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Dream of Goldfish Encounter Letter

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YAVANNA VALDELLON

Dream of Goldfish

It's the unlikely who are best able to squeeze into the crevices of our minds, the way the bespectacled student did on one of those protracted jeep rides home. I remember thinking her sneakers must have boasted whiteness once. In the clear plastic bag she was clutching was a miniature sun, no, a goldfish. If it had been swiveling with a partner, perhaps the urge to puncture the bag with a pencil would not have welled up so insistently.

And in the light of rush hour, I suspected Newton was wrong: more than one future could swim away from the swoosh of a single action. Water could gush out of the wound, wetting passengers' toes, while the girl's hands shook my shoulder for an explanation. She could rush out the vehicle to find a method of salvation, trusting in traffic to avenge her finned friend. Guilt could tug at my sleeves if she burst into tears and let the bag dangle from her fingertips, my act finally tipping her into despair. Or she could snap, grab the still-wet pencil from my hand and shove it up my left nostril. I thought I could love her forever if she heaved a sigh of thanks and flung the bag, frantic fish and all, out onto the Elliptical Road's rage.

What would I have done, had she handed the bag to me like Charon giving up his oar before stepping out onto twilit Quezon Boulevard? That I am telling this in the subjunctive reveals nothing about the orange fins twitching for life on the drenched floor of my dreams.

Encounter

Between car lanes, the woman—
an apparition in polka dots
that have greeted better New Years—

waves at vehicles, as if to unfreeze their wheels. The stoplight's steady eye watches, unmoved, removed from the traffic of daily drama enacted on the road. Her hands shake profanities at passersby and drivers,

who may or may not deserve them.

They pretend not to look as she hooks
thumbs into the garter of her shorts

and crouches down for relief.

No smugness leaks from her face,
just a puddle staining the asphalt

yellow beneath her, refusing erasure.

When she stands, the static of rain falling dares anyone to applaud.

Letter

Was she thinking: grief is a letter you mail to yourself

once the turnstile's been turned x or so number of times

at the train station? The delay is necessary, is chosen in advance

for a day like this, when she pushes the door open into a room

made immaculate, and relatives made inquisitive, by an infant's

early death. The father lets out facts one at a time: heart failure.

Two days of life. Less than one hour for the cremation. The periods

like steel clicking into place. She hears the footsteps of a man

who hands the ashes back in a white envelope, to the mother

who accepts it with the calm of a commuter holding a ticket

to a train ride that will carry her farthest from the right address.

CHARLIE SAMUYA VERIC

Song

The shining blue water of the infinity pool has the sky in it.

There is a cloud over the valley and the church bells toll in the distance.

What have I lost to the days?

I was not my grandmother's favorite. The neighbors in my town I knew as a child their deaths I hear now as news in the morning. And if

I went home, I would forget the names of streets and birds, the look of fields from the highway, the cliffs looking down on houses.

How they love the heavens opening above them, those sloping mountains. How isolated they are: how single in their isolation.

The valley knows the sky so well—they come to shape the void between them.