

# Solarpunk Magazine

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## ONYEMA'S HEAD

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Onyema, the sweetheart of Achina town, had a (fine) head on his shoulders. Though his secondary school uniform was most tattered, his exam scores were most admired. Because of that fine head, ndi Nze na Ozo convinced ndi Achina to sponsor Onyema's university education. *Maka* we don't have our own children or what? they protested. *Maka* when Onyema graduates; he will get a big job; bring plenty money; add it to the small one we bring and send one of our children abroad. Nice investment, they thought. So, they donated their sweat on top of Onyema's head.

Onyema studied Chemical Engineering. Five years later, the entire village emptied themselves to support their investment: the best graduating student in the history of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their eating and dancing continued in Achina for two days.

True to their instincts, Chevron employed Onyema even before he graduated. He was to start working two months after his graduation.

Onyema, a humble man with the brownest eyes, visited Mbaraoye market square, went from shop to shop, thanking the villagers for supporting him. He told them of how his head runneth over with knowledge, how he would be their shepherd henceforth because they were once his shepherd, how he'd bring ghana-must-go bags of money from Chevron and send their children to school. Oh, he'd also build schools in Achina and even a university! Yes, he'd build a *mahadum* in Achina so that Achina can become London.

He finished his gratitude rounds two weeks later. He finished mad.

It started as a rumour that Onyema's talks were incoherent. He'd start well, hold a conversation as fine as his head, then suddenly go off, rapping about chemicals

they've never heard, calling names of politicians they were sure had never been born. At first, when impossible names like methionylthreonylthreonylglutaminylarginyl, tetraoxosulphate-six acid, slithered smoothly from his tongue, they laughed. They clapped. They hailed, *supu! supu!*

The hailing stopped when Onyema said that Chinua Achebe was the president of Nigeria. Was Achebe no longer dead? But Onyema argued that Achebe did not die. That it was a rumour the useless politicians spread so that they could hide Achebe in Aso Rock, be exploiting his intelligence, and collecting ransom money from abroad.

The clapping stopped when Onyema insisted that snakes walk. Silence, of the deafening variant, descended. Then they cracked their knuckles and asked if Onyema would be so merciful and tell them which snake it is that walks, *gbọ*? Onyema asked them if they've ever heard of pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. One by one, they raised their shoulders, folded their arms across their chests, shook their heads, and walked away. Whisper by whisper, snapping their fingers, they declared Onyema *Onye Iberibe*, the stupidest one.

The laughing stopped when Onyema claimed to be so filled with the Holy Spirit that he could drink this gallon of kerosene, die, and rise again on the fourth day. The kerosene seller quietly slipped her merchandise away before somebody's property will become another somebody's property, *maka adighi amama*. But didn't Onyema know that even master Jesus, our owner, did not stay that long in the tomb? But Onyema beat his muscular chest and asked them to give him a gallon of kerosene.

Onyema had lost his head!

Onyema would not stop talking in Mbaraoye. Onyema's father would not stop shaking his head and eating his teeth. Onyema's mother would not stop crying. Her cries competed with the honks and faulty exhaust of Mbaraoye's automobiles until *ndi Nze na Ozo* gathered again. This thing doing Onyema was not emptyhanded, couldn't they see? A strong hand was holding Onyema because who then emptied Onyema's fine head, couldn't they see?

That was how Evangelist Iche from Elele landed in Achina. The villagers adhered strictly to his all-day dry fasting mandate. They murdered the nighttime, breaking the yokes of Onyema's head.

Onyema returned to Mbaraoye, the prayer venue, the next day well-dressed. His white shirt and black trousers were crispy straight, as though he was going for an interview. He clutched to his Bible and said very little. People swallowed their hellos and peeped from their shops for fear of awakening the *ekwurekwu* spirit in him. He sat in front of Estate Supermarket and quietly read his Bible. Oga Estate pityingly gave him a bottle of malt two hours later.



Onyema's mother, who had turned to a skeleton, started gaining flesh. Onyema's father stopped grinding what remained of his teeth. Gradually, everyone started saying hello to Onyema. He'd just wave and continue reading his Bible. Ndi Nze na Qzọ gathered again, very joyful, and decided that Evangelist Iche deserved a fat cow for saving Achina town's investment. No, no, forget donations; they would buy the cow.

Fine Onyema, one week later, spoke only when spoken to, laughed at a joke, and—this was where they raised their eyebrows—started telling his Bible to *hapu ihe e dere na motor banye na motor*. Ignore the inscription on the motor and enter the motor? Ha! Was that the latest parable in the Bible? Or was Onyema a flake away from madness? Then Onyema started telling the palm trees, the dusty road, the Achina-idegwu statue, their houses to *hapu ihe e dere na motor banye na motor*. Well, they shrugged, at least he was no longer shouting. At least he was not as hopeless as Ahiazu, irrevocably mad, whose skin was caked and recoloured with dirt, who paraded the village stark naked save for his long dreads that covered his buttocks. At least Onyema knew to wash his clothes, iron them, comb his hair. If all he did was tell inanimate things to enter the motor, it was manageable.

But it was not manageable to his parents. It was not manageable to ndi Nze na Qzọ who were expecting the cow they ordered for an evangelist that did nothing. Cow came. They killed Cow. Shared cow's meat to ndi Achina. Consider your investments paid off! They all washed their hands from Onyema. His mother's competition with honks did not work this time. They too had wasted money to cry about, but did you see them crying? No. So, please, let them hear word.

Then one night, the lyrics of her cries changed, and her husband accompanied the song with his bass. She accused her husband of being unreasonable for refusing to heed the Nze's advice and take Onyema to Dibia. Mr. Husband's refrain, he would not indulge in anything fetish. Mr. Nze prayed from his house that nobody should call his name in that their madness o.

Three days later, the chants stopped. Did they take Onyema to Dibia or not? Their answer was ballooned on the lips of the number one gossip. He said he saw it with his two eyes. That Dibia shaved every single hair on Onyema's head. That Dibia soaked Ekwueme leaves in the water he used to bathe Onyema. That Dibia did not allow Onyema to close his eyes during the bath o.

Two extra days; Onyema, they did not see. His parents, they did not see. Should they barge in and check if they're still alive? Ndi Nze na Qzọ said no, at least allow one week to pass. *Maka* when sleep enters one week, it becomes death. Which week, the villagers wondered, the Igbo one or the Roman one?

But they needn't worry, because four days later, Onyema and his parents emerged, clutching a travelling box. Onyema was gaunt. His face cap did not hide his sunken cheeks. His once muscular chest was a flatland. His legs were bones in the sea of his jeans. The family did not look at anybody, did not respond to anybody's greetings. They just stood under the sun, waiting for a bus. Cars stopped before them, some of those cars driven by some Nze na Qzq, yet this ungrateful family did not utter a word. How dare they!

A bus came one hour later. Onyema's father entered. Onyema's mother pulled him by the hand. He dragged his hand away. People came out of their shops. Those far away walked closer. Nobody wanted to hear from another person. Onyema's mother held him. He pulled his hand again. His mother asked him what was wrong with him. His father threatened fire and brimstone if Onyema did not come inside this bus now! The villagers asked Onyema to enter the bus. Didn't he want to work in Chevron again? Couldn't he talk? Then Onyema snapped, screamed. Were they blind, couldn't they see what's written on the car?

Ha! Wonders shall never end! Onyema, the forerunner of *hapu ihe e dere na motor banye na motor*; the preacher of *ignore the inscription on the motor and enter the motor* is now the one refusing to enter a motor because the common phrase *God is Good* was written on the motor? Wonders shall never end!





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Kasimma is from Igboland—obodo ndị dike.

