



Attacking my assembly line for mobiles with renewed panic, I was making desperately gradual progress. The ceiling was hung with slowly rotating Viking longships. I had jammed two poles tightly between the walls and hung the mobiles off them. I calculated I would need to work night and day to get them all done. With a last admiring glance at the longships, I buckled down to start on the walnut ships.

After dinner I scampered back across the lawn to the long house and ongoing labour. Garth had lifted a glazed eye at me.

“What? More mobiles? Haven’t you got enough?” he mumbled vaguely.

My paraffin hurricane lamp on the table didn’t really illuminate the room so much as throw it into a charmingly dim glow almost impossible to see by. Working in a mild frenzy, I was cross-eyed in the gloom.

My attention was so focused that, had Ben walked in in a leopardskin with a gift of ostrich chicks, I wouldn’t have noticed. But there was a strange sound on the floor.

Finally, I had to peer down to see what was making the sound. And then I wished I hadn’t. In one bound I was on the table, peering over the edge with all my hair on end.

A huge hairy dark spider was on the floor. He/she/it was the size of a dinnerplate. She was eerily still and, I was convinced, staring up at me in arachnid predatoriness.

I stared back, wondering what would happen next. Would the spider leap up on to me from the floor? Could I jump off the table in a long enough arc to land beyond it and run for my life? Could



I yell and Garth would hasten in and rescue me — cancel that. He was sound asleep.

Slowly, I reached for my torch and switched it on, training the beam on the spider. It instantly crouched down flat under the light and, I swear, held its breath.

Feeling my gorge rising along with all my body hair, I moved the beam just off the creature's body. After a moment of guarded immobility, the spider extended its front legs to the rim of the circle of light and pulled at the rim. I stared at it in disbelief.

I moved the light fractionally, and it followed and again struggled to pull at the rim of light. Not achieving any success, the spider bundled up closer and began to push at the rim. Then it changed tactics again and tried to lift it. Its whole body straining in the endeavour, it circled the beam, struggling from different positions round the disc of light.

Despite my visceral reaction I was intrigued by this small creature's obsessed struggles. It had, however, given me an idea. Very slowly, by degrees, I moved the light closer to the table, and the spider followed. I kept moving it till I had the disc and the spider both well under the table.

Then, tucking the torch into my bra and grasping the handle of the hurricane lamp, I gathered myself and leapt off the table with a small yelp.

As my feet hit the concrete, I ran for the door and into the passage. Then a perverse notion struck me: I tiptoed back to see if the spider were following — only to nearly step on it, orchestrating all its legs in a rapid high-stepping scramble towards me. With a yell I leapt down the passage. I stopped in mid-gallop to check on the enemy. Two yards behind me, it stopped, just like me, one leg poised motionless, in the air.

Horrified, keeping my eye on it, I took another slow but looong step, it did the same. I stopped. It stopped.

With a scream I flung myself out of the door and practically



levitated across the lawn to the house with the red doek. I slammed the front door behind myself and leaned against it, panting and making small sounds of hysteria.

The slamming of the door rudely awakened the husband. He jumped a foot in the air from his sleeping position slumped on the diningtable. His glasses flew off, his book tumbled to the floor and he gave a piercing shriek.

Trying to gather himself and focus on me, he yelled, white faced: "What on EARTH is the matter with you! Why did you DO that?"

I swallowed.

Giving a last shudder, I remarked, shakily: "Shame, did I wake you? It was nothing, really. Probably just a horny Martian, trying to jump me."

"Oh, REALLY!" snorted the husband, grumpily retrieving his glasses and book from the floor, "that's not amusing. And you know I'm totally focused on rebuilding our finances. Plenty of time later — for, for..." he waved a dismissive hand and escaped back behind his book.

Studying him newly in silence, I wondered if some weird middle-age affliction had besieged his libido. He would, of course, refuse to discuss it, so any delicate suggestions of an innocent annual medical checkup would lead to open warfare.

Maybe it was me?

The thought was not entirely new.

I tramped off to the bedroom with a candle and swiftly stripped in front of the mirror. Regulation issue, I grunted, eyeing myself from all angles. But in great shape from all the manual labour!

No. Not me at fault, I decided, slowly putting my clothes back on. Joshua was going to receive a visit in the morning. Surely his *mutthi* would work on white men too...

