

Spiders

Paula Brady

Whenever we were afraid of the spiders
in the stone walls, Hobos, Recluses and Widows,

you reached into the funnels and dream catchers
that grouted the rocks,
and, brushing one gently
into your hand, swept it into your mouth.

You tongued them out again whole, saying *See?*
without speaking:

the fangs are brittle,
the jaws, weak. More importantly,
the garden variety wouldn't, even if it could.

But you made only that motion, from earth
to mouth back to earth, like eating from a bush
or drinking from a stream,

and retreated again
under the car or the sink, to the bedroom
or the woodpile—
your axe driven sharp
into the stump, but, true, wielded only for kindling.

My brother would upset the rocks, clambering
for the spider. I wanted to do the same to you:

stalk, pounce—pry open your mouth and curl
in the darkness.

But when you would move
not to speak, but to remove me—I would sting you,
if only to draw some exclamation of surprise.

It was not so much ungratefulness as hunger—
like the newly-hatched swarming their mother
with ravenous kisses.

The most dangerous ones
are named for lonely and left-behind things.