

## Esmeralda's Web

### The Burning:

The time for burning was at hand and I almost missed it; I cursed my laziness and ran to the bars of my cell to look out there and found the door was left open.

Before anyone could stop me, I ran out of my cell and made it down the corridor leading outside, it was so long since I saw the sun that it hurt my eyes, took me a moment to focus without running into someone; I made it to the crowd below my cell but the people were packed in so tightly that I couldn't make it any further, I wanted to get close enough to try and save her or die in the process but needed to get a lot closer and knew I didn't have much time.

I could feel her fear, she was still fighting it; refusing to show that to the crowd and not give them even a small bit of satisfaction; she was holding out as long as she could, though she was clearly terrified as they led her to the center of the pyre and fastened her hands and feet to the pole, she could move around a little but not much.

Looking around her as they fastened the chains around her wrists over her head and her ankles together she knew that they were waiting for a scream and it was close but not yet! Not yet! This is madness, she thought to herself.

I was proud of her and hoped that I would die with as much dignity and strength as she did, and I felt that as she looked around the crowd she was searching for me because she had nothing else left and wanted, *needed* to see one more friendly face before she died and it broke my heart that I wasn't able to get close enough to at least allow her that. I was able to see, feel and hear what she was going through as if I was right there with her, I felt that close to her and hoped she would feel me there but I knew it was too much to hope for and instead of bringing us closer it reminded me that I let her down, she deserved much better and certainly didn't deserve to die this way; I tried to get inside of her head, to tell her that I loved her and wanted to be with her.

Then Gregor spoke to the crowd once more and everyone fell silent, waiting to see what was next. This should have been his finest hour, and outside of his heart it was but all he could manage was that he couldn't have her now, but then; neither could anyone else, especially me.

Knowing that I would also be dead soon didn't give him any comfort, though he blamed me for all of this; and tried to give her one more chance, one last effort to appeal to her common sense and give in to him, but as she always did before; she refused.

"Love between you and I was not meant to be!" she told him. "I cannot give in to you and pretend to be that happy and dutiful wife that you desire while my heart belongs to another! No decent woman would even consider such a travesty of emotions!" she told him.

She almost gave in just then, because she thought they started the fire and he was distracting her, she panicked but fought it off and he couldn't let that final insult pass, "Enjoy your time in hell!" he said as a final goodbye and he turned away from her, to close the time between them but also because he didn't trust himself and knew he would run to her if he didn't.

"You will be there long before they have time to think of me!" she answered though he pretended not to hear it, her words stung him.

He turned one last time to look at her and in that moment she looked more beautiful than ever, even with shackles on and her white dress torn and dirty from her time in prison and the wind blowing her hair away from her face.

Her thoughts had nothing to do with him anymore, she was delirious with fear and anticipation of the flames that she knew were on their way even now.

She was right, she saw as the flames began to slowly lick and snake its way to the upper levels of the structure and that began a small series of fires at the bottom of the platform as if they didn't like the taste of the oil before they also began to smolder and catch; in a matter of moments after that smoke rose from below and stung her eyes as the fire caught and spread quickly.

I felt cold terror as it gripped her heart but then someone in the crowd saw me and shouted that I was trying to help her escape, they attacked and hit me; dragged me to the ground before the guards took me to another cell.

She was starting to panic then, I could feel that too; her fear as strong as her determination not to give in to them though she was weakening, she could see the flames as they rose to the levels below her; racing as if they had a will of their own and couldn't wait to taste her flesh.

She was afraid to look down at the flames because when she did she saw the flames as snake crawling slowly towards her on it's belly; she saw its forked tongue flicking out at her and catching more of the wood on fire.

Not knowing what else to do, she began to pray again; shaking her head because she still couldn't believe what was happening to her, she tried to think of being anywhere else but here.

The flames slowed as they rose to the platform just below her level, the wood felt warmer underneath her bare feet as the flames rose and fell back through the cracks in the wood.

Once the flames poked through the cracks and stalled there the crowd began to chant again, as if they could sense the flames hesitating and were speaking to it; coaxing it along to where she stood. They were impatient for it to be over and felt cheated because she was so strong, that she hadn't given in yet gave them a sense of resentment instead of admiration as it should have.

Then they all held their breath and waited for the scream that they knew was close now, they gasped when they saw the flames lick their way through at last; some saw the look on her face and saw that even she knew what that meant. Her eyes were closed while she prayed but at that moment they were wide open with the realization that the end was close.

The fire seemed to be alive and watching her; it was almost over and the worst part of it lie ahead, and she jumped as the flames seemed to call out her name.

She watched the flames rise up from the cracks in the wood; spiraling up from the center as the boards began to smoke and then turn black, then bright red with hues of blue, green and orange, it was almost beautiful.

The crowd stood looking as if they saw gold in those flames, gold that would line their pockets and make them rich somehow and the fire seemed to be examining her now; moving like a Cobra once the flute started playing.

The flames quickly spread across the last of the area in front of her and closed in on her and that was when she finally released the scream they were waiting for; the crowd swelled and pressed forward like waves crashing on the shore.

The flames licked out between the boards even closer to her then, shooting out and then backing off as if they were teasing her; then repeating that until it was black and around her the air was getting harder to breathe. The flames went from yellow to orange and then to green as they rose before her and then finally bright red, tasting her fear as she screamed and pulled at the chains that held her fast, her skin bloody and raw as the flames circled around her and the crowd cheered her death.

Her skin was hot where the chains touched her; she felt the heat pulsating over her in waves and jumped around the platform, trying in vain to find a place that wasn't too hot to stand on. The heat already so intense that the hair on her arms and head was singed and she felt her eyelashes curl; she began to feel numb as the flames inched closer to her.

She hopped from one foot to the other because the wood was getting hotter but it was useless; there wasn't a place anywhere on the wood that wasn't hot enough to cause her feet to blister. She tried to scream again but her lungs were raw and she coughed out blood, with so little air she not able to scream at all.

There were those that thought they saw hell itself open up and take her away, that a very large demon rose up from those flames and snatched her up and swallowed her whole.

The others said that the fire swept over her like a giant hand, taking her with it as it went and the crowd was both horrified and mesmerized by it; were so numb they stood silent and waited for something else to happen as a terrible smell rose and spread out but they hardly noticed.

They said they saw her skin turn a bright red and explode into blisters that split her skin open and said she did manage a scream then; her last as she expired but others said that her lungs exploded first, her brain fried and the blood in her veins

boiled out as her skin followed the burning fragments of her clothing and peeled away.

As she died, I felt that I could see her angelically rise up above everyone and I could see her through the crowds, the smoke and confusion and she was beautiful as always; looking so peaceful and calm that I wanted to hold her close and take some of that strength for my own demise.

I looked at the platform where she stood only moments ago and it still smoldered while hot smoke rose from the dark edges. There was a hole where she had been, but other than that there was nothing to say that she even been there at all, and were it not for the terrible scream that still echoed through my mind I would have doubted that any of this was real.

As I turned away, I could swear I saw the eyes of Esmeralda floating in those flames or just behind them, she was eager to take in the aroma of Elspeth's burning flesh deep into her lungs, taste the fear and pain she felt as she died.

## Synopsis:

Esmeralda's Web is the story of two kids caught up in the Spanish Inquisition, accused of the crimes of witchcraft and consorting with the devil; they are both murdered in such horrible fashion that they would never return to haunt the town.

Though Elspeth is innocent, the prosecutor, Gregor yearns for her love since they first met; she spurns all his advances and then he ends up being the prosecutor during her trial as a witch when he has no choice. Though the preferred method of the time was hanging, they decided to burn her at the stake instead and let the world see how they handled witches and demons in their part of the world.

Diego's only crime is that he loves her, his is the lone voice that will argue on her behalf so he is boiled in acid soon after her demise in those wicked flames.

Esmeralda is the true witch, evil beyond description, she murders her own mother in cold blood and is the one that kills Gregor in a fit of passion.

All four die within hours of each and are reincarnated almost two hundred years later, they don't know who they are or why they are here, they share the same nightmares from different perspectives.

The battle begins with that single kiss that brings back the nightmares; once more, they are forced to fight for their lives against Esmeralda, who returns to finish what she started long ago.

Elspeth is abandoned at a church doorstep soon after she is born, grows up in an orphanage and becomes "Maria" whose first foray in the world outside those walls is high school in Los Angeles, where she meets Diego, who was born as his parents were fleeing a vicious drug lord that already killed their other son.

Gregor returns as slime and eventually mutates to a vampire, he doesn't know why he's here, only that he must find "that damned witch" and throttle her.

Esmeralda returns as the evil she has always been, this time as a huge black widow with a voracious appetite for blood and revenge.