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Warnings We Do Not heed

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A Tomato in the Sun

“Fucking bugs!” Old Tom Rogers grumbled. “Every morning the same thing! You crap and I clean. Iye-god, you little bastards, but one day I’m gonna get Minnie’s tomcats to hunt you down! Then I wouldn’t have to put up with y’all crapping all over my nice tomato plants. It’s enough to make a grown man cry.”

Before the Texas sun rose too high and the heat became unbearable, Tom Rogers walked the oldest section of his back yard garden – he watered the heirlooms, pulled new growth weeds here and there, and picked up leaves that had fallen to the ground during the night. All the while breathing in the fetid smell of bug crap layered over earth and dirt and vegetation lilted sweet on the morning air. He crossed through the west portcullis to check on the new growth calabash he had planted a season earlier. The root looked strong, but this year’s vine fruit were coming in undersized. Maybe four inches at best and nothing close to the lovely purple and deep red heirlooms he harvested ten inches in diameter a year earlier. This season just wasn’t ripening with the same energy. Which, to an old green thumb like Tom, was both a sin and an insult.

“Don’t worry girls,” Tom soothed, “I’ll get to the bottom of this, I promise y’all that. I got a pretty strong suspicion who the culprits are cutting down our season.”

Tom Roger’s “One Acre Farm” was a fixture at the farmer’s market in Justin, Texas for the last forty years – always anchoring the prized corner booth every Saturday and Sunday with his summer heirlooms and fresh winter citrus fruits. He had been growing hot house climate fruit and vegetables since a little boy. Learning at the knee of his Daddy and his Daddy’s Daddy - whose cumulative experience dated back well over a century to their original farm in Ogallala before the Seven Continents War. Long before China and Asia abandoned Earth to successfully colonize Mars. And long before the UK built no-soil, hydro-silicone herbotic warehouses in the Tyco and Eimmert Craters of the Moon so they could feed their new civilization of Englishmen, Irish, and Scotsmen expanding across the surface. And even before Africa revolutionized the food supplementation industry by developing edible cotton pods – little puffs of augmented nutrition that tasted like shit – but helped stave off starvation for the millions of North and South Afrikaans who inhabited Venus. Earth, by the end of the century, had been left to old men like Tom. The remnants of global societies - the mountain folk and the dirt farmers and the indigenous people who preferred living off the grid.

Old Tom used a homemade concoction of water, plant fertilizer, and non-acidic vinegar to wash off the walking paths of bug crap. “You can bet it’s them alien locust motherfuckers, the way they keep shitting out that crispy brown crap all over the ground like broken eggshells every morning before dawn. Stinks like sour milk too and is way too chemical to be natural. It definitely ain’t harmless no matter what my son and all them scientists say. Especially considering the diet them fuckers is on.”

Spotting a fallen leaf under the Jacaranda tree, groaning as he bent to pick it up, Tom suddenly felt a gust of wings smack his heavily tanned face by a fierce, angry flutter that bounced off his cheek bone and flew high up into the tree just out of reach.

“Dammit, you bastard! I’m just trying to water my tomatoes,” Tom growled knowing the bug could care less. This one, sitting on a tree branch staring back with those big, black bug eyes, hissed loudly in reply.

“Don’t hiss at me, you bastard. Your bathroom break was over an hour ago. Well before the sun rose. What’re you still doing up anyway? Shouldn’t you be off with your swarm sleeping in your desert pod or dining on a mound of garbage or something?”

Tom stared up at the alien locust and thought, *decades of curiosity, movies of every speculation, and tons of government conspiracies about E.T. and the first aliens to arrive that make contact are these fucking things?! Big, tortoise shell alien looking locust motherfuckers from God knows where. Green with blue piping wings over metallic tinted shells. Who knows if they’re even aliens or if they’re not just some kind of dandruff that fell off them real aliens that crashed landed their spaceship in Roswell back in ‘53. I tell you this, our earth scientists don’t know shit. Or if they do, they ain’t sharing. Benign, my ass.*

Tom knew, just over a year ago, at the end of the Kellerman Century Count, Earth experienced a seismic shift. From the deepest part of southern Nevada, a swarm of alien locusts un-hibernated, forced themselves out of their travel capsule, and began swarming the planet like cicadas escaped from some secret lab. Gravitating to the hottest areas around the planet mostly, camping out in places like Death Valley in California or over in the Mojave deserts of Saudi Arabia, but pretty much going everywhere there was pollution in the air, sea, or land. These alien locusts fed off of that same pollution. It attracted them. Drew them to it. Dined on it like it was manna

from God. And as a result of their dietary habits, they ate up most of the planet's pollution while simultaneously purifying the air, cleansing the soil and filtering the seas. The only downside being they shit out massive quantities of brown crinkly eggshell pieces all over the ground each morning like it was Christmas snow. Go fucking figure. And now everyone left living on Earth got to experience the kind of environmental purity probably not seen since Juliet took Romeo off into the garden and laid down with him in the soft grass.

"Yeah," Tom said looking up at the alien locust in the tree, "we were scared of you at first. Figured we was goners, but you proved us wrong, huh? Well, I don't care if you do un-pollute the planet. Look what you're doing to my tomatoes, you alien motherfucker! My son and his Earth council can call you symbiotic and deem you beneficial to all mankind if'n they want. They can swear your crap is non-toxic cause it dissolves by midday with a little water and vinegar. And they can offer y'all every conceivable protection they damn well think of. But that don't convince me you aren't a nuisance. You and your fucking alien bastard brothers and sisters. What do you think about that, huh?!"

Tom continued watering his tomatoes while keeping an eye on the alien locust fucker sitting up in the tree. He had an urge to spray him with his hose, but it was illegal under Texas law to harm or harass them in any way. And his other neighbor, Agnes, – the queen of nosiness - would most certainly be up at this hour and in her own garden. If she saw him spraying "our benevolent friends," she would certainly report him. She already called the police once for his setting up the netting over his tomato plants, but since the netting didn't bother the alien fuckers in the least, he was only given a warning to be careful and told if the swarm was affected he would have to take it down.

"Don't you have someone else to bug?" Tom growled looking up at the bug. "Get it? Bug?" he said chuckling at his own pun.

"Yes, I understand, Tom," grumbled the bug back at him, still staring down.

Huh? Tom thought, *am I suffering heat stroke or did that alien bug fucker just talk to me?*

"I didn't find it that funny in the first. And second, you've been acting like a complete horse's ass since coming out here this morning. I'm just trying to live, how is that even bothering you?"

"I AM having a stroke!

"No," the bug replied, "you're not having a stroke."

Tom started feeling dizzy so walked over to the west portico table to sit down. Sweating buckets, even in cool early light, he lit up a cigarette to calm his nerves when the alien fucker had the nerve to fly down and sit across the table from him.

"As much as I enjoy the smell of cigarette smoke," the alien locust said, "that is truly one of the most disgusting self-habits you humans have invented. I hope I don't smell like an ashtray by the time you're finished."

"Fuck, I can't be high. Can you get high off alien crap? I'm sure some teenager out there has tried it by now."

"No, you're not high. And you're not experiencing heat stroke. I AM actually talking to you. So suck it up pal and get a hold of yourself. I have a few important things to talk with you about."

"Well, ain't I the lucky one."

"I detect your sarcasm. And you *should* feel lucky. Not everyone gets to talk to me. That neighbor you have, for example. She's oddly patronizing yet an insidiously unpleasant woman!"

“Well, y’all ain’t gonna get any argument from me on that one. So, if I’m not delusional, and y’all are gracing little ol’ me with your divine speech, why are you?”

“Glad you asked. Saves me the trouble segwaying into what we need to talk about. I want you to call your son and arrange a meeting between him and I.”

“Which son?”

“You know damn well which one, old man. Your eldest son, the 124th president of the United States. Mr. Thomas Theodore Roosevelt Hamilton-Rogers the fourth.”

“Okay, I’ll bite. Why do you need me to call my son in his official capacity?”

“Because, one, he doesn’t garden like you. And two, I have guests coming for dinner and I need him to set out a few extra dinner plates.”

“Huh?”

“You heard me.”

“There are more of you coming?”

“Yes, of course. I’m just part of the advance team. Your basic chief scout. The rest of my phylum will be arriving in, oh, about five earth years. Give or take a solar cycle or two to receive the message we sent them.”

“How many will there be?”

“Conservatively another hundred million.”

“Shit. That’s too many. We’ll be swallowed up.”

“Not really. One hundred million is a fairly small number considering how many of you disgusting humans are still running around this dirty planet.”

“We’re not that disgusting.”

“No, not in the grand scheme of things. The Malonates in the Vega System were much more disgusting creatures! You should’ve seen what they ate and then did with the digested food after. Truly ick! Their planet was much more polluted than yours too, which was nice, but the food tasted terrible. I like it here on Earth much more and am especially fond of your non-biodegradable plastics polluting the ocean. A salty-sweet treat for sure. And many of my younger larvae like getting high on the carcinogens from your aircraft exhaust. But the gross way you guys mate, so sweaty and convulsive, and constantly sweating out bio androgens even when just walking down the street turns my stomach. It’s the smell. Ugh, gags me.”

“Well, fuck you very much.”

“Temper, temper. Something you Earthlings seem to have great quantities of.”

“Glad y’all like it. So what do you need my son for? You little fuckers already have all the protections y’all need. More than most humans.”

“True. But if you haven’t noticed, your world is nearly pristine again. The air, the soil, the water.”

“Yes, I’ve noticed.”

“So, don’t you see? There are only a million of us scouts here and we’ve nearly exhausted your supply of food in a little over a year. We’re going to need a great deal more when my brothers and sisters arrive.”

“You’re talking about pollution. What is my son supposed to do about that?”

“Well, first, he needs to rescind every environmental protection law ever issued. And then he needs to re-institute growth in every major fossil fuel industry and get those pollutants going again. Coal mining, industrial waste, oil drilling, mineral fracking. Then he needs to call the rest of your fellow first world country demagogues and get

them doing the same. My counterpart in Brazil has already reported they're on board, but no one else in the world has yet."

"Wait. If we start polluting the planet again, you're saying your hundreds of million brothers and sisters can handle the pollutants sufficiently to continue cleansing the planet?"

"Of course. I'm not going to let my nest starve."

"Hold on, a sec. Just hold on. It occurs to me, if we go back to hard core fossil fuels just to give you a buffet, at the levels you seem to be expecting, won't we eventually completely exhaust Earth's resources? I don't know exactly how long that would take, but if you alien fuckers eat at such great speeds, then chances are it won't be long before Earth is all dried up. What then?"

"How do you mean?"

"You heard me. If we cut down all the trees to burn for fuel and make paper and build houses. And dig up all the minerals to create more microchips for computers, plastics for cars and spaceships and what not. And burn coal and fossil fuels into the air again killing off all the birds. And dump all that waste into the oceans killing off all marine life. Not to mention all that eggshell crap you shit on us killing off all the grasses and plant life, not to mention my prized heirlooms. What do we do when we've exhausted our world resources and you fuckers have eaten every last bit of pollution and begin to starve. What then?"

"It won't come to that. By that time my scouting team will already left for another planet. And the swarm will gather together to hoard supplies, hibernate and travel again. There's a really crass civilization we've heard of destroying their planet in the Nebula galaxy a few light years away. Now how about we make that call to your son. I'm free this afternoon."

“Wait! You’ll be gone. And we’ll be fucked.”

“I won’t let my brothers and sisters starve.”

“What about MY brothers and sisters?”

“That’s not really my department. Move to Mars or Venus or something. Make a real go of it. You all used to share a planet once. I’m sure you guys will be fine.”

“I don’t think you understand. You want humankind to turn loose the hammer of fossil fuel destruction and all you can say about our wellbeing is ‘I’m sure you’ll be fine.’

That’s a bullshit answer if ever I heard one. You fuckers started all this. We were doing fine before you.”

“You were? Hardly. Look, Tom, we’re going to finish what we started. And we’re going to leave you with an absolutely clean planet. No pollution, breathable air, rich soil, clean water. What more can you want.”

“The ability to sustain ourselves. What does it matter if the world is clean if we aren’t able to survive? If we’ve destroyed everything in the process just to feed you? You’ve invaded us and now you’re destroying us.”

“I assure you it isn’t like that. And it is much better than the alternative.”

“What alternative?”

“Well, we’re going to finish our cycle and leave you with a clean planet. And all you have to do after is develop new ways of living and caring for yourselves without relying on fossil fuels polluting your planet. It’s a win-win.”

“And just how do we do that?”

“Not my department. Even if it were, not really my concern. I’m a chief scout.”

“And if we don’t do it your way. The alternative is?”

“Well, until now we’ve stayed away from your thermonuclear arsenals and have been saving your buried plutonium till last. But, if push comes to shove - if it’s a matter of my brothers and sisters arriving without sufficient accommodations being made – I have little compunction not to instigate a world war among you. It wouldn’t be hard. Your people have been dying to set off those giant dildos against your own kind for decades. And when every nuclear warhead from here to Istanbul has been set off irradiating your planet, and nuclear winter set in, you’ll be dead and my nest will arrive in time to have the biggest backyard barbeque this side of Lubbock. Now how about you make that call?”

“You got it all figured out, don’t you, ya’ little fucker. All nice-n-cozy. But you forgot one thing. We Texans don’t take shit off no one. Not even alien locust motherfuckers who think they are doing us a favor!”

And with that Tom picked up his heavy glass ashtray smacking it down hard on the alien locust shell. He felt the crunch, saw the goo shoot out, and heard the shriek of pain.

“Oh, you bastard!” the little fucker whined. “That hurt! Oh, you human turd! You’ve done it now. Do you think you’ve stopped me?! I will not be denied! And you pigheaded human piece of Texas shit race can just die for all I care!”

“Viva Texas, you locust motherfucker!” Tom yelled again bringing the glass ashtray down repeatedly till there was nothing left but a quiet stain of goo and broken shell. It felt damn good.

At first, Tom noticed the silence as the sun continued climbing into the sky and the heat of the day rose. No birds, bees, or buzzing bugs of any kind. Then he heard the swarm. Buzzing low and long at first, echoing off the hills. Rising into the air. Growing till the sun started dimming in the sky and the sound reached a deep zenith.

“I think I’ll make that call to my son now,” Tom said to the dead alien bug, quickly standing and heading back into his house.

The End.