

Unforeseen Consequences

by

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My mood was as thick and turbulent as the storm filled sky. If I had been in a better disposition, I would have realized how clichéd that was. Instead, I found myself cursing, white knuckles gripping the counter to keep myself from hurling something, trying to calm down. My husband was asleep in the other room and I had just enough of a grip on reason that I didn't want to wake him. Having him storm out of the bedroom thinking someone was breaking in only to find me in the middle of a tantrum was not an avenue I wished to explore.

Letting out a forceful hot breath, I forced my shoulders down and pushed away from the counter. I slicked back my hair, curls frizzed in all directions from the high humidity, and tugged at my sopping wet shirt. Hissing under my breath, I trudged upstairs. "This is not going to beat me," I murmured to myself.

He had said it was easy if you knew what you were doing, and had trusted my intelligence to figure it out from there before heading off to bed. I'm sure he chuckled to himself a moment or two before drifting off to sleep, but I knew in his wildest ideas he had no idea what torment this would cause me. He loved me and even his taunting had limits.

Pulling off my shirt, I tried to reason with myself. "I can do this. I can make ArcView do back flips. Coworkers envy my computer abilities. I can certainly figure out how to hang a solar shower." As the shirt came over my head, I glared at the offending bathroom shower, pieces ripped from the wall, the handle pulled off to expose its deep innards. Somewhere in there was a leak. The evil look I cast at it, known to make teenagers tremble, had no affect on the leak in the shower.

Sighing, I rubbed my eyes and blinked at the time. I had to work tomorrow. I would never get to sleep without a shower. All I wanted was that blissful feeling of smooth as silk water running over my body, washing away a long hot day. A slight sob of desperation slipped past my defenses and I thought once again of waking my husband.

No, I can do this. I can overcome, make the best of it. It'll be fun. I pushed down the urge to roll my eyes at myself and picked up my favorite soap, a lump of goat's milk and oatmeal rolled together with an almond scent. Gathering my loofa, a washcloth and towel, I wrapped myself in my robe and put on my slippers to head back downstairs.

Okay, I thought, I know now that the hose on the solar shower is sensitive and will detach easily. That is what I had discovered in my first effort. Hopefully I hadn't lost too much water. But then, I could always fill it with warm water from the kitchen sink. It wasn't like the hot water tank was busted: just the shower fixtures.

Kicking off my slippers, I stood outside on the slate and stared out at the stormy sky. The rain had finally begun, sending ripples across the ornamental pond and pattering

on the walkway. From where I stood and watched beneath the overhand, holding a pail of all natural bathroom accoutrements, prepared to shower naked under a midsummer night sky, everything was perfect. Everything was in place: everything except me. I felt numb to the scene before me, disconnected. A core of fury wrapped in steel made of ice, I bent to pick up the solar shower going through the motions.

In less than two minutes, the half suspended bag was disgorging its contents in a torrent onto the slate. Trying to stem the flow, I allowed the bag to slip from its loosely knotted rope and fall to the tiled floor. Burning frustration, I wanted to rip apart the night sky, scream at the storm. Barely contained anger fueled my obstinate desire to succeed against the universe. Soaking wet, I reached once again to pick up the half empty solar shower.

Lifting a corner, my eyes caught the tiny curve of a salamander half hidden under the bag. Tiny eyes stared up at me, pausing my pointless passion. Gently, I picked it up where it perched on my finger, its tail wrapping along my finger. Though it was three inches long, it was still so young that most of its skin was transparent except for a smudge of black on its back and a dappling of yellow spots. Breathless, I stared into its wide spaced eyes as it stared back at me. It was not just any salamander I held, it was a Yellow Spotted Black Salamander. Unbelieving I raced into the house.

It had been after heavy spring floods had subsided during the spring that my husband had found a pile of gelatinous eggs sitting high and dry in the woods. The swollen spring stream was still too turbulent a habitat for such a fragile find. He had brought them home and placed them in the ornamental pond. "We can always use more frogs." I had nodded agreement with this truth.

We had kept aside just a dozen eggs or so, safe in a recycled Jiff jar. They floated in pond water as we watched them develop like excited school children, amazed at every wriggle, every tiny measurable amount of growth. It had taken weeks for us to notice something was wrong. Instead of plump little tad poles, these embryonic creatures stayed firmly slim, and long. Looking more like fish than tadpoles, we began to research exactly what type of creature we were harboring.

An internet search had ensued and finally revealed the nature of our charges: Yellow Spotted Black Salamanders. Awed, we had looked at each other, wondering what to do with an egg sack full of salamanders. Would we have a pond full of adult salamanders? We watched our micro-ecosystem of twelve develop and grow and then one day hatch. Moved to a bowl with flared sides to provide shallows, we watched the little creatures swim and wiggle, zooming around their tiny puddle. They would rest on the bowl edge on tiny, nearly invisible legs and watch us watching them with their tiny bright eyes.

Until one day we realized, they weren't growing very fast. "They don't have enough to eat." I agreed. It was time to let them go. So we freed them to mingle with brothers and sisters who were surely terrorizing our ornamental pond. They swam out of site and disappeared from our radar screen. Did they survive? We didn't know.

"Honey! Wake up! They're out! You're babies, they're out!" My husband tossed the covers back like I had yelled fire. Leaping over the edge of the bed, he met me

at the door and we both stared down at the tiny lizard staring up at us. Did he remember our two faces peering at him through the walls of the jar? Such a thought seemed impossible. Still, he was amazingly calm. Clutching my finger a little tighter with his tiny toes, he adjusted his body a little more snugly on my finger. Enamored, I sighed. My husband smiled.

A moment or two, we watched him amazed at the growth, the spots, and the translucent skin. Then my husband headed back to bed, a dreamy smile on his face. I headed back outside and stopped beneath the overhang. The storm was in full gear now, rain pelting the stone walkway, pummeling the pond. Hosta leaves bent under the rain, glistening in the light from the house. A cooler breeze cut through the humid air, carrying with it the scent of oatmeal almond soap like some exotic flower. The solar shower bag lay forgotten at my feet.

The whole world opened up to me again and embraced me. I placed my tiny passenger under a hosta where he clung to the bark mulch and continued to stare, not the least unnerved by the bizarre route his life had just taken. Breathing in the night air, I caught a movement out of the corner of my eye. A zigzag run from the pond to the flower bed. Looking around, I counted one, two, no there was another. That one made five, and counting the first one found, that made six: six salamanders running in the rain, emerging from the pond. I laughed from somewhere deep inside of me.

What were the chances that the bathroom shower would break on a humid night in the middle of the summer, the same night that summer storms would enable the salamanders to migrate? Smiling, I ducked inside to fill a large pot from the kitchen with hot water opting for a simple sponge bath. Then I slipped back outside to shower amid the salamanders.