

# **ANANSE IN THE LAND OF IDIOTS – THE COMPLETE PLAY BY YAW ASARE (FOR LEARNING PURPOSES ONLY)**

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## **ABOUT THE PLAY**

This is an experience into the intriguing world of Ananse, Kweku Ananse ... Odomankoma's Head – Weaver... Fellow –of- The – Cult – of Cosmic Linguist..... Supreme Strategist!

*Ananse in the Land of Idiots* tells the story – through the challenging African multi-generic technique of ‘Total Theatre’ – of how Ananse, a shrewd, cunning, tactful, versatile, intelligent and resolute character, employs his ‘God –given latent talent ‘to cope with the challenges of a hostile world.

In his encounter with the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira – “Land of Idoits”, Ananse tactfully blends his skills to persuade, coax, flatter, ridicule, entrap, court, insult, blackmail, coerce and lure King Dosey and his credulous citizenry to realize his personal dreams as he finds himself suddenly lifted from a gloomy position of one condemned (for defiling a sacred ritual process) into a veritable Prince, complete with a royal bride, a whole chiefdom, power and wealth!

What is the cost of Ananse’s triumph to the destiny of his host, King Dosey and his subjects of Dim–Nyim–Lira? Why were they caught in the cunning web of Ananse, despite the caution from the gods?

The play tries to reveal the basic causes of alien domination of all forms: insatiable lust, egoistic materialism, greed, lack of committed faith, loyalty and eternal vigilance of the part of the victims. Have these weakness not been the causes of the social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual enslavement of African societies?

The play is meant above all, to sensitize African and other exploited people of the world on the inherent lusts, perversions and attitudes which have facilitated the processes of their entanglement, dislocation and dispossession. For are we all not bigger idiots than Odudu, if we fail to perceive and be on our guard against the subtle deceptions, diversions, disguises and thefts that have ended in the depletion of our sacred heritage?

For answers, follow Ananse to the Land of Idiots but, mind you, 'only with your eyes, not your .... Okro mouths!

Yaw Asare

Legon , July, 1993

### **Playwright's Dedication**

To all the bootlickers of the Land!

And also

**FOR MY CHILDREN SO THEY ARE WARY OF DECEIT.**

### **CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY**

<b>KWEKU ANANSE</b>	.....	Above 40 years old
<b>WOMAN IN THE CROWD</b>	.....	Aged 30 years
<b>KING DOSEY</b>	.....	Abi of Dim- Nyim – Lira
<b>QUEEN FAYASEY</b>	.....	His wife
<b>PRINCESS SODZIISA</b>	.....	Their daughter, about 25 years
<b>ELDER ( OLD ONE)</b>	.....	Over 70 years
<b>PRIESTESS</b>	.....	About 45 years
<b>AKPALA</b>	.....	A royal guard

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<b>GUARDS</b>	..... ...	
<b>MBASILA</b>	..... ...	War captain and head of the royal archers
<b>POOTAGYIRI</b>	..... ...	Prince of about 40 years
<b>ODUDU</b>	..... ...	Idiot of Dim-Nyim- Lira
<b>MAIDENS</b>	..... ...	Peers of Sodziisa also dancers
<b>WOMEN</b>	..... ...	Acolytes of priestess
<b>MALE DRUMMERS</b>	..... ...	Of king's palace
<b>YOUNG MALES</b>	..... ...	Of the warrior cult
<b>ROYAL RETAINERS</b>	..... ...	

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## 1ST MOVEMENT

*The stage has a composite set. At up Right is a raised platform on which there are regal seats for the KING and the QUEEN. Flanking these are lower seats for the ELDER and the PRIESTESS. A large door behind this platform leads to the main palace chambers. Off on up left are a series of erect tree stems diagonally positioned, scanty foliage.*

*Further down from left to down left are fringes of low bushes. This section represents the forest where off-town rituals take place and ANANSE's secret craft shop surrounded by low grass. The entire area from Centre Stage to the Apron, between the palace and the bush constitutes a neutral playing area, where rituals and dances take place. The left side represents the general approaches to the town while the right side is the forecourt and open arena of the settlement. Various doors lead off from Right, Down Right and Down Left. The pit is lit, representing the path between the settlement proper and the forest.*

*ANANSE picked by a spotlight rises from his seat in the centre of the auditorium. He is clad in a grey smock and speaks in a nasal tone.*

## **ANANSE**

Well, ladies and gentlemen,... I suppose we are all here to watch this play.... "Ananse in the Land of Idiots" Hmmmmmm! That's quite a title, isn't it? "A land of idiots" indeed! Anyway, let's not worry about that – it is the discretion of the playwright. Artistic license, the pundits call it! Anyway folks, I think I should first introduce myself and define my role here, tonight, so it wouldn't seem I'm hoisting myself on such an august gathering

*(Whispering, looking round enquiringly, laugh disdainfully).*

Wonder if anybody here can guess my identity! No? What short memories you folks have out here, or shall we say you've all purged yourselves of all knowledge of myth.... Of legend ..... of history, of folklore? That should be sad indeed! Now, let's come back to me. I must not hold up this play nor keep you waiting, must I

*(Stepping out onto stage facing audience, posing importantly*

I ..... am..... Kweku Ananse..... Oh yes ..... Kweku Ananse himself? Kweku Ananse.... Odomankoma's Head-weaver. Master Craftsman in the Guild of Divine Craftsmen; Legend of Tailless Tales;

One who manipulates creation from the fringes of a vibrant web; Hunter Extraordinary; Fellow of the Cult of Cosmic Linguists; Supreme Strategist; Odomankoma's Mystery Messenger who flies the skies without wings and crosses rivers without a boat. (*out of breath panting*) Hau! That was surely a mouthful of appellations! You couldn't have forgotten me so easily? (*feigns anger*) That is why I must go. Yes! Leave this world ..... your world of gross pretensions and ingratitude. You have turned my hard-won fame into titles of notoriety "Ananse-the-Tickling-Trickster" "Ananse the Cunning Crook" you call me. What praise names to give a hero! Such terrible appellations! And.....

### **WOMAN IN THE CROWD**

(*Dressed in an ordinary evening dress*)

Excuse me a moment, Agya Ananse. What did you do to deserve such terrible appellations as you call them? Surely there must be some trait in your nature and character that may have earned you such names! Everybody here, even the smallest kid knows you .... well ... your sly and deceitful ways. We hear them time and time again in your numerous tales. Ananse Tales (*to audience*) or is it not so, ladies and gentlemen?

(*Sits down*)

## **ANANSE**

You see? What did I say? Your world misunderstands me! No one accords me my proper place as the prime custodian of ethical, moral and philosophical norms. You say my methods are crude and sly. Hmm! Now tell me; what is wrong with a man employing his God-given latent talents to cope with the challenges of hostile world? You see, you all misjudge me, I say! Isn't it sad that of all your scholars and critics, only one recorder of folk- history... now what's her name ... aha... Ewura Efua Sutherland – I puff my pipe to that thoughtful daughter of the land.... Isn't it sad that she is the only one who sympathetically acknowledges my logic of existential imperatives in her chronicle of the marriage of my daughter Anansewaa .... A marriage which you all refer to as scandalous? [pause]. Anyway, I am not here for another trial. Your verdict has always been the same. I know I've lost credibility here. Which is as it should be, for the elders say that water that stays too long in a pot, stinks. So now I go.... My next stop?

*(Cups his mouth in intimate confidentiality)*

DIM-NYIM LIRA! “The Land of Idiots”. Again it is said that if at sundown able-bodied customers shun your rotten mushrooms at the centre of the market, carry them to the fringes; the handicapped would buy! So long, then ladies, gentleman and children. I leave behind all I have. I shall take nothing except this small bundle and these three small gourds. This

one contains honey; this, some hard-sticking tree –gum and this last one (*shows it perforated underside*) holes... Oh... yes.. empty holes! I mean to travel light, you know. You may follow me if you wish.... But only with your eyes, not your itchy bodies and okro- mouths!

*ANANSE scampers off back stages, having removed his cloth and dumping it on his seat. He is now wearing a grey smock.*

*Ritual music sounds. The PRIESTESS clad in raffia and wielding a white flywhisk leads a procession of seven MAIDENS simply dressed in white loin-cloths and short, sleeveless white blouses. The leading maiden carries an earthen bowl heaped conically with a meal of mashed-yam-in-oil. Around the edge of the bowl, evenly surrounding the yellowish meal are six boiled and unshelled eggs. A seventh egg is stuck at the apex of the conical heap. Following at the tail are three female singers / acolytes, with a long piece of white cloth tied around the bust of each of them. The middle acolyte is holding a large calabash of water. Coming behind the singers are four male drummers, bare – chested and wearing loose pants.*

*The procession enters through “path” Down Right. On reaching the earthen mound Down Left, the priestess collects the earthen bowl and sets it atop the mound. The singers and drummers position themselves diagonally at the far side Left, behind the mound while the MAIDENS arrange themselves in a horse-shoe, squatting on either side of the*

*mound, facing front. The music intensifies as PRIESTESS rocks in frenzied movements, hopping and leaping over and around the mound. The drums stop suddenly and PRIESTESS engages in a suppliant chant whose refrain is picked by MAIDENS and SINGERS. PRIESTESS, picks the top-most egg and hands it to the leading maiden, who holds it with both hands above her head. PRIESTESS mutters prayers and circles the maiden's head with her flywhisk before replacing the egg. The process is repeated for each maiden. The music increases in intensity and tempo as MAIDENS rise and dance round the mound. The music stops as they fall to the ground, shaking in spasms of possession. PRIESTESS dips her flywhisk into the calabash held by one of the acolytes and sprinkles it over MAIDENS as they rise one after the other. The procession exits Down right with the PRIESTESS at the rear, performing a weird dance, her back to the mound. As they exit, ANANSE, still clad in his smock, holding his bundle under his armpit and the three gourds strapped around his waist, enters through door left, imitate the dance of the receding PRIESTESS as he approaches the ritual area.*

ANANSE

*(Stops and points amusedly at the PRIESTESS exit and bursts into laughter)*

Ha! What an idiotic dance! No wonder .... what else can one expect in this land of .... Hey, but wait a minute. Did you see how those pretty maidens danced? Firm contour bodies writhing.... putting one's mind into a void of an orgasmic dream! Ha! And that leading maiden.... Goodness.... I nearly ran out of that bush to grab her! What a way to be introduced to a new culture! (Sniffing) Now.. there ought to be some food here... yes... I smell food. There!

*(Walks over to mound and examines bowl of mashed yam and eggs)*

Tweduampong Kwame! Mashed yam... a real meal of mashed- yam –in-oil.... Hey! And with eggs too! What a feast for the gods! (*holds up his hand in mock libation gesture*) Whatever gods you are ..... that have been offered this sumptuous meal.... wherever you are .... Spare Kweku Ananse a bite. You gods know how long my journey has been .... Without a morsel of food for days. Allow me a bite of your sacrifice... no more.

*(removes food from mound, brings it Down Centre and places it in front of him)*

But ... suppose it is a feast meant to ensnare.... Poison some monster. (*sniffs at food*) No! poisoned food can't smell so good! Or.... Perhaps the gods have foretold my arrival and this is my welcome.... Oh yes!

This is my welcome feast, for sure, I should have guessed that long before.

*(He starts eating the mashed yam. After two mouthfuls he picks the topmost egg and takes a bite. Upon his second bite a noise in the nearby bush Down Left startles him. He turns to see AKPALA whose bow and arrow are aimed at him.*

**AKPALA**

You there! Who are you?

**ANANSE**

Er... errr... you see .... Errr

**AKPALA**

Speak up, now, or I shall release this bow.

**ANANSE**

O .... no... no... ! Please, shift that arrow to the right.... That's my heart you're aiming at. Shift it a bit, please...

**AKPALA**

And why should I? You expect me to miss my mark? Look, I mean to drive this poisoned arrowhead right through your heart..... that is if you fail to tell me who you are, and why you are here, munching a sacrificial egg.... Now!

### **ANANSE**

Well, you see, I am only a lonely, hungry traveler, I came across this meal and couldn't help but...

### **AKPALA**

Help yourself to it.... uninvited, eh? Well, I must take you to the King. You have broken a crucial taboo... intercepted a very critical ritual process. You must answer to the King

### **ANANSE**

O please, please. Can't you spare me?

### **AKPALA**

And face the wrath of the spirits? No! Up strange one! Mount that bowl on your head and get along. This way .... Hurry!

*(ANANSE complies and leads with the bowl balanced on his head, through door Down Right. Lights fade out. Ritual music resumes in the*

*background. When light cue back in, AKPALA and ANANSE are Up Right, in the palace proper)*

**AKPALA**

*(indicates a spot to the left of King's platform)*

Sit down there.

*(ANANSE attempts to bring down bowl from his head)*

No, do not remove the bowl from your head. The King must see you carrying this defilement. *(calls out)* Is any guard out there? *(GUARD rushes in)* go in and tell the King I've brought a thief.

**ANANSE**

I'm no thief... I am only....

**AKPALA**

Shut up, would you? We shall see about that, when the King comes.

*(turns to see GUARD still standing and looking with fear)*

What keeps you waiting, man? Call the King! Tell him Akpala has brought a thief from the forest.

(exit GUARD)

## **ANANSE**

This is a strange world indeed. Fancy a respectable man like me being called a thief! Truly, the royal of one land becomes a commoner in another.

## **AKPALA**

A royal does not go scavenging food meant for the gods.

## **ANANSE**

A hungry, wandering royal does .....

## **AKPALA**

Tell that to the King. Now will you shut up? The King is coming. (*Flourish of horns and drums as two armed guards escort KING DOSEY, and ELDER to their stools. KING DOSEY takes a hard look at ANANSE, then at AKPALA and then at ANANSE again*)

## **KING**

Who is this, Akpala? And what is this he's carrying?

**AKPALA**

(prostrating)

Your Royal Highness, Abi of Dim-Lyim-Lira.... I was in the forest doing my rounds, inspecting traps when I saw this strange man, this thief prowling around the crossroads where our maidens went through their final puberty rites this morning. His strange outfit and manner caused me to suspect he was up to some evil. So I hid and watched.  
(pauses)... Your Highness, to my horror and disgust I saw this man removed the bowl of sacrificial food from the mound, sat down and set to eating it!

**KING/ELDER**

W-h-a-t

**KING**

Eating the food meant to appease the spirits of evil destiny? Strange man, spirit or whatever you are ... tell me. Do you know what you have done? (to AKPALA) You have done well Akpala, and I will remember to honour you during the next Festival of Valour.

**AKPALA**

My loyal duty, Great One.

**KING**

(to ANANSE) And you ..... what do you have to say?

**ANANSE**

Great King, I am only a wondering.....

**KING**

Deity ....?

**ANANSE**

No, Great King.....

**KING**

Ghost

**ANANSE**

No, Great King, I am ... er....

**KING**

Human? (*ANANSE nods*) Ooo..... So you are human then? And you dare partake in the meal of dissident spirits, eh? Surely you must have a name.

**ANANSE**

Kweku Ananse

**KING / ELDER**

K-w-e-e-k-u..... A –n-a-n-s-e-e!

**KING**

A queer name that .... But sounds familiar ... What tribe is that?

**ELDER**

I know that name, Kweku Ananse.... A legendary hero of distant lands..... Kweku Ananse.... Odomankoma's Head Weaver.

**ANANSE**

(*with great enthusiasm*)

Yes, it's me... Master Craftsman in the Guild of Divine Craftsmen;  
Legend of Tailless Tail Tales: One who manipulates Creation from the

Fringes of a Vibrant Web. Hunter Extraordinary; Fellow of the Cult of Cosmic Linguists; Supreme Strategist; Odomankoma's Mystery Messenger...

**KING**

Enough! Surely Odomankoma didn't send you to defile our ritual feast! (pause) Now listen! Whoever you claim to be; however lengthy your chain of praise-names, you are a captive now. You have perpetrated a gross defilement by intercepting the passage of evil destinies, among them that of my daughter, the sole princess of Dim-Nyim-Lira. I suppose you do not know what that means... yet. (to GUARD) Hey, you .... Run in and call the High Priestess of Kompi. She must tell this man the enormity of the taboo he has broken. (exits GUARD, KING turns to ELDER) did you say you've seen this man before, old one?

**ELDER**

Emm.... Emm... no, not exactly. I recall misty memories of stories our elders used to tell about a mysterious Kweku Ananse.... About how he passed through this land a very long time ago. But as to whether this is the same Ananse or not....

**ANANSE**

I am.... I am the very Kweku Ananse, Old One, I used to .....

## **KING**

(*holds out his hand to silence ANANSE*) Whoever you are, or were, matters little now. The reality is that you've broken a prime taboo and, in so doing, put the destinies of a whole generation of worthy maidens to great risk. Now here comes the Priestess. (*PRIESTESS enters and charges on ANANSE, flywhisk raised; she speaks in an intoned, strained voice*).

## **PRIESTESS**

You ... you... you've ruined that sacrifice.... You've stopped the passage of sacrifice to appease evil spirits. You are an evil soul... and evil soul... Great King.... This man... must die.... He must die.... Instantly... He must die .. ai.. ai... ai... ai... ai... wipe this evil should from the land of dying sun ai... ai... ai... ai...

## **KING**

Well, Ananse, you've heard the priestess yourself. You must die instantly. And that is that, for in such matters her decision is final.

## **ANANSE**

Is there no reprieve, Great King? Please with the priestess on my poor behalf, Old one, you who recall my presence in times of yore.... Plead on my behalf

**ELDER**

When the priestess throws down a sacrificial egg, who am I, short-sighted mortal, to cushion it from breaking? That would mean death to the whole clan, my son.

**ANANSE**

So is there no voice to plead for a lonely wanderer in transit? Great King, spare my life

**PRIESTESS**

Ai... ai ... ai... he dies... he dies instantly. Ai... ai ... ai...ai

**KING**

Take him guards and hand him over to the executioners! Let them take him to the very crossroads where he committed his abomination. There, they must allow him to eat all the sacrificial food – every morsel of it – to fatten him for the offended spirit. Then let his blood spill over the mound to quench the thirst of the spirits. (*GUARDS seize ANANSE*

*and drag him towards door Down Left, with the bowl still held firmly on his head.*

**ANANSE**

(as he reaches exit Down Left) Er.... One last word, Great King. I have one proposition to make.... An offer you'd find of great benefit.

**KING**

(consider for a while) Alright... bring him back for a moment... remember, only for a moment. Now what is this proposition you speak of?

**ANANSE**

Great One, as I have already identified myself, and as your venerable elder has rightly acknowledged, I am the greatest Craftsman ever created... Odomankoma's Head Weaver. If you'd spare my life, I shall weave for you and your household the best... the most beautiful cloth anyone ever set eyes upon.

**KING**

Well..... how do we even known you are who you say you are? Or that you are capable of the feats you claim? How, in fact, do we know you are not some shallow impostor?

### **ANANSE**

Me? An impostor? The gods forbid! Great King, Just give me a minute!

*(Puts down bowl and rummages through his bundle. He flips out three bright 'kente' headbands of assorted colours. All gathered gaze at the headbands with admiration)*

### **KING**

Hey! Let me see that one... yes. Yes! The one with the purple fringe!..  
*(ANANSE hands KING DOSEY one of the headbands)* Ah! This is splendid. Never seen anything so beautiful. Have you, Old one?

### **ELDER**

Never! This is surely the work of a master craftsman.

### **KING**

(to ANANSE) You mean... you... wove these yourself? With your own hands.

### **ANANSE**

These condemned hands wove everything. Great King.... Every single thread.... Every single motif..... every single hue... every single.

### **KING**

Alright .... Alright. Just wait a minute. I must consult the Old One and the Priestess first.

*(KING DOSEY signals PRIESTESS and ELDER to his high stool. They hold whispered conversations. From their gestures and moods, it is plain that KING DOSEY and ELDER are ready to compromise, while PRIESTESS is protesting vigorously. They break council)*

### **KING**

Well, Ananse.... We will give you a chance to prove your worth... yes, just one change, though the priestess is not in favour of it. If you prove yourself a genuine and talented weaver as you claim to be, and if you are able to accomplish the task I shall set, that may buy you your

freedom. If not, then of course the priestess shall have her way.... You will die instantly.

## **ANANSE**

Thank you very much. Great King.

## **KING**

Now listen! Three days from now.... That is on the morning of the day following tomorrow, my daughter, the princess Sodziisa whose puberty ritual you so unwisely ruined, is going to be married to Pootagyiri, a valiant prince of one of our clans. Your task will be to weave for the royal couple clothes that have no match in splendor and dazzle anywhere, so they can wear them for the marriage ceremony.

Remember, you have only between now and tomorrow evening to accomplish this task. If on the morning of the appointed day the clothes are not ready, or that they fail to meet the admiration of the princess or her betrothed, the prince, your blood will still spill at the crossroads.

This is the only way to can buy your freedom. If you accomplish this task, you may proceed on your wanderings, for we still cannot accommodate one who lives with the curse of evil spirits upon his head.

## **ANANSE**

This is a most challenging task.... considering the time I have to finish it, Great King. Yet I will try, for it is my only bridge to freedom. Great King, with all humility... I wish to make three modest requests.

**KING**

Go on. Name them.

**ANANSE**

First, that I may be given an isolated spot somewhere in the forest to undertake my task.

**KING**

Granted. And your second?

**ANANSE**

That tomorrow afternoon the princess and her peers come to dance and sing while I weave....

**ELDER**

What sort of request is that? What purpose would that serve? You, forget, Kweku Ananse, that you're a condemned man striving to buy

back your life, eh? You have the impudence to request for leisurely privileges.

### **ANANSE**

Old One, I ask for no leisurely privileges, as you term them. It is only part of my creative formula. The finesse of the motifs and designs, the balanced blending of the hues would be determined by the contour dancing and melodious singing of these pretty maidens. It is a matter of artistic expediency Great One, not trivial frivolity.

### **KING**

Well..... that point is well made. What is your third request?

### **ANANSE**

That, Great King, a certified idiot is made my messenger, to run errands between my secret workplace and this palace.

*(KING DOSEY and ELDER laugh loud and long)*

### **KING**

Well.... that is a simple request indeed and modest too. Idiots abound in our land, and you'll have one readily. (pauses) Now Ananse, I have granted your three requests. However, so you won't sneak off while in

the forest, this guard here, Akpala, will keep watch over you, day and night. If you attempt to escape, he will pierce a hole through your heart with an arrow. Do you accept that, Ananse?

**ANANSE**

I accept that wholeheartedly.

**KING**

Good, now you may go.... we must allow you to begin your task. (*rise to go, and pauses*) Aa! These beautiful headbands, what should we do with.....

**ANANSE**

They are yours, Great King. For you, the Old One and the priestess.

**KING**

Thank you Ananse. Thank you very much (*KING DOSEY wraps headband around his own head*)

**ELDER**

Ha! How it fits.

**KING**

(*flattered*) Really? (to GUARD) You ... run in and tell the Queen to bring along clean calabash of water ....hurry! Old One, take this and pass that on to the Priestess of Kompi.

(*ELDER attempts to give the headband to PRIESTESS, who all this while has been sitting stone silent and moody. She mutters and gesticulates violently to reject the headband. Then, without a word, she rises and leaves through door Right.*)

**KING**

Well, that goes to the Queen then.

(*QUEEN enters through door Up Right, carrying a large calabash of water which se gives to KING DOSEY. Her eyes are glued admiringly to the headbands, especially the one on KING DOSEY's head*)

**QUEEN**

What a splendid headband! Where are these from, my Lord?

(*KING DOSEY points at ANANSE, while admiring headband in his reflection in the calabash*)

**KING**

From him. The stranger brought them. He was going to die for breaking a taboo. Now he buys his life with his craft. Here... take this... it's yours.

**QUEEN**

*(Receives it with reverence)*

Oo! For me? Oh, thank you. Strange One....

**ANANSE**

Not me, Mother of the Land. Thank the King. It is his benevolence that has won you such a prize. *(pause)* Now if I may be excused. Great King. I need to get my things together and .... Yes ... yes. The maidens will prepare something for you to eat. *(in hand with QUEEN, and followed by ELDER and GUARDS, KING DOSEY enters his chambers, Flourish of horns and drums.)*

**ANANSE**

*(Facing audience)* Look what I've gotten myself into! That was a near disaster, I tell you. I'd have been asking my way around ancestral paths by now. Hey, don't breathe a word to my wife and children, eh?

Remember what I said: follow me with your eyes, not with your itchy bodies and okro-mouths. Now how do I get myself out of this tangle? For I do not only have to weave and tomorrow evening; I must make sure the texture, design... everything, is the best ever made. But this is nothing to beat Ananse. I shall accomplish this task, go ahead to earn myself honour, recognition and authority here. Tell me... what man with such intellect as I have, would willingly turn his back on a good life in this land of idiots? Sumptuous meal and pretty, smiling maidens! Not me ! (*pauses*) . Now, you folks, is that all you can do? Sitting tight over there and staring at me as if I was a mad man? Can't you see I need inspiration? Yes, I need inspiration from you... to think.... to create... to scheme.... to plan strategies. You must inspire me. Here then, chant for me! Kweku Ananse, Kweku Ananse Osee yiee!

### **CHORUS/ AUDIENCE**

Yeeeeeee ..... yeeeeeee

### **ANANSE**

Kweku Ananse, Onyansafuo Ananse Osee yiee!

### **CHORUS/ AUDIENCE**

Yeeeeeee ..... yeeeeeee!

Kweku Ananse oooooooo .... Yiee!

Onyasafu Ananse ooooo .... yiee ! ayeeeeee!

## **ANANSE**

Thank you very much

*(as he hears a female voice calling out his name from within)*

Sssshh ! They call me for food. So long, friends. I must get ready to embark on this task of life and death. I shall keep in touch.

*(enters palace through door Up Right)*

## **2ND MOVEMENT**

*(Blackout as voices pick up Ananse's chant backstage. The audience may join in. When the lights cue in again, a white cloth screen of about nine feet wide and four feet long can be seen stretched between two of the erect tree – stems positioned Up Left. The screen itself is about six feet above the ground. Behind the tree stems and close to the screen*

*so that it forms a sort of mounting rafter is a narrow platform about four feet high and covering the entire breath of the screen on its far side. Hanging at each end of the screen are two large spindles of gantry chords of assorted colours. ANANSE, who is mounted on the rafter, can be seen from his mid-section upwards, as he busily weaves patterns into the far side of the white screen. He hums a lively song as he shuttles from one end of the rafter to another with movements of exaggerated spinning. Suddenly he stops, take a look at AKPALA, who is sitting on a stump Left, dozing off and snoring, his bow and arrows lie on his laps. ANANSE smiles at the sleeping figure and descends from the rafter. He walks slowly to Down Centre, facing the audience)*

## **ANANSE**

Just look at him! How can such a sleepy scarecrow embody the watchful vigilance of an empire? Tell me somebody. What stops me from picking my things and sneaking off now? With that dunce of messenger gone to fetch the maidens from the palace, and this worthless one lost in another world, what indeed stops me from taking my freedom... on a silver platter.... As the politicians say? (pauses) But you think I will? No! I know better than that. I have only this evening to finish these clothes. Then I will be expelled from this empire of idiots, sumptuous meals and pretty smiling maidens. I need to work out something fast that can earn my stay and perhaps a title. Something like "Personal Adviser to the King." Yes.... Something as elevating as

that. Then I will marry two or three of those pretty maidens and settle down. Hmm! If that buffoon of a king thinks I will finish this task and walk off with my bundle between my thighs, he must be thinking from his underside! (*walks up to sleeping AKPALA and shakes him violently*) Hey you .... Wake up, fool.

### **AKPALA**

(*suddenly wakes up and aims an arrow at ANANSE, drunkenly*) Aaw ... you .... Stay where you are or I will shoot.

### **ANANSE**

(*mimics AKPALA*) "Aaw.... You.... Stay where you are or I will shoot". Go on! Shoot.... idiot-in-arms! Here you are.... a guard charged to watch over an important prisoner. You go to sleep on duty, snoring like a pregnant pig. The very prisoner awakes you and you train your worthless weapon at him. "Stay where you are or I shoot", you say. What silly captive will do that? Ha ha ha ha!

### **AKPALA**

(*embarrassed*) Well... I must admit I dozed off just a bit. And who wouldn't.... having to watch you without a blink since yesterday? (*look around and sees cloth screen*) Gods of Dim-Nyim-Lira! How fast you

weave! This cannot be the craft of mortal hands. Ananse, you must be some deity posing as a mortal traveler, aren't you?

### **ANANSE**

Well, that is your idea, not mine.

### **AKPALA**

Aha! That is the elusive response of a mystic....

### **ANANSE**

Again, that is your judgement, not mine. (*listen to sounds of distant singing*) Hey, listen! Aren't those the maidens approaching? Of course it's them! O come, pretty smiling maidens, come! Come sing and dance, so the melodies of your voices and the contours of your bodies will smoothen the passages of my needle as I weave.

(*ANANSE sets himself vigorously to his weaving. The voices approach until they enter through door Right. There are seven MAIDENS led by their leader, SODZIISA the princess. They keep rhythm with clappers and rattles, as they wriggle their bodies erotically*)

### **SODZIISA**

Who is the great weaver?

**CHORUS**

Kweku.... eee, Kweku Ananse!

**SODZIISA**

Who is the great craftsman?

**CHORUS**

Kweku.... eee, Kweku Ananse!

**SODZIISA**

And what does he weave today?

**CHORUS**

A rainbow cloth, a rainbow cloth.

**SODZIISA**

Whom does he weave it for?

**CHORUS**

Our mistress .... Sodziisa

**ALL**

Weave it left: weave it right

Weave it centre. Kweku ... ee

Blend it with parrot feathers

Blend it with rainbow fingers

Aya.... aya ... aya!

*(ANANSE is flattered. He descends from the rafter and slowly walks to the maidens. He stops them and addresses SODZIISA, observing her lustfully)*

**ANANSE**

I suppose you are the charming princess, Sodziisa.

**SODZIISA**

*(coyly) Y- e- s.*

**ANANSE**

Welcome to my craft shop. Now come along and have a glimpse of your cloth in its process of growth. Come!

*(ANANSE helps SODZIISA to mount the rafter. The latter, overwhelmed, glides from one end to another; her hands tracing the patterns and motifs, gasping with pleasure. In the background is the soft singing of the other maidens)*

### **SODZIISA**

*(steps down from the rafter)* Ooo! Agya Ananse! The beauty of this cloth takes my very breath away... ooo!

### **ANANSE**

This is only the beginning, charming princess. Just you wait until I weave in the hues – the toning hue that would hold the eyes like glue. And that is why I invited you to dance.... So the art in the cloth will synchronise with the contours and vibrations of your body. So you must dance your best....

### **SODZIISA**

I will dance the dance of my life, Agya Ananse. I assure you.

### **ANANSE**

Right, Now let's get to it. There is very little time.

*(SODZIISA immediately begins to organize the other MAIDENS into a horse-shoe facing front, Down Centre. They begin to sing and clap, swaying from side to side as they kneel. SODZIISA gets into a graceful dance in the centre, her movement highlights her shapely features and gait. During this performance ANANSE struts about, making a show of taking mental notes. Finally, the dance stops with the music and ANANSE approaches SODZIISA. He begins to applaud and GUARD and ODUDU join in)*

### **ANANSE**

Aa! That was a splendid dance, Sodziisa. This is enough: I have got all I need now... now, except one.....

### **SODZIISA**

Except one! What else remains? We are here to do your wish.... anything.

### **ANANSE**

Nothing much, princess. Only minor details. That won't involve any singing and dancing. You only need to pose, in your favorite position as I note them, take measurements, to help me shape the dress itself....

**SODZIISA**

You mean ..... to fit my shape?

**ANANSE**

Exactly .... exactly

**SODZIISA**

So what must they do now... I mean my friends, the dancers?

**ANANSE**

Er.... Let's see. Perhaps they can go down the river and bath themselves, take a rest until I have finished with you.

**SODZIISA**

That sounds fine. Mbisike, take the other girls to the river down the valley. Go there and enjoy yourselves – bath, catch baby-crabs or play

games, while I finish up with Agya Ananse. Then, I will send Odudu here to come for you. Is that fine?

## **MAIDENS**

Very fine..... mistress.

*(MAIDENS leave through door Down Right)*

## **ANANSE**

Now, let's get to business. *(to ODUDU) You there, pick that gourd and fetch me some water from the river. Hurry, I'm dying of thirst. (ODUDU exits Down Left with the perforated gourd)*

Now, Sodziisa I will have to take your measurements. First will be the length of the dress. Now stand erect.... So aha! Now don't move.

*(ANANSE begins to "measure" SODZIISA; his measuring unit is the space between the tips of his middle finger and thumb when the palm is stretched out and placed lengthwise along SODZIISA's body).*

Good. This makes seven palm-units. Now let's measure your hips.

*(ANANSE begins the same exercise across SODZIISA's hip. He uses the opportunity to tickle the princess from time to time. AKPALA paces up and down, fidgeting with unease.)*

### **SODZIISA**

This is tickling... ooooo... mmm... mm...

### **ANANSE**

Control yourself; this should be over in a moment. Let me take that measurement again. Try not to fidget this time.

### **AKPALA**

*(unable to contain his anxiety any longer)*

Excuse me Ananse.... I think you're over-stepping your bounds. She's a betrothed woman, you know, and....

### **ANANSE**

O... so I must stop measuring her up, eh? I see... in that case you will take the blame, if the wrapper turns to be ill-fitting. Princess, you heard your father's guard. He thinks I have no right to measure....

**SODZIISA**

(eyeing AKPALA scornfully)

Look here, Akpala, Were you sent here to guard over a captive or to supervise its creative work? What do you know about art?

**AKPALA**

I .... I'm sorry, mistress. Only the way .... he was..... I mean .... He was holding you....

**SODZIISA**

And what has that got to do with your role here? You want the new wrapper to be ill-fitting, don't you? So it can fall off and you can feast your hungry eyes, eh?

**ANANSE**

(FEIGNING RESIGNATION)

I think I must give up. People always misjudge me. But I will rather die than ruin my hard-earned creative reputation by compromising my methods.

**AKPALA / SODZIISA**

(On their knees) O.... no, no, no... please Agya Ananse.... please.....

**SODZIISA**

You see what your rude intrusion has caused? If he fails to complete my clothes, I will get you beheaded.....

**AKPALA**

O, please, good mistress. Forgive me. I won't intrude again.

**SODZIISA**

You better not! Now face about – that way! Now lie down.... on your face! Bury your face in the ground! Hurry! Aha. That's better. Stay that way until I order you up!

**AKPALA**

(*mutters with difficulty*)

Yes, mistress. Thank you mistress.

**SODZIISA**

Sorry for the interruption, Agya Ananse. Shall we go on now?

**ANANSE**

Thank you, princess. Now, come this way.... Up the rafter. Good!  
Stretch out your bosom.... tighter.... Good!

(ANANSE begins to 'measure' SODZIISA's bosom. This exercise turns out to be an intimate embrace as ANANSE fondles SODZIISA who gasps and groans with pleasure. The lights begin to dim on them until they become mere silhouettes, their swaying bodies almost fused. Fade out lights. After a while the lights begin to brighten again and the voices of SODZIISA and her singing maidens can be heard receding in the background. AKPALA is still in his awkward position, now snoring audibly. ANANSE looks at him and smiles, goes over slowly and taps him. AKPALA springs up, looking about himself confusedly.)

**AKPALA**

Who? What? Where is the princess? Where are the maidens?

**ANANSE**

Gone! Can't you hear their singing in the distance?

**AKPALA**

I hope you were not up to any tricks. What happened?

**ANANSE**

Happened? Who said anything happened?

**AKPALA**

I thought I heard noises....noises as one hears during....

**ANANSE**

Your own snotty dreams, perhaps.

**AKPALA**

And Odudu.....where is Odudu?

**ANANSE**

He went to fetch me some water to drink. I wonder what has kept him so long. Aha! There he comes. Where is the water? What kept you so long, Odudu?

**ODUDU**

I....I... any time I filled the gourd all the water leaked off.....and I had to go again....

**ANANSE**

Give me that gourd, fool! You picked the wrong gourd! (ANANSE snatches perforated gourd from ODUDU. He sits on a stump and takes a swill at the gourd containing honey.

Aa! How tired I am! Now this is refreshing. (pauses) Have you two ever tasted honey?

**AKPALA**

What is that? Honey? Never heard of it.

**ODUDU**

Nor I.

**AKPALA**

What is it? A fruit juice?

**ANANSE**

*(laughs scornfully)*

You mean there is no honey in these parts? No bees?

**AKPALA / ODUDU**

We know nothing of the sort in these parts.

**ANANSE**

Poor you! The gods passed your land over when they distributed the greatest pleasure to mankind. Here, stretch out your palms. (*ANANSE turns a drop each into their palms.*) Go on! Taste the mystery sweetness of the gods. (*cautiously AKPALA and ODUDU lick their palms cleans and stretch them out for more.*)

**ANANSE**

Aa! You want some more, don't you?

**AKPALA**

Where did you get that sweet stuff, Ananse?

**ANANSE**

I just told you, didn't I? From the gods. When you are in consort with the gods they lead you into their secret pleasures. Here, take just a drop...no more. (*gives the two a drop each and cocks the gourd*) Now I must get back to work to finish the princess' clothes. You there! Is it not time to fetch the evening meal from the palace?

### **ODUDU**

Ah, yes. I nearly forgot. I must be off. (*ODUDU exits through Down Left, still licking his palm naively*)

### **AKPALA**

Now how did you get that snuff, Ananse? If you show me, I shall relax my vigilance over you....

### **ANANSE**

(*climbs back onto the rafter*) That is not enough. You are mostly asleep. Relaxed or not, your vigilance is of little consequence. I can easily slip out when you are asleep.

### **AKPALA**

So what would you have in exchange? Name it.

**ANANSE**

Now you're talking business, man. (*descends again*) Let's sit down and talk. This is a world of modern business... of reciprocity.... of mutual bargaining, eh?

**AKPALA**

Alright. What is your price?

**ANANSE**

Listen, I want the princess for myself.

**AKPALA**

(*rather shocked*)

Did....did I hear you right? You.....you mean you want to....

**ANANSE**

Marry that princess... Sodziisa. Yes. I want her for myself, and you must help me!

**AKPALA**

You are surely out of your senses, Ananse. The prince is betrothed to the ferocious Pootagyiri, the most ruthless warrior and wrestler in our time. *[Flashback. AKPALA and POOTAGYIRI wrestle, and the former is thrown]*

### **ANANSE**

Forget about what he is. Look, pretty princesses are won by brain, not brawn. Are you ready to help? Then the secret of the honey will be yours...for good.

### **AKPALA**

Well, but the very thought of it. Pootagyiri is the prince of an esteemed clan. Immediately after their marriage tomorrow morning, the King is going to offer him a whole chieftain, the island of Boyile, beyond the Kpeyi River – a chieftain complete with palace, cattle, an army, food barns, everything. And you think....

### **ANANSE**

It is all the better, Akpala. If you co-operate in this plan, I will share all that with you, on an equal basis, in addition to giving you the secret of the gods.

**AKPALA**

You mean, you intend to acquire all those things meant for Pootagyiri as well? How?

**ANANSE**

Simple. That's where an active brain comes handy. Are you ready to accept the bargain? Think of yourself with half a chieftain – an autonomous empire with pretty maids to choose your wives from, countless cattle and food barns, loyal subjects, an army, palace... think of all these pleasures. An exciting life.... away from this dull one of watchful servitude.

**AKPALA**

*(dreamily)*

That would be fine indeed. But I still wonder how....

**ANANSE**

Leave the “how” to me!

**AKPALA**

Alright, let's hear that plan of yours. Where do I fit in? Maybe I can help.

### **ANANSE**

First of all, tell me. How well do the King, his wife and the Princess know this Prince Pootagyiri.

### **AKPALA**

Well..... not much, really. The King and Queen may recall memories of him as a boy, as leader of our initiation group when the royal couple honoured us. As for Sodziisa, she doesn't know her groom-to-be beyond the vague descriptions by go-betweens.

### **ANANSE**

Good. I shall invite that prince here, to take his own measurement tomorrow. When he arrives, I shall make him leave his bows, arrows, amulets and necklaces here, and then stretch his arm across the cloth. You will be hiding in the bush there. Then when you hear me whistle you will shoot your arrow right through his heart. And that will be all, a very simple task, and you would have won yourself a chieftain and unlimited wealth, pleasure... power.

**AKPALA**

That sounds simple....but he's my kinsman and .... That would be murder....

**ANANSE**

Kinsman? Isn't he a privileged prince while you're a servile guard? And....are you not a soldier, to talk of murder when you kill an enemy and claim your booty?

**AKPALA**

It sounds less vicious when you put it that way....

**ANANSE**

And that stops you from putting it that way? Look, all these so-called virtues and vices are mixed up until the mind sorts them out. Rational justification is all there is to it. Are you in?

**AKPALA**

Well.... I think I am ..... but one more point. What happens if you renege... if you refuse to honour your pledge?

**ANANSE**

Me? Renegue on my pledge? You think the gods would consort with such a dishonorable man? Besides, you can always kill me; you have arms. Or better still speak out....

**AKPALA**

Yes ... yes.... the latter is a better guarantee. I receive my rewards or else I reveal the secret!

**ANANSE**

You reveal the secret! But be assured, my friend. As soon as the marriage is over and the king proclaims my chieftain, you'll have your reward in full.

**AKPALA**

All right. Let's see again – half of everything... chieftain, cattle, food barns, land, everything, as well as the secret of the honey. (*dreamily*) and as for Pootagyiri....aa! I haven't forgotten how the fool humiliated me during our seclusion as initiates into manhood. Maybe this will be my rightful revenge....

**ANANSE**

Your rightful revenge! Sure.... Sure. This is the spirit!

**AKPALA**

Now let's hear how you propose to acquire these things once the prince is dead.

**ANANSE**

That's the most delicate part, Akpala. You need to rally all your senses, if you have any.

**AKPALA**

Yes... yes... go on.....

**ANANSE**

When the prince dies, we shall dress him up.... in my clothes. Then you will go and report my death to the King. You will take the princes' new cloths along.

**AKPALA**

You mean... your death?

## **ANANSE**

Yes. Now listen you dumb fool! You will tell the King and his elders that I fell while tying in the final knot up there on the rafters, and broke my neck. And that Pootagyiri and you vainly tried to save my life. you will tell the King that I requested before my death that, as a mark of gratitude to my newly found friend, the prince, who had tried heroically to save my newly found friend, the prince, who had tried heroically to save my life not elaborate funeral be accorded me, nor should the impending marriage be tainted with any signs of mourning for me. Nobody should wail or mourn until seven days after the marriage. Finally, tell him that if any of these conditions are flouted, the young couple will go mad instantly, and their new cloths will vanish.

## **AKPALA**

Hmm .... this is a strange plan..... but it sounds feasible... Now when do I receive my rewards?

## **ANANSE**

As soon as the marriage between me posing as Pootagyiri and the princess is over, and the king formally offers me my chieftain. Then shall me leave together, you to your part of I to mine.

**AKPALA**

Sounds good

**ANANSE**

Of course there would be little training exercises to re-orient me into my new role as Pootagyiri, you know. Like the way he walks, laughs and such things.

**AKPALA**

These can be worked out. I know Pootogyiri's every mannerism, gait, inflection of speech. You forget he was my group leader during our initiation. Now, to start with, you must learn to drop that ghostly nasal tone of yours. And then.....

**ANANSE**

Ssshh.... Now that's Odudu whistling along. Don't give anything away. After the meal, I shall send Odudu to fetch me some water.... with the perforated gourd as usual. He will be told not to return until he can bring back the gourd full. That's when we must finish our plan. Here, let's seal our secret pact with some honey. (*pours a little honey into each of*

*(their palms) To the success of our heroic scheme! (they both lick from each other's palms.)*

## 3RD MOVEMENT

*(When the lights fade in, it is late evening and AKPALA is pacing up and down between Centre and Centre Left, keeping an eye on the cloth Up Left. POOTAGYIRI suddenly bursts in through door Down Right. He is bare-chested with a necklace of leather amulets and a bow with arrows strapped over his shoulder)*

### **POOTAGYIRI**

Where is the master – craftsman?

### **AKPALA**

Aa... Pootagyiri, son-of-Pootaguo, whose totem is the prowling bush-cat...

## **POOTAGYIRI**

Cut that ceremony! I say where is the master –craftsman? I have little time and there are things to do.

## **AKPALA**

He's up on the rafters, finishing up your cloths. I will call him (*runs to the base of the rafter and calls out*) Ananse .... The prince have arrived.

## **ANANSE'S VOICE**

Alright..... get him a seat. I'd be there in a minute.

(AKPALA returns to POOTAGYIRI, looking rather panicky)

## **AKPALA**

Take a seat, valiant Prince. Ananse will be here in a minute. (pauses)

Aa! You're just on time: he was on the point of thinking you'd never come....

## **POOTAGYIRI**

And the princess.... Has she been here already?

## **AKPALA**

Yes.... she left only a while ago.... She and her band of dancing maidens. O, you should have been here, Pootagyiri. And the princess.... How gracefully she danced. And when finally she tried the dazzling cloth around her body....o, you ought to have been here. You are a lucky man, valiant prince....

## **POOTAGYIRI**

You are lucky I wasn't here, Akpala. If I had been, you'd have been living in perpetual darkness by now. I would have shot arrows straight into each of those prying eyes of yours.

## **AKPALA**

This rage of yours is pointless, valiant prince! I was posted here by the King to watch over the master-craftsman while he worked. Your betrothed came along here to dance. How could I have avoided taking a glance at her without losing vigilance over my charge?

## **POOTAGYIRI**

You know the custom.... you know that no lowly man must take any pleasure – physical or visual- from the spouse of his superior. I will surely remember to reward you when I assume my chieftain. Just you wait!

(ANANSE *hurries over from the rafter*)

## **ANANSE**

O, I am awfully sorry to keep you waiting. You are welcome to my craft shop, valiant prince. I am Ananse, Kweku Ananse... (*proffers a hand*).

## **POOTAGYIRI**

(*shakes hand violently*) and I am Pootagyiri – the Tortoise-that-Feeds-On-Ants-At-the-Tree- Top.  
One-Who-Wrestles-Seven-Lions-and-Kills-Them-Empty-handed;  
Son-of-Pootaguo-whose-totem-is-the-prowling-bush cat! Prince of the Dark forests...

## **ANANSE**

I am greatly honoured to make your acquaintance, Prince of the Dark Forest.

## **POOTAGYIRI**

The king tells me you wished to see me regarding special clothes you are weaving for our marriage tomorrow. Whatever it is you want of me, let's get it over with. I don't have the time.

## **ANANSE**

Certainly....certainly. Yes, I invited you to have your measurements taken for your smock and togas. The princess has been here for the same purpose....

### **POOTAGYIRI**

That's when you allowed this worthless owl the opportunity to feast lustful eyes on my bride as she dances... a privilege even I, her rightful owner, have never had!

### **ANANSE**

Valiant prince, I am sorry that happened. I tried to persuade him to hide his wretched self in those bushes, but he wouldn't. Well, as a stranger and captive, there was little I could do then. Where I come from, we observe firm ethical rules about how those of lowly status must not over-step their prescribed bounds of liberty. But here.... well.... this is another land. (*pauses*) Now, if you will come this way.... so I can take

your measurements, and then I will show you the beautiful designs, if you still have the time. Put your bow and arrow on the stump and come over...*(pause)* those amulets too... if you please ... aha!

## **POOTAGYIRI**

Alright, let's be quick about it, then. (*looks scornfully at AKPALA who is fidgeting with unease*) And you don't stand there staring at me so! I've known it all along... that all you mean guards at the king's palace have been making passes at the princess... trying desperately to count her very waist-beads before the rightful owner comes along. Mean guards indeed!

## **AKPALA**

That is not true. Prince Pootagyiri. You misjudge me. I have never nursed such thoughts.

## **POOTAGYIRI**

Aren't you ashamed telling such lies? Don't I know you, Akpala? Don't I remember how, as leader of our initiation group, I had to punish you severely, when you were caught peeping at nude maidens as they bathed at the riverside? You thing I've forgotten what lustful eyes you have? I shall punish you for this arrogance yet.

## **ANANSE**

Just ignore the silly brute, valiant prince. You don't have the time, you know. (*furiously to AKPALA*) And you, must you continue showing so much disrespect, for such an exalted prince? In my tribe, repentant subjects hide themselves the moment they behold the superior they have offended. Get yourself behind that bush, at once! Vanish! (*exits AKPALA as ANANSE lead POOTAGYIRI to the side of the cloth*)

Here, face front and stretch out your arms....

**POOTAGYIRI**

*(looks at cloth with some disgust)* Is that the sort of special cloth you  
are spinning for us?

**ANANSE**

The designs and hues are on the other side. You can see those after ...

**POOTAGYIRI**

Well, I don't have the time. Just make sure they are absolutely artistic. I  
have a very high sense for artistic judgment.

**ANANSE**

I will remember that, valiant prince. Please stretch out your arms, this way.

**POOTAGYIRI**

O, this way eh? (*chuckles*) Like a dressed antelope, eh? Right.... here .... now hurry.

**ANANSE**

Just hold on a minute. I will fetch some charcoal to make out vital points. (*ANANSE hurries off towards Down Centre, whistling an incidental song. Suddenly POOTAGYIRI emits a loud and long wail and collapses at the base of the rafter. ANANSE rushes to his side and starts examining the prostrate prince. AKPALA also emerges, a fresh arrow pulled and aimed at the prince.*

### **ANANSE**

No need, friend, spare your arrow. He is cold dead.

### **AKPALA**

The fool, the bragging fool....

### **ANANSE**

Not the time to stand there to insult the dead! We must hurry. (*starts taking off his own smock*) Here, put this smock on him while I remove the cloth. Then after I have gone, call Odudu and tell him about my death. Then of course you must let him help you put the corpse away. Remember all you have to tell the King, and don't make a slip. (*AKPALA climbs the rafter and starts removing cloth, while AKPALA attends to the corpse.*)

## **ANANSE**

Here, take the princess' dress. I must hurry off to finish the prince's smock. Soon after I have gone, scream you head off, call Odudu and clear up this mess. So long. Meet me again in that isolated hut near the large silk-cotton tree. Then you can take me through my preparations to play the prince's role.

(*ANANSE straps the remaining gourds around his waist; with the bundle of cloths under his armpit, he heads off towards door down left*)

**AKPALA**

Wait a minute, Ananse. Er....er....

**ANANSE**

Yes, what?

**AKPALA**

Suppose you just run off and leave me to bear this burden alone?

**ANANSE**

What little sense you have! You think I will run off and leave all these good things behind? Why do you think I strained my brains hatching and nursing this scheme to fruition? Meet me at the hut at midnight, and....don't blunder!

## **AKPALA**

Alright, Ananse... I shall not blunder.

*(ANANSE vanishes behind the bushes. The light begin to dim, leaving a red spot on AKPALA who is bent over the dead prince. Then, suddenly he lets off a loud, mournful wail.*

## **AKPALA**

Yieee.... yieee.....yieee.... Odudu! Come at once!

## **ODUDU'S VOICE**

Why should I? The gourd is still not full yet....

## **AKPALA**

Leave the water and come at once! Agya Ananse has fallen from the rafter and broken his neck. Agya Ananse is dead!

## **ODUDU'S VOICE**

Ao.....oooo.....oooo...oooo! Agya Ananse oooo!

## **BLACK OUT**

## 4TH MOVEMENT

*(The stage is set as for an important festive occasion at the palace. Soft drums roll in the background. ANANSE and AKPALA stroll across the Apron, from Down Left towards Down Right. ANANSE is wearing a white smock, a hat and loose togas with bright cyclical designs and motifs. AKPALA is in his old guard outfit.)*

### AKPALA

*(stop and observes ANANSE critically.)*

Your limp on the left foot needs to be more pronounced. Pootagyiri had a long bout of yaws under his left foot in early boyhood, and that left him with a permanent limp. You need to exaggerate that a bit. Pull that hat to the right .... just a bit. Aha! Now where is the charcoal? I must reinforce that facial mark. Remember, intimate go-betweens who know Pootagyiri would be at the palace. Your imitation of the prince needs to be flawless.

## **ANANSE**

I am trying my best. I am sure I shall get it all before we arrive at the palace. I am sure I ....

## **AKPALA**

There....you're slipping back into the awful, give-away ghostly tone again! And, remember never to smile or laugh. Pootagyiri had gab-teeth; you have none.

## **ANANSE**

Hmm. When you realize I'm slipping off at the palace, shout out my titles, to bring me back on track and also to divert attention from the defect. After all, that is what a friend and companion of the groom is supposed to be. With these marks, my limp and these clan-amulets, no

one would suspect. Did you tell the King that Pootagyiri chose you to be his companion for the occasion?

**AKPALA**

Yes. As his kinsman and peer, who else can fit better for such a role?

**ANANSE**

Good. Now let's go over those appellations again. You start....

**AKPALA**

Pootagyiri- wo- Pootaguo...

## **ANANSE**

*(hits his chest repeatedly)*

Yes .... That's me! The-tortoise-that-feeds-on-ants-at-the-tree-top-;  
One-who-wrestles-seven-lions-and-kills-them-empty-handed....  
Son-of-Pootaguo-whose-totem-is-the-prowling-bush-cat.... Prince of the  
Dark Forests! That's me!

## **AKPALA**

That was good! Now you're so transformed I almost thought you were Pootagyiri re-incarnated. (*pauses*) Aa! Listen. Listen to the drums of the palace. Let's hurry now, for soon the warriors would be sent to carry you to the palace. Let's go.

*(Fade out lights as the chant of warriors intensifies from backstage., When the lights fade in, KING DOSEY is seated on his stool, on his left side the QUEEN. On the far side Left sits SODZIISA, dressed in a flowing gown and wrapper of the same material as that of the groom. Flanking her are six MAIDENS singing praises. On the immediate right side of the King sits ELDER and on the far right sits ANANSE [as Pootagyiri] with AKPALA in attendance. To the extreme right mid stage are a group of drummers and warriors- dancers. ODUDU the idiot sits on the floor at the edge of the Apron. Right sheepishly grinning and licking his right palm from time to time.*

*The drummers strike a lively tune, and the MAIDENS gather and start a romantic dance. As the music becomes more and more vigorous six warrior-dancers join the maidens. The two groups begin a dodging dance in pairs, the girls eluding the aggressive male dancers. The music increases progressively into a dizzy tempo and stops as the males make a final plunge. The girls leap high only to land in the ready hands of the males. They freeze as the music revert to a slow rhythm as ANANSE [as Pootagyiri] rises, dances across to SODZIISA, who is now up. The groom lifts the princess to the centre where the frozen dancers form a ring around them, kneeling and clapping their hands. The couple engages each other a hilarious dance. The music finally stops*

*and KING walks to the couple in the centre of the ring of kneeling  
dancers. KING holds their arms, joining them in front of him)*

**KING**

Pootagyiri, son-of-Pootaguo, Whose Totem is the Prowling –Bush-Cat!  
Today I hold your hand in marriage to Sodziisa, sole princes of  
Dim-Nyim-Lira. May the gods bless this marriage! May Naa Buruku  
bless this marriage, so that it may yield fruit and forge greater harmony  
between our two clans. (*cheers and flourish of drums.*) I bestow to you  
Pootagyiri, son-of-Pootaguo and my daughter, the entire island of Boyile,  
beyond the Kpeyi River as custom demands. I bestow to you all the  
people, the lands, the cattle and food barns of that island (*more cheers*)  
May you live in endless happiness!

*(Flourish of drums as KING goes back to his seat. The kneeling dancers  
rise and make way for the groom, who carries the bride back to her  
seat. The groom returns to his seat. They drum his appellations and he  
acknowledges them.)*

## **ANANSE [AS POOTAGYIRI]**

Yes, that's me. Tortoise that Feeds on Ant-At the Tree top! One who wrestles seven Lions and kills them empty handed. Son of Pootaguo whose totem is the Prowling Bush-cat! Prince of Dark Forest! (pauses) I thank you Great King. Abi of Dim-Nyim-Lira, Fire that eats Rivers.... I thank you for this honour done me. I pledge by the seven spears of Kompi to uphold the trust, goodwill and exalted position you have given me. I swear to answer your call in rain or fire; day and night. (*cheer*) For my good friend, the Master Craftsman Kweku Ananse, who so selflessly demanded that his death must not taint this happy occasion, I propose, Great King, that our first son, who would be on the way soon, be named after him, as a token of gratitude.

*(cheers as he sits down)*

## **KING**

Thank you, prince of the Dark Forest, worthy son-in-law. Your request shall not be. Ananse's death, in fact, was good riddance, for he was bound to die after completing his task. The priestess won't eat, drink nor talk; she insists Ananse's defilement and the catastrophe it entails remains with us as long as Ananse lived. He went the way he was bound to go. No memories of him; no legacy of his shall remain in this land.

### **ANANSE [AS POOTAGYIRI]**

Your wish, Great King.

### **KING**

Now the retainers will pack up your possessions and put them into the three boats which will ferry you to the island, your chieftain. We wish you well.

*(The drummers resume playing. The MAIDENS sing and dance while the warriors-dancers perform the parting dance. The groom dances back into the palace with his bride, while the KING, QUEEN, ELDER and AKPALA all dance back into the palace. The lights fade out)*

*(Light fade in. ANANSE emerges from the palace through door Up Right. He looks around and starts address the audience confidently. He speaks now in his usual nasal tone)*

## **ANANSE**

Now you see, folks? What did I tell you? Now I've won myself a chieftain, a wife, wealth unlimited, and even three boats to carry everything to safety. Soon, I shall be on Boyile Island, King in my own right! There, nobody can reach me, for those boats will never return, nor their pilots! Then it will take these empty – headed souls another

decade to carve new boats to pursue me, by which time I would have built a formidable army. I am no fool! I am Ananse, the Supreme Strategist, Master Craftsman in the Guild of Divine....

(*SODZIISA suddenly appears from Up Centre and watches ANANSE with shock*)

**SODZIISA**

My husband....

**ANANSE**

(*taken unawares*)

Who? Ooo....it's you, my wife. What's the matter?

**SODZIISA**

Well, nothing really....only for a moment I thought I heard you speaking to yourself.....

**ANANSE**

Well... I may have been meditating.... I often do, when I am overwhelmed with joy.

**SODZIISA**

And my husband....your voice.... You sounded like er...the dead craftsman.

**ANANSE**

Ooo..... did I ? Aa! Now I am sure I know why. Ananse's evil spirit may have crept into my being. Do not worry, wife. I have potent medicines to purge myself of those spirits. I am certain they invade me through those vile gourds he gave me as parting gifts. I must destroy them immediately. Fetch them from that bundle, will you?

**SODZIISA**

Instantly

(*SODZIISA re-enters the palace. AKPALA enters from Right.*)

**AKPALA**

Well....?

**ANANSE**

Well what?

**AKPALA**

Your promise...my reward. Now that everything is over....

**ANANSE**

You must be a very impatient man, Akpala. Fresh wind has hardly blown over my marriage., and here you are making demands.

### **AKPALA**

That was the agreement. "Immediately after the marriage you said."

### **ANANSE**

Alright, alright. I have set my wife to fetch those magic gourds of honey....

### **AKPALA**

Really? O, what an honourable gentleman ....

**ANANSE**

Ssssh! There she comes. No word about it, you hear that? No woman must hear the secrets of the gods. (*SODZII SA enters*) Aa! My good wife....thank you. Now hurry in and speed up the packing.

**SODZII SA**

Yes, my Lord.

(*SODZII SA goes back into the palace*)

**ANANSE**

Now.... you.... come this way! Hurry, there's very little time. Kneel down and close your eyes. If you as much as blink, you ruin the magic. Open your mouth... wider good. (*ANANSE drops a little honey on his tongue*) What do you taste?

**AKPALA**

Honey!

**ANANSE**

Good. Swallow it.... and open your mouth again. (*pours another round of honey*) What do you taste, Akpala?

**AKPALA**

Honey, Sweet honey!

**ANANSE**

Good swallow it again. Now open your mouth again. But this time, do not swallow. Keep your mouth open until I have smeared your lips with honey. Then I will tell you what to do next, right?

*(AKPALA nods anxiously. ANANSE quietly places the gourd of honey back into its strap and brings out the gourd of gum. He begins to pour its contents into AKPALA's mouth.)*

**ANANSE**

*(with pious dignity)*

## **ANANSE**

By the powers given me by the timeless gods, I give you, Akpala this secret of honey, as a token of your untainted loyalty, help and kindness to me. Let it be with you forever. Any time you want honey, may your very spittle become honey – just on the thought. (*ANANSE begins to smear some of the gum on the lips of AKPALA*).

Now, do not swallow.... you hear me? Do not swallow! If you do so, it will turn to crocodile bile, and you will die this very moment. Slowly, close your mouth....good. Now press your lips tight so your mouth won't open to let off the spirit. Now open your eyes and take this gourd. Run back to the crossroads and there, think of honey. Tell yourself you want honey. Then open your mouth and you will see honey filling this gourd and spilling over! Ha! Now you have the secret of the gods! Go! When you return, we will work out the details of the other rewards.

(*AKPALA, now beaming contentedly, nods repeatedly as he piously holds his mouth shut, picks the gourd of gum and heads hurriedly off towards exit down Left. ANANSE quickly runs to bushes Left and hides the other gourds*)

**ANANSE**

That was close, I tell you. A close shave indeed! But keep your okro mouths shut. There are still more knots to untie.

*(Enter drummers, maidens and retainers bearing huge bundles of assorted household possessions, led by SODZIISA. The KING and QUEEN take their seats looking very satisfied.)*

**SODZIISA**

My husband and Lord, everything is ready for our departure.

**ANANSE**

Ready! Great King, we take our leave. We will surely visit from time to time, with boats full of cattle, grains, yams.....

**KING**

Will you not wait for the tappers to bring in the evening wine, so we can pour libation for your safe journey?

**ANANSE**

No, Great King. I'd rather we got to the island before dark, so we can settle in and rest a bit. You may pour the libation on our behalf, Great King.

**KING**

Well, in that case, we won't delay you any longer. May the gods guide you through your journey.... may you live in eternal sunshine.

Goodbye.....goodbye my princess, Sodziisa, goodbye son-in-law.

**ANANSE/SODZIISA**

Goodbye... goodbye....

*(Suddenly as the procession begins to move, towards Down left, there is muted commotion from outside, Left, as of a dumb person trying to scream or speak. AKPALA stumbles in, agitated, his gestures wild but meaninglessly holding the gourd of gum in his hands. He makes violently at ANANSE. The guards restrain him as he continues to groan and gesticulate towards ANANSE, his mouth firmly closed.)*

**KING**

What is the meaning of this Akpala? What is the wrong with you? Can't you speak?

## **ANANSE**

Aaa!..... I understand, Great King. The dead craftsman gave us his two gourds of honey as parting gifts before he died. But I suspected the sweet stuff contains an evil spell, considering what everyone knows about his ghostly ways. I told Akpala we must bury those gourds, and he agreed. A while ago I made my wife fetch me those gourds and I went to bury them in the bush. I am sure Akpala hid by and thought he must have those two for himself. This is one of the gourds, and he has drunk all the stuff no doubt. Ananse warned that none should taste it on a Friday else the one would have his mouth sealed forever, and then go mad. Today is .... (*pretends to reckon the days*)

## **CROWD**

Friday! Friday!

## **ANANSE**

Now if you allow him to touch anybody with his mouth, that person will suffer the same affliction. (*Everybody, including GUARDS restraining AKPALA, begins to protect their own mouths. AKPALA is struggling without success to speak or charge on ANANSE*)

## **KING**

Hold those hands firmly! Fetch a rope, someone, and bind the greedy fellow! He is surely mad, possessed by Ananse's evil spirit. See his blood-shot eye! Keep him off! What shall we do with him now? He's surely a great danger.

**ANANSE**

Great King, it saddens me to make this suggestion, Akpala being my best friend, companion and peer during initiation. But if the empire is to be saved from the scourge of dumbness and madness, I'm afraid he'd have to be killed immediately. For one must endure the pain of pulling out one rotten tooth, to save the rest from infection.

**CROWD**

Yes....yes... he must be killed immediately! Kill the greedy brute!

**KING**

Wise words indeed, son of Pootaguo. You carry the head of a sage.  
Poor Akpala. How he struggles... to spread his affliction, no doubt.  
Guards! Take him out. Let the executioners lead him to follow Ananse's  
dark path into the forest of evil souls. (*GUARD drags the still struggling,  
tearful AKPALA off through Down Right*)

## KING

Now the final legacy of the vile stranger is gone.... with Akpala forever.  
You may go on your journey now. Darkness approaches. The gods  
guide you. (*The drums begin to sound as well as singing, and  
ANANSE's procession exits through Down Left.*

## FADE OUT

(*It is dusk. The KING is seated on his stool, his hand propping his chin  
in a gloomy mood. Standing aloof to his right, rigid and staring  
thoughtfully into space is the PRIESTESS, a green twig stuck in her  
mouth. She waves her flywhisk slowly.*)

**KING**

I have told you the defilement has been adequately appeased.... The aberration is over. Ananse is dead, and so is that greedy fool, Akpala. You must eat.... you must drink... above all you must speak. Or have you too been afflicted by the dumb disease? (pauses) Your continued silenced drives me mad. (*hears a sudden giggle from within, Centre Right*) Who is there? Come out whoever you are. (*Odudu emerges giggling foolishly.*) Aaa! So it's you, Odudu. Now what amuses you so?

**ODUDU**

The stranger.... Ananse. Is he gone, my Lord?

**KING**

What do you mean “is he gone?” Must you always play the Idiot? Can’t you muster a little spell of thoughtful sanity? Didn’t you bury Ananse together with Akpala? (*ODUDU continues giggling*) Now would you stop those silly pranks? You need some whipping to clear your misty head. Guard!

**ODUDU**

(*suddenly cuts the giggle and sobs*)

O..... o..... my king. Don’t let them whip me.

**KING**

Speak sense then, or get out!

**ODUDU**

(sobs) My.... my King.... Ananse.... he did not die o! We didn't bury Ananse. We buried the prince.... Ananse, he's gone with the princess.  
(sobs) And now I can't get any more honey. (*licks his palm sadly*)

**KING**

Hey, what are you talking about now? Have the gods added insanity to your idiocy?

**ODUDU**

O..... my King.... It is true. I swear by Naa Kompi. I heard everything when he sent me to fetch water.... I saw them.... It was Akpala... he shot Pootagyiri with an arrow. Then.... My King... then....

**KING**

(he rises; clearly agitated and confused)

Yes, go on!

**ODUDU**

Then we went to bury the prince, Akpala and I. The dead *prince*, he was wearing Ananse's smock. And Ananse, he took the prince's amulets and went into the bush...err...

**KING**

Hey, Odudu, are you sure of what you're saying?

**ODUDU**

Very sure my King..... O now Ananse has gone with the gourd of sweet honey oo...oo...oo! Yes, my lord. I saw the prince myself as we buried him. His lips were smiling, so I saw his gab-teeth. I like his gab-teeth .... oo...oo...oo.. Pootagyiri! Shall I lead you to see him?

**KING**

Look here, Odudu. If what you say turns out to be one of your silly jokes. I will have your brainless head chopped off instantly. You hear that? (*ODUDU nods timidly*) Guard, run in and call Mbasila.

**GUARD**

Your wish my Lord.

*(runs out, through door up Left)*

**KING**

Now, Odudu, you will go with Mbasila, Captain of the Royal Archers and some warriors, to the forest. You will show them the very spot where Ananse was buried and then.....

**GUARD**

*(re-enters though door Up Left)*

My Lord, Mbasila, Captain of the Royal Archers, responds to your summons....

## **MBASILA**

(at the heels of GUARD, clad in full battle dress of an amulet-studded smock and a horned skull-cap) Hail, Abi of Dim-Nyim-Lira.... Mist that shrouds....

## **KING**

Go, Mbasila! Gather some warriors and go to the forest. Odudu here will lead you to where Ananse.... well... of course... Ananse was buried last night. Exhume the body and bring it back here. We must verify the truth now! Odudu, you hear? Go with Mbasila and his men. And remember, if that ill-fated stranger's body comes back to foul the sanctity of this palace again for nothing, your head won't be worth a discarded kitchen-pot. Go, Mbasila. Bring the corpse here. And once

here, determine whether it is Ananse or Pootagyiri. You know the Prince well. You two belonged to the same initiation camp didn't you?

**MBASILA**

Yes, my Lord, I can tell the very patterns of his most obscure body scars even in the dark.

**KING**

So go. Get the task done, at once!

**MBASILA**

It is done, Great King. (*to ODUDU*) This way, Odudu. Be quick, for we must get to the forest before the flame of the sky dies completely.

(*MBASILA and ODUDU leave through door Right*)

## KING

(pensively) Hmm! I only hope it turns out to be a farce or one of Odudu's clownish jokes. O yes, I know for certain it is... and the fool will pay dearly for it! Come to think of it, who would have doubted that it was Pootagyiri, resplendent in his princely smock, into whose hands I blessed my daughter? Who, but a sightless moron could have missed his likeness to my long –gone friend and chief, the valorous Pootaguo? Listen to him stringing the praise-names of his ancestral lineage! "Pootagyiri-wo Pootaguo, whose totem is the prowling bush-cat.... Yet this Ananse, this mysterious character, why does his malevolent spirit still haunt this empire? Perhaps ...perhaps, as the Old (*PRIESTESS breaks her long stock-silence, smiles wryly and stares vacantly into space*)

## **PRIESTESS**

And sweet dew-drops

Dripping from the navel of

An alien god

Moisten twitching tongues of desire

Turning reason into pungent vapours

Of insanity...

As gaudy rainbow figures blend with parrot features

To hypnotise virgin nipples

That melt into eyes

Or fiery lust....

And prepare the fertility

Of the land for rape...rape...rape...rape

**KING**

(observes PRIESTESS with some mirth)

Well, Priestess of Kompi, Confuser-of-minds! You have broken your silence at last, haven't you? (chuckles) Thought you too had lost the power of your tongue. Now thanks to Naa Buruku....

**PRIESTESS**

(oblivious of KING DOSEY's interruption)

As gaudy rainbow figures

Blend with parrot feathers

To hypnotise virgin nipples

That melt into eyes

Of fiery lust ... ai... ai... ai... ai...

## KING

(*contemplatively*)

Those are strange words. Priestess of Kompi... rainbow figures... parrot feathers... Hmm? Now where did I hear those strange words once? Ah! Of course.... the very words of that silly song the wandering craftsman taught Sodziisa and the maidens. Ho! How interesting! Shall we say my Priestess.... The invincible bedmate of the Great Kompi, Confuser-of-minds has herself been afflicted with Ananse's maddening charms?

*(Wordlessly, the PRIESTESS stares disdainfully at KING DOSEY, then, smiling and shaking her head faintly, she saunters off, through door Right. Instantly the lights dim as echoes of a touching warrior-dirge float from the distance. A procession of warriors bearing a corpse dance slowly across the forestage, led by MBASILA, with ODUDU at the rear, sucking the thumb in aloofness; entering through Down Left. The bodies*

*of those in the procession are in total silhouette. Further upstage, also in dim light, the ELDER and QUEEN flank KING DOSEY as slowly, the three rise and peer at the passing procession. The lights brighten immediately the procession disappeared through Down Right.)*

**MBASILA**

*(re-enters briskly through door Left)*

My King....

**KING**

Well....?

**MBASILA**

It was Pootagyiri, my Lord. He died with a poisoned arrow-head sticking through his heart... (*QUEEN lets out a shrill, horrific wail and stumbles back into the palace chambers through Up Right, sobbing*).

**KING / ELDER**

Naa Buruku!

**ELDER**

We are doomed I should have known. Will posterity ever forgive an elder who went to sleep at mid-day as his barn was looted? [exits]

**KING**

*(in sober resignation)* All is lost, then. *(to audience)* Why didn't anybody tell me? *(turning furiously to ODUDU)* You... why didn't you tell anybody, fool? You sat here and looked on. Why?

**ODUDU**

Nobody asked me, my Lord.

**KING**

Aa! Ananse... Kweku Ananse has swindled us...taken everything away...

**ODUDU**

No, my Lord...not everything... He... he left.... (*pulling out the perforated gourd strapped behind him*) this!

**KING**

Naa Buruku! What a land of idiots I preside over! (*KING moves agitatedly to wall, Right and puts on battle smock and horned cap.*)

**KING**

(to GUARD) Quick, Call Mbasila!! Get the boatmen! Err... err... sound the war-drums. Put everybody to arms. (*KING clashes with GUARD and both fall, confused*)

**KING**

Fool! Hurry... everybody! The Empire is in crises!