

DECEMBER DINNER, MANHATTAN ISLAND

Embossed and tasseled menus offer sole,
Fresh-caught, sauteed with lemon, chives and dill,
For sixteen dollars. I'm not hard to sell.
My mind flies back to offshore Maine: A shrill
Breeze blows; two fishermen are braced until
A wave plows by. One checks the last end-knot
In seven-hundred pounds of ice-caked net.

The day drains into dark-- an eerie glow
On bitter spindrift near Three Dory Ridge.
The pair make ready for the longest tow.
The hungry net flares out to form a bridge
With mud-slime ninety fathoms deep, to nidge
Through ancient green dimensions. Spools unwind,
The dragger boat aims high into the wind.

Dan begs the cable not to twist. "All down!"
He cries, his teeth bared in the salty cold.
The trawl will prow the bottom until dawn.
Five hours on a northerly course, a bold
Approach near the ridge's curse. Jarl can hold
The dragger true if anybody can;
One eye is cocked on weather, one on Dan.

They keep their senses honed on winter, knowing
No one else is out, slipping into troughs
More calm than either side, and always going
For the fissures between storms. Jarl coughs,
A brine-hack, one of fishing's ons-and-offs.
Whenever seas are docile, all the boats
Come plying, trailed by waves of white wing-beats.

The price of fish sinks like a weighted trap.
Now grays will bring a buck a pound or more,
But then it drops to forty cents like tripe.
If these two drag luck's lap enough before
She rolls away and orders them to shore,
They'll own their boat. Moon dirties comber caps
As numb lips hover over coffee cups.

(cont.)