

The Shark in the Fishbowl



written by Chris Thompson based on **JUST WORK** (an autobiographical account of workplace bullying) by Kathleen O'Brien



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The Shark in the Fishbowl

Welcome to Joe's Aquarium Supplies. Joe's the boss. He's a dolphin. Likeable. Harmless. We all like dolphins but they don't make great bosses. Joe tries to please everyone and ends up pleasing no-one. Alison runs the office. She's a Pike; a predatory fish that likes to ambush its prey. Alison likes to think she's the big fish in this pond. Ruby's a sucker-fish. Whatever power they have is leeches off the big fish they suck up to. Ruby is the Assistant Officer Manager except on Alison's flex-day when she's in charge. She likes to get her own way, no matter who gets *in* her way. Kathy's the Office Assistant. She wishes she was an angel-fish, but mostly she thinks of herself as a jellyfish; a spineless mollusk hiding in its shell.

Today, that shell is the stationery cupboard. Kathy's locked herself in there and she's not coming out.

There's a shark in this fishbowl and nobody's doing anything about it.

Since 2005, Creative Ministries Network has been supporting the development of this performance project based on a real account of workplace bullying.

The 1st draft was completed towards the end of 2006 and received an 'in-house' reading on December 4, 2006. On that occasion, the performers included Janine Watson, Laura Bray, Margot Fenley and Daniel Nellor.

A 2nd draft was developed in response to that reading and a 3rd draft was developed in July, 2007. The 3rd Draft Script received a public reading on August 7, 2007. On that occasion, the performers were Tirese Ballard, Steven Smith, Janine Watson and Elizabeth Welch.

This further creative development of the project is undertaken with performers Margot Fenley, Steven Smith, Janine Watson and Elizabeth Welch with Dramaturgy from Jane Bayly.

The project is written and directed by Chris Thompson

CHARACTERS

The play is intended to be performed by four actors doubling roles in the following ways:

Actor 1: plays Kathy Actor 2: plays Ruby, Mum, *The Age* Actor 3: plays Joe. Rob, Dad, *The Herald/Sun* Actor 4: plays Angela, Alison, Trudy, Doctor McQueen, *The Local Leader*

The Shark in the Fishbowl

written by Chris Thompson

based on JUST WORK by Kathleen O'Brien

developed with Tirese Ballard, Jane Bayly, Steven Smith, Janine Watson & Liz Welch
and with assistance from John Bottomley, Margot Fenley and Brendan Byrne

DRAFT 5
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SCENE ONE: TOMORROW

Sounds in the dark... bubbles... water... a fish tank...

Lights up...

Four figures 'swim' into the space... a SCHOOL OF FISH darting about... turning this way and that, following each other's lead.

From above the FISHBOWL, Angela appears. She watches the fish dart around below.

She holds up a book.

ANGELA

When Joe was a young man, he wrote a book about the care and enjoyment of fish; *The Amateur Aquarist - Fish Friends For Everyone*. It was really popular. A big seller. At least it was amongst the fish fraternity. In its preface he says:

She reads...

ANGELA

An aquarium is more than just a bowl full of water and fish. It's a little world in there, just as beautiful and fragile and dangerous as our own. Take care of it - keep the oxygen flowing, the water clean, the plants healthy, the fish fed - and it'll be a happy environment. Healthy, happy, productive. Neglect it - let the algae take hold, forget the food, let a predator fish get in there - and you've got trouble. The fish get stressed, sick, desperate to escape.

She looks down at them, swimming about.

ANGELA

But it's a fishbowl. There's only one way out.

Angela exits.

Now the fishbowl is an office...

...at the rear is Joe's Office... desk, chair, whiteboard and a fishbowl on a little table.

...on one side towards the front is Ruby's desk and chair.

...on the other side, opposite is a spare desk and chair.

Kathy is crouched on the floor up close to the audience, hugging a clipboard. This is the Stationery Cupboard.

Together, the three desks and the stationery cupboard form a round shape; a fishbowl.

Joe is in his office.

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. Kathy? Kathy? Have you done those monthly figures yet? Kathy?

Ruby is at her desk.

RUBY

(hushed)

Kathy? You still in there? Joe's waiting on those monthly figures.

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. Ruby, has Kathy done those figures yet?

RUBY

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. They're coming, Joe.

Joe makes bubble sounds with his mouth. Ruby goes to the Stationery Cupboard.

RUBY

(hushed)

Haven't you finished that stocktake yet?

Joe comes up behind her.

JOE

Is something wrong, Rubella? Do you want me to...

RUBY

(cuts him off)

Everything's fine, Joe. I can handle it. You go back to your office.

Joe leaves. He makes the bubble sounds again.

RUBY

(pissed off)

You better not just be slacking off, Kathy. You're making me look bad. Kathy?

She stops. Joe stops too. They look up suddenly, something up there? Lurking? Circling?

They snap out of it and return to their desks.

Kathy is in the stationery cupboard. She has a clipboard. She's ticking off items.

KATHY

(a bit manic)

The stationery cupboard. Paper clips, bulldog clips, foldback clips, three sizes, packets of 200. Twenty-four HB black lead pencils. Post it notes, message pads... *Good morning, Joe's Aquarium Supplies. I'm sorry, he's not available. I'll leave him a note.* Plain white A4 copy paper. Laser copy. Eighty grams. 500 sheets to a ream. *The photocopier's jammed again. I'll call the Rep.* Blue Tac. Mapping pins. Two hole punch. Lever arch files. *Kathy, I need the monthly reports from the last quarter.* Invoice books, receipt books, account books. Bic fineline ballpoint pens. Packets of twenty. Three colours. Blue. Black. Red. *Stay out of the red, that's what Joe says. Always stay in the black.* Black. Black. Black. Sharpeners. Staplers. Sellotape. Permanent markers. *The permanent mark.*

Angela is above them again.

ANGELA

There's a shark in the fishbowl. And nobody's doing anything about it. One day, a little fish got so stressed by the shark that she jumped right out of the water... and Kathy jumped in to replace her.

SCENE TWO: THE INTERVIEW, SIX MONTHS AGO

The office comes to life...

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. Send her in please, Ruby.

Kathy moves back to the spare desk. She sits. Nervous.

Ruby, working at her desk, slowly tearing stamps from a sheet, licking them and placing them on envelopes with a thump to make sure they've stuck. She watches Kathy out of the corner of her eye.

RUBY

(chirpy)

Bzzz. Right away Joe.

Kathy stands, ready to go in, but Ruby says nothing, returns to putting stamps on the envelopes. Kathy doesn't know what to do. She sits down again.

Joe, sits in his office. He stares at his fishbowl, lovingly. He pours a bit of water into the fishbowl making bubble sounds with his mouth as he does, enjoying the sound that it makes.

Angela walks through with her cleaning equipment, watching Ruby. Ruby doesn't notice. Neither does Kathy.

Ruby looks up at Kathy, smiles a bit too hard.

A long pause, then...

RUBY

You can go in now.

Kathy smiles back and goes into Joe's office.

RUBY

Good luck.

Joe greets Kathy at the door. Shakes her hand.

JOE

Katy, come in.

KATHY

It's Kathy.

JOE

Of course it is. Thanks for coming in Kathy. I'm Joe.

KATHY

(nods a nervous laugh)

As in Joe's Aquarium Supplies.

JOE

Actually no. Not the Joe in Joe's Aquarium Supplies. Common mistake. That was my dad. This was his business.

(points to a sign outside the window)

That's his name on the big sign out there. I'm his son. Joe Junior. Of course it's my business now, since he's gone. But that's his name up there. Joe senior. My old man. Joe's Aquarium Supplies.

KATHY

Sorry.

JOE

Quite alright. Common mistake. Thanks for coming in. Have a seat.

Kathy sits. Joe sits. He looks at the fishbowl.

JOE

Sorry to keep you. Busy day. Interviews. Water?

KATHY

Thanks.

Joe pours, slowly, deliberately. Kathy waits. Joe picks up her CV and looks it over.

JOE

Quite a little resume you've got here.

KATHY

Oh, not really.

JOE

No, you'd be surprised.

KATHY

I was a good worker when I used to work. This'll be my first time back in the workforce since I got married. Fifteen years. If I get the job, of course.

JOE

Lot of changes in fifteen years.

KATHY

My last job, we didn't even have computers.

JOE

Well, then you'll fit right in here. Look around. No computers. Ruby licks the stamps and I write the cheques. My father was a great believer in elbow grease and brainpower so that's what we use in this business. Do you still have brainpower, Kathy?

KATHY

Oh yes.

JOE

Good. So many people can't spell or add up or even commit things to memory any more. My kids can't even remember their own telephone number without looking it up. Do you like fish?

KATHY

Er... yes. Every Friday night. We're not Catholic or anything. It's just a sort of... something we do. A family tradition.

JOE

That's nice, Kathy. But I was talking about aquariums.

(goes to his fishbowl)

My dad gave me this fishbowl when I was only five years old. I loved it. It became my passion. I even wrote a book about it.

(Kathy's impressed)

Fish are so much easier to deal with than people, don't you think?

Kathy doesn't know what to say. Joe picks up the jug and pours water into the fishbowl. He makes the bubble sound with his mouth as he listens to the water.

He indicates for Kathy to come and listen to the fishbowl. They both press their heads to the glass.

JOE

Hear that? Isn't that a wonderful sound. That's the sound that fish hear all day long.

He makes the bubble sound with his mouth again, indicates that Kathy should copy him. She has a go at making the bubble sound but she's not very good at it.

JOE

Do you ever put your head under the water when you're having a bath? I do. Blocks out all the worries of the world. You should try it. Of course, you can't stay like that forever or you'd drown. More's the pity. Not fish, though. They can do it until the cows come home. That's the life of a fish. All the worries of the world just blocked out.

(he makes the bubble sound)

Just like that.

Angela comes into Joe's office. Joe pays her no attention as she takes the bin liner from his bin and leaves. Outside, Ruby appears to be listening from her desk. Angela watches Ruby as she walks through the office.

JOE
Anyway. Enough about fish. Tell me about you.

KATHY
Well, there's not much to tell really. I, er...

JOE
(holds up a finger)
Just a minute, Kathy.

Joe listens for a moment, then speaks into the intercom.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Ruby?

Ruby freezes as though she's been caught out.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Ruby?

RUBY
Yes Joe?

Joe seems about to say something, then reconsiders.

JOE
Never mind.

Ruby goes back to licking stamps. Joe hears her thump the envelope. He smiles.

JOE
Now, where were we.

KATHY
I was just telling you that I...

JOE
You know Kathy, I have a good feeling about you. You tell me you're a good worker and I believe you. You tell me you've got brainpower and I believe that too. You're a mother and that counts for something in my book. You've got a good resume and you were on time for your interview. You'd be surprised how many people are tardy. I'm looking for someone who wants to be here, Kathy. A company only keeps going because the people who work there want to be there. I think you want to be here Kathy.

KATHY
I do, Joe.

JOE

Good. This has been a good interview, Kathy. It's been a strong field, but you're the most outstanding candidate I've seen today. In fact I think I want to offer you the job.

KATHY

You do?

JOE

I do. If you want it.

KATHY

I do.

JOE

Well, good then. When can you start?

KATHY

(a little taken aback)
Whenever you want.

JOE

How about right now?

KATHY

(more taken aback)
Now?

JOE

Is that a problem for you?

KATHY

No, I... no. That's fantastic. Thankyou Joe. I... I was just...

JOE

Don't get intimidated, Kathy. Just because I'm your boss now, doesn't mean we can't have the same friendly relationship we had a few moments ago. My door is always open, Kathy. Our motto here is '*your fish are our friends*'. I want you to think of yourself as just another one of the fish, Kathy.

KATHY

Thankyou Joe, that's... very kind of you. But it wasn't that I was... I was just wanting to...

JOE

There is a problem, isn't there Kathy.

KATHY

No. No problem. I was just... is there some sort of contract, Joe? Something I should sign?

JOE

Contract.

KATHY

Should I speak to someone from HR? Is there someone looks after personnel?

JOE

Ruby does the pays.

KATHY

I mean is there something I should sign? Terms and conditions? A job description?

JOE

No.

KATHY

No?

JOE

I don't hold with that sort of thing, Kathy. If there's one thing about business that my dad taught me it's to leave room for growth. Contracts tie you down, Kathy. I believe in being fluid. A hand shake was always good enough for my old man and I've never seen any reason to disagree with him.

He stands and holds out his hand. Kathy stands, uncertain, but acquiesces and holds out her own hand. Joe shakes her hand and kisses her on the cheek.

JOE

Welcome to Joe's Aquarium Supplies, Kathy. Come and I'll introduce you to Ruby and we'll see if we can't get you to do a little handover with your predecessor before she leaves. You're going to like Ruby. She's a mother too. You two are gonna get on like a house on fire.

Joe leads Kathy the long way out into the main office.

Ruby's on the phone.

RUBY

(whispering)

I'm telling you, Alison, she just looked me right in the eye and said *I'm going to lunch, Ruby, and I might be late getting back....*

(ALISON speaks)

Nuh. No sign of her. She's been gone almost three hours. It wouldn't surprise me if she never came back at all. She was always slack as...

(ALISON speaks)

I checked her desk, all her drawers. I reckon she's cleared out. And I reckon there's a fair bit of stationery missing too. I only just filled a new order for her and I can't see half the stuff I gave her... might get the new sheila to do a stocktake, work out how much is missing.

(ALISON speaks)

No, I reckon you should. I would. Dock her for half a day, and for the missing stationery.

Joe and Kathy come into the fishbowl, laughing.

RUBY
(into the phone)
Call you back.

She hangs up and busies herself with the mail.

JOE
Well, this is the main office. We like to call it the *fishbowl*. Ruby will make sure you get to meet the rest of the team down in the *pond*...
(laughs)
...that's what we like to call the warehouse.

KATHY
(laughs along with him)
And I suppose you call all the company vehicles the *fleet*.

Joe doesn't laugh.

JOE
We're only a small company, Kathy. We have one van and we call it... *the van*. Aquarium Supplies isn't rocket science, but there's a lot of job satisfaction and, dare I say, pride in providing the best quality equipment and supplies to both professional and amateur aquarists. I hope you'll enjoy your time with us as much as Trudy did.

RUBY half chokes at the mention of Trudy enjoying her work. Joe turns, annoyed at the response. He gives her a half-hearted glare.

JOE
Ruby, this is Kathy. She's the successful candidate for the Receptionist job.

RUBY
So you're the new fish.

KATHY
(friendly)
Any advice for a girl on her first day?

RUBY
Don't ask me. I just work here.

JOE
What about Trudy? Is she around?
(to Kathy)
It's her last day today. Maybe she'll have some tips for you before she goes.

RUBY
Haven't seen her.

KATHY

How come she's leaving?

RUBY

Don't ask me. I just work here.

JOE

Let's just say she outgrew the position. I'm sure she's moving on to greener pastures.

KATHY

Was she here long?

JOE

She put in a good innings.

RUBY

Six months. That was long enough.

Kathy is taken aback by how short an amount of time Trudy was in the job.

JOE

Like I said, Ruby'll take you down to the pond and introduce you around, wont you Rubella.

RUBY

Sure, Joe. You're the boss.

JOE looks around the office.

JOE

No Alison today?

RUBY

It's Friday, Joe. Alison has her flex-day on Fridays.

JOE

Friday. Fair enough.

(to KATHY)

POETS day, eh Kathy?

Joe leaves.

KATHY

POETS Day?

RUBY

(rolls her eyes)

Piss Off Early Tomorra's Sat'day?

KATHY nods and smiles as though she'd known what it meant all along.

KATHY
Who's Alison?

RUBY
Office Manager.

KATHY
I thought you were the Office Manager.

RUBY
Assistant Office Manager. Except for Fridays when Ali has her flex-day. Then I'm in charge.

KATHY
Oh.

RUBY
(leads off)
The Pond's this way.

Ruby shows Kathy around the warehouse, introducing her as they go. The introductions are flat and disengaged. Kathy tries to make a good impression but no-one really seems excited to meet her.

RUBY
Listen up everyone. This is Kathy. She'll be taking over from Trudy.
(KATHY smiles)
This is Wally, our Storeman. He'll give you the stock updates for the monthly reports.

KATHY
Hi, Wally.

RUBY
He's been here longer than any of us.

KATHY
More than six months, I hope.

Kathy laughs. No-one else does.

RUBY
That's Mario. He drives the forklift.

KATHY
Nice to meet you, Mario.

RUBY
And, that's pretty much it for the pond, except for the young bloke, Lien Yu. He must be down the back somewhere. No great loss. You'll probably catch up with him in the lunch room.
(in a mocking Asian accent)
He don't speak much Engrish.

Ruby leads her back to the Fishbowl.

RUBY

And here we are back at the Fishbowl.

KATHY

Joe seems nice. They all do.

RUBY

You don't get the job done being nice, Kathy.

KATHY

Do you mind if I make a call. I'd like to let my husband know I got the job.

RUBY

Knock yourself out. That'll be your desk there.

Ruby goes back to work. Kathy calls Rob.

KATHY

Hi Rob, it's me...

(Rob speaks)

Yeah, really well. I got the job...

(Rob speaks)

I know, isn't it great. I'm so excited...

(Rob speaks)

Well, that's the thing. I sort of can't. Joe, he's my boss, he asked me to start right away. Like today. So I've just been getting my induction from Ruby, she's my co-worker.

(Rob speaks)

No, she seems really nice...

Kathy can see Ruby watching her. Eavesdropping.

KATHY

No, it's a nice place. Seems like fun. They call the office the fishbowl...

(Rob speaks)

Yeah, that's what I thought...

(Rob speaks)

Just like that, offered it to me then and there. Said I did a really good interview. Said it was a strong field, but that I was the most outstanding...

(Rob)

Thanks you... I'm proud of me too...

Ruby gags to herself. She taps on the desk and gestures to Kathy that she should get off the phone.

KATHY

Gotta go. Don't want to make a bad impression on my first day... See you for dinner...

(Rob speaks)

Love you too...

Kathy blows a kiss into the phone and hangs up.

KATHY

Sorry, Ruby. I was just...

RUBY

(cuts her off)

Listen Kathy, I know you're the new girl and all, so it's no big deal, but for future reference, Joe's not your boss and I'm not your co-worker. *I'm* your boss. You report to me. I report to Joe. Got it?

KATHY

Sure thing, Ruby.

RUBY

Good. So how about we do some work, eh?

KATHY

Where should I start.

RUBY

We need a stocktake on the stationery supplies.

Before Ruby can get Kathy sorted...

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. Ruby. Ruby.

Ruby rolls her eyes and points to the intercom.

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. Rubella, are you there?

Ruby pushes Kathy towards the intercom.

RUBY

(silently mouthing)

I'm not here.

Kathy answers the intercom.

KATHY

(into the intercom)

Bzzz. Can I help you Joe?

JOE
(on the intercom)
Kathy? Where's Ruby? Is Ruby there?

Kathy doesn't know what to do. She doesn't want to lie to Joe.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Kathy?

KATHY
(flustered, into the intercom)
She's right here Joe.

Ruby shoots a dagger look at Kathy. She's not happy.

RUBY
(into the intercom, cheerful)
Sorry Joe. Just had to run to the little girl's room.

JOE
(on the intercom)
I'd like to see you in my office please, Ruby?

RUBY
(cheerful, into the intercom)
Sure thing, Joe. Be right there.

Kathy is apologetic and confused and embarrassed all at once.

RUBY
Not a good start, Kathy.

Ruby goes into Joe's office. Joe is looking at his fishbowl.

JOE
How's the new girl doing? Okay so far?

RUBY
She's terrific. You've made a good choice there Joe, even if she was the only applicant.

JOE
Quality not quantity, Ruby. That's what counts.

RUBY
(impatient)
What's up Joe?

JOE
Did you introduce Kathy to everyone in the pond?

RUBY
Just like you asked, Joe.

JOE
What about Lien Yu?

RUBY
What about him?

JOE
Did you introduce Kathy to him?

RUBY
I don't know what you mean.

JOE
I heard you didn't introduce her to him.

RUBY
You heard? How?

JOE
It doesn't matter, Ruby. I don't want an argument.

RUBY
Alright, so he wasn't around when I took Kathy to the pond, so I guess I missed him. Who dobbed me in Joe? Was it Wally? Did Wally say something?

JOE
It doesn't matter who told me. What matters is that we're a team here, Ruby, and when we welcome someone to the team we don't leave anyone out.

RUBY
I didn't do it on purpose, Joe. He wasn't there.

JOE
I didn't say it was on purpose, Ruby.

RUBY
Wally's just pissed off that I showed you where he overspent his expense budget. He's just trying to get me back.

JOE
I didn't say it was Wally.

RUBY

(on her way out of the office)

If I were you, Joe, I'd be spending less time worrying about whether I introduced the new sheila to a couple of lazy storemen, and more time worrying about where they were. They were probably out the back sneaking an extra smoko. They're always slacking off, those two.

JOE'S VOICE

(calling after her)

Okay, Rubella. You're probably right. I'll have a word with Wally about them. And let's just make sure the new girl gets off to a good start, eh?

RUBY

(calls back)

Sure Joe. Whatever you say. You're the boss.

Joe goes back to work. Ruby comes back into the fishbowl.

KATHY has heard the last bit of the conversation. RUBY gives her a sharp look.

KATHY

Sorry, Rubella. I didn't mean to get you into... it didn't bother me that you didn't...

RUBY

What'd you say?

KATHY

I said it didn't worry me that you...

RUBY

No, before that.

KATHY

Sorry?

RUBY

Joe gets to call me Rubella because he's the boss. You're not my boss, alright Kathy? My name is Ruby. That's what you call me. And if you want to stay in my good books, you won't make that mistake that again.

Angela walks through the office. Neither Kathy nor Ruby notice her.

Ruby checks her watch.

RUBY

I'm off.

She goes. Kathy looks around. There's nothing to do.

KATHY

(into the intercom)

Bzzz. Sorry, Joe. It's Kathy. It's gone five o'clock. Should I finish up?

JOE

Bzzz. Work all done?

KATHY

I think so.

JOE

Night then. Good first day.

Kathy leaves.

SCENE THREE: THAT NIGHT

Joe's alone in his office. He picks up the jug and trickles water into the fishbowl.

He shuffles some papers around with no particular purpose and makes the bubble sound with his mouth. He screws up the papers and tosses them in the bin.

He picks up the phone.

JOE

(on the phone)

Hi darl. It's me.

(she speaks)

No, still here. How was your day?

(she speaks)

A while yet, I'm afraid. I can't even see my desk for paperwork.

Joe hasn't noticed Angela come into his office until now. She looks at his desk, clear except for the fishbowl. He knows he's been caught out in a lie.

JOE

(on the phone)

Anyway, I just rang to say don't wait dinner. I could be a while yet.

(she speaks)

Oh really? That's great. Listen, darl, the Cleaner's just come in so I've gotta go. You can tell me all about it when I get home.

(she speaks)

That's okay. Just leave it by the microwave.

(she speaks)

Me too. See you soon.

He hangs up and looks at Angela. She hands him a docket. He places it on his desk beside the fishbowl. He takes out a pen.

JOE

Everyone else gone?

Angela nods.

JOE

Must be nice. Get to the end of the day, hand over a piece of paper for someone else to sign and that's it. Get paid. Go home.

Angela shrugs. Joe signs the docket.

JOE

Sometimes I think that signature is all there is to me.

He slides the docket back to her.

JOE

Is that it? Is that all of it? Is that what it's all for? You can go, you know.

She starts to leave.

JOE

It's easy for you. Not so easy for me. I can't leave. This is me. I'm... this. You got kids?

Angela shakes her head.

JOE

We've got two. Well, we had two. I mean we've still got them, they're just not there anymore. Moved out. Now it's just me and my wife. Used to think how nice it'd be when the kids grew up. Time to myself. Bit of peace and quiet at last. You don't really know what quiet is until the noise moves out. You got a bath at your place?

She nods.

JOE

You can't hide in a bath. There's no mistaking who you are. You can stick your head under the water and block out the world, but you can't hide from it. Not like you can here. Do you know me?

She shrugs.

JOE

Do you know who I am?

He gets up and takes her to the window. He points at the sign.

JOE

*See that sign? Joe's Aquarium Supplies? That's not me. Everyone thinks that's me and it's not even close. Maybe I should get a new sign. Maybe I should get a signwriter to come in and rub out that sign and paint a new one. No more Joe's Aquarium Supplies. A brand new sign. It'd say *Joe's Aquarium Supplies*. What do you think, Angela? That Joe, the one who had his own sign. He'd be able to go home at night. He'd know who he was.*

Angela reaches over, picks up the jug and trickles a bit of water into the fishbowl.

Joe watches her do it and smiles to himself. She mops up a spill.

JOE

Night.

Angela goes home. Joe sits making bubble noises with his mouth.

Fishtank sounds, SCHOOL OF FISH. Ruby and Joe tussle to see who leads. Kathy tries to keep up.

Angela appears above the fishbowl.

ANGELA

In Chapter One, Joe points out that, by and large, fish are naturally happy creatures, but that the fishbowl is not a natural environment for fish. So we must make our best efforts to make our fish as happy as they make us. He lists all the things you'll need. Air pump, filter, gravel, plants, water conditioners, water test kits, fish food, marine novelty figures. You can't just plonk a fish in a fishbowl and hope it'll look after itself.

SCENE FOUR: TWO WEEKS LATER

The SCHOOL OF FISH comes to rest leaving Ruby and Kathy in the office.

Ruby tosses some papers to Kathy.

RUBY

Listen Kathy, my little girl's in a bit of trouble at school and I need to go and sort it out. Joe's...
(looks around)

...somewhere around here. I need you to get his signature on these letters and get them in the mail by close of business. Okay?

KATHY

(sympathetic)

Can I do anything to help?

RUBY

(like she's an idiot)

Yeah. Get Joe to sign these.

Ruby storms off. Joe strides through the fishbowl on his way to the pond.

KATHY

Oh, Joe.

She chases after him, down to the pond.

Joe is trying to sort out a problem with Wally.

JOE

I understand what you're saying, Wally, but it doesn't change the fact that...

KATHY

Excuse me Joe...

JOE

It's not about cutting corners. There's no safety issue here. I just can't justify that sort of money. I don't have it in the budget this year.....

KATHY

I don't mean to interrupt, but...

JOE

And I know that's what I said last year. And it'll probably be the same next year. What do you expect from me, Wally. I put my heart and soul into this business. I work my guts out, don't I deserve some appreciation for that?

KATHY

Sorry, Joe, these letters need to be signed and...

Joe turns on Kathy, furious.

JOE

Can't you see I'm busy here? Can't you organise yourself so that I don't need to be bothered every five minutes. Jesus, Kathy, what is it that's so important that it can't wait until tomorrow?

Joe storms off. Kathy is stunned by his outburst.

SCENE FIVE: LATER THAT DAY

Kathy's already in when Ruby arrives.

KATHY
How's Rachel? Everything okay?

RUBY
If everything was okay, I wouldn't have had to rush down to her school, would I.

KATHY
Sorry. I was just concerned.

Ruby sees the letters on her desk.

RUBY
I thought I told you to get these signed.

KATHY
I know, Ruby. I...

RUBY
Was I not clear? Signed and in the post by the end of the day. How hard can that be?

KATHY
Don't shout at me, Ruby. I've already been shouted at once over these bloody letters. I don't want to be shouted at again.

RUBY
What are you talking about?

KATHY
I tried to get Joe to sign them, but he shouted at me and stormed off. He made me look like an idiot in front of all of them. I shouldn't have to put up with that sort of treatment. Not from him. Not from you. I was just trying to do my job.

RUBY
He shouted at you?

KATHY
Yes.

RUBY
He has no right to shout at you.

KATHY
No, he doesn't.

RUBY gets on the intercom. Bzzz.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Bzzz. What is it Rubella?

RUBY
(into the intercom)
Did you shout at Kathy down in the pond yesterday?

JOE
(on the intercom)
I might have raised my voice a little, but I was in the middle of a difficult negotiation with Pete and she...

RUBY
(into the intercom)
You can't just shout at people for doing their job, Joe. It's not right. Kathy's in tears here. I won't put up with you treating my staff this way.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Your staff?

RUBY
(into the intercom)
On Fridays she's my staff, Joe. You shout at her on a Friday and you're going to hear from me.

JOE
(on the intercom)
Alright, Rubella. I apologise.

RUBY
(into the intercom)
Don't apologise to me, Joe. Come in here and you can apologise to Kathy, after you've signed the letters.

Ruby smiles to herself, pleased with her little burst of power over the boss. Kathy is confused by Ruby's sudden defence of her.

KATHY
Thanks, Ruby.

Ruby looks up, almost as though she's forgotten Kathy was there.

RUBY
Yeah, sure. Whatever.

Joe appears. He takes the letters from Kathy and signs them.

JOE

I'm sorry Kathy. I didn't mean to yell at you. I've been under a lot of pressure but that's no excuse.

KATHY

Thanks, Joe. I appreciate it.

Joe pats her on the back.

JOE

Good girl.

He's about to leave.

RUBY

POETS day, eh Joe?

He stops and looks at Ruby who fixes him with a stare.

RUBY

It only seems fair, don't you think?

JOE

Of course. Good call, Rubella. Why don't you both finish up, and have a nice weekend.

Ruby watches him go.

RUBY

Sorry's never enough, Kathy. You can always get more than an apology if you play your cards right.

Fish tank sounds. SCHOOL OF FISH again.

Angela appears above the fishbowl.

ANGELA

Feeding your fish is just as important as providing them with a happy environment. In natural conditions, fish are forced to be opportunistic. If food is abundant they will eat several times a day. If food is scarce, they might go for days without a meal. In a fishbowl, fish will very quickly work out that you are their food source. You must use this power to the benefit of the fish. Feed them too often and they will bloat. Forget to feed them and they will waste away. It's not important when you feed your fish, as long as it is regular and in manageable amounts.

SCENE SIX: FOUR MONTHS AGO

The SCHOOL OF FISH comes to rest leaving Kathy alone in the stationery cupboard. She's on the phone.

KATHY

(hushed on the phone)

I know you're busy, Rob, but some days I just have to talk to someone who's not insane...

(Rob speaks)

Because no-one else would believe the things that go on here. Like this morning, Wally parked his car on the nature strip, so Ruby rang the council and pretended to be a resident. Got them to send a parking inspector down to book him. A hundred and eighty bucks. Why would anybody do that?

(Rob speaks)

I know. It's like One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest except the cuckoos are all fish.

(they laugh together)

Tell me about it. I mean what kind of a nickname is Rubella anyway?

(Rob speaks)

Because it's not all bad, and the extra money has been handy.

(Rob speaks)

Yes, I know that Mister Alpha Male but I like it that I'm making a contribution. Besides, I enjoy the work.

(Rob speaks)

I didn't say I enjoy the workers. I said I enjoy the work. There's a difference.

Joe comes in and waves at Kathy.

KATHY

Sorry Rob, I've got a staff meeting. I'll see you tonight.

(Rob speaks)

Love you too.

JOE

Was that Rob?

KATHY

Sorry, I know I shouldn't be making personal calls.

JOE

Not at all, Kathy. I don't expect you to leave your life at the door when you come to work. I'm not that much of a slave driver.

KATHY

Thank you Joe. You're too good.

JOE

Whoa, go easy on the compliments there Kathy. People will think you're sweet on me.

Kathy doesn't quite know how to take that.

JOE
Now, on a more serious note, we've got a staff meeting to get ready for. I might need some help with the chairs.

Joe places an agenda on the table for each member of staff.

JOE
Alright, so there's Ruby, of course. Alison, Wally, Mario, Lien Yu. And *me* and *you*.

Joe laughs at the rhyme. Kathy smiles. She can't quite manage a laugh.

JOE
So that's seven of us.

KATHY
Don't forget it's Friday. Alison's flex-day.

JOE
That's right. No Alison today. So it's only six.

Joe takes away one agenda.

JOE
Well then. We're all set. Where is everyone?

Ruby comes in speaking on her mobile.

JOE
Ah, here they all come.

RUBY
(on the phone)
Don't give me all that shit, mum. I know you haven't got anything better to do so don't pretend you have.

Joe gets up from his place and goes to the whiteboard. Ruby goes straight to Joe's place and sits. She continues

RUBY
(still on the phone)
I know all that, but I just need you to pick Rachel up from school and look after her for an hour or so while I get my hair cut.

Ruby sits in Joe's place. She continues.

RUBY
(still on the phone)
That's okay. I'll text her and let her know you'll be there when the bell goes.

Joe comes back to the table. He sees Ruby in his place. He gathers his things and moves to another chair.

RUBY
(still on the phone)
Yeah, okay. I'll get some takeaways on the way home.
(Mum speaks)
No, I won't be late.

Joe is starting to look impatient. He makes the bubble sound with his mouth and fidgets with his agenda.

RUBY
(still on the phone)
Listen, I have to go, mum. I've got a meeting. I'll see you tonight.
(Ruby hangs up)
Sorry. I just had to deal with that.

JOE
That's okay, Rubella. We're still waiting for the others.

RUBY
What others?

JOE
Wally? Lien Yu?

RUBY
Wally's not back from that big delivery yet and Lien Yu's sick today. Didn't Kathy tell you that?

JOE
(surprised)
No.

KATHY
I didn't know.

RUBY
Yes you did, Kathy. I told you to tell Joe.

Kathy tries to stare down Ruby but Ruby's wins out.

JOE
Right, well then we're just waiting for Mario to come up from the pond.

RUBY
Actually, I just saw a big container pull in. Mario'll have his hands full for the next hour or so.

Joe does a quick count.

JOE
Okay then. In that case it looks like we're all here.

He looks around the table at Kathy and Ruby. Ruby is trying to hide the fact that she's texting under the table. Joe ignores it.

JOE
Alright. First things first. Because we had to cancel last month due to lack of numbers, this is Kathy's first staff meeting. So welcome Kathy.

Joe gives a little round of applause and nods at Ruby to join in. She fumbles with her phone to give a half hearted clap.

KATHY
Thanks Joe.

JOE
And since Trudy used to take the minutes, then perhaps you wouldn't mind inheriting that little job.

KATHY
Oh. Sure Joe. Just let me get a piece of paper and a pen.

Joe hands her a pen.

JOE
You could use the back of one of these spare agendas.

KATHY
Thanks.

Kathy starts to scribble down some notes. Ruby rolls her eyes.

JOE
(glances at his own agenda)
Good then. Second item. From today, I'd like it if we referred to these little gatherings as Team Meetings instead of Staff Meetings.

RUBY
Team meetings?

JOE
Yes. It has more of a team feel to it. Don't you think?

RUBY
If you say so.

KATHY
I think it's a good idea.

JOE
Good. Well, I don't think we need to vote on it. Let's just record it in the minutes eh Kathy?

KATHY
I already have.

JOE
Good. Moving on then. Birthdays. Any birthdays coming up that we should know about Rubella.

RUBY
No.

JOE
Oh. Pity. We could have had a special morning tea.

RUBY
Are there any biscuits? I thought we said we'd always have biscuits at staff meetings.

JOE
Team meetings.

RUBY
Biscuits.

KATHY
There's some in the tea room.

RUBY
I'll get them.

Ruby takes her phone and goes out texting. Joe and Kathy wait.

Angela comes in and starts to clean the room. Neither of them look at her.

Joe makes the bubble sound with his mouth.

After while, Ruby comes in with two biscuits on a plate.

RUBY
Packet was almost empty. We'll have to share.

She snaps a biscuit in half, pops it in her mouth and sits down again.

JOE
All set?

Ruby nods.

JOE
Good. Well, in honour of Kathy's first meeting I thought we'd all like to hear her impressions. See if she's got any ideas for improving the place. Kathy?

KATHY
(surprised)
Oh. I wasn't expecting to...

JOE
That's okay. You don't have to say anything.

KATHY
I did have one idea.

JOE
Good for you. Let's hear it.

KATHY
I've been finding my workstation is a little cramped.

RUBY
Your workstation?

KATHY
My desk. It's a bit of a tight squeeze at the moment so I was thinking about how the fishbowl is set out and I had a few ideas about reearranging a few things.

JOE
Excellent. Always happy to hear new ideas.

RUBY
Joe.

JOE
Yes, Ruby.

RUBY
We only just got through changing everything around after the last suggestion.

JOE
Really. I thought that was a year or more ago. Before Trudy started work here.

RUBY
We're still settling in, Joe.

KATHY
I'm not talking about anything huge, Joe.

JOE
I understand, Kathy. But Ruby's got a point. If we've only just finished changing things to the way they are now.

KATHY

More than a year ago, Joe.

RUBY

Trudy never had any problems with the way things are in the fishbowl.

JOE

That's right, Kathy. She was very happy at her desk. At her workstation.

KATHY

Well I find it all a but cramped.

JOE

I'm sure you do. Probably she didn't have that problem because...

Joe stops himself.

KATHY

What? What Joe?

JOE

Nothing. Let's move on.

RUBY

Trudy was quite thin.

Angela drops her bucket.

Kathy is stunned. Joe is embarrassed. Angela seems shocked.

Kathy tries to remain composed, but she's clearly hurt.

RUBY

What's this next item, Joe? This DIVE?

JOE

I'm glad you asked me that Ruby.

Joe jumps up and writes the word DIVE on the whiteboard in vertical letters.

JOE

I've been thinking that we don't do enough professional development here, so I've come up with a few ideas and this is the first one. D, I, V, E. What's that spell?

They look blankly at him.

JOE

Anyone?

KATHY
Dive?

JOE
Exactly. When we come to work at Joe's Aquarium Supplies, we should all be prepared to *dive* in and get the job done.

RUBY
Is that it?

JOE
No, Ruby. Because D, I, V, E doesn't just spell dive. It also stands for something.

Joe writes a horizontal word against each of the letters.

JOE
Dependable. Innovative. Energetic. That's what we all need to be when we *dive* in to our jobs, eh?

RUBY
That's DIE Joe. What about the V?

JOE
Well spotted Ruby. What about the V? I spent a lot of time trying to work out what the V should stand for and then I came up with a really good idea. We should workshop it together.

RUBY
Workshop it?

JOE
A team task. What could the V stand for.

No response.

JOE
Maybe we can just brainstorm it. Anything that comes into your head. No such thing as a silly idea in this workplace. What's a word that starts with V?

RUBY
Vincent.

JOE
Good try, Ruby. Anything else?

RUBY
Vibrant.

JOE
Excellent. Vibrant.

Joe writes Vibrant against the V.

KATHY
Versatile.

JOE
Even better. Versatile.

He rubs out Vibrant and write Versatile. Ruby isn't happy.

Angela starts cleaning the table around them.

RUBY
What's wrong with vibrant. ?

JOE
Nothing. Vibrant is a good word.

RUBY
Then why did you rub it out?

KATHY
Versatile is more useful, don't you think? It's more versatile.

RUBY
No I don't think that, Kathy. I think we'd be better to be vibrant.

JOE
Okay, okay. This is good. We're communicating. So how about we adopt another C word.

RUBY
There's no C in dive, Joe.

JOE
I know that Ruby. Try not to be difficult.

KATHY
Maybe Joe means compromise.

JOE
Very good, Kathy. We'll compromise.

Joe adds a second V to the word.

JOE
There. At Joe's Aquarium Supplies we DIVVE into our work because we are Dependable, Innovative, Vibrant and Versatile and Energetic. Wasn't that a good exercise to do together.

RUBY

I've got another C word for you Joe. Crap.

Ruby gets up.

RUBY

I've got work to do. So do you, Kathy.

JOE

(looks at his agenda)

We haven't done Gripes and Grumbles yet, Ruby.

Ruby just gives him a look and walks out. Kathy watches her go.

Angela leaves. Kathy starts packing up the tables.

KATHY

I really should get back to work, Joe.

Joe helps her pack up.

JOE

Okay then. Let's adjourn the meeting. We can hold over the other items until next month. You'll make sure the others get a copy of the minutes.

KATHY

Sure, Joe.

JOE

Good girl. Versatile.

Kathy smiles and leaves.

Joe makes the bubble sound with his mouth as he returns to his desk.

SCENE SEVEN: THE NEXT DAY

Kathy is at her workstation. The phone rings.

KATHY

Reception...

(Mario speaks)

Yes Mario, what can I do for you?

(Mario speaks)

Hang on just a moment. I'll get her to check.

Kathy catches Ruby as she comes into the fishbowl.

KATHY

Mario wants to know if you can check his overtime. He thinks there's been a mistake.

RUBY

(lets out a big sigh)

Tell him I double check the pays. There's no mistake.

KATHY

He thinks he's owed an extra half an hour.

RUBY

(another sigh)

Alright. Tell him to hold on.

Ruby makes a big song and dance about checking through the pay sheets. She casts her eye over the paysheets, a quick glance at best.

RUBY

Tell him there's no mistake. Tell him he's wrong and I am right. Tell him to get a life.

Kathy doesn't think she's been very thorough, but isn't game to call her on it.

KATHY

Mario? Ruby says she's been back through all the timesheets and can't find any mistake.

RUBY

Tell him he was wrong and I was right.

KATHY

Sorry Mario, I'm just passing on what she said.

Obviously Mario has shouted at Kathy and then hung up.

RUBY

What'd he say.

KATHY

Nothing. He was upset.

RUBY

Dickhead. Blokes like him should be put down at birth. No brains.

Angela comes through the office. The phone rings again.

KATHY

Reception...

(Wally speaks)

Hi Wally. How're you goin'?

RUBY

(sighs)

What does he want?

KATHY

Hang on just a moment. I'll get her to check.

Kathy turns to Ruby.

KATHY

He says Joe called him in on Saturday, but he wasn't paid for it. He's says he's owed an extra two hours.

RUBY

(sighs again)

Tell him I paid him for it. There's no mistake.

KATHY

He wants you to check again. Two hours.

RUBY

(another sigh)

Alright. Tell him to hold on.

Ruby makes another big song and dance about checking through the pay sheets. She casts her eye over them, but this time finds something. She smiles to herself.

KATHY

What should I tell him?

RUBY

Put him through to me. I'll do it.

KATHY

Wally? I'm just putting you through to Ruby.

RUBY

Hi Wally, it's Ruby here. How's it going?

(Wally speaks)

Good, mate, good. Listen, I've been through your timesheets and you're right, I did make a mistake. Not like me, I know, but none of us are perfect, eh Wally?

(Wally speaks)

The thing is, Wally, you're not going to like it. See I actually overpaid you. Oddly enough, by two hours. Isn't that funny.

Wally obviously isn't happy. He unloads on Ruby.

RUBY

There's no need for that tone, Wally. It was an honest mistake. I'll just deduct it from your next pay.

(Wally speaks)

Don't know anything about it, mate. You can't blame me if you park your car in the wrong place. It's your own stupid fault Wally.

(Wally has something else to say)

Listen Wally, I'm gonna put you back to Kathy. She can sort that out for you.

Kathy picks up the phone.

KATHY

Hi again, Wally.

(Wally speaks)

I know. Yeah, I know. It's like that every payday.

(Wally speaks)

Well, maybe next time you should take it straight to Joe.

(Wally speaks)

Yeah, me too. See you Wally.

Ruby stares at Kathy. She doesn't like what she's just heard.

KATHY

What?

RUBY

Don't ever cross me, Kathy. Don't ever take sides against me with someone like Wally. You'll regret it if you do. Rubella never forgets.

Kathy refuses to stay and listen to this. She gets up and walks out.

KATHY

(calls after her)

Just kidding, Kathy.

Fishtank sounds, SCHOOL OF FISH.

Angela appears above the fishtank.

ANGELA

Make sure your fishbowl is large enough for the fish you have. You will need approximately sixty square centimetres of surface area per centimetre of fish. Be extra careful when you have faster fish and slower fish mixed in together. The slower fish might not get enough food and the faster fish might over eat. Sometimes a larger fish will eat a smaller fish. If you make sure that your smaller fish are too big to fit in your larger fish's mouth, this should not happen. Although sometimes, mishaps occur.

SCENE EIGHT: TWO MONTHS AGO

Joe and Ruby busy themselves about the office, moving in circular patterns a bit like SCHOOL OF FISH but not as free. This is work.

As they pass each other they talk shop.

JOE
How are the new orders coming Ruby?

RUBY
Almost done Joe.

They cross paths.

JOE
That container arrived yet Ruby?

RUBY
They're unloading it now, Joe.

They cross paths.

JOE
No Alison today?

RUBY
It's Friday, Joe. Flex-Day.

They cross paths.

JOE
Those monthly figures done yet, Ruby?

RUBY
I've put Kathy onto them, Joe.

Eventually, they come to a stop at the Water Cooler.

They have an awkward moment, not knowing what to say to each other.

Angela walks through.

Joe pours a cup of water, slowly, deliberately. He's about to drink it when he realises Ruby wants one too. He offers it to Ruby. She takes it. He pours another one the same way. They drink. They smile awkwardly.

JOE
Off on holidays soon, eh?

Ruby nods, sips.

JOE
That'll be nice.

Ruby nods, sips.

JOE
How's the new girl doing? Kathy.

RUBY
She's been here four months, Joe.

JOE
Time flies.

RUBY
Does it?

JOE
So how's she doing.

RUBY
(shrugs)
She off sick today. Again.

JOE
Again? How many days has she been sick?

RUBY
(shrugs again)
A day here, a couple of days there.

JOE
Oh. Nothing serious I hope.

RUBY
You'd have to ask her.

JOE
But apart from these few sick days, she's doing okay? Fitting in? Getting along?

RUBY
(shrugs again)
I guess so. About as much as Trudy did.

JOE
Good.

RUBY

But then, Trudy wasn't much chop.

JOE

Oh.

They've run out of things to say. They sip. They stare at the floor.

JOE

Maybe we should send a card. Get everyone to sign it.

RUBY

I don't get cards when I have a sick day.

JOE

No? Hmm. Might be something for the next Team Meeting.

Ruby crushes her cup.

JOE

Back to work then, eh?

RUBY

Things to do.

JOE

No rest for the wicked.

RUBY

So it seems.

They go off on their respective paths again.

SCENE EIGHT: TWO NEXT DAY

KATHY comes to JOE's office.

KATHY

You got a minute, Joe?

JOE

My door is always open, especially to pretty ladies. Seriously, come in. What can I do for you? You feeling better?

KATHY

Sorry?

JOE

Felling better. You've had a few sick days in the last month. Nothing's wrong is it?

KATHY

I don't know. Maybe.

JOE

If there's anything I can do, I'm here to help.

KATHY

I don't quite know how to say this.

JOE

Coming right out with it is usually the best way.

KATHY

Maybe I should just forget it...

JOE

Well I can hardly give you advice if don't tell me what it's about.

KATHY

I want this to be confidential, Joe.

JOE

It'll just be between you and me and the fish.

KATHY

It's Ruby.

JOE

Rubella? What's she up to now. Whatever it is, I'm sure she didn't mean it. You have to take people like Ruby with a grain of salt, Kathy. Try not to think about it. Just get on with the job.

KATHY

That's just the problem. I've tried putting it all out of my mind but I can't do it any more. It's affecting my work. It's keeping me awake at night. I'm irritable and crabby. Poor Rob, doesn't know what to do.

JOE

You've talked to Rob about this?

KATHY

Until I'm blue in the face. Until we both are. To tell you the truth, he's getting a little tired of me talking about it and to be honest I don't blame him.

JOE

You think Ruby is somehow responsible for this?

KATHY

She's mean, she's abusive, she's a bully.

JOE

Are you sure you're not just over-reacting? Both Ruby and Alison can be a bit hard-arsed, but that's their job and they get the job done.

KATHY

She's been very hurtful to me. She can be very threatening. I've got rights. I shouldn't have to put up with that sort of threatening behaviour.

JOE

Are you saying that she's assaulted you?

KATHY

No...

JOE

Do you think she might become violent with you?

KATHY

It's not that sort of bullying.

JOE

What other sort of bullying is there?

KATHY

I thought you said you'd try to help.

JOE

I will, if I can, but I can't just go down there and say, *cut it out Rubella* if I don't have anything specific to point to. She's got rights too. She's a single mum. She does it harder than most. Maybe you need to cut her a bit of slack.

KATHY

What about my rights?

JOE

Maybe you need to see a doctor.

KATHY

I've seen the doctor. She's not helping. All she did was write me a prescription and when that didn't work she told me to double the dose. I don't want to go back to the doctor, Joe. I want you to speak to her. I want her to know it's not on. That you think it's not on.

JOE

Look, you're a good worker, Kathy, but if you're not happy here... I'd hate to lose you, but...

KATHY

I don't want to quit. I'm happy with my job, I'm just unhappy with what happens around me when I'm doing my job.

JOE

How about a raise. How long have you been here now? You must be due for a raise.

KATHY

It's not about money. It's about the way people who work for you feel, Joe. Doesn't that matter to you?

JOE

Of course it matters to me. Ruby's due for holidays in a couple of weeks. If she upsets you so much, close your door. Simple as that. Close the door and see if the whole thing doesn't blow over by the time she's back from leave. Who knows, you might even miss her.

KATHY

I don't have a door, Joe. There are no doors out there. This is the only door. Your door. You're the only one who gets to close the door, Joe.

Joe doesn't respond. Kathy is dumbfounded. She walks out of the office.

JOE

(calls after her)

That's right, Kathy. This door, right here. Any time you need it, it's always open to you. Any time.

SCENE EIGHT: A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Kathy comes into the washroom and slumps down on the floor. She starts to cry but manages to hold it back. She reaches over and tears off some toilet paper to wipe her eyes, but the paper wont tear off.

KATHY

Stupid thing. Stupid, bloody, hopeless, stupid thing.

She pulls at the toilet roll and it unravels all over the floor into a white tangled heap.

Angela comes in and sees the toilet paper.

KATHY

Sorry. I've made a real mess here. Such a mess.

Kathy tries to clean it up but only makes it worse.

KATHY

I've made such a terrible mess of things.

Angela steps in, sets Kathy at ease, cleans up the toilet paper.

KATHY

I feel like I can't breathe. Can't clear out my lungs. It's like she's in there. Like I've breathed in some bad, toxic air and I can't breath it out again.

Angela offers Kathy a tissue. Kathy blows her nose with it.

KATHY

I feel like I'm in one of his fishbowls. You know?

Angela nods.

KATHY

I can see him. I can see Joe through the glass and he's pouring water in from that big jug and its filling up around me and it's like he thinks I really am a fish. Like he hasn't realised that I can't breath under water. And it's over my head now and I can't breath. And I'm shouting at him, *Joe. Joe. It's me. I'm not a fish. I'm not a fish* but he just taps on the side of the glass and smiles at me. Just taps the glass and waves and keeps pouring the water in.

Kathy looks at Angela.

KATHY

I wish I still smoked. I've started drinking.

Angela comes and sits with her.

KATHY

I get home and I pour myself a glass of wine. It's the first thing I do. And then I drink it down and pour myself another one. And I drink that down too. And then I wash the glass. Wash it and dry it and put it back in the cupboard. Then when Rob gets home and asks me if I want a glass of wine I say, yes and he pours me one and we drink it together like there's nothing wrong.

Angela holds Kathy's hand.

KATHY

I feel so bad for Rob. I'm so moody all the time and I never want to... you know... not for months now. And he knows something's wrong but he doesn't know what to do and I don't know what to do and nobody here seems to want to do anything about it.

Angela puts her arm around Kathy. She's teary again.

KATHY

I've been having panic attacks. I stumble over my words. My memory is no good anymore. I'm a total mess. The other day I hid in the stationery cupboard, just so that I could get away from her. I feel like I'm losing my mind. I try to hide it, but it's too much. I feel like I want to just.. I hate her. I do. I hate her hard little eyes and her mean little mouth and her pinched, sour face and I just want to kill her.

Both Angela and Kathy are a bit shocked by what she's just said.

KATHY

Isn't that terrible? But it's true. I want to take her head and force it into the heavy-duty stapler and just staple her head, bang, bang bang.

Kathy bangs her hand on the floor. She laughs.

KATHY

Just staple that mean little mouth closed for good. Bang, bang, bang.

Kathy bangs her hand again then stops. She looks at Angela.

KATHY

You won't tell anyone, will you?

Angela starts to laugh.

KATHY

It's not funny, Angela.

Angela laughs some more. Kathy laughs again.

KATHY

I really want to kill her. I fantasise about going into that stationery cupboard and finding a packet of supersized jumbo staples and a stapler big enough to do it.

They both laugh. Then Kathy stops. She blows her nose on the tissue again.

KATHY

Does that make me a terrible person?

Angela smiles. She hugs her for a moment, then leaves.

SCENE NINE: THEN...

Kathy comes out of the toilet to find Ruby standing there.

Ruby just stares at Kathy. Kathy tries to compose herself.

KATHY

Is something wrong. Ruby?

RUBY

What's going on?

KATHY

I was in the toilet.

RUBY

Why?

KATHY

I had to go. I couldn't wait until lunchtime.

RUBY

Why'd it take you so long?

KATHY

I wasn't that long.

RUBY

You weren't the only one who needed to go. I was dying to go. I've been hanging on all this time.

KATHY

I'm sorry, I didn't know.

RUBY

What were you doing in there?

KATHY

It's none of your business.

RUBY

When you go to the toilet during work hours, that makes it my business.

KATHY

This isn't primary school, Ruby.

RUBY

Don't talk to me about primary school. Who went running to the headmaster?

KATHY

I don't know what you're talking about.

RUBY

You dobbed on me, didn't you. You went to Joe behind my back.

KATHY

That's between me and Joe.

RUBY

Well now it's between you and me.

KATHY

I'm sorry Ruby but I had to do something. I can't take it anymore. He told me he'd keep it in confidence.

RUBY

It's a shit when someone lets you down like that isn't it. You trusted him. I trusted you. Shit happens.

KATHY

Why don't you just shut-up, Ruby.

RUBY

Don't you ever tell me to shut-up or I'll knock you right into the middle of next week. And don't ever go behind my back again, 'cause I'll find out if you do and you'll be sorry. Rubella always finds out.

KATHY pushes Ruby out of the way.

KATHY

I have to get back to work.

Fishtank sounds, SCHOOL OF FISH.

Kathy alone, moving from despair to happiness at Ruby being on holidays.

Angela appears above the fishbowl.

ANGELA

You must position your fishbowl so as to provide the optimum conditions for your fish. Do not place it against an outside wall or near windows, doors, heaters or airconditioners. Avoid drafts and sudden changes in temperature. Never use aerosol sprays near your fishbowl. Use a net to remove all waste, uneaten food and any foreign matter every second day. As a precaution, you can place a hood or canopy over your fishbowl. Remember, some fish are jumpers.

SCENE TEN: SIX WEEKS AGO

Kathy's on the phone to Rob.

KATHY

Well, I'm just glad we haven't forgotten how to.

(Rob speaks)

Play your cards right, and you never know.

(Rob speaks)

Rob! I hope no-one can overhear you.

Joe walks through the office.

JOE

How's life in the fishbowl, Kathy?

KATHY

(to Rob)

Hang on a tick...

(to Joe)

Going swimmingly, thanks Joe.

JOE

You got those new orders for me?

KATHY

On your desk, Joe.

JOE

That Rob on the phone? Say hi from me.

Joe goes into his office. Angela come sin and cleans Ruby's desk.

KATHY

Joe says hi.

(Rob speaks)

Yeah, well don't get too used it. It's only for another two weeks.

(Rob speaks)

I know, sweetheart. I'm trying. Even jthinking about it makes me feel... I dunno.. I don't want to talk about it... I better do some work. See you tonight.

Fish tank sounds. Kathy moves around the fishbowl. Time passes. Ruby enters. They cross paths. They move to their desks.

SCENE ELEVEN: FOUR WEEKS AGO

Kathy finds something unexpected on her desk. A snowdome from Seaworld. Kathy shakes it and watches the flecks swirl about in the liquid.

Ruby comes in. Kathy is apprehensive. Surprised. She holds up the snowdome.

KATHY

Is this from you?

RUBY

It's nothing. I got 'em at the airport. I got the same one for everyone. It's no big deal.

KATHY

It's gorgeous. I love it.

RUBY

(shrugs)

Like it ever snows on the Sunshine Coast.

KATHY

It's the thought that counts.

RUBY

(awkward)

I guess so.

KATHY

So, how was it? How did Rachel like Seaworld.

RUBY

It was okay. No, it was more than okay. It was fantastic. You should have seen her. She got to swim with dolphins. She got to touch a whale. They only choose half a dozen kids, and the whales come right up to the edge and you just reach out and... we had a great time together.

KATHY

That must have been so lovely, Ruby. Did she just love it?

Ruby looks around the office. The shine has quickly worn off the moment.

RUBY

Yeah, well now I'm back here aren't I. Feels like I never went away.

KATHY

Alison got me to do some of your work while you were gone, so you won't have too much catching up to do.

RUBY

What d'you mean my work? What did you do?

KATHY

I just did what Alison asked me to do. Just the pays and that.

RUBY

Yeah, well don't get too used to it, Kathy. Alison should have looked after that herself. The pays are my job and I don't intend giving it up any time soon.

KATHY

I just did what Alison told me to do. I didn't mean to...

RUBY

Jesus Christ. Will you look at my desk. Couldn't you have at least kept it tidy for me? Jeeze it shits me when everyone leaves their crap on my desk when I go away.

KATHY

It's only a few...

RUBY

(cuts her off)

I'm gonna make a cup of tea. Clean that shit off my desk before I get back.

RUBY storms out.

SCENE TWELVE: A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Angela is in the tea room doing the crossword. Ruby storms in.

RUBY

No-one even noticed my tan.

Angela pulls a chair out for her. Ruby sits.

RUBY

I was going to be different. Rachel and I promised ourselves we'd be different when we got back.

Ruby scuffles around in her pocket and pulls out two Mars Bars. She slams them down on the table and sits staring at them. Angela looks at the Mars Bars. She looks at Ruby.

RUBY

This place we stayed at? Beautiful. View of the beach. Pay-TV in the rooms. Every morning, a huge breakfast laid out for us. Fresh fruit. Not out of tins. The real thing. Rachel and I ate fruit salad for breakfast every morning and then had a walk on the beach. We felt so different. We promised ourselves that we'd be better when we came home. Eat better. Walk more. Leave the car at home.

Ruby stares at the Mars Bars.

RUBY

So what do I do on my first morning back? Rachel and I have a big fight about her getting ready for school until she's running too late to walk so I drive her there and by the time I've done that I haven't got time to take the train, have I? And when I stop at the servo for petrol they offer me these for half price and like an idiot I end up with two Mars Bars when I meant to buy an apple.

Ruby rubs at the tan on her arm.

Angela reaches out for the Mars Bars but Ruby stops her.

RUBY

No.

Angela pushes the teapot and an empty cup across the table. Ruby pours herself a cup of tea. Angela goes back to her paper.

RUBY

We really did have a good time, you know. We were like two different people.

Ruby pulls out her mobile phone.

RUBY

I've got some happy snaps I can show you if you like.

Before Angela can reply, Ruby's showing her the photos on the little screen. As she goes through the photos her mood lifts. She brightens.

RUBY

That's Rachel at the airport ordering us a couple of Hot Chocolates from Gloria Jeans. That's before we got there. And this is our room at the hotel. Pretty swish, eh?

Angela nods.

RUBY

And this our first sunset. Some of those big apartment blocks are in the way, but you get the idea. And there's the breakfast spread. You see what I mean? Look at all that fruit. Oh, and this is the entrance to Seaworld and this next one is Rachel with the whale.

Ruby takes a moment to look at the photo of her daughter with the whale.

RUBY

And when we were at Seaworld we met this woman here, Jada, and her little girl Lily. Really sweet. Rachel and Lily got on really well and Jada and I split the cost of a babysitter for them so we could have a girls night out on the town. You know how long it is since I've been able to do grown up things? Do you know how long it is since I've had an adult conversation that wasn't about aquarium supplies?

Angela reaches over and takes the phone from Ruby, looks more closely at the next photo.

RUBY

That's me. Jada took it at this kind of place we went to down by the beach. Freshest seafood you've ever eaten. Straight off the boat. Not even frozen or anything. I should email some of these to her. We said we'd keep in touch. She lives over in the west but we swapped email addresses, you know.

Angela looks from the photo to Ruby's face and back to the photo again. Ruby reaches out for the phone, takes it back from Angela. She looks at her own face in the photo, like it's something she's never seen before.

RUBY

Ha. I look happy here don't I.

Angela smiles at Ruby. Ruby looks suddenly disappointed.

RUBY

I was going to make such an effort. Especially with Kathy. I was really going to try.
(points at the photo on the phone)
I was going to be her.

Angela watches Ruby stare at the photo for a moment, until Kathy comes in and breaks Ruby's concentration.

KATHY

Any tea left?

Ruby snatches up the Mars Bars. She puts one in her pocket and tears open the other.

RUBY

Don't be all day, Kathy.

Ruby takes a big bite and goes back out into the office.

Kathy shakes the tea cannister. It's empty.

KATHY

Bloody Ruby.

She goes out.

Angela is alone in the tea room.

ANGELA

At the end of his book, Joe has this to say. A fishbowl is different from a kennel or a basket or a birdhouse. Dog owners, cat lovers and bird fanciers share their world with their pets but when you're an aquarist, you must create the world. You are more than just a friend to your fish. You are their provider. Be a good provider and your fish will return your care with love and loyalty. Make your fish happy and you will be happy too.

She closes the book.

SCENE THIRTEEN: TOMORROW

RUBY's on the phone to ALISON, secretively, hand over the mouthpiece.

RUBY

I'm not bullshitting, Alison, she's locked herself in the stationery cupboard.

(ALISON speaks)

I dunno. She's not doing stocktake, that's for sure.

(ALISON speaks)

Joe? What do *you* think? About as effective as he is with everything else. He thinks it's my fault she's in there. I reckon someone's been in his ear. Stabbing me in the back again.

(ALISON speaks)

I told him that, Alison. I said I've got a right to know.

(ALISON speaks)

If it's not her, I know who it'll be. Wally. He's still pissed off about that pay thing. Dickhead.

JOE

(on the intercom)

Bzzz. How're those monthly figures coming, Rubella?

RUBY

(into the inetrcm)

Bzzz. Working on it, Joe.

JOE

Make it snappy, Rubella. I can't wait all day.

RUBY

(to ALISON)

Gotta go. Joe Cool's on the warpath. See you Monday.

RUBY hangs up and returns to work.

She stands outside the stationery cupboard. Impatient. Unsympathetic.

Suddenly Joe is beside her.

JOE

Where is she?

RUBY

In the stationery cupboard.

JOE

What's she doing in there?

RUBY

Having a spac-attack.

JOE
Is she coming out?

RUBY
Am I a mind-reader?
(Ruby checks her watch.)
I should be on lunch.

JOE
Kathy? Kathy? Are you in there, Kathy?

RUBY
We know she's in there, Joe. What we don't know is whether she's coming out or not.

JOE
What are you doing in there Kathy?

KATHY
What do you think I'm doing, Joe? I'm taking your advice. I've shut the door. I'm not coming out.

JOE
What does she want?

RUBY
I don't know, Joe.

JOE
What do you want, Kathy?

No reply.

JOE
What happened? Did you do something to her? Did you say something to her?

RUBY
Has she been to see you again?

JOE
I didn't say that, Ruby.

RUBY
If someone complains about me, I have a right to know, Joe. Was it her? Was it someone from the pond? It was Wally, wasn't it.

JOE
I haven't received any official complaints.

RUBY
What does that mean?

JOE

I haven't got time for this. I've got a business to run.

(to Kathy)

I don't pay you to hide in the cupboard, Kathy. If you need a sick day, take a sick day.

RUBY

She hasn't got any left.

JOE

I give up. Get her out of there and onto the monthly figures.

JOE goes off. RUBY watches him go.

RUBY

Good one, Kathy.

RUBY goes off.

KATHY

(to herself)

I just want to do my job. I can't live like this. I can't work. I can't... It's okay. It'll be over soon. Don't let it... Just breathe. Keep breathing. Every breath is a step closer to...

She slows her breathing.

KATHY

It's okay. It'll pass.

She takes up the clipboard and ticks furiously.

KATHY

(a bit manic)

The stationery cupboard. Paper clips, bulldog clips, foldback clips, three sizes, packets of 200. Twenty-four HB black lead pencils. Post it notes, message pads. Plain white A4 copy paper. Laser copy. Eighty grams. 500 sheets to a ream. Blue Tac. Mapping pins. Two hole punch. Lever arch files. Invoice books, receipt books, account books. Bic fineline ballpoint pens. Packets of twenty. Three colours. Blue. Black. Red. *Stay out of the red, that's what Joe says. Always stay in the black.* Black. Black. Black. Sharpeners. Staplers. Sellotape. Permanent markers. *The permanent mark.*

She sits, silent for a moment.

KATHY

You take the pills to make you feel better, to make the Doctor feel like she's doing something to help you, and if you still feel like shit, then you take more pills. Double the dose to feel half as bad. So if you double that does it take more of the pain away? And double it again. And again, and keep going until all the pain is gone?

Outside the stationery cupboard.

JOE
(off)
Kathy? Kathy? Kathy?

SCENE FOURTEEN: LATER THAT NIGHT

Angela arrives home. She dumps her stuff and looks around.

ANGELA
Hi mum. I'm home.

VOICE OFF
I'm in the bathroom.

ANGELA
Something smells good. What's for dinner?

VOICE OFF
Tuna casserole.

ANGELA
Sounds good.

VOICE OFF
How was your day?

ANGELA
(shrugs)
Just another day of mops and buckets and picking up after other people.

VOICE OFF
Were you at the primary school?

ANGELA
No. The fish place. Primary school's tomorrow.

VOICE OFF
Lucky you. Why don't you go and have a shower and I'll set the table.

ANGELA
Okay. Cheers.

Angela goes off.

BLACK