

*De volgende tekst is het begin van The Grief of Strangers, een roman van Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.*

### **The Grief of Strangers**

Chinechelum said little as her mother drove her to the airport. She looked out of the window, at the trees whose leaves had turned the colour of a ripe banana, or a berry-red, and others that had shed all their leaves and stood with their naked branches sticking up. It was one of the things she liked to talk about: fall in New England, how it looked like the flowers had lent their colours to the leaves. She liked to talk about summer, too, how the sun lingered and flirted until late. Or winter, how there was something primal about the stillness of snow and the cold needles at the tips of her ears. 'Please,' her mother would say. 'Please, *nne*, try and talk about something real.' Her mother said it always in that pleading-pitying tone, as if to say she knew Chinechelum had to be handled with care but it still had to be said. Before they left for the airport that morning, her mother had said in that same tone, 'When you get to London, *biko*, try and talk normally to Odin.' And she had wanted to tell her mother that she *had* talked to Odin on the phone, hadn't she? Odin had seemed to find her conversation normal enough, too, because he had invited her to visit, hadn't he? But she said, 'Mama, I will.'

She would try and talk normally, although she was not sure what normally was. Was it the self-indulgence people lapped up from one another these days, the mutual navel-gazing that went on at the recent faculty holiday party, for example? She had listened to a string of self-reflexives, the things that the 'I' would do or had done or wished to do with, or to, the 'me.' Nobody talked about things outside of themselves, and if they did, it became about the relationship of those things to the 'me' or the 'I'. But maybe it was the way conversation had always been. Maybe she had been away from life for too long and she didn't recognize the rules any more. Nine years was a long time. That holiday party was her first party, indeed her first social function, in so long. And maybe it was what had finally made her give in to the idea of her mother and Aunty Ngolika 'connecting' her to a husband, a Nigerian man. *Connect*. That word had amused her, still amused her now.

She rolled the window down a little because the car heater was turned on high, and recalled the first few Nigerian men she'd been 'connected' to, whom she had talked to on the phone, who had faked American accents and littered their conversation with clunky mentions of BMWs and suburban houses. But Odin had been different, perhaps because he had said little about himself when they talked, had come across as self-confident without needing anything to prop him up. Or so she thought. It was Aunty Ngolika who found him. 'The only thing is that he does not live in the US, he lives in London,' Aunty Ngolika had said, in an almost conspiratorial whisper. 'But you can easily relocate, it shouldn't be a problem.' Chinechelum had wanted to ask her aunt why the man—she hadn't been told his name was Odin then—could not relocate. But she didn't ask, because she didn't want to come across as the old Chinechelum, the one her

mother said was distant and faraway, the one her mother had worried so much about. She wanted to be the new one who was willing to live again.

When they had arrived at the airport, her mother hugged her and held her face between hands that were scrubbed weekly in the Korean-owned nail studio and said, 'I am praying, *nnem*, it will work out.' Chinechelum nodded, looking at her mother's anxious face with its thin-shaved eyebrows. She wished she had her mother's enthusiasm and her mother's serious hope. She wished that she felt something, anything, rather than the numbness that still wrapped itself around her, that had wrapped itself around her for nine years.

Before she boarded her flight, she saw a woman hugging her children and husband. The woman had unsightly jerry-curl hair. Her heavy make-up streaked as she cried. Her children were crying. Her husband was looking away with a false braveness. Chinechelum watched them for a while and then started to cry. She had discovered that she had the uncanny ability to participate in the grief of strangers, and so she felt the acute pain of that family, crying at the airport, at their looming separation.

### Tekst 3 De volgende tekst...

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- 4p 3 Geef van elk van de volgende beweringen aan of deze wel of niet in overeenstemming is met de inhoud van de passage.
- 1 Chinechelum vindt het moeilijk New England te verlaten.
  - 2 Onderweg naar het vliegveld probeert Chinechelums moeder haar moed in te spreken.
  - 3 Chinechelum heeft in Londen een man ontmoet.
  - 4 Het valt Chinechelum op dat mensen voornamelijk over zichzelf praten.
  - 5 De mannen waarmee Chinechelum in contact is gebracht waren meestal opscheppers.
  - 6 Chinechelum heeft een aantal jaren ten onrechte in de gevangenis gezeten.
  - 7 Chinechelum wordt getroffen door het beeld van de bedroefde familie op het vliegveld.
- Noteer het nummer van elke bewering, gevolgd door “wel” of “niet”.

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#### Bronvermelding

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