

WESTLY

A SPIDER'S TALE



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

BRYAN BEUS

FOR REVIEW ONLY

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DO NOT DUPLICATE



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SHADOW
MOUNTAIN

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To my mother and father

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Summary: Westly is as ready as his caterpillar friends to keep their beautiful territory free of lesser creatures as they await the day they turn into delicate butterflies, but when he finally emerges from his cocoon, he discovers he is vastly different from his friends.

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Chapter 1

Near the base of a dead volcano at the edge of a distant island stood a small glass menagerie. Clouds passed overhead, lit at the edges by the rising sun. Shielded from the outside elements, the plants, trees, and bushes grew thick and green inside the square building. Sunlight filtered through the domed ceiling and illuminated a chandelier hanging in the center of the room. Brilliant gold and white flowers covered the chandelier and filled the space right up to the edge.



As the morning sun rose, light streamed through the high menagerie windows, illuminating both the wide-open mouths of flower cups and the abundant angel ivy covering the chandelier. Waterfalls trickled from leaf pools, and the stream they formed traveled all the way from the top of the chandelier down to its edge and then tumbled out of sight. Exotic flowers

grew around the crystals, creating an unorganized but beautiful garden.

At the highest level of the chandelier, several young caterpillars splashed in puddles and slid on slippery leaves. Some played under a sprinkler attached to the menagerie's water pipes.

An energetic and chubby caterpillar with a delicate jaw stood on a ledge in front of a dozen other caterpillars who were watching in anticipation. She held two leaves as if they were wings. "This is me, in style," crooned Sara, waving the leaves on her back. She leaped from her three-inch perch and landed with a bounce on her fat belly.

Another caterpillar, with round cheeks and a double chin, pointed at the bud of an exotic flower and, with a heavy nod, proclaimed, "When I get my wings, the first thing I'm going for is nectar straight from the tap!"

"I just want to soak my wings in the sun," said a third, stretching her arms out wide. They ran together in circles around the garden, leaping on top of each other, singing songs, and swinging from their caterpillar threads—all but one.

A scrawny purple caterpillar sat near the others, but he paid his silly friends no attention as he gobbled down a leaf three times his size. His eyes and teeth were bright, but otherwise

he was so dark and withered he looked like a charred piece of wood.

“Come *on*, Westly . . . I mean, Your Majesty,” Sara said. She twirled and landed next to him with a plop. “It’s our last chance to play as caterpillars. Tomorrow we’ll all be delicate like the rest of the butterfly grown-ups.”

“*Last chance* is right,” Westly said, wiping the corners of his mouth. Speaking loud enough so all could hear, he exclaimed, “It’s our last chance to juice up before our change! Tomorrow, once our wings have taken shape in our cocoons, they’ll be that way forever. That’s why you should be eating with me, instead of goofing off. Seriously, Sara, you should sit next to me and have some of my angel ivy,” suggested Westly, tearing off a piece.

Sara had a soft spot for her scrawny friend. She sighed. “Yes, Your Highness.” She gave a halfhearted salute before grabbing some ivy. She opened her mouth to take a bite.

“Dirt eater!” a classmate yelled, pointing at the empty air.

“Where?” Sara dropped her ivy and jumped to her feet.

There was nothing to see, but the other caterpillars still formed a mock battalion. Assuming it was part of a game, Sara played along. She gasped, putting her hands to her cheeks, and then called out, “Intruders! Fire the sprinklers!” And with that, she ran off with the other caterpillars.

“Hey! Hey, everyone!” Westly shouted after them. When they didn’t respond, he grumbled, “They’ll be sorry tomorrow when their wings are smaller than mine.”

The others charged playfully into the leaves. Westly sighed, hurriedly finished the last few bites of his meal, and marched after them. They scurried through the bushes, tiptoed across a narrow bridge, and wove their way through the leaves, all while throwing things at their imaginary invaders.

Just as they passed out of view, Westly heard a soft cry of alarm. He perked upright and bounded toward the sound.

As he hurried down the path to a familiar clearing, Sara darted out from behind a leaf. She placed a hand over Westly’s mouth to silence him, and then pulled him back into the leaves, where all the other caterpillars were hiding.

Westly gave Sara a scowl. “What are you—”

“Shh, Your Majesty.”

“But why are we . . . oh!” Westly’s eyes shifted to the clearing, where a moth was sleeping in the sunlight.

A quiet gasp came from the caterpillars.

“There really *is* a dirt eater here!” whispered Westly. He stood, threw his arms in the air, and shouted, “Everyone! Drive him out! He doesn’t belong here!”

In a wing beat, the moth awoke. His body went rigid when

he heard the charging caterpillars, and he fluttered into the leaves.

“Charge!” yelled a caterpillar.

“Yeah, let’s catch him. It’ll be fun!” yelled Sara as she bounded after the fugitive moth.

His friends, ordinary caterpillars, inched forward as fast as their small chubby bodies would allow. Every now and then, they used the threads they produced to help themselves down high ledges.

Westly, however, was anything but ordinary. Instead of scrunching and pushing like an inchworm, he scurried in a smooth fashion, his feet stepping not two at a time, but alternating from side to side like a blindingly fast centipede—and he could leap farther than anyone else. Stranger still, Westly could sling his thread and swing from leaf to leaf like a trapeze artist. His abilities raised some eyebrows, but since he was the son of the king, the others simply accepted the oddity.

The panicked moth made several attempts to fly away, but Westly blocked him from reaching the top of the ivy, and each time the other caterpillars forced the moth closer to the outer rim of the chandelier.

Upon seeing the ledge and a chance for freedom, the moth spent a final burst of energy, outpacing all but one of his relentless pursuers.

Westly was within range of the fleeing creature. The moth passed the last tuft of leaves and jumped into the open air, his wings outstretched. Before Westly reached the edge, he skidded to a halt. He watched the moth intently as it flapped frantically into the empty air below.

In one fluid motion, Westly lashed his thread to the ground and ran back a few paces just as his classmates caught up with him. They crowded around the ledge, watching the moth fly away.

“Aww, gnatters,” Sara moaned as she watched the moth drop to freedom. “Wait . . . Westly? What are you doing? Westly, stop!”

As the other caterpillars watched in shock, Westly dashed toward the edge and leaped into the air after the moth, his webbed thread streaming out from behind him “Westly! You’ll fall into the well!” Sara warned.

His face grim, Westly flew after the moth like a heat-seeking missile. Suddenly he realized where he was headed and his mouth opened in shock.

Far below the chandelier was a wide, black, and seemingly bottomless well covered with moss and creeping vines. Trails of steam rose from its depths and the wood holding the stones together was rotten and splintered. The ground surrounding

the well was dead and dry, empty of the green life that filled the rest of the menagerie.

Just as Westly drew level with the moth, he lost his nerve and missed his chance to grab his target. Instead, he zoomed down below the creature.

The thread trailing behind Westly caught a flower's root dangling underneath the chandelier. The sticky string twisted and Westly swung in a wide circle.

As luck would have it, the thread caught the moth and pulled him along as well. In an ever-tightening circle, Westly spun around one of the chandelier's bottom struts, wrapping up the moth as he did.

Round and round they went until Westly slammed into a clump of low-hanging roots and completely disappeared.

"Westly? Your Highness!" Sara yelled from high above. The other caterpillars peered over the edge to see if they could see their fallen prince.

With great effort, Westly untangled himself from the roots and shook dirt off his head.

"Are you okay?" Sara called.

Barely. Westly nodded. He looked down at the moss-covered well waiting to swallow him whole. He gulped and looked away. He spotted the dirt eater they'd been chasing,

tangled in Westly's thread. "I caught him! I have him wrapped up!" Westly shouted and began climbing over to his prisoner.

The moth struggled wildly against the thread, beating his wings and tugging with his thin legs. The more he tried to escape, the more entangled he became.

When Westly arrived, the moth finally slumped and lay still, panting heavily.

Westly boldly exclaimed, "You know you're not welcome here. The atrium is our area. You're supposed to . . ." He paused. The moth's wings were freshly tattered and chipped, and missing flakes were stuck in the tangled threads. Westly's face flushed as he realized that in capturing the moth, he had damaged his wings.

The moth growled, "I'd be happy to get out of this smelly palace if you'd just let me out of this murderous noose."

The young prince stammered, "I-I-I d-didn't mean to hurt you. I'm really s-sorry about your wings."

Westly felt a shadow of shame fall upon him—and then realized it was more than just a feeling; it was an actual shadow passing overhead. He and the moth looked up. Above them a majestic butterfly blocked the sun, the light illuminating its translucent wings like fire. The large butterfly fluttered into view—a monarch butterfly. Westly immediately recognized the

crown that adorned the butterfly's head and the velvet robe wrapped around his neck and shoulders.

"Father!" Westly exclaimed.

The moth shuddered.

"What in heaven's name?" the Monarch began, throwing his robe over his shoulder. "Is that a creature from the undergrowth . . . in *our* territory?"

The old moth harrumphed.

"And what are you doing holding him here, my boy?" demanded the Monarch.

"Well, um, it was an accident," Westly said. "I was only trying to chase him away." The Monarch turned from his son to the unwelcome moth. He puffed out his chest. "And what were you doing in my kingdom? You have no right to be here!"

The moth only struggled harder against his bonds.

"Get him out of here!" the Monarch commanded.

Westly carefully but quickly began to unwind his thread. He didn't want to cause any further damage to the moth.

The Monarch tapped his hands together impatiently.

Finally, the last of Westly's thread came loose. The moth wasted no time fluttering for the trees.

As Westly watched him go, the moth turned his head back. Their eyes met and Westly felt an electric thrill pass through his body, but he couldn't understand why.

“I’ll bet my spots he was coming to drink our nectar,” the Monarch huffed. He turned to Westly. “And a prince should not be mingling with riffraff.”

“I was just trying to—” Westly started, cringing.

“It’s not befitting a prince to be caught with such hooligans. Our subjects might start thinking you’re *friendly* with them, and that sort of rumor would spread like pondside moss.” There was nothing more to say, and Westly shrank further.

“Well,” the Monarch said, “I’m sure you’ll learn eventually.”

“Yes, Father. I promise,” Westly replied.

The Monarch put his arm around his only son. “I am proud of you, Westly. But come to me next time, child. The well-being of the chandelier depends upon us, upon the way we respond to threats like this. And someday it will depend entirely upon you. Understood?”

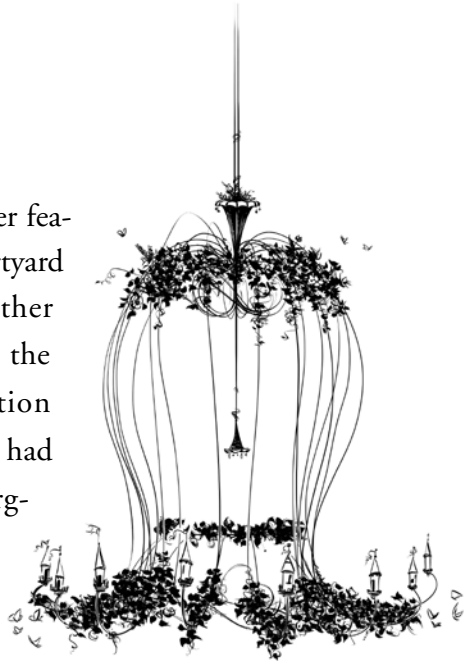
Westly nodded.

“Good. Now climb on my back and I’ll get you to the palace. I’ll expect you in the auditorium before the cocoon ceremony begins. Today is your big day!”

Chapter 2

The inside of the chandelier featured a large circular courtyard made from vines and other flowering plants. It was where all the butterflies gathered in preparation for the cocoon ceremony. Dinner had been served, and Westly was gorging himself. Instead of eating the richly filling rose petals or lily pollen, he had chosen the more common but nutritious greens.

Frankly, he was tired of angel ivy and milkweed, but he forced himself to keep eating. He ignored his classmates, who were too excited and nervous to eat sensibly. Instead, they gulped down sweet nectar desserts. Black-and-white butterflies offered



trays of white rose petals, lilac stems, and tiny purple amaranth flowers.

Sitting on leaves at the edge of the chandelier, the caterpillars nibbled bites from the dessert trays and pestered the adults with question after question about their ceremony and about how the transformation would feel.

A blue-spotted butterfly replied, “Stop worrying. This is the most important day of your lives. Enjoy the moment!”

Some butterflies uncurled their long noses to play like flutes, and others beat their wings in wild rhythms, shaking so that their thin antennae twirled around in hypnotizing patterns.

As Westly slowly finished another leaf, Sara noticed him sitting alone. As much as he had eaten, his little body was not as plump as one might expect. She inched over to her friend and said, “Prince Westly, I would be honored to dance with you.”

As Westly looked up, he clutched his stomach, his cheeks turned purple, and he doubled over.

“Are you all right?” Sara asked. She bent to look at Westly’s face.

“I’m quite all right, thank you very much,” Westly gasped, turning his head and wincing. Before she could reply, Westly’s

cheeks bulged and he ran for the exit, clutching at his thin crown to keep it from slipping off his head.

He ran through a tunnel in the ivy and emerged on the outer rim of the chandelier. He quickly leaned over the edge and relieved his aching stomach.

Suddenly, he felt an odd tingling sensation at the base of his skull. It felt like he was being watched. He clamped his mouth shut and looked up.

Outside the glass windows, the silhouette of a large bird stared down at Westly. Protected by the glass menagerie all his life, Westly had never seen a bird before. It was a very strange and dreamlike vision. *Are my eyes playing tricks on me?*

His stomach gurgled and he bent over the edge again.

A soft voice from within the ivy said, “Your Highness? Westly, are you there?” Westly wiped his mouth and clutched his stomach.

“There you are,” Sara said. “Are you all right? You’re missing the Silken Sisters, and they almost never play in public.”

Westly straightened up, stretched his arms, and smiled. “After tomorrow, I can command them to play again. You’ll just have to ask me nicely.” He winked.

Sara smiled and spun around on a leaf. “What were you doing out here?”

“Oh—um, I saw something and wanted to see what it was.

As a butterfly prince, it'll be my job, you know, to watch over the safety of the chandelier."

"What'd you see?"

"I—well—I don't know. It was up there." Westly pointed out to the atrium. "I'm going to investigate."

"You mean it was outside the windows?" Sara hopped to the ground, her eyes bright with excitement. "I've never seen anything out there. Can I tag along?"

"No." Westly shook his head.

"Why not?"

"Because it's probably dangerous."

"But there's glass."

"Still. I might die, you know."

Sara pursed her lips.

"I'm not joking," Westly insisted.

"All right, I believe you," Sara sighed, sitting down. "Can I wait here, Your Majesty, so you can tell me about it when you get back?"

"*If* I get back," Westly said.

"All right, *if* you get back?"

"That's a good question," Westly mused, running a hand over his thin crown. "The problem is—what if I don't *ever* come back? You'd be waiting here all night."

Sara raised an eyebrow.

Westly huffed. “Well, all right then. You can come along—”

She smiled widely.

“—and in the event of my untimely death, it’ll be your job to take my crown back to my father and tell him what happened. That way they can all write songs about how I died as a hero, defending our kingdom from outside invaders.”

“Okay!” she exclaimed, bouncing to her feet.

“Right. Okay, well, this way, then,” Westly said, pointing to the ceiling, and the two marched off through the brush.

A quarter of an hour later, they reached the stem of the chandelier and climbed up a few inches. With no flowers or leaves to block their view, they could see the night sky.

“Keep your eyes there,” said Westly, pointing at the spot on the glass where he had seen the shadow of the bird.

The two caterpillars settled down to wait. A minute passed. There was nothing but stars. “I’ll bet it’s out there and we just can’t see it,” Westly whispered, still searching.

Another few minutes passed, and then Sara quietly sighed.

“I really did see it,” Westly said.

“I believe you,” Sara replied.

“It was big—bigger than the highest tier of the chandelier. And it had red glowing eyes and yellow claws.”

Sara squinted at him.

“Don’t you believe me?”

“I already said I did, didn’t I?” she said, gently swinging her lower feet.

“Well, it’s gone now,” Westly said. “So there’s no point in staying here any longer. Let’s go back to the party.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Sara murmured. She let go of the stem and fell to the ground with a plop.

