

Leslie Adrienne Miller

NATURE MORTE

A small scorpion kicks, caught in a spider's web
over the desk where I am expected to write
as many great things as possible with the gifts of time
and this famous light. Somewhere my mother has read
that lavender repels scorpions, and she advises me
of this in a letter, as if it were a tip for removing blood
from a fine lace, blood she knows I would otherwise leave,
as I do the scorpion, to rust into something like a souvenir.
Perhaps she has read that lavender opens the traps
of male desire -- but that one, she keeps to herself.

The scorpion hangs here exhausted, the elegant comma
of its tail rooted, its pincers open, its fringe of legs spilled
in the air. It will take days for the quiescence the spider
desires -- her splay of limbs slight and crooked as scratches
or the invisible joints of a skeleton's unlocked knuckles --
but rhetorical as the long muscle-wrapped arm that reaches
for God on the domed chapel ceiling, one finger fully extended
with the knowledge that what it reaches for is obtainable.
In one of the scorpion's surrenders to languor, the spider
ascends to him gently -- I've no idea what she intends --

this being a foreign country, and I here in the woods with
no library or book to tell me whether she'd like him dead
or simply alive but paralyzed. She moves to the still point
of the tail's end, where she sketches thin descriptions
of the deadly part -- she's so light in her hunger,
he doesn't seem to know she's there until she's on him.
The web, designed for balance so true, stillness and movement
are one, gives as he curls his spine, pincers and tail spired
above his back, the free legs treading air and rocking them both
-- thought lightly, because her web, after all, is a soft place.

I don't have to tell you how much I'd like her to have him,
how I admire the bright strings of glue she's strapped
on his corded segments, every bead of his bulk and swagger.
She's got his right pincer wrapped in her opal gauze,
and the stinger. She makes her patient runs down
the invisible ladder of her hunger and throws another
rope around his amber hind leg, pins it to the arch
of his torso. He's strung up like a puppet, the free
pincer clasping the air with its tiny tongs, trying to clip

the cord on the other, but every time he touches himself, he sticks.

It is still possible that the spider will squander three days
and all her threads on the scorpion, then, that I,
forgetting her, might simply close the flimsy curtain
over my desk on which she's built her web. If I were
to take a lover suddenly. One simple sweep of the cloth across
the pane, a gesture to satisfy my hunger rather than hers --
and they'd both be on the floor, he running, trailing
her broken threads and missing the use of any of his eight
legs still glued with her sap. It might have been easier for her,
were it a fly, a mosquito, but no, it is this -- this monster

which looked yesterday like luck, and today like possible
catastrophe. The foolish scorpion has lifted his free left arm
to pinch the wire that holds his right, and now, that one too
is glued. By morning he's stopped thrashing, strung up
by the end of his tail alone. She's unwrapped the mitt
of gauze from his pincer, touched it lightly to the other.
Though he's not dead. Nor does it matter now if and when
he does die: it's the shape she's made of him that graces me,
a gesture: the beads of his tail, the blue bow of his back
and tiny amber bubbles of his under parts -- she's turned him

into a rosary let down from the hand bead by bead,
still warm with the pressure of prayer.