

The Spider Family

By Emily Cameron
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Mrs. Scuttle, she proud mother of three little spiders, lived in an old village with broken-down brick buildings and tall oak trees with long, thick branches that looked as though they would snap off any second and fall onto the crooked roads. She had built a lovely web between two branches of a particularly ancient tree, and liked her comfortable home. Plenty of flies buzzed by and got caught in the web, the sticky silk trapping them. No annoying children could reach the web and destroy it, so Mrs. Scuttle was perfectly safe. The spider was quite snug and cozy in her peaceful home. She was a widow, for Mr. Scuttle had been killed by a terrified child as he had crawled down the tree, but he was always still alive in her tiny heart. Mrs. Scuttle was not really dangerous—she was simply a black spider, a harmless one, really, and she didn't know why everyone was afraid of her. She had three sweet spider children—Tanya, Alice, and Mathew—who were exactly the same age and were very kind to any other spider they met. The four spiders all lived happily in their home, always busy doing something—patching up a hole in the web, slurping blood out of an insect, or just talking to one another. Life was wonderful for the spiders . . . mostly.

I say mostly because there was one problem for the Scuttles, and that was winter. Huge snowflakes slowly and swiftly fell down from the sky and plopped onto the spiders' heads. Spiders do not like to be hit by gigantic white things, for that gives them a dull headache and the snowflakes will melt, leaving an icy puddle at their feet and making them soaking wet. The weather was freezing cold, and insects did not come out so the spiders did not have any food. The snowflakes would sometimes land on their web and would destroy it, and they would have to make a new one, which is not easy when snow keeps falling on your head. Tanya was once knocked off the web as a great gust of wind blew by and she fell, screaming dreadfully, onto

the hard ground, breaking her two most useful front legs. She was not able to walk for months, and it caused trouble for everyone. They all worked their hardest to keep warm and get food, but they could hardly do either.

The Scuttles lived, not quite happily, because winter was difficult, but most of the time cheerfully. Mrs. Scuttle had more problems than her children did. She didn't like it when they mentioned Mr. Scuttle. When they did, she had a sudden, painful feeling, like a bullet being shot through her heart, and for the rest of the day the word "dead" kept nagging in the back of her mind. The family was forbidden to say things such as "Dad" or "Father." But every once in a while one of the children forgot this rule and said something about Mr. Scuttle. Mrs. Scuttle felt rather sick for the rest of the day if they said his name.

One dark night, Mrs. Scuttle stared sadly at the velvety black sky. It was bleak and empty except for the moon. The spider's eight eyes traveled over to that large round ball hanging quietly in the sky. It was a full moon tonight, glittering and shining like a huge white gem. Mrs. Scuttle looked closer and smiled. The craters in the moon made a sort of misshapen, ugly face, gazing back at the spider—no, *glaring* back at her. It looked unhappy and miserable, exactly how Mrs. Scuttle felt. She felt unhappy and miserable. She wanted to tell the world that she was sad, sad because her wonderful husband was dead, sad because winter was so difficult, sad that everybody hated spiders. She wanted people to love spiders. If they did, then maybe her Mr. Scuttle wouldn't have been killed by that dreadful child and humans would let spiders sleep inside a little bed for bugs or something in winter. But no. Everybody hated spiders, and it seemed it would stay that way. And besides, even if they decided spiders were good, Mr. Scuttle would still be in spider heaven. Mrs. Scuttle started to cry. Since she had eight eyes,

she had formed a puddle of tears at her feet by the time she stopped. She lay down in her web next to her children and fell into an uneasy sleep in which she tossed and turned all night. She dreamed about Mr. Scuttle crawling down the tree, screaming as a child saw him, grabbed a stick, and flattened him to a pancake with one simple wave of the stick.

In the middle of the night, she woke up, her forehead damp with sweat. She took a deep breath, closed her eight eyes, and opened them again slowly. "It was just a bad dream," she muttered to herself. She lay back down on her web, but couldn't go back to sleep. Finally she got to her feet, crawled to the edge of her web, and jumped. A long, soft line of silk trailed out from her abdomen. After making several inches of silk, she stopped. Dangling upside-down on the end of the line, she began to decide what to do. Perhaps . . . encourage a fly to land on her web if she could find one? No. There were barely any flies in the winter, much less in the middle of the night. How about . . . think. Just stay here and think? Nah. Boring. Oh! An idea popped into her head. She could explore. With no wide-awake, mischievous children to worry about, it would be a perfect idea to explore.

Mrs. Scuttle let the silk trail out from her abdomen until she reached the ground. She clambered off the silk and scuttled over to the cracked black road. She began to walk down the street. She passed a bright blue house. Here she knew the Smith children lived. The youngest child, Annabelle, had killed Mr. Scuttle. The mother spider scowled at the house and moved on. She hurried past the Dewberry household, where Mr. and Mrs. Dewberry spied on the neighbors with their unusually long necks, and the Dewberry children ran to their mother to tattle on kids who merely *touched* them. Nobody really liked the Dewberry people.

Mrs. Scuttle stopped for a moment to stare at Dr. Crude's rickety, broken-

down brick house. Dr. Crude was a mad scientist. There were rumors that he was crazy and absent-minded. His house had once been a beautiful, lovely building until one day there had been a huge explosion caused by one of his potions. His house had turned into that horrible house because of the potion. Mrs. Scuttle had always wanted to go inside his house ever since then, but he had boarded up every crack he could find so no animal or person could come in.

Suddenly, Mrs. Scuttle heard a soft creak. Instantly she dived inside a pile of raked dry leaves. What was that creak? Was a person coming? Mrs. Scuttle listened for any footsteps, but she heard none. Whew! No people. Just—just something had been creaking. Mrs. Scuttle crawled out from inside the leaves and glanced around. *CREEEAK*. There it was again! But there was no human or any living thing in sight except for the trees. *CREEEEEAK!* Again! It was longer and louder than before. Mrs. Scuttle observed everything intently. Ah-hah! The front door of Mr. Crude's house was ajar. The scientist had forgotten to close the door! That's what had been creaking! Mrs. Scuttle quickly ran over to the door and did not hesitate to go inside.

She was in the living room of the house—except it didn't look anything like a living room. A thousand bottles covered the only couch. The TV was barely visible behind ten huge glass wine bottles. Inside all of the bottles was a silvery substance. The bottles were all labeled “Makes you smaller. Drink this liquid and you will become as tiny as an ant.” Mrs. Scuttle was amazed. If she drank this bottle, she would become as tiny as an ant? Cool! She thought for a moment, shook her head, and decided she wouldn't drink the stuff. She didn't want to become as tiny as an ant.

She walked into the kitchen and gasped. There were huge metal

cauldrons covering the floor with bubbling green liquid inside them. The cauldrons were all labeled “Makes things explode. Pour this on something and it will explode. Doesn't work on metal.” Mrs. Scuttle finally knew what potion Dr. Crude had used to explode his house. She chuckled, rolled her eyes, which was quite scary because she had eight of them, and decided she would not even touch that stuff.

She moved on to the dining room. Here there were tiny little bottles the size of a spider's head. Inside the bottles was some rippling red liquid. There was only enough in one bottle for a spider to swallow in one gulp. There was a teensy-tiny label on each bottle that read, “Makes you bigger. Drink all the liquid in the bottle and it will make you the size of the continent Australia. Drink two bottles and you will be twice the size of Australia. Drink three bottles and you will be as big as the earth. Drink four bottles and you will explode.”

The spider frowned. If she drank some, she would become huge and she could tell the world not to hate spiders. That would be perfect! She grabbed four bottles—one for each spider in the family—hurried back to the living room, and left out the open front door. Out on the dark road, she raced over to the Y-shaped tree where the spiderweb was.

“Children!” cried Mrs. Scuttle. “Come, come!” There was silence for a moment. Mrs. Scuttle waited. “Kids! Spider-honeys! Could you come down? I'm waiting for you at the bottom of the tree.” She waited in silence. No answer. Growing worried, she scrambled up the tree trunk and found the web. It was empty. “Children?” called Mrs. Scuttle. “My dears! Where are you?”

“BLAAAAAAAH!” screamed a tiny voice. Mrs. Scuttle whirled around and gasped as a small black ball whacked her in her face. She did a backward

flip, landed on her belly, and screamed. A black spider was swinging back and forth on a line of spider silk. The spider jumped off the silk and landed with a flourish next to Mrs. Scuttle. “Momma!” wailed the spider. “Hi!”

Mrs. Scuttle sat up shakily. “O-o-oh,” she muttered. She glared at the spider, who turned out to be Tanya. “What were you thinking?” Mrs. Scuttle scolded. “Now I have six black eyes!”

“BLAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” screamed another voice, and Mrs. Scuttle was hit by another spider, who turned out to be Mathew. “Hi, Mom!” grinned Mathew.

“Mathew! You should know better than to—”

“BLAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” shouted yet another spider. It was Alice. Mrs. Scuttle ducked just as Alice sailed over her head. “Yo, Mom.”

“Alice, Mathew, Tanya! I'm very disappointed in you guys. Now you shall not have these bottles I found.” Mrs. Scuttle showed them the bottles with the blood-red liquid inside.

“Blood!” wailed Tanya happily. “Oh, hooray!” She made a grab for one of the bottles, but Mrs. Scuttle snatched it away.

“Not so fast. You must promise not to ever do that again,” Mrs. Scuttle said. Her children nodded.

“It was a silly thing to do. I thought it up and it's all my fault,” Mathew said sadly.

Alice nodded. “It *was* his fault.”

“Hey!” Mathew snapped angrily. Tanya muffled a quiet giggle. Mathew glared at her. “*Hey.*”

Mrs. Scuttle cleared her throat. “Alright then, children. Would you like me to tell you what is inside these bot—”

“Blood!” shrieked Tanya impatiently. “Give me the blood already!”

"It's not *blood*," Mrs. Scuttle corrected primly. "It is a magic potion. See, if you drink one bottle, you will become gigantic, and we can tell the world that spiders are not the slightest bit evil, or bad, or horrifying, and everybody will love spiders and give us squashed dead flies!" She laughed joyfully. Images of the happy smiles of gentle children, the blood of a dead insect, and the giggles of the villagers were whirling around Mrs. Scuttle's mind. She could practically hear Mathew slurping up blood, Tanya smacking her lips noisily, and Alice dancing around happily as she giggled. It would be so wonderful if she had a gulp of that red liquid.

Then again, there could be problems. People would be terrified of giant spiders roaming the earth. Hardly anybody liked spiders when they were normal-sized and tiny, and they would definitely *not* like abnormal, gigantic spiders. She'd probably destroy all the houses and skyscrapers in America, and she'd crush every single human with her harmless little thin legs. Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to be giant, but *still*, she had to tell everybody not to hate spiders, didn't she? She frowned thoughtfully.

"Mom."

Mrs. Scuttle thought she heard somebody say something, but she was too busy thinking to worry about that. Should she be gigantic, or not? Should she take the chance to be huge, or just stay normal and live her difficult life? With her luck, they'd be on the news, and the reporter would be announcing, "Four gigantic spiders the size of Australia have requested that everybody like spiders, and we have accepted the request. We shall now send anybody who kills a single spider to jail for two months. We have a jail for children, also, so you kids out there, you'd better listen and not kill any spiders." That would be great, but would it happen? She didn't think. . . .

"*Mom.*"

Somebody called her name again, but she hardly heard. The worst thing that could ever happen was that Mrs. Scuttle's head would stick above the clouds and into space, and she couldn't breath. She'd have to hold her breath forever and she'd drift off into space and land on the smallest, coldest planet, Pluto, where she'd freeze to death. Oh, wait, she probably couldn't even *fit* on Pluto, she'd be too big, and that idea was just too crazy to become true. She chuckled to herself, admired her wild imagination, and thought about tumbling over slowly in space, her cheeks puffed out as she held her breath, which would be easy for her, since she was so big and could store a lot of air in her lungs..

“*MOM!*”

Mrs. Scuttle, startled, leaped a few inches into the air and landed on her back. She squirmed around for a minute, managed to get to her feet, and smiled at her children. Tanya's eyes were fierce and glaring. “Give us the blood, Mother!” she wailed. “I cannot take it anymore! I have not had good blood for *ages*, Mother, don't you understand? And what type of blood is it? Mosquito, perhaps? Or is it fly blood? Oh, I don't really care, Mother, just let me have a *taste!*” She threw her two front legs into the air angrily.

Mrs. Scuttle rolled her eyes. “It's not *blood*, my dear child,” she explained gently. “It's a magic potion. I stole it from Mr. Crude's house.” Her children glanced disbelievingly at one another, and leaned forward eagerly to hear the story. Mrs. Scuttle smiled. “Well, you see, I went out for a midnight stroll and saw he'd left his front door open, so I crept inside and stole these four bottles! Children, don't you understand? We could have a taste, and become gigantic! And we could tell the whole world not to hate spiders, and, with a little luck, they'd listen to us and give us squashed dead flies and—”

Just then Tanya attacked her. “AAARRRRRGGG!” Mrs. Scuttle screamed, as

her daughter threw her whole body on her. She was knocked over, lying on her back, with Tanya struggling crazily on top of her. “Blood!” shrieked Tanya. Mrs. Scuttle was hugging the four bottles to her chest, with all eight arms wrapped tightly around them, and Tanya was trying to pry her mother's arms off the bottles. Mathew and Alice were standing, amazed and shocked, behind them, frozen. Mathew was first to make a move. “Tanya, get off Mom!” he yelled, and grabbed Tanya's back. He pulled hard, she yanked on the bottles, and finally, the all four bottles flew into the air.

The three spiders struggled to their feet and watched as the bottles' caps popped off, and the red liquid spilled out. A drop of liquid landed on Mrs. Scuttles' head, and another landed on the edge of the web, and another splattered on the middle of the web, and the last hit Tanya in the face, knocking her off her feet. A bit of the liquid leaked down Mrs. Scuttle's eight-eyed face and dribbled into her mouth. Oh, no! She'd drunk that liquid!

She waited for a second. Nothing happened. She did not instantly start growing like she'd expected. She could see Tanya slurping the red liquid off her lips crazily, and Mathew and Alice were licking her face. Finally all the spiders sat down, their tiny bellies filled with the strange red liquid. Nothing happened to either one of them. None of them grew bigger. Not an inch.

“Bummer!” Mathew wailed angrily. “It didn't make us bigger!”

“It didn't even taste very good!” scowled Alice, disappointed.

“It's not blood!” Tanya cried sadly.

“I *told* you it wasn't going to be,” sneered Mathew, planting his two front hands on his hips.

“Hey!” protested Tanya. “How was I supposed to know it wasn't?”

Mrs. Scuttle did not stop her children from arguing with each other. Her

eyes were half-closed and she was getting sleepy, but not too sleepy that she couldn't think. She lay down in the middle of the web, closed her eyes, and thought. Since she had such a wild imagination, she had no trouble getting on a topic to think about. She thought about herself drifting away in space, gazing at the huge, colorful ball in front of her, Earth. She could easily see her children roaming earth, stomping and crashing every building with their harmless feet, and squashing every human in the world. She would have laughed softly to herself, but she was already asleep.