



## STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

### CULTUREVERSE – EPISODE 11: THE MIAMI WATA

[0:06]

*NARRATOR: This is Cultureverse. A place where myths and legends come alive in the modern world.*

*NARRATOR: I'm your host Yara Shahidi. Episode 11 - The Mami Wata. Today we bring you a story about an outstanding visitor.*

*NARRATOR: Obi, Dwayne, and his sister Tiffanie are hanging out at Mayes Lake in Jackson, Mississippi.*

*(SFX splashing and laughing)*

*NARRATOR: Obi just moved here from Nigeria with his family and Dwayne and Tiff are his next-door neighbors. They bonded over their shared love of filmmaking. (Sfx laughing sound) Dwayne is making a short film about a local lake with an old waterproof camera which he will enter into an online film contest.*

[1:03]

*DWAYNE: Alright, so I'm gonna use this to film some fish first. Obi can you dive underwater??*

*OBI: Sure!*

*(SFX SPLASH)*

*DWAYNE (EXCITED): Perfect! Oh man I gotta get a shot of that plastic bag floating in the wind above the lake!!!*

*TIFFANIE (laughing): He would literally film anything with that thing.*

*OBI: Yeah, definitely (Pause) (shakes off the water - hesitant) So, how's your mom doing? Is she still in the hospital?*

*TIFFANIE: She got back last night, our dad's watching her now. I didn't wanna leave but she made us... she's um... she said no matter what happens we still need to make time for fun.*

*OBI: I'm sorry, guys, if there's anything I can-*

*DWAYNE (forceful): Race you to the middle of the lake and back!*

*OBI: You ok, Dwayne?*

*DWAYNE: Yeah, let's race to the middle of the lake and back!*

*TIFFANIE: He doesn't like to talk about her-*

*DWAYNE: Can we just... can we please change the subject?*

*(SFX: Swimming and lake sounds)*

*NARRATOR: Tiffanie swims away from the guys.*

*TIFFANIE: Well I don't know about you two but I'm gonna enjoy myself. See ya!*

*OBI: Sorry, man, I didn't mean to-*

*DWAYNE (Forced laugh): It's all good. I just wanna change the subject that's all.*

*(SFX: Nature sounds only)*

*[2:20]*

*OBI: SO... What's this contest about anyway?*

*DWAYNE: It's The Cultureverse Film Contest: They have five student categories: documentary, experimental, drama, comedy, and one more I'm not gonna mention!*

*OBI (CURIOUSLY): What's the last one?*

*DWAYNE: It's a secret! It wouldn't be much of a secret if I told you.*

*OBI: Then I decline to be filmed unless you tell me what it's about!*

*DWAYNE: But you're the star, man!*

*(SFX: Swimming and lake sounds)*

*NARRATOR: DWAYNE moves closer to Obi and zooms in on him but Obi puts his hand out to block him.*

*DWAYNE: Come on, bro. It's gonna be a masterpiece!*

*OBI: Like your last masterpiece?*

*DWAYNE: Listen, I'm working my way up. Rome wasn't built in a day.*

*NARRATOR: Tiffanie swims back flailing her arms and screaming.*

*(Dramatic music)*

*TIFFANIE: Oh my God! Oh my God! Did you hear that?*

*DWAYNE (scared): Is that what... I think it is?*

*OBI: What?!?!*

*TIFFANIE: You don't wanna know!*

*OBI: Come on, guys! Tell me!*

*DWAYNE (to Tiffanie): Should we?*

*TIFFANIE: For his protection, yes.*

*OBI: You guys are TOO MUCH!!*

*(SFX OMINOUS 'JAWS' MUSIC) (SFX: Swimming and lake sounds)*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne and Tiffanie start circling around Obi.*

*DWAYNE (creepy voice): Coming to this lake has been a tradition in our family for one hundred years!*

*TIFFANIE (creepy voice): And our family will tell you all sorts of crazy stories about this lake.*

*DWAYNE: CRAZY stories.*

*OBI: Like what?*

*DWAYNE (creepy voice): When our family first bought this house our great aunt, Irene, and her two cousins, were swimming here alone...*

*TIFFANIE (creepy voice): And something strange happened, something unexplainable, something that has haunted our family for decades...*

*OBI (laughing): Sure... Uhuh...*

*DWAYNE: According to a boy fishing on the shore, one by one, each girl just... vanished. One minute they were there and then...*

*[4:23]*

*NARRATOR: When Obi turns back, Dwayne is gone.*

*OBI: Very funny, Dwayne.*

*TIFFANIE: And then... they all disappeared...*

*NARRATOR: When Obi turns towards Tiffanie... she is gone.*

*OBI: Funny, guys, real funny!*

*(SFX Lake ambiance sounds - Everything is quiet)*

*OBI: Dwayne? Tiffanie? (Pause) Guys...?*

*NARRATOR: All of a sudden Obi feels hands pulling him under the water.*

*(SFX: Obi screams out of the water)*

*(SFX Dwayne and Tiffanie laughing hysterically)*

*DWAYNE (Laughing): CUT! Oh my goodness, bro you shoulda seen the look on your face!*

*TIFFANIE (laughing): You look like you just saw a ghost or something.*

*OBI (a little upset): "Cut?" What do you mean CUT?*

*DWAYNE (laughing): I'm entering the Cultureverse Found Footage Horror competition! I got this close-up of you and your eyes were soooo wide, I thought you were gonna pass out! Once I lay some spooky music over and tweak it a bit, I'm gonna win for sure!!*

*(Sfx more splashing from far away)*

*TIFFANIE (with concern): Hey guys, what's that?*

*OBI(sarcastically): Is this the sequel?*

*TIFFANIE: I'm serious this time! Look, way over there! You see it?*

*OBI (Sarcastic voice): Is it the ghost of your great Aunt Irene?*

*[5:44]*

*NARRATOR: In the distance, a figure appears. At first, the kids can't quite make out what it is. It begins gliding in their direction--quickly just above the surface of the water and gets closer and closer.*

*TIFFANIE (scared): That is definitely not Aunt Irene! Guys, I think we need to go...*

*DWAYNE (Scared): Is it... is it seriously walkin' on the water?*

*TIFFANIE (Scared):Walking?! That thing is straight-up gliding, LET'S GET OUTTA---*

*(SFX MAMI WATA improvised humming - We'll use this tape as part of the cue when she appears in the script)*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne and Tiffanie turn around and race to the shore.*

*TIFFANIE: Phew, that was close... What WAS that thing??*

*DWAYNE: I dunno but it was like an alien or something...*

*NARRATOR: They look back and see... the figure, hovering. They can see her more clearly now.*

*DWAYNE: Whooooooooaaa...*

*TIFFANIE: OMG, She looks like Beyoncé...*

*(Mami Wata music)*

*NARRATOR: They see the head and torso of a beautiful brown-skinned woman with deep penetrating eyes... and, instead of legs, she has the tail of a fish!*

*TIFFANIE: Wait! Where's Obi?*

*NARRATOR: Obi is mesmerized by her presence and after getting a better look, stands*

*completely still, facing her.*

*DWAYNE (yelling and terrified): Obi!!!!!! Get outta the water, man!*

*OBI: I can't believe what I'm seeing!*

*TIFFANIE (Yelling): Well, I can't believe I'm about to see you get eaten alive by a sea monster that looks like Beyoncé!*

*DWAYNE: Well, that's not a bad way to go...*

*NARRATOR: Obi bows down to the entity levitating in the air above him.*

*OBI (in awe, slowly): Mami Wata? Is that you?*

*[7:38]*

*NARRATOR: The spirit floats around Obi and then disappears back into the depths of the lake. Dwayne runs back and drags Obi out of the water.*

*OBI (Pleading and superexcited): Nooooooo, it's ok. I know who that was... it's Mami Wata.*

*TIFFANIE: Mommy what?*

*OBI: Yes! She's the goddess of the rivers! Everyone in Nigeria knows about her. She is a water spirit and she can bring good tidings or bad ones.*

*DWAYNE: That's really cool. How do you know about this stuff?*

*OBI (super excitedly): My Aunt Ngozi used to tell me stories about her when I was little. We gotta go tell her!*

*(MUSIC TRANSITION)*

*NARRATOR: Obi, Dwayne, and Tiffanie go straight to Obi's Aunt's house.*

*NGOZI (happily): Hi kids!*

*OBI, DWAYNE AND TIFFANIE: HI!!!*

*NGOZI (worried): Obi, why are your eyes so big? You look funny! Are you sick?*

*OBI (Breathing heavily and excited): No, aunt Ngozi, I just saw---*

*NGOZI (exaggeratedly worried): Are you well? Do you have a fever? Come here let me touch your head!*

*OBI (excited): I'm fine, Auntie, we were just at the lake and-*

*NGOZI (intensely sassy): Ahhhhhhhh, that's why you're sick! I told you to stay away from that water! That cold water! You'll catch pneumonia one day.*

*OBI: Aunty!!!!*

*NGOZI (intensely sassy): And you better not vomit! I just got the carpet cleaned and it was expensive!*

*OBI (quickly): I saw Mami Wata today!*

*NGOZI (surprised): What did you say?*

*OBI: Mami Wata! I saw Mami Wata at the lake-*

*NGOZI (super concerned end emotional): Ohhhhhhhhhhh, you definitely have a fever. You're hallucinating!*

*OBI: I don't have a fever! I just saw the Mami Wata at the lake. I'm serious!*

*NGOZI (serious): Obi, please stop playing games with me.*

*TIFFANIE: Mrs. Ngozi, I promise, he's not! Dwayne, show her the footage from your camera!*

*[9:19]*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne pulls up the camera footage on his phone and passes it to Ngozi.*

*(SFX lines from the lake earlier and splashing)*

*OBI: Now do you believe me?*

*(SFX Humming sound - MAMI WATA MUSIC)*

*NARRATOR: Ngozi stops in her tracks.*

*NGOZI (super surprised): (Gasps) I cannot believe it!*

*OBI: My heart stopped. She was soooooo-*

NGOZI (praising): Beautiful! My beautiful goddess of the water. (PAUSE, directs to Dwayne) You and your sister saw her too?

DWAYNE: Yeah, we were shook!

NGOZI (super horrified): Mami Wata shook you?

OBI: Noooooooo, Auntie, shook like scared. They ran to the shore. They thought she was a monster.

NGOZI (defensive): A monster?! Mami Wata is peaceful. She is worshipped by people around the world. Did you tell them that our people worship her?

OBI: I tried to!

NGOZI (Dazed, praising): She is neither good nor evil, she exists outside of such things. She is like a siren that draws men in and can give them great wealth or great misfortune. Ohh and for women, she can be helpful for fertility.

TIFFANIE: Fertility, like having babies?

NGOZI (cheerful): Yes, child! OH MY GOODNESS I must tell EVERYONE. Especially my neighbor's daughter, she wants a baby... She's not much to look at but she will make a great mother!

[10:46]

NARRATOR: Ngozi frantically gets up and grabs her phone, filling up multiple WhatsApp groups with the message:

Ngozi (SENDING A WHATSAPP VOICE MESSAGE, TALKING REALLY FAST AND EXCITED): THE MAMI WATA IS HERE, SHE IS IN THE LAKE! IF YOU WANT TO MAKE YOUR WISH, GO TO...! (Interrupts herself and talks to Obi) Obi, which lake?

NARRATOR: Now Obi is lost in a daze while watching the clip over and over.

NGOZI: Obi!

OBI: Um... sorry... what were you-

NGOZI (hurriedly): The lake! What lake is it?

OBI: Um... Mayes Lake...

NGOZI (CONTINUES SENDING WHATSAPP MESSAGE, EXCITEDLY): MAYES LAKE...



GOOOO RIGHT NOW!!

DWAYNE (under his breath): Wait... Will she really grant us wishes?

NGOZI: Of course! But please don't ask for some silly video game!

OBI (nudging Dwayne): What about a... video camera, Dwayne?

NGOZI (intensely): Ask for something from your heart and then she will respond. Now excuse me, I have messages to send!!

(SFX: NGOZI calling her sister, and her mother, and her brother and speaking Igbo and English,

"She is real, I swear it" - "Chidi, tell your wife to make her way to Mayes lake now I am telling you she's here!!!!")

NARRATOR: Obi and Dwayne stay up most of the night chatting about Mami Wata, and Obi finally convinces him that a documentary about her would definitely win him first place in the film contest. So the next day, they return to the lake and see that there's a huge...

(SFX CROWD)

Sandy Poplore: CROWD! All around the lake as you can see! Sandy Poplore here reporting live from Mayes Lake where a crowd has gathered to see some kind of water... deity...? (To another news team member) George is that right? Check the copy before I go live!!

RANDOM GUY: GET YOUR MAMI WATA WELCOMING SIGNS!! Just 2 dollars!

NGOZI FAR AWAY (Yelling): Get your Kola Nut for the offering right over here!

Dwayne: Man, I can't film like this! There's way too many people. They're all throwing trash everywhere.

[12:31]

Narrator: All along the shore, there are folks having barbecues and holding up signs for Mami Wata. Ngozi's WhatsApp message went viral, and all over town people started researching about the goddess and what she can do for them.

DWAYNE: I'm goin' back home!

OBI: Yo, what's up, man? I thought you were on board with this... You couldn't get footage like this even if you had a budget for CGI!

*TIFFANIE (Quietly to Obi): It's mom...*

*(Pause)*

*OBI: Is... everything... alright, Tiff?*

*TIFFANIE: When we got home last night we stayed up watching over her. She's back in the hospital. He didn't want to leave her but she forced us out. She really wants us to still go out and... keep on living...*

*OBI (to Tiffanie): your mom is a fighter, she's going to pull through.*

*TIFFANIE: Yeah... just... I don't know... Get him hyped about filming. I have some wishes to ask for and that's the only way he's gonna stay!*

*OBI (to Dwayne): Ok, I got this! Hey Dwayne, get your camera out! Let's win this contest!*

*NARRATOR: As Obi tries to amp up Dwayne, a young man wades in the water towards Mami Wata...*

*(SFX - CROWD SILENCE, THEN MAMI WATA MUSIC AGAIN)*

*OBI: Yo Dwayne are you getting this?!*

*DWAYNE: I'm rolling!*

*NARRATOR: As the man arrives before the deity, Dwayne is intrigued and slowly moves through the wall of people with his camera to film the exchange:*

*(SFX MAMI WATA MUSIC)*

*[13:55]*

*Mami Wata: Young man, how can I help?*

*YOUNG MAN (nervously): I, um...*

*MAMI WATA: There is no need to be afraid.*

*YOUNG MAN (nervously): Ok, I, um... I read online that you can make someone wealthy. I could use some financial assistance right about now... I... I...*

*MAMI WATA: What will you use your wealth for?*

*YOUNG MAN (more reassured): College tuition, for my younger sister. Our dad's been out of work for a while and - and we have no savings. She just needs a break. Could you um... Could you help?*

*MAMI WATA: You speak from your heart, young man. It is done. You will receive good news very soon.*

*Narrator: The man returns to the shore with a huge smile and a bright glow on this face. One by one people of all ages line up to see Mami Wata.*

*DWAYNE (in awe): This can't be real...*

*Tiffanie: Just keep rolling!*

*Narrator: After each meeting with Mami Wata the person turns back to face the crowd, and every single person has a huge smile on their face and a glow... of happiness. The crowd applauds after as each person speaks with the deity.*

*Obi: Dwayne, Dwayne! Let's go ask for a wish!*

*DWAYNE: I'm good.*

*OBI: Come on, man!*

*DWAYNE: I need to get back to the hospital to be with my mom and anyway I'm not sure I believe in all this stuff... Come on, Tiff, let's go back...*

*[15:36]*

*NARRATOR: Obi looks at Tiffanie for help and she just nods. He knows what to do.*

*OBI: Then come with me while I ask for my wish.*

*TIFFANIE: Just go! We'll leave for the hospital afterwards. Mom would want you to go and get that shot!*

*DWAYNE: Fine... I'm only doin' this for mom, let's get this over with!*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne reluctantly makes his way into the water behind Obi and they make their way towards Mami Wata.*

*DWAYNE: She's soooo tall... Are you sure we should be getting this close?*

*OBI: We're OK, Dwayne, she's not gonna hurt us. Come on, we are almost there.*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne and Obi take the final steps to meet her.*

*DWAYNE: WHOA...*

*NARRATOR: As Dwayne tilts his camera up to get her in the frame he is overcome by a warm sense of peace and calm. There is a warm gentle breeze skimming the surface of the water and Dwayne feels safe for the first time in a long time.*

*[16:58]*

*MAMI WATA: Come closer. How can I help?*

*NARRATOR: Obi approaches Mami Wata as Dwayne films.*

*OBI: Mami Wata, I have one wish I'd like to ask for.*

*MAMI WATA: Yes?*

*NARRATOR: Obi pauses and looks at Dwayne filming him with the camera. He thinks about how his friend has been restless these past few months with his mom in and out of the hospital... All of a sudden Dwayne drops the camera down by his side.*

*DWAYNE: Come on man, can you ask her so we can get goin'? I wanna get back to... my... my mom.*

*MAMI WATA: What is your wish?*

*NARRATOR: Obi turns back to Mami Wata and looks up into her light-filled eyes, and smiles.*

*OBI: I really want... (PAUSE) I really want my friends' mom to get better. Can you heal her?*

*MAMI WATA: Why don't you look over there?*

*NARRATOR: The kids turn around and see Dwayne & Tiffanie's Mom & Dad are at the water's edge.*

*DWAYNE: MOM! MOM! Tiff! Mom is here!*

*NARRATOR: Dwayne drops his camera. Tiffanie, who's been helping Auntie Ngozi on the Kola nut stand, hears Dwayne in the distance. They both run toward their parents & give their mom a big hug.*

*OBI: How did you know what I was going to ask for?*

*MAMI WATA: Your friend Tiffanie already asked.*

[18:32]

*NARRATOR: Obi looks back at Dwayne to find him smiling and glowing with joy. He walks over to Dwayne and says:*

*OBI: So I guess you believe me now?*

*DWAYNE: I do. Thank you bro, thank you!*

*(NGOZI (excited): Ms. Beauvais, come over and try some fresh kola nuts! Personally, I like it with salt, here you go!! Tiffanie, Dwayne, come share the kola nuts with your mother!)*

*Narrator: As the sun sets on Mayes Lake and all of the attendees finish making their own wishes, Dwayne looks back at Mami Wata. She is still hovering above the lake with her tail barely touching the water's surface. He smiles to himself as the goddess nods back at him. Then, she dives again into the depths of the lake and disappears.*

*(SFX WATER)*

### **CREDITS BEGIN -**

[19:31]

*NARRATOR: This story is inspired by the Pan-African folktale of the Mami Wata, a water goddess known for protecting seaside towns by sending fishermen calm waters. Africans who were displaced from their continent believed that the Mami Wata guided & protected them as they were taken to the West. Even today, for many Africans in the Western world, the deity is said to have traveled with them from Africa on the Atlantic Ocean protecting them from harm.*

*NARRATOR: If you want to learn more about Nigerian and Pan-African culture and folklore, check out the books *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*, by Virginia Hamilton, and *Moonlight Stories*, by Nigerian author Remi Adedeji (pr. ade-DEji).*

*NARRATOR: This podcast was produced by Studio Ochenta for TRAX on PRX. Obi was voiced by Owen Nnamdi Aguh (pr. AH-goo). Dwayne was voiced by Kevin Thelwell. Tiffanie was voiced by Marion Toro, Aunt Ngozi by Florence Mafomemeh (pr. Mafo-MEmeh), and Mami Wata by Janet Onye (pr. O-nye).*

[20:41]

*NARRATOR: Special thanks to our Cultureverse editorial team for this episode: Uche Aguh (pr. Oo-chay Ah-goo) and Phillip Calvert, who brought their experiences as Nigerian and African-Americans to this story.*

*NARRATOR: The creative director for this series is Lory Martínez, founder of Studio Ochenta. Dr. Kiona is our consulting producer for all things culture. Our Senior Fiction Producer is Maru*

*Lombardo. All original opening songs for this series were composed by Gabriel Dalmasso. Sound design by Chiara Santella (pr. Kee-AWW-ra San-TEll-a) and Luis Raúl López Levi. And our art is by Steve Aparicio.*

*NARRATOR: The lead producer from the TRAX team was Michelle Smawley and our scripts were edited by Nathan Yungerberg. Follow us on TikTok & IG @cultureversepod. Transcripts are available at ochentastudio.com.*

*NARRATOR: And I'm Yara Shahidi, your host. Thanks for listening!*

**END OF EPISODE**