

“THE SEAMASTER”

A PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 60 MINUTES

REHEARSAL – DECEMBER 2017

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SUMMARY

A young man harvests green emeralds from the watery shoals of Bogue Sound. When confronted by his former stepson of the same age a strange dance of language and power ensues. And a story is told of the merman and despair.

CHARACTERS

RALEIGH, 20s

BENNETT, 20s

TIME

The end of November.

SETTING

A seashed by the Bogue Sound, near Beaufort, North Carolina.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

The Seamaster was first performed on January 11, 2018 at Carteret Community College (NC) on the Bogue Sound, as commissioned and produced by Seven Stories Theatre Company, directed by Joey Madia, and with following cast:
RALEIGH, Dominic Massimino; BENNETT, Robby Justiss.

THE PLAY.

Evening.

*Light from within the seashed is provided
mostly by a near-full moon, unobstructed as
the seashed has no ceiling.*

Moonlight streaks outside the upstage door.

We hear the sounds of coastal shore.

*RALEIGH stands inside the seashed.
RALEIGH is young but seems old.*

*RALEIGH speaks to his left hand, fully
wrapped and sealed in protective bandage.
The left hand is wrapped, entombed in some
strange casing.*

RALEIGH

By the end of two nights, tonight and tomorrow, here before the sea, the thirtieth night, my story will be told a final time. Tomorrow night it will become itself a final time, and die, abandoning itself once and for all to despair.

*RALEIGH uses his right hand to wrestle
from the left-hand bandage what we now see
has been a voice recorder. RALEIGH
pauses the recorder.*

*RALEIGH moves to find a water bottle.
Small amount of contents remain.*

*RALEIGH swigs and drains the entirety.
Places the bottle in a bucket with other
empty bottles.*

RALEIGH

[Reactivates the voice recorder] You said, perhaps three nights ago, you said you wanted to know where we come from. All water starts from someplace, doesn't it. A melting pool of mountain snow, dripping to join ponds, then flowing to streams, a river, all towards sea. Does it ever go back to die? Does it reverse, from sea to stream, pond and return to mountain snow? For me it will never be. Caught at the gate between the only two roads on earth: water and land. When I die. Here. In two nights.

RALEIGH shuffle-slides to find a different water bottle. This one full. As RALEIGH goes to swig...

BENNETT [OFF]

Hey! Hey, you bastard!

RALEIGH drops the voice recorder inside the empty water bottle and places the bottle holding the recorder in a concealed spot.

BENNETT [OFF]

Yeah, I see you in there! Hey, I see you! That's right, you! Don't be pretending you ain't in that shack! Discovery's a bitch, ain't it! Now, let's go! We got business needs attending and I'm fixing to bust a door if you don't get out here!

RALEIGH

Door's already busted.

BENNETT

Oh. Well, it's damn late November cold with a frigid toss of wind so I'm coming in there. Alright, that's the revised plan, I'm coming in there! So you stay in there. That way you're in there and I'm in there! I like that plan better, much as I don't like it. Hey!

RALEIGH shuffle-slides across stage and opens the door.

They stare at each other.

BENNETT

Surprise, loser.

RALEIGH

Bennett.

BENNETT

Bet you didn't expect to see me.

RALEIGH

No.

BENNETT

Damn, you're a sorry-looking fool. The years have not been kind. To your sense of surprise as well. Bet you never thought you'd stare into this face again.

RALEIGH

Hmm.

BENNETT

I double that. Didn't much want much to see you again, either. Especially in this pitiful affair! Tell me this ain't where you've been hiding all these years. Hunkered in a hellacious fishing shack, huh? No lights, no indication of being occupied. Sure was a bitch of an ordeal finding it.

RALEIGH

You look well.

BENNETT

Hell about how I look. I know how I look. Didn't come all them miles to here to affirm my beauty.

RALEIGH

But you did come.

BENNETT

Only the sorry-looking fools need repeat themselves. We already said I come!

RALEIGH

Been a...long time?

BENNETT

Five years. Ain't long enough, far as I'm concerned.

RALEIGH

That how long it's been. Five years? How are you?

BENNETT

I ain't here to small talk you. Don't need to barb 'bout lost years or hard feelings or any of that stuff. Wouldn't want to carry conversation any farther than I could lift it around you. Damn, this really where you been hiding?

RALEIGH

Don't sit on that. Broken.

BENNETT

Oh, I get it. Lie low in busted accommodations. Don't let the shoreline folk here get the inkling you bamboozled somebody's dead Momma's money and living in squalor to extend the spending of that bounty. Spare the change and extend the rod!

RALEIGH

You came alone?

BENNETT

Don't you worry, you bastard, I ain't bring along my cadre of drywallers to pummel you. If I wanted you in the grips of pain you'd already be in it. No, I need you up and alive right now, in good steady and sane form, cuz we got business affairs to resolve, and you're gonna do it of your own free standing and standing free will, you understand?

RALEIGH

How long were you outside?

BENNETT

Long enough to mark this place the spot and you the sorry-looking bastard in it. And nobody else contained here with you.

RALEIGH

As usual.

BENNETT

...say that again?

RALEIGH

There's no one here but me.

BENNETT

I knew you wasn't entirely gone. I could sense it! No man disappears after all them lies and with all that money and all that homewrecking motley on his conscience. I was out to find you and find you I did.

RALEIGH

Don't drink that one. Here.

BENNETT

Man, did you not hear what I said? I ain't come all this way for pleasantries. Especially from you, you sorry-looking thief! No, I told you, I come to finalize affairs.

RALEIGH

I just figured after what was likely a long and arduous journey.

BENNETT

Raleigh: don't be trying your slick speaky-talk on me. For that reason my ears come pre-clogged. We ain't never bore much talk between us before and I ain't 'bout to start five years later now. You might've swindled Momma and God knows how many other elderly-trusting women around the inskirts and outskirts and upskirts of North Carolina with your young looks and youthful charm. But I ain't helpless and dependent. Not like it was between us before. I come here a man now.

RALEIGH

The age of receiving.

BENNETT

That's right. Guess a runaway lie-cheat hermit like you still pays note to calendar.

RALEIGH

I do indeed. Two nights remain.

BENNETT

Two nights remaining of November. One-Two. Tonight and tomorrow. And then comes the turn of December and me to the receiving of Momma's estate. So no idle discourse, no rambling, no distracting, and no evading. You is found and discovered and caught.

RALEIGH

Well it wasn't as though I was looking to be uncaught.

BENNETT

...I didn't quite follow that there. But no matter. Whatever I am or am not got me the knows. About you. Who you really are.

RALEIGH

Who I really am.

BENNETT

Why I'm here.

RALEIGH

...then let's begin tonight's engagement.

BENNETT

I told you, this ain't some kind of family reunion. And this ain't no social call. This is business.

RALEIGH

You made it here without trouble?

BENNETT

Man, I am the trouble. I'm the epicenter of trouble! The trouble just got here. Headquarters mischief, traveled straight to your hideout door. The man who tries to vanish is always found, huh? 'Specially when he's fool enough to remain in the general vicinities of the crime he created.

RALEIGH

Well, I don't doubt I didn't leave a mess behind. And I may sure have been the one to create it. But it was out of necessity. Genetic necessity.

BENNETT

Well, however you wanna speak it doesn't matter. Crime doesn't need a name to know it's all the same how you did it. Should be outlawed. Get all them Senators and Presidents to make it that way. Although, would turn most of 'em into criminals overnight. As for me, I'm glad I pieced together what I needed to. To get here in time on time.

RALEIGH

[Extending the bottle] As it were.

BENNETT

Did I say I was thirsty? I ain't toasting this gathering. Damn. [Drinks the water, without realizing it] Of all the places to go and disappear yourself. Bogue Sound on the Carolina shore!

RALEIGH

Really quite a charming location, once you get used to the taste of it.

BENNETT

Hell with that. I had to slink myself all around this sordid terrain to find this seashack. Damn near took me forever! Cottage to cottage, dock to dock, bobbing boats and runner lights, slippery shallows and briskly air, 'til finally arriving at this mess. Some barely walled shack amidst old provision shops and empty harbor lodges and pirate graveyards and a boatyard's worth of half-sunken get-away-from-it-all dreams. Trust me when I tell you Bogue Sound ain't nothing but salty and bleak. Fits you well.

RALEIGH

Where there's history there's water.

BENNETT

What I say 'bout the words, huh? I wouldn't be caught dead here.

RALEIGH

But I will. In fact, I am.

BENNETT

And a good much of me hoped to find you that way. Your little rotting corpse. You dead would make this all easier. With the land shark lawyer overseeing this affair. Could tell the lawyer that old swindler Raleigh's done us a decency and got himself proper dead so there's no more barrier to transaction. And then Momma's money would be all mine.

RALEIGH

How is Mr. Ellard?

BENNETT

Tight in his lips. But loose enough to have told enough. 'Bout Momma's estate.

RALEIGH

When did he do that?

BENNETT

Thought estate meant land. Real land you could touch. Like my family's house. These scallywags of the law take the precaution to put all this legal in it. But Ellard gave me enough. Oh, I have your attention now, don't I. Didn't seem to rank too high on your attention scale for all those nights Momma forced me to share roof with you. The same roof over the same home wrecked by you. My Mother stripped of her senses, by you.

RALEIGH

You still don't know. Surely your awareness of her estate is nothing new.

BENNETT

But my possession of it will be. One-Two, turn of the month, the five-year anniversary of her death, and I finally get it.

RALEIGH

As long as I allow it.

BENNETT

That's about what I got from Ellard.

RALEIGH

Well. If that's all you got?

BENNETT

All I got? I got that Momma restricted the money to be used for education. I got enough education. Made enough mistakes and fool setbacks to fill entire textbooks. Besides, education is just learning what someone else wants you to know.

RALEIGH

Imagine that.

BENNETT

But I didn't have the one thing I now needed to know. If you were still alive. And your location.

RALEIGH

Well. I figured you'd come.

BENNETT

Thought I'd call ahead?

RALEIGH

Not that I could have answered.

BENNETT

No matter. I don't do meetings, I do surprises. Now: you and I need to speak 'bout this money.

RALEIGH

There's nothing to speak about.

BENNETT

We're gonna speak about you signing back over to me what's rightfully mine.

RALEIGH

If that's how tonight is going to be.

BENNETT

Couldn't be no other way. Now that I've got you.

RALEIGH

Mr. Ellard tell you he was with your Mother and I before she died? At the hospital. Last time I saw him. He explained that after your mother's death I would become your legal Guardian—

BENNETT

Only 'cause you pushed off my real Dad.

RALEIGH

—and your mother's house and money would go into holding until the five year anniversary of her death, the first of December. At that time you get the house and I'd see to the money.

BENNETT

I'm already living in the house. You about to get the half that matters. Makes me wonder just how many other other-halves of other women's money you got stashed? Piled under fishing nets. Horded behind the rotting wood of these crumbling walls?

RALEIGH

This place has become a fortress of preservation.

BENNETT

Fortress? Disaster of three dimensions more like it. There ain't even no roof connected to the walls!

RALEIGH

In case rain falls. That and I need to see the moon.

BENNETT

No roof. No furniture. Not even a mailbox or address.

RALEIGH

Most people feel to own something, it must be possessed. If you recall, I tried to teach you the opposite.

BENNETT

When you happened to be around. When you were actually, for those brief minutes, inside my father's house. Only homewrecker I know who never slept in the bed he turned over, beside the woman he turned.

RALEIGH

I never could become what I wanted to be for you.

BENNETT

To think she never even married you then bound me to you through all this.

RALEIGH

That's what you've told yourself all these years?

BENNETT

I knew you a swindler. I double knew it when after you vanished and that legal sadist Ellard said only on the fifth anniversary of her death do I get the house. And to get the other half, the family inheritance, you of all people would need to be alive and in sound mind and sign it over. But he wouldn't say if you being alive was true or not. So I had to resort to sneaky measures.

RALEIGH

There's a cold November wind tonight, Bennett. If you're going to stay I could use your help—

BENNETT

I ain't staying.

RALEIGH

It's reaching a late hour and there's only one place to go.

BENNETT

Forget it. Distract me long enough so you can slide offshore, slither to again to the unseen? Nah, my eyes are on you and ain't disengaging 'til affairs are settled.

RALEIGH

How did you come here?

BENNETT

Now that is a tale worth telling. But not small talk, though, long talk.

RALEIGH

I meant: *how* did you come here?

BENNETT

And I'm fixing to tell you. Started when one of my drywallers first told me how he comes home from worksite and suspects his wife's been entertaining. *Visitors*, he calls 'em.

RALEIGH

What kind of visitors?

BENNETT

He don't know. He never sees 'em. But he comes home from worksite and says to his wife 'how was your day', and she says 'amazing!', and he says 'what so amazing 'bout it?', and she says she left work early for the afternoon, and he says what was so amazing 'bout leaving work early in the afternoon, and then she don't say nothing. Except her feet are all wet and muddy.

RALEIGH

That's how it starts.

BENNETT

He's furious! Deception and secrecy happening in his house! I tell him I know a thing or two about that. I tell him I lived a childhood when my own father was pushed out of my house by a young swindler barely years older than me. And I had to endure him taking my Dad's place, while my real Dad couldn't stand the indignity and vanished. Hell, everyone in town knows my story. You know what that's like to have to live your life in everyone else's eyes. The looks that town can give. But it's my town, so I stayed, hard as it was, I stayed for that house where my family lived for generations, but also because there's an inheritance coming my way, if only I could satisfy certain conditions, a-fore-mentioned. The drywaller tells me he's been tending a corner spot and keeping tall glass at The Muni. And then he tells me the strangest thing. That he ain't the only man of town of late drowning sorrow in liquid refuge. Because the men of town have all been noticing and feeling like all their houses have become places of entertainment for visitors. It's told now that the men of The Muni were at first growing aware of it, and now growing sure of it, and now becoming quite sore of it. The women all having their romantic attention elsewhere.

RALEIGH

And that was how you came here.

BENNETT

I'm saying it ain't just my drywaller. It's apparently all the ladies. All being wooed by someone, something, somewhere else. But that don't tell me the whereabouts of my estranged semi-stepfather. And Ellard wouldn't scuttle a word. Only that the many mensfolk of town who regular The Muni have become right agitated by the subject in mention, thanks to me rekindling the subject. How everything was fine until it all started with that conniver Raleigh. And whatever did happen to him? That young-looking, old-acting migrant stranger who over five years ago slinked to town and snatched that woman's heart and broke her home and then slinked off with half her will and ain't nobody heard from him. One says: I seen him at nights trying to sneak back to her house. Another says: his ghost haunts where the riverline meets the backyard of the dead woman's house.

RALEIGH

I've become a renewed sensation.

BENNETT

Hell about that. I knew better. I knew you wouldn't come back.

RALEIGH

I haven't been in the house since your Mother died. It was too painful.

BENNETT

Most pain I ever known.

RALEIGH

You remember her funeral. You remember?

BENNETT

... 'course....hell, yeah.

RALEIGH

Didn't rain that day.

BENNETT

December day dry.

RALEIGH

A full sun.

BENNETT

Rotten air.

RALEIGH

You and I stood next to each other.

BENNETT

Was her wish. The only reason.

RALEIGH

We watched her.

BENNETT

Lowered...like that.

RALEIGH

Returned to earth.

BENNETT

The only perfect the world ever had. My feet...stepped towards that box...I took the shovel.

RALEIGH

I gripped it with you. A rich earth, soft to the shovel.

BENNETT

I tossed the first clod. And by the time I went to toss a second you weren't standing there. You were gone.

RALEIGH

Bennett, there were things that couldn't be spoken that day.

BENNETT

As if the pain of Momma's death wasn't enough I've had to endure you. From the day my father decided he'd had enough of Momma philanderin' and wandered himself gone.

RALEIGH

Your Mother and I became entangled in something that's not easily explained.

BENNETT

Still can't believe she cheated my Dad for you. Some word-slinger with midnight kicks taking him to the ever-reaches of Carolina so he ain't ever home. Gone for extended time. Momma patrolling the backyard riverline at nights waiting for you to come back. And just like my real Dad couldn't stand it, and went gone, you were finally gone. But at the worst possible time. If only she could've lived to see what happened after she died.

RALEIGH

I'll explain it to you, Bennett, but first I'll need you to stay and help with something.

BENNETT

I don't want no explanation. It'd be nothing but lies anyway! Mistruth's a poison in that throat of constant deceit! Besides, I ain't here to help you, this a business occasion! I need the money.

RALEIGH

For what?

BENNETT

For what I need it for.

RALEIGH

You want to sell the house.

BENNETT

If I was selling the house, the hell'd I go through all the trouble of finding you? I already got the house! I'm already living in the house. So the only thing that happens December first is nothing. Unless I find you. And found you I did.

RALEIGH

And you don't remember.

BENNETT

Remember what? I remember ole' swindler Raleigh, and the woman of the lonely house, disappeared by two men, the father expired by grief and the husband by swindle, and that young-old homewrecker fleeing with his stepson's money! And there I was, left to bear the brunt of it, unanswered and unsettled. Five years trapped with the knowledge that all I got is facts but no reason behind it. A hard case of having the what and the when but not the why.

RALEIGH

Trapped. Between two worlds.

BENNETT

But no longer. For it was one night, call it one month ago, late October at The Muni, the men have gathered for nightly discourse about the visitor epidemic when some shoreman arrives. With loose shoreman's cape. And wide brim fisherman's cap drawn low. He stands far from barside where the light barely reaches and listens to the strange ruminations that spawn from town gossip. The woman's heartshifting, the houses dishonored, and the ladies of town shunning the men's romances. But it was after hearing the name Raleigh...this phantom shoreman affords a strange tale. About a fishing spot at Bogue Sound. There, he says, by the Sound, just below the sand flats, opposite Emerald Isle. That's what he says: just below the sand flats, opposite Emerald Isle. And one night, this shoreman says, he comes upon strange waters, green swirl, as if the undercurrent was lighting itself. So the stranger follows the green water and by the end of the green liquid trail sees what looked like a one-handed man. From an oar boat, trolling the sea.

RALEIGH

Bennett, this is a situation which carries not a small amount of explanation. Now are you going to stay and help?

BENNETT

I always resented you for what you did to my Dad. Pained him to the point where he couldn't stay any longer. And now this? Burns the memory of the mother I buried. The mother I buried and you ran out on before I even finished packing her plot. And now all this talking makes me thirsty, and all this talking...GIMME THAT!

BENNETT takes the bottle, drinks much.

RALEIGH

It's always good to hear you speak. Your voice.

BENNETT

I ain't even get to the profanities yet!

RALEIGH

Your custom tone of negativity.

BENNETT

Not anymore. I got a lot to be optimistic for. I'm an optimist now!

RALEIGH

Yet you look worried.

BENNETT

You think it's easy being an optimist?

RALEIGH

You see how it can get difficult. For us. Caught between worlds in the only home we thought we knew.

BENNETT

Not sure I caught that either. But now I'm in all the homes. I see everybody for how they live but ain't nothing's as bad as this.

RALEIGH

Doing construction?

BENNETT

Drywall. I got nothing more to say to water. Carry dry slabs on my head up ladders, cutting for sheet, banging to place. But that's not gonna be me down the road of future years. I ain't gonna be some middle-aged bastard reeking of stale gin and avoiding semi-stepkids while hauling rock slabs on my head and my back cranked three ways and my neck compressed to my knees. I'm gonna have a nervous breakdown just thinking about it. See, damn! You got me talking to you. [BENNETT removes from his inner dress lining a tube] Ellard's papers. You sign, stating you acknowledge your half coming back to me.

RALEIGH

When did you get this?

BENNETT

That don't matter.

RALEIGH

You've never shown this before.

BENNETT

Before? I just got here! Now sign!

RALEIGH

...you see this? This design?

BENNETT

What about it.

RALEIGH

That was her tattoo. Your mother's.

BENNETT

She wasn't inked.

RALEIGH

Down her back. A waterfall. Started, the cascade, from below the shoulder.

BENNETT

This just some insignia on law paper.

RALEIGH

Your mother's the one who drew it there. That's how she signed. It's what first took me to her.

BENNETT

I'm interested in *this here* ink.

RALEIGH

I was confused. Like you are. Never saw a woman painted before. The way it meshed with her torso. I gave myself up for her.

BENNETT

Yet you couldn't even wait for a coffin to drop before slinking off to find the next victim. Really a shame I didn't find your rotting corpse.

RALEIGH

Alright, Bennett, let's get on with it. Since you won't help.

BENNETT

There's nothing to help with. There's just me and you. Just off the tidal inlet, below the flats, tallest sand dune opposite Emerald Isle, a one-handed man. I want your half of the trust. Your half to go with my half. I want it whole. What's rightfully mine.

RALEIGH

Possession still haunts us, doesn't it.

BENNETT

Not after tomorrow night. I ain't your legal guardian semi-stepson thing anymore. Not by force, not by law.

RALEIGH

You come to the Sound, the same brash and deluded perception of your own self, saying you know, now showing papers, demanding release of your Mother's estate, with no further explanation as to why.

BENNETT

What's the problem?

RALEIGH begins dressing for the outside.

He gathers fishing gear: one glove, hauling net, an oar.

BENNETT

Where you going?

RALEIGH

Since you won't help.

BENNETT

Nobody's going anywhere. Not 'til we sort this.

RALEIGH

In my condition it takes extended effort to prepare the watercraft.

BENNETT

...you bought a boat?

RALEIGH

Half of one.

BENNETT

You bought half a boat? With your half of my other half of the money?

RALEIGH

An old wooden rowboat with one oar and a half-keel. Together it floats.

BENNETT

That how you destroyed your hand? How much of your half of my half of the money is left? You buy this shack, too?

RALEIGH

A shower nozzle is outside, lee of the wind. Otherwise, you stand outside long enough you're bound to get wet.

BENNETT

I came here to settle accounts and be gone.

RALEIGH

There's catfish. Some soft shell that I know you like. In rain barrels by the nozzle.

BENNETT

Are you not listening to the sounds I've been making?

RALEIGH

Your usual cacophony of foolishness, yes.

BENNETT

And you're still trying to run!

RALEIGH

And you're still caught in the same net of self-deception!

BENNETT

A net you threw. But I have a very special occasion happening for which I'll need my money. So sign it over.

RALEIGH

There'll be low cloud tonight.

BENNETT

Hey!

RALEIGH

The moon cycling towards near full.

BENNETT

You're not going anywhere, you hear me!

A moment.

RALEIGH

You still don't know. Do you. About me and you.

BENNETT

I know I hated you for what you did and that surely hasn't changed. You made me feel I was the punch line to a joke I never heard. Even after the damage was done. Now. Sign.

RALEIGH

[His voice, different, growing large, commanding] I'm putting to sea tonight, Bennett. I'm putting to sea tonight in a boat called Despair, with the prow alee of the open wind, at night, when the wind strikes straight, when the sea becomes sound, out to where the clang of water buoy is tussled by waves. [Now almost singing, harmonic, angelic] I'm putting to sea tonight to become the master of it, the sea from distant lands, to collect and destroy that which destroyed me, in a boat called Despair, by the man who lives it.

BENNETT

...

RALEIGH

It's good and hard to see you.

BENNETT

...

RALEIGH

Again.

RALEIGH then goes to don a loose shoreman's cape and wide brim fisherman's cap.

RALEIGH puts these on and then exits.

Time passes.

BENNETT remains entranced, immobile.

The moonlight shifts and wanes. Soon we begin to see a different light form. The light of day, from horizon.

RALEIGH reenters, still dressed in cape and cap.

RALEIGH now lurches from the weight of carry-dragging a large bucket. The bucket is full of green emeralds.

RALEIGH places the bucket in a location out of plain sight.

RALEIGH disrobes from the shoreman's cape and cap. He stows these out of sight.

RALEIGH then works to unscrew the tops of two water bottles and takes a long drink from one.

RALEIGH

Bennett. Bennett!

BENNETT

Hmm.

Morning.

RALEIGH

...hmm.

BENNETT

Morning. Well, soon. Sun, anyway. Don't want to be caught in the sun. Bennett!

BENNETT

Hmm.

RALEIGH

Want something?

BENNETT

What?

RALEIGH

Should drink something.

BENNETT

What're you saying?

RALEIGH

Water. Water!

BENNETT

Trying to quit. Say morning?

RALEIGH

Sure did.

BENNETT

Damn feels it. [Smacking lips, contorting jaw] Pasty.

RALEIGH

You don't drink enough.

BENNETT

I drink fine.

RALEIGH

Not what I've seen.

BENNETT

How'd it get light?

RALEIGH

Sea horizon. Coastline first to know the day's begun. Doesn't want to let the rest of land in on the secret.

BENNETT

...where's that nozzle? Drown my throat.

RALEIGH

If the nozzle isn't enough you can do the crawlpit. Off the shack towards tide.

BENNETT

I ain't ready to move distance.

RALEIGH

[Handing a water bottle] Then here.

BENNETT

[Sniffs] Hell's this?

RALEIGH

Go on.

BENNETT

Ain't no water I'm used to!

*RALEIGH finds another water bottle, opens
and pours together, mixing almost.*

RALEIGH

Too coastal? Sometimes I get the mixture off. Think I would have perfected the formula by now.

BENNETT

[Curious, then drinks] What is this?

RALEIGH

House water.

BENNETT

This ain't no house.

RALEIGH

From your house. From the river by the back of your house.

BENNETT

...you have water from the river behind my house.

RALEIGH

Wasn't much oyster last night. Too much chop to hold the net steady. Hog snapper, though, if you're interested.

BENNETT

Whaddya mean last night? It's tonight. It's still...

RALEIGH

Should eat while it's fresh. Otherwise, you can help haul The Despair under-dock and bury the bevy 'fore land heeds the horizon's secret and stirs to full rise. The few folks living nearby don't know they have me as neighbor. I'd like to keep it that way.

BENNETT

Does feel morning.

RALEIGH

If you could help me store the bounty.

BENNETT

...the hell's that.

RALEIGH

A bucket.

BENNETT

In the bucket.

RALEIGH

...last night's haul.

BENNETT

Green rocks.

RALEIGH

Your eyes still work.

BENNETT

Shining.

RALEIGH

Yes.

BENNETT

This what you've been doing with Momma's money? Buying rocks?

RALEIGH

Harvesting them.

BENNETT

Stealing, I wager. From another dying widow's vault!

RALEIGH

From the Sound. From Emerald Isle.

BENNETT

Whole damn bucket's filled.

RALEIGH

I need help repacking the largest on bottom before going to the crawlpit for burial.

BENNETT

Yours?

RALEIGH

Precisely.

BENNETT

Just like old times, Raleigh, hey! You getting enough words and leeway to dissuade and distract, with some fool trickery! But this? Holing up in some sea shack and plundering fake rocks from Bogue Sound?

RALEIGH

Takes most of the night. Rowing with one arm. Hauling with one hand. And since you wouldn't help I figured seeing this would be the only way to continue our talk.

BENNETT

I ain't staying and I ain't helping you and I ain't talking.

RALEIGH

You've shared more last night than before. Except you still never know how you come here.

BENNETT

Don't tell me what I don't need you to know.

RALEIGH

What you should be doing is attempting to possess understanding. Because you don't know anything, really, about why you came here. Or your house. Or your Mother. Or yourself. Or me.

BENNETT

I know about mine.

RALEIGH

Possession's a fairy tale, Bennett. Or a curse. However you choose.

BENNETT

Possession is law. I got legal papers.

RALEIGH

No more proof than the land on which it's drawn. And the sea, well, that's far more authority than land. And in between, held between the two, is the ultimate curse: pleasure over pain. Where I've remained, pinched between the two. And since you still haven't answered I'll ask you again: how did you come here?

BENNETT

I came here because—

RALEIGH

Not why, how?

BENNETT

—to get back my family's money!

RALEIGH

To go with your house.

BENNETT

Yes!

RALEIGH

And do even know who bought your house?

BENNETT

Course I do. Never test another man's history. My great-grandfather bought that house.

RALEIGH

Your great-grandmother, actually. She arrived to Carolina a harbor merchant's wife. Made her fortune getting paid by the land councils to mitigate pirates. I'm told she was a feisty woman. They were all drawn to her. She was something of a land charm.

BENNETT

Told to you by who?

RALEIGH

Those who lined the shores. Those who went to sea. Those who found us.

BENNETT

We're inland. Me and mine's been generations in that house.

RALEIGH

She made her fortune sending to sea those who found us. Then the succeeding generation turned to textile mills.

BENNETT

S'right.

RALEIGH

And they all died young, didn't they. Your father, too, was young. Young-old, like me. Young when he left, young when he died.

BENNETT

Because of you.

RALEIGH

Do I look like land? You want to talk possession, let's start with owning it's no longer last night. No moon streaking down from dark sky to remind me it's the only light I have left to see for one more night. You come all this way to get me to sign papers, fine, but you tell me first: what did your father have, Bennett? What killed him?

BENNETT

...brown lung.

RALEIGH

Drowned by air. What else?

BENNETT

That's it. S'all he had! Even with Momma's family money the man somehow barely had enough scratch to keep water in the pipes. Whatever he did have was to take me fishing. Otherwise, all he had in the world was Momma.

RALEIGH

I never had the chance to meet him. I always wondered what I would say to him.

BENNETT

He wouldn't've talked to you. He kept to himself. He always seemed ashamed of his dress, the clothes he wore. Always uncomfortable with somebody looking at us when we were out together. I figured it had to do with me. That something was always wrong with me. Different. Like I never fit the system of the world somehow.

RALEIGH

But he never died.

BENNETT

He left. Same thing.

RALEIGH

Where do you think he went?

BENNETT

Probably someplace I wouldn't have to watch him die. He was always on the edge of something. The edge of lost and hurt. It's a sharp edge. People don't realize how sharp it is. I know it. But I got an idea where he left for. He said to me once when I was little, when the only thing I thought was a day's happiness came in the form of a river, he said Bennett!, and he coughed, he was always coughing, and gulping swigs to kill the cough, and he said Bennett! We going fishing! I said we don't fish that river behind the house. You told me never to fish there. He said we ain't fishing behind the house. We going a place where no building and no body got a look upon water. Except he didn't say it like that, he said it in his fancy voice. He said: we go to where water can't take you from land. Like that.

BENNETT [CONT.]

He said: you know where this place is, Bennett? The city. Tall buildings and fast cars and long days and longer nights. Whaddya think people do in a land place where there ain't no water, Bennett? How ya think they fish their bounty in places like that? I said I surely don't know. So he grabbed a bunch of old dead batteries and hard glued 'em together, end to end to end, and twirl-attached some tree cord as line, and we left that house by morning with our long battery sticks, and somehow we got them and ourselves to that big city. I don't remember how we got there but I remember I ain't never seen a thing like it. I remember it was closer to November than June, a chill fall, sky dry and bored dusty, as me and my Dad hiked them city streets of What's-In-It-For-Me-Ville feeling every bit a fish out of water, until he stopped and said, this here's the spot! And sure enough if he didn't wade by them motors cars and crouched to heave aside one of them cut circles of street, strong like that, and we gathered 'round an open street hole, a small hole of darkness on center main street, and dropped two lines, with all the speedy motorists and violent air trying to dislodge, but a family stakes claim to a spot and says this here's where we're fishin'! C'mon, Bennett, we gonna fish the city sewers for dinner. Us standing there with two lines falling to God knows where, and standing there, with no action, 'til my Dad closed his eyes and said I feel it coming, and sure enough it rained. A big necessary land rain pummeling the pavement, and still my Dad didn't move, just stood there with his head back and mouth open, knowing that something was still to come, and I heard it first, the sound of the city sea, the underground flood flashing our hole. And damn if my line didn't snag. And then his line, both of us yanking and hauling our lines and cheering 'cause we'd hauled up RICHES. Old pictures frames and household cutlery and assorted wardrobe and discarded letters and sharded glass and such that we forgot why we was even there in the first place! We were so joyous and laughing and...well. I guess he might'a left to head back that way. Maybe he died standing over that hole to remember me, and what it was like to be joyous and laughing, those few perfect memories we have of our fathers, and when the underground flood came he just fell in and got swept away. I sure do miss him, though. I surely do.

RALEIGH

I never had a father.

BENNETT

Everyone has a father. Even if they run out on you. My mother, for all her history, was still something of a dreamer. Restless.

RALEIGH

She never went fishing with you.

BENNETT

She was always waiting for me. To come home. Always with a smile and something to drink. And she used to say to me, what she always said: if the storms came for thirty mornings would you know where to be at night? I used to tell her I'd always have this house. And she said I'll make sure you do.

RALEIGH

How'd you get back to the house from the city? How'd you return with your father?

BENNETT

Raleigh, the contents of that bucket ain't no poor man's sewer trash haul. That seems legitimate stones. Getting valuables by ocean deems you a pirate, but burying them in somebody else's backyard makes you a dog.

RALEIGH

They're bait.

BENNETT

For what?

RALEIGH

To lure those whom your mother sought and now the women of town seek.

BENNETT

To think I come all this way for some thieving one-armed bandit to tell me about my mother burying green stones.

RALEIGH

Are you ready to finally listen? To hear the rest of the story?

BENNETT

The story is done told.

RALEIGH

Only a fool thinks that. A story has many winds, and they come from many directions, and they kiss the coast and go towards land and diverge to tell the same tale many ways. I first came to your house in the late stages of an extended spring, a confused time for me. North Carolina lends itself to the wanderer. Especially to someone who comes from unlimited space. We have no possession. We shared equally, open. The merman swims, from coral to cove. Unseen.

BENNETT

...did you just say merman.

RALEIGH

...we need to bring the Despair back under dock.

BENNETT

And I asked you to sign.

RALEIGH

And I asked how you got here.

BENNETT

I know how I got here!

RALEIGH

Do you? I know I come from where it became dangerous to live and even more dangerous to leave. A sea so deep of lies it becomes a truth.

BENNETT

Don't sound like no place I ever heard.

RALEIGH

Look at us: one who can't remember how he got here. The other who can't tell you.

BENNETT

Because it doesn't matter.

RALEIGH

Because we can't speak of it. Because of who we are. Mermen.

BENNETT

You're insane. Really. Not a lick of virtue remains!

RALEIGH

How did you come here, Bennett?

BENNETT

I told you.

RALEIGH

Impossible to walk. So by car? I don't see a car out there. Which river was it?

BENNETT

I came here!

RALEIGH

It all goes to sea. Mountain snow to ponds and streams and rivers to sea. As you have come to sea.

BENNETT

...this is crazy.

RALEIGH

I never met your father but I assume.

BENNETT

You're crazy!

RALEIGH

When a merman hears watercraft approach he rises to shallow depth, to stare at the oarsmen through surface. I watched sea masters and their vessels. I listened to their songs of land. One place, one root, is not part of our myth, you see. The need to go, to move, to swim...overpowering.

BENNETT

You're not a merman. I'm not a merman.

RALEIGH

The strange land calls to the stranger. So I ventured closer. And that's when I first saw them. It was the light, Bennett, the green swirl, the shimmering green seamoons floating at night. And with it: the scent of land woman cooking spiced meats, celebrating a feast, and asking those who breathed that air to come share their battle against a faceless enemy called loneliness. The Crystal Cove. The Emerald Isle. And I followed.

BENNETT

There's no such thing as mermen!

RALEIGH

A long, green trail from the tip of the Sound up the river Nuese. You can't be too trusting. Pirates, scallywags, raiders. But still I was lured. The curves of low shores at high tide. Beckoning. Slowly at first, then more, further. Until that night. The waterfall. Her waterfall.

BENNETT

All of this! I could tear your words to pieces.

RALEIGH

How did you come here, Bennett! Was it one leg in front of the other?

BENNETT

I'm sure it was!

RALEIGH

Or did you feel the need to drink, to slip into it, to slink, side to side.

BENNETT

You're undone.

RALEIGH

To breathe is to drink.

BENNETT

...[notices he's drinking water]...

RALEIGH

You swam here.

BENNETT

...no...

RALEIGH

As I swam here. It was though she expected me, waiting for me, beneath the leaning fronds of wet Evergreen.

BENNETT

You didn't meet my mother at no river as a merman!

RALEIGH

Behind your house. The low banks of the Nuese. She was naked in the moonlight. So foreign and familiar. Soft black eyes and long limbs and great in appearance. A selkie. I could almost feel the earth. Smooth shore and grass under bare, muddied feet. Somewhere, the thrumming of a summer drum pounded. We aren't seen so much as suspected. She seemed to know. I was careful with the first announcement. Subtle but playful. She heard. She turned. Her back somehow still her front. The waterfall fell. And then I left. And then returned for thirty nights. For thirty nights, you see, because thirty nights is how long it takes before the merman decides to commit, the cycle of the moon. For thirty nights, each night at the first moment after sunset, when water and air join, I followed the emerald trail, for thirty nights I returned to your mother. By this point I knew enough to sing to her, to entrance her and bond her to me. But this time I didn't have to sing. We didn't have to explain anything but ourselves. For thirty nights we swam, we drank, empowered, weakened. Pleasure and pain. Slave and master of both. And on the final night I decided. As you now come here to decide.

BENNETT

Yes, I came here!...because!...the papers!

RALEIGH

As if all that matters anymore.

BENNETT

'Course it matters!

RALEIGH

The only thing that matters is deciding to leave one home without truly knowing you have another. You know what it takes to do that?

BENNETT

I know everything you're saying is impossible.

RALEIGH

Impossible was when I learned of you. Learning about you, seeing you, for the first time. I never had a family before.

BENNETT

I ain't your family.

RALEIGH

We don't have children. We don't age. We're as young as we are old. We don't know about responsibility.

BENNETT

You ain't no merman, I ain't no merman.

RALEIGH

You're at least half.

BENNETT

My Momma ain't.

RALEIGH

No, your father. Which means part you.

BENNETT

...

RALEIGH

We started as all of us, the beginning of time. We're not sure how. But we didn't need to know, really. It was ours at first, the open sea. Because there's no such thing as mermaids, you see. Only women seduced and brought back to join us. The ice shelves, the heated pools, the snaked canyons of deep cold. Love is a primary sense. We act on it at night, the sun makes it hard to remember, but the moon is our source, it pulls waves and negotiates the tide. We learn language through song and can only approach women through song. It was all ours. Before the land men arrived on their sail ships, changing the system of the waves. We don't fight others, so we began to migrate to stay alive. Scattered, displaced. So you see when I learned there were places to go, where a merman could escape the rise and fall of unknown seas, I decided to leave the great swim. She was my new anchor. And I abandoned everything. You know what employment I took? As a Carolina merman?

BENNETT

Some kind of salesman.

RALEIGH

Man still in the name. Salesman for those Adopt-A-Highway signs. The Roanoke, Cape Fear, Pee Dee, the rivers, all along the highways. Still allowed me to roam. Far west, to before the mountains, and south to the plantations.

BENNETT

You're a mess. Look at you. This isn't real.

RALEIGH

Real is the mess of expecting to possess something in this world for myself. To have a field to its sun. The sky to its cloud. The sea to its moon. And for all those Carolina moons how I roamed by day, to try and be for her, and to learn how to try and be for you...only to return to the river behind the house by night...and find her with others.

BENNETT

Now you're telling me Momma had more than you.

RALEIGH

Women. With her, behind her, a few starting to the shore, watching how she turned her eyes, how she placed her feet in the water. The women must have seen your mother's love like nothing they had seen before. They must have seen it as something different than anything they had known. And they wanted to know where it came from. And they saw it. Wading in the water.

BENNETT

Other mermen.

RALEIGH

Holding these [emeralds]. I raged that night. I seethed. I had never known fear and greed. And anger! I inhaled the ocean through the rivers. And I spit it to all the rivers that night, flooding grey waters over the banks and destroying crop, dousing land, driving people from towns to the cities. If the field can't have the sun to itself, if the sky can't have the cloud to itself, if I couldn't have this woman and this place for myself! Jealousy!

BENNETT

Possession.

RALEIGH

Is that why your father left? Was he fishing for emeralds in that city sewer? Trying to get back what he once had, taken from his possession, by me?

BENNETT

Now listen, you've been trying to tarnish the dead and spread shells of lies and cracked truths and fantasy lore and I've had it! I'm a drywaller. I plug post to frame. About as solid as belief and far away from delusion as you can get.

RALEIGH

And more and more women were emerging 'round the charged rivers of Carolina, the ones newly foamed by my despair. Lifting their eyes, dipping foot in water. They must have heard our song at night. But your mother was beyond what they all were first learning. She saw your father and me now as everyone else, the corrupted, the land scuttled, the heart-wrecked. She wanted a love that was as pure as the sea. And there's only one place for that. She was drowning when I found her. I swam her back through the Sound. She never recovered. She died on land and is buried under it.

BENNETT

...how many are there?

RALEIGH

Mermen? Here? Not sure. I suspected Ellard.

BENNETT

And I'm...

RALEIGH

Half.

BENNETT

Which.

RALEIGH

We're gonna find out tonight. Once you decide. Land or sea. But I believe after everything you've been through, after everything you've heard, there's only the sea. What do you have to remain for? I took it from you. All I have left is to give you the sea.

BENNETT

You stayed. After Momma died you still hung around.

RALEIGH

I can't return to what I chose to abandon. What I left is gone for me forever.

BENNETT

I surely wish you had gone back. I surely wished I never heard any of this!

RALEIGH

Which is why I've been burying these. In the hope that no merman will see again. So no merman will find their way here again. So no more young men of land will be harmed or have to go through what you've endured. And we're coming towards the end, Bennett. Because you've never made it to morning before, here. And by tonight you're going to have to choose which half. You can't serve both.

BENNETT

Why anyone'd wanna be a merman anyway. It don't seem like much good anymore. I've been watching water a long time. You show up every day, you put hours to that water, your hands, your back, your life. Everybody in that house I come from, we depended on that water. But that water don't care. Say you don't show up the next day, you think that water's gonna care where you're at? You ain't show up for a week, you think that water's gonna put a call to your house, hey!, where's that Bennett, I ain't seen him of late! You can love the water all you want. But it don't love you back. That the kind of love your world has?

RALEIGH

Our world.

BENNETT

You can keep it. And I'll keep the money.

RALEIGH

You don't need it any more.

BENNETT

I need it!

RALEIGH

For what? I told my tale.

BENNETT

...I found myself a woman. A nice girl. I'm anxious to wed her. She's party to oblige. There's to be proposal. I need to buy a ring.

RALEIGH

That's what the money's for.

BENNETT

I aim for her and me to be married. And leave far from that house. And far from any river. I might not be able to sell that house, or leave it in the care of kin, but that don't mean I can't abandon it. I'm already nostalgic for when I leave. She don't know it yet but we're gonna wed and depart. Town don't know it yet either. But we're going. Not sure where but I can tell you it'll be far from here, some distant geography, where there ain't a lick of sea!

RALEIGH

What about here, tonight.

BENNETT

Your problem.

RALEIGH

Our problem.

BENNETT

I might believe it but I don't have to understand it, much less accept it. I ain't got time.

RALEIGH

Look at us. Entranced by the promise of distant comfort, a mirage of our own making. Don't you see what's happening? I'm a reminder of the destruction it wages.

BENNETT

I got life to attend!

RALEIGH

How'd you meet this woman? What's her name?

BENNETT

It ain't nothing to you.

RALEIGH

[The emeralds] Somebody laid these to the coast. A beacon!

BENNETT

Seems more like warning to me!

RALEIGH

...never thought of it that way.

BENNETT

Maybe it ain't no woman leaving the trail. Maybe it's someone else, a burned lover, a toasted heart, the men of the town, barricade by sea, warning y'all not to encroach. Or a net, a trap! To bring you and keep you here. But that don't matter none. What matters is I don't want to know you anymore. I don't want to know this anymore. All I want is for you to sign and we be separated once and for all.

RALEIGH

I always told myself it was your mother who laid them. This way to the coast of renewal. To despair!

BENNETT

I don't plan to be part of that mess. I'm gonna have it all day and night with my intended.

RALEIGH

And there won't be a moment more wonderful and bitter in your life than the moment you first saw her. Trust me on that, Bennett! The rest of your life an unsung reflection, full of doubt and tempest! You can't tell me how you came here! And you can't tell me how you met her!

BENNETT

How people meet people.

RALEIGH

How far did you swim?

BENNETT

She's from Carolina!

RALEIGH

She from town?

BENNETT

I don't...

RALEIGH

You want me to sign? So you can stay on land, so you can wallow between pleasure and pain? In the end you'll be victim of the worse half. And when that's gone, all you'll have is Bogue Sound, all you'll be is me, returning night after night before the endless sea, trying to make every last sense of it all before burying it, before burying yourself.

BENNETT

She’s a nice girl.

RALEIGH

You sing for her?

BENNETT

She wants to get married!

RALEIGH

Which town, Bennett?

BENNETT

...

RALEIGH

There are things you’ll want to learn. About us. Things I can teach you. To help you survive out there.

BENNETT

I’m getting married! You made your call! I’m making mine.

RALEIGH

What will that get you.

BENNETT

Only everything I’ve lost. A place. A home. With no river nearby. I can stop waking up wet, wondering what happened to me, where I didn’t know I’ve been. I can stop having to drink. I’ll build a city, with the men of town, they’ll come with! To make walls to keep the lovers in and roofs to keep the water out. Where I can make a child, and give that child the parents I never had. And take us all fishing in the sewer. I want to have that joyous and laughing again. That’s what I’m gonna get.

RALEIGH

Until you see her with another? Until you decide to swim back here? A quarter off bow, to windward, your body angle, so the gust strikes you straight.

BENNETT

By the time your ink hand has finished swiping the page I’ll be back at the house, packing everything I own, thankful I ain’t never gonna see you or the sea again!

RALEIGH

Maybe it'll be the smell of distant lands, whipped and carried through oceans!

BENNETT

I only know Carolina, from here on out!

RALEIGH

Will you forego the merman?, and become the barman?, joining the men of the Muni and wondering why there is no love left for you? Until they remember their history, from song, and realize what it is that's come from the sea for the love on their land, maybe for revenge, from forcing them here, and now there's only one way to end it. Will you become that fight?

BENNETT

I got only tonight, this coming night, and then we turn to the day of receiving.

RALEIGH

Why would your mother make you wait five years? I thought it was to protect me but maybe it was to protect you. I think she wanted this, you before the sea. It was right out there where I found her.

BENNETT

You've had your talk, you've said your piece, and I ain't sorry your despair now matches what I wallowed through for all those years. Rudderless, penniless, parentless. But I got jobs now. I got life. A place where people know me and I know myself! And a girl. She's pretty. Long eyelashes and smooth straight hair and soft sad eyes. The merman's tale is ended! You might be alone. You might be homesick. You might be howling to those winds in despair. But my skin is colored the Carolina sun. I'm buoyed by currents of hope! Finer living and settled like sand. Why, I see myself part of the glamorous now. The sweet land rain that comes for thirty mornings and washes the trappings of water. In the end I ain't no sea. I ain't your anger, I ain't your treachery, and I ain't your despair. I live where the generous and pleased roam and the water's got no salt on it. And that's land. Land is me! And I am land! And we're each other. And that's all I've got to say about it. And that's all I've got to say.

A long moment.

RALEIGH

...alright...alright. Well. That was better.

BENNETT

What was.

RALEIGH

[Getting a recorder] Last night. This morning.

BENNETT

The hell's that?

RALEIGH

You never said those things before.

BENNETT

Course I didn't.

RALEIGH

You've never described her like that the other nights.

BENNETT

I've never described her to anyone!

RALEIGH

You never said that before, here, to me, the first twenty-nine nights.

A long moment.

BENNETT

...what is this.

RALEIGH

Last night was twenty-nine. Tonight will be thirty.

BENNETT

I ain't never said nothing before and you know it!

RALEIGH

The first bunch of nights you got to yelling and swam right away.

BENNETT

The hell's wrong with you? I came here last night, to sign!

RALEIGH

That's always why you come but that's always why you leave.

BENNETT

Listen, Raleigh, I come here!—

RALEIGH

You swam here—

BENNETT

A girl!—

RALEIGH

The river—

BENNETT

Tonight!—

RALEIGH

TO SEA! The first twenty-nine nights! And you’ve got one more. Until the thirtieth moon from when you first came. You’ve now been here for twenty-nine nights, Bennett. At first you slinked to the crawlpit, never reaching the door. Then you walked to the sea and didn’t even say a word. Only the last several nights you’ve come to the door. Don’t you see? You’re trapped between what I am and what you’re becoming. But you’ve never brought those papers before.

BENNETT

This is absurd! More of your lies!

RALEIGH grabs another voice recorder and activates sound. It’s BENNETT’s voice.

BENNETT [RECORDER]

She stands on the edge of wide crystal lake. I don’t know her name. I never know her name.

BENNETT

What is this?

BENNETT [RECORDER]

I don’t remember how I got there.

RALEIGH

I think this was three nights ago.

BENNETT

Turn that off!

BENNETT [RECORDER]

I tell her: if the storms came for thirty mornings would you know where to be at night?

RALEIGH depresses the recorder.

BENNETT

That's not my voice. Some other trick! Conniving!

RALEIGH shows the shoreman's cape and wide brim fisherman's cap.

BENNETT

...you bastard. It was you at The Muni.

RALEIGH

To bring you here.

BENNETT

Just go. You've done enough to my life. Go back to the sea.

RALEIGH

There's nowhere for me to go. Don't you see? This is all I have before I die. I've been waiting for you. That's what this is.

BENNETT

Listen: I'm bound to wed a woman from inland and we're gonna bind ourselves to a tall city.

RALEIGH

What's her name?

BENNETT

I told you. Her name...

RALEIGH

How many are there?

BENNETT

...hold on!

RALEIGH

How many lining the riverbanks and creek shoals? The rich, the curious, the restless and the wanting. How many placing emeralds to lips of rivers, hoping you'd come, so that after thirty days you'd tie it back and sing: swim away with me. How many have you tried to woo with the seduction of our song?

BENNETT

There is no song! I don't sing!

A moment. RALEIGH begins to sing.

RALEIGH

Was ere of dusk when I spied green

And was not far from land

When upon the bank I saw her face

With emerald stone in hand.

RALEIGH/BENNETT

Oh, the ocean heaves to windward

And the home we left alee

While we poor men swim to the shore

And the women walk down to sea (to sea, to sea)

And the women walk down to sea

The women walk down to see (to sea, to sea)

And the women walk down to sea

Oh, oh, won't you go, deep into the sea

And the women walk down to sea (to sea, to sea)

And the women walk down to sea.

RALEIGH unwraps his hand. Takes from his hand a green emerald ring.

RALEIGH

The emerald I took for your mother. The ring I gave to her. The ring she gave back to me before she died.

BENNETT

...how many times have you shown me this.

RALEIGH

First time. After she died I wrapped my hand to make sure I never dropped it, or lost it, or let it be taken by current. Before I could give it to you.

BENNETT

Me.

RALEIGH

Case you needed it.

BENNETT

...so...what now?

RALEIGH

Oh. I don't know. All the previous nights, after you've run out or swam away, I've prepared for the next night. All leading up to the final night.

BENNETT

By night I swim and by day I forget.

RALEIGH

We're creatures of habit. That and you're still half. As far as we've come, we still have a'ways to go.

BENNETT

But I have to choose. Between land and sea.

RALEIGH

Tonight.

BENNETT

What about you?

RALEIGH

I made my choices. Now, after the thirtieth night passes, after tonight, I won't be alive.

BENNETT

...are you...?

RALEIGH

I cheated death once, you see. I should have drowned with your mother. I should have died with her. But I didn't. For you. Besides, I didn't know how many are left. Of us, out there, here. How do I know you and I might be the last ones? The sea knows I cheated it from death. It's been waiting for me. Even after five years, with one more night to go, I don't know how it will be. Despair isn't one night, or thirty nights, it's the one night before death, knowing that nothing will remember you. That maybe all you've been is some filament of forgotten truth, squeezed by that grey area between sea and land. And still not having an answer.

BENNETT

She, um...she wanted you to be buried with her.

RALEIGH

What.

BENNETT

She...told me. Before she...in the hospital.

RALEIGH

Told you what.

BENNETT

She made me promise I'd have you buried with her. Not next to her, with her. She made me swear I'd somehow dig back open her grave and put you with whatever was...I mean all this talk, now, about helping, I guess I...

RALEIGH

...

BENNETT

So, maybe, by tonight, I guess, we can plan for how I...

RALEIGH

Yeah.

BENNETT

Unless I choose land. Unless you sign and I take this ring and go to city and never be known to the sea again.

RALEIGH

...well there's that.

BENNETT

Yeah.

RALEIGH

Listen, um, I'll...store the boat. Before the sun gets here. And then come back. Maybe you and I could...bury...

BENNETT

Emeralds.

RALEIGH

Emeralds. But then...

BENNETT

Talk.

RALEIGH

...talk. About...

BENNETT

What we're gonna do.

RALEIGH

Not that we'll have an answer.

BENNETT

But we'll have today. Before tonight.

RALEIGH

Alright. Alright.

RALEIGH prepares to exit.

RALEIGH

Moon's almost out.

RALEIGH goes.

BENNETT takes a long drink of water.

*BENNETT peers into the bucket of stones.
Perhaps compares one with the ring he
holds in his hand.*

*But then the light shifts. And the sun arrives
in full. Bright.*

*BENNETT slinks, shifts, moves from the
rays of sun. He cannot stay in the light.*

*Ultimately, BENNETT exits to off. We might
hear a splash of subtle splay of water.*

A moment passes.

*RALEIGH returns. He sees the seashack
empty. He moves to look for BENNETT.*

RALEIGH alone.

*RALEIGH moves to take a voice recorder.
But he doesn't activate the recorder.*

*RALEIGH sees the papers were left behind.
He takes these in his hands.*

RALEIGH

See you tonight.

Lights fade to blackout.

END OF PLAY.