

FISHING
by Stephen Gnojewski

Cast of Characters

FATHER

SON

Setting

A pond

Time

Now

“Let him think I am more man than I am and I will be so.”
Ernest Hemingway,
‘The Old Man and the Sea’

Scene 1

SETTING: Sunrise. An early morning mist blankets a small pond.

AT RISE: Two fisherman struggle within a small aluminum boat. The SON is naive and idealistic. Restless, he would rather be anywhere else than in the boat. The FATHER is patient, yet strict. A steel worker, he is awkward in his attempts at communication. Both are disappointments to each other.

SON

...stuck.

FATHER

...still.

SON

It's stuck.

FATHER

Keep still.

SON

It's stuck in my side.

FATHER

Would you keep still?

SON

The hook...

FATHER

I said...

SON

It hurts.

FATHER

...don't move.

SON

It's caught.

FATHER

We're caught! We're all tangled up.

SON

The hook, the hook. Just get the hook!

FATHER
Keep still. Keep quiet. Would you keep quiet? The fish...

SON
The fish?

FATHER
You'll frighten the fish.

SON
The fish!

FATHER
I've got it. I've almost got it.

SON
I'll frighten the fish?

FATHER
Would you keep still?

SON
And where are they gonna go? Where the fuck they gonna go? We're stuck in the middle of nowhere!

(Lights fade.)

END OF SCENE

Scene 2

SETTING: The pond. The boat has drifted to a different area of the stage.

AT RISE: The SON's line has been cast. The FATHER gazes out into the distance.

FATHER
The corn.
The cattle.
The oak.

(Breathing in deeply and exhaling.)
God, what a country. What a beautiful, open country.
(He takes a bite out of his sandwich. With mouthful.)
Sandwich?

SON
No thanks.

FATHER

You're sure? Your mother always makes the best sandwiches.

SON

I'm not hungry

(Silence. The FATHER casts his line.)

FATHER

It's out there, ya know. The Snapper. I can feel it. Feeding. Damn turtle ate almost all of Smouler's pond last summer. Must be bigger than the boat by now. Can snap a man's foot off –

(He takes a bite out of his sandwich.)

Right in two.

(He chews and swallows and takes another bite.)

You're sure you don't –

SON

I'm sure.

(Silence. The FATHER slowly reels in his line.)

FATHER

So your mother tells me you're planning on leaving.

SON

(Defiant.)

At the end of August.

FATHER

(To himself.)

At the end of August.

SON

Seattle or San Francisco. I'm not certain. I want to head West.

FATHER

(To himself.)

West.

(Silence. The FATHER casts his line again and slowly reels it in.)

You know, when I was just about your age, after working the night shift down at the mill, I would come out here sometimes all by myself. I would come out here to this very same cove. To fish. To think. To forget my troubles. And one night, after getting nothing, not even a nibble, I must have dozed off, drifting, when all of sudden I heard this great big splash, and when I came to, I saw my pole getting drug into the water. And without even thinking, I jumped up and dove in. Head first. And somehow, somehow I managed to

grab onto that pole, and I was fighting, fighting with that fish, fighting for what seemed like an hour or more, just trying to wear him down, but that sucker, that sucker was strong, I tell you, and he tore that pole right out of my hands and disappeared with it under the dark water. Must have weighed about 13 pounds. 13 pounds, I tell you. It's a damn shame too.

FATHER & SON

Would've looked great above the mantle.

(The FATHER stares at the SON. The SON looks out ahead, despondently. Slight pause. The FATHER casts his line again.)

FATHER

Have you given any thought about school? About an education? Ya gotta think-

SON

I know.

FATHER

Ya gotta think about these things.

SON

I know.

FATHER

'cause an education-

SON

I know.

FATHER

Just think about it. Okay?

SON

Okay.

(Pause. The FATHER reels in his line.)

FATHER

My old man, my old man never once... Went straight to work at the steel mill, and never once gave a thought about -

SON

I don't want to go to school. I don't want to go to school and be stuck in some stupid community college while the whole world moves on without me. I want to get out of this Podunk town. Learn on my own... about life, about people...

People!?

FATHER

I want to give...

SON

People are thieves and scavengers.

FATHER

I want to get...

SON

Selfish scavengers!

FATHER

I want to get involved.

SON

These people...

FATHER

To make a difference.

SON

FATHER
(With a seething resentment and anger.)
They've moved in and taken over your mother's neighborhood. Nice neighborhood. But she can't go back there. She can't go back there anymore. They've broken and boarded up all the windows. Parked cars on the lawns. Whole families on meth and welfare. Selling drugs on the streets. She can't go back there anymore. She's not welcome. To the place where she grew up, goddamn it! It's not safe...

I'm not coming back.

SON

It's just not safe.

FATHER

(Silence. The FATHER casts his line and reels it in very quickly.
To himself.)

Seattle or San Francisco.

SON

‘This is the way. This is the way of the world.’ All my life. Listening to your small town tales. But I don’t believe them. I don’t. I don’t believe in what you stand for, and I never have. ‘People are scavengers.’ People are drowning out there. Sinking like stones –

FATHER

(To himself.)

And I have sacrificed so much.

SON

I know.

FATHER

So much.

SON

I know.

FATHER

Keep quiet. Keep quiet and let me finish.

SON

No. Not this time.

(The SON struggles to stand up in the boat.)

FATHER

Keep still.

SON

You can’t.

FATHER

Sit down.

SON

I won’t. I can do anything, anything I want. I am who I am. And anything is possible.

(The boat starts to rock violently.)

FATHER

Would you sit down?

SON

I can move to the city.
I can make a difference.

FATHER
Sit down, I said.

SON
I can change the world.

FATHER
Sit down!

SON
I can change the whole fucking world!

FATHER
Sit down, you fool. You'll tip us over.

SON
I can!

FATHER
I said.

SON
I can!

FATHER
I said.

SON
I can!

(Black out. Splash.)

END OF SCENE

Scene 3

SETTING: The boat has drifted to another area of the stage.

AT RISE: The SON is shivering and soaking wet.

FATHER
I told you. Just like your mother. Stubborn. You're lucky. You're lucky the snapper didn't gettcha.

SON
Be quiet. 'You'll frighten the fish.'

(Laughing, the FATHER casts his line.)

FATHER

I don't know if you remember, hell, why should you remember?
But when you were little you used to love to climb trees.

SON

Trees?

FATHER

Like some silly circus monkey.
And in the backyard,
Near the rabbit cages,
Just before the woods begin,
There is that great big sycamore.

SON

I used to love to climb trees?

(The FATHER reels in his line.)

FATHER

Well one day, one summer day, your mother said you could play outside, just as long as you went nowhere near that tree. Now I was out mowing the lawn, and couldn't hear the screams, but somehow, somehow you had managed to climb straight to the top and were afraid to get back down. And your mother... your mother comes storming out of the house shouting at me, 'That son of yours, that son of yours, is stuck. He's stuck up there in that tree.'

(The SON casts his line.)

Well, we didn't have a ladder that could reach that high. So I thought to myself, hell, if he got himself up there, he can damn well get himself back down. And so I planted myself below the branches, and guided you down.

Step by step.

Limb by limb.

Back into my arms.

SON

(To himself.)

I used to love to climb trees.

FATHER

And you were so pale and trembling. I didn't have the heart to –

(The SON's line jerks suddenly.)

A bite. A bite. I finally gotta bite.

SON

(Excited.)

FATHER

The pole, the pole. Pick up the pole.

SON

A fish! A bite!

FATHER

Keep it up. That's it. Keep it up, up, up. And reel her in. Reel her in. That's it. Thatta boy. Just like I taught you. Easy now. Easy. Nice and easy.

SON

I finally caught a fish.

FATHER

A bluegill. That's a real nice bluegill.

SON

I finally caught a fish, after all this time.

FATHER

After all this time, you finally caught a fish.

(Slight pause.)

SON

A bluegill.

FATHER

A real nice bluegill.

(Slight pause.)

Better throw it back.

SON

What?

FATHER

Better throw it back.

(Slight pause.)

But we finally caught...

SON

It's too small. Now, let it go.

FATHER

But we finally...

SON

Let it go.

FATHER

(The SON unhooks the fish and gently places the fish back in the water. Lights fade.)

END OF PLAY