

We Have a Fat Fish

We have a fat fish
Right now he is wedged under a piece of pretend wood at the bottom of his aquarium
His extremely tiny mouth is opening like a heart valve, again and again and again
In a rhythm making life happen
I'm waiting for him to die
Because he's not really fat
He's actually sick
About a week ago our other fish, who had a crooked back, floated to the top of the water
and didn't move his mouth anymore
Then this guy just puffed up
His body, his stomach, has stretched out
Like a ball of sad is stuck inside
Before this, he swam around
Now he stays in one place, either at the top of the tank or down in the fake flora
I just went to look at him
At this moment, he's resting on the rocks
Tail and fins still as a skyline
Only the mouth moving, opening, opening, opening
He looks like a horror movie
When his friend died, I looked into the tank and saw that his eyes had gone white
Cloudy
The little gills weren't pulsing
So I scooped him out with a ladle and buried him under the maple tree outside
After I put the dirt on, I was afraid he wasn't ready, so I dug him back up
To make sure he was fully finished
He didn't move
He was covered in soil
I buried him again
Poured some water on the tree
Told him he was a really good fish
Oh my god
I just checked on our fat fish again
He's caught in the plastic fern branches
The little mouth is panting still
His black eyes are enormous, glossy and half silver and pleading
I drew a heart for him on the glass
Where he is facing
Now I will wait with him
Play music as the night goes on
Because I think tomorrow he will not hear it
I will bury him at the maple tree too

Mandolin

There's a global mandate for isolation
It's insisted I dust off my guitar
Sequestered as it was, against a suitcase and a wooden wall in the shed out back
We're together now, instrument and me
Harmonizing
What side are you on, friend? (this is what I ask the guitar while he tunes his strings)
"The one with a waltz"
Triple-time seems appropriate
A waltz, of course
Yes
Patient enough to be the embers, restless enough to ignite
"Will you be dancing along as I play?"
He is only asking to hear me answer
I'll be dressed for it
Guitar has a glorious voice, but no way to speak on his own
He can choose a side as long as he has an ally

The waltz, then, drags like a trailer's tow in three-four time
I'm in green, cinched at the waist, ready
During quarantine, I ask him, which dance do we do?
He tells me, *and I love it when he uses his mandolin voice*, let's do the one you like best

Forward Isn't Fast Enough

For now let me say
Without hope or agenda
I thought you'd be back in the writing room
Copy chief, sir

With all due respect
We both know I can run the empire from this desktop
It's not direction that I need
But a bit of banter wouldn't punish the hours in between projects

I'll make my own assignments
Be brutal about the deadlines
What's missing is all the back-and-forth
Collaboration, if you will

When I got hired, I knew life was going forward
My elevator may well have been catapulting into the stars
We pinky-promised our handshake and the business was in operation
Partners in publishing

The launch took off

Then you hit "Resolved" where my name used to live

But I'm not a book, sir
They won't release me to Walden or Super Crown
I'm not even a best seller
Barely on the shelves
I was hoping we could talk through my contract

Copy chief, sir

Sir?

Plenty of Fish

Setting Sail

In a perky white sailor hat, I waved goodbye to the shore
Smiling and cupping my hand like Little Miss Mermaid Lagoon
Waves crashed and soared around my tiny boat
Following my heart across the Atlantic

The ocean drifted me along as I ate canned sardines
And laughed at my good fortune
As I rafted over the current I dreamt
Of panning tide pools for seahorses together

The Romantic Ending

One day I arrived, singing, "Land, ho!"
The captain came to greet me, offering his hand
So I could reach the dock
And we watched crocodiles under the magic moon

The Drowning Ending

One day I arrived, singing, "Land, ho!"
The first mate lent me his cane for balance
And introduced me to the captain
Who seemed surprised I was there

Water

The grass at the park is all lit up
I told you before that when it rains here, it's not like normal wet
Our water sweats its way from the shoulders of trees
to the shoes of anybody on the sidewalk
All the leaves twinkle like foliage turned astronomical
Mud, etched with little sticks, is beaming
It reflects back at the sun like you wouldn't believe
There's a knife, I think, that butters our sky
Smears stars from one end to the other
Back on the ground, the cement goes from
plain, steel-grits gray to shiny, shiny black
Practically iridescent
You know that smell after it rains?
We can actually see it