

Chapter 8



The spider kept spitting webs over Paul as it approached. The sticky silk strands covered his eyes, partially blinding him, and they'd gotten into his mouth, sticking to his tongue, tasting salty and sweet. He strained to free himself, but the webs were too strong. What he could manage to see were the eight gleaming eyes and the pincering fangs.



Grant, terrified beyond rational thought, found himself weeping, his vision blurred as he clung to Eric. He let out a blood curdling scream and began to hyper-ventilate, growing faint as he struggled to breathe in his corset. Eric, for his part, found himself strangely calm as he assessed the scene. He pulled Grant closer, then cupped Grant's chin. "I need you to cure Hal," he said.

"No.. no..." Grant whimpered..."I can't..."



pitched voice.

"I know you're scared," Eric said, remaining calm. "But I believe in you. I know you can do this, and..." He noticed Marlena hopping up and down, growling. "Marlena will protect you."

Marlena chomped her jaws.

Grant closed his eyes and tried to run past Eric, away from the spider. Eric grabbed his little round shoulders and held him. "You don't have to fight the spider. Just sneak past. I'll distract it."

"I can't—" Grant called in his high-

"I believe in you," Eric said. "Now go be my brave girl." He turned Grant and nudged him forward even as he equipped a torch and began to wave the fire over his head. "Yah! Yah!"

The spider, its fangs dripping with poison, bite Paul on the neck and would have webbed him up more, but the threat of the fire drew its attention, and it did its own assessment. The succulent, blood-filled barbarian was trapped, poisoned and couldn't move, while the little elf girl that seemed to think she was sneaking past it was no threat and little more than an appetizer.

The flame was danger, and so that one needed to be terminated. The spider moved past Paul and closed in on Eric.

Grant, trembling in fear, found Hal, whose health bar flashed red, down to 20% and dropping, and the word POISONED floated above his body, which lay on the floor in a tangle. Grant wiped his eyes and lay his hands on Hal, first casting Cure Poison and then Heal, feeling the usual rush of pleasure as he watched the health bar rising.

When the spider had bitten Paul, he'd received a private notification. "Poison Negated by Patch of Anti-venom." He continued to try and fight free from the webs, his arms and legs burning out from the strain. He couldn't twist around to see what was happening between Paul and the spider, so he relaxed for a moment to regain his strength, thinking— Eric's got this.

Eric also thought he got this. Dropping the torch in a place where it wouldn't ignite the webs, he raised his hands to fire a magic missile, thinking to aim it right into the spider's eyes. He even shouted the catch phrase he'd been working on, "Missile This!"

The spider, however, did not wait to see what spell would come blasting from the wizard's hands. Like many of its kind, it was really good at leaping, and that's what it did. In an instant Eric found himself knocked to the ground, the spider on top of him. Stunned by the sudden attack, his magic missile fired off and slammed into the cavern wall, the spider sinking its fangs into his throat. It then immediately began to cover him in webs, spinning him, cocooning him.



Grant put his hands to his cheeks and screamed. Hal sat up, confused, saw the spider on top of Eric. He froze. The sight of the giant spider struck him as impossible. Insane, even. Terror and disbelief overtook him. He found himself laughing maniacally.

Marlena howled and did her own leap, pouncing on the spider's back and viciously biting.

The spider made a screeching noise as it felt the pain of the ripping fangs. It thought itself against the wall, back first and knocked Marlena off.

At the sight of the girl in danger, Grant felt a sudden maternal surge of pure rage. He screamed and equipped his dagger, the all-consumed need to protect the little girl over-riding his fear. He stepped forward, but Hal



grabbed him and held him back. "It's too dangerous."

“Let go of me!” Grant squeaked, struggling helplessly. “Marlena!”

The spider and Marlena circled each other, Marlena dodging several web shots fired by the spider, who chittered in fury. The spiders and the foxes were long-term enemies in the dungeon and both groups feared, respected and hated each other. The spider was looking around even as it schemed to take the fox girl down– the foxes often attacked in packs, and it also needed to keep an eye on the humans who were still a threat, though the two who were free reeked of fear.

Paul thought back on the previous fight with the green blob. The thought suddenly occurred to him. Inventory. Checking his inventory, he saw **POTION OF BERSERKER**. It would make him stronger, tougher and faster. Oh, yes. He equipped the potion and managed to bring it to his lips. It tasted like Red Bull and Vodka. As soon as he finished, he felt a surge of power.

Paul flexed and snapped the webs, ripping his arms and then his legs free as he bellowed with rage.

“Oh, wow,” Grant said, impressed with the man’s show of strength.

Paul equipped his hammer and moving like a blur due to the potions, rained blows onto the spider, smashing it to a bloody pulp in a matter of seconds. The notification popped up immediately:

BARBARIAN HAS DEFEATED SPIDER

Barbarian is now Level 5

Each Member of Party Receives a Treasure Chest.

Paul flexed and said, "Level 5." He stood over the spider's mangled body, his hammer planted on its head. "I wish I had a picture of this.," he said. **PHOTO TAKEN** the dungeon voice said, and the picture appeared floating above him.

"We can take pictures?" Marlana gasped. "How did I not know this?"

Grant's heart fluttered as he looked at Paul with new eyes. The burst of attacks had left Paul with a sheen of sweat on his skin, and Grant walked daintily up to him, tilting his head back. "That was, um, so impressive," he said in a breathy voice, curling his hair behind his ear. "You're so... um... strong."

Paul felt the allure. How could he not? What man isn't pleased to have a pretty female praise him, especially when she had that smitten look in her eyes? "Get in here for a picture with me."

Grant shook his head. "I'm— the spider? It's... um....?"

Paul grabbed Grant's arm and yanked him to his side. Grant squealed, blushed, and clung to Paul's side, grossed out to find himself standing on a dead spider but also feeling super cute. The guys were always grabbing him, moving him, holding him. He was, to his surprise, starting to like the feeling.

Paul threw a meaty arm over Grant's slender little shoulder. "Show me that pretty smile."

Grant dutifully smiled.

"I wish I had a picture of that," Marlana said, and the picture was taken.

Seeing himself clinging to Paul like any girl, sent the ever more familiar swirl of conflicted feelings swirling through his head. "I'm tiny," he whispered, seeing how small he looked next to the big man.

Paul and Hal laughed. "You're just now noticing that?"

"I mean, I knew, but..."

"You're turning into a total airhead," Hal laughed.

"She's such a blonde," Marlena said, repeating something she'd heard once of the men say.

Grant blushed, and raised his little round shoulders, giggling.

The sound of a groan brought their attention back to Eric, who lay half wrapped in webs, his skin green and a health bar nearly to zero.

"Oh, no!" Grant called out, rushing to Eric's side and casting cure poison just before the man died. He cured poison and then healed him.

The notification popped up:

Priestess is now Level 4

Eric opened his eyes and looked up at Grant. "Are you okay?" Grant said in his breathy, cutey girl voice.

Eric, punch drunk and muddle-brained as he woke, found himself captivated by the pretty blonde looking down at him. "Are you an angel?"

"Stop." Grant pulled away.

"I can't seem to move my arms."

"Spider web," Grant said.

Although Paul had freed himself from the constraining aspect of the web, the sticky silk stranded still clung to his clothes and face. "How are we supposed to get this off our clothes?" He said as he tried to pull them off but only found them sticking to his hand.

"I think I can do it," Grant said, pulling out the Cloth of Cleaning he'd used earlier to clean the blood off Marlana. He wiped at the webs on Eric and a swath of the webs vanished. "I'll get you both cleaned up."

"Thanks, Mom," Eric said, amused.

"Shut up," Grant said.

"While you do that, I'm going to go up on the plateau and look for the treasure chests and see what else I can find," Hal said.

"Can I come?" Marlana asked.

"Better stay here and protect Divinity," Hal said. "She's helpless."

Grant gave the man a dirty look, though he knew it was kinda true. Before he could think of a response Marlana piped up.

"Very true," Marlana said, but there was a sneaky look in her eyes, which Grant picked up on right away. He knew she was going to follow Hal, and he worried about her being in danger.

"You can take pictures, too," Grant said, wanting to sweeten the pot.

“Oh, yeah!” Marlena said, hopping up and down excitedly.

As with the mirror room, there was a treasure chest for each of the party members, even Marlena, who danced and clapped, she was so excited. “It’s like my birthday!”

The treasure was all good and useful stuff:

Warrior

Enchanted Hammer of Smiting. +5 damage. +2 accuracy. Armor Class +1

Potion of Giant Strength.

Potion of Fire Resistance.

Patch of Accelerated Recovery.

Paul lifted the mighty hammer, which glowed faintly and did a practice swing. “Hell, yeah.”

Thief

Armor of the Night Shadow. +5 Armor Class. +5 stealth. User gains the ability to cast invisibility once per day.

Patch of Spider Climb: User can climb on walls and ceilings.

Potion of silence.

Potion of Fire Resistance.

Hal held up the armor for the group to see. “Is this cool as hell or what?”

“It is, indeed, cool,” Eric said before opening his own chest.

Wizard

Spell Book: Sleep.

Spell puts targets into a comatose-like slumber for duration.

Spell Book: Magic Mouth.

Spell creates multiple illusionary versions of the target to distract enemies.

Ring of Protection: +5 armor class. +5 Magic Resistance

Patch of Enhanced Mana.

“About time I got some new spells,” Eric said, nodding.

Marlena

Patch of speed: Increases wearer’s speed

Patch of blending: Wearer can blend into the surroundings.

“Patches for my dress! Marlena sang out, clearly more excited about the fashion statement than the powers. She turned to Grant. “Open yours! Open Yours!”

Grant Opened his box and cursed. “Damn it. Again?”

Priestess

Enchanted Makeup of the Influencer

As long as wearer’s makeup is perfect, she may ensorcell a single figure and command them to do her bidding.

Spell Book: Glyph of Warding. Priestess can make a magical and invisible glyph that triggers when touched.

Spell Book: Summon Celestial. Priestess may summon an angelic figure to either attack enemies or defend her.

Corset Patch: User will reflect 20% of all damage back on attackers.

Potion of Restore Mana.

"Oh, my God!" Marlena shrieked. "You get to wear makeup."

"Lucky me," Grant said. He would have gone through his normal struggle of denial, but the power the makeup offered was too good to ignore, and it wasn't like he could just equip it when needed. He was, he realized ruefully, going to have to get used to painting his face. The summon celestial spell was also super cool. He liked the idea of being able to summon a supernatural force to fight for him. Still, he cursed a little. Why can't I get a cool attack spell like magic missile?

"I'm thinking we should risk missing the deadline so we Divinity can sew all these patches onto our clothes," Paul said.

"We'll get a lot of extra experience if we can make it," Eric said.

"And we'll all lose a level if we die," Hal countered.

They debated for a time, and it was ultimately decided that they would sew the patches first. Grant sat down and equipped his sewing kit, buzzing. He'd found he enjoyed sewing, somehow, and looked forward to having the calming and pleasing task to focus on after all the excitement of the spider attack.

"Gentlemen... milady," Kim called out. "Break time for us. The AI will be in charge."

"I have a name," Nimue sassied back.

"Can you come down for a visit?" Paul said. "We would all love to see you."

"Why is that?" Nimue said.

"Because you're hot as hell," Hal said.

"Oh, you do flatter, but there's a little problem. I'm taking a bubble bath right now, and I'm not decent."

"What's the problem, again?"

Grant rankled. He hated the way the guys gushed over the stupid AI girl. Did she ever sew their clothes? Heal them? Humph!

"You're so much prettier than her," Eric, who'd sat near Grant said.

"Thank you," Grant said, then remembering he was supposed to be a guy, added, "sort of."

"You are prettier than her," Marlena said.

Grant smiled. Coming from the little girl, it seemed better. Of course, he'd been dosed with endorphins every time he received a compliment for being pretty. He was already learning to love it.

Real World

Warden Warrant watched as Kim and Madison checked out and headed home for the day. "Feminists," he hissed. He turned from the CCTV camera and went back to his laptop. He would have shut down the whole operation on his own authority, but the geeks had gotten all this approved through the governor's office. One thing you didn't do was cross the governor. "If we had a good, morally righteous man in charge this perversion of the natural order wouldn't be allowed," he grumbled, going to the governor's website and looking at HER picture.

An older woman who was handsome rather than pretty who even gone so far as to wear a string of pearls in her official photo, her biography claimed she was a devout Christian, happily married for over 30 years and a mother of three."

"Happily married my keister," Warrant grumbled. "A happily married woman would be happy to stay at home and take care of her family. Only unhappy women want jobs and such. As for her being a Christian? He had no doubt it was as fake as her hair color. "There's a reason women weren't allowed to vote by the founders of this country, and there's a reason women shouldn't be allowed in politics." He glared at the picture of the smiling seemingly normal woman.

"Probably a devil worshipping commie."

Still, she was a politician, and she, like all of them, dreaded bad publicity. Yes. He would alert her office as to what was going on here, but in such a way as to suggest he was trying to protect her reputation. Grinning, he typed the title to his email: **PR THREAT TO GOVERNOR'S RE-ELECTION.**

Back in the Dungeon

“What did you do before all this?” Eric asked. “I mean back in the real world?” He’d decided to try the friend’s first approach. The other guys were going about it all wrong, he thought. They were coming onto Grant like he was a regular girl. While Eric had seen lots of signs Grant was acting more and more like a girl, he also knew that this girl had been a guy not long ago. Grant, Eric assumed correctly, was not going to be comfortable with any kind of amorous encounter as a woman– so Eric had decided to earn her trust and confidence first before he would make his move.

“Crime,” Grant answered.

“We all did crime,” Eric said. “But there has to be more to you than just that. Hobbies? Passions?”

Grant considered. He’d learned over the years to keep things to himself. The guys he’d hung out with were all scum. You didn’t reveal anything to guys like that because you never knew what they might try and use against you one day. His plan to secretly control all these guys required different tactics. He decided to play the femme. He smiled and looked at Eric sideways, the way girls had always done when they were trying to be cute. “I don’t know if I can trust you,” he said, starting with something true in a gambit to earn Eric’s trust.

“Nothing you tell me leaves my lips,” Eric said.

What a nerd, Grant thought. “It may be hard to believe looking at me now, but I was in a biker gang.”

“Remember, I saw the real you back before we came into this...” Eric searched for a word, “insane dungeon.”

"Oh, yeah." Grant giggled. "I forgot." He finished sewing the patch he'd been working on and started on the Reflect Damage patch for his corset. As impractical as it looked and felt, the corset was getting more and more useful with these patches adding to his defenses. "Good thing I'm getting used to it," he thought. He'd imagined at one time he would switch out of it in a second if they found some pants and a shirt that would fit him, but now he wasn't so sure.

Getting back to the conversation with Eric, he decided to seem even more feminine and vulnerable. Guys liked that. "I'm worried I really am turning into an airhead."

"I can't see that happening to you."

"The thing is..." he now dropped his voice to a whisper. "The other guys? The way they look at me? It's the same way the bikers looked at sweet ass."

"Sweet ass?"

"Girls that hang around the club for sex, but who don't belong to any of the guys." Thinking back on those days, he had a sudden image of himself as a biker girl, sweet ass hanging around the club, having all the guys brazenly stare at his body. He shivered. "I know those guys want to... fuck me. I can see it in their eyes. It makes me feel scared, vulnerable." He closed his eyes. "I used to be the same way. If I saw a girl with a body like this, there would only be one thing on my mind."

"Do you want me to talk to them?" Eric offered, thinking, this is going better than I ever imagined. "I'll make them stop."

"No. Don't." Grant glanced over his shoulder to where Paul and Hal were sitting with their backs against the wall, eyes closed, snoring. "It'll make me

seem even more... it'll make seem like a scared little girl. Don't say anything, but...." He stopped sewing for a second and squeezed Eric's arm. "Promise if one of them tries something, you'll protect me."

"I don't think they would..."

"They're men," Grant said. "And I'm this. Of course they would. Promise me. Promise me you'll keep me safe." Much to his surprise, Grant felt tears flowing down his cheeks. Damn, I'm good, he thought. I should win an Oscar.

Eric could not resist a woman's tears. 'I promise,' he said. "I'll keep you safe." An old Stones tune came back to him. He hadn't thought about it in years. Under my thumb.

Grant smiled a real smile as he thought, hook, line and sinker.

Once he'd finished sewing, Grant turned his back on the men, pulled his mirror and makeup kit out of his inventory and sighed. He would definitely going to sue those hags. This was all cruel and unusual punishment. He couldn't say he was totally surprised at the makeup kit. Once of the stupid skills he had been given was Art of Makeup 10. It was almost as bad as his Walking in Heels skill, which since he'd spent all this time in heels had risen from 10 all the way to 20.

"I doubt they even had any of this in medieval times," Grant murmured. Then, he went to work. Foundation. Lipstick. Eyeliner. Mascara. Eyeshadow. Blush. Eyebrow Pencil. Nimue made sure to juke all the pleasure centers in Grant's brain as he did his makeup, and even though it made him feel great, he still soured to look at himself in the mirror all dolled up. The makeup in the kit was all sparkly and glittery. The exact kind Cherise had worn. It enhanced every feminine aspect of his face, making his eyes and lips look bigger and more dramatic. Seeing himself with his

face painted turned him on just the same way seeing Cherise all prettied up had turned him on. He felt his cheeks grow warm, his skin tingle. He fanned himself.

The guys are going to go nuts, he thought, both annoyed and amused at the thought. The spell he earned from having his makeup done would allow him to command a single figure to do his will and that included members of his own party.

Makeup, Grant thought, is power.



Bonus (Grant Imagining Himself as a Biker Girl)

