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## Near Misses

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## NEAR MISSES

After a bad date  
I slip into the pet store  
for the air conditioning.

When I knock over an empty fishbowl  
the dogs all turn to look,  
tongues lolling, owners tugging.

A clerk points to the fat black goldfish  
with billowy cheeks—*they're on sale.*  
*That one's name is Winston Churchill.*

Winston sidles up to the glass and looks at me.  
He puffs and his round mouth blows bubbles  
like pipe smoke. *I'll take him*, I say.

Then Winston and I are hitchhiking off-highway  
near the Cracker Barrel where the cowhands  
eat steak, sober.

A man named Hank gives us a ride.  
I squeeze next to his toothless father  
on the seat. The father places a hand

on my bare thigh. He starts talking  
about the Pacific Theatre and I can't  
gather the courage to shake off his hand,

so I let it rest there while he recalls  
manning the 50 Cal after everyone else  
was dead. *Almost lost my leg*, he says,

lifting his jeans to the knee. A round red scar  
on his shin is a cluster of bark, the skin raised  
and dented. He pats my thigh. *What about you,*

*little one? Any scars to show an old man?*  
A little leak springs in Winston's bag  
and I cover it with my thumb. *Cut it, Dad,*

Hank sighs, and pulls up to my building.  
*Be safe out there.* He reaches past his father  
to pull the door shut behind me.

I give Winston a tour of my small apartment  
and plop him in a vase. *Welcome home.*  
He has a small white line along his belly

probably from that knife flashed by a hungry man.  
I look at the jagged cut along my forearm  
from fighting with the other fish.

Winston mouths at the food I sprinkle  
and I watch him  
until dark.