

**Ìwà:
A
Phoenix's
Appearing**



Tito O'tobi

Ìwà: A Phoenix's Appearing is a short folk story written by Tito O'tobi. The story follows a sequence of events that brings Oòduwà in contact with a princess while he is running away from his destiny as predicted by the oracle at Òyó.

This short story is an excerpt from the popular trilogy, The Hunchback of Langbodo.

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In the heat of his anger, Oòduwà stormed out of the village of Òyó and only after seven days did he realize that he had been walking in a totally different direction than he had come with the procession of priestesses and Àgbonirègún. It was one of the things that made Òyó village unconquerable by external forces. The priestesses had nestled their abode between seven mountains and several hills that closed the village in a circle and almost all routes along the valley floor was identical. Most visitors could not easily pick out which route by which they had come in. It was not uncommon to see invaders and spies lose all sense of direction as soon as they found their way into the village. They were often captured by the priestesses and made examples of. Visitors sometimes came in and had to be accompanied on their way out. In Oòduwà's case he had come in through a North-west valley route and left through a direct east valley route.

He had been so blinded by his fury; he didn't even know which direction he had been travelling. Moreso, he had entered Òyó during dark hours. When he realized his error, he quickly took solace in the fact that he had his hunting gear with him and feeding will not be a real problem, there were numerous animals he could kill for food. He however knew it would take a longer time than usual before he could find his way back to *Ilé-Ifè* because now he lacked the privileged guidance of Àgbonirègún's charms.

The ever-potent charm that directed him back to the village, no matter how far he ventured into the forest. All he had to do was place the bound charm, *egbé* to his lips and speak incantations stating where he wanted to go as he had been taught to do it. In an instant, a bright star appeared in the sky above him and he followed the star till he got home. For best results, he had been advised to carry out the process before leaving home and note the side of him which the star took as he left home.

And it always worked.

Àgbonirègún's wisdom was unmatched by any priest. Now he had lost it.

He had not even taken the charm with him when he left Òyó. He had been stripped of all amulets and charms before entering Yemoja's presence. In his desperation, he looked up again but there was no star above. Not even a faint one. Everywhere was damp and it looked like rain was about to fall. The wind blew heavily around him, howling in the trees overhead. He briefly regretted leaving the procession but threw down the thought before it could gain a foothold on his mind. He continued his journey in the direction he had been going. At least, that was what his instinct told him to do even though he knew it was contrary to reason. He deeply didn't feel like returning to *Ilé-Ifè* just yet. He felt Àgbonirègún and his wife had betrayed him. He even wondered why Ìyá had led the procession. She was not a priestess of Yemoja. She was just a priestess.

The rain poured down in torrents and he was drenched. In the battering rain, he picked up strange movements ahead of him. It was probably an animal looking for somewhere to hide and was probably drawn to the warmth of his body. He picked up his sharpened spear. The one that had been specially forged for him when he had encountered the priest of Ògún, the deity of the hearth place in the jungle sixty years ago. He raised it to his chin, anticipating the approach of the animal.

There was no animal.

For the first time in years, he felt deep fear. He had no charms. The rain poured down around him. He ran in the direction of the sound ahead of him ducking behind trees occasionally. The rain continued for two whole days only slowing down to an occasional drizzle. The ground

beneath him was wet and mushy but he continued deep into the forest. The rain made it easy for him to catch animals but difficult to prepare and make them edible so he survived only on fruits.

Then on the third day, as he sat on a large stone sharpening his spear in the rain, he heard movements in the forest. The same sound he had heard two days earlier.

Someone was stalking him. His muscles bulged as his senses quickened and his heart sped up almost two times its normal speed. Whoever it was, had been on him for two days. That's a lot of patience for even the most skilled hunters and warriors among men. He knew instinctively that he was encountering an extremely potent adversary.

He scanned the skies and the trees above. Everything seemed normal. Birds whistled, insects chirped. Then in a blink of an eye, a lightning bolt struck the earth a few distance away from him. The brightness momentarily blinded him. When he opened his eye, the earth that had been wet where he sat was dry and there was a round stone at his feet half buried in the earth.

He picked it up. It was hot and smoking. A lightning bolt. He had been missed narrowly by a lightning bolt. The alarm in his muscles rushed to his brain.

Only one being threw lightning bolts and he is not human. Sàngó.

He ran off into the jungle with the bolt still in his left grip and his spear in his right. He had never wrestled a deity. It was an impossible feat. After running for an hour, he got to a flowing stream that crossed his path. There was no means of crossing. He stopped.

Heaving.

He looked up the stream, then down the stream. There was no means of crossing. It was too deep to swim. Just at that moment, he heard the sound of someone approaching cautiously from behind him. He gripped his spear firmly without turning around and without giving a hint that he sensed the approaching presence. But he listened closely. The sound seemed to descend. At the moment he felt the approaching sound was within range of his spear, he turned around in an instant and launched the spear at the approaching presence.

He had launched the spear before seeing what had been stalking him. As he turned to face his adversary, he was met with the most terrifying sight ever.

Gripping in one hand, the head of the spear he lunged, was the most beautiful animal he had ever seen but he didn't know what kind of animal it was. It had short hands that looked like a man's and stood on two legs. It was covered with flame coloured feathers that shone brightly as fire could and it had a face characterized by long hair like a woman with beautiful white eyes that could probably melt a man's heart. At the moment, it didn't look too pleased with its attacker but it had not been injured. As he watched, its wide eyes grew into narrow slits. The lightning bolt burned in his left palm reminding him to show no mercy. Not even to this strange but beautiful birdlike creature. It had wings folded in its back.

He drew his spear back from the animal's grip, tearing its hand. In a flash, he lunged again with his spear at the strange beast's heart chanting incantations. In a flash of fire, the animal took on a fearsome nature, rushing at Oòduwà like a wild cat. It transfigured in mid-air into a humanoid form with only its short arm remaining. It knocked the arm on Oòduwà who raised his left hand to defend the coming blow. Oòduwà felt his bone crack on the left hand. The hand instantly dropped to his side and felt limp with the creature's nail tearing a scratch on the left

side of his face as it came down with the broken arm but Oòduwà continued the struggle for his life with only his right hand. He caught the animal on its side with his spear. The animal let out a deep growl and crashed upon him. And with its left limb, knocked off his spear from his hand. Both were injured but only Oòduwà bled. He knew he had not eaten strong food in a long time and bleeding would make him lose strength quickly. The fight continued for almost six hours with the two circling and rolling over each other and knocking each other against any nearby object. Oòduwà was getting confused. Most animals would have given up and ran into the bush. Then at a crucial moment when the animal had seemed to be gaining strength and he was losing strength, his weapons were all shattered and lay broken all over the floor and the sun had risen high over head, he caught a glimpse of the spear head reflecting bright sunlight where it lay. The reflecting beam was sharp. He had bled all over the floor and could barely walk two steps without falling. He pretended to circle his opponent and made his way slowly to the spear head that lay on the floor and with the blood oozing from wounds all over him, he found the brightest part of the clearing beside the stream from where the sun's rays shined brightest. In an instant, his adversary pounced on him, knocking him to the ground beside the spear head. He turned the spear head so it reflected its rays directly in the beast's eye. It winced and in that moment of his opponent's blindness, Oòduwà saved his own life by knocking the only instrument he had kept firmly in his hand all through the fight without using it - the lightning bolt in his left hand. His left fingers had clutched it tightly, unable to open all through the fight since he broke his arm. He had plucked it out of his left palm with his right, just moments before while circling his opponent.

The impact of the lightning bolt on the beast's head knocked it unconscious but as the animal went limp on top of him, he felt its bodily form changing and right before his eyes, the beast

was transformed into the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She was ten times more beautiful than any of Yemoja's priestesses.

A pretty beautiful maiden. Very youthful.

The utter sight of what had just happened and the fatigue from the fight turned his head and knocked him unconscious before he could stand up.

So he slumped after his six hours fight, with the beautiful Ìwà stretched unconscious atop him.

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