

Anansi's Fishing Expedition A Tale from Ghana

I N the country of Ashanti, not far from the edge of the great West African forest, there was a man named Anansi,[^] who was known to all the people for miles around. Anansi was not a great hunter, or a great worker, or a great warrior. His specialty was being clever. He liked to outwit people. He liked to live well, and to have other people do things for him. But because all the people of the country knew about Anansi and had had trouble with him, he had to keep thinking of new ways to get something for nothing.

One day Anansi was sitting in the village when a man named Osansa came along.

'I have an idea,' Anansi said. 'Why don't we go and set fish traps together? Then we shall sell the fish and be quite rich.'

But Osansa knew Anansi's reputation very well, and so he said :

'No, I have as much food as I can eat or sell. I am rich enough. Why don't you set your fish traps by yourself?'

'Ha ! Fish alone? Then I'd have to do all the work !' Anansi said. 'What I need is a fool for a partner.'

Osansa went away, and after a while another man named Anene came along.

'I have an idea,' Anansi said. 'Why don't the two of us go and set fish traps together? Then we shall sell the fish and be quite rich.'

Anene knew Anansi very well too, but he seemed to listen thoughtfully.

'That sounds like a fine idea,' he said. 'Two people can catch more fish than one. Yes, I'll do it.'

The news went rapidly around the village that Anansi and Anene were going on a fishing expedition together. Osansa met Anene in the market and said :

'We hear you are going to trap fish with Anansi. Don't you know he is trying to make a fool of you? He has told every one that he needs a fool to go fishing with him. He wants someone to set the fish traps and do all the work, while he gets all the money for the fish.'

'Don't worry, friend Osansa, I won't be Anansi's fool,' Anene said.

Early the next morning Anansi and Anene went into the woods to cut palm branches to make their fish traps.

Anansi was busy thinking how he could make Anene do most of the work. But when they came to the place where the palm trees grew, Anene said to Anansi :

'Give me the knife, Anansi. I shall cut the branches for the traps. We are partners. We share everything. My part of the work will be to cut branches, your part of the work will be to get tired for me.'

'Just a minute, let me think,' Anansi said. 'Why should I be the one to get tired?'

'Well, when there's work to be done someone must get tired,' Anene said. 'That's the way it is. So if I cut the branches, the least you can do is to get tired for me.'

'Hah, you take me for a fool?' Anansi said. 'Give me the knife. I shall cut the branches and you get tired for me !'

So Anansi took the knife and began cutting the branches from the trees. Every time he chopped, Anene grunted. Anene sat down in the shade and groaned from weariness, while Anansi chopped and hacked and sweated. Finally the wood for the fish traps was cut. Anansi tied it up into a big bundle. Anene got up from the ground, holding his back and moaning.

'Anansi, let me carry the bundle of wood now^ and you can get tired for me/ Anene said.

'Oh, no, my friend Anene,' Anansi said, 'I am not that simple-minded. I'll carry the wood myself, and you can take the weariness

for me.'

So he hoisted the bundle to the top of his head and the two of them started back to the village. Anene groaned all the way.

'Oh, oh !' he moaned. 'Take it easy, Anansi ! Oh, oh !'

When they came to the village Anene said :

'Let me make the fish traps, Anansi, and you just sit down and get tired for me.'

'Oh, no,' Anansi said. 'You just keep on as you are.' And he made the fish traps while Anene lay on his back in the shade with his eyes closed, moaning and groaning.

And while he was making the traps, working in the heat with perspiration running down his face and chest, Anansi looked at Anene lying there taking all his weariness and sore muscles for him, and he shook his head and clucked his tongue.

'Anene thinks he is intelligent,' he said to himself. 'Yet look at him moaning and groaning there, practically dying from weariness !'

When the fish traps were done Anene climbed to his feet and said, 'Anansi, my friend, now let me carry the fish traps to the water, and you can get tired for me.'

'Oh, no,' Anansi said. 'You just come along and do your share. I'll do the carrying, you do the getting tired.'

So they went down to the water, Anansi carrying and Anene moaning. When they arrived, Anene said to Anansi :

'Now wait a minute, Anansi, we ought to think things over here. There are sharks in this water. Someone is apt to get hurt. So let me go in and set the traps, and should a shark bite me, then you can die for me.'

'Wah!' Anansi howled. 'Listen to that! What do you take me for? I'll go in the water and set the traps myself, and if I am bitten, then you can die for me!' So he took the fish traps out into the

water and set them and then the two of them went back to the village.

The next morning when they went down to inspect the traps they found just four fish. Anene spoke first.

'Anansi, there are only four fish here. You take them. To-morrow there will probably be more, and then I'll take my turn.'

'Now, what do you take me for?' Anansi said indignantly. 'Do you think I am simple-minded? Oh, no, Anene^ you take the four fish and I'll take my turn to-morrow.'

So Anene took the four fish and carried them to town and sold them.

Next day when they came down to the fish traps, Anene said :

'Look, there are only eight fish here. I'm glad it's your turn, because to-morrow there doubtless will be more.'

'Just a minute,' Anansi said. 'You want me to take to-day's fish so that to-morrow you get a bigger catch? Oh, no, these are all yours, partner; to-morrow I'll take my share.'

So Anene took the eight fish and carried them to town and sold them.

Next day when they came to look in the traps they found sixteen fish.

'Anansi,' Anene said, 'take the sixteen fish. Little ones, too. I'll take my turn to-morrow.'

'Of course you'll take your turn to-morrow^ it's my turn to-day,' Anansi said. He stopped to think. 'Well, now, you are trying to make a fool out of me again ! You want me to take these sixteen miserable little fish so that you can get the big catch to-morrow, don't you? Well, it's a good thing I'm alert! You take the sixteen to-day and I'll take the big catch to-morrow ! '

So Anene carried the sixteen fish to the market and sold them.

Next day they came to the traps and took the fish out. But by this time the traps had rotted in the water.

'Well, it's certainly your turn to-day,' Anene said. 'And I'm very glad of that. Look, the fish traps are rotten and worn out. We can't use them any more. I'll tell you what — ^you take the fish to town and sell them, and I'll take the rotten fish traps and sell them. The fish traps will bring an excellent price. What a wonderful idea !'

'Hm,' Anansi said. 'Just a moment, don't be in such a hurry. I'll take the fish traps and sell them myself. If there's such a good price to be had, why shouldn't I get it instead of you? Oh^ no, you take the fish^ my friend.'

Anansi hoisted the rotten fish traps up on his head and started off for town. Anene followed him, carrying the fish. When they arrived in the town Anene sold his fish in the market, while Anansi walked back and forth singing loudly :

'I am selling rotten fish traps ! I am selling wonderful rotten fish traps !'

But no one wanted rotten fish traps, and the townspeople were angry that Anansi thought they were so stupid they would buy them. All day long Anansi wandered through the town singing :

'Get your rotten fish traps here ! I am selling wonderful rotten fish traps !'

Finally the head man of the town heard about the affair. He, too, became very angry, and he sent messengers for Anansi. When they brought Anansi to him he asked indignantly :

'What do you think you are doing, anyway? What kind of non-sense is this you are trying to put over the people of the town?'

'I'm selling rotten fish traps/ Anansi said, 'very excellent rotten fish traps.'

'Now what do you take us for?' the chief of the town said. 'Do you think we are ignorant people? Your friend Anene came and sold good fish, which the people want, but you come trying to sell something that isn't good for anything and just smell the town up

with your rotten fish traps. It's an outrage. You insult us.'

The head man turned to the townspeople who stood near by, listening.

'Take him away and whip him,' he said.

The men took Anansi out to the town gate and beat him with sticks. Anansi shouted and yelled and made a great noise. When at last they turned him loose, Anene said to him :

'Anansi, this ought to be a lesson to you. You wanted a fool to go fishing with you, but you didn't have to look so hard to find one. You were a fool yourself.'

Anansi nodded his head.

'Yes,' he said thoughtfully, rubbing his back and his legs where they had beaten him. And he looked reproachfully at Anene. 'But what kind of partner are you? At least you could have taken the pain while I took the beating.'