

A God's Commentary on Life - Keira, Year 12, VIC

On the left side of my living room, my fishtank sits inconspicuously against the peeling wallpaper. There is nothing particularly remarkable about my fishtank, a humble glass prism where two goldfish drift amidst the craggy outreach of rocks in an otherwise austere void of water. There's Miles, a tarnished orange who, I have to admit, is a tad plump around the edges. Accompanying him is Coral, a pretty pale pink goldfish fanning into a wispy white, who is significantly on the slimmer side.

I think Miles is stealing Coral's food.

It's hard to conceptualize fish being greedy. I mean, truly, can the notion of greed process through those miniscule brains of theirs? Or, rather, is it an innate and subconscious action fuelled by the intrinsic hankering for survival?

I tap lightly on the glass, slowly tracking the indolent movements of the two goldfish. Entirely oblivious to my dilemma, Miles only stares back at me, googly eyes bulging from his head in a jarringly lopsided fashion. He thinks I've brought food, the selfish mongrel.

"Avaaa!" My roommate's voice comes ringing down the hallway. "Stop looking at those damned fish and get in the car! Staring at them isn't going to get you your promotion! We're going to be late for work!"

Rolling my eyes, I grab my bag and sprint out the door, bundling myself into the passenger seat. Evelyn is already there, gunning the car out the driveway before my seatbelt is on.

"Ready for the big day?" she asks, eyeing my hands restlessly tugging at the cuffs of my sleeves.

I nod tentatively, trying to swallow the feeling of my heart thumping in my throat. We fall into comfortable silence as the car ride continues, occasionally punctured by Evelyn humming absentmindedly to the tinny radio music. I spend the short car ride musing out the car window, eyes glazed over in apprehension as I watch the shrubbery pass by out the window.

Work, as I know it, is the scourge upon my existence. Four years of experience in the marketing department has taught me that it is a place for those people imbued with the rabid souls of blood thirsty devils. Hidden against the backdrop of staged smiles and candied words lies the turbulent desire to outshine the others, each person more infernal than the last.

However, the true epitome of suffering takes the form of one man; a stocky, rotund man with the temperament of a morose toddler prone to lashing out at those around him. My Manager.

Four years under him, and I remain a victim of saying yes to unpaid overtime, extra coffee runs, and basic admin work. And to my abhorrent displeasure, he happens to be the supervisor of my pitch today, and the one holding my future at this company between the index and thumb of his pudgy fingers.

Evelyn pulls into the staff carpark, before wrapping me in a reassuring hug.

“Deep breaths. You got this, ok?”

“Thanks, Evelyn,” I sigh nervously,

“I’ll see you later.”

As Evelyn heads off to the social media department, I brace myself as I take the elevator onto the fifth floor of the building, before reaching my office cubicle wedged into an obscure corner. I come to an abrupt stop, heels scuffing the carpet.

My Manager is sitting in my chair, his smile all teeth and gums as he swings around to greet me.

“Ava! How nice to see you made it to work today! I was starting to worry you had ditched me considering your appalling tardiness.” His sardonic grin splits wider as he tuts sneeringly.

I discreetly check my watch to see I’m late by a grand margin of three minutes. Stiffening, I grit out the beginnings of an apology before he interrupts me again.

“Oh, not to worry darling, it’s already forgotten. What I wanted to tell you was what a stellar pitch you have prepared for our client, Bubble Blast Sodas. Thank you for sending through the power point last night, by the way. In fact, it was so good that I took the liberty of making some final changes for when I present the pitch today. Really, the marketing strategies, buyer persona research, and possible brand images have all been done magnificently.”

I’m frozen for a moment. I can’t be hearing this right.

“Sorry sir, I thought *I* was presenting the pitch today? Considering this project and research has been a product of two months of my time and effort?” I can feel my world unravelling at the seams.

My Manager chortles, and a wad of his spit lands on my left cheek. I’m standing stock-still, wholly disassociated with my surroundings, save for his voice reverberating through my skull.

“Why, Ava, don’t be so daft. Bubble Blast Sodas is a client we absolutely cannot afford to lose, and for the safety of the company it would be secure with me at the helm. I really

appreciate the hard work you've put into this, and I'm positive it'll come through in the pitch. Also, we'll have to find another client for you to pitch to in order for me to properly evaluate you for a promotion, I'm afraid it's just the way things are. You'll get your big star moment in a few months. Now, why don't you quit that gawping and start working on your next project. As a matter of fact, why don't you take the day off? As a part of my generosity."

He throws me a wink, and in that moment he utterly resembles Miles' bulging, blinking googly eyes.

He's gone before I can voice a word, leaving me aghast as his spit stings on my cheek. Only when I manage to jolt myself out of my daze do I realise I'm viscerally shaking.

And I'm livid.

As I stare down at the tiny desk I spent months labouring away at, my blood thrums in my ears, on the brink of blistering over. Two months of late nights, furious research, and relentless meetings all to serve my Manager who will see all the credit and praise. It is that precise moment that I recognise how burlesque of a life my four years here has been. Four years of monotonous, strained adulation in a desperate chase after that pinprick of hope offered within the soulless corporate world.

What a fool I was to believe I could distort the rules of a game that was rigged from the very start.

I call an uber to take me home, sucking in deep breaths until my lungs feel near to bursting in a frenetic attempt to keep the tears burning behind my eyes at bay. In the end, it's pointless. I have no fight left. I end up sobbing all the way back.

At home, I wind up staring at my goldfish. Miles is all up in my face, eager at the prospect of food. Coral, poor forlorn Coral, is vagabonding in dejected circles around the back of the tank. Exhausted, I grab a handful of fish food without looking, dumping a profusion of flakes unceremoniously into their tank. Miles capitalises on the abundance of food, making a beeline for the biggest clumps. Coral timidly nibbles on some in her corner, but it's short-lived as she is soon body bashed as a minor inconvenience to Miles's vehement gobbling.

The excess in the tank is laughable. And yet, Miles is relentless in his quest to have it all.

I suppose it is a universal experience to forgo morals for the wiles of greed.

More despondent than ever, I flop onto the couch, clicking past various channels and landing on a sea life documentary. I zone out to the azure waves on the screen, watching vibrant fish dart in and out of frame. I wonder if Miles and Coral are watching it as well. I wonder if they

even know what the ocean is; do they feel a calling to their true home, or is it merely a swath of blue pixels to them?

Truth be told, they're just dumb fish. They don't realise the existential prison they were born into, and will live out the rest of their lives in. Those four glass walls are all they will ever know. I know the next cycle of goldfish I bring in will be all the same. In that small tank, they will experience all the greed and hope that is tied inextricably to the threads of life.

Leaning over the back of my couch, I tilt my head towards the floating forms of the fish in my unassuming tank, pondering what goes through their heads when they look back at me.

Me, the magical being that can survive out of water, that miraculously spawns food from the heavens.

Maybe I am the hand of fate. Maybe I am hope.

Perhaps, to them, I am a god.