

AQUARIUM

Those lacy plants and filtered water supported
ten fish, including two blue gourami-- gorgeous
but disgusting. All they ever did was die.

Now only seven specimens share the excited bubbles,
the ceramic galleon. Out here in our larger glass menagerie,
my two crashed DUI brothers were the missing gourami.

Look at the swordtail lurking in the moss. Uncle Carl.
Manipulating, maneuvering to inject himself
into everyone he encounters, kin or not his kind.

Watch the pair of angels, my twin nieces. All body
and no brains. Ballet students badly rehearsed.
Vain jerky movements, unsure why they're dancing.

There goes the tiger barb. My mother. Always in pursuit,
always nipping at somebody's rear, usually my cousin,
the guppy, returned from a visit to a neighbor's tank,

bulbously gravid again without husband or currency.
Her fry will provide delicate tidbits for Uncle Dylan,
the cichlid. Most of the inhabitants are top feeders,

very particular. Dylan is cannibalistic, sleek, handsome
like Carl, he consumes everyone's trailing edges,
and I suspect, fed on the blue gourami past healing.

That's my husband, Walter, under the auger shell.
I often asked him why he slimes around on his belly,
cleaning up what everyone else drops.

He told me he would inherit the earth. It's true,
he can claim words like "meek," and "redeeming value."
On their way to being flushed, all the others

are mere eye-objects, adorning their element,
flicking boredom, making long ribbons of waste.
--Yeah, right, no finny counterpart for me--

an unknown breed, never in the swim. Just came by
to see if the fish are being fed. Last week
I sickened into a graceless dangle

and threw myself out, gills gasping.