

How the Abosom Came into the World

(Asante)

There once was a woman who bore eleven children. Every day when she got up and cooked food the children ate it all and the mother did not get any of it. She pondered long about the matter, and went off to the plantation and spoke to the silk-cotton tree, saying, "I shall send my eleven children to come beneath you here to pluck pumpkins; and when they come, pluck off eleven of your branches and kill those children of mine."

The silk-cotton tree said, "I have heard, and I shall do it for you."

The mother then went home and said to her children, "You must go to the plantation beneath the silk-cotton tree; there are pumpkins there. Go pick them and come back."

The children set off. They went and reached the silk-cotton tree. Duku* [Number Eleven] said, "Piesie [Number One], stand still; Maanu [Number Two], stand still; Mensa [Number Three], stand still; Anan [Number Four], stand still; Anum [Number Five], stand still; Nsia [Number Six], stand still; Nsona [Number Seven], stand still; Awotwe [Number Eight], stand still; Nkroma [Number Nine], stand still; Badu [Number Ten], stand still; and I myself, Duku [Number Eleven], I have stood still."

Number Eleven then addressed them, saying, "Do you not know the sole reason why Mother said we must go and pick pumpkins?"

His siblings answered, "No."

Thereupon he said, "She has told this silk-cotton tree that, when we go there, he must pluck off branches and beat us. Therefore all of you cut sticks and throw them against this silk-cotton tree."

They cut the sticks and threw them against the silk-cotton tree. Pim! pen! pim! pen! was the sound they made. The silk-cotton tree supposed that the children had come. He took off eleven of his branches and let them fall to the ground. Little Number Eleven said, "You have seen had we gone on there, the silk-cotton tree would have killed us."

They picked up the pumpkins and took them to their mother. She cooked them. And at once the children had eaten all! Their mother said, "Ah! as for this matter, I cannot bear it! I shall take these children and give them to Nyankopon [the Creator dwelling in the Sky]."

The next morning, when things became visible, she went and told Nyankopon all about it, saying, "The children to whom I have given birth eat so fast and so much that when I wish to eat, I can't get anything. Hunger is killing me. Therefore I implore you, let the children be brought and killed, so that I may get something to eat."

Nyankopon said, "Is that really the case?"

The woman said, "I am speaking with a head, the inside of which is white."

So Nyankopon picked out messengers, and they went and dug a large pit in which they placed broken bottles. Nyankopon Himself went and fetched a snake and a leopard, put them in the pit, and covered it over. And now the messenger went to call the children.

No sooner did they reach the place where the pit lay than Duku [Number Eleven] said, “Piesie [Number One], stand still; Maanu [Number Two], stand still; Mensa [Number Three], stand still; Anan [Number Four], stand still; Anum [Number Five], stand still; Nsia [Number Six], stand still; Nsona [Number Seven], stand still; Awotwe [Number Eight], stand still; Nkroma [Number Nine], stand still; Badu [Number Ten], stand still; and I myself, little Duku [Number Eleven], I have stood still”. You must pass here, but you must not pass there.”

His siblings said, “Why, when a wide path lies there, must we pass through the bush?”

Now, as they were going along they all carried clubs. Number Eleven said, “Throw one of these clubs upon this path.” They threw a club upon the path and it fell through into the pit. *Yiridi* was the sound of its fall. Number Eleven said, “There you are! You see! Had we passed there, we should all of us have died.”

So they took a bypath and went off to meet Nyankopon. Nyankopon had caused holes to be dug, covered over and *ngua* [*ngua* (*plural*): *carved seats*] placed upon them, so that when the children came to sit on them, they would fall into the holes. Soon the children arrived before the face of Nyankopon. He spoke to them: “*Ngua* are set there. You may go and be seated upon them.”

Then Number Eleven said, “Who are we that we should be able to sit upon such very beautiful *ngua*? So, Nana, we are going to sit aside here.”

Thereupon Nyankopon gazed at the children and He said to Himself, “I shall send these children to Owuo’s (Death’s) village.”

The next morning, when things became visible, He called the children and said, “You must go to Awuaa (Death) who lives yonder and receive from her a golden pipe, a golden chewing-stick, a golden snuffbox, a golden whetstone, and a golden fly-switch.”

Number Eleven said, “You are our master, wherever you will send us, we shall go.”

Nyankopon said, “Be off!”

So the children set out for Awuaa’s village. When they arrived there, Awuaa said, “Why, when no one must ever come here, have you come here?”

They replied, “We were roaming about and came here quite by chance.”

Awuaa said, “Oh, all right then.”

Now Awuaa had ten children. With herself added, they made eleven. When things began to “disappear” that is, when it became “dark” Awuaa divided up the children one by one and gave one to each of her children, while she herself and Number Eleven went to rest. When it was dark, Awuaa then lit up her teeth until they shone red so that she might seize Number Eleven with them.

Number Eleven said, “Awuaa, I am not yet asleep.”

Awuaa said, "When will you be asleep?"

Number Eleven said, "If you were to give me a golden pipe to smoke for a while, then I might fall asleep."

And Awuaa fetched it for him.

A little while later, Awuaa again lit up her teeth in order to go and seize Number Eleven with them.

Number Eleven said, "Awuaa, I am not yet asleep."

Awuaa said, "When will you be asleep?"

Number Eleven said, "If you were to bring me a golden snuffbox, I might go to sleep."

And Awuaa brought it to him.

Again, soon afterward, Awuaa was going to seize Number Eleven.

Number Eleven said, "I am not yet asleep."

Awuaa said, "When will you be asleep?"

Number Eleven said, "If you were to go and fetch a golden chewing-stick for me so that I might chew it for a while, then I might fall asleep."

Awuaa fetched it for him. A short time passed, and Awuaa was about to seize him.

Number Eleven said, "Nana (Grandmother) I am not yet asleep."

And Awuaa said, "Then when will you be asleep?"

Number Eleven said, "Nana, if you were to go and bring me a golden whetstone, then I might sleep."

And Awuaa went and brought it. Again, soon afterward, Awuaa rose up once more.

Number Eleven said, "Oh, Grandmother, I said I was not yet asleep."

Awuaa said, "And what will be the day when you will be asleep?"

Number Eleven said, "If you were to go and take a calabash full of holes and go and splash water in it and boil some food for me to eat, then I might sleep."

Awuaa lifted up a strainer and went off to the stream. When she splashed the water into it, the holes in the strainer let it pass through. Now Number Eleven said to his siblings, "Rise up and flee away!" Then they rose up and fled, and Number Eleven went and cut plantain stems and placed them where his siblings had lain and took cloths and covered them over.

Now Awuaa was at the stream splashing water. And Owuo (Male Death) called to Awuaa (Female Death), saying, "Ho there, Awuaa!"

She replied, "Adwo."

He said, "What are you doing?"

She replied, "Alas, is it not some small child whom I have got! When I am about to catch him, he says, "I am not yet asleep." He has taken all my things, and now he says I must take a strainer and splash water.

Owuo said, "Ah, are you a small child? If you pluck leaves and line the inside of the strainer and then splash water, would it not be all right?"

Awuaa said, "Oh, how true!"

She plucked leaves, placed them inside, and splashed the water and went off. Number Eleven said, "Awuaa, you have come already? Boil the food." Awuaa cooked the food; she lit up her teeth in order to kill Number Eleven's siblings and cook them for food. When she went, she did not examine them carefully, and she herself killed all her own ten children.

The next day, very, very early, when things became visible, Awuaa rose up and sat there by the fire. Number Eleven said, "Nana, a tsetse fly is sitting on your breast."

Awuaa said, "Fetch the fly-switch which is lying there and kill it for me."

Number Eleven said, "Good gracious me! A person of your consequence" when a tsetse fly settles on you and a golden fly-switch lies there, you would use this old thing! Let me fetch the golden fly-switch and come and kill it."

Awuaa said, "Go and fetch it from the room."

Number Eleven went and brought it. He purposely drove the fly away; he didn't kill it. Number Eleven said, "Oh, today, where this tsetse fly will rest, there I shall rest with him."

Then Number Eleven went to the room and took his bag in which lay the golden pipe and all the things. He said, "Nana Awuaa (Grandmother Death), nothing will suffice save that I get the tsetse fly, put it in this bag, and bring it to you."

Number Eleven set off, *yiridi! yiridi! yiridi!* He reached the end of the town and said, "Ho, there, Nana Awuaa! Pardon my saying so, but if you were not a perfect fool, could I have relieved you of all your things, could my siblings with whom I came have found a way of escape, and could I have made you also kill all your ten children? As for me, I am going off."

Awuaa said, "You, a child like this! Wherever you rest, there I shall rest!"

Number Eleven leaped old *yiridi! yiridi! yiridi!* and Awuaa, too, went to chase him.

As Number Eleven was going, he overtook his siblings, who were sitting on the path. They were making a bird-trap. Number Eleven said, "Have you not gone yet? Awuaa is coming, so let us find some way to escape."

Now Awuaa came upon them. Number Eleven took medicine and poured it on his siblings, and they went on top of a silk-cotton tree. And Awuaa stood at the foot of the silk-cotton tree. She said, "Just now I saw those children, and where have they gone?"

Number Eleven was sitting above. He said to his siblings, “I am going to make water on her.”

His siblings said, “E! she is seeking us to catch us, and we have fled and come and sit here and yet you say, “I am going to make water on her!””

Number Eleven would not listen, and he made water all over Awuaa.

Awuaa said, “Ah, there you are! Today you have seen trouble.” □ Awuaa said, “You, child, who are sitting up there, *Kyere-be-ne, Kyere-be-ne!*” □ Thereupon one of the children fell down. “*Kyere-be-ne!*” □ A second one fell down. Soon there remained only Number Eleven.

Awuaa said, “Child, *Kyere-be-ne!*” □ and Number Eleven leaped and descended on the ground, *kirim!* And Awuaa then went on top of the silk-cotton tree.

Number Eleven said, “You, great big woman, you too, *Kyere-be-ne!*”

And Awuaa, also, came down, *tum!* She was dead.

Number Eleven went and plucked medicine, rolled it between his palms, and sprinkled it on his siblings, and they rose up. Number Eleven was going to throw the medicine away, when some of it dropped on Awuaa, and Awuaa awoke. She said, “You have killed me, and you have also awakened me. Today you and I will have a chase.”

Then they all started to run off at once, *kiri! kiri! kiri!* Now Awuaa was chasing them. As they were going, there lay before them a big river in flood. When Number Eleven and his siblings reached it, the siblings knew how to swim and they swam across. Number Eleven alone did not know how to swim. The children stood on the other side; they cried and cried and cried; their mouths became swollen up. As for Number Eleven, he turned into an **obo** [a stone].

Awuaa reached the river. She said, “Oh, these children! You stand there! Let me get an obo [stone] to throw and hit your swollen mouths.” □ Awuaa, when she looked down, saw an obo [stone] lying there. She picked it up and threw it. As the obo was travelling, it said, “Winds take me and set me on the other side.” It alighted on the other side. Number Eleven said, “Here I am!”

Awuaa said, “Ah, that child! I have no further matter to talk to you about. All I have to say to you is this: Go and remain at home and change into one of the **Abosom**, and if anyone whom I wish to take comes to where you are, do you inform me. If I so desire, I will leave him and make you a present of him; but what I wish in exchange, you must receive it for me.”

That is how the Abosom came into the world. They are descended from the small child Duku [Eleven].

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*In this translation, we include the Akan birth-order names to shed light on the descriptions “number eleven, number ten” etc. We also use the male and female versions of the name for death. The verb **wu** means *to die*, while the noun **owu** means *death*. **Owuo** is name of the *Male Entity* Death. **Awuaa** is a version of the name of the *Female Entity* Death. **Owuo** and **Awuaa** are Husband and Wife. [In the **Asante** dialect of Akan-Twi, the Male Entity Death is called **Owuo Barima** and the Female Entity Death is called **Owuo Ba**].

The term for *stone* as well as *precious stone, precious metal; invaluable* is **obo**. Note that the term **som** means *to serve*, however, the term also means *to take hold of; to seize*. Awuaa took hold of *som* the stone *obo* and threw it across the water. This is a play on the term **Obosom** (Deity). With respect to the **Akradinbosom**, we should also take note that the term for *up, upper, above, sky* is **so**. The term **somu**, shortened to **som** means *within (mu) the upper regions/sky (so)*. The stones, precious metals, etc.(**abo**) that are within the sky (**som**), are the celestial bodies, planetary bodies, Sun and Moon that fly across the waters and the land. The Abosom traverse **Asaase** (Earthly realm) the **So** (Sky realm) and **Asamando** (Spirit realm). In the story, the **mma** (*children*) were tested on Earth, in the realm of the Sky (realm of **Nyankopon**) and in the realm of Death. They overcame all obstacles placed before them. Finally, one of the names for Moon in Akan is **Bosom**, while the name for the celestial bodies (planets, stars) is **Nsoromma**. **Nsoro** – sky, **Mma** – children.

Odwirafo

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