

GONE FISHING GONE

A short dramedy by
Michele A. Miller

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MOM, woman, any reasonable age, caring demeanor.

JACK, any gender, age 9-10, Mom's child.

PRODUCTION NOTE

The play can be staged minimally with "poles" without rigs or line; dialogue and action can indicate "tangles," etc.

While he/him pronouns are used for Jack in the script, should Jack be played by/as a female or non-binary young person, please adjust pronouns as needed, and Jack may serve as a shortened version of Jackalyn.

(On a wooden pier on Father's Day, early morning. MOM and JACK arrive carrying fishing equipment – a tackle box, two poles, a bucket [of small bait fish] and a box [of nightcrawlers]. Mom is carrying most of it.)

MOM: *(Walking to the end of the pier:)* OK, so I'm pretty sure this is the place he used to talk about. Best fishing spot on the peninsula. And look, we're the only ones here!

JACK: *(Yawning:)* Because everyone else is still sleeping.

MOM: Well, the early bird catches the worm, sweetie.

JACK: We got the worms last night.

MOM: OK, so catches the fish with the worms.

JACK: Do you even know how to do this?

MOM: How hard can it be? Bait goes on hook, hook goes in water, then we wait.

JACK: Dad made it look hard.

MOM: Dad made everything look hard. We'll be fine. *(Holding up the poles:)* OK, so which is yours?

JACK: The smaller one, of course. It has a special reel on it that is supposed to be easier. Or maybe you should use that one.

MOM: Don't worry about me. I watched a ton of videos on YouTube last night. I should be fine with this one.

(She takes the longer pole.)

OK now, first thing – setting up the rig.

JACK: Which hook?

MOM: Let's see.

(She opens the tackle box and takes out a lure/hook.)

The man in the store recommended these.

(She holds up a small, barbed hook attached to a shiner/lure.)

JACK: Dad used to use these, with all the little hooks strung together.

(He holds up a long line with multiple small hooks.)

He said they were great for stripers.

MOM: Well, I don't know what is in the water now and I don't think I can handle more than one hook at a time, so let's start with these, OK? We can mix it up when we get a handle on things. Now, where are those sinkers?

(She rummages in the box.)

JACK: We'll want the bobbery-thingy, too.

MOM: The what?

JACK: *(Holding up a small bobber:)* This.

MOM: Oh, right. I'm not sure how that...give me a sec to look at the diagram. *(Checking her phone:)* OK, right—that's good if you want to drop it right in. We can try that. OK, let's just get this ready. It shouldn't take long. I practiced last night.

(Mom starts setting up the line carefully, checking her phone every so often. It's obvious she is new to this but that she has done her homework and is prepared. Jack watches her at first and then grows bored. He looks into the bucket of bait.)

JACK: The minnows are still alive.

MOM: I know. Those are supposed to be the best bait.

JACK: You're not going to kill them, are you?

MOM: I'm going to have to put them on the hook. It goes through their eye.

JACK: Nooo!

MOM: Sorry, I thought you knew. Didn't you use them with—

JACK: I don't remember.

MOM: The guy at the bait shop said they were the best bait.

JACK: I don't care.

MOM: I thought you wanted to catch—

JACK: I don't care.

MOM: You used to be so excited to bring home a fish.

JACK: It was different then. You're my mom. I don't want you to kill them.

(He covers the bait pail with his arms.)

MOM: Then it's good I dug up those worms, isn't it?

(She opens the box and pulls out a huge, wriggly worm.)

Good and wriggly — yum!

JACK: Yuck.

MOM: Hand me that pole I just set up. Let's get you fishing.

(Jack hands her the pole, she baits the hook slowly, carefully, then hands it back.)

OK, plunk 'er in. I'll get this other one ready.

(Jack takes the pole hesitantly and walks to the edge of the dock.)

MOM: Do you need help?

JACK: I can do it.

(Jack attempts to cast with wild swinging, and the hook swings past Mom's face and gets caught in the vertical pole of the pier.)

MOM: Jack! Be careful with that— you almost hit me in the eye with the hook!

JACK: It's caught on the dock.

MOM: I see that. I'll get it free... Here. You don't need to cast. Just let the line out.

JACK: I want to get the hook away from the dock.

MOM: Want me to help you?

JACK: Yes... No.

MOM: OK.

(Jack casts again, less vigorously but ineptly, and tangles the line.)

JACK: Mom! The line is tangled around the reel.

MOM: What? How did you — ? *(Sighing:)* Well, this rig is done now. Take my pole and I'll deal with yours.

(She hands him the pole.)

Please don't cast! There are fish right here under the dock.

JACK: OK, OK.

MOM: You want help with the reel?

JACK: No... Yes.

(Mom comes up behind Jack. She takes the pole and demonstrates.)

MOM: I watched half a dozen videos on this last night and then practiced down the stairs. I think the key is once you open the bail—here—you put your thumb there—see? So you can control the line. Now swing back very carefully—like that—then snap it forward and release the line...there it goes! Point the rod toward where you want it to go. I aimed for that little dark spot in the water over there, see? Want to try it together?

JACK: I got it.

MOM: OK, let's reel this back in. You know how —

JACK: I can do it.

(Jack starts reeling with vigor.)

MOM: Slow down! Easy does it. Slow and even. Like this.

(She leans over and reels with Jack.)

This is when you might catch a fish. They see that worm swimming by—

JACK: Worms don't swim.

MOM: I don't think the fish know that. Now keep at it, just that way. Got it?

JACK: Got it.

MOM: You want to cast the next one together?

(Jack doesn't respond.)

I told you—after you went to bed last night, I stayed up practicing. That's all it takes: a little practice. We can practice together.

JACK: OK.

(Mom stands behind Jack and guides each step.)

MOM: OK, so open this, thumb here, press firmly, now back and aim and forward—lift you thumb! There! Now close it back... And there you are. Great job!

JACK: I think I got it now.

MOM: Great! You can just let the worm hang out there a bit, tempt those fish for a while. Remember you have the bobber. Just keep watching it, see if it moves. I've got to fix this tangle now.

JACK: OK.

(Jack sits and watches the line and soon fidgets, bored. Meanwhile, Mom is frantically trying to untangle the reel. She pulls the line out across the entire stage/pier and slowly starts reeling it back in

correctly. She occasionally curses when it tangles again and she has to start over.)

MOM: *(To herself:)* Sheesh, not again.

(She pulls more line out, starting over.)

Gosh darn torture device.

JACK: Mom?

MOM: *(Exasperation sneaking into her tone:)* Yes, Jack?

JACK: Do you think... Do you...

MOM: What?

JACK: Nothing.

MOM: What...? OK, finally getting somewhere with this line. Third times the charm.

JACK: Mom?

MOM: What?

JACK: Do you even like fishing?

MOM: *(Reeling in the last of the line:)* Honestly, Jack, how would I know? I haven't even started yet.

JACK: So why are we?

MOM: Why are we what?

JACK: Fishing.

MOM: It's Father's Day. You always go fishing on Father's Day.

JACK: But that was with Dad. And Dad's gone.

MOM: But I'm still here.

(She has finished untangling.)

OK, then—so let's fish! Just let me get one of these fat nightcrawlers on the hook and...here we go. Ready to see if I like fishing!

(She casts, lightly, somewhat shakily, but gets the job done.)

Well now, time to relax.

(Mom sits next to Jack side by side with their lines in the "water.")

MOM: See, now *this* I like, very peaceful.

JACK: *(Jumping up:)* Mom! Look! My line is moving! I caught something!

MOM: *(Getting up reluctantly and helping him:)* Wonderful. OK, baby, now start reeling in slowly.

JACK: I know!

(Jack starts reeling in too fast.)

MOM: Slowly! You don't want to lose it. Slow down!

JACK: I know!

MOM: Jack...

JACK: Mom, I can do it!

(The line goes slack.)

What happened? Where did it go?

(Jack continues to reel in and gets to the end. The entire rig is gone.)

It's gone!

MOM: Sorry. I guess that's the one that got away.

JACK: What one?

MOM: The one that got away. It's a fishing joke. It means the fish you caught but then lost.

JACK: Oh. The one that's gone.

MOM: Right. You know, it can be people, too. Like the person you thought you were going to be with for the rest of your life but then something happened.

JACK: Oh. Like Dad?

MOM: Yes... No. I guess so. Sorry, I know it's hard... Hey, why don't you take my pole while I fix yours?

JAKE: OK.

(They switch poles and Mom starts the entire process of adding a new rig to his pole. Meanwhile, Jack is getting bored again, swinging the pole up and down and generally fooling around.)

MOM: Hey, stop swinging the pole—you don't want to break it.

JACK: I'm trying to make it look like the worm is swimming. Like you said.

MOM: OK then. I'm almost done. New rig. I'm getting faster at this. Getting a lot of practice.

(Mom casts more confidently and goes to sit next to Jack. Still bored, Jack is letting out more line and reeling it back in.)

Jack, be careful, I'm running out of—

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