

I swivelled my head back and forth at the street garden life, how it dominated the lawns as the rain fell on my cold face. How they sway, stretch, happy as the droplets fell, growing, living.

My moments alive are limited now.

I pondered. If these horrible events stopped now, I still do not believe I could face trees or any plant in the same way again. Now, they are something else, benign, as twisted as the bark gnarls that stretched out - they see me.

They watch.

Those knotty branches just want to reach out and grab me.

Unthinkable just a few months ago. 'Twas a time when me, Harold Pinsley, would more likely hug a tree rather than want to chop it down.

Let's backtrack a little.

Now retired, taking care of my garden placed a daily smile on my face, never a chore. I love the greenery. I don't want to think differently even now. I do not understand how it started, how those bent and weather-beaten formations just one day decided,

Kill us all.

Where did the anger grow in those fleshy protrusions? At what point did we seriously piss off Mother Nature and cause her to throw the biggest strop since time began.

And what about food - now we are talking. Perhaps my vegetable diet is one reason I stand amongst an endangered species now. Sounds silly. Sure it does until quite recently. True vegetarian, me. I sought that next succulent plant, something unique. I have eaten just about every vegetable there is, for what can grow in a typical British garden.

But, Cactae.

Hmmm. Now that turned a new leaf - no pun intended. Those hardy cactae that can flourish in the garden, just grow and grow into a succulent source of food. That was the plan, an edible cactus. A hearty and tasty meal with a different vegetable for dinner. I hear you, what he say? Eat cactus?! Those pads are tasty, raw, cooked, whatever. I was desperate to try something so different. In hindsight, I should have stuck with potatoes.

Anyway, I digress.

Then it started. Nature cast a shadow across the planet sending us right to the bottom of the food chain. The greenery began to consume just about every ounce of fauna around, then humans; they hit back, and now impossible for us to regain our higher position in the food chain. How? Simple.

They eat us. Why Not? We eat them.

When I bought the two foot fleshy cactus, I just wanted to whip up a tasty meal quite different for myself. Not my bitch of a wife. Nothing pleases her, Just zero, except several gins. As I stand here, staring at my cactus and intended source for some hearty meals, I continue to wonder at what force of nature I grew. And good food, a different taste for my palate.

The cactus held a sense of a solitary life, one to connect with my own. Just about to slice it up when the world just flipped over.

For me, this is how this new world started.

So, four months ago.

I purchased the sizeable critter down at the local garden store. Soon as I returned home, I picked a spot, right in the centre of the garden. Gloves on, I eased the cactus out of its pot and transplanted it into the soil and filled the hole.

Now, this may not come across as a big deal to anyone else. For me, no-one else in my street had grown one. And I smiled, lost in complacency even now at growing this thing - that literally changed my life.

In more ways than I imagined.

I recall how I smiled oblivious to the fact that soon a new world beckoned where humans no longer controlled the planet.

It unfolded.

Two weeks later. I slurped on my hearty stew. Maisie, my ever-loving wife, I huff, plonked her handbag on a chair as she sighed before her first insult of the day. A daily routine: she gets home from work, time to pick an argument. No surprise that our children flew away as soon as they could so long ago.

“Stew again, any chance of you eating real food, rather than your slop.” Her face contorted with a bitterness that had wrecked her once smooth complexion.

“Good to see you too, Maisie.”

“Bin it. Suppose I either eat your shit or cook actual food.” She spat upon her inspection of the bubbling saucepan: a Mediterranean concoction of lentils, peppers and courgettes. “You may like being a vegan, but some of us actually like to eat food sometimes, Harold. Oh, but go ahead, just cook for yourself.”

“It is nice, different to the last stew, try it. Guarantee, you will be satisfied.” I sniggered inside.

“Don’t bother schmuck face. I’ll eat out, again.”

With that, she swung the front door behind her, not even so much as a glance at the events unfolding on the TV news worldwide.

Or my grateful face as she departed.

I glared at the television as the news spurted what could not be true. I listened.

A BBC newsreader spelled out the unfolding chaos. “In many areas of London and other cities, Manchester, Cardiff, Bristol, and within many other towns, reports are coming in of people claiming that various plant life has tried to...eat them. Of course, the events have been dismissed until this footage was captured and posted to YouTube today. We ask viewers to be cautious of who is watching, much of this footage captured in Hyde Park today is very disturbing.”

My blood slithered through my veins like a fast flowing ice stream. Jerky mobile phone footage of a teenager running and screaming. Lots of people fled from the park area. Screams, cries for help. So many ran from something.

Then, it came into view.

Truly, my eyes lied.

Despite the shaky footage, I could make out tree branches as they grabbed people and tossed them upwards before a tight clasp, for consumption. The trees danced around, they pulled at their roots as the branches reached out like claws grabbing anyone within reach.

“Scientists are baffled by these terrifying pictures. Frank Kosser, a professor of natural science at London Metropolitan University is with us now. Professor, what does the science world make of this footage?”

The wise yet perturbed face of the Professor filled the BBC newsroom screen. I turned up the volume.

He spoke. “At first, I thought of course, this is a farce, some computer generated hoax but there are now over one thousand reports of them, attacking residents, and feeding. Whatever is happening is escalating by the day. So far, just a sprinkle of areas globally, but it is clear that this will become more ubiquitous in the days to follow.”

“What is happening if this is no hoax, what conclusions should we reach due to this extraordinary footage?” The news reader asked, she barely hid the tremors in her voice.

The professor sank a little in his chair. “The prized author and researcher, Anthony D. Williams, once wrote: Mankind can only disappoint Mother Nature for so long. He spoke wise words of warning. We have ravaged this planet, we have poisoned it for far too long. We have arrogantly thought we can outsmart nature. Now it is time for nature to show us, we are not as clever as we think. Given the way we have treated our planet, nature now wants a win, and is fighting back. Slowly, weather has worsened across the globe, we have witnessed climate change that is unprecedented. But one aspect Mother Nature’s wrath has simply been waiting. Landscaping has changed our land, we have destroyed forests, scientists have experimented on plants to research plant parasites, germination. In so doing, we put humanity first. Now we must pay the price. And now the flora has no respect anymore for any living organism other than its own kind. Their intelligence has remained hidden from us since time began. What they are truly capable of, always buried in the earth. Until now. The human race will soon no longer be the dominant species...”

I switched off the television unable to comprehend what I heard.

I ran sweaty palms through my hair and strode out into my garden. My eyes took in the street view: gardens with hedges, some with huge Piwon trees, many neighbours showed off blooming cherry gardens, and pink blossoms - all still, for now.

They waited, prepared.

A few months passed. At least one report of an attack daily in cities worldwide. Yet to reach my tranquil street though.

The cactus just wavered there in the brewing wind. And my first scary revelation. Over five feet in just a few months: long fleshy feathery and spiny arms attached to a thicker hard-walled trunk.

How?

Will take time to eat this, I muttered at the time.

Its prickly skin bulged, sometimes, the stems pulsated, as if it coursed with life. Each day, it just grew at a phenomenal rate.

As dusk fell, I watched more documentaries about the insane attacks worldwide. One realisation for sure, the professor so right - it escalated by the day. A news reporter asked a gardener about his venus fly trap, and why it lunged at him, almost said goodbye to her hand when she tempted the plant with an outstretched hand. Hundreds of people reported dead in cities, martial law declared in some countries. I mean, really, martial law declared to secure towns because of - homicidal vegetation. Another piece of footage showed the army as they advanced with flamethrowers and torched whole woodlands as nature lashed out at them.

Maisie burst through the door, just back from her local watering hole - sobriety out the window. Worse for wear, she clambered around then just stood there, stared at me with those bitter eyes. I felt the weight of her contempt in those eyes; even as the world around changed, she remained the one thing I truly despised.

A scream. Then another from outside.

“What was that?” I stood up.

“Sit down you pathetic excuse for a man.” Maisie pushed me back onto the chair.

“Can’t you hear that. Have you not been watching the news for weeks now. This world, of ours, something is wrong, people are dying,” I gathered strength against this wicked woman, I pushed myself off the chair. God knows why I had hung around so long. “And as for you, think I have truly had it...”

She just cackled back at me. “You standing up to me now. Not going to go curl up into your sofa, wanna man up?” My blood boiled as this despicable drunk, my wife, barely able to stand upright threw more insults my way. “Mother fucking nature wants us dead, might as well enjoy our lives while it lasts. All you care about is that piece of shit garden you spend your hours in, “ She paused, eyebrows furrowed adding to the copious wrinkles, time had not been kind, “And that ridiculous cactus.”

“I have given up on interest.” My heart cold, skin as thick-skinned as the cactus. “No more of you, I want you out.”

She snorted loudly. “Really, this is my house you snivelling waste of space and...”

I cut in, “Wrong Maisie, my house, recall, I bought it. And in the event of a divorce, as per our little prenup, so many many years ago now, which in your so sober state you have forgotten, I get everything. You, “ I neared her, my eyes wide with hate, “Get what you are - nothing.”

Shrill screams for help again outside; think Jim wailed two doors down but I couldn’t absorb it, Not now. Time to eject this hideous creature from my life.

She craned her neck in my direction, cold eyes. “Really.”

With that, Maisie just headed out into the garden. I heard the shed door get wrenched open. The skies opened up outside, and it poured. Then, through the kitchen window, I watched as Maisie approached the cactus - wielding an axe.

She swung at the cactus, an axe blow that buried deep into the trunk.

“NO.” I yelled as I ran outside as fast as my aged legs could move.

She held the axe up, poised for another swing. Water seeped from an open wound on the cactus; another blow would be final.

“Stop Maisie, you crazy bitch.”

“Oh, shut up Harold. You fool. The cactus hates you Harold, all of us.”

“No Maisie, “ I walked towards her, one careful steady step after another, her enraged eyes felt like they stared right through me. The downpour soddened the garden soil, the cactus gash continued to seep more and more water as Maisie held the axe high.

“Say goodbye to it.”

She took a swing.

A spiny stem clasped her wrist, preventing the blow, the axe fell as the spines tore most of her flesh away to the elbow; another prickly stem wrapped tight around her neck, a sickening crackle as I heard it break. Her dead eyes stared right back at me as though sending a final scornful glare.

I fell back into the wet grass, whimpers, lips trembled, I stared at the horror before my eyes.

I could only watch as it consumed her, the spines withdrew every drop of blood, not a drop spilt, till her pallid skin tightened against the bone. Then the rest of her, every bone crackled under the sheer force of the prickly stems as it pulled her carcass into the soil before it buried her crushed torn body deep beneath the roots.

I cried out in terror, yet I also felt released. I could hear screams all over the neighbourhood. Shattering glass and shrill yells then a sudden silence.

Mother Nature now snapped at my front door.

Then it felt like a thousand nails just stabbed me, I bolted upright and scurried to the doorway.

Each blade of grass strained in my direction, my blood smeared across them.

And now. Moments after I watched it devour my wife.

Here I stand, in my porch, no longer in a peaceful world. I stood still as I accepted my destiny, too old to run, reminded of the Anthony D. Williams quote.

I knew my happy moments were short lived. As I peered at each blade of grass stretching in my direction, as the neighbours' trees strained, snap, snap, as they uprooted themselves, tearing away from their earth shackled roots.

Even my cactus, nature had other plans for my pride and joy.

I just stood there in the porch doorway, head craned outside, eyes shut, the rain pitter-pattered on my face and weary eyelids.

Ahead, I could hear the cactus roots as they writhed, twisted and tugged.

It wrenched itself from the soil.

Now, it came for me.