



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G33**

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# 1. The Bride Price

Buchi Emecheta

## CHAPTER NINE A Forced Wedding

On his way home after meeting the girls, Chike thought about Aku-nna. 'How surprised and pleased she was when I told her about her examination results!' he said to himself. 'Her success will make things easier for both of us. I must make sure she gets the teaching job she wants. The money will be a big help to her mother and brother. And I shall have time to decide between the oil company and the university. Father has promised to talk to Okonkwo, but I must say he's taking his time about it. Perhaps he's been waiting for the results of Aku-nna's examination. And if Okonkwo will agree to the marriage, Father will gladly pay a hundred pounds. Father can easily afford it, and surely Okonkwo will be very glad to accept - it'll seem like a fortune to him.'

It was a very dark, moonless night. It was a night for murder, a night for fear. He stopped suddenly. He thought he heard someone calling his name. But when he lifted his lamp and looked around, he saw nothing except the black trees on each side of the path. The call came again. It was Aku-nna's voice. 'But that's impossible,' thought Chike. 'She's safe in the dancing hut with Zik and her friends. My imagination is playing tricks on me.' He walked faster, and his heart beat like a drum.

Then he heard a gun. It was followed by another shot, and another and another. Ibuza people always fired guns on their wedding night. He heard wedding music too, from the other side of the village.

'Why haven't I heard about this wedding?' thought Chike. 'Well, I expect my sisters will tell me all about it when I get home.'

He went straight to his father's house to tell him the good news about Aku-nna's examination.

'I'm glad, my son,' said Ofulue. 'And I have spoken to Okonkwo.'

'What did he say, Father?'

'He didn't say no, and he didn't say yes,' replied his father. 'We shall have to buy him. He wants to be a chief, and he'll use our money for that. But that means you will have to marry early, and I don't like that.'

'Oh, Father, Aku-nna is not sixteen yet. We can wait. She can take teacher training, or I can work with the oil company in Ughelli. I don't mind what we do. But I do want her to leave her uncle's family. They are not kind to her.'

'So I hear. I also heard that you knocked down Okoboshi a day or two ago.'

'Yes, I did. He was hurting Aku-nna. I had to stop him.'

Just then they heard more shots in the distance. The sounds of singing and dancing reached their ears.

'Who can be getting married on a night like this?' said Ofulue.

Suddenly Chike knew. He felt weak and sick. He almost fell to the floor. Holding tightly to the back of his father's big leather armchair, he whispered, 'I think that noise is coming from the Obidi family hut... I think they have kidnapped Aku-nna for their son Okoboshi.'

Moving forward, Ofulue laid a strong hand on his son's shoulder, and Chike cried like a child.

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After their frightening experience in the dancing hut, the other girls ran home and told their parents what had happened.

'It was all so sudden - the lamps went out - somebody held the door shut - then the door was thrown open, and we all ran home.' It was a strange, confused story and their mothers decided to forget about it and let their men investigate it.

When they felt better, the girls told their mothers about Aku-nna's examination. Everyone was very pleased.

'Let's go and congratulate her family,' said Ngbeke, Okonkwo's first wife. So a small crowd arrived at Ma Blackie's hut.

'Please come in,' said Ma Blackie. 'My daughter is still dancing, and my son is out playing. But do come in.'

'Where did you say Aku-nna was?' said Ngbeke sharply.

'She went to the dancing.' Then Ma Blackie saw Ogugua and the other girls. 'I thought she was with you.'

Ngbeke suddenly realized what had happened, and shouted for her husband.

'Okonkwooooo! Wake up! They have kidnapped our daughter. Wake up, everyone, wherever you are! Wake up, everyone in Ibuza!... Girls, go and get the gong!'

The gong was large, shaped like a bell. When anyone hit it with a stick, it made a great deal of noise. As the first wife of the family, it was Ngbeke's duty to bang the gong. She had to tell the terrible news to the whole village.

Now everyone was screaming and crying. 'They shall die for this!' shouted Ngbeke's son Iloba. The noise was terrible.

Ma Blackie cried and cried. 'They have kidnapped my daughter,' she thought. 'Was it for this that I sent her to school? Kidnapped!'

The big boys went out to search for the kidnappers, Nna-nndo stopped crying and followed them. Ngbeke with her gong led the women around the village.

'Who has stolen our daughter?' (Gong). 'Come out and tell us!' (Gong). But they knew it was useless. Aku-nna had gone. The kidnapper had only to cut a piece of her hair, then the kidnapped girl belonged to him for ever. He could force her to sleep with him, and if she was unwilling, his friends could hold her down. Perhaps that had already happened to Aku-nna...

Ngbeke shouted until her throat was sore. Okonkwo shouted until he felt thirsty. Then he sat down with a bottle of native whisky for company. It was much later, in the middle of the night, when three men from the Obidi family came to him.

'Your daughter Aku-nna is sleeping peacefully,' they said, 'on the bed that we made specially for her and her husband Okoboshi.'

There was nothing Okonkwo could do. The whisky had made him sleepy and confused. Together he and the Obidi men agreed on a small bride price for Aku-nna.

'After all,' the Obidis said, 'there's nothing special about her except her education, and all this modern education doesn't do women any good... it makes them too proud.'

More whisky flowed. At last the three men prepared to leave. 'By morning,' they said, 'we shall know if she is a virgin or not.'

'She is a virgin,' said Okonkwo. 'Nobody has touched her. You must bring me a big pot full of wine.'

That was the tradition. If a bride was a virgin, her new family had to bring her father wine. If she was not a virgin, they brought an empty pot.

Meanwhile Nna-nndo had found out where his sister was. He went to his only friend, the only person who would never harm his sister. Then he went home and told Ma Blackie.

'Chike will save her,' he told her. But they both wondered how Chike could do that.

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Escape

Aku-nna was carried into her new home, and the women laid her on a bed. 'How smooth her body is!' they cried. 'How soft her hands are!'

When she became conscious again, Okoboshi's mother greeted her warmly. 'Don't worry. We'll send a message to your mother. You're in good hands. My husband decided to kidnap you for our boy because of that slave, Chike. No girl from a good family like yours could possibly marry a slave.'

'Oh no,' repeated the other women. 'Never!'

They showed Aku-nna a pile of new clothes. 'Look,' they said. 'All these are for you.' They took off her short dancing skirt and tied a new skirt round her waist.

Then they took her into a room with a new, colourfully painted bed. 'For you and Okoboshi,' they explained.

They saw the fear and dislike on her face, and laughed. 'Don't worry,' said Okoboshi's mother. 'He'll be gentle with you. You may even like it - lots of girls do!'

The others laughed. They were very pleased with their new bride. But the bride herself was silent and trembling with fear.

'What's the matter?' demanded Okoboshi's eldest sister. 'Doesn't she like us?'

'Be quiet!' said her mother. 'No girl likes to be kidnapped. Go and join in the celebrations.'

Soon most of them left. But many visitors came to see the new bride. The men outside went on drinking whisky and firing guns for a long time. Aku-nna was stiff and tired, but she would not lie down.

'I'll die before I lie on that bed,' she thought.

Okoboshi's sister brought her some water. 'Would you like to wash?' she asked her.

'No, thank you,' said Aku-nna, 'but I need the toilet.'

'I will show you. Now remember, don't make it hard for Okoboshi. If you do, he'll call for help, then the men will come in and hold you down. That's the custom.'

'If that happens to me,' thought Aku-nna, 'I'll kill myself.'

Then, on the way to the toilet, she heard a whistle. It was Chike's special song. So he knew, and was near! But she could not get away, because Okoboshi's sister was watching her.

She was led back to the hut like a prisoner. She lay down on the bed with her face to the wall, and shut her eyes.

After a troubled sleep she woke with the feeling that someone was watching her. As she opened her eyes, she saw Okoboshi. He was smiling a cruel, unfriendly smile and he smelt of whisky. Suddenly Aku-nna realized how much he hated her.

He tried to touch her, but she fought like a wild animal. 'I'm on my own,' she thought. 'No one can help me. I must look after myself.'

Okoboshi laughed and hit her in the mouth. Then he was on top of her. She kicked and scratched, but he was too strong for her. Then suddenly an idea came to her. She laughed like a mad woman, and shouted at him:

'Look at you, Okoboshi! Am I the only bride you can get - the girlfriend of a slave?'

Okoboshi let her go. Aku-nna continued: 'You think I am a virgin? I tell you, a better man has been here before you! I have slept with him many, many times. That afternoon in school, when you and your friends made me cry - that was our first time. But it didn't do my schoolwork any harm, did it? You failed your examination, but I passed!'

Okoboshi stood up. His mouth hung open. He looked at her as a man looks at a poisonous insect.

She went on and on. 'Even if you do sleep with me tonight, what then? If I have a child, how can you be sure that the child is yours? And believe me, I shall tell everyone in the village!'

'But you were unclean until two days ago. Your mother said so.'

'Oh yes, that's true. But today I heard my examination results. We celebrated my success together!'

She said to herself, 'Have I gone too far? What if his people have been watching me all day? Then they'll know that I'm lying.'



Okoboshi hit her across the face with all his strength. 'You dirty animal!' he shouted. 'Do you think I want to touch you now? Slave-girl!' He hit her again. 'I never really wanted you anyway! My father helped me to kidnap you because he hated Ofulue, your slave lover's father. But just wait! Soon I shall marry the girl of my choice, and you will fetch and carry for her! Now get out of my bed!'

He hit her once more. She fell onto the floor and lost consciousness.

When she woke, it was almost morning. Okoboshi was asleep in the bridal bed. She ached all over. Just then Okoboshi woke and gave a cruel laugh.

'You'll have a busy day today, my educated bride. Go and find a gourd to take to the stream. The older women will ask you what happened. You'll have to tell them your story yourself. My father and I will go to your parents with an empty wine pot. Then the whole village will know about you and your slave lover!'

Aku-nna ran out of the hut, almost into the arms of Okoboshi's mother and sister. Okoboshi then came out and, with hate in his voice, he told them what Aku-nna had said the night before.

'So now you are a slave too! Well, the water gourds are there!' Okoboshi's mother said coldly.

As Aku-nna bent to pick up a gourd, Okoboshi's sister spoke: 'Mother, have you got an old skirt for this slave-girl? I need this one!' She tore the new skirt off Aku-nna's body. Her mother produced a dirty, torn skirt and stood there while Aku-nna tied it around her waist.

Then Aku-nna went to fetch the water, while everyone laughed and pointed. Her whole face was stiff and sore and she moved like an old woman. 'This is the end,' she thought. 'Now Chike will turn me away too. Okoboshi did not cut a piece of my hair last night. Why should he? I am worthless. I can run away if I want to, but where can I go? My uncle will kill me if I go home. But I'll die if I stay here. And when I die, they will say, "There, I told you so. She broke our laws. And now she is dead."'

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All that morning Aku-nna was a prisoner in the hut of Okoboshi's mother. They gave her some cooked yam, but she could not eat it because her mouth was too sore and swollen.

At noon she heard a voice outside the hut. It was Nna-nndo. Okoboshi's mother let him see his sister alone. He brought her words of comfort - and a letter from Chike, which she read eagerly.

'Dearest,' it said, 'I will whistle after dark, when you go to the toilet. I love you. Chike.'

She gave the letter back to Nna-nndo, who hid it inside his shirt - just before Okoboshi marched into the room.

'So you have come to visit this slave-girl,' he said. He raised his hand and moved towards Aku-nna.

'If you touch my sister I'll kill you!' shouted Nna-nndo. He picked up a heavy pot. When Okoboshi's mother heard the shouting, she rushed in, took the pot from Nna-nndo and ordered him and her son to leave. Tears of anger poured down Nna-nndo's face as he left the hut.

Okoboshi's mother turned to Aku-nna. 'Go to Okoboshi tonight,' she said. 'Soon, perhaps, he will forgive you and take you into his bed. Many good marriages start unhappily.'

She was unexpectedly kind, and for a moment Aku-nna wanted to tell her the truth. But she remembered Chike's letter.

'I will go to him,' she said. 'Let me wash and go to the toilet first.'

As Aku-nna walked to the toilet, she suddenly heard Chike's whistle. There was a movement in the long grass, and before she knew what was happening, she was in Chike's arms. Then she heard his voice, low and urgent. 'Come on, my love - run!'

His warm body seemed to breathe new life into her. She ran. When she could no longer run, she walked. It was only seven miles from Ibuza to Asaba, but it took them nearly four hours. At last they reached a house.

'Our driver lives here,' said Chike. 'He'll take us to Ughelli in the morning.' But Aku-nna was already asleep in Chike's arms.

## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
33

### should 1

A

You **should do** something = it is a good thing to do or the right thing to do.

You can use **should** to give advice or to give an opinion:

- You look tired. You **should go** to bed.
- The government **should do** more to improve schools.
- A: **Should** we **invite** Stephanie to the party?  
B: Yes, I think we **should**.
- The man on the motorbike **should be wearing** a helmet.



You **shouldn't do** something = it isn't a good thing to do:

- You **shouldn't believe** everything you read in newspapers.

We often use **should** with **I think / I don't think / Do you think ... ?**:

- I think** the government **should do** more to improve schools.
- I don't think** you **should work** so hard.
- A: **Do you think** I **should apply** for this job?  
B: Yes, **I think** you **should**.

**Should** is not as strong as **must** or **have to**:

- You **should** apologise. (= it would be a good thing to do)
- You **must** apologise. / You **have to** apologise. (= you have no alternative)

B

We use **should** when something is not right or what we expect:

- Where's Tina? She **should be** here by now.  
(= she isn't here yet, and this is not normal)
- The price on this packet is wrong. It **should be** £2.50, not £3.50.

We also use **should** to say that we expect something to happen:

- Helen has been studying hard for the exam, so she **should pass**.  
(= I expect her to pass)
- There are plenty of hotels in the town. It **shouldn't be** hard to find a place to stay.  
(= I don't expect it to be hard)

C

You **should have done** something = you didn't do it, but it would have been a good thing to do:

- You missed a great party last night. You **should have come**. Why didn't you?  
(= you didn't come, but it would have been good to come)
- I wonder why they're so late. They **should have been** here long ago.

You **shouldn't have done** something = you did it, but it wasn't a good thing to do:

- I'm feeling sick. I **shouldn't have eaten** so much. (= I ate too much)
- She **shouldn't have been listening** to our conversation. It was private.  
(= she was listening)

Compare **should** (do) and **should have** (done):

- You look tired. You **should go** to bed now.
- You went to bed very late last night. You **should have gone** to bed earlier.

D

**ought to ...**

You can use **ought to** instead of **should** in the sentences on this page.

We say 'ought to do' (with **to**):

- Do you think I **ought to apply** for this job? (= Do you think I **should apply** ...?)
- Jack **ought not to go** to bed so late. (= Jack **shouldn't go** ...)
- It was a great party last night. You **ought to have come**. (= You **should have come**)