

A Christmas Chantycle

Being a Comedic Entertainment, in the style of certain Mummers' plays, telling the story of the travels of the Three Wise Women to the Holy Land aboard the Good Ship Northern Star. Containing diverse references to modern events, in this year of the everlasting election, written by Charles Roth, 13 December 2000.

Dramatis Personae:

- A Narrator
 - Captain Christmas
 - The Three Wise Women: Dear Abby, Miss Manners, Hilary Clinton
 - 6 Crewfish: Eel, Lobster, Mackerel, Herring, Cod, Sea-Horse
 - A Monstrous Sea-Dragon
 - St. George
 - A Doctor

Narrator: I stood one day by a breezy bay,
Watchin' the ships sail by
When an old tar said, with a shake of his head,
"I wish I could tell you a lie"
I've seen some sights that would jigger your lights
And they jiggered me own forsooth
But I ain't worth a darn at spinnin' a yarn
When it wanders away from the truth
I'll tell you the rede of the Wise Women Three
On their journey to Bethlehem
For they sailed forth on "The Star of North"
And all Bedlam entered in.

Nar: Scene I: the Story begins. Enter Captain Christmas, on his ship "Star of the North".

Capt: Here come I, old Captain Christmas
Welcome, or welcome not
I dearly hope old Captain Christmas
Will not screw-up the plot!

Narr: (*whispers in Capt's ear*)

Capt: Jigger me lights! I mean,
I dearly hope old Captain Christmas
Will never be forgot!
My roast beef, plum pudding, and pumpkin pie
though delicious, are now all gone
And I raise one last jar to my "Northern Star"
and the voices cry "Sail on!"

Fish & others in background: "Sail on! Sail on!" etc.

Capt: *(into annunciator)* All aboard that's going aboard!
(sotto voce: "Or in this case, all them broads what's goin' abroad!")

Nar: Enter the Three Wise Women: Dear Abbie, Miss Manners, and the Honorable junior senator-elect from New York.

(**3WW**, carrying assorted bundles, walk up the gangplank, conferring with each other.)

Abbie: Diapers?

Manners: Megapack. Check.

Hilary: Three-in-one modular baby safety seat?

Manners: With camel and donkey straps. Check.

Capt: *(into annunciator)* Hey my crew -- that means you, too!
Or you'll end up in a fishy stew!

Abbie: Automatic baby wipe warmer?

Manners: Check (but very tacky)

Hilary: 37 pans of tofu casserole?

Manners: Check. Check. Check. Check....

Capt: *(interrupting)* **37 pans?** Isn't that going a little, well, overboard? (**3WW** wince.)

Capt: What could you possibly need 37 pans of
(spits over the side, gong sounds, hits eel ["ow!"]) tofu for?

3WW, together: *(meaningfully and forebodingly)*

Though we may, in our deeply mystic rhyme

Lift the flowing veils of time

Such knowledge do not attempt to see

For some secrets must yet undiscovered be.

(Capt stares blankly. Finally Hilary waves a hand in front of his face.)

Capt: Huh? *(They are interrupted as various fish, possibly inebriated, begin to stagger on board. Or swim. Or whatever crewfish do.)*

Abbie: Excuse me, captain? Your crew? They're **fish?!**

Capt: *(Recovering:)*

Right-o, me ladies! Finest pisceans that ever wriggled a poop-deck, if you know what I mean. *(Yells at party of crewfish):*

"stop floundering and get to work!"

Herring: OK, OK, do you think we need a herring aid?

Cod: Yeah, I cod'a heard you across the port!

Lobster: C'mon, stop your carpin', cap'n!

Eel: And don't complain just for the halibut!

Manners: But... how can they climb the whatsis? Or raise the thingambob? Or hatchen down the battens?

Capt: *(rolls his eyes: "women!")*

Look -- these are the handiest fish what ever sailed the salt seas. Besides, I mean, I figger it this way:

Fish float in the ocean. (**Abbie:** "well, sort of")
Boats float in the ocean. (**Manners:** "on top of, I hope")
Therefore, fish weigh the same as boats. (**Hilary:** "Huh?")
Ipso facto, a fish is as good a boat as a boat is a fish!
(*3WW hold their heads in their hands etc.*)

Capt: (*Smiles proudly, as though he has explained something profound.*) (*Aside*) Besides, they taste like, well, you know, like **fish**. And the really nasty sea-dragons hereabouts are bored by the taste of fish. So I've got, like, a 100% safe, unedible crew. (*Proud:*) Pretty helpful when you sail the waters **I** sail!"
(*3WW look at each other and roll **their** eyes; "men!"*)
Capt: But, heck, let them tell you themselves while we get underway:

(*Crewfish begin parody of Morris "call-on". Each fish enters the set when named, and all the fish currently in the set do stick-slapping during each chorus.*)

Mackerel: (*with fish & audience chorus*)
Up jumps the eel with his slippery tail
Climbs up aloft and reefs the topsail
Up jumps the lobster with his heavy claw
Bites the main anchor right off by the jaws

(**Chorus:**)
And it's windy weather boys, stormy weather boys
When the winds blow we're all together boys
Blow you winds westerly, blow you winds blow
Jolly sou'wester boys, steady she goes.

Up jumps the mackerel with his striped back
Saying "watch your eyes captain, it's time for to tack"

Up jumps the herring, the king of the sea
Saying "All other fishes now you follow me."

Up jumps the codfish with his chuckle head
He runs out up forward and throws out the lead
Up jumps the sea-horse, the fastest of all,
He heaves on the windlass, pawl after pawl
(*Applause and laughter and good cheer amongst all.*)

Manners: (*after things quiet a bit*)
But, pray, do tell me, what are those **things** you were waving about so vigorously?
All fish: (*brightly*) **Fishsticks!**

Nar: (*assisted by Doctor, walks between players and audience with a sheet, banner, etc. to signify the passage of time*)
Scene II: And so begins the strange and wonderful journey to the Holy Land. Over the next few weeks, the 3 Wise Women crochet baby clothes, the captain practices his expectoration (*a gong sounds*) and the gallant, if cold-blooded crew...
Cod: Hey -- no specist jokes!
Nar: ...greet each new day work with a song...

Fish: (*sing "Morning has broken". Badly. Really badly. Really, **really** badly. In different keys.*)
(*The 3WW have fingers in their ears. **Capt** hums along, standing at the ship's wheel, grinning.*)

Nar: Suddenly, from over the side, appears a monstrous sea-dragon!
SeaD: SHUT UP! SHUT UP ALREADY!
Fish: (all scurry out of the way. **Capt** hides between two fish, trying to look fish-like. Silence.)

SeaD: *(pause, looking down at the crew:)* You call that singing?! For a performance like that, you should file an environmental impact statement! And to hear the things you people say about poor sea-monsters like me. I never. I mean, with a sea-dragon, one quick bite and it's over, but you! This is torture, sheer torture, that's what it is. I've a mind to write the Times.

Cod: *(sotto voce, pointing at another fish)*

"well, don't blame us just because **he** can't carry a tuna in a bucket..."

SeaD: I HEARD THAT! If there's anything worse than a bad singer, it's a bad punster. *(Several fish agree, nervously.)*
YOU! Come closer so I can eat you! *(other fish retreat)*

Cod: butbutbutbutbutbutbutbut...

SeaD: *(getting a closer look):*

Oh, scales. You're a fish. I'm sick to Pissing Poseidon of fish. Haven't you got anybody **good** to e... *(spies Capt, cowering).*

SeaD: AHA! Now there's a Man-Sized Meal ^{*(tm)*}
I smell meat... hmm, flavored with plum pudding!

Capt: *(wails and sobs):* and pumpkin pie, too!

SeaD: Hey, it's not so bad. At least you'll be eaten by someone famous. *(Declaims):*
Bare your bodkin and be game
For Dragon Bedlam is my name!

SeaD: *(sharpens its claws [knives? forks?]) and moves in for the feast.)*

(3WW suddenly interpose):

Dragon, have a care
This dinner you must forbear!

Our captain may not be tasted
For he guides our mission sacred

SeaD: Though I be a fiend from Hades
I will not chew upon the ladies
But stand ye out of my way
I do not have all day!

SeaD: *(begins to lunge at Capt, who darts back and forth around the deck, hiding behind various fish, etc. Some fish push him back out, others try to protect him and misdirect the dragon. A general melee ensues.)*

3WW: *(join hands in a circle and turn, while chanting eerily:)*

Joining hands and joining hearts, we call upon our mystic Arts
We send, in our utmost hour, for one who has the strength and power

To join us on our journey East, and do battle with this beast
Champion and hero, hear our cry: Fly to us now! Fly! Fly!
Fly!

Fish: *(take up the echo "fly! fly! fly!")*

(Simulating special effects in whatever way possible, St. George rises out of the mist)

StG: *(talking into a cell phone)*

"...so tell them, chad or no chad, we'll take this fight to the Supreme Court, and beyond!

(Looks around)

Uh... Al, hey, can I call you later? Right. 'Bye.

StG: *(stares up at the dragon, and begins to wave his sword and pontificate)*

Here am I, St. George the bold
Often have you heard that told
Dragons great their lives have sold

My shining armor to behold
Gilded Wryms their tombs enfold!
Had they been as wise as bold,
Strong in limb, in judgement old
Their slaughter had not been foretold
Fare...

Hilary: *(interrupting)* George... George! We've got a situation here. This dragon wants to eat our captain!

SeaD: Out of my way, tin man! I've got a date with dough-boy, there *(points at Capt. They begin circling to fight)*

StG: Over my dead body!

SeaD: That can be arranged!

StG: Hah! You couldn't arrange a tea party with an army of Martha Stewarts! *(Fight ensues, a la 3 stooges taunting -- improvise)*

Fish & Capt: *(cheer St G.)*

(Suddenly SeaD bops St G a good one on the head, and he falls, apparently dead, to the deck)

Mackerel: Oh -- horrors!

Lobster: Alack a day!

Herring: Woe is us!

Cod: OH SHIT!

(other fish and 3WW stare down Cod, 3WW wag their fingers)

SeaHorse & Eel: *(dash below decks, and return, dragging the doctor, quite inebriated)*

Doc: "...look, I keep telling you, I'm a doctor, not a sturgeon..." *(everyone groans, including the dragon)*

Abbie: Doctor, hush your spate

Hilary: Our hero, St. George of late

Manners: Has taken a blow to the pate

Abbie: Can you heal him in your state?

Doc: Is he dead?

Lobster: Mostly.

Doc: Mostly dead, or all dead?

Herring: I dunno. He's DEAD!

Doc: Ah... but mostly dead is a little bit alive!

(improvise on Billy Crystal routine from Princess Bride)

SeaD: ROWR! *(begins to move towards Capt again)*

Doc: Hey you! Are you sterile? Are you prepped?

SeaD: *(confused)* Well, no, but...

Doc: Then shut up and keep your saliva off my patient!

When I want you to make an incision, I'll call for it!

(Shrugs in disgust.) The help you get these days...

SeaD: well, I, uh, I mean...

Doc: *(ignoring dragon)* Hmm, let's see.

Mostly dead, mostly dead... hmmmmmm...

(patting himself, finding pockets, pulls out one bottle, squints at it, opens it and drinks some -- gasps "Oooh, that's good", finally finds another and looks up)

Here we are -- I've just the thing.

(Holds forth a bottle)

Battery acid, runny, from the Energizer Bunny

To help him go on and on

Steeped in a bag a' the waters of Vi-- Niagara

To make him stand straight and strong

And a bit of brew of election night stew

For endurance to right all wrongs!

Doc: *(pours into St G's mouth, who coughs and revives)*

St G: Alive again I'm glad to be

But this dragon is too fast for me

Without my trusty, speedy mount

My sword arm will be soon worn out

Seahorse: *(stands and declaims)*

St Gee! St Gee! What about me?
I can swim fast! I can -- you'll see!
Ride me as we go to battle
And we'll show this beast he's naught but prattle!
(St G wraps his arm around the seahorse, and waving the sword in the other, the two duck and weave around the dragon, confusing him until he's exhausted and slumps to the deck)

St G: Now comes your doom, dragon foul
You may not eat others, it's not allowed
Forsake all flesh, that is your bane
Or else my sword will cut you in twain!
SeaD: *(whining)*
You are very well aware of what I am
How could I become a vegetarian?

Abbie: Hold your sword, St. George the bold!
Manners: For this teachable moment we foretold!
Hilary: Before you cut and slice him through, do
3WW: Remember the casseroles made from tofu!
(They high-five each other)

Fish: *(fetch casseroles and feed them to Sea-dragon)*
SeaD: *(chewing, belching, etc.)* Hey! Not bad!

Eel: *(pointing) (with what? Eels got arms?)*
Look! Look! Here's an end to our good sport
For we've somehow sailed straight into port!

(3WW gather to leave, patting the fish on the head as they do)

Abbie: In future times they'll sing a hymn
of how the animals in Bethelhem
Comforted our Saviour in his stall

Bringing their peace to one and all
Manners: But that same honour, we do wish
Should visit upon these humble fish
And in latter days your shapes sublime
Will make the curve of His good sign.
Hilary: Thus to truly make a Holy night
Needs men **and** women, wise and bright.
And so, good friends, our thanks to you
For your strong hearts, brave and true.
3WW: Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! *(and exeunt)*

Fish and all: Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!
(general rejoicing, dancing on deck, etc.)

Credits:

1. The beginning of the Narrators first speech is from "A Tall Tale", possibly by Lorne Johnson, recorded on Teresa Doyle's Dance to Your Daddy.
2. The crewfish call-on is from "Stormy Weather Boys", a traditional song from the Miramichi region of New Brunswick, also found on the same recording.
3. St. George's speech is based on the "golden chest" missive in Shakespeare's A Merchant of Venice, with massive rearrangement.