

# The Fat Man; Or, The Judgement of the Fifteenth Year

## by Jack CJ Stark

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It was the exploding of the mirrors that signalled his arrival. He didn't like to see his own reflection. He considered it an unnecessary distraction. Also, he quite liked to make a dramatic entrance. He was a powerful man, after all, and it was important to him that others remembered this.

The fish woman had been giving herself a pep talk in one such looking glass before it was transformed to foot slicers. Fifteen years, and his fifteenth visit. This would be his last, though. It was the fish woman's final test, her final chance to impress. She had failed all other tests. This one mattered more than the rest, for if she failed this time, there would be no going back. She knew this to be true.

For the last thirteen visits, the fat man had chosen the greenhouse at the rear of the property to be his judgement hall. He was a man of habit. The fish woman waddled on her fins along the corridor. The slip slap of webbed membrane against the solid floorboards echoed out. Legs were a distant memory to her, but they were not the first thing to go. The fat man had taken her smooth skin as his first punishment. Turned it to scales. In an instant, in one single moment, she had gone from a woman to an outcast. The bat-like wings had come at some point after that. A cruel action caused by her misguided courage to convey her desire to fly, to flee. The fat man had mocked as he made the change. The fish body and head was little more than laziness on the fat man's part to come up with something innovative.

As the fish woman approached the door to the greenhouse, she could hear the chitter chatter of voices within. It hadn't been unknown for the fat man to bring another with him, but it was unusual. No doubt he wanted an audience for this last hurrah. Others to cheer his name, and spread stories of his deeds. No man truly dies when his name is kept in a story.

As for the fish woman, her death would be for another time. It is a universal truth that many things are worse than death, and word had gotten to her that the fat man was done with changing aesthetics. This time, if she failed, it would be her mind that would change. Would she

remember being a woman? A fish woman? How much would she be aware of herself? Three seconds, they say. That's as much as a fish can remember. It's probably bullshit. If the fat man had his way, which he would - there was no stopping that - he would leave the fish woman with enough capacity. Enough familiarity to cause an itch.

Three hundred days. That's how long the fish woman had been working on her latest piece. She felt it was her best yet, but it was difficult for her to gauge what the fat man really wanted. He rarely spoke his thoughts. He had no need to justify his desires to lesser beings. All the fish woman had to go off was the occasional smile or frown during her past performances. This time she was more confident than before that she would be spared a punishment. The story had a message. The songs contained upbeat, catchy, choruses. The characters were distinct from each other. The plot had dynamics and the ending was bittersweet enough. It was her Magnum Opus, but would it be enough?

The greenhouse smelled of violets. The floor was carpeted with overgrown thorns. The help did not want to work for a fish. So they had left long ago. The fish woman made her way to the far end of the space, in front of where the fat man sat. Upon the fat man's shoulders were two parrots, speaking in tongues. They silenced as the fish woman took her position. By the fat man's side, was a tiny owl. It spoke not. The fat man watched. His gaze unbreaking and suffocating. The fish woman filled her lungs, or whatever was in their place. The fat man nodded.

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Heavy breaths. Jazz flaps. The big finish. The fish woman looked on nervously. Trying to hold her smile, to hold her final pose. It had gone well, as well as could be hoped for. No mistakes. No fluffed lines. No missteps. If this was to be the last thing she remembered, so be it. She'd done her best.

"Bland," said the right shouldered parrot.

"Brave," said the left shouldered parrot.

"The performance lacked conviction," said the right parrot.

"The performer gave her best," said the left parrot.

“What is being said that hasn’t been said before?”

“A throwback to the times when stories were challenging and spoke what they couldn’t say.”

“A pandering to the whining snowflake generation.”

“A spotlight on the social issues of our time.”

“PC drivel. There is no substance to what is being said. She’s too afraid to speak her mind.”

“She shows compassion to all. None are her enemy.”

“She is weak. A pansy. A shit stained fuck hole.”

“She is my queen.”

The owl spoke not.

The judgement of the parrots was inconsequential to the fish woman. Only one opinion mattered. The fat man stared intently. His eyes had followed her around the room. His attention noticing every small movement, every breath, every blink and momentary lapse of attention.

He leaned forward, his fat stomach bunching up and pressing onto his neck. He brushed his face with his callous ridden hand. His left eyelid peeled off, revealing a black, smoke filled, orb. He silenced the parrots with his will, and smiled before snorting in the air around him. He was ready to speak, and the world was ready to listen.

“Goodbye, my love.”

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