

The Big Fight in the Family

from *Exchange Is Not Robbery*: 197-213
Part Three: Hawa Contextualizes Her Life
Chapter 8: The Big Fight in the Family

Location: *The village in Burkina Faso*

Sections:

The Two Wives

The Big Fight

Interlude: Big Brother

The Big Fight (conclusion)

The Two Wives

You know, my father has two wives, and the time he was in hospital, it was only the younger one who was doing everything. He was having three wives, but my mother is dead. My own mother who gave birth to me is not in life. She died when I was three years old. And so it remains two wives.

My mother had five children, and three died. We are two who are left among my father's children. The same mother, the same father: we are only two. That one is a boy, Kofi, the one I told you about, that I brought him to Tamale when I was with Nigel: that is my brother. Kofi is one mother, one father with me. He's in Kumasi.

My brother in Ouagadougou, the one I stayed with when I got there, he is not my father's son. He's the son of my mother's big sister, the one who was in front of my mother.¹

1. As noted, only cross-cousins (your mother's brother's children and your father's sister's children) are called cousins, and sometimes they are even addressed as brother or sister. Your mother's sister's children and your father's brother's children are your brothers and sisters. In the same vein, your mother's brothers are your uncles, and your father's sisters are your aunts; your mother's sisters and your father's brothers are your mothers and fathers, sometimes called "small" or "junior" if they are younger than your mother or father, or "senior" if they are older.

We are plenty, eh? Yeah, I think now we are more than thirty. We were thirty-five but two have died not long ago, so we are thirty-three now. We had two who were twins: those twins have died. Apart from my brother and me, there are two children who are from outside women.¹ All the rest are from those two women he has now. And they still didn't stop.

The younger wife is a twin. That girl, they gave birth to her as twins, one boy and one girl. The boy died. My father married that girl, and she also had twins again, two girls. They are the ones who died not long ago. And then, after those twins, she had a small one. It's now that that baby has started walking, but he doesn't walk well. I think if she has another chance, maybe she will get another again. She is not too much old. As for the old wife, I think she may be fifty or something. But the young one, she's not even up to forty. And so my father is much older than the younger wife.

I don't know actually how old my father is, but he must be maybe seventy or eighty or something like that. He is very old. I think so, because *all* the friends who were having the same age and they grew up together in the village, all of them are dead, and he's left alone.

And so my father's wives are not the same age. You know, my father didn't marry straight. At first, when he grew up, he used to do business, traveling, buying things from Abidjan, or buying things from Ghana to take to Ouagadougou, cola and different things. He used to take cola to Ouagadougou and to Abidjan, and take things from there back to Ghana. So when he grew up, I think at first he was happy in the work, so he didn't marry quickly.

He got his first two children from outside, and they are senior to all of us. The second son of my father, we know the mother. But the first one, we don't know the mother. My father carried the baby from the mother at Côte-d'Ivoire. He said the baby was two years old when he carried him from Abidjan. I think he just took this woman as a girlfriend. When he traveled there, he used to go and lodge with her. When they got the child, I don't know: I don't think the woman was ready to marry, or maybe she was ready to marry and then I think my father was trying to

1. not inside a marriage; outside the family house

run away. So this girl just said, “OK, I don’t need a baby. So if you want your baby, you can take him away. Otherwise I will dash the baby to government.” And since my father took the baby from that woman, he never, never touched the woman’s house to say hello to her, up to now until this boy is now old. The senior son is an old man now, this boy, the one I’m talking about. So we don’t know the mother actually. Only my father knows where he brought him from. He is the oldest.

So: these two wives. The senior wife is very bad. This old man was sick, and the older wife didn’t mind. She didn’t even know¹ that the husband was sick. She didn’t care about anything. She was in the house, cooking heavy tuwo,² eating, going out with people, drinking pito around the village. So from there, I got annoyed with her. Even today I don’t think I will be free with her again. I told my father, “What do you keep this woman for?” *Ha!*

Do you know how the young wife came as a wife? I will tell you. She is the sister of the senior wife. Yeah. You know, at our place, in the olden days, they had this thing: one man will marry sisters. Even now they still have it, but we don’t mind them. But in my village, if I marry, they will give me some of my sisters to come and serve me. Young, small girls. Maybe sometimes you can get one about eight years or ten years old. Some people get their sisters with them at about four years old. You will look after the sister. Oh, some men at our village may have about four sisters.

But I don’t actually know, because my father’s two wives have the same father but different mothers. So I think that in this case, they also used to give the children when they are not from the same mother. If the sisters have the same father, they can be married together to one man, just like that. Your senior sister will marry, and you will come and be serving your senior, and your sister will look after you as her baby. After you grow up, this man has been seeing you from when you were a kid – *Agh! It’s shit!* – he will look after you like that, up until you grow up to be a woman. When the first wife takes the baby sister, all the family knows already that these two children have a husband. They know

1. she acted as if she didn’t know

2. making big meals to eat

that by all means, the man cannot be feeding this baby like that and then give her out. If the baby is growing up, they will just go and see the family. The senior sister will go and tell the father or the mother, “This time, I think my sister has grown up, so I think that to let my husband go and search for some woman outside, I will become jealous. Maybe – we don’t know – I don’t know who will die first. Maybe I will be dying first, leaving my children. Then my husband will go and bring another woman from the other country or other village to treat them badly. So I want to take my younger sister to give to my husband. If something happens to me, I think that as we are sisters, we cannot be jealous.” And so just like that: the man will get two wives. So my father has two sisters. *Ha!*

Yeah. They are two sisters. But they don’t like each other. The senior one brought the younger sister. OK? So when the younger sister was growing up, then she also married my father like that. And from then they have had to share the days they go to the husband.¹ Then the senior one was jealous of her. Even before the younger sister started having all these children, the senior one was starting to be jealous. From that time they have not been all right with each other. OK?

The small one has her children. The senior one also has her children. Some of the boys are living in the village with my father, and some of them have traveled. And I think the younger one has more sense than the senior one. She has good sense about family as we Africans take it. If her daughter or her son comes from Abidjan with many things, she will say, “No. You go and show your big mother.”² But the senior one, if her son brings something, she doesn’t want the younger one to see it. She wants it for herself alone. You see? She used to keep her everything for herself. But the younger wife, if the children come with things, then the mother will say, “No, carry it.” Then they will carry it, and the

-
1. In a polygamous household, the wives take turns sleeping with the husband. Each wife has her own room, and they go to the husband’s room to sleep at their turn. In the household, the responsibility of cooking is also shared in rotation, and normally the wife who cooks is the one who will go to the husband’s room in the night.
 2. The older one is the “senior” or “big” mother, and the younger is the “junior” or “small” mother, regardless of who actually gave birth to the child. The distinction is not generally used in addressing the parent, and children in the house will call them both “Mother.”

mother will give it to the senior sister, “My sister, this is what your son¹ has brought,” or “This is what your daughter has brought. So I think it is better if you keep it.”

Then maybe the senior one will say, “OK, if that will be the case, then you also take this.” Say if it’s two pieces of cloth, they will share it. But the senior one will never get something like that and share with the younger one. And if it’s money they give, she will never share it.

The Big Fight

And you know, the younger wife has a very, very clever daughter who has married a rich man. He is from our village. His mother was married to someone in Abidjan, and they gave birth to him there, and he grew up there. The father had many cocoa farms, and also coffee farms. Then the father was dead. This man is the first born, so now he has a lot of money. The younger one’s daughter is married to him.

But this is the funny thing, too. Our people, if the children marry rich people, every time they used to visit their children, so that maybe they will get something from the husband. But my father’s younger wife, since the daughter married, it’s about three or four years now, and she hasn’t been there. Not even once. But the senior one made excuse that she was going to visit one of the daughters in Ghana, and from Ghana she passed to that girl’s place and collected things. You know, when the senior mother came, this girl treated her nicely: “Oh! My mother!” And that and this. Everything that she wanted, this girl gave it to her.

And then: you know, we Africans have a big pot which we used to cook the tuwo inside. So this girl said that when she had visited the village, her mother had told her, “If you go back, try to buy me that cooking pot, because now the house is becoming like a family house.² Sometimes we used to get strangers. And this pot which we are now cooking inside, it’s too small. Maybe if it’s harmattan, we need hot

1. In the same way that the children will call each of them “Mother,” the wives will also call one another’s child as “my child” or “our child”

2. the main house in the extended family, i.e., a big house

water,¹ and to put water into that pot and then to take and put another one, it's wasting of time. So if you can get us a big one, it will be nice." So this small girl got that type of pot and gave it to the senior mother to go and give it to her mother.

And when the senior mother came, you know, this woman didn't say any word. Maybe, at least, if you don't tell your sister, you will just tell my father, "Oh, when I came from Ghana, I passed Abidjan. I have seen your daughter." But she didn't say anything.

So you know, I told you that when my father was sick, they were writing all the family, and no one came. And after that, when my father came out from hospital, he said that we all should come and group. All the children. He had written to my sisters in Côte-d'Ivoire, and Bobo, and Ghana. But no one came. That time I went to the village, so I was there, and then this girl who had sent the pot to the mother, she also came from Abidjan.

Then this girl's mother was annoyed. She said, "I told you to – *Ah!* I have been asking you for this cooking pot. You didn't bring it. So thank you very much."

Then the girl said, "*Ah!* But I bought this cooking pot. I have given it to your sister, your senior sister."

"When?"

"About four months ago, your senior sister came to me at my husband's place."

Everybody wondered. This was the place when we were going to get palaver. Then my father called the senior wife. He said, "When you went to your daughter, did you tell me?"

She said, "Why should I tell you?"

And my father said, "Why shouldn't you tell me?"

"She is my daughter. I was going to say hello to her. That's all."

Then my father said, "She is not your daughter. When you came from your house, did you have any daughter there? All the children are for me. You don't have any right to go to my daughter. It's because you are a witch. Suppose, if I don't look after my children, you will go and

1. During harmattan, nights can be cold, and many people heat their bath water.

kill her there and eat her, and then you will come here. In three days' time they will say she's dead. Isn't it?"

Then the senior wife said, why should my father say so?¹ If she's a witch, how many children of my father has she eaten?²

Then my father said, "All my children, they are bitter. I have boiled them³ before I brought them out. So you can't eat one of them. But you can eat in your family house, because you have eaten all of your brothers and your mother." – *Ha~ha!* – "And your father!"

So it was a *big rout*⁴ that day. This woman, in the night, about eleven o'clock, she put her hand on her head, and – her village is maybe roughly eight kilometers from our village – she was shouting on the road, going to her village to wake all the families – the brothers, and the mother's sisters – to come with her to our village. Come and see! My father says she is a witch!

Then when they came, my father said, "OK, you went and brought your witch group. Well, I'm here, if you people can eat me."

Then the youngest mother of this woman said to my father, "Are you drunk? Or what? What are you trying to talk?"

And you know, the woman's brother also came, "Eh~h, even if she's a witch, now she has made this big house."

Then my father's first-born, the one we don't know his mother, he got up and said, "Don't say this foolishness here. She made a house? Can she build a house for our father?"

Then the woman's brother said, "Mm~hm."

Then my brother said, "OK, the children – the children of your sister. What have they done for their father? Tell me."

So: they were having all these topics, then my father said, "OK, you people came here to come and do what? Because I have abused your sister that she is a witch?" Then you know, the senior wife, her mother too had married with her younger sister. That senior woman had died, and the younger sister was still there. So my father said, "When you

1. talk like that

2. in this context, killed

3. given them medicine or juju

4. a fight, noise and disorder

were with your big sister, then you people both had children. Your big sister says she is going to see her daughter at Kumasi. From there then she passes to your daughter's place in Abidjan. So if she comes back, she can't tell you that, 'Oh, my younger sister, you know, because our husband is now an old man, he used to trouble people with too much talk. So I don't want him to tell him all this. But I have passed from Kumasi to our daughter in Abidjan. So she's greeting you.' Even if she can't tell the father, it wouldn't pain him, but she can tell the younger sister all this. It's nice. But because of this cooking pot, and all the money this girl gave you, you don't say anything. But this girl said you should give the cooking pot to the mother."

Then my father's senior wife went inside and brought the pot. She threw it down. This is the property the daughter gave to her, and now they are trying to abuse her about it.

Then my father said, "You lie. It is not only the cooking pot she gave you. This girl cannot give you only the cooking pot. All that you have brought, she has given you. Give all of it out. All that she has given you, give all of it out. If I was you, I would give *all*." You know, my father was teasing her to make her hot.

Then she said, "*Eh~heh!*" You know, the girl had given her some cloth, about four pieces of cloth, different kinds, from Holland. So she was telling my father, "Eh, this cloth, I have stayed in Ghana. I know cloth. It is Holland cloth. It's not the one they are making at Koudougou here."¹ And that and this.

Then my father said, "Yes. It is Holland cloth. Have you given her some before? When she was going to marry, you know that she's your daughter. Have you given even a head scarf?" And he went and took all these things from her.

And by that time the daughter was sitting there. We were all there. That day was family fighting. As for this girl, she is a clever girl,

1. Waxprint cloth made in local factories in West Africa is regarded as having less quality. Quality is judged by how fast the colors are and by whether the printing is done on both sides. Particular print designs from various manufacturers can become fads, but in general waxprint cloth from different countries is ranked and priced accordingly, with "Hollandais" at the top, followed by English and then specific African countries, headed by Côte-d'Ivoire and Senegal; local factories also produce different "qualities" or grades.

but she doesn't talk much. But she brought the complaint, because she told the mother that she had given the pot to the big sister. So they were talking all this, and this girl was sitting very quietly.

Then the sister of the grandmother, you know, the senior wife's mother's sister, what she had to tell this young girl was that: "Mm, yes, may God bless you.¹ If you can do that to divorce your father and your mother, and spoil your father's marriage, may God bless you."

Then I said, "Don't say this word. Don't say that, 'May God bless her.' She didn't do anything bad. She didn't do bad like her mother's big sister. The mother's sister came to her, and she looked after her. Maybe she stayed some days; she was eating. And I think the husband wouldn't just leave this woman. When this woman was going to join a car to our place, he would pay all the debt. And so this girl didn't do anything bad. Even, if God didn't bless her, she wouldn't have got this man to stay with."

Then I said, "But I think, our family has many witches, but they can't eat us. Even from the same village, the same family. We Gurunsi people, we used to say that a witch — a witch eats in his house. These Ashantis also have some sense: they say before something will bite you, it is from inside of your cloth. So before a witch will kill you, it is from your house. Isn't it? But the way our father looked after us, it is very difficult for a witch to get us from our own village. And how much about the village which is some kilometers from here?"

You know, my senior mother's village is called Fara, and our place is Sibi. And to come to our village, you have to pass one village. That village is where my mother was from: Dana. My mother's village and my father's place are just close to each other. You pass my mother's village before going to this woman's village.

So then I asked her, "Do you people think, even if you people can turn to a vulture, if you pass Dana, they will just shoot you off. Your light² cannot work anymore. To come to Sibi and eat people: is that

1. A phrase like "God bless you" or "Thank you" in this situation is meant to shame another person in a quarrel, with the implication, "You are abusing me unjustly or wickedly, and I will not respond; I will give my response to God."

2. witch light; a light given off by witches

why you people have come in the night? To eat us? Oh, I'm very sorry for your witchcraft. But we people from Sibi, if we want to eat somebody, we eat him in day≈time, when everybody is seeing.¹ But not in the night. Or what did you people come here for, at this time? To come and eat us? To finish our house? Do you people think you can finish us? Look, if you eat this one, tomorrow the other one you left will bring four or five. You can't finish the family. So if you people have a case with my father, or you want to take your daughters away, this is not a case for the midnight. We don't want any witch case. If you have a case, we are waiting for you people tomorrow. So I don't want to see anybody here. So, my father, go inside." *Ha≈ha!*

Then my father said, "Thank you, my daughter."

Then my big brother – the one we don't know his mother – he said he's closing his eyes for one second, and if he opens his eyes and sees everybody there, the house will be fire.

Interlude: Big Brother

This boy, even in my village, everybody is afraid of him. He's a *crazy* boy. And I don't know: sometimes I used to pity him. He doesn't know the mother. Since that time when my father took the boy, he didn't one day tell him the family of the mother, or say, "This is the country your mother is from." Never. So he was just growing up in the house like that, with us. But he is the senior of all of us. And if we get a problem with people in the village, then because of this boy, they are afraid of my father's house.

You know, these old people in the village, the old people used to meet where they are selling this pito. That is where they used to be happy and get their conversing. And my father is somebody who doesn't like drink too much, but this time, since he went back to the village, he also used to meet the other old people at the pito house.

So our village people, they are funny. You know, every time when my father talks, he used to bring Ashanti small≈small inside of his Gurunsi. You know, he will say something in Gurunsi and add: "*Koraa≈a*"

1. that is, our witchcraft is stronger because we can do it in front of you

or “*Paa≈a*.”¹ You see? So these old people used to tell him, “You too, fuck off. We don’t know where you’re from, even. Whether you are a Gurunsi man or you are what. Every day ‘*Koraa, Paa≈a*’ – what is all this?” So he used to get this quarrel from the old people of his size.

And when he gets this thing, he won’t do anything. *Shit!* You know, if everybody who is growing old is coming like that, it’s fucking. He will just come to the house. And he will start abusing all his children. “*Pfft!* I don’t know why I have wasted all my strength. I used it for nothing! A man like me, when I get many children like that, I can go to that fucking, smelling pito house, and those fucking people who don’t know where they are from – even they don’t – they don’t know how to sleep with a woman, to get children – they will come and abuse me like that. And you people are here. For *what?!* You people – ” *Ha!*

Then my big brother will say, “Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey. Come here.”

So, you know, now my father is very funny. He will just go like a baby, and say, “What did you say? What did you say? Can you call me, ‘Come here?’” But he has already gone! *Ha≈ha!*

Then my brother said, “If I can’t call you, then why did you come? What is your problem?”

He said, “Don’t you see that man – that fucking man who has grown up from his youth – he hasn’t – even he hasn’t tried once to marry. He has no baby, he has no anything – to come and abuse me that they don’t know where I am from. Because every time if I’m talking, I say ‘*Koraa koraa.*’ But ‘*koraa*’: they are not people? You know? Ashantis? They are people like us.”

So then the big son just said, “OK. You stop. I’m going to see that person.” Then the boy walked there – *pum, pum, pum, pum*. He said, “Hey, look. You have abused my father. It is the first and last for you. Next time, if you do that, I will beat you till you’re dead!” *Ha!*

So then my father said, “*Eh≈heh!* You see? The time when you were young, they were telling you to marry. See? My son, come and

1. Akan words often used to add emphasis at the end of a phrase; literally, “at all” (“not all all”) and “very much.”

stand. Bring your son to stand!” *Ha!* So, you know, these kinds of funny things, I used to meet them when I go to our village. So it’s very funny.

The Big Fight (conclusion)

So: *ha!* So this boy, he told them that if they let him close his eyes, *once*, and he opens and sees everybody here, the house will have fire. So I don’t know where all of them passed. They went back to their village.

Yeah. And then this witch-woman was sitting there crying, crying, crying, the whole night. She was sitting outside the house, crying. So everybody went to sleep. Ah, *tsk*.

Then I told my younger brother, “*Tsk*, this woman, she wants to kill somebody in this house. Why? Why should she be crying like that?”

Then my younger brother – he is the boy I love in my family – he is the younger wife’s first-born: this boy got up, and he opened the door. Then he said, “Mama, won’t you go and sleep?”

And she was crying, and she said. “*Ooo~o, boo~hoo*. No – *sniff* – I’m not feeling like sleeping. I can sit down here – *sniff, sniff* – even if something can come and catch me, it can come and – ”

Then he said, “Nothing can catch you here. It’s better to go to your room. You know, all of us here, we are stone. You can’t eat us. It’s better you go and sleep. Or if you want to eat somebody, go back. Follow your people to your village. To be crying so the witches will come and meet you, so you people will get some meat there. But here, you are calling them for nothing. We are all stones here. We are not human beings. We are human beings, but our meat is not like human beings. It’s just like a stone. You can’t eat anyone. So get into your room.”

Then he opened the door for the woman. Then she said, “*Ah~h~h~h*, you can do whatever you want to me.”

Then he said, “You are my mother, but if you refuse what I am telling you, I will give you a dirty slap, and then you will go to sleep *just now!*”

So this woman said, “*Mm, mm,*” and that they used to talk about this in the world, that her father used to give her advice when she was young, that sometimes you can give birth to your son, and your son will

come and beat you. Yeah, they have been saying that this is the ending of the world. And the son is trying to beat the mother now.

Then my brother said, “Yeah. If your mother does something, and you are trying to tell your mother the truth, and your mother doesn’t listen, if you beat her, God won’t do anything to you. This is not any bad thing you have done, because you have been teaching your mother to do the correct thing.”

So she went inside and was talking, talking, talking, talking. Then early the next morning, I went to her *first*. I knocked on her door. I said, “Mama, good morning.”

She said, “I’m not your mother. Suppose I am your mother, you cannot abuse my mother.” She said I had told her junior mother – her mother’s younger sister – that I told her mother that they are witchcraft people, that they can’t eat us in the night, and if they want, they can come in day≈time to face each other. So I have abused her mother. Suppose I were her own daughter, I could not say all this. And she’s not my mother who gave birth to me, and that and this.

So I said, “If you were my mother, yesterday I would have told my father, if he doesn’t divorce you, I won’t be his daughter again. But I thought if I do that, they will say that it is because you are not the one who gave birth to me. That’s why I am giving you the respect to come and call you in the morning≈time. It is not that I want you for a mother. I don’t want an ugly woman like you for a mother. Didn’t you know my mother? You see the way I am. All my form and my everything is just like my mother. All the color, too.”

You know, this woman is *tall*. Now she’s growing old, so she’s lean. She was a big Makola woman.¹ When she was in Kumasi, she was very *fat*. And if she opened her voice, you would think she was a man.

So I said, “You can’t be my mother. Even you can *not* be half of my mother. I’m talking to you. My mother didn’t talk this to you. Early in the morning like this, and you are calling the name of my mother in her

1. a well-to-do market woman. Makola market in Accra was formerly the main market; its women traders had the reputation for wealth. The popular image of them, often reproduced on postcards, represents them as wealthy, shrewd, fat (from having enough to eat), and (for the postcards) jovial.

grave? Don't you know that my mother has died? When you call this name early in the morning, what do you mean?"

So: *Ha!* This is the time I'm going to get her. My father was inside his room. He made like he didn't hear anything. How he built his house, his room is the last room, and the second one is for the small wife, and the third one is for the big wife. And the children live on the other side.¹

So I told her, "To call you in the morning~time and say hello to you, and you are trying to talk about my mother! What do you mean? Do you think – ? My mother is not – if suppose my mother was a witch, you people couldn't come here. You couldn't come. If my mother was like you, do you think you would be here? If suppose you were here before my mother, my mother wouldn't have come, because you are a witch. So my mother is not a witch. So don't talk about my mother. I'm talking to you. If you don't want my 'Good morning,' then say, 'From today going, don't say "Good morning" to me.' But don't try to call the name of my mother here."

So then I said, "It's not your fault. All the fault is from our old man. I think the time when he was growing up, they covered his face. He doesn't see anything. Or maybe he went to you people and then you just caught him, by your witch powers, so he didn't see you. If not my father, which man do you think is going to marry a woman like you? Ah!"
Ha! Hee~hee!

Then she said, "Thank you very much. May God bless all of you people."

I said, "God will bless us? If God didn't bless us, we wouldn't be living like this. We are living free! Don't you see that? God blessed us. People have been seeing me in Ouagadougou. Did they come and tell you that they saw me taking a pan and begging for food? Have you heard that I am begging? Never. I will never beg for food. And I've been eating. I'm all right. I used to get my cloth to put on. So I think God blessed me. But it's your own: you should also try to forget about your

1. It is a typical African style, a "compound house" with individual rooms around a central compound; the wives' rooms extend on one side of the householder's room, and the sons' rooms are on the other side.

witchcraft so that God will also bless you. Not any fucking *small* child like your own children will come and stand in front of you and say you are witch. Suppose you beg God to forgive you, God will forgive you. He will bless you too, like the way he blessed us. Nobody can come here and abuse me for nothing. But as for you, as your witchcraft is inside your heart, you don't open a white heart¹ to show the people in the house. So every day, God is giving you punishment. But as for me, God blessed me. It's not you who is going to say that God may bless me. God has already blessed me. So you beg your God to bless you, too, so that we shouldn't abuse you again.

“Do you see your small sister? Don't you know that God blessed her? Have you seen any one of us stand in front of her to say something? Sometimes she used to abuse us. We don't reply. Because of what? Because how we see her, she is a nice woman. She respects herself. She doesn't do the witch way. But as for you, nobody will respect you. We have all come to know now that you are a witch. So throw your witchcraft away and beg God. Then God will forgive you.” *Ha~ha!*

So she didn't say anything. And that day we went to the bush. That time was the time when they had got the guinea corn.² They had to cut it. So that day, they were cutting my small brother's guinea corn, so we went to the place. Before we came back, this old woman had packed her things and gone to her village.

Then – *ha!* – then my father said, “*All* of you people here: I don't know which one of you send to go and bring your mother. Because she has a quarrel with *all* of you people.”

So my small brother who said that if the senior mother doesn't go inside, he will beat her – he is the one I said I like among the boys in my family – that boy just came out and, “Why don't you know somebody to send? As for me, if you try to send me there, I won't go. The best thing is to send her own son to go and bring his mother. That is all.” *Ha~ha!*

1. clean, plain heart; happiness

2. The sorghum had grown and was ready to harvest

But the son of that woman is older than this boy who was talking.¹ Then that son also came out. You see? Our family problem, when we meet in the village, it used to be just coming, just like that, like a cinema.² So then the woman's son also came out. He said, "Look. Yesterday, all the problem you people were having, I was in my room. Did you see me? Did I put a word inside it?"

Then my small brother said, "Yeah. What word can you say? Because it's your mother. She's taking her witchcraft to look after you, and you are growing tall, more than all of us in the house" *Ha~ha!*

This my younger brother, he's a *horrible* boy! He is a *big* trouble-maker. One time he said that he is going to marry, but if the girl is not fine, he wouldn't marry her, so I should see the girl first, to see if she's fine, before he will marry her. That boy is another boy. My father used to say that, if suppose we had the same mother, they would say that the same place I am from is the place this boy is from. He is a *ruffian!* So he said to his senior brother, "How can you say a word? Among *all* of us in this family, you are the tall man. Your mother has been taking her witchcraft to make you tall, to be growing you big. So you can't say a word." *Hee~hee! Ha!*

So then he said, "Eh, eh, eh, so – eh, eh – you want to abuse me as yesterday you were abusing my mother."

Then my small brother said, "Ah~h, yesterday I was abusing your mother. It is hurting you. And you didn't answer. Today your mother packed her things, and she won't give you witchfood again. That's why. That's why now you have started worrying about yesterday. Yes, I have abused your mother. Your mother wants to eat us. Your mother wants to take us like those small~small fish the Togo people used to catch. Those small~small fish, they used to get them in a group.³ Your mother just wants to make us like that and fry us. But she's not going to fry you, so that's why you didn't say anything yesterday. So what do you mean? Do you think your mother is better than our father?"

1. According to traditional respect for age, the younger son should not be sending the older one.

2. like the movie story, with one thing leading to another

3. He is referring to a type of small fish (Ewe: *akpa*) caught with a net, generally fried and eaten with pepper.

Then my senior brother said that they want to change the family. So he doesn't worry about anything. The mother can go away if she wants. So my small brother can talk these things; he should know that he the senior brother was first before him.¹

And this boy said, "Yeah, you are first before me, but you don't have your experience. These topics we did yesterday, you are the person who should have said, 'Mama, what you are doing is not good. You have this problem with your husband, or with our father and your daughter. It's not good for you to cry and go and call your family.' But you have left all this. Or maybe, I think you led her to go there and bring the family so that they will come and eat us." *Ha!*

So that boy was also annoyed. So he said: OK, if that is the problem, my father is the one who gave the chance for the younger brother to be abusing him. So he's also going to leave the house.

Then this small boy said, "Yes, we have already known. We know that if your mother is not here, you can't stay, because as a witch's son, she used to give you some small things, to go out with her every night. So since she packed her things, I know that by all means you have to go back to your own, too. You just want the road you will pass to pack your things. That's why you been arguing this with me. So if you want, you can pack off with your things and follow your mother."

So we all got up. That day, my senior brother was inside the room. I was feeling pity for him, because he didn't talk to anybody again. So they cooked the tuwo. They used to eat together, and they called him. He said, no, he's satisfied. And me, if I am in the village, I used to eat with my father, always. So I told my father, "This boy doesn't want to eat."

My father said, "Leave him. If he doesn't want to eat, he's not a small boy. Can you force him to give him food?"

And I said, "No. I don't feel it like that."

So I went to his room. Then I called my mother to bring me my food. So she gave the food to my younger sister to give us inside the room. Then I said, "No. Even if you are annoyed with everybody, you just come and eat with me, so that — "

1. He was born first.

So the boy is a big, *tall* boy. A *big* boy. If you see him, you will be happy. He is senior to me, too, but every time, he is just like a woman. Any small thing, you will see him with tears in his eyes. So when I was talking to him, he was crying like a small baby. As he's tall, I could not hold him. So I stood up and then I took his head, "No, don't do that, don't do that – " *Ha!* Then I said, "Do you want me to cry, too? Do you want me to cry? You are crying. Because your mother has gone away today, you are crying. What about me? My mother died. I won't see her anymore, eh? You can go and see your mother tomorrow if you want. So what are you crying for?" So I was trying to boss him, "Stop crying and eat a little bit with me."

And my small brother – that boy, he can cause trouble in the house! – this small boy said, "Aha! You are eating with him! You will become a witch!" *Ha!* "You want to be a witch, too? You are making friends with a witch. It's night-time. Eh? Go and sleep. It's better for you. This is the time they used to go out. In some minutes' time you will see him like a vulture. If you don't want to see that, go and sleep." I was afraid! *Ha!*

So I told my big brother, "Oh, don't mind him. You know he's a small boy. He doesn't have sense. You know this boy: I think he is a ruffian inside of the family. You also know. He just has some kind of character. He can't help it, but we can't throw him away. So don't mind him. He's going. He hasn't got sense so he's just saying what he doesn't know."

So: do you know that the time when we all went and slept, my big brother, this boy got up to go to the mother's village. And now he has become a mad person. He has become crazy. They took him some place to look after him. He's in some village now. I think maybe he met something in the night. You know, we African people, it used to happen. He waited till everybody was asleep, then he got up to go to the mother's village. So maybe in the road he met something, and the thing turned him to craze.¹

We Africans, we have this belief. If you ask an old person, he will tell you about this. Sometimes if you walk in the midnight, huh? They

1. go crazy

used to tell you that there are some things that come out in the night~time. Especially the village people. They like juju. They have been praying to it, so it's working for them. So maybe in some villages, if they have juju, you shouldn't go out in the night~time. Every place is dark. There's no light. Maybe you can meet something like that.

So this boy went to the mother. The next day, we heard that this boy started to craze, cursing some things in the village of the mother, and that and this.

So my father asked that boy who had made him annoyed to go and see. The boy said, "Me? I am not going." *Ha!* "I am not going. He went and found his trouble."

So then my father's senior son said, no, he will go by himself. He went, and he came back with the bicycle. He said, no, where the boy is, he can't bring him home. "When I got to him, I didn't know what is wrong with him. He just took himself. And all the clothes which he was wearing, I don't know whether he tore it by himself or the dress was just torn." You know, they don't believe much in hospitals. They believe in these juju people. So they took him to some village, and the juju man said that he met something – the grand-grand-grandfather's things,¹ but they didn't want to do him bad, so that's why they turned him to be like that. If they had wanted to do him bad, he would have died. So he is living with the juju man. I don't know whether by now he has come back home.

So this thing, it was a big rout. My father and the senior wife were about to divorce. Now she has come back. But she's just living in the house. My father doesn't mind her. And she also says that because of her children, she doesn't want to leave the house. But it's a lie, because if she leaves the house, she doesn't know anywhere to go. So she's just hanging there.

1. ancestral spirits