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I Wrote You a Fish Once

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I Wrote You a Fish Once

Liz Lyon

I used to write you letters, remember?
Long, sprawling spidery lines of letters and words.
I would take three days for one letter,
Fill it with drawings and nonsense-thoughts
And everyday occurrences.

Do you remember what you said
When I wrote you about the fish?
I was cleaning the tanks; and one
Had sunk to the green gravel bottom.
It wasn't quite dead yet—this I didn't know.
It had probably been sick a few days, a cancer
In its eye, growing larger and larger.
The lens remained intact.

A dry test tube, and the sickly-sweet smell of ethanol—
No, we didn't use formaldehyde—and the fish
Was girdled in death-juice.
Its mouth twitched,
A premature burial
More like pickling
Did you know what? Its eye
Stuck to the side. It stared, wet and round
Against that dry surface.
That luminous globe, that viscous eye seeped blood.
Tainted, orange-red, the eye was a dying sunset.

And now, when I see blue fading
Into rusty orange, smeared across the sky
I think of the eye of a dying fish
And how you asked me not to write you
Such things anymore.