

Bliss, Sheer Bliss

I live in the warmest part of this house.

For an indoor arachnid like me ¹ this is a paradise - I have a south facing room with large double glazed windows all round *and* underfloor heating.

When No. 8 was remodelled in 2007, my great-great-great-great-great. . . grandmother ² suffered months of disruption. But it was worth it.

And think about it - I have 8 legs and I live in No. 8.

Bliss, sheer bliss.

Now it's October ³ and the mating season is over, I have the place to myself again.

Last year's September partner called himself Englebert, (real name Eddie - short for Eduardo). Poor wee Eddie was not as big as his head told him. He thought he was such a wonderful singer but in truth, he was mostly off key. He was around for about three weeks and frankly, it was a trial by duff notes and a great relief when he did not return after another foray upstairs.

Last month I had a proper singer. His real name was Erik the Great but he liked to be called Andrea. Although he was good, his range was less than perfect, particularly in the crucial top notes.

But, despite his limitations, we did quite well in a karaoke version with the TV showing Andrea and Sarah singing *Time to say Goodbye* ⁴.

¹ Large House Spider, *Eratigena saeva*, also called the 'northern version'. A large, brown, hairy spider with long, unbanded legs. Male body length: approximately 10–14 mm. Female body length: approximately 11–16 mm. A large male may have a leg span of roughly 60–75 mm, occasionally more. The abdomen is dark brown, often with a paler central stripe and a series of pale chevrons. The male's legs are especially long—about one and a half times the length of those of a female of similar body size. Adult males have enlarged pedipalps at the front, resembling tiny boxing gloves.

² For our type of spider females live for 30 months (two mating seasons). Males live for 18 months, one mating season.

³ Females live for 30 months (two breeding cycles), males for 19 months (one cycle).

⁴ *Time to Say Goodbye* https://youtu.be/4L_yCwFD6Jo?si=D0toPPVyZxr_F44A

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He was a very big lad, very dishy, much bigger than Eddie. I was sorry to lose Erik. One minute he was here and the next he was gone.

Now, first off, I need to debunk a common misunderstanding. My kind of spider does not eat her partner after mating. I store his sperm until spring and lay fertilised egg sacs when food is more abundant. We eat flies, moths gnats and midges, occasionally beetles, small wasps and other tiny insects as nibbles. I do very occasionally eat other spiders, the small dopey ones who wander into my web and become trapped. I'm not a big eater, one meal every two weeks is enough.

Oh, another myth, we don't drop into baths for a drink. It's accidental, like falling down a big hole with slippery sides. Remember Eddie? He was rescued TWICE by John's wife and dropped out of the bathroom window from a cup. But dim though he was, he found his way back to me. It's a smell thing. I don't sweat, but in September I do give off a very potent perfume to attract the boys.

When the mating season was over, Eddie went upstairs and was caught in the bath for a THIRD time and did not make it back to me. I heard John's wife say she dropped him out of the bathroom window, even though it was a downpour outside.

I almost never need water, I get moisture from my prey.

So, how do I spend my time? Mostly I daydream, taking long flights of fancy, visiting some of the places I see on the TV, nice sunny and cheery places but not too windy.

I'm big on footie and I went to the World Cup, in my daydreams. My human, a man called John, was watching every kick of the ball on TV. Scotland were good, at first, but in the end just not good enough.

John and I prefer the English Premier League and record all matches for Liverpool, Manchester United and Aston Villa. Everton are on our list too, because of David Moyes their manager. We occasionally record European football matches but only if there is nothing better available. As a last resort, we watch games in the Scottish Premier League.

When there is no footie worth watching, John flips over to YouTube to check updates on scientific stuff and EV cars, stuff which bores me rigid. Later, he almost always changes to the Music channel and then I'm back watching with him and singing along, but very quietly, *sotto voce*. When he turns off and goes up to bed, I retreat to my web den and replay our favourites in my head singing, along at full volume, *a capella*, loud and clear.

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When the house was being remodelled back in 2007, Legend ⁵ informs it was chaos, madness and very noisy, the same sort of turmoil which can happen when our small humans from Abingdon visit. Often called the Wee Boys, Zac, recently six and Rory 'still four', when set loose after a long car journey, hurtle around like demented grasshoppers.

Outside of school time, both Wee Boys enjoy a non-stop life with Swimming, Drama, Soccer School, Rugby Tots, Trampolining and the like. Rory is keen on any game which uses a ball, whatever size, whatever shape. Both have two-wheelers and have recently learned to ride proficiently without 'stabilisers'.

When our welcome but unpredictable visitors arrive, I retreat into my web den and hope it will not be whacked by a skidding toy car or stray Lego block.

Ethan (12 soon to be 13) and Drew (11) are another two young humans who visit No. 8 from Netherlee. They are quieter now although Legend tells when they were Zac's and Rory's age they were also prone to wild cavorting.

Matthew, the other older young human who visits, is the brother of the Wee Boys. He is sixteen, a senior pupil at Abingdon School and has just earned an impressive batch of GCSEs. His school is on the banks of the Thames, a river in England where rowing is an important activity. Matthew trains most days with his crew and he also goes to rowing camps (USA and France) and competitions (Oxford and Henley) and is hoping to get a place in the Scotland Under Eighteen rowing squad.

Like many older humans, Matthew, Ethan and Drew watch small screens a lot (called iPads, iPhones and laptops). I don't like it when the humans are on their screens because I can't see what's happening.

A month or so ago they were all here at No.8, all five young humans. They played hide and seek, under every bed, in every wardrobe and cupboard, playing as two ever changing teams, screeching around like banshees, even Matthew. I scuttled into my web den and covered by ears, trying to shut out the screaming SIDS (Spiders In Distress Signals) which filled the air.

When the Wee Boys are here, I do enjoy watching TV for Kids and sneak out to sit in a dark corner and watch with them. It calms them down. Me too. I've watched dozens of episodes of *Bluey* and *Paw Patrol*. My favourites are *The Gruffalo* and *Room on the Broom* and other films by Julia Donaldson.

⁵ Possibly genetic memory, passed on through our female line.

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One morning, early, during their last visit to No. 8, when it was just Zac and John who were awake and John was clearing up the dishes and tidying up, he gave Zac his iPad loaded up with a YouTube video called:

*The boy who always talked back.*⁶

Zac was hooked and watched all six episodes. I was frustrated because I couldn't see the screen, just the voices. Half way through watching, Rory joined them. That was better for me because then I could hear Zac answering Rory's questions.

Zac is a good big brother and very knowledgeable. At his school, he is very popular because he looks after other children and helps them with their schoolwork. Rory is at the same school now too. It is called the Europa School⁷. Zac and Rory are in the Spanish 'stream' which means they are taught in English for two and a half days then in Spanish for the rest of the week.

Now we are in October, we are looking ahead to Halloween which is when Ethan will become thirteen. Halloween is an odd word. One time, with the Wee Boys, John watched a very strange video on YouTube⁸. I was hiding in a corner, out of sight. It was an animation, not real people, set somewhere in America. The house and everything in it looked very old-fashioned. Weird, or what? John's toe was tapping at the music so maybe he liked it? As Halloween approaches, John and I are in our usual routine, watching footie and YouTube Music videos. When there is no good footie, we watch old rom-coms saved on Prime, such as *Love Actually*, *Four Weddings*, and the BBC version of *Pride and Prejudice*, all six episodes.

Like most arachnids, I do enjoy a good love story.

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<https://youtu.be/VG3arGjg0Hk?si=My6sSjYDqhVONE20>

⁷

The Europa School UK is a state-funded, all-through free school on the former European School campus at Culham, near Abingdon (OX14 3DZ). It educates pupils from age 4 to 18 using a bilingual, multicultural curriculum: in primary, children spend half the week in English and half in a "stream" language (French, German or Spanish); in secondary, subjects such as history and geography are taught in the second language, and students finish with the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma rather than A-levels.

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<https://youtube.com/shorts/L-RmDWixkJ4?si=VLreZ5VqtDWldUsM>

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