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Dramatic Publishing



Anansi the Spider: A Trickster Courtship



Comedy by Jeremy Kisling

Anansi the Spider: A Trickster Courtship

Comedy. By Jeremy Kisling. From the folktale. *Cast: 1 to 3m., 2 to 3w., 1 either gender.* The trickster, Anansi, has taken the proverbs of wisdom from Nyami, god of the sky, angering him greatly. Soon after, Anansi meets Aso, Nyame's daughter. He is smitten and must marry her. Aso is not sure whether she can trust a trickster like Anansi and requires him to prove himself by sending him on a quest. Anansi must acquire the tooth of a crocodile, the whisker of a lion and an eagle's feather. So Anansi meets Marty, the crocodile, who likes baked goods; Lelia, the lion, who wants to be a beauty queen; and Edwardo, an eagle who is afraid of heights. With the help of the audience, Anansi accomplishes his task but lies about how he does so, taking all the credit. Aso and Nyame see right through him. Aso decides to give Anansi another chance, issuing a more complicated task. Anansi is charged with putting stars in the sky. This seems impossible until he meets Chloe, a smart but nerdy firefly, who finds some friends who join her in lighting the heavens. When Anansi takes credit for the firefly's feat, Aso and Nyame are greatly offended. Nyame sends the winds to dry up all the water. The whole earth will suffer if Anansi cannot make it rain, which he cannot do, and he realizes he is doomed. It is in defeat that Anansi finds humility and the path to acceptance and love. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: AL1.*

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Anansi the Spider: A Trickster's Courtship

By

JEREMY KISLING



Dramatic Publishing Company

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Anansi the Spider: A Trickster's Courtship was developed and premiered by Lexington Children's Theatre (Lexington, Ky.) in 2006.

Cast:

Nyame, the Sky God	Adam Montague
Aso	Dana Chester
Anansi	Christopher Bell
Marty, a crocodile	Adam Montague
Lelia, the lion	Casey Holloway
Edwardo, an eagle	Adam Montague
Chloe, the lightning bug.....	Casey Holloway

Production Staff:

Director	Vivian Snipes
Scenic Design.....	Tamara L. Honesty
Costume Design	J. Nicole Smith
Lighting Design	Amy Stallings
Stage Manager	Jacqueline Massé
Technical Director	Dawn Alex

Anansi the Spider: A Trickster's Courtship

CHARACTERS

ANANSI: the spider trickster.

NYAME: god of the sky.

MARTY: a clumsy crocodile with a sweet tooth.

EDWARD: an eagle who's afraid of heights.

ASO: Nyame's daughter and Anansi's future wife.

LELIA: a vain, beauty-queen lion.

CHLOE: a shy intelligent firefly.

The play can be performed with as few as three actors if doubling is used.

Anansi the Spider: A Trickster's Courtship

SCENE 1

(The play opens just after ANANSI has successfully obtained the wisdom of the proverbs from NYAME. NYAME is angry and searching for ANANSI to retrieve his lost wisdom.)

NYAME. Anansi! Where have you gone, you scampering, conceited little spider? You tricked me. I—Nyame, god of the sky—ruler of all of Africa, shall not be bested by a simple yiki buibui. Anansi, show yourself! *(Arrives at C and takes a breath.)* Not here. I must call on the wind to find him and regain my proverbs of wisdom.

(NYAME turns and addresses a section of the audience.)

NYAME *(cont'd)*. North Wind, *[I need you to]* blow across the mighty Sahara, *(Swshhhh.)* raise the sand into a huge dust storm, *(Swshhhh.)* blinding all who travel there. *(Swshhhh.)* Bring Anansi to me. *(Swshhhh.)*

(As NYAME makes each “swshhhh” sound, he makes an accompanying gesture. As the participation progresses, NYAME should be able to replace his “swshhhh” sound with just the hand motion. His hand motion will enable the participation to continue under his later conversation with ASO. NYAME turns and addresses another section of the audience.)

NYAME *(cont'd)*. Winds of the south, I need you to join the North Wind and blow toward the mountains, *(Swshhhh.)* blow to Mount Kilimanjaro, *(Swshhhh.)* and when you find Anansi, *(Swshhhh.)* blow him to me. *(Swshhhh!)*

(NYAME addresses yet another section of the audience.)

NYAME (*cont'd*). Let the winds of the east blow through the sky, (*Swshhhh.*) blow from Mozambique to Timbuktu. If you find Anansi, (*Swshhhh.*) let him feel my rage. (*Swshhhh.*) Blow, East Wind, blow! (*Swshhhh.*)

(NYAME addresses the final section of the audience.)

NYAME (*cont'd*). West Wind, blow through the trees of the savannah (*Swshhhh.*) and shake him out if he is there. (*Swshhhh.*) Blow, winds of the west, blow! (*Swshhhh.*)

(Talking to all sections at once, indicating with his hand motions that they should continue the participation.)

NOTE: If we are to hear ANANSI cry as he falls out of the tree and the papers spread to the wind, now would be the moment that happens.)

ANANSI. Aaugh!

NYAME. Blow, mighty winds, blow! (*Swshhhh.*) Blow!

(ASO enters, buffeted by the winds. NYAME continues encouraging the four winds to blow as the following conversation happens over the rush of the wind.)

ASO. Father! Why do you create such a fury of the winds?

NYAME. I search for a spider. (*Swshhhh.*) Blow winds, blow harder! (*Swshhhh.*) Bring Kwaku Anansi to Nyame.

ASO. Father! You endanger our people.

(NYAME makes the hand motion, quieting the audience.)

NYAME. Winds of the four directions, calm yourselves and rest. I, Nyame, the sky god, thank you for your assistance in my search.

ASO. Father, what is so important that you forget what is best for all Africa?

NYAME. A deceitful trickster has taken the proverbs of wisdom from me.

ASO. The proverbs with which you guide our people?

NYAME (*nods*). The wisdom is gone, stolen by that yiki spider, no longer to be shared. Even my winds could not find him.

ASO. Come and walk with me. Perhaps a walk in the garden will calm you.

NYAME. No, I am going to rest. I wish to forget this awful day.

ASO. As you wish. I am going to stay and walk in the garden.

NYAME. Follow me to the sky, precious Aso, for the dark night will soon be upon us.

(NYAME exits. ASO finds a scrap of paper or parchment. It is a piece of wisdom blown away by ANANSI's carelessness. She reads it.)

ASO. What is this ... "One falsehood spoils a thousand truths." This is one of father's proverbs. Look, here's another. (*Finds another.*) "The heart of the wise man lies quiet in reflection." Won't Nyame be pleased that I've found these ...

(ASO finds one more. ANANSI enters and listens.)

ASO. "Virtue is better than wealth."

ANANSI. It is true you know.

ASO. What is true? Who are you?

ANANSI. I could ask the same of you. (*A beat. She does not answer.*) I am Anansi the spider.

ASO. Kwaku Anansi?

ANANSI (*nods*). The very same. (*Makes a grand gesture.*) I am responsible for spreading wisdom throughout the world.

ASO. *You* brought wisdom ... ?

ANANSI (*bragging*). Yes, I obtained the wisdom of the proverbs from Nyame, the sky god. Shall I tell you the story?

ASO. Yes, I would like to hear it.

ANANSI. I traveled to the court of the sky god and inquired; (*He bows low as if speaking to the sky god.*) Nyame, what is the price of your stories? (*In NYAME's voice.*) "Someone such as you could never pay the price. There are three things I want in exchange for my wisdoms. How could you, a yiki buibui, expect to bring them to me?" (*Back to ANANSI's voice. Laughs.*) The sky god thought he asked the impossible! But I used my brawn to catch a python, my brain to trap a fairy and my cunning to seize a nest of hornets. When I presented the python, fairy and hornets to Nyame—he had no choice but to give me the wisdoms.

ASO. Why then are all the proverbs scattered about?

ANANSI. A short while ago, a giant wind was blowing and the trees began to sway. I was storing the proverbs for safe-keeping, but when I felt the wind, I decided to spread the wisdom on the wind. I still have a few bits of knowledge here in my bag. Please choose one for yourself.

(*ASO does so and reads it.*)

ASO. "Love is like a child, it must be treated tenderly."

(*ASO smiles. There is a beat as the two look at each other, and we see them fall in love. ASO breaks eye contact first.*)

ANANSI. What is your name? You have not yet told me.

ASO (*reluctantly*). I am Aso.

ANANSI. Nyame's daughter ...

(*ASO nods. There is an awkward moment. Then ANANSI bows low as he speaks.*)

ANANSI (*cont'd*). It is a great honor to meet you, princess.

(ASO crosses to ANANSI, takes his hand and raises him up from the low bow.)

ASO. I am merely Aso, Anansi.

(ASO looks ANANSI in the eye, and the two are momentarily entranced again. We see that ASO is smitten. She giggles and pulls her hand away.)

ASO (*cont'd*). Think of our meeting as a pleasure, Anansi, not an honor.

ANANSI. The pleasure is indeed mine.

(ANANSI composes a song for her)

ANANSI (*sings*). Aso, Aso, beautiful princess

Aso, Aso beautiful one

Aso, Aso be joyful ever

Under the setting sun.

(Embarrassed, she laughs lightly.)

ASO. Oh, Anansi.

ANANSI. Aso, you are the loveliest—

NYAME (*offstage*). Aso!

ANANSI.

Nyame!

ASO.

My father!

ASO. I should be going.

ANANSI. So soon?

NYAME (*offstage*). Aso!!

(ASO starts to leave, but ANANSI catches her hand and pulls her back. ASO glances between ANANSI and NYAME's voice, obviously torn.)

ASO. I must go, Anansi. It is past sunset and the moon is new so there is no light in the night sky. My father worries for all who would travel after dark and I am forbidden to stay.
NYAME (*offstage*). Aso!

(*ANANSI pulls her to him. We are to think he will kiss her.*)

ANANSI. Farewell, sweet Aso.

(*ANANSI kisses the back of her hand and lets go. She reluctantly starts to leave and then turns ... perhaps she blows him a kiss.*)

ASO. Until we meet again.

(*Which he would catch and put on his cheek.*)

ANANSI. May it be soon.

ASO. I would like that. (*Exits.*)

ANANSI. She is beautiful! I must see Aso again. No! I must marry her! With Aso at my side, nothing can stop me. (*Sings.*)

I shared the wisdom, the stories, the proverbs

Let the knowledge of the world be heard

For a little spider such as I

Met a beautiful princess from the sky

I will marry her and shout on high

Let all sing praise of Anansi!

SCENE 2

ANANSI (*cont'd*). Nyame! Nyame, great god of the sky, I beg a boon of you.

NYAME. Who calls Nyame's name in the dim hours of twilight? Who dares interrupt my evening contemplations?

ANANSI. It is I, Nyame! Anansi, the spider.

NYAME (*appears*). Anansi! I have nothing to say to you.

ANANSI. But Nyame, I have come to seek your guidance.

Would you hear my plea, great one?

NYAME. Yes.

ANANSI. I have learned, through your wisdoms, that I cannot be content without a wife—someone with whom to share my wisdom and happiness.

NYAME (*dismissively*). Then set out and find yourself a suitable wife. (*Turns to leave.*)

ANANSI. And so I have. You have a daughter, do you not, Nyame?

NYAME. Why yes, but I think you might do better to find someone more—[*in keeping with your station.*]

ANANSI. Ah, but Nyame, who better than the daughter of the sky god?

NYAME (*sternly*). My daughter ... is beyond your station.

ANANSI. Once Aso—I mean—your daughter sees—I mean—meets me, she will no doubt consent to marriage. No one can deny my charm and wit.

NYAME (*laughing*). Anansi, you are arrogant beyond compare ... I will ask her to come, but I can assure you, Aso will not be swayed by your wiles. (*Exits.*)

ANANSI. First, I spread wisdom throughout the world and now I will have Aso as my wife. Life is good! (*Chants.*)

Who shared the wisdom, the stories, the proverbs?

Let his triumphs o'er the world be heard

For a little spider such as I

wins a beautiful princess from the sky

When I marry her they'll shout on high

Let all sing praise of Anansi!

Let all sing praise of Anansi!

Anansi!

Anansi!

Let all sing praise of Anansi!

(During the song, NYAME and ASO returned. They overhear his singing and boasting. NYAME calls ANANSI's name, overlapping the song.)

NYAME. Anansi. Anansi! *Anansi*, allow me to present my daughter, Aso.

ANANSI. It is truly a pleasure and an honor to see you again, sky princess.

NYAME. See you *again*!?

ASO. Yes, Father. Anansi and I met—briefly in the garden ... just as the sun was setting.

NYAME. You spoke to him? The crafty little buibui that tricked me? He took the wisdom I used to guide our people.

ASO. Did you not set him three impossible tasks?

NYAME. Yes ...

ASO. And did he not complete them, as you demanded?

NYAME. Yes, but—

ASO. Then were you not obligated to give him the wisdoms as you had agreed?

NYAME. Of course, but that does not mean—

ASO. And did he not share them with all creatures of Africa?

NYAME. He shared them?

ASO. Yes, it seems (*Pointedly.*) a great wind came rushing through the trees of the savannah. The great wind then scattered the proverbs across the continent so all could share and learn from their wisdoms.

ANANSI. A noble deed, no doubt, and now I have come to ask for Aso's hand in marriage!

(ASO steps forward before NYAME has a chance to speak.)

ASO. What makes you think that I would be interested in you, Anansi?

ANANSI. But earlier ... I thought we had a moment.

ASO. I am the sky princess and you are a mere spider ...

ANANSI. But I shared the proverbs of wisdom with the world and with you as my wife, my life would be complete for you are the loveliest creature I have ever laid eyes on.

ASO. And you believe marrying me a symbol of status. Perhaps your praise is nothing but a trick.

ANANSI. NO NO NO ... I adore you and you should want to marry me. I am capable of more than just sharing wisdom with the world; I will do many great things, Aso! Marry me and you shall see.

ASO. Anansi ... *(A pause.)* ... Wait here. Father ... May I have a word with you?

(ANANSI sits. ASO takes NYAME aside to the sky.)

ASO *(cont'd)*. Father what do you think?

NYAME. Anansi has great ambition, but he twists every action to his advantage. Do you truly believe he would have shared the proverbs if my wind had not knocked them from his grasp? Be wary of this spider my child. I do not trust him.

ASO. It is true, I am not interested in a spider who only boasts of his great deeds or desires to marry me because I am the daughter of the sky god ...

NYAME. Then do not marry him.

ASO. But I believe he has a good heart. In the garden, I was certain he showed me true affection.

NYAME. How *would* you have someone prove that what he says and does is true?

ASO. Perhaps a task—one that requires determination, sincerity and teaches humility?

NYAME (*laughs lightly*). That is much to require from one task. (*Shaking his head.*) I would settle for an honest answer from Anansi.

ASO. An honest answer ... Thank you, Father!

(*ASO kisses NYAME.*)

ASO (*cont'd*). As always, you give me good advice.

NYAME. Do not tarry long, for it grows dark.

(*ASO bows deeply to her father and then returns to ANANSI. NYAME exits the playing space.*)

ASO. Anansi, if you wish to marry me, you must bring me a crocodile's tooth, a lion's whisker and an eagle's feather.

ANANSI. Why must I do this?

ASO. Because I do not know if the man standing in front of me is an honest one.

(*ANANSI quickly steps behind ASO or turns her around.*)

ANANSI. How about the man behind you ...

ASO. Anansi!

(*ANANSI holds up his hand to stop her from rattling on.*)

ANANSI. If it's proof you want, it is proof you shall receive.

(*ANANSI starts out the aisle. Then stops and turns back.*)

ANANSI. What is the task again?

ASO (*exasperated*). Bring me a crocodile's tooth, a lion's whisker and an eagle's feather. May your journey be quick.

ANANSI. Crocodile's tooth, lion's whisker and an eagle's feather.

(ANANSI starts out the aisle again. Then stops and turns back.)

ANANSI *(cont'd)*. I will prove myself a worthy husband, dear Aso.

ASO. I hope so.

(She blows him a kiss. He catches it and puts it on his cheek.)

ANANSI. Goodnight, Aso. *(Sings.)*

Aso, Aso, beautiful princess

Aso, Aso, beautiful one

Aso, Aso, be joyful ever

Tomorrow my task's begun

(ASO exits. ANANSI settles in to sleep on the log.)

ANANSI *(cont'd)*. A crocodile's tooth, lion's whisker and eagle's feather ... Tooth, whisker, feather ... *(Snores loudly.)*