

Another Day in Paradise

Betsy's eyes stung with held-back tears as she pushed her way through the short grasses, ignoring the rough burrs were scratching up her legs. So what if she didn't come prepared to hike? Shorts and a tank top were fine for a few trails in a national park in the Bahamas.

"The honeymoon's already over, and it's only day two," Betsy thought to herself as she forged ahead.

"Why don't we go out to the state park for a hike today?" Betsy had asked Joe at breakfast that morning. "I had looked it up before our trip, the maps are in my backpack."

"I don't feel like hiking today," Joe said. "We just got here and I was planning to relax."

"We relaxed all day yesterday!" Betsy said.

"We were in bed all day yesterday. But I wouldn't call it relaxing. More entertaining," Joe said with a wink.

"But don't you want to get out and see this place? We spent a lot of money to come here."

"All I care about seeing is you. In clothes, or no clothes, preferably the latter."

"Come on, I'm not kidding around," Betsy said. "I want an adventure."

"Why don't you go ahead? You want to see the sights. I'll hang out here by the pool. Then you can fill me in on your big hike while we enjoy that steak dinner we have reserved."

"I thought we were in this together."

"Don't get me wrong honey, we are in this together. For the long haul, for better or worse. I just didn't expect that meant every minute of every day."

Remembering the conversation only served to make Betsy madder.

"Let Joe sit there on his lazy butt and drink Bud Light all day. I'm going to see some birds."

Betsy took a deep breath. Finding herself at a fork in the path she decided it was time to stop ruminating over Joe and concentrate on the here and now. She was in exotic surroundings, nothing at all like the wooded foothills of North Carolina she grew up in, and she wasn't even seeing it.

She grabbed her map and decided to go left. It looked like the trail just made a big loop anyway, so either direction should have been fine. A couple of bright red and yellow birds flew around some gorgeous pink flowers in the tree right above her. Everywhere she looked she saw green. The big palm leaves created just enough shade to make the hike bearable on this hot June afternoon, and the lushness continued at her feet with short grasses and shrubs growing in a dense carpet.

The first half mile the trail was well marked. More bright-colored birds flew through the trees, which were also decorated with orchids growing on the trunks, making Betsy feel like she was in a movie set in paradise.

The trail got a little narrower and less kept up as she went further, but Betsy hardly noticed. It was like the deer paths Betsy followed at home.

Another half mile in, and the trail Betsy was on became completely overgrown. “Should I turn back?” she wondered. The trail markings weren’t clear at all, but up until now she’d been sure of herself with the wider path. Now she was standing at the edge of a clearing, with no clear direction to lead her forward. Looking at her map wasn’t any help. She couldn’t figure out where she was without trail markers. Looking ahead to the clearing she saw a big group of birds.

“There must be water up there,” Betsy thought. She decided to go explore. After all, she just had to turn around and follow the beaten down grass where she was walking to find her way back to the trail.

Led on by the birds, Betsy forged ahead. With her eyes focused on the beauty in the sky, she was paying less attention to where she was walking. She felt something sticky on her leg and reached down to brush it off.

Stupid spider webs.

Betsy looked around for a stick to start whacking at the air in front of her, hoping to avoid any more sticky webs.

Ow!

A sharp pain took Betsy’s attention away from the birds. A spot on her thigh was already swelling up as she brushed away a yellow and black spider. The spider didn’t bother Betsy, she’d had her share of bites in her nights spent camping with her brothers. She wielded her stick in front of her and kept on.

The shade cast by the umbrella was getting longer, and Joe’s stomach growled. He was already looking forward to stuffing himself with a big ribeye at dinner. And he had to admit, he had his eye on that cheesecake for dessert. The chocolate torte with last night’s dinner was fine, but the slice was too small for his liking. He noticed the couple sitting next to them got the cheesecake, and it was twice as big.

“That cheesecake will be big enough to share with Betsy. It’s her favorite, I don’t know why she didn’t get it last night,” Joe thought.

He knew she was mad he didn’t go hiking with her, but the last thing he wanted to do was walk. He was on his feet all day at work, and had planned to come on this honeymoon to totally relax.

Thinking about relaxing led Joe's mind to wander back to just how much fun they'd had in bed last night, and yesterday, and the night before. He was going to have to do some big-time apologizing when Betsy got back, to make sure they could enjoy more of each other again tonight.

The cabana interrupted Joe's daydream. "Is there anything I can get you sir?"

"Sure, bring me a hamburger, I think it's time for lunch."

Betsy made it to the clearing, where what seemed to be thousands of birds were flying around, diving into the wetlands for food. The view was spectacular. She took a few pictures. "Man, I'm glad I bought this iPhone before we got married. It really does take some great photos. I can't wait to show Joe what he's missing."

She started walking again, but her leg was starting to throb. Looking down, she saw her thigh was red and pretty swollen.

"I've never had a reaction like this. I wonder what it was that bit me."

She reached around to her backpack for her phone again to try to find out what bit her, and saw a new text from Joe.

So sorry about this morning. Missing you by the pool. Hurry back.

"Sure. Now he's sorry. He can miss me a little longer." Betsy left his text unanswered as she did a quick Google search for spiders in the Bahamas, and brought up a page with a picture that looked exactly like the spider Betsy brushed off her leg. She found something that looked like the yellow spider she brushed off her leg, called a banana spider.

"Listed by Guinness as one of the world's most poisonous spiders. Great."

The initial bite is painful, muscle spasms follow shortly after, then intense pain will rack the body as venom flows through the blood system, leading to paralysis, asphyxiation, and a slow, painful death.

"What? Slow and painful death?"

Surely that couldn't be. She wasn't even in that much pain. Still, maybe she should turn back. She'd gotten what she wanted, an adventure out in the wild. And she wasn't going to let being a little mad at Joe make her miss their dinner reservations.

Betsy looked ahead to try to find the trail where it left the woods, but couldn't see an opening. She decided to focus on following her own tracks back as best as she could. The throbbing in her leg got worse with each step, but she convinced herself it was just a normal reaction, like a bee sting without Benadryl.

The sun beat down on her as she struggled to find her way back through the clearing, and with every step the pain intensified. It wasn't just her thigh anymore. She started feeling throbbing in her other leg and buttocks.

"Is this muscle spasms? What's going on?"

Betsy started to hyperventilate. Panic attacks weren't totally foreign to her, she'd had a couple in high school. "I can't let this get to me. I've got to keep my head straight." Betsy took a big breath and started running towards an opening in the trees.

"That's it. That's the trail back to my car."

Betsy wanted to keep running to get to her car as fast as she could and get the hell out of here. But she was starting to have trouble breathing.

"Asphyxiation. What if it's the venom? What if I can't breathe?"

She started to feel her lungs constrict. Scared she might not be able to drive herself home, Betsy sent a text to Joe.

Been bit by a Banana spider. Very poisonous. Come help. I can't make it back to the resort.

She hit send and kept walking.

The cabana boy shut down the umbrella next to Joe and asked Joe if he'd like another Bud Light.

"What time is it?" Joe asked.

"3 p.m."

"Sure, bring another Bud Light. And you might as well throw in an order of cheese fries to tide me over to dinner."

The beer and fries were delivered promptly.

"Everything at this resort is fabulous. Maybe we can make this an annual event, not just a once in a lifetime vacation," Joe thought.

Joe chugged the last of his beer and headed back to the room to get ready for dinner.

"Betsy? How was your hike?" he called out as he opened the door to their room.

His stomach sank a little when she didn't answer back.

"Man, I really botched this one. She's so mad she's not even back yet."

Joe composed another apology text before hopping in the shower.

I mean it Betsy, I'm really sorry. Come back to the resort, and I promise you the best make-up sex you've ever had before dinner.

Ten minutes later, towel around his waist, Joe headed straight for his phone hoping to see Betsy's cute smile in a selfie, reassuring him everything was okay. Instead, he saw his text was sent but not delivered.

"That's weird," he thought. "She's always checking her phone."

He opened up the tracking app Betsy had put on their phones. Betsy's phone hadn't been updated in an hour.

"No service. What the heck."

Joe threw on a shirt and shorts, grabbed the brochure for the national park Betsy had showed him that morning off the dresser, and headed to the car.

Fighting her way through muscle spasms, Betsy made it to the fork in the trail.

"It's just half a mile to the car now. Just keep putting one foot in front of the other," she told her brain. "Surely I can make it, and Joe will be there to get me."

Her phone dinged. Betsy reached behind her to grab it from the pocket of her backpack, but her arm wouldn't stretch that far. She shrugged the pack off her shoulders, her whole body feeling stiff, thinking to herself the text better be important to put her through all this pain. She glanced at her phone and saw two texts from Joe, and her spider text to him, all sent just now.

"Oh no, I didn't have service out there!" Panic set in. The muscle spasms were getting worse, and Betsy realized Joe hadn't gotten her text about the spider bite. He wasn't going to be waiting at the car to drive her home.

"I've got to get myself out of here." Determined to get to the trailhead, Betsy grabbed her pack and pushed forward. Each step her body was wracked with pain. She started getting dizzy, and stumbled over a root in the ground. She tried to push herself up, but her arms couldn't seem to work. "I'm just going to rest here a minute," Betsy thought as a fog settled over her brain.

Joe parked the car at the welcome center for the park. He glanced over at his phone laying in the passenger seat. The blue light was blinking, so he grabbed the phone and saw the text from Betsy.

What the hell? Banana spiders?

He ran to the welcome center to get help. The door was locked. He looked around and noticed his rental car was the only one in the parking lot. Betsy had taken the bus here, and the office was closed for some sort of holiday. There was no one.

Luckily there was only one trail at this place. Joe headed for the path and started to dial 911 to get help on the way in case Betsy couldn't make it out.

“Wait. This is the Bahamas. Is there even 911?”

In a panic, he called the resort.

“It's a great day at the Andros Inn, how may I help you?”

“My wife's in danger! She went on a hike all by herself and was bitten by a banana spider. What do I do? Who can I call? Do you have 911?”

“Yes, yes 911! Go to your wife. I will call. An ambulance will be there in minutes.”

Joe was already on his way down the trail. He found Betsy lying at a fork in the trail, passed out from shock. Joe's nursing training kicked in right away. He took off his t-shirt and rolled it up to put under her feet, then started on CPR. He could hear the siren getting closer.

Betsy opened her eyes.

“You're going to be okay!” Joe said, maybe a little too loud. He meant only to reassure her, but was flooded with his own intense relief.

“Joe!” Betsy grabbed his neck and pulled him to her, taking in her surroundings. She could feel the draft on her back from the open hospital gown, saw the IV in her hand behind Joe's hair, and the stark white walls of the hospital room.

“I'm so sorry,” Betsy cried, too exhausted to get out all she was thinking. She should have never left him. She had ruined everything. Here she was, stuck in an emergency room on their honeymoon. She didn't want to fight, she was so sorry. So sorry.

“Don't say anything. I love you more than you'll ever know,” Joe said. “Just rest. We're together. For better or for worse, in sickness and in health. Here's to health!”