





**Vivienne Plumb**
**Goldfish**

My son doesn't go to school  
 any more he goes somewhere  
 else. He goes out walking alone  
 with his hat on his head,  
 lies on a bed, where they slip  
 a drip to the vein and  
 he has his body pumped full.

*Funny how they grow up*

says the woman who is the chemist,  
*Is it your only one?*

*It's harder then because you've spoilt them  
 here's your prescription, forty nine dollars.*

I try to pretend

she doesn't know a thing, a thing that she's saying.

Here's a red light outside

and I have to stop, and everywhere there's children

a reminder of the way we come

into the world, birth, growth,

and end up fat or thin.

He, my own, was thin before

the drugs set in and made him fat,

now he looks like a frog.

There's a dog on the way home

so I pat it, sign of the hope

I have for the future.

When I get in he's on the bed

I can tell he feels bad, *don't*

he says. He often says that.

Or *come here* and he holds my

hand and *there we are, two*

*tiny pebbles* perched on the edge,

with the silvery sand far below us.

We don't like to use the C-word

*says one white coat.*

They prefer the ambiguous

*nodes to tumours*, or even

*bumps and lumps*, if you were dumb

you might think you had *mumps*.

In ward one he starts to tell me

his dream: we are chased

by a giant goldfish, we reach

a cellar, we are trapped

by the goggle-eyed fish in a dead

sea end, and then suddenly

he is all alone with an enormous

tome on his lap, the words *medical*

*dictionary* are embossed on its cover,

and he opens it, and he begins to read.

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