

“SUMMER TOUGH”

A SHORT PLAY BY SAM GRABER

ESTIMATED RUN TIME – 10 MINUTES

Sam Graber
2020 Norway Pine Circle, Minneapolis, MN 55305
612-695-3125
samgraber@outlook.com

SUMMARY

A young college student goes to sea for a woman.

CHARACTERS (2M)

ALBIE, 20, a mousy college student

WALRUSK, 40s or even early 50s, a huge, gruff seaman

TIME

The present.

SETTING

Below deck on a fishing vessel.

The tiny, cramped mess of a ship’s hold, aglow in muted colors. At stage right is a step ladder leading upward to a hatch. At center a small circular table and microwave are wedged underneath storage cabinets. At far stage left of the mess rests a backpack.

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Summer Tough was first performed at the Mildred’s Umbrella Theater Company, Museum of Dysfunction 2012 Festival on August 18, 2012, as directed by Rod Todd, with the following cast:

ALBIE – Crash Buist

WALRUSK – Sam Smith

THE PLAY

We hear rough sea winds blended with the crashing of ocean waves. Also heard are muffled shouts of working fishermen.

The hatchway opens. Slowly down the ladder, amidst the rocking motion and slosh of sea water, stumbles ALBIE.

ALBIE is in bad shape, hacking, sputtering. ALBIE falls onto the hold floor, rolling over, holding onto anything for stability.

The upper hatchway opens again and quickly down the ladder slides WALRUSK.

WALRUSK

You have got to be kidding me. You have got to be KIDDING ME.

ALBIE groans, seasick.

WALRUSK

Get your ass back up on the transom.

ALBIE

I'm sorry.

WALRUSK

The fuck I'm sorry. You lasted ten minutes! The hell you think you're doing?

ALBIE

I threw up.

WALRUSK

Saw that. Puked your breakfast all over Steely.

ALBIE

Throwing up eggs sucks.

WALRUSK

Get used to it. All we got on this ship, eggs and coffee. Now get back topside.

ALBIE

I made a mistake.

WALRUSK

I know from mistakes. You didn't make a mistake. You made a choice: I'm to sea! That was your choice. Puking right on Steely's favorite boots. That was also a choice. Now you got a third choice. Either get back topside and start hauling fish or get my elbow shoved sideways through your thorax.

ALBIE

Please.

WALRUSK

GET YOUR ASS-COCK EXCUSE FOR A SUMMER HIRE BACK ON DECK. I ain't about to do the work of two jobs this trip. I need you back up there!

ALBIE

I can't walk. My stomach.

WALRUSK

Shit. I remember my first commercial fishing jaunt on the ocean. Younger than you. Staring at skies darker than morning shits, fighting through waves rockier than Balboa. A month straight, no sleep. Biggest erection I ever had.

ALBIE throws up.

WALRUSK

A day on the sea is like riding heaven's inner thigh. Every wave is a chariot, every fish a feast, every breath a salty canvass of joy. Marve-fucking-lous! That's what they put on television, huh? You kids see it on your reality TV. Real reality a lot different now, ain't it. You a college boy?

ALBIE

Yale.

WALRUSK

What's that?

ALBIE

I said Yale.

WALRUSK

Never heard of it. But I bet it's got them college girls who like to fuck. Places I go you gotta get all drunk and fight guys named after Aleutian Islands just to get one whiff of their sister's panties.

ALBIE

I need my phone. In the backpack.

WALRUSK

Dear Motherfucking Jesus God. We are fifty-one mark eighty. Bristol Bay is two days out. Alaska mainland is three days at fair seas. You think you make a call and someone'll pick you up?

ALBIE

My phone, please.

WALRUSK takes from the backpack a cell phone, flips open, examines.

WALRUSK

This picture on the phone. The girl.

ALBIE

...Kelly.

WALRUSK

You waiting for her to call or something?

ALBIE

Yes.

WALRUSK

This is the picture that came with the phone, ain't it. You're a virgin.

WALRUSK scales up the ladder in one fluid motion and throws opens the hatch, screaming into the wind.

WALRUSK

Hey, Crabs! You owe me twenty bucks!

WALRUSK closes the hatch.

As WALRUSK continues he rummages through the rest of ALBIE’s backpack: a plaid swim suit, flip flops, swim goggles.

WALRUSK

You didn’t say much on the motor out here, sitting below here in the corner all silent, but I could tell. Can spot virgins like I can spot fish.

WALRUSK scales the ladder, opens the hatch and throws the backpack and items onto deck.

WALRUSK

Hey, Crabs! Forget the money! Chuck this over!

WALRUSK closes the hatch and jumps back down, still with the cell phone.

ALBIE

Oh, God.

WALRUSK

Yeah, my sailing days never seen the rosy port of privilege. No fancy cell phones with them satellite plans to get me out of choices I made.

ALBIE

I can’t do this.

WALRUSK

One month. One month my first time out and you barely lasted ten minutes.

ALBIE

I’m so sorry.

As WALRUSK talks, he takes a bottle from a cabinet, puts the bottle in the mess microwave. WALRUSK punches buttons and the microwave whirs.

WALRUSK

You're sorry. You're not sorry. That's just shit that spills out your mouth because you're hurting, you're laid bare, and what pours out is 'I'm sorry.' You know Steely up there? Feel sorry for him. One time Steely cheated Crabs on his haul count, riled the revenge motive, so while Steely slept Crabs went down to the hold and took the body hair off the cadaver, whatever college kid died on us that summer, put cadaver hair into Steely's mouth.

ALBIE

You're lying. Nobody died.

WALRUSK retrieves the bottle from the microwave and shakes.

WALRUSK

Steely decided payback was throwing a bone to some hooker in Skagway, gave Crabs his nickname. You got a little sea queasy, Crabs can't go five minutes without shedding his foulies to scratch off his ping pang, so I will tell you when it is time to be sorry. Now drink this.

ALBIE

I can't lift my arms. I can't.

WALRUSK

You're whole fucking generation is I Can't. How about I FUCKING BETTER. That's your new pledge on this vessel, I swear allegiance to I Fucking Better before Walrusk, Steely and Crabs use me as shark bait for entertainment.

ALBIE

What the hell is that?

WALRUSK

Something to quash the seasickness. My special recipe, from scratch.

ALBIE

From scratch doesn't mean the microwave, you freak.

WALRUSK

...what's your name, college boy?

ALBIE

Albie.

WALRUSK

Albie? The hell kind of name is that?

ALBIE

It's Yale for Jew. Can I have my phone, please?

WALRUSK

You get it back once you've fished it back. Up top on my transom.

ALBIE

Could've built shelters in Guatemala. Could've farmed a kibbutz in Israel. No, I chose fishing in Alaska.

WALRUSK

Nobody chooses fishing. Commercial fishing is a job of last resort. Desperation.

ALBIE

Yeah. Well. I was desperate.

WALRUSK

College is not desperate.

ALBIE

I needed to show her I'm a man of toughness. Someone tough.

WALRUSK

...you did this for a girl.

ALBIE

Kelly.

WALRUSK

Oh, man. Oh man, man, man-man-man, you are fucked. HA. You are so shit fucked. Rule Number One: never go to sea over a woman. First love, right? Course I'm right. Can spot these things. Might as well tell me about her.

ALBIE

You're the last person I'm talking to about anything.

WALRUSK

I might be of help.

ALBIE

You were just screaming about eviscerating my thorax.

WALRUSK

You don't think I've broken Rule Number One? I own Rule Number One. This boat is named after Rule Number One. If there's one thing this boat stops for it's fish and stories about women. Spin me a little yarn and I might help.

ALBIE

...she's this soccer player. A junior. Incredible legs.

WALRUSK

Leg man myself.

ALBIE

No way she'd ever be interested in someone like me.

WALRUSK

When you say that, someone like me, what do you mean?

ALBIE

You know.

WALRUSK

A virgin.

ALBIE

Someone with an extreme phobia of she's probably somebody's baby.

WALRUSK

I'm with you.

ALBIE

Turns out it *was* somebody's baby syndrome. Kelly didn't have a boyfriend because she's so hot all the guys assumed she was already with someone.

WALRUSK

I see Jackson Browne isn't lost on your generation. Continue.

ALBIE

I was assistant editor for the Yale Daily, the big student newspaper. Important position. For weeks I wrote Kelly these secret admirer haikus. I snuck them into the feature section of the Daily with my cell number as the author. Each night I went into her dorm and tagged the Daily to her door. She finally called. She thought it was cute. I got fired from the Daily from abusing the powers of position but it was like life never started before I met her, you know?

WALRUSK

Oh, I know.

ALBIE

Her hair. Her eyes. Perfect smile.

WALRUSK

Teeth man myself.

ALBIE

Things started out great. Then it got even better. It was like it was too good to be true. I told her I planned this special midnight picnic at Lighthouse Point, overlooking the harbor. Where I was going to finally, you know...

WALRUSK

Stop being a virgin.

ALBIE

I stood outside her dorm that night, the basket of food, the blanket, waiting. But she never came out. I waited there, ten minutes. You know how long ten minutes can last?

WALRUSK

I have an idea, yes.

ALBIE

Finally went into her dorm, to her door. I heard her and some other guy's voice, laughing inside. I banged on the door. The voices stopped. And I saw, lying there, by her door, stacks of the Daily, crumpled, tossed in a heap. Found out it was some rugby player. She was into his toughness. She wanted someone less sweet and more tough.

WALRUSK

So while Smooth Legs Kelly is with Rugby Tough this summer at some white linen restaurant asking the waiter how the catch of the day is prepared, you want her to be thinking that fish was caught by Yale Haiku Jew strapped into the toughest hours of sea labor imaginable, so she'll dump the sportsman and come running back to soft and sweet.

ALBIE

Growing up you dream of being with the beautiful girl. Just wait until you meet her. And then, finally, you meet her, but the beautiful girl leaves you hurting so much you're just trying to hold on to the ordinary nature of things. I did the picnic by myself. Staring into those waves. I thought it must be great being you. Tough out here, among extinguished memories, where the sea takes the place of loneliness. Maybe you could understand that.

WALRUSK

Skipper says to look after this one, make sure he doesn't go overboard. You've been overboard before you stepped on deck. [Sighs] Alright. Walrusk has to help.

WALRUSK pulls out a longshoreman knife.

ALBIE

What is that.

WALRUSK

A knife. And that is your arm. You're going to cut a stitch for her.

ALBIE

Okay, we're not chasing some white whale here.

WALRUSK take off his shirt, showcasing a scar filled arm.

WALRUSK

See this?

ALBIE

Yeah.

WALRUSK

Lisa. And this one?

ALBIE

Yeah.

WALRUSK

Cordelia...and this one, Annabelle...here's Rhonda. You're on the beach staring into waves and I'm out here staring back through that same mirror. You think I don't wonder if my life was like yours? Commuting to an office, cup of coffee handed by something pretty behind a counter, bathroom breaks with time to wipe. Coming home to those perfect legs. I went for it, many times. Now I wish I could go back to before, without having to know what I know now. But I made my choices. And you made yours.

ALBIE

Kelly might call. To apologize.

WALRUSK

They never call.

ALBIE

Saying she misses me. She wants me back.

WALRUSK

Once you've moved out it's best to move on. Out here, on my side of the waves, if you don't purge a head case from your love-burned skull, then you are going to die. The sea doesn't tolerate divided attention. It sticks a death warrant to it.

ALBIE

And you want me to cut my arm with that rusty thing.

WALRUSK

Someday, when you're far away and better from here, I want you to have something reminding you when the fish was out of the water. Besides, wouldn't you have cut to get her back? So you gotta cut to get her out.

ALBIE: a moment. Then pricks his arm.

ALBIE

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

WALRUSK

Well, here goes Mr. I Can't! [Sings a sea shantey] 'Cut him open and find underneath the cold Alaska sea' – to toughen what's left of his short life!

ALBIE

Give me something to wrap it up.

WALRUSK

Wrap it up, nothing! You let that bleed. You let that bleed ‘til it stops bleeding! Until she’s bled full from your life. And when you climb that ladder, when you rise back topside, together we’ll hound the depths of the sea, and the first fish you haul we’ll eat raw and spit its bones to the wind. You’ll get summer tough on the rough waters with me, college boy!

ALBIE

Hey, uh, Walrusk...you know...thanks. For listening.

WALRUSK

Yeah, well, don’t thank me yet. Skinny college boys like you tend to get killed out here on their virgin cruise. But that’s the past. Today’s your new future! To the fish we go!

But the cell phone rings.

WALRUSK stares at the phone.

WALRUSK

Huh.

ALBIE

...

WALRUSK

Rule Number Two: never stay at sea for a woman.

WALRUSK tosses the phone to ALBIE, and exits out the top hatch, slamming it behind.

ALBIE alone, stares at the ringing phone, holding his bleeding arm, against the sound of the ocean roar.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY.