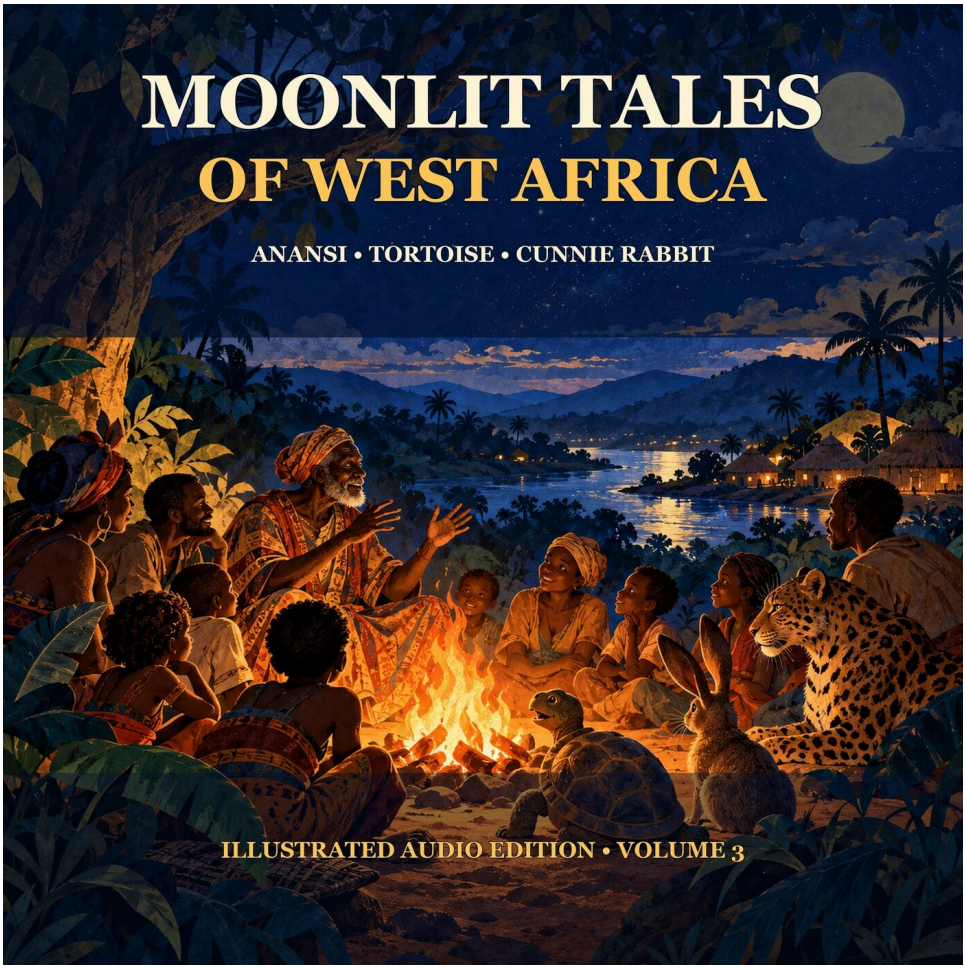



# Moonlit Tales of West Africa

## Anansi, Tortoise, Cunnie Rabbit, and Stories of Wonder

Illustrated Audio Edition — Volume 3

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# When the Night Has Come

*Sierra Leone (Temne/Krio tradition) — Cunnie Rabbit, Mr. Spider and the Other Beef (1903)*



0:00 / 0:00

The African day was lingering for a brief moment in a tropical twilight, as if reluctant to give over a world of natural beauty to the impenetrable darkness of a moonless, forest night. The mud huts of the native village, with their conical, palm-thatched roofs, showed in the fading twilight like great shocks of harvested grain in a little field fenced in by a high hedge of trees. Narrow foot-paths—the only suggestion of streets—wound

irregularly through the village, and in these, children, innocently nude, were romping, and chasing each other with all the noisy delight of that care-free age. Men and women, led by their inclination to gossip, or by an instinctive shrinking from the gathering darkness, were unconsciously drifting into groups about fires that had been kindled here and there in the irregular open spaces. Other light the village had none, and the little fires seemed only to exaggerate the thick curtain of gloom that was now drawing around the place. The countless invisible and mysterious forces that control the destiny of the unfortunate black man, seemed to be taking on bodily shapes, and to be stealing forth under cover of the night to work their spells through forest and earth and air. Out of the stilly darkness came myriad voices of the night—familiar ones from within the village, the explosive chant and monotonous beat of the drum that accompanied a weird tribal dance, or the shouts of irrepressible childhood still at play, or more often the hum of conversation that told of the sway of gossip, or the fascination of myth and story. Anon came the awesome, half-terrifying voices from the outer night—the uncanny insect chorus, or the distant call of wild beasts, speaking to one another a language that seemed full of meaning, but which the human ear had lost the power to understand.

To-night the voices possessed a peculiar fascination for the group gathered around Sobah's fire. Coarse banter and desultory gossip had ceased to interest; the spirit of the night was upon them, and the voices from the darkness seemed to address them personally, and to assert the kinship of all creatures. It scarcely needed the accumulated traditions of untold generations to convince these listeners that their ancestors had once possessed the ability to comprehend their fellow-creatures, and so had dwelt on terms of equality and friendship with them. As it was, Sobah and his friends did not trouble themselves about beliefs, but in imagination

passed easily and naturally into that realm where all creatures spoke a common language, and possessed common needs and attributes.

For some time Sobah had been sitting in silence, wholly absorbed in his own mental processes. Suddenly an inspiration seemed to stir him. He tossed back his head, his eyes began to sparkle, and his face to glow with the anticipated delight of the story that had come to him from the depths of his capacious memory. These significant preliminaries were quickly noted. "He duh get story," was the warning exclamation passed around the group. Every eye was at once riveted upon Sobah's face, and every countenance took on a look of eager expectancy.

Konah, a bright-eyed, ebony-hued beauty of thirteen years, who all her life had seemed to possess the supernatural power of being present unnoted whenever anything new or marvellous was to be seen or heard, came up just at this moment, led by unerring instinct, and settled down unobserved in the shadow, ready to absorb every word.

Casting a dignified glance around the company, to assure himself that all were properly attentive, Sobah proceeded to relate the wonderful exploits of Mr. Spider, in meeting the requirements of his prospective mother-in-law.

MR. SPIDER WINS A WIFE

"One ooman get girl pickin (pickaninny). Dis girl done do fo' married, but no man no deh (there) wey (who) able fo' married um, because de mammy no 'gree. Well, Spider come, he say he go married de girl, en de mammy answer um, say:



"'Yo' mus' fus' do dis t'ree t'ing; bring Lion teet' wey fresh wid blood 'pon um, en sass-wood palm-wine, en bowman'" (boa-constrictor).

Here the story was interrupted by a chorus of "Eh! eh's!" and other exclamations of wonder at the impossibility of each of the three conditions imposed.

"Lion 'trong too much," protested Dogbah, who was sadly wanting in the imaginative quality, and demanded hard, prosaic fact, "Spider no able fo' get heen teet' fresh wid blood 'pon um."

Gondomah, who was of a rather silent and thoughtful turn, said meditatively, as if speaking to himself:

"Palm-tree no get banana, sass-wood no get palm-wine." It was his way of asserting the impossibility of securing palm-wine from the poisonous sass-

wood.

"Spider leelee (little) too much fo' bring big, big bowman," was the verdict of Oleemah, and yet his tone contradicted his words.

Sobah silenced the interruptions with the pertinent question: "Aintee Spider pass all fo' cunnie? He able fo' do um." Then he proceeded:



"Spider say he go try fo' all dem t'ing fo' get de girl. He go inside one big forest wey (where) all de beef (animals) duh (do) pass. He make leelee fiah by de road. De part wey de smoke duh go he make good bench, so de beef kin sit down. He say: Make dem come wa'm fiah,[1] de cole too much, because nar (it is) rainy season. He say make dem no come togedder, make dem come one one. He kare (carried) one hammer, heaby one, wey he fo' hole wid two han'. He hide um. Well, den beef all duh come. De' one he no wan' he no hit um, he jus' duh coax, make dem go get de big beef fo' come. Well, w'en den beef all done come, w'en dey duh wa'm fiah, dey go call Lion fo' say: 'Eh! Spider one good man, dis make he duh make good fiah fo' we en we cumpin (companions).'

[1] Wa'm fiah, _i.e._ warm themselves by the fire.

"Well, one day Lion come, en Spider he make de smoke good fashion; put plenty leaf deh. W'en Lion come he say:

"'Fren', I sorry fo' dah cole wey ketch yo'. Kahbo (welcome)! All day I duh make good fiah fo' yo'.'

"Well, he go wipe de bench good fashion, he say, make Lion sit down fo' wa'm fiah. De Lion sit down. Spider take mo' leaf, raw one, fo' make smoke come out _plenty_. Dis yeah big smoke go 'pon Lion; he shut he yi, he duh open he teet', he duh wa'm hese'f; he no know say Spider duh watch um fo' hit um wid hammer 'pon heen teet'. Spider take de hammer soffle (softly), he hit Lion _one_ tem, no mo', but dah hit wey he _hit_ um! Lion he pull one big, big holler tay (until) all de groun' duh shake. He spit heen teet' out 'pon de groun', he run!"

Sobah had been telling his story with voice, countenance, hands and suggestive motions of his whole body, and as the climax approached, his impressiveness increased. The hearers were shaking with suppressed mirth, and when they saw the result of Spider's cunning, and Lion beating an ignominious retreat, leaving his teeth behind him, they could restrain the inevitable outburst of laughter no longer. Some of the more excitable threw themselves upon the ground in an ecstasy of delight. Konah had become so identified with her favorite, Mr. Spider, and was so pleased with his success, that she forgot her own art of cunning, and crept boldly out of the shadow.

Sobah chuckled contentedly, while the outburst was expending itself, then went on.



"Spider hese'f run, he mean say de Lion go grip um. W'en he see Lion no duh follow, he turn back, he take de teet', he kare um go to de ooman, he say:

"'Look me, I done bring dah raw lion teet' wid de blood.'"

"De ooman say: 'All ret, but he lef' mo' t'ing fo' do. Go bring dah sass-wood palm-wine.'

"Spider come out, he take heen ax, he sharp um, "Wahtah, wootah! wahtah, wootah!"[2] He fine one sass-wood 'tick (tree), he klim 'pon um, he dig hole, he come down. He go buy country-pot, big pot, he tie big rope 'pon um, make um 'trong; ef he no 'trong bimeby de pot go fa' down, he broke, because palm-wine go full um. W'en he done hang um he no sleep all net, he go 'roun' to den people all, he tief (steals) plenty palm-wine, he trow um 'way (empties it) inside de pot wey hang to dah dry sass-wood

'tick, en he full dis pot wid de people yown palm-wine[3] sotay he t'row 'way' nah groun'. He duh rub palm-wine inside de hole, en 'pon de 'tick all. He tell one man say:

"'Make yo' follow me, look ef de palm-wine run.'"

[2] These words represent the sound made by sharpening the axe.

[3] Sotáy he trow 'way nah groun', _i.e._ until it overflows upon the ground.



[Illustration: "Spider take the hammer soffle."

[_See p. 43, line 3._] ]

This bit of shrewdness on the part of Mr. Spider, Sobah unfolded with intensest appreciation in tone and gesture, and was rewarded at this point

with grunts of satisfaction and approval from the listeners, and with exclamations of unbounded admiration for the clever little hero who could both steal and deceive without detection. As soon as the silence told him they were ready for more, he proceeded.

"W'en dey go, dey meet de pot full. Spider tell heen cumpin fo' take um down, en dey two dey tote um sotay (until) dey reach de ole ooman. Spider pin (place) um down 'pon de groun', he say:

"'Mammy, look dah sass-wood palm-wine!'

"De ooman ax de man: 'Nar true?'

"He say: 'Yes, nar me see um wid me yown yi.'



"Well de ooman say:

"'Odder t'ing lef' yet fo' do befo' I gie yo' me pickin. Go bring live Bowman.'

"Spider go nah puttah-puttah,[4] he look sotay (until) he jus' meet Bowman, he say:

"'Fren', how do?'

[4] Puttah-puttah, _i.e._ black mud deposited upon the banks of rivers or pools.

"Bowman answer um: 'Tankee!'

"Spider kare one long 'tick, big one, he say:



"'One day me bin say Bowman long pass dis 'tick, but me cumpin done deny, dey say: "No, he no kin pass um fo' long." Make yo' lie down 'pon de 'tick fo' try ef yo' pass de 'tick fo' long, or de 'tick pass yo'.'