

take it from the top

by iztopher

They say every villain is the hero of their own story. Even the tiny, annoying ones.

Ishti and I joked about how someone should write fic about That One Spider, so. here it is.

Content warnings: Major character death, if you count a spider getting killed. Repeatedly.

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Your first death is slow and painful. You fight for your life, scrambling up the stick that's stabbed at your innards. Fangs meet flesh. You almost win.

But you don't. And by your second death, you no longer stand a chance. The short, gnarled stick has been replaced by one sturdier and sharpened to a point. One slash sends your body-turned-corpse flying from the ground. That death repeats enough times to establish a rhythm, enough times to feel gratuitous. At least it's quick.

When your seventh death approaches, you can tell it will be different. You don't know how yet, but the difference in vibration on the wooden planks, the appearance of a second vague towering shape, somehow even taller than the first, warns you of the shifting danger. Crackling lightning strikes you with pinpoint accuracy before the first human can so much as unsheathe the sword you've come to anticipate.

You live longer, after that death. Not long enough to mate, not nearly as long as you'd like, not even long enough to be killed by some other predator, but longer than you've come to expect. You die squashed under a sandal.

Time passes strangely in this jungle, if indeed it ever truly passes at all. One moment your guts coat the wooden bridge you've made your home, the next they're back in your prosoma where they belong and filled with mosquitos. Sometimes you can scarcely tell if it's a day or a life passing you by. The air

will begin to cool and dry as if caught by the winter monsoon, as if winter is a concept that could apply here, and then -

Then it grows heavy with warmth and moisture, back to the summer months. An arrow pierces straight through your abdomen. A cold, manicured hand yanks it from the bridge's planks and turns you over in its fingers, though you're not alive to feel it.

At the beginning, you thought that maybe you could outrun death. Leave this bridge, this jungle. But no matter how far you travel, no matter what traveling cart you cling to, what unsuspecting backpack you burrow deep inside, when the bridge wants you back, you're there, ready for the parade of sandals and sabatons and leather boots. So you try your best to fight it. It's useless, of course - you're slashed through by a sword wider than you are.

When you next wake, the procession of footsteps has dwindled down to two. You feel the rumble on wood as they approach, then see - nothing. No looming figures, no gleaming weapons. You feel the swish of a cloak draw up a gust that nearly sends you flying across the bridge, but there's no one it's attached to, no swath of fabric you could see and climb onto. The bridge creaks, then stills.

The next time you die, you don't come back to life. But that's okay. It's two years later, after winter has come and gone and come and gone again. A good life for a spider. You're killed by your mate, not a heroine, in service of your offspring hatching into a jungle where the seasons change with time.