

BLACK CLAN

By Chukwu John David

Twins were considered abominable in my clan. And the day that Obinna gave birth to twins, it was not something to think twice – the twins were sacrificed after some rigorous discussions that I had with elders of the clan.

I did not sleep throughout that night while I thought other men did. I was in the shrine communicating with the spirits of my deceased ancestors. I listened very carefully to hear when the cock would give out the first crow, and sleep did not come to my eyes until when I heard the first cockcrow. The day had broken. Everywhere was still light-dark when I clutched my leather bag and left for the village *ilo*, or playground. Uremma and Ujunwa were still sleeping, and I did not eat anything since the previous night as that would desecrate any word I would speak during the rituals.

I arrived in the village *ilo* before everyone else arrived. I sanctified the atmosphere before people started arriving. Maazi Ibekwe came first, followed by Ogbuefi Okeke and Maazi Ofiafuluagu. Soon, the *ilo* was crowded with people.

I had earlier prepared strong *efulefu*...five of them that would carry sacrificial pots and other materials. I called them forth and painted their bodies with grounded *nzu*. I took palm fronds and tied across their heads and their waists. They were all naked, and I made their eyes to see spirits alone. The first *efulefu* carried a pot of blazing fire on his head, and the second carried a sacred ball of *nzu*, and the others' fates were yet to be decided.

Before we began the ritual, I led the people in a brief prayer:

“Chukwu, we are here to justify Ala, our great earth goddess. An abomination has fallen upon the land, but we are here to reverse it so that integrity will prevail. Therefore go with us and see through everything we do,” I said and Amadioha rumbled his thunders in chorus.

I spitted hard dink to the four corners of the earth and said to the people, “Let us commence the ritual.”

The *efulefu* that carried a blazing pot of fire on his head went before us. He stood in the front and directed ways to us. We walked through the narrow road that led way from the *ilo* to a crossroad where the path went three. There, we stood and made a ritual of compensation. I called the name of the path and spoke to it.

“Uzo, were you asleep when the twins of Obinna walked into the village?” I asked rhetorically. “No, I do not think you were asleep because you have never been. You know every leg that walks upon every pathway and you decide what happens to it anytime. An abomination has fallen upon you, but we beg you to please accept our compensations,” I said and poured hard drink in the middle of the crossroad. An old man from the back had begun to sing a sacrificial song and the rest of the elders hummed. The fourth *efulefu* poured out libations, and we left the crossroad after I had broken a kola and thrown a piece into the middle of a circle line I drew on the crossroad. That was to appease Uzo, the agent god of Ala that saw about the legs that walked on the pathways. We were actually walking to the shrine of Ibini Ukpabi where the final ritual was to be performed.

The weather was still light-dark after the second and the third cockcrow bellowed. We had done some part of the ritual. We walked to the threshold of the village where I squeezed three matured cocks and allowed the blood to sprinkle on the woven palm frond that made the gate of entrance into the village. I heard the gate had a name. It was called Iyi-eke. The people of Arochukwu knew it as the *Destiny Gate* – the gate of no return. The gate never allowed people that would desecrate the tradition to enter the village. It always struck them dead instead. My father told me that a strong spirit guided the woven gate, and sacrifices were given to it at the beginning of each year.

However, I spoke words to the woven gate after I had sprinkled blood on it. I begged for forgiveness on behalf of the village. I said:

“The great spirit behind the mighty gate that has ever guided Arochukwu clan, I greet you. I do not know if you too were asleep when those taboos in the form of children walked into the village. I do not know if you saw when they walked into the village as twins to cause damages to Ala. But we appease you this day to allow integrity to prevail. Do not get annoyed against the inhabitants of the nineteen villages of the great land of Arochukwu clan. Do allow people that will be of benefit to the land to come in, and always resist those that would cause damages to the clan. Let it be as we believe it this day,” the elders echoed *isee* after me.

Finally we arrived in the shrine of Ibini Ukpabi where the conclusion of the ritual was to be performed. The twins of Obinna were put in baskets and were placed on the high altar of Ibini Ukpabi that accommodated the carved wooden symbol of the great god. Many other carved symbols of smaller gods rested fervently on the mud wall of the wide shrine. The people of Arochukwu liked calling them *ikenga*.

The elders wore white hide-skirts during the ritual. Pieces of palm fronds were put in their mouths. They were bare-footed, and *nzu* graced their bodies. They were standing in the shrine, circulating the smoldering fire that burned consistently without fading. They were only humming while I talked. The only *efulefu* that joined us in the shrine during the sacrifice was the one that carried a ball of *nzu* and the other that held up a pot of blazing fire on his head. Others were standing outside the shrine, making spiritual intercessions.

I appeared into a different type of being while talking to the gods. Then, my eyes saw spirits alone. My body changed and became very hot. Yellowish fire blistered in my eyes, and as I talked, smoke found way out of my mouth.

I collected a piece of kola nut from a wooden bowl beside the *ikenga* of the great god Ibini Ukpabi and chewed. I took a hard drink and poured half a cup to Ala before having a taste and giving the gods and Chukwu to savor. I blew into the air and it turned smoky. Smoke engulfed the shrine and accelerated into the sky in just a single stand.

I invoked the deceased spirits of the ancestors and they appeared standing in a corner. I talked to them before they finally went back to the spirits world.

My eyes were still blazing fire. I could not do any other thing at that moment if not to recognize and appease the creator of the whole earth and everything therein. I did a brief incantation and beckoned on Chukwu. I killed a bull for him and said:

“Chukwu, the creator of the whole earth, I honor you this day. We are here to mollify you to have mercy upon the land. We also came to sacrifice the twins to you as the tradition demanded. There are the twins in their sacrificial attires,” I pointed at the twins. *Nzu* was rubbed on their bodies, and the blood of an owl decorated their faces and their stomachs. Pieces of palm fronds were tied across their heads, and their hands and legs were tied together as a sign of surrender to Chukwu. Just then, the humming of the elders slowly went high. I continued:

“We bring them to you so that peace may continue to rest in the village. Take them and let joy flourish the land forevermore,” I concluded, and a mighty wind immediately fell upon the earth and shook the foundation of the earth from the beginning. The shrine became very heavy, and the wind became so mighty in the shrine, blowing every now and then as if the god of wind had come to destroy the earth. A mysterious clattering sound filled the shrine and thrilled me. I was very serious, and I joined the elders to hum. Soon, a powerful hand descended upon the twins and took them, leaving just a sprinkle of blood in the raffia of the basket that the twins were placed in. Chukwu had accepted the sacrifice; he had taken the evil children. The twins had been sacrificed successfully.

I made reach of the metal gong, boomed it three times and returned it to the altar where I collected it from. I sang some spiritual songs, thanking the gods for a successful ritual. I summoned Ibini Ukpabi and appreciated him with a piece of kola nut and hard drink.

The ritual was performed, but the tradition needed to be done – banishing Obinna from the village and his dead wife thrown into the evil forest of Ikpa. However, we walked out of the shrine to the threshold of the village where the banishment was to be performed.

Soon, we arrived at the Iyi-eke entrance gate. Obinna was stripped naked, and a piece of palm frond was tied across his waist. I called him forth and drew lines on his buttocks with *nzu*. His buttocks were very dark and even darker than his dark body in complexion. He had an oval head which I used my staff to strike three times before speaking.

“From now henceforth, Obinna is no more a native of this land since he has decided to bring evil children into this land. I therefore declare that his ill-luck is paid with the price of banishment,” I said and tears jetted from Obinna’s eyes. I observed his ugly mood. The people yelled with ecstasy, and the weather immediately changed gloomy, looking expectant as if it had planted a seed into the earth.

“Now, I declare that he shall no more return back to this land again in his entire life time until the earth eats him up. And if he does, may the wicked powers of Ala fight against his life until he succumbs. As I have spoken, so shall it be!” I concluded and libations were poured out. A song rose high, and Obinna was pushed out of the village. The people rejoiced and the earth kept calm. But one thing still remained in the minds of the villagers. Anytime that somebody was banished from the land, the thunders would rumble and there would be a heavy downpour of rain with lightening. But this time around, all the signs did not come. It was unbelievable and astounding. Thus, revelation and explanation were needed.

However, after Obinna was banished from the land, his wife’s dead body was carried to the evil forest of Ikpa where I performed a brief ritual before ordering the *efulefu* to throw her body into the deepest part of the forest.

“Let the hungry spirits of the great deceased ancestors arise for food has come to the stomachs that are hungry. Spirits of the deceased ancestors, I beseech you to accept this evil body and let peace continue gracing the clan of Arochukwu,” I said and allowed my metal staff to shake and make an abrupt noise.

Different types of noises were heard from all corners of the evil forest. The scariest one was that from the spirit that guided the masquerades in Arochukwu clan. He was called Ekpe.

The scary noise he produced could scare away a brave lion during combat. My father had told me that before masquerades would perform in Arochukwu clan during new yam festival or special occasions that Ekpe must be consulted first. That was because he took charge and controlled every masquerade that performed in the clan of Arochukwu.

“Go and throw her into the deepest dark part of the forest where the spirits can find pleasure in devouring her dead body,” I said and the four *efulefu* that carried the dead body on a bamboo stretch bed immediately went down the forest where I did not see their backs until they returned without the dead body.

Soon, the ritual was concluded. The tradition was kept maintained. That was one of the secrets of Arochukwu as a prosperous clan – keeping the tradition as stipulated by the gods. We finished performing the ritual before the day broke totally. We walked home when it was easier to point a tree standing feet away from another.

As I walked home, I thought about my father. He would return from pilgrimage sooner before Maazi Mbaonu’s in-laws would visit him with many pots of palm wine and kola nuts. I thought and wondered about the ritual I had just carried out. I had never performed ritual before, and I knew my father would be very proud of me when he would hear that I took the elders on a ritual. Many thoughts ran my memory as I walked home, but I never allowed my thoughts to overshadow my imagination.

Bio

Chukwu John David is a young creative writer from Abakaliki town in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, West Africa. He started writing stories at the tender age of nine, and he has written for many magazines and anthologies including SYNW anthology 2014, Tuck Magazine, Gnosis Magazine, Prose and Poetry Hood, Literary Temple Magazine, Pen Egg, among others. His worldwide read short story ONE WINTER IN GEORGIA was first published in 2015 in Canada and has been translated and published in Polish language by Pocisk Magazine. David is an internationally recognized writer of many powerful short stories; in 2015, he won the recognition of The Literature Revelation of the year from MLF, and he also won the *number-first* top five prose writer that rocked 2015 from Black Pride Magazine. His first published great novel AFRICAN DARK LIGHT is published in the United States of America by Inner Child Press Ltd.

www.innerchildpress.com/chukwu-john-david.php

www.facebook.com/chukwujohndavid.author

He can be contacted at chukwujohndavid8@gmail.com