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Arachniphobia

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ARACHNIPHOBIA

When I was four, I had a big brown book about spiders. There was a picture of a big tarantula on the cover that scared me, because if you stared at it long enough it seemed to move. I loved that book, and every time I'd see a spider I'd run to it and look it up and read about it. My father had given me that book for my fourth birthday.

Our house was covered with white wooden planks that overhung the stone foundation by about a half an inch. Spiders used to hide between the wood and the bricks. I'd take a jar and a pencil and scrape the spiders off the wall and keep them. It was fun to watch them scratch at the glass with their useless legs. One day my mother was mad at my dad because he'd left the peanut butter out all night, and she threw the jar at him. It shattered, and she stooped on the scrambling spiders while she screamed at my dad.

I was sitting at the hammock in the back yard watching my mom and my dad trying to hit a birdie back and forth across a badminton net. This was true entertainment because they are not athletic people at all. Then I was a giant black spider reaching down from the tree above my mother trying to grab her and pull her to her death. I blinked in amazement and realized that it was only a low branch blowing in the wind. My mother never even noticed because my dad had launched the birdie in her direction.

There was a tree outside our house that had thousands of spiderwebs near the top. I would climb up there and watch the spiders as they climbed around. If I blew on the webs, they would move frantically about, so I did it often. When I fell out of the tree and hurt my leg, it took my mom and my dad ten minutes to hear my crying, because they were loudly arguing about dinner. When they finally did come running outside, the pain had gone, but I told them that a red spider had pushed me out of the tree. My dad laughed, but my mom began to cry and ran inside the house. I wondered what I had said wrong.

I awoke late at night to the sounds of my parents yelling. I never would've believed that my dad could cry. This was the first time I realized that they didn't like each other anymore. There was a big black spider who had a web at the corner of my bedroom. I called him Alex and he was my best friend. Now I walked across the room amidst the shouts and sobs, and turned on the light. Alex's insides felt warm in my hand as I smashed him over and over again. I didn't stop hitting him until they stopped yelling.

The driveway was a small dirt road that led from the highway to our house. It was nearly a quarter mile to the mailbox. Everyday after school, I ran all the way from the bus to the house, where my mom would be waiting to make lunch for me. Once, she told me that she'd seen a spider the size of a dime in the mailbox, so I turned right around and ran back to the road to see it. When I opened the mailbox, it was empty and dark. I trudged back slowly, and told her that the spider was gone. All she said was, "Oh," and then made me a tunafish salad sandwich. I've wondered if she was lying about that spider.

On Sunday nights my dad and I always watched "Wild Kingdom." We both sat there and watched it while my mom made popcorn. I remember the night that the show was about the African rain forest. I was wishing my mother would hurry up with the popcorn so she wouldn't miss the part about the bird spider. Those spiders were the largest in the world. I went and got her from the kitchen and we all sat together on the couch and watched the white spider suck the life out of a sparrow.

There was a daddy-long-legs on my wall that was so big he scared me. I couldn't even move. I called to my dad to come to kill him, but my mom came instead and told me that my Dad was gone. I slept in my parents' bedroom that night, with spiders in my nightmares. My dad didn't come back for two days. When I tried to tell him about the spider, he just looked at me sadly and put his hands over his face.

The doors of the empty moving van swung open with a loud creak. There was a silver spiderweb in the corner, a yellow monster crouching in the center. My dad didn't even help as my uncle and I moved my mom's things aboard the truck. When my desk was loaded in, the drawer fell out, and as I replaced it, I thought I saw a small movement amid the junk inside. Looking up quickly, I saw that the silver spiderweb was empty.

Sitting in my new bedroom, on my bed, I felt a tickling on my leg. Seeing delusive spiders, I became paralyzed with fear. I had nobody to call to, and I was sure it would kill me. I was at its mercy. My mother was afraid of spiders too, and now we were alone against them. I looked down at my leg, there was nothing there. Paranoia, I guess.

I used to think spiders were cool and interesting. Now I can't even look at the pictures in that big brown book with the hairy tarantula on it without shaking. It's too bad, really. My dad gave me that book for my fourth birthday, and I haven't seen him in two years. He only lives three miles away.

Ray Mittan