Xenology

By James Bezerra

Even the cockroaches had grown skeptical. Discussions began taking place in quiet cabals behind the refrigerator. Conditions had been improving out there, they knew, but The Resident still was not working. Fewer resumes had been sent in recent weeks. No interviews had been scheduled in months. Plates and bowls were being washed right away now because this provided The Resident with some diversion since the cable and internet had been cut. Older roaches told stories in the weak green light thrown by the microwave clock; stories of stacked dishes, of full trash cans, of cereal boxes left open on the counter in morning haste. Quiet and and lazy and easy had the days been when the apartment was theirs and theirs alone for eight or ten or even twelve uninterrupted hours. Lives were lived fully then, and contentedly, calmly. Abdomens swelled and glistened proudly in the quick scurry spaces between shadows, then.

Xenology sometimes breeds odd loyalty. Geriatrics were able to feast on their memories and were willing to wait patiently for the abundant times to return. Bent old legs. Mandibles which ached with age. These things encouraged them to hope because hope can sometimes sate hunger. Hope is easier than exodus.

Reconnaissance missions were launched though and did find more promising lands beyond the walls. Intrepid homesteaders set out, stittering carefully up cliffs of

sharp pink insulation. Some of them still couldn't stand to leave though. Younger generations - who had only ever known hunger - felt no pangs at all about the journey out.

With a growing sense of desperation, those that remained behind began to venture further from the empty pantry shelves. Just an old grain of rice under the microwave or flake of broken ramen noodle under the stovetop would have sustained them. Zigzagging out across the carpet exposed them to great danger, but there were hysterical stories of crumbs in the sofa. Keeping calm became difficult, keeping their hope was even harder. Very few of them lived through those lean times. Unemployed, The Resident had the time to hunt them.

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