



# *The Ladyroach*

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Animals, Fable

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*5 min read*

Once upon a time, there was a little cockroach who lived in the pipes and dark corners underneath an apartment building. The particular apartment where she lived had been left unoccupied for some time so she was free to explore it as she wished. Still, her mother always warned her to be careful as a human would surely kill her if she were spotted, so she would only venture into their parts of the building after dark.

One evening she was exploring the bathroom, when the light came on suddenly and she went scuttling for shelter. From her hiding place behind the shower curtain she saw a young man. She had never seen a human so closely before in the light and she was struck by his handsomeness. He briskly entered the bathroom, looked around, grimaced slightly at the dirtiness of the place and then walked out, switching the light off again. She followed him into the living room where he was busy taking things out of a big backpack. Out came some clothes which he left on the sofa, a single set of knives and forks which he left on the solitary table. The cockroach watched with fascination.

After this, he took out several large canvases, some blank, some covered in colors. He started holding the colorful ones up against the wall. Finally he took out a set of paints and brushes which he left on the table. Clearly this handsome young man was a painter, although to the little cockroach, this was all new.

Over the next week, she would watch him spreading paint over the canvases, layering colors in thick splodges,

creating a whole series of images. She knew she shouldn't stay watching, but she couldn't help herself. She felt captivated by his beautiful face and the magical way he produced pictures out of nothing.

She watched him assemble piles of objects, an orange, a candle, the sheet from his bed, a lamp, and paint them. She watched him paint plants in a pot. Whatever he chose to paint, fruit, clothes, the remains of his lunch, he would recreate in a festival of colors. The little cockroach found herself wishing that she herself could become the object of his art.

One day, a ladybug flew in through the open window of the living room. The little insect landed on the table next to the handsome man's paint palette. "Be careful, little beauty!" he cried, and within a second was offering his hand to the ladybug. The insect proceeded to walk on it, leisurely exploring the breadth of his palm without fear.

The cockroach was amazed at the gentleness of the man. She had never known humans could be so kind. She watched as the man placed the ladybug upon the little green plant he kept in a pot. He proceeded to paint them, the red of the ladybug contrasting brightly with the green of the potted plant. At the end he had achieved a lovely little painted study.

With that, he again held out his hand to the ladybug like a gentleman. She walked across his palm to the edge of his index finger, opened her wings and flew away, back out of the window. "Goodbye my little friend," he said.

Oh how the cockroach wished she could be that ladybug instead of the ugly creature she was. How she cursed her misfortune to be born into such a body, so close to the ladybug in many ways, but so, so different in others. If only there were a way she could hide her hideous nature.

That night after the handsome young man had turned off the light, the cockroach went close to admire the picture of the ladybug. The image was a lot larger than in reality and dwarfed her completely. As she approached the canvas she reached out to touch it and found that the red came away on her foot. It had been painted with thick oils and still hadn't dried. Looking down at the bright red on her foot gave her an idea.

She reached out and touched the painting again, taking away a larger dollop of red paint. Gently she rubbed it over her own back, covering the area where one day her wings would grow. Soon her entire back was covered

in red. She then took some of the black from the picture and while looking back at her own reflection in a glass on the table, carefully added two spots to her back, one either side. She was so little that there was only room for the two.

She looked back at herself in the glass. Now she appeared very much like a ladybug, and just as cute too. She returned to her dark corner, to wait until the break of dawn and give her time to let the paint dry a little

The next morning, the cockroach watched the man pick up a fresh canvas and take his seat at the table. After taking a deep breath, she walked towards him and took a step onto the blank canvas.

“Hello little one, would you like to be painted too?” he said, smiling. He reached out his finger and let the insect walk upon it. She stayed there on the end of his finger, while he made a study of her. Though he expected that she would fly away eventually, she waiting patiently, allowing him to make a detailed painting of her.

The cockroach was overjoyed. Little did the handsome young man know the pleasure it gave her to be painted and that she couldn't have flown away even if she wanted to. As a young cockroach, her wings were still growing and wouldn't support her weight until adulthood.

After the painting was finished, he was amazed to see that still his new friend didn't seem to want to leave. He gently laid her down on the potted plant. Then he took out a packet of raisins and left a couple in the pot as he had heard that ladybugs enjoy these.

That evening before he turned off the light, he said good night to the ladybug, expecting her to be gone in the morning. But she did not want to leave. She was feeling now quite in love with the handsome young man. However, she noticed that over the course of the day, the colors on her back had begun to smudge. So while he slept, she repainted herself, using leftover oils that he had in his palette.

The following morning he was delighted to see that his ladybug was still there. She kept him company all day as he continued with his work. He gave her some drops of honey to eat and again she posed for him, fascinated by the process. In the evening he wished her goodnight.

From here on it became a habit. Every day, she would walk up to him and he'd lift her on his little finger. “Why do you never fly away?” he would ask, but of course she could not reply. Each new still life he painted, he would

add somewhere the image of her. At night she would let him go to sleep before sneaking away to retouch her back with the leftover paint.

In all that time she never returned to see her family, so entranced was she by her new love. After much time had passed they gave up thinking about her, assuming that she must have been eaten by a bird or crushed by a human. The life of a cockroach is short and there is little spare time to waste on those who leave the safety of the nest.

In those same months, the cockroach continued to grow. At first the handsome young man didn't realize that it was happening. But over time he couldn't help but see little changes. One day he looked down and noticed that she had an additional two spots where she had painted them to make use of her larger shell.

As time went on, these spots increased until she had seven in total. The painter denied it completely, he just couldn't bear to admit that the tiny insect was getting bigger, that his sweet little love was not as tiny and perfect as she had first seemed.

One day one of his friends came to visit the painter and meet his new muse. "That's not a ladybug," the friend cried, "it's far too big!"

This made the handsome young man furious. He denied it and demanded his friend leave. He couldn't accept the truth. The cockroach saw this and started to worry. She knew that she was still not fully grown and could probably end up double her current size. She painted and repainted her shell, but she couldn't hide the truth, nor her increasingly long legs, or her extended antenna.

Doubts started to fill the mind of the painter, his great affection transforming into fear and anxiety. He found himself endlessly wondering and questioning, maybe she was not what he had thought. It gnawed away at him and he regretted shouting at his friend. After several sleepless nights, he realized the only way to be sure would be to trap and show her to someone else.

One day the painter leaned out his hand and the cockroach stepped upon it as normal. Then suddenly, in a quick motion, she found herself being placed into transparent plastic container on which he then secured a lid that had several little holes in it for the insect to breathe.

There was no way for her to escape, but more importantly, there was no way for her to be able to repaint her shell. She remained there trapped overnight staring sadly through the plastic at her love and wondering why he was treating her this way. By the morning, much of the paint was smudging against the walls of her prison.

He brought her to meet his friends. They took one look at the now not so small insect in the container and jeered at him. "It's not a ladybug, it's a cockroach!!" "Couldn't you see that before?" It was then that the painter woke up to the true horror. His muse was a cockroach. He felt ashamed of his folly, what a fool he had been, to love something so disgusting and dirty.

From inside her container, the cockroach could only stare at the cruel faces surrounding her, laughing and pointing. She saw the horrified expression of the painter, his face turning away from her.

In all the commotion, someone knocked the plastic container out of his hand and it tumbled to the floor, the lid being knocked off in the process. She grabbed her opportunity to escape. Scuttling out, she heard the stamping of heavy feet around her and the screeches of the humans.

As she raced along she thought for the first time of her wings. Never had she wished to use them before, but surely now was the moment. She spread them out and took off into the air, away from her persecutors, and away from her love.

Into the sky she flew, a terrible sadness in her heart. From up in the air the humans themselves looked like insects, before disappearing completely. If only she hadn't grown, if only she could have stayed young forever.

Through her tears she found herself laughing at the bitter irony of it all. Those same adult wings that had ruined everything were saving her. Wings to fly and now nowhere to go, only away from her love and her youth.

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