

## The Spiders in the Jewelry Box

Jane went to an animal shelter a few towns over and adopted an enormous orange cat. Luna named him Orange Boy. He had one eye, no testicles, no fear of death, and he could not be contained by their home's walls.

Jane built the birdhouses taller, but Orange Boy climbed higher. She closed the windows to keep him in, but he learned to open the door. Orange Boy was a menace and Jane quickly regretted ever bringing him home, but Luna loved him to death. And he loved her, too. He brought her presents in the form of dead birds and squirrels, and he slept on her bed every night, right next to her. She woke up to him purring away in the crook of her arm, his enormous orange leonine body compressed into a cute little ball. Whenever she played outside, he followed her and watched her, usually from the big sunny rock in the yard. When she read on the dock, he sat with her and watched fish swim underneath. He yowled pitifully when she left for school in the morning, so love-struck was he for his human girl.

Luna cultivated a deep appreciation for all things pink and silly. She loved stuffed bunnies most of all, collecting them whenever she could. Her favorite way was to win them from the arcade game at the Big Hoot Bowling Alley, where everyone in town had their birthday parties. Luna couldn't bowl to save her life. Whenever she tried, she released the ball with so much force that her pink heart-shaped glasses flew off her face and the ball made a dent in the wood. But Luna was great to have a party; she turned every party into a karaoke party and got the most thoughtful gifts. So people kept inviting her anyways.

Luna made many friends during school: Sara, a girl with a video camera, and Megan, who loved to act in plays. Blanca and Anita Lo, a pair of twins who fought constantly and owned a paddleboat, rounded off Luna's squadron. The five of them spent nearly every summer paddling around the waterways and filming movies together. Luna acted as the idea guy—everyone agreed, she always had the best ideas— and, as the de facto leader of their little group, took the downfall when they got in trouble.

Like when the paddleboat overturned halfway between shore and Pirate Island, and Sara's camera got waterlogged, and it cost her dad forty dollars to get a new one. Or when the groundskeeper caught them all trespassing at the Masquinongy Resort golf course, backpacks full of garden trowels, because Luna claimed there was a mummy buried under the third hole. Or when Megan fell in love with Drew McKenzie middle, school hockey star, but he didn't like her back. Luckily for her, Luna had just recently discovered that there were lots of occult rituals on the internet you could perform to remedy such things— her inbox was *full* of them, forwarded from others, urging her to send them on to six friends lest a terrible curse befall her. One Friday night, the girls got together in Luna's room to snack on pizza rolls and summon No-Face Nellie, a ghost who could grant any wish.

“But beware! If you show any fear, she will *come through the mirror and steal your face*,” Luna warned them. Anita shuddered. “Like that,” Luna added gravely. The shadows on her own face looked gruesome in the dim candlelight, and her heart-shaped glasses almost seemed like the eyes of some gigantic insect.

The girls held hands and began to chant: *No-Face Nellie, No-Face Nellie, No-Face Nellie....*

They peered into the mirror on the floor, gleaming obsidian like a dark portal. Waiting. Suddenly, Anita screamed and kicked the mirror. It flew across the room, hit Luna's dresser, and shattered.

“My reflection smiled at me!” She shrieked.

“That was *my* reflection, dummy!” Her twin, Blanca, shoved her.

Mom came in then and turned the light on. All the spookiness dissipated out of Luna's bedroom as her pink floral wallpaper and mountain of stuffed animals came into view.

“What's going on in here?” Mom demanded. She glanced around, and once she saw no one was dead, her gaze fell to the broken mirror on the floor. The blood drained from her face. “This party is over. I'm driving everybody home.”

Luna shouted herself red in protest, but Jane would not be swayed. She bundled up the mirror shards in a white dish cloth and set them on her bed.

When she got back a half hour later, Luna couldn't look at her. *It's just a stupid mirror,* she thought.

"Come here," said Jane from her room. "I need to show you something."

Luna came. She'd pieced the mirror together as best she could, like a puzzle, though there were some pieces so small she couldn't find space for them. It lay on Jane's bed. There was a ring of dust around the spot where Luna had found it on her mother's wall, the spot over Mom's drawer of gym gear. Its frame was woven from dark branches that fused seamlessly in a ring. It had been there as long as Luna could remember. Seeing it now, she suddenly felt very guilty.

Jane took a porcelain jewelry box from her gym drawer. Inside was a pile of loose white pearls.

"You broke something important. Now you're going to fix it." She held the open box to Luna. "Choose one."

Luna picked the smallest pearl. It weighed nothing in her fingers.

"Anita was the one that actually *broke* it," Luna said.

"Whose idea was it to take my mirror?"

"It was an accident."

"It doesn't matter— never take my things without permission. We can't get another mirror like this. It was a gift to me, from a Sylvory craftsman."

Luna was old enough now to notice that many of the places that her mother spoke of— Sylvory, Medaphracea, Snikit, the Crimson Asinykaa— were not on any maps. Mom talked about these places she traveled through in her youth like other people's moms talked about going to college in Michigan. *When I was over in Dumhanaang, hiking the Crimsons, I had nothing to drink but boiled milk with pepper and honey.*

"Is it magic?" Luna asked. Jane snorted.

"You're too old to keep asking that," she replied. "You don't need magic when you have good craftsmanship. Hold out your finger, I need to prick it."

Luna winced as Jane used a sewing needle to draw blood from her ring finger.

"It needs something living to wake it up," Jane said, showing Luna how to rub the single drop of blood across the pearl's surface.

Luna wanted to ask if *this* was magic, but she held her tongue and watched her mother place the pearl on top of the shattered mirror. She cleared her throat as the pearl rolled across the silver, dragging a red streak behind it, and spoke.

*“Spider, spider, make amends,  
Fix the seams and fix the ends  
Mend what is broken,  
that which is spoken:  
This Sylvory mirror that my daughter and her friends broke during some kind of cult ritual.”*

Luna shifted, embarrassed. Mom bundled up the mirror in the dish towel. Together, they laid it in the herb garden outside, where Orange Boy was chewing all the leaves off a peppermint plant.

In the morning, the mirror was fixed. It had rained the night before and Jane got her brown clogs full of cold mud, squelching her bare toes inside, when she went into the garden to retrieve it. It was slicked wet with cold forest rain which pooled in the crevice around its rim. A tiny white spider floated there, drowned doing its duty. But it had done it well.

Jane and Luna washed the mud off in the bath, and Luna saw the hundreds of tiny spiderwebs patterned over the mirror’s surface. It looked like a frozen windowpane. They were gone with one swipe of Jane’s dishcloth, and the mirror was clean again.

“Can the spiders fix anything?” Luna asked.

“Basically.” Jane grunted, lifting the mirror back over her dresser. “But just things you can’t fix yourself. And just important things. Nothing we can replace.”

“... or the magic won’t work?”

Jane rolled her eyes and wiped a strand of ashy hair from her face.

“You and magic,” she clicked her tongue. “Spiders are just animals, hon. It’s biology. It’s just that they don’t have this species outside Drasha, and I only have a handful.”

Jane, who had slept restlessly all night, now sat on her bed and observed her Sylvic mirror with relief.

Luna got a bad stir in her gut. Mom was very serious about things to do with her homeland. She was serious about nearly everything, of course. She carried her blacksmith's iron-hot focus and caution through everything she did. But when she spoke about her homeland, something else blazed in her eye as well— fear for something nameless.

"I'm sorry I broke your mirror," Luna said. "I didn't know it was... fancy. Would something bad have happened? If we couldn't fix it?"

"Maybe," Jane said. "Maybe not. It's like driving a car with tinted windows. Without the mirror, people can see straight through. But it's fixed now and it doesn't matter anymore. Go get dressed for school."

As Luna left, she watched out the corner of her eye as her mother put the porcelain box back in her sock drawer.

Mrs. Krazinski was a tall, knobby old woman who always wore her hair up in a bun with a comb stuck through it. She spat when she talked. She seemed to think each and every student in her class was scheming against her. Each day began with her beady eyes surveying the room for troublemakers. She always found someone— usually, it was Wilson Parker, a boy at the front of the classroom who had trouble sitting still.

"Knock off that kicking. You want to pay for damaging that desk?" She would snap at him. When he switched to bouncing, she snapped at him again: "Quit distracting everyone!" Wilson would hang his head in shame and sit still in a painful way that made it look like his desk was made of hot iron.

Mrs. Krazinski would then call attendance and loudly note whoever was absent with a judgmental *tsk tsk*, writing their names on the board.

Nothing happened to you if your name got on the board. It was purely meant to shame the students that displeased her. At the end of the week, she handed out Smarties to all the kids who stayed *off* the board. Wilson never received Smarties. Nor, usually, did Luna, due to Krazinski's sadistic policy regarding drawing in class. If Krazinski caught you drawing *anything* in your notes, she'd tear it right out of your notebook and rip it up in front of you. Once, Luna made the

mistake of drawing a little heart over the ‘i’ in her last name on an assignment. Mrs. Krazinski called her in during lunch.

“What is this?” She demanded, spitting. She pointed a bony claw at Luna’s paper.

“That’s my name,” Luna said.

“Is your name spelled with a heart?”

“... I... thought it was pretty,” she admitted quietly.

“You’re telling me, that if a judge in *court* asked you to write your name, you’d put a heart in it? You’re telling me when you get to college, you’re going to sign all your tests like *this*?”

Luna didn’t know how to respond. Mrs. Krazinski didn’t give her a chance to. Instead, she just ripped up the assignment and tossed it in the garbage.

“You get a zero,” she said.

Luna, Anita, and Megan, who all shared this class together and who had all been on the sharp end of Mrs. Krazinski’s wrath, began a coordinated effort to try to sneak as many secret drawings in their notes as possible. Their favorite method was using white space to make pictures. It started small— a little heart or star made of white space between notes— but Luna wanted to see how far she could push the boundary. She wound up on the board again when Mrs. Krazinski spotted her large, detailed drawing of Orange Boy made from white space.

“But, Mrs. Krazinski,” Luna argued, “it’s not a drawing!”

“Yeah! It’s not a doodle!” Sara agreed. Anita and other students in the class made murmurs of agreement.

“You’re trying to tell me,” Mrs. Krazinski said, “You’re trying to tell me that *this* isn’t a drawing? This isn’t a picture?”

“It *is* a picture,” said Luna, “But it’s not a drawing. By definition. A drawing means that you had to *draw* it. And I didn’t.”

Krazinski scowled at the paper, and scowled at Luna incredulously.

“Then who drew it?”

“You’re missing the point,” Luna tried to explain.

“*You’re* missing the point, young lady,” Krazinski said. “This *isn’t* an art class. And don’t you ever dare be rude to me again. *Learn your place.*”

And at that, she tore up Orange Boy and all of Luna’s notes for the day, and she received a 0 again.

Krazinski started to get the idea that Luna was a troublestarter. She’d pick on Luna for all manner of things, from wearing distracting clothes— such as her fluffy pink sweater with sequins— to her bathroom habits— you’ve gone *twice* this period, you got some kind of medical problem? No? Sit back down.

One Friday in autumn, just before Halloween, Wilson made it through a whole week without getting on the board. The whole class knew it, and watched him sitting at his desk, beaming with pride. Mrs. Krazinski went from desk to desk distributing the Smarties (Luna didn’t get any that week). She walked up to his desk and lay one of the candies down. Wilson let out a gleeful sound at his long-awaited reward and bounced in his seat. Mrs. Krazinski swiftly hurried back to him and snatched the candy out of his hands. She tossed it in the garbage.

“We don’t *do* that,” she said.

Wilson stopped bouncing. All the joy drained out of his face. Luna watched his eyes turn dull and his mouth turn down. His shoulders sunk and he lay his head in his arms for the rest of class.

Even after, when Luna bought candy bars from the vending machine and sat next to Wilson on the school steps, offering him his pick of chocolate or taffy, he only barely smiled.

“I’m not like you,” he said to her eventually, pulling the taffy apart with his fingers. “I don’t *try* to be bad.”

“I don’t *try* to be bad,” Luna scoffed. “We’re the same. It’s just how you are, and just how I am.”

But, Luna thought, that wasn’t completely true. Krazinski liked to bully him because he was easy to humiliate. She liked to bully Luna because she was arrogant.

Luna got dragged off to the principals office the next week because she had shown up to school dressed in what Krazinski determined to be an “inappropriate” Halloween costume. Mr.

Kevin, the principal, walked into his office to find two nearly identical Mrs. Krazinskis, one merely smaller than the other, fuming in chairs across from one another.

Both Luna and Krazinski wore their hair up in buns with a comb stuck through it, and a denim dress over a knit star-spangled sweater. She'd put on mauve lipstick and steel grey eyeshadow to match her teacher's. Luna had swapped out her trademark heart-shaped glasses for a pair of rimless readers, twins to the pair Krazinski wore every day. The only differences were that Luna's nose was buttony where Krazinski's was hard, Luna's face was round and ruddy and splotched with freckles *and* pimples, where Krazinski's was tight and pale and cut deeply with frown lines.

"You understand that this is very disrespectful," the principal said.

"I was trying to be *flattering*," Luna argued. "Imitation is—"

"You think this is *flattering*? Do you know how it feels, on a day when everyone is dressed as monsters and devils, to see someone making fun of you like this? That says to me that you think *I'm* a devil, too. Is that what you want people to think about me? That I'm the devil?"

"Marina," Mr. Kevin motioned her to calm down. "Luna, what do you have to say?"

"I'm sorry," Luna said. "Mrs. Krazinski is my favorite teacher and I thought it would be funny."

Mrs. Krazinski shot her a dirty look that said *I know damn well you're lying, you little rat*.

Mr. Kevin asked if Luna had another costume she could wear, and Luna said yes, so he told her to go change and apologize to her teacher. Luna mustered up the sincerest apology she could manage, and headed off to her locker room to switch up her outfit.

She didn't come back. After a few minutes, Krazinski and Mr. Kevin heard the sound of children's laughter coming from the halls— never a good sign in a school. A small crowd had formed in front of the gymnasium. Kids in witch hats and monster makeup gathered around what seemed to be a kind of one-man circus. Luna, the ringmaster, clown, and stuntman all in one, pointed into the audience and screeched,

*"Mandy Jonson, I can see your bra strap! It makes me sick! I'm calling the police!"*

"Sorry, Mrs. Krazy pants," Mandy called back.



*“You’re going on the board! Tom, are you laughing? You’re going on the board too! You bunch of n’er-do-well sociopaths!”*

Luna, to her credit, *had* altered her costume somewhat. Now, she had five combs stuck in her hair, and her makeup was smeared all over her face. She waved a yard stick around like a sword, threatening to smack passersby.

“Mrs. Krazypants, I love you!” Shouted a boy from the back.

*“Quit that racket!”* Luna shouted back. She finally noticed Mr. Kevin and the real Marina Krazinski stomping toward her. *“Ooh, look, it’s the principal!”* She said, eyes bugging out.

“Mrs. Krazypants, is that you?” Several people laughed in Krazinski’s direction.

*“No, that’s, uh, my twin sister, Marina! Marina, how fashionable you look today! I did my makeup just like you—“*

“You’d better *stop* whatever the *hell* this is, *right now!*” Mrs. Krazinski bellowed. Luna shrunk slightly, but as the kids around her gasped and tittered, eager to see a showdown, she got bold again.

*“You DARE cuss at me, young lady? You’re going on the board!”*

Mr. Kevin stepped through the crowd and grabbed Luna’s arm, pulling her toward his office. “We need to talk,” he hissed. “Marina—“ he turned back, but the real Mrs. Krazinski now stood at the center of the crowd, blazing with rage, like a crazy horse or some other rampaging animal.

“After all I do for you kids, you turn around and treat me like this! How *dare* you! How *dare* you show me so much disrespect, you ungrateful little brats! I give you candy every single week, and this is how you pay me back?”

Krazinski gesticulated wildly with her hands, and Luna mimicked these movements as Mr. Kevin pulled her away. The crowd loved it.

They suspended her. She had to write a five-page apology essay to Mrs. Krazinski and another five-page essay to Mr. Kevin explaining why what she did was wrong. And they made Jane come in to talk about Luna’s behavior.

“What we’ve seen suggests that your daughter has shown a disturbing lack of empathy for others,” Mr. Kevin said cautiously. Jane, who was bored, and didn’t like being in people’s

offices because she felt like *she* was in trouble, nodded. “I’m not saying she’s a bad kid. I think she’s a good kid. All her teachers love her— she’s a funny character, all her creative outfits, feather boas and the glasses and all of that— we love that. But at the same time, I’ve never seen Mrs. Krazinski so upset. She cried her eyes out.”

“What do you think I should do?” Jane asked.

Mr. Kevin coughed and fumbled with some papers.

“I have a list of counselors, psychiatrists who can test her for ADHD and everything, and... if Luna wants to come back to school in the winter, we need her to take a two-day conflict resolution workshop. Parental attendance is... suggested.”

“Thank you,” Jane said, picking up the papers. “Is that all?”

“Have you talked to her about it?” Mr. Kevin asked.

“Yes,” Jane replied. Kevin waited for her to say more, but she just stared at him blankly.

“Well, then that’s all,” he said finally.

Luna waited in the car, pink boots against the window, trying to figure out how to get her Tamagotchi to stop pooping itself to death. When Jane returned, she handed the forms to her daughter.

“I’m not mad at you for standing up to a bully. I’m mad because you didn’t think about the consequences. Now we both have to take a twenty-four hour conflict resolution workshop in Hibbing.”

“Do we *have* to? Couldn’t we just... say we did?”

“The rules apply to you,” Jane replied, turning the key in the engine. Luna grumbled. “And me,” Jane added. Luna wasn’t so sure of this— she’d just recently learned about felony tax evasion, and she was nearly positive that her mother had never paid the US government a cent.

The conflict resolution workshop was awful. They had to go to a library basement in Hibbing that smelled like congealed cheesy broccoli soup, where a man with no eyebrows who forced everyone to call him Cool Captain Jeff made them watch a powerpoint presentation about his trip to Peru. The other people there were either nervous parents or bored kids who occasionally hit each other for no reason. Luna was partnered up with a really short and quiet girl named Doris who cried at all of the imaginary conflict scenarios.

“Stop yelling at me!” She’d sob at Luna.

“I’m reading the *script*,” Luna tried to explain, until Cool Captain Jeff rushed in to intervene.

“Remember to use ‘*I* statements, ladies!” He said, lanyard dangling between his knees as he crouched to meet Doris’s eye.

“I’m reading the script,” Luna emphasized.

“This is too much conflict for my daughter,” said Doris’s mom, who was always two inches behind Doris, looming over her. “Look at what you people have done to her! For shame.”

Luna glanced back to the metal folding chairs by the wall where her own mother had previously been sitting— Jane had taken up three full chairs with her legs, black boots crossed, arm dangling off the side, reading a tool catalogue in a blacksmithing magazine— and found that her mom had abandoned her. Later, when Jane came back, she admitted to Luna that she’d gotten bored and gone to the gym.

“In my defense, where I come from, ‘conflict resolution’ was what we called burning your enemy’s garrison to the ground,” Jane said sheepishly on the drive home.

“I wanna go live with Cool Captain Jeff,” Luna replied.

Even though Luna was gone, the character of Mrs. Krazypants (sometimes just Mrs. Krazy) lived on in the student psyche. This was because— perhaps against all odds— Luna was super popular at Loon River Middle School. Nearly everyone liked her. Despite her eccentricities — her pink feather boas, the crocs she wore with striped knee-high socks, her neon green braces, her locker covered in badly hand-drawn cartoons which vomited out piles of loose books and papers every time she tried to open it, her booming laugh that could be heard everywhere in the school at once, her stomach-turning homemade lunches of cheese sushi and beet sandwiches— Luna had the kind of big welcoming spirit that put everybody at ease.

During her exile, Megan kept Luna updated with nightly phone calls, describing all the happenings at Loon River Middle, including her successful first date with Drew Mckenzie to the corn dog stand at the homecoming game.

“Oh— and Wilson got expelled,” Megan added as an afterthought one night as they traded stuff on Neopets.

Luna blinked. Her little guy in the Flash game crashed into a wall and died.

“What?”

“Yeah, Kraz heard him doing the voice and wrote him up. I think it was like, his last chance or something, or like maybe she said he was harassing her or something, but Mr. Kevin expelled him for it I guess. Which sucks, because literally *everyone* is doing the voice.”

“He got expelled— because he did the Kraz voice?”

“Yeah,” Megan replied. Luna’s gut dropped. “I mean everyone thinks its funny, because Kraz is a *nightmare* and literally everyone hates her, and like, nobody’s scared of her anymore, I mean for now at least. But yeah, he’s gone. Never coming back. I wonder if he’ll have to like, move?”

It wasn’t right. She could see it in her mind— everybody joking around, getting big laughs with the same dumb bit over and over. Finally, Wilson must have thought, everyone was on his side, he could safely blow off some steam, joke with the others. Except that he couldn’t. Of course he couldn’t. Of course she wouldn’t *let* him. Because why should Wilson ever get a pass on anything?

It was one thing for Luna to get punished.

“Wilson’s never done anything wrong, though,” Luna argued.

“Well, I mean, he’s in trouble all the time, right? For being disruptive or whatever.”

“But he’s never done anything *wrong*.”

“Yeah, he’s nice. It’s not fair.”

Luna said goodbye and hung up the phone. She hugged Orange Boy.

“This is all my fault,” she said to the cat, who blinked at her slowly and purred. “I have to make it right. There’s gotta be a way to fix it.”

Her thoughts suddenly turned to the porcelain box in her mother’s room.

Surely, if the spiders can fix *anything*, they could fix this, right? Yes, Luna thought to herself. Some primordial instinct deep in her belly told her that it could be done. And her heart told her that it *should* be done. And a twitching, determined vein full of fire that cut straight through the impulse control center in her brain had already decided that it *would* be done.

Her fingers found their way into the cream-white jewelry box, grasping a trio of those pearly eggs in her fingers. She also grabbed the sewing needle.

She heard the sounds of her mother's hammer on molten steel ringing from the smithing shed out back. When Mom was focused on a project, she was *focused*. She wouldn't notice if Luna stepped out for a little while.

So Luna wound up her long brown hair into a messy bun, pulled it into an orange knit hat, and hurried out into the chill winter evening.

She knew the woods around Daurnile lake like the back of her hand. The woods were her playground, and a recurring movie set for her friends, and full of all kinds of secret places where she sometimes buried pirate treasure and read her favorite books. It was one of these places where she crouched in the darkness, laying the pearls on a paper towel by a rotten log.

She brought the needle to her fingertip. Her heart pounded in her throat. She could do this — just a little prick, right? But her fingers fumbled and the needle fell into the forest humus. It was dark out now, and the forest floor was covered in long, brown pine needles. She'd lost a needle in a needle stack. Luna cursed and stood up to go get a flashlight— when a sharp pain sliced through her foot. She screamed, raising her foot. The sewing needle had stabbed her right through the Croc. Seeing the metal eye poking through the bottom of her foot, Luna screamed again.

She fell on her rear and slowly, slowly pulled the needle out. Only then could she get the shoe off. The bottom of her foot was slick with blood, which pooled from the deep puncture wound. She thought it must have hit her bone, it hurt so bad.

Undiscouraged from her purpose, Luna hovered her foot over the cluster of pearls. She let the blood drip out like a leaky faucet, making a big dark splotch at the center of the paper towel.

“Hope this is enough blood for you dumb suckers,” Luna hissed. She lay on the forest floor trying to tie her wool hat around her injured foot, bleary-eyed, as she chanted the incantation:

*“Spiders, spiders, make amends,  
Fix the seams and fix the ends  
Mend what is broken,*

*that which is spoken:*

*Uhh, Mrs. Krazinski got Wilson expelled. Please make it right so that she un-expells him. He shouldn't pay for what I did and I feel really bad about it. Just fix everything for me, please. Thank you."*

The chill wind picked up, and Luna shivered. She shouted when the paper towel blew off the ground, scattering the pearls to the earth.

Crestfallen, Luna picked up and headed back home.

She couldn't sleep that night. Her thoughts were full of strange shapes, thin shadows that spindled and knit webs from the dark. She heard clicking outside her window, and the scrape of something long and metallic on her roof. Just nightmares, she assured herself. She was just worrying herself paranoid.

It wouldn't be the first time she'd had strange dreams which felt real. You just gotta buckle down and sleep harder, that's all.

Luna woke up when her mother screamed. Luna jumped out of bed and scrambled to the front door, where Jane stood, mouth agape, staring out across what appeared to be an arctic landscape. The trees, the car, the dock, everything within sight had been sheathed in thick sheets of spiderweb. The morning sun glittered on the arsenic-white strands, which blew ghostly in the breeze.

"What did you do?" Mom demanded.

"I don't know!" Said Luna.

"You did something with the spiders," Mom said. She was furious. "I *told* you not to—"

"I'm sorry! I was trying to fix everything!"

Again, there was that scraping on the roof. It sounded like something was up there. Something huge. Mom bit her lip and went silent.

"Tell me *exactly* how you woke it up."

Luna sheepishly lifted her foot to show Mom the thick white bandage, splotted with blood.

"And... what did you tell it to fix?"

“Uh...” Luna tried to think about her exact words. She shrugged. “You know, all my problems.”

Jane dragged her hand down her face and sucked in a deep, slow breath. Behind her, a massive arachnid face descended from the top of the archway. Following it was a body the size of a pony. It slid down on a rope of silk, clacking its jaws. Jane shut the door.

“*Think stuff through,*” she said. Then the window smashed.

Luna fell to the ground as Jane leapt, kicking the giant spider square in the face. She fell into a roll across the kitchen floor and grabbed her darkwood bow from its display over the fridge, along with the four arrows she kept behind it. The spider rushed her, its massive white fangs needle-sharp and dripping. With a motion as fluid and natural as a smile, Jane nocked her arrow, aimed, and let it fly. The first arrow only hit their coffee table, shattering a ceramic frog. The spider jumped at Jane and she kicked it again, shooting a second arrow through its thorax.

Green bug juice squirted everywhere. Jane wiped the goo off her face. The spider twitched and writhed on the sofa. Jane strode over, reached under the sofa, and pulled out an iron longsword.

She stabbed the spider through the head. The twitching stopped.

“Now that *that’s* taken care of,” Jane said, breathing heavy.

“There’s two more,” Luna interrupted. “Also, holy shit, Mom.”

“*Don’t* curse.” Jane went to the bathroom to towel the spider blood off. Orange Boy peeked out from beneath Luna’s bed. Now that all the racket was over, he slinked over her big stuffed rabbit and a pile of her pink shirts. His tail waved back and forth as he inspected the dead spider— he’d killed lots of spiders before. This wasn’t anything new. Bored, he retreated back under the bed.

Jane gave Luna a steel shortsword that she kept under the kitchen sink and told her to hide in her room. Jane put on her leather jacket— the thick kind that bikers wore— and crept outside, hunting for more spiders.

Luna rocked anxiously on her floor. The cat wouldn’t let her pet him, swiping at her when she tried. To her dismay, she found that her Tamagotchi, which she’d named after herself, had once again died in its own waste.

Jane returned an hour later. Before she could say anything, Luna spoke up.

“I might have mentioned Mrs. Krazinski. To the spiders.”

“Why didn’t you say anything earlier?” demanded Mom. “Never mind. Let’s go find her before the spiders eat her.”

“Is that really going to happen?” Luna cried, jumping to her feet.

“I don’t know,” Jane sighed. “Bring the sword.”

Luna found Marina Krazinski’s address in the Loon River Middle School Directory. She lived in a one-story wood-paneled house under a big pine tree in town. Her yard was full of patriotic pinwheels, kitschy plastic animals— mostly ducks, but also including, inexplicably, a life-sized plastic antelope— and a big *No Trespassing* sign. From the outside, there was no sign that anything big and spidery had been by here.

Faced by the sudden thought that she might ring the doorbell and find her teacher perfectly fine, and that she’d then have to deal with a bitter, spiteful, angry Mrs. Krazinski who she’d woken up needlessly on a Sunday morning, Luna shuddered.

“Mom, maybe we shouldn’t go in,” she said.

“I’m going in, you’re staying out here. You know how to swing a bat? Do that with this. If anything comes out.”

Mom, who was still wearing her blue pajama pants under the leather jacket, wrapped Luna’s hands around the sword’s hilt. It was foggy out.

“If anything comes out of there, I’m running away,” Luna said. Jane shook her head gravely.

“No, killing them quickly is the only way. They’ll always find you. They’ll never stop trying to carry out your wish.”

“It’s good then, if they like, serve me—“

“They don’t. You gave a vague instruction, and when spiders get confused they get kill-happy. I told you, hon, it’s not magic— it’s just spiders.”

Mom knocked on the door. Luna stood in the grass, crows slick with dew, holding the sword. She hoped none of the neighbors saw her. That’s just what she needed right now, to get arrested *and* expelled. Mom called Mrs. Krazinski’s name a few times.



Finally, Jane raised her farm boot and kicked the door in. Luna startled at the noise. Jane made it look easy— she had a look of mild satisfaction, the look of a woman who had kicked many doors in before, and was glad she still had it in her. Chips from the door frame flew everywhere.

The house looked completely normal, except for the mummified body hanging from the ceiling. The form of what Jane had to assume was Mrs. Krazinski hung from the ceiling by her feet, wrapped head-to-toe in thick white spiderweb.

“If you’re alive in there, Mrs. Krazinski, we’re gonna get you down,” she called. That was when the first spider struck.

It came from behind the sofa, huge and white and terrible, and it launched itself onto Jane’s back. She swung to strike it away, but this one was faster than its brother, which she’d slain without problem. It wound her round with string so quickly she could hardly track its movements, and suddenly she was on the floor, face planted into Mrs. Krazinski’s dirty cloth rug.

Jane snapped like a snake, smashing her head into the spider’s body, and knocked it off of her.

That was when she saw the second spider. A shiver ran up her spine. It was massive, the size of a car, a hideous Goliath of chitin and silver.

The gigantic spider ignored her. It carried objects in two of its arms, things from Mrs. Krazinski’s house— wooden ducks from her vast collection, old quilts, picture frames, a teakettle. As Jane wrestled the smaller spider, struggling to bludgeon the thing to a pulp while she tried to get her sword arm free of its net, the huge one stretched to the ceiling and affixed these objects to Mrs. Krazinski’s strangled form, winding thread about her, connecting ducks and clocks all around her like some kind of bizarre cocoon.

To Jane’s horror, the spider lifted its fangs and pierced the cocoon, filling it with a dripping green fluid.

Jane threw all her weight at the first spider, pinning to the ground. It squirmed beneath her as she used her teeth to break the fibers binding her arms. Her sword was free.

She ran at the huge spider and pierced its belly. It hissed, green spittle flying. But it did not die. It only enraged.

The massive thing shot ropes of sticky, stringy spiderweb from its abdomen with such force that it knocked Jane into the wall where she remained, strung up.

The first spider returned to its work, spooling Krazinski with her belongings, while the second began to cocoon Jane in a similar fashion.

Except that Luna ran in just then.

“Leave my mom alone!” She yelled. She held her sword like a bat, and aimed to strike the smaller spider— but her crocs were slippery from the wet outside, and she slid across the kitchen linoleum instead, diving head-first into the massive spider’s legs and bringing the whole thing down on top of her.

It was a scramble for both of them to right themselves. The huge spider was faster than her. Suddenly she was being lifted into the air by her shirt collar, an enormous silver leg above her, enormous silver jaws dripping venom below.

“Spiders, spiders, make amends,” Luna choked out. The big spider stopped short of her face. “I *said*,” she began to speak louder, “*Spiders, spiders, make amends.*”

Both of the spiders now turned to her, beholding her with something like curiosity, if such a thing was possible for arachnids. The one that held Jane released her, and the big spider let Luna fall to the floor as it backed onto the cloth rug. Luna continued:

*“Fix the seams and fix the ends*

*Mend what is broken,*

*that which is spoken:*

*That door frame,”* she pointed to Mrs. Krazinski’s front door, which Jane had pulverized thoroughly in her entrance.

The spiders stood still. It was impossible to tell what spidery thoughts went through their minds. Luna’s heart hammered against her rib cage.

Luna nearly threw up from the wave of relief that washed over her when the spiders turned towards the door. They pulled from their abdomens thin silvery strands of silk, which their delicate legs spun and wove about the door frame. Not only did they fix the hole that Jane had made— they patched up scuffs and loose boards all over, working like professional carpenters, fusing wood and iron with the strange power of their silk.

When they weren't trying to kill her, their movements were beautiful to watch.

Luna sawed her sword through the net of silk around her, cutting herself free. When the spiders were finished, they turned to look at her— she held the shortsword tightly, trembling.

“Good job,” she said. “You’re done! You can chill out now, guys. Everything’s fixed.”

The spiders lingered beneath the threshold for a long moment, and one appeared to glance at the other. Then, all at once, they unraveled before her. The white morning light from the yard blazed upon their carapaces, and something in their image loosened, like a thread had been pulled from the loom of their existence. They shrank and shrank in the white light until they were only the size of dimes. The tiny white spiders slid up their webs and anchored themselves to the corners of the door frame, disappearing into the thin shadow behind it.

Luna cut her mother free first.

“I can’t believe that worked,” Mom said, peeling spiderweb from her pajamas. “I’m lucky you’re smarter than I am.” She hugged her daughter tight, leaving threads of loose webbing on Luna’s clothes.

“I thought that maybe they were doing bad stuff because they were bored,” Luna replied. “Like maybe they just needed a task.”

“Well, you were right, and I was wrong, and things aren’t looking so good for Mrs. Krazinski right now.”

They turned to the hanging form of Mrs. Krazinski, cocooned in threads beaded with wooden ducks and throw pillows. Was she even alive in there?

Mom cut her down and lay her on the kitchen linoleum. There was a solid chance she was going to be just goo. But Mom opened the cocoon anyways.

Inside, Marina Krazinski slept like a stone angel. There was something almost pretty about her when she was asleep, which Luna had never once observed during the woman’s waking hours. Mom lay her on the sofa, and Luna prepared her some weak tea from her pantry, and arranged some graham crackers on a plate. Mrs. Krazinski began to stir and rouse.

“What are you doing in my house?” She asked, when her eyes opened.

“Luna came over to apologize, and we found you passed out on the couch,” Jane explained.

“Oh. How embarrassing.” Mrs. Krazinski sat up. “It’s my allergy medications, they make me drowsy.”

“That’s what I thought, but Luna insisted that we stay to make sure you were okay.” Jane smiled at Luna, who had actually begged her mother to just leave as soon as they determined Krazinski wasn’t dead. Mrs. Krazinski ate the graham crackers and drank the tea and said she felt much better.

Finally, Mom gave Luna a meaningful look and asked her if there was anything she’d like to say to Mrs. Krazinski.

Luna grimaced. Krazinski’s eyes were on her, bereft of malice, merely expectant and sleepy. The truth was, Luna *was* sorry. About the spiders. But not about anything else.

“I just want to make things right,” Luna said. Mom nodded. “I need to be better. Otherwise... the wrong things just go wrong in a different direction.”

“That’s alright, Luna,” Mrs. Krazinski said, yawning. “I accept your apology. I’m suddenly so tired again— I’m afraid I’ll need to kick you folks out.”

On the drive home, they stopped at the Espresso Cabin at the edge of the hardware store parking lot and got hot chocolates to celebrate their survival.

Mom sat on the red plastic lawn chair outside the Espresso Cabin, legs splayed out, slunk into her seat. It was a white foggy day, and the air and earth was damp and cold. The cold wetness soaked through their clothes and skins and into their bones, but the hot chocolate warmed them inside.

“It’s a mistake to try to fix everything,” Mom said. “You’ll go crazy thinking that way. You’re too much like my sister.”

“Did this kind of thing happen to her a lot?” Asked Luna. Mom rarely brought up her sister. Luna sensed that there was some soreness there. She was desperately hungry for any and all stories about her biological mother, but it seemed to tire Jane to speak about her.

“Aurora never got into trouble,” Jane replied. “Not with teachers, at least. Everyone liked her too much. But she was always on thin ice with her own conscience. I’d fix all the evil in the world if I could, but I can’t, and that’s why I can sleep at night. My sister was an insomniac.”

“I sleep just fine,” said Luna. But that wasn’t entirely true.

Luna's nights were haunted. There were always dreams. They were vast things, like continents that swallowed her up in their sprawling geography, sometimes strange and dark, sometimes bright and wild. She dreamed of immense planets, looming above her, drawing near. She dreamed she was a little black rabbit in a red world where the sun was not a sun at all, but a golden owl, circling her in the sky. She dreamed about this woman called Aurora who gave birth to her—a lion standing like a woman, ten feet tall, in a dress made of lilies, with a fire-red mane that turned to flame and ash at the edges. Her face was hidden behind a white rose. She dreamed of doors in the clouds. She dreamed of fields.

For Luna, sleep was like being trapped inside a movie. The images she saw never meant anything when she awoke, but she could never shake the feeling that they were true somehow—real things, somewhere, in some way, that she'd peeked at before they were ready to be seen.

The night after they rescued Mrs. Krazinski, Luna dreamed about the night sky.

She stood on a grassy hill, watching constellations move. Draco and Orion were locked in battle, while the planets all around them swirled like fish in a bowl. There was a tall man next to her who she'd never met before. He gazed unblinking into the open abyss above, his eyes mirrors reflecting the stars, his skin obsidian-black, his dark hair so long it touched the earth.

"It was a mistake," he spoke in a deep voice, like a sound from the core of the planet. "There's no order to any of this. Does that make you afraid?"

"Will the man kill the snake?" Luna asked him, pointing at the battle above.

"Yes. And the snake will kill the man. This is always happening. This happens forever. It's all protons and neutrons. I've seen the edge of everything. I know how it ends and where it goes."

Luna and the man watched the battle rage on for awhile. The sun rose and fell, though the sky around it remained black.

"Are you showing me this for a reason?" She asked.

"You came here," he said. "You had a question."

Luna tried to think of her question. But she couldn't recall it now.

"She saw the edge of the world, and it made her afraid," said the man. He said it like it was the answer. But she didn't know what she was supposed to ask. And then there was a sound

like the sky cleaving, and Orion's sword cut the snake's belly, and milk-white starlight spilled forth, washing out the sky with its brightness as it fell to the earth.

When Luna awoke, thunder rolled across the bay, muffled by deep dark clouds of snow. It was the first snowstorm of the season. There would be many more before the winter was over.

Luna returned to school the week after, and, to her surprise, Wilson was there, too.

"I thought you got expelled," she said.

"Me? No, I just got suspended, like you," Wilson shrugged. "Everyone's been saying I got expelled, but that's just because Ms. Krazy flipped out and yelled, *Wilson, you'll never see the inside of this school again once I tell the principal about this!*" He did her voice and wagged his finger.

"Oh," Luna said, feeling extraordinarily stupid and suddenly tired. "Good. I was worried."

Strangely, history classes became more bearable in the coming months. The spider venom didn't seem to have any ill-effect on Marina Krazinski. Perhaps, Luna considered, she was already so full of venom herself that she'd become immune. Or maybe the spider's digestive fluid had worn away at the woman's hardest bits, softening her somewhat, smoothing out her deepest frown lines and nastiest fragments of her personality. She stopped giving out candy on Fridays and started giving out extra credit for reading about history in your free time, or visiting historical museums. She was nicer to Wilson. When he fumbled during his timed Historical Heroes presentation, she told him he was doing a good job and to just try again; first time was a freebie.

She still chided Luna for drawing in class, but she stopped ripping up notes.

Soon, there was nothing to make fun of anymore, and Ms. Krazy pants faded into obscurity, becoming a mere collective dream of the student body. And, for the rest of the year, everything was okay.