

Traps

by michael larkin

You see the mouse glue board that your exterminator with the cliché of a butt crack creeping over his drawers has left in the pantry next to your cereal box, and you experience a brief dropping of the Adam's apple into your gut at finding something there first thing in the morning, only to discover the false alarm of a chocolate chip stuck to the panel, and you wonder how you mistook something so small for a rodent. You must be tired.

The previous day, your exterminator shook his head at the piles of brown bags under your kitchen sink and said, "This won't do. This is mouse nesting city down here," while placing a second sticky placard of death amongst your pipes and ending your hopes of saving the planet by conserving

your exterminator stared at you blankly as if you were an idiot and said, "Just throw it away," presumably meaning into one of your brown bags with which you were going to save the world before you bagged the bags at your exterminator's request.

Seeing now the helpless flexing and twitching and the bulbous black eyes that sense death and hope for a last-minute salvation, a salvation that will not come even if you wanted to grab his broken leg and peel him loose (which you don't), you hate your exterminator for expecting you to leave this gray hopeless being lingering alive in your garbage until his ticker peters out from the perpetual pulse of worry, and you hate yourself for calling the oafish bastard in the first place. You find yourself

brown bags, which was a silly notion anyway since the underside of your sink has come to resemble nothing if not your own personal landfill.

Duly disabused of your environmentalist notions and your mirages of Tollhouse mice, you turn from your rodent-free cereal box and spy the real mousy deal shivering on no-pest strip number three behind your grease-riddled oven, and it appears the small grey Jerry—who is indeed larger than a chocolate chip in real life—has shat himself. He's still squirming a little against the sticky panel, trying to pull free, one toothpick leg pulled up lame in a wave of the mucous-colored goo, and with his charcoal black feces spattering his fear out behind him, the words that come to mind for you are indignity and pity, which go sonorously with the other words that occur, which are itty and bitty. You are remembering now asking the exterminator about what to do in the event of just such a capture, since the landing pads of slow torture are equipped with neither poison nor fast-snapping steel arms that would end everything quickly, and how

glad that your exterminator is damned to his cliché butt crack, a crack you may be damned to yourself if you keep up with your diet of falafels and twice-greased french fries and nightly whiskey sours. Still in your bathrobe and slippers, you take the little fella, sprawled on his death pad, out onto your patio and put him inside one of your last remaining brown bags—one you've been saving for Armageddon—and with a couple of sharp blows from a spade, your bag starts seeping through in mouse blood and you're wondering if ol' butt crack would call this act humane.

You might say a few words if you were a religious sort, but you're not, and you soon have to admit you're simultaneously relieved and angry: relieved that the only rodent near your Rice Krispies is merely a chocolate chip that resembles one, and angry that your exterminator has left you holding the bag, in the literal and the figurative sense, and that ultimately the responsibility is all yours for reducing the mouse to this dubious state of grace.

• • •

Michael Larkin's fiction has appeared recently in journals such as Cimarron Review, Other Voices and Natural Bridge. He regrets that all readers don't have the exquisite literary taste of Kitchen Sink's editors. "Regret" is derived from the Old French regreter, which apparently translates as "to bewail the dead"; sometimes, that sounds about right to him.