

spiders (*how to not be afraid of cars*)

1.

I know it was hubris. The whole world was condemned to suffer in this sick apogee of humanity's collective blunders and there we were, enjoying it.

*I am the most okay*, I write in a text. *My lifestyle is not just unchanged but now ethically justified*. I chuckle, pleased with myself, not realising how fate was raising an eyebrow. Screenshot. Fate leaned forward; they can't resist a challenge. *Try me*.

J leans his head on top of mine. *I don't ever want to go back to the office*, he says. We dance in our bedroom, drunk on homebody bliss, and quietly wish for an endless quarantine. The gods spy us, too thoroughly enjoying the weekday crossword; *What's this? Not frightened enough?* We'd slipped under the door when uneasiness was being handed out. We were across the road having tea when antsiness was passed around. *Looks like we missed a few*, and the gods begin to stir.

2.

They chose a day heavy with the potential for beauty, leant into the cruel irony of it; the ninth, my lucky number. The day we'd borrowed a car and I was fantasising about picking up pizza for dinner. The sky grew dark far too quickly – we should have known. It was the night after the supermoon, and still it was sitting low on the horizon, huge and distant, stained a deep amber. I should have remembered Nicole Kidman, blood on the moon – *Where is your tiger's eye?*

And then the gods nodded to one another, and the command was sent, and misfortune scuttled around the Earth to find us, and began to drum.

*the little grey body running out / my screams / J's hands trying to steady our baby / the blood / the tufts of fur hovering like butterflies / the neighbours standing around not knowing how to help / the street light both too dark and too bright / the way only one of us could go into the vet / and we were told over the phone parked outside in the borrowed car / hysterical on the curb side gasping / the little bundle wrapped in the pink towel –*

And then it was done, and again the gods nodded, because now we were caught up on the true precarity of our times. *None are exempt from this disorder*, they pressed, and then it was our turn to nod, and fold.

*J throwing his shirt out as soon as we got home / bloodstained / trying to at least eat a slice of toast / what do we even do now / wine / the way the blood kept trickling from his little nose / valium / digging up the only plot of dirt in the backyard / rearranging stones / arranging roses / valium / squashing each flea that was trying to bounce / flinching at every foreign sound that came through the window / codeine / leaving fingernail crescents in J's arm / shying away from night / recoiling from passing cars / valium*

We're trembling through this new reality, a world tense with dread. Co – star tells me to embrace the loss of innocence. Fate is trying to disclose the lesson; terse mother explaining to whimpering child. The gods are murmuring – *perhaps this has become too pitiful* – another shared nod. That's when the spiders arrive.

3.

It starts quietly: one tucked into a corner, one clinging to the window (*nothing out of the ordinary*). Then a few more, each day: a little one scuttling on the wall above our bookshelf (*that he would frequently piss on, to our distress*), a daddy long-legs seated on its threaded perch at the bend of the staircase (*where he used to nap, and watch the feet running up and down, stepping around his soft paws*), another daddy long-legs in the bathroom (*beside his litter tray*), an acrobatic-looking one, outstretched (*right by his favourite window*), a small stout spider with scampering legs running across the wall in the spare room (*his favourite room, where he'd nap, and yowl at us in confusion whenever the door was closed and he couldn't get in, or someone was staying over – what is this person doing in my bed?*), another in that room, lowering itself down a stretch of web to dangle above mine and J's heads while we chat (*trying to get close?*).

And the jumping spiders; suddenly in such numbers! At least a couple a day, compact legs launching plump abdomens faster than you can make out. *Money spiders*, J identifies, thinking of an old superstition, but my mind is elsewhere.

As a young child obsessed with ghosts, I read once of spirits returning to visit their loved ones, temporarily reincarnated as spiders. *Is that you, baby boy?* Despite the juvenility, there lay, already set in place (*and no wonder I remembered after so many years*), the perfect framework for the gods to work with, to undo just a sliver of their previous ferocity. Watchful, otherworldly, and ancient, the spider presents an unrivalled vessel. If one knows anything of the ballooning practices of young spiders, in which they fashion an expanse of web to catch gusts of wind and drift through the air, one may accept that it had been spiders all along who perpetuated this mythos of the ghostly figure. Of course, the gods are amongst those who know.

4.

This goes on for days; maybe nine. *Hello sweet pea*. I make mental lists of each spider and their locations, running them through my head over and over. Each new sighting casts a thread of warmth through my chest. I can no longer differentiate between spider web and the fine lengths of fur clinging to all our belongings. When the numbers begin to falter, I understand that there are limitations to this new arrangement; the sympathy of the gods only goes so far. I make note to be on the lookout this time next year. A little spider wanders across my desk, curious, pawing at my measuring tape. Delighted, I lean in close. *There will always be next time, right, darling boy?*