

A blue-tinted photograph of a cave entrance. The cave is dark, and the light from the opening illuminates large, jagged rocks inside. The overall mood is mysterious and atmospheric.

Anna

THE

Human

RICHARD SHEKARI

Anna the Human

By Richard Shekari

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He that loves has no fear in him but he who fears is ruled by darkness hence an enemy of light.

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Xanxa Raggatt

Gordana Misciew, Xanxa

Terna Torkwembe

Fat-hi Said

Richard Aderinto

Ayiwulu Alaku

Martin Ibrahim

Felix Ikani

Shima I. Stephen

...Your words of encouragement and profound support greatly influenced my desire to write this novella.

You're appreciated, Richard.

Dedication

To my beloved nephews, Declan J. Agieve and Karston A. Aderinto.

I am Buga.

It was late at night. I gripped my weapon tightly, having heard screams. As I looked around, all I could see was a burning bush; the entire place licked up by flames, the moon light blocked by a thick smoke that mantled the surroundings. All of a sudden, about three of them ran out of the bush with their bodies enshrouded with fire. Something burst into flames, sounding like big drums accompanied by a hissing sound which erupted. The smell of sulphur and burning flesh took my nose hostage but for some reason, I simply stood and watched the horror with my feet grounded defensively.

The invaders took siege of the bush, holding their torches while they continued to set it ablaze. I went closer and saw people being butchered by the invaders. Anyone who jumped out of the burning bush was instantly killed. The sight was awful and it seemed there was nothing I could do.

I also noticed the invaders were bigger in size compared to the ones that were being hunted, burnt and killed. The sound of their voices and cries in the fire weakened my heart. I could not fathom why I was there or why I could not do anything. The attack was merciless, unspeakable and unthinkable.

While I watched, someone ran out of the burning bush and headed toward me, but I could not lift my sword. I just stood there dumbfounded. She walked over to me without a single drop of fear and placed what she carried in my arms, then begged me in a language I did not understand. My hands and body were larger than hers, but the sight of me did not scare her. She looked me straight in the eyes and uttered her request in a most courageous tone. I did not get a good look at her face, for the fire which was the only source of light stood behind her. However, I saw her eyes and noticed that she had no fear of me. I was amazed but she ran away before I could say anything. Then one of the invaders sighted her and chased after her.

The thing she placed in my arms moved a bit, so I used the tip of my sword and unveiled it; the sight was astounding, the light from the moon shone upon it and it smiled confusingly and chuckled. I giggled in return, my mouth wide open in wonder as the two of us continued to look and stare at each other. It was a little human, it clenched my garment and chortled then its eyes turned from happy to sad. It looked me deep in the eye as though it were afraid of me, blinking its eyes repeatedly. I looked around then covered it slowly with the garment that it was wrapped in, turned quickly and started to run.

Feeling amazed and excited at the same time, I kept running. I did not look back and the invaders did not bother themselves with me. As I ran with the little

human, it moved its mouth as though about to cry, I immediately shut it and continued running but it was already too late. One of the invaders had sighted me and launched toward me.

Without a word, he chased me and tried to attack me with two swords. However, as he jumped into the air to strike me I pulled out my sword and pierced it through his heart. He fell to the ground, unable to move. I bent down and took a careful look at him; we had a lot in common, he and I, in terms of body size and the type of clothes we both had on. I wrenched my sword from his chest and stood up, taking a good look at the invader whom I had just killed. I was shaken by what I saw; I seemed to be one of them, they were just like me. I had joined the attack the humans but I did not know why we attacked them, or why I hadn't killed any of the humans yet. The little human moved again, so I turned and continued running.

Not far from where I slayed him, I sighted a body of water and headed straight to it. On reaching it, I put my sword back into the sheath. My instinct told me to plunge into the waters, which I did without any hesitation.

I swam deep underwater until I came across a hole that seemed to be like an entrance to an underwater cave. I moved up through a pool into the cave. The cave had a big space within its belly. I got out of the water and as I placed the little human on the ground I saw a rock much bigger, so I picked the little human and put it on top of the rock. The little human began to cry and I became confused. I removed the garment that covered it and tried to play with it; I made different facial expressions, hoping it would calm the little human down but it cried out loud.

I remained mute and befuddled by the situation, then I heard something moving from behind me. As I turned my back I saw a beautiful human woman in a cage staring at me.

I looked around the cave wondering how she had come to be there. The look she gave me made me feel like she knew who I was.

She slowly bent down in her cage and stared at the little human, then quickly stood up in awe, seeming a little shocked at how I got the little human inside the cave. However, I was more disturbed by how she could have gotten into the cage in the first place. I gave it a quick thought and rapidly took the little human to her; she accepted and embraced it, then gently wiped the dirt and water from its face.

Captivated and astonished by her beauty and how she was so concerned with the welfare of the little human, I stayed there and watched them both. The human woman pointed at some vessels behind me and made a gesture asking me to bring them to her, which I did without hesitation. She gently changed the

cloth the little human was wearing and wrapped it in a dry garment then prepared a more comfortable place and laid it down. However, the little human continued to cry out. She then mixed some liquids from the vessels I gave her, rubbed the mixture around her nipple then picked the little human and dipped her breast in its mouth. It went mute as it sucked and finally, the place was quiet and sweet.

The human woman took her time and checked to see if the little human was injured, but it appeared to be fine. She gave me a strong look of distrust and spoke in a harsh human tongue.

I had no way of telling how she had got into the cave or who had locked her in the cage. She appeared to be much younger than the first human woman who had handed me the little human.

I was trying to make sense of many things in a short time. I could not understand her tongue when she spoke to me, so she made gestures to describe to me what she wanted or was trying to say. I think she considered me a dull one; she would point at me then poke her head twice and nodded, squeezing her mouth in an annoying way.

When the little human started to cry again, she moved away from me and sat on the ground then rubbed more of the liquid around her nipple and fed it, this continued until it belched and shortly yawned before going to sleep.

The human woman smiled and pointed at the small basket behind me. As I went for it, she asked me to bring what was inside but I picked the whole basket. She shook her head in disagreement and directed me to bring just one of the items inside the basket, so I picked out a loaf and handed it to her. She then sent me to bring water from another vessel, which I poured into a small jar and offered it to her.

The human woman smiled and sat in the cage looking at me. I admired her hair and wanted to touch it but I was somehow shy. She then signalled me that it was okay to touch it but instructed me to stroke it gently. I smiled and sat down like a youngling and as I fondled her magnificent soft hair, we both smiled at each other.

I asked her to give me the little human to hold but she made a gesture that it was asleep and I must not disturb its peace. The human woman later instructed me to go get a thick garment for the little human and more food for them both when I returned. She explained to me that the little human was very young and must be wrapped in a much thicker garment to keep it warm or it would fall ill.

She would speak words I could not comprehend, but when I showed no understanding, she would make use of gestures instead.

The human woman was so beautiful and I loved her blue eyes and dark hair. As I moved my hand to touch it again, she shook her head then asked me to leave. I stood up, feeling a bit disappointed like a youngling. I then picked up my sword. Before I jumped into the pool, I turned and looked at her but she ignored me, so I dived deep into the pool and swam away.

By the time I got to the other side, it was already morning. The sun was up and the vultures were everywhere feasting on the flesh of dead humans. I sighted some of the invaders pulling dead human bodies along, cutting up some of the parts and stacking them for transportation. I walked between these invaders holding my sword firmly and nervously but none seemed worried about my presence. There were about six of the invaders who looked older and seemed like the elders amongst them, standing while they examined the body of the invader whom I had killed. They appeared daunted by what lay before them.

I approached them cautiously, holding my sword, and as I got closer, they all bowed their heads to me and revealed the face of the dead invader. I couldn't understand why they had bowed to me neither did I know the dead invader. I kept a firm hold on my sword.

“The Chief will not take this lightly. How can we break such news to him?” said one of the elders.

Finally someone spoke in a language I understood, not like the tongue spoken by that human woman.

“They will pay so dearly for this!” exclaimed another, “Brothers, one or more of us will suffer this, we all know that.”

The six elders stepped aside and had a little chat among themselves. I could tell they were afraid but I chose not to offer any proposal. In accordance with the respect they showed me I decided not to speak unless spoken to, and also kept my reply short and shallow. None of them saw me as a hostile and since they did not suspect any foul play, I began to feel more comfortable.

We marched in line with the rest of the invaders who carried the stacks of human parts from the hunt in several nets. I turned and looked back to make sure that no-one could find out the location of the humans. The dead body of the invader whom I had killed was also carried along. No-one spoke a word, not a song of victory was sung on our way. It felt strange, so I wisely continued to look over my shoulders and my back but instead I saw honour and loyalty in their eyes.

The way they all treated me on our way back home stirred some pride within me. One of them ran to me and walked beside me.

“You seemed so quiet Buga, this is unlike you my brother!” he said.

“Shut your mouth Oden!” retorted one of the invaders.

The one called Oden was getting all nosy and appeared baleful, so I reached out for my sword and tackled him then placed the sword on his neck.

‘Not as quiet as your Mother the day she dropped you, eh brother?’ I said.

The invaders stopped marching and all went silent. I stared at them defensively and they all burst into laughter.

“You mean our Mother, huh, brother?” said the one called Oden as he too laughed and then pinched my stomach.

I gently took my sword off his neck and pretended to laugh maniacally along with them. I gave him a hand and lifted him off the ground. He then hit me lightly on the chest as we continued to march up the mountains. Oden kept pestering me with how he slaughtered the humans and how they screamed as they begged for their lives. I uttered no word and acted as though he inspired me. The good thing was, I understood the tongue they all spoke to me with.

We walked through the giant trees and up the mountains. Along the way, I saw skulls of humans and sights that almost made me puke but I held on while acting strong and bold because the invaders had high respect for me for some reason I did not know. However, the one they called Oden gave me a suspicious look.

“Your garment is wet, my brother,” said the one called Oden.

‘I chased one of them into the waters, but the um...sharks got to him first,’ I replied while still walking.

“Hmm, sharks got to the human Buga chased before Buga got to the human? How great! We go to a battle with our kind, you slaughter thousands but to brag about killing one human, just one human? It’s a null on your list Buga, come on, share with me...ooh unless, unless if your power comes from not-killing the humans or eating flesh! A Purican that doesn’t enjoy the spoils? Hmm!” said Oden.

He kept on talking as we walked up the mountains, his head went flying in the air, well, that was the picture painted in my mind but in reality, the one called Oden was still babbling, I got so fed up with him but I remained silent and smiled nicely.

The Dead Purican Prince

On our arrival, the whole community came out to welcome us home. We marched through the settlement and arrived at the compound of the one whom they called the chief. Some of the invaders stopped at a distance with the dead body of the invader whom I had killed outside the palace.

I watched them gather the human parts and pile them all in one place. After all the invaders gathered, someone came out and examined the goods and went back into the chief's palace. In an instant the chief came out, the invaders then bowed down and I bowed along with them but the chief asked me to stand up. I did so slowly.

One of the six elders broke the news of the dead invader to the chief. He laughed, hoping the elder was trying to tell a joke but after looking into our eyes, he became sad and filled with disbelief.

The body was brought forth and on sighting it, the chief cried out and tore his garment in grief.

"I told this fool to stay back but he insisted on going for the hunt. Where were you when my son was killed?" said the chief as he turned and stared at my direction. I went to my knees and uttered no word.

The chief snatched a sword from one of his guards and rushed toward my position. I held to my sword while on my knees and as I made an attempt to stand up in order to defend myself, while at the same time not exposing my intentions, the chief lifted his sword and decapitated the head of the one who had broke the news to him. The headless body fell right next to me, and the remaining five elders fell to their knees begging for their lives.

"Forgive us, have mercy, oh great one," they spoke out of fear.

"You and your sons shall all pay for this. The first male of each one of you must be buried with my son and your daughters shall bear offspring for me... the one who did not birth a male I shall kill along with the new born," said the chief.

I kept my head low ready to defend myself if threatened.

"Well, he got what he deserved for ignoring the instructions of a dear father. My beloved Puricans, let us inhumate the dead and observe the feast!" he added as he stared down at me and wiped the blood stain on his sword with his garment.

The guards were sent to apprehend the first male offspring of the remaining five elders as ordered by the chief, including the first male of the one that was decapitated. While the guards went to bring them, the rest of the elders pleaded

with the chief who was seated on his throne. The throne was made from human bones and decorated with their skulls on its arms. It was placed on top of a platform made from human skulls, with human limb bones laid over them.

The remaining elders begged for forgiveness but the chief kept a deaf ear to their plea. Some of the Mothers pleaded along but nothing seemed to dissuade the chief. When the guards brought in the sons of the five elders, the chief stood up.

“Well, to forgive...yes...yes I must! To forget? It is the easiest thing for me to do my beloved Puricans. I shall forgive and forget because it is the only way to move on, I shall move on and the Puricans must too, knowing none of these elders and their sons will be around to remind us of this great loss,” said the chief as he gave a sign to the guards.

The guards chopped off the heads of the five remaining elders and the six first male offspring brought before the chief.

“Offer the twelve heads to the oracle, spread their skulls under the foundation of the new temple as soon as the sun hides under the mountains!” added the chief.

The guards packed the heads as ordered and moved away while some carried the headless bodies of the six elders and their offspring to the sacred site where the chief’s son was to be buried. As we walked away, I noticed the Mothers bringing the human parts from the hunt to the kitchen to prepare for the feast.

We walked behind the chief as he led the way to the graveyard, and just as the chief declared; the bodies of the elders and their sons were buried alongside his son. Their graves were displayed to ornament the resting place for the chief’s son, and in accordance to the Purican custom, the relatives of the deceased fetched and ate the sands from the grave of their loved ones who had died in order to corroborate that they had nothing to do with whatever incident that might have led to the demise of their own. It was believed that if the hand of any Purican was stained with the blood of a deceased family member, they would be kissed by death and their corpse would be cut in half and thrown to the vultures.

By the time we got back to the palace, it was already sunset and food was served. I watched them eat and drink. The sight of one eating the cooked or fresh flesh made me vomit. I didn’t know why, but they always laughed at me.

“Son, have some fruits,” said one of the Mothers.

I smiled and as I was about to take a bite, she hit my hand and gave me some water to rinse my hand with.

“I taught you more than that, don’t shame me in the presence of the other Mothers, Buga,” she added disappointingly.

I rinsed my hands and ate the fruits she gave me while she sat beside me. Later, the one called Oden came to us. He addressed the one who served me the fruits as “Mother” and took some fruits too. I noticed that she did not eat the meat either. I wasn’t sure about Oden, even though I saw him eating the fruits with us and from the way he behaved, I could tell that the one who served me the fruit was related to me. It seemed that Oden was my blood brother. My memories began to flash back and forth, then I would readjust when it was clear, and follow the memories with a gentle smile.

The chief’s throne was lifted from its position in the palace to the place where the bonfire was set. The Puricans sat and listened to the chief’s boring speech around the fire that night and different sorts of food and drinks were served. Many rituals were also observed and after a while, the chief was taken back to his palace.

The one Oden called Mother then asked us to go home but as we were about to leave, the chief sent for me. Mother didn’t seem to like the sound of it but she had no choice and as I was about to go, she reminded me to carry my sword. I walked away with the messengers, leaving Mother and Oden.

By the time I arrived, the chief was already drunk and looking upset. I met the six Puricans whom he tearfully ordained as the new elders with oil and ash rubbed on their bodies.

“What do you suggest I do with them, my young and fearsome warrior? I, the great Purican chief, gave them the opportunity to serve the chiefdom and yet, they broke his heart,” questioned the chief.

I looked at the elders and saw sorrow in their eyes, Forgive was the word that came to mind. I did not know that I had said it out loud. “Forgive them? For abandoning my only son? The heir to the Purican throne who was slaughtered by the humans?” said the chief angrily.

“You have already punished the elders, Your Highness!” I said.

“Have I?” he asked.

‘Yes Your Highness, you have ordered their heads be offered to the oracle and be placed under the foundations of the new temple. Their headless bodies have been buried to honour your great son. Your Highness, these are the new elders you’ve assigned to take over,’ I whispered.

He then walked toward me staggering and smiling.

“Oh my, I must have forgot. You know, my young warrior, when you lose something greater than life itself you just wish everything will um...hmmm! Well, why wasn’t he as strong and wise as you?” said the chief, as he turned to the six newly ordained elders.

“Well, you lucky old bones ... I have forgiven. You had better thank Buga, my young warrior here,” he added, before he fell to the ground snoring.

The guards lifted him up to his bedroom as the newly ordained elders thanked me and walked away. I walked into the chief’s bedroom with the guards. He seemed not to be aware of what he had done earlier. Luckily for the new elders, the chief did not order them to be killed before I came. For even while drunk, his orders were taken and executed by his guards without any question.

After a long talk with the chief while he lay on his bed, he raised his hand and told me to go away, so I turned to leave.

“If I do not do that, they will not fear me, my young warrior,” he joked and we both laughed hard.

“Ah! You, you...what can I do without you? You are one of my strongest pillars, Buga! Yes, yes, I must reward you handsomely!” He exclaimed as he lay down and began snoring.

After leaving the palace, I found Mother and Oden waiting for me. We went home together and I told Mother everything that happened. She wasn’t impressed.

“He had no choice but to do as you asked,” Mother said, but I had no idea what she meant.

“I also want you to know that I am tired of being a mother to two old grown Puricans. I want to play with your offspring. Look at the other mothers, they all have play friends!” Mother added as she talked about the many young Purican mates who would die to be my brides. She went on to mention name after name of almost all the young Purican mates whom she would prefer me to bond with. I loved Mother; she was special because she treated me like a youngling all the time. I did not know if it occurred to Mother that I was a great Purican warrior because she never saw me as one. Her words and the way she looked at me brought many good memories flashing through my mind.

That night, while they were asleep, I stole some of Mother’s garments and wrapped them in an animal skin and tied it so air wouldn’t go in. I also packed some more fruits and loaves she made from her kitchen. I took some of the juice which Mother always made from some of the sweetest fruits that she picked.

I ran down the mountains, and after a long walk I arrived at the waters and dived in, making sure nobody had followed me.

The human woman and the little human were asleep, but the woman woke up as soon as she heard the sound of water splashing from the pool. I unpacked the food and gave her the garments too. The human woman used them to cover

herself and wrap the little human. I also gave her the food I brought for them. She then tried to ask me to open the cage, explaining that she would not run. However, I could not take that chance.

The human woman seemed to want to order me around. Maybe I was being too nice to her or maybe she felt I was too weak to resist her. She was right! I thought.

I could not remember how she got there and how I got to know about the underwater cave either, but somehow I believed she was safer in the cave than out there, where she would be hunted and eaten by the Puricans.

The human woman permitted me to play with her hair again and demanded I stay a little longer, but I had to leave because I did not want the Puricans to suspect me of harbouring their dinner. Before I left I made her understand I would come back. She then asked me to bring something to make fire the next time I was to come, because the cave was too cold for the little human. I asked her why she didn't inform me earlier but she only smiled which left me with only one thing to do; I smiled back like a fool. I then looked around for some small rocks to make fire but I found none. I needed two good smooth rocks and some dry grass, barks or garments to make fire for her and the little human. I knew I had to bring it soon so I promised the human woman that I would come with the necessary items. I dived into the pool and because my heart was warmed by her smile the water felt so good and warm.

The next day my brother Oden woke me up by sticking one of his arrowheads in my nostril. It was already noon and I guess I was late for whatever his reason was for waking me up. Oden told me that the young Purican mates were at the stream and we should go see if we could find a mate as Mother had requested. I wasn't interested but he persuaded me and in order to avoid the noise from his rattling mouth, we made a deal on one condition; he would not utter a word till we got to the stream and would not utter a word on our way back as well. Oden agreed but of course, it was like tying a thirsty elephant to a shrub by the pond.

Oden couldn't keep his mouth shut on our way down the stream. I wondered how I got to live under the same roof with such a character. He was shorter than me; his head only coming up to just below my chest. Oden told me that he had been informed that the chief's two daughters were at the stream with no guards. The question was — who would want his mate to be fathered by the chief? He wasn't the type of Purican you would want to have your offspring play with.

While Oden was busy trying to assault my eardrums, we heard Mother's voice calling. I turned and there she was, running down with my sword. Oden shook his head repeatedly.

I walked up to meet Mother. She threw the sword at me angrily and turned to go home. Poor old Mother gasped. The sword was very heavy for her to carry. I picked it up and my brother Oden took over from where he left off.

Mother was always kind and caring to me. There was a great resemblance between Oden and our father, more so than between myself and our father. I could swear it was better to have ten thousand bees buzzing in your ears for two moons than have Oden speak for a day. However, I think I tolerated him because I became fond of him. Oden was so full of life.

It took us a while to get to the stream, but from a distance we overheard the young Purican mates playing in the water. By the time Oden and I got into a good position to watch them, we spotted some individuals hiding in the bushes, who turned out to be Redican scouts. This was no time to think as I watched four Redicans advancing down the stream toward the Purican mates. One of the Redicans slipped and fell, allowing the mates to see him. They suddenly started screaming and began to run out of the water.

Oden suggested that we should go back and call the others. He was afraid but I assured him that I would take the enemies down. The Redicans approached with such malicious intent, chanting gleefully as they ran after the Purican mates. I had to jump from my hiding place and advance. Oden had no choice but to fire his arrows as well. He swiftly shot two Redicans from where he was standing and of course couldn't keep his mouth from bragging about it.

I leaped across the stream, killed two Redicans with my sword and stained the stream with their cruddy blood. I grabbed hold of the fifth Redican and seized his spear, using it to kill the sixth one as I strangled the fifth one under my arm.

It was easy, I dealt with them like the way Mother made breakfast. The rest of the young Purican mates came to meet me, but the chief's daughters pushed their way through and started touching my arm. I stood with great pride before them even though I had no love or lust for any of them. I just wanted to make Mother proud, for she deserved a play friend. However, the chief's daughters were the last mates I would think of bonding with.

By the time all the Purican mates came out of their hiding place, the guards had arrived. They packed the bodies of the six Redicans and burnt them.

"These Redicans knew not who they were up against, eh Buga?" acclaimed one of the guards.

"You've sent thousands of their brothers to the afterlife in one night and yet six fools had the unmitigated effrontery to come against you?" added another as they all laughed.

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