

Penguin



Readers

Yaa.
Gyasi
HOME
GOING

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CHAPTER ONE

Effia

On the night Effia Otcher was born, in the land of the Fante people, a fierce fire burned through the woods near her village. It moved quickly for days and destroyed everything in its path until it reached an Asante village and finally stopped.

Effia's father, Cobbe Otcher, left the new baby with his first wife, Baaba, to look after while he inspected the damage to the **crops** in his fields. Some of the villagers thought Effia had brought bad luck because of the fire, and Baaba did not like her. When Effia cried, Baaba covered her mouth with her hand to try and quieten her down.

"You have to love her," Cobbe told Baaba. But Baaba could not. Sometimes, Baaba dreamed of leaving Effia in the forest alone.

Effia was three years old when Baaba's first son, Fiifi, was born. Once, when Baaba let Effia hold Fiifi, she accidentally dropped him. Fiifi was not hurt, and he did not cry, but Baaba was angry. She beat Effia across her back with a stick. By the time Baaba had finished, Effia was covered in **bruises** and could not stop crying. When Cobbe came home and saw what Baaba had done to Effia, he was angry. He beat Baaba, just as she had beaten Effia.

Effia grew to be a very beautiful girl and many men in the village wanted to marry her. They gave gifts to Cobbe and Baaba in the hope that Cobbe would allow them to marry Effia when she was old enough.

One day, a British soldier came to Effia's village to marry a girl called Adwoa. Adwoa was the first girl in their village who had been approached by a British man for marriage, and Effia was **curious** about the arrangement.

"Can I come with you to show him the village?" Effia asked her parents.

"No," said Baaba.

"Yes," said Cobbe.

Effia ignored Baaba and went to see the soldier with them. It was the first time she had ever seen a white man and she was scared. When he reached out his hand for Effia to shake, she took a step backward and hid behind her father's leg.

Cobbe and Baaba showed the soldier around the village. They showed him their mud huts with **straw** roofs and their fishing boats made from tree trunks.

"Baaba? Why is Adwoa going to marry this man?" Effia asked, as Cobbe and the man walked ahead.

"Because her mother says so," said Baaba.

Later, the white man came back with servants carrying money and **goods** such as iron and cloth for Adwoa's mother.

"Do you know what's happening?" Cobbe asked Effia.

"Yes," said Effia. "The white man came to take Adwoa away."

"Good," said Cobbe with a nod. "The white men live in the Cape Coast Castle. There, they **trade** goods with us, the Fante people."

"So, they give us things like iron and cloth?" asked Effia.

Cobbe nodded. "Yes, they give us iron and cloth, but we have to give them things in return."

“Like Adwoa?”

“Yes,” said Cobbe with a sad smile. “And more white men like him will come to try and take our daughters away. But not you. I have big plans for you. You will marry a man in our village.”

Effia already knew who she wanted to marry. His name was Abeeku Badu. He was the next man in line to be the village **chief** and he was handsome. Cobbe had already arranged for Effia and Abeeku to share a meal together later in the week.

“Did you go to Adwoa’s wedding **ceremony**?” Baaba asked Abeeku while they ate.

“Yes, I was there,” said Abeeku. “It’s sad that Adwoa will be leaving the village to live in the Castle. She would have made a good wife.”

“Will you work for the British when you become chief?” Effia asked.

“We work with the British, not for them,” Abeeku told Effia with a smile. “When I am chief, things will continue like normal. We’ll keep on helping the British with the Asante **trade**.”

Effia nodded, though she was not sure what Abeeku meant by “Asante trade.” The Asante were another group of people who lived in their country.

“You will let me know when Effia is ready for marriage,” Abeeku said to Baaba once he had finished eating. Baaba nodded, but she did not look happy.

That night, Baaba woke Effia up.

“When you get your first monthly blood, you must hide it. You must tell me and no one else. Do you understand, Effia?”

Effia had never seen such a look of desperation in her mother's eyes before.

"Yes," she said. "I understand."

"What's it like in the Castle?" Baaba asked.

Effia and Baaba were having lunch with a girl called Millicent and her mother. They were from another Fante village, but Millicent's mother had married a British soldier.

Baaba was very interested in Millicent's mother's life in the Castle.

"It's fine," said Millicent's mother. "They take care of you in the Castle."

Baaba moved closer to Millicent's mother, but Effia could still hear her. "And did he pay your mother a lot of money to marry you?"

"Yes!" said Millicent's mother. "The money they give you is very, very good, but I have to be honest. I wouldn't want my daughter to marry a white man. She would have to live in the Castle, far away from me. It's better if your daughter marries a man in the village, so she can stay close to you."

Baaba nodded and turned to look at Effia. Effia quickly looked away.

Two days after her fifteenth birthday, Effia's first monthly blood appeared.

"Baaba, I have gotten my blood."

Baaba covered her mouth with her hand. "Who else knows?"

"No one," said Effia.

“Good,” said Baaba. “Keep it that way. If anyone asks if you have become a woman yet, you must say no. Do you understand?”

“Why?”

Baaba reached into Effia’s mouth and grabbed her tongue sharply. “Don’t question me! If you don’t listen to me, I’ll make sure you never speak again. Do you understand?”

Effia nodded. For the rest of the night, she could taste the blood on her tongue.

The next week, the old chief died and Abeeku became the new chief of the village. At the chief ceremony, Cobbe was unhappy.

“My daughter should be standing next to him,” said Cobbe. “Is she really not ready to be married yet?”

“No,” said Baaba.

After three days as the new village chief, Abeeku announced that he had a plan to make their village even more **powerful**. He brought all the men in the village together to tell them his plan.

“What are they going to do?” asked Effia.

“That’s none of your business,” said Baaba.

Effia turned to her brother Fiifi. Although he was younger than her, because he was a boy he was allowed in the meeting with Abeeku and the men.

“What are they going to do?” Effia asked Fiifi.

“You’re a girl; you don’t need to know about the business of men,” said Fiifi.

“You’re not a man yet,” said Effia.

“And you’re not a woman! If you were, you would’ve married Abeeku by now.”

Effia started to cry. She turned to go away, but Fiifi suddenly grabbed her arm.

“We’re helping the British and the Asante with their trade,” said Fiifi.

“Oh,” said Effia. “We’re going to give Asante goods, like gold and cloth, to the white men?”

“Don’t be stupid,” said Fiifi. “Abeeku has made an arrangement with one of the most powerful Asante villages. We’re going to help them sell their **slaves** to the British.”

The white men returned to Effia’s village, this time to approve some goods Abeeku had promised them.

Baaba took Effia to meet them. There were two of them and they followed Abeeku into his hut. Abeeku introduced the white men to his family.

“Who is this?” the older of the two white men asked, pointing at Effia. He smiled at her. “Is she your wife?”

“No, she’s not my wife,” said Abeeku. He sounded annoyed so Effia looked away. She was so embarrassed. She wanted to break her promise to Baaba and tell Abeeku she was ready for marriage, but she was too scared to say anything.

The older white man was called James Collins and he was the **governor** of Cape Coast Castle. He returned to the village a week later and asked Baaba if he could marry Effia.

“No!” shouted Cobbe. “She has to marry Abeeku!”