San Antonio Review • San Antonio Review (Issue 2 | Winter 2019)

Feeding the Fish

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Published on: Apr 22, 2019

Updated on: Aug 22, 2020

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The lone algae eater, who somehow
survives our neglect, hides inside a castle.
When I tap the glass to see if he's
still alive, I think about my little brother,
who spends twenty-three hours a day
confined to a 6 by 8 cell. When I open
the top and sprinkle in food, the fish
rises up through the murky water to eat.

Visiting him means leaving my feelings
behind, passing through metal detectors
and multiple check points, so I can
sit across from someone I don't know
if I ever knew. I buy him vending machine
food and rise up through the murky water
to eat. While we play cards, I watch him
transform — lungs to gills, arms to fins,

skin to scales. We are mostly silent
as he extracts oxygen from water,
but when I finally speak to him, it's like
how I talk to the algae eater when I
open up the lid of the tank, *Listen*, I say,
even though I don't do it often, I am
the only one who feeds you anymore,
how are you still alive, seriously, how?

[Rebecca Schumejda](#) is the author of several full-length collections including *Falling Forward* (sunnyoutside press), *Cadillac Men* (NYQ Books), *Waiting at the Dead End Diner* (Bottom Dog Press) and most recently *Our One-Way Street* (NYQ Books). She is currently working on a book forthcoming from Stubborn Mule Press. She is the co-editor at Trailer Park Quarterly. She received her MA in Poetics from San Francisco State University and her BA from SUNY New Paltz. She lives in New York's Hudson Valley with her family.

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