

# The Daughter Who Married a Skull

*Nigeria*

**O**NCE THERE WAS A MAN named Effiong, who had one beautiful daughter, named Afiong. Afiong had many suitors fighting for her hand in marriage. Though they were all very wealthy, they were old and dull. Afiong refused to marry any of them, hoping to one day meet a man who was as charming and youthful as she.

Down in the spirit world, there lived a skull who heard of Afiong's dilemma. He also thought she was very beautiful, and hoped to marry her as well. He went to his friends in the underworld and borrowed some body parts – an arm here, a leg there – and soon made himself a convincing human suit. He made sure to make it up to Afiong's expectations: he was young, handsome and intelligent.

The next day, he left the spirit world and went to Afiong's village. Before long, she noticed him shopping at the market. She was immediately taken with him, and invited him to come and meet her parents. Her parents were suspicious, as they had never seen this man in town before. Still, they wanted her to be happy, so they agreed.

"Perfect," said the skull. "Tomorrow I will take you back to my home to meet my parents."

The next day, the two left Afiong's village. Days went by, and Effiong and his wife heard nothing from their daughter. He began to worry, so he visited the fortune teller. After casting some lots, he looked down and frowned. "This is not good," he said. "Your daughter has been taken by an evil spirit. She may not return home safely."

After walking for several days, Afiong and the skull, still in his disguise, crossed over into the spirit world. As soon as they entered, a mob of people rushed the skull. One man demanded his legs back, the other his torso, another his head. Soon, there was nothing left but the skull.

Afiong screamed. "Let me out! I want to go back home!" but it was too late. The rift had already closed behind them. "Come, let me show you my home," said the skull.

When they arrived at the Skull's house they found his

mother. She was very old, and needed help taking care of the house and herself. Afiong helped her cook and clean, and brought her firewood to warm the house and water to drink. "What a sweet young woman you are," said the skull's mother. She began to become worried – the spirit world was not a safe place for a human like her.

That evening, she had to tell Afiong the bad news. "Listen. You must leave soon," she warned. "The spirits that live here are not kind to humans. If they find you, they will make you one, too."

It didn't take long – the skull had already told the rest of the spirits that he had brought someone to join them. They mobbed the house, gnashing their teeth and stretching out their bony arms, but the skull's mother hid Afiong under the floor. They ransacked the house, but brought up no trace of a human.

After they had left, the old woman brought Afiong back up into the house. First, she went to her dresser and took out a pair of gold anklets, giving them to Afiong. "These are for the kindness you have shown me in your short time here," she said. Next, she conjured up a spell that called the wind to come take Afiong home. A gentle breeze arrived, and she told it to carry Afiong to her mother's house. Soon afterwards, the breeze dropped Afiong outside her front door.

When her parents saw her, they were very glad, as they had given her up as lost. Her father called all the village to come and dance, and the feasting and dancing was kept up for eight days and nights.



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*This scary story has a happy ending! What would have happened to Afiong if she had stayed in the spirit world? Write a new ending below.*

