

The Spider on the Windowsill · *Greg Kuzma*

Barb painted the sill last week
and its foot stuck to the strip
along the edge. Or I did it.
Or I like to think it was out
walking and Barb drew her brush
along the edge and a few bristles
ran over the outstretched foot
of the spider. Brushing by the
way traffic does, and we are
almost under the wheels, the wind
blowing our hair back at the crosswalk.
We found it a week later. It was
still there, in the same spot, on the
sill of the north window in our
daughter's room. Saturday to Saturday,
while we were living our lives, going
to school, fretting and worrying.
I played racquetball four times, twice
with Rick, twice with Paul,
ecstatic to get on the court after
the long and frustrating days in class.
Got some manuscripts back, sulked
in my office, dabbled a little on the
computer, wrote a few letters, sent
the books out again. I had wanted
to give up, and throw in the towel.
One book's been rejected seven
times in the past four months. I
made multiple copies—which made
my heart skip a bit—on the unlikely
chance that the book would be
taken twice on the same day,
and I would have to choose, and
make another enemy. Meanwhile

the spider waited. There might have been a moment right away that with some awesome effort it might have yanked its foot free. But the paint was the quick-dry variety, and locked up fast. And there was the strong smell of it too, which must have made its eyes tear. We didn't go back to the room. Barb was busy in school, ten classes a day, sudden shifts from science to German to theatre to art, her inventions unit, which involved the whole school, her ambassadors of her own making, which meets before school on Fridays, and in the evenings our frantic meals, before I'm off to the library for a night of study. There were all kinds of crises. We had a visiting poet, who was coming to one of my classes, which I fretted over. Monday I worked hard late reading over her new book, trying to do a preview reading in my classes, trying to do justice to her without envy or rancor—remembering my conduct of six years back, where I would welcome them and then betray them in a review. Which I can hardly talk about, it seems so awful now. Remembering that, trying to make up for it, trying to be attentive and respectful, trying to become Karen Swenson, and

think like she does. There I was sitting in my chair in a study carrell at Doane Library, reading the book over and over, trying to absorb Karen Swenson into my being. Meanwhile the spider settled down. It sat, or perhaps rather, lay, flat on the windowsill, dropping the weight of its body firmly onto the sill (which we did not hear, being busy in the kitchen), taking the weight off its legs. It shifted to get comfortable, or rubbed the trapped leg with one of its other legs, to keep the circulation up, to prevent cramping. Later there were noises in the house. Squirrels chased each other across high sections of the roof, and once, maybe it was around midweek, midday on a Wednesday perhaps, a squirrel came down the side of the house, and, clinging to the stucco siding with its nails, and latching onto a few old vines with its feet, hung there beside the window, and looked in. Perhaps the spider saw him, or perhaps it was sleeping then. Karen arrived, we did the class. I was pretty nervous. I saw right away she was not going to talk about the book I read, and tried to steer her to it, on account of all the questions I had made. We

struggled for a few minutes,
maybe ten, I trying to
attach myself more firmly
to her, she trying to break free.
We were like a spider stuck on
a glass plate, like a spider
and its mirror image. Everything
she did I countered her. Everything
I did she countered me. Until,
exhausted, we surrendered.
The students sat there the whole
time, as if they were themselves
the ones trapped, and did not
interfere, did not come to our
rescue. And then the remorse,
like waves over me, clamped
down in my chair in my office,
afraid to be seen, ashamed of
myself for having imposed myself,
and for our weird dancing in
public. Somehow, by an effort
almost superhuman, I dragged myself
out of my chair and climbed
the stair, and went in to where
Karen was talking, and apologized.
If I had not, would I be
sitting there still? And the
world gone by me in a rush?
Stuck in the tar of remorse,
and almost lost. Meanwhile the
spider was spending a long week.
Mostly it slept, mostly it just
lay there. Outside the window
the world's weather paraded
itself. And then the end of
the parade, a few stragglers,
the remnants of a band, a little

movement in the branches of the cedar tree, a swish of green across the pane. Of course it got very hungry. Barb and I were out to dinner at an expensive restaurant. A tiny chip of spiced lamb fell off my fork to the table top. The spider could have kept alive a year on what I could not see. Then it was Friday night. Another party at the country club. A night of golf, then dinner at a steak house. I got involved in a long political discussion with Steve Rische. I was astonished he knew so much, astonished that I could follow what he said. We sat there for two hours, locked in our chairs, as the chaos of the evening passed around us. I did not hear another voice, or even eat my food. It was like young love, entirely transfixed. The next day at last was Saturday. It's the day Barb and I have reserved for working on the house. I slept in as usual, she up at 9:00. But by eleven thirty we were gathering the tools. I was to be outside primarily, scraping brown paint off the window, where I had been in a hurry six or seven years before, — who was this maniac of six

or seven years before? How did we live? Up on the ladder on the north side I found a comfortable position, while Barb looked over our paint job from the week before and worked sewing the curtains she was putting up. We talked to each other through the window. It was a mild day. "What's this?" Barb said. A spider stuck to the paint. With the end of the tip of her nail she cut the tiny tip of the spider's leg off, setting it free. On one of my trips inside to get coffee and look at my work from the other side, I saw the spider. One of the eight legs was noticeably shorter. There it was, running back and forth along the windowledge. An hour later I was back inside for more coffee, admiring the work. The spider was still there. It seemed very excited.