

Five Stories

Lydia Davis

THE MICE

MICE LIVE IN OUR WALLS but do not trouble our kitchen. We are pleased but cannot understand why they do not come into our kitchen where we have traps set, as they come into the kitchens of our neighbors. Although we are pleased, we are also upset, because the mice behave as though there were something wrong with our kitchen. What makes this even more puzzling is that our house is much less tidy than the houses of our neighbors. There is more food lying about in our kitchen, more crumbs on the counters and filthy scraps of onion kicked against the base of the cabinets. In fact, there is so much loose food in the kitchen I can only think the mice themselves are defeated by it. In a tidy kitchen, it is a challenge for them to find enough food night after night to survive until spring. They patiently hunt and nibble hour after hour until they are satisfied. In our kitchen, however, they are faced with something so out of proportion to their experience that they cannot deal with it. They might venture out a few steps, but soon the overwhelming sights and smells drive them back into their holes, uncomfortable and embarrassed at not being able to scavenge as they should.

THE OUTING

An outburst of anger near the road, a refusal to speak on the path, a silence in the pine woods, a silence across the old railroad bridge, an attempt to be friendly in the water, a refusal to end the argument on the flat stones, a cry of anger on the steep bank of dirt, a weeping among the bushes.

ODD BEHAVIOR

You see how circumstances are to blame. I am not really an odd person if I put more and more small pieces of shredded kleenex in my ears and tie a scarf around my head: when I lived alone I had all the silence I needed.

FEAR

Nearly every morning, a certain woman in our community comes running out of her house with her face white and her overcoat flapping wildly. She cries out, "Emergency, emergency," and one of us runs to her and holds her until her fears are calmed. We know she is making it up; nothing has really happened to her. But we understand, because there is hardly one of us who has not been moved at some time to do just what she has done, and every time, it has taken all our strength, and even the strength of our friends and families too, to quiet us.

LOST THINGS

They are lost, but also not lost but somewhere in the world. Most of them are small, though two are larger, one a coat and one a dog. Of the small things, one is a certain ring, one a certain button. They are lost from me and where I am, but they are also not gone. They are somewhere else, and they are there to someone else, it may be. But if not there to someone else, the ring is, still, not lost to itself, but there, only not where I am, and the button, too, there, still, only not where I am.