Cape Morton
The Musical

Book and Lyrics by
Richard F. Hamre

Music by
Albert Ignatius

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info@hungryhillmusic.com
954-804-1438

SYNOPSIS

Cape Morton is set in a fictional seaside town during the summer of 1966, where tradition and routine guide daily life.

When shopkeeper Herman Jennings displays a daring new monokini swimsuit in his storefront window, the shocking sight sparks outrage among several citizens and ignites a town-wide debate about decency, change, and who should decide what the community allows.

The controversy leads to a formal town meeting where residents gather to vote on a proposed “Cape Morton's Decency Expectations” ordinance that would regulate what local businesses may display and/or sell.

As the votes are cast and the result hangs in the balance, Doris Kimball, wife of the town council chairman, finds herself reconsidering assumptions she's long held about the world in general, and her town in particular.

In the end, her deciding vote prevents the ordinance from passing, leaving the town to move forward, uncertain but thoughtful about the changing times.

CAST OF CHARACTERS (11 in total, 6 female, 5 male)

Harold Kimball – Town Council Chair, professional, mid-50s

Doris Kimball – His wife, thoughtful and principled, mid-50s

Agnes Porter – Council member, practical, early 60s

Walter Pike – Council member and caretaker, mid-60s

Emily Carter – Shoreline Gazette reporter, novice, mid-20s

Eli Mercer – Quiet observer of town life, late 60s

Herman Jennings – Runs the Sandpiper Dress Shop, early 50s

Ruth Talbot – Local resident, town busybody, mid-60s

Mildred Kline – Local resident, assistant busybody, mid-60s

Benjamin Curtis – Editor of the Shoreline Gazette, late-50s

Mrs. Whitmore – The town's historian and vocalist, late 60s

Residents - As desired for Town Hall meeting room scenes

Additional Townspeople – Portrayed by simulated silhouettes

SETTING

The story takes place in the fictional seaside community of Cape Morton, during the early summer of 1966.

PRINCIPAL LOCATIONS

Sandpiper Dress Shop (Interior with a visible front window). A small shop featuring a mobile mannequin decked out with such accessories as a beach ball, sunglasses, and a floppy sun hat. The mannequin stands inside the store wearing a controversial monokini swimsuit, but can readily be seen through the angled front window of the shop.

Shoreline Gazette newspaper office with the editor's desk and a chair for visitors.

Town Hall meeting room of Cape Morton, with a head table and chairs for the town council members, chairs for residents, space for public debate and voting, a piano and a small table and chair off to the side for the newspaper reporter.

A simple sidewalk cafe table and chairs where residents can gather for tea and conversation.

Doris' bedroom with a bed, dresser and full length mirror.

The area out in front of Town Hall with a functional exterior door leading down toward a sidewalk, with a simple bench situated nearby.

SCENE LOCATIONS AND TIMELINE

ACT I

Scene 1 - Sandpiper Dress Shop, early evening

Scene 2 - Town Hall meeting room, later that evening

Scene 3 - Shoreline Gazette office, the following day

Scene 4 - Sandpiper Dress Shop, later that day

Scene 5 - Town Hall meeting room, the following evening

Scene 6 - Sandpiper Dress Shop, the next morning

Scene 7 - Sidewalk Cafe, the next afternoon

Scene 8 - Town Hall meeting room, the following morning

Scene 9 - Doris' Bedroom, later that day

ACT II

Scene 1 - Town Hall meeting room, the following afternoon

Scene 2 - Sandpiper Dress Shop, later that afternoon

Scene 3 - Town Hall meeting room, that evening

Scene 4 - Town Hall exterior, shortly afterward

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

1. Sandpiper Theme (1:49)
2. Cape Morton, My Home - Mrs. Whitmore (3:43)
3. Just Breathe - Walter (4:13)
4. Do What It Takes - Benjamin (4:28)
5. Fabric And Thread - Herman (3:58)
6. Help Me With My Story - Emily (4:34)
7. What If - Ruth (3:28)
8. It Could Be A Doozy - Walter (3:59)
9. I Once Knew A Girl - Doris (3:49)

ACT II

10. It's Always Been This Way - Eli (4:24)
11. Good Luck To Us - Herman (3:54)
12. Meeting Protocol - Harold, Agnes, Walter (1:47)
13. Things Change Anyway - Harold (4:27)
14. I Learned Something - Emily (4:13)

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

Sandpiper Dress Shop.

Before the lights come up, we begin to hear the "Sandpiper Theme".

After 12-13 seconds, dim lighting rises and we see the interior of the Sandpiper Dress Shop. The storefront window is visible at the stage right.

HERMAN is busily working on re-dressing the mobile window display mannequin.

He removes what was a rather modest house dress and sets it aside. He steps over to the sales counter, opens a plain brown shipping box and removes a black garment, a garment which isn't quite visible to the audience. He then dresses the mannequin in that same black garment.

As he finishes, he steps back to review his work, steps forward a moment to make a small adjustment to the neck strap, steps back and nods with approval and then dims the store lights even further, leaving the mannequin to appear as nothing much more than a semi-darkened silhouette, visible through the front window.

RUTH and MILDRED slowly and casually enter from stage right as if window shopping. DORIS follows just slightly behind. They all stop in front of the dress shop window.

RUTH glances in the window and nearly does a double-take, then leans forward a bit to peer into the semi-lit dress shop window as best she can.

RUTH
(pausing)
Oh my God, what the, ... what the heck is that? Is it what I think it is?

MILDRED
(peering in)
I'm not sure, ... but if it's what I think it is, ... it's probably worse than what you've imagined.

DORIS steps forward and peers in.

DORIS
(firmly)
Well, ladies… there's no doubt. It's exactly what you both think it is.

RUTH
No, no, no. This simply can't stand. Not here in Morton.

MILDRED
No, it can't. It mustn't.

DORIS
Yes, ... I suppose it certainly shouldn't.
(to herself)
It surely is quite different.

RUTH
(urgently)
Doris, we need to go tell your husband.

MILDRED
Isn't there a council meeting tonight?

DORIS
Actually, yes. I believe there is.

DORIS glances at her wristwatch

In fact, it should be going on right now.

RUTH
Then we need to be there.

MILDRED

Tonight.

RUTH

Yes, right now!

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP

As the lights come up, we view the interior of Cape Morton's Town Hall meeting room. A long folding table sits UPSTAGE CENTER. Seated at the table are HAROLD in the center, Chair of the Town Council, AGNES, a Town Council Member and Recording Secretary to his right, and WALTER, a Town Council Member to his left.

Standing to one side behind the table is a bold American flag. Centered on the rear wall is a large replica of the town seal.

MID STAGE RIGHT is an upright piano, where MRS. WHITMORE is seated on its bench.

DOWNSTAGE CENTER are a number of folding chairs with an aisle down the center.

DOWNSTAGE RIGHT is the main entry door to the meeting hall.

MID STAGE LEFT is a rather small table where EMILY, a newspaper reporter, is seated with notebook and pencils.

The only other person in attendance is ELI, who always wears a baseball cap and typically likes to sit DOWNSTAGE LEFT in the very back row of folding chairs.

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
Alright, it's exactly 7:00 pm, so I now call to order this meeting of the Cape Morton Town Council. Madam Secretary, please call the roll.

AGNES
Chairman Kimball?

HAROLD
Present.

AGNES
Councilwoman Porter? ... Yes, I am here. Councilman Pike?

WALTER
Seriously Agnes, the place is nearly empty. Can't you see I'm here?

HAROLD
Walter, just go along, okay?

WALTER
(begrudgingly)
Yeah, yeah, I'm here.

AGNES
All present and accounted for, Mr. Chairman. We do have a quorum.

HAROLD
Thank you Agnes. Now, before we conduct business, I ask us to all stand, face the flag and together, recite the Pledge Of Allegiance.

Everyone in the room rises, places their hands across their hearts, as Eli removes his cap and they all mumble together.

ALL TOGETHER
I pledge allegiance to the flag, of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
(pause)
And now, Mrs. Whitmore, if you're ready for the annual presentation of our Town Anthem ...

WALTER
(head in hands)
Seriously, again? Must we?

HAROLD
(mildly annoyed)
Now Walter, you know very well it's tradition. It has been ever since VJ Day, and now some 20 years later, that tradition will most certainly continue, right here, just as we've always done during the first Town Council meeting of
(MORE)

HAROLD (cont'd)
the summer. It's been designed to help keep us well-grounded. It's an important tradition and as you know, we tend to live and breathe tradition around here.
(turning back)
Mrs. Whitmore, please?

MRS. WHITMORE begins to "play" the piano and then sings along.

CAPE MORTON, MY HOME

MRS. WHITMORE
(singing)
THERE'S A PLACE WHERE THE TIDE ROLLS IN WITHOUT HURRY
WHERE YEARS PASS BY JUST LIKE OLD FRIENDS
WHERE THE DOORS STAY UNLOCKED WITHOUT WORRY
AND THE ROAD ALWAYS BENDS HOME AGAIN

WHERE THE CHURCH CHOIR SINGS HYMNS WITH DEEP EMOTION
AND THE OLD TOWN CLERK REMEMBERS YOUR NAME
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY CHANGE WITH RUSHED COMMOTION
THINGS HERE SEEM TO STAY JUST THE SAME

CAPE MORTON, MY HOME, BY THE WIDE FAITHFUL SEA
JUST THE SAME AS YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE
CAPE MORTON, MY HEART, WHERE THE SHORELINE STANDS TRUE
NOTHING CHANGES HERE THAT MATTERS, NOTHING EVER CHANGES YOU

THERE'S A BENCH BY TOWN HALL WHERE MEN GATHER
AND THEIR STORIES GROW TALLER EACH YEAR
WHERE PROMISES MADE HOLD TRUE FOREVER
AND THE FUTURE IS NEVER UNCLEAR

PEOPLE MAY COME AND STAY LONG PAST SEPTEMBER
WHILE THEIR CHILDREN GROW STRONG IN THE SUN
WHERE THE THINGS WE'RE MOST PROUD OF WE'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER
AND FORGET THOSE WE WISH WE'D NEVER DONE

CAPE MORTON, MY HOME, BY THE WIDE, FAITHFUL SEA
JUST THE SAME AS YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE
CAPE MORTON, MY HEART, WHERE THE SHORELINE STANDS TRUE
NOTHING CHANGES HERE THAT MATTERS, NOTHING EVER CHANGES YOU

HAROLD, AGNES, EMILY and ELI applaud politely, while WALTER just sits still and mildly fumes.

HAROLD
Thank you, Mrs. Whitmore, that was lovely, as usual.

AGNES
Yes, quite lovely indeed.

HAROLD once again bangs the gavel.

HAROLD
Alright then, let's move along with our meeting agenda. First order of business is to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which were hand-delivered to each of you this morning. Are there any additions or corrections to be made?

AGNES
No.

WALTER
(feigning interest)
If you say this is what happened, then it must have happened.

HAROLD gives WALTER a quick glare.

HAROLD
All in favor?

AGNES
Aye.

WALTER
Aye

HAROLD
Alright, on to our old business. We still have to decide if we're going to release funds to decorate the fire hydrant outside the Town Library for the upcoming Fourth of July celebration. Any thoughts?

At this moment, the entry door at DOWNSTAGE RIGHT burst open and in rush RUTH, MILDRED and DORIS.

RUTH
Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman! Stop the meeting. We have an emergency!

MILDRED
(shaking her cane)
No, no, it's not an emergency, it's much worse, it's, ... well, it's an utter catastrophe!

DORIS
(somewhat calmly)
Yes, it really is quite bad I'd say.

All three women stand before the council table, clearly upset and very agitated.

HAROLD
What is it? Is someone hurt? Has there been a fire?

MILDRED
No, it's worse, much worse. It's scandalous! It's offensive. It's like nothing I've ever seen before!

RUTH
She's right, Harold. It's well beyond sinful.

HAROLD
Ladies, I'm afraid I don't understand, please slow down a bit and explain yourselves.

DORIS
Yes, ... well, we just saw it, we all did, while we were out taking our early-evening walk. It was right there, Harold, plain as day, as bold as can be, and at the very least, quite surprising to see.

AGNES
What, what did you see?

MILDRED
That thing. In the window. At the Sandpiper. In the window!

WALTER
The Sandpiper? You mean Jenning's Dress Shop?

RUTH
Yes! The dress shop!

HAROLD
Okay, slow down and someone tell us exactly what you saw.

MILDRED
It was there, on display. It was that god-awful, horrid swimsuit. I'm telling you, we could see it inside, right through the front window.

HAROLD
(grinning)
A swimsuit? Well then, what was wrong with it. Was it too skimpy? Was it made out of licorice sticks? C'mon ladies, what could possibly be the problem? Oh, I think I know, it was too expensive maybe? Or was it just too shoddy?

DORIS
No, of course not, ... actually, ... it appeared to be rather well-made ...

RUTH
(interrupting)
But, it wasn't there, I mean it wasn't complete.

HAROLD
Huh?

RUTH
It wasn't right, Mr. Chairman. The top was missing!

HAROLD
I'm sorry ladies, you are making no sense at all, but please, we must get back to our business. I'm sure we can discuss this later on.

DORIS
No, Harold. It can't wait. It really needs to be addressed now.

RUTH
Yes, right now.

MILDRED
Immediately, if not sooner.

HAROLD turns to each of his fellow council members.

HAROLD
Agnes and Walter. I don't see how we can do anything else right now but walk over to the Sandpiper and see what this is all about. So, this meeting of the Cape Morton Town Council will be temporarily adjourned for fifteen minutes, after which time we'll reconvene and determine what if anything needs to be done.

HAROLD bangs his gavel and all three members of the Town Council exit, as do the three women who had barged in. MRS. WHITMORE closes the piano lid and sits quietly in her place, leaving EMILY and ELI as the only others in the room.

ELI stands and slowly strolls over toward EMILY'S table.

ELI
(after a short pause)
Well, I guess the fire hydrant will just have to wait.

EMILY
(smiling faintly)
Sort of like it always does.

ELI
(another pause)
So, have you seen it?

EMILY
The swimsuit? No, but I've seen pictures and I'd heard rumors it might be coming. And to be perfectly honest, I'm not the only one in this town who knew about it.

ELI
How did you happen hear it so soon?

EMILY
C'mon, Eli, you're the old-timer in this town and I've only been here less than two years. And don't forget, this is Cape Morton. We may not get earthquakes here, but sometimes we do seem to have a habit of manufacturing them.

ELI
(nodding)
So, Miss Reporter, do you think it's actually something scandalous?

EMILY
Well, I can't say, but from what I gather so far, it seems like we're simply talking about a piece of fabric. How can that in itself be scandalous?

ELI
(chuckling)
Hmm, you may have a point there.

EMILY
And from what I've learned about this town, Mr. Jennings has been selling all sorts of clothing for more than twenty years. And supposedly, he's been selling swimwear nearly that long as well. Some I suspect were rather daring for their day. I mean, this is a beach town after all, so it makes sense a shop like his would want to be selling all the latest styles.

ELI
Well, you're certainly right about that. I remember when Herman first opened up his store.

EMILY
(pondering)
It is strange though.

ELI
What's that?

EMILY
Seems, people always like to brag how things never change around here, but then, if any change even starts to brew, they work themselves up into a panic rather easily.

ELI
(sarcastically)
Well, maybe that's what makes our glorious anthem so special.

EMILY
(chuckling)
Yeah, maybe.

ELI
So, are you going over there?

EMILY
Me? Of course, but not right now. In time I will. I mean, I have to. I've got a responsibility to the Gazette.

They both look at each other, somewhat curious and somewhat amused.

The Town Council members and the three ladies who barged in earlier return to the meeting hall, only a tiny bit calmer, though much less agitated.

ELI returns to his seat.

HAROLD
If the council members would please take their seats, ... and ladies, if you don't mind, please sit down as well.

MILDRED, RUTH and DORIS take seats in the front row of chairs.

HAROLD
(pause)
Alright, after our brief adjournment, I'd like to formally reconvene this meeting of the Cape Morton Town Council.
(MORE)

HAROLD (cont'd)
(banging gavel)
Before I put forward my recommendation on this matter, do either of the other Council Members have anything they'd like to say.

AGNES
No thank you. Not me.

HAROLD
Walter?

WALTER
Sure, I've got a few thoughts to share.

AGNES
(sarcastically)
What else is new?

WALTER steps from behind the council table and stands off to the side of the meeting room so all can see and hear him. He brushes off the front of his shirt, as if preparing himself for something important.

HAROLD
Very well, go ahead.

JUST BREATHE

WALTER
(singing)
JUST FIFTEEN MINUTES AGO
WE WERE DISCUSSING HYDRANTS AND PAINT
BUT NOW CIVILIZATION'S IN PERIL
'CAUSE SOME FABRIC IS AND SOME FABRIC AIN'T
THERE'S GAS IN THE PUMPS
AND THERE'S FISH IN THE SEA
BUT LORD HELP US ALL
THE TOP'S NOT THERE WHERE IT ONCE USED TO BE

IS IT JUST ME
OR IS THE WHOLE TOWN GOING NUTS
WE TRUST IN THE FLAG
THEN PANIC WHEN FASHION TAKES CUTS
WE SWEAR NOTHING HERE WILL UNDERGO CHANGE
THEN TREMBLE WHEN SOMETHING DOES

IS IT JUST ME
OR ARE WE DRAMATIC BECAUSE
(MORE)

WALTER (cont'd)
BECAUSE WE LIKE IT THAT WAY

LAST WEEK IT WAS MUSIC TOO LOUD ON THE BEACH
AND BOYS GROWING SIDEBURNS DOWN PAST THEIR CHEEKS
THE RADIO'S SHAKIN' THE SODA SHOP WALLS
BALLGAMES KEEP LOOKING MORE LIKE NEIGHBORHOOD BRAWLS
KIDS ARE DANCING WAY TOO CLOSE
AND THE PUNCH SEEMS MUCH TOO STRONG
AND THEN PARENTS ARE TOLD
THEY'RE SIMPLY DOING THINGS WRONG

IS IT JUST ME
OR HAVE WE LOST ALL COMMON SENSE
WE WHINE OVER HEMS
LIKE THEY'RE MAJOR EVENTS
WE WHISPER "DECAY" WHILE ADJUSTING OUR HATS
AND FIGHT OVER FABRIC AND STITCHES AND STRAPS
IS IT JUST ME
OR ARE WE ALL FULL OF CRAP

WALTER does a bit of a mediocre soft shoe dance during the musical interlude.

NOW MAYBE I'M GUILTY
YOU KNOW THINGS I'VE DONE
MAYBE WE'RE ALL AFRAID
OF THE WAY WE'VE BECOME
BUT IF ONE LITTLE SWIMSUIT
CAN KNOCK US ASKEW
THEN WHAT WILL HAPPEN MY FRIENDS
WHEN SOME REAL CHANGES COME THROUGH

WILL WE SHOUT
WILL WE PRAY
WILL WE HIDE IT AWAY
OR WILL WE JUST BREATHE

SO IS IT JUST ME
OR IS THE WHOLE WORLD COMING UNGLUED
SEEMS WE GO THROUGH UPHEAVAL
OVER NEWER ATTITUDES
IF MODESTY HANGS BY A FEW SIMPLE THREADS
THEN HEAVEN, PLEASE HELP US DO
WE MUST HAVE ALL LOST OUR HEADS

IS IT JUST ME
OR DO WE WISH TO EMBRACE
THOSE MOMENTS OF PANIC
THAT SMACK US RIGHT IN THE FACE
OR WILL WE JUST BREATHE

(MORE)

WALTER (cont'd)
BECAUSE IF THINGS STAYED JUST THE SAME
WE'D HAVE NOTHING TO ARGUE ABOUT
SEEM WE LIKE IT THAT WAY

ELI applauds quite slowly, yet emphatically, from the rear of the room.

HAROLD
(a patient pause)
Well, ... uh, thank you Walter. That was, ... umm, ... rather spirited.
(another pause)
So now, if we could, let us return to the matter at hand.

Without objection, WALTER returns to his seat.

MRS. WHITMORE begins to play her piano, but is quickly interrupted.

WALTER
Oh jeez ...

HAROLD
No, no, Mrs. Whitmore. This is still the same meeting. We don't need the anthem again.

MRS. WHITMORE
(embarrassingly)
Oh ... alright.

HAROLD
Okay, so, as I see it, we have ourselves a bit of a dilemma. On one hand, we have a private businessman attempting to run his store, and on the other hand, we have certain townspeople objecting to the ummm, ... let's call it, the candor of his merchandise. And of course, this Town Council most certainly has an administrative responsibility to step in and see if the matter can be settled amicably.

RUTH
(firmly)
You better believe it!

MILDRED
(loudly)
And you need to do it quickly, please!

HAROLD
Alright, alright ladies, settle down. Shouting isn't going to help one bit.

HAROLD turns toward AGNES and slowly whispers in her ear. AGNES nods in agreement. He then turns toward WALTER and whispers in his ear. WALTER also nods in agreement.

HAROLD
Okay then, ... it is hereby the unanimous opinion of this Town Council that no decision can be made at this time.

RUTH groans out loud.

HAROLD
Because, ... more information is needed. More detailed information. Therefore, I'm calling for a special meeting of all interested town residents to discuss this matter right here, in open forum.
(checking calendar)
Now, I see the ukulele club meets here tomorrow night, so we'll have to wait an extra day and hold this special meeting on Thursday night at 6:00 pm. I'll make sure we post proper notice on the Town Hall bulletin board. Anyone with thoughts or concerns will be encouraged to attend.

WALTER
(sarcastically)
Well, that should bring out the entire town.

HAROLD
(glaring at WALTER)
It will be during this meeting when we'll decide just what, if any, next steps should be undertaken. So, feel free to spread the word to all your friends and neighbors.
(banging the gavel)
This meeting of the Cape Morton Town Council is hereby adjourned.

RUTH and MILDRED moan and groan, but quickly begin to exit the room, followed by a less upset DORIS.

RUTH
(to no one in particular)
C'mon, let's go, girls, we can start spreading the word tonight ourselves!

HAROLD, AGNES, WALTER and MRS. WHITMORE also exit the room.

ELI stands and slowly walks up to EMILY's table.

ELI
(grinning)
So, how's your news story coming along now?

EMILY
(shaking her head)
Well, it's a bit hard to say at this point. I've already got a few bones to pick at of course, but there's certainly not much meat yet to speak of. I'm really not sure what to do next. I may have to seek out some professional advice.

ELI
(chuckling)
Well, welcome to the dramatic and ever-surprising world of Cape Morton, Emily. Goodnight to you and good luck.

ELI exits the room leaving EMILY to sit at her table pondering.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP

The next morning, EMILY goes to visit the newspaper office of BENJAMIN Curtis, editor-in chief of a number of regional papers, including the Shoreline Gazette, seeking advice about the developing story in Cape Morton.

BENJAMIN is seated, working busily, at his very cluttered desk as EMILY knocks on the open door jamb.

EMILY
Mr. Curtis? Can I have a moment please?

BENJAMIN
Emily! Of course, come on in. What can I do for you?

EMILY
Well, I'm, not exactly sure. That's pretty much why I'm here.

BENJAMIN
Then why don't you sit yourself down and explain, how about that?

EMILY sits in a chair facing BENJAMIN'S desk.

Okay, thank you.
(hesitant pause)
So, here's what's happening. I don't know if you've heard or not, but there's a bit of an uproar going on in Cape Morton right now.

BENJAMIN
Well, I am familiar with an ad recently placed in our paper, but let me guess, ... the fine people of Cape Morton think they've discovered something new to complain about yet again, is that it?

EMILY
Kind of, and it looks like their discovery could very well wind up involving a few prominent people. There might even be some potentially scandalous behavior.

BENJAMIN
Hmmm, ... how scandalous?

EMILY
Well, I'd like to not tell just yet. I don't want anything to color your thinking, but I do know I need your advice. I need to know how best to handle what could be a very delicate situation as I work on what has the makings of a very interesting, yet provocative, news story.

BENJAMIN
Town bigwigs?

EMILY
Yes, some.

BENJAMIN
What about the rest of the town?

EMILY
Well, it seems as though many have already formed their opinion. Or at least they're in development right now.

BENJAMIN
(thinking a moment)
Well, I'm certainly no stranger, nor its people, so maybe you can ponder this just a bit ...

DO WHAT IT TAKES

BENJAMIN
(singing)
I'VE WATCHED THESE TOWNS, FOR THIRTY-SOME YEARS
SEEN THE HAPPY TIMES, AND SEEN THE TEARS
SOME MEN TELL THE TRUTH, WITHOUT A FIGHT
WHILE OTHERS CHOOSE, TO LIE OUTRIGHT
NOW, PEOPLE DON'T MIND, A LITTLE WHITE LIES
IF IT TRULY HELPS, TO KEEP THE OCEAN STILL
BUT NEWSPRINT INK, SHOULD NEVER TRY
TO CHANGE A TOWN, OR FORCE ITS WILL

EMILY pulls out her notebook and begins taking notes.

YOU DON'T WRITE TO WIN THE CROWD
AND YOU DON'T WRITE TO KNOCK THEM DOWN
SO, WRITE YOUR STORY CRISP AND CLEAN
WRITE A STORY LIKE THEY'VE NEVER SEEN

DO WHAT IT TAKES, TURN OVER THE STONES
HEAR WHAT THEY WHISPER, WHEN THEY'RE ALL ALONE
(MORE)

BENJAMIN (cont'd)
IF IT RUFFLES SOME FEATHERS, IT WON'T BE YOUR FAULT
'CAUSE THOSE WHO COMPLAIN, JUST AIN'T WORTH THEIR SALT

EMILY takes more notes.

IF SOMETHING'S A-BREWING, WITHIN THAT BEACH TOWN
THEN HELP IT TO BREATHE, AND STAND ON ITS OWN
OUR JOB'S NOT TO COMFORT, OUR JOB'S NOT TO CODDLE
YOUR DEADLINE'S A-COMING, THERE'S NO TIME TO DAWDLE

YOU NEEDN'T KEEP YOUR NEIGHBORS GLAD
OR BUFF AND POLISH EVERY NAME
YOU WRITE BECAUSE A SILENT PRESS
IS JUST A DWINDLING FLAME

SO,DO WHAT IT TAKES, FOLLOW IT THROUGH
GO WHERE IT LEADS YOU, DON'T SOFTEN THE VIEW
IF IT COSTS YOU A DINNER, OR YOU LOSE A HANDSHAKE
I'LL MAKE SURE YOU'RE COVERED, SO DO WHAT IT TAKES

EMILY takes yet more notes.

THIS PAPER'S MORE THAN FOLDED SHEETS
IT'S MEMORIES IN BLACK AND WHITE
BUT IF WE LOOK AWAY FROM WHAT WE SEE
WE LOSE THE RIGHT TO WRITE

SO, DO WHAT IT TAKES, AND WRITE WHAT YOU SEE
NO NEED TO BE AFRAID, WE'RE A TEAM, YOU AND ME
IF THE TRUTH GETS TOO HEAVY, I'LL HELP WITH THE WEIGHT
DON'T EVER GIVE UP, JUST DO WHAT IT TAKES

EMILY SLOWLY closes her notebook and sits silently for a moment or two, just thinking.

BENJAMIN
Well, what do you think, can you do that?

EMILY
(confidently)
Yes, sir, I'm sure I can.
(beaming)
Thank you!

BENJAMIN
Anytime, Emily. You're more than welcome.

EMILY stands and exits.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE FOUR

LIGHTS UP

It's late the next afternoon as we see the interior of The Sandpiper Dress Shop.

HERMAN is folding clothes at the service counter when the entrance door warning bell rings.

HAROLD enters, as the entry bell jingles. He glances about very briefly, sees the mannequin, and then walks over to the service counter.

HERMAN looks up while continuing his work.

HERMAN
Harold, you're quite the last-minute shopper, aren't you? It's nearly five-thirty. What can I help you with before I close up?

HAROLD
Well, to be perfectly honest, Herman, I'm not here as a shopper. I'm here on official business. Town business.

HERMAN
Oh?

HAROLD
It seems we had quite an uproar at last night's Council Meeting.

HERMAN
Yes, I heard a bit about it.

HAROLD
(surprised)
Oh, from who?

HERMAN
(grinning)
C'mon, Harold, Cape Morton is a fairly tight-knit community. Let's just say I have my sources. So, is that why you're here.

HAROLD
Yes.

HERMAN
Care to explain?

HAROLD
We're holding an open forum meeting for the townspeople tomorrow night in the Town Council Hall. I'd like you to be there.

HERMAN
I see.
(pause)
Am I being ordered there? Commanded to attend?

HAROLD
No, Herman, you're being invited. You deserve a chance to speak for yourself.

HERMAN stops what he's been doing and sort of stares out into space, glances over toward the mannequin and then pauses a moment or two.

HERMAN
Alright, fair enough, I'll be there.

HAROLD
The meeting will be called to order at exactly 6:00 pm. I'm hoping you'll arrive before the gavel strikes.

HERMAN
(firmly)
As I said, Harold, I'll be there.

HAROLD
Thank you, Herman. Have a good night.

HERMAN
I'll do my best.

HAROLD
As will I.

HAROLD turns to exit the store and notices the mannequin. He stops a moment to give it another lingering glance, then momentarily turns back toward HERMAN, shakes his head just a bit, and continues to exit the store.

HERMAN leans forward over the service counter and appears to be pondering something.

HERMAN
(to himself)
Official business, ... hmmmf!

HERMAN goes to the front door and turns the lock, then tidies up his sales counter and even makes minor adjustments to the mannequin, all while singing.

FABRIC AND THREAD

HERMAN
(singing)
I KEEP THE LEDGERS, I COUNT THE TILL
SWEEP UP THE SAND SOME TOURIST MIGHT SPILL
I LOCK THE DOOR AND I DIM THE LIGHTS
JUST THE SAME AS I DO EVERY NIGHT
BUT TONIGHT THESE WALLS FEEL SO VERY THIN
LIKE THE WHOLE DAMN TOWN IS PEEKING IN
AT THE FABRIC, THE THREAD, AND EACH OF THE SEAMS
AS IF I'M PROMOTING SOME TERRIBLE SCHEME

WHY DO I FEEL LIKE I'M STANDING ON TRIAL
WHEN ALL I DID WAS DISPLAY A NEW STYLE?
I ORDERED THE STOCK, AND I PRICED THE WHOLE RACK
THEN HUNG IT ALL UP AND TOOK A STEP BACK
I SELL WHAT PEOPLE COME HERE TO SEE
I SIMPLY SELL WHAT THEY HOPE THEY CAN BE
SO HOW DID I WIND UP ON THIS CENTER STAGE
MIXED UP IN THIS TOWN'S LATEST OUTRAGE?

LAST YEAR IT WAS ALL ABOUT SHORTER SKIRTS
BELL BOTTOM PANTS AND PSYCHEDELIC SHIRTS
EACH SUMMER BRINGS ON ITS OWN FASHION WAR
BUT IN TIME FOLKS SETTLE DOWN JUST LIKE BEFORE
NOW THINGS IN THE AIR FEEL EVER SO TIGHT
MAYBE I LIT A MATCH I KNEW I SHOULDN'T LIGHT
BUT NOW SPARKS ARE FLYING AND STIRRING UP HEAT
ALL FROM MY WINDOW RIGHT HERE ON MAIN STREET

MAYBE I SHOULDN'T HAVE CROSSED THAT LINE
SHOULD HAVE KNOWN WHAT WAS THEIRS AND WHAT WAS MINE
'CAUSE RUNNING A DRESS SHOP SHOULD NEVER CAUSE PAIN
BUT SOMEHOW, SOME WAY, THAT'S WHAT THIS BECAME

As HERMAN prepares to sing the next verse he finds himself standing by the mannequin, gently adjusting the fabric.

HERMAN
(still singing)
NO, I NEVER MEANT TO TAKE UP A SIDE
AND I NEVER MEANT TO STIR UP THE TIDE
I ONLY MEANT TO RUN THIS SIMPLE STORE
NOT BECOME THE SOURCE OF SUCH AN UPROAR

SO, TOMORROW AS THEY CALL OUT MY NAME
AND TRY TO FIND SOMEONE TO BLAME
I'LL HONESTLY SAY WHAT I'VE ALWAYS SAID
IT'S JUST A WINDOW DISPLAY
SIMPLY FABRIC AND THREAD

HERMAN dims the store lights and exits, locking the door behind him.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE FIVE

LIGHTS UP

The Town Hall meeting room is already mostly full with (silhouette) residents. The council table is set as before, with a microphone and stand out on front added for public comments.

The Council Members as well as a few townspeople are milling about, chatting, murmuring and more.

In the midst of all this, HERMAN enters and finds a seat nearest the entry door.

After a few moments, HAROLD steps behind the Council table and speaks.

HAROLD
Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats so we can get underway.

The other Council Members take their places at the table while RUTH, MILDRED and DORIS take seats in the front row.

EMILY moves to her own table while ELI takes his place at his normal seat in the back row of the audience seating area.

HAROLD waits a moment or two while scanning the room.

HAROLD
Please, ... everyone. take a seat.

MRS. WHITMORE finally finds a seat in the room near the other residents.

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
I now call this Special Forum of the Cape Morton community residents to order.

As you all know, concerns have been raised regarding Mr. Jennings' dress shop on Main Street. But, before this council even thinks of making any kind of decision or recommendation, we need to hear from you, the interested residents of Cape Morton.

HAROLD points softly to the front row.

Ruth Talbot has agreed to provide a summary of how this matter first came to our attention, after which time we'll then hear from the shop owner and manager himself, Mr. Herman Jennings.

Ms. Talbot? If you would, please step up to the microphone and state your name and address for the record.

RUTH rises with purpose, already enjoying the attention, adjusting her hair as she leans in toward the microphone.

RUTH
Thank you, Harold, ... I mean, Chairman Kimball. My name is Ruth Talbot and as you all know, I live in the pretty pink bungalow on the corner of Pointe Avenue and Plum street.
(takes a deep breath)
Well, this all started a couple days ago when myself and the girls, Mildred and Doris ...
(out to the room)
Stand-up ladies.

MILDRED almost jumps to her feet and waves to the other residents with a sense of glee, while Doris simply remains in her seat, nods her head and softly smiles.

RUTH
We were out for our evening stroll, ... and that's then we saw it.

HAROLD
And what exactly did you see, Ms. Talbot.

RUTH
We saw it!
(MORE)

RUTH (cont'd)
(leaning in)
We saw it, ... through the shop window. It just, ... wasn't all there.

HAROLD
What do you mean it wasn't all there?

RUTH
The top. It was supposed to be a swimsuit, but the top simply wasn't there. The mannequin, ... it was exposed! We could see its entire bosom!

MRS. WHITMORE gasps.

HAROLD
Now, just so everyone here is clear in their own mind, was this a mannequin Mr. Jennings was still in the process of dressing?

RUTH
No, Harold, not at all. Because now, two days later, I know it was supposed to look exactly the way I saw it. I learned it's one of those swimsuits invented by some crazy French designer, ... far out in California of all places.

MILDRED
Beyond crazy, I'd say!

RUTH
Yes, and it even caused trouble in Chicago with hundred dollar fines and arrests and more. It was covered on the TV news and everything. I actually had to cancel my subscription to Look magazine because of it. And now, well here it is, right here, in our lovely town, and it's already starting to stir up the very same kind of trouble!

HAROLD
Okay, so to be very clear, you're referring to what some call a topless swimsuit, what others might call a monokini… correct?

RUTH
Yes, and you can use all the tricky words you want, Harold, but it's trash, it's degrading, and it should be illegal. Cape Morton needs to put a stop to this at once.

HAROLD
(patiently taking a deep breath)
Alright, thank you Ms. Talbot, you may be seated.

RUTH returns to her seat, almost as if strutting with a sense of pride.

MILDRED
(standing)
So, tell us Harold, what is this Town Council going to do about it?

MRS. WHITMORE
Yes, I'd like to hear that answer as well. I have two young nieces coming to visit very soon and they certainly don't need to be seeing things of this nature.

HAROLD
Alright, patience, please, ... everyone, ... we'll get to possible action steps eventually, but it's really only fair for us to hear the other side of the story.

Herman Jennings, owner and operator of the Sandpiper Dress Shop is here to answer a few questions.

Herman, would you please step up to the microphone?

And like before, state your full name and address for the record.

HERMAN
Certainly.

HERMAN steps forward, smartly dressed, quietly confident.

HERMAN
My name is Herman Jennings and I live at 227 Huckleberry Lane.

HAROLD
Thank you, Mr. Jennings. It's my understanding you've owned and operated the Sandpiper Dress Shop for quite some time. Is that correct?

HERMAN
Yes, my wife and I opened this store back in 1947. She passed away in 1956, but I decided to stay on here in this community and continue to operate the store.

HAROLD
Of course, and we're all very sorry for your loss.

HERMAN nods graciously.

HAROLD
So let me get right to the point, Herman. Are you currently selling something known as a topless bathing suit?

HERMAN
Yes, I am.

HAROLD
And how long have you been doing so?

HERMAN
I received my initial delivery about a week and a half ago.

HAROLD
And how many suits did you order?

HERMAN
Just three. They were a bit on the expensive side so I decided to limit my trial investment to see how they sold.

HAROLD
And how much is expensive?

HERMAN
I set my retail price at $24.50.

A gasp is heard from an attendee.

RUTH
Can you believe it? Half of it's missing and he has the nerve to charge nearly five times what any other swimsuit would cost?

HAROLD
(banging the gavel)
And you still possess all three of those swimsuits?

HERMAN
No, I only have one left, I already sold the other two.

HAROLD
You sold them to townspeople?

HERMAN
No, I sold them to tourists who happened to visit the shop. The only one I have left is the one the ladies saw on the mannequin.

AGNES
Are you telling us Mr. Jennings that two tourists just happened to stop into your shop and coincidentally purchased the other two swimsuits?

HERMAN
No, Ma'am, I'm not suggesting that at all. I run a successful clothing business. I don't wait for customers. I advertise. And I want you all to know, ... this town's been very good to me. It's never been my intention to offend it.

HAROLD
Herman, do you think this swimsuit is offensive?

HERMAN
I think it's a swimsuit.

HAROLD
Yes, but would you call it obscene?

HERMAN
I'd call it fabric and stitching.

HAROLD
I see.

HERMAN
Don't misunderstand me. I sell fashions.

HAROLD
Alright. Thank you.

Are there any further questions for Mr. Jennings from either of my fellow Council Member?

AGNES
No, not me. I've heard quite enough.

WALTER
Well, I have only one question, ... have you ever considered retiring the mannequin, ... and maybe finding a model who could at least blush?

ELI
(chuckling and speaking out)
Well said, Walter!

HAROLD
Councilman Pike, I think it's best we let that one fade off into the night, hmm?
(back toward HERMAN)
Alright. I thank you Mr. Jennings for attending this meeting and for answering our questions.

HERMAN nods toward the Council Members and quietly exits the meeting room.

HAROLD
Well, I'd say we've all been given quite a bit to think about.

RUTH
So, what are you going to do about it?

HAROLD
I'll be honest, Ruth. I anticipated we might have ended up with two vastly different points of view in this matter, so I've had preliminary discussions with Councilors Porter and Pike and we've unanimously agreed, ... this matter will not be decided quietly ... nor should it simply be decided by those behind this table. We believe it should be decided by the good people of Cape Morton. And so it shall, this coming Monday. Seven o'clock. Right here.
(banging the gavel)
I hereby declare this Special Forum adjourned.

All three Council Members rise and begin to exit, while RUTH, MILDRED, DORIS and MRS. WHITMORE mill about briefly before exiting.

EMILY rises to exit and briefly looks to the back of the room where ELI is standing.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE SIX

LIGHTS UP

The entry bell jingles as EMILY enters the Sandpiper Dress Shop and seeing Herman is on the phone, she begins to browse around a bit.

She quickly spots the mannequin and can't help but stroll over to get a closer look.

But, as she steps toward the mannequin, HERMAN finishes his call, turns and speaks to her, so she returns his way.

HERMAN
Miss Carter, good morning. I'd offer you the proper Sandpiper welcome I give all my customers, ... but somehow I suspect you're more likely here on newspaper business.

EMILY steps up to HERMAN'S sales counter.

EMILY
Yes, sir, you're right, I'm not here to shop. I'm here to try and understand a bit better what's going on with what appears to be a rather unusual news story in the making.

HERMAN
Seems to me, it's the town's reaction that's most unusual.

HERMAN points toward the mannequin.

You've seen it. What's your reaction?

EMILY
Well, I really try my best to stay as neutral as possible, but I must admit, it certainly seems to be a bit on the radical side, don't you think?

HERMAN
Maybe yes, maybe no. But it is a new fashion style and it seems some people have taken an interest. Some very positive, and of course, some very negative. But all in all, it is just a swimsuit, right?

EMILY
I suppose so. But the real reason I'm here, sir, is because of my news article. I certainly don't want to be writing based solely on conjecture or supposition, so who better to get the real story from than the man who now seems to be at the very center?

HERMAN
I'm sorry, Miss Carter, but I can't imagine anything I might be able to offer that you don't already know.

EMILY
Well, for starters, the two suits you sold, were they locals? Tourists? Were they purchased together or were they totally separate sales?

HERMAN
(pausing)
Okay, I realize you have a story to write, but you should know Miss Carter, ... I run my business. What my customers buy, and why, ... that’s their business. It's just not mine to share. I hope you can understand.

HELP ME WITH MY STORY

EMILY
Maybe I do, but I really am at a loss here.

(singing)
I'VE HEARD THE RUMORS FLYING
I'VE HEARD BOTH SIDES DECLARE
BUT SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE
SEEMS THE TRUTH IS NOT QUITE THERE

I CAN QUOTE WHAT’S BEING SHOUTED
I CAN PRINT WHAT’S PLAIN TO SEE
BUT THERE’S SOMETHING MORE BENEATH IT ALL
THAT DOESN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE TO ME

SO PLEASE, HELP ME WITH MY STORY
HELP ME FIND THE THREAD
HELP ME STITCH TOGETHER
WHAT’S BEEN WHISPERED AND WHAT’S BEEN SAID

I'M NOT TRYING TO CAUSE AN UPROAR
AND I DON'T NEED ANY FAME OR GLORY
I JUST WANT TO GET IT RIGHT
WON'T YOU HELP ME WITH MY STORY

BUT YOU'VE DODGED ALL MY QUESTIONS
LIKE YOU SWORE YOU'D NOT BETRAY
(MORE)

EMILY (cont'd)
MUST BE THE TRUTH IS SOMEONE'S SECRET
AND IT MUST BE KEPT THAT WAY

YOU'VE SOLD MINI SKIRTS AND DRESSES
AND NOW THIS SWIMSUIT, SO IT SEEMS
BUT YOU SAY THE SHOPPERS PASSING THROUGH
DON'T OFTEN SHARE THEIR DREAMS

I SENSE THERE'S MORE BELOW THE SURFACE
MORE THAN JUST WHAT'S ON DISPLAY
I FEEL THERE'S SOMETHING JUST BENEATH IT ALL
AND IT'S EATING ME AWAY

I'M NOT TRYING TO CAUSE AN UPROAR
AND I DON'T NEED ANY FAME OR GLORY
I'M JUST TRYING TO UNDERSTAND
WON'T YOU HELP ME WITH MY STORY

SO MAYBE IT'S NOT THE SWIMSUIT
MAYBE THAT IS JUST THE SPARK
COULD BE SOMETHING SO MUCH DEEPER
THAT MOVES SO QUIETLY IN THE DARK

SOMETHING NO ONE WANTS TO NAME
BUT FOLKS HERE CLEARLY SEEM TO FEEL
IT'S SOMETHING HIDDEN JUST BELOW
WHAT'S POLITE AND WHAT IS REAL

IF I LISTEN TO THEIR SHOUTING
I MIGHT MISS WHAT ISN'T SAID
SO I'LL FOLLOW EVERY SILENCE
NO MATTER WHERE I'M LED

I'LL TRY TO FIND THE ANSWER
FOR THOSE THINGS I CAN'T DEFINE
AND THEN MAYBE MAKE A DIFFERENCE
WITH THE TRUTH I HOPE TO FIND

SO I'LL FINISH UP MY STORY
AND I'LL FOLLOW WHERE IT LEADS
I WILL DIG BELOW THE SURFACE
AS I TEAR THROUGH ALL THE WEEDS

IT'S NOT MY PLAN TO STIR UP A SCANDAL
AND I DON'T NEED A GRAND DESIGN
BUT WHATEVER TRUTH IT SEEMS YOU'RE HIDING
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I KNOW I NEED TO FIND

SO I WILL KEEP ON DIGGING TILL IT'S FOUND
I'M SURE I'LL FIND IT SOON WHATEVER IT MAY BE
AND THEN I'LL WRITE MY STORY, OH SO CLEARLY
AND THIS WHOLE TOWN WILL FINALLY GET TO SEE

As the song ends, the store's entry bell jingles and in walks DORIS.

She hesitates a brief moment when she notices EMILY, but then walks right up to HERMAN'S sales counter.

EMILY steps back a bit and observes silently.

DORIS
Mr. Jennings, good morning.

HERMAN
(nodding)
Mrs. Kimball, hello, and yes, it certainly is a glorious morning here in Cape Morton. So, what can I do for you?

DORIS
(a bit flustered)
Well, umm, ... I was actually wondering if the, uh, necktie I ordered for Harold has arrived yet. After all, his birthday is fast approaching and if I need to make other arrangements I'll have to get moving on that rather soon.

HERMAN
Of course, I think it has arrived, but let me go check.

HERMAN exits to an unseen storeroom, leaving the two ladies alone.

DORIS
(after a pause)
So, Miss Carter, doing a bit of shopping are you?

EMILY
Oh, no Ma'am, I'm actually doing research for a news article regarding last night's meeting.

DORIS
(a bit nervously)
Oh? And uh, ... have you come across anything of interest?

EMILY
Not really. I mean I probably know as much as you do, but I'm afraid Mr. Jennings isn't much of an open book, if you know what I mean.

Before DORIS can respond, HERMAN returns from the back room with a necktie wrapped in tissue paper.

HERMAN
It's right here Mrs. Kimball.

HERMAN folds back the tissue paper to show the tie to DORIS.

Here, let me box it up for you.

HERMAN pulls out a pale blue box with a white ribbon-covered lid. He places the tissue-wrapped tie inside, covers it with the lid and hands it to DORIS.

Is there anything else I can help you with today?

DORIS
No, I don't think so, not at the moment anyway, but thank you very much, Herman. Good day, Miss Carter

Emily watches Doris turn and exit,
... then looks to the mannequin,
... then to Herman.

A question is forming in her mind that she doesn’t quite know how to ask.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE SEVEN

LIGHTS UP

RUTH and MILDRED are sitting at a sidewalk table enjoying afternoon tea as they wait for DORIS to come join them.

RUTH
I know, and so then I told him, "Ninety-three cents a pound for ribeye steak? That's crazy. For that price you should deliver it, come cook it and serve it up as well!"

MILDRED
(giggling)
And then what happened?

RUTH
Well, I had no choice, I told him to wrap up four steaks. I put them in the freezer and I'll be glad to have them when his price goes up even more.

MILDRED
I think it's just crazy, so I know what you mean. I was in there last week and paid twenty-nine cents a pound for a stewing chicken. That President of ours needs to do something about this. Sometimes I get so mad, but then I think of his oh-so-sweet wife and I calm down again. But all these high-in-the-sky-prices are simply getting too far out of control. I just can't stand it.

RUTH
I agree, they really are crazy. And speaking of crazy, is it just me or does it seem as though Doris has grown a bit "unusual" lately? I mean, I saw her just this morning. She was out shopping and when she saw me she acted like she didn't even want to be seen. So, I can't help but wonder what's going on with her. I just don't know. Maybe she's got something important on her mind.

MILDRED
Oh my God, Ruth, I thought it was just me, and yes, she does seem a bit off, but it's not something I've been quite able to put my finger on.

RUTH
Well, I admit I have been doing my share of thinking.

WHAT IF?

RUTH
(singing)
THERE'S COMFORT AT A SIDEWALK TABLE
IN THE SAME SEAT EVERY DAY
WHERE THE TEA TASTES JUST THE WAY IT SHOULD
AND THE BREEZE BEHAVES ITS WAY

WHERE THE SHOP SIGNS NEVER WANDER
FROM THE COLORS THAT WE KNOW
AND THE TIDE COMES IN ON SCHEDULE
LIKE IT ALWAYS HAS BEFORE

IT'S NOT THAT WE RESIST THE WORLD
OR THINK IT'S ALL A BLUFF
IT'S JUST THAT WHAT WE'VE BUILT RIGHT HERE
HAS ALWAYS BEEN ENOUGH

DORIS KNOWS THIS TOWN AS WELL AS WE DO
KNOWS THE RHYTHM, KNOWS THE LINE
SHE'S THE LAST ONE I'D IMAGINE
EVER CHOOSING TO DECLINE

BUT SHE'S QUIETER LATELY ABOUT IT
DOESN'T SPEAK AS FIRM OR FAST
AND I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER
WHAT IF SOMETHING'S CHANGED AT LAST

WHAT IF ONE SMALL DOOR IS OPENED
AND IT DOESN'T CLOSE AGAIN
WHAT IF SOMETHING SHIFTS AN INCH
AND NOT THE WAY IT'S ALWAYS BEEN
NOT DISASTER, NOT A FALL
JUST A DIFFERENT KIND OF START
WHAT IF CHANGE BEGINS SO GENTLY
YOU DON'T FEEL IT IN YOUR HEART

RUTH and MILDRED do a bit of light dancing during the musical interlude.

IT ISN'T FEAR THAT DRIVES US
OR A WISH TO SCOLD OR SCORN…
IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT ONCE YOU LOOSEN
WHAT WAS TIDY AND WELL-WORN
WHERE DOES IT REST
WHERE DOES IT LAND
WHO DECIDES
WHAT WILL STAND

WHAT IF DORIS SEES IT CLEARER
(MORE)

RUTH (cont'd)
THAN THE REST OF US CAN SEE
WHAT IF HOLDING ON TOO TIGHTLY
ISN'T STRENGTH, BUT SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY
WHAT IF WE'RE JUST WATCHING HISTORY
FROM THE SAME OLD CAFÉ CHAIRS
WHAT IF NOTHING TRULY CHANGES
AND WHAT IF IT DOES ANYWAY

MILDRED
And what if, what if, what if? The truth is, you or I simply don't know and if she knows, well, I'm sure she'll tell us. After all, we are her very best of friends.

DORIS enters and joins them at the table.

RUTH
Well, there you are, we were beginning to wonder if we'd ever see you today. Your tea is probably ice cold by now.

MILDRED
(nervously)
Oh, ... Doris, hi. We were just ... wondering what was keeping you.

DORIS
I'm sorry, girls, I guess I got a bit distracted while running a few errands and I totally lost track of time.

MILDRED
Ughh, I hate running errands on such a beautiful day.

DORIS nods in agreement.

RUTH
(pausing)
So, is everyone ready for tomorrow night's meeting? I really can't believe what all this has come to. Just imagine, an official Cape Morton town meeting called to vote on an obscene garment. I'm simply beyond words.

MILDRED
I agree. Doris, have you been stewing over this as well? It's been driving you crazy, right?

DORIS
Well, I try to avoid getting too worked up over things I can't control. But, it certainly has the makings of an unusual meeting, I don't doubt that. Still, when all is said and done, I suppose we'll all be glad to finally put this to
(MORE)

DORIS (cont'd)
bed. I just hope the night doesn't drag on too long. That's when things seem to always take a wrong turn around here.

RUTH
No, ... I can't imagine it will take very long for people to vote on getting rid of that horrible garment. Mildred and I are thinking of bringing some "My Vote Is No!" signs. Do you want us to bring one for you too?

DORIS
Oh, no, but thank you. Besides, I'm pretty sure there's a Town Council rule about signs and such. I just think as long as everyone votes their conscience, things will turn out just fine. I'm quite sure of that.

MILDRED
Alright, so no signs, but I can I at least assume there's a big no vote planned for you, yes?

DORIS
Now, Mildred. Let's not forget, a vote should always be private until it's cast.

RUTH
But you will be voting no, correct?

DORIS
I'll do just as I expect everyone else will do, I'll vote my conscience.

RUTH and MILDRED look a bit quizzically at each other as all three drink their tea in silence.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE EIGHT

LIGHTS UP

At mid-morning, HAROLD, AGNES and WALTER huddle in the Town Hall, meeting room planning their strategies, depending on how the community vote goes later that evening.

HAROLD
Alright, you know why I called this meeting. We need to be prepared. None of us knows how tonight's meeting will go, so we need to make sure we're ready. We need to have a couple of contingency plans in place.

AGNES
For what?

WALTER
For the inevitable.

HAROLD
So the meeting doesn't get out of hand. So we don't lose control. Who knows what might happen if people get all riled up, as I suspect some may very well do.

WALTER
So, what do you propose?

HAROLD
A plan B.

AGNES
Which is what?

HAROLD
It will be our escape route. I already met with Herman and I honestly don't know what to expect from him. And we already know how wound up some of the ladies are.

AGNES
You mean Ruth, Mildred, and Doris?

HAROLD
Yes.

WALTER
Harold, why can't you control Doris. After all, she is your wife.

HAROLD
(chuckling)
Walter, you've never been married. If you ever had been, you'd know just how foolish a thing you said.

AGNES
Alright then, so what will our Plan B look like.

HAROLD
Well, most people are coming tonight to vote on whether Herman can sell the swimsuit. But others may be looking for something more, something bigger.

WALTER
Such as?

HAROLD
A policy change. A new rule. Maybe even a new town ordinance. People may want us to put something in place that goes well beyond this particular incident and helps to protect the town from all kinds of similar situations, across a wide variety of instances.

AGNES
What do you mean, Harold?

HAROLD
Well, you tell me. What if the town movie house decided to start showing adult movies, or if the Bayside Tavern decided to bring in barely-dressed young ladies and stripper poles? Or what if the corner newsstand displayed some of those Playboy magazines right out on the street side where school boys pass by every day?

AGNES
Well that would be horrible of course, but do you honestly think those things could happen here in Morton?

WALTER
Did you ever think topless bathing suits would be displayed for sale here in Morton?

AGNES
No, I suppose not.

HAROLD
That's my point. None of us want to have to deal with this kind of thing over and over again. Sure, we know the world is changing, but that doesn't mean we have to change as deeply or as quickly as the rest. So, I think we need to be ready to offer up a motion concerning a new ordinance. A decency ordinance if you will.

WALTER
I suppose that does make sense. Be prepared. Yes, I agree.

AGNES
Alright. So, how do we do that? The meeting's only a few hours away.

HAROLD
Well, if it's okay with you two, I'd be happy to go home and draft a motion and ordinance for the voters to consider. The wording can easily be altered by them, or by us, during the meeting. I'll have no problem getting it ready in time.

AGNES and WALTER nod in agreement. All three stand. HAROLD and AGNES head toward the exit as WALTER stays behind.

WALTER
You two go ahead, I want to do a bit of cleaning up here before tonight.

HAROLD and AGNES exit as WALTER grabs a broom and starts to sweep the floor.

IT COULD BE A DOOZY

From time to time, WALTER is liable to simulate a bit of dancing with the broom as he sings this song.

WALTER
(singing)
WELL, I'VE SEEN TOWN HALLS FILL UP FAST
FOR MATTERS SMALL AND THIN
I'VE SEEN DEBATES AND ARGUMENTS
TURN NEXT OF KIN TOWARD KIN
SO, IF TONIGHT'S ABOUT A TINY SUIT
THAT COULD FIT INSIDE A HAT
I'D SAY WE MIGHT BE IN FOR
A LOT OF THIS AND THAT

IT COULD BE A DOOZY
IT COULD BE A SIGHT
IT COULD BE THE KIND OF MEETING
FOLKS RECALL FOR YEARS BEYOND TONIGHT
WITH VOICES FIRM AND SHOULDERS SQUARED
WITH MINDS THAT ARE DETERMINED
TO HOLD A LINE FOR WHICH THEY CARE
IT COULD BE A DOOZY
(MORE)

WALTER (cont'd)

NOW HERMAN’S JUST A DRESS SHOP MAN
HE MOVES WHATEVER SELLS
BUT TAKE A THING LIKE THIS TONIGHT
IT MIGHT NOT GO SO WELL
ONE SIDE TALKS OF LIBERTY
ONE SIDE TALKS OF GRACE
AND SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN IT ALL
THERE'S COMMON SENSE MISPLACED

IT COULD BE A DOOZY
IT COULD KNOCK US OFF OUR FEET
AND BLOCK THOSE AISLES WE’VE SHARED SO LONG
FROM PEWS TO COURTHOUSE SEATS
WITH NEIGHBORS FLASHING TIGHT-LIPPED SMILES
WOND'RING HOW THE VOTE WILL GO
BUT IF THIS THING DRAGS ON A WHILE
IT COULD BE A DOOZY

TRUTH IS, I DON’T OPPOSE DEBATE
THAT’S HOW TOWNS LIKE OURS ENDURE
BUT SOMETIMES PRIDE OUTGROWS THE TRUTH
AND NOTHING FEELS SECURE
IT’S RARELY FACTS THAT STIR THE POT
OR FANS THAT WIN THE GAME
BUT FOLKS AFRAID THE WORLD’S MOVED ON
JUST MIGHT WONDER WHO'S TO BLAME

IT REALLY COULD BE A DOOZY
OR IT REALLY MIGHT BE OKAY
I DON'T HAVE A CLUE WHAT'LL HAPPEN
IT'S REALLY THAT HARD TO SAY
BUT EITHER WAY, I HOPE IT'S FAIR
AND SOMEHOW WE ALL CAN WIN
'CAUSE WHEN IT'S DONE AND NO ONE CARES
THEN IT REALLY WOULD HAVE BEEN
ONE HECK OF A DOOZY

Walter puts the broom away, walks toward the exit, turns out the light and leaves the stage.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE NINE

LIGHTS UP

DORIS returns home and enters her bedroom, gently locking the door behind her. She opens a dresser drawer and removes a pale blue box with a white ribbon, obviously from the Sandpiper Dress Shop. She opens the box and lifts out the monokini, secretly examining and pondering its true meaning.

At first she simply sits on the edge of her bed holding it in her lap, and in time she stands, slips out of her dress and shoes and while standing barefooted in her pure white slip, holds it in front of her, even smoothing it at times against her body, while she studies herself in the full-length mirror.

DORIS
(to herself)
Yes, yes, ... I know it was so silly of me to buy it, but something inside of me made me do it. A voice told me I had to. And Herman couldn't have been any more polite. Not a single word from him. No teasing or anything.

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL

(singing)
I ONCE KNEW A GIRL, SEEMS NOT LONG AGO
WHO WANDERED THE SHORE, BY THE BEAUTIFUL SEA
WITH SALT IN HER HAIR AND SAND ON HER SKIN
SHE NEVER ONCE WORRIED WHAT OTHERS MIGHT SEE

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WHO WOULD LAUGH OUT TOO LOUD
AND WHO'D DANCE NO MATTER THE HOUR
WHO NEVER ONCE WORRIED OF HOW SHE MIGHT LOOK
NEVER QUESTIONED HER OWN QUIET POWER

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL BEFORE BORDERS WERE SET
BEFORE RISKS WERE CONSIDERED AND THE RULES WERE ALL MET
YES, I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WHO NEVER WOULD CHOOSE
BETWEEN WHAT FED HER HUNGER AND WHAT SHE MIGHT LOSE
(MORE)

DORIS (cont'd)

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WHO'D OFTEN DRESS DARING
TO FEEL THE SUN'S WARMTH BEAR DOWN ON HER SKIN
SHE NEVER CONSIDERED WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT THINK
OR IF BEHAVIOR LIKE HERS WAS A SIN

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WHO WOULD NEVER LOOK BACK
TO MEASURE EACH YEAR AS TIME PASSED HER BY
SHE WOULD NEVER COMPARE WHO SHE ONCE USED TO BE
TO THE GIRL SHE BECAME OVER TIME

I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WITH NOTHING TO PROVE
THAT GREW UP AND CHOSE THE WAYS SHE SHOULD MOVE
I ONCE KNEW A GIRL WHO'D NOT SHY AWAY
FROM THE TIME THAT REMAINED FOR THINGS WAITING THEIR DAY

During the instrumental portion of this song, DORIS gently dances in front of the mirror while holding the monokini close to her

SHE’S HERE IN THIS ROOM, STILL WONDERING WHY
HOW TIME SLIPPED RIGHT IN TO HELP HER DECIDE
BUT SHE'LL ALWAYS BE NEAR SHE WILL NOT RUN AWAY
BUT SHE WONDERS ALOUD IF SHE'LL EVER BE READY TO SAY ...

I ONCE WAS THAT GIRL AND MAYBE STILL AM
BUT NOT HERE AND NOW, IT'S NOT MY BEST PLAN
STILL I ONCE WAS THAT GIRL THOUGH TIME HAS MOVED ON
I'M PROUD OF WHO I AM AND PROUD I ONCE WAS THAT GIRL

DORIS stands silently and then turns to carefully fold the swimsuit, place it back in its box and return the box to the dresser drawer. She then sits down on her bed, silently thinking.

LIGHTS DOWN

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

LIGHTS UP

Inside the dimly-lit Town Hall meeting room, ELI sits in the back row of seats as usual.

EMILY enters and sits at her small table.

No one else is in the room.

EMILY places her notebook and pencils down on the table and sits in a folding chair and begins to study her notes.

ELI speaks from the shadows.

ELI
You're here early.

EMILY
(startled, looking up)
Oh, ... I didn't think anyone else would be here this soon.

ELI
(smiling)
I like to get a sense of the room before the crowd moves in.

EMILY
And I wanted to get things right. In my head I mean.

ELI
Everything?

EMILY
Yes, about whatever might happen here tonight.

ELI
(standing up)
You know, the people in this town have been worrying over "whatever might happen here tonight" a lot longer than you might think.

EMILY
You sound like you've seen this sort of thing before.

ELI
(chuckling)
Yeah, a time or two.

ELI walks slowly toward the front of the room eyeing the empty chairs.

ELI
Funny thing about this town ... every time the wind changes direction, people start thinking the whole place is about to be blown away.
(looking toward EMILY)
But it never quite does.

EMILY
How do you mean?

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY

ELI
(singing)
I'VE BEEN HERE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE
HOW QUICK SOME WORRIES GROW
HOW SOMETHING SMALL CAN GATHER WEIGHT
BEFORE A BODY EVEN KNOWS
I'VE SEEN A BREEZE TURN INTO WIND
WITHOUT SO MUCH A WARNING SIGN
I'VE SEEN THIS TOWN SURVIVE ITSELF
EACH AND EVERY SINGLE TIME

IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY
RISING UP, SETTLING DOWN
SOMETHING NEW COMES WALKING IN
AND THE TOWN ALL GATHERS 'ROUND
THEY SAY THIS ONE'S THE TURNING POINT
LIKE THEY'RE STUCK IN SOME BAD DREAM
BUT OVER TIME, THINGS ROLL ON BY
LESS TROUBLING THAN THEY SEEMED

I'VE SEEN THE HEMS GET HIGHER
SEEN THE GOSSIP TALK GO LOW
I'VE SEEN THE YOUNGSTERS MAKE A MOVE
BEFORE THE OLD ONES EVER KNOW
I'VE SEEN THE OLD ONES SHAKE THEIR HEADS
THINKING CERTAIN THINGS MIGHT LAST
THEN WATCH 'EM SIT AND LAUGH IT OFF
THE MOMENT TROUBLE'S PASSED

SEEMS IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY
WHEN VOICES SPEAK WITH FORCE
(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)
FOR EVERY WORRY SOUNDS LIKE THUNDER
TILL THE STORM HAS RUN ITS COURSE
WE CLOSELY GUARD THINGS THAT WE KNOW
THOUGH QUESTION THINGS WE FEAR
I’VE WATCHED THIS TOWN FOR DECADES NOW
AND BY GOD, WE’RE STILL RIGHT HERE.

THERE’S A BIG OLD CLOCK ABOVE TOWN HALL
IT KEEPS THE SAME OLD TIME
IT DOESN’T RUSH FOR ANYONE
OR SLOW DOWN WHEN IT CHIMES
IT'S HEARD SO MANY HOT DISCUSSIONS
INSIDE THESE TOWN HALL DOORS
AND THEN WATCHED THE WORRIES FADE AWAY
LIKE SO MANY TIMES BEFORE

MANY STORMS HAVE CROSSED OUR HARBOR
TALES TO WRITE ABOUT SOMEDAY
SOME MAY FUSS AND FIGHT THE WEATHER
BUT THE WIND WILL HAVE ITS WAY
AS YEARS GO BY AND FOLKS REMEMBER
WHO STOOD FIRM AND WHO GAVE GROUND
IN EVERY BATTLE WE'VE ENDURED
WHILE FIGHTING FOR THIS TOWN

SO GIVE YOUR STORY ALL ITS DUE
JUST TRY YOUR VERY BEST
TO TELL THE WORLD THIS SEASIDE TOWN
STOOD UP TALL AND PASSED THE TEST

IT SEEMS IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY
TIDES COME IN AND ROLL ON BACK
WE FEAR WE’RE RUNNING OFF THE RAILS
BUT THEN WE FIND A SMOOTHER TRACK
AT TIMES THIS TOWN'S BEEN CHALLENGED
BUT IT'S NEVER COME UNDONE
WE'VE HAD OUR SHARE OF HARD TIMES
YET STILL, WE KEEP ON STANDING HERE
AFTER EACH AND EVERY ONE.

EMILY simply sits, pondering what she's just heard while looking up at ELI.

ELI eventually walks over toward EMILY's table and extends his hand.

ELI
(smiling)
You know, we've got plenty of time yet. How about you and I go share one of the Moonbeam Diner's famous blue plate
(MORE)

ELI (cont'd)
specials? It just might help us build enough energy for whatever's headed our way.

EMILY hesitates, but takes ELI's hand, stands up and silently follows him out the door.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE TWO

LIGHTS UP

The interior of the Sandpiper Dress Shop where Herman readies himself to attend the critical vote meeting later that night. He's seen fitting the now-naked mannequin with a colorful sundress.

The phone on the service counter rings and HERMAN walks over to answer it.

HERMAN
(into the phone)
Hello, Sandpiper Dress Shop, Herman speaking.

Yes, I'm just finishing up a few things.

Of course I'll be there.

Yes, just before 7:00.

No, it's perfectly fine, you needn't worry.

Because I'm a man of my word. I promised you then and I still promise you now.

Of course, I'm sure I'll see you there.

Really, there's no need to thank me.

Because my customers always come first.

Certainly, you're very welcome.

Thank you for calling.

Goodbye.

HERMAN hangs up the phone, smiles satisfactorily and walks back over toward the mannequin.

He stops short and chooses to then "greet" the mannequin.

GOOD LUCK TO US

HERMAN
(singing)
WELL, THERE YOU STAND, MY SPECIAL GIRL
THE STAR OF MY WINDOW DISPLAY
WE NEVER MEANT TO CAUSE A FUSS
BUT SEEMS IT HAPPENED ANYWAY
HOLD YOUR CHIN UP HIGH, NO NEED TO SLOUCH
LET'S CHANGE YOUR LOOK TODAY
WE'VE WEATHERED WORSE THAN THIS BEFORE
THAT'S WHAT I ALWAYS SAY

GOOD LUCK TO US, MY SILENT FRIEND
I LIKE HOW MUCH YOU'VE GROWN
WITH EVERY HEM WE'VE EVER PINNED
AND EVERY STITCH WE'VE EVER SEWN
IF TONIGHT SHOULD BRING A STORM OUR WAY
WE'LL SEE IT THROUGH AND THROUGH
GOOD LUCK TO US, MY WINDOW QUEEN
GOOD LUCK TO ME AND YOU

YOU'VE SEEN THEM STOP AND POINT AND STARE
YOU'VE HEARD THE THINGS THEY'VE SAID
SOME CALLED IT ART, SOME CALLED IT SHAME
WHILE OTHERS CALLED IT TRASH INSTEAD
WE'VE CHASED THE FASHIONS YEAR TO YEAR
I'VE TRIED TO STOCK WHAT LOOKS THE BEST
BUT NOW IT'S ALL COME DOWN TO THIS
A FINAL VOTE AT THEIR REQUEST

GOOD LUCK TO US, MY PAINTED DOLL
GOOD LUCK TO THREAD AND LACE
GOOD LUCK TO THOSE THAT SPREAD THEIR WINGS
IN LIFE'S EVER-CHANGING RACE
MAY COMMON SENSE AND DECENCY
SHAKE HANDS BEFORE THEY'RE THROUGH
GOOD LUCK TO US, MY WINDOW QUEEN
GOOD LUCK TO ME AND YOU

During the musical interlude,
HERMAN casually "dances" a bit with
the mobile mannequin.

YOU KNOW, I NEVER THOUGHT WE'D CAUSE A FUSS
I JUST OPENED UP THE DOOR
I TRIED TO SMOOTH THINGS OVER
BUT FOLKS WANTED SOMETHING MORE
I TRIED TO BUILD THIS SHOP ON SIMPLE THINGS
I ALWAYS HOPED I DID IT RIGHT
BUT EVERYTHING RELIES UPON
(MORE)

HERMAN (cont'd)
HOW THE TOWN FOLKS VOTE TONIGHT

GOOD LUCK TO US, MY STEADY GIRL
HERE'S HOPE FOR ME AND YOU
FOR QUIETER DAYS AND BETTER TIMES
ONCE TROUBLES HERE ARE THROUGH
FATE MIGHT KNOCK UPON OUR DOOR
WITH RESULTS WE CAN'T UNDO
SO, LET'S KEEP OUR FINGERS CROSSED TONIGHT
GOOD LUCK, I SAID GOOD LUCK
I MEAN GOOD LUCK, TO ME AND YOU.

HERMAN admires his handiwork and then positions the mannequin so it can easily be seen through the store's front window.

He then dims the lights, locks the door and exits offstage.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE THREE

LIGHTS UP

(PRODUCTION NOTE: Anonymous voting responses may be performed by available cast members, stagehands, or other production personnel, either from offstage or from seats within the Town Hall meeting room. Individual performers may provide multiple voices, varying their vocal delivery as appropriate. The precise arrangement is left to the discretion of the director and does not require enlarging the principal cast.)

The interior of the Town Hall meeting room, set up as in Act I, Scene Five, is bustling with people. Some are seated, while others are signing in at a small table near the entry door to the room.

A number of attendees, in order to facilitate the staging and scene set-up, will be casually carrying in cardboard silhouettes of "attendees" which they'll put in place on various empty chairs to help the room look "fuller".

Some residents are talking with each other and the Town Council members are talking among themselves.

A couple of residents are carrying double-sided, hand-painted signs. One reads, "Demand Decency!" and another reads, "No Top, No Beach!" One even reads, "Let It All Hang Out!"

EMILY and ELI are chatting privately at her table, unheard by anyone.

After a short time, AGNES and WALTER take their seats at the head table as HAROLD stands and gavels the crowd toward silence.

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
If everyone will please find a seat we'll try to get things going.

Most of the crowd finds a seat while HERMAN enters and takes a seat in the front row, closest to the entry/exit door.

MILDRED, RUTH and DORIS take seats in the center of the front row.

ELI moves to his normal seat in the back row while MRS. WHITMORE finds a seat in one of the other rows.

EMILY remains seated at her own table.

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
Everyone, please make sure you've signed in if you intend to vote. There's an alphabetical list on the table where you came in. Sign in and then find yourself a seat. And for those of you carrying signs, I do appreciate your enthusiasm, but I have to remind you, ... they're not allowed to be displayed during any official town meeting, so please, I ask you to lower them at this time.

A couple residents finish lingering before finally taking their seats.

Those with signs reluctantly lower them.

HAROLD
Thank you.
(banging gavel)
Okay, at this time I'd like to call this special meeting of the Cape Morton community to order.

(MORE)

HAROLD (cont'd)
It's obvious all three of the Council members are in attendance, so we'll dispense with the formal roll call, but be advised, Councilor Porter will be taking the minutes as our official record of these proceeding. Are you ready to begin Agnes?

AGNES
Yes, Mr Chairman, I'm all set.

HAROLD
Good. Thank you. Now, before we get underway, your Town Council would like to take a moment or two to remind everyone of what's important whenever we conduct such a meeting, calling for the citizens of our town to vote. It's what we call the Cape Morton Town Meeting Protocol. So please, bear with us.

As HAROLD makes this announcement, AGNES and WALTER stand up and take their positions on either side of HAROLD.

AGNES and WALTER will be functioning as the back-up vocalists (imagine something like the Temptations performing "My Girl") as they support HAROLD's rendition of the following song.

MEETING PROTOCOL

HAROLD
(singing)
HERE WE MEET AS NEIGHBORS GATHERED,
UNDER WATCH OF SEA AND SKY,
BOUND BY LAWS OUR TOWN HAS WRITTEN
SO THAT FAIRNESS SHALL NOT DIE.
EVERY VOICE MAY SPEAK ITS CONSCIENCE,
EVERY HEART MAY HAVE ITS SAY,
FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CAPE MORTON
WE'RE GATHERED HERE TODAY.

LET US WEIGH OUR WORDS WITH HONOR,
LET NO ANGER RULE THIS FLOOR,
WHAT WE GUARD IS MORE THAN CUSTOM,
IT IS WHAT WE ALL STAND FOR.
HERE WE MEET IN OPEN FORUM
SEEKING WHAT IS JUST AND TRUE,
FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CAPE MORTON
TRUST IS HEREBY PLACED IN YOU

As the music winds down, HAROLD, AGNES and WALTER take their seats, and an appreciative shout or two is heard.

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Okay, already, let's get this vote underway!

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Yes, please, let's rid this town of that horrid swimsuit display!

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
Alright, alright, let's just settle down. We will address all that needs to be done, but we must do it in an orderly fashion, fair enough?

A few murmurs linger, but the attendees eventually quiet down.

HAROLD
Now, since many of you were not here at last week's preliminary meeting, I feel it makes sense to ask Mr. Herman Jennings, owner and operator of the Sandpiper Dress Shop, to share a bit of information for the benefit of us all.

Herman, do you mind stepping up to the microphone?

HERMAN
(standing and stepping forward)
No, of course not. I'm happy to oblige.

HAROLD
Thank you.

Now, I do have a couple of questions to make sure we're all up to speed on the facts.

Number one, is it true you've been displaying what's come to be known as a topless bathing suit, visible through your storefront window?

HERMAN
Yes, that is correct.

HAROLD
And you told us last week that you had originally acquired three of those swimsuits, correct?

HERMAN
Yes.

HAROLD
And I believe you also told us that two of those swimsuits had been sold even before your display was set up in the window?

HERMAN
Yes, that's also correct. I sold them both to out-of-town tourists.

HAROLD
How is it you were able to sell those two swimsuits when they hadn't even been on display?

HERMAN
Advertising.

HAROLD
Excuse me?

HERMAN
Newspaper advertising. I routinely take out ads in the Shoreline Gazette for special sales and upcoming promotions. Apparently these two customers noticed the ad and sought out my shop as a result.

HAROLD
Alright, so that now leaves you with one swimsuit remaining, yes?

HERMAN
No.

HAROLD
No?

HERMAN
No, Harold, I recently sold the last suit.

HAROLD
To another out of town tourist?

HERMAN
No, it was sold to a local.

A gasp or two is heard from the meeting attendees.

HAROLD
Are you telling us that one of Cape Morton's residents purchased the last topless swimsuit from your shop?

HERMAN
That's correct.

HAROLD
And if I may ask, who was it that made that purchase?

HERMAN
Well, you certainly may ask, but I'm not at liberty to disclose that information. I was requested by the customer to not divulge the shopper's name.

HAROLD
I see, so now you have no more inventory of the swimsuits?

HERMAN
Correct.

HAROLD
And do you plan to order more?

HERMAN
I'm not sure. I might. I might not.

HAROLD
And the window display mannequin?

HERMAN
It's recently been re-purposed.

HAROLD ponders a bit.

HAROLD
(to the room)
If you all could give me a moment ...

While HERMAN remains at the microphone, HAROLD turns toward each of his fellow council members and all lean in together in a whispering huddle. After a few moments, they all sit back as they were.

HAROLD
Herman, you can take your seat again.

HERMAN returns to his seat.

HAROLD
(clearing throat)
Ladies and gentlemen, ... this meeting was called in order to vote on whether the Sandpiper Dress Shop would be allowed to continue displaying and selling the topless bathing suit. But since those suits no longer exist in that shop, we're at a bit of an impasse. We certainly can't vote on something that's no longer an issue. However, your Town Council members anticipated this meeting might very well require a different course of action. As a result, we've put together a new Town Ordinance to deal with what could be similar situations in the future. This new ordinance would apply not only to the Sandpiper Dress shop, but to every commercial enterprise currently in existence, or as may come to be in existence, in the future. It will apply to all businesses anywhere within the town limits. This new ordinance is entitled, "Cape Morton's Decency Expectations".

Murmurs are heard through the meeting room.

HAROLD
It's a brief document, so I'll read it to you now.

"Effective immediately, it will be the official policy that any and all displays, events, activities and/or items for sale, that can possibly be considered indecent, when brought to the attention of your Town Council, and then determined by a majority vote of that Town Council members to be indecent, will then be prohibited from being advertised, displayed, and/or sold, within the town limits of Cape Morton."

A hush comes over the room, followed by more murmurs.

HAROLD
At this time, I ask, ... is there any resident of this community, in attendance here tonight, who would like to make a motion regarding this proposed ordinance?

RUTH almost jumps out of her shoes as she stands up.

RUTH
Yes, yes, yes!

HAROLD
Alright Ruth, go ahead.

RUTH
I move that we immediately approve the adoption of this ordinance for the betterment of our community and all of its fine citizens.

HAROLD
Is there any ...

MILDRED
Me, I second it.

HAROLD
Alright we have a formal motion and a qualified second. It's now time for us all to vote. As each of your names is called out, please speak slowly and clearly and cast your vote to either, "Approve" or "Deny". Vote "Approve" if you want to adopt this ordinance, or vote "Deny" if you do not want it adopted. As always, any voter can choose to "Pass" their vote until a bit later in the process, or they can "Abstain" if they choose not to vote at all. Any questions?

The room remains silent.

HAROLD
Okay then, Agnes, as the town's official Recording Secretary, will you please call each person's name who signed in, in alphabetical order, by means of their last name, at which time each community member may register their vote out loud.

AGNES
Arthur Bell?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Clara Benton?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Thomas Caldwell?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

A few murmurs are heard.

HAROLD
(banging gavel)
Please everyone, try to refrain from making any comments during the voting process.

AGNES
Emily Carter?

EMILY
On behalf of the Shoreline Gazette, I respectfully abstain.

AGNES
Eleanor Duffy?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
George Ellsworth?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Franklin Foster?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Margaret Grainger?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Henry Haskins?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Lillian Ingersoll?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
(inaudible whisper)

AGNES
I'm sorry ... I couldn't hear that.

HAROLD
Miss Ingersoll, please speak up so the clerk can hear your vote.

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Oh, .. I approve.

AGNES
Samuel Jenkins?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Herman Jennings

The room goes absolutely silent.

HERMAN
(pausing)
I abstain.

The murmurs grow louder again causing HAROLD to bang his Gavel.

HAROLD
Please, let's all settle down, ... alright, go ahead and continue Agnes.

AGNES
Doris Kimball?

DORIS
(firmly)
I pass.

RUTH and MILDRED look at each other, rather amazed.

RUTH
What do you mean, Pass. She can't pass. Why should she?

HAROLD
Calm down Ruth. It's perfectly acceptable for someone to pass rather than vote immediately. Sometime a person wants to see how the vote is going before they take a position. Many times it turns out their vote won't even matter, so let's not get all worked up and just continue on with the roll call.

AGNES
Harold Kimball?

HAROLD
(a slight pause)
Approve.

AGNES
Simon Kingsley?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Mildred Kline?

MILDRED
(firmly)
Approve.

AGNES
Jessica Langley?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Eli Mercer?

ELI
Deny.

AGNES
Jacob Merritt?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Nancy Merritt?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Oliver Peabody?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Walter Pike?

WALTER
Deny.

AGNES
Agnes Porter?

AGNES
Approve.

AGNES
Benjamin Porter?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Martha Quincy?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Edgar Rowley?

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Judith Rowley?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Approve.

AGNES
Beatrice Sawyer?

ANONYMOUS FEMALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Ruth Talbot?

RUTH
I approve. I approve. I approve.

WALTER
Nice try, Ruth, but you only get one vote.

HAROLD glares over at WALTER.

HAROLD
Go ahead, Mrs. Porter, please continue.

AGNES
William Underwood.

ANONYMOUS MALE VOICE
Deny.

AGNES
Catherine Whitmore?

MRS. WHITMORE
Approve.

AGNES
Alright Mr. Chairman, that's everyone.

HAROLD
Very good. Is there anyone here who signed in but whose name was not called?

MILDRED
(rising)
You forgot Doris. She hasn't voted yet.

HAROLD
Please be patient Mildred. We have procedures to follow.

HERMAN stands and heads toward the exit door.

AGNES is seen tabulating the results.

HAROLD
Does the clerk have a preliminary result?

AGNES
One second please ... okay, yes, ... the votes as collected so far are 14 Approve and 14 Deny.

Gasps are heard throughout the room, lots of murmurs.

HERMAN pauses at the exit door and looks back into the room.

RUTH
You forgot Doris, she hasn't voted yet.

HAROLD
And she doesn't have to vote if she doesn't wish to.

Some groans are heard, some elation is heard.

HAROLD
Mrs. Kimball, you passed earlier, do you now wish to vote.

DORIS rises from her seat, looks straight ahead at the Council members, nowhere else.

DORIS
My vote is ...
(heavy pause)
My vote is ... Deny.

The room erupts into a mass of chatter as DORIS sits back down.

RUTH and MILDRED stare at DORIS in utter disbelief. They each start shaking their heads in total disgust.

WALTER
(with admiration)
Wow, I must say, that certainly took a bit of courage.

HERMAN stares down at the floor for a moment and then slowly exits the hall.

HAROLD
The final vote is fourteen to approve and fifteen to deny. The proposed ordinance has been defeated.
(banging the gavel)
With no other business to be addressed, this meeting of the Cape Morton community is hereby adjourned. Thank you all for your participation.
(banging the gavel)

RUTH and MILDRED are up quickly and storm out.

Slowly, MRS. WHITMORE and other attendees begin to exit the meeting hall.

With DORIS already leaving the room, HAROLD starts to gather up his papers.

AGNES and WALTER do the same and they both follow the remainder of the crowd out the door.

HAROLD remains seated at the table.

ELI walks over to EMILY's table and quietly shares some words.

ELI
Well, I think you found your headline, yes?

EMILY
Maybe, but it's now more likely the real story will be about how this very traditional town is going through a rather significant change.

EMILY begins to gather up her notebook and pencils as ELI nods and quietly retreats to the back of the room.

EMILY exits through the main door.

HAROLD sits and ponders a bit, seemingly unaware ELI is still in the room.

THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY

HAROLD
(singing)
THERE WAS A TIME I KNEW CAPE MORTON
LIKE THE BACK OF MY OWN HAND
I KNEW EVERY NAME AND BUSINESS
KNEW THE FEATURES OF THIS LAND
I WAS YOUNG AND FULL OF THUNDER
THOUGHT THE YEARS WOULD WAIT THEIR TURN
BUT THEN I WOKE UP ONE BRIGHT MORNING
TO FIND THE TIDE HAD ABSOLUTELY NO CONCERN

THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY
NO MATTER WHAT YOU SAY
YOU CAN NAIL THE SHUTTERS TIGHTER
STILL THE WINDS WILL FIND A WAY
YOU CAN STAND UPON THE BEACHFRONT
DRAW A LINE ACROSS THE SAND
BUT THE WATERS KEEP ON MOVING
WITH NO MIND TO WHERE YOU STAND
THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY

I REMEMBER DORIS LAUGHING
HAIR ALL CAUGHT UP IN THE BREEZE
BACK WHEN RULES WERE JUST SUGGESTIONS
AND THE WORLD WAS OURS TO TEASE
(MORE)

HAROLD (cont'd)
NOW SHE’S FIGHTING FOR THE ORDER
SHE BELIEVES WE’RE MEANT TO KEEP
AND I SEE THAT GIRL I MARRIED
NOW SO THOUGHTFUL AND SO DEEP

THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY
AND THERE'S NO ONE YOU CAN BLAME
YOU CAN CALL IT MODERN NONSENSE
YOU CAN CURSE IT BY ITS NAME
YOU CAN GUARD THE DOOR TILL MIDNIGHT
YOU MIGHT SWEAR TIME CAN'T COME THROUGH
BUT A CLOCK WON’T ASK PERMISSION
IT JUST DOES WHAT CLOCKS WILL DO
THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY

COULD BE WHAT WE’RE REALLY GUARDING
IS NOT A WINDOW OR A VIEW
COULD BE THE SOUND OF YOUNGER VOICES
THINKING OLD WAYS SHOULD BE THROUGH

BUT THINGS CHANGE ANYWAY
THAT’S THE BARGAIN THAT WE MAKE
EVERY SEASON LEAVES US SOMETHING
EVERY SEASON HAS ITS ACHE
SO I’LL STAND BESIDE MY DORIS
EVEN THOUGH WE DISAGREE
’CAUSE THE ONLY THING THAT HASN’T CHANGED
IS WHAT SHE MEANS TO ME

AND THAT WON’T EVER CHANGE, NOT FOR ME.

HAROLD stands, dims the lights just a bit and heads toward a rear door of the meeting room.

He takes a moment to glance back into the hall.

HAROLD
(a cappella meeting protocol song)
FOR THE GOOD OF ALL CAPE MORTON ...

HAROLD turns and exits the hall.

After a few moments, MRS. WHITMORE enters through the main door. She sees ELI sitting in the back of the room, but doesn't speak to him. She takes a seat at her piano.

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE FOUR

The exterior of Cape Morton's Town Hall is suggested by a simple stone bench, a doorway, and a nearby window.

The transition from the previous scene should be accomplished primarily through lighting, without requiring a major scenic change. The Town Hall interior may remain in place, unlit.

As the exterior lighting rises, townspeople are seen continuing their departures from the previous scene, emerging from the building and dispersing in various directions.

A single window glows beside the entrance.

Eventually, EMILY emerges from Town Hall and approaches the stone bench. She sits down at one end, quietly reflecting on the evening's events.

After a thoughtful pause, she begins to sing.

I LEARNED SOMETHING

EMILY
(singing)
I CAME HERE TO WATCH A MEETING
AND WRITE WHAT I COULD SEE
A QUESTION ON A MOTION
A VOTE ON DECENCY
I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE SIMPLE
JUST WHO WAS WRONG OR RIGHT
BUT NOTHING FELT THAT SIMPLE
AS I WALKED OUT TONIGHT

I LEARNED SOMETHING HERE TONIGHT
IN THAT CROWDED LITTLE HALL
IT WASN'T CLOTH OR CUSTOM
(MORE)

THAT UNSETTLED US AT ALL
WAS THE FEAR OF SOMETHING MOVING
WHEN WE'D SWORE TO STANDING STILL
AND THE QUIET IN THE DOORWAY
AS THE LAST VOTE BROUGHT A CHILL

NO ONE RAISED A BANNER
NO ONE STORMED THE GATE
NO ONE BROKE A WINDOW
OR TRIED TO DEMONSTRATE
SOME VOICES TREMBLED SLIGHTLY
SOME NEIGHBORS WALKED AWAY
WHILE OTHERS TRIED TO COMFORT
THOSE THAT FELT THEY'D BEEN BETRAYED

I LEARNED SOMETHING HERE TONIGHT
AS THE VOTE WAS COUNTED CLEAR
SOME CHANGES DON'T ARRIVE WITH NOISE
THEY SIMPLY APPEAR
THIS TOWN WILL STILL BE STANDING
WHEN TOMORROW GREETS THE SHORE
BUT I DON'T SEE IT QUITE THE WAY
I SAW IT ONCE BEFORE

During the musical interlude, EMILY wanders about the stage, staring up at Town Hall, looking out over the community and quietly reflecting on what she observed during the meeting.

I LEARNED SOMETHING HERE TONIGHT
THOUGH I CAN'T YET NAME IT TRUE
SOMETHING BETWEEN WHAT STAYS THE SAME
AND WHAT IS BREAKING THROUGH

As the music ends, EMILY sits back down on one stage left side of the bench.

DORIS enters gingerly from STAGE RIGHT, carrying a small gift-wrapped box, She pauses momentarily.

EMILY silently glances up toward her.

DORIS sits down on the opposite end of the bench from EMILY.

DORIS
(after a long silence)
You knew it was me all along didn't you?

EMILY
(a shorter pause)
I suspected.

DORIS nods slightly and places a pale blue box with a white-ribboned top down on the bench between them. Again, obviously from the Sandpiper Dress Shop.

DORIS
It wasn't the fabric you know. It wasn't even the style. It was a feeling. A feeling long forgotten.
(a brief pause)
But it didn't take very long for me to realize, it just doesn't belong to me anymore.

DORIS nudges the box toward EMILY.

EMILY stares down at the box a moment and then gingerly rests her hand on top of the box.

She pauses a moment and then looks over at DORIS.

EMILY
Are you certain?

DORIS
Quite.

Both DORIS and EMILY pause silently.

EMILY then draws the box into her lap and lifts the lid slightly, just to take a peek. She closes it again.

DORIS rises and smooths her skirt.

DORIS
Please do us both a favor. Take good care of it.

EMILY gently nods.

DORIS calmly, yet confidently, exits STAGE RIGHT.

EMILY remains seated a few moments, then gathers up her notebook and rises, tucking the gift box under her arm and slowly exits STAGE LEFT.

The primary lighting remains focused on the empty bench.

From inside the Town Hall, what appears to be MRS. WHITMORE's profile is seen through a glowing window as she rehearses the Town Anthem.

CAPE MORTON, MY HOME (REPRISE)

Softly and sentimentally, accompanied only by a gently played piano.

MRS. WHITMORE
(offstage,)
CAPE MORTON, MY HOME
BY THE WIDE, FAITHFUL SEA
YOU ARE JUST AS YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN
AND JUST AS YOU ALWAYS WILL BE

As an instrumental portion of the anthem continues, the Town Hall door opens and ELI appears, standing still in the doorway.

He looks down toward the empty bench.

He lifts his gaze outward briefly, as if scanning the horizon, then lowers it.

He turns slowly and re-enters the building, closing the door behind him.

CAPE MORTON, MY HOME

MRS. WHITMORE
(offstage)
CAPE MORTON, MY HEART
WHERE THE SHORELINE STANDS TRUE
NOTHING CHANGES HERE THAT MATTERS
NOTHING EVER CHANGES YOU

LIGHTS FADE
SLOWLY TO BLACK

FINAL CURTAIN