

SCENE 1

Open in a quiet diner. The door to outside is stage right and the kitchen is off stage left. A middle-aged couple sits conversing while a waitress comes by and re-fills their coffee. An older man sits by himself in a corner, stereotypically dressed as a fisherman with sou'wester and slicker. The soft patter of rain on window can be heard.

BRENDA

Quite the storm brewing out there, isn't it?

MARGRET

Certainly is. Glad I'm not out in it.

DON

Should've made our way home before the rain picked up.

MARGRET

Oh, hush-up. No harm in spending an extra half-hour among friends. Isn't that right, Brenda?

BRENDA

Well, you certainly won't hear me complaining. Your company's always welcome here.

FRANK

D'you know what that storm means?

All turn to look at Frank.

BRENDA

Now what's that?

FRANK

DOOM!!!

As Frank says "doom", he pulls a lumpy, misshapen object from the floor behind the table and slaps it down on the table. It's greyish beige in color and has vaguely aquatic appendages sticking out at odd angles though no clear head, front or back. It's wet and roughly the consistency of a bag of jello. The

reveal of the object is accompanied by a well-timed clap of thunder.

BRENDA

Bah, Frank, you see the apocalypse in your bowl of oatmeal every morning. And get that disgusting...thing...off my tables.

FRANK

Ah, but it's real this time. (gesturing at the bizarre object) D'you recognize this species of fish?

BRENDA

No, I can't say know a single darn thing about it, other than it not being indigenous to my tables—

FRANK

(cutting off Brenda) Precisely! This fish is unlike any other I've ever seen in all my years of sailing, and—

ALL

(Frank energetically, everyone else as though this is a well-worn groove) I've been sailing longer than you've been playing baseball.

FRANK

You've gosh-darn got it. That fish right there, that's got to be the Emissary of Neptune.

BRENDA

(pause as if internally sighing) Do I want to know what the "Emissary of Neptune" is?

DON

Oh, let him tell his story, I don't think I've heard this one.

FRANK

Way, way back, yes, even before I was sailing, in the 1700s. When the original colonists were settling New Smorgasbord, they tried subsisting on fish but found the waters off the coast almost barren. They were desperate, so the mayor went down to the beach and called out to God to send them fish. God didn't answer them. Or at least, no Christian god. Legend has it that Neptune, god of the sea himself, rose up out of the depths, and promised the colonists prosperity but that one day, he would send the sea to swallow up the town.

DON

Wait, just swallow it up for no reason? No, "300 years of prosperity" or "until your descents transgress the sea" or something like that?

FRANK

The sea is a fickle mistress.

DON

Mistress? I though we were talking about Neptune, here.

FRANK

Ah, well, I may be mixing metaphors, but my point is, legend has it that Neptune would one day send a unique fish to our town to forewarn us of the coming flood, his emissary. It would be the most magnificent creature, with scales of every color, and wide, fanning fins that catch the sun as it rides the crest of waves.

Everyone looks at the lumpy mess on the table.

BRENDA

And that is the emissary.

FRANK

Well, it was dead when I found it. You've got to imagine it must have been more colorful when it was alive. And look, if you sort of hold it up like this...

Frank trails off into mumblings about orientation and fluid dynamics, while trying to pose and articulate the "fish" to illustrate his point. After a few seconds though, it slips out of his hands and hits the floor with a splat.

BRENDA

Alright, I've heard enough. Frank, I want you to take that poor thing, whatever it is, back to where you found it—

FRANK

Down by the beach.

BRENDA

Back down to the beach, and leave it there. You hear me?

FRANK

But you don't understand, if you don't listen to me, it'll be your doom. Doom!

BRENDA

Enough! Out!

The two of them bicker as Brenda shepherds Frank towards the door, at stage right, all the while Frank still trying to relay his message of cataclysm to Don and Margret. Right as they reach the door, in bursts Josh, soaked from the rain.

BRENDA

Darlin, you're soaked. What were you doing out in that storm?

JOSH

Sorry, my car broke down up the road. Could I use your phone, for some reason I can't get reception— (noticing the weird fish in Frank's hands)

DON

(chuckle) Yeah, that's the nearby naval base. Something about their SONAR or RADAR or FUBAR interferes with cellphones. Gotta use what we "old folk" call a landline.

JOSH

(to Frank) Where did you get that?

FRANK

It's an omen! Of doom!

BRENDA

(to Frank) Not another word from you. (to Josh) And you may certainly use our phone. But first, just you have a seat and I'll see if I can't get you a towel.

JOSH

Uh, thank you, that's very kind but—

BRENDA

(sighing) I'll be right back. Please, sit.

Josh hesitantly takes a seat by himself at the table next to the couple. He keeps an eye on Frank, who's now standing by the door, seemingly examining the strange fish as he turns it over and over in his hands. Margret breaks his concentration.

MARGRET

So where you from, stranger?

JOSH

I'm sorry?

MARGRET

Well you're not from around here, are ya?

JOSH

Oh, uh, sorry. I'm a film student up at the state college.

DON

Haha, we got ourselves a city slicker.

MARGRET

Oh, a film student? That must be fun. I always wanted to be an actress, you know. Drawn to the glamour of the silver screen, I suppose.

DON

Who isn't?

MARGRET

What are you doing in our little town? (gasps) You're not scouting for a film, are you? Oh that would just be lovely if you made a movie right in our back yards, wouldn't it, Don?

DON

(sarcastically) Yeah, just wonderful.

JOSH

Well, uh, actually, I'm already filming a short movie for my thesis project—

MARGRET

Already filming? Here?

JOSH

Well, just up the coast a little bit, but yeah.

DON

Where's your camera?

JOSH

I left it in my car. I didn't want it to get wet with the downpour out there. Do you often get storms like this?

MARGRET

No, not that I can say. It really is raining cats and dogs out there, isn't it?

Frank, who has been progressively eavesdropping, interjects into the conversation.

FRANK

(shaking the fish for emphasis) That's because the sea is angry! Neptune has sent us his herald in the form of this fish and we would be wise to heed the warning!

JOSH

Yeah, about that...

DON

Ah, don't worry about him. He's completely off his rocker. Comes in here every Tuesday to show us the latest junk he's dragged in with the fish. Last week it was "Atlantian fashion accessories".

FRANK

I'll have you know those were authentic!

DON

They were a bunch of seaweed caught in set of plastic six-pack rings.

He's interrupted by a loud clap of thunder.

Everyone turns to look out the window.

There's a pause and then Brenda comes back with a towel.

BRENDA

(to Josh) Here you go darling.

JOSH

And your phone?

BRENDA

Oh, silly me, plain forgot the phone. I'll go get that right away— (she notices the storm outside) Say, it's really coming down out there.

MARGRET

You can barely see out the window. Just a steady sheet of water.

DON

(to Josh) Hey, son, did you take the seaside road to get here?

JOSH

Yeah.

DON

How high were the waves breaking?

JOSH

Uh, I dunno, it was kinda sloshing up onto the road I guess. Almost got swept off my feet by the backwash a few times.

Everyone looks worriedly at each other.

JOSH

Why? What's wrong?

BRENDA

The ocean around here doesn't get that rough. We haven't had any flooding on the seaside road since they built the seawall about five years back.

DON

If the waves were coming up over the seawall, we're in for some real trouble.

Everyone looks at Frank, then to the bizarre fish in his hands.

DON

Hey, Frank, mind telling us about that fish again?

JOSH

(hesitantly) About that—

FRANK

The Emissary of Neptune! 'Tis a herald of the coming wrath of the sea god. A malign augury that portends the fulfillment of a dark prophecy. (to Josh) An ill omen that bodes even (finger quotes) "ill-er", my dude. If the flooding has begun, then there's nothing to do but wait for the end.

JOSH

Sorry, about the fish—

MARGRET

We've got to do something!

DON

We've got to barricade the doors!

MARGRET

What good will barricading the doors do if there's a flood?

DON

We can stop-up the cracks around the doors.

BRENDA

I'll go get more towels. (exit stage left)

DON

(to Josh) In the meantime, you help me move some of these tables.

MARGRET

(grabbing the towel Josh was using to dry off) I'll take that.

Don starts moving tables with the aid of Josh, who reluctantly gets roped into it, while Margret starts using the towel to stop-up the crack under the front door.

JOSH

I don't really think all this is necessary—

FRANK

Necessary? Of course it's necessary! (waving the bizarre fish in the air) The fish has spoken!

JOSH

It hasn't said anything. Besides its—

Brenda enters stage left, carrying towels.

DON

Enough chit-chatting! If we don't get this building secured, we're all fish food!

There's a general clamor as everyone, except Josh and Frank, sets about reinforcing the building. Josh is reluctantly caught up in the preparations, and Frank puts the fish aside to climb up on a chair.

FRANK

All hands on deck! Hoist the forecandle! Aft-board the stern rigging! Let Neptune do his worst!

MARGRET

Don't encourage him. Just because we have some towels, doesn't mean we're ready to fight the sea!

DON

There, I think that ought to hold.

Everyone stands back to examine their handwork. Towels and furniture are piled in an attempted to seal the front door. There's a moment of silence.

DON

Kinda ironic, don't you think? With these plate glass windows, we'll be like a reverse aquarium when the flood comes.

BRENDA

(snort) No we won't. Towels will keep out the rain but if we actually get submerged, we're going under.

JOSH

We won't get submerged.

DON

Why d'you say that? Are you double-majoring in marine biology?

MARGRET

Is that what your movie is about? Like, one of those documentaries about the whales? Oh I love whales.

DON

Why would he be making a documentary about whales here? We don't get whales.

MARGRET

We do too. I saw one last spring.

DON

That was driftwood.

FRANK

That wasn't driftwood, and it wasn't no whale neither. It was a sea monster!

DON

(to Josh) See what I mean about him being crazy? Thinks we've got a sea monster infestation.

FRANK

Well if I was right about the flood, why wouldn't I be right about sea monsters!

DON

You're not right about the flood yet. Just (beat) better safe than sorry.

FRANK

You'll see! When the waves come crashing up over the hills and the ocean swallows the land! Then you'll see the sea serpents and krakens swimming their way past our windows. Just pray none of them take notice of our little refuge.

MARGRET

Oh, Don, I think I left one of the windows open at home.

Don and Margret begin bickering about the merits of having windows closed in a flood, steadily growing more heated. Brenda quickly jumps in to support Margret in the argument. Frank takes the opportunity of chaos, maintaining his vantage on the chair, to start shouting things like "Praise Lord Neptune!" Everyone grows more agitated until Josh interrupts.

JOSH

Everyone, shut up!

DON

(pause) They teach you to talk like that at college?

JOSH

No, everyone listen. The fish isn't real.

BRENDA

What?

JOSH

The fish isn't real and it's not an omen. It's mine, I made it out of latex, and it's supposed to be a scale model of an Amorpho-platy-sarco-pseudo-ichthus.

BRENDA

(pause) A what, now?

JOSH

It's Greek for a formless, flat, fleshy, fake fish, but that doesn't matter! It's a sea monster for a Horror movie I'm making. I was filming when the current carried it out along the coast, so I came down here specifically to ask if anyone had seen it. That's when I found all of you acting all crazy!

Brenda moves to look out the front of the diner.

FRANK

But the signs! The signs are all there! The rain! The flooding!

JOSH

(grabbing the fish from Frank) This fish is fake! Rub-Ber! (hitting the fish on a table for emphasis) This is like, twenty bucks worth of junk from a Jo-Ann's and some stuff I pulled out of my neighbor's recycling bin a week ago. I spent half-an-hour, tops, making the damn thing! When my thesis advisor saw it, he told me I should maybe "reconsider my long-term career plans". But are you all such in-bred, backwater, cousin-fucking, country bumpkins, that you're fooled by a student art project? Are you all too dense to get that!?

MARGRET

(pause, then delivered dripping with animosity) Dense?

JOSH

Well, uh, I mean, that's to say...

BRENDA

Looks like the storm is breaking, too.

MARGRET

Looks like we all got duped.

DON

Well, speak for yourself.

His wife shoots him a dirty look.

DON

Though speaking for myself, I will fully admit I, too, was duped.

BRENDA

Someone could have gotten hurt in the panic. There should be some sort of public service announcement before someone comes gallivanting about filming a "horror movie".

MARGRET

That's a good point, does that boy have a permit to be filming?

DON

As a matter of fact, did anyone even get his name?

All look around momentarily to find where Josh has gotten to. They catch him half-way through dismantling the furniture barrier blocking the front door.

DON

Hey, not so fast!

MARGRET

Get back here!

Josh cries out, throwing the fish back as a distraction, and escaping over the barrier. The fish hits Brenda, knocking her backwards into Don and generally creating a pile-up of people. They quickly untangle themselves, throwing the fish aside, where Frank retrieves it.

DON

Margret, hand me the car keys, I'm going after that punk.

BRENDA

I'll call the sheriff. I'm sure he'd like to have a word with that miscreant when you bring him back.

FRANK

(lifting the fish aloft Lion King style) Neptune will have his revenge!

Everyone pauses and looks at Frank, seemingly coming to terms with the mob mentality he's worked them into.

MARGRET

On, uh, second thought, maybe we should just get back to our breakfast.

DON

That sounds like a good idea. Brenda, would you mind refreshing our coffee?

BRENDA

Not at all dear.

Frank looks around, dismayed that he's now being ignored.

FRANK

Alright, fine. But y'know that naval base just north of here? I was poking around there the other day and check out these weird shells I found. If you arrange 'em just right and squint, I reckon they look like Elvis.

Frank begins dumping sandy shells out of his pocket onto Don and Margret's table as the scene ends.

FIN