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Carp

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CARP

If we come up sputtering like the ducks
we fed old bread, their tail feathers

translucent as the eyes of carp,
will we find the rhubarb's

fanned out leaves, its stalks thick
like wrists that twisted hollyhocks,

the patch of rag
a swallow used to build its nest.

Or if we dive and bob like gulls
pecking edges off the Platte,

could we still find the rocks
whose faces reveal breathing ferns,

crawling bugs, ancestral carp.
Would we find roses or flawless elms,

cherries by the river where
rats lunge on robins' eggs.

Once we raised bantams in the yard,
bees, and squash so big

you couldn't hold one in your hand.
Imagine yellow roses,

lilacs taller than the house.
We remember without cutworms or disease,

more gentle than spurge
quaking in summer squalls.

Oh how the carp
lurched in butcher paper,

grandma slitting its belly on the porch,
mud draining. Now we say we stood there motionless,

the puddle collecting on the floor,
its body twitching,

bravely erasing this scene from supper
as the room twirled around us,

real cries unrecorded as discarded scales
while the carp's gills filled with air.