

*Marcus Speh*

### THREE QUESTIONS

#### *Why*

Spiders were crawling up the edges of the portal into another world. Whenever a spider had reached the top, a blue light appeared and turned the insect into a flower that fell down in front of the machine. Soon the ground around Emma's feet was covered with blossoms in many colors. The professor turned to the alien commander next to him: "What's happening here," he said. "We're turning the spiders into flowers," said the alien. He looked like an ugly lobster with pointy black knobs for eyes and a bright pink rump. "But why would you do that," said the professor, who was a highly skilled specialist in many scientific disciplines and trained to look for hidden meanings and causes. He spoke so many languages so well that he himself sometimes wasn't sure which one was his mother tongue. He was so erudite, so well educated and removed from his childhood that often he couldn't even remember his own mother. "Are you doing it to bend the structure of the physical space-time continuum?" said the professor. "Are you perhaps manipulating matter itself to teach us a valuable lesson? Do you mean to suggest that spiders and flowers came from the same tree of life and that we ought to be more circumspect of them? Or does the pattern of plants hide a mathematical formula, which will help us solve the energy crisis?" The professor had become frenetic: "Tell me, my friend from another galaxy, why is this happening?" – All the while, thousands of spiders had marched up the sides of the giant, door-like structure and subsequently, exposed to the blue light, dropped to the ground transfigured into blooms. "Oh no," said the alien commander and scratched his behind, "none of that, none of that at all, we just thought the girl would look beautiful standing in a sea of flowers."

#### *How*

If Albert had known what the stars wanted from him, he'd have stopped looking at them. He felt compelled to gaze upwards and try to make sense of the constellations above his head. On a trip to Algier, undertaken to look for traces of Camus in the coral-speckled sand, he met a red-haired woman, who seemed to share his obsession: he found her sitting on the hotel terrace, her head bent towards the night sky for hours. Finally, on his last day, he said to her: "Are you also looking for answers up there that you can't get down here?" He was hoping for easy companionship and perhaps a little love for the road home to Reykjavik. She did not look at him when she replied: "But no, dear sir, I am quadriplegic, I couldn't look down if I wanted to. See, I can't even look at you properly, which is a pity since I do enjoy the sound of your voice." Albert felt shy and shamed. The woman said, "you must feel like quite a fool now." Then she asked him, courteously, he thought, which answers he hoped to find among the stars. "I really don't know," he said. "I've lost track of my question in the course of a lifetime." – "Perhaps," she said, "the answers are

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just as forgettable as the questions were." He shrugged. It turned out that she was called July in summer and Autumn in fall, and that she had no name during winter and springtime. Over time, she became an excellent substitute for astronomy. Albert loved obsessing about her because she was actually needy and she didn't just sit there but willingly gave answers to all the questions he could ever think of and sometimes even before he'd thought of them. "How do you do it," he said, "where do you take your certainty from, dearest." – "I just don't think about it too much, Albert," she said and winked at the universe above making him smile before he rolled her into the bedroom, whose ceiling was painted with hundreds of fluorescent stars each with a small question mark at its centre.

### *When*

Six people, three men and three women, sat in a closed room deep under ground. how deep, they did not know. why they were there as a group, they did not know though every one of them had a reason. The door was oddly like a person: it had character. Looks like a submarine door, one of the men said. really, said a woman, you been on a submarine then. Only to visit as a boy, he said. Somehow she knew that he lied. – The room had a square shape and it was painted in a color that almost wasn't a color: you might describe it as dark green, another might call it grey, yet another one may find it was a reddish brown. it was too bad in a way that later none of them would say the same thing about that room because it would sound as if they'd all been in different places. If this sounds familiar then welcome to the human condition: no two perceptions of the same situation are the same, many don't even sound vaguely alike. It is as if god had put us in one place but punished us to live our lives with everyone inhabiting his own personal parallel universe. Sometimes, our perceptions cross so that we almost believe we might reach agreement, even unanimity. But these are moments and they make the whole affair almost more painful than if there had never been a meeting of minds. Only music, stories, art exist in a common place for all of us, which is why we must get back to them whenever we can. Even those among us who don't know that this is where they're headed, apart from death's door, the certain point of final convergence.