

# Goodbye

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When I returned to the university again  
three months after pandemic closure  
I cried the koi in the pond  
were still there tails waving by  
lilies overhead the same blue  
dragonflies with gilded wings  
circling poised like miniature helicopters  
of the campus biome  
animal companions

No one knew how long the pandemic  
would last  
say *we'll be back by summer*  
then *fall*  
then *maybe next year . . . ?*  
No one took care of them changed  
their algae-grown water

The fish so used to the passing reflection  
of students carrying textbooks  
and heavy back packs were sick  
bugs were dying  
in the pond  
and the fish were feeding off  
of the decomposing remains of their young  
like forced scavengers  
making best of a poisonous habitat

The koi were my favourite part  
of the university symbols of strength  
in my culture

My favourite amulet  
a koi carved in jade — a departing gift  
from my grandfather  
I asked him why he did not give me a dragon  
my horoscope as was customary  
and he said koi  
was the ancestor of the dragon  
the koi were stronger

I'd look for one  
swimming up against breeze over current  
and be reminded that once  
it took a koi 100 years to journey  
to the top of a waterfall  
that once there the Gods  
turned them into dragons  
the koi were comforting  
that way  
I didn't feel as alone in the semester  
the fish sensed  
my coming  
my hand as if sensing  
a foreign stick  
or bread crumbs though I didn't have any

the biologists                rushed to my aid  
*you shouldn't do that, they said*  
*we are testing the water*  
*this water is not             a substance you want*  
*to be exposing to your skin*  
*there are pathogens             in the water*  
*it's really polluted*

And I knew better than to ask     *why*  
*why is no one changing the water*  
I wanted to scream it             but I only cried

  I knelt by the brim     of this pond  
and whispered

goodbye

whispered                        so softly  
my sound             startled

  a dragonfly