



IFE AXE Creative Designs
By Gerardo
Jewelry Inspired by The Orisha

Chapter Six

THE GODS (cont.)



OYA (Yansan)

Saint:

Our Lady of the Presentation of Our Lord. (Santa Virgen de la Candelaria) and St. Theresa.

Day of the Week: Wednesday. Friday is also popular.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes):

Black and white. The collar is made up of nine black beads followed by nine white beads. Then a black bead alternates with a white bead nine times. The pattern is repeated to the desired length. A variant is a collar made of brown beads striped in a variety of colors or lilac or maroon beads striped with colors.

Sacrificial Animals:

Chickens and guinea hens. Some hold that Oya does not eat any four legged animals, but others say that she likes female goats.

Sacrificial Foods:

Ekru-Aro (black-eyed peas unpeeled and cooked in a double boiler. Her favorite fruit is the star apple. Oya loves eggplant. All of her food should be liberally laced with corajo butter. She drinks chequete. Her water should be rain water.

Herbs:

espanta muerto, bonita, varia, palo rayo, cabo de hacha, revienta caballo,

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Peppercress, marigold, plantain, Jamaican rosewood, mimosa, mugwort, aralia, camphor, breakax, cypress, flamboyan tree.

Ornaments:

Oya wears a crown with nine points from which hang nine charms; a hoe, a pick, a gourd, a lightning bolt, a scythe, a shovel, a rake, an ax, and a mattock.

A spear or a metal rendition of a lightning bolt. A red gourd. The dried seed pod of the flamboyan tree. She also wears nine copper bracelets.

Apataki:

Many years ago, Chango was embroiled in one of his unending wars. He had fought for many days and killed many of his enemies, but, more came than he could kill. He found himself surrounded by his enemies in the middle of the forest.

"Enchile," he shouted, but his famous magical horse had become lost during the fighting. Chango was afraid to yell again. He might be found. He heard his enemies beating the bushes and shaking the trees to find him. If they did, they would kill him.

Without Echinle, Chango had to scurry through gullies and cover himself in river mud to hide from his enemies. Days passed. His implacable enemies did not rest. They did not eat. Chango, tired and hurt, had to keep on running without sleep and without food.

He ran and he ran until he reached the place where Oya lived. It was very deep in the woods. Very few people there knew that Oya was Chango's wife.

Chango came to Oya's house and pounded on the door. She opened it and saw Chango bruised, cut and panting.

"What has happened to you?" cried Oya.

"Oya, they have me surrounded," panted Chango. "They want to hang me from a tree."

"Come in, quick." said Oya, hustling Chango into her house.

"My lightning is not effective against my enemies today," He told Oya.

"That's because you lack the courage to fight," she scolded. Oya gave him water and a bite to eat.

"It's not courage I lack," said Chango. "I'm very tired."

"What do you want from me?" asked Oya.

"If I could escape my enemies' deadly circle, I could rest and sleep," said Chango. "I would recover my strength and destroy my enemies."

"Why is it that you only come to see me when you need help?" asked Oya.

In those ancient times, Chango was used to fighting by himself, but he swallowed his pride.

"Help me, Oya."

Oya thought for a moment and then turned to her husband.

"When night falls," she said. "You will put on one of my dresses. The disguise will let you escape."

"They will still recognize my face," said Chango.

"I will cut off my hair and put it on your head. That will complete the disguise," said Oya. "I will cut off my hair to save my king's life."

They waited until night. Oya lit no fire. She was afraid that the smoke from her chimney would be noticed by Chango's enemies and draw them to the house. When the sun had gone down, but before the moon had risen, Oya cut off her beautiful hair and pinned it to Chango's head. Chango did not know what to do with woman's hair. It fell across his eyes. It tangled in his ears. Oya had him sit down and wove the hair into two long braids.

"Here's a dress," she said. "Put it on quickly, before the moon comes up."

Chango managed to tangle himself up in Oya's dress. "Stand still," she said. "Just stand still and let me dress you."

Finally, Chango was dressed as a passable imitation of Oya. She went to the door and peered out.

"Hurry," she said. "There's no one around."

Chango stepped outside, imitating Oya's dignified walk. He walked until he reached the forest and came across the line of searching men. He greeted his enemies with an imperious tilt of his head and crossed their line. He did not speak to them because his voice is very deep. It would have given him away.

This is the way Chango was able to escape his enemies' trap.

Once he was far away from the forest, he made camp. He rested and slept and ate and regained his strength and his will to fight.

Echinle managed to find his way back to his master. Chango fed him and groomed him.

A few days later, rested and healed, Chango mounted Echinle.

"It is time to kill," said Chango to his horse, and galloped off to find his enemies.

It was dawn when he reached his enemies' camp. He came rushing at them. His fury was terrible to behold. Lightning flashed from his hands. He shouted wild warrior cries. He was still dressed as a woman.

"Oya has turned into Chango," his enemies shouted when they saw the screaming apparition bearing down upon them, long hair flying and a gown flapping in the wind. They panicked.

Behind them, Oya came striding out of her house, fully armed, and began hacking right and left with her ax. Her short hair bristled and shot out electric sparks.

"If Oya helps Chango, there is victory," she shouted, cutting off arms and legs.

Chango and Oya were victorious. Since that battle, Oya has been Chango's inseparable companion in war. With Chango's thunder and Oya's storms, they are invincible and remain so to this day.

Notes:

Oya is the only Orisha that has power over the dead. Since she is a compassionate Orisha, she has allowed many dying children to live as a gift to

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their parents. Cemeteries are known as "ile yansan", Oya's house. Anyone who uses dead bodies or parts of dead bodies in their ceremonies, must render payment and homage to Oya.

Whenever there is a haunting, Oya is summoned to dismiss the spirit. Sacrifices must be made to ensure that she takes an interest in the matter.

Oya is the Orisha of tornadoes and twisting storms, hurricanes and gales. The four winds are dominated by Elegua, Orunmila, Obatala and Oya.

Oya has such a terrible face that anyone looking on it will be stricken mad or blind. In ceremonies where Oya descends, no one looks upon her. When she possesses someone, she puts on a red crepe dress or a flowered dress and weaves multicolored ribbons around her head. She only dances warrior dances. When her "children" enter trance, some of them can handle live coals with their bare hands.



YEMAYA (Olocum, Ocute)

Saint:

Our Lady of Regla. (La Virgen de Regla) The patron Saint of Havana's port.

Day of the Week: Friday. Saturday is also popular.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes):

White or crystal and blue. The collar is made up of seven crystal beads followed by seven blue beads. Then, a crystal bead alternates with a blue bead seven times. The sequence is repeated until the desired length is obtained.

Sacrificial Animals: Lamb, ducks, roosters, turtles goats. Fish and pigeons.

Sacrificial Foods:

Banana chips and pork cracklings washed down with chequete. Black-eyed peas. All her food should be liberally spread with sugar cane molasses.

Yemaya's favorite fruit is the watermelon. Her water is seawater.

Herbs:

cucaracha, chinzosa, Yellow mombin, indigo, anamu (garlic herb native to Cuba), water hyacinth, seaweed, purple basil, green pepper, chayote fruit, Bermuda grass, Florida grass, sponges, coralline, majagua linden, salt water rushes.

Ornaments:

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Yemaya is summoned at the seashore with a gourd rattle. She always has a fan made of duck feathers.

She owns an anchor, a key, a sun, a half moon, a siren which she holds in her open arms. It holds in its hands a ray, the head of a shovel, a conch shell and a sea shell. All her ornaments are made of lead.

Apataki:

Chango first saw the light of day thanks to Obatala (in a female aspect). However, Obatala soon became indignant with her son's pranks and threw him out of her house. Yemaya took pity on the young Orisha and raised Chango as if he were her own child.

Chango grew up and left home to find his fortune. Chango forgot the details of his upbringing. He had no past. He wandered the world without roots and without goals. Many years passed and many women crossed his path. He had many amorous adventures. So many, that he forgot, in time, Yemaya's face.

Time passed. Chango kept chasing women, fighting and going to parties. It was at one of these parties where Chango met Yemaya again. He was drumming and singing. The people were dancing. When he looked up, he saw Yemaya.

He immediately felt a very strong attraction towards her. His heart opened and he felt an intense tenderness wash over him. He did not remember feeling like that before, so, he confused it with passion and sexual attraction. He was wrong. What he felt was the love of a son for his mother, his second mother, the woman who had brought him up.

He stopped playing the drums, stood up and sidled up to Yemaya.

"Have I met you somewhere before?" he asked.

Yemaya turned her back on him for an answer.

"We could go off and be alone," said Chango. "Just you and I."

His lips brushed her shoulder. She shrugged him off.

Yemaya knew the dissolute life that Chango had been leading. She knew he was a drinker, a brawler and a womanizer. When he attempted to seduce her, his own mother, she decided to teach him a lesson.

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"I'm going to teach him respect for women," she said to herself. "I'm also going to teach him a little humility." She turned to Chango. "What did you have in mind?"

Chango jumped at the opening. "Let's go to your house and keep this party going. But, more privately." He did not want to go to his house, since his wives would not exactly approve of a conquest under their own roof.

"Why, I think that's a wonderful idea," purred Yemaya, leading him on. "Come with me."

She walked through the crowd. Chango was close behind.

"What an easy conquest," he said to himself. "What a virile man am I."

They walked through the sleeping town until they came to the seashore. Yemaya went to a small boat tied to a rock. She got in the boat.

"Please undo the lines," she told Chango.

"But, where is your house?" asked Chango. "I thought that you wanted to have a little party."

"My house is over there," said Yemaya, pointing towards the dark line of the horizon. "Come with me."

She stretched out her hand to Chango, who gingerly climbed into the boat. He was rapidly losing his enthusiasm for this romantic adventure. He was afraid of boats and did not like the water because he could not swim. But, it was too late to change his mind. He would appear frightened. He was, but he would admit it to any man, let alone a woman.

Chango tightened his grip on the gunwale as the little boat bobbed over the breakers and headed out to sea. The farther out they went, the more nervous Chango became. The little boat was out of sight of land.

"That's enough," said Chango.

"Isn't the sky lovely?" said Yemaya.

"I said, that's enough," growled Chango, striking the oars from her hands. "Who are you who has the strength to send this boat flying over the waves?"

Yemaya did not answer. She sat in the boat calmly, her hands crossed on her lap.

"Who are you who can live out in the middle of the ocean?" demanded Chango.

Instead of answering him, Yemaya dove over the side and swam straight down to the bottom of the sea.

Chango was petrified. He had no idea how to handle a boat. He didn't know what to do. Clumsily, he picked up an oar, but got it tangled in the lines coiled in the bottom of the boat.

While Chango struggled, Yemaya sent a gigantic wave towards him. It was a wave taller than a mountain. When he saw the wave coming, Chango dropped the oars and covered his head with his hands.

"I can triumph over men," he muttered, curled up in the bottom of the boat. "I can triumph over women. But I can't triumph over this wave." He took a peek over the side. A blue wall of water was bearing down upon him. He tried to make himself small. He tried to make himself disappear.

The giant wave came crashing down on him. It washed him off the boat and sent him tumbling and bubbling to the bottom of the sea. It was quiet and blue. Chango was afraid.

He fought his way back to the surface and felt immensely grateful to Olodumare when he was able to pull in a lung full of air. The boat was floating right next to him. He scrambled into it. He did not sink and drown.

Yemaya came gliding on the waves, her feet barely touching the water.

"I think you are going to have to save me," said Chango through chattering teeth.

"I will save you upon one condition," said Yemaya. "Name your condition."

"You must respect your mother," said Yemaya.

"My mother!" blustered Chango. "My mother abandoned me when I was a baby."

At that instant, Obatala, Chango's mother, who had been magically aware of the lesson being given to her son by Yemaya, appeared in the boat.

"You have to respect Yemaya," said Obatala. "She is your mother."

"You are my mother," he yelled. "You abandoned me when I was a child. You kicked me out of your house."

"I brought you into the world," said Obatala. "But it was up to another to bring you up."

"You forget women too easily, Chango," said Yemaya. "You have hated your mother, but you have forgotten your second mother."

"You have forgotten that she is your mother, as well as I," said Obatala. "I brought you into this world and she raised you."

"You have two mothers, Chango," said Yemaya. "you have two mothers in a world where many people have none."

A stiff breeze sprang up and washed Chango clean of the hatred he had carried for many years.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry I hated you, Obatala. I'm sorry I forgot you, Yemaya." He sighed. "It is indeed wonderful to have two mothers."

From that time on, he began to respect women more. But, he is still a womanizer.

Notes:

Yemaya is the Orisha that controls all the seas and the oceans and all the creatures that live in them.

She is considered the mother of all human beings.

When Yemaya comes down and possess someone, she endows him or her with all her grace and very spicy personality. She will immediately call for a long gown tightly belted at the waist and for her fan. She dances with movements that are like the movement of the waves. When the drums heat up, she dances like waves in a hurricane.

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She is full of love and tenderness, as befits the mother of all mankind.



BABALU-AYE **(Chopono, Taita Cañeme)**

Saint: St. Lazarus.

Day of the Week: Sunday. Wednesday is also popular.

Colors and Collars (Ilekes):

White with blue streaks. The collar is made up of white beads with blue streaks strung out to the desired length.

Sacrificial Animals:

Gelded goat, spotted rooster. Also, chickens, guinea hens, snakes, quail and wild pigs.

Sacrificial Foods:

Fermented corn meal. Babalu-Aye loves to drink aguardiente and to smoke good cigars. Coconut butter (ori) is his favorite condiment. His water should come from a pond.

Babalu-Aye is an Orisha with simple tastes and will accept with a piece of stale bread and a glass of milk or water, dry wine and a few peanuts if the petitioner cannot afford anything better.

Herbs:

jayabico, ateje, hierba vieja, hierba nina, tengue tengue, angariya, Guava, balsam apple, thistles, all types of beans and seeds, peanuts, guaguasi (Loetia Apelata) tree native to Cuba, Virginia creeper, pigeon peas, agave, heliotrope, caroba, bastard feverfew, basil, sage, pine nut, caisimon (Pothomorphe peltata L. Mig.) medicinal plant native to Cuba, yaya lancewood, cowhage, broom, rose of Jericho, datura, cocillana bark, sabicu, olive, sesame, cactus pear, and butterfly jasmine among others.

Ornaments:

Babalu-Aye always has his crutches and his two faithful little dogs. On his altar there is always a charara, a broom made from the fruit clusters of the palmetto, used to sweep away evil influences.

Jute sacks also belong to him. Devotees who have been cured due to his intervention wear clothing made from jute in gratitude.

Apataki:

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A long time ago, Olodumare, the Supreme Being, the Creator of all the Orishas, decided to give his children a gift. He called them all together.

"My children," he told them. "It is time for you to take over your responsibilities in this world."

There were a few polite coughs. There were also a few giggles.

"I have decided to share my powers with you," continued Olodumare, after staring down the gigglers. "I will give you of my ashe so that you may fulfill your destinies as best you are able."

All the Orishas got very excited. This was the big moment when their influence among mankind was going to be determined. They shuffled and sorted themselves out in a line.

"Oshun," said Olodumare. "To you I give the rivers."

"Thank you, Father," said Oshun.

"Chango, to you I give thunder."

"Thank you, Father," said Chango.

"Oya, to you I give the wind and the shooting stars," said Olodumare. "To you, Ogun, I give all the metals of the earth. Orunmila, I give you the power of divination so that you may guide the destiny of mankind. Elegua, Elegua, quit talking and listen to me! Elegua, to you I entrust all paths, ways and entrances and, since you love to talk so much, I'll make you the messenger of the Orishas."

Then, came Babalu-Aye's turn.

"Is there a particular boon you would like me to bestow upon you, Babalu-Aye?" asked Olodumare.

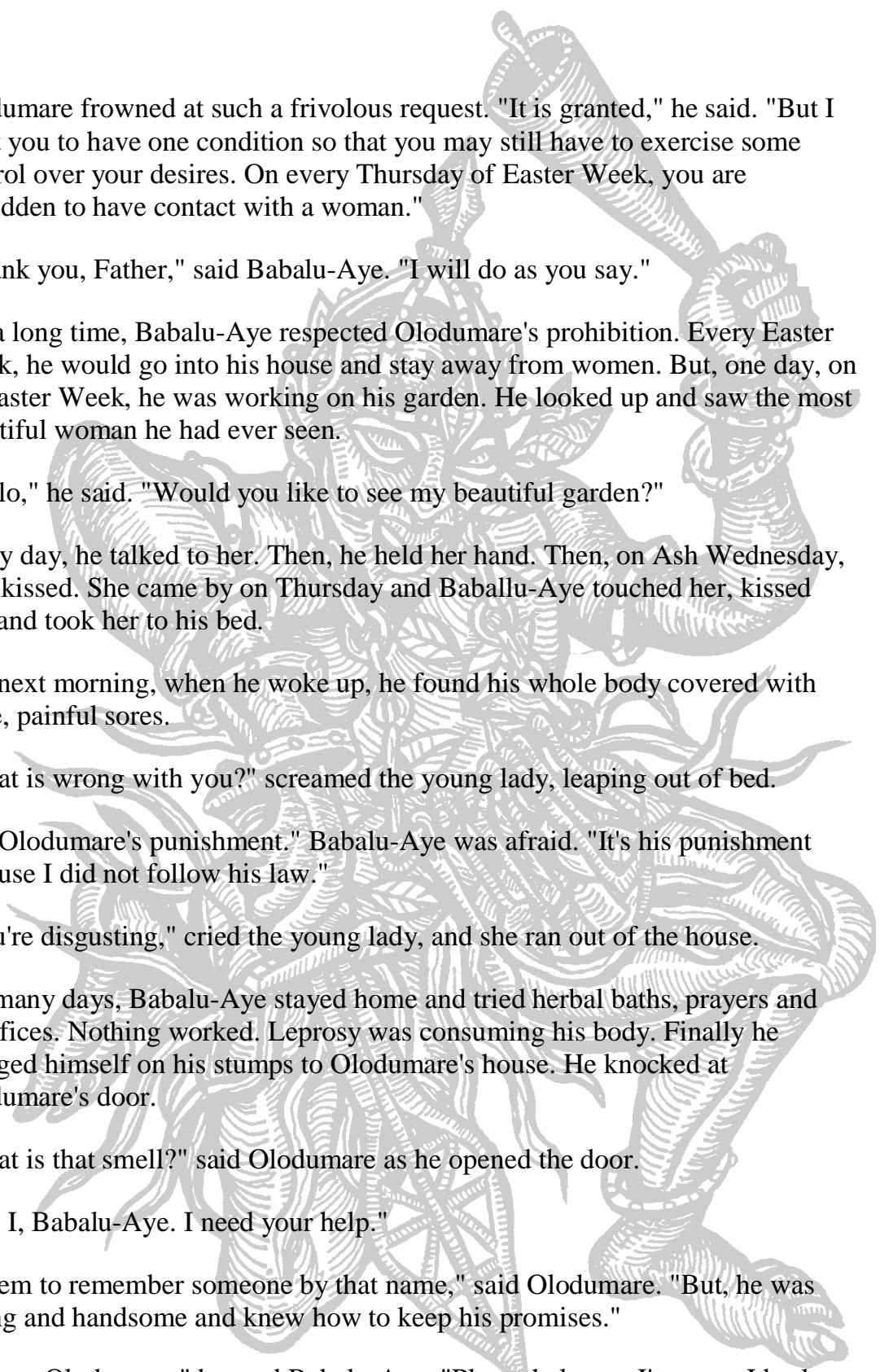
Back then, Babalu-Aye was very good looking and very young. His primary concern was his ability to make love to women; as many of them as he could.

"I want you to give me the power to be every woman's lover," said Babalu-Aye. "I want to dally with the ladies. I want them to love me."

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Olodumare frowned at such a frivolous request. "It is granted," he said. "But I want you to have one condition so that you may still have to exercise some control over your desires. On every Thursday of Easter Week, you are forbidden to have contact with a woman."

"Thank you, Father," said Babalu-Aye. "I will do as you say."

For a long time, Babalu-Aye respected Olodumare's prohibition. Every Easter Week, he would go into his house and stay away from women. But, one day, on an Easter Week, he was working on his garden. He looked up and saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Hello," he said. "Would you like to see my beautiful garden?"

Every day, he talked to her. Then, he held her hand. Then, on Ash Wednesday, they kissed. She came by on Thursday and Babalu-Aye touched her, kissed her, and took her to his bed.

The next morning, when he woke up, he found his whole body covered with large, painful sores.

"What is wrong with you?" screamed the young lady, leaping out of bed.

"It's Olodumare's punishment." Babalu-Aye was afraid. "It's his punishment because I did not follow his law."

"You're disgusting," cried the young lady, and she ran out of the house.

For many days, Babalu-Aye stayed home and tried herbal baths, prayers and sacrifices. Nothing worked. Leprosy was consuming his body. Finally he dragged himself on his stumps to Olodumare's house. He knocked at Olodumare's door.

"What is that smell?" said Olodumare as he opened the door.

"It is I, Babalu-Aye. I need your help."

"I seem to remember someone by that name," said Olodumare. "But, he was young and handsome and knew how to keep his promises."

"Please, Olodumare," begged Babalu-Aye. "Please help me. I'm sorry I broke your commandment."

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"I'm sorry," said Olodumare. "But I don't speak to people who do not keep their word."

He slammed the door on Babalu-Aye's face. And, right there, on the street in front of Olodumare's house, Babalu-Aye died with horrible convulsions and sufferings. Babalu-Aye's death was mourned by all the women in the world. They decided to send a petition to Oshun, the Orisha of love. The women were graciously received at Oshun's house.

"What may I do for you?" asked Oshun.

"Dearest Lady, we ask you to bring Babalu-Aye back to life." they cried. "The women of the world are saddened at the horrible death of one who loved them so."

Oshun was moved by their prayers.

"Ladies," she said. "I will go to Olodumare's house and try to bring your lover back to you."

That evening, Oshun went to Olodumare's house. She found a side door open and went in without anyone seeing her. She went from room to room, sprinkling her oñi everywhere. Oshun's oñi is her power to awaken uncontrollable passion in men.

Olodumare, sitting quietly and reading the paper, began to shift and wiggle. He threw the paper down and ran to his wardrobe closet. He felt great and he wanted to look great. He put on his best clothes and put perfumed pomade on what was left of his hair. He thought about old lovers who he had not seen in years and wondered what had become of them. All the passions that had lain dormant for ages of the world awoke. He looked at himself in the mirror.

"I haven't felt this good in a very long time. I haven't thought about sex in an even longer time." he said to himself.

Wise as he is, Olodumare knew that he was under the spell of Oshun's oñi.

"Oshun," he laughed. "Are you in here?"

"Here I am, Olodumare."

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you for making me feel wonderful."

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"You see," said Oshun. "It's not such a bad thing to feel good. You punished Babalu-Aye for this very thing."

"Give me some more of your oñi," said Olodumare. "I feel young again."

"only if you forgive Babalu-Aye's indiscretion," said Oshun. "If you bring him back to life, I will give you my oñi."

Olodumare had already decided to revive Babalu-Aye, since he had considered his death as a temporary punishment anyway.

"Granted," said Olodumare. "Babalu-Aye will live again."

Oshun gave her oñi to Olodumare and Olodumare gave life to Babalu-Aye. But, Babalu-Aye's sores never went away.

Notes:

In his African guise of Chopoño, he brought smallpox and leprosy to the tribes, but now, he cures. His cures are always miraculous, especially among persons who are unable to walk. Babalu-Aye is full of compassion towards human suffering and misery. He knows more about pain than any of the other Orishas.

When he takes over the body of a believer, the trance is characterized by muscle cramps. The individual walks with difficulty and, at times, rolls on the floor, feeling all of Babalu-Aye's sores burning into his skin. If the pain gets to be too much for the person possessed, the head and feet are sprinkled with water.

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