**Spidergeddon and the Bug Night**

by Amanda Vickers

Arachnophobia – fear of spiders. From the greek ‘Arachne’, a woman who provoked the wrath of the gods by spinning a tapestry showing in beautiful silk threads, Zeus’ mysogynistic string of sexual conquests. Zeus, an ancient Weinstein with shape-shifting powers to rape and abuse with alacrity.

Arachne, a whistleblowing precursor to #MeToo, was silenced, turned into a spider.

Spiders are silent, other-worldly, prehistoric, wear their skeletons on the outside and have an unfeasibly large number of tickly legs. Spinning webs, another instance of their sheer otherness. Charlotte, the loving mother of *Charlotte’s Web* fame, spun a web in a barn doorway somewhere in rural America, and laid her 514 eggs, each no bigger than a grain of sand, in a sac that dangled from the pig-pen fence.

Such a spider egg sac is dangling above me now. Is it soft, cotton-wool-warm and maternal, or, is it triggering my arachnophobia? It could be full of unknowable minute progeny, tiny monsters, planning to erupt onto the bed while I sleep. It’s bulging, it’s moving in the breeze from the window. I’ll brush it down in the morning.

The window is in a bedroom converted from an outhouse, in a deeply rural Greek garden. The creatures of the garden were here first. The outhouse, for the century it was there, never bothered them. In fact it offered new nooks and crannies where they could live their mysterious, buzzing, egg-laying, prey-eating and crawling lives undisturbed.

They fly and crawl in during the night, not comprehending the change of use. They probably weren’t party to the planning permission paperwork. The sheet is right up to my eyes, which are shut. But I’m wired to feel their wings disturbing the air, their sticky feet attached to brittle legs, brushing my skin, and worst of all, the imperceptibly soft, baby-spider parachutes grazing my hair, landing in it. On me. Touching me.

I scream loudly when something divebombs onto my face. Nearly into my mouth. Light on, I run about finding a concert programme to shoo it out of the window. It is pale translucent green with six crooked legs and dragonfly wings, long, long antennae. It’s body cold and chunky, as I felt when it flew into me. Now, I am pulling on clothes in case it blunders into me again.

My friend appears at the door, bleary-eyed and annoyed. I feel so lame, when I explain that a bug landed on me. Most of the terror, the sheer horror, the feared tickliness and sense of violation, the clash of unknown worlds, is in my head.

A bug is just a bug.

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Really, it’s perverse of them to wear their skeletons on the outside. To have eyes in odd places, to have more legs than they need. Why have wings as well?

Window, closed now against them, but who knows what is already in the room.

Light, off again.

Sheet, actually over my head.

The night, pitch black, silent, too hot with all these clothes on. The cloying sheet means I can’t fully breathe.

I think about friendly Charlotte, about feisty Arachne, and comical Incy Wincy, climbing up the water-spout. Calming spider-tropes, better ways of neuro-linguistic programming myself to ignore that white sac.

The next one isn’t a spider or a bug. It’s a big brown millipede with a million pedes. Actually on my leg. Crawling up inside the sheet, inside the pajama bottoms. These odd creatures are usually tight-curled, like fossils, dead, found in corners of rooms in various stages of dessication. I’ve never seen one alive or felt one. It’s unmistakable movement up my body zings into my tired brain. Light on, try not to scream. It doesn’t come off easily, it is determined to stick wetly to my skin. I scream.

My friend appears again, again annoyed and understandably bemused, as he’s never bothered by bugs. I feel like a hysterical Victorian matron. It’s embarrassing, but the big brown millipede was genuinely horrible.

He offers gruffly to swap rooms, and I accept. Maybe we’ll both get some sleep.

The other bedroom, a traditional Greek kamara, is less dark. I can see there aren’t any open windows, spider sacs or bugs. Maybe just one. Something blue and fat, crawling slowly up the curved wall. I deal with it swiftly, scooping it out of the room with a piece of sketch-paper. I feel strong and capable. I didn’t make a fuss. There was absolutely no hysterical screaming.

I must have slept. The faintest glimmer of the sunrise tell me it’s the earliest possible beginnings of morning. Far too early to get up, but I’ve got to make a toilet trip so I reach out a bare foot, finding my flip-flop on the floor. Then the other foot.

Connects with an immense spider. Squashing it. Black or dark red liquid and broken leg-fragments everywhere. I scream, and keep on screaming. I run, hopping, to the shower room, turn on the water jet and pressure-wash it off my skin. The parts of it are all over my foot, between toes, up the ankle, smeared on my shin. The exo-skeleton, the many eyes, those unnecessary legs, its bulbous body.

Sorry, Charlotte, Arachne, or Incy Wincy. I didn’t catch your name. You did nothing to warrant your violent death. Sorry as well my good friend, who I’ve woken up yet again.

He makes tea. We sit opposite each other at the big work table, cluttered with various ongoing projects. The sunrise strengthens. It is whitish, pinky-blue, a soft and insistent glow pushing away nightmares and replacing them with the promise of day.

‘Spider-geddon’ I say.

‘…and the Bug Night’ he agrees.

We know the disturbed night will go down in the history of our friendship. We’re already laughing about it. We pack a picnic, the watercolours and charcoal sticks, and set off on the bikes down to the beach.