

A Fish with a Wish



Ethan
Crownberry

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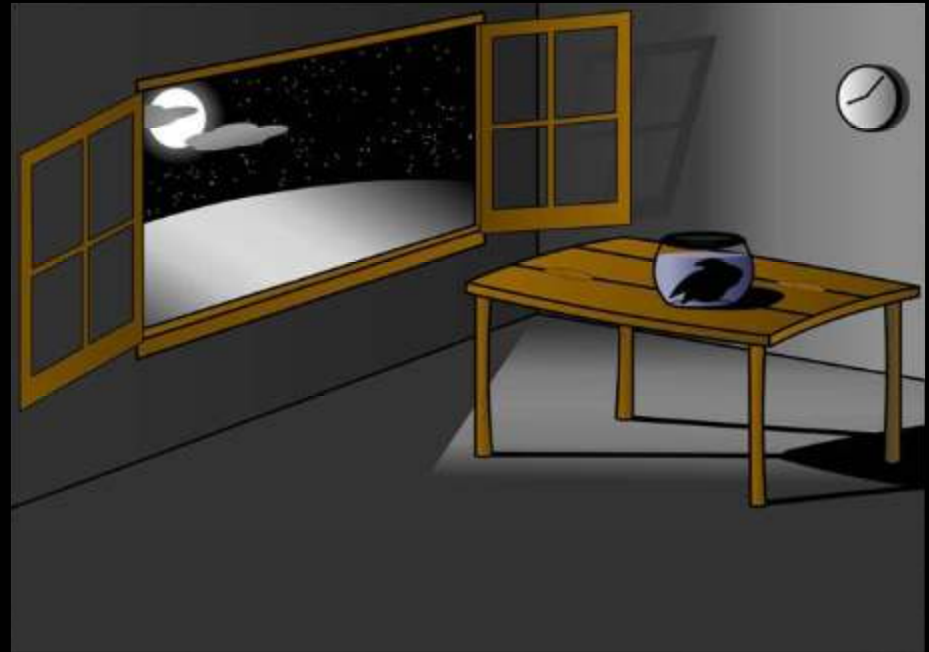
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To my father,
the most honorable man I've ever known.
I wish you well...

Some time ago, in an awfully gray room,
in a corner so dark and so filled up with gloom,
on a table just barely four legs and a plank,
sat one gallon of water in a tiny glass tank.
And inside that water a goldfish was swimming,
pondering glumly the life he was living.
And in that glass tank on that old wobbly table
is where we begin this odd fish-wishy fable.

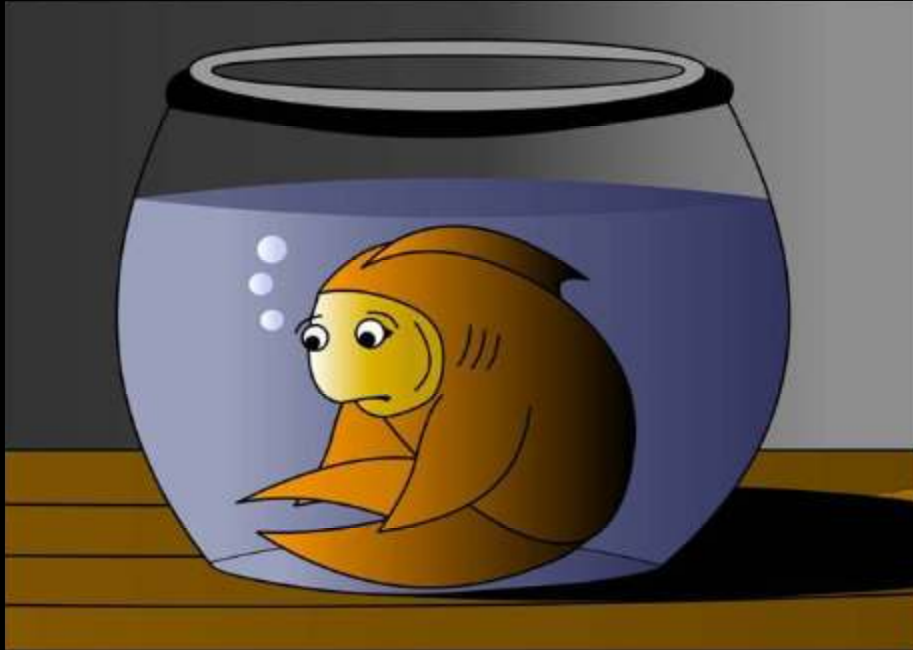




For the fish had been brought home from the pet store that day,
and was dropped in his tank in a most unpleasant way.
He'd been bought by a man as a gift for his daughter—
bought with no more than one thin, shiny quarter,
then carried home quickly in a small bag of water.

And now the fish was unhappy. He was far, far from glad.
He was quite disappointed, and growing quite mad.
For the water all around him was cloudy and cold,
and the table beneath him was eighty years old.
“How mean to have put me in such a tight place,”
said the fish with an awful fish frown on his face.
“Thank goodness I’m small and not big like a trout,”
he huffed one more time as he pouted about.





His tank was too small; it was quite plain to see.
His tank was much smaller than a fish tank should be.
There were no fun fish toys, and no fish decorations,
like shipwrecks that bubble and plastic crustaceans.
There was no ocean backdrop. There were no colored stones.
There were no pirate chests with skulls and crossbones.
There were no deep-sea plants, and tree trunks to swim through.
There was no one to talk to. There was nothing to do.

“This tank is not fit for a fish to be in,”
said the fish as he tapped on the glass with his fin.
“Now, I don’t mean to mumble, and don’t mean to moan.
And I don’t mean to grumble, and don’t mean to groan.
Please pardon my anger, and pardon my tone,
but...IS ANYONE THERE? AM I HERE ALL ALONE?”





But no one came running to answer his call.
There was nobody there; there was no one at all.
And the room was as dark as the night was outside.
It was quite hard to see, though he tried and he tried.
There was nowhere to go. There was nowhere to hide.
And with nowhere to swim, he was fit to be tied.
He was so sad and lonely he could have just cried.
But the tears wouldn't come; he was too full of pride.
It was all he could take; he would not let it slide.
He would not keep the way he felt bottled inside.

So up from the water the fish popped his head,
and with one giant fish breath the fish loudly said,
“I am not just some trinket one locks in a case.
I’m a goldfish with needs—I need room—I need space.
I need sunlight, and friends, and clean water, and food,
and a lack of these things is not good for my mood...”

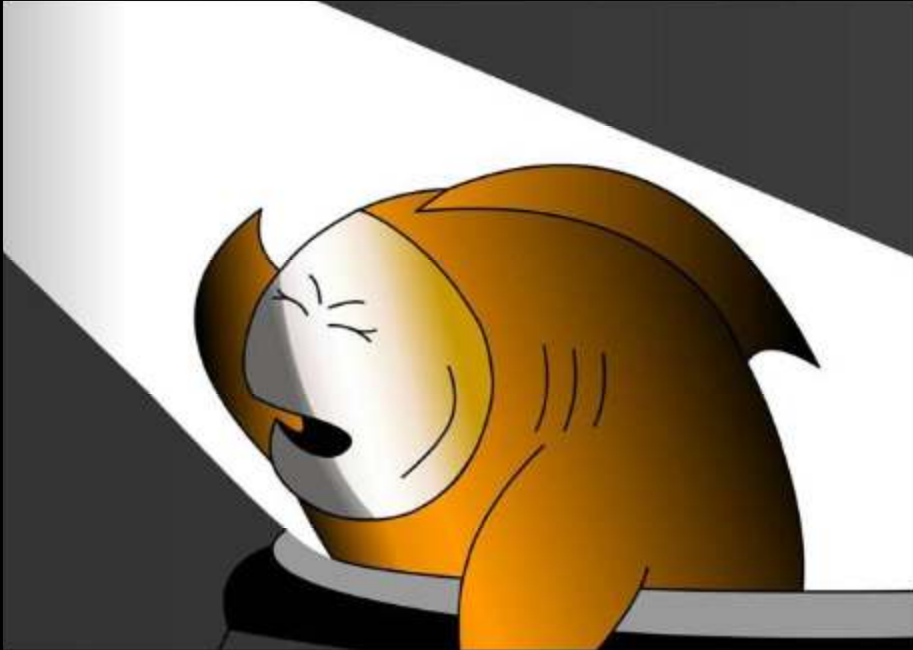




“Now, I know that you’re out there, you fish-buying man,
and I know you can hear me—I know that you can.
Well, this tank is as bad as a fish tank can get,
and one day I’ll get out, and on that, you can bet!
For I feel that my life should hold much more in store.
I do not want to stay here—not one minute more.
And I don’t mean to frown, and I don’t mean to pout.
I don’t mean to ramble, and don’t mean to spout.
I don’t mean to yell, and I don’t mean to shout,
but...FOR GOODNESS SAKE, SOMEBODY, PLEASE LET ME OUT!”

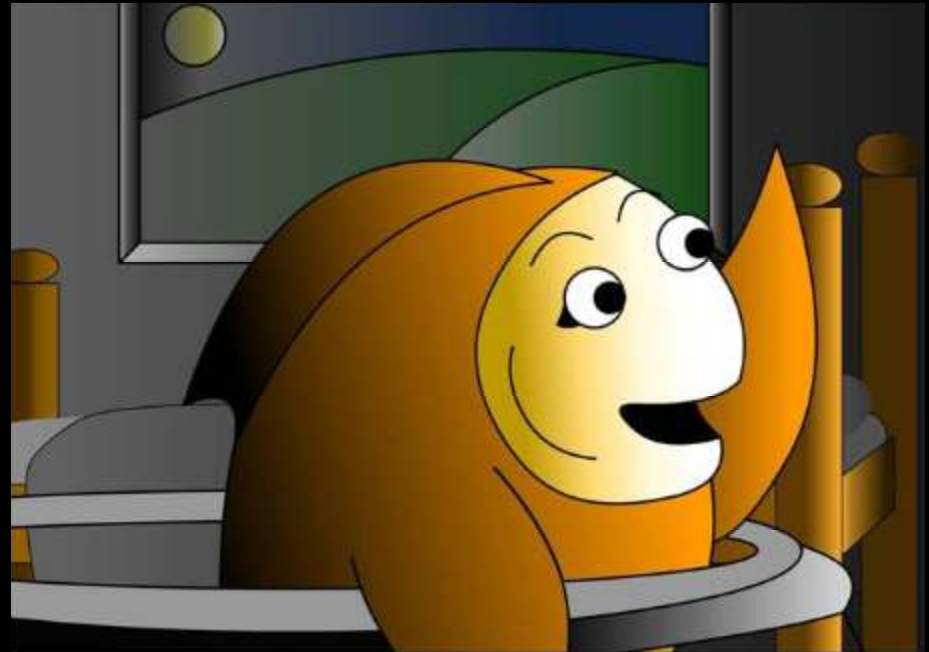
And again no one came. And the fish kept on talking.
He complained and complained, and went on and on squawking.
He muttered and whined, but he didn't stop there;
he giggled and nagged, and continued to blare.
He ranted so loudly that if he had hair,
he'd have pulled every strand 'til his fish head was bare.
He nitpicked and picked, and left nothing to spare,
and at least thirty times shouted, "LIFE ISN'T FAIR!"

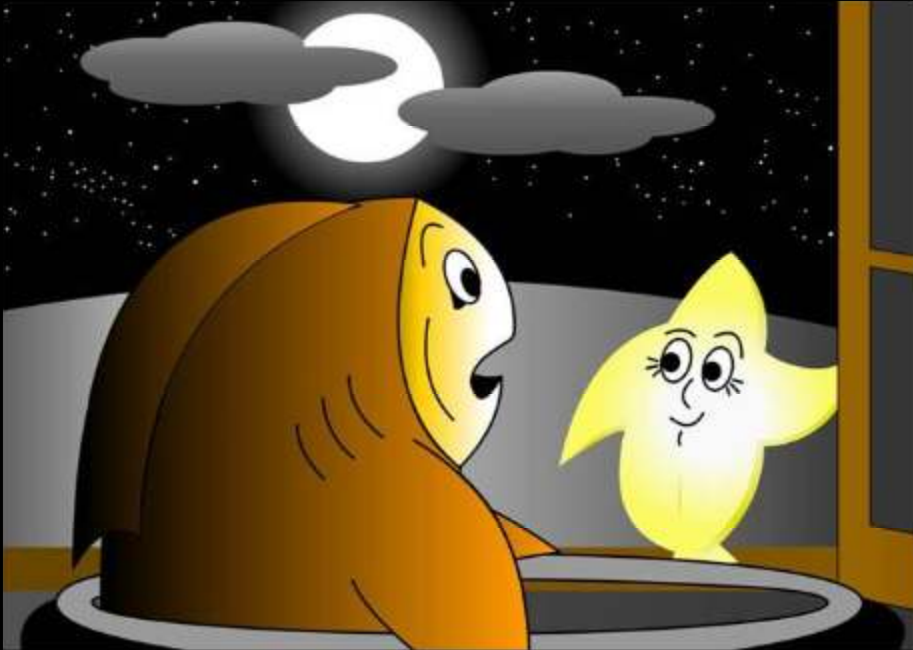




Then all of a sudden, a light shined in his face,
not a light from inside but from deep outer space.
It shined through the window right down in his eyes,
so fast it had taken him quite by surprise.
He squinted and flinched, and he closed his eyes tight,
and he held up his fish fin to block out the light.
He had never seen anything shining so bright,
and had never seen light with such power and might.

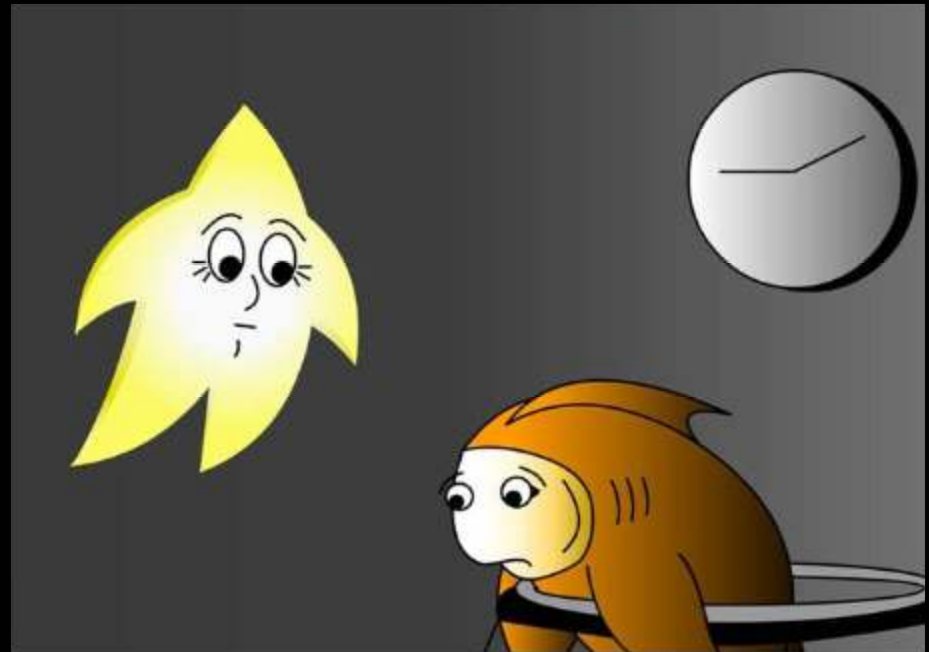
“Who’s there?” asked the fish, wondering who it could be.
“Could you please dowse your light? It’s too bright! I can’t see!”
Then slowly but surely the light faded low
‘til all that was left was a soft gentle glow.
“What’s this?” said the fish, as he opened each eye.
With his eyes opened wide, he looked up at the sky.
“A star!” he declared. “I know just what I’ll do.
I will wish and I’ll wish ‘til my wishes come true.
I will wish a whole lot. I will wish a whole slew.
I will wish ‘til my fish face turns three shades of blue.”

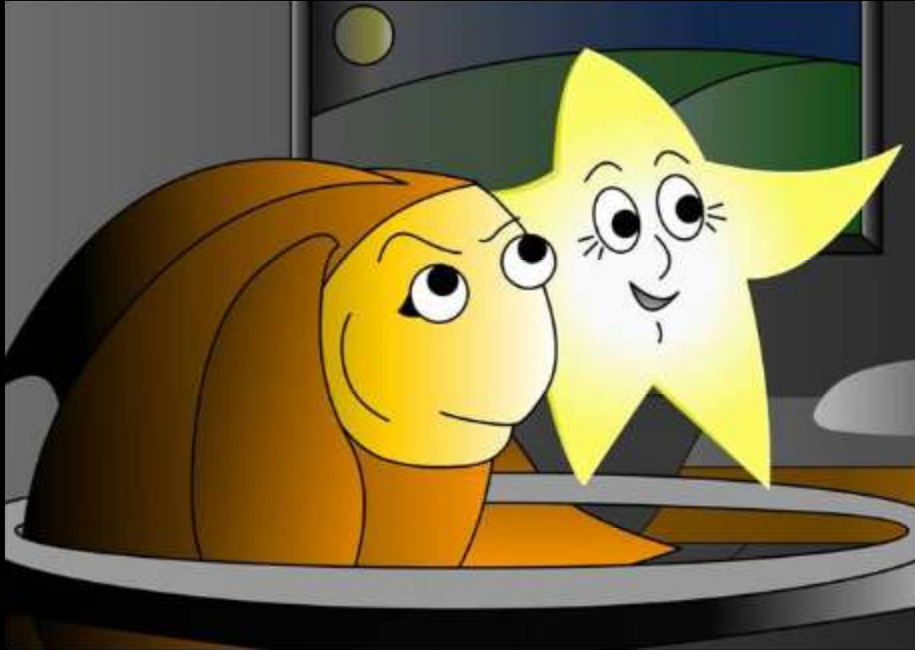




“And what would you wish,” the fish heard the star say,
“if your wishes were granted all night and all day?”
And the fish nearly jumped back a half-inch or two.
“You can talk!” he said, shocked. “Well, that’s something quite new...”

“But as long as you’ve asked, I will tell you my wish.
I wish I was much more than a measly goldfish.
I wish I could get out of this tank and be free.
I wish I could go swimming somewhere in the sea.
I wish I could go here. I wish I could go there.
I wish I had two wings and could fly in the air.
I wish I could be big. I wish I could be grand.
I wish I had four legs and could walk on dry land.
There are so many things that I wish I could be.
There are so many places I wish I could see.
And if I had my way and could wish a whole lot,
I would wish I was somewhere and something I’m not.”





“So what will it be?” the star asked him to choose.

“Just make your first wish. You’ve got nothing to lose.”

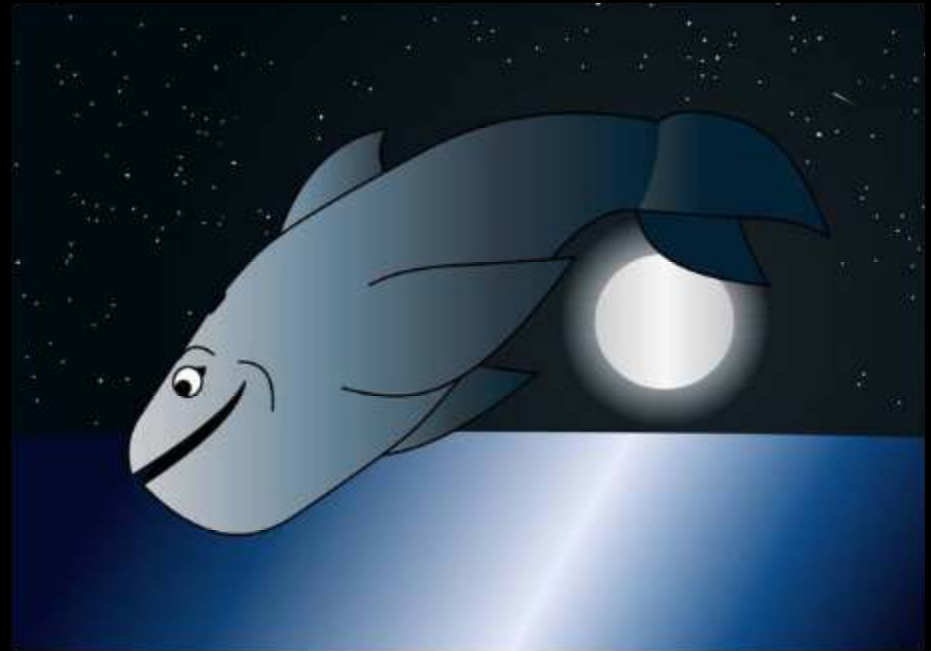
Then the fish started thinking and scratched his fish head.

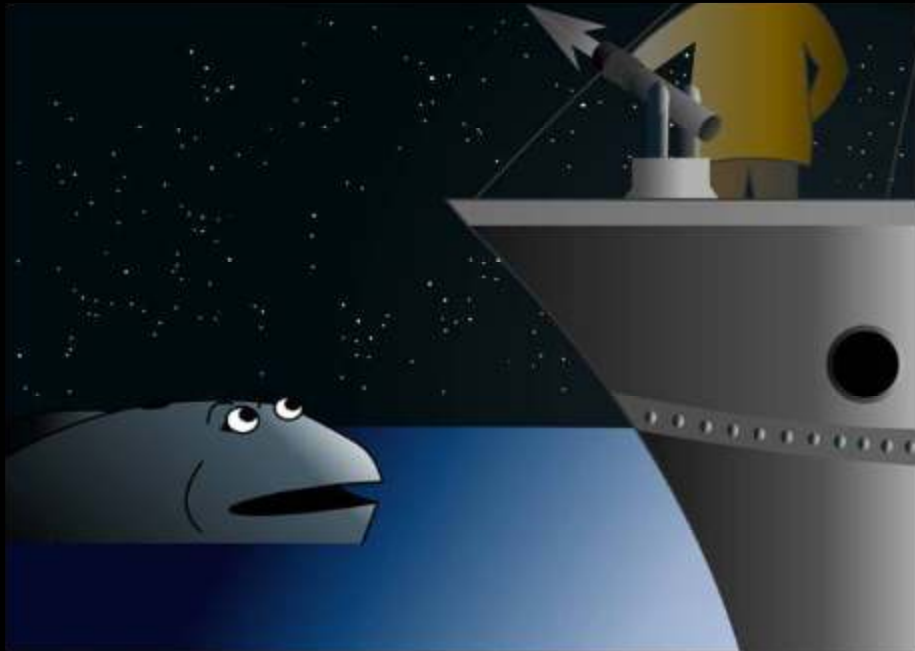
And he scratched and he scratched ‘til his fish fin turned red.

And he thought and he thought. He thought once and thought twice.

Then, “AH-HA!” he said quickly. “Being a whale might be nice!”

And *poof!* He was there. He was far out to sea.
That ol' star had come through, and the fish was now free.
He was swimming in waters so wide and so blue.
He was a great ocean whale. His fish wish had come true.
He was fifty feet long and at least twenty feet wide,
and was feeling quite strong as he swam through the tide.
And he swam and he swam. He swam east and swam west.
And he swam without ever once stopping to rest.
Then he dove down real deep. Then he swam up real fast.
Then he leapt from the surf shouting, "FREE! FREE AT LAST!"

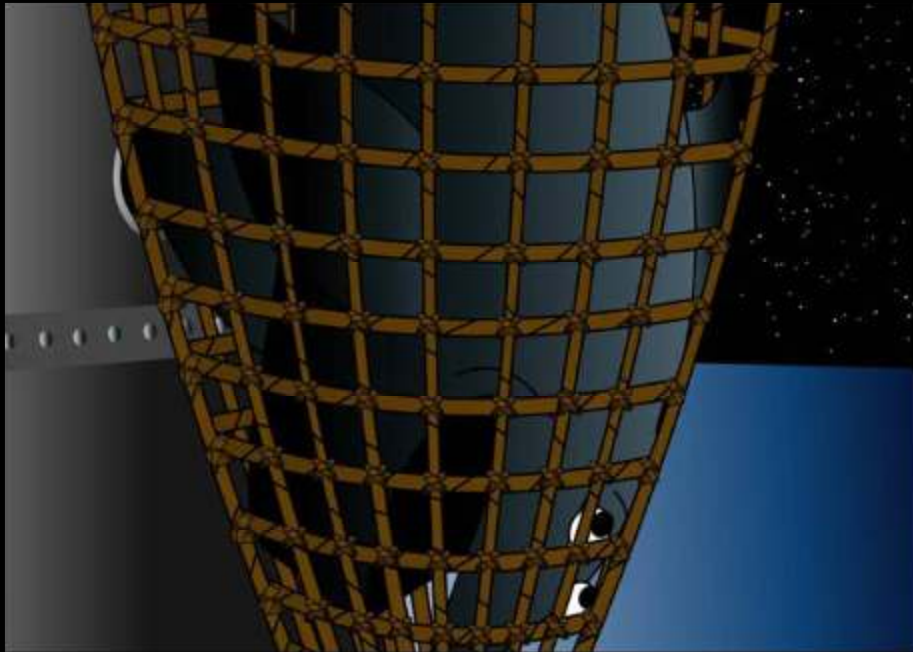




But then, all at once, a big boat came along,
and the fish knew right then there was something quite wrong.
On board there were men who were hunters by trade,
who hunt ocean whales for the wages they're paid.
Then the captain yelled out to his crewmen, "WHALE-HO!"
And the fish knew right then it was time he should go.

So the fish swam away, and the boat chased him down,
and through sea and through surf they went 'round and went 'round.
They went 'round through Cape Cod, and went half way up Maine,
then they turned a sharp right and went half way to Spain.
Then the men threw their nets, and the fish was now caught,
and the men pulled and pulled 'til their nets were quite taut.





“Are you up there, ol’ star?” the fish cried out in fear.

“If I may, may I make myself perfectly clear?

Now, I’m not sure you’ve noticed, and not sure you’ve heard,
but this whale-wish you’ve granted has grown quite absurd.

And if I could please ask you for one more quick word,
could I not be a whale, could I, instead, be a bird?”

And *poof!* He was off. He was high in the sky.
He was flying much higher than most birds could fly.
He was free of those nets and that boat and those men.
That ol' star had come through for the fish once again.
He was a great mountain bird. He was soaring so proud.
He was flying as high as his bird wings allowed.
And he soared and he soared. He soared left and soared right.
And he soared past three clouds and two planes and one kite.
Then he climbed, and he climbed. Then he dove down real low.
Then he swooped up as fast as his bird wings would go.





But far down below him, somewhere on the ground,
a shotgun rang out with a loud shotgun sound.
Then the fish looked straight down and saw something quite grim;
there were hunters with shotguns all aiming at him.
So he flew away fast. Yes, he flew and he flew.
But the next place he flew had more hunters there too.
So he flew a bit more. He flew far, far away.
And he searched north and south for a nice place to stay.
But the next place he flew had much more than before;
everywhere that he flew there were hunters galore.

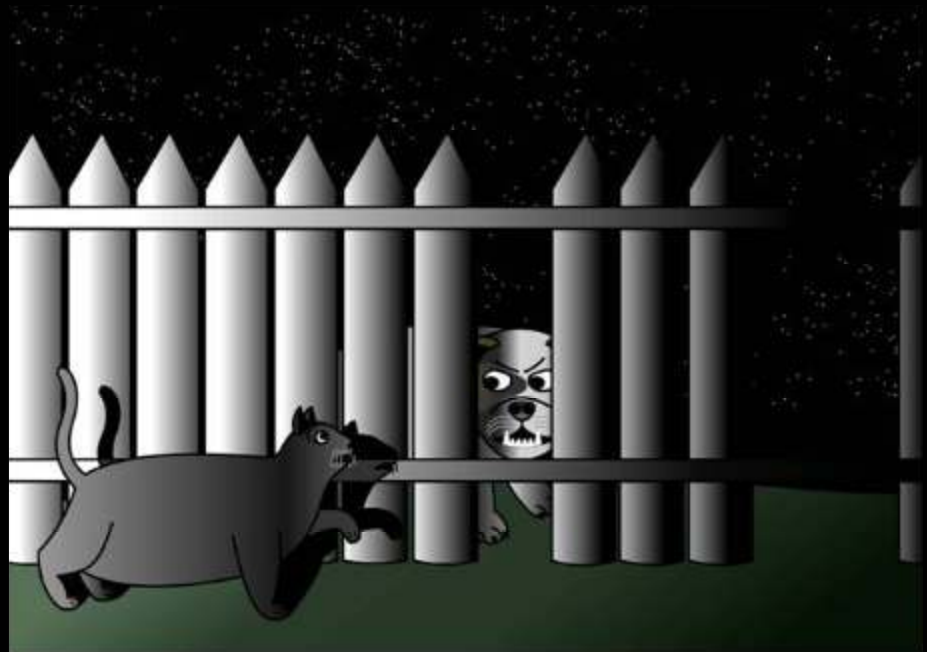
“Are you up there, ol’ star?” the fish cried out for help.
“Now, I don’t mean to yammer, and don’t mean to yelp.
And I don’t mean to be such an ungrateful fish.
And I don’t mean to wish I had not made this wish.
But this bird-wish you’ve granted has grown quite unfair.
Could I not be a Bird? Could I, instead, be a bear?”





And *poof!* He was there. He had fur and big claws.
But the forest was full of bear traps for his paws...

So he wished one more wish. He wished he was a cat.
Then along came a bulldog, and that was quite that...

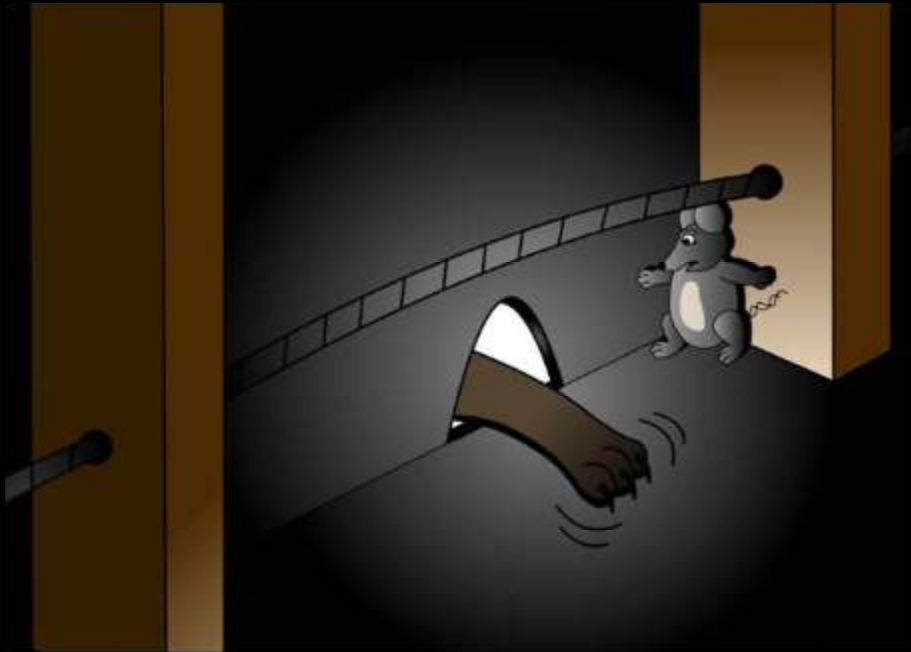




So he wished one more time. He wished he was a toad.
But he nearly was squashed near the side of the road...

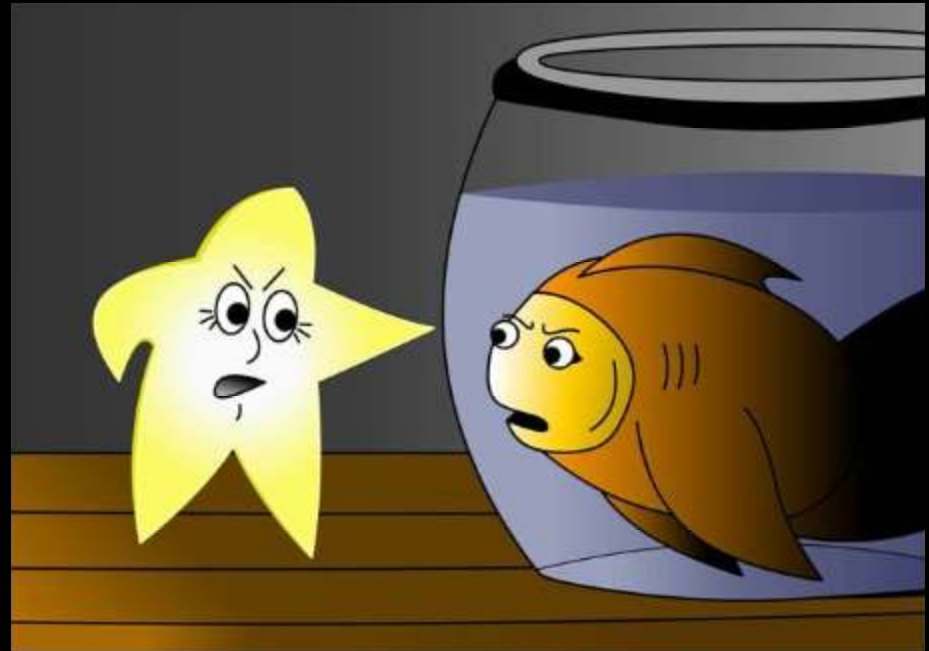
So he wished once again. He wished he was a snake.
But the food a snake eats his fish mouth couldn't take...

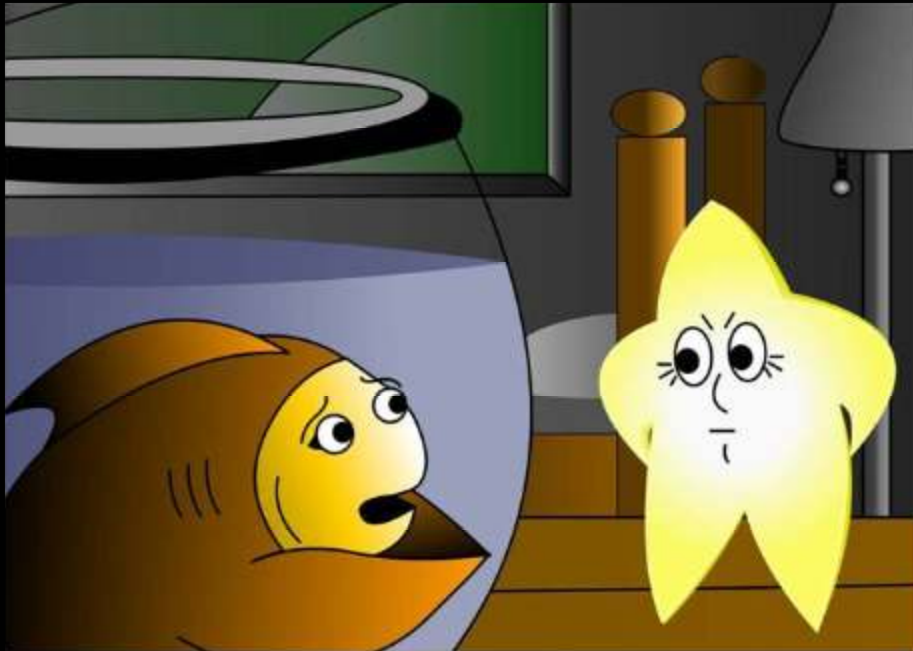




And he wished and he wished. He wished he was a mouse.
But he could not run free with a cat in the house.
And he kept making wishes and wishes all night,
but not one single wish of his turned out all right.

Then *poof!* He was there. He was back in his room.
He was back in his tank. He was back in the gloom.
“I give up,” said the star. “I have had quite enough.”
“No more wishes for you,” he said, sounding quite gruff.
“You can not go on wishing like that—it’s not fair.
You can not wish as though you had wishes to spare.
They do not grow on trees, and, in fact, they’re quite rare.
You should make only wishes you’ve thought of with care.”





“Pretty please,” said the fish. “Please with sugar on top. Could I have one more wish? Then, I promise, I’ll stop.”

And the star listened closely, his patience worn thin, while the fish begged and begged. Then he finally gave in.

“I will grant you one more,” said the star to the fish.

“You may have only one—only one final wish.

But this wish has a price; there is one small concern.

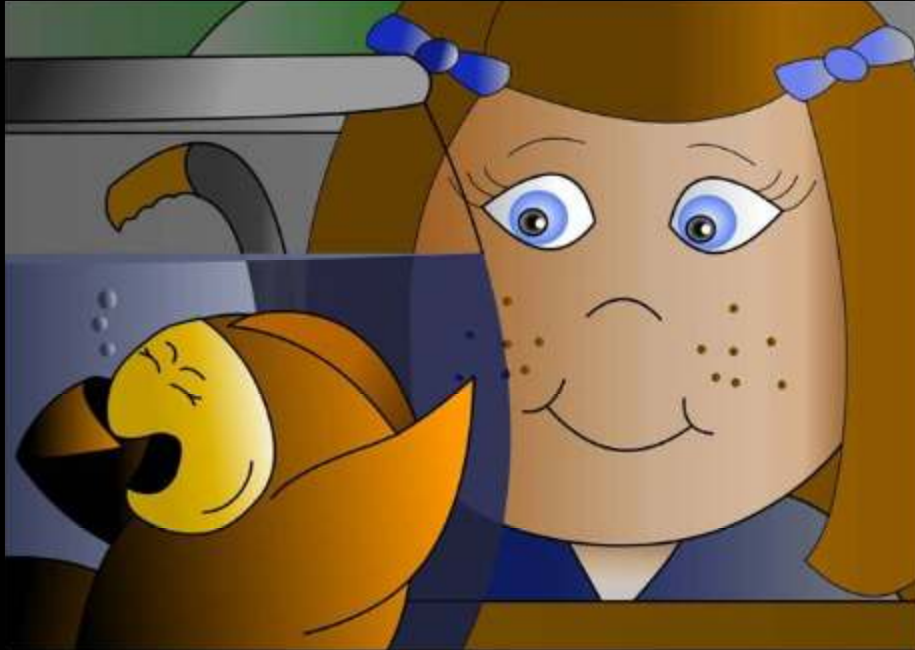
For this last wish I grant you, you can not return.

You can not take it back! You can not change your mind!

This last wish that I grant you, you can not rewind!”

“Fine with me,” said the fish. “On your terms, I agree.
And if I may speak, here’s what I’d like to be—”
But the star cut him short with a raise of his hand,
“Did I not make my point? Do you not understand?
Have you not learned a thing from the things you’ve been taught?
This last wish that you wish must be given some thought.
You can not make it now—you may not wish tonight.
You must ponder this wish ‘til it’s perfectly right.
You must ponder this wish for at least a whole day.
I’ll come back here tomorrow when the sun’s gone away.”





Then the star disappeared. And the fish closed his eyes.
And the fish slept and slept 'til the morning sunrise.
Then he yawned and he stretched. He was now wide-awake.
He had dreamt half the night of what wish he would make.
Then he peered through the tank, though the room was still dim,
and he saw a small girl staring inward at him.

She was cute as a bug, with blue eyes and big cheeks,
and a giggle that sounds like a squeak when she speaks.

She had bows in her hair, and had freckles to spare,
and, beneath her, the fish spied an odd sort of chair.
It had wheels on both sides, and two spots for her feet,
and two handles for pushing on the back of the seat.
Then the girl leaned in close, and she grinned ear to ear.
She was quite full of joy. She was quite full of cheer.
Then she started to speak, and went on for a while.

And little by little, our fish friend grew a smile.





He did not understand her—not one single word,
but was quite tickled pink by each word that he heard.

He was happy to know he was not so alone,
and did not have to stay in that room on his own.

And the day went by quick. And the sun came and went.
And the fish was quite pleased with the time they had spent.

Then the girl said goodnight as she rolled to her bed.
And the fish wondered why she had not walked instead.
Then it dawned on him fast that this girl who can talk
was a sweet little girl with two legs that can't walk.

Then it all came so clear. It was all making sense.
“Am I really this dumb? Am I really this dense?”
said the fish. “This poor girl has been trapped here all day.
She could not go outside. She could not run and play.
Now, I’m sure there are places she’d much rather be,
but she’s trapped in that chair, and she can not break free.
This poor girl is a fish! She’s a fish just like me!
She’s a fish in a tank far away from the sea!”





Then the girl crawled in bed, and she turned off her light.

And the star, as he promised, reappeared in the night.

"It is time," said the star. "You may now make your wish.

And what wish can I grant you, my fine fickle fish?"

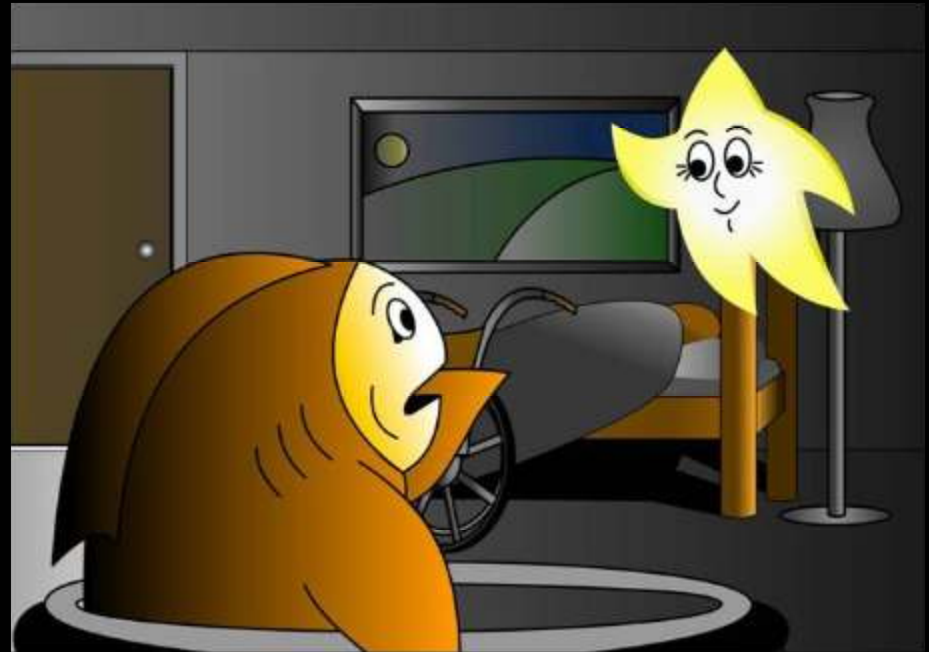
Then the fish went to speak, but he stopped at mid-thought;
with the thoughts he was thinking his face was quite wrought.

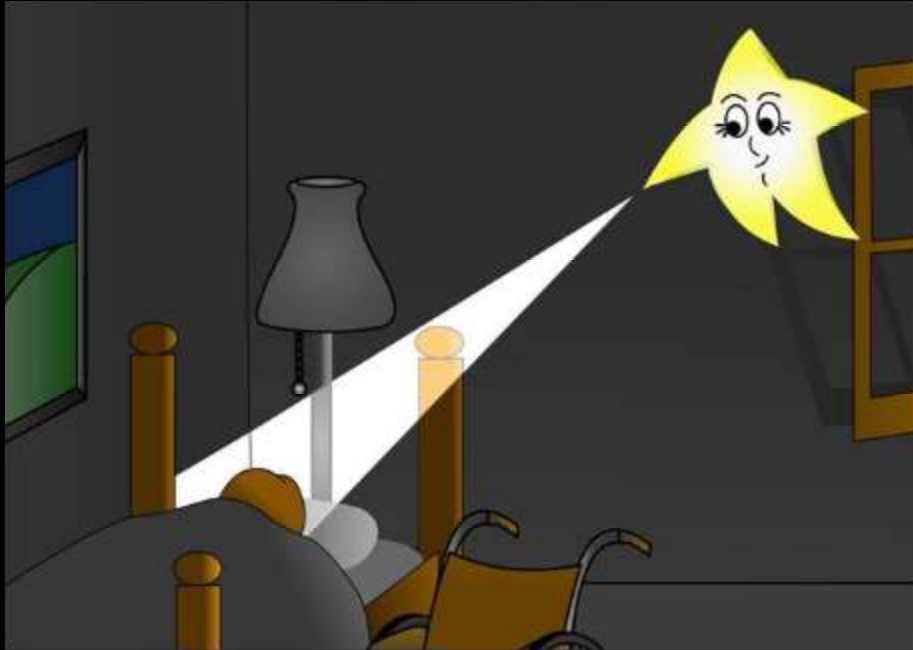
Then he turned toward the girl with a sad sort of stare.

And he stared at her there. Then he stared at her chair.

Then he took a deep breath and he sighed 'cause he knew
the next wish he would wish was the right thing to do.

Then he turned toward the star, and looked up through his light,
and he said, "Here's a wish you'll find perfectly right.
Now, you've made it quite clear that these wishes are rare,
and these wishes we wish should be thought of with care.
And this last wish I'm wishing, I don't have to spare,
but this last wish I'll wish is a wish only fair.
So, I'm wishing this wish for that girl over there,
and I wish she can walk and does not need that chair."





And the star smiled and said, "That's an excellent wish!
That's the best wish of all ever made by a fish."

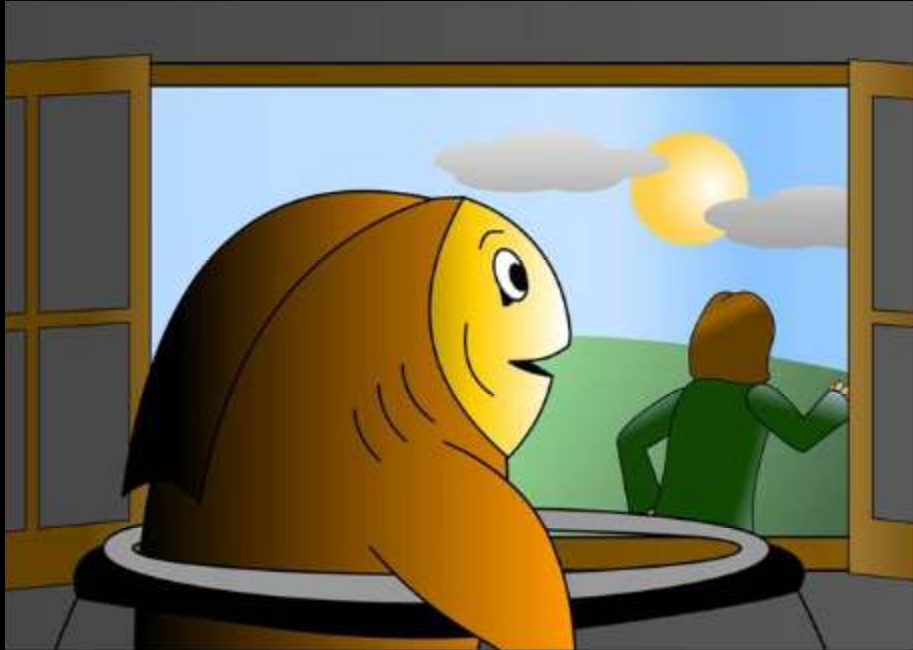
Then he raised his star hand, and he gave it a whirl,
and he cast down his wish granting light on the girl.

Then the star winked an eye. And the fish was enchanted.

"My fish friend," the star said, "your fish wish has been granted."

And *poof!* It had happened. The girl sat up fast.
She could wiggle her toes—she could feel them at last.
Then she moved both her legs, and she bent both her knees.
Then she leapt from her bed just as quick as you please.
Then she jumped up and down, and she spun all around.
And the fish was quite pleased at the joy she had found.
And the girl was so glad to have legs she could use
that she ran to tell all of her family the news.
And the fish knew right then, out of all he would lose,
that the wish he had wished was the right wish to choose.





And that's all there is to this fish-wishy fable.
And the fish, to this day, is still there on that table.
And the tank he's still trapped in has not changed at all;
the water's still cold, and the space is still small.
And most times he just stares out the window all day,
in the hopes that he'll see his blue-eyed girl at play.
And one day, just outside, she had quickly run by,
with a smile on her face, and a gleam in her eye.
And this made him quite happy. He was far, far from sad.
And he thought to himself, "Being a fish ain't half bad."
But he never thought once 'bout the price he had paid
for the wish that the girl never knew he had made.

If you only had one wish to make,
would you change your life,
or would you change someone else's?



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