

# UC Merced

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## Shuffles In February

By Noemy Campos

Sometime in the early morning, Sebastian wakes up a little disoriented. The cool February breeze comes in from the open windows and sends chills down his back as it tickles his bare feet.

He stretches and rolls around in his bed for a few seconds before he hears an odd sound, a shuffling, like someone is dragging their feet across the carpet. His door is ajar, so he sees into the living room where his parents and little brother are still sleeping soundly. He dismisses the noise, but now feels uneasy. He feels that something is watching him although there is nothing there. "Odd," he thinks, settling into his bed. He hears the noise again, this time, closer.

A slight fear begins to enter Sebastian. He looks out again to see if his parents have moved. They have not. They are still lying together. Not sure of what to make of the noise, Sebastian decides to simply ignore the sound and as he nestles into his dark blue blanket, the shuffling noise gets louder and closer. Sebastian closes his eyes. His mind begins to doze off. His muscles relax. There is now a sudden and loud silence.

Nothing to be afraid of, Sebastian thinks, the noise could have been the neighbors or maybe even the cat.

The shuffling noise rushes into his room, a gust of wind following it. Sebastian quickly removes the blanket off his head, and his eyes dart around the room. The young man is nearly paralyzed with fear as he sees a dark figure looming over him. His eyes begin to focus and he realizes it is merely a towel hanging from the top bunk of his bed. His heart does not slow down as the feeling of being watched is still present and has only

become more daunting.

The room has grown colder. The peaceful aura that was once in his room has up and gone. There is a sense of malevolence. The dreadful shuffling sound returns and Sebastian can tell it's coming from the room. The side of his bed sinks as if someone has sat down. A panic fills Sebastian as he feels the weight of someone sitting on him. His mouth opens in a silent scream. He attempts to move his body to throw the force off him. He cannot move. His muscles are stiff. He shakes his head violently, continuing his silent screams. Before he can begin to cry, the weight is lifted off of him. In seconds Sebastian is up and carrying his blankets out to the living room. The malevolent energy is still in the room. He goes to his mother and begs her to wake up. She does not even stir, and so the young man attempts to wake his father, but he has no luck with him either. Petrified and anxious, Sebastian curls up beside his mother and father and cowers beneath his sheets as if they will protect him. Inside the blanket the poor young man begins to pray. His mother, a heavy believer in the paranormal, told her son if he should ever encounter a spirit to leave it alone and pray that The Lord protect him. Never in his whole life had he expected to use his mother's advice and yet here he is, praying. After a few prayers, Sebastian musters up the courage to peek out from his blankets. His adrenaline levels have begun to fall and his fears subside. When he lifts the blanket an inch above his eye the first thing he sees is the small hallway that leads to his room. In the door frame of his room he can see the white outline of a man looking at him. Sebastian, paralyzed with fear, blankly stares back at the man. His shaky fingers move to cover his eyes. Just before Sebastian covers them, the outline grows two large eyes and a mouth. A smile spreads; a full set of white teeth appear and a bright red

tongue.

“You can’t win, Sebastian,” says the figure in a multitude of voices—high, deep, low, distorted.

Sebastian lets out a shaky whimper. His fingers are shaking next to his eyes. The figure begins to move again. And once again that awful noise starts. *Ssshhh, ssshhh, sssh.* Inch by inch the smile, the eyes, the tongue come closer. Sebastian shakes his head, closes his eyes and begins to pray and doesn’t stop. He doesn’t stop until sleep takes over his body. Until he can no longer see IT, hear IT, think of IT.

Later that morning, Sebastian wakes up to the sound of his mother’s voice.

“Victor, leave your brother alone,” she says in a hushed yell.

Despite her efforts to allow her son to sleep longer, Sebastian no longer can. He stretches his limbs and lifts off his blanket to show his mother that he is awake. She kindly looks down at him and says, “Did you have a nightmare? I was surprised to see you here.”

Sebastian nods his head, recalling what happened a few hours ago. The unsettling feeling he felt earlier rushes back as he looks past his mother and into his room. From that day forward, never again would he be able to stand the sound of shuffling feet. Never again.