

Brown Bugs



Actually it was only one bug. But if you had seen my friend abruptly pulling away from the table, you too would have thought an entire army of brown beetles was invading our coffee tray.

The bug had a strange resemblance to a deer. Maybe it was the way it stalked across the rainbow-coloured tray, its long legs more like antlers that tested the air, before taking the next step, its mantle a soft brown.

I wonder what had lured this beetle away from its leafy shade to our patch of sun-lit grass. The creature certainly did not look at home crawling from the yellow stripe to the orange one, stopping confused in the red. Hesitating every step, it crossed into purple and then into blue. Finally it reached the edge, clambered over the rim and scuttled away.

Where to? A place that was mainly brown, I suppose. Where it could not be seen by preying eyes. Its solid mantle was clearly not made for change, for adapting to other colours. It was probably this inability to blend into the new surroundings that had made the beetle look so utterly vulnerable stalking across the plastic rainbow.

Standing out from the background always implies a risk for an insect, a zebra, or us humans, if we lack the surroundings that allow us to merge into the masses. Can you imagine what it must feel like for an African in a swimming pool in Switzerland? Every movement of his is up for inspection and evaluation, not a step goes unnoticed. There is no place for him to disappear into the undergrowth of dark-skinned brothers and sisters. He is as vulnerable as our brown bug crossing from yellow to green.

published in *New Roots*, Fall 1995