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Mishaps: A Catalog

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Mishaps: A Catalog

Todd Samuelson

She was yours, Sasha the recalcitrant fish
who would eat nothing—you bought her
for the warmth of yellows along her sides rising
to the flame of the trailing fins, who
for all this was named for androgyny—
not enough personality, you said, *to assign*
a sex, though I always saw her as feminine.

The tank, we assume, was overfilled (water rising
past the plastic fern, up nearly to the edge)
for we found her stiff on the floor, now
a uniform, unrelenting red, fins brittle and curled

like the pages of my *Alice in Wonderland*, loaned
and left flat by your sill during the rain's percussion,
bloated from the night's overfeeding,
floating on the top of your counter,

like the fallen leaf the wind pasted to your leg that I tried
to write a note on, my ballpoint passing through
the brittleness as easily as a hand into water—*like Keats*,
I said, *you know the epitaph*, and your vague nod,

like the mohawk, in the photo, of your then-boyfriend:
a formal dance, absurdly out of place—
tuxedoed but his hair brilliant red and rigid, a comb
on some exotic Colombian bird, rising as if immersed.

So I try to see the fish, jumping in the excitement
of assumed freedom or simple boredom, passing
the slim walls of the tank in passage to the floor.
And its death, evoking for you not grief
or even pity, only the questions.