

Papa had gone back downstairs, and I was still sitting on the sofa, watching Aunty Ifeoma talk to Mama, when my cousins arrived. Amaka was a thinner, teenage copy of her mother. She walked and talked even faster and with more purpose than Aunty Ifeoma did. Only her eyes were different; they did not have the unconditional warmth of Aunty Ifeoma's. They were quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and did not accept many answers. Obiora was a year younger, very lightskinned, with honey-colored eyes behind thick glasses, and his mouth turned up at the sides in a perpetual smile. Chima had skin as dark as the bottom of a burnt pot of rice, and was tall for a boy of seven. They all laughed alike: throaty, cackling sounds pushed out with enthusiasm.

They greeted Papa, and when he gave them money for igba krismas, Amaka and Obiora thanked him, holding out the two thick wads of naira notes. Their eyes were politely surprised, to show that they were not presumptuous, that they had not expected money.

“You have satellite here, don’t you?” Amaka asked me. It was the first thing she said after we greeted each other. Her hair was cut short, higher at the front and gradually reducing in an arch until it got to the back of her head, where there was little hair.

“Yes.”

“Can we watch CNN?”

I forced a cough out of my throat; I hoped I would not stutter.

“Maybe tomorrow,” Amaka continued, “because right now I think we’re going to visit my dad’s family in Ukpo.”

“We don’t watch a lot of TV,” I said.

“Why?” Amaka asked. It was so unlikely that we were the same age, fifteen. She seemed so much older, or maybe it was her striking resemblance to Aunty Ifeoma or the way she stared me right in the eyes. “Because you’re bored with it? If only we all had satellite so everybody could be bored with it.”

I wanted to say I was sorry, that I did not want her to dislike us for not watching satellite. I wanted to tell her that although huge satellite dishes lounged on top of the houses in Enugu and here, we did not watch TV. Papa did not pencil in TV time on our schedules.

But Amaka had turned to her mother, who was sitting hunched with Mama. "Mom, if we are going to Ukpo, we should leave soon so we can get back before Papa-Nnukwu falls asleep."

Aunty Ifeoma rose. "Yes, nne, we should leave."

She held Chima's hand as they all walked downstairs. Amaka said something, pointing at our banister, with its heavy handcarved detail, and Obiora laughed. She did not turn to say good-bye to me, although the boys did and Aunty Ifeoma waved and said, "I'll see you and Jaja tomorrow."