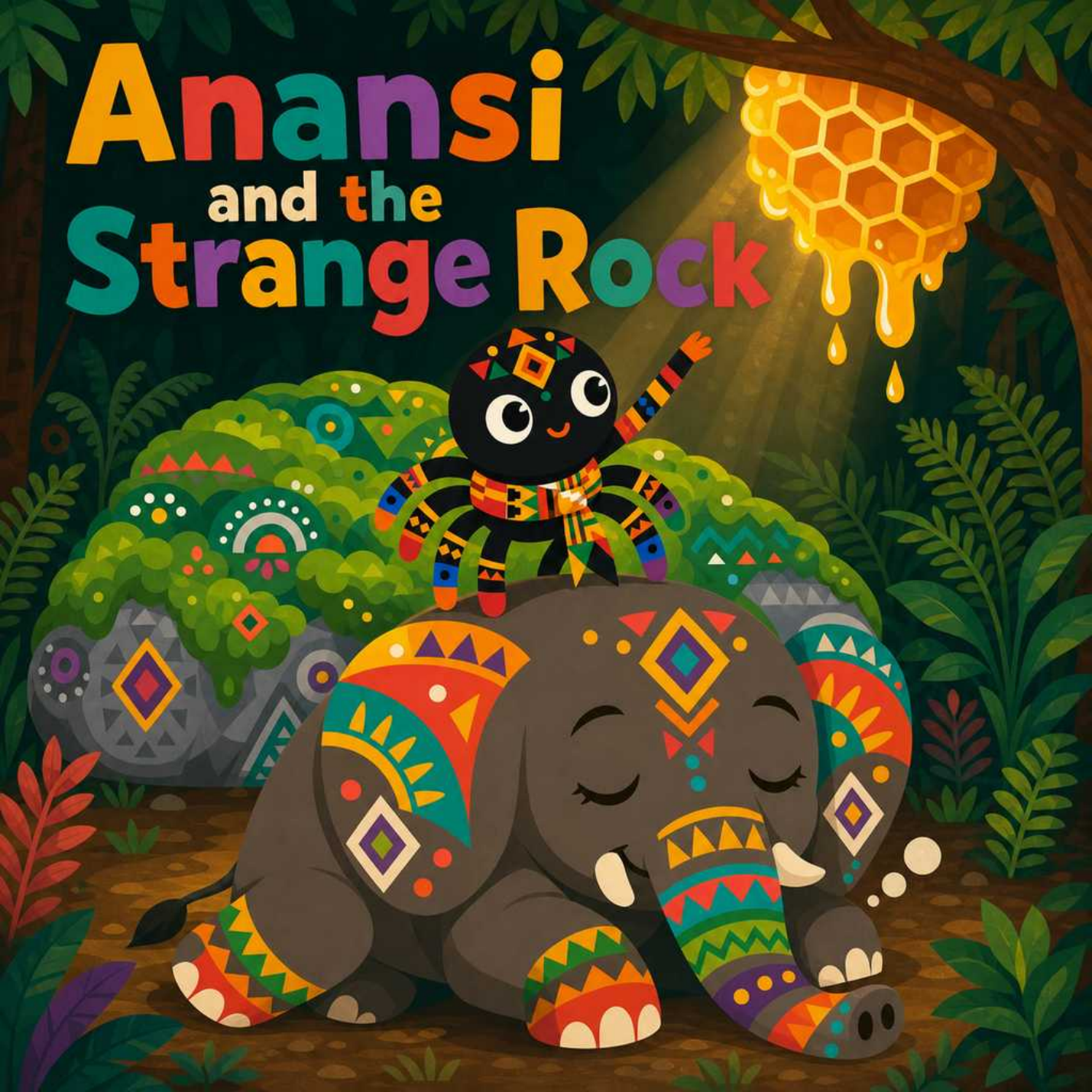


Anansi and the Strange Rock



Deep in the forest, the trees grew so thick that noon looked like night. One day Anansi the spider found something strange. Half-hidden by ferns sat a rock, wide and green, thick with soft moss.

The whole **atmosphere** hummed with a sound that was not quite a sound. Anansi had walked this path a hundred times and never seen it.

He leaned close and whispered seven words. Then all went dark.





One hour later, Anansi woke up flat on his back in the ferns, an **aphid** crawling over one leg, staring at the sky. He felt fine, just very mixed up. He had not fallen. He had not been hit. He simply said the words and went to sleep.

He sat up and looked at the rock. He was too clever not to test it. 'Isn't this a strange moss-covered rock?' he said again. The forest went dark.

One hour later he woke up flat on his back, staring at the same sky. Anansi sat up slowly and began to smile a smile that should have worried someone.

The plan came all at once, the way Anansi's best plans always did. He knew where every animal kept its best food. **Elephant** hid honey in a big tree to the east. Lion kept dried fish under a flat stone by the north path. Hornbill had three mangoes saved for his mother. All Anansi had to do was bring each animal to the rock and say seven simple words. He tapped four legs together and went to find **Elephant**.



'**Elephant! Elephant!**' Anansi called, running up fast. 'There is a strange thing on the south path. **Elephant** must come and see.' **Elephant** was big and never worried about tricks, so she came along.

When they reached the rock, Anansi pointed and said the seven magic words. **Elephant** sat down with a boom that cracked a branch, and began to snore.

Anansi took the honey and ate it. **Phew**, it was sweet. By the time **Elephant** blinked awake, she just felt tired and wandered off.



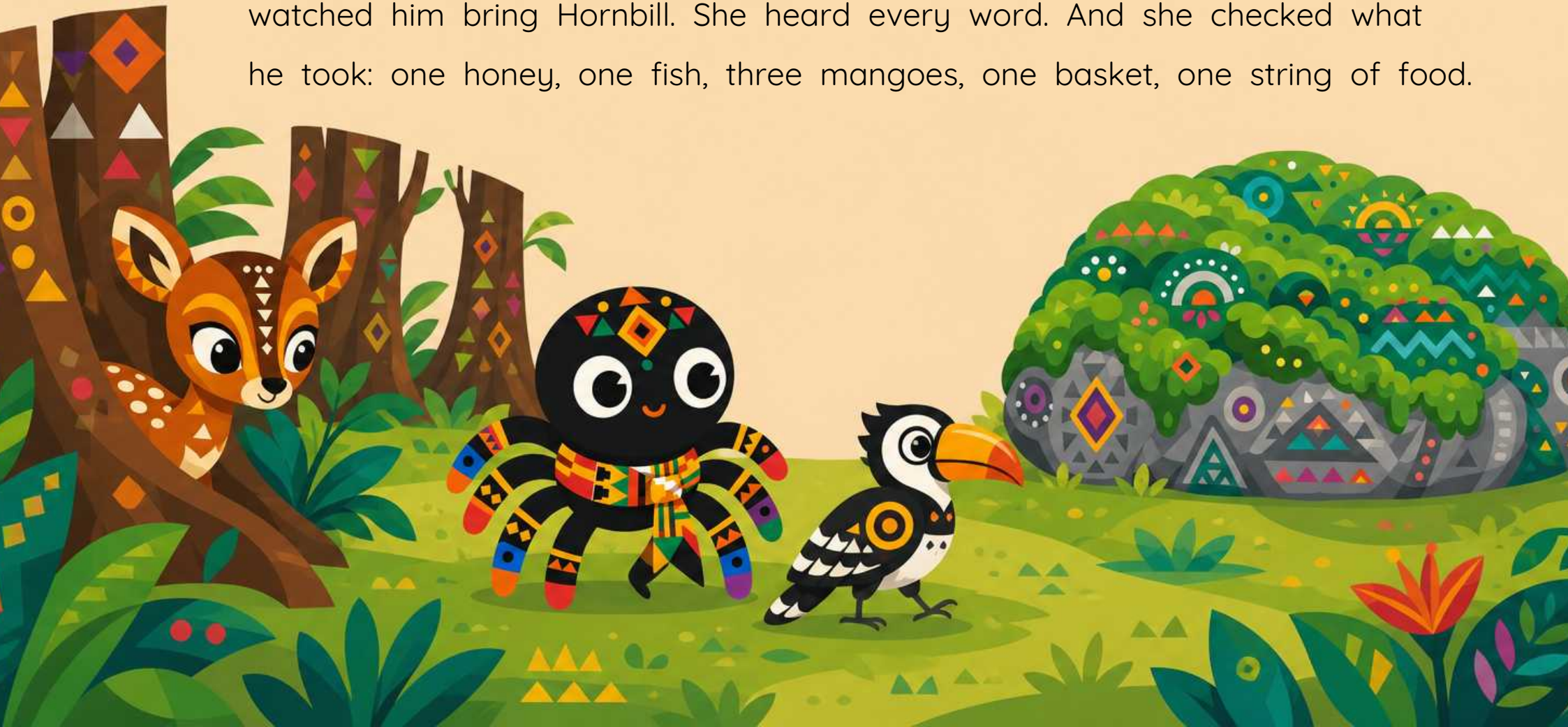


The plan worked so well that Anansi wanted more. Lion's dried fish went the same way. So did Hornbill's mangoes. So did a basket of nuts from the otters. So did a string of dried food the bush-pigs had saved for a week.

One by one, every animal who followed Anansi to the south path woke up with no memory of sitting down and no idea where their food had gone.

The rock said nothing. It just sat there, green and useful, **aphids** resting on its moss. Anansi had never been this well-fed in his life.

But one small animal had not followed Anansi to the rock. Little Bush Deer had been standing by a wild fig tree when **Elephant** went down the south path and came back all mixed up. Bush Deer was small and careful, and not in the habit of following spiders anywhere. So she followed at a distance, close enough to see everything. She watched Anansi bring Lion. She watched him bring Hornbill. She heard every word. And she checked what he took: one honey, one fish, three mangoes, one basket, one string of food.



Bush Deer went to find the animals. They were spread along the south path, sharing mixed-up memories of sitting down. It took some doing. None of them wanted to believe that a spider half their size had knocked them out and stolen their dinner.

But the missing food was hard to argue with. Lion checked his fish.

Elephant checked her honey. Hornbill checked zero mangoes where three had been.

'He used the rock,' Bush Deer said. 'Seven words. I heard them.'

Elephant sat down again, this time on purpose, and thought very hard.





The plan came from Bush Deer. It was simple, and it used the rock's own power against Anansi. They knew Anansi would be back. He was greedy, and greedy animals always return to what works.

Bush Deer would hide near the rock with the other animals out of sight behind her. When Anansi came with the next victim, she would step out and say the words first.

The animals went over it three times, until everyone knew their role. Then they went to wait in the still **atmosphere** near the rock.

Anansi came humming down the south path the next morning. He led the otter's cousin along, who had not yet heard the news. Then he stopped. Bush Deer stood calmly in the clearing, right beside the rock. 'Anansi,' said Bush Deer, sweet as can be, 'I have been looking everywhere for you. Isn't this a strange moss-covered rock?' All eight of Anansi's legs folded at once. He landed face-first in the moss, scattering the **aphids**, and began, right away, to snore.



The animals came out from behind the trees. They collected every piece of food Anansi had stored nearby: the honey, the dried fish, the mangoes, the nuts, all of it. Then they gave each thing back to its owner.

The otter's cousin, who still was not sure what had happened, was given a mango for the trouble and went home quite pleased.

The animals sat down together around the rock and had a very good meal in a happy **atmosphere**, while Anansi slept moss-faced beside them, snoring away.





One hour later, Anansi woke up, lifted his face from the moss, and found himself with a ring of very full and very calm animals.

Elephant held out a small piece of his own stolen honey.

'You did not ask,' said Bush Deer, 'if anyone else might learn the words.' Anansi looked at his empty food store. He looked at the rock. He looked at Bush Deer.

He opened his mouth and closed it. Then he ate the honey, because it was still good honey, and a spider who has just lost an argument needs something sweet.

After that day, no one ever went to the south path alone. They went in groups, talking loudly, watching each other. And they always came with more food than they needed, because sharing had started to feel better than keeping. The moss-covered rock sat where it always had, green and useful to whoever was most careful. And whenever a new animal came to the forest and someone led them toward the south path, one small voice would always pipe up: 'Isn't this a strange moss-covered rock?' Just to make sure everyone stayed awake.





Anansi and the Strange Rock

Deep in the Ashanti forest, Kwaku Anansi finds a strange moss covered rock that puts anyone to sleep the moment he whispers seven secret words. Soon every animal is nodding off and losing their dinner. But who is that little deer watching quietly from the shadows, counting each stolen meal? When Anansi's greed gets the better of him, will the trick he loves so much turn against him? This clever Bookbot level practices the 'ph' sound with words like 'elephant', 'atmosphere', 'aphids', and 'pew'.

Reading Skills: <ph>

aphid, aphids, atmosphere, elephant, pew

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