

The gloom of the woods couldn't be the only reason people said this area was cursed. Her village told her that the deeper you went the more dangerous it became, hauntings and otherworldly creatures would grab you up! So they'd told her when she was just a young kitten. That had been enough to dissuade Teri at the time.

For her time in the village she had heeded their warnings, except for one time during her teens when in a rebellious fit she'd stormed off into the forest. She'd got lost and spooked by noises within an hour and retreated, plagued by nightmares for a month afterwards. By the time she slept soundly she felt she was past the need to go there just to prove a point.

Now, a few years had passed and the thought still burned in her mind. She felt hooked, compelled to return. She'd made it deep into the trees before without seeing anything abnormal, nor was she haunted in any way she could tell unless you could count that urge and the short-lived nightmares.

She'd come back to the village one last time to wish it farewell but before she could truly leave it in her past she had to explore the final mystery.

As far as her guardians knew she was on the road back to the city to start up her career but the woodland creatures would have been able to call out her lie, had they any desire or means to.

The forest grew gloomier, as though she were entering a place cut off from the sun, lit by an odd half-light instead. Something broke the natural forest spread before her, stone pillars, no higher than her waist. They had been arranged like a boundary and carved with ornaments that had spider-like motifs.

There was something different about the depictions, too. Bulky creatures, much different than the tiny arachnids that were all people saw locally. There was a path clearly marked out, though, and she followed it. The stone was old, weathered. It led her through the trees until she broke into a clearing.

The unnatural feeling struck her immediately, she let out a gasp, sucking her breath in. Before her the trees all looked bent and bowed, as though they were in a circle paying homage to what lay in the middle, a rocky construction, like some shrine or temple from an ancient age.

Though her heart fluttered with concern, she couldn't help feeling satisfied too. There was something to find here after all.

Following the pathway led her to an open doorway and crossing within the arachnid motifs grew more prevalent, inlays of metal shone in abstract eight-pointed shapes. The squared off walls surrounded her, more ornamental reliefs on show, yet otherwise the room itself seemed empty beside a door frame at the back and a hole in the ground, a smoothed ramp leading below the earth, constructed that way and as old as the ruin itself. Putting off delving deeper for now, her attention turned to the single connected room at the rear.

The wind shouldn't have been able to touch her here, yet she felt a gust and heard an inaudible whisper. "Who's there?" She replied, calling out. The feeling of a presence grew, weighty and hefty around her, yet there was nowhere for anyone to hide without being seen.

"Ah whatever." She said, speaking out her confident bluster to empower herself into venturing deeper, moving through to the back room. Her eyes were snapped to a low pedestal. Upon it, a pair of open-toed boots rested, long heels adorned the back. They looked leathery, though decorated with gold, sharing that spidery pattern. Not only did Teri think they'd look great on her, they even looked her size.

With one last peek around the room to make sure she was actually alone, she stepped out of her shoes and socks. Sitting down, she pulled the new boots on. They were a snug fit, smooth inside, letting her paws glide into position and then feel a firm comfortable embrace all around.

She had to push herself up the wall to help stand but already they felt worn in, almost meant for her. The pointed heels clacked loudly as she trod on the stone, testing them, twisting her ankles to peer at them. "Oh, hell yeah." She proclaimed in victory.

Striding out she moved back toward the entrance room, planning to explore the building further, she always thought dungeons with loot were a thing of make-believe but here she was, maybe she should figure out if explorer was a viable job in this day and age.

Her heart skipped a beat, her fur stood on end, instincts feeling the growing presence and identifying danger ahead before her eyes and mind caught on to what they saw.

A black shadow, swirling as though made of fog stood between her and the way out, eight ribbons of mist flowed around it, eight red spots, glowing eyes, met her own. "W-what the hell!?" Teri squealed, the shout catching in her throat as a light squeak.

"My Priestess." A voice replied, old, matronly yet firm. "It has been too long since your line ascended to their duty."

"Get away!" She yelled, not understanding its blathering. She took a few steps back retreating into the room. The shadow didn't move.

"Why do you fear your goddess, you, who are chosen?" The voice intoned again.

Teri's feet stopped suddenly, feeling something soft. For a moment she thought she'd trod in her discarded clothing yet this squished and stuck, thick webbing on the floor grasped her boots, clinging to the sole and heel.

"Back off!" She insisted as the black shade flowed nearer. "Don't touch me!"

The shade ignored her protest, yet moved slowly, it circled around her, out of the way, a tangible pressure touched her shoulders. "Calm yourself, you are in my presence, you are safe. The rest of your raiment awaits you."

The path to the door was clear, Teri shrugged the feeling off her shoulders and ran. Her boots squished as they stepped, despite the sticky webbing it barely felt like it restricted her, yet when she tried to step onto bare stone it cloyed, stretching, preventing her feet settling down and then when it reached its peak of tension it reeled her boots back.

“My webs do not restrict you, my chosen, stay within their embrace.” The shade insisted, though the tone was somehow different. If she couldn’t step off the web she’d have to ditch the shoes. She reached down hurriedly only to find a golden anklet ringing the top of the boot. Had she missed that? It felt too tight to shake off and the shade was on her tail, too close for comfort. “Come, join me below.” It whispered.

“Screw you!” Teri said, wrenching her foot free from the path only to nearly trip. Her eyes scanned the floor, the webbing led out of the door anyway! She was sure it hadn’t been there before, but- without further contemplation she ran along the thin path, boots slapping wetly.

“Do not leave.” The voice murmured, the shadows drifting effortlessly in pursuit. Teri reached the door at a running speed only to be caught by an invisible barrier.

“What?!” She gasped, she was stuck to a web that only lightly glinted in the air. “Get back, monster!” She cried, feeling the shade drift closer. The black ribbons stretched out, circling Teri’s arms and body, plucking her free from the web and then into the air. She felt nothing yet she was hovering in their grasp, no longer touching the ground or the wall.

“Get off! Help! HELP!” She cried as the shadow pulled her down toward the ramp, descending deeper.

The further down it went the more tangible the ribbons felt, two slid up to her face, muffling her shouts, twisting in her mouth. When she went to bite, her teeth felt thick, sticky webbing. “Mnnh!?”

The misty quality of the shadows dissipated as they went in deeper. She struggled against the apparition that was holding her yet it didn’t even slow until it had passed into another chamber.

Teri was placed back on the floor, though held bound, still. The ribbons cradled her head, turning it toward a dress. White and black cloth, lined with more gold, the colour following into accessories that hung in the air from spider’s web. Despite her fear and struggles, Teri felt a desperate longing for what she saw.

“Mnhhh?!”

The shadow dropped her, the ribbons slipping away leaving only the mouth-web behind, yet it now blocked the door, the form was more defined. A black wreathed body, eight limbs complementing the ribbons, dressed in a robe seemingly built of a single twisted sheet.

The entire floor was caked in the webs, the light suction held Teri steady as she staggered away and brought her hands up to rescue her mouth. Her fingers got stuck within, unable to get a hold of the web, for a mercy though, these threads snapped, freeing her digits before they became truly trapped when she pulled them away.

“I see now.” The shadow whispered. “You are of the line, yet you know not why you are here. No matter. I have waited long for your arrival, I will teach you. Accept the gift I have given you.”

Her instincts still cried out in terror, the shadow’s aura seemed on the edge of impatience, yet she would be damned if she’d do what it ordered. Teri approached the dress, turning her back on the shadows. Her coat and shirt preceded her skirt before she hesitated, torn between playing along any further and showing this shadow what she thought of it. She took up the dress and threw it to the floor. It flowed through the air, gold ornament’s clattering against the stone.

She heard a hiss of anger before the shadow swept forward. Teri was carried on a wave of force, twisted in the air and pressed against the far wall. “Mhh, hhhmmh!” She mewled, stubborn resistance warring with instant regret.

The ribbons lashed out, brushing her exposed arms and smearing them to the wall in more webbing. She kicked her legs out yet soon felt a thick wad of web that she was inevitably squishing into and caking her feet within.

A blurred mass of shadow reached to the dress, flowing where strands of white webbing had clung to brush them away. The fabric was lifted, pressed against Teri, looped over her head and then tugged down.

As the material passed her vision she saw more of the shadow, seeing it clearly now as though the regalia had given her the ability to sense properly. A spider woman stood before her, four of its arms pressed together in a meditative repose. The feline stared into a face that was featureless beyond the brightly glowing eyes.

“You are my priestess.” It said, speaking out in cold anger, “Yet you must learn your role, as such you must face the discipline that has been lacking in your life. When the rage and fear in your heart has diminished I shall complete your attire.” She said, one of her spectral ribbons brushing one of the golden accessories. “When that is done, you will have some power over my embrace, yet you are bound to me. You accepted the covenant, you will keep it.” She insisted.

More webbing swung from the ribbons, the spider goddess attached her ‘embrace’, the sticky webs, to the furred backs of Teri’s legs, the bared segment of her shoulders and then all eight ribbons flowed together over the cat’s face, enveloping it, muffling Teri away from her senses.

“Accept my gifts and become greater than you could have been. Or spurn me and decline your rewards. I shall give you time to think.” The spider mused before pulling away, she would walk this land again, her motherly heart would prefer her priestess as an ally, yet after centuries of being forgotten, she would take what she needed one way or the other. Teri was left in the chamber, to reflect on the spider’s words, stifling web to be her only company until the spider deigned to let Teri make the decision between willing service or rebellious payment.