

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# The Law of Large Numbers

---

by Peta Murray

---

EXTRACT

© 2003 Peta Murray



This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre  
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

**CHARACTERS:**

This play is written for 5 PLAYERS and a CHORUS of COMMUNITY MEMBERS. With the exception of CORAL, (who should be a female performer) others may play across gender (and species!) as required.

Character doubling is required as follows:

**Coral Reith** - in her early 50's, born a Jewell, now, a Reith, Coral is our protagonist and played by a single, constant performer who (unlike the others) does not play any other roles.

Coral is married to Ray Reith, who has long been the pest exterminator on The Mount.

**Amber Reith** - late 20's – Amber is Coral's daughter-in-law and in some ways quite a good friend. Amber likes to shop till she drops.

This actor may play other roles if needed.

**Boy Reith** - late 20's, Boy is Coral's only son and Amber's husband. He's a bit of a lost soul and likes a bong. He helps in the family business from time to time. He has a passion for astronomy.

This actor may play other roles if needed.

**Jade Costello** - mid- 40's, Jade was also born a Jewell and is Coral's baby sister. Jade left The Mount at 17 and has never been back. Jade returns to The Mount married and heavily pregnant.

This actor also plays the role of: **Ruby the Dalmatian**

**Rex Costello** - in his late 40's or early 50's, Rex "the King" Costello is Jade's husband. He is a giant of the gaming industry. Costello is an ideas man and industry trouble-shooter who is also a major stakeholder in a gaming corporation.

This actor may play other roles as needed.

**Ruby:** Coral's dog, and an important voice in the play. A mature Dalmatian and much loved family pet. Played by the actor who plays Jade.

**The Ants:** A duo of two Ants who have a voice in the play. They speak in unison, or share out their speeches and are sometimes accompanied by other non-speaking ants.

**Bob:** A Pawnbroker

**Goldie:** A Netball Umpire

**Beryl:** The Mayor of The Mount, and the Conductor of the local Choir

**Gemma:** A Chorister

**Kris:** A Chorister

**Pearl Swine:** Professor of Myrmecology

**The Chorus:** This is the mob of community members who are an essential part of the play. The more the merrier. They have occasional lines and lots of improvising to do.

They appear variously as: **Netballers**  
**Hecklers and Community Members**  
**Experts & Entomologists**  
**Ants**  
**Punters, Tourists & Media People**  
**Eclipse-gazers**  
**Singers**

They may also voice machines, answering machines and **Lucky the Computer**, as well as providing live musical and sound effects wherever possible.

**THE GRAND PROCESSION:**

As the play begins cast and chorus members file in, two by two, in a grand procession. They are laden down with bags and boxes containing their props and cossies. Amongst them, somewhere, is AMBER, with plastic shopping bags.

As the procession ends we hear the following announcement.<sup>1</sup>

VOICE: Paging Mrs Coral Reith... Mrs Coral Reith? If you are still in the Mall, please hurry to the Information Desk on the Ground Floor.... Your Shopping Spree Coach Captain.....

AMBER: (grabbing the microphone) And your extremely embarrassed daughter-in-law...

VOICE: ... are waiting for you there. Repeating: Mrs Coral Reith.....

AMBER: There she is! Coral!

CORAL: Amber?

CORAL comes running in, possibly through the audience, to whom she is apologising furiously. She too carries shopping bags and an enormous ugly matronish handbag.

CORAL: I'm sorry....Sorry, everyone... Amber... I'm soooo sorry....

CORAL apologises to the rest of the cast and takes her seat on the bus. AMBER & CORAL continue to apologise to each other amidst general chatter and hubbub from all the "shoppers" aboard the bus. The voices fade out to be replaced by the barely audible hum of Ray's TV. We move immediately to:

**ACT ONE, SCENE ONE: Coral's Sunroom.**

This is Coral's domain. It's only sketched in, but there are a few important items. One is a shelf (or a player holding a shelf) upon which sits a distinctive deco wooden mantelpiece clock.. A dog's mat and bowl is also seen. There may be a table. Chairs? The kitchen is nearby, and the laundry is too. We will also need to venture into the backyard. A clothesline is visible, with Ray's overalls on it.

CORAL and AMBER enter, in high spirits, with their shopping bags.

CORAL: (CALLING) Ray! Ruby... Sorry we're so late, I'll get tea on straight away...

---

<sup>1</sup> Note that all such announcements, voiceovers, phonecalls, tv sounds etc are delivered "live" by one of the company

AMBER: Rooooo-beeeee?

CORAL: But guess what happened? They forgot me... They left me behind and drove away... Ray? Rube...?

CORAL opens a door and RUBY the Dalmatian comes bounding in.

CORAL: Here she is... Did mean old dad lock a spotty girl outside...? (CALLING) Ray! Why's this dog outside?

AMBER grabs RUBY and they playfight. AMBER wrestles RUBY down, so she is lying in an unseemly pose.

AMBER: I miss you, Rube. So does Boyboy.

CORAL: You can move back, any time you like.

AMBER: And have our blokes at each other's throats again?

RUBY won't settle. It's as if she wants to tell them something.

CORAL: You wouldn't forget me, would you, Rube?

AMBER: I said I was sorry! Geez... If you hadn't done your vanishing act...

CORAL: On your mat, Rube!

AMBER: You were into it when we started.

CORAL: I'm sorry. I'm a failure as a shopper. It made me feel sick.

AMBER: And so you just...disappear!

CORAL: All those women, grasping and grabbing...

AMBER: It's a spree. A shopping spree!

CORAL: (RELISHING THE WORDS) A sppreee... A shopping...sppreee....

AMBER: Well come on. Show and tell!

RUBY settles. Perhaps AMBER starts pulling all her purchases from her bags? CORAL continues to repeat the word "spree" as she opens her shopping bag.

CORAL: (RELISHING THE WORD) A sppreee... A shopping...sppreee....

CORAL reveals a toy. It's a Bug Catcher.

AMBER: A Bug Catcher?

CORAL produces another toy. It's an Ant Farm.

AMBER: And a...what is that?

CORAL: An Ant Farm!

AMBER: Two hours there, and two hours back...for toys!

CORAL: No harm in putting a few things away, is there?

AMBER: You don't let-up, do you?

CORAL: I'm a Granny-in-Waiting...And waiting.... And waiting....

AMBER: You've still got Ray. And Rube!

CORAL: Yes. You're my baby. Aren't you, Rube?

A PHONE rings nearby.

CORAL: Ray! Get that, love?

AMBER: Machine will get it. Okay. Let an expert show you how you do a spree...

CORAL: Spree. (STILL RELISHING THE WORD) Shhhopping... spreeee

AMBER: I saved a fortune there today. I did Christmas. I did Boy's birthdays till he's a hundred and ten. Shoes, undies...bras.. Wait till Boy sees me in these. Won't be able to keep his hands off... Three handbags. Want one?

AMBER picks up CORAL's handbag.

AMBER: What've you got in here? Bricks? Speaking of ladies' intimates ... Guess what I heard today?

THE PHONE continues to ring.

CORAL goes, looking through the house.

AMBER: Janelle swears that Marlene told her that Lois caught Jim again! And guess what he was trying on this time? A lacy underwire bra with matching...

Another player sounds a CAR HORN. AMBER yells inside to CORAL.

AMBER: Coral! That's my baby Boyboy!

AMBER packs up her shopping as an ANSWERPHONE picks up the call.

MACHINE: You've called Ray and Coral and the home of Reith's Pest Control. Leave a message, and we'll get back to you. Problem Pests? Send them a Reith!

From one of the other players, the VOICE of a would-be customer, leaving a message:

VOICE: Ah. G'day Ray. It's Terry Trout here. Call me back, mate? I've got something odd out here I'd like you or the lad to take a look at...

Angry blast from the HORN. AMBER yells out the back door.

AMBER: Coming, hon! (CALLING IN) I gotta go, Coral. See you soon...

RUBY leaps to her feet, as AMBER gathers up her bags.

AMBER: No, Rube... You stay, girl. We'll take you in the car another day...

RUBY slinks back to her place.

AMBER: (AS SHE GOES) Hi babe... Guess what? I forgot your mum...

A BEAT. Then CORAL returns to the kitchen in a strange trance. She is holding a note.

RUBY approaches. She gives CORAL a nuzzle, then getting no response, tries again. RUBY gives up. She removes the note from Coral's hand and reads it to herself.

RUBY: (TO HERSELF) Well, well, well...! Three holes in the ground!

CORAL appears as if she may faint.

RUBY: Steady now... On your mat....

RUBY gently leads CORAL to a chair. CORAL sits. Perhaps RUBY packs the Bug Catcher and the Ant Farm away?

RUBY: (TO THE AUDIENCE) Take a moment if you need it. I see that some of you are quite agog. You're thinking: Oh my god. They've anthro-po-morphised the dog! Oh dear. It goes from bad to worse... the canine speaks in tortured verse! But speak I do, and rhyme I may, by virtue of one thing. The play! The play's the thing! (As a Great Dane might say!) And play we will... Oh yes, games and fun for everyone...

As RUBY speaks, CORAL reaches for her handbag.

RUBY: But friends, this is not silly-buggers... There's a rationale you see... Consider the alternatives, from a playwright's P.O.V... Lone woman in an empty house, some crushing blow befallen... Should she let her speak her thoughts aloud? Or dance them? Sing them? All of 'em?! No! No! Too horrible to contemplate. Instead, let's have the hound narrate. And so, you'll hear, in black and white, the Tale of Coral Reith, tonight. Enough.

Still in her trance, CORAL opens her handbag. She removes an unusual object. It's a plastic beaker in a distinctive colour<sup>2</sup>. Without looking at it, she sets the cup aside.

RUBY: My owner's face, as you can see, betrays some shock, or tragedy. And here's the source, of course. This note. From Ray. Let's see what the old dog has to say... (READING) "Dear Coral. Sorry. But I had to!" (TO THE AUDIENCE) Oh dear. My master is an untutored man. (READING) "I have met a young lass, crossed out... Lady. In another town. And I am...

CORAL: (AS IF IN A TRANCE) Smitten...

As RUBY reads, CORAL takes a second object from her handbag. It is a Compact Dictionary. CORAL thumbs through her dictionary.

RUBY: (READING) Smitten with her!"

CORAL: Spree... ..splurge...spell.. smitten!

RUBY: (READING) "And she is smitten with me."

CORAL: (READING) Past participle of smite.

RUBY: (READING) "And soon she is having our baby."

CORAL: Smite?

RUBY: (READING) "This marriage is old and so are you. I'm leaving to be with her."

CORAL: (READING) To strike with a heavy blow.

RUBY: (READING) "House is yours. And the business. Bills are too."

CORAL: (READING) Smote. Intransitive.

---

<sup>2</sup> It is in fact a coin cup from a gaming venue, but we don't need to know that yet.