

A Creature of Habit

or

Richard and the Mermaid

An opera by Dean Burry

Richard Whitbourne, *baritone*
The Maiden, *soprano*

John/Scully/Reverend Leat, *bass-baritone*
Will/Tom/Barbour, *tenor*
Jennie/Jelly 1/Elizabeth, *soprano*
Bess/Jelly 2/Victoria, *mezzo soprano*

Scene One

(Sunday morning, Summer, 1610. A fishing stage in St. John's harbour is represented by a raised platform high enough to allow performers to pass beneath it. The upper portion of the platform is arrayed with the equipment of the fishing trade: wooden crates, ropes, etc. The posts and lower portion of the platform are decorated with starfish, barnacles, seaweed and water marks. A ladder runs from one side of the platform to the floor. From off-stage, loud raucous singing is heard; the morning remains of a simple, but enthusiastic wedding the night before.)

CHORUS: By the morning light,
 hey one, two , three,
 She's a won'drous sight,
 hey one, two, three!
 Take yer husband by the hand
 now yer life it will be grand
 count yer blessings 'cuz yer headed
 to the Promised Land!

 'Tis a brand new day,
 hey one, two, three,
 But yer hitched to stay,
 hey one, two, three!
 Well you found yer love somehow,
 there'll be youngsters, yes we 'llow,
 but don't you pine about yer life before
 She's over now!

WOMEN:

Little Johnny was a sailor
and he journeyed all about,
with a girl in every port
no wonder he was all beat out.
He set his line and sinker
for to catch himself a mate,
but he's the one t'was hooked and split
and served upon a plate.

Little Johnny thought that he'd be king
and lord without a row.
But Johnny, don't you kid yerself,
She's over now!

CHORUS:

By the morning light,
hey one, two, three,
She's a won'drous sight,
hey one, two, three!
Take yer husband by the hand
now yer life it will be grand
count yer blessings 'cuz yer headed
to the Promised Land!

'Tis a brand new day,
hey one, two, three,
But yer hitched to stay,
hey one, two, three!
Well you found yer love somehow,
there'll be youngsters, yes we 'llow,
but don't you pine about yer life before
She's over now!

MEN:

Little Jennie was a cook
upon a royal English barque,
with pots and pans her only friends
from morning until dark.
But then she caught a "keeper"
out amongst the many fish.
He's all the right ingredients,
but can she make a dish?

Little Jennie thought she'd be a queen
or lady, anyhow,
but Jennie, don't you kid yourself,
She's over now.

CHORUS: By the morning light,
hey one, two , three,
She's a won'drous sight,
hey one, two, three!
Take yer husband by the hand
now yer life it will be grand
count yer blessings 'cuz yer headed
to the Promised Land!

'Tis a brand new day,
hey one, two, three,
But yer hitched to stay,
hey one, two, three!
Well you found yer love somehow,
there'll be youngsters, yes we 'llow,
but don't you pine about yer life before
She's over now!

(They dance.)

WILL: *(hoisting a half-full bottle of rum.)* Here's to life!
Here's to love!
Here's to John Thomas;
a dearer friend and dirtier rogue
n'er did upon New-found-land rock
e'er pitch!

ALL but JOHN: Here's to John Thomas!

BESS: And here's to comfort!
Here's to joy!
Here's to Jennie Thomas;
a gentler soul and fiercer angel
n'er did, from heaven's bower,
e'er descend.

All but JENNIE: Here's to Jennie Thomas!

WILL: And here's to eternal damnation...uh, I mean...bliss!

(They all laugh.)

JOHN: Come now, Will. Before you know it, you'll be married yourself.

WILL: Never, so long as the sun shines in New-found-land, shall I willing give up my freedom to a merry, malevolent maiden.

JENNIE: Which could be any minute 'round here, you fool.

BESS: Alright, alright. This is not about Will's failure in the sack, as if any women would have 'im!
But now, my dear mister and missus, mind ye true, the deal is not yet signed 'til ye takes "the leap"

JENNIE: The leap?

JOHN: The leap?

WILL and BESS: Oh yes, the leap!

Before God and comrade
you have sworn to love and honour
each other.
But two, not one, you'll always be
'til ye jumps into the harbour.

'Tis a tradition!

JENNIE: Oh yes now, jump in St. John's Harbour?
What, you think me a duckling?
Never have a heard of such a tradition!

BESS: Oh, 'tis old.

WILL: Ancient!

BESS and WILL: We just made it up!

JOHN: Still, a tradition's a tradition, Jennie.
(he moves to pick her up) Down we go then, girl.
I don't intend to be a half-way husband.

JENNIE: John William Thomas, take one more step and ye can sleep under the fish flakes with Captain Whitbourne's old dog!

ALL but JENNIE: Down, down, down we go,
into the briny sea,
where fishes leap
and sirens sleep

united you will be.

(John grabs Jennie, who resists, but squeals in delight. The others roar with laughter and try to assist John in his efforts. They are interrupted by a very stern Richard Whitbourne. Will tires to conceal his bottle while Johnny still holds Jennie in an awkward lift.)

WHITBOURNE: What, on God's green Earth, is going on here?

JOHN: *(barely containing his giggles)* Captain Whitbourne, sir, nothing at all, Your Majesty.

(They explode with giggles.)

WHITBOURNE: John Thomas, as pleased as I am to see you demonstrate some sniff of responsibility and make an honest woman out of Miss Andrews, it is now the full blown morn of Sunday and the time for rebellious abandon has ended.

OTHERS: Aye, Captain Whitbourne.

WHITBOURNE: *(seeing and grabbing the bottle)* Furthermore, if spirits on the Sabbath is what you seek, than may I suggest the Sacramental Wine as opposed to this rancid swill.

OTHERS: Aye, Captain Whitbourne.

BESS: Sir, we were just having fun.

WHITBOURNE: Fun?!
Fun is living decently.
Fun is duty to King and Country.
Fun is an honest day's work.

WILL: With all respect, sir, that don't sound fun at all.

WHITBOURNE: And was mighty England built upon fun?
Was glorious Britain raised upon frivolity?
Will the Empire to which our Lord and Sovereign, James the First aspires be held aloft by lollygagging wastrels such as I see assembled here before me?

WILL: I would guess the answer likely to be no.

WHITBOURNE: NO is correct. Certainly not!

There was a time
not long ago
when St. George's Cross
above the deck of an English ship
would scatter foreign vessels
to the four winds.

And in that time,
not long ago,
an English captain knew
he commanded the finest seaman
the world had ever seen,
in ages old or new.
And England's reputation grew
'Cross fields of green and skies of blue
The Masters of Navigation,

CHORUS: The Masters of Navigation!

WHITBOURNE: Commanders of the Seas.

CHORUS: Commanders of the Seas!

ALL: And England's reputation grew
'Cross fields of green and skies of blue
The Masters of Navigation,
Commanders of the Seas!

WHITBOURNE: But that was then,
and this is now,
and sadly, things have changed.
For sluggishness and laziness
have spread throughout the realm
like weeds in the Sally Gardens,
or rats below the deck.
And England's heart is being held
by sinful subjects who idly rebelled

No more the Masters of Navigation,

CHORUS: No more.

WHITBOURNE: Commanders of the Seas.

CHORUS: No more.

ALL: And England's heart is being held
by sinful subjects who idly rebelled
No more the Masters of Navigation,
Commanders of the Seas.

So sad.

WHITBOURNE: The French, they say *poo,poo!*

CHORUS: *Poo, poo!*

WHITBOURNE: The Spanish, they say *estupido!*

CHORUS: *Estupido!*

WHITBOURNE: The Portuguese think we are *porco ingleses.*
and the Dutch all say we are *Idioot*

CHORUS: *Idioot!*

WHITBOURNE: Can we sit by
and twiddle our thumbs
while English honour continues to slide.
Even as fishermen, here in the New-found-land
you can rebuild her pride.
Do you want to rebuild her pride?

CHORUS: Aye, Captain Whitbourne, we do!

ALL: The Masters of Navigation,
Rule Britannia
Commanders of the Sea
Britannia rules the waves,
Britons never, never, never,
shall be slaves,
but the Masters of Navigation!
Commanders of the Seas!

JOHN: Oh, thank you, Captain Whitbourne.

JENNIE: We were so wrong.

WILL: We will drink no more to the wedded couple...

BESS: But Merry Old England instead!

(The chorus cheers, pulling out a spare bottle, and exits laughing and singing.)

WHITBOURNE: No, that is not what I meant...I..ugh.

CHORUS: By the morning light,
hey one, two , three,
She's a won'drous sight,
hey one, two, three!
Well the captain's fumin' hot
with his tights all in a knot
and he needs a lass to loosen him up
or else he'll rot!

(They exit.)

WHITBOURNE: What can I do here?
Fish, timber, a thousand safe harbours –
everything the king desires is here in the New-found-land.
Ready to be settled.
Ready to grow,
to be another jewel in His Majesty's crown-
but laziness is rampant.

The fruit is ripe to be plucked,
but there's a worm in the apple:
Temptation.

Ever since the Dawn of Man,
she's been there:
Temptation.

In the Garden,
she was there:
Temptation.

And men, when they're caught,
struggle like a codfish
with a jigger in his gut
and they thrash and twist for freedom
with the darkness drawing near
but then the lucky few who are able to break free of
temptation's grasp,
what do they do?
Learn a lesson?
Or wait blindly for another flash of silver?

Another sniff of bait?
A knife in the belly?
Temptation.
Such is the ruin of man.

(The Maiden, a mermaid, appears underneath the stage. She looks thoughtful and devious as she watches Whitbourne, but remains unseen to him.)

But a strong and pious soul
can overcome
Temptation.

A clean and humble life
can save you from
Temptation.

I have struggled for a lifetime
to maintain a spotless name,
follow orders to the letter
and sacrifice for King and Country,
And would Richard Whitbourne throw it all away
for a touch of flesh,
a drop of grog,
a handful of ill-won shillings?
Temptation.

(The Maiden, sensing the moment is right, swims out from underneath the stage and begins a dance of seduction in the water before Whitbourne. He still has not noticed her.)

Temptation.
I will not be dragged down...
by *(he notices something in the water)*
Temptation?

(As the music rises and falls, the Maiden seductively dances before the incredulous Whitbourne. He kneels down and stares, mouth agape, into the water.)

MAIDEN: Buy a girl a drink, sailor?
Take her to the theatre.
Shower her in flowers
or satisfy with sinful sweets.
Tell her that she's gorgeous
or drape her in gems and pearls.
But didn't your mum ever tell you

it's impolite
to stare?

(Whitbourne stands and turns away, embarrassed, but immediately returns his disbelieving eyes to the Maiden.)

Tell me what you think, sailor.
Does the figure fit the form?
Can I consider your fancy tickled?
Can this Sea-maid float your boat?
Am I the type you'd like to tail?

Don't just stand there
mouth wide open
like a leering lumpfish looking at a lure.
Don't be frightened,
don't be nervous.
Tell me sailor,
do you like what you see?

WHITBOURNE: You...you're a...

MAIDEN: What I am does not matter.
What I offer can change the world.

WHITBOURNE: Get thee hence, spawn of Satan.

MAIDEN: Come, come, sailor.
Is that how your mum taught you to treat a lady?
Do I look like a threat to you,
Big Strong Englishman?

WHITBOURNE: No, but I...

MAIDEN: Surely with one wrong move,
you'd have me laid out
with taties, scrunchions and brewis.
Am I not just another thing of the sea,
to be controlled and caught and killed?

WHITBOURNE: Well now, miss, no one said anything about...

MAIDEN: So do your worst, sailor.
Call your men
and net me,
bind me,

scale me,
fillet me
and let all of England remember
it was you who killed the Maiden.

WHITBOURNE: Well, now, I would never...

MAIDEN: Or then listen to what I am saying-
to what you can learn-
to utter enlightenment.

You look like an observant man,
awake, aware and alert.
You've probably seen so many things
you'd swear you'd seen it all.
But I could show you things, sailor,
I could show you things
that you're wandering eyes could scarcely contain.

You look like a learned man.
Thoughtful, thorough through and through.
You've probably learned so many things
you think you've learned it all.
But I can teach you things, oh sailor boy,
I can teach you things
that would cause your precious brain to pop its top.

I am a Maiden of the Sea,
a Keeper of Knowledge,
your wildest dreams come to life.
I am a sign of the times,
a siren of suspense
and what's lurking down below.

Come with me,
come with me,
down to the thrilling depths of the sea.
Open your eyes,
open your mind
and come, come down to the sea.

(Whitbourne is again speechless. The Maiden slowly begins to climb the ladder towards him.)

With one kiss I can make you immortal,
with one kiss, anything you desire.

Simply surrender,
silence suspicions.
Just give me a kiss,
come and give me a kiss.

(Whitbourne seems hypnotized as he slowly kneels down, closes his eyes and is about to kiss her.)

MAIDEN: You are mine Captain Whitebone.

WHITBOURNE: *(snapping out of it)* Uh, that's Whitbourne, actually.

MAIDEN: *(confused)* What?

WHITBOURNE: My name. You said WHITE BONE. It is Whitbourne. Richard, well, Captain Richard...Captain Richard Whitbourne. Call me Richard...uh, Captain...uh, I mean, call me what you will. Who, or what are you?

MAIDEN: Surely a man such as yourself knows the answer to that question.

WHITBOURNE: You are a mermaid, I suppose.

MAIDEN: What gave me away; the flowing tresses, the radiant beauty or the bloody great fish tail?
But now, you must follow your heart
now you must give me a kiss.

Come with me,
come with me,
down to the thrilling depths of the sea.
Open your eyes,
open your mind,
and come, come down to the sea.

With one kiss, you can dwell
in my watery arms ... forever.

WHITBOURNE: Well, miss ..uh, it is not that I'm not greatly flattered. But, well, forever is a rather long period.

MAIDEN: But surely the great Captain Richard Whitbourne is not afraid.
Surely a scholarly man such as yourself would leap at the chance to gain the vast oceans of knowledge.

WHITBOURNE: You make an excellent point, miss,

But you're talking of forever, and I have appointments,
responsibilities. Admiral Hawkins will be here in three days to
inspect English fishing interests.
Orders must be given,
ledgers must be balanced.

MAIDEN: You sound like a man buried in numbers,
drowning in the mundane.
What about Christopher Columbus?
What about John Cabot?
Does not the blood of the Explorer's
course through your veins?

WHITBOURNE: Yes, I believe so.

MAIDEN: And what would your king say of such timidity?
Would he not desire to add Neptune's kingdom to his own?

WHITBOURNE: Yes, that is also a good point,
but he also likes balanced ledgers.

MAIDEN: Captain Richard Whitbourne,
you are toying with me,
you naughty boy.
Such a clever Englishman.
I offer you paradise,
but still you shuffle your feet.
One final offer:
a touch.

WHITBOURNE: A touch?

MAIDEN: With the Maiden's kiss,
you would be allowed to live forever in the ocean realm.
But with the Maiden's touch,
just a simple little touch,
you could enter that realm for an hour.

WHITBOURNE: An hour.

MAIDEN: No commitment,
no regret.
An hour of utter bliss.

WHITBOURNE: Well, I believe, I can spare an hour.

MAIDEN: *(sarcastic)* You do make a girl feel wanted.

WHITBOURNE: One touch?

MAIDEN: One touch.

BOTH: One touch.

(He tentatively reaches out his hand, she moves quickly to grab it, but he does not flinch. She smiles and gently caresses his hand. He climbs down the ladder.)

Scene Two

(The Maiden swims back and allows Whitbourne to descend the ladder. At the bottom, he looks uncertain as he holds his breath and steps onto the “ocean floor”. Still holding his breath, he walks forward, the grinning Maiden swimming around behind him. She waits as he refuses to breathe. Finally, he gasps for air and begins thrashing and gagging as though he is drowning. She rushes to his side and encourages his to breathe.)

MAIDEN: Breathe, breathe,
 calmly, calmly.
 Relax,
 release,
 receive.

(Whitbourne takes another huge gulp and holds it, but stands still, looking frantically at the Maiden. She nods her head, he relaxes and nods his head and slowly releases his breath. He takes a normal breath and his look of panic turns to one of amazement.)

WHITBOURNE: How can this be?
 How can I be
 where I am?

 Can I believe?
 Is this a dream
 or reality?

 Every inch of my spirit
 is terrified.
 Every ounce of my soul
 feels reborn
 and the new life teeming around me
 tells me nothing is as I believed.
 The other side.
 I have seen the other side.

The other side of the world
is not thousands of leagues away,
but a fathom.
Only a fathom
below.

MAIDEN: Were my promises empty?

WHITBOURNE: A fog has been lifted,

MAIDEN: Have I led you astray?

WHITBOURNE: great secrets made clear,

MAIDEN: It seems you are satisfied.

WHITBOURNE: such wonders revealed.

MAIDEN: Then give me a kiss.

(She tries to kiss him, but oblivious, he moves away, pointing at some new wonder.)

WHITBOURNE: I gazed down from above

MAIDEN: Oh, sailor, I'm calling.

WHITBOURNE: on this world from above

MAIDEN: Don't keep me waiting.

WHITBOURNE: But now I am here
and it could not be more different.
The ocean I knew
has suddenly changed,
but is this heaven or hell?

MAIDEN: They both have their charms.
Is this a blessing or curse?

WHITBOURNE: This gift is beyond imagination.

MAIDEN: Then offer some thanks,
how 'bout a kiss?

(She tries to kiss him and he again turns away. She "huffs" in frustration)

WHITBOURNE: Here I stand before the threshold
of a new and beautiful realm
And the blood of the Great Explorers
runs fiery through my veins.

With the vastness laid before me
I could conquer like a king
and the name of Richard Whitbourne
would go down in history:
The Master of Navigation,
Commander of the Seas!

(He comes out of his reverie and looks around.)

Thank you, miss.
You were right,
This is indeed something to behold.
I am sorry I doubted you..
This is amazing.

MAIDEN: Is it worthy of a kiss?

WHITBOURNE: *(Still distractedly looking around.)* A kiss?
Why, that seems a small price to pay.
A kiss ...
a kiss ...

MAIDEN: Ah, my sailor, a kiss.

(She moves to kiss him, but at the last moment he again becomes distracted and moves away.)

WHITBOURNE: Well just look at the shoddy construction of this fishing stage. The
cross beams are not even reinforced.

(He walks back to examine the dock and the Maiden sits C, rolling her eyes in frustration. Two jelly fish, a tom cod and a sculpin enter and see Whitbourne and the Maiden. They talk amongst themselves.)

JELLY 1: Well what have we here?

TOM: What?

JELLY 2: Seems our pretty maiden has caught herself a new prize.

SCULLY: What you mean ... him? And her?

JELLY 1: Aye, the prelude to passion.

TOM: Passion?!? Love? What foolishness.

JELLY 2: This is what the Maiden does. Her *forte*, as they say in Europe.

TOM: *(laugh)* And when have you been to Europe?

JELLY 2: Shut yer gob.

SCULLY: But I ain't never understood.
I mean, he with the legs
and she with the tail,
how do they ... *(becoming lewd.)*
you know ...

JELLY 1: ...Dance!?

JELLY 2: Don't you oafs know that there is more to a relationship than
physical compatibility?

(Tom and Scully break into uproarious, knee-slapping laughter. After an extended guffaw, they see the Jellies staring at them, unimpressed.)

TOM & SCULLY: What?

JELLIES: Shut yer gobs.

JELLY 1: Besides it is not love that drives the Maiden.
She has lured others.

JELLY 2: She will lure others.

JELLIES: For that is the nature of the beast.

 There once was a Sea-maiden, charming
 who's rates of success were alarming
 and news of her fear
 travelled far, travelled near
 and made many seamen go farming.

 Our beautiful maiden did court
 the world over, by every report.
 From St. John's to Riyadh

not stopping 'till she had a
jackass from every port.

There she goes again,
doin' the things that
a watery woman must do.
There she goes again,
flappin' her fins in the face
of what's good and what's true.
We'll say our prayers later,
'cuz how can you hate her?
O' there she goes again!

JELLY 1: I heard that an ensign from France
was tickled when she gave him a chance.
So over he went
and his life was well spent,
for all that they found were his pants!

JELLY 2: A prominent Portuguese figure
was told that his mast could be bigger.
But she dragged him down hard
when he let down his guard
as he thought he was going to jig her!

CHORUS: There she goes again
doin' the things that
a watery woman must do.
There she goes again,
flappin' her fins in the face
of what's good and what's true.
We'll say our prayers later
'cuz how can you hate her?
O' there she goes again.

*(The four fish swim over to the Maiden, who is still sitting on the floor in
frustration. They notice that she is not happy.)*

JELLY 1: Oh my, little pout? Why so glum?

JELLY 2: Has your latest plaything proven more that even you can handle?

MAIDEN: O sisters, this man is infuriating.

TOM: So what? Set him adrift.

SCULLY: He looks like a bit of a chucklehead to me.

MAIDEN: No, I will not give up.
But look at him,
pouring over construction when he could be pouring over this.

(She writhes into a sexy pose. The jellies roll their eyes)

What do you think boys ...
boys?

TOM: *(completely focussed on stage)* I think those cross beams do need reinforcement. Scully?

SCULLY: Yeah, yeah, I'd say two-and-a-quarter, two-and-a-half ...?

TOM: Nah. Two-a-quarter.

SCULLY: *(arguing)* Half!

MAIDEN: Boys!

(Tom and Scully are startled and jump.)

TOM: *(trying to cover)* Uh ... um ... oh, yes, very arousing.

SCULLY: My ... uh ... heart is aflame.
(to Tom) Two-and-a-half.

MAIDEN: Ugh.

(The Jelly Sisters laugh.)

JELLY 1: Dear Maiden, you said it true!
Boys, the lot of them for real men
exist only in a dream.

MAIDEN: I just wish to understand him.

JELLY 1: What? To understand a man?
Dear maiden, to understand a man, you merely need to examine
the humble donkey.

JELLY 2: What does the beast want?
What does it need?

JELLIES: Eat, drink, sleep, shit, shag.
Understand?

MAIDEN: What?

JELLIES: Eat, drink, sleep, shit, shag.
There now you understand all men.
But like the humble donkey
when his mind is set on something
the very turn of the tides
will not drag him away.

JELLY 1: The problem is not in the understanding.

JELLY 2: The problem is in the changing.

JELLIES: And that is a mystery that even
you will never discover.

3 WOMEN: A mountain stands strong
eternal.
The four winds blow
on their own sweet whim.
Far better to try and halt the setting sun
than to try and change a man.

An iceberg crashes
its journey
and the capelin roll in
as they always have.
Far better to try and turn the tide
than to try and change a man.

JELLIES: You can travel the waves for a lifetime,
searching,
searching for one who is different.
You can wait, you can wait,
you can wait but there's more
satisfaction
from bangin' your head up against
a bloody great rock.

JELLY 1: (*softening*) But a man can stand strong
like a mountain

JELLY 2: And be driven to greatness

like brave gallant winds

MAIDEN: And the setting sun,
reveals a romantic moon
Hidden beneath,
but always there.

WOMEN: A warm embrace
a gentle smile
a comforting shoulder
a twinkling eye.
The feeling of joy that
you get from a man.
Let's hope they never change.

JELLY 1: There, there maiden, he'll come around ...
they always do.

JELLY 2: Yes, and because of your kiss,
you have him for eternity.

MAIDEN: Yes ... uh, well ...

JELLY 1: What do you mean ... "uh, well"?

JELLY 2: You did get him to kiss you.

MAIDEN: Not precisely.

JELLY 1: No kiss? Then that means...

TOM & SCULLY: You didn't let him ...

ALL FISH: TOUCH you!?

JELLY 2: Oh girl. You are giving away the milk before he buys the cow.

JELLY 1: You think he will kiss you now that he's already seen the goods?

JELLY 2: Men like him are all the same. When the hour is up, he'll go back
and brag to his buddies of all the wonders that he saw ... for
nothing.

JELLYES: How he conquered the Maiden.

MAIDEN: You're right. What have I done.

TOM: Hold on there now, sister. Scully and me ain't about to float around while some angishore takes advantage of our little miss.

SCULLY: We ain't, Tom?

TOM: No, we ain't.

SCULLY: Well, what are we gonna do?

TOM: We're gonna teach him a lesson.

SCULLY: I don't know, Tom, he looks pretty well educated.

TOM: No, we're gonna, you know, give him some lumps.

SCULLY: Oh, is it tea time already?

TOM: No, you moron. We're gonna knock him 'round 'til his teeth fall out, then throw him back to cry to his mudder.

SCULLY: Oh. Then can we have tea?

TOM: *(sarcastic)*Yes, then we can have tea with biscuits and marshberry jam ...Come on, fish brains.

(The Maiden and Jellies move to the side. Whitbourne comes forward, still inquisitively gazing about. Tom and Scully move to either side of him casually shuffling their feet as though they were simply "hanging out.")

TOM: How's she goin', buddy?

SCULLY: Whadayat?

WHITBOURNE: Astounding. You are a tom cod and you are a sculpin.
Myoxocephalus octodecimspinosus and *Microgadus tomcod*.

TOM: Whoa, whoa, hang on there, cocky. Watch the potty mouth.

WHITBOURNE: No, my friend. I utter not vulgarities, but your latin classification.
(to Scully) You, sir, are an exquisite specimen.

SCULLY: Hear that, Tom, ole man? I'm a Quizzy Spaceman.
He's quite a flatterer.

TOM: Alight than, buddy. Let's see you talk your way out of this. Our friend over there tells us that you been taking advantage of her.

WHITBOURNE: My good fish, I assure you, I did nothing of the sort.

SCULLY: What, you callin' her a liar? She said that you touched her.

WHITBOURNE: I never laid a finger on her ... well I mean, I touched her.

TOM & SCULLY: He admits it!

TOM: Alright then, buddy. Out through the narrows with you.

SCULLY: See how you do when an hour runs out and you're half way to the Grand Banks.

TOM: I'm sure there's more than a few codfish happy to turn the tables and have a real feed of fisherman's brewis!

(Tom and Scully grab the struggling Whitbourne and begin to drag him forward. The Jellies urge them on.)

MAIDEN: *(rushing forward)* No, stop!

TOM: Now don't you worry your pretty little head, sister.

SCULLY: We'll have him out of your hair before you know it.

JELLY 1: 'Tis better this way.

JELLY 2: Everyone makes mistakes.

MAIDEN: But I love him!

(The fish and Whitbourne all freeze, stunned.)

FISH: What?!

WHITBOURNE: What?!

TOM: Now that's a laugh.

JELLY 1: My dear, the Maiden does not love.

TOM & JELLY 1: She wants, she needs

desires and feeds
She lusts and longs
but never, never
does she love.

SCULLY: I think its sweet.

JELLY 2: You must be sick or taken with a mild bout of nerves.

MAIDEN: No, with all of my being
I love Captain Richard Whitbourne.

WHITBOURNE: (*slightly stunned*) Just call me Richard.

FISH: But how?

WHITBOURNE: But how?

MAIDEN: I have gazed on the face of love.
Through the ages, I have seen it in the poor men's eyes.
Long have I denied them,
Long have I denied the burning heart,
that quivers inside of me.

I have laughed in the face of love,
gently held, cradled in my hands
as life slowly slipped away.
They looked to me with pleading eyes
and I held them, tender, close
until the final moment.

But too many years of staring into
the light of true emotion
has left me transformed forever
and the very thing I toyed with
played with
tricked with
has become the only thing that I desire.
I have gazed on the face of love
and need the warmth reflected onto me.

TOM: But why this uptight English prig?

WHITBOURNE: Yes, why this uptight English ... I mean, me?

MAIDEN: One year ago, I rested in these same waters

waiting for some poor soul to entrap
when I witnessed such a moment of compassion
that I knew I would never be the same.

A wealthy English merchant had discovered his stores had been
raided, and he blamed it on the people of this land:
The people that you call the Redman.

The merchant wanted blood,
the merchant wanted murder
and a ravenous mob had gathered for the sport.

Countless lives would have been forfeit
upon that fateful day.
If not for the voice of reason.
If not for the voice of love.

And it rang out loud and clear.

WHITBOURNE: *(remembering)* No man is guilty 'til proven.
No innocent to be punished unjust.
Everyone equal on God's green earth
And justice deserved by all.

WHIT. & MAIDEN: "You will harm these people over my dead body
and condemnation of the Crown."

WHITBOURNE: I remember, 'twas Master William Barbour. Three days later, they
found the pirates who carried out the raid.

MAIDEN: How many lives did you save that day, Richard.
I have gazed on the face of love.

*(Richard is momentarily taken into the Maiden's impassioned story, but then
snaps out of it.)*

WHITBOURNE: *(uncomfortable)* Uh ... right. Well, thank you so much for saving
me. I really do appreciate it more than you can imagine. I must
insist, though, you really could do much better than an "old
English prig". Really, I'm not much of a catch, and I do confess
that the only word that scares me more than "death" is *(gulp)* ...
"love".

JELLY 1: Has anyone ever told you that you talk too much?

MAIDEN: Richard, it is too late. Abandon me if you must and I will drift out to sea and die of loneliness.

WHITBOURNE: If only you could see my life up above,
you would see more clearly what you want.

MAIDEN: I want to know more, Richard.
I want to know what you do,
who you are,
how you live.
But I will never. *(hangs her head in sadness)*

WHITBOURNE: I admire your curiosity.
(thinking)
And surely ... well ... there must be a way.
If the touch of a mermaid permitted
a man to live beneath the waves for an hour,
should not the opposite be true?

SCULLY: Yes now, s'pose buddy is well educated.

MAIDEN: Rise above the waves for an hour?

WHITBOURNE: An hour.

WHIT. & MAIDEN: No commitments,
no regrets.
Another world
for an hour.

(Whitbourne runs back to the ladder, climbs up, and stands at the top. He smiles and extends his hand. Now somewhat disarmed and nervous, the Maiden crosses to the ladder and climbs. At the top, she shyly takes Whitbourne's hand and he helps her step out of the water.)

FISH: Here's to life.
Here's to love.
Here's to joy
and comfort.

Scene Three

MAIDEN: Every inch of my spirit is terrified.
Every ounce of my life feels reborn
and the new life teeming around me
tells me nothing is as I believed.

The other side.
I have seen the other side.
The other side of the world
is not thousands of leagues away
but a fathom,
only a fathom above.

WHITBOURNE: Yes, Maiden,
this island is beautiful, indeed,
though it does seem to look different now,
now that I've seen beneath.
But not less mystical,
not less wondrous,
somehow more familiar,
somehow more like home.

MAIDEN: (*playfully*) So come then, Richard,
you have seen my world, my family,
heard all my dirty little secrets.
You are obviously not scared off by legends.

WHITBOURNE: Legends are the stories of men
who have turned to fantasy.
I prefer to let those men ...
those women
and their actions speak for themselves.
Thank you for saving my life.

MAIDEN: My pleasure, dear Captain.
But please,
now we are in your element.
The sailor must enlighten the Maiden.
What is your legend, Richard Whitbourne?

WHITBOURNE: (*chuckling*) Legends?
Legends?
Legends are reserved for
far more interesting men.
I work hard,
try to live an honest, loyal life.
I fear I am not a legend,
but a footnote.

As a young lad,
I first saw light
in Exmouth, Devonshire.

Born in the land of Men of the sea,
Raised by strong men and stronger women.
A fisherman and a seaman.
And I did my duty and fished.

But nets and traps don't offer the thrill
of the Royal English Navy,
and before long, I found myself
captain of a ship of war,
though I've never been a fighter.
But I did my duty and fought.

(Two well-to-do society ladies enter. They are the daughters of a wealthy captain spending the summer in St. John's. They admire Whitbourne.)

In August of fifteen and eighty-eight
I found myself again,
the footnote to legends.
Just one of the ships against the force
of the mighty Spanish Armada.
And on that day true legends were born:
the names of Drake and Howard.
As the English turned the hand of fate
and won the day in glory.
The Masters of Navigation.
Commanders of the Sea.
And I did my duty,
followed orders,
and did my little part.
On that day I was proud.

But honestly, I'm happier
with words and numbers and law.
I am happy to do my duty.
I am happy to be a footnote.
Mostly, I am happy.

(The ladies come forward, the Maiden hangs back)

VICTORIA: Oh, but Captain Whitbourne,
you are too modest.

ELIZABETH: Surely you know that you are the most eligible bachelor up or
down this whole god forsaken shore, and certainly a legend in your
own time.

VICT. & ELIZ: Our father says
that you're the best
so strong and smarter
than the rest.
Full of wit and bravery and some
people think you're rather handsome.

Captain Whibourne sailed the sea
and trounced the Spanish handily
for they all say that he's the man
to save this godless New-found-land.
And we think so too.

WHITBOURNE: *(slightly embarrassed)* Ah, Elizabeth and Victoria Smith. And
what brings the two of you down to the rooms this morning?

VICTORIA: Perhaps we were looking for you, Captain.

ELIZABETH: We thought you would enjoy some company.

WHITBOURNE: That was very gracious of you, but ...
Well ...I am currently not lacking for company.

(He motions to the Maiden who, somewhat shyly, comes forward.)

WHITBOURNE: The Ladies Victoria and Elizabeth Smith, this is ...
(unsure what to say)

VICT. & ELIZ.: Oh, my word, what have we here?
A dirty, wild little dear.
Is this a dream and are we sleeping?
What's this company you're keeping?

Whitbourne, you've a reputation.
Don't you see our hesitation?
Wooing us would be more smart
So cast away this grinning tart.

VICTORIA: She is a demon.

ELIZABETH: She is the daughter of the devil.

BOTH: And look at her hair!

WHITBOURNE: Now, ladies ...

MAIDEN: Why you no good snotty-nosed excuses for a festering, maggot-ridden bag of fish guts. Why don't ye shut yer gobs afore I knock yer flabby arses clear up into yer dog-faced, dung-filled noggins?

(The ladies and Whitbourne stand aghast.)

VICTORIA: Well, I, I, I ...

(Elizabeth starts to cry like a baby.)

MAIDEN: Get out of here!

(The ladies hurry off in shock.)

MAIDEN: Sailor, are you blushing?

WHITBOURNE: Gentle maiden, I believe you need to learn how one is to behave on land. That ... that language. A woman simply does not act that way.

MAIDEN: Richard Whitbourne, you are more clever than that. Tell me your women don't work just as hard. Tell me your women don't nurture your children And face pain and death to continue your line. Tell me that England, and the whole world over wouldn't be half what it is without women. And then tell me a lady shouldn't behave just exactly the way she sees fit.

WHITBOURNE: *(chuckling)* Please forgive me, Maiden. Your logic is as brilliant and baffling as always.

MAIDEN: There, see, you have learned something from me.

(They laugh. The two ladies return with Reverend Leat.)

VICTORIA: There she is, Reverend.

ELIZABETH: There's the ... the ... sea witch!

LEAT: Now calm yourself, Lady Smith. We will sort out this disturbance.

WHITBOURNE: Good morning, Reverend Leat.

LEAT: Good morning, Captain Whitbourne. I can't help but notice that you were not at the service this morning.

WHITBOURNE: Yes ... well ... something came up.

(He motions to the Maiden.)

LEAT: Holy Father In Heaven! Is that a mermaid?
But she is a lovely creature.
Young lady, are you here to tempt me
as our Messiah was tempted in the desert?

MAIDEN: Certainly you are jesting,
but I do know an old Walrus
that would be just your type.

(Whitbourne laughs, but contains himself. Leat is slightly embarrassed and angry.)

LEAT: Ah, very clever.
I see your tongue is as slippery as your tail.
But clever works will not guard you
against the judgement of the Lord.
You are clearly a being of sin.

WHITBOURNE: Now, stop right there, Reverend ...

LEAT: Control yourself, Captain. When your fellow military man,
Humphrey Gilbert, claimed this island for His Majesty lo these
thirty years ago, he installed the Church of England as the one true
faith. I am the Church of England in New-found-land and I will be
heard.

MAIDEN: It is fine, Richard,
let the gas bag blow.

LEAT: Ever since the Dawn of Man
she's been there:
Temptation.

In the Garden,
she was there:
Temptation.

But temptation must be eradicated.

(The ladies join in during the following "hymn")

All creatures great and creatures small,
the Heavenly Father loves them all.
But He will scorn and strongly smite
those creatures that refuse His light.
Yes, He will scorn and strongly smite
all creatures that refuse His light.

The serpent in the garden
seduced a woman there
so she betrayed her husband
and left them in despair.

And down throughout the ages,
mistakes have been repeated
and thus eternal paradise
on earth has been so cheated.

All creatures great and creatures small,
the Heavenly Father loves them all.
But He will scorn and strongly smite
those creatures that refuse His light.
Yes, He will scorn and strongly smite
all creatures that refuse His light.

LEAT: It is a heathen and sinner, and
no better than those poor savages,
living in ignorance
in the forest.

WHITBOURNE: So what do you plan, Leat?
Torture 'till she repents?

LEAT: Now, now, Captain, this is not the bloody Inquisition.
We aren't a mob of Papists or Puritans are we.
No, this poor creature needs help.
It will be taken on the next ship to England.
The Archbishop will know what to do with it.

(He grabs the Maiden by the wrists and begins to pull her off.)

You are coming with me.

WHITBOURNE: Leat, I order you to stop you to stop this at once.

(William Barbour enters, taking the Maiden by the other hand and spinning her as if at a grand ball. He is an unabashedly charming merchant.)

BARBOUR: Yes, good Reverend. Haven't you got anything better to do than to harass a couple out for a Sunday stroll?

LEAT: William Barbour, this has nothing to do with contracts or commerce ...

BARBOUR: Everything has to do with commerce, Reverend.
(he looks the Maiden up and down)
Ah, so it is true.
Whitbourne has landed himself a real beauty.

(The Maiden is flattered and giggles.)

WHITBOURNE: Mr. Barbour, this is really none of your business.

BARBOUR: Don't worry, Richard.
You never had much of an eye for opportunity,
but you won't be left out.
You'll get your cut.
Just leave it to me.

WHITBOURNE: I will have none of your treachery.

MAIDEN: Be calm, Richard,
I do have an eye for opportunity.
Let's hear what he has to say.

BARBOUR: Ah, beautiful and clever,
a rare combination, indeed.
And for what is rare,
people will pay,
will pay through the teeth.

LEAT: Really, Mr. Barbour, this is a mockery.

BARBOUR: Patience. Just hear what I have to say.

Dearest maiden, your beauty is beyond the earthly realm.
I am sure you capture hearts without a chore
And without a doubt, the only living mermaid in the world
ever held in captivity ...

I mean “well met.”

And it appears that you have formed some small attachment
to our darling Captain Dickie, who knows why.
But my dear, on land, the rules of living are not a simple lot.
To live in comfort, you need lots of money.
And here is the deal that I offer:

On the streets of London, Paris and Berlin,
you’d be a sensation unmatched.
They’d call for your radiance
and cry for your grace
and pay a king’s ransom to gaze in your face.

(aside) The lines would be endless,
They’d stand there for weeks
for the high class of Europe
so do love their freaks!

(back to the Maiden) Where was I, oh yes.
You’d live like a Princess, with Dickie your prince.
Forever, you’d captivate hearts
and all your desires, below and above,
would come true, for you would know love.

With costumes so stunning,
the Bard would dismay.
We’ll hire a band
and viols will play.

(The Maiden has become somewhat inspired by his idea. He reaches his hand out to her and she takes it. Whitbourne appears somewhat jealous. Barbour bows and the Maiden curtsies. A minuet begins and they start to dance.)

BARB.& MAID.: La, la, la, la, la etc...

(After one refrain of the minuet, Barbour spins the Maiden into the Reverend who is drawn into the moment and begins dancing with her. Barbour goes to Whitbourne.)

BARBOUR: Do not worry, Richard.
Play along and we’ll both be rich.
Sixty, forty, of course to cover my producer fees.
I have a dozen men on the way to cage the abomination.
How on earth did you ever lure it out of the water?

(Whitbourne tries to contain his fury, but explodes.)

WHITBOURNE: Why you no good, snotty-nosed excuse for a festering maggot-ridden bag of fish guts! Why don't you shut your gob afore I knock your flabby arse clear up into your dog-faced, dung-filled noggin?

(The others stand with mouths wide open, except for the Maiden who looks quite pleased at Whitbourne's outburst.)

BARBOUR: *(suddenly seething and deathly serious)*
How dare you speak to me that way, you insolent cur.

WHITBOURNE: Please, Mr. Barbour, I do not seek to provoke, but ...

BARBOUR: Well, provoke you have, Captain.
(pulling his rapier) Draw sword and defend.
You shall pay for your disrespect.
Reverend, you can witness the duel and
conduct the funeral at the same moment.

LEAT: Gentlemen, please.

BARBOUR: Draw sword, Whitbourne!

(Whitbourne hesitantly draws his sword.)

MAIDEN: Richard, it is not worth this.

WHITBOURNE: I have never been a fighter ...

BARBOUR: Than this will be quick.

(The two begin to duel. The Maiden is terrified, the Reverend solemn, and the two ladies squeal in delight. The dramatic duel continues with Barbour initially gaining the upper hand. Gradually, Whitbourne fights the merchant back until he is disarmed. Whitbourne stands with his rapier at Barbour's chest.)

WHITBOURNE: I have never been a fighter,
but there are times when one must fight.

VICTORIA: Do it, Captain. Fair is fair.

ELIZABETH: The world won't miss him.

LEAT: You are well within your rights under the Lord

WHITBOURNE: Then there are times for the fighting to cease.
William Barbour, as Vice Admiral and magistrate of the English fleet in St. John's of the New-found-land, I hereby charge you with attempted abduction and unprovoked assault. As of this moment, all provisions, supplies and holding are property of His Royal Majesty, James the First until such time as you are deemed not guilty by trial of your peers in London. Such trial will be arranged subsequent to your arrival on English soil, subsequent to your imminent departure from the New-found-land.
You will be on the next ship to England, Mr. Barbour ... alone. Reverend Leat, kindly escort Mr. Barbour back to his quarters. Please forgive us for this morning's disturbance and accept Mr. Barbour's current fish stocks as a donation to the Church.

LEAT: Thank you, Captain. It will be done.

(Leat leaves with Barbour.)

WHITBOURNE: Thank you, ladies. I am sure that you do not wish the rest of your quickly fading courting years to be tied up in legal unpleasantness, so I would advise you to forget what you have seen here today and return home.

VICTORIA: Yes, Captain Whitbourne, thank you. Come, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: *(To Victoria, somewhat starry eyed.)* He was magnificent.

(The two ladies exit.)

WHITBOURNE: I have never been a fighter,
but there are better ways to fight
than with steel.

MAIDEN: You were willing to die for me.

WHITBOURNE: It was nothing, Maiden.

MAIDEN: You were willing to give up everything.

WHITBOURNE: Please, any decent man would have ...

MAIDEN: Hours ago, you feared death,
afraid for even a unknown kiss,
But now ...

WHITBOURNE: Now it is different.
Now I have come to know you.
Legends are but fantasy
and actions speak for themselves.
You have changed me forever.
Now all is different.
Now I have come to know you.
Now I have come
to love you

(They stand, eyes locked.)

WHIT. & MAID.: Revelations
unfolding
Hesitations
disappearing
Reincarnation
revealing
I would never have believed
that I could ever know this love.

Aspirations
turning clearer
Anticipation
growing nearer
Exaltation
holding dearer
And I would never have believed
that I could ever know this love.

The sunshine shimmers on the bay.
The green moss verdant on the hills.
The blue sky bending
to caress the gentle seas
are all made grander next to you.

The cliffs majestically tower.
The fields smell of berries soft and sweet.
The ocean's vastness
is as boundless as a dream,
but they all seem better next to you.

Revelations
unfolding
Hesitations
disappearing

Reincarnation
revealing
But I would never have believed
that I could know this love.

WHITBOURNE: I believe I owe you a kiss.

MAIDEN: A kiss?

BOTH: A kiss.

(The two move to embrace each other and slowly move their lips closer. There is great anticipation. Just before the kiss, they both open their eyes and step away from each other. They still gaze at each other as their mood lightens.)

BOTH: Sometimes change is for the better.
Sometimes change will do you good.
Sometimes change will make you happy
but the more you change,
the more you stay the same.

WHITBOURNE: You would be miserable amongst this crude, self-serving society.

MAIDEN: And you would be lost without your order ... your England.

WHITBOURNE: Perhaps, but you have given me the great knowledge you promised. There is more to life than order and obedience.

MAIDEN: You have taught me great knowledge as well, Richard. You have taught me to know true love.

BOTH: Sometimes change is for the better.
Sometimes change will do you good.
Sometimes change will make you happy
but the more we change,
the more we stay the same.

WHITBOURNE: Fare thee well, Maiden.

MAIDEN: Fare thee well, Captain Richard Whitbourne.

(She turns and slowly climbs down the ladder, their eyes never breaking. When she reaches the bottom, he turns away and she leans her back up against one of the post. Whitbourne mournfully sits, his head in his hand. After a moment, the Revellers from the morning quietly and hesitantly enter.)

JENNIE: Captain Whitbourne, sir. Are you alright?

JOHN: He looks like a different man.

WILL: He looks like a man who has lost something great.

BESS: Cheer up, Captain. Whenever something is lost, something else is found.

CHORUS: Say fare thee well to love,
but life continues onward.
The ocean's give,
but also take away.

Say tally ho to life
for love shall come again.
Tomorrow may give
the promises of today.

WHIT. & MAID.: Say fare thee well to love,
but life continues onward.
Tomorrow may give
the promises of today.

ALL: And the future is bright in this place
a new found hope in a New-found-land.
Though crosses and comforts
we all are bound to bear
The future is bright in this place.

The air in New-found-land is wholesome and good.¹
The fire as sweet as any made of wood.
The waters, very rich, you know it is no less
Where all are good, Fire, Water, Earth, Air,
What man made of these four would not live there?
What creature made of these four, would not live there?

(The Mermaid swims out to sea as lights fade.)

THE END

¹ from *Quodlibets* by R. Heyman, 1628