



## THE SPIDERS

It was late when Simon and Lars got into their nursery beds. Simon had played strenuously all day and was tired so he was soon asleep. But Lars couldn't sleep. He was afraid of the dark and in the nursery there was only a small streak of light from the kitchen. The roller blind was down and the blackout blind was in place, as it was the end of May. The weak little light from the kitchen was the only security Lars had. This was not enough and Lars became increasingly afraid. Dad had forbidden the boys to turn on the lamp or to remove the blackout blind and he used to tell Lars that his fear of darkness was something he must overcome now that he was older. He must realize that it was not at all dangerous. But Lars knew better and his fear continued.

When the sun had set and there was no light from the lamp the spiders crept out of the gloom. They were no ordinary spiders; they were horrible, poisonous, strangler spiders programmed to kill young boys and Lars believed that one night

they were going to kill him. This thought often gave him nightmares and he used to wake up all wet and panic-stricken. Simon, on the contrary, was not afraid of the spiders. He didn't believe there were any dangerous spiders in Sweden. But Lars thought there was probably another explanation: Simon was a spider himself. Lars began to believe horrifying things about his brother. Simon was peculiar. He moved his fingers so that his hands looked like giant spiders and Lars felt he couldn't trust him.

Lars lay quite still in his bed and listened intently. A clicking noise came from the kitchen. It was Dad opening a can of beer. Mum was snoring in the bedroom opposite the boys' room and down on the street somebody was walking with heavy steps. Who could that be? Perhaps it was a man who in reality was a spider and a friend of Simon's. Sometimes the steps died away but returned after a while. Suddenly, whoever it was stopped under the boys' window, or so it seemed. He was busy with something and he hammered on the wall. He evidently tried to climb up but couldn't get a grip. He was no spider and Lars sighed with relief. The noise from the street stopped and did not return.

In the nursery itself many faint sounds could just be heard. Very small creatures were creeping around on the floor. It was the spiders. They emerged from the wardrobe and entered from the corridor in increasing numbers. Soon the whole floor was covered with spiders moving aimlessly. Then one of them climbed on to his bed and Lars felt it go over his foot. It was only a question of time before hundreds of them would be on the boys beds.

"Dad, please come and help me. There are spiders everywhere and they are on our beds," yelled Lars. Dad dashed in as fast as he could but the spiders moved even faster and disappeared before he could turn the light on.

"You silly boy. There are no spiders in our flat. Now go to sleep or your pocket money will be reduced."

"But Dad, I am afraid," sobbed Lars.

“You afraid? Afraid of some small spiders which don’t even exist. And someday you will be a man. People will call you a woman when you grow up.”

“No they won’t,” said Lars.

“Sure they will. Only girls and women are allowed to be afraid of spiders. Now do as I say and go to sleep.”

“Dad, please listen to me. I have made an awful discovery. Simon is a spider!”

Dad roared with laughter and left. Lars was alone again with Simon who slept or pretended to. He wanted to wake Mum but didn’t dare. Dad was tough and he could very well stop all his pocket money.

Lars felt tiredness came over him and he didn’t think he could stay awake much longer. But he must. If he slept, the horrible spiders would return at once and creep into his mouth and nostrils and down into his windpipe so he couldn’t breathe. Now he could hear the rustling of the spiders as they come closer and closer. They must have injected their poison into him as he slept despite the approaching danger. Lars dreamt that his nursery bed had become a deathbed, his own deathbed. Then a weak but demonic voice told him everything was now over.

Outside, the birds twittered and the kitchen radio was playing good morning music. Dad stretched himself, yawned and went into the nursery to wake the boys.

“Jump up boys, it’s breakfast time. Oh no! Oh no!” He yelled.

Simon’s spider like hands and tentacle like fingers were clutched tightly around Lars’ stiff neck. Lars was dead. Simon had strangled him. His own brother!