

THE PEOPLE OF EKUKU

Ojee couldn't contain his joy as he peeped through the back door, spotting his mother walking down the long, tacky road to his father's compound. Iche Ezeugo, a name known and loved by all in Ekuku, was cherished for his selfless and loving nature toward the people of the village.

Ekuku, often referred to as the land of peace among neighboring villages, faced a period of uncertainty after the passing of King Ebube. The situation began to deteriorate, and even King Ucheagu, who inherited the throne, seemed indifferent to the plight of the people. Iche Ezeugo did his utmost to maintain peace, but King Ebube remained apathetic.

Mama Ojee, as she was affectionately called, had gone to Ikedi, a neighboring village, to attend a funeral for her long-time friend who had passed away a few months earlier. Upon seeing her son Ojee, she smiled and waved, and Ojee dashed toward her with excitement.

Meanwhile, Iche Ezeugo was engrossed in his nightly ritual outside his compound, a practice he had inherited from his late father and grandfather. Every evening, he would pour spirits three times on the ground and invoke his ancestors. Spotting his wife from afar, he smiled.

The people of Ekuku were growing increasingly discontented with the state of affairs in their village. No one seemed to care about their well-being, whether they had enough to eat, or even whether they lived or died. Ekuku was no longer the peaceful haven it once was, yet they persevered in their efforts to maintain their sanity.

One fateful morning, King Ucheagu gathered his chiefs and candidly expressed his concerns about his health and weariness in ruling Ekuku. He acknowledged that while he had tried to follow in his father's footsteps, he was not his father and couldn't continue in

the same manner. He sought their advice on the way forward and gave them three eke market days to ponder it.

News of the king's unusual request reached Iche Ezeugo, and he simply said, "May our ancestors provide answers," as he savored the sweet aroma of his wife's yam porridge. He reminisced about how he had pursued and won her heart years ago, surpassing numerous rivals. Nne Ojee's beauty was unparalleled.

Ojee admired his father and aspired to emulate him one day, valuing humility and discipline. He commanded respect from many in the village, and they wished he could be their king.

The day arrived for the chiefs to provide their feedback on who the next king should be. King Ucheagu sat on his throne, deep in thought. After years of having only daughters—Erimma, Olaedo, and Ugomma, who were far away in the city and disinterested in their father's kingdom—he was faced with a difficult decision.

Mazi Amadi stood up after much deliberation and delivered a lengthy speech, ultimately proposing Iche Ezeugo as the rightful candidate for kingship. The other chiefs exchanged puzzled glances, questioning their king's intentions. It was unheard of for a non-royal to ascend to the throne.

King Ucheagu listened intently as each cabinet member offered their suggestions, promising to deliver his verdict soon. The news reached Iche Ezeugo, reminding him of a recent dream in which a stranger passed a rod to him. He shook his head, praying for guidance from the gods.

The people of Ekuku gathered in the town square as instructed by the king, anxious to learn his decision. Men, women, and children assembled, waiting in anticipation. For the first time in Ekuku's history, someone not of royal birth was about to be crowned.

After several hours, King Ucheagu arrived with his cabinet members, welcomed the people, and delivered a brief speech before announcing his decision: Iche Ezeugo would be the new king. Cheers erupted, echoing through the town square, as Ekuku celebrated with unbridled joy.

Iche Ezeugo maintained a composed demeanor, looking up at the sky. Ojee watched his father, a tear escaping his eye, and hoped that Ekuku would soon return to its former glory. Beside her husband, Nne Ojee remained silent, knowing the immense responsibility that lay ahead. Deep down, she understood that this was a significant challenge.

Summoned by the king, Iche Ezeugo stood before the throne and expressed his gratitude for being considered worthy to rule. He had initially contemplated declining the offer but recalled the dream and promptly accepted, eliciting resounding shouts from the people of Ekuku.

With Iche Ezeugo as their new king, Ekuku underwent a remarkable transformation, and it would never be the same again!