

A note from a six-legged chap whose heart was small, but nonetheless had room for both sorrow and the desire for an extraordinary revenge . . .

THE TUNNEL

by C. Brian Kelly

TODAY MY FRIEND WENT STARK raving mad.

So, while debating whether to laugh or cry, while not knowing what else to do, I thought it would be appropriate to make a note or two of my life these past few months, the slow months that have dragged on since the death of my beloved Theresa.

This, you might say, will be a statement, of sorts, for posterity. And, for Theresa.

First, I should explain about myself. I have six legs, and a mean set of choppers. My appetite is both vociferous and indiscriminate. I am slim as a crack, wide as a button—in short, a cockroach.

But, no ordinary cockroach. Since *it* happened, everything for me has changed. That night, when crawling about in our "friend's" home laboratory, Theresa and I were spotted by him, were doused by a liquid from a test tube of his, and were smitten by the fire that leaped from the solution—she to

the death and I to the verge. And my world was changed. No more of the sink drains, the coffee grounds and fellow bugs, or the tired talk, the low goals, the drab life, thought I. In the succeeding dawn's light (which played fitfully upon her stark, stiff legs), the breath of life slipped back into me, and with it purpose, intent, reason! Revenge became my theme, my "friend" the target.

I opened my campaign that day, and thus a life of drama and adventure, capped by victory, began.

The first time was in a cafeteria. I jumped off his collar, danced crazily across his neck and raced down the spine. At the belt-line, I slipped through a small hole in his shirt and retired to a side pocket of his jacket. The same day, in a bus, I ran up and down the calf of his leg five times. He howled in rage.

It took only a few days of this before he realized, and began

speaking aloud to me—as would a man chained to a hated enemy. It was fascinating, his growls and grumbles, his intimate, hateful asides. All of them sure signs of my progress, I knew.

Stepping up the campaign, I unnerved him further with tantalizing glimpses of me. The first time, while he was shaving before the mirror, I exposed myself upon his ear. By the time the hand came swooping up for me, I had dropped into a bathrobe pocket on the side. (Great things, side pockets!)

He countered with Turkish baths, quick trips to while-you-wait suit cleaners, dips at the Y, new clothes and similar tricks. Naturally, however, he never sent his shoes, or for that matter his wallet, to the cleaners.

Then, movies became a torture to him. The darkness was my friend. On dates with young women, I made him senseless with anger, a useless, tense wreck, by dancing through his hair in the moonlight. Finally, humming a song of Theresa, I disrupted his sleep by crawling on his nose or skipping along his eyelids.

His acquaintances remarked his pallor. Circles under his eyes caused comment. He developed the shakes, people talked behind his back. His best girl left him.

I added a colorful touch more recently. At the laboratory where he worked I crawled into a mess of

green dye one day. Thereafter, I allowed him several times to see me with that green tint about me, that he might know he was dealing with one cockroach, and one alone. "Very clever," was his comment the first morning he saw me thus.

So life went, empty without my Theresa, but in a way completely new, dangerous and purposeful. True, there was less to eat. True, my own nerves became somewhat frayed. But I knew it was worth it.

And, I was getting quite an education. Peeping over his shoulder at work, at restaurants, in the bus or at home, I learned to read. I picked up phrases from the medical tracks he pursued in his work as a chemist and amateur anatomist. From his readings I became a bit of an expert myself in cranial studies. Also, I even learned the salient points in his research studies on anaesthetics.

In fact, it was when I realized that a combination of my already jazzed-up body fluids and some of his new compounds would make a fine anaesthetic that there came the idea for the finishing touch, the coup de grace. And none too soon at that!

I ate the chemicals one afternoon, and that night, while still assimilating, I went to work as he slept. It was slow and painstaking. A nibble here, a tiny gouge there. What with the secretion I

had worked up, he never felt a thing.

But, it's been exhausting. I had to take such care in the work! A slip would be fatal, I knew well. Most of the work had to be done at night. During the day I kept after him in the usual way, to avoid arousing his suspicions.

Every morning I dragged myself into position on his left ear as he shaved. Each time by a closer margin I managed to escape when he tried to clap his hand over my pale green body. At the office and lab, I dogged his arms, belly, back and neck. At night, the important work was continued.

And today, not a moment too soon, it was finished! What luck, for only last evening I learned of his plan to rid himself of me forever!

I heard him talking on the telephone. (He never did realize I might understand him.) He was talking with a chemist friend who apparently had agreed to fumigate my "friend's" total possessions. Oh, they had cooked up a thorough scheme! My "friend" had arranged to have himself completely shaved, knocked out and dipped into a vat of weak acid

solution. He was to breath through a rubber hose while I drowned in the acid. That failing, he was to be placed several succeeding hours in an airtight room saturated by killing vapors. He was to wear an oxygen device while he waited for me to choke.

It was a fiendish scheme, but I fixed that!

This morning he began to shave as usual. He glanced into the mirror with a smart smirk, sure his plan would get rid of me today. As he expected, I was there—perched on his left ear lobe, a green and also secretly smiling spot.

I turned and ran. His hand came up in a mighty swat. Slap! He boxed his ear. But I was already inside. He shouted a wild thing when he saw me plunge into the ear.

A moment later, while he was still staring into the mirror, I pulled myself free from the far end of the tunnel I had so laboriously constructed. That's the moment he went mad, the instant he saw the green spot again.

Naturally, it was I—poised this time on the lobe of his *right* ear.

