

The Bandera PROPHEET

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My son's fish tank is trying to kill me

By Calista Drake
The Bandera Prophet

Last Christmas, Mee Maw bought my son a fish tank with a Betta Fish. As my son is a nature lover, and desperately wanted a lizard or turtle that no sane pet store would sell a 4-year-old, fish it was.

“How hard can it be?” I asked my husband when he bleated out a few half-hearted protests. After being married since we graduated college, he's learned that some battles just can't be won.

“Just wait,” he warned, scurrying into the garage away from holiday-frenzied children and chaos. “Just wait. You'll see I'm right.”

He wasn't the only one who thought I had made a grievous error.

“Why would you do that?” my in-laws asked, aghast. “Fish are so hard to maintain! The tanks are so finicky!”

“I've never been able to keep my fish tank clean,” another parent confessed to me when my son crowed about his fish to all the parents on the playground the next weekend. “It smells like a sewer and looks awful, but the fish is still there.”

Their words fell on deaf ears. Nothing says Christmas like a 4-year-old little boy who lives in camo, spends almost every waking moment outside, and keeps hauling snails and fish home from the creek to keep as 'pets.' The day after Christmas, off to the pet store we went. I even hauled the whole aquarium, since I couldn't figure out the filter set up and after four phone calls, the manager of the pet store was tired of dealing with me.

“Your husband wouldn't do this for you?” he questioned while my children cooed at his collection of reptiles and fish.

“Nope. He said he refuses to be part of fish-i-cide.”

“Fish actually live a long time,” said the pet store man as he fiddled with the Amazon special fish tank my mother had ordered. “A betta can live several years.” He smiled at my son. “What are you going to name him?”

My son beamed. “Fish.”

With our tank set up, we returned home with Fish. At first, he was a happy fish. He’d swim around, his beautiful red fins furling like an underwater ballerina as he sat in his little plant and under his bridge. And then we made our fatal mistake.

“Mama, I want to get Fish a friend,” my son said. “Can we ask the pet man what friend we can get for Fish?”

“No,” my husband said.

“Sure,” I said.

I think you can guess who won.

So off we went to the fish store, where they gave us a golden mystery snail. Any good writer would have seen the foreshadowing, but two children have erased all my brain cells. “His name is Protector,” my son beamed.

For a while, Protector and Flash co-existed happily. But my son by this point had made the pet store his second home after the park, and now insisted we get live shrimp for the fish once a week, and somehow weaseled in a second mystery snail, this one grey, named Flash.

Flash, it turned out, with a sociopathic snail. Now, the fish man tells me this is impossible, but Flash killed Protector. I just walked in one day to see him sucking out the insides of a now empty golden shell.

About a week later, I noticed tiny little things crawling around the tank. Tiny, baby snails, to be precise. My son was overjoyed.

“They got married and had babies!” he crowed. “Or, Mommy, did you know that snails are a-sew-ual and they can have babies by themselves like seahorses?”

Yes, he’s precocious. And he watches too many nature shows. All I knew was that this tank was nasty. Like a bad soap opera, you couldn’t look away at the chaos. The snails kept eating each other and creating more and more snails. At one point, there were 40 snails in the tank. Fish

would get sick and his fins would rot off, so I'd have to buy medicine and re-treat the water. We've tried real plants, fake plants, algae killer when the tank got so green you couldn't see anything, hose water, spring water, tap water....

Yet, Fish still lives. Even after killing several snails, there's still at least 20 in there. I quit counting. Fish just lays on the bottom of the tank. My babysitter says it's because he's seen too much. I am not getting a fish therapist to treat his trauma.

As Thanksgiving draws near, the kids are already making out their lists for Santa.

"What are you going to ask for?" I asked them.

"A golf cart!" my daughter cheered.

"A turtle," my son chirped happily. "And a lizard. Maybe a new friend for Fish. You think Santa will bring a dolphin and we could keep him in Grandpa's pool?"

Maybe it's my kids, not the fish, who are going to kill me.