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**A bite for a bite leaves everyone bitten**

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—An estimated 1,000 spiders have died during the last 40 years, squished flat by my shoes, newspapers and, in a pinch, the heel of my fist.

I don't pick these fights, but I haven't shied from them. I don't dislike spiders. In fact, I think they're cool. On the other hand, I don't want them webbing up my house as their preferred habitat.

As with most fights pitting size against stealth, I am neither winning nor losing, even though I win every battle when a spider puts up its dukes.

It reminds me of what's going on in Afghanistan.

Spiders are all around us. In a typical one-acre grassy field, you might find between one and two million. This is Internet information; I've not actually gone into any of our grassy fields and counted.

Several hundred spiders reside in the typical American home. Farmhouses, like ours, are even more hospitable to the little bugs they eat. (I did not disclose this information to my wife, Melissa, when I suggested that we buy an old farmhouse. I told her something generic, something like she should be prepared "to see fish and game, along with other native wildlife.")

I thought of my 1,000-spider, lifetime toll when one hard-bitten jihadist nailed my not-entirely-innocent foot last week. I was ambushed inside my own shoe. Why a spider was looking for a buggy breakfast in my footwear is not a question I will address in a public forum.

I didn't feel the bite, and I didn't see it escape to bite again another day.

My foot swelled. A red circle appeared in the middle of the swelling with a white dot in the center. I gimped for four days.

Black widow spiders are around, but I've yet to see one in the house.

My friend, Joerg, who has a better eye for these matters, has found them in his crawlspace on a neighboring mountain. Joerg and I see each other at the workout room in the mornings where we solve the problems of the world before 9 a.m. while lifting and trotting. We are very skilled at multitasking.

Among his many talents, Joerg is the only guy I know who has ever swept a bear off a porch with a broom.

The bruin in question refused to stop munching on seeds that Joerg clearly intended for birds, not bears. The bear paid no attention to Joerg's reasonable request to stop freeloading. So Joerg fetched his broom and tickled the bear's nose. Well, it might have been a little more than a tickle.

The local black widow colony watched this showdown and decided to give Joerg a wide berth.

I'm encouraging Joerg to apply his broom to several foreign leaders who also need to be moved away from feeding on what they consider to be a free lunch—their national treasuries.

The spider that got me was not a black widow. I did not find two tiny red puncture marks. I had no headache or dizziness (other than what those who know me consider normal). I was not short of breath, and I had no belly spasms. I was no more irritable or agitated than usual. And I didn't die—which is a sure sign that it was not a black-widow bite.

Female black widows commonly, but not always, make a cannibal's meal of their harmless, undersized boyfriends after sex. She's hungry; he's available and easy pickin's.

Researchers have discovered, however, that big males do not become meals. Maybe the little guys should start bulking up with us in the mornings. Life is not fair.

A bite from the female black widow is venomous and potentially fatal, even to the likes of us.

Males are defenseless against hungry, aggressive females. That sentence should not be taken as ideological in nature.

I try to keep on the good side of all females who hide in my shoes. I feel the same about males.

Maybe, a deal can be struck. I'll agree to stop squashing spiders, and, in return, they'll agree to stop biting me.

Maybe, world peace is not that hard to figure out.

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