

koi

by Karen Whitelaw

Every spring my mother drags us to the koi pond in the Chinese Gardens in Darling Harbour. We sit on the rocks with a bag of embarrassing green pellets that look like mouse droppings.

The fish slip slide in a jumble of autumn colours. 'When I was a kid in Shanghai they sucked vegetable scraps from my fingers,' my mother says. Her eyes droop like falling cherry blossoms.

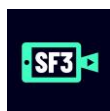
I cross my arms tightly against my chest. Her slimy wet fingers dart under my elbows and nibble my sides. I slap them away.

She brags to the koi that my brother won a scholarship to university. Their mouths gape like absent grandparents starving for her words.

My mother looks at my eyebrow piercings and torn black t-shirt. Then she dips a handful of pellets instead of words into their obscene mouths. Sometimes they suck her fingertips and I scowl.

'It tickles,' she laughs.

This spring the koi swim inside her. The white ones go free radical racing through her bloodstream and the yellow ones pool under her needle-pricked skin. I sit on her hospital bed holding her stick-thin fingers, hoping for the chance of one more nibble.



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