

A COLLECTION OF  
**STORIES**  
FROM  
**WEST AFRICA**

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# THE CHIEF'S RING



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**By Spark Team**



## THE CHIEF'S RING

Note to the reader: Words and phrases typical of West Africa are retained and indicated by italics.

“The evil doer is over-anxious.” “After a foolish action comes remorse.”

The Big Chief had many jewels. He had a big jeweled pin he often wore on his robe when he went to special feasts. He also had an antelope’s head with horns made of gold with emeralds for the eyes. He would put it on his turban. One that he wore to celebrate rice harvest was of gold. It looked like a sheaf of rice. The rice heads were many many small small diamonds.

However there was one that he liked more than any other. It was a very expensive ring that he wore only on very special

occasions. He would not wear it at any other time. It had a big diamond on it and some rubies.

One day he saw that the ring was missing. "What has happened to my ring?" he pondered. Have I somehow misplaced it? No, for I am quite sure that I put it back in the jewel box after the District Commissioner visited. That was the last time I wore it. Has it been stolen? If so, who is the *rogue* (thief)? Is the *rogue* one of my servants? Is it one of the town elders? Both are often in my house. I must be very sure before I make accusations. I love my people. I do not want to *do bad* to them."

The Chief thought about it for a long time. Then he had an idea. One morning a few days later he called all the town people together. He gave each of his people a stick. All the sticks were carefully cut to the same length.

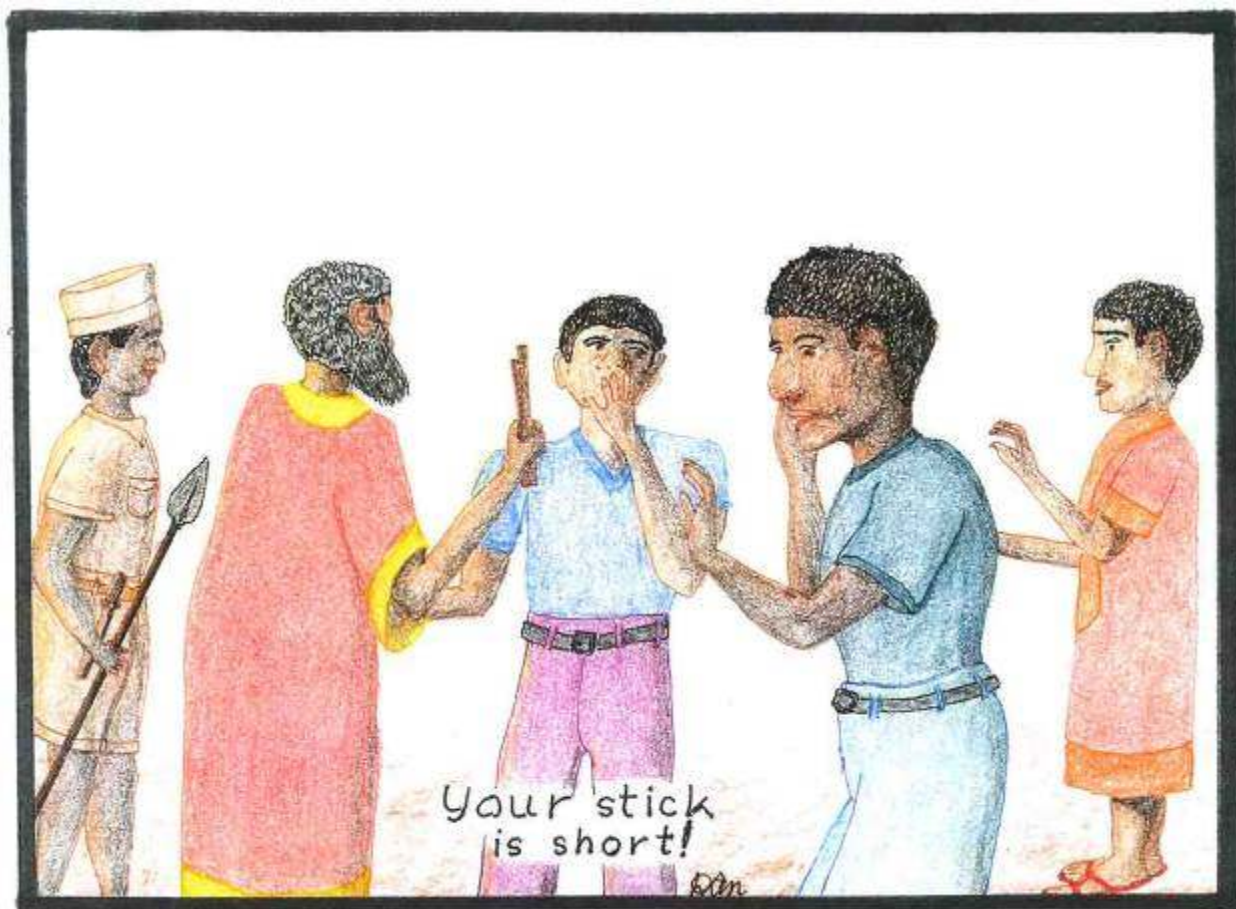
The Chief told them, "My very valuable ring is missing. Maybe someone here has taken it. I hope that none of you, my trusted elders and town people, is a thief but I need to prove that you are not guilty before I look elsewhere. The ring must be found!

"Now I am going to be away all day today. I have given each of you a stick. They are all the same length. During this day the stick belonging to the one who has stolen the ring will grow one inch longer. Then I will know if there is a thief among us."

With that announcement the Chief left on business for one whole day.

Everyone in town was talking about this strange way to catch a thief.

"Do you think that it is true?"



"I do not know. How can a dead stick grow longer?"

"The Chief is very clever. Perhaps he has made strong *ju-ju*." (magic)

"But our chief has never liked the *ju ju* business. He wouldn't *put his hand there*."

"I am glad that I'm not the thief."

And so the talk went. Talk, talk, talk the whole day long. Everybody was discussing the stick each one had, the theft and how their stick could grow. Some people who were guilty of some other small thefts marked the length of their stick on the doorway of their house so they could see if it grew.

Now the servant who had taken the ring went off to think about it.

"How can a dead stick grow?" he muttered to himself. "The Chief must be a great magician..... But if the stick can grow one inch longer, I can cut one inch off it. Then it will be the same length as all of the others."

So he took his cutlass and, very carefully, cut one inch off his stick. He even rubbed the fresh cut end in some dirt so it would not look like a new cut.

In the evening the Chief came home and called all his people together. "Now give me back all the sticks," he ordered.

As the people handed back their sticks to the Chief, he carefully measured each one. All were the same length until he came to the stick belonging to the man who had cut one inch off. It was one inch shorter than all the others.

The Chief spoke harshly to the man. "Now why did you feel that you should cut one inch off of your stick? You must be the *rogue*. Soldiers! Seize that man! Put him into the jail! Search him! Search his house!"

Sure enough, when the soldiers searched his house they found the Chief's ring.

It is true is it not? A guilty conscience will make a man to do the very thing that will catch him. That rogue must not have known that Numbers 32:23 tells us, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

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