Spider Ants

 She was coming to; her fingers were just touching the ground; she was hanging upside down from a beam in a barn. She tried to remember where she was and why she was in this predicament. Little by little the situation started to become clear. She was a reporter in the Australian outback. She was investigating illegal mining in a remote area in the Australian interior. She had thought the camp was unoccupied and was taking a look around when a man pounced on her from behind, shouting at her as he did so. She was knocked to the ground. Her head had hit a rock as she fell. She must have passed out at that point. That was the last thing she could remember until she regained consciousness. The door was open so a stream of light illuminated a little of the interior. Her hands were touching the ground and she shuddered; somethings were creeping up her arms. She took a sideways look: they were the Australian Spider Ants, the largest of their kind. They weren’t poisonous, but they could bite. The strength and stickiness of their webs was a formidable combination. She was frightened, very frightened. She thought for a moment and did what her mother used to do when she was tormented by thoughts or troubled by demons, she began to sing a lullaby. Shortly afterwards, she felt the spiders creeping legs stop running over her body. She kept on singing and sensed a gentle massage being performed on her skin. It was hardly discernable at first but as time went on she started to feel different. She wriggled her toes and the spider ants climbed to her feet and started to massage them. She rubbed one foot against the other where her ankles were tied. She kept on singing. Some of them were at her ankles doing something. She felt the rope on her right foot slacken. She felt the web take the strain as the rope became more loose. Some spider ants were also spinning a web around her ankles.

More spider ants were at her mouth only this time they were depositing some kind of nectar on her lips. It tasted of grape juice and it gave her energy. She concentrated very hard, trying to communicate love thoughts. She wasn’t sure if it was working but the sensations she was experiencing were becoming more pleasurable as time went on. She kept on singing her lullabies and kept thinking the thoughts she wanted to communicate. She felt the rope tied around her right ankle give and her leg fell a few inches. The web was now taking the strain of half of her weight. There was another give as the other rope holding her ankle gave way. She was gradually being lowered by the strength of the spider’s web strands.

She tried to convey her appreciation and love as the spider ants worked to lower her to the ground. Her feeders continued to bring her nectar to consume. It was very little but it was extremely nutritious, refreshing and energy giving. The spider ants were doing different jobs to free her. Some had started to clean her. Removing dirt from her fall to the ground as she was being taken prisoner. She wondered what she could do to reward her helpers. She felt another jolt as another bond was broken. The spider ants’ webs had secured her from falling too much too quickly.

When she was on the ground the spider ants started to extricate their strands of web from her body. She let them finish their unbinding.

She stood and thought, where next? Somehow the spider ants could understand. They left her body and gathered in front of her in a kind of arrow formation . She understood that was the direction they wanted her to walk. She walked slowly. The spider ants moved quickly as soon as they realized that she was going where they wanted her to go.

 Suddenly a man appeared and shouted, “How the hell did you get out of there?”

She recognized his voice, he was the man who had dragged her to the ground.

She stood motionless and watched the man approach her and the spider ants as they advanced towards him. The spider ants surrounded him and climbed inside his trouser legs. He started to yell as they bit into him. Their threads of web were starting to restrict his mobility and he started to cry out as the spider ants crawled around his mouth. He tried to raise his arms but the threads of web kept his arms low. He was finding it difficult to walk. The stickiness of the web strands were slowly reducing his mobility to nothing. He was becoming paralysed by the strength and quantity of the web strands. Finally, he stopped and succumbed to the strands of web that were covering his body and toppled over onto the ground.

The spider ants regrouped and led the young woman to the center of their communal living area. To them it was their city. Three towers of dried mud rose twelve feet or more before her. Twenty feet away three towers had been destroyed. Two portable cabins had been parked near the barn. There had been some deliveries of petrol. She walked over to the barrels and was able to lever one on its side and roll it over to some pieces of machinery. She undid the lid and let its contents pour onto the ground. She was careful to let it spill under machinery. She picked up a sheet of plastic and went back to the man. She wrapped it around his body and was careful not to touch the strands of web that bound him. She grabbed the plastic sheet and pulled the man out of the way. She didn’t want him to die in the inferno that would soon take hold.

She went into one of the cabins and looked around. She spotted next to an ash tray the thing she was looking for, a box of matches. She took the box and went outside to where the spider ants were waiting.

She thought hard and waved her arms away from her truck. The spider ants retreated to a safe distance. She got into the truck and started the engine. She knocked another barrel of oil over and pushed it away from the spider’s homeland. She got out of the truck and undid the lid and let the oil spill out of the drum and under other equipment. She thought hard, sung and waved her arms to warn the spider ants of the imminent danger. She waved her arms again a little more vigorously than before and the spider ants started to retreat in earnest. She stopped singing and got back into the truck and drove it to a safer place. She walked back to the machinery , struck a match and lit a line of petrol and ran back. The line of fire soon engulfed all of the site. She went back to where the spider ants had congregated and thought hard. She thought that she wasn’t sure if their homeland was still in a safe place. She walked further into the outback and waved her arms. The spider ants started to communicate with each other, formed a line and proceeded to evacuate their homeland.

She went back to the man. She wondered whether to let him die of heat stroke.

 “You want me to leave you here?”

 “You know what I tried to do to you?”

 “Yes. So what’s your answer?”

 “I’m tied up. You were communicating with those spider ants.”

 “So it seems.”

 “What did they say, Miss?”

 “I don’t know exactly. I tried to convey that I wasn’t sure if they were safe. I think they have gone to find somewhere new.”

 “Will you take me with you and leave me where someone can find me?”

 “Do you still want to kill me?”

 “Not after I saw you communicate with those spider ants. Can you get me some water to drink, please?”

 “I have some in my truck. It will be very warm if not hot.”

 “As long as it’s wet. I don’t mind.”

 I’ll get us some then.”

 The young woman went to the truck and looked through a box, found the pair of wire cutters she was looking for and picked up the bottle of water. She went back to the man and cut the strands of the spider ants’ web around his mouth. It wasn’t an easy job because the web strands were extremely sticky and they were sticking to the wire cutters. Eventually enough were cut away. She took a swig of water first, just in case the bottle stuck to the remaining bits of web around his mouth. She gave the man a drink. She went back to the truck and put the bottle between the two seats. She went back to help the man stand up, only touching the plastic sheet that she had wrapped around his body. She helped him to shuffle to the truck and get into it. He slumped onto the seat in a more or less comfortable position.

 She turned the ignition key and started the truck and they left the site of the mineral speculators’ camp which was still burning.

The End.