

Dead Quiet

By Marilyn Reeves

It's the dead middle of the night and I awaken from a dream paralyzed with fear. I open my eyes but can see nothing. It's pitch black. And dead quiet. Something is wrong. The power's gone out. Then I hear a soft little creak. Then a sort of pop. What was that? Oh my! I tell myself to be calm. It's just the usual sounds of the old building settling. Timbers that creak and pop when they expand and contract. The old pipes that subtly rumble and rattle. Those same sounds that are present all the time throughout the day and night that I no longer hear except when it's quiet. Too quiet. And pitch black.

I steel my courage to get up out of bed and feel my way down the hall into the kitchen, telling myself there is nothing to fear. It's still my own place. Everything is as it should be. There is nothing here to harm me. I just can't see.

I feel around for the little votive candle in the corner of the pantry and light it. Even that tiny flame helps immensely. Then, taking it with me, I open the storage room, fighting the icy cold fingers of fear that creep down my spine, and grab the lantern off the shelf. Quickly I step back out of the tiny dark room and back into the kitchen. I set the lantern down on the table and turn on the switch. It gives off a reassuring glow. So glad I bought that lantern! Perhaps I should find another place to keep it, however, so I won't have to go into that spooky storage room again the next time this happens.

I leave the glowing lantern on the table and walk over to the refrigerator. The yawning blackness of its interior momentarily startles me, and it takes my rational mind a second to grasp that of course it would be dark inside as well. Its familiar hum has been silenced too. I grab the bottle of juice by feel – it's where I always keep it. I cross the room to pull a small glass out of the cupboard, pour a couple of ounces of juice, put the bottle back into the fridge, and then sit at the table in the dim light waiting, hoping, that the power will come back on again. But it doesn't.

Finally, my drowsy eyes tell me that I should get back to bed. Despite the darkness. Despite the too quiet silence of the middle of the night. So, I take my lantern into the bedroom with me and set it next to the lamp on my bedside table. Just as I reach to turn it off, the electric lamp comes back on, and the bathroom night light comes back on, and the sound of my little humidifier with its soothing white noise comes back on. Out in the kitchen I can hear the hum of the

refrigerator come back on. I turn off the lamp, roll over, and instantly fall back to sleep ... to the usual, comforting sounds of the night.