Hymn to the Chesapeake



A Poem Play with Music

By

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Credits

This musical play has been adapted from the book *Hymn to the Chesapeake,* ROAD Publishers, 33412 Lankford Highway, Painter, Virginia 23420. The author uses fragments of actual conversations, traditional melodies, adapted lyrics from traditional songs, captions, etc. He also uses the works of various painters, photographers, and writers as inspirations for various poems. The literary works of William Warner have been used extensively and are often quoted. The Crisfield section is based on a chapter of Warner's *Beautiful Swimmers.* The known composers whose works have been adapted herein are Gordon Bok (*Clear Away in the Morning, Mrs. MacDonald's Lament,* and *Saben, the Woodcutter*), Les Dwier (*Sadness and Divorce, Death,* and *Symmetry*), Dodie Welsh Paris (*Ladies of the Bay*), Andy Stewart (*Blackbird, Golden*), Bob Zentz (*Companioned by the Sea*), Chris Van Cleave (*Emmanuelle*), and William Whiting and John B. Dykes (*Eternal Father*). In some cases, the author has not been able to identify the sources of the music adapted. The introduction and arrangement of *Leave Her Johnny, Leave Her* have been adapted from a recording by The Virginia Company (*Blow Ye Winds*). Transcription and many arrangements are by Patrick Belote, Judi Beck and Carin Cowell. Judi Beck first conceived of this project and has been both a driving force and a font of ideas in regard to its completion. Bruce Jones greatly assisted with the plotting. Also offering valuable advice and direction were Gray Arthur, Ann Louise Johnston, David Poyer, Lenore Hart, Elizabeth Arthur, Donna Robinson, and Joseph Adams.

First presented by the Trawler Dinner Theater under the direction of Judi Beck August 1995 in Exmore, Virginia with the following cast: Larry Lovelady, Marilyn Kellam, Laura Trala, Robert Oliver, Jim Turner, Sherry Belote, and Robert P. Arthur. Guitar by Bruce Jones and keyboard by Patrick Belote.

SAMPLE PAGES - 80% of script

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HYMN TO THE CHESAPEAKE

Tom Thatcher, a man in his late thirties
Grandpa, a man in his early sixties
Annie Drummond, a woman who plays from sixteen to twenty-five
Aunt Kate, a woman in her sixties
Fishermen, all ages (two or three suggested)
Fisherwomen, all ages (two or three suggested)

Note: Parts in script designated for Fisherman and Fisherwoman are suggested character and voice changes by the author. Directors should determine number of Fishermen and Fisherwomen to be used and designate specific assignments. Also, all of the principle characters may double as Fishermen or Fisherwomen. Hymn can be successfully performed with as few as five cast members and as many as sixteen.

(NOTE: *Throughout play, instruments improvise at appropriate places between songs—even, at times, during dialogue. The dialogue should always begin over the final phrases of music for a constant meshing of song and poetry*.)

SCENE: The Eastern Shore of Virginia. A large farmhouse with a porch upstage center. Rocking chairs and planters are scattered about on the porch. Rain slicks for fishing are hanging on the porch railings. The place has not been well maintained, but it's livable. There is an old pier reaching into the Chesapeake down stage left. Near the pier are crab traps, baskets of clams, nets, oyster shells, etc. At down stage left there is a garden. The scene begins with a dark stage.

(Music "CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING")

(The tin flute *continues until the* **Fisherwoman** *starts to sing the first stanza. One by one,* MEN *and* **Women** *enter and join in singing.)*

All:
TAKE ME BACK ON THE BAY, BOYS
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING
I DON'T WANTTA STAY ASHORE, BOYS
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

TAKE ME BACK ON THE BAY, BOYS
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING
I DON'T WANTTA SPEND MY PAY, BOYS
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

CAPTAIN, DON'T YOU LEAVE ME
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING
THERE'S NO ONE HERE THAT NEEDS ME
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

BRING ME TACK AND BRANDY
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING

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STAR LIGHT IS MY FANCY
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

CAPTAIN, DON'T YOU LEAVE ME
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO, BOYS
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

(*Softly*)

TAKE ME BACK ON THE BAY, BOYS
CLEAR AWAY IN THE MORNING
I DON'T WANTTA STAY ASHORE BOYS
OH BRING HER 'ROUND

Tom: Once from the wracklines
I drew the wild sea up
in a snag of drifted wood
from the moonflung chalk
of waves. I heard
that entangled ghost of bitternut
salt riven, hickory
pock and slurp in tongues
of breaking dark's
surge and roll
beyond the reefs
of stalking ice
and Spanish sea
to marshlands of the Virginia
coast, combed by holes
and swept by tide

Then in the sojourn of my mood
I weathered again
the easterlies
of my childhood
the rising flood of shadowed sea
and storms of light
at Horse Hammock Point
I probed again with ear and eye
the hungering crab
in stinging beds of waving grass
and lolling eel,
the shot black ducks'
fluttering, beak-first
demise into silent
pools
and knew then, in my bone

the plunging stars

and saw as if from Mercury
the bleached earth orb,

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spinning and dumb
a little spot out there, adrift

(*Guitar music stops*)

in deepening space, like wood
that God could cover with his thumb

(Pause. Lights up on fisherman. Fog, fog horns sound of a whistle)

Fisherman: The whoosh of keel
the push of sail
I reach into the morning wind and find

(Long pause)

the Age of Steam

Fisherman: I remember
When the big freeze came
and left the Patuxent sheeted
in fields of ice
and off the Virginia capes all the dredges
framed
by necklaces of white

Fisherman: I remember
the gusts of freezing rain
the motionless tributaries
the swollen James
the ice breaker Annapolis
chuffing in its track

Fisherman: I remember the big ships—
Kate Darlington
and *City of Norfolk--*
trapped by the ice's mass

(*Stage grows darker*)

Mother's Voice: Tommy! Tommy. Come in from the weather.
As if from a silence, as if from deep water
and the bootblack cold parlor in the back
of our house, my mother's voice, surfacing
now, in memory, now dissolving...

Mother's Voice: Tommy, oh Tommy boy!
Tommy, oh Tommy boy!
Tom: Like ice. My mother listening at night in the cold parlor.
I remember I remember

(*Sound of foghorn*)

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Smokey Joe steaming out
in flakes of snow big as a hand
trailing smoke from his stack
Perry of the Love Point Ferry"
to the rescue
from the chill of Love Point
to the balladeers of Baltimore

Fisherman: Old Captain Perry of the Love Point Ferry

(*Lights come up on **Cap'n Perry**)*

Cap'n Perry (**Fisherman**): A long finger of icy snow down the back of your neck
Coffee boiling...on the cabin stove.
Wet men in lamp light, near downed,
their teeth chattering, and there I am at the wheel

(*Points into space*)

sawed off and red-faced, pulling boats to harbor
through the inky dark.

Tom: I remember I remember

Fisherman: Point Lookout and Point Look-in
Point-No-Point and Point Again
and the last Dutch windmill on the edge of the Honga River.

Fisherman: Thimble Shoal, Wolf Trap, the Drum Point light,
and the light at Thomas Point

Fisherman: both slung, low on stilts, like prehistoric spiders
and the bobbing, rocket lights
at Hooper's Island and Sandy Point
that above the brooding water
rise in cylinders, lit like candles

(One by one, small lights emulating lighthouse lights *come up as the theater grows darker*)

Tom: and I remember all the names of the mollusk towns
still on the wind
Fisherman: Oyster, Virginia
Fisherman: Oystertown and Shelltown
Fisherman: and Bivalve, Maryland
Tom:and the names of towns of the Eastern Shore
that come on moccasins:
Fisherman: Nassawadox
Fisherman: Chincoteague
Fisherman: Assateague, Machipongo, Onancock
Fisherman: and Assawoman

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Tom: I remember I remember
the tales of plunder, of piracy
in its golden age
and the oyster wars, of geese that
flew in squadrons, wave on wave
till the sky turned black
and filled with flapping

(*Shadows of* **Company** *all about him.* Tom *is unaware of singers' physical presence, but seems to be hearing them*)

(Music "CHESAPEAKE BOAT SONG")

All Men:
HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SWING HER HEAD ROUND
INTO THE WEATHER

HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SAILING HOMEWARD
TO THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Tom:
WHAT CARE WE HOW
WILD THE SEA IS
WHAT CARE WE FOR
THE WIND OR WEATHER

All Men *(softly)*:
FOR YE KNOW, BOYS
EV'RY INCH IS
CLOSER HOME NOW
TO THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

(*Sounds of* wind *and* creaking mast)

Tom: (*Overlapping music*)Somewhere blood is flowing
in Africa, in Mozambique, in Peru
But here, the night has peeled away and left
a yellow fruit
all is musical, quiet

Whispers flutter like empty sleeves

Not even cannon boom over the bay
to frighten the children

How quickly in memory it becomes
yesterday
in Canton Hallow
or Baltimore,

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where even before trucks bellowed
the long dock trembled,
crowded with bateau's selling potatoes—
all summer long
and wagons pulling melons
as the black oyster hucksters
on Pratt Street cried:

Company: Zawneeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.
Zawneeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.
Zawneeeeeeeeeeeeee.

Tom: "In those days," says Mencken, "the days chased one another like kittens chasing their tails."

(Music "MRS. MACDONALD'S LAMENT")

First Woman:
WHEN THE WIND'S AWAY
AND THE WAVE'S AWAY
THAT CRAZY OLD FOOL
WILL GO

First and **Second Women** (*harmonizing*)
DOWN TO THE BAY
All Three Women:
DOWN TO THE BAY

Tom: There is shadow of wind moving on the water—
beneath the surface the moon
like a fish, swimming.
Fisherman: Falling on the Chesapeake
Fisherman: Falling on Tangier
Tom: A Light morning rain brings its handfuls
of soft currents
to the heron
Company: Old Fisheyes

Tom: (*Guitar plucks the melody of "MRS. MACDONALD'S LAMENT" under monologue*)
listening
on one foot
to the mounting tide

(Lights *come up full*)

(Music "CHESAPEAKE BOAT SONG" — REPRISE)

Company:
HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SWING HER HEAD ROUND
INTO THE WEATHER

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HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SAILING HOMEWARD
TO THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Tom: (*as* **Company** *hums*)
FAR BEHIND US
OCEANS OF DARKNESS
WE WILL SEE OUR
OWN PEAKS OF WINTER
Annie:
AND YE KNOW, BOYS
First Woman:
CANDLES GLOW, BOYS
All Women:
LIGHTING THE WINDOWS
OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

Company:
HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SWING HER HEAD ROUND
INTO THE WEATHER

(*Softly*)

HEEL YE HOE, BOYS
LET HER GO, BOYS
SAILING HOMEWARD
TO THE CHESAPEAKE BAY

(*Lights dim*)

Fisherman:(*Overlapping music*)1950, Cape Charles, Virginia

(Lights come up on Tom)

Tom: The night my mother left
my father drank and cried
Holding his glass to hide his mouth

Next day we went out for shark
My brother and I held on for pride
and jerked our lines
from the undertow.

We caught dog shark
Bill's to port, mine to the right
and my father took them by their throats

Because he'd forgotten the butcher knife

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(and sharks are dangerous in rocking boats)
he stood upright and didn't curse us
for pulling them in

But cursed the man and the morning
light that made him span
a boat of children
with a snapping shark in either hand

(Music stops)

Why couldn't he have been God?
He squeezed Bill's shark until its
guts came busting out
Then smacked my shark against the
boat to break its back

Why couldn't he have been God?
I'd give the job to anyone
who could handle sharks like that

(*Lights dim*)

Fisherman: If you couldn't of took a hunnert back then at glut time,
it was black gum against thunder.

*(Lights half up on **Tom*** (*Voices singing* WE WILL ROCK YOU *continues throughout the following piece.)*

Tom: Oh Mother—Dark
in this cradle of time and wounding light
I am afraid of motion—

Company: *(rapidly)* of trees
of stars
of spring
of flow
and fall
of age
of dying
of joy
and grief

Tom: I am afraid of the firelight that is ever changing
And the thrusting rocks that do not change by human time.

Fisherman: Here in the shallows of Curtis Creek hard to port off Baltimore harbor, lie the ghosts of barges and tugs, of sailing vessels in mirroring water

Fisherman: Here in the black water in the images of hull and bridge
thrown skyward, here rising and falling
in the hold and forecastle, in the memory of binnacle lamps

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once burning, now hushed
The tide slithers unrelenting through decks of rotting timber
The photographer stands in a canoe in choppy sea.
Click

(**Company** *snap fingers*)

Fisherman: …graveyard of skeletal timber, spar and mizzenmast
of hulking wreck of barge and bugeye, skiff and ketch

Fisherman: There lies the pongee's spine
The ribs of a barkentine that plied the coffee trade

Fisherman: There sails as a ghost ship the *John T. Ford*,
who pitched her crew and sailed the Atlantic upside down

Fisherman: And there lies the *Priscilla*, whose captain's son was washed overboard to drown, and then by sea washed aboard again

Tom: and how the boy sleeps now
how he sleeps pale and washed in the sunlight
drifting through the weeds
in the shifting remains of his father's cabin
how he tosses, green-eyed, crab-picked and beckoning
and how his mother, who died in the wreck, washed from him
now sings in her sleep
how she whistles and weaves in her rocking chair of wind and water
and the children in their homes at Baltimore harbor
go rushing to their windows
whenever she sings

(Song ends. Tom *listens to the cries of birds in the distance*)

Tom: I have come to the place where the clocks wind down
and the end begins
with the ticking of new life in the wild sea grasses
I have come from the hollow places of Eastern Shore towns
Silver Beach and Painter
from the fairgrounds at Keller, where even from the hollows
mothers trot out their children
their jams and glasses

(Music "NEW OYSTERS")

FISHERWoman: NEW OYSTERS
NEW OYSTERS
NEW WELL BRED OYSTERS

Fisherman: Man was once a child
but knew from a puff of air the day's priorities
and from the shadows of his labors

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guessed his name

FISHER**Woman**: Weatherford, Workman, Cookson

FISHER**Woman**: Miller and Hull and Netty and Ty

FISHER**Woman**: Fisher, Farmer, Painter, and Price

FISHER**Woman**: Sassy and May Wine

FISHER**Woman**: Heaven help us if it can!

FISHER**Woman**: When the wind turned 'round, he pulled
When the wind set fair, he ran

FISHER**Woman**: (*Pointing*)
Ain't no such thing as oystermen?
Nor fishermen, nor clammers
Nor proggermen?
Them's watermen, over thar!

Tom: Thank you, Mrs. Waterman.

FISHER**Woman**: And every one of us is a waterman's woman!
Who's to say we ain't?

FISHER**Woman**: Smell of crab on my clothes…every day of my life.

FISHER**Woman**: NEW OYSTERS
NEW OYSTERS
NEW WELL BRED OYSTERS

FISHER**Woman**: AT THE GROANING BOARD
AT THE GROANING BOARD
WHERE IT HURTS TOO MUCH TO STAND

FISHER**Woman**: **All** THE BREAD AND WINE WE MAY EAT
LET THEM KNOW THE TIME WE STARTED
TO MAKE A BANQUET FOR A PRINCE

(FISHER**Woman** *walks to audience, sings* COMPANIONED BY THE SEA)

(Music "COMPANIONED BY THE SEA")

FISHER**Woman**: MY LITTLE HOUSE RIDES LIKE A GULL
HIGH ON A HILL ABOVE THE BAY
BY THE SLOW PASSAGE OF THE TIDE
I MEASURE OUT MY DAY

THERE IS MUCH THAT LIFE WITHHOLDS
THERE IS MUCH THAT LIFE DENIES

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STILL I'M CONTENT AND MOST CONTENT
WITH SEAWARD GAZING EYES

MY DREAMS SAIL WITH THE T**All** WHITE SHIPS
THOUGH I MUST EVER BIDE AT HOME
I SHARE THE BLUE OF SINGING SPACE
THE BITTER KISS OF FOAM

THE PAGEANTRY OF STORM AND CLOUD
THE MYSTERY OF THE EBB AND FLOW
THE SOUND OF WATER AS I SLEEP
All OF THESE I KNOW

NO GREATER JOY CAN DIM THE THRILL
QUIETLY CONTENTED HOURS
WHEN THE SEA WORE REFLECTED STARS
UPON HER BREAST LIKE FLOWERS

BRINE SCENTED DAWN, SEAFARING DREAMS
HOW RICHLY THESE HAVE DOWERED ME
THAT I SHOULD GO **All** MY DAYS
COMPANIONED BY THE SEA

BRINE SCENTED DAWN, SEAFARING DREAMS
HOW RICHLY THESE HAVE DOWERED ME
THAT I SHOULD GO **All** MY DAYS
COMPANIONED BY THE SEA

(**Annie** *enters*. Lights *come up on her and dim slightly on* Tom. She *talks to an unseen boy*—Tom *as a* child.)

Annie: Little Tommy Thatcher
Wither do you wander?

Tom: (*From the shadows*)
My Annie Drummond. Annie.

Annie: (*To unseen boy*)
Oh come over here, Tommy. Stay with me.

Tom: Annie.

Annie: (*To unseen boy*)
Look at the chicken, Tom. See, it's got two heads. A two-headed chicken.

Tom: Annie Drummond. Born in '43, dead at twenty-five.

Annie: (*To unseen* BOY)
Come back here, Tommy Thatcher. Don't you run from me.

(Music "BLACKBIRD")

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IF I WERE A BLACKBIRD, OVER THE OCEAN I'D FLY
I'D FLY TO MY DARLIN' AND THERE BY HIS SIDE
I'D WHISTLE AND WHEEDLE **All** BEYOND THE DEEP SEA
I'D CHATTER AND WHISPER 'TIL HE CAME HOME WITH ME

IF I WERE A BLACKBIRD, NESTLED IN HIS BLACK HAIR
I'D WHISTLE AND WHISPER OF THINGS I'D FIND THERE
OF PROMISES PLENTY, OF BOWS AND OF RAIN
WE'D FLY O'ER SO SWEETLY IF HE KEPT ME WITH HIM

IF I WERE A BLACKBIRD AND THE NORTH SENT A STORM
I'D FLY THROUGH THE ICED WINDS TO KEEP HIM HARM
I'D SPREAD OUT MY BLACK WINGS OVER OCEAN AND SEA
AND SHELTER MY DARLIN' TIL HE LOVED ONLY ME

IF I WERE A BLACKBIRD, OVER THE OCEAN I'D FLY
I'D FLY TO MY DARLIN' AND THERE BY HIS SIDE
I'D WHISTLE AND WHEEDLE **All** BEYOND THE DEEP SEA
I'D CHATTER AND WHISPER 'TIL HE CAME HOME WITH ME

(Sound of church bells)

Tom: Oh, father light, in the passing
in the new movement of water in the winds' releasing
in the dying leaves, which have in love knots

(*Improvised* piano music *plays softly under dialogue*)

in the dark boughs and branches left shadows of their forms
their colors their functions

(Lights *fade*)

I have come to the grove of wounded trees
You, in soft silk, walking beside me

(*Reaches for retreating darkness and grasps it*)

where night from its encampment in air
comes on with its whistles and cannons
and the quiet murdered animals move enfilade
to a misty desecration as unilateral as cold
in the islands

And it is all because of your soft hand's easing
that the budyard shines

And the whole sodden landscape sobs suddenly
with glory

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(Lights *come back up;* music *stops*)

Oh, father light, in the returning
I have come to the tiger towns of my youth
that have scratched me
with the birdsong of wind in the
grass harp of memory

(*Sound of a* tin whistle)

AUNT KATE (FISHER**Woman**):
Wash up for dinner, Tommy! Your father will want your hands washed.

Tom: My grandmother's voice, like the groan of hawser, yowl of jib and spar.

(ENTER: GRANDPA AND AUNT KATE)

GRAND**Mother**: And scrub those dirty fingers. Wash up for dinner, Tommy, your father will want your hands washed. And scrub those dirty fingers.
Wash up for dinner, Tommy. And scrub those dirty fingers. Your father will want your hands washed.

(Music *stops. There is the sound of a* tin whistle)

Tom: The song is richly called
"Apples in winter"
And suggests an orchard
of white, cold light
black branches and frost
the words "scarf"
and "cap" (pulled down and woolen)
red ears tingling
and a boy braver than the ducks
on the icy river.

Why is it that I am moved
by a tune from a whistle
played well or badly?

(*Whistle*)

When I leave the road
the sun is plunging
into the hollows of my lonely heart

and old leaves falling
The dogwood's blooming
with earthly crystals
and, still, the old song, "Apples in Winter"
What sweet scent and veil of sycamore

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lies beyond the crisp leaves falling?

(*Whistle*)

Grandma and her needles
in the kitchen
beside the old pump handle
knitting
and the night coming on
with its lightning.

The smell of wintering hay
and Grandpa in the cold stables
cursing the horses

and the tip tapping pitying dark
tree by tree
moving into the arbor
like a visitor come without warning
no washcloths, no towels

Just the kiss — a dark life
The whole farm riding out the thunder

Then, in winter

The flesh of apples sizzling on the stove
The getting up in the morning

(*Whistle*)

GRAND**Mother**: I've a letter from you father, Tom.
He'll be back in the morning.
I've a letter from your father, Tom.
Are you listening Tom?
By Christmas morning.

GRANDFATHER: He'll be back in the morning,Tom.
He'll be back by Christmas morning.
He'll be back in the morning.

GRAND**Mother**: Oh Tommy, he's off to Ocean City!

GRANDFATHER: He'll be back in the morning.

(Sound of thunder. Darkness. Then a new day begins with the rising of the lights. All of the characters are sitting on the porch of the farmhouse, rocking in their rockers, fanning themselves, drinking tea. Whinny of a horse. All eyes watch the horse past in front of the house. An automobile chugs up into the drive way. *Grandpa Thatcher* and little *Tommy* are in the car.)

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FISHER**Woman**: Hey, Grandfather Thatcher. Get on down!

GRANDPA: *Guess I will, but only for a minute*.

Fisherman: *Come on, Grandpa, set a spell. Get on down*.

FISHER**Woman**: Now you, Little Tommy Thatcher, you get on down here now and jest set a spell.

FISHER**Woman**: *Get on down, Grandfather Thatcher! You and Little Tommy. Get on down! Get on down!*

(**Company** *freezes in various action poses*)

Fisherman: *Get on down!* they'd always say
when you drove up in the yard
All those old folks,
sittin' on porches
living in the country
rocking back and forth, their rockers squeaking
or riding them porch swings

Fisherman: back and forth
back and forth
their eye bolts groaning
their hand fans a-waving

(**Company** *breaks freeze and resumes fanning, etc.*)

FISHER**Woman**: in Pungoteague
in Melfa
Onley,
Fair Oaks, and Keller

FISHER**Woman**: Shooing away flies and the country
heat
Their collars popping
Living in the country

Tom (as older man): Monitoring the crops
I was about fourteen before I ever saw an old folk
rise from his rocker

FISHER**Woman**: *Get on down!* they'd always yell
in their old folks voices
Swirling them ice chunks in their country glasses
of ripe lemonade
swirling that tea
in their mason jars and jam jars
or drinking from a pitcher if they were born to be men
and didn't know better

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FISHER**Woman**: or if they were named Parks, or Drummond, or Turner
and didn't care about better

FISHER**Woman**: or born to be women
knowing better
wearing those print country dresses
and combs in the buns of
their piled on hair
turning tricks in
bridge, cursing like sailors
in the creaking, groaning, shimmering
a-waving afternoon of golden
grain
in a porch shaded space
of old folks air

FISHER**Woman**: in Birdsnest or Cheriton, where Mama lived

Fisherman: *Hey, you boys, don't you climb aboard Eenie!She's got that hoof disease; you'll probably kill her!*

Fisherman: Hey, George Floyd, look at that. Old stiff collar Boggs is driving to church

Company: Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha

Fisherman: Down the middle of the two-lane road
At 'bout eight miles an hour

Company: Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha

Fisherman: ' Bout forty honking cars backed up behind him
Him, in that stiff collar, not even looking around

Company: Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha, Ha

Fisherman: Funniest thing I ever saw
Since last Sunday

Tom (as older man): Get on down, the old farmers and their bean shelling wives would yell
just when you drove up in your car or truck
or it didn't matter what

Tom: Even if you drove up on a bicycle they'd yell

Tom: They'd yell, Get on down
like they'd gone nuts
on lemonade and tea

FISHER**Woman**: Get on down, they'd yell
like they'd gone nuts

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GRANDPA: Hey there, Mucken, ain't that the big Walters woman gettin' outta that truck?

Fisherman: Hush your mouth. Looks like she's gonna charge, George!

Fisherman: Oh, grab my onions

Fisherman: Hey you boys, leave that horse alone, I told you
It's got those infected hooves. Leave her alone, I tell you

Fisherman: Damn, fell off…right on his head!

FISHER**Woman**: Here's a nine of diamonds, Sassy. If you take that trick, I'm going to slap you silly!
Oh, is that Hot Huffman?

Fisherman: Don't care if it is
Lost all respect for Hot Huffman
Cause he'd trained his dog
By blasting its behind with birdshot when it chewed on a bird.

AUNT KATE: You don't mean it?

Fisherman: The man should be arrested.
That ain't the way to train a dog

FISHER**Woman**: The way to train a dog is to smack him on the nose with a rolled up newspaper

FISHER**Woman**: What they tell me
is George Floyd there did something
caused the closing of the Melfa church

AUNT KATE: Weren't true, Sassy
George never did nothing but sit right there
even before that car slipped off the jack
and rolled over ta the ditch on top of him

FISHER**Woman**: Hey lookit there. There's Myrtle Lewis on her way to church.
Killed my little dog with a chunk
For chasing her chickens

Hey there, Myrtle Lewis, dog killer!
Get on down ta the porch…you sorry sack of…beet fertilizer!

AUNT KATE: Hush, Sassy. Don't talk to them that don't know better.

FISHER**Woman**: Get on down, they'd shout out to everybody
like 'em or not
Get on down, they'd shout to the preacher
stepping out on his wife

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FISHER**Woman**: To the undertaker going home from work.
To the postman or clammer or tailor or barber
or farmer or realtor or superintendent of schools or
some Hog Islander wandering home from a drunk.

FISHER**Woman**: Tell you what. Some of those smart-assed cheeky fellows
Would get off the porch and sit in their cars
Just to hear the old folks holler, Get on down

Fisherman: Get on down, get on down
they'd holler
like you was on a horse

AUNT KATE: or atop a buggy maybe
or atop of a building

or better than them

Tell you what.

TomMY: Those Melfa people
sittin' on the porch
They'd yell, Get on down, if you walked up on foot

(Music " GOLDEN GOLDEN")

1.

All: SLOWLY SLOWLY WALK THE PATH
AND YOU MIGHT NEVER STUMBLE OR F**All**
SLOWLY SLOWLY WALK THE PATH
AND YOU MIGHT NEVER F**All** IN LOVE AT **All**

WILDLY WILDLY BEATS THE HEART
WITH A RUSH OF LOVE LIKE A MOUNTAIN STREAM
WILDLY WILDLY PLAY YOUR PART
AS FREE AS A WILD BIRD'S DREAM

LONELY LONELY IS THE HEART
THAT NE'ER ANOTHER CAN C**All** HIS OWN
LONELY LONELY IS THE PART
THAT HAS TO LIVE **All** ALONE

GENTLY GENTLY TEND THE FIELDS
AND YOU WILL ALWAYS CHERISH THE RAIN
SOFLY SOFTLY GIVE YOUR HEART
AND YOU WILL FIND LOVE AGAIN AND AGAIN

(CHORUS)

GOLDEN GOLDEN IS THE SUN
IN THE MORNING HAZE OVER FIELDS OF CORN
GOLDEN GOLDEN FLOWS HER LOVE
SO SWEET AND CLEAR AND WARM

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(Scene changes to waterfront, shedding float, and crabpicking shed. Snow. Characters change into overcoats and gloves,stomp snow off their boots.)

Fisherman: Pure winter comes and the bitter cold
puts the sooks to sleep

FISHER**Woman**: Across the watery avenue swim the herring, shad, and menhaden

Fisherman: The potting's slow and the turbaned black women
leave the shedding
float to pick soft crab by furnace light
beyond the bitter groans of the skipjack's hull
and dreams of cull, dredge and tong

Fisherman: Out on the bay, a schooner having left Baltimore harbor
tugs along its yawl, like a mother her child.
Even sea birds blowing south, over Old Point Comfort
glide thoughtfully, as if listening...

Fisherman: The Maryanne sails wing and wing, catching fore and aft
the strong stern winds that make for a heavy,
wet, and rolling ride

Fisherman: As the crabs forecast — turning to sun and moon
bellies white as snow
The Christmas cold, moving over the water
will be late and easy

(Music No. 6 "LADIES OF THE BAY")

(**Women** *dance holding white, transparent material to simulate sails*.)

All: A HUNDRED YEARS AGO THEY SAY,
LADIES OF THE BAY,
THEY WERE C**All**ED,
LADIES OF THE BAY
I CHANT THEIR NAMES SOFT TO MYSELF
ON A WINTER'S DAY
REBECCA RUE,
ANN STANDING NORMAN,
KATHRYN CALEB JONES
THE NAMES RING OUT UPON US,
THEY ECHO IN MY BONES

PATTEN TONGS AND DIESELS
WERE A WONDER IN THEIR DAY
WHO HAD TIME FOR SAILING,

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BUT RICH MEN OUT TO PLAY
FIBERGLASS DON'T LOOK LIKE WOOD,
BUT IT'S EASIER ANY DAY
AND IT'S HARD ENOUGH TO MAKE ENDS MEET,
ON THE WATERS OF THE BAY

LADIES OF THE BAY,
THEY WERE PROUD,
LADIES OF THE BAY
I CHANT THEIR NAMES SOFT TO MYSELF
ON A WINTER'S DAY
REBECCA RUE,
ANN STANDING NORMAN,
KATHRYN CALEB JONES
THE NAMES RING OUT UPON US,
THEY ECHO IN MY BONES

NOW SOME HAVE BEEN ABANDONED
LONG FORGOTTEN BYE THE BYE
TIMBERS **All** ROTTEN,
BARNACLES IN THEIR SIDES
SOME WILL CARRY TOURISTS
FOR A HOLIDAY
JUST A FEW ARE DRUDGING STILL,
OUR LADIES OF THE BAY

LADIES OF THE BAY,
THEY WERE PROUD,
LADIES OF THE BAY
I CHANT THEIR NAMES SOFT TO MYSELF
ON A WINTER'S DAY
REBECCA RUE,
ANN STANDING NORMAN,
KATHRYN CALEB JONES
THE NAMES RING OUT UPON US,
THEY ECHO IN MY BONES

Tom: At nightfall
west from Crisfield through
Tangier Sound
the orange boat moves on
to the isle of Deals

Fisherman: Nets of snow tumble to the water dark

Fisherman: In the waning sun
south of the Choptank the fast land
disappears. Hummocks of pine and oak
give way to icy tumps

Fisherman: Captains
of bateaus and dinky skiffs

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begin their prayers
Reaching the shallows
the orange boat feels its way
down trenches of tidal gut
through thoroughfare, drain
and little swash of sucking marsh

Fisherman: From over a shoulder, the pale moon comes
thin as a lure and shining
There, in widgeongrass and wild, wild celery,
silage from the marshlands flow,
the spiky corngrass
ripples in windrows, or lies
in cowlicks damp and sticky

Tom: My orange boat parts the Spartan flora, the sea lettuce
the eel grass
The mud banks quake and hold its bow
and caught like fish for a moment only
we are lost in the dark netting
that circles the globe
and rules the world
There you are, the dredge boat captain laughs
And so we are

Tom: thinking of the cypress
in the black water of the Pocomoke
of the great depth at which we find
images of ghosts and things now gone

FISHER**Woman**: of the osprey, white
the teal
mallard
railbird
loon and canvasback

Tom: Thinking of the islands vanished
into the Chesapeake

Fisherman: of Holland Island
whose schoolhouse, church and houses
broke off in chunks and drowned
Thinking of the the original floating theater
Showboat, closed down
and drifting
Thinking of the dark haul of all
the wide-eyed once familiar faces
now sinking or sunken
Thinking of all the souls now settling
like ballast
into the Chesapeake
into the empire of the whistling swan

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AUNT KATE: I've a letter from your father, Tom.
He'll be back in the morning, Tom
(*Angry*)
He'll be back in the morning.

GRANDFATHER: He'll be back in the morning.
I've a letter from your father, Tom
He's likes the cards Tom
He likes the cards

(Tom *puts both hands over his ears*)

Tom: (*Looking into distance and speaking very slowly*)
In the distance, mist
smudges of gray pine and loblolly
overhanging clouds
And near to hand, a gate of split rail
propped open
and various masts of sycamores sailing a
gray sky
Still, in memory, two oxen, a double yoke, moving through
the split-rail gate and dragging a log
that cuts a trough in the muddy road

Fisherman: Everything underwater

Fisherman: the oxen

Fisherman: the log

Fisherman: the yoke

Fisherman: the split-rail fence, the sycamore—
like masts reaching into a watery sky
All underwater—

Fisherman: even the drover
a black shape walking, holding a rod over the oxen
as if he were fishing

Fisherman: All underwater, now in memory

Tom: He is wearing a narrow-brimmed hat
He is my father

Fisherman: or memory of my father

Tom: or memory of my father's father

Fisherman: and his father before him

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(Music "CAPTAIN' S GONE TO HILO" To continue in background throughout rest of piece and ending after the poem ends).

FISHERMEN: OOO OO OOO OO OO OO
CAPPY'S GONE AND I'LL GO TOO
AWAY DOWN HILO

OH CAPPY'S GONE AND I'LL GO TOO
CAPPY'S GONE TO HILO

AHH AHH AHHH

CAPPY'S GONE WHAT SH**All** I DO
AWAY DOWN HILO
OH CAPPY'S GONE WHAT SH**All** I DO
TomMY'S GONE TO HILO

AHH AHH AHH

CAPPY'S GONE INTO THE LIGHT
AWAY DOWN HILO
OH CAPPY'S GONE INTO THE LIGHT

CAPPY'S GONE TO HILO

PLEASE DON'T BREECH THE BRIDGE TONIGHT
AWAY DOWN HILO
WE WON'T LAY DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT
CAPPY'S GONE TO HILO

AHH AHH AHH

CAPPY'S GONE FOREVERMORE
CAPPY'S GONE TO HILO
OH CAPPY'S GONE FOREVERMORE
OH OH CAPPY'S GONE TO HILO
HILO HILO

Tom: He is the ghost of my father sailing in memory in time
through the split-rail gate
holding the rod to his waist, its high tip out over the oxen
he is the ghost of my father's father

Fisherman: sailing in water in slow time

Tom: He is the accurate and not to be forgotten memory of my father
and what he is saying comes rising toward me, curving
as if refracted by water
It moves from underwater into this empty spirit of now
into this boneyard where I lay asleep, near waking
Now birthing, now dying

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(Music *stops*)

now sailing beyond tide, beyond kin, beyond this boneyard
at last, where I lay asleep
in Autumn
undreamt of now for my trouble by either sons or daughters

(Song: *Gone to Hilo ends)*

GRANDFATHER: No letter again today, Tom. No letter.

AUNT KATE: No letter, Tom. Probably just too busy to write.

GRANDPA: That's it, Tom. Too busy, just too busy.

FISHER**Woman**: (SONG)

NEVER AGAIN. NOT EVEN ONCE. DEATH IS ENDLESS NOTHINGNESS.

(Clap of thunder. Darkness. Tommy turns back on audience. After a pause, cock crow, morning breaks on a Spring day. Bird sounds. Annie appears and throws off her coat. She is looking out over a field.)

Annie: New seasons bring their wings of angels
of light and dark of rising and falling
and scarecrows in old hats whisper, "Now!
May the change come now."
Then straw may lift into the wind
A piece of face, a hand may dare its windowpane
Oh, crazy beloved, oh child, I fly
Because things may find that which they need
If I were not afraid
I would fly to anything

Tom: (*Looking at* **Annie**)
Gulls, like eyelashes in flight, follow the pleasure boats of the Sassafras River.
And me, Annie

(Music "SYMMETRY")

Annie: I LOVE YOU
YOU LOVE ME
PURE SYMMETRY

Tom: following you

Fisherman: Annie Drummond, dead at 25

Tom: Men who had seen her drank deep and were silent.
Women were talking wherever she went.

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Fisherman: (*Vigorously gesturing and moving*)
Wheeeeeeeeeee

(*Sound of* tin whistle)

Out of the spray
of the Chesapeake
comes running the schooner
Enchantress B.
fore-gaff sails set
topsails aloft
past Cape Henry Light
and dreaming, spotless
her horseshoe
holding luck

at the Samson post
her decks fresh
holy-stoned
cream white
she hauls
to starboard
rounds into the wind
to shoot the narrows
past Old Point Comfort
and boom for harbor
And, oh, how immaculate
her wings
her fittings, planking, spars, and shrouds
knights heads and haws

(**Annie** *crosses stage coquettishly, suggesting a ship*)

Now, windlass tight
she pays off again
to the whistles of soldiers
at the earthenworks, otherwise
dumb, in wonder
Then all the crew leaps
from rigging and mast
The way is checked
by head sails, thrown suddenly back
and from the chain lockers
the cable shudders out
for its first thirsty drop since
the China Sea.
Even the gulls are standing by
pumps are shining
by the galley stack
yards are braced, parallel
the tasseled crew leaps into the rigging
to furl

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the luffed skysails
A warp is hurled
and all hands together on the capstan bars
crank her to port with a chantey of a deep
sea voyage
Wheeeeeee

(*Sound of* tin whistle. Tom *and* **Annie** *come together and touch*)

(Music "SPRING OF MY DAYS")

Tom: **Annie** DRUMMOND, THE THRUSH WAKES WITH THE MORN
WHERE THE WOODLANDS LAY FROSTED BY DEW
HOW THE CLOUDS DRIFT BLUE OCEANS OF SKY
AND THE ROSE CLIMBS THE BRIAR FOR YOU

THERE SHE LAY WITH HER HEAD ON MY KNEE
AND THE WORLD SETTLED DOWN FOR US THERE
HOW THE LIGHT CAME THROUGH DARKNESS AND THE RAIN
LIKE A CROWN FOR HER RAVEN BLACK HAIR

On the first day
In the low green and sacred hush of leaves
The light was keeping its own company

And on the second day
Did I imagine you here breaking the
water's dark
Or was it light that was moving from
tree to tree?

And then, long ago, on the third
day, the river was flowing
And the white birds flying were
paths of autumn

and you were my children on the
fourth and fifth day

All hands and faces and knees of
them like light releasing
Through the sixth day to tender
callings

Out past the grave on the final day

As if to old men who adore you so
That heaven seems less dear than
light they know

Annie: TomMY THATCHER, THE GULL CRIES IN THE SUN
WHERE THE CLIFFS RISE TO BECKON THE SEA

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HOW THE WATERS TOSS IN THEIR DESIRE
TO RETURN YOU TO BELLE HAVEN AND ME

THERE YOU ARE IN THE SPRING OF MY DAYS
AND I RUN TO YOUR ARMS AS TO HOME
HOW THE BERRIES CLING SWEETLY TO THE VINE
AND THE BIRDS SING, "OH TomMY, MY OWN."

Tom and **Annie**: THERE YOU ARE IN THE SPRING OF MY DAYS
AND I RUN TO YOUR ARMS AS TO HOME
HOW THE BERRIES CLING SWEETLY TO THE VINE
AND THE BIRDS SING, "OH DARLING, MY OWN."

(Stage lights go down. Whistle begins lovely air in distance, sound of ship's bell and quiet waves)

Fisherman: The orange boat moves on
from the cemetery at Journey's End
from Chapel Point, Maryland,

(*Click*)

As if in a photograph: the Tidewater Sister States appear
as masted craft of fragrant brush
and pine

Fisherman: A spit of Maryland floats in the
solemn atmosphere, rows of crosses
now in the wake of my orange boat
lift their names to a graying sky

Fisherman: Virginia moves in shadows
behind Port Tobacco Creek
and the Potomac River

Now, in the dark of all the islands
the dead converse
in bowers sweet with water oak
tupelo and wax myrtle.

FISHER**Woman**: How they tell
tales of how the wind feels
in Nassawadox creek on Sunday mornings
tales of firelight in a night sky
where the wind has taken drops of rain
in filmy satchels to the whispering corn

FISHER**Woman**: tales of sea birds, white and small
like cold morning poems in a boundless sky

FISHER**Woman**: of young sea grasses that struggle
and wave in the arms of their windy gods

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Fisherman: And listening to these tales of moments
of young green grasses
of good brown grasses with their harps
and dying

Tom: I am not ashamed of the violence I have done the earth
with my singing
with my apples and epitaphs
with the shadows of my dead that clog
the earth's arteries
of the plowed earth
that blushes with radiance
of the prayed for rain
each atom of which contains its own
continent of light
(Who will instruct the sailor that the sea is not his treasury?)

So, I say this, beside the sea oats and lap of waves
beneath new leaves and chimney smoke against a white
morning sky
I have been obsequious and powerless since the dawn of
time
and shall now go a-sailing
in the sea winds that are the shadows passing of
sailor men's souls
in the swell and thrust of tides
in this orange sloop that dances like a firefly
in the Chesapeake, its home

AUNT KATE: Oh, Tom. She's a lovely bride. A lovely bride.

GRANDFATHER: Get to work now, Tom. Yep. Up in the morning.

AUNT KATE: Let me kiss her, Tom. A bride all in white. So lovely.

GRANDFATHER: Check the tides, Tom, Yep. Know where yer at. Hurts your hands, don't it son? Yep. Feels good in the morning …if it don't blow so much …if the winds don't come.
She's a lovely bride, Tom. A lovely bride.

(Music "SYMMETRY" — REPRISE)

GRAND**Mother**: WHEN THE WORLD IS VERY QUIET
AND I'M COZY IN MY BED
I BARELY BREATHE
CAUSE I'M DREAMING BUTTERFLIES
I AM THE SUMMER SUN
WARMING MEMORIES OF SNOW FLAKES
DELICATE LACE CRYST**All**IZED
NATURAL SYMMETRY
IN SNOWFLAKE AND BIRDS
IS LESS PERFECTION

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THAN THE WORDS
I LOVE YOU
YOU LOVE ME
PURE SYMMETRY

(*There is a flash of lightning, the peal of thunder, and the sound of heavy rain. The stage darkens. Sound effects can be achieved using the piano*.)

Fisherman: (*As thunder and rain continue, he shouts*…)
Get over here, Tom. Lend a hand. You men there, pull damn it. Hot damn.

(MEN *mime the work of oyster dredging*)

We're making a lick, gentlemen
we're making a lick
The donkey engine yowls and howls
dumps the oysters on the deck
The rain beats down

(*Thunder*… MEN *shout*)

We're making a lick, gentlemen
Making a lick
The Choptank erupts in mud
So hard the rain beats down

The dredge is dragged across the oyster bar
We're making a lick, gentlemen
Making a lick

Lightning. Violent rain. Shouts)

The teeth clamp down like oyster tongs
We're making a lick, gentlemen
Making a lick
So hard the rain pours down

(*A last peal of thunder.* MEN *throw off coats, as if entering a tavern;* **Women** *greet them. A celebration begins*.)

(Music "SHANGHAIED SAILOR")

(MEN *become progressively more drunk and try to capture* **Women***, who duck and run and laugh.* EVERYONE *joins in singing the chorus. The* **Fisherman** *dances throughout when not chasing women.* EVERYONE *dances now and then; and all cheer periodically*.)

Fisherman: UPON THE FAR OFF EASTERN SHORE

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AN OYSTER DREDGER LAY
WITH A SEAT WORN OUT OF HIS OIL SKIN PANTS
HIS HAT HAD BLOWN AWAY

HIS CLOTHES WERE RATHER SEEDY
AND HIS CHANCE HE KNEW WAS SLIM
OF EVER REACHING BALTIMORE
IN THE PUNGY HE WAS IN

NOW IN SPIRIT HE COULD FANCY HIMSELF
iN A RESTAURANT AGAIN
ORDERING PLATES OF LIVER
FOR HIMSELF AND SHORTY MCCAIN

THE DREDGERS STOOD AROUND HIM
THEIR EYES COULD SCARCELY SEE
FROM DRINKING FIVE CENT WHISKEY
OH, WHAT A GLORIOUS SPREE

Company: THEN LAY ME IN THE FOREPEAK
WITH MY FACE TOWARD BALTIMORE
PRAYING I'LL NEVER GET SHANGHAIED AGAIN
DOWN ON THE EASTERN SHORE

WHERE THEY FEED YOU ON CORN DOG
AND SOWBELLY TWICE A DAY
AND YOU'RE COUNTED A LUCKY DREDGER
IF YOU EVER GET YOUR PAY

Fisherman: OUR STEWARD HE WAS A COLORED MAN
AND THE BEST COOK IN THE FLEET
AT MAKING INDIAN RUBBER BREAD
HE NEVER COULD BE BEAT

HIS SHADOW SOUP WAS EXCELLENT
AND ON A CHRISTMAS DAY
WE'D EAT DEAD DUCK THAT HE'D PICKED UP
WHILE SAILING DOWN THE BAY

AND OH THAT HARBORTOWN SKIPPER
I NEVER SH**All** FORGIVE
HE'D H**All**O LIKE A PORPOISE
TO THROW AWAY THE JIB

ON SUNDAYS WHILE AT REST HE'D SWEAR
I'M ONLY FOR YOUR GOOD SO
COME UP MY LITTLE HEARTY
AND SAW UP **All** THE WOOD

Company: THEN LAY ME IN THE FOREPEAK
WITH MY FACE TOWARD BALTIMORE
PRAYING I NEVER GET SHANGHAIED AGAIN
DOWN ON THE EASTERN SHORE

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WHERE THEY FEED YOU ON CORN DOG
AND SOWBELLY TWICE A DAY
AND YOU'RE COUNTED A LUCKY DREDGER
IF YOU EVER GET YOUR PAY

Fisherman: IT WAS ON A CHILLY EVENING
AFTER WORKING **All** THE DAY
THE CAPTAIN SAW WITH HIS TELESCOPE
THE POLICE SLOOP FAR AWAY

WITH SAILS TRIMMED AFT AND TOP SAILS SET
OUR G**All**ANT PUNGY FLEW
OVER TO THE FORBIDDEN GROUNDS
TO CATCH A JAG OR TWO

BUT SCARCE WE'D STARTED WORKING
WHEN THE POLICE HOVE IN SIGHT
HAUL DOWN YOUR JIB WAS HIS COMMAND
AND THEN BEGAN THE FIGHT

OUR CAPTAIN HAULED THE PISTOL WHILE
THE SLOOP AROUND US TRIED
BUT WE RAISED OUR DRUDGE AND MADE AWAY
UPON THE FOGGY TIDE
(Drunken DANCERS crash into each other and fall to floor)

Company: THEN LAY ME IN THE FOREPEAK
WITH MY FACE TOWARD BALTIMORE
PRAYING I NEVER GET SHANGHAIED AGAIN
DOWN ON THE EASTERN SHORE

WHERE THEY FEED YOU ON CORN DOG
AND SOWBELLY TWICE A DAY
AND YOU'RE COUNTED A LUCKY DREDGER
IF YOU EVER GET YOUR PAY

FISHER**Woman**: Go where the oysters is, Tom. Where the oysters is.
Crisfield, Maryland.

Tom: And now, in Crisfield, beyond the whispers of the bay's blue water, tern and gull
Sleeps Maggie Wick`s general store

FISHER**Woman**: …dreams of horse collars, sliding ladders, shelves and piping, wicks and matches, woolen hats and scarves, and pickles in a barrel

FISHER**Woman**: …dreams of bright candles and
calendars, sealing wax, and Raleigh in a can.

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FISHER**Woman**: Better let him out.

FISHER**Woman**: Here, the loops of ropes…there, salami, waiting to be cut and wrapped in waxy paper

FISHER**Woman**: …and filled with smells—the whole store. Tobacco, dung, the weather gusting at the windows and doors…and suddenly, assaulting the nostrils, the smell of coal oil, paraffin, wood burning in the pot-bellied stove...

Tom: On balmy evenings, Crisfield's gentlemen of leisure, in their boaters and gaiters, suspenders and print shirts gather on the
rickety porch
play checkers with bottle caps
swap lies

Cap'n TURNER (**Fisherman**):
(*Playing checkers with* DANNY*…* DANNY *has one arm and one leg.)*

She was pretty as a picture. It were a tickly bender to go sparking with her, but I done it.

DANNY (**Fisherman**): Go on, yer didn't.

Cap'n TURNER (**Fisherman**):
Didn't I?

DANNY (**Fisherman**):
Parson's wife!

Cap'n TURNER (**Fisherman**):
Her belly was broke some from having gone to Canaan for four little chillen, but her big behind hit a ton crack and would take you through the rubs.

DANNY (**Fisherman**): What I heard was a whole 'nother story.

Cap'n TURNER: You a Virginia man? Or are you from up the country?

DANNY: This game is pret near over, Cap'n. Crown me a king.

Tom: No one likes Crisfield, says the great writer, William Warner. Least of all Cap'n Danny Smith, college educated, who's lost an arm and a leg.

Fisherman: ...memories of gun fighters, gamblers in slouch hats and rough coats under lamplight, Shanghai gangs with blackjacks, bare-knuckle boxing, grog shops and brothels

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Fisherman: More like a western town than a town on the eastern shore of Maryland. "Tombstone on the edge of the Chesapeake," says William Warner, "Abilene or Dodge City by the Sea."

Tom: Crisfield's built into the water on two long wharves. "The crab capital of the universe," laugh the crabbers. No one likes Crisfield, not even the residents, least of all Danny Smith and the Pruitts and Crocketts come over from Tangier.

FISHER**Woman**: ...memories of sores, infections of the pillow, the flip flopping collapsing feet of the moonshine poisoned, the shriekers in the night, the swill-fed children lugging home from the grog shops their daddies' buckets of beer.

Fisherman: My own Aunt Edith, insane, in the Crisfield hotel, tearing at her clothing, crying out at the bugs at the windows.

Tom: Crisfield's a place makes you happy— when you leave.

FISHER**Woman**: The boilers hot and steaming, the smell of crabs.

Tom: Not even the railroad engineers, the boat builders, nor the oyster shuckers like Crisfield.

FISHER**Woman**: Nor do the fishermen, hauling
Nor do the crabmen, with their baskets and chicken necks, their peelers and lines,
their telescoping eyes
Nor the clammen, with their toes in the shallows
harvesting dozens of hard-shells an hour

FISHER**Woman**: Nor the oystermen, with their tongs, oyster stabbers, and shadows of tongs
shaking their fists at poachers
yelling, red in their faces
in their hip boots and visor caps
in their dredges
after miserable licks
ready to ram, ready to ram

FISHER**Woman**: Nor the sailmakers mending, nor the widows dreaming
Nor the Easter bells in the church tower ringing
Crisfield's built on millions of tons of
oyster shells
filling the sea and beneath the trestle
on a sinking bed of shell
and quaking mud
All is turbulence
All impermanence

(Piano *pulses like engine*)

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Fisherman: ...memories of whistles and chuffing wheels...the captains calling...the twisting smoke, blue as coal.

FISHER**Woman**: ...the drowned men...the railroad cars, rattling, dripping with the oyster's juice.

(*Piano's chuffing stops*)

Fisherman: ...the dark, unending caprices of waterspouts, squalls and hurricanes the folk of Crisfield slap their foreheads

(*Slaps forehead*)

and laugh about.

FISHER**Woman**: Why, that old fireball started 'bout a mile out.

and rolled

(*Slaps forehead*)

right in the tavern door.

Fisherman: Crisfield's built on waste
uncertain harvests
and the appetites of men
No matter how illiterate, reckons Cap'n Danny Smith,
No man, woman, or child lives long in Crisfield needing instruction in:
irony,
metaphor, or
gut grabbing comedy.

Tom: No one likes Crisfield, not even the gentlemen of leisure, except maybe on feast days in clubs, in lodges, in backyards, in homes

(**All** *get up and prepare for crab feast — spread newspapers on table, etc.* **Annie** *serves crabs*. Piano *improvises happy* "country style" *under dialogue*)

Cap'n TURNER (**Fisherman**):
When the steamed crabs are brought, rosy,
in tubs, in seasonings, beckoning
When the newspapers are laid out
and the mounds of crabs are dwindling in butter
beyond napkins tied at throats
When claws are yielding to nutcrackers
slammed knives
When the backslapping furious and the beer runs cold

(**All** *eat, making happy shouts and talking as* **Annie** *serves the crabs*.)

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DANNY (**Fisherman**): "Life is to drink beer," says Charles Bukowski.

(EVERYONE *freezes*. Tom *steps down stage*.)

Tom: No one likes Crisfield, as the great writer, William Warner says, except maybe when the spirit of Crisfield gets itself up early and walks all around singing to itself past the watery graveyard
each ripple a tombstone
except on the day of the annual Main Street parade
when the citizens of Crisfield, even the folks from the modern, mainland areas
throw their hats and laugh at the boat docking competition,

(**Company** *runs and cheers to see the competition*)

the log sawing contest

(**Company** *runs and cheers*),

the greased pig run

(**Company** *runs and hoots*)

and the newly crowned Miss Crustacean, smiling, throws kisses to the boys

(MEN *react with open mouths*)

and the little Miss Crustacean, five years and younger, ducks her head and runs.

(**Company** *ooohs and aaaahs.* EVERYONE *resumes action, shouts happily*.)

No one likes Crisfield, except
when local favorites Coyote Chaser
and Pocomoke Flyer

(**Company** *jump to their knees, root the crabs onward*)

their bodies aaaa-scuttling
open big leads in the National
Hard Crab derby

(EVERYONE *cheers, then falls quiet*)

and the marsh proggers in their progs
stand over the water, clapping
crying

Everyone: (*Quiet turtle noises*)

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Turkle, turkle, turkle, turkle, turkle, turkle, turkle.

Tom: until the day is done.

(*Happy shouts. As* **Annie** *serves, she catches* Tom'S *eye and rubs her stomach*. EVERYONE *freezes*.)

Tom: What?

Annie:

You know, Tom. I'm going to call him Emmanuel, William Emmanuel Thatcher.

(Tom *walks to* **Annie**, *kneels, puts his ear to her stomach and listens.* THEY *hug.* **Annie** *breaks away.* EVERYONE *cheers, gets up and says goodbye.* **Annie** *kisses* Tom)

Annie: Hurry home, Tom.

Tom: I'll be right there, Annie. Let me check the boat.

(Music "Fallow Ground")

Annie: WELL, IT'S GOODBYE PERFUMED WATER

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: AND IT'S FAREWELL SEA AND HARBOR

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: WELL, IT'S GET ME CLOTHES IN ORDER

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: OH THE WIND WILL TURN BY WINTER

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: WELL, ITS F**All**OW IN THE MORNING

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: JUST AS THE DAY IS DAWNING

FISHERMEN: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: WELL, IT'S GOODBYE PERFUMED WATER

Fisherman: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

Annie: AND IT'S FAREWELL SEA AND HARBOR

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Fisherman: F**All**OW, OH F**All**OW GROUND

(**Annie** *leaves*. Tom *is left on stage. Thoroughly satisfied with life,* HE *walks out into the daylight.)*

Fisherman: Now in a delicious afternoon
of my sailing in slow time
in a father light of shaking sun and reluctant stars
in the time of steeplechase at Fair Hill, Maryland
In the time of railbirds at the
head of the bay and vibrant silks
at Rogue's harbor on the Elk river
the kiteman does his festival stunts, flags wave

Fisherman: From the northern tongue of the North East river
a storm looks southward, dark clouds gathering
Darkness squats on the trees and river houses
lightning parts the water

Fisherman: Shacks along the river that wear their porch roofs
like the bills of hats and year by year slide further
into the water's embrace

Fisherman: close their eyes—
Somewhere within, lamps are burning—
Fallen trees turned white by time, grow gray
at dusk, extend their branches, their twigs like skeletal fingers

(*Stage darkens. Sun turns red; light is failing*.)

AUNT KATE: Times passes, Tom.

GRANDFATHER: It grows lighter, Tom. Darker. Time passes Tom. Who knows what will happen.

AUNT KATE: The day slides into evening. Time passes.

(*There is the cry of a newborn* child)

GRANDFATHER: Hurry, Tom. Annie gives birth on her birthday. She's twenty-five.

(*A roll of thunder*)

Fisherman: O mother dark
in the dying time
of sundown at Tolchester

(Piano *quietly improvises "death music"*)

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the heron waits like a fisherman on a long pier
his head erect
his body in silhouette
an upside down "L" against a rosy sky
his soft flesh and feathers
breakable
(dark posts loom above his head)
He is listening
for jumping fish

FISHER**Woman**: And unredeemed by dying

Fisherman: You'll catch more crabs when you're out there than when you ain't!

Fisherman: The marshland sings of dreams unending
of waves of grasses black and green
fleshed with flounder, ray
and fattened worm
The sun suspends itself in liquid blue
Smith Island weeps with light
The day is ending

Fisherman: The sea is slatey ca'm, as they say

Fisherman: Now comes a dream within a dream
Out where the buoys
bob tidal urge and doings
waters close over the sea blown
roofs of Tylerton

FISHER**Woman**: All night the wind is blowing

Tom: All night it cries through my dreams
Like some forsaken poor progger dead
and unredeemed by dying

Fisherman: More arysters down there than we been ketchin'
says old Ben Parks, pulling shut his coat

Fisherman: one-eyed jacks and deuces wild
by the guttering candles.

(Ghost of father puts down cards. Light dim. Lights up on the baby's cradle. A small wind sweeps the stage. **Annie** *makes a broad, flowing, dance-like sweep around the stage. Tommy senses her presence.)*

Tom: Annie!

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(Tommy looks over the child, with Annie's ghost looking over his shoulder)

More minuscule
than a needle's tip
the mackerel spawned
in the surface broth
of open sea
drifts on a drop of buoyant
amber oil in a globule
speck
no larger than a poppy seed

FISHER**Woman**: It's time for rain to fill the sky with silvery fins

Tom: It's an awful world
to wander in
When you are small and without your bearings

FISHER**Woman**: The night belongs
to the predator
in the throbbing bells
of the jellyfish
and sounding whale
to diatoms, worms, and the big-eyed shrimp
that feed on milt and the tender
lives of mackerel eggs

Tom: Still, we celebrate the heart's beginning

Pain, scoffs Carson, the hell with pain
Pain's just weakness
winnowing
from the body

It's an awful world to wander in
When you are small and without your bearings

(Sound of wind and cries of gulls. Fisherman bound up in excitement. They see that the fish are running)

Fisherman: An arc of sail
the spilling wind
Off Tangier
the fishermen draw their
purse nets in

Fisherman: and let them out
The sea is breathing
wild with rock, black drum and trout

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beneath the *Margaret's*
dead-rise sharp and hollow hull

Fisherman: The hickory shad, white shad and herring
begin their aching run to spawn

Fisherman: beyond the gill nets
pounds and fykes
to the churning water
of the dark, bright country

Fisherman: The Margaret tosses, as if in prelude to a disturbing night
The fleet waits in softened sun
The strike boat moves out to mark the spot
(with freeboard's creak and raking mast)
in the nursery chill

Fisherman: Evening comes
with weir poles, stakes and traps
soft crab, sook, peeler, and peeler buster

Fisherman: the net boats drop their haul seines and
bobbing corks
for croaker, bass, sea trout and perch

Fisherman: for flounder, sharks
for robins of the sea, for toads that puff
for alewife, cheborg, largemouth and blue

Fisherman: for the sea itself and all its finery

Tom: What can I give my son
that will be his to keep
though I have given it?

(**Annie**'S GHOST *appears on platform*)

(Music "MRS. MACDONALD'S LAMENT" — REPRISE)

(**Women** *hum*)

Women AND **Annie**: WHEN THE WIND'S AWAY
AND THE WAVE'S AWAY
THAT CRAZY OLD FOOL
WILL GO DOWN TO THE BAY
DODGING THE LEDGES
AND SLIPPING HIS GEAR
AND COMING BACK
WHEN THE WIND DRIVES HIM IN

(GHOST *disappears*.)

Fisherman: Beyond the darkening

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