

Pond Life

A short story of about 9,130 words set mostly in Southgate in North London. A horror story for Halloween, involving the strange friends Tim made on Twitter and the..... But I'm getting ahead of the story.

If he'd listened to Delphine none of it might have happened. But who does listen to BDSM junkies on the internet ?

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"Morning everyone, it's a cool rainy morning in Muswell Hill."

Tim Stevens blinked a few times to clear the early morning gunk from his eyes. He read his first post of the new day and quite liked it, and best of all no typos. At one time he'd just typed any old crap and hit return. The occasional daft pre-coffee spelling was good for his Twitter persona. Then Maxwell had started to tease him about being a freelance writer who'd spelt Muswell Hill wrong three times in a single week. Anyone else and he'd have put their posts on mute for a while, but Maxwell was one of his Twitter support group, his inner circle. Plus he was an account for someone's pet cat and he wasn't going to have a pet cat throwing shade at his spelling.

"Yeah looks fine." He muttered.

He pressed the return key and waited. Sometimes a few of his friends were online, sometimes it took them until ten to face the horrors of Monday.

"Same here in Crawley." Said Eat The Rich.

Everyone had their own 'thing' on Twitter, from pictures of kittens to trying to overthrow the establishment. Eat The Rich was an old school anarchist. There was even a list on his blog naming those first against the wall after the great revolution. He was also quite keen on Veganism.

"Still moving on Friday ?" Asked Her/She

Not really her Twitter name, he tended to think of people by their pet hates of current obsession. Her/She seemed to be constantly angry about gender, though he had no idea why.

"Yes, still a lot to box up though.....Hope Gizmo settles in."

"He's a hamster Tim, not an endangered species."

"And you've only had him six months." Added Maxwell.

"Must go, things to do." Tim typed.

He hadn't of course. His freelance writing work was going through a bit of a drought. In fact he'd been seriously thinking of putting himself through the hell of claiming benefits, when the solicitor's letter had arrived. A private message showed up on Twitter.

"Don't get stressed..... Call me."

"I will... Still coming over tonight."

"Yes, will bring a tiramisu."

Karen, who was his best and perhaps only real friend. Complicated though, even he didn't understand their relationship. He'd found her on an adult 'entertainment' website. He'd paid her for sex when he'd been able to afford such things and she'd hung around after he was broke. Most of the time she was just a good friend, but bringing a tiramisu meant she was going to share his bed. An horrific thought hit him hard between the eyes.

"Shit, the place looks disgusting." He muttered.

Actually it wasn't too bad. Most of the dirt and dust had gone into the cardboard boxes with his possessions. He'd started packing too early of course, half his cooking stuff was under layers of paperback books. Takeaways and plastic spoons seemed a good way of surviving the week.

"Do you need a hand packing?" From Alien Bob.

Alien Bob was a published author from Los Angeles. An author who could recite most X files episodes from memory.

"You're in the wrong continent."

"Oh shit, yeah of course."

Tim hadn't glossed over his life that much, he'd even taken a few pictures of his tiny one room flat in Muswell Hill. Pictures just after the pre-xmas clean-up of course and carefully cropped afterwards. He'd loved his flat when it was cheap, but the landlord now seemed to be charging him the rent on a mews house in Chelsea. His beloved twelve times removed cousin he'd never heard of, couldn't have died at a better time.

Fiona Meadows hadn't left him her house by name. A solicitor had found him and thought he was the late Fiona's last surviving relative. The law and probate are famously slow, but he was moving into the house on Friday.

"A bit of a fixer upper, but Miss Meadows kept the essentials in good working order."

The house was old for the area, a rectory once, for a church that had long gone. Or at least that was what the man from the solicitors had told him. A house close to two hundred years old, but waterproof and everything worked. Three floors and an attic, fully furnished and he could move right in and start living there. For a freelance writer with very few resources, it was going to be heaven.

"Worst comes to the worst.... You can sell it and buy somewhere smaller."

Delphine had Tweeted, after he'd posted about fifty pictures on Twitter. Delphine was heavily into BDSM, she'd even had her account sin binned on Twitter over a few pictures. He really wasn't sure if he liked Delphine that much, but he respected her opinion. A quick poll had showed that ninety percent of his three hundred Twitter followers thought he should move into Fiona's old house.

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Gizmo was the guilty party of course; he'd been the direct cause of the problem. Tim had gone through the house, selling a few antiques for surprisingly large amounts of money. He had the kitchen done up a bit and the bathroom completely replaced. That was it though, the total extent of the work he intended to do on his fixer upper. The old house was comfortable; the old lady had even fitted a new heating boiler. It took the usual month or so for it to feel like his home. After six months Gizmo began to start sleeping outside of his cage.

"My hamster has started to nest under the floorboards...Good/Bad?" He'd tweeted.

Crap! Mention hamster and the public began to circle, in large numbers. Mike from Romford sent him an angry reply about the evils of keeping any animal as a pet. It got steadily worse, until Tim began to ignore the updates for a while.

"How old is Gizmo?" Asked Eat The Rich.

"About thirteen months, maybe fourteen."

"Has he gone feral?" Asked Delphine.

"No, he still goes back into his cage to eat..... He's just sleeping under the floorboards."

Gizmo was still his loveable old self. The hamster was happy to sit on his lap and be stroked while he watched TV. He did pee on him occasionally, but hamsters did that. His pet's only eccentricity was going through a gap in the floorboards at about midnight and not coming back until breakfast time.

“They don’t live that long. Block up the hole, you don’t want a dead hamster under the floor.”
From Delphine, who rarely seemed to look at the world with anything other than crap coloured glasses.

“Eww yes, nasty.” Added someone called Peter from Selly Oak.

“Where is the hole ?” Asked Her/She

No good, Tim couldn’t resist.

“In the floor.”

“Oh, typical man..... Where in the house ?”

“The old conservatory.”

“Do you use the room ?”

“Not really.”

“Capitalist Bastard !” Typed RedZone from Craiglang.

Tim Stevens realised Twitter was a filter bubble and he knew that was a problem. He tended to talk to other writers, who weren’t a fair representation of the public. Some might even say he was relying on the opinion of the borderline insane. He read the tweets and saw a consensus forming. Being Tim he had to put it to a vote. A surprisingly large numbers of people voted and seventy percent backed the idea of;

‘Wait until Gizmo dies and dig him out then.’

Only Delphine was brutal honest with him. If only he’d listened.

“Don’t be crazy Tim, block the damn hole up.”

Life wasn’t bad for Tim for a while, he even had a Novella published by an up and coming Sci-Fi publishing house. No need to sell off any more of Fiona’s antiques, the bank were no longer sending him demands and threats. He’d had the pretend hypothetical conversation with Karen, to see if she expected to be paid again. He felt happy for weeks after she promised to break his hypothetical neck if money was ever offered. Was she now his girlfriend ? He had no idea, but whatever they did have was pretty damn good.

At the age of about two, Gizmo stopped coming up out of the floor for his food. After three days Tim decided to recruit a floorboard lifting team from his Twitter followers, who now numbered eleven hundred and four. Of course being Twitter, very few of them lived anywhere near Britain, let alone Southgate. On the fateful day it was just him and Karen, armed with crowbars and dressed in the scruffiest clothing they owned.

“Wow, I’d forgotten how beautiful this room is.” Said Karen.

“The late Fiona never used it though.” He replied. “One of the neighbours knew her for years. Very little was ever changed in the house and this room was kept locked. I’m not really into plants and conservatories.”

“Run power in here and set up a work desk. It’d make a great place to write Tim. I could help you get it nice again.”

“Good idea, once we’ve dug out Gizmo..... There, that’s the hole. We can start digging out the floorboards round the hole.”

Old hardwood boards, probably worth a fortune. Held in place by iron nails that didn’t want to be pulled out of the joists. Hard grubby work that went on for hours. The smelly ball of fur that had once been Gizmo, was in a nest about two feet below the floor.

“So that’s where my Sunday supplements kept vanishing to.” Said Tim. “If we both get hold of it, we can get the nest and Gizmo out in one piece.”

“You know how to show a girl a good time.”

Together they lifted the paper nest, bringing it out of the hole. It formed a rough ball shape about eighteen inches across. It would go straight into the hole he'd already dug in the back garden.

"Is that a pipe?" Asked Karen.

"I didn't even think about Gizmo damaging stuff down there."

Whatever it was shone white in the limited amount of light below the floor. Tim reached down and rubbed it with his hand. It was a small head, the head of a cherub carved in marble.

"It's a statue I think..... It won't shift."

No amount of pulling would budge it.

"Look..... There's more of it." Said Karen.

The cherub was next to a unicorn, who was next to a leaping lion. More creatures appeared, all expertly carved in perfect white marble and they in turn were just part of a much large object. After burying Gizmo and saying a few words over him, they removed another four floorboards in the early hours of the morning. Karen had an LED Maglite in the boot of her car. With it they both looked in amazement at what they'd still only partially uncovered.

"It's more than a water feature..... Look, there's a path right round it." Said Karen.

"A pond and quite a big one..... All in marble, it must be priceless."

"Who puts a pond indoors?"

"Maybe it wasn't always indoors." He said. "They might have built the conservatory round it."

"Why?"

"I have no idea, but we have to clear the entire floor. Hard work I know, will you help me?"

"I'm as curious as you..... Keep the take away meals coming and the prosecco and I'm your girl Tim Stevens."

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"I wouldn't fill it up. They had terrible diseases then. God knows what you might stir up."

Tweeted Doc Meredith from Pasadena. The Doc looked clean cut in his pic. A stethoscope round his neck, just the right sincere expression. Being Twitter it could be a stock photo though.

"Give it all a good wash with bleach." Typed Her/She

It had taken about six back breaking months to clear the room of floorboards and dig the topsoil out of the pond. There was rubble in there too, as though someone had intended it to remain filled. Tim had put lots of pictures on Twitter. The pond might well be a priceless masterpiece, but its size and weight made it an impossible thing to steal. Weight was another part of the problem.

"A cubic metre of water weighs a ton. Have you done the math?" From Alien Bob.

"No, but it must have been full of water at some time." He replied.

Sunday morning and he'd only logged on to Twitter to post a picture of Karen and him enjoying breakfast together. Shallow perhaps, but it gave him a warm glow. Neither of them had expected so many technical questions over their muesli and it didn't look like stopping.

"Hope it collapses you scum." Typed RedZone from Craiglang.

Tim was beginning to get quite fond of RedZone.

"You should work out the weight, it might have settled a bit in 200 years." From Maxwell.

Karen was just shrugging at him when things started to get serious. A water company was taking an interest, though luckily not his.

"There are rules and regulations to be followed, please DM for details." From Essex & Suffolk Water. Getting inappropriate replies from faraway places was normal on Twitter. A structural engineer from Garforth in Yorkshire joined the Twitter-fest.

"From the pictures I estimate the full weight of the pond as in excess of 150 tons."

"Wow, maybe we shouldn't fill it." Said Karen.

He didn't like the idea, but felt good about her saying 'we.' Definitely his girlfriend, no doubt about it.

"We could fill it slowly and carefully." He said.

"How about filling it slowly?" She typed into her Twitter account.

"That amount of water being taken from the system could be a problem. You must contact us." Essex & Suffolk Water again and he still had no idea why they thought he was their problem. The structural engineer was filling the thread with heaps of statistics on the problem of supporting something weighing 150 tons.

"Bleaching it before filling sounds sensible." From Delphine.

"We'll do that." He typed.

"You'll get a lot of damp in the house. All that water." From RayGunn in Potters Bar.

"There are windows in the conservatory roof." Karen replied.

For some reason Essex & Suffolk Water were listing the offences they might be about to commit under various rules and regulations. Tim closed his laptop and smiled at Karen.

"How about we wash it down with bleach and fill it slowly?" He asked.

"Yes..... It must have been full of water when they put it in."

Washing it down was never going to be that thorough, there was simply too much of a surface area and the marble was rough in places. Tim bought huge amounts of gravel to put in the bottom, for when it was an idyllic indoor water feature full of Koi carp and exotic plants. With more than a little trepidation, Tim ran a hosepipe from a tap in the utility room.

"Do we toss a coin for who turns it on?" Asked Karen.

"No, you can do it."

The hose began to send a steady flow of water down the side of the pond, which vanished into the foot or so of gravel at the bottom.

"I wonder how long it'll take." Said Karen.

"Probably a few weeks, at least." Said Tim. "We'll just have to try and forget about it for a while."

Essex & Suffolk Water might have had a point. The tap ran round the clock for months and months. There was evaporation of course and it was a huge pond. The hose filled the pond for a very long time. Time enough for Tim to find a replacement for Gizmo. The new Gizmo was a cat though, a tiny black and white kitten. The new Gizmo was a plump bundle of fur when Karen finally turned off the tap.

"And not the slightest sign of the house tilting over to one side." She said.

"I'm glad we didn't do the math, it might have scared us into filling it in with rubble again."

They had a glass or two of champagne, while Gizmo-two moved around the edge of the pool, prodding his paw at something in the water.

"Careful Giz, you'll get wet again."

"I think he enjoys the fuss of being towelled down afterwards."

His cat had been in the pond about four times, but he was a good swimmer and he did seem to enjoy the whole 'drying the cat' process. Tim looked at what Giz was pawing at.

"Hey, our new pond has life in it. We've got daphnia, water fleas."

"They must have come in the gravel." Said Karen.

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Time continued to be kind to Tim Stevens. Not one of his books being published by a major publishing house, which was what he was always hoping for. But he'd gained a reputation for writing

quickly, a major plus for low budget TV shows. It needed online conference calls, but he could still work from home and the money was good. Karen had just about moved in and Giz was a large cat who now walked like a gunslinger.

Tim strolled around the conservatory one rare Tuesday afternoon when he wasn't busy. Taking pictures of course, his idyllic water feature was loved by his twenty five thousand or so followers.

"The Koi are huge now." He typed, before attaching a pic.

The camera was new, as was the filter system for the pond. Plants now grew alongside the path that ran right round the edge. The water lilies were only just getting started, but everything looked lush and gorgeous.

"I'm going to try and get the creatures into a jar." He tweeted.

"Just use Wiki you moron." From RedZone in Craiglang

"Morning Red."

"Piss off you scum."

He was quite fond of RedZone, but the relationship still needed some work. Tim had bought a few small nets from a nearby garden centre that sold tropical fish. He knelt down next to the pond, which Giz took as an excuse to climb all over him.

"Alright you crazy cat, just let me get a few of these guys."

He'd washed out an old pickle jar, punching a few holes in the top to keep the creatures alive.

Catching a few was hard, they zapped about near the edge of the pond and Giz was purring right into his ear.

"Get a cat she said, it'll be company she said." He muttered.

He loved Giz, even going out in the rain to buy him tuna as a treat. After removing Giz's nose from his ear a few times, he finally had several of the pond creatures in the jar. He nearly tweeted, asking about the best way to take a pic of bugs in a jar. There was RedZone to be considered though, his tweets could be brutal. Instead he broadcast his difficulties across social media, after he'd solved them.

"Damn difficult, the flash made them invisible." He tweeted.

"Wow, good pic !" From Alien Bob.

"Doesn't look like daphnia to me." From HotMomma in Liverpool.

"No flash, lots of backlight." Tim tweeted.

"Dragonfly larvae." From Maxwell.

"Rubbish ! Look stuff up before tweeting this shit." From RedZone.

Maxwell and RedZone began a series of personal attacks on each other. Some were quite amusing, though most were anatomically impossible.

"How big are they ?" Asked Delphine.

"About a quarter of an inch across."

"Too big for water fleas."

The pictures showed creatures with about eight legs and large heads with compound eyes. Spiders scared Tim and he'd screamed after finding a leech while out fishing for tiddlers as a kid. For some reason the bugs in the jar didn't scare or disgust him, even as they ate a few water fleas he'd caught with them.

"Hey, one just as a water flea." He typed.

"Carnivores then....You need to get an expert to take a look." From Alien Bob.

As the bugs in the jar caught the light there was an iridescence about them that was quite beautiful. Tim took a chance, a quick shot with his new camera. The picture captured the colours perfectly, though Twitter wasn't impressed.

"Oh, it's fake isn't it.... One of your stories." From Her/She

"No, I just took that.... Not even cropped or anything."

"Bullshit." Added Eat The Rich.

"Take the jar and see an expert." Typed Delphine.

Tim took a few moving images too, all rejected as fakes by his twenty five thousand followers, or at least those who bothered to add to the growing thread. Tim didn't take a vote on it; he was worried it might come out as 90% believing the pics were fakes. To him it seemed Twitter was watched over by an unstable deity, who might push you up onto a pedestal one day, only to slam you to the ground the next.

The bugs in the pond continued to grow, but they seemed harmless. Tim was busy, TV scripting on the fly for people demanding ludicrous deadlines wasn't fun. He was probably too tired to notice what was going on. He'd probably never have gone to see an expert, if Karen hadn't shown him the partially eaten Koi.

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"Yes, I can see where Giz has pawed at it." Said Tim. "The bites don't look right though, lots of small sets of teeth."

"Maybe you should keep him out of here." Said Karen. "He isn't a harmless little kitten anymore and we've both seen him pawing at the water."

Great....Getting Giz had been her idea and she was suggesting locking him out of the conservatory. It was his cat's indoor playground, Tim had even put a litter tray in there. He knelt down and prodded at the dead Koi.

"The claw marks are his Karen.... But not the bites, I'd swear to it."

"Well, they are your fish, but I remember how much they cost."

"If another one gets killed I will lock him out of here."

Strangely, considering how much work had gone into cleaning it out, Tim had never looked that closely at the carved images of creatures around the outside of the marble pool. A good representation of a Lion, next to a Dragon, next to a Cherub, followed by a.....

"What the hell is that ?" He asked, getting his head close to it.

"You took pictures of everything. Delphine was certain it was a snapping turtle."

"Standing upright on its back legs ?"

It did look a bit like a turtle, but one stood up on powerful legs. A hard outer shell on its back and a jaw full of wicked looking teeth. No turtle had six arms though, each ending in a sharp claw. The image reminded him of the creatures in the pond, though he wasn't going to say it out loud. He didn't want Karen thinking he was going crazy.

"Artistic license Tim.... The dragon has six legs and the lion has two rows of teeth."

"Yeah....I'll take a few more pics of it though."

Giz was purring at him, wanting to be stroked. Tim rubbed his ears, always guaranteed to make his cat happy. Karen was right though, he was a big cat now.

"No more eating my fish..... Alright ?"

A camera full of pictures, there was only one place they were going to end up.

"Nice fish, pity it's dead. How much did it cost ?" Asked Alien Bob.

"About five hundred pounds."

“Christ ! I can see why you’re in mourning.” Typed Maxwell.

“Screw you.” From RedZone in Craiglang.

“Looks like Giz got hungry.” Added Delphine.

“The teeth marks are wrong. How about the creature carved in marble ?” Asked Tim.

He posted another pic he’d taken without a flash. He was sure the creature was carrying some sort of weapon in one set of claws.

“Still looks like a snapping turtle.” From Delphine.

“There must be a mythical creatures database somewhere.” From BizGuru in Dublin.

“Mayan, definitely Mayan.”

Alien Bob had attached a picture of a wall carving. It showed a long line of creatures identical to the pictures he’d taken in the pond room. Karen was stood behind him. She gripped his shoulders and stared at the screen on his laptop.

“That’s it.” She said. “What are they carrying ?”

“What are they carrying ?” Tim typed.

“Ceremonial spears I think. These are the guys who wipe out the world.” From Alien Bob.

“More bullshit.” Type RedZone.

“Hey, backup.....Guys who wipe out the world ?” Typed Tim.

“Wasn’t that supposed to happen in 2012 ?” Asked Her/She

“That was a great film.” Added HotMomma in Liverpool.

“It was shit, get some therapy.” Added RedZone.

The argument about the film went on and on for some time. Sending a DM to avoid all the tweet traffic was considered a bit rude by his group of friends, but he didn’t have all day. Tim sent a message to Alien Bob.

“Guys that end the world ? A bit more verbosity buddy.”

No character limit on DMs, or one so high he’d never hit it.

“The army of the apocalypse Tim. A numberless tide of creatures who will rise up out of the ocean and destroy everything. For some reason they seem to be a bit late. Just scanned a book I have, see the attached.”

“Got it all thanks.”

Lots of genuine archaeology mixed in with nonsense, Tim had a few similar books in his collection. Most of the narrative would be nonsense, but the pictures weren’t.

“I’ve got a bag with one of them in the pattern. I just never really thought about it.” Said Karen.

“No one does think about these things.” He replied. “Like dragons and unicorns, we see their images everywhere.”

Lots of pictures from Alien Bob, all showing armies of the creatures, always in large numbers, rarely alone. They were on everything from ancient Mayan carvings to the souvenirs taken home by tourists.

“Fascinating, but I don’t think a Mayan army of the apocalypse ate your fish.” Said Karen.

“No, of course not.”

Delphine had obviously become bored with the never ending argument about just how crap the film 2012 really had been. A message popped up from her.

“Did you ever see an expert about the pond bugs ?” She asked.

“No, things got a bit busy.”

“How big are they now ?”

“About three inches long, some a bit bigger.”

“Crap Tim, go and see that expert, I’ve got a bad feeling.”

So had he, but so had everyone he knew on Twitter. Everyone was a little paranoid and had bad feeling about something, it went with the territory.

“I will Delphine, promise. My old Biology teacher Mrs Pocock will know what these things are, she had a bit of a thing about weird stuff in ponds.”

“See her then and take the pictures of the carvings, take everything Tim. I’ve got a really bad feeling..... Will you take everything ?”

“Yes.... Yes I will.”

Tim Stevens liked to drop it into conversations about saving the planet. He hadn’t owned a car in the last ten years and had no intention of buying another. The idea that it was a decision made to improve his carbon footprint was never said directly, but often hinted at. His car had been stolen and at the time the settlement from the insurance company had been used to pay the rent for a while. Luckily Karen had a car and didn’t seem to mind running him around.

“Do you mind taking me to see Mrs Pocock ?” He asked.

“No..... Well... Unless she now lives in Tallinn or something.”

“I have no idea where she lives now, we’ll have to find her on the internet, everyone is on the internet.”

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Not Tallinn, Mrs Pocock lived in a quiet street in Palmers Green. It really was possible to find just about anyone within an hour or so. Providing they weren’t really hiding of course and you didn’t mind paying several online databases. It hadn’t taken the dark web and corrupt public servants to find Mrs Alice Pocock, just a little time and a credit card.

“There, number eighty seven.” Said Tim.

Someone was smiling on them, there was even a space to park not too far away. His school biology teacher had never looked young, but she hadn’t looked particularly old either. He recognised her face, but the large elderly lady using a cane wasn’t what he’d expected. People change of course, even if our memories of them don’t.

“I called you earlier, it’s Timothy Stevens..... Tim.”

“I recognise you Tim, though you must be a foot taller and quite a bit broader.”

The house looked nice inside. Lots of pictures of people of varying ages on the mantelpiece. Mrs Pocock was the only person on the electoral register, so her husband had probably passed on. Every available wall had a book case, most full of books on wildlife.

“Tea ?”

“Oh, yes please.” Said Karen.

“I might have a few biscuits somewhere.”

While Mrs Pocock went to get refreshments, Tim removed a jar from the large bag he’d been carrying. A large plastic muesli jar, he’d been worried it wouldn’t be big enough for the two creatures inside. They were bigger now and still seemed to be growing. The jar was in the middle of her dining table when Alice Pocock returned with a tray full of tea things.

“When you said you’d found something strange.....I assume they’re not a hoax. I really don’t appreciate that kind of warped sense of humour.”

“They’re real, one tried to bite me.” Said Karen.

“I remembered your love of pond life Mrs Pocock.” Said Tim.

“Pond life indeed, let me have a good look at them.”

After giving them their tea and biscuits, the retired biology teacher got her head right up against the plastic jar.

“Amazing, have they just developed the iridescence ?”

“No, they had that from being the size of daphnia.” Said Tim.

“Amazing, no really..... Amazing. Obviously how they hide from predators, or ambush prey of course. See how they’re changing colour to match my tablecloth.... Amazing.”

“They’re not something ordinary then ?” Asked Karen.

“Oh no, far from it. Cuttlefish are the best known users of this kind of camouflage technique and there are a few others. To my knowledge none are found in British freshwater ponds. I think you’ve found something brand new. Not just a new species, but perhaps a whole new genus. This is a huge discovery. Where did they come from ?”

“It’s a bit complicated.” Said Tim.

“Tim moved and found a filled in pond where he now lives.” Said Karen. “It was over two hundred years old. We cleared out the pond and bleached the inside. After we filled it up, some bugs that looked like daphnia started to appear. They grew into the things in the jar. Oh...they killed one of his fish, though Giz is still considered guilty until proven innocent.”

“I take it Giz is a cat ?”

“Yes.”

“We put gravel in the pond, they might have come in that.” Said Tim.

Mrs Pocock’s vision couldn’t have been that good. She kept her head right up against the jar, squinting at the creatures inside.

“I doubt that Tim, I really doubt that. Daphnia can do what looks like a magic trick, appearing in a pond that has been dry for years. They do the trick using something called encysting, you can look it up on the internet. Then there are Tardigrades, wonderful organisms that are just about indestructible. Some trees live for thousands of years.....Two hundred years is just a blink of an eye to some forms of life.”

One of the creatures struck out, its claw making an audible thunk as it hit the side of the jar next to Mrs Pocock’s head. She jumped back a little.

“They’re quick little swine, one nearly got me.” Said Karen.

“So far they’ve never tried to hurt me.” Said Tim.

“Really ? They don’t try to bite you ?” Asked Alice Pocock.

“Never.... I have a theory they think he’s their dad.” Said Karen.

“Hmmm..... I worked at a marine institute in the USA one summer vacation from college.” Said Alice Pocock. “One of the research fellows there set up a new large freshwater tank. A large tank, very large, he could get inside with a snorkel to clean the inside. Piranha went into that tank, a whole shoal of tiny baby fish. They were scared of him and always ran away as he scraped the rocks and cleaned away algae. As they grew he still went in there and they still ran away, the entire shoal moving into the furthest corner away from him. Even as fully grown adults, they still remembered being afraid of the man with the snorkel and the scraper.”

“So that’s it, you think they remember being scared of me when they were tiny ?” Asked Tim.

“Yes I do and you should be careful about relying on that, the effect might not last. Years later I heard that the research fellow now has a few nasty scars on his left buttock.”

A nasty story but Tim had no intention of swimming in the pond. Even Giz had become so used to the door being locked, that he made no attempt to enter the conservatory when the door was open.

“Show her the pictures Tim.” Said Karen.

"I'm not sure..... It sounds a bit crazy."

"Go on."

"I always thought of you as one of the brighter kids." Said Mrs Pocock. "I can't promise not to think you're crazy, but it's unlikely."

Tim showed her a few of Alien Bob's pictures, all printed up in full colour. He hadn't brought the words that went with the pictures, some of that was tin foil hat territory.

"I'm not really sure what it means." He said. "But you have to admit..... These apocalypse army guys do look a lot like bigger versions of our friends in the jar."

His old biology teacher just shrugged, not even hiding her lack of interest.

"I have seen these carvings before; I even visited a few Mayan ruins when I was younger. In fact....Yes, I'm sure there's a tea towel somewhere with these creatures printed on it. As for looking like the creatures in the jar..... Hmm.....I will give you there is a similarity, but what are you suggesting Tim ? That the rather late twenty twelve apocalypse has begun in your Koi pond ?"

"I'm not suggesting anything."

"They're the same..... Look." Persisted Karen.

"Too much time on social media, I see it all the time." Said Alice Pocock. "We need to begin looking after these creatures, securing their habitat. I don't get about as well as I used to. I still know people though and a temporary preservation order is a good first step."

"A preservation order, on my pond ?"

"Oh yes, and Giz will need to be moved of course. A full grown cat can wreak havoc on a fragile ecosystem. Don't worry..... I can just make a few phone calls. I'll need your address of course and a few details."

"No." Said Tim.

It was all going wrong and he didn't like the look in his old biology teacher's eyes. It was the look of a fanatic, like a politician two days before an election.

"What do you mean by no ?" Snapped Alice Pocock.

"No, you're not turning my life upside down."

"Poor Giz, it's his home." Added Karen.

Tim grabbed the paperwork, shoving it into the bag, before putting the jar on top. When Mrs Pocock picked up her cane and began to wave it around, he knew they had a problem.

"Those creatures are the find of the century, you're not taking them anywhere." She yelled.

Their elderly nemesis was large and filled the doorway to her lounge.

"I don't want to have to push you out of the way." He said. "We're leaving though and I'm taking my property with me."

"I don't mind pushing..... Just try me lady." Said Karen.

Alice used her cane like a pro. She held it in the middle, using the heavy silver handle like a club.

"That jar is mine, I'm claiming it as a unique find of immense importance." She shouted.

She swung the cane and might have hit him if Karen hadn't pulled him out of the way. It wasn't good, the old lady's shouts were becoming louder, more desperate. If the neighbours came to investigate, they'd just see two people upsetting an old lady, a retired teacher.

"Quickly Tim, get out of the house.... I'll keep her off you."

The shouting continued as Tim moved quickly, making sure he didn't drop the bag containing the heavy jar. The threats from Alice Pocock became louder, more explicit, more crude.

"I know people.....They can make fucking idiots like you disappear."

One neighbour did come out, a woman shaking her head at Mrs Pocock. Tim thought it wasn't the first time people had fled the house to escape the old woman's verbal tirade.

"That creature is mine.....I will find you.....I know people, dangerous people."

As soon as the central locking beeped, Tim was in the passenger seat of Karen's car, the jar on his lap. Karen ran round the car, leaping in and locking the doors.

"Christ Tim, does that crazy bitch know your address?"

"No, just my phone number."

Karen drove fast for some distance. Her face was flushed, her breathing fast. They were a mile away before she spoke again.

"I don't think you've heard the last of her."

~ ~

If the human race could be said to have one motto, it would be 'anything for a quiet life.' Tim didn't want a preservation order on his house and a lot of science types digging about in his pond. His home was his sanctuary, a place of peace and tranquillity. Wrecking that peace would almost certainly ruin his ability to write. Time and luck were still treating him well, the low budget TV show was being picked up by Netflix. Tim ignored the problem in his pond, even when he hadn't seen a live Koi in weeks. He still changed the filter elements for the water, he still looked after the plants. The water Lilies thrived, the water looked crystal clean. If you ignored the inexplicable arrival of the weird creatures, his little piece of Eden was perfect.

"I saw one today, as I was cleaning a filter." He said.

Two weeks before Christmas, they were both getting ready to go to a party. No one he knew, it was a couple Karen had made friends with in the area. She had the knack for starting instant friendships. Karen was adjusting her makeup in the mirror.

"Thanks, I'd almost forgotten about them and the crazy biology teacher. How big was it?"

"It saw me and dived down towards the gravel. Bigger again, a good three feet long."

"Crap! What are they finding to eat?"

"I still throw food pellets in there every day, the ones for the Koi."

"Oh Tim."

"I know, but they're harmless Karen. Plus if Mrs Pocock was right, they might be a new species."

"She is certifiable.....Batshit crazy."

All the creatures tended to stay deep now, Karen had once suggested they might be breeding down there.

"They must breed Tim, every living thing needs to breed."

The party wasn't that far away, just about walking distance. Rain was starting as they left, so Karen volunteered to drive and stay sober. Tim couldn't really judge how good parties were, he went to so few of them. It seemed alright and none of them were writers. Unfortunately he ruined the night after seeing Karen make what looked like a furtive phone call. He wasn't a hypocrite, he had paid for sex with her and a few other girls. It was just that if she was working again....

"Look, this is awkward, but I know how you used to earn a living....."

"What? For a writer you say a lot of stuff that sounds like gibberish."

They were on the garden path, the car was so close. If only he'd kept his mouth shut, but he hadn't drunk that much recently. His brain refused to stop his mouth from opening and letting words out.

"I know you have bills to pay." He said. "You kept your own flat, the rent can't be cheap."

"Are you asking if I'm on the game again?" She yelled.

It wasn't going well, all the warning signs were there.... If only he could have stopped speaking.

"I wasn't going to put it quite like....."

"Oh, you mean am I sucking dicks for money?"

"Look, it's not really my business, but as we're now living together....."

"Shut up Tim..... Shut up!"

She hit him, a slap so hard that he wondered if his face was bleeding.

"I only moved in with you because I felt comfortable, you never tried to own me..... This conversation makes me feel trapped. No, not all problems in my life mean I'm working again."

She walked towards the car and he followed.

"I'm going home..... You can walk from here." She told him.

Tim didn't walk home, he ended up at Southgate Station. The buses ran all night and there was a constant stream of people. He enjoyed people watching, it soothed his mind in a more natural way than pills and booze. People close up worried him, but they were fascinating at a distance. A group of girls heading home were arguing about who'd chatted up the best looking guy. Tim stood in a shop doorway and watched. His phone rang at about one in the morning. It was Karen.

"I'm so glad you called..... I got all the words wrong." He said.

"Where are you Tim? I'm on your doorstep and the door isn't locked."

"Damn, I've been doing that lately.... I probably forgot to close it properly. I'm at Southgate Station."

"People watching?"

"Yes, you know me far too well."

"Do you want me to come and get you?" She asked.

"No, stay in the warm.....It'll only take me a few minutes to walk home."

~

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The front door was still slightly ajar when he got home. Tim went inside and closed it behind him, flicking the lever to lock it. No coming home to a dark empty house, Karen had turned on the lights in the hall and the kitchen.

"Hi, it's only me." He yelled.

"I'm in the kitchen Tim. Watch out, I don't know where she is."

The spots of blood on the kitchen door caught his attention first and then the scene of chaos where he usual ate and drank his morning coffee. The table was on its side and there was more blood, this time spots on the floor. Karen was sat on the one chair that looked undamaged, Giz on her lap. Lastly Tim noticed the large sticking plaster near Karen's left elbow.

"What happened?"

"She was in here, your crazy biology teacher. I heard a noise and being stupid I shouted out instead of calling the police. You have to call them Tim, she attacked me."

He hugged her and to his relief she hugged him back. Tim still wasn't sure if he was forgiven or the row had just been postponed for a while.

"Oh Karen, that is dreadful..... I'll find her and throw her out."

"Call the police, she boasted about having a key to the front door. She's obviously been watching the house for a while. She swung at me with that damn cane of hers. If Giz hadn't started hissing at her, she might have seriously hurt me."

He risked a kiss and she kissed him back.

"It's just that..... Mrs Pocock was my favourite teacher."

"Tim Stevens, you are such a soft touch..... Fine, find her and throw her out, but we'll need to call a twenty four hour locksmith to change all the locks. Decent locks, expensive modern locks. And we need to get an alarm system."

She'd said we twice, it looked as though she hadn't come to pack her things and leave him.

"Do you know where she went?" He asked.

"That's easy, she shouted at me about claiming the conservatory in the name of science. Be careful..... If she gets you across the head with the silver handle of her cane..... Just be careful."

He was about to leave, but she grabbed his arm.

"No.....I'm not..... You've been the only man in my life.....Even before I moved in."

"I sort of knew that..... The drink, I'm not used to it."

No protestations of love and never ending devotion, that wasn't their thing. He kissed her again and stroked Giz, before heading for the conservatory. Karen's words of warning had an effect, he stopped at every doorway, every turn of the corridor. It was a big rambling house with plenty of places for a crazy cane wielding person to hide. He even called out a few times.

"Mrs Pocock ! I don't want to call the police. You need help though. If you agree to see a doctor, this can all be ended without you getting arrested."

Nothing, no sound at all. The conservatory door was wide open, the lights inside turned on. He called out again as he stepped into what still looked like an idyllic piece of Eden.

"You hurt Karen and caused a lot of damage, but I still think we can resolve all this without involving the police. Stop hiding, show yourself."

Back to the glass wall he surveyed the room. The plants had reached the roof and filled in the corners. There were plenty of places to hide, all of them capable of containing a psychopath with a deadly cane in her hand.

"If you don't come out, I will call the police."

He found the shovel by tripping over it. It had been in a shed in the garden, far too good to waste. A solid wooden handle and a heavy blade. Probably Victorian, an age when such tools were made to last. Just holding the shovel made him feel braver. He pushed at the plants in the nearest corner with it.

"This is childish Mrs Pocock.....I will find you, there aren't many places to hide."

The light glinting off silver caught his eye. Tim spun, but the cane wasn't being used as a weapon. It was on the ground near the filter and pump housing. What was left of Alice Pocock was lying on the ground close to the pond. Shock probably, his mind began to make a few strange connections. He found it easy to understand that Koi pellets weren't enough for them, so they'd found more substantial food.

"You shouldn't have come here Mrs Pocock." He muttered.

He knew the human body contained just over a gallon of blood, he'd even quoted it in a few of his novels. The number didn't adequately describe how far eight pints of fresh blood would go. Her ripped clothing was covered in it, the nearby plants were covered in it. Even the ground for some distance was covered in Alice's blood. Not many bones, they'd probably taken those away for some reason. There were a few finger bones and a part of a leg bones, but that was it, no trace of her skull. He gripped the shovel tighter when he saw them standing among the plants.

"Crap..... They're out of the water." He muttered.

There were a lot of them among the plants, though it was difficult to be certain how many. Some just over three feet tall, some a bit taller, all stood up on their rear legs. They were identical to the Mayan carvings, right down to the jaw full of sharp teeth. No need for any further proof about how Mrs Pocock had died, a few of those teeth still glinted with the moistness of fresh red blood. With mammals the eyes told you a lot, everyone claims to know if their cat or dog is having a bad day. The creatures had insect like compound eyes, they told him nothing.

“Can..... Can you understand me ?”

Nothing, but they had moved back as he'd stepped forward. For now at least, they still seemed a little wary of him. Tim remembered Alice's story about the research fellow with the piranha bitten buttocks. The creatures in amongst the plants could eat him as easily as they'd eaten Mrs Pocock. He walked slowly back to the conservatory door, locking it when he was outside. The door was mainly glass, with a flimsy wooden frame. A child could have broken through it. Tim threw the key a long way down the corridor and hoped the creatures stayed where they were for a while.

“Delphine was right, I should have left the pond full of rubble.” He muttered.

Tim didn't run, he walked quickly and with a purpose. He still had the shovel in his hands as he entered the kitchen.

“Karen, we have to.....”

She'd gone and there was only one place she was likely to have gone. He found her upstairs changing her clothes. She eyed the old shovel in his hands.

“Did she fight you ? Have you thrown her out ?” She asked.

“Mrs Pocock is dead.”

“Oh no..... don't blame yourself, I'm sure she left you with no choice.”

“Not me..... They ate her, the creatures are out of the pond, walking on dry land. Throw a few things in a bag, we're leaving.”

“What..... Right now ?”

“They ate her Karen, even her bones.... Pack a bag and pack it quickly.”

Two bags, one for her and one for him, just the essentials. He went first down the stairs and there was no sign of the creatures. They had the front door open when he remembered the third resident of the house.

“Damn, I forgot Giz.” He said.

No arguing that it was just a cat, she dropped the bags and was ready to go with him.

“I'll take the upstairs.” She said.

“No, you get into the car, I know where he'll be. Giz will be outside the conservatory, hissing and ready for a fight.”

“And if he isn't ?”

“Then I'll make a noise like a tin of tuna, that'll flush him out.”

It was an old joke, but she still laughed. He watched her until she was inside her car, before he walked back towards the last place on Earth he wanted to be, the conservatory. He heard the sound of shattering glass before he got there.

~ ~

Giz was probably something else the creatures were unsure about. His feisty black and white cat was stopping at least ten of them from leaving the conservatory. He wasn't uninjured, there were several spots of blood on his fur. One of the creatures nipped at him with its claws. Giz jumped back, but quickly tried to scratch the one who'd attacked him. Giz was outmatched and losing the fight, he just hadn't worked that out yet. Tim grabbed his cat in his left hand, holding him tight against his chest. He rubbed the top of his cat's head with his chin.

“Quiet now Giz, be still..... We're getting out of here.”

Cat in one hand, shovel in the other, Tim retreated slowly along the corridor. He waved the shovel at them and the creatures kept back a little, but one tried to grab the shovel in its claws. They were a quiet enemy, not a single sound. Their compound eyes moved around, following him, watching his every move. Giz was hissing at them again.

“Shush boy, stay still.”

He did think they were going to make it to the front door until he saw about ten of them standing between him and the door. The old house was a maze of corridors and the creatures obviously weren't unintelligent. Some had come round by another way, blocking his way out. He kissed the top of his cat's head.

“Not looking good old buddy, not looking good.”

The creatures were becoming braver, going back less every time he tried to hit one with the shovel. Most worrying was how much closer they were coming back after moving away. He was being squeezed between the two groups, the amount of space to swing the shovel was shrinking. He thought about putting Giz down and letting his pet make a run for it. A strange noise filled the corridor, as though someone had a motorbike running on his doorstep. The front door flew open.

“I'm so pleased we made up.” He muttered.

He'd bought a petrol driven chain saw to tackle the overgrown back garden. After a few months of use it had gone into one of the garden sheds, probably to stay there until it rusted solid. Karen had obviously found it and decided the chain saw would make an ideal weapon. The creature closest to the door had its back towards her. She took the saw down through its head, easily cutting through the skull and the jaw with its wicked looking teeth. Tim now knew they bled and that their blood was red, as the saw sprayed it all over his corridor. There was a little sparking and the engine made a few strange noises, as the fast moving blade hit the creature's shell. Nothing was going to stop the saw though, it almost cut the beast in two.

“Get ready..... I left the car's engine running.” Shouted Karen.

The saw got tangled up in broken shell and one of the creatures turned and struck out at Karen. She turned the chain saw over, cutting off all its arms on that side as she brought it up. All that cutting, all that pain, yet the creatures never made a sound. As that one died there was just enough space to get past, if he was quick.

“Run Tim..... Run.....”

~ ~

~ The End ~

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