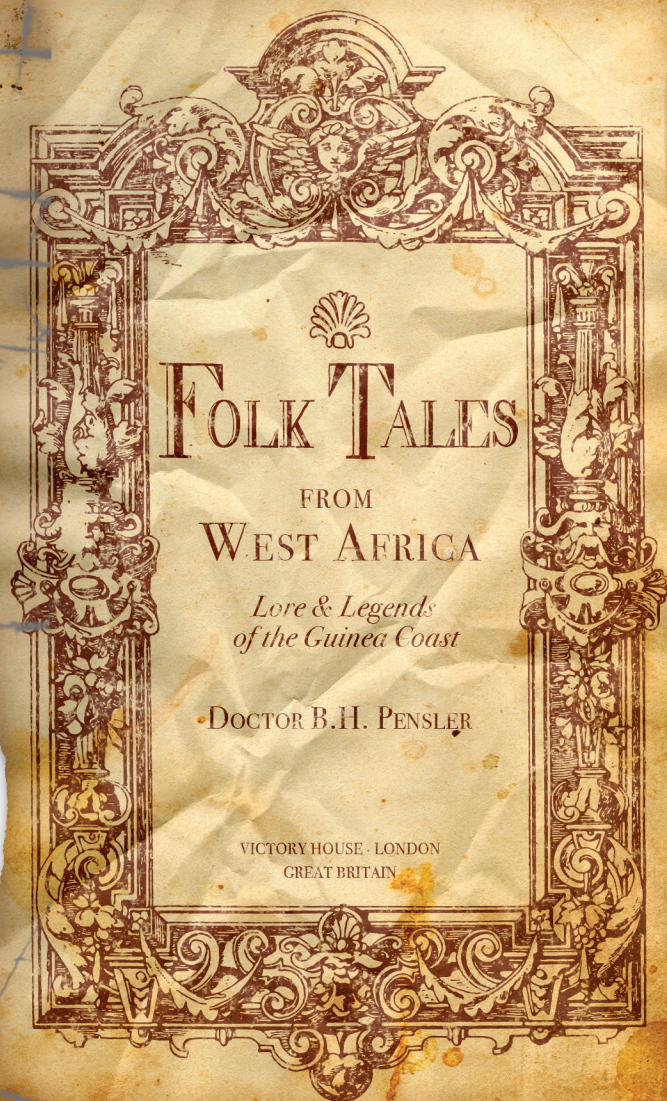




THE IROKO MAN

Within the Iroko tree dwells a spirit known as the Iroko Man. Iroko trees grow to be mighty and tall in this world, but more impressive are its branches that stretch into the spirit world. This is one way that spirits cross the veil. The Iroko spirit serves as gatekeeper and protector of this conduit.

Those who would disturb the tree without the proper ritual may come face to face with a tall, shadowy figure. The spirit wields supernatural terror capable of destroying body and mind. It is within the spirit's power to frustrate or aid attempts to cross the Iroko portal, but securing such aid is almost unheard of. Ritual offerings provide only a chance to beseech a spirit reluctant to allow any but the spirits to pass through.

While an Iroko spirit may come and go freely from the tree assigned to its protection, killing the tree traps the spirit into the wood. This is agonizing for the spirit, causing it to lash out and haunt those in proximity to whatever the wood is used for. Only a specific ritual can prevent or undo this.



OPEN UP, OPEN
UP, IROKO MAN

In the depths of the jungle, past the very biggest waterfall and the trees where the monkeys chatter at night, there was a village. The village grew millet, plantains, and yams, and did not have much need to deal with other people.

One day Abeni, who was the most beautiful girl in the village, went out to the fields to gather yams for dinner. While she worked, tall Segun came to the field. Now Segun was the best hunter in the village, and he had his eye on Abeni. So he asked her, "Will you be my wife?"

Abeni looked into his eyes, and saw nothing but thirst for power and glory. She wanted no part of it, so she said, "No, I will not, Segun."

At this Segun's eyes blazed, for he did not like being told no. He chased Abeni, who fled into the jungle, past the very biggest waterfall and the trees where the monkeys chatter. She ran up the steep hill with the black rocks, and at the top, she found the Iroko tree.

Abeni looked back to see Segun coming with spear in hand, and she hit the tree with her fists. "Open up, open up, Iroko Man!" But the tree did not respond.

Then Abeni remembered what her mother had told her. She took a bundle of akara she had for her lunch, and she set them in a row along the Iroko tree's roots. Then the Iroko Man within was pleased with the gift, and a door opened in the tree, and Abeni slipped into the spirit world.

When Segun marched up, he saw the door close. He shouted, "Open up, open up, Iroko Man!" But the tree did not respond.

Then Segun shouted, "I will bring the very biggest deer if you open up, Iroko Man!" But the tree did not respond.

Finally, Segun shouted, "If you will not open, I will open you up!" And he stabbed the tree with his spear.

Then the Iroko Man appeared before him, and Segun screamed and screamed. When the villagers found him the next day, all he could do was scream and shake, and he never hunted or left his hut again.

And Abeni? She came back to the village eventually, after many adventures. But that is a story for another time.

