"Bowls of Goldfish"

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)

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While visiting the Ball State University art gallery for an assignment in another class, I came upon a painting, "Bowl of Coldfish", by Childe Hassam. It seemed to assess perfectly the mood of the gallery that afternoon. The scene was of a peaceful moment, also a very ordinary moment, that of a woman feeding some fish. The picture expressed the quiet of the nearly-empty gallery, but it retained the excitement that the newcomer like me can always discover. The bright colors, the splashy strokes, and the playful fish in the center of the scene reflected my mood as I wandered by the many works of art.

After I had finished setting material for my assignment, I was drawn back to gaze at the picture. I wished it was one of those that could be bought, but I knew just by looking at it that this wasn't simply student art. Still, I wanted more than anything to remember the painting. Then, I thought of my thesis with Dr. Pinsky. I knew I could write stories about that scene, stories that would help me remember the color and the peace of the picture.

The following are the three stories I eventually wrote. Their starting point is the same, the scene in the painting. But they offer three different views of life surrounded and perhaps influenced by bowls of goldfish.
Bowl of Goldfish

The house was shaded on the north and west by maples, so the kitchen was almost always cool, even on hot July days. Sunlight, reflecting from the dewy lawn, sparkled through the fluttering curtains in the bay window. The smell of the lilacs filtered in, giving the small room a fresh and cozy smell, like hot chocolate does on a winter's eve. The window shelves were dotted here and there with odd-colored glass bottles. Most of them were old, but not really old enough to be worth much yet. Colors danced on the small dark table that stood next to the window, as the sunlight played within the contours of the bottles on the shelves. On the table sat a large glass bowl of water. In it were several pounds of blue stones, a ceramic castle, and three bright orange goldfish. The fish seemed unaware of the castle and the beautiful morning as they lazily swam about, around and around the circumference of the bowl, waiting to be fed.

When she awoke, the first sensation Lora felt was the throbbing that came from directly behind her eyes, which were red and puffy from crying the night before. She lay back down for a few more moments, hoping the ache which was now spreading to all parts of her face and head would go away, but as the pain levelled off to a steady throb, she decided she might as well get up and try to ignore it.

As she wrapped the soft green bathrobe around her, she realized she was alone. The other side of the bed was smooth, and then she remembered why. The tears sprung to the brims of her eyes, ready to
flow again, and the throb in her brain became a drum roll as she
thought of the conversation that had left her sobbing long into the
night. For a moment she had forgotten, had let herself believe it
didn't happen, that Jack hadn't told her that the reason he'd avoided
their bed until after she was asleep was because he felt guilty.

He said it had been a short affair, only the last month or so.
She was twenty-two and had convinced him he could be a boy again.
That weekend he'd gone to see his brother Ted in Chicago had actually
been a weekend with her. That was the last, though. He said it
hadn't made him feel young, only silly and awfully guilty. Now, he
was sorry and wished it hadn't happened.

When she had started to cry he had left the room, and now he
was sleeping down the hall in the room Lora had someday hoped would
be a nursery. The tears and the sudden ache in her throat came at
once as she thought of it, but she shook it off, saying to herself,
"Come, on old girl, that's not playing fair! You're just trying to
avoid the real problem with feelings and you know it. Straighten
up and decide what you're going to do." Her words sounded so con-
fident, so sure, but Lora knew that inside she felt helpless to make
the decision that awaited her. The trouble was that there were no
pleasant options open to her.

Should she stay bit a man she could trust only to tell her he
had been unfaithful, but couldn't trust to be true? Her pride and
her feminine ego had been damaged already; would they die completely
if she stayed? But what was the alternative? Leave? Kick Jack out?
And then what? For nine years she and Jack had been very happy. She
didn't want to be alone now, and she didn't want to start again.
She also didn't want to live without Jack, but it hurt to admit how strongly she was tied to him. Even at the peak of her anger, a part of her, and not a small part either, wanted to forgive him, to be held close and warm again.

Feeling defeated and more tired than she could remember ever being, Lora showered and dressed, putting on a favorite frock to cheer herself up. The soft print gave the illusion of color to her pallid cheeks, and the feel of the cool cloth against her body was the first enjoyable sensation she'd had for ages, it seemed. She stepped silently down the stairs to the kitchen, to avoid waking Jack. She wanted to know what she was going to do; she didn't want him to see her as indecisive as she now was.

The coolness of the kitchen floor comforted her feet, but the pungent smell of the lilacs increased the throbbing in her brain. She got herself a glass of milk and a box of some kind of children's cereal, the back emblazoned with brightly-colored banners declaring that there was a free glow-in-the-dark decoder ring inside. Lora set these on the table along with a bowl and spoon, and while watching the neighbor's dog putter around Mrs. Finney's rosebushes, reached for the bread. Her fingers twitched as she realized how programmed she was, almost putting toast in for Jack, who usually came bounding down the stairs a few minutes after she did. Then she relaxed, eating slowly and trying not to think. She noticed for the first time how lovely a day it was outside, sunny but not too hot. A good day for golf if Jack wasn't... Lora caught herself before the throb could start, and sat quietly until the thought had passed. She spotted the fish swimming up and down in search of food, so she got up to find the box.
They always ate too quickly if they were fed a lot, so Lora sprinkled just a bit into the bowl, then sat down again, watching the flame-colored bodies dart around trying to get every speck of food. They looked as if they were playing when they chased each other around, but Lora knew they were really fighting over who would get the biggest piece, the largest amount of food. Lora hated to watch them when they were like that, like three spoiled children. After the fights they sometimes would lie sullen all day, as if waiting for the next feeding time so they could get more.

Today they behaved nicely, so Lora gave them a little bit more, then cleared away her dishes and took them to the sink. She stood for a long time at the window, watching the fish and the sun shining through the bottles. Many of the bottles were souvenirs of trips to historic places which they had visited over the years. They loved to travel; in fact, she remembered that they had met in college because they had both signed up for a travel tour over Easter vacation. After nine years of marriage, they had been together over most of the United States. A trip to Hawaii was what they'd hoped for, either this year or next. Now what would she do with all the places left to go without Jack to go along, laughing, enjoying, and taking her enjoy it more? The ache came back, but the throbbing had finally ceased. She still didn't know what to do; she kept thinking, "Would he take me back if it was me instead? Do I want him? Can I take the risk? Am I just afraid I can't make it on my own?" These questions and others flooded her mind for a few moments, then she pushed them all back as she put back the green bottle she had been holding. She
hadn't ever really decided, yet she knew in her heart what she would do.

"I'm going to stay today," she told Jack when he came down and sat with his toast, on the other side of the goldfish. "It's a risk for both of us; me, because you've betrayed me once already, and you, because my heart and my mind are still at war about whether I should leave you or not. I don't want to today; I don't think I will tomorrow, but I knew before; now I'm not sure anymore."

Jack's look was obvious; he wanted to know if this was an ultimatum, power play, or what, but Lora's eyes steadily gazed into his, and she gently took his hand.
Bowl of Goldfish

Joanna awoke, but lay silent in bed, waiting for the depression that had been a constant companion and almost a comforter these past few months to come to her. At first, after Davey's short illness and unexpected death, the grief had been always there, even in her troubled sleep, but now each day it took a little longer, and often Joanna unconsciously urged it on with thoughts of the dead child.

This morning she thought of the bright spring day outside, envisioning the fat legs scrambling through the high grass, the tousled dark head tossed back in perpetual laughter. Davy had loved the outdoors so, she thought, and the tears came easily then. A heaviness descended upon her, and she pulled herself up, steeled for another day of mourning.

Tom, her husband, lay sleeping joyfully past his usual waking time, and Joanna banged the pans around in the kitchen to show her disgust that he could enjoy living so freely. She just didn't understand him anymore; he had been so grieved when Davy died, so comforting at the funeral, but in the last few weeks he had changed so much. He seemed to have forgotten Davy, his laughter and love and life, everything about his only child! How could he go on so--normally, as if Davy had never been? Why had he deserted her in her grief?

Grease flew at her from the pan as she clansed it down too briskly on the stove, startling her from her angry thoughts. Glancing out the window, she watched the sunlight reflect on the dandelions that sprinkled the fresh green lawn, and smelled the lilacs that were
beginning to cluster on the bushes. The coolness of her shift felt good as the morning sun warmed her face. "What a wonderful day," she thought to herself, then just as quickly felt guilty and ashamed for having forgotten her grief. "I'm sorry, Davy!"; the words rushed to her lips, but she knew how foolish they would sound.

She moved away from the sunny scene, determined to busy herself with the dullest tasks, as if in repentance for enjoying life.

Joanna turned to the sink first, because dishwashing had always been her most hated chore, and then noticed the goldfish bowl on the dining room table. The three large orange fish were moving slowly in the water, waiting to be fed. They had been a source of continual delight to Davy, who would watch them for hours in the mornings while he did housework. They looked lazy now, barely moving in the morning heat, but Joanna remembered how playful they'd get when Davy sprinkled in some fish food, then wiggle his fingers to let them know chow was here. "Come and get it!" his little voice would mimic the cowboy cooks on the morning movies. She smiled as she remembered how he chatted with the fish as if they were playmates.

Joanna got down the box and dropped in the fish food, then watched them dart and jump and dive for the tiny morsels. She could feel the heaviness in her heart begin to lift a little, as if she had just released a heavy package, and for a moment she felt desperately in need of calling it back. She watched the goldfish, mesmerized, thinking again of Davy running and jumping outside, only the grass was green and the sky was cold. None of the colors went together; it looked like the world of Davy's coloring book. But it made Joanna
feel strange, as if somewhere, Davy was still Davy, still ran and played and laughed. She wanted to cry, but now she also wanted to smile, to laugh, to believe in the joy of where Davy was now. She touched the bowl at her side, as if to remind her of this world, so caught up was she in the one in her mind. The tears had retreated; the heaviness was gone, and Joanna felt sorrow only for giving in to the comfort of grief as she had. She realized now how she had shut Tom out, demanding that he deny his own grieving and follow her pattern. He had lost his son, and she had denied him a wife to share in that loss. "And I actually blamed him!" she realized with a sharp hurt. She wanted to be near him now, not to try to forget Davy, but to remember him with joy, both in his memory and in their living. She wiggled her fingers in the water of the bowl, sending the fish darting away, then smiling mischievously, Joanna climbed the stairs to sprinkle the drops on Tom.
Bowl of Goldfish

The air in the tiny kitchen was cool, although the bright summer sun poured in like hot wax past the fluttering pink curtains in the dining room window. It wasn't much of a dining room, just a passageway between the kitchen and living room, but the kitchen was much too small to allow five people to eat in it, and the passageway was wide enough, if they squeezed in a little. The only object in the dining room other than the table right now was a large bowl of goldfish. Their bright orange bodies lazily moved about, waiting for someone to come and take them out of the advancing sunlight into the living room and feed them. They were put in the dining room at night now, ever since Fran discovered that they splashed water out of the bowl onto the carpet at night. She didn't like soggy, fish-smelly splotches too well, so she moved them to the dining room every night after dinner.

Fran came into the room smiling at the bright morning and the solitude of the house. It was Saturday and Jack and the girls could always be depended upon to sleep in until almost lunchtime. Fran got up early in order to get her housework done before the day became too oppressively hot.

She sipped her coffee slowly, watching Mr. Madison next door through the window as he let the dog out. She heard the screen door slam as he withdrew, and smiled at the dog's antics in the yard. The smell of lilacs drifted in with the warm breeze, the sun playing in the leaves of the bushes to make them appear to be sunbursts. The violets were spreading from the garden onto the lawn, Fran
noticed with dismay. She'd have to try to transplant them to a more appropriate spot. She never could just uproot the hardy little flowers; they were too pretty, too much a part of summer to throw away.

Fran's thoughts were broken by a faraway scraping sound, like metal hitting concrete, then childish voices bickering loudly. Must be Beth Hil'is' kids; they're always fighting over those bikes of theirs, she thought. The yelling got louder, then another crunching sound was heard, followed by a shrill scream, "Kommee!"

Fran sighed, glad that Janie and Joyce were past that age, then smiled as she remembered a very similar squabble just a few days ago. That one was over the ownership of a certain pink sweater they both wanted to wear. She heard a bell peal from the street, and went to the front window to see. A boy on a bicycle loaded with newspapers was trying to slow down to the pace of three other boys on foot. The three were dressed in cut-off shorts, were barefooted, and obviously were ruing for a swim, for they had towels looped about their shoulders. The boy on the bike told them to wait on him, then rode away up the street, tossing newspapers with fair accuracy at the houses on either side. Fran arrived at her door just in time to barely miss getting clipped by the paper, which landed near her left foot. She picked it up from the step, smiled vaguely at his retreating figure, and went back inside.

Jerry's picture might be in today, she thought as she opened the paper to the society pages. There were several pictures, but her son's engagement announcement wasn't there. It was probably
because his fiancee, Linda, was from out-of-state. Maybe those took longer to do or something, Fran figured. One of the boys in the pictures of couples looked familiar, so Fran looked up the name, embarrassed that she didn't recognize what obviously must be one of Jerry's friends. The name startled her; the boy was the son of an old friend. She read the article excitedly, thinking how funny it was that both she and Phil had boys getting married so soon.

The article listed the boy's mother as living in California, but gave Phil's address as here in town. Fran wasn't surprised at the idea that they were divorced; it was so common nowadays. In their worst times together she and Jack had even considered it. But she was surprised that Phil had come back to Greenfield; it wasn't much of a metropolis for a successful businessman like him. She was also surprised that the boy seemed to be living with his father.

Fran looked again at the boy in the photograph, noting the curly dark hair, the dark eyes and wide smile, the easy good looks that were his father's at that age. The girl was pretty, but Fran knew nothing of her and wasn't much interested. He's a fine boy, Phil, Fran thought, and wondered what he would think of Jerry. She laughed at herself for being so silly, then left the table to get on with her work.

Because she hated dishes most, she wanted to get that done first. Standing at the sink, she saw the paperboy, now clad in trunks, running down the street to the pool, which was in the city park. She thought of Janie; did she need a suit this year? She was getting a bit "filled-out" for the one she'd been wearing, and Fran
decided that she'd take both girls to Bryant's this afternoon and see what was there.

Several voices brought her attention to the window again. Coming down the street were a group of teens, some girls with two or three boys. They were a few years older than Janie, so she recognized some of the faces, but knew no names to go with them. The two girls in front were Elsie Wilson's twins, she knew that; they were both in shorts and bathing suit tops. Following them was a short, stocky boy who wore cut-off jeans and a T-shirt. There were three more girls, one plump wearing a suit that unfortunately made her look fat, another in a two-piece suit that looked nice with her figure but clashed with her hair, and the third, who looked like the only one who knew how to look right. She had on a bikini of bright green, a dark tan, and blond hair that looked natural, whether it was or not. The boy following this group was telling funny stories and making faces at the girls.

Fran's gaze came back to the pretty girl, and to the boy who came running up to her. He had dark, wavy hair and an even deeper tan than she, and was wearing cut-offs like the rest of the boys. But he had a nicer build, slim but with some muscles already visible. The girl was definitely aware of him, Fran decided; she walked a bit more carefree after he came, softly swaying her hips in a lilting rhythm. Her hair was shoulder-length, a soft brown, shiny and swishing around her neck when she moved. They began tussling half-heartedly over an innertube that the boy was carrying, but Fran knew they were really more interested in watching each other. Not
in any bad way either, Fran knew that; she could remember having watched a boy's muscles twitch, feeling excited and alive and young because you knew he was watching you too . . . .

A squeal was the only sound that fit Fran's mood as they shuffled down the sandy path toward the creek. When they got there, she and Janice pulled off their shorts and shirts, each dutifully admiring the other's new bathing suit. The boys were already wet by the time they got to the falls, and they came running out at the girls, splashing water everywhere. They all laughed and tried to chicken each other into being the first one to dive off the falls, when suddenly Fran felt her feet slip out from under her. She plunged into the cold water screaming, splashing about wildly to get her balance in the waist-deep water. On the bank Jeff and Phil were laughing, and Janice was loyally trying to suppress a giggle. Fran felt herself about to laugh, but not being able to give in to the joke that easily, she turned and dived, as if in a huff.

The water was achingly cold, but the vibrations from the falls were soothing, as she slowly swam about. She began to feel a bit warmer; the water began to be refreshing, rather than just cold. A shout behind her made her spin around, just in time to see Phil's dark head disappear under the falls. She felt a scream rise up in her throat, but she knew that he would be embarrassed if she showed she cared that much, even if he were drowning, so nothing came out. She stared, her eyes frozen on the spot where he went under, until a sudden movement near her caught her attention.
She tried to jump, but Phil had her foot, raising it up until she had to sit down hard in the water. He stood over her laughing while she tried to splash him, then he reached down to her with both arms and yanked her up. Before she could get her footing, Phil had pulled her to him, his arms circling her waist in a soft but tight hold. She glanced at him and watched as his laughter became a very serious half-smile, then closed her eyes as he pressed his lips to hers.

Fran could still feel the kiss from her dreams as her thoughts were broken by a splashing sound nearby. One of the goldfish in the bowl on the dining room table had come too near to the top and had spilled some water over the side in his attempt to keep from falling out. She wiped up the water, then finished off the dishes and removed her apron. As she smoothed her dress, she remembered that Janie would need a new dress soon for the honor roll banquet held at the school every year for the kids and their parents, when they had made grades in the top ten percent of their class. Janie had been going since she was in sixth grade, and Joyce said she was going to go next year, for sure. In her mind, Fran saw a blue dress, with maybe white flowers on it; something simple, but not cheap. She'd always had an aversion to buying bargain clothes, or even making things if they were for special occasions. Now, this old dress she had on, that was fine; she had made it and it looked pretty enough to wear to the store and everything. But for special occasions, a girl needed a new dress...
Fran could hear her mother talking to her father in their room that night, about her request at supper.

"Frank, are you sure we couldn't afford to buy Frannie that dress she wants so bad?"

"We can't afford nothing that Bryant's sell, Jean, you know that. Besides, we got Tom's schooling to pay for, and Frannie has even talked about maybe wanting to go to college when she's out of school. I'm gonna be saving every cent from now until 1960 as it is. I simply don't have money for prom dresses. Maybe when she's a senior thing'll be better."

Fran turned her face to the wall, not wanting to hear any more. She knew her father was right, but she also knew that nothing she could now would ever match the silky green dress she had fallen for in Bryant's. Here she was, only a sophomore, and Phil had asked her to the Prom. Sure, they had been pretty close this last year, and he hadn't really dated anyone else, but somehow she never thought of them going to the prom. Most of the junior class and all of the seniors would be there, she knew, and she just had to look good!

Dinner the next few nights was quiet, mainly because Fran knew if she talked at all, sooner or later she'd let her disappointment show, and she didn't want her folks to feel any worse than they did already. So since Fran didn't talk, her dad told what happened to him that day, her mom related what she had seen at the store, and then they all were silent. Fran knew they would catch on if she
kept up a silent act, so she finally convinced them that she had this beautiful pattern for a dress, and would be able to buy the material next week with her babysitting money. The dress really wasn't that bad, it had a nice neckline and you could add some cute trim, but it looked years younger than she wanted to look at the Prom. After this announcement, Fran quickly finished the meal and ran upstairs, unable to hid the coming tears any longer.

Fran was going to set the material on Saturday, after babysitting Friday night at the Haffers, and Saturday morning was a beautiful day for shopping, even for a "second-rate dress" material. Fran had slept late, and only got up at her mother calling, "Frannie, hurry! Your father is coming home in a minute for lunch!" Fran threw on a sweatshirt and some jeans and hurried downstairs.

She had just rotten the table set when her father came in. She could hear him whistling as he picked the morning paper off the front step, and felt glad that he wasn't so worried about money lately. Her father came into the dining room carrying a large box, which he gently handed to Fran, and smiling, he told her to open it. Her fingers flew at the string tied double around it, and the lid came off with the string in an instant. Fran squealed as she uncovered the dress from Bryant's that she had wanted so badly. She looked at her father with unbelief, as if he just told her he was Santa Claus.

"But now, Daddy? We don't have any money!" Fran cried.

"Well, I told myself I needed a raise if I was gonna send two kids to college and still be able to live like I am somebody at all, so I got myself one." He turned to her mom and said, "You know, Jean,
it wasn't that hard at all; once I started talking to Lewis, he understood right away." She smiled at him, then they both watched as Fran tenderly folded the dress and carried it up the stairs.

The Prom night was perfect. Phil could dance like crazy, and he treated her just like a queen all evening. He even kissed her once on one of the slow dances, just like she'd seen in the movies. They laughed and talked and danced until Fran thought it must be two or three days since they arrived, but then all too soon she realized it was almost over. Phil walked her home in the early morning, and she wondered if her folks had waited up for her. They sat for a while on the steps when they got to her house, neither one wanting to end the time together.

"I had a great time, Fran," Phil whispered, as he leaned over and kissed her softly. His eyes were bright but his look was solemn as he said,"I'm afraid this may be the last time we'll be together for some time."

Fran's eyes asked the question, and Phil answered, "I'm gonna start college right away instead of waiting for Fall. Colorado State has a root summer program for freshmen, and it's a good way for me to get ready for the fall sports too. So, my folks are sending me out there next week." He looked down at his black shoes, hoping Fran wouldn't cry.

She didn't; she was too stunned. She had been thinking all week of the things they'd do this summer that now she'd do alone or as the odd-man out with Janice and Jeff. She wanted to scream,"That's not fair!" but instead she grinned and said excitedly,"You'll love it
out there, I know it! Do you really think you could make the first
teams in your freshman year?"

They talked a few minutes more, then Phil pulled her close to
him and they kissed quietly, Fran wanting desperately to hold him
a little longer, but knowing she didn’t dare.

After he left, she quietly went inside, and up to her room.
She let her parents know she was in, but didn’t say anything about
the evening, and they didn’t ask. Later, she’d think of some light,
carefree way to say it, that didn’t show how she felt. She slowly
laid the dress aside, the tears she had held back coming closer all
the time, and crawled into bed. The weight of her body sent her dog,
Jake, out from under the bed, and he climbed up on the foot of the
bed. Fran called to him, and held his warm, fat body tightly as she
cried.

The Madison’s dog whined and scratched the screen door next door,
rousing Fran from her daydreams once again. She heard her neighbor’s
angry voice, the dog’s yips, then the door slamming, and it was quiet
again.

Feeling guilty for letting the whole morning fly by like that,
Fran grabbed the bucket underneath the sink, and hurriedly mopped the
kitchen and dining room floors. She worked so fast and so vigorously
that when she finished she had to sit down for a moment and rest.
She got some iced tea from the refrigerator and sat at the dining
room table, thinking about stopping for the day after she finished
the living room rug. The sun reflecting off the mop sent a flash of
light across the goldfish bowl, with the fish playfully flitting through. She noticed the sun was setting rather hot for the bowl to be in it, and nudged it back into the shade. The water lapped up close to the edge of the bowl from the sudden shove, sending the fish toward the glass in crazy, splashing waves. They quickly retreated to the bottom of the bowl until the water calmed, then they cautiously rose a little, one by one, like skaters on thin ice. Fran poured out the leftover tea and ice, and headed toward the hall to get the vacuum. As she cleaned the rug, she kept an eye on the fish, making sure they were fully recovered from their near-spill. The orange bodies began to move faster, darting in and out of her vision, like the sparkles in a pin in the sunshine.

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The girl was absolutely gorgeous, Fran admitted, with her sleek hair and shiny lips. Her make-up, dress, even her fingernails were perfectly tailored to give her the most completely chic look Fran had ever seen, even in magazines. But she gave Fran the awful feeling of something not real, a store mannequin, maybe. Phil was holding her arm proudly, which hurt Fran's pride, but after all, it had been two years; she hadn't kept from dating guys because of Phil, and she knew he'd be dating in college all right. Still, to have him bring a girl home seemed almost--settled! Fran didn't like that; she always hoped that when she went to college, maybe they would get together again. They hadn't changed all that much really; and she still cared for him, she knew that. He had even written to let her know he was going to be home for Thanksgiving this year. And now he brought her
with him, and Fran didn't know how to act. Friendly? Fond? Affectionate? Buddy-buddy? She stared hard at the couple, trying to decide. Phil saw her first, yelling, "Hey, Fran!" and running toward her, still holding the other girl's hand. He let go of it to hug Fran tightly, while the girl watched, apparently amused.

After Phil let her down, Fran turned to the girl and said hi, while Phil introduced her as Melanie Forester. When Melanie extended her hand and said, "Phil tells me you're one of his best buddies," Fran knew that this girl could see into her heart as Phil never had, and she felt embarrassed and numb at the thought. She stared past the hard, perfect face at the pin on her dress, a bright orange goldfish with a diamond for its eye.

Fran had been staring at the bowl so hard that the splash made her jump. One of the fish had jumped out and now lay flopping wildly on the table. She hurriedly scooped it up and dropped it back into the bowl. Slowly it sank, not moving, and lay floating half on its side for a few seconds. Then with a leap, it flashed away, resuming its dangerous playing near the top of the bowl. Fran tapped a bit more food into the bowl, then sat for a moment, looking at the paper.

Tumblings erupted from upstairs; Fran recognized the two Irish voices arguing over clothes. She smelled the lilacs as the breeze drifted in, and glanced out the window again at the summer morning, now beginning to get really hot. Taking one more look at the fish that had jumped out, and one more look at the dark-haired boy in the picture, she sighed and turned toward the stairs.