

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

Poet Mekeel McBride, from *Kittery*, writes: “I told a friend that my goldfish had died. He scoffed, said, ‘I’m a journalist. I deal with things that really matter.’ I felt ashamed for even mentioning it but later, this poem taught me what really does matter and why.”

The Goldfish

by Mekeel McBride

It was a feeder, which means it was supposed
to get fed to something bigger like a barracuda.
But I put the ten-cent comet in clean water
with enough food, no predators, and it grew
into a radiant glider full of happy appetite.

That was the truth of it for a long time and then
the fish, for no reason that I could see, suddenly
curled upside down into a red question mark.
Now, its golden scales drop off like sequins
from a museum dress and its mouth forms over

and over the same empty O. Though I wish to,
there’s no way to free it, not even for a second,
from its own slow death. You say this fish is the least
of it, that I’d better start worrying about what’s
really wrong: a child chained somewhere

in a basement, starving; the droop-eyed man,
cooking up, in a cast-iron kettle, germ stew
that will end the world. But that’s exactly what I said.
The golden thing is dying right on the other side
of the glass; I can see it and there’s nothing I can do.

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