

Fear like love and death and beauty

by [Valerie Wohlfeld](#) in the [November 3, 2021](#) issue

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.