



DEAR MISS PUDDLES



Letter #6 - "Our Koi Spits on People"

Our koi gather at the side of the pond every afternoon and stare at us until they are fed. We have accepted this, the way one accepts weather. The problem is that one particular koi, Awa ("Bubbles"), has developed a habit of singling out certain people and giving them a well-aimed spritz of water directly from its mouth, with what I can only describe as intent.

She does not do this to everyone. My sister has been sprayed many times. My husband has been sprayed hundreds of times and now approaches the pond sideways, like a man defusing a device. Our neighbor has never been sprayed once and is now unbearably smug about it, wandering past the pond in dry sunglasses like he owns the place. Is Awa choosing her victims?

— *Watched, and Occasionally Spritzed, by Koi*

Dear Watched,
You have koi. They have a pond. At least one has discovered projectile technology, and, apparently, a sense of humor. You have been selected. Koi can learn to associate people with feeding and may gather when a familiar person approaches. They can also learn that certain behaviors reliably produce attention, chaos, or a snack, and Awa, by all accounts, has learned this exceptionally well.

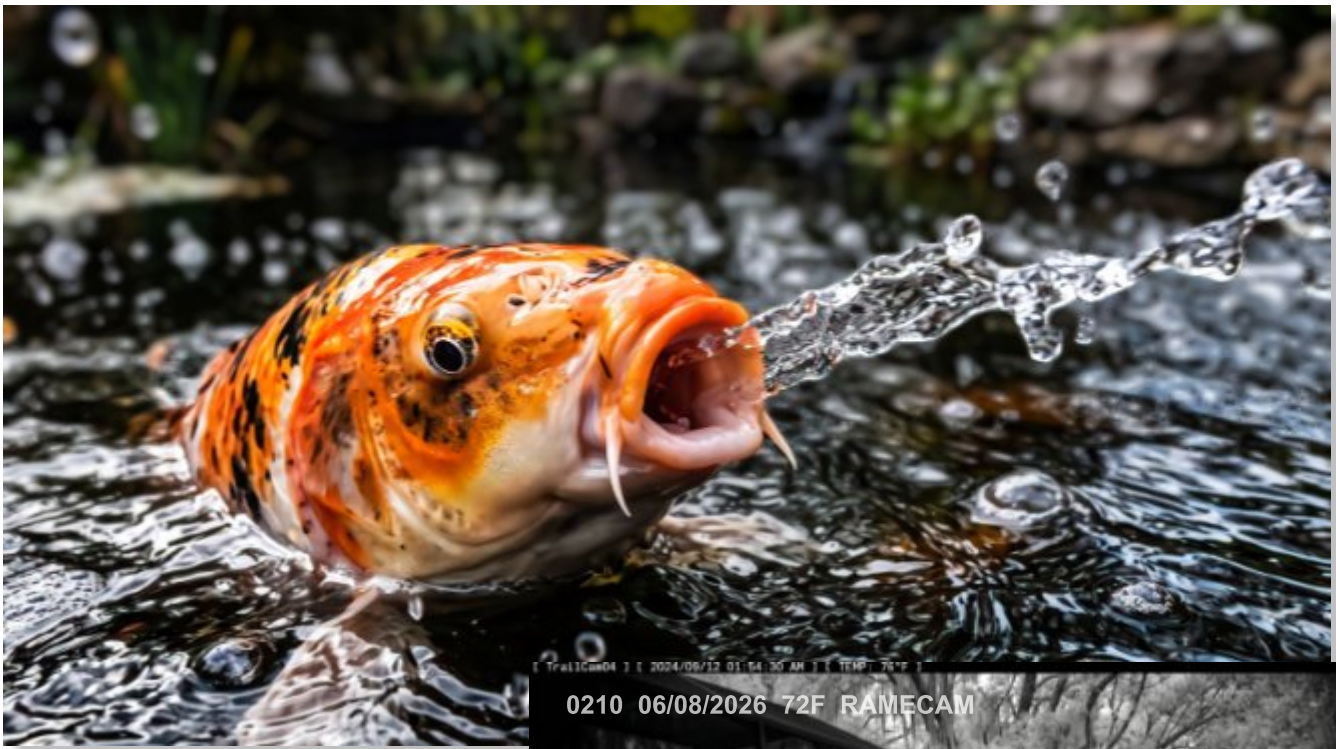
In Japan, a koi's expectoration is highly valued, the '*Kōfuku na Tsuba*' of this revered fish; specimens capable of these projections, the '*Supitto Ninja*', are prized, and these koi and their offspring are felt to enrich the legacy not only of entire families, but the property on which they are tended. 'Koi Water' is bottled and sold worldwide, and wait lists can stretch for years.

Suggestions

- Do not reward the attack. If the koi sprays and everyone screams, laughs, points, runs for a towel, and immediately feeds it, the fish has received an extraordinary jackpot. From the Awa's perspective: Spritz → Chaos → Dinner.
- Establish predictable feeding times. Feed appropriate amounts on a consistent schedule rather than allowing the pond to become a 24-hour aquatic drive-through with a very aggressive drive-through attendant.
- Stand farther back. If someone has become the official target, increasing the distance from the pond edge may prevent the koi from practicing its marksmanship. A small umbrella is also perfectly acceptable. Dignity is optional, and, at this point, largely theoretical.
- Avoid theatrical reactions. This may be difficult, especially if the koi catches you directly in the glasses at close range and with what appears to be excellent aim for a creature with no visible arms. But try.
- Never retaliate against the fish. Do not splash it. Do not wag your finger. Do not tell it that you are "very disappointed." Do not mention "fish sticks" or any other breaded, grilled, or raw aquatic or marine life within

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earshot of the pond. Koi cannot understand English, but they can understand tone, have a 'thing' for criticism of any kind And they hold grudges!

Miss Puddles' Bonus Holistic Tips:

- A healthy koi pond is an ecosystem, not an ornamental fish bowl, and certainly not a hostage negotiation, however it may feel by Tuesday.
- Keep an eye on water quality, filtration, oxygenation, shade, temperature, and overall fish condition. Avoid overfeeding simply because the residents of the pond appear to be staging a hunger strike. They are not starving. They are negotiating. And they are very, very good at it.
- If fish show unusual behavior accompanied by poor appetite, lethargy, gasping, sores, or other signs of illness, seek advice from a qualified aquatic veterinarian or koi professional rather than relying on neighborhood folklore, however confidently it is delivered at the mailbox.



EXTRA BONUS - Field Notes:

Dear 'Watched', I reviewed your trailcam footage. My observations: a fox trotting the property line one evening paused to consider the koi as a buffet and received a spritz directly between the ears from roughly four feet out. The fox left. It has not returned. Word travels fast in the fox circles and beyond in Magnolia Point. A raccoon, undeterred by reputation, attempted a late-night raid and was met with what witnesses describe as sustained aquatic fire from Awa and at least one deputized colleague. It retreated up the nearest tree to reconsider several of its life choices. On another occasion, a feral cat approached with the studied casualness of an animal pretending it wasn't interested, and was corrected mid-saunter. It has not returned, though it has been seen watching the pond from a safe distance, visibly holding a grudge. And even the neighbor's terrier, a dog with no respect for property lines, made one exploratory visit to the pond's edge and left considerably wetter and noticeably more thoughtful. And has never returned.

What the household and visitors have perhaps failed to appreciate is that Awa does not spray residents purely for sport. She also serves, unofficially and without pay, as Head of Pond Security, a role she takes with tremendous seriousness and zero jurisdiction.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

