

THE BOY WHO WANTED TO BE A MAN

AN AFRICAN FOLKTALE FROM THE ANIKE FOUNDATION



There once was a young man who couldn't wait to be a man. He asked his mother every day,

“Mother, when am I a man?”

“When you provide food for your family.”

“Oh.” He nodded his head and went out to play.

Every night before he went to sleep, he asked his father, “Father, when will I become a man?”

“When you build a house to rest in after a hard day's work.”

“Okay,” the little boy said as he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

He asked his mother and father every day and every night until one day his mother's answer was different.



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“You are old enough to become a man. Go out and see if you are able to be who you have desired to become.”

But the boy didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know the first thing about having a family or feeding them!

And so, because he didn’t want anyone to know he was clueless, he set out to find a family on his own and figure out a way to feed them himself.

The young man walked through the forest until he came upon a beautiful bush, full of red and purple berries.

“These look good to eat! I will feed them to my family, once I have one.”



So, the boy gathered the berries in a sack and kept walking. As he was turning back home, he saw a snake dropping from a tree.

“Look, my family is falling down just to meet me.” So, he picked up the snake and put it in a satchel. The young man almost made it home when he stumbled across a wild piglet sniffing around a patch of trees.

“My family will not even allow me to walk by them without making sure that I notice them and take them with me.”

So, he tied up the piglet to a tree next to his home and went inside for bed.



He made sure he asked his father the same question before sleep came and this time, his father's answer was different as well.

"It is time for you to show that you can be a man. Tomorrow set out to do what you know to do."

But the young man didn't close his eyes that night because he didn't even know how to build a house!

But he didn't want anyone to know he was clueless.

So instead of asking questions, the next day the young man took his snake, berries, and piglet, and traveled a little way past his 'old' home.



He found a flat piece of land and decided, “This is a good spot to build my house.”

He placed all his ‘family’ there and went to gather materials. He found straw and small pieces of wood, leaves and fine rope.

A long time passed, but before dark the young man had built a small hut. He gathered his ‘family’ and went inside.

“My father was right. After a day of hard work, all you want to do is relax in your own home.”

He decided it was time to feed his family. He took the berries out of the sack, untied the piglet, and brought the snake out of the satchel.



“I am now a man. I have found my family, provided them food, and have built my own house. Look at my piglet eating those beautiful berries!” But suddenly the piglet started squealing and turning colors.

“Oh, no!” the young man cried. “The berries must be poisonous!”

The piglet was squealing and stomping, causing such a commotion all around - then suddenly stepped on the snake! The snake was gravely injured and with its dying breath, struck the pig with a poisonous bite.

The young man jumped back, fell, and knocked his tied straw hut down with a loud thump!

When the scattered straw settled, all the young man could see were mushy berries, the purple piglet, and the squished snake.



He walked home dejected and told his parents what happened. His parents hugged him but told him cheerfully:

“We knew you would have trouble son, but you wanted to grow up so badly. You are not aware that it takes quite a while to know how to be a man. Enjoy being our little boy! Enjoy every day, while you can, because tomorrow will come, whether you are ready for it or not.”

The young man didn’t ask any questions that night but went to sleep soundly with a smile on his face, thinking about all the time he had to enjoy being a boy before he had to become a man.

“The young can walk faster, but the elder knows the road.”