Anansi the Spider

Folklore... Mythology... A people's legends... Traditional stories... as in Africa. Mythology transforms, making the ordinary into the magical. It brings beauty to the ways of man, giving him dignity and expressing his joy in life. Folklore prepares man for adult life. It places him within his culture. With oral traditions, retold through generations, the social group maintains its continuity, handing down its culture.

This story is from a long-established culture, the Ashanti of West Africa, in the country of Ghana. Ghana is a green stronghold of dense rain forests and between the ocean and the desert. This home of the Ashanti people protects their oral traditions. The Ashanti have had a federation, a highly organized society, for over four hundred years. Still, today as long ago, the Ashanti people are superb artisans. They excel as markers of fine metal work and as weavers of beautiful silk fabric. Into this fabric they weave the rich symbols of their art and folklore--Sun, Moon, Creation, Universe, the web of Cosmos, and Anansi, The spider.

Anansi is a folk-hero to the Ashanti. This funny fellow is a rogue, a wise and loveable trickser. He is a shrewd and cunning figure who triumphs over larger foes. An animal with human qualities, Anansi is a mischief maker. He tumbles into many troubles. Here is one of his adventures.

Anansi. He is “spider” to the Ashanti people. In Ashanti land, people love this story of Kwaku Anansi. Time was, Anansi had six sons... First son was called See Trouble. He had the gift of seeing trouble a long way off. Second son was Road Builder. Thirsty son was River Drinker. Next son was Game skinner. Another son was Stone Thrower. And last of sons was Cushion. He was very soft. And all were good sons of Anansi.

One time Anansi went a long way from home. Far from home. He got lost. He fell into trouble.
Back home was son See Trouble “Father is in danger!” he cried. He knew it quickly and he told those other sons. Road Builder son said, “Follow me!”
Off he went, making a road. They went fast, those six brothers, gone to help Anansi.
“Where is father now?” “Fish has swallowed him!” “Anansi is inside Fish.” River Drinker took a big drink.
“No more river.” Then Game Skinner helped father Anansi. He split the fish open.
More trouble came, right then. It was Falcon took Anansi up in the Sky. “Quick now Stone Thrower!” The stone hit Falcon. Anansi fell through the Sky.
Now Cushion ran to help father. Very soft, Anansi came down.
They were very happy that spider family.
All home again that night, Kwaku Anansi found a thing in the forest. “What is this? A great globe of light?” “O mysterious and beautiful! I shall give this to my son,” said Anansi, “To the son who rescued me!” “But which son of six... Which deserves the prize?”
“Nyame, can you help me? O Nyame!” called Anansi. For Ashanti people, Nyame is the God of All Things.
Anansi asked this of Nyame—“Please hold the beautiful globe of light until I know which son should have it for his own.”
And so they tried to decide which son deserved the prize. They tried, but they could not decide.
They argued all night. Nyame saw this. The God of All Things, He took the beautiful white light up into the sky.
He keeps it there for all to see. It is still there. It will always be there. It is there tonight.