

The Ceiling Man

by Eunsae Lee

The last few weeks have been a bit of a challenge for my family. Everyone is irritable. We have a Ceiling Man, you see. He's always walking around our house, body stretching upside-down from the ceiling. There doesn't seem to be a purpose to it; he follows a random path, but his steady pace never stops.

He appeared one morning on the upper floor. My sister discovered him when she almost smacked into his forehead. She screamed her spider-spotting scream, so Dad put down his bowl of cereal and marched upstairs to deal with it. The rolled-up newspaper wasn't too helpful in the face of a full-sized man.

Every morning, Dad grumbles about the whole affair. It's infuriating, he says, that we can't even make him pay rent. We have tried talking to our guest, but after a few attempts that were answered by silence, we felt kind of ridiculous. At my sister's misty-eyed request, we've even tried to feed him. After a tense planning session, we agreed to leave a sandwich on top of the living room ceiling fan. It went ignored, and we had to give up when the whole room started smelling moldy. I don't think he notices us. Or maybe he's just terrified by these loud, inversely oriented people in his way.

We have wordlessly agreed that it feels right to avoid physical contact. This is a little difficult, however, because unfortunately he is quite a tall fellow. At the dining table, we get ready to duck when he enters the room. At first, we used to jump out of our seats and wait outside until he left, but we quickly got tired of returning to cold food. And he wanders out to a different room pretty soon anyway.

We've seen cases of this on the news; it's the *worst* type of pest because of its outright indifference to us floor people. Besides, whereas mice may multiply, a Ceiling Man definitely lives longer. I've done some research that shows he apparently ages at the same rate as us. Meaning he'll be around for quite some time. That drove Dad crazy. He picked up the phone with a fiery determination, but every pest control business in the city was busy with earwig season. Then we called the authorities, and they said there wasn't anything they could do. It seems they can't take a man into custody without a valid offense. When the city zoo finally returned his call, Dad couldn't get the words out. He doesn't believe in wildlife captivity.

I have to admit, we have discussed escorting the Ceiling Man out the front door. But after some heated debate, we concluded that it would be immoral to force him into the open air. It would be like pushing him off a cliff. Mom says that it's in times of trial like this that we truly have to prioritize our humanity.

When the neighbours heard about our predicament, they consoled us with the fact that we only have one. They told us that in the big house around the corner the Ceiling People walk in a group and their staggered stomping drives the family mad.

My parents didn't find that very comforting. However, our Ceiling Man seems to remain solitary and we're all pretty used to him by now. Besides, I find it hard to villainize him. I mean, it's not as if he eats our food like most pests do. I don't think he carries any diseases either. I've never heard him cough. Also, he knows his manners and won't open any doors that are shut. We make sure to close them before bed, and he seems content to wander through the halls at night. It's like white noise.

Sometimes I'm sitting on the sofa in the basement watching TV, and I'll see him coming down the sloped ceiling over the stairs. He usually walks toward the back of the room first. Last week, I swear I saw him bump into the wall and stumble a little. I tried not to laugh. He seems very shy, and I don't want to embarrass him.

My sister isn't as concerned about his feelings. She follows him around when she is bored, or when she doesn't want to do her math homework. Giggling, she will try to mirror his exact movements until Mom frowns at her and tells her to leave the poor man alone. She enjoys telling him about her day, too.

I think she might have named him Truffles.

He won't admit it, but I know Dad is grateful to be free of my sister's nagging to get a dog. His complaining at breakfast time has warmed toward affection, too. I've seen him look around wondering why he doesn't hear the footsteps nearby. In fact, when pest control finally called him back, Dad didn't answer.

Anyway, I'm pretty certain that Ceiling Man is into Britney Spears. I've definitely noticed him speeding up a little to be on beat to "Toxic." Maybe I'm imagining it, but he even struts a little. He's way better than my friends, who won't listen to any older stuff.

My parents say that we have to do something about him before the holidays and our relatives come down. It's part of their morning routine to bring it up. But I have a feeling that Grandma is going to make a new friend this year!

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