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.