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The Palm-Wine Drinkard (1952)

Amos Tutuola (1920-1997)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Amos Tutuola (1920–1997) was one of Nigeria's most original literary voices, a writer who brought Yoruba imagination into global literature. Tutuola was born in Abeokuta, in southwestern Nigeria, into a culture rich in oral storytelling, spirit lore, and communal performance. His formal schooling ended early. he attended St. Peter's School in Abeokuta and later the CMS School in Lagos. But his traditional education was deep: He grew up listening to folktales, chants, and mythic narratives that shaped his creative world. Before becoming a writer, Tutuola worked as a blacksmith, messenger, and laborer. With *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), Tutuola astonished readers at home and abroad. Nigerian critics were divided: Some admired his bold use of English and Yoruba cosmology, while others disliked his unconventional grammar. European and American critics praised his inventiveness, comparing him to surrealists and myth-makers. His work opened doors for African imaginative fiction on the world stage. Tutuola wrote several books after *The Palm-Wine Drinkard,* including *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), *The Brave African Huntress* (1958), *Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967). Though he did not receive major international awards, his books became classics, studied in universities worldwide. Tutuola died in Ibadan in 1997. Today, he is considered a pioneering figure in Nigerian and global literature, a writer who proved that oral tradition could stand proudly on the world's literary stage.

Book *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) is Amos Tutuola's wildly imaginative novel about a man who travels through strange forests, spirit towns, and ghostly worlds in search of his dead palm-wine tapster. Blending Yoruba storytelling with dreamlike adventure, the book explores themes such as identity, illusion, excess, moral confusion, freedom, coercion, and the fragile nature of community. When it first appeared in Nigeria, reactions were divided: some readers criticized Tutuola's unconventional English, while others admired his bold creativity and the way he brought oral tradition into print. Abroad, the novel was embraced with enthusiasm. Writers like Dylan Thomas praised its originality, and it quickly became one of the first African novels to gain international attention. Tutuola received the 1953 Nigerian Federal Literature Prize, and the book helped open the door for African storytelling on the global stage.

Background Tutuola wrote *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* at a moment when Nigeria was undergoing major cultural and political change. In the early 1950s, nationalist movements were growing, colonial authority was weakening, and Nigerians were debating what independence should look like politically, culturally and artistically. Literature was part of this conversation. Many Nigerian writers were trying to define a modern literary voice, often shaped by Western education and expectations. At the same time, British publishers were eager for African stories, but often preferred works that felt "folkloric" or "exotic." Tutuola's novel appeared right in the middle of these tensions. He wrote in English, but not in the polished, formal style expected by colonial schools. Instead, he used English the way Yoruba storytellers use speech: flexible, rhythmic, and full of imaginative leaps. His approach challenged ideas about what "proper" literature should sound like. Culturally, the book reflects a world where traditional beliefs, spirit encounters, and magical logic were part of everyday imagination. Politically, its chaotic landscapes and unpredictable events echo the uncertainty of a society preparing to step out of colonial rule and into self-governance. The novel captures a moment when Nigeria was redefining itself, balancing tradition and modernity, local identity and global visibility. Tutuola's work became one of the earliest literary expressions of that transition.

SYNOPSIS

The Palm-Wine Drinkard tells the story of a man whose entire life is built around drinking palm wine. From childhood, he drinks nothing else, supported by his wealthy father who hires a master tapster capable of producing enormous quantities of wine every day. When this tapster dies suddenly, the drinkard's world collapses: His supply disappears, his friends abandon him, and he is forced to confront a life without the abundance he once took for granted. Refusing to accept this loss, the drinkard decides to search for the tapster in the land of the dead. His journey is a long, surreal adventure through forests, ghostly towns, and supernatural territories filled with strange creatures and unpredictable magic. He meets gods who test him, spirits who challenge him, and beings who distort reality. He rescues a chief's daughter from a deceptive "Complete Gentleman" who turns out to be a skull wearing rented body parts. He battles Death, encounters monstrous children, confronts curses, and survives magical transformations. Eventually, he reaches Deads' Town, where he finds his tapster living among the dead. The tapster welcomes him, shares food and stories, and explains the rules of the dead. But the tapster refuses to return to the world of the living, insisting that a dead man cannot live among "alives." Instead, he gives the drinkard a magical egg that can produce anything when placed in water. The drinkard leaves Deads' Town and continues his journey home, facing new dangers and moral lessons. By the end of the novel, he returns to his community transformed by his experiences, carrying a deeper understanding of the world's mysteries and the fragility of abundance, identity, and companionship.

PLOT NARRATIVE

CHAPTER 1**: On the Way to Death's Home**

A Life Built on Palm-Wine: The narrator (the drinkard) explains that from childhood, his entire identity revolves around palm-wine: *"I was a palm-wine drinkard since I was a boy of ten years of age."* He explains that he drank it constantly, unable even to taste water. His father, the richest man in town, indulges this obsession by hiring a dedicated tapster and giving him a massive palm-tree farm of 560,000 trees. The tapster produces extraordinary quantities of wine, *"one hundred and fifty kegs every morning,"* which the narrator finishes before mid-afternoon. His house overflows with friends who drink with him, but this prosperity collapses when the tapster dies in an accident.

Loss, Loneliness, and a Desperate Quest: After burying the tapster, the narrator faces a sudden drought: no palm-wine, no friends, no joy. He tries to find another tapster, but none can meet his impossible demands. Forced to drink water, he feels deeply unsatisfied. Remembering an old belief that the dead live somewhere in the world, he decides to search for his tapster. Armed with his *juju* (talisman), the narrator leaves home and wanders through forests, sleeping in trees to avoid spirits. In each village he stays months, asking for the tapster, but no one has seen him. His journey stretches into many months of hardship.

The God Who Tests Him: After seven months, the narrator reaches a town ruled by an old man who is actually a god. When asked his name, the narrator boldly answers, *"Father of gods who could do everything in this world."* The god challenges this claim: He sends the narrator to retrieve a mysterious object from a distant blacksmith. Using *juju*, the narrator transforms himself into a bird, spies on the god, discovers that the object is a bell, and retrieves it. Impressed but not yet satisfied, the god assigns him a second, far more dangerous task, that of capturing Death himself using a special net.

Journey to Death's House: The narrator identifies Death's road by lying across a crossroads until market goers remark that his head points toward *"Death's road."* After eight hours of eerie travel, he reaches Death's lonely home. He announces himself by beating a drum, prompting Death to ask, *"Is that man still alive or dead?"* Death tries to kill him by commanding the drum's strings to bind and suffocate him, but the narrator counters with his own *juju*, commanding yam ropes and stakes to attack Death. This magical duel ends in a truce, and Death even shares food with him and shows him his gruesome household, where human bones serve as fuel and utensils.

Outsmarting Death: Death tries to kill the narrator at night by smashing the bone-bed where he was supposed to sleep, but the narrator has wisely slept underneath it. The next night, the narrator prepares a trap: a pit covered with the god's net. In the morning, he convinces Death to walk with him, and Death falls into the pit. The narrator wraps him in a net, carries him on his head for eight hours, and brings him to the god. Terrified, the god begs him to take Death away, but the net tears and Death escapes into the world. The god and his wife flee, and the town empties in panic. The narrator is left without the promised information about his tapster.

A New Town, A New Bargain: Five months later, the drinkard reaches another town with a large market. The town's head welcomes him warmly, offering him food and palm-wine. When the narrator reveals his name, *"Father of gods who could do anything in this world,"* the town head panics and confesses that he knows where the tapster is. But he demands a favor first: The narrator must rescue his daughter, who was abducted from the market by a mysterious creature. The narrator initially hesitates, but remembering his boastful name, he accepts. The daughter, known for her beauty, has refused all her suitors before the creature seduced her on a market day.

CHAPTER 2-*The Description of the Creature*

The Gentleman Who Was Not a Gentleman: The man who seduced the daughter of the town's head is described as a handsome man, *"a beautiful 'complete' gentleman … dressed with the finest and most costly clothes,"* so perfect that, if he were for sale, *"he would be sold at least for £2000."* His beauty overwhelms the chief's daughter, who abandons her market goods just to follow him. He ignores her completely, but she trails behind him as the market closes, captivated and determined.

CHAPTER 3-*"Do Not Follow the Unknown Man's Beauty"*

Ignoring the Warnings: As the chief's daughter follows the dazzling stranger whose perfection had already made her abandon her market goods, she moves farther from safety, ignoring every warning he gave her to turn back. After nearly twelve miles, he leaves the main road and steps into an *"endless forest in which only all the terrible creatures were living,"* a place no ordinary person would dare enter. But she continues following him, driven not by reason but by the dangerous spell of his beauty, unaware that she is crossing the threshold from the human world into one ruled by spirits, monsters, and deception.

CHAPTER 4: *"Return the Parts of the Body to the Owners; Or Hired Parts of The Complete Gentleman's Body to Be Returned"*

Returning the Rented Body Parts: As the chief's daughter follows the complete gentleman deeper into the endless forest, she witnesses a terrifying scene: His perfect body is only borrowed. He stops at hidden spots in the bush to return each rented part, first the left foot, then the right: *"he pulled it out and gave it to the owner and paid him."* With both feet gone, he crawls forward like an injured animal, and when she tries to turn back, he forbids her, warning, *"now that cannot be done."* As they continue, the gentleman surrenders his belly, ribs, and chest, then his arms, and finally even his neck, until nothing remains but a living head bouncing forward like a monstrous bullfrog. The woman, gripped with fear, realizes too late that she has followed beauty into horror, trapped in a forest where every step strips her companion of the illusion that has lured her away from safety.

CHAPTER 5-*A Full-Bodied Gentleman Reduced to Head*

A Bare Skull: The complete gentleman even removes the skin and flesh covering his face, and the dazzling man the woman admired in the market becomes a bare skull. Terrified, she tries to flee, regretting that she ignored her father's advice to marry a real man, but the skull chases her with supernatural speed, leaping *"a mile to the second before coming down,"* and blocks her path like a fallen log. Forced to follow him, she enters his underground home, a hole inhabited only by skulls. He ties a single cowrie around her neck as a magical alarm, sets her on a giant frog as a stool, and places a watch-skull beside her with a whistle to alert the others if she tries to escape. Whenever she attempts to run, the cowrie shrieks, the watcher whistles, and thousands of skulls roll forward like to seize her and drag her back to her frog-seat, trapping her in a world of bone, noise, and terror.

CHAPTER 6-*The Father of Gods Should Find Out Whereabouts the Daughter of the Head of the Town Was*

The Father of Gods Begins the Search: Delighted by the prospect of finding his long-lost palm-wine tapster, the drinkard sets out to find the daughter who has foolishly followed the complete gentleman from the market. That night he sacrifices a goat to his *juju*, and at dawn he drinks forty kegs of palm-wine to strengthen himself before beginning the investigation. Because it is market-day, he starts there, using his powers as a juju-man to read the crowd. At exactly nine o'clock, the same dazzling "complete gentleman" appears again, and the drinkard instantly recognizes him as a dangerous, supernatural creature.

CHAPTER 7-*The Lady Was Not to Be Blamed for Following the Skull As a Complete Gentleman*

The Gentleman of Impossible Beauty: When the narrator finally sees this gentleman, he is overwhelmed by the man's supernatural beauty. He is so perfect that even bombs, enemies, or danger would never touch him. The narrator admits, *"if I were a lady, no doubt I would follow him to wherever he would go …"* (22). Even as a man, he admits that he is jealous of the beauty of this man, and that when he saw him, he went to a corner of the market and cried for not being that handsome man. He then remembers that this flawless being is, in truth, only a skull wearing borrowed beauty. His pursuit becomes both an investigation and a meditation on how irresistible appearances can mislead even the wisest observer.

The Skull's Deception and the Lady's Innocence: As the narrator continues his search, he learns that the lady cannot be blamed for following the Skull, because she genuinely believed she was following a real gentleman. The Skull behaved impeccably, mimicking every gesture and manner expected of a refined man, leaving the lady no reason to suspect his true nature. In her eyes, she was simply following her husband. The narrator reflects that neither the lady nor the Skull is at fault: She followed beauty and good conduct, and he performed the role flawlessly. This realization deepens the narrator's understanding of the strange world he travels through, a place where appearances rule, and truth hides beneath masks that only persistence and supernatural insight can uncover.

CHAPTER 8-*Investigation to the Skull's Family's House*

Investigation into the Skull's Hidden World: As he trails the gentleman for miles, the drinkard witnesses the astonishing moment when the man begins returning his borrowed body parts to their rightful owners, revealing himself as a skull who had assembled beauty piece by piece. The narrator continues the pursuit until they reach the skull's home, where a strange domestic scene unfolds: A lady sits on a bullfrog with a single cowrie on her neck, watched closely by a skull, while the gentleman's family works in the backyard.

CHAPTER 9-*The Investigator's Wonderful Work in the Skull's Family's House*

Flight, Transformation, and Return: The narrator attempts to help the woman, but his effort triggers the cowrie's terrible noise, summoning the entire skull family and forcing him into a frantic escape. Chased through the forest by skulls rolling like massive stones and humming with dreadful sound, the narrator transforms the lady into a kitten and himself into a sparrow to flee through the sky. Even then, the cowrie's relentless noise follows them. Once home, he restores them both to human forms and returns the lady to her father. The father rejoices at her rescue. But the cowrie's supernatural power continues to torment the daughter. It will not stop shouting, preventing rest or relief. The narrator's success is overshadowed by the lingering curse of the skull's cowrie, reminding him that in this world rescue does not always mean release.

CHAPTER 10-**There Remain Greater Tasks Ahead**

Should the Drinkard Return to the Skull's Lair? The drinkard is still determined to free the lady from the skull family's curse. He tries everything to cut the cowrie from the lady's neck so she can speak and eat again, but the charm's power refuses to yield. Praised as the "Father of gods" but ashamed of his failure, the drinkard weighs the dangerous idea of returning to the skulls' forest home, knowing that greater trials still lie ahead, and that the path to truly rescuing the lady will demand courage beyond anything he has faced so far.

CHAPTER 11-*Back to the Skull's Family's House*

Returning to the Forest of Secrets: After failing to free the lady from the noisy cowrie, the narrator decides to return to the endless forest to continue his investigation. Though ashamed of his earlier failure, he knows that *"greater tasks"* lie ahead, and he must face the dangers of the Skull family once more. His determination outweighs his fear, pushing him back towards the mysterious house where the lady had first been taken.

The Leaf That Restores Speech: Upon reaching the skull family's house, the narrator transforms into a lizard and climbs a tree to observe the skull who had deceived the lady. The skull behaves like a gentleman, standing before two plants and cutting a single opposite leaf, holding it carefully in his right hand. The skull then says: *"As this lady was taken from me, if this opposite leaf is not given her to eat, she will not talk for ever … and … the cowrie on her neck could not be loosened away forever"* (28). The skull then throws the leaves away. The narrator changes into a man and cautiously retrieves the leaves. Once back, the drinkard cooks the leaves for the lady to consume. The lady starts talking again, *"as if she had never stopped talking before,"* freed from the cowrie's terrible noise. The lady's recovery leads to celebration, and her parents give the narrator fifty kegs of palm-wine in gratitude, and they give him the lady as wife and two rooms in their house.

A Child Born from a Thumb: Life settles calmly for six months. After this period of time the narrator remembers his dead tapster. He asks his father-in-law to fulfill his promise and reveal where he can find his tapster. But his father-in-law, fearing that he might take his daughter far away, asks him to wait for some time. For three and a half years, the drinkard taps his own palm-wine with the help of his wife, but *"I could not tap it to the quantity that I required to drink"* (29). Soon, another supernatural event erupts. The narrator's wife's thumb swells painfully, and from it emerges a strange child who grows rapidly and introduces himself as *"Zurrjir,"* meaning a son who will soon change himself into something else. Zurrjir drinks palm-wine, eats enormous amounts of food, and becomes violent and powerful, ruling the household with frightening strength. His presence turns daily life into chaos.

Ending the Child's Destruction: Zurrjir's violence spreads beyond the home, disturbing the entire town. Desperate to restore peace, the narrator traps him inside a leaf-thatched house during the dry season, sets it ablaze, and seals the doors. The child burns with the house, and the inhabitants rejoice that the terror has ended. Only then does the narrator return to his original quest, pressing his wife's father to finally reveal the whereabouts of his long-lost palm-wine tapster.

CHAPTER 12-*On the Way to an Unknown Place*

The Half-Bodied Baby Appears: After learning where his long-lost palm-wine tapster might be, the narrator urges his wife to pack their belongings so they can begin a new journey. They leave early in the morning. But only two miles out, his wife remembers she left her gold trinket in the house that had burned down. She insists on going back: *"it was a metal and it could not burn into ashes."* Despite his hesitations, the narrator follows her back to the ruins. As the wife searches through the ashes, a half-bodied baby emerges. The creature speaks in a deep voice and begins commanding them to take him with them. As they refuse, he orders them to stop breathing, and they cannot breathe. The narrator and his wife are forced to carry this supernatural being as they travel, baffled by his power.

Driven Out of Every Town: The couple's journey becomes miserable. Whenever they enter a town or village, people chase them away, shouting that they are carrying a spirit: *"we could not travel through towns or villages without being driven away."* The baby refuses to let them eat. Hunger begins to overwhelm them. They try to put the baby down, but it refuses, clinging to them with relentless force. The baby grows heavier as it eats, swelling until it weighs at least twenty-eight pounds. The narrator's wife becomes too exhausted to carry it, so he takes over. But soon he is drenched in sweat and barely able to move. He wonders aloud, *"Ah! how could we escape from this half-bodied baby?"* Their suffering continues as the baby forbids rest and forces them to wander through the bush, searching for relief.

CHAPTER 13-*Three Good Creatures Took Over Our Trouble-They Were:-Drum, Song, and Dance*

The Creatures Who Lift the Burden: After hours of carrying the exhausting half-bodied baby through the bush, the narrator and his wife finally reach the source of the mysterious music. There, they meet three living beings, Drum, Song, and Dance, each a creature with its own supernatural force. When Drum beats, it sounds *"as if fifty men"* were striking. When Song sings, it echoes like *"a hundred people,"* and when Dance moves, everyone around is compelled to join. The baby leaps from the narrator's head and joins them, freeing the couple from their torment for the first time.

Five Days of Dancing and a Desperate Journey: The three creatures dance without stopping for five days, never eating or resting, and the narrator and his wife are swept into their rhythm. They follow the beings to a mud-built compound guarded by soldiers. Only Drum, Song, Dance, and the half-bodied baby are allowed inside. The couple continue dancing outside until two o'clock in the night, then leave and travels for two days. Penniless and exhausted, the narrator remembers his title: *"Father of gods who could do anything in this world."* He uses a carved paddle and a guiding *juju* to cross a river and reach a large town.

Work, Wealth, and New Dangers: In the new town, the narrator's wife turns their canoe into a ferry service, charging adults and children for passage. Their work is successful: In one day they earn Seven pounds, five shillings, and three pence, and after a month they accumulate Fifty-six pounds, eleven shillings, and nine pence. With their savings, they continue their journey, traveling nearly eighty miles. But the road ahead is perilous. Highwaymen threaten them, and the forest teems with dangerous creatures, including countless boa constrictors. Their adventure shifts from supernatural burden to human danger, reminding them that every stage of the journey carries its own trials.

CHAPTER 14-*To Travel By Air*

Flying Toward the Realm of Spirits: After surviving dangers on the road, the narrator decides that the fastest way to reach his palm-wine tapster is to travel by air. He tells his wife to climb onto his back with all their belongings, then uses his powerful *juju* to transform himself into a great bird. Together they soar for hours over forests, rivers, and strange territories until they finally land near the domain of the Water Spirit woman. From there, they continue on foot through creepy places such as the *Bush of Ghosts*, meeting supernatural beings who reveal that the tapster is no longer among the living but has crossed into the world of the dead.

Discovering the Tapster's Fate: Guided by spirits and driven by determination, the drinkard and his wife press forward until they reach a town inhabited entirely by the dead. The journey becomes increasingly surreal, filled with ghostly landscapes, uncanny silence, and beings who exist between worlds. It is here that the narrator learns the truth: His palm-wine tapster has been living in *Deads' Town*, a place where ordinary rules no longer apply. This revelation marks a turning point in the narrator's quest, showing that to reclaim what he has lost, he must now confront the mysteries and dangers of the afterlife itself.

CHAPTER 15: *"No Road"-"Ought to Travel From Bush To Bush To the Deads' Town"*

Into the Bush on the Road to Deads' Town: The narrator and his wife leave town and push nearly forty miles into thick, pathless bush, determined to reach the mysterious Deads' Town where the palm-wine tapster is said to live. As night falls, the forest becomes eerie and threatening, and they soon encounter a strange white pillar-like creature with no head, feet, or hands. Remembering a protective charm from his father, the narrator transforms into fire and smoke, burning the creature and keeping the others at bay.

Creatures of the Field and the Termites' House: At dawn, the couple escape deeper into the bush, eventually reaching a field of tall wild grass. They find a termites' house shaped like an umbrella and rest there, only to be approached by a cream-colored female figure who kneels silently before them. As night comes, they hear sounds like a bustling market, and field creatures surround them. The owner of the termites' house, a being with no foot, only a tiny leg, leads them through the field for twenty minutes until they arrive at a king's palace.

The King Who Laughs Without End: The palace is filthy and ruined, and the king himself is covered in dried and undried leaves. His people accuse the narrator and his wife of trespassing, unable to describe them because they have never seen humans before. To test whether they can feel pain, the king orders a servant to poke them with a sharp stick. When they cry out, the king and his people erupt into uncontrollable laughter that lasts for two hours, their joy becoming overwhelming and bizarre. After the laughter subsides, the king commands his people to take the narrator to their "gods of war." The narrator, identifying himself as the *"Father of gods,"* faces the god, a fearsome being who emits hot steam like a boiler and breathes in slow, five-minute intervals. Despite the danger, the narrator manages to leave unharmed, proving his supernatural resilience and earning safe passage out of the field.

Journey Toward the Dead: With the field creatures behind them, the narrator and his wife resume their trek through the bush, still determined to reach Deads' Town. Each encounter, white spirits, strange field beings, laughing kings, and steaming gods, deepens the surreal nature of their journey. Nevertheless, they press forward, knowing that only by crossing these supernatural territories can they finally discover the fate of the palm-wine tapster and complete the quest that has carried them through worlds both living and dead.

CHAPTER 16-***The "Wraith-Island"***

Life Among the Kind Creatures of Wraith-Island: After escaping the strange field-creatures and their king, the narrator and his wife reach Wraith-Island, a peaceful, water-surrounded place inhabited by gentle beings who welcome them warmly. These creatures give the travelers a house, share food, and fill the island with constant music and dancing: *"They were the most beautiful creatures in the world of the curious creatures and also the most wonderful dancers and musicians"* (47). Their days on the island unfold in harmony: planting crops, listening to music, and joining in dances that seem to rise naturally from the island's spirit. It is a rare moment of rest and joy in a journey otherwise filled with danger and supernatural trials.

The Terrible Creature of the Farm: The peace of Wraith-Island is interrupted when a monstrous creature appears on the farm and devours the crops. The narrator describes it vividly: as large as an elephant, with fingernails two feet long, a head ten times bigger than its body, and teeth as thick as cow horns. Its body is covered in long black hair, and five horns project from its head. At first, the narrator tries to drive it away by throwing stones, but he soon realizes that it is the true owner of the land. To show respect, he offers some of the crops, and the creature accepts the gesture. In return, it leads him to its home, where it gives him magical seeds, four grains of corn, four grains of rice, and four okra seeds. When planted, these seeds sprout instantly, grow into full crops within minutes, and bear ripe fruit almost immediately. The narrator harvests them and returns triumphantly to Wraith-Island.

Magical Harvests and the Road Ahead: The narrator keeps the dried seeds from these miraculous crops as proof of what he has witnessed, storing them carefully for future use as he prepares to continue his journey. After the crops produce their final fruits and dry up, he cuts them and saves the seeds.

CHAPTER 17-***"Not Too Small To Be Chosen"***

The King's Call and the Great Clearing: In the strange land of Wraith-Island, the king summons every creature, humans, spirits, and monstrous beings, to help clear his enormous cornfield, a space stretching two miles across. The narrator and his wife join the crowd, and together they work through the morning until the field is spotless. They return proudly to the king, who thanks them warmly and rewards them with food and drink. None of them suspects that their work is about to be undone by a force so small they never imagined it mattered.

The Tiny Creature's Revenge: Unbeknownst to the workers, a creature the size of a newborn baby, only one day old, had been left out of the king's selection. Feeling insulted and overlooked, this tiny being goes to the field after everyone leaves and uses its mysterious power to command the weeds to rise again as if they had never been cleared. The next morning, the king visits his field and is shocked to find it untouched.

He accuses the workers of lying, and although they insist they cleared it, the evidence says otherwise. They clear the field again, only for the weeds to rise once more. Confusion turns to frustration as the cycle repeats.

Discovering the Saboteur: Determined to solve the mystery, the workers clear the field a third time and hide one of their own in a nearby bush to watch what happens. Within half an hour, the tiny creature appears again and commands the weeds to grow. The hidden watcher leaps out and captures the baby-sized saboteur. When brought before the king, the creature explains that it acted out of resentment: The king had chosen everyone except him, even though he possessed powerful abilities. The king apologizes, explaining it was an oversight, not discrimination. Satisfied, the tiny creature leaves peacefully, and the field remains cleared.

Farewell to Wraith-Island: After spending eighteen months among the kind inhabitants of Wraith-Island, the narrator and his wife decide to continue their journey, still far from their ultimate destination. The islanders shower the wife with valuable gifts and escort the couple in a large canoe, singing heartfelt farewell songs as they paddle along the river. At the boundary of their land, they stop, forbidden from entering another creature's territory, and they return home with music and affection. The narrator and his wife step into another unknown bush, ready for whatever lies ahead.

Entering the Greedy Bush and Beyond: The couple's next passage leads them into a bizarre and unsettling bush where nothing behaves normally. The ground warms beneath them, trees have no fallen leaves or sticks, and a sweet smell fills the air, satisfying their hunger without food. The bush seems alive and impatient, pushing them onward. They encounter a pond that dries instantly as they try to drink, palm trees topped with artificial talking heads that laugh loudly at them, and later a forest filled with deadly birds that pierce animals with sword-like beaks. Using a protective *juju* powder, they escape the birds and continue until nightfall, when an enormous "Spirit of Prey" approaches. It is a terrifying creature whose gaze emits scorching light. Only divine intervention prevents it from closing its eyes and killing them instantly. Exhausted but alive, the narrator and his wife press forward, knowing many more trials await.

Escaping the Spirit of Prey: After surviving the Spirit of Prey, the narrator and his wife face a new danger: A buffalo wanders into the creature's path. As soon as the Spirit of Prey closes his eyes, the act that kills any prey instantly, the buffalo dies and drags itself toward him. While the creature devours it in minutes, the narrator seizes the chance to escape. He lifts his unconscious wife into a tree with many branches, leaving their loads below. When the Spirit of Prey finishes eating, he shines his deadly flood-light eyes toward the spot where the couple had been sitting. Finding only their luggage, he pulls the loads toward himself, discovers nothing edible, and waits beneath the tree until dawn. Only when daylight approaches does he give up and leave, allowing the narrator to revive his wife and continue their journey.

Entering the Ruined Town of Strange Images: By late afternoon, the couple leaves the dangerous bush behind and enters a smaller, eerie one filled with ruins. They find abandoned houses whose belongings look untouched despite being centuries old. Among the ruins sits a terrifying stone image with long breasts and hollow eyes. Further ahead, they encounter another statue with a basket full of kola nuts. When the narrator takes one, a disembodied voice warns him to leave it, but he ignores the command. This act triggers the appearance of a bizarre creature: a man walking backward, with eyes on his knees and arms so long they can reach the tops of trees. Holding a whip, he chases the couple relentlessly through the bush for two hours, trying to flog them.

The Chase and the Mysterious Road: As they flee from the backward-walking man, the narrator and his wife suddenly stumble onto a wide, clean road. The moment they step onto it, the creature stops chasing them and retreats, as if forbidden from entering that path. The couple wait for thirty minutes, hoping someone might pass and guide them, but the road remains empty. Its surface is spotless, without footprints or signs of life. This unnatural stillness convinces them that they have reached a legendary and dangerous route.

The Road to the Unreturnable Heaven's Town: Realizing the road's significance, the narrator identifies it as the path leading to the Unreturnable Heaven's Town, a place feared by all creatures. Anyone who enters it never returns, for its inhabitants are cruel, merciless, and hostile to outsiders. The road's silence, cleanliness, and supernatural aura confirm its reputation. Standing at this crossroads, the narrator and his wife must decide whether to risk entering a town from which no traveler has ever come back, or to turn away and continue their wandering through the unpredictable wilderness of spirits, monsters, and enchanted landscapes.

CHAPTER 18-*On Our Way to the Unreturnable-Heaven's Town*

The Road That Leads to No Return: The narrator and his wife travel along a strange, empty road that shows *"no footprints"* and no sign of life. They walk from two in the afternoon until seven in the evening without reaching a town or even the end of the road. After cooking food and sleeping by the roadside, they continue the next day until four o'clock, still without meeting a single creature. They decide not to go farther and rest again. When they resume their journey, they reach a closed gate guarded by bizarre beings. The gate opens into a town filled with cruel inhabitants who mistreat strangers. They push, insult, and threaten the travelers. The town's architecture is strange, with buildings that seem alive and hostile: *"all the houses bent downward as if they were going to fall"* (61).

Questioned by the King of the Town: The couple are dragged before the king, who demands to know *"where we came from"* and *"what we wanted."* The narrator replies that he is looking for his tapster who died a long time ago. The king informs him that his town is the Unreturnable-Heaven's Town, *"a town in which are only enemies of God Living, only cruel, greedy, and merciless creatures."* The king's attendants surround the couple, staring as if they have never seen humans before. The king orders his people to scrape the couple's hair with sharp tools, burn the scraps, and tie them to a pillar. The cruelty is deliberate, meant to test their endurance and break their spirits.

Buried Alive in the Field: The torment continues as the king's men take the narrator and his wife to a field and bury them up to their necks. They are left exposed to the sun, insects, and the taunts of the townspeople. Stones are thrown at them, and they are mocked for hours. The narrator describes the pain as unbearable, yet they survive, refusing to give in to the cruelty around them. A sudden rainstorm loosens the earth enough for the couple to break free. As they flee, an eagle swoops down repeatedly, trying to attack them, but they manage to escape its claws. They run until they reach another town, only to find more danger. Houses burn mysteriously, and unknown creatures roam the streets.

Through the Bush of Arrows and Roasted Meat: The narrator and his wife leave the town and enter a bush filled with strange phenomena. Arrows fly from unseen hands; roasted meat appears mysteriously on the ground. The river they reach is difficult to cross, and the land around them feels alive with threats. Every step forward is a battle against forces they cannot fully understand.

Faithful-Mother and Faithful-Hands: As they continue, they encounter a massive white tree. A powerful voice calls out, *"STOP THERE, AND COME HERE,"* commanding them to approach. Large hands emerge from the tree, communicating silently and eventually pulling them inside. The narrator explains that they had previously *"sold our death"* and *"lent our fear,"* which is why they can face such supernatural events without collapsing. Inside the tree, they find a large house and an old woman seated in a decorated space. She reveals that she is *"Faithful-Mother,"* a helper of those suffering in the bush. She explains that the giant hands that brought them are called *"Faithful-Hands,"* whose job is to rescue travelers in difficulty. For the first time, the narrator and his wife find kindness, protection, and a moment of rest before continuing their long journey toward the land of the dead.

CHAPTER 19-*"The Work of the Faithful-Mother in the White Tree"*

Inside the White Tree's Hall of Remembrance: Faithful-Mother welcomes the narrator and his wife with food and drink, then leads them into the largest dancing hall at the center of the white tree. The hall is

dazzling, decorated, and filled with over three hundred dancers moving in perfect rhythm. Everywhere, orchestras play, children sing melodiously, and technicolor lights shift every few minutes. In the middle of this spectacle, the couple discovers two white images that look exactly like them. When they ask Faithful-Mother why these images exist, she explains that they are kept *"for remembrance and to know those she was helping from their difficulties and punishments."* The hall is a living archive of every soul she has rescued.

Healing, Hospitality, and a Place to Rest: Faithful-Mother continues guiding the couple through her vast home, showing them a dining hall, a kitchen bustling with *"three hundred and forty cooks,"* and finally her hospital. There, many patients lie on beds recovering from hardships like theirs. She hands the narrator and his wife over to a nurse who treats their heads, still raw from being scraped with broken bottles in Unreturnable-Heaven's Town. After a week of care, their hair grows back fully. Restored and relieved, they return to Faithful-Mother, who gives them a room of their own. For the first time in a long and punishing journey, they find safety, healing, and a moment of peace before continuing onward.

CHAPTER 20-*Our Life With the Faithful-Mother in the White Tree*

Settling Into the White Tree: Faithful-Mother welcomes the narrator and his wife into her vast, magical white tree, offering them care, rest, and protection. Within days, the couple feels so safe and comforted that they forget the suffering they endured before arriving. The narrator explains that Faithful-Mother tended to them *"with her faithfulness,"* creating a home where they could finally breathe. Their wounds heal, their spirits lift, and they begin to understand why so many travelers speak of her kindness. Life inside the tree feels almost unreal, peaceful, warm, and free of danger.

A Life of Wine, Dance, and Endless Hospitality: Faithful-Mother encourages them to join the community in the great hall, telling them to *"go there and drink freely."* The narrator and his wife discover a world of abundance: palm-wine flowing without limit, dancers moving in perfect rhythm, and musicians filling the air with sound. Soon, they become excellent dancers themselves, welcomed into the nightly celebrations. Even when the wine runs low, Faithful-Mother produces a tiny bottle that miraculously lasts for days. The narrator marvels that although the bottle contains only *"a small quantity,"* it never seems to empty. Their days become a cycle of drinking, dancing, and joy.

Gambling, Losses, and the Realization of Danger: After three months, the narrator and his wife become full inhabitants of the white tree. They live freely, wandering from hall to hall, joining games and gatherings. Gambling becomes a daily pastime, but the narrator quickly discovers that the other gamblers are experts. He loses money repeatedly, unable to match their skill. The carefree life begins to feel risky: The more he loses, the more he realizes that staying too long might trap them in comfort and distraction. The narrator senses that the white tree, though beautiful, is not a place to remain forever.

The Faithful-Mother Sends Them Onward: After one year and two weeks, Faithful-Mother calls the narrator and his wife to her side. She tells them that their time with her has come to an end. They have healed, rested, and regained their strength; now they must continue their journey towards Deads' Town. Her farewell is not harsh but purposeful. She reminds them that every traveler must move forward, even from places of comfort. With gratitude and a touch of sadness, the narrator prepares to leave the magical white tree and the mother who sheltered them.

CHAPTER 21-*"We and the Red-People in the Red-Town"*

Entering the Red-Bush: The journey into the Red-Bush feels increasingly surreal. After traveling about twelve miles with the Red-lady, the narrator notices that the landscape is shifting into a world colored entirely in red. When they finally reach the settlement, they see that *"both people and their domestic animals were deep-red in colour,"* a sight that confirms they have crossed into a realm governed by unfamiliar forces. Hunger pushes the travelers into the largest house in the Red-Town. The Red-lady offers them food and

water, both *"as red as paint"* but tasting perfectly ordinary. This contrast between appearance and reality deepens their sense of unease, as if the town's redness conceals truths not yet revealed.

Meeting the Red-King: The Red-lady leads the couple to the palace, where the Red-king sits *"red as blood,"* his presence commanding and worrying. He interrogates them with authority: *"Where did you come from? Who helped you? Are you alive or dead?"* Only when the narrator explains that they came from the Faithful-Mother does the king soften, because she is his sister. The king orders the Red-lady to place the couple in an isolated room. The emptiness of the space and the silence of the palace make the narrator restless. He lies awake, wondering what awaits them: *"I could not sleep because I was thinking of what the Red-king would say in the morning."*

The Red-King's Story: At dawn, the king recounts the strange events that cursed his land. Once, when he was still a human, he set traps expecting ordinary game but instead caught a red-bird and a red-fish that *"were talking like human beings even inside the fire."* Their unnatural speech terrified the people and marked the beginning of the town's transformation. When the king tried to burn the creatures, the smoke turned red and spread across the land. Everyone who inhaled it, humans and animals alike, changed color and eventually died. As the king explains, *"All the people and domestic animals turned red and died after seven days … and we left that town and settled down here"* (81).

The Demand for Sacrifice: The red creatures survived the fire and retreated into a deep hole, from which they demanded yearly human sacrifice. The Red-people complied out of fear, believing that only this ritual could keep the creatures from destroying them. The king announces that the time has come again and asks for a volunteer, hoping that either the narrator or his wife will volunteer. The narrator's wife speaks in parables, hinting that courage and destiny are intertwined*: "This would be a brief loss of woman and a shorter separation of a man from a lover"* (82). Her words move the narrator deeply, and he realizes that *"I must volunteer myself,"* accepting the role of sacrifice to protect the town.

Painted for Death: The Red-people prepare the narrator for the ritual by painting his hair and body with red and white paint, marking him as the chosen offering. Though they give him a gun and a cutlass, they doubt these weapons will help. Still, he feels a fierce determination as they lead him toward the creatures' lair. Left alone at the edge of the hole, the narrator hears strange noises rising from below. Soon the monstrous beings emerge: the red-bird covered with insects and the red-fish bearing *"many horns and eyes."* The drinkard fights them with his gun and cutlass, battling not just physical danger but the supernatural terror they embody.

Victory and Revelation: After defeating the creatures, the drinkard returns to the Red-king, who is astonished. The king is now afraid that the formidable drinkard can be a danger to him and his people: *"here is another fearful and harmful creature who could ruin my town in future"* (86). The king signals his people who change into fire and burn their own houses and properties and change themselves into two red trees and flee before the narrator can reach them. The narrator searches desperately for his missing wife for days. Eventually, he reaches a new town where the Red-people have settled. There he learns that larger tree was the Red-king, and the smaller, slender one was his wife. She returns to her human form, ready to continue their journey together.

CHAPTERS 22-***"The Invisible Pawn"***

The Strange Offer of Give-and-Take: The narrator and his wife meet an unusual man who calls himself Give-and-Take. He asks to borrow two thousand cowries and promises to work as a permanent hired laborer in return. His confidence is perturbing, and the wife warns that he would be *"a wonderful hard worker but also a wonderful robber."* Despite her caution, the narrator accepts the offer, intrigued by the man's mysterious abilities and the odd way he speaks of his work.

The Invisible Worker in the Bush: Give-and-Take explains how laborers can summon him by calling his name into the bush, and soon his supernatural skill becomes clear. Farms are cleared overnight, and heavy

logs appear in town as if carried by invisible hands. People begin calling him the Invisible-Pawn because he cannot do anything in the day time, but at night his work is unmatched. His unseen presence amazes the townspeople but also stirs unease, as no one understands how he performs such feats.

Mischief and Rising Danger: The Invisible-Pawn's behavior grows more troubling. One night he shaves and paints the heads of people and domestic animals, causing panic throughout the town. The narrator later learns that Give-and-Take is actually the leader of the Bush-creatures who steal crops such as yams and corn. His nighttime visits become more violent, and he arrives his followers to fight the townspeople, leaving destruction behind. What began as a labor arrangement now threatens the narrator's safety. The townspeople, furious over the losses caused by Give-and-Take and his followers, prepare to raise an army against the narrator, believing he is responsible for bringing the Invisible-Pawn into their midst. He and his wife hide in the town while the natives search for them, careful not to fire guns inside the settlement. His wife urges him to call for help from Give-and-Take himself, insisting that only the Invisible-Pawn can protect them. Early the next morning, the narrator sends a laborer to summon him, hoping that the same mysterious power that caused the trouble might now save them.

CHAPTER 23-***"The Invisible-Pawn on the Front"***

The Midnight Attack of the Invisible-Pawn: In the dead of night, the Invisible-Pawn returns to the Red-town with his supernatural followers. Because he cannot act during the day, he strikes at *"about two o'clock in the mid-night,"* unleashing a violent assault on the Red-people. The attackers kill every native inhabitant. Only the narrator and his wife are spared, left standing alone in a town emptied of its population. With no one left to live among, they gather their belongings and flee before dawn.

Toward Deads' Town and the Man With the Mysterious Bag: Leaving the ruined Red-town behind, the couple resume their long journey toward the legendary Deads' Town, where the narrator hopes to find his deceased palm-wine tapster. They travel through bush after bush, resting briefly at the place where they once met the Red-lady. After covering ninety miles, they encounter a solitary man sitting with a full bag placed before him. When asked for directions, he claims he is heading to Deads' Town himself. He begs them to carry his load, insisting that two hands must not touch the load and that they must not put it down until they reach the town.

The Burden That Must Not Be Examined: The man refuses to let the couple test the weight or inspect the contents of the bag, saying it is *"the load which two persons must not know the content of."* Suspicious but prepared to defend himself with his gun and cutlass, the narrator agrees to carry it. When his wife lifts the bag onto his head, he realizes it feels exactly like *"a dead body of a man,"* heavy but manageable. Trusting his own strength and weapons, he follows the stranger, who walks ahead confidently as though leading them toward their destination.

The Shocking Truth About the Load: After traveling thirty-six miles, the trio enters a town, but it is not Deads' Town. Only then do the narrator and his wife discover the truth: The man has deceived them. The mysterious load is actually the corpse of the town's prince, whom the man *"had mistakenly killed … in the farm."* Desperate to avoid responsibility, he has tricked the narrator into carrying the body so he can be blamed as the killer. The couple suddenly realize that they have been led into a dangerous trap, one born from fear, guilt, and the stranger's attempt to shift his crime onto an unsuspecting traveler.

CHAPTER 24-**We and the Wise King in the Wrong Town With the Prince Killer**

The Prince Killer's Deception: When the narrator and his wife arrive in a new town, they find themselves entangled in a deadly lie. The man who had been traveling with them rushes ahead to the king and falsely reports that *"somebody had killed the prince and brought the dead body"* (100). He tries to hide his guilt by pretending to be a mere messenger, but when the king sees the corpse, he recognizes his son instantly. The killer's panic deepens as the king orders everyone involved to be locked in a dark room, leaving them to wonder what fate awaits them.

Seven Days of Ceremony: The next morning, the king commands his attendants to dress the narrator and his wife in fine clothes, mount them on a horse, and parade them around the town. The attendants, unaware of the king's true intentions, celebrate with drums and mourning songs, believing they are honoring the dead prince. For six days, the narrator is carried through the town in this strange ritual, hearing the attendants chant that *"this is the last time"* the procession will pass. The king's silence makes the seventh day loom with dread.

The Execution in the Reserve Bush: On the seventh day, the attendants lead the group to a reserve bush, still unaware of the king's plan. There the real killer confesses his crime: *"I killed the king's son in the bush."* He confesses his crime because, seeing the suspects of the prince's murder being celebrated, he thought that the king was pleased his son was dead and was about to reward those who killed him. The attendants take him to the king, who orders the same ceremonial treatment, fine clothes, a horse, and a final procession, before the man is executed. The narrator witnesses how deception leads each liar to the same grim end, and he realizes how narrowly he and his wife escaped being mistaken for accomplices.

The Moving Town of the Dead: The narrator and his wife continue toward the Deads' Town. They travel for ten days and see the town from afar, but each time they approach, it seems to be farther away, forcing them to walk six more days. Only when the wife reveals the secret that *"anybody who had not died could not enter into that town by daytime,"* do they understand the strange distance. They rest until night, travel for just one hour, and finally reach the town, waiting until dawn to enter the mysterious place that living people must approach only in darkness.

CHAPTER 25-*I and My Palm-Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town*

Searching for the Palm-Wine Tapster in the Town of the Dead: The narrator and his wife finally reach the mysterious Deads' Town. They learn that living people cannot enter during the day, which explains why the town kept seeming to *"run away"* from them each time they approached. Only after waiting until night are they able to reach it, and at dawn they step inside, unsure of what rules govern this strange place. The narrator immediately asks the dead inhabitants about his palm-wine tapster, Baity, who had died long ago. The dead request Baity's name, but the narrator admits he does not know what name Baity now uses in the land of the dead. This uncertainty makes the dead suspicious, and they begin questioning where the narrator comes from and how he managed to enter their town.

Forced to Walk Backward in the Deads' Town: When the narrator and his wife try to move forward inside the Deads' Town, a dead man rushes toward them and insists that *"alives could not come and visit any dead man"* unless they walk backward. They obey, but the rule proves dangerous: The narrator stumbles near a pit and accidentally turns his face forward, prompting the dead man to forbid them from approaching the tapster's house. As they continue walking backward, the narrator trips on a sharp stone and begins bleeding. When the dead man sees the blood, he becomes *"greatly annoyed"* and drags them out of the town by force. Only then do the narrator and his wife learn that the dead *"did not like to see blood at all,"* a taboo that explains the dead man's harsh reaction.

Meeting the Tapster Again: The dead man informs the tapster that two living visitors are waiting. When the tapster arrives, he first assumes the narrator must also be dead and gives him *"the sign of deads,"* which the narrator cannot return. Realizing they cannot stay inside the town, the tapster builds a small house for them outside the boundary and brings food and ten kegs of palm-wine. The narrator is shocked to see that his tapster now walks backward like all the other dead. After they eat and drink, the narrator recounts his ten-year journey through forests and tree branches.

A Life of Sorrow After the Tapster's Death: The narrator tells the tapster that his life has been unraveling ever since the tapster died, not only because he lost the drink that sustained him, but because the loss of good palm-wine cost him his entire community. He explains that friends stopped visiting, acquaintances drifted away, and gatherings that once filled his compound with laughter dissolved into silence. Without the tapster's skill, he could no longer offer the "good wine" that had made his home a lively meeting place, and

people gradually abandoned him as if he had nothing left to give. He describes how shame and loneliness pushed him into the bush, where he wandered for *"ten years since I had left my town,"* searching for the only person who could restore the social life he had lost. Meeting the tapster again feels like recovering a part of himself, and he begs him to understand that this long journey was driven not only by devotion but by the hope of reclaiming the friendships and human warmth that disappeared with the tapster's death.

The Tapster's Account of Death: The tapster listens silently, then returns with twenty more kegs of palm-wine before beginning his own story of death, training, and initiation into the world of the dead. The tapster explains that after dying, he first went to a place where *"anybody who just died must go to first,"* spending two years in training before qualifying as a full dead man. He cannot remember the moment of his death, so the narrator tells him he fell from a palm-tree. The tapster replies that if so, *"he over-drank on that day,"* and describes returning invisibly to the narrator's house the night he died. The tapster explains that both white and black dead people live in the Deads' Town, and that everything the living do is *"incorrect to deads,"* just as the dead's behavior is incorrect to the living. He refuses to follow the narrator home, insisting that a dead man cannot live among "*alives*." Instead, he offers the narrator anything he desires and eventually gives him a magical egg that can produce whatever he wishes when placed in water.

Leaving the Deads' Town: On the third day, the tapster shows the couple a shorter road home. As they travel, they meet thousands of dead people heading toward the town. Whenever the dead see the living couple, they slip into the bush, reappear behind them, and make bad noises to show their hatred of *alives*. They murmur instead of speaking, wear spotless white clothes, and have wild brown eyes, an eerie procession marking the narrator's final departure from the land of the dead.

CHAPTER 26-*None of the Deads Too Young to Assault. Dead babies on the Road-March to the Deads' Town*

A Midnight Encounter with the Dead Babies: While traveling the narrator and his wife encounter an eerie procession at midnight: Nearly four hundred dead babies marching together, singing a mournful song and carrying sticks. Unlike adult dead people, who usually avoid the living by slipping into the bush, these babies remain on the road and confront anyone who approaches. When the narrator and his companion draw near, the babies suddenly attack, beating them with their sticks until they are forced to flee into the dangerous bush. The scene is both surreal and terrifying, showing that even the youngest dead are not too weak or too innocent to assault the living.

Captured by the Giant Bag-Carrier: As the narrator and his wife run through the bush to escape the babies, they encounter a massive man carrying an enormous woven bag on his shoulder. Before they can react, the man sweeps them into the bag as easily as a fisherman catching fish in a net. Inside, they find dozens of others, up to forty-five people can fit in the bag, and none of them knows where they are being taken or whether the giant is human or a spirit.

CHAPTER 27-*Afraid of Touching Terrible Creatures Bag*

Caught inside the giant woven bag, the narrator and the others find themselves pressed against terrifying creatures whose bodies feel cold, hairy, and rough like sandpaper. The air from their noses and mouths blows out hot like steam. No one speaks, neither the captives nor the creatures, and the man carrying the enormous bag moves through the bush without a word, letting the bag slam against trees and the ground as he walks. At one point, he meets another being like himself, and together they toss the bag violently back and forth before continuing their journey. By daybreak, the carrier has traveled nearly thirty miles from the road, leaving the narrator and the others trapped in darkness.

CHAPTER 28-*Hard to Salute Each Other, Harder to Describe Each Other, and hardest to Look At each Other at Destination*

Dropped at the Giant's Destination: After being carried all night inside the enormous woven bag, the narrator and the others are suddenly emptied onto the ground when the huge creature reaches his

destination at eight in the morning. The fall is unexpected and disorienting, and only then do they realize that nine terrible creatures had been inside the bag with them the entire time: *"it was in that place that we saw that there were 9 terrible creatures in that bag.*

Facing the Giant and His Terrible Companions*:* Once outside the bag, the narrator finally sees the giant who carried them through the bush. He is extremely tall, with a *head "like a big pot of about ten feet in diameter"* and eyes so large they resemble bowls. His gaze is unnerving, able to spot a pin from three miles away. The nine terrible creatures beside the narrator are equally frightening, short, rough-skinned beings with sharp, sandpaper-like bodies and small horns on their palms. The narrator notes that *"very hot steam was rushing out"* of their bodies, making them even harder to approach. The giant leads the narrator and his wife to a strange farm where more terrifying beings appear. These creatures have cold bodies, thick short hands, block-like feet, and heads covered with sponge-like growths. Their movements are heavy and unnatural, and their presence fills the farm with dread.

The Fight and the Wife's Rescue: The narrator is forced to fight the creatures, including their champion, who attacks with overwhelming strength. During the struggle, the narrator is struck so violently that he faints, collapsing on the ground. His wife rushes to his side and uses a special plant with eight leaves to revive him, restoring his strength just enough for them to escape. Indeed, after recovering, the narrator and his wife flee the farm and travel for two and a half days along the Deads' road. But when they reach a familiar stretch of the path, they cannot continue because "fearful dead babies… were still on it," blocking their way. These babies, unlike adult dead people, do not avoid the living; instead, they attack with sticks and terrifying cries. Forced to turn back, the narrator realizes that even the youngest dead can be dangerous, and the road to safety remains uncertain.

CHAPTER 29-*To Travel in the Bush Was More Dangerous and to Travel on the Deads' Road Was the Most Dangerous*

The Bush Becomes More Dangerous: As the narrator and his wife continue their journey, they realize that traveling through the bush is dangerous, but traveling on the Deads' Road is even worse. To protect themselves, the narrator prepares four kinds of leaves to make powerful medicine against the creatures that roam the wilderness. They stay close to the road to avoid getting lost, knowing that any misstep could lead them into deadly territory. One night, a strange being approaches them, crying *"hungry"* in a long, echoing voice. Its appearance is frightening, but the narrator feels no fear because he has already prepared his *juju*. When the creature asks for food, they give it unripe bananas, which it swallows whole without chewing. But even after eating, it continues to cry "hungry," revealing that its hunger is supernatural and cannot be satisfied by ordinary food.

The Egg and the Creature's Growing Aggression: As the creature keeps begging for more food, an egg given to the narrator by his wife accidentally falls to the ground. The creature immediately tries to seize it, but the wife picks it up first. Enraged, the creature attacks her, attempting to swallow her whole. The narrator quickly uses his *juju* to transform his wife into a wooden doll and hides her in his pocket. The creature, confused, demands to inspect the doll, trying to determine whether it truly represents the wife.

The Creature Swallows the Wooden Doll*:* The creature becomes more aggressive and insists on taking the wooden doll for identification. When the narrator reluctantly hands it over, the creature swallows the doll in one gulp. Because the doll symbolically represents the wife, the creature's act means it has swallowed not only her but also the narrator's gun, cutlass, egg, and load, all of which were spiritually tied to her. Only the narrator's *juju* remains, leaving him alone and desperate to retrieve his wife from the creature's stomach. The narrator tries to force the creature to vomit the wooden doll, but it refuses, mocking him and insisting that the doll, and therefore his wife, now belongs to its belly. With no weapons left and the creature growing more threatening, the narrator must rely entirely on his remaining *juju* and his wits.

CHAPTER 30-*Both Wife and Husband in the Hungry-Creatures' Stomach*

Swallowed by the Hungry-Creature: The creature's magic pulls both husband and wife into its stomach. Inside, they find themselves in a dark, suffocating space filled with strange movements and the creature's relentless cries. The narrator fights desperately from within, using his *juju* to recover the items the creature had swallowed, his gun, cutlass, egg, and the symbolic doll. The struggle is intense, but eventually he forces the creature to release them, allowing the couple to escape back into the bush.

The Case of the Borrower and the Collector: Once free, the narrator and his wife continue traveling through the dangerous bush. They move cautiously, knowing that the bush is filled with unpredictable beings and traps. After hours of walking, they reach a *"mixed town,"* a place where humans and supernatural beings coexist uneasily. The narrator hopes for rest, but the town soon draws him into new responsibilities and conflicts. In the mixed town, the narrator is asked to judge a strange and tragic case. A habitual borrower refuses to repay a 1-pound debt, insisting he has never paid any debt in his life. The lender brings a bold debt-collector to confront him, and the two men begin fighting fiercely. Their argument escalates until the borrower stabs himself, declaring he will never repay anything. The collector, determined never to fail in his profession, stabs himself as well so he can collect the debt in heaven. A curious bystander, eager to witness the end of the fight, also kills himself. The narrator is asked to decide who is guilty, but the case is so tangled that he adjourns judgment for a year.

The Case of the Three Wives and the Wizard: Before the first case's judgment date arrives, the narrator is summoned again to judge another unusual matter. A man traveling with his three devoted wives dies suddenly, and the senior wife dies with him out of love. The second wife fetches a wizard who revives both the husband and the senior wife. When the husband offers one of his wives to the wizard as payment, all three refuse. Their refusal leads to a quarrel so fierce that a policeman arrests them and brings them to court. The narrator cannot decide which wife is "essential" to give to the wizard, since each showed loyalty in her own way, so he adjourns this case for a year as well.

Leaving the Mixed Town: With both cases unresolved, the narrator and his wife leave the mixed town. The townspeople send multiple letters urging him to return and deliver judgment, but he continues his journey instead. The road ahead is long and filled with uncertainty, but the narrator feels compelled to move forward, trusting that his path will eventually lead him to reason.

The Mountain of a Million Creatures: After traveling for more than fifteen days, the narrator and his wife reach a massive mountain. When they climb it, they encounter more than a million mountain-creatures, each stranger and more fearsome than the last. The sight is overwhelming, reminding them that the world they travel through is vast, unpredictable, and filled with beings beyond human understanding. Their journey continues, shaped by danger, mystery, and the narrator's unwavering determination to reach home.

CHAPTER 31-*We and the Mountain-Creatures on the Unknown Mountain*

The Unknown Mountain: At the top of a strange mountain, the narrator and his wife step onto a vast, flat summit glowing with colored lights and arranged like a great hall. All around them, countless mountain-creatures, shaped like humans but clearly not human, dance in wide circles, filling the space with movement and rhythm. When the travelers walk into the middle of the dancers, the creatures suddenly stop and stare toward a distant bush, as if listening for something only they can hear. Then, drawn to the wife's presence, the mountain-creatures invite her to join their dance. She accepts, moving among them in the surreal celebration that marks their arrival on this unknown mountain.

CHAPTER 32-*To See the Mountain-Creatures Was Not Dangerous But to Dance With Them Was the Most Dangerous.*

The Danger of Dancing with the Mountain-Creatures: At first, the mountain-creatures welcome the narrator's wife warmly, delighted as she joins their endless circular dance on the glowing, hall-like

mountaintop. But when she grows tired and stops, the creatures, who never tire, become suddenly displeased, revealing that *"to dance with them was the most dangerous,"* because stopping breaks a rule they fiercely enforce. Their joy turns into threat, and the narrator must act quickly to protect his wife from their anger.

Escape Through Transformation and Pursuit: To save his wife, the narrator uses his *juju* to transform her into a wooden doll and hides her safely in his pocket. But the creatures immediately turn their fury towards him. He flees across the mountain, pursued by beings who move with supernatural speed and determination. Cornered, he transforms himself into a flat pebble to avoid detection, lying motionless until the creatures give up the chase.

Return Home and the Shadow of Famine: Once he reaches the river, the narrator transforms himself and his wife back into human form and bids farewell to the mountain-creatures from afar. He finally returns home, welcomed with joy by family and friends, and hides the magical egg he received earlier from the Dead's Town. But peace is short-lived: A devastating famine strikes, so severe that *"every plant and tree and river dried away,"* and in desperation, people begin killing even their own children for food. The narrator's long journey ends in a homeland transformed by hunger and grief, reminding him that danger exists not only in supernatural realms but also in the harsh realities of human survival.

CHAPTER 33-***The Causes of the Famine***

The Quarrel Between Land and Heaven: Long before famine struck the world, Land and Heaven lived as close friends, hunting together and sharing whatever they found. But one day, after hours of fruitless hunting, they discovered only a single mouse, too small for both to enjoy. Land insisted on taking it, Heaven demanded it instead, and their friendship shattered over this tiny creature. That moment of greed and stubbornness broke the harmony between earth and sky, and from their quarrel came the first great famine, a mythic reminder that even the smallest conflict between powerful forces can starve an entire world.

CHAPTER 34-***Who will Take the Mouse***

The Quarrel That Created the Famine: Neither Earth nor Heaven will allow the other to take the mouse, each insisting he is senior. After arguing for hours, both abandon the mouse and return angrily to their separate homes. But Heaven's anger does not end there: Once back in the sky, he stops all rain and even the dew from falling on Earth. Plants wither, rivers dry up, and both living and non-living things begin to die.

CHAPTER 35-***An Eg Fed the Whole World***

The Egg That Filled a Room with Food: To test the egg's power, the narrator places it in a bowl of water and commands it to produce food and drink. Instantly, the room overflows with meals, kegs of palm-wine, and enough provisions to satisfy his wife, his parents, and all his old friends. The miracle spreads by word of mouth, and soon people from nearby towns and villages begin arriving, eager to see the egg that can feed the hungry and revive hope in a dying land.

Crowds, Kings, and Endless Demands: As the egg continues to produce food, drink, and even money, the narrator's home becomes a gathering place for the starving. Children, elders, kings, and attendants arrive in overwhelming numbers, filling the yard and making so much noise that the narrator cannot sleep. When he tries to open the door, the crowd rushes in and damages it. Realizing he cannot manage the chaos inside, he decides to place the egg outside so the people can gather around it without destroying his home.

A Miracle That Became a Burden: With the egg outside, the narrator commands it to feed the endless crowd, and it continues to produce food and drink without stopping. But the miracle becomes a burden: the people never leave, the noise never ends, and the narrator cannot rest. The egg that saved the world from

famine also traps him in constant responsibility, showing that even a blessing can become overwhelming when the entire world depends on it.

CHAPTER 36-*Reckless Life at Home*

Reckless Life at Home: After becoming the most celebrated man in his town, the narrator spends his days commanding the magical egg to produce endless food and drink for everyone, turning his home into a place of constant feasting and noisy celebration. But the joy quickly becomes chaos: as people eat, drink, and wrestle in their excitement, they accidentally smash the egg and its bowl, breaking the miraculous object into two pieces. The narrator hurriedly picks up the broken egg and glues it back together, trying to restore the power that had made him great, even as the reckless crowd continues to demand more from a miracle now damaged by their own excess.

CHAPTER 37-**Pay What You Owe Me and Vomit What You Ate**

The Egg Turns Against the Community: After the magical egg breaks, the narrator secretly repairs it, hoping it will once again produce food and restore his former popularity. But instead of abundance, the egg produces millions of leather whips. Alarmed, he commands it to stop, and the whips vanish. Later, desperate to regain the admiration he once enjoyed, he asks the king to summon everyone to his house, claiming he has received a new, even more powerful egg from the Deads' Town. When the crowd gathers, he places the egg among them and hides inside his house. The moment one of his friends commands the egg, it unleashes the same millions of whips, which begin flogging everyone mercilessly. Panic erupts. Children, elders, kings, attendants, no one escapes the beating. Many flee into the bush, many die, and within an hour the entire crowd disappears.

The Egg Reforms and Vanishes: Once the whips finish their violent work, they gather together and reshape themselves into an egg, just as before. But this time, the egg instantly disappears. The narrator is left alone, surrounded by silence and the consequences of his deception. Meanwhile, the famine that has been ravaging the town continues to worsen. Old people begin dying daily, and the narrator realizes that the disaster caused by the egg has only deepened the suffering of the community. With the town in crisis and no magical solution left, he decides to confront the famine directly.

A Sacrifice to End the Famine: Seeing the remaining elders on the brink of death, the narrator calls them together and proposes a ritual to stop the famine. They prepare a sacrifice consisting of two fowls, six kolas, one bottle of palm oil, and six bitter kolas. The fowls are killed and placed in a broken pot, along with the kolas and the oil. This offering, he explains, must be carried *"to Heaven in heaven,"* a symbolic act meant to appeal to higher powers for relief. Through this ritual, the community attempts to restore balance and end the suffering that neither magic nor deception could resolve.

CHAPTER 38-***But Who Will Carry the Sacrifice to the Heaven for Heaven?***

The Sacrifice That Ended the Famine: When Land finally surrenders to Heaven after their quarrel over the mouse, the town faces a new dilemma: Someone has to carry the sacrifice up to Heaven. A king's attendant refuses, a poor man refuses, and only a king's slave agrees to make the dangerous journey. He climbs to Heaven, delivers the sacrifice, and Heaven accepts it joyfully, proof that Land has admitted he is junior. But on his return, before he reaches even halfway, Heaven sends a heavy rain that drenches him completely. Terrified, the townspeople refuse to let him enter their homes, afraid he might carry them to Heaven as he has carried the sacrifice. But the rain does not stop. It falls steadily for three months, soaking the earth, filling rivers, reviving plants, and ending the famine that has nearly destroyed the world.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

THE NARRATOR (THE DRINKARD) *(excessive, resourceful, self-absorbed*)

The narrator's obsession with endless palm wine drives the entire story. His quick thinking and magical adaptability keep him alive in chaotic supernatural worlds. At the same time, he often acts out of pride and personal comfort, giving his journey a mix of brilliance and moral confusion.

Excessive The narrator lives in a world ruled by excess. His identity is built entirely on drinking palm wine in unimaginable quantities, and every decision he makes is shaped by the desire to maintain that abundance. Even when the tapster dies, he does not grieve the man but the loss of limitless wine. His excess becomes a lens through which he sees the world, pushing him into dangerous forests, spirit towns, and supernatural realms in search of the life he once enjoyed.

Resourceful Despite his flaws, the narrator is remarkably resourceful. He transforms into birds, smoke, or lizards when danger strikes. He negotiates with spirits and solves problems using *juju*, quick thinking, and sheer stubbornness. Whether facing Death, skulls, or monstrous children, he finds unconventional ways to survive. His resourcefulness is what keeps him alive in a world where logic collapses and danger appears without warning.

Self-absorbed The narrator often acts from self-interest, focusing on his comfort, pride, and reputation. He glues the broken magical egg to regain admiration. He accepts tasks only when they align with his boastful title, *"Father of gods."* Even his journey to Deads' Town is driven less by loyalty to the tapster and more by the desire to restore his own pleasure. His self-absorption shapes the moral ambiguity of the story.

THE WIFE *(loyal, resilient, grounded*)

The loyal wife follows the narrator through every danger. She endures curses and exhaustion with resilience, and she stays practical and steady even when the world around them becomes wild and unpredictable.

Loyal The narrator's wife follows him through forests, ghost towns, dangerous creatures, and endless hardship. She carries burdens, helps tap palm wine, and remains committed even when supernatural beings torment them. Her loyalty is steady and practical, grounded not in fantasy but in partnership. She is the emotional anchor of the journey.

Resilient The drinkard's wife endures exhaustion, hunger, curses, and terrifying encounters without collapsing. Whether carrying the half-bodied baby or dancing for five days with Drum, Song, and Dance, she adapts to each new challenge. Her resilience contrasts with the narrator's impulsiveness, showing a simpler strength that keeps them moving forward.

Grounded Unlike the narrator, the wife does not chase illusions or boastful titles. She thinks about practical needs, food, rest, safety, and often reminds him of reality. Her grounded nature balances the narrator's chaotic energy, making her one of the few stable presences in a world full of unpredictable magic.

THE TAPSTER *(skilled, independent, steady)*

The tapster's mastery of palm-wine tapping defines the narrator's early life. Even in the turbulence of Deads' Town the tapster remains calm and committed to his own rules. His refusal to return shows a firm independence rare in the novel's shifting world.

Skilled The tapster is introduced as a master of his craft, capable of producing extraordinary quantities of palm wine every morning. His skill is so exceptional that it shapes the narrator's entire lifestyle. Even after death, he continues tapping in Deads' Town, proving that his identity is inseparable from his mastery.

Independent In Deads' Town, the tapster refuses to return with the narrator, explaining that the dead cannot live among the living. His independence shows a clear sense of boundaries and self-knowledge. He chooses his own path, even when the narrator begs him to come back. His autonomy contrasts sharply with the narrator's dependence on him and his palm-wine.

Steady The tapster remains calm, consistent, and reliable throughout the story. He does not panic in the world of the dead, nor does he behave unpredictably. His steadiness makes him a rare figure of stability in a chaotic universe. Even his refusal to return is delivered with calm justification, reinforcing his grounded nature.

THE SPIRITS *(unpredictable, authoritative, symbolic)*

The spirits appear suddenly, enforce strange rules, and reshape reality without warning. Their presence embodies the cultural, moral, and imaginative forces that drive the novel's surreal universe.

Unpredictable The spirits are wildly unpredictable, appearing without warning, shifting shape, and enforcing rules that make no sense to the living. Their actions often overturn the narrator's expectations, creating sudden danger or strange opportunities.

Authoritative The spirits are authoritative, commanding the narrator, punishing mistakes, and reshaping reality with absolute power. They do not negotiate or explain themselves. Their word is law in whatever realm he enters. Their authority shows how small and vulnerable humans are in the supernatural world.

Symbolic The spirits are symbolic. They embody fears, desires, cultural beliefs, and moral lessons drawn from Yoruba imagination. Each spirit represents something larger than itself, a warning, a temptation, a test, or a reminder of unseen forces shaping human life.

THEMES

Friendship: *Social Belonging and Conditional Friendship* One of the lessons to draw from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is how quickly social belonging can collapse when the source of one's value disappears. The narrator's house is overflowing with friends as long as the tapster produces *"one hundred and fifty kegs every morning,"* and the drinkard can host endless gatherings. But the moment the tapster dies, the narrator's social world evaporates. People stop visiting, stop greeting him, and treat him as if he no longer exists. This same pattern repeats in the Deads' Town episode when the narrator announces he has received a new magical egg, *"the whole of them came,"* eager to enjoy his generosity again. Yet their loyalty is shallow. As soon as the egg produces millions of whips and punishes them, they flee in terror, leaving him alone once more. These scenes reveal a painful truth: Many relationships are built not on genuine affection, but on what a person can provide. The narrator's identity is tied to abundance, and when abundance disappears, so does his community. This theme resonates strongly today. In modern life, people often experience similar abandonment when they lose a job, fall ill, or can no longer offer the social or economic benefits that once made them attractive. Social media amplifies this dynamic: Popularity rises and falls based on visibility, status, and what one can "give" to others, such as entertainment, validation, or access. The narrator's loneliness mirrors the experience of individuals who discover that their friendships were conditional, dependent on resources rather than connection. The drinkard's journey is a reflection on how fragile belonging can be when it is built on consumption instead of care. Tutuola's surreal world exposes a very real human vulnerability: the fear that people love us for what we offer, not for who we are.

Appearance: *The Illusions and the Seduction of Appearances* *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* critiques how easily people are seduced by appearances, even when those appearances are nothing more than carefully

assembled illusions. The “Complete Gentleman” personifies this danger perfectly. He is described as so flawless, so dazzling, that the chief’s daughter abandons her market goods without hesitation and follows him for miles. She does not question his silence, his indifference, or the strangeness of his behavior. Beauty alone becomes her compass. But as she follows him deeper into the forest, she discovers that his perfection is literally rented: He returns his feet, his belly, his ribs, his arms, and finally even the skin of his face, until nothing remains but a skull bouncing forward like a monstrous frog. The woman realizes too late that she has followed a mask, not a man. In our modern world, illusions are everywhere, on social media, in advertising, in politics, and even in everyday interactions. People curate identities, filter their faces, and present versions of themselves designed to attract admiration or desire. Just like the Complete Gentleman, modern illusions can be convincing, polished, and seductive, hiding the truth beneath layers of borrowed beauty. Tutuola’s narrative invites us to question what we see, to look beyond surfaces, and to recognize how easily appearances can mislead us. In a world saturated with images, the story becomes a warning: Beauty can be a trap, perfection can be a disguise, and the truth often lies beneath what dazzles the eye.

Power: *Power Without Wisdom / The Abuse and Misuse of Magical or Technological Tools* A recurring lesson in the novel is that power, when used without wisdom, becomes destructive rather than helpful. The narrator constantly receives supernatural tools, *juju*, charms, magical seeds, and especially the egg. But he rarely uses them with restraint or foresight. He misuses the egg twice. The first egg breaks because he overuses it, demanding endless food and wealth. Later, he glues the broken egg, hoping to regain the admiration he once enjoyed. But instead of abundance, the egg produces *“millions of whips,”* unleashing violence on the entire community. The narrator hides inside his house while the egg beats children, elders, kings, and friends, showing how power can become cruel when wielded for ego rather than responsibility. Even after the whips vanish, the famine worsens, confirming that shortcuts and magical fixes cannot replace real solutions. Tutuola’s world is a mirror for modern society, where powerful tools, technology, social platforms, artificial intelligence, political influence, can be used to help communities or harm them. When people chase status, validation, or control, they often misuse these tools, creating chaos instead of progress. The narrator’s reckless use of the egg resembles how misinformation spreads online, how digital tools can be weaponized, or how leaders sometimes use authority to punish rather than protect. The story invites us to reflect on the responsibility that comes with power: Abundance without wisdom leads to destruction, and tools meant to improve life can become instruments of harm when guided by pride, insecurity, or desperation.

Quest: *The Quest for Fulfillment and the Addiction to Excess* A central reflection running through *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is the narrator’s insatiable hunger for more, more palm-wine, more comfort, more magical solutions, more abundance. From childhood, his entire identity is built on excess: He drinks palm-wine instead of water, consumes *“one hundred and fifty kegs every morning,”* and surrounds himself with friends who come only because he can provide limitless drink. When the tapster dies, he is forced to confront a life without excess, and the shock is so great that he abandons his home and wanders through forests for months, driven not by grief but by the desire to restore the abundance he has lost. The narrator’s first instinct is to drink ten kegs at once and to ask the tapster to return with him so he can resume his old life. Later, when he receives the magical egg, he uses it not to solve famine or help his community but to regain the admiration and social status that came from providing endless food and drink. His addiction to excess blinds him to consequences, leading to disaster. This motif resonates anywhere life encourages constant consumption, more money, more entertainment, more productivity, more validation. People often chase fulfillment through external sources: shopping, social media, luxury, or status. Like the narrator, many discover that the pursuit of “more” becomes a trap, creating anxiety, emptiness, or dependence. Tutuola offer us a universe that functions as a mirror for our own: Excess promises happiness but often leads to isolation, disappointment, or harm. The narrator’s journey shows that fulfillment built on consumption is fragile, and that the endless chase for abundance can distract from deeper forms of meaning, connection, and self-understanding.

Social Groups: *The Boundary Between Life and Death as a Metaphor for Social Exclusion* In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the boundary between the living and the dead is an efficient metaphor for how societies create rigid categories that exclude, misunderstand, or fear one another. In the Deads’ Town episode, the narrator discovers that *“everything the alives were doing was incorrect to deads,”* and

everything the dead did was equally incorrect to the living. The dead walk backward, reject blood, communicate through signals the living cannot understand, and flee into the bush whenever they see a living person approaching. Even domestic animals in Deads' Town walk backward, reinforcing the idea that this world operates by rules completely foreign to human logic. Likewise, the skull family lives underground, isolated from human society; Wraith Island is a world of gentle spirits separated from dangerous creatures; and the narrator repeatedly enters territories where he is treated as an outsider, questioned, tested, or chased away. These episodes highlight how communities often build invisible walls around themselves, defining who belongs and who does not. This theme resonates with conversations about cultural divides, generational gaps, immigration, racial segregation, and social groups that cannot understand one another's norms. People frequently label others as "different," "strange," or "incorrect," just as the dead do with the living. The narrator's struggle to navigate these worlds reflects the experience of individuals who move between cultures, identities, or social classes, constantly adjusting to unfamiliar expectations. The book's landscapes become symbolic spaces where exclusion, misunderstanding, and fear shape interactions. The story invites us to reflect on how societies create "Deads' Towns" of their own, spaces where groups live side by side but remain unable to communicate, coexist, or recognize each other's humanity. The novel transforms the supernatural boundary between life and death into a timeless commentary on social separation.

Freedom vs. Confinement: *Coercion, Confinement, and Abduction* Across *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, freedom is constantly threatened by forces that abduct, confine, or coerce individuals into worlds where their individuality dissolves. The chief's daughter follows the Complete Gentleman out of admiration, but her "choice" is not truly free. His supernatural beauty overwhelms her judgment, pulling her into an endless forest where every step strips away her autonomy. Once he reveals himself as a skull, she tries to flee, but the cowrie tied around her neck shrieks whenever she moves, summoning thousands of skulls who roll toward her like living chains. She is forced to sit on a giant frog, watched by a whistle-blowing skull, trapped in a system designed to erase her freedom. Later, even after the narrator rescues her, the cowrie continues screaming, preventing her from speaking, eating, or resting. Freedom becomes something she must fight for long after the abduction ends. The narrator himself experiences similar coercion: The half-bodied baby commands him and his wife to stop breathing, forcing them to carry him across towns where they are chased away as if they were criminals. In the Deads' Town, the narrator and his wife are dragged out of the town because the dead *"did not like to see blood,"* and they are forced to walk backward, obey signals they do not understand, and accept rules that strip them of familiar movement. Coercion is not always violent; sometimes it is disguised as beauty, tradition, supernatural authority, or social expectation. People today face pressures that limit their freedom, manipulative relationships, social norms, economic constraints, digital addictions, or systems that trap individuals in cycles they did not choose. The world of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is a metaphor for how easily autonomy can be stolen, and how difficult it is to reclaim one's voice after confinement.

Ethics: *Moral Corruption* Moral corruption is a recurrent theme in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. It shapes the narrator's world just as powerfully as spirits, *juju*, and supernatural creatures. Corruption appears in its dramatic forms--abduction, deception, coercion--but also in subtle everyday behaviors that gradually undermine moral responsibility. The Complete Gentleman is a perfect symbol of corruption disguised as beauty: he rents body parts to construct perfection, deceives the chief's daughter, and leads her into a forest where illusion becomes horror. His borrowed beauty is a metaphor for moral decay hidden beneath attractive surfaces. Later, the narrator himself becomes an agent of corruption when he glues the broken egg and lies to the entire town, claiming it is *"more powerful than the first."* His motive is not survival but pride, nostalgia, and the desire to regain social admiration. The egg's violent explosion, millions of whips flogging children, elders, kings, and friends, reveals how corruption punishes not only the guilty but the innocent. In Deads' Town, corruption takes another form: rigid rules, backward walking, and the dead's refusal to tolerate blood show a society where norms have become so extreme that they no longer serve human well-being. Moral systems are corrupted by fear, rigidity, and exclusion. Our societies face corruption in politics, institutions, relationships, and digital spaces. People hide wrongdoing behind polished appearances, manipulate others for personal gain, or enforce rules that harm rather than protect. Tutuola indicates that corruption is not always loud or dramatic. Sometimes it is disguised and culturally accepted.

The novel invites us to reflect on how moral decay begins, how it spreads, and how easily communities normalize behaviors that harm their members.

Identity: *A Fluid, Unstable, and Negotiated State* In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, identity is never fixed. It is constantly reshaped by magic, danger, desire, and circumstance. Characters repeatedly lose, alter, or reinvent their identities in ways that challenge the idea of a stable self. The Complete Gentleman is the clearest example: he appears as a flawless man, *"a beautiful 'complete' gentleman,"* but his identity is literally rented, assembled from borrowed body parts that he returns one by one until nothing remains but a skull. His transformation exposes identity as performance, a temporary construction shaped by external expectations. The narrator himself undergoes constant metamorphosis, turning into a bird, a lizard, smoke, fire, or a sparrow depending on the threat he faces. His identity becomes a tool for survival rather than a fixed essence. Even the lady's identity is destabilized: She becomes a kitten to escape the skulls, then she loses her voice entirely when the cowrie shrieks at every movement, reducing her identity to silence until the narrator retrieves the magical leaf that restores her speech. Zurrjir, born from a thumb, embodies identity as chaos. He grows instantly, declares he will *"soon change himself into something else,"* and becomes a violent force that reshapes the household. In the Deads' Town episode, identity is defined by rules that invert the living's norms: The dead walk backward, reject blood, and communicate through signals. To survive, the narrator must temporarily adopt their identity, walking backward and obeying their customs. These transformations reveal a world where identity is not a stable core but a shifting negotiation between self, environment, and supernatural forces. Today, as people constantly reinvent themselves online, navigate cultural or social expectations, and juggle multiple roles. Tutuola's novel offers us a metaphor for the modern struggle to define oneself.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the narrator's obsession with palm wine shape the choices he makes, and what does this reveal about his character?
2. In what ways does the journey through spirit worlds challenge the narrator's sense of identity and force him to adapt?
3. How does the wife contribute to the narrator's survival, and what does her behavior suggest about partnership in difficult circumstances?
4. What does the tapster's refusal to return to the world of the living say about boundaries between life and death in the novel?
5. How do the spirits reflect cultural beliefs, fears, or moral lessons?
6. What larger message might Tutuola be sending about human desire, excess, or responsibility through the narrator's chaotic adventures?