

The Spider and the Corpse, Or, The Corpse and the Spider

by Nathaniel Tower

The corpse lay silently in his open casket. Dressed in the finest silken suit. Italian. Rubber skin pulled over his bones. Arms folded in eternal prayer.

--He looks so peaceful.

--Yes, nothing can hurt him now.

--Such a shame. So young.

--Well, he's with God now.

A spider unnoticed pitter-pitter-pattered on the corpse's leather shoes.

Please get off my shoes, the corpse said peacefully, trying to shake his stationary leg.

What do you need shoes for anyway? the spider wondered aloud.

The corpse thought about it for a moment. In case I need to go anywhere, he told the spider.

The spider laughing continued to pitter-pitter-patter up the corpse's rubber leg.

Please get off my leg, the corpse told it nicely.

I may go where I please. This suit is made from my webs, the spider replied.

I think you are mistaken.

No, you are.

Although bothered by the spider the corpse did not break from its reverent pose. After all it wanted to leave a good impression on the onlookers.

--He was a great man.

--Indeed. We will miss him.

The spider continued on its journey betwixt the suit and the skin, up the shin, past the knee, through a thicket of dead hair follicles, into the corpse's private region and beyond.

The corpse winced. Please go away, he pleaded with his crossed arms.

I have every right, the spider answered with his eight spread legs.

You have no rights. You are just a spider.

And you are just a corpse.

But I was once a man.

And I was once an emperor.

I don't believe you.

Your belief means nothing to me.

You have no proof.

Nor do you.

I have my mourners.

Fine. Then talk to them.

Grandma. Grandma! the corpse shouted at his grandmother.

She wept but did not respond.

--It's okay, her husband told her as he rubbed circles on her back. He lived a good life.

See, see. I lived a good life.

They're just saying that. They always say that.

The spider approached the folded hands.

No. I did. I had a good life.

What was so good about it?

The corpse thought a moment and chose his words carefully. You'll see. I'll go to heaven.

Ha. The spider laughed. They turned an emperor into a spider. Imagine what you'll become.

The spider stopped. The folded hands rested too heavily on the chest for him to pass. He needed to find another way.

You were probably ruthless and cruel.

Who are you to judge?

The spider on its new course tickled over the ribs that poked the corpse's rubbery side.

Where are you going?

I'm going where I can.

Well, I'm going to heaven.

Ha. Why aren't you already there?

The spider crawled across the arm and emerged into artificial daylight at the corpse's hand.

--A spider, a spider!

--Kill it! It's on Henry.

The spider trampled quickly across the corpse's suit jacket, avoiding the gentle shoes and swishes from the onlookers. He reached the rubber skin that had been pulled over the face.

The swats continued, becoming more violent.

Stop, stop! cried the corpse to the onlookers and not the spider.

Their fists became blind.

The rubber skin became dented.

The corpse cried out in pain.

Only the spider, crouching under the corpse's shirt collar, heard, then continued his eternal crawl in the darkness.

