

# **Tit Fi Tat!**

## **How Annasi Tied Tiger**



**Retold and Illustrated by:**  
**Rasheedah Hakeem**

## PREFACE

Jamaica, a divine and beauteous isle is a bubbling goulash of rich and interactive cultures hybridized from the plethora of people that inhabit the island. The saline opera of the Caribbean sea drifts from coast to coast, carrying on it, ethereal chords of Afro-caribbean beats which serve as the soundtracks for the Jamaican tales that impregnate the rich culture.

Storytelling, in the sense of the oral rendition of tales, is a catalyst that provides a distraction from modern life, particularly among the rural folks of Jamaica's countryside. The artform has also been revived by the government of the island, organized in an effort to provide cultural sensitization to the Jamaican people about their ancestral 'roots' and folk traditions; especially in Jamaican schools during Culture Awareness Week, Emancipation and Independence Day celebrations. The Jamaica Cultural Development Commission is one of those entities that spearheads the regeneration of this oral tradition.

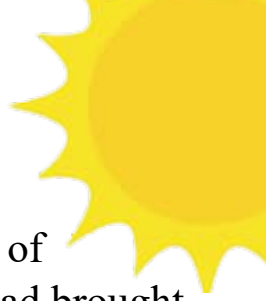
Jamaican tales are similar to the island's colloquial language, Patois, as they have several variations depending on the storyteller and the parish from which he/she hails. This is the exact nature in which this story has been written by myself. I have extracted this story from a book entitled "Jamaica Anansi Stories" by Martha Warren Beckwith, which was edited and published in 2019 by Global Grey. It was originally told by George Parkes in Mandeville, Manchester. I have however, made this story my own by translating it into Standard Jamaican English, which can be more easily understood by those with little knowledge of the Jamaican Patois. Much like myself you too can make this story and others your own tale by retelling them in your own way.

Rasheedah Hakeem

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## *Tying Tiger - The Fish-basket*

The sun rose on the silver-stitched horizon like a glowing medallion, bathing the tree encircled glade in its warm, ethereal glow. The seemingly impenetrable screen of vegetation that adorned the towering glaucous trees; innumerable in sizes and shapes, was now speared by the lances of sunlight from the celestial fireball situated in the sky. It was a morning like no other- a perfect day for a visit to the babbling river fed fat by winding streams that traverse across the land in smooth, seductive curves. The forest floor woven with ancient roots from tightly knitted trees and the accompanying decorations of jubilant wildflowers, outgrown weeds and fallen leaves, was but a dizzying blur of eccentricity for Anansi as he scurried towards the river. Dodging and zipping past the century old canopy of trees with his feet treading in manic flurry, the river came into full sight. Swollen at the banks, the river's deceptive depths was peopled with large fishes and tribes of crabs and crayfish that lay idly across the moss smattered pebbles strewn across the river floor.



Giddy with excitement and emboldened with a rush of adrenaline, Anansi placed the large handbasket he had brought with him under a massive tree- deep with spring foliage of verdant green, some centimetres away from the river banks. Opening its folds, he took a bundle of firewood from within it placing it ceremoniously onto the forest floor, striking it with a match until a roaring fire erupted from the tiny sparks emitted from the kindling. He delved within the basket a second time and brought out a large cast iron cauldron, setting it firmly unto the flames that nipped at his hands. Following the recipe, that was etched indelibly into his mind he scurried towards the river scooping up water into an earthen calabash he had placed at the river bank in previous visits. He emptied the contents of the calabash into the pot, seasoning it with salt and pepper, returning to the river banks this time with his fishing pole in hand.





Using a trick passed down throughout the generations in his family Anansi cleared his throat and steadied his stance, planting his feet firmly onto the forest floor. Carefully enunciating every vowel and consonant that escaped from his lips he bellowed, “Come, big fish, come!”. In a millisecond some of the large fishes who had previously rode the turbid torrents of the mighty river were magically exported to the bubbling water of large cauldron. The awe that painted Anansi’s face quickly dissipated as he readied himself to utter the magical phrase for a second time. This time he changed the chant bellowing instead “Big fish go, mek little fish come!”. Once again some of the small fishes from the river came forth from the river and were placed in the pot. Anansi repeated the chants again switching between the phrases periodically until the handbasket that once stored the cauldron and the firewood was none filled to the brim with fishes, both great and small, fluttering furiously in a rainbow coloured flurry, under their last breath escaped them. The river, which was once choked with schools of fish, swimming in delightful glee was now barren and lifeless.

Satisfied with his day's work, Anansi turned from the lifeless river, skipping towards the clearing in which the cauldron lay bubbling on the hungry flames that blackened its exterior. A goulash of scents wafted from the cauldron, mingling effortlessly with the brackish tang of the river and the nectar sweet smell of the spring flowers, delicately caressed by the passing breeze.



The smell bombarded Anansi's nostrils, travelling stealthily to the depths of his brain, wrapping seductively around his nerve endings sending the most delightful message to his stomach. Anansi's toes curled as he thought of the feast that awaited him, after waiting a few minutes for the stew to simmer to perfection.

Anansi took the calabash and dipped it into the pot, scooping out its contents in one swift swoop. Without hesitation, he positioned the calabash on between his parted lips, now chapped with the anticipation of the coming delicacy. Anansi felt the warm stew, coursing through his body, it invigorated him so thoroughly that he couldn't help but release a small sigh of satisfaction. With every bowl he ate Anansi's belly became more rounded, but still he continued to shovel the delicious stew into his mouth until every last drop had evaporated thoroughly into his body, giving it a slight glow.

With his hunger now sated, Anansi crawled towards a massive tree, resting comfortably at the base of the trunk, patting his stomach slowly, drunk from the stew with which he engorged himself. After lazing around for some time Anansi gathered the cauldron and placed it inside the basket with the fishes he had caught previously and journeyed home. While on the trail home Anansi crossed paths with one of his acquaintances, Tiger.

Throughout the forest, Tiger had developed a fearsome reputation. From a glance it was very easy to see why, his body was enormous and adorned with bulging muscles that flexed whenever he walked, showcasing the thick veins that ran under his skin. It was only Tiger's physical appearance that struck fear into Anansi; but it was also his thunderous roar which ricocheted off the thick canopy of trees in the forest dulling the sweet melodies of the musical notes chirped in the local symphony unique to that forest. With his limbs shivering from fright, Anansi stood his ground, clutching the handbasket tightly to his chest.

Tiger who had been taking a mid-morning stroll through the forest saw Anansi standing there with the handbasket. His keen nose picked up the unbelievable scent of freshwater fishes- one of his favourite delicacies. He stalked towards Anansi menacingly, his huge paws trampling the matted forest floor, stilling only when he was a few feet away from him. With his eyes trained directly on the shivering Anansi, Tiger questioned him with a mighty roar, “ Wah yuh have inna di baskit sah?” Anansi was shaken to his core, if he told Tiger about the fishes in the basket, he would want it for himself. Visibly contemplating, his next move, Anansi decided to protect his treasure and so replied ““Nothing sah! Nothing sah!”. Tiger knew Anansi was lying, but instead of snatching the basket from him and dumping out the fishes that were inside it. Tiger hatched a devious plan. Pretending to believe Anansi’s lies. With a lazy yawn Tiger returned to the path from which he had come, leaving Anansi standing by himself in the path. Anansi smiled to himself, he had successfully tricked Tiger and would be able to keep for himself all the fishes in the basket. Anansi then went on his merry way.





Upon seeing that Anansi had comfortably believed that his lie had been believed, Tiger pursued Anansi stealthily. Ducking between the thick bushes, camouflaging his large body with the rich rainbow of spring colours that decorated the surrounding environs. After sometime Anansi stopped at a large clearing resting under a massive tree, shrouded from the harsh rays of the mid-morning sun by its lush green foliage. Tiger who saw this scrambled behind a thick hedging of wild bushes heavily pregnant with wild berries which wrapped his body with their energizing waft. Without knowing that he was being watched, Anansi opened his handbasket and took the fishes out one by one laying them gently on a pile of leaves.



With every fish that he took out, Anansi would utter “Pretty little yallah-tail this!”, “Pretty little snapper this” or “Pretty little jackfish”. Each in reference with the type of fish that he took from the basket

After witnessing Anansi’s deception, Tiger jumped from the bushes and ran into the clearing with an explicit intent to expose Anansi’s deception.

“Think you say nothing was in the basket sah!” he huffed. Shocked at Tiger’s sudden outburst, Anansi gathered his wits and replied in the calmest of tones “Mi jus go down a di rivva to have a bathe and sah,, ah saw some little fishes and ah catch a few of them.” “Oh, is that so?” questioned Tiger “then give them here sah! Be a good friend and share yuh bounty.” Anansi visibly paled, every one ein the forest knew of Tiger’s voracious appetite.

If he gave Tiger the entire basket, he would devour the whole thing and nothing would be left for him to eat. On the other hand, Anansi could not refuse Tiger’s demand. Tiger was physically stronger than he was and would no doubt be victorious if they ever fought over the contents of the basket. One swat from one of Tiger’s massive paws would squash him like a bug.

Tiger saw that Anansi was weighing the options in his head, with him being visibly distracted Tiger grabbed the handbasket from Anansi’s hand, and proceeded to devour its content leaving only the bones as evidence that fishes were in the basket. “Man that was a feast fit for a king” laughed Tiger. Anansi took up the discarded bones off the forest floors from where Tiger had spat them eating them with pure malice in his eyes.





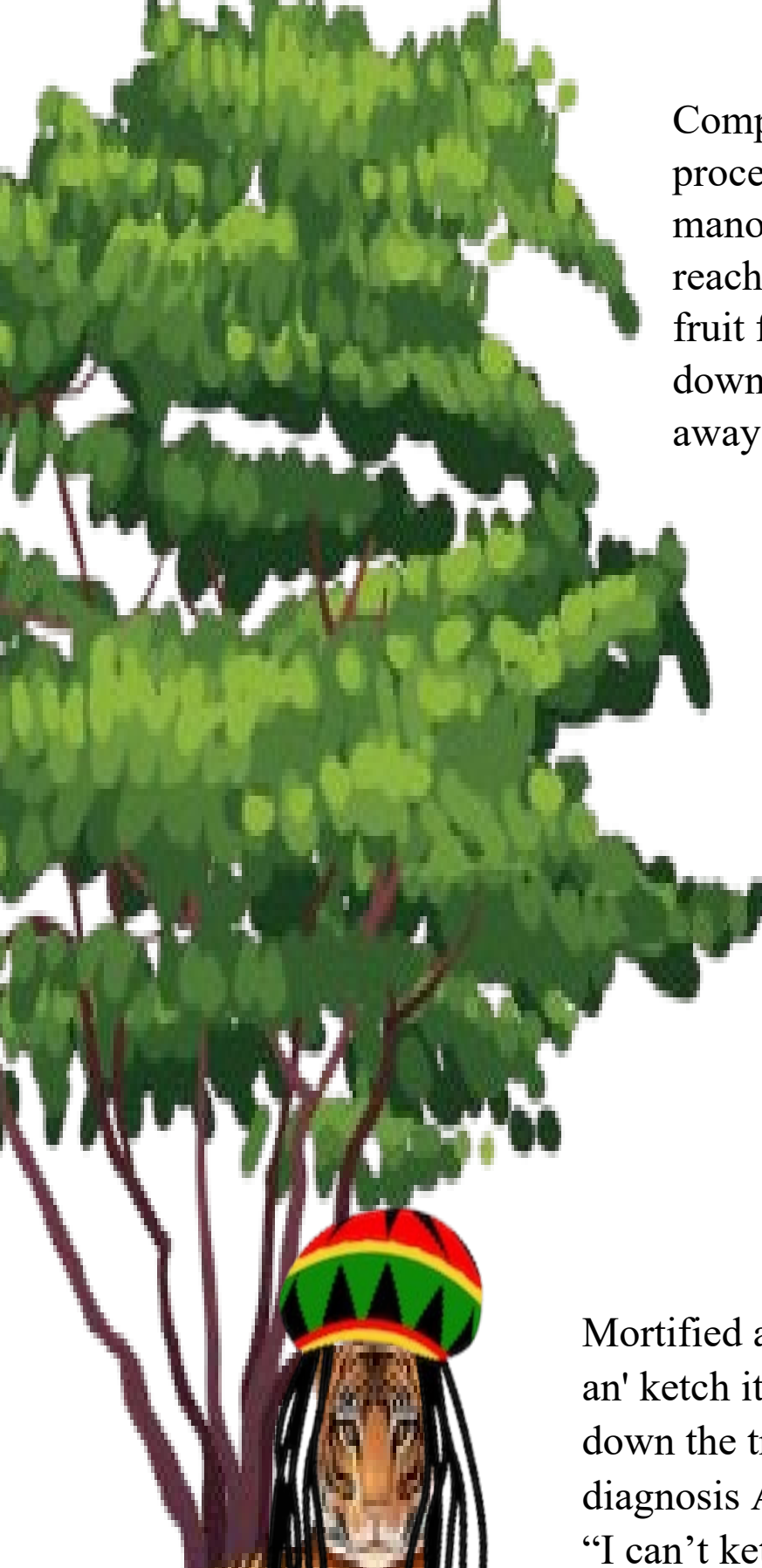
Unable to voice his dissatisfaction, Anansi grumbled to himself “But look how me bwoy labour go!”. Catching a few of Anansi’s grumbles Tiger asked “What you say?” Noticing that Tiger had heard some of what he said, Anansi angrily swatted the air around his face, shooing away imaginary flies he replied “A fly a handbug me face sah!”.

After some time had passed they both travelled along the winding dirt path back to their homes. Already angry with Tiger’s earlier behaviour, Anansi devised a clever scheme in his head.

With a devious smile adorning his face Anansi waited until they had stumbled upon a massive fruit tree. Looking up into the thick foliage of the tree Anansi shouted gleefully “What a pretty fruit tree!” Upon realising that Anansi had stopped, Tiger turned towards Anansi and roughly commanded “Climb it sah!”. Anansi had guessed that this would have been Tiger’s reaction. The greedy little wretch had never worked for anything his life and only depended on the efforts of those he could bully to feed himself.

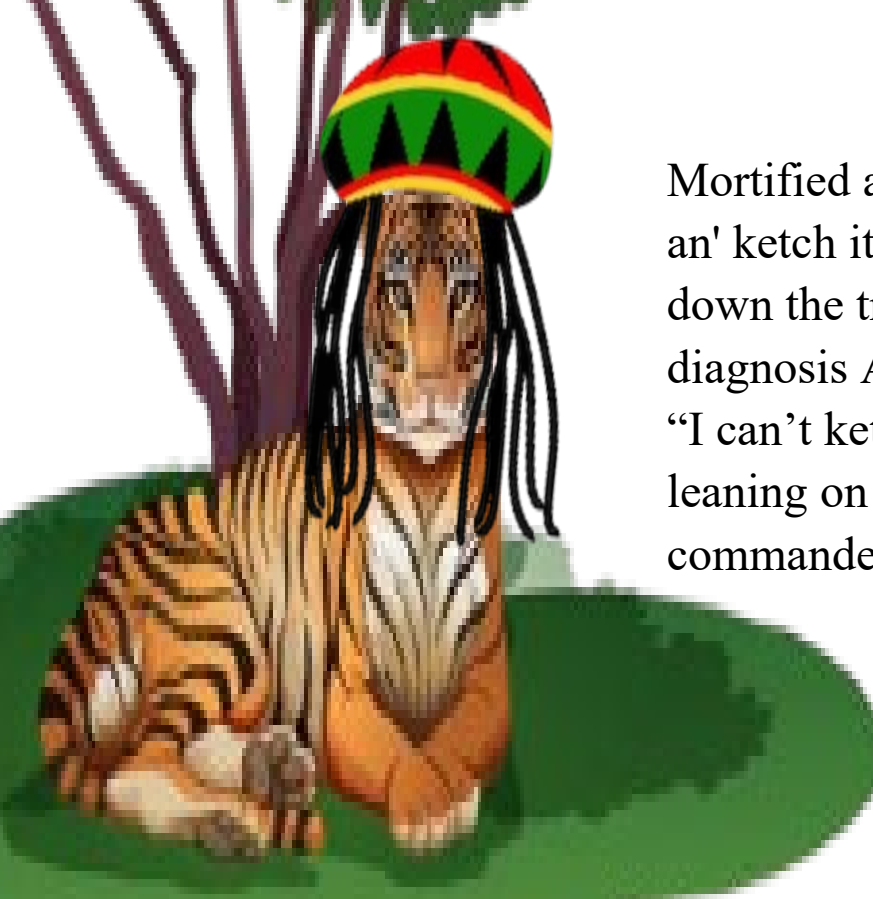






Complying Tiger's command Anansi proceeded to climb the tree, skilfully manoeuvring along the tree's ever reaching branches, he pulled some of the fruit from the stem and made his way down stopping when he was a few feet away from the ground.

Tiger now lay underneath the tree preening up into its thick foliage as Anansi completed the task he had commanded. The first phase of his plan had been accomplished. Anansi now realised that it was time to set the second part of his plan in motion. With much gusto Anansi yelled for all in the forest to hear "Look pon lice inna Brar Tiger head!"



Mortified at this Tiger replied, "Come down an' ketch it, sah!" Anansi hurriedly scurried down the tree, pretending to treat his diagnosis Anansi huffed with disappointment "I can't ketch the lice dem without you leaning on the tree sah!" Thus Tiger commanded, "Then lean on the tree sah!"

Leaning on the tree, Anansi diligently combed through Tiger's long flowing fur, squashing the imaginary insects. The length of Tiger's fur made the supposed de-lousing a very time consuming process and after no time Tiger had fallen asleep. Anansi chuckled to himself as he heard the deafening snores that escaped Tiger's sleeping form.

Stealthily, Anansi took Tiger's hair and roped it around the wide berth of the massive fruit tree, securing the strands snugly in a neat knot. He had successfully tied Tiger to the tree.





Anansi then woke Tiger and informed him that he was too tired to remove any more of the lice from Tiger's fur. With disbelief at Anansi's boldness, Tiger gruffly said "Come an' ketch it sah!" To further test Tiger's patience Anansi defiantly replied "I won't!"

He sprinted from Tiger's grasp urging Tiger to pursue him for his disrespect. In accordance with Anansi's devious plans Tiger stood on his feet and proceeded to chase Anansi through the forest. After several attempts to move from his previous post, Tiger came to a startling realisation. His long, flowing locks had been used as a contraption of war against him. He had been tied to the tree! Tiger who was seething with rage gritted through his teeth "Come an' loosen me sah!"

Paying no attention to Tiger's obvious rage, Anansi taunted him mercilessly, singing a little song he had produced in his head.

***"See how Anansi tie Tiger, See how Anansi tie Tiger, Tie him like a hog, Tiger, See how Anansi tie Tiger, Tie him like a hog, Tiger!"***

With his vengeance completed, Anansi returned to the path that led to his home. Smiling ruefully at Tiger's stupidity.





Moments later a hunter stumbled upon the clearing where Tiger was tied to the tree. Aiming his shotgun on Tiger, he released his hold on its trigger, killing Tiger instantly.



**THE END**

## **Translations**

Ah- I

An'- And

Baskit- Basket

Brar- Brother

Bwoy- Boy

Dem- Them

Di- The

Handbug- To annoy or disturb

Inna- In the

Jus-Just

Ketch- Catch

Mi- My

Pon- On

Rivva- River

Sah- Sir

Seh- Say

Tit fi Tat- This for That

Yallah- Yellow

Yuh- You

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Nb: The illustrations that grace the pages of this book were made using materials compiled from the sources cited below. Through these citations it is my hope that the artists who have created them receive the proper salutations for their work.

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