

# The Wax Doll, a West African version of the Stickfast motif

It was the farm season, and everybody was making plantations, first in the low marshes and then on the highland or in the mountainous regions—all except Spider, who was said to have been at the time very ill. Everybody in the town turned out to work but Spider. From the time the bushes were cut down and burnt to the time when the rice began to ripen, Spider lay in bed ailing.

When the rice was fully ripe and the people started to gather it, Spider's case became serious. It was thought he would die. But just before dying, he asked the people, when he was dead, to bury his body in some large rice farm.

Spider then died, and his body was accordingly interred in his uncle's largest farm.

Every morning after the burial, when the people came out to the farm, they found that either rice or some other article had been stolen during the previous night. This went on every night for a week. Several attempts were made to lay hands on the thief, but without success. There was no one who could guess who the thief was.

The people then went to a diviner to seek his priestly advice, or, if possible, to have the culprit described to them. The priest, however, told them to go and make a wax doll in the shape of a young girl, and to place it near the corner of the kitchen. In the morning, on their return, they would find that the burglar had been caught.

As the shades of night gradually fell, the disheartened laborers began to retire from their daily toil. There was a perfect stillness—all the farmers had gone home—and, when it was nearly midnight, Spider crept out easily from his grave, and went into the kitchen on a hunt for rice. His search was a quick one, he got everything he needed, and he commenced cooking some food. When the blaze became brighter, he looked around for a spoon with which to stir the rice, and his eyes suddenly fell on the beautiful young initiate (the doll is meant to resemble a girl in puberty school) standing in the corner.

Spider laughed, and said, "Are you watching me burn my hands without coming to my assistance?"

Spider was puzzled because the initiate did not reply. He dropped the spoon on the ground, and stepped up boldly to her and put his left hand on her shoulder.

The pots began to boil, and Spider made several attempts to go and look at his food, but the initiate refused to let him go—he was stuck to the wax.

Spider got vexed, and started to curse and swear. He told the initiate that if she did not speak or allow him to go and look after his pots, he would slap, kick, and knock her all over her face.

A deep silence ensued for a quarter of an hour. The initiate did not speak, nor did she release him.

It was now almost day—the rice in the pot had burned to cinders—and there was Spider, hanging with his hands, feet, and teeth stuck on to the beeswax coating of the initiate. When it was day, and the people came to their farms, they found old Spider hanging. They yelled and shouted at him, and some of them poured oil on him and set his body on fire. Spider was burned to cinders, and his ashes were thrown into his old grave.

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