

I could have been born and raised in Africa. But my Spirit was in too much of a rush to be reincarnated. Instead I borrowed the body of a Nigerian woman who was trying to escape her life by setting sail to the land of Milk and Honey. I thought I saw two lovers lying together on the flower-strewn banks of the river Oshun. So I said to myself here's the chance I've been waiting for. I jumped inside her body in the hopes that this time round I would be a love child.

Last time I was aborted at three months, pierced through the uterus by a knitting needle. I was the eleventh child. My brothers and sisters before me had exhausted all my parents' energy and resources. And so I vowed that now I would be the firstborn, conceived out of love.

Unknown to me, this woman had given birth before. She had dumped a four-year-old girl onto her relatives on the outskirts of Lagos. Arriving pregnant in England was most definitely not part of this Nigerian woman's plan. So I played dead in her stomach to avoid an abortion. Until one day a doctor said: "Sorry, Miss Charles, it's not fibroid cysts after all. It's a twenty-week-old healthy baby snuggled up inside your womb."

I could tell from her heartbeat that she resented the fact I

had chosen her. Her blood, red with fury, whipped its way through the umbilical cord as if to flog me to death. I realised then I had made a blunder. It was not love, but hate, which was bringing me into the world; she had been a victim of rape.

So my impatience got me into trouble, and I've been paying for it ever since. But I had been roaming the ether for hundreds of years, and I thought it was about time I was reborn. The year was 1965.

I was cut out before my time, five weeks too early, just before the festive season. Then at six weeks I was chucked out into the new year, abandoned on a harsh English winter's day which wasn't prepared to welcome an African baby.

White healthy babies were still in demand and so a white family had to be tempted by money to foster me. Ten months later they realised there were easier ways of raising cash so they put me back on the shelf. Seconds later a widow with an eight-year-old daughter and two boys of six and seven put me in her shopping trolley. She had a menagerie of abandoned children, sometimes as many as ten within her crowded house. Often five of us were crammed into one room. I thought I was back in the Spirit world, with so many children like me, who came for a week or two, and then disappeared into another world.