



Arachnids

CLAIRE KIMANI

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Claire Kimani



A Story Shares book

Easy to read. Hard to put down.

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Contents

Title Page
Copyright Notice

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven

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Chapter One

Anorae opened her eyes, her mind fogged over with sleepiness.

"Lazy one! Foul creature! You deserve to be called everything the Cowards call you!" an angry voice behind her rasped. It was the unmistakable voice of Headmaster Ilianus. He approached her angrily and proceeded to punish her. "A terrible thing, incompetence is. The sin of Demons, laziness is!" he growled.

Anorae hissed in pain and tried to move, but Headmaster's pinchers sank deep into her skin. Burning venom surged through her. She felt her side grow wet from the liquid dribbling out of her wound, just above one of her eight legs. He had to punish in the same spot he did last time? she thought ruefully. It was just starting to heal.

"T-terribly sorry, sir. Won't happen again," she muttered. He continued to stare at her expectantly. Other classmates began to snicker.

Conora, an especially nasty piece of work, whispered, "Way to go, two-legs."

Some of the meaner students at the Academy mockingly called Anorae "two-legs" because of her interest with the Cowards, who had only two legs.

Anorae felt her face heat up like the hot embers from home, in Amber. Thousands of men worked there turning fire into power for the country. They sang all day to keep themselves entertained.

In Amber, women smiled and gathered food for the little ones and the children watched in awe. But many of them were poor and in debt to the wealthy government officials, so they paid back their debt by giving their children to the Continuum Academy. There, spiders from ages three to eighteen learned how to keep the past and future separate and put the present in between.

The punishments were so severe at the Academy that there had been absolutely no mistakes thus far. How Anorae wished to go back home, to feel the warmth of Uncle tending the coals...

Headmaster Ilianus cleared his throat.

Anorae glanced up at him, startled back into reality. "May...may the silk string you produce never run dry; may you never fall into your own silvery nets," she said quietly. The standard blessing that she had been taught to say was exactly the opposite of the thoughts that were going through her mind. May you be eaten by the Cowards and buried in pomegranate marmalade. Oh, and may Enoch arrive sooner than planned and pluck all eight of your legs off.

Smiling to herself at this fantasy, Anorae turned back to her work, uniting the past and future and untangling the threads of time.

Chapter Two

Imani swore loudly as she leapt out of the shower. Shivering from the sudden cold and horror, she grabbed her towel and, hair dripping down her back, skittered out of the bathroom. She needed to get far away from the spider lurking in the corner of the bathtub.

Her father was shaving in front of the mirror in his room.

“Dad,” she said, a tone of urgency in her voice.

“Mmm?” her father murmured.

Imani shivered again. “We have a...situation.”

Only then did her father turn to look at his daughter, dripping on the floor, almost pale with fear.

* * *

Ping...ping...ping...ping...

The fourth-period bell dinged, signaling students that class had begun, as Imani, Annie, and Harley conversed before math class.

“You’re saying it was the size of a quarter?” Harley asked skeptically.

Imani’s eyes widened.

“Yes, it was a gargantuan spider! And if I was any closer, it would

have... it would've... touched my back." She shivered, remembering its hairy legs.

Harley bit his lip thoughtfully. "It probably wouldn't have bitten you, though. Maybe crawled into your hair, then—"

"Stop! I don't even want to think about it," Annie said, turning the same shade of green as her eyes. "'Thank goodness your dad killed it.'"

Harley had dark red hair that he tied into a tight bun at the top of his head, and he usually wore colorful plaid button-down shirts and slim-fitting black pants. His signature feature was a black gem earring in one ear. He was a misfit at their school. His motto was, "I'm gay, not contagious."

Annie had chin-length blonde hair and bright green eyes. Freckles dotted her face like stars. Imani was dark-skinned and dark-haired. Her parents were from Kenya, and she inherited her mother's knotty, can't-be-tamed African hair.

"Get out your journals, everyone! Today, we're battling systems!" the teacher called. A collective groan filled the classroom.

Chapter Three

Eight glassy eyes stared up at her achingly. Anorae was standing over Enoch, who was crumpled on the strange, smooth floor of the slippery, rectangular chamber. The “chamber” had curved edges, wet surfaces, and high walls. She thought she’d heard the Cowards refer to it as a bathtub.

Enoch’s embers, the shapes on a spider’s back that usually give off a healthy glow, were dim and flickering. This, of course, was a sign of dying. Spiders may control time as we know it, but they cannot stop death.

“You... you were always my everything, Anorae,” Enoch murmured. Then he gave a labored laugh. “Remember how fascinated you were by the Cowards? How everyone teased you and called you two-legs, but you ignored them? So brave, my Anorae.”

Anorae thought of the Cowards, the tall lumbering one who crushed her Enoch. Look at what my idols have done to my beloved Enoch. It’s all my fault, she thought. I’m the one who wanted him to visit!

“Why? Why do such terrible things happen to such good people?” Anorae wailed, her embers flaring icy blue out of grief. The pain in her chest was worse than any time she had ever been Punished at the Continuum Academy. “What,” she whispered, “what will I tell your mother back in Amber?”

Enoch smiled weakly. “Tell her that she can give my things to the

little ones. They...they'll be fine...without me. Oh, my god, I can feel the..."

Anorae screamed "NO!" as Enoch's eyes rolled up mid-sentence and his embers flickered, and then died. He fell limp in her arms and his body grew cold, but Anorae didn't notice. All she could feel was pain.

Not the hot, throbbing pain of a headache. Not the sharp, stabbing pain of fear; not the cold, clammy pain of sickness. It was the deep, heart-rending pain of grief and anger, stronger than all the rest. And this pain could only be relieved by one thing: revenge.

Chapter Four

Imani pulled on her snowflake pajamas, her eyes darting around the room, searching for spiders.

“No need to be paranoid,” she told herself out loud. “Dad killed it.”

But what if it had babies? a voice in her head snarled. What if its egg sac is in your bed and at exactly midnight, it'll burst open and the spider babies will skitter around and enter your sleeping body? Imani's skin grew goosebumps and she shivered violently.

Brushing her teeth in front of the mirror, she thought of Sean, the quiet boy in her class whose sand-colored hair was wavier than the ocean. She practiced smiling into the mirror, trying to show all of her best features at once. Oh, that's not right, she thought. Try fixing your hair. She pushed it all to one shoulder, glanced at the mirror, then sighed.

“I wonder who Sean likes...” she mused. “Probably Hannah.” Hannah Nabors, the blonde, skinny cheerleader who every guy had a crush on, was a complete and total jerk to everyone outside of her friend circle, of which Imani was not included. Imani rolled her eyes and stepped out of the bathroom.

Five minutes later, after thoroughly checking her bed for egg sacs, Imani slid into bed. Turning off the light, she stared up at the ceiling and soon fell asleep.

“Imani, I need to use the bathroom!”

Imani rolled over and squinted in the light. Kinari, her seven-year-old sister, had flashed her reading light into Imani's eyes.

Imani groaned, and, covering the light with her hand, said, "Then go. Who am I to keep you from using the bathroom?"

"It's dark in there," Kinari said.

"Fine," Imani huffed. "I'll go turn on the light if you let me sleep."

Chapter Five

Anorae, as one might imagine, was utterly terrified. The thought of the tall Coward that crushed Enoch almost made her turn around, but the thought of avenging his death pushed her forward.

“I can’t let Enoch’s death go unnoticed,” she told herself as she neared the exit of familiar darkness and entered the unknown world of filthy, disgusting light. Light was a garish and unfeeling thing. She knew that.

Chapter Six

Kinari spent a rather long time in the bathroom. Imani grew worried. "Hurry up," she called.

From the other side of the door, Imani heard her sister whisper, "Don't flush this one down the toilet. Please, Imani."

Imani opened the door. There was Kinari, crouching on the floor with a spider. Kinari did not share Imani's fear of spiders at all.

Imani jumped backwards, then said, "Flush it. Quick! What is this, an infestation?!"

Kinari said, "This one is different. Hold her, Imani. She's gentle."

Imani's eyes widened and she shivered involuntarily. "I-I will do no such thing. You know how I am with spiders, Kinari."

But, despite her terror, she inched closer. Her heart thudded. She reached out. Her skin prickled. She picked it up by its hairy legs. A horrible shiver rushed down her spine. And then, their eyes met.

Chapter Seven

As Anorae stared into the large brown girl's eyes, her urge to kill slowly drifted away. The Coward was gentle, unlike the tall murderer of her dearest friend. Enoch may be gone, but it wasn't their fault, she thought. She didn't like it, but...she understood.

""I suppose that not all Cowards are really evil,"" she murmured. As the girl set her down, Anorae felt something new ignite in her embers. She felt forgiveness.

As Imani looked into the tiny spider's many eyes, she felt her fear evaporate. She decided that she needed to let this spider free. Maybe this spider has a family, she thought. She seems unhappy about something. How could anyone kill someone with a family?

""Kinari, you were right."" she whispered, ""Let's set her free.""