

“Fine, if he won’t go and ask, I’ll have to do it myself.” That had been the thought that led the nimbat Fidget to fly from her companion’s side. It should have been a simple trip to a nearby village followed by a quick interview with the locals if they seemed friendly or some stealthy spy work if not. However, distracted by her own grumpy mutterings, Fidget hadn’t noticed the dark bank of clouds until they’d blown in and the heavens opened up with a sudden downpour.

The storm whipped up dangerous winds, knocking the nimbat higher in the air than she had meant to go, tossing her around like a scrap of paper, fate being so cruel as to prevent her attempts to dive to cover or land somewhere sheltered.

By the time the winds lightened enough for her to gain a semblance of control she was blown far off course and drenched besides. A towering building caught her eye, solitary and thick with ivy, yet still light glimmered from within. She needed shelter, once she’d dried off and waited out the storm she’d find her way to Dust, probably meeting him at the village. With that decision in mind her wings, already wearied from fighting the wind, took her closer to it, looking for an opening.

Presumably because of the weather there was none to be had up high, shutters clasped tight over windows and curtains drawn against the darkness. Though a back door had been blown ajar, rain drenching the stones. She made it to the dark aperture, walking in and finding a shaded corner where the wind still whipped the occasional curtain of rain, yet she was mostly spared from the elements. As her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, she noticed several shelves, stocked high with materials that seemed more at home in a magical shop or, given how old some looked, a museum.

At any rate it was probably bad that they were getting this drenched but the Nimbat was too small to help push the door shut. Instead she looked around for something that might cover them, finding to her relief, a few thick dust covers, folded in the least wet corner.

Not only could she quickly pull those up to cover the shelves but they seemed absorbent enough that, having done that, she could use them to towel herself off a bit. Far from ideal but at least she was no longer dripping.

“Gotta get out of this rain.” She mumbled to herself, taking one last look around the room to make sure the covers were likely to stay in place. Her eyes found a ladder in one corner leading up into the tower and another trapdoor in the floor beside it. A basement? Well if it wasn’t flooded it might be more acceptable to hide out there than intrude in someone’s home.

Fidget moved to the hatch, grasping the edge and tugging it up.

It elicited a groan of effort before flapping open, a dim light shone from within, showing wet floors and a small puddle, yet overall it had been secure from the elements. She hopped down the first two rungs of the ladder, each one nearly her entire height from the next and looked about.

The glow came from a shaded oil lantern on a desk, lighting up the room a bit more. The room seemed to glitter at her eye level, bright shining sparkles hanging in the air. Oh yeah, this was definitely some magical stuff. Had she found one of those hermit wizards? If so, hopefully it was one of the eccentrics and not one of those exiled practitioners.

It was still cold down here, perhaps she could risk going up, if she was spotted she had leverage for them to let her stay thanks to her work in preserving those materials.

A loud gust of wind reached in, even catching her and shaking the ladder that she clung to, a slam resounded as the door above was snapped back into place by the wind, followed by more noises, tumbling sounds, the tangled sheets falling with their supposedly protected cargo each bump making the nimbat wince.

The hatch above her slammed down with hollow thunks sounding as more of the supplies fell to bundle on top of it. “H-hey! No!” She said, scrabbling up the ladder and smacking the underside. The thuds barely shook it, whatever had tumbled had completely obstructed the hatch. She was stuck down here then.

Feeling all the more glum, Fidget clambered down the ladder, making it to the ground. She was far too tired to want to fly up, though it seemed with the hatch closed it wasn’t as chilly as she thought. “Ugh, this stupid day keeps going from bad to worse.” She said out loud.

“Oh? Is that right?” A voice said suddenly in her ear as several shining red eyes opened up from the shadow.

“Gaaaah!” She yelped, jumping into the air, flapping in spite of her exhaustion away from the ground. “Who’s there? Show yourself!” She said, feeling something stroke her back and wings from above. “Get off!” She yelled, trying to dip back down but whatever brushed her held on with a sticky cling. She couldn’t see what had touched her and found herself plucked back into the air by the unseen force.

“Mmmh, bad place to run to.” The voice said, still in the corner. Four long limbs unfolded, arms with claw tipped fingers and soft paw-like feet, as the red eyed creature stood up, thick black fur camouflaged it in the shadows. Though the slow stretching limbs seemed imposing at first, when it was on full display the standing creature was only two thirds of Fidget’s height.

“What is this?! Get off me!” She yelled kicking and swinging at the air, feeling more brushes but when she looked, there was nothing there except the glinting lights, yet they were bending close to her- oh no. It hadn’t been glitter at all. Instead, nearly invisible strands of webbing had been hanging in the rafters and now they were caught on the nimbat, lightly clinging to her arms but quite heftily snaring her tail and wings, thick enough that she could see the white stickiness building up.

“That *was* my bed.” The creature said, the dark colouring and shade made it hard to see, though as it moved Fidget was able to spy an extra abdominal mass standing out behind it, akin to a spider’s. In a surge of speed it clung to the wall, scampering up it until it was level with Fidget. “Do you always make a mess of every room you walk into?”

“I didn’t mean to! If you hadn’t noticed there’s a storm going on!” Fidget replied in a stuck up tone, sniffing as she looked into the creature’s face. It had a toothy grin that seemed more mirthful than scary when up close. Furthermore it only had four red eyes, the other spots were just markings. “I’m sorry about your bed but you shouldn’t have scared me like that!”

“It’s my duty to scare intruders off. Though usually they try upstairs where my illusions work better.” The dark furred thing said. “A good thing you stumbled for me. I’m not much of a fighter.”

“Why would you need to fight? I’m just looking for shelter!” Fidget hissed back.

“Making a mess, destroying ingredients and then climbing deeper in? Sure.” The spider-aspected imp trod seemingly into the open air, using more invisible fibres to get closer to Fidget. “I recognise a rival familiar when I see one.”

“Rival? F-familiar?!” Fidget stammered in outrage. “I’m not a familiar, I’m an equal partner thank you very much!”

“Your leg, please.” The creature said, reaching out a hand.

Fidget’s mind was doing somersaults, this thing was accusing her, messing around, seemingly interpreting it all wrong and *now* it wanted to help. Ugh, definitely one of the eccentric wizards then if it kept a pet like this. “Now we’re talking.” She said, extending the limb.

The imp’s hands rubbed along her calf and shin and she felt a ping as it released a few clinging web strands. She sighed in relief, it talked teasingly but maybe it was here to help. “Other leg.” It directed, repeating the procedure, freeing up the limb from the clinging strands. “Well, that was easy.” It said before both hands clasped at the air and tugged. Fidget’s legs slapped together, paw-to-paw, pulled by the strings like a puppet, only for the imp’s hands to rub over them again, this time there was no release of tension, instead a thick white spread followed as it rubbed webbing over Fidget’s feet, binding her shins.

“What?! What’s the big idea! You stop that right now!” She said, kicking and thrashing her already united legs.

“Oh yeah, or what, you’ll dangle more aggressively at me?”

“Lemme go! I’m not an intruder!” She insisted.

The imp scoffed, tilting its head. “Hah, how’s that? You were invited then?”

“Well no-” Fidget mumbled, waving her arms again at the familiar as it wrapped over her knees and started at her thighs. “Hey! Stop it!”

“Oh hush, trespasser, I’m not allowed to show mercy to intruders, only deal with them.” The imp said, with a smile that hinted it might be a lie but even if it wasn’t true, it didn’t regret such an imperative.

“Let go of me! I know some magic and I can hurt you!” She threatened.

The imp chuckled. “There are many reasons that won’t work, not least because you already looked exhausted when you climbed down.” Its legs moved from the invisible threads, one paw squashing against Fidget’s wrapped up knee and the other settling on her stomach as it turned around.

The spider-like abdomen danced near her face, it was mocking her! That does it! She decided to prove her words, jaw opening wide before she surged forward, biting the creature.

“Gyaaaah!” It yelled, tumbling from her. It caught itself in the air, rubbing its abdomen in pain.

“Haha, I warned you!” Fidget said smugly, eyes slowly widening with worry as she realised that even with the imp pushed away, she couldn’t exactly break free. It turned an anger-tinged face to her and began to climb swiftly up. “Uh oh... Wait, wait! It was just a joke! I didn’t pierce skin or anything, see?”

The familiar was having none of it, it rose up above fidget and then hovered behind her head, out of sight. The silence stretched, making her more nervous by the second until she couldn’t stand it anymore. “Wh-what are y-aaahg!” It had been waiting for her to run her mouth again before diving in with two hooked loops of webbing, one between its arms the other between the legs.

The forceful shove prised her lips apart, spreading her jaws as they were anchored in place before it crawled around in front of her, hanging in the air, letting her watch it pull together a large wad of webbing. “W-waigh!” She tried once more, earning a smug chuckle as it finished up the ball and shoved it into the logical place, between her teeth. The squishy mass gunked up her lips, even before the imp swiftly wrapped around her muzzle and cheeks with more webbing, leaving her nose to the air. “Ghhmhh! Gmmhghghh!” She yelled in muffled fury as the familiar repositioned itself as before, planting its weight on her suspended body and turning to her wings.

“This is much easier to work with.” It chuckled over her protests. Her arms still gave some fight, not least because active cooperation and at least passable manners hadn’t earned any respite. Still, it had her at a disadvantage, leaving her limbs suspended over her head until they were wrapped in sleeves of webbing for the familiar to cut from the rafters and stick to her body. “Now, trespasser.” Her captor began after a while. “I’m not sure why you came here and

I'm terrible at interrogation. That's usually for my master to deal with. But you owe me a bed, and sooo~." It left the sentence hanging, finishing off a coating on Fidget's wings, tucking them down into her back and then it severed most of the connecting threads.

"Gwhahhhmmh!" Fidget yelped as only her trussed up legs were still attached to the ceiling. Her head hung downwards as she tried to pull her arms loose and kick free. The imp let her bounce as it lowered to rest near her before its hand pushed and started to spin her. In next to no time the spinning was already dizzying, yet Fidget knew what was coming even before she felt the slow and steady stream of webbing. It started high, right at her bound paws and traced the web wrapping down with a tauntingly leisurely pace. The claw tipped digits on the imp's hands poked between her legs from behind and in front, ensuring that while the mass of web was thick enough to mask her fur, it was tucked between shin, thigh and knee frequently enough to show where they were.

Fidget's head was swimming, losing focus before the web had reached her hips. The imp took care to ball up her hands uselessly before wrapping and tucking over them, the cocoon growing until it finally pressed over her shoulders and chest to join the gagging stretch.

The spinning ceased. A few thick bands were slapped onto her shoulders and then she was righted, more or less. Still held at an angle but a more comfortable one with her head higher than her feet. "You nimbat's do have pretty eyes, I'll give you that." The imp said, making Fidget squirm. If this familiar knew what a nimbat was surely it was just bluffing, then. "Shame that I'll have to hide 'em!"

"Whmmh!" Fidget squeaked but it was no use, the spidery imp gathered its last surge of webbing and smeared it on, wrapping over the nimbat's face, even covering her ears until her orange and white fur was hidden in a cocoon of grey, thick webbing. A weight fell on her chest and lap, making her bounce softly as the imp let out a loud yawn.

"All that work takes a toll on me. I'll see you soon, my interloping bed." It said before relaxing back, using her suspended body as a hammock.

"Ariadni? Ariadni! Answer me already!" An elderly man's voice echoed around the basement.

"Mmmh?! Mmhhh Hmmmllmh!" Fidget groaned and then shouted, having been unable to sleep like her captor. Hearing a new voice came with a new thread of hope.

With loud yawn the spider-imp turned to the side. "Oh, hello, Master. What's the problem?"

"Ah, good, you're safe. It looks like that storm damaged the tower and store room. Anything to report?"

“Hmm, there was some clattering, unfortunately I couldn’t do much to fix it, sorry Master.”

“Harrumph.” The old wizard said, straightening out his robe. A short incantation echoed as he cast a spell to instantly dry and make them presentable. The lack of residual magic suggested the truth to Fidget, this wizard wasn’t in the room with them but projecting from the upper floors.

“Mmmmh!! Mmhhhhmgphhh!” She tried to yell, desperate to be heard but there was no indication that her muffled pleas were even audible.

“Oh, one other thing. I met a swordsman on the road. He said his nimbat companion had vanished into the storm. Orange, white fur, black markings on the face. About the same size as you. Ringing any bells?”

“No one entered the front door while you were gone, Master.” The imp said dismissively.

“Hrmm. Well, do keep a lookout and let me know if you see anything. Anything else to report?”

“I did a spot of redecorating after the storm blew some changes my way, but otherwise no. A simple rest will have me ready to serve again.”

“Alright, well I’m home now. Disable the alarms in my study, would you?”

The imp waved a hand, doing so as the communication cut off. “It sure is a shame for you that my Master has such poor hearing but is far too proud to admit it. Oh well. Maybe I’ll let him know there’s an intruder here for questioning once I’ve fixed up my bed. But given how comfy these hours have been, maybe I’ll keep this new one. It’ll be our little secret.”

“Ghmhh!!” Fidget yelled, squirming and kicking with one last fitful burst. But it was useless, in her smooth silken prison, she served only to tire herself out and make that warm wrapping all the more stifling.

She wouldn’t give up hope, and when she was inevitably saved she’d show this Ariadni a thing or two! Between the wizard and Dust, there had to be someone who’d notice something was up. If not it looked like she’d be stuck until she was also fully recovered. Unless the imp was truthful when it implied that there were reasons her magic wouldn’t help her here...