

Tales of Groove

from *Exchange Is Not Robbery*: 232-42
Part Three: Hawa Contextualizes Her Life
Chapter 7: Life With Father

Ha! I'll tell you a story, and it's very, very funny – about groove,¹ eh? You know, in our house in Kumasi, my brother Kofi was a seller. He's not the one who taught me how to groove. It was my sister. My sister: she was not the same mother the same father, but we were family. Every time when we were going to market, we passed by the toilet.² She used to have this thing. So: "Let's go and groove."

I said, "Ah, what is that?"

I was looking, and I didn't know the thing. She used to say, "If you groove, then you know, you are feeling strong. Even somebody who has strength, you can fight him – by grooving. Groove can give you some power." I was about – almost eleven, or ten years old. When I started grooving, it's long time, eh? Yeah. We would go to the toilet; then we would get our grooving. We went there to hide the scent. So I used to be grooving with this girl.

So my brother was a seller, and I used to steal it from him. *Ha!* Yeah! I knew where he was hiding it, so when I would go to the house, if I looked and I didn't see him, then I would make quick and take one,³

1. marijuana

2. Although many urban houses have an incoming water pipe, most houses do not have flush toilets; the toilet is generally in a separate place, sometimes over a deep hole with lime or sometimes simply over a bucket. People in houses without toilets use public toilets which serve urban areas.

3. take a "wrap". People rarely hold marijuana. A typical routine for a seller is that a portion of marijuana is placed into a piece of airmail paper which is cut so that it can be used to roll the cigarette; the paper is folded over and the ends tucked like a knot. People can then buy one or two or whatever number of "wraps" they need at the moment. The wraps are generally hidden outside the seller's room, perhaps in some bushes in a semi-crumpled cigarette pack, and are retrieved discreetly when a customer gives an order.

and then I would go and meet my sister with that thing. We would smoke. Every time.

So I also had a senior sister, and she didn't know anything about groove. And I was trying to teach her, because I thought it was good, you know. "Here, cut it."¹

She would say, "Oh, no. If I do this thing, I used to be afraid, because —"

"Because you have done it only twice. If you do it more, you will see how it is."

So every time I used to force my senior sister, you know, because I wanted her to be a guy.² When I was young, I liked this sister. Now we are not free like the first time. But at that time, every time I would call her to force her, then she would come and smoke. And then, you know, she also passed.³ Even she used to send me to buy. So if she sent me with money to buy, then I would steal from my brother to give to her, and then I would keep the money. *Hee-hee-hee!* Yeah.

And my brother too, he liked me; he didn't know that I was doing something like this. He thought I was a very secret girl, and I wouldn't make any *kɔnkɔnsa*,⁴ so every time he was going out, he would tell me, "I put this thing here. If somebody comes, and you know that he used to come to me to have it, you can sell it to him."

Then I would say, "OK."

So I used to sell to people and give the money to him, but if I got it for my sister, I would keep the money. I would just take something for her, and then we would go together to smoke, and then the money was for me. Yeah.

When my brother would come, he would say, "Oh! This thing, somebody took some."

Then I would say, "Oh, no-o. Ah, one of your friends came and bought about one *cedi*, so I thought to add him one, or two. Because I thought he is — every time when he comes here, you used to give him

1. take some, that is, smoke some

2. someone, man or woman, who is modern and hip

3. She learned how to smoke; she qualified, as if from an exam.

4. (Asante Twi): gossip, talk about other people

free, you know.” So my brother didn’t know anything about what I was doing.

So one day, my sister and I were making trouble. And I told her, “You think you’re a guy? I used to teach you to be a guy, and now you’re trying to be a guy past me. Even all your two shillings, every time when you give me to buy grooving, I eat the two shillings. But I know the way to find you grooving. You are not a guy. You are not a guy, you know.”

At that time, too, my sister didn’t want my brother to know that she was doing this thing, and so she was hiding from my brother. He was a seller, and my father was not all right with my brother for selling this thing. All of us, we didn’t want my brother to know. Only me, my brother knew that I’m grooving. But my sisters, he didn’t know. So my senior sister was thinking that if my brother knows, if they have trouble, maybe my brother will say, “Hey, Papa says every time it’s me who does it. But you too are doing it.” You know? So every time she was afraid for my brother to know this.

So ah! We had trouble; now she can’t get somebody to send. And you feel for grooving, what can you do? So one day she called me inside and said, “Yes, it’s OK. You know, whether you buy it or you don’t buy it, every time I will give you some dash when you bring it here.”

So I said, “OK.” Then I went and brought the groove. So then, every time she would give me two shillings. And then, it came to one shilling. Then she gave me sixpence. I didn’t say anything. We would groove together, then I would be thinking, “Ah! This girl! *Tsk!* If she is doing that, it will come and be a big palaver. I won’t bring her any groove again.”

So evening time, the children used to go out to play games in the night, and every time we used to go there, we would pass a corner-way.¹ We would groove a heavy one, and then come and play nicely. So, you know, my father had a horse, and I took small shit of this horse, and wrapped it well in the paper. *Tee-hee-tee-hee hee hee!!* So that day when we were going, she said, “Do you have some?”

Then I said, “Yes.” So we passed in back of the house. Then I said, “Oh, sister. You know, today if you don’t give me the money, I don’t

1. shortcuts or indirect ways; backways, as behind or between the houses

think we can do this thing, because, the last time, you gave me only sixpence. And I didn't have money to put on top to pay this man. So this one was a shilling. If you give me the other sixpence money, then we can light it.”

Then she said she didn't have sixpence, but she had a two-shillings coin.

Then I said, “OK. If that will be the case, take the groove and light it. I'm going to find change before I come back.”

When I came, my sister was there, “*Pppbbbt!*” *Sniff, sniff.*

“Ah! What is wrong?”

She said, “*Pffffp!* Who gave you this groove?”

I said, “Ah, Kofi hasn't got some. I had to go to some place to search.”

Then she said, “No-o, it's not groove.”

I said, “It's what? Let me see.” She didn't know what it was, but I knew what it was. Then I said, “*Hmmm! – Hmm! – sniff, sniff – Oh! This is shit! Of horse!!*”

Then she said, “So, what are you going to do? Are you going to pay him?”

Then I said, “Yes, I must pay. Because next time if he has some, he wouldn't give me.”

Then she said OK. So I gave her the shilling balance. Then, three days, you know, I brought another groove again, and she gave me sixpence! So I told her, “You know, if you are giving me sixpence, then every time I will give you shit of horse. Like the last time. Yeah! Last time I gave you shit of horse! Do you know that it's because you are giving me sixpence? You will smoke shit, and it's because you don't pay.”

So from that time my sister also started to be a guy, to know the people who are sellers and to buy by herself. Yeah, she thought it's better to buy for herself. Sometimes when I saw her that she was grooving heavy, I would think, “Eh! This time she doesn't groove with me; she used to go alone.” Then I would also start my palaver:¹ “Hey, sister! You grooved today, eh?”

1. troublesome talk; also, argument

Then she would say, “Aw-w. It’s finished.”

Then me: “Uh-huh? Is that so?”

“Yeah, I’m just groovy a little – not much, just small.”

Then I would say, “Uh-huh. So this time, you know your way, and you go away and leave me.”

Then one day she broke a plate, and I said, “So, now you can groove heavy and break everything. I will tell Mama.” Yeah! She was grooving alone, and she didn’t give me, and I didn’t get any money from her again, you know, so I must know the way to do with her.

Then she said, “Oh-h, don’t do that.”

“OK, then. Give me sixpence. If you give me sixpence, I won’t tell our mother again.” *Ha!*

So from that time, if she grooved and came home, then I wanted to look at her eyes. And she would say, “Oh, my head. Oh, Hawa, go and buy me APC.¹ Look at my eyes. They’re red, eh?”

“Yes.”

“*Ah-h-h*. I’m feeling pains.”

Then she was serious, you know, so I thought she was sick. I didn’t know that she didn’t want me to get her way. Then I said, “Oh, to take this APC, don’t you think if you take grooving, it’s better?”

“No, no, no, no. How my head is paining me, if I take grooving, it’s not good. This time I have stopped, because I think it’s worrying my head.”

Heh-heh. I thought I was clever. She’s also clever now. She’s getting everything, you know. So then when she would come home, every time, her head, her head, her head. Then one day she said she was sick. All her body was hot. She grooved heavy and there was much sun. You know, if it’s very hot and you groove, then you used to get some kind of hot, like your body is walking fast. So she came and lay down. Then our mother came from market, and said, “Why?”

I said, “*Ah-h*. She says she’s sick since morning-time, and I gave her APC, and still she is sleeping.”

1. an analgesic tablet, no longer sold, containing aspirin, phenacetin, and caffeine

Then the mother came and woke her. And I think she was dreaming, so when the mother touched her, she shouted, “Hey-hey! Hey! Hey!”

Then I said, “*Um-hm!* This girl is still in grooving. This is now free, eh? I’m going to get her again.”

Then one day she said she was going to some place, and I said I would accompany her. And she said, no, I shouldn’t follow her, because she is going to see somebody. So she was going, then I was following her corner-corner-corner, you know. So the house she entered, I went and sat at the door. They closed the door, and I sat in front of the door like that. Before they opened this room – *ah-h-h* – grooving was coming out. Then I ran away and passed back home. She didn’t see me.

So, I was free. When she came home, then I started to laugh. Then she told me to go and buy her APC. *Hee-hee-hee-hee!* I didn’t say anything. I took the money and went and bought bread and sugar. I came and put the sugar in water. Do you know that that time she was conceived? I didn’t know. She was taking a shit. I started to eat. Then she was laying down and looking at me. When I finished, then she said, “Oh-h, Hawa. So you didn’t bring the APC to me?”

I said, “*Ah!* I’m hungry! You, you can go and groove heavy like this, and then you want to drink APC every time. You think I am a fool? That is the money which I took to buy bread.” You know, it was very funny. When she conceived, every time when you did her any small thing, she used to cry. So she started crying. *Hee-hee*. Then I went to her. I said, “O-o-oh. Don’t cry. If you groove, you shouldn’t feel to cry, you know. Why are you grooving and then you cry like that? Don’t cry. I haven’t any money, and I ate the bread, too. So I can’t get this APC for you. If you have some more, I will buy it for you. Don’t cry.” – *Ha-ha!* – “And next time, if you groove, don’t tell me you’ve got headache. It’s not good.”

So from that time, she didn’t hide from me. I know she smokes. She also knows I smoke, too. She has married now, but if I go to the husband’s place, she will invite me to smoke. But we are not free. She doesn’t like me like the first time, and I don’t like her, too.

So all this was in Kumasi, in our family house, my father’s house. I was about eleven years old. But before I came to my father house, I

knew all this. My other sister showed me. We used to groove and go to the market. She used to tell me if you groove, then you can fight everybody.

The first time I grooved, you know, I was feeling somewhat tired, feeling sleepy. Then the second one, it made me happy. If I smoked a small thing, then in a little time, I would become *co-o-ol*. I didn't want to hear somebody's talking. Then when I was sitting quietly, I would hear some music, light music, past my ears. I didn't know where the music was from. Every time, I wanted to be sitting quietly, and then I would start to shake my head to the music. Yeah, as for starting grooving, it's nice, you know. And sometimes, I used to look up, and then I saw something pass me; sometimes some people were coming like strangers, then I would close my eyes and shake my head. *Heh-heh-heh*.

So you know, at that time my uncle's wife said that there is some sickness that used to catch babies; the Africans say it's a big bird.¹ So if you see the bird, and you didn't see it before, you will stay and look at one place. So when I sat small, then I made so, then I would come and open my eyes, then I would sit, then I would laugh a little; I would laugh small-small. So they thought that it was that sickness, and they used to be afraid for me that, "This girl is getting some sickness, we don't know." They wanted to take me to hospital, then my uncle said, "Oh, these our African people have got medicines for that." They used to get something for me to drink, from some trees, you know, to boil it for me to drink. And I was drinking it, but this sickness could not go away. *Hee-hee-hee*.

Until I passed. When I passed and qualified for the grooving, then they didn't see it again. Then they knew that, "Ah. This thing has gone." You know! But – it was grooving! *Hee-hee!* It was not any sickness. Yeah. They told me to drink this thing morning and evening, and they put it everywhere on my things. Morning-time, I will drink, and I have to bathe with this in the water, too. For about ten months, I was bathing with this medicine. *Hee-hee*. Special medicine! And it was bitter! So when I grooved and was drinking it, I liked the way it was

1. like a witch

bitter, and it had a scent, and I liked the scent, too, you know. So I drank much of it. *Ai-yee! Hah!*

Oh, yeah. Still now my father doesn't know that I groove. He only knows that I am smoking cigarettes, and it's not one year now when my father got to know that I am smoking. When I came from Lomé to our village, you know, I thought that this time I'm not a child, I shouldn't hide again, I will smoke it. So I gave him two packets of cigarettes. I had plenty in my things. So when I go to our village, my brother used to give me his room to sleep. I was relaxing there and my father came and met me with a cigarette. He didn't say anything; I didn't say anything. I wanted to hide it, but then I thought it's too late. So, it's OK. He just looked at me like this, at me smoking.

But you know, this story I'm telling, it's very funny, a very funny story about grooving. You know, one time my father was sick. He didn't have any appetite to eat. Then, every time, it was my brother who used to buy him tobacco. Do you know *tawa*?¹ It's what they call tobacco. This *tawa*, in Kumasi they have a kind of *tawa*, a long one, and they used to put it in a pipe. This was what my father was smoking, and every time he used to send my brother to buy it for him.

Then: my father always used to fight my brother because of grooving. I told you my brother was a seller, no? And my father would say, if my brother doesn't leave this work, he'll take him to the police. And my brother was still doing it, but he smuggled² it from my father. He didn't let people groove in the house. If you come to him, he will make as if he's leaving with you; then he will give you the thing.

So one day my brother came from work, and my father said, "Oh, didn't you bring me some *tawa*?"

And my brother said, "Oh, no, I haven't got some."

Then my father said, "Oh. But try to get me some."

Then: my brother saw that his last money was two shillings, just two shillings. He went and bought this *tawa*; one was one shilling. Tomorrow he must take a car³ and go to work: one shilling. To spend

1. (Asante Twi): locally grown tobacco

2. hid

3. transport; private bus

that shilling will be a problem for him. So he had one small groove rolled, and he put the grooving in the pipe, then he put the tobacco on top. Then he took the fire; he lit it for my father. And my father was smoking it.

“Ah!” he said. “This tawa is *good!* Ah! This tawa, it’s got some scent. It’s not looking like that one I smoke always. It’s a *nice* one!” Then he started, *hm-mmm-mm*; then, when he finished, he said, “Ah! I’m hungry.” *Hey!* The wife was happy.

“Eh?! Today you are hungry?” Since some days, he didn’t eat; now, he’s opening his mouth to say he’s hungry. Oh, the wife was very happy! So she had to make quick-quick time and get something for the old man to eat. When they made the food for my father: *oooo!* He ate *all!* He drink a lot of water!

You know, our step-mother used to talk about my brother all the time, that my brother is bad boy, and that and this. And you know, a man used to take the words from the wife, so every time, my father was agreeing. But this time, my father said to our mother, “You see? Before, you wanted to talk!” Then he said to my brother, “Ah! Kofi, you see, before, your mother was doing something like I should sack you. Suppose I sacked you, I would be lost. Or else I would die with hunger. That’s why they say, ‘If you grow up, you must marry early and have a baby early, so that when you are becoming old, he will look after you.’ Suppose no Kofi, today I will die. But Kofi made me eat today.” So then he started to tell Kofi all that our mother told him about Kofi. And the wife too was there, but he didn’t mind anything! Just talking: “Y-y-your mother was saying I should sack you, that you don’t – you don’t hear people’s talks – and you are doing these things – so you will become a thief, because these plenty thieves used to come to you – but –” And *all* this, my father started to tell my brother. And the wife was getting a big head: she was ashamed because she didn’t know my father could say these things about her.

Then my brother said, “And now you see yourself! I be a thief? Why is it that every time I wake up four-thirty in the morning to go to work? If I know how to be a thief, I won’t do this.”

Then my father said, “Yeah. I know that you cannot do that, but it was just your mother who was trying to say all this. Then I thought, if I

follow her, a wife can go today.¹ But you are a baby: even if you are not good, you will go to somewhere, you will think that you have a father.”

So from this case, every time my brother used to mix small groove inside the pipe for my father. Then one day this case came again: my father was going to cause trouble with my brother. He was smoking this thing every day, you know, and sometimes when you smoke this groove, you will like to talk some things, and sometimes when you smoke, you used to be annoyed. So my father started a palaver with my brother again. He said, “That my wife, I told you all that your mother was telling me about you, but still, you don’t change your mind. You are still like that. And now I think you are going more. So if that will be the case, you can find another house to live. Because I can’t live with my son, and then he’s doing something, and I will tell him to stop it, and he doesn’t stop.”

Then my brother said, “What am I doing that you are telling me to stop, and I don’t do it?”

He said, Yeah, he saw some people coming to my brother the time he used to sell this grooving, and he knows that my brother doesn’t smoke in the house, but maybe they are coming to get it from my brother.

And my brother said, “So, why?”

And my father said, “You know this thing used to make people crazy! They say in Asylum Down,² where they have the Asylum in Accra, it’s full of people who use this. And so Kofi, you must stop it.”

And Kofi said, “Are you crazy? As you are there now, how you are, are you crazy?”

“If I smoke it, maybe I will be crazy.”

Then my brother said, “Ah-h! But you have smoked it for long time! Why didn’t you craze?”

“Me??!”

“Yes. When you were sick, how many days didn’t you eat? When you got it, didn’t you eat well?”

Then: “A-a-ah — Is that the one you give me, then?”

1. A wife can leave her husband at any time.

2. section of Accra

“You don’t know the smell? OK, wait. I will give you some to get the smell.”

Then he brought some, and my father just laughed. He said, “*Phoo.*” Then, “*Phm. Phm. Phm.*”

Then my brother said, “You *lie!* The time when you were smoking, you told me that it’s a nice scent. Why now are you making *hmm-hmm-hm?*”

So every time, my father used to like this thing. But that time, he also didn’t want my brother to know. He had a Zambarima friend who used to sell sheep. And every time, this Zambarima man also used to smoke this grooving. He was an old man, too. Zambarima. And this man used to buy groove from my brother, too.

So my brother saw that this man and my father, they are now serious friends. And this Zambarima man, every time he used to buy two shillings, but now he is buying four shillings. So my brother also knew. Then one day he said, “Hawa?”

I said, “Um.”

“Our father likes this Zambarima man; he used to go with him everywhere. I think Papa is making a friend with Mohamadu because of smoke.”

Then I said, “Oh, but Papa said he doesn’t like this thing.”

He said, “Yes. But I thought so. Because every time Mohamadu used to come and take two shillings, but now he changed. It’s four-four shillings he is taking. What do you think?”

Then I said, “Papa wouldn’t do that. If he wants it, he will ask you.”

He said, “No, the last time, we had trouble; he won’t ask me again. So we must trap him.”

Then, I started to watch my father to know if he was doing this thing. Then every time he used to put on dark glasses. If it’s not evening time, he won’t take his dark glasses off. Then one day, he took off his glasses to wipe his face with a handkerchief.

Then I said, “*Ey-y.* Papa! Your eyes are paining you?”

Then he said, “What?”

I said, “They’re red!”

Then he said, “*Ah-hah*. That’s why I put on these spectacles.” Then he put them back on. “If the sun is too hot like this, my eyes used to be red. I can’t see well. That’s why I used to put on the spectacles.”

Then I went and told my brother, “Yes, I think so, because, Papa’s eyes, deep down, it’s like pepper.”

So one day, I don’t know what came to my brother. He said, “Papa, you see. This thing, I was doing it. You told me that it’s not good, and I stopped. And you are still doing it!!”

“What thing?”

Then my brother said, “What thing? Do you think if some – first time you were very quiet – and this time, oh-oh, you don’t give a damn. So I think you didn’t stop it.”

Then he said, “Because you are used to seeing me with this Zambarima man?”

Then my brother said, “*Ah?! That Zambarima old man, too, he smokes?*”

“Yes, he smokes. But I don’t do it!” *Hee-hee!* So that time we got to know that our father was a smoker. So any time, if this Zambarima man came to buy, my brother used to give him about one or two rolls on top of the thing he bought, that he was giving him as a dash. Because he knew what my father was doing with him! *Ha!*

Then, from that time, I left to stay with my aunt, so I don’t know what happened after. But I think that maybe my father has stopped. I think that this time he has changed. He doesn’t smoke again.

You know, the time when I was in the house and he was smoking, every day, whenever he was coming and he saw me, he would go, “Hey-y, Mama-o! Mama-o!”¹ Then he would pick me up. But before, if my father was coming from work, when we went to meet him, “Papa-o! Papa-o!” He didn’t mind anything. But when he used to groove, you know, when he was coming, then he would see me and be very happy. I knew the time when he used to come. At that time in the house, every time they would send me for something, I wouldn’t go. I wouldn’t do anything in the house, so my step-mother didn’t like me, and she used to beat me. When they did something to me and it pained me, I wouldn’t

1. Hawa has the name of her grandmother, so her father calls her “Mama.”

say anything. I would go and stand outside. When I saw that this is the time my father will come home, I would go outside, and start to force myself to cry and get tears. If my father saw me with my tears, “Oh-h. Mama-o! Mama-o! Oh-h, what is happening? Why are you crying?”

Then I would say, “Your wife has done me that and that and this.”

Then he would come to the house and shout on all of them. *Heh-heh-heh.*

But when I left to my Auntie’s place, I didn’t used to be going there every time. And the time I came to live with them again, by that time he was very quiet. So I think he has stopped it. Eh?