

me and take my place. I don't want it."

Quickly the trader untied Ahmadu and took his place. Then Ahmadu tied him up in the bag and rode off in the trader's donkey with the bag of kola nuts.

Soon the Chief's men returned and hauled off the cargo. "Finally, Ahmadu," one of them said. "Finally we have you in our hands. No longer will you trick people. Now you die. We will throw you in the river."

"No! No! No!" the trader shouted from the bag. "I am not him. It is I. Untie me!"

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" replied the men. "It is you! It is you!" Then they threw him into the river and returned to the Chief.

Before they had finished reporting to the Chief, there came Ahmadu on the donkey. He urged the donkey on and came before the Chief, who was speechless.

"Your great, great grandfathers send their greetings," Ahmadu said to the Chief. "They send their regards and this bag of kola nuts. It would be nice for you to go see them and show your respect and appreciation. Where they are, they have tons of gold and silver and would like you to come and fetch them yourself. You must go to where I have been to claim them. Meanwhile, I will stay here until you return."

On hearing this, the Chief summoned the villagers. He told them how Ahmadu had seen his forefathers and that he must go to see them too. While he was gone, Ahmadu was to assume his throne until he came back.

"You must serve him just as you have served me. He is your chief until I return."

Ahmadu gave instructions for the Chief to be tied, just as he had been tied. Then the men took him to the river and threw him into the deepest end.

Ahmadu ruled the village for four moons. And when the Chief never came back, Ahmadu remained the Chief of the village.



Ghana

COUNTRY

Formal Name: Republic of Ghana (formerly Gold Coast)

Short Form: Ghana

Term for Citizens: Ghanaian

Capital: Accra

Independence: March 6, 1957 (from United Kingdom); became a republic July 1, 1960

GEOGRAPHY

Size: 92,098 square miles (238,540 km²)

Boundaries: Bordered to the north by Burkina Faso, east by Togo, south by the Atlantic Ocean, and west by Côte d'Ivoire

SOCIETY

Population: 18.9 million

Ethnic Groups: Akan (44%) mostly in the western part of the country; Ga and Ga-Adangbe in the coastal belt around Accra; Ewes (13%) in the Volta region

Languages: Ga, Twi, Ewe, Fante, Dangme, and Dagbani, among others. The official language is English.

Religion: 38% local religions; 30% Islam; 24% Christianity; 8% others

A BRIDE FOR A GRAIN OF CORN

Nyame, the Great One, challenged all the creatures of an Akan village to a contest of wisdom. No one was brave enough to accept the challenge except the Spider, who was determined to prove he was the wisest of all Nyame's creatures—even after he learned that to prove it, he must pay a bride price with a grain of corn.

Long, long time ago, Nyame, the sky god, wanted to test the wisdom of his creatures. So, he issued a challenge to both the animals and the people. He told them that he would bestow wisdom and riches on the one who proved himself the wisest of all his creations. To make sure that the creatures were not out to waste his time, they had to pass a qualifying test.

The creatures found the challenge rather callous, for they were afraid of what the outcome would be if they failed. They gathered at the village square with everyone else and discussed the situation among themselves.

"How can we prove our wisdom to the Great One?" asked the Lion. "He already knows what is in our hearts."

"We cannot fake it, then?" asked the Hare.

"Maybe he wants only the humans for the contest," said one man. "That must be why he challenged our wisdom."

"The least he could've done is tell us what the test is," complained the Monkey, "that way we can decide whether or not we want to compete."

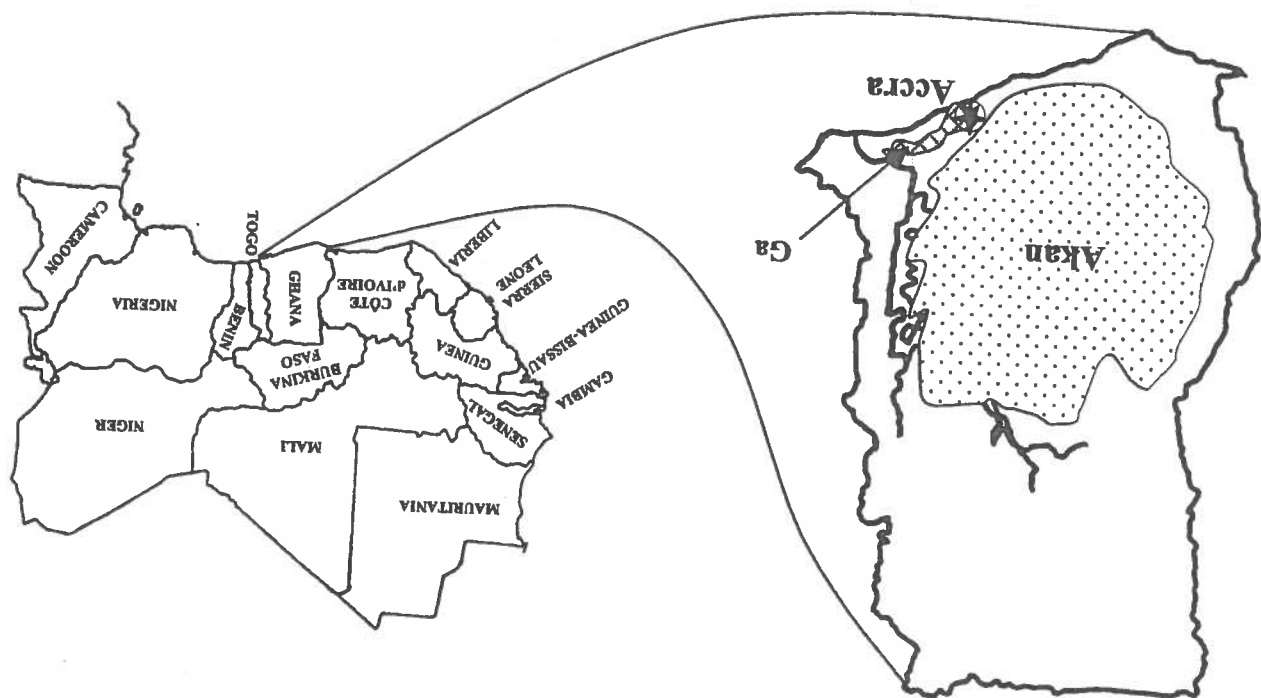
Thus the creatures and humans argued among themselves. Soon a great crowd formed before Nyame's court. But no one was willing to step forward and accept the challenge. They all withdrew to the periphery of the court. Just then the Spider approached the crowd.

"What's happening?" he asked the Elephant.

"You must be the only one who didn't hear the challenge," replied the Elephant.

"I heard the challenge," the Spider corrected him. "That's why I am asking why everyone is leaving. Who accepted it?"

"You must be crazy. No one in his right mind would dare accept the challenge."



ANIMAL LANGUAGE

From the Akan people comes this story of a man who was down on his luck. Everything he touched turned to disaster, until he chased a deer who had stolen from him. As reparation for his losses he was given a rare gift—the ability to understand the language of the animals. With the gift came one condition: if he were to reveal it, he would die. At first, the man saw the gift as a worthless burden. But when his fortunes began to improve miraculously, his view changed.

There once lived a very poor man and his wife. They were so poor that they had neither enough to eat nor enough to wear. Not only was the couple poor, they were also unlucky. So unlucky were they that *nothing* they did ever turned out right. If they bought goats or cattle or chicken or pigs to breed for food and cash, the animals died. If they farmed, the crops died or the animals dug them up and ate them.

One day as they sat in their old beat-up house that let in water when it rained and sun when it shined, the man said to his wife, "I think I might just have the answer to our poverty."

"Please do not tease me, Kofi," she warned her husband. "Nothing can get us out of this poverty. Everything we've tried has failed and I have given up."

"We should not give up, Araba. You told *me* not to—now you are?"

"Alright—what is this wonderful idea?" asked Araba.

"I have an idea. I don't know that it is wonderful, though. I am thinking of going to Chief Kumah to beg him to let me tap his palm trees for wine. And you, my wife, can take the wine to the market and sell it."

"That is a splendid idea," assured Araba. "But would he oblige you?"

"I don't know, but there is only one way to find out. I have nothing to lose anyway. Besides, he has so many palm trees in his farm that I am sure he will not mind my tapping a few of them. People say that he is a very rich and generous man. That is why they call him the Money Chief."

Meanwhile, Araba was counting her chicks before they were hatched. She closed her eyes and fantasized about how she would spend the money from the wine on new sets of clothes and thatching for her leaky roof. "Oh, that cloth Mrs. Nattay wore yesterday would be great in blue. Yes! Blue. That is the color I want," she thought.

Very early the next day, Kofi left for the Money Chief's villa to ask him for some of his palm trees.

"What is in it for me, my son?" asked the Chief. "I am a businessman you know, and I didn't get this rich by giving away all my wealth. As our people say, 'a chicken does not feed into its neighbor's stomach,' so let us make it a business proposal. I wash your hands and you wash mine."

"I know you to be a fair man," said Kofi. "Whatever you say will be alright with me."

"Take ten of my palm trees and tap them. Then whatever money you make from selling the wine from them, we shall share equally. I will even give you the calabash for collecting the wine. There, take what you need," Chief Kumah concluded, pointing to neat rows of calabash containers.

Kofi was overjoyed and took as many calabash containers as he could. When he arrived back home and told his wife about the deal he had struck with the Chief, she was ecstatic. She knew now that all her fantasies were about to become realities.

The next day, Kofi was up before everybody else in the village, eager to get to work. He fell the palm trees and tapped them for wine. He worked tirelessly all day and into the late evening, even as his stomach growled for food. "Once the wine comes in and it is sold, I will eat all the food I want," he thought.

Later that night, Kofi and his wife were talking and chattering like they never had before. They were very happy all of a sudden; they were filled with anticipation of the next morning. They played games, counting the number of full calabashes of wine they'd collect in the morning.

First thing the next morning, Kofi was off to the farm to collect the wine.

"Oh no!" he exclaimed as he approached the first tree and saw

that the calabash container was broken. "Who did this?" he asked. But confident that the other containers were still there anyway, he didn't dwell much on the lost wine. He ran with hope and anticipation to the next tree. But that container was also broken. One by one he visited the rest of the trees. And one by one, the calabashes had all been broken, and the wines gone. All that remained, as evidence, was a swarm of bees and flies fighting over the spills on the ground. Dejected and in tears, Kofi ran back home to his wife.

"What is the matter?" asked his wife.

"Lightning has struck us again," replied Kofi in disgust. "I told you that everything I try is bound to fail. There was no wine and all the calabashes were broken."

"Do not talk like that," admonished his wife. "You are a very hard worker and our god is bound to look kindly on us someday. You must keep trying. I am sure there was wine from the trees. My guess is that someone must have stolen it, and broken the pots to cover their tracks."

"You are right," said Kofi, "I must not give up and should try again."

"Perish the thought of giving up," said his wife. And as Kofi spotted a smile of encouragement, she added, "Now, that's the man I married."

Encouraged by his wife, Kofi went to Chief Kumah to borrow more calabash pots. After making fresh cuts on the palm tree for the wine to run, he tied the calabash under the cuts and went home.

By the next morning, all the pots had been broken again. Once again, only the flies and the bees were left, fighting over the drips. Kofi was now convinced that indeed this was the work of a thief and not just his bad luck alone. So, he went back and borrowed more pots. This time he set them up to collect the wine and decided to keep watch over them. He took up position at a strategic location in the palm tree plantation and waited patiently.

Tired from the long wait, Kofi was about to doze off, when the buzz of mosquitoes awoke him. Rather than slap the mosquitoes against his chin or ears, he just gently warded them off with his hand. He was afraid that swatting the mosquitoes might alert the

thief to his presence. For the next several hours Kofi waited patiently. But the mosquitoes were also frustrating him. He was about to call it a night when he heard a twig snap a few yards behind him. For just an instant, he began to wonder why he was out there in the deep forest. "Are these pots of wine worth my life?" he thought. "Suppose the thief is some wild animal I cannot subdue—then what? Or—"

His thought was interrupted as he heard the breaking of a pot. Straining to see in the weak moonlight, he made out what looked like a deer by one of the calabash pots. As he watched, the deer pulled Kofi's pot from under the palm tree and emptied its contents into its own pot, then smashed the empty pot to the ground.

Kofi dove after the deer, aiming at the antlers. The deer, though, leapt away in the same instant. But Kofi chased after the Deer, determined not to lose it. The chase continued into the early morning as the sun began to provide some daylight. The chase took them up over the crest of a very high hill, until suddenly, upon descent, Kofi found himself in the middle of an assembly of animals. In the center of the assembly was the Lion, and Kofi could tell that he was their king.

Kofi stopped in his tracks. "Now, I have really done it," he said to himself. "Walked into an ambush of wild animals."

The Deer ran straight to the Lion. He stretched out his forelegs with his head between them as if prostrating.

"What is the matter?" asked the Lion. "Is it not bad enough that we have to avoid you in the open forest, now you chase us in our own homes?"

Before the Lion could conclude his remarks, the Deer, almost out of breath, quickly told his version of the story. The Monkey, who must have been the Lion's assistant, asked Kofi to tell the Lion why he was chasing after their friend.

Kofi wasted no time telling the animals his life story. He began with how he was down on his luck, and how he hoped the palm wine would be his ticket to riches, and ended with the discovery of the Deer stealing from him. He then apologized to the Lion for disrupting his council and asked to be allowed to go back to his wife. "I am a fair judge," said the Lion, "and it is obvious to me that it

is the Deer who is at fault. He was given enough money with which to buy wine for my court, and he chose to steal from you instead. What he did with the money I don't know. We shall deal with him later. For you, I will give you a special gift that could pay for your troubles ten fold. From today onward, you will have the power to understand the language of the animals."

Kofi just stood there, still waiting for the gift that would pay for his losses ten times over.

"Be gone then," said the Lion, "while we decide on the fate of our friend here."

"What could be more ridiculous?" Kofi thought, as he bowed to take his leave of the animals. But not wishing to offend them, he thanked the Lion and was about to leave when the Lion said:

"One more thing about your gift."

"What?" Kofi asked in frustration.

"You must never tell anyone about it. If you do, you will surely die."

Kofi thanked him again, even though as he left he was more disappointed than ever. "What a gift!" he thought. "How can understanding the language of the animals pay for my losses? That is too ridiculous to imagine and talking about it to someone else is even worse. I'd *rather* die than talk about such a gift."

Tired from the long chase and his disappointment, Kofi went back to his house afraid that his wife might be mad that he had been gone for too long. But to his amazement, she was very understanding and thrilled to have him home.

"Where have you been?" she asked frantically. "You look horrible. Are you all right? Did you catch the thief?"

"It was the Deer who had been bringing bad luck to us. I chased after him but couldn't catch up with him."

Later that night Kofi went back to guard the palm trees to be sure that the Deer did not come back. But the Deer did not come back, and by daybreak he found all the calabash pots full of palm wine. He quickly brought them home and prepared them for his wife to take to the market. Every morning he came back with pots full of palm wine, which his wife sold for lots of money.

Kofi's luck seemed to have changed after that night he chased the

Deer. He now had a little bit of money to buy many of the things he needed such as cattle, goats, and horses. He was now able to fix up his house to keep out the rain and sun. His wife was now happier than ever. She was able to buy the clothes she needed to make herself presentable in public.

Meanwhile, Kofi understood what the animals said, and so often just chuckled or laughed out loud, and felt awkward since no one knew what he laughed about. One hot afternoon after tilling his farm for planting, Kofi went to the river to take a bath. Then he heard a hen with a brood of about ten chicks say to them, "How stupid can he be? Strip all his clothes only to get water on his body? That figures. No wonder he does not know that there is a box of gold behind his house. I saw it last time I was scratching for worms, but covered it up before his evil dog chased me out."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Kofi started to laugh. But he startled the hen and quickly stopped. Then he ran his palm several times over his face to make sure he was not dreaming. Sure enough he wasn't. He struck his pinkies into his ears to clear them. Then he heard the hen rebuke one of his chicks.

"Leave that worm for your brother. I gave you the first catch, didn't I? You have to learn to share."

Convinced of what he heard, Kofi continued with his bathing as if nothing had happened.

Later that night after everybody had gone to bed he took a hoe, went behind his house and dug up the box of gold.

Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold everywhere. There was enough gold in the box to set Kofi and his wife up for life. But he couldn't tell his wife how he knew the gold was there in the first place, much less where to dig. So he hid it away in a safe place and brought home a little piece at a time, as he needed them.

Soon Kofi and Araba were the richest couple in all the land. Araba was very generous to the poor and tried to help them get back on their feet. Kofi was equally generous. But he concentrated his efforts on making more money and making himself more famous. Life couldn't have been better for the couple. They were very happy together. Soon they were blessed with a son, whom they loved very much.

As Kofi and Araba lay down one evening to sleep, he heard two

mice gnawing at the door and one mouse said to the other.

"These people are now rich. They fortify everywhere with iron doors. Things were better when they were poor and had wooden doors you could gnaw through."

"Yeah! Such is life," replied the other mouse. "When you gnawed through the wooden doors, you found nothing. Now that they are rich and you are sure to find something in their home, you cannot gnaw through the doors."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" laughed Kofi, forgetting that he was there with his wife.

"What's so funny, Kofi?" asked Araba as she woke up with a start. "Are you laughing at my snoring again?"

"No! Nothing! I was just dreaming," he lied. "Go back to sleep."

But the laugh was loud enough to wake up the baby too, and Araba didn't take kindly to that.

"This laughter of yours will get you into trouble one of these days you know. I have tried to ignore it, but one of these days you will laugh at a corpse in a crowd of mourners and make a fool of yourself. Now I will have to nurse the baby to sleep all over again. I wish you were equipped to nurse him yourself."

"Sorry dear. Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Go back to sleep."



According to one ancient saying, when a dog is about to die, somehow it loses its sense of smell, especially of meat, its most favorite food. Though Kofi was a very rich man, he was content with just one wife. But because polygamy was one of the true signs of wealth in Kofi's village, he decided to take a second wife.

Kofi married a woman whose beauty could only be matched by her jealousy. She couldn't stand to see Kofi and Araba together. When they laughed, she claimed they were laughing at her, and when they talked, she claimed it was about her. She was happy only when Kofi and Araba were fighting.

One day as they cooked in their backyard, Kofi's second wife walked by. Then Kofi heard his dogs talking about her.

"There she goes again," said one dog to the other. "Since she

came our portions have become smaller."

"And one would think that if she ate our portions she would be bigger," replied the other.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Kofi burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Araba. "Don't you know that one-man laughter weakens the jaw muscles?"

"Do not pretend that you don't know on account I am here," added Kofi's second wife. "I hear you two talking and giggling all night about me. Now you have to do it even in my presence. Only God knows what you talk about when I am not here."

"Honestly I do not know what he is laughing about," Araba tried to explain. But Kofi's second wife did not want to hear of it.

Kofi came to Araba's defense, only making matters worse. His second wife now concluded that it was Araba whom Kofi loved all along and would do anything to get her out of trouble.

This was how Kofi lived with his two wives for a very long time until one day his laughter really went overboard.

Kofi had called a two-day party to celebrate the coming of age of his son. He had selected and tethered two cows, two goats, and chickens for the occasion. He sat in the crowd and watched his wives' women's league put on their specialty dances. Then he heard one of the cows tell the other.

"Boring. When will this be over? I am famished and cannot wait to get out of here."

"You better enjoy it while you can because your bones are mine tomorrow," said one of Kofi's dogs to the cow.

Unfortunately, it was just at the point when Kofi's second wife was performing a solo number for her husband and his peers.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" Kofi went into an uncontrollable bout of laughter.

"That's it," said Kofi's second wife, as she stopped dancing and started crying. "As everyone here is my witness, you are laughing at me because I cannot dance."

"No! No!" protested Kofi. "I was just laughing at a wild thought."

"What kind of wild thought could you be having at a time like this?" she asked.

But Kofi would not tell for fear that he would die. In order to get

the ceremony completed without further incident, Kofi promised to tell her about his wild thoughts later.

For days Kofi's second wife bugged him to tell her what he laughed about during the festivities but he always dismissed her. When his wife couldn't wait any longer, she took the matter to their Chief.

"This matter has gone on for so long, my friend, that if I were you, I would just get it over with," the Chief advised him.

"I am sorry. But I cannot tell, for if I do, I will die," Kofi told the Chief.

"Now that's funny. Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!" bellowed the Chief. "Who ever heard of someone dying for saying what he thought?"

Kofi stood there confused. If he told the source of his laughter, he would surely die. Then again, if he didn't he would die too, albeit slowly, from the nagging of his wife. So, he decided on the former method of death. He called all his friends, family, and the Chief to assemble in his house the next day for a feast for his death, for he had led a good life. When they were assembled, Kofi addressed them.

"People shouldn't cry for me," he said. "To you Araba, I give all my gold. To you son, I give the rest of my estate." Then bowing to the Chief, he told the people gathered about his encounter with the Deer and the Lion King and the gift they had given him for his losses. Then he told them what he was laughing about during the celebration of his son. No sooner did he finish telling his stories, than he fell down on the ground, dead.

The feast turned to mourning. The villagers were so grieved and angry that they hardly knew what they were doing when they seized Kofi's second wife and killed her. They cremated her and put her ashes in a sack and gave it to the Crow to dump into the river. But the Crow was very curious and opened the bag in flight to see its contents. The ashes spread all over the place. Wherever they fell, hatred and jealousy were sure to sprout. This marked the beginning of bad things and bad people in the world; before then, kindness, love, and unselfishness had thrived.

FINDERS KEEPERS

Every farm must have a road that leads to it, even if it is seldom used. The Akan people tell this story of Anansi the Spider, who sought to steal the Squirrel's farm by presenting this logic before the Lion's court. But what if the farm is a Squirrel's? The Squirrel has no use for roads—he just makes his way through the trees. In this story, neither the Lion nor the Spider has the final word.

The Squirrel was a very good farmer and farmed large fertile lands during the farming season. And come harvest time, he gathered his crops and saved them in his barn for the dry season. The following farming season, he did the same thing all over. When he had gathered enough for his barn, he sold the rest for money.

Eventually, the Squirrel realized that the lands that were close to all the animals had been over-farmed. The yield had become scanty. So he decided to go away to a richer virgin land.

Now, we know the Squirrel. He climbs the trees. He could jump from one tree to the next and cover a wide distance. From the treetops, he could see far and choose which way to go. So it was that the Squirrel was on top of a very tall tree. He saw at a distance a land he knew to be very rich for his corn. Hop! Cham! Cham! He went through the branches until he came to the land. Just as he thought, the soil was very black with richness. He went down to it. Dug up a bit of dirt and was satisfied with its quality.

"This is it," said the Squirrel. "This is where I plant my corn this season. I am sure it will be the best corn ever planted. Now comes the hard part—clearing these thick bushes."

But being such an industrious animal, the Squirrel went to work immediately. He cleared the forest and burned the brush. Several days later, he tilled the land and planted his corn. In not very long, the corn grew. Their leaves were green and full of life. In time, the corn matured and was ready for harvest.

Because the Squirrel traveled through treetops, he never bothered to build roads to his farms. No matter where his farms were located, he reached them through the treetops.