

Akara-Ogun Meets Agbako

(Excerpt from “Forest of A Thousand Daemons,” Wole Soyinka’s translation of D.O. Fagunwa’s Yoruba literary masterpiece)



On the third day of my sojourn in the forest of Irunmole, I woke up and ate. Unfortunately, I ate so much that I forgot all the charms I needed at the foot of the palm tree. All I remembered to carry were my gun, cutlass and hunting-bag, which I slung over my shoulder, and headed to the forest.

I started encountering game soon after entering the forest, but they went helter-skelter, evading my shots. Soon after, I heard a rumbling that sounded like six hefty men approaching. It was Agbako, a sixteen-eyed monster whose tales I had often heard from my predecessors. Seeing him, I was terrified.

Once he saw me, I became his target. When I felt he was too close, I ordered the road to seize him, but not only did it seize him, I was also seized and thrust right in front of Agbako. Terrified, I conjured earth to return me to the road; it did, but Agbako was right there waiting for me. Now, I invoked ogede and commanded the road to take him to the bush to be bound by forest ropes, but I was not spared by this as well. When the thongs began to strangle me, I yelled to be released and set back on the road; it happened, but Agbako was there again to receive me. Fed up, we began wrestling, sweating profusely, our eyeballs reddened, the ground shone brightly; yet no one toppled the other. Soon, I was exhausted, but not he. I untwined my arms, but he held me fast and only released me when he perceived my tiredness.

I was exhausted, but not he. I untwined my arms, but he held me fast and only released me when he perceived my tiredness.



Agbako sat down and served us palm-wine, which he got from a gourd in his pouch. After I had rested a while and the palm-wine was almost exhausted, he said we should resume our strife, which we did. After wrestling for a while, I drew my cutlass, slipped behind him, and slammed him on the back of his head, but the cutlass broke into two while he was unscathed. Surprisingly, he joined the broken cutlass, made it new again and said the fight should continue. Completely exhausted, I hit him on the side with my cutlass, but he in turn cut my arm and the cutlass off with his sword, and I came crashing to the ground in deep pain.

While I groaned in pain, Agbako took my missing arm, fitted it on the stump, spat on his hand, and when he had rubbed the spittle on the joint, my hand returned to normal as though it was never cut off. Then he looked at me, laughed and said the contest must continue. In terror, I said to myself “E-ya! Is this not the certain approach of the end?” So I cried aloud: “Spirits of the woods! Pilgrims of the road! - hasten to my rescue!”

Shortly after, all beings in the forest of Irunmole came, ghommids, birds and animals, yet Agbako acted like he saw no one. He pulled me up and we grappled anew, with him returning every blow I gave him while the leaves and the forest were in dead silence.



One of the ghommids that had been watching us signaled to Agbako to release me, which he did. Then he gave me a slice of kola-nut, which I ate and instantly regained a new vitality and strength equal to that of sixteen men. I charged at Agbako and seized him by the neck till he bellowed like a beast, which made all the ghommids cheer. But when I tried to lift him up and smash him to the ground, his foot was firm and did not move at all. He, in turn, tried to lift my legs, but I too was firm and did not feel any of his kicks and blows. Then his entire body turned scorching hot and his breath was like a violent storm. And then, to prove that he was indeed Agbako the master, he stomped his feet, and the earth opened and swallowed both of us.

Below the earth, I found myself in a strange house, but there was no sign of Agbako. Not until the day of our journey to mount Langbodo would I encounter him again, but I will never forget what I experienced until my escape from the depths of the earth.