

# **CARGO 1813**

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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**

**Scene II - Hours Later - "Shivering Stars"**

BETH

"The cold has only one eye. The night sky took the other one, and added it to his collection".

We are now lit by stars over-head.

If the "Down Below" of the ship is claustrophobic, dim, hot, and warm colored from the lanterns;

The "Main Deck" is cold, open, and airy with some bright white stars, and cool lights.

At one end of the ship is BETH, on highest ground she can manage, occasionally looking up at the stars.

BETH (CONT'D)

The cold tries to hurt us because it's angry, and always teased at by the gawking sky; but since it can't see so well, since the cold is half blind, we fool him by hiding under blankets...and that's why they keep us so warm.

In the main space, central and midway along the deck, are four bodies entirely wrapped in white sheets.

CLARK is securing ropes and there is a nearby crate of small canon balls he fastens to weigh them down. He has fabric tied around his face to breathe through.

At the opposite end of the ship, at the helm, is ANYA.

ANYA

I guess they'll stay warm then, in the deep, dark, drink.

BETH

Better than running a fever from the Scarletina.

(Beat. To CLARK)

Please, can we just burn them?

CLARK

What's the difference? They'll be off the ship and away from us in the end.

ANYA

(facetious)

But if we burn them, they're sure to be warmer than any sheets can serve...

CLARK continues to bustle, tying knots and trying to get this over with as soon as possible. He occasionally steps away from the bodies, and their stench, to gasp a clean breath.

BETH

Think of your wife.

CLARK

She's not my wife.

BETH

Still pregnant, though, isn't she?

CLARK

Yes.

BETH

Then no use risking the germ! What's the sense in risking that?

CLARK

Have you found it yet?

BETH

(Looking up)

Alright, alright...

CLARK heaves a body over the rail, out of sight with a SPLASH

ANYA

(beat)

I feel like Anne Bonny. Lady pirate at the helm! Mistress of the sea!

BETH

You can't be a lady captain, remember what the fat one said: "This is no hen frigate".

ANYA

No, no it's not, is it? It's a bloody ghost ship?

CLARK  
We're not dead.

ANYA  
We're not able sailors either.

BETH  
Making us as good as dead - so,  
still a ghost ship.

CLARK  
Then I guess you're not much of an  
Anne Bonny after all. Have you  
found it yet?

ANYA  
(Looking around the helm)  
Alright, alright...

CLARK heaves a body over the rail out of sight with a SPLASH

ANYA (CONT'D)  
(Beat)  
Why do I have to look for the  
compass, anyhow?

CLARK  
Because your friend can't find the  
North Star, like she said.

BETH  
Yes I can!

ANYA  
Yes she can!

CLARK  
She hasn't found it yet!

ANYA  
It's cloudy! She can read the  
heavens like a book.

CLARK  
(Beth)  
What books have you read?

ANYA  
(annoyed with CLARK)  
She can't read like that, you shit.

BETH  
(to CLARK)  
Are you calling me stupid?

ANYA

You shit.

BETH

You don't need to afford school to study the sky, it belongs to all of us.

(spitefully pointing)

That's Andromeda. The beautiful sacrifice, chained to a rock, to sate Poseidon's Cetus. Over there is "The River" and right there is "Ursa Minor" which makes that there the North-fucking-star.

CLARK

(beat)

Is that all true?

ANYA

(to BETH)

He and the fat one have the nerve to ask if we're being dishonest.

CLARK

(to BETH)

How do you know all that?

BETH

Studied the sky, didn't I?

CLARK

I believe you've been on your back long enough for a lesson, but search me if-

BETH picks a scrub brush up from a bucket and throws it at CLARK.

BETH

I found your star, what matter is it who taught me??

CLARK

Alright,

BETH

What business is it of yours? You've your stupid star, what now?

CLARK

(beat)

Now we find out whether or not we're floating East.

ANYA

You want to know in which *direction* they left us dying?

CLARK

It's the difference between learning to sail in the dark, or watching out for land in the day.

ANYA

And do what? Jump ship when we get close enough, and let the vessel run to ground?

BETH

Easier said than done without row-boats, mate.

CLARK heaves a body over the rail out of sight with a SPLASH

BETH (CONT'D)

Did we lose a row boat in the storm?

CLARK

The log said only two men and some crates.

BETH

Then why'd the last two take separate boats? Maybe they went in opposite directions to find help sooner, faster, and we're best stuck sitting here.

CLARK

We can't do that. We have to move. We have to find land.

ANYA

"We" meaning you and the fat one.

CLARK

She's not fat, she's pregnant.

ANYA

Why do we have to move?

CLARK

You'd like to stay here and starve, then? You'd like that?

ANYA

One of the perks of not having a home is making due with the present. I'd rather learn to fish than learn to sail.

BETH

Might not have to do either if rescue comes.

ANYA

Might not, indeed.

CLARK

Well, it won't come.

ANYA

(beat)

You think they took two boats so that we wouldn't have any left over.

CLARK heaves the final body over the rail and out of sight with a SPLASH.

CLARK

Yes.

The bodies are gone - ANYA and BETH are now comfortable leaving the polar ends of the ship and traversing if they care to.

ANYA

Am I to keep an eye out for big nasty ships, then, as well as land?

CLARK

Yes.

ANYA

And should I be worried if I see one before the other?

CLARK

(beat)

Maybe.

BETH

(pensive)

You and the fat one. Lots of explaining to do.

ANYA

(before CLARK can)

She's not fat.

(smiles)

She's Andromeda. Stuck here waiting for the beast to swim on over and devour her. A sacrifice meant to save everyone else.

BETH

Doesn't sound so bad to me - us being "Everyone else" and all...

ANYA

I've half a mind to just keep my eye out for a ship alone.

CLARK

She needs saving same as the rest of us.

BETH

Just like Andromeda. Does that make you some hero, Clark? Should I be counting and blessing my stars as lucky now that you're here? Tell me why we should believe you're the hero.

CLARK

Tell me who taught you the stars.

Silence.

ANYA

I have a feeling Beth and I are in this mess because of you to begin with. That means you've put us in this danger you won't speak of.

CLARK

We were all along for this trip together, no matter what - mercy of the sailors and the wind, we were. You don't like where we are - me neither. We can live for ourselves if it means working together at times, okay? Spying the horizon, or catching the wind, I'll need you.

ANYA

Hear that, Beth? I don't know if this one's a hero...but he just made us the boss.

BETH  
Aye, aye, Captain Bonny!

ANYA  
Aye, aye, Captain Read!

CLARK  
(to BETH)  
You know the stars. Please figure  
which way we're floating.

BETH politely ignores CLARK.

CLARK (CONT'D)  
..."Captain".

BETH  
(pleased)  
Yes, "yar"!

ANYA  
Oh, yes: Yar!

BETH  
(nodding, agreeing)  
Yar.

CLARK makes to go back down to the hull.

ANYA  
And tell him he's a "scallywag" as  
well, love!

CLARK  
This is *temporary*...

ANYA  
Yes, temporary rule. Our own little  
floating regency. Only here, the  
poor get to thrive!

BETH  
The hungry!

ANYA  
The abandoned blight of the ocean!

CLARK exits.

BETH  
(after him)  
And this: The insane.

ANYA  
(calling after him, but  
too late)  
...scallywag...

BETH and ANYA are finally alone.

BETH  
He is insane. So are we.

ANYA  
I can't bare it when you look so  
sad.

BETH  
I can't help it. This is the most  
free we've ever been, wouldn't you  
say? We're not under anyone's  
thumb, or anything-

ANYA  
Or under anyone at all, no-

BETH  
-We're not sick, we're not  
arrested...

ANYA  
Then why aren't you happy?

BETH  
Is our freedom all but being left  
to die? Here we are living with no  
strings attached and we can't make  
it work. Like we were never  
supposed to. Like we were never  
meant to be free.

ANYA  
We're between two places right now,  
that's all. Between two places, and  
the beauty is that the one we're  
heading toward is a brand new life -  
one you can't think of because you  
haven't seen it yet.

BETH  
And the life behind us is catching  
up.

ANYA  
No it isn't. Only for the other  
two.

BETH

That doesn't bode well for us as well, and you know it.

ANYA

This isn't the end.

BETH

Then what is this? It's not living. It's not freedom.

ANYA

Well it's not dying, neither. We won't let it be that. And we've had so little of life and freedom up until now, that I don't reckon you've an eye for it yet.

ANYA holds BETH.

BETH

I feel a bit more free already, Anya.

Their embrace is love.

ANYA kisses BETH's forehead.

BETH (CONT'D)

And alive.

**End of Scene II**

**Scene III - "Aromatic"**

Back in the congested, lower hull, MAPLE sits with a sponge and water basin.

CLARK comes in

MAPLE  
(gestures to the basin)  
You can clean yourself.

CLARK  
I could wash your feet.

MAPLE  
I wish you wouldn't. You touched those men.

CLARK  
(beat)  
So then I'll clean myself.

CLARK goes to the basin and uses the sponge on his forearms and hands.

MAPLE  
They're gone?

CLARK  
Tied and overboard. You're safe.  
(still washing)  
You are safe.

MAPLE  
Was it their food?

CLARK  
No. Some was spoiling, none foul.  
We've enough to eat and drink for another few days. It could rain, though, and I could fish.

MAPLE  
It doesn't sound like we're safe at all.

CLARK uses a cloth to wipe his hands.

MAPLE (CONT'D)  
(beat)  
I'll go up when they come back down. So I can finally breathe again.

CLARK reaches for MAPLES foot with one hand, and picks up the wet sponge with the other.

MAPLE moves her foot away.

CLARK throws the sponge in anger and moves from MAPLE.

CLARK  
You're killing me, slowly.

MAPLE  
We could all do with a quick death.

CLARK  
Is that it, then? Doomed at sea,  
doomed with each other, so give up  
on both?

MAPLE  
I have not given up.

CLARK  
Given up on surviving, given up on  
trying t-

MAPLE  
I've not given up.

CLARK  
On me, you have.

MAPLE  
Don't climb on a cross.

CLARK  
Because you're not?

MAPLE  
Because I can't.

CLARK  
Whenever you say "when", then.

MAPLE  
It takes time

CLARK  
Selfish-

MAPLE  
Selfish is prodding me to hurry

CLARK  
I'm not a villain!

MAPLE  
No, you're a baby, and I only have energy for the one.

CLARK  
(beat)  
You're making me ask forgiveness for things you once loved me better for. I'd not have sinned ten times by your reckoning, had you not loved me every step along the way. You set me up to fail. You're changing the cover of our book.

MAPLE  
I've not changed the cover, I've closed it entirely - now stop. I'm not making you apologize, I'm not asking you to say or do anything.

CLARK  
Yeah, nobody's asking shite. And I'm not asking you to love me, you know? I'm not begging - What I'm asking for is you to just - to just remember me, remember us-

MAPLE  
What does that mean? You're asking me to remember a time when I felt the same, and I don't, so you're still begging as far as I'm-

CLARK  
I'm worthy of your love-

MAPLE  
Not while you're anchored to the past, no.

CLARK  
So you admit it, you're falling out of love for me.

MAPLE  
Yes! That's the closed book, Clark! Why make me say it ten different ways?

CLARK

The past means nothing! Me anchored or not.

MAPLE

The past means everything! You just don't like your role in it. You can't fathom that I don't love you just because I used to!

CLARK

I know you, Maple - I love you, so I know you.

MAPLE

I don't like you. I know you, and I don't fucking like you.

CLARK

You'd rather survive me as some villain rather than mourn us as "love lost". You want to lament ever having engaged. You'd rather feel regret than heart break.

MAPLE

Clark, leave me alone. Don't tell me how I feel.

CLARK

I'm not perfect - never said I was! But my admitting it just lets you pile your own ugliness onto me as we go, adding to an already burning pile. I'm the only one willing to be human and ugly, so you make me the ugliest! For the both of us. I never have confidence to tell you when you're wrong or unfair because we're too busy counting my own damn sins. Anyone who stops you from being a victim is victimizing you - It's not fair! There's no winning!

MAPLE

I'm not a victim and I don't need you to be one. You've changed since England. I'm not saying I hate you - But our perfume does not smell as sweet as it used to. My only concern is this child, and if you fall by the wayside, don't be offended because: I do to.

(MORE)

MAPLE (CONT'D)

Nothing and nobody is more important than my baby; And if it means dying while someone cuts me open to spare her, so be it. No matter how horrible.

CLARK

Maple-

MAPLE

No, I've been thinking about it as much as you, and I'm decided.

CLARK

(beat)

It feels like a "her"?

MAPLE

When I feel anything at all.

After a moment, MAPLE goes to CLARK and takes his hand.

She puts it on her womb.

CLARK

God...

MAPLE

All the love you want, and all the love you have to give: We need to keep it here.

CLARK

They're smart, the others. Maybe useful, even.

MAPLE

You are too. I told them so.

CLARK

You believed what you told them?

MAPLE

If you can, I will.

**End of Scene III**