**The Lesson** 

“Your father’s gone,” my bald headmaster said.  
His shiny dome and brown tobacco jar  
Splintered at once in tears. It wasn’t grief.  
I cried for knowledge which was bitterer  
Than any grief. For there and then I knew  
That grief has uses – that a father dead  
Could bind the bully’s fist a week or two;  
And then I cried for shame, then for relief.

I was a month past ten when I learnt this:  
I still remember how the noise was stilled  
in school-assembly when my grief came in.  
Some goldfish in a bowl quietly sculled  
Around their shining prison on its shelf.  
They were indifferent. All the other eyes  
Were turned towards me. Somewhere in myself  
Pride, like a goldfish, flashed a sudden fin.

**by Edward Lucie-Smith (1933- )**