

Getting up at 4 a.m. is my idea of a waking nightmare, and I do it only under duress. Sadly, I sometimes actually have to do this for work.

You can't imagine what it feels like for me, or maybe you can. I'm basically jarred—ripped--out of the exact middle of my sleep cycle by the alarm clock. I can never figure out what the alarm clock noise IS, and usually have a few heart-slamming moments as the reptile part of my brain tries to understand what's happening, and whether I should try to climb a tree to avoid danger.

The effect that waking up like this has on me is downright hallucinatory. Everything in my field of vision sort of shimmers, and if, later that day, I find magazines in the fridge or a CD on the toilet paper holder, it's because I tried to function in this state of mind—DO things without really being qualified to try to think. It amazes me no end that I make it to work like this. I mean, I have to drive up a foggy, dark twisting road beset on all sides with random cows and lost tourists hoping to get to the top of the volcano for sunrise. It's a miracle I'm still here to tell you all this.

The other morning I was deep in the grip of that dreamy, floaty state of mind, and brushing my teeth. I looked up at the bathroom wall to see my large female cane spider sidle into the room, gingerly toting her little silk pillow of eggs. Cane spiders carry their egg sack around—it looks like a miniature, perfectly round, little white silk sofa cushion. They hold it up under their bodies with the shortened legs by their mouths—pedipalps, I think they're called—and somehow manage to roam around with this big load tucked up underneath.

I've always wondered if they can put those down to hunt food—cane spiders are fast runners—or if the females roam around starving, just keeping that precious load safe and dry. Do they survive reproduction? I really don't know very much about my housemates, when it's all said and done.

Anyway, it was unusual for her to walk so slowly into a brightly lit room, unusual for her to walk inches from my big mammal head, and unusual for her to be moving so slow. I was mesmerized. She walked right in front of my eyes, eased around to the inside of the window frame, and did the most amazing thing. Working carefully, perfectly and methodically, she tacked the silk pillow of eggs to the inside of the window frame. She touched abdomen to silk, then to wall, about 10 times, going carefully and exactly all around the egg sack. Then she, I guess, took a break.

Emboldened by her tolerance of me and my giant movements, I put my face right next to the egg sack to get a really good look. And you know how Oreo cookies are two bands of dark with a white layer between them? Well, this egg pillow was the reverse image. The clean white silk pillow was splitting, and the dark layer in the middle was alive. As the mother spider rested (I assume) and I watched, the egg case seemed to increase in depth, or thickness, and the dark band in the middle became tiny spiderlings, spilling out so magically that I couldn't see them emerging. Just, suddenly, they were out. And so, so little. And looking for all the world like small mobile stars.

I don't think I breathed. I don't remember breathing. I just remember the whole room shimmering. The window was dark, the mother spider held still, I held still, and stars fell from a white silk pillow sky in ones and twos.

A few minutes later, my spider fanned the span of her legs over the egg case, broke the silk tacks in some way I never saw, tucked her bundle up under herself and began to journey away to somewhere, I don't know where, else. As she took herself away across the walls, constellations of baby spiders trailed in her wake, exquisitely tiny black stars against a white universe.

Perfect, perfect, perfect.