

The Dusk Market

The chapter introduces the enigmatic Dusk Market, a hidden marketplace that emerges at twilight, filled with sensory richness—smoky stockfish, buzzing flies, sizzling agbara pans, and the cacophony of bartering voices. The market is preceded by flickering kerosene lanterns, guiding the way for those who belong. Ordinary pedestrians and drivers avoid the intersection instinctively, though children occasionally glimpse surreal sights like head-hopping men or winking birds, which adults dismiss or ignore. The market women, though unfamiliar, bear uncanny resemblances to people one might know, their mannerisms and appearances eerily familiar yet otherworldly.

Salewa, a lonely ogogoro seller, stumbles upon the market after dulling her inhibitions with alcohol. Her slow, meandering walk leads her to the intersection where the Dusk Market materializes before her eyes—lanterns, vibrant stalls, and bustling women in colorful ankara. The warmth and camaraderie of the market stir a deep longing in her, but the vision vanishes as suddenly as it appears, leaving her disoriented. The experience lingers in her mind, blurring the line between dream and reality, and she becomes distracted the next day, unable to shake the memory of the market's fleeting embrace.

The Dusk Market exists in a liminal space, visible only to those invited or those who, like Salewa, slip through “slippery moments” of perception. Children's innocent observations and adults' peripheral glimpses hint at its supernatural nature, but most dismiss these signs. Salewa's encounter, however, is transformative—the market's warmth contrasts starkly with her isolated life, hinting at a deeper yearning for connection. Her vulnerability and intoxication allow her to see what others cannot, but the market's ephemeral nature leaves her questioning its reality.

The chapter blends magical realism with poignant social commentary, contrasting the vibrancy of the Dusk Market with Salewa's grim existence. The market symbolizes community and belonging, a stark contrast to the alienation of urban life. Salewa's fleeting glimpse of this hidden world underscores the human desire for connection, even as it remains tantalizingly out of reach. The narrative leaves readers questioning the boundaries between reality and illusion, much like Salewa herself.

