

Spider

He's in the kitchen cutting a pizza into triangles with a pair of scissors. She watches him from the adjoining bathroom, perched on the edge of the bathtub. She studies the muscles twitching under his Welsh Water shirt and feels them under her fingertips. The air stinks of hot black crust.

It is November and cold, and she is exhausted. The shadow of a branch flickers in the frosted glass of the window above the sink.

She bends to plug the drain and screams.

A house spider sits on the drain, black and skeletal, abdomen bulging with threat. Instantly she imagines it scuttling across the curve of her neck, and moans with fear.

He doesn't jump when she screams but turns and walks into the bathroom with the scissors in his hand. He cocks his eyebrow at her in a way that lacks concern but wants to express it.

She gives an apologetic laugh and points to the spider. He smiles and it is a generous, forgiving smile and her cheeks warm with embarrassment, with pleasure. She is pleased that she can offer this to him because it makes him frown with concentration, it broadens his shoulders, and he is handsome to her in a way that is painful.

He comes to the bath and looks at the spider. She goes to the window and opens it in preparation. A slip of wind howls over her hand, and at the same moment he bends over the drain and cuts the spider in half with the scissors. It falls apart in two limp pieces. The bulb of its body, attached to a cluster of legs, lies on one half of the drain. Its beaded head stares at her from the other half, smeared with tomato paste.

He turns from the bath and she has just enough time to rearrange her features before he looks at her and grins. He goes into the kitchen and she doesn't move for a long time. She stares at the halves of spider in the drain.

She closes the bathroom door and locks it, then goes to the bath. She runs water and the parts of the spider swirl around the drain, but do not go down. She picks up a shampoo bottle and kneels with half-closed eyes and thumps its base down on the spider. She thumps it until the soft flesh of its abdomen has sunk through the holes of the drain and its legs are slick against the ceramic like pressed flowers.

She hears him singing under his breath in the kitchen, and something inside her curls in on itself.