

UPSTREAM / DOWNSTREAM

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## CHARACTERS

### MACK

Gruff. As real as you want them to be.  
Charming.

### PISGAH

Mildly joyful. Trusting. The girl who thinks  
she's not like other girls.

“.” denotes ending of the sentence, or a slight pause. like searching for the right words.

“—” denotes a cutoff.

“/” is when the following text interrupts or to mark brisk exchanges.

MACK uses he, him pronouns and PISGSAH uses she, her.

Anyone may play these characters.

*Late Winter in Riverside Park. Pre-covid-19.*

*The light is softly retreats with the incoming dusk.  
Few people walk along the Hudson River pathways. (It is too chilly.) But  
24 yr old PISGAH enjoys the solitude the cold provides.*

*PISGAH plays “Cardigan” by Taylor Swift through her headphones. The  
song plays for us as if the audience were sitting in her ears.*

*What is PISGAH thinking? Is PISGAH thinking at all?  
This sad girl aesthetic. No comments on the irony from PISGAH.  
For it is just her life.*

*Then comes this Gordon Fisherman character. No, really. Like he looks  
like he’s about to go on some expedition to Alaska for Salmon. The bright  
yellow fishing coat. MACK wears the whole fish-stick advertisement get-  
up. (And he wears it well.) PISGAH doesn’t see MACK right away, but it  
becomes quite obvious someone else is there. MACK, drags a large  
wagon of some sort. The contents: a large Yeti Cooler, two fishing poles,  
a net, and a six pack of beer, bump each other and clink.*

*Who is this man? PISGAH tries not to get distracted from her meditative  
stare across the river, but MACK is just really loud. MACK is also  
starting to get into PISGAH’s space. MACK sets up the folding chair.  
“Cardigan” by Taylor Swift continues to play. MACK warms his hands  
by rubbing them together.*

*Who is this man? PISGAH looks over.  
They make eye contact and quickly*

*PISGAH breaks back to looking forward out towards the great state of  
New Jersey.*

*(“’Cause I knew you,  
Steppin’ on the last train  
Marked me like a bloodstain, I...”)*

*MACK tries to speak with PISGAH. (Because we are hearing what  
PISGAH is hearing, MACK’s sounds should either be muffled or simply  
nonexistent against the “Cardigan”. PISGAH continues to look forward.  
Maybe if she pretends she is oblivious to him he will go away.*

*MACK tries to get her attention again. MACK waves his hand in her in  
an innocent way. Startled, PISGAH takes her headphones off.  
“Cardigan” abruptly stops. We are no longer in her ears.*

What? PISGAH  
*(stand off-ish)*

Is it alright if I set up here? MACK

... PISGAH  
*(confused)*

Okay I'm gonna take that as a yes. MACK

*MACK returns to setting up. The cooler, the fishing rods. The beer in the hand. The first cast and the first drink. The first sit.*

*PISGAH embraces the peculiarity.*

What are you trying to catch out here? PISGAH

What? MACK

What are you. What are you trying to catch? PISGAH

Trout. MACK

*Both looking out towards the great state of New Jersey. One fishes and the other is cautiously curious.*

Are you going to eat it? PISGAH

Huh? MACK

Are you going to eat / the fish? PISGAH

Oh no. No. MACK

PISGAH  
So then what are you going to do with it.

MACK  
Not eat it.

PISGAH  
...

*Well. I guess that's an answer.*

PISGAH  
You got a second fishing rod you waiting for someone?

MACK  
Not really.

PISGAH  
Not really?

MACK  
Sometimes people join sometimes people don't.

PISGAH  
You just have one for strangers to join you?

MACK  
Why not? People do Chess with strangers in Washington Square. It's not like strangers meeting in parks is a far-flung concept here—

*!!! a bite on the line.*

PISGAH  
The line! The line's got—you've got a—

MACK  
A bite!!

*MACK lunges for the fishing rod. MACK tries to pull it in. Ooh!  
PISGAH watches the pull and tug for the trout.*

*Like the uncorking of a bottle or the opening of a soda can, a trout appears on the line. It wriggles to-and-fro. Trying to get off from the hook, but unsuccessfully. Perhaps a beautiful puppet. Shimmering scales that looks slightly "rusted" from the pollution.*

MACK

Wow. That's a beauty.

*Wriggle wriggle.*

PISGAH

Oh my god.

*PISGAH moves closer to see the fish being reeled in.*

MACK

Mind grabbing the net?

PISGAH

Um, yea, sure.

*PISGAH goes to the wagon and retrieves the net.*

*After reeling it in a bit, MACK grabs the line.*

*He holds the fish up to get a good look at it. (Wriggle wriggle.)*

*PISGAH returns with the net. The fish wriggles to and fro, almost hitting PISGAH in the face.*

PISGAH

Watch where you swing that fish—

MACK

Oh, sorry. Sorry. Great, put the net right under it. Right like that. Yup. Great.

*MACK puts the fish in the net.*

MACK

Yeah so catch these fish. Trout mainly. This one. This one is a bit bigger than usual. Usually they're about like—

*MACK holds up his hands about 8" apart.*

MACK

--like that's usually as big as they get when I find them. But sometimes they're bigger like this one. Usually not though...here, trade with me.

*MACK holds out a hand. MACK and PISGAH trade the net and the fishing rod. MACK goes to put the trout in his cooler.*

PISGAH

What do you do now?

MACK

Well. You see I put them in the cooler. There ya go.

*The fish disappears into the cooler.*

*MACK comes back to PISGAH's side.*

*MACK grabs the line as PISGAH holds the fishing pole, awkwardly.  
MACK begins to prepare the line: bait, maybe a new hook etc.*

PISGAH

Do I have to hold it?

MACK

Right now you do...

PISGAH

...people are staring.

MACK

Okay hold on. Almost done.

*MACK finishes preparations.*

MACK

I can take it. Thank you.

*Fishing pole handoff.*

MACK

And then I-I. I um. Just recast that line. Like that. Yep. I go back to my chair. I take a sip of beer.  
and I just do it all over again.

*MACK does these modest actions as he speaks. He ends in the chair with  
a beer, looking at the fishing pole and line that bobs in the water.*

*PISGAH looks around self-consciously.*

MACK

You're new to the city.

PISGAH

How did you know?

MACK

You're looking around.

*MACK mimic's PISGAH's looking around.*

MACK

You're still worried about what people think. What people see in you.

PISGAH

Um, I, no I'm not worried—

MACK

Sure sure. With your outfit from ASOS and H&M.

PISGAH

How did you—

MACK

Because every girl in this city who wants to be “different” or “special” somehow manages to all shop in the same digital discount store. Really unique outfit.

PISGAH

Okay, you got me. Good eye.

MACK

If you want to be real unique, go shopping for vintage in Brooklyn.

PISGAH

Really?

MACK

No that was a joke.

PISGAH

Oh.

MACK

You gotta live life the way you want to live it. Rent's too expensive.

PISGAH

*way too expensive.*

MACK

You want a beer?

PISGAH

Why not.

MACK

Take them from the side I started with. The left side. I chilled those first.

*MACK takes a beer out of the six pack.*

PISGAH

Thank you.

MACK

Cheers.

*They clink. They each take a drink.*

MACK

Another way I know you're new to the city---

PISGAH

Oh what's that?

MACK

You take beer from strangers.

PISGAH

Got me!

MACK

College Towns Syndrome.

PISGAH

What like I expect people to be nice?

MACK

Yea something like that. I read about it once.

*Pause.*

PISGAH

Wow.

MACK

What?

PISGAH

I didn't know you could read...

*PISGAH and MACK look at each other blankly.  
Then PISGAH cracks a smile.  
MACK laughs.*

MACK

Jooookes! She's got joookes! Very good. Very good, um. What's your name?

PISGAH

Pisgah.

MACK

Pisgah? Pisgah. Pretty name. I'm Mack. Like—

PISGAH

Like Mac and Cheese.

MACK

Yea sure. Or, well, Mackerel. Might be more fitting for our current situation.

PISGAH

Nice to meet you.

MACK

Welcome to the neighborhood.

*!!!! a tug on the fishing line. The fishing rod falls.*

MACK

Oh! A bite! Get it!

*PISGAH instinctively goes to grab the fishing rod while MACK leaves his chair and beer.*

PISGAH

What am I doing?

MACK

Reel it in! Like this.

*MACK imitates reeling it in.*

PISGAH

Okay.

MACK  
That's great! That's awesome. Great job.  
Yes! That's it. Wow. Wow, it's a fighter.  
This has gotta be a big one. Just hang on.  
Keep reeling. Yup. Oh wow! Wow look at  
that. Yup keep going.

*As PISGAH reels it in, MACK's dialogue to  
the left is spoken. MACK cheers PISGAH  
on. Ad libs are also acceptable.*

*The fish appears from the water. Wriggle  
Wriggle. Shiny and scaly again. Make it  
look beautiful. PISGAH continues to reel it  
in. The distance between the fish and the  
fishing rod closes.*

*This is the first time PISGAH has caught a  
fish.*

MACK  
That's number 2!

*MACK grabs the net. A similar sequence as before happens except this  
time it is PISGAH with the fishing rod and MACK with the net. The fish  
disappears into the cooler.*

MACK  
Nice going.

PISGAH  
That was. um...thrilling? Awesome fantastic amazing?

MACK  
Yea fishing is really fun; more people should do it.

PISGAH  
I mean like. Whoa. Just the fight and then seeing it on the line. And it squirming. Ooh!

PISGAH  
*(continued)*  
You don't kill the fish, do you? You don't kill the fish right?

*As PISGAH speaks, MACK prepares another fishing line. Casts the next  
one. The usual routine.*

MACK  
I don't kill the fish.

PISGAH  
Good.

MACK  
I., uhm.

PISGAH

What?

MACK

You're gonna think it's funny.

PISGAH

It's fine. You're fine.

MACK

I um. I take the fish upstream. Like up towards Poughkeepsie area. And I release them up there. Why not, right? Like here: here the Hudson is just like gross. Like maybe dead bodies in the river gross and its like. Those poor trouts.

*PISGAH starts to laugh.*

PISGAH

Those poor trouts? Oh my gosh. Wow.

MACK

No for real like think about how awful they must feel in there.

*PISGAH is still laughing.  
MACK lets her finish her laughter.*

MACK

Are you finished?

PISGAH

Yes. *Yes*. I'm finished. Continue.

MACK

Think about living somewhere that's smelly all the time. Loud. Polluted. And then you could go somewhere with clean water. Clear air. Better light. These fish? They don't know. Like they don't even comprehend that something better is out there.

But like...we do. And we're the ones shitting in their river and screwing it up so...

maybe we should do something to help fix it. Or at least help them. Cause *we* know.

We know they could have it better. And so many people could have it better.

Like. *so many* people. if they could just swim upstream a little bit. If they could choose.

Who knows what they could be. or what they could've been, right?

...

You don't have to stay. You know? If you think what I'm doing is something close to crazy, you can go. I don't have to get your approval on this. I'm not hurting anyone.

*A brief silence.*

PISGAH

Can I cast a line too?

MACK

You wanna?

*PISGAH nods. MACK begins preparing the next fishing rod.*

PISGAH

“What they could be. Or what they could’ve been”

That’s why I moved here. To find out what I could be. I mean, there’s no way to know what I could’ve been, time doesn’t work that way, but I can see what is possible now.

*MACK hands PISGAH the rod. SHE casts it.*

PISGAH

I’m not from, um, a place like this. Where I’m from, the land stretches and the buildings don’t cut the sky like these ones do. It feels you’re in some beautiful enclosure.

MACK

Sounds like a place worth staying in.

PISGAH

Not for me. It was. Well. It’s like the whole town was sleepwalking. When you’re awake and no one else is, it’s kinda lonely.

MACK

I get that.

PISGAH

You’re giving those fish a choice. It’s admirable. Laughable? Sure. I bet some fish choose to stay in Poughkeepsie and some come back downstream. But at least they’ve got a choice now, right?

MACK

Right. Everyone deserves a choice.

*PISGAH and MACK sit in their chairs and drink their beers.*

PISGAH

Let’s fill this cooler with all the trout in the Hudson.

MACK

HA! You got yourself a deal.

One thing.

PISGAH

Yea?

MACK

ASOS actually has really comfortable leggings.

PISGAH

*They share a laugh.*

*Both fishing rods twitch at the same time. Bites!*

*The lights fade.*

*END OF PLAY*