

## **Glen, age unknown, died 4.15pm 3 July 2006**

*Liew Suet Fun*

He was a lively one. Never quite still, with a brilliant maroon tinged blue at his fin tips and gills, he swam tirelessly around that little bowl on my dining table, day and night. He was beautiful, he was brilliant, he was the life of the party as I sat and ate my dinner most nights, watching him groove. He banished solitude from my meals.

His meals were more prosaic than mine. Most days, it was the flake food that I scattered lightly on the round surface of his world. Always, he would pause in his dance, raising his head sharply and nibble delicately at what may seem like showers of food coming down on him. He never rushed, never grabbed, never descended to the hurried gluttonous motions of so many other fish I had known. He never stepped up even when I dropped the occasional live worm in. Maybe it comes from being solitary all your life.

Glen was a fighting fish. We call them Siamese fighting fish, but I am not sure if he really was that kind. Anyway, these fish spent pretty much all their lives alone, simply because they cannot tolerate another's presence in their space. If another fish was placed in his waters, he would rear and raise his fin and tail, ready to assail and probably kill the other, unless of course he is killed instead. But in the bowl that Glen lived in, he wasn't alone. I had placed a small porcelain figure of an old Chinese man reading a book to keep him company. Maybe they were sharing stories, I don't know. But Glen never once butted him, or pushed him over. Just moved carefully and gently around him, as though he had a right to the same space. They lived well together.

Until this afternoon, that is. I came home after lunch and discovered that Glen had somehow leapt out of his bowl, straight over my wooden table, onto the floor a good four feet away. When I picked him up, he was alive, but I could see that his colour had already faded, and that brilliant blue had become almost like quiet bruises around his eyes and mouth. He moved quickly in the water as though shocked that he had found his home again, and swam desperately around the old man. I watched him flail a little afterward, and knew somehow it was too late.

It took him another hour-and-a-half to die. The old man, for the first time, lay on the round tiny pebbles at the bottom of the bowl. Glen had, in his last hour, knocked him over for the first time. Then in final minutes, when he was too tired to hold himself up anymore, Glen laid his head under the old man's head. I saw his mouth opening and closing softly, and then he went, quietly from this life.

In a while, I will bury him in the garden with the old man. They will lie together under a large green fern and maybe whisper to each other, stories of the brave new world where they will continue their journey together.