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STORIES
FROM
WEST AFRICA

Compiled and Illustrated by
David A. Naff



SPIDER'S HEAVY LOAD



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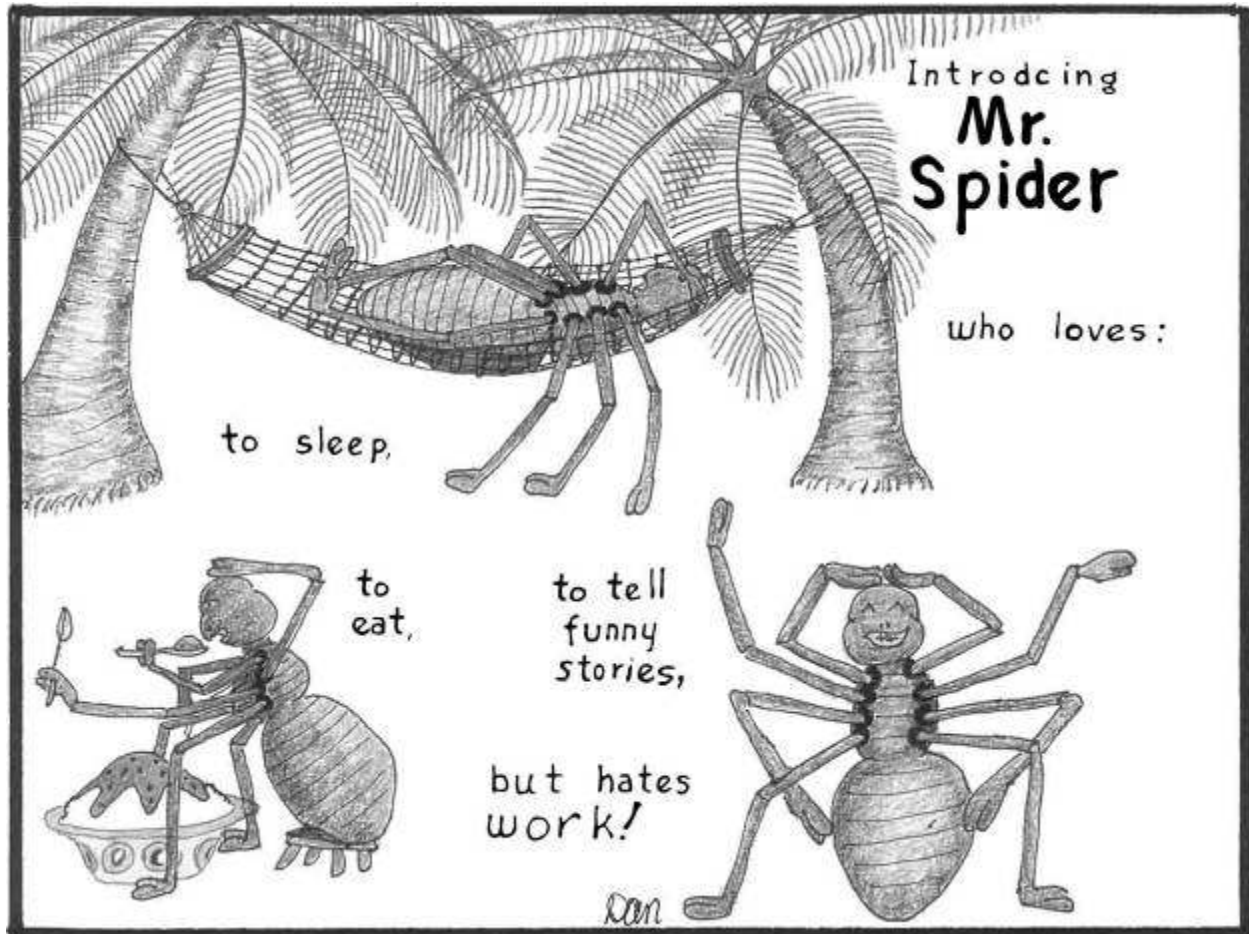
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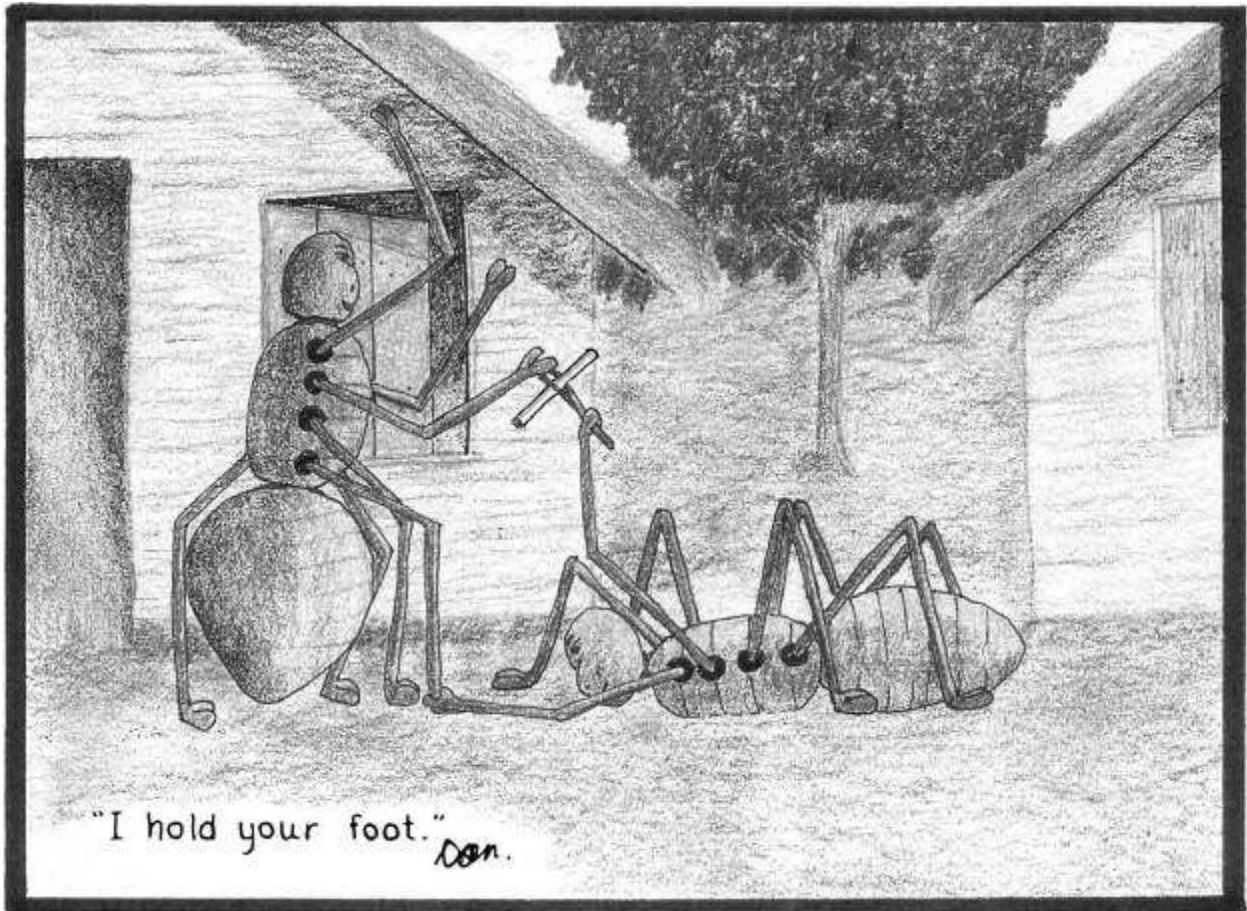


SPIDER'S HEAVY LOAD

Everyone knows how funny and clever Spider can be. He loves to eat, but is always invited to feasts because he tells good jokes and funny stories too. Not only that, he loves to dance and sing so he makes people have a good time.

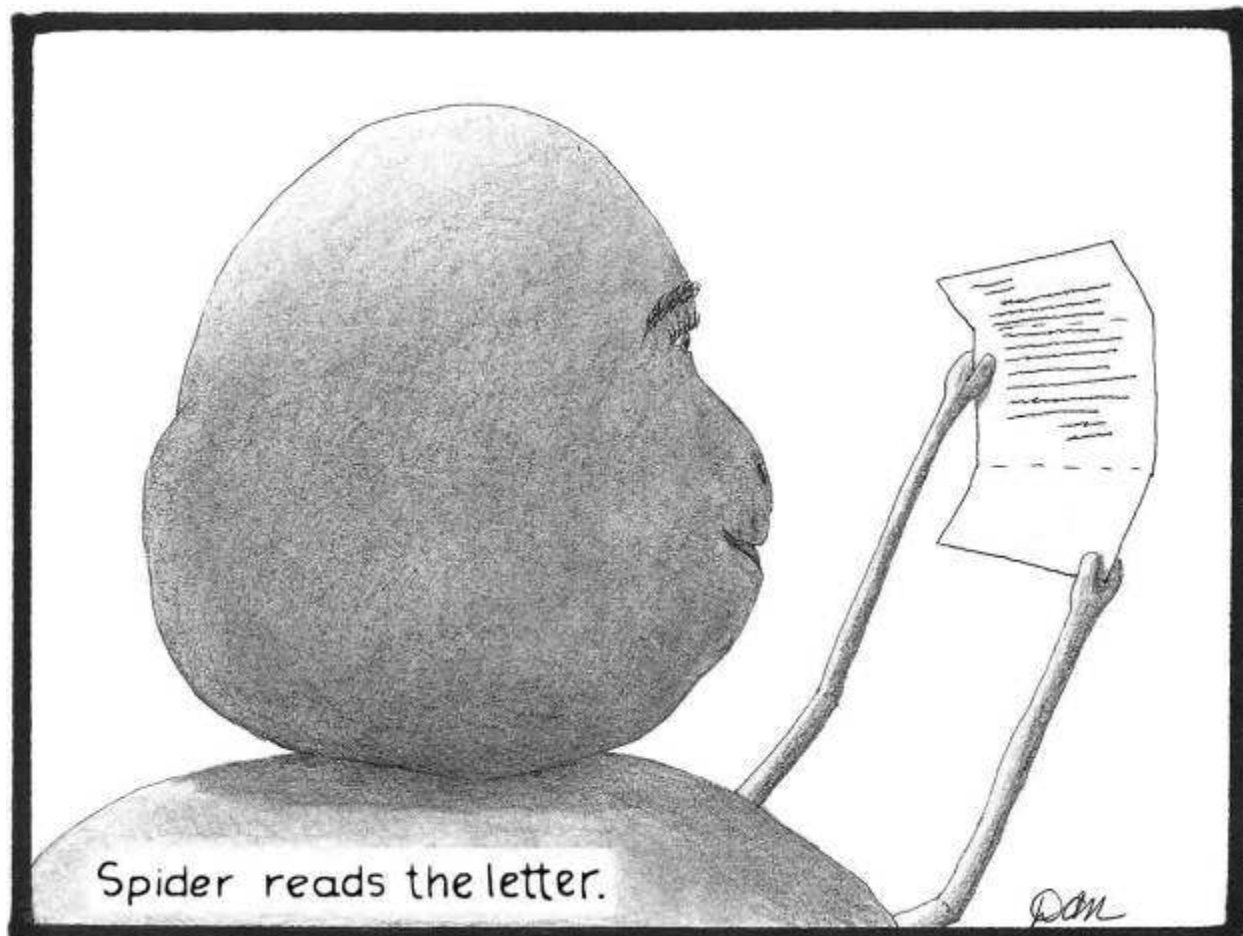
But Spider is also very lazy. And sometimes he can be very tricky and even cruel. When he thinks you have *done him bad* he will want to *get back on you*.

But there came a time when Spider was changed. And that's what this story is about.



Spider had an older brother who was a big chief in a far away town. He was very rich and very good. Things were so fine and good in his town that many people wanted to go to live there. But there was a law there that nothing evil or bad or dirty could go there. It reminds me of what God says about His heavenly city: "Nothing sinful will go into the city. No one who is sinful-minded or tells lies can go in" (Rev. 21:27).

One day a messenger came running to Spider. He carried a stick in his hand with a paper tightly wedged in the split end of the stick. The messenger fell down on his face in front of Spider and took hold of His right foot. The messenger panted as he gave Spider the stick.



“*I beg you, Spider. I come with a message from your big brother. Please read it at once.*”

Spider took the stick, carefully pulled the paper out of the slit, opened the paper which said, “To Anansi Spider,” and read,

Dear Anansi,

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter to you. I hope you are in good health and all your family. I greet your elder son, Kuma, as well as your younger son, Kwaku and your wife, Asa.

I am writing this important letter to you to invite you, Anansi, and all your friends who will, to come to a big important feast. It will be held here in my town in three days time. Please *pleasure me* by all there coming.

All will be welcome, but remember the law of my town.
Nothing evil or bad or dirty can come into my beautiful town.

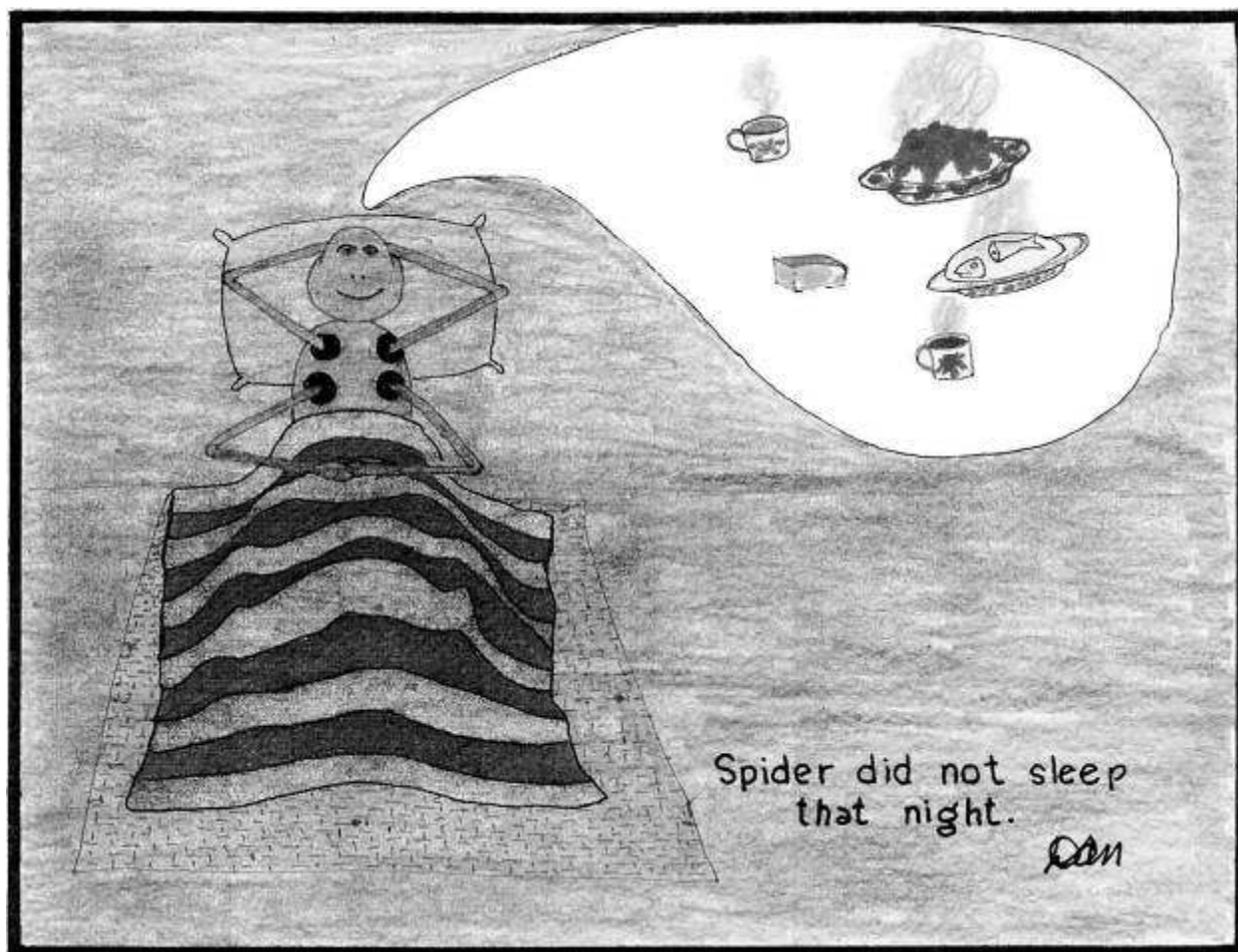
I wish you well and a *safe passage* to come to me.
Your Brother

Spider sent the messenger back to his big brother saying,
“Thank you *too much*. *I coming* to your big feast in your beautiful and wonderful town and *plenty people coming* with me.”

Spider was very proud of his brother. Until time to go he told everyone about his wonderful brother and his brother’s beautiful town. He invited everyone to the big feast in his rich brother's town. Many said they would go.

The night before they were to leave, Spider lay awake all night thinking about the big feast. Mostly he thought about all the good food that would be there. Surely there would be white rice piled high in big bowls, with palm butter running down over the sides and big chunks of meat in it - chicken, and fish, and goat and cow! Mmmm!! And there would be fufu with fish or peanut soup and plenty of hot pepper and benne seed. And certainly there would be hot tea and coffee with plenty of sugar and big pieces of shortbread. And ... And ... Spider's mouth ran with water when he thought of all this.

Spider also thought of all the funny stories he would tell and he certainly would also hear some new ones. And then too, there would be games and acrobats and all kinds of fun things. Spider did not sleep at all that night.



Spider did not sleep
that night.

Don

Early in the morning, before there was any light in the sky, Spider was up, dressed in his brightest feasting suit, and ready to go.

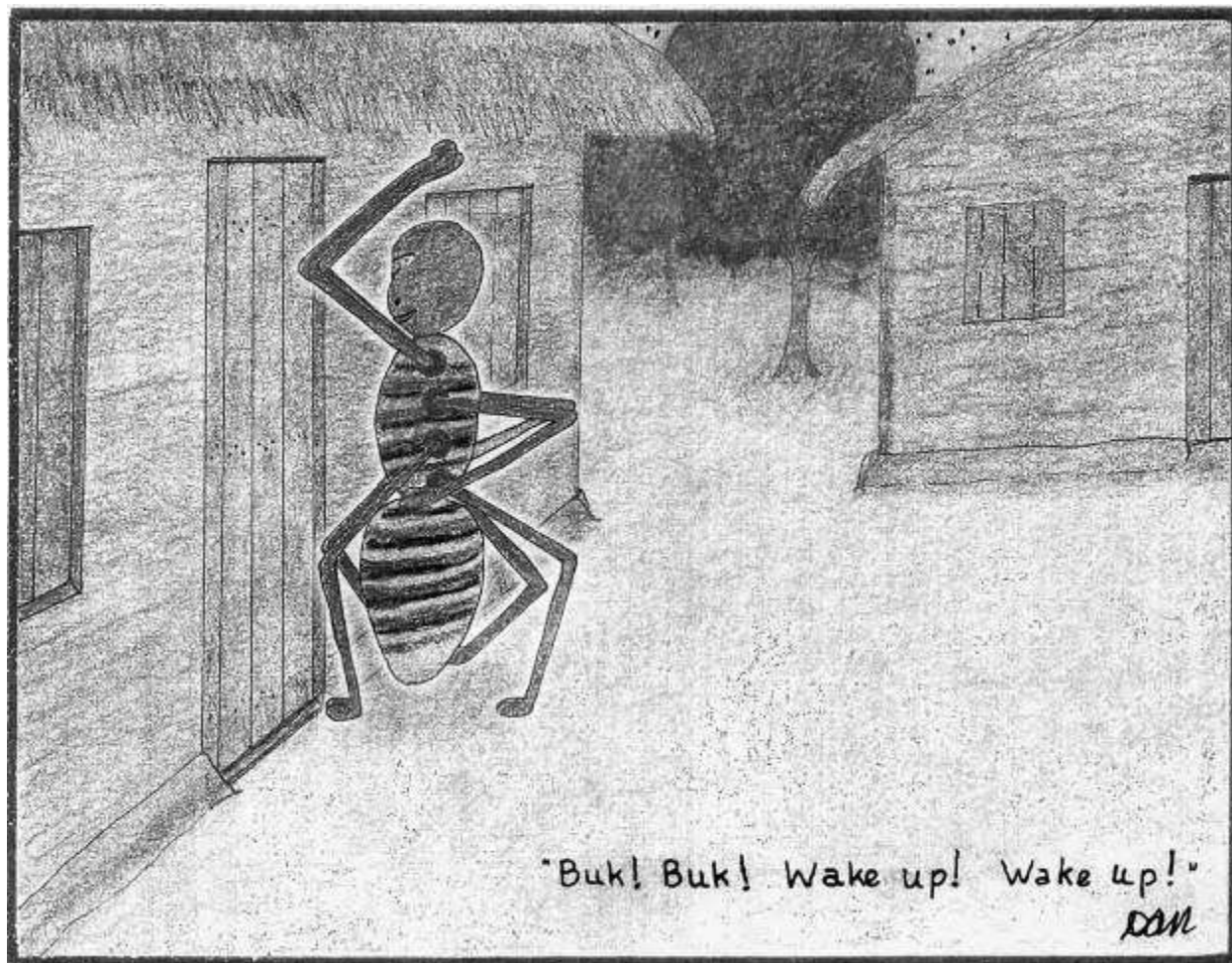
Spider went to one house and called out, "Buk, buk, buk, Get up. It is time to go to the feast of my brother the big chief."

A sleepy voice answered, "Spider, Is that you? Go back to bed. It is still dark. We cannot go yet."

Spider went to another house, "Buk! Buk! Buk! Get up! Get up! This is the day of my brother's big feast."

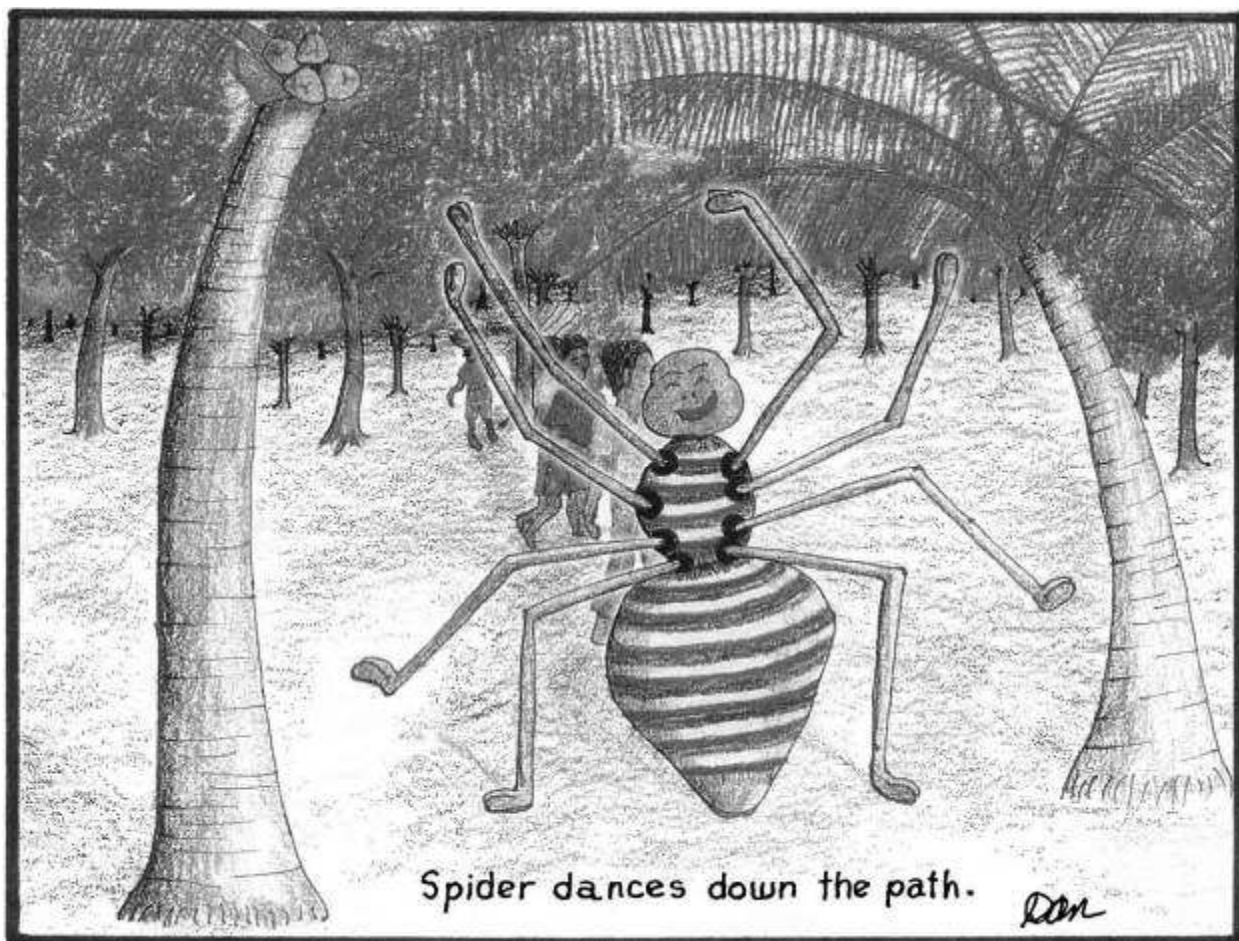
Another sleepy voice called out, "Quiet, Spider! You'll wake up the children."

A baby began to cry. "Now look what you have done. You woke up the baby," someone complained.



But Spider went on from house to house and then back to the first one again until everyone was awake. Children were crying. Fathers were grumbling. Mothers were scolding and yelling at the children. But since everyone was awake, they might as well get ready and go.

Finally all the people going to the big chief's feast started down the path. The light was just beginning to show through the trees. Spider ran along in front of all the people, leading the way. He danced along the path. He sang. Many of the people joined Spider, repeating the words after him as he sang.

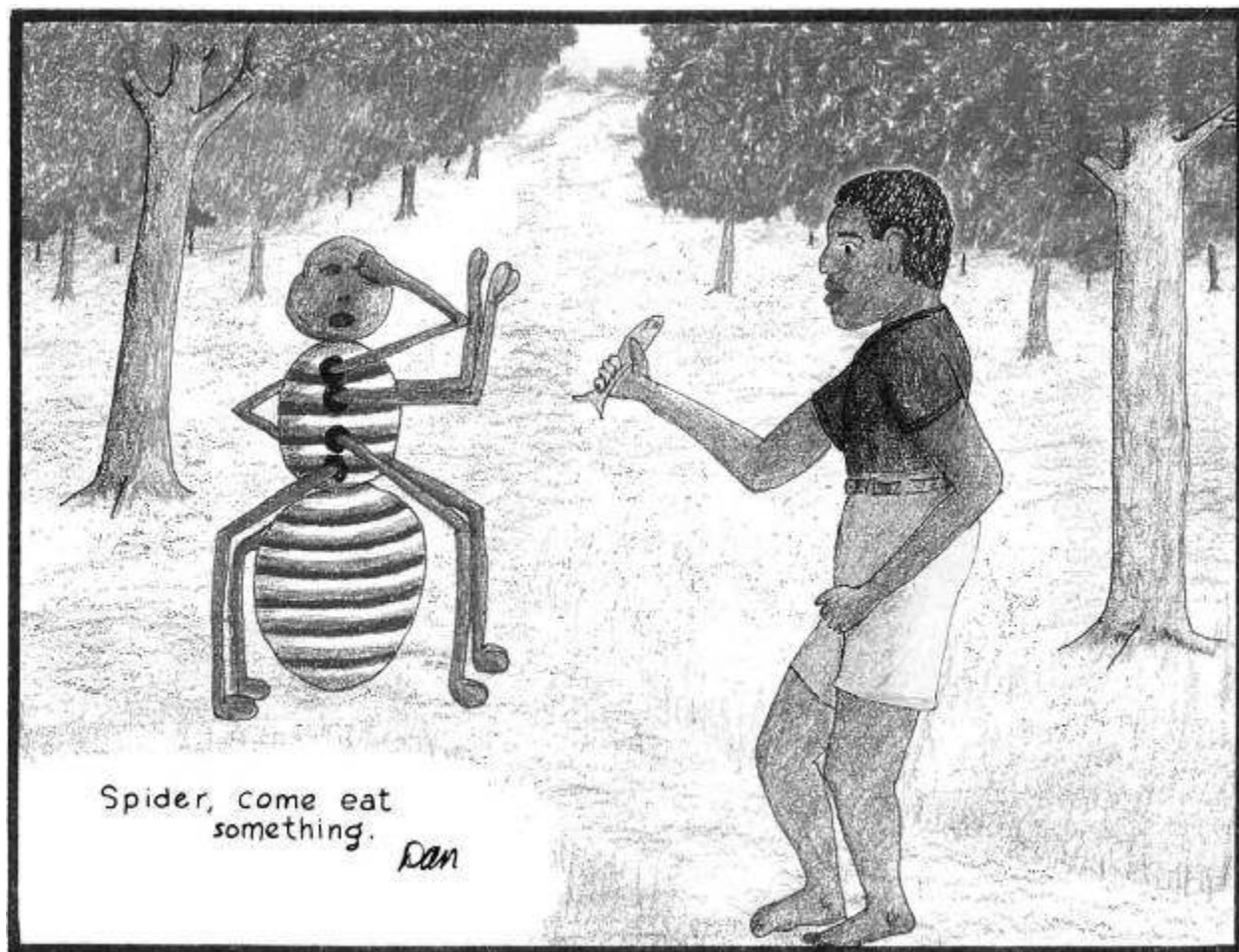


We're on our way (We're on our way)
To my brother's town. (To my brother's town.)
We'll have a feast (We'll have a feast)
In my brother's town. (In my brother's town.)

Chorus: We're on our way to my brother's town.
We'll have a feast in my brother's town.
Won't you come with me to my brother's town?

Oh, my brother's town (Oh, my brother's town)
Is very good. (Is very good.)
No bad can come (No bad can come)
To my brother's town. (To my brother's town.)

Chorus



As the others followed, some ate some crabs that they had dried on the roofs of their houses or over their fires; others ate *cold bowl* (food that was left over from the day before wrapped up in a banana leaf); others had chunks of short bread, or corn bread. Everyone but Spider had *small something* to eat.

"Come, Spider, eat something." they called.

But Spider answered, "I will not eat anything until I get to my brother's house. Then I will eat *plenty-o*."

"But you will *hungry too much before you reach*."

"All the better to be able to eat plenty when I do get there!" retorted Spider.

"Perhaps you will *weak too much and fall out* (faint)."



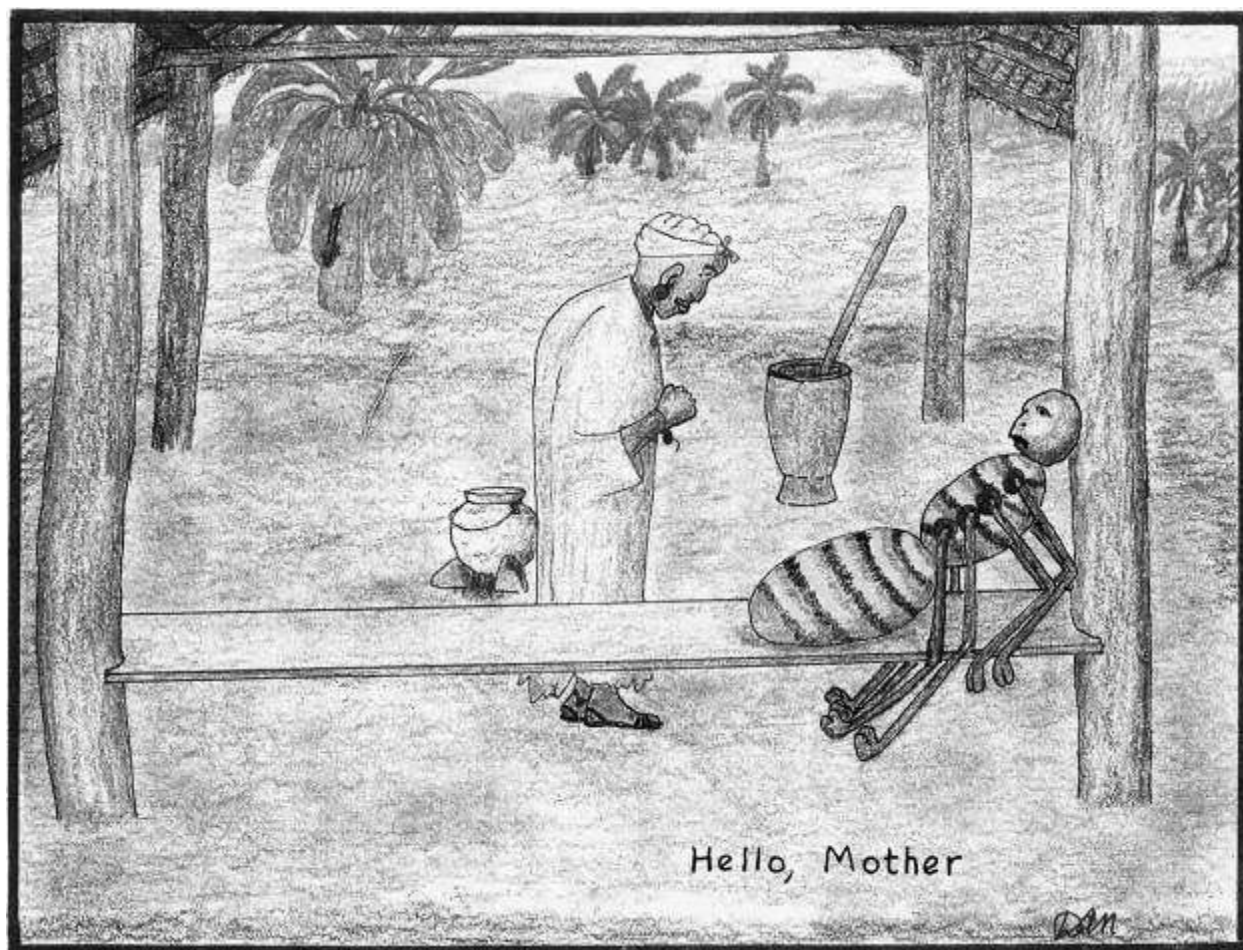
Now the way was long and the sun kept getting hotter and hotter. Spider became more and more tired and weak. He stopped dancing and singing and began to walk. He walked slower and slower. He became hungrier and hungrier. The people began to pass him. Spider became weaker and weaker because he had eaten nothing.

When the sun was the hottest, they came to a little *half-town* (two or three houses). Many of the people sat down to rest. Oh, but Spider was so hungry and weak.

While they were sitting there Spider noticed a little old woman nearby.

"Hello, Mother," Spider greeted her respectfully.

"Hello, Spider, how are you?" she replied.



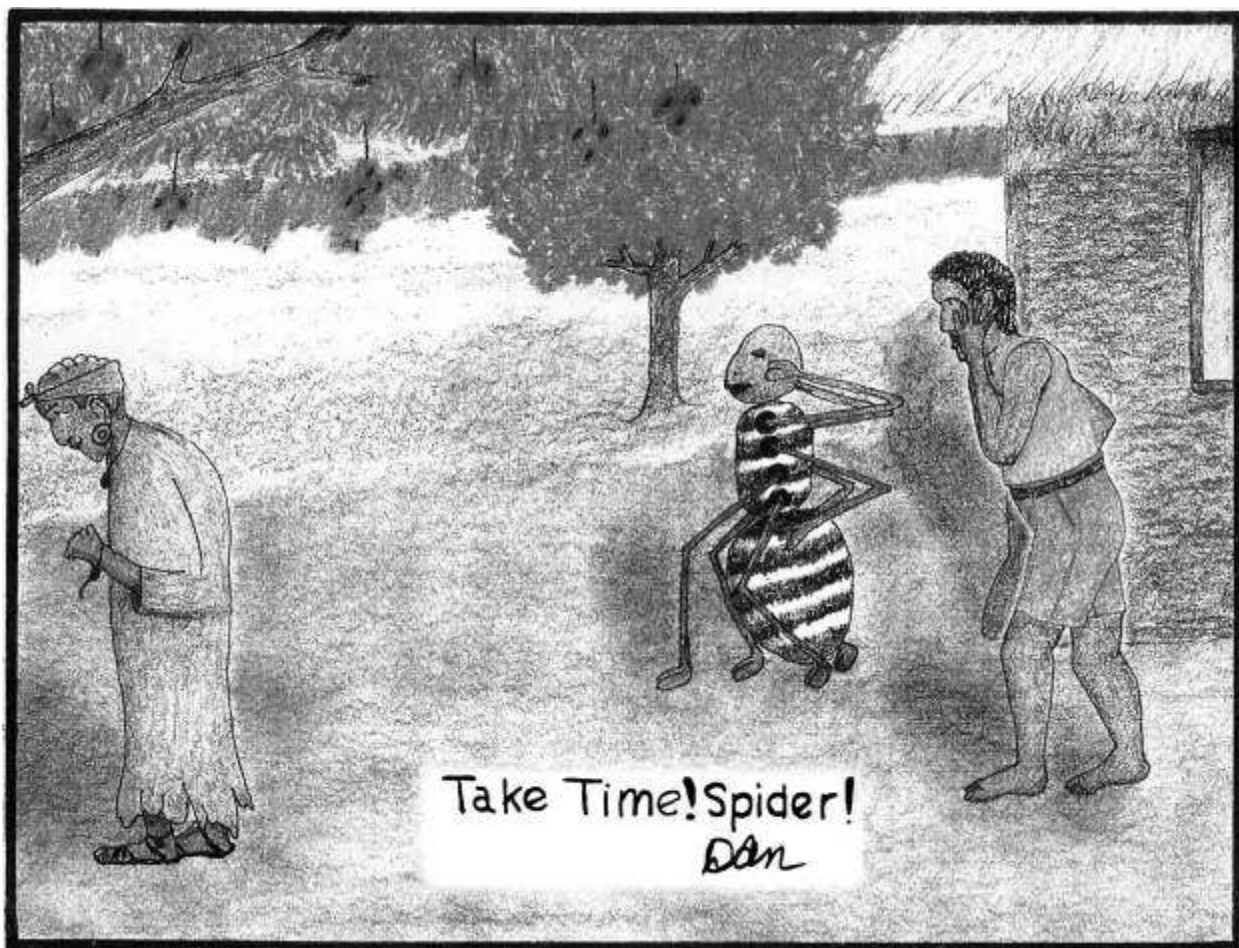
"Oh, Mother, I am so hungry and tired."

"Where are you going, Spider?"

"I am going to the big feast of my brother, the wonderful chief, but I am so hungry and weak that I think I shall die before I reach there."

"Oh, yes," said the old woman. "I also am going to the big feast, but I need someone to carry my very small head load, for I am too old to carry it. Spider, if I give you some food, will you carry my load for me?"

Spider looked at the load. It was a brightly painted enamel dishpan with a very pretty head tie covering it. Spider did not ask what was in it; he only lifted it up and found it was very light. It smelled like some sort of good food, too.



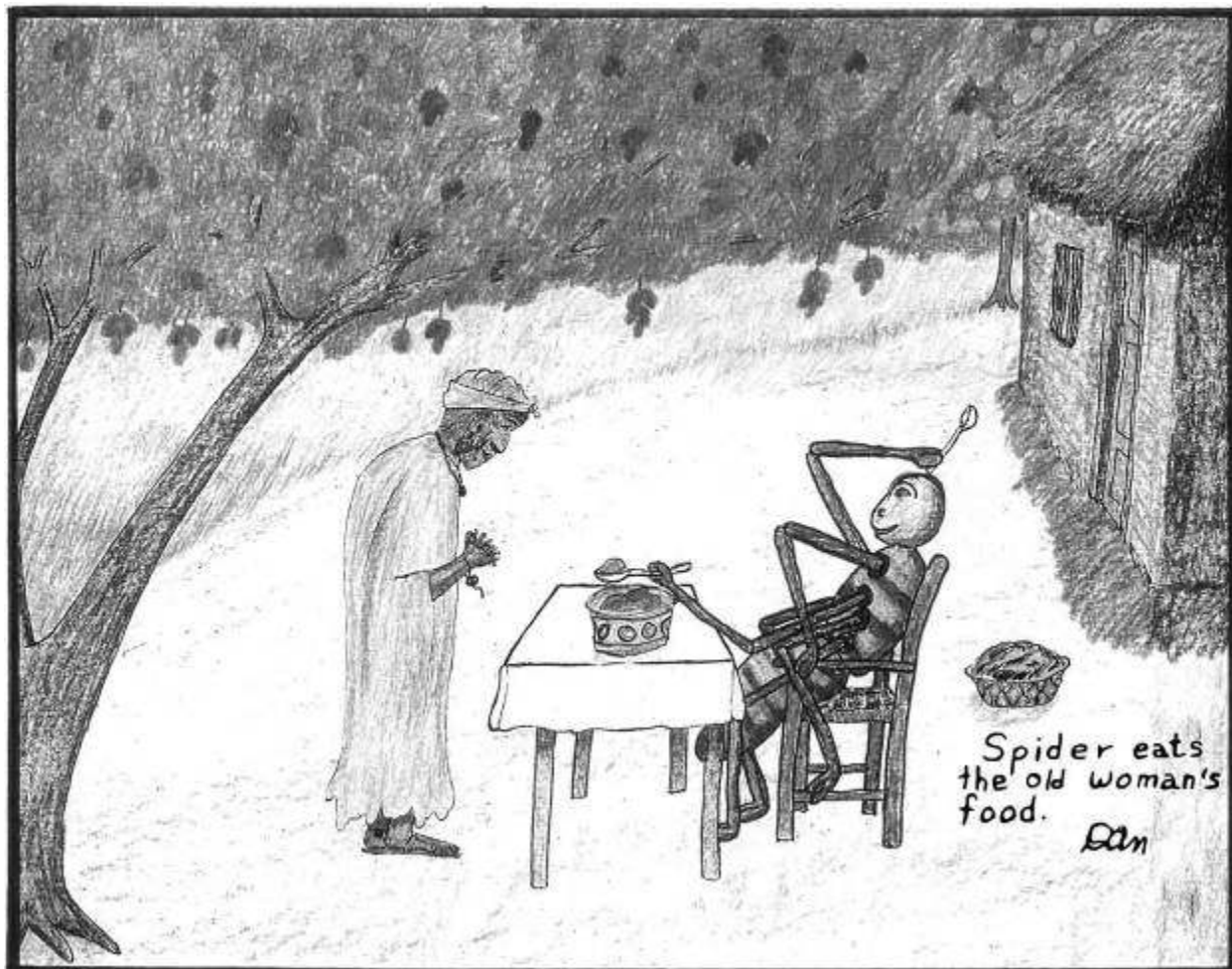
"Yes, Mother," he quickly replied. "Bring me the food and I will carry your load."

"Thank you, Spider. *Thank you plentyo,*" she said, and she hurried off to get the food.

Now some of the people who saw Spider talking with the old woman, came and said to him, "Spider, *take time*. Have nothing to do with that old woman. She is a witch and will *give you plenty trouble.*"

"Oh, I am only eating a little of her food and carrying this *small small* head load," he replied. "Nothing at all is going to come of that."

"Don't eat her food!" they exclaimed. "Don't touch her things!"

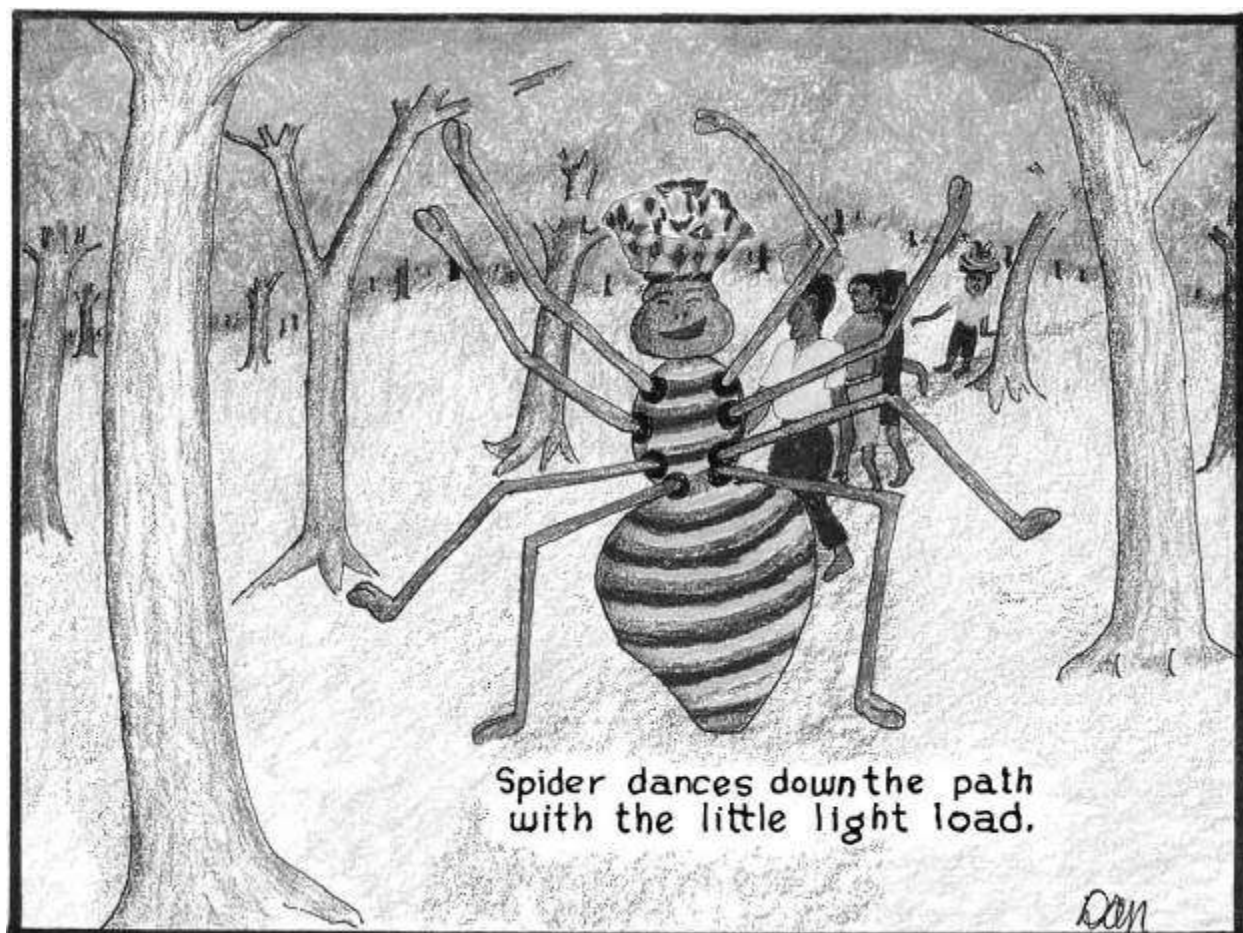


"But," Spider argued, "It is a very pretty pan and has a pretty head tie covering it. And besides that, it smells very nice."

"We warn you. It is danger," they admonished.

"*Move from here!*" Spider roared. "You are just jealous because you are not getting the food. I'll eat and be strong enough to reach my brother's feast. You will be weak and will be lying beside the path."

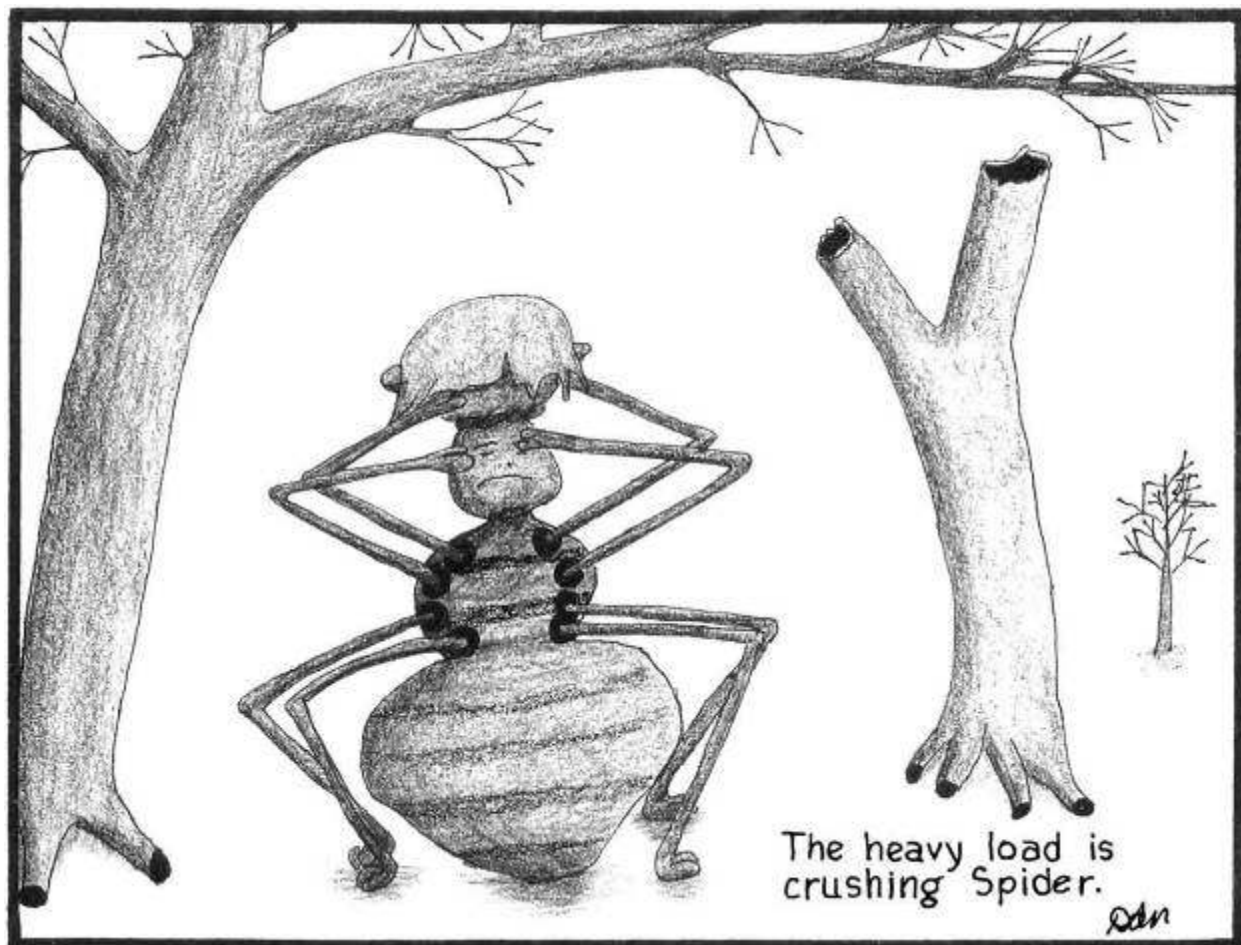
Perhaps Spider did not know that the Bible says, "There must not be found among you anyone who...uses secret ways or does witchcraft..." (Deuteronomy 18:10).



So Spider, *with hard head*, did just what he said he would. He ate the old woman's food. Then he made a pad for his head of some pieces of cloth the old woman had, picked up her little load, put it on his head and began again to dance and sing down the pathway.

We're on our way (We're on our way)
To my brother's town. (To my brother's town.)
We'll have a feast (We'll have a feast)
In my brother's town. (In my brother's town.)

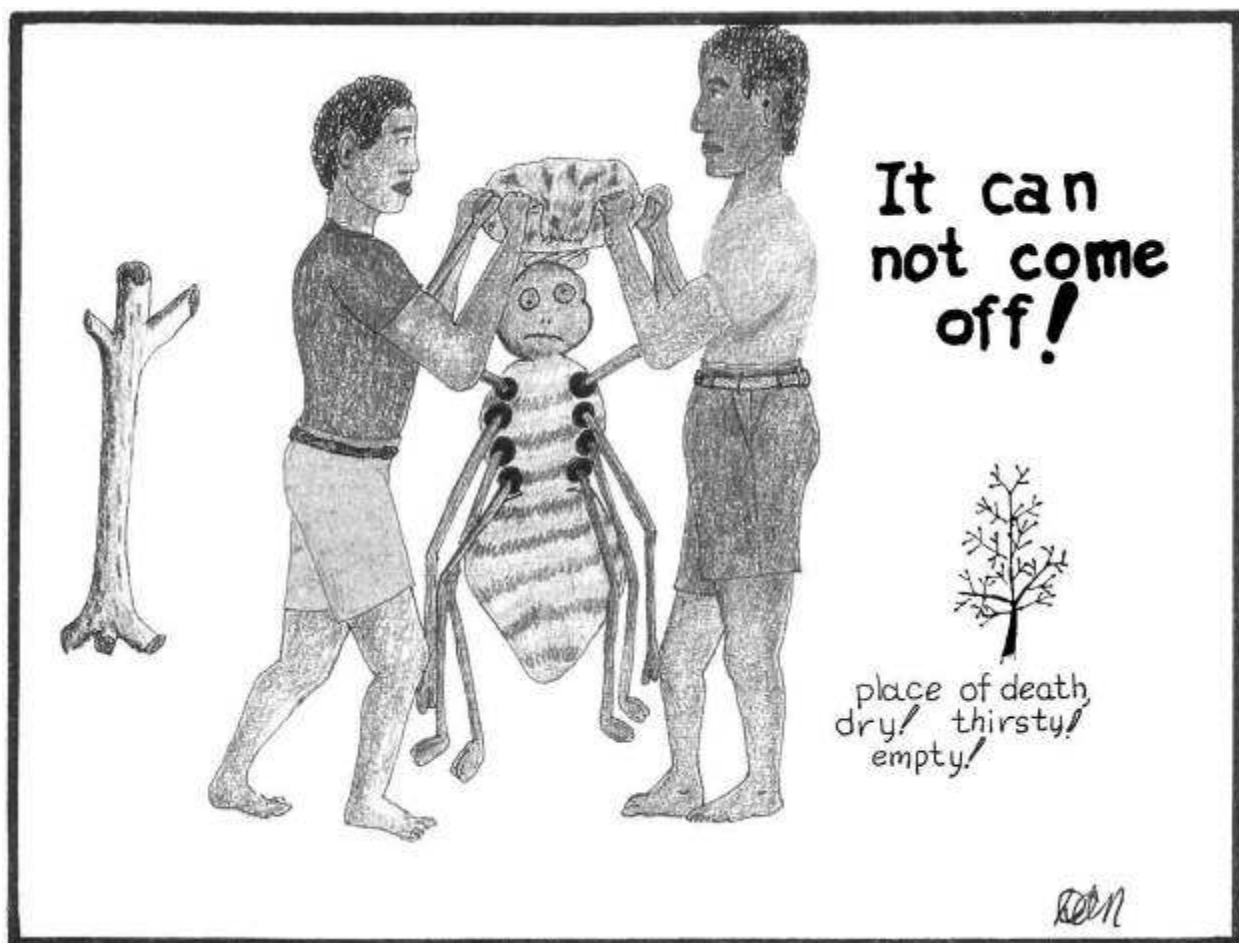
Oh! Spider was happy! He had food in his belly and a little, light beautiful load to carry. Besides that he was going to his brother's beautiful town for a wonderful wonderful feast.



But the way was long and the sun was still very hot. The place they were going through was dry - only dead trees and bushes. Spider began to feel tired. His neck began to ache. He looked down and saw that his new suit was dusty, dirty and ragged.

That little head load seemed much heavier than it was before. He thought that he would set it down for a bit and rest. He reached up to it, but he could not lift it off. It was stuck tightly to his head. Not only that, but it did not smell good anymore.

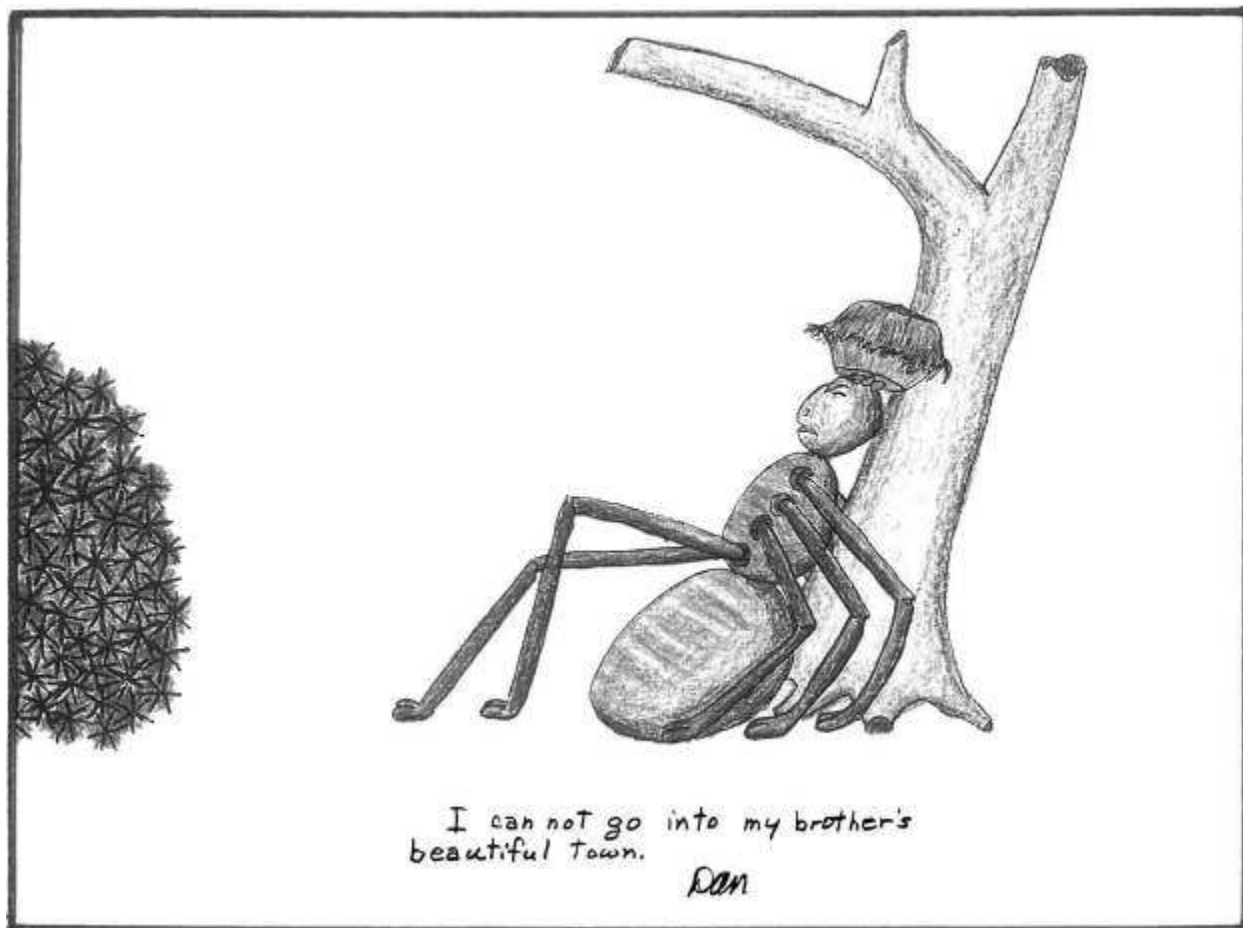
Some of Spider's friends held their breath and tried to lift it off. They said, "We'll help you take that dirty stinking thing off your head."



But as hard as they tried, it would not come off. And did they say 'dirty' and 'stinking'? Yes they did, and it seemed to get worse every minute.

"Spider," they said, "We want you to walk behind us. We don't want to smell that terrible thing you have on your head."

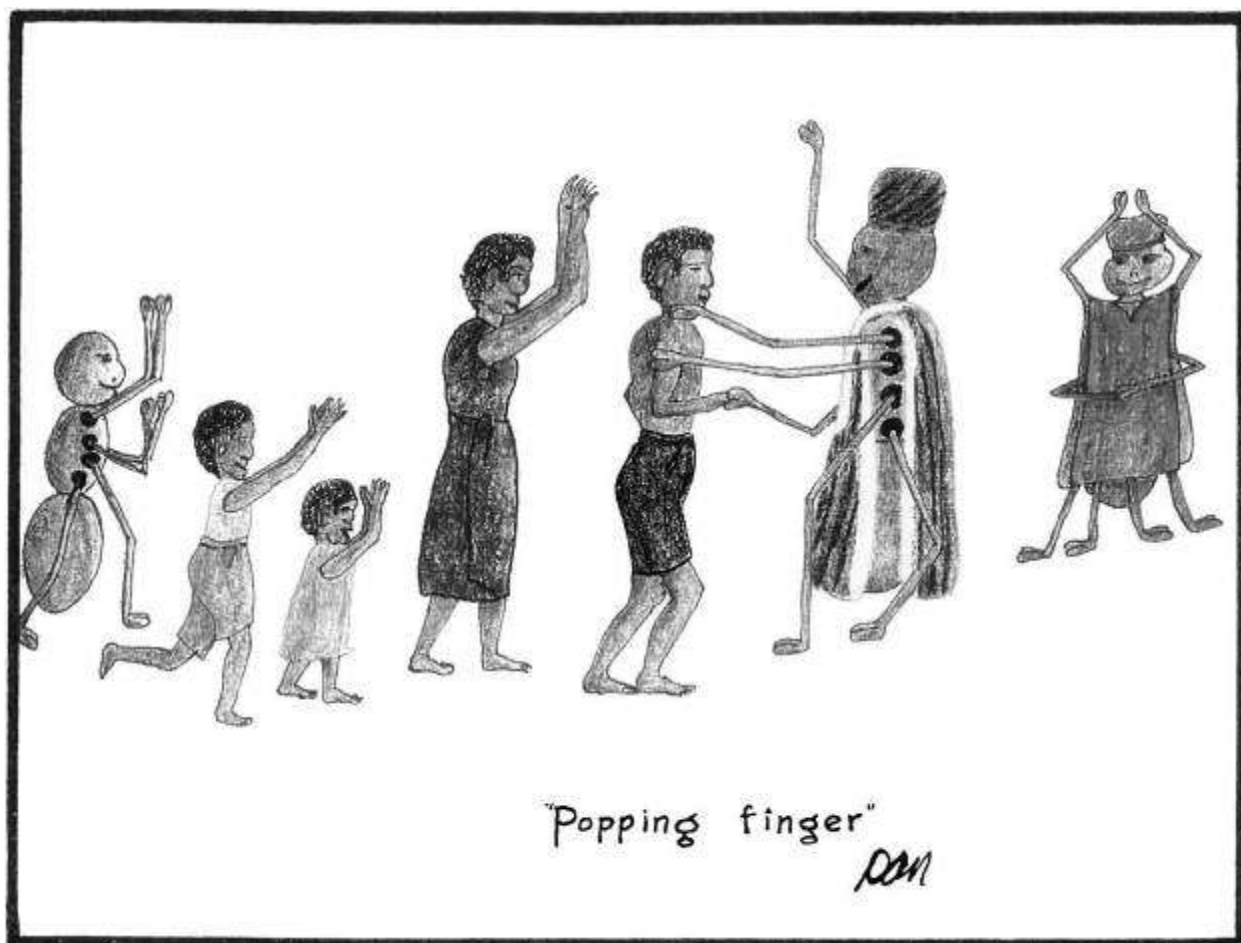
So Spider stumbled along at the end of the line. His whole body ached. The load was crushing him down. He could hardly walk. His neck hurt. His legs hurt. His back seemed about to break. He felt sick. His *eyes were turning* (he was dizzy), but he stumbled on. Would he never reach the town of his brother the big chief?



Then, he suddenly remembered the law of that town. Do you remember what it was? It was that nothing evil or dirty or bad could come into the town.

Spider stopped. "I cannot go into my brother's town with this evil thing on my head. I cannot see my brother the big chief. Why, oh why did I ever agree to carry that old woman's load? Why did I eat her food? Why did I refuse to listen to my friends who were trying to help me?"

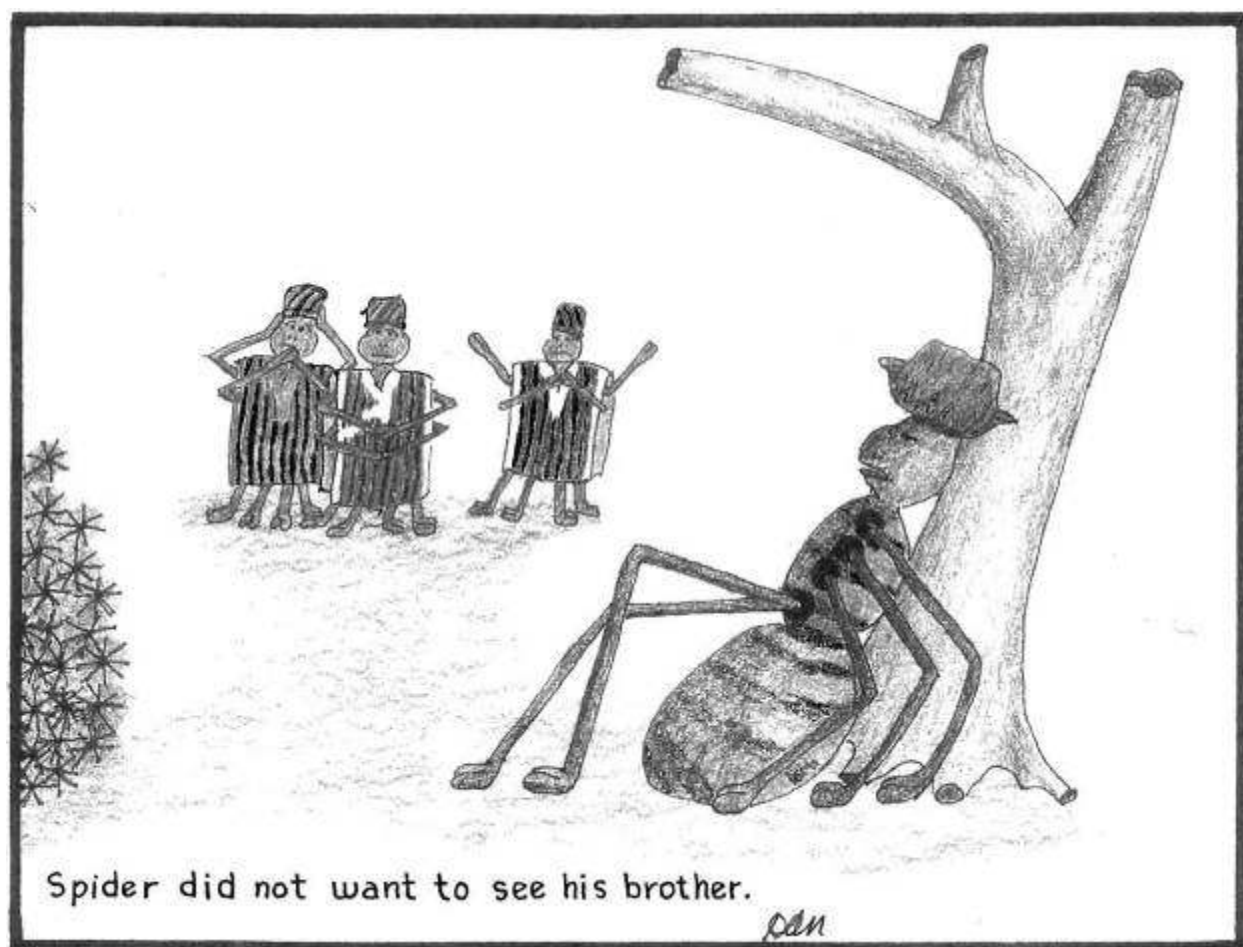
Spider sat down on the ground under a big dead tree. He leaned the heavy, rotten, stinking load against the big tree. The tears rolled down his cheeks. "Oh! Oh! Oh! What can I do? What will happen to me? This heavy load is killing me. And I will never be able to see my brother!"



Spider was beginning to realize the truth of God's Word when it says, "My body is in pain because of Your anger. There is no strength in my bones because of my sin. For my sins have gone over my head. Like a heavy load, they weigh too much for me" (Psalm. 38:3, 4).

The rest of the people went on into the town. They met the big chief, Spider's brother. They were *popping finger* and saying, "Hello" and talking together when the big chief asked, "But where is my brother, Spider? I have not yet seen him."

"Oh, a terrible thing has happened to Spider," someone said, and they told him about the witch, and the heavy, dirty, rotten thing stuck on Spider's head.



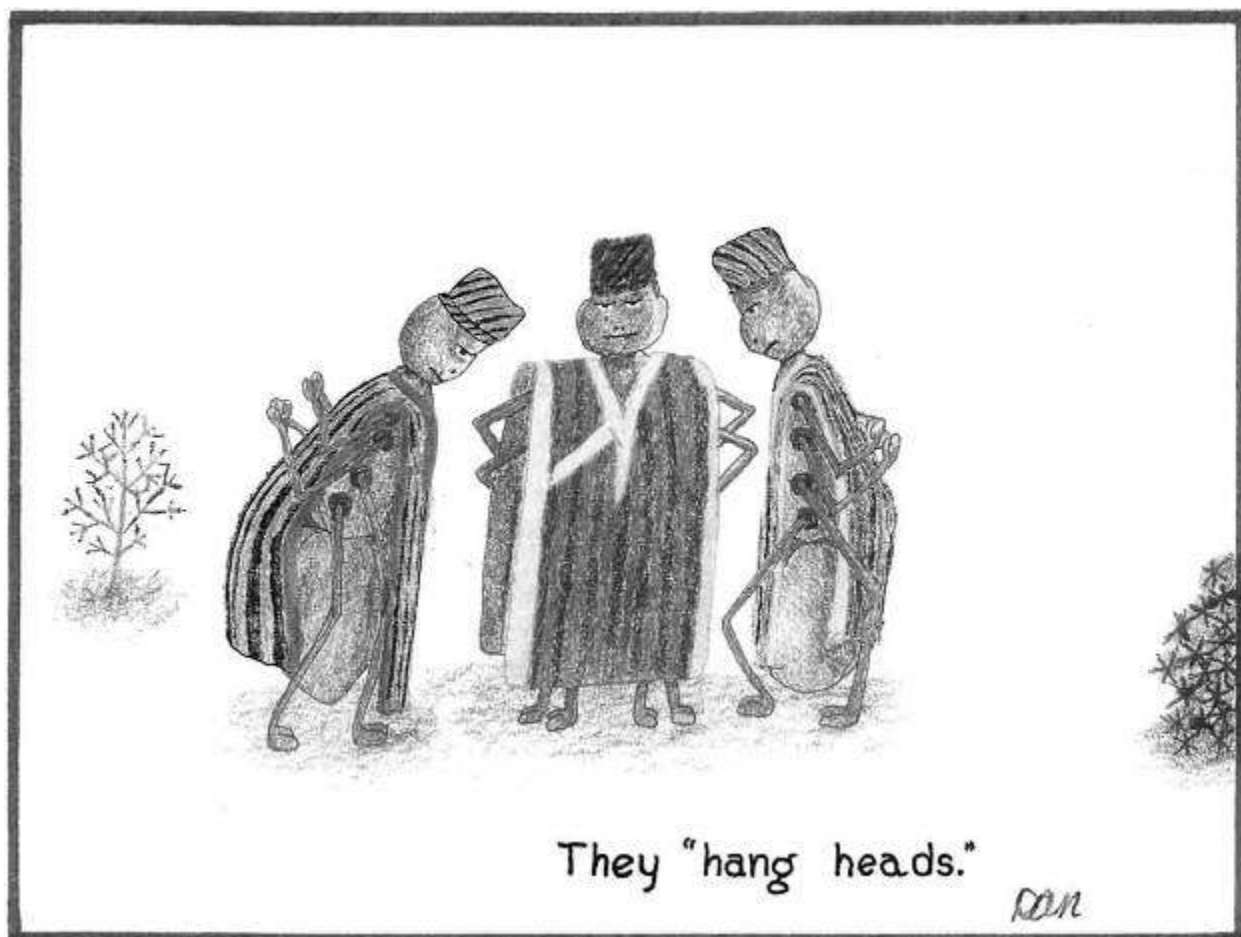
"Oh, that is very bad! It is terrible!" cried the chief. Then he shouted loudly, "Call the elders. We must go to Spider."

So the big chief in his *fine fine* robe and all the elders in their *fine fine* robes came out to Spider. Isn't that just like God who ". . . does not want any person to be punished forever" (II Peter 3:9)?

Now Spider was very ashamed. He did not want to meet his brother in those *fine fine* clothes, for Spider, remember, was very dirty and sick.

"Oh, my brother, Spider! What has happened to you?" cried the big chief.

"Oh dear, my brother. I am too sorry. I met an old woman, a witch who wanted me to carry her small load, and as I was very hungry she gave me some food. I ate her food and agreed to carry



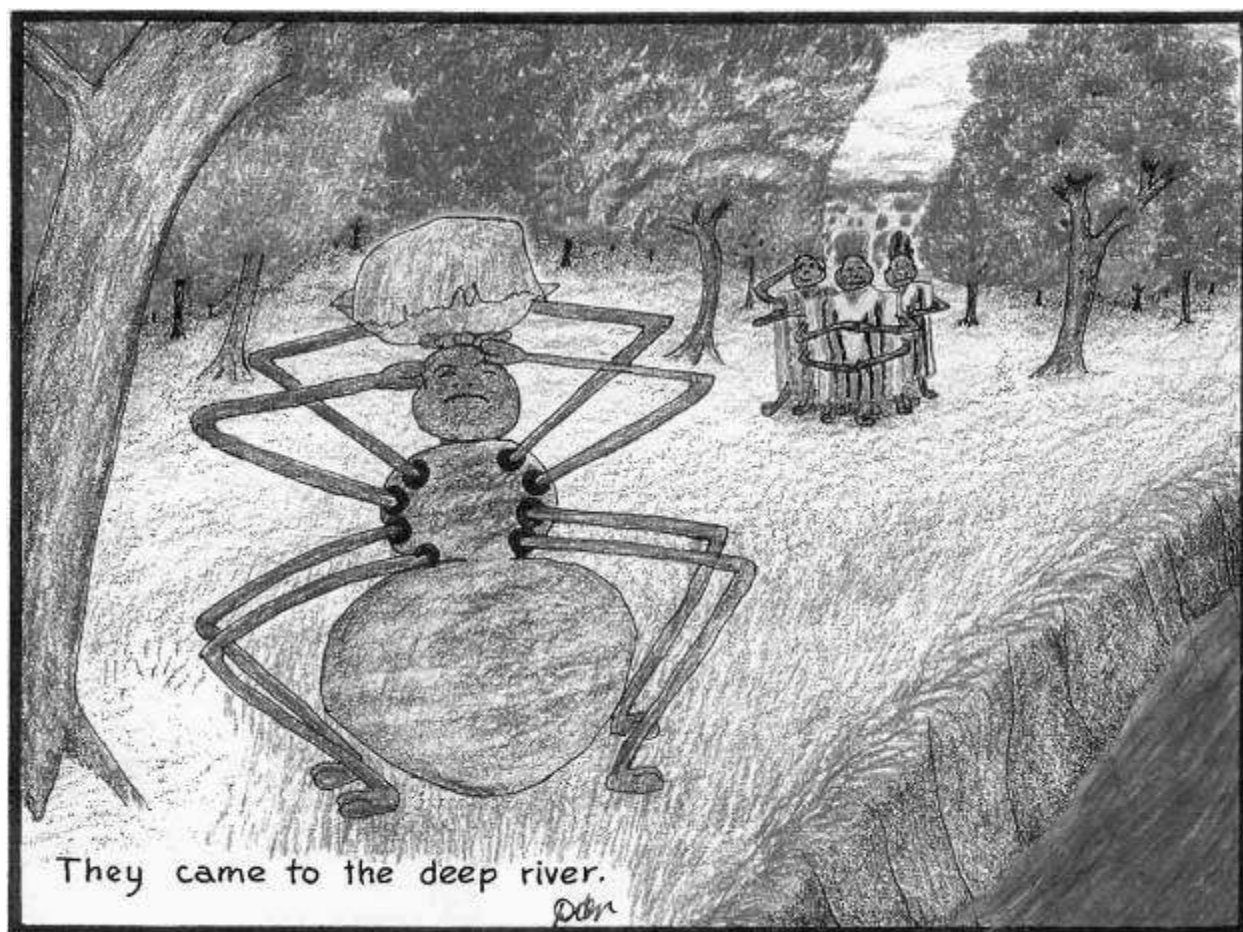
her load. And now it is rotten and dirty and so heavy! It is stuck on my head. I hurt all over. I am sick. And I cannot come into your beautiful town."

Spider made a very good confession of his wrong to his big brother just as God tells us to confess our sins to Him.

"That is true Spider," said his brother. "The law of my town is that nothing evil or dirty or rotten can come into my town. Therefore you cannot come in as you are. But we will *hang heads* (put their heads together) to see if something can be done to help you."

So the big chief and all the elders *hung heads* and talked for a long time. At last they came close to Spider again.

The big chief said, "Spider, we have talked. *For true*, your problem is *not easy*. But there may be something that can be done.

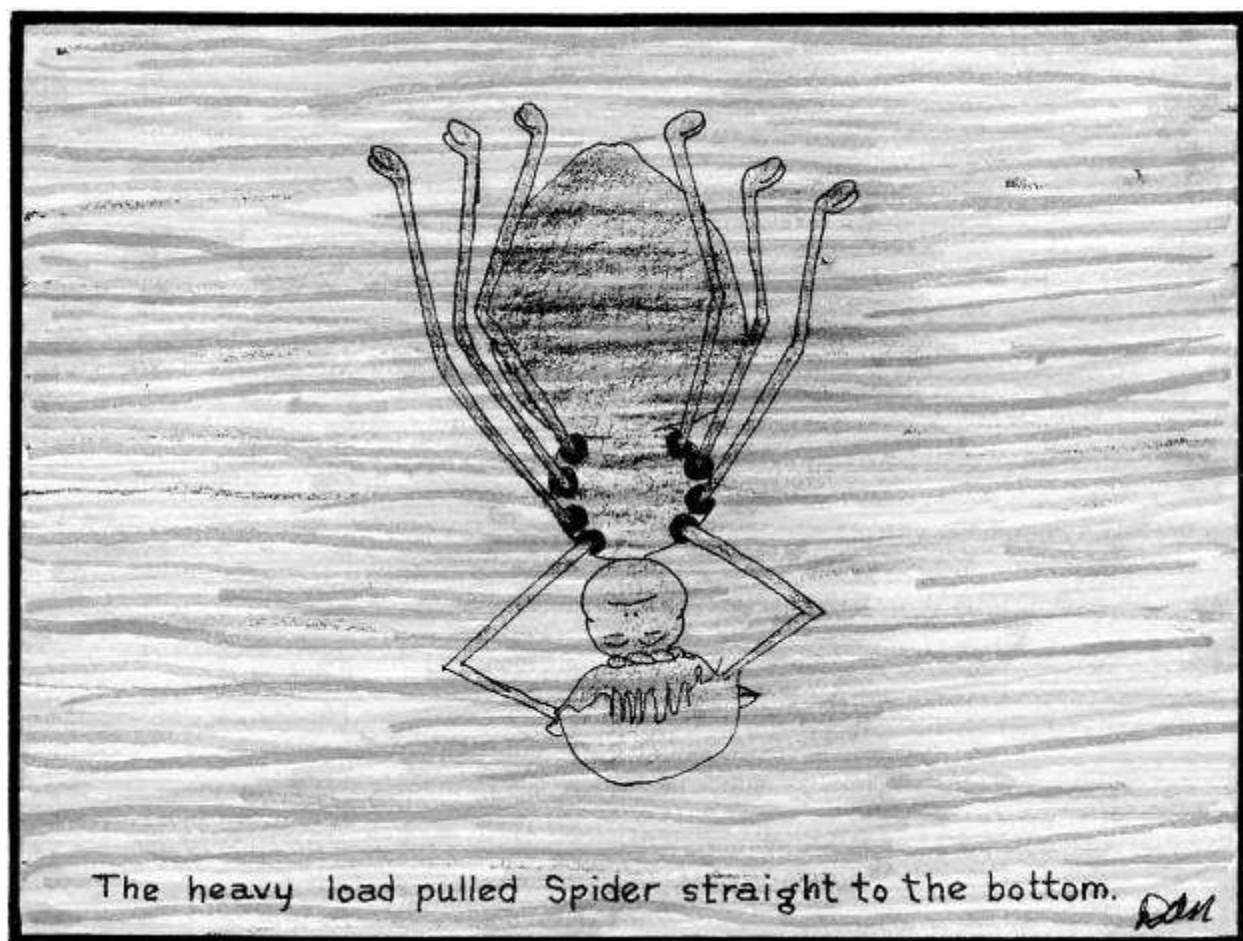


If you will agree to go and jump into the river, perhaps that dirty rotten thing can be washed away."

"But, my brother," Spider cried, "this heavy thing on my head will pull me straight to the bottom! I will never come up again! I will never see you again! I will die there! I will be buried in the river!"

"I know, Spider. That may be true," sadly answered the chief, "But it is the only thing that can help."

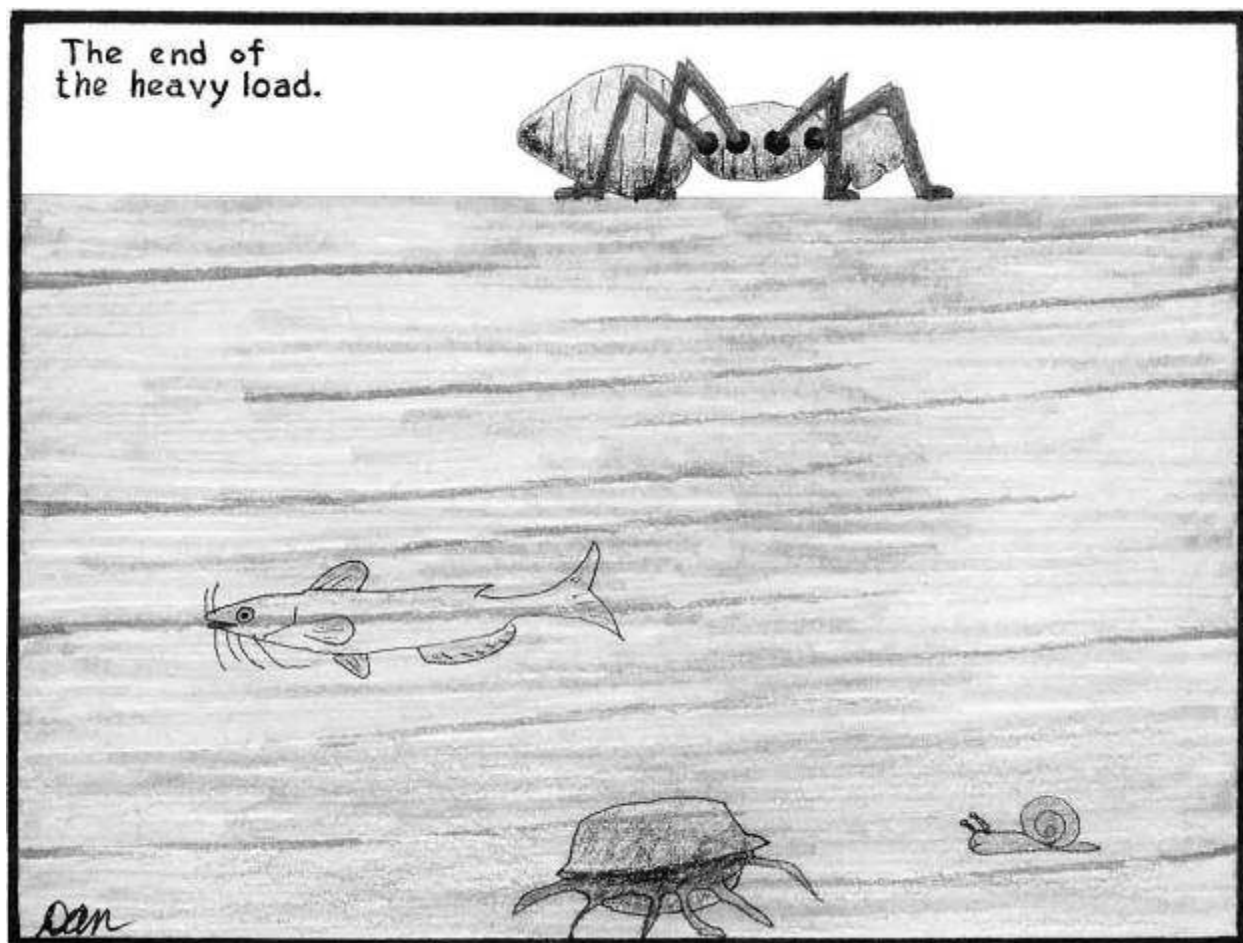
Spider sat and thought a long time. Then slowly and with many sighs, Spider struggled to his feet. Oh, his body hurt so much and his *eyes were turning*, and now he must die. But he would rather die than live on in all this pain and misery.



They came to the river. Spider stood on the bank looking at the deep swirling water. He looked back at the elders in their fine clothes. He looked at his own tattered dirty clothes. He felt the heavy heavy load crushing him down. Its evil smell filled his nose.

Spider did not look back again. What else could he do? Nothing! So he just jumped right into the deep swirling water. He went down, down, down! The heavy load pulled him straight down head first to the bottom just like a stone. It stuck fast there. Spider thought he was already dead. He was sure that this was the end of everything for him.

But suddenly Spider started to go up. And then, Pop! he was on the top of the water. He looked down and there on the bottom of the river was his heavy load, but it was the last time he ever saw it, for it was gone! He was free!



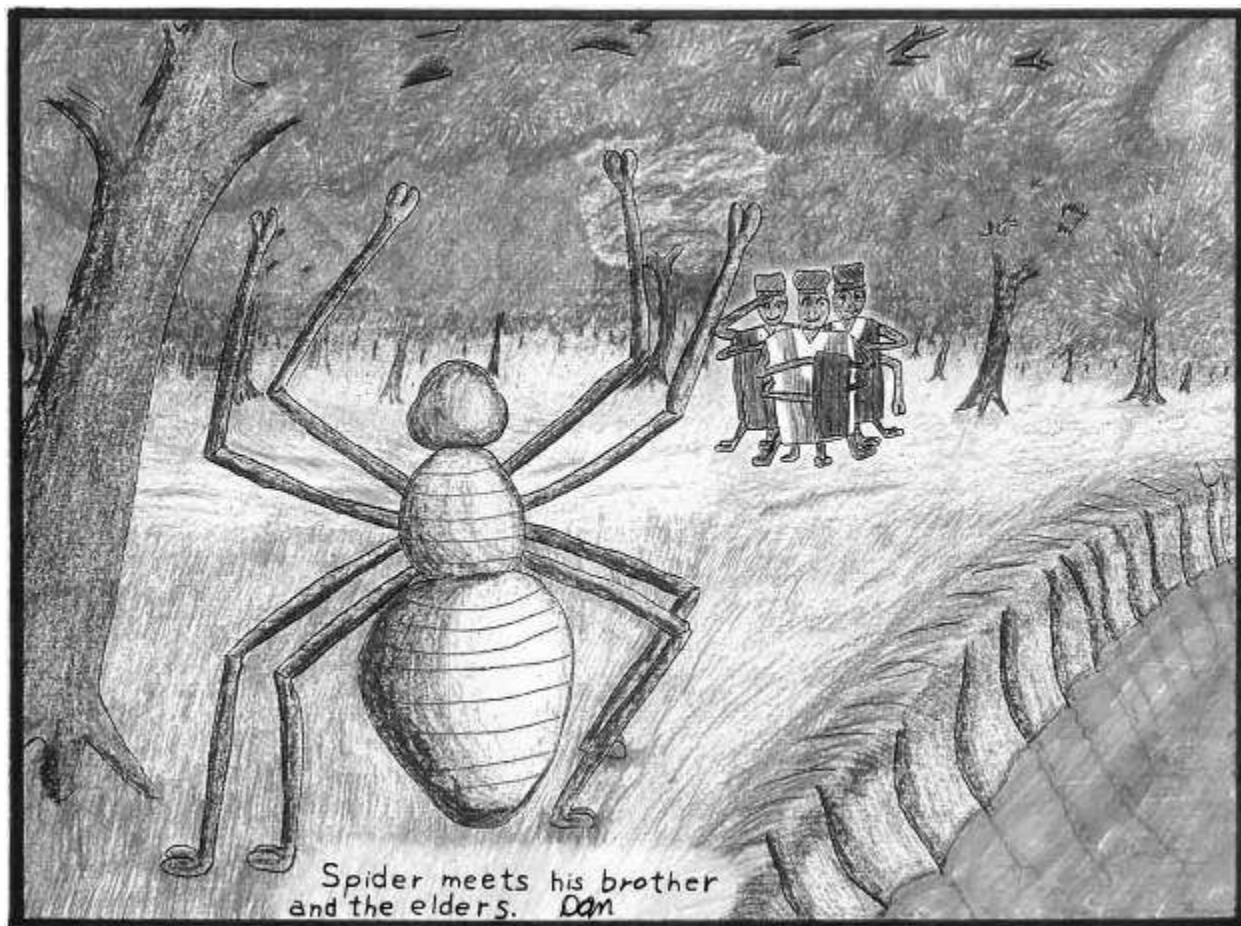
"I'm free! I'm free!" Spider shouted!

And when he looked at himself again he shouted, **"I'm clean! I'm clean!"**

And *for true*, he never saw that evil thing again. It was gone forever. Spider was clean! He skimmed joyfully over the surface of the water.

Soon Spider was back on the shore where he was greeted warmly by his big brother, the chief. They had a fine new robe for him to put on. His brother introduced him to all the elders who had come out from the town to meet Spider. They all welcomed him into their beautiful town.

Joyfully they went back into the beautiful town. All the people were dancing and singing. And they had a wonderful wonderful time.



Well! Spider got himself in big trouble didn't he? Carrying that load looked right to him and he wouldn't listen. God says, "There is a way which looks right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12), and Spider found out this was true.

But Spider was changed when he confessed his wrong and then obeyed his brother. Do you know you too can be changed? Yes, God can do it! I John 1:9 says, "If we tell Him (Jesus) our sins, He is faithful and we can depend on Him to forgive us of our sins. He will make our lives clean from all sin."

And just like Spider's brother's beautiful town, God has a beautiful place for us. Jesus said, "There are many rooms in my Father's house." The Bible also says, "Those who wash their clothes clean are happy (who are washed by the blood of the Lamb). They



will have the right to go into the city through the gates ...” (John 14:2; Rev. 22:14).

Jesus asks us to come to His beautiful town. As the song asks, “Are you on your way...?”

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