

## Dylan Thomas

### "Ballad Of The Long-legged Bait"

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The bows glided down, and the coast  
Blackened with birds took a last look  
At his thrashing hair and whale-blue eye;  
The trodden town rang it's cobbles for luck.

Then good-bye to the fishermanned  
Boat with it's anchor free and fast  
As a bird hooking over the sea,  
High and dry by the top of the mast,

Whispered the affectionate sand  
And the bulwarks of the dazzled quay.  
For my sake sail, and never look back,  
Said the looking land.

Sails drank the wind, and white as milk  
He sped into the drinking dark;  
The sun shipwrecked west on a pearl  
And the moon swam out of it's hulk.

Funnels and masts went by in a whirl.  
Good-bye to the man on the sea-legged deck  
To the gold gut that sings on his reel  
To the bait that stalked out of the sack,

For we saw him throw to the swift flood  
A girl alive with his hooks through her lips;  
All the fishes were rayed in blood,  
Said the dwindling ships.

Good-bye to chimneys and funnels,  
Old wives that spin in the smoke,  
He was blind to the eyes of candles  
In the praying windows of waves

But heard his bait buck in the wake  
And tussle in a shoal of loves.  
Now cast down your rod, for the whole  
Of the sea is hilly with whales,

She longs among horses and angels,

The rainbow-fish bend in her joys,  
Floated the lost cathedral  
Chimes of the rocked buoys.

Where the anchor rode like a gull  
Miles over the moonstruck boat  
A squall of birds bellowed and fell,  
A cloud blew the rain from it's throat;

He saw the storm smoke out to kill  
With fuming bows and ram of ice,  
Fire on starlight, rake Jesu's stream;  
And nothing shone on the water's face

But the oil and bubble of the moon,  
Plunging and piercing in his course  
The lured fish under the foam  
Witnessed with a kiss.

Whales in the wake like capes and Alps  
Quaked the sick sea and snouted deep,  
Deep the great bushed bait with raining lips  
Slipped the fins of those humpbacked tons

And fled their love in a weaving dip.  
Oh, Jericho was falling in their lungs!  
She nipped and dived in the nick of love,  
Spun on a spout like a long-legged ball

Till every beast blared down in a swerve  
Till every turtle crushed from his shell  
Till every bone in the rushing grave  
Rose and crowed and fell!

Good luck to the hand on the rod,  
There is thunder under it's thumbs;  
Gold gut is a lightning thread,  
His fiery reel sings off it's flames,

The whirled boat in the burn of his blood  
Is crying from nets to knives,  
Oh the shearwater birds and their boatsized brood  
Oh the bulls of Biscay and their calves

Are making under the green, laid veil  
The long-legged beautiful bait their wives.  
Break the black news and paint on a sail  
Huge weddings in the waves,

Over the wakeward-flashing spray  
Over the gardens of the floor

Clash out the mounting dolphin's day,  
My mast is a bell-spire,

Strike and smoothe, for my decks are drums,  
Sing through the water-spoken prow  
The octopus walking into her limbs  
The polar eagle with his tread of snow.

From salt-lipped beak to the kick of the stern  
Sing how the seal has kissed her dead!  
The long, laid minute's bride drifts on  
Old in her cruel bed.

Over the graveyard in the water  
Mountains and galleries beneath  
Nightingale and hyena  
Rejoicing for that drifting death

Sing and howl through sand and anemone  
Valley and sahara in a shell,  
Oh all the wanting flesh his enemy  
Thrown to the sea in the shell of a girl

Is old as water and plain as an eel;  
Always good-bye to the long-legged bread  
Scattered in the paths of his heels  
For the salty birds fluttered and fed

And the tall grains foamed in their bills;  
Always good-bye to the fires of the face,  
For the crab-backed dead on the sea-bed rose  
And scuttled over her eyes,

The blind, clawed stare is cold as sleet.  
The tempter under the eyelid  
Who shows to the selves asleep  
Mast-high moon-white women naked

Walking in wishes and lovely for shame  
Is dumb and gone with his flame of brides.  
Susannah's drowned in the bearded stream  
And no-one stirs at Sheba's side

But the hungry kings of the tides;  
Sin who had a woman's shape  
Sleeps till Silence blows on a cloud  
And all the lifted waters walk and leap.

Lucifer that bird's dropping  
Out of the sides of the north  
Has melted away and is lost

Is always lost in her vaulted breath,

Venus lies star-struck in her wound  
And the sensual ruins make  
Seasons over the liquid world,  
White springs in the dark.

Always good-bye, cried the voices through the shell,  
Good-bye always, for the flesh is cast  
And the fisherman winds his reel  
With no more desire than a ghost.

Always good luck, praised the finned in the feather  
Bird after dark and the laughing fish  
As the sails drank up the hail of thunder  
And the long-tailed lightning lit his catch.

The boat swims into the six-year weather,  
A wind throws a shadow and it freezes fast.  
See what the gold gut drags from under  
Mountains and galleries to the crest!

See what clings to hair and skull  
As the boat skims on with drinking wings!  
The statues of great rain stand still,  
And the flakes fall like hills.

Sing and strike his heavy haul  
Toppling up the boatside in a snow of light!  
His decks are drenched with miracles.  
Oh miracle of fishes! The long dead bite!

Out of the urn a size of a man  
Out of the room the weight of his trouble  
Out of the house that holds a town  
In the continent of a fossil

One by one in dust and shawl,  
Dry as echoes and insect-faced,  
His fathers cling to the hand of the girl  
And the dead hand leads the past,

Leads them as children and as air  
On to the blindly tossing tops;  
The centuries throw back their hair  
And the old men sing from newborn lips:

Time is bearing another son.  
Kill Time! She turns in her pain!  
The oak is felled in the acorn  
And the hawk in the egg kills the wren.

He who blew the great fire in  
And died on a hiss of flames  
Or walked the earth in the evening  
Counting the denials of the grains

Clings to her drifting hair, and climbs;  
And he who taught their lips to sing  
Weeps like the risen sun among  
The liquid choirs of his tribes.

The rod bends low, divining land,  
And through the sundered water crawls  
A garden holding to her hand  
With birds and animals

With men and women and waterfalls  
Trees cool and dry in the whirlpool of ships  
And stunned and still on the green, laid veil  
Sand with legends in it's virgin laps

And prophets loud on the burned dunes;  
Insects and valleys hold her thighs hard,  
Times and places grip her breast bone,  
She is breaking with seasons and clouds;

Round her trailed wrist fresh water weaves,  
With moving fish and rounded stones  
Up and down the greater waves  
A separate river breathes and runs;

Strike and sing his catch of fields  
For the surge is sown with barley,  
The cattle graze on the covered foam,  
The hills have footed the waves away,

With wild sea fillies and soaking bridles  
With salty colts and gales in their limbs  
All the horses of his haul of miracles  
Gallop through the arched, green farms,

Trot and gallop with gulls upon them  
And thunderbolts in their manes.  
O Rome and Sodom To-morrow and London  
The country tide is cobbled with towns

And steeples pierce the cloud on her shoulder  
And the streets that the fisherman combed  
When his long-legged flesh was a wind on fire  
And his loin was a hunting flame

Coil from the thoroughfares of her hair  
And terribly lead him home alive  
Lead her prodigal home to his terror,  
The furious ox-killing house of love.

Down, down, down, under the ground,  
Under the floating villages,  
Turns the moon-chained and water-wound  
Metropolis of fishes,

There is nothing left of the sea but it's sound,  
Under the earth the loud sea walks,  
In deathbeds of orchards the boat dies down  
And the bait is drowned among hayricks,

Land, land, land, nothing remains  
Of the pacing, famous sea but it's speech,  
And into it's talkative seven tombs  
The anchor dives through the floors of a church.

Good-bye, good luck, struck the sun and the moon,  
To the fisherman lost on the land.  
He stands alone in the door of his home,  
With his long-legged heart in his hand.

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