

"This cannot go on, nwunye m," Aunty Ifeoma said. "When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head."

"It has never happened like this before. He has never punished her like this before," Mama said.

"Kambili will come to Nsukka when she leaves the hospital."

"Eugene will not agree."

"I will tell him. Our father is dead, so there is no threatening heathen in my house. I want Kambili and Jaja to stay with us, at least until Easter. Pack your own things and come to Nsukka. It will be easier for you to leave when they are not there."

"It has never happened like this before."

"Do you not hear what I have said, gbo?" Aunty Ifeoma said, raising her voice.

"I hear you."

The voices grew too distant, as if Mama and Aunty Ifeoma were on a boat moving quickly to sea and the waves had swallowed their voices. Before I lost their voices, I wondered where Father Amadi had gone. I opened my eyes hours later. It was dark, and the light bulbs were off. In the glimmer of light from the hallway that streamed underneath the closed door, I could see the crucifix on the wall and Mama's figure on a chair at the foot of my bed.

"Kedu? I will be here all night. Sleep. Rest," Mama said. She got up and sat on my bed. She caressed my pillow; I knew she was afraid to touch me and cause me pain. "Your father has been by your bedside every night these past three days. He has not slept a wink."

It was hard to turn my head, but I did it and looked away.