

## Spiderman and Cricket

by

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Mother Nature may be vicious but She isn't cruel. When an animal is killed by another, it is done in the quickest most efficient way possible, assuring food for the victor and avoiding needless suffering to the victim. While one's death is supposed to be as personal an event as one's life, occasionally circumstances beyond even Mother Nature's control intervene with the natural path set for an existence and, suddenly, one is faced with a fork in the road. Down one path is the continuance of normalcy; down the other, mutations of the former. Usually Mother Nature is there to help one choose the correct path but She is very busy and cannot be everywhere at once thus, sometimes, the wrong path gets chosen, through no fault of her own. But even She admits She screwed up big time with Peter.

Peter Wallace was a punk. With his hair shaved into a mohawk and dyed a color that can only be called diet purple, his tattered jeans and torn black t-shirts showed the world his spite for fashion, and the knife in his pocket symbolized his hatred for the establishments his parents lived for. He seldom bathed. Being he was only fifteen, and on probation, he was forced to live at his parent's, but they pretty much left him alone. They were scared of him.

Peter had a pet tarantula. While not as cuddly as a cat or as faithful as a dog, it did manage to offer an entertainment neither of the others could. On Sundays, when his parents were off to church, the guys would come over to get high and watch a little death. For a group of teenagers without lives or girlfriends, it was a cheap outing and really kind of fun.

Peter's tarantula was Haitian. Barely three inches in size, the brown spider wasn't a tarantula at all, rather it was so named for better sales at the store. But what the Haitian tarantula was was vicious, killing for the sake of the kill. With long hairy legs and a small body, the largest creature to be brought down by Peter's spider was a field mouse twice its size. Not even Peter put his money on the spider in that fight, but the spider proved everyone's hunch wrong. The Haitian tarantula was the most vicious spider alive, and that was why Peter chose it. For pure entertainment value.

Jimmy "Cricket" Moriallo was Peter's best friend. Sixteen years old, he had the worst case of acne in all of Queen Elizabeth High. Standing six-two and weighing every bit of two-fifty, there weren't many who would, never mind could, stand against him if he wanted them felled. Peter was a brother to Cricket, and he would die for his brother. They did everything together.

Cricket was always the first to arrive for Sunday's festivities, sometimes arriving as early as Thursday. He never had a job but always had primo pot, which he pinched from his dad's stash. His mother left when he was quite young and his dad drank too much, so he stayed at Peter's as often as possible, much to Peter's parent's chagrin. (They were scared of him, also.) He never touched alcohol but smoked everything he could get his hands on, and he was able to get his hands on a lot. He was welcome at Peter's anytime.

Peter's parents were gone by ten-thirty Sunday morning. They wouldn't be back until later Sunday evening, as after church they would drive to visit his grandmother. The house was his until Sunday eve, the guys arrived just after noon.

The guys were Lefty, Tony and Kyle. Lefty was called such because there was a Tony in the group already, and Tony was Lefty's real name. Tony and Kyle were brothers and lived with their grandmother, since their parents were killed in a car accident seven years back. Tony, Kyle, Cricket and Peter went to school together all their lives; they met Lefty in junior high school. Like Peter, they always wore tattered clothing and loved listening to any music that sounded like chainsaws in heat.

Peter's room was the house's basement. The entrance, a door that didn't seal properly, was accessed from the back yard. There was no way in from upstairs without going outside first. There was only one small window in the basement, three feet to the left of the door. The spider tank was on a coffee table in the middle of the room. A couch, occupied by Kyle and Tony was on one side, Lefty, posed like Captain Kirk, was on a recliner on the other side, Peter was standing alone at one end, and Cricket was busy rolling a joint at the other. Besides the spider tank and drug paraphernalia, an ashtray overflowing and a year old copy of Fangoria, used as a coaster for the ashtray, occupied the table. The first joint was lit and the show began.

Peter had bragged all day about his strange creature, about the great battle they were in store for. He said he found the creature at the abandoned textile plant amongst forgotten and rotten steel drums marked PCB's, where he was rummaging the day before. This was going to be the final battle, he had said, after this he was going to retire the spider. He knew there would be no topping that Sunday's fight. The rest of them knew it, too, when he revealed the glass jar containing the star of the show's next victim.

At first, they thought it was a weird fly. But, on closer examination, realized it was more like a winged-ant. Then, upon even closer scrutiny, realized both previous realizations were wrong and that it was more like a person.

With wings.

Two inches tall.

The guys couldn't believe their eyes, but it was right in front of their faces.

Peter had caught a fairy.

It appeared to be female with tiny antennae and black specks for eyes on a pinkish-peach pinhead that was otherwise bald. Its wings, once colorful like a butterfly's, were broken and useless. (Peter had broke them capturing it. Purposely.) Cricket opposed tossing the fairy to the spider, saying it would be bad luck, but he said that about all the creatures, so no one paid him any mind. Lefty wondered if there could be any financial gain in its remaining alive, but the thought was forgotten before it had time enough to be expressed. Death and destruction was their pastime. The fairy had been captured to fight, and fight it would.

Peter flipped open the lid on the jar and dumped the fairy into the spider's tank.

Immediately, it ran towards the wall, scrambling at the glass, broken wings flapping a thousand beats a second. It turned around quickly, hunched down and surveyed its surroundings. Unable to fly, it could see there was no way out. It climbed atop the only adornment in the tank, a hollow half-log.

It saw the eyes of its captor's peering at it.

Then, it saw the spider.

The spider felt one of the damaged wings brush against it and lunged in its direction. Its fangs only managed to tear into a wing and the fairy, its wing hooked by the spider's fang, flipped onto the spider's back and went for its ten eyes, digging in with its tiny fingers. The spider raced under the log, catching the fairy in the chest with the log's edge, pulling the wing hooked by the spider from the fairy's back and knocking the fairy to the dirt. The spider spun around and attacked.

The fairy lifted its arms just before the spider slammed down upon it. It held the spider up, fangs just a hairsbreadth away from the fairy's eyes.

The fairy thought of its situation.

It thought of its broken wings.

It thought of its child.

Then, it screamed an inaudible curse to its captors and let its arms fall to its side. The venom was extremely quick and the fairy was dead before it heard the disapproving hisses and curses.

But, they hadn't heard the curse the fairy had hissed at them, either.

The spider retreated beneath the log and started grinding the carcass into a ball of melted protein to suck up like a milkshake. It always ate in the privacy of its lair.

Peter was as disappointed as any of them, perhaps even more. He thought he had the mother of all fights set out for them but, by comparison, the field mouse was a much better battle. It was almost as if the fairy wanted to die quick, just so they wouldn't have a show.

But the show had only just begun.

It was Cricket that noticed it first, and that was only because being stoned was his natural functioning state and he was more than acquainted with the actions of the spider.

And he never saw it do that before.

It had come out from beneath the log and was moving around. Not walking around moving, rather shaking back and forth like it had shivers. The shaking got more violent, almost convulsive. The guys thought maybe the spider was having adverse reactions to the fairy, like maybe it was allergic or something. But something else was happening.

Before their very eyes, the same eyes that had just witnessed a fairy get killed, the spider shed its skin, an eight hour process, in one second. Its thorax popped open and a spider twice the original one's size flew out like a spring.

Then, it happened again.

And again.

In mere seconds, the spider had shed its skin a hundred times and had long since sprung out of its cage. Its torn and shedded skins were filling the basement like a sick snowstorm.

When the chaos subsided and the skins fluttered to the floor, it was Tony that made the discovery. He picked up what he hoped was close to the spider's last shed skin. The thorax alone was the size of his head.

They all clumped together, back to back, in the center of the room and stood perfectly still. Reality set in all at once and none felt the other had to have the situation pointed out. They were standing waist deep in spider skins, one of which shows the spider, which happens to be the most temperamental of all spider species, to have a head the same size as their own, and there was only one door out.

No one needed to hear the obvious.

For what seemed like a very long time, no one moved.

Then, Kyle tried and that's when all hell broke loose.

He ran for the door but the spider shot up from beneath its skin cover, touching the ceiling and creating a living arch between him and the door. Kyle scrambled to make a retreat, but the spider snapped him up like a back-hoe on speed. Tony ran at the spider when it attacked his brother, but died when he was knocked into the cement wall by the spider when it suddenly spun around to start laying down web to wrap its meal in. Lefty made a mad leap for the window, smashing it out but lodging halfway through. His legs flailing frantically, the spider pierced him through the hip with its fangs and hauled him back in. With both Kyle's dead and Lefty's dying bodies dangling from its fangs, the spider continued laying down web. Its rear end slammed up and down indiscriminately

about the basement, knocking over the coffee table it used to live on and pushing aside the couch Peter and Cricket had taken refuge under.

Exposed, it was now their turn to kill or be killed.

Cricket ran at the spider and Peter was right behind. A strike from the left while moving to the right confused the spider's radar, and its attack missed.

Cricket's attack proved futile also, though, barely shaving a hair from the spider.

Peter jumped between the two middle legs on the spider's right side and plunged his knife in and out. The spider fell, pinning Peter.

Cricket moved in and stabbed at the spider's eyes. There had to be a brain beneath, he had to stop the spider, Peter was trapped and the spider would kill him. He had to save Peter, he had to. His thinking was that basic. It cost him his life.

And, while Cricket died, Peter became aware of a few truths. One was he landed on his own knife and was bleeding heavily. Another was fools shouldn't play with life and death, and he was a fool. And, finally, that there was a God. Then he knew what it was to be dead.

Peter's parents arrived home Sunday evening, as expected. They called to Peter that they had returned and, when he didn't answer, went down and around. The door seemed to be blocked but they managed to push it open enough to squeeze into Peter's room before the door slammed shut behind them. It was amidst the webbing, spider skins and human carcasses that Peter's parents saw they no longer had to be scared of their son.

For, when they looked up and saw the glistening fangs, they realized they had bigger things to be afraid of.

The End

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