

Mrs Anancy, Chicken Soup and Anancy *by James Berry*

Mrs Anancy has six chickens to sell. She wants the money to get a new dress to wear. Anancy believes Mrs Anancy has enough nice dresses already.

Anancy whispers to himself, "Oh, those fat and lovely chickens! Any good and loving husband deserves to eat them. But the trouble is Mrs Anancy will never, never agree."

Anancy works out a way for the six fat chickens to become his meal. He goes and sees Bro Dog to get him to agree to do a little trick for him.

Bro Dog goes and hides himself in the doctor's surgery. He stays there hidden till the surgery is closed.

Just before night comes down, Mrs Anancy walks into her home. She comes and finds her husband close to death, in pain.

"Oh, my husband, what's the matter? What's the matter?"

"Oh, my wife – good-good wife – pain has me in its jaws. Pain chews me up. Pain cuts me up. Everywhere." Anancy clutches himself and rolls about in bed.

"My poor-poor husband. Where is the pain? Where?"

"Everywhere." Anancy groans. "In my belly, in my throat, in my mouth, on my tongue."

"I must get the doctor," Mrs Anancy says, all worried.

Anancy groans. Anancy sobs. Anancy gasps. "Wife – I'm getting a glimpse – a glimpse – of another world. A light – a light beckons me to another place."

"No, no, husband. Don't go," Mrs Anancy embraces her husband. "Hold on. Hold on. I'm going to the doctor. Right away. Right away."

Mrs Anancy leaves the house in haste.

Then sudden-sudden Mrs Anancy stops. She doesn't want to leave Anancy alone. She looks back at the house. In disbelief, she sees Anancy rush out onto the road. He hurries the other way. Mrs Anancy is puzzled. She turns round and follows Anancy.

Then she realises he's surely heading for the doctor's surgery. Mrs Anancy follows unseen.

At the surgery the place is closed. No lights on. Then Bro Dog comes out and both him and Anancy go back into the surgery. The lights are put on and Mrs Anancy stands outside in shocking disbelief. Nothing is wrong with her husband. He and Bro Dog are talking happily inside, obviously they are plotting something

Mrs Anancy goes to the surgery door and knocks. Doctor comes out.

Doctor is a bearded and bent-back little old man. Doctor wears dark glasses and a white coat. Doctor speaks in a very peculiar croaking voice.

"It's my husband, Doctor," Mrs Anancy says. "He's at home in bed in terrible, terrible pain."

"Does he have pains everywhere?" Doctor asks in his peculiar croaking voice.

"Yes, Doctor."

"The pains come worst in the belly and throat and mouth and tongue?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Common. Very common." Doctor shakes his head. "Some bad-bad cases about."

"Will he be cured. Doctor?"

"Yes, yes. Completely. But there's only one cure."

"Yes, Doctor? Tell me."

"Chicken soup. Go home, Mrs Anancy. Find six to eight of the fattest chickens. Make the tastiest soup you ever made. Give every bit of it to the patient, every bit of flesh and soup and seasoning. And leave him alone to eat, madam. Leave him alone."

"Thank you sir."

Mrs Anancy conceals herself outside. She sees the surgery lights go out. She sees Anancy and Bro Dog slip away smart-smart.

Mrs Anancy gets home. There is singing inside. She stands. She listens to every bit

of Anancy's song.

Wanting Anancy to hear her, Mrs Anancy goes inside noisily. Instant-instant, the singing stops. She goes into the room. Anancy rolls about, grunting in pain.

"Any news? Any good news, good wife?"

"I'm to give you chicken soup."

"And that'll cure me?"

"I'm to give you lots of it. Lots of it."

"Oh! Oh!" Anancy groans. "When will the treatment start?"

"Not tonight."

Early morning, Mrs Anancy goes out. When she comes back she kills the six chickens and begins the cooking.

Mrs Anancy makes herself very busy. Importantly, she goes and opens Anancy's bedroom window and sets up her cooking just underneath it. The cooking steams up and tempting cooking smells drift in and fill Anancy's room.

With the delicious cooking under his nose, Anancy turns and twists. He turns his face to the wall. He turns his face the other way. He turns his face towards the ceiling. Sometimes Anancy sits up in bed. When he hears Mrs Anancy round at the back, he craftily takes a peep outside at the cooking.

Anancy lies down.

Mrs Anancy sets up a long table outside, near her cooking. She goes and closes Anancy's window and tells him "I don't want to tempt you any more. I don't want you to either see or smell the spiced-up soup. Everything is ready. Just wait."

Anancy continues his long wait.

Unseen by Anancy, a party of village children arrive. Earlier that morning, before Mrs Anancy started cooking, she had picked them out as the worst fed children in the village and asked them to come to her house. The twenty-four children are settled around the long table.

Mrs Anancy dishes up every bit of chicken flesh and soup and seasoning. All is put in front of the children. In no time every bit is eaten. Every bowl is left clean.

Tortured by the sound outside, and his waiting-waiting, Anancy leaps up, swings the window open and rushes outside.

Anancy sees the children and their empty bowls. He sees the big empty iron pot. He sees everybody looking at him. Anancy holds his head and screams, "My chicken soup! My chicken soup!"

The children burst out laughing.

Anancy storms out of the yard. But he doesn't stay away for long. He is simply too hungry.