

FISH FACE FOOLS

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STAGE RIGHT: CYPRESS TREES EDGE A COMPLETELY DRY LAKE BASIN. A WEATHERED ROWBOAT SITS ON TOP OF THE MUD. THE SUN GLARES DOWN.

STAGE LEFT: A WELL-BEATEN DIRT PATH FROM BOAT TO TREES. TWO OLD MEN STAND IN THE SHADE NEXT TO A SMALL SHED.

SCOOTER BARTLETT – 79, LITTLE GUY, 125 LBS, WHITE HAIR STANDS STRAIGHT UP. ROUND, THICK, WIRE-FRAMED GLASSES SIT ON POINTY NOSE. BLUE BIB OVERALLS TUCKED INTO BLACK UNTIED WORK BOOTS AND LONG-SLEEVE, RED-AND-GREEN PLAID SHIRT. TALKATIVE.

LOUIS HODGKIN – 76, TALLER, HEAVIER BUILT, 250 LBS. GRAY, COTTON ZIP-UP-THE-FRONT JUMPSUIT. PALE-SKINNED, ALMOST BALD, WITH WHITE STRANDS HANGING OVER COLLAR. HUFFS AND PUFFS AS HE MOVES. QUIET

THELMA – LOUIS' WIFE – OFF-STAGE VOICE

WEATHERMAN – OFF-STAGE VOICE

INTENSE BRIGHT LIGHT ON LAKESIDE (RIGHT) OF STAGE.

WEATHERMAN

(From off stage – radio voice – rural accent.) Howdy out there in sunny Florida! Here's today's weather for the Lakes Area. Continuing hot and humid, with no rain to be seen. Folks, it's been a long time hasn't it? We sure could stand a couple of big ol' downpours! Most lakes around here are almost dust bowls. Heck, some of them like Dry Lake to the west haven't had a drop of water in them for six months, not a drop!

So while y'all are waiting for the rain, why not drive over to the A&W for a good cheeseburger and a nice cold root beer!

DIM LIGHT ON WOODED (LEFT) SIDE OF STAGE – BRIGHTENS WHEN OLD MEN TALK.

SCOOTER BARTLETT

(Walks to shoreline - high-pitched quavering voice.) Looks like a mighty good day to go fishing! Not a single cloud in the sky. Whadaya think Louis, huh? Say, yes, and it's your turn to bring the beer.

LOUIS HODGKIN

(Joining him, deep breathless wheezy voice) Yep, looks purty good, don' it? Can't beat a day fishin' on Dry Lake. Guess I'll check with the wife. No, betta' not say nuttin'; she might have some work to do or want me to haul her skinny behind somewheres. Ya' know, seein' how things are and the kids bein' long gone, I oughta' teach her howta' drive. Anyway, I'll get the stuff and be back in a flash.

SCOOTER

A flash? Big old mossy-back turtles like you don't move in a flash.

(Giggling, breaks into coughing fit, ends in working up a big gob that he spits out). Damn, I hope somethin' can be done 'bout this cough!

LOUIS

You know Scooter; we've fished together for what seems almost a century. Even before Maybelle and Thelma captured us. Why do you even fish with me?

PUSHES BACK FLOPPY STRAW HAT. WIPES PERSPIRING HEAD. RUMBLING LAUGH, TRUDGES, WHEEZING, UP TO SHED AMONG LIVE OAKS WITH SPANISH MOSS. WITH FISHING GEAR AND SMALL COOLER, STARTS SLOW PONDEROUS WALK BACK. PAUSES NOW AND THEN TO CATCH BREATH.

SCOOTER

Well, you sure live up to being a turtle.

(Drops chin to chest - makes snoring sounds). I almost fell asleep waiting. Let's see if we've got everything. Rods? Good. Tackle box? OK. Fish stringer? No? Go and get it! You know I lost mine when we went out on the lake last week. Remember? I had a whole load of fish on it, just ready to take home and clean. That sure was a pisser! Now, let's see. Beer? Ha, for once you didn't forget!

LOUIS

You drive me 'most nutty as Thelma. Here's the stringer, snapped on ma' belt. We have everythin'; let's go.

SCOOTER

Wait a minute, forgot the oars.

LOUIS

Ha! Looks like you need ma' Thelma to tell you what to do.

SCOOTER SHUFFLES TO SHED, RETURNS, DRAGGING OARS.

SCOOTER

(Throwing oars down - raises bony fist and waves it at Louis.) I don't know why I put up with you! Ha! To you! You forgot the net!

LOUIS

(Sets down load) OK! OK!

LOUIS PLODS TO SHED, GETS NET, RETURNS. THEY WALK DOWN PATH TO ROWBOAT. LOUIS GETS INTO BACK, SITS DOWN, PLACING TACKLE BOX, THREE FISHING RODS, NET AND BEER IN FRONT OF HIM. BOAT CREAKILY TILTS UP OUT OF MUD SO THAT FRONT LIFTS TWO FEET INTO AIR.

SCOOTER

Louis, you barrel of lard, you know you're supposed to sit in front, not the back. Makes me feel like I'm way up on the poop deck when you do that. Move, move!

LOUIS

Well the poop deck is where an ol' shit like you is supposed to sit! (Laughs.) But to keep you from havin' a stroke – I'll move.

LOUIS MOVES GEAR AND CLIMBS INTO FRONT OF BOAT.

SCOOTER CLIMBS IN BACK, GLANCES OVER DRY LAKE.

SCOOTER

Any sign of action?

LOUIS

Yep, there's a bass bumpin' those reeds. (Pause.) What? You don' see it? Clean those little bottle-bottom glasses, you fish face fool!

SCOOTER

Fish face fool? I'll show you who's a fish face fool! You say there's a bass over there and I say it's mine. Watch this!

GRABS ROD, SLIPS PLASTIC WORM ONTO BASS HOOK. GIVES BAIT A QUICK SPRAY OF FISH ATTRACTANT.

They love this homemade fish attractor on the worm, you know. They taste the ol' sardine juice and then get drunk on the beer that I add. Easiest way to catch a fish, get 'em hungry and get 'em drunk. Watch my technique! What a cast! There, he took it! Shit, got away!

LOUIS

He's still there. Ma' turn!

PUTS PLASTIC WORM ON HOOK, SPITS ON IT FOR LUCK - CASTS OUT OVER DRY LAKE BOTTOM.

A strike, what skill!

SCOOTER

(Shouting excitedly) Play him right! It's fighting hard enough to be a bass. I'll get the net! Where's the net?

LOUIS

I put it in the boat when I got in. Musta' fallen out when you made me get in the front.

SCOOTER

Lip it! Lip it! It won't bite you. Don't mess up now. Damn, almost got away!

LOUIS

HOLDING ONTO MOUTH OF INVISIBLE BASS.

Quit flappin' yo own lips! Gimme the stringer. Not a bad 'un, huh?

SCOOTER

You sure that's a bass? Looks like a shoe or something.

LOUIS

Don' give me no grief! Of course it's a bass! Even looks like you, fish face!

DROPS ROD OVER SIDE OF BOAT.

Oh damn, I dropped ma' rod! Can you see it down there? That water is so dark. Maybe I can snag it with a hook.

THELMA

(From a distance.) Looooouis! Looooouis! Come home now. I need to go over to Maybelle's.

SCOOTER

You hear someone yelling, Louis?

LOUIS

Hear sumpin', but it's too far away. Is it a foghorn? Sure sounds like one.

SCOOTER

See any more fish out there?

LOUIS

There's some yearlin's jumpin' near that grassy area.

THELMA

Looooouis! Looooouis!

LOUIS

Wheee-uu, is ma' Thelma mad! I bet she wants to fillet me just like a fish!

SCOOTER

Ha, it would take all day just to cut through your blubber! Pop us some beers and let's get serious about fishing. Let's try to get some of them little ones; they're the tastiest.

LOUIS

CASTS RANDOMLY OVER DRY LAKE BOTTOM. TURNS TO SCOOTER; LOOKS AT HIM INTENSELY.

(Long pause). Scooter, what did your doctor say?

SCOOTER

(Long pause, then in subdued voice.) Oh, about a year, if I don't start the chemicals. You, Louis?

LOUIS

(Sighs.) Well, he wants to clean out some of the tubes, an' maybe I'm too old to do that.

SCOOTER

(Long pause, looks about.) Things in life are looking pretty dry, aren't they? And, just look at this lake.

LOUIS

PAUSES, LOOKS OUT OVER THE MUD, TURNS, LOOKS SCOOTER IN THE EYE.

You know what Charlie Jenkins tol' me? Huber Lake has a lotta' water in it yet and the fishin' is good. Maybe it's time to try it. Who knows what a change in fishin' holes will do.

SCOOTER

Sounds like a good idea; let's pack it in. Anyway, I think I hear that old foghorn blowing again.

LOUIS AND SCOOTER STEP OUT OF BOAT, GRAB FISHING GEAR - SLOWLY TRUDGE ALONG THE DIRT PATH FROM THE BOAT TO THE SHORE AND BACK TO THE TREES AND OFF STAGE LEFT.