

# Chapter Nineteen



## A resting place

**T**hey stopped outside the clearing.

“Is this the city?” whispered Madu, peering to get a better view.

“No,” laughed the tall warrior. “This is just a small place used by our people for travellers to rest. Wait here. I will go ahead and find us food and shelter.”

When he had gone, Amenze gathered the children around him.

“You can stay here safe for a few days.” He gestured to the tall warrior – “Chief Osawe here will watch over you while I go on to the city and make arrangements. I must speak to the guildsmen. I will be gone for a few days. You rest and regain your strength. And learn what you can of our Edo language.”

“I speak it already.”

“I know Madu – so you can teach the others.”

When we reach the city, we will all need to speak Edo. Especially Nosa and Ada, for they may meet the sky-king, their father.”

Madu nodded solemnly.

“I will be a good teacher.”

Ada glanced at Nosa. It had not occurred to her, until now, that this is where their journey might take them – to the Ogiso himself. Ever since leaving home her only thought had been to escape from danger and find Papa Eze again. She had never dreamt that her path might lead her this way, towards the very heart of the Edo kingdom – towards the sky-king himself.

Nosa seemed untroubled. Despite his exhaustion he was holding his head up.

“I will learn Edo,” he said.

“Remember,” said Amenze, “while you are here, be careful. Chief Obiro’s men may stop here too, so do not tell anyone who you really are.”

“We’ll be careful.”

Now Chief Osawe returned.

“Come. I have found a good place for us to stay.”

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**A** deep, impenetrable blackness settled through the rainforest and the Edo people drew into their round houses, shutting out the night.

In their travellers’ shelter at the edge of the clearing, Chief Osawe fastened the screen across the doorway. In the distance they could hear the splash of a river, though no boats travelled on it during the night. Ada remembered Kene’s warnings about crocodiles.

Then, before they all settled down to sleep, Amenze finished his story.

“Ada, you asked how I was sure who you were when we met again at the forest border. I will tell you.”

He pointed to her wrist – to the armlet.

“As soon as I saw this precious thing, I was certain. I have seen it before, you see, many

years ago. When I was an apprentice, I helped my own master to make it. It was gift for your mother, Queen Akele.”

Ada looked at him in wonder.

“You made this?”

“Yes – at least I helped to. And I believe its return to the city now is a sign. Maybe it was sent by Ogun himself! When your father sees what a fine daughter he has – and what a fine son – he will recognise the truth. And Chief Obiro will be punished.”

# Chapter Twenty



## Speaking Edo

**A**t first it was strange living in the rainforest. The children stayed close to their lodgings. They kept to themselves, sitting quietly at the edge of the clearing, watching tradesmen and travellers come and go on their way to and from the Edo city.

On the first night Ada had lain awake for a long while, worrying that Chief Iwe and his men were creeping in from the border with their knives, coming silently through the trees – but when she had finally fallen asleep, she'd dreamed that the forest paths began to twist around Chief Iwe, doubling back on him until he became lost. And all the while Chief Osawe and his warriors were watching from the trees, ready with their spears.

The next night Chief Iwe did not return to her

dreams – or any night after that.

They rested and Nosa's injuries continued to heal.

Madu helped Ada with the food. There seemed to be no shortage here – yams, beans, okra. And a new fruit that they had not seen before, but so sweet that the children delighted in stripping its tough skin from the long cane and chewing it greedily to get at its juice. Chief Osawe told them it was called okwere.

The small village in a vast sea of green began to feel like a sort of home. Or at least, in its own way, it felt safe.

In the evenings, Chief Osawe sat with them, telling them stories and playing akhue, a skillful game of spinning and knocking down seeds. Madu soon became obsessed by it.

And all the time now they spoke in Edo.

Gradually, like the forest itself, the Edo language began to seep into Ada's mind – and without noticing she began to speak and think in new words.

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A few days later Amenze returned. He sat down gratefully, resting his legs. And setting aside his bag he accepted the cocoyam porridge that Ada and Madu had been preparing together.

“My friends,” he smiled. “Has young Madu been a good teacher? Can you all speak in the Edo tongue now?”

“Yes, I understand you now Amenze,” replied Ada.

“I too,” said Nosa. “I am ready to meet the king, our father.”

Amenze nodded.

“That is good Nosa, for it is the plan I have made. Tomorrow we will go on to the city. And when we arrive, the guildsmen will meet you in secret, and speak with you both. After that... if all goes well, we will enter the palace.”

# Chapter Twenty-One



## The Edo city

**T**he journey to the heart of the rainforest took them another three days. On the third morning, the path twisted along beside a river, and they began to see men fishing from canoes beneath the overhanging trees – small craft like the one Kene had rescued them in – and larger boats too, being paddled and steered along on the current.

Across the river the path joined a wider trail. Then another.

And suddenly the forest ended.

A great trench – large beyond imagining – had been dug out of the ground with a bank rising up behind it. This earthwork stretched away into the distance on either side, as if a giant had scored a deep line in the earth and scratched away all the tangled vegetation.

On one side of the line was the rainforest. On the other side was another world.

The great Edo city.

Ada would never forget her first sight of it.

The city was so bright in the sun! The sky opened wide and clear above her for the first time in days. And beyond the long trench stretched an open landscape of cultivated lands: neatly tended crop gardens with homes dotted among them beneath well kept groves of fruit trees and palms.

Further off in the distance, the city itself could be seen, where the buildings were larger and arranged more closely together. Even from here Ada could see that their thatched roofs were well maintained, and the walls beneath them freshly finished in reds and ochres. Above many of the larger buildings, trees waved in the gentle breeze, casting shade over hidden courtyard gardens beneath.

There were people everywhere – working in the land, talking together in groups, carrying

goods into and out of the city along a network of paths. A line of warriors was jogging towards the trench, fully armed with swords and spears.

“See that wide road straight ahead? It leads to the great palace,” said Amenze softly. “But we will take a different way, for now.”

Chief Osawe was raising his hand in greeting towards the guards beside the earth bank, and they nodded back.

Amenze led the children onto a path that widened into a narrow lane.

Ada marvelled – its surface was smooth beneath her feet, pressed with fragments of pottery. And as they came into the city itself, she saw that the red clay walls of the buildings on either side were polished smooth.

“You will stay here, at my home,” said Amenze and he ushered the children into a large compound with many thatched houses.

He gestured to a small empty building.

“Wait here and rest,” he said. “My family will

bring you food, but nobody will bother you.”

The four children settled down to wait – and to talk about the amazing place they had come to.

“I’ve heard stories about the forest city, but I never imagined it would be anything like this,” said Mbe. “Did you see that great ditch?”

Nosa nodded.

“Now I want to meet my father, more than ever.”

Ada looked across the compound to the crowded street, just visible through the doorway. She thought about Papa Eze, Mama Ginika and the village where she’d lived her whole life, and it seemed suddenly very small.

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**T**hey rested all day. Then, when it was dark, Amenze returned.

He led the children out

“We must go quickly. The guildsmen are waiting.”