A Great Northern River

The Unthanks

the big ships sail up, the big ships sail down
a great northern river
funnels of red, funnels of black
banded with yellow and silver
bringing in cargos of oil and wood
taking home girders of steel and pick ironoh, coloured faces, flaxom old places
high from the sternposts are flyingdown on the docks, down on the wharves
lofty grain standing
stevedores working and rivermen shouting
crews making ready for London
ropes black and tarry
chains rusty and red
lay among timber and bollards and packing
seagulls wheel over wild river cats
down on the jetties are watchingnights by the docks, pack'd smoky pubs
plenty of shouting and swearing
heavy brown ale, thick muddy stout,
and nobody's caring
a lass starts to warble a popular song
they're throwing her pennies and pieces of silver
closing time called, silence then falls
on a great northern river

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