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In the Fish Bowl

Mary Graham Bonner

Susan kept a large glass bowl in her room full of helleries — small, round tropical fish, warm-water creatures that had become fashionable pets. She also kept snails in the bowl, which the helleries largely ignored.

One afternoon she watched through the glass as the father hellery began chasing the mother around the bowl, keeping her away from the far corner where the babies were clustered. Susan recognized the problem immediately. She reached in, scooped up the mother hellery, and moved her gently to a separate glass of water nearby.

Then she counted.



Twenty babies — all alive, all present, all apparently unharmed. They were huddled in one corner, staying as close to their father as possible, and the father was now very still and seemed, for a fish, considerably relieved. The snails were also relieved. Susan gave everyone a generous portion of fish food.

The mother stayed in her separate bowl until the young helleries were large enough to look after themselves. Then she was returned, and welcomed back.

"Why couldn't she stay with them when they were small?" Susan had asked.

The answer, it turned out, was simply that some mothers don't take to their young until the young are big enough to be interesting. The father, though, loved them from the very first day — small as they were, barely there at all, he was quite devoted.

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