

ROSALIE MOFFETT

Nervous System

It's the one where the wolf spider's silk
sac is separated from her. The eggs,
removed, are replaced

with small lead shot. Mute, round changelings.
They're returned
to the spider. She can be described as frantic.

She struggles to lift them,
to hurry away. Subsequent experiments
show, with heavier loads

she will break even
her legs, so
intent on reclaiming her eggs—

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A scientist, my mother betrayed
sympathy, describing the study to me.
She held spiders

in such high regard, how could I not sorrow
for the spider-mother. Little Miss Muffett
they called me, but I was never afraid, never

when I was little. When it hit me
I was grown: fear my mother would forget me, one copy
of my self deleted,

leaden shape
in her mind
where I once was.

Her blood so thin when they drew it
her arm grew itself a blue-black
blotch, huge. *Too much*

aspirin. The body, in pain,
needs venom—the brain, its mass of castle-cells,
has pain-only traffic routes:

ache and pang and sting travel on channels
velvet tarantula toxin
can block. *To dream you are bitten by a spider*

reveals a conflict
with your mother—but think of the dream,
the idea of a spider the brain holds

like a lit match, a little request
for venom, a little
like my mother: her blue arm, her self

which held my self, an idea
of me, until I was real.

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I don't say I'm afraid to hear
 something final, some certain
end date. *How is she?*

 I employ a polite veer away: *She remains*
in high spirits. Or, depending on who's asking,
 Her lemon tree is blooming

or *Her dog excels in agility class.* Which is true:
 her dog, at long last, can be coaxed
into the narrow tunnel with one cloth end collapsed,

 a thing existing for this sole purpose:
to appear to have no exit. No dog
 likes the way it looks.

One way is to army-crawl in, yourself,
 a treat in your pocket.
Some dogs will follow, and some dogs will meet you

 at the other end.
But my mother could not crawl, could not
 show the dog

it was possible to enter the dead end
 and find a way out.
I don't know what she did, but now

 I watch her point, say *In.*
And the dog crawls in.

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A web: the most practical art. Whatever
the world offers in the way
of sustenance snares in those careful lines.

Every morning the spider
finds a way to string from branch to house,
from solid thing

to solid thing, in order
to stand on what
looks like air, waiting. It's hard

to believe. By this,
I mean we forget there's a space
where we might wait

for our survival to be furnished.