

Oh, bats! Cue the pipe organ!



"I knew it. Look, a bat," I said to Yolanda. "Where?" "On the siding. By the door," I pointed.

We were home from teaching night classes, Yolanda, Conversational Spanish; me, Rhetoric. It was dusk, outside lights not yet on, the perfect time for bats (and vampires) to emerge. The bat/vampire clung to our lavender siding, motionless, wings spread. A miniature black umbrella with a head.

"Aye, no. That's so creepy," Yolanda said, stopping in her tracks, hand on heart.

"Not really, I thought we might have one."

"That's not what I mean," she said, waving her hand. "Just get me inside."

My brain flashing to Chevy Chase and the squirrel scene in "Christmas Vacation," I kept one eye on the bat as I crept toward the storm door. As I turned the handle, our Sheltie, Sammy, barked, and the door squeaked.

The bat didn't budge, but Yolanda bolted by like a sprinter at the crack of a starter's pistol.

Inside, we stood side-by-side, cheeks pressed to the glass and propped the door open for a glimpse. The bat perched unperturbed.

"Get rid of it," Yolanda whispered. "Whatever it costs, whatever it takes. No bats."

"Did you just cross yourself?" I said, laughing. "C'mon, it's not Count Dracula."

A shiver shot up my spine, and the ominous rumblings of a pipe organ roared from my subconscious. Neither courtesy of the Count, however, but Yolanda's glare.

"Yes, ma'am, no bats," I said. "I'll find a guy."

Yolanda went to bed, and I to the Internet.

After reading horror stories about bats in attics, the stink, their discharge and the ensuing damage to insulation, flooring, drywall, even structural beams, I joined Yolanda in bed.

I lay on my back, spine shivering again, pipe organ braying, and stared at the ceiling. Visions of bats zooming through the air at night, dangling from rafters by day, dropping piles, and rotting floor beams, raced through my mind.

"Find a guy?" Yolanda asked.

"Yeah," I said, rolling over and gazing out the window. "I found a guy. No big deal."

I awoke at 4 with a start, slipped on my clothes and, like a gawker at a car wreck, returned to the Internet.

By 7, I was at Olympic Hardware, buying a flashlight along with a mouth and nose mask. Jeans, boots and long-sleeve shirt buttoned at the wrists

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and neck, I grabbed a ball cap, gloves and goggles from the garage and trudged up the stairs, dead man walking.

Our house was built in the 1890s with three floors. At some point, there was a fire, and the top floor and most of the stairwell was lost. To access the attic, I stand on a chair and hoist myself up to the remaining stairs. As a result, I'd not been in the attic for years, and now my imagination raged.

As I emptied the hallway closet that leads to the stairs, Yolanda awoke.

"They're in the attic?" she said, brown eyes wide.

"Honey, no, I mean, I doubt it," I said, slipping off the mask.

"I'm going downstairs," she said, scurrying away. "Close that door behind you."

"Appreciate the support," I shouted.

Thankfully, there was no stink, no piles and no rot in the attic.

"No," I said, later in the day to "the guy" i.e. Dan of All Seasons Animal Control, as he inspected the wall where the bat perched the night before, "didn't see any signs in the attic."

"Good," Dan said, a smiling, energetic man, "but I'll check it out to make sure. Well, lookie here. There's your bat."

I leaned against the siding. The bat, wings folded, hung between the wall and gutter. Dan slipped on thick gloves and gently removed him with long tongs, placing him in a jar with air holes. Its wings flapping and teeth bared, I kept my distance, the bat as ugly as any I've seen online or in the movies.

And that's the rub with bats, right? They're dreadful looking. There's just no way around it. No good side. Can't blame the lighting or claim they're cute as babies. God whacked them with the ugly stick.

And for that, bats get a bad rap.

Sure, my nocturnal Internet search convinced me we don't want them in the attic, but what animal would we want in the attic? Not squirrels, not raccoons, not birds. And bats do one thing that those critters do not. They eat thousands of

insects in a single night, riding of us pests.

Despite the vampire mystique, bats usually won't bother us if we don't bother them. They just want to live their lives and raise their young. They're also protected. We can't harm or kill them. They must be safely removed and the roost sealed, or they will return. Let's face it, they're homebodies.

Dan and I inspected the house, inside and out, top floor to basement and determined there were only a few bats in the garage. Yolanda and I agreed with him on a price, and he'll soon return to finish his work.

No neck bites and no massive bill.

"Happy, honey?" I asked Yolanda.

"Yes, but remember when I said it was creepy?"

"Yeah, sure. Bats are creepy."

"No, no. That's not all. That night, in Spanish class, before we came home, I wrote 'murcielago' on the board because it contains every vowel."

"OK, so?"

"It's Spanish ... for 'bat'."

A shiver shot up my spine, and a pipe organ bellowed.

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