

## Rejected

I'm stranded. I find myself standing in the middle of a dark jungle, full of thick, mossy trees with branches endlessly tangled in bundles of leafy knots. There's no hint of light for at least fifty feet in every direction from which I stand. Spaghetti vines reaching the ground are swaying to the sweet, seductive music of the gentle wind. Dragonflies are buzzing overhead with crickets chirping in sync to the jungle beats. A lonely snail beside me moves as if knowing it's in danger of being nearly stepped on, but its body is unable to process this instant urge to slither away faster.

In the midst of this gloomy jungle lies a muddy swamp. The soft pink lotuses floating within it morph into a bright, hot pink when the mucky water caresses their perfect, heart-shaped petals every so often. I notice two little balls of light piercing through the thick fog lurking above the swamp. Out of this fog emerges a sinister, dark green crocodile glaring at me with its evil eyes. It's so dark green that it looks almost black. There's mud caked between the ridges on its back and its bumpy, dry scales. It begins to come out of the mud and steps onto the damp grass beside the swamp.

Now within a few feet away from me, it walks slowly on its stubby, short legs in my direction. Facing the crocodile, I inch away from my spot, now imprinted with my rather small footprints. After a few minutes of backing away from the crocodile, I realize that aside from this frightening situation itself, something else doesn't feel right. The crocodile, still in my line of vision, bows down to me like I'm a royal queen. I ponder its sudden obedience, confused yet relieved in a sense. After all, I'm still hopelessly lost in this creepy jungle. The crocodile still stares at me with those eerie eyes and an evil smirk.

At that moment, I realize that something is behind me, because I could feel its hot breath on the back of my arm and hear a low snarl. I whip around in an instant, so rapidly that I almost

hit this thing on its furry nose. It too gives me a menacing stare. It looks at me as if I had invaded its space, instead of the other way around. This thing had sneaked up behind me. I should be the one giving it that glare, but then again, I'm at a huge disadvantage, being so small and fragile versus four and a half feet of pure muscle with its stylish Halloween-striped coat.

I start hearing a rough, low voice but am too afraid to take my eyes off this beast to look around. It starts to get louder and louder and I start imagining that it's coming from this fashion diva in front of me. It asks me why I have come back. It goes on with an edge of disgust in its voice about status and power, about how I should give up my silly dream of acceptance or there will be consequences. It lightly turns around on its paws, its eyes never leaving mine, and gives me a mocking farewell. As it heads back into the darkness of the jungle, it tells me one last thing, "You'll never fit in. You don't belong here."

As I watch the diva vanish into the jungle, its paws not leaving a single echo as they touch the ground, I stand there lifelessly as if I'm under some hypnotic spell, unable to figure out what just happened. Eventually, I dismiss my fright and turn around to find that the crocodile had returned to its sanctuary. I wonder who this diva was that thinks it's so special and how it could possibly tell me to "get lost", when it doesn't even know me. I certainly don't know who that was. Maybe I remind it of some previous visitor who stumbled onto its territory, but still, what happened was strange. It seemed to have some kind of control over the crocodile like it was its creator. I guess I should appreciate its interference in that it got rid of that crabby crocodile.

I notice that there's a stone path bordered by little green garden gnomes, leading somewhere deeper into this jungle. There are cracks shattered into the stone path, too tiny to be caused by an earthquake yet too large for the average-weight animal. Dead, rotting leaves have made their graves in between these cracks. From a distance, they look like the dry, stretchy Elmer's glue left on the tip of a bottle after someone is done using it, only the shade of wet sand

mixed with dirt. I should be trying to figure a way out of what seems like an endless black hole. I tell myself, “No, do not go down this path. Obey your conscience for a change. If you don’t, there will be consequences.”

I stay glued to my spot for about ten minutes debating my next step on this internal quest. Mama always points out that my worst quality is not listening to my elders. Throughout my life, I’ve gained knowledge that only my individual experiences could bring, and while elders always think they know what’s best for everyone inferior to them, they don’t. They try to control our actions and believe their wisdom overrules our personal learning experiences, but they fail to recognize that we need to learn for ourselves. Otherwise, we’re not able to grow up being strong, self-reliant individuals, the kind of creatures we need to be to succeed and survive in life. I, being stubborn as I am, choose to go down the stone path. How much more lost could I possibly get?

I walk along the stone path for about ten minutes. Aside from the dead leaves in the cracks, I find dead mice and bits of thin, wet fur lying scattered about on the path. I wonder what kind of animal I’d encounter next. Whatever it is, it’s probably looking for its next meal and if I’m not careful, I could end up like those mice, bits of my cotton-soft, brown coat lying around as well. Before long, I realize that with each bouncy step I take, the forest behind me is being blown out like candles on a birthday cake. Unfortunately, I become the melted candle wax on the piece of birthday cake that nobody wants anymore. The disappearing forest detects me as an unidentified germ. It starts to catch up, going all white-blood-cell on me. Soon, I’m hopping the hell out of its reach, continuing on for as long as my bouncy spirit could endure. After all, I may be stubborn and rebellious, but that doesn’t mean I have a death wish.

I’m still fleeing from the disaster zone, glancing back every few minutes to check if my safety cushion is expanding. I want to put as much distance between the white blood cell’s ancestor and me. As I glance back again, I trip over a large rope crossing my path. I fall face first

to the ground, but my little knees save my fall. Before I could turn around to better examine the cause of my fall, something thick and scaly grabs my foot, lifts me up ten feet off the ground, and flips me upside down. The blood is still rushing to my brain as I realize I've just come face to face with what must be the world's largest anaconda.

My heart leaps in fear and I freeze, not knowing how to react. If I start screaming a loud shriek, I might enrage this silent but deadly serpent and this could be the end. She starts hissing at me with a lisp, her tongue snaking out and now just an inch or two away from my little, button-top nose. She says, "Ssstay away from thissss foressst. How ssstupid and sssmall could you get, by returning here. I could ssswallow you whole and ssspit you out in a minute." I start shaking, desperately crying for it to let me go. She says to me, "Thisss foressst belongsss to ssstrong and powerful animalsss like me. Ever hear of the phrassse, *ssssurvival of the fittessst*? Don't ssshow your facce around here again, you bawling *baby* bunny." She did not just say that.

Flames of rage burn inside me. I realize I'm a small, cute creature, never taken seriously when it comes to toughness. I'll admit it. Sometimes, I have trouble reaching the carrot jar in my scolding mama's kitchen. Sometimes, I can't see clearly, because my brown floppy ears always come down and smack me in the face, even if I tie them into a ponytail. Sometimes, I wonder whether the Easter Bunny is real or not, but that's a different story. I may be small, but I am NOT a baby!!

By this time, all my fear has vanished like smoke. I wonder why I ever wanted to join the big leagues of the jungle. Now that I think about it, they're not so special. They may be strong on the outside, but inside, I bet they're mush. Either that or their brains are too tiny for their bodies. They have nothing better to do with their pathetic time than to bully little bunnies like me. I start to think what would my hero, Bugs Bunny do. The anaconda's scaly tail has my legs tied up, but my little bunny arms are still free. I quickly untie my floppy ears and sling the purple headband

at the serpent. It lands a perfect ring around its mouth. Then, I take my big floppy ears and for once, have them smack something else other than my face. Finally, I am defending myself in this cruel world, but before I could take any more action, the anaconda tries to open its mouth and my poor headband snaps like a thin thread. I've got to admit that this slimy serpent has a strong set of jaws. Its mouth opens wider and wider and in a matter of seconds, I'm enveloped once again into dreary darkness.

A long time passes before I feel any sensation in my furry body. It feels like I'm floating down somewhere, light as a feather. Am I an angel now? Is this what it feels like? Well, at least I died courageously. I have no regrets. I imagine where my little angel wings will take me and how my afterlife will be. And once again, I return to the blackness of exile.

I open my big brown eyes a slight crack. Sunlight is streaming in. Blooming red flowers surround me. I hear squirrels chattering and birds singing a lovely melody. I lay there on the soft field grass of the meadow a few more minutes. As I roll over from my back, I see Mama coming towards me with a glass of water. "Are you dead too? Are we in heaven?" I ask her. "Goodness no! You just fell down the rabbit hole and hit your head," she says. "You've been unconscious for only a few minutes though. I always warn you not to play near the rabbit hole. But did you listen?! Nobody ever listens to me! Then, they get hurt and complain to me about scolding them instead of comforting them." She hands me the glass of water and walks away mumbling to herself. I rise up slowly and sigh for a long time. Too bad it was just a dream. That jungle was creepy and dangerous, but at least it gave me a little sanctuary for a while.