

Royal Monster Competition

The busy roads leading out of the capital proved to be of little consequence to the gilded carriage being pulled along it by the best horses that money could afford. Inside were members of the royal family getting ready for a stay at the abode of Duchess Catherine. Over the course of the journey, each of the four women nestled inside had their own way of passing the time. For Princess Eloise, that meant ample opportunity to bemoan her status as the middle child.

Twisting her brown hair through her fingers, Eloise looked out at the passing countryside with an apathetic gaze. No matter how often the 19 year old woman traveled around the kingdom, nothing seemed to spark an interest in her eyes. This lack of energy translated to her plain choice of a light pink gown with white frills. The attire was satisfactory for her position but paled in comparison to the dresses of her sisters.

Princess Aurora made her position as the first child known thanks to the golden coloring of her dress that contrasted against her black hair tied up in a bun. At the moment, she was busy picking apart the youngest of the sisters, eighteen year old Charlotte's choice of dress. It was a common argument that nonetheless kept things mildly interesting.

Growing tired of her older sister's critiques, Charlotte waved around her long, straight black hair. The twists of her locks ruffled the white frills spread across her gown that brought some much needed contrast to the black fabric. While Eloise's apathy came from her feeling an emptiness inside, Charlotte's gloomy mood was just something she had adopted as her style to stand out from the rest of her family. It was a decision that the king struggled with on a regular basis, but less so his wife.

"Settle down, girls," Queen Esmeralda spoke, ceasing her maintenance of her raised up, curly brown hair in favor of her main duty as a mother. "As I said before, you are all free to

choose the way you dress, as long as it is appropriate for princesses,” she stated, bringing attention to her own, purple gown.

“Charlotte could still try to look like something other than a witch in the woods,” Aurora accused.

“You’re being close minded again,” Charlotte replied. “This isn’t like the old days where we sent off countless adventurers to their deaths trying to stop people from using magic. Maybe you would understand that if you read something other than those dusty tomes.”

“They are important literature about our kingdom’s past,” Aurora shot back.

“That’s enough,” Esmeralda spoke, bringing momentary peace to the carriage. “We must remember to be on our best behavior for our visit. Especially since the Duchess is so kind to welcome us to relax in her-“

“AAAAAAHHHHH!”

The scream that left Eloise’s lips was born from what she saw out of the carriage’s window. Peeking outside revealed to the other women that all around them were creatures of various sizes, shapes, and terrifying visages. At any moment they expected the carriage to come under attack. Instead, the beasts were content to merely go about on their own with a few stopping to show off their forms to the people traveling on the road. The confusion that overtook the royal family hit its peak when they entered the outer gates of the Duchess’s land. Hanging over the entrance was a banner that read: “The Royal Monster Competition.”

“What in the world is that?” Aurora asked as the carriage continued into town.

“I’m not sure,” the Queen replied, bringing attention towards the entourage coming to meet them. “Hopefully the duchess will be able to shed some light on the situation.”

The carriage came to a stop as it arrived in front of the Duchess and her entourage. Stepping out of the vehicle, Eloise came face to face with Catherine. She was around the same age as the queen, but she was less afraid to show the few, grey strands mixed in with the blonde hair she left draped across her shoulders. In comparison to the other ladies, the duchess was dressed in more common garb of a tunic and knee-length skirt. The same level of relaxed wear was seen in her eighteen year old daughter, Lady Eugenie who had her golden locks tied up in a pair of pigtails that matched the wide grin on her face.

“Greetings, your majesty,” Catherine said, she and her daughter bowing towards their guests. “Thank you so much for gracing my lands with your presence.”

“What’s up with all of the freaks?” Charlotte bluntly asked, earning a bump to the back from her eldest sister.

“I believe what she was trying to say,” Aurora began, “is that she’s curious about the odd creatures roaming through the town.”

“Have no worries, that’s quite normal for us,” the Duchess replied.

“How is that considered normal?” Eloise asked.

“It is when you hold the largest guild of Transmuter Mages in the kingdom,” Eugenie spoke up.

“I did hear that there was a rise in magical events thanks to my husband’s recent lift on the ban of practicing the arcane,” Queen Esmeralda commented.

“Correct,” the Duchess verified. “For years, the mages had been holding this contest in secret. Now that they’re free to show off their powers to the public, I’ve taken it upon myself to provide as much support as I can.”

“Is it really alright to have monsters moving around the town though?” Eloise asked.

“I mean, they are our citizens,” Eugenie pointed out.

Aurora looked towards the Duchess and her daughter with horror. “You’ve been transforming your own people into these... things?”

“Calm down, it’s not like we’re forcing them,” Catherine clarified. “The ones you see wandering about in their bestial forms have volunteered to experience first hand the powers of transmuter mages.”

“It’s still hard to believe that someone would willingly become one of these things,” Eloise commented, her gaze wandering towards a monster floating by with one large eye and several smaller ones attached to the tips of its furry tendrils.

“Hmm, perhaps a demonstration would better explain how things work here,” the Duchess suggested.

“Oh, I’ll do it!” Eugenie spoke up. “I’ve had a bunch of different offers from the mages.”

“Hmm, I suppose that would make things easier to explain. Very well, as long as you don’t go too crazy. You need to at least pick something that can speak.”

“You got it,” Eugenie said, taking off down the road to the center of town.

“She seems overly excited about this,” Charlotte commented as she and the others followed after the eager woman.

“True,” the Duchess commented. “Same as the mages, when the ban was lifted she was able to freely indulge in her arcane hobbies. Apparently she had been secretly collecting tomes about the craft for years. That’s why she was so adamant about being a participant in the event’s main contest.”

“Contest?” Eloise asked.

“You’ll see in just a moment,” Catherine answered as she guided the group past a creature with a countless number of spider legs.

Forced to hoist up their skirts to keep up with Eugenie, Eloise and the others traveled towards the center of town. Waiting for them were the mythical transmuter mages decked out in purple garbs with black and white eyes painted along the back. Each of them was stationed near a roped off section of cleared out space. Anyone that passed was shown an image of the creature that the spellcasters were trying to bring to life. While there were a variety of choices, there was one in particular that managed to get Eugenie to slow down.

“How about this one?” Eugenie asked, snatching the illustration out of the mage’s hand to show it to her mother.

“I suppose that will work,” the duchess replied. “Very well, you may proceed.”

“You heard her,” Eugenie said, making the mage match her expression of a wide grin. “Make a monster out of me.”

Waving around his arms, the mage sent a crackle of black energy towards Eugenie. The smile on her face changed from inviting to absolutely horrifying as her mouth stretched out into a wide maw to contain numerous rows of teeth. As most of her body was overtaken by the fang-filled hole, her clothes were ripped apart to make way for a collection of writhing tendrils that matched the red tone that had spread across fleshy hide. Careful not to get hit by the creature’s tail, the mage nodded in approval at his creation and gestured for it to approach the queen and her daughters.

Slithering its way towards the group of shocked nobles, the beast seemed to narrow in on Eloise. Though the rest of her family tried to step in, they were pushed back by the sets of smaller maws attached to the center of each of its limbs. Cornering the princess against the wall

of a building, it opened up its mouth wide to reveal a second one within. Stretching out a tendril to show off its third set of teeth, the monster stopped just shy of yet another hole of teeth and terror pressing up against the princess's face. Moments before Eloise was about to fall victim to the drool leaking from the many mouths, the Duchess stepped in to push back the monster with a single push of her hand.

"That will be far enough Eugenie, you've made your point," Catherine said before turning her back on the beast. "I do apologize, but my daughter sometimes gets caught up in playing up the role of a bloodthirsty creature."

"That's because I'm really good at it," Eugenie answered, her deeper voice emanating from her many maws. "Besides, it's not like I was going to hurt them. I just wanted to have a little fun." Turning all of her maws towards Eloise, she bent down to try and seem less intimidating.

"Sooooo, what do you think?" Eugenie asked with one mouth.

"Isn't this body marvelous?" asked another of the creature's orifices.

"It's hard to believe is what it is," Eloise answered, unsure of which mouth to speak to.

"Why would you give up your humanity to become this... thing? You don't even have any eyes."

Pausing for a moment, Eugenie scratched right below her main maw with one of her many claws. "It's kind of hard to explain, but it feels really great when you experience it firsthand. The mages do this thing that makes you feel like you've always had this weirdo body. It lets me do things like this."

Backing up from Eloise, Eugenie made a display of getting her various mouths to click their teeth in unison. The unusual symphony continued even as her tendrils twisted about in

various directions. The resulting yelps of terror from the princesses revealed the creature's delight through a series of laughter-like clicks.

"Interesting," Eugenie commented as she swirled her many mouths to surround the queen. "I obviously can't see your face, but I can feel something vibrating through your body. Is our beloved ruler starting to enjoy looking at my horrendous form?"

"I will admit, I'm a bit intrigued," Esmeralda answered, hearing the chittering of teeth in response. "How long must she stay like this?" the queen asked, turning away from Eugenie to address the duchess.

"Until the end of the day," Catherine explained. "That is when the judging for the main contest begins."

"Until then," Eugenie began, slithering her way up to the mage that transformed her, "I get to have fun showing myself off to the town. I'll see you, er, meet you all again later." With a wave of her many tendrils, she bid farewell to the group and followed the lead of the spellcaster.

"As my daughter explained," Catherine began, shaking off some of the group's astonishment, "it's really something you need to try for yourself to fully understand. Why don't you go find a mage's creation you like and change yourself into a monster for the contest?"

"Absolutely not," Aurora stated.

"Why? Afraid you'll come out looking better than you do normally?" Charlotte teased.

"It is quite intriguing," the queen said, stepping in to prevent another argument. "Very well, then we shall play along with your contest."

"But mother," Eloise spoke up, "aren't you afraid of what the mages will do to you?"

"I have my trust in the Duchess's judgement," she explained. "Besides, this is just another step in making our magically gifted citizens feel welcome. Now then, off you go girls."

Make sure you pick something suitably interesting and with a high chance of winning this competition. You don't want to squander this kind of opportunity."

Before Eloise could voice any further concerns, her mother and sisters set off to find their mages. Left to meet the duchess's expectant gaze, the princess let out a sigh. Walking away from the transformation area, she tried to dodge person and beast alike while she tried to put her thoughts together. Catherine had been correct to say that these hang ups were born from years of prejudice against the spellcasting class. However, that didn't make it any easier for Eloise to come to grips with the idea of deliberately giving up her human form for something so grotesque.

As Eloise was pondering if she could get away with hiding from her family until the festivities were over, she spotted a mage wandering through the streets. Clutched in his hand was a piece of paper with a creature scrawled onto it. The desperation in his voice as he asked one person after another made it clear how many times he had been rejected. However, the look in his eyes were one of eagerness as he spotted the princess.

"Why, hello there, your majesty," the mage said, giving a bow towards her. "My name is Pumi, a master of the transformative arts and a favorite to win our first 'official' competition. What brings you to our little town?"

"Er, visiting the duchess," Eloise replied, leaning her neck to the side to catch a glimpse of the sketch. "Are you... trying to find someone to change into that?"

"Indeed," he said, proudly holding up the drawing. "I believe this is the ticket for claiming first place. Unfortunately, no one seems to share in my brilliance. I've yet to find a volunteer to be my canvas for the day."

Finally getting a good look at the proposed monster, Eloise couldn't hide her disgust. It was against everything she had learned about beauty and grace. She was certain that the form would be enough to make herself faint if she had to be anywhere near the disgusting creature. That made it all the stranger when something in the back of her mind made her ponder what it would be like to inhabit such a strange body. Looking between the mage's expectant gaze and the sketch, she took a deep breath.

"What about me?" she suggested, somewhat surprising herself as the words tumbled out of her mouth.

"Why, it would be an honor," Pumi replied, bowing once more. "I promise to live up to your expectations and then some."

"I appreciate it," Eloise said, looking away from the sketch before she could change her mind. "Come with me. My family will be waiting for me to return."

With Pumi in tow, Eloise made her way back to the center of town. She managed to arrive just as the queen and the other princesses were returning with their own mages. Managing to catch glimpses of what the others had planned for their transformations made her wonder if she might have made a mistake.

"Hmm, yes, most exquisite," Catherine said as she inspected each of the forms. "There will be some complications with a few of these, but they should be more than enough to give you a taste of transformation magic. Who would like to go first?"

"I shall take the lead," Queen Esmeralda announced. "Far be it to let my daughters go through such a strange process before I test it myself."

Looking between the Queen and her mage's proposed monster form, the Duchess let out a small laugh. "Apologies, I mean no disrespect. I'm just surprised you would make this your first choice."

Despite Esmerelda's reputation, the comment made a slight tint of red appear on her cheeks as if she were a shy, young woman again. "All my life, I've been having to uphold that reputation of a regal ruler. From what my mage told me, this is all about getting a chance to literally go wild. Ergo, why I chose such a ferocious beast."

"Have no fear," Catherine said, putting her hand on the queen's shoulder. "I know that feeling all too well. Transmuter, are you ready to begin?"

"Once the queen removes her dress, we should be good to go," the hooded spellcaster replied.

"Very well," Esmeralda replied, shirking off her gown and handing it over to the duchess. Stepping into the transformation area, she held her arms aloft. "You may cast when ready."

In an effort not to look at her mother's naked body, Eloise obscured her view and missed the moment the magical energy struck the queen. When she pulled her hands away, she joined her sisters in letting out shocked gasps at the sight of their mother's body becoming more leech-like as she grew to five times her original size. Though she lost her limbs in the process, she made up for it with four tentacles cloaked in slime emerging from around her widening maw. Opening up her mouth flap, the queen celebrated her change by letting her ten eyes glance around to witness her children's reactions.

Aurora looked suitably horrified at the mass of pulsating flesh before her. Charlotte couldn't hide her interest in watching her mother's tendrils flail about. For Eloise, she was left in

a state of shock that her mother would willingly choose this form. The sight of the leech queen shifting her many eyes about in different directions did little to ease Eloise's stunned state.

"Marvelous," the mage commented as the huge, slimy worm dragged her body forward using the hooked talons at the ends of her tentacles. "Simply marvelous. Why don't you show off your best feature?"

Unable to speak, Esmeralda nodded towards the spellcaster while keeping the majority of her eyes on the girls. Directing her head towards her daughters, she allowed her mouth to hang open and stick out a fleshy, pink tongue that ended in what looked like a flower bud. As the sphere got close to the girls, it unfolded to reveal yet another maw that dripped a downpour of yellow mucus from its sharp teeth. A guttural grunt escaped the hole as she flexed her second set of teeth to better show off her frightening form. While the other girls were understandably horrified that this beast was their mother, one princess in particular stepped forward to give the terrifying leech creature a hug.

"Woah, you're really slimy," Charlotte said, pulling away with a layer of goo on her dress.

"Are you feeling okay?" Aurora asked her mother.

"Not in any pain, right?" Eloise added.

Once more, the queen nodded her head. The look in her multiple eyes told of a serene calm that contrasted greatly against her fearsome form. This clash of outwards horror and inner serenity proved to be all the motivation Charlotte needed to rush towards her own Transmuter mage.

"My turn!" Charlotte said, her burst of enthusiasm making the spellcaster tremble a little.

"Are you sure?" the mage asked. "It's a pretty odd one."

“That’s the point,” the princess replied, already taking the steps to remove her clothes. “I picked yours because it looked so freaky. I’m curious to see what it feels like.”

“Very well,” the mage said, sharing some of Aurora and Eloise’s hesitancy. “This might be a little awkward but remember to trust in the magic.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” Charlotte replied, keeping her gaze locked on her monstrous mother as she was zapped with the transformation spell.

Charlotte’s petite figure folded in on itself as she turned a bright orange. The bulbous form gained support as long, gangly talons formed from her feet. Tripling the size of her torso, she proceeded to sprout dozens upon dozens of arms that reached out several feet each. As she stretched out her claw-like fingers, she revealed yellow eyes set into the palm of each one.

“Yes,” came a hissing voice amidst the collection of numerous hands. “This is better than I could have expected.”

“How is she talking?” Eloise asked, hazarding to step up to the creature. “I don’t see a mouth.”

“Best not to ask,” Charlotte’s mage commented.

“Hey mom,” Charlotte said, stomping over to the queen. “Look, I have way more eyes than you do now.”

Letting out a hissing noise from her maws, the Queen nodded her head in approval.

“Charlotte, are you sure you’re feeling okay?” Aurora asked.

“Never better,” Charlotte answered, trying to ease her sister’s mind by making some of her hands give a thumbs up.

“Can you... see in multiple directions at once?” Eloise asked, finding herself compelled to sate her growing curiosity.

In response, Charlotte fanned out her arms to make each eyeball stare at a different location. “Yeah, I can.”

“Isn’t that disorienting?” Aurora asked.

“A little, but I think I’m getting used to it,” Charlotte replied, gracefully stomping herself around while keeping her eyes out to scan the area. “It’s unlike anything I’ve felt before. It’s amazing!”

“That does sound like fun,” Aurora commented, finally breaking through her role as the big sister to reveal a childish sort of fascination with the transformation process. “I would like to try it myself, but... Eloise would you mind going first?”

“W-why me?” Eloise asked.

“Because I actually want to see what you turn into,” Aurora clarified.

Looking between Aurora and Charlotte’s many eyes, Eloise managed to put together that, whatever her eldest sister intended to change into, it wasn’t going to be able to see. Glancing over at Charlotte and Esmeralds examining each other’s forms, she was given small comfort by the ecstatic growls that emanated from them. Telling herself that everything would be okay, she nodded towards Aurora and made her way towards her mage.

“I’m ready,” Eloise said to Pumi.

“Are you sure?” he asked. “You look a little shaken. We can wait a while to give you a chance to mentally prepare.”

“No,” she said, begrudgingly starting to take off her clothes. “Better to get changed now while I have the courage for it.”

Leaving both the remainder of her dress and mental hang ups behind, Eloise stepped into the transformation circle. As Pumi began to cast the spell, she looked out for support. Aurora was

of little help with the way she excitedly looked on. The Duchess was equally unnerving with her expectant gaze. Moments before the spell was cast, Eloise found strange comfort in the way her mother and younger sister glanced over at her. Though there was nothing human about the way the monsters looked at her, she was able to pick up an eagerness of getting to see her experience the same sensations they did.

Eloise stumbled a bit as Pumi struck her with the black bolts. Crumpling to her knees, she tried to remain calm even as her skin began to secrete a thick, green mucus. The slime encasing her body spread itself along her form to cover her developing tail and the dozens of spiked legs she had acquired in exchange for her human ones. As these new limbs overtook her arms and her neck stretched out, she tried to remain calm at the thought that this was merely the beginning.

Blindness struck Eloise as her eyes sunk into her skin. Though she couldn't see what was going on, she could certainly feel her mouth stretch out to accommodate a circular maw of teeth, along with a secondary pair behind them similar to her mother's. Gradually her vision returned to her as a pair of long eye stalks emerged from the peak of her body. Surveying the fearsome hybrid of a centipede, slug, and nightmare she had become, she found it strange how calm she was.

Though she wasn't able to fully stop the slime from leaking from her mouth, she was able to manipulate her teeth to control where it trickled onto the ground. In spite of the bulk of her new form, she managed to expertly use her many feet to maneuver herself around with ease. It was as if she felt right at home inside of the disgusting sack of slime and flesh. Purposefully stretching her eye stalks out in separate directions, she was amazed by her ability to simultaneously take in two different views of the area. In the midst of exploring everything her

body had to offer, she nearly missed the sensation of someone poking her slimy hide with their fingers.

“Impressive,” Aurora commented as Eloise was given close scrutiny by her monstrous family members. “For how nervous you looked, it’s strange to see you acting so calmly. It’s almost like you were destined to be a slimy worm.”

Though Eloise tried to retort, all that came out was a splatter of slime that drizzled across Charlotte’s arms and Esmeralda’s tentacles. Jutting her jaw forward to speak again, she managed to push out her second mouth and spill some of her slime onto Aurora’s dress. Rather than get angry at the mess, the eldest daughter merely let out a laugh.

“What’s wrong with you?” Charlotte asked. “Is Eloise so horrifying that you’ve gone insane?”

“No,” Aurora said, taking a moment to console herself. “I’m just surprised that all it took to break through our family’s reputation was the offer to dive into what we considered to be dark arts for ages.”

“Does that mean you’re ready to make the final step?” the Duchess offered.

“Might as well,” Aurora replied, gesturing for her mage to get into position. “Just give me one last chance to take a look at my monstrous family before I can’t see them anymore.”

After Aurora had gotten her fill of gawking at the group’s transformed figures, Eloise watched as her once noble sister stripped down like the rest. Taking her spot in the transformation area, the eldest sister held her arms up high to invite the magic to take her. She managed to shoot Eloise a grin before her facial features disappeared to better fit with her new body.

In exchange for Aurora's smile, she gained a gaping maw that was flanked by a set of black pincers. Eloise and the others didn't have a chance to stare into her void of flesh and teeth as her body stretched out to a similar shape as Eloise's. From the thick, white blubber of her body emerged stubby legs that helped her squirm about with her sausage-like visage. Rearing back her eyeless head, the princess let out a clicking noise by tapping her mouth tusks together. Looking past the armored ridges lining Aurora's back, the group watched as a long, pulsating tail covered in spikes emerged from between the two pincers on her backside.

The sight of the eyeless, maggot-like creature squirming around left Eloise and the other monsters in awe. Something about the gaping maw with its chittering teeth and the throbbing tail brought a sense of unease that contrasted against the way Aurora expertly maneuvered her unorthodox figure. While none of the royal family was able to properly communicate how they felt, Duchess Catherine had no such issue expressing her wonder for the disgusting beast.

"Magnificent," Catherine announced, unflinchingly approaching Aurora. "Simply marvelous. I know you can't see yourself but believe me when I say that I've never seen such a fascinating creature. With a body like this, you're bound to win the competition."

"Figures," Charlotte replied, crossing her many arms. "Looks like Aurora is getting preferential treatment again."

"Now, now," Pumi spoke up, he and the other mages joining in to marvel at their specimens. "It's too early to make a judgement call. There's more to beasts than merely their appearance. We'll only know the true winner once the proper judges get involved."

"Don't waste your breath," Aurora's mage spoke up. "She can't hear you either. The best she can do is locate us through tremor sense. Until her time is up, she'll have to rely on reading our vibrations."

In spite of the mage's words, Aurora seemed to be able to eagerly nod her head in agreement. Even with being unable to see, speak, or hear, she showed her appreciation by nudging her mage with the side of her head. Catching on to the wordless command, the spellcaster placed his hand on her side and began to lead her down the road.

"Guess they're heading over to be appraised by the expert mages," Catherine commented. "Best we join them. After all of that hard work, I'd rather not have you be disqualified for being late. That, and I would never hear the end of it if I didn't give my daughter some worthy competition."

With mages and monsters in tow, the group began to make their way towards the judging area. Hanging at the back with Pumi, Eloise kept her eye stalks glancing back and forth. Half of her vision was focused on the way people reacted to their monstrous forms as they passed. The other eye kept glancing across the horrifying creatures that used to be her family members. Refocusing herself to stare at her slimy form as it crawled towards the competition, she found herself shivering at the notion of getting to show off what had become of the kingdom's once regal, royal family. The idea was more than enough to convince her that the remainder of their visit would be far from boring to say the least.