

The Old Fish and the Sea
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By

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EXT. PIER - DAY

RAY JONES, 23, walks along a scenic boardwalk. He pauses to look out over the waters of Lake Obligatory. His cell phone rings.

RAY
Hello? Oh, Hi, Mom.

He's not exactly eager to talk to her. He leans on the pier railing.

RAY (CONT'D)
No, no work yet. I've got resumes out. Made a lot of phone calls today.

Ray's mother has something supportive to say.

RAY (CONT'D)
Yeah, I suppose. No, I'm not going to call Uncle Louie. Because last time he had work for me, I was snaking toilets all day. Right, well washing machines can't be much better.

At that moment, a large trout flings itself out of the water and lands at Ray's feet. Ray is puzzled.

RAY (CONT'D)
Umm hmm. I know, I know.

The fish gasps, drowning in the open air. Ray considers it. He nudges it with his toe, meaning to push it back in the water.

FISH
(in a Brooklyn accent)
Hey! Stop it, I'm trying to die here!

Ray nearly drops his phone off the pier. He fumbles and catches it. He looks around. Did anyone else hear that?

RAY
What?

FISH
Can't a fish commit suicide in peace?

(CONTINUED)

RAY
(into phone)
Mom, I'm going to have to call you
back. Sure, sure, I'll talk to
Louie.

He hangs up. He crouches down close to the fish.

RAY
Did you say suicide?

FISH
Yeah, you know, the last
hurrah. I've had enough of this
life. Hello, sweet death.

The fish coughs.

FISH (CONT'D)
... I can feel it coming now...
(GASP) The darkness is closing
in...

Ray stands up, dumbfounded. He looks around again. No one is paying attention to the fish's dramatic scene.

Ray sees, down on the beach, a little girl with a bucket making a sand castle.

Ray leaps into action. He runs down the pier the short way to the beach and runs across the sand.

EXT. BEACH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

RAY
Hey! Little girl! I'll give you
five bucks for that bucket.

He doesn't wait for an answer. Ray shoves a fiver into the girl's hand, snatches her bucket, and runs to the water. He fills the bucket and runs past the girl again. She sits, confused, the money in one hand, a plastic shovel in the other.

EXT. PIER - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The fish is blubbering to itself.

FISH
Mama, Papa, is that you? I'm
comin', I can see that light at the
end of the tunnel!

(CONTINUED)

Ray scoops up the trout and dumps him into the bucket. It's a small bucket and a big fish, but at least his gills are underwater.

FISH (CONT'D)

What the Hell? Hey buddy, who do you think you are? I don't need rescuin'!

RAY

Calm down, fish. You're not dying today.

FISH

What do you care?

RAY

I don't know. But you must have landed at my feet for a reason.

FISH

Yeah, I got a reason. To die! Go belly up! I got troubles, pal, and you're not helping. Hey, where you takin' me?

Ray carries the bucket down the pier with a determined look.

INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ray sits at the kitchen table. His laptop is open to the website for INTERNATIONAL AQUATIC INSTITUTE. He scribbles furiously on a pad of paper. He rips off the page and adds it to the mess on the table. Several sheets of paper are covered with drawings and phrases like RAY JONES AND HIS AMAZING TALKING FISH. One page is a list with the title SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CASH \$\$\$\$! The names NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, SMITHSONIAN, JACQUES COUSTEAU FOUNDATION.

FISH

You got any food in this dump? I mean, as long as I'm trapped here, you know...

The fish (and his bucket) sit on the floor in the middle of the kitchen.

Ray grunts and points to the fridge.

FISH (CONT'D)

What charming hospitality.

(CONTINUED)

The fish hops the bucket across the room. THUMP THUMP THUMP.

Over Ray's shoulder, we see the refrigerator door open. After a moment, it closes again.

FISH (CONT'D) (O.S.)
You know, you should really eat, a growing boy like you.

The chair across from Ray squeaks back. The fish pokes his head over the edge of the table. He flips a ripe lemon onto the table. Then a bottle of tartar sauce.

FISH (CONT'D)
What d'ya say? Care for some seafood?

Ray looks up, suddenly paying attention.

RAY
Hey! Get back in your bucket!

FISH
Oh, for Neptune's sake! Just let me die!

RAY
No deal. You're a talking fish, and there's got to be a way to make a living off you.

FISH
You're dreaming, kid. Get a real job. I'm worth more dead than alive, anyway. Just ask my wife. How about a nice beer batter?

The fish heaves a bottle of imported beer onto the table.

RAY
Bucket!

The fish grumbles and hops back down. He splashes into the bucket.

INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ray lies in bed, staring at the ceiling. The bucket sits on the floor nearby, under the light of a small lamp.

FISH

Go ahead, chief. Get some shut-eye. I'll still be here in the morning. Or maybe I'll go for a walk, get some fresh air. Die a little.

RAY

Don't you dare. I'm a light sleeper. I'll hear it if you try anything.

FISH

Yeah, yeah. G'night you jerk.

INT. RAY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - MORNING

Ray's cell phone wakes him up. Barely.

RAY

Hello? Who? Uncle Louie? Oh, man, what time is it? Hey, I don't know what Mom told you, but I've got something else going on today.

Ray looks down at the floor. The lamp is there. Bucket and fish are gone. Ray sits up fast.

RAY (CONT'D)

I know, you could use the help. Could you hold on a minute?

(calling out)

Hey! Hey fish! Where are you?

There is the sound of a toilet flush. The bathroom door opens and THUMP THUMP THUMP the fish and bucket hop out.

RAY (CONT'D)

Damn, you scared me!

FISH

Nature called. You don't expect me to pollute my own water here, do you?

(CONTINUED)

RAY

(back on phone)

You know what, Uncle Louie? I think I will come down. I've got something to ask your opinion on anyway.

He reaches for a pen and paper.

RAY (CONT'D)

Yup. The First Rate Laundromat on 12th. Got it.

INT. LAUNDROMAT - DAY

Uncle Louie is a no-nonsense kind of guy.

LOUIE

So after you clean the lint traps, there's one unit in the back I want you to take a look at. The motor's runnin', but the water isn't flowin' right. I remembered how good you were with plumbing that time, so I thought of you for this job.

RAY

Sure, I appreciate it. Say, Uncle Louie, I have something I wanted to ask you about, as a businessman...

LOUIE

You know, it ain't easy findin' good help these days. It's good to know my sister's kid is a handyman-in-the-making.

RAY

Sure, I...

LOUIE

So then, if you have the time, this place could use a once over. There's a mop in the utility closet. I see you brought your own bucket.

Ray looks down at the bucket. Water, no fish.

(CONTINUED)

LOUIE (CONT'D)

That shows initiative. A little weird -- I mean, I got my own bucket here -- but I get it. So once you mop up, give me a call. I've got three other laundromats where I could put you to use.

Ray is subtly scanning the room for the fish.

RAY

Okay, yeah. Thanks, Uncle Louie.

LOUIE

Don't mention it. So I've got some errands to run. Call me if you need anything.

Louie leaves. Ray is left standing with his bucket.

Ray kneels down on the floor, looking under tables, between appliances.

He comes upon a woman putting clothes into a dryer.

WOMAN

Is there a problem?

RAY

Well, actually, I'm looking for a...

The woman cries out in surprise.

WOMAN

What the hell? Ugh!

The fish is in the dryer with her laundry.

RAY

Thank God, there he is!

WOMAN

What is wrong with you? I just washed those!

RAY

No, it wasn't me. The fish jumped in there on his own!

Ray starts pulling clothes out of the dryer to get to the fish.

(CONTINUED)

WOMAN
(hysterical)
Are you mental? Give me those!

FISH
(softly)
C'mon, Ray. Help a guy out. Set
it to permanent press and close the
lid. It would be so easy.

RAY
Look, lady, I just want to get my
fish back, okay?

WOMAN
Get away from my clothes, you
freak!

She gives him a shove and grabs the rest of her
unmentionables. She flings the fish onto the floor.

Ray makes a move toward the fish, but stops when the woman
turns on him.

WOMAN (CONT'D)
Don't you come near me! I'll call
the cops! You're lucky I don't
sue.

With her clothes basket under her arm, the woman stomps out.

Once again, Ray is alone with the fish. He lies there,
twitching.

FISH
Little help?

INT. LAUNDROMAT - LATER

Ray sits on top of a washer. The bucket, now with fish,
sits next to him.

There's a long silence.

RAY
My life sucks.

FISH
Your life sucks? I'm a fish in a
bucket!

(CONTINUED)

RAY

Four years of liberal arts, and I'm mopping laundromats.

FISH

Yeah? Well, try getting up in the morning knowing your wife is leaving you for some young guppie. Us trout are supposed to mate for life. Doesn't that mean anything anymore?

RAY

Man, that's tough. I'm sorry.

He thinks for a moment.

RAY (CONT'D)

Maybe it's meant to be. I mean, who says you can't start over? There's other fish in the sea.

FISH

Are you TRYING to insult me?

RAY

I just think there's got to be something out there for you. Killing yourself over a woman is just... sad.

FISH

Yeah, sad. Like mopping floors in a laundromat.

RAY

See? You don't have it so bad.

They laugh.

FISH

Maybe all I need is a change of scenery.

RAY

Like the inside of a bucket?

FISH

Like Bermuda. I got a cousin down there. Maybe I could drop in on him.

(CONTINUED)

RAY
That's the spirit.

EXT. PIER - DAY

Ray carries the bucket and fish along the pier. He stops by the railing.

RAY
Well, I guess this is it. Take care of yourself.

FISH
You, too.

The fish looks out over the water, about to jump. He stops.

FISH (CONT'D)
Things are gonna turn around for you, kid. You'll figure out what you want to do with your life.

RAY
Thanks. Have a good time in Bermuda.

FISH
I'll send you a postcard!

The fish leaps out of the bucket and into the open water.

Ray watches him swim away.

THE END