

The Spider Weaver



Once, long ago, in an Ashanti village in the country of Ghana, there lived two expert weavers. One weaver was called Kofi. The other one was Yaw.

These men wove a simple cloth called nwen-ntoma. And everyone from the king of the Ashanti people to the poorest child wore it.





Late one night, Kofi and Yaw were returning home from a walk in the great Ashanti Forest. All of a sudden Yaw stopped. The light from his lantern had fallen on an amazing sight, glowing like moonbeams against the midnight sky.

“Come look, my friend,” Yaw whispered to Kofi. “I see a small miracle.”

The small miracle was actually a web. But never before had either of them seen such a wondrous design! Yet it had been woven with a single unbroken thread – a thread that was even finer than a strand of human hair.



“Let’s bring this treasure home with us to study,” Kofi whispered to Yaw.

Yaw carefully detached the web from where it held fast to a banana tree. But as he did, the web collapsed, sticking to his fingers.



“Oh, it is ruined!” Kofi cried. “Now how will we ever learn to weave this beautiful design?”

Saddened, the weavers walked home. Their discovery was lost forever.



When the men entered their village at dawn, Yaw's wife, Amma, came out to meet them and offered them a gourd filled with cool water to drink.

Neither man spoke as he ate, and for this reason Amma could sense that something was wrong.

"Please tell me what troubles you," she said.



"It is a beautiful web," her husband answered sadly. "When we tried to bring it home from the forest to study, it crumpled in my hands and was ruined."

"Do you think you could find another one like it?" Amma asked quietly.

Kofi was doubtful. "This web was very different – very special. And no creature ever spins the same web twice."

"Perhaps what happened was a blessing," Amma suggested gently. "Though you cannot find the same web again, perhaps you can find the same weaver."



And that is what Kofi and Yaw set out to do. Early the next morning, they eagerly made their way through the forest. They found the banana tree where they had first seen the extraordinary web.

Sure enough, in front of them were the beginnings of a new masterpiece.

In no time, a slender black leg emerged from the shadows and rested lightly on the silk threads. Yaw and Kofi could see the creature clearly now. The Master Web Weaver was a lovely, large, yellow-and-black spider.

As soon as they saw the spider, the men felt terrible for wrecking the magnificent web the night before. Now they could see that the web was the beautiful spider's home.

Longing to take the web home with them, the weavers looked at each other. But neither of them wanted to destroy the spider's home a second time. They were about to leave when the spider looked directly at them and began a weaving dance.



Dip! Twist. Turn and glide. The spider made her way across and back over the web. She moved like a woman dancing, regal and very graceful.

The spider wove on and on into the afternoon, and the weavers stood in admiration as they watched her.

At dusk, the tired but satisfied spider completed her creation.

The spider moved sideways to the edge of her web. But before disappearing into the shadows, she turned in the direction of Yaw and Kofi. In that brief moment, the men were quite certain she smiled at them.



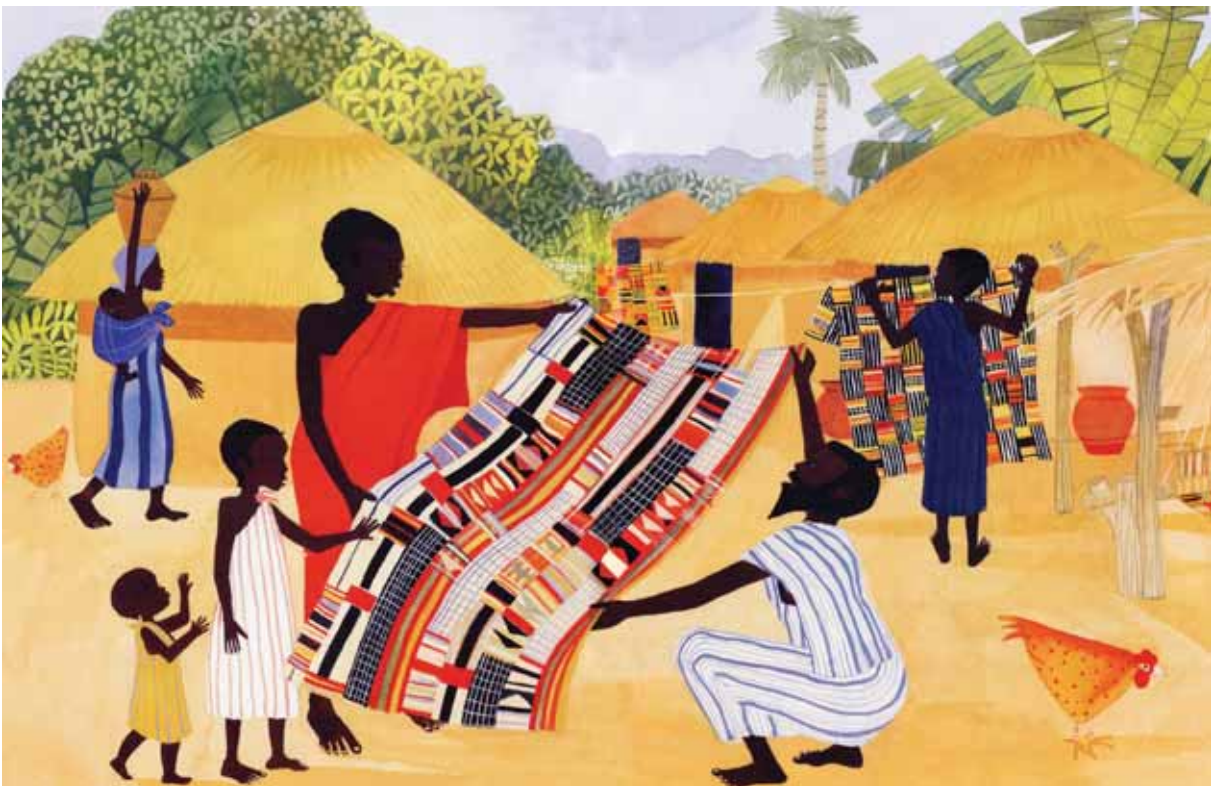
Then, in the blink of an eye, she was gone.

The beautiful spider had shown the weavers how to weave new, intricate designs. What a wonderful teacher she had been! What a wonderful gift she had given them!



With great joy they returned to their village.

In time, the weavers redesigned their looms so they could imitate the spider's weaving dance. At first, they copied her patterns in black and white thread but soon they dyed their threads in bright colours and developed many new patterns themselves. And they named this new cloth ken-te-nwen-ntoma – which today is commonly called ken-te cloth.



Everyone in the village wanted to wear this new cloth, but, at first, only the king of the Ashanti people wore it on special occasions. However, as time passed, others were allowed to wear the new cloth, too.

Soon the two weavers were well known across Ghana. And, because of the spider's generous gift, they created designs and patterns that are still worn throughout the world today.



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