

"Spiders"

Liz Bushman

So I'm sitting outside. It's late, I'm reading a book, and I'm just sitting there underneath the orange-yellow lights of the Ortega Commons, when I happen to look to the side-- and what do I see but the *biggest and hairiest spider with the most terrifying long skinny legs and the fattest bulbous body imaginable* calmly walking towards me.

A second after I stand up in split second time and find myself pressed up against the chicken-wire fence six feet away, I am berating myself for startling so easily-- it's not as though I can't take that spider out in mere seconds. Even though I'm wearing flip-flops I could stomp it out of existence, and even if I wanted to try something more long range I have that canister of semi-toxic chemicals that I spray on my wire creations to keep them from tarnishing that would probably do the trick (it even has a warning label that advocated calling the Poison Control Center in case it gets sprayed into someone's eyes or nose or mouth and another warning label that tells you it can cause flash fires when exposed to heat). Finally, if I'm too squeamish to outright destroy this monster, I could probably kick it over the edge of the cement and into a bush or something.

But none of that really matters because *how could I dare to think I could be capable to stand up to this horrific creature???*

Its body is easily an inch or so long, and its legs even longer. It is gray and it looks sort of fuzzy-- but not the nice kind of fuzzy, the sparse, coarse, hairy kind of fuzzy that you'd expect to see on a really ugly rhinoceros or a gnome. It deliberately places its legs in a perpetual forward motion, an obscene sort of ballet that brings to mind the opening bars of Saint-Saëns's *Dance Macabre*. And then you see the head-- the gleaming, glittering row of pitch-black alien spider eyes and the tiny pair of pincers that could so easily sink into your flesh like a viper's fangs, depositing poison and who knows what else, but in a subtler, less violent method. This is the predatory spider, that can float over vast distances on the wind until it ghosts into the most secret places of your home, or silently rappel from the ceiling on a strand of silk to

land gently upon your cheek as you sleep, or squeeze into the smallest cracks that even mice can't enter to surprise you once you're helpless sitting on the toilet, to which nothing, not even walls are an impediment. *This* is the very real ninja of the human world, and it will not hesitate to *take you down*.

And that's not all. This thing is the monster that makes its sinister sticky traps where you least expect it-- a brown spot in the fold of that shirt hanging in your closet, or the delicate spindle gray speck in the corner of the window next to your bed, or the sickly yellow patch in the dark space between that old pair of unworn socks and a candy wrapper under your bed, or gleaming jet jewelry decorating the dress of your precious baby-doll that you left sleeping in its baby-doll carriage.

There was a time when spiders had not been so horrifying, I remember. There were the jumping spiders that were so fun to chase, leaping and skipping away from grasping baby hands that left me with my first recollection of the doctor's office covered in red welts all up and down my arms. Or like back in preschool, all of four years old, catching daddy long-legs with a girl named Sabrina in an old cake pan, flicking the huge spindly creatures back from the low edges of the tin. And my most memorable-- where my dad used to trap black widows and keep them in jars, and my sister and I would catch bees and butterflies and moths with a bug net to lock in with the fat, feral black bulb that held court in a tawdry, twisted tangle of twigs and twine.

But then came the nature shows-- the shows on snakes and frogs and crocodiles, Steve Irwin and Jeff Corwin and everything else-- but especially the exposés of those deadly creatures of the night-- *spiders*. Sydney Funnel-Webs, spinning their spiral spreads in outhouses and bathrooms and dark spaces in Australia; the Brown Recluse that hid in roofs whose bites caused gangrene; massive, black tarantulas as big as a dinner plate-- all lived beyond the flickering television screen in the darkest corners of my imagination. And soon they came not to inhabit my mind, but also every dark corner behind a dresser, every dark space hidden on the wall behind an opened door, on top of door sills, in the cracks between the stacks of dry firewood we kept behind the house, in every square inch of the garage-- waiting for me to

accidentally put a finger within reach, waiting for me to stand too close with shorts, waiting to crawl up my exposed back when I rucked up my shirt...!

All this flashed before my eyes. The sensation of tiny spider feet pricking my bare skin skittered up my back under my shirt, bringing a wave of goosebumps down my arms, and I shivered terribly, frantically looking for the gray spider that had so terribly startled me--

--only to see that there was nothing there--

Where did it go???

And then I felt the needle prick burn on my big toe.

~fin~