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MAX RITVO

Poem Set in the Day and in the Night

Just do things that are meaningful to you.
Go to the beach, says the doctor.

The man lies on his stomach.
The sand is fine, chewed through
by the waves many times over.

The sun is wide, like an eye cut open,
and it blasts the man
so that his whole shadow
scuttles beneath his belly.

The shadow grows dense
and the man sweats himself thin.

The man becomes a web
and his shadow becomes a spider.

It's not that his life passes to the shadow—
but a tipping happens
as in an hourglass,

and there's suddenly a new order
to the life he never knew was shared.

That night a cricket kills himself in the man.

It's unbearable, his silk body thrilled through
with the screams. All the man is: a speaker—

and not loud enough to communicate
the fear to God.

Enough, however, to bring the spider.

Who brings a kind of relief.

Is it a sin to take the moon? On a night like this?

To bask the body in soapy light, sipping in
gray moisture like beads on a necklace?

But what night isn't like this?

The monster is quiet on his long white limbs—
you only notice what he mops up.

And while there's no such thing as pure silence,
memory breaks apart
and that's close enough.

Close enough for sleep:
A sweet face
rips in half and

you pass through it
like a curtain.

On the other side, you're the body again,
and the shadow is again shadow.

You can enjoy anything—
you don't remember
how clumsy the old hands were
how picky the tongue.

When you smile, every tooth is a perfect circle,
when you write, every letter is a perfect circle,
when you weep, sorrow comes clean out.

Hello again, you say. Hello again.