Leopard's Spider Supper

Leopard catches Anansi on a Tuesday. That is **unfortunate,** because Tuesday is the one day Anansi forgets to watch his feet.

One moment, Anansi walks in the tall grass, thinking about yams.

The next moment, a big spotted paw drops on his back and presses him flat into the dirt.

'Anansi,' Leopard says slowly, 'you have been **absolutely** bad. You stole my fish. You ate my mangoes. You told the whole forest that my roar sounds like an old man sneezing.'

He leans down close. 'Today I eat you, Anansi. But I am busy now, so I will eat you at dusk.'

Leopard carries Anansi to his rocky den and drops him in.

Anansi gets up and looks around. The den walls are hard rock. The way out is a narrow gap, and Leopard has to squeeze through it sideways. So Anansi could squeeze out too, with a little **agility.** But Leopard sits right across the gap like a big spotted door. Anansi calls out **cheerfully.** Leopard does not move.

Anansi checks **every** corner of the den. In one crack in the rock, he finds a bundle of dried pepper. These small, sharp seeds flavour the most **delicious** soups.

Anansi sniffs it. Very good pepper. The smell is so strong his eyes water.

He picks up the bundle and holds it **carefully.** Slowly, a clever **idea** grows in his mind.

Anansi calls out to Leopard again. This time his voice is not cheerful. It is calm. 'Great Leopard,' Anansi says, 'I have been thinking about supper. Leopard caught a spider, but Leopard has no spice.

Plain spider is **absolutely** dull. Even a king must season his meat.'

Leopard's ear turns. His tail flicks once.

Leopard turns his big head. 'I eat my prey just as I catch it. I am a leopard,' he says. 'Yes,' says Anansi, 'so they call Leopard a great hunter but a poor host. Even Nyame the Sky-God keeps pepper on his table.' Leopard's tail lashes. His **reputation** means as much to him as hunting. He lets the pepper smell drift toward the gap.

Leopard stands up. 'There is a pepper tree three hills north,' he says slowly. 'I know the one.' He looks at Anansi with narrow eyes. 'Anansi is trying to trick me into leaving.'

'Leopard sees through **everything,'** says Anansi. 'Fine. Forget the pepper. Plain spider it is. I just thought, since this is Leopard's first spider in two seasons, it could be **memorable.'**

Anansi sighs.

'I will go north for one moment,' says Leopard, 'but I will web the gap first, so do not think of **escaping.**' He drags a tangle of old silk across the gap and pads away north.

Anansi waits until the spots vanish into the tall grass.

Afterwards, he gets to work. He has spun stronger webs than that before breakfast.

Anansi slips through the gap in three seconds flat. But he does not run, not yet. First he tucks the pepper bundle deep in the rock crack, far back where Leopard will not find it. Then he spins an **additional** web across the gap, so thin that sunlight will not show it. He hums as he works.

Then Anansi runs. He runs south through the **afternoon** forest, swinging on his silk from tree to tree. He is almost at the village when he hears the thunder of Leopard's paws.

Leopard found no pepper tree. There is no pepper tree three hills north. There is no pepper tree anywhere. Anansi **invented** it.

Leopard hits the web and sticks fast. The silk is fine, the best work Anansi can spin. It wraps around Leopard's nose and ears and paws in a **magnificent** tangle.

Leopard roars. He thrashes. He rolls. The web stretches but holds, long enough for Anansi to drop from the last tree and reach the village edge.

'Even kings must season their meat,' Anansi calls back. 'Try a little patience. It makes the flavour better!'

Anansi sits in the village square and eats three bowls of palm-nut soup with pepper. The cook gives it to him. She heard the whole story from the treetop birds. Anansi eats slowly, with great **satisfaction.** From that day on, Leopard checks **every** den before he naps. And cooks all across the forest say it: 'Even kings must season their meat.' But in the village, they always wink when they say it.

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Anansi is caught, and Leopard means to eat him at dusk. But how does one small spider outwit a hungry leopard guarding the only way out? When Anansi finds a bundle of fiery pepper in the den, a clever idea begins to spin. Can a whisper about seasoning and a leopard's proud reputation buy enough time to escape? This Bookbot book practises reading longer words of three or more syllables, like 'unfortunate', 'reputation', 'magnificent', and 'satisfaction'.

Reading Skills: 3+ Syllables

absolutely, additional, afternoon, afterwards, agility, carefully, cheerfully, delicious, escaping, every, everything, idea, invented, magnificent, memorable, reputation, satisfaction, unfortunate

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