Arachne

The large circular web sparkled with dew drops in the morning sun, and Cindy felt a familiar shiver, the hairs on the nape of her neck prickling, as she eyed the large black and yellow spider waiting patiently in the center of the web, its eight legs held in pairs to form a X. Another one! She hurried back to her garden supplies on a bench under the wide roof overhang to get the insect spray.

She cautiously approached the web, spray can held before her like a sword, ready to deal death to the spider. As if it could sense her intent, the garden spider dropped quickly on a strand of silk into the bushes, out of sight and escaping. "Damn," Cindy said aloud, "Got away!" She got a rake and tore down the web any way. Why don't you things stay out of my garden, she thought.

That afternoon her friend and workmate Lucy visited. The day was warm and humid and they retired with ice tea and just baked peanut butter-walnut cookies to the backyard, sitting in the shade of the roof.

"Ugh," Cindy said with a shudder as she looked up and saw another large web spanning a gap between two rose bushes, black and yellow spider in the center of the web. "I'm going to get the bug spray."

Lucy shook her head, "You really have a phobia Cindy. Spiders are good for the garden. They eat bugs that would lunch on your roses and vegetables. Biologic pest control. Better for your health too than using a lot of bug sprays."

"I don't care," said Cindy. "I hate spiders. Always have." She sprayed the spider and the web with a generous cloud of insecticide, then tore down the web and its dying weaver. "Got ya this time," she said with satisfaction.

"Have you always felt this way about spiders?" Lucy asked.

"I think it all started when I was eight and I was hiking with my folks and I was in front and singing so happy and looked back at them and walked right into a spider web and it got all over my face and stuck in my hair. I can still feel the shock of that and how it felt. And they had the nerve to laugh as they pulled the web off me!"

"Poor Cindy," said Lucy. "But you're fifty-five now."

"Well, some things never change. I remember that scene in "Lord of the Rings" where Frodo and Sam are trapped by Shelob, the monster spider? Oh God, I had to walk out of the movie! That was the worse!"

"Well," Lucy said, taking a bite of her cookie, "Lucky for you no monster spider in your yard. Just helpful garden ones that you insist on poisoning."

"I wish the hell they'd go somewhere else where they'd be appreciated. Like with you." "Sorry, live in a condo. No garden."

"Well they sure seem to like mine. Every day at least another one that I have to exterminate."

Luckily there were no more spiders that afternoon so they were able to chat, refill their glasses from the pitcher of ice tea, and munched on the cookies until it was time for Lucy to go.

"And here's Monday tomorrow again," she said. "Weekend seemed to fly by. Pick you up same time?"

"Yes, same time. I'll be ready." Cindy replied as she put their glasses and the cookie platter on a tray to take inside the house.

"I'll get the pitcher," said Lucy.

After dinner Cindy watched TV for a while till, bored with the program, picked up the fantasy- romance novel she had started yesterday and read till she was ready for bed. A beautiful young girl fleeing danger, a mysterious man, dragons, and sex, she thought as she brushed her teeth, same formula, but it works. Time to get eight hours of sleep.

She was wakened from sleep by a woman's soft voice singing a song about weaving. There was a dim light from the hallway that led to the living room. Must have left the TV on, she thought. But that can't be, I distinctly remember turning it off, she then recalled. Strangely she did not feel afraid. I must be havng a dream, she thought, but that's strange because I usually don't realize I'm dreaming until I wake up. Cindy rounded the corner into the living room, where the soft light seemed to come from the air itself, and she saw a beautiful young woman weaving at a loom, dressed in a yellow and black Grecian- style tunic. The woman rose from the stool she had been sitting on and smiled at Cindy.

"Hello Cynthia," the woman said. "Did you know that your name is of Greek origin as is mine? "Who are you and what are you doing in my home?" Cindy asked, still not frightened.

"I am Arachne," the woman replied, continuing to smile.

Arachne, Cindy thought, that kind of rings a bell. Something about a Greek myth.

As if she could read Cindy's mind, Arachne said, "Yes, I challenged the Goddess Athena to a contest to see who could weave the most beautiful tapestry. Unfortunately for me, Athena was a poor loser and so punished me."

Greek Goddess and a weaving contest, Cindy thought, what a wild dream. Maybe the story I was reading before bed?

"Did you know that your name Cynthia is another name for Artemis, the sister of Apollo, and the virgin Goddess of hunting and the wilderness?" Arachne continued. "And you, Cynthia, have lived up to your name too well, hunting down my followers."

"Hunting your followers?"

“Ah, you’re not aware of the consequences of your actions,” said Arachne.

“Consequences of my actions? What are you talking about?” Cindy asked, puzzled.

“Why do you hate my followers so much? Why are you killing my followers who are helping you in your garden?”

“Killing your followers? And in my garden? Wait, wait. What? You mean spiders?” Cindy asked, feeling a chill run down her spine, a weakness in her knees, backing away.

“Poor Cynthia, you are frightened. Let me ease your mind,” said Arachne, spreading her arms wide and approaching Cindy. “Come, let me embrace you and kiss you, in peace and forgiveness.”

Cindy was frozen in place in fascinated terror as she watched Arachne come closer, as she saw her two arms become four, to fold her closely even as she kissed her left cheek. And Cindy felt her fear drain away to be replaced by a feeling of peace and contentment as she was held tenderly, lovingly even, as black and yellow garden spiders streamed into the room through the open windows.

The next morning Lucy pulled her car to the curb in front of Cindy’s house. “She’s late coming out this morning thought Lucy. Usually she’s so prompt, standing here on the sidewalk unless the weather’s bad. After waiting another five minutes, Lucy got out of the car to ring the front door bell. No response.

“Cindy,” she yelled, knocking hard on the door. Nothing. Beginning to feel worried, Lucy went around to stand on tiptoe peering over a hedge, covered with spider webs, into the living room. She screamed at what she saw, but still had enough presence of mind to call 911. Then she retched again and again, sobbing uncontrollably.

When the firemen arrived they broke down the front door, then stopped at the entry from hall to the living room in horrified awe at the sight of Cynthia, suspended in the center of a giant spider web, wrapped in a cocoon of silk with just her face visible, eyes closed and a Mona Lisa smile on her lips. They carefully cut her out of the web. As one of the firemen gently laid her body on the floor, he remarked “She’s so light.”