

# A FINE KETTLE OF FISH

By Jon Kommes

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**SYNOPSIS:** Dr. Taylor, an unscrupulous therapist, is having her first couples' therapy session with Karen and Jack. Their marriage is on the rocks, but that isn't even the complicated part. Jack is a merman, half fish, half man, and Karen has secrets of her own. Can Dr. Taylor save their marriage or are they destined to be with other fish in the sea?

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(1 female, 1 male, 1 either)*

JACK (m)..... Husband. *(36 lines)*  
 KAREN (f)..... Wife. *(38 lines)*  
 DR. TAYLOR (f/m)..... Marriage counselor. *(27 lines)*

**DURATION:** 10 minutes

**TIME:** Morning.

**SETTING:** Couples' therapy office.

## PROPS

- Blanket
- Clipboard
- Paperwork
- Diamond ring

## COSTUMES

JACK should be dressed as a male version of a mermaid.

**AT RISE:** JACK, visibly uncomfortable, sits in a chair with a blanket covering his lower torso. KAREN, his frowning wife, sits in a chair next to him. After a moment, DR. TAYLOR, the resident marriage counselor enters, holding a clipboard.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Good morning, Jack and Karen. I'm Dr. Taylor.

**KAREN:** Thank you for seeing us on such short notice.

**DR. TAYLOR:** I'm sensing bad body language between the two of you.

**JACK:** Is it that obvious?

**DR. TAYLOR:** I wouldn't be a very good marriage counselor if I didn't notice. Now I know it's your first time, but keep in mind we're all here to make your relationship better. With that being said, time is money, and I'll be honest... my time isn't cheap, so let's jump right in. Tell me what's going on.

**KAREN:** We've been married for five years now, but things just aren't what they used to be. We're getting into arguments. It's been really challenging. Something is just... off.

**DR. TAYLOR:** I can assure you, these are common problems every married couple has.

**JACK:** OK, let's stop beating around the bush and just cut to the chase. Maybe this is what's "off" about us.

*JACK pulls the blanket off his bottom half to reveal his legs aren't legs at all. It's one big fish tail. He's a merman.*

**KAREN:** There you go showing off again.

**JACK:** Oh, please. I'm being honest so we get our moneys' worth.

**KAREN:** It's always about money with you!

**DR. TAYLOR:** OK, wait. Stop. I'm sorry. Everybody just stop.

**KAREN:** What's wrong?

**DR. TAYLOR:** So you're a... a mer—

**JACK:** —man. A merman. The mermaids get all the glory, but yes... we exist.

**KAREN:** Your ad said you provide counseling to any couple. The slogan was, "before you walk out, talk it out."

**JACK:** Obviously, on land, I do more of a hop than a walk, but I think it still applies.

**KAREN:** Can you help us or not?

**DR. TAYLOR:** *(Takes a deep breath, centers herself, then exhales.)*

I'll be honest. Nothing is ever easy these days. When I decided to become a marriage counselor, I knew it would take four... maybe even five months... to get my online degree. But I rose to the challenge and I will do the same now. Let's do this.

**KAREN:** Thank you, doctor.

**DR. TAYLOR:** The good news is that clearly you love each other... otherwise you wouldn't be here.

**JACK:** That... and your ad had a coupon for a two-for-one special. That still applies, right?

**DR. TAYLOR:** Let's go back to the beginning. How did you two meet?

**JACK:** In the ocean. Shocking, right?

**KAREN:** I was hanging out on the beach with some friends, and we decided to go into the water to cool down. I was trying not to get my hair wet, but before I knew it, I got slammed by a huge wave. I was fine, but I realized the water swept my ring right off my hand. My grandma gave it to me and it was irreplaceable. I was a little... upset.

**JACK:** Upset? More like hysterical. All I saw was this screaming and crying girl treading water. I thought she was in danger.

**KAREN:** It was actually sweet. He swam me back to shore. We started talking. The rest is history.

**DR. TAYLOR:** And now here we are. So. First things first. When was the last argument you had?

**KAREN:** Last night at dinner.

**DR. TAYLOR:** What happened?

**JACK:** Senseless murder. That's what happened!

**KAREN:** Oh, don't be such a drama queen. It was a mistake! I made a new casserole recipe my sister gave me. It turned out really good, but I kinda... forgot to tell him there was tuna in it.

**JACK:** Tuna! Can you believe that? Disgusting! It's like a horror movie. For all I know, I took a big bite of my cousin.

**KAREN:** It slipped my mind. Honestly.

**JACK:** All of a sudden lately, she's Mrs. Forgetful. Very convenient!

**KAREN:** Even if I told you, you wouldn't have listened. You never do anymore.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Listening is a key component in every marriage.

**JACK:** I try. The problem is there's so much coming at me, it's hard to catch it all. She's constantly nagging me. Don't even get me started on the mood swings. One minute she's happy, the next she's mad. She'll go to bed so angry she wakes up sick to her stomach. Literally!

**KAREN:** It's not mood swings. You make me upset. There's a difference.

**DR. TAYLOR:** What's a common thing he does to make you upset?

**KAREN:** He goes out with his mer-friends. They swim around the ocean all day. He comes back late at night, exhausted. Who knows what he's been up to, but one of these times I might not be home when he stumbles in.

**JACK:** I can throw threats around, too. There's plenty of other fish in the sea. I know. I've seen them!

**DR. TAYLOR:** Alright, everybody calm down. Now, it's normal to be annoyed with our partner. The important thing is that we address it. Jack, what's something Karen does that bothers you.

**JACK:** She's always throwing away my stuff.

**KAREN:** It's junk.

**JACK:** It's not junk! And even if it was, it's my junk!

**KAREN:** How many sand dollars do you need? You know they're not actual dollars, right?

**JACK:** Hey, if the world's economy collapses, maybe they will be! And when that day happens and you're the richest woman on the planet swimming in a vault of sand dollars, you'll thank me.

**KAREN:** Fine, let's talk about what you do that bothers me. Sometimes at night he goes into the backyard, on the rocks near the shore...

**JACK:** Here we go...

**KAREN:** —and he blows on his conch.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Excuse me? Conch?

**KAREN:** It's like this... over-sized seashell. It sounds awful.

**JACK:** It's a serious musical instrument. And it sounds lovely. You just don't have the ears for it.

**KAREN:** No, I don't have the stomach for it.

**JACK:** The conch means a lot to fish everywhere. You know I hate when you offend my people like that.

**KAREN:** OK, you're only half fish... so cool it with the 'my people' stuff.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Let me ask you something Jack. If you know the conch upsets your wife, then why keep playing it? There must be more to it.

**JACK:** When I was a teenager, practically a guppy, my dream was to be in a band. I'd play lead conch, tour the seven seas, and be rich and famous.

**DR. TAYLOR:** So it's a reminder of your childhood. A relic from the past. Your dream.

**KAREN:** I didn't know that was your dream. You never told me any of that.

**JACK:** You never asked.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Alright, I think I've heard enough. I have a prognosis.

**KAREN:** That's included? We don't pay extra for that, right?

**JACK:** Give it to us straight, doc.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Jack, you're out with your friends all night. You're protective of your old things, like the conch, which helps you relive your dreams. The reason you're hostile and lashing out at your wife is because you're simply afraid that by getting older you're also losing that young part of yourself.

**JACK:** Yeah, I guess so.

**DR. TAYLOR:** And Karen, your need to nag and harp on your husband comes from your unhappiness with his rebellious and youthful behavior. He often acts like a child, but all you want Jack to do is grow up, isn't that right?

**KAREN:** Exactly.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Tell him. Don't tell me.

**KAREN:** Sweetie. I don't want a merboy. I want a merman.

**JACK:** I wanna be your merman.

**DR. TAYLOR:** There you go. Good. Let it out.

**JACK:** Since we're being honest, I have a confession to make. I wasn't out with the merguys all those nights.

**KAREN:** Who were you with? Was it that dolphin? It was, wasn't it? I knew it!

**JACK:** No!

**KAREN:** So it's that pufferfish! Isn't it? I saw her making eyes at you. She wouldn't stop staring!

**JACK:** She wasn't staring! Fish don't have eyelids, so it just looks that way.

**KAREN:** Don't you dare try to use marine biology on me!

**JACK:** Listen to me. I wasn't with anyone. I was alone.

**KAREN:** By yourself? All those late nights?

**DR. TAYLOR:** What were you doing?

**JACK:** At night when the moon shines down on the ocean, it's like a giant spotlight. So using the moonlight, I've been combing the sand at the bottom of the sea, looking for anything with a sparkle. It took longer than I thought because I couldn't really remember the exact spot we met... but I think this is it.

*JACK holds out a DIAMOND RING. KAREN gasps in shock.*

**KAREN:** You found it! My grandma's ring!

**JACK:** I'm sorry I was acting so suspicious, but I wanted it to be a surprise anniversary gift.

**DR. TAYLOR:** Now we're making progress.

*JACK puts the ring on KAREN'S finger.*

**KAREN:** It looks just as beautiful as the day I lost it.

**JACK:** So do you.

*JACK leans in for kiss. KAREN stops him.*

**KAREN:** Since we're doing confessions, I think it's my turn...

**JACK:** Is it Tim? Tim from accounting! I knew it! I never liked that smug jerk and now I know why!

**KAREN:** No! I haven't done anything with anyone.

**DR. TAYLOR:** I'm going to write down "trust issues." Seems to be a reoccurring theme for both of you.

**KAREN:** I know I've been oversensitive and moody and you think I go to bed so angry I wake up sick to my stomach... but there's actually a reason for that.

**JACK:** If it's my cooking, I'll just come right out and say you're way better than me. I can just stop trying.

**KAREN:** I'll need you to keep cooking, sweetie. After all... I am eating for two...

**JACK:** *(Incredulous.)* Are you? Are we?

**KAREN:** You're going to be a merdad.

*JACK and KAREN hug and hold each other in excitement and happiness.*

**DR. TAYLOR:** Congrats, you two. We've made a lot of progress and I'm so happy for you both.

**JACK:** Thank you!

**KAREN:** This has been so helpful!

*DR. TAYLOR hands them a sheet of paperwork.*

**DR. TAYLOR:** I'll just need your signatures right here, and here. It basically confirms all the work we've done today. And grants me rights to your life story so I can publish any or all of this session. You see the real money isn't in therapy. It's in therapy books! Now let's talk about payment options. Credit or debit?

**JACK:** How do you feel about sand dollars?

*Blackout.*

**THE END**