

TANKS FOR ALL THE FRISH

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

- FRISH A small, smart-ass, attention-deficit, pearl gourami.
- LARRY A much, much larger oscar fish. Pure of heart, void of mind, and in love with...
- BALISTA An orange-lined triggerfish who does not speak Japanese. She has a somewhat quirky sense of humor, and is very touched by Larry's interest.

SETTING

Two adjoining fish tanks.

SCENE

(Larry, a large teenage oscar fish, is gazing out of the tank at the next tank over. Frish, a much smaller pearl gourami, comes drifting over.)

FRISH

Hey, buddy! It's almost time for the flakes to come down from heaven. What are you doing over—

LARRY

Isn't she beautiful?

FRISH

Didn't you hear me? Flake time, buddy. Flakes! F, L, something something fuh-LAKES!

(Larry hefts a big sigh, and continues to stare out of the tank.)

What's the matter, Larry? You look so... depressed. You're practically buoyant.

LARRY

I'm not depressed. Just... trying to work up my courage.

FRISH

It don't take courage, just push the guppies out of the way and eat until you're full. That's what I do.

LARRY

Not about the flakes.

FRISH

What? What are you talking about?

LARRY

Her.

FRISH

Her? Her who?

LARRY

Over there. The one with the beautiful orange lines on her tail.

FRISH

Where? I don't... Oh. *Her*.

LARRY

Isn't she beautiful?

FRISH

Larry. Buddy. Forget about her. She's a triggerfish.

LARRY

I know. A beautiful, amazing tiggelfish. So graceful.

FRISH

Triggerfish. For Poseidon's sake, please don't called her a tiggel-anything if you talk to her. But you know she's way out of your league. Talk about swimming in a different aquarium. But in this case, literally.

LARRY

But she's so... so...

FRISH

Buddy, you need to get serious. You could never get a dollfish like that.

LARRY

Tiggelfish.

FRISH

Triggerfish.

LARRY

Says who?

FRISH

Larry! Wake up. She's like half your size.

LARRY

So? You're a quarter of my size, and we get on okay.

FRISH

Yeah, but then you're not trying to slip me the wiggly fin, are you? Besides, doofus, she's literally not even in the same tank.

LARRY

It's not that far. I could maybe jump over.

FRISH

Don't you know nothing? That's saltwater in there. Can you breathe saltwater?

LARRY

She's so pretty.

FRISH

Doesn't mat—

LARRY

I'm going to ask her out.

FRISH

You can't—

LARRY

I even got her a Valentine's Day rock. Look.

(Larry shows him an aquarium pebble.)

FRISH

You got that.

LARRY

Uh huh.

FRISH

For her?

LARRY

Uh huh. I picked it out special.

FRISH

Larry, the whole bottom of the tank is filled with those. What makes that one so special?

LARRY

It's orange. Like her tail.

FRISH

They're all orange. Every stupid rock in this tank is orange, Larry. And if it's for Valentine's Day, shouldn't it be red?

(There is a silence as Larry tries to fathom this. He gives up and decides to ignore it completely.)

LARRY

What do you think I should say to her?

FRISH

Nothing.

LARRY

I mean, when I call her over. What should I say?

FRISH

How about 'Sorry to bother you, but I forgot that I'm a big stupid oscar fish and we got no possible future together.'

LARRY

That's a lot of words. I don't know if I can remember all that.

FRISH

Let's just forget about her. Besides, you know what they say about triggerfishes. Come on, let's just—

LARRY

(Calling out...)

Hello? *(More quietly to Frish.)* She was looking this way, so I thought I'd— *(He calls out again...)* Hello!

(Balista comes swimming over.)

Hi. Sorry to bother you, but I... I... forgot that I'm an oscar fish.

FRISH

(Muttering...)

That is not what I said.

BALISTA

You're named Oscar?

LARRY

Uh huh.

FRISH

No you're not. *(To Balista...)* No he's not.

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LARRY
I'm Larry.

BALISTA
Hi, Larry. I'm Balista.

LARRY
Like you shot a harpoon through my heart.

BALISTA
I what?

FRISH
Don't mind him. He's a lot dumber than he looks. Which is a lot.

BALISTA
He doesn't look dumb.

FRISH
I think you might be getting a reflection or something.

LARRY
(Still trying to clarify his last comment.)
Cuz she's a ballista.

BALISTA
Okay, maybe a little dumb. My *name's* Balista. It's short for Balistapa. Balistapa Balistoides.

LARRY
Oooh. Is that Spanish?

BALISTA
It's Latin. But I'm from Japan.

LARRY
Oooh. Then I should have said "Watashi no kuchibiru wa katayudedesu".

BALISTA
What?

FRISH

I think he just said that his lips are hard-boiled.

(They stare at him.)

What? A fish gets a hankering to be multilingual and all of sudden he's a freak of nature or something?

BALISTA

(Continuing on...)

My parents were from off the shore of Japan, but I was actually hatched at the aquarium store. You know the one with all the aquarium stuff in it.

LARRY

I love that place.

BALISTA

I don't think they have any plaice.

LARRY

What?

BALISTA

It's a joke. You know. Place... plaice...

FRISH

Oh great. Puns. You two deserve each other.

BALISTA

Who are you?

FRISH

I'm Frish.

BALISTA

We're all fish.

FRISH

Not *fish*. Frish.

BALISTA

Like as in—

FRISH

Please. I've heard 'em all before. Is that fish Frish? Yes, just caught today. What goes great with burgers? Frish fries! Oh look, we're Frish out of tartar sauce. Spare me.

LARRY

Frish was just leaving.

FRISH

No I wasn't.

LARRY

Yes you was.

FRISH

Wasn't!

LARRY

Was!

BALISTA

Were.

LARRY AND FRISH

What?

BALISTA

Were. You *were* leaving.

LARRY

I was? Sorry. I must have forgotten. I mean I must have were forgotten.

FRISH

Actually, maybe I was leaving. I can't watch this.

(The other two turn to stare at Frish, who doesn't do anything. Then...)

What? Do I have a flake in my teeth or something?

LARRY

You said you were leaving.

FRISH

What? Oh, right. Yeah. Sorry. My mistake.

(Everyone stares at Frish.)

I mean I was wrong about leaving. Say, Bally—

BALISTA

Balista.

FRISH

Ooohh, feeling a little testy are we?

LARRY

Not if you don't get out of here, she won't.

FRISH

Anyway, Balista... Larry here got you a present. Do you want to know what it is?

BALISTA

A present?

LARRY

Here. I got you th—

FRISH

It's a rock. From the ground.

LARRY

This rock.

BALISTA

It's lovely.

LARRY

It's a Valentine's Day rock. To remind you of—

FRISH

The Valentine's Day Mascara.

LARRY

To remind you of—

Mascara?

BALISTA

To remind you of—

LARRY

FRISH

I might have misheard it. Maybe the Valentine's Day Mascarpone? Mascot? M—

LARRY

I'm gonna eat you if you don't shut up.

FRISH

Oh, look. More rocks.

(He suddenly is very interested in the ground.)

LARRY

What was I saying?

BALISTA

About the rock.

LARRY

What about it?

BALISTA

That it was to remind me of...

LARRY

I don't remember.

BALISTA

Would it help if—

LARRY

I wish I had gotten a rock to remind me.

BALISTA

A Valentine's Day rock to remind me...

LARRY

Oh! Oh! I remember. To remind you of the day we met.

BALISTA
That's very sweet, Oscar.

LARRY
Larry.

BALISTA
Yes, of course. That's very sweet, Larry.

LARRY
Here.

(He goes to hand her the rock, but suddenly it is not so clear how this will work, what with two solid panes of glass between them. After much fumbling, he finally decides...)

Maybe I'll just leave it here.

(He puts it on the ground.)

BALISTA
Thank you, Larry. It's very nice. I really like the pointy part on the top.

LARRY
That's not the right one. It's this one with the little nibbly bit.

BALISTA
Even nicer.

LARRY
I'm glad you like it.

FRISH
(Who has suddenly noticed his own reflection.)
Oh, look! You have a pearl gourami fish in your tank that looks just like me! But I thought your tank was sea water. How could a...

(Awareness dawns, and Frish goes silent. Then he gives an embarrassed 'heh heh', and suddenly gets fascinated with the gravel again.)

LARRY
(To Balista...)

So?

BALISTA

So?

LARRY

Did you get *me* anything?

BALISTA

Did I...

LARRY

For our first Valentine's Day. Did you get me anything?

BALISTA

I didn't know that...

LARRY

Aw, it's okay. No one ever gets me anything for Valentine's Day, so I'm kinda used t—

BALISTA

No, no! I... uhh... sure I got you something.

LARRY

You did? Really?

(Frish suddenly notices the Valentine's Day gift rock.)

FRISH

Oh, hey! Look at that cool rock! That's a great one! I think I could use that to—

LARRY

Hey hey hey!! Fins off, Frish!

FRISH

But it's—

LARRY

I swear I'm gonna eat you if you touch that rock!

FRISH

Sheesh. Someone woke up on the wrong side of the filter this morning.

LARRY

(Angry...)

Frrriiisshhhh...

FRISH

You know what? I'm gonna go look at those rocks over there.

LARRY

Good idea.

(Frish swims off.)

Sorry. Frish can be a little annoying. I like him, but sometimes I wish he was in a different tank, you know.

BALISTA

Maybe they'll get him one for Valentine's Day.

LARRY

Nah. Besides, he's got fourteen cousins in here, and they're all named Frish. So if he does go, there's always another.

BALISTA

Well, maybe they'd put them all in the other tank.

LARRY

Nah. They don't get along. They'd need fifteen tanks.

BALISTA

Ahh, that would be tough. Tanks for all the Frish. Still, it would be a nice present.

LARRY

Oh oh oh! Is that what you got me for Valentine's Day?!

BALISTA

No.

LARRY

Did you really get me something?

BALISTA

Mm hmm. I... got you... a... ummm... Guess.

LARRY

You got me a guest? I already have Frish and—

BALISTA

No, not a guest. I said ‘guess’.

LARRY

A guest?

BALISTA

No, I said *guess*.

LARRY

I’m sorry. Sometimes it’s kinda hard to hear you. It almost sounds like you’re under water or something.

BALISTA

I *am* under water.

LARRY

So what did you get me?

BALISTA

You have to guess.

LARRY

Is it bigger than a breadbox?

BALISTA

Do you *think* it’s bigger than a breadbox?

LARRY

Nooo. Is it blue?

BALISTA

Do you *think* it’s blue?

LARRY

Nooo. Is it a rock?

BALISTA

Would you like it to be a rock?

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LARRY

Umm, yeah.

BALISTA

Well, that's really lucky, because that's exactly what I got you.

LARRY

You did?!? Wow! That's just what I wanted! How'd you know!?

BALISTA

It just seemed right.

LARRY

Where is it?

BALISTA

I put it on the ground over there.

LARRY

Is it this one?

BALISTA

(Beat, then...)

Is that the one you like the best?

LARRY

Uh huh.

BALISTA

Well, then I got lucky twice in a row, because that's the one.

LARRY

This is the best Valentine's Day Massacre ever!

BALISTA

It certainly is.

LARRY

Say... I was wondering... Would you like to, you know... maybe have dinner with me?

BALISTA

Sure. That'd be nice.

Do you like flakes?

LARRY

Apparently.

BALISTA

(Lights out.)