

B FLICK



MAREN

SMITH

B-Flick
by Maren Smith

Newsite Web Services Publishing

www.disciplineanddesire.com

Copyright ©2006 by Maren Smith

First published in 2006, 2006

NOTICE: This eBook is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution to any person via email, floppy disk, network, print out, or any other means is a violation of International copyright law and subjects the violator to severe fines and/or imprisonment. This notice overrides the Adobe Reader permissions which are erroneous. This eBook cannot be legally lent or given to others.

This eBook is displayed using 100% recycled electrons.



Distributed by Fictionwise.com

CONTENTS

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

* * * *

B-Flick
by Maren Smith

B-Flick

By

Maren Smith

All rights reserved.

Copyright 2008 © by Maren Smith

This book may not be reproduced in whole
or part, by mimeograph or any other means,
without permission of the author.

CHAPTER ONE

Audrey flopped two body pillows and a huge floral quilt on the hardwood flooring in front of the entertainment center. She ran down her mental list of preparedness. Fire crackling warmly in the fireplace? Check. Huge bowl of heavily buttered and salted popcorn? Check. Half-gallon container of strawberry cheesecake ice cream, with a bottle of Magic-Shell chocolate topping? Check. And a two-quart plastic bottle of Diet Coke, which had just come out of the freezer and was chilled into a perfect state of half-ice and half-liquidness? Double check. She wasn't even going to use a glass. No, sir. Tonight, she was swigging straight from the bottle. Tonight was about decadence. It was about self indulgence. It was about starting her three-day weekend, God-am-I-glad-to-be-off-work, and too-bad-I-don't-have-a-boyfriend-right-now vacation.

Not that she needed a boyfriend to have fun. Nope. Audrey plopped down on her pillows, the ice cream and Magic-Shell on her right side, the popcorn and Diet Coke well within reach on the left. She rubbed her hands gleefully. No, sir. She knew how to have fun all on her own.

Audrey bent forward and pulled the short stack of video tapes closer. They were six of the most god-awful B-flick monster movies that she owned—Roger Corman notwithstanding. There was *Attack of the Eye Creature*, *The Thing That Couldn't Die*, *The Giant Gila Monster*, *Attack of the*

Giant Leeches, The Spider Feeds!, and her all time favorite, It Conquered the Earth.

Outside there was a low rumble of thunder as spring decided to announce the growing season with a good hard rain storm. Audrey raised her head as a sudden pounding of rain drops pelted the roof and windows. The perfect night for a monster movie marathon. Now, for the perfect atmosphere...

She got up to shut off all the lights, casting her living room into cave-like darkness and surrendering it to flickering, demonic shadows that moved upon the walls to the whim of the dancing fire. She returned to her pillows on the floor and swaddled herself in her warm, comforting and monster-under-the-bed-proof rose quilt.

Awash in the blue glow of the blank tv screen, she agonized briefly over what to watch first. Unable to decide, she finally closed her eyes and Eenie Meanie Miney Moed herself into sticking *The Giant Gila Monster* into the VCR.

A flash of lightening briefly washed the room in an eerie, flickering light, but then the whir of the VCR caught her attention and the blank blue tv screen was replaced by the start of the movie. She swigged a long drink from the Coke bottle, crunched contentedly on little crystals of Diet Coke ice, and reached for the ice cream and magic shell.

It'd take two weeks on the treadmill to recover from the cottage cheese thighs she was planning on developing tonight, but she still didn't care. Every nerve in her body came to life as she caught her first glimpse of the dreaded Gila. She shivered into her ice cream just before it took its

first two victims, and scooted up closer to the TV as the monster, through badly choreographed implication, derailed a train and made a smorgasbord of the riders. Her muscles jerked with the explosion as Chase, the hero of the day, who sings whenever he sings whenever he sings whenever he sings, drove his car into the gigantic lizard, destroying the beast and saving all of Texas in the end.

As she ejected the tape from the VCR and bent down to select the next movie, a sudden strobe-like flash of lightning and a glass-rattling boom had her glancing over her shoulder at the nearest window. The rain beating against the house intensified, and Audrey frowned. She didn't really care how hard it rained, just so long as the power didn't go out and ruin her whole weekend.

She slid the blood-red cardboard cover off the video she'd seen the least, *The Spider Feeds!* Just as she was placing the tape in the mouth of the VCR, another flickering strobe of blue-grey light lit up the inside of her house. Audrey felt the jolt and smelled the burning ozone as a line of blue electricity exploded out of the entertainment center in a shower of sparks and burning plastic.

Let go of the tape! her brain screamed, but it was already too late. The current shot into her fingers, up her arm and for a moment it felt as though she'd put her entire body in a light socket.

The next thing Audrey knew, her living room was gone and she was behind the wheel of a truck. A big truck. Old, with no suspension, she realized as she bounced along the unpaved road at what had to be no more than thirty miles an hour. It

was hard to tell really, since the inside of the dash was entirely unlit and only one headlight on the driver's side illuminated the quickly passing wooded landscape to either side of her.

"What the hell?" she said.

The truck hit a rut and Audrey grabbed the wheel as the vehicle bounced precariously out of the center of the narrow road and headed for the trees. There was also no power steering, and she had to crank the wheel hard to get the truck back on the road, accidentally overcorrecting. The back half of the unfamiliar vehicle fish-tailed on the gravel, and Audrey screamed, yanking on the steering column to keep from driving clean off the road and crashing into the woods. Her feet stomped the floor, searching for the brakes and finding the clutch instead, and—oh my God—it was a manual drive!

The truck swerved wildly back towards the road, and she screamed again as she pulled the wheel back to the right. The vehicle came grudgingly back under control, and once more she found herself following that unpaved road in the unfamiliar truck, wide-eyed and panting, one foot still stomping for the brakes, although with a little less panic now that she was no longer fish-tailing.

Right up until the hairy eight-legged, six-foot-high spider dashed across the road right in front of her single headlight, then Audrey panicked all over again. She screamed, both feet finding the brake at the same time. Though her brain suggested that this was perhaps the wrong moment to stop the truck, gravel flew as the wheels skidded right off the road

and she crashed head-on into the thick trunk of a monster pine.

The one headlight shattered, the motor abruptly died in a billow of smoke, the radiator hissed steam, and Audrey sat in the sudden silence and stillness, clutching the steering wheel in both white-knuckled hands. She panted raggedly. Was she hurt? She looked down at herself. Despite the lack of a seatbelt, no. She didn't seem to be.

Suddenly it felt as though she were breathing in a vacuum. The whitest brightest light exploded all around her, blinding her for the barest second. Then the brightness simply disappeared, replaced by dull, flashing lights that rhythmically splashed up against the tree trunk before her and illuminated the grayness of the interior of the truck from behind.

Still gripping the steering wheel, dread creeping up her spine, Audrey turned around to see a black fifties-style police car with grey and white lights rotating on the roof. Grey and white? Audrey looked at the lights, at the cars, at the policemen conversing with one another back on the road, then down at her hands. Everything was in black and white. There was nothing was in color. Not even her fingernails, which she'd painstakingly painted red just that afternoon.

What the hell was going on? Where was her living room? Where was she?

More importantly, where the hell was that spider? She leaned over the steering wheel, searching the surrounding woods through the cracked windshield for anything that looked even remotely arachnid-ish.

Tap-tap-tap!

She turned to look out the driver's window. A blond-haired, boyishly-faced, thirty-something man stood grinning back at her. Cheerfully, he said, "Hello there. How you doing?"

Audrey didn't say a word.

He glanced back at the police officers, gave a wave, then grinned at her. He beckoned with two fingers. "Come on out of the truck."

She shook her head.

His grin turned cajoling as he blinked both eyes and gestured with his head. "Come on. Get out of the truck. The nice policemen want to ask you a few questions, and I'm sure by now you've probably got one or two to ask yourself."

Chilling fingers danced up her spine, spreading tingling tendrils of uncertainty through every nerve ending in her body before lodging in the pit of her stomach. She must be in a coma or, dear Lord, dying. Her mind had taken her, for whatever bizarre reason, into the movie she had been gearing herself up to watch.

This wasn't real. It couldn't possibly be. In all likelihood, she was lying on her living room floor, dying from electrocution. And if that was the case, well then, she felt a little bit cheated, to be honest. Not one spirit had beckoned her to the other side of that bright light. She hadn't seen not one angel, or her Grandma, or anything. What did she get? A big-ass hairy spider, running across the road in front of her truck.

Audrey gripped the steering wheel with sudden, knuckle-whitening strength. She was in hell! That was the only explanation! Not even God would let spiders into heaven.

Well, crap! Mom had been right after all: the devil did love a potty-mouth.

Tap-tap-tap.

"Uh, hello?" the blonde man outside her window said. He half-smiled. "Unless you want to finish out the scene in the hospital, you should really make-up your mind and come out here. Police are notoriously short tempered in these kinds of films."

Audrey turned her head to look at him. Maybe she wasn't in hell, after all. This might all be one big hallucination, and all she had to do was snap herself out of it.

She closed her eyes, but when she opened them back up, he was still there. She tried again, squeezing her eyes closed for a little longer. Nope, he was still there. She tried again. Nope. One more time. Still there. Damn. Maybe a series of rapid-fire blinks with a really energetic Samantha "Bewitched" nose wiggled thrown in...

She stopped when she noticed the blonde man had raised one eyebrow at her. Slowly, he turned his head to one side. "Are you ... okay?"

"Oh damn," Audrey said. "You're real."

He grinned. "Yes, I am."

"But you can't be real!"

"No?" His grin began to fade. There went the eyebrow and the head turning again.

"No!" she insisted and thumped passionately upon her chest. "I refuse to go to hell! This is my hallucination! My twisted, dying-brain illusion, and my rules. And I say, if I'm going to die, I want my hallucinations to be in color, without

police, and sure as hell without big-ass, hairy spiders running across the road!"

He smiled. "Trust me. You are not dying. This is not a hallucination. The police aren't going to disappear until the scene changes. And, if I were you, I really would not bring up the significantly larger than normal spider."

"But it was huge! Big enough to eat people!"

"Yes, it was," he agreed mildly. "And it will. But you're not supposed to believe you really saw it."

"I *don't* believe I really saw it!"

"That's my girl! Come on, now. Out of the truck." He stepped back so she could unlock and open the truck.

She glanced behind her at the two officers watching them from the road, then slowly reached for the door. He helped her down, folded her hand into the crook of his arm and, as they walked back to the waiting policemen, whispered, "You're a little shaky from the accident, but you feel fine. Something ran in front of your truck, you think maybe a rabbit."

"No way was that a rabbit," she said, looking at him as though he'd suddenly sprouted a second head.

"Yes, it was. Because they're not going to believe you if you say 'spider.' Also, your father disappeared last week—"

"My father's been dead for ten years!"

"You've been searching for him all day," the blonde man said with forced patience.

"He's buried in Blodgett Cemetery!"

"You're really worried."

"About me, maybe," Audrey snapped. "I don't want to get eaten by a huge, hairy spider! Dad's dead. There's not a whole lot else that can happen to him!"

His voice dropped a little lower since they were almost to the police. "Just tell them what I told you, or we're going to have to redo the scene."

"You okay?" one of the officers asked her.

"No, I'm not okay!" Audrey jerked her hand out of the blonde man's grasp and pointed to him, saying, "I don't know who this man is, but I think he's crazy! I am not looking for my father, because my father's dead!" she barked up into the frowning blonde's face. "And that was no six-foot-tall, hairy, eight-legged bunny I saw scampering in front of my truck. It was a spider!"

The blonde man sighed and ran a hand through his hair. The two officers looked at one another, and Audrey stamped her foot, shouting up at the tree tops, "And the world has until the count of five to switch back into color, by God! One!" She cast the night sky a baleful glare and her whole body bounced as she tapped her foot with impatient patience. "Two..." she warned the heavens.

Audrey was handcuffed for her own protection and put into the back of the police car. Before one of the officers closed the door, the blonde man came over and squatted down beside her. Very calmly and very matter-of-factly, he said, "I have waited fifty years for a non-movie generated co-star. If I have to wait another fifty years for you to get your lines right, I'm going to be really, really cross with you."

She stuck her tongue out at him, but as she looked angrily away, for a moment she couldn't seem to make her lungs inhale. The sensation of breathing in a vacuum came again. It lasted less than a second before her stomach seemed to drop to her toes, much like riding the downhill curve of a roller coaster, and the whitest, brightest light exploded all around her.

Audrey was back in the crashed truck, staring at the steering wheel, which was clenched tightly in her no-longer-cuffed hands. The radiator was still hissing in front of the pine tree, and the police lights flashed rhythmically through the rear window to briefly light up the interior of the truck in all its black and white glory. The two police officers were still talking to one another back on the road, as though nothing had happened, as though they hadn't just cuffed her and put her in the back of the squad car.

Tap-tap-tap.

The blonde man leaned his shoulder against the truck and smiled at her a little wearily. "Let's not try to make this any more difficult than it already has to be, all right?"

Audrey scrambled sideways out from behind the steering wheel, shoved open the passenger door, and took off running into the surrounding woods.

The police yelled out for her to stop, but it was that second set of footsteps that came crashing through the leaves and brush behind her that put wings on her feet. The blonde man had given chase, and despite her best efforts, she could hear he was catching up.

It wasn't a very exciting escape attempt. It was an old forest, vastly overgrown and dense, with fallen trees and rotting stumps everywhere, all covered in moss and half buried in shrubs. And he caught up to her as she was trying to scale over the top of the first fallen log she came to.

"Now hang on," he said, half laughing, as though unsure whether he ought to be amused or annoyed.

But when he tried to take hold of her arm and pull her back, she swung around fist first. She missed his nose by a good eight inches, but the attempt alone was enough to leech some of the amusement from his eyes. His face took on a grimmer expression.

"Have you lost your mind?" he demanded, and grabbed both of her arms to keep her from hitting him again.

She couldn't slug him, so she stepped on his foot instead—hard. When he let go of her with a shout and grabbed his own calf, she threw a leg over the top of the log in a renewed bid for freedom from all this unbelievable lunacy.

"Ow, damn it!" The blonde man grabbed the back of her shirt, pulling her back down. Catching her shoulders, he shook her once. The look in his eyes now anything but amused. "That hurt! Now look here, I know you're—"

"Let go!" She stomped rapidly and angrily at his feet.

"Ow!" Through gritted teeth, he growled, "I'm trying to be patient with you, but I swear, if you do that one more time, I'm going to put you over my knee!"

She actually stopped fighting him for all of two seconds. Then her eyes narrowed and she kicked him smartly in the shin.

"OW! That's it!" he snapped and sat down on the log. "If this is the only way you're going to settle down and listen to me, then fine! We'll do it the hard way!"

The next thing Audrey knew, she was face-down across his lap and he had both her legs pinned between his own. Her jaw dropped and her eyes widened in shock when she felt his open hand connect sharply with the seat of her pants. "Hey!"

It didn't hurt exactly, although it did sting. And maybe if he'd only left off with the one swat, it might not have developed into something more painful. But he didn't leave off. In fact, he kept right on walloping her, his palm cracking across her rapidly warming bottom with Levi-muffled smacks and pops that turned that slight stinging sensation into a full-blown ache with unbearable quickness.

As her level of discomfort began to increase, so did the volume on her protests. "Stop it! Let go of me!"

She beat her fist against his leg and swung her elbow back, trying to catching him in the side. It wasn't very effective, as far as self-defense went, and frankly, he was doing more damage with the fire he was vigorously lighting in her behind.

"I know you're scared," he snapped, his hand never once breaking the angry tattoo rhythm he was beating out against her backside. "So was I when I first came here, but if you don't stop fighting me and start listening, we might damn well be here forever!"

"Ow! Ow!" The warmth in her jeans had become a bonfire of heat, the steady smacks of his hand imparting very real shocks of pain each time it landed. "Ouch! Ow! Stop it!" she

yelped and squirmed, her distressing growing, and tried to reach back with her free hand to grab his arm. "No more, please! Ow!"

"Oh no, you don't!" He caught her wrist. "You wouldn't settle down when I tried to talk to you, so now you're going to do your listening like this!"

"Ow!" Audrey bucked, desperate to twist her bottom out of his reach. "Okay, okay! I'll listen!"

But he pulled her back over his knee, making her bottom an even better target and dropping her nose that much closer to the earthy ground. And he kept right on spanking, his hand seeming to grow harder and his swats more painful as he lectured, "Like it or not, we're stuck with each other and without a whole lot of choices. So you can either cooperate and make this easier on the both of us. Or you can continue acting like a little pain in the butt, and I'll tell you right here and now," he finally stopped spanking her, shook his hand twice, then rested it on the surface of her sore and throbbing bottom, "I've got no problem returning the favor."

Audrey lay over his hard thighs, gasping and panting and trying hard not to cry. This was quite possibly the meekest moment of her entire life. How embarrassing, to be taken across a stranger's knee and spanked like a recalcitrant child! She was thirty years old, for crying out loud! A grown woman, and grown women just didn't get spanked! They sure as anything didn't get spanked by hallucinations in dying-illusion forests where huge spiders were wandering freely about!

Blinking rapidly, she stammered, "Is this real?"

"Yes," he said, exasperated.

"No, I mean is it—" she squeaked, "—really, really real?"

The blonde man holding her was quiet. Then, without the slightest hint of rancor, he softly said, "Yes. It's really, really real."

From behind them, as the two police officers crashed into view through the underbrush, finally catching up to them, all of Audrey's wounded pride came rushing back to her.

"Let me up! Stop man-handling me!" She bucked and kicked, fighting to get off his lap and getting absolutely nowhere. He'd pinned her just too darn effectively. Grunting, she tried one last time to heave herself up, then shouted to the police, "Don't just stand there! Arrest the sonofabitch!"

Shaking his head, his mouth compressing in hard, tight line, the blonde raised his arm and attacked the bouncing swells of her bottom with renewed vigor.

While Audrey shouted and wailed, one of the officers took out a pocket knife. He clipped a thin branch from a nearby maple and trimmed it down before bringing it to them. "Here, son. Lord knows, you'll wear out your hand before you wear down that wild cat."

"Thanks," the blonde man said and took it.

Audrey screeched as that switch made its debut assault across the seat of her jeans. And though she exhausted herself trying to get away, reprieve from the relentless 'swish-thwacks' of that branch came only with the breathless vacuum sensation and the blinding flash of light that dumped her back behind the wheel of the truck.

Yowling like a trod-upon cat, she arched her hips in a vain attempt to get her oh-so-sore bottom up off the stiff leather

seat. Tears streaked down her cheeks. Hiccupping and miserable, she cupped her nether cheeks in both hands and simply held them, wounded and throbbing, between splayed fingers.

Tap-tap-tap.

Gasping, she turned her head and looked into the very grim face of the blonde man. They stared at one another for a long time before, wincing, Audrey lowered her bottom gingerly back onto the seat and reached over to roll down the truck window.

"What—" she sniffled, "what was th-that?"

"Scene change," he told her, his tone once again mild and calm. "We made too many mistakes, the script couldn't be carried through to the end, so we have to start the scene over. It feels odd, I know. But it only lasts for a second or two. You'll get used to it."

"Who are you?"

"Peter, according to the script. But my name is Morgan Kreiter."

He put his hand through the open window and, after a moment, she meekly shook it and sniffled again. "Who am I?"

"According to the script, you are Beth."

"My name's Audrey."

"Hello, Audrey." He let go of her hand. "Come on. Let's get this scene over with."

She opened the door and gingerly climbed down out of the truck. She groaned and gently cupped her bottom again. The rasp of her jeans felt like sandpaper against her tenderized flesh. "What's my father's name?"

"Doctor Arthur Waller. He's a local botanist and spends a lot of his time out here in the woods, which of course makes him prime spider fodder. But you don't know that yet. Anyway, he went missing about a week ago, and you're beside yourself with worry for him."

Audrey sighed. She cast a slightly disgruntled side-long look up at the police, who had approached their side of the road and were waiting for them. Then she turned that same look on him. "I can't believe they let you spank me like that."

Morgan half smiled. "Yeah well, lucky you, you've landed in a movie that predates political correctness. Spanking young ladies isn't considered wrong back now."

She glared at him, but when he held out his hand, she grudgingly took it and let herself be led up to the waiting policemen.

"Looks like a nasty crash," one officer commented as they were approaching. "Are you okay?"

Audrey gave Morgan another peevish look, but dutifully said, "I was feeling a little shaky, but I'm fine now."

"What happened?" the officer asked.

"Rabbit," she said shortly. "Just sort of ... darted across the road in front of me."

The one man nodded. "That can happen, I suppose. You're lucky it wasn't a skunk."

"This is a school night, isn't it?" the second officer asked. "What are you doing all the way out here at this time of night?"

Her mouth twitched. "I'm looking for my father."

"Out here? The closest town's five miles away."

"He's a botanist," Morgan supplied. "He's been studying some of the local flora."

"At ten o'clock at night?" the second officer asked, his tone dubious.

"He disappeared last week. No one's seen or heard from him."

"I'm beside myself with worry," Audrey dead-panned.

The policemen looked at her.

So did Morgan. He cleared his throat. "She's, uh ... probably still a little shaky from the accident." He put his arm around her shoulder. "It's all the stress. And she's tired. Worried. Missing her daddy, and all. You know little girls and their daddies."

Finally, one of the officers said, "You need a lift back to town?"

"Yes, thank you. That would be very nice. Come along, Beth." He took her arm and walked with her to the back of the squad car. Very low and close to her ear, he whispered, "It wouldn't kill you to put a little effort into this, you know."

"This is a Roger Corman movie," she whispered back. "I don't have to act if I don't want to."

"How badly do you want to get out of here?" he asked bluntly, holding the car door open for her.

Audrey looked at the seat, then at him, and then she sighed. Very gingerly, she crawled in to kneel on the seat, facing backwards out the rear window.

"Sit down," Morgan said, sliding onto the seat beside her. "Try and look normal."

"I can't sit down."

"You can, too. Now sit. Hurry up before they get in. If they see you like this, they'll say something and that runs the risk of altering the script. We might have to redo the scene."

"I can't sit down," Audrey huffed. "It hurts."

Morgan turned sideways on the seat and said, "You want it to hurt even more?"

Scowling, Audrey turned on her knees and gradually lowered herself to actually sit on the seat. She wilted a little the instant her fanny made contact and, hissing a breath between her teeth, snarled, "Boy, I hope you get eaten next!"

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAPTER TWO

"And I mean that, too," Audrey grumbled, pushing her hands against the car seat in an effort to get her weight up off her tender bottom. "I hope you get eaten by the biggest, hugest, meanest spider out there."

She was careful to keep her voice down so the two police officers in the front seat wouldn't hear her.

"It wouldn't be the first time that happened, but I think you're heading for disappointment, sweetheart." Morgan grinned at her, although it didn't quite touch his blue eyes, and with his head cocked sideways like it was, it was a look that appeared almost evil. "I'm the hero. I actually survive this film."

She tsked with disgust and turned her head to look out the window just in time to see everything go from black and white to ... well, a grayer form of slightly unfocused black and white.

Audrey blinked twice. "What just happened?"

"We're between scenes," Morgan said. "Mind if I ask you a question?"

Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "What?"

"What year is it? Back home, I mean."

"Two-thousand-and-three." Her mouth twisted with a grimace of distaste. "I know I'm probably not going to like the answer, but why?"

"Hm." Morgan looked out the window on his side of the car. "Interesting."

Silence reigned in the back seat of the squad car as they bumped and jostled down the unpaved road towards town. Finally, realizing he wasn't going to say any more without some prompting, Audrey nudged him with her elbow. "Mind letting me in on whatever it is you find so interesting?"

"Time," he said again, as if that should explain all. When she only gave him a blank look, he said, "It's not constant; it's relative. See, the movie runs for about an hour and a half, but for us, in this alternate dimension, it takes about a week to go smoothly from start to finish. As near as I can figure, I've been re-enacting this movie for fifty years. But in actuality, only twenty years have passed on the outside. I just," he shrugged. "I find that interesting."

"You don't look over fifty. You don't look over thirty-five."

He cast her a very boyish smile. "Yeah. I find that interesting, too."

"Alternate dimension," Audrey mused. "Constant time, relative time. Are you a scientist?"

"Security guard. But I've seen a lot of Star Trek. Never missed a rerun. You can't watch that much Spock and not pick up a few things."

Picking at her fingernails, in an uncharacteristic bout of timidity, she asked, "Have you picked up on how we can get out of here and back into our own dimension?"

"I've got a good idea. The way I figure it, we can do one of two things. We can play out the movie to its scripted conclusion, the reality will have been completed and it's possible that we'll end up back in our own reality."

"Possible?"

"Well, I figure it's either that or, when this dimension reaches its completion, the credits will roll and then the reality will collapse. We could end up fading into nothingness."

"And if we don't act out the movie to the end?"

"We stay, reenacting the same scenes over and over again until we do."

She groaned "Do we have to play out every single scene? I mean, exactly like the script?"

"We have a little bit of leeway, as far as I can tell. The problem comes in when we alter the course of the script. I've made some little mistakes before and still completed the scenes to the end of the movie. If I veer too dramatically from the script, then the scene starts over, and too many little mistakes spread out over several scenes can result in my going back two or three scenes. And of course, if I get killed or the spiders win, then the whole movie starts over."

Audrey raised her hand. "Excuse me. Killed? What do you mean, killed?"

Morgan scratched one eyebrow, ducking his head a little sheepishly. "Well, in the beginning, for about three months I was a little suicidal. When it finally hit me that I wasn't going home anytime soon, I tried a lot of—other ways to get out of this place. Thankfully, they didn't work."

She groaned again, turning her face back to the window.

"Well," Morgan protested. "It was depressing. I'm thirty-five, still in high school, and no matter what I do I'm always failing history. I'm a nerd, the school bullies pick on me, and I had to learn how to play the ukelele so I could sing a dorky

little song about a sad frog in scene nine. I absolutely hate that song, but I have to do it because it's in the script."

"A sad frog?"

"It was the age of Elvis and Frank Sinatra, and that was the best the director could come up with." Morgan shook his head, but then he laughed and covered his eyes with one hand. "Oh, and you're going to love scene thirteen."

For some reason, when he said that the fine hairs at the nape of Audrey's neck began to prickle. Warily, she asked, "Why? What happens in scene thirteen?"

"I spank you for being unreasonable."

"Okay, stop the car," Audrey told the policemen in the front seat.

Neither man turned around or spoke, and the one who had cut a switch for her continued driving as though she hadn't said anything at all.

"Do you guys understand English?" she demanded. "I said pull over!"

Neither officer showed any signs of having heard her.

"We're in between scenes," Morgan told her again.

"What the hell does that mean?" she snapped.

"It means that between scene two and scene three, in the script there was a little line that said, 'Cops drive Peter and Beth to Beth's house'. The camera didn't cover that in the movie, but it was in the script so we have to reenact it. This reality doesn't jump from scene to scene, it has gray periods when the 'camera' isn't on us and we can do pretty much anything we like without affecting the movie."

"Can you write the script out for me?" Audrey asked. "That way at least I'll know what to say and do."

"I could," Morgan said. "But the second the scene changed, whatever I give you will disappear. Reading from a script isn't in the script. Don't worry. It's an easy enough movie to pick up. We probably won't have to do many scenes over more than two or three times. You strike me as a pretty smart woman. I'm sure you'll pick this up in no time." He smiled at her. "How about you?"

"How about me, what? Do you think I'm going to argue with you for calling me smart?"

"Oo, we are a defensive one, aren't we?" Morgan said. "No. I meant, how did you get in here?"

"Lightning," Audrey said. "It got me as I was putting the tape in the VCR."

"VCR?"

"Video Cassette Recorder. Oh yeah. You're pre-BETA, aren't you? Man, you really are old." She ignored the look he gave her. "A tape is a plastic box about this big." She showed him with her hands. "After a movie is released from the theaters, then it gets put on tapes and DVDs (we'll save that for a different discussion) and people can watch them at home with their VCRs."

"I'll have to take your word for it," Morgan said, then his face brightened. "Hey, have they built flying cars yet?"

Audrey blinked twice. "Um ... no."

"How many moon colonies do we have?"

"Um ... As far as I know, NASA isn't even sending explorers to the moon anymore. We've pretty much found out everything we need to know about it."

Morgan's smile faded away. "Oh. That's too bad. I was kind of looking forward to living on the moon."

He turned his head to gaze out the window at the passing black and white landscape and was quiet.

After a moment, Audrey broke the silence with a tentative, "I hear Mars colonies might not be entirely out of the question, though."

He turned back to her. "Mars? Really?"

"NASA's sent some probes and supposedly they've found evidence that there was once an atmosphere and running water. Some folks are talking terra forming, though it probably won't happen in our lifetime."

Morgan's face brightened with another big grin. "Oh well, that's okay. Gives us something to look forward to, doesn't it?"

The police car pulled up to the sidewalk in front of a small, but nice two-story house. Neither policeman made any acknowledgment of the stop. They didn't look back in the rear view mirror, say 'get out' or even 'good bye'.

"Are they just going to sit there?" Audrey whispered as Morgan opened the door and got out.

"It's not in the script that they do anything but drive us home." He held the door open for her and offered her his hand to help steady her as she gingerly climbed out of the backseat. "I once stripped them down to their underwear just to see if I'd get a reaction, but there was nothing. If it's not in

the script, during these gray periods, the movie generated characters don't do anything."

"This whole thing is just not right," Audrey said, holding her head in her hands.

"Yeah, I know," Morgan said, almost cheerfully. "I've been thinking that for the last fifty years."

She blinked as the police car drove away and left them standing in front of the strange house. "When did you come in?"

"August twelfth, nineteen-eighty-one."

"That's twenty-two years." She blinked again. "I thought you said you've been here for fifty."

"Remember, time is relative," Morgan said again. "Not constant. If I had to guess, I'd say this dimension is probably independent of our own. So, unless you'd like to stand out here all night." He gestured to Beth's dark house. "I'm not entirely sure, but I think you've got the house to yourself. I don't think Beth had a mother written into the script."

Audrey stared down the neat cement walkway at the nice suburban home, lit as it was only by the soft grey glow of the front porch light. She made absolutely no move towards it though, and instead asked, "How did you get here?"

"I was a security guard, working night shifts at MGM studios. Boring job, but it paid the bills and I got to see all the movies I wanted, so the perks were good. One night, I put a reel on the projector and reached to turn it on, the lights suddenly flickered, and the next thing I knew, I was standing outside of Beth's crashed truck."

"I wish I'd been watching something nice," she said. "Little Women or Anne of Green Gables. Or a comedy maybe. Ghostbusters. I could do Ghostbusters. I wouldn't mind seeing a ten-story-tall, Stay-Puffed marshmallow man right about now. Anything is better than huge, disgusting spiders."

"Oh, I don't know," Morgan said. "I can think of something worse."

She gave him a dry look. "What?"

"We could be doing *'The Story of O'*."

Her look turned incredulous. "Morgan! That doesn't make me feel better."

"No? Have you ever seen *'The Story of O'*?"

"No."

"Trust me," he said. "If you'd seen it, you'd feel better."

She shook her head and turned back around to stare up at the dark house.

"Just go inside," Morgan said. "Try to get some sleep. I'll come back and walk you to school in the morning."

Audrey's shoulders slumped. "I have to go to school?"

"We're seventeen, according—"

"—according to the script," she intoned with him, then sighed. "I don't suppose I could just click my heels together, say, 'There's no place like home', and have all of this just disappear, huh?"

"I'll be cross if it does, since it didn't work for me," Morgan said. Then his tone turned soothing, "You'll be okay, Audrey. I'm going to help you through this. We'll do a scene-by-scene run down of what you can expect tomorrow. Don't worry. You'll have plenty of warning before things start to get hairy."

I'm going to do everything I can to keep you as safe as possible, all right?"

Audrey started slowly up the walkway, but only got a few steps before she spun around on her heel and came back to him. "Would, um ... would you mind, Morgan, um ... staying here tonight—I mean, sleep on the couch or ... I know we don't know each other, but..."

"Nothing's going to happen tonight," he assured her. "I know where all the spiders are; you're perfectly safe."

"I know, I—I just don't want to be alone tonight." She looked straight at his chest so she wouldn't have to see him laugh at her childishness.

Except that he didn't laugh. He didn't even smile. "Sure. If that's what you want."

"You'll sleep here with me?" she asked, then abruptly flushed. "Well, I don't mean *with* me, I meant—"

"I know what you meant," he grinned. "Just give me a pillow and blanket. I'll sleep on the floor."

And he did, too. He spent the whole night lying on the carpet by the twin bed in Beth's second-floor, baby-doll room. He didn't even complain. He snored like a chainsaw, but he didn't complain. He didn't make fun of her, either. That was almost enough right there to make her want to forgive him for spanking her. At which point she tried to roll from her belly onto her side, her tender bottom touched the sheets and mattress, and she sucked a sharp breath and quickly turned back onto her stomach.

The word 'forgiveness' vanished from her personal dictionary.

She slugged him with one of her two pillows instead, then quickly closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

"Huh?" He sat up blearily. "What?"

Though her actions were childish, they did make her feel a bit better.

She heard Morgan yawn and scratch his chest. Then he picked up the pillow and set it on the bed next to her. He patted her hand lightly, before laying back down. A few minutes later, the snores began to rattle up from the floor again.

Opening her eyes, Audrey drew the returned pillow into a one-armed embrace, hugged it close to her body and sighed. Great. Now she felt guilty too. Cussed man. He was only being nice just to spite her.

She sighed again.

Tomorrow would be another day in spider hell and was likely to come, in typical tomorrow-like fashion, much too quickly. She buried her face in the pillow, closed her eyes and tried to get some sleep.

* * * *

Breakfast was scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast, all in varying shades of in-between-the-scenes, unappetizing gray. Audrey hadn't yet identified what he'd given her to drink. Might have been orange juice. Could have been milk. She'd probably know for sure if she ever worked up the courage to sip some, but uncertain what to set her taste buds to, she was understandably reluctant.

Morgan sat across the kitchen table from her in full 'ivy league' dress, complete with tie and cardigan sweater. He'd picked her clothes out for her, absolutely refusing to let her wear her 'dungarees', as he'd called them, to school. Instead, she was decked out like a doll in a pale, belted, past-the-knee length dress (which might have been yellow or even a pale pink, judging by the gray shading), with clunky, white-and-black saddle shoes on her feet. And rather than partaking of normal breakfast time conversation, Morgan was content to pass the morning grilling her.

"What's your name?" he asked.

And she replied with a very unenthusiastic, "Beth Wallers."

"And mine?"

"Peter, from school."

"What grade are we in?"

"Twelfth."

"And what are you?"

"Bored to tears," she said in barely concealed exasperation. She poked her fork at her eggs, which looked as though they'd sat too long in the fridge.

Swallowing the last of what was in his own mouth, Morgan set his fork aside and said, "Try again."

Audrey wilted in her chair. "But we've been over this a million times!" She didn't mean to whine, but that's how it came out anyway. And she even kicked at the legs of her chair, an emphasis to her frustration.

He was completely unsympathetic. "Then make it one million and one."

Growling with frustration, Audrey bouncing in her chair and stomped her clunky shoes on the floor. Then she sighed. "I'm worried about my father. I don't know where he is. I want to go looking for him, and yet I'm going to school instead. Morgan, I've played hookie-for real—for lesser reasons!"

"The script says—"

"Oh, hang the script!" She scowled at her plate. "I don't see what difference it makes if we go look for him now or later. The end result's the same. We still go looking for him."

"It makes a difference. There's things that happen at school that progress the plot, such as it is. So, to school we go. Eat your breakfast."

"I'm not hungry."

In the process of picking his fork up, Morgan put it right back down again. His good-natured smile faded into something slightly less amused, and the stern look in his eyes grew just a little more grim. "Is this really how you want the day to go? Because if your highest aspiration is to be as difficult and as argumentative as possible, then we can start practicing for scene thirteen right now."

"Practice for whatever the hell scene you want," she grumbled into her eggs. "I could care less."

It wasn't until he pushed his chair back that she remembered what scene thirteen was.

Her eyes widened and her head snapped up. "I'm sorry!" she blurted as he walked over to the stove and took a wooden spoon out of the utensil crock. "I didn't mean that! I—I'm just on edge, Morgan! I didn't sleep well!"

He came back to the table and pulled her chair out.

"I just—I don't want to be here!" she cried as he took hold of her arm and pulled her up.

"I don't want to be here either," he said as he took her place on the chair. "I have also been here a heck of a lot longer than you, but you don't see me trying to make the situation worse."

"You're right," she babbled, digging in her feet and leaning back when he began to drag her to him. But he was stronger, and despite her best efforts, he began to win by slow inches. "You're absolutely right! I've seen the light, Morgan! I-I'm a changed woman! Oh no, please—I-I-I swear y-you won't hear another snarky word out of me! No, no wait! I-I'll be a ray of sunshine!" she cried out desperately when he finally succeeded in pulling her face-down over his sturdy thighs. "Oh please, Morgan! I didn't mean to say that! It just came out!" She whimpered and reached back one handed to grab the back of her skirt to keep him from raising it. "No, you can't! What are you doing? I promise I'll be good! Don't—Don't spank me!"

He caught hold of her wrist, pressing it up into the small of her back and out of his way. As he worked her pale skirt and slip up over her hips, she began to kick and struggle with frantic desperation.

He wouldn't need to bare her to make a lasting impression this morning. The switch had left its mark and dark lines streaked out around the edges of her elastic underpants as well as lower down where he had caught the tops of her thighs in two places. On that soft crease where her bottom met her thighs and her underwear failed to cover her, there

were dark mottled prints that looked suspiciously a lot like his thumb and two long fingers.

He patted the seat of her white cotton panties with the wide flat head of the wooden spoon, even as he shook his head once. She was going to feel this, all right. "You remember what I said about choices and about being a pain in the butt instead of cooperative?"

Giving up trying to struggle out of his implacable grasp, Audrey sagged limply over his lap. She swallowed hard, tried feebly one last time to twist her wrist out of his grasp, then reluctantly answered, "You said you'd return the favor."

"This would be a lot easier on us both if you'd make up your mind to believe me."

The wooden spoon bit into the fleshiest part of her buttocks with sharp, crisp smacks that had her yelping and screeching within the first six whaps. He only gave her fifteen, but he made them hard enough to count. And he put them in all the right places so that by the time the last one fell, Audrey was performing a veritable shimmy of a dance over his thighs, panting and gasping, her breaths like sobs although she stubbornly blinked back the tears that glistened in her wide eyes.

When he let her go, she vaulted up off his knee, scrambling to get her skirt back down and then grabbed her bottom in both hands. She mewed in pain as she clutched herself, then rubbed, then clutched again and gave him the most wounded look.

"I think I'll keep this until the scene changes," he said, and as he stood, he slid the wooden spoon into his back trousers' pocket.

Her eyes narrowed and her mouth turned down into a mutinous frown.

"Now, eat your breakfast," he told her as he went back to his seat.

"It looks gross," she muttered.

"True," he said, picking up his toast. "But you're going to be here a while, and the food won't look any better later on."

It was a weird thing to eat food that looked so awful and yet tasted so good. She managed to swallow five or six bites, but it sat like a lump in the pit of her stomach for a long time afterward, and she spent the entire walk down the grey streets to Beth and Peter's highschool trying to convince herself that she wasn't going to throw it all up again.

"When do we start to get chased by spiders?" she asked Morgan. She had to scoot a little closer and slightly behind him as they passed two movie generated teenagers—listless and non-conversational—also walking towards the high school. Everyone they passed looked just like that. To Audrey, it was like walking through a town full of zombies.

"Not for a good while yet," he assured her. "Don't worry. I'll let you know before it happens."

"I don't think I want to know."

Just as they were about to cross the street to the high school, Morgan stopped her. "This is a fifties-style movie and you're the heroine, remember? That means you survive this too, okay?"

She nodded. "I'd just feel better if I knew what was going to happen. What if we survive the spiders only to have this reality collapse in on us? I don't want to fade to black. I want to go home."

"I know. It'll be okay." He smiled at her, and then without warning, leaned down to press a soft kiss on her forehead. In that instant, it felt as though her stomach dropped all the way to her toes. It wasn't an unpleasant kiss and, delivered as it was in an almost brotherly fashion, the warm touch of his lips against her skin had her lips tingling to return the gesture.

The sensation shot down through her body, ignoring all of her innocent extremities to lodge in her suddenly stiffening nipples and even lower down in her belly. It was an entirely sexual response, one that was completely unexpected, unwarranted and was, frankly, unwelcome. This was, after all, the man who had unrepentantly spanked her. Not just once, but twice now! He wasn't supposed to kiss her, and she really wasn't supposed to like it, for crying out loud!

By the look on Morgan's face as he pulled back again, that kiss had been just as unnerving for him. "Um, that was just ... for luck."

"Right," she agreed wholeheartedly. "Thanks."

"Sure." He let go of her and cleared his throat. "Anytime."

They started across the street and Audrey felt that by now familiar vacuum sensation begin to suck the air from her lungs. The entire world brightened with a lightning flash of brilliance and she felt a sudden disorientation hit her as her surroundings vanished.

She found herself standing at the foot of the school's front steps, not far from the flag pole and with Morgan nowhere in sight. But at least the world was back to black and white instead of ... well, black and grey.

"Hey, Beth!"

Audrey turned to see three giggling girls heading right for her.

"Well, has he asked you yet?" one gushed as they drew near.

"Uh, who?" she asked. "Asked me what?"

All three stared at her in astonishment. They probably couldn't have been more surprised if she suddenly shucked off all her clothes and gone running down the sidewalk starkers.

"Has Trevor asked you to the dance?" one girl, a platinum blonde, asked slowly. "Do you remember Trevor? Your incredibly cute boyfriend, the most gorgeous hunk in the entire school, not to mention the captain of the football team."

"How could you forget?" another, a dark haired girl with a Lucille Ball hairdo, asked. "I thought you went out last night."

"Uh, no, I went out looking for my father," Audrey stammered, and darted a quick glance around for Morgan. "He's missing. I'm very worried."

"Beth?" The blonde peered at her closely. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, I—I'm just very, very worried and don't feel much like dating. I guess."

The three girls looked at her, then at each other, then back at her.

"Well, then," the blonde managed a smile. "We'll see you in home-ec, okay, Beth?"

"Sure." Audrey waved to them as they shuffled past her. They jogged quickly up the stairs, their heads ducking together in furtive whispers as they glanced back at her once before disappearing into the school.

That probably could have gone better.

"Beth!"

Audrey turned around to see Morgan jogging across the school grounds, headed straight for her. She had just started out to meet him when she noticed a group of four boys in letter jackets moving to meet him as well. There was no greeting exchanged, but as they drew close enough, one jock pulled away from the pack and stuck out his foot.

A briefly irritated look crossed Morgan's face a second before he obligingly tripped over the proffered limb, stumbled, then went all the way down to the sidewalk in the nastiest looking of spills.

"Morgan!" Audrey broke into a run. "Are you okay?" she cried as she reached him.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Morgan said, picking himself up off the cement. He looked at his hands, then bent to brush the dirt from his trousers.

Audrey spun on the boys, her eyes narrowing and her hands clenching into fists at her sides. "You bullying bastards! You did that on purpose!"

All four of the young men looked stunned, but the one who had done the actual tripping gaped at her in disbelief. "Hey, chill out, doll face. I didn't know the spaz was gonna fall down."

"Doll face?" Audrey echoed, and then again with even more temper than before. "Doll face? I'll doll face you!"

She punched him square in the nose. Cartilage crunched under her knuckles and his head snapped back.

Blood spurted between the young man's fingers as he grabbed his face with both hands and fell to his knees. "By dose! By dose!"

"Audrey!" Morgan grabbed her from behind, pulling her sharply back and away from the stunned jocks.

"Ew broke by dose!" the young man cried, staring at his bloody hands in total astonishment.

His three friends stood like gaping statues, frozen in a half-circle of uncertainty around their downed companion.

Audrey struck a boxer's pose, her fists up and ready, straining against Morgan's tight grasp as she demanded, "Who's next? You?" she barked at the taller of the three friends. "You want a piece of me? How about you, you want a piece of me? Come on! I am a woman on the edge; I'll take you all on!"

"Ew broke by nose!" the man on the ground cried out again.

"Get up," she dared him, "I'll give you the black eyes and fat lip to match!"

Without taking their eyes off her, the friends reached down to grab their fallen companion by his jacket. They quickly

dragged him out of her reach until he could finally stagger back onto his feet.

Looking from his bloody fingers to her, the wounded jock shouted, "Led the spaz take ew to da dance, den! I'm trew wid ew!"

They fled to the school with Audrey shouting after them, "Get back here! I'll break the lot of you down to my size!"

Behind her, Morgan began to shake and then to laugh. He had to pick her up off the ground entirely to keep her from running after them. "Audrey, it's all right. I'm fine. They were supposed to knock me down. It's in the script."

"Well, the script sucks!" she snapped back at him. Then glared at him over her shoulder as she added, "And don't let this go to your head! I still don't like you!"

Morgan flopped down to sit on the curb, holding a still seething Audrey tightly on his lap. Though she struggled briefly against his embrace, he continued to laugh and to hold her until the vacuum sensation began to suck at them and the whole scene started over.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAPTER THREE

Watching the bully spill Morgan flat on his face on the sidewalk without any more protest than what Beth, as a nineteen-fifties style maiden of the times would utter, had Audrey gritting her teeth in frustration. Thankfully, it was a scene that didn't last long. At least not once she got it right, a process that took six 'takes' before she managed it. Knocking Trevor down turned out to be the highlight of them all.

In the second attempt, Audrey managed to contain herself while Morgan obligingly stumbled to the ground. But her skin crawled when Trevor threw his arm around her neck and pulled her close to his chest.

"My old man's giving me keys to the car on Friday," he said. "I'll be picking you up in style!"

"Peachy," she said flatly.

He hugged her neck until she was walking hunched over almost bent in half beside him. She wasn't sure whether he was being brutishly lovely, or if he was going to knuckle her head until she cried 'Uncle.'

She tried to push his arm back at least enough so that she could stand up straight. But then he grinned and tried to kiss her, and Audrey reacted without thinking. She grabbed his arm, twisted and then flipped him.

Trevor yelled out the instant he became airborne, and then hit the sidewalk flat on his back. He gaped, his mouth bobbing open and shut again as he sucked to refill his lung with the air that had just been knocked out of him.

"Audrey," Morgan said grimly, brushing off his hands and knees as he stood up. "I'm getting a little tired of falling down. You need to make up your mind. Do you want to follow the script and eventually get out of here, or would you rather stay stuck in this B-flick limbo—" he grabbed the front of her blouse and pulled her so close that they almost bumped noses, "—with me for the rest of all time."

"All right, all right!" she huffed.

He let her go and Audrey shook out the willies that touching her 'boyfriend' had caused. Straightening her shirt, she grudgingly went back to the school's front steps to wait for the scene to repeat itself.

In the third attempt, she made it all the way up to the kiss with minimal effort, but the sight of his smirking mouth, puckering up and zeroing in on her own, had her acting up again. She grabbed his bottom lip in self defense and held on tightly to it.

Trevor yelled. "Hey—ooowwww!"

Audrey would as soon have ripped his lips off except that Morgan came up behind her and caught hold of her arm.

"Drop him," he said sternly.

She obeyed, but grudgingly, and Trevor clapped his hands over his mouth and quickly ducked out of her reach.

"Waz the matter wiv 'ou?" he demanded, cupping his injured mouth protectively.

"I can't do this," Audrey told Morgan. "I'm trying, but I just can't!"

"Itch!" Trevor spat out. He stuck out his bottom lip, his eyes crossing as he tried to see the extent of the damage done to him without the aid of a mirror.

Morgan held up a finger. "Will you excuse us for just one quick second, please?" He took hold of Audrey's arm and pulled her over to the flagpole to talk.

Trevor didn't bother trying to stop them. He rubbed at his mouth. "Knock 'ourseff ou'." He turned to his cronies and pointed at his bottom lip. "Did you see that? Did you see what she did?"

"What part of the concept 'stuck in this repeating universe for all eternity' are you having a problem with?" Morgan demanded once they were far enough away to be considered alone.

"Hey!" She jerked her arm out of his grasp. "You want to get out of here so bad, you kiss him! He'd be more interested in you than me anyway!"

Folding her arms across her chest, she huffed indignantly.

Morgan only blinked at her. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Oh come on! Like you don't know!"

"Know what? Aside from the fact that you're not following the script, what's there to know?"

She gave him a knowing look. "That's Touch Collins."

"So?"

"So, it's not me he's wanting to lock lips with. You're standing in the direction that his door swings anyway."

Morgan stepped back from her. His hands went to his hips and, for a moment, he only stared at her. Finally, he said, "No, I'm not."

Audrey gestured to where her 'boyfriend' was currently getting his mouth closely examined by a friend. "Touch Collins," she said, as if the name alone should explain all.

Morgan looked from her to him, and then back again. "So? So he likes men. So what, that means you can't kiss him?"

"I don't care if he likes men, women, or rutabagas," Audrey said. "It doesn't change the fact that he's playing a mean character. If you want to move this scene along, then you kiss him! That's all I'm saying."

"My kissing him isn't in the script."

"Saved by the All-Mighty script. How convenient for you."

Frowning, Morgan loomed closer to her. "Okay, let's put this in a way that even someone as argumentative as you can understand. I have been here for fifty years; you have been here two days. When you have been here for fifty years, then you may say what you will and will not do in accordance with how this movie goes. Until then, you are going to do what I tell you to or, if you back me into that corner, then I will be more than happy to spank you at the beginning of each and every new scene, just to make sure you do it right. Now, do we understand each other?"

She glared at him, before forcing her mouth to curl into a very grim smile. "Perfectly."

The grey changed all around them, brightening.

"Close your eyes," he said. "Pretend it's Robert Redford."

The vacuum sucked them into the fourth 'take' of the scene.

This time she didn't wait for Morgan to spill himself to the sidewalk. Instead, she made a beeline straight for Touch, reaching him just as Morgan was making his faithful and obligatory trip. She flung open her arms to engulf her surprised boyfriend in an overly-intimate embrace.

"Darling!" Audrey declared. Grabbing his shoulders, she jumped on him, wrapping her legs around his waist, and kissed him full on the mouth.

He even kissed like a two-dimensional black and white man. As she swept her tongue inside his mouth, the taste, texture and feel of him all seemed so very ... well, grey. But she made herself do it, and when the entanglement of their lips finally did break, she was careful to keep her expression as sultry and beguiling as she knew how. That part of it was rather vindicating, actually. She'd always known, somewhere in the back of her mind, all those pre-prom hours spent practicing in front of her bedroom mirror would eventually pay off.

"Hi," Touch gushed, swallowing her performance hook, line, and sinker. His hands settled around her waist, and one even dipped low enough to cup her bottom.

"Do you love me?" she asked him huskily, combing her fingers through his hair, much to the whooping amusement of the surrounding highschool boys.

His hand squeezed her right bottom cheek and his breathing got a little heavier. "Oh, yeah."

Glancing back over her shoulder, Audrey looked at Morgan.

Already beginning to pick himself up off the ground, he stared warily back. In a low voice, he warned, "Don't even think about it."

She cocked an eyebrow at his arrogance and, even though she knew she shouldn't, she turned back to Touch anyway. Pressing her breasts against his chest, she cooed, "Prove your love." Unwrapping her legs, she climbed down off of him and indicated to Morgan with a toss of her head. "The spaz keeps threatening to hurt me. Beat him up."

Touch, along with all his thug cronies, looked at Morgan. "Shit," Morgan said. He took off running with the schoolyard bullies in hot pursuit.

Audrey enjoyed her revenge for the rest of the scene. Of course, as the fifth take began, watching Morgan run wasn't anywhere near as amusing once she realized that the direction he was taking culminated at the spot in which she was standing. For the first time all morning, he hopped clean over Touch's out thrust leg, shoving the bully to one side and kept right on coming. Straight at her.

Audrey dropped her books and raced for the safety of the school.

Some boyfriend Touch turned out to be!

"Hey!" he shouted after them, but didn't bother coming to her rescue. He only watched as they disappeared one after the other through the front school doors.

Audrey ran into the main office with Morgan only a scant few paces behind her. Flinging herself into the principal's office, she tried to slam and lock the door, but he caught the

edge of it in both hands, wedged his leg in the threshold and forced his way into the room.

"Excuse me!" the secretary shouted after them.

"Help!" Audrey screamed back, but Morgan slammed the door and locked it before anyone could come to her rescue.

"I am doing my damndest to get along with you," Morgan growled.

Ducking around the principal's desk, she pointed at him. "Don't you touch me!"

"I want to go home!" he snapped.

"So do I!"

"Then quit messing around!"

"Then quit threatening me! It's not my fault we're stuck here!"

"Newsflash," he said hotly. "It's not my fault, either. But every time you screw up, all you do is ensure that we stay stuck here for that much longer."

"All right!" she shouted, and then held up her hands placatingly. "You're right. That was a mean trick I just pulled, and I'm sorry. I-I'll try to be more cooperative, but I don't want you spanking me any more! It doesn't feel good."

"It's not intended to." He lunged at her, grabbing hold of her arms and pulling her face down over the desktop. He swung his arm, his hand cracking hard across the summit of her rounded bottom three times in rapid succession. Just as quickly, he let go of her and she scrambled backwards onto the floor. She clutched her bottom in both hands and glared at him in wide-eyed anger, panic and even a little relief that it hadn't been worse.

He pointed at her. "Now, you can either acknowledge that we're even and settle down. Or, we can keep fighting and picking at one another, making this whole experience just that much worse, until I get fed up again and really let you have it."

She rubbed her bottom, her chest heaving as she considered her options. There really weren't any.

"I could have spanked you a whole lot harder and a heck of a lot longer than that," he added. "I'd also like to point out one more time that spanking errant, troublesome young women these days, isn't considered wrong back now."

Her mouth pursed, her bottom lip protruding slightly. "Truce?" she asked.

He nodded. "Truce."

The vacuum sucked at them again, and Audrey closed her eyes an instant before the bright light flashed them back to the beginning of the scene. This time, she got it right.

* * * *

It looked exactly like any other science room that she could remember having studied in throughout her high school days. There was a fake skeleton hanging from a metal pole behind the instructor's desk, a chart of the periodic tables hung on the wall, and the blackboard had a 10-page reading assignment chalked next to a list of chemical liquids.

The professor himself looked like Albert Einstein without the mustache and wearing coke-bottle-thick, black-rimmed eyeglasses. He was old, his curly white hair frizzed out all

around his head, and he walked between the students' individual science labs with a back that was slightly hunched.

"Hello, study buddy," Morgan said, startling Audrey as he dropped into the seat next to her.

"Now what?" she asked, her eyes darting furtively between the other students sitting around them.

"No 'Hello, Morgan, thanks for getting me through that last scene'?"

"No," she said shortly.

"What's the matter?"

"It just occurred to me: the more I cooperate with you, the further into this movie we're going to go and the closer we'll get to the part where the spiders start eating people. I don't want to see that. And I really don't want to be in it!"

He caught her hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. "I'll warn you before that starts to happen. Besides, you're the heroine, remember? You survive this, too."

"That's IF everything goes as the script dictates."

"Right."

"But I don't know the script. And you may or may not have noticed, but my skills in following directions aren't really as fine-tuned as they could be."

"If worse comes to worst and we do get eaten," he squeezed her hand again, "it's a short-lived discomfort and then the movie starts over again. No big deal."

She arched her eyebrows. "A short-lived discomfort?"

He nodded. "Really. I've had paper cuts that hurt more than being speared by those giant spider fangs, injected with

a poison and enzymes that slowly turned my body into a liquified goo, right before I was used as a spider slurpee."

Audrey stood up, but Morgan caught her arm and sat her back down again. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. That wasn't funny. I'm sorry."

"I hate spiders," she said. "If I survive this, I'm going to dedicate the rest of my life to squishing every single one of the little eight-legged freaks I find."

"Say, 'Is it possible for a spider to grow as big as a man?'"

Audrey blinked at him. "What?"

"You two aren't doing your work."

Audrey jumped when the elderly teacher suddenly appeared at her elbow. "Oh, Mister, er..."

"Russell," Morgan supplied.

"Right." Audrey cleared her throat. "I, uh, was wondering if you could answer a question for me."

The teacher halfway smiled. "My dear, I have been employed in this capacity for almost forty years just so that I could do exactly that. What would you like to know?"

She tapped two fingers on her desktop and tried not to look too crazy as she mumbled, "Can spiders grow big enough to eat people?"

Mr. Russell's bushy white eyebrows arched up into his hairline. "An interesting question."

"One that's going to have a very interesting answer," Morgan said out of the corner of his mouth. Elbow on the desk, he cupped his chin in the palm of his hand and leaned into it while he listened. "This is my absolute favorite part of

the whole movie. I remember smoking stuff that was good enough to give me epiphanies as convoluted as this."

"Can spiders grow big enough to eat people?" the science teacher mused, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "You know, I'm not entirely sure that they can't. There are some species of tarantula that live out in the desert, which can grow to be as big as a fist or more. I've heard of a species in Africa that's as large as a dinner plate. I suppose it is conceivable, if given enough food, shelter, the right growing conditions, and of course let's not forget the undeniable influences of a nuclear waste facility, such as the one we have just two short miles down the road—"

"Naturally," Morgan said, winking at Audrey.

"Nuclear waste facility?" she echoed.

"I suppose anything is possible," Mr. Russell finished. Then he laughed. "Although highly unlikely, my dear girl. After all, ours is a world of science. For a spider to grow large enough to become a significant danger to human beings, well ... now that would be the discovery of the twentieth century! I'm certain if such a monster existed, we'd have seen some sight of it by now."

"Absolutely," Morgan said, nodding.

"It would have been all over the news. We could read all sorts of articles about it in our morning newspapers."

"Absolutely."

"Rest easy, my girl," the teacher patted her cheek. "There is no such monster living on this world. And certainly not in this town."

"Oh boy, did those ever sound like famous last words," Audrey said as he turned and walked away.

"They were," Morgan said cheerfully.

Folding her arms on top of her desk, Audrey dropped her head down upon them. She groaned. "He seemed like such a nice man, too."

Morgan patted her shoulder. "Try not to get attached."

* * * *

"Is this the scene where we get attacked for the first time?" Audrey huddled close to Morgan's side, constantly scanning the forest of trees and underbrush that shadowed both sides of the unpaved road. It was night, and the only thing that either of them had to protect themselves against any eight-legged creatures that might go 'bump' in the night, were a pair of flashlights. "Why not just hang a sign around our necks? Free spider kibble here, while supplies last."

Morgan only smiled. "Relax. We don't get attacked for another couple scenes yet. Remember, B-Flicks generally start off slow and work their way up to suspenseful—and yet, oddly enough, hoaky—endings."

"So why come out here?" Audrey asked.

"We're looking for your father, remember? Where else should we start but where the first large spider was sited?"

"The first spider?!?" Audrey whipped around to stare at him. "How about a million miles in the opposite direction?"

They rounded a bend in the unpaved road and Audrey saw two things. First, her truck was where she'd left it: crashed

against a tree with the driver's side door wide open and the lights still on. Good battery, that.

Secondly, there was a sixteen foot spider web stretched across the road between the vehicle and themselves.

"Oh, geez!" Audrey jumped back, but a wide-eyed scan of the surroundings revealed no menacing web-builder anywhere in sight. "What does it hope to catch, a Buick?"

"This," Morgan said, gesturing to the web, "is our first real evidence that things are not all rainbows and joy in our lovely little town. Take a good look at it. Tell me what you see."

Reluctantly, Audrey shone her light over the web, following strands that were as thick as her forearm from one side of the road all the way over to the left, where the loose ends were tied to a tree. She blinked twice. "Is that a clove hitch? Is our spider a sailor?"

"Takes some of the scariness right out of the situation, doesn't it?" Morgan patted her back and then went over to the tree. "Whatever you do, don't touch the web."

Unwilling to be left by herself on the open road and in the dark, she followed him at least as far as the web. While Morgan began to dig around in the bushes, she shone her flash light on the strands. For the most part, they looked like ordinary lengths of white rope, sprinkled in glitter that made the web almost sparkle under the light of the half moon. She glanced over at Morgan's back, then stuck out her hand and touched the nearest strand with the tip of her finger. The glitter must have covered glue because the instant she made contact with it, her finger stuck to the web. And it stuck fast.

Audrey glanced at Morgan's back guiltily and tried to pull her finger free. She pulled until it hurt, but the web refused to let her go.

"Um," she said. She closed her eyes, dreading having to confess to something this stupid. "Morgan?"

"Yeah, hang on." He crawled deeper into the bushes.

A branch snapped off to her right and Audrey turned around. She shone her flashlight into the trees, freezing when eight unblinkingly-beady black eyes stared back at her. Eight long legs unfurled, and the huge spider came down out of the tall tree branches, venturing out of the shadows and into the flashlight's glow to touch its front legs to the web.

Her knees almost buckled beneath her, and all of Audrey's breath whooshed out of her lungs in one gasping exhale. "Oh, sh—"

"Okay, I've got it!" Morgan called, climbing back up out of the bushes and onto the road. He held up the clawed tip of a spider's leg, then saw what loomed at the end of her flashlight's quaking beam. "Did I or did I not tell you not to touch the web?"

Audrey shivered and the spider inched closer, plucking and feeling at the glittery rope strands with its front legs.

"Don't move a muscle," Morgan said from behind her, but at the same time the spider's fangs parted and the mouth rubbed together as it made a low hissing noise. As far as Audrey was concerned, that was all, folks!

She dropped her flashlight with a scream and jerked wildly on her arm to either free her finger or remove it from her hand completely.

"Don't!" Morgan yelled. The spider lunged even as he charging in front of Audrey, waving his arms and the clawed leg and shouting, "Hi-yah! Get out of here! Get!"

But it was too late. The spider jumped on her.

* * * *

The instant the vacuum dropped them back on the unpaved stretch of road leading to the truck, Audrey started running. Morgan tackled her to the ground, quickly rolling her onto her back, both flattening himself over her and hugging her tight while she became a kicking, shouting, bucking mass of wildly flailing arms and legs.

"Get off me!" Audrey screamed, the gravel digging into her back and the memory of feeling that spider wrapping its legs around her and sinking its fangs into her shoulder. "Let me go!"

Morgan caught her face in his hands. "Shh, it's okay! Audrey, honey, calm down!"

She beat her fists against his shoulders and the side of his neck, hitting and shoving, struggling to either knock him off or to scramble out from under his weight. But as determined as she was to get away, Morgan continued to hold her until her strength began to wane and the edge of her panic wore down.

"It's okay," he whispered. "You're okay."

Exhaustion and raw fear left her shaking in his arms. She hit his shoulders again, and then began to cry. "You lied to me."

"No, I didn't." He wrapped his arms around her, simply holding her.

"You said we wouldn't get eaten!"

"I said we wouldn't get attacked for another couple of scenes." Morgan raised his head to look at her. He touched her face, smoothing her hair back from her eyes and wiping the tears and dirt from her cheeks. "I also said, don't touch the web. We weren't supposed to know that spider was there. If you'd held perfectly still, the scene would have started over again before the spider reached you, but your struggles elicited a feeding response."

Sobbing, she hit his shoulder one last time, a half-hearted and useless attempt to budge him. "Get off me."

He touched his forehead to hers. "Don't cry, honey."

She shuddered. "I felt its fangs go through me."

"I know." He held her face in the cup of his palms. "Believe me, I know."

"It was going to eat me."

He lowered his head and his lips gently brushed across hers. She shivered again, tasting the salt of her own tears, but didn't say anything more. Sniffling, she raised her chin, a shy invitation for him to do that again.

"The timing is all wrong for this," he murmured, the touch of his breath and the warmth of his body completely different from that of Touch's.

She turned her cheek into his palm, and against his lips whispered, "Comfort me."

The timing might have been wrong, but his body responded to the touch of hers like ... well, like a man who'd

spent that last fifty years without a partner. And the feel of him, hard as a post as he pressed against her, his hips grinding into the cradle of hers, made her heart pound.

She twined her arms around his shoulders, a soft, throaty moan escaping her as his kiss deepened hungrily. Her fingers wove through his hair, and he reached down to catching her bottom and pulled her hard against him even as she arched into his embrace.

It was entirely the wrong time for this, she thought again as the first hints of an impending scene change filtered in through her consciousness, tickling at her sense of reality and refusing to be ignored.

Morgan raised his head, his eyes stormy with desire. All around them the night brightened, and she heard him swear an instant before she vanished right out of his arms.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAPTER FOUR

"Where did you find this?" Mr. Russell, the highschool science teacher asked as he turned the huge foot-long clawed tip of the spider's leg over in his hands. He ran his fingers over the sporadic hairs, staring and shaking his head in wonder, then looked up at both Morgan and Audrey. "Is this a practical joke? It can't be real."

"It is," Morgan said somberly.

It was nine o'clock at night, and what he was still doing at the school Audrey couldn't fathom, but she stood silently beside Morgan, leaned up against the teacher's desk and waited for the scene to complete itself so she could go to bed. Not that she was tired. She reached up and rub at her neck and shoulder, the skin there still tingling with the memory of being speared by the fangs of that spider. No, she wasn't tired. Not at all. In fact, it would be nothing short of a miracle if she ever slept again without the aid of some serious prescription medication.

"You should have seen it, Mr. Russell," Morgan said, affecting a wide-eyed, golly-gee, Leave-It-To-Beaver tone. "The web stretched across the entire road. The spider that must have made it was huge."

There was a brief pause, and then his foot stepped not so gently down on hers.

"Peter will be happy to show you where we found it," Audrey said. He pressed a little harder on her foot, and she reluctantly amended herself. "We both will."

The teacher turned the leg over in his hands yet again, making no acknowledgment of her deliberately fumbled lines. "It must be that nuclear waste facility," he murmured. "Only radiation could have such an affect on a spider."

For anyone to make such a conclusive leap in logic was ludicrous, but Audrey only nodded. "Damn those forward thinking scientists, the politicians that back them and the rabid, extremist environmentalists who have yet to be born. Damn them all to hell."

Russell furrowed his brows in confusion. "Envirm ... vironmen ... what did you say?"

"Heh," Morgan tried to laugh. "She's having a hard day." He moved his foot off of hers, but maintained physical contact with her when he lay his hand on her backside instead.

Audrey stiffened, but he wasn't fondling her. His hand was flat across her right bottom cheek, pressing slightly into the soft, vulnerable flesh with unmistakable warning.

"A very hard day," she agreed, and swallowed hard, the tiny hairs along her nape prickling with dread. Her bottom prickled, too. Beneath his hand. Around his hand. He had a very hard hand, and her bottom remembered what kind of punishment he was capable of dishing out, even if her brain and mouth chose not to.

"Ah," the grey-haired teacher said, his attention shifting momentarily back to Audrey. He looked at her over the top of his glasses. "Your father still missing, is he? Very sorry to hear that." His gaze shifted, as if unable to be distracted, back to the leg. "Very sorry indeed."

Morgan moved his hand, two gentle warning pats and glared at her.

Audrey stiffened, holding herself perfectly still while she waited for him to remove his palm. When he didn't, she cleared her throat. "Yes, uh ... I fear what may have happened to him."

"As you should," their teacher said. "This," he shook the spider leg at her. "This is nothing to take lightly." Then he turned back to Morgan. "Would you mind if I kept this, my boy? I have colleagues back at the University that I'd like to consult with."

Morgan stuck out his hand to shake Russell's. "Thank you for all your help," he said. But though he smiled as he said it, there was an odd note to his tone that caught Audrey's attention. To her, it almost sounded like he were bidding the man farewell.

As they were leaving the classroom, Audrey said, "You were telling him goodbye, weren't you?"

"I told you not to get attached."

"Are..." Audrey swallowed hard. "We're not going to have to watch him getting eaten, are we?"

"No," Morgan assured her. "It'll happen sometime in the night. We won't see anything at all."

As they walked out of the school, the lights shifted around them, becoming a slightly darker shade of grey.

"The scene stopped," Audrey said, looking up at the seemingly dimmer light from the street lamps that lined the road. "What now?"

Morgan arched his eyebrows in a kind of shrug. "Now I walk you home and we get some sleep. Tomorrow's a Saturday. So we'll get up early and continue searching in spider infested countryside for your father."

The movie world was very still as they walked home. There was no breeze or croaking frogs and chirping crickets to serenade their walk back to Beth's house. No other people strolled the sidewalks in the night, no cars drove past in the streets. For the most part, the houses they passed were dark, although here and there a light could be seen behind curtain-drawn and silhouette-less windows.

"I hate the nights here," Audrey said. "They feel so eerie."

She hugged her shoulders as if she could hold back a shiver that had nothing to do with being cold.

"I've gotten used to them," Morgan said. "It kind of makes me wonder how I'll adjust to having a world full of sound again."

"That's assuming we can go home when this is over."

"I think we will."

Audrey snuck a quick look at him out of the corner of her eye. She lacked his positive outlook. She knew it was just as likely that the movie would simply fade to black, taking both her and Morgan with it, once the final scene had played. Everything here would simply cease to be. She dropped her eyes to the sidewalk. That was a possibility that she couldn't bear to think on.

"It'll be all right," Morgan said again.

But deep down inside, Audrey had no confidence that it really would. And the feeling inside her just seemed to grow worse the closer they drew to Beth Walker's house.

"Here we go," Morgan said as they turned onto her street. When they reached her house, he held open the front gate for her and together they walked past the azaleas and the morning glories that twined up the trellises that lined the porch. Under the yellow glow of the Walker's front porch light, he said, "Home sweet temporary home."

Audrey glanced up at him and for a moment they stood facing one another, neither moving or speaking, just studying one another in the pale light.

"Well," Morgan finally said. "Good night."

He turned to go, but Audrey caught his elbow. "Stay," she begged. "Please, I just ... I want you to stay. You can even have the bed; I'll sleep on the floor. I," she hesitated before confessing. "I don't want to be alone here."

Morgan gave her a lopsided smile. He reached out to cup her cheek, smoothing her skin with the pad of his thumb. "Nothing will happen tonight, I promise."

"Stay anyway," she whispered.

And Morgan gave in.

* * * *

"Ow!" Audrey cried out. "OW! Stop! It won't fit!"

"It'll fit," Morgan assured her.

"It's too big!"

"It'll fit," Morgan repeated, and began to push again. "You know, it would help if you pushed too."

"I am," Audrey grunted, "pushing!"

"Wiggle your end."

"I am!"

"Wiggle harder!"

"Yell at me one more time and you'll be doing this by yourself!"

"Yell at me once more time, and you won't sit for the rest of this movie." He frowned at her and then looked down between them. "Maybe if we switched positions...."

With a sigh that blew her bangs up off her forehead, Audrey dropped her end of the couch and stood up. "This isn't working, Morgan."

"It's halfway through the doorway, we can't stop now." He squatted down and picked up his end. "Tip it on its side."

Audrey groaned and grunted as she yanked on the wooden feet of the couch, struggling to turn it over. On her third shove, she thought she heard the snap of breaking wood, either the frame or something in the couch, but after two quick shoves the long sofa finally popped the rest of the way into Beth Walker's room.

She was too out of breath and tired to cheer.

"Team work," Morgan said, both panting and grinning as he gave her a jaunty thumbs-up. "Works every time."

He tipped the couch upright and shoved the heavy piece of furniture out of the way so she could stagger past him into the room. Pushing it up against the louver closet doors, he flopped down to rest on the cushions.

"Ah yes." He bounced in the center experimentally. "Much more comfortable than the floor."

Feeling both grateful and a little bit sheepish for having imposed on him two nights in a row, Audrey stripped her bed of two blankets and a pillow and handed them to him.

"Thanks," she said.

"Thank you," he replied. "I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have been able to move this on my own."

"No, I mean ... thank you for sleeping here the night ... so I wouldn't have to be alone."

"Oh." He arched his eyebrows, then nodded. "It's all right really. If ever a place could cause nightmares and evoke a fear of the dark, it would be this one. Believe it or not," he flashed her a wry grin. "Beneath this devil-may-care grin and strong, masculine veneer, I had a hard time getting used to this place when I first arrived, too."

Audrey matched his smile with one of her own, which gradually faded away as she found herself staring at him again. And he back at her. And a lengthy silence stretched between them, filling the room with an odd awkwardness that she wasn't used to feeling.

"Well," she reluctantly said. "Good night."

"Good night," he replied.

They sat watching each other for another minute more before she shed her shoes and crawled under the remaining blanket. She rolled her back to him, closing her eyes and trying her best to sleep when she really didn't feel like it. A moment later, all her attempts became null and void when, after hearing each of his shoes hitting the floor one at a time and listening to the soft rustle as he made up his impromptu

bed, she heard the unmistakable sound of an unzipping zipper.

Her eyes snapped open. Oh God, he was taking his pants off!

Her cheeks turned hot and she locked her eyes on the wall dead ahead of her. Morgan hummed a brief tune under his breath, but then lay down and the room fell quiet once more.

She was still wide awake a good half hour later when he began to snore. The burning heat in her cheeks had trickled down within her until it had relocated between her tightly clenched thighs. She didn't want him, she told herself furiously. She didn't even like him.

And she especially was not fond of snorers, she thought as he let out a particularly loud one at decibels sufficient to rattle the glass in the window frames.

She had to be out of her mind.

Covering her head with her pillow, she tried to get some sleep.

* * * *

The next morning breakfast was bacon and eggs, buttered toast and grey tinted orange juice that tasted a heck of a lot better than anything grey ought to have, and still her breakfast sat like an indigestible lump inside her. Particularly when Morgan said, "You wanted me to warn you before we got attacked by spiders, so consider this it. We've got a while before it actually happens, but just so you know, from here on out, things are going to start to get a bit hairy."

"Oh," Audrey said, putting the last sliver of toast back down on her plate. "Great."

Morgan brushed his hands together over his own plate and said with a grin, "Well, are you ready to go hunt down your father?"

"Do we actually find the man?" she asked.

"Nope. Although we do find the biggest spider ever to be seen on the face of the planet."

Audrey slunk down even lower in her chair. "Great," she said again, with even less enthusiasm.

"It'll be all right," Morgan assured her. "Remember, we're the heros. We live through this."

There wasn't a lot of comfort in that, but there was also no way for her to get out of this. So, when Morgan left the house that morning in search of her father, she went with him. Dragging her feet the whole way, but she went.

It was a bright, clear, sunny grey morning, and yet they were the only two people on the streets. There were no pedestrians, morning joggers or passing cars on the roads, but then the vacuum hadn't sucked at her so she knew the movie hadn't started 'rolling' either.

"This is eerie," she commented as they walked down the street. "It's just as bad as last night. Only worse now, because it's daylight."

"I think it's peaceful," Morgan said with a smile. He walked with his hands tucked into his back jeans' pockets. "Everything is quiet, serene. No motorists drag racing up and down the street with holes in their mufflers."

"No birds singing or gentle breezes, or insects buzzing over the flowers or crickets chirping," Audrey pointed out. "Or frogs at night or the odd dog or cat darting through the yards or across the road. There's nothing. Just ... nothing."

"There's you," Morgan said, and looked at her.

Audrey ignored the compliment. "I can't imagine fifty years of walking this road without another person to offer companionship or conversation. How could you stand it?"

"I didn't," he said. When she glanced over at him, he suddenly crossed his eyes. "I went crazy about forty-nine years ago."

Audrey stepped off the sidewalk and started to cross the street, but he caught her arm, laughing as he pulled her back to him. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding!"

She half laughed and shook her head, and they continued walking until the town faded away and the street become the same backwoods country road that they'd traversed the day before. "Are we going back to the web?"

"Nope. It only looks like same. They had limited quantities of film when they shot this flick and had to get creative with the scenery." Morgan looked up at the trees above and, as if judging by some cue she couldn't see, said, "And ... here we go..."

The grey all around them brightened and her stomach tightened as the now familiar pull of the vacuumed sucked the air from her lungs. She shut her eyes against the blinding flash of light and when she opened them again the world was a brighter place. Birds were now singing and the branches in the towering evergreen pines above were swaying in the

slight wind that played with her hair. An invisible director had just called action and the movie was once again playing.

"This way." Morgan took her elbow, leading her off the road and down a short incline into the woods.

"What are we looking for?" she asked.

"You'll see," he said cryptically. "It's right over here."

With him leading the way, they picked through a rolling green wave of blackberry bushes and stinging nettles.

On the look out for spiders and spider webs, when they ran across the car it took Audrey a moment to realize what she was looking at. The long green station wagon was wedged between two towering pines. Both the driver's and passenger doors were wide open and the headlights were on.

Good battery, that.

Twin splashes of illumination fell across the bushes and trees spread out before the crashed vehicle and lit up the glittering spider silks that ran across the headlights and which covered everything in area. The trees, car, ground; everything was blanketed in fine gossamer lines.

Although still a good thirty feet from the nearest part of the cocoon-like web, Audrey froze. "Is that—?" she paused, unable to finish the sentence.

"Your father's car," Morgan said for her. "Yup."

Her gaze darted up into the treetops, and then all around them. "I don't see any spiders."

"Don't worry. They're long gone. Go ahead and call to him."

Audrey looked back at him in surprise. "Isn't he—? I thought he was—?"

"Dead as a door nail," he affirmed. "But it's in the script. You're supposed to call three times."

"And bring every spider within hearing distance running straight to us?" Audrey laughed. "Forget it! The script can go hang, for all I care. I'm not doing it!"

Morgan held up his hand, palm flat and at the ready to deliver a necessary spanking. "One..." he began to count. Although his smile didn't waver, a steely look entered his eyes. "Two..."

Audrey cupped her hands around her mouth. "Dr. Walker!"

He arched an eyebrow at her. "You call your father 'Doctor Walker'?"

"No," she said sarcastically. "I call my father stone cold deceased and buried in Blodgett Cemetery."

He held his upturned palm out for her perusal. "Do we need to discuss this with Mr. Hand?"

She cupped her hands back around her mouth. "Father!"

"Beth called her father, daddy."

"I'm not doing that!" she snapped. "It feels weird. I'm a grown woman, and grown women don't call their father's daddy. Except in the South. And only because it's a different world down there."

Morgan moved his menacing palm several inches closer. "Do I need to swat you?"

Audrey looked down at his hand, the soft skin of her bottom beginning to prickle with sensitive awareness. "No."

"I think I do." He took a step towards her, and quickly reached out to catch her by the waist of her pants when she promptly tried to back away again. "You're not following

directions very well, and frankly I think you're going to keep right on not following them until I swat you."

"No," she said meekly. "I just think it's silly and—"

"It is silly," Morgan agreed. "But unless you do it, and do it the way I tell you to, this hand," he held it up for emphasis, "and your bottom are going to become reacquainted in a very short, sharp, unpleasant way."

"Daddy!" Audrey called. "Daddy, where are you?"

A corner of Morgan's mouth turned smugly upwards. Letting go of her pants, he headed for the car.

"I feel like such a tool," Audrey muttered, and stuck her tongue out at his retreating back. Then, cupping her hands around her mouth again, she continued to call for the missing doctor until Morgan summoned her to him.

"Take a look at this," he said as she picked her way through the underbrush to his side. He bent down, crawling halfway onto the driver's seat before reemerging a minute later with a shiny gold bracelet in his grasp.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A gift," he said and held it out to her. "From your 'father' to you."

For a split second, Audrey felt like a perfect heel for every mean thought she'd ever entertained about the missing Doctor Walker. It took her a minute to remember that none of this was real.

Thank God.

"You're supposed to put it on," Morgan said, his arm still extended for her to accept the bracelet.

Audrey made a slight face. "I don't feel quite right about this."

Half sighing and laughing, Morgan held up his palm again. "You know, I don't think you're quite getting the point."

"Oh, all right!" She snatched the bracelet from his hand, giving him a hairy look as she squeezed the band of gold jewelry over the meatiest part of her hand and onto her wrist. "There, happy?"

"Ecstatic. If I have to do remind you to do what I tell you one more time, I'm going to do my talking on your behind."

Audrey moved aside so Morgan to shut the car door, sticking her tongue out at his back. Wordlessly, she then fell into step behind him where she could continue to make faces without his knowing.

Instead of climbing back up the short hill to the road, Morgan took her further down into the woods. Just before they reached the bottom of the incline, Audrey saw the trees around her brighten and felt as the vacuum began to pull at her.

"Ugh," she said, just before it overtook her once more.

Suddenly the forest was gone and a vast and rocky desert stretched out before and behind them, with high rocky cliffs flanking either side of them as far as the eye could follow. The ground beneath her feet was hard and cracked, like an ancient, dried up riverbed, and burned through the soles of her shoes as hot as the sun beating down upon her back.

She stopped stalk-still in her tracks. "What the hell?! Where did the woods go?" Audrey turned around, but the dry river bed and rocks extended as far as she could see behind

her, too. "Where's the town? How can you have a dried up desert and a lush evergreen forest within a few seconds walking distance from one another?"

He laughed. "Yeah, I know. Fun, isn't it?"

"My God," she said. "This place comes with everything: sand, cactus, baking hot sun, scrub brush, dead cow's skull...."

"Spider cave at the top of the cliff," Morgan interjected.

Audrey turned to look up, shading her eyes against the glare of the sun. "Holy cow, that's way up there." She sized up the wall, and then looked down at the jagged rocks that cascaded down the side to the bottom of the river bed. "This looks so familiar. Where have I seen this before?"

"Deep in the burning desert, where nothing can survive, lives the dreaded Gila monster," Morgan said in a deep, melodramatic voice.

"Oh, for crying out loud," Audrey said. "This is the set for The Giant Gila Monster?"

He grinned.

Her eyes narrowed as she raised her face to the sun to study the cave again. "What's the shiny thing, up there?"

"That would be Mr. Russell's car."

"If there's a road up there, what are we doing way down here?"

Morgan smiled and patted her shoulder. "Blame the script."

The climb was steep, but not difficult and Morgan took the lead to show her the easiest places to put her hands and feet. About a hundred feet up, the wall gave way to the ledge and

road that supported Mr. Russell's car and the crowning feature, the spider's cave. Complete with a lot of gossamer webbing across the rocks, Audrey noted as she heaved herself over the lip of the ledge. She supposed that meant the spider must be at home.

She fell into line behind Morgan. But while he skirted around the car, heading for the cave, she paused to look inside the driver's window. Sure enough the clawed tarsus was still lying across the passenger seat.

Audrey glanced up at the cave and swallowed hard. "We live through this," she whispered as she followed Morgan. "We live through this."

A chill due more to just the change in temperature trickled down her spine as she passed beyond the sunlight and into the shadows of the cave. Once, this had been a mining shaft. Old railway tracks lined the ground, strewn with wood debris and the odd and end strip of rebar. There was only one tunnel to take and that descended down a gradual slope farther than the fading sunlight would follow, and like a perpetually leaky faucet, a soft plink of falling water drops echoed up from somewhere below.

Audrey never would have described herself as cowardly or excessively girlish. However, knowing that somewhere inside this tunnel there lurked a man-eating arachnid, just waiting to pounce on them, had her creeping as close to Morgan as she could get without fusing their bodies into one. She all but pushed him ahead of her while she clung to the shirt at his back and stumbled over the cocoon-like bundles of spider silk that littered their path.

"Be careful," he cautioned, half turning to place a hand on top of her head and helping her to duck beneath a web that stretched the width of the tunnel. He must have known it was there by experience, for she could barely make it out in the darkness. "We don't want another repeat of last night."

Audrey shivered and touched her shoulder where she'd been bitten. "No," she agreed, and as if their voices triggered the next cue, in the distance the soft shifting of pebbles whispered up through the tunnel. Not twenty feet directly ahead of them, the darkness shifted and the shadows began to move.

Audrey's hands became claws in Morgan's shirt. "Please tell me that's my eyes."

"Pay attention," Morgan told her as the shadows solidified into a thorax, eight eyes and legs, and the largest pair of fangs that she'd ever seen in her life. "This is where you can read 'Tonka' on the underbelly. Kinda makes you wonder if anyone even bothered to edit this film, doesn't it?"

Tonka? Who the hell was Tonka? Audrey couldn't have cared less if it had 'Made in Taiwan' stamped in gold letters on every one of its hairy legs. It was a spider. A huge spider, extending at least eight feet from the end to end and growing ever bigger as it lowered itself from the ceiling to the ground and faced them.

Audrey's mouth ran dry. She wanted to scream; it came out as a barely audible whimper.

"When it comes charging at us, we're going to run like hell back to the surface," Morgan said. "Don't worry about the

cave in; I'll start that. You just try not to get caught in the webs, okay? Audrey?"

Her eyes growing wider and wider, beginning to tremble, Audrey backed up a step. Then two, and then kept going until she felt the cool stone of the cave wall at her back. Her hand touched something metallic and, out of reflex, she closed her fingers around it. She looked down at the length of rebar in her hand.

"Audrey?" Morgan said, a touch of impatience creeping into his tone. "Did you hear me?"

Lifting the length of rebar, Audrey held it in front of her like a club. "Yes," she choked, her fear leaving her panting. "Run like hell. Don't get caught. I heard you."

There was a clicking of clawed legs tips tapping against the rocks as the spider shifted closer, the whisper of feeler hairs rubbing together as it stroked its fangs with its mouth palps. All eight eyes fixed intently on Audrey and Morgan.

"Get ready," he said.

Audrey backed fully against the wall, pressing herself against the rocks as the spider stalked them and then crouched as if preparing to spring.

"Run!" Morgan snapped.

He turned, but Audrey didn't follow. When the spider jumped after him, she let out a blood-curdling scream, hefted the pipe and brought it crashing back down again on the spider's head. She drove the rebar like a spike all the way through it and into the hard ground.

"Jesus!" Morgan shouted.

The spider crumpled in on itself, its legs folding, its fangs clicking weakly, its body sinking lifeless to the rocks. Slowly, Audrey let go of the rebar and stumbled backwards until she fell against the wall again. Her hands shook. Her legs felt as though they were about to give out any second.

"What did you do that for?" Morgan demanded.

She looked at him in shock, barely able to distinguish him from the rest of the darkness. "What do you mean? I've killed it! The movie's over!"

Hands on hips, he glared at her. "That was *not* the plan!"

"That's the object of the whole, damn film, isn't it? Kill the spider and save the day?"

"We're only thirty minutes into it!"

Audrey gave him another incredulous look. "It's a Roger Corman film!" she exclaimed. "He can pad it! Didn't you see King Dinosaur? Forty minutes of that film was rock climbing for God's sake!"

Morgan took an ominous step towards her. "You seem to be having difficulty grasping this one, little, simple concept: I am in charge. You do what I tell you, when I tell you. You killed the villain," he waved one hand back at the dead spider, "and that means we're going to have to start all over again from the very beginning! That's two more days that we're stuck in this stupid, pointless existence!"

Still shaking, Audrey snapped around and started walking back up the incline to the sunny mouth of the cave.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"Back to town," she snarled back over one shoulder.
"Maybe I can find a real man there. Preferably one with a backbone!"

"What?" he said stiffly.

"You heard me!"

The last threads of what few good natured tendencies he'd been clinging to snapped. "I've had enough of this!"

Heedless of the danger brewing behind her, Audrey said, "Good! I've had enough of you too!" She marched out of the shadows and back into the sunlight. Pulling stray wisps of gossamer spider silks from her hair and clothes, she was too busy muttering hateful comments that questioned his legitimacy as well as his human parentage to notice when he unbuckled his belt and yanked it free of his pants.

She caught a flash of movement out of the corner of her eye and turned to see him stalking up out of the shadows after her, his head lowered and a darkly ominous look in his eyes. Her gaze dropped to the long loop of leather clutched tightly in his right hand. The dangerous hand. The one that meant business.

Audrey never thought twice. She ran for her life with Morgan fast at her heels.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAPTER FIVE

Audrey sat in the crashed truck, the radiator still hissing steam, smoking still billowing from the engine to dance in front of the single remaining headlight. She sat with her arms folded across her chest and glared out at the darkened forest, the trees before her sporadically brightening into clear focus as the flashing police lights from behind her illuminated all.

Morgan had his forehead pressed to the glass of the locked driver's side door while he glared at her through the window from out beneath a very heavy and angry brow. "You can't stay in there forever."

The hell she couldn't.

This was the thirty-third time in a row that they'd had to reenact this particular scene. So far, she'd refused the crash the truck sixteen times, tried to drive back to town before the scene changed and started all over again eight times, run over the spider twice, and run over Morgan once, kinda halfway sorta by accident. Although each time the scene reset, so did time as well. Audrey's body was telling her they'd spent hours out here, methodically messing up one lousy five minute sequence, but she still wasn't ready to cooperate.

One look at Morgan's face told her quite plainly that if he ever got her out of the truck, she'd wind up wishing she'd been born without a butt. As if she wasn't already wishing that!

Sitting on the hard leather of the truck's seat, all Audrey could feel was the hot, dull pulsing hurt blazing in both

buttocks. More than anything in the world, she wanted to roll onto her knees to avoid having anything touch her tender seat, but that would give Morgan a measure of satisfaction she was unwilling to concede.

"Get out of the truck," Morgan drawled.

"Get bent," she snapped back and didn't move.

"I am willing to forgive you everything that you've done so far, even your attempt to make me like a splattered bug on the grill. But if you don't get out of the god damn truck right now, I am going to rip this door off its hinges and strangle you with my bare hands."

She gave him a withering look, but didn't budge.

"I'm serious," he warned.

"Go to hell," Audrey said back.

"Why must you make everything so difficult?" Morgan snapped, exasperated. "What part about 'follow the script so we can go home' do you find objectionable?"

"I did follow the script! I killed the spider!"

"You weren't supposed to kill it. We were supposed to start a cave in!"

"What does it matter when it dies, so long as it dies?"

Morgan threw back his head with a muted roar of frustration, then looked at her again. "We are going to kill it, Audrey, but it has to be done a certain way at a certain time, or we don't get out of here."

"That thing," Audrey whipped halfway around, wincing at the spike of renewed hurt as her bottom was forced to swivel on the seat, and pointed back up at the road, "is going to start killing people unless we kill it in the cave."

Morgan placed his hands on the window. "Sweetheart ... Darling ... Honey Bunch..." he said, painstakingly calm and patient and even kind. "The movie is called The Spider Feeds! It is not called The Spider Skips Gaily Through A Field Of Tulips. When you have a title like that, you almost have to expect a few expendable movie characters to be killed and messily devoured."

"But we are in the movie!" She thumped her chest with both hands for emphasis. "The way you keep throwing us in front of the spiders makes us prime targets."

"Is everything all right down there?" one of the impatiently waiting police officers called down at them.

They both turned to look up the hillside. Morgan waved; Audrey just frowned. "We could be in here forever."

"The way you keep fumbling your lines," Morgan said, "it wouldn't surprise me."

"Yeah, well, as long as we're going to be trapped here forever, I'd rather spend my forever sitting quietly and not getting eaten, thank you very much. And you're not going to spank me anymore either. I've had enough of that."

Morgan snorted. "If you'd really had enough, you'd be obediently working your way back through the script right now."

"I'm serious," she snapped. "Your belt put bruises on me. I can feel them."

"You brought that on yourself."

"Yeah," she snorted. "Sure I did. I remember it all clearly now. I threw myself down on the rocks, yanked my own pants and panties down to my ankles and blistered my own butt

with your belt. Using that twisted stream of logic, you must be responsible then for biting your own leg."

"If I get tetanus, by the way, then you're really going to get it," he growled at her. They glared at one another for a moment in silence, then Morgan said, "If you're waiting for me to apologize, you're going to be waiting a very long time."

She folded her arms back across her chest and faced forward again, scowling even more blackly than before. "Guess you're going to be waiting a long time before I cooperate, too."

He sighed. "You can't stay in there forever. Sooner or later, you're going to have to eat."

As if in agreement, her stomach rumbled. Audrey looked down, then folded her arms even tighter across it and pretended to ignore the rumbling. "I could stand to lose some weight, anyway."

"You're a stick as it is," Morgan grumbled. He took hold of the locked door handle and shook it. "Get out of the cussed truck!"

"All right," Audrey snapped. "I'll get out, but only if you promise not to spank me any more."

His eyes narrowed at her. Leaning his hands against the vehicle's frame, he said, "I can make that promise. I can make it easily. In fact, let me spell it out for you. I will one hundred percent promise never to spank you ever again, as long as you follow the stupid script, so we can both get the hell out of this damn movie!"

"Fine!" Audrey unlocked the door and shoved it open. She pointed one finger at him sternly, a smug grin curling her

mouth as she said, "But I'm going to hold you to that promise, buster! And you'd better not break it!"

She was halfway up the hill to the waiting police officers before she realized that she'd just hung herself in his carefully worded loophole. She stopped, frozen in tightly fisted surprise at her own stupidity, and Morgan passed right by her, returning her smug smile with one of his own.

* * * *

Sure enough, there it was: the words 'Tonka' written as bold as day along the underside and down one leg of the spider. Despite all of her best intentions, utilizing the excuse of keeping a closer eye on her, Morgan was keeping her very close at hand. Unfortunately, that also meant getting very close to the spider.

No other part of the movie had special effects remotely as good as the spider. Knowing that the props guy out in the real world had cobbled the thing together out of truck parts and latex was of precious little consolation to Audrey now, as she huddled against Morgan's back in the spider's lair. No, sir. Right now, right here, in whatever movie generated and lightning induced space she was presently occupying, this spider was one-hundred-percent real—wiry legs and swollen belly, rotten egg-yolk eyes and bony mandibles dripping with grue—and the way the word TONKA pulsed and stretched as the spider groped and scratched restlessly at the cave floor did absolutely nothing for her peace of mind.

"Get ready to run," he murmured somewhere to the right of her in the cave's darkness.

Run, she thought wildly. Sure she'd run. Just as soon as she regained mastery over her legs. Right now it was a wonder that she could even stand. Her knees were shaking so badly that, from the ankle upward, it felt as though she were standing on Jell-O.

"And don't forget," he said, "you want to drop the bracelet at the entrance, right before I start the cave-in."

The spider's mandibles were making an awful clicking noise, a sound which made her spine prickle and every hair she possessed stand straight up on end out of sheer alarm.

The spider's legs unfolded and the thorax slightly scraped the rocks as it dropped from the ceiling to the floor. All of its eight legs remained steady and stable beneath it as the spider stalked them in the near darkness of the cave; in contrast, hers nearly gave out beneath her.

"I'm going to die," she quavered fearfully.

"We can't die," Morgan reminded her, but his warm hand found her stomach in the dark, pressing flat against it and pushing her protectively behind him. "Even if we get killed, we can't die. So relax and get ready to run."

The spider inched forward, then crouched, the swollen abdomen bobbing as the spinners twitched to make their silk.

"Run!" Morgan barked.

Audrey turned and ran smack into the wall before she reoriented herself in the darkness. She tripped over the barrel and the junk strips of rebar and nearly fell except for Morgan, who grabbed her arm and almost dragged her on the ground until she got her feet back under her. After that, however, she had no trouble out distancing either him or the spider all

the way back up the steep incline to the mouth of the cave and the warm sunshine streaming inside, a welcome beacon of light that she ran toward as fast as she knew how to go.

"Drop the bracelet!" Morgan shouted from a distance behind her.

At the mouth of the cave, Audrey stopped running to look back. She saw the spider coming up fast just behind Morgan and then glanced dumbly down at her wrist. Grabbing at the bracelet, she tugged and jerked, a lopsided and frantic one-woman tug-o-war with her own arm, but the bracelet refused to be dislodged.

"It's stuck!" she yelled, as Morgan reached her side.

He grabbed at the bracelet too and they both pulled. For such a thin band of gold, with both of them yanking in opposite directions, it felt as though the precious metal were skinning her hand from the wrist on down.

"OW!" she shrieked. "It won't come off!"

"Hold still!" Morgan bent over to spit on her arm and Audrey saw the dark shape of the spider coming up the steep incline fast behind them. The bright light of the sun fell across it in time for her to watch as saliva dripped from its fangs in anticipation of its impending meal, and she screamed. She hardly felt the pain as Morgan skinned the bracelet off her wrist, dislocating her thumb as he jerked it off her hand and tossed it on the ground. Then he flung her out of the cave and into the desert heat.

Audrey only saw Morgan touch the side of the cave, and yet the entire ceiling structure buckled with a deep earthy roar and fell inward, crushing the spider just before it reached

them and barely missing burying Morgan in the gusting avalanche of rocks and dust.

She didn't see what she tripped on, but when she fell hard upon the ground, she rolled quickly onto her stomach and covered her head. Morgan fell on top of her and stayed there, a warm and almost comforting weight that covered her entirely, pressing her into the sand until she nearly choked on it. He wrapped his arms over her head, pushing her down and burying his face into the side of her neck.

They had just risked their lives, and yet she could think of no more erotic sensation than that of feeling his hips pressed up against her buttocks, his chest flat against her back, his hot breath billowing across her nape and along the shell of her ear as they waited for the rocks to stop falling. She turned her head toward him to keep from choking on the sand and felt his lips brush her cheek.

Behind them, the rumbling of the falling rocks eased into silence with the occasional clatter of stones bouncing on stones keeping them flat on the ground for a full minute longer just to make sure the danger was past. With the taste of dirt in her mouth, Audrey tentatively raised her head and looked at him.

Morgan's eyes were open and he was staring back, unsmiling, the look on his face intense in a way that probably should have frightened her if she didn't first already feel the sudden bulge stiffening against the cradle of her buttocks.

"Hi," she whispered.

"Don't look at me," he said back. "If you do, I'm going to make love to you and then we'll have to redo this scene over again."

Insanely, she actually found herself thinking she wouldn't mind doing that, but then she moved her hands off her head and her thumb began to hurt. Pain was a good distraction; she turned her face reluctantly away from his and glanced back over her shoulder at the cave instead.

Beneath the avalanche of rocks, the base of which lay less than two feet from the bottoms of their shoes, protruded the clawed tips of two spider legs.

"You get to kill it, but I don't?" she asked.

Morgan shifted, sliding his legs apart to straddle her hips, lifting his greater weight off her without actually having to get up. "It's in the script," he said simply, and followed it with a husky, "God, you're beautiful when you're covered in dirt."

Audrey looked at him again. She could still feel his erection pressing snugly against her. It hadn't diminished with the slight distance that he'd put between them, nor had her urge to reach back and cup it with her hand. "Maybe you'd better get off me."

"Right." Coughing on the dusty air, he pushed to his feet. Slapping the worst of the sand from his clothes, he then reached down to help her to her feet.

She tried not to look at him and, failing that, not to look any lower than his waist. And failing that, she did her best not to look like she was looking, particularly not while he was readjusting his jeans.

"Focus on the scene," she told him, hiding a smile as he swore.

"Right. But in my defense, you make it hard when you keep staring at me like that."

"It was hard before I ever looked at it," she teased, wiping the dirt from her mouth.

He gave her a very dry glare. "Go ahead. Keep that up and see where it gets us both."

She walked her gaze slowly down the length of his body to the crux of his jeans. "Dealing with something hard, I hope."

Morgan turned to face her fully, his expression both dark and erotically delightful to behold. "Finish the scene," he told her.

"Is it over?" she asked, lightly running her fingers up over her legs to the waist of her dress. She began to inch her skirt upwards by the barest degrees.

"Yes, it's dead," he said flatly, advancing on her with measured steps.

"Now look who's not putting his best effort into acting."

"Finish your damn lines."

Her nipples were perked, scraping against the soft cotton of her clothes until they felt raw from the stimulation. Each breath she drew rasped them against fabric that suddenly felt as rough as sandpaper and, with each touch, sent a deep aching pull all the way down into her womb. She lowered her head, licked her teeth and meant not a word of it as she said, "Let's go back to town."

The brightness of their grey and white world dimmed and Morgan tore her dress in his haste to bare her breasts. His

fingers dug into her bottom as he lifted her into the air before lowering her all the way to the ground. Audrey had rocks digging into her shoulders and into her legs and she could have cared less, particularly not when shoved his pants down just far enough to be out of the way and imbedded himself deep inside her with a single strong thrust.

"Oh yes," she breathed, lifting her hips to meet the forceful rhythm he set, weaving her fingers through his hair as the heat of his mouth suckled, nipped and teased the aching tips of her breast one after the other. "Very hard indeed."

* * * *

The soda shop was packed full of teenagers and there was a jukebox in the corner playing music old enough for her grandmother to have danced to it. Being the gentleman he was, Morgan had bought her a drink and Audrey sat across from him at a window booth, under the grey candy striped window awning, playing footsy with him under the table.

"I guess that successfully lays to rest everything they say about men over fifty." She walked her feet up his legs and sidled them between his knees.

"This is a PG movie," he reminded her. "We need to keep it that way."

"What if I don't want to?"

"I don't want to, either. But we'll never get out of here if we don't."

Audrey slowly lost her smile. "Do you suppose we'll see each other?"

"Back home? Sure." He didn't look at her. "Why wouldn't we?"

"Are we both going to come out of my VCR and live happily ever after screwing on my living room floor?"

"You don't have a bed?"

"Answer the question."

"I have no idea," Morgan told her. "The world has changed since I've been in here, so I suspect I'm going to have a hell of an adjustment to make when we get home. But will I be in the studio or your house, I have no idea."

She stroked his leg under the table. "Do you even want to see me when we get back?"

"Of course I do."

"Why won't you look at me when you say that?"

"Because I don't see the point in making plans for a happy future together when we don't even know if we're going home or fading into nothing."

Audrey took her feet off his legs and put them back into her shoes. She played with her drink in silence for a moment, not wanting to look at him now either. "I think it's rather chauvinistic that you got to kill the spider, but I couldn't."

"It's a man-dominate time period."

"Hardly anybody's been eaten."

"That'll change."

She pushed her glass away. "What does that mean?"

Hands folded on the table, Morgan turned his head to look out the window. "It means we got the adult spider but the movie isn't over yet."

"Great." She leaned back against the booth. "So how long before the little buggers burst forth from their giant egg sac and swarm the town?"

Morgan half smiled. "We've got a few hours yet. But on the bright side, this is where the movie starts to pick up."

"Oh God," she groaned. "Can't I just hide in a closet until the end of the film?"

"Trust me, they look in all the closets."

The bell above the door chimed brightly as Touch and two of his buddies strolled inside. They came up to their table and while Touch flopped onto the seat beside Audrey, nearly sitting on her before she relented and scooted closer to the window to give him room, his friends squeezed in next to Morgan. She barely had time to stuff a napkin between her cheek and his lips before he kissed her. Under the table, she felt Morgan cover her foot with his own. She startled, but it took her a moment to realize that he wasn't playing footsy back at her. Although he didn't step down, he didn't need to for her to comprehend the slight pressure as a warning.

"What's the matter with you?" Touch demanded, snatching the napkin aside. "Why are you all of a sudden hanging around with this dweeb?"

Morgan mouthed, 'Study partners,' but Audrey never had a chance to repeat the excuse. "Hey!" Touch snapped. "I saw that! What, you think you're going to move in on my girl?" He reached across the table to punch Peter in the arm.

"Don't!" Audrey told him. When he turned a jealous glare on her, she dutifully added, "Nobody's moving in on me."

Mor—I mean, Peter's been helping me look for my—" she rolled her eyes and sighed, "—my father."

Touch looked from Morgan to her. Gradually, seeming to accept the excuse, he leaned back in his chair. "Oh. How's that going, anyway? You think you'll find the old man in time to go with me to the dance?"

Audrey opened her mouth and Morgan applied a little more pressure to the top of her foot. "Yes," she said unenthusiastically. "Wouldn't miss it for the world.... unfortunately."

Touch wrapped his arm around her shoulders, hooking her around the neck and hugging her close. "Great. I'll pick you up at five on Friday."

Audrey couldn't get out of his arm fast enough to avoid a full front-on kiss on the lips, but the minute her 'boyfriend' and his highschool-aged thugs got up from the table, she swiped the back of her hand across her lips. "I'm not going," she said flatly, a disgusted look on her face.

"Yes, you are," Morgan corrected. He flexed his right hand meaningfully.

Audrey slumped in her seat, cursing her promise and the fact that she seemed perpetually unable to run faster than he could. "Fine. I'll go. But if he gets fresh with me in the car, I'm going to take his head off."

"No, you won't. Because it's not in the script."

Jerking her foot out from under his beneath the table, she snapped, "This script needed better writers."

He chuckled. "I won't argue that."

Two giggling girls came up to their table, sliding into the booth to sit beside Morgan while giving him wide-eyed adulating stares.

"Will you sing something for us, Peter?" asked the little blonde-haired, blue-eyed beauty-queen wanna-be as she lay her hand coyly upon his forearm, surreptitious feeling him up.

Not making future happy plans aside, Audrey had the most absurd urge to snatch the teenie-bopper bald. She struggled to swallow the tidbit of jealousy she felt when Morgan draped his arm across the back of the seat, encompassing both girls and said, "Sure." Her jealousy turned to barely contained laughter, however, when he added. "Hand me my ukelele."

"Ukelele?" she echoed. "What are you? School yard geek by day and soda shop Sinatra by night?"

Scooting the girls out of the booth, he smiled at her though it didn't quite reach as far as his eyes and stood up. "I hate this song. Words cannot describe how much I hate it. I could have sung Elvis, or even the Beatles. Hell, I could have sung the Monkeys. But no. What do I sing?"

One of the cutesy twins handed him a ukelele out of nowhere and said, "Sing the one about the frog!"

Audrey covered her mouth with her hand, trying not to laugh. Morgan didn't miss it. Without losing his smile, as he stood up, he leaned towards her and reminded, "Only four more scenes to go."

"For what?" she asked, before she did the math in her head and the realization hit her. "Oh yeah." She frowned, slumping down that much further in the booth. As if her bottom wasn't already sore enough as it was. Of course, even

that wasn't as sore as some other parts of her. She rubbed her right shoulder where a particularly sharp rock had left a fist-sized purple spot on her skin.

"If you're very good," he said, "I'll only pretend to spank your adorably cute and ever so wiggly bottom." He ruined the promise by winking, however, and then hefted the musical instrument to serenade his adoring audience.

"Yeah, sure you will," Audrey drawled, drilling a knowing look into his back. She didn't think it was in her to be that good for another four scenes.

Sipping on the soda he'd bought her, Audrey sat in the gray sunlight of only a partially victorious day, and listened with a half astonished ear while Morgan crooned four off-key refrains about a melancholy toad. Someone had probably licked him, she decided partway through the second chorus, to have written such a song in the first place.

And yet Morgan looked very cute singing it. His broad shoulders moved ever so slightly, the muscles of his back barely rippling as he strummed the silly ukelele. His big hands moved over the strings with a comfort most likely born of learning how to play the instrument only because he lacked something else to do. And damn if his tight little butt wasn't packed into form-revealing jeans, leaned up against the edge of the table close enough for her to goose him.

No future happy plans, Audrey told herself. She sighed. Right.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAPTER SIX

The happy strains of Bill Haley and His Comet's *'Rock Around The Clock'* were pouring from the record jockey's station inside the school gymnasium. There were lights on everywhere, including in the outside basketball court, and teenagers were flocking in couples and small groups towards the open gym doors. Poodle skirts, bobbysocks and ducktails abounded. James Dean wannabes snuck away from the well-lit areas to sneak a smoke outside of the watchful eyes of the teachers, principal and moral chaperones. One in particular, still safely ensconced in his father's station wagon, was sneaking a drink out of a stolen silver flask.

"I got it out of my father's dresser," Trevor said, wincing and coughing even as he took a drink and passed the rest to Audrey. "Good whiskey," he wheezed.

Audrey looked from him to the flask and then to the gym. Be cranky and grumpy in this scene, Morgan had told her. Herself, in other words. Well, Audrey certainly didn't need any extra encouragement for that. Her hair was pinned up in a beehive, she was dressed in a corset and pink poodle skirt, with a very itchy crinoline, and her shoes looked like something she remembered, as a child, seeing in her grandmother's closet.

She glared at Trevor as she took the flask from him. Wiping the rim with her palm, she took a deep draught from the tin. The liquor burned all the way down her throat to her stomach. It was just the fortitude she needed to keep sitting

next to Trevor, butch waxed hair and all, as he sat grinning ear to ear.

"Golly gee whiz!" he said appreciatively. "I love a woman who can put it away." Draping an arm across the back of the seat, leather creaking beneath them, he scooted closer to her. "And you sure do look every inch a beautiful woman in that dress."

Audrey gave him a very dry look as he angled his head to see down the front of her dress. She rolled her eyes and stifled a heavy sigh as she turned to look out the window again, sweeping over the students as they drifted in happy couples towards the open doors. Morgan wasn't among them, but she was certain he'd show up when the script dictated. With any luck, that would happen without her first having to kiss touch, or to suffer through his juvenile attempts at putting the moves on her. She hadn't thought fifties movies this sexually graphic.

Trevor began to play with her hair, twining a thick lock of it around his finger. She took another hearty swig from the flask. She was going to need a heck of a lot more fortifying to put up with this.

"Are we going to go in and dance at some point this evening?" she asked.

"Plenty of time for that," Trevor told her, leaning close enough that she could feel his breath caressing her neck.

She gave him back his flask. Hard. Her elbow stabbing into his gut and the flask slamming down onto his thigh a bare half inch too low to 'accidentally' strike anything that would result in an automatic do-over of the scene.

Trevor jumped, grabbing both the flask and his stomach. He stared at her in shock. "What did you do that for?"

"Get out of the car," she told him, and followed her own advice. Slamming the door behind her, she started walking across the parking lot.

"Hey!" Trevor shouted after her. He scrambled out of the car and chased after her. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," she said shortly, and kept walking.

Trevor grabbed her arm and spun her around. "Don't think I don't get it," he hissed at her. "Don't think I don't know about you and that geek. You've been together nearly every night this week, or maybe you think I'm too stupid to have noticed!"

"I plead the Fifth," she said, glaring at him before pulling her arm from his grasp and continuing on. She frowned, shaking her head. Of all the years to have to re-do, why oh why did it have to be the teenaged years? With pimples, parents and boy problems galore. And in the fifties no less, with big hairy spiders threatening to swoop down and destroy the town at any second.

"I want my jacket back!" Trevor yelled after her.

Audrey took it off and dropped it in the parking lot. She kept right on going, past several gawking teen girls that were supposed to be her friends, and up the steps into the school. Let them fight over him if they wanted, she didn't want him. And of course, the one she did want she couldn't have. All she needed now was a terminal illness and the tragedy would be complete.

Audrey sighed. She should have been zapped into a soap opera.

* * * *

For the first time in fifty years, Morgan dressed with care for the sock hop. He brushed his hair, and adjusted his clothes, not in his bedroom as young men were supposed to, but from the point that the script brought him back into the movie.... in the parking lot under one of the street lamps.

He was the epitome of a geek: his trouser legs were a tad too short, his dress jacket was plaid and he wore a red bow tie. He rather hoped Audrey didn't laugh him out of the gym.

Of course, the instant he walked into the school he realized he needn't have worried. Audrey was where he'd always met Beth, standing at the refreshment table. Only instead of sipping her punch and chatting with her giggling schoolmates, Audrey had her back to them and she was tossing back punch as if it were hard liquor. Then he saw which bowl she was taking her fortitude from. It was the one with that little extra something added to it.

Morgan shook his head and headed for her.

"Watch out," he cautioned as he neared her. "That stuff is spiked."

"I know," Audrey said without turning around. She tossed another cup back as though it were whiskey, straight up. Handing the glass back to the punch attendant, she rapped upon the table and said, "Keep them coming, my good man."

Catching her arm as Audrey raised the next cup, Morgan took the liquored punch from her fingers and set it back on the table. "Dance with me."

He pulled her onto the dance floor, bringing her into his arm in time for the melody to chance from Tennessee Ernie Ford's miner's pickaxe Sixteen Ton beat to a slow and loverly, cheek to cheek Earth Angel.

"You look beautiful tonight," he said, winning an actual laugh from Audrey, who backed away enough to look down at herself.

"Poodle skirt and all?"

Morgan grinned. "Absolutely. And those bobby socks ... it doesn't get any sexier than that, darlin'."

He pulled her close again and spun her in a gentle turn, even dipping her romantically low though it didn't match the music, before dragging her back to him.

"So?" she asked when she was finally upright again. "Now what do we do?"

"We kill the villains and end the film. Then we should be able to go home."

"I already killed the villain. If you recall, you got cranky with me and smacked my bottom for it." She lifted her chin, smiling playfully. "Rather hard, too, I might add."

"We're coming up on Scene Seventeen, so I'm going to get to smack your bottom some more."

"Not too hard though, right?"

"That depends entirely on how well you perform your duties in reclaiming your bracelet," Morgan said.

"You killed my hand trying to get that damn—"

"Language," he said dryly.

"That thing," she quickly amended, and cleared her throat because his hand had moved low enough to pat her right bottom cheek, "off my wrist. Now you want me to go back after it? Why?"

"Because it was a gift from your father and it has sentimental value."

"Blodgett Cemetery," Audrey softly sang.

"It's also the main reason why you're going to get spanked afterward," Morgan told her. "Although if the writers of this film knew you as well as I do, they'd have added a heck of a lot more spanks to the script and given me a hairbrush to dispense them. Sadly, as the script stands, for doing something so foolish as to sneak away from the dance, putting yourself into an incredibly dangerous situation, and forcing me to chase you down, I'm only going to give you eleven blistering swats on camera and six off as the credits begin to roll."

"Seventeen swats?!" Audrey stopped dancing and glared at him. "Blistering?! I still can't sit from the last one you gave me!"

"I promise, until the writers provide that much beloved hairbrush, for the Scene Seventeen spanking, I'll only use my hand."

"I'd just as soon not go to the cave and not get spanked for it, thank you very much."

"Hey, it's in the script." Morgan shrugged. "I've got no choice. And neither do you. Not if we want to go home."

"Right. And we do want that, don't we?" She sounded sulky, and he leaned back to check her face. Yup. Definitely sulky.

Morgan sighed and pulled her close again. "You have to go, Audrey. It's—"

"If you say it's in the script one more time," she growled, "I'm going to punch you right in the nose."

"Just one more time and then it'll all be over."

"And then things really will be over," she muttered. The teasing light had gone completely out of her and she was frowning intensely.

"What?" Morgan asked.

"Nothing." Audrey turned her face away from him, glaring out across the dance floor, hardly seeing the other students or the decorations and spinning lights.

"Audrey." Morgan cupped her chin, trying to bring her back so he could see her eyes. "Look at me."

Suddenly, she shoved him back and ran for the door.

"Audrey!" He chased her out through the parking lot. It didn't quite occur to him that they'd likely have to redo the scene until he caught up to her by the flagpole. "Hey!"

He caught hold of her arm, swinging her around so he could catch her shoulders. She had tears pouring down her face, each one pulling straight at his heartstrings although she quickly wiped them away.

"Oh honey," he said, laying her head upon his shoulder. "It'll be all right. I'm almost positive that we'll be home after the credits roll."

"What does that matter?" she demanded, not moving in his arms. He hugged her tightly, but her arms remained limp at her sides and she made no move to accept the comfort he offered or even to comfort him in return. "We'll both be back in our separate homes. We might even be back in our separate times. What's our chances of ever seeing one another again?"

"We won't be on different planets," he told her.

Audrey laughed. It was a bitter sound. "It doesn't matter. No future plans, right?"

She tried to pull away, but Morgan refused to let her go. "Don't. Let's not worry about this now. We still have to get out of the film, so let's just take it one step at a time. All right?" When Audrey didn't respond, he cupped her face and met her watery gaze. "All right?"

Sniffing, she nodded. "Whatever you say. You're the boss."

It wasn't the kind of acquiescence that he would have preferred, but at this point in the film, beggars couldn't be choosers. The light around them began to dim and experience told him the vacuum was coming.

"We're going to have to redo the scene," Morgan told her.

"Right," she said unenthusiastically.

"Do you remember what you have to do?"

"Argue with Trevor, dance with you," Audrey reached up to cup his cheek, "realize my bracelet is missing and then leave early."

"I'll be right behind you," he assured her. "Just grab the bracelet and get out of the cave again, running as fast as you can."

"And you'll be right behind me," she finished as the air changed all around them. The light became blinding and she vanished from his arms.

* * * *

The desert sun was beating down upon her shoulders as the vacuum swept Audrey from the sockhop to the spider's cave. She stood on the cliffside, her feet seemingly rooted to the rocky ground as she stared into the darkness. Both the huge spider and the debris from the rockslide that had hopefully killed the monstrous thing were completely cleared from the mouth of the cave, leaving the gaping blackness of the tunnel waiting before her like the open maw of a nightmare.

Audrey took two hesitant steps forward, close enough to peek into the cave as far as the daylight would illuminate, but there was no sign of the bracelet. She took two steps back again. She'd have felt soooo much better about going in there if only she could see the body of that smashed, crushed, totally dead spider somewhere out here.

Of course, there was still the egg sac tucked safely in some hitherto unknown place to contend with.

Maybe baby spiders were like kittens. Maybe their eyes and ears didn't open right away. Maybe they needed their mother to hunt for them or they died right away.

Audrey fidgeted her fingers. Somehow she doubted it. Monster restrictions that tight did not make for very exciting horror movies.

The scene reset itself twice before Audrey managed to drum up enough courage to venture into the mouth of the cave. Creeping in past the edge of the light into the dusky darkness, she felt her way along the wall, searching the ground for signs of the bracelet. There were only rocks, however. Nothing at all sparkled in the dim and failing light, but from deep in the cave ahead there came a soft rustling sound. Like the ticking of spiders' legs clicking over the rocks.

The sound froze Audrey for a moment. It made the hairs on her nape prickle and stand upright. Her knees trembled and her breath caught in the back of her throat.

The rustling faded into silence, and after a moment of strained listening, Audrey dropped to her knees, sweeping her hands through the dirt and rocks. She crawled on her knees deeper into the darkness, feeling through the rocks and the dirt until she heard the rustling again.

The sound successfully froze her in her place. She stared into the darkness until the sound faded back into silence. Every hair on her body was crawling with dread and the cave suddenly seemed to close in suffocatingly around her. She swung her arms wide apart, sifting her hands through the dirt in desperate search for the bracelet once more.

Nothing. There was nothing this way.

Turning back towards the light of the cave's entrance, she felt her way back up the path while behind her the rustling

noise became clicking, like the clicking of many spiders' exoskeletons clicking against the rocks.

Jumping to her feet, Audrey ran for daylight, without the bracelet. She could have cared less if the scene was doomed to repeat. Glancing back over her shoulder, just before the vacuum and bright light reclaimed her, she saw the entire mouth of the cave swarming with hundreds of spiders as tall as her knee.

The breath was sucked from her lungs before she could scream. When she finally regained her equilibrium, she found herself standing at the entrance of an ominously still and quiet cave. There were no spiders in sight, no sound but for the faint calling of some distant desert birds and the whisper of a breeze, and the warm sunshine was beating down across her shoulders once again.

And through all this, there was no sign of Morgan.

"Like hell I'm going back in there," Audrey muttered, but she made no move to leave. She had to go back inside; there was no other way around it. She had to get the bracelet or spend the rest of her life standing here, staring at the cave.

"This is ridiculous," she scolded herself, wiping her sweat-dampened palms on her skirts. "Just find the damn thing and get out again. You're the heroine. You're not going to die."

And look on the bright side, at least now she knew one area of the cave where the bracelet was not. She wouldn't have to look there again.

Once again she ventured into the darkness, dropping to her knees right there at the entrance and crawling inside, sweeping her arms constantly from side to side as she slid

her hands through the dirt in search of the necessary jewelry. Going deeper and deeper, she widened her search until she heard the clicking of the spiders coming up out of the earth.

She continued searching for as long as she dared, and then ran back out into the sunlight. On her fourth trip in, just as the clicking began, she finally found it. She glimpsed the sparkle of gold a bare instant before her fingers touched upon it and Audrey scooped the bracelet up with a cry of victory. With a sound that was not unlike the starting shot at the beginning of the race, the bowels of the cave below released a tidal flood of spiders. The blackness came alive with movement, with arachnids crawling on the ground, the walls and even the ceiling. Audrey screamed, but though her mind yelled 'Run!' her feet suddenly rooted to the ground.

They swarmed over her, the clicking of hungry mandibles drowning out her horrified scream.

The light flashed, the vacuum sucked, and Audrey was deposited, still screaming, back at the beginning of the cave. That was one experience that she didn't need to repeat twice. And now she knew exactly where the bracelet was.

Audrey ran down into the cave, dropping to her knees within a foot of the golden jewelry ring and she found it in seconds. Again the darkness exploded into movement as spiders swarmed up out of the back of the cave and headed right for her, their legs clicking on stone, their fangs salivating to taste her.

Leaping to her feet, Audrey ran like hell for the daylight with a wave of hungry spiders right behind her and closing the gap with frightening speed. She ran without looking back

and for the first time in the entire scene she heard Morgan shouting out, "Run, baby, run!"

No sooner had she cleared the shadows into the sunlight, than did she heard the first of many explosions. Rock shattering vibrations trembled up from deep inside the cave, like an earthquake that knocked her off her feet and right into Morgan's arms. He all but picked her up and ran with her back down the opposite side of the hill, great clouds of dust billowing at their back until they both fell.

Morgan landed on top of her, shielding her from a sudden rainstorm of falling rock and debris and they both lay panting, coughing and gasping together until the vibrations and explosions finally ceased. Small pebbles and rocks trickled down the hillside and fell across the backs of her legs for a long time before everything suddenly fell unnatural still. Silence overwhelmed them, broken only by their own coughing as they struggled to breath through the cloud of dust.

"Why—" gulped Audrey, tentatively. "Why the HELL are those things the ONLY realistic effect in this whole damn movie?"

"They were animated in the studio afterwards," Morgan coughed. "The film doesn't know how to compensate, so it just made them real."

"They're real because they were animated LATER?!" Her voice shook at the unfairness of it.

"The studio got an award for it. The Golden Squid or something, I don't know."

"Oh JOY!" Audrey snarled, her voice shaking another minor avalanche free from the hill above them.... or words to that effect.

"Look on the bright side," Morgan panted against the back of her neck. "It's done now. We did it."

Wiping dirt away from her mouth, Audrey said, "What exploded?" She waved her hands, trying to clear enough air to breathe.

A gruff male voice bit out through the dissipating dust cloud, "What the hell are you kids doing?"

Audrey jumped, but Morgan only smiled. "Beth, may I introduce Sargent Pelosi from the U.S. army."

With an incredulous look, Audrey stared from him to the forms of three men dressed in split pea soup green as they materialized out of the settling debris. "Army? Army?!" She flung her hands up in the air. "Now they send in the army!"

"Are you kids okay?" Sargent Pelosi asked.

"Oh, we're just hunky-dory," Audrey snapped back at him. "We've been fighting spiders for weeks now; where have you been? Nice to know our national security tax dollars are being well spent."

Offering both her and Morgan a helping hand up, Pelosi gave Audrey a cross look. "You are one very lucky young lady. You had no business being in there. You could have been killed!"

Morgan took her by the shoulders and gave her a small shake, but he was grinning as he said, "Beth, how could you have been so foolish?"

"Oh, I would just like to slap you," Audrey told him.

He grinned and gave her another gentle shake. "No amount of jewelry is worth your life."

"I know that!" Audrey flung her hands into the air. "Who are you, and what have you done with 'it's in the script' boy?"

Morgan pulled her close, forehead to forehead, nose to nose and smiled. "I'm so glad you are okay."

"No thanks to you, buster," she told him grumpily, but his good humor was infectious and eventually she smiled back.

"So, now we're done, right?"

"Almost." He kissed the tip of her nose.

"Alm—" Her eyes widened as she recalled the crowning event of Scene Seventeen.

Morgan caught her by the arm before she could pull away and he dropped down to one knee, pulling her down and spilling her across his thigh before she could run. He wasted little time in bringing his hand down hard across her skirt-clad bottom.

"You are never to endanger yourself like that again!" he told her, grinning as she stiffened across his knee with a yelp.

"Ouch!" Audrey snapped a hand back to protect her smarting right bottom cheek, but he only dodged her splayed fingers and walloped the left side just as vigorously as the right. "Morgan!" she wailed. "I-I mean Peter! I-I mean—I—OW!"

She kicked her legs and screamed. Seventeen smacks could easily have been a hundred. Her bottom was on fire by the time Morgan let her up. There was also music playing loudly from out of nowhere and the light all around her seemed ... odd.

Holding her bottom with both hands, Audrey looked up at the dimming sky. "Are we going home?" she whispered.

"I don't know," Morgan said, looking up as well. "Something's happening. In all the years I've been doing this, I've never seen this."

The sky was gradually turning as black as night. Only belatedly did Audrey realize, it wasn't the sky. It was everything. Including her. She held up her hands, a stab of panic sinking all through her when she could barely make out her fingertips.

"Eight-oh-three, five-two-five, sixty-seven eleven," she blurted, catching hold of Morgan's shirt. "Remember that. It's my phone number. Eight-oh-three," her voice was growing tinny and she shouted the rest, "five-two-five, sixty...."

There was no sound at all after that.

* * * *

Audrey stood in the middle of her living room, alone. The carton of ice cream had melted all over the floor and her favorite pillows. The bottle of Diet Coke was now thoroughly stale, and her impromptu bed on the floor lay strewn all over the room. The TV was a blue screen and, although lightning had struck the house and coursed through the VCR, the machine certainly didn't look damaged.

Audrey turned around in a full circle. She looked up at the clock on the wall. It was just past two and from the sky outside, that was in the a.m. She caught a whiff of something sour as she walked through the kitchen towards the den room. There were two bowls in the kitchen sink that were

growing some really nasty looking mold cultures, and the date on the computer showed she had been gone for seventeen days.

So much for her job.

She had kind of liked that job, too.

Two in the morning or not, Audrey picked up the telephone and called her mother, and promptly spent the next forty-five minutes assuring her mom that she was all right. She debated on whether or not to call her boss, but figured calling in the morning would likely be better for her career than three a.m.

She should probably call the police, too. As she sat there debating on whether or not it could wait until morning, the phone rang. There were only two people that it could be: her mother, calling to assure herself that Audrey really was home, or it could be Morgan.

Her hands trembled a little as she reached for the phone, almost afraid to find out. "Hello," she whispered, closing her eyes in heartfelt prayer.

Every bone in her body melted when she heard Morgan's smiling voice. "Hello, darlin'. How long have you been back?"

"About an hour?" Audrey burst out, on the verge of both laughter and tears, if only she could decide which emotion to indulge first. "You?"

"About the same."

"Where are you?" Tears were winning out and she turned in a full circle trying to locate a box of Kleenex.

"California," came his cheerful reply.

"Where in California?" There weren't any tissues, only window curtains. She sniffled, wiping her eyes and then her nose. Oh well, she'd never liked that pattern anyway....

"Did you re-appear back where you disappeared from?" he asked.

"Yes, in my living room. You?"

"Back where I disappeared from," Morgan said easily. "After all this time, MGM is still a studio. Who'd have thunk it? I must have set off some silent alarms while I was stumbling around in the dark. Anyway, the nice officers that arrested me said I got one free phone call."

"I'll come and get you," Audrey said instantly. "If I drive all night, I can be there before noon."

"I'll see you then," Morgan said. "Drive carefully."

Audrey ran to get her purse, her excitement making her so jittery that she dropped her keys twice on the way out the door. Halfway down the walk, she realized she forgot to lock the door and had to go back. Securing the house, she again got halfway down the walk before she stopped, turned around and went back.

She all but yanked the VCR out of the wall, hardly stopping to disconnect the wires. Opening the front door, she threw the machine down on the cement walkway and stomped on it twice as she headed for her car. It was a brand new machine; she still didn't care. DVDs were the wave of the future anyway.

* * * *

"I've got two interviews tomorrow," Morgan said, coming out into the living room with the freshly popped microwave popcorn. "With any luck, I'll land one of them and be able to pay you back every bit of that bail money by the end of the month."

"I've got an interview, too." Audrey followed behind him with the movies in one hand and a two liter bottle of half frozen Diet Coke in the other. "And don't worry about paying me back. You got us out of that horrible movie. Believe me, that's payment enough."

Dropping down to sit on a nest of pillows in front of the TV, Audrey began to shuffle through the movie selections. "What do you want to watch? Drama, comedy, action/adventure, or horror?"

"Depends. What kind of movies are they?" He started to sit down behind her, but she held up her hand to take stop him.

"Check list," she said.

"Right." Handing her the popcorn, Morgan walked over to the window and parted the drapes. "The skies are clear and cloudless. No storm in sight. Hence, no lightning." He turned back around and smiled. "Tonight is all clear for movie-watching." He climbed onto the cushions behind her, pulling her back into the cradle of his legs. "Let's do horror, so long as it's not a b-flick film."

"Nope," Audrey said. "No b-flicks here. I'm cured of my love for b-flicks." She looked over some of her movies, a slight smile curving her lips. "Well, okay, I'm cured of my love for older b-flicks. The modern ones don't count

Morgan kissed the back of her neck. "Put in the movie."

Audrey closed her eyes. She picked up the first film she lay her hands on and popped it into the brand new DVD player that she'd picked up at Walmart the same night she'd brought Morgan home from jail.

"Deep Rising," Morgan read the title. "What's this about?"

"Sea monsters," Audrey said, picking up the remote control and cuddling back into his arms. "You're going to love the special effects. Things have changed since you were last in the real world."

"So long as there are no spiders, I'm good."

She laughed, tipping her head backwards to kiss him. "No spiders. I promise."

Raising the remote, she hit play and a streak of blue-green light shot out of the machine and hit both her and Morgan. The living room, pillows, remote control, popcorn and Diet Coke all vanished, and the cold grey steel of a cruise ship's deck and cabins took their place. A cool ocean breeze tussled through Audrey's hair as she turned her shocked expression out towards the endless miles of ocean. In the distance she could hear music and laughter, and the soft rustle of her evening dress moving around her hips and legs.

"I can't believe this," she whispered, clutching her face and hair. "I can't be in the movie."

Audrey turned at the sound of footsteps and watched in horror as one of the ship's crewmen walked by with a tray of drinks.

"I'm in the movie!" she wailed. "Oh no! Not again!" Her panic suddenly died into an unnatural calm as she spun back

around and stared across the water. "Oh my God, I'm in the Deep Rising. I'm Famke Janssen."

Any minute now tentacles with teeth were going to shoot out of the water and start devouring people.

Audrey heard footsteps behind her again and spun back around. One of the senior officers was on his way to the bridge when she grabbed him by the white lapels of his uniform jacket.

"Quick!" she cried, shaking him in her urgency. "I've been robbing the passengers blind! Lock me in the kitchen! Lock me in the kitchen!"

If you are connected to the Internet, take a moment to rate this eBook by going back to your bookshelf at www.fictionwise.com.