



**A MISLEADING TALE  
BY MOONLIGHT**  
Revised Edition

*Kelicha Ocheneger*

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PART ONE



## CAST

- \* Uli
- \* Esther
- \* Friend 1
- \* Friend 2
- \* Man

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

It is very early in the morning. A woman is seen walking through a bush path. She is greeted by the cries of a baby. The more she moves forward, the louder the cries. She stands and talks to herself for some time.

**Uli:** I hear a very loud cry. I am very sure it is a baby wailing this early morning. Who would be so wicked to leave a baby in this bush? *(Thinks)* What if it is one of those chief priests or his workers that left the baby there to die? Is there a prophecy on the baby's head?  
*(Baby stops crying for a while)* I better start going on my way before I will carry a problem home.

*(She starts going and the baby continues crying very loudly. She stops moving)*

**Uli:** What is this?  
(She moves into the bush to look for the baby. She follows the sound of the cry and finds the baby. The baby is shedding plenty of tears and is red in the face from excess cries. One look at the baby's face and she is moved with pity.)

**Uli:** What a fine baby!

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*(Checks the baby thoroughly and sighs a sigh of relief)*

**Uli:** There is no red cloth tied to it! No native doctor left it here.

But, what kind of mother will keep her baby in a bush? A baby that some of us have prayed to God for! She has been given freely and she throws it away. Maybe she was not prepared to have this beautiful baby. Maybe she does not have the money to use and take care of this child. Maybe her husband ran away when she was pregnant. But none of them is enough reason for her to throw away this beautiful baby which God has blessed her with.

*(Thinks a little)* I would like to take this baby home, but what home can I offer this child? I don't have a husband anymore and I am too old to be its mother. And I have always wanted a child!

*(Sighs)* No, I will not be as heartless as it's mother. I will take it away from here, far away so that no one will come to disturb me because of this child. I don't have a child of my own, but I can call this child my grandchild. Who will question me? After all, I'm old enough to be its grandmother.

*(She carries the baby. The baby stops crying)*

**Uli:** (to the baby) Look at your fine face! I will tell people that your father is from Cross River State. I have always liked that name Asari. That's what I will call you, my fine baby. Your name now is Asari. Thank God for you my sweet grandchild.

*(She leaves the bush and goes back home quickly)*

ACT 1  
SCENE 2

**A**t Uli's house, Uli keeps the baby on her bed. Her house is comfortable and nice. It has three rooms – the sitting room, the bedroom and a spare room. The bathroom and toilet are in an outhouse beside the house.

She pets the baby to sleep a little while she went out to look for baby food. She finds some, makes it and prepares it for the baby. The baby stops crying for a while and sleeps peacefully.

***Her friend visits her. They sit in the parlour discussing.***

**Uli:** *(Very happy)* You will not believe what happened to me today!

**Esther:** Wait till you hear the gist going around today.

**Uli:** What happened?

**Esther:** It is said that a child went missing yesterday.

**Uli:** Whose child?

*The baby starts crying again. It clearly is awake.*

**Esther:** Is that a child crying in your house?

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**Uli:** Yes, it is a child. But it definitely is not the child which they are searching for. I found her crying in a bush alone. I could not leave her alone in the bush.

*(Uli runs inside the bedroom and comes out with Asari. She cuddles her and makes her to stop crying.)*

**Esther:** You can never be so sure.

**Uli:** I am serious. I found her alone in the bush. I am telling you; she was clearly abandoned. You know I would never lie to you, my friend. Besides, this matter is too serious to joke about.

**Esther:** My friend, I understand the matter completely. I know you can ever steal a child no matter what. But we need to be careful. What if someone is looking for this child?

**Uli:** Esther my friend, if anyone comes I within a month to claim this child, I will surrender the child immediately. I am not so heartless to keep a child away from its rightful mother. It was out of pity I took the child away from that bush. If nobody comes to claim the child, I will raise the child as my own. To say the truth, I see the child as an answer to prayers.

**Esther:** Its true o. Who says God does not answer prayers? Let me touch the child a little my dear friend.

*(Uli gives the baby to Esther who carries her gently and plays with her a little.)*

**ACT 2**  
**SCENE 1**

**U**li is at a small shop close to her house. She wants to buy a few things. Two friends also come to buy some things. They are waiting for the first person who arrived the shop to finish getting what he was buying and give them a chance to buy what they came to buy. Meanwhile, as they stand talking, Uli is listening attentively.

**Friend 1:** Did you hear?

**Friend 2:** Hear what? What's new?

**Friend 1:** They found the missing child yesterday.

*(Uli sighs a sigh of relief, unknown to them.)*

**Friend 2:** Thank God oo! How did they find the child? And how did the child get missing in the first place?

**Friend 1:** I do not know for sure. But I heard that child kidnapers are around. They kidnap and sell them.

**Friend 2:** That is bad. How can human beings be so heartless!

*(The man that was buying some things gets interested in their talk.)*

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- Man:** The child that was missing was stolen.
- Friend 2:** Seriously!
- Friend 1:** I heard so too. I heard he was recovered from the woman he was sold to. The woman could not describe the people that sold the child to her so they cannot catch the thief.
- Man:** It is not only in this village that children are missing like that. Even in the neighboring villages, children have been reported missing. Now, any woman that was not with child but suddenly got a child by any means is being checked. Mothers are crying.
- Friend 2:** These women buying these children, if they should stop buying them, these people will stop stealing these children since they will not make money from them.
- Friend 1:** What can they do when life has not been so fair to them by not giving them a child?
- Man:** Two wrongs cannot make a right!
- Friend 2:** Even if those women stop buying stolen children, they will still steal the children. The only question is what they will use them for next. Maybe for rituals or meat.
- Friend 1:** Human beings can be so wicked like that! God please save us and our children!
- Friend 2:** Amen o!

The man has gotten all what he needed. He leaves the store. Uli leaves the store too at this point. She is thinking hard and has already forgotten what she came to buy. She hurries back to Asari hoping she will see her in the house and that someone will not come and take her away.

ACT 2  
SCENE 2

**U**li is now home. She is thinking of what to do with Asari.

**Uli:**           What if they come and take her away from me?  
                  Will they listen to me if I tell them that I did not steal this child? Everyone knows I was desperately looking for a child before my husband died.

*The baby starts crying again.*

Uli does not carry her. She is lost in thoughts. She hears a knock on her door, but she does not go to receive the visitor.

**Esther:**       (Opens the door and walks in) Greetings upon this house!  
                  (Gets no reply) It cannot be that there is no one in this house. The door is open!

**Uli:**           (Finds her voice) I'm here!

**Esther:**       I'm coming!

*She walks into the bedroom and finds Uli standing confused.*

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- Esther:** What is it? Why are you looking so down?
- Uli:** What if they take her away?
- Esther:** How?
- Uli:** I heard some people talking about missing children. They are stealing children?
- Esther:** You are not a thief my friend. Everyone knows that you don't steal. They will not accuse you of stealing. So, calm down dear. Nobody will accuse you.
- Uli:** I also heard they are returning the children back to their mothers.
- Esther:** What are you afraid of now? Are you afraid that they will take the child away from you?
- Uli:** (Sighs) Maybe.
- Esther:** What if they find the child's mother and come to take her away? What will you do?
- Uli:** I do not know. I will never be myself again.
- Esther:** Look, if they should find the mother of this child, you will have to give her back! You cannot keep what is not yours. The mother must have been worried sick for this child. Who knows?
- Uli:** I found this child in the bush. What kind of thief will steal a child and leave it in the bush to die? It is not possible. I am very sure this child was abandoned!
- Esther:** Uli, maybe she was abandoned, maybe she was not. All I am saying is that just in case the mother of this child shows up, you should be able to let this child go. You have to be strong enough. It is for the good of the child.
- Uli:** I've heard you.

ACT 3  
SCENE 1

In Uli's house, she has packed some essential things into two bags. She gently carries Asari and ties her to her back.

**Uli:** I will not wait for them to take you away from me before I act. I will take you far away where nobody knows me. I will not allow you to be taken away from me!

She carries the child away that night. She takes care to not wake her neighbors so that they would not know that she has gone. She leaves and never returns.

## GLOSSARY

**Wail:** To make a long loud high cry because you're sad or in pain.

**Prophecy:** A statement that something will happen in future especially one made by somebody with religious and magic powers.

**Problem:** A thing that is difficult to deal with or understand.

**Thorough:** Done completely with great attention.

**Husband:** The man that a woman is married to.

**Heartless:** Feeling no pity for other people.

**Disturb:** To interrupt somebody when they are trying to work or sleep etc.

**Grandchild:** A child of your son or daughter.

**Comfortable:** Making you feel physically relaxed.

**Spare:** That which is not being used or not needed at the present time.

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**Outhouse:** A small building outside the main building.

**Peaceful:** Without disturbance.

**Parlour:** A sitting room.

**Discuss:** to talk about something with somebody especially in order to decide something.

**Search:** an attempt to find somebody or something by looking carefully for them.

**Cuddle:** to put something close to your arm to show love or affection.

**Gist:** the main or general meaning of a conversation.

**Understand:** to know or realize the meaning of something.

**Immediate:** Happening or done without delay.

**Claim:** to say that something is true although it has not been proved and other people may not believe it.

**Desperate:** feeling or showing that you have little hope and ready to do anything without worrying about danger to yourself and others.

**PART TWO**



# Prologue

**U**li is a woman quite close to her old age. She has no child and her husband died long before the story. She came upon a baby in the bush and is willing to do anything to make sure the baby remains hers forever, including running away from her old village.

The journey was rough since it was a hurried flight. How would they cope in this new environment?

# CAST

- ▶ Uli: main character
- ▶ Usula: Uli's neighbor
- ▶ Ina Abusa: the midwife

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

It is normal for a baby to cry but Asari's cries made Uli very sad. It has been two weeks since Uli and Asari made it to the beautiful town of Obiaruku in Delta state. Uli had used the first week of their stay there to adapt themselves to the new environment. She had decided on not making too many friends there so that nobody will poke-nose into any of her business as she would have to tell so many lies if she was asked anything from her past; especially when it comes to the part starting with Asari.

However, in their second week of staying there, Asari suddenly started crying more often. Despite everything Uli did and gave to her, Asari kept crying. The second day of her ailment, she was hot to touch. She was rejecting food and Uli, in vain, tried all that she could to make sure Asari stopped crying and bounced back to health.

Asari has been crying seriously for three days now and Uli was in tears herself.

**Uli:**           **(Bathing Asari)**  
Asaa nwam, please! Please stop crying, please!  
I'm begging you. What have I done to deserve  
this? Which of our gods did I offend?  
(Notices some small red blisters)

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Hei! What is this? Red spots? Why is this part red?  
What is happening? I need help!

*(Runs outside and tries to comport herself. She walks to the house adjacent her own and knocks on the door.)*

**Uli:** Please somebody should answer the door.

**Usula:** (From within)

Who is that? Who wants to knock down my door?

**Uli:** It is your neighbour please. I don't want to knock down your door, I just need to see you please. I need your help!

**Usula:** *(Opens the door)*

Neighbour! *(Surprised to see Uli at her door wiping tears from her eyes.)* Come inside neighbour. Come in and tell me what the issue is.

**Uli:** I cannot come inside please. My daughter is very sick. I do not know what to do again. Please, if you can just come with me and see if you can help me in any way. I see you are a woman like myself and you have children. I do see them play around here sometimes. If you can help with a cure for my daughter's illness or suggest the local doctor or someone that can help, I'll be very grateful. I would have taken her to the hospital myself but I am new to this environment. I know nowhere around here except my house and the market. Help me please!

**Usula:** How old is your baby?

**Uli:** She is less than a year old.

**Usula:** Let me get my slippers from within. We will go and see her immediately, okay?

**Uli:** Okay.

**Usula:** Neighbor please, clean your tears. Nothing will happen to her, okay?

**Uli:** Okay. (Cleans her tears and tries to stop crying)

ACT 1  
SCENE 2

Uli's new apartment is small and bare. It contains the foam she and Asari share, a small stove and some few personal items. There is no real furniture and carpet.

**Usula:** (Enters) Peace be upon this house!

**Uli:** (Carries Asari to Usula) This is my baby. She has been crying for three days straight.

**Usula:** Wait! So, it is your daughter's voice we have been hearing all along?

*(Carries Asari in her arms) Shh... Little one, you have not allowed us to have rest for three days now. I now know why.*

*(To Uli) Has she been able to eat anything?*

**Uli:** She has refused to eat anything for the past three days!

**Usula:** Since when has she been hot like his?

**Uli:** Since the second day she started crying plenty.

**Usula:** (Notices the red blisters) When did these appear?

**Uli:** I noticed them this morning! What do they mean?

**Usula:** Well, I am not good with nursing. But I will take you and this baby to the midwife. She should

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know what to do with her since she is not up to a year. Do not worry, okay? She will be fine. What is her name?

**Uli:** Her name is Asari.

**Usula:** Asari?

**Uli:** Yes. Her father is Efik.

**Usula:** Okay, get her a light cloth so that we will be on our way.

ACT 2  
SCENE 1

**A**t the midwife's house, Uli and Usula stand outside and knock lightly.

**Ina Abusa:** (From inside) Whoever that is, I'm coming! Just wait!

*Uli and Usula wait a little*

**Ina Abusa:** (Opens the door) Good morning, ladies.

**Uli & Usula:** Morning ma!

**Ina Abusa:** (*Sees the baby*) Oh, you have a fine baby there. Let me see it.

**Uli:** (*hands the baby over to the midwife*) Please...

**Usula:** (*Cuts in*) With all due respect ma, we are sorry to disturb you like this at this time of the day.

**Ina Abusa:** It's no trouble. This baby is very hot. Come inside. (*Opens her door wide for them to come in.*)

Uli and Usula walk into a tastefully furnished living room. It has comfortable chairs and a center table in the middle. There is a television by the wall and a fridge

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close to the door that leads to the inner room.

**Ina Abusa:** Please, sit down.

*Uli and Usula sit down. Uli is busy looking around the house while Usula who has been here before talks.*

**Usula:** Ina Abusa, you are a friend to all. This is my neighbor. She just came into town, not less than two weeks ago. She has this baby and the baby is ill as you can see.

**Ina Abusa:** What is the name of the baby?

**Uli:** Asari.

**Ina Abusa:** I have seen that the baby is ill. You two are very lucky to see me in the house at this time and you know that Usula. This baby needs immediate attention.

**Uli:** Please, what is wrong with her?

**Ina Abusa:** I have to sit down and check her well. I can see she is hot to touch, she has been crying and she has blisters. Has she been eating since she started crying?

**Uli:** No. She has not been eating.

**Ina Abusa:** I will keep her here for two nights. But you will have to pay because I will not be able to go to my trade for those two days.

**Usula:** Please, she is but a stranger in our midst. Be kind to her.

**Ina Abusa:** I understand that too much. That is why I will not charge too much.

**Uli:** (Almost a whisper) How much?

**Ina Abusa:** Fifteen thousand.

**Usula:** (Looks at Uli's face which shows no hope of having such an amount)  
Please, can you reduce the money any further?

Circles

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**Ina Abusa:** The main things that the money will be used for is to buy drugs for the child. I wish I could reduce the money but I can't. Usula, you of all people should know that I don't charge unnecessarily.

**Usula:** Thank you, Ina Abusa. We will go and look for the money.

**Ina Abusa:** May the gods go with you.

**Usula:** (To Uli) Let's go.

**Uli:** (Stupidly) Am I leaving Asari here?

**Usula:** Yes! Did you not hear Ina Abusa.

**Uli:** Okay. *(Takes Asari up in her arms and tells her goodbye)*

ACT 2  
SCENE 2

On the road, Uli and Usula are walking home. The road is wide with small bushes by the side and the women walk by the middle of the road. Uli is very quiet until Usula breaks the silence.

**Usula:** Uli, do not worry. Asari is in good hands. Ina Abusa will find out what's wrong with her and treat her well. You will have your baby back in good health.

**Uli:** Thank you Usula.

**Usula:** I only hope you will be able to pay.

**Uli:** As far as she will cure Asari, I will make sure I work hard and get the money.

**Usula:** *(Clears throat)* Erhm, you will have to pay the money first. The money, as she said is for drugs.

**Uli:** I have to pay first?

**Usula:** Yes, you have to pay. She has to pay transport to the neighboring village, buy the drugs and come and administer it. If she doesn't get the drugs, there will be nothing done for Asari.

**Uli:** Nobody sells the drugs here?

**Usula:** No

**Uli:** *(Sad)* I have just five thousand left. Nothing

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more!

**Usula:** That is bad. Where will you get ten thousand from? You have to pay in bulk. If you pay in parts, you will have to add extra for transport again. Besides, you don't have anything doing yet, do you?

**Uli:** I don't! What am I going to do? Even if I get work today, they will not pay me tomorrow!

**Usula:** *(Thinks)* I don't have money myself. I've spent it all on my child's school fees. If I had a man in the hand, I would have given you the money but it's just me.

**Uli:** What happened to your husband?

**Usula:** It is King Uguta that touched me. I had my child from his touch. I will tell you all about him later.

**Uli:** I don't know anybody here except you. What am I going to do?

*Usula has no answer to this question so they walk on in silence.*

ACT 3  
SCENE 1

This is evening. Usula goes to check on Uli at her house.

**Usula:** *(Knocks)* Uli

**Uli:** *(Opens the door after some time. Her face is wet with tears)* Usula, please don't come inside. The house is very scattered.

*(They stand by the veranda)*

**Usula:** I bring a bit of goodness Uli. Brighten up!

**Uli:** *(Cleans her face again of tears)* Okay?

**Usula:** Someone was owing me five thousand. The person just paid the money. I want you to have it. Whenever you can pay back you do so but add it to the five thousand you have.

**Uli:** Thank you so much Usula. I don't want to sound ungrateful but, I still don't know how I'm going to get the remaining five thousand.

**Usula:** You can try borrowing from anybody. Just try.

**Uli:** Thank you very much. Thank you for everything. I will not forget this kindness you have shown to me.

**Usula:** It's okay. You would have done the same.

ACT 3  
SCENE 2

**A**t Ina Abusa's house, Uli is seated, waiting for her to bring Asari from the inner room.

**Ina Abusa:** *(Walks in with Asari in her arms)* Here she is. She was sleeping. I've given her a little something to help.

**Uli:** *(Collects the child and starts crying)*

**Ina Abusa:** Now that the child is not crying, you are the one in tears. What is the issue?

**Uli:** *(Kneels down)* Ina Abusa, please.. I need your help!

I am a stranger in this land. I came here, not so long ago. I have no work and the only money I have is what the remainder of what I came with is. Usula lent me some money. Even at that, it is not enough. And I have nobody to ask. *(Goes down on her knees)* Please, I'm appealing to you *(starts crying)* if only you can lend me that remaining five thousand naira. I can't afford to lose Asari!

**Ina Abusa:** *(Collects Asari from Uli and takes her inside. Returns)* Uli, give me the money you have.

**Uli:** *(Removes the money from the folds of her wrapper)* Here it is Ina Abusa. It's ten thousand only.

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**Ina Abusa:** Don't worry, when you have the money, you pay back okay? I will get the drugs for her tomorrow morning.

**Uli:** *(Sheds tears of joy)* Thank you! Thank you so much Ina Abusa. *(Kneels down)* My God will bless you Ina Abusa. Thank you so much!

**Ina Abusa:** It's okay. Stand up! But you have to tell me the truth about this child. You are too old to be this child's mother.

**Uli:** Well, the baby is not mine. She belongs to my daughter. She is my grandchild.

**Ina Abusa:** But you do not know when this child was born. She is not as young as you said she is. I feel there is something you have to tell me.

*Uli breaks down and begins to tell Ina Abusa of how she ran to Obiaruku. At that moment, Usula walks in.*

**Usula:** Is everything alright Uli,  
I saw you entering here?

**Ina Abusa:** Uli, it's okay. You'll tell it to me later.

**Uli:** Let me say it to her hearing, after all, she has been like a sister to me.

**Ina Abusa:** Okay, go on

*Uli tells them of how she found Asari and ran with her to that village.*

**Usula:** You should not have run like that. What will you tell the child when she comes of age? That you ran away so that her real mother will not find her?

**Ina Abusa:** This is not the time to cast blame Usula. She has acted in her capacity as a mother. Let's just pray everything works out well.

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ACT 3  
SCENE 3

On their way home, Usula tries to advice Uli

**Usula:** I believe you should tell the child the truth Uli, when she is old enough to understand.

**Uli:** You want me to tell my child that she was picked from the bush?

**Usula:** Why not? lying to the child about it will be very bad.

**Uli:** No, I will tell the child that I'm her grandmother. Her parents are dead. Finish! After all, when they left her in the bush, they clearly did not need her.

**Usula:** You just have to be careful. You should know that the truth sets free. If you tell this child the truth, she would have no reason to hate you later on. If you don't, it would look as if you actually stole the baby.

**Uli:** I will not have that! Just because I told you the truth does not mean you should start claiming morals. Where is this King Uguta you say that made you have your child? Why is he not living with you?

**Usula:** He is in his palace. If you know who you talk about, you will not speak of him in that way. I see you do not want to hear what I have to say. But at some point in this life, you will have to tell Asari the truth. I just hope it won't be too late.

*They both enter their houses.*

## GLOSSARY

**Normal:** usual or ordinary.

**Adapt:** to change something in order to make it suitable for a new use or situation.

**Poke-nose:** to involve yourself in what does not concern you.

**Business:** work that is part of your job.

**Ailment:** illness that is not very serious.

**Reject:** to refuse to accept or consider something.

**Blister:** a swelling on the surface of the skin that is filled with liquid.

**Midwife:** a person who is trained to help women give birth to babies.

**Immediate:** happening or done without delay.

**Ungrateful:** not showing or expressing thanks for something that someone has given to you.

**Appealing:** attractive or interesting.

**PART THREE**



## **THE STORY**

**E**veryone wanted the touch of King Uguta and Asari, even at just eight years of age, was beginning to desire the touch of King Uguta's too. Having stayed there for the past seven years, she came to regard herself as a true citizen of Obiaruku. Uli always regaled her with the story of the king's touch. She always said that Asari's mother was touched by King Uguta also; and that if Asari would behave, her turn would come one day - when King Uguta would touch her too. She carefully made sure Asari never found out that she was picked from the bush.

So far, Asari has been happy. Uli has been the mother she should be.

Would things stay that way forever?

## CAST

<b>Asari</b>	- The main character
<b>Grandma Uli</b>	- The 'grandmother' of Asari
<b>Grandma Uli's neighbours:</b>	Usula, Nkebo, Nenijo, Marigu, Dudubo, Neride and Achude
<b>Dunube</b>	- Asari's classmate and friend.
<b>Obi</b>	- The supposed King Oguta
<b>Ohunda</b>	- The town crier of Obiaruku
<b>Ine Abusa</b>	- Grandma Uli's friend and counsellor
<b>Mr. Onulo</b>	- Obiaruku Primary School headmaster
<b>Mrs Ajinaka</b>	- Asari's Primary 3 class teacher
<b>Girls of Obiaruku</b>	- Girls of different ages.
<b>The Woman:</b>	- The supposed true mother of Asari
<b>The Man:</b>	- The supposed uncle of Asari's mother
<b>Mr. Ochuko:</b>	- Headmaster of L.A. Primary School, Oghara Waterside.
<b>Mrs. Okpako:</b>	- Asari's new class teach at L.A. Primary School, Oghara Waterside.
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Drawing</b>	

ACT 1  
SCENE 1

It is morning, and the people in the community have woken up, preparing for farm work. At Grandma Uli's house (a two-room apartment she shares with Asari), a small ukpe (a local lamp) is still flicking amber fire in the centre of the living room. The living room is bare, except for three \*\*\* (Square wooden seats with four legs) placed in no particular order, a few sleeping mats rolled up and standing at a corner, a cooking area to the far left, with hanging racks of dried corn and other accoutrements for cooking. At another end of the room, sits a big earthen pot for drinkable water, and white basins full of stream water for general use. The door to the bedroom is open but the room is dark; its only small window still shut.

An old woman is seen in the kitchen searching for something.

**Grandma Uli:** Asaa! *(She fondly calls the girl she claims as her grandchild.)*

**Asari:** Yes, grandma! *(The girl enters the kitchen area of the living room from the back door which leads to the backyard which consists of a garden for vegetables and a path to the raffia-fenced enclosure used as a bathroom.)*

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**Grandma Uli:** I can't find the *mmpama* (a big knife for cutting yam tubers). Where did you put it? Nothing in this house is safe when you are around. Everything for you is to use for play!

**Asari:** Ah, grandma, you gave it to Grandma Usula last night, remember?

**Grandma Uli:** Has she not returned it yet? Go get me my *mmpama* for me. I have warned that woman countless times to not to depend on my generosity. It's high time she bought her own *mmpama*. Go to her right away and get me my *mmpama*.

(The girl leaves the room through the open front door into the large yard bounded by six similar houses that make up the Mbobosi compound where Grandma Uli lives with her neighbours. Nkebo and Nenijo, the neighbours could be seen some hundred metres away with baskets on their heads leaving for the adjoining bush path that leads to the farm road).

**Asari:** Good morning ma! (*The girl greets both women.*)

**Nenijo:** Where are you rushing to, Asari?

**Asari:** My grandma sent me to collect her *mmpama* from Grandma Usula.

**Nkebo:** (*Chuckles*) You and your grandma!

**Nenijo:** I just saw Usula going to her farm. (*Sneering*) Doesn't your grandma have another *mmpama* to use? (*Chuckling with Nkebo as both women hurry away.*)

(Asari pauses. She stands there, somewhat confused and thoughtful. She looks after the two women as they walk

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away still giggling. She turns and begins to walk towards Grandma Uli's house.)

**Grandma Uli:** (*Sees Asari returning with no mmpama in her hand.*) Where is my *mmpama*, and what is that look on your face?

**Asari:** I saw Auntie Nkebo and Auntie Nenijo. They said Grandma Usula has gone to farm.

**Grandma Uli:** So why are you looking so sad?

**Asari:** Auntie Nkebo and Auntie Nenijo were laughing at me.

**Grandma Uli:** Why would they do that? Don't let them make you sad. I will pass by Usula's farm and collect my *mmpama*. If that's what she hopes to work with at her farm today, too bad. I will collect my *mmpama*.

ACT 1  
SCENE 2

At Esumu-Uku Primary School. Asari is walking sluggishly through the school gate 10 minutes after the morning assembly had started. Mr. Onulo, the headmaster, with a long cane in his right hand, is addressing the pupils who are all standing in different lines according to their classes. Asari attempts to join the third line of Primary 3 (her class line), but the headmaster stops her, and calls her out to the front of the line directly facing the raised veranda of the long single school bungalow building.

**Mr. Onulo:** (*Looking stern*) Where are you coming from, Asari, and where do you think you are going?

**Asari:** (*Head bowed with a gloomy face*) I'm coming from home, sir (*Some of the pupils giggle at the obvious answer*).

**Mr. Onulo:** (*Raised face and booming voice with hands raised to hush his audience.*) **Your** grandmother's house is not far from here (*Addressing Asari directly*). The distance can't be the reason why you are late to school. Why are you late? (*His voice is raised again and sounds threatening, as though he is about to apply the cane at any moment.*)

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**Mrs Ajinaka:** (*Walking close to the headmaster and whispering to him.*) Let me have a word with the little girl, Sir. It appears something is troubling her (*seeing how sad she look*).

**Mr. Onulo:** (*Pulling up his baggy trousers strapped up with worn out suspenders.*) **Your** grandmother would have to see me soon to explain why you can't get to school early. As for the rest of you, the assembly is dismissed. March to your classrooms.

(The school band hits the marching beat, as the pupils begin to tap their little feet, left, right, left, right, on the ground. Beginning from the Primary 1 class, the smallest pupils begin marching to their classrooms. Mrs Ajinaka steps down from the raised veranda to meet Asari. She puts her right hand across the girl's shoulder and leads her to her classroom.)

ACT 2  
SCENE 1

**A**t Grandma Uli's house on a dark evening. The ukpe burning at the centre of the living room casts a dull light on Asari as she gathers the plates after the evening meal.

**Grandma Uli:** Asaa, did you say your headmaster wants to see me at your school?

**Asari:** Yes, grandma.

**Grandma Uli:** And why does he want to see me, do you know?

**Asari:** I don't know, grandma. But he was angry that I was late at school.

**Grandma Uli:** Okay, I will see him when I return from *Nkwor* (local name for the main market in Ubiaruku) tomorrow.

**Asari:** But, grandma. Why are some people always giggling whenever I talk of my grandma? Don't they have their own grandma?

**Grandma Uli:** Don't mind them. They are jealous of you. They know that King Uguta will touch you because you are the most beautiful girl in Obiaruku. (*Describing Asari as the most beautiful girl in Obiaruku always*

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*lightens her face with joy. And the talk about King Uguta always makes her happy.)*

- Asari:** Grandma, Dunube, my friend, is beautiful also. She said Obi is King Oguta. Is it true?
- Grandma Uli:** No, no, no. That boy? No, he is not King Uguta. I know the mother of that boy. King Uguta is from a far place. No one knows his parents.
- Asari:** Dunube pointed at where Obi lives when we were returning from school. Obi's house is near that big wall you call King Uguta's house.
- Grandma Uli:** Yes, his parents live near King Uguta's palace, but he is not King Uguta.
- Asari:** Dunube said the big wall is a bad place, and the people who live there are wicked people.
- Grandma Uli:** King Uguta lives there, and King Uguta is not a bad person.
- Asari:** Have you seen him, grandma, did he touch you when you were small?
- Grandma Uli:** No, King Uguta did not touch me because I was not living here when I was small. But King Uguta touched your mother when she was small like you because she was very pretty like you.
- Asari:** Is that why my mother and my father died?
- Grandma Uli:** No. Your mother and your father died in the big city where they were living because fire burned their house when they were sleeping. They did not put off the fire before they went to sleep. That is why I always put out our fire at night.

ACT 2  
SCENE 2

The next day being the Nkwor market day, Grandma Uli displays her wares on a spread cloth on the ground at a space just beside the wares of her friend and counsellor, Ine Abusa.

**Grandma Uli:** I am beginning to get worried.

**Ine Abusa:** What are you worried about?

**Grandma Uli:** Too many people in Obiaruku already know the true story. And many people are beginning to sneer Asari in public, and I fear she will soon find out the truth.

**Ine Abusa:** But I told you a long time ago; that the moment Asari crossed six years, you should begin to tell her bits and bits of the truth. She is eight years old now and will not immediately understand, but she will eventually do, and come to understand and appreciate how you rescued her at a road junction one early morning and adopted her as your own child.

**Grandma Uli:** That's my biggest fear. If she knows, she could begin to ask many more questions that would lead to her true parents, and they will come here and take her from me.

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**Ine Abusa:** How have the lies you told her helped the matter? Is it not better to say the truth than to tell one lie to cover another lie?

**Grandma Uli:** I am just confused about what to do. If only that Usula had closed her big mouth. She is the cause of all this trouble. I trusted her like I trust you, but instead she betrayed my trust and has been peddling the rumour around Obiaruku.

**Ine Abusa:** I understand how you feel. I will never betray you. As for Usula, shame on her. I know her own secrets too. She is the one who started that King Uguta story many years ago when she suddenly appeared pregnant. No one knows where she got that pregnancy from. She claimed a King Uguta touched her because she was very beautiful and she became pregnant. I knew she was lying. There is no King Uguta anywhere. It's all a lie. That son of hers who is now living overseas does not have a known father till now. It appears her son found out the truth, and in shame left Obiaruku and has never returned since.

**Grandma Uli:** E wo! You mean King Uguta does not live inside that high fenced compound in the middle of Obiaruku?

**Ine Abusa:** Which King Uguta? *(She chuckles derisively)* It is a closed secret. I have never told you this before because the moment you heard of that King Uguta you have been carried away in your imagination. I have been watching you over these years talking about this mysterious King Uguta yourself.

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Have you ever seen him? Haven't you stayed in Obiaruku long enough to have sighted this *ogbanje* King uguta?

**Grandma Uli:** I'm getting more and more confused.

Ine Abusa's attention is switched to a customer who happens to stop in front of her displayed wares at that moment.

ACT 2 SCENE 3

**A**t the headmaster's office of Esumu-Uku Primary School, Grandma Uli steps across the threshold coming to face with Mr. Onulo who sits behind his large table piled with School Registers, teachers' lesson notes and assorted items. The office has a closed side door that links one of the classrooms but the main door facing the veranda is open, letting in a gush of fresh breeze.

**Grandma Uli:** Good afternoon, Headmaster! *(She steps into the office through the open door without knocking.)*

**Headmaster:** Good afternoon, Madam Uli. You are welcome!

**Grandma Uli:** Thank you! My daughter said you wanted to see me, that is why I am here, Sir.

**Headmaster:** It's good you are here. I asked to see you because of Asari. She is a bright and intelligent girl. I understand she stays with you and your house is not far from here. However, I have noticed recently that she has formed a habit of coming to school late, and she has been looking very unhappy recently. What is happening at home?

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**Grandma Uli:** Unhappy? Coming late is my own fault because I don't wake up early enough to prepare her for school. But if she is looking unhappy, then I need to ask her what she is unhappy about. Or did she tell you?

**Headmaster:** I have not asked her but her class teacher, Mrs. Ajinaka, did. What she told me was making Asari unhappy is a rumour which she claims someone revealed to her through a verbal abuse at your compound.

**Grandma Uli:** What rumour is that, and who is abusing my Asaa?

**Headmaster:** I also heard the rumour here in the school. I don't believe it, that's why I wanted to hear from you myself.

**Grandma Uli:** Look, headmaster. This town is full of rumour mongers. They are bad people, and whatever rumour they peddle about me is not true, and no one should be lying to my daughter. *(She becomes excited, so agitated that she stands up and flays her hands in the air as she begins to curse all liars and rumour mongers in Obiaruku. She storms out of the office still talking in an agitated voice as she walks away.)*

ACT 3  
SCENE 1

**A**t Onoku (The stream that serves the community), where women and girls go to fetch water, especially in the mornings and evenings.

**First Girl:** I thought King Uguta's gate will be open today, that's why I came to fetch water now.

**Second Girl:** But you also came to the stream yesterday; did you also expect King Uguta's gate to be opened yesterday?

**Third Girl:** Don't mind her, she is always looking out for King Uguta as if her type is what the king is looking for.

**Fourth Girl:** What about you. Are you the type the king is looking for? If the king's gate should open now, I know who the king will call into his house.

**Second Girl:** Who else but me.

**First Girl:** You of all people. I will surprise all of you. Just let that gate open, you will all see the king pointing at me.

*(The girls continue to chatter as they walk home from the stream, their water pots on their heads. They pass the high walls of King Uguta's palace; no gate opens, no call from the king.)*

ACT 3  
SCENE 2

**Flashback:** Grandma Uli at the market in Obiaruku with Asari at Age 5. She goes from stall to stall asking for things and purchasing colourful dresses for Asari. The little girl with chubby face smiles at a young woman who had been following them at a safe distance, waving at her. Grandma Uli is too busy to notice the young woman.

**Asari:** *(To herself)* What a fine lady. She almost looks like me!

ACT 3  
SCENE 3

**A**t the market square. Grandma Uli does not display her wares on the ground as before. Instead, they remain in their bale, packed and sealed. She sits on a stool besides Ine Abusa.

**Grandma Uli:** I'm not in the mood for any trade today.

**Ine Abusa:** Why, what's the matter?

**Grandma Uli:** I was told a young woman visited Esumu-Uku school yesterday, and asked to see Asari. I was told Mrs. Ajinaka did not allow the woman to see Asari, but everyone was looking at the woman curiously because they said she looked so much like Asari.

**Ine Abusa:** E wo! You think the woman is the true mother of Asari? That is very strange. After eight years? How did she know where Asari is? You said no one was there when you picked the baby at Abraka road junction that morning, didn't you?

**Grandma Uli:** That was true. But I am beginning to think that the true mother of Asari may have been hiding somewhere in the bush that day, and perhaps secretly followed me to my home after I picked up the child.

**Ine Abusa:** How long after you picked up the girl before

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- you left Abraka to Obiaruku?
- Grandma Uli:** It was the same day, before people woke up. It was still a little dark that morning.
- Ine Abusa:** Ho! It must be that whoever followed you and the baby home, also followed you here, and entered Mbobosi compound. It is possible she has kept a close watch on you and the baby ever since.
- Grandma Uli:** But for eight years?
- Ine Abusa:** Women, especially mothers, have long patience. Apparently, her motherly heart is longing for her child, and she can't bear it no more.
- Grandma Uli:** But she can't claim my Asaa! She has no proof she is the rightful mother.
- Ine Abusa:** I thought you said Mrs. Ajinaka said that Asari resembles the woman very much?
- Grandma Uli:** O my God! I must take Asari and run away before this evil happens to me.
- Ine Abusa:** I think so too; but where will you run to? You can't go back to Abraka. Don't even think about Amaï, or Umutu, and Obinomba. They are too closeby. You have to leave this area completely. But let me know where you are going. You are my closest friend, and I will miss you greatly.
- Grandma Uli:** Thank you very much, Mbusi mo (*her fond name for her closest friend and confidant*).

*Grandma Uli rises to leave, but stops abruptly. A young woman she can't remember ever seeing before, sitting in a stall belonging to Usula's sister, was staring right at her. The woman was not quite smiling, but the dimple in her amiable face is strikingly very similar to the dimple in Asari's face when she smiles or laughs. Grandma Uli quickly regains her gait, and walks briskly away.*

ACT 3  
SCENE 4

At the headmaster's office at Esumu-Uku Primary School. Mrs. Ajinaka sits across the headmaster's table, facing Mr. Onulo, who is writing on a paper as he listens to his Primary 3 class teacher.

**Mrs. Ajinaka:** I said the woman is here again, asking to see Asari. This time, she is with a man she is claiming to be her uncle. However, as I told you before, Asari is not in school today. I would be going to her grandmother's house to check on her. This woman doesn't need any other evidence to prove that Asari is her child; the resemblance is too much.

**Headmaster:** Okay, tell the woman and the man to come in here and see me. Meanwhile, hurry down to Madam Uli's place to know the whereabouts of Asari.

**Mrs. Ajinaka:** Yes, sir. (*She leaves.*)

ACT 3  
SCENE 5

**T**he veranda in front of the headmaster's office. Mr. Onulo standing with a woman and a man.

**The Woman:** Good afternoon, Mr. Headmaster. We were directed to see you, sir.

**Mr. Onulo:** Good afternoon, madam and sir. How can I help you?

**The Woman:** This is my uncle; we came to see one of your pupils. We hear she is called Asari. I've been here before, but I gathered you weren't around that day.

**Mr. Onulo:** How's that? How come you have a name for her, is she related to you?

**The Woman:** *(Looking askance, she stutters)* Yeees, she's sort of related. *(She turns to the man by her side, expectant of a rescue).*

**The Man:** Sorry, Mr. Headmaster. We are related to Asari. But the girl doesn't know that yet. That's why we are here to introduce ourselves to her.

**Mr. Onulo:** But the school is not the place to do that. Go to your relatives at her home and introduce yourself there.

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- The Man:** We intend to do that, but I needed to see the girl first, before we make that move.
- Mr. Onulo:** Is there something I don't know because her home is not here. The school is not the appropriate place to exchange acquaintance; you have to go to her house.
- The Man:** We will be doing that today when we leave here, but can we just have a sight of the little girl, we are not here to take her away.
- Mr. Onulo:** Not as though that is possible, anyway. We don't release our pupils to visitors and strangers. Only their rightful parents and known relatives can come here for their wards. In any case, I hear the girl hasn't been to school today. I have sent someone to her house to know why she is not in school already. You may have to come back another day, except if you can offer to wait.
- The Woman:** *(Looking at the Man for approval)* We will wait, please.

*The headmaster leads the Woman and the Man into his office to await Mrs. Ajinaka's return.*

ACT  
4 SCENE 1

**A**t a pontoon, the floating dock where Grandma Uli, holding Asari with her right hand and her left hand supporting two boxes she carries on her head, is in line with other people waiting to board a boat to ferry them across the wide Ethiope river.

**Asari:** Grandma! Where is this?

**Grandma Uli:** It's called Oghara. The people here are Urhobos. We will be here for a while.

**Asari:** Why? We left in the night. What about my school? Is there another *Esumu-Uku Primary School* here? What about my friend, Dunube? You said King Uguta is at Obiaruku, will we see him in this *Ugara*?

**Grandma Uli:** It's not *Ugara*; it's Oghara. Here you will be in a new school. There will be other girls like Dunube here. King Uguta will also come here to see you.

**Asari:** Grandma, I don't want another school. My teacher is not here. Dunube is not here. *(The girl begins to whimper. Grandma Uli pulls her close as they enter the boat where they sit in the third row, with their boxes at her feet.)*

ACT  
4 SCENE 2

**A**t Esumu-Uku Primary School. It's break time. Pupils play about. Teachers stand in groups on the veranda talking. Mrs. Ajinaka is in the headmaster's office with the Man and the Woman.

**Headmaster:** What did the neighbours of Madam Uli say about her whereabouts with the girl?

**Mrs. Ajinaka:** I only saw two old women, Neride and Achude. All others had gone to farm, they said. I was told that one of the neighbours heard some noise in the night and saw Madam Uli leaving the yard with two boxes on her head in the darkness of the night with the girl tied on her back like a baby. Apparently, the girl was too sleepy to walk at that time of the night to wherever Madam Uli was sneaking to.

**Headmaster:** In other words, she spirited away in the dark night with the girl. Doesn't that tell you there is some truth in the rumour that the girl is not her grandchild as she has always claimed?

**The Woman:** The girl is my

**The man:** (*Cuts in*) We would like to make our own enquiry about this Madam Uli. She may be

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one of our distant relatives who we would like to meet. (*The Man takes the hand of the Woman, and they hurry out of the headmaster's office.*)

**Mrs. Ajinaka:** Sir, I will miss Asari very dearly. She was the brightest pupil in my class. I have long heard the story of her being an abandoned child who Madam Uli had seen one early morning by the roadside. She had pity on the little baby, picked her and took her home to nurse the baby as her own. She did nothing wrong. I would do the same. And she has cared for Asari with so much love. This woman, possibly Asari's true mother, showing up now to claim the girl has complicated everything. Now Madam Uli is nowhere to be found and Asari is gone. Everyone is confused.

**Headmaster:** I suggest we keep quiet about it all. We don't yet know for sure the true story. Too many things are left to speculations. Let everybody stay calm. Meanwhile, keep an eye on that Mbobosi compound. Just in case the woman may reappear with Asari.

ACT  
4 SCENE 3

**P**rimary 3 Class. The class is empty except for Dunube who is at her seat; her head resting on her crossed elbows, face down. Mrs. Ajinaka enters.

**Mrs. Ajinaka** Dunube! Why are you not outside playing with your friends? It's break time. *(No answer from the girl.)* What's the matter, Dunube, didn't you hear me? *(No sign of movement from the girl. Teacher moves to the girl, and touches her.)*

**Dunube:** *(The girl raises her head, eyes wet with tears.)* They took my friend away *(she mutters amid sobs).*

**Mrs. Ajinaka** *(Hand still on the girl's shoulder)* Don't cry Dunube. Your friend will return soon. I hear her grandma travelled with Asari early this morning. I believe they will come back very soon.

**Dunube:** They will not come back very soon. I heard Primary 4 teacher saying Asari's grandma ran away with her. But why? Asari didn't do anything wrong, did she?

**Mrs. Ajinaka** No, Asari did nothing wrong. I believe Asari and her grandma will come back very soon.

ACT  
4 SCENE 4

**A**t a new one-room apartment at Oghara Waterside, a fishing town, in Ethiope West Local Government of Delta State, the Urhobo people are very friendly with strangers but are curious about the history of everyone who lives among them.

**Grandma Uli:** Asaa, dear. You are hungry and need to sit up and eat this food to stay strong. *(She lays the plate of food by the mattress which is on the floor on which the girl lays).*

**Asari:** *(Unwilling to sit up but clutching her stomach)* Yes, grandma. But my stomach hurts badly, and I can't sit up.

**Grandma Uli:** You have to try, my dear. The cramps you feel in your stomach is because you refused to eat since we arrived here. You must try and sit up. This food is delicious.

**Asari:** *(The girl struggles to raise her head from the mattress; her shaky fingers pressed on the foam as she pushes herself to a sitting position on the mattress, her back to the nearby wall. One look at the bowl set before her leaves her puzzled.)* Grandma, what sort of soup is this?

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**Grandma Uli:** Our new neighbour, the one who calls you Asiri, brought it this morning. They call it *Ovwovwo* in Urhobo. It is delicious, spicy and hot. My new friend said it will help your appetite and clear your blocked nose. I like these people; they are very kind.

**Asari:** *(The girl accepts a spoonful of the sauce as Grandma raises it to her lips)* Umm! Grandma! It's hot. The pepper is much. It burns.

**Grandma Uli:** Yes, but it will drive your fever away.

**Asari:** *(The girl suddenly brightens up.)* Grandma, I'm not sick. I don't have any fever. I just want to go back to Obiaruku. I want to go to my school. I want to see my friend Dunube. I want King Uguta to touch me.

**Grandma Uli:** *(Surprised!)* So, if you are not sick, then eat your food. I want you to be well and strong.

**Asari:** *(The girl accepts to eat, takes the spoon herself and begins to eat.)* Yes, Grandma. It is delicious. It tastes nice. I like the fish, the crayfish, and this other thing in it. What's it called?

**Grandma Uli:** *(She dips in another spoon and eats from the same bowl.)* I don't know, but it's either goat meat or antelope. The people here eat a lot of bush meat too. Whatever it is, it tastes good.

ACT

4 SCENE 5

Three months after at L.E.A. Primary School, Oghara Waterside. At a morning assembly, the Headmaster, Mr. Ochuko addresses staff and pupils.

**Headmaster:** You all already know that this week we shall begin our promotional examinations. Your teachers have set your questions in all your subjects, and I expect you to study well and pass your exams. Is that clear to you all? *(The pupils chorus yes, sir!)* I want the three new pupils in the school to see me in my office while the rest of you go to your classes. *(The three pupils include Asari.)*

ACT  
4 SCIENCE 6

**A**t the Headmaster's office. His large table is at the centre of the office. A tall cupboard with two glass doors is by the wall to his left. Books and files are stack all over the six rows of the cupboard. To his right is a smaller rectangular table with four chairs, each on a side of the table. Beside those, the office is bare.

**Headmaster:** *(The three pupils: two boys and Asari stand before Mr. Ochuko, their faces somewhat apprehensive.)* This will be your first examination here at L.E.A. Primary School, Oghara Waterside. I have followed your progress since you arrived, and I am very happy with the three of you. You all have been doing quite well. I have called you to encourage you to do more. Odiri *(Addressing the older boy)* Your Arithmetic is good but your English needs to improve. Diamond *(the second boy)* your Arithmetic is good too. Your English can be better. But your Elementary Science is something else. Only Asari is doing excellent in all the subjects. I want three of you to do more. I expect you to lead your class. Is that clear.

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*(The pupils chorus 'Yes, sir!' and were dismissed.)* Asari, stay back, I need to ask you something. *(The girl stands, facing the headmaster but looking down.)* What school did you say you attended previously?

**Asari:** Obiaruku Primary School, Sir.

**Headmaster:** And you say your headmaster's name was?

**Asari:** We called him Headmaster. Only my grandma knows his name, Sir.

**Headmaster:** You are a bright girl, what made you leave that school.

**Asari:** My grandma said some bad people wanted to kill me. So, she took me out in the night.

**Headmaster:** From your test sheet, I can see that you have been taught well and your performance in all the subjects is good. But I've noticed, you don't laugh a lot, and don't seem to play a lot. Are you troubled by anything in this school?

**Asari:** I miss my friend and my class teacher at Obiaruku Primary School, Sir.

**Headmaster:** I see. Obiaruku is far from here. You can make new friends here. Your class teacher tells me you are a good girl, and she likes you a lot. She wants to follow you home today to see your grandma.

**Asari:** *(The girl smiles)* I like that, Sir.

ACT  
4 SCENE 7

**O**n the road leading to Asari's grandmother's home. The girl's class teacher, Mrs Okpako holds her hand as they talk along.

- Teacher:** Asari, do you like our school?  
**Asari:** Yes, but the girls talk about boys and quarrel a lot.  
**Teacher:** Do you know the boys the girls talk about.  
**Asari:** The tall one. The class monitor, James.  
**Teacher:** Oh, that one. But what do the girls say about him?  
**Asari:** They say he is from Lagos. They say his parents are in London. They say he is going to be rich. Then the girls argue about who will be his wife.  
**Teacher:** Do you like James too?  
**Asari:** Yes, but he is not like King Oguta in Obiaruku. My grandma says King Oguta will touch me one day because I am pretty.  
**Teacher:** King Uguta? Is that the name of the ruler of Obiaruku? And the king will touch you?  
**Asari:** Yes.  
**Teacher:** I see!

ACT  
4 SCENE 8

**A**t Grandma Uli's one-room apartment, the sleeping area with just a mattress on the floor, with a few bags and clothe boxes, all screened off with three women wrappers of different colours on a twine rope from one end of the side wall to the other. The cooking area has a tripod with sticks of wood set between the three legs, but no fire is burning. A few covered pots lie on the bare floor by the fire area. There are four \*\*\* (four-legged stools) in the remaining area by the entrance door. The four \*\*\*, set in no particular order, make up all the furnishing in the room. The two women sit on a \*\*\* each, facing each other. Asari, having since introduced her teacher to Grandma went about her own affairs, dashing in and out of the curtained area. She dished her meal from one of the pots, and sat apart from the women to eat it.

**Teacher:** Thank you, Madam Uli, for welcoming me to your home.

**Grandma Uli:** You are welcome to our humble home. This is the most I could afford in this town since I came here to stay.

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**Teacher:** It's portable, and the area is nice too, most people start that way. I believe very soon you will be able to stay wherever you desire. I came to see you because we have been very curious about Asari.

**Grabdma Uli:** *(Her eyebrows twitching, eyelid raised in some surprised expectation of trouble.)* Is she all right?

**Teacher:** Actually, Asari is fine, very fine. She is doing very well at school, and looks quite healthy too. We have noticed though that Asari is very reserved, does not play freely with the other kids. Our headmaster wants me to see you to check up if everything is okay at home.

**Grandma Uli:** *(She heaves a sigh, apparently relieved nothing very serious had happened.)* Well, you would expect that from a little girl of eight years old in a new school, wouldn't you. I believe with time Asari will adjust and do just well.

**Teacher:** We expect that too, but what is this King Uguta of Obiaruku she is expecting would come over and touch her one day? She said that to me on our way here.

**Grabdma Uli:** *(The twitching of her eyebrows returns, her right fingers moving from her right knee to the left knee in an uneasy fashion.)* In our home town of Obiaruku, our king there is called King

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Uguta, and every young girl expect the king to tough her if she is pretty. It is the dream of every pretty girl to be touched by King Uguta and be made a queen.

**Teacher:**

That's the interesting thing I am curious about. I've been to Obiaruku before. I even spent a month there a few years ago. I know that the king there is called *Okpala'Uku*. And some of the neighbouring towns call their rulers *Igwe*. But I've never heard of this King Uguta before. Isn't that curious?

**Grandma Uli:**

*(The eyebrows still twitching, the fingers moving, and her entire demeanour fidgety.)* I wasn't born in that town. But I began to hear of this King Uguta since I began staying there. And the story about him is the same everywhere. I've never sighted him; no one seems either. But why not let's talk about other matters, please.

ACT  
4 SCENE 9

Under a tree at the bank of River Ethiope. Asari sits alone.

**Asari:** (*Soliloquising*) This holiday is too long. I am bored. I am almost nine years old now. What am I doing here? I wonder what Dunube is doing now at Obiaruku. She may be thinking of me too. Thinking of me? (*Chuckles*) Maybe she thinks I'm dead since I didn't see her to say goodbye before Grandma took me away. I can't even remember what time we left Obiaruku or how we left. Grandma said it was very early in the morning. It was still dark. People were still sleeping. I was sleeping too. She said she grabbed me like this (*Demonstrating with her two hands*), then carried me on her back like this (*Still demonstrating with her hands over her back*), and wrapped me up with one wrapper and secured me firmly with another wrapper which she folded into

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a cord, like a baby. Then zoom! (*Flinging her right hand to show speed.*) We just left. Just like that. We left everybody. Everybody. What was the hurry about anyway? When people go away like that and people don't see them, they think of such people as dead. Dunube! (*She calls to her friend at Obiaruku as though she was nearby.*) Please don't think of me as dead o! I'm not dead. I am here in *Ogara* Waterside. But can you see me? I can't see you except in my mind. I wish I could see you truly in body. I would like to tell you some interesting things about that stupid boy called James in my last class. He is definitely not King Uguta. But people like him a lot, especially those dumb girls in my class. I wish he would fail and repeat Primary 3 so he would not follow us to primary 4.

## LITERARY ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. How does the main and other subordinate characters in the story develop the theme?
2. How does the conflict in the story enhance the main theme?
3. How does the symbols used within the story develop the theme?
4. How does the author's tone enhance the theme of the story?
5. How is one of the story's main themes reflecting the context in which it was written?
6. How does the setting of the story affect the plot?
7. How does the setting of the story affect the conflict?
8. How does the setting of the story affect the tone?
9. What is one of the protagonist's main flaws?
10. What is one of the antagonist's major weaknesses if any?
11. What do you think motivates the protagonist to act according to the story?
12. What motivates the antagonist to act from the story's standpoint?
13. What is the most believable character and why do you feel so?
14. How does the conflict in the story reflect the context of the time in which the story was written?
15. How did the author create a believable conflict within the context of this story?
16. How does the setting and characters interplay in the novel?

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**Vocabulary building/new words**

Find the meaning of the words below to boost your vocabulary. There may be other words you don't understand, mark and find their meanings.

Adventure:-----  
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Grandeur:-----  
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Sauce:-----  
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**BOOKS BY  
MRS. KELICHA OCHONOGOR**

1. The Covered Web
2. The Will Power
3. A Dangling Sword
4. Circles
5. Fabulous Seven
6. Joyce
7. The Enclosed
8. The Incredible Two
9. The Quest for Peace
10. The Visionary Woman of The Twenty-First Century
11. Untold
12. Was Stella Wrong?
13. A Shadow in the Shade
14. Darling, It's Not Working
15. United Nations' Partnership with God
16. Sacrifices of the Virtuous Woman
17. The Power of Choice
18. Understanding the Covenant of Holiness
20. Prayer Enhancers
21. Following the Steps of Giants
22. Understanding Glory
23. As Intended
24. Till Death Do Us Apart?
25. Perfect Standard
26. The Godly Parent
27. A Misleading Tale by Moonlight
28. 7 Things God hates