Princess Nkonta

by

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Princess Nkonta

A story of love, the green-eyed monster called jealousy and despicable betrayal shall I spin. It all happened in the kingdom of Okonti, a far away kingdom tucked away in a lush island surrounded by the sparkling waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Now you probably know the ocean isn't always sparkling but can be a deep forbidding blue or murky brown, but dare I say, the crystal-clear waters surrounding the beach of this lush island glistened and shimmered in sunlight. And what an exotic island it was. Wildlife ranging from lions to playful monkeys, roamed the island. Insects of diverse varieties fluttered, crept or crawled as they went about their various businesses on trees laden with different types of fruits and flowers. Yes the island was beautiful. And so was the great kingdom of Okonti.

Okonti. Sitting majestically on a hilltop, it was a grand kingdom to behold. It was also ruled by a noble warrior, king Isuki and his beautiful wife queen Ivabi. They had two children: Prince Nweze and Princess Nkonta. And my, oh my, were the King and queen ever so proud of their children. Prince Nweze was the best archer and swordsman of his age grade and a very handsome sight for sore eyes indeed. And the princess, I would liken her to a young goddess. She had an oval face with mesmerizing green-brown eyes and a smile that could lighten up a room like the first rays of sunlight did the sky. Her hair was dark brown and as long as a giraffe's neck. She was slim and had a voluptuous figure too. Despite her exceptional beauty, the princess was a joy to be with, as she was sweet, kind and caring.

In the royal palace also lived the King's brother Prince Azuchu, a weak-willed man who secretly despised his brother the King because of the King's strength, gentility, generosity and power. Prince Azuchu had a daughter, Princess Omizi. Omizi was a beauty to behold with her slightly long curly black hair, light brown eyes and olive-brown skin that always glistened. Her character however was a different kettle of fish. Spoilt, arrogant, selfish, vain and wicked barely describe her. You had a greater chance of pleasing an attack-ready cobra than you had of pleasing her royal snootiness, Princess Omizi as her servants knew too well

"Will you clean off that spot on the floor right now!" she once shouted at the poor cleaner boy

"You have not washed my cloths yet? I thought I told you to wash them 5 mins ago. You will be fired" she shouted at the washerwoman a week ago.

"Did you taste this before serving it? It's a disaster!" she said as she flung the plate of food on the poor cook's clothes during dinner time while her spineless father watched.

Yes, Omizi was a royal terror and hence nobody in the palace and indeed the whole kingdom liked her. She had no friends and everybody avoided her. Everybody that is but Princess Nkonta, who loved everyone and was inexplicably fond of her nauseating cousin. One day, as Princess Nkonta was sneaking out of the palace, Princess Omizi saw her. "Where do you think you are going?" asked Omizi, her eyes full of suspicion.

"To the beach. I want to pick shells and swim a little" replied Nkonta, an innocent smile breaking across her face.

Omizi pressed her lips into a tight pout and her eyes bulged out of their sockets as she scrutinized Nkonta. She looked like a scary cross between a scarecrow and a foreboding, stern teacher then. “where are your bodyguards and your entourage of maidens?” she queried finally.

“I wanted to go alone this once. I just want to have a normal girl’s life today. Do things normal girls do and not have a bodyguard stop me from going here or there and have maidens falling all over themselves in a bid to do something I could easily do myself. You know what, why not follow me. It will be a lot more fun if we went together” said Nkonta.

Omizi squeezed her face even more as wild thoughts chased each other in her brain. If you guessed that the Omizi was thinking her cousin was lying, you guessed right. In fact Omizi couldn’t understand how a crown princess would want to ‘have a normal girl’s life’ unless she had a secret. Yes! Maybe she was going to see…someone. Someone special. Ahhhh! I will find out and tell everybody her secret. A sinister smile crooked Omizi’s mouth to one side and gave her eyes a look of dark delight, the kind usually seen on a cat’s face before it pounces on an unsuspecting prey.

Omizi accepted Nkonta’s invitation and the two girls set off on the trip to the beach. The two girls walked in silence till they walked past the great gates of the kingdom. Then princess Nkonta joyfully threw back her cape and all of a sudden became wildly animated to Omizi’s chagrin. It was like she had held her breath till they passed the gates and couldn’t wait to release it. Along with a few words, of course. Practically sailing down the path that led from the village, words flew out of her mouth like the ceaseless chirping of a cricket. It was Omizi this and Omizi that and Omizi look at this…..is that a lion, we should run…..Omizi isn’t this butterfly divine, I love it so. Those monkeys Omizi, they are laughing mischieveously…

Omizi rolled her eyes. Seriously, this girl should never have been crown princess at all, she thought disdainfully, I would have been more befitting for that role. The two girls passed a family of jumping monkeys, a small group of noisy hawfinches busy taking care of their newly hatched babies and a herd of gazelles that stared at them curiously for a bit before sprinting away. Soon they were at the beach. Omizi looked around carefully. There was no one on the beach waiting for them. What was going on? Wasn’t Nkonta having an affair then?

As if to prove her innocence, Nkonta started picking sea shells. When she was done, she packed her little treasure neatly. She then made a dash for the ocean, all the while laughing and giggling. After swimming a little, she came out of the water and ran back to Omizi. “This is fun, Omizi. Come and join me.” Omizi stared at her in utter disbelief, her mouth agape. “I thought you came here to have a secret meeting with someone you have intimate feelings for?”she blurted out.

“Me? No dear. I came here to enjoy myself. I thought I told you that. Come on the water is great.”

“So I came here to waste my time. Well no more. I am going back to the palace now. I have more important things to do with my time. In fact today, the prince my father arranged to marry me arrives.” Omizi scoffed

“Today? A prince is coming to see you today? You are getting married?” asked Nkonta in such wide-eyed disbelief that gladdened Omizi’s heart. Touching her hair daintily, her face upturned to the sky in a perfect picture of haughtiness, she continued “O yes. The prince I hear is very, very handsome. But that is

not as important as the fact that he is from an opulent empire that is twice as strong, powerful and as big as Okonti. He is the first son too, so if his father dies, he will become king and I will be queen. Queen Omizi. In fact I have to leave now!"

Just then a strange sound like the muffled heart-torn groan of a sick bear echoed through the beach. The girls froze. The sound came again, only much clearer this time. "Help!"

"I think somebody is in need of help." Whispered Nkonta

"I think it's the water spirits playing a trick on us, looking for an easy prey. Let's leave before something terrible happens." Replied Omizi

"Or it could be a person in dire need of our help" said Nkonta as she followed the echo of the groan in search of its source.

Omizi shook her head. Nkonta is going to fall into the trap of the spirits one day, she thought. Maybe that day is today. It would be fun to see her snatched away by the gods of the sea. Would serve her right too, and she turned and followed Nkonta a good five steps behind.

However it wasn't Nkonta that found the 'spirits' first. Ironically, it was Omizi. She was cautiously following Nkonta when suddenly a great big hand delved from beneath the shrubs and wrapped itself firmly round her left leg. Omizi, completely caught off guard, screamed her heart out in fright. Her scream pierced through the relative calmness of the beach causing all the birds in nearby trees to panic away and a few coconuts to fall from adjoining palm trees in submission.

But the mysterious hand did not let go, even when Omizi started kicking the air furiously in a bid to make it let go of her leg. In fact it fastened its deadlock grip and Omizi's kicking only helped to drag the whole part of the "mysterious entity" out from under the shrubs. The hand was actually the hand of a young man whose face was scratched, swollen and smeared with a dark substance. His wet clothes were ripped and his body battered and bruised. In fact some of his wounds were still raw and attracted the unwanted devotion of flies.

"Help me…please… attacked…pirates….need….help" he said weakly before his head fell to the ground.

"Let go of me, leave my leg alone!" spat Omizi as she wrestled her feet from the weak man's firm grip

"Omizi, this man is very ill. We have to take care of him or he might die" said Nkonta as she knelt besides the bruised man and gently touched his forehead to feel his temperature.

"and how is that any of my concern? He might as well die right now for all I care. It's bad enough that you dragged me here, now you want me to spend precious time tending to a mere slave or pirate as he just called himself when I should be getting ready for my future husband. What arrant nonsense!"

"But Omizi if we leave him here he could be eaten by wild animals or die of cold or an infection. At least help me carry him to the gates. I could easily get a doctor…"

“NOOOOOO! Am leaving!” with an abrupt turn of her heels accompanied by an angry march up the path leading to Okonti, Omizi was gone leaving a puff of sand in her wake and a dismayed Nkonta looking at her back.

“Don’t worry.” muttered Nkonta to the stranger in her arms, “I will make sure nothing happens to you. I promise.”

She cleaned the stranger’s wounds and gave him some water to drink. Swinging one of his hands over her delicate shoulder, Nkonta half carried and half dragged the stranger up the path leading to the kingdom of Okonti. Luckily for her, she met a couple of hunters who helped her carry the stranger to Okonti and to the native doctor’s hut.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, Omizi and her father had prepared a banquet in readiness for the expected prince. It was already the appointed time and both sat patiently in the living room waiting for their highly anticipated guests. Two hours later, Omizi was fidgeting. “Father, are you sure they are coming today?” she asked

“Yes, my dear. They are coming today.”

“Well where are they? It’s getting dark and they are not here yet. Are you sure they have not being sent out by Uncle Izuki. Why didn’t you tell the king I will be wed today? What If they have been sent away? You servant girl, go and find out if any foreign visitors were sent out of this palace”

Omizi’s father kept quiet. The servant girls returned with the news that no foreign visitors had been sighted in the whole kingdom let alone the palace. Three hours later, Omizi had paced the ground clean. Was her beloved prince still coming? She wondered. How dare that prince keep her Omizi, the eye candy of the gods, waiting…what type of man said one thing and arrived hours later…did the prince change his mind about her?…is he still coming?...I doubt he is still coming…he is obviously not coming again, how dare he reject her?…thought Omizi as twins jets of steam escaped through her ears and her eyes flashed dangerously.

It was an angry and unhappy Omizi that retired to her bed that night. She hoped there was a mistake somewhere and that the prince of her dreams would still come tomorrow. Before she finally fell into a troubled slumber, she managed to convince herself the prince would come the following day. But while she slept she dreamt that the prince never came for her again.

The next day, Omizi woke up and dismissed her nightmare, still hopeful her prince would come. However the days ran into weeks and the weeks into a month but the prince never came. “Worry not my dear,” assured her father “soon I will go to the prince’s empire and find out why he will not come. If he is not interested in you any longer I will get you another husband. Now smile dear.”

“Promise me daddy that whoever you find must be a crown prince.” sobbed Omizi “I want to be queen.”

“I promise.” her father said.

Nkonta on her own part had been busy all this while. Everyday she would go to the native doctor’s home with a basket laden with royal delicacies. She helped tend to the ill man till he became well. Somehow along the line, she fell in love with this stranger. You see this stranger, now he was filth free, was divinely

handsome. Tall, dark, muscular and with a face that could melt even stone, the stranger had Nkonta's heart melting long before he was strong enough to walk on his feet. And what's more the stranger fell completely head over heels, nail-hook-line-and-sinker in love with his goddess-like savior. Even though he learnt Nkonta's name before he remembered his own, he preferred to call her "my Mylitchi" which meant "my tender goddess of light" because of the way Nkonta's soft smile brightened everywhere and everyone not excluding his tender heart.

As soon as the young dashing stranger was well, he and Nkonta became quite an item. They went on long strolls outside the gates of the kingdom, stole midnight moments once a while where they admired the moon and stars, and had leisurely picnics at the beach side. The handsome stranger told Nkonta his name, Meziego. He told Nkonta how his ship was attacked by a band of pirates and how he barely managed to escape with his life.

"I will soon have to go back to my father. But I hate to leave you and I will come back, with my father to marry you if only you will be my bride. Tell me, my Mylitchi, will you marry me?" said Meziego as he tucked a delicate rose flower into Nkonta's hair. Nkonta was dazed. Speechless. Her heart throb was leaving soon, she thought sadly. But at least he is proposing. That means he will be back.

Alarmed by the stunned look on Nkonta's face and her silence, Meziego quickly said "I know I have nothing now but I …."

"YES! Yes I will marry you. Promise you will be back soon. I don't care about what you have or don't have. I just want to be with you."

"For you, I promise I will be back soon. Nothing can stop me from coming to marry you, my Mylitchi. Nothing." said the gorgeous young man.

Two days later, Nkonta stood in the same exact spot on the beach where Meziego proposed to bade him farewell as the ship he boarded sailed away. Nkonta stood there till the ship was but a speck in the horizon, then she crumbled to tears hoping and praying that she would see her sweet heart again.

Life was never the same again for Nkonta. Everyday she went to the beach, hoping to see her Meziego but never did. Omizi, who by now had learnt of the affair, could barely understand why anybody- let alone a princess- would nurse then fall hopelessly in love with a menial workman or bandit. She spared Nkonta no sympathy-though it is difficult to imagine she had a drop of empathy in her ice-cold heart- and mocked Nkonta ceaselessly.

A few weeks later, the queen informed Nkonta and Omizi that the King of Mabenin had sent word that he and his son would be arriving in a week's time.

"The prince wishes to marry his heart throb. So you girls better look exceptionally beautiful that day." Finished the queen

Omizi's eyes swelled in pleasure "The prince of Mabenin. That is the prince I am betrothed to. So he is finally coming to marry me. Finally!"

The queen frowed quizzically. Nkonta couldn't care less. It was more than a month now and she had not heard from or seen her heart throb. In fact she had no intention of staying to welcome the royals from another Kingdom. She would much rather stay at the beach and reminisce about her heart throb.

On the appointed day, the entire royal family prepared for their royal guests. Omizi's preparation was nothing short of comically horrific. Even her father was treated as a servant.

"Father, where are my gold trinkets and hair bands. Well find them."

"You are holding my royal blouse wrongly. Pray it's not ruined or you will pay dearly!" she shouted at an unfortunate maiden.

"My special scented herbs! Where are they? Who stole them? I need them to smell wonderful and entice the prince too. All you rats and rodents find them. Now!" She barked at her maids. There was mayhem in Omizi's house I tell you. Maids scurried here and there to do her highness's bidding, cloths were flung in various places and Omizi's voice could be heard nagging endlessly.

Shortly before midday, the king received word that three royal ships had landed on his shore. He assembled the entire royal family with a train of bodyguards and maidens and went to meet the royal guests. On the way to the beach, when no one was looking, Nkonta slipped out and went to her favourite spot. She had no intention of spending the day in the boring midst of elders, family and foreign royals.

The visiting royals were welcomed warmly and led to the palace of king Isuki and his wife. There they were fed scrumptious meals and entertained by dancers and musicians alike. All the while, the handsome prince scanned the crowd, as if looking for someone in particular. You might be wondering who he was looking for but I can assure you it was not Omizi because while Omizi battered her eye lashes coquettishly at him, smiled sweetly and blinked an eye playfully once or twice when he looked in her direction, she might as well be invisible judging from the amount of attention he gave her.

Soon it was evening and it was time for the prince to officially see his bride. The Mabeninan King stood up and asked the king of Okonti, "We came here to marry a bride. Where is she? May we behold the future queen of Mabenin?"

King Isuki nobbed. He consulted with his brother and soon Omizi was called. Rising majestically, resplendent in her exquisite red outfit and gold jewelry, a dazzling smile on her exceptionally beautiful face, Omizi cat-walked to the prince's front and bowed delicately before him.

"What a beauty, my son you are lucky she has accepted to be your wife..." the king of Mabenin was saying.

"I will not marry her." said the prince quietly. Everyone froze. Time stood still. The king and queen of Okonti were stunned; the prince's father was shocked and glanced at his son, a frown planted on his face. As for Omizi, she was sure she either misheard the prince or he was simply joking.

"There must be another princess. I wish to see her before I make my choice. Else I refuse to marry at all."

"But you are betrothed to Princess Omizi, who is front of you…" began his father but the prince cut him short.

“With all due respect father, my decision is final.” said the prince firmly.

“Very well. There is another princess. She is my daughter. Guards, summon Princess Nkonta.” said king Isuki.

At that very moment, Princess Nkonta was returning to the palace from the beach and heard her name being called. She frowned. She was about to sneak into her room when a bodyguard saw her and ushered her to her father’s presence. Omizi looked at Nkonta and smiled inwardly. Nkonta had sand in her hair, her clothes were rumpled and had a few unsightly grass stains, her face was puffy as if she had just awakened from sleep and her hair housed a few threads of a spider’s cobwebs. Besides Omizi’s resplendence, Nkonta looked totally washed out. There is no way the prince would choose someone that looks like a street urchin over me, Omizi thought joyfully. Even the two kings and queen stared at Nkonta in dismay, the same thoughts, no doubt, running through their heads.

But as soon as the prince set eyes on Nkonta, his entire body reacted as if struck by lightening. The firm expression on his face dissolved to that of amazement while he jerked up from his seat as if the seat had developed hot coals. Then his face softened into a smile and he walked to Nkonta, lifted her face ever so gently and said softly, “My Mylitchi.”

Hearing the pet name known only to her love, Nkonta’s eyes widened in astonishment. It was then she noticed the charming brown eyes, perfect nose and handsome face that had melted her heart. It was then she saw that the prince was her Meziego, who had promised he would come to wed her soon. Tears running down her eyes, she embraced her long-seen love.

After their embrace, the prince explained to all that when he had initially set out for Okonta to marry Omizi, his ship had been waylaid by pirates and he managed to escape to the island. Though Omizi, his betroth, the girl he was coming to marry, saw him first, she had abandoned him to die. It was Nkonta who took him to the native doctor and nursed him till he was well and strong. Hence it was Nkonta, who had ensured he lived that he was going to marry not Omizi, who had wanted him dead.

Everyone started praising Nkonta –and condemning Omizi. Even her maidens started laughing at her. Omizi felt humiliated from tip to toe. Unable to bear it a moment longer, Omizi stormed out of the banquet hall. When she was safely locked up in her room, she swore to make Prince Meziego and Nkonta pay. How dare they embarrass her this way? How dare Nkonta snatch her husband? How dare the prince insult her in public? Fury like a steaming brew, swelled within her to the extent that she started smashing anything in her path against the wall. After hours of exerting her anger, she calmed down. If you think she was so exhausted that she fell into a tearful slumber, then you know not Princess Omizi well. She calmed down, not to cry or sleep, but to scheme and plot. She resolved that while one of those who angered her could be forgiven, the other must be dealt with mercilessly.

Under the cover of night, she stole out of the palace and went to an area where no lady, talk less of a princess, should be found. Pungent with the fetid smell of rotten meat and unmentionables, laden with an incessant supply of rats and foul rodents, covered with refuse dumps and generously sprinkled with sewage water, that area was ugly and what’s more: it was filled with blood thirsty lowlifes. Princess Omizi was promptly let into a roofless hut. There she met an old ‘friend’ and discussed her mission. Two bags of cowries changed hands. “I want it done tomorrow night. He leaves in two days time.” Omizi

instructed her ‘friend’, a man of dubious means. The man, an ugly short thing with red-shot eyes and a healed knife wound that stretched from his hairline to just above his jaw line on the right side of his face nodded. It was a happy Omizi that returned home that night.

The next day the wedding ceremony between Princess Nkonta and Prince Meziego took place. A grand affair it was. Gifts of gold, precious stones and gems, ivory, exotic skins were given to Nkonta’s parents. There was plenty of food to eat and wine to drink. Dancers, singers and musicians from both kingdoms entertained all and sundry. Magicians also thrilled with their tricks. Indeed it was a grand affair.

By nightfall, the prince and his new wife were exhausted but still felt wonderfully happy to be with each other. They slept off as soon as they entered their chambers.

The next morning, the prince woke up to find Nkonta missing from his side. Thinking his wife had gone to have her bath or prepare him breakfast, he went to bath too. Two hours later, the prince had a real cause for concern- Nkonta had still not returned. He queried the guards and maidens and their replies caused his concern to deepen to fear. Nobody had seen Nkonta that morning. He sent guards to scan the palace, the market place, the beach. Nobody saw Nkonta.

By now, the prince was agitated, confused, afraid and sad. Where was his sweet Nkonta? Was she really missing? How, they had retired to bed together? Did she run away? No that’s not possible, she loved him wholeheartedly. What then had happened? How did Nkonta disappear and where did she disappear to? These and many thoughts troubled the young prince. Soon King Isuki, Nkonta’s father was told his daughter was missing. He immediately summoned his council of elders and a decision was quickly reached. Town criers were sent to the various villages in the kingdom with this message: All young men were to assemble at the town square so a search party for the princess could be formed. Every nook and canny of the kingdom must be combed by this search party till the princess was found.

Sitting in her room, Omizi heard the bells ringing and the distant voices of the town criers. She smiled coldly. The fear that gripped the kingdom was so tangible, Omizi felt she could slice through it with her knife. And this is only the beginning, she thought. I want all of what I want and if I didn’t get it, rivers of blood would surely flow. Part one of the plan has worked perfectly. Now time for part two…

Ensuring she looked gracious, Omizi plastered a sympathetic warm smile across her cold face as it was vital that she appeared innocent and caring. Then she stepped out of her room to execute part two of her evil plan.

PART II

Omizi had acted her part perfectly. In another time she would doubtlessly have been an award-winning actress. She had walked into the throne room, expressed her shock and surprise at Nkonta’s disappearance, even shred a tear or two and then sympathized with the King, Queen and Prince Meziego promising fervently to do all she could to ensure her cousin was found. Under the guise of going to look for her cousin, she left the palace. In a bush outside the palace, she donned ugly scarves and wretched clothes so no one would recognize her. Moments later, she was knocking on the door of the banished witch, whose hut was on the outskirts of the kingdom of Okonti.

The witch opened the door. She was a haggard-looking woman, bent double by old age, a conspicuous big pimple on her nose with a good number of her teeth missing. She smiled-if the expression on her face could be called a smile. It looked more like a cross between a wince and a grimace. “I have been expecting you, Omizi. Come in.” She said in a faint voice. Omizi was surprised. How did the witch know she was coming? How did the witch know her name? And even if the witch had once seen her or heard about her, she was disguised beyond recognition, or wasn’t she? wondered a puzzled Omizi as she entered the hut.

“You want the prince to fall madly in love with you and forget his true love. You also want to be able to control the prince totally. Is that not so?” said the witch as she prepared her charms. Too astonished to utter a word, Omizi nobbed.

“It can be done.”

A short while later, the witch had finished preparing the charms. “Take this,” she said handing Omizi a gourd half-filled with liquid. “Put two drops of your blood inside and a strand of the prince’s hair. Then put just five drops in his food or drink. Once he tastes it you can command him to do anything, including to love you and he will do your bidding.”

Omizi face brightened instantly. “Thank you. Thank you.” She gushed.

“But be warned. If the prince should ever touch or be touched by Nkonta, the power of the charm would be reversed and a very terrible thing could happen to you. The power of love between the prince and Nkonta is so strong, it’s an eternal bond. No witchcraft can break it.”

Omizi’s eyes narrowed. As she left the witch’s hut she resolved to go again to the roofless hut of her old ‘friend’ that evening. But first she must gain the affections of the prince.

“This is an insult to our friendship. The bride of my son kidnapped on his wedding night within your borders. Isuki, you couldn’t have slapped me harder on my face.” spat the King of Mabenin, his body trembling with suppressed rage.

“This is obviously the work of an enemy, a common enemy. Let us not be ruled by emotions my friend. Let’s calm down and think of a way to solve the issue at hand.” said King Isuki calmly.

“I refuse to be talked into feebleness. It would be an unpardonable mockery to my kingship and people if I return to Mabenin without our future queen. The future queen of Mabenin was abducted on your lands and unless she is returned promptly there shall be dire consequences.” said the king of Mabenin.

King Isuki rose from his throne, his huge and muscular form posed in a combat-ready posture “are you threatening me, my friend?” He asked

“Not yet. Just warning you. When I do threaten you, you will know.” said the king of Mabenin in a disdainful voice. Then he strode out of the throne room with his son Prince Meziego, their bodyguards at their heels.

King Isuki sank into his throne, his face that was calm and brave a moment ago suddenly crumbled with lines of pain and apprehension. He had not only lost his daughter- a terrible and painful occurrence indeed- but if care was not taken would soon lose an ally. He knew only too well how powerful the kingdom of Mabenin was. It was definitely suicidal to make such a great kingdom an enemy. But his hands were tired. The entire kingdom had searched for Nkonta since midday and yet no one had seen her or had any clues that might lead to her. It was as if she vanished into thin air.

Queen Ivabi saw how troubled her husband was and touching his hands said, “Take it easy, my lord. The gods will definitely come to our rescue.”

Omizi, having returned from her trip, was standing obscured in a shadowy part of the passage near the throne room. She smiled, brown sparks of devious pleasure glistening in her eyes. Good. Good. Now I must go to the prince’s room. With that thought in her head, she left her hiding place.

Omizi carefully scanned the prince’s bed till she saw a strand of his dark hair. She smiled. Then she retrieved the small gourd of charm from a hiding place in her cloth and carefully inserted the hair into the gourd. Instantly, the liquid in the gourd flashed a bright blue light. Using her knife, she prickled her left hand and let two drops of blood drip into the gourd. The liquid in the gourd was unaffected for a brief spell, and then it slowly changed into greenish-black liquid with orange highlights. Quickly Omizi wrapped the gourd and returned it to the hiding place in her cloth. Then she opened the door and let herself out of the prince’s room. Outside she thanked the prince’s guards and smiling graciously at both of them, walked away.

How sinister! You might be wondering how Omizi gained entry into the Prince’s personal room if there were guards at watch. It was easy really. You must remember that Omizi is a very beautiful young woman. She had first strutted to the front of the guards. Then she chatted with them, all the while generously throwing divine smiles in their direction. It wasn’t long before the two guards, whom nobody ever spoke to, warmed up to Omizi. They were just too happy that a beauty was talking to them. Then as if it was an afterthought, Omizi requested to take her own wedding gift to the prince’s room personally. The two dumbstruck guards, they practically agreed before Omizi had finished her request. No thanks to them, Omizi had easily completed the tasks the witch had prescribed for an extremely potent potion.

And now the potion was complete, all that remained was for the prince to taste it. To achieve this, Omizi headed for the palace kitchen. A few moments later, armed with a big gourd that was half-filled with fresh goat-milk, Omizi looked for the prince. She found him not too far from the palace, alone. She smiled inwardly. Then putting a sympathetic look on her face, she walked up to the prince.

“My Prince,” she said “am so sorry about Nkonta. So sorry. I have been looking for her and though I have found her not, I believe soon she would be found.”

The prince tensed up at the sound of Omizi’s voice. He deeply disliked Omizi. The only reason he didn’t walk away from Omizi was because Nkonta had requested he always be nice to Omizi regardless of her past wicked behavior. He slowly turned and said in an uptight voice, “Thank you for your concern.”

“Look I know how you are feeling now. Even I am feeling so bad. Nkonta has always been nice to me. I am sure you have not eaten anything. Here, I brought fresh goat milk for you.”

“Thank you but I am not hungry or thirsty.”

“Please just a little sip. I know I wronged you in the past but please I am trying to right all I did. Please. I went through a lot of trouble just to get this milk. Just a sip and I will leave. Please.” pleaded Omizi sweetly and earnestly.

“I am not thirsty….”

“Please just a sip, to show that you have forgiven me.” said Omizi as she poured the potion-laced milk into a cup. The prince quietly took the cup and drank a little. Then he returned the cup to Omizi. And the strangest little thing happened. The prince’s eyes flashed a purple colour then turned black completely. Everything in his eyes was jet-black including his cornea, his pupil and iris. At that moment he looked so forebodingly scary that Omizi jumped in fear, the cup in her hands crashing to the ground. Then just as abruptly, his eyes transformed to their original beauty and he looked at Omizi, a look of great reference on his face. Kneeing down and touching Omizi’s hands tenderly he asked, “My princess, what do you want me to do for you?”

Pleasantly amazed, Omizi said “you shall be my husband. You shall obey my every command from hence forth. You shall also order the end to the search of Nkonta too. Do you understand me?”

Bowing slightly, Prince Meziego replied “My princess, your word is my command.” Omizi smiled evilly.

The moon shone brightly and could be clearly seen from the roofless hut. But the woman in disguise was not interested in the lovely moon or the twinkling stars. She was speaking in hushed tones to her scarred ‘friend’.

“I want her dead! She is a threat to me especially now. I need her out of the way.” She said

The man with the ugly scar, nodded and said “that is no problem. But it would attract more money.”

“That is not a problem.” She said handling over a bag of money. “Make sure Nkonta is killed. For I, Omizi can’t risk her being alive.”

The scarred man nodded. “It will be done.”

The bright full moon shone on Nkonta’s body. Nkonta woke up for the third time that day. Tear marks, dirt and grass stains decorated her face. She still could not understand what was going on. Last night, she had gone to sleep besides her heart throb, Prince Meziego, only to wake up gagged and tied up in the company of bandits. She didn’t know who her kidnappers were. She didn’t know where she was. She didn’t know why these strangers kidnapped her. What did she do to them? Had she wronged anybody before, who could order her abduction? Why on her wedding night? Why? why her, of everybody in the kingdom, why her? thought Nkonta tearfully.

She was tied to a tree, surrounded by grasses and her kidnappers were close by, within earshot. Suddenly another bandit joined the gang. “New development. Our commander wants her dead. It must be done this night. Jodizie, you will do it.”

The one named Jodizie nodded and walked to where Nkonta was tied. Nkonta who heard everything started trembling. They were going to kill her? This night? No, not her.

Jodizie roughly pulled her up and led her down a tiny, dirt path. Looking around and making sure no one was watching them, he removed the piece of cloth covering her mouth.

“please don’t kill me. Please, please, I beg you.” Cried Nkonta.

“shut up or else…” scrowled the man, menacingly. Nkonta immediately shut her mouth up.

The man cut the ropes that tied her hands. He looked around again. Then said “Now, my princess. You must run. Run as fast as you can. Run in that direction. I will trick the others. You were once good to me and that is why I am saving you. And whatever you do, never go to Princess Omizi, she is the one that paid to have you killed.”

Nkonta nodded and thanked Jodizie silently. Then she took off. She ran and ran and ran, refusing to stop for anything. She heard a lion roar, a wolf howl, even the hissing of an angry snake but she did not stop. She kept on running, only pausing once in a while to catch her breath. She ran till daybreak before she chose a safe tree to rest her tired bones. Meanwhile, Jodizie saw an animal recently killed by a predator and took out its heart. It was this heart he showed to his gang members and hence convinced them that he had killed Nkonta.

Back at the kingdom of Okonti, a lot of things were happening. You do remember that Princess Omizi had bewitched Prince Meziego to obey her every whim. The poor prince firmly wrapped round her little finger, Omizi ordered him to marry her. He agreed and told his father that he wished to have a new wife – Princess Omizi. Imagine everyone’s shock and surprise when the prince went on to say that even if Nkonta was found, Omizi would be crowned Queen as soon as he was King. His father was greatly disturbed by this turn of events. How can his son even think of marrying a woman that left him to die? And so soon-in fact barely a day -after his first wife’s disappearance? Was he in his right mind? Why was the Princess Omizi always shadowing his steps and telling him what to do or say? The King, who knew his son well, suspected foul play and refused to give his consent to his son’s wish. This infuriated Omizi, who told Prince Meziego that he must marry her despite his father’s wishes. And so the prince went to Omizi’s father to make his intentions known and set a date for his second wedding. Omizi’s father accepted and a date was set.

Omizi became very happy. She started planning her wedding. She wanted it to be bigger, better and grander than Nkonta’s wedding ceremony. Since Nkonta’s wedding was a two-day affair, Omizi wanted hers to be a 7-day ceremony. The best musicians, flutists, drummers in the world would be brought to entertain guests from diverse kingdoms in the world. The services of the most spectacular magicians, conjurers, fire-breathers, snake-soothers in the world would be engaged. Only the most exquisite materials, gems, skins and gold would be used to decorate the palace. Quite a wedding ceremony, won’t you say.

Because of what was involved to ensure the royal wedding Omizi craved, the wedding ceremony was scheduled to start in two weeks time. Thinking Nkonta was dead (her scarred 'friend' had showed her the heart of Nkonta) Omizi didn't mind the long wait. Her only interest was to marry in splendor.

But Nkonta was not dead. She was very much alive in the middle of a formidable forest. For days she ran or walked looking for any signs of human existence. But alas she found only animals- both meek and dangerous ones. Once she ran into a lioness and barely escaped with her life. But she continued moving in the path she chose, never once giving up hope that she will see her sweetheart again.

Then one day, she saw a hut. She ran to it. There she met some hunters, who used the hut to keep their hunting supplies. None of them recognized Nkonta because of the dirt, scars and grass stains that caked her face and body as well as the foul scent emaciating from her. She begged them to show her the way to Okonti. Thinking she was a lost destitute, one of them replied "Okonti is on the other island. We are indigenes of Okonti that come here to hunt because of the abundance of game. But don't worry, we are going back now so you can follow us."

Nkonta thanked them profusely and followed them to Okonti. When they got to Okonti, Nkonta noticed that all the villagers were preparing earnestly for- *what?* Was it her burial? Or was there another celebration in the offing? She asked the hunters.

"It's for princess Omizi's wedding. Her wedding is in two days time to Prince Meziego."

"But I thought Prince Meziego had already married. Are you sure princess Omizi is marrying Prince Meziego?" replied Nkonta in amazement.

"Very sure. Everyone thinks the prince must be bewitched because he made public his intentions to marry someone that left him to die, a day after his savior vanished into thin air." replied another.

Nkonta remembered the warning of the gangster that set her free. "…and whatever you do, never go to Princess Omizi, she is the one that paid to have you killed." She trembled as she finally realized how evil Omizi was. I have to save the prince, she thought. He is obviously bewitched by Omizi, but how? I must not allow Omizi see me. O yes! I now know how….

What do you think princess Nkonta is planning? Ah, only time will tell. That day, Nkonta went to the beach and scrubbed herself clean. Can't blame her really, it's been weeks since her last bath. Then she borrowed some beggar clothes. Yes princess Nkonta dressed herself to look like a beggar with a hood over her face. Then she smeared some dirt on her pretty cheeks. The very next day, she set out for the palace.

There was a lot of activity in the palace. Maidens, cooks, interior decorators bustled here and there to finish the preparations for the wedding ceremony that starts tomorrow. So no one noticed as Nkonta slipped into the palace. You must remember that Nkonta used to sneak out of the palace to go to the beach so she knew every secret nook and cranny of the palace. Nkonta went to Prince Meziego's room and almost entered but was stopped in her tracks by Omizi's voice. She crept to the window and saw that the prince Meziego and Omizi were together in the room. Her face fell. What will she do? She couldn't let Omizi see her and the wedding was tomorrow. Something told her that if Omizi was married to her

Prince, she will never know the happiness of her prince's love. It was while she was there, musing that a guard saw her and raised alarm. The prince and Omizi ran out of the room.

"A beggar in the palace? What nonsense. Remove this piece of filth from the royal palace. You incompetent guards, do you know how embarrassing it will be if a beggar is seen in this palace when dignitaries arrive for my wedding tomorrow? You are lucky am not in a foul mood or you all would have received 50 lashes…" said Omizi

"But my princess, don't you think we should help the beggar. She is probably very hungry and…." Started the prince but he never finished whatever he wanted to say.

"How dare you challenge my orders? I said I want the beggar throw outside right now. Say one more offending word and you will regret it!" spat Omizi

"Sorry my princess. Let it be done as you have said." replied the prince Meziego meekly.

And Nkonta was thrown outside the palace, in a way akin to how people throw flea-infested, germ-producing ugly dogs out of their homes. But she did not give up all hope. She resolved that she would try again the very next day.

As you already know, the next day was the day the wedding ceremony starts. Nkonta watched the palace from a very discreet place. The royal guests were arriving today and it is customary for the host royal family to go and welcome the guests at the sea port. Nkonta knew this and so she waited in this discreet spot, just outside the palace, till the royal family, Prince Meziego and their entourage of servants left the palace. Then she sneaked into the palace and hid herself. After a while, she heard the distant voice of Omizi and her heart skipped a beat. She knew the royal family accompanied by their royal guests was returning to the palace. She knew what she had to do. But the voice of Omizi still made her insides quaver and made her heart beat a million a second.

And was Omizi's voice loud. Every other person in the royal family was gloom while Prince Meziego was acting like a living walking zombie. He didn't even sit down till Omizi told him to. The guests were silently confused by the gloom on everybody's face. It looked more like they were about to attend a funeral. But Omizi couldn't care less. She chattered loudly about this and that. She gave all the orders to the servants. She beamed non-stop like an overactive fire-fly that doesn't even blink its light. So happy was she that she will soon be marrying Prince Meziego, that her normally hawk-like eyes didn't notice a ragged, dirty-looking beggar dash to Prince Meziego's side.

Guess who the beggar was? Nkonta of course. She knelt before the Prince, her one true love and beseeched him, "My love have you forgotten me so soon?"

Guests near the prince gasped loudly. How dare a mere beggar call a fine Prince her love? What insane impetus? What an insult to the throne? Who even allowed a beggar into the royal palace? They thought while the prince stared at Nkonta bleakly, like he was seeing her for the first time and couldn't understand a single word that had tumbled out of her mouth. The loud gasps of the guests caught Omizi's attention and she turned. Her eyes bulged when she recognized the beggar.

“Why you flirt!” she screamed, “I mercifully had you thrown out yesterday. Today I shall feed you to the dogs!”

Nkonta trembled but said in a fearless voice “You dare not for I am Princess Nkonta, daughter of the King of Okonti, crown princess and an anointed daughter of the gods. You dare NOT.” And she threw aside the cape that covered her face. Omizi’s eyes narrowed as she saw beneath the stains and dirt on Nkonta’s face. She immediately knew it was Nkonta. But not every other person was sure. The guests mumbled to themselves in disbelief. A rag girl claiming to be princess? Impossible! How preposterous! they said. Those who would have recognized Nkonta instantly, Queen Ivabi and her son had graciously excused themselves previously and were in their rooms. king Isuki was so bowed and shaken by grief, he could barely recognize his own daughter especially in the rags and flirt she wore. But Omizi was not deceived. She acted quickly, “Guards, arrest this woman, this liar!” she screamed.

“No. It really is me. My prince do you not recognize me still.”

“Do not let her touch the prince.”

But as the guards were about to drag her out, Nkonta, in an act of desperation, grabbed Prince Meziego’s arms. “Please don’t let her kill me.” She cried.

And the most amazing thing happened. Prince Meziego’s eyes turned black, and then purple while his mouth opened. Five drops of greenish-black fluid fell from his mouth. Then a blue glow radiated through his entire body frame. Omizi, knowing exactly what was going on, seized the sword of a near-by bodyguard. If she could have Prince Meziego, neither should Nkonta. With that evil thought, she aimed the sword at the prince’s heart. Meziego saw the sword flying towards him and deflected from its path. The sword, therefore, only managed to graze his arm. Pointing at Omizi, he immediately ordered, “Arrest that villain.” His personal body guards immediately arrested Omizi.

Meziego then transferred his attention to the beggar at his feet. Touching her cheeks gently, he said softly “Nkonta, my love, my Mylitch. I have been waiting patiently for you to come and free me. O my love, who tried to hurt you?”

At the mere mention of “my love”, Omizi’s body started convulsing. She seemed to have gone mad. Her captors left her like she was a pack of hot coals. Everyone sifted from her as if she was leprous. But she actually had something worse than leprosy. She now had the witch’s curse. The old witch had warned her of the dire consequences of Nkonta touching Meziego. The dire consequence was the witch’s curse.

She started confessing while convulsing uncontrollably. She told how she hated Nkonta, how she plotted Nkonta’s kidnap and death, how she bewitched the prince, how she planned to rule as queen. After her confessions, her body began to transmogrify while she screamed and howled in pain. Boils sprouted on her face, her nose elongated downwards, her once oval face changed into an indescribable long grotesque shape. Her skin shrank, into her bones after turning an ugly dark green patch-filled colour. Everyone stared in complete horror. Then the greenish-black fluid, vomited by the prince, enlarged into a bubble. It rolled on the floor towards Omizi and when it reached Omizi, completely engulfed her. Omizi screamed “No! No! NOOOOOOOO!” Then suddenly she was solidified into a green-black statue. A horrendous statue she was, her mouth agape in a soundless cry and her bones jolting in awkward positions. A few moments later, the statue dissolved to dust and was blown away by a mysterious wind.

Everyone in the hall was astonished. Wouldn't you be if you witnessed such a dramatic incidence? When tales of what happened filtered through out the kingdom, everyone was relieved that Omizi was gone for good. Omizi was such a bad egg after all. They were also happy that now Prince Meziego and Princess Nkonta would be able to enjoy their marriage. And enjoy their marriage, they did. The two lovebirds soon left the kingdom of Okonti for Nkonta's new home, the kingdom of Mabenin. There they lived happily ever after. Oh and did I mention that their happy home was soon bombarded by the arrival of three lovely, meddlesome kids. Yes they soon had three adventurous children whom they loved with all their hearts. Maybe one day I would tell you one of the numerous adventures those daring kids had….