

THE SECRET SHARER

by Greg Oliver Bodine

Based on the short novel

by Joseph Conrad

CHARACTERS:

Marlow, a veteran British sea captain
Dana, a young seaman looking for work
Boyette, a tugboat skipper

Hughes, Chief Mate
MacKenzie, Second Mate
Verborn, ship's Steward
Johansson, ship's Boatswain
Conway, ship's Helmsman

} *Nerthus'* crew

Capt. Archbold, Skipper of the *Sephora*
Rhea, Archbold's wife
Leggatt, Chief Mate of the *Sephora*
Sephora Boatswain
Sephora Helmsman
Sephora Mutineer
Sephora Oarsman

Suggested Breakdown of Roles (for 9 actors):

ACTOR 1: Dana
ACTOR 2: Hughes / *Sephora* Boatswain
ACTOR 3: Mackenzie / *Sephora* Helmsman
ACTOR 4: Marlow / Verborn
ACTOR 5: Leggatt
ACTOR 6: Capt. Archbold
ACTOR 7: Rhea
ACTOR 8: Boyette / Johansson / *Sephora* Mutineer
ACTOR 9: Conway / *Sephora* Oarsman

TIME & PLACE:

Late Spring, 1909. Various locations in the Far East -- on land and aboard the merchant sailing ships, *Sephora* and *Nerthus*.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES:

Scene 1: Deck of the *Sephora* during a hurricane.

Scene 2: Captain's cabin / deck of the *Nerthus*, docked in Bangkok.

Scene 3: Officers' mess / deck of the *Nerthus*, at anchor in the Gulf of Siam.

Scene 4: Captain's cabin / deck of the *Nerthus* around midnight.

Scene 5: The same, next morning.

Scene 6: The same, an hour later.

Scene 7: The same, later that afternoon.

Scene 8: Deck of the *Nerthus*, underway near the Siamese island of Koh-ring.

Scene 1

(Evening. Spring, 1909. On deck of the merchant sailing ship, *Sephora*, somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

AT RISE: a planked, two-level, horseshoe-shaped platform sits perpendicular to the stage proscenium, connected by two sets of short, narrow stairs at opposite sides, with shrouds and rigging rising from the railing alongside and meeting in the center overhead. The helm, situated on the higher, upstage deck, comprises the ship's binnacle (compass) and wheel. A round, red life buoy with the name "SEPHORA" stenciled in large, white letters hangs prominently on the taffrail of the ship's stern.

House lights dim as pre-show music transitions to the low rumbling of thunder and the sounds of creaking ship timber for a few moments in darkness, then...

An explosion of thunder, wind and lightning suddenly reveals the deck again as *Sephora* struggles to stay afloat in the midst of a raging hurricane. In flashes of lightning, four members of the crew are seen at the helm, clad in foulweather, oilskin coats and Sou'wester hats. The HELMSMAN struggles to keep a steady course, turning the wheel left, then right, then left again through the tremendous pitch and yaw of the ship. ARCHBOLD, *Sephora's* skipper, appears confused by the desperate entreaties of his crew to stay in control of the ship)

SEPHORA BOATSWAIN
(loudly over the tumult)

The main sail's split!

ARCHBOLD

What's that?

LEGGATT

The main sail's *gone*, sir!

ARCHBOLD

Gone?

LEGGATT

Permission to reef the for'sul, Cap'n -- or we'll lose that one too!

ARCHBOLD

Helmsman, prepare to bear away and *back* the for'sul. Bo'sun -- ready about!

LEGGATT

We can't, Cap'n -- she'll *split*! We're already starting to founder!

SEPHORA BOATSWAIN

Mr. Leggatt's right, sir!

SEPHORA HELMSMAN

The ship's makin' a lot of water—she's just about swamped!

LEGGATT

Cap'n? Cap-tain Archbold!

(Another explosion of thunder and lightning)

ARCHBOLD

(whimpering)

Our last hope...and night coming on!

(invoking a prayer)

O Lord that stillest the raging of the sea -- save us that we perish not!

(With one arm hooked around the taffrail, ARCHBOLD removes a whiskey flask from inside his oilskin coat and drinks deeply. There is another clap of thunder and flash of lightning.)

God save us all!

(He runs off downstage, passing a panic-stricken sailor, who runs aft, upstage towards the helm.)

SEPHORA BOATSWAIN

What about it, Mr. Leggatt -- are we to bear away and *back* the for'sul?

LEGGATT

(taking command)

No! Belay the skipper's last order there, Bo'sun!

SEPHORA BOATSWAIN

Belay, aye, sir!

(The sailor stops in front of LEGGATT on the upper deck, clutching the rigging to keep from being washed overboard)

LEGGATT

Helmsman, bring her close and prepare to--

MUTINEER

(frantically)

The ship's bilged, Mr. Leggatt! Lower the life-boats -- she's sinkin'!

LEGGATT

Get back to your station!

MUTINEER

Where's the Skipper?

LEGGATT

I'm in command. Now get afore and secure that sheet!

MUTINEER

Lower the damn boats 'fore it's too late!

LEGGATT

I'm giving you an order!

MUTINEER

You'll get us all *drowned*, you damn nigger!

(The sailor turns his back on LEGGATT, faces downstage and cups his hands around his mouth)

To the lifeboats! ALL HANDS ABANDON SHIP!

(LEGGATT spins him around and knocks him to the upper deck, stunning him. A brawl ensues. The two men grapple, tangling themselves in the ratlines of the shrouds. They become locked together, throttling one another in a death grip. The fight climaxes in a punctuating flash of lightning and clap of thunder, then trails off to a distant rumble and the fading, swirling sounds of the sea. The stage is dark.

Music fades up during the scene shift, as a small table and two chairs are set downstage center on the lower deck. Upstage, the red “SEPHORA” life buoy on the stern taffrail is replaced by a *white* one with the name “NERTHUS” stenciled in large *red* letters)

Scene 2

(Six weeks later in the Captain’s cabin of another sailing ship, the *Nerthus* -- docked in Bangkok. Transition music fades out as special fades up to reveal MARLOW, a veteran British sea captain, seated at a chronometer’s table downstage on the lower deck as he listens to HUGHES -- an unshaven, middle-aged man dressed in a cap and stained, unbuttoned officer’s tunic.)

HUGHES

(casually cocksure)

My respects sir, but under the circumstances, I’m the best man for the job.

MARLOW

(in a clipped, RP accent)

Mr. Hughes—

HUGHES

Ask the skipper -- he’ll tell you!

MARLOW

(firmly)

I do not answer to your captain -- I answer to the owners of this shipping company.

HUGHES

The owners! What do they know? I’ve twenty years at sea under my belt on a dozen ships, in all kinds of weather. I’m as qualified as *any* mate you’re likely to find in this backwater!

MARLOW

I do not take issue with your seamanship, Mr. Hughes – only evidence of conduct which, frankly, calls into question the quality of your *moral fiber*.

HUGHES

(indignantly)

Such as?

(MARLOW opens a file on the table)

MARLOW
(coolly)

Citations for lewdness---

HUGHES
(with a smirk)

Well, nobody ever accused me of being a *gentleman*.

MARLOW
(reading)

“Public drunkenness, brawling, destruction of personal property”...shall I go on?

HUGHES
What I do on leave and *off* duty is nobody’s business but mine!

MARLOW
And if I have the displeasure of finding out that you went behind my back and engaged the owners in this matter *directly*, then I will have no choice but to terminate your employment forthwith. Do I make myself perfectly clear?

HUGHES
Sir, I think you’re makin’ a big--

MARLOW
(beginning to lose his patience)
The answer is ‘no’, Mr. Hughes. My decision is final. If you wish to file an appeal with the Board of Trade, then of course that is your right. In the meantime, I fully expect you to resume the shipboard responsibilities for which you were engaged, and are presently under contract to perform.
(looking up)
That is all, Mr. Hughes. You are dismissed

(HUGHES leaves in a huff, ascending the upper deck to join MACKENZIE, another crew member, when he stops and sees DANA, a young man who appears upstage dressed in a faded, blue merchant marine uniform and hat.)

DANA
Is this the *Nerthus*...slip seventeen?

HUGHES
(suspiciously)
Who’s askin’?

DANA
(a little intimidated)

I'm...I'm looking for the Fleet Captain.

MACKENZIE

Down the stairs, friend.

DANA

Much obliged.

(DANA crosses, descends the stairs, and
knocks politely on the cabin door)

MARLOW

Come in.

(DANA enters the cabin)

DANA

I'm here to see a Captain *Marlow*?

MARLOW

Yes. You must be Mr. Dana.

(They shake hands)

DANA

Pleasure to make your acquaintance, sir. I went to the shipping office -- your clerk told me I could find you aboard here.

MARLOW

I'm afraid my duties require me to spend more days on the docks than behind a desk as of late. Please sit down.

DANA

Thank you.

(DANA sits in a chair opposite the table)

MARLOW

I've just finished reviewing your application for the pilot position.

DANA

I'm very interested in the job, sir -- if you'll have me.

MARLOW

Do you know the river well?

DANA

Quite well -- from Ban Tran all the way south to the Gulf.

MARLOW

Splendid. (beat) Look here, Mr. Dana – I believe myself to be a fairly decent judge of character...there is *another* appointment that has just recently become available. I think it may interest you.

DANA

Oh?

MARLOW

Right here, in fact -- aboard the *Nerthus*. She arrived in Bangkok a few days ago with some rather bad news.

DANA

Bad in what way, sir?

MARLOW

An acquaintance of mine, Mr. Pemberton, became feverish en route from Java, and is in hospital battling a nasty bout of Malaria.

DANA

He's expected to recover, I hope.

MARLOW

In time, yes. But he won't be well enough to make the return voyage, and *Nerthus* is already behind a rather tight schedule.

DANA

I see.

MARLOW

The ship's owners were notified, of course. They asked if I might solicit on their behalf, and assist with securing a new--

DANA

What's she carrying?

MARLOW

A cargo of cocoa and rubber bound for New York.

DANA

(with a perceptible frown)

New York.

MARLOW

Yes. She is one of the last of the great clippers. A unique opportunity, wouldn't you say?

DANA

Well...

MARLOW

You *do* have a practical knowledge of *sailing* vessels.

DANA

(demurring)

It's been some time since I contracted on a square-rigger. Most of my experience has been aboard tramp steamers.

MARLOW

Yes. I am aware that you served aboard the Australian oiler, *Otago*.

DANA

(uneasily)

My respects, sir, but how do you know that?

MARLOW

Never mind *how* – is it true?

DANA

Yes. For two years as chief mate.

MARLOW

And that you were dismissed after the third officer ran her aground somewhere off the Malay Peninsula.

DANA

(reluctantly)

Also true.

MARLOW

What happened exactly?

DANA

(defensively)

You already seem to have all the *pertinent* facts.

MARLOW

I would like to hear *you* tell it.

DANA

There's not much to tell. We were steaming north-north west through the Sunda Strait in heavy fog. *Otago* ran up on a bar that had shifted.

MARLOW

Was the captain aware that his charts were out of date?

DANA

It was my watch, Mr. Marlow.

MARLOW

Yes, of course. No real damage sustained, I believe.

DANA

No. A tug came out next morning and pulled us off the bar ...I was put ashore that afternoon and “dismissed,” as you say. If you’ve read an account of the proceedings which followed, then you know how the story ends.

MARLOW

A blot on a promising and otherwise spotless career.

DANA

No offense, Mr. Marlow, but I came to inquire about the pilot vacancy on a *ferryboat*.

MARLOW

(coolly)

That position has been filled.

DANA

(irritably)

I see. Thank you for your time.

(DANA gets up from his chair)

MARLOW

I am offering you something more, Mr. Dana. The pay is handsome, and the position *much* better suited to your credentials. Why not listen to what I have to say?

DANA

Thank you, sir -- but I’m simply not interested.

MARLOW

Not interested, or simply not up to the *task*?

DANA

(tersely)

My best wishes for Mr. Pemberton’s return to health. I’ve no doubt you’ll find a qualified mate to replace him.

MARLOW

This ship already has a chief mate, Mr. Dana – she is only lacking a *skipper*.

(DANA stands, stunned)

So, I ask you again – will you accept the appointment?

DANA

(in a convulsive, half-stammering manner)

That... that is quite *out of* the question -- good day!

(DANA lurches toward the door)

MARLOW

I made some inquiries at the Registrar General's Office and pulled your record.

(DANA stops and turns around. MARLOW reads from file folder on his desk)

Four years of Sea School. Advancement to Mate in less than seven. Full marks for seamanship and navigation on your Certificate for Master's exam. Seems a pity to have your career stunted under such extenuating circumstances -- especially when one also considers the prestige of your *family's* stock and trade.

DANA

I don't quite take your meaning.

MARLOW

(tediously)

I *know* who you are Mr. Dana -- it is no great secret. I have, in my time, come into contact with a good many important persons...Rajas, Viceroys -- even the occasional, American naval *hero*.

DANA

You know my father?

MARLOW

I met him once, on a packet ship bound for Singapore -- *before* he built his shipping empire, not long after your Civil War.

DANA

Then you know why I can never return to New York.

MARLOW

No, I'm afraid I do not.

DANA

(derisively)

A respected ship-owner's son -- relieved of his duty and discharged in disgrace? My father has never had much tolerance for scandal, and neither do the men with whom he does business!

MARLOW

I am not speaking to your father -- I am speaking to *you*.

DANA

(bristling)

There's not a shipping line from Maine to Japan that would take me on now! There's no future for me at sea, Mr. Marlow -- not anymore.

MARLOW

Do you really believe that?

DANA

Profoundly.

MARLOW

I can think of worse things to befall a young officer than running a rusty, old tub like the *Otago* onto a sand bar.

DANA
(sharply)

What exactly *is* your interest in my well-being?

MARLOW

Unlike your last employer, I am a firm believer in second chances. You were made for the sea, Mr. Dana – that much is clear. The *Nerthus* is in need of a shipmaster, and you are in need of a job. It really is very simple.

DANA

Is it?

MARLOW
(after a pause)

To be perfectly frank, you remind me of someone I knew once. Between Suez and the China Sea there are many nameless souls who *prefer* to live and die unknown – he was one of them. I helped get him a fresh start as a water-clerk...wished I could have done more.

DANA

What happened to him?

MARLOW
(morosely)

He got himself killed upcountry somewhere in the bush...after a skirmish with some bandits.

DANA

I am sorry.

(MARLOW solemnly leans in toward DANA
across the desk)

MARLOW

Whatever you believe is *keeping* you here, wallowing in self-exile, boy -- facing it, always facing it -- *that's* the way to get through!

(MARLOW composes himself and leans back in his chair)

(curt and business-like)

The *Nerthus* departs for New York in one week. She is neither fast nor nimble for a square-rigger, but she is forgiving. Do right by her, and she'll do right by you. You'll find the ship's manifest in good order and your quarters here quite adequate.

(MARLOW countersigns an official looking document and holds it out)

Your Master's Certificate of Competency.

(DANA hesitates, then takes the certificate)

DANA

But how--

MARLOW

I have some influence with the Board of Trade. The ship's *owners* needed some persuading, but in the end, I should like to think I appealed to the better angels of their nature.

DANA

What did you say?

MARLOW

I reminded them that you were "one of us."

(MARLOW rises, then DANA. They shake hands)

(brightly)

Congratulations, *Captain*.

DANA
(awkwardly)

Thank you...sir.

(MARLOW opens the cabin door and calls out).

MARLOW

Mr. Hughes, Mr. MacKenzie – a moment, if you please!

(HUGHES descends the stairs from the upstage deck and enters, followed by MACKENZIE)

HUGHES

Somethin' set you to change your mind then, Mr. Marlow?

MARLOW

Gentlemen, I would like you to meet your new skipper -- Captain Dana.

(HUGHES glowers at DANA, then grudgingly removes his cap. MACKENZIE does the same)

Captain -- this is Mr. Hughes, Chief Mate of the *Nerthus*. And Second Mate, MacKenzie.

DANA

(awkwardly)

I believe we've *met*.

MACKENZIE

(not knowing what to say)

Welcome aboard...Cap'n.

(HUGHES turns to MACKENZIE with a disapproving look)

MARLOW

Mr. Hughes.

HUGHES

Sir?

MARLOW

(pointedly)

I trust that you and Mr. MacKenzie will extend Capt. Dana *every* courtesy in assisting to ease him into his responsibilities of command.

HUGHES

(matter-of-factly)

Oh, you can count on it.

MARLOW

(back to DANA)

A steam tug will arrive to pull you down river Monday next with the incoming tide, Captain. Once into the gulf and across the bar, I suggest you start making the ship ready for sea and get underway post-haste. With good weather and a bit of luck, you might even make up for lost time on the voyage home.

DANA

Understood, sir.

MARLOW

Well, this concludes all *pertinent* company business. Best to let you three get acquainted, I should think. May you have fair winds and following seas, gentlemen. Good day...

(with a final, reassuring smile to DANA)

and good luck.

(DANA, HUGHES and MACKENZIE salute MARLOW, who exits, then stare uncomfortably at each other as lights fade to blackout)

Scene 3

(Sunset, two weeks later aboard the *Nerthus*, now at anchor in the Gulf of Siam. Lights fade up to reveal DANA, standing on the upper deck and facing out downstage left of the ship's wheel and binnacle in a pressed, white Captain's uniform and cap, as he scans the horizon. HUGHES and MACKENZIE enter from downstage center chatting with Mr. BOYETTE, a grizzled, salty-looking tugboat skipper. DANA remains motionless, oblivious to their conversation)

BOYETTE

I'll be off then. Not much wind yet, but there's plenty of depth to draw here til you get underway.

HUGHES

Much obliged, Mr. Boyette.

BOYETTE

Any mail to go ashore, Cap'n?

MACKENZIE

Cap'n Dana?

(DANA turns around, surprised)

DANA

Hm?

MACKENZIE

Tug's leaving, sir. Any letters to give Mr. Boyette before he shoves off?

DANA

Oh, yes -- I'd almost forgotten.

(DANA crosses up, clumsily removes two letters from his jacket pocket and hands them to BOYETTE)

Thank you.

(The Steward's bell is heard)

HUGHES

That'll be Verborn's supper bell, Cap'n – best not to keep him waiting. He's kinda fussy that way. Evening, Mr. Boyette.

(BOYETTE tips his cap)

BOYETTE

Mr. Hughes. Mr. Mackenzie.

(HUGHES and MACKENZIE depart and exit down center offstage)

Safe voyage home, Cap'n.

(BOYETTE starts to leave)

DANA

(detaining him)

Mr. Boyette?

BOYETTE

Yes, sir.

DANA

(pointing off)

That group of little islands over there – are they inhabited?

BOYETTE

(shaking his head)

Nah. They're nothin' but sandy patches of scrub.

DANA

So quiet here outside the bar. Is it always like this?

BO YETTE

Cap'n?

DANA

(looking around)

The stillness. Not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air...not a cloud in the sky.

BOYETTE

I'm just a tug skipper, sir -- I don't make the weather.

DANA

Sorry...that's not what I meant—

BOYETTE

(turning to leave again)

You'll be on your way soon as the wind picks up.

DANA

Mr. Boyette—

BOYETTE

(sizing DANA up)

You'd be Cap'n *Pemberton's* replacement.

DANA

That's right.

BOYETTE

First time at sea on a Master's ticket?

DANA

Yes, why?

BOYETTE

(with a derisive chuckle)

It's as plain as the nose on your face.

DANA

(insecurely)

I don't know what you've *heard*, Mr. Boyette--

BOYETTE

Beg your pardon, sir -- I don't begrudge any man the privilege of command, but you'd best let Mr. Hughes do what comes natural to him and stay out of his way, if you take my meaning. He knows every inch of this ship, and the men respect him.

DANA

(diplomatically)

I'll be sure to keep that in mind.

BOYETTE

Have a pleasant evening, Cap'n.

(off right, to his tugboat crew)

Look sharp, Mr. Grimaldi -- prepare to cast off!

(BOYETTE descends the upper deck and exits off center)

Goodnight, Mr. Boyette.

(DANA waves weakly as the sounds of the departing tugboat slowly fade in the distance. The Steward's supper bell is heard again, but DANA ignores it)

DANA
(fretfully)

'Nose on my face.' What the deuce have I got myself into?

(He grabs the rigging and addresses the ship)

Nerthus, old girl, I hope Mr. Marlow was right about you.

(DANA starts to descend the steps along the opposite side of the upper deck when something on the horizon catches his eye. He squints into the setting sun, then raises his binoculars for a better view as lights fade to blackout.

Special fades up down center on the lower deck to reveal the Officer's Mess on board the *Nerthus*. HUGHES and MACKENZIE are seated at a table set for three. The ship's Steward, Mr. VERBORN, stands attentively and glances at his pocket watch)

MACKENZIE
(to HUGHES)

You think he's coming?

(HUGHES shrugs and begins to eat in silence)

I wonder what kind of sailor he is.

HUGHES
(derisively)

Don't make me laugh! He's got 'nautical school' written all over him. Went to sea an officer *cadet* before he could even shave, I'll wager. He's not like us, Mr. MacKenzie. Not by a long shot.

MACKENZIE
(to VERBORN)

Did you ring the supper bell?

VERBORN
(with a light German accent)

Twice.

HUGHES

You see? Now eat your vittles.

MACKENZIE

Maybe he didn't hear it.

HUGHES

What do I look like, his nursemaid?

MACKENZIE

No, I just thought—

HUGHES

That's your problem—you *think* too much. And he *talks* too much. Blah, blah! It's enough to give a man indigestion.

MACKENZIE

He does come across a bit nervous, doesn't he?

HUGHES

A bit? Last night he cornered me on the foc'sle head, so I offered him a cigar. Just as he was running out of things to blab about, we heard one of the men sigh in his sleep through an open hatch. "Did you hear that?" he says with a little grin, puffing away. "That, Mr. Hughes, is why I went to sea. There's nothing quite like the security of the sea, is there? And the untempted life that presents no disquieting problems." And then he turns green and pukes up all over himself!

(HUGHES and MACKENZIE both laugh, then abruptly stop as DANA enters from stage left. His posture shifts nervously)

DANA
(meekly)

Ah, I see you've already started. Good. No sense standing on tradition.

(DANA sits upstage as VERBORN serves him some soup.)

HUGHES

No, sir. Not around here.

(The meal resumes. DANA looks up at his officers in an attempt to make small talk. He is

startled by two, quick “gunshots” outside -- far off in the distance, dropping his spoon loudly into the soup bowl)

DANA

What the devil was that?

HUGHES
(nonplussed)

Sounds like fireworks, sir. Siamese New Year.

DANA
(covering)

Of course.

(HUGHES and MACKENZIE trade looks and smirk. The men continue to eat in silence, then finally):

DANA
(to HUGHES)

Are you aware that there's a *ship* anchored inside the islands?

HUGHES
(with mock interest)

Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!

DANA

Yes, I saw her mastheads above the ridge as the sun went down.

HUGHES

She probably draws too much water to cross the bar. I reckon she sailed into the natural harbor there to wait till she can get inland tomorrow at high tide.

MACKENZIE

She draws over twenty feet. She's the coal ship, *Sephora*, bound for Bangkok. Two hundred forty six days from port. Almost lost at sea, she was. And *cursed* the day she left Boston.

(DANA and HUGHES look at him in surprise.)

DANA

Cursed? Who told you that?

MACKENZIE
(matter-of-factly)

Tugboat skipper...when he came on board for your letters, sir. Rumors of 'murder and mutiny' -- Quite an ordeal, it seems. He told me an *amazing* story.

(Capt. DANA and HUGHES lean in to learn more, but MACKENZIE contentedly goes back to finishing his soup)

HUGHES
(after a moment)

Well, sir...there you have it.

(HUGHES pats his mouth with a napkin and rises to excuse himself from the table. MACKENZIE does the same.)

DANA
(detaining them)

It's been a long, hot day, gentlemen. The crew has had plenty of hard work getting us cleared for sea, so all hands may turn in tonight without setting an anchor watch. I'll keep on deck myself.

MACKENZIE
(perplexed)

You're going on watch, Cap'n?

DANA

I thought I would.

(HUGHES and MACKENZIE trade looks again)

HUGHES

Bless my soul, sir. You don't say!

DANA
(to HUGHES)

Yes. I'll have Mr. MacKenzie relieve me at two o'clock and give you a call at four. Of course, at the slightest sign of any wind, we'll have all hands up and get underway at once.

HUGHES
(suppressing a chuckle)

Of course, sir. At once!

(MACKENZIE exits, followed by HUGHES who waddles off downstage center, and breaks into a familiar sea shanty...

"I'm a deep water sailor just come from Hong Kong /
Give me some whiskey, I'll sing you a song..."

(Lights fade to blackout. Music fades up with a dim blue light. During the scene shift, Capt.

DANA gets up and crosses stage left to change out of his uniform as the entire downstage platform transitions into his stateroom: the mess table becomes his writing desk; a curtained sleeping berth is set upstage center, abutting the upper deck between the two sets of stairs; a Merchant Marine Ensign's tunic, several caps and an oilskin coat are hung on hooks; and a worn leather couch is set stage left next to a large wooden sea chest. Transition music fades out with lights to blackout.

Scene 4

(Later that evening, past midnight. Lights dimly fade up on the upper deck to reveal Capt. DANA in a grey, striped sleeping suit and bare feet as he gazes out left over the stern's taff-rail. A small lighted lantern – the ship's riding light -- hangs from some rigging overhead.

Suddenly, a pair of hands are seen clutching the top of the ship's rope ladder attached to the stage right side...then the face of a man peering over the railing. Sensing the intruder's presence, DANA reels around. The men lock eyes. The intruder freezes, then lets out a painful groan)

DANA
(matter-of-factly)

What's the matter?

LEGGATT

Cramp.

(DANA takes a cautious step backwards)

(anxiously)

No need to call anyone.

DANA.

I wasn't going to.

LEGGATT

Are you alone on deck?

Yes.

DANA

Do you have the time?

LEGGATT

DANA.

(DANA looks at his pocket watch)

It's not quite two.

LEGGATT

I suppose your captain's turned in.

DANA

I'm sure he hasn't.

LEGGATT

Look...could you call him out quietly?

DANA

I'm the captain.

LEGGATT

You're kidding.

DANA

No.

LEGGATT

My name's Leggatt.

DANA

You must be a good swimmer.

LEGGATT

I've been in the water since nine o'clock. The question now is whether to come aboard here...or let go of this ladder and keep swimming until I sink.

DANA
(amused)

You can't be serious.

(DANA sees that LEGGATT is dead serious)

Come aboard then.

(LEGGATT climbs aboard, dripping wet and almost completely naked, save his under-shorts. He collapses onto the deck, clutching his leg, taking long controlled breaths. He then hoists himself onto a deck hatch near the wheel and sits morosely, folding his arms.

What is it?

LEGGATT

An ugly business.

(DANA looks at his pocket watch again)

DANA

I'm due to be relieved on deck. I think you had better slip down into my stateroom. This way.

(DANA grabs the riding light, then quietly descends the stage left steps to the lower deck. He opens the narrow slatted door and enters his cabin, followed by LEGGATT)

In the meantime, here...

(He grabs another gray-striped sleeping suit hanging on a hook and hands it to LEGGATT)

Those should fit you.

LEGGATT

Thanks.

(DANA exits with the lamp, closing the cabin door behind him and crosses up around the wheel and down the opposite steps as LEGGATT solemnly changes into the dry clothing. Ascending the center aisle through the audience, DANA knocks on the Second Mate's off stage cabin door)

DANA

Four bells, Mr. MacKenzie.

MACKENZIE
(groggily offstage)

Four bells. Aye, sir – on my way.

(DANA returns to the upper deck, where he is soon joined by a sleepy MACKENZIE)

DANA

Not much sign of any wind yet

MACKENZIE
(with a yawn)

No, sir. I suppose not.

DANA

Well, that's all you have to look out for. You've got your orders.

MACKENZIE

Aye, sir.

(As Capt. DANA descends the stairs to his cabin, LEGGATT quickly hides behind some coats hanging next to the sleeping berth. DANA enters and looks around with his lamp as LEGGATT quietly steps out from behind the coats)

LEGGATT
(alarmed)

I heard somebody moving about.

DANA

Nobody is likely to come in here without knocking and getting permission.

(DANA sets the lamp on the desk and proceeds to light two additional oil lamps swung from gimbals on the stage left and right walls.

That's better.

(He blows out the match and crosses to his desk, where he deposits the spent match into an ashtray and turns to LEGGATT who is now seated, facing him.)

(awkwardly)

Well, Mr. Leggatt... perhaps you can tell me how I came to find you clinging to our ladder.

LEGGATT

Your ladder. Who would have thought of finding a ladder hanging over at night on a ship anchored out *here*. I wasn't sure I had the strength to hold on. I was trying to swim round as far as your rudder chains. And lo and behold, there was your ladder. My luck's changing.

Changing?

DANA

(LEGGATT quickly crosses to look out the stage right porthole)

LEGGATT
(warily)

There's a ship over there.

DANA

Yes, I know. The *Sephora*.

LEGGATT

I'm her chief mate... I should say I *was*.

DANA

What happened?

LEGGATT

I've killed a man.

DANA

Just now -- tonight?

LEGGATT

No, on the passage, weeks ago. Thirteen North.

(LEGGATT sinks dejectedly to the couch.)

LEGGATT

My father's a minister in Norfolk -- a pillar of his community. Can you see me before a judge and jury on the charge of murder? Do I *look* like a cold-blooded killer?

DANA

No.

LEGGATT

When I say I 'killed a man,' I mean he was one of those snarling curs that just simmer all the time. He wouldn't do his duty and didn't let anyone else do *theirs*. It happened while we were setting a reefed for'sul—a *reefed* for'sul! You understand the kind of weather.

DANA

Of course.

LEGGATT

The *only* sail we had left to keep the ship running! Everybody at the edge, nerves frayed beyond belief! We thought the storm would never end. Terrific swells! A furious gale—just howling!

(LEGGATT's anger begins to build. As he continues, he appears to forget himself in recounting the events of the storm, working himself into a state of near frenzy)

He was giving me a lot of trouble at the sheet. Then he called for the *lifeboats* – ordered the crew to abandon ship! Well, it was no time for polite reproof—I knocked him down, but he was up again in a shot. We closed to grapple just as a large swell started to break toward the ship. All hands saw it coming and grabbed for the rigging, but I had him by the throat and went on shaking him like a rat! (beat) They say that for ten minutes the ship was awash from stem to stern. It was a miracle they found us, jammed together behind the fore-bitts. (beat) I was still holding him by the throat when they rushed us aft, gripped together, screaming “murder!” like a bunch of lunatics. We broke into the cuddy and found the skipper drinking himself into a stupor. He started raving with the rest of them, “Mr. Leggatt, you’ve killed a man! You can no longer act as chief mate of this ship!” (beat) Nice little tale for a quiet tea party, huh?

(LEGGATT becomes overwhelmed by the memory of it all)

My father's a *minister*...did I tell you that?

(He breaks down and begins to sob quietly, burying his head in his arms as he sits huddled on the couch)

DANA

In all likelihood, that reefed for'sul saved the ship.

LEGGATT

(regaining his composure)

The captain wouldn't hear of it -- I was confined to my cabin for almost seven weeks! To see some of their faces you'd think they were afraid I'd go about strangling people at night. When we sighted Java Head I asked to speak to the old man. He came and stood in the doorway gaping at me as if I had the noose round my neck already. I asked him point-blank to leave my cabin door unlocked that night as *Sephora* passed through the Sunda Strait. That's all I wanted, nothing more. The Java coast was within two or three miles, off Angier Point—an easy swim for me...

DANA

And?

LEGGATT

He refused. He was afraid of the men, he said. God only knows what the captain *wasn't* afraid of! The law I suppose -- or what his *wife* might do to him if he let me slip away.

DANA

His wife?

LEGGATT

Oh yes! She's on board too. She'd have been only too happy to have me taken off the ship.

DANA

How did you escape?

LEGGATT

The ship's steward forgot to lock the door tonight after bringing me my supper. Drunk maybe.
(suggesting an ulterior motive)

Or not. I don't know

(Special fades up on both men as cabin lights dim.)

I'm not sure that I meant to do *anything*—a breath of fresh air was all I wanted. (*Pause*) Then a sudden temptation came over me. I kicked off my slippers and was in the water before I had even made up my mind.

(In a flashback, the sound of a "splash" followed by two shrill blasts from a whistle are heard as a special fades up to reveal two of *Sephora's* crew on the upper deck):

SEPHORA OARSMAN

Leggatt's gone! Quick -- lower the boats!

(He rings the ship's bell furiously. Capt. ARCHBOLD enters running through the center aisle with a revolver, then along the stage right gangway and up the stairs onto the deck)

SEPHORA HELMSMAN

He's drowned himself, sir!

ARCHBOLD

What's that? Drowned?

SEPHORA OARSMAN

(pointing down off)

No, look Cap'n — He's swimming!

SEPHORA HELMSMAN

Shoot him!

(ARCHBOLD takes aim and fires twice down into the water. Special fades out on the upper

deck as DANA's cabin lights fade back up to full)

LEGGATT

I reached the nearest island before the first lifeboat left *Sephora's* side. I heard them rowing around in the dark.

DANA
(inscrutably)

There's no place to *hide* on those islands.

LEGGATT

I was clear of that ship! That's all that *mattered*...I took off my clothes, tied them up in a bundle with a stone inside and dropped them in deeper water. (pause) I gave them their suicide. Let them think what they want.

DANA

You never intended to drown yourself?

LEGGATT

I meant to swim til I sank, but that's not the same thing.

DANA

Did you know of us?

LEGGATT

Hadn't the slightest idea. I struck out again when I first saw your riding light.

DANA

And you made straight for it.

LEGGATT

Something to swim for. I couldn't turn *back*. Can you picture me being hauled back off one of those tiny islands by the scruff of my neck and bucking like some wild animal? Somebody else would have gotten killed for certain. I didn't want any of that. So I went on. Then I found your ladder.

DANA

Why didn't you hail our ship?

(The darkened figure of MACKENZIE is seen pacing the upper deck...his footsteps are heard outside and then stop. The two men freeze)

LEGGATT.
(frightened, in a hushed tone:)

Who is that?

(DANA crosses quietly to close the open port at stage left)

DANA

My second mate.

LEGGATT

He couldn't hear us talking, could he?

DANA

I don't think so.

LEGGATT

Can he be trusted?

DANA

Don't know. This is my first command. I'm as much of a stranger to my crew as you are. It's made for a lonesome start, I can tell you.

LEGGATT

I know the feeling. After I got hold of your ladder, I thought, "What's the point of it?" When I poked my head over the rail and saw you, my first impulse was to swim away and leave you shouting after me. But you spoke to me so quietly—as if you had expected me—it made me hold on a little longer.

DANA

I confess I was intrigued, if not a little surprised.

LEGGATT

I was just glad to talk to somebody that didn't belong to the *Sephora*. I don't know—I wanted to be seen, to talk with somebody before I swam on. As for asking for your captain...well, it might not have made a difference, or prevented the whole ship from finding out about me. But I didn't know that...and I didn't care.

DANA

Do you think they'll come looking for you?

LEGGATT

First light tomorrow, most likely

DANA

If there's a *wind* tonight, it'll be alright. Once underway, you'll be found in the sail locker – a stowaway about whom nobody knows anything -- and any tale you care to tell. After we round the Horn you can jump ship at Cape Town...then you'll be safe, and that'll be the end of it.

LEGGATT

And if you *don't* get a wind tonight?

DANA

Let's see what tomorrow brings.

(LEGGATT begins to show outward signs of his ordeal. He rolls his head on his shoulders and barely suppresses a yawn.)

Meantime, climb into the bunk and get some sleep.

(He gives a lift to the exhausted LEGGATT, who tumbles into the bunk and rolls over onto his back. DANA considers him for a moment before drawing the green serge curtains which run along a brass rod. Lights fade to blackout.)

Scene 5

(The next morning. DANA is found asleep on the couch of his stateroom. The curtains around the bunk are still drawn. Repeated knocking at the cabin door. DANA stirs, but before he can collect himself to answer, VERBORN enters with a tray of coffee and biscuits, then crosses to the desk. Groggy and startled, DANA shouts to him as though from miles away.)

DANA

This way, Verborn -- I'm over here!

VERBORN

(bemused, with a keen look)

I can *see* you're there, sir.

(He puts a cup of coffee and a plate of biscuits from the tray down on the desk and turns to leave when he notices that the bunk curtains are drawn. Nonplussed, he goes out, routinely hooking the cabin door open as he exits. Seeing that the coast is clear, DANA quietly crosses downstage to the bunk to check on this guest. He is about to peek through the curtains when VERBORN suddenly reappears in the doorway.)

Captain...

(DANA jumps in a start, and turns to VERBORN.)

DANA

What do you want?!

(The Steward returns his stare obliquely, then wavers.)

VERBORN

To close your ports, sir. They're washing the decks.

DANA

They are closed!

VERBORN

(taken off guard)

Very well, sir... may I take the empty dish away, sir?

DANA

Of course!

(He turns away, facing out, as VERBORN slips in sheepishly to retrieve the dirty dish and then leaves. CAPT. DANA crosses over to the bunk, about to part the curtains and check in on LEGGATT.)

I should show myself on deck.

(He turns around when he is met by HUGHES, who has appeared in the doorway and smiles indulgently, shuffling forward, opening his mouth to speak)

Square the yards by lifts and braces before the hands go to breakfast!

(HUGHES stands stupefied)

(invigorated by a newfound feeling of authority)

I'll be on deck shortly to see that it's executed. (beat) That is all, Mr. Hughes.

HUGHES

Yes, sir.

(HUGHES tips his cap, does an about-face and leaves, glancing back before he exits. DANA quickly crosses upstage, unhooking the door and closing it. He grabs the coffee and biscuit, crosses down to the bunk and parts the curtain. LEGGATT gives his host an intelligent, inquiring look.)

DANA
(whispering)

All's well so far, but I think I've aroused some suspicion. It's time for you to vanish into the bathroom. Here—

(LEGGATT takes his breakfast and obeys without a sound, crossing left to the head and closing the door quietly behind him. DANA closes the curtain and rings for VERBORN, who returns, knocking at the door.)

Come in.

VERBORN

You called, sir?

DANA
(officially)

Yes—I want you to tidy up my stateroom. When you're done, put a kettle of water on in the galley.

(VERBORN's face brightens at the opportunity to satisfy a nagging curiosity.)

Well? I don't mean tomorrow!

VERBORN

Yes, sir.

(He hurries off and quickly returns with brush and dustpan in hand. Meanwhile, DANA has settled into his desk chair, pretending to preside over some important matter in the ship's manifest. VERBORN nervously sweeps some dust into his pan, and then with a quick but careful survey of the cabin sets his sights on the curtained bunk.)

DANA
(firmly, not looking up)

I want a thorough job, mind you.

VERBORN
(delighted)

Of course, sir.

(VERBORN puts his brush and pan on the couch and looks toward the bunk. With deliberate strides, he crosses to it and after a brief pause, parts the curtains to reveal a neatly

made, albeit wrinkled bed. He glances quickly over his shoulder, but DANA still appears to be engrossed in his manifest. VERBORN smoothes out the bed and proceeds to the closet, which he opens to find full of heavy coats and several pairs of shoes. Satisfied, he steals one last glance at DANA, crosses to the door, collecting his brush and dustpan.)

VERBORN

All finished, sir – I'll just go and put your water on then.

(VERBORN opens the door and exits just as MACKENZIE appears and puts his head in)

MACKENZIE

Beg pardon, sir.

DANA

Yes?

(MACKENZIE enters and removes his hat.)

MACKENZIE

There's a ship's boat coming our way, sir.

DANA

Ship's boat?

MACKENZIE

Yes, Cap'n – from the *Sephora*. Two men and...

DANA

And what, Mr. MacKenzie?

MACKENZIE
(quizzically)

A young *woman* sir.

(Lights bump to blackout with transition music)

Scene 6

(An hour later. Lights fade up to reveal DANA entering through the cabin door)

DANA

This way, Captain.

(He is followed by Capt. ARCHBOLD, skipper of the *Sephora*. The Steward enters, holding a tray with a bottle and two glasses. He crosses to ARCHBOLD, offering him a drink)

VERBORN

Whiskey, sir?

ARCHBOLD
(with restraint)

Thanks, no. I...I don't take liquor. I *would* like some water though.

VERBORN

Very good, sir.

(The Steward sets the tray down on the desk and goes out for water. ARCHBOLD sits, removes his cap and pats his forehead with a handkerchief.)

ARCHBOLD

Terrible thirsty work. I've been up since daylight exploring the islands around my ship.

DANA
(with polite interest)

Oh. For fun?

ARCHBOLD

No! Painful *duty*.

(DANA leans forward in his chair)

DANA

I'm sorry, could you speak up? I'm a little hard of hearing.

ARCHBOLD

That's a shame...such a young man too.

DANA
(feigning deafness)

WHAT?

ARCHBOLD

I SAID, THAT'S TOO BAD. WHAT'S THE CAUSE OF IT? SOME DISEASE?

DANA
(cheerfully)

Yes—disease!

(ARCHBOLD pulls his chair a little closer to
DANA's desk)

ARCHBOLD

Captain...I'm here to ask for your help.

DANA

My help?

ARCHBOLD

Yes—your assistance in apprehending a dangerous fugitive...an officer from the *Sephora* who jumped ship last night.

DANA

Sounds serious.

ARCHBOLD

Murder is always a serious charge, sir! The man's name is Leggatt. He was my chief mate. I had him arrested for strangling one of the crew. I'll spare you the details, except to say that it happened at sea and the nature of Leggatt's crime is particularly brutal.

DANA

What does this fugitive look like?

ARCHBOLD

He's about thirty-five. Average height and build...

DANA

Fair? Clean-shaven?

ARCHBOLD

A Negro.

DANA

I see.

ARCHBOLD

I was planning to turn him over to the authorities, but he escaped from his cabin last night. We suspect—

DANA

We?

ARCHBOLD

The ship's crew and officers, yes – there's a consensus he may have drowned himself, but we've no evidence of that, yet.

DANA

Made more difficult with the outgoing tide, no doubt.

ARCHBOLD

The mainland however--

DANA
(feigning deafness again)

Sorry?

ARCHBOLD
(troubled)

THE *LAND*, I SAY. THE MAINLAND IS AT LEAST SEVEN MILES OFF MY ANCHORAGE.

(DANA's lack of interest begins to arouse
ARCHBOLD's mistrust.)

DANA

About that, yes.

(The two men study each other coolly.
ARCHBOLD pulls his chair in a little closer)

ARCHBOLD

But I reckon we had no more than a *two*-mile row to your ship.

DANA
(fanning himself)

An awful trip too, in this stifling heat.

ARCHBOLD
(then more gravely)

I am single-minded, sir, in searching for him until he is either captured or his body is recovered. It is my solemn duty as a captain, you understand, to uphold the law to the letter. After all, I have a reputation to maintain. I'm a well-known shipmaster.

DANA

Of course. Tell me, Captain Archbold—in your opinion, what do you believe would drive a man to do a thing like that? The circumstances must have been horrific.

ARCHBOLD

A Hurricane! The worst I've ever encountered! I'm lucky to be sitting here with you this morning.

DANA

That reefed for'sul saved you.

ARCHBOLD

By the grace of God, yes. But, how did you—

DANA
(covering)

My second mate had a chat with the tugboat skipper yesterday morning.

ARCHBOLD

Oh, yes. He's supposed to bring us up the river later today...eh, what were we talking about?

DANA

The for'sul.

ARCHBOLD

Yes, it was by a miracle that it stood some of those squalls!

DANA

It was the *setting* of the sail to which I was referring.

ARCHBOLD

Of course! Nothing less could have done it. I hardly dared to give the order. If *that* had split, well—our last hope would have been gone.

DANA

(calmly postulating)

Don't you think the heavy sea that came on board just then might have killed your man? I've seen the sheer weight of a breaking swell snap a man's neck very neatly.

ARCHBOLD

What? Good God! The man's face was...

(Holding his hand to his own throat, he gestures absurdly, sticking out his tongue.)

No man killed by the sea ever looked like *that*.

(defensively)

What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the *Sephora* for fifteen years. I'm a well-known shipmaster, you know!

DANA

Yes, you said that. The strain on your men must have been immense.

ARCHBOLD

I believe we were all close to going off our heads.

DANA

Well, if what you say is true—

ARCHBOLD

There were witnesses!

DANA

Then I suppose even an officer is likely to do *something* regrettable under such *mutinous* conditions.

ARCHBOLD

What are you suggesting, captain?

DANA

For the safety of the ship, I mean.

ARCHBOLD

See here -- deliberate or not, a crime on board a ship is still a crime! This thing must take its course. I represent the law here!

DANA

Sir, I only—

ARCHBOLD

(in a tirade)

I've been at sea now, man and boy, for thirty-seven years!

(RHEA, an attractive, but severe-looking, young woman, wearing a black dress and bonnet, suddenly appears in the doorway)

RHEA

(with corrective authority)

Thirty-*eight* years, Josiah.

(She enters holding a small bible, accompanied by MACKENZIE and the OARSMAN from *Sephora's* lifeboat, who positions himself upstage left and stands planted with his hands clasped behind his back. Capt. DANA and ARCHBOLD rise)

ARCHBOLD

You're right, my dear. Of course.

DANA

Welcome to my quarters, Mrs. Archbold. May I offer you a chair?

RHEA

Thank you, no.

DANA

I trust your tour of the ship was satisfactory?

RHEA

(coldly)

So far, yes.

DANA

Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie. You can go.

(MACKENZIE exits and closes the door)

ARCHBOLD

(resuming his tirade)

Thirty-*eight* years, sir! And I've never heard of such a thing happening. And that it should be on *my* ship! With my wife on board too!

(ARCHBOLD sits down again)

DANA

You seem *anxious* to give up your mate.

RHEA

To the proper authorities, Captain. To the law.

ARCHBOLD

Hiring Mr. Leggatt wasn't *my* idea. I was forced to take him on.

RHEA

He had some influence with the ship's owner, Mr. Cuffee.

ARCHBOLD

Also a Negro.

RHEA

Oh, Mr. Leggatt came *across* very smart, very gentleman-like for a—

DANA

Yes?

ARCHBOLD

We simply never *liked* him is all!

DANA

He seemed to you then at once...too confident?

ARCHBOLD

Well...

DANA

Self-possessed?

ARCHBOLD

Uppity, yes.

DANA

And would you characterize Mr. Leggatt as a disciplined officer?

ARCHBOLD / RHEA

I suppose so. / Not in the least.

DANA

His seamanship was at issue then?

ARCHBOLD

Well, no.

DANA

Derelict in his duties as chief mate?

ARCHBOLD

No.

DANA

So, am I to believe you took exception to Mr. Leggatt's character then, or...*color* -- is that it?

ARCHBOLD / RHEA

Yes. / No!

ARCHBOLD

(flustered)

Look...I'm a plain old salt. He just wasn't suited for the job of chief mate on a ship like mine. Not at all my style of man, you understand.

DANA

In matters of responsibility, I've never known a man's *style* to disqualify him from anything.

(ARCHBOLD takes a moment to consider his predicament)

ARCHBOLD

(unpleasantly)

I suppose I'll have to report a suicide.

DANA

Beg pardon?

ARCHBOLD

SUICIDE! THAT'S WHAT I'LL HAVE TO WRITE TO MY OWNERS WHEN WE GET TO BANGKOK.

DANA

Unless you manage to recover him before tomorrow... I mean, alive, that is.

RHEA

(looking around the cabin)

Your stateroom's quite elegant, captain.

DANA

Yes it is. Very well fitted-out. Clothes locker over here.

(He stands and crosses over to the locker with heavy, deliberate footsteps and slowly opens the double doors. The contents of the shallow closet are plainly revealed)

(uneasily)

Very roomy, as you can see.

(ARCHBOLD follows him and inspects it with great interest.)

ARCHBOLD
(with a look to RHEA)

Yes. Very convenient.

DANA

Sleeping berth...

(He crosses and gestures to it)

...serged curtains for a bit of privacy.

(ARCHBOLD walks up behind him. DANA reaches up hesitantly for the curtains, which he parts briefly for six or seven inches and then completely, revealing a crisp, expertly made bed.)

ARCHBOLD

Very nice, Captain. Very...comfortable.

(RHEA surveys the remaining downstage area of the cabin and sees the closed door of the head.)

RHEA

And this must be the door to your bathroom. May I?

(She stridently makes her way to the door of the head, then pauses, beckoning the OARS-MAN, now armed with a blackjack.

DANA

Mrs. Archbold, really!

(Capt. ARCHBOLD unsnaps the flap of a pistol holster suspended from his belt. He shoots a cool, accusing stare to DANA, who stands grimly, perspiring at the foot of his bunk. With a nod from RHEA, the

OARSMAN quickly opens the door, revealing
an empty bathroom)

(surprised)

As you can see, it's--

RHEA

Spotless.

DANA

(covering)

Yes. My steward keeps things very...ship-shape.

SEPHORA OARSMAN

(aside to ARCHBOLD)

Mr. MacKenzie took us all over the ship, sir. There's no sign of him.

ARCHBOLD

(to RHEA)

Perhaps we should be getting back to the *Sephora*.

DANA

That's probably a good idea. I'm sure your crew is restless for some shore leave...

(ARCHBOLD starts for the cabin door,
followed by his OARSMAN, who is followed
by DANA to see them out.)

Best not to risk an official inquiry with any more scandalous insolence.

(ARCHBOLD turns around at the door.)

ARCHBOLD

Do you honestly think I'm such a—

(then after a glance to RHEA)

May I remind *you*, sir, that harboring a fugitive is a punishable offense!

DANA

(tickling this ear)

COME AGAIN?

ARCHBOLD

I SAID--

DANA

(loudly)

Certainly not...I'm delighted! Good-bye!

RHEA

Josiah, I would like to have a word with Captain Dana...*alone*, if I may. Please wait for me in the boat – I shan't be long.

(ARCHBOLD angrily throws open the door to reveal HUGHES and MACKENZIE hunched over, eavesdropping.)

ARCHBOLD
(parting them)

Gangway. Gangway!

(He exits with the OARSMAN in tow. RHEA goes to the cabin door and closes it)

DANA
What seems to be on your mind, Mrs. Archbold?

RHEA
Would you consider yourself to be a God-fearing, man, Captain? A good Christian?

DANA
I don't much *dwell* on the subject, if that's what you mean.

RHEA
Children?

DANA
Children.

RHEA
Yes. Do you *have* any?

DANA
No. I'm not married.

RHEA
We had a son -- Josiah and I. But he was taken from us before we left Boston.

DANA
(bemused)
Do you mean to say--

RHEA
 Taken, Mr. Dana – by God! We celebrated his birthday at sea just eight weeks ago...
(her tone softens)

He would have been four years old. Bright, happy blue eyes. Soft, blonde hair...and a smile –such a sweet little smile...

(becoming emotional)
A beautiful boy. My only child.

DANA

I'm sorry for your loss.

RHEA

A wife who loses a husband is called a widow. A husband who loses a wife is called a widower. A child who loses his parents becomes an orphan. But what do you call a mother and father who lose their *child*? There is no word for it, Captain – that is how awful the loss is!

DANA

My condolences. I can only imagine—

RHEA

No, sir, you cannot! As you are neither a woman, nor a mother, you cannot even begin to *imagine* my grief. You will never experience the miracle of birth or wish beyond wishes that you could smell his smell or hold his weight in your arms again – that bond will never be yours.

DANA

I *am* sorry.

RHEA

(her intensity building)

When my parents died, Mr. Dana, I lost my past. When my little boy died, I lost my future. My purpose!

DANA

Surely, you and your husband--

RHEA

And so I turned to seek solace in the Lord...to...to... try to understand the *why*, you see? Children are not supposed to *die*...a mother expects to see her son grow up...this is natural. This is the course of life, the cycle continuing as it should.

(becoming inconsolable)

But the loss of a child is the loss of innocence, the death of the most vulnerable and dependent, and therefore can only signify a divine intervention...a reason.

DANA

(awkwardly)

My sympathies ma'am, but I don't know what this has to do with the search for your chief mate...or with *me*.

RHEA

(fiercely)

A man is *dead* by another's hand -- that is a sin! The wrong must be righted. That is God's law and I speak plainly to you as his instrument of justice!

DANA

Mrs. Archbold—

RHEA

Where is Mr. Leggatt? Tell me, Captain! God is *listening*.

DANA

Mrs. Archbold.

RHEA

Confess it or be damned!

DANA

You have no moral authority here.

(She begins to angrily quote scripture at him)

RHEA

“And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?”

DANA

In all likelihood, Leggatt has *drowned*. Your husband practically said so.

RHEA

“And Cain said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?”

DANA

So why won't *you* believe it?

RHEA

(more aggressively)

“And the Lord said, what hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.”

DANA

It's not for *us* to judge his guilt or innocence.

(She begins to pray feverishly, clasping her hands in the air)

RHEA

We acknowledge and bewail our sins and wickedness against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; Have mercy upon us, and grant that we may hereafter serve and please thee in the newness of life, and glory of thy name!

DANA

Mrs. Archbold, PLEASE!

RHEA

Amen.

DANA

You are not an agent of God!

RHEA
(pointedly)

“Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” --The Book of James.

DANA
Finding Mr. Leggatt won't bring back your son—

RHEA
It is written!

DANA
Or bring your soul any closer to Heaven!

RHEA
I wasn't speaking of my soul, Captain – I was speaking of *yours*. May God have mercy upon it!

(She turns and exits. The Steward enters a moment later, but stops just inside the doorway.)

VERBORN
I'm sorry, sir. I had to open a barrel of fresh water in the galley...
(looking around)
Captain Archbold....his wife...where did they go?

(A Bo'sun's whistle is heard, then a loud desultory shout offstage):

JOHANSSON
Sephora's away!

DANA
(tensely)
They've just left.

(DANA takes a glass of water from the tray and finishes it in one gulp. He sets the glass down, crosses to his desk, sits and proceeds to fill his pipe. HUGHES shuffles through the door)

HUGHES
So, the rumors are true. S'pose you had it from the captain yourself, sir.

DANA
Yes, I heard the whole thing.

HUGHES
A pretty sordid affair—isn't it? Beats all the tales we hear about murders on them “foreign” ships.

DANA
(lighting his pipe)

I don't think it beats them. I don't think it resembles them one bit.

HUGHES

Bless my soul—you don't say so! Of course I don't have any working knowledge whatsoever of foreign ships, so I couldn't go against *your* vast experience. Strangest thing though is that they all seem to think the man is hidden aboard *here*.

(DANA stares, poker-faced.)

Really. Can you believe that?

(HUGHES eases himself comfortably into a chair opposite the Captain.)

There was almost a quarrel over it. Some of the men really took offense. I mean, as if *we* would harbor a thing like that!

(smacking his lips)

Quite a tiff. But, everybody made up in the end. I suppose this Leggatt character did drown himself. Don't you, sir?

DANA

I don't suppose anything.

HUGHES

You, uh...have no *doubt* in the matter, sir?

DANA
(curtly)

If you'll excuse me, I'd like to make a few entries in my journal before taking my bath.

HUGHES

Happy to oblige, Cap'n.

DANA
(coolly)

And Mr. Hughes -- don't ever let me catch you eves-dropping outside my door again.

HUGHES

Yes, sir. I'll just...leave you to *yourself* then.

(He exits, closing the door behind him.)

DANA
(looking around)

Leggatt? Mr. Leggatt. They're gone.

(The lid of the sea chest creaks open to reveal LEGGATT inside. He climbs out of the trunk and closes the lid)

LEGGATT

Everything all right?

DANA

(distracted)

Yes, yes...it's just this *mental* feeling of being in two places at once—it's unnerving. This whole mood of secrecy is starting to affect me. Just before Archbold came on board, I told my chief mate to take a compass reading and caught myself about to whisper the order in his ear. It startled both of us.

(changing the subject)

Could you hear everything?

LEGGATT

Archbold told you he hardly dared to give the order.

DANA

Yes. He said he was afraid of the sail being lost in the setting.

LEGGATT

He never gave the order. He may think he did, but he never gave it—I did.

(Sensing doubt, LEGGATT slowly moves toward DANA, who rises himself and crosses to the downstage edge of his desk, mirroring his opposite.)

He stood there with me at the helm after the main topsail blew away and whimpered a prayer or something about "our last hope." Then he ran -- positively *ran* for his cabin, in front of the whole crew, leaving *me* to steer the ship! The situation was desperate—I took things into my own hands and...well, you know.

DANA

The sailor you killed...there's a rumor he insulted you, called you a—

LEGGATT

A nigger?

DANA

Yes.

LEGGATT

Cap'n, I've been called that my whole life....and as a very wise man once said, "the soul that is within me *no* man can degrade." (beat) Yes, that sailor insulted me. But that's not why he ended up dead. Do you think if I hadn't been harsh with him I would have gotten *any* of them to stay with the ship? It wasn't a heavy sea—it was a sea gone *mad!* And maybe in the worst of that storm, I did too.

(bitterly, looking away)

I don't blame the crew -- I was just as scared as the rest of them. But I was an *officer* on that old coal wagon -- my duty was to the *Sephora*!

(LEGGATT notices the small black bible Mrs. Archbold has left on the desk -- bookmarked with a thin piece of red ribbon along the spine. He picks it up and reads):

LEGGATT

"Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid;

(He puts down the bible and recites the rest by heart)

And I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; And it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me... "

(DANA rests his hand on LEGGATT's shoulder.)

As long as I know that you...

DANA

I understand.

(A soft creak on the stairs is suddenly heard outside the cabin door. DANA points to the closet, then puts a finger to his lips. LEGGATT quietly retreats to the interior of the coat locker as DANA puts his ear to the cabin door. Another creak is heard. DANA throws open the door and seizes MACKENZIE by his tunic, before dragging him inside and throwing him violently onto the couch. DANA slams the door shut and turns on a surprised and frightened MACKENZIE)

DANA
(seething)

What were you doing out there? Answer me!

MACKENZIE

Mr. Hughes sent me to fetch you.

DANA

What the devil does *he* want?!

MACKENZIE

He thinks there may be enough wind to get underway with, sir.

DANA

(clenching his fists)

If you're *lying* to me, MacKenzie, so help me God!

MACKENZIE

(cowering)

That's the truth, Cap'n – I swear!

DANA

What did you hear through my door?

MACKENZIE

Voices, sir. I didn't mean to eavesdrop. I just--

(DANA lurches towards him)

DANA

(ferociously)

What did you hear?!

MACKENZIE

(with some hesitation)

It's him, isn't? The mate from the *Sephora* – the one they been lookin' for.

(DANA stands silent, listless)

DANA

He's a stowaway. That's all you need to know.

MACKENZIE

(with contempt)

All I need to *know*.

(MACKENZIE gets up off the couch, straightens his uniform and marches toward the door, but DANA quickly steps in to block his path)

DANA

Yes. In fact, from here on out, the *less* you know about him, the better.

(The two men lock eyes. DANA attempts a more diplomatic tact)

Well, Mr. MacKenzie -- what about it, then? Can I trust you to keep this affair in confidence? As a fellow officer?

MACKENZIE

He's on the lam! And you're asking me to just...just *turn* the other cheek?

DANA

I'm asking you to heed your conscience.

MACKENZIE

(loudly)

The man is wanted for murder!

DANA

(sternly)

Keep your voice down.

MACKENZIE

(sotto voce)

Cold-blooded *murder*, Captain.

DANA

You weren't there. Being accused of murder doesn't make a man guilty of it.

MACKENZIE

It don't exactly make him sprout angel wings either.

DANA

What lengths would *you* have gone to save that ship? Hm? In that kind of weather? All I'm asking is that you *try* and put yourself in his shoes.

MACKENZIE

My respects, sir, but guilty or not – he ain't your concern. And keepin' him hidden aboard here, you're puttin' the whole crew at risk. Maybe I *can't* put myself in his shoes, but I sure know what I'd do if I was in *yours*.

(LEGGATT steps out of the closet, revealing himself to MACKENZIE)

LEGGATT

He's right, Captain.

DANA

Mr. Leggatt--

LEGGATT

Bring me topside and muster the crew. I'll say I snuck aboard and hid myself in your clothes locker -- that much is true. I'll tell them what I've told you...then they can make up their own minds. That should satisfy them. That's fair.

MACKENZIE
(warily to DANA)

Then I'm free to go?

(DANA nods sullenly, then steps aside and sinks dejectedly into his chair)

DANA

I won't stop you.

(After a long pause, MACKENZIE turns to LEGGATT)

MACKENZIE

The man you strangled to death...did he have a family?

LEGGATT

Not that I'm aware.

MACKENZIE

(quietly)

I didn't think so.

(MACKENZIE walks to the door, then suddenly stops. He takes a moment and turns around to face DANA)

MACKENZIE

If *Mister* Leggatt hasn't quit this ship by the time we reach Cape Town, I won't think twice about goin' straight to the Admiralty, or stop Mr. Hughes from takin' command.

DANA

Thank you.

MACKENZIE

Cape Town, Cap'n. After that, my conscience is clear.

(MACKENZIE solemnly exits the cabin, closing the door behind him. DANA and LEGGATT look at each and breathe a collective sigh of relief, but are suddenly interrupted by a heavy knock at the door. The two men freeze.)

DANA

Who is it?

CONWAY

Conway, sir.

(Without being prompted, LEGGATT quietly slips into the bathroom)

DANA

Come in.

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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