



I wouldn't say that the Oblong farm pool was the most scenic place I've ever fished, nor were the fish therein liable to threaten even Albert Buckley's record (or so we thought...). But carp there were, and at the time that fact alone made the water somewhat unique, and a secretive sombrely clad band of anglers, including myself, travelled many miles to fish there. The atmosphere about the place was difficult to describe. The motley bunch of carp anglers who gathered there at weekends all interpreted the strange feel of the lake in a different way. Sometimes it seemed to resent you; at others it was happy to see you, and on some occasions showed its sense of humour by playing tricks on you. One thing you could always be sure of - no matter how slow the fishing, something of interest was bound to happen. And these events more often than not had nothing at all to do with the fishing. I think everyone who fished there had an interesting story to tell about the place, and although I've long ago lost touch with the principal characters in these stories, I'm sure they won't mind me relating some of their experiences. Before I start on this tale it may be as well to fill in a little of Vince's background. Unusually, for a carp angler, especially at the time which was around 20 years ago, Vince was Asian. Born in the small province of Yasoviristan, he had moved to England with his family some 10 years previously. Now you might have noticed that many people of Asian races cannot pronounce the letter "V". I don't know whether his parents had played some cruel trick on him by giving him the christian name they had, but it made Vince unique in the respect that, despite having complete mastery of the English language, he was the only friend I ever had who couldn't pronounce his own name. Wince he called himself, and so therefore did we.

I was into my second season on the lake when I first met Wince. It was rather an alarming meeting. He lived locally, and someone had told him that there were some large fish in the lake. Walking along the bank early one afternoon, I was surprised to see wisps of wood-smoke coming from one of the swims. It was mid-summer, and unless the farmer had decided to clear and burn some brushwood, I could think of no reason why anyone would want to light a fire. As I entered the swim, Wince had his back to me, and was crouching low over a crackling fire, poking vigorously into the flames with a large stick. I didn't recognise the back.

"Hello there, caught anything?" I ventured an enquiry.

The back suddenly sprouted legs which propelled it a foot into the air. Upon landing he whirled around, at the same time brandishing the still smoking stick above his head. I was rather taken aback at this greeting, particularly as the perpetrator looked somewhat akin to the infamous wild man of Borneo, eyes blazing from a dark face, and hair pointing in all directions. I took a step back.

"Oh hello" he said in an accent that wouldn't have been out of place at Sandhurst. "I am sorry - you frightened me".

I said nothing, but looked meaningfully at the stick which was still being held in a menacing position. He followed my gaze.

"Oh - sorry again" he stammered and slowly lowered the weapon.

In the few seconds in which this had taken place my mind had already figured out why he had a fire going. Of course - it was clear from his dark complexion that he came from a very hot country - obviously he was feeling the cold. I relaxed a little and smiled. I'd have to gently tell him he shouldn't be lighting fires by the lake though.

"Have you caught anything" I repeated. In answer to this, he grinned and stepped to the side of the fire, proudly gesturing with his stick and inviting me to see what was there. Above the mass of glowing embers and crackling twigs, and mounted on an impromptu spit was a very dead, and half cooked mirror carp of about 16lbs! A thousand words shot through my head in a flash. Luckily the only one that actually completed the journey to my mouth and found its way into the open air was a very loud "What!!??". For some time after that I found it difficult to speak. Not that I couldn't think of anything to say - a profusion of words raced around my brain, but they kept colliding with each other and shattering so that the only sounds I seemed to be able to make were a series of mutilated and fractured words which emerged in the form of gurgles and grunts. Wince looked puzzled.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

I slowly sat down on a nearby tree stump, still unable to speak properly.

"Are you alright?" he said.

"Noffle bog ro zat carp" I spluttered.

"What?" he said.

"Shefum raz de moggle zlish" I ventured.

A knowing smile spread across his face.

"Oh", he said, "it's alright, I speak English perfectly."

I spent several hours with him that afternoon, and by the time evening came he had received a potted version of the history of carp angling in Britain. Wince, it turned out, was highly intelligent. His father had been a scientist in his home country, involved in researching nuclear physics. His mother was a qualified doctor, and when his father had retired the family had moved to England where the mother now had a practice in a nearby village. So Wince, whilst not being steeped in the English angling tradition, was very quick to learn. And I was pleased to see the interest on his face as I explained to him the various aspects of carp angling. This had been his first ever fishing trip in this country. The tackle he had used to catch the carp consisted of a hazel branch, some string and an ancient hook he had found among the odds and ends his father had brought from his home country. It was the discovery of this hook which had given him the idea of going fishing. For bait he had used three curried beans. It was the first carp that had been caught from the lake in weeks. I did however decline the portion offered to me, though I suppose Wince was right in

saying it was a shame to see it go to waste. I had to go for a walk around the lake while he finished his meal and wrapped the remains to take home.

We became great friends in the weeks that followed. He had been introduced to most of the other anglers on the lake (with the exception of the Spook, who I will come to later), and having the most engaging personality, not to mention being nearly six and a half feet tall, got on very well with everyone. After kitting himself out with some half decent tackle, he became one of the most successful anglers there and seemed to have an infallible instinct in knowing where the carp were. We always tried to fish near him, because you knew the fish wouldn't be too far away.

One midnight, as we sat in quiet conversation we heard the faint tread of footsteps coming down the path towards us. We stopped talking and listened. Closer they came, then came to a halt as a cheery voice called

"Hows yew doing boys?"

We immediately recognised the distinctive accent of Norfolk Norman, or as some of the lads called him, the midnight crawler. This was after his habit of creeping around lakes at the witching hour. He had at one time been a keen carp angler, and indeed did still fish for carp. However, since the dreams had started, he found he could only bear to fish for them in the daytime. The instinct to fish was still strong in him though, and many a perfect carp fishing night would find him prowling the banks of a carp lake. What he couldn't bear to do was to sleep on the banks. For a while after the dreams began, he had tried staying awake all night, but always tiredness would get the better of him, and he would drift off. Then the dream would come, and he'd wake up screaming. The first few times this happened it terrified the other anglers on the lake. But after a while they got used to it, knowing it was only poor old Norman suffering again. He had been quite a successful carp angler at one time, then one night he had had this strange dream. He had dreamed that he was out with a certain gorgeous young lady, who he had always fancied but never had the courage to speak to. Well in this dream, not only had he asked her out - she had accepted. He had spent hours getting ready, putting on his best suit and generally making himself look smart. They were to have dinner at an exclusive restaurant. He had picked her up as arranged, and in a short time they were both seated in a romantic candle-lit corner. From her behaviour, it was obvious their feelings for each other were mutual. Even before the main meal came she had dropped enough hints to let him know she wasn't expected home that night. He could hardly contain his excitement, and was tempted to forget the meal altogether and rush straight home with her. But no, he'd savour the moment - take his time, after all, they had all night. By the time the main course arrived, she was hardly taking her eyes off him. He picked at a small potato on the edge of the plate, but was finding it extremely difficult to swallow. That was enough, he thought. Just finish the steak and we'll go. He cut off a generous portion, impaled it on his fork and popped it into his mouth. As he slowly chewed it, she looked deep into his eyes, put her hand into his and gave him that small signal that means "I really want you". (Any attractive females reading this who don't know what that is see me afterwards!). He gulped, tried to swallow, and at that instant felt a searing pain in his lip. Then he was being hauled sky-wards into an ever brightening light. Just before he woke up screaming he was able to make out protruding from his top lip a size 1 Au Lion D'Or.

And so it was, every time he fell asleep on a carp lake the dream would begin and he would wake up screaming. This had all become too much for him, and now he only fished days. On this night he came softly into the swim. We put an extra tea-bag into the pot and added some more water.

"Hev yew got un?" he asked.

"No nothing yet, but something should happen tonight" I replied. Wince sat quietly confident, rolling a cigarette. We chatted for some time, and listened to the usual night noises, and the occasional splash of carp. But suddenly a new and more sinister sound was added - a high pitched scream coming from deep inside an adjacent wood.

"Shit! what the f\*\*\*s that" said Norman.

"Don't know, but I hope it stays where it is" I replied.

Again the unearthly sound pierced the quiet night. We tried to ignore it, but whatever topic of conversation we took up, we eventually fell into silence as we listened for the strange sound, which continued unabated.

"Well oim not gewing back to moi car whoile thas gewing on" said Norman emphatically.

"It could be some creature in distress" I said, "perhaps we'd better go and investigate". I looked towards Wince for support. Wince winced.

"Come on", I said, "there's three of us and we can take the umbrella poles to defend ourselves."

"Oi got a knoife" said Norman.

"Come on then" I said, pulling Wince off his chair. Reluctantly he got up and the three of us set off somewhat apprehensively into the darkness.

to be continued.....

Alan Tomkins - March 1995

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