

## **When you clean the aquarium**

***By Jennica Harper***

When you clean the aquarium you lean over with your back,  
instead of bending  
at your knees. You try to get in  
the corners, but often give up.

In the four months we've been living  
together, you've cleaned the tank  
three times. Concentration  
buckles you.

You go to the kitchen sink to dump  
the dirty water from the bucket, and ask me  
to keep an eye on the betta, Mingus,  
make sure he doesn't jump out,

try to make a swim for it,  
His fuschia tail feathering him over the edge,  
swimming turned flight—  
fish alchemy.

Would the flutter of his caudal fin  
be the same as in water? Snapping out anger, the all-at-once whip  
that works so well diving beneath a ceramic house?  
Will he know how to fly when he hits the air?

(Repeating his mantra: *Breathe, man, breathe!*)

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The fresh water you pour into the aquarium clouds up,  
but I can't help noticing the light coming through,  
and the calm — your temperate voice  
as you reassure him, as you tell him to stay put.