



## WHO WAS ANANSI?

*He was a man and he was a spider.*

*When things went well he was a man, but when he was in great danger he became a spider, safe in his web high up on the ceiling. That was why his friend Mouse called him "Ceiling Thomas."*

*Anansi's home was in the villages and forests of West Africa. From there long years ago thousands of*

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*men and women came to the islands of the Caribbean. They brought with them the stories that they loved, the stories about clever **Br'er** Anansi, and his friends Tiger and Crow and Moos-Moos and Kisander the cat.*

*Today the people of the islands still tell these stories to each other. So, in some country village in **Jamaica** when the sun goes **down** the children gather round an old woman and listen to the stories of Anansi.*

*In the dim light they see the animals—Goat, Rat, Crow, and the others—behaving **like** men and women. They see how excited everyone becomes as soon as Anansi appears. They **laugh** at the way in which he tricks all the strong animals and gets the better of those who are much bigger than himself. At last the story comes to an end. The night and bedtime come. But next day when the children see Ceiling Thomas they **know** that he is more than a spider. They **know** that he is Anansi, the spider man, and they do him no harm.*



## *FROM TIGER TO ANANSI*

**ONCE** UPON a time and a long long time ago the Tiger was king of the forest.

**At** evening when all the animals sat together in a circle and talked and laughed together, Snake would ask,

"Who is the strongest of us all?"

"Tiger is strongest," cried the dog. "When Tiger whispers the trees listen. When Tiger is angry and cries out, the trees tremble."

"And who is the weakest of all?" asked Snake.

"Anansi," shouted dog, and they all laughed to-

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getner. "Anansi the spider is weakest of all. When he whispers no one listens. When he shouts everyone laughs."

Now one day the weakest and strongest came face to face, Anansi and Tiger. They met in a clearing of the forest. The frogs hiding under the cool leaves saw them. The bright green parrots in the branches heard them.

When they met, Anansi bowed so low that his forehead touched the ground. Tiger did not greet him. Tiger just looked at Anansi.

"Good morning, Tiger," cried Anansi. "I have a favor to ask."





“And what is it, Anansi?” said Tiger.

“Tiger, we all know that you are strongest of us all. This is why we give your name to many things. We have Tiger lilies, and Tiger stories and Tiger moths and Tiger this and Tiger that. Everyone knows that I am weakest of all. This is why nothing bears my name. Tiger, let something be called after the weakest one so that men may know my name too.”

“Well,” said Tiger, without so much as a glance

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toward Anansi, "what would you like to bear your name?"

"The stories," cried Anansi. "The stories that we tell in the forest at evening time when the sun goes down, the stories about Br'er Snake and Br'er **Tacumah**, Br'er Cow and Br'er Bird and all of us."

Now Tiger liked these stories and he meant to keep them as Tiger stories. He thought to himself, How stupid, how weak this Anansi is. I will play a trick on him so that all the animals will laugh at him. Tiger moved his tail slowly from side to side and said, "Very good, Anansi, very good. I will let the stories be named after you, if you do what I ask."

"Tiger, I will do what you ask."

"Yes, I am sure you will, I am sure you will," said Tiger, moving his tail slowly from side to side. "It is a little thing that I ask. Bring me Mr. Snake alive. Do you know Snake who lives down by the river, Mr. Anansi? Bring him to me alive and you can have the stories."

Tiger stopped speaking. He did not move his tail. He looked at Anansi and waited for him to speak. All the animals in the forest waited. Mr. Frog beneath the cool leaves, Mr. Parrot up in the tree, all watched Anansi. They were all ready to laugh at him.

"Tiger, I will do what you ask," said Anansi. At these words a great wave of laughter burst from the



forest. The frogs and parrots laughed. Tiger laughed loudest of all, for how could feeble Anansi catch Snake alive?

Anansi went away. He heard the forest laughing at him from every side.

That was on Monday morning. Anansi sat before his house and thought of plan after plan. At last he hit upon one that could not fail. He would build a Calaban.

On Tuesday morning Anansi built a Calaban. He took a strong vine and made a noose. He hid the vine in the grass. Inside the noose he set some of the berries that Snake loved best. Then he waited. Soon Snake came up the path. He saw the berries and went toward them. He lay across the vine and ate the berries. Anansi pulled at the vine to tighten the noose, but Snake's

body was too heavy. Anansi saw that the Calaban had failed.

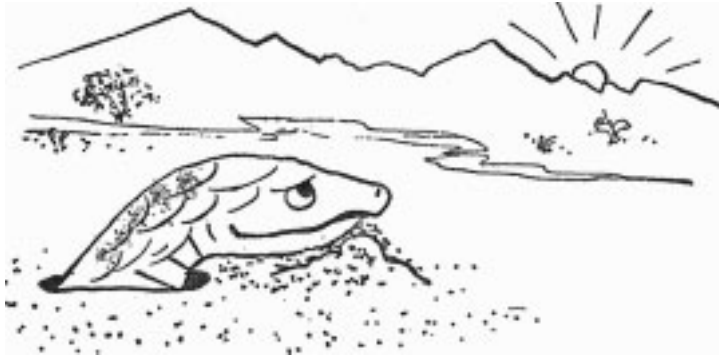
Wednesday came. Anansi made a deep hole in the ground. He made the sides slippery with grease. In the bottom he put some of the bananas that Snake loved. Then he hid in the bush beside the road and waited.

Snake came crawling down the path toward the river. He was hungry and thirsty. He saw the bananas at the bottom of the hole. He saw that the sides of the hole were slippery. First he wrapped his tail tightly around the trunk of a tree, then he reached down into the hole and ate the bananas. When he was finished he pulled himself up by his tail and crawled away. Anansi had lost his bananas and he had lost Snake, too.

Thursday morning came. Anansi made a Fly Up. Inside the trap he put an egg. Snake came down the path. He was happy this morning, so happy that he lifted his head and a third of his long body from the ground. He just lowered his head, took up the egg in his mouth, and never even touched the trap. The Fly Up could not catch Snake.

What was Anansi to do? Friday morning came. He sat and thought all day. It was no use.

Now it was Saturday morning. This was the last day. Anansi went for a walk down by the river. He



passed by the hole where Snake lived. There was Snake, his body hidden in the hole, his head resting on the ground at the entrance to the hole. It was early morning. Snake was watching the sun rise above the mountains.

"Good morning, Anansi," said Snake.

"Good morning, Snake," said Anansi.

"Anansi, I am very angry with you. You have been trying to catch me all week. You set a Fly Up to catch me. The day before you made a Slippery Hole for me. The day before that you made a Calaban. I have a good mind to kill you, Anansi."

"Ah, you are too clever, Snake," said Anansi. "You are much too clever. Yes, what you say is so. I tried to catch you, but I failed. Now I can never prove that you are the longest animal in the world, longer even than the bamboo tree."

"Of course I am the longest of all animals," cried

Snake. "I am much longer than the bamboo tree."

"What, longer than that bamboo tree across there?" asked Anansi.

"Of course I am," said Snake. "Look and see." Snake came out of the hole and stretched himself out at full length.

"Yes, you are very, very long," said Anansi, "but the bamboo tree is very long, too. Now that I look at you and at the bamboo tree I must say that the bamboo tree seems longer. But it's hard to say because it is farther away."

"Well, bring it nearer," cried Snake. "Cut it down and put it beside me. You will soon see that I am much longer."

Anansi ran to the bamboo tree and cut it down. He placed it on the ground and cut off all its branches. Bush, bush, bush, bush! There it was, long and straight as a flagstaff.

"Now put it beside me," said Snake.

Anansi put the long bamboo tree down on the ground beside Snake. Then he said:

"Snake, when I go up to see where your head is, you will crawl up. When I go down to see where your tail is, you will crawl down. In that way you will always seem to be longer than the bamboo tree, which really is longer than you are."

"Tie my tail, then!" said Snake. "Tie my tail! I

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know that I am longer than the bamboo, whatever you say."

Anansi tied Snake's tail to the end of the bamboo. Then he ran up to the other end.

"Stretch, Snake, stretch, and we will see who is longer."

A crowd of animals were gathering round. Here was something better than a race. "Stretch, Snake, stretch," they called.

Snake stretched as hard as he could. Anansi tied him around his middle so that he should not slip back. Now one more try. Snake knew that if he



stretched hard enough he would prove to be longer than the bamboo.

Anansi ran up to him. "Rest yourself for a little, Snake, and then stretch again. If you can stretch another six inches you will be longer than the bamboo. Try your hardest. Stretch so that you even have to shut your eyes. Ready?"

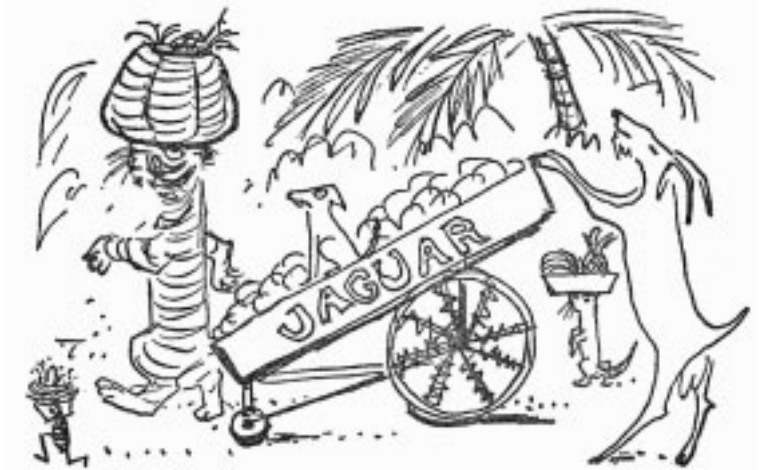
"Yes," said Snake. Then Snake made a mighty effort. He stretched so hard that he had to squeeze his eyes shut. "Hooray!" cried the animals. "You are winning, Snake. Just two inches more."

And at that moment Anansi tied Snake's head to the bamboo. There he was. At last he had caught Snake, all by himself.

The animals fell silent. Yes, there Snake was, all tied up, ready to be taken to Tiger. And feeble Anansi had done this. They could laugh at him no more.

And never again did Tiger dare to call these stories by his name. They were Anansi stories forever after, from that day to this.





## *ANANSI AND THE PLANTAINS*

IT WAS market day, but Anansi had no money. He sat at the door of his cottage and watched Tiger and Kisander the cat, Dog and Goat, and a host of others hurrying to the market to buy and sell. He had nothing to sell, for he had not done any work in his field. Turtle had won the few coins that he had saved in the broken calabash that he kept hidden under his bed. How was he to find food for his wife Crooky and for the children? Above all, how was he to find food for **himself**?

Soon Crooky came to the door and spoke to him. "You must go out now, Anansi, and find something

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for us to eat. We have nothing for lunch, nothing for dinner, and tomorrow is Sunday. What are we going to do without a scrap of food in the house?"

"I am going out to work for some food," said Anansi. "Do not worry. Every day you have seen me go with nothing and come home with something. You watch and see!"

Anansi walked about until noon and found nothing, so he lay down to sleep under the shade of a large mango tree. There he slept and waited until the sun began to go down. Then, in the cool of the evening, he set off for home. He walked slowly, for he was ashamed to be going home empty-handed. He was asking himself what he was to do, and where he would find food for the children, when he came face to face with his old friend Rat going home with a large bunch of plantains on his head. The bunch was so big and heavy that Brother Rat had to bend down almost to the earth to carry it.

Anansi's eyes shone when he saw the plantains, and he stopped to speak to his friend Rat.

"How are you, my friend Rat? I haven't seen you for a very long time."

"Oh, I am staggering along, staggering along," said Rat. "And how are you—and the family?"

Anansi put on his longest face, so long that his chin almost touched his toes. He groaned and shook his

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head. "Ah, Brother Rat," he said, "times are hard, times are very hard. I can hardly find a thing to eat from one day to the next." At this tears came into his eyes, and he went on:

"I walked all yesterday. I have been walking all today and I haven't found a yam or a plantain." He glanced for a moment at the large bunch of plantains. "Ah, Br'er Rat, the children will have nothing but water for supper tonight."

"**I am** sorry to hear that," said Rat; "very sorry indeed. I know how I would feel if I had to go home to my wife and children without any food."

"Without even a plantain," said Anansi, and again he looked for a moment at the plantains.

Br'er Rat looked at the bunch of plantains, too. He put it on the ground and looked at it in silence.

Anansi said nothing, but he moved toward the plantains. They drew him like a magnet. He could not take his eyes away from them, except for an occasional quick glance at Rat's face. Rat said nothing. Anansi said nothing. They both looked at the plantains.

Then at last Anansi spoke. "My friend," he said, "what a lovely bunch of plantains! Where did you get it in these hard times?"

"It's all that I had left in my field, Anansi. This bunch must last until the peas are ready, and they are not ready yet."



"But they will be ready soon," said Anansi, "they will be ready soon. Brother Rat, give me one or two of the plantains. The children have eaten nothing, and they have only water for supper."

"All right, Anansi," said Rat. "Just wait a minute."

Rat counted all the plantains carefully and then said, "Well, perhaps, Br'er Anansi, perhaps!" Then he counted them again and finally he broke off the four smallest plantains and gave them to Anansi.

"Thank you," said Anansi, "thank you, my good friend. But, Rat, it's four plantains; and there are five

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of us in the family—my wife, the three children, and myself.”

Rat took no notice of this. He only said, "Help me to put this bunch of plantains on my head, Br'er Anansi, and do not try to break off any more."

So Anansi had to help Rat to put the bunch of plantains back on his head. Rat went off, walking slowly because of the weight of the bunch. Then Anansi set off for his home. He could walk quickly because the four plantains were not a heavy burden. When he got to his home he handed the four plantains to Crooky, his wife, and told her to roast them. He went outside and sat down in the shade of the mango tree until Crooky called out to say that the plantains were ready.

Anansi went back inside. There were the four plantains, nicely roasted. He took up one and gave it to the girl. He gave one each to the two boys. He gave the last and biggest plantain to his wife. After that he sat down empty-handed and very, very sad-looking, and his wife said to him, "Don't you want some of the plantains?"

"No," said Anansi, with a deep sigh. "There are only enough for four of us. I'm hungry, too, because I haven't had anything to eat; but there are just enough for you."

The little child asked, "Aren't you hungry, Papa?"

"Yes, my child, I am hungry, but you are too little.

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You cannot find food for yourselves. It's better for me to remain hungry as long as your stomachs are filled."

"No, Papa," shouted the children, "you must have half of my plantain." They all broke their plantains in two, and each one gave Anansi a half. When Crooky saw what was happening she gave Anansi half of her plantain, too. So, in the end, Anansi got more than anyone, just as usual.





## *ANANSI AND FISH COUNTRY*

THERE WAS famine in the land. For months there had been no rain. Day after day the sun rose and set in a cloudless sky. The grass changed from green to yellow to parched brown. The parched leaves of the trees cried out for water. The plants in the fields withered away. There was famine in the land.

Anansi was hungry. He felt as if he had been hungry for weeks, for months, forever. Now he must go off to some other place to find food.

## *Anansi and Fish Country*

"If I only had a bag and a long coat," he said to himself, "I would go to Fish Country and pretend to be a doctor. That's it," he thought to himself: "the only thing that a doctor wants is a black bag and a long coat and a long face."

No sooner said than done! By next morning Mr. Anansi had his tall hat and black bag and long coat. Then he set off.

When Anansi got to Fish Country he took an office and outside of it he put up a signboard: "M. Anansi, Surgeon."

The first patient was a very large, fat fish. She had many children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Now her eyes were troubling her. Could Mr. Anansi help her?

Anansi looked at her eyes from every angle. He spent a long time looking, and as he looked he talked to himself. Sometimes he shook his head or stopped and coughed as he had seen doctors do. He seemed to be thinking hard. At last he said, "Yes. Your eyes are very weak, but I think that I can help you. Will you do what I tell you?"

"Yes, doctor, I will," said the fat old fish, who was now very frightened.

"Very well," said Anansi. "Go to bed as soon as you get home. See that your maid makes up a big fire in your room and puts a frying pan beside it, along with

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some coconut oil and a sharp knife. Call me when you are ready."

The fat fish hurried home as fast as she could and told the maid to make a fire. Soon everything was ready, and she sent to call Anansi.

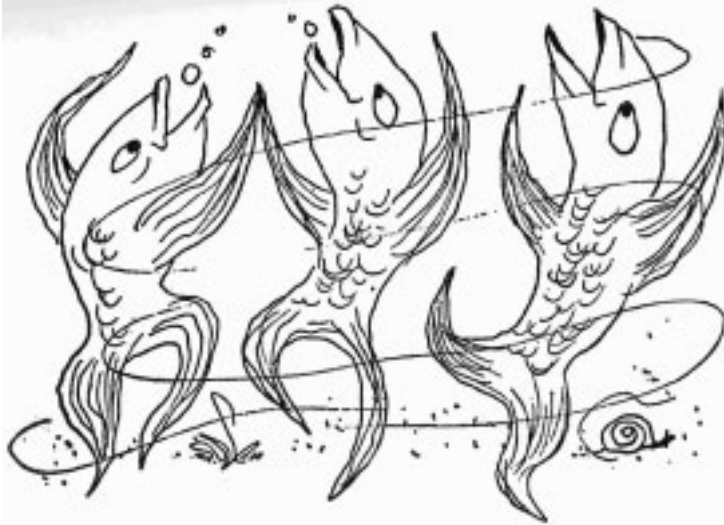
As soon as Anansi came to the house he said to the relatives:

"All of you must leave the room. I will lock the door. Do not try to look inside, but listen carefully. When you hear the frying pan say 'fee-fee' you must all stamp on the floor and sing this song:

"Bim, Bam, my grannie's eyes are well, oh,  
Bim, Bam, my grannie's eyes are well, oh,  
Bim, Bam, my grannie's eyes are well, oh,  
Make a lot of noise."

Quickly the fishes learned the tune and the words. When Anansi was satisfied that they could sing the song without his help he went into the room. First he locked the door, and then he put the frying pan on the fire and put the oil in the pan. As the oil got hotter the frying pan sizzled and called out 'fee-fee.' Quickly Anansi put the fat fish in the frying pan while outside all the other silly fish sang as loudly as they could: "Bim bam . . ."

And while they sang Anansi ate the fish. When he was no longer hungry, he began to think about getting away. But what was he to do? Quietly he put all the



bones and scales in the bed and wiped his mouth with the sheet so that no crumbs showed; and then he covered the bones with the sheet. He took up his bag, put on his longest face, opened the door, and faced the crowd of fishes.

"All is well," he said. "The operation was very successful. Leave the fish alone for two hours. You have been making a lot of noise, but now you must be still. Now you must pay me my fee."

The fish paid Anansi the money he requested, and away he went. He meant to leave Fish Country as quickly as possible.

There was a river to be crossed, however, and when Anansi came to the river he was horrified to find that it was full of alligators. How was he to get across?



Just at the moment Anansi saw Brother Dog on the other side of the river.

"Ah, Brother Dog," he cried, "are you glad to see me?"

"No," barked Dog.

"Ah, but you would be glad if you knew how much money I have here," said Anansi, shaking the bag of money.

"Bring it," barked Dog.

"But I must cross the river!" said Anansi.

## *Anansi and Fish Country*

"Cross now," barked Dog.

"The alligators will eat me," cried Anansi. "Look how hungry they are."

"Leave that to me," barked Dog. He began to run along the bank, away from Anansi, barking as he went. The greedy alligators followed him, thinking that he was going to jump into the water. And while they chased Dog, Anansi dashed across the ford and was soon safe on the other side. He knew that Dog was stronger than he was, and so he left the bag of money by the fording. Dog was very pleased with himself.

When the fish came to the bank of the river, which was the boundary of their kingdom, they saw Anansi. But what could they do? He was running through the forest singing,

"Bim-bam . . ."

