



**Learn English Through Stories**

**G Series**

**G34**

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# 1. The Bride Price

Buchi Emecheta

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### Too Good to be True?

Ben Adegor was an old school friend of Chike's. They had written to each other regularly and Ben knew about Chike's feelings for Aku-nna. It was Ben who had suggested a job for Chike with the oil company at Ughelli, where Ben was the head teacher at the local school. Ben knew that the oil company needed bright young men, and he also promised to get Aku-nna a teaching job in his school.

'You and your bride can have my old hut until you find somewhere better,' he had written to Chike. 'I've bought a new house with a tin roof.'

Ben Adegor was a small, strong, dark man who loved to talk and argue. His wife Rose, who was small and dark too, was a teacher at the same school, and she was expecting their first child.

They welcomed Chike and Aku-nna kindly and showed them the hut with its three large rooms and its wide, airy veranda. They lent them some furniture, then left the young couple alone. Chike and Aku-nna stood and looked at each other.

'Will you marry me?' Chike whispered.

'Where you go, I go,' said Aku-nna.

Like small, excited children, they began to count their money. Chike's father had encouraged him to run away with Aku-nna and had given them a wedding present of a hundred pounds.

'I've never seen so much money before,' whispered Aku-nna, staring at Chike's hundred pounds.

'He was going to use it to pay for me to go to university,' said Chike.

'And you changed your plans?'

'Universities don't run away. I'll go when I'm ready. Just now I'm too busy. Guess what Father said when he gave me this money?'

'Did he tell you to pay my bride price with it?' asked Aku-nna with trembling lips.

He took her in his arms. 'Don't worry. My father will pay the bride price in good time. He will give Okonkwo double whatever he asks. But that isn't all. Nnando must come and live with us, and get a proper education. Also we must send a little money to your mother, so that she can be independent.'

'Oh - will you do all that for me? I'll serve you until I die. I'll be a good wife to you. I'll always love you and love you, in this world and the next world, until the end of time.'

He kissed her hair. 'People will say you're marrying me because of my money!'

'Oh no, not because of that. Because of so many, many things - how can I name them all? Because of the way you look at me, because of your kindness and understanding...' Chike held her tight.

They had had very little sleep after their night's adventures, but now they forgot their tiredness. Chike wanted to go to town to do some shopping, and Aku-nna wanted to go with him.

'My father gave me this money to buy something special. I'll buy it today, and tonight we'll christen it,' he told her.

The 'something special' was a lovely new English bed with a wonderfully soft mattress. Aku-nna clapped her hands with excitement when she saw it.

But their shopping did not end with the bed. Chike bought sheets, curtains, cooking pots and plates and even a small oil stove. Aku-nna had never seen anything like them before. He also bought her two beautiful new skirts.

'Thank you, thank you,' she said again and again.

They loaded everything onto a lorry. On the way home, Chike asked the driver to stop at the offices of the oil company.

'I'll only be away ten minutes,' he said. 'I want to tell them that I'm in Ughelli and available for an interview.'

Chike was away half an hour and came back looking pleased and proud. 'Sorry to keep you waiting,' he said to the driver. To Aku-nna he said, 'I start work in five days' time.'

Aku-nna could not believe it. 'Everything has been too easy for us,' she thought. 'It's too good to be true. Dear God, don't let anything happen to destroy our joy.'

Chike gave the driver a bottle of whisky and the driver wished them a long and happy marriage. When they unloaded the new bed in front of their new home, the driver poured a little whisky over the mattress.

'There, I have christened your bed,' he said. 'But you'll do it properly tonight, when you're alone!'

Then Chike's friend, Ben Adegor, came along and joined in the fun. 'So you're christening the bed?' he said. 'What are you going to call it?'

Aku-nna burst out laughing. 'Whoever heard of christening a bed?' she said.

But Ben was suddenly serious. He asked God to look kindly on his friends' marriage. 'Give them a happy life together, with many children. Now, I christen this bed Joy!'

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But to Chike's surprise love-making did not come easily to them. At first Aku-nna tried to avoid it. First she wanted a bath, then she wanted to listen to their new radio... always she found some excuse. As for Chike, he was worried. When he had rescued her from Okoboshi, everything had seemed so easy. 'No matter what they have done to her, I will still marry her,' he thought. 'Even if she is expecting Okoboshi's child.'

He had discussed it with his father and the old man had given him some good advice. 'Never blame a woman for something that happened in the past,' he had said. 'It's the future that matters.'

But now Chike was anxious. Aku-nna seemed so frightened and worried. He wondered what they had done to her that night, and if she was still a virgin, but he did not want to ask her.

At last, however, Aku-nna told him her story. She told him that she was still a virgin, and that she had told lies to Okoboshi to get away from him.

'I have been saving myself for you,' she said shyly. 'Please help me to give you joy.'

Chike was surprised and delighted. 'My darling,' he said, 'your people must know of this. They must be told that you are innocent. My father must be told too. How happy they will all be!'

'Is that necessary?' said Aku-nna. 'You know the truth, and that's all that matters. Just give them their bride price in peace. You know what they say: if the bride price is not paid, the bride will die in childbirth...' Aku-nna stopped for a moment. 'I love you, Chike,' she said softly. 'Please teach me...'

And the beautiful new bed became a place of joy for them both.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### The Unpaid Price

In Ibuza there was no joy for Akunna's family. As soon as Okoboshi realized that Aku-nna had escaped with his enemy, he lied to his parents.

'I slept with her,' he said, 'and she was no virgin. But I cut off a piece of her hair, so now she belongs to me!' He produced a piece of hair to prove his story.

His action caused some bitter arguments, and many people became really angry with Chike's family. 'Who are they,' people said, 'to destroy the life of an innocent young girl? She will never come home to Ibuza now.'

'But,' said an old man, 'as long as Okonkwo does not accept any bride price from Ofulue, the girl still belongs to Okoboshi. No one can possibly expect a slave to behave like a free man, and no one can blame the girl if a slave runs off with her.'

The argument went on and on. Everyone spoke against Chike's family. Ofulue did not fear for his own life, but he sent all the girls of the family away for a while. However, the people took their revenge in another way.

Years before, when Ofulue left his job as a head teacher, he had bought some land in Ibuza. He had planted trees there and looked after them well. Now one morning he woke up and found that all his trees had been cut down. The shock hurt the old man badly, and he was sure that Okoboshi's family, the Obidis, were responsible. Ofulue's sons were very angry, so together they collected enough money to take the Obidi family to law.

Everyone in Ibuza spoke against the Ofulue family, but the white man's law did not understand about slaves and free men. So the Obidi family were found guilty and the free men had to plant new trees for the slaves, and pay a large sum of money too. The Obidi family hated the Ofulue family more than ever after that, and naturally they saw Okonkwo's family as the cause of their misfortune, since Aku-nna was Okonkwo's responsibility.

All this had a very bad effect on Okonkwo, who felt that Aku-nna had behaved very badly and brought shame on the whole village. He became very ill, but the medicine men were unsympathetic.

'What do you expect?' they demanded. 'All this is your own fault.'

Okonkwo forgot about becoming a chief. He was fighting for his life and the life of his family. He blamed Ma Blackie for his troubles, and he took his revenge by divorcing her. After that, of course, everyone blamed Aku-nna.

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In Ibuza, if you wanted to destroy someone, you made a little doll exactly like that person. Then you pushed a sharp needle into the doll's heart. The magic usually worked; the enemy died slowly and painfully.

Ma Blackie was sad, but not surprised, when one day she saw a little doll in Okonkwo's hut. The doll had Aku-nna's face, and there was a needle through its heart. She cried quietly for her daughter.

Chike and Aku-nna had sent a secret message to Ma Blackie, asking her to send her son Nna-nndo to Ughelli to live with them. Soon, too, the Ofulue family started sending Ma Blackie two whole pounds every month, which made her completely independent. 'I will pay a medicine man to destroy Okonkwo's magic,' she thought. 'Then my daughter will be safe.'

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In Ughelli Aku-nna and Chike were wonderfully happy. After their wedding in the white man's church they moved to a small house of their own, quite near Ben and Rose Adegor. Aku-nna was teaching in the local school and Nna-nndo was doing well and growing like a young tree. The lorry driver who had christened their bed was now a useful friend and helper. Chike was training to become a manager of the oil company, and they had plenty of money.

Aku-nna was not always happy, however. Sometimes there was a shadow of sadness on her face, and Chike knew she was thinking about her bride price.

Chike's family wanted to pay it, but Okonkwo refused to accept the money. 'No girl in my family shall be the bride of a slave,' he said angrily.

'Don't worry,' Ofulue wrote to his son, 'I'll offer them more next time, and sooner or later they will accept.'

Chike told Aku-nna this sad news as gently as he could. She cried a little, because she knew that until the bride price was paid, her family would not recognize the marriage, and she was worried.



Ofulue soon learned about Okonkwo's little doll. He wrote and told Chike, but told him not to mention it to Aku-nna. 'It's only an old native tradition. If Aku-nna knows nothing about the doll, it cannot harm her.'

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One day Chike came home from work and found Nna-nndo waiting for him. 'Where is Aku-nna?' demanded Chike. Usually she came running to greet him. 'She came back early from school with a headache,' said Nna-nndo. 'She's asleep now.'

Aku-nna looked very small and childlike on the big bed. Nna-nndo was growing every day, but his sister looked smaller and thinner than ever. She got tired very easily too. Chike went and sat down on the bed beside her. He touched her burning hot forehead. She opened her eyes and said, 'I'm sorry I wasn't there to welcome you home. I don't feel very well.'

'Is it that other pain?' he asked gently.

'No - I haven't had that since Christmas...'

'But that was three months ago, my love... Are you going to have a baby?'

'Perhaps!' she laughed. 'Mrs Adegor said the same thing this afternoon when she brought me home from school. I hope she's right, because I want to have your baby... Would you like that too?'

'Of course.' With her feverish head on his shoulder he talked to her about the baby. 'What shall we call our son?' he asked her.

'Will you be very disappointed if it's a girl?' asked Aku-nna.

'Not at all. But then people will talk. You know what people say about girl babies. They say girls are love babies. Their parents make love day and night. I want our love to be private!'

Aku-nna laughed. 'I'll ask God for a girl, then, and another one, and another one after that. Then everybody will know just how much we love each other... I'll have a son when you're forty.'

'You are a bad girl!' He kissed her.

Then he questioned her. Her tiredness worried him. Was it because of the baby, or because of her busy life? He decided that she ought to see a doctor.

The doctor at the oil company examined Aku-nna. 'Yes, she's going to have a baby,' he said. 'She must stop work and eat plenty of good food. Mr Ofulue, your wife is very young and small. Is she sixteen yet?'

'Yes,' said Chike. He felt suddenly very guilty. 'Will she be all right?'

'Oh, yes, but you must both be very careful. She isn't strong.'

Chike drove his wife home from the doctor's office in his new car. He drove badly and seemed annoyed with everything and everybody. Aku-nna wondered what was the matter, but she was too tired to talk. She fell asleep in the back of the car.

Aku-nna's wish to continue working was the cause of their first argument. 'I want to work, because you are sending money to my family,' she said.

Chike pushed her away. 'You mean you want to continue work until your bride price is paid,' he said unkindly. 'Why don't you say that? How many hours a day do you spend thinking about your family? You think about them so much, you forget about me. Don't you care about me? What if you become ill, too ill to look after our child? Listen, I'll make sure that your bride price is paid. And you're not going to die and leave me - do you understand?'

At the mention of dying Aku-nna was afraid. 'Am I going to die?' she thought. 'Did the doctor say that?' Aloud she said, 'Please tell me the truth. Did the doctor say I was going to die? Is that why you were so unhappy on the way home?'

He took her in his arms. 'No, no, he didn't say anything like that. I was just expressing my own fears. But he did say we had to be careful. You must rest. Dearest, I don't want anything to happen to you. You mean so much to me.'



## 2. Grammar Page

Unit  
34

### should 2

**A** You can use **should** after:

**insist demand recommend suggest propose**

- I **insisted** that he **should apologise**.
- Doctors **recommend** that everyone **should eat** plenty of fruit.
- What do you **suggest** we **should do**?
- Many people are **demanding** that something **should be done** about the problem.

also

**It's important/vital/necessary/essential** that ... **should** ...:

- It's essential** that everyone **should be** here on time.

**B** You can also leave out **should** in the sentences in section A. So you can say:

- It's essential** that everyone **be** here on time. (= ... that everyone **should be** here ...)
- I **insisted** that he **apologise**. (= ... that he **should apologise**)
- What do you **suggest** we **do**?
- Many people are **demanding** that something **be done** about the problem.

This form (**be/do/apologise** etc.) is called the *subjunctive*. It is the same as the *infinitive* (without **to**).

You can also use normal present and past forms:

- It's **essential** that everyone **is** here on time.
- I **insisted** that he **apologised**.

**C** We do not use **to** ... with **suggest**. You can say:

- What do you **suggest** we **should do**?

or What do you **suggest** we **do**? (*but not* What do you suggest us to do?)

- Jane won the lottery.

I **suggested** that she **should buy** a car with the money she won.

or I **suggested** that she **buy** a car.

or I **suggested** that she **bought** a car. (*but not* I suggested her to buy)

You can also use **-ing** after **suggest** (What do you **suggest doing**?). See Unit 53.

**D** You can use **should** after some adjectives, especially:

**strange odd funny typical natural interesting surprised surprising**

- It's **strange** that he **should be** late. He's usually on time.
- I was **surprised** that he **should say** such a thing.

**E** You can say **'if something should happen ...'**. For example:

- We have no jobs at present, but **if the situation should change**, we will contact you.

You can also begin with **should** (**Should** something happen ...):

- Should** the situation **change**, we will contact you.

This means the same as **'If the situation changes, ...'**. With **should**, the speaker feels that the possibility is smaller.

**F** You can use **I should ... / I shouldn't ...** to give advice. For example:

- 'Shall I leave now?' 'No, **I should wait** a bit.' (= I advise you to wait)

Here, **I should ...** = 'I would ... if I were you,' 'I advise you to ...'. Two more examples:

- 'I'm going out now. Is it cold outside?' 'Yes, **I should wear** a coat.'
- I shouldn't stay** up too late. You have to be up early tomorrow.