

# Spiderman

By Scribblesinink

"Can you hand me that bowl?" Heather indicated the glass bowl that sat on the top shelf.

"Sure." Mimi raised herself on tiptoe and reached up.

Heather bent to check on the oven. She usually grabbed a chair if she needed anything from the highest shelves, or asked Jake, if he was around. However, the clumping noises upstairs indicated he'd only just woken up after coming home late last night and was headed for the shower. And Mimi was a couple inches taller than Heather was, so she should have no trouble taking down the bowl.

"Eeek!" The quiet peace in the kitchen was abruptly broken as Mimi gave a loud shriek. "Get it off me, *getitoff!*" The bowl crashed to the floor, shattering into a thousand sharp pieces.

Heather spun around. Mimi had leaped back from the shelves and was hopping around in the middle of the kitchen, flapping her hands wildly—until a big spider landed among the glass splinters. It sat there, stunned for a heartbeat, before it scuttled sideways on hairy, black legs.

"It was *on* me...." Mimi's voice was still shaking with horror. "God...." She glanced around the kitchen, before looking back at Heather and giving her a sheepish shrug. "Sorry 'bout that." She nodded at the mess of broken glass.

Heather couldn't really fault her. The spider had been big, and she doubted she would've reacted much differently if it had fallen on her. Though perhaps a little less loudly....

"That's—."

Heavy pounding in the hallway stopped her mid-sentence, before she could finish reassuring Mimi. The next instant, the kitchen door slammed open with such force it hit the wall with a crack. Heather let out a startled gasp. "Jake...!"

For a few seconds, breathless silence reigned, everyone's eyes comically wide in astonishment as they stared at one another. Heather fought the urge to burst out laughing at the look on Mimi's face—the other woman's eyebrows seemed to be trying to meet her hairline—even as she felt her own cheeks grow hot with embarrassment.

Jake was standing in the door frame, buck-naked but for the Beretta in his right hand.

Soapy water dripped from his hair and trickled onto the wood floor, leaving an ever-growing, glistening puddle.

"Oh my..." Mimi was the first to break the spell.

Jake looked back at them, slightly bewildered. "I heard screaming...?"

Heather bit her tongue, afraid that, if she said anything, she'd be unable to stop the giggles that were bubbling up in her throat.

"Oh. That." With visible effort, Mimi dragged her gaze away from Jake, and squinted at the floor suspiciously, even though the spider had long since found itself a dark crack to hide in. "There was a spider. Fat, ugly thing." She shuddered and rubbed her arms.

"Oh...", Jake echoed Mimi. He glanced around the kitchen uncertainly, clearly at a loss what to do next, now that the perceived threat turned out to be non-existent.

"Here." Heather grabbed a dish towel from the sink and shoved it into Jake's free hand. Stepping between him and Mimi, she nudged him to back out of the kitchen with a palm on his chest. "We're fine. You should, um—" She swallowed down another giggle, feeling her cheeks dimple. "—finish your shower."

"Yeah... right..." Still looking a little puzzled, Jake allowed her to shepherd him from the kitchen, and Heather closed the door behind him.

Turning away from the door, she caught Mimi's gaze. Unable to hold it in any longer, they both burst out laughing at the same time. "Oh my God, that was—" Words failed Heather, and she discovered she was laughing so hard that tears were streaming down her face.

It took a long time before they had collected themselves enough to clean up the glass splinters. Of the spider, they found no sign.

oOo

Jake's skin pebbled from the cold air as he found himself pushed back into the hallway, clutching the Beretta in one hand and the dish towel in the other. From beyond the shut kitchen door, he heard muted laughter. He scowled at the door and thumped back up the stairs, annoyance and embarrassment battling for precedence.

He'd woken up shortly before and, still only half awake, been soaping up his hair in the warm stream of the shower when a panicked scream had sent cold prickles of terror down

his spine. He hadn't given it a second thought; he'd just bolted from the shower, snatched up his gun from the dresser in the bedroom, and flung himself down the stairs three steps at a time. The long months of the ASA siege and the war, and even before, had taught him that such screams never equaled anything good.

And then they flat out told him it had been nothing but a damned *spider*?

The adrenaline was slow to fade as he finished his shower and toweled off with brusque, angry gestures.

oOo

"So, there he was, as naked as the day he was born, with that wicked-looking black gun in his hand." Mimi grinned. "All because of an itty bitty spider." She paused and frowned. "Well, it was a really big one, actually." Another shiver ran through her as she remembered the sensation of hairy legs scrabbling on her skin.

She glanced up at Stanley, expecting to see him grinning back and for him to shake his head and call her a wuss. When he'd asked how her afternoon baking Halloween cookies with Heather had gone, she'd simply *had* to tell him the story of the Naked Man and the Spider Scare. She chuckled softly; it did sound like a comic book title, didn't it?

Much to her surprise, Stanley was neither shaking his head in mockery, nor laughing at her tale. Instead, his expression was dark: a brooding frown creased his forehead.

Mimi lifted an eyebrow. "What?"

He gave her a long, hard look. "You.... Jake...." He shook his head, before turning it away.

"Stanley?"

"Never mind." He warded off her questions with a gesture. "It's nothing."

Mimi stared back at him. What on God's green Earth could—oh.... *Oh!*

Her mouth wanted to twitch into another smile as she worked out the reason for Stanley's peculiar mood, but she forced the grin away, keeping her features in check. She was balancing on a precipice; if she laughed at him now....

"Stanley?" She scurried over to the chair he was slouched in and settled herself in his lap. Though he let her, he still refused to look at her. She leaned forward, keeping her voice low. "Stanley, believe me, Jake Green has *nothing* on you." She reached for his chin,

turning his head and forcing him to look back at her.

"Really?"

Mimi struggled not to roll her eyes. She leaned in to kiss him. "Yes, really."

oOo

"I'm sorry I laughed at you." In the light cast by the tiny flame of the single candle, Heather couldn't quite make out Jake's expression. He finished folding up his jeans and put them on a chair. "That wasn't very nice of me."

Jake made a non-committal noise as he joined her in bed. He crawled under the covers and blew out the candle, casting the room in darkness.

"But you have to admit," Heather was determined to talk this out before they went to sleep, "it was rather funny."

Jake pounded the pillow and settled down, his back to her. "Nothing funny about it."

Jake's tone made Heather sit up straighter. What had happened to his sense of humor? "Jake, you were naked! Dripping soap suds all over the floor. And then that gun...." Her mouth twisted up in a smile, and she was kind of glad his back was to her.

For a long minute, Jake didn't respond, and she thought he was going to refuse to discuss it further. Then he sighed and sat back up. Although a little light fell in through the window and Heather eyes were beginning to adjust to the gloom, she felt more than she saw his gaze turn on her. "You two scared the crap out of me," he admitted.

Heather started, at last catching on that maybe she'd misjudged the reason for his chagrin over the incident. "You thought something had happened?"

He gave a nod, again more sensed than seen. "When I heard that scream...." He drew up his knees and folded his arms around them. "All I could think about was everything that went down the last few years."

She scooted over to him, putting her hands on top of his. "And so you came to our rescue?"

She felt him shrug. A lot of bad things *had* happened over the past two years, and Mimi had let out one heck of a scream. She wriggled closer, turning over one of his hands so she could kiss his palm. "You're my hero, Jake Green."

He gave a wry snort. "I don't know about that." Some of the tension slipped out of him, though.

"I'm sorry we scared you," she whispered contritely.

Jake offered another shrug, lying back down and pulling her with him.

She snuggled up against him, resting her chin on his chest. "The war is over, you know. We're safe."

He hmm'ed. "I guess I haven't gotten quite used to it yet."

Heather made a soothing noise, closing her eyes and burrowing deeper into his embrace. She was almost asleep when Jake broke the silence one last time. "I guess you're right, I suppose it was pretty funny...."

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