

His Beta 374

Chapter 374

Zane

Spider shifters?

“I’m not a shifter.” The spider laughed again. Now it was the size of a cantaloupe, which thankfully seemed about as big as it was going to get. It looked me over with its eight sparkling eyes and waved one long front leg at me. “Just an enclavian spider.”

“You read my mind?”

“I could see the horror all over your face,” she said.

“But yes, I read it. A little. You were sending very loudly. It’s a bit rude to invade someone’s thoughts, so we spiders generally only do it amongst ourselves. I do want to reassure you, though, I am not a shifter.”

I still took a step back and looked around the stairwell for any signs there might be more potentially giant spiders. “I’m Zane.”

“I’m Bellissa. I’ve heard of you. We all have. The wolves who came to Brightsky with Malachi’s

granddaughter. Welcome.”

“Thanks.” This was kind of awkward.

“Out exploring are you?” Bellissa waved her leg again

“Are you looking for Greyson? Sorry. That was a bit rude. You’re just sending so loudly, it’s difficult not

to

receive.”

“I guess I am?” I said. “I mean, I was just kind of wandering around. Getting the lay of the land, so to

speak.”

The spider dangled lightly from a thin string of webbing that attached itself to a high-up corner. She

spun gently in the breeze from a nearby ventilation duct. “It’s always good to understand where you

are...

Would you like me to find Greyson for you? I can put out a call to my friends.”

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“Uh...” I looked up the stairs and then down again. I could spend the day wandering around without any

purpose, or I could hang out with Greyson, assuming this spider could help me find him. "Sure."

She let out another tinkle of that light laughter and said after a second, "Oh, he's far, far down in the

pearl

fields."

"In the what, now?"

"The underground lakes in the caverns that the enclave was built over," Bellissa explained cheerfully,

pointing with one leg to the stairs going down. "Some of them house fish, while others grow edible

water plants. And of course the clams and mussels provide food for the ducks and chickens on the

farm level, and the pearls are sold to wealthy human collectors so the enclave has income. This entire

complex was designed

to be self-sustaining."

"For safety?"

"In the event of an attack, especially a siege, yes. But generally, also in case that its residents

determine there's a need to completely go underground. Not just physically; I mean if the leadership

council feels like it's imperative for us all to withdraw from the world.

Hide for any indeterminate amount of time.”

“Why would they decide that?”

She waved both her front legs. “I suppose if there seemed to be some kind of natural local or global disaster. I’ve heard stories about an enclave-”

“This one?”

“No, an older one.”

“How many are there?”

Bellissa swayed lightly. “I don’t know, really.

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Enclavian spiders can only talk to others in the same enclave. But I’ve heard there were at least a few other enclaves. And one of them went on lockdown during the humans’ Black Plague. They didn’t re-emerge until sometime after the invention of the airplane. It must have been quite shocking for them all.”

“How often has this enclave gone into lockdown?”

“We spiders live short lives compared to most of you, so I can say that it hasn’t happened in my lifetime

and it won’t mean much,” Bellissa admitted. “But because we live such short lives, we also share

generational memories. So far as I’m aware, no, Brightsky has never gone into lockdown. But isn’t it

comforting to know that you’re safe here and could be for the rest of your life and the lives of your

children, your children’s

children...”

“I don’t want to stay in here forever,” I interrupted. “I sure don’t want my descendants to have to, either.”

Bellissa chuckled. “I suppose not. We spiders like our dark corners and our sheltered spots. I’ve heard

the sun is horribly bright. No, thank you. Ah, my sister Agatha says that she would be happy to tell

Greyson you’re on the way, if you like. So he doesn’t leave before you get there. It’s a terribly long way

down via the stairs, and

I’d hate for you to make the trip without reason.”

“That would be great. Thanks. I’ll just head down that way anyway,” I said, already turning. I might as

well see the pearl farms whether Greyson was there or not.

worry.

“Have fun!” Bellissa called after me. “Oh, and in case the enclave suddenly goes into lockdown, don’t

The alarms will all sound and the lights will go off, but you should still be able to breathe all right. At

least, I think so.”

I paused with my hand on the railing. “I thought you said Brightsky had never gone into lockdown.”

“Well,” said Bellissa cheerfully, “there’s always a first time!”