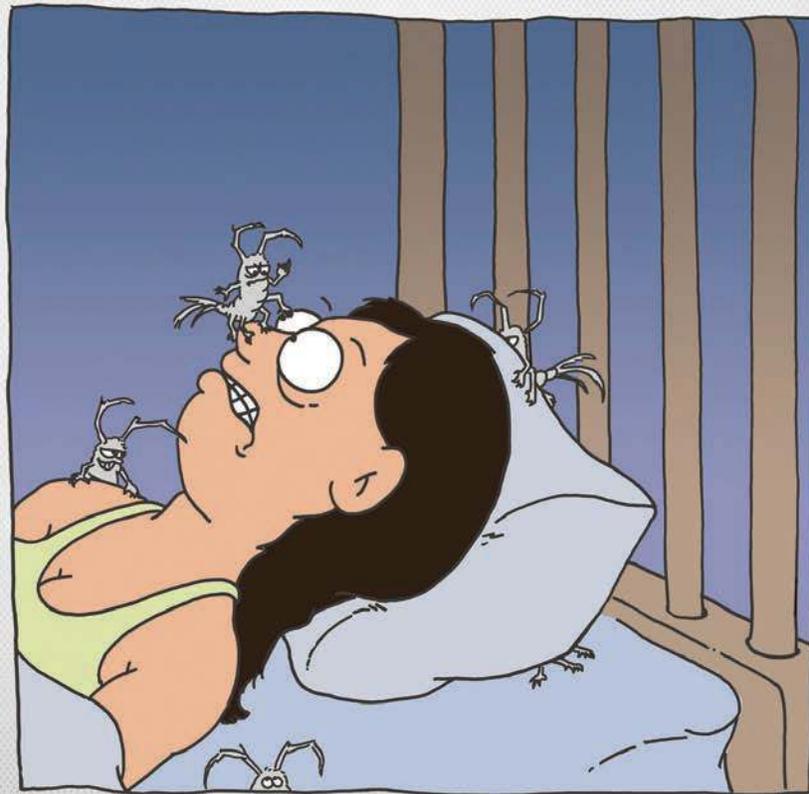


ATTACK OF THE  
**SILVERFISH**



ALISON RAND

**One woman's journey through the insufferable world of apartment extermination.**

**W**e all have issues, and phobias, right? Mine happens to be "Entomophobia," an extreme and persistent fear of insects. I can tell you that my fear and sheer panic of bugs may be innate having stemmed from early childhood. That might explain my feelings of trauma whenever I see a bug inside my house. Or at least that is what I tell myself when sheer dread seeing a bug causes my insides to burn and makes me feel like I need to move out.

It may have begun when I was not much older than a baby. I remember when I was only about two years old, my older brother would be giving me a bath. If I saw anything in the water, I would say "speck, speck" and my brother would laugh. I think I may have imagined that this black speck in the bath water might be a bug. He and I would splash the water and away went the black speck.

When I was six years old my mother took me and my siblings to Florida for a week's vacation. At the hotel, I was in the bathroom taking a shower and when I was done, I opened a large plush towel on the towel rack and a huge palmetto bug flew out of it right at me! "Mommy, HEELLP!" I screamed! My mom screamed! The bug screamed. A palmetto bug is like a large cockroach with wings. The hotel staff got rid of it, thank goodness. I never forgot that and still to this day, every time I open a large bathroom towel, I think of that palmetto bug flying right towards my face

I vividly recall in my first apartment living on my own in NYC I opened a closet door late one night, and out popped a huge, crusty water bug. I must have been three inches long. In shock, I reacted by covering it with a glass as I frantically called my mother in Florida at eleven P.M. She laughed because really, what could she do so far away but she did try to calm me down?! My mother couldn't tolerate bugs either and would always yell out to my step-father to come get them. She was lucky she had him! In this situation it was the doorman of the building that came to my rescue. So perhaps I was born with the fear of bugs gene.

When I moved to my current apartment, a lovely residence near the Hudson River in NYC, I never saw a bug for years. I love my home and maintain it perfectly. Then one night about seven years ago, out of the blue, while on the phone, I saw a bug whisk across my kitchen floor. I tried to be calm and told myself, "I can get it. I can do it." I immediately took a wad of paper towels and whacked it. "Whew," I said, feeling very proud of my accomplishment. "O.K., it was one bug. Don't worry, Alison," I said to myself. The bug turned out to be a silverfish. It was relatively small, without wings and with a silvery grey color. They are fast marathoners, running and escaping in record time making them very difficult to catch.

Then a few minutes later there was another one, and then another - all scurrying around my kitchen floor! As soon as I would kill one, another crept out of nowhere. Where were they coming from?! It was like I was in my own horror movie. A Twilight Zone that was happening to me. The only thing I could think of causing this infestation was that my downstairs neighbor had been doing a huge gut renovation. So not only was the noise an irritant for months, but now it opened up a passageway from hell for the silverfish to escape and come get me.

I remember it was a Friday night and the building Supervisor was off. I begged the doorman to give me the name of the building's exterminator, but no one answered the phone. I sent an urgent email begging for help to quickly "fix" my problem.

I began to research silverfish manifestations on the internet and to my dismay and horror, found that they were extremely difficult to control and get rid of. Apparently, they like the glue inside wall paper and I was shocked to see a section of my kitchen wall paper was a tad loose. Oh my God! How would I survive the weekend knowing that there were bugs coming out of the walls?!

My body was in a complete panic as I broke out in a sweat and I knew I needed to take an Ativan to try and sleep. I had a fitful night's sleep with one eye open the entire night, thinking silverfish were coming out of my bedroom walls and would invade me right there in my bed. I thought I felt them crawling on me during the night. I was a mess. I didn't leave my bedroom the rest of that long night. That next morning, I had to take a deep breath to look inside the kitchen, creeping silently around the corner of the kitchen like a trained spy, praying that I would not see anything moving on the floor.

I lost my breath..... There was a steady swarm of silverfish, maybe dozens, on my kitchen floor! There were so many moving about that it looked like the floor was moving on its own, from side to side. My heart was beating way too fast and I immediately closed the door to the kitchen. This was an infestation. How could I survive until I got an exterminator? I immediately went out and bought a cheap can of bug spray, knowing it was only a temporary fix, while trying to keep my elderly chocolate poodle, Alba, out of the kitchen until the exterminator came.

The following week my first exterminator came. He was not very interested in my distress and offered to pour a chemical liquid all over the kitchen floor to kill the silverfish. "I have a dog," I said. "What do I do with my dog?" The exterminator, a burly unpleasant man said, "you have to keep your dog out of the kitchen for two days until it completely dries."

"What?" I said. "No, I can't do that." Besides I had read that this is not the correct way to get rid of silverfish. He then suggested using white wine vinegar because they hate the smell. So, I rushed out to buy it knowing it would not hurt Alba, and squirted it all over the floor. The vinegar didn't appear to deter them. In a few hours I witnessed a silverfish looking like it was splashing about, having fun in its own private vinegar pool. Then, I found a silverfish on my living room

rug and went crazy. I was afraid to be anywhere except in my bedroom until this was solved.

I would make dinner in the kitchen in a constant state of anxiety and bring it into my bedroom to eat. My imagination was wild with images of bugs all over the place. Before trying to go to sleep at night, when I closed my eyes, I saw a collage of silverfish in a pattern in the dark. Was I going nuts?

By chance I had an appointment with my eye doctor and when he asked me how everything was, I blurted out my silverfish horror story and asked if he knew a good exterminator. He gave me the name of another exterminating company that he had used for a roach problem and immediately got in touch with the president of the company. He offered to come for an exorbitant fee and I agreed out of desperation.

When the head of the exterminator company arrived, my body was shaking in fear of what he might find. He needed to look inside the cabinets in the kitchen as well as inside my bedroom closet, my most sacred place. He didn't find anything but did tell me that the only way to try and get rid of these horrid things was to put a powder inside the walls. He said there must be cracks or openings inside the walls allowing the silverfish to escape, but there was no way of knowing unless I got a contractor to rip out my cabinets to see behind the wall. I couldn't fathom going through that financially as well as emotionally.

I agreed to pay him to have one of his exterminators come and put this white powder into the walls. The man he sent was heavy and unshaven. "Any coffee in the house?" he said. "Excuse me?" I said. "Could you please just put the powder in the walls?" I said irritated. What was he thinking that this was a social call to schmooze over coffee about silverfish?

He used a screwdriver to make a slight hole in the wall and took out this humongous long piece of equipment, what looked like a foot-long hypodermic needle filled with this toxic white powder to kill the silverfish. He said whatever bugs were in the walls would slowly creep out and die on the floor. My God, I was in a horror movie! How would I ever get through this? Alba was so good and adaptable, quickly understating that her meals and wee-wee pads were in a corner of the living room now and the kitchen was no longer a joyous place to go. Why couldn't I be more like Alba?

The next morning, I found dozens of dead silverfish, spread out all over the floor in a bad design with five still slowly dying. I don't know who was squirming more

– me, them, or Alba. I got my wad of paper towels and delivered them to their final resting place in the garbage. The head of the company explained that I will need to get this done every three months. “Ohhh Hell Nooo!!!” I said. I was no longer able to be at peace in my own home because I was constantly looking at the floor of my kitchen for disgusting bugs dashing about. I’d be frantically counting down the days till his next visit.

Not only had it already cost me \$850.00 but I would need to repeat this every three months?! The financial aspect was bad enough but my mind was worse. My home had become a hot bed of silverfish living in my walls. I couldn’t get that visual out of my mind. I was being tortured.

I seriously thought about moving but I knew that wasn’t realistic. What would I do? I couldn’t stand the visual of turning on the kitchen lights and seeing the creepy silverfish look up at me and run. So, I decided to keep one of the kitchen lights on all the time at night, until Alba and I went to bed so at least the bugs wouldn’t be startled and startle me even more.

Like clockwork every 2 ½ months, I would see the bugs running across my kitchen floor as I begin to shake in fear and distress. I called the expensive exterminating company for my next visit with an exterminator. This was a different man, another heavy-set guy who did his job of putting the screw driver into the wall behind the stove and the dishwasher and then squirting inside the walls the toxic white powder, but his smile lingered a bit too long, making me feel uncomfortable that he wanted to stay and chat about his work. I just wanted him to do his job and leave me in my state of misery.

My trauma and fear of seeing these silverfish enveloped and controlled my life. I thought about them every day and night. I still kept the lights on in the kitchen at night time until Alba and I went to sleep and again, in about 2 ½ months, one or two or three would straggle inside my kitchen floor and I would fall apart, all over again. I called the company and this time they sent a thin and very pleasant exterminator. I was almost in tears when he rang the doorbell because I had also seen a silverfish that morning on the kitchen’s radiator. They were moving up. After making the necessary holes in the wall, he squirted white powder behind the stove and behind the dishwasher and put an animal and child friendly liquid on the sides of the kitchen floor for extra security. He charged me \$250 but said, “You’re being ripped off.” He told me he was feeling bad due to my problem and witnessing my palpable stress, offered to come in between his other jobs, charging me much less. He was my new best friend.

So, the months passed with no relief. Every two and a half months almost to the day, the silverfish returned and I would shake with my misery until the nice exterminator would come back and do his job. Finally, I decided that I had to have a contractor remove my kitchen cabinets to see what lurked behind them. I could no longer live in this crazy manner. What he found were huge holes that no one had ever covered or fixed. One was over six inches long along with other smaller holes throughout the wall. Hallelujah, maybe this was the answer. Alba and I had to move out for a few days as the contractor filled in all the holes and replaced the cabinets. Once we returned home, I was living on tinder hooks longing to never see these disgusting creatures again.

I had to have the nice exterminator return for one more shot of the white powder. I was ready to pray to the exterminator gods to finally get my life back to normal so I could relax in my own home again.

My relief from not actually seeing one in the kitchen was allowing my body to begin to relax even though my home no longer felt like my safe space. I continued to cook dinner in the kitchen with trepidation and then retire to my bedroom leaving the kitchen light on until bedtime. Every morning as I entered the kitchen for my coffee, I held my breath as I looked on the floor, until I didn't see anything running. Then one morning, foggy-eyed I entered the kitchen eager for my super strong cup of coffee. I sat on one of the two kitchen stools sipping my needed first cup as I felt Alba's whiskers rubbing my leg, her cue that she wanted me to begin throwing her toy. YIKES! It wasn't Alba. It was a silverfish hurrying across my leg. Working on adrenaline, I swatted it with my napkin, and then my body froze with revulsion as I called my exterminator friend. He said he would come back and check it out.

This time my wonderful handyman, pulled the stove out from the wall and like Columbo looked at every crevice and inch of the wall with a flashlight finding two more small holes. I was aghast. Why hadn't the contractor seen those holes? I certainly paid him enough to do this demolition carefully. Plus, it was unmistakable how upset I was from my bug problem that had lasted years.

This time seemed to be the charm. I was free of the silverfish for about two years with only a few maintenance visits by the nice exterminator, just to be sure. I still thought about them every day and continued to leave the kitchen light on until bedtime. This ordeal had become part of my DNA, I feared. Sadly, during this time, my beloved dog Alba had died and I now have a new wonderful and loving small black mini poodle, named Dea or Goddess in Italian. Dea loved compa-

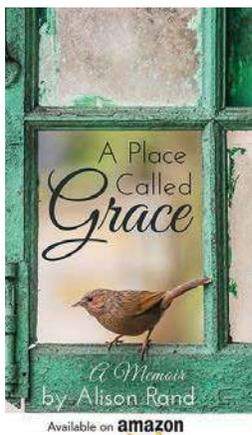
ny and when the exterminator was at my apartment, for my maintenance "fix" showed love and affection.

At times, I was O.K. while brushing Dea's teeth on the kitchen floor without too much stress that a silverfish would whisk on by. After all, I had been free and clear for a few years. Then last week, entering the kitchen needing my super strong cup of coffee, Dea beat me there, thirsty for some water. To my horror, there was a silverfish swimming in her water bowl doing the side-stroke. I got to Dea before she swallowed it and with my wad of paper towels picked it out of the bowl and got rid of it.

My exterminator friend was now retired and living out of state so I had no choice but to try my building's exterminator again, who seven years ago had no idea how to treat and kill the silverfish. To my amazement, this time I was told that they too now used the white toxic powder inside the walls.

The exterminator came and was the best of all of them. He was friendly and knowledgeable and came with an even longer looking syringe as he shot the white powder into the wall for 20 seconds, in various places, behind the stove and the dishwasher. Best of all there was no fee because it was part of the building's contract.

Still, every morning as I enter the kitchen longing for my first cup of coffee, I continue to look for something running around the floor. Sometimes, I give myself a pat on the back for sticking it out but wonder why my reaction continues to be so strong. I have gone through a number of serious health issues without this kind of fear! But I feel I am adapting more and more even though Dea and I may not equally share a blissful experience in the kitchen; for me it is back to being tolerable which is pretty remarkable given my suffering from entomophobia. Or is it innate?



*Read more of Alison's stories at [aplacecalledgracebook.com](http://aplacecalledgracebook.com)*