

## Elisa and the Spider King

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Elisa was afraid of spiders.

When she saw even an itsy bitsy spider in her room she'd scream. She insisted that her father remove every spider from the house.

She thought about spiders every day, from the moment she woke up until going to bed. She used a flashlight to check for spiders at night, and looked under her bed in the morning...when she wasn't feeling afraid about what she might find there.

One night before bed Elisa saw several spiders: a big grey one, a small one with red stripes, and a tiny black one. Her father was busy scooping them up with his spider-catching cup and tossing them gently outside.

That night Elisa had trouble falling asleep. All she could think about was the spiders she'd seen. Finally, she fell asleep.

But she had a terrible nightmare. She was wandering alone in a field and all sorts of spiders appeared. There were big ones and little ones, grey ones, red ones, spotted ones, stripey ones and pure black ones. They all had long, spindly, hairy legs and they all looked very scary!

Although Elisa was afraid, she walked on through the field through the mass of spiders, as if pulled by some unseen force.

Finally she came to the opening of a dark cave. She stopped and hesitated. But then she heard the most kindly, deep voice say "Come in, please."

The voice was so gentle and inviting that Elisa entered the cave without thinking.

It wasn't like any cave she'd ever seen or heard about. It was warm and cozy instead of cold and damp. It was bright and sunny instead of dark and gloomy. The walls were brightly decorated with multi-colored strands of cobweb and what looked like family portraits of spider families. There were mommy spiders, daddy spiders, teenage spiders, kid spiders and little baby spiders.

"Welcome to my realm," said the gentle voice that Elisa had heard outside.

She looked up and was surprised to see the largest spider ever. He was pure black with red accents here and there. Although his legs were long and spindly, Elisa could sense a gentleness and playfulness in his eyes.

“I am the Spider King,” continued the large spider. “What can I help you with?”

Now Elisa was really surprised. A spider helping her? And what was she doing here anyway?

“I...I don't know why I'm even here,” she spluttered.

“Why, you called me, of course,” said the spider king.

“Well, no, sir, I did not,” said Elisa trying to be polite so as not to anger the large spider in case he turned out to be a nasty beast.

“Follow me,” said the spider king. He led Elisa through a passageway to a small chamber. There stood a revolving globe. Little lights flashed on it. Some were brighter than others.

“Look here,” said the spider king, pointing to a light in Elisa's hometown. It was the brightest one.

“I'm afraid I don't understand,” said Elisa, beginning to think that maybe she'd done something wrong and meeting the spider king was some kind of punishment.

“Our spider alert globe picks up signals,” said the spider king, “when you think about spiders all day long we think that you're calling us so you are magically transported to our realm.”

“You mean, I was brought here just because I thought about spiders all the time?” asked Elisa.

“Well, yes,” said the spider king. “Have you ever heard the expression: ‘you are what you eat’? Well you are also what you think. So, if you think about hamburgers all day, your life will be about hamburgers, if you think about ponies all day, your life will be about ponies, and if you think about spiders all day, well, then you're brought here to the spider kingdom so that you can get to know all about us.”

The spider king then gave Elisa a tour of his kingdom. He introduced her to his subjects and to his family, the spider queen and prince and princess. He also explained that only a few types of spiders were dangerous to humans and that most spiders actually helped humans by keeping the insect population under control.

“After all, isn't spiderman a good guy?” asked the spider king, looking at Elisa with his soft brown eyes.

Elisa said goodbye to the spider king and the other spiders and returned to her warm bed.

The next morning she woke up and said to her dad: “Shall we go outside and catch some spiders with your spider cup so that we can play with them?”

Her father was really surprised.