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**Dr Mark
Dooley**



MORAL MATTERS

Miracles and wonder... by my back door

A MINUTE spider gently spins its fine web, the majestic detail illumined by the morning sun. Through rays of splendid light, the web glistens like crystal. Unaware that it has just created one of nature's most magnificent spectacles, the little creature rests in anticipation of its reward.

The web serves as a bridge between a railing and a flower pot containing white blooms. As if worshipping the sun, their petals slowly part revealing a deep yellow core. Into the core glides a bee, its mission to mine that precious substance produced in abundance by yet another of nature's artworks.

As the bee retreats, my youngest smiles and says: 'He has gone to make honey for his porridge. He wants to eat his dinner by himself and his brother.' Innocence so beautiful you don't know whether to laugh or cry. Impervious, he returns to his toys, his giggles blending sweetly with the birdsong.

A robin swoops from the heavens before perching on the very tip of a swaying branch. He cries out to the skies from which he has just descended like an angel. His song is nature's symphony, a choral celebration of all creation.

With one last burst of exultation the robin ascends high above the trees, before heading towards the hills. As if carved by the hands of Creator, the surrounding hills grace the skyline.

Drenched in the morning sunlight, they are a glorious reminder that some things are not easily altered by time.

Standing between Heaven and earth, those hills have witnessed all the trials and wonders of humanity. They appeared the very same to our ancestors as they now do to us. And long after we are gone, they will continue to memorialise the perpetual passage of mankind across the landscape far below.

Seemingly unhappy with its original work, the spider has another attempt at perfecting its web. The sun having shifted slightly, the web now appears like a ballroom chandelier.

Why these creatures inspire such irrational fear is a mystery, for to witness their workmanship is to experience a miracle.

The warm wind blows, the trees sway and their leaves gently rustle. Elegantly, the web bends back and forth, the spider gliding through the air on a stray strand of silk. A little less elegantly, our middle son is also gliding through the air on the trampoline.

Wearing a Harry Potter cape and muttering some manner of gibberish, he bounces freely and without fear. 'I

am Emperor Business!' he announces in mid-flight, before collapsing in laughter. It is the sweet sound of joy, one that nothing in nature can replicate.

A pink petal falls from a rose. It contains a drop of morning dew, in whose radiant reflection is captured a world of natural beauty. It is as if, in that one small bead, nature has finally found a mirror in which she can admire herself.

The scent of the rose blends beautifully with that of the coffee. The bees are momentarily conflicted, before instinct settles the matter in favour of the rose.

As it is placed on the saucer, the coffee cup makes a sound that chimes harmoniously with the surrounding chorus.

Dead leaves, a reminder that life is fleeting. Scattered across the dew-laden grass, they are a warning from the far side of summer. They are a stark reminder that true beauty lasts but for a moment, before yielding to decay.

Still, those leaves reveal another type of beauty. Not the beauty of the rose or the diamond-like web but something like the beauty of old age or even of our fading memories. If such things are beautiful, it is because they testify to a life lived and lived well.

A bell chimes in the distance. 'What is that?' asks our youngest. It is, I respond, the call to morning Mass, an appeal to offer thanks for all things, both great and small.

THE sky fills with cloud as a host of swallows soar overhead. Emperor Business has absconded, leaving behind only memories of his infectious laughter. The little one pretends to drown the flowers with his multicoloured watering can, picking off their heads whenever I avert my gaze.

As the clouds drift, a golden beam pours down upon the spider, its web, the trees and the hills, the pink petal, the dead leaves and the empty coffee cup.

Now, they all look completely different. They are normal and everyday things, yet somehow they seem to glow with a supernatural aura.

I stand up to go and write this column but I am barely able to drag myself from such a precious scene. I know what I want to write for you but realise it will have to wait for another day. How could I not share what I have just experienced?

It all happened in five minutes while sitting in the back garden. Yes, that's all it took to take a trip into the very heart of paradise.

We search so long and so hard to find happiness, to discover the magic formula for bliss here on Earth. Simply walk outside your back door and you will need to search no more.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—