



A VERY SHORT STORY

BACK TO NATURE

BY TYLER ENFIELD

→ Tyler Enfield is the award-winning author of five novels, including *Like Rum-Drunk Angels*, an offbeat, slightly magical re-telling of *Aladdin* as an American Western (Goose Lane Editions, 2020).

→ FIVE MINUTES IS ALL IT TOOK. Five minutes and already three fish; each fat as a calf, scales shimmering like pearls. Had I stumbled into a dream? Some fishermen's heaven? I cast again, yanked a Red Bull from the cooler and cracked it open, lit a smoke, tossed the match. My God, I hadn't even set up my chair yet.

And another bite! Unbelievable. I spilled the Red Bull in my excitement, the rod twitching like a telegraph as I arced it back and felt the hook set deep. My drag started to whine as the fish darted for the duckweed. I let him run, played him a few feet, let him run again. He was starting to tire.

I was sucking in line a mile a minute when this guy in a tuxedo appears. "You can't fish here."

"Why not?"

"This is a koi pond."

"So."

"In a restaurant. You can't fish in a restaurant."

This guy, *Raoul* his nametag said, was totally wrecking my concentration. I focused on the line, trying to reel the thing in. But it was an absolute monster. Four-pounder at least.

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you leave. This is not —"

"Can you just, like, be quiet for one minute? I've almost got this thing. Here, take my cigarette."

"I will not take —"

"Whoa! You see that?"

Raoul froze. A quiet moment of awe. "Was that a jump?"

"Heck yeah. This puppy's got springs."

Raoul took a step closer. And then: "That was a big one."

"Dang right. Here, give me a hand. Grab that net."

Raoul threw me an inquiring glance.

"Go on. You can't net him from up here."

Tentatively, the *maitre d'* climbed down to the pond's edge, nearly tripping on a Buddha, squatting beside a potted ficus. His patent leather shoes shone in the foyer's light. "Just scoop him up?"

I tugged the cigarette from my mouth. "You gotta get him headfirst."

"Like this?"

"No, you gotta get right in there. Get it down in the water."

Raoul jerked with surprise, and then stood with a look of child-like disbelief, the fish twisting in the net.

I bit down on the cigarette and grabbed the fish by the gills. Lifted it up. With Beethoven drifting in from the lounge, I said, "So what do you think?"

Raoul just stared, caressing his little moustache in wonder.

"Want to hold him?"

The tiniest gasp, a pause.

"Can I?"

"Heck, you helped. He's half yours, far as I am concerned."

I wrenched out the hook with my pliers and passed the fish over. Raoul grasped it admiringly, letting it hang there like a prize pheasant. Which reminded me. I pulled two more Red Bulls from the cooler. Cracked one open, passed it along. "You like fresh duck?" Took a sip.

"I love it," he said.

"Ever go hunting?"

"Never."

He handed me the fish and I opened my knife, squatted down by the water to clean it.

"Meet me at City Park at nine." **ED.**