Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

Things Change

by Stefano Turato

'I hope the video camera works,' thought Sam, carefully moving back the elephant-ear foliage as he made his way through the cloud forest, pausing to hold it for Zoe. Someone is out here. I'm sure of it.

'How much further?' asked Zoe, attempting to duck under the huge leaf.

Sam wiped the moisture from his forehead. 'Not sure. It should be around here somewhere. I mean, the GPS is showing that we are almost there...'

'And?'

'I just don't recognise the route from last week.' Something isn't right.

'You wouldn't recognise me from last week.'

'Sorry?'

'Nothing. It all looks the same to me: green! And will those birds ever fucking stop?'

Sam let the leaf spring back, just whooshing past Zoe's face, and continued walking.

'Bastard!'

Since he had positioned the trail cam six days earlier, the tracking device had shown different coordinates every day. There must be somebody out here moving it. But who? He hadn't said anything to Zoe, and he didn't dare mention that people had been reported missing. Her mood was bad enough as it was. Probably just the altitude. He couldn't afford to jeopardise the trip, so he tried to ignore it and pressed on through the mud.

The tracking system was now showing that they were within one metre of the cam. Sam checked the nearest tree, and there it was.

'Thank fuck for that! I thought we'd lost it.'

'Is it the correct one?'

'It must be. There aren't any others within eight kilometres.'

‘Thank fuck for that!’

‘But I didn’t position it here. I know it sounds crazy, but it’s moved. I mean, it’s on the same tree, I think, but in a different location. The coordinates don’t match. Can’t get my head around it. Why would somebody move it, though?’

‘For fuck’s sake, Sam. We’re lost in a jungle, and you choose now to have a fucking delusional episode!’

‘Jesus, Zo. I’m not delusional. Something isn’t right.’

‘Yeah, this fucking relationship.’

‘You were lovely once.’

‘Yeah, well, a lot can happen in twenty-six years.’

Why do I let her speak to me like that? He thought she would love a trip to Guatemala. He couldn’t take much more of the hostility.

‘Let’s check the footage.’

He unfastened the cam, plugged in a USB drive and uploaded the file. The lens was responsive to movement, enabling it to switch on and capture whatever passed in front of it. The seventy-two-hour file was full. He viewed some of the footage: a big deer mouse—a common rodent species, but still amazing to see. Then a tapir, then more large rodents. Then a bird with a long, streaming tail perched directly in front of the cam. It was the evidence he had travelled halfway across the world for: a threatened and beautiful resplendent quetzal! He was ecstatic. He could now sell the tape and afford to stay in his flat for another few months, at least.

Back at base camp, he looked through the footage. Although they had been down from the mountain for two hours, his head was still in a cloud of joy. But a fly wriggled in the ointment of Sam’s euphoria, and he couldn’t relax. He rewound the file at full speed to get back to the start. Although the footage was sped up, with snippets of fast-moving birds and mammals, underlying everything was a slower, more fluid movement, like a time-lapse recording: the trees were moving. Literally moving with the ground and disappearing out of frame like some kind of tectonic shift. He had made a major discovery. He started shaking.

That’s why!

But they seemed to do it so slowly that, because of the limits of our own perception, we didn’t see it happening. An imperceptible shift revealed only through time. He looked at Zoe, who was asleep beside him, and couldn’t help but think about the similarities to their relationship.