

Tom the Philosopher

'Here he comes again ! That flick of his tail irritates me !' Tom hated to admit that the goldfish fascinated him. He sat, back arched, tail twitching, eyes fixed straight ahead of him, watching the tiny fish go past go past go past. He had to keep looking forward. The fish made him dizzy if he tried to follow it.



Slowly, Tom's fascination turned to bewilderment and bewilderment to irritability. 'Stupid fish ! How can anyone be so silly as to go round and round and round all the time. Doesn't he realise how stupid he looks. He just swims past opening and shutting his mouth. Maybe he's trying to fool me. Maybe he opens his mouth in surprise. He won't see many cats about. I'm the only one who gets on this table to look at him....and I'm not supposed to be here. Maybe he's really afraid of me.' Next time the fish came past, Tom curled up his lip to show his teeth and look like his ferocious ancestors, but the fish just opened and shut its mouth the same and swam on by. Tom had another think about it. 'Maybe he's open-mouthed in wonder. I suppose I am a pretty impressive sight to a passing goldfish !'

He had another thought. Maybe the fish was just bored and yawning. 'That's not surprising. I'd be bored myself just walking round and round and round in circles.' He shook his head, Even the thought of it made him dizzy.

Tom watched a little longer. Then a blinding flash of inspiration came to him. Perhaps the goldfish was trying to frighten *him* ! He thinks I think he get's bigger when he's the other side of the bowl. But he doesn't know I know that everything else looks bigger at the other side....doesn't it ?

The fish had at least sown doubts in Tom's mind. He pushed himself up with his hind legs and slowly walked on tip toe round the table top to the other side. The goldfish followed him, swimming slowly now. Tom lowered himself gently into a sitting position again, his tail drooped over the table edge, perfectly still. He waited. The fish swam on round the bowl. Sure enough, as he reached the far side, he was twice as big. But was he really bigger? Wasn't it this side he was supposed to be a big fish? But then everything else seemed bigger - didn't it?

Having thoroughly confused himself, Tom decided he'd think about something else. He'd think about the real point of his being there. 'What does goldfish taste like?' The fish, as though aware of Tom's train of thought dived straight for the bottom and stayed still among the weed there. It turned round to flash its tail at the cat, then turned again to stare at him.

Tom bristled. His tail swished. This was a challenge. No-one, not even a goldfish, could outstare a cat. He settled himself down into a sphinx mode, his back straight, white-tipped paws tucked in and his all black tail wrapped around him. He could wait as long as necessary. No puny goldfish would outwit him. 'Does he think I can't see him.! Just because he's stopped swimming round.'

Carefully, Tom placed one paw on the side of the bowl and let it slide down the glass. The fish moved away again and resumed its circling. 'I wonder where he thinks he's going?' Perhaps he doesn't know he's going round in circles. Perhaps he thinks he's on a long journey, and every time he comes round he sees a different cat. Perhaps I should make a different face each time he passes, just to help him along. He must think that. What's the point of swimming if you're not going anywhere?' Tom thought about himself and all the rest of his noble species. 'Every cat knows where he's going,' he convinced himself. 'We make detours, yes of course, that's just a clever ploy to confuse our enemies; and we don't go at it in a great rush, but that's just so we can enjoy the anticipation of what's at the end of the journey. We do spend a lot of time sitting, thinking, or washing ourselves, but only so we can be our best when we arrive. We are definitely going somewhere. We're certainly not going round in circles. That's for kittens who chase their tails, or those silly toys on strings that people play with when we're around. I wish I could hold one and watch people run round it and pounce on it. But people aren't pouncers,' he concluded disdainfully.

'Where are you going ?' Tom mewed at the fish through the glass, but the fish just stared back, opened and closed its mouth and swam on. Then it suddenly changed direction. It swam straight to the surface, gulped at some pelleted food floating there, and dived again. It then occurred to Tom that the fish who thought it had seen so many cats on its journey, might like to see the inside of a cat, and that he had not answered his earlier question - I wonder what he tastes like ?

He unwrapped himself from his tail, arched his back and stretched into a sitting position, before slowly raising one paw to place it on the rim of the fish bowl. He sat back and raised the other paw. The bowl tilted slightly. Tom brushed the surface of the water with the whiskers of his paw, then swiftly backed off as a voice sounded behind him.

'Get off that table' Tom was already in free-fall as the Lady of the house flicked a damp towel at him. He sat where he had landed, licking his wet paw, ears closed to the lady's words, his back to the table and the fish bowl as though to say, 'Who'd ever think I was interested in a goldfish. I was just looking. I wouldn't eat it. A goldfish wouldn't taste very good. This side of the bowl it's hardly a mouthful anyway; not even worth getting a wet paw over.'

Tom had lost interest now. The lady of the house left the room. 'Come on out, Tom!' Tom, with that common feline independence which some call defiance, waited a whole minute. To prove an important point so clearly understood by his species, he walked nonchalantly once round the table and the fish bowl, before walking in a straight line across the room and through the open door. His purposeful tread and erect tail told all the world - 'I'm a linear cat. I know where I'm going.'

***In the human world
there are still goldfish bowl people
who spend their existence
taking circular walks to nowhere.***