

Chapter 2

The end of the month seemed to stalk her as it moved closer each day, and bills would soon be due again. Nire had not, in fact, gone home on time the next day, or the next... all the way up to the end of the week. She *needed* those extra tips.

Tonight she had to sort through the bills and figure out which ones she could actually afford to pay. The electric and utilities bills had to be paid first... no wait, the car payment had to be made first, *then* the utilities and electric. Then she needed to put aside a little money for groceries, and rent wasn't due until the ninth.

Chances were the medical bills would just sit in that pile getting older, and later. She was already receiving collection calls for them- she had been for some time now. She wondered what they would do if she cancelled the phone line... but she couldn't do that, the restaurant needed to be able to get a hold of her.

It was Saturday. She always wanted Saturday shifts for the tips, but the pain in her leg made it nearly impossible to keep up, so she got the less busy days; Sunday through Thursday. She sat folded up in the hot bathwater looking at the scars on her leg. There were some pretty wild ones from where the passenger seat had folded into her, but the one that bothered her the most was the long, straight scar that went from the side of her knee, all the way down to her ankle.

It was left by the cut the surgeon had to make in order to put her bones back together. Her leg had *screamed* with pain. The first day she had to get up and walk again was a torturous nightmare. She had lost most of the flexibility in that leg, and stretched it every morning before work after she got out of the shower. The doctors said she would probably have some pain in that leg for the rest of her life, but if she took care of it now and let it heal properly she might get lucky.

Like that was going to happen. Taking care of it meant not straining or over working it. It meant that if it started to hurt, she had to sit down and rest and not push herself. It was still healing, and at this point the pain meant she was disrupting that process. Well, if the doctors were really concerned about her healing properly, they wouldn't be billing her.

She ran her fingers up and down the long scar. That fire bubbled up again. The asshole that completely destroyed her life had only been sentenced to 30 days in jail and fined. The fine was hefty, but how did that help her? He got 30 days in a cell and had to shell out couple thousand dollars. She got a life of pain and 30k in medical bills.

She had sued him for the medical expenses, but as it turns out the rat was so far into debt that a prison sentence was more inviting than writing her a check. Now rather than him paying her, her taxes were keeping him fed and providing him with free education. Sure he was behind bars, but it hardly felt like justice.

Okay, okay... she took a deep breath and tried to calm herself. *Look at the bright side, Nire. You can still walk, and all your limbs are attached. You're not dead or horribly deformed, and you still have your*

grandmother... if worse comes to worse you can look for a job closer to her house and move back there for a while. That will be 700 more a month that you can use for slowly paying off medical bills, and you can help grandma with groceries and cleaning.

Even so, she felt that moving back in with her grandmother would be more of a burden than anything else. Not to mention the reason she'd moved so far away in the first place was the lack of employment possibilities. She'd even been passed up for fast food positions a couple years back, and grandma was considering moving into a retirement home anyway.

What if she had to declare bankruptcy? She was only 24, and she didn't even understand the details of what that would mean for her. Maybe she should call Mark... he could come over and they could watch a movie or something... she sighed, and unplugged the drain to let the water out. *No... never mind.*

She stood, pulling a green towel off the rack and wrapping it around her body. Her leg felt a thousand times better today. She supposed that was the one bright side of not going to work. She didn't make any money, but they were the only days her leg didn't feel like a nail sandwich.

After drying her hair and pulling on a pair of soft flannel plaid pajamas, she made a cup of hot tea and settled down on her futon. The apartment was filled with plants of all kinds. Mark had been nice enough to water them every week while she was in the hospital. Why had he broken it off? Sure, it wasn't like she thought he was her soul mate or anything, she wasn't even sure if she really loved him or not. But he was a good guy, she liked spending time with him and they got along so well.

Maybe that was really the point. They were good friends... *not* boyfriend and girlfriend. So why was it so awkward now? Why didn't they get to hang out anymore? And not to mention, why was she brooding over breaking up with a guy she didn't even really want to date?

I am screwed. She thought to herself as she sipped the hot liquid.

As she drank her tea she looked around her apartment at her plants. She had always wanted a real garden...

She was running through a garden; a hedge maze to be precise. Someone was chasing her, but she wasn't afraid. She was smiling as she bolted through the dark maze, and the moon hung high in the sky. Something in her hand was glowing... she took a sharp turn to the left. "Damn!" she called out at the dead end. Taking a few steps back she turned to take a different path.

Clouds rolled over the sun, and the warm afternoon light that had filled the apartment moments ago fell dark. Nire blinked. "God damn it," she exclaimed to the air in front of her. Couldn't the weird dreams at least wait until she was asleep?

A motion caught in the corner of her eye made her turn to look at the window. It was mostly sunny today, but below freezing, and there, fanning its wings on the outside of her window

was a white *moth*. *What in hell is a moth doing out right now?* She blinked a few times to make sure it wasn't a trick of the mind. Out of curiosity she wandered over to the window and looked closely at the soft white body of the moth as it beat its wings gently against the window pane.

Still in slight disbelief, and thinking it was just her mind playing tricks on her, she opened the window. The moth rushed inside and fluttered wildly around the apartment. Nire slammed the window shut against the cold air that rushed in, and turned to watch the moth. It was flying spastically all through the air, almost like one of its wings was partially lame. Suddenly it darted towards her, and Nire let out a shriek.

With her eyes tightly closed and her arms shielding her face, she peeked out. *Why am I blocking a moth?* She thought to herself. *What's it gonna do, flutter me to death?* When she lowered her arms she looked around, but the moth was nowhere to be seen.

"Huh," she said out loud, before sitting back down on her futon and finishing her tea.

After her nightly routine of watching static television and checking the weather report, Nire brushed her hair and settled back into the blankets on her futon. She wasn't looking forward to work tomorrow. Making money is great and all, but her leg was just begging her for one more day off. She let out a sigh, and watched as fluffy white snowflakes began to pile on her skylight.

She had been staring at the stars when she realized that what she was actually looking at, was just a reflection. The pond that stretched out in front of her mirrored the dark moon-lit sky, and all the stars were reflected in its still waters *perfectly*.

There was someone sitting next to her on the grass. It was that man with yellow eyes. She considered him for a moment. He *should* scare her. His skin was a dark bluish-gray color, and there was a large set of ram's horns that protruded from his temples. He looked like he was some kind of demon.

She wondered who he was, and why he was sitting here with her. She suddenly felt the heat of his hands on her bare shoulders and his breath in her ear, though she couldn't hear what he was saying. The sensation of his hands on her shoulders lingered for a moment even after he stood. She felt...

Beep. Beep. Beep.

"God damn it," she said, smacking the alarm clock that sat on the end table next to her futon.

After showering and straightening her hair, she got dressed for work. Black polyester pants and a scoop neck T-shirt were the required attire for everyone at the Purple Turtle. Although she greatly preferred to leave her hair down, it was not allowed, so she tied it back in a low pony tail, letting the slightly shorter strands of hair fall loose around her face.

“Just the first shift today,” she reminded herself. “Ten to six and that’s it. No staying late, no covering Holly’s stupid ass, nothing. Work your shift then go home.” Nire rummaged for a moment in the clutter on the floor, pushing things aside with her feet. She hadn’t bothered with much housekeeping lately. “Where are my god damn shoes?”

Dropping to her knees she stuck her ear to the floor to look under the futon. “There you are,” she said, reaching for the black pair of ankle boots that had been kicked out of sight. As she grabbed them and pulled them out, something shimmering caught her attention.

Curiously she reached under the futon towards the object, and pulled it out. Sitting back on her heels, she looked at it speculatively. It was a silver pendant in the shape of a moth. “Where did this come from?” She wondered out loud, turning it over in her hands. It was dull, tarnished, and the right wing had a long scratch on it. Her eyebrow rose as she thought of the moth the day before.

“... nah,” She said, dismissing the thought quickly. Still, how did it get in here? It’s not like she regularly entertained guests, and *she* had certainly never seen it before... or at least... she didn’t *think* she had...

Nire sat staring at it for a few moments, her brow furrowng slightly as she studied it. That was when the phone rang.

“Hello?” She said into the receiver, her thoughts quickly turning away from the pendant.

“Hey Nire, its Holly,” came a high pitched voice from the other end. “I’m gonna be like, an hour late today, cuz I have this appointment...” she paused. “Can you cover my tables for me until I get in?”

Nire sighed. “Yeah, no problem.” Why did she say that?

“Great, thanks Nire!” The other girl shouted, and then hung up.

“Fuck you Holly. And fuck me too, why did I say it was no problem? It *is* a problem. A big, pain-in-my-goddamn-leg problem!”

After strapping her boots on she grabbed her purse, coat, and lunch and walked out the door, slamming it shut.

“God... Damn it!” she yelled.

Holly was not an hour late, as it turned out. She was *three*. There were three shifts at work; First shift was from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., second was from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m., and third was 6 p.m. to close, which was usually between one and two a.m. Holly’s shift overlapped with Nire’s for 4 hours in the afternoon, and for three of those hours Nire was working two sections.

When six finally rolled around, Nire’s leg was killing her.

“Mr. Anderson?” Nire asked, gently knocking on the door frame outside the supply room and peeking in.

“Yes Nire, what is it?” answered the man sitting at the desk that had been shoved in the corner.

“Well...” she started. “I don’t really like to complain or anything -”

Mr. Anderson interrupted her. “Holly?” he asked raising an eyebrow.

“Yeah...” she hesitated. “She called me this morning and said she was going to be an hour late and asked me to cover her section,” she began.

“But she didn’t show up until five,” he finished her sentence.

Nire made a grimace and nodded.

“I’ll talk with her about it. This happens pretty frequently and I know her lack of work falls back on you a lot. I won’t tell her you said anything, but I will let her know if she slacks off any more she won’t need to come back.”

Nire smiled politely. “Thanks Mr. Anderson.”

“Also, remind me tomorrow when you come in: I’m going to have her tips garnished for 3 hours of work, and I will have that waiting for you in the morning.”

“Really?” Nire asked in surprise. She always thought Mr. Anderson was a nice guy, maybe she should have complained about Holly sooner.

“Yes, there is no reason she should get tips for hours she didn’t work.”

A real smile tried to sneak its way across her face this time. “Thanks Mr. Anderson,” she said as she turned to go.

It had been snowing lazily most of the day, but luckily the roads weren’t too slick looking. As she headed out the door towards the parking lot she stuffed her hands in her pockets and tucked in her chin as a sharp wind sent her hair flying. Feeling something in her pocket, she grabbed hold of it and pulled it out.

It was that moth pendant. She must have stuffed it in her pocket on the way out the door without thinking. Unlocking the car door she quickly sat inside and started the engine. Maybe she should polish it up a bit, it was kind of pretty after all. She knew her grandma had some silver polish, but there probably wasn’t anything that could be done about that scratch.

If she remembered correctly, she still had a silver chain in her dresser that used to be her moms. She wondered if it were solid silver... maybe she should sell it? Nah, she liked it. Probably

couldn't get more than twenty bucks for it at a pawn shop anyway. Stuffing the pendant back in her coat pocket, she threw the car into reverse and headed home.

The skin around her scar looked red today and her whole leg was slightly swollen. It was irritated and tender when she touched it... the doctors hadn't mentioned anything about this. Maybe she was just working too hard... She needed to start looking for more receptionist positions again, something where she wouldn't have to be on her feet all day long.

It just didn't seem like anyone in town was hiring. The classifieds were filled with adds for "Web Gurus" and "Top level marketing experts", not to mention the jobs for management positions with "experience required", but not a single damn one of them was anything she was qualified to do. She couldn't even apply for the housekeeping adds, not that she would, but even *they* required 6 months housekeeping experience with references. Even a floral designer! "Not an entry level position, experience required".

She threw down the paper. "Damn it!" she exclaimed as she fell backwards onto the futon. Glancing at her coat she had draped over the back of the futon, she reached over and rummaged through the pocket. Pulling out the pendant, she laid back and studied it. Where had it come from, and how had it found its way under her couch?

She turned it over in her hands as she considered it. As she flipped it she noticed a marking on the back. It was worn, and she might have passed it off as more scratches, but something about it caught her attention. It was definitely a deliberate mark of some kind, a symbol. She brought it closer to her face to examine it. There was *something* about this mark that nagged at her. It was something she had seen before, but she couldn't quite place where she had seen it.

As she stared at the mark she suddenly felt a stabbing pain in her chest. It was like the usual ache, but stronger, and it continued to grow until it felt as if there was a knife between her ribs. "Ahh..." she said in surprised pain, closing her fist around the pendant and instinctively placing her hand to her chest.

Suddenly there seemed to be a glow emanating from below her. Light escaped from between her fingers, and grew until it filled her vision.

Then everything was black. She could feel someone next to her in the darkness, tracing a finger across her chest in some sort of pattern or picture. She looked down at herself, and saw the pattern that had been traced start to glow. It was the same mark that she had seen on the back of the moth. The glow was faint and it didn't illuminate much, but she could see a large hand - fingers tipped with sharp black nails as it was placed in the center of her chest, directly over the mark.

That was when a sonic boom punched through her chest, and the strange glowing mark sank into her skin and disappeared.

Nire jumped to her feet from the futon and dropped the pendant. "What the hell?!" the startled girl called out at it. She put both of her hands on her chest, as if to grasp at whatever it was

that had been there. She could still feel the pressure from the mark. It was like standing in front of a giant stadium speaker and feeling the sound waves move through her, only it had been a thousand times stronger. As the residual feeling faded, the usual ache returned to replace it.

“Holy hell!” Nire called out into the empty apartment. “I am NOT crazy!” she said to herself. “The doctors *checked!*” she called out in defense, as if the air itself had posed argument. That seemed more like an excuse than a fact. Her leg still ached, but she began to pace. After turning in place numerous times, she bent down and picked up the pendant, studying it closely.

Maybe it had nothing to do with the pendant. It’s not like she hadn’t had these disturbances before. Granted it was odd that the mark on the back was part of the waking dream, but maybe it wasn’t any more than a coincidence.

“Ok, let’s look at this logically,” she said to herself as she continued to pace. “You are stressed, you have been dealing with one trauma after another, and you were recently in an accident that made a stressful situation worse. You are overworked, tired, and hurting on a daily basis,” she stopped pacing. “So why *wouldn’t* you be hallucinating?”

There was no reason she should expect to be in a healthy mental state after everything she had been dealing with. Right? “So, there is no reason to freak out or think you’re going crazy, you are just stressed beyond belief. That’s all,” she paused. “And you are talking to yourself way too much, get a damn social life, Nire.”

With that, she walked into the bathroom to get ready for bed. *Everything will work out.* She told herself in the mirror as she brushed her teeth. *Things will calm down eventually, and all this crazy ass shit will stop.*

Pulling out her futon she made up the covers and lay down. It was only 8:30 but she clearly needed sleep, so she switched off the desk lamp that sat on her end table, and closed her eyes.

She was holding a pink seashell in her hand. It was her favorite. She was small... very small. She had picked it up on the beach earlier today, and it had been so exciting to see the ocean. The shell was coiled around itself and elongated into a cone shape. It wasn’t perfect, the end was broken off, but it was the best one she had found, most of the others were just broken pieces of shells.

She reached up... high up... and placed the shell in a hand much larger than hers, a hand that had sharp black nails at the tip of each finger. The pink shell looked much smaller in his hand than it had in hers. A smile crossed her face.

Opening her eyes into the dark apartment she lay still and quiet for several minutes. The feeling in her dream had been so... peaceful. She had felt truly happy... a feeling she hadn’t experienced in a long time. The blankets were warm around her, and she felt comfortable. Turning onto her side she coiled into a ball and sighed. She tried to hold onto that feeling for as long as she could, and she played the short dream over and over in her mind.

It felt like all these dreams were little pieces of the long, jumbled mess she'd experienced in the hospital before waking up. She tried to think back to when she was young, when she really *had* been happy like that. The earliest thing she could remember...

She saw the face of her mother as she bent down to give her a kiss goodbye. She was wearing a red evening dress, and her father stood just behind her in a suit jacket. They were going out for the evening, and her grandmother had come over to take care of her for the night...

Hold on a second. What the hell was she remembering? Her grandmother couldn't possibly have come over to take care of her for the night; she lived a 4 hour drive away. And since when was her mother's hair blond? The harder she thought about it, the stranger it seemed. Her mom never wore red either; she thought it made her look like a hooker. All her mother's dresses were blues and purples, and her hair was *black*.

She focused on the other details of the memory, but the rest of it was fuzzy, even her father's face was hard to recall. Nire stared into the empty darkness of her apartment, and then she tried to see if she could recall anything after that... She thought hard for a moment, and then she remembered hearing the phone ring after she had been put to bed. Her grandmother was talking in a hushed voice in the other room, but she sounded strange. The phone was hung up, and her grandmother came into her room. Only... that was not her grandmother.

Nire stopped trying to remember and sat straight up in bed. Her heart was racing as she tried to reason with the bizarre memories. They were definitely memories, she *definitely* remembered them. But why was she remembering her parents wrong? And her grandma? Why had the door in her bedroom been on the *right* side of the bed? What the hell was going on?

Trying to calm her nerves she focused on her childhood bedroom as she knew it to be. The bed had been placed up against the *right* wall, and the door to the hallway was on the *left* side, right next to her closet. Yes, that was right. She had a dollhouse and a dresser on the wall at the foot of her bed. She tried to remember the room as far back as she could.

Okay... okay. She thought as her heart raced, and she took a deep breath. All of those memories were right. Knowing that she could remember things as they actually were calmed her a little and she lay back down. As long as she wasn't forgetting reality, she supposed she would be ok... hopefully.

It was unbelievably cold the next morning as she woke in silence, and she jumped around in a freezing rush to get her pants on. The digital thermostat read 48 degrees, but her alarm clock was completely dark. "Shiiiiit!" Nire shouted as she rushed to turn on a light. Nope, no lights. She was sure she had paid the electric bill, and hurried over to her desk. In the dim light of the morning she sifted through the bills. It wasn't there.

Amber flashing lights out the window caught her attention, and she looked up. A cleanup crew was outside, it looked like a tree had dropped a branch on a power line from the weight of the

snow. She let out a sigh of relief that her power hadn't been turned off. Well, no shower for her this morning... no coffee either... *Damn.*

She didn't dare go back to sleep without her alarm to wake her, so she pulled on the rest of her work clothes and was ready to go more than two hours early, according to the analogue clock on her wall.

As she sat around in the cold apartment waiting for it to be time to go, she decided to go find that chain she thought she had. In the top drawer of her dresser she had a shoe box where she kept what was left of her mother's things. *There it is.* She thought as she pulled a silver snake chain out of the box.

It was still in pretty good condition, only a few kinks in it here and there and still fairly lustrous. She picked up the tarnished moth pendant and slid it on the chain. It was a little beat up, but it still looked pretty.

She hooked the necklace around her neck and wandered into the bathroom to see how it looked. The dim light made it a little difficult to see, but it looked nice, and it felt... *natural.* The silver rested against her breast bone, just above her shirt collar, and the pain in her chest suddenly subdued to a dull roar. "Huh," she said aloud. "Weird."

The phone rang. If that was Holly again, she was going to scream.

"Hello?" she answered as politely as she could manage.

"Nire?" a male voice responded on the other end.

"Yes?"

"Hi Nire, its Rick Anderson,"

"Oh, hi, Mr. Anderson..." she said, her voice trailing with suspicion.

"Hey, Michelle called in sick today, Collin can't cover her shift but he can cover yours, can you come in for the third shift and cover Michelle?"

Collin usually worked second shift on the weekends, and normally wouldn't go in today. She thought about it for a minute. It was Thursday, so third shift wouldn't be that bad, and tomorrow was her day off.

"Um, yeah that's okay I think," she finally answered after a moment of careful consideration.

"Great, thanks Nire. I'll give Collin a call and let him know to take your shift this morning, and you can come in at six, all right?"

"Sure Mr. Anderson, see you then." She hung up the phone, took off her clothes, and got back into her warm bed.

By the time Nire woke later that afternoon, the power had been restored and her apartment was back up to its usual temperature of 64 degrees. She mulled around for a couple hours before showering and getting ready to go. As she stood in front of the mirror and brushed her hair, her eyes fell on the pendant that rested just above her black, scoop neck T-shirt. She liked it... it just felt right.

Nire headed out the door around 5:30. The sun was just hovering above the horizon line as the sky began to take on a pink glow. She jogged down the steps through the freezing air and hopped in her car.

Cold. As. Hell. She thought as she slammed the car door shut, her breath puffing out and fogging the windows. Turning the key in the ignition, she waited a few minutes for the car to warm up before backing out. Glancing at her gas gauge she took a mental note. *Don't forget to stop and get gas on the way home.*

Nire was not used to working the third shift, and by 11pm she was dragging mentally. Mr. Anderson, who normally went home around five, waited until she arrived before he left for the day. After showing her which section she would be working he thanked her again for switching shifts on such short notice.

The restaurant was a popular place to hang out after hours when most everything else nearby was closed. Even on the weekdays there was usually a small crowd of people still sitting at the bar and at the tables, watching sports on the large, flat screen TVs or just having a late dinner with friends. Mr. Anderson used to have the kitchen close at 10, but because of their location near the highway and their large parking lot, they had inadvertently become a rather popular truck stop over the years as well.

They did limit the menu after 10, to appetizers, breakfast, and desserts only. Where there were normally at least 4 waiters on staff, after 10 there were only two, and only one chef in the kitchen. It was not a particularly busy night, but the few people that were there did keep Nire on her feet. She came to the realization that even after a fairly slow day, her leg was still going to hurt by the end of it. She could probably stand perfectly still, and at the end of 8 hours it would hurt.

One of the truckers, Joe was his name, noticed her limp and told her to sit down for a while. Melissa was working the bar tonight, and she urged Nire to sit as well. *Maybe I should ask to switch to nights...* she thought to herself. *Sure I'm tired as hell, but I will get used to that...*

By the time 1:00 a.m. rolled around, Nire could barely keep her eyes open. The bar closed down, and within 30 minutes everyone was out the door and Chuck, the night manager, was closing up.

"You gonna be okay to drive Nire?" Melissa asked as they walked out the back.

"Yeah, I think so," she said with a yawn.

“Okay, well you take it easy!” The other girl called with a wave as Nire broke off from the group and headed towards her car.

After waving to Chuck and Tony, she climbed into her car and rested her head on the steering wheel, closing her eyes for just a moment. Damn she was tired. Melissa was nice... maybe if she worked third shift they would become friends... and hey, maybe she could teach her about bartending too.

Irritated by the hair tie that pulled against her temples, she pulled it out and let her hair fall freely. She tossed the simple black elastic into her purse and rubbed her head, ruffling her hair to get the feeling off. Taking a deep breath and letting it out, she blinked and opened her eyes widely, trying to urge her mind awake.

As she started the car, the engine made a sputtering sound while it struggled to turn over. It was below freezing outside, and she knew she should let it run a bit before heading home, but she was exhausted. *I'll just take it slow until its warm...* She could see a full moon hanging in the clear sky through her windshield as she backed out of the parking space and headed home.

She turned up the radio to help her stay awake as she flicked her blinker and entered the on ramp to the highway. It only took her twenty five minutes to get home from work during rush hour, so tonight when there were no other cars on the road it should only take fifteen. She had never seen the roads so empty, only one or two pairs of taillights here and there entering the highway, and the occasional semi-truck.

Suddenly her engine started to make that same sputtering sound. Nire looked down at her gauges as her speed began to drop. “SHIT!” She screamed, her tired mind slamming awake as her eyes fell on the little amber light next to the gas gauge, silhouetting the image of a gas can. “GOD DAMN IT! How could I forget to get gas?!?” she yelled, scolding herself as she pulled off the road and rolled to a stop.

“Why can’t I have a SINGLE day that goes right? Why is it so freaking impossible, that for just ONE DAY, nothing bad happens?” She slammed her hands into her steering wheel with a grunt and the horn blared, mirroring her frustration. “ARUGH!”

Taking a moment to calm her breathing, she brought up her head and looked out her window and mirrors to see if anyone was coming. No one was. Someone had to pass by eventually, right? She waited. She let the battery run in her car for fifteen minutes before shutting it off. The last thing she needed was a dead battery too.

She laid her arms across her steering wheel and cradled her head in them as she started to cry. Why was everything constantly falling apart? For once her day seemed like everything was going okay. People at work were nice, and she didn’t have a single moment where she wanted to strangle Holly and hide the body in the dumpster out back. She and Melissa had even chatted a little. She felt like a normal human being who might even be able to have friends again.

Looking up, a car's headlights appeared in her mirrors. She opened the door and got out quickly, waving her hands to signal them to stop. The car sped past her without even slowing down. "Damn it!" she shouted, stomping her foot. An action which she immediately regretted as daggers shot up her leg, reminding her to throw tantrums with the *left* foot from now on.

It was freezing outside. She had gotten rid of her cell phone that was costing her sixty dollars a month, in favor of a land line that only cost twenty. Now she was stuck out on the highway in the middle of a freezing winter night, with no way to call for help.

She looked down the dark highway towards her apartment, and then back in the other direction towards work. She was going to have to walk. She certainly couldn't afford a tow truck so her journey would have to take her to a gas station, where she would then have to buy a gas can, and walk back. Her vision blurred at the thought of walking five to ten miles in the snow.

Frustration began to build up inside of her. She was cold, exhausted, and the knives in her leg felt like they were trying to dig their way out.. Tears began to stream down her red cheeks as a semi-truck sped past. Her breathing became choppy and her heart rate skyrocketed. Clenching her hands into fists she began to shake.

"I just want to go home!" She shouted desperately into the darkness. Was that really so much to ask?

A light emanating from below her made her look down. The pendant was glowing.

No.

The pendant was *not* glowing, she was going nuts. She was so screwed... it had started to move.

"Oh god oh god oh god..." she said to herself as the moth that perched on her mother's chain began to flap its wings. "Oh god I am SO going crazy!" she said in a panic.

Lifting from the chain, the moth began to flutter in front of her. It was not by any means graceful as it staggered left and right, just trying to stay up. Looking closely at it, Nire could see that the right wing was not moving as high as the left. The white moth glowed in the darkness, and when it suddenly took off down the highway, Nire couldn't resist the sudden urgency she felt to chase it.

She had only taken a few steps towards it as it bolted down the road, when her entire world went black. Her hand was stretched out in front of her, and it felt like time had slowed. She could still see the moth as it lingered just out of her reach. Her fingers strained towards it, and just as she could feel the tiny beating of its wings, time began to speed up again, and she had the sudden sensation of falling.