

PALMER THOMPSON  
HOLMES, NEW YORK

PATTERSON 2686

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THE DROWNING FISH  
by  
Palmer Thompson

CAST

MARK TRAIL

CHERRY DAVIS

PETE DENHAM

RUSS TRAYNOR

{ JOE MOLINA

{ VINCE

NARR: On a small island off the coast of New England, stands the factory and plant of the Molina Packing company, a fish cannery. As the gathering dusk cloaks the building in deep blue shadows, two men emerge from a door labled "Office". They are Peter Denham, head salesman for the company, and Russ Traynor, production manager. Definitely not friends they stride wordlessly down the beach towards a lone figure standing knee deep in the surf, casting for fish with a long bamboo rod. He is Joe Molina, president of the company. As he sees the two men approach, he reels in his line and walks out of the surf onto the shore.

(LOW ROAR OF SURF BEHIND SCENE)

JOE: (SLIGHT ITALIAN) Hallo, Pete, Russ.

RUSS: Hello, Mr. Molina.

PETE: Hi.

JOE: They tella you ina office I want to see you?

RUSS: Yes.

JOE: Suppose you know why, hah?

PETE: Haven't the faintest idea, Joe.

JOE: All the time kid, eh Pete.

PETE: Life's too short to take it serious, Joe.

JOE: I'ma feller what know you right. Gettin old myself.

RUSS: I wouldn't say that, Mr. Molina.

JOE: Maybe you don't say Iam, but I fell I am. Can'ta make up my mind, atsa good sign a man is getting old.

PETE: Now I wonder what you can't make up your mind about, Joe?

RUSS: Let's stop the sparing, the three of us know what

RUSS: (CONTINUED) This is all about.

JOE: Atsa Russ, always direct, to the point. Gooda production man for that reason.

PETE: Well he's certainly not subtle.

RUSS: Why should I be, we both know Mr. Molina wants to retire, and that he's picked one of us to replace him as president of the cannery.

PETER: That's not only laying it on the line. That's throwing it on the line.

JOE: But he's right. Trouble is I don't know which one, you botha such gooda men.

PETE: Why thank you, Joe.

JOE: Atsa why I come out here to fish in the surf. Sometime she clear the mind, but this time no.

PETE: Maybe because you haven't caught anything, eh, Joe?

JOE: Isa to early for the bass to run. Be ten twelve days before they come in.

PETE: I'll have to remember that.

JOE: Why. You gonna fish to?

PETE: Why not.

JOE: I never knew you lika surf fishing.

PETE: There's a lot of things about me that you don't know, Joe.

RUSS: You good at it, Pete?

PETE: Good enough.

RUSS: Better than me?

PETE: I'd take my chances against you.

JOE: Watch out, Pete. Russ is one good man witha bamboo rod.

PETE: I'm no slouch myself.

RUSS: Well in that case I think we can settle Mr. Molina's problem.

JOE: Oh?

PETE: How?

RUSS: When the bass start running we'll have a fishing contest. The one who wins gets the job.

JOE: Mnnn.

PETE: Isn't that a pretty silly way to decide an important position like that.

JOE: I don't know, Pete.

PETE: What?

JOE: Like I said, either one of you could handle the job, you both are good men and I can't make up my mind. Since we can fish, maybe it's not so crazy to let the fish pick the new boss.

RUSS: Well, Pete. You said you were pretty good at this surf fishing. You willing to take your chances, or are you going to back down?

PETE: Back down. Sorry, Russ, no. A good salesman never does. It's a deal. We'll let the fish elect a president.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

MARK: (CHUCKLES) Of all the crazy.....(CHUCKLES)

CHERRY: What's so funny in the telegram, Mark. Who's it from?

MARK: Pete Denham, Cherry. Remember him?

CHERRY: Denham?

MARK: The boy who was a lieutenant in my company in the army. He was here at Lost Forest a couple of times.

CHERRY: Oh yes, that good looking boy, the fish salesman.

MARK: That's him.

CHERRY: As I remember it, he was inclined to stretch the truth a little.

MARK: Let's say embellish the facts, an occupational disease of most salesmen.

CHERRY: What does he want?

MARK: Listen. (READING) Opened my mouth too wide once again. Stop. Have both feet and one arm in it now. Stop Entire career rests on claim I made to be world's greatest surf fisherman when in fact I am only world's greatest big mouth Stop.

CHERRY: He's candid about himself.

MARK: If you have ever fished surf help Stop At least come east and show me which end of the line to place the hook on. Stop Have twelve days to become an expert, with two days to travel, that leaves ten days to teach me Stop Can you do it, Please Stop Help Stop Help Stop Help Stop.

CHERRY: Three helps, and a western union prices. He sounds desperate.

MARK: Now what could make surf fishing that important?

CHERRY: That's one item he neglected to tell you.

MARK: I'll bet you it was deliberate. He's salesman, he knows knows how to stimulate curiosity.

CHERRY: You going to go, Mark?

MARK: A couple of weeks at the seashore, some surf fishing.

CHERRY: Sounds like a nice rest.

MARK: Which we could both use. Yes, Cherry, I think we'll go if only to find out why Pete Denham has suddenly

MARK: (CONTINUED) become so interested in durf fishing.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(KNOCK ON DOOR)

RUSS: Come in.

(DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES)

(FOOTSTEPS FADE ON)

VINCE: (FADE ON) You sent for me, Mr. Traynor.

RUSS: Yes, Vince. Sit down.

(CHAIR SCRAPE)

RUSS: You've been running the motor boat between this island and the mainland for about three years, haven't you Vince?

VINCE: That's right, Mr. Traynor.

RUSS: Like the job?

VINCE: Why sure.

RUSS: Manage to pick up a little money on the side, don't you?

VINCE: What do you mean?

RUSS: Smuggleing.

VINCE: That's a lie, if anyone says.....

RUSS: Take it easy, Vince. I don't care.

VINCE: Huh?

RUSS: And don't try to deny it. I'm no fool. I know you've been picking up packages from different tramp steamers lying off shore.

VINCE: Listen, Mr. Traynor, I'll tell you....

RUSS: Don't bother. I said I don't care. In fact I'll do you the favor of forgettint it right now, if you'll do me a favor.

VINCE: Oh? What?

RUSS: You're picking up a man on the mainland this afternoon,  
a Mr. Mark Trail.

VINCE: That's right. A friend of Mr. Denham.

RUSS: Well let's say no friend of Mr. Denham is a friend of mine.

VINCE: So?

RUSS: You're docking at the concrete quay?

VINCE: I always do.

RUSS: Well if a accident should happen, if this Mr. Trail should  
fall between the boat and the quay, I wouldn't be unhappy.

VINCE: A man could get killed, the boat could crush him against  
the quay.

RUSS: Could it?

VINCE: You want him ki.....

RUSS: I want an accident, Vince, that's all.

VINCE: Okay, Mr. Traynor, you'll get one. A fatal accident to  
Mr. Mark Trail.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

NARR: Well it looks like the rest that Mark and Cherry are looking  
forward to is going to turn into a riot of action instead.  
We'll learn what happens in a moment, but first.....(COMMERCIAL)

NARR: Now back to Mark Trail. Mark and Cherry in response to a wire from a friend of theirs, Pete Denham, are on their way to the island of the coast of New England where the cannery Pete works for is located. They both are looking forward to a rest, and Mark is anticipating a couple of weeks of surf fishing with Pete, whom he has agreed to instruct in the sport. As they near the concrete quay in the motorboat piloted by Vince Carter, they see Pete Denham waiting for them.

(MOTORBOAT ENGINE)

(LAPPING OF WAVES AGAINST BOAT)

MARK: There's Pete now, Cherry.

CHERRY: Looks as chipper as ever.

PETE: (OFF) Hello, Mark. Cherry.

MARK: (UP) Hi, Pete.

PETE: (OFF) Good to see you.

VINCE: (SLIGHTLY OFF) Mr. Trail.

MARK: Yes?

VINCE: Will you toss that bow rope to Mr. Denham so that we can tie up.

MARK: Whenever you say.

(MOTORBOAT ENGINE IDLES)

(HOLD)

VINCE: Okay, Mr. Trail.

MARK: Here, Pete catch.

(OFF ROPE DROPS TO QUAY)

PETE: Got it, Mark.

MARK: What about the stern rope.

VINCE: I'll toss that on the quay.

MARK: Okay. Come on, Cherry. Think you can make it?



CHERRY: I've done it before, Mark.

MARK: Hold my hand for balance.

PETE: (FADING ON) Here Cherry give me your other hand.

CHERRY: Right.

(JUMP TO CONCRETE QUAY)

CHERRY: There. I'm always afraid the boat will drift away from the dock and I'll be doing an involuntary split.

PETE: I'll get you a date in vaudeville if you do, Cherry. Come on, Mark give me your hand.

MARK: (SKIGHTLY OFF) Don't bother, Pete. I can make it all right.

CHERRY: Well, Pete, what.....

(MOTORBOAT ENGINE SUDDENLY STARTS)

PETE: Mark, Look out the boats moving away from the dock.

CHERRY: Jump, Mark. You'll be crushed between the boat and the dock.

MARK: (SLIGHTLY OFF) I can't. I'm off balance.

PETE: Mark, don't.....

(PLUNGE IN WATER)

PETE: He dove in. VENCE THE boat...keep it away from the dock.

(SUDDEN SURGE OF MOTORBOAT POWER)

CHERRY: No, away! Away from the dock.

(GRINDING RASP OF BOAT AGAINST QUAY)

CHERRY: Oh, no.

PETE: Vince, I said.....

VINCE: (OFF) I can't move it away. The bow rope's holding it in.

PETE: Then cut your motor. She'll drift out.

VINCE: (OFF) Right.

(MOTORBOAT ENGINE IDLES)

CHERRY: Come on, Pete. It's drifting away from the dock. Mark might have got in between the pilings.

PETE: He couldn't. It's a solid wall of concrete.

CHERRY: There's no sign of him.

PETE: Oh, no. I'll never forgive myself if.....

VINCE: (FADING ON) Mr.. Denham, I don't know how it.....

MARK: (WAY OFF) Hallo!

CHERRY: Mark.

PETE: Where I.....

MARK: (WAY OFF) Hallo!

CHERRY: On the other side of the boat. Come on.

(ROPE FALLS IN WATER)

PETE: Grab the rope, Mark. We'll pull you up.

MARK: (OFF) Okay, I got it. Haul away. I never did enjoy swimming in my clothes on.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

VINCE: Mr. Trail, I don't.....

MARK: Forget it. Accidents happen.

CHERRY: You might have been killed.

MARK: I wasn't.

PETE: How did you.....

MARK: Well the boat and the dock started to part company I figured the best thing for me to do would be to dive and try and get under the boats

MARK: (CONTINUED) Keel. So I dived and I did.

PETE: Thank heaven for that.

MARK: Had to go down pretty far. That's a big boat for a one man operation. It draws a lot of water.

VINCE: I know, Mr. Trail, if you'd been....you see what happened was I stumbled against the throttle and...

MARK: And it's water under the bridge. Which reminds me I've got a lot of water in my clothes so how about getting me someplace where I can change Pete, and then you can tell us about this big surf fishing crisis of yours.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

VINCE: I tried, Mr. Traynor.

RUSS: So I gathered from what I've heard.

VINCE: But that man Trail, thinks quick and acts fast. I was lucky I could cover it as an accident.

RUSS: You sure you did?

VINCE: Yes, but I wouldn't want to try anything else. That would be sure to make them suspicious of me.

RUSS: All right, Vince. Just keep an eye on Trail and Denham.

VINCE: Why?

RUSS: Trail's suppose to instruct him in the sport of surfishing I want to know how Denham progresses.

VICNE: So it's true..

RUSS: What is?

VINCE: The rumoe around the cannery that you and Denham are having a contest and the winner becomes president.

RUSS: That's right, Vince. And I could be mighty grateful to a man who helped me win.

VINCE: You name it, Mr. Traynor, and I'll do it.

RUSS: Good boy, Vince. Just keep watching them Vince. I've got an idea of my own I'm going to try. If it doesn't work, then I'll have something else for you to do, and this time it won't fail.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

MARK: (DIP IN) You really did open your mouth, didn't you Pete.

PETE: I sure did, Mark.

CHERRY: Why don't you try some adhesive tape across your lips.

PETE: That's a wonderful suggestion Cherry, only late.

MARK: Well, let's see what we can do. Just what do you know about surf fishing, Pete?

PETE: Nothing.

MARK: At least we start from scratch.

CHERRY: You know you use a pole and line?

PETE: I gathered that much. Always seemed kind of silly to me when you can get so many more fish with a net.

MARK: Pete, the idea is not the fish you get, but the thrill you get out of fishing.

PETE: Well I'm ready to be thrilled, just teach me.

CHERRY: First you'll need some surf fishing equipment, won't you, Mark?

MARK: Definitely. I bought some.....

PETE: Don't bother. I went to a sport store on the

PETE: (CONTINUED) mainland and ordered three of everything anyone needs for the sport. It's all down in a shack on the beach..

MARK: Then let's go. The sooner we start the better chance you have of winning this silly contest.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES)

JOE: Ah, come in, Russ, come in.

RUSS: Thank you Mr. Molina.

JOE: Now....you say you want to see me. What's she about.

RUSS: This is a little bit difficult to talk about.

JOE: Oh?

RUSS: It's not that. It's just that it's not fair to Pete Denham.

JOE: So?

RUSS: Well, Pete actually lied, I mean more or less exasperated. You see he's never really done any fishing.

JOE: You think I don't know this, Russ.

RUSS: You do.

JOE: Of course, I know Pete's weaknesses as well as his strength. He stretches the truth some time tells the tall story.

RUSS: Well then, Mr. Molina I should think you'd....

JOE: But when he gets caught, he doesn't try to back down. That's what I like about him. He does his best to learn how to live up to what he

JOE: (CONTINUED) say he cana do.

RUSS: I see Mr. Molina.

JOE: And Russ, I tella you one thing I don't like.

RUSS: Yes.

JOE: Thatsa for fellows to carry tales.

RUSS: Mr. Molina, I was just thinking about Pete and....

JOE: Sure, sure....but he'sa no cry....and you gota the big advantage over him. You fish lotta times. So letsa forget this talk, Russ. Pete's a willing to ~~take~~ his chances .....you take yours.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(RIAR OF SURF)

MARK: Come on, Pete. Get a better hold of that bamboo rod, balance it right.

PETE: It's so doggone long. Nearly ten feet, I'll bet you.

MARK: We'll get one longer if we have to. Hold it so it doesn't get topheavy on you.. That's the way.

MUSIC: UP AND DOWN

PETE: How am I doing, Mark?

MARK: You're handling the pole all right. Now try a cast.

PETE: All right. There..

MARK: No, no Pete.. You've got to handle the rod like a whip. The idea in surf casting is to get distance. Get your hook out beyond the breakers. Like this.

(WHISTLE OF CORD THROUGH AIR)

MUSIC: STING

(ROAR OF SURF)

MARK: That's the idea, Pete. Wade in as far as you can.

PETE: These breakers could batter a man to pieces.

MARK: Not if you're set for them. And remember every foot you walk out gives you that much more distance.

PETE: Okay, Mark.....I'll.....

MARK: Watch it, Pete.

(ROAR OF A BIG BREAKER)

PETE: (SPLITTING) Whoof.....ow.....that caught me when I wasn't looking.

MARK: You've always got to be looking. Now try another cast.

(WHISTLE OF CORD THROUGH AIR)

MARK: That's the way, Pete. You're getting the idea.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(ROAR OF SURF)

CHERRY: Over this way both of you. I've got some coffee and hot dogs on the fire.

MARK: (FADE ON) Wonderful, Cherry.

PETE: They'll hit the spot.

MARK: Nothing like sea air to give you an appetite.

PETE: How am I doing, Cherry?

CHERRY: You look good to me.

PETE: Mark?

MARK: Well I won't say you're the greatest surf fisherman in the world.....

PETE: Oh....

MARK: But with luck you'll more than hold your own.

PETE: Luck I got.

MARK: Good.. That's the onething every fisherman needs

MARK: (CONTINUED) that no one can give him.

PETE: I've got a chance.

MARK: You bet you have.. You come out here tomorrow for another session with the rod and line and you'll have an even chance with any man.

PETE: Including you?

MARK: Including me. Now let's wrap ourselves around those hot dogs.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

RUSS: He's become that good, eh Vince.

VINCE: You want my honest opinion, Mr. Traynor?

RUSS: Give out.

VINCE: You hold that contest, and it's just a matter of luck. Whoever the fish run to bite will be the winner, because Mr. Denham won't lose any time in rebating, casting, or getting bowled over by the surf.

RUSS: Luck, eh.

VINCE: That's the size of it. Pretty big job riding on the way a fish bites..

RUSS: To big.

VINCE: What can you do?

RUSS: I don't have to leave it up to luck.

VINCE: No?

RUSS: No. When Denham leaves the plant to meet Trail and the girl on the beach I'll take the short cut around the cliff by the sea..

VINCE: That's right.

RUSS: Could be a dangerous way to go.



VINCE: Not particularly. I use it myself. It's a narrow path but solid.

RUSS: If a man was to fall off it, a man who wasn't a good swimmer, he'd be in a bad spot. The current, the undertow is strong at that point.

VINCE: That's right.

RUSS: Well?

VINCE: Look, Mr. Traynor, pushing a guy.....

RUSS: Who said anything about pushing?

VINCE: You didn't?

RUSS: I was thinking about digging.

VINCE: Digging??

RUSS: Suppose someone was to go out to that path tonight with a spade, a small pick....dig a hole on the side of it, and then cover that hole with some branches and dirt. If a man came along and stepped on that, he'd probably slide right into the sea.

VINCE: Yeah, he would.

RUSS: Think Denham might do that?

VINCE: I think he might, if it was worth my while.

RUSS: It will be worth your while, Vince. In cash as well as being top dog under me. What do you say?

VINCE: I guess I'll take a nap.

RUSS: What?

VINCE: Yeah, cause I'm going to be up late tonight...digging.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(ROAR OF SURF)

CHERRY:: Mark, you really think Pet's got a chance.

MARK: I do Cherry. You've seen his progress in handling a rod and line yourself.

CHERRY: He certainly learns fast enough.

MARK: That's one thing about, Pete, anyone calls his bluff he does his best to make sure it's not a bluff.

CHERRY: Look, he's coming around one now.

MARK: Oh, yeah the edge of that cliff.

PETE: (WAY OFF) Break out the equipment, Mark. Her come's old Isaac Walton himself.

CHERRY: Nothing ever fazes him.

MARK: (UP) It's already for you Isaca.

PETE: (OFF) Be there in.....

(SLIDING OF ROCKS OFF)

CHERRY: Mark, Look.....

PETE: (OFF) Help!

MARK: The path, it caved in!

(OFF PLUNGE IN WATER)

CHERRY: Mark, that current....

MARK: And Pete can't swim worht a hoot.

CHERRY: Look, he's thrashing around. Come on.

MARK: It's too far, Cherry. We'll never reach him in time.

CHERRY: We can't let him drown, Mark. We can't.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

NARR: Pete Denham, a poor swimmer caught in the strong ocean currents off New England. What will Mark

NARR: (CONTINUED) DO? We'll learn in a monment when we return to Mark Trail, but first.....(COMMERCIAL)

NARR: Now back to Mark Trail. Mark has been teaching Pete Denham, an old friend of his, the sport of surf fishing. As pete walked along a narrow path beside a cliff overlooking the ocean, the path caved in and Pete, a poor swimmer, plunged into the ssea. Mark and Cherry standing on the beach see this, but they seem powerless to help him as the distance is too far for Mark to swim before Pete goes down, and the path along the cliff is too high and narrow to permit for any rescue action.

(ROAR OF SURF)

CHERRY: Mark, we can't just watch him drown.

MARK: We're not going to. Hand me that surf fishing rod.

CHERRY: What.....

PETE: (WAY OFF) Hellp...Help....

MARK: I'm going to cast. If the line reaches him he can wind it around himself, and we can reel him in slowly.

CHERRY: Do you think you can, Mark? It's a long cast, almost fifty yards.

MARK: I'm going to try. You shout to him what to do while I get set for the cast.

PETE: (OFF) Help, Mark. Cherry....

CHERRY: (UP) Pete, Mark's going to cast. Try and grab the line. Wind it around yourself. Do you hear?

PETE: (OFF) Yes....but....hurry.....hurry.

MARK: Here goes, Cherry.

(WHISTLE OF CHORD THROUGH AIR)

CHERRY: Perfect, Mark. He's grabbed it. He's winding it around himself. Reel him in, Mark, Reel him in.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(ROAR OF SURF)

MARK: Got your breath back yet?

PETE: Just about.

MARK: Ugliest specimen of sea food I ever landed.

PETE: I thought for sure I was food for the sea.

CHERRY: What happened, Pete?

PETE: I don't know. I've been using that path for a long time. It just suddenly gave way under me.

CHERRY: Just all of a sudden. I wonder why.

MARK: So do I....and I think we ought to take a look and see if we can find the answer.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

PETE: Dug out?

MARK: No question of it. Look. You can see the spade and pick marks.

PETE: But who, why?

MARK: I'd guess, your competitor in this contest.

PETE: Traynor?

MARK: Well who else.....

CHERRY: Mark, Look what I've found.

MARK: A knife.

PETE: That's a fish scaling knife.

MARK: Look here on the handle V...I...N....

PETE: Vince.

CHERRY: The man in the motorboat.

PETE: Vince, why should he....

MARK: I don't know, Pete....but I've got a hunch that that accident to me at the dock was no more of an accident than this fall of yours. Come on. Let's ask Mr. Vince some questions and show him this knife.

MUSIC: BRIDGE

(DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES)

RUSS: Who.....Oh, Mr. Molina.

JOE: Atsa all right, Russ. Sit down, sit down.

RUSS: Of course, Mr. Molina, What did you want.

JOE: I been thinking about what you say. Abouta no havea the contest.

RUSS: Well I'm glad, Mr. Molina.

JOE: I thinka maybe itsa silly to leave a big job like this up to luck.

RUSS: That's the way, I felt to.

JOE: I know, atsa what Vince say.

RUSS: Vince?

JOE: Yes.....

(OPEN DOOR)

JOE: Come on ina, Mr. Trail, Pete.

RUSS: What's the meeting of this.

MARK: It means, Mr. Traynor, that we convinced Vince it wouldn't be smart to face a charge of attempted murder by himself.

RUSS: Attempted.....

(SUDDEN FOOTSTEPS)

PETE: Look out, Mark.

RUSS: Let me out of here.

MARK: Oh no!

PETE: Watch it, Mark. I'll get him.

(SCUFFLE)

RUSS: You won't.....

(SOCK ON JAW)

(BODY FALL)

MARK: Nice punch, Pete.

JOE: Hesa out cold.

PETE: I never knew I could do it.

JOE: Well this settles who's going to be president of the company when old Joe goes.

PETE: Oh, no.

MARK: What's the matter?

JOE: You no wanta the job.

PETE: Sure, but I was just thinking of a**ll** the work I put in learning how to surf fish and now I don't need it.

JOE: You need him all right. Part of your job is gonna be to keep Joe Molina happy, and I like a partener when I go fishing.

MARK: And when it comes to selling, Pete, think of the pride you'll take in selling a fish that you personally caught.

PETE: Suppose I catch one like you did, me.

MARK: You mean a large mouth bass?

PETE: I asked for that.

MARK: Throw him back in the ocean, because from experience I can tell you, you'll never know what kind of trouble a big mouth fish will get you into.

MUSIC: CURTAIN