****

**Because the night. By Hope Cotter**

**Belongs to mothers.**

**Because the night belongs to us.**

I listen as the night becomes mine. I am serenaded by the beeping of house machinery shutting down for the day.  Washer. Dryer. Dishwasher. Roomba – silent in their seats.  White noise machine pumps its singular airplane sound in the hallway between my bedroom and the children’s triple bunkbed room.

I breath; I exhale. I am as at peace as I can be. I curl into the pita pocket of my bed and comforter and relax.  I sleep.

The clock says 5:15 a.m. I stare at the ceiling, notice the cracks that need patched and filling, and wait…the spider who took up residency in the corner. I consider the spider’s rights. Do I allow it to exist in my house?  What if it is hungry and bites me? What hole in the wall did it climb in through? No, I decide it must go.  I will get the broom downstairs in the kitchen and put it outside.

I mean, it can live.  But it cannot live in my bedroom. I can’t just lay there waiting for that god damn spider to crawl up my arm and invade my space.  Or my soundly sleeping husbands for that matter. I am determined to eliminate the tiny arachnid invader. I tear through my dresser, spastically looking for pants, since I’m in a long tee shirt and undies. I don’t want to feel exposed, especially with this little spider searching for a midnight snack in my room. My robe was torn and I threw that out last season. There are three sons, the grandparents live upstairs and yes, I’d like to wear pants to walk outside my house in the middle of the night to dispose of this misplaced spider. After all this caring for others, you would think that getting dressed would be a simple and automatic task. But I lost weight and now nothing fits. Nothing! I am empty of options. Frustrated, my hands pull the bedsheet off the bed and I wrap around me like a cloak over my shoulders. I look up at the black spider making sure it hasn’t moved. I was so busy being the mortar that holds this house together; I became a shape that doesn’t fit her own objects anymore.

I get the broom. I catch a glimpse of myself in the armoire in the hallway. Between the broom and the white cloak, I look either like Disney cartoon heroine or suboptimal Halloween costume. Delicately, I get the creature on the head of the broom and keep my eyes on it in case it’s one of those critters that jumps and flies. She will not escape me. I am a mother, a vigilant protector.

“Goodbye little bitch,” I whisper. I open the screen door and wail the broom with might. The spider is launched into a freefall away from my house.  I add this success to the list unseen and uncelebrated things I’ve done in the middle of the night.

*Sorry, Patti Smith,* I think to myself, *but the night belongs to mothers*.  Mothers like me who smear lotion on kid’s legs with little red spots and rashes that WebMD cannot confirm. Rashes that are probably contagious, but moms like me don’t care. The night belongs to mothers who are holding their babies to teach them how to sleep with shhhushhing in their ears.  The humbling nights when those babies throw up on you and then have the audacity to blow out a diaper that ruins your favorite jammies. Evenings where, mothers wait the four hours for the Tylenol to wear off and double check the forehead for fever, offer water and retire, weary from worry.  Mothers who co-sleep and get freakishly scolded by society for loving too much. The night belongs to those mothers whose hands trim tiny toenails cautiously as the child sleeps, because it is impossible to do when those wiggly feet are awake. Mothers who think about the electric scooters catching on fire in the garage and burning down all they have built.  Mothers like me used to who get up before dawn, nurse her baby, put on Cover Girl makeup to pat down those half-eye circles, commute and clock-in a job she hates to care for those she loves.

The night belongs to mothers who have sweet moments of holding a baby that smells like fresh nectar to her chest. The weight of those children, a gift of a lifetime. The senses heightened by the night, sounds are singular. Like a beautiful trauma, I hear their healthy melodic breathing rhythm -- even when it’s not there.

The night is mine, and the night belongs to mothers.  Day is for linear time, for real life, but in the dark I can think what I might do with all my imaginary time and money. I might finish the next great novel and become an art historian tour guide. I might remodel my side room into fuchsia and turquoise haven with a daybed and sparkly light beads.  I might host dance parties during the full moon for friends with all my imaginary time. I might buy long gorgeous draperies for my windows in thick fabrics. I might organize my favorite music and books into some kind of themed pattern that reflects me.

I am mother with twelve years’ service. That is a phD with research in any field – even if the first half was offset working full time in finance and event planning. Thank God for the other women holding me together during those formative years until I found my footing. What I know now is how effective night can be to restore order to the entropy, the fraying and friction of being so close together as a family. I know may never sleep again as my body and mind fight each other. Rest, worry, think, repeat.

I lean over and grab my phone; its automatic photo appears of a giant rainbow arching over my family on spring break vacation. That’s what I’m after. Some moment of light intersecting with a storm.  I check for today’s weather; cool and vernal. I feel the house awaken – alarm clocks being to ring, the cat chatters like a rooster from the living room and she sounds like she is saying “Mom, Mom, Mom” not meow, meow, repeatedly. I survey the ceiling. It’s clean. No adjacent sister spiders came out. I can safely unwrap myself from my bedsheet.

Sleep is great and everything, but if I didn’t wake up at night, I wouldn’t get to make up my wildest dreams and greatest fears.