MOTHER’S GOLDFISH

My mother cannot remember
the end of the Great War, except,
as she tells us at dinner,
she had, in 1918,
two goldfish: King George
and the Kaiser, who died overfed
on soda crackers.

She brings her words to the surface
slowly, as if she had rolled up her frock sleeves
and cupped her small hands
in the cool of a prayer,
lifting two goldfish
out of her damask napkin to pass around
the table until the guest beside her
places them back in her glass bowl heart
with no words, no splash,
and we go on eating.