

# Gandy Dancer Archives

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Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 29

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12-1-2017

## Webbed

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### Recommended Citation

Jackson, Laurie J. (2017) "Webbed," *Gandy Dancer Archives*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 29.  
Available at: <https://knight scholar.geneseo.edu/gandy-dancer/vol6/iss1/29>

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# Webbed

Every three months the Terminix guy, Eric, climbs out of his white truck, wearing his super utility belt and disposable polypropylene shoe covers, and sprays inside and out of the South Carolina house. Additionally, I'll spray Raid: Ant and Roach Killer 17 along the edge of the garage, in hopes of keeping the spiders away. I stay low to the ground with the can, so the wind doesn't pick up the insecticide and kill the plants on the side of the house. However, bug spray will only kill spiders if their bodies touch the spray. This means when Eric comes and sprays the entrances to the house and in the garage, the spiders must lay down in the area that has been sprayed. If the spider just walks over the spray, then the spider won't be harmed. I guess that's what it means when the can says, "Kills on contact."

The bug spray I bought at the store will kill insects just like the company's spray. However, there's a *but* there.

Eric says, "The spray that you buy at the store will only last two to three weeks, while our spray lasts three months."

So, in the beginning of November, Eric comes over and rings the doorbell, breaking the quiet early morning. I choose sleep over decent presence, waking up to the sound of the door, and grabbing a pair of shorts to throw on under my nightshirt. Hopefully he can't tell I haven't brushed my teeth yet. I walk around with him as he sprays between the blinds, in the cracks of the windows that are in the kitchen and sunroom, and at the base of the back door.

He asks, "How are things goin'?" in a southern drawl.

"Things are going pretty well. There have been a lot of those big-buttred black spiders in the garage, but thankfully none inside the house."

"Well, I'll take a look in the garage for you and spray around the walls."

"There have also been a lot of earwigs in the bathroom," I explain. "After I kill one, another just takes his place."

“I’ll be spraying in there, as well. They usually come up through the pipes.”

Eric is the only one who really comes over. Company is a rarity for me because graduate school consists of friends who want me to come there, rather than them come here, which results in no one going anywhere. I watch Eric spray, switching the can from each hand, doubling his speed.

The one floor, three bedroom, two bathroom house is big for one person. The radio plays throughout the house, so there’s some noise to fill up the space even when I’m not there. I don’t like being the one to break the silence when I get home from class.

My mom and dad are back home in Saratoga Springs, New York, and my sister lives in Florida now for her new job, while I’ve moved into the South Carolina beach house. The South Carolina house is my parents’ future retirement home, with no stairs and less obstacles. A place they can go when they don’t want to deal with snow, which now seems to come later and stay longer in the north. My parents bought the house back in 2005, when the development was still being built. The walls are still an off-white primer color, but it makes the house brighter. My parents got to choose the layout: the open sun-room, connected to the dining room and living room; the dining room next to an open kitchen, overlooked by a bar; and a double-sink master bathroom, with a guest bathroom. Having two bathrooms is a big deal, since the house in Saratoga only has one. I moved to South Carolina after graduating from my college in Oswego, New York, to pursue a master’s degree in writing at Coastal Carolina University. The house is convenient, so I can live off campus at a cheaper rate and explore on my own.

When I was little, growing up in Saratoga, I used to be able to pick up Daddy Longlegs and carry them away from the house. My older sister told me that they were actually quite poisonous, but they couldn’t penetrate through human skin, and that’s why they weren’t dangerous. I didn’t think they could be dangerous, with their thin, flat, brown bodies and long skinny legs. I was actually right too, since they lack venomous glands. I watched as a Daddy Longleg crawled along the house using its second pair of legs as feelers. I grabbed him by the back leg and he wiggled as he tried to use his other legs to push away from my two fingers.

When I watched the movie *A Bug’s Life*, the spider, Rosie, didn’t scare me at all. Rosie was part of a group of circus performers. The circus performers helped save the ants from the grasshoppers, who were planning on taking the ants’ food as winter got closer. Rosie’s character was sweet and delicate. She had two eyes, a thin body, and thin legs. My fear of spiders started to grow as

I watched my sister cower from the hairy eight-legged arachnids. It's as if I absorbed her fear. Rosie's cartoony look, even though it was supposed to remind me of a spider, didn't remind me of the fear I *have* for spiders. I've never been brave enough to get as close as you'd need to in order to see their eight gazing eyes. My fear started with the big spiders with big abdomens, and spanned all the way down to the tiny specks of a spider. It wasn't long until I couldn't even pick up the Daddy Longlegs anymore. I always called for Mom or Dad to save me. Later, I learned that Rosie was one of the most dangerous spiders. The red hourglass on her lower abdomen meant she was a Black Widow.

Eric works his way from the back door to the front door, going inside the two bedrooms and guest bathroom, while talking about his daughters. Then, he moves to the master bedroom and master bathroom, asking about how grad school has been at Coastal and how my parents are doing in New York. Of course, while Eric is in the master bathroom there are no earwigs at all.

"How are your parents doin' with you all the way down here?" he asks. "I bet they wish they could stay too, with the cold weather headin' their way."

"Apparently, it's already dropping down into the forties," I reply. "Dad is fine, but Mom is nervous as always. I think she's asked the whole neighborhood to look out for me."

Eric's can of spray has a long, skinny rubber tube at the nozzle. He hits the top button, and the spray comes out like water out of a showerhead. The air circulates enough in the house that there's no smell, but I still wouldn't want to be accidentally sprayed in the face—no matter how animal and child safe it claims to be.

It's different being in the South Carolina house without my parents. I have to go to school, which changes the house completely from its original beachy, family vacation vibe. We used to come a lot when my sister and I were in high school, then less when we both went to college. The house felt like summertime, with the smell of banana boat suntan lotion and the sound of virgin strawberry daiquiris being made by my mom. Now, I come to an empty house after school and work with the radio on in the background.

The first night my mom, sister, and I stayed in the South Carolina house, there was no furniture, so all three of us slept on the floor in the master bedroom. Mom and I were fast asleep, but Lisa apparently couldn't sleep because of the noises she heard, which she wouldn't discover until the next morning were caused by the fridge. It sounded like someone was turning on the water and banging around in the kitchen all night. This is a sound I've grown accustomed to.

When my family was in the process of moving things into the South Carolina house, my mom noticed these really big, black spiders in the corner of the garage. She figured if they didn't bother her, she wouldn't bother them.

She got tired of leaving the house for months at a time and coming back to spider webs everywhere. My sister and I would refuse to sleep until the house was bug free. So, after our sixteen-hour drive from New York, we'd vacuum and clean, killing all of the bugs. Well, my mom would kill all the bugs.

My mom hired Terminix so she didn't have to do as much work when she first arrived. Eric explained that if other houses got sprayed, and ours didn't, all the bugs would come to our house. Now, that's a pretty good salesman. He helped get rid of the spiders in the far corner, which were black widows—a painless initial bite, but extremely poisonous.

There's an old children's song that goes, "There was an old lady who swallowed a spider to catch the fly, that wriggled and jiggled and tickled inside her. She swallowed the spider to catch the fly, and I don't know why she swallowed a fly. Perhaps she'll die." It's not the most comforting song.

When I was little, my sister told me that if I slept with my mouth open, spiders would crawl into my stomach, so I learned to breathe through my nose at night. We slept in the same room; I was on the bottom bunk, and she was on the top. One night before bed, we saw a black spider on the ceiling. We ran to wake up Mom, but by the time she got into our room, the spider had disappeared. We both refused to sleep in our beds until he was found. The idea of an unwanted late-night snack crept into my mind; at least the old lady in the song chose to swallow the spider. Mom helped us shake out our comforters and sheets. We were all about to give up hope and sleep in the living room, when I saw him on the wall by my pillow. Mom put the tissue aside, took a flip-flop from our closet and killed him. His body fell to the ground, under my bed. She told us we could sleep now; all the spiders were gone.

Eric sprays the entrance to the garage, behind Dad's workbench, and all along the walls and behind the beach toys. "You'll see winter here is usually just rain, with lows in the thirties."

"It's weird not seeing the leaves change," I reply. "It still feels like summer."

The smell of the spray in the garage is stronger than in the house, but it doesn't necessarily smell bad. It's not a good smell, like when there's food in the oven, but it doesn't smell strong like bleach.

He takes out the Terminix sheet and fills in the receipt. I sign at the bottom where my mom usually signs.

"I'm going to work around the outside of the house now. I'll knock down those spider webs at the front entrance," Eric says.

"Yeah, Halloween is over. Thank you," I say. "Should I leave the garage open to air out the smell?"

"You can if it smells, but I wouldn't for too long. You don't want snakes to come in."

I stutter, "Oh, oh yeah. Good point." He takes off his shoe covers and heads outside to his truck.

I kick a few chips of mulch that have strayed out of the garden back into the dirt. The garden is no longer a fresh, dark brown color with green plants bursting through the soil. The dirt has dried out, and the plants are dying. Autumn is a slow process in the south, while the temperature gets cooler, the brown inches its way down the grass and leaves. Eric pulls a hose out of the back of his truck and starts spraying the lawn. I sweep away the leaves that have blown into the garage, along with the remains of spiders.

When I'm alone in the house, I can hear the emptiness. It isn't silent. The noises are loud, but I can't always place the cause of the noise. As I'm sitting on the couch doing homework, the TV will occasionally make a cracking noise as if the flat screen were falling off the wall. The air conditioner will groan, stutter, and then start up with a small boom, as if there was something living within the vents. In the kitchen, the fridge will vibrate and refill with water, making new ice. During the day, the windows in the sunroom will make a banging noise, like a wild golf ball went off course and into the window. Since the development is located around a golf course, and hole ten is basically in our backyard, I've checked occasionally. But there's never been any evidence of a golf ball, and the windows still hold in one piece. I recently discovered the banging is from bumblebees as they fly into the window.

I ignore the sounds while I lay in bed, knowing the house will never be still. The house is alive, and there's no one but me inside. Well, not just me. I also have the Robertos, the name I give the earwigs, which seems less creepy since their real name leads me to believe they like to crawl in my ears at night. I tell each new Roberto if any of them crawl low enough from the ceiling, they will die. The Roberto that lived on the unreachable kitchen ceiling was there for weeks, until I discovered him slammed on the bottom of the door in the microwave. I found another Roberto steamed in my coffee grinds, which kind of ruined the rest of the pot of coffee for me. It would have ruined my first cup of coffee if I'd noticed it beforehand. The Robertos in the bathtub die the quickest, since they get mushed and washed down the drain in the tub.

In the book *Charlotte's Web*, I never had a problem with Charlotte, as she helped keep Wilbur alive. Charlotte took on a mothering role in the story. However, the movie was a different story. Charlotte brought herself down, from the darkness, and had eight hairy legs, and a huge abdomen that came to a point. She had millions of creepy, crawling babies, flying out on their own webs, making me realize one spider equals so many babies. I was supposed to feel sad when she died, but I didn't.

One time, as I sat in the chair on the porch, my sister stared behind me. She told me not to move, which of course made me duck out of my seat, recoiling out of her view. I could see the fear in her eyes. Hanging from the ceiling on the porch, a spider was inches away from where my head was a moment ago. We yelled, but no one was home. It was either I kill the spider, or I'd have to think about it all day. So, I grabbed a napkin, which was thicker than a tissue, and wrapped it around the spider. I made a fist so hard that I could feel my nails dig into my palm. I don't like the squish or crunch a bug makes. The feeling of the sound ran up my arm, and I became queasy.

From inside the house I see Eric in the back, scraping down the black egg sac that clings to the siding. He gets rid of the funnel orb web in the far-left corner by the patio furniture. I hate orb webs because they look like caves, and I know deep inside there's a big spider hiding. Once Eric finishes in the garden, setting up what he calls, "Bug traps," he puts his things away and leaves, never saying goodbye.

Even after Eric's visit, I find myself spraying the entrance of the garage at night after I get home from class. Once the sun sets, I don't like to go outside. The spiders crawl out from wherever they were hiding during the day, and crawl all over the tan driveway, making it way too easy to see them. Sometimes they crawl into the garage when I get home from school, and I grab the Raid from Dad's workbench. I kill them on sight, and spray along the edge of the garage. I have a rule that eases my guilt: if I see a spider in the house, which includes the garage and back patio, then it will be killed. Every morning I see dead spiders lying curled in front of the garage door. They must have rubbed their spider bodies through the spray, or their legs weren't high enough to keep them safe. There are only a few spiders that make it into the house, and if they are bigger than the size of an ant, then they get sprayed or flip-flop squished.

There are lots of lizards in South Carolina that eat insects like flies and crickets, along with snails, caterpillars, and spiders. I have a lizard named Henry that comes in and out of the garage. I appreciate the lack of spiders in the

garage since his arrival. However, as the temperature drops at night, so does his health. I pet him before I leave for school, to see if he is still alive. After school, I planned on getting a plastic container from the store, to bring him into the house to keep him warm, but it's too late. When I come back home, he has disappeared. He was a small lizard—one of those green anoles. I watched as he went from a brown to a green, back to a brown. I don't appreciate his bigger, brown lizard family members though—one of which I later discover in the kitchen.

I wake up at seven in the morning to get ready for school, and there he is just lying on the windowsill, under the blinds. At first glance, I scream, thinking his tail is a snake, and my scream never stirs him. I call my mom that morning and she tells me to capture him, or get him to run outside, which sounds easier said than done. It is up to me to get rid of him, so I take the rectangular-shaped Ziploc container that we use for leftovers and slide him from the windowsill onto the lid. It is actually quite easy. I accidentally set the container on his head, but he still isn't moving or trying to run away. Possibly I have stunned him, or maybe he is pretending to be dead. I go through the garage and set him free on the driveway. He plops to the ground in front of me, so I poke him with the tip of my shoe. He's had a traumatic morning, so I leave him alone. When I get home from school, I find him in the same spot in front of the garage. Maybe he ate a spider that had been poisoned. I sweep him into the garden, making sure he is right-side-up.

Children's books always tried to make spiders seem so friendly and so misunderstood. In *James and the Giant Peach*, James let Miss Spider be, while she sat at his window. James even considered her a friend. Miss Spider was portrayed as a dark artist who preferred to be alone, friendless. I've tried to think of spiders as living creatures, something that helps us by eating pesky insects, but there are larger spiders out there that eat millipedes, wood lice, and even small lizards, frogs, and birds. I hope I never see a spider large enough to eat a bird.

I'm scared of the idea of having spiders on me or near me. I remember when I went to open the door on the back porch in Saratoga, and I felt a tickle, a simple itch at my arm. But, when I turned my forearm over to scratch it, I found a big spider, with a huge abdomen. I squealed and flung my arm, brushing my hand down, knocking her off, across the room. I had no idea where she went, and I ran my hands over my body, shaking. I still felt her, as if she'd crawled back on me. I could still feel the tickle at the hairs on my arms and then my legs. I ran outside, asking Dad to scan me over, to make sure there were no spiders on me.



After Eric leaves, the bugs stir and come out from where they're hiding. There's just me left to kill the spiders, and the other bugs who cross the line and come too far, inside the house. I'm temporarily brave killing spiders when I know I'm the least scared in the room, or the only one left in the house. Mom and Dad bought me the Terminix Ultimate Protection Crawling Insect Killer, which is specifically for ants, roaches, and spiders. It's for indoor use, with active ingredients of geraniol, cinnamon oil, and other ingredients that make up the majority: white mineral oil, 2-propanol, vanillin, triethyl citrate, isoprophyl myristate, lactic acid, N-butyl ester, and carbon dioxide. I'm not a scientist, so I don't know what it means; I just know it does the job.

One morning, I wake up ready to leave for school, and I blindly reach in the dark to hit the garage button. The door slowly opens, letting light in, which is when I see her. The size of her butt is the size of my thumb, and that's not including her long legs. Her big abdomen is like a False Black Widow's, and her long legs are like those of a Brown Recluse. I bring my stuff to the car, and run to the workbench, pulling out the Raid, which says, "spray areas infected by these pests." I spray her area, which is right next to the garage door button, where my arm had reached over just a few seconds ago. None of the others have compared to Charlotte's size, who must have walked her way over the spray to the other side of the garage, too close to the entrance of the house. She clings to the wall as I continue to spray her, making direct contact with her giant body. When she finally falls to the cement, she lands in a puddle of Raid. She crawls her way out of the puddle towards me, twitching, as I continue to spray her. She stops and stares at me with her eight eyes. She refuses to die. I spray her again, and she falls over onto her side, as her legs finally retract and curl into her body.

I can't tell if she is suffering because I can't hear her screams. So, I set down the Raid and I take Dad's iron shovel, with the wooden handle, and whack her. Charlotte is dead. I sweep her remains into the garden, streaking her yellow blood across the garage, which still remains there. The way she crawled towards me terrifies me still. The arachnophobia in me believes her spider friends witnessed my cruel actions and will want to take revenge. If I ever find a Charlotte in the house, Eric will be sadly mistaken for giving me his cellphone number for emergencies. I'm not sure what he believes is a bug emergency, but to me, a Charlotte is a "get-your-butt-over-here-now" call.

The next morning I walk into the garage and place myself in front of the garage button; I'm not taking the risk of reaching over again. I hit the button as fast as I can, trying not to think about Charlotte. To my relief, there is nothing on the wall, but as the garage opens, over by the garden, where I swept Charlotte's body, there are baby spiders. They are everywhere. I don't want them to crawl into the garage and they are too tiny to step on, so I grab the Raid. Raid: Ant and Roach Killer 17 has the active ingredients of

imiprothrin, cypermethrin, with the majority of other ingredients that aren't specifically listed out on the bottle. This red and black spray can of death has warning labels all over it, explaining how harmful it is to pests, plants, animals, and humans, yet it is promised to be "outdoor fresh." I spray the baby spiders until the movement on the driveway stops, and then I do the entrance to the garage just in case.

It's interesting how small the word *killer* is on the can.