

BUYING A FISH

by Fred Coppersmith

A pet shop. Behind the counter, the SHOPKEEPER. Enter MAN.

SHOPKEEPER

Good afternoon, sir, and welcome to the International Pet Emporium. May I help you?

MAN

Um, yes. I would like to buy a fish.

SHOPKEEPER

Well you've come to the right place then, sir. We have plenty of fish to meet your every possible need. What sort of fish did you have in mind?

MAN

Well I'm not really sure what they're called. They've got gills.

SHOPKEEPER

(beat)

Yes...well I think you'll find that *all* fish have gills, sir. It's how they *breathe*.

MAN

And fins. This one has fins.

SHOPKEEPER

(beat)

Well again, sir, I think you'll find that all fish have fins. It's what separates them from the rest of us.

MAN

Oh, I see.

(beat)

What about that one, over there? He points. The Shopkeeper looks, pauses, looks back at the Man.

SHOPKEEPER

That's a canary, sir.

MAN

Does it swim?

SHOPKEEPER

Not very *well*, sir, no.

MAN

Oh. Well I won't take that one then.

SHOPKEEPER

A wise decision, sir.

MAN

Yes, the fish I get will have to be able to swim. It's very important.

SHOPKEEPER

To you and the fish both, I'm sure, sir. Now perhaps I could interest you in—

MAN

Of course...I *could* always build it a little boat...

The SHOPKEEPER sighs.

SHOPKEEPER

You would need a very small sail, sir.

MAN

Oh. Yes. I hadn't thought of that.

SHOPKEEPER

Sir, perhaps you would be better off with something simple. Something like—like a goldfish.

MAN

Right... Goldfish. And that's what?

SHOPKEEPER

Well it's a *fish*, sir...

MAN

Okay...

SHOPKEEPER

And it's *gold*. Gold fish.

MAN

I see. And those can swim?

SHOPKEEPER

Yes, sir, they can swim. Standard feature on the goldfish. If it isn't swimming, it's probably dead.

MAN

Right. And do you have any of them?

SHOPKEEPER

Yes, sir. In this tank right over here.

He points. The MAN walks over, looks in, seems to think for a minute..

MAN

Hmm...they're a little small... How much do they cost?

SHOPKEEPER

Three dollars each, sir. And they *will* grow, don't you worry. Remarkable creatures, these goldfish.

MAN

Right. And do you think one of them could stand up in a fight against a monkey?

SHOPKEEPER

(beat)

I'm sorry, what was that, sir?

MAN

In your professional opinion. Could one of them win a fight against a monkey?

SHOPKEEPER

A fight against a monkey, sir?

MAN

Yes.

SHOPKEEPER

You're buying a fish so you can force it to fight a monkey?

MAN

Well I was hoping I wouldn't have to *force* it. You see, he's not a very friendly monkey.

SHOPKEEPER

And so you want to get a fish to fight him?

MAN

That was the plan, yes.

SHOPKEEPER

You're going to put the monkey in the tank with the fish, are you?

MAN

With a snorkel, yes. I don't think it's fair the fish have too much of an advantage over him.

SHOPKEEPER

Well he *is* a monkey, sir. And these are just fish.

MAN

So you don't think it would work?

SHOPKEEPER

No, sir, I don't think it would. It's quite a stupid plan actually, sir.

MAN

Oh. Yes, I suppose it is, isn't it.
Hmm.

(beat)

Well what about a cougar? Do you think a fight with one those could work? The Shopkeeper sighs.

SHOPKEEPER

You would need a very big tank, sir.

MAN

I could build one. I've *got* a hammer.

SHOPKEEPER

Sir, I don't think so. Goldfish are not very *aggressive* fish for one thing. I don't think they would stand much of a chance against a mountain lion.

MAN

A mountain lion?

SHOPKEEPER

Yes, sir. That's what a cougar *is*.

MAN

Oh!

(beat)

Oh yes, yes. So you think the cougar would just eat the fish then?

SHOPKEEPER

Yes, sir, I think it would After all,
that's what they do. And as much as I'd
like to help...I think you can see
we're fresh out of cougars this
afternoon.

MAN

Isn't that one?

He points. The SHOPKEEPER looks, pauses, sighs, looks back
at the MAN.

SHOPKEEPER

No, sir. Like I said, that's a canary.

MAN

Not a cougar?

SHOPKEEPER

No, sir, not a cougar.

MAN

Oh. Well I won't trouble you anymore
then. Good day.

SHOPKEEPER

Good day, sir. Sorry we couldn't help
you.

MAN

Not at all.

The MAN leaves. Just outside the door (or off-stage) he
stops.

MAN

Oh look! A parakeet!

SFX: Loud lion roar. Blood-curdling screams as MAN is torn
to shreds by mountain lion.

FADE OUT.