



MEE-AN AND THE MAGIC SERPENT

A Play Based on a Folktale from Mali

Characters:

- » **Narrator 1**
- » **Narrator 2**
- » **Narrator 3**
- » **Mee-An:** Beautiful but vain young woman
- » **Assa:** Mee-An's younger sister
- » **Mother:** Mee-An and Assa's mother
- » **Oumar:** Shepherd 1
- » **Amadou:** Shepherd 2
- » **Serpent**
- » **Balakononifin:** Black Bird of the River

NARRATOR 1: Long ago, there lived a beautiful but vain girl named Mee-An. She was looking for the perfect husband without a single scratch or scar on his body. She lived on the edge of the desert along with her parents and younger sister, Assa. Suitors came from far and wide to seek Mee-An's hand in marriage, but she rejected them all.

MOTHER: Be careful, daughter. Seeing a person is not the same as knowing his character.

MEE-AN: Oh, Mother, stop worrying.

NARRATOR 1: Assa was magical and wiser than her older sister. She turned herself into a fly and buzzed around the marketplace, landing on people to find a perfect man for her sister. Word of Mee-An's quest soon spread far and wide. In a village quite far away, two shepherds sat and talked in the shade of a giant termite hill.

OUMAR: Have you heard of the girl, Mee-An? She thinks that no man is good enough for her.

AMADOU: Yes. They say she is the most beautiful

girl in the world, and she is looking for a husband as perfect as she is.

NARRATOR 2: A powerful serpent that lived in the termite hill heard their entire conversation.

SERPENT: A beautiful young girl looking for the perfect husband? I will use my magic to win her hand.

NARRATOR 2: The serpent, disguised as a handsome young man, arrived in Mee-An's village during a celebration. Assa, as usual, was buzzing around as a fly. She inspected the handsome stranger and made a beeline for home.





ASSA: Mee-An, I have found the perfect man for you. Only, there is something odd about him. He does not smell . . . human.

MEE-AN: No matter. Run back and invite him to our house for dinner while I get ready.

NARRATOR 3: That evening, the perfect young man came for dinner. As the sisters cooked, the walls cracked and cooking pots fell and broke into pieces. Birds sang wildly and the wind howled.

MOTHER: These are signs of evil. Beware, Mee-An.

MEE-AN: Oh, Mother. Stop worrying.

NARRATOR 3: Mee-An and the magic serpent were married the next month. They prepared to move to their new home.

MOTHER: Assa, according to tradition, you will go with Mee-An and her new husband to act as the *konyo-wuluni*, the “little barking dog of the wedding.”

NARRATOR 1: The three walked for many days before they reached their new home—a hut on the other side of a great river that could only be reached by boat. They soon settled into a routine. Every day, Mee-An’s husband went to the river, returning home with a great many fish for dinner.

MEE-AN: Let’s surprise my husband with some lunch on the river.

NARRATOR 1: The girls walked and walked, until they heard a strange noise. They saw a giant serpent in the middle of the river, singing.

SERPENT: I fish all day for Assa and Mee-An. To fatten them up is my master plan. Boiled with mangos and fresh river eel, They will make a delicious meal!

ASSA: (*whispering*) That serpent is your husband. And he is going to eat us!



NARRATOR 2: The terrified sisters crept away. They knew they had to get home quickly. But how to cross the great river? Just then, a shadow passed above their heads. It was Balakononifin, the black heron.

MEE-AN: (*calling to the heron*) Please help us cross this river. The snake will eat us if we do not escape.

BALAKONONIFIN: I do not trust humans.

ASSA: If you take us home, we promise to give you a horse, a cow, a donkey, and sheep for your troubles.

BALAKONONIFIN: Those are pretty words. That magic serpent has certainly caused me problems, stealing all the fish from the river. Very well, get on my back.

NARRATOR 2: The girls scrambled up, and Balakononifin took flight. Seeing his beautiful dinner disappear, the snake launched himself

into the air. He swirled around the heron and the girls in a funnel of ashes and dust, but he fell back into the river, defeated. Ever since, serpents have lived in the water. Balakononifin kept flying, straight back to the sisters' family.

ASSA: We are home! But look at your feathers. They are no longer black. The serpent's dust must have turned you white.

MEE-AN: Thank you for saving us. As we promised, please accept our payment: a horse, a cow, a donkey, and sheep.

NARRATOR 2: The heron was very pleased with his new friends. To this day, when you see animals grazing by an African river, you will probably see a white bird sitting proudly on their backs. As for Mee-An, she learned that "seeing a person is not the same as knowing his character." When she married again, she was able to love her husband in spite of his scratches and scars.