

Feed the fish - sure thing, but what when it's D.O.A?

One down. One to go, 10 more days. How difficult could looking after two goldfish be?

Well, in literally one day, one of my neighbours' two goldfish, entrusted to me over their 10-day holiday, has died.

Just let me ask it again. How difficult could it be to feed a couple of goldfish? After all, I'm a reasonably responsible adult. [I have a plant, a niece, I once went fishing. I have never been up on animal cruelty charges.]

The care of these two fish, whose names I don't even know, was sprung on me last Thursday. By Saturday, I suspect, one had pushed up daisies.

On Sunday, my first real day of responsibility, I walked upstairs to the flat to feed the fish, as promised.

Stumbling around, because, of course, light switches are never in obvious places, I found the aquarium and the food and dropped in some flakes into the bubbling bowl.

Chuck was supposed to be scouting round for the lights before he got distracted by the glittering snakeskin stilettos with mirrored platforms kicked under the table, along with the baby toys and the husband's work paraphernalia.

"Ohh, look at these," he said. Meanwhile, I could only make out the figure of one fat fish in the algae-covered bowl, which I



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naturally enough, the neighbours and I had never talked about the possibility of disaster or death.

Returning with an empty pizza box which had only recently had dinner in it. Chuck took the fish by the tail and put it in its ready-made coffin.

We had to dispatch the lifeless body. Down

the toilet was where Canadian goldfish usually ended up.

What, suggested Chuck, would happen, if the we flushed the dead fish down the toilet, but it didn't go round the u-bend, therefore it kept reappearing, and when the neighbours came back they would find their little daughter's pet staring up at them.

He suggested releasing it into the other neighbour's paddling pool, the water of which was as stagnant as the one in the aquarium. Or we could toss it off my balcony into the garden below and let the cat finish it off.

Somehow, it was OK, it flushed down my toilet, which is where it found its last resting place.

The next ethical dilemma was revelation. Tell the neighbours that the fish died the day after they left. Admit that I didn't feed it for 36 hours, replace the fish and hope they never notice. Or just blame it on Jude, who takes over my duties when I go to Canada?

The only good goldfish is a dead goldfish, or in this case two.

thought was odd, and so we resumed the search for the lights.

Having found the switch for a small lamp above the tank, I turned it on.

Argggh. There floating, belly up I presume as I couldn't bear to look, was a dead fish.

Bloated, smelly, definitely D.O.A. With horror in my voice, I tried to suppress the raising panic and managed to get out the sentence: "Chuck, the fish is dead."

I recoiled, in best B-movie fashion, throwing my hands up and squeaking as if I was wearing a too-tight 1950s angora sweater, completing the sentence with the statement that there was no way on earth I was getting that fish out of the water.

When Chuck finished laughing, oh sympathetic Englishman, I remembered that he, having just returned from a trip to Scotland, was an accomplished fisherman who would have no problem flipping the dead creature into the toilet bowl.

I was dispatched back downstairs to get a container, because