

The Fisherman  
& His Wife and Kids

by  
Michael Kaplan

1st Draft  
April 2009

mkap926@aol.com  
2517 Blvd. Del Campo  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
(805) 440-2695

FADE UP ON:

A title card:

*Once Upon a Time There Was a Fisherman...*

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SAN LUIS OBISPO - WEE HOURS

A suburban street in Central California. Not the big city, but the quiet, sun-drenched, grape-growing coast 3 hours north of Los Angeles.

It's 20 minutes before dawn. Still dark.

We glide towards a modest family home.

Camera keeps moving to the lawn and down to...

A sprinkler head that's weeping. Audibly sputtering.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ON A CLOCK: 4:58.

It changes to 4:59 and a hand reaches over and disables the alarm before it goes off.

TOM SABEN waits in bed. He's 43: handsome, athletic. A man's man who's softened into the family fixer.

The clock strikes 5.

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The irrigation clicks and the sprinklers come on: a full, orchestrated blast that waters the front lawn evenly...

And immediately shrinks into a sad flutter. Except for the weeping sprinkler head, which shoots a plume straight up onto the roof of the house.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tom hears the pitter-patter on the roof and winces. He rolls out of bed.

KATIE, 40, a hard sleeper, mutters.

KATIE  
Did it work?

TOM  
Negative.

KATIE  
This house hates us.

TOM  
(insistent)  
I know what it is. I tried the  
wrong thing, I'll get it.

He begins to dress. His closet door is off the runners. It opens about half way, then makes a scraping noise.

KATIE  
When's Bobby's game?

TOM  
9. Warm-ups 8:15.

KATIE  
Am I doing snack?

TOM  
No snack. No drinks. Take him  
there, take him home. You're done  
by 11.  
(beat)  
See if you can bring Carla.  
(no response)  
Otherwise she's on the couch all  
day with her phone.

KATIE  
She'll just take it to the game.

TOM  
Maybe her battery's low.

He kisses her on the nose.

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - DAWN

He heads down the hall and stops to examine a discolored part of the ceiling.

He takes the bathroom plunger and probes the spot with the wooden handle. It's spongy to the touch.

He sighs. Add it to the list.

The subtle sound of electronic beeping is coming from a bedroom. He glances in at his daughter.

CARLA, 13, is barely awake. But tapping away.

TOM  
Who you texting?

CARLA  
(almost growling)  
Somebody.

EXT. TOM'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Tom takes Lucy, the family labrador, for a quick stroll up the block and back.

He nods to MRS. SIEGEL, an elderly woman who has taken up her daily spot on the front porch.

MRS. SIEGEL  
Who's walking who?

TOM  
Excellent question.

He jogs the rest of the way back home, waving at the couple next door (we'll meet them later).

Tom disappears into the backyard with the dog. He has to slam the gate 3 times before it latches properly.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen is another room screaming for a makeover. Chips and pockmarks in the counter, a sink stained permanent gray.

Lucy the lab comes through the doggie door: a sliding screen with a huge rip in it.

Tom puts a kettle on for coffee. After a misfire, he finds a working burner. He suddenly straightens up, listening carefully.

TOM  
Under the table.

His son BOBBY, 10 and small for his age, crouches under the breakfast nook.

BOBBY  
You'd already be shot.

TOM  
Maybe in the ankle. Plus, who shoots a man making tuna fish?

BOBBY  
I would. It's gross.  
(beat)  
Do you think I'll make all-stars?

TOM  
I don't know. You deserve it. It all depends on the coach.

BOBBY  
Can I do some Playstation?

TOM  
Put your clean clothes away, make your bed, and read one article in the paper.

BOBBY  
Dad!

TOM  
Your brain needs to know it's awake. Before you freak it out with screens.

Tom gathers up everything and kisses his son on the head.

TOM  
Have a great game.

EXT. PETE & DORIS' HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Tom's parents live in a much nicer house bought forty years earlier.

Tom carefully backs up beside a small motorboat. DORIS and PETE come out the front door. She's in her bathrobe, he's dressed for fishing.

Tom embraces them both, then starts working the hitch.

DORIS  
Watch your back.

TOM  
I'm fine, mom.

DORIS  
Make sure he wears a hat.

TOM  
He's 81. I can't tell him anything.

INT. TOM'S CAR/EXT. SAN LUIS OBISPO - EARLY MORNING

Pete goes through the food bag at his feet.

PETE  
There better be some crap in here.

TOM  
You want Ruffles or Oreos?

PETE  
Pull away from the house!

The round the corner, and Pete goes for a frosted Poptart.

PETE  
So how's everybody?

TOM  
We're good. We're great. Bobby's getting ready for all-star try-outs.

PETE  
Still swinging for the fences?

TOM

Yeah.

PETE

He oughta learn to bunt.

TOM

I know.

PETE

So work with him.

TOM

(sighs)

Teaching your son to bunt. It's like teaching him to sell insurance.

PETE

And Carla?

TOM

She's 13. Feels like she's angry all the time. Sits in her room tapping on the phone.

PETE

That's not a social life.

Tom's phone RINGS.

TOM

Hey, babe.

KATIE (V.O.)

The hot water ran out. After two minutes.

TOM

Ah god.

KATIE (V.O.)

This house hates me.

Tom has grabbed a sharpie and written **Hot W** on the tip of his finger.

TOM

I'll look at it tonight.

KATIE (V.O.)  
Can we just call a plumber?

TOM  
Not on a Saturday.

KATIE (V.O.)  
I need a real shower before Monday.

TOM  
I know what it is. I promise.

KATIE (V.O.)  
Okay.  
(joking, mostly)  
Are you coming home now?

TOM  
Ha ha. Love you.

He hangs up. A silence hangs between father and son.

TOM  
What was your key?

PETE  
For what?

TOM  
Keeping mom happy. You always knew  
how.

PETE  
Your mother has a gift for  
happiness. My job was not to do  
anything stupid.

EXT. SANTA MARGARITA LAKE - EARLY MORNING

Tom drives along the oak-strewn back roads and enters the  
park.

EXT. SANTA MARGARITA LAKE - PIER - EARLY MORNING

He backs the boat down into the water.



EXT SANTA MARGARITA LAKE - EARLY MORNING

Pete steers the boat across the water. We now see its name:  
*Fortuna.*

He and Tom confer over the roar of the motor and head towards  
a far corner.

EXT. SANTA MARGARITA LAKE - MORNING

It's quiet now. The two men tie their lines.

TOM  
Wait a minute.

He pops his tackle box. There's a small wrapped gift.

TOM  
Happy birthday.

Pete excitedly opens the gift. It's a multi-colored lure,  
beautiful in its miniature detail.

PETE  
You make this?

Tom nods.

PETE  
Looks like a winner.

He starts to tie it on. Tom allows himself a proud smile.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SANTA MARGARITA LAKE - DAY

Pete is asleep against the side of the boat. Sawing logs.

Tom bends over and straightens his father's hat so it blocks  
the sun. The fishing pole lies across his lap, line still in  
the water.

Tom lifts and slides the pole away without waking his father.  
He goes to the middle of the boat, pulling the line with him.

The line yanks violently. Startled, Tom reels in.

It's a genuine struggle. After a bit of back and forth, he pulls out a beautiful five-pound bass.

The FISH flops on the bottom of the boat, mouth opening and closing.

FISH  
Too much air! Too much air!

Tom's eyes go wide. The fish is looking right at him.

FISH  
DO SOMETHING!!

Tom stumbles forward. He tries to remove his homemade lure from the fish's mouth. The fish thrashes and Tom gets jabbed.

TOM  
Ow! Hold still!

FISH  
The lip! The pain! Too much air!

TOM  
There!

He pulls it out. The fish lies slack in his hands, croaking.

FISH  
I die. Now I diiiiiiiiee.

Spooked, Tom pitches the fish overboard. With a splash, it disappears.

PETE  
(stirring)  
What was that?

TOM  
A talking fish.

Pete gives him a look. Tom has to laugh.

TOM  
He said he was dying and I felt bad and threw him back.

PETE  
But he was under, right?

Tom indicates minnow-size with his fingers. Pete is clearly relieved.

PETE

Did you make a wish?

TOM

No. That's funny.

Pete takes his pole and casts out.

Tom sucks the blood off his index finger. He sees the letters beside the cut: *HOT W.*

He gazes out at the water and whispers so his father won't hear.

TOM

I wish my house was perfect.

He casts his line into the water.

EXT. TOM'S NEIGHBORHOOD- DAY

Mrs. Siegel sits on the front porch with her needle point. Gazing towards the street, looking at nothing in particular.

She hears a whimper at the screen door. She gets up and lets her ancient poodle onto the porch.

She settles back down and...her eyes narrow.

Tom and Katie's house practically sparkles. Lawn beautifully manicured. No cracks, no peeling paint.

The old woman glances down at her dog, trying to puzzle it out.

EXT. PETE'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

Tom pulls up in front of his dad's house. His mother comes out the door, waving.

TOM

You want some Ruffles for the road?

PETE

I have no idea what you're talking about.

They have a quick hug in the car.

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - TWILIGHT

Tom pulls into his driveway. He gets out of the car and stands in shock.

His house looks flawless, almost radiating a subtle glow of well-being.

Tom walks to the front door. Not wanting to jinx the moment. He gathers himself and enters.

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tom drinks in every detail. The pristine paint job. The rock-steady ceilings.

There's a happy bark and Lucy comes running in through a real doggie door.

TOM

No way.

INT. TOM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS SHOTS

Tom opens and closes the medicine cabinet.

He turns on the hot water in the shower.

Runs the garbage disposal.

Opens the automatic garage door.

Lights all four burners on the oven.

Slides his closet door back and forth

Taps the ceiling with a broom handle.

Returns to feel the shower water. Still cooking away.

EXT. TOM'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front lawn irrigation goes off with a blast: strong, balanced, not a drop out of place.

Tom jumps up and down on the front stoop like Rocky.

Katie's old Volvo station wagon pulls into the driveway. Tom cuts the water and moves to greet them. Bobby is blue, Carla is glowering, Katie is jangled.

CARLA

I am SO DONE with this family!

She tromps into the house. Katie looks at Tom, exasperated.

KATIE

She spent the whole time texting Chelsea--who's planning some thing and won't tell her what it is so of course that puts her in a crap mood the whole time. And then we're in the outlet center and we find these really cute jeans but she rejects them outright because of course I'm the one who's saying they're nice.

BOBBY

(a little plaintive)  
Hi pops.

TOM

How was your game?

BOBBY

Fly ball. Pop up. Come backer.  
Pop up. I need a new bat.

KATIE

We checked them out, and the cheapest ones are like 95 bucks.

BOBBY

I would pay half!

KATIE

I said I'm not buying a new bat until I have hot water.

TOM

We have hot water.

BOBBY

Yessssss!

TOM

As a matter of fact: I have a surprise inside.

BOBBY

Awesome!

He races into the house.

Tom gives Katie a kiss and escorts her to the front door.

TOM

The house likes you again.

KATIE

Oh my god.

Tom can barely contain his glee.

TOM

I got lucky, and lined up a few people to all come today. Take care of some stuff.

Katie stands there, stunned.

TOM

(beaming)

The whole list. This is why I keep a list.

KATIE

Who did you get?

They're interrupted by Carla, in a rage.

CARLA

Were you in my room?

TOM

I wasn't. The dry wall guys. Maybe a painter.

CARLA

You can't just go in my room without asking!

She turns tail and disappears down the hall.

KATIE

Who did you get?

TOM

Uh, some guys we'd never heard of. Sara White, from United Way? She knew this crew, like three contractors and a maid. They do plumbing, electric, dry wall, sheet rock. Painting. Even irrigation.

Katie doesn't look thrilled.

KATIE

How much?

TOM

A *lot less* than you'd think.

(adding)

I wanted it to be a surprise.

Kate gives him a long look.

KATIE

If I did something like this you'd lose your mind.

She heads down the hall. Bobby looks at his dad, still expectant.

BOBBY

Is that the whole surprise.

TOM

Yeah.

BOBBY

Big whoop.

Tom is left by himself in the dining room. He turns the chandelier on. Off. On. It works beautifully.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Bobby's coming up to bat in a Little League game. The opposing coach is shouting to his players.

COACH

Tommy, Evan!! EDGE OF THE GRASS!  
Duncan: hug the line, behind the bag. Louie: DEEP! PLAY DEEP.  
It's going in the air!

All the outfielders have been brought in, the infielders moved back. It's like a defensive half-circle. One of the outfielders starts talking trash.

OUTFIELDER  
Hey-hey. Slappy McPop-up!

Tom, pacing behind the backstop, mutters at the coach.

TOM  
You don't put a shift on for Little League. That messes a kid up.

COACH  
It's not a shift. They're playing shallow.

TOM  
You told them to move. They *shifted*.

Bobby shakes his wrists (a nervous tic we see from time to time). He picks up the bat and steps into the box.

He lines the first pitch in a soft arc over third base. The left fielder is right there to grab it. Whoops from the opposing team and their fans.

Disgusted, Tom goes back to Katie.

TOM  
He hits the ball every time. Why should he be punished?

Katie hasn't been paying attention

KATIE  
I'm watching snack bar psychodrama.

Tom follows her gaze. Carla is hanging around four other middle school girls.

The center of that hub is CHELSEA, tiny and vivacious. Body language indicates there are two pairs, with Carla very much the 5th wheel.

KATIE  
Look at her. She can't crack the circle. I swear I'm going to go over and smack them all in the face.