

The village just behind the waterfront in Lagos is rural. There is Internet and electricity, but there are still thatched roofs and mud walls, the scenery still reminds you of ancient culture and reverence. This village is special, it is known as the Mamiwota village by neighbours and tourists. Mamiwota is a special native spirit worshipped by the people of this village. "A beautiful woman", is how the people describe her. They don't stop there, their praise for mamiwota is usually effusive. Her face shines like light bouncing off a marble, her hair is dark as night and so long it reaches down to her waist. In old times there are only a few female spirits or gods worshipped, mamiwota is one of them. I will tell you more about her later.

The night in this riverine area is usually cool. Cool breeze carrying misty moisture from the ocean blows into the village, raising nylons from the ground, rustling zinc roofs and causing hairs to stand on edge. If you listen closely you can hear the sounds even from afar away, swoooooosh, swoooooosh, swoooooosh, the tide pulling up and back in, calling out to you. The moon is full tonight, if we go closer we might catch a glimpse of the famous deity worshipped in this village; mamiwota. A lot of people think she is scary, the villagers disagree, they say she protects them, they worship her and a moonlit night's like this during the full moon, mamiwota herself comes to interact with her surface subjects. Don't be afraid, I've seen her too, she is a beauty that contends with the moon. Her hair is as dark as the darkness of the beyond behind her and so long it reaches her back. I won't tell you everything, come, take my hand and I'll show you. As I take you to the front of the ocean I want you to relax. Our journey is in your mind, your body doesn't need to be stressed. Lay flat on your back with your hands by your sides. Let go of your legs, feel them slowly fall asleep. Now you're conscious of your breathing, the rising and falling of your chest. Close your eyes and breathe slowly. Inhale and exhale deeply, feel your body flow into the motion. Focus on your breathing. If a thought pops up, let it go and refocus on your breathing. Notice the weight of your body on the bed. Focus on your face. Soften your jaw, eyes, and facial muscles. Move to your neck and shoulders, try to relax them. Continue down your body, feel the flow of passive energy moving to your arms and fingers. Continue to your stomach, back, hips, legs, and feet. Notice how each part feels. If your mind wanders, slowly shift your focus back to your body. If you like, you can repeat in the opposite direction, from your feet to your head. Take deep breaths for a few seconds, allow your heart to do its job independently, let your hands go to sleep like your legs. Do nothing, lose all control of your body, let yourself float, yes, float, just like in the water. Let go of any thought that pops up in your head. You are relaxed now and those images will surface, let them go. Feel as if you are letting go of a rope, or a load you have been holding on to. Release the tight hold, let your mind be free, this is the way to feel the nighttime and see mamiwota.

There are many roads that lead to the waterfront, many people choose different roads but we would take the longest one today. Let your imagination wander, your legs aren't needed here, they won't tire. On this road, we will see many things. It is said that the first time mamiwota came on land, she walked through this road. For this reason, it is respected amongst the villagers. There are a number of interesting sights on the way too, and tonight is a special worship night for mamiwota. The villagers have been anticipating it all through the year and we're in earnest preparation during the day. Listen softly to the air, on nights like these different

sounds flow through the air, they form a melody that's just perfect. The villagers say it only happens on this day every year, mamiwota sends her spirits to soothe the villagers with cool music from the ocean. You can hear seashells even from here. Everybody we see is dancing, slowly swerving their hips. There is a spirituality to the worship of mamiwota, as the women dance they make sure to do it smoothly without over-exuberance. They're graceful, all the body movements resembling the to and fro of the cool ocean waves. You can feel the energy in the air, it smells like cold, sweet harmattan but feels like soft fur.

On nights like these, the villagers keep as many lights as they can off. The electric bulbs are put off. Electric generators are put on early in the evening but one by one they go off as the night gets darker out of respect for mamiwota; she doesn't like noise. Only her ethereal sounds are permitted. Before the night gets darkest, simultaneously the brightest because of the full moon, the villagers have some routines. We will see some of them on this road to the oceanfront. First, we see one of the busiest places on days like this; Aduke's hair saloon. Many women plait the hairs of their daughters themselves, but some women can't and bring their daughters to Aduke's saloon. The women too have to get their hair done. Beautiful, neat cornrows gleaming Aduke's oil. There are different styles; shuku, kpatewo, all back, just to name a few. The women believe that they have to do their best to be pretty for mamiwota. Aduke's saloon is only more busy during the Christmas period, and today wasn't different. Earlier she and her workers weaved tirelessly but they too have to prepare and have left for home. All we can see now is her closed saloon with the sign "Aduke's looking good place" in fanciful fonts. There is a shade made of zinc roofing just in front. Pieces of nylons swerve around on the ground, tufts of hair lay in some places. We pass Aduke's stall and move down the road. The sweet, alluring scent of fish being roasted fill the air. It is a rule that on this day no one fishes from the ocean. Nobody really knows why, maybe it is out of respect for mamiwota. I think some people believe it is because she is closer on the day and the fishes are too sacred to touch much less to consider eating. Whichever way, fishes are preserved from the previous day and roasted to perfection on these special days. The smell of smoke mixed with fish juices wafts through corridors and households. We're right in front of Mr Akin's House now. There is no gate or fence, only a small stall made of wood where he sells his fish. Mr Akin is a fisherman, just like some men in the village. He belongs to one of the oldest families in the village and his father, just like his father's father and so on, were all fishermen. Mr Akin is well respected in the village because of this, the villagers buy fish from him on these special days. During the rest of the year, he has business as usual; he and his 2 sons go to the ocean with their nets and boats, they catch as much fish as they can and bring them home for his wife and daughters to sell. They very rarely sell all the fishes they catch. However, on these special days when mamiwota is honoured, the villagers buy fish from him and his tables clear before evening. During the day he and his family stay busy cleaning and chopping up the fish for buyers. His wife is very friendly, she greets them warmly and asks about their families. At night Mr Akin and his family stay inside their house. The once busy shop is left empty, littered with fish scales and fins. The open compound illuminated by the moon, a large blue hue spread all over.

Night has fallen over the village, only the select worshippers of mamiwota are awake. They are at the shore while the rest of the village sleep. A cool, deep and peaceful sleep it would be. Mamiwota gives them peace of mind. Mamiwota is a spirit believed by the people to be a powerful mermaid who lives and rules over the ocean. Her torso is human and she has fins in place of legs, fins that gleam like a rainbow. The people worship her for protecting them from invaders from foreign lands who travel through the sea. As a fishing community, they worship her for providing food for them and their families, they give sacrifices to her regularly. It is said that she has the ability to grow real human legs and blend into the village. Some people have confessed to having seen a stranger walking around the village whose beauty was so marvellous it beat logic. Not many people have ever seen her, but those who say they have say she has deep, blue eyes, they also say she can disappear. The mystery around her existence is supreme. Women in the village are especially drawn to mamiwota, more because she takes care of them. She is their protector and they come to her for protection, prosperity, and fertility. She grants women peace of mind.

The rest of the road is quiet and empty. The town is asleep, protected by mamiwota. Soon we are at the shore and see mamiwota worshipers singing cool songs to her. Songs of praises and adulation. Their voices mix with the sounds of the waves to form an arranged melody. We see a woman now, rising out of the water. She looks just like the villagers described, only more beautiful. Her skin, dark, alluring skin is shining like she just bathed in oil. She doesn't talk, she communicates telepathically. The villagers bow down in worship, her aura makes us feel like we are in a trance. Waves crash at the bank, splashing water on our feet, but it feels so light, lighter than a breeze. It feels like mamiwota is touching us with soft feathers. She is wearing a necklace made of precious stones and they gleam in the moonlight. It looks like she and the moon are meant for each other, the light compliments her looks perfectly. It is this white brilliance that inspires her worshippers to only wear white clothing on her day of worship. White represents her purity and holiness. As we watch, mamiwota swims out from the water and her fin transforms into legs. She walks to her worshippers, they don't realise it because they are bowed down with their heads in the sand as is customary. As she moves around, the wind moves with her, the flow a calming stream just like everything around. The sand feels like it is made of clouds. There are lots of palm trees around, the branches sway in the wind, making a similar sound with the swoosh of the waves. The atmosphere is mesmerising. The villagers say mamiwota brings peace of mind to their hearts, you can feel it now. An encompassing calm is in the air, breathing in is taking the calm in. In and out, calm goes in and all the tension in your heart flows out.