

Keeping Fish

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Like the traumatic abjection that is his dancing technique, S. regarded his fish tank as both a quaint glistening of exotically coloured movements, and an existential quagmire, the hideous spectre of which he suppressed daily. At first he thought himself a benign sustainer of life; he approached the tank to feed his fish in the early mornings gratified by their enthusiastic whirlwinds of chronic desperation. How readily he mistook this manic display as a seductive ritual pandering to his god-like offerings. How readily he mistook as munchkin-like camaraderie the cut-throat competition to capture even the tiniest morsel of sustenance to continue life, a competition that often descends into the cruel bullying of weaker fish trapped in an unending repetition of cyclical violence never to be broken, never to be escaped, unless of course in death. One morning he found the remains of suicidal fish squished between his toes, already decomposing, contorted in disturbing demonic ways, with eyes and mouths rolled back over a screaming skeleton and scales sinking in between the bones. A glass ceiling placed over the tank stayed those who would rather jump out to their death rather than live on in the mercilessness of the fish tank.

On this occasion when the fish can sigh that they have indeed survived another day, that the lord was benevolent, S. is confronted by a single fish that stares into the glass for several hours. The fish seems to stare directly at S. and niggles at the cohesion of his relatively privileged existence. Often times S. would stare back for several atemporal moments in the day, hoping to make some psychic connection with the fish, hoping to perhaps register within the fish that there is life outside itself. That they might be one, that they might connect there and forever, and live continually in the security of their togetherness. Perhaps this fish, he thought, would venture into the mystical wholeness of uniting the self and other, and would then cross with him into the eternal plane of bliss. It was with this conviction that he attempted to trade Qi energies with the fish, and meditated on the position of this fish's life in the great ocean of the universe. But now with little success on that front, the fish seems to stare as a kind of taunt, as if the pain of his meaningless imprisoned existence were being meditatively transmitted to S. with more vehemence and dedication that he could ever have mustered himself. The fish balloons an unstable and terrifying void between their two fragile existences,

and holds it there with masterful psychic wizardry. Similarly the tiny fish with whom this fish-wizard cohabitates seem to dance around the gravity of this threatening void, as if in an occult ceremony of possession and hysteria.

How to lessen the power of this fin-mage's dark spell-work? How to overcome the deathly magic of its ever opening and closing mouth, enchanting the space between them as if with the rupturing magnificence of a well controlled black hole. S. spasmed when waking from an affecting dream that seemed to call him to hazard one more attempt at psychic connection, a mind meld of sorts that would soothe the discordance of their disparate energies.

And so S. adorned himself with his weightiest of robes, purchased in Japan from an ageing matriarch whose price he haggled down to a most degenerately tiny sum, and who chastised him in his absence as an idiotic foreigner bent perversely on parading funeral attire. A later garment saleswoman, whom he mistook for a witch-doctor, sold him all manner of Japanese pyjamas in which he did most of his conjuring. He planted himself by the tank, burnt incense and chanted incantations before a full blown meditative grappling with the sea-shaman he beheld in front of him.

The face of this conduit of magic was right up against his, in his imagination, staring him down crossly. Then as if with a sly glimmer of cunning the face shifted to turn and join with his own. With an over eager desire to join, S. accelerated into this mysterious face and found himself abruptly, with the cool shiver of a light spattering of water, in the mind of the fish. He was surrounded by walls and was looking directly at his person. The mind itself was desolate. No movement, no thoughts. But S. became acutely aware of the physicality of the fish itself. Slowly an incredibly uncomfortable stiffness in the digestive system became palpable. Psychic flashes came rushing into him of distasteful food trickling onto the surface of the water, and it became apparent that the fish was suffering from severe immobility brought on by the inadequacy of its food. In fact he felt that any movement on his part would result in a massive bowel expulsion building up with unspeakable tension and discomfort over the last several days. The tension seemed to build exponentially the more S. became conscious of the fish's body and integrated further into its consciousness. The only instinct left to him beyond the pain was to stare out into the translucent wall and stay the compulsion to move lest he rupture himself.

And then it registered, the fish was not a wizard at all, that the staring was not what he had imagined, it was simply staring into the glass to avoid any movement after feeding. S. became repulsed by entering so pathetic a creature, so demeaning as it was to his

impressive powers. He tried to wrench himself as if from a deep dream, a dream where he was conscious and yet immovable, but the act was proving difficult. Centring on the image of the face of his real person in front of him, he mustered enough meditative poise to focus on wriggling his way out of this consciousness and extracting himself from the mind meld. With one last thrust he powered through a swirling cacophony of mental images, bodily confusion between the fish and his prior body, and ending finally and steadily with a return to himself and the calm, quieting image of the fish surrounded by a cloud of its own brown.