



Learn English Through Stories

G Series

G35

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1. The Bride Price

Buchi Emecheta

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Joy

Soon Aku-nna was glad to stay at home. The baby was giving her a very bad time. In the early months she was sick every morning and unable to eat. Even in the sixth month, she still could not enjoy her food. She hated to cause her young husband so much worry. Chike remained gentle and loving with her, but his eyes were large and anxious. He paid a local girl to clean the house and do the cooking. 'Take it easy,' he said to Aku-nna. 'Read as much as you like, and eat plenty of good food.'

Chike's eldest brother, who was a doctor, visited them and examined Aku-nna. 'She's not strong,' he told Chike.

'What's the matter with her?' demanded Chike. 'Most girls in Ibuza have babies very easily. Why is it so hard for my wife? She's getting weaker every day.'

'Don't worry. We can always take her into the hospital for an operation, and save both her and the child. And do remember that many native girls die in childbirth too. Your wife didn't get enough of the right food when she was young. She's sixteen, but she looks like a fourteen-year-old. You were wrong to give her a child so early, brother.'

Chike gave a short, bitter laugh. 'We didn't plan this baby - it just happened.'

'Don't worry, everything will be all right. You're a lucky man. She's a sweet, lovely girl. Take good care of her now.'

At home in Ibuza, Ofulue again asked Okonkwo to accept the bride price, and again Okonkwo refused to give his daughter to a slave. Then one day somebody - nobody knew who - took away the little doll from Okonkwo's hut. Okonkwo was terribly angry. He paid a medicine man a lot of money to make a new doll. 'This will bring Aku-nna home,' he said. 'It will call her back in the wind.'

Chike's father came to Ughelli to visit them, and was very glad to see them so happy. When Chike was at work, Ofulue and Aku-nna talked and laughed together like old friends. But he always reminded her to rest, so that she was fresh and happy when she welcomed Chike home from the office.

When it was time for Ofulue to leave, Aku-nna cried on his shoulder. 'I hope I shall see you again, Father. I know that my uncle Okonkwo does not want to accept my bride price. He hates me. He's calling me back. I hear his voice in the wind when I'm alone - but I'll never answer him... Oh, Father, I don't want to die!'

Chike did not hear Aku-nna's words, but he knew she was crying. He came over and took her gently away from his father. 'After our baby is born,' he told her, 'we shall all go home together and visit Father. We'll all look forward to that.'

Aku-nna tried to smile as she waved goodbye to her father-in-law. But now she was frightened to be alone. Again and again she heard her uncle's voice calling her, telling her to return to her family. She could no longer sleep. The doctor gave her sleeping tablets, but they did not help.

Every night she and Chike knelt down together and asked God to help them through this difficult time, but still Aku-nna could not rest. Sometimes she woke in the night, crying. 'Hold me tight!' she begged Chike. 'Hold me! My uncle is trying to take me away. Please don't let him get me.'

'Don't be silly,' said Chike gently. 'You don't really believe all that nonsense, do you? You're anxious and excited, that's all. Cheer up; soon the baby will be here.' Gently he rubbed her tight, swollen stomach, which looked so huge beside her thin little arms and legs.

They spent many nights like this. Then one night Aku-nna suddenly screamed and lost consciousness. Chike examined her; the baby was coming. At once he telephoned the doctor, who sent an ambulance at once.

Chike watched anxiously while the ambulance men covered his wife with their horrible red blankets and lifted her into the ambulance. Then he sat beside her and held her hand. When the pains stabbed through her body, he felt them too.

When they reached the hospital, the doctor told him the truth. 'She must have an operation,' he said. 'The baby is small, but it will be all right.'

As Chike sat on the hard chair in the hospital waiting-room, he remembered the shy little girl from Lagos. He remembered all their happy times... the day they bought their new bed, the day he received his first cheque from the oil company. He remembered their escape together and tears poured down his face.

Someone touched his shoulder. It was Nna-nndo, who had ridden the seven miles to the hospital on his bicycle, to sit beside his brother-in-law. To Nna-nndo, Chike was perfect. He loved him and was grateful to him for his happy life in Ughelli. He wanted to help Chike, but did not know how. He held Chike's hand and cried.

A doctor came in. 'Mr Ofulue?' he said. 'Please come with me.'

Chike followed like a sleepwalker. The doctor said, 'She has had the operation. She isn't conscious yet, and I'm afraid that she may never wake up at all. I'm sorry - we did everything we could, but she was very small and weak. I don't know how she stayed alive so long... I expect you want to sit with her. She's in here.' He pointed to a door. 'By the way,' he whispered, 'you have a baby girl. She's small, but she's doing fine.'

Chike stared wordlessly at the doctor, then he went into the unnaturally clean white room. He was alone with Aku-nna.

She was so beautiful and peaceful lying there. He took her small, dry hand and held it. Aku-nna was dying. Chike called Nna-nndo, and the two of them sat there together.

It was almost morning when Aku-nna's hand moved a little. There was a smile on her lips, and she spoke softly but clearly.

'I know you are here, my husband.' Slowly she opened her eyes. They were very bright, too bright for this world. Nna-nndo heard her voice and came nearer.

'Don't worry, brother,' she said. 'This isn't the end of the road for you, it's the beginning. My husband will look after you. He's a good man, and I thank God for him.'

Nna-nndo began to cry. Then Aku-nna spoke to Chike. 'Dear husband, be strong. Be happy for me.' Her voice was very weak now. 'Did we have a boy or a girl?'

'A little girl,' he whispered in her ear.

Aku-nna's whole face shone with joy. 'I told you so,' she whispered. 'I told you I wouldn't keep our love a secret. Now everybody will see our little girl, and they will know that our love will never die... Let's call her "Joy" too, the same name that we gave our marriage bed. Please. Promise me you'll call her Joy... Then promise me that you'll be happy, because you have made me so happy, so...

Her eyes closed. Chike took her whole body in his arms and kissed her gently. 'Good night, my love. Our child's name shall be Joy.'

She smiled again, a smile of unbelievable sweetness and beauty. Very softly and peacefully, she died. But he still held her gently, lovingly against his heart.

The morning light grew stronger. The doctor came in. 'It is time to go now,' he said. 'Your wife is at peace.'

'Our child shall be called Joy,' repeated Chike.

Afterwards every girl in Ibuza was told the sad story of Aku-nna and Chike. 'If you want to live a long time,' they were told, 'you must accept the husband that your people choose for you, and your bride price must be paid. If it is not paid, you will never survive the birth of your first child.'

Of course, that is all nonsense. Of course a safe birth does not depend on a bride price. But even today, no girl wants to risk it.

- THE END -

2. Grammar Page

Unit
35

I'd better ... it's time ...

A had better (I'd better / you'd better etc.)

I'd better do something = it is advisable to do it. If I don't do it, there will be a problem or a danger:

- I have to meet Amy in ten minutes. **I'd better go** now or I'll be late.
- 'Shall I take an umbrella?' 'Yes, **you'd better**. It might rain.'
- We'd better stop** for petrol soon. The tank is almost empty.

The negative is **I'd better not** (= I **had** better not):

- A: That jacket looks good on you. Are you going to buy it?
B: **I'd better not**. It's very expensive.
- You don't look very well. **You'd better not go** out tonight.

Remember that:

I'd better = I **had** better, **you'd better** = you **had** better etc.

- I'd better** phone Chris, **hadn't** I?
- We **had better** go now.

Had is normally past, but we use **had better** for the present or future, *not* past.

- I'd better go **now** / **tomorrow**.

We say 'I'd better **do**' (*not* to do).

- It might rain. We'd better **take** an umbrella. (*not* We'd better to take)

B had better and should

Had better is similar to **should** but not exactly the same. We use **had better** only for a specific situation, not for things in general. You can use **should** in all types of situations to give an opinion or give advice:

- It's late. **You'd better go**. or **You should go**. (a specific situation)
- You're always at home. **You should go** out more often. (in general – *not* 'had better go')

Also, with **had better**, there is always a danger or a problem if you don't follow the advice.

Should means only 'it is a good thing to do'. Compare:

- It's a great film. You **should** go and see it. (but no problem if you don't)
- The film starts at 8.30. **You'd better** go now or you'll miss the beginning.

C it's time ...

You can say **It's time** (for somebody) **to** ... :

- It's time **to go** home. / It's time for us **to go** home.

But you can also say:

- It's late. It's time **we went** home.

When we use **it's time** + past ('it's time we **went**' etc.), the meaning is present, *not* past:

- It's time** they **were** here. Why are they so late? (*not* It's time they are here)

It's time somebody **did** something = they should have already done it or started it.

We often use this structure to criticise or to complain:

- This situation can't continue. **It's time** you **did** something about it.
- He's very selfish. **It's time** he **realised** that he isn't the most important person in the world.

You can also say **It's about time** ... :

- Jack is a great talker, but **it's about time** he **did** something instead of just talking.