

Fear like love and death and beauty

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Because I could not drive, my mother had to drive me to the phobia clinic where I went to get over my fear of driving, when I was twenty. My mother blazed along at a faster clip than the speed limit, in love with the road more than where the road led, a love I would never know. I daydreamed beside her, wondering what the world's history would have been, beginning with the Bible, if essential characters had been phobic. If Samson suffered from melissophobia—he with the strength to bring down pillars, frightened of the little insect—what then, of the lion's side slain, sweet salvage of honey, and no riddle to come out of Timnah's vineyards? Would Eden still be ours, if Eve had ophidiophobia—that serpent, Satan, Old Scratch, foiled? Forty-two years after I was twenty, it seemed I still had nothing but fear while my mother feared nothing: she with cane and then walker, still shuttling me here and there with her approaching ninety; and I still daydreaming of the Bible, where fear could be a pact with the divine, the beginning of wisdom if only done right. Hadn't fear like love and death and beauty laid claim to the human world, not to be left out of Creation's narrative? As if fear and love could embrace in order to praise, like two hands that need each other to clap, to pray.