

CARGO 1818

Written by

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Anya (F)
Beth (F)
Maple (F)
Clark (M)

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ACT 1 - Scene I - BLACK.

MAPLE

I can hear the ocean.

Now we can as well. The ocean swells around us and we hear WATER and a heavy weight SLOSHING from left to right; There's a faint BELL RINGING.

A soft glow of light from a flame-burning lantern reveals MAPLE, in her white simple dress. She is crouched with her ear cupped to the floor. One hand is draped over her womb; She is pregnant, and well along.

MAPLE slowly sits up. She closes her eyes, seemingly seasick.

The lantern light gets brighter, as several others seem to turn on for the first time and reveal:

A claustrophobic hull. We're down below a wooden ship with incredibly crude living arrangements of hammocks, blankets, buckets, etc. - It's been lived (or survived) in for some time.

The Atlantic Ocean - October, 1810

Two other women (ANYA and BETH) observe MAPLE from their own nook - set well apart from MAPLE'S.

They're both glaring at her, BETH with one bruised eye.

CLARK comes into the hull from the main door. Beyond, would be blocked off access to the upper deck, and the farther extent of the ship.

CLARK has been coming from the stern - he has a cup of water, and a modest slice of bread wrapped in cloth; he goes to MAPLE.

BETH

Crazier than King George, that girl. Seems what little of England we brought along with us was the insanity.

CLARK turns away from them and feels MAPLE'S womb for a kick. He puts his ear against her.

MAPLE

What do you hear?

CLARK

Are you a sea shell? Or the ocean?

MAPLE
I feel like a whale.

CLARK
Not even close. Eat.

MAPLE
Is there more for you?

CLARK
Oh, no, I ate mine already. Eat,
eat.

MAPLE
"Mangiare".

CLARK
You promised we'd learn together
when we get there.

MAPLE
I won't be able to keep this food
down.

CLARK
(beat)
Is that why you were on the floor?

MAPLE nods. CLARK gets up to leave.

MAPLE
I exchanged morning sickness for
sea sickness faster than I can
remember.

CLARK
You need fresh air. We've been kept
down here so long it's like we're
buried alive.

MAPLE
(semi-hushed)
Please don't leave me alone with
them again.

CLARK tries to rest a reassuring hand on MAPLE's knee, but she instinctively moves it from him.

CLARK leans in, still trying to comfort her:

CLARK
(private)
I think you're the ocean.
(MORE)

CLARK (CONT'D)

(Beat)

Too fierce to be a precious shell.

CLARK leaves.

ANYA and BETH keep their conversation in ear shot of MAPLE.

ANYA

(After a moment)

Is he off to be a big strong man again?

BETH

Oh, a titan. A bull.

ANYA

He provides, Beth. He brought her food and sup. More than either you or me get to eat. He goes without for her.

BETH

A knight in scrawny armor. Then again, it's not hard to go without food when you're already fucking starving.

ANYA

Tucked away down here and cut off because some tart we don't even know-

MAPLE

This is not a hen frigate.

BETH

(beat)

What?

MAPLE

This is not a ship nor journey intended to have women on it. The captain was trying to protect us - all of us.

BETH

I think I'd have braved the bloody storm had I known we'd be down here for a whole week.

BETH remembers something, and comforts ANYA.

ANYA

I was thankful during the storm, at least. All that banging and crashing and hollering... It was like owing God money and not being able to find the door hen was rapping on. Such a horrible din.

BETH

(Private)

I know, Anya, but that's all an echo now. Debt and fear are behind us, it's just thunder from a storm that shook our bones long ago.

MAPLE

Did you hear that one thunder crack just before the end? I thought it was wood splitting; I thought the mast had snapped right in half.

ANYA

And the sailors screaming.

BETH

Your timid little manservant wasn't out there heaving and pulling though, was he?

MAPLE

He was told to stay and protect us.

BETH

Or maybe the captain wanted to keep all the girls together in one place. Maybe in a time of need, I can throw that boy a free ride, and then he'd be man enough to actually protect someone. 'Could've saved me a black eye from the First Mate.

MAPLE

You don't give out free rides - That's why you got the black eye.

ANYA subtly calms BETH...

ANYA

She has a point. Why isn't he heaving and pulling ropes? Why isn't he working?

MAPLE

This brigantine only needs the seven sailors it has.

ANYA

All the more curious that he's here. And he doesn't touch you.

MAPLE

He touched me just a moment ago.

ANYA

He fusses. Cares about the child. He doesn't touch you, and you don't touch him.

MAPLE

What do you know? This is the most you've spoken to us since we've been cooped up.

ANYA

We've watched.

BETH

So what got you on here? 'You wealthy and he's your man servant? Your doctor? I know I could use a doctor, I've been aching and torn, love.

MAPLE

(beat)

He's a perfumer's assistant.

ANYA and BETH laugh over this.

MAPLE (CONT'D)

The captain profited from it in the past, and Clark bought our passage with surplus crates.

ANYA

(recovering)

We smell horrible. This whole time!

BETH

(still amused)

Perfumer's assistant. S'pose we could use one of those as well!

ANYA

Or a bath more like.

BETH

God. What I would do to even have water that isn't cold.

BETH wipes a tear and seems to be teetering between laughter and anger.

BETH (CONT'D)

Jesus, it stings! All this bloody salt. I can't stand the seawater slamming around me and filling my lungs and hair with this rough...this foul...

ANYA

I smell it too.

MAPLE

Aye, me too. It's why I can't eat. But I don't think it's salt.

ANYA

Fish guts?

MAPLE

Clark is braving going up above, again. He wants us to have fresh air.

BETH

Took him long enough.

MAPLE

There was more than just a storm raging around up there - I insisted he wait.

ANYA

So angry, they were. I thought I heard the word "mutiny"

MAPLE

But it's only seven sailors and the captain.

BETH

Even scarier. Seven people can agree on something a lot faster than twenty.

ANYA

I'm more interested in what the fighting was about.

BETH

Too many mouths to feed.

ANYA

I don't think they like filling one hole with no access to the other

(Gesturing to MAPLE)

I blame the fat one. No way she'll put out.

MAPLE

They don't trust whatever's been ailing the captain. And I don't trust it either, I won't risk infection. You'll thank me to have waited.

BETH

The Captain? He's just old.

MAPLE

I won't risk it.

BETH

He's sick, sure, but it isn't scarlatina. Not like Manchester this past year.

ANYA

Maybe it's all about you.

(beat)

Are you exciting?

MAPLE

It has nothing to do with me.

She and BETH grin and approach MAPLE slowly.

ANYA

Beth got punched for wanting to charge money; the captain put us down here with you to keep us "safe", and then the quartermaster accepted what very little money we had to let us on board to begin with.

BETH

Very little money. I'd think it were charity if we deserved it.

ANYA

And I'd have thought it were a miracle if I believed in that sort of thing. Why would he want us on board but not want us fucking?

BETH

Not that we mind.

ANYA

Not that we mind at all. To be honest, all that's behind us when we get off the boat.

BETH

"Behind us" and "getting off" no more, indeed.

ANYA

(Affectionately)
More wit than class, you have, love.

MAPLE

Those men had plenty to argue about between the sick Captain and the storm.

ANYA

Perhaps it's to do with what you're cooking down there.

BETH

Oh God, don't say that.
(To MAPLE)
...I'm so hungry I might just eat you.

ANYA

(beat)
Are you scared of us?

MAPLE

No.

ANYA

Liar.

MAPLE

Then, nonsense - you're as scared as I am.

BETH

Ha...

ANYA

As scared as you? Having to barter onto a ship in the middle of the night? How exciting!

BETH

Trading perfume when you can afford a perfectly good seat elsewhere?

ANYA

If I cut your belly open, I bet all your secrets would come pouring out.

CLARK is at the entrance, pale and in slight shock.

ANYA (CONT'D)

Can we go back up? Is it unlocked?

CLARK wanders to MAPLE as BETH takes ANYA by the hand - they exit together.

Alone, CLARK holds MAPLE. She doesn't reciprocate at first.

MAPLE

I'm okay. They weren't violent, just mean.

CLARK breaks from the embrace - MAPLE shakes him off, more so - and he sits silent, cold in his sweat.

MAPLE (CONT'D)

Please don't leave me alone with them again. The things they say. The way they look at me.

CLARK

I'll protect you.

MAPLE shifts away from him a bit.

MAPLE

I don't feel safe.

CLARK

I'll protect you, Maple.

MAPLE

We weren't safe in England, either.

CLARK

Maple. No matter what we face...

MAPLE nods, but it seems to be an attempt to stop CLARK speaking.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Something's happened.

MAPLE
What now, pirates? The end of the world?

CLARK
No, no...I...no...

CLARK seems dazed until he lets out a smile/laugh.

CLARK (CONT'D)
I didn't think I was good at anything until I met you. I don't know how brave I can be, and I don't even know if I'm always a good person. But I can love you. I'm good at that. I like being good at it. Even when I fail at so many things along the way-

MAPLE
-No-

CLARK
-Even if I have to die without you loving me again. I want you to trust me again; to rely on me. To remember me.

We hear ANYA and BETH screaming up above, in the distance.

MAPLE
Oh my God.

CLARK
Now more than ever I need you to trust me. Do you trust me?

MAPLE
What's happened, Clark?

CLARK
Do you trust me?

We dim to just the lantern nearest to them both, before going to

End of Scene I