A Spider sewed at Night

Without a Light

Upon an Arc of White.

If Ruff it was of Dame

Or Shroud of Gnome,

Himself himself inform.

Of Immortality

His Strategy

Was Physiognomy.

 —Emily Dickinson

 **Design**

I found a dimpled spider, fat and white,

On a white heal-all, holding up a moth

Like a white piece of rigid satin cloth—

Assorted characters of death and blight

Mixed ready to begin the morning right,

Like the ingredients of a witches’ broth—

A snow-drop spider, a flower like a froth,

And dead wings carried like a paper kite.

What had that flower to do with being white,

The wayside blue and innocent heal-all?

What brought the kindred spider to that height,

Then steered the white moth thither in the night?

What but design of darkness to appall? —

If design govern in a thing so small.

 —Robert Frost

**Spider**

Anansi, black busybody of the folktales,

You scuttle out on impulse

Blunt in self-interest

As a sledge hammer, as a man’s bunched fist,

Yet of devils the cleverest

To get your carousals told:

You spun the cosmic web: you squint from center field.

Last summer I came upon your Spanish cousin,

Notable robber baron,

Behind a goatherd’s hut:

Near his small stonehenge above the ants’ route,

One-third ant-size, a leggy spot,

He tripped an ant with a rope

Scarcely visible. About and about the slope

Of his redoubt he ran his nimble filament,

Each time round winding that ant

Tighter to the cocoon

Already veiling the gray spool of stone

From which coils, caught ants waved legs in

Torpid warning, or lay still

And suffered their livelier fellows to struggle.

Then briskly scaled his altar tiered with tethered ants,

Nodding in a somnolence

Appalling to witness,

To the barbarous outlook, from there chose

His next martyr to the gross cause

Of concupiscence. Once more

With black alacrity bound round his prisoner.

The ants—a file of comers, a file of goers—

Persevered on a set course

No scruple could disrupt,

Obeying orders of instinct till swept

Off-stage and infamously wrapped

Up by a spry black deus

Ex machina. Nor did they seem deterred by this.

 —Sylvia Plath

 **Arachne**

What is that bundle hanging from the ceiling

Unresting even now with constant slight

Drift in the breeze that breathes through rooms at night?

Can it be something, then, that once had feeling,

A girl, perhaps, whose skill and pride and hope

Strangled against each other in the rope?

I think it is a tangle of despair

As shapeless as a bit of woven nest,

Blackened and matted, quivering without rest

At the mercy of the movements of the air

Where half-lodged in, half-fallen from the hedge

It hangs tormented at a season’s edge.

What an exact artificer she had been!

Her daintiness and firmness are reduced

To lumpy shadow that the dark has noosed.

Something is changing, though. Movements begin

Obscurely as the court of night adjourns,

A tiny busyness at the centre turns.

So she spins who was monarch of the loom,

Reduced indeed, but she lets out a fine

And delicate yet tough and tensile line

That catches full day in the little room,

Then sways minutely, suddenly out of sight,

And then again the thread invents the light.

 —Thom Gunn