

Masquerade Season

Pauly, a disobedient but imaginative boy, routinely ignores his mother's warnings to stick to major roads on his way home from his cousins' house. Preferring quieter, scenic routes, he often takes a shortcut through the Alele Estate, where the guards recognize him. One day, after staying late playing with his cousins, Pauly encounters three mysterious masquerades blocking his path in the bush. Despite their eerie presence and out-of-season appearance, Pauly politely addresses them, intrigued by their vivid and elaborate designs—one towering with raffia threads, another draped in red aso-oke with a silver mask, and the third adorned with colorful feathers and intricate embroidery.

When the masquerades begin following him, Pauly questions their motives, to which the feathered one responds, "Because we are your masquerades." Delighted by the idea of owning something so extraordinary, Pauly decides to bring them home, imagining his mother's pride and his cousins' envy. The journey back is effortless, with the masquerades moving gracefully and even earning nods of approval from the Alele guards. Pauly, though aware of his mother's rule against bringing strangers home, believes these masquerades are an exception—too special to leave behind.

At home, the masquerades stand brightly in the dim living room, their presence overwhelming yet fascinating. Pauly struggles to understand how to interact with them, pondering whether to ask about their origins or offer them food. Eventually, he offers biscuit and water, but the red aso-oke masquerade requests palm oil instead, its voice smooth and insistent. The scene is interrupted by Pauly's mother's arrival, leaving her reaction to the unexpected guests unresolved.

The chapter blends everyday life with the supernatural, exploring themes of curiosity, disobedience, and the allure of the extraordinary. Pauly's defiance of his mother's rules is tempered by his politeness and wonder, while the masquerades' enigmatic nature adds a layer of mystery. The vivid descriptions of the masquerades contrast with the mundane setting, creating a sense of magic in the ordinary. The unresolved ending leaves readers anticipating the mother's response and the masquerades' true intentions.