

A Note About This Story

This is a story about life in Africa before the Europeans came, and about the destruction of this life by the Europeans. The people in the story lived in a district of Nigeria called Umuofia. The people of Umuofia were farmers. They produced goods, such as palm oil, that the Europeans wanted.

Umuofia was a small district of nine villages. The people of these villages belonged to the same clan. A clan is a group of people who live together and share the same customs¹. In the time of war, all the people of the clan helped each other and fought together.

The religion of these people was not Christianity. The clansmen had many different gods. Some of the gods were very important. One of the most important gods protected the crops, and she was called the Earth Goddess. Some of the gods belonged to a man's family and wooden figures of these gods were kept in one of the family huts. The clan believed that their customs pleased the gods, and they believed their gods would punish people who broke these customs.

The people of Umuofia did not know much about the rest of the world. They grew their own food and made their own things. The clan had its own customs, religion and leaders. The way of life in Umuofia had not changed for a long time, but the people were free. They made their own decisions and they chose their own leaders. In Umuofia, a man could become a leader as a result of his own work and ability.

¹ **customs**

the ways of life of a group of people, which make them different from other people. For example, their way of arranging marriages, cooking and eating food, burying people etc.

The People in This Story

Okonkwo	a famous man in Umuofia
Unoka	Okonkwo's father
Nwoye	Okonkwo's eldest son
Ikemefuna	a boy from another clan
Ekwefi	Okonkwo's second wife
Ojiugo	Okonkwo's third and youngest wife
Ezinma	Okonkwo's daughter
Obierika	Okonkwo's closest friend
Ezeudu	the oldest man in Umuofia
Uchendu	Okonkwo's uncle from Mbanta
Mr Kiaga	head of the church in Mbanta
Chielo	the priestess of the God, Agbala
Mr Brown	the first English missionary in Umuofia
Mr Smith	the second English missionary in Umuofia
The District Commissioner	the English administrator of the district

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Okonkwo

Okonkwo lived in a small village called Iguedo, in the district of Umuofia. There were nine villages in Umuofia. Okonkwo was well-known by everyone in the other eight villages near his home and even by people living a long way away.

Okonkwo first became famous when he was a young man. At eighteen years old, Okonkwo fought the best

wrestler² in all Umuofia and he won the match. He put the other man flat on his back on the floor. And everyone was proud of Okonkwo.

Okonkwo was now nearly forty years old. His fame had grown like a bush fire³ and he was very famous indeed. He was tall and big and he walked like someone with springs in his feet. He had thick black eyebrows over his eyes. His nose was wide. If you did not know Okonkwo, and if you just looked at him, you would think he was a serious man and not very kind to people.

Sometimes Okonkwo would be very angry. When he was angry, Okonkwo could not say what he wanted to say. So he used his hands instead of words, and he hit people.

Okonkwo's father died ten years ago. His father was called Unoka. Unoka was a very lazy person and he did not like to work. He did not like seeing blood and he was afraid of fighting. Unoka had been poor all his life because he never saved any money.

² **wrestler**

to wrestle is to fight a man by holding him and pushing him to the ground. A wrestler is a man who fights in this way.

³ **bush fire**

a fire which moves very quickly from one tree to another.

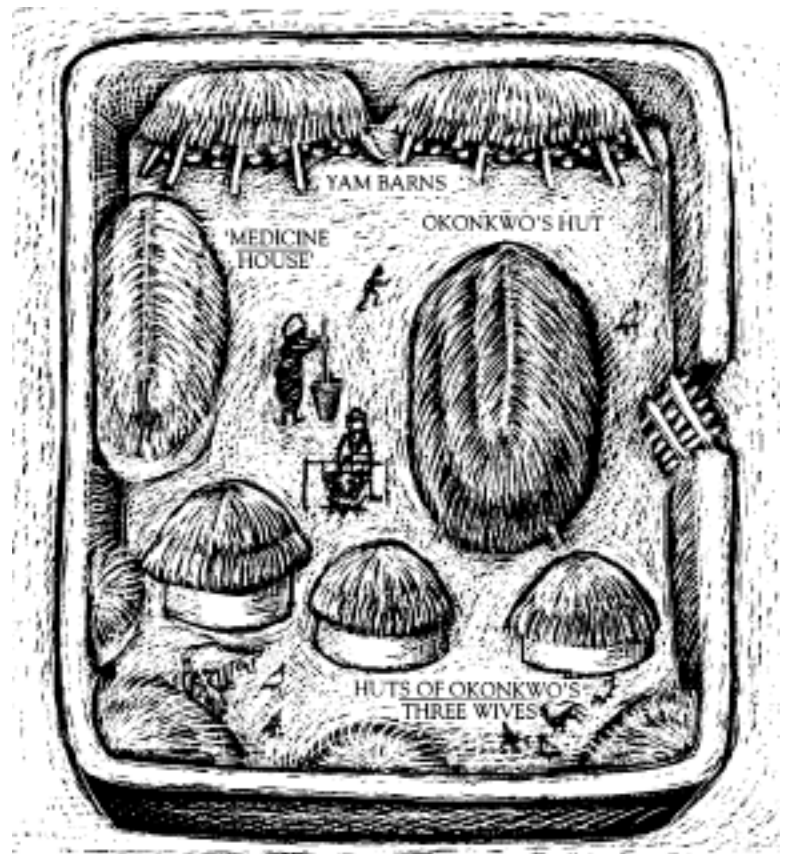
When Unoka had some money he always spent it on lots of palm wine⁴. He asked all his friends to come to his hut and drink the wine with him. They used to have a very happy time, sitting in a circle, drinking and singing songs. He was a sad-looking man and only seemed to be happy when he was making music. Music made Unoka very happy.

Okonkwo was ashamed⁵ of his father. Okonkwo hated men who were lazy. And, as he was strong and brave, he hated men who were afraid of fighting in battles and wars.

When Unoka died, he left nothing for his wife and children. Okonkwo wanted to be strong and rich and powerful but he began with nothing. In the village it was not important who your father was. People knew that Okonkwo could do great things.

A few years later, Okonkwo had married three wives. He owned a large farm and he had a large compound with a thick wall with a thick wall of red earth round it.

Okonkwo's hut was built behind the only gate in the red walls of the compound. Each of his three wives had her own hut. Two barns were at one end of the compound,



⁴ **palm wine**

an alcoholic drink which comes from a palm tree. *To tap a palm tree* is to make a hole in the tree to take out the liquid in the tree. The liquid is made into wine.

⁵ **be ashamed of someone**

to feel unhappy because someone important to you, like your father or your mother, does foolish things.

and they were full of yams⁶. At the other end of the compound there was a shed for the goats and each wife had built a small hut for chickens near her own hut.

There was a special house near the barns. Okonkwo kept the wooden figures of his family gods in this house. It was the family shrine and Okonkwo often went there to pray for himself and his family and to give gifts to his gods.

Okonkwo had become one of the greatest men in Umuofia at that time. Everyone in his clan respected⁷ him because he was not like his father.

⁶ **yam**

a large vegetable which grows in the ground. It is like a very large potato. It makes very good food.

⁷ **respect someone**

to be polite to someone because he or she works hard and does well. To think very well of a person.