



THE LURE, THE BAIT, AND THE BUMBLING.

A screenplay by Phillip Chandler

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Logline: Two hapless friends, Abbott and Costello, venture into the great outdoors for a relaxing fishing trip, only to find that nature, and the English language, are their greatest adversaries.

Characters:

- **ABBOTT:** The sharp, conniving, and perpetually exasperated straight man. He knows everything, except when he doesn't.
- **COSTELLO:** The stout, naive, and perpetually confused comic relief. His mind works in wonderfully literal, and incorrect, ways.
- **A BEAR:** A bear.

Format: Screenplay

[SCENE START]

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

A rickety 1930s Ford Model A, piled precariously high with fishing gear, tents, and coolers, chugs its way up a winding mountain road. The car sputters and groans with every incline.

Inside, ABBOTT grips the steering wheel, a look of rugged determination on his face. COSTELLO sits beside him, looking green around the gills.

COSTELLO (Clutching his stomach) Abbott, are we there yet? My lunch is doing the jitterbug with my breakfast.

ABBOTT Relax, Costello. We're communing with nature! Smell that fresh mountain air. It's invigorating! It fills your lungs with vitality!

Costello takes a deep, dramatic breath and immediately goes into a coughing fit.

COSTELLO (Gasping) I think I swallowed a bug! A big one! With fur!

ABBOTT (Sighs) That's the vitality. Now stop your bellyaching. I've found us the perfect spot. Pine Ridge Lake. Secluded. Pristine. Teeming with fish just begging to be caught. I read about it in "Rugged Man Monthly."

COSTELLO Are you a rugged man, Abbott?

ABBOTT Of course, I'm a rugged man. Why do you ask?

COSTELLO Because the last time you tried to be rugged, you tried to chop firewood and ended up splitting your pants.

ABBOTT That was a faulty axe! And faulty trousers! This time will be different. This is a scientific expedition. Man against fish. Brains against... gills.

COSTELLO I'm for the fish.

Abbott shoots him a withering glare as the car rounds a bend, revealing a sparkling, magnificent lake surrounded by tall pines.

ABBOTT (Grandly) Behold! Paradise!

The car's engine gives one final, pathetic SPUTTER and dies. A cloud of steam erupts from the hood.

COSTELLO Paradise looks broken.

EXT. PINE RIDGE LAKE - DAY

Abbott and Costello have unloaded their mountain of gear by the lakeside. It looks like a sporting goods store exploded.

ABBOTT Alright, first things first. We have to set up camp. A base of operations. You grab the tent, I'll survey the area for the optimal strategic position.

COSTELLO What's a strategic position?

ABBOTT It's a spot that's not too close to the water, but not too far. Good drainage. Away from that... that thing.

Abbott points to a sign that reads: "BEAR COUNTRY: SECURE YOUR FOOD."

COSTELLO (Eyes wide) B-b-b-bears? You didn't say nothing about bears!

ABBOTT It's a formality, you nincompoop. They put those signs up to scare tourists. There hasn't been a bear in these parts for fifty years. It's a scientific fact.

COSTELLO What science?

ABBOTT The science of... me wanting to come here without you whining. Now, get the tent.

Costello struggles with a large canvas bag. He yanks it open and a jumble of canvas, ropes, and poles spills out. He looks at the mess like it's an unsolved math problem.

Abbott returns, puffing his chest out.

ABBOTT I've found the spot. Now, let's get this canvas palace erected. It's simple. I'll direct, you work.

An hour later, the "simple" task has descended into chaos. Costello is hopelessly tangled in the guy lines, looking like a captured Gulliver.

ABBOTT No, no, you idiot! The pole goes in the grommet! The GROMMET!

COSTELLO I'm a grommet? Abbott, that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me!

ABBOTT (Facepalming) The hole, you chowderhead! Put the pointy end of the stick in the little metal hole!

Costello, still tangled, tries to maneuver a long tent pole. He swings it around blindly, narrowly missing Abbott's head with a loud *WHOOSH*.

ABBOTT Watch it! You almost took my head off!

COSTELLO I can't see! This rope is giving me a wedgie!

Costello gives a mighty heave. The pole slips from his grasp, flies through the air like a javelin, and lands with a *SPLASH* in the middle of the lake.

Abbott stares, speechless. His face goes from white, to red, to a deep, pulsating purple.

COSTELLO (Shrugging) Well, at least we know where the lake is.

EXT. LAKESIDE - LATER

They have given up on the tent. A lopsided, pathetic lean-to made of canvas draped over a low branch is their new home. Abbott is grimly unpacking the fishing gear.

ABBOTT Forget the shelter. We came here to fish, and fish we shall. We will redeem this trip with a bounty of glistening trout!

COSTELLO Hooray! I'm starving!

ABBOTT Alright, pay attention. I'm only going to explain this once. This is a delicate art. First, you need the proper equipment.

COSTELLO (Nodding seriously) Equipment. Got it.

ABBOTT Now, to catch a fish, the first thing you need is bait.

COSTELLO You think I'm bait? After all we've been through? You're gonna use me as bait? HEYYYYY ABBOTT! I'm too lumpy to be bait! The fish will get indigestion!

ABBOTT No, you fathead! Not you! The bait! The little worm you put on the hook to attract the fish.

COSTELLO Ohhh, the worm. Why didn't you just say so? You call me bait, I think you're gonna throw me in the water.

ABBOTT I'm tempted. Now, if you don't want to use live bait, you can use a lure.

COSTELLO Lure? What am I gonna do, stand by the water and say, "Yoo-hoo! Mr. Fish! Come on over here, the water's fine!"?

ABBOTT (Rubbing his temples) A lure is an artificial bait! It's a little shiny thing that looks like a bug or a small fish!

COSTELLO It's a fake! You want me to lie to the fish? Abbott, I can't do it. My mother told me never to lie. A fish has a family, a home. I can't trick him with a little shiny fake. He'll go home to his wife, Mrs. Fish, and she'll say, "What happened to you?" and he'll say, "I was almost tricked by a fat man with a lure!" I'll be the talk of the lake!

ABBOTT WILL YOU BE QUIET! Some people prefer a different method entirely. They use a fly.

COSTELLO A fly? You mean I gotta swat a fly, tie a little string around his neck, and throw him in the water? That's terrible! The poor little guy! What did a fly ever do to you?

ABBOTT (Through gritted teeth) It's not a real fly! It's a hook decorated with feathers to LOOK like a fly! It's for fly-fishing!

COSTELLO Oh, so the fish can fly?

ABBOTT NO! The fly is what you use! Then you have to tackle the fish!

Costello's eyes light up. He gets into a three-point stance.

COSTELLO Tackle him? Okay! So I get a running start, dive in the water, and BAM! Right in the gills! Hut, hut, HIKE!

ABBOTT NO! Your tackle box! The box with all the gear in it! The hooks, the sinkers, the lures!

COSTELLO Oh, the tackle BOX. You say "tackle," I think I'm playing for the Giants.

ABBOTT The only thing you could play for is a team of hot dog eaters. Now, take the rod. To get the line in the water, you have to do some casting.

COSTELLO (Striking a pose) Casting? Well, I've always seen myself in a dramatic role. "To be, or not to be, that is the question..." Do you think the fish will be my audience? Is there a producer?

Abbott snatches the rod from Costello.

ABBOTT GIVE ME THAT! Casting the line! You swing the rod and cast the line into the water! Once the fish bites, you've got to reel him in!

COSTELLO Reel him in? You mean like a movie? Is it a short subject? A feature film? I hope it's a comedy!

ABBOTT (Screaming) THE REEL ON THE ROD! YOU TURN THE HANDLE AND THE LINE COMES IN! BAIT, LURE, FLY, TACKLE, CASTING, REEL! IT'S ALL PART OF FISHING!

COSTELLO Abbott... you're making this very complicated. Bait is a worm, a lure is a lie, a fly is a fake, tackle is a box, casting is for a movie, and a reel is a picture. How are we supposed to catch a fish? We're gonna bore him to death!

Abbott, defeated, simply hands Costello a rod with a worm already on the hook.

ABBOTT Just... throw it in the water. And don't talk.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A meager campfire crackles. The two men sit silently, not a single fish to show for their efforts. The woods around them are dark and full of strange noises. Costello nervously roasts a marshmallow.

COSTELLO Abbott... it's awful quiet out here.

ABBOTT It's called "peace and quiet," you dunce. It's what we came for.

A twig SNAPS in the darkness. Costello jumps, launching his flaming marshmallow into the air. It lands on Abbott's hat, which begins to smolder.

COSTELLO What was that?!

ABBOTT (Beating out his hat) That was you, you pyromaniac! You nearly set my head on fire!

COSTELLO No, before that! The snapping sound! It sounded big! It sounded... rugged.

ABBOTT (Dismissively) It was a squirrel. Or the wind. Relax.

A low, guttural GROWL echoes from the trees. It is most definitely not a squirrel. Costello's eyes widen to the size of dinner plates.

COSTELLO The wind sounds hungry. And furry.

ABBOTT (A little less confident) It's... it's probably just your stomach growling. You ate all the hot dogs.

COSTELLO My stomach doesn't have claws and weigh 500 pounds! Abbott, I think it's one of them... them... things from the sign!

A massive, dark shape emerges from the treeline. A very large, very real BEAR stands on its hind legs and sniffs the air. It's looking directly at their cooler full of food.

Abbott is frozen solid, his "rugged man" persona completely evaporated. His face is a mask of pure terror.

COSTELLO (Whispering) Abbott... Abbott... you said they were a formality! You said it was scientific fact!

ABBOTT (Barely a squeak) Science... was wrong.

The bear drops to all fours and takes a step towards them. Costello, in a blind panic, does the only thing he can think of. He grabs the first thing he sees—a loaf of bread—and hurls it at the bear.

The bread bounces harmlessly off the bear's nose. The bear stops. It sniffs the bread, then takes a delicate bite. It seems to like it. It looks back at Costello and grunts, as if to say, "More."

COSTELLO He likes it! He wants more!

ABBOTT (Finding his voice) Don't give him more! He'll think we're a restaurant!

But it's too late. Costello is frantically throwing everything from the cooler at the bear: a string of sausages, a block of cheese, a jar of pickles. The bear is having a delightful picnic.

COSTELLO Maybe if we feed him, he'll go away!

ABBOTT That's not how it works! He's just going to want dessert! And dessert is US! RUN!

Abbott scrambles to his feet and bolts towards the car. Costello, seeing the last of the food gone, yelps and follows, waddling as fast as his short legs can carry him.

COSTELLO HEYYYYY ABBOTT! WAIT FOR ME!

They dive headfirst into the jalopy, slamming the doors just as the bear ambles up to the driver's side window, peering in curiously. Abbott fumbles frantically with the ignition.

ABBOTT Come on, come on, start you tin can!

The engine CHUGS... CHUGS... and finally ROARS to life. Abbott stomps on the gas, and the car lurches away, spraying gravel.

INT. CAR - DRIVING AWAY - NIGHT

They speed down the mountain road, looking back in terror. The bear is a receding shape in the darkness. They are panting, disheveled, and covered in marshmallow goo and dirt.

COSTELLO Well, that was exciting. Did you see the size of that fella? He could have been on the cover of "Rugged Bear Monthly"!

ABBOTT (Still shaking) Quiet. Just... be quiet. The whole trip... a disaster. No tent, no fish, nearly eaten by a walking fur coat. We're going home.

COSTELLO Abbott?

ABBOTT WHAT?

COSTELLO I'm a little disappointed.

ABBOTT (Incredulous) DISAPPOINTED? A BEAR TRIED TO EAT US! WHAT COULD YOU POSSIBLY BE DISAPPOINTED ABOUT?

Costello looks down at his lap with a sad expression. He opens his hands. Lying in his palm is a single, sad, earthworm.

COSTELLO We never got to find out if the fish liked the bait.

Abbott stares at the worm, then at Costello's earnest face. He opens his mouth to scream, but no sound comes out. He just closes his eyes and grips the steering wheel tighter, driving them away from his failed communion with nature.

[FADE OUT]

[SCENE END]