He was drawn to markets and straight roads. Not any tiny neighbourhood market where a handful of garrulous women might gather at sunset to gossip and buy ogili for the evening's soup, but a huge, engulfing bazaar beckoning people familiar and strange from far and near. And not any dusty, old footpath beginning in this village, and ending in that stream, but broad, black, mysterious highways without beginning or end. After much wandering he had discovered two such markets linked together by such a highway; and so ended his wandering. One market was Afo, the other Eke. The two days between them suited him very well: before setting out for Eke he had ample time to wind up his business properly at Afo. He passed the night there putting right again his hut after a day of defilement by two fat-bottomed market women who said it was their market-stall. At first he had put up a fight but the women had gone and brought their men-folk--four hefty beasts of the bush--to whip him out of the hut. After that he always avoided them, moving out on the morning of the market and back in at dusk to pass the night. Then in the morning he rounded off his affairs swiftly and set out on that long, beautiful boa-constrictor of a road to Eke in the distant town of Ogbo. He held his staff and cudgel at the ready in his right hand, and with the left he steadied the basket of his belongings on his head. He had got himself this cudgel lately to deal with little beasts on the way who threw stones at him and made fun of their mothers' nakedness, not his own.

He used to walk in the middle of the road, holding it in conversation. But one day the driver of a mammy-wagon and his mate came down on him shouting, pushing and slapping his face. They said their lorry very nearly ran over their mother, not him. After that he avoided those noisy lorries too, with the vagabonds inside them.

Having walked one day and one night he was now close to the Eke market-place. From every little side-road crowds of market people poured into the big highway to join the enormous flow to Eke. Then he saw some young ladies with water-pots on their heads coming towards him, unlike all the rest, away from the market. This surprised him. Then he saw two more water-pots rise out of a sloping footpath leading off his side of the highway. He felt thirsty then and stopped to think it over. Then he set down his basket on the roadside and turned into the sloping footpath. But first he begged his highway not to be offended or continue the journey without him. 'I'll get some for you too,' he said coaxingly with a tender backward glance. 'I know you are thirsty.'

Nwibe was a man of high standing in Ogbo and was rising higher; a man of wealth and integrity. He had just given notice to all the ozó men of the town that he proposed to seek admission into their honoured hierarchy in the coming initiation season.

'Your proposal is excellent,' said the men of title. 'When we see we shall believe.' Which was their dignified way of telling you to think it over once again and make sure you have the means to go through with it. For ozó is not a child's naming ceremony; and where is the man to hide his face who begins the ozó dance and then is foot-stuck to the arena? But in this instance the caution of the elders was no more than a formality for
Nwibe was such a sensible man that no one could think of him beginning something he was not sure to finish.

On that Eke day Nwibe had risen early so as to visit his farm beyond the stream and do some light work before going to the market at midday to drink a horn or two of palm-wine with his peers and perhaps buy that bundle of roofing thatch for the repair of his wives' huts. As for his own hut he had a couple of years back settled it finally by changing his thatch-roof to zinc. Sooner or later he would do the same for his wives. He could have done Mgboye's hut right away but decided to wait until he could do the two together, or else Udenkwo would set the entire compound on fire. Udenkwo was the junior wife, by three years, but she never let that worry her. Happily Mgboye was a woman of peace who rarely demanded the respect due to her from the other. She would suffer Udenkwo's provoking tongue sometimes for a whole day without offering a word in reply. And when she did reply at all her words were always few and her voice low.

That very morning Udenkwo had accused her of spite and all kinds of wickedness on account of a little dog.

'What has a little dog done to you?' she screamed loud enough for half the village to hear. 'I ask you Mgboye, what is the offence of a puppy this early in the day?'

'What your puppy did this early in the day,' replied Mgboye, 'is that he put his shit-mouth into my soup-pot.'

'And then?'

'And then I smacked him.'

'You smacked him! Why don't you cover your soup-pot? Is it easier to hit a dog than cover a pot? Is a small puppy to have more sense than a woman who leaves her soup-pot about...?'

'Enough from you, Udenkwo.'

'It is not enough, Mgboye, it is not enough. If that dog owes you any debt I want to know. Everything I have, even a little dog I bought to eat my infant's excrement keeps you awake at nights. You are a bad woman, Mgboye, you are a very bad woman!'

Nwibe had listened to all of this in silence in his hut. He knew from the vigour of Udenkwo's voice that she could go on like this till market-time. So he intervened, in his characteristic manner by calling out to his senior wife.

'Mgboye! Let me have peace this early morning!'

'Don't you hear all the abuses, Udenkwo...'

'I hear nothing at all from Udenkwo and I want peace in my compound. If Udenkwo is crazy must everybody else go crazy with her? Is one crazy woman not enough in my compound so early in the day?'

'The great judge has spoken,' sang Udenkwo in a sneering sing-song. 'Thank you, great judge. Udenkwo is mad. Udenkwo is always mad, but those of you who are sane let...'

'Shut your mouth, shameless woman, or a wild beast will lick your eyes for you this morning. When will you learn to keep your badness within this compound instead of shouting it to all Ogbu to hear? I say shut your mouth!'

There was silence then except for Udenkwo's infant whose yelling had up till then been swallowed up by the larger noise of the adults.

'Don't cry, my father,' said Udenkwo to him. 'They want to kill your dog, but our people say the man who decides to chase after a chicken, for him is the fall...'
By the middle of the morning Nwibe had done all the work he had to do on his farm and was on his way again to prepare for market. At the little stream he decided as he always did to wash off the sweat of work. So he put his cloth on a huge boulder by the men's bathing section and waded in. There was nobody else around because of the time of day and because it was market day. But from instinctive modesty he turned to face the forest away from the approaches.

The madman watched him for quite a while. Each time he bent down to carry water in cupped hands from the shallow stream to his head and body the madman smiled at his parted behind. And then remembered. This was the same hefty man who brought three others like him and whipped me out of my hut in the Afo market. He nodded to himself. And he remembered again: this was the same vagabond who descended on me from the lorry in the middle of my highway. He nodded once more. And then he remembered yet again: this was the same fellow who set his children to throw stones at me and make remarks about their mothers' buttocks, not mine. Then he laughed.

Nwibe turned sharply round and saw the naked man laughing, the deep grove of the stream amplifying his laughter. Then he stopped as suddenly as he had begun; the merriment vanished from his face.

'I have caught you naked,' he said.

'Nwibe ran a hand swiftly down his face to clear his eyes of water.

'I say I have caught you naked, with your thing dangling about.'

'I can see you are hungry for a whipping,' said Nwibe with quiet menace in his voice, for a madman is said to be easily scared away by the very mention of a whip. 'Wait till I get up there.... What are you doing? Drop it at once... I say drop it!'

The madman had picked up Nwibe's cloth and wrapped it round his own waist. He looked down at himself and began to laugh again.

'I will kill you,' screamed Nwibe as he splashed towards the bank, maddened by anger. 'I will whip that madness out of you today!'

They ran all the way up the steep and rocky footpath hedged in by the shadowy green forest. A mist gathered and hung over Nwibe's vision as he ran, stumbled, fell, pulled himself up again and stumbled on, shouting and cursing. The other, despite his unaccustomed encumbrance steadily increased his lead, for he was spare and wiry, a thing made for speed. Furthermore, he did not waste his breath shouting and cursing; he just ran. Two girls going down to the stream saw a man running up the slope towards them pursued by a stark-naked madman. They threw down their pots and fled, screaming.

When Nwibe emerged into the full glare of the highway he could not see his cloth clearly any more and his chest was on the point of exploding from the fire and torment within. But he kept running. He was only vaguely aware of crowds of people on all sides and he appealed to them tearfully without stopping: 'Hold the madman, he's got my cloth!' By this time the man with the cloth was practically lost among the much denser crowds far in front so that the link between him and the naked man was no longer clear.

Now Nwibe continually bumped against people's backs and then laid flat a frail old man struggling with a stubborn goat on a leash. 'Stop the madman,' he shouted hoarsely, his heart tearing to shreds, 'he's got my cloth!' Everyone looked at him first in surprise and then less surprise because strange sights are common in a great market. Some of them even laughed.
'They've got his cloth he says.'
'That's a new one I'm sure. He hardly looks mad yet. Doesn't he have people, I wonder.'
'People are so careless these days. Why can't they keep proper watch over their sick relations, especially on the day of the market?'

Farther up the road on the very brink of the market-place two men from Nwibe's village recognized him and, throwing down the one his long basket of yams, the other his calabash of palm-wine held on a loop, gave desperate chase, to stop him setting foot irrevocably within the occult territory of the powers of the market. But it was in vain. When finally they caught him it was well inside the crowded square. Udenkwo in tears tore off her top-cloth which they draped on him and led him home by the hand. He spoke just once about a madman who took his cloth in the stream.

'It is all right,' said one of the men in the tone of a father to a crying child. They led and he followed blindly, his heavy chest heaving up and down in silent weeping. Many more people from his village, a few of his in-laws and one or two others from his mother's place had joined the grief-stricken party. One man whispered to another that it was the worst kind of madness, deep and tongue-tied.

'May it end ill for him who did this,' prayed the other.

The first medicine-man his relatives consulted refused to take him on, out of some kind of integrity.

'I could say yes to you and take your money,' he said. 'But that is not my way. My powers of cure are known throughout Olu and Igbo but never have I professed to bring back to life a man who has sipped the spirit-waters of ani-mmo. It is the same with a madman who of his own accord delivers himself to the divinities of the market-place. You should have kept better watch over him.'

'Don't blame us too much,' said Nwibe's relative. 'When he left home that morning his senses were as complete as yours and mine now. Don't blame us too much.'

'Yes, I know. It happens that way sometimes. And they are the ones that medicine will not reach. I know.'

'Can you do nothing at all then, not even to untie his tongue?'

'Nothing can be done. They have already embraced him. It is like a man who runs away from the oppression of his fellows to the grove of an alusi and says to him: Take me, oh spirit, I am your _osu_. No man can touch him thereafter. He is free and yet no power can break his bondage. He is free of men but bonded to a god.'

The second doctor was not as famous as the first and not so strict. He said the case was bad, very bad indeed, but no one folds his arms because the condition of his child is beyond hope. He must still grope around and do his best. His hearers nodded in eager agreement. And then he muttered into his own inward ear: If doctors were to send away every patient whose cure they were uncertain of, how many of them would eat one meal in a whole week from their practice?

Nwibe was cured of his madness. That humble practitioner who did the miracle became overnight the most celebrated mad-doctor of his generation. They called him Sojourner to the Land of the Spirits. Even so it remains true that madness may indeed sometimes depart but never with all his clamorous train. Some of these always remain--
the trailers of madness you might call them--to haunt the doorway of the eyes. For how could a man be the same again of whom witnesses from all the lands of Olu and Igbo have once reported that they saw today a fine, hefty man in his prime, stark naked, tearing through the crowds to answer the call of the market-place? Such a man is marked for ever.

Nwibe became a quiet, withdrawn man avoiding whenever he could the boisterous side of the life of his people. Two years later, before another initiation season, he made a new inquiry about joining the community of titled men in his town. Had they received him perhaps he might have become at least partially restored, but those ozo men, dignified and polite as ever, deftly steered the conversation away to other matters.