

On the white painted bolt of a door that is never opened, a thick line of tiny black grains — the dung of cockroaches.

They nest in the coffee filters, in the woven wicker shelves, and in the crack at the top of a door, where by flashlight you see the forest of moving legs.



Boats were scattered over the water near Dover Harbor at odd angles, like the cockroaches surprised in the kitchen at night before they move.

The youngest are so bright, so spirited, so willing.

He sees the hand coming down and runs the other way. There is too far to go, or he is not fast enough. At the same time we admire such a will to live.

I am alert to small moving things, and spin around toward a floating dust mote. I am alert to darker spots against a lighter background, but these are only the roses on my pillowcase.

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A new autumn stillness, in the evening. The windows of the neighborhood are shut. A chill sifts into the room from the panes of glass. Behind a cupboard door, they squat inside a long box eating spaghetti.

The stillness of death. When the small creature does not move away from the lowering hand.

We feel respect for such nimble rascals, such quick movers, such clever thieves.

From inside a white paper bag comes the sound of a creature scratching — one creature, I think. But when I empty the bag, a crowd of them scatter from the heel of rye bread, like rye seeds across the counter, like raisins.

Fat, half grown, with a glossy dark back, he stops short in his headlong rush and tries a few other moves almost simultaneously, a bumper car jolting in place on the white drainboard.

Here in the crack at the top of the door, moving on their legs, they are in such numbers conscious of us behind our flashlight beam.

It is in his moment of hesitation that you sense him as an intelligent creature. Between his pause and his change of direction, you are sure, there is a quick thought.

They eat, but leave no mark of eating, we think. Yet here in the leaf edge, little crescent shapes — their gradual bites.

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He is like a thickened shadow. See how the shadow at the crack of a window thickens, comes out from the wall, and moves off!

In the cardboard trap, five or six of them are stuck — frozen at odd angles, alive with an uncanny stillness, in this box like a child's miniature theater.

How kindly I feel toward another species of insect in the house! Its gauzy wings! Its confusion! Its blundering walk down the lampshade! It doesn't think to run away!

At the end of the meal, the cheeses were brought. All white except the Roquefort, they lay scattered over the board at odd angles, like cows grazing or ships at sea.

After a week, I take a forgotten piece of bread from the oven where they have visited — now it is dry, a bit of brown lace.

The white autumn light in the afternoon. They sleep behind a child's drawings on the kitchen wall. I tap each piece of paper and they burst out from the edges of pictures that are already filled with shooting stars, missiles, machine guns, land mines ...