

Threads

*So many times I've walked alone here
Carried with the breeze.
Many more have walked beside me
Carried with the breeze.
Big Big Train*

One Door Closes...

Ted peered through the foliage and watched the two lads enter the cabin – up until a few minutes ago ‘his’ cabin. His mood had changed little since the discovery of the Common - the dead Common – and a weariness seemed to have descended upon him, like a heavy cloak. As he noticed the first fingers of smoke reach up into the autumnal sky he turned and made his way quietly through the wood, barely disturbing the golden blanket that recent gales had cast upon the woodland floor. He had no purpose here any longer, nothing to watch over and protect.

He had seen the arrival of the great carp as just that – a purpose, a task, but he had failed in that task and so it was time to leave.

As he trudged towards the small copse that hid his Land Rover from view he felt as if the life was ebbing from him, a feeling that had been increasing daily, and he knew that the sands of time were running low. One last mission lay before him, and it was a simple one – to end his days peacefully. A brisk breeze whistled through the trees and brought with it a tangible foretaste of winter. Yes, the sands were indeed running low; time to find a final refuge...

Sometime Later...

‘Shit! It’s got it, hasn’t it, Posh?’

They looked carefully, the fish was over the hookbaits, its vast bulk impeding their view, but then all became clear. With a sudden twist of its body, the carp fled the scene, a monstrous bow wave in its wake. At the same time a scream of tortured gears heralded the spinning of the reel, lain on the grass. A second, no more, passed before the scream was accompanied by the cracking of branches as those previously aloft became suddenly earth bound.

A rod arced, a reel continued to scream, as the biggest carp in the land fled for its life.

The memory of that day was burned into Neil’s brain like a brand. A power that he’d never felt the like of, before or since. The torturous scream of the reel as it begged for forgiveness, fruitlessly.

The fight had been epic; they’d known nothing like it before. Neil had descended the tree the quickest and had grabbed the rod first, as they’d agreed – first down gets it – but initially he had no control whatsoever and just had to hold on whilst the carp tried to put as much distance between itself and its potential captor. But ‘captor’ was an honour that Neil would have to earn the hard way and it was at least five minutes before the clutch eventually stopped ticking and he could start to gain some line. The initial run was ridiculous, probably a hundred yards, and neither he nor Smiffy could believe the

power. They'd seen the fish from above, so were pretty certain which one it was, but neither of them anticipated this sort of, well...rage!

Minutes seemed to pass in chunks of ten and it wasn't long before Smiffy looked at his watch and said, 'Bloody hell, Posh, half an hour. Do you want me to have a go?' There was little chance of that, he knew, but he was just trying to lighten the tension that hung over them like a thunder cloud.

'Yeah, right mate. 'Course I'm gonna do that!' said Neil with a snort, but he knew the score and also knew that it really would be 'their' fish, after all the hard work they'd put in to catching it. But he was getting way ahead of himself, and as the line flicked off the dorsal his heart skipped a beat and he shunned all thoughts of whose carp it might be from his mind. First of all, let's try and land the bloody thing, he thought.

They'd tracked it for months, catching brief glimpses of it in amongst the Poacher's Pads in the south west corner, or hanging like a ghostly submarine in amongst the snag trees. There had initially been no discernible pattern to its movements; it would just appear before them after days of absence, then be gone for just as long before betraying its presence in a totally different part of the lake. But after a few weeks a pattern did seem to appear, if a somewhat flimsy one.

Although they could not tell when it would appear, it did seem to favour one area for a casual feed. On the two or three occasions that they'd seen it in the Poacher's Pads, they'd also seen it a few hours later slowly grazing in front of the reeds opposite. They'd been unsure whether it was feeding or not but then, on one particular day, the sun had shone down perfectly through the crystal clear water and they'd seen little puffs of silt exiting its gills – it was definitely feeding on something, and that was the chink in its armour they'd been looking for.

They'd made a plan. Pre-bait, of course, but carefully, sparingly. No sack-loads of hemp or kilos of boilies, just a few bits here and there; a dozen grains of corn, four or five broken boilies, a handful of hemp. Half a dozen random spots, between the pads and the reeds; never the exact same spot, but within a yard or so, just to keep the fish looking and searching.

And they did. Look and search. Over a period of about a month, gradually the carp's natural curiosity and hunger outweighed their fear and stealth. How Posh and Smiffy stayed their hand for so long is incomprehensible, but they did until, by mutual consent, they knew the time was right. They also knew that they could only use one rod; one hookbait. Although by now they'd seen the Poached Mirror join its large companion, it was still too risky. This sort of chance might never arise again, or if it did it might be years hence.

Over that endless month they'd noticed that the pads seemed to be the area where the carp were more at ease. Maybe due to the cover overhead; who knew? It mattered not. The plan was amended and the pads would be where they would lay their trap, and on that very first afternoon...

A Wicked Web...

Stan had little knowledge of 'social media'. He'd heard of Facebook and Twitter, obviously, but they were as alien to him as knitting, nuclear physics and bio-degradable shoes (if there were such a thing). Still, he knew that Jean used Facebook to keep in touch with friends so he saw no harm in getting her to put a photo of Neil with the big mirror on there, to show their friends, especially Buzz. What Stan was totally unaware

of was that the 'Likes' on her Facebook page weren't just her friends, and his only concept of viral was to do with diseases, like flu.

It therefore came as somewhat of a shock to him when he got a call from Sid, the following evening, ranting down the phone at him.

'Blimey, Quill, you're taking a bit of a chance publicising that fish, ain't you?' was Sid's first volley as Stan answered the phone.

He was a bit taken aback and didn't quite know how to respond. 'What fish?' he stammered. 'What are talking about Sid?'

'What fish? What fish d'you think? That bloody great mirror that young Neil caught. You know, the one you told me about last night! What you doing putting it on Facebook?'

Stan felt his stomach turn over, as if the roller coaster ride had just gained extra momentum. 'How do you know that, you're not one of Jean's Facebook friends, are you?' Stan was scrabbling around in the dark, searching for a door that would lead to enlightenment, but they all seemed to be locked.

'Quill, you really are a bloody fossil, aren't you! It don't need to be a friend, mate. It just needs to be a friend of a friend who happens to like fishing and suddenly the whole bloody world knows. I don't suppose you go on any fishing forums do you?'

Stan mumbled a negative and allowed the opening door that was Sid to continue his enlightenment. 'Mate, it's everywhere. "Biggest carp in England" people are saying, although at least you didn't give a weight. But you're in luck, though.'

The door seemed to be opening a little wider, and the light was spreading through the gloom. 'Yeah, as usual, there's geezers on there who are saying it must be foreign. Nobody's seen it before so it can't be English – you know the flavour. I've gone on there and stirred that particular pot a bit and now they're all talking gibberish as usual – I think you owe me a beer, fella.'

After a further ten minutes of Sid's acerbic character assassination, they said their farewells and Stan was left to contemplate the big, wide web of spiders that he'd almost been trapped in. From now on, he thought, just keep yer big mouth shut, Peacock!

But there are spiders and there are spiders, and some are relentless in the pursuit of their prey, and this particular prey was fat and juicy, and very, very enticing...

A Plot Thickens...

'That's definitely him, Phil. I recognize him from Chris's photos. He had that big forty from there last year. That's gotta be the lake.'

Gaz had nearly lost his coffee when he first saw the photo of the carp on the forum. He wasn't a regular visitor, he found them pretty tedious most of the time, but he'd flicked on just to relieve the boredom at work. Hence, the thread was a day or so old and many pages long when he joined it. By then it had gone off onto numerous tangents, and deteriorated into the usual name calling, reminding him why he rarely went on there.

He was about to go back to the main page when he saw the top of a photo, at the bottom of his page. When he scrolled down and saw the huge carp was when his coffee nearly sprayed across the screen. The thread certainly had his attention now.

After scrolling back a few pages he got the gist that the fish was probably from France, but something about that bothered him. He was sure he recognised the captor

so had gone into his photo files and began searching, and after half an hour of good, Sherlock-like detective work, there he was. In Chris's folder, with the fish he'd caught from Felcham. There was the guy with an upper forty from the previous summer, and Gaz was absolutely certain that it was the same lake.

That was no French fish; that was one of the biggest carp in England and Gaz vowed, there and then that, sooner or later, he would be holding it. He just had to.

Whisperer...

Tony sat quietly, his back against the gnarled old oak tree. Occasional sunlight penetrated the leaf canopy and danced across his arm, his leg, the carpet of wild flowers at his feet.

The world hummed; hummed a tune he knew well.

For almost twenty years he had been learning the words, and he would continue to learn them for the rest of his life. It wasn't a task or a chore. It was just something he could do – like breathing.

Sitting in a semi-trance, he let the world sing to him, and he sang back.

A whisper of grass on hoof came from his right. Slowly, he focused his half-closed eyes and saw the doe and her fawn, quietly grazing on the tough grass ten paces away, on the edge of the tree's shadow. She looked up at him, indifferently, then went back to her grazing. There was no fear in her; it was as if Tony were just part of the oak's trunk, just another part of the landscape.

He remained sitting, comfortably, and let his mind wander off again, in search of another verse.

Time passed, slowly, and when he once again focused, the doe and her fawn were a breath away, enjoying some wild orchids. Casually, Tony folded his hand around a bunch of pungent garlic, easing it from the dark earth. He didn't offer it to the pair of deer, there was no need, he just lay his opened hand on the ground with the white flowers upon it. He then went back to his song.

The doe's tongue was damp and rasping, like fine sandpaper. It tickled his hand but he left it where it was until she'd finished her meal. Then, slowly, he raised his empty hand and began to stroke her muzzle. She didn't spook and run, she just moved her head up and down a little, nuzzling his hand.

From half-lidded eyes he watched as the fawn left its mother's side and slowly sidled up to him, pushing its moist nose into his armpit. He let the mutual massage continue for as long as they wished, and then felt them leave. The lyrics to this song were so very powerful...

Sometime earlier, somewhere else...

A particularly persistent ray of sunlight finally burst through the thin cloud blanket and alighted on the marginal waters of the lake, dancing along the rippling surface to reveal all beneath, to any who could see.

It alighted upon the broad back of a large carp, idly meandering close to the bank, and painted streaks of dark and light across its scaly shoulders.

From a nearby tree, a pair of eyes feasted on the sight, and a pair of lungs filled with air, not to be exhaled for many seconds.

This wasn't the first time that Anders had seen such a sight, but it still made his heart beat a little faster, his brow perspire a little more. What made the viewing even more tantalising was the fact that he was not able to cast a line to this irresistible carp – well, not legally.

He had spent many hours over many seasons in similar trees around this most private of lakes, and on very rare occasions had been witness to similar sights as those below him. But the rarity of the sight made it even more astonishing when it came.

The length of the fish was incomprehensible and, even in a lake so large, at points in its journey it must surely have to do a three-point turn to turn around!

It was a common, of that he was pretty certain, although the angle of the sun always seemed to be just south of wrong to view it's scaling. And its age; if rumours were to be believed it must surely be approaching its sixth decade. How could it have survived so long, almost undetected, certainly uncaught?

The answer, possibly, came snuffling along from his right. There were enough leaves and pine cones on the ground to ensure that an approach from man or beast would not go undetected and, surely enough, the arrival of the two Rotties was announced whilst they were still a hundred yards distant.

He'd anticipated such a turn of events – it wasn't unusual, and, let's face it, it was he who had instigated such patrols – which was why he'd chosen an area with quite a covering of fallen pine cones, just to help hide his scent. The hounds trotted up to the tree and, after a quick territory marking, carried on through the woods. He'd wait a further ten minutes before descending from his perch and disappearing through the woods and the boundary wall. Sadly, on looking back to the pool, he realized that the fish had moved on, but that brief glimpse would be enough to fuel his imagination for another winter.

How many winters were left, though? Not just for the carp but for him as well. He doubted that the fish was much younger than he, but his remaining time seemed predetermined and if they were to meet it would have to be sooner rather than later.

The sands of time were running low...