

Robert the Bruce and the Spider by Geraldine McCaughrean

'Robert the Bruce, lost, stolen or strayed!' read the English proclamation jeeringly, for the so-called King of Scotland had been gone all year and those trying to hunt him down could find no trace.

Dispossessed of his country by the English and driven to live as an outlaw, he and his companions were on the run, propping up branches for shelter, sleeping on animal skins, eating rabbits, berries and fish. With winter coming on, Robert the Bruce deemed it better the ladies should go to Kildrummie Castle into the care of his young brother Nigel, while he and his few companions headed further north.

The news that reached them was all bad. Though Bruce kept his comrades entertained with stories of questing knights and poems about the heroes of Scotland, his spirits sank lower and lower. Every day, relations and friends were being captured, imprisoned, put to death. Perhaps he should abandon his dreams of driving the English out of Scotland. Six battles he had fought with the enemy, and six times his fortunes had fallen still lower.

One night, sheltering in a dilapidated hut on the island of Rathlin, he lay looking up at the roof. A spider hung there from a single thread, trying to swing from one rafter to the next so as to establish a web. Again and again it tried, though surely the distance was too great. Four, five, six times it tried. What perseverance! Did it never know when to give up? Why did it not scuttle away into a corner and weave there?

Bruce found himself oddly caught up in the efforts of the spider. His eyes hurt with watching it too intently. I too have made six attempts, he thought. If this creature tries again – if it succeeds – then, by all that's holy *so will I!*

The little gossamer thread was barely visible, and yet from it hung the rest of Bruce's life. He forgot to swallow. He forgot to blink. The spider gathered its legs into a single black pellet. Swinging across the dark chasm of the roof, the little trapeze artist reached its goal and began, without respite, to construct a gossamer kingdom between the rafters.

In that moment, a surge of determination swept through Robert the Bruce which drove out all his weariness and despair. He would live to see the English driven out, and to be acknowledged King of Scotland!



Name:	Class:	Date:
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1 “Dispossessed of his country”

Which of the following is closest in meaning to “dispossessed of” in this clause?

Choose **one**.

cast out of

valued

lost

owned by

2a

1 mark

2 Number these statements to show the order in which they happened.

Bruce chose a dilapidated hut in which to spend the night.

The ladies were sent to Kildrummie Castle.

Bruce watched the spider build a web.

Six battles had been fought and lost.

2c

2 marks

3 How would you know from reading this text that Robert the Bruce is an historical figure who is not alive today? Give **two** ways.

2f

2 marks

4 Why did the author spend a whole paragraph describing the spider’s attempts to build a web?

2f

1 mark

5 “Swinging across the dark chasm of the roof, the little trapeze artist reached its goal and began, without respite, to construct a gossamer kingdom between the rafters.” (paragraph 6)
Explain why the writer refers to the web as a “kingdom”.

2g

1 mark

6 How does Robert the Bruce’s mood change between the start of paragraph 3 and the end?
Give **one** idea from each place in the text, using evidence from the text to support your answer.

2h

3 marks