

*TROLLING*

by  
Grady Smith

## CHARACTERS

George  
 Harry  
 the Messenger

*THE SCENE IS the bottom of a body of water, a confusion of a domesticated aquarium and the wilds of the ocean. There is a turretted castle hardly taller than the actors, and a bench, a refuse container and some rocks. Wild seaweed abounds in flowerpots, and a stylized mobile of fish hangs from the flies. A bench with maybe the papier mache statue of a mermaid on one end.*

*AT THE RISE: GEORGE is standing down right of the castle, full front, not moving, holding a bouquet of forget-me-nots, patient. HARRY, whistling, rushes on with his fast gait, crossing GEORGE without noticing HIM, looking for someone. She is not there. Stops whistling. Stops walking too, but still seems to be moving. GEORGE takes out a big round watch from his vest pocket, looks at it, sighs, returns it, resumes looking straight out over the audience with that big, ridiculous nosegay clutched in front of HIM. HARRY takes a couple of steps, looks at HIS wrist watch, snorts, paces back.*

## HARRY

That big dumb ladyfish. Late again. The way she takes her time, you'd think she was the only female in this whole body of water. Course I *was* a little late myself, half hour or so. Say, have you been here long, Buddy? Maybe you saw her. Gertrude's her name, a little guppy about this tall, with the finest set of fins ya ever saw.

*(pause)*

You waiting for a broad too, Mac? Must be kinda serious with the forget-me-nots and all huh?

*(pause)*

I'll bet she does all the talkin', huh? Hahahahah!

*(pause)*

Say, Buddy, are you *in* there?

## GEORGE

Why -- I think so. At least I was the last time I wanted to know.

## HARRY

Well that's a relief anyway.

## GEORGE

Are you *in there*?

HARRY  
Sure I am. Where do you think I'd be?

GEORGE  
Well that's a relief, anyway.

HARRY  
Your ladyfish friend stand you up?

GEORGE  
Oh, no.  
*(getting his watch out)*  
She's just a little late.  
*(putting his watch back)*  
Three days.

HARRY  
Three days?!

GEORGE  
Oh, I don't mind. She knows I'll be here.

HARRY  
I wouldn't wait for a broad three minutes, Mac. If I thought Gert was playing hanky panky, I'd take off outa here and hit the seaweed cider with the guys.

GEORGE  
Well, for myself, I really don't mind, just as long as she comes. That's what's....

HARRY  
Hey hey hey! Get a loada that, will ya?  
*(HARRY follows an imaginary female of a species with a pivot of his body. GEORGE, still dead front, follows her with HIS eyes. HARRY gives a wolf whistle)*

Boy, would I like to swim upstream with her!  
*(to GEORGE)*  
For Pete's sake, Buddy, relax! You been like that for three days?

GEORGE  
Well, as a matter of fact, I....

HARRY  
What's this broad got? Come on, sit down, huh?  
*(beat)*

Come on!

*(HE drags HIM to the bench)*

Take a load off your tail fins.

GEORGE

Oh. I -- I *am* rather stiff --

HARRY

Stiff! Oh, brother.

GEORGE

I didn't realize how long I'd been treading water.

HARRY

Listen, Mac, you need a Dutch uncle talk.

GEORGE

George.

HARRY

Huh?

GEORGE

My name is George. All my friends call me George.

HARRY

Oh, yeah -- George. Well -- Harry is me -- I mean, I'm Harry.

GEORGE

Hello, Harry.

HARRY

Uh -- Hello, George.

GEORGE

Hi.

HARRY

Yeah. Well, uh -- Oh, yeah -- your Dutch uncle.

GEORGE

Who?

HARRY

Me!

GEORGE

Oh.

HARRY

Listen, kid, you got no moxie! You gotta have moxie or they'll keep you waitin' till -- Hey hey hey! Get a loada that, will ya?

*(THEY watch another imaginary female cross the stage)*

Boy, would I like to weigh in on those scales.

GEORGE

What's moxie, Harry?

HARRY

What's moxie! Kid, I'm moxie! You wanna know what moxie is, you look at old Harry.

GEORGE

But Harry, what do I need moxie for, what does it do?

HARRY

What does it do! Kid, if you're gonna get ahead in this two-bit ocean, you *gotta* have moxie. A few fast movers are lucky enough to be born with it, like me. That leaves everybody else. They see us going places, and if they're smart they work up some moxie on their own.

GEORGE

But what does it do, Harry?

HARRY

The greatest thing you can think of, kid. It gives you this whole big dumb ocean on a silver platter, all you have to do is take it. You're loose, kid! Anything you want -- up, down or away! The ocean is *yours*, kid -- you *own* it!

GEORGE

*(dubiously)*

Ocean?

HARRY

Every drop of water that ever was, Mac --

GEORGE

George.

HARRY

-- George -- and moxie makes it mine.

GEORGE

Oh, you're pulling my leg, Harry.

HARRY

On the level, kid. And what's more, I've pumped every one of them drops through these gill-flaps of mine, and moxie does *that*. When you got moxie, Mac, you can see it *all*.

GEORGE

George, please.

HARRY

George.

GEORGE

But you're not really serious, are you, Harry? "Ocean."

(*laughs*)

Oh, my!

HARRY

Wait a minute. What's funny? Waddaya laughin' at?

GEORGE

Your joke. Calling this pint-capacity fish bowl an ocean.

(*laughs again*)

Really very funny.

HARRY

It *is* an ocean. It's the *only* ocean. An' it's *mine*.

GEORGE

Why -- I really think you're serious, Harry.

HARRY

Of course I'm serious! Pint size fish bowl -- oh, brother. You say it's so small -- tell me, wise guy -- what's over that next little hill?

GEORGE

Well, as a matter of fact, I don't exactly know.

HARRY

Well *I* do! I know what's over *every* hill cause I *been* there.

GEORGE

Oh, now really, Harry, why don't you just admit that it's a fish bowl?

HARRY

Cause it ain't, that's why. It's an ocean.

GEORGE  
I'm sorry, Harry -- it's a pint-size fish bowl.

HARRY  
It's the ocean, wise guy!

GEORGE  
It's a fish bowl. I live here too, you know.

HARRY  
IT'S THE OCEAN, MAC!

GEORGE  
George.

HARRY  
*GEORGE, DAMMIT!*

GEORGE  
And it's still a fish bowl.  
*(HARRY is apoplectic)*  
A *small* fish bowl.

HARRY  
I seen it, I tell you! I seen it all! You ain't seen any of it. I know statues that've been more places than you. If somebody smacked you with a bag of fertilizer you'd grow roots.

MESSENGER  
*(enters)*  
Telegram! Telegram for Harry! Telegram! Special delivery telegram for Harry!

HARRY  
Awright, awright, give it here.

MESSENGER  
*(waving the telegram overhead, playing the audience, back to HARRY)*  
Important telegram for Harry! Harry, are you out there?

HARRY  
Yeah, yeah, here for Pete's sake!

MESSENGER  
Please, Harry! For your own good! Telegram of the first importance! Harry, please come and get this....

*(HARRY grabs the telegram and hits the MESSENGER a good one on the back of the head with the heel of HIS hand. The MESSENGER, without ever looking at HARRY, weaves off stage, still calling for HARRY, but in an extremely muted voice)*

HARRY

What you don't have to go through for one lousy telegram.

GEORGE

I hope it's good news, Harry.

HARRY

Yeah, yeah.

*(Moxie to the fore)*

It's from Gertrude!

GEORGE

What does she say, Harry?

HARRY

"Dear Harry Baby..." She always calls me Harry Baby. "This is to inform you that I will be unable to keep our previous engagement..." See that, kid? She couldn't make it so she sends a *telegram*. She knows a guy with moxie when she sees one.

GEORGE

Gee, Harry, you sure can handle your women, all right.

HARRY

You said it, kid! "...our previous engagement, as I am shacking up with Catfish Charlie for the weekend.

*(incredulous)*

You were lots of laughs, Harry, but you're not in Charlie's league at all. I hope you take this as the observation of a deep true friend when I tell you that you...you...

*(Gives a little cry of disbelief and lets the wire slip from HIS hand. HE looks around desperately for something, anything, to do)*

GEORGE

*(picks up the wire)*

"I hope you take this as the observation of a deep true friend when I tell you that you got no moxie. Your ever faithful Gertrude."

HARRY

*(trying unsuccessfully to cover)*

Of all the dames to say who's got moxie and who ain't.

GEORGE

Harry...

HARRY

She couldn't tell moxie from a sick sponge.

GEORGE

Gee, Harry, I'm awfully sorry...

HARRY

What are ya sorry about, kid? It don't bother me none.

GEORGE

Well, Harry, I only meant that...

HARRY

Just drop it, huh, kid? Just drop it, awright?

*(Begins pacing, mumbling audibly to HIMSELF. As HE does, GEORGE pulls a large tablecloth from inside HIS coat and spreads it on one end of the bench, takes a lunch box from behind the bench and begins to set out a meal.)*

HARRY

*(constantly moving)*

Dames! Bug dumb ingrates! Take 'em out, show 'em a good time, best gravel bars in the layout, and they drop you like you wuz nothin'. And for Catfish Charlie! Bottom mud! Well, he'll be good for her.

*GEORGE has found a banana in his rummagings. Begins to peel it.)*

I don't think she's a guppy at all. She's some kind of a smelt that's had rickets.

*(without realizing it, GEORGE pitches the banana peel directly into HARRY's cross-stage path)*

Well, damn if I'm gonna worry over *her*! I'm gonna get up and *move*! Never sleep under the same wave twice! Yes *sir*! This calls for *action*!

*(A boffo pratfall on the banana peel)*

GEORGE

*(pause)*

Heh. Sorry.

HARRY

Waddaya tryin' to do, meat head? What's yer trouble, anyway? Ya tryin' to kill me or something?

GEORGE

Of course not, Harry. You know I wouldn't do that. Why, you have everything to live for.

HARRY

Sure I do.

GEORGE

Right.

HARRY

Don't I?

GEORGE

Of course.

HARRY

I do?

GEORGE

Sure you do.  
(*beat*)  
Don't you?

HARRY

I think so.

GEORGE

You do?

HARRY

I thought so.

GEORGE

Well, of course you do! You've got moxie, Harry!

HARRY

Yeah. Moxie. You know, I had a friend once -- got mashed against a reef by a pregnant whale.

GEORGE

Ooh. What a way to go.

HARRY

Yeah.

GEORGE

One of those accidents of fate.

HARRY

Yeah, it is kinda chancy. But how can you plan *that* little trip?

GEORGE

If you wanted to go?

HARRY

Well, you *could* plan it, I guess, if you wanted to.

GEORGE

Plan?

HARRY

Say, maybe *I* could...

GEORGE

Harry -- what are you thinking about, Harry?

HARRY

Well maybe I *could*, dammit.

GEORGE

Why would you want to do a thing like that, Harry? You wouldn't do it for her, would you?

HARRY

Course not, not for her. I'd do it for *me*, kid. And you know something? I just realized: it's the only place I haven't been to.

GEORGE

Gee, Harry, I don't think I've been there too.

HARRY

I guess nobody has who's hanging around here.

GEORGE

What do you think it's like?

HARRY

Like any other gravel bar, kid, only different. No current.

GEORGE

Really?

HARRY  
And no water.

GEORGE  
And no gravel, I'll bet.

HARRY  
You're probably right, kid.

GEORGE  
Gee, that sounds wonderful.

HARRY  
Only one trouble, kid -- pickin' the mode of transportation.

GEORGE  
Well, you could hold your head above water, Harry.

HARRY  
No, no, kid. I get within three feet of the surface and I get airsick. It's gotta be somethin' special --  
moxie, kid, moxie!

GEORGE  
Well, what about...

*(A noose comes from the flies, but an enormous noose, made of four inch hemp. THEY consider it and HARRY's hand goes instinctively to HIS throat. HE shakes HIS head)*

HARRY  
No, no, kid! For Pete's sake, how did you think that up?  
*(the noose goes)*

Why, anything would be better than that, even --  
*(An outsize meat cleaver makes its appearance from the flies. It has a certain attractiveness for HARRY, but not for GEORGE)*

GEORGE  
Oh. Oh, no, Harry. Oh, what a mess that would be.  
*(to the cleaver)*

Out, leave.  
*(IT starts, then hesitates)*

Go on, you heard me.

*(IT goes)*

HARRY  
It's sort of flashy, you know?

GEORGE  
Oh, Harry, don't even...

HARRY  
Yeah, yeah, you're right, kid. It is kind of -- messy.

GEORGE  
What about --  
*(looks around cautiously)*

HARRY  
What is it, kid?

GEORGE  
What about -- the shark?

HARRY  
*(blanches. Visibly shaken)*  
For Pete's sake, kid, not so loud. Come over here. Now what the hell brought that up? I just about think I got you figured and you pull this.

GEORGE  
I didn't mean any harm, Harry. I just thought you'd like a helpful suggestion.

HARRY  
Well I do, but -- the shark. Ugkhh. How did you ever think of that?

GEORGE  
I have lots of time for thought, you know. Celestina isn't always exactly on time.

HARRY  
Celestina? For Pete's --

GEORGE  
And sometimes I think about how I'd make the trip if I ever decided on my own to do it.

HARRY  
Why, kid. Why should you ever want to make the big break?

GEORGE

Well, the waiting does get longish sometimes, especially about the second night, and sometimes I -- well, I get to doubting, because I don't consider myself...

HARRY

What, kid?

GEORGE

Well, I'm not the most magnetic fish in the bowl. I don't have much moxie, I guess, Harry, like you. And Celestina is so attractive to men.

HARRY

What's she like?

GEORGE

Oh, not like Gertrude. Like -- well, like Celestina. So wonderful and tender.

HARRY

Isn't that strange, kid? I think I must have know her once.

GEORGE

Oh, if you did, you'd remember her!

HARRY

And for her you'd....

GEORGE

If I ever thought she... Oh, yes, Harry, for her I would.

HARRY

But the shark.

GEORGE

It's the only way, Harry. He's power and movement and fierceness. He thrashes and never sleeps. Harry, it's *his* fish bowl.

HARRY

No, kid, no! Me, *I'm* moxie -- not him. He's not moxie, kid.

(*beat*)

Is he?

GEORGE

(*awe and mystery*)

When you told me what it was, I thought of him.

HARRY

Oh no! You're not fakin' me outta my life.

GEORGE

Oh, Harry, I didn't mean anything like that.

HARRY

No, you don't, kid. I got my mode of transportation now.

*(to the flies)*

Okay up there! I'm ready! You watch the genuine article make an exit, kid, and you'll never doubt again.

*(to the flies)*

Awright, awright, let's go up there! See that boat bottom up there, kid? That's some guy fishing. I'm giving myself to the service of a higher order.

*(pause. To the flies)*

What the hellaya doin' up there, anyway??

*(A meat hook on a rope, with a large viscous blob labeled "worm" on it, plummets out of the flies)*

Build an exit and what the hell happens?

GEORGE

Harry, don't do it. Think it over before you...

HARRY

Oh, shut up.

*(Jerks on the line a couple of times and steps onto the crook of the hook. Beat. To the flies)*

Come on, come on!

*(starts into the flies. Muttering on the way up)*

David Belasco wouldn't of put up with this crap!

GEORGE

*(Looks up after HARRY. Breaks the mood, looks around. Sees forget-me-nots, picks them up, looks at watch, sighs, smiling. Spots the banana peel, crosses, picks it up, examines it, looks up to where HARRY has exited, shakes head. Wanders back to bench examining banana peel. Carefully puts it in refuse container near where HE is eating lunch. Sits on bench, folds hands on lap. Looks quickly right, jumps up)*

Celestina?

*(Relaxes, smiles, wanders back to seat, sits, folds hands on lap. Great commotion off left. Voices, swearing, breaking glass, clanging bell. GEORGE jumps up again, startled. More swearing, bucket*

*bounces all over hell, obvious physical struggle.  
The final is comprehensible:)*

VOICE

*(off)*  
Now Get off my boat and stay off!  
*(And HARRY lurches in left, coming to rest flat on  
his back)*

GEORGE

Did something go wrong?

HARRY

Goddam ingrates! Of all the nerve -- ! The next time he --

GEORGE

Harry! What happened?

HARRY

I no sooner got in the boat than he slapped me on a ruler and took a fit of laughing. I never been so humiliated in all my life.

GEORGE

Harry, if I can help at all...

HARRY

Aw shut up! If anything else happens today --

MESSENGER

*(enters)*  
Telegram! Telegram for George!

HARRY

That does it!

GEORGE

Here. I'm George.

MESSENGER

Here y'are.  
*(gives GEORGE telegram. Turns toward the audience.)*  
Hey Mom, I made it! I told you I would!  
*(carries on in this fashion as HARRY sneaks up behind  
and tries to whack the MESSENGER's head, as before.  
MESSENGER ducks, pivots and kicks HARRY a good one in  
the shin. Yelling, kicking, slapping and punching*

*from both a la the Three Stooges, until the MESSENGER notices GEORGE, who has opened and read the telegram, and is now staring straight ahead.)*

Hey, wait a minute.

*(HARRY turns as GEORGE lets the telegram slip from HIS fingers. HARRY picks it up and begins reading as GEORGE crosses to bench with vigor, throws down flowers, picks up knife from lunch box. HARRY turns as GEORGE crosses down center, utterly broken and fiercely resolute)*

HARRY

Gee, kid, I don't know what to -- Oh, Christ, kid, don't! The shark smells that blood, he'll be here in thirty seconds.!

MESSENGER

Shark!

HARRY

Shut up, dammit! Kid, listen to me --

*(a slash across GEORGE's arm stops HARRY's cross toward HIM)*

Oh no!

MESSENGER

What's wrong with him? What's he doing?

HARRY

Shut up! Get out, get under cover!

*(MESSENGER exits. GEORGE is waving his arms furiously, bitterly, crying)*

Oh, kid, come on, behind the house here, it's not too late.

*(sound of approaching jet plane comes in, softly at first)*

Oh no! Here he comes! Come on, kid!

*(jet is louder)*

Oh God!

*(HARRY jumps behind the castle)*

Kid, take cover!

*(louder, a fearful din. GEORGE stops waving, then holds arms out in a gentle, sad welcome. Still louder. HARRY pulls back behind the castle.)*

Take cover!

*(Louder, to apex. Fast recession. At the break toward diminuendo, GEORGE turns upstage, as if looking after the shark. HARRY comes from behind the*

*castle, also looking upstage. Pause. HARRY turns to GEORGE. GEORGE lowers arms to side. Bows head. Looks around on the ground for something or other. Kicks a little at the floor. Sees the forget-me-nots on seat, crosses, picks them up. HARRY approaches a few steps.)*

What are you going to do now, George?

GEORGE

*(looks at watch, then at HARRY)*

Oh. I think I'll wait around a little while longer.

HARRY

Yeah. Well. I think I'll be moving on.

*(softly)*

Never sleep under the same wave twice, you know. So long, kid.

GEORGE

So long, Harry.

*(HARRY exits. GEORGE looks after HIM. Looks at the forget-me-nots, at HIS watch, and at the refuse container. Sighs. Crosses slowly to refuse container, looks at flowers, and gently drops them in. Crosses back to the bench, sits, folds hands on lap)*

CURTAIN