

FULL PERFORMANCE TRANSCRIPT

ÌRUN

Told by Olu Oke

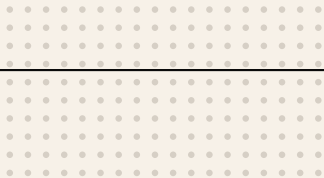
An oral storytelling archive transcript

10:07

ENGLISH + YORUBA

HERITAGE

A PERSON’S HAIR CANNOT BE SO BUSHY THAT THE
BLADE WON’T CUT IT.



ABOUT THIS STORY

In a forgotten land where hair expresses identity, status and history, only the sacred Abe - its barbers - may touch or cut it. When an acquisitive traveller breaks this ancient law by stealing a lock from a young boy, the consequences engulf the entire island. Its people lose their hair and memories, while an impenetrable forest of hair grows across the land.

Guided by a mysterious hag, the traveller must carry the burden of what he has done and complete three tasks. Yet his final lesson is more difficult: repairing the damage requires responsibility, knowledge and action.

STORY DETAILS

STORYTELLER	Olu Oke
RECORDING DATE	1 Jul 2026
LOCATION / COMMUNITY	London
DURATION	10:07
CARD LABEL / SUBTITLE	A tale of consequence, responsibility and restoration
THEMES	Community, Heritage
LANGUAGE / DIALECT	English, Yoruba

CULTURAL / COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The story opens and closes with the Yoruba proverb: Ìrun kò ní kún kí abẹ má lè gé. “A person’s hair cannot be so bushy that a blade cannot cut it.”

The story combines English narration with Yoruba words and phrases. Hair represents identity, memory, knowledge and cultural inheritance. The traveller’s actions explore acquisition, exploitation and the consequences of taking something without understanding or permission.

Other Yoruba words heard or referenced include abẹ (blade/razor), wàhálà (trouble), dúró (stop), ẹ káàbọ (welcome), kí ló ń ẹlẹ̀? (“What is happening?”) and “Eku amojubab”, a greeting of welcome after a long journey.

The accented Yoruba spellings should ideally be confirmed by Olu before publication, particularly where the performance uses character voices or colloquial pronunciation.

ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

This transcript accompanies Olu Oke's recorded performance of ìrun. The storyteller's supplied script has been used as a reference for the Yoruba passages.

The wording follows the recorded performance wherever it differs from the written script. Punctuation and paragraph breaks have been added only to improve readability.

ACCESS NOTE

The timestamps are section markers designed to help readers navigate the recorded performance.

FULL TRANSCRIPT

00:00

ÌRUN

Ìrun kò ní kún kí abẹ má lè gé.

A person's hair cannot be so bushy that a blade won't cut it.

I'm going to say that again to make sure that you've heard me.

Ìrun kò ní kún kí abẹ má lè gé.

A person's hair cannot be so bushy that the blade won't cut it.

00:27

A forgotten land in ancient times sat on the edge of the world. Its society was based on hair.

Strand by strand, hair told the story of a life: rich man, poor man, bureaucrat, artisan.

Styles were fabulous: two foot wide, four foot high and six foot long.

Architecture resembled the over, under and through of a plait.

A peaceful place.

00:57

There was one rule. A taboo.

Hair was not to be touched or cut by anyone other than the Abe—the barbers. Holy people.

The rule was known by all and religiously kept:

Look, but don't touch and definitely, without question, don't cut.

01:20

But there is always one: The Traveller.

He had bartered across lands and haggled over seas. Realising that he had not yet imposed himself on this land, he arrived.

He was greeted with courtesy and excitement. A new head of hair was a rare thing indeed.

The Traveller was told immediately of the land's unbreakable law:

Look, but don't touch and definitely, without question, don't cut.

01:50

This wasn't a problem until fascination became acquisition.

Of course, he was refused.

"Can I?"

"No."

"Could I?"

"No."

"Might I?"

"No."

With each rebuff came an itching frustration. Complaining to himself:

"It's only hair. Everyone has it. Honestly, what's the worst that can happen?"

02:12

And with this thought, he collides with the most magnificent head of hair he has ever seen.

A kaleidoscope of rainbow blacks: blue-black, red-black, yellow-black.

A halo of coils and curls, and twists and twirls.

A gleaming, spherical mass sat on the head of a young boy.

02:43

"Oh! Sorry, sir!"

Parcels scatter. They pick them up.

"No apologies required, young man. I am at fault. As reparations, let me help you. Where is it that you're going?"

"Thank you, sir. My uncle's shop. Just this way, sir."

03:04

The Traveller converses, but his mind is elsewhere. The need creeps from his fingers to his mouth.

He asks:

"Young man, I know that it's not your people's custom to give gifts of hair, but I am, for a small snippet, willing to compensate you."

The Traveller produces a purse of coins. The Boy refuses.

"No, sir. It's against the law, sir. Sorry, sir. I can't, sir. Just a few more turns, sir."

"Indeed, my apologies."

03:46

But the itch now burns.

When the purse is returned to The Traveller's bag, his fingers graze against a small knife.

He drops behind The Boy. The gestures are quick.

The knife in hand reaches up and in.

A grab.

A flick of the wrist.

A simple cut.

An ancient law broken.

04:08

Three things happen the moment The Boy's hair is cut.

One: everyone loses their hair. Every strand on every head.

Two: every mind is wiped clean. All knowledge gone.

Three: a forest of hair begins to grow. And grow.

04:25

You see, the stolen hair fell to the ground.

Each strand untwists, untwirls, burying itself into the earth to sprout up again.

Rising thick, coarse; growing fast, strong and pervasive.

It swallows the island.

The chaos and devastation is instantaneous. The population flees.

04:54

In the world, a thousand years have passed. But on the island, time stands still.

The Traveller alone remains—lost, confused.

“Hello? Can anyone hear me? Please?”

05:12

“Wá! Come, you blasted man!”

The voice stuns The Traveller.

“So! Now you get an answer, but you don't move. Wá níbí!”

05:26

Stumbling towards the voice, he emerges into a circular clearing.

In the centre: a chair, a fire, a bubbling cooking pot and a pile of rags.

The Traveller scrambles towards the food.

05:39

He trips and falls over the rags.

No, not rags. A sleeping boy.

A voice whips across the clearing. He falls back.

“Fi mí sílè! Leave him alone! Have you not caused enough trouble?”

“I'm—I—I'm sorry. I just wanted to—”

“Bẹ̀ẹ̀ni! Yes! You are always wanting something. A trinket here, a snippet there. Always something.

“Come, eat!”

06:09

The Hag finishes eating, then shuffles over to the sleeping Boy.

Pulling a comb from her headwrap, she begins to tease The Boy's spherical mass of curls and coils.

Suddenly, The Traveller's mind floods.

The cut. The chaos. The impenetrable forest of hair.

“No! It is not true. It was just a simple cut!”

06:37

“So, you remember?”

“I—I didn’t understand.”

“Ah-ah! Is that so?”

“I wanted to trade.”

“But you took.”

“I wanted to gift!”

“So you stole!”

“It was not like that!”

06:49

“Dúró! Stop. I will give you a gift.”

She flicks out her headwrap and covers The Boy.

“Traveller, this wàhàlà—this trouble—is for you to fix.

“Three tasks. Then you return.”

07:08

She rolls The Boy, shuffles forward, then tucks the material at his head and feet.

Roll, shuffle, tuck, tuck.

Roll, shuffle, tuck, tuck.

With each roll, The Boy gets smaller, until what remains is a small ball of cloth in the palm of her hand.

“Here...”

The Hag throws the ball.

“...the gift.”

07:35

The ball weighs a ton.

“I cannot carry this!”

“You can. You will. It is your burden and salvation.

“Traveller, do not let anyone carry your gift. Otherwise, you will wander forever.

“Go!”

07:55

Arriving in the New World, the tasks are not completed by The Traveller alone.

The first—the Wig Master’s punishment, a death sentence for illegal immigrants—is completed by The Boy.

The second—the writing of the Old Abe’s Hair Encyclopaedia, an act of restoration—is completed by The Boy.

But the third task—the third task—centuries of servitude to a family of milliners, is endured by The Traveller alone.

08:28

Then one day, while sorting cloth, the ball reappears.

So he returns with The Boy, back to the clearing.

The Hag greets them both.

“È káàbò...Èku amojubab

They eat and tell their tales of lessons learned.

08:45

The Traveller, when done, picks up his bag and begins to leave.

“Kí ló ń ẹlẹ? Why are you leaving?”

“The three tasks are complete. I have paid my debt. You have The Boy!”

08:58

“Traveller—you are the solution!

“You can plait. You can comb. You can tease.

“Why should he pay? Did he cause wàhálà?”

09:18

The revelation that he, The Traveller, is the solution to taming the island’s forest of hair angers him.

He storms towards the edge of the clearing.

“I will not be imprisoned here! If you wanted the knowledge, you should have taken notes!”

09:33

The moment The Traveller steps into the undergrowth, follicle-vines coil around his feet, throwing him into the air to place him, weeping, next to The Hag.

The Hag grabs onto The Traveller’s hair and says:

09:57

“Ìrun kò ní kún kí abẹ má lẹ gé.

“A person’s hair cannot be so bushy that the blade will not cut it.”

— END OF TRANSCRIPT —