

# Invasive Species

by E. Victoria Flynn

Margaret sat. She was very good at sitting and did it often without talking to anyone. Margaret was proficient in her work. She lived alone, sat alone and ate alone. When she came to work in the morning, she walked the gray corridors without a nod, placed her lunch bag in the right-most refrigerator on the second shelf from the top closest to the wall, farthest back. This was to insure the safekeeping of her bologna and mayo sandwich on white, but she needn't have worried. Nobody would touch it.

Occasionally, an unfamiliar office worker thought to chat Margaret up a bit, bring her a cup of coffee and cookie--only to be disappointed. She was very unpleasant. Margaret snarled.

Thus, life was always the same in Margaret's bare cubicle up on the fifth floor of the slate-gray Owens & Tabby office building. She kept to herself. A snarl or occasional hacking cough was close enough to conversation for any of her cubicle neighbors—until the Plant.

We couldn't say who noticed it first and no one would admit to seeing it arrive; but one day, there it was-- a perfect 10 inch variegated philodendron with heart-shaped leaves-- sitting on the top shelf of Margaret's cubicle. And there was Margaret, dowdy, sullen, and hunched over her computer. Business as usual.

Except, something about Margaret was a little *off*. She would stop typing suddenly and look up at the plant, studying it, almost as if daring it to cross her. Then, she would go back to her computer and start pounding away again.

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Throughout the day the episodes began to lengthen until Margaret wasn't working at all, just sitting, staring at the plant. Her eyes were almost clouded over and her hair was the slightest bit less limp.

The next morning, Margaret came in to work with a red, flowered scarf tucked tightly around her neck and a second brown paper bag. Next to the philodendron Margaret placed a small cactus. Again, her work was interrupted periodically to watch the plants until she ceased working completely. It was then that Margaret began to hum. The hum started as a low rumble that grew until her surrounding coworkers couldn't help but hear. The song was "English Country Garden," and it was getting louder.

For the rest of that week, Margaret continued to collect plants, and stare, and hum until all that could be detected of Margaret behind the wall of vines, leaves, flowers, and trees was the humming. It was a rough, coarse rendition, but it was always "English Country Garden" and it was getting even louder.

On Monday, when Margaret hummed her way into the office decked head to toe in a large floral sundress, scarlet hat, and flip flops, we tried to write it off.

"Business as usual," we muttered to each other on our trips to the coffee pot. But when we sat down to login to our computers and pull up our accounts, the humming was so loud no one could concentrate. The floor felt unsteady. It was vibrating. We looked in the direction of Margaret's cubicle, but all we could see were potted

palms, bromeliads, ivies, lilies, cacti- - and they were all vibrating. The vibration got stronger, the humming, louder. If anyone attempted to approach the office jungle the decibel level grew. Computer monitors shook. Desk chairs raged. The humming grew so loud, the vibration so violent, we began shouting at each other to take cover, prepare for an earthquake. We raced for door jambs, threw ourselves under desks. The entire fifth floor throbbed until something gave and collapsed. Impermeable silence followed. We unfolded ourselves from beneath office furniture and emerged. Save for a few torn leaves, Margaret was gone.

