

The Broken Window

By Colyn Rogers

“You don’t bother me, I don’t bother you,” Miguel said. “Okay, pal?”

The spider he spoke to curled itself in the corner of the opening, and Miguel put his shoe back on, and nearly fell off the ladder as he did so. The whole while he kept his eyes fixed on the small, black spider, worried it would move suddenly and he would lose track of it.

It’s just one spider, Miguel thought. Something I can deal with later.

He turned his attention back to the matter at hand and continued to climb the ladder. He pulled himself through the opening and into the attic. It was cluttered, he could tell that much through the thick, dusty darkness. Boxes and furniture lined the attic, but he could not see where the paths between them began or ended in this darkness. He pulled himself to his feet and went to flip the light switch when the thud resounded again.

Miguel froze, shuddered, and his eyes darted around the room as they looked for the source of the noise. When nothing happened, he moved his hand to the switch and flipped it up with a click. He let out a sharp, quick breath.

You’re kidding me, Miguel thought. Dead bulbs? Dad was supposed to replace those last week!

He tried the switch a few more times, then felt something touch the tip of his finger and quickly skitter up to his knuckle. Still frozen, he slowly turned his head to see the same black spider on his finger.

“Hey, you don’t bother me, I don’t bother you,” Miguel said. “That was the deal, remember?”

The spider crawled to the back of Miguel’s right hand. He raised his left, ready to swat the spider.

Come on, he thought. Get off me.

Miguel turned the back of his hand toward the light switch, and the spider skittered down his hand and onto the switch. Miguel sighed, relieved, the fear that had gripped him receded, which made room for the present fear.

He swallowed hard, then started to move. In the darkness, there was a dim light emanating from the opening to the attic, and through that light he could make out the shapes of discarded furniture and boxes, but not exact locations or any other defining features. To him, they looked like the shapes of monsters, but he knew that they could be nothing more than a bunch of junk.

This is useless, he stepped over a box and into another one, which caused him to trip and fall with a loud thud that echoed throughout the attic. I can’t see anything, and now whatever is up here with me knows it. I need some light.

The thud Miguel made had a reply, which sounded much closer than it did earlier. He let out a shaky breath and got back on his feet. He searched the now crushed box with his hands and

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felt for a solution to the problem of the darkness that he faced. His fingertips grazed against the coarse strike surface of a matchbook, and he chuckled to himself.

Please be a good pack, he thought. I need to see something up here, even for a short while.

He pulled out a match, struck it, and it lit. The shapes of monsters turned to shapes of furniture and boxes, and there was a path dug between them. He walked, careful of the creaking floorboards, and by the light of the first match he made it to a corner in the path. The flame from the match burned the tip of Miguel's thumb, which caused him to drop it. It burnt out before it hit the floor. He stared at where he thought it landed, just for a moment, to collect his racing thoughts.

Okay, he squared his shoulders. So, the match went out. Big deal. I can just—

The thud echoed again, this time it sounded like it came from the left, around the corner he was at. He took a deep breath and went to pull out another match. His fingers grazed the tip of the last two matches, and he hesitated, then pulled one out to strike it. It lit, and he rounded the corner.

The path narrowed in front of him as he moved, the boxes and furniture closed in around him. His heart nearly burst from his chest as a stack of boxes fell in front of him. The thud resounded again in the distance. He shuddered at the thought of whatever was up there with him, and that it remained unseen.

This is getting ridiculous, he thought. How big is this attic? What's up here?

He stepped over the fallen stack of boxes, and his foot caught on something, which tripped him. He lost the match as he fell, but he looked back to see what tripped him and the smile on his face would have lit the room had it been able to.

A small, half-used candle sat in an ornate brass holder, with leaves and vines of ivy embossed in the brass plate and shaft. His heart settled in his chest, and he took a deep, steady breath. He reached for his final match and felt what was left of the end of the match, as it had broken when he fell.

Oh, shit, he thought. Where is it?

He patted the floor with his left hand to search for the other half of the match and held the unlit candle with the right. He felt the familiar skittering on his right hand but held tightly onto the candle. His left hand found the match, and then the pain hit him.

His lungs wanted to scream, but the thought of something with claws and fangs scared them into submission. The wound burned, the fire of it shot up through his arm and to his shoulder for a few seconds. He shook his injured hand and the small, black spider fell to the floor. It began to skitter away but swiftly found its fate beneath Miguel's shoe.

"Should've stuck to the agreement," Miguel said. He scraped his shoe along the floor to discard the dead spider. He lit the half-match and quickly used it to light the candle before the match burnt out. He let out a shaky breath and continued to move down the narrow path.

The light of the candle illuminated the path ahead of him, which made it easier to see the stacks of boxes and furniture that looked like they could fall on him. His heart felt light, the fear in the back of his mind subsiding, but the pain in his hand persisted as he walked.

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I need to do something about that bite, he thought. But I have to find out what that noise is. I think I'm getting close.

The thud echoed again, still ahead of him. The path narrowed, and he squeezed his way through a tight passage between a large row of boxes. A strong gust of wind came from in front of him, which blew out the candle. Out of matches, the candle was now useless, and proved to be more strain for his injured hand, so he had no choice but to leave it behind and continue down the narrow passage.

Upon exiting the passage, he could feel the cold gusts of air that flowed in this section of the attic but could hardly see where they came from due to the darkness. Ahead of him, he saw a faint light emanating from something distant. He moved towards it, and the thud repeated. Three times he heard it, then silence, then another three, then silence again.

Whatever that is, he thought, it sounds angry.

He moved towards the faint light, down a narrow, twisting path. His hand ached, but he pressed on, determined to find the source of the noise. In a few moments, he made it through to the other side of the path and found the source of the light. A boarded-up window had a large hole in the corner, where long vines of a dark green ivy grew through, and the pale moonlight poured through into the attic. The ivy had wrapped itself around the broken piece of board.

A heavy gust of wind blew through the hole, and the vine whipped around and smacked against the floor with a loud thud. Miguel chuckled and knelt by the vine. He pulled at the vine and unwrapped it from the board. The wind blew again but he heard no thud, and he sighed, his heart light and the fear subsided.

The vine twisted and gripped his right hand, and another gust of wind blew, and the ivy pulled him toward the window. He stopped himself with his left hand and punched another hole through the old boards. The pain of the splinters, now interspersed with the pain from the spider

bite, pulsated in his hand. He pulled his hand free from the ivy and backed away from the window.

Note to self, he thought. Get Dad to replace the lights and clear the ivy. Tomorrow.