

The Patron Saint of Luchadores: The Spider Story

By: Joseph Rollins

“What the fuck is wrong with your eye?”

“What’re you talking about?”

Victor walked away to go check out his eye in the bathroom mirror. I heard him yell, then the water run in the sink for like five minutes.

I went to eat breakfast on the scarred wood table in the kitchen. Burnt eggs and half-raw chorizo. Tia was not a good cook. Abuelita was complaining to her daughter-in-law in fast Spanish while picking off the crunchy parts of her fried egg with a fork.

“I got pink eye,” said Victor, sitting down in the last empty chair. His face was red and splotchy and still damp from the sink.

I leaned in to look at his eye up close. Definitely pink eye - it was bright pink like Barbie’s favorite color in a box of crayons. A bunch of nasty crusty shit was still in the corner of his eye. I swear as I sat there staring more puss came out.

“What is wrong?” asked tío between bites of ground-up pink sausage.

“Pink eye,” I answered, “an infection. Victor can’t go to work. He has to go to the doctor.”

Tío translated for his mother; abuelita stood up and walked around behind Victor. The four-foot-eight woman, so thin you could see every bone through the skin on her hands, wrenched Victor’s nineteen-year-old neck back so hard she probably gave him whiplash. She leaned in close enough for her nose to brush his face while she studied Victor’s nasty, weepy eye. The old lady straightened up and released my cousin’s head,

causing it to snap back like a rubber band. Abuelita scuttled back to her seat and rattled off a few sentences in Spanish to my uncle.

“She says a spider peed in it,” said tío with a mouthful of food.

I froze with my fork halfway to my mouth. Victor just stared at my uncle like he had confessed to being Batman. Tía and abuelita started arguing again over what was wrong with breakfast; tía dropped a stack of blackened tortillas on the table.

“What the fuck are you talking about, ‘a spider peed in my eye?’” said Victor.

“That’s what she said happened,” said my uncle. “That’s why your eye looks like that. You can go work at the bar tonight, no problem.”

“He has pink eye and it’s very contagious,” I said. “Other people can get sick.”

Tío turned to his mother and they talked back and forth in Spanish for a minute. At one-point abuelita wagged her finger at Victor and said, “No, no.”

“She says Victor made a spider mad and it peed in his eye while he was asleep. If someone else gets sick, we have to smoke out all the spiders in the house.” Tío picked at his eggs like they weren’t really there.

“How the fuck did I make a spider mad?” asked Victor. His voice sounded high and irritated. “Forget to call her the next morning?”

I snorted and tío slapped the weathered gray wood with his palm: “You try to squish it maybe, but you missed.”

“Maybe you rolled over in your sleep and killed its girlfriend.” Tío shrugged like my explanation was perfectly reasonable.

Victor lowered his eyes to his cold breakfast and began eating: “Crazy fuckers.”

I came home from work with tío and found abuelita and Tía Juana tearing apart the house. They had already turned over all the small furniture and now were emptying every single cupboard and drawer into piles all over the house.

I walked into the kitchen and found my cousin sitting at the scarred, gray table. The air in the room was thick with brown smoke and smelled like burnt hair.

I coughed and waved my hand in front of my face: “What the fuck is going on?”

“I got pink eye again,” muttered Victor. “Probably picked the shit up from one of the skanks at the club.” I didn’t doubt one of those hookers could have passed on a disease, even pink eye, just by being near my cousin.

“That doesn’t answer my question,” I said.

My cousin sighed and looked at me with his nasty, crusty eyeball. “They’re trying to smoke out the spider that peed in my eye. They said it’s a real mean spider since it nailed me twice and they need to get rid of it.”

Victor waved at a new shrine on the little kitchen shelf. A thick bundle as fat as my arm of some sort of brown plant burned in the giant copper ashtray. The leaves and stems were long and thin and the whole thing was tied together with a piece of thread from abuelita’s sewing box. Half of the bundle was smoldering like a giant cigar but smelled like cat shit.

“I have to sit in here while they smoke out the spider,” Victor said. “That way if they don’t find it I’ll smell like shit and the little fuckers won’t come near me.”

“No one is going to come near you,” I said.

“Simone.”

“Your hooker girlfriend’s going to dump your ass.”

“Fuck you,” he said. I smiled.

Abuelita screamed from the bedroom where me and Victor slept. It wasn’t a scared scream; more like ‘ah-ha, I got you.’”

Everyone in the house answered abuelita’s howl and piled into the tiny bedroom me and Victor slept in. With me and Victor, tío and tía and abuelita, the twin bed and second-hand dresser, there was wasn’t enough space to turn around.

“Mira, mira,” said abuelita, pointing to the wall. Climbing up the tobacco stained stucco towards the dirty little window was a line of spiders of all different shapes and sizes, marching like ants to dinner. The line reached the window and the spiders vanished one by one through a crack in the caulk around the glass.

“Holy shit,” said Victor. “It really was a spider that peed in my eye.”

“Bullshit,” I replied. “There’s no way.”

Tío cracked open a Budweiser and wandered out of the room. I heard him burp from the living room and flip on the television. Abuelita danced a little jig right there in the bedroom, wedged between the bed and the bodies and the wall with the spiders. Tía left and came back waving the bundle of burning plants that smelled like cat shit at the spiders. I swear they moved faster up the wall and out the crack under the window.

“I guess you can go to work at the bar tonight then,” I said.

Victor squeezed past me and left the room without answering.