

A Nice Prison in Togo

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Part Five: The Life in Togo

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And so that was the time when I met that Austrian man, and I stayed with him at a village. Ah! What do you call the name of that village? It's near Kpalimé.¹ It's where they were cutting trees. But where we were living really was called what? I forget the village's name. Tsukudu! It was Tsukudu! We were at Tsukudu, and from Tsukudu to Kpalimé I think is about two or three kilometers. It's not far.

So when I was living at Tsukudu, I didn't have a problem there. I was all right. But I wasn't exactly staying at Tsukudu: maybe I could go there for two or three weeks, and come back to Lomé for one week, and go back again. I was just going up and down like that. I still had my room in Lomé near the cemetery. I didn't want to leave that room. OK? Then when I met that man, he said that he wanted me to stay with him at Tsukudu. But at least every three weeks, I had to tell him that I was coming to Lomé to pay my rent. Then I would come and see Mama Amma

1. small town northwest of Lomé

and all the friends, and we would yab.¹ You know? So I wouldn't make one month there. Every three weeks, I said I was coming to pay my rent, that my landlord was a bad man, and you had to pay before the ending of the month, and if not so, he would put my things out. So this man at Tsukudu, he didn't mind. If I came to Lomé, I would make one week. In that one week, I would see all of the friends. We would yab good. Then I would go back for another three weeks' time.

I met this man at Pussycat. The girls in Lomé used to call him Django.² They said he resembled the man who used to act in Django cinema, so they called him Django. The first time I met him, he said he was at Kpalimé with his wife, but his wife would be going away in about three days, on Wednesday, and that when he took the wife to the airport, from there he would come to meet me at Pussycat. So that Wednesday night he came to Pussycat. We were at Pussycat dancing, and at about one-thirty he told me that he was going back to Tsukudu, because he had a young daughter about twelve years old. The wife had gone, but the daughter would go next week. Then he left us at Pussycat and he went. I was with one girl, Marie Zazu. She is a good girl, a nice tall girl. If you meet her, you will like her. Marie Zazu. So he left us and went back to Tsukudu, and he told me that the next week, when he took the daughter to the airport, he would come to town.

About three days later, he came to town in the daytime. He met one girl, Celia, and asked her did she know where Marie Zazu lived, because when he asked me where I was living, I said I was living with Marie Zazu. But I was not living there. So Celia also was a friend of Marie Zazu, and she knew her house, so she carried him to Marie Zazu's place, and Marie Zazu brought him to my place. He said, Oh, he had come to buy some food; they wanted to make a party, and because of that he was going back. He just came to get some things which they couldn't get there. He had passed to say hello to us, and this and that. So we had some talks, and he said we should drink, and he went and bought some beer. Me and him and Marie Zazu and Celia, we were drunk. Then he said he was going, so as we were three, he dashed all

1. (Pidgin): to talk roughly (abusively or playfully), to run one's mouth, to mess with; in this context, hang out

2. hero of Italian-made Western movies

three of us money, five thousand, and he said we should share it, that as he was going back, it was for the three of us to go out in the evening time. Then he went his way.

And that week, when he dropped the daughter at the airport, he passed at Pussycat. At that time I was at the Hotel du Golfe. When I came back to Pussycat, Marie Zazu said, “Oh-h, where did you go? Your man has come here. Just now he has gone out, with some friends.”

I said, “Oh, let him go.” So I didn’t see him. I think they went back to the village. That day was Friday. I didn’t see him, up to Sunday. On Sunday we went to the beach, at Ramatou. You know, at Ramatou Beach they have a small restaurant. So we went to that place, and we saw these people from Tsukudu: my man and one of his friends and one of my girlfriends, too. She was called Tani; she is a Fulani.¹ So she said, “Oh, Hawa.”

I said, “Hey, Tani, where are you from?”

She said, “I am from Tsukudu. That is my man, the one I said is in Tsukudu.” Her man was a French man, but he could speak German more than a German man. He could speak *nice* German. He was called Henri.

So my man said, “Oh, I came to you that Friday at Pussycat, but I didn’t meet you. But I had told you to wait for me there.”

And I said, “Oh, that day I was sick, so I was sleeping.” *Ha!*

So he said, did I want to eat with them at twelve o’clock? Then I said, Yes. You know, that is the day I ate some rice – that rice, every time I used to go to Lomé, I used to like it. They say it’s Spanish cooking. They mix many, many, many, many, many things from the sea inside. That is the day I ate that rice first. After, we went to town. We drank, drank, drank, drank, up to the night. Then evening time, we went to dance. From dancing, then they said we should go to Tsukudu. I didn’t know that it was *far* away, you know. I thought it was about three or four miles. Do you know that it’s a hundred-and-something kilometers from Lomé? Tsukudu is a village, a small village near Kpalimé. These

1. a large cultural group, known in French as Peul. They are spread across the West African savanna from Senegal into the Cameroons, with the largest concentration in northern Nigeria and Niger. Only a few Fulani groups remain nomadic herdsfolk; nonetheless, many retain their husbandry calling and make their living tending cows for other local peoples.

people were working at a company there: they are the people who are cutting timber. And we were going, going – hey, we didn't reach there.

Then I said, "Hey!" to Henri. Then I asked Tani, "Where are we going?"

Tani said, "Oh, but I am living there, so you shouldn't be afraid."

So we went to Tsukudu. I stayed three days, then I said, "No, I want to go back to Lomé." It was very *quiet! Ha!* That place was very quiet. Night time, sometimes, if the cinema was good, we would go to cinema. They had one restaurant. Now they have a big hotel there. I think they also have a nightclub. But before, there was only one restaurant. And a small bar – a small place, a dirty place: you won't suspect that they can sell beer inside. There's no chair, nothing. If you go, there is a bench outside. It's like a pito house.¹ You sit down and drink beer. The beer, too, it's not a cold one; it's a hot one. So I didn't feel much for the town. After that, too, you know, we were only two African girls. All the rest, they were with their wives, white women, and some of them with their children. So that kind of place, you know, you can't be happy. *Ha-ha!*

Shit. Sometimes, if you go out, eh? They have a canteen. If you are living with somebody there, you just take the name of the man, and they supply you. You don't go with money. Anything you want, even food, they will give you everything and then keep the receipt for him. But every time, if you go there, you know, these fucking – these European children – *ha! Shit!*

You know, some of the children will come and look at you, and then they will ask the mother in German language, "Hey! Where's this girl from?" *Ha!* Yeah? I think as I lived with this man for some time, maybe I could hear their language² a little bit.

And then maybe, some of the mothers, you know, when they see that maybe you are watching the baby, she will just make the baby like she's beating her, "*Sh-h!* Don't say anything!"

1. Pito is a fermented drink made from sorghum or sometimes millet. A pito house is a brewing house, normally with place where people can gather, sitting on benches, to drink pito. In front of them are smaller benches with gouged out indentations to cradle a small half-calabash that holds a person's pito.

2. understand their language

And some of them, they tried to scratch me. *Ha!* I am sure. *What!* Look, one baby told the mother – the mother was a nice woman; she was called Ilsa. Every time she used to come to visit me. She would come with her small girl, about three years old. And this girl could talk. She said to her mother, “But it’s not dirt that is making her like that?”

Then the mother said, “No.”

Then this baby said, “No-o-o.” She doesn’t believe the mother. So she stopped and watched me and watched me. The next time, when she was coming, she was wearing a white cloth: she took a piece of the white cloth and started rubbing my arm. *Ha-ha!*

I asked her in French. I said, “*Mais, qu’est-ce qu’il y a?*”

“*Mais non, mais je voulais voir. Je pense tu n’as pas prend ta douche. Tu pas prend la douche. C’est comme ça je –*”¹

I said, “Hey! What are you doing?”

She said, “No. I want to know. I think maybe you don’t bathe, that’s why you are like this.” She couldn’t speak French well, but she just said it plain-plain, eh?

Ah! I had nothing to say to her. Then the mother told me that, oh, I shouldn’t mind, this baby is just somebody who is learning talking, so she doesn’t know anything. Then later the mother told her that it was the sun that burned me, and then my body became like that. Sun burned me and my body came like that, because when I was a baby like her, I was always in the sun. Suppose she would be staying here and growing up, before she would grow up, she would get my color. Then the baby said, *Ah!* Then she will go to the sun every day. *Ha! God! Ah, shit!* She wanted to get a black color, because now she saw that it’s not dirt. You can go to the sun every time to get the color.

So, you know, I just didn’t like the place. And I wondered. This kind of babies, they used to see many of the black people who work in the factory. But, you know, I think they didn’t used to get close, to touch them. But I was free to her. She used to come to me, and do everything. So she thought it’s the way to know these people, what kind of people they are. *Ha!*

1. (slightly broken French): But no, I would like to see. I think you didn't take your bath. Didn't you bathe? It's like that I –

Yeah. They were so much like that baby there, so I didn't enjoy the place. But if I went there, before I would come back to Lomé, if I needed anything, this man used to give me. Anyway, Django was not rich, but I thought he was somehow OK. So sometimes if I came to Lomé for about a week, and I saw that everything was hanging up,¹ then I would say, OK, let me be free. If I went back there, then maybe I would be getting fed up, and I would get something to come back to Lomé, to make my weekend. So every time I was going there. This man wanted to me to stay there. Sometimes I could go there and stay three weeks, and nobody would see me outside. I wouldn't go out. Anything I wanted was in the house. I could cook inside, do everything. *Ha!* Any kind of food I wanted to eat, I would get it. You see, my girlfriend always used to go to town because her mother was living in Kpalimé. Or sometimes, if we needed something, we would give money to this girl's sisters if we went to the cinema in the evening time. Morning time they would bring it. So for me, every day: I could stay there three weeks; nobody would see me outside. Until night time, you will see me in cinema or in restaurant. Daytime, you won't see me!

Ah-h, the place was just a fucking place, so if I went there, if I went out to see anything, there were some women, you know, these white women. Some of them are fucking. They used to come and just be teasing you. If they saw the man went to work and left you, then they would come to you and start asking you questions. *Ha-ha!* "Do you know this man has a wife? Do you think this man – he has told you that he going to marry you? Or he wants to keep you as a girlfriend?" You know, this kind of question, they have it.

So there was one fucking woman. Every time, she used to come and talk to me. Every time she came and told me, "Look, Max – " They called this man Max; I told you that in Lomé they called him Django, but his real name was Max. So this fucking woman had a very *sma-al-l-l* voice. She would say, "You see, you are nice girl. Max not good man. Max wife go – *one* week. Max take you, bring you here. Max should pick you a marriage?"

Then I would look at her, this woman, and say, "What do you want from me?"

1. going nowhere; nothing was happening; also, hassled

“Why you come for Max?”

Then I said, “Why? Why do you ask me? Are you his mother?”

“Oh, no, you no *fâchée*.” You see? She spoke a English a little, and French a little: she could not speak French, and she could not speak English either, so she used to mix up. “You no *fâchée*.” You see: “Don’t be annoyed.”

So then I said, “No, I don’t want this.”

Then she said, “OK, OK, OK. Finish, finish, finish – me no talk. Ah, Max make you marriage? Good!” She will say, “Me no talk.” But she will talk again! “Good, good, good. Max make you marriage. Good! Me no speak. Me speak – you *fâchée*. No. Me no like. You *fâchée*. Max, you, marriage.”

Then I’d be annoyed. I wouldn’t mind her. I would just get up and go to the bedroom and lock the door. Then she would be sitting down in the sitting room: “OK, OK, me go, eh? Me go. You come sit down. Me go.”

Ha-ha! She was a *fucking* woman! You know, they were next door to us. The village, they made it round, but the German people’s was in a line. How they built the houses, it was all one building, but everybody had his part. But their place was big; it was not small. Every place had a kitchen, and maybe two bedrooms. They made it something like quarters, and they built a wall around the compound. All the machines for the work were inside, too. And all the white men also lived inside the compound. All the white people who were working there, they were maybe fifty or forty. And all the compound – where they built the company – the people who were there were all white. The African people, the workers there, they lived in town, in Kpalimé.

So this *fucking* woman was next door to us, and she used to come to me. Because of her, if I went to Tsukudu, I used to get fed up. “You no go? You go for Lomé? You no stay? You come back.” *Ha-ha!* “Max – no good! Max, Madame, bébé, *two*.” The man had two children with the wife. “Max – no good, no good, no good. No good. Max speak you, speak you – papapapa. Nothing! Max marry for you? No. You stay Lomé, you get fine, fine man. You marry, OK?”

Ah! This woman! I told the man. I said, “Look, this woman is doing something with me. I don’t want it. Tell her that I also have my

experience. I know what I'm doing. I don't say that you are going to marry me. I know that you won't marry me. But you should tell this woman not to disturb me."

So this man even had some talks with the woman's husband, and they had a problem, because I think he told the man to tell his wife not to say all these things, and the woman's husband man was also annoyed. He said, "But why? Your wife has just gone, now, how many days?" *Ha!* So everybody hated my man in the place. All of them. Only Ilsa and her husband: they were good people. They were the people who used to make me happy a little bit. And then Tani, that African girl, her man, too — Henri — he was a French man. He was a nice, good man.

So these people, if the time came when they were going on leave, one man would go maybe two or three weeks, then another one would go. They used to go and come like that. They were many there. It was a *big* compound. They had many African workers in Kpalimé. And when they would come from leave, they wouldn't go out: every time, one man will call a party in his house, another day another one will call his party. So the parties were going around like that, *every* day.

So these our men, as they knew the way, they also used to call their party. They would invite all the people from the compound. It was there: you see these fucking German women? Some of them were drunkards. Some of them, too, were very gentle. So Henri called a party. That day was the day for fighting there.

This fucking woman and the husband came and sat down. They had nothing to do. Only talk about me. And, you know, sometimes, if somebody is talking something about you, you are just there. I was sitting here, and she was sitting here, my man was here, and then her husband was there. So we two women, we were in a double chair. *Ha!* So *all* the ways I saw that this woman was talking about me, I couldn't keep it. I was drunk, too. As for me, if I am drunk, and somebody is talking fucking things, I don't have time. I used to give you cheek. But that time I didn't want to do that. As there were many people, I would disgrace myself. So I told this man, "I beg you:¹ you should give me the key to go and sleep, because I can't help it."

He said, "Why?"

1. please

I said, "I'm drunk."

Then this man gave me the key, you know. So this woman told my man, "Hey! You are giving your key to this girl? Your wife went and left all her things in the room, and you are giving your key to her? If your wife comes and something is lost from her things, I will tell her."

There, you know, that thing came to me like – I became like a fool. Then I told her, "*Prends!* Take the key." She wouldn't take it. I said, "Take."

Oh, there were many people. That day I did something there. But I had a *good* man. He was from Holland. He was also working there; he was the director. He didn't have a wife. This man just liked me like that.

So I said she should take the key. She should hold the key, because she is the sister of this man's wife. So if the man's wife is not there, she is holding the key. These German people, it's their business. So I just told her that and threw the key at her. Then her husband got up and held me: why should I throw the key at his wife?

Then I said, "Who are you? Who are you?" That time, I was drunk. Do you know Ricard, you know, that you put the water in? I had drunk that. And then wine. And I took Cointreau, too. You know, there is sugar in Cointreau. So my head was big. And I was going to do the big things, too. *Ha!* So this man held me. Then I said, "Hey! Don't hold me again! Who are you?"

Then when I pushed him and said that, then this Dutch man got up. He said, "Why? Why do you people want to beat this girl?" And he fucked my man. *Wow!* He said, "Max, God will punish you. You bring somebody's baby, and you give her to your people to be killing her. And you are sitting down there. For what? For what are you people talking? The girl heard it."

Then they said they were speaking German language. Did I speak German? Then the man said, yes, he speaks German. It is the same thing that I heard; it's the same thing that this woman was saying. I heard it. Even if it were that woman, she would be annoyed. So I was right to do it. It's not that I don't respect myself.

Pfft! That night, it was hot! I said this man should take me to Lomé the *same* night. This man begged me. He did everything. I said,

“No.” Even to go inside the room and take my things, I said, “No! This door, I won’t enter inside.”

Drink can work, eh? If you get much drink – *ha!*

So I stood up there. I said, “Go inside and pack my everything from your room, and bring it to me. Because if I go into your room, your wife’s things will get lost. In Lomé market, there are plenty of *buroni-wawu*;¹ they are neater than your wife’s things. What would I want hers for? Go and pack my things for me. Me, I *dey*.² Let me go my way.”

This party was finished at one o’clock. We took the road. He brought me to Lomé. We were in Lomé at about two or half-past two. The car spoiled on the road, and we stopped a truck to take me to Lomé. I said he should take me home. He is the one who brought me: the same house where he packed my things, he should go and leave me there with my things. So he packed everything and came and left me.

The same day when he left me, he passed another house and took another girl! *Huh?* His other woman. Vera. *Huh?* All the girls in Lomé, there are only a few of them who don’t know him. He knew every kind of girl. This girl, Marie Zazu, he knew her. She was the first girlfriend he took in Lomé when he came from his country. He said he stayed seven years in Togo. These seven years, the girls he took are more than millions. *Ha!* All the girls, everywhere you call his name, somebody will know him. So he took the girl and went back with the girl. He stayed four days with the girl, then he brought the girl back to Lomé. *Ha!* The girl’s friends told me. They said, “Hey? Why? Where is Django?”

I said, “Why? I brought Django to Africa here? I don’t like foolishness. He came for his work. Why should you people ask me about him? I’m not the one who brought him.”

“Oh, no, it’s not so. We saw him. He came and took that girl from our place. That girl, even she has conceived with some boy. She’s working at Hotel de la Paix. So the boy said if she comes, he won’t take the conceive.”³

I said, “This is not my problem. You people leave me alone.”

1(Asante Twi): second-hand clothing from overseas; from “Oburoni, w’awu,” literally “White man, you died”; the pronunciation of the noun form is “broni-wawu.”

2. (Pidgin): I’m here; I’m all right.

3. He won’t accept the baby.

So then in four days' time, Django brought this girl and dropped her at her house. And then he came to me. But you know something which makes me laugh? He had promised me many things. Cloths, and then I had said I needed white cloth to make bed sheets. He promised me all this. He didn't give me. Then I was annoyed at him. That day when he was coming, he thought I am a fool. But that day he brought all these things – cloths and things – oh, many things – pieces¹ of cloth – twelve-twelve yards – about six pieces. And different kinds of material which can make bed sheets. They make a special one for that: they were about seven – and pillow cases, curtains. *Heh-heh!*

When he brought these things, you know, he was very funny. The day when he had dropped me, I told him I didn't want to see him anymore. He shouldn't come to my place. The day when he was going to bring me these things, when he was coming, I was upstairs. I think when he was getting to the steps, it was left with about three steps, and he was standing there with the things.

I had a small maidservant, a small girl. Her real name was Yawa, but she was called Vodou. So I called her, "Vodu."

She said, "Auntie?"

I said, "You should go and make me some fire. I want to make tea."

Then she went out. Then: "Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!" Every time when she saw this man, she used to make so.

Then I said, "Vodu, I said to make fire for me. What are you doing?"

She said, "Auntie? Come and see that white man."

I said, "Which white man?"

Then I went and looked there, and I saw him. I said, "Fuck off! You are coming here? Is it today you know here? Where is your girlfriend you went with last time? Where is she? You think you are a champion? Go and do your champion's work. You are bringing these things for what? I don't want these things. Go with them. Go with your fucking things."

Then my landlord was another drunkard. He also came outside. He was drunk. When he saw this man with the things, he went and got the

1. One "piece" is twelve yards, enough for a complete African outfit.

things from the man, *ntɛm'tɛm'tɛm*,¹ and put them in my room. Then he brought the man. He said, "Sit down." Then he said, "Hey, Hawa, why are you treating people like that?"

Then I said, "Hey, it's not your lookout. I don't want that. Who am I treating?"

"But why is the man standing there, holding these things, and you are talking to him, and you wouldn't let him put them down before talking?"

And I said, "Is this your lookout?"

Then Django was just standing there. He was ashamed. He didn't know how I could know that he had taken a girl. So how I knew it, it was very big shame to him. And so he was sitting there. He couldn't say anything.

Then I took my tea, finish. It was early in the morning. I finished my tea, then I said, "OK, I'm going to my friends."

He said, "Can I drop you?"

I said, "You can drop me, if you want to drop me."

He took me, and I dropped at Royal Hotel to go and drink. I didn't have any friend there. I just went to see the Guinness. At first I liked Guinness-o! *Tweaa!*² Yeah.

That small girl I had, you know, I taught her to cook. She could cook *well*. I would go out, I didn't have any problem: before I would come back, there was food. So I didn't have anything to do in the house in Lomé. Sometimes I would come back and sleep, and she would wake me. It was a funny thing: "Auntie, Auntie, wake up and eat small. You see? If you drink and you don't eat, it's not good." Sometimes I would be sitting there like that, and this girl would cut the banku,³ and put the sauce on it and put it in my hand, and then take my hand like this and put it in my mouth! You know! I was drunk! Ah, you know, Lomé. I think that place just was not good for me. There was not good for me. I was becoming crazy there. *Ah!* I could drink from morning time to evening! Royal Hotel: even if I didn't have money, if I went to Royal

1. (Asante Twi): quickly, quick-quick-quick, from *ntɛm ntɛm ntɛm*

2. (Asante Twi): an exclamation of disgust

3. a pastelike food made from corn flour

Hotel, I could drink. They trusted me. I would pay. I could pay, too. So if I didn't have money, they used to give me drink there.

So this man dropped me at Royal Hotel, and I went there to have my drink. And he also went, and then later he came back to our place. He said that he was not going back to Tsukudu that evening. He would go back tomorrow, so we should meet. OK, then that time I also had another man. He was a stranger. He was not from Togo, but he had come from Nigeria to do some business there. He was in the Hôtel Le Benin. I had a promise with that fellow, you know, so I didn't mind this this Tsukudu man. I went out with that man, and then the next day I didn't see the Tsukudu man again. Maybe he came in the night and looked for me, and he couldn't see me.

But after that, he came back. The next Sunday again, they came back in a group. We went to the beach again. We went and ate that rice. And that girl Tani was also there with her boyfriend, so after we all went back to Tsukudu again. So I started again with him. OK. We were in Tsukudu three weeks. I came back to Lomé and stayed one week, and then went to Tsukudu, three weeks. Sometimes not quite three weeks, you know, and I would come to Lomé. If it was three weeks when I came to Lomé, then I knew that maybe the next week, maybe Sunday or Saturday, they would come and meet me in Lomé and then pick me back to Kpalimé.

And why I started with him again: he came and talked to me and he begged me and – *ha!* You know, I was annoyed. Actually I was annoyed, eh? But then I also thought, OK, if somebody does you bad, and then he says, "Forgive me," if you don't forgive the fellow, then you are walking in the wrong way. What do you think about that? It's better for you to know that if you are going the wrong way, it's better to forgive the person so that you will walk together again. So I thought of this and I said, "Oh. Shit! What this man has done, I have seen things more than this-o. We can still continue." Yeah. This was what I thought, eh? So I said, OK.

You see? You will agree like that. And you know, maybe there is not anybody who will say that this way is good. Everybody knows that it is not good. But OK: if you think, this way is not good, and you don't know any way which is good for you, then you must follow the one you

think is good for you. Maybe if you say it's not good, maybe you are going to stay and stay, and you can't do anything or you can't get any money. So you will *do* it, even if it's not good. You have to force to do it.

Lomé

Interlude: The Maidservant's Tale

OK? Vodou. She was about fifteen or sixteen. She was a nice girl. Oh, I enjoyed the girl. When I visited Lomé, I went and asked of her. They said she has given birth. She has a baby. *Ha-ha!* Since I left her, she went and married.

How I got her: one of our girlfriends, Patience, had a small girl staying with her. How she got that girl was because she knew the mother. The mother used to sell fufu¹ in the market. We all, we used to go and eat there. When we were in Royal Hotel, we didn't have cooking pots and all these things, so we used to go and eat at the small market, where they sell buroni-wawu. This woman was there. She spoke Ashanti well, and she could make good food a little bit more than the others. So we used to like her fufu. We ate there every day. So Patience told the woman she wanted a maidservant, as a small girl. And the woman gave her her daughter. Her daughter was nice. Very slim. She was a beautiful girl. A black beauty – slim, portable. She must have been about eleven or twelve years. So I saw how she used to go to the market and do these things for my friend, so I also asked for one. We paid them one thousand five hundred² for the month. Yeah, it was very cheap. So I looked for one, and I got my own. But my own was growing up. At first when I got her, I didn't like her at all. After about one month, I saw the girl was becoming smart. So I said, "Yeah, this girl, if I hold her, she will be smart." So I held her tight. I used to buy her plenty buroni-wawu. When people saw her in town: *hey!* It was not a joke. Vodou: Black Beauty.

1. a pounded, starchy food, eaten with soup

2. CFA francs: about six dollars in the 1970s

She had a kind of Japanese eyes, so many people used to say she was my sister. I said, “Fuck off!” But many people used to believe that she was my younger sister. So she was with me, and she was a nice girl. It was nice. I paid her fifteen hundred a month. Her family told me to pay fifteen hundred, but I used to give her five hundred for *cadeau*,¹ because she was a nice girl. Ending of the month, I would give her two thousand. No balance.² I didn’t want the balance. She kept the balance. And then I used to buy her clothes. She had big feet, too. *Ha!* My shoe could not go on her feet. She got big shoes! I bought this Charlie-wɔti, the big one, the guarantee Charlie-wɔti.³ When she got it, she *liked* it. Oh, she was happy. And I bought her buroni-wawu. Different, different skirts; different kinds of dresses. Every time, every day, this girl could bathe about four times, and every time she bathed, she changed her dress. Even if she was in the house. She was funny, huh?

Sometimes, if I was sitting, you know, she used to come to me. I gave her a big valise, and I packed these buroni-wawu inside. Oh-h. Then she asked me, “Auntie, so even if you are going to your country, wouldn’t you take me with you? Don’t you have a brother?”

Then I said, “Yes, I have a brother.”

“Wouldn’t you go and give me to your brother to marry.”

Then I said, “Why?”

She said, “No, Auntie, I don’t want to leave you. I want you to – if I marry your brother, then I will be with you every time.”

Then I said, “No. My brother has a wife.”

She said, “In your country, they don’t marry two times?”

I said, “No, we marry only once.”

You know? She was funny. “So when you are going, you will give me all these my dresses?”

1. (French): gift, tip

2. She paid her with two 1000 CFA notes and didn’t ask for change.

3. flip-flops. The name refers to the easy way one slips into flip-flops; it is an allusion to someone getting up quickly to go out, saying in Ga, “Charlie, wɔti,” meaning “Let’s go, Charlie.” “Charlie” is a generic “guy” name, like Mack or Buddy. Guarantee Charlie-wɔti, like guarantee shoes, are flip-flops with thick soles, i.e., that won’t wear out quickly.

I said, “Yes, they are for you. Even if you like, today you can carry them to your place.”

“Hey, Auntie! God will bless you. Hey, Auntie, you see, this time when I am going to the market, some people used to meet me and talk French. They think I am a student. I don’t understand them. I used to laugh. I just smile, then they also think maybe I hear them.” *Ha!*

So she was a funny girl, Vodou. When I was inside the room like that, alone, sometimes, you know – sometimes in Lomé I used to get some kind of – just fucking things. I used to come to the room like I was going to sleep, but I couldn’t sleep. I used to turn in bed. This girl had studied me well. As she stayed with me a long time, she knew my character a little bit. I would be so: when I was turning like that, then she would come, with a funny story. You see? She would come and sit down. And say, “Auntie, you see, I told you! You see? The drink is not good. Look how you are trying to balance and – it’s not good to drink. You know? Even, if somebody wants to buy for you, if he doesn’t give you money, leave your drink for him. Don’t drink, huh? You see how you are tired?”

And I said, “Oh, it’s not that I am tired. I just don’t feel like sleeping.”

She said, “Mm-m. Suppose you sit in the house, when you eat and finish, and we talk, talk, talk. You see? You could go to sleep. But this time you can’t sleep now. You didn’t drink anything, but you can’t sleep now, you know?”

So I said, “Hey, Vodou. Go and sleep.”

She said, “Uh-huh, Auntie. Tomorrow, what are we going to eat?” *Ha!* “I think the way, if you sleep, maybe I can’t see you the time when we get the good market.¹ So you should tell me what we are going to eat.”

But you know, there was something I used to do with this girl. I used to do something. I would just put about five thousand in some place. Then I would say, “OK, every time you should take some from inside and go to the market.” Then I would see how long before it will finish. So I would give that money in her hand. But this girl, sometimes she could make economics to make one week, sometimes ten days, with

1. early

this five thousand. But she was cooking well. Then I asked. I said, “Hey, Vodou, this meat: how much did you pay for it?”

She said, “I bought it for one hundred.”

I said, “Oh you lie. Do you know the person? The person has been with you?”

“Hee-hee-hee-hee, Auntie – no. Oh. No.”

“But how can he give you – ? This kind of meat which you used to buy for one hundred. Even me, I can’t get it for three hundred.”

You see? And every time, when I asked her if the money was finished, she would say, “No.”

Ah! I used to wonder. So the last show, you know, was very funny before I left this girl. OK? My landlord was something like an inspector of police. He had three wives. The one, the child died and she traveled, so he was left with two. The two wives: when I would leave to go to Kpalimé, then this girl would go between these two women. When the small one said something to her, she would go and tell the senior one. When the senior one said something to her, she would go and tell the young one. So there was a time when the senior one said that she had lost one pair of her earrings. It was gold. She said she lost it, and she talked this in front of my small girl. Then Vodou said, Ah, she saw that the younger wife of the landlord had brought some earrings to show her that, if I come, she would give it to me to buy. She didn’t know whether it will be the same one. OK? So when they talked this thing, then the senior wife came and told the husband. Then the husband said, OK, if that will be the case, they should wait until I come. Nobody should say anything. When I come, maybe the junior wife will be first and see me and give the thing to me to buy. OK?

The day when I came, evening time about seven o’clock, the small wife brought the earrings, in some white material, that she wanted me to give her five hundred and hold this thing for her. She didn’t say that she would sell it to me. So I should keep this thing and give her five hundred because she had a problem. The husband gave her chop money,¹ and every time when the husband gives her chop money, she has to give the balance. But she spent the five hundred. So if she doesn’t have the five hundred, today the husband will beat her, or something like that,

1. money for food

because this man used to beat his wives like horses. So she wouldn't want –

Then I said, “OK, you know, as for me, I can't hold this thing.” Nobody told me anything, but I just don't feel things like that. So I told her, “No. This kind of thing, I can't do it. You are my landlord's wife, huh? If there is something you need, if your husband knows something about it, I can give you. Not to say I will take it off from the rent, when I rent your husband's room. But I just don't want you as a married woman to be coming to me and asking for money. I'm not rich. If I were rich, I wouldn't do what you see me doing. So I can't give you anything. I haven't got money. And I can't keep this thing.”

So this woman went away. Then the husband came home about ten o'clock in the night. This woman saw me about seven o'clock. When the husband came about ten o'clock, he sent the children to come and call me in my room. So I went there. Then he said, “Hawa, I want to ask you a question. But this question I'm going to ask you, you shouldn't get annoyed. Take patience and give me a good answer, because what I have seen, I think I have taken you to be just like my sister. So anything that will happen to me, it will happen to you, too. I want to ask you something. Tell me the truth. Did my small wife bring something for you?”

Then I said, “Like what?”

He said, “When you came, when you came from Kpalimé, did you see my small wife?”

Then I said, “Yes, I met her in the house.”

Said, “What did she do?”

I said, “She helped me to put my things in the room, and after a few minutes, she came back with some – something. She said it was earrings. Because I didn't want it, I didn't open it. I didn't look at it. I don't know what was inside. It was in some white material. She said that I should hold these things and give her some money. But I thought, I cannot be here to be doing this work. I can take her as a sister. I can dash her five hundred. But married people, I don't go to dash them money, because they wanted to be married, to marry and take their blessing. That's why they have married. And I don't want the blessing, and I am going round and round. So I just took it like a joke.”

Then the man laughed. He said, "Give me five! You are a woman." Then he said, "Yeah, you did well. Suppose you gave her this money, then this matter came outside, the way I would deal with you, you would run away from Togo."

Then I said, "Eh?"

He said, "Yes, what you did is good."

So from there, he said, OK, I could go and sleep. So I went to my room. Then he called both the two wives upstairs. And this man, you know what he used to do with them when they had a problem like this? Sometimes if he was annoyed, he would *whip* both the two women. Look, the senior one is the one who lost her earrings. OK? The earrings are with the younger one, isn't it? Because the younger one has brought it for me. OK. Then the senior one hasn't got patience with the younger one. The husband was asking the younger one questions, and the younger one didn't say anything. The senior one said *all*. OK. Let the younger one also talk. But you know, some people, sometimes if you say something, they will say, "No, it's not true."

So when the small one wanted to talk, then the senior one said, "No, you lie, lie, lie!" Then they wanted to fight. So this man just got up and took a stick. He had a *big* stick for them – *cho cho cho!* Both of them, he was just beating them like that, and they were all running downstairs. *Ha!* Then I came up, and I wanted to hold him. Hey! He was about to beat me, too! Then I said, "Hey, hey, hey, *fo, fo.*" I said, "Brother, brother," in Togo language. You know, he used to call me his sister, so I thought maybe if I call him "brother," he will know that I am not one of them: "Hey, don't put the stick on me. Oh-h, why don't you take patience?"

He said, "No! But why? You have said your own. Let her say her own, too. Even if she is thief. You can catch a thief with your things in her hand: she can challenge you that it's not for you, because you are not the only person who has this thing. So let her say her own, too. She doesn't want her to open her mouth. What is all this?"

Then I said, "OK, take patience."

So by all means, they had it back from the younger one. And from there, after all this trouble, then I didn't feel happy with that girl, my maidservant. From that time, when she went between the wives and was

doing this thing to involve me like that, from there I started not to feel the girl again as the first time when I was doing for her. And she also changed her mind, to do me bad.

You see? Vodou, that small girl who was living with me, every time she was going through all these talks. Look at the trouble: she brought it. She used to go between these women. She found out all these things. She was a friend to the senior wife and a friend to the younger wife. If the senior said something, she would come and tell the younger. If the younger said something, she would go and tell the senior. This is what Vodou started to do to me. So when all these talks were coming out, I was fed up with her, but I couldn't just tell her to go. I felt pity for her. But I was not doing like the first time when I was free with her. First time, we joked together. Then I started to change my life, and show her that, you know, I was older than her. And that time, too, she also was clever. She got to know my point, that I just wanted to see her at some point, so that I would just let her out. So she started to steal my things, one by one.

You know, this man in Tsukudu gave me many cloths. I don't know how many cloths I had. I just cut-cut them. My window curtains: I took cloth to make window curtains. If I wanted pieces, full pieces, maybe three or four, I would get.

So as this girl was living nicely with me, I didn't count my things. But then she started doing some things. If I went to Tsukudu, before I would come, she would open my portmanteau. I didn't lock my portmanteau. She could open my things and choose what she wanted inside. Then she would go and give to one of the wives of our houseowner, my landlord. When I came back, I didn't know that I had lost something because I didn't look at my things, and I trusted this girl. I had stayed with her a long time, so I didn't know that she also would change her mind as I had changed my mind. So she was doing this thing.

Then, I had a *nice* blouse. This man brought it from Germany: five different colors, the same style, but five colors. It had a belt. I liked this blouse, and I knew all the five colors. One day I took some trousers and looked for one of the colors. I didn't find it. Wow! I looked through all my things. I had lost two colors; it was left with three. And I said,

What? Where's the other color of this blouse? I didn't look anywhere again. I called this girl and said, "Vodu."

She said, "Auntie."

I said, "Come here. Where is this blouse, the other color? You used to wash the things. You know it well. Where is it?"

"Ah, Auntie, look inside."

I said, "Look inside? Where? Go and look for me. Search it for me."

Then I went and sat down. She looked for it for me. She pulled *all* my things *down*, and packed them back. Then I was sitting down. And she said, "Auntie, I don't see it."

I said, "Hey! Don't talk this talk. Don't let me hear this. You don't see it? Who will see it? We are two here. Every time when I used to leave some dirty things, when I come back, you wash them, and you put them back. Now I'm back. So you have to find these things for me. If you don't find these things, get your things out. Right now. Get out."

Then she started crying. So our landlord's wife came up to ask me that, why is Vodu crying? I said, "No, Vodu wants to change her life. So she must go away. She's fed up with me. Maybe she will find another somebody she can stay with, who is better than me. I can't take Vodu today. What I asked Vodu to do, if she doesn't do it today and tomorrow, I can't take her if she doesn't bring that thing back."

Then the woman said, "What kind of thing?"

I brought out all the three blouses for her, that these five colors I had, I lost two of them. Then she said, "Oh. Then if because of that, I will let Vodu find it for you. So I beg you. You leave her."

So I said, "OK, if you are sure that you will let Vodu do it, then as for me, I will leave her. But from today to tomorrow, if I don't see it, I won't agree. She won't live with me again."

So from there, she lied something to Vodu, and then Vodu stopped crying and went inside and slept. Then I dressed up to go out, and I dropped down the stairs, and the woman called me. She said, "Hawa, come here." Then I went and she showed me the two blouses. She showed me three bed sheets, my bed sheets. Vodu had been taking my things, and she told the landlord's wife that I had given them to her. She gave all to the wife of landlord to keep for her, so that if the things were

plenty, then she would carry them to her house. She had many of my things.

When the woman told me, then I said, “No. Should I go with this girl to the family house and take everything?” But something said no.

The time when the woman showed me this, it was about ten-thirty in the night. I swear, I was boiled up. I woke the girl the same ten-thirty and packed all her things and put her in taxi to go to her house. I paid the taxi. You know, that month, when she worked for me, I didn’t pay her. I said, “I won’t pay you today. I won’t pay you tomorrow. If you want, you should bring police.”

Then the next day she came with the brother. Then the brother started to come and say something. I said, “If you people want, right now I will take police people to check your house, to see what your sister has been stealing. If she brings something to you people, if I have given it to her, then she should come and tell you as a brother. As we Africans are living, you know, if somebody has your daughter – Look. I came and found the girl. You said I should pay fifteen hundred. OK. I’m paying her two thousand. So it means that I have put something on top of her pay. And I used to buy her clothes. I used to give her some things, huh? Then you can’t come to see me. If your sister brings something, ‘Oh, it’s my Auntie who gave me,’ then the next day, you can come, ‘Oh, Auntie, we thank you very much for what you have done for our younger sister. Yesterday, she brought things like this and that, that you have given her.’ In our real African way, this is what we do. But not that your sister will bring something, to say, ‘Auntie gave me,’ and then she will keep it. You won’t come to say ‘Thank-you, Auntie.’ Hey! You are a thief too. Maybe your sister has come and told you that I have many things, so if she has taken some, I can’t know.”

And it was true. She took many things of mine. Before I got to know, it was too late. She had taken all my things to their place. So when the brother wanted to bluff. I said, “OK, if you people want, you should go and get my things for me.”

So the case just finished like that. And you know, sometimes when she would see me in town, she used to bend down.¹ “Auntie, how are you?” And sometimes when she saw me and greeted me, I used to give

1. lower herself in greeting, a gesture of respect

her maybe a hundred francs or two hundred, if I had money. When I went to Lomé, I asked of her. I went to the woman who was making fufu. She was still in the market.

Kpalimé

Louky's Problem

So I was there with these German people. I didn't keep long there, anyway. I used to come and go. Maybe I was doing that for five months or some months like that.

Then: there was one stupid old man. He was Swiss. They called him Louky. This Louky couldn't make love, because his thing didn't work, you know? So he couldn't make love. So every time, what he did, he went and picked up the small, small, small, small girls, the ones who are selling cola and groundnuts and things like that. He would fill up his car with these young girls. Then he would give them Coca-cola, and he would put some small spirits¹ inside the Coca, and they would drink. When they got drunk, then he would take off the dresses of all of them. Then he would tell them, "You have to finger your friend. And this one has to finger her friend." Then you are drunk, you know, then you people will start doing this, then he's holding your breasts, then he will feel you with the other one putting her hands in this thing, then he will take a photo of all of you. Then he'll wash² the photo.

When he took the pictures, he used to give it to the man I was living with, Django. That man was a good photographer; he could wash the pictures and all that. He had everything for developing film. Anyone who took pictures used to bring the film to him, and he will make your photo for you. And he also said, they were friends, you know, as a white life, you cannot charge your friend for small things like this. He said he was working at photography work for about three years before finding another work. So he was just keeping this place for film developing for his children, if he wanted to make a photo for them, or something like

1. alcohol; whiskey, gin, akpeteshie

2. develop and print the photo

that. So if these people brought any photos for him, he wouldn't charge them. But he was buying the medicine, so what he also did, he did them plenty and kept some copies, and he would give you the others. You see his trouble? I don't know what he was keeping the copies for.

So when Louky took the photos, he would bring the film to this man. And this man would develop it. *Hee-hee!* Yeah! So: my man would wash this photo and print it, and then if he made the photos, if he made about six pictures, then three were for Louky, and three were for him, because Louky didn't pay him anything. My man had bought all this medicine for washing the photos with his money, and his profit was: when he washed the pictures, then he would share them fifty-fifty. And he had many, many friends. They used to bring him all kinds of pictures, and he was washing them. In some of the photos, you could even see Louky himself. The girls were holding him like this, and making him like this, in the pictures. And my man would wash all of them, and then they would share them together.

So one day, Louky went and picked two girls. These girls were not small. Even they were big girls. The one was fourteen and the other one was eighteen. They were both Hausa girls, but they were born in Lomé. Louky took them, the two, with one of his friends. He was going to give the eighteen-year-old to the friend, and the fourteen-year-old was for him. So they went to Louky's house, in the night. They drank heavily, this Cointreau and all these drinks together. And these Hausa girls, you know, they don't drink. So how the first starting of drink is, when they started to drink, they couldn't know what they are doing again. They drank and finished, and then Louky told them to lie down and open – to be taking their hands to open their vaginas. And they lay down, they did that, and he took their picture. Then the one lay down; the other one made something like a dog. All these pictures – different, different ones, about ten.

And then the other old man said, "No. Louky." I think the old man told Louky it was too much. This old man took his hands to cover these two girls, to cover their vaginas like this. Then Louky cut that photo, too. But you could see the hands of the other old man. You could not see his face.

Then when these girls went home, the next morning when they went home, they were thinking, “Yea-a, yesterday I think we have done something bad.” The eighteen-years girl, she didn’t know anything; she was a fool. But the fourteen-years girl was very clever.

Then the fourteen-years girl said, “We did something bad yesterday, no?” Then she said, “Yes. It seems like a dream, but I think it was not a dream. We did something yesterday.”

Then the other one said, “What did we do?”

“Didn’t you see that Louky took us plenty of photos?”

Then the other one said, “Yea-ah, I remember. Why did we do so? What did we do before he took us these photos?”

Then they were asking each other. They didn’t know what they did. The one will say, “I think we didn’t wear a dress,” and the other one will say, “I think I wore pants but I didn’t wear a dress,” and the other will say, “Yeah. Then me too, what did I do?” They didn’t know what they did.

Then the small one said, “No! I will tell my sister.” So the small one went to the big sister, and told her, “Yesterday Louky took us to Tsukudu. He made us drunk, and he took us some pictures. We don’t like the pictures. So we are afraid. So we want you to go with us to Louky and get our pictures.”

So the sister said, “What kind of pictures have you people taken?”

They said, “We don’t know. We can’t remember. But if somebody drinks, he can do something bad.” So they didn’t know the way they took the pictures, but they thought so.

So, there was one girl called Ladi. She was also living with these people. She went to town for shopping. And this sister and the younger sister, they met Ladi. Then, they said, “Ey! Ladi. Louky, what he did he do to us yesterday? Did you – ? Louky took us some pictures. Did you see it?”

Then Ladi said, “Yeah-h.” Ladi didn’t see anything, but Ladi already knew Louky, what he was doing and all that. She knew Louky well. Then she said, “Ah-h-h! I swear. They made the cinema¹ this morning. They used these photos to make the cinema. It’s you people who made these photos? I didn’t look well. Because I was annoyed. I

1. showed them to everybody

will let people – They will arrest you people. What kind of bad photos did you make like this?”

Then these girls, the two of them, they started crying. “*Eh-h, yeh-h-h*. What shall we do to get these photos?” *Ha!*

And then the big sister said, “OK. If that will be the case, come with me. I will go and tell a big man. No? To go and catch Louky and take these photos from him.”

So they went and saw one man. He had opened a bar there. I don’t know what kind of man he was.¹ They told him because he was a friend to Louky. Every day Louky used to come to him to drink. So the big sister told this man. Two days: they didn’t see his answer.

So there was one old army man, you know, he was in the old military, and now they pensioned him. They called him El Couté. That was his name. Everybody called him El Couté. They said he hadn’t been to school, and when he was a soldier, when he was going to shout, “*Écoutes!*”² then he would say, “*El couté.*” So they took it like his name, in that town. So they went and told El Couté. The fourteen-years girl was a friend to El Couté. Look at a funny thing: a fourteen-years girl was a friend to a person who was in the army and came to pension. An old, old grandfather, with the girlfriend, fourteen years old. *Hah!* So she thought because the boyfriend is one of the old soldiers, if she tells him, he can help to take these photos from Louky.

So when she went and told this man, and then this man said, “No-o. These people are spoiling this town. I must go and tell this case to –” *Ah!* What did they call him? Chef-Cir?³ I don’t know whether it’s French or it’s Togo language. I don’t know. But it something’s like – ah, what do you call it? You know, in Ghana they have something like District Officer or Regional Commissioner. *Mm-hmm*. It’s like Regional Commissioner, because he is controlling the whole area. But these people called him Chef-Cir. In French countries, it’s something like the chief of the area – *Ah!* So: “I’m going to tell this case to Chef-Cir.”

1. what was his cultural or national origin

2. (French): listen

3. Chef de Circonscription. An administrative district was called a *cercle* during the colonial period; after independence the term *circonscription* was used for some time; the recent term is *prefecture*.

So El Couté went and told this Chef-Cir, for the Chef-Cir to take police and soldiers around the place, to search everywhere, the whole place together with the factory. I told you these Germans had made a big compound like that where they were working, you know, with a wall, and then the factory and their houses were inside. But first, they didn't do that kind of search. First, the Chef-Cir and one friend just came to Louky as if they were coming as friends to take one Coca-cola and one glass of beer. Before, the Chef-Cir used to come to Louky to drink. So the first time, they went there and talked to this man quietly, and they drank together. Then the Chef-Cir said, "Do you have some film in your camera?"

Then Louky said, "Yes."

"OK, I want to go and take my children. So I will take them. If you wash the film, then you can send my children's photo to me."

Then this Louky didn't have any idea, so he gave them the camera. The film which he took with these girls, the film didn't finish yet. It was remaining some of the film. So he thought this man was going to take the pictures, and then bring them to him, then when the film finished, he could get his chance to wash it. So they went straight and gave the camera to a photographer to take out the film and wash it, then they saw all those pictures. Then they came and arrested Louky. The soldiers came with police to go all around the place, and they entered the compound and made the special search.

When they arrested Louky, in two days, then they brought him to Lomé. Then when they joined the case,¹ they sent him home. They deported him. The day when they were going to deport Louky, he came home to pack his things. Then these people were fools, you know. When Louky got this trouble, they were a group. These our people we were living with, they were five. They were all in the same company. I was living with my man. And then there was Louky and the other old man. And then there were two French people, Alain and Henri. They were five who got this palaver in the compound. They sent them all away! Of these five, Alain had not got a wife; he just came about three months and he got this case.

1. hear a case, judge a case

The day when they were going to deport this Louky and the other old man, the one they saw his hand in the picture, they were the first people they deported. So the day when they were going to deport them, they brought them back to pack their things. It was at that time, these three people who remained, they saw that this thing was very serious. So the rest of the photographs they had, they had to go and throw them away. And these police people were inside of Louky's room, and Louky's room was like: here is his door, and here is our door. So my man came and packed his own, all, and then Alain packed his own, all, and Henri packed his own, all. Then they put all the photos in an envelope and then put the envelope inside a plastic sack. Yeah, they said they are going to throw it in the bush. So Alain was working where they were getting the water, at a river where they got the water to work in the factory. He was the one who was looking at the machine which was pumping the water. He was an engineer, and he looked after all the machines. So he said they should give the plastic to him so that when he goes there, then he would dig up the sand and put all of the photos there. Then some people came and called him that one of the machines had stopped in the workshop. So he too, when he went to go out, he had this plastic bag. If he was not a fool – at that time they were not searching our rooms – he was afraid to leave the photos in his room, so he put this bag with the photos in his garden. He put it under the flowers. And you know, there were many garden boys there who were working in the garden. Then you go and hide things in your garden! French people, they are fools! *Hah!* So when he was hiding the thing, one of the watchmen saw him. So the watchman just removed the thing and took it to show to the laborer director. He was an African man; I think he was Togolese. He was the director for all the laborers. Then this man just took the pictures and went to give them to Chef-Cir.

When this watchman took the pictures, there was one Mossi man among them. This Mossi man came and knocked my door, and then he said, "Ah! I saw the friend of your husband. He took something to the garden, but I have seen that the watchman took it and ran with it." So that time, I didn't know what it was. So I asked the girlfriend of Alain to go to the workshop and ask Alain whether he had something in his garden. Then Alain came and said, yes, he had something.

And I said, “Oh, the watchman took it. So you too should go and tell my man.”

So my man also left his work. They all went to see this African man. He controlled all the laborers, so if a laborer takes something, you must go to him. And this man said, “Oh-h-h, I will give you people. He brought it. It’s a picture. I will give you people, but not now, because it’s twelve o’clock. I’m tired. I’m going to eat. So if it’s two o’clock or two-thirty, you people should come back. You can come and collect your photo.” So this man went. Two o’clock, he didn’t come back to work.

And then, evening time, these people rushed on our place – police, soldiers – searching everybody’s room. They took the camera and all the things which my man used to work with the photos. They took all of it.

Then, we were three girls who were living with them. Henri’s girlfriend was Tani, and Alain’s was Arita. Arita was Anago¹ and Tani was a Fulani. They arrested *us!* All of us – all of us three! When they arrested me, I had just made ready to go to Lomé. But they just came and took the three of us girls. They didn’t arrest the white people. They didn’t do anything that day. They just took us girls along – the three of us. *Ah!*

Prisoners for the Lions

I think they took us to trick us – yeah. They said that we were living with the white people, and then we used to tell them to go and bring the young girls who don’t know how to drink. Then they took the pictures and went and sold them, and we shared. Look at the foolish case! *Ha!*

Then the Inspector said to me, “Where from you?”²

I said, “I am a Ghanaian.”

He said, “*Aha-a!* You Ghanaians come and spoil our babies. We see.”

And I said, “Hey, don’t tell me this.” You know, these white people were very funny, too. The year when they took a picture, they would

1. Yoruba

2. (Pidgin): Where are you from?

write it on in the back of the picture. So some of the pictures made seven years. And I told the Inspector, “I’m in Togo here for how many years? And these photos, some of them are from seven years. I am the one who taught them?”

So they kept us for one good week. Oh, they kept us at a *nice* house. Ha! They didn’t keep us in prison. They gave us the house where strangers used to sleep when they come to this Chef-Cir. It was a bungalow. There was a fridge; there was everything. We had a cook, every time. You know? The time when they took us, they took us in a way that if they make us good, you know, maybe we’ll have some secret to tell them about. So the first time – oh! They kept us nicely. We had beer; we had everything; we would eat, with wine. Everything we wanted, we would get it. Cigarettes – they bought a carton for everyone – each person, a carton of cigarettes. We didn’t worry at all. And even this groove!¹ When people came from town to greet us, they used to bring us groove. *Ha!* So we got it! And then we were enjoying inside!

So with me, there was Arita and Tani. And then Nana, the one girl who was in the picture, the eighteen-years old. The fourteen-years girl ran away to Cotonou. *Mm-hm*. So Arita, me, Tani, Nana, and then another girl again – I forgot her name – that girl, she also had a picture with these people – and the picture was seven years old! Even she left long ago from the time she made this fucking thing. She went and married, and she was conceived three months. They went and arrested her from the husband’s house. Togo is very funny, you know? They arrested her from Lomé, because one of the policemen knew her. But by then she had married some man and she had conceived for three months. They went and arrested her, too. She was among, too. That is five, eh?

And there was another one again. Another one with five or six months conceive, too. She had a baby with one man at Tsukudu, and her photo was there. It wasn’t Louky who took her photo like the other girls, but the police people saw her picture among all the photos. She went to give birth to this baby in her village, and she didn’t come back to Tsukudu again. She stayed in her village and married. The first baby had two years, and she conceived again. And then she was conceived again, five months. The man who had the half-caste baby with her was called

1. marijuana

Yves, and he had left the work about two years, I think. A long time ago, when Yves's girl left this ashawo work, and she went and married, she had made a report on this man, that he wasn't helping her with the baby, and that the police people should help to get something for her. She stayed quietly for about three or four years. Then the police people telephoned to that village, that they wanted to come and pick her, because they had arrested these people at Tsukudu. The police people said, "Ah, the case you reported to us – now, we understand. We know the fellow. He has done something. We want to send him home. So you must come and see – we want to send many of them away – you must come and see if your man is inside, then we'll let him pay an amount for you to look after your baby." When this girl came, then they locked her, too! *Ha!* And then they showed her her picture. Yeah, they also made their cinema. They said, "Do you see what you did? That's why we followed you. We didn't follow you to give you anything. Is this good?"

She said, "No."

Then, we three girls, me and Arita and Tani, we didn't know what we did to be in the police station. We had no pictures with Louky. Inside of all these pictures, we hadn't any picture. The two pictures we had, one was me and Tani, and we were wearing the same dress, with up and down. We were going to Kpalimé in the daytime, and we stopped there on the road, so we held each other and kissed and took the picture with our dresses. Then, we also had one photo at some river near Kpalimé. We went there to swim, with our swimming pants. These were our pictures there. We hadn't got any other picture. But the police kept us with the other girls. They wouldn't tell us anything. The first time, they said that, eh, when we were together with these girls, we knew all their ways and so we must tell them.

Then Arita was annoyed. She said, "This is stupid. You can't put me in prison to be a – a spy to a prisoner. I'm a prisoner, too, no? Because you people are watching us. How can I be a spy to my friends? I can't do it."

Arita was a girl who was hot!¹ When we went to Lomé, the man there asked her, "What kind of family are you from?" Then she called

1. She could become annoyed quickly or easily.

the family name: the father was a Yoruba man, but the mother was Togolese. Then they said, "Have you finished your school?"

Then she said, "Yes."

"But why don't you try to find some work to do?"

Then she said, "OK. I want work to do, but I didn't get. If you can give me something to do, I will do it." *Ha! Hee-hee.*

Yeah. So we were there for one week, and then after one week, this Arita, you know, she was senior to all of us, she said, "Hey, if we make ourselves cool here, we will remain here. So we mustn't make cool." So: everybody didn't eat that day. We drank all the drink from the fridge: it finished; the whiskey, everything was finished. Then we started to break the bottles in the house – *ch-ch, ta-kr, ta-kr*. The plates, with the food, all: we broke all. Then this policemen who was guarding us, he tried to bring himself. Then Arita said, "If you don't know, you will open this room and enter here. I didn't kill anybody, I didn't do bad, and they put me by force in prison. I'll kill you, to get my first prison."

Then this man was afraid, so he didn't come in. Because we were drunk, and then we smoked groove, too, you know? *Ah!* That place was a *very nice* place. If we had to go to the toilet, we would go one by one; you can close yourself inside. You will booze fine with the groove, then you go out, then the next one comes. *Ha!* It was another good place, eh? Even, the day when they told me to go and leave the other people there, I was crying, "I don't want to leave! I want to stay!" *Ha! Ha!* Yeah. Then, every time, we used to get dash,¹ too. If people come from town to greet us, they used to give us dash, so we had money all the time. We didn't buy anything, either! *Ha!*

So when we did all this, they went and telephoned the Chef-Cir. When he came, then Arita said, "*I swear*, any fucking man who enters, we will kill him."

So the Chef-Cir said, "Oh, Arita, it's me, it's me, Chef-Cir. Let me enter. I want to see you people. I know you people are suffering. Yes. I'm going to do something about it. Especially you three girls. You didn't do anything bad. I must leave you people free. But we want to understand these German people before." That time, they had made

1. gifts, usually of money

these people under house arrest in the compound. They were three. They couldn't go out. They could go to their work: police people were there with them. But they could not come to town. The police thought maybe they would run away.

So one Sunday, the Chef-Cir said, "OK, to finish everything, tomorrow is Monday. We are going to Lomé. Then we will finish everything. Then you people can go." *Ah!* We were happy, eh? Then the next morning, even it was before morning, we woke up early – about four o'clock in the morning. Then we left from Kpalimé, because from Kpalimé to Lomé, maybe it's one hour and some minutes when the car is going fast. So we took a car. The company of these German people, they gave them one of the busses with a driver, to take them. So we reached Lomé about five-thirty in the morning.

So, we had to go to the – ah, what do they call them? – they are army people – the big ones. I think it's like a *gendarmerie*, or something like that. It's the big place for all of them, where they are living and where they used to make their army training. They took us there. Then they said, "Everybody who wants to take tea can come and take." So we all refused: we don't want to take any tea; all of the girls, nobody took any tea. So they took us to the big man's office first, to make some papers with these white people. And about seven o'clock, we went to Eyadema's¹ office there. We stayed there up to eight or half-past eight. Then they called all of us. When we went first, everybody was standing, then one man brought out the photos. All the photos, oh, maybe they could pass three hundred or five hundred or one thousand. Different kinds of girls. They brought these photos, and they put all the photos on a table.

Then this man looked at these photos. He shook his head like that, then he asked these white people, "What did you people come here for? For this? Or what did you come here for?" Then they said they came to work. Then the man asked, "For what are you people doing all this?"

Then they said, "Anyway, everybody used to do something bad, or make mistakes." So they made a mistake. They have nothing to say. They are guilty.

Then he said, "OK."

1. General Gnassingbe Eyadema, the Togolese head of state

Then the man I was living with, you know, he said that all the photos, he was the one who had them, because he was the one who washed them. Louky and the other old man brought the film to him. You see? He wanted to save these other two people, you know, so that if he carries the trouble alone, then they will leave these people in the company to work. They were five, but the first two were deported fast, and now they were three remaining. The day when they arrested these three, they didn't send them. They kept them one week under house arrest, before they took them to join their case in Lomé. And we girls were also in that bungalow. So the day we came to Lomé, that was the day we all came together. Yeah?

So this man wanted to carry all the trouble for the other two. So he said, "All these photos are for me alone." But the mistake they did, everybody with his pictures, they wrote their names on back of the envelope.

Then they said, "But what are all these three envelopes for? So the three names are for you, too?"

Then he said, "No, the three names are not for me. What I said is that these photos are for me. It's me. I used to get the pictures, and then I used to give them some." He used to dash them, so he is the one who brought the whole trouble.

So they said, "OK, if that will be the case, then quickly, get lost from here. We don't want to see you anymore."

And they left these two people. So, my man, oh! It was very pitiful for him that day. The way they did this man to get him to the downstairs, pushing him, and some people slapping him. "Stupid idiot!"

And oh! It was very pitiful, eh? He poisoned himself. That man — he poisoned himself. The *same day!* Do you know, the day when they said they would bring them to police station, I think that in the morning time he took something. They put him on the plane, to go and drop him in his country. Everybody came down, and they saw him sitting like that. Then the women who are walking in the plane, one just turned to touch him, and then he fell down. And they took his body to the cemetery. The same day they put him on the plane, that day he was dead. Even he didn't go back to Tsukudu. The clothes he was wearing every day, and all his clothes, they said they would post it after. They didn't let him to go

back to the village even to prepare something. From that place up to the airport with police people, then they were waiting for the plane. And they just put him inside. And then he too, before he dropped at his country, he was a dead body. How? I don't know, because the company wrote a letter, after this case, to the two boys remaining, Henri and Alain, to tell them all this. And I thought what made this man kill himself was shame. Yeah, it was shame, because he had two daughters. So maybe he felt that when he goes back, people will laugh at him. Maybe he thought the wife would be laughing at him.

You know, when Louky's palaver came, everybody was afraid. All of them in the compound, *all* of the German people, on that day they were shit. They were afraid. OK. So everybody – I think many of them had these pictures, and they threw their pictures away, so they were safe. There were many of them I knew who used to come to Lomé with the girls to the beach, and this and that. But they had wives: their wives were in Tsukudu, you see? So all of them threw away their things. It was only the five who were arrested.

Louky and the other one, they deported them first. Only this fucking Django, he didn't have luck, with Henri and Alain. But Django took three people's troubles. The one who was going to throw the photos away, at that moment they reported that the machine had spoiled, and he was the only engineer to repair the machine. So he only went and hid the photos in his garden behind his house.

And you know, the police still kept us girls. So Henri and Alain, these two people, every time they had to bring money for me, and they had to do everything for me. They said my man took all their trouble. So everything, even when I came back from that place, they were the ones who gave me money to make my transport. And all my things, my dresses with my suitcase, they kept it for me. When they wanted to make all the parcels of the man, then the Alain and Henri said, no, they know my dresses and they know my things, so they chose my things out. The only thing I didn't get was my sewing machine. My man bought me a foot machine; that one, I didn't get it. I think they put it with his things.

Then this Henri and Alain were also at Lomé. Then people started to watch them, too, small-small. Sometimes they would go out, and some small things, and then they would have problems at police station

and all this, and so they also left. They went by themselves. They didn't keep long in Togo after this case.

But the police were still keeping us there! Yeah. The day they took us to Lomé, at Eyadema's place, when they finished sacking this man, it was now us girls they were asking questions. Yeah. This case, you know, they joined the case from the white people first, and they sacked this man. Then it was left with the girls. They called each of us, "Come here." Then we went. They showed you your picture. "What you did is good?" We said, "No. No, what I did, I – it is not good, but forgive me," you know, like that. All the girls who had photos, they asked them, and the girls said, "Forgive, forgive, forgive." Then it was finished. It was left with us three, you know. That time we were in Eyadema's office, the same day.

Then this Eyadema man¹ called Arita. Then Arita went. He said, "Look at all these things. Is it good?"

Then Arita said, "No, it is not good."

Then he said, "Go."

Then he called Tani: "Tani, you see what your sisters are doing – is it good?"

And Tani said, "No."

Then they called me. "Eh, what you see your sisters do, is it good?"

Then I said, "No, it is not good."

Then he said, "OK. The best thing to do with these people: we must carry all of these girls who have the pictures, to go and put them on the road of Dapongo."²

Did you pass that road before? There is some place, a mountain place, with big, big stones, two of them: one is here, one is there, and a car passes in the middle. There are some holes, like a hill where you can pass inside. They said if it's daytime, if we are coming from this place, we can go inside some hills, and it's like a house, down into the hole. So he said they should carry all these girls who have the photos, and go and throw them there, because there are many lions there. It's good for the lions to eat these girls. It's not good to let them live.

1. man from the party or employ of, representing Eyadema

2. town in the far north of Togo

OK, when he said that, *Hey!* Come and see everybody: “*Wey, wey, wey, wey.*” They were all crying.

Then, you know, I had grooved early in the morning – a thick one! – me and Tani. So it was making us laugh, me and Tani, every time. Any small time we looked at each other, then we would smile a little. We thought they were going to leave us, because the man said the people who have the pictures, but we didn’t have pictures, so we knew that we were free. Then: they went and put us inside the car.

Then we asked, “Oh, Chef-Cir, but this man said you should leave us. So why?”

He said, “No, I didn’t catch you people here in Lomé. I must go and leave you people in Kpalimé. It’s Kpalimé that I have arrested you, so I must leave you people in Kpalimé.” So then we knew that if we got to Kpalimé, he was going to drop us there. And he took us to Kpalimé. We passed straight, up to the place we were living. Then he said we have to wait there, and he is going to go someplace and come. For *three days*, we didn’t see the Chef-Cir! Hey! After three days, he came there and said, eh – if he leaves us, the other girls – the girls who he is going to put in jail – they will say that and this – ah – so he cannot jail us – but we have to wait for some – for some time.

Look at the foolishness! So we were there. Every time, to see the Chef-Cir, the Chef-Cir said he has to go and see this man, and he said he’s begging Eyadema, and he was saying, “Because Eyadema told me to give all of the girls to animals, because you don’t have pictures, but you are following Europeans, you are also the same people.” Look at the charge they put on us! Yeah. So we all must stay there until he begs Eyadema so that they will leave us.

If All the Prisons Were like This

So, you know, they have some kind of women there in Togo. They are like the time when Nkrumah was there, he had some people – the C.P.P. – on the women’s part, like these market women from Makola market: when Nkrumah was going to some place, they used to beat

gongongs¹ and dance and be putting their cloth down for him touch. So in Togo they had something like this for Eyadema. He too had the same things. Yeah, he also got some people like that, and they called them R.P.T.² So this R.P.T., some of the big women inside, they came to see us. You know, this Tani had her mother at Kpalimé, and Arita's mother was at Atakpamé.³ And this girl who conceived, all the family, and the mothers of Tani and Arita, they went to see these women. This Chef-Cir said that unless they go and beg Eyadema; if it not that, then he can't do anything about it. So they too, they went and saw these women, because they were big women, to go and beg Eyadema to leave their children, that they did bad but they won't do it again. Now, if the police people will leave their children, they will hold their children well.

So these women used to come there, and one woman said, "Yes! If this place was Zaire, it is good to put these girls in the grinding machines and mill them." *Ha!* Then, you know, Arita hasn't got patience. Arita said, "We all who are here, not all of us have pictures. So she is taking us to be the same thing." Arita just held this woman, and she said we should beat this woman, and we all beat this woman. So now we must be in jail! *Ha ha ha!* She was something like a big woman to Eyadema, something like the people who follow his back when he's going to some place; they are the people who dance and follow him and all this. Then, we caught this woman and we beat her.

So now, they had a chance. Already, they wouldn't leave us; already they didn't want to leave us. So then this case: they said that as for us, they begged and they said they should leave us, but how we beat this woman, they cannot leave us, so we must stay there. So we stayed there seven months. *Seven months!* In that house. When they left us, they were sending the other girls, the ones who had the pictures; they picked those girls with the car again. I don't know where they were going to put them, whether they were going to put them someplace, or they were going to put them in prison. I don't know. And so, with these girls, we made seven months there. All of us. When they left us three,

1. bells

2. Rassemblement du Peuple Togolaise, the general assembly, like a parliament but basically a one-party movement under Eyadema

3. small town north of Lomé

then they took the other girls with the police car again. *M-hmm*. So I don't know where they put them. The girl who was conceived five months, she stayed there three months, and then they left her. The three-months girl, she was sick seriously when it was one month, so they took her to hospital. From there she was well, and she didn't come back; they left her to go away. So we were three from the company compound, and then the rest. We were nine girls, all of us; the time they arrested us, we were nine girls.

We had one girl: the father was Ivorien, from Côte d'Ivoire, but the mother was Togolese. This girl also had a picture there from a long time before, and then she went to Côte d'Ivoire. So by then, she wasn't doing any work, and she bought Ivorien cloth and brought it to Lomé to sell. She gave her things to the sister to sell, that she will come back for her money. And the sister was married to the Inspector of that area, so the sister took the money and gave it to the husband to hold. So when this girl came back, she went to the Inspector to collect the money, and then the Inspector carried her to the Chef-Cir, and they locked her.

So that seven months in the house, yeah! Food and drink, all, we had everything. Even sometimes we would go out. You know, we didn't feel the thing. When they did all this to us, we ourselves, we didn't understand. It was looking like they made us something; we didn't feel like going away. We didn't feel anything like that. Look, you can come out to the market to buy what you want, then you will walk back or you will take taxi back to the place. Look at the foolishness! Why? We didn't know!! We didn't know why! It was the day they left us before we said, "Ah! We were fools to stay here seven months." Look, the time you go to the market, you can take a car to Lomé. From Lomé, you can go to another place. But this type of mind didn't come to us when we were there. Because I thought we ate plenty, and we had groove, and every time we got drink. What we wanted, we got. Yeah, even we got grooving. We had drink, we had music, and all this. So — we forgot to go home!! *Hee! Ha!* Yeah, when I came back to Lomé, I was fine: red and fat, you know. Eating free, *ah!* We didn't cook. We didn't do anything.

And then too, the people in the town used to bring us food — plenty! — we couldn't eat all of it. The girls they arrested, their families used to cook food for them and bring it there from the house. Different,

different, different foods. And they were cooking for us there, too. The place where we were living, we had a cook, and he was also cooking for us there. So the food was too much. When you come to the room, you will see different, different foods in a line. You open this, you don't like it, you close it, you go and open there. Yeah, if prison was like that, it would be good, not bad. I haven't seen any thing like this in Ghana or Upper Volta. I haven't seen this thing before. Only in Togo did I see this.

When I was there, nobody from Lomé came to visit me. Even Mama Amma knew the other girls. When I went back to Lomé, they said if they came there, the police would arrest them too, so they didn't come. That's what they told me when I went back. Even Jacqueline, Jacqueline came and stayed in my room in Lomé, about three months, I think. Then she told Mama Amma that she came there to Kpalimé, and they said they wouldn't let her see me. And I said it's a lie. Everybody who came to greet us, they would bring that person straight, anyone who wanted to see somebody. Even we ourselves, we were going to the market. We could go to Zongo¹ to get groove; if we didn't see somebody to send, we could go by ourselves to get the groove, and then go back there. The police people didn't know we were grooving, but sometimes, some of our friends from the town would bring it to us.

And what is funny, you know, the three of us, we said we didn't do anything bad, and so we don't have any bad name, and so we will stay up to the time they want. We used to go to town like that. Me and Arita and Tani, we could go to any place we wanted. Yeah. And sometimes, we used to do something funny. Sometimes we would go with a car to Tsukudu, to give a letter to the watchman at the gate to go and call these people for us, to talk to them, and we would use the car to go back to the place. *Ha!* Our minds didn't make us think of running away, because we thought we didn't do any bad. Maybe if we went away, they would say we ran away. But we didn't do any bad, so we wanted to understand the meaning of why they brought us here. But there was no meaning. Later they told us that because we beat that woman, we had to be in jail, so we had to stay there.

1. (Hausa): a section of any town where people from other African cultures, generally savanna cultures, live

Ah! Togo! *Ha!* Yeah, the time you came to Lomé first, I was at Kpalimé in this case. When I came back, Mama told me, “John came here. He missed you. He was very sorry for you.” Ah-h. But we had a nice prison in Togo. If all the prisons are like this, then every day I will cause trouble and go to prison. Oh, yeah! You can get drink, you can get groove, you can get anything. Even if we didn’t have beer, or if the beer was getting short, if we didn’t see the Chef-Cir, we would just boss¹ the police people, “Good morning. Morning, morning,” and they would send the houseboy, and he would go and buy us a case of beer. Even when we were there, we were having money, eh! We could buy everything. Even if somebody had about two thousand, she didn’t have anything. People will come and greet you: “Oh, sorry! Take this, and you can buy something.” And these people from Tsukudu, they always sent us money. With an envelope. They said if we are short of money, then we should write to them. Their driver used to bring food.

So this police case, our case, it was wonderful. Yeah, the first time I was in the jail, I was crying. “Yeah-h-h. Eh-h-h, so-o-o, if these people are going to kill me, how can my people hear of it? I don’t have anybody here. Who will hear of my death, and then he will go and tell my family?” So in the night, it was only this that I was thinking. In the night, if I grooved heavily, I could not sleep. Every time, I would go to the toilet; I would come to the sitting room; I would go here, go there. Everybody was asleep, snoring, “*Houn, houn, houn.*” Then I said, “Look at these animals.” *Ha!* “They have nothing to think; their head is full up with yams.” Yeah. Then every time I just used to go round, round, round.

And Tani too didn’t sleep. Tani didn’t sleep much, because she also was thinking about her mother. Every time, she said, “Yeah-h. If something happens to me now, what is my mother going to do with my young girls.” Her father was dead, and the mother had small children. Tani was senior among them. And so she also used to think about her mother, the way her mother used to suffer. Every time, the mother would bring us food, too, and be walking up and down. From the town to where we were living, it was maybe one mile. This old lady would walk, and it was on top of a hill. They built this place on top of the hill. All

1. talk nicely to

these warders and then this Chef-Cir, they all had bungalows in back of there. So to go there, you will climb a hill, a big hill. So Tani used to say, “Eh! My Mama will climb this two times a day. Oh! My old lady will die for me.”

And when they caught us, the girl who came from Côte d’Ivoire, you know, she was a friend to the Chef-Cir. She was called Rosalie. And when the Chef-Cir said he was taking this girl to lock her and all of this, this girl started fighting. She said, “Stupid idiot! Don’t you know that you fucked me before? And you are going to put me in prison! I’m not going to enter!” So they were fighting, but the girl was strong. Eh? They were beating her – *pap, pap, pap* – and all this. She held one policeman on the ground. Ah-h! It was very nice. I saw that she held where she shouldn’t hold, and this man was shouting, “*Make – her – leave – me!*” Then he just lay down quietly. And they were beating her, on top of this man. She didn’t leave this man until they also left her, and then she let go of this man. So they put her in the cell. This cell was in the prison hall, the big hall. They had small cells in the middle. They said that if you kill somebody, they have to put you there.

So they kept this girl there about three weeks. She didn’t eat. She pissed and slept with the piss. Morning time, they would bring her out to go and throw the piss away. And every day she abused these police people. She didn’t care about anything. But she was not a smoker: she didn’t know how to groove. Whenever we were grooving, she was just watching. After all this, after three weeks, they brought her to our place. Then she was very, very quiet. She said, “When I come out, I will show this man! If this man really fucked me as I said, this man will never be free. This Chef-Cir, I will show him.” Ha! You know? So every time, when we were sitting together, she would become quiet.

Then I said, “Oh, sister Rosalie, why you are sitting quietly like this again?”

“I am praying to God. If I don’t die here, then I will come out. This man! He won’t leave his life, but it will be hard for him.”

So, I don’t know whether they left her. You know, the day when they were leaving us, I told her, “If I know where they are taking you, if I ask people, if they show me, I’ll come and see you.” But I was asking; they said they didn’t know where they were taking her then. If they took

these girls to Dapongo prison, I don't know. They have a prison in Dapongo. So maybe they carried them to that prison. Yeah. But as for us three girls from Tsukudu, we only stayed in the bungalow.

Fish from the Sea in Vaginas

And do you know something very funny? People were saying funny things in town. People used to come to us, plenty, to see us, and we thought, "Ah, why do these people come like that?" Do you know that these same people were talking? In town, in Kpalimé town, people said that they arrested some girls because when they went to the beach, they opened their vaginas and the fish were going in. And they said they had a picture. They said that if you see the picture, you will see that the fish is going inside, and then he makes so, and then he shakes, and then he turns and he goes out, and then he's going. *Ha! Ha! Ha! Hee-hee!*

So when we went to the town, and we heard this, we said, "Oh-h-h, *good God!* What kind of fish knows that this is a *toto*¹ so I must go and enter there, and then shake myself and go back again to the water? Did you hear this before? Which girl will open her vagina, and a fish is coming to go inside, and she doesn't fear to close it?" *Ha! Ha!* They are very funny, eh? So they were saying all this in the town.

So the day when they left us, when we came to the town, they said, "Is it true? Did you people see the photo films, of these girls – and the fish was going inside and coming out?"

Then we said, "Which kind of fish?"

And the people said, "But they said – the people who saw the photo – they said there was a fish – they said the girls opened this thing at the seaside, and a fish used to come inside, and then get in and shake, and then it would go back."

Then we said, "Ah, we didn't see that picture." Then I thought that maybe some people didn't look at it well, because maybe they saw that picture when that man was trying to cover the vagina with his hand, and when they saw his hand, they thought maybe it's a fish. This is what I think. Maybe they didn't look at it well, and then they thought, yeah,

1. (Ga): vagina; vernacular: pussy

this is a fish. What kind of fish is that? What fish knows how to go inside and go back and get into the water?! How are you going to call the fish out of the water to come and see a vagina's inside and then go back to the beach? Ah! Togolese!

And some of them said, "Some of the girls, they put a candle to stand inside the vagina, and then they lit it, and and they made a photo." Some of them said that. *Ha!* You know, if something happens, everybody just says what he likes. Even if he doesn't see anything, he can still have something to say about it. And so this is what some of the people were saying in the town. You know, they didn't put anything about it in the newspapers for people to read, so the people were only talking about it. If they write it like that, it's their palaver; it's their disgrace in their country. So they didn't put it. They wouldn't do that. And so in the town, some of the people said that they put some eggs in some people's vaginas, and they took pictures. *Hey!* How can you do that? So when we went to town, they asked whether it is true and we saw these pictures.

We just said, "We didn't see that. We saw the vagina pictures, but we didn't see the fish one, and we didn't see the eggs one. If they have it – that one – they didn't show it to us." Yeah.

So this palavar, this trouble made plenty of Togolese girls run. Some of them went to Abidjan; some of them went to Ouagadougou. Because there were many of them who had photos inside. Even I had one friend called Maku – she is a Kotokoli – she had a picture, too. She went to her village, to hide herself for about six months before she came back to Lomé when the case passed. Many girls ran away from the town. *Mm-m.*

So after they left us, I went back to Lomé. But do you know? I went back to Kpalimé two times. Do you think I am afraid of things like this? *Ha-Ha!* You know, the day when they were leaving us, the Chef-Cir was giving us advice: "From this time, when you people go, you must sit quietly to find a husband to marry, eh? Don't follow these people again. We are just punishing you people so that you will stop following Europeans." Then, the very day when they left us, they got a car, and they said they would drop us where we wanted.

And Arita! Arita said, "As for me, you should drop me at Tsukudu."
"Huh? Tsukudu again?!"

She said, “Yes. But why? I didn’t kill somebody. I must go there again, because my things are there, and my man is still there. When I was in prison, he used to bring me money to eat. He didn’t leave me.”

So this Chef-Cir said, “No, drop down and take a taxi. We are not taking you with this car to Tsukudu again.” *Ha-ha!* So she didn’t care; she didn’t care at all.

Coda

After they left us, I was at Lomé for about two or three months. Then I got a man. He was doing some work at Parakou¹ in Dahomey, and I used to go to Parakou with him. When we went, sometimes we used to pass Kpalimé for his work before we would go to the north of Togo and pass to Parakou. So when this man took me, we had to sleep at Kpalimé. We moved from Lomé at about seven o’clock in the night, and we reached Kpalimé around nine o’clock. So he said that we should rest, and then if we continue in morning time, it would be better. They have some hotel on top of a hill. So we went to that hotel.

When we were going to enter, I saw the Chef-Cir. I said, “*Eh! Hey! Chef-Cir! How are you?*”

He said, “I’m all right. And you?”

I said, “I’m all right.” Then I said, “Here is my husband. Greet him.”

Then he looked at me and said, “*Woa, woa, woa. Womule vɔn nu o.*² You! You! You don’t fear anything.”

And I said, “Why? Why? I want you to greet my husband. And you say I don’t fear anything.” You know, I wanted to show him that still I’m walking with a white man. Yeah?

Then he greeted this man, and this man asked what would he take? Then the Chef-Cir said he wanted beer, and they got him one bottle of beer. And the Chef-Cir wanted to return it again, and he asked us, what did we want to drink? Then I said I wouldn’t drink again, and this man

1. small town in the middle of Benin

2. Mina/Gen language

said it was OK, we didn't need anything. And then the Chef-Cir said, how can he see this man again.

Then this man said, "OK. Tomorrow, evening time, we should meet."

Then, when the Chef-Cir went away, I told this man all this story, you know, how they caught us, how they put me in that house, and all these things. And when I told this man, this man said that suppose he knew, he wouldn't buy the Chef-Cir a beer.

Then I said, "No, the way you bought him a beer, I like it. It's bluffing. *Ha-ha!* The next time when I meet him, I will say, 'You say I shouldn't follow white people. Suppose the day you met me in the hotel, if I didn't have a white man, who will buy you a beer?' *Ha-ha!* So it's nice when you buy him a beer. Yeah."

And the day when I passed Kpalimé again, I also saw the Chef-Cir, and I asked, "Where are the other girls?" He said he went and gave them to animals. I know he didn't give them to animals. He didn't want to show me where they were, because he knew I would go and greet them. He didn't want it. So that's why he didn't tell me where he put them.