

JALIYA

celebrating African and Caribbean Folklore

Issue One - January 2023.



**Happy Birthday,
Bernard
Dadie**

Editorial

Dear Reader

In this, the first issue of JALIYA, we pay homage to the one from the Ivory Coast, born this month in 1916, who gave us *The Black Cloth*. This collection of tales has its own altar in my folklore shrine, as do other classics, such as *Tales of Amadou Koumba* by Birago Diop and *Sunjata*, first given to us by Djibril Tasmin Niane.

I have selected and transcribed some of my favourite passages – interspersed by my writings - from the sixteen stories. Because of Rootical Folklore, one of the invitational aspects of the book for me, is the mention of silk cotton and mahogany trees, as tamarind and baobab are mentioned, in the aforementioned collection by Diop. And good to see our old acquaintance Anansi – also known as Kacou Ananze - featured throughout the collection. And I wonder if Karen C. Hatch, won a prize for her translation.

Did Anansi come into the Ivory Coast via the Baule? From the Akan, due to a regnal dispute amongst their fellow Ashanti, they left present day Ghana, crossing the Comoe River into Ivory Coast, following their founding monarch, Abla Poku. The Baule sculpting traditions influenced artists such as Amedeo Modigliani. Have you ever seen a Baule wooden mask or a pendant of gold? With those familiar motifs; elongated nose, minuscule mouth and almond eyes. And after seeing Baule creativity, did you see *Head of a Woman*, by Modigliani?

And talking of Europeans, are students of French language literature, reading from the short story genre, introduced to this collection, as well as those by Du Maupassant? Through this tribute, I give thanks again for Black Cloth.

Wishing you a Happy New Year; and join me in wishing, a Happy Birthday to Bernard Dadie.

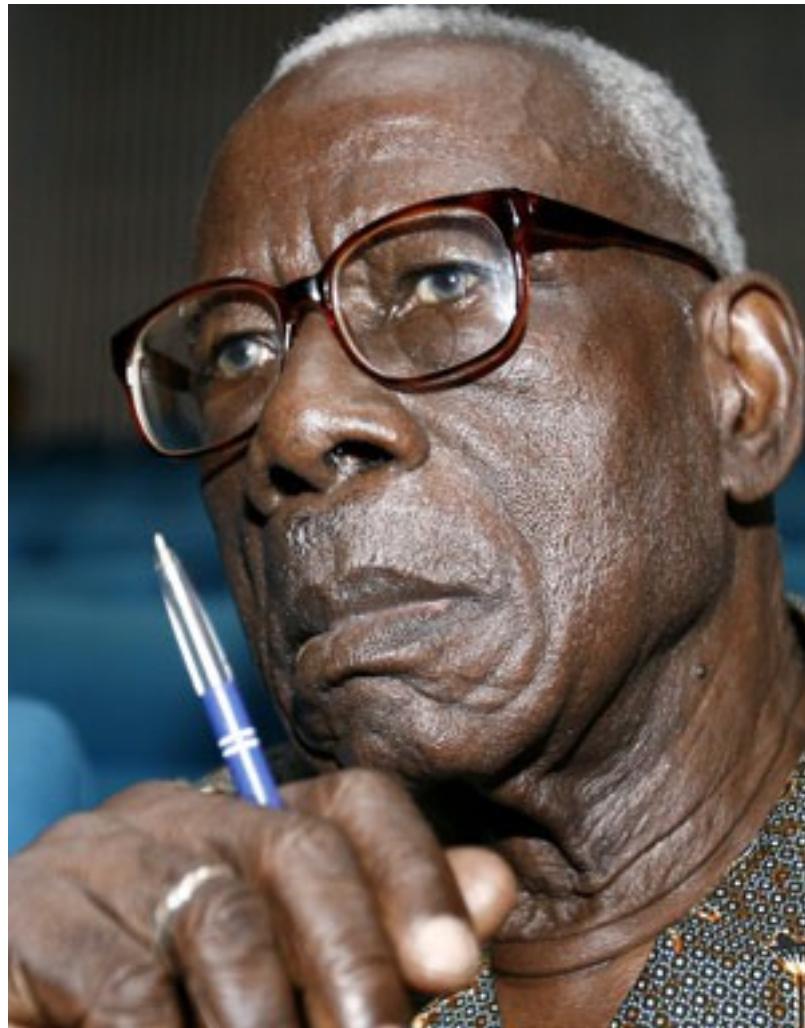
Dedication

to all those who organised or participated in the inaugural Birago Day celebrations;
and to Karen C. Hatch, for the 1987 translation of *The Black Cloth*.

***Jaliya* is a Mande term for their bardic tradition. The jali is storyteller, musician, historian, genealogist, tutor, advisor and envoy. Jalimuso is the female counterpart of Jali.**

The Papine Tales, Laughing With Anansi and Chanting of Bernard Dadie©Natty Mark Samuels, 2022. African School.

Front cover photograph of Bernard Dadie, from Booknode



from *Modo de Usar and Co*

Bernard Dadié

10/1/1916 - 10/3/2019

There was a famine in the village then. For three successive years, the rains had failed to keep their rendezvous. No longer did even one dark cloud lose its way in the sky. Starved, did the clouds die on route? In anger, the sun broiled everything; and the wind, in order to woo her, never stopped carting sand. The grasses no longer grew. Every day the dry earth would crackle, and then crackle some more. Not content to set fire to forests, the sun burned cottages. The trees, stripped bare, were pitiful to see. They resembled a woman whose head has been shaved, whose ornaments had been removed.

...They were all gone, all of them; the cascades, the eddies, the whirlpools, the waterfalls crowned with foam! The trees, pushed far back on the banks by the receding water, were, only a short time ago, magnificent as they leaned over the shimmering waves, leisurely gazing at their necklaces of liana vines, their curled headdresses, and their jewellike clusters of fruit. Let's not even mention the reeds and the mangroves. They all had disappeared: everything was dead, burned to cinders. Having divorced themselves from the forest, the waters flowed sadly, without song, without even the slightest whisper that one could hear at the feet of the trees when the water was still a friend of the forest.

from *The Mirror of Dearth*

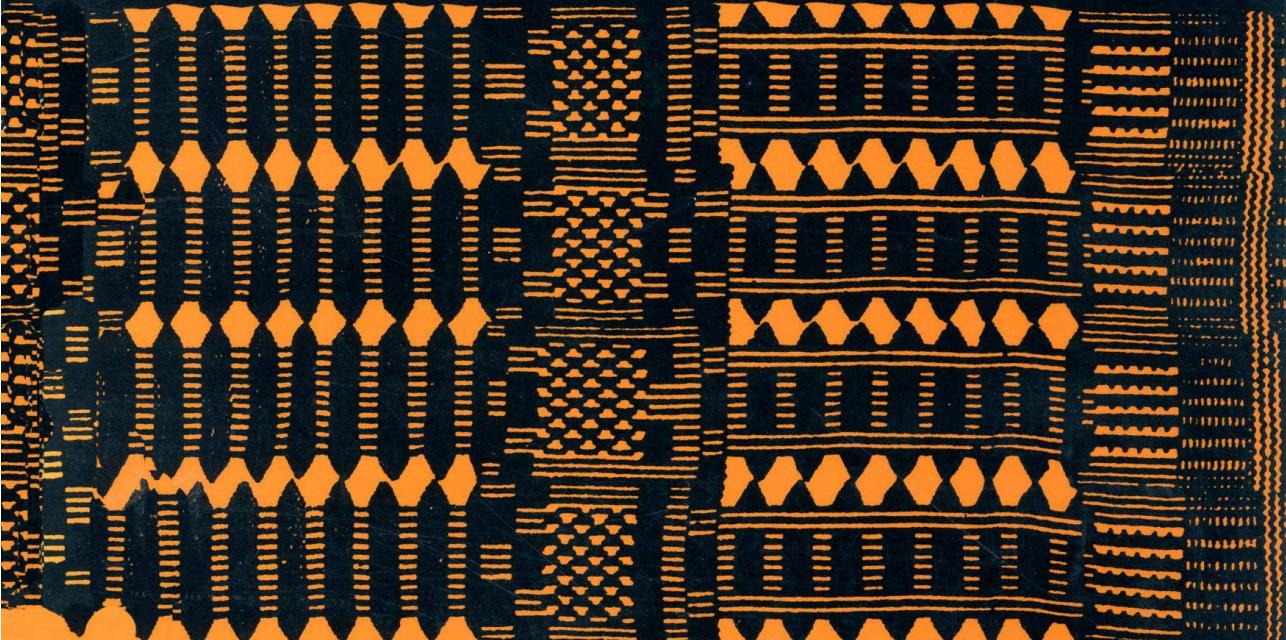
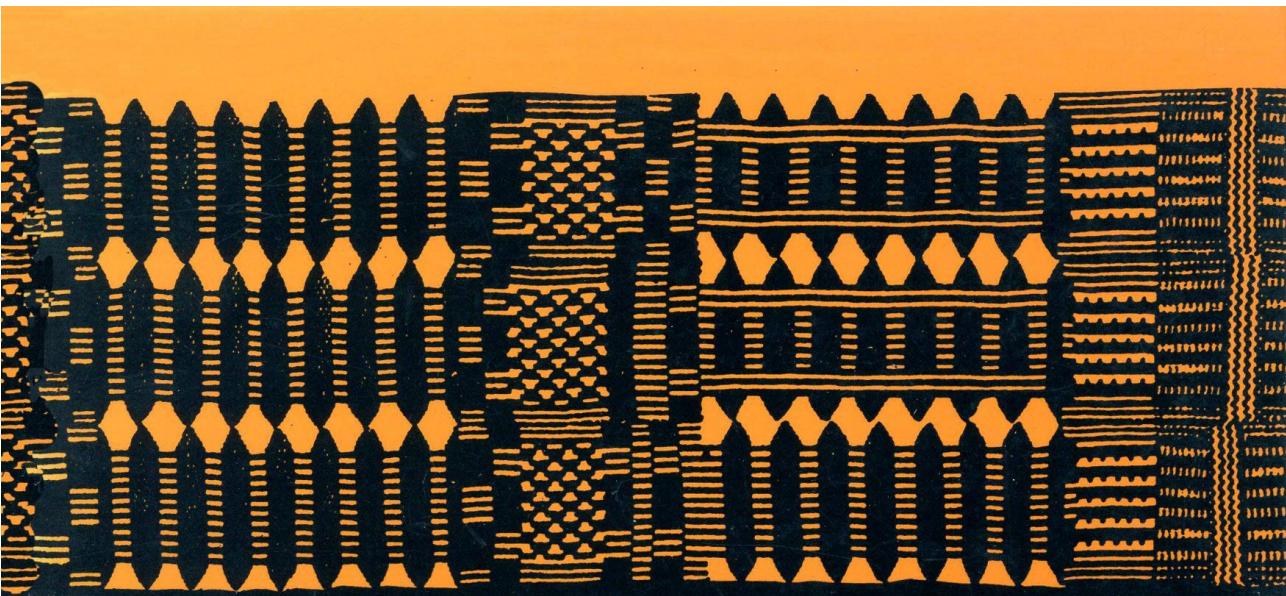
Little Aiwa was beautiful, truly beautiful, more beautiful than all the other girls in the village. And this too irritated the stepmother, who envied this glorious, captivating beauty.

The more she increased the insults, the humiliations, the forced labors and the deprivations, the more Aiwa smiled, the more beautiful she became, the more she sang – and this little orphan girl sang wonderfully. But she was beaten because of her good humor, beaten because she was the first to rise and the last to go to bed. She would awaken before the roosters and go to bed only after the dogs themselves had gone to sleep

The stepmother no longer knew just what to do to get the better of this young girl. She looked to find a way: in the morning when she awakened, at noon when she ate, in the evening when she dozed. And these thoughts hurled beastlike sparks from her eyes. She searched for a way to end the young girl's smiling, to stop her singing, to dull her radiant beauty...

And this magnificent smile which charmed everyone for miles around put fire in the heart of the stepmother. It sowed coals in the heart of the stepmother. And with all her claws showing, she fell on the little orphan girl, who kept smiling.

from *The Black Cloth*



Bernard Binlin Dadié

THE BLACK CLOTH

A Collection of African Folktales

Translated by Karen C. Hatch

Introduction by Es'kia Mphahlele

from **Amazon Books**

Tale of Silk Cotton

to David Brailsford and Sharon Barcan Elswit

You used a horn,
Spearing my auntie,
But you can't kill me.

Utilised your four hooves,
Trampling brother Kwesi,
But you can't kill me.

You think you're invincible,
Gashanami;
So let me tell you,
I am the fearless one:
You cannot kill me.

So sang a young man from a silk cotton tree; taunting, incensed at the carnage of the dreaded bull and its calves, rampaging through his village. They had charged down from that part of Kingston we now know as Gordon Town, into Papine, ferrying devastation: Hurricane Gashanami. From the square in Gordon Town, where the statue of Miss Lou stands, to the square in Papine, where a few vendors sit, alongside the watchers of the world going by. They came storm trooping through, mashing down trees and houses. It was the time when the soil sang Uprooted Blues; the mango sang a verse of early removal and the blossom of the flame tree, cried a cascade of orange.

In other parts of the city, people began to board up and barricade, in case the bovine regiment came stomping through. And you know how it is with all the stories about shape-shifting; here and there, people began to see things, to hallucinate, lose consciousness or bring down damnation on the rest of the community. As well as physical destruction, there was also damage to the mind.

And the young man Kwame, can't rid his mind of the death of Afia, killed by the hated bull, while washing clothes in Hope River. Everyone loved her. She was the unofficial princess of the village, because she was gentle and generous to all. In many cases, I think her death affected some mourners, more than their personal ones. Young and old loved to be in her company; she was almost like a talisman to them, a little totem; the elders called her the "Cherished One."

What would you use in your defence? What item would you choose, as your bulwark against the bull? Our emerging hero chose a silk cotton tree; as have many others, down through the ages. For the Caribs, when they descended from their home on the moon, it was the tree of survival - bearing all kinds of fruit - in the time of famine, during first residence on earth.

In one of the great stories of the Hausa, Zankallala, who is escorted always by birds who sing of him, uses one of these trees, to hide the boy being chased for food, by the monster that is called Dodo. And Ozidi, the hero of the eponymous epic of the Ijo, uproots one, to bring fire wood to his mother! So Kwame, from his chosen bastion against the bull, challenges him in song. And as you can imagine, the taunting enrages the bull. He begins to charge, using himself like the battering ram of medieval times. And with each charge, he grows bigger – like the guy going back and forth to prison - and the tree begins to bend. So Kwame sings another song...

This is no time to falter,
To stumble and fall:
Raise your head silk cotton tree.
I need you,
We need you:
Help me end our misery.

This is no time to bend,
To stagger and drop:
Raise your head silk cotton tree.
Hear my plea,
Our request,
Help me kill monstrosity.

The tree appears to listen to the chant, straightens up and the bull begins to tire. Anyway, battling with a silk cotton tree, isn't like the momentary skirmish with a banana tree! He's got all those buttresses to deal with, as well as the main body. I wonder, did his hooves sometimes slip on those massive roots? Did a horn get stuck in the trunk? They battled for two days; through the firefly nights and the john crow days. After two days of battle, Gashanami exhausted, fell: prison bully can't batter the prison wall. With an axe, Kwame finishes him off.

Anyway, Gashanami should have known better, than to mess with a silk cotton! It's name might not sound like much, but its one of the trees I wouldn't tangle with: the other three being the baobab, iroko and the fig. You're never going to defeat those buttress brigades!

So after lamentation, they sang. No longer would their homes - of whatever material - be susceptible to such an onslaught again. Their ackee and jackfruit trees will now be safe, from attack worse than canker and blight.

All over Gordon Town and Papine, people sang, like at the Homowo Festival in ancestral Ghana, where the Ga people hoot at hunger after surviving famine; so the people from a part of Jamaica, jeered at the passing of their nemesis. They sang two songs: for an old tree known as silk cotton and a young man called Kwame.

And while the people sang, Kwame went down by Hope River; reflecting and giving thanks. For rescue and for the blessings that can still be counted. Giving thanks as the Caribs did, to Kabo Tano, their word for the Creator. There will be a commemoration annually, on this the day of deliverance. While the sun plays her glinting melody on the water, he sits in the shade of other trees, writing the first part of a song of eternal gratitude.

I could kiss a butterfly,
Dance with a hummingbird;
Write a poem for coconut water,
Ballad for bougainvillia.
And I'll continue writing,
Anthem for a Silk Cotton Tree.

Friendship bracelet for tody,
Luncheon date with oriole;
Blessings from cold sorrel,
Benediction of ginger.
I'll be composing always,
Anthem for a Silk Cotton Tree.



from *Uncommon Caribbean*

Silk Cotton Tree

Koffi continued on. And the strange thing was that the longer he kept going, the more life seemed beautiful to him. How truly small and limited his horizon had been!...In front of him was the world...space! He gazed at this world though eyes that now were dry. The tears that had distorted everything were gone; so were the his feelings of loneliness, deprivation, wretchedness and continual fear.

Koffi still walked on; and the farther on he went, the more his trust in people grew. He was at ease as he breathed in the healthy air, and he sang with such a marvelous voice that the leaves danced on their branches while the branches swayed on the trees. And the trees, drunk from the melody in the blowing wind, entwined their headdresses which were dotted with bright-coloured butterflies busy flirting with some bees who were trying to rest.

And still Koffi kept going, Koffi who had never known his mother's slightest caress, or even her faintest smile, and about whom he remembered nothing. She had closed her eyes when Koffi had opened his on the world. It was said that in this vast universe, there had not been enough flame, enough light, to shine at the same time in the eyes of both Koffi and his mother, and that it was up to the mother to transmit her own flame to her son. Her life had died out as the child's was illuminated...

from *The Pitcher*

Day came, a glorious one. One of those days that, for no reason at all, brings joy to your heart, fills you with energy, and makes you want to keep moving. Everything in nature was musiclike and enchanting, a fairyland of peace and tranquility. One would have wished for it to last and last.

Yes, it was one of those days that had dawned. The birds, admiring themselves more than usual, hummed cheerfully; the leaves rustled calmly; and the roosters launched rousing cock-a-doodle-doos. Chickens clucked, and were followed by their chirping young. Ducks who looked like important personages never in a hurry tacked about like ships without a rudder. A peacock was all puffed out with his own importance and turned round himself. And there were birds in the sky, and birds in the flowering trees...

from *Spider's Hump*

Tale of Sorrel

Jah Folk began by asking the question, "what is your favourite drink after water, to quench thirst on the hottest of days?" Some said coconut water, others said ginger beer, some said sorrel. And with the mention of the latter, he told us in verse - with us chanting Anansi - the story of the coming of sorrel drink.

He goes strolling along,
Anansi.
He sees some red stalks,
Anansi.
Doesn't know what they are,
Anansi.
Still he picks a few,
Anansi.
Takes them to market,
Anansi.
A misunderstanding,
Anansi.
Chased by a vendor,
Anansi.
Throws away the stalks,
Anansi.
In a pot of hot water,
Anansi.
People love the colour,
Anansi.
And the aroma,
Anansi.
He suggests cinnamon,
Anansi.
Sprinkling of ginger,
Anansi.
He is then credited,
Anansi.
Invention of sorrel drink,
Anansi.

After conclusion, there began a discussion, of what Tommy and I called, Anansi drink. Of cinnamon addition and ginger. How much orange peel? Which kind of berries? Quantity of sugar and maybe input from cloves. Jah Folk sat back and smiled, as those stationary and those passing by, spoke of the hibiscus elixir.



from *Presence Africaine*



from [Amazon.com](#)

A rather unusual and massive silk-cotton tree grew in this field; a big, thorny silk cotton tree that must have been the ancestor of all silk cotton trees, for it was so very crooked and ungainly, so twisted and corkscrew like. Frightful it was, something hideous in the way of trees. The birds never landed on this field. Even the sun glided on by, while the breeze skirted it altogether. One wonders how God, who was always has such an accurate eye, could let loose from his hands such a monster. People would look at the moon, the stars, and the ocean; they would listen to the humming of the wind and the chattering of the breeze; they would admire the graceful flight of the birds and the butterflies; and then, turning their heads toward the the silk cotton tree, would say to themselves: "Come on now, really: even God could have done better than this: All those marvels to look at, and over there, that monster of a silk cotton tree!"

"I put all the ugliness of the world into that silk cotton tree, so that my creatures would be beautiful and prefect. Now, one talks about anything but that twisted and misshapen, one armed silk cotton tree that looks like a corkscrew. The sun talks about it; the moon talks about it; man talks about it; even the breeze and the wind, the stars, the ebb and flow of the tide..."

from *Spider's Ox*

There they were in the village of the squirrel, who recounted his entire adventure to his family, stressing in particular the innate goodness and generosity of Kacou Ananze.

To receive him, they killed more than a thousand beef. As for the goats, chickens, guinea cocks, sheep and ducks, one no longer counted them. There was no time for it. Dishes were everywhere, some here, some there, so many in fact that one no longer knew where to put them. And yet they kept coming. Ananze ate, and ate still more. He would have wished to have a more voluminous stomach, and to fill it with all those succulent dishes that kept coming all the time. But he had only a spider's stomach.

Young girls came to sing for him, young boys to dance. He forgot his own village, the famine, and the traps. For the very first time, he congratulated himself on having been so kind. He whispered to himself: "Oh how nice it is to do good! If I had killed the squirrel, would I have had all this?" And he ate and ate. His stomach was stretched to bursting. He ate anyhow. Whenever he thought of the severe and persistent famine that had settled on the hillsides and mountains, in the valleys, the bush and the villages, he would stuff himself until it hurt. He ate, happy to eat, happy to take his revenge on the famine.

from *Spider and the Tortoise*



from *Wikipedia*

Mahogany



from *Tree Factor*

But one evening, after dinner, as the people were chatting around the fire, the women on one side, the children on the other, a stranger arrived and gave them the news: Mother Iguana had just died.

Mother Iguana was the best of mothers. And her son cried and cried. He threw himself down over there and over here; he rolled around in the dust, thrashed the earth with his claws, and again with his nails, and beat his head against a wall. And he became dirty, so very dirty, that poor little Iguana who has just lost his mother.

from *Mother Iguana's Funeral*

One day, as the sun stood directly overhead, casting shadows at the feet of the trees and animals, Kacou Ananze, tired from hunting, sat down at the base of a high mountain. He drifted off to sleep. While dozing, he seemed to sense something approaching... He opened his eyes, and what do you think he saw? A genie with a nose as big as that, yes as big as that, as big as a hundred silk cotton trees all tied together, and as long, even longer, than ten mahogany trees placed end to end. And the monster breathed! It seemed that all the world's air rushed in and out of that unbelievable nose, for it made such a frightful noise! It was terrifying! It sounded like a crash, like thunder. Mountains were lifted off the ground, hills were thrown afar. Trees flew off, after being torn from their roots, and animals fell dead when the genie's breath would merely graze them.

from *The Pigs' Snout*

The waters flowed by. Along the banks and in among the mangrove trees, they told a thousand stories to the immovable land, a land that would never travel to another region, but one that would always be crouching there, over the water, admiring her mop of hair composed of trees and weeds that were crawling with all the lice in the world, swarming with every vermin in creation. Stirring loose thousands of twigs along the banks, the waters recounting their adventures to an attentive land, a land fascinated by the exciting news that the indiscreet and forever-gossiping waters had picked up while listening to the conversation between the hunter and the boa just so they could repeat it farther on, as they made their long journey.

from *The Hunter and the Boa*

What a sight! Butterflies fluttered about; they would perch on one leaf, brush against another, fly up, then down, take a nose dive, disappear, then reappear. Some were white, others yellow, and still others speckled. Two, four, several of them gadded about in this way. Like vagabonds, they sang the joys of indolence, of whimsy, fickleness, and sheer laziness. They flirted about while mocking the burning sun who, most certainly feeling ashamed, had just hidden behind a mountain of clouds to take time "for some serious thinking," as people might say, before coming back out to cast its rays even more forcefully. But the gallant sun was not ashamed; it was laughing! It ignored the butterflies persistent mocking.

from *The Yam Field*

Tale of Plantain

I am Plantain, from the genus *Musa*, like my cousin banana.

Come laugh with me, through one of the funniest of the Anansi stories, known as Anansesem, in the language of the Ashanti, who gave us this legendary arachnid; king of the spiders, monarch of the tricksters. Come laugh with me, of how, after a gift of me from Brother Rat, he ends up with more of me on his plate, than on those of his wife and children! Master of role play, he plays the forlorn one. His family, touched, each give him half of their slice, so he ends up with a plate, fuller than all! I know I look good in my yellow succulence, but imagine the provider, taking food from the plate of his children!

So the story begins in a time when hunger is approaching the family, so Aso his wife, she who carries the attribute of patience, like a Patron of the Long Time Sufferer, sends him on a mission to find either food or work. After some trudging, he rests and falls asleep. Waking, embarrassed, he encounters Brother Rat homeward bound; a calabash of plantain atop his head. The consummate actor, playing the role of one abandoned by the world, Brother Rat gives in to the barrage of requests from the sad supplicant; giving him four slices, although Ananse had asked for five, one for each member of the family, including him. Once at home around the dinner table, he plays the aforementioned forlorn card, gaining more than all!

They laugh with me, in various parts of West Africa and the Caribbean; from Jamaica south to Surinam.

From *The Papine Tales*



from *The Flag Shop*

Ivory Coast

Truly now! God sure comes up with some funny ideas now and then! Just imagine wanting a sample of everything that's eaten on earth? Can anyone possibly count everything that's eaten on earth? When you want to give your daughter away in marriage, you just do it, without testing people. I had to buy my way to God's youngest daughter. And today he's seeking a husband for his oldest daughter. He doesn't demand any dowry whatsoever; but he will only bestow the hand of this young girl on whoever succeeds, in a maximum of thirty days, to bring him a sample of everything that's eaten on earth. In the beginning, we all thought that the heralds were playing some kind of a joke; but when those same heralds kept repeating the proposition for four days straight, we had to accept it as real. Yes, there was no doubt about it. The proposition called for: A SAMPLE OF EVRYTHING THAT'S EATEN ON EARTH. This was a difficult test, to be sure, but who wouldn't want to be God's son-in law?

from *The Dowry*

Spider-Son ruled the happy nation for years and years. There was always an air of festivity about. The reputation of this good and powerful king had travelled throughout the world. The wind and the swallows sang praises at every moment during their long excursions; the geese and herons that hopped about on the banks of the golden rivers sang only of his wisdom. The monkeys, as they leaped from tree top to tree top, were careful not to disturb the air that the king would soon be breathing. And night and day the flowers would change their dress, for they no longer knew precisely what they should wear in order to keep the attention of their powerful master. Even the heavens draped themselves in their most pleasant and enchanting colors, in exquisitely dappled tones and captivating hues. And the twinkling stars were like magic in the sky.

from *Spider and His Son*

The stream just glides along like a vagabond; she turns round on herself, snuggles up against a tree lying across her bed, enters a small cave to learn a new song, and plays quietly in among all the shadows and light spots with the shellfish, the butterflies, the dragonflies, and the insects. She serves as a mirror for all trees, liana vines, and birds, for the sun and the moon too, and also the stars, and the bright blue sky. She deposits a water lily over here; over there she takes away some duckweed...She carries with her the laughter of young girls, the songs of washerwomen, and the whisperings of bamboo trees and reeds. And she never brings tears to the eyes of any society or family. She knows men too well to create new worries for them. After all, doesn't everyone come by each day to share a few thoughts with her, to reveal a little of what they are suffering? And murmuring quietly, she offers fresh, cool water.

from *The Man Who Wanted To Be King*

Laughing With Anansi

And the old man said to Death,
"Go easy dark angel,
Don't run to me.
Take your time:
I beg you to go slow.
Just a little longer,
Before I go to Asamando.

One more time is all I ask,
With the little ones and the spider.

My grandchildren are coming next week.
After rice and peanut stew,
They'll expect fireside enchantment.
For the last time,
Let me see their faces glow.
Just a little longer,
Before I go to Asamando.

Let us have one more evening,
Laughing with Anansi.

Chanting of Bernard Dadie

Time to pray, fly away,
Folklore bless me today,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

La du du deh,
Weh yeh la la,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

A mother, or elder,
Brings sunset laughter,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

La du du deh,
Weh yeh la la,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

Ashanti, Anansi,
By Lake Bosomtwi,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

La du du deh,
Weh yeh la la,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

Tale teller, ancestor,
Moonlight and the fire,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

La du du deh,
Weh yeh la la,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

Firefly, lullaby,
Stories of you and I,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

La du du deh,
Weh yeh la la,
Chanting of Bernard Dadie.

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