

It seemed as though we walked forever. The tunnel floor started to slope down and the air became much cooler. I was hearing a funny noise, like a high-pitched squeak, and I couldn't place where it was coming from. The good thing was that I knew it wasn't coming from inside my head. The noise had me peering around in the darkness, but of course, I couldn't see a thing. I was just about to ask Cavanaugh what he thought the noise was when he stopped without warning. I slammed into his back, and he reached around to steady me, turning so that the light shined on the tunnel wall, lighting us both up. He grabbed my hand and put the flashlight into it.

"Hold this a minute," he told me.

He pulled the backpack off his shoulder and set it on the ground at his feet.

"Shine the light here," he said.

He opened the pack and pulled out a bottle of water. Twisting off the cap, he took a deep drink and then handed it to me.

"Is this all we have?" I asked, tucking the flashlight under my arm. I took the bottle and brought it to my lips.

"No there's more in there." He indicated the pack.

When I heard this, I tipped the bottle back and finished off the water. I handed the now-empty bottle back to him and watched as he stuffed it in the pack. Zipping it up, he slid it back onto his shoulder. I heard the high-pitched squeak again.

"What is that..." I started to say, shining the light on the walls and then the ceiling.

"Don't..." he whispered fiercely.

"Oh crap, bats!" I yelled as the light shined on hundreds of furry bodies squirming around the ceiling on top of each other. I guess it was the combination of the bright light and my yell that caused the little rats with wings to take flight.

They launched themselves from the ceiling right at us. First, a small cluster dropped, and then layer after layer until every furry, squeaking body was in the air, heading right at us. I screamed and flailed my arms and hands, trying to swat at the bats that were flying at me and colliding with my body. Cavanaugh grabbed me and pushed me down into a crouch against the wall, covering me with his larger frame. The squeaking and flapping wings drowned out every other sound. I could still feel the bats smacking into us. I whimpered and burrowed myself closer into Cavanaugh's arms.

It seemed like it took forever for the exodus of vermin to leave the tunnel. Cavanaugh lifted his head and eased away from me. He didn't get very far because I had a death grip on his T-shirt. Instead of trying to pry me loose, he pulled me up with him. He shined the flashlight around us, checking to make sure the way was clear, while I just stood there, shivering in his arms. He turned me, tucked me under his shoulder, and briskly walked me back to the main tunnel. He tried several times to get me to let go of his T-shirt; he got my left hand free, but only because I was still holding the shard. I didn't know how I managed to maintain my grip on the crystal throughout this whole ordeal. He gave up fighting with my right hand as he hurried me down the tunnel.

We managed to make it back to the dimly lit tunnel exit. I let go of Cavanaugh's shirt when I saw the light and hurried ahead of him. I stopped, leaning over with my hands on my knees, trying to catch my breath. Cavanaugh led the way to the boarded-up entrance, and I followed close on his heels. I still had the heebie-jeebies from those nasty, furry little bodies hitting us, and I still felt as though I had things crawling on me. I ran my right hand through my hair and down my left side. Switching the shard into my

right hand, I did the same with the right side of my body. Satisfied, I put the shard back into my left hand.

I was crowded behind Cavanaugh, waiting for my turn to step into the light. I felt a little tickle on the front of my T-shirt. I had already run my hands over myself, so I looked down at my chest instead of doing it again. Sitting on my T-shirt, right between my breasts, was a small bat. He had his little feet hooked into the material of my shirt and his wings tucked into his sides as we stared at each other. His pig-like nostrils flared at me, and his pink tongue flicked out and licked his upper lip. The scream that I let loose was so high and so loud, I'm surprised it didn't shatter the crystal in my hand.

I shoved Cavanaugh through the opening of the mine with a strength I didn't know I had. He stumbled out and tripped over the lumber at the bottom of the entrance. I ran past him, leaping over his fallen body, beating my hand against my chest to try to dislodge the bat. I reached a patch of sunshine and tried to rip off my jacket. In my panicked and delusional brain, I thought that if I could just expose his little black-and-brown body to the sunlight, he'd disintegrate like the vampires you see in the movies. The only thing the sunlight did was make him tuck his furry face into my T-shirt and slowly crawl up to my neck. I screamed again. My jacket was stuck on my left hand because I couldn't release the shard. I began to brush at the bat, trying to get him off me. Dancing around the clearing, I flung my left arm around, smacking Cavanaugh upside his head with my jacket. He'd gotten to his feet and was trying to help me with the bat. However, he was also laughing so hard that he could barely stand straight.

"Get it off! Get it off!" I screamed, beating at my chest.

He ducked as I swung my jacket again at him.

"Stand still, damn it," he laughed as he tried to grab my arms.

I screamed again as the little bat continued to climb up to my neck. I did not want that thing in my hair. Cavanaugh, having no luck getting me to stand still long enough for him to remove the bat, knocked me to the ground and straddled my hips. He put his knee on my jacket so I couldn't move my left arm and held my right wrist, while he tried to pluck the little furry bat off my chest without getting bit. And still he laughed. It was a good thing he had a hold of my free hand, because I wanted nothing more than to punch his lights out.

"Hold still, Tink," he said.

The bat was fighting to stay attached and had all four sets of claws hooked into my shirt. I was definitely throwing out this shirt when I got home. I didn't think you could wash out bat cooties. Cavanaugh finally managed to get the bat off me. He held the little bat up between us.

"Poor little guy," he sympathized. "All he wanted was a soft, warm spot to hide, and look what happened."

He tossed the little creature up into the air and it took flight back into the mine. Cavanaugh held his spot straddled over me for another minute before standing and hauling me up with him. He chuckled when he got a good look at me. My jacket was still stuck at the end of my hand. My hair was sticking up in all directions, and my T-shirt was stretched out of shape and hanging off one shoulder. I gave him a shot in the chest with my fist and glared at him for laughing at me.

"Ow!" he complained. "You're an ornery little thing when you're riled up, aren't you?"

“I so hate you right now,” I seethed as I tried to pull my jacket back up my arm. He reached out to help me, but I was too mad to accept his assistance. I smacked at his hands as he held my arm and tried to work my sleeve back up. He gave up with a grin and let me do it myself.