

50 SHADES OF SLIME

RUMMAN R KALAM

"I am Gary, Crusher of Souls," said James Earl Jones.

Sorry, it wasn't James Earl Jones. It was the pet snail of the meme-loving kid down the road. He named his snail Gary like 99% of the clever snail lovers. Back to the problem at hand, though.

An eight-foot-tall snail began circling me. I could read what was painted on its side. "All your base r belong 2 us."

It seems that the snail's former owner had painted its shell. I would be an angry soul-crushing villainous cliché too if my body was covered with ten year old overused memes.

How did I come to be in front of a giant, murderous snail? Well, I blame all of this on David Icke. That dude got his calculations wrong and "figured" out that all the world leaders were either inter-dimensional space reptiles or at were least controlled by them. I don't think we would be morbidly obese or anti-vaccination level stupid if inter-dimensional reptiles were pulling our strings. We'd at least be fit enough to serve their agenda involving mining all the world's gold or constantly trolling the middle-east. Damn it, David. If you only got your cards right, everyone would know about the snails and would've put a stop to this. Inter-dimensional space reptiles are a step too far for us to wrap our heads around.

"I have observed you for long, Chen, it pains me to hurt you," said Gary.

"Uh... what?" I replied.

"You have always treated your ISP technicians with care. You offered them orange juice when they showed up two days late without prior notice. You have always thanked them for their terrible service. You treated them as equals," boomed Gary.

"I... uh... what?" I said.

"What better way to control a sentient being than to



have a tight grip upon their information services? We were everywhere. In the pockets of your local technicians, engineers and even inside your routers. For when a *snail* loves another *snail*, your internet gets slow."

I looked over Gary's shoulder at the wall-mounted TV.

David Icke was being crowned King Snail.

My view was entirely blocked before I could make out anything because Gary slimed his way all the way towards me. Is slimed even a word? I don't even know but that's

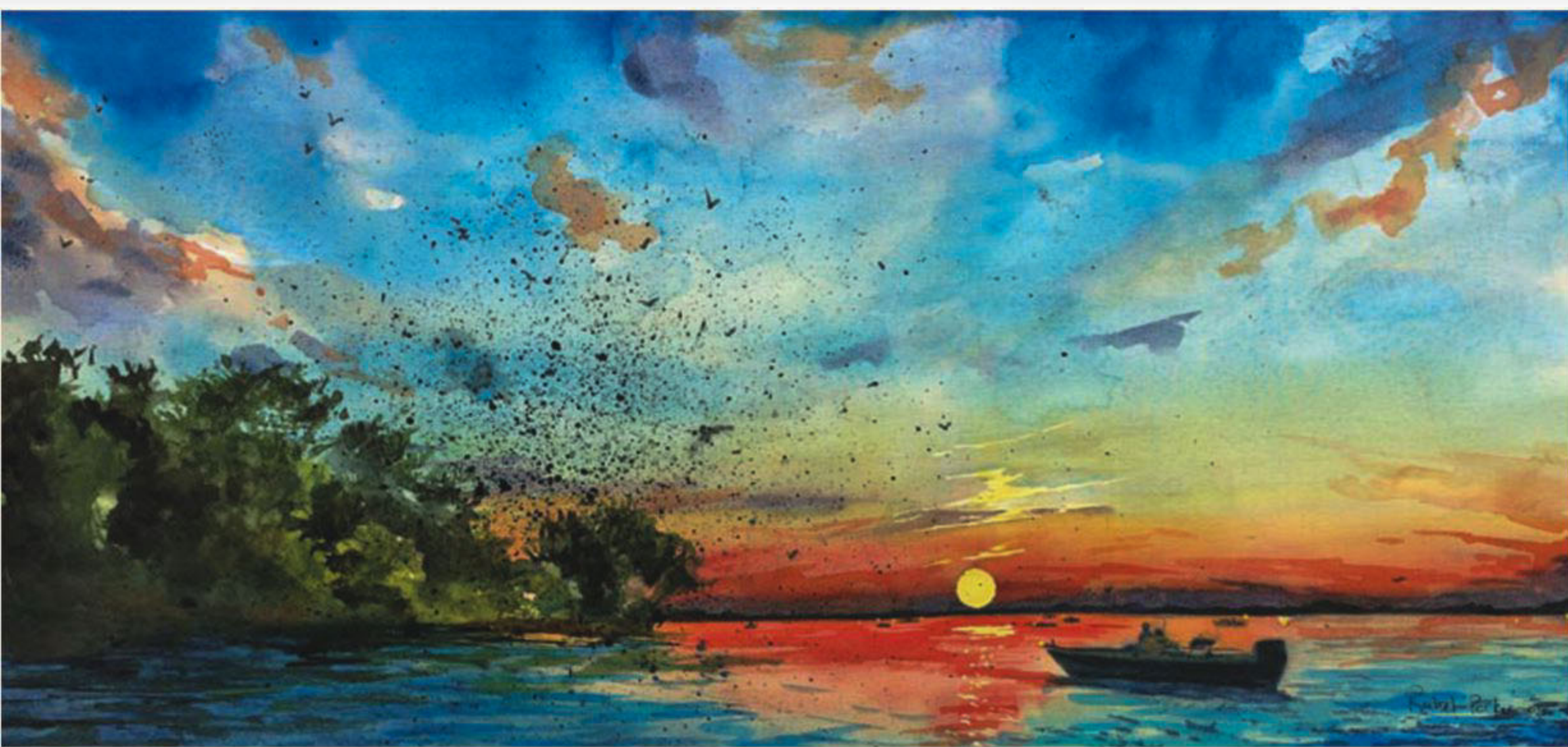
what it looked like. It brushed a tentacle against my cheek and actually crooned at me.

"Join us, Chen. Become my pet while we rule the world. You will be *mine*. The nights do tend to get lonely."

It brushed a tentacle over my clenched fists and let out a sonorous giggle. I could see Gary turning slightly red. It turned around and beckoned me towards my bedroom.

I obeyed.

FICTION



MALIYAT ANIQA NOOR

Slipping his afternoon cup of apple cider, the artist abruptly remembers the days he spent in a lake-house during his late teens. He hears cicadas and laughter. He smells the crisp earthy aroma of the woods encircling the lake. He feels ripples of water tickle his toes.

He gently sets his cup on the table beside him. As if possessed he wanders towards the blank canvas he had set up on the aisle just this morning. The paints are waiting for him and the brushes are eager too. He

begins painting hesitantly at first but then the strokes of colour take on their own rhythm and suddenly the painting slips out of his control and slides into his heart.

There is a purple lake and laughing children lapping about in its waters. There is a knot of weeping orange-coloured apple trees in the background. The sky is earthy and clouds of cicadas laze across its breadth. Once he is done painting the artist returns to his cup of apple cider, he is no longer oppressed by the memory of the lake-house. He is at peace.

Afterword

I'm not sure how to feel about this.

I've run quite a few stories in the year I've had held this job, and by and large it's been a varied year. Published some things I felt were a bit clunky, some I really liked, a few that made me laugh, a handful that annoyed me very much. This is the first time a story made me clench up inside and want to take a shower. Thank you, Rumman. I hope you're proud of yourself.

In addition to violating your mind with 50 Shades of Slime, I'm presenting you with a new series called Boys' Own Adventure Stories. You can read the first installment of it today. It's topical stuff. The Government doesn't want you to know about it (well, the US government anyway, so not really relevant to us... *or so we are led to believe*). I want you to know about it. I want to preserve the purity and essence of your natural fluids, and it's not every day someone will tell you that. I'm fighting for your freedom. You matter to me.

After putting you through all of that I'm including this nice little piece by Maliyat by way of apology. It's a metaphor for the creative urge, when you have an idea you just have to get down on paper (or the word processor.) The big problem with it is that apart from the title the story itself doesn't indicate that it's a metaphor for anything. Threads between the narrative and its objective are missing. Quite lovely descriptions, though. She's good at them.

- Zoheb Mashiur, sub-editor, SHOUT