

SHORT EXCERPTS**Excerpt one**

Amidst all that chaos, Okem lifted me with both hands and walked in the direction of the house. Everyone stared at us in amazement. Okem had grown from the scrawny child that came to live with us a few years back to a strong teenager. I couldn't believe it was the same person who had irritated me so much the first time I met him that sacrificed his own life to save me.

Before long, Okem became my greatest friend, brother, and teacher. My grandmother sent Okem to the community secondary school in Ntebe, and I moved away from home to attend the private co-ed in Ajidi, the big city. Okem's school wasn't highly ranked, but it was relatively good. It had produced some high caliber individuals that went on to become successful leaders in the community. In contrast, my school was one of the highest-ranked schools in Ajidi. It was reserved for the brightest and the most privileged pupils—the children of the rich, and top government officials.

Despite the differences in our upbringing, Okem and I treated each other as equals. I wished I could see him every day I was in school. Unfortunately, that luxury was left for the holidays and once a term when he came along with my grandmother on visiting days. On those special occasions, Okem dressed in his Sunday best and wore his hair in a different hairstyle each time to impress me—whatever was in style that season. The haircuts always had a name —“pompadour” or “high top fade,” or “mohawk.” It was always something funny. I could sense his excitement whenever he showed them off. Those occasions were the most memorable of my stay in boarding school.

Excerpt two

“How did I—I mean when did I become an Eri?” I asked wide-eyed.

“It started several millennia ago when Luenah was restricted to its original inhabitants—a handful of people living in utmost serenity and joy, never growing old or dying from diseases. Everything changed when a wily princess, Ani, found her way in through a portal in an ant hole. When she arrived in Luenah, panting from exertion, our ruler had taken pity and accepted her into our fold. With time, she proved to be loyal and imaginative, wildly so, that she found immense favor in his eyes, but she wanted more.”

“What did she want?” I urged.

“For her people on earth to inhabit Luenah. At the time, the earth was plagued with famine and diseases, and she felt Luenah would provide the respite they needed. As noble as the idea was, it wasn't feasible.”

“Why not? There's enough space here for everyone,” I claimed, looking around at the beauty and riches in Luenah.

“There’s enough space,” he agreed. “But there is no room in Luenah for conflict and turmoil. Look at Ide and Ntebe. See what has become of them.”

I nodded once, and he continued.

“A few years passed, and Ani presented her plea again. She threatened to expose the ant hole so her people could enter if our ruler failed to grant even a few ‘chosen ones’ access to live here.”

“Did they fall for it?” I asked, my heart beating in anticipation.

“The negotiation was tough, but they later struck a deal. Ani was permitted to select a handful of good earthly humans to visit Luenah. These humans, called Eris, were bestowed gifts to be passed on to chosen ones in their future generations, and they were assigned missions to help the earth regain its balance.”

“So, Eris are born?”

Excerpt three

Death was nothing new to me as living with my grandparents gave me the experience of witnessing village elders passing away. My grandfather was always in attendance to support families who had lost loved ones, and I sometimes accompanied him. Unlike the others, his death was more than a passing experience. This was no ordinary man. This was my Papa—a six-foot-six gentle giant, the head of our family. Since my grandfather was a chief, layers of rites were performed in keeping with the tradition of Ntebe. All the other chiefs in the town, twenty in total, lined up in their full chiefly regalia to pay homage to their fallen comrade. For a full twenty minutes, they danced and made ritualistic sounds around the casket that bore the body of my grandfather. I remember being in complete awe of their attires and flamboyant displays.

They placed the casket in the ground at midday. I stood next to my grandmother and my parents at the graveside. My parents had been in Ntebe since the day before. For the first time that day, I saw a physical reaction from my grandmother. Wailing from deep within her lungs, she threatened to throw herself into the six-foot grave if my grandfather didn’t return to her. As the gravediggers worked desperately to cover the hole with a mound of red dirt, a group of men tried to prevent her from jumping in.

“Stop her!” I heard several people screaming.

Since I had always known her to be dramatic, I doubted she was going to carry out her threat. And I was right. As gunshots to commemorate the occasion tore through the air, my grandmother abandoned her display and ran for cover.