

Issahaku and the Fulani Thieves

from *Exchange Is Not Robbery*: 214-21

Part Three: Hawa Contextualizes Her Life

Chapter 7: Life With Father

You know, my father is some kind of guy like – he doesn't drink, but sometimes, if you see him, you will think he is somebody who drinks heavily. When he means to fuck people, he will just call you and fuck you. [abuse verbally] And he never fucks only one person. If I am doing something bad, and he wants to talk to me, he will talk to me up to my brother. He will say, "Your brother too, he's the same." So: my brother too, my father will tell him he did this and that and this. "And you, too! Why don't you people change your mind?" [attitude; way of thinking] Or: "What kind of children did God give to me like that?" Then he's coming to the other one, too, and he will call and add the other one to me.

So if somebody does bad, and then he is talking like that, then I used to reply, "Hey, Papa! If somebody does bad, you must talk to him alone. But you just mix all of us like this."

He will say, "Because you used to do it, too." *Ha!*

My father can talk, oh. I can tell you. He likes me very much, but we can never stay together. If we stay a little bit, we will have a problem. Sometimes if I am annoyed, then when he sits down, I won't look at his face. And he has something, too. When he's talking to you, if you are putting on sunglasses, he will say, "Open your eyes and look at me." If you don't open your eyes, then he will talk about you. Even if you are friendly and talking to him, just conversing, if you don't look at him straight, then when you go, he will say, "Oh. This is one of my children. He is a liar. If he's talking to you, he can't look at your face." *Ha-ha*. He will just take you like that. So he used to make problems for us. Yeah, my father can abuse people very well. And these children will just walk away. They don't say anything, then they will just go their ways.

So: my father doesn't know what he has done with his life. The way he is, you know, he tried to marry to have children, but he hasn't got any good one inside. Sometimes, if I do something, he is annoyed. He will abuse me. He will abuse me, and he will abuse my big brother! *Hee-hee-heh!* Then he will call the name of our mother and my grandmother and my grandfather! *Ha-ha!*

He will say, "*Eh-heh!* I don't know self. This family: *ay!* In my family we haven't got people like that. Maybe it's from your mother's mother or something, your grandfather!" *Ha-ha!* You see? That inside of his family, he didn't have a kind of children like us. So that day, you and all your family at your mother's side, you are hot. He will make all of you hot. Then, maybe the other children from another woman will like it, but it's not one minute and he will come to someone on their side.

You know, the small wife [younger wife] has the boy who I said is a very strong boy in the house. He is very funny too. He and our father can't sit down five minutes without some trouble starting between them. *Ha-ha!* The boy is rough, and he doesn't care about the topics of the old man. The old man used to talk, talk, talk, talk. Then this boy will just stand up and say, "But you, self, I don't know what is wrong with you! Every day you will talk, *tey-y:* [(Pidgin): like that] 'This woman's family is no good, that woman's family is no good!' But every time, you don't waste your time: you will conceive them and get more bad children for yourself!"

My father will be annoyed! *Ha-ha!* So every time, they used to have problems. When that boy is coming to him, the old man will say, "It's true. Even a woman, when she is short too much, her children are also the same thing." *Ha-ha!* "Because a short woman has got an experience. And she will be giving you some different kind of children." *Ha-ha!*

Ah, old man! He's a shit! So sometimes, you know, I used to sit down and watch him. I groove heavily, and I will go behind him, and then I will sit down to watch him. Then if he talks and talks, *tey*, then he will turn to his back, and he will see that I'm watching. Then he will say, "*Eh-heh!* This is another white woman, too. She takes her dark glasses and covers her face." *Ha-ha!* "I have been watching her. *Eh-heh!* What's wrong with you? Have you something to tell me?"

My old man is a fucking man, eh? But this time, he's sick, so the sickness has made him *coo-o-ol*. This time, you won't hear his talking again. But first time – *pfft, pfft*.

Look, my younger brothers, you know, the young boys: they can go out as they like. But this old man will never sleep. If he doesn't see them come home, he will never sleep. He will go and hide himself at some corner. And he will carry that type of stick watchmen used to carry, and then be waiting for them. At the moment you just get into the door, he wouldn't beat you with it; he will just make like he has missed you. He will go and knock somewhere – *bap!* Then he will say, "You are lucky! Where from you?"

Then you will say, maybe, "Oh Papa, I have gone out to the friends to converse and –"

Then he will say, "Look! When I was your age, I didn't go out at this time. Don't try to go with these townspeople and bring any witch to this house!" What he hates in his life is a witch. He doesn't like witches. So any baby, any boy who doesn't yet grow up, he shouldn't go out and come back home at twelve o'clock or one o'clock in the night. *Hey-y!* Then he will say, "You know that I used to watch my house. That's why the thieves don't come in."

But it was very pitiful. When my father went to our country – *Ha-ha! Hee-hee!* – he had many, many things. These grand bobos [a large embroidered gown], he had many! Oh! We had a box, a big one: it was heavy wood. I think they used it to bring a fridge from Europe or something like that. When he went back to his village, my father packed that box with these up-and-downs, and he carried it to our place, and he was selling these things. He used to get a cow for one up-and-down. A cow. From these Fulani people. [cultural group, widely dispersed; they often work as herdsman] The big, big dress: my father used to get a cow for it in our village.

So: these Fulani people, I think, when they would come to him to get the thing, I don't know whether he used to open the box and let them see, or what. I don't know. But they robbed my father! *Oh!* But when he told me, I *laughed! Ha-ha!*

He said, “*Eh-heh!* Maybe it was you, my own people. You sent them to come and take it, so that you people will go and share it.” *Heh-hee!*

You know, this is what made me laugh, because he said he was in his room. You know, he doesn’t have a lock and key for the village door. [The doors of village houses are often heavy woven mats that are pushed up against the entry opening.] He was sleeping. Then he saw somebody opening the door. Then he said, “Who is that?”

Then the person told him, “Shut up!” *Ha-ha!*

Then he got up to put on his lamp. He had a kerosene lamp, but he had reduced it when he was going to sleep. So he put on the light, and then he saw three men, with knives. *Ha-ha!* He told me, “When I woke up, I didn’t have anything to cover myself, you know.” He wasn’t wearing even underpants. So he was going back to the bed to take a cloth, and they said, “Where are you going?! Stand there!”

When he told me, he said, “I was just like this. Then I made so.” He was using his hand to be covering his front like that.

Then they said, “What are you covering there? Take your hands away!” *Ha-ha!*

Then he told me, “*Ah!* I am not strong. And I was sick. And all your brothers were sleeping. If I made a noise, maybe they would kill me.”

So then, he just stood like that. Then they took *all*. His own suitcase was on top of the box, and they put it down and packed all these things inside. And the other one was holding him, pressing him to the wall with the knife to his throat. They finished packing the things, and then the two people carried the things and went away. And the one who was the last man, who was holding him to the wall with the knife, he looked at the bed. You know, my father had more than ten bedsheets on his bed. So the man saw that these bedsheets and blankets were many. Then he told my father, “Look you, you don’t have the kind of fresh skin to sleep on a bed with all these bedsheets.” *Ha-ha!* The man just wrapped all of the blankets and the bedsheets, and said, “You – it’s good for you to sleep on the floor. If you sleep on the bed, I am going to come back. You will see!”

So when they went away, my father was sitting up to the morning-time! *Ha-ha!* He said, “I was sitting like this.” They left one black cloth for him, blue-black. It was just a white material which I dyed in Ghana and gave to him – a very big cloth. They left only that one. And he was afraid to go and take it, because the man had told him that he is coming back, and if he sees him sleeping on the bed, or if he’s wearing a cloth, he will kill him. So this old man just preferred to sit down, and he didn’t get anything to cover himself.

And you know what made me pity him? When he told me, why I was laughing, you see, we have some ants, black ones. They are big. They can *bite!* Do you know that one? They were in the room on this old man, and they were getting him. He said, “When they were biting me, you know, as there is not much meat, they were biting through to my bones!” *Ha!* “And then, even to take my hand to brush them away, I couldn’t do it, because I was afraid the man would come back. So I just took my bones and dashed [gave to] the ants.” *Ha!*

And he couldn’t shout, too. The man said he was going to come back, and my father was afraid that maybe they were not far, so before he would blow alarm to let these children hear his voice to wake up, maybe this man would come back to kill him. So he didn’t want to say anything. He was sitting up until something to five, and the day started breaking. Then he came out like that. He didn’t take any cloth. He said he was going to see whether this man had gone, but he made up his mind that if this man was there and said, “Where are you going?” then he would say, “Oh, but I beg you. I’m going to piss.” So he said that when he came out, nobody had awakened yet. Then he went to the bathroom side. He didn’t see anybody. Then he came back to the compound.

When he came back, the old man was crazy. Instead of going and taking his black cloth they left for him, he said something came to his mind that maybe these people came back and the person had run into the room. So he didn’t want to enter there to take the cloth. So he just started knocking these children’s doors to come out. And then he was holding his prick like that.

So when – *ha-ha!* – when my younger brother opened the door, he saw our father, that he wasn’t wearing anything. Then he pushed the door and closed it again. Then my father said, “Come out! Are you

afraid? They have been killing me, but they didn't finish me yet. I'm still in life. Come, come!" *Ha!*

Then my brother said, "But you should take a cloth."

He said, "What is a cloth? Do you know what is a cloth? The day when they gave birth to you, were you carrying a cloth? Come out!"

So this boy opened the door and took a big towel and gave it to him to cover himself. Then the senior one came out, the one who I said is now crazy in the village; he also came out.

Then my father said, "*Eh-heh!* This is why they say a man should marry plenty of women, and give birth to many children! If somebody comes to this house in day-time, he will know that I have thick-thick men in my place. To come and attack me and pack all my things, and you people were sleeping! You people were sleeping like dead bodies. So: what is the profit of you people? The profit for you to live here with me? I want to know. You people must tell me today."

Look at this. You lost your things. You have to tell your children so that they can find your things for you. But he just called them early in the morning, to start – *Ha-ha!* – to start abusing all of them. "*Eh-heh!*" He doesn't know the profit if they are here. It's better if everybody finds his way, and he will know that he's living alone. If they want somebody who has many children to give him chieftaincy, in the whole village, he can be second or third. But he slept, and the thieves came to his room.

Then he said, "I tell you people: maybe even it's your friends, because you people used to come home at one o'clock, or two o'clock. So you people came together, and you let them bring their knives to kill me and pack my things. And you just went to your rooms and locked your doors as if you are sleeping. What kind of sleeping is that? All these three tall men came and passed inside here: you people were sleeping! Why didn't they go to your rooms then?" *Ha-ha!* He just called the children, blasting them like that.

So the big one said, "Oh, Papa. Sometimes I don't understand. I think you – now you are growing old. All the topics you are talking now, it's not normal. How can we know that thief people have come to your room?"

Then my father said, "Let everybody say. You: don't say anything. As for you, I have already known you. Even maybe it's you who did it!"

Ha! He just put it on that boy, that he should shut up his mouth, that maybe he is the one who brought the people to attack him. “They were tall like you. They were all wearing *batakari*, white-white ones.

[(Hausa): a type of wide smock made from woven strips of cloth] Only that was different. But they were tall like you.” *Ha!*

So I told you the small one is a ruffian. If he sees that my father wants to disgrace them, he will say: “Let’s leave him.”

So my father was talking, and they were walking away one by one. Then he said, “*Eh-heh!* What kind of children are like that? When the father wants to talk, even they wouldn’t want to stand and listen to him. They start walking away. Yes, I know. But I didn’t do that to my father. That’s why God blessed me to get you people. But if you are doing that to me, God will punish you! If you are not my own children, even if you all know that I am crazy, I swear. They came and stole all my things, and you people were here. Then I’m going to tell you something, so you start walking away. Yes. Go and share it! I won’t die! I didn’t steal it. But God will punish you people!”

Hey! So the time these three Fulani people came and robbed him, he was talking about this thing for more than one week, that his own children are the ones who came and robbed him. *Ha-ha!*

So when I went home, he told me, “Your brother did it. But I can’t blame them. It’s not their fault.”

Then I said, “How, Papa? How could they do that?”

He said, “*Ah!* So do you think – you, *Hawa* – if you are here, you can sleep in this house and people will come and pass the whole way to come and open my door, with knives, and shout on me to ‘Shut up!’ and you won’t hear anything? You say you are sleeping! Are you dead?!” *Ha!* “In the night-time, when you speak a little, it’s loud, you know. You think – ? They know! I’m telling you, my daughter. You think I – ? I’m not lying. These my boys – anyway, they used to help me to farm. But they’re *bad* boys like I haven’t seen in my life. They are the people who did that.”

So I said, “Oh, no, Papa, I don’t believe that they can do that.”

He said, “If you want to back them, you can back them. But I know that they are the ones who did it.”

So that time passed. And the next time I went, then he told me, “Oh, you see? I was blaming your brothers for nothing. It’s the Fulani people who came and robbed me.”

And I said, “How did you get them?”

You know, from our house to where the Fulani people are living, it may be about one and a half kilometers. So my father said a Fulani man came and told him that his cow had a baby, so he was going to see it. And you know, he had a towel he used to put around his neck when it’s hot. These old, old men, you know, even in Ghana, they do it. So he saw that towel behind the road there, and he got it. So: he knows it’s not his children. He was blaming his boys for nothing. It was the Fulani people who robbed him. When they passed there, maybe his towel fell down. But I shouldn’t tell my brothers. They will blast him. *Ha! Ha!* This old man is funny! So he said that he knows that I’m his mother. He used to tell me his everything. Even he didn’t tell his wife. He will be watching small-small. He will get some of his things before he will tell anybody. But I shouldn’t let my brothers know that he knows the people who robbed him, because this time, my brothers are serious: they said that he has insulted them that they are thieves. So if they hear that he saw the towel there behind the Fulani people’s house, they will be annoyed with him. Then they will say he was telling lies on them, and they will all run away and leave him.

So I said, “OK.”

Then I went and told my small brother: “Papa has seen his towel.” *Hee-heee!* “Papa has seen his towel near the Fulani people’s house, so he told me that the Fulani people are the ones who robbed him. But he doesn’t want you people to know. So don’t tell the other ones. You shouldn’t let anybody hear it.”

So: *ha!* This boy wasn’t serious. He said it. That evening-time, I had brought some cloth, and I said I would give it to that boy to make a full cloth like the one the men wear. So the boy said, “Ah, well, as for me, you know, I don’t need such things much. And now, I think they have robbed Papa, so we should add it to Papa’s things.”

So my father was sitting outside and this boy brought it. He said, “Papa, they have robbed you. Hawa has brought this cloth for me. But I

think you don't have enough clothes now, so I want to give this to add to your own. I think it will be better, a little bit."

Then my father said, "As for you, you have sense. The others: they are foolish! They are stupid! *All* these children I have in this house, if not you alone, who is giving me respect?! That day when they stole my things, I was annoyed. I thought you were among, too."

Then the boy said, "Papa, I brought this thing for you. I don't want you to bring this thief palaver. The Fulani people robbed you. If you are afraid of them, don't bring your problems to me!"

Then you know, I knew I had said the thing, so I was afraid. So I said, "What Fulani people? They robbed him?"

Then my father said, "Shut up! You went and told him! I know that. You – you people I've given birth to, you my children, you are the people who are going to sell me to kill me. *Hawa!* You! I said you are my mother; I tell you all my secrets!" *Ha!* "So you went and told your brother? Yes? I know. You are the people who will take me out and go and sell me to my enemies, and then they will kill me. Why should you tell him? When I talked to you, I said, 'As my mother, don't tell him.' Why did you tell him?"

I was *ashamed!* *Ha!* I was ashamed. I said, "I swear, it's not – I didn't tell him anything." Then I asked the boy, "Who told you that? Who told you?"

Then my brother also tried. He said, "*Ah!* Who told me? Papa thinks I don't have sense. When they robbed Papa, he didn't even have a towel. It's my towel I gave to Papa. But I have seen Papa's old towel with him."

So with all this, my father got to know that I had told my brother. Then the next day when he saw me, he said, "*Hawa,* you see? I *like* you. You are my daughter. I *love* you more than all my children. But you did something to me. It's very serious. I told you not to tell your brother where I got the towel, and you went and told him. Do you see how you disgraced me? Don't you pity your Papa?"

He was talking like this. And you know, the way he talked about it, I was feeling pity. I regretted: *Ah!* Why should I talk to that fucking boy? You know?