

Piki, the young man in this scene from a play, has recently saved a white spider from drowning in a pond. Now, the spider has the chance to repay the kindness, as the young man tries to win the hand of the chieftain's daughter in marriage. Read the scene and then answer the questions that follow.

The White Spider's Gift

A South American folktale . . .

by Jamie Turner

Characters

WHITE SPIDER, offstage voice

PIKI, Guarani boy

CHIEFTAIN

TUKIRA, Chieftain's daughter

KUMA, Guarani boy

DABU, Guarani boy

SCENE 3

TIME: *Two days later.*

SETTING: *The forest; before curtain.*

BEFORE RISE: *PIKI enters, carrying jar. He approaches spring, kneels down as if to fill jar, then sets jar beside him and sits, looking sad.*

SPIDER (*From offstage*): Piki, Piki, why do you look so sad?

PIKI (*Looking up at bush in surprise*): Oh, it is you, little spider. (*Sighs*) My heart is heavy because I shall not win the beautiful Tukira for my wife. I ran well, I shot well, and I fought well. But now I have no hope. Tukira will surely become the wife of Kuma or Dabu.

SPIDER: You can win the final contest with my help.

PIKI: Do you know of the contest?

SPIDER: Yes. I listen as I sit quietly in my yerba bush spinning my web. The women talk as they come to fill their water jars. I heard them speak of the gifts for the lovely princess.

PIKI: Yes, the lovely princess . . . but she will never be mine. Tomorrow we must present our gifts. It is said that Dabu will bring a headdress woven of colorful feathers from rare birds. And Kuma boasts openly of his gift, a necklace of gold, encrusted with the lovely topaz stones of the highlands. But I . . . I have nothing. My mother and I are poor, unlike the families of Dabu and Kuma.

SPIDER: Piki, did you not hear me? I shall help you win Tukira's hand.

PIKI: But how can you help, little spider?

SPIDER: Go home to your mother, Piki, but return to the spring at sunrise. Your special gift for Tukira will be ready. Be joyful, Piki, for the morning will dawn bright.

PIKI (*Puzzled yet hopeful*): I shall do as you say, little friend. Bless you for giving me hope.

SPIDER: Bless you, Piki, for taking time to save me from the bubbling spring. I promised on that day to repay your kindness, and I will. (*PIKI exits, looking back in wonder at spider's bush. Lights dim and music plays softly, indicating*

45 *nighttime.*) I will spin my most delicate thread
and sprinkle it with moon dust. In the center I will
form the beautiful guava flower . . . the loveliest
I have ever spun. And then, rare orchids of many
designs. Then I shall spin stars to twinkle around
the edges, and then I shall weave all the designs
50 together with a fine, intricate lace. Now I will
begin my work, for I must finish before the sun
reaches the horizon. (*Music continues for 30
seconds, with lights gradually coming up. Music
stops.*)

55 **PIKI** (*Entering left, approaching bush*): The
new day has dawned, and I have returned as
you said, friend.

SPIDER: Look beneath the bush, Piki. I have
finished your gift.

60 **PIKI** (*Removing lace mantle from bush; holding
it up*): Oh, it is beautiful! Never have I seen such
delicate lace! It is fit for a princess.

SPIDER: It will be Tukira's bridal veil. Now,
hurry home to show it to your mother, and then
65 take it to the chieftain at the appointed time.

PIKI: How I thank you, White Spider! (*Gently folds
lace and turns to exit, but KUMA enters, blocks
his way. PIKI hides lace behind his back.*)

KUMA: Piki, what makes you rise so early?
70 Surely you are not still searching the forests for
a gift worthy of the princess? (*Laughs*)

PIKI: No, Kuma, I am no longer searching. But
I cannot talk; I must go now. (*PIKI starts to
move on, but KUMA stops him roughly.*)

75 **KUMA**: The women of the village say you
have no gift to bring. (*Laughs rudely*) I have
fashioned gold into a necklace for Tukira.

PIKI: Yes, Kuma, I have heard of it. The whole
village has heard.

80 **KUMA**: And soon Tukira will wear my necklace
and become my bride. What will you bring,
Piki? Perhaps a bowl of tea leaves? (*Laughs*)
Or a dish of berries? (*Laughs harder*) Or perhaps
the lovely princess would like a new mat woven
85 from dried grass. (*Laughs more*) Go, Piki, and
I shall meet you soon as we stand before the
chieftain—unless you decide not to come. I
would not blame you.

PIKI (*Passing KUMA*): I shall be there,
90 Kuma. (*Exits, followed by KUMA, laughing.
Curtain rises.*)

* * *

TIME: *Later that morning.*

SETTING: *Chieftain's home.*

AT RISE: *CHIEFTAIN and TUKIRA sit side by
95 side. 2ND GIRL combs and arranges flowers in
TUKIRA's hair. MESSENGER sits behind them,
tapping a drum as they talk.*

CHIEFTAIN: The morning has come, daughter.
Soon the three young braves will hear the drum
100 and arrive to present their gifts.

TUKIRA: Father, what if I cannot decide which
is the most beautiful gift?

CHIEFTAIN: You will know. Your heart will
tell you. And after you choose, I shall give
105 one final test to prove the worthiness of your
husband. Stand, now. Here come the youths.
(*CHIEFTAIN and TUKIRA stand as DABU,
KUMA, and PIKI enter, carrying gifts behind
their backs. MESSENGER stops beating drum,
110 and VILLAGE PEOPLE enter, gather around.
CHIEFTAIN addresses boys.*) The three days
have ended, and now Tukira will choose among
you. Present your gift first, Dabu. (*DABU steps
forward, kneels, holds out feathered headdress.
PEOPLE murmur approval.*)

TUKIRA (*Taking headdress; with admiration*): It is lovely. Such rare feathers and such brilliant colors! Thank you, Dabu. (*TUKIRA hands headdress to 2ND GIRL. DABU rises and moves back.*)

120 **CHIEFTAIN**: Now your gift, Kuma. (*KUMA steps forward, kneels, presents necklace to TUKIRA. PEOPLE murmur even louder and lean forward for closer look. KUMA glances back at PIKI scornfully.*)

125 **TUKIRA** (*In admiring tone*): What fine gold! And such glowing topaz stones! Thank you, Kuma. (*TUKIRA hands necklace to 2ND GIRL.*)

KUMA (*Pompously*): The topaz stones do not compare to the beauty of your eyes, lovely princess. (*TUKIRA lowers her eyes, and CHIEFTAIN motions KUMA back. KUMA speaks to DABU and PIKI.*) I can see in her eyes that she admires the necklace above all else.

CHIEFTAIN: Piki, you may present your gift now. (*PIKI steps forward, kneels, presents lace mantle. PEOPLE gasp, reach forward to touch it, murmuring loudly at its beauty. TUKIRA takes mantle, unfolds it, studies it silently.*)

TUKIRA (*After a moment*): Never have I held such beautiful lace. It is clearly a miracle, for no hands could spin such glistening threads and intricate patterns—so delicate yet so strong. I choose Piki's lace mantle as the best gift, Father. (*PIKI bows head gratefully, rises, steps back.*)
145 *KUMA scowls angrily.*)

CHIEFTAIN: You have chosen well, daughter. (*Addresses boys*) Before I give up my daughter, however, there is one final test.

KUMA (*Aside*): Aha! Perhaps I shall win yet!

150 **CHIEFTAIN**: It is said that the spirit of a great tiger roams throughout our forest. Only the wisest and noblest among the Guaranis can see the spirit. (*Motions toward audience*) Look into the forest and tell me what the tiger wears around his neck. (*PEOPLE murmur. DABU, KUMA, and PIKI gaze out silently.*)

DABU (*Questioningly*): I believe he wears around his neck a . . . a cord of twisted vines?

160 **KUMA** (*Boastfully*): Yes, yes, I see the spirit clearly, but you are wrong, Dabu. He wears about his neck a beaded leather strap. He turns his head now and gazes at me, recognizing me as one of the wise and noble. (*Kneels and bows toward "spirit"*)

CHIEFTAIN: Piki, what can you see?

165 **PIKI** (*Puzzled*): I have looked and looked, Chieftain, but I see no tiger spirit at all. (*PEOPLE murmur.*)

CHIEFTAIN: You have shown yourself worthy, young Piki, for it is also said that the tiger spirit never reveals himself where many people are gathered. I do not know what you saw, Dabu, nor you, Kuma, but it was not the great spirit tiger. You alone, Piki, have been truthful. Surely you are the wisest and noblest of all the young Guaranis. You have competed with honor and have won the hand of my daughter in marriage. Let us make ready for the ceremony. It will be tonight.

TUKIRA: And I shall wear the lovely lace mantle for my veil.

180 **PIKI**: Yes, you shall. Just as my friend said you would. (*PIKI gently places mantle over TUKIRA's head as curtain falls.*)

THE END