

Heroic or Harmful?

“Are you here to be my heros?” I joked as the two plumbers arrived to repair some leaky faucets.

“We *already are* your heros. We just killed a spider,” the younger one boasted.

“What? Was it a big spider?” I asked.

“It was huge. It had a web that went all the way across your driveway. The web got caught on our truck. When we got out, the spider was on the windshield. I took my shoe off and killed it for you.”

“He’s really afraid of spiders, so I’m proud of him for dealing with it,” said the older plumber.

They were convinced that I’d be pleased they had already done a great favor for me, even before getting started on the dripping faucets.

Actually, the demise of this spider made me sad. I noticed that magnificent web several days ago when I walked down the driveway to check the mailbox. What a marvelous feat of engineering to exude body fluids to create a sturdy yet nearly invisible flexible three-dimensional structure capable of trapping insects. There she was, vigilant in the center of her web, awaiting any vibration signaling the entanglement of an insect. That unfortunate insect would provide sustenance for her and her offspring. I was delighted that this spider had constructed the web high enough that our cars could pass beneath it without disturbing it. I suppose most of my neighbors would not tolerate such an asymmetrical intrusion of nature across their driveway, but I felt fortunate to have this spider and her web on my property. I welcomed that spider and had committed to letting her live as long as possible.

“I know the spider you’re talking about. That was an amazing web. I’m not afraid of spiders. I like spiders. I was happy to have her there,” I said, unable to hide my disappointment.

“Sorry, man. We didn’t know. Most people are scared of spiders.”

“I agree that most people are afraid of spiders. You just did what you thought was the right thing to do,” I said. If we had more time maybe I could convince them that this spider was no threat.

An act can be perceived as heroic or harmful.

Reminds me of partisan politics these days.

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But there may be more than these two perspectives. Imagine my conversation with the spider:

“Why did you build there, high above my driveway?” I wondered.

“I’m being smart. I’m building high to avoid traffic. I’ve observed what happens when spiders like me build low. In fact, I built low once, and that web was destroyed when a rabbit ran through it. I lost another web to a weed eater. I managed to survive in both cases, so here I am, making another attempt,” the spider replied.

“Tell me about this web. How did you make it?” I asked.

“The only way I have of making a living is to squirt sticky threads out of these nozzles on my butt. I don’t have hands or a beak or teeth. I make do with what I have. True, I have eight legs but I’m not convinced I need all of them. I’d trade a couple of legs for some jaws or a bigger brain. But you have to admit, that’s a pretty impressive thing I’ve created! Shows ambition, I’d say.”

“I am impressed. Your web is magnificent. Big and complex! How did you even get started,” I marveled.

“That first thread was a challenge. I wanted to establish a line that went all the way across what you call a driveway. I’d estimate the distance was about ten feet in the way you humans measure distance. I climbed up to a high branch and waited. I had to rely on catching a breeze just right that would blow me across so I could land in some vegetation on the other side. That was only step one, but it was a biggie. I needed another strong thread all the way across, so I had a couple

of options. I could sit tight and wait for the breeze to blow me back across in the opposite direction, or I could shimmy over that original thread back to my starting point and “ride the wind” again to spin out a second line. But you’re probably not interested in these details. And if you ask me how I decided which of these options I chose, I, myself, couldn’t tell you. I don’t understand why I did what I did. It is an urge, a motivation that’s hard to describe. But if I didn’t do anything, if I didn’t try, how would I survive? A girl’s gotta eat, you know. There are no government assistance programs for us spiders. Nobody coming to rescue me if I make poor choices or have bad luck.”

Just then a work truck with ladders strapped to the top wrecked the web as it came up the driveway. Even the strongest filaments were shredded by overwhelming force. The spider slammed against the windshield. The sudden impact would have knocked the breath out of her if she had lungs. Dazed, she scrambled to establish her orientation. Several legs were broken. Some were missing. When the truck stopped, a human approached with something in his hand.

The spider pleaded, “Why is this happening to me? What did I do to deserve this? Who have I offended? What harm have I done?”

Then, oblivion.

This spider reminds me of ordinary people, just trying to make a living, confronting challenges, being creative, and asking “Why?” as they encounter misfortune.

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I leave you to imagine these events from a fourth perspective, that of a Creator.

Onward,
GR Davis Jr

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