.

The seven spirits of the seven powers, my wife and I then left for the forest of the seven creatures for an adventure. I had no prior knowledge that we were to make that journey but they had already arranged it for that day. Along our way my wife revealed to me that the spirits and herself made me sleep soundly the day before because they did not want me to hear or know what they were saying or doing. She told me that in the forest that we were going to, there were seven creatures of the forest who were all women and they needed to communicate with these seven creatures before our journey.

She also said that since these creatures were women, that was why it was their duty to talk to them alone. The seven creatures of the forest would be very unhappy should they start talking to them with a man in their midst. When I now asked my wife why I was following

them there if these creatures did not like to communicate with a man, she told me that they had already informed them that they would be coming with me, and that they had received their blessings.

When we were close to the forest, the seven spirits of the seven powers and my wife started singing. To my utmost bewilderment, I noticed that all the creatures in the forest started dancing as if they were human beings. Trees were dancing, monkeys, gorillas, lions, hyenas, snakes and birds of all sorts were all dancing. In short, the whole forest was dancing. The scene was in accordance with the rituals that the seven creatures expected from the seven spirits of the seven powers and my wife anytime they were paying them a visit.

The seven creatures of the forest appeared to us without wasting any time. They first led the seven spirits of the seven powers to a place that was unknown to me, but familiar to them and my wife. It was later in the day that the seven creatures of the forest and my wife came out and took me to where they had gone initially. These seven creatures of the forest were all very short women with horns on their heads like buffalos. Nobody dared laugh at them because if he did, he would die immediately. I knew this because the other spirits and my wife had warned me while we were approaching the forest. I was very lucky that they warned me; otherwise I would have been dead by now, because I would have laughed when I saw them. Thus, when I saw them with their horns on their heads and their tails on their backs like buffalos, I did not laugh.

We were with these creatures of the forest for seven good days and on the final day of our visit, I started crying like a baby. I had fallen in love with them to the extent that leaving them now became a difficult thing for me to do, but I summoned up courage to leave because there was no way that we could have stayed with them for more than seven days. That was the custom anyway and nobody on earth could have changed it. I must say, however, that during the seven days, I learned a lot about the many wonders of life that I never knew about, from the seven creatures of the forest. They recognized me as the official husband of my wife, the arcane girl. When I met the seven powers of the seven spirits, I thought that my marriage with the arcane girl had been sealed. I did not know that these spirits also owed allegiance to the seven creatures of the forest. The seven creatures of the forest led us outside their abode and we started our journey via the way we had come.

The seven spirits of the seven powers and my wife started singing again as they did when we neared the forest of the seven creatures. All trees and all animals that I mentioned before started dancing. It was then that I understood that our coming and going were the happiest days of their lives. They would probably not see us again and if at all they were to see us or hear the beautiful songs of the seven spirits of the seven powers and my wife, they would have to wait till the next moon. When the spirits, my wife and I moved far away from the forest, they stopped singing. It was then that they

told my wife and me that we were officially recognized as husband and wife and could go and live wherever we wanted and rest assured that they would keep their eyes on us.

It was deep at night when we got back to the abode of the seven spirits of the seven powers. All went to bed but my wife and I, we talked and played for a long time that night before sleep finally cut short our discussion. The following day, when we woke up, we prepared our luggage, ate our breakfast with our hosts and after that we left for our own home, far away from the seven spirits of the seven powers.

They gave us many goods that we carried with us as we set out to start our marital life and deal with our enemies – the real human beings. We embarked on a long journey and it was as if our life together was to be characterized by travels. I carried a lot of our luggage on my shoulders since I had very strong ones. My wife did the same because she was a very strong woman as well. I must mention that before we decided to go to our house, we went to see the colleagues of my wife under the tree, where I was lying after I had been chased out of the seven mountains of the seven earths. As you will remember, I met my wife, the arcane girl, there after I was beaten and taken to her palace. It was with tears in our eyes that we left the beautiful spirit women, colleagues of the arcane girl, my wife. Our leaving them did not mean that we severed ties with them because we would continue to solicit their help anytime we were

in difficulty and it was to be like that with the seven spirits of the seven powers as well.

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## Chapter Six

### THE GHOSTLY HOUSE

After my wife and I met her colleagues, the seven spirits of the seven powers and the seven creatures of the forest, we performed all the rituals they wanted us to do with them. Among the rituals were the stories of the seven spirits of the seven powers, that I was told, and the powers they transferred to my wife and me. Besides, they took us to the seven creatures to complete our initiation process. Having gone through all these wonderful rituals, we became more confident than ever. This was because we had the blessings of these two different types of spirits. It was after all these ceremonies that we were upgraded into adulthood because before then, we were still considered young spirits in terms of power in our spiritual world.

After leaving our spiritual godmothers, we decided to live together in our place called the Ghostly House. Our house was not too far from Aduga village where my wife was initiated into the *Emere* group for the first time. We decided to build our home on the mountain near the school of the *Emere* girls who had pitied my wife and lured her into their midst after her uncle beat her on that memorable day. We did not want to forget this place because it was a memorable place for my wife in particular. All the *Emere* girls who initiated my wife to their cult had gone to their various destinations and only *Olodumare* knows where they are now.

As soon as we got to our Ghostly House, we put all the powers we got from the seven spirits of the seven powers into our house. Nobody else would see those powers besides us. We had a very big bag that contained all our powers which we carefully hung on the wall of our room. This bag containing all our powers must not fall, otherwise we will not have any powers anymore and defending ourselves against our enemies would become very difficult. We really liked our house because we had all we needed inside. My wife joined me only at night. During the day I was never bored as I had to do all the cleaning and made sure that everything was in order in our house.

Our visit to the seven spirits of the seven powers was a blessing because they gave their individual powers so that we could add them to those we already had. We were now very powerful spirits even though my wife appeared as a real human being. It was very difficult at first for her colleagues to let her follow me but, because they realized now how much I knew about them and their secret world, they yielded. Even though I was a spirit like them, they felt that they were different from me not only as a male spirit but because their powers were to stay within their group. After I had convinced them that I would be loyal to my wife and to their group and that we would visit them frequently they allowed us to go and live together as husband and wife in our Ghostly House forever.

Throughout the day, my wife was a real human being and did everything like human beings, but at night

she was a spirit again. It was deep into the night, that she usually joined me at home where we discussed all the issues that she brought to me. We deliberated on the fate of all those who had offended my wife and the spirits together. When a real human being offended my wife, it was the whole spirit group that this particular fellow had offended. We decided the best punishment an offender deserved with the other seven spirits of the seven powers. Our house was like a labyrinth because once an offender was brought in, there was no way out. All the spirits had powers but what they hated most were the divine spirits who were more powerful than any spirit on earth. Whenever divine spirits were dealing with spirits of our world, we quickly backed out. We punished and tortured many real human beings who had no divine spiritual backing because they were easy meal for us. We did this for a long time.

One day, my wife told me that a woman had insulted her. I became furious and told her that the woman would be punished. This woman was living very far away, but since we had the power to deal with a person living far away from us, that was not an obstacle. We simply sent a vulture to her roof one night when she was sleeping. When the vulture got to her house, it started making a loud noise that only the woman could hear. The woman started screaming to the astonishment of everybody who woke up that night and gathered in her compound. Villagers who could not understand why she was screaming, began to laugh but, at one point a wise



woman among the group told them that this was not a laughing matter.

That very night, rituals were performed but, since we knew a lot about human rituals, the rituals hurriedly carried out to cure this woman who was going insane, did not help matters but rather aggravated things for her. She started vomiting and it did not take long before she died. This incident was definitely pushed people who were witnesses of the event to go and present the matter to the king, who called all the sorcerers of the village to look for a solution to this calamity. The sorcerers knew the woman had offended wicked spirits but they knew their limitations since they themselves derived their powers from us. By and large, the sorcerers could not provide him with any solution to the problem.

Many human beings who had no divine spirits to accompany them, were continuously punished in our Ghostly House and I supported my wife and her group in whatever punishment they prescribed for anyone that offended us, the spirits of the arcane world. We were immune to any attack from ordinary human beings and saw ourselves as a dominant force in the whole region where our house was built and even beyond, for many, many moons.

## *Chapter Seven*

### **BREAKING THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

The day the seven spirits of the seven powers gave us their individual powers, they all reminded us that the only creatures on earth that could cause us troubles were divine spirits. They did not tell us what they meant by this. They simply said that when the time came, we would discover them by ourselves. The seven spirits of the seven powers never wanted to talk much about the divine spirits because they seemed to fear them. It did not take long before we discovered the divine spirits. They are heavenly created spirits; they are sent to this world to disrupt activities of spirits who harm ordinary human beings.

One day, my wife and I met a young man who started talking of divine spirits in the market place. Since my wife had the power to transform me into a real human being, she did so that day, after which I followed her to the market. As this young man who was dressed in a white garment started talking about the divine spirits, my wife and I started shaking like leaves. We were unable to look into his eyes. It was on that day that we understood what the seven spirits of the seven powers meant by the divine spirits and we were afraid of this young man instead of him being afraid of us. Unable to do anything to the young man who had a divine spirit,

we quickly left the scene before he harmed us. He was actually holding in his hands a book that had a cross on it. We had never seen this book before in our spirit world and that was the first time my wife and I saw it. As he started quoting passages from this book, we were becoming nervous and hated what this young man was reading. So we hurriedly left the market place that day.

Much later, after we had made other trips to the same market, we met a woman who was holding a book similar to that of the young man. My wife approached her and soon realized that she was an *Emere* and not a divine spirit. People in the market place who thought that the woman was a divine spirit, also approached her for salvation because many bad things were going on in the village at that time. Together with the *Emere*, my wife and I started punishing these human creatures without wasting any time, because they did not possess divine spirits in them. Only few real human beings possess divine spirits and arcane spirits cannot defeat them despite the fact that arcane spirits have mysterious powers over other living creatures.

Spirits of the arcane world were also afraid of divine spirits. When we ran to them for help, they could not assist us. We eventually came in contact with some other divine spirits, besides the young man we met in the market on the day. Whenever we were in the presence of real human beings who had divine spirits, we quickly abandoned them. The beautiful spirit women had powers over all things that were on earth, in rivers and on mountains. It was after my marriage to the arcane girl

that I discovered that beautiful spirit women had power over all that existed, unlike we the spirit children who had no power in rivers. Spirit children of the giant *Iroko* tree did not have powers in rivers and that was why they could not subdue *Yemaja*.

My wife and I lived for a long time in our Ghostly House and we enjoyed the help of the seven spirits of seven powers whenever we were in difficult situations. We did not forget the beautiful spirit women of the tree where I rested and met my wife. As I said before, no spirits, no matter how powerful they were, had powers over the divine spirit beings.

It was festival time in Aduga, and my wife had told me the previous night that she had made up her mind to join the celebrants in that village, so I decided to go with her. This time my wife and the seven spirits of seven powers were able to change me into a real human being. In the past, I had that power as well but since I met my wife, who ordered the six beautiful women who were with her to bathe me with a red liquid, I had lost that power. I was very happy that she and her friends always turned me into a real human being whenever I desired so. I was dressed in a very beautiful attire like the Aduga villagers and I had the opportunity on that day to appear like a real human being as well.

The celebration started with all its fanfares on that sunny day. Vultures and dogs were parading the venue of the celebration, feeding on the remnants of food that littered the village. People were dancing, jumping and landing on their feet like wrestlers. Children were

crying on the backs of their mothers. Their mothers who pretended not to hear them crying, were busy serving food they had cooked early in the morning to the people at the venue of the celebration. Men were rejoicing and drinking palm wine continuously as people in Bagudu village did before the spirit children turned their life upside down. My wife was serving food as well, for nobody knew at that point that she was a dangerous *Emere* woman. If people had suspected that she was one, nobody would have wanted her in that place, not to talk of her serving food.

Many people came to grace this occasion from neighbouring villages as usual and nobody knew *who was who*, except for people from the same village. People seldom asked others where they came from, in order not to annoy them and, as a result, nobody bothered himself or herself about me. My wife served me food before any other lady could do so. I sat down at a little distance from real human beings, though before the end of the celebration, I was laughing, dancing and drinking palm wine like they were, so as not to give anyone any reason to suspect me.

Divine spirits who also came to grace the occasion, unbeknown to us, attacked my wife after they discovered who she was. My wife confessed to them the kind of creature she was and revealed all she had done to people in the village. This did not go down well with her colleagues, the seven spirits of the seven powers. No matter what the circumstance was, spirit women were not to reveal their identity. That was the

custom of their secret world, for their secrets had to remain within their inner circle, no matter what. This was so because real human beings could neutralize them through divine spirits and destroy their powers should they know their secrets.

My wife was overpowered by the divine spirits and, before I knew what was happening, I was also overpowered. They took both of us to their spiritual house where they performed rituals in the form of prayers on us. My wife became a real human being again and, through the continuous prayers of the divine spirits, I also became a real human being. It was after their spiritual prayer that I discovered that we spirit children of the giant *Iroko* tree of Bagudu village, were formerly human beings before becoming spirit children. I never knew this before and it was on that day that I learned that there were several spirit lives. The life of the dark spirits was that of my wife, the seven spirits of the seven powers, the seven creatures of the forest, the spirit children of the *Iroko* tree and other arcane spirits. The life of the divine spirits was another one that was more powerful than the life of the dark spirits. As a consequence of our transformation into real human beings, we were now protected by the divine spirits, though we lost all the powers we used to have in the past. The seven spirits of the seven powers, the seven creatures of the forest, and all other spirits thought that we had betrayed them. They later realized that we were now protected by divine spirits and, because they were unable to punish us, they abandoned us forever.

## GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS USED

<i>Abami-eda:</i>	a strange being.
<i>Abiku:</i>	a spirit child believed to die young and reincarnate continually.
<i>Aboro:</i>	a desolate and deserted place.
<i>Aje:</i>	a witch; a woman practising witchcraft. .
<i>Atare:</i>	alligator pepper; a kind of peppery fruit found in tropical Africa.
<i>Babalawo:</i>	a witch-doctor with magical powers.
<i>Buba:</i>	a loose garment for the upper part of the body.
<i>Emere:</i>	an evil spirit-possessed individual, especially a female.
<i>Ileke:</i>	special beads worn around the wrists, ankle or neck.
<i>Iro:</i>	wrapper.
<i>Iroko:</i>	a type of tree with hard wood and many leaves, believed to harbour evil spirits.
<i>Juju:</i>	African traditional medicine.
<i>Ofi:</i>	a kind of indigenous, woven cloth worn on special occasions.
<i>Olodumare:</i>	the creator.
<i>Sokoto:</i>	trousers.
<i>Yemaja:</i>	river goddess.

**THE SPIRIT CHILD**

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When a certain woman in Bagudu gives birth to her seventh child, the whole village is curious to know if this child will also die like the previous six, on the seventh day.

*The Spirit Child* is the story of Ladigana, an *abiku*, who is also the vindictive king of the spirit children. He wreaks havoc on the inhabitants of Bagudu who dare to insult him. On his seventh reincarnation, his parents, Ladigun and Ladigan, with the help of *Yemaja*, the river goddess, manage to break his link with the spirit world, thus making him a normal person.

However, after the death of his parents, he begins a journey that takes him to the depths of the spirit world where a confrontation with a higher power precipitates an unexpected turning point.

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Spectrum Books Limited

ISBN 978-029-570-4



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