

with rubber gloves, broom, and wooden shoes, I began my assault — smacked the branches from the rear with my broom, squashed the wounded beetles with my shoes, swatted the retreating beetles into the neighbor's yard, until a beetle kamikazied into my hair, flaked into my ear, and another beetle divebombed into the bodice of my sundress and I ran for my life back into the house where I watched the beetles through my sliding-glass door the rest of June have their fill of my peaches, each chomping its way through a peach a day so loud I could hear them lick their chops from my kitchen. Last year, when the peaches were all mine, I made 41 cobblers — 8 cups of sliced peaches in each — and when my kids got sick of eating peach cobbler every day, I gave them to friends and neighbors, then froze some we later ate on Thanksgiving and Christmas. This year, though, I made only four, but tell my war stories and brag about my Peach Badge of Courage and my Peach Heart.

#### KAFKA THE SPIDER

My tract home was designed in the '60s, one of those architectural ostrich-optimisms, a G.E. untruism, so there are no windows in my bathroom, just one of those blowers that megaphone all the jet-airlined, cop-helicoptered sky noise and the nearby freeway roar while I take my bath. Because of the unnatural darkness, my bathroom's the local hideout for spiders, who probably think it an attic, a dungeon, or some other unlit den of iniquity. So every morning, before I run my bath, there's always a spider near the faucet, so I Save The Spider, transport it upon my comb to the

National Forest in my wastebasket. Sometimes the spider saves itself and splits for sanctuary behind the soap dish. I know it's probably not the same spider, but I've named it Kafka and, while I bathe and it hides out, I ask it questions about the Universe, entropy, irony. "Tell me, Kafka," I ask, while I shave my legs, "What is it like to be blind and have 8 legs?" And Kafka's silent, scorching answers steam up my bathroom mirrors. I'd like to ask Kafka to put in a good word for me with God, tell Him what a St. Francis of Spiders I am, but it would be like asking B.F. Hutton to give you free money when you can't even balance your bank balance of ninety-nine bucks.

#### THE MACHINE SHOP

The girls in the office want to show me, the new girl, the machine shop, so we cross the threshold separating our air-conditioned Shangri-la and enter a hot, Hieronymus Bosch's Steely Delight where hooks and ladders orbit the heaven while it rains chains, thunders baritone and tonnage. Out back, the girls in the office show me the men's latest machine shipping out for Japan, a Jupiter strapped to a flatbed truck, the widest load I've ever seen, and I imagine the Volkswagens it could run off the road. Walking back, I stop to remove a steel sliver from my shoe, this steel place's rason-sharp sawdust, a man-thread, amazing me again at man's ability and necessity to make a machine bigger than himself, his house, his God. No wonder a man is merely amused by a woman's patchwork and crochet; a peach cobbler is no wonder to him. He has steel and he can bend it with his bare hands.

Back at Shangri-la, the girls in the office and I nibble on Winchell's powdered donuts and talk about how much noise men make while they work.