



The World in a Wall

Getting Started

- * Do you have pets? Do you recollect an incident when an animal or insect caused great confusion and many people were affected? Share your experience with class.

One day I found a fat female scorpion in the wall wearing, what at first glance appeared to be, a pale fawn fur coat. Closer inspection proved that this strange garment was made up of a mass of tiny babies clinging to the mother's back. I was enraptured by this family, and I made up my mind to smuggle them into the house and up to my bedroom so that I might keep them and watch them grow up.

With infinite care, I manoeuvred the mother and family into a matchbox and then hurried to the villa. It was rather unfortunate that just as I entered the door, lunch should be served; however, I placed the matchbox carefully on the **mantelpiece** in the drawing-room, so that the scorpions should get plenty of air, and made my way to the dining-room and joined the family for the meal. **Dawdling** over my food, feeding Roger surreptitiously under the table and listening to the family arguing, I completely forgot about my exciting new captures. At last Larry, having finished, picked up the matchbox he had brought. **Oblivious** of my impending doom I watched him interestedly as, still talking glibly, he opened the matchbox.



Now I maintain to this day that the female scorpion meant no harm. She was agitated and a trifle annoyed at being shut up in a matchbox for so long, and so she seized the first opportunity to escape. She hoisted herself out of the box with great rapidity, her babies clinging on desperately, and scuttled on to the back of Larry's hand. There, not quite certain what to do next, she paused, her sting curved up and ready. Larry, feeling the movement of her claws, glanced down to see what it was, and from that moment things got increasingly confused.

He uttered a roar of fright that made Lugaretzia drop a plate and brought Roger out from beneath the table, barking wildly. With a flick of his hand, he sent the unfortunate scorpion flying down the table and she landed midway between Margo and Leslie, scattering babies like **confetti** as she thumped on the cloth. Thoroughly enraged at this treatment, the creature sped towards Leslie, her sting quivering with emotion. Leslie leapt to his feet, overturning his chair, and flicked out desperately with his napkin, sending the scorpion rolling across the cloth towards Margo, who promptly let out a scream that any railway engine would have been proud to produce. Mother, completely bewildered by this sudden and rapid change from peace to chaos, put on her glasses and peered down the table to see what was causing the pandemonium, and at the same moment Margo, in a vain attempt to stop the scorpion's advance, hurled a glass of water at it. The shower missed the animal completely, but successfully drenched Mother, who, not being able to stand cold water, promptly lost her breath and sat gasping at the end of the table, unable even to protest. The scorpion had now gone to ground under Leslie's plate, while her babies swarmed wildly all over the table. Roger, mystified by the panic, but determined to do his share, ran round and round the room, barking hysterically.



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'It's that silly boy again,' **bellowed** Larry.

'Look out! Look out! They're coming!' screamed Margo.

'All we need is a book,' roared Leslie; 'don't panic, hit 'em with a book.'

'What on earth's the matter with you all?' Mother kept imploring, mopping her glasses.

'It's that boy. He'll kill the lot of us. Look at the table, knee-deep in scorpions'

'Quick, do something. Look out, look out!'

'Stop screeching and get a book, for God's sake. You're worse than the dog. Shut up, Roger'

'By the Grace of God I wasn't bitten.'

'Look out. There's another one. Quick, quick'

'Oh, shut up and get me a book or something.'

'But how did the scorpions get on the table, dear?'

'That silly boy...Every matchbox in the house is a deathtrap.'

'Look out, it's coming towards me. Quick, quick, do something.'

'Hit it with your knife. Go on, hit it.'

Since no one had bothered to explain things to him, Roger was under the mistaken impression that the family was being attacked, and that it was his duty to defend them. As Lugaretzia was the only stranger in the room, he came to the logical conclusion that she must be the responsible party, so he bit her in the ankle. This did not help matters very much.

By the time a certain amount of order had been restored and all the baby scorpions had hidden themselves under various plates and bits of cutlery. Eventually, after impassioned pleas on my part, backed up by Mother, Leslie's suggestion that the whole lot be slaughtered was quashed. While the family, still simmering with rage and fright, retired to the drawing-room, I spent half an hour rounding up the babies, picking them up in a teaspoon, and returning them to their mother's back. Then I carried them outside on a saucer and, with utmost reluctance, released them on the garden wall. Roger and I went and spent the afternoon on the hillside, for I felt it would be prudent to allow the family to have a siesta before seeing them again.

—Gerald Durrell

