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The Collector

by Holly Raber

Jozef crumpled the glossy leaflet in his large blue veined hand, the smart white clapboard houses folded in on one another their smiling residents crushed within. He hated the word 'retirement' as much as he hated the word 'village' as if aging made you a peasant or a fool.

Before she reached the end of her tether, Greta had tried to persuade him to move to 'Elysian Fields' a last resort for the 'active elderly'. Her entreaties fell on deaf ears. Jozef had watched her leave quietly on a Friday morning in her best coat, clutching a small suitcase. Sparing scarcely a backward glance at her irascible husband she stepped daintily into her bright future with Bernard from Bingo.

The space she had left behind was soon filled. These days Jozef rarely saw another human being apart from the man from Amazon who arrived most mornings with oddly shaped packages. The two men had struck up a friendship of sorts. Jozef would have liked to offer a cup of tea or lemonade on a hot day however as he possessed only one cup he felt the delivery man might feel discomfited drinking alone.

As well as a wife, there had also once been a cat. Jozef missed the cat. It had left some time during the hot weather, shortly before the bluebottles had begun to arrive. It had started with just one or two but soon the flies seemed to be everywhere, their jewelled carapaces flashing menacingly like miniature scarab beetles. They clustered thickly on the curls of fly paper suspended in the gaps between the boxes in the hallway, their bloated bodies finally falling and piling in dusty drifts amidst the mosaic of leaflets on the floor.

The clocks in the hallway ticked softly, a little out of sync. Although he could no longer see their faces, Jozef was comforted by their presence. Aware that he was still holding the leaflet, he smoothed it flat once more, the white cabins looked a little less jaunty now. He laid it carefully on top of a flyer promising a flat belly in four weeks. It might come in handy one day.

Sidling along the dark passageway Jozef prised open the living room door dislodging several years' worth of Sunday supplements in the process. Delving into the detritus of his pocket he extracted a small brown bottle with a worn label and placed it carefully in the remaining inch of space on the Mahogany dining table. A stray beam of sunlight slipped uninvited between the heavy curtains drawn against the outside world and settled among the rows of bottles already waiting in the gathering gloom.

After several days the Bluebottles returned.