



Age of Pisces

By Geeti Das

On the last day I go down to tickle the fish. It's been a while. What if they haven't missed me? It is common knowledge these fish can't see above water, but they know me by the scar on my hand from a shard of glass. I tell people it was because of an unhappy love.

My wife loved them dearly. I liked her better. Still we stayed in the house near the water, first out of love, then out of house arrest. The grounds have a conservation park and it is now my sanctuary.

Better not think about it, now she's not around. Ask me where she's gone. Go on, ask. Maybe I'll say she ran off with the insurance salesman. Pretend she's "Missing!" on a box of milk. Or I could tell you it was because of an unhappy love.

The fish, then. Greg is my favourite. The others show up when they feel like. Greg comes every time I visit.

He's a half-breed. I don't know how such a small fish got it on with such a big one, but there you go. He seems unselfconscious, though, and that must be tough with all these uppity purebreds. "What's the news from outside?" I ask him. "Who's in power now?"

Most of them aren't worth shit but I give them pellets anyway. At twilight they all come up to the surface and float on their sides like they're dead. It fools me every time. Occasionally I pull one out to see if she's breathing, then toss her back when she twitches. I'm intrigued by their inertia. They float along, one beady eye up to the sky as if they could see it. Morons.

Apart from this they have no unity. I saw them set upon Carlisle when he was still flopping about near the sandbank, and pick his bones clean. I saved his skeleton for scientific research. When they burned my lab I transferred it to the fridge, floating in Tupperware. I put an open box of baking soda next to it for freshness. We're lucky; baking soda's going up but we still have plenty stockpiled. I bought some stock in it and it's keeping me afloat now that the regular sources of income are dried. We keep it in a neutral area for tax purposes.

The fish, that's what I'm talking about. They reek. Rhonda's the only one who can save me now. I'm sure of this, though I don't know how I know. I feel it in her belly, she's going to produce an heir. They ruled against her but she stayed anyway. Nobody noticed, not with all the fighting, scuffles in the reeds and in the schools, every day blood on the plastic diver by the treasure chest. And the music blaring out of those newfangled gills. Who are these beatniks and where do they get their funding?

There's no more paper. I don't just mean in the house, but everywhere. There's no heating either. My assets are frozen. Every day I go down to the water and nab a fish for money. Salt is the original currency. I pick which friend to boil and dry so I have enough for groceries. First I took the ones I didn't like. Then I started to take the ones I did like, so's not to play favourites. Then I said, "Fuck it", and just stuck with the ones I didn't like, until only the ones I liked were left. Then I started to like them less, and it got easier. Today it's going to be Jill. They don't seem to notice I'm massacring them one by one. Every day when I stick my hand in that piss-coloured pond they rub up

against my fingers, waiting to be pleased. They have no foresight. Where is their Five Year Plan? Jill was jilted by Phil the other night. It was an unhappy love affair. In homage I make the first incision in the heart.

Riots have started down-pond. After dinner I make a second visit. I never go more than once a day, but civil unrest deserves an exception. Phil is gone and Rhonda is gone and the storefronts have been smashed by bats, yet Greg finds time for me. What are they saying in their gatherings of less than three after curfew? Who is carrying the messages? Who funds them?

"I think you can go now," Greg whispers to me urgently in the moonlight. "The doors are broken, and nobody's been watching you since you boiled the last guard for salt. I took the rap. I had to leave my moll behind. A man must break a woman's heart of gold, and you can go anywhere now."

I push my beaker into the water and gently nudge Greg in. I take him out of the grounds and slowly, reverently, I carry him in to the kitchen. I set him on the counter. I sing to him. I light the stove and his eyes widen when he hears me strike the match, so wide you can't see the lids any more. Wider than saucers, and whiter too.

"Take me away from all this," he implores me, gasping on the cutting-board, "The surveillance has ceased. They're all gone." He could be right – I haven't been to the front part of the house since the fire. On the other hand, it could be a trap. I can't take any chances. How can I check, when it's impossible to see the foyer from this angle?

Geeti Das hopes to become a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies in May, after which she hopes to continue studying at the New School, hoping to eventually become a Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science and then, hopefully, be employed. If not her, then who?