

# Chapter Seven



## A warning and a lie

**A** few days after she had found the secret armband, Ada was sitting in the shade, repairing a worn mat with new threads of raffia. It was fiddly work, and all the more difficult because she was also watching Papa Eze.

She was worried about him.

Papa was with Mbe, showing him how to lay palm leaves out in the sun. When the leaves were dry, they would be stripped and used to make fibres for weaving. Mbe was nodding, his face as serious as ever.

But Ada could see that Papa was still moving stiffly. Had his pain not eased? Ujo had promised that if Papa revealed his secret, he would feel better...

Papa Eze had not spoken of it again, but Ada could tell that he was still troubled. She put down the mat. Mbe was already heading off, to fetch more bundles of palm. This would be a good time to take Papa some food.

But at that moment, as she stood, she spotted a familiar figure, hurrying towards them through the village.

Mama Ginika was striding purposefully, moving more quickly than Ada had ever seen before, her stick striking at the ground.

It made Ada feel uneasy.

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**P**apa Eze turned to greet Mama Ginika warmly, but in a moment his body language changed.

Ada couldn't hear what they were talking about, but Papa was leaning in, listening intently. After a while he glanced up at the path, the one that led towards the hill and Mama Ginika's home.

And then the old woman was holding both

his hands in hers, and he was nodding.

Suddenly Papa was crossing the garden towards Ada.

“Daughter – hurry now. Run and fetch Mbe as fast as you can.”

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**A**da ran to find Mbe, and when the two of them came back they found Mama Ginika waiting for them at the door. There was no sign of Papa Eze.

“Follow me children. And you – ” she looked at Mbe. “Bring your spear young man.”

“Where are we going?” he asked.

“Not far.”

The old woman set off, walking ahead, and they followed, skirting the edge of the village.

“Where is Papa? What’s happening?” asked Ada.

“Quiet now child! I am too old to walk and talk at the same time.”

She led them out past the grazing cattle, through the long grass to the great baobab

trees. Then she stopped at last to catch her breath.

“Your Papa will join us here soon. Now let’s sit.”

And as the old woman lowered herself to the ground and rested her back against one of the great trunks, she told them what had happened.

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“ I first heard the rumours yesterday, from a trader. I should have paid more attention, but I did not realise what it meant.

“This man – his name is Idris – he used to trade cloth with my husband. They did business together for many years. My husband is long dead, but whenever Idris is passing on the road, he still stops to see how I am and buy some of our best cloth. He is a good man, and he travels, far and wide.

“He visited yesterday and told me of a strange thing. There is a rumour that men

from the Edo city have crossed the river into our lands. Warriors. They are going from village to village, asking questions.” Mama Ginka looked directly at Ada. “ – searching for a herbalist and a girl.”

Ada gasped.

“Don’t worry child, you are safe here. The spirits of these great trees will keep us hidden. I used to play here when I was a child, and once they protected me from a leopard.”

Mbe was staring at Mama Ginka.

“Why are Edo warriors looking for Ada?”

“Wait, let me finish. Today, just this afternoon, I discovered that the rumours were true. A group of men came along the road and stopped at my house. They said they want to find a man called Eze.”

Ada put her hand to her mouth.

“Don’t worry.” The old lady shook her head. “They won’t come yet. I didn’t trust these men, child. I didn’t like the look of them at all,” she tutted. “Even in a different language, I can tell when people are lying to me, so I

told them a small lie of my own. I said that Eze and his daughter had just gone away for a few days, gathering herbs. I told them to hurry after the morning sun, as you had not long left.”

“Thank you Mama!”

“But you haven’t explained!” demanded Mbe. “Why are they hunting for Papa Eze and Ada?”

“That is not our business to know,” replied Mama Ginika. “Unless Ada wishes to tell us. We will wait here until Papa Eze comes. And then we will decide what to do.”

Mama Ginika folded her arms and they sat in silence for a moment, with no sound but the wind in the grass and the birdsong in the branches above them – a pair of bushshrikes flitting back and forth, taking insects to their young.

“I will tell you what I know,” said Ada after a while, looking at Mbe.

And, as the three of them waited for Papa, she told her story, finishing with:

“The Edo warrior chief wanted my mother dead.”

# Chapter Eight



## Papa Eze's plan

**T**he afternoon grew late. Still Papa Eze didn't appear.

Mama Ginika leaned against the tree. Her eyes were closed. But she was not asleep. Every so often Ada noticed her looking towards the village.

Until finally Papa came, stick in hand and bags slung across his back.

"Thank you for looking after these children, Mama."

"It is no trouble at all," she replied. "It is too long since I had a good reason to sit still like this."

Ada helped the old woman to her feet, and she stood leaning on her stick.

"Well Papa, have you decided what to do?" Mama Ginika asked.

"I have. Children, we must leave our home

for a while.”

“So you think these warriors are hunting for you?” frowned Mama Ginika.

“I fear so,” he replied.

“But we don’t have to run,” protested Mbe, raising his spear. “We can fight them!”

But Papa Eze held up his hand.

“You are brave Mbe. And I know our neighbours will help, if we ask. But how many will be hurt? And if we win, will more Edo fighters come? Will we have a war?”

Mbe lowered his spear.

“A time to use your spear will come,” said Papa. “But it is not now.”

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**M**ama Ginika stood watching, a lone figure beneath the trees, as they walked away.

Papa Eze went ahead. Ada and Mbe followed. The moon was rising now, and the sounds of the savannah changed. The calls of birds were replaced by a chorus of insects, and the

yap and scuffle of animals hunting out in the long grass.

After a while, Papa found a rock for them to sit against and said they should take turns to keep watch. He would stay awake first.

As Ada fell asleep, she tried to make sense of the day.

It seemed to her that she was no longer sure where home was. The village that she had grown up in was not the land of her ancestors.

Her ancestors were Edo. And now the Edo were hunting her.

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**A**da opened her eyes but the sun had not yet risen. Papa had got a fire going.

“Wake up children,” he was saying softly.

Beside her, Mbe was sitting up yawning.

“This is for you. And this for you,” Papa passed each of them one of the bags he’d brought from home.

“Food for three days. Supplies. Ada, your

armlet is in here too, wrapped up safely. Keep it hidden until you reach your new home.”

They looked at each other – what did he mean? – but then he held their hands in his.

“We must go separate ways for a while. The Edo warriors will soon find out that we left together. They will search for an old man travelling with two children. We must not be seen with each other.”

“Do not worry Papa Eze,” said Mbe. “I will die before I let any harm come to Ada.”

Ada nodded – “Yes, we will be fine” – but she did not feel as brave and certain as she sounded and wondered if it was the same with Mbe.

Papa had been warming a pot over the fire. It now began to steam and he lifted it off with a stick. He divided the liquid into three carved bowls.

“Drink, both of you. It will give you strength.”

Ada cupped the bowl and breathed in the sweet aroma.

“It is good,” said Mbe.

And Papa explained.

“When it is light I want you to travel as fast as you can. You will be quicker without me. As soon as the sun rises, put it behind you and walk west. By the afternoon you will reach the great river.”

He leaned forward with his stick, and by the firelight he scratched a line in the earth.

“When you reach the river – here – turn aside. Follow the flow of the water. Keep walking for a day then ask for a man named Chief Iwe.”

He looked at them to make sure they had understood.

Mbe nodded solemnly.

“And will you be following us Papa?” asked Ada. “Shall we wait for you?”

“I will not be following. I have a different journey to make. But I will find you. We will meet again as soon as it is safe, I promise.”

“But why Chief Iwe? Who is this man?”

Papa Eze stirred the fire. He collected the bowls together and packed them away. Then

he looked at Ada.

“He is the one who sheltered your brother.”

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**A**nd by the firelight, Papa Eze told them how he had saved the Edo queen’s newborn twins, but then been chased by the warrior chief’s men.

He had stumbled through the trees and along hidden paths, ever fearful of the warriors behind him. His legs had cried out for rest but he had ignored the pain and kept moving, carrying both children, one in each aching arm.

And when he’d thought he could go no further, he had found help. At the river’s edge, a man was sitting beside a canoe.

“Greetings friend. Where are you running to?”

As Papa had collapsed, the man rushed to help.

He shared his food and water. And while Papa drank, the man had taken one of the

infants and cradled him.

“We must keep these children safe, and never speak of this day,” both had agreed.

The man knew of a village where the head man – Chief Iwe – was always looking for help to work his land. He was said to be happy to take in orphans, to give them shelter. So there would surely be a place for the infant boy there.

And before any watching eyes in the forest could see them, each went his own way, each with a new child to care for. One with the girl. The other with the boy. Separating the twins was the best way to protect them.

Papa finished the story, then settled back to sleep.

“Rest now daughter,” he said, as the fire flickered low. “Tomorrow you must travel fast. Go with my blessing and find your brother.”