

Heavy Plant Crossing

He remembered that last shining moment when she had turned to him and smiled, before she closed the front door behind her and went to work, every last detail in a crystalline moment of clarity before the world changed.

He remembered the Tuesday morning ritual as they moved through their morning routines like dancers, touching briefly, kissing deeply and laughing freely. He saw the fall of her hair on her neck as she glanced back mischievously after stealing a bite of his toast, recalled her pantomime scream as she fled his threatening milk soaked spoon. He remembered her sexy smile that turned to warm lips making his heart ache, while she poured Rice Krispies down the back of his neck.

Jody always been the one for him, from the second they met while studying astronomy at university. She was slender, small and had a way of bringing out his smile; she was the fun side of trouble. He had become her accomplice in fun, hullabaloo and eventually in love. But she had always been the shooting star, ending up working for the government, while he taught at the local college.

They had bought the little detached cottage together that she had loved at first sight and he had wanted because it made her smile that supernova smile and that was the centre of his solar system.

She'd been excited that morning almost hopping with excitement as she bounced around the kitchen, they had a meteor fragment coming into the lab today and she couldn't wait to see the promised large fragment and was already suggesting it might be part of some alien's bathtub, interplanetary craft or the universes version of left over KFC.

"You never know, we might discover the ingredients of the universe's secret recipe." she smiled and her big brown eyes shone with excitement.

They were the last memories of happiness.

He'd packed his satchel with marked papers, a John Wyndham novel and a plastic wrapped egg mayonnaise sandwich and headed for the car.

His day was a repeat of most of the proceeding work days, this one was only punctuated by the slight disenchantment at not to get a sharing lunch message from Jody. But he sent her one about his egg sandwich and the clenched noses

in the staff room and tried to assuage his disappointment by remembering how exciting today was for her and how busy she must be.

He was first home as always as his day in the college finished at half past three. He started dinner, her favourite Thai red curry, sang lustily and badly along with his 'Born to Run' album, a classic that they both enjoyed and waited impatiently for her return.

When she hadn't returned at ten past six, he became irritated and checked his phone for a missed message that she would be late home and then tried calling her. He left a cheerful (not that he felt it) answer phone message about her dinner being over her side of the bed.

By the time his irritation had started to turn to worry, the amount of text messages had tripled and finally he called the facility she worked in, to be told that she was unavailable to take calls.

Now the worry started to turn into deep concern, being this late home was unheard of and by the time he went to bed at 1 AM to lie staring at the ceiling he was frantic. Finally an hour later he heard her car pull into the drive way and he read 2:05 off the glowing red of their alarm clock and he jumped out of the double bed, throwing off the duvet and raced down the stairs.

When she walked through the door, she looked pale and tired and he felt the annoyance of worry vanish under a wash of concern. He immediately swept her up in his arms and felt the wetness of her tears on his T-shirt and he held her till she stopped shaking. When she gently pulled away he took her to sit in the living room, while he made hot chocolate. Once they were both settled, he asked what had happened.

She started hesitantly, but once she'd started it came out in a flood. She told him that she had gone to the lab to see the new meteorite sample that had come in, but as she had arrived the lab had been filled with floating black fluffy specs that looked like dark dandelion seeds caught in the breeze. She saw Jeremy and Tom her colleagues (less than interesting boffins he'd met at parties) through the labs double doors in a swirling storm of spores.

Dumbstruck she watched them thrash about until an alarm went off. Lights flashed and a siren screamed, in shock she just stood and stared at the two men apparently choking or struggling to breath like fish out of water in the snow storm of seeds, until with an electrical whine the double doors swung shut to seal the lab and the two struggling men off.

She'd looked desperately through the thick glass to see the two men collapse onto the floor and she told him how she had then started to scream for help. A group of security men arrived and took her to a small conference room where she was locked in and she had sat there numb for at least a couple of hours, trying to take in what had happened.

She had sat in shock for a while, remembering the men falling, clawing at their throats, while they writhed on the floor as if the skin of their necks were on fire. Eventually after several hours and the shock began fading and annoyance kicked in, her natural spirit took over and she became mad about being locked up and being told nothing (I began to fear for the first person to open the door she said). She had then begun hammering on the door and shouting for attention.

Eventually the director of her dept. arrived Dr Evental and he was full of apologies, but he was white face and had haunted eyes. He tried telling her that it was simply a quarantine procedure and there was nothing to worry about. But she could see the strain around his eyes and the memory of her writhing and prostrate colleagues was fresh in her mind.

She raged against his apologetic and watery eyes, till she could tell that her attempts to find out any information had hit a cliff face of desperate silence and she then demanded to be released.

They brought in a medical technician who checked her mouth, ears and eyes and seemed satisfied and sent her home with instructions not to return to the facility for a couple of days and here she was.

In the face of such excitement, he could only register his shock and surprise at the events she had been through and offer sympathy for the fear and hardships she had had to endure. Finally when it seemed she was too restless and annoyed to ever stop pacing he told her it was late and she needed to sleep then proceeded to chivvy her up to bed.

He awoke at seven AM as usual, but unusually didn't manage to wake her up as she rolled out of bed and stumbled half asleep into the bathroom. When he shuffled out of the bathroom in his dressing gown, showered and shaved twenty minutes later; she still hadn't shifted, so he took a moment to drink in her features that were caught by the bright glow of light coming through the curtain fibres. Not wanting to wake her after her nightmare day yesterday, he

snuck downstairs for breakfast and let himself out of the front door as quietly as possible.

It was a dull day at the college, with too many smart mouth kids and too few smart minds. Worse still despite numerous messages to Jody, he got no reply and again irritation turned to worry and the last few hours at work seemed to last an eternity, as his voice droned out his lesson and the clock ticked in slow motion.

At the end of the day he rushed home, only stopping off to get her favourite flavour of Ben and Jerry's before he got home, spraying gravel as he sped into the drive and anxiously battling his key into the front door lock.

The house was quiet and despite the June warm weather all the windows were still closed and the TV screen black in an unused living room. He jogged up the wooden staircase that they had sanded back to bare wood together and he remembered them drawing faces together in the dust left behind.

The bed was unmade and empty, as was the bathroom. Only a vague odour of decaying vegetables like his parents old greenhouse hung in the air.

Beginning to feel concern that made his heart seem to swell in size, he trotted back down the stairs and into the kitchen. The fridge was wide open and several of her favourite spotted glasses were left on the counter with varying degrees of half-finished water. The door to the little conservatory was open and when he looked into the bright lit room he found her, sitting in the middle of the conservatory in the light, seemingly lost in thought as she stared up to the sun through the glass ceiling.

"You alright love he asked?" he asked a little nervously, confounded by her inattention and distant stare.

He was about to repeat the question, when as if she had just realized he was there, turned towards him and gave him a frail smile.

"Hi Honey, where have you been?" She asked in a happily apathetic tone.

"I've been at work hun, but I got you some 'fish food' your fav Ben and Jerry's, I may even let you use a tea spoon this time." He grinned at her trying to slip into their normal repartee, trying to escape the strangeness in her behaviour.

"Thanks hun...but I don't want any fish. But I am thirsty. Could you get me some water?" She asked with the same disjointed smile fixed on her face.

"Yes, sure babe" He said with giving her a reassuring smile, which she ignored as her gaze drifted back up to the view through the glass roof.

With a ridge of concern like a lump in his throat, he closed the fridge door and starting hunting for an unused spotted glass when the phone in the kitchen rang.

“Yes, hello!” he said a little abruptly, wanting to get back out to see Jody.

“Hello, Mr, erm. Is this Jody’s partner?” The voice was strident but a little shrill and he recognized Evental’s voice.

“Yes, this is he.” He said a little dryly as it was irritatingly obvious that the man didn’t even remember his name.

“Is Mrs, erm Miss...Is Jody available please?” He started stumbling over name choices and tried to finish off sounding important, succeeding in making himself sound more obnoxiously ridiculous.”

“No, I’m afraid she’s busy in the conservatory and can’t come to the phone at present. Mr. erm, Evan Ball is it?”

He felt enormous delight in puncturing the little man’s self-inflated importance.

“Well, yes. Could you ask her to call Dr EVENTAL, the office please?” He could hear the sneering annoyance, which gave him a little happy satisfaction.

“It would be my pleasure, Mr Evertal.” He said deliberately mistaking his name again, with his enjoyment leaking into his voice.

“Yes, yes. Well thank you. I hope she is, erm well.” Evental asked in a congested tone.

There was a long pause and gradually unnervingly long pause, he could hear Evental’s breathing and could almost feel the tension in the man’s harsh breathing coming across the echoing sound of the line.

“Was there anything else Evental.” He said dropping the ‘Dr’ prefix to his name to finally trying to shake out the awaited question, which the man obviously wanted to ask. But he was surprised when it wasn’t finally a question that the man strangled out.

“If she does become, ill or you think anything is the matter, you must call us.”

There was what sounded like fear in the man’s tone and his pretension had dropped away “You are in danger, please believe me, we can help you.”

“Thanks, I’ll bear that in mind.” He said as he abruptly hung up and placed the kitchen mobile back in its cradle; he did not want to hear anymore, his mouth had become uncomfortably dry.

After failing to get Jody to eat tea or managing to drag her out of her fugue wool gathering state of mind with conversation, he did eventually manage to get her up and into bed, where she fell quickly asleep. He lay in the dark next to her staring at the moonlight flashing unfathomable shapes onto the ceiling above him and in the darkness and wondered with trepidation, what had happened to the perfect nature of their little world.

He was woken up at half past two by the red lighted numbers of the alarm clock, as Jody was thrashing in the bed next to him, twisting away the sheets leaving him exposed to the early summer night air. He was struck immediately by the palpable heat coming off her body and was not surprised when he touched her brow to find it hot and damp with sweat.

He tried to wake her, but she only managed to partially rise from her fever ridden stupor, managing to croak "water."

He brought her a large spotted glassful and two paracetamol, which she swallowed and quickly emptying the glass in large gulps and sending him for more with another croak.

After a repeat performance with a second glass, she was asleep by the time he returned with a third. He put the water down quietly on her bedside cabinet and looked at her now peaceful face and then looked closer. Her face seemed a little lined, which he thought was where she had creased her face on the pillow material. But looking more closely it appeared as if her face had stretched out a little and was crisscrossed with tiny creased lines, vaguely like veins in the surface of her skin. She seemed comfortable though and despite being concerned he decided to wait until the morning to see if she had improved.

When he awoke in the morning the situation with her temperature had dissipated and she seemed calm and happy, but the situation with her skin had become more severe. The creases and texture of her face had become more like the surface of a nettle, while the colour of her skin had become tinged a light pear green. More startling was the change in the angles of her face. The stretching had continued and each ridge of her face had become more pronounced, while the edges of her face had become thickly bordered and sharp. He was ambiguously reminded of Christmas holly while his chest ached with fear sharpened horror.

On her request for more water, which led yet again to several trips, the last of which he finally realized filling the summer Pimms jug would save time.

When she reached out to take the jug with both hands, he saw that the ridges on her face and the changes in its shape had continued across her body and a cold chill ran through his guts. While he panicked internally about what to do he went downstairs, leaving her gulping water and found he was back in the kitchen looking at the phone. He stared at it for minutes while he worried at his indecision, till with a flash of her changed face in his mind, he began frantically opening kitchen draws to find Jody's address book, so he could phone Evental.

After a desperate search involving emptying any paperwork or object that got in the way of his search on the floor, he finally discovered the brown leather phone book and began searching for the number. On finding the number he snatched up the phone and stabbed the number into the phone dial pad, while pacing through the debris he had thrown all over the kitchen floor.

The phone rang, the burring ring repeating again and again, but no answer came. With no other plan of course of action going through his mind he let it ring on, while he dug his nails into the wooden edge of the kitchen worktop. Just when he started to consider an ambulance the line clicked and there was the static of connection and gentle sounds of breath.

"Hello...Is that you Dr Evental?" The silence stretched again with only the sound of soft breathing. "Evental, do you hear me?"

He could hear the strain in his voice and feel a wave of nauseous panic rising at the back of his throat.

"Evental, do you bloody well hear me!" he shouted his voice was rising with anger and anxiety.

Before he could begin shouting down the phone line again, and release the desperation gathering in his chest and to get a reply to the circumstances that were gathering like red lined shadows at the edges of his sight.

Then like a distant ghost voice Evental spoke.

"It's too late...too late" Evental breathed with a soft rattle "They have come from the stars to take possession of our world..."

"What are you talking about? Who has come?" He demanded.

The strange nature of Evental's distant voice only added to the surreal horror that seemed to be unfolding in his mind.

“The asteroid was just a seed pod.” Evental laughed gently to himself, lost in a dream of his own words “We are just fertile ground.”

The line clicked again and the dial tone was droning in his ear.

He heard the sound of the back door through the conservatory opening and closing and was instantly through the kitchen door and into the bright lit conservatory, sunny in the late morning light. Outside he saw Jody, she appeared to be naked, but the movement of her body seemed wrong as she moved very slowly up the garden

He snatched open the PVC bound glass door and ran up the garden to her.

She had stopped with her arms extended, her face and body angled up toward the sun.

Her body now looked more like a human stick insect, thin joints and widened limbs and body parts, like the imitation of leaves. But her face still remained within the holly shaped surround, and despite the indentations on the flesh, her features remained.

“Can you hear me Jody?” He asked with a voice full of hesitant disbelief and empty of emotion as if had been scared away. He waited hopelessly for a reply that didn’t seem to be coming, he dropped his head in loss and just when he felt that he might weep for the grief of losing her, she spoke.

“There’s no need to fear my love.” She breathed in a voice chillingly like Evental’s “It’s warm and safe my love. You just need to wait and we can be together, for always.”

He looked into her eyes that were unchanged by her transformation and he longed to be lost in those eyes he’d always known. He couldn’t be apart from her, couldn’t leave her behind while he went on with life. The choice had already been made, he’d never wanted to be anywhere else but with her, so he took her ridged and misshaped hand, ignoring its alien texture.

“Will we always be together my love?” He asked heartsick and defeated.

Her face and neck seemed to be swelling, but her eyes were locked on his.

“We will change and grow together...for always.” She said in her breathy voice and smiled her supernova smile, while black dandelion like seeds began being blown out from the indentations in her new skin. They surrounded the pair in a swirling cloud of tiny bristling spores while they stood in the multitude of floating specs staring deeply into each other’s eyes.

Time drifted by, rain fell at night and the sun rose the next day. No planes passed or cars in the street, not a person or animal could be heard.

As the days turned, the pair became entwined into each other, merging as each grew into the plant tissue of the other until they were unidentifiable as individual beings. As more days passed the garden began to shoot and grow green tubes with golden leaves that formed together into a huge flower bud wrapped in multiple layers of tendrils and leaves. The two that had become one swayed to the rhythm of the swelling bud, as its vast golden leaves spread out around the central hub and expanded, soaking in sunlight like solar panels. Energy began to surge within the veins of the growth and power surged, while the interior of the tight bloom began to glow in verdant greens and lambent reds as over many days the energy built creating a shimmering haze.

Finally late on afternoon the intensity of force became a bright shivering glow within the bud and it compacted in upon itself. The entwined pair raised leaf arms, as if waving of a loved one on a journey.

The bud blossomed peeling away in leaves from the top of the flower with a roar of plasma energy and a shoot of blue force, that fired a stony asteroid seed up through the clouds like a rocket. As it travelled upward it ejected blue luminescence out behind it and it passed up through the atmosphere. The fiery projectile left the bloom behind smoking and wilting from its burnt leaves and carbonised interior.

The person plant then began to drift away from the dying vegetal assembly and its completed task, out into the trees behind the house. Like an enormous blueish green hybrid Aloe Vera walking in staccato waving steps, while one central stem, a indented dish shaped oval, surveyed its new world through the shared eyes of lovers.