

The Bedbugs

by strannikov

Cockroaches in bed was the last straw. Alicia was sure she'd swallowed one in the middle of the night, and the evidence of two more crawling under the covers with them in the morning was all the proof either needed or wanted.

After waking, John called an exterminator to fumigate the condo pronto. The young thin couple stripped the bed while they awaited the exterminator's arrival. "Shit! They're everywhere!" John groaned before loading the wash: he had to scoop out four dead roaches from the drum of the washing machine before pouring in extra bleach for good measure. Alicia shuddered and winced as she stumbled towards the kitchen.

The condo had not seemed so vermin-prone when they'd signed the lease six weeks earlier. The windows on the south and west gave lots of light in spite of the trees all around. The walls and ceilings had all been freshly painted, the carpet freshly shampooed. No spider webs, no nests, not a dead bug in sight, no scurrying roaches when cabinet doors opened suddenly in kitchen or bathroom.

Then, within a week of moving in: roaches, spiders, wasps, ants, and flies of various size with various aspects of menace. Then, the weekly visits from silverfish and millipedes in the bathroom. Then, actual slugs in the kitchen! But the worst, really only an undeniable reality the night of Alicia's suspected swallowing of an ugly roach, were the bedbugs. What a swarm! With all the itching and scratching, neither one had slept much in weeks, John and Alicia both had grown drawn and haggard. Co-workers had begun noticing how pale and listless each had become since their move. Alicia's own mother had failed to recognize her daughter one evening when she'd shown up to borrow a can of Raid (this was barely a week after the roaches had arrived). Since then, Alicia's eyes had acquired a weird light around the rims, John's eyes had irretrievably sunk into their sockets, in only weeks.

Have the bedbugs been here all along? John wondered once he got the sheets started in the wash. For two months almost? He had no appetite for breakfast and hadn't eaten much in days, Alicia was at least managing some juice but only after washing her glass by hand under extremely hot water for almost five minutes before cooling the glass down with cold water.

A van door slammed out front. "Samsa Exterminators? I didn't call them!" John fumed, looking at the man gathering his equipment from the van's rear. "Licia, get the door for a moment, I have to check the listing fast!" John stalked back to the bedroom to check, and Alicia opened the door slowly and awaited the end of the exterminator's climb up the stairs. "Thanks for coming so quick," she said with tired but sincere gratitude, not noticing or caring what the side of the van read.

No, I called Pee Cee Pest Control! Who's this Samsa guy? John wondered.

By the time he returned to the front room, the Samsa guy had donned a full-body plastic suit with a close-fitting ventilation helmet. "We don't have to leave while you spray? Are you sure?" Alicia questioned him. Just as John was about to ask whether Samsa's served as a sub-contractor for Pee Cee, the Samsa guy aimed a wand connected to a canister as tall as a large yellow fire extinguisher and sprayed John directly in the mouth, nose, and ears: blistering in pain on contact and neurotransmitters otherwise severely disrupted by the toxic spray, John collapsed in a quivering heap and was dead in less than two minutes. Alicia, gaping in disbelief, made an easy second target for the Samsa guy, who spun around to hose her with a lethal dose, and soon Alicia was out of her misery, too.

After bagging up John and Alicia and hauling them down to his van, the Samsa guy returned with his printed invoice: this job for Joe and Betty Bedbugz, this address, completed this date, payment due within thirty days. He left the bill on the dining table and locked the door behind him, then drove off with the carcasses of John and Alicia for disposal.

Joe and Betty were away for the day, shopping for new tenants: they were getting hungry again after a lean month.

-END-

