



The Wise Man and the Evil Man


(A story from the Democratic Republic of Congo)

A long time ago in Congo, in a village far in the forest, there was a king who had a wife and one daughter whose name was Pasi. The village had many, many troubles. But the worst trouble of all was the huge snake that lived nearby in the forest. It was so huge it could swallow a man in one or two gulps. Everyone was afraid of it. Anyone one who wandered too far from the village would be attacked and eaten by the snake. It would not leave the village in peace. The king and his people tried everything to get rid of it, but nothing worked. Many set out to kill it, but they always failed and were never seen again.

So, one day the king said: 'I am tired of this snake that has terrorised our village for so long. I will make an announcement to be carried far and wide: If anyone can kill that snake and give us peace of mind in this village, he can take my daughter in marriage.' Soon, everyone for miles around had heard the message and in the weeks that followed, many men took up the challenge. But each one ended up being eaten by the snake.

There was a man who lived deep, deep, deep in the forest, Ndoki (the Evil One), a magician who controlled demons and could do almost anything. Ndoki was huge and horrible in appearance. He smelt terribly and all over his body he had wounds with maggots crawling out of them. When he heard the news of the king's proclamation, he said to himself, 'this is a good opportunity for me. I can't stay here in the forest on my own forever. This is a chance for me to capture the woman and make her my wife.'





Using his supernatural powers, Ndoki changed his appearance completely. He transformed himself into a normal human being, in fact, a handsome young man. Then he dressed himself up in a fine suit and shoes and made his way towards the village.


When the people saw him approaching, they said: 'Look here is a stranger. Maybe he is Mayele, the Wise Man. The king will be happy to see him.'


So, Ndoki went to the king's house. 'I have heard the promise that if any man can kill the snake that is terrorising your village, he will be able to take your daughter in marriage,' he said. 'Well, I am that man. I am strong enough to kill the snake. Show me the direction I must go to find it, and I will go alone. No-one must follow me. I will kill the snake and I will bring you back its head with the diamond ring.'

The king was delighted to hear this, and he showed Ndoki where to go to find the snake. He assured him that, if he succeeded in killing it and bringing back the diamond ring, that ring would be the one he would put on his daughter's finger and Ndoki could take her in marriage.

So Ndoki travelled into the forest and came upon the snake. It really was a massive creature. But, Ndoki transformed himself into a huge, powerful man - bigger and stronger than the snake - and he drew out his knife and fought with it. Fierce as the snake was, it was no match for him, and so, after a short struggle, he killed it. Then he cut off its head and removed the diamond ring.

When he returned to the village carrying the snake's head, the king was astonished. 'People have been trying to kill the snake for ten years,' he said, 'but nobody could do it. Many of my friends have died in the attempt. And now you have come from far and succeeded. I am very grateful. The whole village is grateful.'





Ndoki gave the king the diamond ring from the snake's head and the whole village rejoiced that, at long last, the giant snake was dead. Villagers ran into the forest and found the body of the snake. Then they carried it back to the village where they cut it into pieces and cooked it. The whole village had a wonderful party.

'From today,' said the king to Ndoki, 'my daughter is your wife,' and he gave him the ring to put on her finger. 'Now, she can go with you to your home. I will give her fifty bodyguards to accompany her. They can go with you to carry the valuables and lead the animals.'


So Ndoki set out with his new wife and the escort of fifty. And they travelled and travelled for a long time and still they never came to where he lived. At last, Pasi said, 'We have come four hundred miles. Will we never reach your home?'


'We will be near it soon,' said Ndoki.'

But still they kept walking, deeper and deeper into the forest and everybody grew more and more tired. They walked on and on in the heat and some of the bodyguards began dying.

Then Pasi's new husband began to change back to his original terrifying appearance. When he threw aside his clothes and his shoes, everyone saw what he had become and they shouted: 'He is Ndoki, the Evil One!'

Some tried to run away, but, with his magical powers, Ndoki paralysed them. And once they were dead, he ate their carcasses.





The king's daughter cried in terror. 'There is no use in crying,' said Ndoki. 'You are very far from your home. Nobody can hear you. You are very deep in the forest, and if you try to run away, with my powers, I can bring you back.'

But she cried and cried because all her people had been killed. Ndoki gathered the bones of all the dead people and put them in a bag and made her continue the journey. When his home came into sight, Pasi saw that it was entirely made of bones – human bones and animal bones of every kind. She was so scared, she cried, 'Oh my God! What have I done?'


'This is my home,' said Ndoki. 'Come! Enter! There is nothing you can do. I warn you. Don't try to run away. I have my spirit everywhere. For a long time, I have been looking for somebody to be here with me, and now you are here, you are my wife.'


For days she stayed in his home, crying all the time. Then she asked Ndoki for something to eat. 'I will cook something for you,' said Ndoki, and he began to pluck the maggots from his body and drop them into the pot. 'This is my food,' he said.

The king's daughter was horrified. 'I can't eat this,' she cried.

'Alright,' said Ndoki 'because you are my wife I will go to the forest and get some fresh food.'

And so he went into the forest and killed some animals and brought them back and cooked them, and Pasi began to eat them. But she was very unhappy, because all she could see everyday was Ndoki and she was afraid. Every day and every evening were the same. She couldn't live normally. She couldn't go out, she couldn't see anyone else, she couldn't wash herself.





But, by chance, one of the bodyguards had fallen down behind a tree, and Ndoki had not seen him. He survived and he was found by people from a nearby village who were wandering there looking for food. At first they were frightened he might be Ndoki, because the Evil Man was able to change his shape or send out his spirit into birds and animals or other people, old or young. But the bodyguard managed to reassure them and tell them what had happened. He told them that he couldn't walk and that he didn't know the way back to his village. So the other people said they would help him, and they took him all the way back to his village.

When the king saw them approaching the village carrying the bodyguard, he cried, 'What has happened?'

'My king, my king,' said the bodyguard. 'Everyone who went with your daughter has been killed and devoured. As we journeyed deeper and deeper into the forest, the man who married your daughter changed. He grew bigger and bigger, and horrible maggots covered his body. He is Ndoki, the Evil One! All of my friends are dead. I don't know if your daughter is still alive.'


The king held his head in his hands and said, 'My God! My God!'

Then he sent word far and wide, proclaiming that whoever could rescue his daughter would be given the kingship with Pasi as his queen. At first, because of what they had heard about Ndoki, people were frightened to go. But the king pleaded: he wanted to see his daughter before he died.

So, many strong men tried, but they couldn't defeat Ndoki. He had many devices, for instance, traps that could fire arrows to pierce the bodies of anyone who came near his home. Even when intruders were far off, he could smell their blood. Every one of them was captured and devoured.

And ten years passed.





In the village there was one young boy, an orphan who sat about all day doing nothing because no-one expected anything of him. One day he went to the king. 'Let me go and try to rescue your daughter,' he said.

'There is nothing you can do,' replied the king sadly. 'You are too young.' But the boy begged to be given a chance, so the king finally allowed him to go.


The first thing the boy did was to go into the forest and kill two animals and skin them and put the skins into his bag. Then he started on his journey. He travelled and travelled until he came upon some people from another village, who were cultivating some land and looking around themselves in fear. They told him stories of Ndoki. 'There will never be peace in our village,' they said. 'If anybody ventures too far into the forest to find food, they are caught and devoured by the Evil One. If somebody could kill him, we would be very happy.' When the young man asked them where he could find Ndoki, they showed him the road, telling him to be very careful because he would be in great danger.


'Don't worry,' said the young man, 'I'm going to rescue the daughter of our king.'

And so he went on his way and journeyed very far, deeper and deeper into the forest until finally he reached the place. Everywhere there were bones - bones of people and bones of animals of every kind - and he knew he had reached the home of the Evil One.

By luck, Ndoki wasn't there. So, the young man entered the house and found the king's daughter. But she had changed so much, with her long hair and her long nails, that the young man said, 'Is it you, Pasi, the daughter of our king?'

'Yes, it's me,' she said, 'but what are you doing here?'





'I have come to deliver you,' said the young man. 'The king has promised that whoever rescued you would become king. Many have tried but they have all died.'

'Oh! Be careful!' cried Pasi. 'Ndoki is near and, if he finds you, you will die.'


'It is alright,' said the young man. 'I know your husband can smell human blood, but I have brought animal skins and, with this one over me, he can't smell my blood, only the dried blood of the animal.'


Just then they heard the sound of trees breaking. Ndoki was returning from the forest. 'Quick! He's coming!' said Pasi. 'Hide under the bed!'

When Ndoki entered, the king's daughter said, 'Husband, I have been staying with you for ten years and we still don't have children. What I need before I can start my pregnancy is some special food. So I would like you to bring me some tondolo (a small fruit you can only get near the river). I need a lot of tondolo and also antelope meat. If you bring me these things, they will help me to start a pregnancy and also to carry the child.'

Ndoki was delighted. 'This is what I have been waiting for', he said. 'I will go and get tondolo and antelope meat for you. The king's daughter knew that to find these things he had to go very far from his home. So, as soon as he was gone, she called on the young man to come out from under the bed.'

'I have brought an animal skin for you also,' said the young man. 'Put it on you and let's go.' So they got the skins on and made their escape.






Far away, Ndoki had a strange feeling and he sensed trouble. He sent his spirit out into animals and birds to check if something was wrong near his home. And, though the young man and Pasi travelled as quickly as they could, they could hear the voice of Ndoki singing, 'Konso wukuenda nkumbuaku lufwa,' which means, 'if you run away you will die. I can smell you from afar. You'll die! You'll die!'


But they journeyed on safe under the animal skins. Until, after a while, Pasi became so hot that she began to lift the skin to get some air. Just then, the young man caught sight of a bird hovering up above them. 'No! No!' he shouted, 'Keep the skin over you! It is your protection! That bird is Ndoki!'

So they escaped and travelled and travelled past many snakes and wild animals and dangers of every kind, until finally, in a state of exhaustion, they reached their own village.

The king and all the people were full of joy, but, when the young man removed the animal skin from Pasi, everyone began to cry, because they couldn't believe the changes in the king's beautiful daughter. 'What has that man done to you?' they cried.

But they took her away and gave her food and bathed her and cut her hair and nails, and put new clothes on her, and they saw her beauty again. They also gave food and new clothes to the young man, whom they now called Mayele, the Wise Man, because he had helped the whole village. Then, when Pasi and Mayele had everything they needed to be king and queen, the whole village had a huge celebration.





From that day, the village became a good place to live. Ndoki tried to approach but found that the village was protected by a spirit that was stronger than his. When the young man's parents died they had given him this spirit, and now, when he became king and head of the village, his power began to work and it gave everyone protection. So the village lived in peace and the people were free to do whatever they wanted. They could go into the forest and hunt animals, cultivate the ground or pick fruit, and nothing could disturb them. There was no snake, and no Evil One. He had gone away and he never returned.

And that is the story of how the poor, young man became Mayele, the Wise man and then King of the village.

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