

“As you can understand sire, this particular curse is rather...potent,” Samantha said, presenting her newest accomplishment. While she had test subjects from the kingdom’s dungeons, the results of her first trials had been rather successful, from her standpoint as well as the directions she had been given. But now, she was required to show off both the curse and its counter curse to her King, but no suitable subjects to test it on. And he was not known for his leniency.

“When can you show me its potency?” The King asked though he did not seem particularly angry, simply curious. Samantha was thankful for that. The King's ire was well known across the land, and it was only great fortune she was able to display her spell on a good day, nervous it would not work and the King would throw her in chains for wasting his time.

Unfortunately, there were no prisoners left in the dungeons, having been all used as test subjects. All had been afflicted were currently in the throes of their punishment. She had not considered this when the King had come to her one day to see the spell's effects firsthand. Having heard of its usefulness in torture, he was sure it would be a useful deterrent against his will over the people and wished to see it firsthand before finding someone to make an example of.

His daughter, Princess Rose, was present in the great hall as well, having a morbid fascination with such things. Almost too much like her father, though such was not for Samantha to judge. It was her task to fulfill the King's will with her spells, her talent for magic, and her own gray morality making her the perfect vessel for such a task.

“I need another subject to show off its usefulness,” Samantha said, as though she had not accidentally used everyone in the dungeons to test the spell and make sure its effects came to fruition, as with the experiments once the victims were under the influence of the curse.

The King was pensive for a moment, as though thinking of the perfect vessel. Samantha was sure he would find someone from the town below, though with his lack of patience, such was unlikely to please him. Maybe he would use one of his guards, though Samantha figured such would be ill-advised if he wanted to keep the man as a guard in the future, such being a rather horrific fate.

Yet, the next words out of his mouth were unexpected, leaving all those in the room agape. “Then bring forth my wife!” He declared, and at once, his two attendants moved toward the inner chambers, where the queen, Leanne, spent much of her time as of late. She had not been seen by the court in some time, leading to rumors of her demise. Samantha had it under good authority to know she and the King were out of sorts lately, though, again, such matters were not hers to contemplate.

“Let me go! I'm perfectly capable of walking on my own!” Declared a familiar voice, the Queen calling out as she was dragged unceremoniously out into the hall. With that, she took her usual seat beside the King, not bothering to glance at him, knowing her place and settling into her role.

“Here is your test subject! Now, perform your incantation for me!” The King declared, and all those gathered, most of all the Queen herself, gasped aloud.

“What? You'd have your witch perform her curse on your wife?!” Leanne declared, as though such was preposterous. For her, it was, though the King's fancies were beyond even that, a look of excitement crossing his features at the prospect.

“My Lord, may I remind you the curse's effects last no less than one month! If I were to cast it on her Majesty, then...” Samantha started, forgetting it was always best to hold her tongue. Still, it was not something to be requested lightly, given the spell's nature. Such had the potential to be psychologically scarring, given the nature of the changes to one's body and the forms of torture that could be inflicted.

“But it is lifted after one month, is it not? Then proceed!” The King declared, his excitement palpable in the air. He had his stubborn streak, and once he made up his mind, there was little point in trying to persuade him otherwise, lest they be the next person to receive his wrath. Samantha had it under good authority that the King cared little about his wife's health, figuring she needed to be kept as a showpiece and little more. As much as she didn't want to involve herself in such affairs, it seemed she had little choice in the matter.

A look of fear crossed Leanne's features as she realized what the curse was to do to her. She had obviously overheard or was simply scared about the implications of any spell that Samantha might cast upon her. It mattered little, and the Queen sat there in her chair, cursing silently that she had not argued harder about her freedom. Though there was little to be done for it once her husband made up his mind, and it was best to suffer through it, knowing she would eventually be free and able to plan her revenge, such as it was.

“Now, Your Majesty, I need you to step down into the circle so I can begin. The results can be rather...chaotic. If you find yourself deaf and blind afterward, bump back twice if something bumps against you. If you can hear and find yourself more motile, then tapping one leg to communicate yes and two for no will suffice,” Samantha explained, Leanne looking at her dumbfounded. Though she had some idea the process would install a less-than-welcome change, she was still not prepared for the reality, and all she could do was acknowledge it with a nod.

After all, once she had changed...there were a myriad of things that could be done to torture all under the guise of simple research, which was not something Leanne wanted to entertain.

“Mother, don’t let her do this!” Rose called out, her father’s ire seldom falling on her, and Rose not beholden to the same rigid standards as the rest of the court. Leanne wanted to console her, telling her everything was going to be OK and that she shouldn’t worry. Of course, Leanne herself was scared, but there was nothing she could do to get out of it, the repercussions were almost worse if she went against her husband’s wishes. And she did not want to risk the chance their daughter was brought into things as well, slim as that might be.

“Everything will be already, dear. I’ll be back in a month. You don’t have to be brave and watch you know. It will be OK,” Leanne said, though little conviction remained in her words.

Samantha wasted no time with the incantation, needing only to focus on the spot where the queen stood. The particulars of the spell were a little random, something she wanted to work on. But their ultimate goal was the same, to separate one entity into hundreds, thousands of smaller parts, each embewed with the identity of the target. Insects and vermin were to become of the subject, body literally being broken down into such beings. It was repugnant, and would only wear off if enough of the component parts were able to come together when the spell was to wear off. That particular aspect was something Samantha was still working on, figuring that technically any of the vermin could be used to summon the whole victim once it was time, but she did not have the confidence to try that, not yet. Especially with the Queen!

Still, it was time for her to cast the spell, and Smanatha did so, treating the Queen as much as she had had with any of the other prisoners she had used for practice. All at once, her magic lit up the room, the power enveloping the Queen and hitting her with a warmth of energy that was enough to stun her for a moment. It started to center in her fingers, and for a moment, the Queen figured such might not be so bad. Yet, that was not to be the case as various creases started to form on her fingers, working their way all down to the base the each digit and the palms inside. The creases seemed to pull apart her fingers in various locations, down to the bones and blood, although no blood flowed forth from the apparent cuts. Soon, it grew so severe that chunks started to peel away, falling to the floor.

A scream escaped Rose’s lips as she realized what was happening, her mother’s hands started to separate and fall in minute chunks, some larger and some nearly imperceivable. They began to pool at her feet, painfully slowly as soon, as each finger of her left hand was gone, followed by the right. Rose found herself looking at the discarded bits as she started to scream, realizing that some of them were starting to move of their own accord. Almost like...

Soon, the falling fragments started to squirm, writhe, and undulate as they gained the ability to do so, some stretching out, some getting larger and squat as legs burst from the sides of them. Some of them rolled around, maggots and grubs and slugs and other such creatures, while the creatures with legs started to crawl around, insects of various species and sizes. It was enough in one place to make Rose wish to retch, and it was evidently only the beginning of what was to transpire.

Leanne, for her part, was staring in frozen terror, realizing that she was without fingers and the same tingling sensation started to play over her palms as well, that likely being the next aspect to change. "Stop this! Please! I beg you! I'll do anything you ask of me, my Lord," Leanne wept, as the reality of her situation sunk in. Though she was aware of the overall effect of the curse, undergoing it in real time was so much worse than she ever could have imagined.

"Once the spell is cast, its effects are inevitable, I'm afraid. I cannot put the parts back till it has run its course. However, it should be noted that only a smaller portion of the overall insect mass is enough to change you back when it is time, and largely intact, though you may notice some loss in weight. Perhaps another useful application," Samantha mused, though it was unlikely to be a popular one in the close

"That is for the best! I wish to see it proceed!" The King declared, as though he had not a care that his wife the Queen was to dissolve into a pile of insects no different than those that crawled in the dirt and under discarded leaves. Though he was cruel by reputation, nothing she knew could match the level of tyranny to allow this to happen to anyone, let alone a loved one! And the King's mage was just as depraved, looking upon the whole affair as an experiment and nothing more.

Leanne was about to protest again when the sensation of her hands falling off next, hundreds if not thousands of pieces made of bone and tissue and flesh falling forth into an ever-increasing pile. She could feel each piece transforming to the point it was nearly maddening to experience it, each a facet of the whole and beyond her ability to conceptualize. For not, it was only her hand motions that triggered the masses to move, but as the creases ran their course up her arms and toward her shoulders, more of the creature's movements were made known to her. Leanne tried with all her will to prevent them from squirming, though be it her fear of the changes or her inability to control those parts of the body she had possessed prior, she could not stop the mass from moving, much to her disgust.

The next tingling changes started in her toes, and Leanne was prompted to kick away her footwear, though not wanting to crush the smaller parts of her former hands and arms in the process. As soon as she willed herself to try, however, it seemed as though her legs no longer had the ability, the creases forming within her body preventing the muscles from working in the way

she was used to. It was all she could do to stand there, waving back and forth as more of the muscles, tendons and bones started to disconnect down to a level she could not fathom. And without them, it was almost impossible to keep standing...

The tingling of the curse increased in intensity, moving through her core and rendering her functionally dead. The curse was not to kill her, however. Even if her body was to die in its current state, each of the millions of maggots, spiders, slugs, and other creatures would live on, taking their parts from her and each forming their own limbs, exoskeletons, and body parts that allowed them to persist as separate entities. She was dead, but each part was her, and in their millions of individual bodies, she would live on.

“Please stop, I’ll do annahaahhhh-” Leanne called out, but her voice was robbed from her the moment the creases started in her tongue and throat, denying her the ability to speak any longer. With that, her tongue fell out, its own fate to turn into that of a fat slug that plopped on the floor, slime trail moving over several dozens of maggots that had once been the veins in her tongue. The lips themselves curled in on themselves, becoming caterpillars, large fuzzy things that Leanne used to tease when she had been a youth. How she would have left them alone if she knew part of her would become them one day!

All at once, her body fell apart, toppling over in her dress as they separated in mid-air. None of the beings had wings, though the wriggling, crawling maggots and grubs might have the ability if they were allowed to grow. Spiders spun their webs from her hair, teeth thickened into beetles, and bones came apart and became crawling centipedes and millipedes. It was impossible to quantify all the pieces within the mass of them that made her up, and each one was Leanne as much as her human body had been!

“This part of the change is fascinating,” Samantha said, ignoring the frightened face of the Princess, who could not draw her eyes away from the terrifying sight, all manner of insects and vermin were fleeing from the Queen's clothes, and part of her mind wanted to stomp on them, though knew that each of them were part of her mother’s former body, and such would be akin to killing her, deplorable as it would be.

Samantha was quick to continue, not caring about the fate of the woman that was once these bugs. “You see, the curse separated her entire body into the creatures you see before you. But, as best as I have confirmed through observation and study, each part of them contains a fully conscious part of her mind, as though each one is her individually. What it must be to experience such interactions against one's own body! Of course, there are innumerable implications of this. Since there are literally millions of such creatures, depending on the variation of the curse I use, killing even thousands will not harm the reversion in any way! Quite a way to torture one’s enemy, killing them over and over while millions more persisted beyond

that simple fate. And turning them into a swarm of filth in the first place must be its own personal hell!”

“Fascinating,” the King said, getting up and eyeing the writhing mass. Stepping forward, the King reached down to pick up a single maggot, feeling it squirm under his touch as though knowing its fate. “So my wife is this maggot, then? As much as she is each and every one of the creatures? Truly, a curse worthy of my hand!” He said, holding the grub in his hand as it writhed there, at his mercy.

The Leanne that was now the maggot was just starting to realize what she was, her mind settling into each body in turn and learning to control them. Though she recalled the horrific scene of dissolving from her body, all she was could be contained in this maggot, and she had barely any concept of anything around her, much less the millions of other creatures that were each and all the same her. More to the point, maggot Leanne was disgusted by what she was, unable to see, to hear, and only able to feel the sensation of flying through the air and a vast plane around her. She had no way to know she was in a man's hand, nor the danger he possessed. All she could do was hope she would eventually pupate, to at least gain some sense of the world again. To eat and grow was her purpose now, all her human desires removed from her for the next few weeks.

“What does it feel like, my dear, to be a simple maggot? Certainly a downgrade, yes?” The King asked, the contempt not lost in his voice.

“Some of the creatures cannot hear, my Lord,” Samantha reminded him. “Try tapping her head, and see if she responds as instructed.” The King did just that, careful not to kill the creature as he did so. She was so helpless, that even the smallest contact would be her demise!

Even in her panic over the situation, part of her was still able to recall what the mage had told her to do should she lack sense. Feeling something massive tapping her head, far too large to be another one of her vermin body parts, Leanne focused all her control on moving up, feeling her head tapping the structure and doing so twice, in hopes of communicating.

“Delightful! It seems her mind truly is within this disgusting creature! And in each and every one of them, you say?” The King asked, and Samantha simply nodded, thankful the King was entertained and not angered at her for what he had her do.

With that, even Rose was prompted to get up, moving toward the writhing pile as her millions of mothers tried desperately to gain control of her various bodies. Some that had become spiders and beetles were able to move, though the grubs and slugs were not so fortunate, left on the floor to their fate. Looking at a beetle larva, Rose picked it up with some curiosity,

tapping it gently on the head as it, too, reached up to tap her back. Rather than be disgusted or distressed over her mother's fate, Rose couldn't help but be enamored by the fact her mother's being was inside each and every one of the creatures. It was enough for her to want to try the same with one of the other creatures, and the two of them did just that, getting the same reactions.

"Marvelous! What shall we do with her, well, them, now?" Asked the King, less familiar with Samantha's process.

With that, Samantha simply shrugged. "Well, it is just a grub, even if it does have your wife's mind. What would you do with a grub normally?"

"I would crush it underfoot, though that seems like such a waste, is it not? I could feed it to the birds," the King mused.

"Then you have your answer, my lord," Samantha said casually. It was hardly the worst thing she had done to one of those cursed, after all.

"Is that akin to murdering her?" The King asked, though was hardly horrified by the notion, rather incredulous.

"It doesn't matter, my Lord, not really. When the curse is lifted, your wife will be back, with the memories of each and every one of the creatures. Regardless of whether they return dead or alive. That was my goal, to potentially have an enemy suffer a thousand deaths without permanent physical harm," Samantha explained.

"Well, in that case, I think it's only fair to feed the birds," the King said with a chuckle, handing Rose the maggot.

Rose gave him a look of disgust, then anger. "It's still mom! I'm not just going to feed her to a bird!"

"It's hardly your mother at the moment, my dear, but rather nothing more than a fleck of her skin or a drop of blood. As it is, her only purpose now is to either wait a month trapped in the body of a grub or be fed to the birds and wake up a month later as though nothing had happened. Now, tell me, Princess, which is more merciful?" The King inquired, and Rose felt she had no counterargument to the matter. With that, she took the grub outside, leaving it on the window where the chirping of birds would do the rest.

No sooner had she backed away than a sparrow landed on the window, regarding the writhing insect for only a moment before gobbling it up and flying away. Rose had a hard time feeling remorse for the act, akin to feeding any errant grub to a bird and not making the connection she had sent her mother to die.

“Will the Queen know what has happened?” The King asked his mage, with morbid curiosity.

An evil grin crossed her face at that. “As much as I’ve been able to discern, maggots can, in fact, feel they are being digested. She’s probably writhing in the bird's stomach right now, feeling the acid eating away at her body,” she said, to a look of horror from Rose.

The version of Leanne within the bird’s stomach was indeed facing a slow death, though she had no way of knowing her conscience would be restored intact to her final human body at the end of the curse. Unable to move, unable to scream, she could only feel the pain of her body being digested, having to live through the agony. Her body could not feel pain in the way she was used to, and her limited ability to fend for her life didn’t leave much option. Still, there was nothing she could do but feel her body shutting down, the limited facilities of her body being eaten away as the bird was fed, one minor meal out of the thousands of bugs it would need to eat that day.

Meanwhile, the King chuckled again, finding the scenario hilariously ironic. “My wife always enjoyed feeding the birds, but I bet she never expected to feed them so directly!”

Samantha laughed as well, happy the King didn’t find fault with her and was overall happy with what she had done. “Now, how about using a bug that can hear me this time? Something larger?” He requested, and Samantha did that, looking through the pile and eyeing a tarantula.

Tapping it on the back, Samantha asked aloud for it to crawl on her hand. The tarantula was not the only one to respond to her request, something that made her chuckle. Still, the tarantula was there first, even going so far as to hiss threateningly at some of the other clingers on, much to their own fear. Despite the fact they were all Leanne, she hardly understood each of them was functionally another version of her as well. Therefore, as the largest of the hoard, the tarantula seemed more inclined to use its dominant status. And it seemed she was ecstatic to be chosen over all the other parts of herself to the point she did not loathe her spider form as much as she thought she might.

As was likely the case with all of the individual insects, Tarantula Leanne was disgusted with her form, hating the legs, the eyes, and the hairs that could feel each and every other bug



crawling over her skin. Though as she eyed the other insects, maggots, and creatures that could hardly move, she soon decided it was the better form, even feeling pity for those that carried her mind in such a limited form. Knowing this was to be her existence for a month, she took the time to test out her new body, surprised at how easy it was, even when coordinating her eight legs. She was clearly a predator, an apex one in her new domain of millions of bodies that were all once her.

Seeing the various beetles and smaller spiders trying to climb up the mage's hand, a fear ran through her, thinking that she was to miss her chance at perhaps returning back to her previous body earlier than the rest. A hiss followed by the flashing of dripping fangs was enough for the smaller creatures to get the hint, and only a moment's reflection reminded her each of these other bugs was as much her as she was, a perplexing quandary she could hardly wrap her head around. Surely, they were as desperate to get out of the scenario as they were, but she was the one being carried toward her husband, set upon his outstretched palm awaiting her fate.

“Shall we try the same procedure? Are you really the Queen?” the King inquired, and Leanne, recalling the mage's command, reached out one leg and tentatively tapped the side of his wrist, making the king giggle.

“Ah, it seems you can understand me indeed! She always did hate spiders, and now I'm sure that's the luckiest thing she could have become of the lot of them!” The King laughed, though Rose did not join in the merriment.

Not wanting her father to do anything so torturous, Rose moved over and allowed the tarantula to move onto her hand, something Leanne did eagerly. She was a little curious, especially since it seemed her mother could understand her words in that body, something that was absent from some of the other forms that had once comprised her. “Are you in any pain, mother?” Rose inquired, and in response, Leanne tapped twice, that being the case and not wanting her daughter to worry about her besides.

“Are you repulsed by this body, mother?” Rose asked, not wanting the answer but needing to know it besides. It took Leanne a moment of consideration, though she tapped yes, something Rose felt she knew deep down regardless.

“Does it feel natural?” Rose asked again, and, to her surprise, Leanne tapped yes after a pause, getting used to her new body and feeling in as control over it as she had her humanity. The next question, if she had total control over the form, was also answered with a yes, followed by a series of taps in sequence, followed by raising herself up on her hind legs and showing off with her fangs.

“I know mom doesn’t like spiders, but she sure makes an impressive one!” Rose commented with a laugh,

“Hmmm, what to do with them now...How about another, one of those cockroaches, perhaps,” The King said, regarding the several hundred roaches having scurried around the room, much to the disgust of everyone, even knowing they were all the Queen. Choosing one of them close enough, the King requested for the cockroach to crawl up his leg, something that she did with some struggle. Several answered the call, and any of the cockroaches that could hear all started to move toward the King’s leg trying to be the one to be used.

“Now, I only need one. The first will do. The rest of you, scatter!” The King commanded though none of the roaches seemed to get the command, either being unaware of their brethren or simply not caring and wanting to be the chosen one for whatever test the King had for them.

“One last warning...” Samantha called out, though the roaches seemed not to hear her, or, more likely, seeming not to care.

At that, Samantha raised her foot, firmly stomping down on the closest roach to the King’s boot, killing it instantly. Several others from the swarm were caught as well, and at the sight of it, the rest scattered, scared for their lives even though they were meaningless so long as at least one of the vermin was to live.

One of the Leanne-turned-roaches was moving faster than the rest and seemed to be content with her disgust over the body of a cockroach. In fact, there were aspects she was starting to become appreciative of, like her sideways opening jaw and the speed at which she could maneuver on six legs. The presence of two wings, something she was not expecting, was a little daunting as well, though in general the strangest thing was how nimble her body was. Still, it was of little consolation as, given her exploration and newness of her body, she was stomped on by the mage’s foot. There was only a brief moment of terror before she was crushed, her life extinguished until her consciousness was merged with the rest upon the resolution of the curse.

“You know, that’s my wife you’re scraping off your shoes,” the King commented, shaking his head. Though he hardly seemed angered, rather complacent with his mage’s ruthlessness, truly a befitting action for one of her station.

At that, Samantha simply shrugged. “I’ve simply killed some insect pests, my Lord, no matter whose mind is within them. Besides, it’s better to kill some of them now. They will procreate, given the instincts the creatures possess being overwhelming. At least, that’s what I’ve observed from previous experimentations. Any offspring will have her mind as well, though it’s best to have them confined to ensure the curse can be easily lifted.”

Meanwhile, the one roach that had scaled the King's robes had been sat on the table where Rose had placed the Tarantula she had been speaking to. At the moment she did so, cockroach Leanne found herself staring at the tarantula in a sort of a stand-off position. Cockroach Leanne felt herself being intimidated by the creature, even knowing she was as much her as any of the other creatures. As much as she hated being a cockroach, there was something more horrific about being a spider, something she loathed in her human form. Besides, the sight of such a creature, even through compound eyes, was more horrific from this angle, the fangs, the pedipalps, and the eight set of eyes staring at her with the visage of a monster.

Tarantula-Leanne, too, was disgusted by seeing a roach, a pest, so close to her, wondering what her other self thought of such a body. Being in the form of a massive spider, while repulsive, was far preferable to being a bug, one that could be easily stomped or eaten by a being such as, well, herself. At that, a hunger seemed to take her over to the point she could almost not resist the urge to hunt, no matter the target...

Asking the roach those same questions, to an answer through her taps as well, the King slowly rose, a smile on his face that sent a chill through his daughter's being. He had been so sadistic, not viewing the insects as his wife or even human, to begin with. And with the next words, the most vile idea was given him to the point that even Rose was unsure.

"Eat the cockroach. It's that, or be quashed underfoot!" The King ordered, and the moment the words left his mouth, cockroach Leanne was off, jumping off the table while the spider stayed frozen, as though pursuing the words.

"Why not give it a try? It's to be expected, after all, even filth like you have instincts. Surely, you wish to hunt, even if it is part of your flesh, much like the subjects of this curse prior," Samantha suggested, and at that, Leanne felt her hunger growing, as well as her curiosity over hunting and taking prey.

Still, tarantula Leanne was left to contemplate the decision, not wanting to inflict death on another version herself, though figuring it was a moot point, knowing that not all of them would survive regardless. Even as she prepared to pounce on the sacred roach, Samantha offered to grab another one, something the one roach seemed to relax at the moment she heard it. It seemed that Samantha was more inclined to grab an unexpected prey item, and tarantula Leanne felt herself getting ready for the hunt to come. Not that she needed her prey to be unaware, with the hunter's instincts in her mind prepared to go at a moment's notice.

Samantha had no trouble coercing one of the other roaches to crawl up her arm, one in the corner of the massive room and not privy to what was going on. The order to crawl on her

hand was quickly received, and with that, Samantha walked it over to the table, setting her in front of the spider. The second cockroach Leanne, while happy to have been given some purpose, was a little confused as to what it was. The insect part of her brain was intimidated by the spider, though she knew it was another *her*, and rationally, it would not harm her. Yet, the twitching, dripping fangs elicited a sense of unease she could not shake no matter how much she tried.

Tarantula Leanne couldn't help but chuckle internally, her intent for the roach unclear to her intended target. And how could she, thinking it was an extension of herself? Still, there was a morbid curiosity about what it would be to eat the other being in this current body, and she could hardly resist the urge to hunt, to sink her fangs into her intended victim and to suck it dry of its fluids

The command to hunt was all the permission she needed. Without hesitation, Leanne moved toward her target, unnaturally fast for her size and too fast for the roach to react. Cockroach Leanne had no time to react, terrified as she was grabbed and eaten alive, pierced with the spider's relatively massive fangs. To her horror, cockroach Leanne was being eaten alive, treated as no more than food and not a sentient being with her own mind copied into it. Roach Leanne tried in vain to struggle, though quickly felt the life being drained from her, discarded and dead without a second more to wonder why.

Tarantula Leanne, however, was enthralled by the notion, her instincts dictating that she hunt and eat. There was no remorse for the act of 'killing' her other self, rather feeling like it was eating a bug. And as she sucked its juices, she was sure that it would not be the last of her brethren she would consume, having opened those floodgates. The prospect, to her at least, was hardly as repugnant as it had been even some moments ago...

The King, all the while, was watching her feed with some interest. "How else have you come to punish those under this curse?" The King asked his mage, as though such horrors had not already happened by his indirect hand.

"The punishment largely comes from the curse itself, my Liege. Many of the vermin have short life spans, they will die within the month. And, as I mentioned, they are prone to breeding, their offspring will have an impression of the Queen's mind as well," Samantha said, sounding proud of her work.

"Well, then, we can leave them to their own devices, then? Until the month is over?" The King inquired, somewhat bored now that he'd had his fun.

With a shrug, Samantha replied, "The most sensible thing to do would be to destroy as many as possible. Otherwise, we risk an infestation. It's more humane that way when you reflect

on how much fewer of her mind would be born to suffer,” Samantha said, and the King found merit in that.

“Guards! Proceed to eradicate as much of the vermin as possible,” the King commanded, and the two attendants moved to do just that. Yet, Rose quickly interjected, unable to imagine thousands of her mothers being killed in such an inhumane fashion. Some needed to survive of course, and with a quick glance toward the tarantula that was still eating the cockroach, there was an obvious solution, one her father would surely not say no to.

“Can I keep the tarantula as a pet?”

\*\*\*

It had been some three weeks since the curse had been set upon her, and Lenna was currently hanging from the roof of her cage, a position she found a liking for, feeling it suited her new being. With little to do but hang there and contemplate her fate, she was left largely despaired, save for those times she was allowed to feed.

By this point, the room was covered with large webs from the other spiders, as well as the husks and molts of the other insects. Many of the maggots had metamorphosed, and some of the Leannes were granted the ability to fly, though most were fed on by the myriad of spiders that had spun their webs. They were the only things that controlled the hoards of maggot Leannes that were already breeding, spawning maggots that each had her mind in turn. Second generations would likely occur by the time they would revert, a terrifying prospect to integrate millions of minds into one. Still, the sheer number of mosquitoes and flies that tried to leave the room was maddening, and Tarantula Leanne couldn't help but wonder if they wished to get revenge on the King as much as they didn't care for their own lives.

Still brooding on her fate, the sound of the door opening drew her attention to Rose, greeting the collected pests with a “Hey, moms,” to which many of the spiders raised their legs as a sort of wave. However they were quickly ignored as Rose started sweating the ceiling with a broom, her usual habit every few days. Showing some disgust over the state of the room, Rose muttered her usual line about her distaste for the webs in the room, apparently not caring about their importance to the maintenance of the castle's insect populations. The motion of the broom, as usual, sent the spiders running for their lives, distressed they would have to start over from scratch.

Rather than be bothered by it, tarantula Leanne simply chuckled, noting how much Rose's demeanor toward her millions of mothers had changed. At first, it seemed Rose was far more conscious of the various insects, not wanting to hurt them directly. But as the days went by, she

seemed to regard them with indifference, even actively hunting down the pest species, in particular the roaches and mosquitoes. Even her daughter found her mothers to be inhuman, though at least was amicable toward her tarantula self, being in the truly superior form, indeed.

As she worked, Rose started talking to them, as she usually did, only this time, her story held more interest. “Father has fled the castle for the time being, it seems like. The number of pests biting him in his sleep has been tormenting him too badly, he says. Also, your cockroaches have infected every room of the castle, and the latrines are full of flies and maggots. The slugs and snails have taken over the royal garden as well, to the point the plants are a write-off. They really have taken over,” Rose complained, making Tarantula Leanne shudder that some of herself would have to sink so low as the breed on excrement as did their species. Not that they had any choice in the matter, but it was still repulsed to know those memories would soon be as fresh to her as she lived them herself.

After finishing her work, and likely unknowingly crushing several of the Leanne spiders in the process, moved toward Tarantula Leanne’s cage, asking aloud if any cockroaches wanted to end their lives. As she had expected, a dozen or so from the corners of the room lined up, as though hoping to be the one to be selected. Figuring she would choose one to be eaten, Rose instead simply stomped on them all, as though they were nothing more than pests to be killed. Tarantula Leanne watched with some amusement, knowing that each possessed her mind as much as the rest and that some would choose to live while the others wished to have their existence ended until the curse was lifted. It was almost impossible to weigh the factors that made each choose such either way, though it was a little ironic that it was Rose to do the deed, having been not in favor of the curse in the first place.

Eventually, a few were allowed to remain, Rose sweeping them toward a dustpan to bring them to be fed to the tarantula. As they were placed into the cage, Leanne felt a lazy compulsion to bare her fangs at them, and they started to tap their feet for ‘no’. It seemed they were not inclined to suffer by being eaten, but rather wanted to be stomped and killed instantly. Rose, however, seeing them flee, simply chuckled a little. “Hey, all I said was that you’d be culled, I never promised it would be with my foot!”

“Enjoy your dinner, ‘mom’, I’ve got to go clean you all off my shoes!” Rose said though Leanne didn’t bother to wait to hear the door close before she bared down on her prey. No longer caring that the roaches were equally herself in mind, she simply pointed toward the husks of dried roaches in her cage with her, baring her venom-glistening flangs wide, and inviting the roaches to come forward and end it all. After all, there was no escape, and even if the roaches had an inkling to resist their fates, they were locked in with her to do as Tarantula-Leanne willed.

Slowly, one Leanne roach moved forward, deciding to end things on her terms. Tarantula-Leanne reached up with one leg and began to pet her almost soothingly, brushing her trembling carapace in an effort to make the cockroach relax. Though it was a fleeting gesture, Leanne soon pounced on her counterpart before ramming her fangs into her, quickly ending her life. Rather than being disgusted, Leanne had come to relish the feeling of her victims struggling desperately as her venom flowed through them, rendering them dead and her next meal.

With that, she made a shooping motion toward the other roaches, which scattered at the sight of their brethren being sacrificed and eaten, knowing they would likely be next. Tarantula Leanne almost felt sorry for her other selves, knowing that was to be their fate. Though, in retrospect, she figured it was a better life than having been placed in the body of a helpless maggot for weeks on end. None of them quite had the privilege of being an apex predator as she was, after all. And as she continued sucking dry the still-living first roach, a part of her, a minor part, figured she was going to miss this once it was time for her to return to her human self...