

Iktómi Spins a Web

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Iktómi is living in a North Dakota farmhouse. The people leave him alone when they vacuum near his hairy feet. They never begrudge him the crumbs he finds beneath the toaster on their kitchen counter. The people are quiet, but their squawk box is not. They run Coyote News all day, every day, and Iktómi watches so he can better understand these beings.

Iktómi is on vacation. He has left the Reservation where everyone knows him, everyone teases him for his trickster ways. He crossed over from Dakota land to white people land, though he never saw a line in the ground dividing the two. He knew he was somewhere different by the look of the houses. Everything works over on this side.

Coyote News is full of angry people with very white teeth. Though their voices are gentle when they talk about rich folks who run this world. Iktómi thinks they must love rich people, but he doesn't know why. From what *he* sees, rich people own everything, or think they do. Every corner of the planet, even this room where he sleeps, rolling himself small so no one will think him a pest. Iktómi knows a thing or two about ownership, about taking possession by force because you want to, then keeping it forever. His people have been called the Dispossessed, and in his dreams

they sometimes walk on air as no earth has been allowed them. They're forced to become hovering spirits because someone decided the land is not alive like a person, the land doesn't get to choose its relatives.

Iktómi decides *he* is going to be a rich man, the wealthiest in the world, so the White Fangs on Coyote News will bow down to him. And he will laugh at their teeth. Iktómi has many big eyes and a hungry stomach. "I will take it all," he whispers. He begins to spin his web.

Iktómi hasn't designed a web for years, but he quickly falls back into the rhythm of silky creation. He works hard for hours, he works into the night. Because he is Iktómi, son of a powerful spirit, he can string his web across the stars. He weaves a glittering map of thread that stretches from one plane of earth to the other. He drops down and spins in another direction, covering the small blue planet with taut ribbons of light that come from his body. Just when he thinks he might be working himself to death, he realizes the job is done—his home planet captured within the most beautiful web that was ever made. Iktómi is too tired to be humble.

"This is mine," Iktómi says, though his voice quavers with fatigue, so no one hears him. He clears his throat and announces again: "All this is mine. I own the world. Every stick and stone, every patch of grass, every house and farm, every mountain." His voice is stronger now and wakes up the only other being, who rolls into a ball on the farmhouse floor.

"What's that?" Igmu stretches and stretches, as if she, too, is trying to claim the world.

Iktómi brags on his achievement. He tells Igmu to come outside and look at his creation, how he's penned up the entire planet and stolen it for himself.

He and Igmu stand on the grass in the moonlight. She looks up at the Great Web and yawns.

"It isn't strong enough," she says. "The humans will easily crash it to pieces. You own nothing, you fool." Then, because she doesn't want to hurt the spider's feelings, she adds: "Nice try, though." Satisfied with herself, she begins to purr.

Iktómi can't believe her words. He bristles, so angry with Igmu his every tiny hair stands out, sharpened like a porcupine quill. He sputters, but no solid words will come. He gnashes his fangs at the cat like the talkers on Coyote News do to their audience.

Igmu leaps onto the nearest tree branch. She tells Iktómi to watch. She doesn't like exercising at night, but she's determined to complete the lesson. A breeze makes

her whiskers twitch. She spots the delicate thread that glistens in the sky above her. She stretches one elegant paw, high into the air, extends a razor claw. Ping! She snaps Iktómi's web, makes a hole in the beautiful cage. The tatters look pitiful and bring tears to Iktómi's many eyes. He was the richest man in the world for maybe a minute. And now, who will ever know but this damn cat?

Igmu leaps back onto the ground, satisfied with her work. She looks at the spider in sympathy, shakes her wise head. *Honestly*, she thinks, *what idiot would ever think he could own Earth?*

But Iktómi cannot hear her thoughts, which is the night's only blessing. He goes back into the farmhouse and rolls himself into a ball. Decides to play dead for a while. Another idea will come into his head. They always do.

