A Fish Story

by

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ACT ONE

In darkness: we hear muffled gunshots somewhere in the distance. Then silence. Then more gunshots.

At rise: mid-afternoon: ANNIE, a teenage girl, is on the couch, half-heartedly knitting a beat-up afghan. ZEE, her mother, is standing at the window anxiously.

ZEE. ...Idiot. ...God!

ANNIE. I wouldn’t stand too close to that window.

ZEE. I don’t know why he thinks he needs a gun. He’s going to hurt somebody, you watch. He’s going to blow his own foot off. Or his leg. Or his head, that’ll teach him, he’s going to blow his own –

ZEE suddenly realizes what she’s saying and is horrified.

ANNIE. ...I know, Mama. It’s okay.

ZEE. ...I just...I just wish he’d come back.

ANNIE. How’s this?

She means the afghan, which she holds up.

ZEE. ...It’s too tight, Annie. Why do you always make it so tight? It’s not a blanket, it’s an afghan. It has to breathe. Here.

ZEE takes the afghan and pulls out a row of stitches.

ANNIE. Mama! That took me, like, an hour!

ZEE. Watch me. It shouldn’t take you an hour. Don’t pull so hard. It’s like you’re trying to strangle it to death.

ZEE is horrified again.

...God I keep doing it.

ANNIE. Stop thinking about it.
ZEE. I know. ...I just...wish he’d....

ZEE begins to tremble.

ANNIE. (gently) ...Mama.

Boom! The door bursts open and there’s GEORGE, the father. He places his shotgun beside the door and holds out a furry, bloody carcass.

GEORGE. ...Well? Well? Whataya say now, huh?

ZEE. George, good Lord!

GEORGE. Huh? Huh? How about this?

ANNIE. Daddy!

ZEE. What have you done!

GEORGE. They said he couldn’t do it! They said he’d never be a hunter! And here he is!

ZEE. What is it?

GEORGE. It’s a wolf!

ZEE. It’s bleeding on the rug!

GEORGE. Or a coyote. Look at his teeth!

ANNIE. It’s a dog!

GEORGE. Or a fox.

ANNIE. It’s a dog!

GEORGE. It’s a dingo! Or a, or a –

ANNIE. It’s a dog, it’s a dog, it’s wearing a collar! It’s a dog!

Put it down!

ZEE. Pick it up!

ANNIE. You shot a dog!

ZEE. Oh my God!

GEORGE. It was on our property!

ZEE. This isn’t our property!

ANNIE. How could you shoot a dog!

GEORGE. It was comin’ right at me! It was wild! Look –

ZEE. Get out! Just get it out! Go! Go put it somewhere!

ZEE runs GEORGE out the front, slamming the door
behind him. She and ANNIE look at each other — and ANNIE flees to the bedroom, crying. ZEE waves her fists, contorts and scowls in silent fury, picks up a pillow or something soft and batters it against the couch, and then picks up something breakable, like a vase, and holds it up as if to smash it on the floor. She stays in that position, shaking, then returns it to its place. She straightens, forces a pleasant smile and perfect composure, then returns to the couch and begins knitting, quietly humming.

GEORGE enters again, contritely. Pause.

GEORGE. ...Well?
ZEE. "Well" what.

GEORGE. ...Go ahead. Let's get it over with.
ZEE. (knitting happily away) ...I feel...I feel I don't ...I can think of nothing to say. To commemorate this occasion. To capture the...there are no words, really. ...Is there anything you'd like to add?

GEORGE. ...His name was Fritz.
ZEE. Fritz. What a happy name. And do we know to whom Fritz belonged?

GEORGE. The Keefers.
ZEE. The Keefers! They sound delightful.

GEORGE. I need a beer.

GEORGE exits to kitchen. ZEE's knitting speeds up.

ZEE. You're going to have to call them. I'd want to know it if somebody...whacked my schnauzer.

GEORGE. (calling from off) Hey Bucky! How 'bout a beer!
ZEE. Leave her alone.

GEORGE. (off) How 'bout you and me go out and dig some worms!
ZEE. She doesn't want to dig worms with you.

GEORGE. (off) We're gonna go out and do us some fishin' tomorrow, ain't that right, Bucky?
ZEE. It'll rain.

GEORGE. (off) "It'll rain." You wish it'll rain.
ZEE. It will. I can feel it.

GEORGE. (off) “I can feel it.”

A distant clap of thunder. GEORGE returns with two beers.

...So what! Little rain never hurt anybody. Cleans out your pores. – Ain’t that right, Bucky! Got a beer here for ya!

ZEE. Just stay where you are, Annie!

GEORGE. Put hair on your chest!

ZEE. Quit giving her beer, George! She’s still a child!

GEORGE. You treat her like a baby.

ZEE. You treat her like a man.

GEORGE. Time I was her age, I could drink a beer through my nose. – Come on Bucko! Bottoms up! It’s good a it’s good for you!

He takes a swig.

ZEE. Just ignore him, Sweety.

GEORGE. Aah! Lovely bouquet, smooth aftertaste.

ZEE. Ow!

GEORGE. Stab yourself there dear?

ZEE. Shut up.

GEORGE. Better put some beer on it.

ZEE. Would you just go away!

GEORGE. You go away! Old bat!

ZEE. Cave dweller!

GEORGE. Varicose veins!

ZEE. Grow up!

ANNIE storms through the room and exits out the front.

Pause.

ZEE. ...Well. I hope you’re happy now. Mr. Big Shot Pup Killer.

GEORGE. I am happy. I’ve had a great day.

ZEE. Where did you put it?
GEORGE. By the woodpile. – Hey Snake-Eye!

This last out the door, after ANNIE.

ZEE. She hates those stupid names you call her.

GEORGE. Hey Cochise! Where the hell’d you go?

ZEE. And do you have to swear all the time? She hears you, you know.

GEORGE. Haul some damned wood in while you’re out there, would ya?

ZEE. (calling) You stay away from that woodpile, Annie!

GEORGE. Would you give it a rest, please!

ZEE. It’s your fault! We were sitting here knitting! We were –

GEORGE. “We were sitting here knitting! We were sitting here knitting! We were sit –”

He snaps up the afghan – and realizes:

...This is his.

ZEE. ...It has holes in it.

GEORGE. We don’t need this thing around here, Zee.

ZEE. I can fix it!

GEORGE. I can fix it too. I’ll show you how we fix this.

He takes the afghan and heads out the front door, grabbing his shotgun on the way.

ZEE. Give it back! Wait! That’s Robbie’s! That’s Robbie’s!

Standing on the porch, GEORGE throws the blanket onto the ground just beyond.

GEORGE. His name ain’t Robbie!

He pumps.

It’s Bob!

Blam! He fires. At that moment, ANNIE enters the porch. At the blast, she screams and falls. ZEE comes running.

ZEE. Annie!
GEORGE. Bucky?

ZEE. George, dammit! You’ve really done it this time!

GEORGE. I didn’t see — ! I was just — ! She was — !

*General pandemonium as ANNIE limps onto the porch.*

ZEE rushes to her.

ZEE. Annie! My baby! Oh, God! She’s covered in blood.
You’ve maimed her!

ANNIE. I think I’m okay.

GEORGE. You okay, Big Guy?

ZEE. Just keep away, you moron! Go shoot some cows!

*They all enter the cabin as a parade — first ANNIE, then ZEE, then GEORGE.*

ANNIE. I think I’m okay.

ZEE. You’re limping. He’s crippled you and you’ll have to use a walker!

ANNIE. No, I just fell and skinned my knee.

ZEE. Sit down! I’ll get some bandages or something.

ANNIE. No, I just —

ZEE. Your body has been mang — I’m going to pass out.

ANNIE. Sit down, mother.

ZEE. We’ve got to do something.

ANNIE. I’ll get an icepack.

ZEE. Icepack, yes. Icepack.

ANNIE exits to the kitchen. Pause. GEORGE has been skulking around by the door, holding his shotgun.

GEORGE. Zee? ...I —

ZEE. (meaning: “not one word”) Huuuhhhppp!

ANNIE re-enters with an icepack. She will sit next to her mother and apply the icepack to her own knee, but ZEE will take it and put it to her own forehead.

GEORGE. You okay there Butch?

ZEE. Don’t you dare answer to that.
GEORGE. She likes the names I call her, don’t ya Bucky?
ZEE. She likes getting shot at, too. “Puts hair on her chest.”
GEORGE. I wasn’t shooting at her.
ANNIE. What were you –
ZEE. Don’t talk to him. He could have killed you.
GEORGE. Don’t listen to her. No I couldn’t.
ZEE. He was shooting Robbie’s afghan. And yes he could if he wasn’t such a bad shot.
GEORGE. It’s Bob. Or Robert. And I’m a damned good shot!
ZEE. Just ask Fritz!
GEORGE. He was dangerous!
ZEE. “He was comin’ right at me!”
ANNIE. Would everybody please stop fighting please!

Pause. ZEE composes herself.

ZEE. ...We are not fighting.
GEORGE. Are too.
ZEE. Neanderthal!
GEORGE. Menopause!
ANNIE. Why did he shoot the afghan!
GEORGE. It was stupid afghan. Who ever heard of a boy his age with an afghan!
ZEE. I made it for him!
GEORGE. It was full of holes!
ZEE. So are you!
GEORGE. Well I’m not apologizin’!
ZEE. Who asked?
GEORGE. Who’d have used it anyway? ...You? ...Not me. Some things aren’t fixable. So let’s just forget about it. Just forget it and move on. That’s what we came up here for, isn’t it? We got this place, this...great...these mountains, all the...for two weeks, it’s all ours! We’re out of the house, away from...all that...so we can...have fun together...as a family...without all that...that....
Pause. He's got himself all knotted up.

...We can’t fix it now! We can’t fix it! But we got each other, right? What we gotta do is – we gotta start looking ahead, see. Start...movin’ ahead. With our lives. Am that right, Scarface?

ZEE. Oh, why do you that when you know how angry makes me!

GEORGE. Why do you keep answering your own questions?

ANNIE stands and says it:

ANNIE. Ohhh...ssssshit! (Or something thereabouts, “ssshinguard.”)

Stunned silence. ANNIE moves away, to the window.

ZEE. (superior, to George) ...Well, I hope you’re proud of yourself.

ANNIE. Can we please just go home?

GEORGE. Annie –

ANNIE. All we're doing here is running away! We're just running away, and it isn’t working!

GEORGE. Hey. C'mon, Bucky. Buck up. We’ll be alright. Tomorrow, whaddaya say? You and the old man, we go fishing, okay?

ZEE. You’ll do it in the rain.

GEORGE. You know, you could be a little more positive around here!

ZEE. That won’t stop the rain.

GEORGE. Well the rain won’t stop us! We’ll tough it out! Won’t we, Annie. Annie? Where you going?

ANNIE exits to her bedroom.

ZEE. Just let her go.

GEORGE. This is your fault! All I'm trying to do is – I can’t do this alone. I can’t –

ZEE. There’s a hole here, George! There’s an empty space and we can’t pretend it isn’t here!
GEORGE. Where are you going?

ZEE exits to the porch, slamming the door behind her.

Zee! You can’t fix it now, Zee!

On the porch, ZEE picks up the afghan, clutches it, and exits from sight. GEORGE is now alone:

You just grab some logs while you’re out there, then! We’re all gonna sit here in front of the fire. Smiling! In fact, we’re gonna roast us some marshmallows, by God!

He exits to the kitchen and calls from offstage:

A regular family outing. Yessir. Right? ...Rrrright. Get us a regular bonfire going, roast us up some marshmallows, drink us some hot damn chocolate. When I get back in there, I want everybody on the couch. ...Laughing!

Pause. Still from offstage:

...They got any marshmallows in this joint? ...That’s okay. We don’t need any marshmallows. ...Or...hot chocolate. That’s okay. We got each other, and we got beer.

He re-enters the living room and stands alone.

...Right?

End scene.
Scene 2

In darkness: thunder – and a hard rain.

At rise: night. Outside, a storm rages. Inside, we hear GEORGE snoring from offstage. After a few moments, the lightning flashes again – and a figure is silhouetted in the window. In the next flash, he raps on the window and places his palm against it – then slides down, out of view.

ANNIE enters from the bedroom, wearing a robe or gown. She thinks she heard something and looks around. She looks out the window: nothing. She tentatively goes to the door – and opens it.

Lightning and thunder crash: the figure outside is standing in the doorway. ANNIE gasps – and he falls forward into her arms.

ANNIE. Aaaaaaaaaa! Mamaaaa! Mamaaaa!

The figure – FRANK, a young man – falls to the floor, groaning in pain. He’s wearing a backpack and is soaking wet. ANNIE runs for the light switch. ZEE enters in a tizzy to see FRANK crawling across the floor.

ZEE. Annie, what in the world are you – oh my Go George! George!

FRANK. Ah! Please! I don’t – ow!

ZEE. George! Get out here now!

GEORGE. (off) Tryin’ to sleep back here!

ANNIE. I think he’s hurt! – Are you hurt? Can you talk?

FRANK. No! Please! Ow! Ahhh! (Etc.)

ANNIE. It’s alright! You’re okay now! – Daddy!

ZEE closes the door and ANNIE helps FRANK to his feet.

ZEE. George get out here now!

GEORGE enters from the bedroom in his long johns.

GEORGE. What!
ZEE. Look!

FRANK is hanging onto ANNIE.

GEORGE. Ho–ly!

GEORGE grabs his shotgun.

FRANK. Aaaaarrrrhh!

ANNIE. Can you stand!

FRANK. My leg! It’s my leg!

GEORGE. (aiming) Get offa my daughter, boy!

ZEE. George for God’s sake no!

FRANK. (utterly terrified) Aaaaaaaaaah!

GEORGE. Annie, get away from there!

ANNIE. Daddy wait! He’s hurt!

GEORGE. Move! Move!

ANNIE backs away from FRANK, leaving him struggling to stand.

FRANK. Aaaaaa! Ow! Ow!

GEORGE. You! Throw that pack down! Do it! ...Now turn around!

FRANK complies, petrified.

ANNIE. Daddy!

GEORGE. Up against that wall! Over there! Now spread ’em!

FRANK. Do what?

GEORGE. Spread ’em! Spread ’em! Like this!

GEORGE demonstrates, and FRANK spreads ’em.

ZEE. George, you’re scaring him.

FRANK. I can explain!

GEORGE. Did I ask you to talk?

FRANK. No sir!

GEORGE. When I want you to talk, I’ll say talk, so you know! Okay? ...Talk!

FRANK. Okay!
George. Okay! – Zee, get over there and frisk him.

Zee. Do what?

George. Frisk him! Check his sleeves, check his coat!

Zee. For what?

George. Just do it! – Annie, see what he's got in his pack.

Annie. Would you just hold on for one –

George. Just everybody quit arguing with me! I can only do one thing at a time! Now do it!

Zee frisks Frank politely.

Zee. It's a very nice jacket.

Frank. Thank you.

Zee. Rayon, isn't it?

Annie is unloading the pack:

Annie. One can of Spaghetti-O's, with little meatballs.

box of fuzzy things.

George. Drugs!

Frank. Flies! They're flies. For fishing.


Zee. Here's something.

She's found a card in Frank's coat pocket.

George. What is it? Give it here.

Frank. It's my fishing license.

George. This ain't your license.

Frank. Yes it is.

George. "Francis"? The hell kind of a name is "Francis"?

Zee. Stop swearing, George.

Frank. It's a family name.

George. It's a girl's name.

Zee. It's a very nice name.

Frank. I go by Frank, sir.

George. Turn your head! ...You got a earring.
GEORGE pumps the shotgun.

He's a cornflake.

FRANK. I am not!

GEORGE. Shut up! Nancy. Mary-Lou. – Zee, check his legs, empty his pockets, see what else we got here.

ZEE sighs, puts her hand in one of FRANK's pockets, and instantly recoils.

ZEE. George! Really, I can't do this!

GEORGE. Oh, move aside! I'll do it!

Keeping the gun aimed at FRANK, GEORGE quickly pats FRANK down. When he hits FRANK's injured leg, FRANK falls.

FRANK. Owwww!

ZEE. George! For God's sake!

ZEE takes over, pushing GEORGE out of the way.

GEORGE. I hardly touched him!

ANNIE. I told you, he's wounded!

ZEE. He's bleeding!

GEORGE. He's faking! – Pansy!

FRANK. I slipped on a rock – fell in the river!

ZEE. Oh you poor – he fell in the river, George!

FRANK. Carried me for – I don't know – miles! Washed up on the bank...saw this place...I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare anyone!

GEORGE. You didn't scare anyone! Alice!

ZEE. His name is Frank.

GEORGE. Annie, here. Keep a bead on him while I go get my pants.

GEORGE hands the gun to ANNIE and exits to the bedroom. ZEE has helped FRANK to his feet.

ZEE. Are you alright?

FRANK. I don't know, ma'am. My leg. It's kinda numb.
ZEE. Annie! Bandages! In the kitchen!

    ANNIE puts the gun aside and starts off to kitchen.

    FRANK watches her.

FRANK. Um, hi.

ANNIE. Hi.

    And she’s gone.

ZEE. You’ll have to take your pants off.

FRANK. Ma’am?

ZEE. And your shirt. You’re soaking wet, you poor thing.

    Go on – off with everything. I’ll be right back. Here.

    lean on this.

    ZEE hands the shotgun to FRANK and exits to the kitchen. FRANK shrugs, leans on the gun and removes his shirt, then pushes his pants to his ankles. GEORGE, now wearing pants, enters from the bedroom and stops in his tracks. Pause. FRANK holds the shotgun out to

    GEORGE:

FRANK. ...She made me do it.

    GEORGE snatches it back.

GEORGE. Zee! Get me some rope!

    ZEE enters with a flannel shirt.

ZEE. What are you going to do, George, hang him?

GEORGE. I’m going to tie him up!

ZEE. Oh, for Pete’s sake, he hasn’t done anything.

GEORGE. He trespassed on our property!

ZEE. This isn’t our property! – This isn’t our property a time share

    ANNIE enters from kitchen with bandages.

ANNIE. Here’s the bandages.

ZEE. Good. Here. Go make some coffee.

ANNIE. It’s already on.
ZEE. Here, put this on.

ZEE offers FRANK the shirt.

GEORGE. What’s that? What’s that you’re giving him?

ZEE. Just an old shirt.

GEORGE. It’s my shirt!

ZEE. No it isn’t.

GEORGE. It isn’t anybody else’s!

ZEE. It’s Robbie’s! You gave it to him last Christmas, but it was too big.

GEORGE. So you’re giving it to him?

ZEE. Are you going to wear it? – Go ahead, put it on. Does it fit alright?

FRANK. Yes ma’am.

ZEE. Good. Now this may hurt.

She pushes FRANK onto the couch.

FRANK. What is it?

ZEE. Alcohol.

She applies it to the wound.

FRANK. Aaaaiiiiiicee!

ANNIE. Mama! Be careful!

GEORGE. I’m losing my patience over here!

ZEE. Annie, go get the coffee.

ANNIE exits to kitchen.

GEORGE. Is anybody listening to me?

ZEE. He’s just a boy, George! He’s hurt and he needs our help.

ZEE removes FRANK’s shoes and begins to bandage his leg.

GEORGE. He’s a grown man, and what he needs is a little backbone – you got that, Barbara?

ZEE. His name is Frank!

FRANK. I think I can...make it to the...highway if I –
He tries to stand; ZEE pushes him back down.

ZEE. You’re not going anywhere. You’ll bleed to death and catch pneumonia. Now you tell me if this is too tight:

She means the bandage. It is:

FRANK. Yaaaaah!

ANNIE enters with coffee.

ANNIE. Here’s the coffee!

ZEE. Help him with it. Don’t spill on his shirt.

ANNIE holds the cup while FRANK sips. It burns his mouth.

ANNIE. It’s still real hot. You want some cream or sugar?

FRANK shakes his head no. ZEE is finished with the bandage and pats it.

ZEE. There now! How’s that feel!

FRANK nodding in pain and unable to speak

Mmmm-mmmmmmmm!

ZEE strips his pants off.

GEORGE. What are you doing?

ZEE. Do you need anything else?

FRANK. (frantically no) Uhhh-uhhh-uhhhh!

ZEE. Are you hungry?

FRANK. Pants!

ZEE. I’ve got to soak them, and wash them, and dry them and iron them, and patch them, and then you have them back. Annie – take these, and get some aspirin and whatever else you can find.

GEORGE. Hold it! Hold it, just stop right there! No moves until I say so. This is coming to an end here. This boy is getting tied up. – Annie, give me yarn. I’m gonna make sure this boy doesn’t perpetrate any horse hockey.
A FISH STORY

Pause. ANNIE doesn’t move.

Well? ...Move!

ANNIE sighs and grabs a ball of yarn.

ZEE. He’s not our prisoner, George!

GEORGE. He’s not our guest, either. Annie, tie him up good and tight.

ANNIE. He’s not done with his coffee.

GEORGE. I don’t care! I don’t care if he’s done with his coffee! Just tie him up!

ANNIE binds FRANK’s wrists and/or ankles. He watches her.

ANNIE. ...Tell me if I’m hurting you.

FRANK You’re okay.

ANNIE. I’m sorry about this.

GEORGE. Is it tight?

FRANK. Yes sir. Real tight.

GEORGE. Not you.

ANNIE. Yes sir. Real tight.

ZEE. Not too tight.

GEORGE. Will you let me do this! – Okay, little girl, you go to bed now. ...Well, go on!

FRANK. ...Goodnight!

ANNIE. Goodnight.

ANNIE exits to the bedroom. Pause.

GEORGE. Now then. I’m going to stay right here and keep my eye on you, Francine. And I’ve got a friend here to help me. You know what this is?

FRANK. It’s a shotgun.

GEORGE. You bet it is. It’s a big shotgun.

ZEE. It better not be loaded.

GEORGE. Of course it’s loaded, what do you think?

ZEE. Fun is fun, George, but –
GEORGE. Shouldn't you be going to bed now?
ZEE. I'm not going to bed.
GEORGE. You're not staying out here.
ZEE. Oh isn't this just typical.
FRANK has put his feet up on the table.
GEORGE. What is that, what are you doing?
FRANK. Sorry!
ZEE. Oh, for goodness' sake, make yourself comfortable.
GEORGE. Get your feet off there! You made our family uncomfortable. Now you can be uncomfortable yourself.
ZEE. I'm not uncomfortable.
GEORGE. Will you just go to bed.
ZEE. I'm perfectly comfortable.
GEORGE. Out! Get out! Out! Out!
ZEE. Oh alright! But I get him in the morning!

GEORGE chases ZEE off to the bedroom. Then he turns to FRANK and scowls savagely. Here follows an uncomfortable pause. GEORGE doesn't know what to do now. He tries to look like a tough guy, but then relaxes a bit. Finally:

GEORGE. So uh. ...What're you doin' up in the mountains anyhow. Hidin' out, or something?
FRANK. No sir. Just kinda...on the road. Thought I'd do a little fishing.
GEORGE. Oh yeah?
FRANK. Yes sir.
GEORGE. Where's your pole?
FRANK. I lost it. When I fell in the river.
GEORGE. ...Oh yeah.
FRANK. Really nice one, too.
GEORGE. Mmm.... You uh...you like to fish, do you?
FRANK. Yes sir. Fly fish.
GEORGE. Fly fish. I never done that.

FRANK. Oh it’s great. I could show if you want. It’s really easy.

GEORGE. Don’t suck up to me, boy.

FRANK. No sir. I just thought that, in exchange for your hospitality and all, I could –

GEORGE. You just sit there and be uncomfortable and maybe I could teach you a thing or two. Fill you in on a few things. Bring you up to speed on a few things around here.

FRANK. Okay.

GEORGE. Like what to do when some yahoo comes bustin’ into your cabin in the middle of the night ’n tries to climb all over your daughter. I mean, it ain’t anything personal, tying you up and all. You might be one hel­luva guy, I don’t know. But it’s my job, you understand.

FRANK. Oh, I understand, sir.

GEORGE. There are things a man has to do.

FRANK. That’s true.

GEORGE. Hard things, you know.

FRANK. I know.

GEORGE. And women don’t understand that sometimes. They don’t understand the, the, the –

FRANK. – pressure –

GEORGE. The pressure of, of, what it means to be a, a, a –

FRANK. – man.

GEORGE. That’s right.

He sighs, frustrated.

...I’m going to have to keep you tied up like that, you know.

FRANK. Of course.

GEORGE. And I don’t know if it’s right to be talkin’ to you like this.

FRANK. Whatever you –

GEORGE. I don’t gotta explain nothin’ to you!
FRANK. No sir.

GEORGE. ...Alright. We’re just gonna sit here, the Coupla wooden Indians. ...Not say a word. Not an word....

GEORGE gets up, if he was sitting, and looks out the window. Long pause. Then he turns and looks at FRANK, who is just sitting there, uncomfortable.

...You uh...you want a beer?

End scene.
Scene 3

At rise: a few hours later. The scene change is as short as possible. As lights come up, **GEORGE** and **FRANK** are sitting on the back of the couch. **FRANK** is unbound and wearing the afghan like a skirt. They are drunk or almost, and **GEORGE** is trying to convince **FRANK** to have another beer:

**GEORGE.** What the hell, come on, come on, Francis, ya pansy, one more, one more, Francis, come on, okay, okay – (etc.)

**FRANK.** (simultaneously) No, no, no more, really, no, I can’t, quit calling me that, no, okay, what the hell, okay, one more, okay, okay, okay – (etc.)

They open beers and drink.

Okay. Where was I?

**GEORGE.** The fishsticks –

**FRANK.** The Physics –

**GEORGE.** The Fishics –

**FRANK.** – of fishing.

**GEORGE.** Right.

**FRANK.** Whereby: you have axioms, maxims and postulates.

**GEORGE.** Axles, maximums and prostitutes.

**FRANK.** Prostitute Number One: Fish...cannot eat and spawn at the same time.

**GEORGE.** I can.

**FRANK.** Prostitute Number Two: Fish...are very picky about what they eat.

**GEORGE.** I’m not.

**FRANK.** Third and final Prostitute: Fish...are basically ruthless loners, cannibals, heartless little bastards. But when the river runs high, they huddle together behind rocks.

**GEORGE.** So beautiful.

**FRANK.** Therefore: the shortest distance between a fish and
a frying pan...is a straight nylon line. In the correct place. With the correct bait. As determined by seasonal and topographical variables. And the kind of mood the fish is in.

GEORGE. So complicated.
FRANK. Man and the elements. Co-existing in harmony.
GEORGE. Show me that fly thing again.
FRANK. Again? We've done it a hundred -
GEORGE. On more, ya pansy, come on, one more, come on, come on, okay, okay, okay -(etc.
FRANK. (simultaneously) No, no, no, come on man, already, we, no, no, okay, one more, one more, one more, okay. Get the fly rod.

GEORGE. Fly rod.

From behind the couch or somewhere, GEORGE retrieved the shotgun. A few feet of yarn dangle from the end of the barrel.

FRANK. Okay. Now hold it in your right hand, line in the left. Got it? Okay. Now just tease 'em with it, nice and easy. Like throwing.
GEORGE. Okay, I got it.

GEORGE whips the line through the air.

FRANK. No no no, you're going too fast again, George. Don't whip 'em to death. You've got to tempt 'em - it...place it...right on top...count to three. One.
GEORGE. Onetwothree.
FRANK. Two. Three.
GEORGE. Oh. Slow.
FRANK. Place it again, watch for the silver, the flash, the silver.

GEORGE. That's the fish.
FRANK. That's the fish. Soon as you see it - quick jerk.

That'll set the hook before he gets a chance to spit out.
GEORGE. One. Two. ...I see it! I see the silver!

FRANK has been hooking an empty beer can to the "fly" at the end of the line.

FRANK. Quick jerk! Quick jerk!
GEORGE. Quick jerk!
FRANK. Bring him in! Don't let him get away!

GEORGE pulls while FRANK tugs at the can: an epic struggle.

GEORGE. He's puttin' up a fight!
FRANK. Keep the line taut!
GEORGE. Get in here, you bastard!
FRANK. Don't give him any slack!
GEORGE. I'll get him!
FRANK. Get him, George! Get him! Bring him in! (Etc.)

FRANK releases the can, and GEORGE "nets" or grabs it.

GEORGE. I got him! Alright! Okay! They said he couldn't do it!
FRANK. Okay! That's good.... Now: what is it.
GEORGE. It's a...rainbow trout. A brook trout. A carp. I don't know.
FRANK. How big is it?
GEORGE. (reads the can) 'bout...twelve ounces.
FRANK. And it's got teeth...so it must be a...
GEORGE. A dyke!
FRANK. A pike! A pike!
GEORGE. A pike! A pike! Right! Let's do it again! Come on, one more, one more, what the hell, come on!
FRANK. No, come on, really, no, no more, we've been fishing for hours, George. How many we got?

GEORGE produces a stringer loaded with empty beer cans.
GEORGE. About twenty five.
FRANK. Ah, see. Bad news. This river is out of fish.
GEORGE. Oh no.
FRANK. Oh yes.
GEORGE. So let’s throw ’em back, catch ’em again.
FRANK. Oh they won’t bite again.
GEORGE. Sure they will.
FRANK. No they won’t. Too smart.
GEORGE. Fish sure as hell are not smart. If fish are so smart, how come they eat their own babies?
FRANK. I didn’t say they were great parents. What I said was that they love mosquitoes. They love them so much that when they see a mosquito, they don’t just eat it, they eat it alive.
FRANK. It’s a mosquito. Fish love mosquitoes. They love them so much that when they see a mosquito, they don’t just eat it, they eat it alive.
FRANK. You can throw ’em back, but that taste stays in their mouth. They’ll never bite another mosquito.
FRANK. Alright. I’ll show you what it is. Watch this...
GEORGE. Mother’d kill me.

FRANK. She’ll never know. Go ahead. Grab him by the gills. Now put him on the rug.

GEORGE puts the beer can onto the floor and watches it carefully.

GEORGE. Okay.

FRANK. Now – what’s he doing?

GEORGE. He’s uh...floppin’ around.


GEORGE. (to the “fish”) You’re dying, bub.

FRANK. What’s he doing now.

GEORGE. Sorta...twitchin’.

FRANK. Step two: Defiance. “I will not die. I will not die! I refuse!” And he’ll lie there, with that gleam in his eye, like he’s looking out at something far, far away. And at that moment George, at this very crucial moment, he begins to have something we don’t.

GEORGE. Rigor mortis.

FRANK. Death Perception.

GEORGE. Huh?

FRANK. Death Perception. Total fish consciousness. The sum total of his entire fish life, all bound together in each last, desperate fish breath. The hatchery where he frolicked as a minnow, the taste of a grasshopper, the thrill of a waterfall, his first fertilization. Warm currents, cool eddies, the shadow of leaves floating by – everything! In one mystical, transcendent fish moment.... No, if you want that fish, George, you better take him now. ’Cause he won’t bite again. He’s got Death Perception.

Pause.

GEORGE. ...You’re one a’ them college boys, ain’t ya.

FRANK. Yeah. Well, I was. I quit.

GEORGE. Good for you.
FRANK. Because what is life, George?
GEORGE. I forget.
FRANK. It's life. Life is just life. And that's all it is.
GEORGE. ...Well hell. I knew that.
FRANK (referring to his book) That's what this Thoreau taught me. He said to hell with, you know, conform,
commercialism, industrial whatever, to hell with the whole leafy split-level suburban carpool, and go out and lived in a hut.
GEORGE. How'd he make out?
FRANK. I don't know, it's incredibly tedious. But the is, the point is...my folks made me go to college. So I go, and they make me read this guy, and like man and Kerouac and Hemingway and all these guys, and they're all saying the same thing: what am I doing in college? The only way to learn about life go out and live it. So I did. About a month ago, I to hell with it. I dropped out and started living the man was meant to: armed with nothing but my, like, instincts.
GEORGE. Wow. What'd your folks say?
FRANK. Oh pff – they don't know yet. They mortgaged house to pay my tuition.
GEORGE. Damn.

Pause. They both sit nodding grimly. Then:

...Well look: I'm gonna do you a favor here, Coc. I'm gonna put this whole fish thing in proper pers-
tive for you here. You watch this. You ready? The Life of a Fish. I'm a fish.

FRANK. You're a fish.
GEORGE. I'm a fish. Here I am, swimmin' around swimmin' around. Gee, I wonder where the hell goin'? I can't tell, 'cause I got eyes on the sides of head. There's only right here, right now. No need memory, no need for worry. When I get where goin', wherever that is, I'll forget where I just w
’cause I’ll be someplace else, which is as good as any other, as far as I can see, which ain’t very, ’cause I got eyes on the sides of my head! Whoa! Look out for that dyke! Watch where you’re goin’! – That’s a fish joke. Think I’ll relieve myself now.

*Fart sounds, with bubbles.*

Wonder where that went. No way a’ knowin’! Think I’ll have a few babies now – say, thirty-two.

*Birth sounds.*

Ah! There! All that works makes me hungry. Think I’ll eat the fat ones. Nobody wants fat kids.

*He gobbles.*

Thanks, kids! Adios! Watch for sharks! – Another fish joke. Hell, where am I now? What difference does it make? None whatsoever. Wait! There’s a bit nasty steel hook dressed up as an insect. Didn’t one a’ them rip out my gums last week? How would I know? Let’s have lunch! I haven’t eaten anything since beats me.

*He chomps.*

Mmm! Tastes like nothing I recall! Wait a minute. Whoa! It’s fighting back! Where am I going? Who the hell knows? Where have I been? I don’t remember!

*He flops on the floor for a few seconds, then stops.*

...Well, this is interesting. Got one eye on the sky, the other in the mud. Well, enough of this. I’ll just swim away.

*He flops some more.*

...Whew! Musta swum for miles. Whatever that means. Wait! There’s a hairy legged fella, wearin’ a dress!

*He means FRANK, who he looks at with one eye.*

Maybe he knows where I am! Maybe I’ll ask him. Ask him what? I don’t remember! I don’t remember...I don’t remem...I don’t....
And he 'dies,' with his tongue hanging out. Frank chuckling, despite himself.

...There. That's how smart a fish is, right there, I can prove it.

FRANK. How?

GEORGE. I'll make you a bet. I'll bet you I can catch – no, a dozen fish – anytime, anyplace, no matter your fishics of fizzing horse hockey. I'll bet you three bucks.

FRANK. Why?

GEORGE. Prostitute Number Four: No fish can out me. Put up or throw up. Deal?

FRANK. Okay! Deal!

GEORGE. Ha! Teach you a thing or two. Francis! Prostitute Number Five: have another beer. Come on, one more, one more, ya pansy, come on, Francis, more, just one more – (etc.).

FRANK. No, no, quit calling me that! Really, no more, come on, don't make me do this, no, really, please – (etc.).

And so on until blackout. End scene.
Scene 4

In darkness: we hear gunshots in the distance.

At rise: the next morning, still raining. FRANK is asleep on the floor, covered by the afghan. ANNIE, in her nightgown, sits beside him, watching him. ZEE enters from the bedroom, dressed for the day.

ZEE. George? ...George?
ANNIE. Ssssshh.
ZEE. ...Oh. ...What are you –?
ANNIE. The rain woke me up.
ZEE. How is he?
ANNIE. Seems to have survived.
ZEE. Look at him. He looks so peaceful.

Pause.

...Rise and shine, dear! Time to –

FRANK groans.

ANNIE. Mother! Why don’t you let him sleep?
ZEE. Too much sleep is unhealthy. He could choke to death on his own saliva. What is that on your face?
ANNIE. Nothing.
ZEE. Are you wearing make-up?
ANNIE. Ts! Noooo!
ZEE. Well go get your robe on. You shouldn’t be walking around like that, for heaven’s sake. And go yell for your father to come eat.
ANNIE. He won’t hear me.
ZEE. (admiring FRANK) Hmm?
ANNIE. He won’t hear me. He’s out there somewhere. And I dress like this every night.
ZEE. Oh for God’s sake, Annie, just go cover up and wash that foolishness off your face.
ANNIE skulks off to the bedroom.

Frank? ...Frank dear. Wake up.

FRANK. (hungover) Ooooooooooooh.

ZEE. Rise and shine, dear. Time to get up.

FRANK. No, no, noooooo.

ZEE. Wh – what’s wrong, dear? Are you injured?

FRANK. My head.

ZEE. What’s wrong with it? Did George – did that – did he keep you up all night? I swear I can’t turn my head around here for a second. That man is an overgrown fetus. Would you like some coffee?

She helps him to his feet.

FRANK. Coffee. Good. Yes.

ZEE. (inadvertently yelling in his ear) Annie!

FRANK. Ooooooh.

ZEE. What’s wrong? Is it your leg? Does it hurt?

FRANK. It’s a little stiff.

ZEE. Well come over here and sit down. You shouldn’t put any weight on it for a few weeks. You could sever an artery. Annie!

Again, right into his ear.

FRANK. Aaaarrh.

ZEE. Poor dear. You’re in such pain, aren’t you. You hide it from me.

One more time:

– Annnnnieeee! – Put your leg up on this, there you just like that. Do you need a pillow? Would you like a sponge bath?

ANNIE enters from bedroom, dressed or covered up:

ANNIE. What!

ZEE. Run out and get some logs.

ANNIE. It’s raining!
ZEE. Don’t argue. We need a fire.
ANNIE. But –
ZEE. Hurry up now, don’t get wet.
FRANK. Good morning!

ANNIE smiles at him and exits to the porch and offstage.

ZEE. Now. How does a nice big breakfast sound?
FRANK. Oh, I don’t want you to go to any trouble, ma’am.
ZEE. Some nice, hot blueberry pancakes, smothered in maple syrup, with sausage and wheat toast? I’ll bet you haven’t had a good meal in weeks.
FRANK. About a month, actually.
ZEE. It’s so nice to have you here, Frank. You don’t know how wonderful it is. You’re like a dream come true. I’m going to take wonderful care of you now.

ZEE blows him a kiss and exits to the kitchen.

FRANK. ...Well alright. – Hey, uh, ma’am?
ZEE. (off) Yes dear?
FRANK. I’m uh, I’m not so big on pancakes. You got any eggs?
ZEE. (off) Fried, scrambled, boiled, poached or Benedict?
FRANK. Scrambled’s great. Kinda runny? With cheese?
ZEE. (off) Four eggs or five?
FRANK. Wow. Uh – five! Got any bell pepper?
ZEE. (off) Coming right up, dear.
FRANK. ...Well alright.

ANNIE enters, carrying an armload of logs, most of which she drops as she enters. FRANK rises to help her.

ZEE. (off) George, is that you?
FRANK. (because she won’t answer) ...It’s uh...it’s Annie.
ZEE. (off) You’re not wet are you Annie?

ANNIE rolls her eyes but won’t answer.
FRANK. Uh, no ma’am.
Pause. To ANNIE:

...Hi. I'm uh -

ZEE. (off) Would you like some juice, Robbie?

FRANK. What'd she - ?

ANNIE. She meant Frank.

FRANK. Uh - yes please! - Is there something...?

ZEE. (off) Orange, apple or grape?

FRANK. Orange is fine! - Are you okay?

ZEE. (off) Jam on your toast?

FRANK. Sounds great! - Are you mad about something?

ZEE. (off) Apricot, strawberry or mixed fruit?

FRANK. Mixed fruit!

ANNIE. It's not you.

*Gunshots are heard in the distance.* ZEE rushes in.

ZEE. What is that lunatic doing?

ANNIE. Who knows.

ZEE. Well I'm not holding his breakfast for him. He can just starve to death for all I care.

FRANK. You want me to go look for him?

ZEE. In your condition? Don't be ridiculous. You can open that wound and get maggots. Besides, I haven't fixed your pants yet.

ANNIE. I can do that.

ZEE. I'll do it. You just go dry yourself off. I told you not to get wet.

ZEE exits back to the kitchen. ANNIE takes a towel from the chest or somewhere and dries her hair.

FRANK. ...How old are you?

ANNIE. Why.

FRANK. Because your mother doesn't seem to know.

ANNIE. She doesn't like anyone to grow up. That's why married my dad. He's twelve.

FRANK. He's a great guy. They both are. You're really luc
ANNIE. Huh.

FRANK. You are. You got, like, the whole family thing here.

ANNIE. Not quite.

FRANK. My family's all screwed up. My dad free-bases anti-depressants, and who can blame him. He's a proctologist. I can hardly bring myself to shake his hand. And my mom, she's like the most un-spiritual person I know. She –

ANNIE. She's a crazed shop-a-holic. She consumes everything and creates nothing. Except for a hole in the ozone that follows her around in her SUV.

FRANK. ...You heard.

ANNIE. You've dated two slutty cheerleaders and a gymnast and once saw your best friend's mother's boob. When you were on the swim team, you shaved your whole body and went commando for a week. Once, when your folks were out of town –

FRANK. You listened.

ANNIE. It was pretty entertaining until you passed out and he went running out into the rain.

FRANK. Who covered me up?

ANNIE smiles – and he catches on, then abruptly drops the log he's been holding.

FRANK. Ow!

ANNIE. What.

FRANK. Splinter.

ANNIE. Let me see.

She takes his hand and looks at it. He looks at her.

FRANK. ...So how old are you?

ANNIE. ...How old do you think?

FRANK. I don't know, like...twenty three?

ANNIE. Riiight.

FRANK. Well that's what I first thought. I was like, "thank you God."

ANNIE. Riiight.
FRANK. I was. I swear. ...I'm serious.

_Pause. She gets a needle to work on his splinter._

ANNIE. ...So what's it like?
FRANK. What's what like?
ANNIE. ...You know. Being out. On your own.
FRANK. Why?
ANNIE. ...I don't know.
FRANK. It's uh....you know. Great. Master of your fate that. It's exciting, like the first time you ran away from home, before the scary part.
ANNIE. I've never run away from home.
FRANK. Or stayed out late. Or snuck out your window snuck somebody in.
ANNIE. I never did any of that. I can't do anything out my mother reminding me what a good girl "You're our angel, Annie, our blessed little angel.
FRANK. That sucks.
ANNIE. Big time.

_She sucks/gnaws on his finger to get to the splinter._

FRANK. ...Um. I could show you.
ANNIE. Show me what.
FRANK. The world. I've seen it. I could show it to you.

_She stops sucking and looks at him._

...Whenever you're ready. Whenever you decide to tell hell with it.

ANNIE. (contemplating - with sadistic glee) ...It'd kill 'em.
FRANK. They'd get over it. ...Okay so, how old are really?
ANNIE. ...I don't know. They won't tell me.

_She removes the splinter with the needle._

There. You're healed.
FRANK. My mom used to kiss it better.
ANNIE pauses, then takes his hand and kisses it nervously.

He touches her cheek. They gaze into each other's eyes. An intimacy is about to develop when — BOOM! The door flies open and GEORGE bursts into the room. He is soaking wet, in his stocking feet, and carries two rubber boots and a shotgun.

GEORGE. Yee haw! He's back! They said he couldn't do it, but here he is, and he's got a surprise!

ZEE enters from kitchen.

ZEE. George! Where have you been!

GEORGE. Fishing!

He empties the boots onto the rug; they're loaded with bloody fish.

Whatever you're burning in there, take it off! I want these babies cleaned and scaled.

— Franky boy, pay the man!

ZEE. Where did you get these?

GEORGE. Where do you think I got 'em? The river! It's full of 'em!

ZEE. You don't even have a pole!

GEORGE. Don't need no pole!

ANNIE. They're all...bloody!

FRANK. How did you catch them?

GEORGE. Don't matter how I caught 'em! I won the bet! — Bet Hot Shot here ten bucks I could catch a dozen fish before feeding time, which it is, right now, for us.

ANNIE. They're deformed!

GEORGE. They're not deformed! Just got a little lead in 'em!

ANNIE. They're full of bullets!

GEORGE. It's buckshot!

FRANK. You shot them?

GEORGE. No, I didn't shoot them. Not at them. I shot around
them. You should have seen it! It was beautiful all the big rocks – like you said – where I figure all huddled up? Blam! Flashes of silver in the sl

ZEE. George, they’re mutilated!

GEORGE. Just get the lead out. Use a magnet or
thing.

FRANK. You didn’t even try to fish for them!

GEORGE. I did it my way! Pay the man!

ZEE. Don’t you give him a cent!

ANNIE. Look at them! They’re –

GEORGE. Just cut it out, you two! This is between hi me. You just go cook ’em up.

ZEE. We won’t touch them!

ANNIE smelling trouble

Mama –

GEORGE. You’ll do as I say. I’m still the boss around h

ANNIE. I’ll do it. I’ll clean them.

ZEE. You will not! I won’t allow it!

GEORGE. You won’t what? You won’t allow it?

ANNIE. Daddy, wait.

GEORGE. What are you, the Permission Lady?

ZEE. Come on, Frank. Your eggs are done.

ZEE pulls FRANK away, but GEORGE grabs his other
arm: a tug-of-war.

GEORGE. We’re not having eggs! We’re having fish!

ZEE. Release this boy, you –

GEORGE. Hag!

ZEE. Baboon!

GEORGE. Giant nipple!

ZEE gasps.

ANNIE. Stop it, stop it, stop it!

GEORGE. Are you his mother? – Is she your mother? Did
she adopt you while I was gone?
ZEE. I’m warning you, George!

ZEE and GEORGE square off, eye-to-eye, except that FRANK is between them.

GEORGE. Damn you, old woman. You’d think you’d have learned by now. Just leave him be! Get your hooks out of him, ’cause he ain’t yours. Got it? ...Now there’s the kitchen. Those are breakfast? Get it?

Pause. A standoff. Then, ZEE suddenly smiles, backs down, and picks up the rug full of fish.

ZEE. ...Oh yes, George. I get it now. It’s all verrrry clear.

ZEE exits to kitchen. ANNIE is seething.

GEORGE. ...You got something to say, Bucky?

ANNIE. ...Yeah! ...To hell with it!

ANNIE storms off to the bedroom. Pause.

GEORGE. (happily) ...Women!

FRANK. What was all that about?

GEORGE. Just a little household maintenance. Nothin’ to worry about. – Somebody! Beer! Now!

This last he shouts into the kitchen.

We’re gonna have us a fish fry, Franky boy! Have us some fun.

FRANK. You can’t eat that fish!

GEORGE. Might be a little crunchy, but –

FRANK. No, no, you missed the whole point, George! You don’t go out and destroy! It’s man and nature, co-existing –

GEORGE. I could catch more fish with my fists than you could with that – (fly thing of yours)

FRANK. Look.

GEORGE. I could catch more fish with my teeth. I’ll bet you.

FRANK. Knock it off, George!

GEORGE. Mr. Man in Nature. I’ll bet you, and if I win...you have to stay here and go fishing with me for a week.
FRANK. ...What if I win?  
GEORGE. If you win...I go fishing with you. ...I could use the company, tell you the truth. Figure you could too, you know?  
ZEE enters with a creepily polite smile and two cans of beer, which she sets on the table, and then exits.  
...So what do you say?  
FRANK watches ZEE go, then looks off in the direction Annie went.  
FRANK. ...Deal.  
GEORGE. Beer?  
FRANK. Beer.  
They open the beers, which spray all over.  
GEORGE. (yelling off) That's very funny, Zee. I'm not cleaning it up.  
...Well alright. Here we are. Tell you what, Franky boy. This is the kind of thing I been missin'. Cheers.  
FRANK. Cheers.  
GEORGE. You're a helluva guy, you know that?  
FRANK. Thanks.  
GEORGE. 'Bout time I told you that. And it's good to have a friend, you know? ...Friends.  
FRANK. Friends.  
GEORGE. That's right. A helluva guy. ...I'll bet your daddy's mighty proud of you.  
FRANK. I'll bet he won't be.  
GEORGE. Ehhh. I'd be proud of you. Maybe you two - maybe you two just need to...sit down and...talk it out, you know?  
FRANK. Maybe not.  
GEORGE. You should though. You should talk to each other, as much as you can. 'Cause... father and son,
you know? That's sacred. It's a sacred thing. ...Wish I could tell him that.

FRANK. Who?

GEORGE. My uh...uh, my....

GEORGE slips into a haze, lost in something. Then he snaps himself back out.

...Well, what's done is done. Ain't gonna sit around feelin' sorry for myself. I mean, that's life, ain't it? Hard road that knows no turning. 'What my daddy used to say. A hard road that knows no turning. Tough son of a gun, my daddy.

FRANK. Really.

GEORGE. Big Bob, they called him. Used to take me to the Broken Butt Saloon every Tuesday and Friday night after my mama left. Get us both drunk, chase around them bar girls. Lord, he loved to fight. I'd be leanin' over the pool table or somethin', and — bam! We'd roll around the floor and crash into somebody and he'd get me in a headlock and throw me across the room. Got us both arrested once. Broke that finger twice.

FRANK. ...Why?

GEORGE. ...It's a long road, Franky boy. Guess it was his way of makin' sure I'd be ready.

GEORGE gets wistful again. FRANK is appalled.

...Yup. Father and son. Sacred. It's a sacred bond.

FRANK. Mmm.

GEORGE. Otherwise, what've you got? Without that, you know? What do you do? ...Right through the rail and over the edge. You know? ...It happens.

FRANK. ...What happens.

GEORGE. That. Happened to...happened to a friend of mine.

FRANK. ...What did?

GEORGE. ...I don't know. Lost control. ...That's what they... I don't know, though. I just...I don't know.

GEORGE is back in his fog. Long pause.
FRANK. ...You alright, George?
GEORGE. Hmm? ...Me? Hell yeah! You ready?
FRANK. Ready for what?
GEORGE. Fishing! What, you forget already?
FRANK. ...Now? It’s raining.
GEORGE. Ah, it ain’t hardly even sprinkling.
FRANK. Yes it is, it’s –
GEORGE. Here’s the rules. You do it your way, with a little “mosquito” there, and I’ll do it grizzly style in nature.
FRANK. You weren’t serious –
GEORGE. Catch as many as you can, and meet back at –
FRANK. George, it’s –!
GEORGE. High noon! Latecomers disqualified! We double the bet? So if I win, we stay up here two weeks.
FRANK. It’s a downpour out there!
GEORGE. I’ll throw in my daughter.
FRANK. ...What?
GEORGE. I saw the way you been lookin’ at her. She ain’t ugly. A little stubborn, kinda moody. Got a hell of a mouth on her though.
FRANK. ...Deal!
GEORGE. Deal! Hot dog! I’ll see you at the showdown!
FRANK. Okay!
GEORGE. Okay! Okay!

GEORGE “okays” all the way out the front door and off the porch.

FRANK. Wait! I don’t...I don’t have any pants! ...Or shoes. Or a fishing pole.

ANNIE has entered from the bedroom, dressed with a bag or pack. During the following she rounds up his coat, shoes and pack and hands them to him.

ANNIE. Not that that would make any difference.
FRANK. True. This is working out great! Two weeks fishing, all the comforts of home. Good company.

ANNIE. You enjoy the attention.

FRANK. ...Are you mad at me again?

ANNIE. I told you, it's not you. Let's go.

FRANK. Go? Go where?

ANNIE. I'm taking you up on your offer. Let's get out of here.

FRANK. What, leave? Now?

ANNIE. Yup.

FRANK. You people have no sense of occasion.

ANNIE. Do you want to stay here for the rest of your life?

FRANK. ...Well.

ANNIE. Forget it.

She starts off.

FRANK. Annie, you can't just –

ANNIE. Don't! Tell me what I can't do! I know what I can't do! I can't live with them anymore. I can't even live with myself.

FRANK. What?

ANNIE. You don't know what's going on here, and I don't have time to explain. Either come with me, or get out of the way.

FRANK. You know, you're really putting me in –

She kisses him hard. He's convinced.

...Well okay.

He grabs his coat, pack and shoes, and stands there, without pants and in his stocking feet, ready to go.

Seems like just a few minutes ago, my life was really shaping up, you know? Seems like I finally caught a break. But – what the hell! I'm an idiot. Got my pack. Got my coat. Got no idea what I'm doing. Are you sure this is what you want?

ANNIE nods.
...Okay. Let's go.

*And they head out onto the porch.* **FRANK** realizes:

*Wait! My pants!*

**ANNIE.** I'll find them. Go ahead. I'll catch up.

**FRANK.** But!

**ANNIE.** There's a bait shop up on the highway. I'll meet you there.

**FRANK exits; ANNIE enters the house and starts looking around for the pants. ZEE calls from the kitchen:**

**ZEE.** (off) ...Annie?

**ANNIE.** Crap!

**ZEE.** Annie? Is that you?

**ANNIE hides her pack in the hope chest. ZEE enters.**

**ANNIE.** Yup.

**ZEE.** I thought I heard the door.

**ANNIE.** That was...me. I was out...looking for wood.

**ZEE.** We have wood.

**ANNIE.** It's wet. I was looking for...dry wood.

**ZEE.** Where are the boys?

**ANNIE.** Uh. Fishing.

**ZEE.** Fishing? I haven't even fixed Robbie's pants yet!

**ANNIE.** Frank's. Where are they?

**ZEE.** It's pouring rain out there! He'll catch cold and his lungs will collapse.

**ANNIE.** Good point. I'll go get him.

**ZEE.** No, you'll catch one too. Besides, you're going to help me with those fish.

**ZEE laughs and tows ANNIE off toward the kitchen.**

**ANNIE.** No, but, but...help you what?

**ZEE.** I'm not sure yet. But if it's fish he wants, it's fish he's gonna get! Ahahahaha!

**ANNIE looks back toward the door as she's towed offstage.**

*End Act I.*
ACT TWO

At rise: later that morning. Outside, it’s still raining. Inside, ZEE is supervising ANNIE, who is sitting on the couch knitting the afghan.

ZEE. ...Don’t be in such a hurry, Annie. It’s too tight again.

ANNIE. Why are we even doing this? Why can’t we just take it out and throw —

ZEE. Why are you so jumpy? You act like you can’t wait to —

ANNIE. I can’t fix it, Mother! No one can! Why can’t we just accept that and, and —

ZEE. Try, Annie. Do it for Robbie.

ANNIE. His name is Frank, Mother.

ZEE. I meant Robbie. Do it for him.

ANNIE. How will Robbie —

ZEE. Do it for me, then. Please? I don’t know why, but... please?

ANNIE. ...Alright.

ZEE. ...You’ve been such a blessing, Annie, through all of this. I just don’t know what we’d have done without you. ...You’re an angel, you know. Our own angel.

ZEE exits to kitchen. ANNIE sighs, thinks for a second, stands, and looks back and forth between the kitchen and the front door.

She starts to gather her pack from the chest, but GEORGE enters from outside, wet and subdued. He stands. Pause.

GEORGE. ...Well?

ANNIE. Well what.
GEORGE. I'm back.
ANNIE. That's great.
GEORGE. How come there ain't a fire?
ANNIE. The wood is all wet.
GEORGE. How did it get wet?
ANNIE. Nobody's really sure.

ZEE calls from off:

ZEE. (off) Annie, did I hear the door?
ANNIE. It's Daddy.
ZEE. (off) Oooh, good. Welcome home, dear! I'll be one minute.

GEORGE is stupefied by her tone.

GEORGE. Where's what's-his-name?
ANNIE. Frank. Beats me.
GEORGE. He ain't here yet?
ANNIE. Nope.
GEORGE. Yee-haw! Disqualification! The winnah! I win bet!
ZEE. (off) What bet is that, dear?
GEORGE. I ain't telling you.
ANNIE. Daddy won Frank in a bet.
ZEE. (off) Really?
GEORGE. Damn right.
ZEE. (off) Did you catch any more fish?
GEORGE. I ain't tellin' you.
ANNIE. No.
GEORGE. Yes! I caught one! ...See?

He takes a minnow from his shirt pocket.

ANNIE. Must've put up quite a fight.
GEORGE. I found him. Down on the trail by the river. Just lyin' there, flappin' his gills in the rain. Don't know how he got there.
ANNIE. Maybe you blasted him up there this morning.

GEORGE. I didn’t know what to do with him. So I picked him up and held him in my hand and just sorta... watched him. He kept hangin’ on and hangin’ on.... So finally I just bashed his head in with a rock. You can cook him up if you want.

ANNIE. Mom saved the eggs. They’ve been waiting for hours.

GEORGE. What’s wrong with you, Bucko?

ANNIE. Nothing.

GEORGE. Female trouble?

ANNIE. Noooo! ...It’s Mother.

GEORGE. That’s what I meant.

He tousles her hair; she smiles despite herself.

Women have this gland, see. If they don’t bitch, it explodes, and they die. That’s why us guys gotta periodically leave the toilet seat up. Right? Huh? Huh?

ANNIE allows herself a chuckle. ZEE enters with a cup of coffee.

ZEE. Here’s some nice, hot coffee for you, dear.

GEORGE. Who, me?

ZEE. Of course, you. And I put it in your favorite Star Trek Travel Mug, with the lid, so you don’t spill and burn yourself.

GEORGE. What the hell’s goin’ on here?

ZEE. What do you mean?

GEORGE. I mean, what the hell’s goin’ on here? You’re bein’ nice to me.

ZEE. Oh, go ahead. Take it. I made it special, just for you.

GEORGE. ...Well I, I guess I oughta...guess I oughta apologize for...yellin’ at ya like I did, huh?

ZEE. Thank you dear. That’s very nice.

GEORGE. I don’t mean most of the stuff I say to you, you know.

ZEE. I know. Drink your coffee.

GEORGE. And shootin’ the quilt there, I’m sorry about that.
ZEE. It’s an afghan.
GEORGE. Except that was kinda funny.
ZEE. It was a scream, dear. Drink your coffee.
GEORGE. You two never could stay mad at me for too long.
Ain’t that right, Bucky?
ANNIE. Drink your coffee.
GEORGE. What say this family has some breakfast!

GEORGE still has not drunk his coffee.
ZEE. We can’t eat with Robbie.
GEORGE. Bob.
ANNIE. Frank!
GEORGE. I’ll go find him. He probably hasn’t caught anything yet, and he’s too proud to give up. He’s got grit, that boy.
ANNIE. Maybe he left.

They look blankly at her.

...I mean, maybe he found a ride out or something.
ZEE. Well, he wouldn’t just...just leave without saying goodbye!
GEORGE. Where would he go?
ZEE. He’s got nowhere to go. I think he’s an orphan.
ANNIE. He’s not an –
ZEE. My god! What if he got struck by lightning!
ANNIE. He wasn’t struck by –
GEORGE. I better go find him.
ZEE. Hurry George! Go!
GEORGE. Okay! Hold your eggs!

GEORGE hands the cup and the minnow to ZEE and runs out the door.

ZEE. Wait! You forgot your...! Rats.
ZEE shrugs, lifts the lid on the cup, and drops the minnow into the coffee. Pause.
ANNIE. ...Mama? ...He’s gone.
ZEE. We’ll find him, sweetheart.
ANNIE. No Mama. Listen. He’s gone.... He had to go. It’s too late.
ZEE. How do you...how do you know that?
ANNIE. He didn’t know how to tell you, so...he just left.
ZEE. He could hardly walk! He wasn’t ready to –
ANNIE. I know! I told him!
ZEE. Why did he go? Was it something...did we...did I do something or –?
ANNIE. No, Mama, it wasn’t you.
ZEE. Why didn’t you make him stay?
ANNIE. I tried, I...tried, Mama, but –
ZEE. You’re not telling something. You’re hiding something behind your back.
ANNIE. No.
ZEE. You spiteful, selfish little –
ANNIE. It’s not my fault!
ZEE. I’d like to know what you did to make him run off like that!
ANNIE. I didn’t do anything! Why can’t he just go if that’s what he wants? God, this family is like a prison!
ZEE. Oh is that so? Well maybe you should have just gone with him, if that’s how you –
ANNIE. Maybe I should have!
ZEE. Well what kept you? Just go, if that’s what you want! I don’t know what we did that was so terrible. All we ever tried to do was help!
ANNIE. I know, Mama.
ZEE. But if you don’t need us –
ANNIE. Mama!
ZEE. We don’t need you either! We don’t need you!
ANNIE. Mama!

ANNIE reaches for ZEE, but ZEE recoils. Then: boom!
GEORGE bursts through the front door, half-dragging FRANK, who is unconscious.